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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
(1ST INFANTRY DIVISION) DURING THE INITIAL PENETRATION
OF THE SIEGFRIED LINE IN THE VICINITY OF
NUTHEIM, GERMANY, 13 - 20 SEPTEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of Operation described: BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st United States Infantry Division, during the initial penetration of the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of Nutheim, Germany, 13 - 20 September 1944. This period marked the beginning of the Rhineland Campaign (15 September 1944).

To orient the reader, it is necessary to review briefly the events leading up to the arrival of Allied forces on the German Border.

In December 1943, at an Allied Conference in Cairo, General Eisenhower was selected Supreme Allied Commander for the operation, referred to as Operation OVERLORD. He was directed to conduct operations aimed at the heart of Europe and the destruction of German forces. (1)

The Allied assault was launched on 6 June 1944. American and British seaborne forces, under the command of Field Marshal Montgomery, landed and deployed along fifty miles of the Normandy coast. This was preceded by heavy naval and air bombardment and an airborne drop of several divisions in vital areas. Resistance from heavily fortified positions along the beach was bitter and stubborn but by D plus one the "crust" of the German coastal defense system was broken. (2) (Map A)

(1) A-1, p. 27; (2) A-1, p. 32.

Powerful German counterattack forces from the south and east were ordered to wipe out the beachhead. However, Allied Air Force action on bridges, railroads, communication lines and troop movements was so effective that the beachhead was secured before successful counterattacks could be launched. (3)

Expansion of the beachhead progressed slowly due to ready-made enemy strong points found in the numerous hedgerows coupled with poor observation for artillery employment, rain and mud. The high quality of the German soldier was also apparent in this fighting. (4)

By late July the beachhead was consolidated and four Allied Armies were poised to strike, awaiting only clear weather to permit aerial bombardment. The plan called for an initial breakthrough by the American First Army in the St. Lo area through which General Patton's Third Army would strike to unhinge the German left flank for further exploitation. (5)

Under clear skies, the attack was launched on 25 July, preceded by an air bombardment of 3,390 tons concentrated on a narrow front. The breakthrough was complete and by 28 July the Third Army broke out to exploit the success. The battle of Normandy became the battle of France. (6)

At this time Hitler, realizing the precarious position of his armies in France, directed the Seventh German Army to stage a large-scale counterattack, using all available armor and motorized infantry with the mission of smashing west to

(3) A-8, pp. 3, 134, 135; (4) A-1, p. 34; (5) A-9, p. 100;
(6) A-1, p. 35.

the sea at Avranches, cutting off General Patton's forces. Due largely to heavy fighter-bomber action by Allied Air Forces, this counterattack was delayed, weakened, and finally called off. Commitment of the German Seventh Army on a counterattack mission which failed delayed regrouping of this force to the extent that Allied forces trapped and destroyed over 100,000 enemy troops in the "Falaise Pocket". (7)

Due to the rapid pursuit eastward by the British in the north and the Americans in the south, the enemy's attempt to establish a line east of the Seine River was committed too late to organize an effective defense. (8)

Remnants of the German Seventh Army which escaped through the Falaise Corridor and the German Fifteenth Army now were in full retreat across Northeastern France. As this disorganized force fell back, the Allies pressed the pursuit on the ground and in the air under continued favorable weather. (9)

On 1 September elements of five German divisions were withdrawing to the east near Mons, Belgium, with the sole mission of reaching and manning the Siegfried Line defenses. Simultaneously, First Army units marching along parallel routes immediately to the south, turned north toward Mons, striking the vulnerable extended southern flank of the enemy, pinning him against the British in the north and cutting his retreat to the east. (10)

During the following three days no front line existed. In the resultant confusion infantry fought in close combat with

(7) A-2, p. 5; A-10, p. 299; (8) A-2, p. 21; (9) A-1, p. 37; A-12, p. 46; A-10, p. 306; (10) A-3, p. 209; A-12, p. 46; A-2, p. 36.

artillery, and service troops were in at least one instance engaged in street fighting as the enemy attempted to break through our left flank to reach the Siegfried Line. Thousands of the enemy were killed and wounded as they were ambushed along roads; over 20,000 prisoners were captured. (11)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The rapid advance from St. Lo to the German border, a distance of 300 straight line miles, resulted in critical shortages due to extended supply lines. Local facilities, such as Engelbert Company, manufacturer of tires - also equipped to recap and repair tires and tubes, were utilized to the maximum to augment available supplies. (12) Units could procure Class III supplies only in reduced quantities as reserves had become exhausted. Some trains returned all the way to the beaches to secure essential gas. (13)

