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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 10TH INFANTRY
(5TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE VICINITY
OF ARNAVILLE, SOUTHWEST OF METZ, FRANCE
10-16 September, 1944
(NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Cannon Company Commander)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN A RIVER CROSSING

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Combat commander of 10th Infantry Regiment
(Personal possession of author)

Note: The duties of the Cannon company commander in addition to commanding his company, consisted of maintaining constant liaison with the regimental commander, keeping abreast of the tactical situation, observing the effects of the companies fires and visiting the battalion commanders to determine their needs for artillery support.

THE OPERATION OF THE 10TH INFANTRY REGIMENT
(5TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE VICINITY ARNAVILLE, FRANCE IN THE
CROSSING OF THE MOSELLE RIVER, 10 SEPTEMBER - 16 SEPTEMBER 1944
(NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Cannon Company Commander)

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this monograph is the crossing of the Moselle river by the 10th Infantry Regiment of the 5th Infantry Division in the vicinity of Arnaville, France, during the period 10 September, 1944, when the Moselle was crossed, until 16 September, 1944, when the bridgehead was considered secured and sufficient strength had been built up to break out and continue the offensive.

To give the reader an idea of the morale, esprit de corps, and past actions of this regiment a brief review of the events leading up to the operation is necessary.

The 10th Infantry had landed on Utah beach on 10 July, 1944, 34 days after the initial landings. The first taste of combat for the regiment was near Caumont, France, in a defensive sector formerly held by the 1st Infantry Division. Following the St. Lo breakthrough the 5th Division was released from V Corps, First Army, and on 4 August was assigned to XX Corps of Third Army. (1) From this date until 1 September the division was one of the spearheads of the Third Army in its dash across France. In less than 30 days the 5th Division, before it was immobilized by the lack of gasoline, had pursued the Germans over nearly the entire width of France. During the pursuit resistance had been moderate to light; casualties had been few and morale and esprit de corps was high. To the individual soldier who had seen the vaunted German Army fleeing in disorder before him, had heard himself proclaimed the hero of the day over radio and in newsprint, combat had become an excursion across France and the war couldn't last much longer.

On 1 September the division had reached the Verdun area and was forced to halt for lack of gasoline. On the 4th of September there were but 2000

(1) A-10, p. 7

gallons of gas in the entire division, 1000 of which were needed for cooking. (2) This supply failure was to have a very direct effect on the enemy capabilities. Up to this time the enemy was in frantic retreat, disorganized and bewildered and offering only token resistance. (3) To our front little over 50 miles lay the Moselle river and the city of Metz. * A reconnaissance force from the Sixth Cavalry Group had already crossed the Moselle, entered Metz and reported it clear of enemy. (4) Thousands of lives could have been saved had enough gasoline been available to move the division to Metz. Before the division was resupplied and once again able to move, the Germans had returned to Metz, reoccupied the surrounding forts and forced the reconnaissance elements of the Sixth Cavalry Group out of the city. (5) Before Metz was to fall on 21 November 3 reinforced infantry divisions were destined to fight for nearly three months for a city the Germans had evacuated on 1 September.

ADJACENT UNITS and THE GENERAL SITUATION

The supply failure which halted the Third Army in the vicinity of Verdun ended the pursuit of the German Army which highlighted the August operations. This logistical breakdown offered the Germans time needed to reorganize and reestablish a defensive line; the fact that the Moselle river and its prepared defensive positions and good defensive terrain were present was indeed opportune for the enemy. The Moselle river in the vicinity of Metz is normally a rather fast moving river varying in width from fifty to one hundred yards and in depth from four to ten feet. The terrain south of Metz on the west side of the river rises sharply to form rather heavily wooded hills which are approximately three hundred meters high. The east bank of the river is less wooded with many flat open fields inland to a depth of about a thousand yards where the ground rises sharply to form the same heavily wooded hills as are found on the west bank. The first of the fall rains had fallen during the first week of September and the river was slightly above its normal level. (6)

(2), (4), (5) A-7; (3) A-9, p. 42; (6) Personal knowledge. * (See Chart C)

