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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY C, 291ST INFANTRY (75TH
INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON THE HIGH GROUND
OUTSIDE GRAND HALLEUX, BELGIUM, 15-16 JANUARY 1945.
(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY RIFLE COMPANY
ATTACKING AND HOLDING A KEY TERRAIN FEATURE IN
MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY

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Major Joseph B. Missal, Battalion Executive Officer,
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of the action concurs in all information listed as
personal knowledge, herein.

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company C, 291st Infantry, 75th Infantry Division in the ARDENNES Campaign near GRAND HALLEUX, BELGIUM. The action to be discussed in detail is that of Company C in the attack and subsequent holding of a high (key) terrain feature 15-16 January 1945.

In order that the reader may be more fully informed on the 75th Infantry Division and the major events leading to this situation, it will be necessary to flash back to June 1944.

The 75th Infantry Division was rapidly training filler replacements at CAMP BRECKINRIDGE, KENTUCKY -- 3,500 men from ASTP and the Air Corps replaced a duplicate number of reinforcements who went overseas immediately after maneuvers.

(1) On 6 June 1944 the invasion of FRANCE was launched by the Allied Armies. Members of the 75th Infantry Division now realized that soon they too would be moving to the combat zone. On 22 October 1944 elements of the 75th Infantry Division embarked for the European Theater of Operations. (2) On 2 November 1944 the 291st Infantry docked at SWANSEA, WALES and departed immediately for camps in PEMBROKESHIRE, WALES. (3)

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- (1) A-9, p. 2
(2) A-1, p. 2
(3) A-1

Orders were received on 9 December 1944 assigning the 75th Infantry Division to the XVI Corps, Ninth Army. (4) By 13 December 1944, most of the troops of the 291st Infantry were bivouaced at ST PAER, FRANCE. (5)

On 19 December 1944 orders were received by the 75th Infantry Division, releasing the division from the XVI Corps and assigning it to the VII Corps of the First United States Army. By 2400 hours on 22 December 1944, the division command post had opened at OCQUIRE, BELGIUM, and all elements had closed into nearby areas. (See Map A) The 75th Infantry Division now prepared, took its place in line to stay the German onslaught. (6)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

On 16 December 1944 the Germans had launched their offensive into the ARDENNES with the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies and the Seventh Army. The ARDENNES -- a mountainous, broken terrain, steep hills, deep and narrow valleys with a great number of small streams and cross compartments, was thickly covered by fir trees as only man can plant them. Into this terrain, covered by snow, shrouded in fog and mist, the German Armies rolled deep into BELGIUM. (7)

American units in the path of the offensive fought valiantly to halt the tide, but fog, snow and the terrain were as much a foe as the Germans. Since time prohibited a coordinated defense the 75th Infantry Division was committed piecemeal. The VII Corps Commander on 23 December

(4) A-2, p. 20

(5) A-1

(6) A-3, p. 5

(7) A-11, p. 343

1944 issued orders attaching the 289th and 290th Regimental Combat Teams to the 3d Armored Division, 291st Regimental Combat Team was ordered to outpost the L'OURTHE RIVER between BOMAL and GRANDMENIL, BELGIUM. On 24 December 1944 the 2d Battalion of the 291st Regimental Combat Team was attached to the 2d Armored Division, while the remainder of the 291st Regimental Combat Team was assembled in the vicinity of SOMMELEUZE, BELGIUM as VII Corps reserve. During the 23d and 24th of December 1944, Company C, 291st Infantry was working with elements of the 2d Armored Division and it was not until late the afternoon of the 24th that word was received that Company C was to join the Regiment at SOMMERLEUZE. (8)

The period of 24 to 26 December 1944 saw the height of penetration by the German offensive, the lifting of the fog permitted the Allies to launch one of their greatest air offensives against a single target, the German columns, on 24 December 1944. The seemingly haphazard employment of units piecemeal into the stemming of the onslaught had blunted and at last stopped the Germans. The stubborn resistance at BASTOGNE, the Third Army's counter-offensive launched on 22 December 1944, (See Map B) together with the ever stiffening of the forces along the northern flank of the salient had turned the tide.

