

Staff Department  
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1949-1950

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY K, 394TH INFANTRY,  
(99TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN DEFENSIVE ACTION  
NEAR ELSENBORN, BELGIUM, 16-21 DECEMBER 1944  
(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY COMPANY WITHDRAWING  
AND DEFENDING A KEY TERRAIN FEATURE DURING  
THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE.

Captain Wesley J. Simmons, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
INDEX . . . . .	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	2
ORIENTATION . . . . .	3
Introduction . . . . .	3
The General Situation . . . . .	4
The Battalion Situation . . . . .	5
Company K's First Position . . . . .	6
Occupation of Reserve Position . . . . .	7
The German Plan . . . . .	9
NARRATION . . . . .	10
The First Day of the German Counter-Offensive . . . . .	10
The Withdrawal to Elsenborn . . . . .	16
The Reorganization at Elsenborn . . . . .	19
The Continued Defense on Elsenborn Ridge . . . . .	22
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM . . . . .	24
LESSONS . . . . .	28
MAP A - First Army Front	
MAP B - Defense Area at Losheimergraben, 14 Nov - 10 Dec 44	
MAP C - Part 1, Reserve Area, 11 - 15 Dec 44	
Part 2, First Day of Bulge, 16 Dec 44	
MAP D - The German Plan	
MAP E - Second Day of Bulge, 17 Dec 44	
MAP F - Defense at Elsenborn, 18 - 21 Dec 44	

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 First U.S. Army Report of Operations  
(1 August 1944 to 22 February 1945)  
(TIS Library)
- A-2 V Corps, Operations in the ETO  
(9 January 1942 to 9 May 1945)  
(TIS Library)
- A-3 Second Infantry Division in World War II,  
Second Infantry Division  
(TIS Library)
- A-4 393d Infantry in Review,  
by Fritz and Rogers  
(TIS Library)
- A-5 After Action Report,  
394th Infantry Regiment,  
January 1945  
Microfilm D-303, Item 3187  
(TIS Library)
- A-6 Dark December,  
by Robert E. Merriam  
(Personal possession of author)
- A-7 Company Commander,  
by Charles B. MacDonald  
(Personal possession of author)
- A-8 Personal Diary,  
(13 September 1944 to 4 July 1945)  
(Personal possession of author)
- A-9 The Story of the 394th Infantry,  
by 394th Special Services Section  
(Personal possession of author)

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY K, 394TH INFANTRY,  
(99TH INFANTRY DIVISION) IN DEFENSIVE ACTION  
NEAR ELSENBORN, BELGIUM, 16-21 DECEMBER 1944  
(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

In mid-November 1944, after a hasty trip from ENGLAND, the 99th Infantry Division relieved elements of the 5th Armored Division and the 9th Infantry Division and took over a defensive position in what was considered a "quiet" sector in the southern part of V Corps in the United States First Army front facing the SIEGFRIED LINE. (See Map A) It was in this "quiet" sector that the green 99th Infantry Division was to receive its combat indoctrination. However, this sector did not remain quiet very long as the Germans directed their famous counter-offensive in this area. This monograph covers a portion of that offensive, known as "The Battle of the Bulge", and sets forth an account of the defensive operations of Company K, 394th Infantry, 99th Infantry Division during the period 16-21 December 1944. (1)

The progress of the First U.S. Army, which had reached the ARDENNES FOREST in September 1944, is of great significance. So rapid had been the race of American tanks and infantry across FRANCE and BELGIUM that our supplies couldn't keep pace. In view of the almost exhausted supplies, the Allied High Command decided, rather than to attempt a final thrust to the heart of GERMANY, to commit all forces on a general line which stretched for nearly one hundred and fifty

---

(1) A-2, p. 304

miles and hold until supporting troops and supplies arrived to permit a resumption of the offensive. (2)

To execute this plan and resume the attack would necessitate the massing of all available forces in the attack sectors. Thus, a decision was made to make substantial withdrawals of troops from the ARDENNES sector, leaving a minimum holding force to maintain the existing line. This obviously, involved a "calculated risk", but the ARDENNES FOREST afforded a natural defensive barrier with few good roads and it was known that the Germans were using this area to rest and refit their battered divisions. During the latter part of October and early November, shifts were made in the Allied lineup. Certain troop units were withdrawn from the ARDENNES sector leaving the remaining units with wider defensive frontages and larger areas of responsibility. (3)

The ROER RIVER was an obstacle which could be made into a dangerous barrier by release of water from dams on its headwaters and upper tributaries. These dams were in the sector of responsibility of V Corps which was executing plans for their capture with veteran units from the vicinity of MONSCHAU. (4) (See Map A)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The 99th Infantry Division, composed of the 393d, 394th, and the 395th Infantry Regiments, was assigned the mission of defending the southern portion of the V Corps sector which extended from MONSCHAU, GERMANY on the north to just below LOSHEIMERGRABEN, BELGIUM on the south - a distance of more than