The enemy, on the other hand, was utilizing every means to gather his strength for defense of the homeland. Field Marshal Model, in charge of enemy forces in Western Germany, rapidly organized remnants of his western armies into battle groups. These groups, armed with infantry weapons and numerous 88-mm batteries taken from antiaircraft defense of cities, were rushed into the west wall defenses. In addition, fresh German units from Norway and the Russian front were appearing for the first time in the American First Army sector. (14)

The rapid Allied advances of the past six weeks came to an abrupt halt along the entire front during the second week of September 1944. (15) (Map B)

(11) A-13, p. 225; (12) A-13, pp. 11,13; (13) A-14, pp. 105, 108; (14) A-9, p. 169; A-12, p. 48; (15) A-2, p. 47.

Future plans of the British in the north called for establishing a bridgehead across the Rhine north of the Ruhr region and the securing of ports at Rotterdam and Amsterdam. To support this operation the largest airborne operation ever attempted was to take place with a drop behind the enemy lines to secure key bridgeheads. (16)

Simultaneously, the American First Army in the south was to strike east to the Rhine between Bonn and Cologne, launching its drive from the vicinity of Aachen, Germany. Its forward elements were searching for weaknesses in the Siegfried Line defenses on September 12. (17)

The First Army's VII Corps, on the frontier several miles southeast of Aachen, was facing favorable terrain for tank employment. Also, in the event of a penetration, exploitation would be facilitated by good road networks north and east of Aachen. The plan was to envelop Aachen from the south and east, with the 1st Infantry Division on the left wing, the 9th Infantry Division on the right, and the 3d Armored Division in the center. (18) (Map B)

A proper appreciation of the task facing the 3d Armored Division requires an analysis of the Siegfried Line defenses in this sector. The outer perimeter consisted of several rows of pyramidal concrete blocks rising above the ground to form an effective antitank barrier. Where roads crossed the barrier steel gates had been installed or iron rails had been cemented upright into the road.

Immediately to the rear of this obstacle, pillboxes were

(16) A-1, p. 39; A-9, p. 161; (17) A-2, Situation Map 5;
(18) A-2, p. 47.

located so as to cover the barrier with fire, thus preventing breaching with demolitions.

Depth of the defenses was dependent on the defensive strength of the terrain. Where terrain favored the attacker, the defenses were proportionately greater in depth. In the area a few miles south of Aachen the first belt extended to a depth of 3,000 yards. (19)

Pillboxes were located on ground providing mutual support and best observation and fields of fire. Distances between pillboxes varied from fifty to several hundred yards. Generally, pillboxes were blind from the rear except when the rear door was open. Firing embrasures permitted only a 50-degree angle of fire. Some contained only one opening whereas others could cover both flanks or contained two mutually supporting guns.

Antitank gun emplacements were constructed to accommodate small caliber guns, which had become obsolete against tanks. The standard 88-mm gun had to be dug in outside the position.

Inside each pillbox, separate living and sleeping compartments were provided, their number and size dependent upon the number of troops for which it was designed.

Observation and command posts in forward positions were combined in one installation which in some instances were four stories deep and contained a half dozen or more separate rooms. This type fortification was entirely underground save for a small cupola to permit observation. Communication between all positions was provided by underground cables.

The defense, as a whole, presented a formidable obstacle

(19) Personal knowledge; A-7, p. 6.

to an attacking force. Over a period of several years since construction, nature had provided the works with a natural camouflage which concealed many positions until after they opened fire. Added to this, some were built to resemble garages, cottages and other deceptive installations where they would be inconspicuous. The only part of a pillbox appearing above the surface was that essential to meet its tactical requirements plus overhead cover consisting of several feet of reinforced concrete, which could withstand tank fire at point-blank ranges. (20)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

On 3 September 1944 the 1st Battalion of the 26th Infantry was detached from the 1st Division and attached to the 3d Armored Division. Its primary employment involved security and mopping up missions behind the fast-moving armored spearheads. For this purpose it was attached to Combat Command Reserve. (21)

Prior to this time the battalion had been committed in combat continuously since 6 June, D-day in Normandy, excepting for a two-week rest in July. Although it had suffered a large turnover in personnel, morale was high from successive quick victories. Its officers were seasoned, some having participated in four campaigns.

