The background of the cover is a painting depicting a scene of total destruction. In the foreground, a tank is partially visible on the left, with its turret and main gun barrel. The ground is littered with debris, including twisted metal and charred remains. In the middle ground, several buildings are in various stages of ruin. One building on the right has a large, jagged hole in its wall, and another in the center has a collapsed roof. A tall, thin utility pole stands in the center. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a somber atmosphere. The overall style is that of a classic war painting, with visible brushstrokes and a focus on the devastation of battle.

**Three Battles:**  
**ARNAVILLE,**  
**ALTUZZO,**  
**AND**  
**SCHMIDT**

By Charles B. MacDonald  
and  
Sidney T. Mathews

**WORLD WAR II**  
50th Anniversary  
Commemorative Edition

*UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II*

Three Battles:  
ARNAVILLE, ALTUZZO,  
AND SCHMIDT

*by*  
*Charles B. MacDonald*  
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*Sidney T. Mathews*



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. . . to Those Who Served



# Foreword

This volume pictures the difficulties of small unit commanders and soldiers in executing missions assigned by higher headquarters. Such missions are based at best on educated guesses as to the enemy situation and probable reaction. Success, failure, confusion, outstanding behavior, as pictured here, illustrate battle as it did, and often can, take place. The viewpoint of the participants at the time is hard to re-create in spite of what is known of the circumstances that surrounded the engagement. What now seems to be obvious was then obscure. The participants were continually faced with questions which can be reduced in number only by thorough training: What do I do next? Where shall I fire? Who is now in charge? Shall I fire? Will firing expose my position? Shall I wait for orders? To us who comfortably read accounts of the engagement the answers may seem evident. We must remember that confusion, like fog, envelops the whole battlefield, including the enemy. Initiative, any clear-cut aggressive action, tends to dispel it.

In battle the terrain is the board on which the game is played. The chessmen are the small units of infantry, of armor, and the various supporting weapons each with different capabilities, all designed for the co-ordinated action which makes for victory. No one piece is capable of carrying the entire burden. Each must help the other. Above all, the human mind must comprehend which, for the instant, has the leading role. There is no time out in battle. Teams must be prepared to function in spite of shortages in both personnel and equipment. They must be practiced and drilled in getting and retaining the order necessary to overcome the confusion forever present on the battlefield. This is the outstanding lesson of these pages. If heeded they will have most beneficial effect on our Army.

We, the victors in this war, can ill afford not to examine our training methods continually. Do we drill as we would fight? Do we instill in the soldier discipline and a knowledge of how to get order out of battle confusion? If not, victory will cost too much.

Washington, D. C.  
15 November 1951

ORLANDO WARD  
Maj. Gen., U. S. A.  
Chief of Military History

# The Authors

Charles B. MacDonald, compiler of this volume and author of two of the studies, commanded a rifle company in the 2d Infantry Division in World War II and is the author of *Company Commander*.<sup>\*</sup> He is now on the staff of this office writing a volume on the U. S. Army in Europe. Sidney T. Mathews, author of the third study, was a member of the Historical Section, Fifth Army, during the war, wrote the study entitled "Santa Maria Infante" published in *Small Unit Actions*<sup>\*</sup> of the series AMERICAN FORCES IN ACTION, and is a Ph.D. in History of the Johns Hopkins University. He is now on the staff of this office, writing a volume on the U. S. Army in Italy.

Washington, D. C.  
15 November 1951

KENT ROBERTS GREENFIELD  
General Editor

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<sup>\*</sup> Washington, 1947.

# Preface

In World War II historians in uniform followed the U. S. Army's combat forces in almost all theaters of operations, their primary duty to interview battle participants in order to enrich and complete the record of the war. Added to the organizational records of the Army units, the combat interviews obtained by these historians produced an unprecedented amount of source material. Rich in detail of small units in action, it provided an opportunity to show what actually happened in battle.

The volumes of UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II dealing with the war in the Pacific are rich in such detail. In those dealing with the war in the European and Mediterranean theaters, the scale of treatment is such that the history can rarely follow the action of small units. One of the objects of this volume is to achieve a microscopic view of battle in those theaters by focusing on the battalions, companies, platoons, and squads that fought in the front lines.

The AMERICAN FORCES IN ACTION\* series has already presented fourteen volumes which are primarily small unit actions, but these are concerned almost exclusively with infantry in battle. Another object of this volume is to present actions in which the role of other arms and services can also be presented, providing a better picture of the interrelation of small parts on the battlefield in as great a variety of tactical situations as possible.

The choice of actions to be included was limited by the kind of source material available for the specific purposes of the volume. Although interviews and unit records are present in abundance, only in a few instances can the small unit level be sustained through an entire operation or to a natural conclusion.

In many respects the actions chosen are representative of scores of battles in their respective theaters, for all three are made up of failures as well as successes. Out of a combination of actions such as these, large-scale victories or defeats are compounded. Squads, platoons, companies, battalions, and even regiments and divisions,

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\* Published by the Historical Division, War Department Special Staff.

experience local reverses as well as successes to decide the over-all course of war.

Each of the three studies presents an operation that constitutes but one of many in which the units and individuals described took part. Their performance in other engagements may have been more brilliant. It should be kept in mind that one action seldom is the basis for a military reputation. Further, a number of factors that often vitally influence a battle action—some of them unrecognized even by the participants—inevitably remain a mystery. The availability of materials and the type of objectives dictated the choice of actions to be recorded, not the individuals or the units. Their assistance in producing information and criticizing the manuscript is indicative of a loyal desire that others profit from their experiences.

While the authors are aware of the vital contributions supply and administrative units perform in the long-range scale of victory, their story lies in the administrative and logistical histories and in the volumes of the technical services of the series, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II. Likewise, the story of command decision in higher headquarters lies in the campaign volumes. One of the actions, "River Crossing at Arnaville," has already been described at a higher level in Hugh M. Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*;\* the two others, "Break-through at Monte Altuzzo" and "Objective: Schmidt," will appear in higher-level accounts, minus the detail of these presentations, in subsequent volumes of UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II.

Both "Objective: Schmidt" and "River Crossing at Arnaville" were written primarily from combat interviews and unit records prepared by persons other than their author. "Break-through at Monte Altuzzo" was written by the historian who obtained the interviews and who made a number of trips to retrace the battle on the ground with surviving participants. Responsibility for editing the Altuzzo study to meet the requirements of this volume, for planning the volume, and for selection of studies to be included was mine.

In preparing this volume, Dr. Mathews and I were assisted immeasurably by the expert professional guidance of the members of the Office of the Chief of Military History. We wish particularly to recognize the contributions of Mr. Joseph R. Friedman, for his highly professional services as editor of the volume; of Mr. Wsevolod Aglai-

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\* Published by the Historical Division, Special Staff, U. S. Army.

moff, for his maps and for his counsel, based not only on his knowledge of military cartography and European terrain but also on his experience in battle; of Miss Margaret E. Tackley, for her exhaustive research in selection of photographs; of 1st Lt. George L. Frenkel and Mr. Britt Bailey, for considerable assistance with German materials; of Mrs. Pauline Dodd, for her invaluable work as copy editor; and of the following, both in and out of the Office of the Chief of Military History, who did so much to make this volume the cooperative enterprise that it is: Miss Norma E. Faust, Dr. Alfred Goldberg, Lt. Col. John C. Hatlem, Mr. David Jaffé, Mrs. Lois Riley, Mr. Royce L. Thompson, Mr. Ralph H. Vogel, Lt. Col. Charles A. Warner, and Miss Lucy E. Weidman. Additional credits to the officers and men who produced the source materials are to be found in the footnotes and bibliographical notes.

Washington, D. C.  
15 November 1951

CHARLES B. MACDONALD



# Contents

## RIVER CROSSING AT ARNAVILLE

<i>Chapter</i>		<i>Page</i>
I.	THE GASOLINE DROUGHT AND THE DORNOT CROSSING . . . . .	3
	<i>The Advance Begins</i> . . . . .	5
	<i>Commitment of the 5th Division</i> . . . . .	7
	<i>The Terrain and the Forts</i> . . . . .	12
	<i>Crossing at Dornot</i> . . . . .	13
	<i>The Assault Begins</i> . . . . .	17
	<i>The German Reaction</i> . . . . .	22
	<i>Advance to Fort St. Blaise</i> . . . . .	23
	<i>Support of the Dornot Bridgehead</i> . . . . .	27
	<i>Holding the Dornot Site, 9-10 September</i> . . . . .	29
	<i>1st and 3d Battalions, 11th Infantry</i> . . . . .	34
	<i>Withdrawal at Dornot, 10-11 September</i> . . . . .	35
II.	THE CROSSING AT ARNAVILLE (10-11 SEPTEMBER) . . . . .	40
	<i>Battalion Preparations</i> . . . . .	42
	<i>The Assault Crossing</i> . . . . .	44
	<i>The 2d Battalion Crossing</i> . . . . .	50
	<i>Counterattack From Arry</i> . . . . .	51
	<i>The 3d Battalion Attacks Arry</i> . . . . .	54
	<i>The 11th Infantry Enters the Arnaville Fight</i> . . . . .	55
	<i>Counterattacks Against the 10th Infantry, 11 September</i> . . . . .	59
	<i>Supporting the Bridgehead</i> . . . . .	61
III.	SMOKE AND BRIDGING OPERATIONS (9-14 SEPTEMBER) . . . . .	63
	<i>Smoke Operations Begin</i> . . . . .	65
	<i>Bridging the Moselle</i> . . . . .	70
	<i>Initial Planning and Operations</i> . . . . .	72
	<i>Armor Crosses at the Ford</i> . . . . .	74
	<i>Bridging Efforts Continued</i> . . . . .	75
	<i>German Counterattacks, 12 September</i> . . . . .	76
	<i>Plans To Expand the Bridgehead</i> . . . . .	80
	<i>Reinforcements for the Bridgehead</i> . . . . .	81
	<i>Supporting the Bridgehead</i> . . . . .	83
	<i>Bridgebuilding Continues</i> . . . . .	84

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
IV. BUILD-UP AND EXPANSION (13-15 SEPTEMBER) . . . . .	87
<i>Impasse on 14 September</i> . . . . .	88
<i>Attack in the Fog, 15 September</i> . . . . .	90
<i>Objective—Hill 396</i> . . . . .	93
<i>The Bridgehead Is Secure</i> . . . . .	95
ORDER OF BATTLE . . . . .	96
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE . . . . .	98

## BREAK-THROUGH AT MONTE ALTUZZO

I. DEVELOPING THE GOTHIC LINE (10-13 SEPTEMBER) . . . . .	103
<i>The Terrain and the Enemy</i> . . . . .	104
<i>The 363d Infantry Attacks</i> . . . . .	107
<i>Attack Preparations, 338th Infantry</i> . . . . .	109
<i>Confidence in the 338th</i> . . . . .	112
<i>Preparations of Company A, 338th</i> . . . . .	113
<i>Enemy Fire</i> . . . . .	117
<i>Advance to Hills 624 and 782</i> . . . . .	121
<i>Fire Fight in the Bowl</i> . . . . .	123
<i>Supporting Fires</i> . . . . .	125
<i>Company A at Hill 782</i> . . . . .	128
<i>Confused Reports From the 363d</i> . . . . .	130
<i>The Enemy Situation</i> . . . . .	131
II. PEABODY PEAK (14 SEPTEMBER) . . . . .	133
<i>Communication Failure</i> . . . . .	135
<i>Company A Attacks the Outpost Line</i> . . . . .	136
<i>Company B Moves Out</i> . . . . .	140
<i>Another Prominent Ridge</i> . . . . .	143
<i>Fire Fight at the Barbed Wire</i> . . . . .	148
<i>Ledford's Patrol</i> . . . . .	149
<i>2d and 3d Platoons Move Up</i> . . . . .	151
<i>First Counterattack</i> . . . . .	156
<i>1st Platoon Moves Forward</i> . . . . .	157
<i>Machine Guns and Mortars Move Forward</i> . . . . .	160
<i>Second Counterattack</i> . . . . .	162
<i>Third Counterattack</i> . . . . .	163
<i>Company B's True Location</i> . . . . .	163
<i>Supporting Fires</i> . . . . .	164
<i>Plight of the Forward Platoons</i> . . . . .	165
<i>Sergeant Lang Goes Down the Hill</i> . . . . .	166
<i>Fourth Counterattack</i> . . . . .	167
<i>Help From Artillery and Mortars</i> . . . . .	169
<i>The Day's Action</i> . . . . .	171
<i>The Enemy Situation</i> . . . . .	173

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
III. SHELLFIRE AND A FALSE MESSAGE (15 SEPTEMBER) . . . . .	176
<i>Preparations for Attack</i> . . . . .	176
<i>Gresham and Corey Move Forward</i> . . . . .	181
<i>Fire at Knobs 1 and 2</i> . . . . .	183
<i>Flanking Attempt</i> . . . . .	186
<i>Misplaced Shellfire</i> . . . . .	188
<i>Long-Range Fire and Counterattack</i> . . . . .	191
<i>Supporting Platoons on Hill 782</i> . . . . .	193
<i>Withdrawal</i> . . . . .	194
<i>The Day's Action</i> . . . . .	197
<i>The Enemy Situation</i> . . . . .	200
IV. ADVANCE TO THE CREST (16 SEPTEMBER) . . . . .	202
<i>General Gerow's Plans for the 338th</i> . . . . .	203
<i>The 2d Battalion Attack</i> . . . . .	205
<i>1st Battalion Prepares To Attack</i> . . . . .	205
<i>Last-Minute Instructions</i> . . . . .	207
<i>Capture of the Outpost Line</i> . . . . .	211
<i>Fire Fight at Knob 1</i> . . . . .	214
<i>American Shellfire</i> . . . . .	215
<i>1st Squad at Knob 2</i> . . . . .	216
<i>Advance to the Crest</i> . . . . .	217
<i>Defensive Arrangements</i> . . . . .	219
<i>2d Platoon Follows to Hill 926</i> . . . . .	219
<i>1st Platoon's Advance</i> . . . . .	221
<i>Advance up the Western Ridge</i> . . . . .	221
<i>Bypassed Pockets</i> . . . . .	222
<i>The Enemy Situation</i> . . . . .	223
V. COUNTERATTACKS (17 SEPTEMBER) . . . . .	226
<i>Assault on the Right Bunker</i> . . . . .	227
<i>Assault on the Left Bunker</i> . . . . .	229
<i>Return to the Bunker</i> . . . . .	229
<i>Search for Spoil</i> . . . . .	232
<i>Action on the Western Peak</i> . . . . .	232
<i>Action at Hill 926</i> . . . . .	234
<i>Enemy Pockets and the 3d Battalion</i> . . . . .	234
<i>Company K Attacks Knob 3</i> . . . . .	236
<i>The 3d Battalion Mops Up</i> . . . . .	238
<i>Break-Through on the Flanks</i> . . . . .	239
ORDER OF BATTLE . . . . .	242
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE . . . . .	244

## OBJECTIVE: SCHMIDT

Chapter	Page
I. ATTACK ON VOSSENACK (2 NOVEMBER)	251
<i>The 112th Makes the Main Effort</i>	257
<i>The 2d Battalion Attacks</i>	259
<i>Company G on the Left</i>	259
<i>Company F on the Right</i>	262
<i>Company E Mops Up</i>	266
<i>Artillery in the Vossenack Attack</i>	268
<i>The 1st Battalion Attacks at H Plus 3 Hours</i>	268
<i>109th and 110th Infantry Regiments Attack</i>	271
<i>Air Support</i>	272
<i>The Enemy Situation</i>	274
<i>Summary for 2 November and Night of 2-3 November</i>	274
II. THE MAIN EFFORT CONTINUES (3 NOVEMBER)	276
<i>The Spearhead Advance of Company K</i>	277
<i>Company L Also Advances</i>	281
<i>Company I Follows in Reserve</i>	282
<i>Company M Moves to Schmidt</i>	282
<i>3d Battalion Medics</i>	282
<i>The Greene Hornets</i>	283
<i>The 1st Battalion Follows the 3d</i>	283
<i>1st Battalion Medics</i>	285
<i>Artillery Support</i>	285
<i>Vossenack</i>	285
<i>The Engineers and the Kall Trail</i>	286
<i>The Night in Schmidt</i>	290
<i>109th and 110th Infantry Summaries</i>	291
<i>Air Support</i>	292
<i>The Enemy Situation</i>	292
<i>Summary for 3 November and Night of 3-4 November</i>	293
III. ACTION AT SCHMIDT (4 NOVEMBER)	295
<i>Tanks Try To Cross the Kall</i>	295
<i>Action at Schmidt</i>	297
<i>Struggle With the Main Supply Route</i>	303
<i>The Battle for Kommerscheidt</i>	305
<i>The Kall Struggle Continues</i>	309
<i>The Engineers</i>	312
<i>Command and the Kall Trail</i>	313
<i>893d Tank Destroyer Battalion Joins the Action</i>	314
<i>Air Support</i>	315
<i>109th and 110th Infantry Summaries</i>	315
<i>The Enemy Situation</i>	317
<i>Summary for 4 November and Night of 4-5 November</i>	319

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
IV. MORE ACTION AT KOMMERSCHIEDT (5 NOVEMBER) . . . . .	321
<i>Tank Destroyers Try for Kommerscheidt</i> . . . . .	323
<i>Another Enemy Attack</i> . . . . .	323
<i>Events Along the Kall Trail</i> . . . . .	324
<i>The Tanks</i> . . . . .	324
<i>Action Again in Kommerscheidt</i> . . . . .	325
<i>Company B, 112th, Moves Up</i> . . . . .	326
<i>The Tank Destroyers</i> . . . . .	326
<i>Command in Kommerscheidt</i> . . . . .	327
<i>The Engineers</i> . . . . .	327
<i>The Greene Hornets</i> . . . . .	328
<i>Tank Supply</i> . . . . .	328
<i>Infantry Supply</i> . . . . .	329
<i>Tank Destroyer Supply</i> . . . . .	330
<i>The Medics</i> . . . . .	331
<i>Formation of Task Force R</i> . . . . .	332
<i>The Engineers</i> . . . . .	333
<i>The Situation in Vossenack</i> . . . . .	334
<i>Armor in Vossenack</i> . . . . .	336
<i>Artillery Support</i> . . . . .	338
<i>109th and 110th Infantry Summaries</i> . . . . .	339
<i>Air Support</i> . . . . .	339
<i>The Enemy Situation</i> . . . . .	341
<i>Summary for 5 November and Night of 5-6 November</i> . . . . .	342
V. ACTION AT VOSSENACK (6 NOVEMBER) . . . . .	344
<i>Armor in Vossenack</i> . . . . .	345
<i>Engineers in Vossenack</i> . . . . .	348
<i>The Situation in Kommerscheidt</i> . . . . .	348
<i>Task Force R</i> . . . . .	349
<i>Tank Demonstration in Kommerscheidt</i> . . . . .	350
<i>The Planned Attack on Schmidt</i> . . . . .	352
<i>A New Defense Attempted in Vossenack</i> . . . . .	352
<i>Was There a German Attack?</i> . . . . .	354
<i>The Armor Builds Up a Line</i> . . . . .	355
<i>The Engineers Act as Riflemen</i> . . . . .	357
<i>The Command Level</i> . . . . .	362
<i>The Night in Vossenack: Armor</i> . . . . .	363
<i>The Night in Vossenack: Engineers</i> . . . . .	363
<i>Medics and Engineers Along the Kall</i> . . . . .	366
<i>Supplies Cross the Kall</i> . . . . .	368
<i>Artillery and Air Support</i> . . . . .	369
<i>109th and 110th Infantry Summaries</i> . . . . .	371
<i>The Enemy Situation</i> . . . . .	371
<i>Summary for 6 November and Night of 6-7 November</i> . . . . .	372

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
VI. ACTION AGAIN AT KOMMERSCHIEDT (7 NOVEMBER) . . . . .	374
<i>A New Commander for the 112th</i> . . . . .	378
<i>Along the Kall Trail</i> . . . . .	379
<i>Company A, 1340th Engineers</i> . . . . .	379
<i>Colonel Peterson's Return Trip</i> . . . . .	380
<i>Attack To Retake Vossenack</i> . . . . .	381
<i>Task Force Davis</i> . . . . .	386
<i>The Tank Destroyers Try To Cross the Kall</i> . . . . .	388
<i>Armor in Vossenack</i> . . . . .	388
<i>Command</i> . . . . .	389
<i>Air Support</i> . . . . .	389
<i>The Enemy Situation</i> . . . . .	391
<i>Summary for 7 November and Night of 7-8 November</i> . . . . .	392
VII. WITHDRAWAL ACROSS THE KALL (8 NOVEMBER) . . . . .	393
<i>The Day at the Kommerscheidt Woods Line</i> . . . . .	394
<i>Along the Kall Trail</i> . . . . .	396
<i>Vossenack</i> . . . . .	397
<i>Withdrawal</i> . . . . .	398
<i>Medical Evacuation</i> . . . . .	401
<i>12th and 110th Infantry Summaries</i> . . . . .	404
<i>Artillery and Air Support</i> . . . . .	404
<i>The Enemy Situation</i> . . . . .	405
<i>Summary for 8 November and Night of 8-9 November</i> . . . . .	406
VIII. CONCLUSION (9-20 NOVEMBER) . . . . .	407
<i>Evacuation</i> . . . . .	409
<i>Summary of Closing Action</i> . . . . .	413
<i>The Enemy Situation</i> . . . . .	414
<i>Relief of the 28th Division</i> . . . . .	414
ORDER OF BATTLE . . . . .	418
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE . . . . .	420
GLOSSARY . . . . .	423
BASIC MILITARY MAP SYMBOLS . . . . .	427
INDEX . . . . .	431

# Maps

<i>No.</i>		<i>Page</i>
1.	Dornot Bridgehead, 8 September 1944 . . . . .	24
2.	Crossing at Arnville, 10 September 1944 . . . . .	45
3.	Arnville Bridgehead, 11 September 1944 . . . . .	58
4.	Smoke Generator Operations, 10–15 September 1944 . . . . .	64
5.	Bridging the Moselle, 11–14 September 1944 . . . . .	71
6.	German Counterattack, 12 September 1944 . . . . .	78
7.	Expanding the Bridgehead, Attack of 15 September 1944 . . . . .	91
8.	Advance Toward Mt. Altuzzo, Company A, 338th Infantry, 13 September 1944 . . . . .	116
9.	Artillery and Air Support Area, 13–17 September 1944 . . . . .	126
10.	338th Infantry Plan of Attack, 14 September 1944 . . . . .	133
11.	1st Battalion Attack, 14 September 1944 . . . . .	137
12.	“Peabody Peak,” Company B on Western Ridge, 14 September 1944	152
13.	Advance to Knob 2 and First German Counterattack, Morning, 15 September 1944 . . . . .	180
14.	Knob 2, Situation Before Second German Counterattack, Afternoon, 15 September . . . . .	192
15.	Plan of Attack, 16–17 September 1944 . . . . .	205
16.	Capture of Mt. Altuzzo, 16–17 September 1944 . . . . .	212
17.	Assault on the Bunkers, Morning, 17 September 1944 . . . . .	226
18.	Situation on Mt. Altuzzo, Morning, 17 September . . . . .	231
19.	Company K Attack, Afternoon, 17 September 1944 . . . . .	237
20.	28th Division Front, Evening, 2 November 1944 . . . . .	270
21.	Drive on Schmidt, 3 November 1944 . . . . .	278
22.	The Kall Trail . . . . .	287
23.	3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, Night 3/4 November . . . . .	290
24.	Tanks on the Kall Trail, 4 November 1944 . . . . .	296
25.	The Switchback . . . . .	312
26.	Intervention of German Reserves, 4 November 1944 . . . . .	316
27.	Situation at Dawn, 6 November 1944 . . . . .	340
28.	Company C, 1340th Engrs, at the Kall Bridge, Night 6/7 November 1944 . . . . .	367
29.	28th Division Front, Dawn, 7 November 1944 . . . . .	370
30.	28th Division Front, Dawn, 8 November 1944 . . . . .	390
31.	28th Division Front, Dawn, 9 November 1944 . . . . .	402
32.	Along the Kall Trail, 9 November 1944 . . . . .	408
33.	Plan for Closing Action, 10 November 1944 . . . . .	412

*Maps I–XI are in accompanying map envelope*

- No.
- I. XX Corps, Situation, Noon, 6 September 1944
  - II. Reaching the Moselle South of Metz, 6–7 September 1944
  - III. Allied Front in Italy, 12 September 1944
  - IV. Situation in Mt. Altuzzo Area, 0600, 13 September 1944
  - V. The Aachen Front, 1 November 1944
  - VI. 28th Division Objectives, 2 November 1944
  - VII. Attack on Vossenack—Jump-Off, 2 November 1944
  - VIII. Attack on Vossenack—Completion, 2 November 1944
  - IX. German Counterattack on Schmidt, 4 November 1944
  - X. Defense of Kommerscheidt, 4 November 1944
  - XI. Fight for Vossenack, 6–7 November 1944

## Illustrations

	<i>Page</i>
Dornot Bridgehead Site on the Moselle . . . . .	10
Congestion in Dornot . . . . .	15
Approaching the Moselle Under Enemy Fire . . . . .	18
River Crossing Near Dornot . . . . .	19
Infantryman at Footbridge Over Railroad . . . . .	33
Army . . . . .	43
Objectives of the 2d Battalion . . . . .	48
Truck-Mounted Smoke Generator in Operation . . . . .	66
Arnaville Crossing Site . . . . .	68
Double Treadway Span Across the Moselle Canal . . . . .	73
Treadway Bridge at River Site 2 . . . . .	82
Heavy Ponton Bridge Across Moselle . . . . .	85
The Battleground . . . . .	104
Infantrymen in Full Field Equipment . . . . .	108
Relaxed Foot Soldier . . . . .	114
Monte Altuzzo Area . . . . .	118
Infantry Approach Over Open Field . . . . .	120
Howitzer and Tanks Moving Forward . . . . .	127
81-mm. Mortars in Position . . . . .	134
Jagged Crest of Western Ridge . . . . .	144
Camouflaged Log Bunker . . . . .	145
German Trench and Observation Post . . . . .	161
Peabody Peak . . . . .	172
Command Post at Paretaio Farmhouse . . . . .	177
Taking a Break . . . . .	182
Camouflaged Tank Destroyers (M–18) Moving Up . . . . .	199
Painting of Monte Altuzzo Area . . . . .	202

	<i>Page</i>
Enemy Casualties . . . . .	209
Artillery-Shelled Area . . . . .	218
German Matériel . . . . .	235
Break-Through . . . . .	241
The Schwammenauel Dam . . . . .	256
Vossenack . . . . .	260
Objective: Pillboxes . . . . .	273
Huertgen Forest . . . . .	280
Kall Trail Supply Route . . . . .	298, 299
German Prisoners of War . . . . .	302
Tank Destroyers M-10 . . . . .	322
Immobilized Armor . . . . .	351
Corduroy Road . . . . .	358
Remains of Church at Vossenack . . . . .	383
Supporting Fire . . . . .	395
Cargo Carrier M-29 (Weasel) . . . . .	405
Evacuation of Wounded . . . . .	410

All illustrations are from the files of the Department of Defense. The photograph on p. 202 is from the Department of the Army, Collection of Combat Paintings, World War II.



# RIVER CROSSING AT ARNAVILLE



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*the story of the 10th and  
11th Infantry Regiments,  
5th Infantry Division, and  
Combat Command B, 7th  
Armored Division, in cross-  
ings of the Moselle River at  
Dornot and Arnaville,  
France.*

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by CHARLES B. MACDONALD

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## CHAPTER I

# The Gasoline Drought and the Dornot Crossing

To the American soldier in Europe in 1944 the historic Lorraine city of Metz was to become known, after the complex series of forts and other prepared positions on its outskirts, as "Fortress Metz." The first test in the long combat lesson which was to give the city its name came in early September with crossings of the Moselle River south of Metz.<sup>1</sup>

By 1 September the main force of the Third United States Army's XX Corps, after a spectacular August drive across France, had run out of gasoline at Verdun. Reconnaissance units were sent as far east as the Moselle River, last major water barrier before Metz.<sup>2</sup> The optimistic reports they brought back of a panic-stricken enemy only deepened the frustration of the paralyzed units waiting for gasoline. Actually, during these early days of September such optimism was unfounded; even on 1 September, the Germans had units going into position

to defend Metz,<sup>3</sup> and by 4 September enemy resistance against American reconnaissance units perceptibly stiffened.

Able to do little during this period but commit ambitious future plans to paper and make a sterile record of the optimistic messages radioed in by the cavalry reconnaissance units, the XX Corps waited and hoped that gasoline soon would arrive. By the afternoon of 3 September enough gasoline was on hand to promise an easing of the situation, and late in the evening of 5 September the XX Corps commander, Maj. Gen. Walton H. Walker, returned from Third Army headquarters with the long-awaited word to resume the offensive.

Early the next morning, General Walker ordered that Field Order 10,<sup>4</sup> the most ambitious and far-reaching of various plans considered during the waiting period, be put into effect that afternoon, 6 September, at 1400.<sup>5</sup> It directed seizure of crossings on the Sarre River, some thirty miles east of the Moselle, and,

<sup>1</sup> For the story of the Metz battle, events preceding and following, and a higher-level account of this operation, see Hugh M. Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign* (Washington, 1950). This volume, a part of the series, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II, has been used extensively in the preparation of this study.

<sup>2</sup> Contrary to a belief prevalent among troops of XX Corps, no American reconnaissance units were able at this time to penetrate any portion of Metz east of the Moselle.

<sup>3</sup> MS # B-042 (Krause). Generalleutnant Walter Krause commanded *Division Number 462*, charged specifically with the defense of Metz. This division, an organizational makeshift, had assumed tactical control over all units in the area.

<sup>4</sup> XX Corps G-3 Jnl and File, Sep 44.

<sup>5</sup> All clock time given is that officially designated by the Allies; British Double Summer Time was used prior to 17 September.

upon army order, continuation of the advance to Mainz on the Rhine. (*Map I*)\* The 7th Armored Division, under command of Maj. Gen. Lindsay McD. Silvester, was ordered to cross the Moselle in advance of the infantry, apparently in the hope that the armor might still find a bridge intact. If Metz itself did not fall "like a ripe plum," the armor was to bypass it and strike straight for the Sarre River and its bridges. The two cities that formed the anchor positions for the German line of resistance in front of XX Corps—Metz and its northern neighbor, Thionville—were labeled intermediate objectives and assigned to the 5th and 90th Infantry Divisions, respectively.

