

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1947 - 1948

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY G, 411TH INFANTRY
(103D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE CROSSING
OF THE TAINTROUX RIVER AND THE LIBERATION
OF ST. DIE, FRANCE, 16 - 20 NOVEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Company Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: RIFLE COMPANY IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

The personal experiences presented herein concern the operations of Company G, 411th Infantry, 103d Infantry Division, in the crossing of the Taintroux River and the closing up of the lines on the Meurthe River, resulting in the liberation of St. Die, during the period 16-20 November 1944.

This action which I am going to develop was the initial action, "The Baptism of Fire", of Company G.

The reason for selecting this action is not to bring out anything that is new or startling in the application of tactics, or to show what this action accomplished in the big picture, although this also will be developed, but I wish to show as my primary purpose, some of the problems that will confront a new unit going into action. It is my hope that this will impress the reader with the importance of detailed planning and application of doctrine as presented by soldiers of experience in preparing for combat. Not that these things were ever knowingly neglected in our training or preparation, but I do wish to show some of the mistakes that we did make. Probably nothing new will be shown in this personal experience, but I do wish to present the thought that mistakes are often very costly in combat and that they may sometimes mean the difference between victory, which is our only purpose in battle, and defeat.

BACKGROUND AND TRAINING OF COMPANY G

Before entering into the action before St. Die, it is necessary, to summarize the background of Company G from the standpoint of training and experience.

The 103d Division had been activated in November 1942 at Camp Claiborne, La. After basic and combined training, they went on the Louisiana maneuvers. The outfit emerged from the maneuvers a well trained "unit", but like many other

divisions who were still in the States, the spring and early summer of 1944 found it stripped of all its trained men and officers for overseas replacements except for a bare cadre. In May and June the Division was again brought up to T. O. strength by an influx of ASTP men and men from the Air Corps. (1) These men had been transferred from the Air Corps when the War Department had been told by General McNair, head of the Army Ground Forces, that either the ASTP or ten divisions, three tank battalions, and twenty six antiaircraft battalions would have to be discontinued. (2)

Many of these men had had very little experience in the ground forces, consequently their morale was initially very low, but it will be remembered that of the total men sent to ASTP, 97.6 percent were in AGCT grades I and II, and the remainder were in grade III. (3) They soon became hardened infantrymen of the highest caliber. The ease and the short time in which they became well trained soldiers demonstrates the necessity for men with high AGCT scores being divided equally among all branches of the service. This also demonstrates the efficiency in training which can and will result. These men were given a very concentrated basic training (four weeks), then went immediately to small unit problems. These were followed, in time, by combined problems and field exercises and tests in which nearly all units were rated superior. (4)

Another consequence of this wholesale transfer of men was the lowering of morale of the old cadre. These new men came to us in almost every grade. We were now over T. O. in all grades below technical sergeant so it was almost impossible for a man to obtain a promotion and some of our squad leaders were still pfc's. (5) Reclassification and reassignments of personnel had to be made with as much fairness and dispatch as was possible.

The Division relied quite heavily on volumes of training S.O.P's which were complete down to small details. ^{THESE WERE} ~~This was~~ beneficial in achieving standardized training and ^{WERE} ~~was~~ perhaps made necessary by the absence of many leaders from their organization^s. Unit leaders were, as a rule, absent on special duty or detached service of some type.

(1) A-1, p. 8; (2) A-4; (3) A-4; (4) A-10; (5) A-10.

"Spit and polish" parades, rigid standards of military courtesy, and uniform regulations brought the Division up to the ultimate in appearance and discipline. (6) Morale was high and every man felt that his unit would be able to make the best showing in the action which was to come.

