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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3D PLATOON, COMPANY L,  
23D INFANTRY (2D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE  
ONDENVAL - IVELDINGEN PASS, BELGIUM,  
17 - 19 JANUARY 1945  
(ARDENNES - ALSACE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY PLATOON  
ATTACKING THROUGH WOODS AND OPEN TERRAIN UNDER  
EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX . . . . .	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	2
ORIENTATION . . . . .	3
Introduction . . . . .	3
The General Situation . . . . .	5
The Attachment of the 23d Infantry to the 1st Division . . . . .	6
Disposition and Plan of the 23d Infantry . . . . .	7
The Employment of the 3d Battalion . . . . .	8
The Company Plan of Attack . . . . .	9
NARRATION . . . . .	10
The Attack on the Ondenval-Iveldingen Pass . . . . .	10
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM . . . . .	22
LESSONS . . . . .	28
MAP A - The German Penetration	
MAP B - First Army Front, 1 - 9 January 1945	
MAP C - 23d Infantry Zone of Attack	
MAP D - The Ondenval-Iveldingen Pass	

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23D INFANTRY (2D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE  
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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 3d Platoon, Company L, 23d Infantry, 2d U. S. Division in the ONDENVAL-IVELDINGEN PASS in BELGIUM during the period 17 - 19 January 1945.

In order to orient the reader, it is necessary to discuss briefly events as they transpired from November 1944 to 17 January 1945.

During the heavy snows and drenching downpours of November and early December 1944, the Allied Armies slogged slowly eastward through the SIEGFRIED LINE, in the teeth of fanatic Nazi resistance.

It was apparently evident to the German High Command that Allied Armies, if unchecked, would eventually cross the RHINE RIVER and cut the German Armies to pieces. (1)

Hitler's final plan to relieve the situation confronting the German Armies, was to execute an all-out offensive; thrust through the Allied Armies with the objective of driving through BELGIUM to ANTWERP. This, he felt, would not only split the bulk of the Allied Forces but would also deny the Allies the use of the largest port in EUROPE, a port absolutely essential to their ever lengthening lines of supplies. (2)

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(1) A-2, p. 68; A-3, p. 325

(2) A-1, p. 243; A-4, p. 103

Suddenly on 16 December 1944, without warning, Hitler made the desperate gambler's last throw to win. (3) He ordered Von Rundstadt, with three German Armies, to smash through the American lines, in the relatively quiet sector, in the ARDENNES region. (4)

The attack was initially successful and a penetration of the American lines from EISENBORN on the north almost to the city of LUXEMBOURG on the south resulted. The attack was successfully stopped on 26 December 1944 with German troops in close proximity of the MEUSE RIVER. (5) (See Map A)

Almost as rapidly as the German thrust had progressed, and before the offensive had been stopped, the Allied Forces were completing plans and preparing to regain the ground lost and with it the initiative. (6) Attacks were driving on the flanks of the bulge by the First U. S. Army on the north and the Third U. S. Army on the south. These Armies were to continue attacks in the direction of HOUFFALIZE, BELGIUM and upon contact to turn generally eastward to drive the Germans beyond their initial line. (7) (See Map A)

On 1 January 1945 a letter of instructions was issued at Headquarters First U. S. Army to put into action on 3 January 1945, the attack to make contact with the Third U. S. Army. (8)

First Army had, as units on the line, the V U.S. Corps on the left, the XVIII U. S. Airborne Corps in the center and the VII U. S. Corps on a narrow front on the right. (9) (See Map B)

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- (3) A-3, p. 242, 246  
(4) A-3, p. 346  
(5) A-2, p. 167  
(6) A-3, p. 346, 362  
(7) A-3, p. 364  
(8) A-4, p. 126  
(9) A-4, Situation Map No. 11

The VII Corps was assigned the major attack mission. The V and XVIII Airborne Corps were assigned defensive missions with the task of patrolling strongly in order to deceive the enemy, thus making them believe a general attack was being launched, and to protect the flanks of VII Corps in the attack. (10)

Since the VII Corps had gained the initial objective on 9 January (See Map B), on 10 January 1945 First Army issued a letter of instructions to continue the attack. These instructions directed an attack on 13 January to continue to exert pressure against the bulge. In this phase of the operation the XVIII Airborne Corps would make the main effort, supported by the V Corps on the left and the VII Corps on the right, to secure ST. VITH. (11)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