In this area the Germans established their defensive line to include the city of Metz and its surrounding forts, commonly referred to as "Fortress Metz." The 43 forts surrounding the city were built on the commanding terrain during the 18th and 19th Centuries. During the period, 1940-1944, the Germans had much improved the condition of the forts, and had installed modern communication systems and modern artillery of varying calibres up to and including 210 mm guns. (7) Using the forts as a base of defense and as artillery emplacements, the Germans organized their defensive line along the east bank of the Moselle from Pont a' Mousson north to the area around Dornot, across the river and north along the high ground. This area as far south as Arnaville was under observation from the forts located on both sides of the river. (8) (See Chart A)

From intelligence reports and prisoners captured in the ensuing operation it was determined that the forces defending the area south of Metz were made up of elements of the 462d Volksgrenadier Division and the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. The most fanatical resistance was offered by students of an Artillery Officers Candidate School which had been located in Metz. These troops were imbued with the will to die for the Fatherland and as will be shown later large numbers of them did. In addition to these units, many administrative troops from Metz were pressed into the fight and manned flak positions (quadruple 20 mm guns) which were used against ground troops. (9)

In line with the rapid advances made during August, General Walter H. Walker, the XX Corps commander issued an order on 5 September to capture Metz and continue the advance to the east and sieze crossings over the Rhine river. (10) At this time the XII Corps on our right flank had moved up to the Moselle river and was preparing to continue the advance to the east. On 5 September part of one battalion of the 317th Infantry of the 80th Division crossed the Moselle in the vicinity of Pont a' Mousson. (See

(7) A-3, p. 6 & 7 and Appendix No. 1, p. 49; Personal knowledge. (8) Personal knowledge; (9) Personal knowledge; A-7; A-3, p. 14; (10) A-3, p. 59 and Appendix 12.

Chart A) Accurate machine gun fire from the far shore sunk most of the assault boats and the troops that landed on the east bank were withdrawn early on 6 September because of the inability to cross additional troops. (11)

To the north in the XX Corps sector and as a result of the Corps order, the 7th Armored Division on 7 September attempted a crossing of the river 1000 yards north of Dornot. (See Chart A) Two hundred and fifty men of the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion were crossed but because of direct fire from the forts in the area and counterattacks by the enemy they were withdrawn on 8 September after holding the bridgehead for twenty-three hours. Twenty-three of the original two hundred and fifty men were all that were left to withdraw. (12)

THE DIVISION SITUATION

The three regiments of the Fifth Infantry Division are the 2d Infantry, the 10th Infantry and the 11th Infantry. On 7 September the 2d Infantry was ordered to seize and hold the high ground on the west bank of the Moselle northwest of Metz. As has been stated before, the enemy defense line in this sector was located on the west bank of the river. After attempting for two days to clear the enemy from the west bank of the river in preparation for an attack on Metz, the 2d Infantry was attached to the Seventh Armored Division on 9 September and the same mission assigned to "CCA" of the Seventh Armored Division and the 2d Infantry Regiment. (13) This regiment remained attached to the Seventh Armored Division and was engaged in this sector until 15 September at which time it reverted to division control. (14) (See Chart A)

To the right of the 2d Infantry, the 11th Combat Team was ordered by division on 6 September to cross the Moselle near Corny and establish a bridgehead on the east bank of the river. The crossing point was chosen at Dornot just north of Corny and the time of crossing was to be at dawn of 8 September. (See Chart A) The crossing made on 7 September by the 23d

(11) A-1, p. 65; and statement of Maj J.G. Martin, former member of 80th Div- on 20 November 1947; (12) A-12, A-9, p. 43; Personal statement of Maj S.F. Frazier on 25 November 1947, Former member of 7th Armored Division; (13) A-1, p. 69, A-7; (14) A-8, p. 41.