Detailed orders for both the armor and the infantry awaited seizure of a Moselle bridgehead and more intelligence on the enemy and the terrain. XX Corps knew that the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division "Goetz von Berlichingen"*<sup>6</sup> had troops in the zone of advance and believed that elements of two panzer divisions might also be encountered. The corps G-2 also believed that two other panzer grenadier divisions, the *3d* and *15th*, might possibly be committed. The Metz fortifications themselves provided a big question mark. Since Roman times, when Metz became a hub for roads in that sector, the city had been heavily fortified. The present system was built by the Germans between the Franco-Prussian War and World War I and was known to have undergone some changes by French engineers in 1939. What changes the Germans had made since capturing the forts in 1940 was not known. In general, the XX Corps staff

believed the fortified system outmoded, and both the Third Army and XX Corps tended to assume that the Germans would at most fight a delaying action at the Moselle and that the main enemy stand would be made east of the Sarre River behind the Siegfried Line. Apparently on this assumption, virtually no information on the Metz fortifications was transmitted to lower units, not even to regiments.<sup>7</sup>

Actually, Hitler and his military advisers had no intention of permitting a withdrawal from the Metz-Thionville area; not even so much as retreat behind the Moselle was contemplated, because the Metz fortifications extended west as well as east of the river. On 4 September, *OB WEST*, the German supreme command in the west, estimated that troops available for defense of the sector were equivalent to four and one-half divisions.<sup>8</sup> The defense of Metz itself was charged to a miscellany of Officer Candidate School and Noncommissioned Officer School troops from the city's military schools, fortress troops, and physically unfit, all brigaded together under *Division Number 462*. Although this "division" was an organizational makeshift commanded by the faculty and administrative personnel of the Metz military schools, most of the student troops had been picked for further training as officers and noncommissioned officers after having demonstrated superior abilities in the

\* All maps numbered in Roman are placed in inverse order inside the back cover.

<sup>6</sup> Hereafter referred to as *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division*.

<sup>7</sup> XX Corps G-2 Jnl and File, Sep 44; TUSA G-2 Periodic Rpt, 3 and 8 Sep 44; Interv with Brig Gen John B. Thompson (Ret) (formerly comdr, CCB, 7th Armd Div), 6 Apr 50; Interv with Maj W. W. Morse (formerly S-2, 11th Inf), 19 Apr 50. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews were conducted by the author in Washington, D. C.

<sup>8</sup> Sit Rpt, 4 Sep 44, found in *Heeresgruppe B, Ia, Lagebeurteilungen (Army Group B, G-3, Estimates of the Situation)*, 1944.

field and were among the elite of the German Army. Most of these officers and men had used the Metz vicinity for school maneuvers and knew the terrain thoroughly.

West of the river, units of the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* had been acting as a covering force. Although on 2 September the *17th SS* had begun to move to reserve south of Metz for refitting and the *462d* had taken over the western security mission, many *17th SS* troops were still in the line when the *XX Corps* attack was launched. The two armored divisions which American intelligence had predicted might be encountered were actually no longer in the Metz sector.<sup>9</sup>

The American estimate that the Metz forts were outmoded was basically correct, even though the inherent strength of individual fortifications might be obscured by such a generality. While the French had concentrated primarily on the Maginot Line, farther to the east, the Germans after 1940 had given priority to fortifying the Channel coast. Many of the forts even lacked usable guns, ammunition, and fire control apparatus, although those forts subsequently encountered by the southern units of *XX Corps*

were in most cases manned and adequately armed. Over-all consideration might label the fortified system as of World War I vintage, but it would be difficult to convince the individual American soldier who faced the forts in subsequent days that "Fortress Metz" could have conceivably been made more formidable than it actually was.

The Moselle River itself was a difficult military obstacle. In the area just south of Metz the river averaged approximately a hundred yards in width and six to eight feet in depth with a rate of flow considerably greater than that of other rivers in this part of France. The banks of the river south of Metz were flat and often marshy. Before emerging nearer to Metz into a broad flood plain sometimes reaching a width of four to five miles, the river traversed a deep, relatively narrow valley flanked on east and west by steep, commanding hills. With the advent of the rainy season, the river could be expected to become torrential.

### *The Advance Begins*

As the gasoline drought gradually ended, *XX Corps* began to assemble its forces east of Verdun. The main effort to reach the Moselle and thence the Sarre was to begin at 1400 on 6 September with two parallel columns of the 7th Armored Division pushing eastward to take advantage of any Moselle crossing site that might be found. First a strong combat reconnaissance force from the 7th Armored, under Lt. Col. Vincent L. Boylan, set out at 0300 on the morning of the 6th to reinforce the cavalry units in advance of the main armored columns. Encountering little resistance initially, the force met stiffening opposition as the morning

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<sup>9</sup> MSS # B-042 (Krause) and # B-732 (Major Kurt Hold, formerly Asst G-3, *First Army*). *Division Number 462* consisted of two infantry training and replacement battalions, one machine gun training and replacement company, one artillery training and replacement battalion, one engineer training and replacement battalion, and the units subordinated to the division for the defense of Metz: the *Metz Officer Candidate School*, formed into a regiment; the NCO school of *Wehrkreis XII*, formed into a regiment; the *SS Signal School Metz*, formed into a battalion of four companies; *Security Regiment 1010*; one artillery replacement battery; several light Flak batteries and one heavy Flak battalion of the Metz antiaircraft defense; and a Luftwaffe signal battalion. MSS # B-042 (Krause) and # B-222 (General der Panzertruppen Otto von Knobelsdorff, formerly CG, *First Army*).

wore on. About noon it struck a strong outpost line along the Fléville-Abbéville-Mars-la-Tour road. Meanwhile, the cavalry units had reached points along the river both south and north of Metz and, although beaten back, had determined definitely that no bridges remained.

Starting out at 1400, the 7th Armored Division moved on an axis along the main Verdun-Metz highway, deploying Combat Command A in two parallel columns on the left, Combat Command B in the same manner on the right, and Combat Command R in the rear of CCB. At first resistance was negligible; as the advance continued CCA became embroiled in a stiff fight near Ste. Marie-aux-Chênes which continued through the night and prevented CCA from reaching the Moselle until the next morning.

Meanwhile, to the south, CCB, under the command of Brig. Gen. John B. Thompson, had also been advancing in a two-column formation. On the north was Force I, led by Lt. Col. James G. Dubuisson.<sup>10</sup> Originally the main component of this force was to have been the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion (less Company B) and was to have been under the command of Lt. Col. Leslie Allison, the armored infantry commander; but shortage of gasoline had necessitated that the armored infantry and Company B (less one platoon), 33d Armored Engineer Battalion, remain behind, to catch up with the column whenever gasoline became available. The force under Colonel Dubuisson ran into its first serious

opposition between Rezonville and Gravelotte in late afternoon and was here overtaken by its infantry and engineers. The CCB commander, General Thompson, was with this northern column and set up his command post just south of Rezonville.

On the south was Force II, led by Lt. Col. Robert C. Erlenbusch.<sup>11</sup> It passed through elements of the combat reconnaissance force at Buxières, east of Chambley, and in late afternoon approached the village of Gorze, which blocked entrance to a narrow defile leading to the Moselle at Novéant. (*Map II*) Here Force II was stopped by mines and anti-tank fire; but Company B, 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, was directed to bypass the town in an effort to reach the river and make a crossing before daylight. Although the company did succeed in reaching a canal which closely paralleled the river, as day broke on 7 September the Germans at Novéant and Arnaville, just south of Novéant, discovered the Americans in between them and saturated the area with fire, causing heavy casualties. The infantry finally were withdrawn under cover of fire from tanks and mortars.

Nevertheless, elements of CCB did succeed in reaching the Moselle during the night. In the left column (Force I), where the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion (-) had joined the fire fight west of Gravelotte, the newly arrived unit was ordered to push alone to the river. Utilizing a road through the Bois des Ognons and the Bois des Chevaux in order to

<sup>10</sup> Force I consisted of the following: Co A, 31st Tk Bn (M); 434th Armd FA Bn (less Btry C); 2d Plat, Co B, 814th TD Bn (SP); CCB Hq, atchd trps, and tns. Force I was later joined by the 23d Armd Inf Bn (less Co B) and Co B (less one plat), 33d Armd Engr Bn. See CCB, 7th Armd Div, AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>11</sup> Force II consisted of the following: 31st Tk Bn (M) (less Cos A and D); Co B, 23d Armd Inf Bn; 1st Plat, Co B, 33d Armd Engr Bn; Btry C, 434th Armd FA Bn; 3d Plat, Co B, 814th TD Bn. See CCB, 7th Armd Div, AAR, Sep 44.

avoid the narrow Gravelotte–Ars-sur-Moselle defile, which was covered by enemy defenses, the battalion fought its way under the protection of darkness to reach at 0400 the little village of Dornot, some 300 yards from the river. At daylight the Germans on both sides of the river opened up with small arms and mortar fire, and the guns of Fort Driant, on the heights southwest of Ars-sur-Moselle, west of the river, poured in deadly shellfire. To ease its situation, the battalion cleared a little cluster of houses known as le Chêne, on the river just north of Dornot, from which the fire was particularly heavy. This success was exploited by sending in Company B, 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, from Force II and the remainder of Force I, including Company A, 31st Tank Battalion (Medium), to assist the armored infantry battalion. And none too soon, for the enemy began to launch numerous counterattacks, the most severe of which originated at Ars-sur-Moselle.

What the American armor had done was to break through, at a weakly held point and in darkness, the defense line of a German “bridgehead” enclosing those Metz forts situated west of the Moselle, a line that the Germans were determined to hold. The German line in this area ran generally from Novéant to Gorze and north to Rezonville. The American success in breaking through these defenses had been surprisingly swift, necessitating formation of a second line running generally from Ancy-sur-Moselle, north of le Chêne, to Gravelotte. The violent German reaction was apparently based in part, at least, on fear that this second line would be turned before it could be adequately manned.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> MS # B-042 (Krause) and accompanying sketch.

While holding against these enemy counterattacks, the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion utilized its three available assault boats in the afternoon of 7 September in an attempt to put a patrol across the Moselle. Direct machine gun fire from the east bank destroyed two of the boats and killed most of the men, driving the patrol back.

In the meantime, to the north, CCA had succeeded during the morning of 7 September in reaching the Moselle north of Metz and was taking up positions in the vicinity of Talange in anticipation of a later crossing of the river. Here CCA remained, under constant enemy shelling, until 15 September, when relieved by elements of the 90th Infantry Division.

At Dornot, in order to ease pressure on CCB and eliminate General Thompson’s concern about his north flank, CCR was committed to clear the heights north of the Gravelotte–Ars-sur-Moselle defile, open the defile, and take Ars-sur-Moselle, the source of the counterattacks against Dornot. The reserve command had scarcely gained enemy contact when it was halted; corps had decided that CCR remain in corps reserve and be passed through by the 5th Infantry Division.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Commitment of the 5th Division*

On 6 September the 5th Infantry Division had been ordered to “pin onto”

<sup>13</sup> As found in 7th Armored Division and CCB records, this period of 7th Armored Division operations is confusing. More valuable are letters from survivors to the Historical Division and interviews by the author. See XX Corps, and CCB, CCA, CCR, 7th Armd Div, AAR’s and Unit Jnls, Sep 44; Interv with Thompson. See also Ltrs to Hist Div from the following: Gen Walker, 8 Oct 47; Gen Thompson, 17 Feb 47, and 1, 6, 7, and 22 Mar 50; Lt Col C. E. Leydecker (formerly CofS, 7th Armd Div), 29 Jul 47; and Col Erlenbusch, 9 Apr 48.

the tail of the 7th Armored Division and be prepared to fight for a bridgehead across the Moselle in the event that the armored attack should fail. Attached to the division were the 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled), the 735th Tank Battalion (Medium), the 449th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, Troop C of the 3d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, and the 84th Chemical (Smoke Generator) Company. (The chemical company did not arrive in the area until several days later.) In support was the 1103d Engineer Combat Group. On the left flank of the 5th Division was the 90th Infantry Division driving northeast toward Thionville; on the right, also driving toward the Moselle River, was the 80th Infantry Division of XII Corps.

The 5th Infantry Division had received its battlefield indoctrination in the Normandy hedgerows beginning in July 1944, and after the St. Lô breakout had participated in the spectacular Third Army drive across France. By the time of its arrival in the Metz vicinity, the 5th had already established a reputation for river crossings: the Maine, Essonne, Loing, Seine, Yonne, Marne, and Meuse. The 7th Armored, its companion in the impending Moselle crossing, had also received its battle indoctrination in the closing days of the Normandy battles and had also participated in XX Corps' drive across France.

In conformance with the orders to follow the 7th Armored Division, the 5th Division commander, Maj. Gen. S. LeRoy Irwin, directed that the 2d Infantry follow CCA on the north, the 11th Infantry follow CCB on the south, and the 10th Infantry remain in division reserve. General Irwin was concerned

as to whether his division was to establish its own bridgehead on the corps' right or to pass through the elements of the 7th Armored already engaged, but his two leading combat teams had already jumped off and made enemy contact on 7 September before he was able to get a definite decision from XX Corps.

Accompanied by its combat team elements, the 2d Infantry was to attack Metz directly from the west while the 11th Infantry was to secure high ground west of the Moselle south of Metz and be prepared to establish a bridgehead. At 0830 on 7 September the 2d Infantry launched its frontal attack and three hours later came up against a well-organized German defense line between Amanvillers and Verneville. Losses were heavy, and here the 2d Infantry was checked in the first of a series of fruitless assaults against the western outworks of the Metz position, assaults which continued until 15 September when the regiment was relieved by elements of the 90th Division.

In the south column the 11th Regimental Combat Team consisted of its normal combat team elements: the 11th Infantry; the 19th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer); Company C, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company C, 735th Tank Battalion; Collecting Company C, 5th Medical Battalion; and Company C, 7th Engineer Combat Battalion. A reconnaissance platoon was attached from the 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Serving as the nucleus of the advance guard was the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry. The combat team, under Col. Charles W. Yuill, 11th Infantry commander, was to move by trucks at 0800, 7 September, to the vicinity of Buxières and to proceed from there on foot.

After detrucking, advance elements of the 11th Combat Team were meeting slight resistance from German infantry who had not been cleared in the armored advance when word finally reached General Irwin about noon on 7 September that the 5th Division was to pass through the armor and establish a bridgehead. By this time the 11th Infantry was deployed and advancing with two battalions forward in widely separated columns, fighting to reach the Moselle. The regimental commander, Colonel Yuill, had directed his 3d Battalion on the left to reach the river in the vicinity of Dornot, north of Novéant, and his 1st Battalion to capture Arnaville, south of Novéant. His intention was to cross the Moselle with his 2d Battalion either at Novéant or just north of Arnaville in order to avoid suspected enemy fortifications north of Dornot. As night approached, the 11th Infantry toiled slowly toward the high ground overlooking the river.

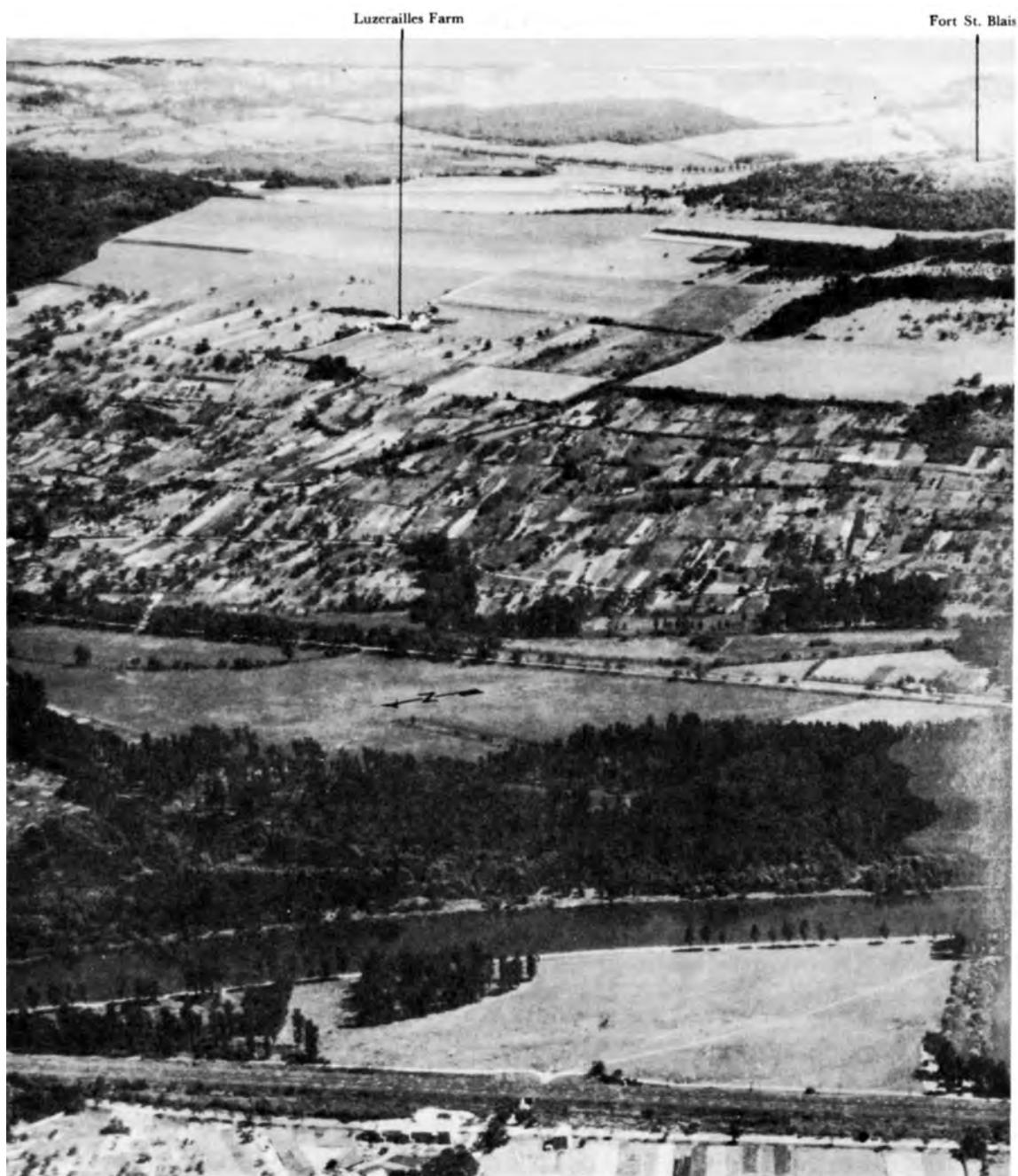
During the afternoon of 7 September, the attempt by the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion to put a patrol across the river at Dornot had given rise to a belief that the armored battalion had already gained a toehold across the Moselle. About 1800, XX Corps told General Irwin to cross the Moselle on the following morning and use the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion to augment his own infantry. The crossing was to be made at Dornot.

By midnight, 7 September, the 1st and 3d Battalions, 11th Infantry, had reached their objectives on the high ground between Arnaville and Dornot. Although the order to cross at Dornot had been protested by Colonel Yuill, the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, had been preparing for the assault since nightfall. The 1st

Battalion, 11th Infantry, under Maj. Homer C. Ledbetter, was being virtually ignored by the enemy at Arnaville, an indication that the latter offered a more likely crossing spot than did Dornot, where enemy reaction continued to be violent. This was apparently overruled by higher headquarters in view of the concentration of infantry and armor in the vicinity of Dornot. But on the ground there was little co-ordination between this infantry and armor. The 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, first 5th Division unit to reach the Moselle, was as surprised upon its arrival at Dornot to find CCB as CCB was to see 5th Division troops. Neither had any idea of the other's presence or impending arrival.

Nevertheless, the order to cross at Dornot was sustained, and Colonel Yuill told his 2d Battalion to make the crossing before daylight, 8 September. Not long before, the 2d Battalion had detrucked at Buxieres; during late afternoon its Company E had been committed to clean out enemy road blocks in Gorze. Now the battalion was moving slowly on foot toward Dornot. Its troops, if they attacked before daylight, would have to do so without daylight reconnaissance and with maps of no larger scale than 1:100,000.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The 5th Div story has been reconstructed from the following: 2d Lt F. M. Ludden, *Combat Interv* 38, Sep 44, including a valuable preliminary narrative, *Moselle River Crossing at Arnaville*, 8 Sep 44–24 Sep 44 (hereafter cited as *Moselle River Crossing*). (All combat interviews on the Moselle crossings are by the 3d Information and Historical Service and were conducted in September 44.) See XX Corps, 5th Inf Div, 1103d Engr (C) Gp, 10th Inf and 11th Inf, AAR's and Unit Jnls, Sep 44; *Pass in Review—the Fifth Infantry Division in ETO* (Atlanta, 1946) (hereafter cited as *Fifth Infantry Division*); *History of the Eleventh United States Infantry Regiment* (Baton Rouge, 1947) (hereafter cited as *Eleventh Infantry*); *History of Tenth Infantry Regiment United States Army* (Harrisburg,



DORNOT BRIDGEHEAD SITE ON THE MOSELLE. *Road in foreground parallel to railroad track leads to Ars-sur-Moselle on left and to Novéant on right. Assault*



*forces of the 5th Infantry Division crossed the Moselle River from top point of lagoon in center foreground.*

*The Terrain and the Forts*

Dornot, the village that was to be the base for the projected assault crossing of the Moselle, was picturesquely situated on the sharply sloping sides of steep west-bank hills. Its main road led into the town from the west and down a narrow main street to a junction with a north-south highway running generally parallel to the river. Beyond the crest of the west-bank hills, the Dornot road and all of the town itself were under direct observation from dominant east-bank hills which began to rise a few hundred yards beyond the river. Atop two of the peaks of the first range of east-bank hills opposite Dornot perched Fort St. Blaise and Fort Sommy, known as the Verdun Group, embedded and camouflaged so as to be nearly invisible from the west bank. Although the forts were shown on the small-scale maps with which the assault troops were forced to work, hardly anything was known of their size or complexity.

In this section of the Moselle Valley a broad flood plain that stretched south from Metz began to narrow, but east of the river there was still a stretch of approximately 400 yards of flatland almost devoid of cover before the ascent to the hills began. Along it ran the broad Metz-Pont-à-Mousson highway, passing through Jouy-aux-Arches, a village one

mile to the north whose name derived from ancient Roman aqueducts still in existence, and Corny, a village one mile to the south of the projected crossing site. The flat stretch of flood land on the west bank was smaller, only about 200 yards wide between the west-bank highway and the river. Here some cover was provided by a railroad embankment which ran generally parallel to the highway and the river. Slightly to the northeast of Dornot, between the railroad and the river, were a small lagoon and across from it on the east bank a small irregular-shaped patch of woods on flat ground between the river and the Metz highway. On the west bank, approximately one-half mile north of Dornot stood the cluster of houses known as le Chêne, which had been cleared the day before by the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion. Just north of le Chêne lay the village of Ancy-sur-Moselle. Approximately one and one-half miles south of Dornot on the west bank and southwest of Corny was the larger village of Novéant.

Besides the two forts of St. Blaise and Sommy, the elaborate west-bank fortification, Fort Driant, with a connecting southern reinforcement, the Moselle Battery, provided the strongest opposition to a crossing of the Moselle in this sector. Built by the Germans between the wars of 1870 and 1914, Fort Driant had been designed primarily to defend the southwestern approaches to Metz, but it was sited so that its batteries dominated the Moselle Valley as well. Emplaced on the highest west-bank terrain feature in the vicinity, Fort Driant had already illustrated the effect of its batteries to the attacking American troops. Just north of Fort Driant across the Ars-sur-Moselle-Gravelotte defile stood another fortifica-

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1946) (hereafter cited as *Tenth Infantry*); Third United States Army After Action Report—1 Aug 44–9 May 45 (hereafter cited as TUSA AAR). See also Intervs with the following: Irwin, 28 Mar and 10 Apr 50; Yuill, 17 Apr 50; Maj Cornelius W. Coghill, Jr. (formerly S-3, 11th Inf), 19 Apr 50; Lt Col Kelley B. Lemmon, Jr., 12 Jul 50; Lemmon and Yuill, 13 Jul 50; Thompson; Morse. Ltr, Lt Col William H. Birdsong (formerly CO, 3d Bn, 11th Inf) to Hist Div, 27 Mar 50.

tion, Fort Marival, whose guns could fire on the Dornot area. Farther to the north and almost due east of Gravelotte was the formidable Fort Jeanne d'Arc, from which fire might also reach the Dornot vicinity.

Accordingly, the urgency of exploiting German disorganization and reaching the Sarre River in effect impelled the Americans to attempt a crossing of the Moselle against great odds. Colonel Yuill and his men were aware that Forts St. Blaise and Sommy existed, but knew little of their capabilities. They were completely in the dark about the very existence of Forts Driant, Marival, and Jeanne d'Arc, for these German defenses did not even appear on the small-scale maps in the hands of the 11th Infantry. The regiment assumed that the fire that had actually come from the batteries of Fort Driant was the work of roving German guns. In addition, any crossing of the Moselle in the Dornot area at this particular time might possibly be subjected to enemy ground action on the near bank, for on the night of 7 September the situation around Novéant to the south and Ancy-sur-Moselle to the north was still fluid.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Crossing at Dornot*

As morning approached on 8 September, troops of the 5th Infantry and 7th Armored Divisions were deployed as follows: To the north, outside the Dornot sector, CCA was digging in alongside the

Moselle near Talange, northwest of Metz, and the 2d Infantry was facing a strong defense between Amanvillers and Verneville, abreast and west of Metz. The 10th Infantry was in 5th Division reserve and CCR in corps reserve. To the south, Force II (less Company B, 23d Armored Infantry Battalion) of CCB was in an assembly area north of Onville, and two companies of the 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry, were astride the high ground north and south of Arnaville. In the vicinity of le Chêne and Dornot was Force I of CCB: the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion (including Company B); Company A, 31st Tank Battalion; and Company B, 33d Armored Engineer Battalion. (Force I's 2d Platoon, 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion, had previously been committed and virtually annihilated east of Rezonville, and the 434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, while supporting Force I, was in firing positions just northwest of Rezonville.) Astride the high ground west and south of Dornot, ready to assist the crossing by fire, was the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, and in Dornot itself, the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry. In the rear of Dornot was the remainder of the 11th Combat Team: the 11th Infantry (less its three rifle battalions); the 19th Field Artillery Battalion; Company C, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company C, 735th Tank Battalion; Company C, 5th Medical Battalion; Company C, 7th Engineer Combat Battalion; and an attached reconnaissance platoon of the 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

The mixture of CCB and 11th Infantry units had produced a maze of perplexity in the command picture. Both CCB and the 11th Infantry had orders to cross the Moselle at Dornot. General Irwin,

<sup>15</sup> This terrain study is based on the following: Moselle River Crossing; *Fifth Infantry Division*; *Tenth Infantry*; *Eleventh Infantry*; Intervs with Coghill, Morse, Yuill, and Thompson; author's visit to area, Jun 49. For other discussion of terrain, see Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, pp. 25-29, 126-29.

5th Division commander, had been given verbal orders by XX Corps placing him in command of all troops in the Dornot area; but this information had not reached General Thompson, CCB commander, and he thought he was in command.

The commander of the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, Lt. Col. Kelley B. Lemmon, Jr., whose unit was to make the 5th Division assault crossing, had understood that CCB, 7th Armored Division, would cross the river approximately 1,000 yards north of Dornot. He had been ordered to make a crossing during darkness and was in Dornot preparing to execute this mission when he found the units of the 7th Armored in the area. Talking with Colonel Allison, commander of the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, he discovered that the armored infantry was to force a crossing at daylight, also at Dornot.

The men of Colonel Lemmon's 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, were already having difficulty getting into Dornot, for vehicles of CCB had clogged the narrow road into the town. Further complicating the situation, rain began to fall, making the road even more treacherous in the darkness. Fire from Germans still on the west bank harassed traffic from the flanks, and when attempts were made to pull the armored vehicles out of the area the two-way movement only resulted in traffic jams at Gorze and Dornot.

It was still dark when rumor spread that a staff officer from XX Corps had appeared and ordered the armored infantry to cross in advance of the 2d Battalion. Although this staff officer was never identified and his intervention denied by XX Corps, the idea, at least,

was prevalent and added to the confusion.<sup>16</sup>

Faced with the confusion on the ground and the probability that his men could not be ready for a crossing during darkness, Colonel Lemmon finally established communications with his regimental commander, Colonel Yuill. Shortly after daylight, 8 September, Colonel Yuill told his 2d Battalion commander that he should proceed with his crossing plans and that the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion was attached for the crossing. The basis for such a statement was probably the verbal order given General Irwin earlier by XX Corps, that the 5th Division was to force a crossing and use the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion to augment its own infantry. But a short while later General Thompson, CCB commander, used the communications of the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry,<sup>17</sup> to telephone Colonel Yuill. Informing him of his mission to cross the Moselle, General Thompson requested permission to use a battalion of the 11th Infantry to assist his own 23d Armored Infantry, because his battalion had been seriously depleted in the battles to hold at Dornot and le Chêne. Since the general's mission was the same, since co-ordination was apparently the only solution to a confused situation, and since General Thompson

<sup>16</sup> Moselle River Crossing; Ltrs, Gen Thompson to Hist Div; Intervals, Thompson, Morse, Coghill, Yuill, Lemmon, and Lemmon-Yuill; Ltr, Gen Walker to Hist Div, 6 Jan 49. Colonel Lemmon says that this staff officer definitely appeared at his command post in Dornot and gave such an order to him and to Colonel Allison, 23d Armored Infantry Battalion. In General Walker's letter, he says that he ordered an investigation later to determine the identity of this officer, but the investigation proved inconclusive.

<sup>17</sup> General Thompson says 3d Battalion, but Colonel Lemmon and Colonel Yuill, recalling the incident in detail, say 2d Battalion.



CONGESTION IN DORNOT before first crossing of Moselle. The entire town was under observation from dominating east-bank hills visible in top background.

was the senior officer on the ground, Colonel Yuill approved and designated Colonel Lemmon's 2d Battalion. This was a major step toward co-ordination, but there was nothing to indicate that General Irwin was aware of the negotiations, and there was no real co-ordination among supporting elements of the two divisions. Colonel Yuill, although having granted General Thompson's request, did not consider that his 2d Battalion was in any sense attached to CCB, only that General Thompson was in over-all command.<sup>18</sup>

After his telephone conversation with Colonel Yuill, General Thompson made contact with the 7th Armored Division artillery officer. Since he had received no response to urgent messages of the day before to division headquarters requesting assault boats, General Thompson told his artillery officer to avoid both division and corps headquarters but to secure as much artillery as possible for support of the crossing. He wanted a preparatory barrage of smoke and high explosive on the east-bank hills beyond Dornot for forty-five minutes prior to the assault. The 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, meanwhile was making its own preparations for artillery support from its own division.<sup>19</sup>

Although it would seem that two divergent efforts to cross the Moselle were being made at the same spot, real co-ordination finally came on battalion level and all preparations eventually worked toward one end. According to Colonel Lemmon, both he and the 23d Armored Infantry commander, Colonel Allison,

recognized that the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, was the major unit and was giving the orders. The 2d Battalion's original plans had been made with the idea that elements of CCB would cross one thousand yards north of Dornot and take Jouy-aux-Arches, the latter town to be on the north flank of the 11th Infantry bridgehead. Now the two infantry battalion commanders decided that both units would cross near the small lagoon on the west bank, across from the irregular-shaped patch of woods on the east bank. The 23d Armored Infantry was to swing north, capture Luzerailles Farm, approximately halfway between Fort St. Blaise and Jouy-aux-Arches, and establish a defense in the southern edge of Jouy-aux-Arches, both positions to protect the north flank of the bridgehead. The 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, was to advance immediately on Fort St. Blaise. The 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, which would cross later, was to capture Fort Sommy and protect the south flank of the bridgehead.<sup>20</sup>

Because supporting artillery was not completely in firing position, General Thompson and Colonel Yuill, apparently at about the same time and with approval of the 5th Division commander, decided to postpone the attack. Another factor in delay was the lack of assault boats. Only those few brought to Dornot by the 11th Infantry's attached platoon of Company C, 7th Engineer Combat Battalion, were present until about 0800 when some twenty additional boats arrived. The arrival of these boats was the result of a lengthy trip during the night through rear areas by General Thompson himself, after his repeated

<sup>18</sup> Intervs with Thompson, Lemmon, Yuill, Lemmon-Yuill; Ltr, Col Birdsong to Hist Div.

