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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 23D INFANTRY REGIMENT
(2D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON HILL
192, EAST OF ST. LO, 11 JULY - 12 JULY 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Regimental Communication Officer)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

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NOTE: During the attack on Hill 192 the Regimental Communication Officer was engaged in maintaining close liaison with the Regimental Operations Officer and in supervising the communication activities at the command post of the 23d Infantry.

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INTRODUCTION

This is an account of the operations of the 23d Infantry Regiment, 2d Infantry Division, in the capture of Hill 192, four miles east of St. Lo, Normandy, on 11 July - 12 July 1944.

Less than six weeks earlier, the twelve thousand people who lived in St. Lo were completely unaware that their peaceful little city was destined to go down in military history as a symbol of the bitter fighting necessary to liberate France and her neighbors from the German occupation. However, a combination of circumstances served to make this capital of the Department of Manche a prime objective in the Allied tactical plan as well as an important keystone in the German Seventh Army's defense of its sector.

The first of these factors was the geographical situation of St. Lo. The Allied landing beaches were contained in a semi-circular piece of terrain, known in France as Bocage country, extending from Caen to Avranches and roughly sixty miles inland. This particular area is characterized by its rolling nature and especially by small fields separated by the now-famous hedgerows. Beyond the Bocage lie the flat plains stretching east toward the Seine River and south toward the Loire River. (1)

St. Lo is located in the valley of the Vire River which constitutes a main corridor through the east-west ridge of

(1) A-18, p. 154.

rough hills extending across the Bocage country and the Allied line of advance. (2) (See Map A)

"Operation Cobra", the name given to the powerful armored thrust which was to pour through a gap in the German defense and break out of the hedgerow country onto the plains, required that the German line be breached on a narrow front. This breach was made with an "all-out" effort at St. Lo.

A second factor which made St. Lo so significant was its location at the hub of an important road net. (3) The main highway from the port of Cherbourg southeast toward Vire and Paris, and the lateral highway from Bayeux to Avranches ran through the town. As long as the enemy held St. Lo, he could shift his forces much more readily across the front. (4)

Early in July the United States First Army began a series of attacks calculated to secure the high ground east and west of St. Lo, and which commanded the two corridors through which any attack to the south of Carentan would have to pass. A second objective in the attacks was to secure vital roads at the base of the Cotentin peninsula.

The plan involved a succession of attacks from west to east by each of three corps. VIII Corps led off the attack on 3 July, followed by VII Corps on 4 July. XIX Corps began its attack west of the Vire River on 7 July, and on 11 July was joined by the 2d Infantry Division, a part of V Corps, in an attack on the high ground east of St. Lo. The remainder of V Corps functioned as a pivot for the First Army attack. (5)

(2) A-2, p. 2; (3) A-9, p. 33; (4) A-2, p. 5; (5) A-2, pp. 2, 5, 6.

ANALYSIS OF THE TERRAIN AND GERMAN DEFENSES

Before undertaking an account of the preparations for this attack, it would be well to consider the nature of the terrain, especially the hedgerow obstacles and the enemy's use of them in his defensive tactics.

The gently rolling Normandy terrain is cut up by hedgerows into small rectangular fields, usually 100 to 200 yards long and 50 to 100 yards wide. A typical hedgerow is a ridge of dirt varying from six to ten feet thick at the base and rising four to eight feet above the adjacent field. The top, and often the sides of this ridge, are covered by trees growing close together and by a dense undergrowth of vegetation, usually consisting of brambles, bushes, and weeds. Many fields are also surrounded by shallow ditches and the hedgerows rise between the ditches. (6)

The very nature of these hedgerows makes most of the country roads defiles. The height and density of the vegetation on top of the hedgerows frequently limits observation to a single field.

Such terrain favored the defender and the Germans made the most of their advantage in this respect. Individual holes were dug deep into the hedgerows, and tunnels inside were often constructed. Firing embrasures were cut in the bank or weapons were merely fired through the brush, thus making it very difficult for the attacker to locate hostile weapons. Machine guns were usually sited at the corners so as to cover the field and were protected by men armed with rifles or machine pistols.