In supporting the XVIII Airborne Corps, the V Corps was to concentrate its efforts in the right of its zone to seize the defile between ONDENVAL and IVELDINGEN. This necessitated a temporary change in the boundary between V and XVIII Airborne Corps, leaving WEISMES, ONDENVAL and the edge of the woods southwest of ONDENVAL as the responsibility of V Corps. (See Map B)

The seizure of the ONDENVAL-IVELDINGEN PASS by V Corps was to facilitate an attack by the 7th Armored Division toward ST. VITH. As soon as sufficient strength of the 7th Armored Division had passed through that defile the original boundary would be resumed. (12)

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(10) A-2, p. 205  
(11) A-4, p. 135  
(12) A-4, p. 135

The V Corps had remained in its present position against repeated attacks from the German I SS Panzer Corps throughout the period of the breakthrough. The south flank had been forced back but the north flank had held fast. The 2d U. S. Division, now the center division of V Corps, was holding on a narrow front.

The 1st U. S. Division on the right was in a ready position to make the main attack of the Corps but occupied a wide and difficult front. Therefore, a decision was made to attach one regimental combat team from the 2d Division to the 1st Division to expedite the main effort of the Corps.

#### THE ATTACHMENT OF THE 23D INFANTRY TO THE 1ST DIVISION

On 13 January 1945 the 23d Infantry Regimental Combat Team composed of the following elements was attached to the 1st Division: 37th Field Artillery Battalion, Company B, 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Company C, 741st Tank Battalion, Company B, 2d Engineer Battalion and Company B, 2d Medical Battalion. (13)

The 23d Infantry Regimental Combat Team moved from its positions in the 2d Division zone on 13 January 1945 and took up positions on the right flank of the 1st Division in the city of WEISMES in preparation for the offensive, as part of the 1st Division. The 30th Division was on the right. (See Map C)

The weather from late December until the middle of January was very cold and miserable and showed no indications of improving. The snow was two feet deep in open areas and collect-

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(13) A-8, dtd 11 - 14 January 1945

ed in drifts and gullies knee-deep to waist-deep. The temperature hovered around 20° with occasional strong cutting gusts of wind. Roads became almost impossible to vehicles due to ice, snow, sleet and mud. Troops became tired rapidly due to the effort required to negotiate the snow, with the excessive clothing they were wearing in an effort to keep warm. (14)

#### DISPOSITION AND PLAN OF THE 23D INFANTRY

On 14 January orders were issued by the Regimental Commander of the 23d Infantry for the attack which was to be launched 15 January. Immediate objectives were the towns of STEINBACH and REMONVOL. The final objective -- the ONDENVAL-INVELDINGEN PASS; the Corps objective. (See Map C)

The attack order gave the 1st Battalion the mission of seizing the town of STEINBACH on the left and the 2d Battalion the town of REMONVOL and the road junction south of REMONVOL. The 3d Battalion was to remain in Regimental reserve, prepared to reinforce the attack on orders. (15)

The terrain immediately in front of the regiment was comparatively flat and open with sparse trees. The weather was almost unbearable.

The two attacking battalions crossed the line of departure on 15 January in good order. Both encountered very stiff resistance from strongpoints held tenaciously by elements of the 9th Parachute Regiment of the 3d Parachute Division. The enemy had employed mines freely throughout the zone.

The 1st Battalion was able to seize its objective after a

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(14) A-5, p. 26; Personal knowledge  
(15) A-5, p. 109

very determined struggle in which the attacking elements were pinned down by heavy volumes of machine gun and rifle fire.

The 2d Battalion had considerable difficulty in securing the road junction southwest of REMONVOL. It was not until a company with two tanks made an old-fashioned infantry charge that the road junction was secure. (16) Elements of the 2d Battalion attacking REMONVOL were pinned down by self-propelled guns and a tank. The entrance to the town was heavily mined. Our artillery was putting a large volume of fire on the town.

#### THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE 3D BATTALION

The regimental attack appeared to be losing its momentum. Captain Eisler, commanding Company L, and Captain MacDonald, commanding Company I, were called to the Battalion Command Post and instructed to prepare for a night attack from the vicinity of the crossroad to seize the town of ONDENVAL.

