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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 409TH INFANTRY REGIMENT
(103D INFANTRY DIVISION) FROM BOUXWILLER, FRANCE
TO KLINGENMUNSTER, GERMANY, 14 - 23 MARCH 1945
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Regimental Liaison Officer)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

In order to familiarize the reader with the 103d Division, I will go back to 15 November 1942.

Like many other United States Infantry Divisions, World War II necessitated its activation from a paper unit to a full strength combat division. Activation was accomplished at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana on 15 November 1942.

The division received filler personnel, went through a normal training period, and participated in Louisiana maneuvers. At the completion of maneuvers it closed into Camp Howze, Texas in November 1943 as a well trained division.

Due to the great demand for replacements overseas, the division lost numerous officer and non-commissioned officer personnel as well as privates within a short time. Fortunately the men who refilled the enlisted ranks of the division were largely ASTP men and being above average in intelligence were quickly oriented and trained as Infantrymen.

More training followed including attacks on fortified areas and Regimental Combat Team exercises. On 21 October 1944, the division landed at Marseille, France and spent two weeks in the Calas Staging Area before moving to the front lines and joining the Seventh U. S. Army.

On 11 November 1944, completely equipped even to the

extent of new vehicles and shoe pacs for every man, the 103d Division completed it's relief of the veteran 3d Infantry Division in the Vosges Mountains.* (Map A)

As a result of the Seventh Army withdrawal from the Siegfried Line during the winter of 1944-1945, the 103d Division on 21 January 1945 found itself occupying defensive positions along the Moder River. The division right flank was defined by the Alastian village of La Walck and the left flank by Rothbach on the edge of the Hardt Mountains, an extension of the Vosges. *(Map D)

It was from this line along the Moder River that the 103d Division launched it's attack on 15 March 1945 that was to terminate shortly after breaching the Siegfried Line at Reisdorf and Nieder Schlettenbach, Germany some twenty miles to the northeast. (Map D)*

PRELUDE TO OPERATION UNDERTONE

The situation of the German Army in early March, 1945, was indeed critical. With the ever increasing threat to Berlin on the Eastern front by the Russian Army and the possibility of losing the highly industrial Ruhr, it seemed quite possible that elements opposing the Seventh U. S. Army might be further thinned in order to reinforce those areas. (1)

Yet the Sarr coal and industrial area might become increasingly important to the German with the likelihood of losing his other industrial resources. Also the defensive qualities of the terrain could likely justify it's defense. (2)

(1) A-1, p. 697; (2) A-1, p. 697; *Personal knowledge.

Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 24, 3 March 1945, Sixth U. S. Army Group, gave the enemy but one capability: German Army Group G can still attempt to defend itself and in doing so it may elect to be destroyed or it may fall back to the Rhine to maintain it's integrity. (3)

In early March, Sixth Army Group was preparing plans for operations in the Sarr while aggressively defending within it's zone. Twelfth Army Group meanwhile was successfully closing on the Rhine.

The Seventh Army plan for the March offensive was submitted to higher headquarters on 5 March and was along the lines recommended by the Joint Planning Staff as follows:

1. Breach the Siegfried Line in the Bleis River Valley.
2. Advance on the Axis, Sarrguemines - Kaiserlautern - Worms.
3. Seize a bridgehead east of the Rhine River.
4. Main attack by XV Corps. (4) (Map C)

The Seventh Army offensive would be made with three Corps abreast, VI Corps on the right, XV Corps in the center and XXI Corps on the left. The main attack would be made by XV Corps along the Axis, Rimling-Sarrbruecken. The VI and XXI Corps were to assist the main attack. (Map C)

After penetrating the Siegfried Line the XV Corps would continue to the Kaiserlautern and Worms Area and the Rhine River. XXI Corps would attack on the Axis Sarrguemines-Neunkirchen and outflank the Siegfried Line from the east at Sarrbruecken. VI Corps would uncover and penetrate the Siegfried Line, capture the high ground east and northeast of Pirmasens and the towns of Landau and Neustadt. (5) (Map C)

(3) A-2, p. 21; (4) A-3, p. 43; (5) A-1, p. 699.