On 27 December 1944 orders were received assigning the 75th Infantry Division, less the 289th and 290th Regimental Combat Teams which were to remain attached to the 3d Armored Division, to the XVIII Airborne Corps. The 2d

(8) Personal knowledge

Battalion, 291st Infantry was to remain attached to the 2d Armored Division until 28 December 1944 and then was to join the Regiment. (9)

On 28 December 1944, the 291st Regimental Combat Team was enroute to relieve elements of the 7th Armored Division at VAUX CHAVANNE, BELGIUM. The 1st Battalion on the left flank, tie its left flank to the 82d Airborne Division; 3d Battalion on the right near MANHAY tying into elements of the 106th Infantry Division. (10)

At 0900 hours, 2 January 1945 the 75th Infantry reverted to VII Corps control in preparation on the VII Corps offensive. (11)

First Army intelligence believed that an immediate offensive by the Sixth Panzer Army against the west flank of the salient had been shelved until the thorn of the American Third Army and BASTOGNE could be removed. (12) The VII Corps plan of attack was to launch its offensive at 0830 hours, 3 January 1945, seize the area HOUFFALIZE-BOREGNY and at the same time cut the HOUFFALIZE-ST VITH HIGHWAY (See Map B) to prevent the withdrawal of German troops. The 2d and 3d Armored Divisions supported by the 83d and 84th Infantry Divisions were to spearhead the attack. (13)

The VII Corps' offensive was launched as scheduled and on 8 January 1945 at 1030 hours the 75th Infantry was assigned to the XVIII Airborne Corps. (See Map B) (14)

(9) A-3, p. 6

(10) A-1, p. 16

(11) A-3, p. 7

(12) A-3, p. 7

(13) A-3, p. 8; A-4, p. 6

(14) A-3, p. 8; A-4, p. 6

On 8 January 1945, the 75th Infantry Division (less 290th RCT) was ordered to relieve the 82d Airborne Division in the western sector of the XVIII Airborne Corps along the SALM RIVER, near VIELSALM, BELGIUM. (15)

SITUATION 1ST BATTALION, 291ST INFANTRY 8-15 JANUARY 1945

The 1st Battalion was located at CREPPE, BELGIUM on 6 January 1945. On 8 January 1945 battalion received orders from Regiment to move to BASSE-BODEUX and to be prepared to move forward to FARNIERES, BELGIUM and relieve elements of the 82d Airborne Division, cross IP at CREPPE at 1700 hours 9 January 1945. (16)

At 1700 hours, 9 January 1945 the foot elements of the 1st Battalion crossed the IP and started on the twenty-two mile march to BASSE-BODEUX, on one of the toughest forced marches they were ever to encounter. The march was over unused roads, at times knee deep in snow, covered by ice, in freezing weather; it was a tired battalion that closed into BASSE-BODEUX at 0330 hours 10 January 1945. (17) By 1700 hours 10 January 1945 plans and reconnaissance had been completed and the 1st Battalion was once more on the move, this time to relieve elements of the 82d Airborne Division near FARNIERS. (See Map C) While the move to position was only about five miles, the route was through the woods over fire-breaks that were deep with snow and blocked by discarded German equipment. By 2300 hours 10 January 1945 battalion had completed the relief and had patrols operating to the front.(18)

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- (15) A-3, p. 9
(16) A-10; A-1, p. 22
(17) A-10; A-1, p. 22
(18) A-11; A-1, p. 23

As the 11th of January 1945 dawned bright and clear the Battalion and Company Commanders of the 1st Battalion could see their position clearly for the first time, all three companies were on line covering a front of four thousand meters of broken wooded terrain. Reorganization of position had to be accomplished at once, as the battalion was one thin line over the entire sector. Battalion Command Post was established at FARNIERS, B Company on the right, C Company in the center with A Company on the left flank of the battalion. (See Map D) A series of strong points were established in each company's sector and were connected by patrols. Contact was established, by patrols, with the 289th Infantry on the right and the 3d Battalion on the left. (19) Continuous day and night patrols were the standing order. The Germans had established a strong counter-patrol screen across the front on the SALM RIVER, this was very effective in counter-ing patrol efforts. (20)

Contemplating an attack order the Regimental Commander, Colonel Harry S. Robertson, had ordered the 3d Battalion to increase the bridgehead over the SALM RIVER at GRAND HALLEUX, BELGIUM. At 1300 hours 12 January 1945 Company L launched an attack and captured its objective, the high ground west of ENNAL, but at 1700 hours received a counterattack and lost the position. Company L retook the position and held it on 13 January 1945. (21)