(6) A-16

Since most of the roads were defiles, antitank defense was not particularly difficult for it was easy to mine the roads and cover them with antitank weapons. If attacking tanks used a road the leading tank could be knocked out and the column stopped. If the tanks tried to climb the hedgerows, they exposed their bellies and became extremely vulnerable. (7)

The German plan of defense in the vicinity of Hill 192 followed the usual pattern employed in the Bocage country. The enemy made no attempt to spread his forces over the entire line but relied on a system of strong points with the gaps between them covered by bands of interlocking fire reinforced by supporting mortars and artillery. Alternate and supplementary positions were prepared for the automatic weapons. The sunken trails, which served the native population as farm roads, and the ditches along the hedgerows provided excellent covered routes for the occupation of rear positions in event of withdrawal and for the formation of counterattacks which were a vital part of German defensive tactics. (8)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The drive beginning on 6 June at Omaha Beach had pushed the First Army line into the hills upon which the Germans had based their strong defense east of St. Lo. The 29th Infantry Division occupied positions on the high ground about three miles northeast of the city. (9)

However, the key terrain feature in the area, Hill 192, still remained in enemy hands. This hill, one hundred and ninety-two metres above sea level, dominated the surrounding countryside. An observer on it could view the First Army zone

(7) Personal knowledge; (8) Personal knowledge; (9) A-2, p. 6.

from the Vire River to Caumont, and all the approaches to St. Lo. Not even the rear areas of V Corps, as far back as the Normandy beaches, were free from observation. (10)

Small wonder then, that this hill had become the most noted strongpoint in the First Army area. The German Seventh Army attached enough importance to Hill 192 to defend it with elements of the 3d Parachute Division. (11)

On 12 June, the 23d Infantry, as part of the 2d Infantry Division, made its first attack on the village of St. Georges d'Elle which lay on the northeast slope of Hill 192. Satisfactory progress was made during the morning hours but in the afternoon both the 1st and 2d Battalions, making the assault, encountered stiff enemy resistance.

The attack was continued on 13 - 16 June with only minor gains. On 17 June the regiment reorganized and Colonel Jay B. Lovless assumed command. On 18 June orders were issued for an attack which was to begin at 0800 on 19 June. (12)

The 1st Battalion, attacking southeast on the right flank of the regiment, met strong resistance on the northeast slope of the hill while crossing the upper end of "Purple Heart Draw", so named because of the casualties suffered in this attack. The battalion gained only three hundred yards and held this position until the main attack on 11 July - 12 July. (13) The Division was disposed on a line running generally east and west with the 38th Infantry on the right, the 23d Infantry in the center, and the 9th Infantry on the left.

Its efforts against this strongpoint had cost the 2d Infantry Division 1,253 men and it was readily apparent that, in addition to the natural obstacles offered by the terrain,

(10) A-1, p. 107; (11) A-2, p. 58; (12) A-20; (13) A-20.

the defense was of a much more determined nature than any previously encountered. (14)

During this period German units in contact and their sectors remained substantially unchanged. The boundary between the 9th Parachute Regiment and the 5th Parachute Regiment ran south - southwest from St. Georges d'Elle with the 3d Battalion, 9th Parachute Regiment, on the west and the 1st Battalion, 5th Parachute Regiment, on the east of the boundary. The 2d Battalion, 5th Parachute Regiment, was unlocated but believed to be in reserve south of the Berigny - St. Lo highway. Enemy elements farthest forward in the 23d Infantry sector were approximately 200 yards south - east of St. Georges d'Elle. (15)

PREPARATIONS AND ORDERS FOR THE ATTACK

The previous attacks on Hill 192 had clearly demonstrated a lack of understanding, especially on the part of the infantry troops, of the tank-infantry relationship. Many infantrymen felt that the tanks had not taken advantage of their armor protection and been bold enough in moving up to destroy enemy weapons emplacements or to spray the hedgerows with machine gun fire so that they (the infantry) would not sustain such heavy losses.