The men generally realized that the picnic, wine and flowers campaign of France and Belgium was at an end. Now, at last, the German was fighting on native soil, so resistance was expected to stiffen. However, the end now seemed within

(20) Personal knowledge; (21) A-4.

our grasp. Optimism was high, in fact too high in view of the tough battles that lay ahead. (22)

Sound tactical doctrine dictated that the enemy's defenses, reached at the close of a pursuit which had turned into a rout, be penetrated as rapidly as possible. The enemy was to be given no breather to recover from the staggering blows struck in France and Belgium. For this reason no time was available for specialized training so valuable to the success of an attack on permanent type defenses. Also, at battalion level, little of value was known as to the nature of construction, strength or depth of the fortifications.

THE INITIAL PENETRATION

On the 12th of September strong patrols from Combat Command "A" and Combat Command "B", 3d Armored Division, arrived on the German frontier in the vicinity of Walheim, Germany, approximately five miles southeast of Aachen, feeling for possible weaknesses in the defenses. (23) (Map C)

Brigadier General Hickey, commanding Combat Command "A", formed two groups known as Task Force "X" and Task Force "Y", each composed of a battalion of armored infantry, a battalion of tanks, tank destroyers and engineers. These task forces assembled in a wooded area several hundred yards southwest of the Siegfried Line's outer fringe during the night of 12 - 13 September, preparatory to attacking on the 13th. (24)

The attack was delayed on the morning of the 13th to await bombardment by the Air Forces. The Commander of Task

(22) Personal knowledge; (23) A-6; (24) A-3, p. 211.

Force "X", realizing valuable time was being wasted and that results were doubtful, proceeded with the attack, notifying attached air-ground liaison personnel accordingly. Several attempts to effect a penetration during the day were stopped by heavy small arms fire from pillboxes and heavy mortar and antitank shelling from positions to the rear. The armored infantry was forced to retire to the woods but the tanks held their ground, firing on the pillboxes at point-blank range. In one instance, 50 rounds of shelling from a tank destroyer on a single enemy strong point failed to neutralize its fire.

At 1500 hours an attempt was made to cross an area in the dragon's teeth previously filled in with gravel, apparently for the convenience of civilians in the area. The attack was successful; twenty tanks were quickly rushed over the home-made ramp, followed by a battalion of armored infantry. Their mission was to take the German town of Nutheim, 2000 yards to the northeast. However, extremely heavy artillery and antitank fire soon disabled ten tanks and dispersed the infantry, requiring reorganization before the attack could be renewed. At 1715 hours the task force commander reported additional forces would be required to effect a breakthrough.

General Hickey chose this moment to commit his reserve, the 1st Battalion of the 26th Infantry, which had been attached to his command that morning. Their mission was to overrun the heavily fortified positions holding up the advance of the armor. The battalion was to attack Nutheim from the west in conjunction with an attack from the southwest by Task Force "X", now reorganizing. (25)

(25) A-5.

Little time was available to the battalion commander for reconnaissance as the attack was to be launched as soon as the battalion could be moved from the assembly area. (See Map C) From the northeast edge of the woods the line of dragon's teeth antitank barrier could be seen several hundred yards to the front. Several of our tanks were burning just short of this barrier. Little could be seen beyond, as a gentle ridge running northeast and southwest masked further observation. A hasty map reconnaissance indicated gentle folds in open terrain offering little cover from small arms fire. The plan of attack most likely to succeed appeared to be a frontal attack through the barrier for 500 yards, then a change in direction to the southeast. This provided a flanking approach to Nutheim from the rear of the enemy's main defenses. The ridge running northeast and southwest would offer concealment from enemy observation to the north. Little was known of the enemy other than his determined resistance as evidenced earlier in the day.

Company commanders were issued the attack order from a vantage point at the edge of the woods, which would also serve as the line of departure. (Map C)

Company A, with a section of machine guns attached, would lead the attack, followed by Companies B and C with a section of machine guns attached. The command group was to be located initially with Company B while the balance of Headquarters Company was to remain in the assembly area. Tanks were to support the attack by firing into pillbox embrasures from

fixed positions until masked by the troops or terrain. Armored artillery and mortar support would be available through dismounted forward observers from Task Force "X" and the SCR 300 radio sets with each company commander. The 81-mm mortars, from positions in the assembly area, were to place harassing fires on Nutheim and be prepared to fire missions on call during the night by map. All organic transportation was to remain in the assembly area, including an attached platoon of 57-mm antitank guns, until ordered forward. (26)

As the attack jumped off at 1830 hours, the troops were immediately taken under heavy mortar and machine gun fire from the front and right flank. Three platoon leaders in Company A became casualties and the formation was broken; word was passed along the line to keep moving and reorganize in the vicinity of a burning barn several hundred yards to the north. The momentum of the attack carried through the barrier and its covering pillboxes. Companies B and C, following behind Company A, suffered relatively light casualties as the enemy's observation was becoming limited with the approaching darkness.

