

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1st BATTALION, 310th INFANTRY
(78th INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE CROSSING OF THE
LUDENDORFF BRIDGE AT REMAGEN, GERMANY AND THE EXPANSION
OF THE BRIDGEHEAD, 7 - 17 March 1945

(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Platoon Sergeant)

Type of operation described:

INFANTRY BATTALION EMPLOYED IN THE EXPLOITATION
AND EXPANSION OF A BRIDGEHEAD

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph is the story of the operations of the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, 78th U. S. Infantry Division, in the crossing and expansion of the Remagen bridgehead at Remagen, Germany, 7 - 17 March 1945.

In battle, the seizing, securing and exploiting of key terrain features is of paramount importance. In World War II the surprise capture of the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen, Germany, coupled with the tactically sound decisions made without delay, relative to securing the bridge and enlarging the bridgehead, is an excellent example of a rapid exploitation of a fortune of war.

To clearly present a graphic word picture and to properly focus the reader's attention on this operation, a brief summing up of prior actions leading to the seizure of the Ludendorff Bridge is necessary.

By the middle of January 1945, the back of the German counter-offensive, which had been launched in December 1944 in the Ardennes, had been broken. The Russians, employing four armies, were engaged in a huge enveloping movement designed to converge on Germany from the north and south. Allied

troops, holding defensive positions along the western front were now preparing to resume the offensive. (1) On 10 February 1945 the U. S. First Army closed to the Roer River, defending that river line and simultaneously making plans for a large scale river crossing and an attack into the heart of Germany in the near future. First Army was now poised and ready to swing into action, and that action was to be the last offensive of the U. S. First Army in Europe. (See Map A) (2)

Deployed in the area of Schmidt, Germany, and along the Roer River in this sector, was the U. S. 78th Division, a unit of III Corps, First Army. Although this division was comparatively new to combat, it had recently and successfully completed a large scale operation -- that of capturing the long and hotly contested Roer River town of Schmidt and the mighty Swammenauel dam on that river. (See Map A) (3)

These two vital and critical features had been wrested from the enemy against fanatic opposition and had cost the division many casualties in men as well as equipment. This action, executed in bad weather and over extremely rugged terrain, coupled with a determined enemy, had thoroughly combat-indoctrinated the men of the "Lightning" Division. (4)

Now at this time on 10 February, the division was employed in defending the hard won ground, so recently taken, orienting replacements arriving daily, effecting re-supply of depleted equipment and generally preparing to continue the attack. (5)

(1) (2) A-1, p. 1; (3) A-2, p. 121; (4) (5) Personal Knowledge.

23 February found the U. S. First Army launching a major offensive across the Roer River for the purpose of advancing to the Erft River while it protected the flank of the U. S. Ninth Army which was to drive to the west bank of the Rhine. (See Map A) (6)

Oposing the U. S. First Army on the east side of the Roer River was an estimated 13 German divisions, supported by armor in considerable quantities, as well as assault guns and artillery. The logistical situation of the German troops opposing the American First Army at this time was extremely critical. Transport was at a bare minimum, in some instances, non-existent. Fuel and ammunition stockpiles had dwindled to the point where artillery batteries had been limited to 10 rounds of ammunition per day and very little fuel was available to operate the few military vehicles still capable of rendering service.

Here was a situation decidedly in the favor of the American forces. However, this advantage was offset, to a certain degree, by the weather, which was in favor of no one. Weather conditions were actually worse than at any other time during the war in the European Theater. It had now become sufficiently warm to cause the snow and ice to melt rapidly. This, coupled with heavy rains and the massed movement of men and vehicles, including armor, had rendered the roads in the southern sector of the U. S. First Army impassable. This same condition existed for the enemy, too and was a factor to be considered. (7)

This was the situation as the U. S. First Army lashed
(6) A-4, p. 3; (7) A-1, p. 6.

out on this offensive which was to carry it to the banks of the Rhine. In most sectors along the army front, the advance was so rapid that it soon developed into a race. Front lines in some instances, were rear areas a few hours later. The enemy was reeling and on his heels from the impact of the sudden, apparently unforeseen blow that the First Army was delivering and it was imperative that he be kept off balance and given no quarter until the Rhine had been reached. (See Map A) (8)

On 7 March 1945, a task force of the 9th Armored Division was given the mission of seizing the small Rhine River town of Remagen. It was not realized that an important bridge would be seized at this time that would alter the course of the war in Europe and shorten it considerably. This possibility had not been overlooked, however, or unforeseen. On 6 March 1945, the III Corps Commander, Major General Milliken, had remarked to Major General Leonard, Commanding General of the 9th Armored Division, "You see that black line on the map? If you can seize that, your name will go down in history", or words to that effect." This referred to the Ludendorff Railroad bridge at Remagen. (See Map A) (9)