The men (95% T/O strength) of the 1st Battalion spent most of their time, while not on patrol, repairing and cleaning equipment, drying clothing and keeping warm the best way

(19) A-11; A-1, p. 23

(20) A-3, p. 10

(21) A-3, p. 10

that could be found during the period 11 to 14 January 1945, inclusive. (22)

Word was received on the afternoon of 14 January 1945 for all company commanders to be at Battalion at 1915 hours that evening. (23)

DIVISION PLAN OF ATTACK

The XVIII Corps (Airborne), of which the 75th Infantry Division was a part, will make a concerted drive against the northern shoulder of the salient of the ARDENNES and force a linking with elements of the Third Army attacking from the south. (24)

The 75th Infantry will attack the morning of 15 January 1945 with the 289th and 291st Regimental Combat Teams, in a double envelopment of VIELSALM and be prepared to continue the attack to the east and south. (25)

The 289th RCT will attack at 0300 hours, 15 January 1945, seize SALM CHATEAU, force a crossing of the SALM RIVER continue the attack to BOURTONVILLE and be prepared to continue the attack to the south and east. (26) The 291st RCT will attack at 0730 hours, seize the high ground north of VIELSALM, VILLE DU BOIS, BEAUFAY, PETIT-THIER and continue the attack to the southeast and establish contact with the 289th RCT in the BOURTONVILLE area. (See Map C) (27)

291ST INFANTRY REGIMENTAL PLAN OF ATTACK

The Regiment will attack at 0730 hours, 15 January 1945,

- (22) Personal knowledge
- (23) Personal knowledge
- (24) A-3, p. 11
- (25) A-3, p. 11
- (26) A-3, p. 11
- (27) A-3, p. 11-14

through positions now held by 3d Battalion, with the sunken road running parallel to the front as the line of departure. The 899th Field Artillery Battalion, reinforced, will fire a ten minute preparation from H -10 to H hour, fire on call after H hour. The 2d Battalion on the left, 1st Battalion on the right, and C Company will protect the right flank of the 291st RCT. Battalions will seize high ground north of VIELSALM and be prepared to continue the attack to the southeast and seize VILLE DU BOIS, BEAUFAY and PETIT-THIER, Company C will seize the high ground 1500 meters south of LD on order. (See Map D) (28)

1ST BATTALION ATTACK PLAN (29)

The line of departure will be the sunken road now held by the 3d Battalion, H hour, 0730 hours, 15 January 1945.

The battalion will cross the line of departure with A Company on the left, B Company on the right with C Company echeloned to the right rear of B Company.

A and B Companies will seize the high ground in their zone of action, 1500 meters south of the line of departure, and be prepared to continue the attack to the southeast on order.

C Company will protect the right flank of the 291st RCT, be prepared to seize the high ground overlooking the SALM RIVER south of the village of HORT.

D Company will attach one HMG section to each of the rifle companies, remaining section to remain in general support. The 81 mm mortar platoon to be in general support of the battalion, and one forward observer to be with each rifle company.

(28) A-1, p. 23-24; Personal knowledge

(29) Personal knowledge

The AT Platoon will establish a road block at the south edge of HORT after H hour.

Attachments are effective as of now, and each company will move to the line of departure independently, companies will coordinate their move to line of departure through battalion headquarters. (30)

Prisoners captured by the 3d Battalion on 13 January had identified the Germans holding the wood line southeast of GRAND HALLEUX as the 752d Volksgrenadier Regiment. Earlier intelligence reports indicated that elements of the 62d Infantry Division, 326th Volksgrenadier Division, and the 9th SS Panzer Division were operating in the vicinity of VIEL-SALM. (31)

PLAN OF ATTACK AND MOVEMENT TO LINE OF DEPARTURE OF C COMPANY

The C Company Commander called his Executive Officer, telling him to have the platoon leaders and sergeants at the company command post by 2030 hours. D Company Commander stated that the section leader of the HMG section would be at C Company by 2030 hours. (32)

As C Company had been sitting for four days directly across the SALM RIVER from their objective, all members were fully informed on the terrain over which they would move on the 15th of January. (33)

C Company would cross the line of departure, the sunken road in the 3d Battalion sector, following the right rear of the right attack platoon of Company B, the time of crossing

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- (30) Personal knowledge
 - (31) A-5
 - (32) Personal knowledge
 - (33) Personal knowledge

was to be based upon the situation of B Company.