Captain Eisler returned to the company area, assembled his rifle platoon leaders and lead them to the crossroad. He oriented them on the situation for the attack as they moved along. The multitude of mines in the vicinity of the road junction prevented freedom of movement without danger in addition to the enemy threat of shelling the area. Dusk was approaching and a heavy fog permitted observation necessary for even a limited visual reconnaissance. (17)

A hot meal was served to the troops that evening and all necessary preparations for the attack were completed. Company L was to attack on the left of the snow hidden road. I Company would be on the right. (See Map C)

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(16) A-5, p. 109

(17) Personal knowledge

At 2200 hours the 3d Battalion attack was "called off". The 2d Battalion had secured their objective, the town of REMONVAL. The 1st and 2d Battalions continued the attack on the morning of the 16th and the 3d Battalion moved to STEINBACH and REMONVAL.

By 1230 hours the 2d Battalion had seized ONDENVAL and Company A had succeeded in securing a little fringe of woods on the northern edge of the ROHR BUSCH. (See Map D) The 2d Battalion continued the attack to seize the high ground south of ONDENVAL. The 3d Battalion was ordered to proceed to ONDENVAL to protect the right flank of the 2d Battalion and if necessary, assist in taking the regimental objective. (18) As the 2d Battalion moved out of the southern edge of ONDENVAL it met such a heavy volume of fire it was stopped completely. Some elements were able to move back into town, while others remained pinned down under fire until dark. The enemy was determined to hold the high wooded ground to the south which protected the ONDENVAL-IVELDINGEN PASS. (19) (See Map D)

#### THE COMPANY PLAN OF ATTACK

On the afternoon of 17 January Captain Eisler, commanding Company L, received the attack order. He returned to the company, oriented his platoon leaders and issued his orders.

Company L would pass through the positions occupied by Company A <sup>in North edge of ROHR Busch Woods.</sup> at 1600 hours, preceded by a ten minute artillery concentration, sweep through the west portion of the ROHR BUSCH and seize the railroad station and underpass in the defile on the west edge of the woods. The 3d Battalion would

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(18) A-8, dtd 15-20 January 1945

(19) A-5, p. 110; A-6, p. 28

have top priority on all artillery support. A platoon of M-4 tanks and a platoon of M-18 self-propelled tank destroyers were available to the company on call. The capture of the ONDENVAL-IVELDINGEN PASS was the Corps objective and the Corps Commander wanted the attack pushed with all possible vigor.

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Because of the limited line held by Company A and the exposed area leading thereto the company would cross the line of departure into the attack in the order, 1st Platoon followed by the 2d Platoon with the 3d Platoon in support. Communication would be with SCR 536 radio.

#### NARRATION

#### THE ATTACK ON THE ONDENVAL-IVELDINGEN PASS

The 3d Platoon had about an hour for last preparations before moving out for the line of departure. But having received a warning order earlier in the morning, were ready to go. The platoon was up to full strength, having received eleven replacements before the regiment was attached to the 1st Division. However this presented no problems because the platoon practiced the policy of teaming each new man assigned to the platoon with an older member thus giving the replacement guidance, confidence, an associate and a buddy.

Individual sleeping rolls, composed of two blankets and a sleeping bag were made into squad rolls and left to be brought forward later. Packs were also dropped, though each man carried his gas mask in accordance with recent instructions

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(20) Personal knowledge

and a K ration. There was no shortage of ammunition.

The platoon moved out on the end of the company column with a single column on each side of the road. The terrain to the immediate front, upon leaving ONDENVAL was open for about the first 1,000 yards. Directly to the front was a defile formed by the dense woods on a high ridge on the left; the ROHR BUSCH, and the dense woods on still higher ground to the right front. Through the defile ran a stream, a normal gauge railroad and the main highway leading to ST. VITH. (See Map D)

The weather for the attack, even though it remained extremely cold, offered one slight advantage for the attacker. A heavy fog was settling in, which would restrict observation by the enemy while crossing the open ground to reach the line of departure and the woods.

The artillery laid down its concentrations on the ROHR BUSCH according to plan and was also firing on the cities of IVELDINGEN and MONTENAU to the south.

The 1st Platoon crossed through the thin line held by Company A, which consisted of little more than a platoon, on time and after moving only a short distance encountered heavy machine gun and rifle fire. The 2d Platoon was then employed on their right. Company I started moving into the narrow neck of woods too, and to avoid the mass of confusion the 3d Platoon was left initially in position along the sunken trail just short of the railroad tracks.

As the attack by the 1st and 2d Platoons alerted the enemy, unobserved light mortars and long range machine gun fire started covering the open ground in front of the 3d Platoon. A low

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flying buzz-bomb crashed into the side of the hill just south of ONDENVAL which did no damage but did have a slight morale effect.