MOVEMENT TO THE FRONT

The Division landed in Marseilles, France, 20 October 1944, after "staging", it went by "40 & 8th" to Decelles where it became an operational unit of the VI Corps. It had originally been intended to attach the regiments of new divisions coming into combat to seasoned divisions. This would have given them the benefit of supervision from combat trained leaders. This plan was discontinued because of the strained manpower situation and the immediate need for destroying the enemy who was still west of the Rhine. It was decided to commit the new division^s as a unit. (7)

The Division was moved into^a bivouac area where it continued to "shake" itself down and rid itself of excess individual equipment which could not be carried into battle. Up to this time all men and officers still had in their possession^s the duffle bags and personal belongings which they had brought from the States. Here all^{of} that equipment was collected and placed in the Division train. (See Map B)

It should also be added, that during this time, it was raining and snowing almost continually. The roads in the bivouac area became almost impassible to wheeled vehicles. Company G lost one of its 1/4 ton vehicles to ordinance because of a broken axel, the result of the condition of the roads. This was typical throughout the Division. The vehicles which were able to negotiate the trails could not be used efficiently as traffic within the area was slowed to a "snails' pace". We quickly learned that bivouac areas must have maintenance of roads, even to permit normal traffic. (8)

In this area two companies of each battalion of the 411th Infantry made a dry run of the contemplated attack, with emphasis on coordinating the

(6) A-1 p. 7; (7) A-5, p. 377; (8) A-10.

* FRENCH R.R. BOXCARS. -3-

preparatory barrage, base of fire, assault by teams, taking of objective, and reorganization.

The 409th and 410th Infantries (103d Infantry Division) completed the relief of elements of the 3d Infantry Division who held the front on which the 103d Division was going to attack. This was a wooded area immediately west of the Taintroux River, extending from Herbaville to Cherry. (9)

(See Map C)

Another move brought the 411th Infantry to its forward assembly position ready to jump off with the 409th Infantry to take its first objective, the town of La Bolle, which was known to be occupied by numbers of the German 16th Infantry Division in hasty, but well camouflaged positions. (10)

Before going into the action itself it is necessary to go back into the planning to see the significance of this impending action.

BACKGROUND OF THE ACTION

The Seventh Army, after entering Southern France in August 1944, had traveled over four hundred miles, (11) and now was confronted with a barrier, or so it had been classified throughout all past history by tacticians. (12) This barrier was the Vosges Mountains. Before the Vosges Mountains could be entered, it was necessary to cross the Meurthe River. Snow had already fallen and the weather was becoming worse every day. It was not a pleasant picture to look forward to; mountain warfare in the middle of the winter would be very difficult, so speed was essential. The enemy had also stiffened his resistance considerably so that now, the possession of every inch of terrain was hotly contested.

On 10 November 1944, the ^{VII} Corps Commander called together his Division Commanders and outlined the Corps mission of attacking east through the Vosges Mountains, capturing Strasbourg on the Rhine, and destroying the enemy west of the Rhine. (See Map A)

Plan "A", which was finally executed, called for three Divisions, 3d, 103d, (9) A-1, p. 24; (10) A-9, p. 265; (11) A-7 p. 80; (12) A-5, p. 385.

100th Div?

and 36th, to make a co-ordinated attack across the Meurthe River in the vicinity of St. Die and proceed due east through the rugged Vosges Mountains, break out upon the plains of Alsace, and proceed to the Rhine. (13) (See Map D)

The idea of the action was to attack vigorously and once the enemy was knocked from position, to keep him reeling and not let him "get set" for a "counter-punch". This idea saved a lot of precious men and time, as line after line of successive prepared delaying positions were later passed over in our hasty pursuit of the enemy. These positions were mostly unmanned, as the enemy in his unorganized retreat, could not slow down enough to organize them. The Germans were also being outflanked by the French attack through the Belfort Gap to the south. (14)

This plan was scheduled for the 20th of November. In order for it to be carried out, the west bank of the Meurthe River had to be cleared of the enemy. We had to have this west bank of the river, if we were to gather ourselves up for the co-ordinated attack across the Meurthe and pursuit to follow.