The supporting tanks, however, had suffered unduly high casualties in attempting to do just this very thing. Germans concealed in the hedgerows and employing antitank guns, rocket launchers, and antitank grenades had taken a heavy toll among the tanks, especially when the latter had attempted to climb the hedgerows. (16)

One approach to the problem by the 23d Infantry was the

(14) A-2, p. 59; (15) A-5; (16) Personal knowledge.

establishment of a rear area school conducted jointly by the regimental executive officer, representatives of the 741st Tank Battalion, and the 2d Engineer (Combat) Battalion. In this school an effort was made to re-emphasize tank-infantry cooperation and mutual inter-dependence. Work in the school consisted of demonstrations and training in the employment of an improvised tank-infantry-engineer assault team, designed to cope with the difficulties of hedgerow warfare. (17)

This team consisted of one rifle squad, one engineer demolition detachment of four men, and one medium tank. The function of the engineers was to clear a path for the tank through the hedgerows. They accomplished this by placing two satchel charges on the hedgerow and igniting them. (18) Each satchel charge consisted of twenty pounds of TNT and eleven such charges were carried on each tank. (19) The explosion caused by a pair of these charges placed on a hedgerow would blow a gap through which a tank could cross without exposing its belly to hostile fire.

The tanks were modified by the installation of a EE-8 field telephone on the rear end of the tank. This telephone was connected to the interphone system, thereby enabling one of the engineers who walked at the rear of the tank to communicate with the tank commander while the tank was "buttoned-up". (20)

The infantry squad received either an extra Browning automatic rifle or a submachine gun, thereby having two automatic weapons in each squad. One light or heavy machine gun was also attached to the squad. The squad was so organized as to provide four scouts, two of whom were armed with the automatic rifles or submachine guns. (21)

(17) Personal knowledge; (18) A-20; (19) A-7, p. 1; (20) A-20; (21) A-20.

The tactics employed ^{was} to have the tank and the attached machine gun in position on the friendly side of a hedgerow. The tank fired its 75-mm gun into each corner of the hedgerow at the far end of the next field ahead. The machine gun, mounted on a spike in lieu of a tripod and placed on top of the hedgerow, fired bursts covering the top of the entire forward hedgerow. (22)

The squad leader then sent forward the two pairs of scouts, covered by the fire of the tank and the remainder of the squad. One pair worked along the inner side of each hedgerow perpendicular to the tank's position. When the scouts reached the far corners of the field they tossed over hand grenades to knock out any resistance on the far side of the hedgerow. The two pairs of scouts converged toward the center of the hedgerow in front of the tank's position. The machine gun was then sent forward. Two engineers, accompanied by the remainder of the squad, moved up and selected a new firing position for the tank. The tank moved forward on telephonic order from an engineer and stopped a short distance in rear of the new firing site. The engineers placed the satchel charges against the hedgerow and blew a gap in it, thus enabling the tank crew to fire on the next hedgerow in front of the new position.

On 27 June Company C, 741st Tank Battalion, and Company C, 2d Engineer (Combat) Battalion were attached to the regiment to participate in this rear area training which began on the following day. Nearly all rifle squads in the regiment were given instruction prior to the attack on 11 July. A rifle

(22) A-20

platoon, and in some cases, an entire company was relieved from its positions in the line in order to move back several miles for a half-day of training. (23)

The 2d Infantry Division on 4 July received an order from V Corps calling for an attack in the right and center portions of the Division sector to secure positions on the Berigny-St. Lo highway. Target date for the attack was originally set at 0600 on 9 July but was subsequently changed to 11 July. The attack was to be made in conjunction with the 29th Infantry Division on the right. The Corps order also directed a strong demonstration to the south on the remainder of the Division front. (24)

Artillery support allotted to the attack was exceptionally strong. The 62d Armored Field Artillery Battalion was attached to the 2d Infantry Division Artillery. (25) The 187th Field Artillery Group was placed in direct support of the Division, while two battalions of the 1st Infantry Division Artillery and the artillery of one combat command of the 2d Armored Division were given reinforcing missions. Other Corps artillery was ordered to render normal support. (26)

Strong air support was also planned in the Corps order. Four fighter groups were scheduled to attack the area four hundred yards north and south of the Berigny-St. Lo highway in the zone of the attack between La Calvaire and La Croix Rouge. Missions were to be of 15 minutes duration beginning at H plus 15 and ending at H plus 90. Each mission was to be flown by forty-eight P-47's, with the first two groups carrying fifty

(23) A-20; (24) A-1, p. 104; (25) A-2, p. 62; (26) A-1, p. 106; A-2, p. 62.

percent high explosive and fifty percent white phosphorus bombs. (27)

The field order of the 2d Infantry Division, received on 7 July by the 23d Infantry, gave the 38th Infantry on the right the mission of taking Hill 192 proper with two battalions in the assault. The 9th Infantry on the left was ordered to support the attack with all available fires.