---

(2) A-6, p. 49, 75  
(3) A-6, p. 75, 76  
(4) A-1, p. 95-98

twenty-one miles. (See Maps A and B) The division was instructed to carry out aggressive patrolling to the front and to maintain contact with elements of VIII Corps on the right. (5)

Because of the greatly extended frontage, all three regiments were placed on line and the 394th Infantry was assigned the defense of the southern portion with a frontage of approximately seven miles. The 393d Infantry was on the left and Task Force X (14th Cavalry) was on the right. The front was generally stabilized with both friendly and enemy action being limited to harassing fires and patrols. The mission of the 394th Infantry was to actively defend its assigned sector through aggressive patrolling to its front and maintain contact with units on its flanks. The enemy to the front was identified as elements of the 347th Infantry Division with the 860th and 861st Infantry Regiments on line. The enemy held a well-prepared line of defense which consisted of two parallel rows of mutually supporting pillboxes (or bunkers) spaced approximately 200-300 yards apart and located at critical points covering draws, roads, and other avenues of approach. They manned a thin OPL with many anti-personnel mines and booby traps scattered to their front. (6)

#### THE BATTALION SITUATION

On 14 November 1944 the 3d Battalion of the 394th Infantry Regiment relieved the 1st Battalion of the 60th Infantry Regiment of the 9th Infantry Division and took over a defensive position protecting a crossroad of the vital VERVIERS-

---

(5) A-2, p. 304, 309  
(6) A-2, p. 304; A-5

LIEGE HIGHWAY. (See Map B) This covered an extended front of three thousand five hundred yards through very heavily wooded, rough, hilly, and broken terrain while the enemy positions were generally on open ground. The 2d Battalion, 394th Infantry, was on the left, and, on the southern flank of both the 394th Infantry and the 99th Infantry Division and in a so called reserve area, entered the 1st Battalion, 394th Infantry with the mission of protecting the open flank and forming a limited reserve. To the south some 8000 yards was the 14th Cavalry Group (Task Force X) with the only contact being made by motorized patrols twice daily. Since no other friendly forces were in this area, enemy patrols could operate without hinderance. (7) (See Map B)

#### COMPANY K'S FIRST POSITION

By 0800 hours 14 November 1944, Company K, 394th Infantry had relieved a rifle unit of the 1st Battalion, 60th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division and was occupying the same battle positions which were  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile east of LOSHEIMERGRABEN, BELGIUM and just across the international line into GERMANY. (See Map B) Company L, 394th Infantry was on the left and the 1st Battalion, 394th Infantry was to the right rear. (8)

Snow was seven inches deep and the weather was very cold. Visibility was generally poor because of the falling snow and rain. During the period 15 November to 10 December 1944, defensive positions were maintained and patrols were sent out daily. The company received a few casualties when our patrols met those of the enemy and during occasional enemy shelling

---

(7) A-2, p. 309; Personal knowledge

(8) A-8; Personal knowledge

in our area but the majority of our battle losses were as a result of anti-personnel mines. Enemy patrolling was not aggressive enough to penetrate our lines to any extent and because of this and continuous snowing, one log hut for each platoon was constructed on or about 4 December to enable a portion of each platoon to get dry and warm. Over 60 per cent of the men had not yet been issued arctics although they had been requisitioned several times. Size 12 was the only size available thus far. (9)

#### OCCUPATION OF RESERVE POSITION

On 11 December 1944, Company B, 394th Infantry relieved Company K as the 3d Battalion went into the flanking and reserve positions that the 1st Battalion had held. (See Map C 1) The 3d Battalion was detached from the 394th Infantry and designated as 99th Infantry Division reserve with the mission to protect the right flank of both the 394th Infantry and 99th Division and to prepare for further action. (10)

Company K went into a position about 500 yards south of the first road junction west of LOSHEIMERGRABEN. (See Map C 1) The company was to be in mobile reserve, as was Company I which was across the road from Company K, and until further orders, was to improve the hutments and foxholes in the area begun by the 1st Battalion, repair clothing, clean and refit all weapons, and be prepared for further action. (11)

Company L, 394th Infantry, reinforced with one section of heavy machine guns from Company M, furnished the security for the battalion and had positions astride a main railroad enter-

- 
- (9) Personal knowledge  
(10) A-8; A-5; Personal knowledge  
(11) Personal knowledge

ing from GERMANY about 300 yards southeast of FOREST BUCKHOLZ STATION. (See Map C 1) The 3d Battalion command post was located in the building at the road junction. The entire battalion position was lightly held, all troops were not completely dug in, and defensive positions were not assigned to Company K and Company I, 394th Infantry. (12)