Armored Infantry of the Seventh Armored had thoroughly alerted the enemy and the crossing of the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry was discovered before the first boat reached the river. Delays in reaching the river prevented the crossing from being made at the time previously selected and it was not until 1115 hours that the first troops crossed. As it was now obvious to the enemy what was happening, artillery fire and automatic small arms fire covered the area and many casualties were suffered. The complete Battalion was crossed by 1800 hours on 8 September and had advanced approximately 2000 yards inland from the far shore toward Fort St. Blaise and Fort Sommy. These two forts, located 2500 yards to the east of the river on the commanding terrain and Fort Driant, 5000 yards to the north on the west side of the river, were all capable of placing direct artillery fire on the crossing site. Counterattacks on the bridgehead were violent and immediate.

A word about the construction of these forts may enlighten the reader. They were of varying size; the largest, Fort Driant, was approximately 700 x 1000 yards in size. Regardless of dimensions, one thing characterized all of them; they were not vulnerable to artillery fire of the heaviest calibres. The author has observed 500 pound bombs dropped from airplanes literally bounce on impact with no apparent damage to the fort. Each fort was an independent garrison and the larger ones were capable of housing and feeding about 1500 men. Most of them were surrounded by moats with defensive positions prepared on both sides of the moats. (15)

10TH INFANTRY SITUATION

Leaving the 11th Infantry on their bridgehead east of Dornot, let us turn to the actions of the 10th Infantry and their crossing at Arnaville.

The general plan of the division commander, Major General S. Leroy Irwin, was to have the 2d Infantry make a frontal attack on the city of Metz from the west, the 11th Infantry to secure a bridgehead over the Moselle in (15) Personal knowledge; A-7.

the vicinity of Corny through which the 10th Infantry would advance and envelop the city from the south. The plan was sound but the strong enemy defense line forced a change of plan. (16)

While the 11th Infantry was establishing their bridgehead in the vicinity of Dornot the 10th Infantry had closed in an assembly area at Chambley, eight miles west of Dornot. (See Chart C)

On 8 September the division commander directed the 10th Infantry to cross the Moselle river the following day. Time and site of crossing to be determined by the regimental commander, with the mission of securing Hills 386 and 310 east of Arnaville. (See Chart B) (17)

Following a reconnaissance in the vicinity of Arnaville by Colonel Robert P. Bell, the regimental commander of the 10th Infantry, the attack order was issued at 1400 hours 9 September. The plan was clear and simple, and offered ample time for subordinate commanders to make their reconnaissance. Taking advantage of the diversion caused by the crossing of the 11th Infantry 5000 yards to the north, it was decided to cross the river at Arnaville during darkness with no artillery preparation. (18) In substance, the attack order was as follows:

Time of attack: 0055 hours, moonrise, 10 September, 1944.

Order of crossing: 1st Battalion followed by 2d Battalion.

Mission: 1st Battalion, after crossing, to move at once to the high ground northeast of Arry, Hill 386, organize the position and hold at all costs.

(See Chart B)

2d Battalion to follow the 1st Battalion across and seize and defend the high ground east of Arnaville, Hill 310. (See Chart B)

3d Battalion to support the two leading battalions by fire from the west bank in the vicinity of Arnaville. To fire only if requested and to be prepared to cross the river on order.

Cannon and Antitank Companies - One platoon of each company attached to

(16) A-9, p. 43; Personal knowledge; (17) A-12; Personal knowledge;
(18) Personal knowledge.

each Battalion and to cross on completion of the bridge or on rafts which-
ever ^{is} ~~was~~ first available.

Company B, 735 Tank Battalion to remain in position north of Onville (4 miles west of crossing site) and be prepared to cross when ordered. On crossing to be held in mobile reserve to meet counterattacks or support further attack.

Company B, 818 Tank Destroyer Battalion to reconnoiter for positions on Hill 301 north of Arnaville and to occupy positions at night and support the attack at daylight.

Engineers to move 60 assault boats to the water, with crews prepared to lead the troops to the crossing site and operate the boats, to blow the approaches in preparation for a ferry site if the crossing ~~was~~ discovered, otherwise to wait until the crossing ~~was~~ completed. To start construction of a "Class 40" bridge and to complete it as soon as possible.* Absolute quiet to be maintained at the crossing site.