The 23d Infantry, with the 1st and 3d Battalions, was assigned the task of taking the southeastern slopes of Hill 192 and securing the Berigny-St. Lo highway from the right of its zone through La Croix Rouge. The 2d Battalion, less Company E, which was attached to the 9th Infantry, was to cover the attack by fire only during the initial stages and move on La Croix Rouge after the 1st Battalion had secured its objective. (See Map B)

The artillery preparation for the attack was scheduled to begin at H minus 20 with the fires of twelve field artillery and armored field artillery battalions.

The 23d Infantry was to be supported in the attack by Company C, 741st Tank Battalion, and Company C, 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion. (28)

The regimental plan of attack involved an assault by the 1st Battalion on the right, employing two companies abreast and supported by Company C, 741st Tank Battalion. The 3d Battalion was ordered to make a diversionary attack on the strong German defenses south of St. Georges d'Elle. (29)

The line of departure was the St. Georges d'Elle - Cloville road. The zone of attack for the 1st Battalion

(27) A-2, p. 62; (28) A-5; (29) A-2, p. 62.

contained the natural terrain obstacle known as "Purple Heart Draw", a deep ravine which ran laterally across the entire zone of advance about 300 yards from the line of departure. The draw was known to be well covered by planned mortar concentrations and by automatic weapons fire from the German positions south of St. Georges d'Elle. (30)

Due to the fact that all three battalions were already committed, the attack by the 1st Battalion was concentrated in a very narrow zone on the right of the regimental sector. The sector held by the 3d Battalion would be thinned out when two companies from that battalion were ordered to be available for attack in the zone of the 1st Battalion. (31)

The regimental commander planned to compensate partially for this weakness in the 3d Battalion sector by directing that twenty-six .50 caliber machine guns, normally intended for the antiaircraft protection of the motor transportation and regimental train bivouac, be put in positions at the extreme left of the 3d Battalion which extended only 200 yards east of St. Georges d'Elle. The guns were to be manned by truck drivers and men who could be spared from Regimental Headquarters Company. (32)

The mission assigned these guns was two-fold. First, to pin down any Germans to their front, thereby supporting the attack of the 1st Battalion, and, second, to prevent a counter-attack down the valley of the Elle River. Both Regimental and Division headquarters were only a short distance in rear of this area and any counterattack on the part of the Germans might

(30) A-2, p. 65; (31) A-20; (32) A-20.

overrun these headquarters. (33)

The 2d Battalion was located on the nose northeast of the Elle River and faced to the southwest toward the Berigny-St. Lo highway. The mission of this battalion, which possessed excellent observation on the eastern slope of Hill 192, was to support by fire the attack of the 1st Battalion. (34)

The mortar platoons of the 2d and 3d Battalions, Company C, 81st Chemical Battalion, and Cannon Company were ordered to be tied-in by telephone and their consolidated fire controlled from a fire direction center at the regimental command post. (35)

With its mission, zone, and objectives assigned, the 23d Infantry undertook vigorous preparatory measures for the forthcoming attack.

An intelligence report issued by 2d Infantry Division on 7 July indicated that the enemy was bringing up an increased number of reinforcements and was effecting some degree of re-organization in front of the Division sector. (36) Consequently, the regiment intensified its patrol activities in an effort to secure any new identifications and to ascertain the changes or improvements made by the Germans in their defensive works. (37)

Throughout the entire period from 1 July until 10 July patrols were unable to secure any new identifications. Patrol reports indicated that the enemy was content to improve his defensive positions and that he maintained a tight defense against our patrol activities. Friendly patrols invariably met instant fire upon closing with the German outpost positions. An increase in the use of anti-personnel mines and barbed wire intensified motor activity at night and the continual sound of

(33) A-20; (34) A-20; (35) A-20; (36) A-5; (37) A-5.

digging indicated that the enemy was losing no time in strengthening his defenses. (38)

An incident occurred on the evening of 5 July which gave rise to some speculation regarding a new trend in enemy weapons. A box of porcelain crocks, each containing about one and one-half quarts of liquid tear gas, was discovered in front of the 3d Battalion area. The box was so placed that the wind could carry the fumes into the area of Company K. (39) However, since no further reports of the use of such weapons were forthcoming, any disquieting rumors regarding the German use of chemical weapons were quickly dispelled. (40)

The nature of the German defenses, coupled with the lack of observation due to the heavily overgrown and ever-present hedgerows, necessitated additional preparatory measures for the attack. Previously, small unit commanders had experienced considerable difficulty in definitely locating themselves and in reporting their own locations due to the limited observation and the unusual similarity of the enclosed fields. This had resulted in a lack of coordination between such units.

