

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
GENERAL SECTION
MILITARY HISTORY COMMITTEE
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED OFFICERS COURSE
1946-1947

OPERATIONS OF THE 163d FIELD ARTILLERY GROUP
IN SUPPORT OF THE 6th ARMORED DIVISION
IN THE SAAR OFFENSIVE 1-16 NOVEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Group S-2)

Type of operation described: FIELD ARTILLERY GROUP
IN SUPPORT OF AN ARMORED DIVISION

Major Vitaly Kevalevsky, Field Artillery

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index	1
Bibliography	2
Introduction	3
Topography	5
Preparation for the Offensive	5
From the Seille to the Nied	9
From the Nied to the High Ground South of Falquemont	13
Analysis and Criticism	18
Lessons	19
Map - Third Army Tactical Situation, 8 November 1944	Tab 1
Map - Preparation for the Offensive and the Crossing of the Seille.	Tab 2
Map - From the Seille to Faulquemont	Tab 3

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 Combat Record of the Sixth Armored Division
- A-2 Combat History of the Super Sixth
- A-3 After Action Report, Third Army Vol. I
- A-4 After Action Report, Third Army Vol. II
- A-5 Patton and His Third Army, by Colonel Brenten G. Wallace
- A-6 Report on Study of the Field Artillery Group, by the General Board,
United States Forces, European Theater, 19 April 1946
- A-7 XII Corps Artillery in Combat
- A-8 Author's Personal Knowledge

OPERATIONS OF THE 183d FIELD ARTILLERY GROUP
IN SUPPORT OF THE 6th ARMORED DIVISION
IN THE SAAR OFFENSIVE 1-16 NOVEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Group S-2)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph tells the story of the 183d Field Artillery Group, while in support of the 6th Armored Division, during a portion of the Saar Offensive, from 1 November to 16 November 1944.

After its historic pursuit across northern France in August and September of 1944, the lack of supplies caused the Third United States Army to lose its momentum, and finally on the 25th of September, upon orders from higher headquarters, it passed from an offensive to a defensive status. Although this turned out to be an aggressive defensive situation which involved numerous limited objective operations, the Army front remained essentially along the line of the Moselle River until the offensive was resumed. (1) (Tab 1)

This was a depressing and monotonous period in the lower echelons. The higher headquarters made plans for the coming drive into Germany and concentrated upon the building of supplies, but the smaller units passed from the exciting pursuit under the best of summer field conditions to cheerless defensive operations in the cold and rain. (2)

When the Third Army received a directive from the 12th Army Group to resume the offensive it was composed of the XII and XX Corps. The XII Corps had the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions and the 26th, 35th, and 80th Infantry Divisions. The XX Corps had the 10th Armored Division and the 5th, 90th, and 95th Infantry Divisions. (3)

On 3 November the XII Corps received an order from Third Army which stated in part that it would advance northeast from the vicinity of Pont-A-Mousson with the sum of one infantry and one armored division and seize rail and road facilities at Faulquemont. (4)

To accomplish this mission the Corps selected the 80th Infantry

(1) A-5, p. 93; (2) A-3, p. 99; (3) A-5, p. 116; (4) A-4, p. GS II

Division which was then located in the line just east of Pont-A-Mousson and the 6th Armored Division at that time in reserve near Nancy.

The plan of the attack was such that the 80th Infantry Division was to participate in the general attack along the Third Army front on D day. Its initial mission was to seize bridgeheads across the Seille River. The 6th Armored Division was to cross the river after necessary bridges were constructed by D+1 and exploit the gap in the enemy lines in the true Patten fashion. The ultimate objectives of the two Corps in the Third Army were bridgeheads across the Rhine River, 90 miles away. The armored divisions were expected to keep pushing until that river was reached. Apparently General Patton had hopes of duplicating his spectacular end run of the previous summer. (5)

The 185d Field Artillery Group from the day of its arrival in France on 23 August 1944 had been assigned to the Third Army and attached to the XII Corps. Until this time all of its combat experience had been as Supplementary Corps Fire Direction Center. Throughout the static situation in September and October its function was to coordinate the artillery fires of the 4th Armored, 26th and 35th Infantry Divisions, and two Corps Artillery Groups firing in support of these divisions.