<sup>19</sup> Intervs with Thompson and Lemmon.

<sup>20</sup> Intervs with Lemmon and Lemmon-Yuill.

requests for boats the day before had brought no results.<sup>21</sup>

Plans for the crossing proceeded, some apparently made by General Thompson, others by the two battalion commanders, and some by Colonel Yuill, 11th Infantry commander. The main fact was that the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, would furnish the bulk of the troops, for in the battles at le Chêne and Dornot the 23d Armored Infantry had been reduced to about half its normal strength and was depleted even further when Company A was ordered to hold the left flank of the near bank at le Chêne. The 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, from its positions atop the high ground south of Dornot, was to assist the crossing with machine gun and mortar fire, while its Company L sent a platoon to investigate Novéant and place outposts in the town as south-flank protection for the crossing. This Company L platoon subsequently found Novéant unoccupied but withdrew in the afternoon when plans were made for a 3d Battalion crossing. Two companies of the 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry, were still in position astride the high ground around Arnaville, with elements of Company B assigned to clear the enemy from a pocket at Ste. Catherine's Farm, between Gorze and Dornot.

With the confusion of men and vehicles still existing in the Dornot vicinity, at 0930 General Thompson ordered the vehicles of his combat command, including the 31st Tank Battalion, which was close behind Dornot, to move from the area. Remaining were CCB's armored infantry, engineers, and medics. Apparently not all vehicles succeeded in clear-

ing the area, for the infantry complained that a number of armored cars with their bright cerise air-identification panels were left parked in the open along the road leading from Dornot to the river, drawing enemy artillery fire.<sup>22</sup> The confusion between 7th Armored and 5th Division troops was finally dissipated on 9 September when CCB was officially attached to the 5th Division in exchange for attachment of the 2d Infantry Regimental Combat Team to the 7th Armored Division.

#### *The Assault Begins*

Ready to support the crossing on the morning of 8 September were the 19th, 21st, 46th, and attached 284th Field Artillery Battalions of the 5th Division and the 434th Armored and attached 558th Field Artillery Battalions of the 7th Armored Division. The new hour of assault was set for 1045. Under cover of heavy blanket concentrations by the artillery (few point targets could be discerned) and a smoke screen on Forts St. Blaise and Sommy, the infantry, assisted by the platoon of Company C, 7th Engineers, and elements of Company B, 33d Armored Engineers, moved the assault craft to the water's edge. Using an underpass beneath the railroad track, they moved northeast to a spot between the lagoon and the river across from the small irregular-shaped patch of woods on the east bank. (To the troops in the action, this woods became known, apparently because of a horseshoe-shaped defense later set up there, as the "horseshoe woods.") Enemy shelling and machine gun fire began to harass the infantrymen

<sup>21</sup> Intervs with Lemmon, Lemmon-Yuill, Yuill, Thompson, Morse, Coghill; Ltrs, Gen Thompson to Hist Div.

<sup>22</sup> *Eleventh Infantry*; Intervs with Thompson, Morse, Lemmon-Yuill.



APPROACHING THE MOSELLE UNDER ENEMY FIRE *for first river crossing near Dornot on 8 September 1944.*





RIVER CROSSING NEAR DORNOT. *Assault boat under way (above) as machine gun (below) covers the crossing. Note casualty in left foreground.*



from the moment they moved through the railroad underpass. At least one infantry squad carrying an assault boat received a direct hit. It became necessary to call for more supporting artillery fire and to send a patrol from the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion to the north to eliminate enemy small arms fire. This patrol finally knocked out the west-bank opposition and captured some twenty prisoners.

Not until about 1115 did Company F, led by its company commander, 1st Lt. Nathan F. Drake, in the lead boat, launch the assault in five assault craft. The crossing was contested by rifle and machine gun fire from the east bank and mortar and artillery fire that wounded several Company F and engineer troops. Before loading in assault boats, each wave of infantry would take cover in a shallow ditch about twenty yards from the river, then make a dash through the enemy fire to reach the boats. Next to cross, despite continued enemy fire which killed one man and wounded five, was Company G. By 1320 all of Companies F and G, plus a platoon of heavy machine guns and 81-mm. mortars from Company H, were across the river, and Company E had begun its crossing. Once beyond the river, the men fanned out in the woods for local security and began to reorganize. The elements of Companies B and C, 23d Armored Infantry, whose combined strength now totaled only forty-eight men, including Colonel Allison, the battalion commander, and his forward command group, went across intermingled with the two lead companies of the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Moselle River Crossing; *Eleventh Infantry; Fifth Infantry Division*; 11th Inf S-3 Jnl, 8 Sep 44; Ltr, Capt Morris M. Hochberg (commander of the armored

Valuable fire support in the Dornot crossing was furnished by the machine guns, mortars, and 57-mm. antitank guns of the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, from positions on the bluffs south of Dornot. Forward observers attached to the 3d Battalion from the 19th Field Artillery Battalion made good use of the commanding observation to adjust fires in support of the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry. Artillery liaison officers from both 5th Infantry and 7th Armored Division artillery were with Colonel Lemmon, 2d Battalion commander. The howitzers of Cannon Company, 11th Infantry, were in direct-fire positions on the heights just south of Dornot.<sup>24</sup>

The engineer plan for the crossing had called for the 537th Light Ponton Company (1103d Engineer Combat Group), assisted by one platoon of Company C, 160th Engineer Combat Battalion, to construct and operate infantry support rafts. Company C, 150th Engineer Combat Battalion, Company B, 160th Engineers, and elements of the 989th Treadway Bridge Company were to construct a treadway bridge in the vicinity of Dornot. But continued enemy machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire forced abandonment of this plan on the first day. The corps engineers were held back by Colonel Yuill, 11th Infantry commander, who realized that bridge-building under the circumstances was impossible. Except for two platoons the corps engineers either remained in

engineers) to Hist Div, 21 Apr 50; Inters with Thompson, Lemmon, Lemmon-Yuill; Ltrs, Gen Thompson to Hist Div. The 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, Unit Journal, is of little value since entries for this period were later destroyed by enemy artillery fire. See also AAR's of 23d Armd Inf Bn and CCB, 7th Armd Div, and arty units, Sep 44.

<sup>24</sup> Ltr, Col Birdsong to Hist Div; Inters with Yuill and Lemmon.

their assembly areas or did mine clearance on rear-area roads. One of these platoons, the 1st Platoon, Company C, 150th Engineers, moved to the crossing site in early afternoon on reconnaissance but met intense enemy fire. Instead of preparing for bridge construction, the platoon was pressed into service assisting the ferrying of troops and supplies and evacuating wounded. When this platoon was relieved after dark by the company's 2d Platoon, the platoon of 7th Engineers and elements of Company B, 33d Armored Engineers, were also relieved. Ferrying operations thus passed to control of the 2d Platoon, Company C, 150th Engineers. During the afternoon one squad of the armored engineers had cut the railroad tracks in preparation for building a road over the tracks to the river.<sup>25</sup>

According to the original plan for the assault crossing the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, was to await the initial success of the 2d Battalion's effort and then cross the river farther to the south. Reconnaissance by the battalion S-3 and an attached engineer officer revealed a likely site in the northern outskirts of Novéant. Although the battalion commander issued tentative orders for the attack, it was delayed to await the outcome of the 2d Battalion's attempts to expand the bridgehead opposite Dornot. Subsequent action at the 2d Battalion site caused cancellation of plans for a second crossing, and at 1705 Company K was ordered to cross at Dornot, to be followed as soon as possible by the remainder of the 3d Battalion. Approxi-

mately one and one-half platoons of Company K had reached the east bank by 1745, despite being held up by heavy enemy mortar fire and confusion with the rear elements of Company E, which was receiving machine gun fire from its left front and still blocked the crossing site. The remainder of Company K managed to cross at intervals during early evening, but the confined situation in the bridgehead forced cancellation, for the moment at least, of plans to send over the rest of the 3d Battalion.<sup>26</sup>

Not all the second company had crossed when shortly after noon General Thompson, CCB commander, received a message to report to 7th Armored Division headquarters. Here he was relieved of command of CCB and subsequently reduced in rank. One of the reasons given for his relief was that CCB had established a bridgehead across the Moselle on 7 September and then had withdrawn it contrary to the orders of the XX Corps commander. This was not a fact, for no bridgehead had been established on 7 September: this was only the small patrol which had crossed in three boats and had been almost annihilated. General Thompson was later exonerated and restored to the rank of brigadier general.<sup>27</sup>

The departure of the CCB commander, the only officer above the rank of lieutenant colonel present thus far in the vicinity of the crossing site, placed full

<sup>26</sup> 3d Bn, 11th Inf, Unit Jnl, 8 Sep 44; *Eleventh Infantry*.

<sup>27</sup> Interv with Thompson. See also in the OCMH files a copy of the letter sent to the Chief of Staff by General Thompson, 6 October 1944, explaining the points raised in the letter which initiated his relief. General Thompson was advanced to brigadier general by Special Orders 210, 20 October 1948, under provisions of Section 203 (a) of the Act of Congress, approved 29 June 1948 (PL 810 80th Cong).

<sup>25</sup> 1103d Engr (C) Gp and 150th Engr (C) Bn AAR's, Sep 44; Interv with Yuill; Ltr, 1st Lt Kingsley E. Owen (formerly Ex Off, Co B, 33d Armd Engr Bn) to Hist Div, 21 Apr 50.

responsibility for the river crossing in the hands of the 11th Infantry. From this time on there was apparently no question but that it was an 11th Infantry bridgehead supported by the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion of CCB.<sup>28</sup>

### *The German Reaction*

From the German viewpoint the crossing of the Moselle was almost as confused as the original American preparations. Defending the east bank at the time of the assault were the *282d Infantry Battalion* ("*Battalion Voss*"), made up of men with stomach ailments, and the *SS Signal School Metz* ("*Battalion Berg*"), both under the command of *Division Number 462*. Headquarters for *Battalion Berg* was in Jouy-aux-Arches; for *Battalion Voss* in Corny. The Americans had crossed the river on the boundary between the two battalions, a line through the middle of the horseshoe woods.

The only other German troops in the vicinity of the crossing site were the *37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment* of the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division*. This regiment had arrived east of Metz on 6 September after a road march of approximately fifty miles from the vicinity of Saarlautern. On 7 September the regiment's *2d Battalion* (battle strength: 620 men) had been ordered to Marly, some three miles east of Jouy-aux-Arches. Attached to the *2d Battalion* was a company of armored infantry, seven Flak tanks,<sup>29</sup> two assault guns and one 75-mm. self-propelled gun. Having arrived in Marly in midafternoon (7 September), the battalion during the

evening passed to control of *Division Number 462*.

About 1000, 8 September, the date of the American crossing, the bulk of the *2d Battalion, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, moved to Augny, between Marly and Jouy-aux-Arches. At noon one of the company commanders reported that he had talked with a wounded man who said the Americans had crossed the river but were equipped with no weapons heavier than submachine guns. A little more than an hour later, when a message from the German corps headquarters indicated that about one company of Americans had crossed the river at the horseshoe woods, the commander of the *2d Battalion* sent a patrol to Jouy-aux-Arches to determine the truth of the report. The patrol returned at 1430 with a written message from the commander of *Battalion Berg* stating that the enemy had crossed north of Corny, that a large part of *Battalion Voss* had been routed, and that there had also been some penetration in the sector of *Battalion Berg* (*SS Signal School Metz*). Although the enemy could be thrown back if reserves were brought up, the message stated, the *SS Signal School* had no reserves available, and "the situation is serious, unless reinforcements arrive."

Meanwhile, several reports had been received from *Battalion Voss* that there was "no change in [the] situation." Because this news contradicted his information from *Battalion Berg*, the *2d Battalion* commander sent a noncommissioned officer to Corny to find out what actually was taking place. He returned with a message from the commander of *Battalion Voss* stating, somewhat inexplicably, that a company of the latter battalion "took off." Perhaps this news explained the

<sup>28</sup> Intervs with Yuill and Lemmon-Yuill.

<sup>29</sup> The Flak tank (*Flakpanzer*) is a hybrid armored vehicle consisting of a light or medium anti-aircraft gun mounted on a tank chassis.

earlier report that a large part of *Battalion Voss* had been routed, but it failed to indicate that there had been an American crossing. In the face of these contradictory messages, the *2d Battalion* commander planned originally to commit only two reinforced platoons, one moving south from Jouy-aux-Arches and one moving north from Corny, with the mission of throwing back the enemy—if found. When continuing reports from *Battalion Berg* in Jouy-aux-Arches indicated that a bridgehead had been established and that reinforcements were crossing the river, he changed his plans. He ordered his *7th Company* to move to Corny and attack north and his *5th Company* to Jouy-aux-Arches and attack south. The *8th Company*, a heavy weapons company, was to support the attacks with infantry howitzer and mortar fire. The companies moved out for the attack at 1515.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Advance to Fort St. Blaise*

At the horseshoe woods, while the early effort of the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, to reinforce the bridgehead had been taking place, Companies F and G had, in late afternoon of 8 September, moved out of the woods in an advance across the Metz highway and up the slopes leading to Fort St. Blaise, more than 2,000 yards beyond the river. (*Map 1*) Company E, still reorganizing in the woods, was to follow when reorganization

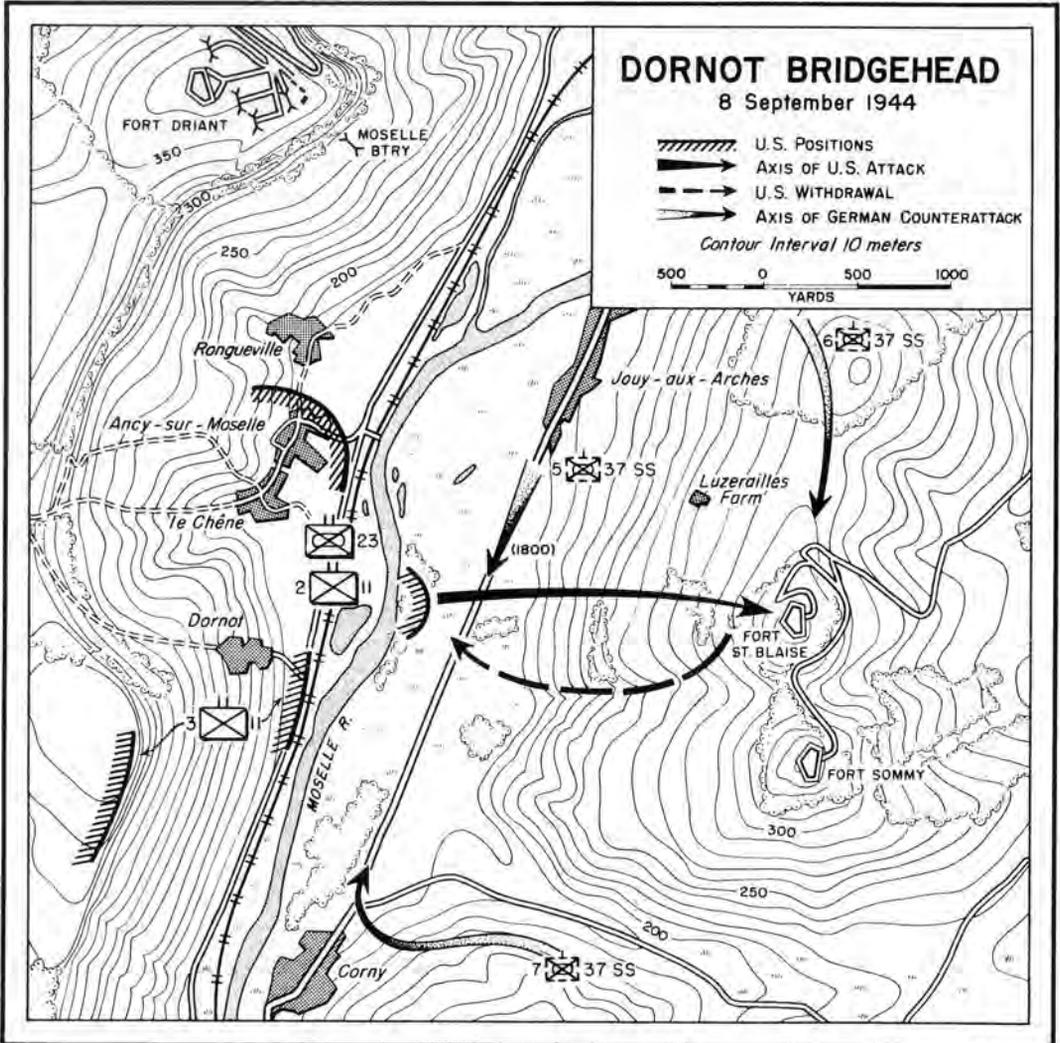
was complete and mop up bypassed resistance. Company K, when other elements of the 3d Battalion were able to cross, was to capture Fort Sommy. Although the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion had been ordered to take Luzerailles Farm and the southern edge of Jouy-aux-Arches, the small number of armored infantry to cross apparently negated this original plan, for no attempt was made to execute it.

Accompanied by Capt. Ferris Church, the 2d Battalion S-3, the two lead companies moved out, Company F forward and Company G echeloned to the left rear. Climbing the steep slope past occasional patches of trees and through vineyards and irregularly spaced fruit trees, the men met virtually no enemy opposition and only a strange silence from the fortification at the top of the hill. There were no casualties in the advance until Company F had reached the outer defenses of Fort St. Blaise. There the company commander, Lieutenant Drake, leaned over a wounded German to ask him a question. As the lieutenant straightened and raised his head, one of three German riflemen hidden scarcely ten yards away shot him through the forehead. He died instantly as the men about him turned their weapons on the three Germans. Command of the company fell to 1st Lt. Robert L. Robertson.<sup>31</sup>

Continuing its advance, Company F slowly and methodically cut its way through five separate double-apron barbed wire obstacles, only to come up

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed report of this action from the German side, see pages from the war diary of the *2d Bn, 37th SS Pz Gren Regt*, found in a file of miscellaneous papers, labeled *Allg., 1, 2, 3, 4/SS Pz. Gren. Rgt. 37 (Feldgericht)* (hereafter cited as *37th SS Pz Gren Regt Miscellaneous File*). This file contains an odd collection of documents, most of them records of disciplinary actions taken by the *1st Bn* of the regiment. The *282d Inf Bn* has been identified through 5th Div G-2 sources only.

<sup>31</sup> Unless otherwise noted, this section is based on the following: *Moëlle River Crossing; Combat Interv 38 with Sgt Hugh B. Sikes and Cpl Otto Halverson, 3d Plat, Co G, 11th Inf* (hereafter cited as *Combat Interv 38 with Sikes, Halverson*); *Eleventh Infantry; Fifth Infantry Division; Intervs with Lemmon and Lemmon-Yuill*.



MAP 1

E. Hanson

against an iron portcullis studded with curved iron hooks that prevented scaling. On the other side of the portcullis a dry moat about thirty feet wide and fifteen feet deep surrounded the fort. The fort itself was a huge domed structure of three large casemates constructed of concrete and covered by grassy earth which provided excellent camouflage and addi-

tional protection. Although the men of the 2d Battalion did not know it, Fort St. Blaise was manned at this time by only a weak security detachment of a replacement battalion which withdrew as the Americans approached.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> MS # B-042 (Krause). Colonel Lemmon says, "Undefended or not, our people got fire from the fort and heard Germans inside." See Interv with Lemmon-Yuill.

Not knowing that the fort was undefended, Captain Church, after radio consultation with his battalion headquarters, ordered his two companies to pull back about 400 yards to permit the artillery to plaster the fort before the final assault. The companies did pull back but, when the supporting artillery fired, three rounds fell short,<sup>33</sup> wounding several of the Americans and killing three. The American artillery fire seemed a cue for a heavy concentration of German mortar and artillery fire, and at the same time (about 1730) German infantry began counterattacking on both flanks and infiltrating in the unprotected rear of the two companies. Over his radio Captain Church ordered Company E to move up quickly to close the gap between it and the advance elements. But it was too late. Intense machine gun cross fire swept in from both flanks, and the broad Metz highway and the flatland on either side of it had become a deathtrap.

The enemy threatened at any moment to split the battalion. Captain Church's forward companies were stretched out so precariously on the open slope of the hill that he ordered a withdrawal back to the woods. So effective was the enemy infiltration in the battalion rear by this time that the withdrawal was planned as

an attack downhill in a skirmish line. But vineyards and patches of woods and enemy fire prevented control of the skirmish formation, and the two companies separated, each coming down the hill in a ragged single column. An old German trick of firing one machine gun high with tracer bullets and another lower to the ground with regular ammunition took its toll. The retreat moved slowly and casualties were heavy. As darkness approached and visibility decreased, unit commanders told their men to make a last dash for the woods; if a man was hit, he was to be left alone to crawl the rest of the way as best he could. The bulk of the companies were three hours in returning to the horseshoe woods, and some men were still straggling in at daylight the next morning. The dead and wounded marked the path of withdrawal. Although medics went out during the night and the next day to care for the wounded, they were often shot down at their tasks.

Earlier in the afternoon of 8 September, after the German commander of the *2d Battalion, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, located at Augny, had ordered a counterattack by two of his companies, the *5th Company* had reached Jouy-aux-Arches at 1700 and the *7th Company* had reached Corny at 1715. Although the *5th Company* soon launched its attack to the south, the *7th Company* in Corny was immediately pinned down by strong American artillery and machine gun fire from west of the Moselle and suffered heavy losses. Because of another message from *Battalion Berg* in Jouy-aux-Arches at 1620, indicating that the town could not be held unless reinforcements arrived (the *5th Company* had not yet reached Jouy), the commander of the *2d*

<sup>33</sup> Moselle River Crossing; Combat Interv 38 with Sikes, Halverson. Because no mention of short rounds is made in artillery journals, it seems possible that these "short rounds" were from German artillery at Fort Driant or from one of the other west-bank forts. According to an interview with Colonel Lemmon there were more than three rounds. From his observation post in Dornot, he could see a battalion volley land among his troops. Checks through his 5th Division and 7th Armored Division artillery liaison officers revealed, he says, that the fire was from a 7th Armored Division artillery unit and had been called for by the 7th Armored Division artillery liaison officer in his headquarters. The artillery liaison officer had the fire lifted immediately.

*Battalion* decided to commit his *6th Company* to attack "objective: Jouy-aux-Arches." By 1800 the *6th Company* had reached the town, no doubt finding it still in German hands. The *5th Company* reported one minute later that it had reached the horseshoe woods and had taken twenty-five prisoners. The *7th Company* was still pinned down at Corny.

But now the *2d Battalion* commander received a message indicating that the Americans had occupied Fort St. Blaise. At approximately the same time, the commander of *Division Number 462* reached the *2d Battalion's* command post in Augny and stressed the importance of retaking the fort. Accordingly, the *6th Company* in Jouy-aux-Arches was committed to "retake" Fort St. Blaise. Under "heaviest [American] artillery fire," the *6th Company* attacked and occupied the fort at approximately 2200 without making contact with the Americans or suffering any casualties. The Germans believed that the Americans had had to evacuate the fort because of their own artillery fire.

Meanwhile, in Augny, two companies of the *208th Replacement and Training Battalion* had arrived and were sent to Jouy-aux-Arches to reinforce *Battalion Berg*. About 2100, German reserves had been further increased when a Luftwaffe signal battalion and the *1st Battalion, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, had arrived in Augny.<sup>34</sup>

Upon withdrawal of the two American assault companies, the men of the *23d Armored Infantry Battalion* and Companies E and K, *11th Infantry*, began to dig in along the perimeter of the horseshoe woods. As troops of Companies F

and G straggled into the original bridgehead area, 2d Lt. John A. Diersing, commanding Company E after its original commander had been wounded, his 1st sergeant, Claud W. Hembree, and other officers and noncommissioned officers directed the survivors into defensive positions. All that the day's efforts and high casualties had gained was a minuscule bridgehead 200 yards deep and 200 yards wide, encompassing no more than the horseshoe woods. Only heavy concentrations from the supporting artillery battalions prevented the Germans from retaking even this small gain and protected the Americans as they dug in. The men were still digging in when the first "counterattack" against the bridgehead itself began: three enemy tanks drove along the highway from the north, spraying the woods line with bullets and shell fragments. Although protected by "bazooka pants," the tanks would not close with the defenders, their crews contenting themselves with trying to draw fire to determine the exact location of the American positions. The defenders' line was hard hit, particularly the positions of Company E at the point of the horseshoe, but the men held their fire. A group of enemy infantry, estimated at company size, heavily armed with automatic weapons, and shouting loudly, "Yanks kaput!" followed soon after the tanks. This time Company E opened fire, but the enemy infantry did not close, continuing to follow their tanks until out of sight to the right.

Almost hourly for the remainder of the night (8-9 September) the Germans counterattacked, mainly with rifles and burp guns. As the enemy formed across the highway, the defenders could hear shouted orders, followed by almost fanat-

<sup>34</sup> *37th SS Pz Gren Regt* Miscellaneous File.

ical charges with the enemy bunched and yelling. The American automatic rifles had a field day, and turned back every attack with high casualties for the Germans; but the defenders were only partially dug in, if at all, and casualties among the Americans were also numerous. The woods were filled with cries for medics. Sergeant Hembree, Company E, realizing that such calls would disclose positions, as well as indicate the number of casualties, and that all available aid men were working near the river in an improvised aid station, sent around an order that no one was to cry out. The exhibition of self-discipline that followed was one of the heartening feats of courage during the hectic days in the bridgehead.

During the first-night counterattacks, two men of Company K, Pfc. George T. Dickey and Pfc. Frank Lalopa, who had volunteered to man an outpost beyond the main line of resistance, stuck to their post despite a warning order to withdraw. Armed only with M-1 rifles, the two men held off the enemy until finally they were surrounded and killed. The next morning when other men of Company K crawled out to the position, they found the bodies of twenty-two Germans, some within three yards of the bodies of Dickey and Lalopa.

Soon after the defense was organized, Captain Church returned to the battalion command post on the west bank to report the situation.<sup>35</sup> Left in command of the

<sup>35</sup> Colonel Lemmon intended going into the bridgehead the first day, but when his advance command group went forward in midafternoon to establish a command post the men met intense enemy fire. From this time on, Colonel Lemmon felt that he could exercise better command and co-ordination from the west bank. His CP was in Dornot throughout the battle, although it had to be moved often because of enemy shelling. Interv with Lemmon.

bridgehead forces was the Company G commander, Capt. Jack S. Gerrie. While the battalion commander, Colonel Lemmon, had realized that the situation east of the river was serious, he was further impressed by Captain Church's report and requested permission to evacuate his battalion. Colonel Yuill in turn asked permission of division. Although General Irwin was aware that the situation in the bridgehead was far from satisfactory, XX Corps refused to permit withdrawal until another bridgehead was secured. A crossing by elements of the 80th Division of XII Corps to the south had been beaten back, and the precarious foothold opposite Dornot was thus the only remaining bridgehead across the Moselle. If the Dornot crossing could be held while the 10th Infantry made another crossing farther south, General Irwin reasoned, there would be a chance to expand the Dornot bridgehead to link up with the 10th Infantry. He therefore denied Colonel Lemmon's request. The Dornot bridgehead was to be held "at all costs."<sup>36</sup>

#### *Support of the Dornot Bridgehead*

After its heavy preassault bombardment and until daylight of 9 September, supporting artillery, particularly the direct-support 19th Field Artillery Battalion under command of Lt. Col. Charles J. Payne, fired heavily in support of the 2d Battalion bridgehead. During the twenty-four-hour period the 19th Field Artillery Battalion fired 1,483 rounds.

<sup>36</sup> Gen Irwin, Personal Diary, loaned to Hist Div by Gen Irwin (hereafter cited as Irwin Diary), entry of 8 Sep 44; Interv with Yuill. (Quotation from Irwin Diary.)

Most concentrations were on call by SCR-300 from the infantry in the bridgehead, giving support which the infantry deemed "excellent and plentiful." The work of the 19th Field Artillery Battalion's liaison officer, Capt. Eldon B. Colegrove, drew particular praise. He remained on duty on the west bank relaying requests for fire the entire time the 2d Battalion held on the east bank. Observers for the 5th Division artillery units were either in Dornot or on the bluffs overlooking the river and thus had good over-all observation on the bridgehead area. One observer from the 7th Armored Division was in the bridgehead itself.

During the afternoon of 8 September, further forward displacement of supporting artillery was accomplished. While the attached 284th Field Artillery Battalion maintained direct support, the 19th Field Artillery Battalion advanced to the vicinity of Ste. Catherine's Farm. One gun of Battery B, 46th Field Artillery Battalion, displaced to a position east of Gorze but, when subjected to what was believed to be observed enemy artillery fire, retired to new positions just west of Gorze. Here it was joined by the remainder of the battalion for a displacement in effective range of approximately 3,000 yards.

While armor had been available in the Dornot vicinity in early stages of the operation, it had been pulled out because of unsuitable terrain and lack of cover, and crossing armor into the tiny bridgehead was still impossible. Company C, 735th Tank Battalion, a part of the 11th Combat Team, remained uncommitted, but one platoon of Company C, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, took position during the day on the high ground south-

west of Dornot and engaged targets east of the river.<sup>37</sup>

Although repeated requests for air support had filtered back through higher echelons all day, none was forthcoming. Priority assignment of air to the fight for the Brittany port of Brest and to "riding herd" on the Third Army's open southern flank prevented its employment.<sup>38</sup>

The commander of the 1103d Engineer Combat Group, Lt. Col. George H. Walker, still planned to build a bridge across the river opposite Dornot the night of 8-9 September, but again enemy fire proved too intense. Additional assault boats were brought up to increase the means of supply and evacuation of wounded and to replace boats that had been knocked out or sunk. The 2d Platoon, Company C, 150th Engineers, continued to operate the assault boats until 1400, 9 September, when relieved by a platoon of Company C, 204th Engineer Combat Battalion. Orders had been received late on 8 September detaching the 150th Engineers and assigning the battalion to duty with the XII Corps to the south.<sup>39</sup>

When crossing the Moselle on 8 September, each man of the 2d Battalion and Company K, 11th Infantry, had taken with him all the ammunition he could carry and the usual canteen of water, but no rations. Beginning at 2200 that night, ten men of the 2d Battalion Reconnaissance Platoon carried all types of

<sup>37</sup> Moselle River Crossing; 19th FA Bn, 46th FA Bn, 735th Tk Bn, 818th TD Bn AAR's, Sep 44; Interv with Lemmon.