The company would be echeloned to the right rear by platoons, in the order: 1st Platoon, LMG Section, 2d Platoon, HMG Section, and 3d Platoon. Company Commander would be at the rear of the 1st Platoon, the 60 mm Mortar Section and Company Headquarters Group behind the 2d Platoon. One bazooka team was attached to each rifle platoon. The 1st Platoon will maintain contact with Company B, 3d Platoon will have one squad ready on call for patrolling when required. The 899th Field Artillery Battalion, reinforced, will fire a preparation from 0720 hours to 0730 hours, and fire on call thereafter. Each rifleman will carry two bandoleers of ammunition, the BAR teams a full load for the BAR's, while company transportation will transport LMG, HMG, and 60 mm mortars to the CHAPEL, at the south edge of GRAND HALLEUX. (34)

The tentative plan for movement to the line of departure will be columns of platoons: 1st Platoon, LMG Section, 2d Platoon, Company Headquarters, 60 mm Mortar Section, HMG Section, 3d Platoon. IP Company Command Post, time 0500 hours. Route reconnaissance to the line of departure will be made by the 1st and 4th Platoon Leaders and the Company Commander. (35)

Reconnaissance was made of the routes to the line of departure, plans coordinated with Battalion S-3, and the time of crossing of IP had to be set up to 0445 hours to allow B Company to clear through C Company's area at 0500 hours. Platoons were notified of the change in time of crossing IP. (36)

At 0445 hours the 1st Platoon crossed the IP, each section and platoon was picked up as the column passed. The 3d

(34) Personal knowledge
(35) Personal knowledge
(36) Personal knowledge

Platoon was slow in forming as two of its members had been allowed to sleep until the platoon was forming and had not secured their equipment. C Company cleared the area prior to B Company's column entry into the area. (37) The movement to the line of departure was uneventful, C Company closed into its forward assembly area at 0710 hours, mortar and machine gun squads were sent after their weapons and ammunition and by 0725 hours had returned to the assembly area. (38)

The artillery preparation that was being fired drew return mortar fire on the positions held by the 3d Battalion, but no known casualties were inflicted by this counterfire. From the position of C Company the artillery preparation could be seen falling in the woods held by the Germans and as the last round fell at 0730 hours the first man of the 1st Platoon crossed the line of departure, keeping in close contact with the right assault platoon of B Company. (39)

NARRATION

THE ATTACK 15 JANUARY 1945 (See Map D)

It was very quiet as all the elements of the 291st Infantry crossed the line of departure, not a shot was heard by C Company. The forward movement was deliberate, visibility was about 200 yards and the snow in places quite deep. The first two hundred yards was up a slight slope, then across level ground -- contact with B Company was firm during all this time. Just as the leading elements of the 1st Platoon reached the level ground, a thunderous roar of automatic small

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- (37) Personal knowledge
(38) Personal knowledge
(39) Personal knowledge

arms and mortar fires could be heard all along the 291st Infantry's sector -- it was all incoming. (40)

Mortar fire could be seen falling on the center and right portions of B Company, however a slight rise in the terrain prohibited visibility of the remainder of the Battalion and Regimental sectors. (41) The right platoon of B Company halted and took cover, the support platoon of B Company side-slipped to the right to get out of the mortar fire zone. As the support platoon moved to the right, the contact group of the 1st Platoon of C Company broke contact with the right assault platoon of B Company, slipped to the right, thereby maintaining contact with B Company's support platoon. This move placed the support platoon of B Company behind a rise in the ground, providing them protection from the small arms fire, all of the mortar and artillery fire at this time was falling on the left and center portion of the zone of advance. (42)

By 0800 hours small groups of B Company's support platoon could be seen rushing forward in short bounds toward the woods two hundred yards to the front. (43)

The C Company Commander ordered the 1st Platoon to utilize only one squad to maintain contact with B Company and to move the remainder of the 1st Platoon one hundred yards to the right, keeping in defilade at all times. The sound of battle was rising in intensity, no other information was to be had at this time on the progress of the attack. (44) The support platoon of B Company was making its way slowly toward the woodline to the front. Trying to get a clearer picture of how B Company