The 3d Platoon was instructed to follow the route of the 2d Platoon; to guide to the right and secure the railroad station and underpass.

The squads moved rapidly across the open ground and into the woods, using the edge of the woods as a guide the platoon attacked through the deep snow and tall trees in squad columns with the 1st on the right, 2d on the left and the 3d following the 2d Squad.

After a rapid advance of about 200 yards the platoon encountered a strong point. The squad leader of the 2d Squad was killed and the two leading squads were pinned down momentarily by heavy machine gun and small arms fire from the front. The exact location of the enemy position could not be determined but the fire was immediately returned and the platoon continued to advance.

The enemy, elements of the 9th Parachute Regiment, immediately in front of the 3d Platoon were firing and moving on through the woods as the platoon continued its drive.

Leading elements of the platoon soon reached the western edge of the ROHR BUSCH from which they could see the underpass and the railroad station with its two adjacent buildings.

To reach the buildings from the edge of the woods it would be necessary to advance down across about 100 yards of open ground. (See Map D) On close observation a small stream of smoke coming from the chimney gave evidence that the building was occupied or had just previously been vacated before

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our arrival. Feeling that the buildings themselves would probably be occupied and defended the first consideration of the platoon leader was to employ tanks or tank destroyers, but because of the time element and knowing that the road leading to the area would undoubtedly be mined, plus the advantage of possible observation, the enemy had from the high ground on the south that consideration had to be cast aside.

One squad was left in position to protect the platoon from the south. The two leading squads were placed in position along the edge of the woods with all weapons trained on the three buildings. Two men advanced rapidly down to the side of the building and, to their pleasant surprise, found them unoccupied and undefended.

The 1st Squad was then moved into the buildings, a position from which they could better defend the underpass and the buildings from a counterattack which might come from the west. The remainder of the platoon remained on the high ground overlooking the area to the front and to furnish protection from the direction of the woods where other elements of the company were still engaged in a fire fight.

It was about 1800 hours and darkness was approaching. The company commander directed the platoon to take up a defensive position in the edge of the woods for the night and to be prepared to continue the attack the next morning at 0730 hours.

A light rain started falling and the weather seemed to present more problems than did the enemy.

Security was posted to the front and the men scraped and chopped in the frozen ground until they had prepared two-man foxholes sufficiently deep to provide cover in case of a coun-

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terattack. (21) The squads were positioned in a general line from right to left; 1st, 2d and 3d Squads. (See Map D)

The area in front of the 1st Squad was open while that of the 2d and 3d Squads was covered with a heavy growth of young bushy trees about 12 feet tall. The trees in the area actually occupied by the platoon were of an older growth measuring 12 to 14 inches at the trunk. Separating the two growths of trees was a firebreak. Also running into the 3d Squad position at an angle from the front was a firebreak which constituted an avenue of approach for tanks.

Elements of Company I were to make contact with the 3d Squad but as yet no contact had been made. The company commander realizing the protection offered by the building, established his command post there. A wire line utilizing a sound powered telephone was installed to platoons, thus providing the platoons with both wire and radio communications.

The night was so cold that men were standing beside their foxholes stamping their feet in the snow in an effort to get warm. The company notified the platoon that sleeping rolls were in the vicinity of the CP, but very little use could be made of them in the rain which was slowly forming pools of water in the bottoms of the foxholes.

At about 2100 hours people could be heard moving to the left rear of the platoon and small arms were being fired about 200 yards to the left flank of the platoon. The platoon was alerted and just before opening fire the people to our left rear were identified as the 60 mm mortar section from Company I. They reported that they were lost and their company was

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(21) Personal knowledge

moving. Later it was learned that Company I had been mistaken for the Germans by Company K who had taken them under fire and Captain MacDonald, the company commander, had been wounded in the leg. (22)

At about 2200 hours a mine clearing detail under the company commander of Anti-Tank Company, using a tank dozer, was removing mines and snow from the road supposedly as far forward as I Company. The detail proceeded too far however, because of inaccurate information concerning the location of Company I and were fired upon by the enemy. The detail returned the fire, inflicting casualties and was able to withdraw but had to abandon the tank. (23)

The 3d Platoon was instructed to send a patrol to the tank, set up a guard and protect it until it could be recovered. A patrol of six men moved down through the woods to the tank-dozer. After finding that the enemy had withdrawn the patrol moved back down to the turn in the highway where they prepared a position from which to protect the tank and cover the road. The position was occupied the remainder of the night by four men, armed with M-1 rifles, a Browning Automatic Rifle and a bazooka. (See Map D)

In the early hours of the morning of 18 January while it was still extremely dark two individual Germans, completely armed, wandered into the platoon position and were taken prisoners by surprise as they pushed against the muzzle of a loaded rifle. The second to be captured was a non-commissioned officer. They were quickly disarmed and taken to the company command post.