<sup>38</sup> Irwin Diary; 5th Div G-3 Jnl, 8 Sep 44; Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, Ch. III, p. 143, citing Ninth AF Opns Jnl, 9 Sep 44; XIX Tactical Air Command, Operations File, 1 Sep-15 Sep 44, inclusive (hereafter cited as XIX TAC Opns File).

<sup>39</sup> 1103d Engr (C) Gp, 150th Engr (C) Bn, 204th Engr (C) Bn AAR's Sep 44.

infantry ammunition, three units of K ration per man within the bridgehead, and 250 gallons of water to the crossing site. The engineers subsequently loaded the supplies and pulled the boats across the river with ropes. Two crossings per boat were made without mishap until the last boat on its second trip was hit near the far shore by an enemy shell and five men were killed.

The 2d Battalion medical aid station, set up in Dornot early on 8 September, merged during the afternoon with that of the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, which had moved into two cellars across the street. Although litter squads were attached initially to the rifle companies, only one squad managed to get across the Moselle, and the others worked on the near shore. Litter bearers first transported patients to the railroad underpass; from there a jeep ran the gantlet of shell-fire into Dornot. The exposed nature of the road across the western hills from Dornot still necessitated a jeep carry from the aid station to an ambulance loading point behind the hills. Later in the afternoon enemy small arms fire raking the open ground between the railroad and the river prevented movement even of litter teams until after dark. During this period 2d Lt. T. H. Pritchett, medical administrative officer of the 3d Battalion, and T/5 Charles R. Gearhart, liaison agent from Collecting Company C, 5th Medical Battalion, crawled into this fire-swept area, gave first aid to three wounded men, and crawled out again, pulling the patients behind them. After dark, when sleet began to fall, further adding to the discomforts of the wounded, 2d Lt. Edwin R. Pyle, 2d Battalion medical administrative officer, crossed into the bridgehead and supervised removal of wounded

by boat to the west bank, where the litter-jeep relay used earlier transported the patients to Dornot. After Lieutenant Pyle returned to the west bank about 0430, 9 September, evacuation was accomplished solely by infantrymen and aid men within the bridgehead who somehow managed to find boats or expedient floats and moved their wounded comrades to the west bank.<sup>40</sup>

At 2200 the night of 8 September the 10th Infantry received orders to cross the Moselle on 10 September in the vicinity of Arnaville, south of Novéant.<sup>41</sup> A second bridgehead was to be attempted, this time allowing a reasonable period for planning and co-ordination. In the meantime, the battle to hold opposite Dornot went on.

#### *Holding the Dornot Site, 9-10 September*

By the morning of 9 September expectation evidently still existed above regimental level that the 11th Infantry's bridgehead could be expanded and pushed to the south.<sup>42</sup> Within the bridgehead itself there was no such optimism. The men inside the little perimeter knew that, if the German pressure continued as it had during the night, the foothold could not even be held for long. The regimental commander, Colonel Yuill, understood the situation and thus made no attempt to reinforce the bridgehead. Any such attempt, he knew, would be suicidal.<sup>43</sup>

Before daylight on 9 September a report from a German prisoner that there

<sup>40</sup> Moselle River Crossing; Combat Interv 38 with Sikes, Halverson; *Eleventh Infantry*.

<sup>41</sup> 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 8 Sep 44.

<sup>42</sup> Irwin Diary; 5th Div G-3 Jnl, 9 Sep 44.

<sup>43</sup> Interv with Yuill.

were about one thousand Germans in one of the forts of the Verdun Group set off frantic requests for air support to hit the forts at daylight. Colonel Yuill, telephoning a number of times to 5th Division headquarters, said that "the bridgehead is desperate" and "it is vitally important that we get an air mission." The request was approved soon after daylight and planes were expected momentarily, but they did not arrive. At 0920 (9 September), General Irwin telephoned the XX Corps commander, General Walker, to protest the fact that the planes had been promised but had not appeared. While the 11th Infantry continued to cry frantically for planes, division promised that, if nothing else, "they would send cubs" (artillery observation planes). But at 1045 the regiment received the word it had apparently been fearing. The planes had been taken for missions against the primary target of Brest.<sup>44</sup>

Enemy pressure against the little bridgehead continued. Counterattack followed counterattack: during the entire time the battalion remained on the east bank an estimated thirty-six separate enemy assaults were hurled against it.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the day of 9 September, and except for occasional lulls on 10 September, the rain of enemy shells continued, not only on the horseshoe woods and the

crossing site but on Dornot, le Chêne, the high ground on either side of Dornot, and the road to the west from Dornot. The Germans made the most of their commanding observation from Forts St. Blaise and Sommy, both of which proved impervious to American artillery fire; and the positions of the enemy's heavy guns and mortars could not be detected, not even from artillery observation planes. Shelling forced abandonment of all efforts to resupply the bridgehead in daylight, daytime activity resolving into hazardous efforts to evacuate the wounded. One of the wounded was Colonel Allison, the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion commander, the only field grade officer to cross into the bridgehead. Although evacuated, he died of wounds six days later.

Despite a tendency toward bunching and almost banzai-like attacks, the enemy facing the horseshoe defense was wily and, it seemed to the defenders, often fanatical. Sometimes his attacks were supported by tanks which would give close-in artillery and machine gun support while the accompanying infantry closed with persistence and courage.

After the first day's attack by elements of the *2d Battalion, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, the next major German attempt to eliminate the bridgehead was launched at 2245 the night of 9 September by two companies of the *37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, supported by fire from a third company of the same regiment. The attack marked the first mention in this action of this regiment's *4th Battalion*. (The *1st Battalion* had previously taken over defense of Forts Sommy and St. Blaise.) The attack proceeded satisfactorily until shortly after midnight when it bogged down under heavy American

<sup>44</sup> 5th Div G-3 Jnl, 9 Sep 44.

<sup>45</sup> Although interviews and unit histories say "36 separate counterattacks," the morning reports of the units involved, particularly the valuable reports of Company K, 11th Infantry, would seem to indicate no such large number. While the enemy launched several determined counterattacks against the bridgehead, others were no doubt local assaults. What matters is that the enemy kept up continuous pressure. See Daily Rpts, 8-11 Sep 44, found in *Heeresgruppe "G" Kriegstagebuch 2 (Army Group G War Diary 2), Anlagen (Annexes) 1.IX.-30.IX.44* (hereafter cited as *Army Group G KTB 2, Anlagen 1.IX.-30.IX.44*); *37th SS Pz Gren Regt* Miscellaneous File.

small arms fire. The Germans intimated that they had failed because the Americans were continually bringing new troops into the bridgehead. In addition to three battalions of the *37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, the German units which figured in the Dornot bridgehead fighting were primarily the *282d Infantry Battalion (Battalion Voss)*, which had been holding the line extending south from the center of the horseshoe woods, the *SS Signal School Metz (Battalion Berg)*, and the *208th Replacement and Training Battalion*, all under the control of *Division Number 462*. (The *3d Battalion, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, was apparently in reserve and was not actively committed in this operation.)<sup>46</sup>

The Americans in the bridgehead could take few prisoners. Representative of enemy refusal to surrender was an event in late afternoon of 9 September when approximately a platoon of Germans attacked Company F. Some twenty were killed with automatic rifle and rifle fire close to the defenders' foxholes; about five others dropped behind the bodies of their comrades. Feigning wounds, although still holding on to their weapons, the five would not respond when men of Company F called out for their surrender. Fearing what might happen after dark if the Germans were left so close to the forward foxholes, Company F had no alternative but to shoot them where they lay.

A number of times the Germans tried another ruse: while a German officer shouted in English to "cease firing," a group of the enemy would form for a local assault to be launched during the

expected lull in American fire. The trick worked only once, and then only partially and to the enemy's disadvantage, when the 1st Platoon, Company E, obeyed the command, only to realize when it was repeated that it was given with a foreign accent. Opening fire again, the platoon wiped out a group of fifteen to twenty Germans who had started an assault.

On the west bank an enemy machine gunner, superbly camouflaged in a log-covered, well-sodded emplacement at the north end of the lagoon between the railroad and the river, remained undetected from the day of crossing until 10 September, providing continual harassment to troops at the crossing site. With the muzzle of his machine gun remaining within his emplacement while he fired through a nine-inch aperture, the German could not be located. Although at night he impudently sang German songs, the American troops still could not find him. His position was not neutralized until 10 September when it was placed under area fire by 60-mm. mortars, automatic rifles, and rifles of Company I, 11th Infantry.<sup>47</sup>

In midmorning of 9 September the Company K commander, 1st Lt. Stephen T. Lowry, was killed in the bridgehead. The one company officer who had not yet been killed or wounded, 1st Lt. Johnny R. Hillyard, assumed command. Just after daylight the next morning, Lieutenant Hillyard too was killed. The

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<sup>47</sup> Colonel Lemmon had no troops to send to clear out west-bank opposition. In answer to a request for such aid, regiment sent either a company or a platoon (probably Company C, 11th Infantry) on this mission, but Colonel Lemmon noted no decrease in enemy fire. Interv with Lemmon; Statement, Capt Stanley R. Connor to OCMH, Jun 50, filed in OCMH.

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<sup>46</sup> *37th SS Pz Gren Regt* Miscellaneous File; MS # B-042 (Krause); MS # B-222 (Knobelsdorff).

1st sergeant, Thomas E. Hogan, took command of the company.

Incidents of individual heroism continued to be almost commonplace. In Company G Pvt. Dale B. Rex took over a machine gun on the left flank when its gunner was killed early on 9 September and manned it through the remainder of the battle. Near-by riflemen estimated that Private Rex killed "wave after wave" of Germans; "hundreds," said the grateful riflemen. In Company K, T/5 William G. Rea, a medical aid man, rendered continuous first aid to the wounded despite machine gun and rifle fire. Once he crawled under fire 300 yards to reach a wounded man, returning unaided with the patient and walking erect through the small arms fire. Almost all officers in the bridgehead were soon either killed or wounded because they moved from their foxholes to encourage their men and direct improvements on the positions. Some men reported that their officers apologized to them for being wounded.

The first night in the bridgehead the men dug slit trenches as fighting positions and later improved them, developing what some dubbed "mole holes," a foxhole dug at one end of a slit trench. Because their weapons' fire blasts revealed the defensive perimeter, crews of Company H's 81-mm. mortars abandoned their weapons and took up rifles from the dead and wounded to continue the fight. Even the rifle companies' 60-mm. mortars had to be shifted constantly to avoid revealing positions by fire blast.

Communications proved to be a bright spot. Although radio became the sole means of communication, the SCR-300's worked almost perfectly, aided by the proximity of the bridgehead to the battalion command post in Dornot. When

Company F's radio was battered by fire and Company G's lost and believed captured, Company F joined in the use of Company K's radio and Company G shared Company E's. One SCR-300, which had been taken across with the men of the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, had been almost immediately destroyed; but the forty-eight armored infantrymen, reduced to an even smaller number by continuing casualties, were soon virtually integrated into the rifle companies. Adequate replacement batteries for the SCR-300's were supplied satisfactorily at night. Even if the batteries had given out, communications personnel were prepared to switch the battalion SCR-284 to the same frequency as the company SCR-536's. No attempt was made to lay telephone wire across the river, but an adequate net existed on the west bank. A double trunk line from the 2d Battalion to the 11th Infantry command post was shot up so badly that repair was impossible and another line had to be laid. The 2d Battalion also had telephone connections with the 3d Battalion, its own aid station and observation post, and the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion. Although a line was laid the first night from the 2d Battalion CP to the crossing site, it was shelled out so quickly that replacement was not immediately attempted.

The 11th Infantry regimental observation post during the action was in a former German bunker atop the hill mass just northwest of Dornot. A forward regimental command post was in another bunker a few hundred yards behind the observation post on the reverse slope of the hill.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Interv with Morse.



INFANTRYMAN AT FOOTBRIDGE OVER RAILROAD near Dornot. *Soldier is carrying both a .30-caliber machine gun and a submachine gun M-3 (grease gun).*

The supply performance of the first night was repeated the night of 9 September by men of both the 2d and 3d Battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Platoons, even to manning the assault boats. Supply was under the direction of 2d Lt. Tyrus L. Mizer, 2d Battalion S-4.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Moselle River Crossing. With the 2d Battalion and Company K in the initial assault went the follow-

The combined 2d and 3d Battalion aid station, under Capt. John M. Hoffman, ing ammunition: 5,000 rounds with each light machine gun; 9,000 rounds with each heavy machine gun; and 100 rounds with each 60- and 81-mm. mortar. Transported later were: 1,000 rounds of 60- and 81-mm. mortar ammunition; 60,000 rounds of .30-caliber in machine gun belts; 13,000 rounds of .30-caliber in 8-round clips and 6,000 in 5-round clips for BAR's; 200 antitank "bazooka" rockets; 200 rifle grenades; and 200 hand grenades.

2d Battalion surgeon, Capt. Emanuel Feldman, assistant regimental surgeon, and Capt. Panfilo C. Di Loreto, 3d Battalion surgeon, continued to operate in the cellars of Dornot. To assist evacuation, a casualty relay point was established, shifting from the railroad underpass to the first house in the eastern edge of Dornot according to the vagaries of enemy shelling. Enemy fire was usually so heavy at the crossing site in daylight that litter bearers could not remain in the vicinity. Although medics made occasional trips to the site, many wounded had to make their way back alone as far as the railroad underpass. At approximately 2300 the night of 9 September, four men of Collecting Company C, 5th Medical Battalion,<sup>50</sup> crossed by boat to the east bank, collected casualties from the bridgehead, and returned. As they were preparing to enter the boat for a second trip, a round from an enemy tank blew the craft from the water. Although infantrymen and aid men continued to get their wounded comrades across, theirs was the last actual evacuation from the bridgehead by west-bank medics.

Enemy casualties were no doubt higher than American, but there was a steady attrition among the defenders, and no reinforcements were coming into help. Although it was obvious to anyone who knew the local situation that the little perimeter could not hold out much longer, the defenders had the temerity on the morning of 10 September to call for German surrender. If the Germans did not capitulate, noted the War Diary of the *37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, the Americans promised to deliver such a

concentration of fire as their enemies had never seen before.

Not long after this demand for surrender, the commander of the *2d Battalion, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, was killed by American mortar fire, and the commander of his *6th Company* was wounded. Possibly because of these and other casualties, the German units on the north and northeast of the horseshoe woods made an unauthorized withdrawal to Jouy-aux-Arches but were ordered to return to their positions. Later the *2d* and *4th Battalions* of the regiment were formed into *Kampfgruppe Ulrich* and ordered to defend Jouy-aux-Arches, apparently a continuation of a strange German preoccupation about the defense of the northern village. While the Americans throughout the action had been most concerned with the forts of the Verdun Group, the Germans on the ground had shown more concern about Jouy-aux-Arches.<sup>51</sup>

#### *1st and 3d Battalions, 11th Infantry*

Since the original Dornot crossing on 8 September, the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, had continued to support the bridgehead from defensive positions astride the high ground south and west of Dornot. On 8 September its Company K had crossed into the bridgehead. The 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry, which had originally been along the Moselle to the south near Arnaville, was relieved late on 8 September by elements of the

<sup>51</sup> *37th SS Pz Gren Regt* Miscellaneous File. Unless otherwise noted, this section is based on the following sources: Moselle River Crossing; Combat Interv 38 with Sikes, Halverson; *Eleventh Infantry*; *Fifth Infantry Division*; 11th Inf AAR, Sep 44; Co K, 11th Inf, Morning Rpts, 9-10 Sep 44; Interv with Lt Col S. E. Otto (formerly actg S-3, 5th Div Arty), 5 May 50.

<sup>50</sup> T/5 Gearhart, T/4 George C. Berner, Sgt Leo W. Phelps, and Pvt Ernest A. Angell.

10th Infantry and ordered to move to high ground northwest of Dornot in order to protect the left flank of the regiment. Despite casualties from heavy enemy shelling, the 1st Battalion by early morning of 9 September had taken up positions extending generally from Dornot to the vicinity of Hill 366 to the northwest.

The 11th Infantry still knew virtually nothing about what was opposing it on the north—the enemy position that turned out to be Fort Driant. Although Colonel Lemmon, 2d Battalion commander, had sent a small patrol in that direction early on 9 September, the patrol had not emerged from the woods and had not discovered Fort Driant. Late on 9 September the 1st Battalion was ordered to send a patrol to investigate the area. A combat patrol from Company B went out that night, returning the next morning with the 11th Infantry's first concrete information that a German fortification of some type existed on the regiment's north flank.<sup>52</sup>

#### *Withdrawal at Dornot, 10–11 September*

With other elements of the 5th Infantry Division crossing the Moselle south of Dornot in the vicinity of Arnaville, General Irwin decided early on 10 September that the Dornot bridgehead could be withdrawn without undue hazard to the new crossing. Because radio silence was imposed on such a message, two volunteers from Company I, 11th Infantry, Sgts. Arch H. Crayton and Frank Noren, swam the river in late afternoon to take the withdrawal order to Captain Gerrie, the bridgehead commander. Both sergeants carried copies of the order in the

<sup>52</sup> Statement, Capt Connor to Hist Div; Interv with Lemmon.

event one did not get through, but both made the trip safely and plans for evacuation were readied to go into effect at 2115, 10 September. That same evening at 2000, the Germans, unaware of the Americans' impending withdrawal, issued an attack order for an all-out assault against the little bridgehead. Using all elements of the *37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment* (except the *3d Battalion*), plus supporting tanks and artillery, the attack was to jump off an hour and three quarters after the Americans were scheduled to begin their withdrawal.

Supporting the American withdrawal, the engineers planned to use the few remaining leaky assault boats and a few rubber reconnaissance boats for removing the wounded, while ropes strung across the river were to aid the able-bodied. The reconnaissance boats were to be inflated and carried during daylight from the bivouac area of Company C, 204th Engineers, to the edge of the woods atop the Dornot hills. After darkness they were to be carried by hand to the crossing site. A floating line, consisting of six rubber reinforcing inserts ("sausages") connected end to end with rope, was to be constructed as an added means of assisting the able-bodied. One platoon of Company C, 204th Engineers, was to continue its work at the crossing site while the remainder of the company readied equipment and brought it to the river. Also assisting at the crossing site was to be one platoon of Company C, 7th Engineers.

In preparation for the withdrawal, the 3d Platoon, Company I, 11th Infantry, moved at midday to a position between Ancy-sur-Moselle and the crossing site, facing generally northeast. Its mission was to decrease the cross fire from the

bridgehead's left. The 2d Platoon was directed to take positions during the afternoon along the right of the lagoon to cover the bridgehead's right flank, while the 1st Platoon was directed to move soon after dark to positions along the riverbank near the northern edge of the lagoon. In the course of these movements during the afternoon, the Company I commander was seriously wounded and 1st Lt. Raymond W. Bitney assumed command.

The few officers and noncommissioned officers remaining in the bridgehead were to organize the operations on the east bank, withdrawal to be by swimming, boats, and expedient floats. All weapons and equipment were to be thrown into the water. Guides were to be posted in the rear of Dornot to direct the men to an assembly area where hot food, coffee, and clothes would be available. Not only was the bridgehead to be evacuated but also the entire area around the crossing site and Dornot, because Colonel Lemmon felt that once the Germans became aware of American withdrawal they would plaster the west bank with shellfire. American artillery, which would continue to fire its usual defensive fires around the bridgehead perimeter, was to increase in intensity upon a green flare signal to be fired by 1st Lt. Richard A. Marshall, Company I, as soon as the evacuation was complete. Upon the signal, the artillery was to concentrate on the horseshoe woods and the area between the woods and the enemy forts in the hope of catching enemy troops that would almost certainly move in as soon as the evacuation was discovered.

The 2d and 3d Platoons, Company I, effectively neutralized enemy small arms fire on the crossing site during the after-

noon, but at the cost of a number of killed and wounded by the enemy's artillery reaction. About 2100 the 1st Platoon, Company I, with Lieutenant Marshall, the two platoons of engineers, and a few men from the 2d Battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon, who brought with them nine litters, reached the river at the crossing site. There was miraculously no shelling at the site itself. Along the road between the railroad and Dornot, however, the engineers of Company C, 204th, who were transporting the reconnaissance boats, ropes, and reinforcing inserts, were subjected to heavy shelling and thus delayed in reaching the river until approximately 2200. But already the withdrawal had begun with three bullet-riddled assault boats and one rope.

Men on the east bank assembled in the darkness at the crossing site, where loading of wounded was supervised by Captain Gerrie. The able-bodied shed their equipment and clothes and began to make their way individually across the river, by swimming, by holding to the one available rope, or by utilizing buoyant devices such as empty water cans or ammunition tins. Although the river was only about ninety yards wide and six to seven feet deep, the water was intensely cold and the current swift, and many men were drowned. Others were saved from drowning by the strength and courage of their companions. Some men, like Private Rex of Company G and T/5 Rea of Company K, made a number of trips to assist other swimmers. An F Company officer, 1st Lt. James E. Wright, was seen to make one crossing and go back to assist others, but he was not heard from again. Many men arrived in the rear assembly area completely naked.

Since the reconnaissance boats had not

yet arrived, transporting the wounded was a slow process. One of the three assault boats was swamped at the east bank on its first trip when too many men crowded into it. In the other two, the profusion of bullet holes made constant bailing necessary. Discipline in loading was generally excellent, but at one point, when Captain Gerrie left to search the woods for others, a group of men became panic stricken. They were forced back into loading formation by 1st Lt. Ross W. Stanley, Company G, assisted by Sergeant Hembree, Company E, and T. Sgt. George A. Gritzmacher, Company K. Only when the 204th Engineers arrived and put the rubber reconnaissance boats and floating reinforcing inserts into operation about 2230 did the evacuation of wounded speed up appreciably.

As the last boatloads of wounded were leaving the far bank, Lieutenant Marshall and his communications sergeant, armed with the important green flare for calling down the prearranged fires of the supporting artillery, crossed to the east bank to determine that no men had been left behind. (Many men were so exhausted that they went to sleep while waiting their turn in the boats.) Already Lieutenant Stanley, Company G, who was in the last boat, had made a last-minute check, but Lieutenant Marshall could not be satisfied until he himself had investigated. Lieutenant Stanley's boat pushed out into the stream, leaving Lieutenant Marshall and his communications sergeant alone on the east bank. One or two German tanks came down to the river's edge, firing point-blank across the river at the withdrawal activity. While Lieutenant Marshall and the sergeant hugged the ground to avoid detection, one enemy shell hit a boat carrying men

of Company H, just in front of that of Lieutenant Stanley, ripping away the front of the boat. A number of Company H's missing personnel were presumed to have been in that boat.

With Lieutenant Marshall and his communications sergeant still on the east bank and the last boatloads of evacuees and crews leaving the water on the west bank, an enemy signal flare went up. By coincidence, the enemy flare was green. Knowing that no matter who had fired the green flare, the American artillery would soon respond, Lieutenant Marshall and his communications sergeant hurriedly pushed out into the river in their rubber reconnaissance boat. The artillery did respond quickly, but only two shells fell short in the river. The little rubber boat and its occupants went unharmed.

This green flare had not only called down American artillery fire but possibly German fire as well, for in the enemy attack order issued earlier use of a green flare was to mean "shift fire forward." The presence of German tanks, use of the green flare, and re-establishment of contact between Jouy-aux-Arches and Corny before daylight the next day indicated that the Germans had launched their all-out attack as planned, only to find that the little American bridgehead had been withdrawn, unwittingly, with only minutes to spare.

Despite precautions to see that no men were left in the bridgehead, at least one man, Pvt. Joseph I. Lewakowski, Company G, had either fallen asleep or lost consciousness in his foxhole about fifty yards from the river. He awoke the next morning just as day was breaking. Climbing from his covered foxhole to find himself alone, he "walked across

dead Germans from his foxhole to the river bank.” (These German dead may have been casualties from American artillery fire called down by the German signal flare.) Pulling himself across the river by the ropes, which had been left in position on the chance that someone might have been left behind, Private Lewakowski made his way to the rear and rejoined his company.<sup>53</sup>

In the assembly area after the withdrawal, the first estimate of bridgehead losses could be made. Company K, which had reinforced the 2d Battalion in the horseshoe perimeter, emerged from the three-day battle with no officers and only fifty men. The three rifle companies of the 2d Battalion had only two officers among them, and their total casualties numbered over 300. The 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, which had fought on both sides of the river, likewise suffered severely and sustained 200 casualties in its four days of action. In the five days following the withdrawal, evacuation of combat exhaustion cases soared in all units.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> This section based on the following sources: Moselle River Crossing; Combat Interv 38 with Sikes, Halverson; Combat Interv 38 with Engineer Officers on Bridgehead Operations (hereafter cited as Combat Interv 38 with unidentified engr offs); *Eleventh Infantry*; *Fifth Infantry Division*; 23d Armd Inf Bn, CCB, 11th Inf, 19th FA Bn AAR's and Unit Jnls, Sep 44; 23d Armd Inf Bn, 2d Bn, 11th Inf, Cos I and K, 11th Inf, Morning Rpts, Sep 44; Inters with Lemmon and Lemmon-Yuill; Attack order, *37th SS Pz Gren Regt*, 10 Sep 44, found in *37th SS Pz Gren Regt* Miscellaneous File. Regimental records of the *37th SS Pz Gren Regt* cannot be found. Although the *37th SS Pz Gren Regt* Miscellaneous File makes no mention of the German attack, the diary concerns itself only with the *2d Battalion*, whose role in this attack was passive and which would thus conceivably not mention the details of the attack.

<sup>54</sup> Morning Rpts, which did not list a casualty until it was unquestionably determined, sometimes as late as a month after it occurred, show the following

The Dornot bridgehead fight had been primarily an infantry-artillery battle with armored commitment limited to the Germans. Company C, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, with two platoons in firing positions near Dornot, did little firing except for ten rounds on 9 September at two enemy tanks near the east-bank town of Corny; one tank was believed hit. Company B, 735th Tank Battalion, waiting for a bridge to be built before joining the fight, did no firing. Air support, although requested many times during the battle, was not furnished until the last day, 10 September, when P-47's of the 23d Squadron, 36th Fighter Bomber Group, XIX Tactical Air Command, made four raids on Forts St. Blaise and Sommy, dropping twelve 250-pound bombs and twenty-three 500-pound bombs. Later investigation showed that the bombs caused no structural damage on the heavy forts.<sup>55</sup>

figures for the period 7-15 September 44. It is the opinion of the historian that most of the casualties occurring during the Dornot fight were recorded during this period, that the large number of nonbattle casualties was a direct result of the bridgehead battle, and that the units concerned suffered few, if any, casualties between 10 and 15 September.

	KIA	MIA	WIA	Non-battle	TOTAL
23d Armd Inf Bn	1	55	159	25	240
2d Bn, 11th Inf	40	28	172	219	459
Cos I & K, 11th Inf	11	5	74	69	159
three engr cos	3	2	62	20	87
Total *	55	90	467	333	945

\* Exclusive of artillery forward observer parties.

<sup>55</sup> 818th TD Bn, 735th Tk Bn, AAR's, Sep 44; XIX TAC Opns File, 8-10 Sep 44. For an exceptionally detailed study of bomb damage on Fort St. Blaise, see report of The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Fort St. Blaise, Verdun Group,

On 11 September the 2d Battalion and Company K moved to division reserve in an assembly area near Gorze where they began to absorb replacements in men and equipment. The 23d Armored Infantry Battalion reverted to its parent organization, CCB, 7th Armored Division, moving

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Metz, France, copy filed in OCMH. "Bombs less than 2,000 lbs. caused no material damage and 2,000 lb. bombs only caused damage when penetration into the concrete was gained or a very near miss occurred. Near misses produced some spalling from the concrete walls." Page 1.

for rest and reorganization to the vicinity of les Baraques, just west of Gorze.<sup>56</sup>

It had been a costly fight at Dornot against a determined enemy. Without reinforcements the men had been unable to consolidate or expand their bridgehead. They had nevertheless held against almost staggering odds until ordered to withdraw. Just how much their holding had affected the try for another bridgehead south of Dornot at Arnaville is apparent in a study of that later crossing.

<sup>56</sup> 11th Inf, 23d Armd Inf Bn, AAR's, Sep 44.

## CHAPTER II

# The Crossing at Arnaville (10–11 September)

Late on 8 September, the day of the Dornot crossing, General Irwin had ordered the commander of the 10th Infantry, Col. Robert P. Bell, to force a second crossing of the Moselle approximately two and a half miles south of Dornot, near the village of Arnaville. (See *Map II*.) General Irwin took this step after having decided that the Dornot bridgehead was too rigidly contained to be exploited successfully. Already during late afternoon the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry, had moved into defensive positions, relieving the 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry, astride the high ground west of the river in the vicinity of Arnaville. Assigning the 10th the mission of crossing the river and securing the high ground north of the village of Arry, General Irwin had set the date of crossing for 10 September but had left the exact hour and site to the discretion of the regimental commander.<sup>1</sup>

Early on 9 September Colonel Bell went forward with his reconnaissance party to Arnaville, a tiny village just west of the railroad track that paralleled the Moselle. Finding that the area had not

been completely cleared of the enemy, the party divided into two patrols and made its way to the river. Parallel to the railroad track and the river the Americans came upon a deep canal, which could be expected to complicate later bridging operations. They found however, that infantry could cross at a lock in the canal. Although approximately 200 yards of open, marshy land extended between the canal and the river, at one place a tree-shaded trail provided concealment to the water's edge. The riverbank itself was suitable for launching assault boats. Detailed engineer reconnaissance could not be made until later, but it appeared that a suitable bridge site existed where a military bridge had been constructed and later destroyed by the French Army in the campaign of 1940. On the near bank the two hills flanking Arnaville on the north and south covered the Bayonville–Arnaville approach road and provided direct-fire positions for supporting the assault. Arnaville was approximately one mile south of the larger west-bank village of Novéant and approximately two and a half miles north of another west-bank village, Pagny-sur-Moselle, in the XII Corps zone.