The 99th Division's first offensive began on 13 December 1944 when it was ordered to attack on the right of and in conjunction with the 2d Infantry Division. The 393d Infantry was to make the main effort and was to attack to the northeast and secure an objective on the high ground just west of HELLENTHAL. (See Map A) Demonstration missions to maintain pressure against the enemy were given to the 394th and 395th Infantry Regiments. (13)

On the afternoon of 13 December, the 393d Infantry was on its first objective but was receiving strong enemy resistance, and late that evening, Company I, 394th Infantry, reinforced with one machine gun platoon from Company M, 394th Infantry, was attached to the 393d Infantry to support their attack. (14)

Early on the morning 15 December 1944, the 3d Battalion commander, 394th Infantry, with his staff, and the company commanders of Companies K, L, and M, each with a platoon leader and communications sergeant, made a reconnaissance of the roads and terrain in the woods north and northeast of KRINKELT, for the battalion had been alerted to be prepared to move in that general area on short notice to follow up the attack made by the main effort of the division. That evening about 1830 hours, the company commander of Company K oriented all the pla-

---

(12) Personal knowledge

(13) A-1, p. 97; A-2, p. 330; A-4, p. 17

(14) A-1, p. 98; A-8; A-9, p. 10

toon leaders, platoon sergeants, and the executive officer concerning the day's activities by giving them a map orientation of the roads and the probable routes that might be taken. At this time it was emphasized that all equipment and clothing be in top condition. (15)

Later that evening, more artillery was heard going overhead into the enemy held territory and the next day the men learned that our front lines had reported hearing unusual noises and activity to our front in the vicinity of LOSHEIM, GERMANY. (16)

#### THE GERMAN PLAN (See Map D)

The events leading up to the German breakthrough in the ARDENNES sector are well known. For several months the German High Command had been devising ways and means to create a counter-offensive which would take the initiative from the Allies and stave off inevitable defeat. The German plan in brief was to attack through the American sector in the ARDENNES with the 5th, 6th, and 7th Panzer Armies. The penetration would be blocked with infantry and the 5th and 6th Panzer Armies would plunge through the center in a mad dash to seize the crossings of the MEUSE RIVER and then speed on to BRUSSELS and ANTWERP. The remains of the fast diminishing Luftwaffe would support the attacking forces. (17)

The 6th Panzer Army, commanded by "Sepp" Dietrich, was assigned the mission to pass through the LOSHEIM gap (First U.S. Army sector) and burst over the ELSENBORN RIDGE on to the MEUSE RIVER, and finally to ANTWERP. To accomplish this mis-

---

(15) Personal knowledge  
(16) Personal knowledge  
(17) A-6, p. 10-14

sion, Dietrich had massed five divisions of infantry and two divisions of armor on a twenty-five mile front generally astride the boundary between V and VIII Corps. Dietrich would be aided by various paratroop drops and Skorzeny's Panzer Brigade, made up of American tanks and equipment, to capture vital bridges on the MEUSE RIVER with a minimum of opposition. (18)

The German High Command hoped that this plan, called "WACHT AM RHIEM" (Watch on the Rhine), would turn the tide of battle on the Western Front, and if successful, the Allied Forces on the Western Front would be split and twenty to thirty American divisions would be trapped. (19)

After several postponements, 16 December 1944 was the final date set by Hitler and at 0530 hours on that day the German counter-offensive smashed into the American positions with devastating results. (20)

#### NARRATION

#### THE FIRST DAY OF THE GERMAN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

At 0530 hours 16 December 1944, the men of Company K, 394th Infantry were awakened by the loud bursting of artillery fire. The rounds seemed to be landing near the front line and it was thought that they were 105's and that the Germans were catching "hell" early in the morning. In a few seconds the bursts became much louder and it was thought that they were 155's and that the Germans were really getting a big dose of it now. Suddenly the rounds were landing in the company area

---

(18) A-6, p. 139

(19) A-6, p. 10-14, 29-34

(20) A-6, p. 47

and not until then was it realized that "that stuff" had been coming in and not going out. (21)

By 0535 everyone in the company area was stirring. At about that moment the company commander's attention was called to an unfortunate incident which occurred in the 3d Platoon area. Two anti-tank men, whose organization was unknown to anyone in Company K, had been shot, one killed instantly and the other in critical condition. Hasty investigation revealed that their anti-tank gun had been located at the road junction just west of LOSHEIMERGRABEN for over a week but they had never bothered to dig any defensive positions. When the shells started landing around them they abandoned their gun and started running wildly for any cover they might find. In their impulsive move for safety they ran into the 3d Platoon's area of Company K, oblivious to the several calls to halt, and tore off the cover of one of the foxholes. They were, of course, the instant target of the foxhole occupants. (22)