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(22) A-9, P. 129

(23) A-5, P. 112

As daylight approached on the morning of 18 January it was evident that the enemy had moved in during the night and was occupying the area covered by the low bushy trees on the other side of the firebreak, immediately in front of the platoon. The bushy nature of the trees, and the heavy snow at the base of the trees and on the branches provided a screen behind which they were hiding. Several individuals, in an effort to move closer to our lines, had exposed themselves as they dashed from one tree to another. Three of the enemy had moved out into the firebreak far enough to make a perfect target and were shot dead in their tracks. They fell into the snow bleeding and groaning.

Every man in the platoon seemed to be just waiting to open fire, and with that outburst of fire every weapon in the line was firing into any likely hiding place of the enemy. The Germans had lost the secrecy which they thought they possessed. The volume of fire delivered by the platoon was so intense only a small number of the enemy were able to return the fire. Many of the enemy came under fire as they jumped from their hiding places in an effort to move to the rear. Others were killed as they lay in their hiding places in the snow. About ten of the enemy were so surprised by the sudden outburst of fire that they lunged forward into the firebreak as they fell dead. Each man in each squad seemed to have spotted a definite target, and when the firing had ceased the platoon checked for casualties. One man had been shot through the left shoulder and was seriously wounded, while two others were only slightly wounded, one having been creased across the side of his head and the other in the fleshy part of his arm.

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The 81 mm mortar fire was immediately placed on the woods to take care of any remaining forces which might be concentrating further to the rear of the enemy attackers.

An effort was made to evacuate the critically wounded man when, it was observed that long range machine gun fire was grazing across the open ground leading down the hill from the platoon position to the company CP, the route of evacuation. A German self-propelled gun appeared at the edge of the woods next to the clearing in front of the 1st Squad. It had been held up by the position occupied by the four men on the road but had succeeded in overrunning that position.

The counterattack plan of the enemy was now perfectly clear, the infantry supported by the self-propelled gun were to make a coordinated attack on the platoon position. But now the infantry had been destroyed.

The self-propelled gun continued its movement rapidly forward firing direct fire from its 75 mm gun and machine-guns into the platoon position.

The platoon leader, knowing that two M-4 tanks and two tank destroyers were in position, below the hill near the railroad station, quickly turned to the telephone to direct their fires on the approaching self-propelled gun. The telephone was dead. The previous firing had probably cut the line which ran down the side of the hill. P.F.C. Warner, the platoon runner also made a determined attempt to contact the Company CP with the SCR 536 radio with no success. It was very likely that the radio was grounded out due to its exposure to the extreme cold and moisture. With no communications it was also impossible to direct artillery or mortar fire on the moving vehicle.

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The platoon bazooka team was employed on the left flank of the platoon to guard the fire-break approach, which appeared to be the greatest tank threat into the position. With the platoon under such intense murderous fire it seemed almost impossible for the team to move so it could take the vehicle under fire. The self propelled gun stopped about 50 yards in front of the 1st Squad and continued to fire.

All members of the platoon who could see the vehicle placed small-arms fire upon it. But this only tended to give the big gun a more exact spot to direct his next high-explosive round.

Spraying snow, mud, ice and smoke plus the crashing fall of a couple of large trees, created by the explosions of the 75 mm gun, created great pressure on the defending platoon. But every man stayed in position determined to hold.

The bazooka team was finally able to sneak across the firebreak to the front and took up a firing position, in the edge of the woods. They fired two rockets each constituting a near miss. At the same time 81 mm mortar fire commenced falling in close proximity of the vehicle. The 1st Platoon which was in position to the right rear was also feeling the effects of the enemy fire and had requested the mortar fire.

The vehicle moved rapidly back over its route of approach and withdrew to the south.

The platoon leader expected to count many casualties in the platoon area. He found that the well spent efforts in digging foxholes had "paid-off" and not one man had been killed, although three men were suffering severely from the concussion effect of the shelling.