On 1 November, in anticipation of the coming push, the Group received orders to take command of three new battalions then located in the northern part of the Corps sector and be prepared to support the 6th Armored Division. On 2 November the Group Headquarters moved its command post from Champenoux, a village in the southern part of the Corps Zone, to Pont-A-Mousson. (Tab 1)

At this point it might be well to say a few words about the organization of that much maligned and often misunderstood unit, the Field Artillery Group.

In the early part of the war it was discovered that the Field Artillery regiment was too stereotyped and rigid a unit to provide the flexibility which was so necessary to give the most efficient support to the man with

(5) A-4, p. G3 II

the rifle. Consequently in February 1943 groups were born to tactically control non-divisional Field Artillery battalions. They were essentially a regimental headquarters and headquarters battery without administrative functions and without assigned battalions. For the accomplishment of any particular mission several battalions, usually from two to four, were attached. The guiding principle in making attachments was the mission and not the caliber. (6)

This organization was so flexible that on 1 November 1944 it permitted Headquarters 183d Field Artillery Group to step out of its role as Supplementary Corps Fire Direction Center and assume command of three strange battalions on a totally different mission.

TOPOGRAPHY

The outstanding feature of the terrain over which this action was to take place was the existence of the numerous streams which had to be traversed. Some of them were only a few feet wide, but nevertheless they constituted obstacles to both track and wheel vehicles.

The Seille and Nied Rivers, which lay directly in the zone of the advance, ran north and northwest respectively. Between them was an area of high ground from which streams and rivulets drained into these two rivers. This watershed was dominated by Delme Ridge, a hill four miles long and 1300 feet high, from which the enemy could cover our whole zone of advance by observation.

In the dry season the ground would have been excellent for the employment of tanks. It was generally open rolling country interspersed with small wooded areas. But the incessant rains had covered many of the fields with several inches of water and others with mucilaginous mud; greatly restricting the use of any vehicles off the roads. One redeeming feature, however, was the existence of a fairly good system of roads. (7)

PREPARATION FOR THE OFFENSIVE

Upon arriving in the new location the Group Headquarters had a three-fold task to perform concurrently. It had to get acquainted with its new

(6) A-6, p. 2, 3; (7) A-8

battalions and the people in the 6th Armored Division with whom it was to work and to make plans for the coming operation.

Let us consider the battalions first. They were the 276th and the 696th Armored Field Artillery Battalions and the 752d Field Artillery Battalion. The two armored battalions were equipped with the light 105mm howitzer M7, self propelled. The other unit was armed with the 155mm howitzer M1, tractor drawn, a medium artillery piece. All three had previously worked with armored divisions; an experience which could not be claimed by the Group Headquarters.

It immediately became apparent that the main problem was going to be the lack of equipment peculiar to armor in the Group Headquarters and the 752d Field Artillery Battalion. They had no 500 series radio sets which were common to both the armored divisions and the separate armored field artillery battalions, nor did they have any armored vehicles. Group Headquarters immediately borrowed a half track with an SCR 508 from the 276th Battalion, for the purpose of utilizing it as a portable fire direction center. (8)

After gathering up his battalions, which were located in position in the Foret De Faco (9), reinforcing the fires of the 80th Division Artillery, the Group Commander contacted the Division Artillery Commander of the 6th Armored Division. Fortunately they had known each other since the 1920's at Fort Sam Houston which made it much easier to break the ice.

Preparations for the coming attack were formulated. It was decided that the 6th Armored Division Artillery would act as direct support for CC B, while the 183d Field Artillery Group would be the direct support for CC A. In order that the CC A units would not have a totally strange supporting artillery, the Division Artillery and the Group exchanged one armored battalion. By this transaction the Group lost the 696th but gained the 231st Armored Field Artillery Battalions.

The Group Commander, accompanied by his S-2 and S-3, then visited the command post of CC A, located on the eastern outskirts of Nancy. Although

(8) A-8; (9) Forest De Faco

the details of the coming operation were not available at that time, the several officers of the two units had the opportunity to meet each other.

On 5 November the Group command post was moved into the field in the Foret De Facq immediately adjacent to that of the Division Artillery which was then in position even though the rest of the division was in reserve.

On 6 November an unfortunate and unusual incident befell the 183d Field Artillery Group. It had been raining almost continuously in that area for over a month, and although the Moselle River was swollen, the Group Air Officer had located the air strip in the bottom land along the river thinking that it could not rise any higher.