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- (40) Personal knowledge
 - (41) Personal knowledge
 - (42) Personal knowledge
 - (43) Personal knowledge
 - (44) Personal knowledge

was progressing, C Company Commander worked his way forward to contact the platoon leader of B Company's support platoon. It was about 0830 hours before the platoon sergeant was found, and when asked where the platoon leader was, he replied, "To the best of my knowledge he was with the first squad and that squad was along the rise in the ground about seventy yards to the rear". "What is B Company's situation and what are the plans of your platoon?" he was asked. "The two assault platoons caught it when they were crossing the slight rise in front of the line of departure, and how far forward they have gone I don't know. What the plan of the platoon is, I don't know, I am supposed to keep behind the 3d Squad and see that it keeps in contact with the 2d Squad", was the reply. The 3d Squad of B Company's support platoon was beginning to swing to the east in what appeared to be an attempt to flank the German position in the edge of the woods. The squad stopped after it entered the edge of the woods and took up firing positions. By this time a heavy volume of small arms fire was being directed at the support platoon of B Company. (45)

The situation of C Company had not changed, one squad of the 1st Platoon was being used to maintain contact with B Company, the remainder of the company was echeloned to the right rear by platoons. Lt. Colonel Sanders was contacted on the company's SCR 300 radio and told of the situation, location and actions of B Company's support platoon and the location and disposition of C Company. Colonel Sanders stated that "the 2d Battalion has advanced about four hundred yards and is now pinned down by heavy fire, A Company is in the same fix and from

(45) Personal knowledge

information received B Company has now advanced about four hundred yards on the left swinging around to the right in a figure "J" with all three platoons committed, as things stand now it does not look like either A or B Company will be able to move forward. Keep C Company out of the fight until you receive orders." (46)

The Company Commander contacted the 1st Platoon Leader, reemphasized his order of maintaining contact with B Company but to keep the platoon in defilade and told him that the company commander was going to the 3d Platoon. The Company Commander then went back to the 3d Platoon, passing on the information to the 2d Platoon Leader, regarding the situation. The 3d Platoon leader was informed of the situation and the plans were discussed regarding sending a patrol of one squad from the 3d Platoon out along the edge of the road for four hundred yards, then east to the edge of the woods, to reconnoiter along the edge of the woods to where the ground rose sharply to the south. The squad was briefed and the route they were to take was pointed out on the ground, the patrol departed at about 0845 hours. Word was passed to all members of C Company that a squad from the 3d Platoon was patrolling to the front of the company. (47)

Lieutenant Knobel, Platoon Leader of 3d Platoon, was informed that if the patrol returned with information that the route they had taken was either lightly or undefended, the 3d Platoon would lead the attack to seize the high ground, if Battalion gave the go-ahead signal. The plan would be for the 3d Platoon to move out in a column of squads, LMG Section, HMG

(46) Personal knowledge

(47) Personal knowledge

Section, 60 mm Mortar Section, and 2d Platoon; the 1st Platoon would maintain contact with B Company and the 2d Platoon using a strong combat patrol. (48) When the lead squad of the 3d Platoon hit the edge of the cliff in the woods it would follow the base of the cliff for fifty yards, turn right and assault the crest of the hill, 2d Squad would follow the lead squad, turn and assault at the same time, 3d Squad would continue straight forward until they reached the top, LMG and HMG would follow 3d Squad, 60 mm mortars and 2d Platoon to follow on order. 3d Platoon would push quickly across the clearing and take up defensive positions. (49) All platoon leaders were informed of the contemplated plan of action and told to be ready to move on ten minutes notice. (50)

The patrol returned at about 0915 hours without firing a shot or being discovered, patrol leader reported that the route was well covered from the woodline up to where he turned to the east and that they saw what appeared to be a two man outpost just inside the woods about fifty yards from where the ground rose sharply to the south; the soldiers in the outpost were observing in a northeasterly direction toward the sound of battle. (51)

The Battalion Commander was informed that it was believed that C Company could take the objective and requested permission to attack. The Battalion Commander said to stand fast, that a clearance from Regiment was required because of the present situation, the 2d Battalion and all but C Company of the 1st Battalion were pinned to the ground. At approximately