Company A reorganized and continued the attack to the north. Coming upon an unimproved road leading to Nutheim, the company commander believed it to be a country road not appearing on the map; accordingly, the column continued on several hundred yards to a hard surfaced road running to the southeast. Here the column turned southeast believing it was

(26) A-15, A-17, Personal Experience.

heading toward Nutheim, the battalion objective. Wires observed along the road were cut. Soon an enemy bicyclist came down the road searching for the break in the wire, and was taken prisoner.

Several minutes later a motorcycle patrol appeared, also looking for the break in the wire, and was in turn taken prisoner. Making an estimate of the situation, Captain Anderson concluded that artillery or mortar positions were located at the end of this wire, as lighter weapons were located in pillboxes which would have underground communications. Due to the appearance of two patrols in rapid succession, these positions were believed to be close by. Accordingly, the column deployed on either side of the road and proceeded to the edge of town. At this point a squad was deployed to the rear of the buildings on either side of the street and one squad worked down the street.

Soon the squads working in rear of the buildings came upon German positions. The Germans were having supper on the position without posting security. The squad on the left captured a 105 and two 120-mm mortars and the squad on the right captured two 88-mm guns. Surprise had been complete; the weapons were put out of action. Interrogation of the prisoners indicated the enemy was aware of an attack developing toward Nutheim but believed they would receive ample warning of any penetration, either from the south or west.

At this time the company commander realized he had overshoot his objective and sought the shelter of a hallway to check his map. Having determined his location, he gave the

order to form rear guard action and retrace the route of advance. Now, however, the enemy had discovered the presence of Company A and suddenly opened fire from all directions with automatic weapons and hand grenades. Fighting its way out of town with the prisoners, the company retraced its route to the burning barn, arriving at 2100 hours. (27)

Turning back to the start of the attack, the balance of the battalion was following Company A when concentrations of mortar fire on the dragon's teeth caused Company B to lose contact with Company A. Before contact could be regained Company A was lost under cover of darkness. Patrols were sent out but failed to locate Company A; radio contact could not be established. The battalion commander decided to continue the attack minus Company A.

As the advance progressed a number of pillboxes were encountered and some Germans in outside positions were taken prisoner without a fight. No attempt was made to investigate possible strong points and suspected areas of resistance were by-passed. Flank security was sent out to the limit of visibility to guard against ambush. No mines were encountered during this phase and the only barbed wire was found on pasture fences.

One thousand yards to the south a violent exchange of tracers between pillboxes and tanks of Task Force "X" was evident.

At 2100 hours radio contact was established with Company A. A patrol was dispatched immediately from battalion which

(27) A-17, Personal knowledge.

contacted Company A and rejoined the battalion at 2200 hours. (28)

At 2300 hours contact was made with elements of Task Force "X" which had been converging on Nutheim from the south. (29)

At a commanders' conference it was decided that the attack would halt, troops would set up defenses for the night in present positions, and that the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry would clear Nutheim of the enemy starting at daybreak, to permit a resumption of the attack beyond Nutheim by Task Force "X".

During the night engineers brought up welding torches and cut off the iron rails which had been cemented in the road-block. (Map C) Shortly after dawn the first vehicles were pouring through the antitank barrier bringing forward rations and ammunition.

At daybreak Company B, with several attached tanks, was dispatched to mop up Nutheim. After clearing out minor resistance, road blocks were organized covering the key approaches to the town. These road blocks consisted of riflemen in a defensive perimeter centered on the road, backed up by attached 57-mm antitank guns. Shortly after the road blocks had been completed an enemy counterattack developed, attempting to break through the position. (Map C) This was driven off with heavy casualties to the enemy; 22 prisoners were taken. (30)

Company A took up defensive positions south of Nutheim and sent a reconnaissance patrol into Walheim, 1000 yards to the southeast. As the patrol entered the town it received a

(28) Personal knowledge; (29) A-3, p. 213; (30) A-4.

large volume of small arms fire and retired after a brief skirmish.