Beyond the river was another stretch of some 500 yards of open, marshy flatland. A network of trails through it led

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted this section is based on the following sources: Moselle River Crossing; Irwin Diary; Combat Interv 38 with unidentified engr offs; *Tenth Infantry*; *Fifth Infantry Division*; 10th Inf, 5th Div, 1103d Engr (C) Gp, AAR's and Unit Jnls; author's visit to area, Jun 49; Ltr, Col Bell to Hist Div, 5 Apr 50.

to Voisage Farm at the intersection of the Arry road with the Metz-Pont-à-Mousson highway. From the north-south Metz highway, the ground rose abruptly to dominating east-bank hills. To the reconnaissance party, two of these, Hill 386 in the Bois des Anneaux and the wooded Côte de Faye (Hills 325, 370, and 369) seemed to offer natural defensive positions and were later assigned as battalion objectives. On the maps used by the reconnaissance party, Hill 325 on the Côte de Faye appeared wooded. In reality it was a bare knob exposed to direct fire from Forts Sommy, St. Blaise, and Driant. Although Colonel Bell realized that the dominant terrain feature in the area was Hill 396, one thousand yards east of Hill 386, he felt that he could not expect his two assault battalions to take and hold this hill the first night. Also impressed with the consideration that up to this time no attempt to establish a bridgehead across the Moselle had succeeded, except the tentative foothold now held at Dornot, Colonel Bell recognized that the success of his regiment was mandatory and he did not want to assume more than he could accomplish.

Southeast of Voisage Farm on the steep slopes of the east-bank hills stood the village of Arry, and northwest of the Côte de Faye and beside the river, the village of Corny. Another factor of terrain which was to prove important was the convergence in the vicinity of the crossing site in the Moselle valley of two defiles from the west, at Arnaville and at Novéant, and a shallow draw leading from Voisage Farm to a saddle between Hills 369 and 386.

Returning about 1400 to his command post in Chambley, Colonel Bell issued his

attack order to his regiment and its usual combat team elements: the 46th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. howitzers); Company B, 7th Engineer Combat Battalion; Company B, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion (with one platoon of Reconnaissance Company, 818th, attached); Company B, 735th Tank Battalion; and Collecting Company B, 5th Medical Battalion. Also available to assist the river crossing by ferrying and bridging was the 1103d Engineer Combat Group, including the 551st Heavy Ponton Battalion, which was prepared to construct the bridge. Thirteen field artillery battalions were available to furnish supporting fire.<sup>2</sup> Designating the hour of crossing as moonrise, 0055, 10 September, Colonel Bell ordered his 1st Battalion to lead the assault and capture Hill 386 in the Bois des Anneaux. The 2d Battalion was to follow at 0400 and capture the Côte de Faye (Hills 325, 370, and 369). The 3d Battalion was initially to hold its positions on the high ground in the vicinity of Arnaville, support the operations by fire as called for by the assault battalions, and protect the crossing site. Assault boats were to be manned at the outset by Company B, 7th Engineers, which was to be assisted in later ferrying operations by the 204th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 1103d Engineer Combat Group. Since Colonel Bell's attack plan depended upon surprise, the engineers were to make no preparations or further reconnaissance

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<sup>2</sup> 5th Div Arty: 19th, 21st, 46th, and atchd 284th (the 50th and atchd 241st were in support of the 2d Inf to the north); Corps Arty: 695th and 558th (5th FA Gp; the 274th, also a part of the 5th FA Gp, was in support of the 2d Inf); 270th, 277th, and 739th (203d FA Gp); and 177th, 773d, and 943d (204th FA Gp); plus CCB, 7th Armd Div, Arty: 434th Armd FA Bn.

before dark except to assemble sixty assault boats and crews in covered positions in the vicinity of Arnaville. The artillery plan, prepared with the advice of Lt. Col. James R. Johnson, 46th Field Artillery Battalion commander, called for no preparatory fires unless the crossing was detected. Although guns would lay on preparation fires across 1,200 yards of front beyond the river, the only officer who could call for them was the artillery liaison officer with the 1st Battalion, Capt. George S. Polich. Check concentrations on almost every possible point of difficulty were available on call by any officer. One platoon of both Cannon Company and Antitank Company was attached to each rifle battalion and was to cross by ferry or bridge, whichever was first available. Company B, 735th Tank Battalion, was ordered to cross as soon as the bridge could be completed, while Company B, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, was to move after dark to hull-down positions on the bare hills north and south of Arnaville, prepared to engage enemy tanks and vehicles beyond the river. An innovation in the Third Army was due for a test in support of the crossing: the 84th Chemical Smoke Generator Company was ordered to initiate at daylight a front-line large-area smoke screen around the crossing site as protection against German observation. This project would be a new combat experience for all concerned, including the chemical troops. The regimental command post was to be at Vandelainville, west of Bayonville.

#### *Battalion Preparations*

The 1st Battalion commander was evacuated with yellow jaundice a short

while before the attack order was given, and the executive officer, Maj. Wilfrid H. Haughey, Jr., assumed command. Issuing a warning order to his companies and directing them to a forward assembly area at Villecey-sur-Mad, near Waville, Major Haughey left with his S-3, company commanders, and artillery liaison officer to reconnoiter the crossing site. There he made his attack plans: the advance was to be made in column of companies, A, C, D, Battalion Headquarters, and B. Once across the river the same formation was to be followed, using two power-line clearings on the skyline as guides to the objective, Hill 386. Company A was then to swing left, eventually to tie in with the 2d Battalion, whose objective was the Côte de Faye, including Hill 369, to the north. Company C was to swing right, pushing out on the southern nose of Hill 386 in the direction of Arry. Company B was to dig in along the western edge of the woods on the rear slope of the hill, mop up any resistance bypassed, and guard the right flank and rear against any enemy countereffort from Arry. With each of the two assault companies was to be a platoon of heavy machine guns of Company D. The men were to carry with them a full canteen of water, all ammunition possible, and three units of K ration. A rear battalion command post was to be maintained initially in Arnaville.

When the battalion officers returned to Villecey about 1700, enough daylight hours remained to permit the platoon leaders to go to Bayonville, where they obtained a brief and distant view of the objective; but there was no time to give the noncommissioned officers or riflemen even that much of a reconnaissance. Al-



ARRY. Road with gooseneck curve out of Arry in upper left of photograph leads to the Voisage Farm. The southwest slope of Hill 386 is visible in upper right.

though most of the men of the 1st Battalion were veterans of one river crossing (the Seine), they were aware of the terrific pounding from artillery and counterattacks which the 11th Infantry's Dornot bridgehead was receiving and sensed that this crossing would prove more difficult than their crossing of the Seine.

Meanwhile, the commander of the 2d Battalion, Maj. William E. Simpson, had taken his company commanders and staff to the hill south of Arnaville, overlooking

the crossing site, and had decided to launch his attack also in column of companies. After the scheduled crossing at 0400, Company E, in the lead, was to advance past Voisage Farm and move up the shallow draw between its objective and Hill 386. Then it was to turn left (north) and follow the ridge line of the Côte de Faye to take, in turn, Hills 369, 370, and 325. Following was to be Company G and then Company E, the latter assigned the mission of mopping up in the battalion's rear and on its left

flank. One machine gun platoon of Company H was to be attached to each of the two forward companies, and the 81-mm. mortar platoon was to follow Company G. An advanced command post was to accompany Major Simpson at the head of Company E.

The problem of getting adequate maps, the lack of which had plagued commanders since the start of the Metz campaign, was finally resolved, even as the 1st and 2d Battalion troops prepared to move toward the river. Photomaps on a 1:25,000 scale were received at 2300 the night of 9 September.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Assault Crossing*

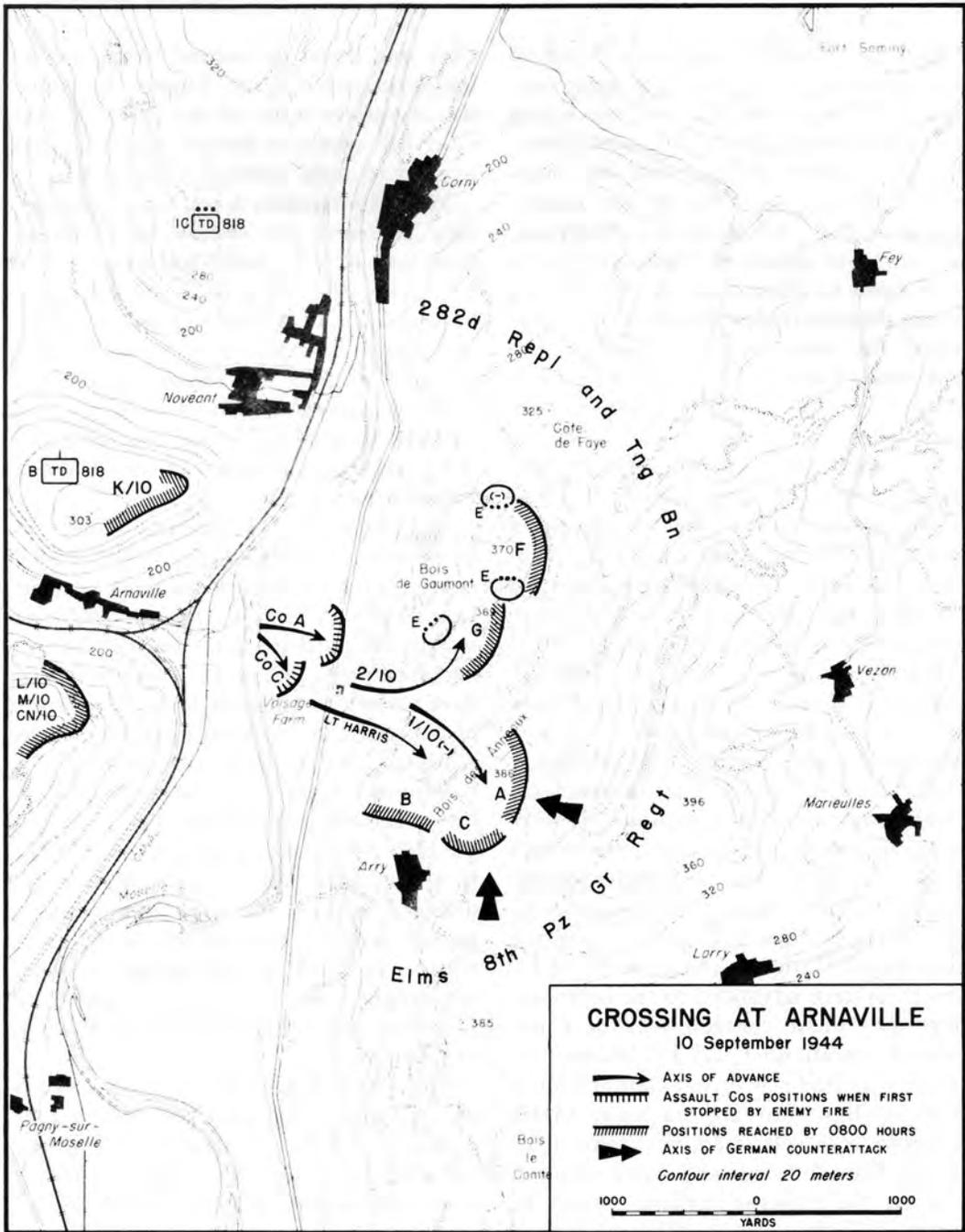
Met on the west bank of the Moselle Canal by guides from Company B, 7th Engineers, the leading squads of the 1st Battalion, those of Company A, crossed the canal footbridges and reached the crossing site at approximately 0035. The company having been previously divided into assault boat parties, there was one guide for each of twenty boats, numbered 1 through 20, which were supposed to be waiting with their assigned engineer crews. But the engineers were not yet ready, and it was 0115 before loading began. As the boats pushed out into the water, enemy outposts along the far bank fired a few scattered rounds from their rifles, but there were no casualties and no delay. On the far shore the

company commander, Capt. Elias R. Vick, Jr., reorganized his men and by 0200 was ready to move toward the objective. In the meantime, the engineers returned to the west bank and began transporting men of Company C. By the time Company A had reorganized, two platoons of Company C were also across the river.

Company A's movement across the flat tableland toward the north-south Metz highway and Voisage Farm brought the enemy to life. (*Map 2*) Machine guns raked the bottom land and the crossing site, and mortars began to find the range. Although a red enemy signal flare went up, enemy artillery reaction was slow; it was not until daybreak that the first artillery concentrations began to fall. This delay was probably due to poor enemy communications—brought about by shortages in personnel and equipment—so poor that sometimes it took several hours for a message from troops in the Moselle valley to reach higher headquarters in Metz.<sup>4</sup> The 2d and 3d Platoons of Company A deployed and advanced in the face of machine gun fire, still inaccurate, to the north-south highway. Here, more accurate fire from a machine gun at the Voisage Farm crossroads enfiladed the road and pinned the men to the ditches on either side. When 2d Lt. Karl Greenberg, 2d Platoon leader, made his way toward the crossroads to locate the enemy gun, he was fired upon and wounded. The company commander, Captain Vick, moving to the highway in an attempt to get his assault platoons in motion again, was hit by the machine gun fire. He died of wounds before he could be evacuated.

<sup>3</sup> This section based on the following: Moselle River Crossing; *Tenth Infantry*; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 9 Sep 44; Combat Interv 38 with Simpson, Capt John L. Lynch, arty ln off, and Capt John H. Lathrop, CO, Co E, 2d Bn, 10th Inf (hereafter cited as Combat Interv 38 with Simpson-Lynch-Lathrop); Interv with Lt Col William M. Breckinridge (formerly Ex Off, 10th Inf), 30 Mar 50; and Ltr, Col Bell to Hist Div.

<sup>4</sup> MS # B-042 (Krause).



MAP 2

Brooks

Back at the crossing site, darkness and enemy fire had brought confusion. Ready to cross with his two remaining platoons, the Company C commander, Capt. William B. Davis, could find engineer crews for only six of the twenty assault boats. While he was searching, the executive officer of Company D, 1st Lt. Francis L. Carr, took part of his men across, his own troops manning the boats. When the boats were returned to the west bank, Captain Davis followed Lieutenant Carr's example and manned the boats with his infantrymen. Once on the far shore, the officers attempted reorganization, but the enemy fire had prompted the men to crouch behind a six-foot protecting bank, and here Companies C and D became intermingled in the darkness. Before they could move out, Company B was also landed.

Finally succeeding in reorganization, Company C pushed forward and took cover alongside a stone wall that surrounded a small orchard at the northwest corner of the Voisage Farm crossroads. The 81-mm. mortars of Company D were set up in a sunken road along the river's edge. The battalion commander, Major Haughey, had crossed with Company C, and while Company B waited near the river Major Haughey and his S-2, 1st Lt. Leo E. Harris, advanced to the highway. Here they made contact with the Company A commander, 2d Lt. Warren G. Shaw, who had succeeded Captain Vick. With daylight fast approaching, Major Haughey was well aware that permitting his battalion to be caught under observation on the exposed flatland would be virtual suicide. Meanwhile, Company F, leading element of the 2d Battalion, already delayed in its crossing by the 1st Battalion's late start, had crossed the

river and come up behind Company A. Its commander, Capt. Eugene M. Witt, was impatient to get off the tableland and onto his objective before daylight and wanted to push through Company A.

While Companies A and C were stalled, they returned the enemy fire, making good use of rifle grenades and 60-mm. mortars. The 1st Battalion artillery observer, 1st Lt. George Dutko, utilizing the previously registered check concentrations, secured 199 rounds of artillery fire, one concentration of which wiped out the crew of a 75-mm. antitank gun at a gooseneck curve in the Voisage Farm-Array road.

Sending his S-2, Lieutenant Harris, to reconnoiter quickly for the most favorable route to Hill 386, Major Haughey readied Companies A and C for a combined assault designed to carry the battalion to its objective. When Lieutenant Harris found what he believed to be an avenue of approach, he delayed no longer. Assembling one near-by platoon each of Companies A and C, in the growing light he led a dash past Voisage Farm and up the hill. When the platoons jumped off, they met little fire of any sort, but the distance and ascent were too great to permit such a pace all the way to the crest. The men paused at the western edge of the woods to reorganize and were joined as they waited by the 2d Platoon of Company C.

Since the remainder of Company A had not moved, Captain Witt directed his Company F to pass through. Streaming through a gap in a low wall east of the road, the leading platoon under 1st Lt. Andrew H. Paulishen was stopped temporarily by two enemy machine guns. A barrage of hand grenades dispatched the enemy, and the advance continued.

Generally following the trail that led east up the Voisage Farm draw, Company F turned north upon coming abreast of Hill 369, its first objective. The remainder of Company A, having at last begun to move, had followed Company F, and then turned to the south through the woods to reach the crest of Hill 386.

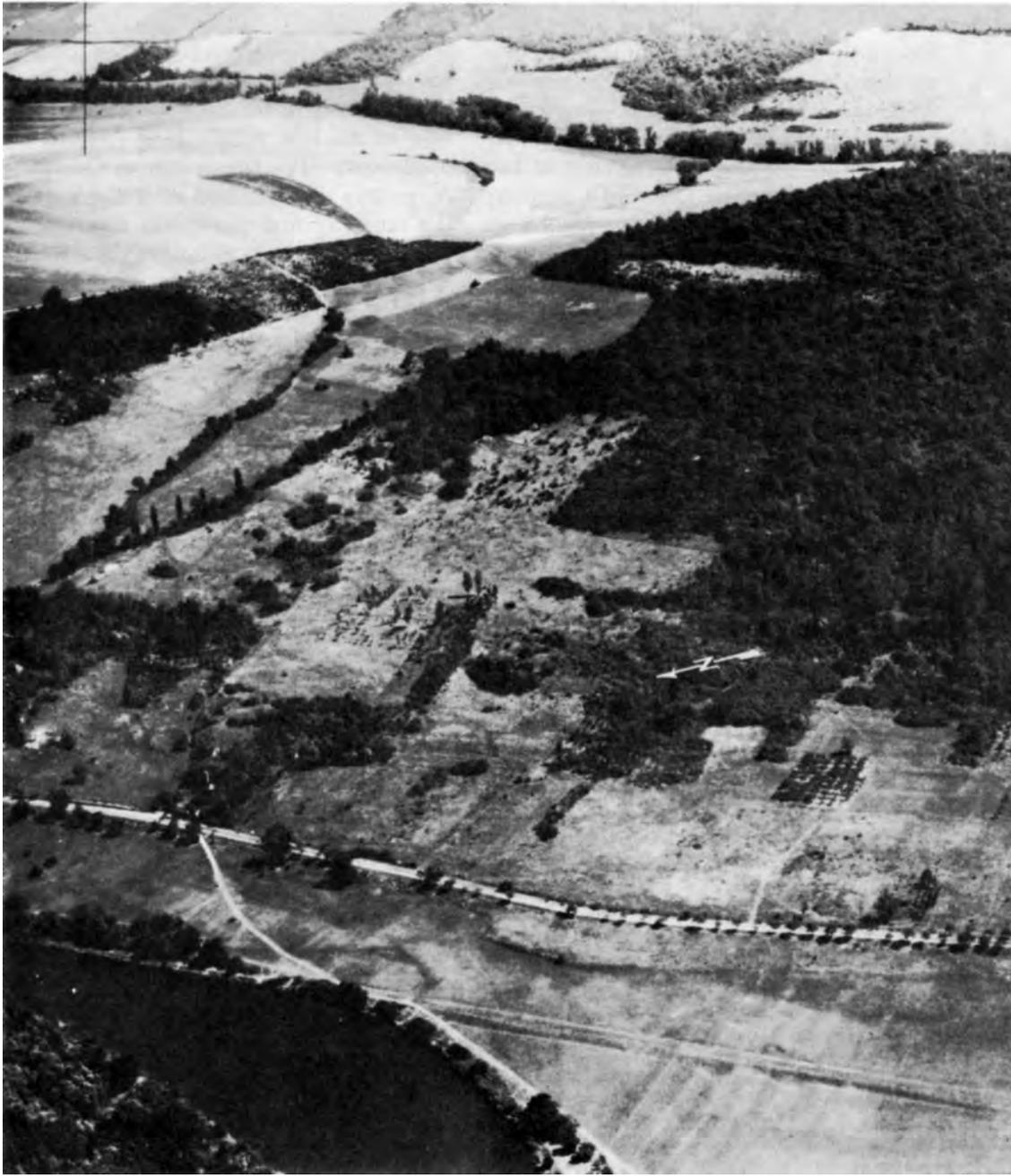
To the southeast, on the reverse slope of Hill 386, Lieutenant Harris, with one platoon of Company A and two of Company C, completed reorganization and began moving again toward the crest. Although the men encountered a small German force, which they engaged with "marching fire and bayonets,"<sup>5</sup> their advance to the crest was virtually unimpeded. At approximately the same time, S. Sgt. William J. Stone of Company D arrived at the crest from the north with a section of heavy machine guns. Having followed closely behind Company F until Company F turned north to Hill 369, the machine gun section had chased a small enemy force from the northern part of the crest. Immediately afterward the men began to dig in their weapons. Closely following them came 1st Lt. Robert B. Guy, also of Company D, and Lieutenant Dutko, the artillery observer, who began to reconnoiter for machine gun and mortar positions and observation

posts. The remainder of Company C soon joined its two leading platoons and began to dig in on the exposed southern nose of the hill, overlooking Arry to the southwest. The remainder of Company A, greatly disorganized after the fight at the highway and the climb through the woods, went into position on the left near Sergeant Stone's machine guns, but no contact was made with the 2d Battalion defenses to the north. Company D's 81-mm. mortars were set up on the left rear.

Shortly before 0830, Company B, still coming up from the river bottom, had passed the Voisage Farm crossroads when its 3d Platoon, bringing up the rear, noticed a German tank approaching from the north along the Metz highway. Taking cover, their bazooka team ready to fire, the men of the platoon saw the tank advance to the crossroads and halt. Although the bazooka team attempted to fire, its rocket did not discharge. The tank commander opened his turret, however, and the 3d Platoon guide shot him in the shoulder. Buttoning up quickly, the tank fired two rounds over the heads of the platoon. Just at that moment an enemy artillery concentration fell near the crossroads, and the tank sped back toward Corny. Meanwhile, Company B's 1st Platoon, seeing a Mark V tank advancing from the outskirts of Arry, took cover in abandoned foxholes along the Arry road. The Mark V pulled back into the town without firing. The platoon, followed by the rest of the company, then continued up the slope of Hill 386. A short while later the men saw the Mark V tank return, run over the foxholes where the 1st Platoon had been hiding, and retreat once more into Arry. By 1000, Company B had taken positions

<sup>5</sup> Although the term "marching fire and bayonets" became an ETO bromide and each instance of its use must be examined skeptically, the anonymous author of *Tenth Infantry* notes it in this instance and is supported by Colonel Breckinridge. See Interv with Breckinridge. See also A Combat Narrative—Crossing of the Moselle River by the Tenth Infantry Regiment of the 5th Infantry Division (hereafter cited as 10th Infantry Combat Narrative), copy in OCMH files through courtesy of Lt Col Alden P. Shipley (formerly CO, 3d Bn, 10th Inf). Neither Colonel Shipley nor Maj. Stanley Hays (formerly Executive Officer, 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry) believes that bayonets were used. Interv with Shipley and Hays, 26 Apr 50.

Hill 325



OBJECTIVES OF THE 2D BATTALION, 10th Infantry Regiment, in the Côte de Faye area. Large wooded area in the center is the Bois de Gaumont. Highway in foreground

Hill 370

Hill 369



*leads to Corny and Metz on the left and to Pont-à-Mousson on the right. Moselle River can be seen in lower left corner.*

from the right flank of Company C atop the southern crest of Hill 386 down the slope to an orchard not far from the edge of town. A patrol of one squad from the 3d Platoon, sent to investigate Arry, returned with the report that at least a platoon of German tanks and some infantry occupied the town.

The men of Company C had been assigned positions on the exposed southern nose of Hill 386. About 0830, in the midst of their efforts to dig into the rocky soil, a platoon of enemy infantry appeared to the right front, evidently having emerged from Arry. As the enemy platoon began to move in, Pfc. Wilbur H. Dodson, a light machine gunner on the right flank with the 1st Platoon, opened fire, accounting for most of the enemy before he himself was killed. Thus ended the first attempt by the Germans to recover the hilltop. It was only the first prick of the thorn which Arry was to become in the flesh of the bridgehead.<sup>6</sup>

### *The 2d Battalion Crossing*

Although enemy mortar fire continued to fall around the crossing site after the 1st Battalion crossing, Company F, leading the 2d Battalion, had begun its move in assault boats at 0430, only slightly behind schedule. Its boats were manned by Company B, 204th Engineers. Closing up behind Company A where it was stalled along the Metz highway, Captain Witt, Company F commander, finally passed his company through just at day-

break. The unit moved up the Voisage Farm draw until it was opposite Hill 369 and then turned north toward its objectives. Three fourths of the way up the hill, Lieutenant Paulishen's lead platoon had a brief engagement with a small force of entrenched enemy infantry, but otherwise the movement was uncontested. Passing initially along the forward edge of the Bois de Gaumont on Hill 369 and then just east of a trail that marked the crest of the ridge line, the company advanced quickly to Hill 370 and continued north toward Hill 325. Finding Hill 325 to be a bare, exposed knob, Captain Witt halted his company, and the men began to dig in along the eastern and northwestern edges of the woods where they had unrestricted fields of fire against Hill 325.

Close behind the leading company came Company G, its movement uncontested. Its men began to dig in across the eastern and southeastern brow of Hill 370 under cover of the woods. The company's left flank was at a jagged clearing in the woods on the southern nose of Hill 370 and its right flank on the southern slope of Hill 369, the company front thus extending almost a thousand yards. Because the distance to be covered was so great, the men were forced to spread their foxholes thin; even the closest were more than ten yards apart.

When Company E came forward behind Company G, its 3d Platoon was moved into the gap caused by the jagged clearing between the two forward companies. Two squads of the 2d Platoon went through the woods to the left rear to check for enemy stragglers and then dug in to the left rear of Company F's left flank. The remainder of Company

<sup>6</sup> Both this section and the section following are based on the following sources: Moselle River Crossing; *Tenth Infantry*; 10th Inf AAR, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 9-10 Sep 44 (from which most times of action were determined); Combat Interv 38 with Simpson-Lynch-Lathrop; Interv with Breckinridge.

E was held in reserve on the reverse slope of Hill 370. One platoon of heavy machine guns of Company H was emplaced with Company F's left flank on the northwest; another was with Company G's left flank at the jagged clearing. The 81-mm. mortars were set up within that part of the clearing which extended to the reverse slope of Hill 370. Major Simpson's battalion headquarters was also dug in on the hill's reverse slope in the woods.

Through the day, enemy action against the 2d Battalion was confined to scattered and occasional mortar and artillery fire until just at dusk a platoon of enemy tanks cruised across the bald crest of Hill 325, apparently in a reconnaissance move. Men of the 2d Battalion held their bazooka fire, although some opened up with small arms. When American artillery concentrations were called for and received, the enemy tanks withdrew.

#### *Counterattack From Arry*

While men of the 1st Battalion were still preparing their defensive positions in the rocky soil of Hill 386, at approximately 1230 shells from German tanks began to burst in the fir trees above Company C's command post at the southern edge of the woods. The command group was badly hit: the radio operator was killed and the company commander, Captain Davis, was wounded in both legs. Three Tiger tanks soon appeared on the bare southern slope of the hill from the direction of Arry. Followed soon by two other tanks, they moved diagonally across the front of Company C's right platoon (the 1st), firing as they went. The 1st Platoon's bazooka team opened fire but without

success, its rockets seeming to bounce off the heavy armor. The tanks pushed on, closing to within a hundred yards of the foxhole line. Cruelly exposed in their shallow holes, the men were ordered by 1st Lt. Carl E. Hansen, 1st Platoon, and 1st Lt. Issac H. Storey, 2d Platoon, to fall back to the tree line. Once they reached the woods, tree bursts from the tank guns brought even heavier casualties and confusion, and many men continued down the rear slope. The wounded company commander, Captain Davis, remained in action, calling for artillery and mortar support to stop the tanks. He would not give up until he finally collapsed and was started back on a stretcher, only to be hit a second time by shell fragments and killed.

Although no enemy infantry were observed, the lead tank commander opened his turret and waved, as if to signal supporting infantry forward. An automatic rifle team shot the enemy tanker, and by this time supporting mortar and artillery fire was falling. If enemy infantrymen were scheduled to follow, they did not, despite the confusion in the ranks of Company C.

In the meantime two more German tanks emerged from Arry and advanced toward the Company B positions along the Arry-Voisage Farm road. About seventy-five rounds of shellfire caused heavy casualties in Company B's 3d Platoon and command group, and a break-through threatened. T. Sgt. Walter E. Jensi of Company B followed alongside one of the tanks on the road, firing rifle grenades at its treads. When that effort failed, he tossed a hand grenade at the turret. Despite his failure to knock out the tank, the tenacity of Company B's 1st and 2d Platoons

prompted the two tanks to pull back into Arry, and the break-through was averted.

Although Company C had suffered heavily and was disorganized, the German tanks on the hill pushed no farther forward, moving on instead across the front of the battalion where they faced Company A. The men of Company A were careful to take advantage of the concealment offered by the woods in their area, and the enemy tanks soon ceased fire, although still remaining just outside effective bazooka range in front of the positions. Meanwhile Company C tried to reorganize. Its executive officer, 1st Lt. Eugene N. Dille, having assumed command after the company commander's death, sent one squad back to the original positions to outpost them and observe for further action, a second squad to regain contact with Company B, and a third to guard the company command post. Then Lieutenant Dille searched the reverse slope for others of the company. Learning that many of the men had retreated all the way to Voisage Farm, he eventually succeeded in locating about eighty and sending them back to their former positions.

This reoccupation of the open slope prompted the German tankers to return to action, and again the infantry had little protection on the exposed nose of the hill. But, in almost movie-like tradition, American P-47's suddenly entered the battle. They bombed and strafed the tanks, dangerously close to the fox-holes, but successfully. One bomb appeared to bounce as it hit the ground and skidded to within a few yards of a group of Company A men, but it did not explode. In the face of the planes, the German tanks at last withdrew.

The intervention by the P-47's, a part

of the XIX Tactical Air Command, was the first positive response to numerous previous infantry requests for air support in the Moselle battle. Early on 9 September the Ninth Air Force had ruled that the XX Corps attack could be adequately supported by artillery. But that evening reports of a steadily worsening situation reached the G-3 air officer at 12th Army Group headquarters. He therefore had authorized the release of as many fighter-bombers from the primary target at Brest as the commander of the XIX TAC should deem necessary for adequate bridgehead support. Although the XIX TAC still had many responsibilities—bombing at Brest, attacking with the XII Corps at Nancy, protecting the Third Army's exposed southern flank, and flying cover for heavy bombers over Germany—P-47's were made available. The planes that arrived at such an opportune time at Arry were from the 406th Fighter Bomber Group and had been vectored from a ground support mission in the Nancy area. They claimed fifteen enemy tanks destroyed. Besides assisting the 1st Battalion to repel the tanks, the planes bombed and strafed the enemy assembly point of Arry, leaving much of the town in flames. The only other air support of the day in the local bridgehead area was that of the 23d Squadron, 36th Group, which bombed Forts Sommy and St. Blaise in the Dornot bridgehead area.