The barrage along the regimental front lasted for ninety minutes. It was concentrated mainly on the LOSHEIMERGRABEN area and falling on the 1st and 3d Battalion areas. There were no casualties in Company K as most of the artillery fire in this area had resulted in tree bursts and all positions had been constructed with overhead cover during the previous week. (23)

At about 0820 hours, a messenger from the battalion CP made his way to the company area and relayed the message that the battalion commander, Lt. Colonel Moore (then Major), wanted one rifle platoon and the weapons platoon to rush to his

---

(21) Personal knowledge  
(22) Personal knowledge  
(23) Personal knowledge

headquarters area. The company commander immediately took down the 1st Platoon, led by Lt. Spencer, and the weapons platoon, led by Lt. Ralston, to FOREST BUCKHOLZ STATION. (24)  
(See Map C 2)

Information received at that time revealed that enemy troops had been spotted approaching down the railroad tracks toward the prepared positions of Company L and that they had pulled in their outposts in order to obtain more surprise fire. As the two platoons of Company K reached FOREST BUCKHOLZ STATION, at about 0912 hours, they became involved in a fire fight as Company L engaged the enemy when they came within 200 yards. The enemy elements had approached in close march column formation with no security to the front. From all indications, they were taken by complete surprise and suffered heavy casualties before they could break formation. (25)

While this initial firing was taking place, the 1st Platoon went into positions on the high ground to the right front of the battalion CP and just right of Company L. (See Map C 2) The light machine gun section of the weapons platoon set up within the 1st Platoon area and the 60 mm mortars went into defilade behind the 1st Platoon on the reverse slope. (26)

For a short while about two companies of the enemy appeared to be trapped in the railroad bed or boxed in by fire from all sides. The enemy scattered, withdrew, and sought whatever cover available. About sixty men took cover in some boxcars that were in the area. Several direct hits were made on these cars by two 57 mm anti-tank guns, moved within close range, and by several bazooka rounds. Whenever any of the enemy at-

---

(24) Personal knowledge

(25) A-2, p. 344; Personal knowledge

(26) Personal knowledge

tempted to escape from the cars, rifle and machine gun fire killed them. The 60 mm mortars of Company K were supplementing the fire of Company M's 81's. The enemy withdrew as quickly as they could but not before numerous casualties and about thirty prisoners were accounted for. (27)

The enemy appeared to be present in large numbers and so the remaining two platoons of Company K were sent for. During the time they were being brought up by Lt. Rose, the company executive officer, the enemy sent a patrol to the right of the railroad track in an effort to locate the flank and strength of the defending forces. They were fired upon by the 1st Platoon, Company K, and the A & P Platoon and again they suffered heavy casualties. Company K received no casualties and the A & P Platoon received only a few, but their platoon leader was one of them. (28)

The 2d Platoon, led by Sergeant Ferguson, and the 3d Platoon, led by Lt. Schlemmer, arrived about 1030 hours. The 2d Platoon was placed in position to the right of the 1st Platoon, and the 3d Platoon was placed to the rear near the road leading to HONSFELD to protect the company's right flank and rear. (See Map C 2) The platoon leaders were promptly enlightened on what was known of the enemy situation and were told not to waste any time digging in, for what had appeared an hour or so before to be just a local attack was now believed to be a large scale offensive. Interrogation of the PW's revealed that the identification of the enemy was the 12th SS Panzer Division. Von Rundstedt's "all out attack" order was taken from one of the PW's captured by Company L during the earlier attack. (29)

---

(27) Personal knowledge  
(28) Personal knowledge  
(29) Personal knowledge

About 1100 hours the area received a very heavy mortar barrage and a few minutes later an estimated two companies of enemy troops attacked Company K from the southeast. The ground had thawed enough to enable the men to have their fox-holes almost completed so that they were able to meet the enemy with some degree of preparedness. The area to the front was scattered with thick bushes, consequently the enemy was able to advance as close as a hundred yards to the company's position. However, the sharp rapidity with which bullets were flying, kept the enemy pinned down and arrested any further advance. In a few minutes the 60 mm mortars had the range and were making it very uncomfortable for the enemy. In about forty-five minutes they withdrew by means of the draw, one hundred yards to their rear, with the mortars harassing them as they withdrew. Company K suffered three casualties, one KIA and two WIA. The enemy's casualties were undetermined but one thing was certain -- he had failed in his attack. (30)

These attacks on the 3d Battalion convinced us that the enemy would continue his advances until he succeeded in making a penetration. Word received from the 1st Battalion, 394th Infantry, revealed that although the enemy had penetrated their area in several places they were still maintaining their original positions for the most part. The enemy would soon be rushing unopposed through the gap on Company K's right flank for there was a distance of several hundred yards to the next friendly unit. It was very likely that the troops around FOREST BUCKHOLZ STATION would soon be completely surrounded. Reinforcements could not be expected as the 3d Battalion was