THE PLAN OF ATTACK

The 411th Infantry had moved behind the lines on the evening of the 14th of November, preparatory to relieving elements of the 410th Infantry who were holding the line in front of La Bolle. (MAI) It rained and snowed continually. The men had only raincoats as protection against the elements. The Regiment spent the next day making reconnaissance and issuing orders. These things were done in strictly S.O.P. fashion. The company commanders went forward to receive the Battalion Commander's order and later sent for the platoon sergeants and platoon leaders to come forward and receive the company order. But as so often happens, the platoon leaders had only a few minutes to make their reconnaissance and very little time to issue the orders to the orders to the squad leaders, who had no time for reconnaissance and had to issue their orders to their men while on the way forward to the line of departure. The Regiment moved up to about five hundred yards behind the front line on the afternoon (15) A-7, p. 80; (14) A-10.

of the 15th of November. Here they really received a "baptism" of mortar and artillery fire. Heavy concentrations fell on the battalion positions all night. G Company had no casualties, but E Company on its left lost their First Sergeant and Communications Sergeant. These were the first casualties in the 2nd Battalion.

The battle formation for the 2nd Battalion, 411th Infantry was: two companies abreast, E Company on the left, G Company on the right to keep contact with the 3rd Battalion; F Company was the Regimental reserve, so the 3d Platoon of G Company was taken for Battalion reserve. It can easily be seen that very little effective reserve was kept out by either of the higher units, but consider the plight of G Company, who kept out one squad as a support. Crew served weapons of the 410th, now on the line, were to stay in position to initially support the attack. H Company was in general support of the Battalion. (15)

A fifteen minute artillery barrage would precede the attack.

The Battalion O. P. was on the highest terrain feature in the Area, Hill 647, (See Map G) from this point one could observe all positions. This O. P. was also selected by the artillery observer. No artillery observers were sent to the front line companies.

The evacuation and supply trail to G Company's area was over a narrow trail which could be negotiated only with extreme difficulty on foot and then not by a heavily laden soldier. No roads passable even to ammunition carriers, lead into the area.

The Battalion was to bring wire forward as soon as possible, but for initial communication, relied upon runner (over the aforementioned difficult trail), and radio. It was found that the SCR 300 radio could not be relied upon to provide adequate communication in mountains and that the SCR 536 could not be relied upon at all.

(15) A-10.

TERRAIN ANALYSIS (See Map C)

The terrain over which Company G was to attack was ideally suited for defense by the enemy. The line of departure was located in a woods so thick that it afforded little observation to the enemy of our troops. However the woods themselves were under the direct observation of the enemy and any movement, perceived in the woods was brought under very accurate "88" mm. gunfire. The cover of the woods on the line of departure was the only thing that was favorable for the attack. The hill which sloped up very abruptly behind the line of departure, flattened out just as abruptly in front. The drop in the first four hundred meters after clearing the woods was about twenty meters. The next two hundred meters dropped ten meters. In other words between the Germans in La Bolle and Company G in the woods was six hundred meters of gently sloping terrain which was almost devoid of cover.

Behind the town of La Bolle was the Taintroux River, a small stream approximately two feet deep and eight feet wide. It was fordable to foot troops along its course through our area. Its course was roughly parallel to the front. This small river offered no serious problem, but was just one more small item, added to the advantages already held by the enemy. (16)

Beyond the Taintroux was seven hundred meters of gently ascending terrain, then came German positions on the steeply wooded slope. This slope in the next six hundred meters ascended two hundred and fifty meters to a rocky crest. On the other side of the crest was St. Die and the Meurthe River, our final objective.

This terrain gave every advantage to the defender and nothing to the attacker. It was the ideal "cross compartment". What we lacked in terrain advantage would have to be counterbalanced with aggressiveness and firepower. The only course of action was to attack enmass. There was no area favorable for maneuver and no avenues of approach to the enemy position. There was no alternative. The Seventh Infantry (3d Division) had already tried these
(16) A-10.

tactics and had found them to be costly. They had had little success, after many attempts to eject the enemy from the town of La Bolle. (17)