An abandoned 88-mm gun with three antitank mines was found on Company A's position. Prisoners captured in the area stated that the gun had been placed on the position with only twelve rounds of ammunition and three antitank mines. When the ammunition was expended they were instructed to destroy the gun with the antitank mines if capture was imminent; no transport was available to withdraw the weapon. Our tanks had made destruction unnecessary by piercing the barrel with a round of 75-mm armor-piercing shell. (31)

Company C was echeloned from Company A southwest to the barrier crossed on the previous night. Some of the pillboxes in this area were found to be occupied and offered stubborn resistance. Occupied strong points were not mutually supporting; however, where a pillbox contained two mutually-supporting embrasures, men attempting to close with hand grenades and bazooka were caught in a deadly crossfire. Various combinations of fire power and movement were attempted as squad teams experimented in assault tactics.

One successful method used was for the riflemen to cover all openings to deny fire from enemy individual antitank weapons while the tanks fired into embrasures at close ranges, killing or wounding those in the compartment and severely shaking those in adjacent compartments of the pillbox. A key position on the forward nose of a ridge was knocked out in this manner yielding

(31) Personal knowledge.

35 prisoners. (32)

During the forenoon a 155-mm self-propelled gun was brought up to test its effect on fortified positions firing a new type concrete bursting shell. It was possible to safely maneuver the gun within close range of an occupied strong point due to the absence of enemy weapons in the area, other than small arms.

After firing several rounds a white flag was hoisted. Close observation revealed that penetration in the reinforced concrete had been only one and one-half feet. However, the concussion in the enclosed compartments had been powerful enough to cause blood to flow about the eyes, ears, nose and mouth of the 35 prisoners taken. (33)

By noon the area had been cleared and the battalion reverted to the control of Combat Command Reserve as other elements of the division continued the attack to the northeast.

On the following day, 15 September, a dangerous gap developed between the 3d Armored Division and the 1st Infantry Division on its left flank. To secure this flank a task force was organized from division reserve. This force was comprised of a battalion of tanks commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hogan and the 1st Battalion of the 26th Infantry motorized. This task force moved from Nutheim approximately two miles northeast to the town of Dorff, immediately setting up road blocks covering all approaches to the town. No activity was reported during the night save for the shooting of two civilians who had attempted to circulate in the perimeter after dark.

(32) A-18; (33) A-19, Personal experience.

The following day, 16 September, the task force was given the mission of clearing Busbach, a town one mile to the northeast in which were located the outer defenses of the Siegfried Line's second belt. On the outskirts of town plunging machine gun fire from a church steeple was encountered. The 155-mm self-propelled gun was called forward and promptly neutralized the position by direct fire through the church steeple. Main resistance in the area consisted of three large pillboxes on a hill several hundred yards to the northeast. A company of tanks was attached to Company A for this mission. To cover the assaulting echelon, two platoons of tanks were maneuvered to hull defilade and a rifle platoon provided a steady stream of small arms fire. The position was taken from some frightened Germans without difficulty.

As the 81-mm mortars were being set up a fire mission was received. Overhanging branches from a large tree standing close by had not been considered, resulting in several casualties within the gun crew as the fuze was detonated in the branches overhead. (34)

By 1500 hours positions were being consolidated on the north edge of town, several hundred yards short of the second series of dragon's teeth antitank barriers. The enemy was becoming increasingly sensitive to all observed movement and early in the evening laid down an artillery barrage on our forward positions.

(34) A-19.

THE ATTACK AT DIEPENLINCHEN

At 1700 hours Company C was detached from the battalion and sent on a separate mission at Diepenlinchen, three miles to the northeast, arriving at the designated assembly area at 1900 hours. (Map C) There the company commander was briefed by the staff of Combat Command B, to which he was attached, on the current situation. A battalion of the 36th Armored Regiment had been driven from the objective, the high ground southwest of Weisenberg, during the afternoon by an enemy counterattack. Elements of this battalion, having been cut off, were believed to be holding out on the objective. This could not be confirmed as no contact had been made in several hours. Company C's mission was to establish contact with these elements, evacuate any wounded men found enroute, and recover weapons abandoned on the position at the time of withdrawal.

At 2000 hours Company C started forward with a platoon of tanks attached. The head of the column had reached a position immediately southwest of Diepenlinchen when a strong enemy outpost or patrol of approximately 35 men was encountered. As the column halted to investigate, the enemy opened fire with automatic weapons. Due to the difficulty of control in extreme darkness over unknown ground, the company commander deemed it inadvisable to attempt further advance during the night. The company withdrew and took up positions at the southwest edge of Diepenlinchen. (Map D)