---

(30) Personal knowledge

not only the regimental reserve but also the division reserve and they were completely engaged. (31)

At about 1445 hours on 16 December, the 3d Battalion Headquarters withdrew to the position occupied by Company K the previous evening. (See Map C 2) At 1500 hours the 2d Platoon, Company K moved over to the left of the 1st Platoon and took up positions astride the road to LANZERATH and the railroad. Company L then withdrew to the area previously occupied by Company I before they were attached to the 393d Infantry. The 3d Platoon, Company K, shifted their positions behind the 1st Platoon and had the same mission. (32)

About 1645 hours, as soon as dusk would permit, Company K sent the third squad of the 3d Platoon as a patrol down the LANZERATH ROAD to seek information about the enemy. This patrol returned about 1800 hours and reported that they patrolled the area for about 500 yards and had encountered no enemy but had heard tank movements on the LANZERATH-LOSHEIMERGRABEN ROAD. This information was relayed to battalion headquarters. (33)

At this time orders were received to leave two rifle platoons in the present position to defend the area in the vicinity of FOREST BUCKHOLZ STATION. The remaining rifle platoon and the weapons platoon of Company K, along with two rifle platoons from Company L under the command of the Company Commander of Company K, were attached to the 1st Battalion to reinforce their defense. 1st Lt. Joseph P. Rose, Executive Officer, Company K, remained with the 1st and 2d Platoons in the vicinity of FOREST BUCKHOLZ STATION. (34)

Information was received about 1945 hours from Lt. Colonel

- 
- (31) Personal knowledge
  - (32) Personal knowledge
  - (33) Personal knowledge
  - (34) Personal knowledge

Robert H. Douglas, Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion, that the 1st Battalion had been hit hard and had suffered many casualties and although they were still holding their original positions they expected another full scale attack before daylight. At 2100 hours, 16 December we took up a defensive position about 600 yards north of LOSHEIMERGRABEN as shown on Map E. Most of the men of Company K had not eaten since the evening meal on 15 December and ammunition was running very low. These conditions were reported to 1st Battalion Headquarters but a resupply of neither food nor ammunition was received. The men spent most of the night digging in and familiarizing themselves with their positions. At about 2400 hours we heard over our radio (SCR 300) that Lt. Rose had reported tanks, with infantry aboard, overrunning his position at FOREST BUCKHOLZ STATION and that he was destroying his radio. (35)

#### THE WITHDRAWAL TO ELSENBORN

At daybreak the following morning, 17 December, the two platoons of Company L were detached and given another mission with the 3d Battalion. That left the position to be defended with one rifle platoon and one weapons platoon. At 0640 hours, after a short artillery concentration, the 1st Battalion was again attacked by six battalions of infantry, supported by tanks, dive bombers, flame throwers, and rockets. About 1000 hours the 1st Battalion was ordered to withdraw to positions in the vicinity of MURRIGEN, BELGIUM. (See Map E) The former positions had been rendered untenable by the flanking of enemy forces on both sides, and food, water, and ammunition were

---

(35) A-2, p. 346; Personal knowledge

nearly expended. (36)

Company K was not notified of the plans for the withdrawal of the 1st Battalion, in fact no information had been received from the 1st Battalion since the evening before. At about 1030 hours troops could be seen withdrawing on either side of our position. It was learned eventually that they were elements of Companies A and B and that they were withdrawing but didn't know where they were going. We discovered that during the night the 1st Battalion had changed their radio call signs and had not included Company K. Whenever attempts were made to contact them on our SCR 300 radio no one would answer and radio traffic would cease for long periods of time. At about 1300 hours Company K was attacked by an estimated two companies of infantry. The enemy was pinned down by automatic and mortar fire for about seven minutes, at the end of which time all of our mortar ammunition and most of our ball ammunition had been exhausted. Simultaneously, enemy mortar fire began landing in our area and the Germans began rushing our position. We withdrew with only a few minor casualties for a distance of about 300 yards where a hasty defense was again resumed. The trees in this location had been planted in rows which afforded good firing lanes from which each man of Company K fired a final volley at the enemy as he came within close range. At this time it was necessary to abandon our mortars in order to withdraw quickly and to aid those who were wounded. (37)

We were unable to comprehend at this time the intensity of this attack by the Germans, which has now gone down in