On the night of the 6th of November the Air Section was awakened when the Moselle River started to flow through their bedrolls. They attempted to push the airplanes on higher ground, but the river was rising so fast that eventually one officer, who delayed too long, had to be evacuated from the top of a 2 1/2 ton truck by an engineer assault boat.

Six airplanes were thus "drowned". Two airplanes belonging to one of the battalions had not yet joined the Group because of poor flying conditions. They were all that remained. Since the Corps Artillery Commander felt that a full complement of airplanes was necessary for the Group, he immediately ordered his S-4 to procure them by taking one away from six of the heavy battalions in the Corps. Thus on the following day we again had eight airplanes, however, they were all located on a new strip. (10)

At 0500 on 8 November 1944 a violent forty-five minute artillery preparation was fired. Every artillery piece in the Third Army participated causing an expenditure of over 30,000 rounds of ammunition. (11)

At 0545 the 80th Infantry Division jumped off across the Seille. The 183d Field Artillery Group and the Division Artillery of the 6th Armored Division, after firing in the general preparation, continued to reinforce the 80th Division. Sixty-nine battalion and five battery concentrations were fired. (12) No observers were sent out since they were held in readiness

(10) A-8; (11) A-5, p. 123; (12) A-1, p. 90

to work with units of the 6th Armored Division, and the weather was so poor that it did not permit the use of observation airplanes. Excellent wire communications existed with the 80th Division Artillery which permitted their observers to fire the reinforcing battalions. (13)

In the meantime the remainder of the 6th Armored Division was being organized into combat commands; CC A in its initial assembly area just west of Dommartin and the remainder of the Division near Nancy. (Feb 2)

The combat commands were subdivided into combat teams. Each combat team was built around one of the major combat units in the Division, hence seven combat teams were possible on the basis of three armored infantry battalions, three tank battalions, and the reconnaissance squadron.

On 8 November the Division was organized as follows: (14)

COMBAT COMMAND A

CT 9

9th Armd Inf Bn (-)
Co D 69th Tk Bn (-)
Co B 68th Tk Bn
1st Plat Co B 25th Armd Engr Bn
1st Plat Co B 603d TD Bn
1st Plat Btry A 777th aaa Bn
(-2 Sects)
1 Plat Tr C 86th Cav Ren Sq Mees

Res

Tr C 86th Cav Ren Sq Mees (-)
Co B 9th Armd Inf Bn
Co B 603d TD Bn (-2 Plats)
(with Sect Tdwy Br Co Atchd)

CT 68

68th Tk Bn (-)
Co C 9th Armd Inf Bn
3d Plat Co B 25th Armd Engr Bn
3d Plat Co B 603d TD Bn
2 Sects 1st Plat Btry A 777th
AAA Bn
1 Plat Tr C 86th Cav Ren Sq Mees

Tns

Btry A 777th AAA Bn (-)
Plat Co D 69th Tk Bn

COMBAT COMMAND B

CT 15

15th Tk Bn (- 1 Med Tk Co
& 1 Lt Tk Co)
Co C 50th Armd Inf Bn
3d Plat Co A 25th Armd Engr
Bn (-)
3d Plat Co C 603d TD Bn
2 Sects Btry B 777th AAA Bn

CT 50

50th Armd Inf Bn (-)
Co C 15th Tk Bn
1st Plat Co A 25th Armd Engr
Bn (+)
1st Plat Co C 603d TD Bn
2 Sects Btry B 777th AAA Bn

(13) A-8; (14) A-1, p. 88,89

RESERVE COMMAND

CT 69

69th Tk Bn (- Cos C & D)
Co A 44th Armd Inf Bn
1 Plat Co A 603d TD Bn
1 Plat Co C 25th Armd Engr
Bn (+)
1 Plat Tr A 86th Cav Rem Sq
Mez
1 Plat 997th Tdwy Br Co
Mine Roller Platoon

CT 44

44th Armd Inf Bn (- 1 Co)
Co C 69th Tk Bn
Co A 603d TD Bn (- 1 Plat)
Tr A 86th Cav Rem Sq Mez
(- 1 Plat)
25th Armd Engr Bn (- Cos A
& B; - 1 Plat Co C)
603d TD Bn (- 3 Lettered Cos)
Bridge Co (- 1 Plat)