During the night the company commander made a thorough

map reconnaissance and at dawn the company renewed the advance, this time by skirting Diepenlinchen around the northwest across open ground. The attached tanks remained at the line of departure to avoid giving the enemy advance notice of the attack. A heavy fog which concealed the column suddenly lifted as the point reached a position just short of the objective, a high bluff rising sharply to a height of 50 feet. Down a trail leading through the center of this bluff a company of enemy was observed advancing to counterattack. To avoid a meeting engagement with a force that had the advantage of high ground, the company commander ordered a delaying action. The withdrawal was proceeding in an orderly manner when enemy automatic weapons opened fire from the right flank, cutting off the point squad together with the company commander. The balance of the company retired to positions occupied during the night and prepared to meet the enemy attack. (35)

Meanwhile, back in the town of Busbach, Task Force Hogan (minus) was being relieved by another unit and at 1035 hours on 18 September this force reached the designated assembly area and was organizing for an attack. (Map C) (36)

Unit commanders were advised that Company G had been attacked by a heavy force, had suffered many casualties, and had lost the area around Diepenlinchen as well as failing to take the objective at Wiesenberg. Many casualties had been evacuated but small groups were believed holding out in positions in Diepenlinchen after being cut off. (37)

Company B, with several tanks attached, would lead the

(35) A-4; A-6; A-18; Personal knowledge; (36) A-4; (37) Personal knowledge.

attack. The infantry was to advance under cover of the woods on the left flank while the tanks would proceed up the road. On reaching the edge of town the infantry was to emerge from the woods, join the tanks and launch a coordinated attack through Diepenlinchen. Company A was to follow Company B until the latter left the woods to join the tanks, at which time it would continue northeast through the woods to the further edge and there take up positions to secure the left flank of Company B. (Map E)

As the infantry reached a point in the woods opposite the outskirts of town the tanks were echeloned to their right. The infantry-tank team launched its attack under scattered small arms, mortar and artillery fire. Tanks covered the infantry by direct machine gun fire into all buildings as the infantry worked from house to house. By darkness the attack had cleared the town and reached the factory district, taking 49 prisoners enroute. Defensive positions were organized for the night, Company B tying in with Company A on its left flank. Elements of Company C were contacted throughout the day and a count taken in the evening indicated that battalion casualties for the day totaled 115. (38)

Shortly after dark an enemy counterattack developed on Company A's open left flank which threatened the rear of the battalion position. The Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon was thrown in on the left to cover this flank and the attack was beaten off one hour later. (39)

The critical condition of the supply system became

(38) A-4; A-17, Personal knowledge; (39) A-4; Personal knowledge.

apparent during the day when Lieutenant Phillips, commanding the 81-mm mortar platoon, received word that ammunition was not available at the army dump to replace his exhausted stocks. This was brought to the attention of the division commander and within 24 hours a 2½-ton truck load arrived on the mortar position, direct from Paris via the Red Ball Express. This represented a distance of over 200 straight line miles. (40)

On the following day, 19 September, shortly after daylight, Company B continued the attack in the factory area. However, due to deadly enemy fire at close ranges from behind a maze of thick walls and numerous supporting pillars, coupled with difficulties of control, progress was very slow. (41)

As a result, the task force commander decided to try a right flank envelopment. Company A, with a company of tanks attached, would attack at 1200 hours from its present position, seize and defend the high ground in the vicinity of Weisenberg, cutting off Germans in the factory area. (42)

Company A jumped off with two rifle and two tank platoons abreast, leaving the balance of the rifle and tank companies in a concealed position to cover the attack. As the line reached a point midway across the open ground, it came under a concentrated fire from all types of enemy weapons, including 20-mm guns. To quote the words of Lieutenant Colonel Hogan, task force commander, "I never saw such a concentration of German artillery before or since." The infantry pulled back to the cover of prepared positions in the woods and the tanks,

(40) A-20; (41) Personal knowledge; (42) A-11.

having no infantry protection, also retired. (43)

At this time General Boudinot, commanding Combat Command "B", directed the task force commander to effect an envelopment around the right flank of Company B, to seize Weisenberg from the south. The task force commander objected to this plan as he had previously considered the plan but had dropped it when a personal reconnaissance proved the boggy ground was unsuitable for tank maneuver. However, he was directed to attack immediately. (44)

At approximately 1400 hours Company C, with a strength of 62 men, and with four tanks attached, moved out of its reserve position. As the column crossed the open, boggy terrain just south of the factory area it came under heavy mortar, artillery, antitank gun and small arms fire from the east and northeast. The tanks soon were mired in the bog, had to be abandoned, and were destroyed; the infantry was forced to take cover. (45)

It was then decided to make a second attempt to envelop the position from the left flank, to be preceded by a 10-minute barrage from all available artillery in the corps. Smoke would be used to screen Company A's left flank from enemy observation as it crossed the open ground. In the event that the infantry could not keep up with the supporting tanks, the tanks were to continue on alone to the objective, Weisenberg.