This task force converged on Remagen, and there, spanning the Rhine and apparently intact, was the bridge. A fortune of war -- and now utmost speed was necessary to seize and secure the bridge and protect it against complete destruction. Without delay a detachment of this task force was sent forward and against light resistance and a stunned

(8) Personal Knowledge; (9) A-3, p. 1.

and dazed enemy, the bridge was secured and a defense established. Engineers were brought forward to check the bridge thoroughly for demolitions. Enough explosives were found in the under portion to have insured its destruction if detonated and these were speedily disposed of. The bridge itself was virtually undamaged. One small charge had been detonated but failed to do any material damage. Because of the nature of the construction of this railroad bridge, it was necessary to utilize planking to provide a means for track and wheeled vehicles to cross. (See Map A) (10)

As indicated by the types and the manner in which the charges had been affixed to the bridge, the Germans had taken great precautions to insure the destruction of it at the most favorable opportunity. Their elaborate plans had backfired, apparently because they delayed the destruction long enough to provide a means of escape for the Germans who were still streaming over the bridge at the time of its capture. The advance of the Americans had been so swift that the German defenders of the bridge had no inkling of the close proximity of American troops to Remagen. When it became evident that the Americans had arrived, spearheaded by the 9th Armored Division, confusion reigned in the ranks of the Germans and they were unable to blow their bridges behind them. (11)

This extraordinary piece of good luck was relayed at once to General Omar Bradley, Twelfth Army Group Commander, who was asked to render a decision as to the number of troops to be committed across the bridge. After conferring with General Eisenhower, it was decided to put five divisions

(10) A-3, p. 2; (11) A-3, p. 1.

across as soon as possible and anything else that was needed to secure the bridgehead. (12)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

The 310th Infantry Regiment of the 78th Infantry Division had been attached to the 9th Armored Division at the time the First Army had launched its offensive from the banks of the Roer River and had remained with that division in the lightning-like plunge across the Cologne plain. The regiment, however, was split and widely separated, each battalion forming a part of a combat command in conjunction with elements of the 9th Armored Division. On 7 March, the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 310th Infantry Regiment were on the Ahr River, in the vicinity of Bad Neuenahr, preparing to drive south on the west bank of the Rhine to meet the Third Army as soon as the 1st Battalion linked-up on the left. However, the 1st Battalion was never to arrive at that point, and the proposed drive to the south to meet the Third Army was never to materialize. A bridge had been captured over the Rhine River and the 1st Battalion, 310th Regiment, was scheduled to cross and attack the east bank. (See Map A)

(13)

The troops of the 1st Battalion were widely separated on 7 March, each company having been formed as a task force and operating independently. However, upon receipt of the order to assemble his battalion, the battalion commander soon had his companies in the village of Berkum preparing for a

(12) A-4, p. 380; (13) A-5, p. 88.

motor march to Remagen, some two hours away. At this time, the men of the battalion were unaware that they would soon be fighting on the east bank of the Rhine and were interested in just two things: food and rest. In the rapid advance from the Roer River there had been little time for either. Food had been in the form of "K" rations and sleep had become a thing of the past. Upon arrival in Berkum, however, a hot meal was had and this helped to bolster morale before the men moved out. (See Map A) (14)

0230 found the battalion detrucking in the outskirts of Remagen, to learn that a few hours hence they would be crossing the Rhine, through the courtesy of the German Army. That bit of information was enough to keep even an exhausted infantryman awake. (15)

An unusual situation, unusual even for combat, confronted the officers and men of the 1st Battalion as they contemplated the crossing of the bridge and the attack to follow. No time was available for such things as reconnaissance, formulation of a detailed plan of attack or gathering information of the enemy. (16) It was later learned, however, that German forces opposing the 1st Battalion consisted of Hitler Jugend, plus Volkstrum units. Elements of the 9th and 11th Panzer Divisions were being rushed to the bridgehead area to reinforce the inadequate forces already there. These facts were unknown before the crossing as well as many other essential elements of information. (17)

As for the terrain on the east bank of the Rhine, it may well be said that it was made to order for the enemy.

(14) (15) (16) Personal Knowledge; (17) A-3, p. 42.