Supply build up by the Seventh Army in preparation for the offensive had been a tremendous task and greatly taxed the transportation and supply facilities of both Army and Communications Zones. (6)

Amphibious training was conducted by the 3d and 45th Infantry Divisions and their supporting 540th and 40th Engineer Combat Groups in preparation for the Rhine River crossing.

Air support for operation Undertone (code name for the March offensive) would consist of interdiction bombing prior to D-Day to destroy supplies, enemy installations and rail heads by the 42d Wing and Tactical Air Command. Eighth Air Force would bomb rear areas and the 42d Bombardment Wing would carpet-bomb defenses opposing the Seventh Army on D-Day. (7)

Until this time no definite date had been selected for D-Day but it was generally agreed that it would be around mid March. On 7 March the 9th Armored Division seized the Remagen bridge.

SHAEP on 10 March set the official target date for operation Undertone as 15 March. (8)

TERRAIN AND ENEMY

The terrain to be traversed by the 103d Division between the Moder River Line and the Siegfried defenses at Bobenthal and Reisdorf, Germany, runs generally along the eastern extremity of the Hardt Mountains. (Map B) Being rolling to hilly and generally wooded along the Moder River,

(6) A-1, p. 700; (7) A-1, p. 699-700; (8) A-3, p. 44.

*Mission of 103rd Div
as part of Bypass mission
was not set until
late of operation for 103rd
on Map A.*

the ground elevation gradually increases as the Siegfried Line is approached until the terrain within the enemy's famous West Wall became mountainous and thickly wooded.*

Five minor rivers crossed the division axis of advance. First the Moder on which the division held position, second the Rothbach three miles to the northeast, third the Zintzel another three miles farther on, fourth the Bieberbach and finally the Lauter River right along the German border.*

All of the streams are small and would be classed as small creeks by American standards. The average width is approximately 15 to 20 feet and they are fordable to foot troops in most places.*

The road net consists mainly of small secondary roads and trails throughout the area. The main road net consists of a hard surface road on the axis Ober Modern-Gumbrechtshoffen-Woerth-Lembach.*

The enemy opposing the 103d Division on 14 March was the 47th Infantry Division.* This division was extremely low in personnel as a result of Germany having many battlefronts to defend and having suffered severe losses. (9)(10)

Obstacles were numerous. During the period 21 January-14 March the enemy had been busy laying mine fields, placing abatis and preparing demolitions throughout the area between the Moder River and Siegfried Line. (11)*

For the period 15-23 March the weather was fair and warm.*

(9) A-2, p. 21, 22; (10) A-1, p. 696; (11) A-4, p. 86.
*Personal knowledge.

THE 409TH INFANTRY IN RESERVE

During the latter part of February the 409th Infantry, commanded by Colonel Claudius L. Lloyd was placed in division reserve. The Regimental Command Post was located in Bouxwiller. Since the town afforded considerable shelter, the 1st and 3d Battalions, Anti-tank Company, Cannon Company, Regimental Headquarters Company, and Company A, 328th Engineer (C) Battalion were billeted there. The 2d Battalion moved into Obersultzbach three kilometers northwest of Bouxwiller while Service Company remained in Gottesheim where it had been located since 21 January.* (Map D)

The division sector was quiet and the 409th Infantry remained in reserve until 17 March, two days after the 15 March offensive was launched.

While in reserve the regiment followed a training schedule that was closely supervised. Training areas were selected and rifle companies practiced marching fire extensively. Fox holes and pits were dug and platoons would occupy them while other platoons assaulted them with marching fire. This type of training instilled confidence in the troops as to the effectiveness of their weapons in closing with the enemy.

Rocket launcher training, foot marches, and flame thrower training progressed. Demonstrations of the illuminating mortar shell were given. Care and cleaning of equipment was stressed and contests to determine the best state of maintenance and cleanliness were held.*

*Personal knowledge.