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- (48) Personal knowledge
 - (49) Personal knowledge
 - (50) Personal knowledge
 - (51) Personal knowledge

1000 hours Colonel Sanders called stating, "Attack when you are ready, keep me informed of your progress you are on your own". Within a few minutes the squad that had done the patrolling moved out followed by the company commander, Lieutenant Knoble, the remainder of the 3d Platoon and other elements of C Company falling in column as planned. C Company moved rapidly along its reconnoitered route, at the point where the route turned to the east, the company was halted while the lead squad moved in to capture the outpost without making any noise if possible -- the LMG Section was brought up to cover the squad. The squad moved out and in a short time captured the outpost without firing a shot, the two Germans were from the 2d Company, 752d Regiment, 326th Volksgrenadier Division. (52) The prisoners were turned over to the 1st Platoon to be taken to battalion while the rest of the company continued the attack. The lead squad moved forward but had not progressed more than twenty yards beyond the captured outpost when a burst of machine pistol fire sprayed over their heads, by a second outpost that had not been seen -- the BAR men, Pfc. Stark, wheeled and fired a one magazine burst at the outpost, wounding one German in the shoulder. These two men quickly surrendered and it was found that they were members of the 5th Company of the same regiment as the first two Germans captured.

The woods at this position were quite dense and movement was slowed down for careful observation for additional enemy positions. As the lead squad started into a thinly wooded area at the base of the cliff a hail of small arms fire splattered the trees above and around them. The squad hit the ground as

(52) A-5

one man and started searching the area in an attempt to locate the source of the enemy fire. The company objective could be seen through the trees, and it was from there that the harrassing fire was coming. Battalion was called requesting artillery support; the Company Commander would direct and adjust the fire through Battalion. (C Company was initially the reserve company of the battalion and did not have an artillery forward observer). The first round was estimated to be five hundred yards right and two hundred yards short, whereas the second round was about one hundred yards over. Word was relayed, through battalion, for the artillery to drop one hundred yards and fire for effect. The "on the way" was received just before the whine of the incoming shells could be heard, they hit with a deafening roar. The short rounds of the battalion concentration was hitting the top of the cliff, less than one hundred yards in front of the lead squad.

Orders were issued for the squads of the 3d Platoon to move to their assault positions, but to watch the company commander for the signal to assault, which would be given when word was received that the last round was on the way. When the lead squad, 1st Squad of the 3d Platoon, was at its assault position, the request to cease fire was relayed to the artillery. A slow count of ten was made after word was received that the last rounds were on the way and the signal was given to assault. The assault hit the base of the cliff as the last rounds hit on the objective. There was a mad scramble up the cliff, which sloped from 60° to 90°, by the three assault squads in what appeared to be a race to see which would be the first to reach the top. Machine gun sections, not to be out-

done, were pushing the riflemen so that they could also reach the top. (53)

Within a few minutes the 3d Platoon had pushed across the clearing and were setting up a defensive position to the south and southeast. The 2d Platoon had moved on to the objective and were setting up hasty defensive positions from northeast to east, tying in with the 3d Platoon. (54)

At 1100 hours Battalion was notified that the objective had been taken by C Company with no casualties. Seven of the enemy had been killed, twenty captured, of these, all were wounded, some seriously and four stretchers were required to evacuate them. How to accomplish this evacuation presented a real problem. It was decided that the aid men would patch them as best they could and when the 1st Platoon made its next contact, all walking wounded would be turned over for delivery to battalion, and the stretcher-bearers were to return with the patrol to pick up the litter cases. (55)

Defensive positions were closely coordinated, security elements pushed out and work on individual foxholes and fields of fire was pushed with all speed to meet the anticipated counterattack. The 60 mm mortars went into position behind a large boulder near the edge of the cliff, the HMG section was on the south flank of C Company firing northeast, the LMG's dug in on the north flank and were firing southeast. (56)

About 1400 hours all foxholes were dug and the men were beginning to place overhead covering over them, when the alert warning was given indicating that motor movement was heard