SUPPORTING ARTILLERY

6th Armd Div Arty
(Direct Supt CC B)

128th Armd FA Bn
212th Armd FA Bn
696th Armd FA Bn

183d FA Group
(Direct Supt CC A)

231st Armd FA Bn
276th Armd FA Bn
752d FA Bn (155 How)

FROM THE SEILLE TO THE NIED

Apparently the enemy had been caught by surprise. Subsequent interrogation of prisoners revealed that he did not anticipate an attack under such unfavorable weather conditions. The greatest difficulties were caused by the flooded state of the Seille River and its muddy approaches. In spite of this a major portion of the 80th Division managed to get to the east bank by the 9th, followed by one CT from CC B which crossed at Port-Sur-Seille. (Tab 2) The remainder of CC B stayed in an assembly area on the west bank until the following day. The original intention had been to have CC A cross at Clemery, but it became obvious during the course of the day that this would be impractical because of the flooded approaches at that town. As a result of this CC A moved to an assembly position just west of the River at Nomeny. (15)

At daybreak on 10 November the 183d Field Artillery Group moved out from its positions in the Forêt De Faco. Although it is normal for a field artillery unit, prior to making a displacement, to send a reconnaissance party forward for the purpose of selecting positions, this procedure was not followed that day. The whole Group just joined the CC A column and proceeded to follow it across the Seille River at Nomeny.

(15) A-1, p. 90

Forward observers had been sent out from the light battalions on the previous day to work with the CTs of CC A. They were well equipped for such duty. Each forward observer party had a medium tank, a half track, and a jeep. When working with the tanks the observer would adjust fires from his tank. When he was with an armored infantry unit he used his half track. The jeep was used when working with the infantry or any other time the observer saw fit. All the vehicles had 500 series radios.

The medium battalion was not so fortunate in its Tables of Equipment. All that the forward observer had was a jeep with a 610 radio. Therefore, the observers from this battalion were not sent out to the supported units. This battalion was assigned targets by the Group fire direction center which received its intelligence from the supported units, the forward observers, and the air observers. (16)

After initial disorganized resistance, the enemy started to show signs of stiffening opposition, exerting his utmost efforts to delay our advance by means of defended mine fields, road blocks, demolitions, and every other conceivable type of obstacle. (17)

As CC A passed through the 80th Division in the vicinity of Mailly-Sur-Seille (Tab 3) it began to fan out. CT 68, being heavy in tanks, went north across open terrain avoiding the Bois de Secourt. CT 9, which was formed with the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion as a nucleus, followed the road running through the Bois de Secourt. A light artillery battalion was close behind each CT.

The Group Headquarters and the medium battalion were to pass around the Bois de Secourt behind CT 68 because it was believed that the abatis which the enemy had constructed along the road in the woods would delay CT 9. Another consideration was the possibility of ambush by the Germans who may have been bypassed.

The Group Commander had a light tank assigned to him by CC A. In it he was able to accompany the command group of CC A. He had excellent radio communications with each of his battalions, Group Headquarters, and the CC A

(16) A-8; (17) A-3, p.128;

Commander. In this way he could control his battalions, give any necessary advice to CC A, and follow the ever changing situation which is so characteristic of armored operations.

This ability to control the subordinate units was illustrated when it was found that CT 9 was making better progress through the woods in spite of the abatis and booby traps than CT 68 which ran into strong enemy opposition on the open ground to the north. The Group Commander, who was in the woods, ordered the medium battalion to come back and follow the road through the Bois de Secourt; thus enabling it to occupy positions and fire much sooner than if it had attempted to follow the original route. (18)

Later in the day a small scale enemy counterattack from the north, accompanied by seven tanks, was broken up by artillery fire which disabled three of the tanks forcing the others to withdraw. (19)

As the 80th Division assaulted Delme Ridge the 6th Armored Division bypassed it to the north. By nightfall CT 9 had reached the town of Luppy. CT 68 followed it to Sologne then turned southeast and went into bivouac near Moncheux which was then held by the 80th Division. The two light artillery battalions were right behind the CTs. The headquarters of both CC A and the Group, the 752d Field Artillery Battalion, and the Reserve of CC A were all centrally located in and east of Secourt. CC B had advanced as far as Vigny. (20)

Shortly after dark the Group had wire communication with all of its battalions. A fire direction center was established in a command post tent and harassing and interdiction fires were fired throughout the night. The computations were carried on by the light of a Coleman lantern. This was not quite up to the comfort of previous days when we operated from a building, and had a portable generator which supplied the electric lights, but the work was done just as well. (21)

At 0700 on the following morning after a ten minute preparation was placed on Bechy the CTs continued the advance; CT 9 due east toward Han-Sur-Nied and CT 68 northeast toward Baudrecourt.