Steep, wooded cliffs rose almost directly from the water's edge, overlooking the eastern approach to the bridge, creating an effective screen for the enemy artillery which was emplaced behind it. Enemy observation on the bridge was excellent and would remain so until that hill mass had been secured. A good road net, commencing at the bridge, provided excellent avenues of approach to the numerous towns and villages within the bridgehead area. Seven miles to the east lay a four-lane superhighway which, when captured, would deny the enemy a road on which to move his troops rapidly in the battle for the bridgehead at a time when he was hard pressed for manpower and time. (18)

The weather was wet and cold while the melting snow and ice had been transformed into seas of mud. Vehicles were restricted to the roads, thus adding to the congestion and confusion caused by traffic jams in Remagen. Roads, streets and alleys leading into the town were choked with men, vehicles and equipment preparing to cross the bridge. A well-timed German artillery barrage at this time would have seriously delayed or even denied a crossing to the Americans.

The 1st Battalion, although depleted in strength, suffering from loss of sleep and the loss of many of its key personnel, was in good spirits and ready to fight. How well they fought was to be demonstrated during the next ten days which culminated in the winning of a unit citation by the 1st Battalion. (19)

(18) (19) Personal Knowledge.

THE BATTALION PLAN FOR THE CROSSING OF THE RHINE

Because of the swift events leading up to the 1st Battalion arrival in Remagen, the plan for the crossing was simple. A brief, concise attack order was issued. "Cross the bridge, turn right and attack." (20) The crossing was to be made in a column of companies as follows: Company B, Company C and Company A. Upon reaching the far bank, the 2d Platoon of Company B would attack and secure the high ground overlooking the bridge. Companies C and A would drive to the south and capture the village of Ockenfels and Kasbach. Company B would then follow, leaving behind a platoon to temporarily protect the eastern approach to the bridge. (See Map B)

A platoon of tanks, attached to the battalion, would be distributed throughout the column until the far bank was reached. They would then, initially, cover the roads and protect the battalion against enemy armor. Machine guns of Company D were to be attached to the leading companies, Baker and Charlie, while the 81mm mortars would follow Company A across the span.

The Battalion Command Group was to follow directly behind Company A, at a distance of 200 yards, preceding the mortars of Company D. The Battalion rear command post would remain in Remagen, initially. (21)

Artillery in the form of one 4.5-inch gun battalion, one 155mm gun battalion and one 8-inch Howitzer battalion, were in position and prepared to deliver heavy interdiction

(20) A-5, p. 89; (21) Personal Knowledge.

fires around the bridgehead. (22) However, there was no artillery in direct support of the 1st Battalion and it was hoped that positions would be readily available for the 81mm mortars so they would be able to support the attack, if necessary.

The line of departure was designated as the western approach to the bridge; H-Hour, 0430, 8 March 1945. (23)

The men were briefed as to the known conditions existing on the bridge and also on those conditions that might possibly exist -- before the crossing was completed. It was expected that gaps might be present in the flooring of the bridge, guard rails broken or missing, debris and wreckage on the span, that would impede progress, and the possibility existed that the bridge might be destroyed before the battalion reached the east bank. The necessity for speed in moving across was stressed, lest the battalion plus vehicles become so jammed on the bridge that enemy artillery fire would destroy the entire column. It would be impossible to move noiselessly because of the armor that would be moving with the battalion. The next best move was to cross with all possible haste.

Wire was to be laid from the battalion rear command post in Remagen to the far side of the bridge. The wire laying party was to accompany the battalion command group. Radio and messenger would be the only other types of communication used.

Location for the battalion ammunition supply point was

(22) A-3, p. 8; (23) Personal Knowledge.

to be in Remagen, which was the only reasonable place for it. It might prove a problem later to get vehicles back across the Ludendorff bridge for re-supply, or the bridge might even be destroyed leaving the battalion with no means of re-supply, but this was a necessary risk to take. The battalion aid station would initially be situated in Remagen, but would displace across the bridge as soon as the assault companies had cleared the far side.

It was felt that the supply problem would be critical for the first 24 hours after the crossing, at least, and the men were cautioned to expend their ammunition wisely and well, and to conserve as much of it as possible. (24)

Weapons were checked, ammunition issued, extra "K" rations distributed and last minute instructions given. The 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, was now ready to begin the hazardous crossing.

THE CROSSING OF THE LUDENDORFF BRIDGE

The route the battalion followed, in the direction of the bridge, seemed to criss-cross through the town of Remagen but in reality, it proved to be a direct route to the bridge. The cobblestone streets, besides creating much noise as the men moved over them, caused many a soldier to stumble as he made his way. About a 20-minute hike ensued between the battalion assembly area and the line of departure, but to the battalion it seemed much longer. It was stop and start, walk a few feet and halt. This was

(24) Personal Knowledge.

caused by the tremendous numbers of men, armor and trucks, all being rushed to Remagen at the same time.