Reports of the seriousness of the tank counterattack against the 1st Battalion had reached the 10th Infantry commander, Colonel Bell, about 1335. Thereupon he ordered his 3d Battalion, still in position astride the west-bank hills flanking Arnaville, to leave Companies L and M in place and prepare to cross Com-

panies I and K in order to capture Arry. While these preparations took place, the 1st Battalion set about reorganizing its lines. The Company A executive officer, 1st Lt. William H. Hallowell, who had been on the west bank organizing supplies, was sent forward to take command of Company A, which Lieutenant Shaw had been commanding since the original company commander's death soon after the river crossing. Collecting some sixty Company A men from where they had taken cover on the reverse slope, Lieutenant Hallowell moved to his company's positions on the battalion's left and reorganized them. The 2d Platoon was placed on the right, the 1st Platoon in the center, and the 3d on the left flank, echeloned to the left rear to protect the battalion's left flank and the heavy machine guns and mortars of Company D. The battalion commander, Major Haughey, then ordered Company B to move from its right-flank positions facing Arry and take over the Company C sector. This time the area designated took advantage of the concealment of the woods. Company C was then assembled at the western edge of the woods on the reverse slope and prepared to follow the 3d Battalion into Arry after its capture. Its mission was to establish road blocks with a platoon of antitank guns which were to be ferried across the river after dark. Despite the havoc caused initially by the enemy's noon counterattack, the 1st Battalion had actually given up only the practically untenable positions on the bare southern nose of Hill 386.

The Germans launched no more counterattacks against Hill 386 during the afternoon, but shellfire and long-range machine gun fire harassed the men there

for the rest of the day. A counterattack elsewhere was attempted soon after the 1st Battalion action when both tanks and infantry headed south from Corny, evidently in an effort to cut off the bridgehead at its base. With artillery observers and tank destroyer crewmen enjoying perfect observation from the west-bank hills, this enemy effort was doomed from the start. Company B, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, claimed one of the German tanks destroyed, and the others fell back on Corny.<sup>7</sup>

Through the first three days in the bridgehead battle, the supporting field artillery and tank destroyers received firing data from the forward companies through both forward observer and infantry radios that were in direct communication with a regimental set atop the regimental command post in a schoolhouse in Vandelainville. An operator at the regimental set relayed the information by telephone to the command post where the 46th Field Artillery Battalion commander, Colonel Johnson, was constantly on duty. The regimental commander felt that one slip in this communication system and a failure to get artillery fire at the precise moment needed would mean that his precarious bridgehead would be wiped out.<sup>8</sup>

In the Dornot bridgehead action, the Americans had experienced the initial good fortune of attacking on the boundary line between two German battalions. In the Arnaville action, that initial good

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<sup>7</sup> This section based on the following sources: Moselle River Crossing; *Tenth Infantry*; 10th Inf, 818th TD Bn, 46th FA Bn, AAR's, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 10 Sep 44; *Fifth Infantry Division*; Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, Ch. III, p. 143, citing Ninth AF Opns Jnl, 9 Sep 44; XIX TAC Opns File, 10 Sep 44.

<sup>8</sup> Ltr, Col Bell to Hist Div.

fortune had been even greater: the boundary between the German *XIII SS Corps* on the north and the *XLVII Panzer Corps* on the south ran just north of Voisage Farm. This line also divided the *282d Infantry Battalion*, attached to *Division Number 462*, on the north and the *8th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, a unit of the *3d Panzer Grenadier Division*, on the south. The infantry battalion was charged with the defense of the Côte de Faye and the panzer grenadiers with defense of Voisage Farm, Arry, and Hill 386. The counter-attack against Hill 386 was launched by elements of the *8th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, supported by attached tanks.<sup>9</sup>

#### *The 3d Battalion Attacks Arry*

In accordance with Colonel Bell's order at 1335, his 3d Battalion commander, Maj. Alden P. Shipley, had left Companies L and M in defensive positions on the west-bank hills flanking Arnville. Companies I and K moved to the river, crossing about 1735 at the same site as the other two battalions. The infantrymen took with them extra amounts of ammunition and extra bazookas and deposited them on the east bank to create a bridgehead stockpile.

With Company K on the left of the Voisage Farm–Arry road and Company I on the right, the advance moved past the former Company B positions facing the town and held up briefly on the out-

skirts while P-47's and artillery bombarded the objective. Then the rifle companies continued against virtually no resistance, ferreting the enemy from houses and cellars where he had sought cover from the bombardment. The Americans fired antitank grenades at three German tanks that were seen fleeing to the east toward Lorry, but the grenades bounced off and the tanks escaped. The town was cleared by 2130, and the regimental commander, Colonel Bell, ordered the companies to pull back to Voisage Farm: the 10th Infantry's lines were too extended and an open flank at Corny and a dangerous route of entry between Hills 369 and 386 necessitated a bridgehead reserve. Returning to Voisage Farm, the companies dug in, there to remain for several days, subjected to murderous enemy shelling.

Since Colonel Bell expected the 1st Battalion to hold Arry, and the 1st Battalion's plan was for Company C to establish road blocks within the town, either the withdrawal order was premature or Company C was late in moving in. In any event, it was 0300 when Company C headed into Arry. Advancing in column, led by the company commander, Lieutenant Dille, and the 3d Platoon leader, 1st Lt. Ralph R. Cuppeli, the depleted company marched down the main street. Lieutenant Dille saw two Germans approaching. Motioning for his men to hold their fire, he waited until the Germans came closer and then he himself fired, killing one. The other German quickly returned the fire, wounding Lieutenant Cuppeli and killing Lieutenant Dille.<sup>10</sup> Although T. Sgt. Robert

<sup>9</sup> Morning Sit Rpt, *Army Group G*, 11 Sep 44, found in *Army Group G KTB 2, Anlagen 1.IX.-30.IX.44*; MS # B-042 (Krause); MS # B-412 (Einem). Colonel Kurt von Einem was chief of staff of *XIII SS Corps*. The exact location of the boundary is not definite, but this deduction is based on prisoner of war information in 5th Division Unit Journal File, 10–11 September 1944, and a captured German map reproduced in *Tenth Infantry*.

<sup>10</sup> This account of Lieutenant Dille's death is taken from *Moselle River Crossing* which is based on contemporary interview information. It is supported

M. Johnson killed the German before he could cause further casualties, it was obvious that the enemy had reoccupied the town after the 3d Battalion's departure.<sup>11</sup>

The wounded Lieutenant Cuppeli gave orders for his platoon to withdraw, and the entire company followed in a mad scramble to escape. Reaching the fields to the north, Lieutenant Storey, the 2d Platoon leader, managed to restore order. He took command of the company and moved it back to the northern edge of the village, where the men began digging in. At 0430 heavy artillery fire, presumed to be both American and German, blanketed the area. With his handful of men diminished even more, Lieutenant Storey wanted to withdraw. He finally established communication with his battalion commander, and the company was withdrawn about 0800 the next morning (11 September) to the vicinity of the 1st Battalion command post on the reverse slope of Hill 386. Here again the men came under intense enemy shelling and suffered further casualties. On Lieutenant Storey's request, the company was moved to defensive positions on the left flank of Company A on Hill 386; now the company's strength was only forty-three men.

The 1st Battalion's 57-mm. antitank guns and its attached platoon from Antitank Company, which were scheduled to be part of the road block defenses in Arry, were ferried across the river during the night, but already Companies I and

K had withdrawn to Voisage Farm. Since the antitank guns could not be moved into Arry, they were hand-carried to positions on the right flank of Company B on the southwestern slope of Hill 386 where they could cover the town and the Arry-Voisage Farm road. The two remaining companies of the 3d Battalion (Companies L and M) and Major Shipley's 3d Battalion headquarters crossed the Moselle at approximately 1900. Battalion headquarters and the heavy weapons company moved to Voisage Farm to become a part of a bridgehead reserve even before Companies I and K withdrew from Arry to join them, and Company L went into a secondary defense covering the potentially dangerous Voisage Farm draw between the 1st and 2d Battalions. Another platoon of 57-mm. guns from Antitank Company went into position near the north flank of the bridgehead, covering Corny, and the 3d Battalion's antitank guns, ferried across during darkness, 11 September, were dug in just southeast of Voisage Farm to cover the road south to Arry.<sup>12</sup>

#### *The 11th Infantry Enters the Arnaville Fight*

About noon of 10 September, General Irwin, his plans already formulated for evacuating the 11th Infantry's Dornot bridgehead during the night, had ordered that the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, under Maj. William H. Birdsong, cross

by Interv with Hays, 26 Apr 50, but is contrary to the account in *Tenth Infantry* and to Interv with Breckinridge.

<sup>11</sup> The 3d Panzer Grenadier Division claimed to have "recaptured" Arry at 0200. Morning Sit Rpt, *Army Group G*, 11 Sep 44, found in *Army Group G KTB 2, Anlagen I.IX.-30.IX.44*.

<sup>12</sup> This section based on the following: *Moselle River Crossing*; *Tenth Infantry*; *Fifth Infantry Division*; 10th Inf AAR, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 10-11 Sep 44; Combat Interv 38 with Shipley, Capt John J. McCluskey, Co K, Capt Frank L. Bradley, Co M, and Capt Dale W. Baughman, arty In off, 3d Bn, 10th Inf (hereafter cited as Combat Interv 38 with Shipley-McCluskey-Bradley-Baughman); Ltr, Col Bell to Hist Div; Ltr, Col Shipley to Hist Div, 15 Mar 50; Interv with Shipley and Hays.

the Moselle, capture Corny, and protect the north flank of the Arnaville bridgehead. The battalion was badly depleted: its Company K was already a part of the hard-pressed Dornot bridgehead and its Company I was heavily engaged supporting the Dornot crossing from the west bank. Even should the battalion wait to cross until after the scheduled nighttime evacuation of the Dornot bridgehead, Companies I and K would not be able to join the new crossing, so diminished and fatigued were they from the intensive Dornot fight. To strengthen the 3d Battalion, Company B of the 11th Infantry was attached.<sup>13</sup>

Since the original Arnaville crossing area was congested with the movement of the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry, and the 10th's supporting units, Major Birdsong's battalion was ordered to reconnoiter for another crossing site near by. With his reconnaissance party the battalion commander crossed the Moselle Canal paralleling the river just southeast of Novéant on the debris of a demolished footbridge. Finding the terrain wooded between the canal and the river and informed by an attached engineer officer that he could construct a footbridge across the canal in time for the crossing, Major Birdsong chose this site. Because ferrying operations were to begin soon after dark at the original Arnaville site, arrangements were made with the 10th Infantry for transporting the battalion's

antitank platoon, the attached 2d Platoon from Antitank Company, 11th Infantry, and radio and litter jeeps to the far shore. There they would join their parent battalion in the vicinity of Voisage Farm. Upon crossing, the 3d Battalion, 11th (less Companies I and K, plus Company B), was to be attached to the 10th Infantry. Crossing was scheduled for 0200 (11 September).

Construction of a footbridge across the canal took longer than anticipated, with the result that the 3d Battalion's leading company, Company L, was two hours late in getting started. The assault boats, manned by troops of the 160th Engineers, were finally pushed out into the darkness on the river, the men of Company L taking with them a telephone and laying wire as they went. With Company L presumably landed on the far shore, the engineers returned. Company B was loading when the Company L commander, Capt. Robert H. Williams, telephoned that his men had disembarked only to find that they had landed on an island in the river. Neither previous map nor ground reconnaissance had revealed the presence of this small, high-banked island, and aerial photographs had not been available. Since Captain Williams deemed the east bank beyond the island unfit for a landing, the assault boats had to be sent back to retrieve the company. In view of the short period of darkness remaining, Major Birdsong secured permission to cross his battalion at the 10th Infantry's Arnaville site.

While this mishap was taking place, the battalion's Antitank Platoon, radio and litter jeeps, and the attached 2d Platoon, Antitank Company, 11th Infantry, had been ferried across the river by the 10th Infantry at Arnaville. Al-

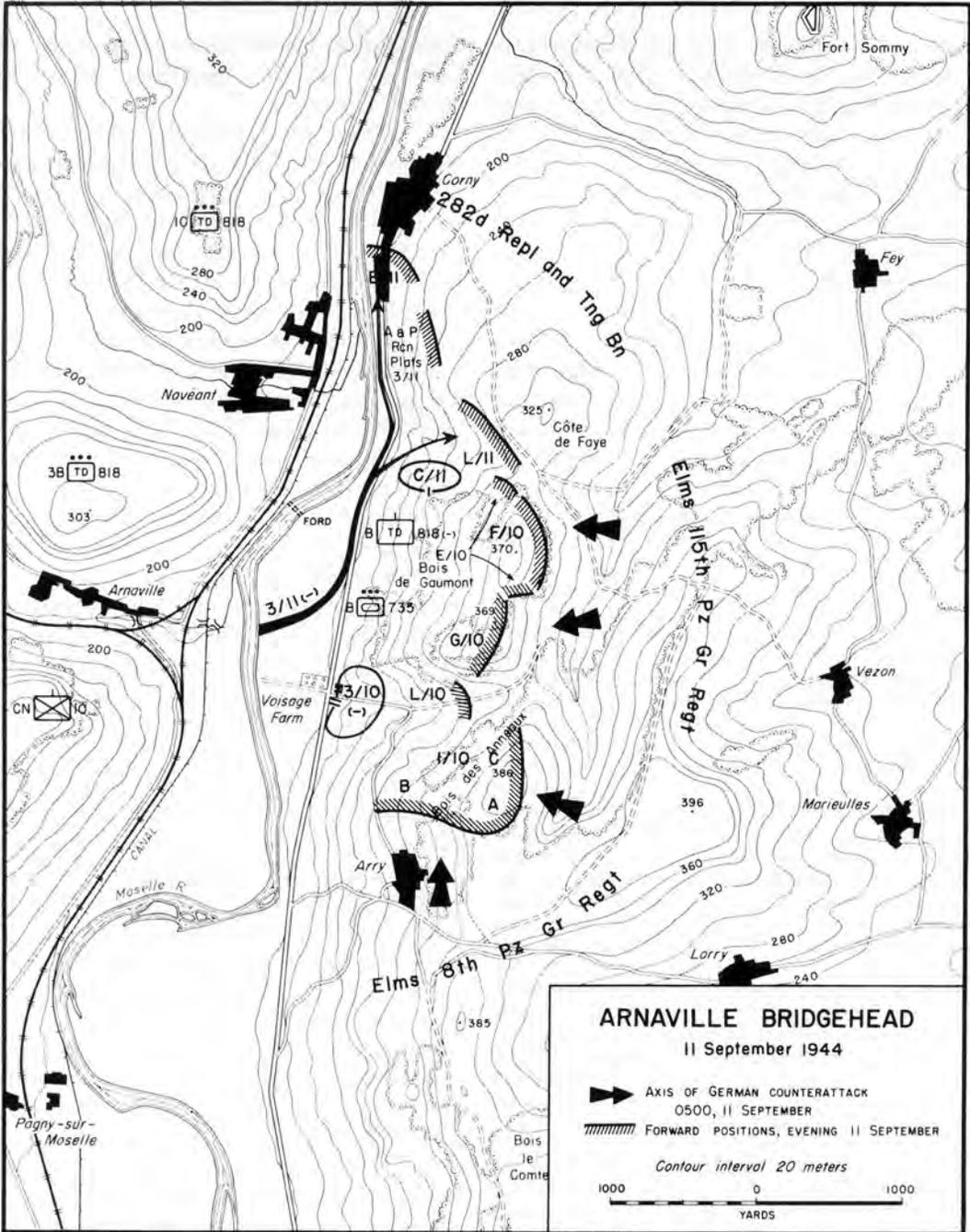
<sup>13</sup> 3d Bn, 11th Inf, story is from the following: Moselle River Crossing; 10th Inf, 11th Inf, 1103d Engr (C) Gp, 160th Engr (C) Bn, AAR's, Sep 44; 10th Inf and 11th Inf Unit Jnls, 10-11 Sep 44; *Tenth Infantry*; Combat Interv 38 with Birdsong; Interv with Breckinridge; Ltr, Col Birdsong to Hist Div; Interv with Coghill; Ltr, 1st Lt Rocco J. Barbuto (formerly plat ldr, AT Co, 11th Inf) to Hist Div, 3 May 50, and atchd statement from Cpl Emidio Di Pietro (2d Plat, AT Co, 11th Inf).

though the organic Antitank Platoon and radio and litter jeeps waited for their battalion near Voisage Farm, the platoon sergeant of the attached platoon, T. Sgt. Harry O. Chafin, deduced that the riflemen had already preceded him to Corny. Moving with its 57-mm. guns, the platoon pushed north up the Metz highway and, unsuspectingly, into German-held Corny. In the quick, violent fire fight that followed, most of the antitank platoon escaped, including eighteen men who swam the river; left behind were the antitank guns and eight men.<sup>14</sup> Sergeant Chafin led the survivors back toward the Arnaville crossing site and this time located his battalion. He insisted upon

returning to rescue his men and guns but collapsed as the battalion advanced toward Corny.

Not until after daylight, about 0825 (11 September), did the leading elements of the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, succeed in crossing at the Arnaville site. (*Map 3*) They immediately reorganized and pushed slowly north toward Corny, Company L on the right, Company B on the left, against occasional artillery and mortar fire. Company L advanced up the bush-covered northwestern slopes of the Côte de Faye (Hill 325) and began to dig in where the men could cover the open northwestern slopes and have at least visual contact with the 2d Battalion, 10th Infantry, to the southeast. Company B, breaking a thin crust of German ground defense south of Corny, advanced to the town's outer buildings. There it found one of the 57-mm. antitank guns, damaged beyond use, and took up positions in and around an old brick factory on the edge of town. By 1700 the Americans had captured forty prisoners. The Reconnaissance Platoon and the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon established outposts on the northwestern slope of Hill 325 between Companies L and B, while the heavy weapons of Company D were distributed among the advance positions. In late afternoon Company C, 11th Infantry, was also attached to the 3d Battalion, crossed the river, and went into a reserve position on the slope near the highway to the left rear of Company L. The battalion's organic Antitank Platoon with its 57-mm. guns went into position echeloned in depth astride the highway south of Corny. Depth in antitank defense was considered essential because there was a logical avenue for tank attack not only down the Corny

<sup>14</sup> As told by Corporal Di Pietro, in a statement attached to Lieutenant Barbuto's letter to the Historical Division (note 13 above), the platoon neared Corny and took cover while Sergeant Chafin moved forward to reconnoiter. He returned shortly and directed the platoon to continue on the highway toward Corny. Arriving in the south edge of Corny, the men took cover in a brick foundry and a garage on opposite sides of the street. When "things did not look good," Sergeant Chafin ordered the men to withdraw, bringing with them the 57-mm. guns and prime movers. As the men loaded, "hell broke loose." Because much of the enemy fire seemed to come from a near-by house, the men put one gun into action and fired several rounds into the house. For a while the enemy was silent, and again the men attempted to load on their carriers. But again the enemy opened fire. Seeing that the situation was hopeless, Sergeant Chafin ordered his men to abandon guns and trucks and head for the river. Corporal Di Pietro ran through the garage, out a back door, and slid down an embankment. Working his way south under concealment of bushes, he encountered five other men of the platoon. When the Germans began to encircle them and to toss concussion grenades down the embankment upon them, Corporal Di Pietro was wounded in the right leg above the knee. Soon thereafter the six were forced to surrender and with two other men also captured were headed toward the enemy rear. One of his companions was forced to carry the corporal on his back. While the seven others went on to prison camps, Corporal Di Pietro was taken to a front-line German hospital, where his right leg was amputated.



V. Brooks

MAP 3

highway but also across the Côte de Faye and down the northern woods line of the Bois de Gaumont.

By nightfall the 3d Battalion was well dug in. Its original order to capture Corny was not followed, despite some objection from the 10th Infantry, after the battalion commander, Major Birdsong, discovered the dominant observation the Germans would have on defenses within the town. The Germans had also sown the town with mines and booby traps, further discouraging the 3d Battalion's entry.

*Counterattacks Against the  
10th Infantry—11 September*

Having made probing attacks on 10 September which evidently determined the locations of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 10th Infantry, the Germans struck violently against both battalions just before daylight the next morning (11 September). The battles to hold against these counterblows assumed even more importance with knowledge that the Dornot bridgehead had now been withdrawn and the Arnaville bridgehead was the only footing the XX Corps possessed on the Moselle's east bank. On the right flank of the XII Corps a small foothold did exist at the tip of the Moselle tongue; and south of Nancy assault units of two divisions were forming for a predawn crossing attempt. But holding at Arnaville was vital, and at the time the Germans launched their counterattacks the infantry situation was made even more precarious because the supporting engineers had not yet been able to bridge the river. Of this handicap, the enemy, still holding dominant observation, was probably aware.

About 0500, at the first sign of light, a platoon of German tanks, followed by approximately a company of infantry (elements of the *115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*), came from the direction of the town of Vezon toward that portion of the 2d Battalion lines which rimmed the edge of the Bois de Gaumont along Hill 370. Without artillery preparation but firing their 88-mm. tank guns and machine guns as they advanced, the tanks attempted to pulverize the defenses of Company F. They then pulled off to Company F's right front to provide fire support while accompanying infantry closed in. With the defenders pinned to their positions by the supporting fire, the German infantry worked in close, and fighting raged at hand-grenade range. One enemy grenade knocked out a Company H machine gun on Company F's left flank. Forward elements of Company F began to fall back some fifty yards; but the enemy was apparently unaware of impending success, for the attack rolled around to the front of Company G, attempting to turn the corner of the woods into the jagged clearing. Here the Germans set up machine guns, and for a few minutes the situation looked almost hopeless; the Americans' difficulty with radio communication had prevented their receiving artillery support. Capt. Lewis R. Anderson, however, the Company G commander, managed to reach the corner of the woods and co-ordinated the fire of a near-by section of heavy machine guns, his riflemen, and the 81-mm. mortars. Their efforts broke the enemy attack. Communication with supporting artillery was finally established, and, as the enemy infantry withdrew, heavy concentrations fell on the German rear. The tanks too

were discouraged by this fire. Except for a small enemy infantry contingent that probed up the draw on Company G's right flank southeast of Hill 369, the counterattack was ended. The probing effort on the right flank was stopped when Company G's light machine guns annihilated a squad of the attackers.

With the counterattack broken, Company F mopped up small groups and individuals who had infiltrated around the left flank, and another platoon of Company E was sent forward to take position between Companies F and G. Although the line had held, the enemy counterattack had cost the 2d Battalion slightly over a hundred casualties, further stretching the battalion's overextended manpower.

At approximately the time of the counterattack against the 2d Battalion, elements of the *3d Panzer Grenadier* and *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Divisions* launched a two-pronged attack against the 1st Battalion, 10th Infantry, on Hill 386. On the 1st Battalion's left front, some 500 yards beyond Company A's forward foxholes, stood a group of barrack-type buildings which were not shown on the battalion's maps. The first day in these positions, Lieutenant Dutko, the forward artillery observer, had turned the fire of 240-mm. howitzers and eight-inch guns on the buildings, only to find that they concealed an underground radar station and underground barracks. All buildings except one were destroyed. From the ruins, as daylight came on 11 September, emerged an estimated company and a half of German infantry. With artillery support ready on call, Company A held its fire, allowing the Germans to come in close, out of the cover of occasional trees and into the company's

effective lanes of fire. Some of the enemy had advanced to within twenty-five yards of the forward foxholes when Company A, its supporting artillery, and Sergeant Stone's machine guns of Company D opened fire. The attack was quickly broken; most of the Germans fell as casualties and fifteen were taken prisoner.

At the time that the infantry attack was discovered, a platoon of German tanks emerged from an orchard just east of Arry and advanced north toward the Company B positions on the southern portion of Hill 386. The oncoming tanks fired directly into the defenders' foxholes. Calls for artillery brought immediate results, and the American tank destroyers on the high ground west of the river also opened fire. With the Germans still threatening, the 57-mm. antitank guns in position with Company B opened fire, their first rounds knocking out one of the tanks. The antitank crewmen claimed another kill but admitted it might have resulted from artillery or tank destroyer fire. The remaining enemy tanks concentrated their fire against the 57-mm. guns, destroying one and, since the guns had not been dug in,<sup>15</sup> making it impossible for the other crews to operate. But the tanks had been discouraged by the reaction and withdrew to cover among the houses in Arry. Later in the day, planes of the 512th Squadron of the XIX TAC descended again on Arry. Their bombing and strafing knocked out some ten German tanks and assault guns, thus probably making a major contribution to the fact that the Germans launched no further ground attacks against either the 1st or

<sup>15</sup> 46th FA Bn AAR, Sep 44.

the 2d Battalion during the remainder of 11 September.<sup>16</sup>

*Supporting the Bridgehead*

German artillery fire had first opened against the bridgehead at dawn on 10 September. During the afternoon of the next day it increased in tempo, and artillery observers estimated that forty fixed German batteries and numerous roving guns, ranging in caliber from 88-mm. to 150-mm., were firing on the Arnaville sector. Since the larger portion of the German batteries was in concrete fortifications, American counterbattery fire was not very effective. Despite the commanding heights held by the Germans, most of their fire against the crossing site was apparently unobserved, possibly because of an area smoke screen being maintained at Arnaville by the 84th Chemical Smoke Generator Company.<sup>17</sup> In the forward areas the enemy fire was definitely observed and caused numerous infantry casualties, notwithstanding American efforts to provide overhead cover for foxholes and emplacements. Artillery observers felt that the Germans here demonstrated considerably more artillery skill than usual, and no ammunition shortage was indicated. Using single rounds of smoke or time fire to obtain a deflection correction, the enemy usually followed with five minutes of heavy fire for effect. Although no time

fire for effect was noted, many shells burst in the trees.<sup>18</sup>

A sometimes alarming shortage in American artillery ammunition had developed. This shortage was chronic through all Third Army artillery units in early September, a result of the same logistical difficulties that had brought the gasoline drought. On 9 and 10 September XX Corps artillery units had fired a total of about 20,000 artillery rounds per day, eating heavily into their allotment. They were now forced to curtail drastically their counterbattery and harassing fire. Again, as at the time of the gasoline shortage, the soldier fighting for his life found it difficult to understand these logistical difficulties. Fortunately, air support was able to take over some of the artillery missions, 411 sorties by planes of the XIX TAC on 11 September being almost equally divided between the Brest and Moselle fronts. Only one mission directly affected the Arnaville bridgehead, that of P-47's of the 492d Squadron, 48th Fighter Bomber Group, which damaged a gun position 3,000 yards southeast of Metz and destroyed a dam on the Moselle just southeast of Ars-sur-Moselle.<sup>19</sup> Despite the ammunition shortage, the thirteen field artillery battalions in position to support the Arnaville crossing fired, on 10 and 11 September, a total of 12,774 rounds, most of them in support of the bridgehead.<sup>20</sup>

Supply of the bridgehead during the first two days was handled primarily by

<sup>16</sup> This section based on the following: Moselle River Crossing; *Tenth Infantry*; 10th Inf, 46th FA Bn, AAR's, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 11 Sep 44; Combat Interv 38 with Simpson-Lynch-Lathrop and Shipley-Bradley-McCluskey-Baughman; Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, Ch. III, p. 149, citing XIX TAC Morning Summary, 12 Sep 44; IPW Rpt, 10th Inf Unit Jnl File, 11 Sep 44.

<sup>17</sup> For details of smoke operations see below, Chapter III.

<sup>18</sup> 46th FA Bn AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>19</sup> XIX TAC Opns File, 11 Sep 44, and Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, Ch. III, p. 149, citing XIX TAC Morning Summary, 12 Nov 44. For more information on the Moselle dam see below, Ch. III, section entitled "Armor Crosses at the Ford."

<sup>20</sup> Combat Interv 38, Artillery on the Arnaville Crossing (hereafter cited as Arnaville Artillery).

Service Company, 10th Infantry, the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoons of the battalions, and the Mine Platoon of the 10th Infantry's Antitank Company. The infantry claimed that these units had virtually replaced the engineers in the task of ferrying rafts and assault boats.<sup>21</sup>

On the first day of the Arnaville crossing, S. Sgt. James O'Connell, Company B, 10th Infantry, trying to find a place for his jeep to cross the Moselle Canal, met a local French girl. Pointing to a spot in the canal, she beckoned the sergeant to follow, raised her skirts, and waded into the water. The water was shallow, and the sergeant found that he could cross on what he described as a "submerged concrete bridge."<sup>22</sup> In this manner kitchen trucks also crossed the canal and were ferried across the river late on 11 September, thus making at least one hot meal daily available to troops in the bridgehead after the first day. Although some supply and medical jeeps were ferried across, mud and steep slopes made their use impracticable east of the Metz highway, and vehicles operating on the flatlands were constantly exposed to observed enemy shelling. One platoon of Cannon Company, 10th Infantry, had originally been attached to each of the rifle battalions, but delay in

ferrying operations had prompted the regimental commander to make other dispositions of the organic howitzers. All six guns were placed on the hill south of Arnaville where they continued to fire in support of the bridgehead infantry until the bridgehead was secured.

When the rifle companies clamored for more bazookas to assist in fighting enemy tanks, the 10th Infantry's Headquarters Company rounded up forty-nine additional rocket launchers and sent them into the bridgehead. Communications personnel laid eight telephone lines, exclusive of artillery lines, into the bridgehead during the first two days. Although at one time all eight lines were knocked out by enemy shelling, communications personnel continued to work under shell-fire until communications were working smoothly again. All three of the 10th Infantry's battalion aid stations were set up in one of the few buildings in the bridgehead: the farmhouse at the Voisage Farm crossroads. Through incessant artillery fire on the flatlands leading to the river, casualties were evacuated by jeeps to the crossing site after having been carried by litter from the forward lines to the aid station, often by their infantry comrades.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ltr, Col Bell to Hist Div; *Tenth Infantry*; Interv with Breckinridge. For details on bridging operations see below, Ch. III.

<sup>22</sup> Ltr, Col Bell to Hist Div.

<sup>23</sup> *Tenth Infantry*; Ltr, Col Bell to Hist Div; Capt Ferris A. Kercher, Personal Experience of a Cannon Company Commander, MS for Advanced Officers' Class I, The Infantry School, copy filed in OCMH.

## CHAPTER III

# Smoke and Bridging Operations (9–14 September)

It had been anticipated that crossings of the Moselle would initially and for some time after establishment of bridgeheads be exposed to commanding German observation. A new technique in Third Army river crossing operations had therefore been planned: a large-area forward smoke screen to assist bridging efforts. The 84th Chemical Company, a smoke generator unit, was attached to the 5th Division on 6 September to provide such a screen. Unfortunately, at the time of the Dornot crossing, the 84th had not yet arrived from employment on truck-driving tasks with the Red Ball Express supply route from the Normandy beaches. Not until the crossing at Arnaville was it able to begin its new assignment.