(18) A-8; (19) A-2, p. 89; (20) A-1, p. 91; (21) A-8

The enemy offered the strongest resistance in the towns through which the armored units had to pass since the soggy ground made cross country movement impractical and in some places impossible. As soon as a town was taken the Germans would start shelling it, greatly hampering our movements. It was extremely fortunate that their artillery was limited in quantity and its quality was not the best.

CT 9 moved very rapidly and managed to drive the Germans from the bridge at Han-Sur-Nied before they had an opportunity to destroy it. The enemy immediately placed a heavy volume of mortar and automatic weapons fire upon it, denying its use to our troops. Since capturing a bridge intact was a prize which the Germans seldom let us have, an assault was immediately organized in conjunction with a battalion from the 80th Division. The Group fired a fifteen minute preparation and smoked the ridge on the east side of the river.

The seizure of this bridge was connected with several acts of heroism. Engineers rushed down to the river in the face of heavy fire and cut the wires which led to the prepared demolitions. The CC A Commander personally led the first squad in the assault, an exploit which earned the Distinguished Service Cross for him. Company B 68th Tank Battalion, part of CT 9, received the Presidential Citation.

CT 68 was somewhat delayed in its advance because of numerous blown bridges in addition to resistance by the enemy. It managed to reach Morville-Sur-Nied which was taken together with 80th Division troops. (22)

The 183d Field Artillery Group had extreme difficulty in maintaining control over its battalions on this day; a condition which was caused chiefly by lack of the proper radios. The only radios in Group able to communicate with the armored artillery battalions were the two SCR 508s, one of which was located in the fire direction half track and the other in the Group Commander's tank. During the course of the afternoon the radio at the fire direction went out. This stopped all radio communication with the light battalions and with the Group Commander who was operating with the mobile

(22) A-1, p. 93

command group of CC A. The 231st Field Artillery Battalion was supporting CT 68 which was off to the flank several thousand yards. The area in between had not been cleared of the enemy, making it impractical to lay wire or even send messengers. The 276th and the 752d Field Artillery Battalions and the Group Headquarters were trying to advance down the Luppy-Han-Sur-Nied Road which was already overcrowded with elements of CC A and which was occasionally denied to us by enemy interdiction fires. The traffic snarl was such that although the Group Fire Direction Center started its displacement at approximately 1600, it did not reach Bechy until close to 2200. During this period the only Group control was exercised by the Group Commander from his tank in the vicinity of the crossing on the Nied. He also acted as a forward observer adjusting smoke to cover the assault on the bridge. At dark he returned to Bechy where CC A set up its command post and where the Group Headquarters Battery finally arrived later in the night.

The 752d Field Artillery Battalion sent its reconnaissance parties as far as the woods west of Han-Sur-Nied while our troops were fighting for that town. There they received both artillery and small arms fire which convinced them that they should not push their reconnaissance quite so aggressively. As they were withdrawing through Bechy, they came under an enemy artillery concentration which put numerous holes in their vehicles but hurt no one. Nightfall found this battalion and the 276th in position around Bechy. The 231st was at Tragny with CT 68. (23)

In the meantime CC B had been successful in seizing a bridge just south of Sanry-Sur-Nied. (24)

FROM THE NIED TO THE HIGH GROUND SOUTH OF FALQUEMONT

As the 6th Armored Division started to expand its bridgeheads on 12 November, Corps reduced the size of its objective from the high ground north and south of Falquemont to just the high ground south of Falquemont. Accordingly CC B moved southeast along the Nied River, turned east at Han-Sur-Nied and headed toward the high ground around Chemery by way of Herny. CC A with the additional attachment of CT 69, which came from the Reserve Command, preceded CC B on the two roads running east from Han-Sur-Nied. (Tab 3)

(23) A-8; (24) A-1, p. 94

During the following three days progress became slower as enemy resistance stiffened. There were more counterattacks and heavier artillery concentrations.