THE MARCH OFFENSIVE

On 14 March the 103d Division commanded by Major General Anthony C. McAuliffe was prepared for the coming offensive. The 14th Armored Division occupied a position on the right flank and the 42d Division was on the left. (12) (Map D)

The 410th Infantry occupied the right and the 411th Infantry occupied the left portion of the 103d Division sector. (Map D) With the approaching date of D-Day coming nearer, reconnaissance patrols continued to probe the enemy defenses to the front to locate mine fields, bridges, enemy activity and any other obstacles. One patrol of the 410th Infantry entered the enemy line to a depth of three miles and returned safely after twenty-six hours. (13)

On 12 March the Regimental Commander, 409th Infantry issued the warning order to his battalion commanders.

The battalion commanders at 1115 hours 14 March informed their special staffs and company commanders that H-Hour, D-Day would be 0900 hours 15 March. The 410th and 411th Infantry Regiments would launch a coordinated attack from their present positions and seize the high ground along the Zintzel River. At this point a task force, including the 3d Battalion, 409th Infantry, would have the mission of seizing Climbach, approximately one mile from the German border. Motorized, the 2d Battalion, commanded by Major Louis K. Henninghauser, would follow the task force, relieve it at Climbach and seize Bobenthal, three miles to the northwest

(12) A-1, p. 708; (13) A-4, p. 81.

and just inside the German border. (14) (Map D)

On the morning of 15 March the organic battalions of Division Artillery, commanded by Brigadier General Roger Wicks, reinforced by the 141st and 242d Corps Battalions, plus the assault guns of the 761st Tank Battalion fired their preparatory fires. (15) At 0645 the 410th and 411th Infantry Regiments attacked. (16)

The 410th Infantry crossed the Rothbach River at two points. The left column crossed at Nieffern and the right column in the vicinity of Kindwiller. As had been expected mines and booby traps were numerous and opposition light. (17)

Company A of the 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion anxious to get into the fight as Infantry was granted permission to attack the village of Kindwiller. The company cleared the town but lost the company commander when he was severely wounded. The Tank Battalion was a normal attachment of the 103d Division. (18)

Over on the left the 411th Infantry had by passed Rothbach but had difficulty in the way of enemy mine fields, automatic weapons and 88mm fire in clearing Muhlhausen. Meanwhile on our right the 36th Infantry Division had attacked at 0100 hours 15 March from the LaWalck-Uberach area held by the 14th Armored Division. Before the enemy had an opportunity to assemble his reserves, his main line of resistance had been penetrated. By 1045 hours that morning the town of Bitschhoffen had fallen to the 36th Division. (20) (Map D)

- (14) A-5, p. 101; (15) A-4, p. 81; (16) A-1, p. 703;
(17) A-4, p. 86; (18) A-4, p. 86; (19) A-4, p. 86;
(20) A-1, p. 711.

Throughout the operations the regimental commander of the 409th Infantry had continuous liaison with the two assaulting regiments of the 103d Division and the 36th Division on the right flank.* ^(1st or 2nd?)

On the morning of 16 March Colonel Lloyd ordered the Regimental Command Post to displace from its present location in Bouxwiller to Engwiller in order to keep up with the attack.* The 3d Battalion remained in Bouxwiller under command of Lieutenant Colonel Reynolds, Battalion Commander, as a part of Task Force Cactus. In addition to the 3d Battalion, the Task Force was composed of Companies A, B, and D; 761st Tank Battalion; Company A, 328th Engineer (C) Battalion; Signal detachment, 103d Signal Company; and the Signal detachment, 103d Division Artillery. (21)

Task Force Cactus was subject to division control but was never committed during the entire operation. (22)

The 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Teal Therrell, displaced from Bouxwiller on the morning of 16 March following the route Zutzendorf-Uhrwiller thence to Engwiller. The 2d Battalion closed into Engwiller on the same date. (23)* (Map D)

In as much as the 409th Infantry was in division reserve and following the attacking echelon by bounds, no fighting occurred.*

Roads along the Axis of advance had been pounded by artillery as well as cratered by the withdrawing enemy. Towns had been effectively bombed and strafed by friendly aircraft and shelled by artillery. Consequently, the streets and roads were littered with debris thus making by-passes

(21) A-5, p. 161; (22) A-4, p. 87; (23) A-5, p. 103;
* Personal knowledge.

numerous.*

Field Order No. 10, 103d Division, directed that the 409th Infantry attack through the 410th Infantry at Gundershoffen, attack the high ground in the vicinity of Climbach, be prepared to assist the 411th Infantry in the capture of Bobenthal and press it's attack through the Siegfried Line. (24)

At 0700 hours on 17 March, the 409th Infantry attacked through the 410th Infantry in a column of battalions with the 2d Battalion leading.