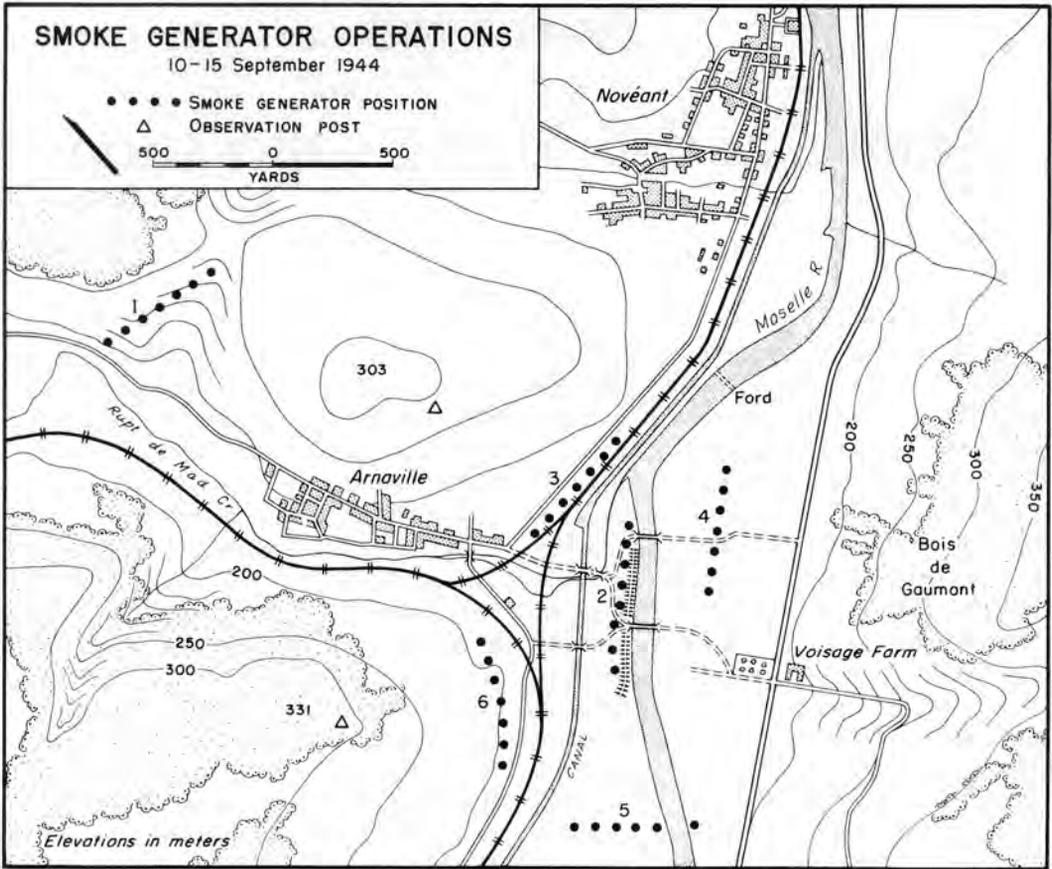
The assignment was new in many ways. It was the first of its kind in the entire European theater. Neither the 5th Division nor its supporting engineers had ever before worked with a smoke generator unit in a river crossing action. And, like other smoke generator units in the ETO, the 84th Chemical Company had been trained only for rear-area anti-aircraft missions, not for assault support. Screening operations at Arnaville were thus to prove a new experience for all participants.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the story of smoke operations is from the following sources: Lt Col Levin B.

The 84th Chemical Company was placed under operational control of the 1103d Engineer Combat Group, which was to construct the Arnaville bridges, and under the general supervision of the 5th Division chemical officer, Lt. Col. Levin B. Cottingham. After the 10th Infantry received its orders late on 8 September to cross at Arnaville, Colonel Cottingham instituted a meteorological study of the area, finding that weather reports available from the air forces could be supplemented by local observations from supporting artillery and natives of the region. He determined that the prevailing wind was of a low velocity and from the west. Both Colonel Cottingham and the chemical company commander conducted reconnaissance and decided that if generators were placed at Position 1, about a thousand yards west

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Cottingham (formerly chemical officer, 5th Div), Employment of a Smoke Generator Company in an Assault Crossing of the Moselle River, Combat Interv File 38; Lt Col Levin B. Cottingham, "Smoke Over the Moselle," *The Infantry Journal*, August, 1948; Ltr, Col Cottingham to Hist Div, 28 Mar 50; Paul W. Pritchard, Smoke Generator Operations in the Mediterranean and European Theaters of Operation, MS, Ch. VI, "Operations with the Third Army" (hereafter cited as Smoke Generator Operations), Hist Sec, Office of the Chief of the Chemical Corps. See also observations on smoke operations by engineer officers in Combat Interv 38, Engineer Operations at Arnaville (hereafter cited as Engineer Operations).



MAP 4

of Arnaville behind the hill mass on Arnaville's north flank, the prevailing wind would carry the smoke through the Arnaville defile, spread it over the crossing site and into the enemy hill positions, and thus cover the entire crossing area with a haze that would deny enemy air and artillery observation on both the approaches and the crossing site. (Map 4) Being so placed to the west of the hill mass, the generator positions, oil supply dump, and unit personnel would be protected from enemy fire and could be readily supplied along the Bayonville-

Arnaville road. Because of these advantages, the presumed improbability of a wind change, and the 84th's lack of experience under forward-area combat conditions, it was decided that no generator would be placed initially at the crossing site.

An observation post was to be established with the Cannon Company, 10th Infantry, on the crest of the hill south of Arnaville. Another was to go on the hill north of the town. Communication between observation posts and the smoke control officer, Colonel Cottingham, at

the crossing site was to be by radio; the engineers had tactical control of the smoke through the control officer. Lacking time for special training, troops of the 84th moved into Position 1 and the observation posts during darkness, 9-10 September.

The 84th was equipped with the new M-2 smoke generator, a weapon especially designed for forward-area screening, and was prepared to supplement the screen with M-1 and M-4 smoke pots. Fog oil had to be hauled by the 5th Division's Quartermaster Company trucks from the Third Army depot at Troyes, some 180 miles in the rear, to the 84th's bivouac area, about four miles to the rear of the forward dump at Position 1. Company trucks were to haul oil and other supplies the last four miles to the generator positions. Originally only twelve generators were to operate at Position 1, but the number could be increased or decreased as the situation demanded, forty-eight generators being available. Assault elements of the 10th Infantry were scheduled to cross the Moselle between midnight and dawn the morning of 10 September, and the 84th generators were to begin making smoke at daylight, 0600, 10 September.

#### *Smoke Operations Begin*

Smoke operations began on schedule. By the time the 1st and 2d Battalions, 10th Infantry, were crossing the Metz highway and advancing toward their hilltop objectives east of the river, activity at the crossing site was almost as well hidden from the enemy as it had been when the infantry crossed under cover of darkness. Although enemy artillery fire did begin at daylight, that which fell

around the crossing site was evidently unobserved.

A sudden shift in wind direction from west to northeast about 1000 sent the smoke away from the crossing site. The screen rapidly dissipated and exposed the open terrain around the river to the dominant German observation. The fact that enemy artillery took immediate advantage of the opportunity emphasized, according to chemical officers, the protection afforded by the screen and the necessity of re-establishing it.

The possibility of a wind shift had evidently been discounted, for now a second reconnaissance was necessary before new generator positions could be occupied. Position 2, only a few yards from the river and behind an abandoned railroad embankment six to eight feet high, was chosen. A number of men under 2d Lt. Frank W. Young moved four generators to the new site, and smoke was started again before noon. A search failed to locate the chemical company commander and revealed that the troops had abandoned the generators and supplies at Position 1. The company commander was subsequently relieved. With the company executive officer across the river reconnoitering for new positions, the 1st sergeant finally succeeded in rounding up some of his men and organizing details for moving spare generators and oil to Position 2. Inadequately prepared for combat operations and minus a company commander to lead the way, many of the chemical troops took position "only after considerable persuasion."<sup>2</sup> The 84th's executive officer, 1st Lt. George R. Lamb, was given command of the company, and the 1103d Engineer

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<sup>2</sup> Smoke Generator Operations.



TRUCK-MOUNTED SMOKE GENERATOR IN OPERATION

Combat Group commander was given specific control over the smoke operations. The 5th Division chemical officer was to continue providing technical supervision.

Through the afternoon the smoke screen was maintained by the four generators at Position 2, augmented by smoke pots to conceal the line of generators. Meanwhile, preparations were made for establishing additional positions. Position 3 was set up in late afternoon along the railroad embankment beside the Arnaville-Novéant road just north of Arnaville. Before daylight (11

September) eight generator crews and generators were ferried across the river to occupy Position 4, almost directly across the Moselle from Position 3 on the flatlands some 150 yards from the river. To test the feasibility of night operations in the event of enemy air attack, screening continued through the night of 10-11 September at Positions 2 and 3. The smoke clung low to the ground and hid the crossing site from observation by moonlight. It drifted slowly under a two-mile north wind. Because no night air attack developed, further night operations were not considered necessary. On

11 September Position 5, between the canal and the river and south of the crossing site, and Position 6, between the railroad and the hill south of Arnaville, were established. They were not put into operation but were kept in readiness for use when the situation demanded. One generator was mounted on a truck to move up and down the Arnaville–Novéant road on the west bank in order to cover gaps that might develop in the screen.

During the early morning of 11 September, while the infantry were battling German counterattacks on Hills 370 and 386, enemy artillery fire around the crossing site was virtually nonexistent. Since the smoke interfered with bridge-building operations, someone among the engineers decided that further screening, at least for the present, was unnecessary. About 0900 an unidentified engineer ordered smoke operations to cease.<sup>3</sup>

As soon as the smoke had cleared the area, enemy artillery reaction was swift and deadly. Two pieces of heavy engineer equipment were damaged, a jeep was demolished, and a number of engineer personnel were wounded and killed. The chemical officer, Colonel Cottingham, acting in the emergency in the name of the division commander, ordered the screen re-established. But during this period and the period the day before when wind change had removed the screen, the enemy had been given an opportunity to lay his artillery pieces; the chemical personnel felt that the effects of the restored screen would have been better had these two lapses not occurred. The engineer group commander, Lt. Col. George H. Walker, felt

that “too great emphasis” was placed on the smoking operations. Because “the Germans were well aware” of the bridging operations, knew the terrain thoroughly, and “had already registered several effective barrages,” he believed German artillery fire on the bridging sites was affected more by enemy ammunition limitations and other target requirements than by American smoke.<sup>4</sup>

After restoration of the smoke, control of smoke operations was returned to the 5th Division commander to be exercised through the division chemical officer. On 12 September and on subsequent days until 8 November, the 84th Chemical Company, and later the 161st Chemical Smoke Generator Company, maintained “continuous”<sup>5</sup> smoke during daylight around the Arnaville site. Unobserved enemy shellfire resulted in the evacuation of eight men for combat fatigue, wounded seven, and killed two. It made supply, particularly east of the river, a difficult problem. Nevertheless, the inexperienced chemical troops stuck to their task. Artillery liaison planes proved most effective in observing to determine the effectiveness of the screen, and at least three flights were made daily for this purpose. The convergence of the draw and defiles with the Moselle valley near Arnaville caused such variance in wind conditions that often the smoke

<sup>4</sup> Ltr, Col Walker to Hist Div, 30 Mar 50. No mention of smoke operations at Arnaville is to be found in available German records.

<sup>5</sup> Smoke Generator Operations. According to Ltr, Col Walker to Hist Div, “During the morning of 12 September . . . the bridge site was entirely devoid of smoke. . . . Whether this was caused by wind or by improper operation of the generators, I cannot say, but the fact remains there was clear visibility between the bridge site and the enemy-held high ground . . . during the entire morning of 12 September. Enemy fire during this period was infrequent and ineffective.”

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* See also Ltr, Col Cottingham to Hist Div.

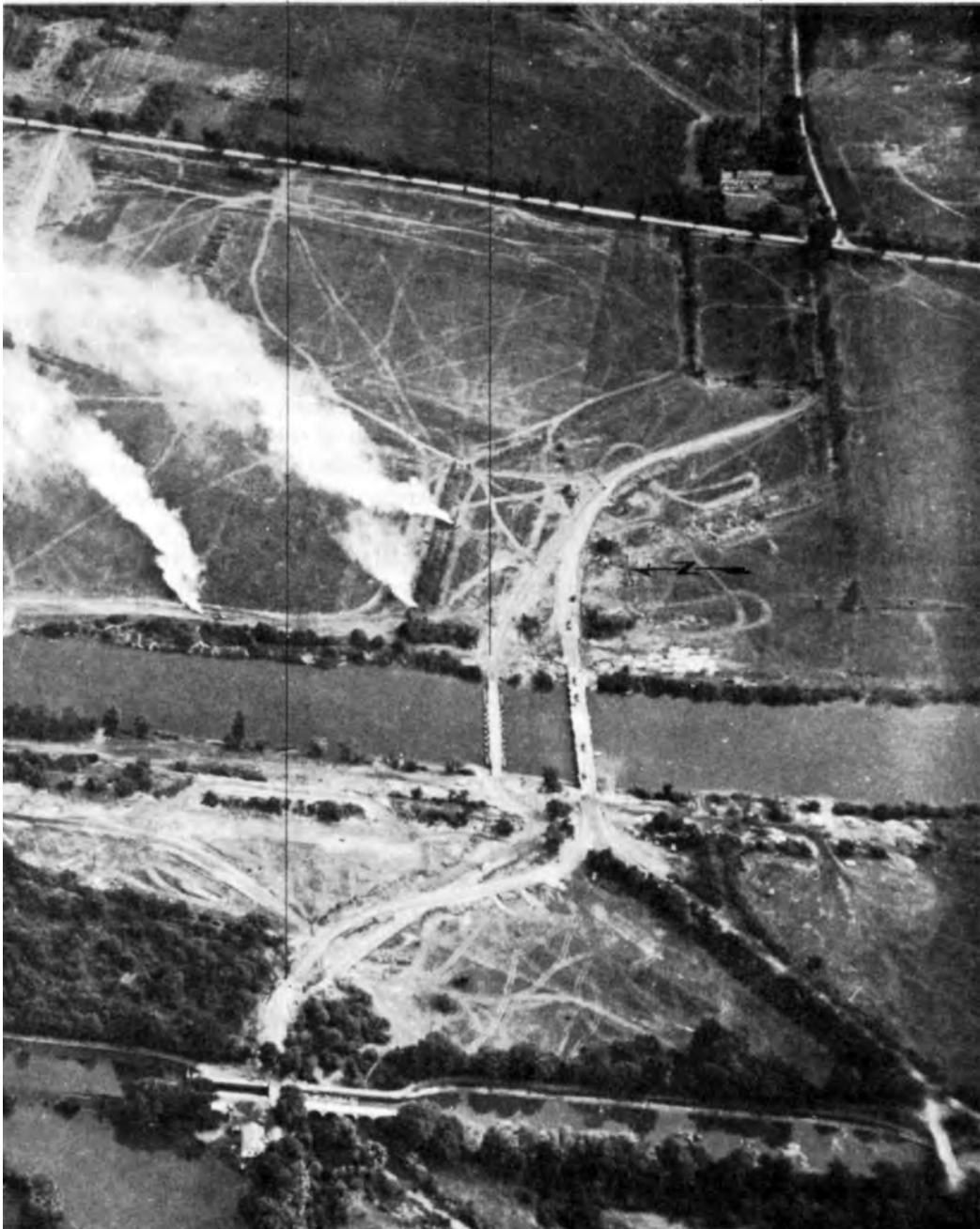


ARNAVILLE CROSSING SITE (aerial photograph taken on 6 October 1944). The Rupt de Mad Creek seen in right foreground passes under the lock on the canal near the Moselle

Bridge over Rupt de Mad

Site No. 1

Voisage Farm



*River. Semi-permanent bridge south of Site 1 was constructed after the Arnaville bridgehead action.*

from two generators only a hundred yards apart drifted in opposite directions; but the dispersion of the generators after the initial wind change on the first day, plus smoke pots and mobile generators on both banks, helped to keep the screen effective. An M-2 generator consumed an average of fifty gallons of fog oil per hour; during the first twelve days of operation 1,535 smoke pots and a daily average of 2,200 gallons of fog oil were expended.

### *Bridging the Moselle*

Colonel Walker's 1103d Engineer Combat Group, attached to the 5th Division, consisted of the following units: the 160th and 204th Engineer Combat Battalions,<sup>6</sup> the 551st Heavy Ponton Battalion, the 989th Treadway Bridge Company, the 537th Light Ponton Company, and the 623d Light Equipment Company. Assistance in engineer operations could also be expected from Company B of the 5th Division's organic 7th Engineer Combat Battalion. Initial ferrying of the 1st Battalion, 10th Infantry, in assault boats was done by the organic engineers; the 2d and 3d Battalions, 10th Infantry, were ferried by Company B, 204th Engineers; and the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, by Company C, 160th Engineers. Construction of infantry support rafts was begun during 10 September by Company B, 204th Engineers, but heavy enemy artillery fire delayed the work. Only a few rafts were completed before daylight, 11 September.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> On 9 Sep the 150th Engr (C) Bn had been detached. See 150th Engr (C) Bn AAR, Sep 44.

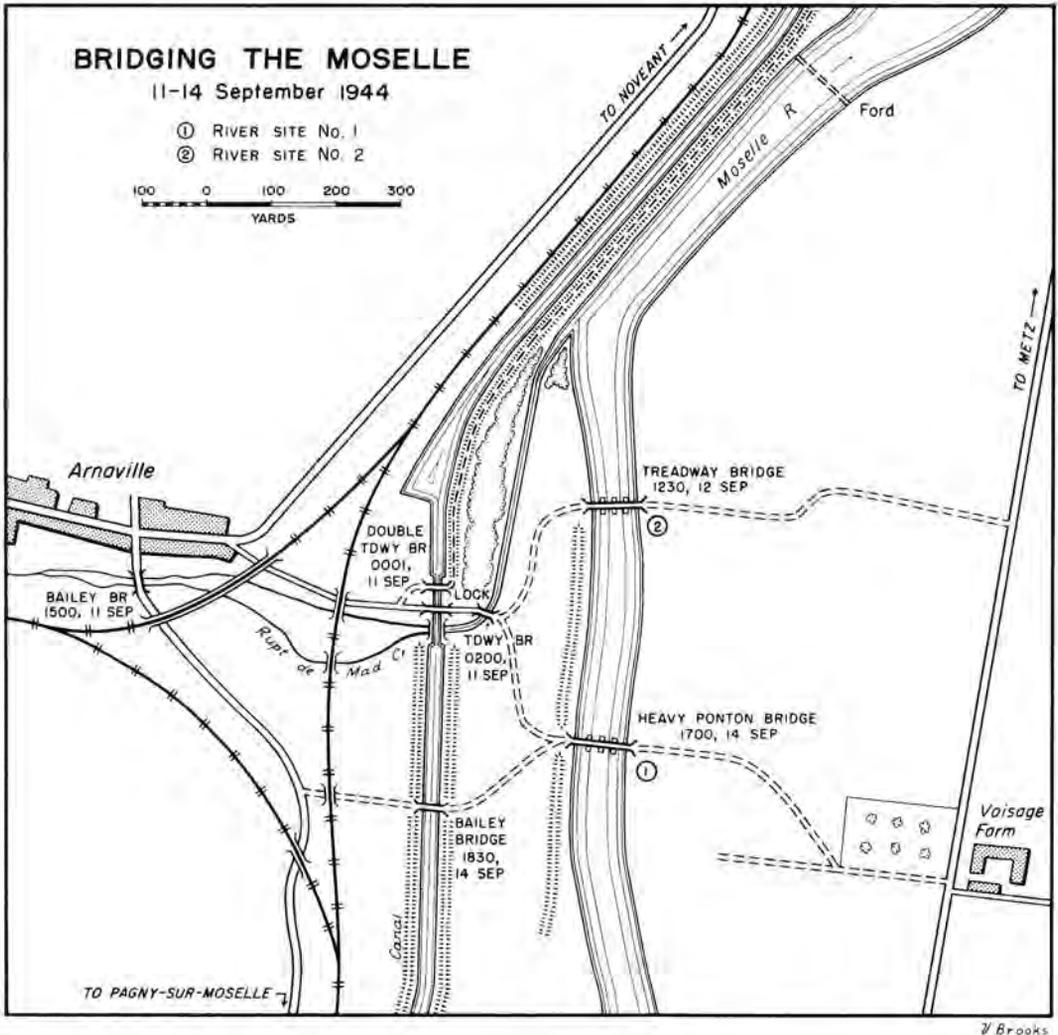
<sup>7</sup> The engineer story is based on the following sources: Combat Interv 38 with unidentified engr offs; Engineer Operations; 1103d Engr (C) Gp, 160th and 204th Engr (C) Bns, 551st Hv Pon Bn, 989th

Bridging operations east of Arnaville were complicated not only by the fact of dominant enemy observation but also by several difficult terrain features at the crossing site itself. In effect, the engineers would have to bridge two streams, and possibly three. The first was the deep Moselle Canal, 80 feet wide. Next came the Moselle itself, approximately 250 feet wide. There was also the Rupt de Mad, a small east-west tributary running through the Arnaville defile, passing under the canal, and emptying into the river north of the crossing site. (*Map 5*)

Reconnaissance revealed that southeast of Arnaville, near the junction of the north-south railroad with a southwestern spur rail line, a narrow trail overgrown with vegetation led up the steep dike of the canal to the remains of a one-way steel truss bridge which had been constructed by French military engineers in 1940. The bridge itself had been demolished, and its debris blocked the site. Opposite this possible bridge site was another high dike, but beyond the dike another narrow trail led to the river and to an outlet road beyond the river leading to Voisage Farm. The banks of the river here offered satisfactory prospects for a floating bridge. To reach this crossing of the canal, vehicles would initially have to travel south out of Arnaville on the Pagny highway, thus crossing the Rupt de Mad on an existing masonry arch bridge between the town's main street and a railroad spur that joined the main rail line northeast of Arnaville.

The most direct route from Arnaville to the river led due east through under-

Tdwy Br Co, 537th Lt Pon Co, 623d Lt Equip Co, AAR's, Sep 44; Ltr, Col Walker to Hist Div. The preliminary narrative, Engineer Operations, is extremely valuable.



MAP 5

passes beneath this same railroad spur and the main rail line to a lock on the canal. Although foot troops had been able to cross the canal at the lock, approximately thirty feet of bridging would be necessary for vehicular traffic. But to reach either River Site 1 or another possible bridging site (River Site 2, northeast of the canal lock) vehicles would have to cross the Rupt de Mad, which

ran northeast between the canal and the river. River Site 2 also offered an outlet road beyond the river to the Metz-Pont-à-Mousson highway. After crossing the canal, vehicles might turn north along the canal dike to reach the river at a shallow rapids which offered the possibility of a fording site. Engineers recognized, however, that a large amount of bulldozer work would first be necessary

on steep west and east banks of the river before fording might be accomplished. Another terrain feature—later to prove an advantage against enemy shelling—was the section of abandoned railroad embankment about eight feet high which stretched at intervals along the river bank from south of River Site 1 to River Site 2. Because of frequent gaps in the bank, it would be no obstacle in reaching the river bridging sites.<sup>8</sup>

### *Initial Planning and Operations*

With Company B, 204th Engineers, engaged in constructing infantry support rafts at the Arnville site and Company C, 160th Engineers, still busy in the vicinity of the Dornot bridgehead, the remainder of the 1103d Engineer Combat Group<sup>9</sup> on 10 September made plans for its bridging operations and assembled materials and construction equipment west of Arnville. Actual bridging operations were not to begin until the night of 10–11 September.

The initial engineer plan envisioned construction by Company B, 204th Engineers, of a double treadway bridge across the canal at the lock. A second thirty-foot section would be required across the Rupt de Mad in order to give access to the river. Concurrently the 537th Light Ponton Company was to

remove the demolished steel truss bridge at the southern canal bridge site and erect a Bailey bridge. As soon as equipment could cross the canal, the 989th Treadway Bridge Company, assisted by Company B, 160th Engineers, was to erect a treadway bridge at River Site 1, while Headquarters Company, 204th Engineers, conducted bulldozer operations to level the banks at the fording site. Company A, 204th Engineers, was to relieve Company B, 204th, of its ferry responsibilities. The remainder of the engineer group would be called upon as needed.

Heavy enemy artillery fire met the engineers as they began their work, but not long after midnight (10–11 September) Company B, 204th Engineers, had placed the double treadway span across the canal at the lock and had begun work on a treadway section across the Rupt de Mad. Meanwhile, Headquarters Company, 204th, moved to the fording site and began to level the high riverbanks. Despite intense artillery fire, which killed two bulldozer operators, the ford was pronounced ready for vehicles at approximately 1030, 11 September.

As the 537th Light Ponton Company was moving from Arnville toward the southern canal bridge site, enemy artillery fire demolished the masonry span across the Rupt de Mad just south of Arnville's main street. Receiving a change in orders, the 537th began construction of a double-double Bailey bridge to replace the masonry span across the tributary stream. Although enemy artillery fire continued to be heavy on Arnville, only two vehicles were damaged and no personnel casualties resulted. The bridge was completed by 1500, 11 September.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to previously quoted sources, this terrain study is based on maps and photographs in OCMH files and a visit by the author to the area in June 1949.

<sup>9</sup> The Light Equipage Platoon, 537th Light Ponton Company, was occupied in the Dornot vicinity. The organic 7th Engineer Combat Battalion was disposed as follows: Company A with the 2d Infantry Combat Team to the north; Company B assisting ferrying operations at Arnville; and Company C still occupied with the Dornot bridgehead.



DOUBLE TREADWAY SPAN ACROSS THE MOSELLE CANAL *placed by Company B, 204th Engineers. Remains of one-way steel truss bridge can be seen in background.*

Not long after 0200 (11 September) Company B, 204th Engineers, completed the small section of treadway bridge necessary across the Rupt de Mad near the canal lock and began moving equipment and bridging materials for the erection of a treadway bridge at River Site 1. Work had been in progress for an hour when about dawn severe enemy artillery fire wounded several men and damaged eight pneumatic floats. Another heavy shelling almost an hour later halted work while the men took cover behind the abandoned railroad embankment. When work was resumed, still under a smoke screen, enemy artillery reaction was virtually nonexistent. It was at this time (about 0900) that some unidentified engineer, evidently hoping to speed construction, ordered that the 84th Chemical Company cease its smoke operations. German artillery reacted almost as soon as the smoke cleared away. An air compressor and a Brockway truck were damaged, and a quarter-ton truck was demolished by a direct hit. Approximately eight engineers were wounded, and six were killed. Shells continued to fall at five- to ten-minute intervals, and the company was withdrawn to a position of safety west of Arnville.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Engineer accounts of this action are in sharp disagreement with Chemical Corps accounts, setting the time of shelling before daylight. With the exception of Ltr, Col Walker to Hist Div, these accounts do not even mention the discontinuance of smoke. Chemical Corps accounts, specifically Smoke Generator Operations and Ltr, Col Cottingham to Hist Div, are accepted because they more nearly agree with messages from the engineers recorded in the 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 11 Sep 44. It cannot be determined who gave the order to cease smoke except that Colonel Cottingham's letter to the Historical Division says, "The order was given by the engineers to the best of my knowledge. . . ." Colonel Walker's letter to the Historical Division declares, "I . . . recall that

### *Armor Crosses at the Ford*

Until 11 September the 735th Tank Battalion had been waiting in a forward assembly area west of Arnville for completion of a bridge across the Moselle. Although the 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion had entered the action with fire support from its Company B in positions atop the high hills flanking Arnville, the tank destroyers also were awaiting a bridge to cross the river and join actively in the bridgehead fight. At 1030 on 11 September when Headquarters Company, 204th Engineers, completed leveling the banks at the fording site north of the bridging sites, it seemed likely that armored elements might at last join the battle. The floor of the river at the ford was of gravel and most of the stream was not over two feet deep. Near the far shore, however, a sixty-foot channel was found where the depth was from four to four and a half feet, a dangerous, even critical, depth for armor. Seeking to lower the water level, supporting artillery units attempted to puncture a dam across the Moselle south of Ars-sur-Moselle to the north while engineers worked to lay sections of treadway bridge on the river bottom in the deep channel.

The dam had not been broken by 1500. Nevertheless the 1st and 2d Platoons of the 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion began to hazard the crossing. Movement was slow and exasperating. Almost every time a vehicle crossed, the treadway sections on the bottom had to be repaired. At one time enemy artillery fire literally blasted the treadway sections out of the river. One tank de-

the 5th Division Engineer stated that I must have ordered the smoke to cease but this was not correct and I so stated at the time."

stroyer was hit and disabled by artillery fire, and by 1630 only six destroyers were across the Moselle. Tanks of Company B, 735th Tank Battalion, next attempted the crossing and met with more success; only six tanks crossed under their own power, but three that stalled were towed the remaining distance.

Since artillery had failed to puncture the dam south of Ars-sur-Moselle, P-47's of the 492d Squadron, 48th Group, gave it their attention. They scored a hit about 1830, blasting a big hole in the dam and lowering the water level seven inches at the ford. By early the next morning (12 September) the remainder of Company B, 735th Tank Battalion, and two platoons of Company B, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, were able to cross the river and move into assembly areas behind Hills 369 and 370, east of the Metz highway.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Bridging Efforts Continued*

When efforts at constructing a treadway bridge across the Moselle at River Site 1 were postponed in early morning of 11 September because of enemy shelling, the only bridgebuilding activity in the Arnaville vicinity through midday was that of the 537th Light Ponton Company. By 1500 it finished construction of a double-double Bailey bridge across the Rupt de Mad just south of Arnaville's main street. Headquarters Company, 204th Engineers, was working at the ford

in its efforts to cross tank destroyers and tanks, and Company A, 204th, was assisting Company B, 7th Engineers, with infantry support rafts at two ferry points south and north of the original assault crossing site.

In late afternoon (11 September) work on a treadway bridge across the river was ordered resumed, this time at River Site 2. Two companies were assigned the task: Company B, 160th Engineers, and the 989th Treadway Bridge Company. Both were under the supervision of the 160th Engineer Combat Battalion commander, Maj. Thomas L. Howard. The engineer group commander, Colonel Walker, was present at the site throughout the night and until about noon the next day.

Working under concealment provided first by the smoke generators and then by early darkness, the engineers had succeeded by approximately 2100 in completing a third of the bridge when enemy artillery again showered the area. Several engineers were wounded, and work was halted twenty minutes for reorganization and for testing equipment. Operations had hardly been resumed when the enemy fire began again, wounding several men. While the engineers sought cover behind the abandoned railroad embankment, Colonel Walker sent a messenger to the 10th Infantry command post requesting counterbattery fire, only to learn later that the messenger failed to locate the command post. When work was resumed after about twenty minutes, five or six shells landed some fifty yards away. They failed to interrupt work at the site but knocked out one of two engineer powerboats with a direct hit. The boat's operator was never found. As an order went back for the third and last

<sup>11</sup> Engineer Operations; Irwin Diary; 735th Tk Bn, 818th TD Bn, AAR's, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 11 Sep 44; General Notes: The Crossing of the Moselle River and the Defense of the Bridgehead by the 10th Infantry Regiment (hereafter cited as General Notes on Arnaville operations) in Combat Interv 38 File; XIX TAC Opns File, 11 Sep 44.

powerboat to be brought forward, the only crane on the bridge site was damaged by another shelling which again forced engineer withdrawal behind the railroad bank. Again the shelling stopped, again equipment was tested preparatory to resuming work, and again enemy projectiles hit the area. While the engineers waited under cover, Colonel Walker went personally to the 10th Infantry CP and requested counterbattery artillery fire. Both the 10th Infantry commander, Colonel Bell, and his artillery officer, Colonel Johnson, wanted to do what they could, but demands on limited artillery ammunition by the infantry in the bridgehead and the engineer commander's inability to give information on location of enemy batteries doing the firing negated his request.