In order to eliminate this difficulty during the planned attack, intelligence sections on both battalion and regimental levels set to work preparing maps of the area on a scale of 1:10,000. These maps showed every hedgerow, sunken road, building, and trail in the area. Code numbers were assigned to each field so that troop dispositions as well as enemy locations could be accurately reported. These maps were reproduced in quantity by the "jelly-roll" process and given a wide distribution down to, and including, platoons. (41) The 741st

(38) A-5; (39) A-5; (40) Personal knowledge; (41) A-5.

Tank Battalion followed the same procedure and every tank commander received a copy. (42)

Intensive reconnaissance was carried on by all commanders during the days preceding the attack. Arrangements were made on 7 July with Division Artillery to permit rifle platoon leaders, as well as company and battalion commanders of the 1st and 3d Battalions, to make reconnaissance flights in liaison airplanes. These flights were made in order to give the officers concerned a clearer picture of the ground over which they would attack and to assist them in orienting their units. (43)

Frequent conferences were held at the regimental and battalion command posts at which aerial photographs were studied, plans discussed, and details of coordination were worked out. (44)

Advance preparations were also made by the regimental communication personnel. A forward command post was selected in a ravine just north of St. Georges d'Elle.

The location chosen for the switchboard was about fifty yards from the road which ran past the command post and several days were spent in digging and sandbagging a shelter. Cables connected this switchboard position with terminal strips near the road in order to avoid the confusion and congestion usually caused by wiremen and vehicles near a switchboard. The site selected for the radio section was about 200 yards from the operational portion of the command post and plans were made to use remote control equipment with the radios. Message

(42) A-7; (43) A-5; (44) A-5.

center was located in the bottom of the ravine near the entrance to the command post.

Every effort was made to provide reliable wire communication for the attack. Two new trunk lines were laid to the 1st Battalion. By modifying and utilizing two existing circuits from the old regimental command post, a total of four trunk lines were provided to this battalion.

The regimental communication officer contacted the commander of the attached tank company and learned the exact routes which the tanks would follow in moving to their positions during the night preceding the attack. Wherever these routes crossed wire lines, linemen went out and dug the lines from one to two feet underground. Line construction crews also utilized French commercial telephone poles to keep the lines off the ground in the vicinity of the line of departure in order to avoid damage by tanks or other vehicles which might move around in the forward areas. (45)

One of the last steps in preparation was the movement of the tanks of Company C, 741st Tank Battalion, to final assembly areas in rear of the line of departure in the zone of the 1st Battalion. These tanks were infiltrated individually and at one hour intervals during the hours of darkness on 9 July and 10 July. (46)

The new regimental command post opened at 2100 on 10 July. (47)

(45) Personal knowledge; (46) A-8; (47) A-4.

THE ATTACK ON HILL 192

During the early morning hours, from 0030 to 0300 on 11 July, the enemy laid down one of the heaviest concentrations of mortar and artillery fire which the regiment had experienced. The 2d Battalion on the left received most of the fire but the men were so well dug in that few casualties were incurred. (48)

Beginning at 0400 the 1st and 3d Battalions quietly moved back 200 yards from the positions which they had occupied for the past three weeks. This movement was necessary prior to the artillery preparation because in most cases the enemy positions were not more than 100 yards away.

At 0539 the Division G-3 notified the Regimental S-3 that the scheduled air strike on the objective had been cancelled due to bad flying weather. (49)

One minute later, H minus 20, the artillery "serenade" began with a tremendous volume of shells landing simultaneously on the enemy positions. For twenty minutes the men waiting to attack listened to their powerful artillery support as twelve battalions of field artillery, a battalion of 4.2 inch chemical mortars, and two cannon companies pounded Hill 192.

A few minutes before H-hour, while the assault companies were closing up to the artillery the Germans began a counter-preparation. Just as the crews of the tank company were mounting their tanks, a platoon leader's tank received a direct hit by a mortar shell, killing two members of the crew and wounding the remainder including the platoon leader. The lieutenant, in spite of his wounds, took command of another tank and moved off with the attack. (50)

(48) A-4; A-5; (49) A-4; (50) A-7

Company C, on the right, and Company A, on the left, moving closely behind a scheduled rolling barrage and employing the tank-infantry-engineer assault team tactics which they had previously rehearsed, encountered only moderate resistance in the first few fields. Then the real fighting began as the German paratroopers recovered from the initial shock of the heavy preparation.