Shortly after the attack started, the 1st Battalion echeloned to the right and moved on the axis: Woerth-Griesdorf-Mitschdorf-Climbach. The battalion objective Woerth, was taken by nightfall of the same day.

Froschwiller, objective of the 2d Battalion, was also secured by dark on 17 March. Both battalion command posts closed in with the battalions. The division forward command post was to move into Froschwiller the next day, 18 March. (25)

Little difficulty was encountered by the 1st Battalion in it's capture of Woerth. However, they were constantly plagued with road blocks, craters, blown bridges and abatis.*

On the morning of 18 March the 1st Battalion pushed on for Climbach, the regimental objective. The narrow Bieberbach River on the eastern edge of Woerth had to be crossed and as usual found that the bridge had been destroyed. With ingenuity the Battalion Pioneer and Ammunition Platoon soon had a very temporary bridge erected that permitted the organic and Cannon Company vehicles to cross. (26)

(24) A-5, p. 103; (25) A-5, p. 105, 106, 110; (26) A-5, p. 110; * Personal knowledge.

This platoon, assisted by the Anti-Tank Platoon, which had no anti-tank role to play during the offensive, had been of invaluable use in supporting the forward movement of the battalion by pioneer work. 1st Lieutenant Peters, A and P Platoon Leader was constantly ready, willing and able to use his platoon at all times.*

Movement to Greisdorf-Mitschdorf and Climbach was without incident other than the usual abatis, craters, and road blocks. The 1st Battalion closed into Climbach late in the afternoon of 18 March and went into position on the high ground on the northeastern outskirts of the town.

Meanwhile the 2d Battalion had been moving from Froschwiller to Climbach. The move was without opposition and there was only one noteworthy incident. Several P-47 aircraft in a bombing run at Lembach narrowly missed the battalion. A quick display of signal panels probably saved them from being bombed or strafed. By nightfall the battalion had reached Climbach. (27)

Task Force Cactus closed into Climbach the same day without having encountered opposition other than congested roads. Upon reaching Climbach the 3d Battalion was released from the task force and rejoined the 409th Infantry. (28)

Cannon Company, Anti-Tank Company, and the Regimental Command Post had closed into congested Climbach a short time after dark 18 March. * (Map D)

On the left flank, the 411th Infantry had taken Niederbronn and Reichshoffen against light opposition on 17

(27) A-5, p. 113; (28) A-5, p. 114; * Personal knowledge.

March. On 18 March the 411th Infantry crossed into Germany and seized Bobenthal. The Lauter River bridges at Bobenthal were captured intact before the enemy could destroy them.

(29) (Map D)

The 142d Infantry Regiment, 36th Division, on the right of the 409th Infantry had advanced to Rott and was preparing to attack Wissembourg on 19 March. (30) (Map D)

THE SIEGFRIED ASSAULT

Throughout the operations up to 19 March, progress had been as rapid as the inadequate road net and obstacles would permit. Enemy resistance had been light as the enemy was withdrawing into the Siegfried Line.

The distance from the 103d Division Moder River Line to the Siegfried Line was twenty miles. The enemy resistance could be likened to that of a steel spring that had lost most of its temper and had become weakened. The more it is compressed the stronger it becomes until at the base it offers considerable resistance. The spring representing the enemy and the base being the concrete and steel pillboxes *of the 2. L* that took advantage of every fold in the ground. *which were selected so*

Maximum use was made of camouflage and concealment. The pillboxes had been there long enough to erode and blend to the color of the ground. Automatic weapons had interlocking fires and lanes had previously been cleared for them. Every approach into the defenses was covered and pillboxes were mutually supporting.*

Within the larger pillboxes were ventilating systems,

(29) A-1, p. 710; (30) A-1, p. 712; * Personal knowledge.

beds, weapons, ammunition, and rations as well as telephone communications.*

Abatis and mines were placed within range and observation of the defenses. Barb wire entanglements and fire trenches were to be found on the thickly wooded hillsides and around the pillboxes.*