---

(36) A-3, p. 87; Personal knowledge  
(37) A-9, p. 11; Personal knowledge

history as the "Battle of the Bulge", and we decided to withdraw to the north and northwest through a thick forest to KRINKELT in an effort to contact other friendly forces and to obtain a resupply of ammunition and food. At 2100 hours we stopped at a spot about 1000 yards east of KRINKELT. (See Map E) The men were exhausted and unable to continue any farther without a rest. A close-in perimeter defense was set up and it was planned to continue the withdrawal before daybreak the next day. The weather was still cold but the snow and ice had thawed to the extent that it was very disagreeable. Friendly and enemy artillery passed overhead all during the night. The men were cold, tired, scared, and hungry. Needless to say, they didn't get much rest that night. (38)

About 0400 hours, 18 December, a soldier from Company A stumbled into our position and said that he had been taken prisoner by the Germans the day before and had just escaped. He stated that the Germans, with tanks, were in the clearing about 400 yards to the southwest. A small patrol sent with the soldier confirmed this report, and plans were made to proceed without further delay to KRINKELT. (39) (See Map E)

When we reached a stream about 300 yards east of KRINKELT at 0515 hours we were pinned down by interdictory artillery fire which we believed to be our own. When the shelling ceased we continued toward KRINKELT, but upon entering the town we discovered that it was occupied by the Germans. (It was learned later that the Germans had taken the southern part of the town and the American troops still occupied the northern part.) Since it wasn't yet dawn we were able to withdraw to the south

---

(38) Personal knowledge

(39) Personal knowledge

without encountering any trouble. As we passed the outskirts of KRINKELT we came upon an overturned half-track with a load of C rations. Each man was able to grab several cans and upon nearing the stream, we located a huge sandpit which was used as cover while the men ate for the first time in over 48 hours and got a little rest. (40)

Our next plan was to follow the stream to WIRTZFELD, the most westernly town on our map. (See Map F) In accomplishing this, we twice had to seek concealment to avoid contact with enemy units. As we neared WIRTZFELD we received small arms fire from elements of the U. S. 2d Infantry Division who were outposting the town. It was necessary to approach the town by means of a deep draw and gully in order to get near enough to the defenders for them to recognize us. About 1400 hours we finally entered WIRTZFELD where information was received that the 99th Division Headquarters had moved to the vicinity of ELSENBORN, BELGIUM. The road from WIRTZFELD to ELSENBORN was littered with abandoned equipment and disabled motor vehicles. With a  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ton truck which one of the men in the 3d Platoon had managed to repair, we shuttled our group to ELSENBORN, arriving there about 1645 hours, just as it was getting dark. We received a hot meal from a cavalry unit and then located the 3d Battalion, 394th Infantry on the east side of the town. (41)

#### THE REORGANIZATION AT ELSENBORN

The 3d Battalion at this time consisted of Companies L and M and about 18 men from the 2d Platoon of Company K. Company I was still attached to the 393d Infantry. All of the

---

(40) Personal knowledge

(41) A-3, p. 89; Personal knowledge

1st Platoon and half of the 2d Platoon of Company K under Lt. Rose at FOREST BUCKHOLZ STATION had been either killed or captured. The total strength of Company K at this time, not including kitchen personnel, was 84. We were assigned a dwelling and a barn on the outskirts of ELSENBORN in which to clean up, and half of the men were allowed to rest while the other half were in general defense of the immediate area. (42)

Early on 19 December we received the battalion defense plan: Companies L and K abreast on the forward slope of the long ridge 2500 yards east of ELSENBORN, with Company M in general support. (See Map F) Company K had a frontage of about 800 yards; Company L was on the left and the 1st Battalion was on the right. A section of heavy machine guns from Company M was with the 3d Platoon in the left half of the company sector and the light machine gun section was with the 2d Platoon in the right half. The 60mm mortar section, after receiving two mortars, set up in battery on the reverse slope behind the 2d Platoon. The company CP was located in a concrete target shed about 90 yards to the rear. The company reserve which consisted of five headquarters platoon personnel, three kitchen personnel and one clerk, was located in the vicinity of the company CP. All obtainable ammunition and automatic weapons were distributed on the front line positions. The front line of Company K was located on an open and barren forward slope not more than 500 yards from a neck of woods and well within range of small arms from the woods. (43)

During the night 19-20 December, the enemy occupied the woods to the front and when they attempted to ascend the ridge,

---

(42) A-8, p. 13; Personal knowledge

(43) A-8, p. 14; Personal knowledge

we called for artillery fire and received a concentration of HE and WP on the near edge of the woods and on the forward slope. Many rounds landed on our front line making larger and better foxholes than the men had been able to dig in the rocky ground with their limited number of entrenching tools. We received three casualties because of the shelling and although the extent of the casualties of the enemy was unknown, the screaming of wounded Germans could be heard throughout the night. The following morning, three wounded Germans were captured and evacuated to battalion headquarters for questioning. They stated that they had been told that there were no troops on that particular hill. (44)