Artillery plan: The three battalions supporting the crossing to cover 1200 yards of front directly across the river and to fire only if the crossings are discovered.

Evacuation: By rafts and boats until bridge is completed." (19)

The town of Arnaville is situated in a valley between two hills which rise to a height of 301 meters on the north and to 330 meters on the south of the town. (See Chart B) The valley between leads down to the river. On the near side of the river about 200 yards toward the town and parallel to the river, a canal flows, over which a foot bridge had been found which was still intact. Approaches to the river were excellent for the launching of assault boats and the far shore was characterized by flat open terrain running inland to a depth of 800-1000 yards and then rising to form the two hills, 310 and 386, chosen as objectives for the 1st and 2d Battalions. (20)

(See Chart B)

* 1103d Engr Bn was available for heavy bridge construction.

(19) A-9, p. 46; (20) Personal knowledge.

THE CROSSING

The crossing of the 1st and 2d Battalions was made on time and as planned. No artillery fire preceded the crossing and the 1st Battalion had moved inland 300 yards on the far shore before the crossing was discovered and the first of small arms fire received. (21)

"Since it was essential to reach the high ground and the protective concealment offered by the woods before dawn, the battalion commander of the 1st Battalion, Major Wilfred H. Haughey, ordered his S-2, Lieutenant Leo Harris, to reconnoiter a route to the top of Hill 386, the battalion objective. Lieutenant Harris found a route to the top of the hill and taking a platoon from A Company and one from C Company had moved up the hill with fixed bayonets and marching fire". (22) The balance of the battalion quickly moved up the hill and began consolidation and organization of the objective for the inevitable counterattack. Through the element of surprise and the aggressiveness of a battalion an objective had been taken with minimum casualties; had the crossing been discovered earlier or if it had been made in daylight and the artillery that was to fall later in the bridgehead had been placed on the crossing site it is doubtful in the authors mind if the crossing would have been successful.

The 2d Battalion under Major William E. Simpson gained their objective in much the same way as the 1st Battalion. Before the enemy was fully aware of what was happening, American troops with fixed bayonets, hand grenades and marching fire were assaulting their positions. Artillery fire was sporadic during the remainder of the night while the battalions prepared their defensive fires, coordinated their positions and dug in.

As the crossing site was under observation from Fort Driant, Fort Sommy and Fort St. Blaise some 5000 yards to the north, smoke generators of the 84th Chemical Smoke Generator Company were set up to screen the operation. At dawn on 10 September the enemy had located the crossing site and had begun

(21) A-9, p. 48; Statement by Bn CO after the action; (22) A-9, p. 49; Statement by Bn CO after the action.

continuous shelling of the area. The shelling interrupted bridge construction and more important at the moment, the engineers operating the rafts left their jobs. Lieutenant Frank M. Vinson, platoon leader of one of the regimental antitank platoons, who was waiting at the river to cross his platoon took over the operation of the rafts, which with the assault boats were the only means of crossing the river at this time. (23)

An interesting use was made of the Cannon Company during this operation. In previous actions the Cannon Company had actually been employed in battery and functioned much the same as a battery of field artillery. On moves or pursuits one platoon was normally attached to each battalion. You will recall that the regimental commander in his order had given each battalion a platoon to be used at the discretion of the battalion commanders. As their crossing was delayed by the small number of rafts in use, the regimental commander directed the Cannon Company commander to place all six of his guns on Hill 330 on the west side of the river, south of Arnaville, with the mission of supporting the 1st and 2d battalions by direct fire. (See Chart B) The company was in position on the morning of 10 September but was unable to fire until 0930 hours due to poor visibility. When observation was possible the whole area from south of Arry north to the left flank of the 2d Battalion was plainly visible and within range of the guns, thus it was possible to place direct fire High Explosive 105 mm Artillery on enemy troops and vehicles from a distance of from 1500 to 1700 yards. Direct time fire was also placed on enemy troops to the right of the 1st Battalion. The guns were located on the topographical crest of the wooded hill, well dug in and because of their naturally low silhouette were difficult to observe from the far shore except when firing. Although counterbattery fire was directed at the gun positions, all rounds either fell short or went over the position. (24)

(23) Personal knowledge; (24) Personal knowledge.