ENEMY SITUATION

All available enemy troops had been committed in the face of strong probing actions. It was estimated that the enemy had 13,700 troops of diverse units to defend the Vosges Mountains. This force was to be considered expendable and to sell the land for as high a price in time and attrition as possible. (18) It could be deduced that we were to attack an enemy who ^{was} ~~were~~ in well selected positions and who ^{was} ~~were~~ determined to resist our every attempt to advance. The German's mission was a delaying action. They were stalling for time to perfect their Siegfried defenses. They knew that if they could delay a few more weeks, our attack through the Vosges Mountains would be almost impossible because of winter weather. They were determined to make this campaign slow and costly to us. The terrain over which we were to attack was ideal for the accomplishment of their mission. (19)

THE ATTACK

G Company moved forward so as to pass through the elements of the 410th Infantry ^{who} ~~who~~ were holding the line of departure. The 410th crew served weapons were in well dug in positions. These consisted of two heavy machine guns, Caliber 30 and one machine gun, Caliber 50 on a ground mount. They had been there for several days, so plenty of ammunition was on the positions. Arrangements were made to coordinate their weapons in our Company fire plan. (20)

The Division Artillery reinforced by elements of the 6th, 17th, 35th Field Artillery Groups, and the 41st and 522nd Field Artillery Battalions laid down a tremendous barrage 15 minutes prior to the attack. The artillery gunners threw 3,168 shells into the breeches of their guns during this 15 minutes. (21) The barrage was more than inspiring to the men who were having their first big artillery barrage. No one could see how any of the enemy could be left after such a terrific pounding, but they were to find that artillery (17) A-10; (18) A-5, p. 396; (19) A-5, p. 402; (20) A-10; (21) A-1, p. 29.

and machine gun fire, supported by rifle fire is not enough to dislodge an enemy from a well prepared position.

At "H" hour (0900) Company G, along with the other elements of the Division jumped off. They charged forward, using fire and movement to advance. No enemy could be seen. The formation was two platoons abreast, the 2nd platoon on the right, the 1st platoon minus one squad, held out as company support, on the left. The enemy let them advance until they had cleared the woods by about one hundred and fifty yards and were proceeding across open ground that was gently sloping toward the German position. The enemy then let them have it with every available weapon. The 1st platoon suffered only a few casualties but the 2nd platoon who had cleared the woods further and was on more open terrain suffered seven killed, eleven wounded, and two missing. These killed included the platoon leader and two squad leaders.

Lt. Wolfe, the Platoon Leader, was wounded by the initial burst of fire. Without regard for his own personal safety, he went to each of the individual positions of his men, aiding them in finding better positions for themselves and in distributing their fire upon the enemy. The example set by Lt. Wolfe inspired his men and enabled them to bring most of the wounded back under cover, when they retreated off the open ground to the cover of the trees. Lt. Wolfe was hit by a second burst of machine gun fire and killed. The Company medical corps men also did heroic service in this action. They gave continuous aid to men who were still under direct enemy observation and fire and could not be moved. (22)

The attack was stopped in Company G sector. Company E was even in worse straits, having suffered heavier casualties.

The positions of the enemy were very hard to distinguish. They were very well camouflaged and their weapons did not give off the characteristic puff of smoke that the men were accustomed to seeing from their own weapons--German powder was smokeless. When they could be seen, small arms and machine gun

(22) A-10.

fire were used with little effect. From our positions it could be seen that many of our casualties were caused by a heavily defended position on our left flank. (See Map C Hill 377) A messenger was sent to battalion with this information. The Battalion O.P. also had a view of the terrain and should have seen this, but this position was never neutralized. The flash and sound of a high velocity gun could be seen and heard coming from that position. If adequate lines of communication with the field artillery had been available, we could have destroyed the gun or neutralized the fires which we were receiving. The 81 mm. mortar observers were also in the Battalion O.P.

The rest of the morning was spent trying to get the wounded men back under cover and trying to establish communication with higher headquarters. Our SCR 300 was not able to contact battalion and wire lines were not established until 1400 hours.