Company A was forming on the line of departure as the heavy preparation began. However, many rounds of friendly artillery appeared to be falling short of the target, in fact

(43) A-11; A-17; Personal knowledge; (44) A-11; (45) A-4; A-11; Personal knowledge.

the concentration searched back toward our line of departure to the extent that Company A was forced to withdraw to covered positions minimizing casualties from overhead tree bursts. After a 30-minute delay to permit registering on the target by all forward observers, the concentration was repeated. Again tree bursts forced the infantry to take cover. The tanks, however, jumped off according to plan and had reached a line just short of the woods (see Map E) when two tanks were destroyed by antitank fire from their left flank and a third was knocked out by a round from a panzerfaust, the German equivalent of our bazooka. Without infantry protection, the remaining tanks retraced their route to the assembly area. (46)

No further attempts were made to take the objective on this day. The task force commander considered the possibility of a night attack that night but the shot up, exhausted condition of the troops prohibited driving home such an attack. (47)

Enemy prisoners captured late in the afternoon stated that a company of German infantry had been forming for a counter-attack when our tanks had opened fire on their position in the woods, disrupting the plan. In view of this a counterattack was considered likely on our left flank during the night.

Outposts reported considerable activity to their front but no patrols were encountered. As our troops had suffered considerable casualties and were exhausted, a plan was devised to keep the enemy off balance during the night. The company of tanks attached to Company A were to crank up at midnight, move out in a line to a point half way across the open ground

(46) A-11; A-17; Personal knowledge; (47) A-11.

to the front, then cut loose with all guns blazing. At midnight a terrific volume of fire suddenly fell on the target area and continued for five minutes before the enemy could call down his supporting fires, ^{which} causing our tanks to withdraw. (48)

A tank-infantry attack with full artillery support was planned for the following day, 20 September; however, at 0630 hours an intense fog covered the area, limiting visibility to 50 yards. Plans were changed in view of the possibility of achieving surprise. Artillery preparation was cancelled and tanks were ordered to remain in present positions. Guides were to be sent back to lead the tanks up after Company A had secured the objective. Company A would move across the open ground as had been attempted previously and, in complete silence, attempt to swamp the position before the enemy was aware of the attack. The attack went according to plan. Many of the enemy were overrun as they slept in their foxholes. Thirty-three prisoners were taken as compared to only two casualties suffered by Company A. These prisoners, who appeared completely demoralized, stated that the sudden heavy tank fire at midnight again had caught them forming for a counterattack and had cut them to ribbons. (49)

Companies B and C were brought up on the flanks to consolidate the position.

On the night of 20 September, at 2130 hours, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was relieved by elements of the 9th Division. It had suffered 229 casualties in the eight days since crossing the German frontier. The battalion moved to an assembly area

(48) A-17; Personal knowledge; (49) A-17; Personal experience.

1000 yards behind the lines, where the men received a hot meal and some rest, preparatory to a continuation of the attack in another sector on the following morning. (50)

The battalion received the Presidential Unit Citation for this action. (51)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

A proper analysis of this operation requires an appreciation of the situation of both German and Allied forces in western Europe early in September 1944. Failure of the German High Command to react promptly to the critical situation in France in July and early August resulted in the destruction of large forces scheduled for defending their fortified frontier. Aerial supremacy gave the Allies a great advantage in mobility, due to its paralyzing effect on logistical support of German forces, as well as limiting tactical maneuver.

However, this was somewhat cancelled by the loss of close logistical support on the Allied front due to unprecedented extension of supply lines.

As the Allied prospects of a campaign on the Siegfried Line drew near; a proper evaluation of its defenses and advance planning for the actual assault would have facilitated greatly the initial penetration. The necessity for a rapid breakthrough was fully realized but combat forces had to improvise tactics and resort to the trial and error method in finding the best assault technique. This proved costly in men, materiel and time.

Armor, which had dominated the battlefield throughout the rapid pursuit, was reduced to a secondary role when con-

(50) A-4; (51) A-16.

fronted with a permanent type defensive position. It remained for the infantry and engineers to destroy antitank guns and barriers before the armor could bring its fire power and mobility to bear on the enemy.

On the night of 12 - 13 September a limited attack by the armored infantry to reduce antitank guns and permit the engineers to blast a road for the tanks undoubtedly would have saved many casualties on the following day. The enemy's excellent observation, covered positions and underground communications with supporting fires should have dictated an advance under cover of smoke or darkness.