THE BRIDGEHEAD

"The first counterattack on the bridgehead came shortly after dawn on the morning of 10 September and consisted of three tanks and a platoon of infantry which struck at the right flank of the 1st Battalion. Artillery fire called for and directed by forward observers with the 1st Battalion and the fires of the Battalion itself broke up the attack." (25)

Hill 386 on which the 1st Battalion had organized its position is crossed by a line of woods running north and south and it was generally along the eastern edge of these woods that the battalion had established their main line of resistance. (See Chart B) The terrain to the east of this position falls off slightly for about 200 yards in front of the woods and then rises gradually to form Hill 396 which is the dominating terrain in the area and from which the enemy could look down on the 1st Battalion position. This hill (396) was without trees or concealment of any sort, hence the 1st Battalion had, in effect, organized a reverse slope defensive position by reason of not having taken the commanding terrain. From the battalions position perfect fields of fire were available. Had they moved forward and taken Hill 396 a salient would have been formed as the 2d Battalions position on Hill 310 was to their left rear. Since Hill 386 was the 1st Battalions objective and for the above reasons the commander was justified in staying on Hill 386 and not attempting to take the commanding terrain.

The position of the 1st Battalion was the critical point of the bridgehead and is well worth study. Any organization of a defensive position in darkness is bound to have its faults. The fact that these positions as organized by the two battalions concerned held off repeated and determined counterattacks with tanks and infantry is a tribute to the battalion commanders and their personnel. From the time Hill 386 was taken until the battalion was relieved, Major Haughey, its commander was continuously (25) A-9, p. 50.

working toward its perfection. He had organized the position with C Company on the left, A on the right and B Company protecting the right flank and containing the enemy in Arry by fire. The town of Arry to the right rear was still held by the enemy and was a constant trouble spot until cleared by the 3d Battalion. (25)

By now the enemy artillery falling in the bridgehead and on the crossing site had reached such intensity that work on the bridge was given up for the time being and rafts and assault boats continued to be the only means of crossing.

Wire lines were constantly being shot out and the only communication with the bridgehead was by radio. Wire crews worked day and night servicing lines but were unable to keep lines intact.

Perhaps a quotation from a Sergeant of the 1st Battalion taken just after the action would best describe the bridgehead:

"To begin with, the place was crawling with Krauts. They were constantly infiltrating and staging little, isolated attacks. We were dug in on a wooded slope and the fragmentation of the tree bursts was like rain. It was almost impossible to get food up to us and when it did come, by way of carrying parties, hardly a man would leave his hole to eat. There was a steady stream of wounded going back down the hill like a parade that went on 24 hours, day and night. You didn't wonder if you were going to be wounded or killed, you wondered when." (26)

While the 1st Battalion was receiving counterattacks in its sector, the 2d Battalion on the left was getting the same treatment. This battalion had organized its position on the forward slope of Hill 310 with F and G Companies and E Company protecting the battalion left flank from the north slope of Hill 310. Excellent artillery support and determined officers and men beat the Germans back. Individual enemy soldiers would infiltrate into the battalion positions only to be killed by members of the crews of mortars and Antitank guns.

(25) Personal knowledge; (26) A-9, p. 56.

Evacuation of wounded and medical care was superior in this operation. "Evacuation was by litter to the river, by boat across the river, then again by litter from the near shore, and across a small canal by foot bridge to ambulances. Some litter hauls were as much as 2000 yards. It was not until dawn on 11 September that the first litter jeep was ferried across."