THE SECOND ATTACK

Meanwhile the platoons had reorganized. The 3d Platoon had been returned to the Company from Battalion control. The Battalion Commander came to Company G's position with orders that another co-ordinated attack was to be launched by the Battalion at 1600 hours after a thirty minute artillery preparation. The plan of attack was to be the same as that used at 0900. (23)

The Company plan was to have the 1st Platoon make a demonstration on the right while the 3d Platoon made an attack on the left. The 1st Platoon refused to move out, when ordered. This platoon had lost its platoon leader to higher headquarters as a regimental, ranger platoon leader, and having been in the attack earlier in the day decided that it had had enough. Investigation into the cause of this revealed that one man was so badly carried away by fear that he had been completely overcome. He could not move, or have any control of his actions. He was evacuated immediately. The acting platoon leader was then able to get the platoon to move into position, to support the attack. This was the first indication of what was going to become very (23) A-10.

apparent to the combat leaders, i.e., the American soldier is very often hesitant to fire on the enemy for fear that it will reveal his position and bring fire down upon him. Perhaps this could be corrected to a large extent, by training in the selection and camouflaging of positions, and development of a smokeless powder. The 3d Platoon had lost its platoon leader to battalion as an assistant communications officer, but no difficulty was ever encountered in this platoon.

It was almost dusk before the artillery barrage was completed. The machine guns had meanwhile been firing at maximum rates and the 50 caliber was used to set fire to a barn for illumination of the battlefield. This proved very effective. The 3d Platoon advanced very rapidly against small arms, mortar, and artillery fire, coming from the positions in and in rear of La Bolle. Casualties were light, approximately five men wounded, including the acting platoon leader. The outskirts of the village of La Bolle ^{Were} ~~was~~ taken. It was decided that the platoon would occupy only the outskirts of La Belle and clean up the rest of the town in the morning. Communications with company headquarters, which was to remain in its original position, ^{Were} ~~was~~ established by "sound power" phones.

We had been receiving artillery fire from the enemy and although casualties were not numerous they were beginning to pile up in our rear area. A company collecting point for the wounded had been set up. Because of the rugged trail which was the only route of evacuation, only a few of the wounded could be evacuated that night. Six men were required to carry a litter over the rough terrain. Troops from B Company, 410th Infantry Regiment were used as litter bearers, but all the wounded could not be evacuated before dark and it was impossible to make the trip up the trail during the hours of darkness. It was necessary to leave the wounded on the position until morning. Their evacuation was not completed until the next afternoon. (24)

(24) Personal knowledge, statement of W. H. Burr, Captain, Infantry, then acting S-3, 2nd Battalion, 410th Infantry.

No rations were received and phone communication was out almost continually. Inexperienced linemen were being initiated to the task of keeping a line in under artillery fire.

The Company was shelled sporadically all night, by direct fire weapons from the heights above La Belle, but even now the soldiers were veterans enough to know the advantages of a well dug in position with overhead cover.

THE THIRD ATTACK

At 0400 hours a messenger arrived from Battalion with orders to withdraw the 3d Platoon from La Belle. The plan was to give the town another artillery barrage and attack again in the morning. The sector of attack of Company G was to be shifted to the left to relieve Company E. F Company was still in Regimental reserve.

The shift in position was completed and by 0900 hours, G Company was again ready to attack. Fog hung so heavily over the valley, the artillery barrage was not laid down. G Company jumped off without the barrage and by 1200 hours had taken the town without a shot being fired — the enemy had left.

G Company had lost about thirty five men, killed and wounded in the action, but apparently had also made the action costly to the enemy, if the statements of the French civilians in the town can be accepted at face value. They said the Germans had carried away two truck loads of dead and five fresh graves were counted in the area. (25)

While searching the town for Germans, we made contact with a patrol of the 410th Regiment who had gone into the town as a patrol on the night of 14 November 1944. They had been unable to return to their unit. These men had been in the town all during our attack without our knowledge. They did not even know that the Germans had left early that morning.

The town of La Belle was only an intermediate objective. Our main objective was to destroy the enemy on the west side of the Meurthe River and take the high ground above St. Die. Already one could see a vast change in
(25) A-10.

Company G. Men who only yesterday were thoroughly perplexed and defeated, could today "crack" jokes and be impatient to move on. Men who had had only one meal of cold "C" rations since yesterday morning and very little sleep the night before, seemed fresh and ready to move on. It is startling to notice the change that can come over a man as the result of a small victory. Even after receiving those initial casualties from the enemy, morale in the unit could be described as good.