During the night of 18 - 19 March, the Regimental Commander, 409th Infantry, held a conference with his staff and battalion commanders at the Command Post in Climbach.* The 1st Battalion was ordered to dispatch a patrol to locate the enemy outpost line and the main defenses in the vicinity of Reisdorf.* The plan was for the 1st Battalion to move out at 0730 hours 19 March in route march formation to Reisdorf, followed by the 3d and 2d Battalions. (31) *(Map E)

Lt. Colonel Therrell, 1st Battalion, after returning to his unit from the commanders' meeting, ordered that a patrol be sent from Company A. The patrol, led by Lieutenant W. L. Hurst, crossed the Lauter River into Germany where it was soon fired upon by an enemy outpost at a sharp turn in the road. The patrol returned the fire and killed one of the enemy, and then withdrew thinking that the patrol leader had been killed. He had been so near the enemy when fired upon that he feigned death when he fell to the ground. As soon as the opportunity arose, the platoon leader captured one of the enemy and returned to his unit a short time later. (32)

At 0730 hours 19 March the regiment moved out in column of battalions with the 1st Battalion leading, using the only road available between Climbach and Reisdorf. This road is

(31) A-5, p. 114; (32) A-5, p. 114; *Personal knowledge.

not much more than a trail and leads down hill to the Lauter River. Numerous trees had been felled across the road and engineers followed to move them out of the way. The Lauter River is not over twenty feet wide at the point where the bridge had been blown and the A and P Platoon soon had a hasty crossing ready for use.*

Immediately after crossing the stream the column turned east on a road that runs parallel to the river and encountered another blown bridge about two hundred yards down the road. This was an obstacle only to vehicles and Division and Corps Engineer units soon started putting in the two bridges. The engineers had moved into Climbach the night before and had anticipated the probability of these two bridges being blown.*

After passing the second destroyed bridge the 409th Infantry turned north at the first road intersection about fifty yards farther on. The column continued up the road to within about 400 yards of Reisdorf at which point a turn in the road exposed the head of the column to the positions within and around the village.* (Map E)

Reisdorf, a village of only three or four houses, lies at a road junction which is at the foot of several surrounding hills. An open field extends 400 yards south from the village to the foot of a hill at the first bend in the road, while it is about 300 yards in width extending east from the same road.

At this road junction were two pillboxes commanding

*Personal knowledge.

the roads leading through the town and so cleverly concealed that they were extremely difficult to locate.*

It was at this bend in the road that the 1st Battalion was forced to deploy. The enemy opened with machine gun fire initially, followed by artillery, mortars and rockets. The battalion after attempting to move into Reisdorf frontally, finally moved into the hills to the right of the road seeking a better route of approach. (33) (Map E)

The 3d Battalion moved into the hills on the left of the road seeking to outflank the town from the northwest while the 2d Battalion became the reserve on the left of the road in the rear of the 3d Battalion.*

Colonel Lloyd selected as his vantage point a place just around the previously stated bend in the road. From this point he directed the attack until Reisdorf was taken on 22 March.*

As soon as the Engineers had completed the two bridges between Climbach and Reisdorf armor was attached to the regiment and formed in column on the road in rear of the assaulting echelon.*

Task Force Rhine was organized and given the following mission: Exploit the breakthrough of the 409th Infantry when it comes, advance in the direction of Landau, and seize Klingenstein on the eastern edge of the Hardt Mountains, thereby making a gateway to the Rhine Valley Plain for the 14th Armored Division.

The Task Force consisted of Companies A, B, and D,

(33) A-5, p. 115; *Personal knowledge.

761st Tank Battalion commanded by Lt. Colonel Paul Bates; Reconnaissance Platoon, 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Signal Detachment, 103d Signal Company; and the 2d Battalion, 409th Infantry. Lt. Colonel Bates was designated Task Force Commander. (34)

The 3d Battalion was ordered to attack Hills 518 and 406 at 1700 hours. The formation for the attack was a column of companies in the order of I, K, and L with the 1st Platoon of Company M attached to Company K and the 2d Platoon to Company I.