(27)

"The village of Arry was being used by the enemy as a jumpoff point for counterattacks and in the afternoon of 10 September, the regimental commander ordered the 3d Battalion to cross two rifle companies with the mission of cleaning out the village of Arry." (28)

The Cannon Company, from its position on the west side of the river had been firing direct fire at enemy personnel and tanks in and around Arry and had accounted for 2 German tanks coming down the road from Lorry to Arry as well as killing many enemy infantry. (29)

The two companies of the 3d Battalion, following strafing and bombing by P-51's and an artillery preparation moved in and cleared the town. At nightfall they were pulled out of the town and moved to position to the rear of the 1st Battalion to act as a reserve. (29)

The night of 10-11 September was characterized by counterattacks both large and small over most of the front. It is believed that had the enemy concentrated all of his forces in one large counterattack and struck at dawn on the 10th of September he would have been successful in eliminating the bridgehead. As it was the enemy counterattacked in a piece meal fashion, sometimes with as little as one tank supported by infantry. This permitted the battalions a breathing spell between each attack and gave them a chance to reorganize before the next attack. (30)

WITHDRAWAL OF DORNOT BRIDGEHEAD

While the 10th Infantry was crossing the river at Arnaville the 2d Battalion of the 11th Infantry was holding grimly to their bridgehead at Dornot.

(27) A-11; (28) A-9, p. 51; Personal knowledge; (29) Personal knowledge
(30) Personal knowledge.

After crossings by the 10th Infantry at Arnaville were made the Dornot bridgehead was abandoned and the 2d Battalion of the 11th Infantry withdrawn after dark on 10 September. "It had held approximately sixty hours and had sustained 26 counterattacks composed of tanks and infantry and had been subjected to incessant shelling from Fort Driant, Fort St. Blaise and Fort Sommy. Casualties for the battalion amounted to 363 killed and wounded." (31)

THE BUILD UP

Although the "Class 40" bridge at the crossing site was still not in, a ford for armored vehicles was prepared on 11 September and 6 Tank Destroyers and Company B of the 735th Tank Battalion were crossed. The crossing of these vehicles impaired the approaches to the ford and heavy artillery fire prevented the engineers from repairing the approaches but at least some armor was now in the bridgehead. (32) Up to this time the bulk of enemy armor in the bridgehead had been fought with rifle grenades and bazookas or fire from the west side of the river. The battalions 57 mm towed AT guns had been ferried across earlier but because of the soft condition of the ground and their weight it was impossible to get them in position where most needed.

Also crossed on 11 September were the remaining two companies of the 3d Battalion who joined I and K Companies and the 3d Battalion of the 11th Infantry which went into position on the left of the 2d Battalion, 10th Infantry and extended and secured the left flank of the bridgehead.

During the night of 11-12 September the engineers were offered a respite from the heavy artillery fire in the crossing area and construction was once again begun on the bridge. "The bridge was complete by 1200 hours, 12 September and Company C of the 735th Tank Battalion was crossed immediately and placed in Direct Support of the 1st Battalion, 10th Infantry."

(33) In addition to this tank company, part of "CCB" of the Seventh Armored Division crossed the bridge and occupied assembly positions in rear of the 3d Battalion of the 10th Infantry.

(31) A-10, p. 27; (32) Personal knowledge; A-9, p. 55; (33) A-9, p. 57.

Heavy rains were now making movement for armor difficult but on 13 September the balance of "CCB" was moved to the bridgehead in preparation for further attack. Although enemy counterattacks had ceased, the volume of artillery falling on the bridgehead did not decrease. An officer of the 7th Armored Division who entered the area at this time recently remarked that the volume of German artillery that fell in this area was greater than he experienced at any other time of the war. (34)

With the securing of Hill 396 on 15-16 September by the 3d Battalion with 2 companies of tanks in support and the simultaneous attack east by the 7th Armored Division the commanding terrain in the area was secured and the attack on Metz could be resumed.