At 0715 when the 1st Platoon of Company A attempted to cross "Purple Heart Draw" it was stopped in its tracks. The Germans held their fire until the platoon reached the bottom of the draw and then unleashed a hail of mortar fire, as well as flanking machine gun fire from their positions south of St. Georges d'Elle. The 2d Platoon, followed almost immediately by the 3d Platoon, was sent on a wide enveloping move around the upper end of the draw with the mission of knocking out the enemy position on the south side and relieving the pressure on the 1st Platoon. (51)

In the meantime, Company C on the right had been making slow but steady progress in its zone. Some difficulty was experienced in maintaining contact with Company E, 38th Infantry, on its right but both companies managed to move forward at about the same rate. When Company C reached the upper end of "Purple Heart Draw", it met with the same determined resistance which had caused so much trouble on the left flank of the battalion. (52)

The 1st Battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel John M. Hightower, III, with the approval of the regimental commander, immediately committed Company B, the reserve company, on the extreme right of the battalion, with orders to move behind

(51) A-2, p. 65; (52) A-6.

Company C until it closed on that company and then to swing to the right attacking south toward the objective. The reserve platoon of Company B was to be used, if necessary, to maintain contact with Company C. (53)

The 3d Battalion had met with determined resistance from the very outset. Company L launched its diversionary attack on the east side of St. Georges d'Elle and encountered an extremely heavy volume of machine gun fire from positions south of the town. The company managed to gain two hedgerows and then was forced to withdraw after suffering heavy casualties. The company attacked again and secured one hedgerow which it held throughout the day. (54)

Company I was ordered to attack along the road running south from St. Georges d'Elle in order to secure that road, make contact with Company A and possibly assist Company L from the right. The regimental commander instructed Lieutenant Colonel John B. Naser, commanding the 3d Battalion, to use only the strength necessary to accomplish the mission, leaving the remainder of the company as a reserve for the 3d Battalion in St. Georges d'Elle. At 0830 one platoon of Company I attacked through the fields just west of the road until it was held up by heavy machine gun fire from positions south of "Purple Heart Draw". (55)

The relentless pressure of the 38th Infantry and Company C on the right was proving too much for the enemy and about noon his resistance to Company A had relaxed to the point where that company was able to work its way straight east to the road, thus relieving the remnants of the 1st Platoon which

(53) A-4; A-6; (54) A-5; (55) A-4; A-5.

had been caught in the draw. Only thirteen men of the platoon were not casualties. Company A then executed a turn to the south, with some difficulty, and continued its attack toward the objective. (56)

At 1500 hours Company B had closed on Company C and began its swing to the right around the latter company in order to make its attack down the right flank of the battalion zone. At this time the regimental commander ordered the 3d Battalion commander to move Company K into the area formerly occupied by Company B with a view toward reconstituting a reserve for the 1st Battalion. (57) Captain Mitchell, commanding Company K, immediately went forward to join the 1st Battalion commander while his company moved to its new position in the 1st Battalion zone. (58)

During the latter part of the afternoon the supporting tanks of Company C, 741st Tank Battalion, were running low on fuel and ammunition. Resupply was accomplished by the tanks working in relays. (59)

At 1730 the leading platoon of Company B had almost reached the Berigny-St. Lo highway and the remainder of the battalion was echeloned to the left rear along the road leading southwest from St. Georges d'Elle. One-half hour later Company K was attached to the 1st Battalion and Company A was attached to the 3d Battalion. (60)

The regimental commander gave the order to "button-up" for the night at 1950 and all companies prepared hasty defenses on the positions which they had reached. (61)

(56) A-2, p. 67; (57) A-4; (58) A-6; (59) A-6; (60) A-6; (61) A-4.