It snowed continually during the day 20 December and blankets and additional automatic weapons were distributed. The men maintained and improved their defensive positions by constructing overhead cover for their foxholes from material gathered at ELSENBORN, and prepared for the next enemy attack which came that evening at about 1630 hours when the Germans launched a tank and infantry attack preceded by a ten minute preparation of artillery and mortar fire. The 57 mm AT guns in our area, which were not frozen, were unable to knock out any of the tanks although several rounds found their mark. Again our artillery placed tremendous accurate fire to bear on the enemy and the attack was thwarted before they made more than a slight penetration. It was apparent the enemy was still attempting to crack the stubborn defense on ELSENBORN RIDGE in order to gain control of the good road net west to the MEUSE RIVER. This attack was made by elements of the German 3d

---

(44) Personal knowledge

Armored Infantry Division whose 8th Panzergrenadier Regiment, with 10 SP guns, had been ordered to seize ELSENBORN. The Jerries had expected to take our position with this attack, for they carried full packs, heavy entrenching tools, plenty of ammunition, loaves of bread, and bottles of wine. (45)

Action on the next day, 21 December 1944, was limited to patrolling and harassing artillery duels. The weather was cold and the snow was about twenty inches deep. Our men continued to improve their positions. The enemy was dug in along the edge of the woods facing the open terrain which offered excellent fields of fire for automatic weapons. (See Map F) Visibility was good which gave the enemy excellent observation of our front line position from the high ground in the woods. We were subject to much sniper fire and accurate observed mortar fire. The enemy had air superiority and we could see numerous buzz-bombs flying overhead. A request to shift our front line to the rear about five hundred yards in order to defend the reverse slope and to outpost our present positions was denied. By this time the strength of Company K on the front totaled 69 men and 2 officers, many of them with minor wounds and trench foot. Since all obtainable information indicated that the Germans were still on the offensive, no one was evacuated if he was able to fire a weapon. Battalion headquarters had no idea when we would receive the much needed replacements. Company K still did not have a 1st Platoon, which was greatly needed as an adequate reserve. (46)

#### THE CONTINUED DEFENSE ON ELSENBORN RIDGE

During the following week the Germans made a few minor  
(45) A-9, p. 13; A-5; Personal knowledge  
(46) A-8; Personal knowledge

local probing attacks and on the 28th of December the 246th VG Division launched a major attack in the enemy's last attempt to gain possession of ELSENBORN RIDGE. After two hours of close quarter fighting the enemy retreated, leaving large numbers of their dead on our positions; thenceforth the Germans assumed a totally defensive role. (47)

To summarize: The German penetration was limited to a futile drive through the comparatively valueless ARDENNES. Outnumbered six to one by the enemy, the 394th Infantry inflicted such heavy casualties on the 12th Panzer Division that it had to be replaced in mid-battle. Everyone had fought on line--messengers, cooks, and clerks. We had thrown the enemy's timetable two days off schedule, and had thwarted his repeated attempts to seize the VERVIERS-LIEGE road net -- a primary objective of the enemy drive. The Germans used every ingenious expedient to insure their success of this drive which they believed would carry them to FRANCE and the ENGLISH CHANNEL.

The defense of ELSENBORN RIDGE can be contributed largely to the numerous isolated groups of troops that had been overrun by the Germans and had managed, without food and ammunition, to work their way back to friendly lines to make another stand against the same enemy.

By General Orders #35, Headquarters 99th Infantry Division dated 5 May 1945, First Battalion and Company K, Three Ninety Fourth Infantry, were cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy during the period 16 to 18 December 1944 in GERMANY and BELGIUM.

---

(47) A-9, p. 15; Personal knowledge

## ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

### 1. RESERVE DEFENSIVE POSITION

The German counter-offensive on 16 December found Company K, 394th Infantry in no organized defensive position in which they could contribute to the defense of the battalion sector. As a result, Company K's defensive power was greatly weakened when it was hurriedly committed to defend several sectors along the front during the first day of the offensive. Each new position required hasty and immediate digging-in and since the terrain was unfamiliar, it is very probable that the best possible positions were not obtained.

### 2. ARTILLERY SUPPORT

During the days 16 and 17 December, we received no close-in artillery support. In fact, no friendly artillery landed within hearing distance of Company K. Large numbers of enemy tanks and troops were able to overrun our positions unhindered by our greatest available defensive weapon. However, on ELSEN-BORN RIDGE, protective fires by artillery constituted the greatest single factor in enabling the front lines to hold their positions. Its fires, when called for, were immediate and accurate and were effective in each German attack.