In a column of companies, one column on either side of the road, the battalion marched through the dark, congested town, pausing now and then temporarily because of traffic jams at various corners and crossings. The tenseness of the men could almost be felt and seemed to grow as they approached the bridge. The march discipline was excellent and it took very little effort on the part of the officers and non-commissioned officers to keep the men quiet and moving in the right direction.

Company B moved across the line of departure at 0430 and started moving up to the span and began to cross. The tanks had arrived at the line of departure by a different route and were guided into the column at various intervals. Twelve hundred feet of steel now stood between the 1st Battalion and the east bank of the Rhine. The columns moved cautiously one to the left flank and one to the right flank of the bridge. (25)

Initial progress was good but slowed down by poor visibility, caused by the low hanging, early morning fog. Also, numerous pitfalls existed, in the nature of holes in the bridge floor and broken guard rails. Several men had the misfortune to stumble into these holes in the darkness and in this manner the battalion sustained its first casualties in this operation.

Soon, however, enemy artillery fire began to fall, and while no casualties were sustained by the battalion, consid-

(25) Personal Knowledge.

erable fear and confusion were created among the men. Coupled with the debris and the tanks moving in and out through the columns, the battalion was soon brought to an unscheduled halt. In consequence of the fast action, initiative and excellent leadership exerted by the officers and non-commissioned officers, control was rapidly re-established and the columns moved again. The tanks were now instructed to keep their assigned positions in the center of the span while the foot columns were led as far to the left and to the right as possible in order to maintain freedom of movement. Close observation was now exercised by the men in watching for holes in the bridge. Many were found and usually by-passed but in some cases it was necessary to bridge these gaps with planking. (26)

The men were now becoming fatigued. Machine guns, heavy and light 60mm mortars and ammunition were being hand-carried. Suddenly a "silent cheer" was raised, weapons became light as feathers -- word was passed to the rear that Company B had reached the east bank of the Rhine!

THE EXPANSION OF THE BRIDGEHEAD

Upon reaching the east bank, the 2d Platoon of Company B, which had spearheaded the crossing, deployed and began their attack up the steep sides of the hill mass overlooking the bridge. As soon as they began to climb, they were hit by small arms and automatic weapons fire from dug-in positions on the top of the hill. The 2d Platoon continued its advance, however, while the 1st Platoon which had now cleared

(26) Personal Knowledge.

the bridge, attacked the enemy position from the left flank. Soon all resistance had ceased and this critical terrain feature was no longer a threat to the security of the bridge. (27)

The 3d Platoon of Company B had also crossed the bridge by this time and was dispersed along the road some 200 to 300 yards to the north when it was alerted by the sound of troops approaching from the north. Feeling sure that these troops were enemy, the men of the 3d Platoon immediately surrounded this group and found that they had to their credit an enemy demolitions squad with enough explosive to successfully destroy the bridge. This incident occurred before the last elements of the 1st Battalion had cleared the bridge. (28)

Company C cleared the span, turned right and proceeded toward Ockenfels without incident at this time, clearing Kasbach which was undefended. (See Map B)

Company A completed the crossing, turned south and had proceeded about 200 yards down the road when the entire company was pinned down by enemy small arms fire, grenades and panzerfaust fire, the equivalent of our rocket launchers. This close range fire was coming from the left flank from a distance of 75-100 yards. A railroad embankment on the left and at a higher elevation than the road, along which were six or seven boxcars, seemed to be the source of the fire. Company C had passed this way a short time before but had apparently by-passed this group of enemy in the darkness. Now, with the coming of daylight, the enemy was resisting. (29)

The company commander, calling the weapons platoon

(27) Personal Knowledge; (28) A-2, p. 162; (29) Personal Knowledge.

sergeant forward, directed him to place 60mm mortar fire in and around these boxcars, setting up the mortars in the best positions available. The company, in the meantime, was directing small arms fire along this embankment, with little effect. The best positions available for the mortars proved to be just off the road and they were soon set up and firing in battery. After a barrage of some 15 mortar rounds had been placed in and around the open doors of the boxcars, German soldiers literally streamed out and in a matter of a few minutes, Company A had well over a hundred prisoners.