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It was about noon before the enemy had been completely defeated. Sixty enemy dead were counted in front of the platoon position. (24)

The relatively quiet lull which followed, permitted the evacuation of all casualties, issuance of ammunition, the eating of a K ration and the preparation for the attack which was scheduled to have started earlier.

That afternoon of the 18th, the platoon attacked with the limited objective of clearing the woods to their front.

No heavy resistance was encountered. However, several wounded who lay in the snow freezing and bleeding to death and five unmanned machine-gun emplacements were overrun. Thus the platoon moved through the woods to the southern edge of the ROHR BUSCH. The three squads were placed in line where defensive positions were prepared and occupied throughout the night.

By 1830 on 18 January the efforts of the entire regiment had succeeded in clearing the ROHR BUSCH. The regiment held a line south of the ROHR BUSCH overlooking the town of IVELDINGEN. Ninety-nine prisoners had been taken and over 300 dead were counted in the Regiment's sector of the ROHR BUSCH with a loss of 5 officers and 81 enlisted men. (25)

The 1st Battalion 18th Infantry, an organic unit of the 1st Division having been attached to the 23d Infantry, had attacked around to the right, and was firmly entrenched on the high ground to the southwest. (26)

During the night it began to snow. Because there was no threat of the enemy immediately to the front, security for each

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(24) Personal knowledge  
(25) A-8, dtd 15-20 January 1945  
(26) A-8, dtd 15-20 January 1945

squad was to be provided by one man being on the alert, in each two-man foxhole, while the others slept. But the weather was so cold practically no one could stop trembling long enough to fall asleep. Each squad sent a detail of two or three men down along the road to the railroad station to secure items from the individual sleeping rolls with which to build shelters over their foxholes and to provide additional comfort. But there was no solution to the cold. The weather was the worst experienced in the entire campaign. (27)

Early in the morning before dawn the company commander made available at the company CP a hot meal for the company. Each squad provided its own relief, not to exceed one-half the squad strength as each man in turn, enjoyed a hot breakfast. This provided a great morale producing factor; an additional thrust of strength. (28)

Early in the morning of 19 January a heavy snow started falling. At 0830 the 3d Platoon as an organic part of Company L, continued the drive to the south. Company L was leading the 3d Battalion attack. The mission for the company was to seize the town of IVELDINGEN. Supporting the company were four M-4 tanks and four tank destroyers. The plan of attack was to guide on the road with the Infantry and tanks advancing together.

The deep snow itself, presented an obstacle to the individual soldier. Negotiating the snow drifts, which in some places were five feet high, was as difficult as wading through waist-high water. (29)

The ~~crossroad~~<sup>road</sup> to the southeast was reached with no re-

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- (27) A-7, p. 328  
(28) Personal knowledge  
(29) A-7, p. 327

sistance but was found to be heavily mined. Complete mine detection in the deep snow was next to impossible. In order to continue the advance with the least possible delay the company commander directed the tanks to bypass the mines by moving to the right into the open field. The infantry elements were then directed to move with the tanks across the open field paralleling the road which was on the left. The heavy snow storm provided adequate concealment from enemy observation for the attack. (30)

The effect of Artillery was sacrificed for the sake of surprise.

The 3d Platoon was given the mission of clearing the right side of the street; to start in the first house and proceed rapidly down the street, maintaining contact with the 1st Platoon on the right. The tanks would follow immediately behind the assault elements, thus providing them the necessary anti-tank protection.

The tanks and infantry moved together across the field and entered the town. The enemy was completely surprised. One German prisoner stated that they did not believe an attack could be made in such a storm. (31)

The enemy began fleeing from the west side of the town. They made perfect targets for members of the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry who occupied the high ground to the northwest. (See Map D)

A strongpoint near the center of town composed of nine men from the 5th Company, 352d Regiment quickly surrendered when a tank fired a 75 mm shell through the side of the wall.

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(30) Personal knowledge

(31) Personal knowledge

At 1400 IVELDINGEN had been occupied and twenty-two Germans were taken prisoners.

The 1st Squad in continuing the pursuit was fired upon by the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry. With the snow still falling it was impossible for them to identify their target as friendly troops. The squad was held under fire until it managed to maneuver back into town. The squad leader, Sgt. Clark, had been shot in the leg. (32)

After radio contact was made with the 1st Battalion the company continued the pursuit into MONTENAU, the final objective, which was undefended.