ON TO ST. DIE

After co-ordinating with higher headquarters, Company G moved forward. Company E had come up contacting our left flank and elements of the 3d Battalion were seen crossing the open field to our right. Company G moved out as skirmishers, 1st platoon on the right, 3d platoon on the left, followed by bounds by the 2nd platoon and weapons platoon in support. They advanced across the ^{newly built bridge} ~~the~~ Paintroux River, and continued to advance across the open ground to the wooded heights. Very little resistance was encountered. The enemy artillery and mortar fire had completely stopped and only very little individual rifle fire was encountered. The enemy seemed to have had enough and was content to retreat with only token resistance.

Two Germans came out of the woods waving a propaganda leaflet at our men. This leaflet, promising immediate evacuation of all prisoners to the rear area, was new to our men at this time, but they were soon to become very familiar with this type of occurrence.

The advance was slow, mainly because of the rugged terrain. Men had to rest frequently as the slope was almost perpendicular, but early in the afternoon we reached the crest of the hill. Contact had been maintained with Company E on our left, and established with the 3d Battalion on our right. When we reached the crest of the hill, the 3d Battalion informed us that that was as far as their orders required them to go. We contacted our Battalion by phone (wire communications had kept up with us all day, things were beginning to be organized) and soon the confusion in orders was corrected. We were

again moving forward. The descent was almost as tortuous as the ascent had been, but by 1630 we had reached the edge of St. Die. Here we were met by the Mayor who informed us that the Germans had retreated across the Meurthe River after burning the south part of the town and destroying all bridges. (26)

The enemy without reasons justifiable even on the grounds of military necessity had ordered St. Die destroyed. Giving scant notice to the occupants of the town houses and business structures, the Germans reduced the greater part of the town to ashes, the wall skeletons which were left standing intact testified that high explosives played little part in the needless destruction of St. Die, but rather that it was gutted by German-started fires.

General Haechel, German 16th Infantry, Division C G, was responsible for the destruction of St. Die and surrounding villages. (27) (See Map C) But most important to us was the fact that G Company had completed its first combat mission satisfactorily.

(as it seemed at the time) The initiation to combat had been rough. Men who had trained on the prairies and in the swamps had climbed this rugged mountain. The men, who had come into combat with the bare necessities, had discarded everything but their rifles, ammunition, and raincoats. Maybe once in awhile a light pack could be found, but generally a man could carry everything he had in his field jacket pockets. They had gone from one extreme to the other and were soon to find that a blanket is almost a necessity in the mountains in the wintertime. Right now they were thoroughly convinced that anything but a rifle and ammunition was extra weight.

The 411th Infantry was now given the mission of setting up a defense to hold the present line while the rest of the VI Corps plan to envelop the city of St. Die from the north was executed. Company G took over the defense of the 2nd Battalion sector. The next day (19 November) the plan was changed and G Company took over the area from Herbaville to south of St. Die. (See Map C) The defense was carried out by use of roving patrols, but an adequate estimate (26) A-10; (27) A-9, p. 264.

of the enemy plan had been made and no enemy counter attack developed. (28)

This daring plan as carried out, allowed the 411th Infantry to execute a river crossing and flanking attack from the south of St. Die simultaneously with the attack of the 3d Division to the north. This plan did not allow the Germans to concentrate their forces on the 3d Division in the north, and contributed to the success of the main river crossing which was carried out on the 20th of November. (29)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In looking back on this operation and evaluating it, it is very hard to definitely say if the results were commensurate to the costs of attaining them. We do know that the mission was accomplished prior to the time limit set by higher headquarters and that the accomplishment of this mission was considered vital to the large operation to come. Looking back on this operation, I can believe that the overall plan was tactically sound -- efficiency of a unit is measured in results -- but minor parts of the plan could have been improved.