### 3. LACK OF INFORMATION

During the time a portion of Company K was attached to the 1st Battalion, no information was ever received from either the battalion commander or his headquarters pertaining to enemy action or plans and actions of the 1st Battalion. Several at-

tempts were made to contact the 1st Battalion by radio and runners, but all were unsuccessful. We had no definite knowledge during the morning of 17 December, that the units of the 1st Battalion had pulled back. Only by bits of information from occasional stragglers did we later realize that we were left out on a limb without support or any hope for replenishing our ammunition and obtaining supplies. It should be SOP to inform all men of the situation. When men are forced to withdraw or become separated they are better able to return to their unit if they know when and to what place the unit is withdrawing.

#### 4. OVERHEAD COVER

During the initial enemy shelling in the LOSHEIMERGRABEN area on 16 December which lasted 90 minutes, overhead cover was responsible for the safety of the men of Company K. Almost all of the rounds resulted in tree bursts which had the effect of time fire and the fragments were unable to penetrate the overhead cover on the foxholes.

As there were no trees or any other sources in the company area on EISENBORN RIDGE from which to obtain material to construct overhead cover for the foxholes on the front line, small details were sent into EISENBORN and surrounding area to scrounge for fence posts, lumber from destroyed buildings, and similar items. These items were dumped in rear of the company area and during the night the men on the front lines secured this material to improve their overhead cover for their foxholes. As a result, many men escaped injury by having overhead protection from artillery. However, individual foxholes

had to be checked constantly to see that the men did not roof over the emplacement to such an extent that it could not be used to fight from effectively.

#### 5. DEFENSE OF FORWARD SLOPE

On EISENBORN RIDGE we defended the forward slope well within small arms range of an aggressive enemy located in the woods less than 500 yards away. It is true, the forward slope offered good fields of fire, but had the defensive position been organized about 400 yards in rear of the crest, we would have had equally as good fields of fire, in addition to protection from enemy observed fire, and the enemy could have been held off by security groups on the crest or forward slope. Artillery and mortar fires could have been planned for the forward slope to assist in breaking up attacks before they reached the crest. By defending the forward slope, many casualties were inflicted by observed enemy mortar and sniper fire, hot meals were limited and infrequent, and any movement on the front line was curtailed during daylight hours.

#### 6. SUPPLY

Prior to the German attack, over 80% of the men in Company K were not issued arctics or any type of water repellent clothing. The weather was very cold, snow was several inches deep, and at all times the foxholes were wet and miserable. After the withdrawal to EISENBORN, the men were without arctics, water repellent clothing, blankets, raincoats, and even shelter halves for several days. Blankets and socks in small quantities were received in about two days but by this time

many men were beginning to suffer from exposure and especially trenchfoot because of the inability of the men on the front line to leave the protection of their foxholes. Shoe-pacs and water repellent clothing finally arrived after most of the cold weather and snow had passed -- too late to help the combat efficiency of our troops.

#### 7. ANTI-TANK DEFENSE

During the period covered by this monograph, no tanks or tank destroyers were available to participate in the anti-tank defense of the 394th Infantry. In the LOSHEIMERGRABEN area, the 57mm AT guns were ineffective against the heavily armored tanks which lumbered through our front lines with only a very small percentage of them being disabled, whereas, if a normal attachment of tanks or tank destroyers had been made, the outcome of the first two days of the Battle of the Bulge would not have been so one-sided. On ELSENBORN RIDGE the crews of the 57mm AT guns were scarcely able to keep the guns in firing condition during the freezing weather and were no match for the enemy tanks which sputtered up the ridge 500 yards to the front. These tanks had to be driven back by an overwhelming volume of artillery fire.

#### 8. RETROGRADE MOVEMENT

Late in the afternoon, 17 December 1944, the remnants of Company K began a withdrawal. There was no plan for the withdrawal, the main purpose of which was to conform with the movement of other troops and to forestall complete annihilation of our group. Much time was consumed in attempting to

contact units on our flanks and in obtaining fragments of information of the enemy which could be used. Stragglers from both the 1st and 2d Battalions were unable to give us any information except that their units had withdrawn but they did not know to what place.

A retrograde movement was not in anyone's mind two days before and it certainly wasn't conducted as a planned movement would have been. One delaying action was accomplished after beginning the withdrawal and was limited to only one because of the lack of ammunition. Afterwards, the purpose of the withdrawal was to become completely disengaged from the enemy and to avoid any further contact with the enemy prior to reaching friendly held lines and receiving a resupply of food and ammunition.

### LESSONS

1. A unit in reserve in a defensive situation should always have prepared positions from which to defend even though an attack is not contemplated.

2. In the defense, protective fires by artillery are indispensable.

3. Every effort should be made to keep even the lowest units informed during a fast moving situation.

4. Overhead cover for personnel in foxholes in the defensive is of utmost importance.

5. In determining whether to defend forward or reverse slopes, the main factors to be considered are fields of fire, protection from observed enemy fire, enemy action, and supporting weapons.