On the night of 13 - 14 September Company A should have checked frequently for contact with elements to the rear, particularly after crossing shelled areas and obstacles. The results in this instance were most fortunate; however, under less favorable circumstances the results could have been disastrous.

Severing of German communication lines undoubtedly denied some of their troops advance warning of our attack, making possible the surprise capture of five crew-served weapons on the night of 13 - 14 September.

Mopping up operations on the morning of the 14th were greatly facilitated by an envelopment earlier during the night. The principle of by-passing strong points to destroy the enemy from the rear proved inexpensive not only in men and ammunition but also prevented the enemy from escaping to fight again another day. The German quickly lost his desire to fight once his route of escape was sealed. In addition, pillboxes were

comparatively blind from the rear, making close-in assault easy unless covered from other positions.

On the 15th, civilians in the town of Dorff were not properly notified to remain indoors at all times. The two civilians shot during the hours of darkness could have agitated some of the local populace to hostile action. The situation did not permit evacuation of civilians but proper S-2 contact with local authorities could have minimized friction.

The commitment of Company A at Diepenlinchen on a mission which had proved beyond the capability of a battalion earlier in the day only resulted in further losses. The lack of its accustomed normal supporting fires on this mission materially reduced its fighting effectiveness.

In this connection, Company A experienced similar difficulty with supporting artillery the following day when shell fire twice disorganized its attack at jump-off time. The supporting artillery consisted of 105-mm self-propelled howitzers. The artillery personnel believed the shelling received by Company A was enemy counter-fire, which sounds logical when it is recalled that the area involved had recently been occupied by an alert enemy. However, to an observer witnessing the concentration, it appeared that the shell bursts searched toward our own troops as the concentration developed. This could be understood when it is considered that the self-propelled guns were firing from muddy standing, causing the rear of the mount to sink in the mud with each round fired. Failure to adjust the piece after each round, under such circumstances, would

result in each succeeding round dropping closer to our lines.

The abortive attempt of Company C to envelop the enemy's right flank on 19 September was foreseen by the local commander on the ground and proves the futility of higher commanders directing attacks without proper evaluation of limitations imposed by the terrain and local situations.

Good use of tank shock action made on the night of 19 - 20 September may have discouraged further enemy counterattacks, if such had been planned.

The task force commander showed good flexibility in planning when, on the morning of 20 September, plans were quickly changed to take full advantage of concealment offered by the fog just prior to the attack.

The cooperation between infantry and armored unit commanders throughout was excellent, although initially teamwork was awkward due to lack of familiarity with characteristics of the other arm. Toward the close of this operation great strides had been made toward mutual respect, confidence and close teamwork between armor and infantry.

The 81-mm mortars rendered close and continuous support except where lack of ammunition precluded such support, and proved a most valuable weapon. Where the situation did not permit prior registration, effective fire could be placed on targets quickly by accurate map location of targets and efficient use of a compass and a fine lead pencil at the gun position.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons learned by this operation are:

1. Night attacks against limited objectives can achieve success but must be preceded by detailed preparation.
2. Specialized training prior to attacking fortified positions will ensure maximum use of fire power and coordination so essential to success.
3. Lack of mobility and flexibility greatly reduces the potential strength of a defense.
4. Contact at night must be maintained from front to rear as well as rear to front to avoid losing the integrity of a unit on the move.
5. Each unit must provide its own security at all times to prevent surprise.
6. Good communications are vital to successful defense.
7. An attack should be directed at enemy weaknesses rather than dissipating a force on enemy strong points.
8. Infantry removed from its normal supporting weapons will suffer a loss in combat effectiveness.
9. There is no real substitute for a personal reconnaissance.
10. The fire power and shock action of tanks, when properly employed, greatly reduce the enemy's will to resist.
11. Infantry that fights with tanks should train with tanks so that each can capitalize on the capabilities and know the limitations of the other.
12. Areas selected for tank employment should be suitable for maneuver.

13. Tanks cannot remain stationary in the face of enemy antitank fire but must maneuver or take cover.

14. Tanks attract enemy fire and, when employed with infantry, may cause excessive casualties to infantry.

15. Use of tanks with infantry removes the element of surprise in an attack.

16. There is no general rule of procedure for infantry-tank employment. The situation may call for tanks to proceed ahead of the infantry, behind the infantry, or one of the two elements may be left behind in an attack. The commander on the ground must make the decision in each case.