CASUALTIES AND REPLACEMENTS

"During the period 10-16 September the 10th Infantry had lost 24 officers and 674 enlisted men or 15 percent of its officers and 22 percent of its enlisted men." (35) Officer casualties had been particularly heavy in the 1st Battalion; Major Haughey had taken command of the battalion on the day preceding the crossing and had no executive officer for the operation. On the first day of the operation the company commanders of A, B, and C Companies were killed, the battalion S-1 and S-3 were evacuated as battle fatigue cases and the S-2 was wounded and evacuated. D Company commander assumed the S-3 duties so that the battalion commander ended the operation with a staff of two officers, an S-3 and an S-4. Casualties in company officers were approximately fifty percent. (36)

Replacements were sent to the battalions on 15 September and before many of them reached their battalion command posts they were on their way back as litter cases, casualties from the intense enemy artillery fire. (37)

During the operation the regiment had stopped eight major counterattacks and countless smaller ones. (38) The German troops, the OCS

(34) Statement by Major S.F. Frazier, in Nov 47, formerly of 7th Armored Division; (35) A-7; (36) Personal knowledge; (37) Personal knowledge (38) A-12.

candidates from Metz in particular, had fought with great vigor and aggressiveness but only to lose the very ground over which they had probably defended dozens of times in defense problems of their "local Kelly Hill"

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In reviewing this operation there are a number of criticisms that come to mind; however, all criticism must be tempered by the fact that the operation was successful.

One of the basic principles of a night attack is that only a limited objective be assigned a unit. In this instance the objective of the 1st Battalion was 2000 yards from the crossing site. The 2d Battalions objective was about the same distance inland. It is true that the objectives were well defined and conducive to good defensive organization but when they were organized both flanks of the bridgehead were exposed and a proper reserve could not be maintained until additional troops were crossed on the day following the original crossing.

The greatest weakness of the operation was the failure on the part of the engineers in not manning the boats and ferries at the most crucial time. (39) The fact that the bridge was not constructed before it was is regrettable but understandable in view of the amount of artillery falling in the area.

The replacements sent to the battalions on 15 September should have been held at the regimental train bivouac until the operation was finished. A soldier sent to a company in heavy action is whipped before he starts fighting. Proper indoctrination within the company he is assigned to makes a better soldier and gives him confidence in his unit.

The medical care and evacuation of wounded in this operation was superior in the face of insurmountable obstacles. The fact that men knew they would be given proper care if wounded added much to their fighting ability.

(39) A-12.

The regimental commanders decision to cross the river without artillery preparation was certainly proven sound. Complete surprise was obtained which certainly would not have been possible had artillery been used. The time of the attack proved advantageous; moonrise coincided with the crossing and facilitated control of units.

One of the largest contributing factors to the success of the regiment was the splendid support given by the artillery. An adequate number of battalions were in support and their fire was accurate, devastating and continuous. Liaison officers and forward observers with the battalions were responsible for breaking up many enemy counterattacks.

Weaknesses by the enemy that assisted the attack should not be overlooked. The most glaring and unforgivable among several was the fact that the enemy was not alert and did not discover the crossing until the first troops had moved inland some 300 yards. A minor weakness but important to the attacking forces was in leaving the footbridge intact over the canal to the west of the river. The enemy erred in not using a river bank defense in this sector. Perfect fields of fire were available to a defender along the river in this area. Whether the enemy placed too much confidence in his counterattacking ability or whether sufficient troops were not available to man a river bank defense is not known, but he certainly was not lacking in strength after the crossing was effected. A river bank defense by an alert enemy would have been disastrous to attacking forces.

LESSONS

Lessons learned and principles confirmed by this operation are:

1. There is no substitute for the advantage gained when the element of surprise is achieved.

2. As brought out by this attack and substantiated by subsequent attacks was the fact that night attacks against the Germans were particularly effective.

3. Good communications are a "must" for any operation. Without radio communication over which nearly all artillery was shot in this action, the operation would have been doomed.

4. Artillery support must be available in great quantity during the early phases of a river crossing to compensate for the lack of tanks in the bridgehead.

5. Tanks should be crossed as early as possible, as soon as the crossing is discovered by the enemy if means are available.

6. Engineers should be aggressive and must operate assault boats and rafts under artillery fire.

7. Time for reconnaissance must be available to subordinate commanders. In this instance the regimental order was issued eleven hours before the crossing.

8. The most important single item which characterized this operation has not yet been mentioned. Excellent officer leadership and disciplined efficient soldiers made this action a success. In the final analysis the individual front line doughboy who bears the brunt of the fighting is still the Queen of Battle.