In planning for the commitment of a unit more stress should be placed in training, upon the effect of battle upon the individual soldier. Men should be trained to realize that fear is a natural reaction with most men, and that it is not cowardly to be afraid. It is only when the control of this fear is lost that men become cowards. They should be thoroughly impressed with the fact that for every act of cowardice on the battlefield, there are innumerable acts of heroism. These acts of bravery were performed by men who were just as afraid, perhaps even more fearful, than the men who were cowards. The courageous recognized the fact that fear is a natural reaction and therefore controlled it. Everyone with reasoning power can recognize that many natural reactions are not beneficial and are even dangerous to them or their fellowmen and therefore they must be voluntarily controlled. Cowardice, however, is like a highly contagious disease. It can spread and contaminate an

(28) A-10; (29) A-9, p. 265.

entire unit. The leader must be constantly on the alert for men who are not psychologically suited for battle and isolate them immediately before more harm is done.

Leaders, especially in lower units, should train with their units and must recognize their responsibility for everything that it does. The small unit leader, especially, must be given orders which are not written out to the last detail. The commander on the ground is the only one who can correctly judge existing conditions and take the proper action if a change occurs in the situation. (30)

Men must be taught to conserve ammunition, but they must also be taught to fire it when it is needed. Many men, as in the case of the 1st platoon, during the second attack, have been very hesitant about firing at the enemy for fear lest they reveal their own position. Aggressive leadership and thorough training will correct this fault. The leadership in the battle situation must come from the squad and assistant squad leaders. The reduction of the number of men under the control of the squad leader, and the abandoning of the idea that the squad could be broken into "Able", "Baker", and "Charlie" teams for base of fire and maneuver, will give the squad leader much more control and supervision over the individual rifleman.

It may oftentimes be more essential to have leaders with the troops than to have them with a higher headquarters. In Company G's case they had lost two of their six officers before combat began. This seriously handicaps a unit, as trained small unit leaders are always scarce. A commander should weigh the situation very carefully before he allows trained personnel to be taken from T. O. positions in the companies to fill a non-T. O. vacancy in higher headquarters.

S.O.P.'s should be used in training but should be designed to be flexible. Leaders should be given decision problems and field exercises where everything does not proceed in an orthodox manner. In battle he must expect

(30) A-2, p. 17.

that the unexpected will happen. He cannot expect to "commit the reserve" and have the enemy leave the position as the "agressors" have so often done in our training problems of the past. Men should be taught that they will have to accept temporary "setbacks" but that victory is and shall be the ultimate end. Many times, it has seemed that the enemy is even more resolved to fight hard when he is losing. Our men became very despondent when faced with temporary defeat.

The value of prior reconnaissance and thorough understanding of the situation down to the last man in the preparation for attack is very vividly portrayed in this action. Many men went into the battle with only a vague understanding of their mission or the mission of the company. If everyone had had the benefit of proper reconnaissance and an orientation of their part in the battle, the situation would have been greatly improved and perhaps the initial attack would have been successful. Men would not have had the terrific drop in morale caused by the temporary setback in the first attack. They would have been able to see the big picture and would not have been beset by the feeling of confusion and perplexity. Orientation always pays off.

When the 3d Platoon of G Company had reached the outskirts of La Belle, it was decided to occupy only the outskirts. It should have exploited its gain and kept aggressive. Whether the 3d Platoon would have been strong enough to have cleared the town the next day will never be known. We do know that they had an advantage at the time that they entered the town, and could have exploited it even if the units on our flanks did not keep contact. The Company did not continue to be aggressive, perhaps the number of prisoners would have been two hundred rather than two for the operation, had they pressed the advantage.

They should have never withdrawn from the town once they were in it. The fact that the enemy withdrew from the town that night shows that they were ready to quit. A little more experience in combat patrolling would have perhaps corrected this fault. In any case, we should not allow the enemy to

break off contact at will. This may seem to be agreeable at the time, as battle is never pleasant, but we must remember that an enemy who is allowed to escape will probably fight us again. By breaking contact, we allow him to choose his own ground. Aggressiveness is essential.