(30)

It was now about 0630, 8 March 1945, and daylight. A light rain was falling and the men of the battalion were cold, wet, tired and hungry. In spite of these conditions, the men were exuberant and in high spirits. Morale was high as they contemplated the events of the past two hours. They were on the east bank of the Rhine, had made a safe crossing, sustaining very few casualties in the process and were now pushing toward Ockenfels where a short rest might be possible. Little did they know that this was just the beginning and that only the surface of this bridgehead operation had been scratched.

Company C at this time was nearing Ockenfels, when the column was suddenly halted by a signal from the lead platoon. The word was passed to the rear that a vehicle was moving north out of Ockenfels in the direction of the Company C column. The men were moved off the road and stood by while the lead platoon captured an American jeep and four German

(30) Personal Knowledge.

officers. They were soon on their way to the prisoner of war cage.

The company now entered Ockenfels against very light, scattered resistance. Company A, meanwhile, moved into the undefended town of Kasbach, and prepared to defend it. Company B, in conjunction with Company C, was deployed in and around Ockenfels.

Now, some time earlier, a 12-man patrol from Company A, plus two tanks, had moved out from the bridge ahead of A Company, with the mission of determining the enemy strength and fortifications on the road and in the village of Ockenfels. It is not known whether they by-passed the town in the darkness or failed to recognize it from the directions given; but at any rate, the patrol did not go to Ockenfels but proceeded to Linz, a considerably larger town and about a mile to the south of Ockenfels. (See Map B) It appeared at first that the town had capitulated, judging from the bed sheets, white flags, and handkerchiefs fluttering from the windows of the houses. Through the interrogation of civilians, however, it was determined that SS and Panzer units were in the area. The patrol, upon reporting this information to battalion headquarters, was told to hold where they were and a detachment of Company C men was dispatched to Linz at once to reinforce the 12 men from Company A. No organized resistance was encountered in Linz, but in spite of the white flags flying, considerable sniping by German soldiers was in progress. (31)

(31) A-2, p. 165.

The battalion commander now hastened to revise his plans in view of the unexpected and unforeseen capture of Linz. Company A was ordered to proceed to Linz at once where its platoons were widely deployed in order to defend the whole of the town. The men occupied positions in the southern portion of the town, defending to the south and to the east.

Company C remained in the village of Ockenfels, prepared to defend it against counter-attack. Company B was moved in and around Kasbach and dug in for the night. Thus, at day's end, 8 March 1945, the 1st Battalion was widely scattered and uncoordinated. (See Map B) (32) An uneasy night was spent by the men of the 1st Battalion. Reports from captured enemy soldiers stated that the enemy was concentrating infantry and armor south and east of Linz with which to annihilate the small bridgehead force. (33)

In spite of the fact that the men of the 1st Battalion had had less than 14 hours sleep in eight days and nights, it was necessary for the entire battalion to remain on the alert all through the night of 8 March due to the imminent threat of a large scale counter-attack from the enemy.

During the night, however, it was possible to send the company vehicles back to Remagen for a re-supply of ammunition as well as a hot meal, which were badly needed.

The night passed and the expected counter-attack failed to materialize. 9 March was spent in the improving of positions, cleaning of weapons and equipment, and the men were able to spend a little time in resting.

This brief holiday ended late in the afternoon of 9 March (32) Personal Knowledge; (33) A-5, p. 95.

when the battalion was ordered to prepare to attack the town of Dattenberg, about one and one-half miles to the south of Linz. (See Map B) This attack was to jump off about daylight, 10 March 1945, with the mission of clearing the town of SS and Panzer units thought to be in that area as well as to further enlarge the bridgehead. (34)

The plan was this: Company A and Company B (Company A on the right) would launch a coordinated attack from the southern edge of Linz, while Company C would converge on the town from the east. Tanks would support Company C. Line of departure for Companies A and B was the south edge of Linz, Company C from positions east and south of Linz. H-Hour was 0600. (35)

The battalion crossed the line of departure, as scheduled. In Companies A and B zone, the advance was good, initially. In Company C zone, however, it was a different story. The eastern approaches to the town were well defended and at the onset the lead tank struck an anti-tank mine, disabling it and preventing the rest of the tanks to follow. Company C continued the attack, however, but was suffering heavily from Panzerfaust, machine gun and rifle fire from the high ground to the left of the road as they moved.

Company B, after advancing to the northeast of the town was effectively pinned down under intense fire from 20mm guns, mortar and artillery.