The 1st Battalion had gained approximately 1500 yards on the right and was dug-in 400 to 600 yards from the Berigny-St. Lo highway. (Map B) Three officers and 104 enlisted men were wounded in action during the day. Fourteen enlisted men were killed in action. (62)

At 0057, 12 July, the regimental liaison officer arrived at the regimental command post with the Division field order directing a resumption of the attack at 1100 hours on 12 July. Lieutenant Colonel Snyder, the regimental executive officer, immediately sent messages to each battalion, separate company, and attached unit commander giving them a warning order and directing them to be present at the regimental command post at 0700 in the morning. (63)

The night was uneventful and the unit commanders assembled at the appointed time to receive the order for the day's attack. (64)

The division field order assigned the regiment the same objective and zones as on the preceding day. The time of attack was set at 1100 hours and the line of departure was to be the line presently held by the forward elements of the 1st Battalion. (65)

The regimental commander ordered the 1st Battalion, with two platoons of tanks attached, to attack due south to secure the division objective in its zone. After the 1st Battalion had secured this objective, Company K with one platoon of attached tanks, was to be prepared to seize and defend La Croix Rouge. When La Croix Rouge had been secured, and upon orders from 2d Infantry Division, the 2d Battalion was to be prepared to close the gap between its present position and La Croix Rouge. (66)

(62) A-5; (63) A-4; (64) A-4; (65) A-5; (66) A-5.

The 1st Battalion attacked at 1100 with Company B on the right and Company C echeloned to the left rear. Fifteen minutes later Company B had crossed the Berigny-St. Lo highway and at 1140 the company commander announced that he was on the objective. Company C, encountering only slight resistance, reached the objective at 1300 and Company K was moved into Company C's former position along the St. Georges d'Elle road. (67)

At 1415 Company K was committed in the direction of La Croix Rouge. The company attacked across the ground between "Purple Heart Draw" and the Berigny-St. Lo highway, an area which the enemy had successfully defended on the previous day. The resistance to this attack, however, was so weak that Company K secured its objective in two hours. Company A was moved to occupy the positions which Company K had vacated along the St. Georges d'Elle road. (68)

In the meantime, the commanders of the 2d and 3d Battalions had sent out patrols to ascertain the enemy strength and dispositions in the pocket between La Croix Rouge, Berigny, and St. Georges d'Elle. At 1700 a patrol from Company F reported that it had been successful in making contact with Company K in La Croix Rouge. The regimental commander, with the concurrence of the division commander, immediately ordered the 2d Battalion to secure positions astride the highway between Berigny and La Croix Rouge. (69)

The 2d Battalion moved out about 1800 hours and occupied its objective without meeting any resistance, although some casualties were suffered enroute when the leading elements ran

(67) A-4; (68) A-5; (69) A-4.

into a heavily mined area. (70)

The 3d Battalion was ordered into a position north of the 1st Battalion and prepared to relieve that battalion on order. (71)

Five officers and thirty-four enlisted men were wounded in action on 12 July. Four enlisted men were killed in action. (72)

The 23d Infantry had accomplished its mission in two days and was now astride the Berigny-St. Lo highway. It remained in this position until 26 July when it resumed the attack toward St. Jean des Baisants and Vire.

Measured in terms of the preceding attacks in June, this two-day offensive had been very successful. The Germans had resisted the attack on Hill 192 and St. Georges d'Elle with all the means at their disposal. In addition to elements already in the line, the 12th Parachute Gun Brigade, then the 3d Parachute Reconnaissance Company, and, finally, the 3d Parachute Engineer Battalion had been committed in a desperate effort to hold the ground.

The German paratroopers had lived up to their reputation as elite troops. There was no coordinated attempt to withdraw and the enemy remained in position until destroyed or forced to surrender.

Twenty-one prisoners of war were taken on the first day and only three on 12 July. One of these prisoners stated that he had no chance to withdraw because he had been trapped between our artillery fire to his rear and the assaulting troops to his front. (73)

(70) A-4; (71) A-4; (72) A-4; (73) A-5: 17

The artillery and supporting mortars had done a "man-sized" job. The artillery fired 20,000 rounds in support of the attack on 11 July. The 81-mm mortars of the regiment expended 6,000 rounds on the first day, while Company C, 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion, fired 3,000 rounds, most of which was white phosphorus. A considerable amount of the mortar fire had been laid in front of the regiment's left flank and on the ridge southwest of the 2d Battalion in order to prevent the use of enemy troops in this area as the attack moved toward the south.(74)

Several lessons had been learned in the use of the assault teams. The TNT satchel charges should have been carried by hand instead of being placed on the tank decks. Several tanks carrying these charges caught fire after being hit and violently exploded, killing the entire crew before they had a chance to escape. (75)