CC A was running into stronger opposition in its advance toward Landroff and CT 44 was attached from the Reserve Command to assist. Its zone of advance was along the Rotte Rau (25), a small stream flowing across a very low area which was inundated in places to a width of several hundred yards. To the immediate north were a number of artificial lakes which formed a portion of the Maginot Line, expressly built for the purpose of flooding the country to make it impassable to tanks. The Germans made good use of these, often forcing our Field Artillery to go in position on high ground and at times sacrifice defilade in order to accomplish its mission.

Strong opposition was encountered in Landroff, and after it was seized four counterattacks were repulsed on that town on 14 November as the determined enemy attempted to retake it. During the following night as CC A units outposted the town, a wakeful forward observer from the 276th Field Artillery Battalion heard noises from the woods about five hundred yards to the northeast. This led him to suspect some sort of enemy activity there. He adjusted his battalion on the suspicious locality, and the screams which followed the first volley prompted him to request additional artillery. Within a few minutes all three battalions were firing on the woods which they covered thoroughly. Investigation on the following day disclosed that the six hundred rounds of ammunition expended had been a worthwhile investment. An estimated one thousand Germans forming for an attack were destroyed. The quick fuzes had caused most of the shells to explode as they hit the tree tops and gave the effect of time fire. Since the enemy was bunched up and not dug in, the results were devastating. (26)

The 15th of November found CC A disposed generally along the north-south line through Landroff. CC B occupied the high ground around Chemery, facing north toward Falquemont. Division Artillery was located in the vicinity of Thicourt and the 183d Field Artillery Group was in position along the high

(25) Rotte River; (26) A-8

a difficult thing to do since the adjustment was usually made on an occasional flash which an observer happened to see while circling around at one thousand to fifteen hundred feet. What made it doubly hard to believe was the knowledge that the Germans usually held their fire while an American observation plane was flying to their front.

Within the next two days the observers submitted their reports which brought out some interesting aspects of counterbattery fires.

It was deduced that the reason the German batteries did not hold their fires, as was normal when a liaison plane was flying to their front, was because they were firing at the troops of the 80th Division advancing from the west and southwest and evidently did not notice our airplanes flying along their south flank.

In evaluating the damage done to the enemy batteries it was concluded that the 105mm howitzer was a poor counterbattery weapon. Of course, if properly adjusted, it caused casualties among personnel, but even then it was not too effective against a dug in position unless time fire was used. The 155mm howitzer and gun with their ninety-five pound projectiles were good, but the 8 inch howitzer firing a two hundred pound shell was ideal.

The question of the amount of ammunition to fire on an enemy gun position has been debated for a long time and still is not solved, but we felt that we arrived at some workable figures. The terms neutralization and destruction are used very loosely. It is obvious that complete destruction of a battery requires a prohibitive amount of ammunition since every piece must be damaged beyond repair. Neutralization, on the other hand, can be effected by firing a battery volley causing the enemy to displace, and resume its shelling from another position. In such a situation more harm than good is done, because the enemy has to be located all over again. Therefore, when an enemy battery is located it must be effectively neutralized. This means that enough damage must be done to the pieces, prime movers, and personnel to destroy some of them and to render others ineffective for an appreciable length of time.

As a result of this survey it was decided that when a battery is de-

finitely located by an observer two volleys from five or six medium or heavy battalions should be placed upon it. This conclusion was later incorporated into the XII Corps Artillery Standing Operating Procedure. If an observer from a light battalion initiated the adjustment, he would continue firing one gun from his battalion on the target to prevent it from moving until the heavier units could be brought to bear on it. This, of course, was based upon the assumption that medium and heavy battalions were present in the area. If this were not so, the light artillery would just have to do the best that it could.

Another point brought out was that extreme accuracy in an artillery weapon can sometimes give undesired results. One observer adjusted an 8 inch howitzer battalion upon a flash which appeared to come from the edge of a small wooded area. After his adjustment was completed he fired for effect at the center of the adjusted range. Subsequent investigation revealed that the German battery was actually located about one hundred yards forward of the woods. The fire for effect fell along the tree line. The only apparent damage done was three Germans killed. In order to avoid this in the future Corps Artillery instructed its units to cover an area of at least one hundred yards in depth when firing for effect on a battery position.