(53) Personal knowledge
(54) Personal knowledge
(55) Personal knowledge
(56) Personal knowledge

along the trail from the south. Two bazooka teams were sent to the road block facing south on the trail, while every other man in C Company prepared for what was thought to be the counterattack. About five minutes later a very slow moving, full tracked, lightly armored vehicle entered the clearing on the trail. When the vehicle had advanced to within forty yards both bazooka men fired, one round hit the tracked vehicle setting it afire, the two occupants took off through the woods amid a hail of small arms fire. The burning vehicle soon sounded like a small battle as it had been loaded with small arms and mortar ammunition, which was now exploding due to the fire. It was now apparent that C Company controlled one of the supply routes leading to the German front line, several hundred yards to the north. (57)

At about 1500 hours a radio message was received from battalion ordering C Company to withdraw to GRAND HALLEUX as the regimental situation was the same as it had been at 0900 hours -- the 2d Battalion was still pinned to the ground on the left flank, A and B Companies were also pinned down on the right. Battalion was requested to change the order, allowing one platoon, reinforced, to remain on the objective and the remainder of C Company to withdraw. The orders were changed as requested, and 1800 hours was the time limit set for the remainder of C Company to close into GRAND HALLEUX. (58)

The Company Executive Officer, Communications Sergeant, and one squad of the 2d Platoon were sent back to the company transportation. The Executive Officer was instructed to establish a CP, have wire laid from battalion, have the Communi-

(57) Personal knowledge

(58) Personal knowledge; A-1, p. 24

cations Sergeant string wire from the Company CP back to the 3d Platoon position, have him bring enough wire so that a second line could be laid to the Company CP, and finally to have the squad bring back sixty rounds of 60 mm mortar ammunition. (59)

Work was immediately started in establishing the perimeter defense location for the 3d Platoon, this platoon was to remain on position, and by 1700 hours all positions were dug, the assignment of sectors of fire for each rifle squad, machine gun squad and the 60 mm mortars completed. The force to remain on the objective was to consist of the 3d Platoon, reinforced by the 60 mm mortar section, LMG section less two ammunition bearers from each squad, and the HMG section less the assistant gunner and two ammunition bearers from each squad, while the bazooka team attached earlier in the day was also to remain. About this time the Communications Sergeant and the squad with the ammunition arrived. A telephone was installed and checked, ammunition was redistributed so that each rifleman of the 3d Platoon had four bandoleers, the BAR men had a double load at each gun and the aid man of the 2d Platoon gave all of his supplies to the 3d Platoon's aid man. (60)

The 2d Platoon and Company Headquarters led by the Company Commander started back to GRAND HALLEUX, laying a second telephone line as they went. The 1st Platoon was picked up on the way back, informing the right flank of B Company of the situation and continuing on to GRAND HALLEUX. (61)

C Company (-) closed into its new area in GRAND HALLEUX

(59) Personal knowledge
(60) Personal knowledge
(61) Personal knowledge

at 1800 hours, the Company Commander reported to battalion to give them the situation and receive instructions. There were no instructions for the immediate employment of C Company, but Colonel Sanders directed that plans be made for a night flanking attack across the front of the 1st Battalion. The Company Commander of C Company was against an attempted night attack because it would be impossible to coordinate his actions with elements of the 1st and 2d Battalions who were pinned down along the front. Plans were made for the night attack and submitted together with the recommendation that it not be used but rather at dawn C Company be permitted to expand the position now held by the 3d Platoon, cutting east behind the German lines and on order turn and attack south toward the regimental objective. (62)

Colonel Sanders took the plans and recommendations to regiment, informing C Company Commander to remain at Battalion Command Post for orders. With nothing to do but wait, instructions were phoned to the Executive Officer to have as many men as possible get some sleep, and that hot food would be sent forward within a short time. The telephone lines from the 3d Platoon's position were spliced into the battalion line at C Company so that direct communication to Lieutenant Knoble and the Company Commander was possible. (63)

The situation of the regiment, the possible employment of C Company in a night attack was told to Lieutenant Knoble, his situation was very quiet. A continuous flow of information was maintained with the 3d Platoon and at 2300 hours Lieutenant Knoble stated he thought movement had been heard to the east

(62) Personal knowledge

(63) Personal knowledge

of his position, the men were on the alert but nervous. At 2330 hours, the platoon sergeant reported, "The Germans can be heard all about our positions but we can't see a thing, Lieutenant Knoble is out making sure all the men are awake." At 2400 hours, Lieutenant Knoble, "We have been hit by a counterattack, Germans are yelling all over the place, have the artillery fire two hundred yards east of our position." A five minute concentration was fired and by 0130 Lieutenant Knoble reported that all was quiet. The 3d Platoon was intact, ammunition was plentiful, one man of the platoon had been wounded, but he was in good condition and could wait until morning for evacuation. (64)