The enemy had felled trees for a distance of about 300 yards in front of Hill 518, the first objective, and had observation to his front and flanks. At 1830 hours three scouts of Company I had crossed the abatis and by 1900 the 3d Platoon had advanced to the front of Hill 518 where it was stopped by heavy machine gun and small arms fire. The 2d Platoon moved up to the left and as the 1st Platoon started across the abatis, enemy artillery and heavy machine gun fire was received causing a number of casualties.

Company K was ordered to cover the rear of Company I and maintain contact. Company L moved up to secure the battalion left flank and was in position by 0400 hours the next morning, 20 March. Enemy artillery and rocket fire had been received by the battalion throughout the day and night.

On the morning of 20 March Companies I and K sent patrols to the front to locate enemy machine guns. Infor-

(34) A-5, p. 115-117.

mation was consolidated between the company commanders and plans were coordinated for the attack of Hill 518.

The attack began at 1600 hours and about halfway up the hill stiff resistance was encountered by Companies I and K. The enemy was rolling concussion grenades down the hill and delivering heavy small arms fire. Company K with the attached heavy machine gun platoon captured several small pillboxes with the use of rocket launchers and demolitions. Hill 518 fell to Companies I and K by the use of marching fire. (36)

After moving off to the right of the road on 19 March the 1st Battalion attempted to close in on Reisdorf from the hills. Patrols were sent forward to reconnoiter locations of enemy positions and in doing so received considerable casualties. Attempts were made to reach the town but the enemy repulsed their efforts with his automatic weapons, artillery and mortar fire.

On 20 March the 1st Battalion advanced across open terrain with Companies B and C leading; Company B taking four pillboxes. Contact between the two companies was momentarily lost and infiltrating Germans recovered one of the pillboxes. Company C soon recaptured the pillbox and moved forward. (36)

As soon as pillboxes were captured, the assaulting units moved forward. By previous experience it was learned that the enemy had his pillboxes and forts pinpointed and would bring accurate artillery fire in on them as soon as they fell. (37)

The attack resumed on 21 March but the 1st Battalion

(36) A-5, p. 115, 118; (37) A-5, p. 119.

made no progress. 1st Lieutenant A. G. Wahlquist, leading the 1st and 2d Platoons of Company C on a raid, neutralized an 88mm gun and captured the crew.

Meanwhile the 3d Battalion had been advancing and receiving sporadic mortar and artillery fire in its advance to take Hill 426. Patrols were sent out and it was discovered that enemy positions had been evacuated in depth. Patrols also felt out Hill 426 on the north side of Reisdorf. A coordinated attack was launched at 1200 hours 21 March and by the use of supporting machine guns and marching fire the battalion secured Hill 426.

Early on the morning of 22 March Company A attacked through Company C on the battalion left flank. Supporting artillery had smoked the Valley and by the use of marching fire while Company B covered the attack, the high ground on the northwest edge of Reisdorf was taken.

After taking Hill 426 the 3d Battalion patrolled to the front and flanks and discovered that the enemy had withdrawn. By late afternoon on 22 March the 1st and 3d Battalion had cleared the high ground around Reisdorf of the enemy and Task Force Rhine was prepared for the pursuit. (38) (Map E)

While the 409th Infantry was engaged in penetrating the Siegfried Line at Reisdorf, the 411th Infantry on the left had been assaulting the fortifications at Nieder Schlettenbach. Enemy resistance was comparable to that confronted by the 409th Infantry and shortly after Reisdorf fell on 22 March, the 411th Infantry broke through and pro-

(38) A-5, p. 119-121.

ceeded to the north.* (Map E)

Contact between the two regiments had been by patrols but could not be maintained at all times. Liaison between the two regiments was continuous.*

Over on the right flank of the 409th Infantry, the 142d Infantry had been meeting stubborn resistance at Dorrenbach. The 1st Battalion of the 143d Infantry went in to strengthen the 142d Infantry on 21 March. On 22 March the 2d and 3d Battalions moved up from Wissembourg to Dorrenbach. The 2d Battalion pushed through the town and by morning, 23 March, the entire 143d Infantry was in Bergzabern.