Company A continued to advance in the face of very light and scattered resistance and after a delay of some little time, on the outskirts of town, while artillery fire was called

(34) (35) Personal Knowledge.

for and received, Company A assaulted the town in coordination with Company C and by 1600 hours Dattenberg was secured. (See Map B) (36)

It was now necessary to send one rifle platoon and the light machine gun section from Company A plus a platoon of tanks to relieve Company B which was still undergoing terrific punishment on the northern edge of town. After a hot fire fight in which eight enemy 20mm guns were knocked out, the Germans withdrew. The score: 12 enemy dead, 14 captured. Company B, however, also had sustained heavy casualties. (37)

At 1900 hours, the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion relieved the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, and set up defensive positions, south and east of Dattenberg, while the 1st Battalion dug in and prepared to defend to the north and west.

The night of 10 March was a wakeful one for the 1st Battalion. A constant alert was maintained, for enemy mortar and artillery fire which rained on the positions most of the night as well as enemy armor could be heard to the south and west of Dattenberg.

11 March dawned without event. A counter-attack had again failed to materialize. The battalion spent the day in improving positions and taking advantage of what little time was available to sleep. All too soon the battalion would again be on the move.

On the morning of 12 March, the battalion was ordered to move, and by 1200 hours was moving on foot toward Linz.

(36) A-5, p. 95; (37) Personal Knowledge.

Upon arrival in the town, the battalion learned that it had been relieved and was to remain in Linz for an undetermined period. It was unbelievable that after 15 hard days and nights in which there had been little rest and very little food, that the 1st Battalion had been pulled out of the line. The men were assigned to billets and were prepared to relax when the blow fell. The order arrived alerting the battalion to be ready to move at a moment's notice. (38)

In the northern sector of the bridgehead, in the vicinity of Honnef, the 311th Infantry Regiment of the 78th Division was fighting against rapidly stiffening resistance and the 1st Battalion was to be attached to that regiment to reinforce it in the battle for Honnef. (See Map C) (39)

Beginning at 1600, 12 March, the battalion moved out of Linz on foot in a cold drizzly rain and by 1900 hours had reached its assigned area near Honnef, and the men dug in and prepared to defend the area along the river in the zone of the 311th Infantry.

The morning of 13 March, the 311th Infantry launched an attack to the north, designed to clear and secure the high ground northeast of Honnef and to capture the town of Rhondorf. Initially, the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, was in reserve, but this pleasant situation was not to last long. By mid-afternoon, the battalion had been committed with the mission of securing the left flank of the 311th Infantry Regiment. The terrain over which the battalion was to attack, while beautiful to behold, was an infantryman's nightmare.

(38) A-2, p. 187; (39) Personal Knowledge.

High wooded hills, barefaced knolls, deep draws and ravines laced with intermittent streams, constituted the zone allotted to the 1st Battalion.

The attack jumped off, with the three companies again in line, and found it extremely difficult to keep contact, due to the nature of the terrain. It was a struggle for many of the men to keep up as the crew-served weapons and ammunition were being hand-carried. Weapons carriers were unable to follow due to the nature of the terrain and lack of roads in this sector.

In A Company zone of advance, the attack was slowed almost to a standstill as the enemy suddenly brought murderous small arms fire to bear on them. In a sparsely wooded area and on a gently rising slope, the Germans had prepared cleverly concealed positions and were using them to good advantage.

A Company Commander, at once placed the four rifle platoons on line, plus the machine gun section, and utilizing marching fire soon cleared out the pockets of resistance in this area.

Company A was actually a reinforced rifle company, having received on 12 March a "Sunday Punch" in the form of a fourth rifle platoon. This platoon was composed of all volunteer Negro soldiers who, a few weeks previously, had taken a condensed form of infantry training in France and were sent at once to the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry. This platoon soon proved to be an excellent fighting force and a welcome addition to a sorely depleted rifle company. (40)

(40) Personal Knowledge.

At nightfall of 13 March, harassed by Nebelwerfers and making slow progress in the woods, the battalion was ordered to dig in for the night. A busy night was spent in fighting off German tanks which were not, however, attacking the 1st Battalion positions but were trying to fight their way back to the German lines, having been cut off during the advances made that day by the 311th Infantry and the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry.

A platoon of tanks was to reinforce the 1st Battalion the night of the 13th, and an officer from Company A was to be posted on a road adjacent to the positions selected for the tanks to occupy. Hearing a tank approaching, this officer ran out into the road to direct it into the pre-arranged positions, but it was soon apparent that the tank was enemy, judging from the amount of ammunition that was expended in an effort to liquidate the officer, who was no longer there. This tank was speedily captured and the crew taken prisoner. No casualties were sustained by the 1st Battalion.