Instructions were received to clear all road-blocks, mines and other obstacles to permit the passage of the 7th Armored Division by 0730 the next morning.

Clean clothes and hot food were the luxuries enjoyed by the 3d platoon that night.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

##### 1. PLANS FOR CONTROL

Company L had a very narrow sector through which to pass in crossing the line of departure into the attack. Company I was to pass through the same area. Although the personnel of Company A did not comprise a large force, control was difficult and would have been much worse with all the elements of both companies moving into the narrow sector of the ROHR BUSCH simultaneously. The Company Commander made a complete plan for control of his unit before entering the woods into the attack.

The plan of employing the 1st Platoon as it crossed the

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(32) Personal knowledge

line of departure followed by the 2d Platoon and using the 3d in support, proved to be a wise one. This permitted the best possible control of his company. As the 1st Platoon engaged the enemy the 2d Platoon was directed to attack on the right of the 1st and the 3d was in a ready position to carry out the Company Commander's desires when so directed.

Had the Company Commander moved his company into the woods without making a plan for its control, confusion would have undoubtedly been great and success small.

## 2. USE MADE OF THE SUPPORT PLATOON

For the attack on the ROHR BUSCH the support platoon was left initially on the small sunken road just short of the railroad tracks. This being about 800 yards from the line of departure would normally be considered an excessive distance for the support platoon to remain in rear of the assault platoons. But the nature of the terrain and enemy indicated that the support platoon, in order to remain free for employment when the situation indicated a good chance for success, should not move into the dense woods with the two assault platoons. As the enemy situation developed, the 3d platoon proved to be in a good position for employment. It was able to move at an appropriate time around to the right of the 2d Platoon and was successful in seizing it's objective; the railroad station and underpass.

## 3. DEPLOYMENT IN DENSE WOODS

While attacking through the dense woods and snow of the ROHR BUSCH control was a big problem. In order to maintain control it was necessary that each man keep visual contact with the man next to him. By veering off in a false direction

one member of a squad could have split the unity of the platoon thus causing confusion and possible disaster. The platoon was forced to deploy, in a close formation, with squads in column in order to maintain control. Two squads forward with the third following closely in rear proved to be a good formation.

#### 4. MAINTAINING THE CORRECT DIRECTION IN WOODS

The platoon was fortunate in having the clearing on its right flank during the attack in the ROHR BUSCH. The 1st Squad, which was on the right, was able to maintain the proper direction of attack for the platoon by using it to guide on. This permitted the platoon to move more rapidly with little or no uncertainty as to proper direction of attack. The 1st Squad was designated as base squad thus giving the 2d Squad and in turn the 3d Squad guidance.

Without using the clearing it would have been necessary to maintain a proper azimuth direction or just plain guess at the proper direction which would leave great chance for error and could have resulted in much confusion, loss of time and possible disaster.

#### 5. INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE

When attacking through the ROHR BUSCH the dense woods created a mask which prevented observation, in many places, beyond ten to fifteen yards. This required each man to exercise his initiative to the utmost in order to maintain visual contact, direction and control. One man could move no faster than the other on his flank, to his rear or front.

When the platoon encountered the strong point it was necessary that each man use his initiative to return the fire and defeat the enemy as rapidly as possible. The trees furnished some concealment and cover for those in close proximity

to move to a position from which fire could be placed on the enemy. On the other hand if each individual had taken cover behind a tree and waited for someone to tell him what to do, the attack would have been stopped completely for lack of initiative on the part of four or five individuals and it would have been very difficult for the unit leaders to get the attack going again.

#### 6. PREPARATION OF INDIVIDUAL FIRING POSITIONS

When the squads of the 3d Platoon moved into the area assigned to them for the defensive position on the night 17-18 January, they knew the plan for continuing the attack the next morning. But realizing the possibility of an enemy counterattack, they selected the place to dig their foxholes and started to work. After scraping away the snow the frozen ground was very hard to dig. Each man continued chopping, scraping and digging to improve his position. The efforts of each man proved its worth many times over when the counter-attack struck the platoon early the next morning.

Without the cover provided by the foxholes the position would have been more difficult to hold and casualties would have undoubtedly been great.

#### 7. EMPLOYMENT OF THE 2.36 inch ROCKET LAUNCHER TEAM

While occupying the defensive position on the night 17-18 January the platoon leader of the 3d Platoon failed to properly employ his bazooka team. Although the men were serving in two capacities; as individual riflemen and as a bazooka team, they should have been employed in a position in rear of the general line formed by the platoon so they

would not be pinned down by initial enemy fire. Alternate positions should have been selected and prepared to protect both the firebreak and the open ground in front of the right portion of the platoon. The enemy self-propelled gun could have been destroyed.