The results of this survey were quite gratifying. Some valuable information was acquired. The 183d Field Artillery Group was reinstated in the good graces of the Corps Artillery Commander. The Group Commander received a Bronze Star Medal for the manner in which he handled the artillery fires in this operation. (28)

On the 16th of November the 6th Armored seized its objective and the 80th Division was left on the high ground overlooking Falquemont. The 6th turned east to continue the push to the Saar in conjunction with the 35th Infantry Division. (29)

This brought to an end the first half of the Saar Offensive for the 183d Field Artillery Group. It was an interesting and instructive period during which it became qualified as an "Armored Field Artillery Group".

(28) A-8; (29) A-1, p. 104

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Headquarters 183d Field Artillery Group was given a new mission for which it was not properly equipped and for which it had no training. Because of these factors it had some difficulty in functioning smoothly at first. But by the time the Nied River was crossed it was well qualified for the job.

It will be noted that the Group was never attached to the Division, as would have been normal in such an operation, but remained "under Corps Artillery control" even when that control could seldom be exercised because of the extended lines of communication. This was due to a policy within the XII Corps Artillery which would not allow their units to be attached to divisions. The reason given for this was that the divisions received the same amount of support but did not have to be bothered with additional administrative matters which would necessarily exist from the attachment of such units. This may have been true in more or less static or slow moving situations. In an operation such as this, it worked an extreme hardship on the Group when it came to drawing supplies and prevented it from getting certain items of equipment issued to armored units which would have been available had they been attached to the Division. It must be conceded that the peculiar status had no harmful effect upon the tactical functioning. This was largely due to the spirit of cooperation which existed between CC A and Division Artillery on the one hand and the 183d Field Artillery Group on the other.

The main adverse criticism is to be directed at the Tables of Equipment of a group headquarters and a 155 howitzer battalion for not providing the necessary equipment to work with armored units.

If it had not been initially evident that medium artillery battalions and group headquarters would be required to work closely with armored divisions, this fact became clear shortly after the Allied Armies started rolling in France. It would seem that some higher headquarters such as Army or Theater would allow these units to be augmented with the necessary equipment to accomplish their mission more efficiently.

There is no question but that the Group Air Officer exercised very bad judgment in the selection of an air strip along the Moselle River while that

stream was rising. It is true that these airplanes were immediately replaced in so far as the Group was concerned, but on the whole it deprived other artillery units of six air OPs for several weeks and numerous targets were lost.

The forward observers are to be commended for an outstanding performance of their duties. They were always in front with the attacking tanks and infantry giving them the fastest possible artillery support. The observer who stopped the enemy counterattack at Landroff while it was forming saved an unknown number of American lives, and illustrated the necessity for the close artillery support which forward observers can give. On the whole the 183d Field Artillery Group performed its assignment in such a way that the commanders of the supported units, by their own admission, were well pleased. That is the ultimate proof of success in a field artillery unit. (30)

LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. The field artillery group organization is essentially sound. It is capable of performing many and varied missions. However, in so far as possible, it is wise to retain the same battalions in a group, otherwise valuable time is lost in "getting acquainted". This may be done by having the groups perform the same type missions. There are always some to be used in support of armored divisions, infantry divisions, and as heavy general support groups. It would be well to let the groups specialize in one of these three and have them change over only in an emergency.

2. Neither a group headquarters nor a medium field artillery battalion is properly equipped to support an armored division. Their main weakness lies in lack of 500 series radios and armored vehicles. If these units are augmented with the above mentioned items they are capable of performing their assigned mission.

3. To be effective a counterbattery concentration should be fired by two volleys from five or six heavy or medium battalions, and should cover a

depth of at least one hundred yards; preferably two hundred.

4. A medium field artillery battalion should be organically assigned to an armored division. This division has only three light battalions and certain types of targets, such as batteries, require the extra punch of a 155 mm weapon.

5. Forward observers must work with the assault companies of the supported units and must remain with them all the time. It is difficult to predict what may have happened to CT 68 if the thousand Germans had not been annihilated by the alert forward observer at Landroff.

6. Air O Ps are invaluable and must be maintained continuously if the weather permits. They proved to be the best source of intelligence as to the location of enemy batteries.

7. A Corps Artillery unit when working with a division and out of communication with the corps artillery fire direction center should be attached to that division.