Colonel Sanders had returned in the meantime, stating that the night attack was off and that C Company would spearhead the attack at 0700 hours. Lieutenant Knoble was notified of the plan and was told that the remainder of C Company would see him at that time. (65)

The remainder of the night 15-16 January 1945 was quiet and at 0600, 16 January 1945, C Company (-) moved out to join the 3d Platoon on the high ground. In conjunction with other elements of the 291st Infantry, C Company launched its attack at 0700, 16 January 1945.

To sum up the results of this action: C Company, 291st Infantry did succeed in accomplishing its mission:

- a. Protect the right flank of the 291st Infantry.
- b. Capture the high ground overlooking the SALM RIVER south of the village of HORT.

From the standpoint of Company C, it was a very successful

(64) Personal knowledge

(65) Personal knowledge

operation, the objective was taken in a minimum of time without the loss of a single man. From the Regimental standpoint however, it did not appear to be a complete success, as the German positions did not weaken or withdraw on the 15th of January. The success of C Company getting behind the German lines on the 15th either caused the Germans to withdraw on the night 15-16 January, or they had so planned as the attack at 0700 hours on 16 January 1945 moved very swiftly meeting only slight resistance.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. GERMAN DEFENSE OF C COMPANY'S OBJECTIVE

The entire success of C Company in this action can be traced to the fact that the Germans did not man their positions with alert troops. The outposts at the base of the cliff were observing in the direction of the sound of battle and not along the avenues of approach into their position. The positions at the top of the cliff did not take full advantage of observation and fields of fire, no positions were constructed to cover the steep approach into their area. A few well sighted automatic weapons could have denied C Company the objective.

2. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

In planning his attack the company commander did not take into consideration the problems of either supplying his company or evacuating the wounded. It was not until four stretcher cases confronted the commander that this

problem was given a thought. Combat patrols were the logical answer but were not thought of until after the action had been completed.

3. CONTROL OF SMALL UNITS

The platoon leader and squad leaders of the 3d Platoon maintained tight control over their men in such a way as to achieve the maximum shock effect. The platoon acted as a single unit in its assault. Squad leaders organized their sector of the objective with a minimum of confusion.

4. COMMUNICATION

The use of the SCR 300 to relay through battalion requests for artillery support and the use of the 3d Platoon wire line for the same purpose were instrumental to the success of the mission. Supporting fires could and were called for rapidly although there was no direct communication between either the company or the platoon with any artillery agency.

5. ARTILLERY

Although artillery support had not been planned for prior to the attack by C Company, the flexibility of artillery lends itself to support all action within range. The artillery concentration on the objective prior to the assault by C Company so demoralized the Germans that they could not defend their position.

6. PLANS AND MANEUVER

The plans of C Company were simple and understood by

all members of the command. The maneuver was also simple, lending itself to control and at the same time directed at the lightly held flank of the enemy.

7. FAILURE OF EXPLOITATION

The failure of Company C and higher units to exploit the penetration of the German lines allowed the Germans to maintain their firm stand along the front of the 291st Infantry during 15 January 1945. It is believed that had efforts been made to exploit this penetration the Germans would have had to either turn to meet the threat on their flank or withdraw, thereby allowing the 1st and 2d Battalions to advance.

LESSONS

1. The confusion of battle and the failure of the human under stress will always have a weakness in the strongest defense. It is essential that all commanders guard against these factors in their own defenses as well as seeking out and exploiting those of the enemy.
2. Commanders and leaders of all echelons must plan not only the tactical phase of the operation but the logistics to support the plan as well.
3. Small unit training must be stressed at all times, it is the actions of small units that win battles.
4. Communications must be maintained for control of units by commanders as well as requesting and directing supporting fires.

5. All leaders and commanders from squad up in a rifle unit must train with the artillery in an Infantry-Artillery team so that he can utilize the support the artillery is ready to give him.

6. Commanders must exploit a weakness or penetration immediately to insure success in battle.

7. Plans of operation and maneuver must be so simple that they are easily understood by those that are to execute them.