Our lines of communication and routes of evacuation and supply were very inadequate. The medical plan was far from adequate. Some of the casualties stayed on the battlefield for twenty four hours. This has an effect upon both the casualty and the man who is still fighting that is far from desirable. Supply was completely abandoned. It seemed that the only way to get any type of supply was to go back to Regiment for it. The Battalion supply, as far as could be observed, was non-existent. In this operation the company supply sergeant was forward with the company headquarters group. It was found, from this experience, that the only way to get the supply impetus from the "rear to the front" was to have somebody representing the company back in the rear to give it a boost. Perhaps by placing the battalion supply officer on the Staff, this deficiency will be corrected.

From experience, (many times from bitter experience) we have all decided that only one line of communication is not enough. Communications must be "double-banked". We went into combat depending upon a communication plan based only upon the SCR 300 radio from company to battalion. This radio had always worked in training and we expected it to be equally dependable in combat. It seems that no one understood the principal of "FM" transmission or that the effect of the rough terrain was overlooked. When it was discovered that radio communication could not be established (0900 hours), a runner was sent to battalion asking for telephone communication. This service was established by single wire, by about 1400 hours. Basics had been taken from all companies to supplement battalion wire teams, and the 3d Platoon Leader had been taken from Company G as an assistant communications officer. No reason can be presented as to why this system was not workable. It seems that one communications officer per front line company should be entirely

adequate. Perhaps the fact that men and officers were not impressed sufficiently in training with the unpleasant truth that wire lines must frequently be installed and maintained under fire, could be presented as an excuse for the non-existence of the wire for nearly five hours, and only such communication as we could maintain by using our company communications sergeant, after that time.

Artillery cannot be controlled with efficiency at a battalion level. The initial barrage had been adequate, but the Company had no means of bringing the artillery barrage down upon individual targets when it needed it most. Smoke would have been very beneficial to the 2nd Platoon when its attack was stopped and it was attempting to bring its wounded back under cover. Perhaps a concentration of smoke laid down upon the enemy would have allowed us to cross the open terrain with fewer casualties. But, nevertheless, we had no means of calling for it. In later operations it was also found that the communications of the artillery F. O. were always available as an alternate communication channel. This would have certainly been beneficial in this action.

The chain for succession of command must be designated down to the last man in the company. G Company had fixed this succession in command very well in the squads and platoons, but the succession of company commander was never stated. It was probably assumed that the command would be designated by higher command or taken by the ranking officer present, but in combat nothing can be assumed. All eventualities must be anticipated. It is not beyond the conception of the mind that all officers would be killed or wounded in the same action. Assumption of command must be preplanned.

Let me repeat this one point. I wish to show the errors which were committed in this action in order that the chances of their being repeated in battle is minimized. All of these errors could have been avoided by adequate prior planning. It is my firm belief that too much stress has been placed on following S.O.P.'s and "the solution" to the letter, rather than

analyzing them and going through a "thought process" in applying them.

In proving my point, I wish to point out that plans had been made to take care of all these errors but none of them were adequate. None of the plans were flexible enough to be useful in a fast changing situation: Plans were made for evacuation but it was over an impossible trail by too few litter bearers; plans were made for communication but they were far from adequate-- I could go through the whole list of errors again and show that plans were made, but they were training solutions not adaptable to combat situations.

Our only purpose in training is success in battle.

LESSONS

1. Training is never completed, training is continuous. "When you're green you're growing, when you're ripe you're dead".
2. Combat reactions should be stressed. Men should be given training with unexpected situations to test their reactions.
3. Men should be made to understand the difference between fear and cowardice.
4. Training in leadership must be stressed.
5. Aggressiveness is essential.
6. Lines of communication, evacuation, and supply do not just happen, they are planned.
7. Leaders should train their troops.
8. A large reserve of trained junior leaders is needed.
9. The value of orientation and prior reconnaissance for squad leaders and individual soldiers cannot be given too much stress.
10. Artillery forward observers must be with the front line commanders.
11. No matter what amount of supporting fires are used, it is still necessary for the infantry to move forward and expel the enemy and/or take possession of the ground before victory is assured.