(39) (Map E)

Due to the nature of the terrain and frontages, ^{physical} contact between the 409th, 142d, and 143d Infantry Regiments was remote. However liaison with the units was continuous.*

THE PURSUIT TO KLINGENMUNSTER

As soon as Reisdorf had been cleared late in the afternoon of 22 March, Task Force Rhine split into two columns at Reisdorf. One column headed north in the direction of Birkenhordt on a trail through the valley that the Germans had used as a supply route. The second column headed east toward Bollenborn but ran into a road block several hundred yards from Reisdorf. The road block was soon cleared but as the last tree was being moved out of the way, a concealed anti-tank gun covering the road block knocked out a tank. As the tank burned more fire was received and Colonel Lloyd who was present making an estimate of the situation, calmly

(39) A-1, p. 733; *Personal knowledge.

directed the troops under fire.

The northern column had advanced so rapidly to Birkenhorcht that the eastern column was rerouted to rejoin it rather than continue to Bollenborn. (40)* (Map E)

Shortly after the Task Force cleared Reisdorf, the Regimental Command Post displaced to Birkenhorcht for the night from it's location just south of Reisdorf.*

Task Force Rhine proceeded to Silz via Birkenhorcht and arrived there shortly after midnight. An enemy anti-tank gun was destroyed before the surprised enemy could man it and the town was set afire as the tanks moved through en-route to Munchweiler.

Between Silz and Munchweiler the tanks overran a column of the retreating enemy on the road and destroyed it. A tabulation later showed that 25 trucks, 5 tracked vehicles, 10 automobiles, 12 kitchen vehicles, 5 88mm guns, 2 50mm AT guns, 12 37mm guns, 5 75mm guns, 1 170mm gun, 116 horse drawn vehicles, 9 Nebelwefer (multiple tube rocket launchers) and 12 horse drawn caissons had been destroyed or captured by the Task Force. (40 $\frac{1}{2}$)

By daylight the Task Force had reached the outskirts of Klingenmunster. Sniper fire from the buildings, anti-tank guns and a road block, were encountered on the western edge of town.*

While the resistance was being eliminated, enemy troops from the surrounding hills surrendered to Infantrymen along the column by the score. Initially, they surrendered in

(40) A-5, p. 122, 123; *Personal knowledge; (40 $\frac{1}{2}$) A-5, p.124.

small groups apparently to see how they would be received by the Americans. Large numbers of Germans from their vantage points on the hills seeing that they would not be mistreated soon poured in to surrender.*

Klingenmunster, objective of Task Force Rhine, was captured shortly after noon on 23 March and the Regimental Command Post moved into town immediately.* (Map E)

The 3d Battalion after the capture of Reisdorf mounted the supply vehicles and light tanks of the 761st Tank Battalion and following in the wake of the Task Force performed mopping up operations. The 1st Battalion moved up to Bollenborn during the night. (41)*

In the operations around Reisdorf, 19-22 March, supply and evacuation had been quite a problem. The terrain was littered with abatis, there were no trails, and the rear areas of the assaulting echelon received considerable enemy fire. One example of the difficulty of evacuation of the wounded occurred on 21 March. It took from two to three hours to cross a 300 yard abatis area on each trip. (42)

The A and P and AT Platoons were employed as carrying parties to get rations and ammunition to the 1st and 3d Battalions. Pack mules were brought up on 22 March but were not used as that was the day Reisdorf was taken, ~~plus the fact that~~ ^{also} the regiment had no trained personnel to handle them.*

Wire communications to the rear and to each battalion was employed by the regimental commander. The lines to the 1st and 3d Battalion required constant maintenance as they

(41) A-5, p. 125; (42) A-5, p. 117; *Personal knowledge.

were frequently cut by enemy rocket or mortar fire.

The supply route up to the Lauter River was nothing more than a trail. The forward route was one way from Climbach to the river and one way to the rear through Bobenthal.*
(Map E)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

In analyzing this operation one must bear in mind the fact that Germany was definitely making a last stand before her final defeat at the hands of the Allies. The vise formed by the Russians on the east, and her Allies on the west, had been tightened to such an extent that the vise handle was no longer difficult to turn except in the high spots that required a bit of pressure.