→ Moving out early on the morning of 14 March, the battalion was ordered to continue its drive northward along the river. Slow and painful gains were made against a strongly resisting enemy using tanks, machine guns and mortars. The mission was enlarged to include the capture of Neider-Dollendorf in conjunction with elements of the 311th Infantry Regiment. The main effort was made by the 311th Infantry and the 1st Battalion helped to mop up the town and clear the houses of snipers and enemy soldiers who were ready to surrender.

(See Map C)

The 1st Battalion situation at this time was critical. Depleted in manpower, low in spirits, physically exhausted and with morale at a low ebb, the men were in dire need of relief if they were to remain an effective fighting force. Rifle companies averaged about 50 men and officers with the exception of Company A, which was supplemented by the one platoon of Negro soldiers. (41)

Instead of continuing the attack from Neider-Dollendorf, the 1st Battalion was given the mission of defending it throughout the remainder of 14 March and throughout the 15th.

This was no rest camp, however. These were the front lines and while there was no immediate threat of a counter-attack, it was far from being an impossibility. Throughout 15 March, the battalion consolidated its positions and there was an opportunity for the men to sleep, shave and eat food once more.

Throughout this period, positions of troops and weapons were improved. In some cases, second story windows of houses on the outskirts of town were utilized as machine gun positions, both heavy and light. There were unlimited fields of fire covering broad expanses of open ground leading up to the town. Mortar observation posts for both the 60s and 81s were also located, mostly in upper stories of houses -- the mortars being dug in within the limits of the town. Communications became quite elaborate, extensive use being made by companies of the numerous sound-powered phones available. Command posts were taking on an air of grandeur and it ap-

(41) Personal Knowledge.

peared that the 1st Battalion was settling down for a long stay. However, this was not to be for less than 36 hours after Neider-Dollendorf had been taken, the 1st Battalion was again on the move. In conjunction with Company G of the 310th Infantry and the 311th Infantry Regiment, the 1st Battalion was to drive to the much coveted Autobahn, a German superhighway, and one of the key objectives of the bridgehead operation. The capture of the superhighway would expand the bridgehead to a depth of about seven miles. This would terminate the expansion phase of the operation and give the American forces a toe-hold from which to launch a breakout from the bridgehead. (See Map C) (42)

So on 16 March, at daylight, the battalion set out from Neider-Dollendorf and again crossed what seemed to be an unending succession of lines of departure. With three companies abreast, the battalion moved into terrain similar to that operated over for the many previous days. Initially, resistance was light and the battalion proceeded without incident until it arrived in an area just north of the town of Ittenbach. Here it was hit hard by a well dug-in enemy, reinforced by tanks. Small arms, automatic weapons, mortar and 88mm gun fire from the German tanks dealt devastating blows to all companies of the battalion. While not pinned down, the battalion was held up and the battalion commander requested tank support. (43)

Tanks were received and the attack continued. Heavy casualties were sustained by the battalion and in Company A sector bitter hand-to-hand fighting with the enemy followed.

(42) Personal Knowledge; (43) A-3, p. 19.

The battalion was fighting SS troops deployed in this area who were fighting desperately and fanatically, but fighting futilely, to keep the 1st Battalion from gaining the Autobahn.

By late afternoon the 1st Battalion had seized the Autobahn in their sector and were fighting against determined resistance to hold the ground gained. (See Map C) Enemy tank fire was received along the battalion front as the men attempted to dig in. The tanks attached to the 1st Battalion were brought up and using direct fire against the enemy armor, soon drove them off. Artillery fire now began to register on the newly acquired positions and the companies, besides consolidating and preparing defensive positions, were engaged in re-distribution of ammunition, which was at a low ebb. The expected enemy counter-attack was received just after dark, hitting Company A left flank. This was successfully repulsed, however, by the fourth rifle platoon, which was in support. Elsewhere along the battalion front there was no activity other than the terrific artillery barrages which continued to register on the battalion positions throughout the night. (44)

The Autobahn in this sector was literally covered with disabled and burned enemy vehicles from enemy supply columns. This was an excellent example of the effects of our air force in diminishing the enemy ability to re-supply his troops and in rendering the highway impassable for the rapid movement of reserves.

(44) Personal Knowledge.