Another difficulty had been caused by the irregular formation of the fields. Due to these irregular sizes and shapes, the hedgerows did not have a common junction point for four fields. Frequently, the field on the right or left of the one in which a squad was working had a junction somewhere along the side of the latter field, rather than at the far corner. In several instances, a German located in the hedgerow junction of such an adjacent field, had fired into the backs of the scouts and automatic riflemen after they had advanced to the far end of the hedgerow. This required very careful coordination in the forward movement of all assault teams. (76)

(74) A-20; (75) A-20; (76) A-20.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The keynote and one of the major factors in the success of this operation lay in the careful preparations for the attack. Previous attacks in even greater assaulting strength had failed to reduce the enemy position on Hill 192. These attacks, so costly in lives and time, had clearly indicated a lack of coordination between the infantry and supporting tanks. The obstacles offered by the German hedgerow defenses dictated a modification of accepted small unit tactics.

The development of the tank-infantry-engineer assault team supplied an answer to the problems of hedgerow warfare and furnished an additional example of the ingenuity and resourcefulness of American troops under varying combat conditions. While strong artillery and mortar support ~~was~~ of great assistance in this action, it was the close, determined and coordinated teamplay of these small units that overcame a well-trained and disciplined enemy occupying strong defensive positions.

Another feature of the attack was the employment of the battalions in the 23d Infantry. A strong thrust was made in one narrow zone while another battalion actively engaged the enemy on a flank of that zone and a third battalion delivered flanking fire on the enemy's main battle position. The German units on the strongpoint south of St. Georges d'Elle were put in an almost impossible situation, for they were being by-passed on one flank, attacked frontally, and attacked by fire on the other flank.

The use of a regimental fire direction center for massing and controlling the fire of two 81-mm mortar platoons and the

4.2 inch chemical mortars of the attached chemical mortar company made it possible to place a tremendous volume of fire on the most critical points in the entire regimental zone and permitted the maximum flexibility in the use of those weapons.

Similarly, the employment of the .50 caliber machine guns was an unusual and effective application of these weapons. Whereas, they normally were unused in the attack, in this case these guns served a dual purpose, that of safeguarding against a counteroffensive breakthrough on the left flank of the 3d Battalion and of actively assisting in the attack.

The strong supporting fires in this attack prevented the Germans from employing several of their defensive habits, and neutralized to a limited degree the advantages offered by the hedgerow terrain. The volume of fire and its continuity eliminated the possibility of organized withdrawal to successive positions in rear, or the organization of counterattacks, and made the movement of reserves very difficult.

The ease with which the 2d Battalion moved toward La Croix Rouge late on the second day (12 July) seems to indicate that the movement of that battalion might have been initiated sooner. If aggressive patrolling had been undertaken during the night of 11 - 12 July, the enemy withdrawal might have been detected and La Croix Rouge occupied earlier on 12 July.

The overall operation of the 23d Infantry during the attack can be adjudged successful, especially when viewed in the light of previous operations in the same sector, the

relatively light casualties incurred in the attack against such a strong position, and in terms of the advance made over excellent defensive terrain.

LESSONS

1. "Infantry fights by combining fire, movement, and shock action." (Field Manual 7-40, paragraph 156a) This attack exemplifies the success achieved by a combination of all three.
2. Reconnaissance and planning for probable action are continuous. Thoroughness in both these factors contributes immeasurably to the probable success of an action.
3. The vigorous and sustained secondary attack made by elements of the 3d Battalion facilitated the advance of the 1st Battalion by holding the enemy in position and prevented him from reinforcing the front of the main attack.
4. In a continuing attack, patrolling must be active during the hours of darkness in order to maintain contact with the enemy and to discover any attempt he may make to disengage during the night.
5. Rifle units must be thoroughly trained and indoctrinated in the capabilities and limitations of supporting armor.
6. Coordination and control are facilitated by a timely and wide distribution of good maps of the area in which an attack is planned.
7. Maximum effect and flexibility in employment of supporting indirect fire of infantry weapons can be achieved through a centralized fire control center.
8. Strong artillery preparatory fires and support alone

are not sufficient to overcome a defending force which is well dug-in and possesses the will to resist. Infantry must close with the enemy and destroy or eject him from his positions.