#### 8. OBSTACLES

Upon reaching the crossroad, on the route leading to IVELDINGEN and finding it mined, the unit was confronted with a difficult situation. The heavy snow had covered the mines. To clear a strip wide enough for the tanks to pass through would have necessitated a delay of at least two or three hours. The Company Commander's decision to bypass the mines, by moving off the road and across the open field permitted the tanks and infantry to advance together more rapidly.

Had the decision been made to leave the tanks behind and continue with the infantry alone, the momentum of the attack on the town of IVELDINGEN would have been slowed down.

#### 9. WEATHER

The weather during the period of this operation was extremely cold to the extent that it was practically unbearable. In order to keep warm it was necessary for the individual soldier to burden himself with clothing thus making him awkward and cumbersome. It was also practically impossible for him to sleep at night because of the cold.

The actions of the Company Commander of having a hot meal prepared and made available to the men actually increased the momentum of the attack which followed.

When the unit reached the final objective, on the second day, the men were tired and their clothes were wet.

#### 10. REPLACEMENTS

Even though the 3d Platoon had received eleven replacements just a few days prior to the attack, this presented no problems. Upon receiving the new replacements in the platoon they were quickly oriented and assigned to their respective squads. The squad leader upon receiving the new man, teamed him up with an older member of the squad thus utilizing the principle of the "buddy system". This gave the new man more confidence in his own abilities, a greater feeling of belonging to the unit and guidance for his learning the actual technique of fighting.

#### 11. DIRECTION OF ATTACK

The decision of the Regimental Commander to commit the 3d Battalion through the ROHR BUSCH was a good one. To have ordered the 3d Battalion to attack over the same ground where the 2d Battalion attack was completely stopped would have been costly in personnel and the possibility for success very small. The enemy was undoubtedly expecting continued efforts from that direction and had to shift their position to meet the new attack which came from a different direction. The direction of this attack was a contributing factor to its success.

#### 12. DEFENSE IN WOODS

The defensive position occupied by the 3d Platoon on the night 17 - 18 January is not considered the best that was to be had in the area. Although it was on high ground and did have observation in the right portion of the sector, to have moved on through the woods and occupied a position in the southern edge of the ROHR BUSCH would have prevented

the enemy from concentrating immediately in front of the position without being detected.

It is believed by the author, that Company I was supposed to have been in a position in the Southern edge of the woods but due to the confusion in the woods and the inaccuracy of available maps was not able to reach their objective for the night 17 - 18 January.

### LESSONS

1. Complete plans for the control of his unit should receive high priority from the unit commander before attacking in dense woods.

2. A support element must be located and disposed so that it can be employed at the proper place and time to carry out its mission.

3. a. A close formation is required when fighting in dense woods.

b. When fighting in woods visual contact between individuals is necessary for control.

4. Any feature in woods which can be used as a guide, for maintaining direction, must be used to the maximum.

5. A successful attack in woods requires more initiative on the part of the individual than in open terrain.

6. When a unit passes from the attack to the defense and the enemy is considered capable of counterattacking, the preparation of individual firing positions should be an automatic and continuous effort to improve that position regardless of the length of time it is to be occupied.

7. The personnel manning a special purpose weapon, such as a bozooka, must be located and disposed so that they can be effectively employed to fire on any target in their zone when it appears.

8. a. An obstacle, such as mines, should be bypassed by the assault elements if such action will reduce the time required to reach the objective.

b. Mines are more difficult to detect and remove when covered with heavy snow than under normal weather conditions.

c. Tanks and infantry together can advance and seize a town more rapidly than a force composed only of infantry.

d. Tanks can achieve a high degree of cross-country mobility when working under the anti-tank protection of infantry.

9. In extremely cold weather, if an operation is to continue for a period of more than two days, hot food, proper clothing and rest are essential.

10. In order to utilize to the maximum the efforts that can be obtained from new replacements assigned to a combat unit, special attention is required of leaders down to and including the Squad Leader of the squad to which the man is assigned.

11. When an attack fails the new attack should, whenever possible, be directed at the objective from a different direction.

12. When attacking through woods, whenever possible, the attack should continue until the far edge of the woods is cleared of the enemy before taking up a defensive position.