Very early on the morning of 17 March it was with a wonderful feeling of relief that the men of the 1st Battalion stood up in their foxholes and cheered as elements of the 9th Infantry Division attacked through the line held by the 1st Battalion, and north across the Autobahn. (45)

Shortly thereafter, the 1st Battalion was detached from the 311th and "came home", so to speak, when it reverted to control of the 310th Infantry Regiment after a period of 17 days of operating as a separate battalion. It is interesting to note, that on this same day, at 1500 hours, the Ludendorff Bridge, after standing up to the pounding it had received for so long, finally "gave up the ghost" and like the "wonderful one hoss shay", collapsed and slid into the Rhine, carrying with it a number of engineers who were repairing the bridge at that time. (46)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making an analysis of this operation, it is important to remember that as far as the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, is concerned, it was an unexpected move and virtually no prior planning or reconnaissance was possible. Further, this was the action of a separate battalion, initially, reinforced by a platoon of tanks.

The success of the Remagen bridgehead operation depended on the rapid movement of troops into the bridgehead area and the expansion of it as expeditiously as possible. As a result, on a scant 12-hours notice, the 1st Battalion was ready to cross the Rhine. At the time of its commitment the bat-

(45) (46) Personal Knowledge.

talion had been almost constantly on the move for a full week and the men were physically and mentally exhausted.

In the battalion crossing of the bridge, the officers and non-commissioned officers displayed excellent leadership in keeping the column moving and the men quiet in spite of the adverse conditions encountered.

It is the writer's opinion that a regiment should have been given the mission assigned to the 1st Battalion on the east bank for the following reasons:

1. One battalion was needed to defend the area in the vicinity of the bridge itself. A large scale counter-attack by the enemy could have well destroyed the bridge and then systematically destroyed the 1st Battalion.

2. One battalion was needed to the south, securing the towns captured by the 1st Battalion.

3. One battalion was needed to be held in mobile reserve so it could be rapidly moved to meet a threat from any direction.

If a regiment had been employed in this manner, the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, would not have been so vulnerable to destruction by the enemy as they were for the first 24-hours following the crossing.

It is felt that the initiative displayed by the battalion commander in deciding to quickly move Company A into Linz, capitalizing on the mistake of the patrol in accidentally stumbling into it, forestalled a possible large scale counter-attack by the SS and Panzer units which were deployed to the south of Linz at the time it was entered by our troops.

*Not to be used
without authority
of the command*

Due to the tactical situation within the bridgehead, it is difficult to criticize the orders relieving the 1st Battalion on 12 March, and then in the space of a few hours again committing it. However, the lowering of morale within the unit was a factor to be taken into consideration.

It must be noted that in the majority of the actions of the battalion in the bridgehead, it was usually with three companies abreast or engaged. Due to the nature of the objectives, as in the initial phase, or due to the frontages assigned to the battalion, this was a must.

The defensive positions maintained by the battalion in Neider-Dollendorf proved to be a God-send to the men in their worn-out condition. While still engaged, it was possible for the men to rest, to re-supply and to clean weapons.

The Negro rifle platoon, assigned to Company A, contributed largely to the success of the battalion in reaching the Autobahn and in containing the enemy counter-attack which developed in Company A zone and threatened the battalion with a large scale penetration.

In summing up this operation, a period of ten days, it may well be said that the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, had accomplished what seemed to them the impossible. It had succeeded in crossing the Ludendorff Bridge, captured or assisted in the capture of five towns, cut the Autobahn and contributed largely to the securing and exploiting of the Remagen bridgehead.

By General Orders Number 513, Headquarters 78th Infantry Division, the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, was cited for outstanding performance of duty in the Remagen bridgehead and under the provisions of Section IV, War Department Circular 333, awarded the Distinguished Unit Badge.

In closing, it is interesting to note that Caesar made his first Rhine crossing in 55 B. C. in the vicinity of Andernach. Two thousand years later, in 1945, the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, crossing was made 12 miles north of the Roman bridge site. (47)

LESSONS

1. The rapid exploitation of a bridgehead is of paramount importance.

2. Surprise, coupled with a fast-moving striking force, is a necessity in the expansion of a bridgehead.

? - 3. Leaders can capitalize on mistakes made by subordinates.

4. Armor is of prime necessity in an exploitation.

5. 60mm mortars can be used with great advantage against an enemy making strong points out of boxcars.

6. Marching fire, used in slightly wooded areas, has a tremendous demoralizing effect against a well dug-in enemy.

7. A fourth rifle platoon adds to the effectiveness of a rifle company and increases the morale of the men.

8. Rest for troops is a necessity, especially in sustained combat.

(47) A-3, p. 45.

LESSONS (Continued)

9. Leaders must anticipate the loss of key personnel and plan for their replacement.

10. Leaders must be versatile and alert in fast-moving and fast-changing situations.

11. When the attack has achieved surprise and gained the initiative, great risks are justified.