The enemy dispositions along the Moder River amounted to nothing more than an outpost line for the West Wall as was evidenced by his weak resistance and flight to the Siegfried Line. Had the enemy been strong and ambitious I don't believe he would have been content to sit idly by during the period 21 January - 15 March and permit the Americans to freely plan and prepare the March offensive.

With this in mind it is understandable as to why the 103d Division encountered such extensive mine fields, destroyed bridges, and other obstacles in reaching the Siegfried Line.

In some units I believe the A and P Platoon is overlooked and not given the opportunity to perform as much pioneer work as it is capable of. But the 409th Infantry in this operation made excellent use of the platoons both in the

assault on Reisdorf and along the route of advance from Gundershoffen to this fortified town.

Continuous training is essential to successful combat. The 409th Infantry training at Bouxwiller was realistic. During the marching fire phase of training, live ammunition was used. The assaulting platoons would cease firing just a few yards before reaching the fox holes or pits for safety reasons. This type of realistic training impressed upon the troops the demoralizing effect marching fire would have upon the enemy as was later demonstrated in the capture of Reisdorf. The Regimental Commander, Colonel Lloyd stated, "I at last saw the Infantryman use his weapons by smothering the target area with fire from both the prone and marching positions. This paid high dividends in the saving of lives and by rendering the opposition helpless." (43)

Liaison with adjacent units must be continuous. Throughout the operation, contact with adjacent regiments was rarely obtained due to the rapid advance and type of terrain. In the absence of contact, liaison becomes increasingly important to the commander in keeping him informed as to the locations of flank units.

Terrain along which the Siegfried Line runs in the vicinity of Reisdorf certainly favored the defender as he intended it to. He took advantage of the five terrain factors: Observations, Fields of fire, Cover and concealment, Obstacles, and Routes of communication. Pillboxes were designed and built to take maximum advantage of the terrain and were camouflaged by erosion and earth which made them extremely

difficult to locate. The defender was far inferior to the attacker in strength but held on to Reisdorf for 4 days before it was captured.

Patrols are the eyes and ears of the commander. Prior to the attack on 15 March the 2 front line regiments of the division had been continuously sending patrols forward to obtain information. 1st Battalion, 409th Infantry, located an enemy outpost along the Lauter River the first night in Climbach. Both the 1st and 3d Battalions used patrols extensively around Reisdorf. A patrol from the 3d Battalion was the first to discover the enemy withdrawal from the north of the town. The regiment had learned the hard way that the enemy would either counterattack or shift his artillery and mortar fire on pillboxes as soon as they were captured. On this second trip to the West Wall the story was different. Reorganization did not occur in, on, or around pillboxes, but beyond them.

Reserves are not used to redeem a failure, but rather to exploit a success. While the 1st and 3d Battalions were experiencing difficulty in taking the high ground around Reisdorf, they were not failing. The attack seemed slow, but why shouldn't it? There had been a time when the German had boasted that the Siegfried Line was impregnable. The regiment proved the enemy boast to be a myth in just 4 days.

The Regimental Commander knew what he was doing or the 2d Battalion might have been committed before Reisdorf fell. By committing the reserve too soon, Task Force Rhine would

undoubtedly have been delayed in launching the pursuit to Klingenmunster.

The Task Force being immediately available at the time of the break-through, was able to overtake the enemy before he could withdraw all of his forces. Surprise was thus obtained causing the enemy to suffer considerable losses.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. Smothering the objective by the use of marching fire denies the enemy effective use of small arms fire.
2. The reserve must be used to exploit a success.
3. Reorganization must not take place at pillboxes.
4. Patrolling must be continuous. Patrols are the eyes of the Commander.
5. The A and P Platoon can greatly facilitate the advance of the battalion.
6. Surprise will be obtained by quickly and ruthlessly exploiting a success.
7. Comprehensive and realistic training is essential before, during, and after combat.
8. Skillful use of camouflage in fortified areas makes the defensive positions and pillboxes extremely difficult to locate.
9. Liaison with adjacent units must be continuous.
10. Able leadership is a prerequisite to success in combat.
11. Observation and superior defensive terrain enables a numerically inferior defender to make the maximum use of

his troops.

12. Normal supply means must be augmented by other agencies in difficult terrain.