On his return to the bridge site, Colonel Walker found that enemy artillery was still taking effect. About 0200 at least one enemy self-propelled gun fired some ten to fifteen rounds of direct fire into the embankment and the canal dike. An hour later enemy artillery fire was blanketing the area at frequent intervals. Deciding that it was pointless to retain the engineers at the river when there was no hope of using the necessary machinery, Colonel Walker ordered their withdrawal to Arnville. He and another engineer officer remained at the site.

Thus engineer activities around the crossing site came to a temporary halt. The hard-pressed bridgehead still lacked a vehicular bridge. There was feeling among infantry commanders that despite the difficulties involved the engineers were not pressing their work sufficiently. General Irwin himself had ordered that a bridge be completed the night of 10–11

September "at all costs"<sup>12</sup> but noted privately that the "best hope is to have a ford in by daylight and possibly a treadway bridge."<sup>13</sup> On 11 September not even the ford was usable until mid-afternoon. On this date General Irwin noted: "Engineers at bridge not well coordinated."<sup>14</sup> The 10th Infantry S-3 journal noted later in the day of 12 September "deficiencies by the engineers in getting the bridge ready for use." Whatever the criticisms, the two engineer companies that had been working the night of 11–12 September had been hard hit by the severe enemy shelling. They had lost not only personnel but vital equipment, of which there was an acute shortage in Third Army during this period. Although the engineer group commander felt keenly his responsibility to the infantry, he also believed it unwarranted to commit his personnel and equipment recklessly, thus inviting an ultimate delay that might prove far more costly than a temporary delay.<sup>15</sup>

#### *German Counterattacks—12 September*

As engineer activity around the Arnville crossing site came to a halt in early morning of 12 September, preparations begun by the enemy the night before for a continuation of his counterattacks against the bridgehead's infantry sud-

<sup>12</sup> 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 10 Sep 44.

<sup>13</sup> Irwin Diary.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> This section of the engineer story is from: Engineer Operations; Irwin Diary; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 11–12 Sep 44; 1103d Engr (C) Gp, 160th Engr (C) Bn, 989th Tdwy Br Co, AAR's, Sep 44; Ltr, Col Walker to Hist Div. Colonel Walker's comments, particularly on the action the night of 11–12 September, are in valuable detail. See also Certificate, Maj Howard W. Clark, Asst XX Corps Engr, 14 Sep 44, atchd to Ltr, Col Walker to Hist Div.

denly erupted in artillery, armor, and ground action all along the line. Early warning of enemy intentions had come the night before when a platoon of German tanks took position beyond bazooka range on Hill 325 and directed 20-mm. and machine gun fire against Company F in the edge of the Bois de Gaumont. (*Map 6*) While harassment of Company F continued sporadically through the night, men of Company A on Hill 386 could hear enemy troop movement several hundred yards in front of them. S. Sgt. Leslie W. Griffin crawled forward of the company's lines with a telephone and directed artillery fire against the sounds. The movement ceased, but tanks could be heard at intervals through the night on the Arry-Lorry road.

About 0300 (12 September) a preparatory mortar and artillery barrage began in front of both the 1st and 2d Battalion lines. Moving forward in hundred-yard jumps, the barrage rolled across the crests to the reverse slopes, subjecting the defenders to the heaviest fire they had yet encountered in the bridgehead. The first counterattack, a well co-ordinated night attack, hit Company A on Hill 386 at approximately 0330. When the company heard the enemy forming up some one hundred yards in front of its lines, Lieutenant Dutko, the forward artillery observer, called for fire. Although the artillery cut into the rear of the attackers, causing some disorganization, the attack had already moved in under this fire, hitting primarily against the 1st Platoon in the company's center. Stationing S. Sgt. Carmine F. D'Anillo with an automatic rifle near the 3d Platoon on the left and a light machine gunner and a bazooka team on the right beside the 2d

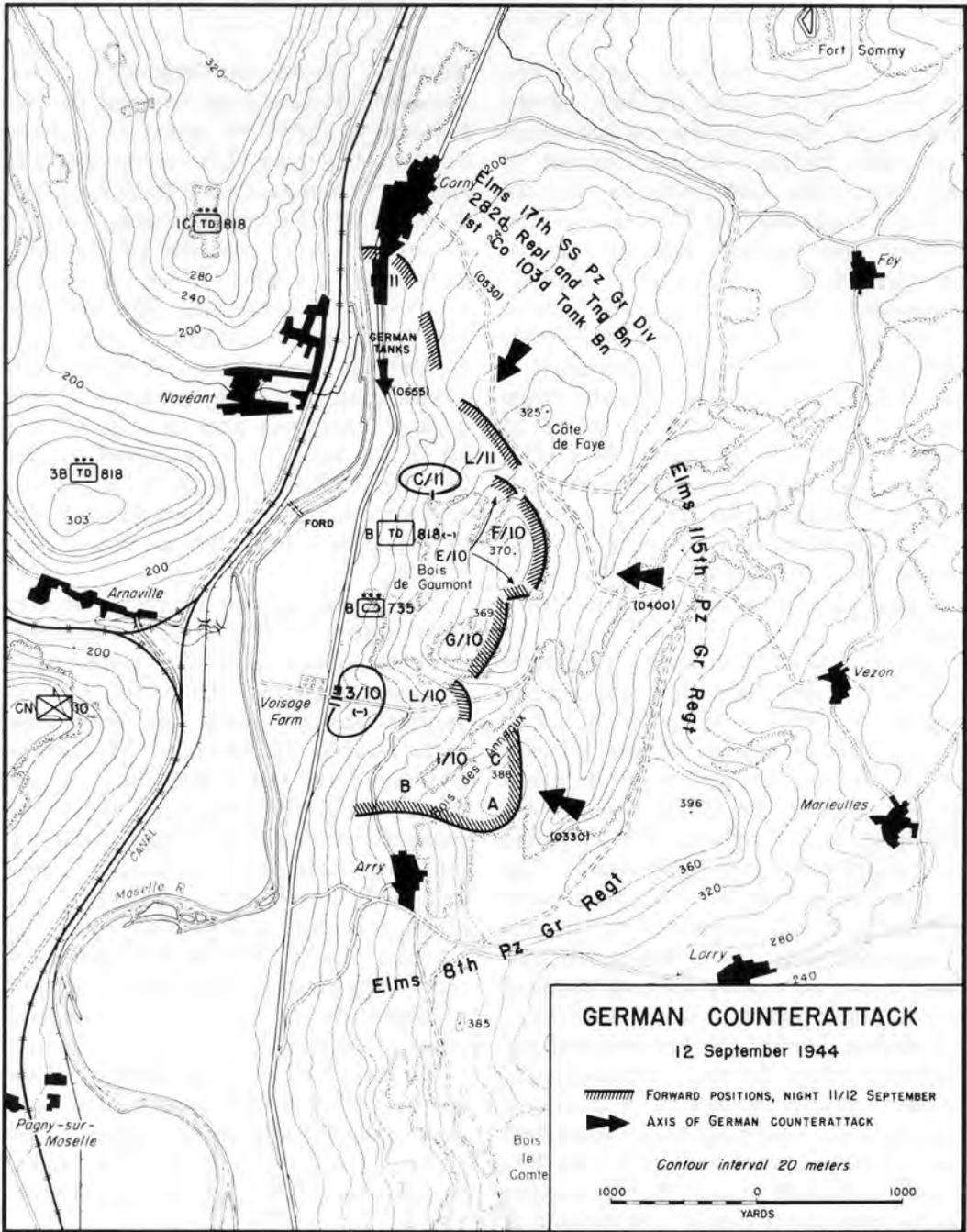
Platoon, Lieutenant Hallowell, commanding the company, ordered the 1st Platoon to withdraw about 150 yards. Even as Company D's heavy machine guns on Company A's left flank fired into the flank of the German attack, the enemy troops moved into the 1st Platoon's positions. Sergeant D'Anillo opened fire with his automatic rifle and the light machine gunner and bazooka team on the right joined in. D'Anillo continued firing even after four men with him became casualties and he himself was hit in the stomach. Supported by this fire, the 1st Platoon, aided by some men of the flank platoons, stormed back into its positions. The German attack was broken.

The attack against Company A had been made by two enemy companies newly equipped and well armed with automatic weapons. Company A found fourteen machine guns and other automatic weapons in the area. Most of the attackers were killed and few prisoners taken except the wounded, and many wounded refused to surrender as long as they had weapons. Company A had sustained twenty-five casualties. The attack was evidently to have been supported by tanks attacking from Arry, but supporting artillery and 57-mm. antitank guns kept the town covered, and no tank effort developed.<sup>16</sup>

On the left flank of the bridgehead the enemy counterattack was a little later getting started and was primarily a tank attack. Two platoons of tanks and a company of infantry were detected about

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<sup>16</sup> 1st Bn story from the following: Moselle River Crossing; General Notes on Arnaville operations; 46th FA Bn AAR, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 12 Sep 44; *Tenth Infantry*.



V Brooks

MAP 6

0400 moving in from the direction of Vezon against the 2d Battalion elements on the left portion of Hill 370. Heavy protective fire from west of the river from artillery, tank destroyers, and Cannon Company, 10th Infantry, was laid on the Germans before they could get close to the lines, and the attack was stopped.

About an hour later, four enemy tanks moved in against Company L, 11th Infantry, now on the lower slopes of Hill 325 to the left of Company F. After the tanks had fired about a dozen scattered rounds against 10th Infantry positions in the Bois de Gaumont and against the bridge site, Company L's bazooka men opened fire. When one tank was hit, although not knocked out, the four withdrew. Farther down on the slope a platoon of tanks, led by a half-track, moved in against the outposts established by the Reconnaissance and Ammunition and Pioneer Platoons of the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry. The half-track bogged down on the muddy slope and bazooka men fired at the tanks; thereupon the enemy abandoned the half-track and the tanks withdrew.

On the extreme left flank of the bridgehead, the positions of Company B, 11th Infantry, in the buildings around a brick factory in the southern edge of Corny, were hit about the same time, just before daylight. At 0530 Company B reported the approach of a platoon of infantry accompanied by four tanks, presumably those whose earlier attack had been thwarted by the bogged half-track. The company reported that it had only one bazooka and that even though the infantry could be stopped the tanks might break through. Major Birdsong, the battalion commander, therefore sent his orderly, Pfc. Harry Saghbazarian, on

foot to the tank destroyer assembly area north of Voisage Farm to guide tank destroyers into firing positions against the threat.

Spearheading the attack, the four enemy tanks passed through the Company B positions. One of the 3d Battalion's 57-mm. antitank guns, manned by 1st Lt. Mitchell J. Hazam and S. Sgt. Cline Bills, opened fire on the lead tank and set it ablaze. The second German tank returned the fire, knocking out both the crew and the antitank gun and forcing the other antitank gun crews to take cover. As the three remaining enemy tanks continued to advance, the tank destroyers of Company B, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, reached firing positions, fired, knocked out one of the three tanks, and damaged another. Meanwhile, Company B, 11th Infantry, had held its small arms fire and allowed the enemy infantry to get into its positions. On signal the men opened fire from their covered positions in the houses, catching the German infantry in a deadly cross fire. Twenty-three Germans were killed, seven wounded, and twenty-eight captured. The two remaining enemy tanks (one of them damaged) raced back through the company's positions. Although Pfc. Walter A. Andrews, Company B, shot the commander of one of the tanks through the tank's open turret, both tanks escaped into Corny and hid through the day and night. The next morning when one tried to escape on the Metz highway to the north it was set on fire by tank destroyers firing from west of the river. Later the remaining tank, previously damaged by the 818th's destroyers, was found abandoned in Corny. The Germans had been beaten back but not without cost; in its right flank platoon

Company B had lost the platoon leader and eighteen men, missing in action.<sup>17</sup>

Although heavy enemy shelling, most of it against the reserve positions around Voisage Farm and on the reverse slopes of the hills, continued for almost an hour, by 0800 (12 September) the third major counterattack against the Moselle bridgehead had been defeated. Prisoners taken were from the *282d Infantry Battalion*, a separate machine gun battalion, a supporting tank battalion (*103d*), the *115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* of the *15th Panzer Grenadier Division*, which had moved into the area the day before, and the *17th SS* and *3d Panzer Grenadier Divisions*. That night the *15th Panzer Grenadier Division* began a move south to the Nancy sector, leaving the burden of the Arnville fight to the *17th SS* and elements of the *3d Panzer Grenadier Division*. The Americans knew nothing of the *15th's* shift at the time. A belief prevalent among both 5th Division and CCB personnel that they were fighting the elite troops of the Metz military schools is not borne out by German records. These school troops were in the German "bridgehead" west of Metz surrounding Forts Driant, Marival, and Jeanne d'Arc and were being engaged by the 2d Infantry and other elements of the 7th Armored Division. Some were north of Metz fighting the 90th Infantry Division. All were under *Division Number 462*. Not until after the Arnville bridgehead was secure did any of these school troops enter the American bridgehead battles south of Metz, except

for one battalion of signal school troops (*SS Signal School Metz*) which fought against the 2d Battalion of the 11th Infantry opposite Dornot. (Replacement battalions in the area, though originally under *Division Number 462*, were not school troops.) Not that the Arnville bridgehead was being opposed by inferior German troops: the *17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* had been refitted and its combat value considerably increased; the *3d* and *5th Panzer Grenadier Divisions* had nuclei of elite personnel and even at this period carried a German classification in general combat effectiveness of II—better than average.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Plans To Expand the Bridgehead*

At daylight on 12 September the force still available to General Irwin for strengthening his Arnville bridgehead seemed at first glance sufficient. But strings were attached to it. The 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry, which had not yet crossed, was actually already committed in holding the division's north flank north of Dornot, and its Companies B and C were attached to the 3d Battalion in the bridgehead. The 3d Battalion's Companies I and K could not be considered fair exchange because of the battering they had received at Dornot. Although the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, still had not crossed, it too had been ravaged in the Dornot battle and was far from reconstituted. Furthermore, it was the division's only infantry reserve.

<sup>17</sup> 2d Bn, 10th Inf, and 3d Bn, 11th Inf, stories from the following: Moselle River Crossing; Combat Interv 38 with Birdsong and Simpson-Lynch-Lathrop; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 12 Sep 44; 818th TD Bn AAR, Sep 44; Ltr, Col Birdsong to Hist Div.

<sup>18</sup> MS # B-042 (Krause); MS # B-728 (Colonel Albert Emmerich, formerly G-3, *First Army*); various Ltrs and Rpts, 9-16 Sep 44, found in *Army Group G KTB 2, Anlagen 1.IX.-30.IX.44*; IPW Msg, 10th Inf Unit Jnl File, 12 Sep 44.

There remained CCB, 7th Armored Division, which was alerted to cross the moment a bridge could be completed. General Irwin was alarmed about the lack of infantry to support the combat command, for the unit's 23d Armored Infantry Battalion had been reduced almost to a cipher in the Dornot fighting. In addition, the 5th Division commander could count on Companies C and D, 735th Tank Battalion, and Company C, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion. (The A Companies of both units were attached to the 2d Infantry Combat Team which was attached to the 7th Armored Division in its fight to contain the enemy west of Metz.) With his division short approximately 60 officers and 1,600 riflemen, General Irwin asked for additional reinforcements. The XX Corps commander, General Walker, considered briefly a plan to aid the 5th Division by leaving the 2d Infantry alone to continue the attack west of Metz and sending CCA, 7th Armored Division, to the bridgehead; but the 7th Armored Division commander advised that it would take more than one infantry combat team to contain these German forces. Therefore, XX Corps had to turn to a plan for wider reshuffling all along the corps front.

Meanwhile, General Irwin tried to make arrangements with the 4th Armored Division, which had moved up to the river at Pagny-sur-Moselle, south of Arnaville, for mutual support that would include a crossing by the 4th Armored at Pagny. Late on 11 September the 4th Armored agreed to cross in conjunction with an attack by 5th Division elements to break through Arry and take Hill 385 to the southeast opposite the proposed Pagny crossing. General Irwin accordingly laid plans for this attack, but at

0400 of 12 September the 4th Armored sent word that it had to delay its crossing for twenty-four hours. Throughout that day, the shortage of infantry stymied any plans to break out of the Arnaville bridgehead.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Reinforcements for the Bridgehead*

Colonel Walker, the engineer group commander, had evacuated all engineer personnel from the Arnaville bridge site at 0300 the morning of 12 September. Two and a half hours later, noting that enemy artillery fire had lessened, he ordered that construction begin again on a treadway bridge at River Site 2. (See *Map 5*.) The 989th Treadway Bridge Company, this time assisted by Company C, 204th Engineers, and one platoon of Company C, 160th Engineers, resumed work at 0800. The delay occurred because no troops had been kept on construction alert after the earlier withdrawal. Artillery fire had dwindled to occasional shelling in the near vicinity, and the engineers sustained no casualties. By 1230 (12 September), some fifty-eight hours after the infantry had begun their crossing, a treadway bridge at last spanned the Moselle. Concurrently the 537th Light Ponton Company's Footbridge Section combined assault boats and support rafts into a footbridge to facilitate evacuation of walking wounded.<sup>20</sup>

Ten minutes after the treadway bridge was completed at River Site 2, tanks of Company C, 735th Tank Battalion,

<sup>19</sup> Irwin Diary; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 12 Sep 44; Moselle River Crossing; 5th Div G-3 Jnl, 12 Sep 44.

<sup>20</sup> Moselle River Crossing; Engineer Operations; 1103d Engr (C) Gp, 989th Tdwy Br Co, 204th Engr (C) Bn, 160th Engr (C) Bn, 537th Lt Pon Co, AAR's, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 12 Sep 44; Ltr, Col Walker to Hist Div.



TREADWAY BRIDGE AT RIVER SITE 2. *Haze in background is from smoke operations.*

began moving over it into the bridgehead. The remaining platoon of Company B and the 3d Platoon, Company C, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, followed, while the other two platoons of Company C, 818th, maintained firing positions on the west-bank hills flanking Arnaville. After the destroyers came Companies A, B, and C of CCB's 31st Tank Battalion. They moved into an assembly area behind wooded Hill 370 east of the Metz highway. CCB's tank destroyer support, Company B, 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion, followed soon after.

The confined bridgehead was almost bursting with uncommitted armor (five medium tank companies, seven self-propelled tank destroyer platoons), but infantry support to enlarge the maneuver area was not available. CCB's 23d Armored Infantry Battalion was still too weak from its Dornot fight for commitment, as was the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry; and the 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry, was holding a defensive position north of Dornot protecting the division's north flank. The infantry already in the bridgehead possessed a reserve in the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry. To commit it despite the battered condition of the 1st and 2d Battalions, 10th Infantry, in an attack which would further extend the infantry lines seemed inadvisable. The Germans were still punishing the area with shellfire from an arc of approximately 210 degrees. They still held the dominant terrain feature in the area, Hill 396; the battered village of Arry; almost all of the north-flank town, Corny; and the bare slopes of Hill 325. On the night of 12-13 September the enemy used his advantages profitably, plastering the bridgehead with artillery fire that took inevitable toll among personnel of

the bunched armored units on the flatlands along the Metz highway.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Supporting the Bridgehead*

The thirteen field artillery battalions charged with support of the bridgehead fired, during 12 September, a total of 5,733 rounds, almost as much as on the opening day of the attack.<sup>22</sup> No doubt a large portion of this fire was directed at repelling the fierce counterattacks of early morning. In comparison with the weight of American shelling, however, General Irwin noted that "Boche artillery has actually had superiority today due to our ammunition restrictions, and has fired over whole area all day long." Planes of the 371st Fighter Bomber Group, XIX Tactical Air Command, taking advantage of another cool, clear day with good visibility, augmented American artillery throughout the day, causing General Irwin to comment: "Air furnished splendid support today and has been of greatest value. It cooperates quickly and efficiently, and has uncanny ability to find targets, both from our designations and its own." Major missions included bombing gun positions at Mardigny, southeast of Arry, strafing tanks and infantry between Mariculles and Fey, and bombing the Verdun forts, Sommy and St. Blaise, all by P-47's of the 406th Squadron, 371st Group. One plane and pilot were lost.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Moselle River Crossing; 735th Tk Bn, 818th TD Bn, CCB, 31st Tk Bn, AAR's, Sep 44.

<sup>22</sup> Arnaville Artillery. This does not include the 434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion of CCB, which placed some fire in the bridgehead during 12 September but for which firing statistics are not available.

<sup>23</sup> Quotes are from Irwin Diary. See also XIX TAC Daily Intel Sum, 12 Sep 44, XIX TAC Opns File.

Infantry, tank destroyers, and artillery all made claims of enemy armor kills on 12 September. The 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, destroyed one tank at Corny with a 57-mm. antitank gun; bazookas of Company L, 11th Infantry, hit another on the open slopes of the Côte de Faye. Company B, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, knocked out two at Corny, while Company C, 818th, firing from west of the river, claimed one half-track and four tanks definitely knocked out and one tank damaged. An unidentified corps artillery unit claimed two tanks knocked out southeast of Arry with 155-mm. fire. The day's total of established kills, not including any that might have been made by air support, was ten.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Bridgebuilding Continues*

Late in the afternoon of 12 September the 551st Heavy Ponton Battalion was ordered to erect a reinforced heavy ponton bridge across the Moselle at River Site 1. Necessary abutments, trestles, and hinge-span rafts were to be constructed during the night and await corps order for completion. Movement of the pontoons and other equipment was a laborious process because the engineers had to use the same route as bridgehead traffic. In addition, a steep incline at the canal lock crossing and a sharp turn at the second treadway over the Rupt de Mad presented formidable obstacles to the engineers' heavy trailers. Despite these difficulties, the first load of equipment reached the river about 2100, and work was begun by the 1st and 2d Bridge

Platoons, Company A, and the 2d Bridge Platoon, Company B. The engineers finished all preliminary work by 0700 and then retired to await the order for completion.

At noon on 13 September came the order to resume construction. By the time personnel and equipment, including additional materials necessary for the floating portion of the bridge, had moved again to the site through the maze of bridgehead traffic, it was 1500. Construction thereafter proceeded rapidly with no interference at first from enemy artillery. It would have taken approximately one and a half hours' additional work to complete the bridge when German shelling began at 1745, driving the engineers to cover. Concentrations continued to fall at fifteen-minute intervals, and work was resumed during the lulls. About 1830 the fire increased, concentrations landing every two or three minutes, until finally, five hours later, Lt. Col. Robert H. Latham, 1103d Engineer Combat Group executive officer, ordered withdrawal.

The enemy shelling, presumably from the heavy batteries at Fort Driant, knocked out a section of the treadway bridge at River Site 2, but the engineers were able to repair it quickly. The 537th Light Ponton Company, which during the afternoon had begun construction of a Bailey bridge over the southern canal crossing site, also suffered casualties from the enemy shelling, including severe wounds to its two bridge platoon leaders. The unit withdrew with the other engineers at 2330.

Work was resumed on both bridges at 1000 the next morning (14 September) with assistance at the heavy ponton bridge by Company B, 160th Engineers.

<sup>24</sup> Combat Interv 38 with Birdsong; 818th TD Bn AAR, Sep 44; and 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 12 Sep 44, from which the information on the corps artillery unit was obtained.



HEAVY PONTON BRIDGE ACROSS MOSELLE near Arnaville was completed by 551st Engineer Heavy Ponton Battalion on 14 September 1944.

Several metallic pontoons that had been damaged in the partially completed bridge were repaired in place. The crane and several vehicles had been knocked out and seven pneumatic floats had to be replaced. Later, about 1330, shelling increased, and all personnel withdrew. They returned to the job once again about 1500 and in two hours completed a 250-foot reinforced heavy ponton bridge (Class 40 tons). At 1830 an eighty-foot double-single Bailey bridge was completed across the canal at the southern crossing site. The two bridges, combined with the treadway bridges at River Site 2 and at the canal lock, gave two complete one-way routes over the combined obstacles and completed engineer bridge construction at the Arnaville crossing until after the bridgehead was

secured. Only maintenance was required, and, although enemy shelling continued, there was no major damage to either the treadway or the heavy ponton bridge until the ponton bridge was hit on 28 September. Six metallic pontoons and several pneumatic floats had to be replaced, and the bridge was again ready for traffic the next morning.

The 1103d Engineer Combat Group had constructed a total of six bridges across three water barriers, the Rupt de Mad, the Moselle Canal, and the Moselle River. In so doing they had suffered 100 men wounded and thirteen killed.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Engineer Operations; Ltr, Col Walker to Hist Div; 1103d Engr (C) Gp, 551st Hv Pon Bn, 537th Lt Pon Co, AAR's, Sep 44. The 551st's detailed account of heavy ponton bridge construction is particularly valuable.

## CHAPTER IV

# Build-Up and Expansion (13–15 September)

A cold, driving rain began during the night of 12–13 September. By daylight the little bridgehead across the Moselle River was a morass of mud boding no good for the assembled armor and adding to the discomforts of the battle-weary infantry. The infantrymen, who had seen little sleep for three days and four nights, were nonetheless grateful for a surcease from the fierce enemy counterblows. Both the 1st and 2d Battalions, 10th Infantry, atop Hills 370, 369, and 386, had been reduced to 50 percent of their original strength, and battle fatigue had become a serious problem.

Elsewhere in the bridgehead the 3d Battalion of the 11th Infantry (less Companies I and K, plus Companies B and C) continued to hold on the north flank in the southern edge of Corny, while the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry, remained in reserve around Voisage Farm. Also in assembled reserve were Companies B and C, 735th Tank Battalion; Company B and one platoon of Company C, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company B, 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion (CCB); and Companies A, B, and C, 31st Tank Battalion (CCB).

At approximately 0900 on 13 September a platoon of light tanks of Company D, 735th Tank Battalion, with one 105-mm. assault gun and one 81-mm. mortar attached, and the 5th Reconnaissance

Troop crossed into the bridgehead to patrol south along the east bank of the river. No sooner had they headed south than they were stopped by intense enemy shellfire.

Later in the morning the 1st Battalion, 10th Infantry, sent a small foot patrol toward the troublesome south-flank town of Arry. By 1100 the patrol's report was back, indicating promise for a drive to enlarge the bridgehead to the southeast: in Arry the riflemen had found only dead Germans and four enemy tanks, all knocked out; the town had been abandoned. Another 1st Battalion patrol, going northeast from the battalion's positions on Hill 386, also made no enemy contact. In the afternoon another patrol, this time a platoon from the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry, investigated Arry and confirmed the earlier findings. Asserting that it would take more than a platoon to defend the town, the patrol withdrew. Despite this evidence that Arry was not occupied, no 10th Infantry troops were sent to hold the town. The Americans feared overextension of their lines and felt that Arry, now reduced to a pile of rubble, could be controlled by the troops on Hill 386 and by direct fire from tank destroyers and Cannon Company guns on the west-bank heights south of Arnville.

Thus, notwithstanding signs of a pos-

sible enemy withdrawal on the southeast and south of the bridgehead, little tangible effort was made immediately to exploit it. Although Brig. Gen. John M. Devine, new commander of CCB, came into the bridgehead in early afternoon with orders from the 5th Division to attack, intense enemy shelling, a lack of time for reconnaissance, and the deep mud that mired his tanks prompted him to ask that the attack be postponed until the next day. Permission was granted, and no further effort at expansion of the bridgehead was made during 13 September. The remnants of the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion had already begun a march toward Arnaville and the bridgehead, where they would have partially remedied the shortage of infantry. They were halted at Onville because of the decision not to attack. The same enemy shelling that helped discourage General Devine also forced the engineers to abandon bridge construction temporarily. As for American artillery units, they passed their most inactive day of the operation, feeling the pinch of their ammunition shortage and firing only 2,533 rounds.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, plans for expanding the bridgehead were being made on 13 September. The XX Corps commander initiated a reshuffling of units by directing the 90th Infantry Division to begin taking over a part of the 7th Armored Division sector west of Metz in order to permit CCA to prepare for movement into the Arnaville fight. This was the first step in a move which was eventually to release

all of the 7th Armored Division and the 2d Infantry combat team for the fight in the south. General Irwin, despite the shortages of men and equipment in the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, alerted the 11th to be prepared to send another battalion into the bridgehead. Meanwhile, General Irwin's headquarters issued Operations Instructions 13, confirming previous verbal orders and calling, primarily, for movement of the remainder of CCB into the bridgehead. The instructions also ordered a subsequent attack by the combat command to seize Mardigny, to the southeast of Arry, and by the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry, to capture Hill 396. The day passed without significant developments on the ground except at the bridge site.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Impasse on 14 September*

The morning of 14 September brought more rain, and attempted movement of armored vehicles produced only further churning of the muddy soil. The proposed attempt to expand the bridgehead to the south and southeast was again postponed. Although Battery B, 434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (CCB), crossed the river into the bridgehead, artillery fire was so intense that the remainder of the battalion stayed in its positions west of Arnaville. Just after dark, the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, still not wholly reconstituted after its Dornot battle, crossed to join the tanks of the 31st Tank Battalion. For the battered 10th Infantry in its positions atop Hills 370, 369, and 386 there was

<sup>1</sup>This section based on the following: Arnaville Artillery; Moselle River Crossing; *Tenth Infantry*; 10th Inf, CCB, 31st Tk Bn, 735th Tk Bn, AAR's, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44; Ltr, Col Shipley to Hist Div; Interv with Col Breckinridge.

<sup>2</sup>Irwin Diary; General Notes on Arnaville operations; 10th Inf and 11th Inf Unit Jnls, 13 Sep 44; 5th Div G-3 Jnl, 13 Sep 44; XX Corps AAR, Sep 44; Moselle River Crossing.

some encouragement with the arrival of 300 infantry replacements, including twenty-five inexperienced officers; but these men were going to forward battalions where battle fatigue had become a serious problem. When one soldier, a veteran of all the division's combat, had his carbine shot from his hand and his closest friend killed by a shell which fell near his foxhole, he jumped up screaming and ran toward the enemy lines. He was caught by a fellow soldier but had to be knocked unconscious before he could be quieted. Evacuated, he could not remember what he had done.

Enemy activity against the forward battalions consisted of continued shelling and occasional small reconnaissance patrols that harassed the fatigued Americans but were readily driven off. One such patrol was repulsed in an effort to go around the left flank of Company B, 11th Infantry, at Corny by swimming the river.

In early morning two platoons of Company C, 11th Infantry, relieved the Reconnaissance and Ammunition and Pioneer Platoons (3d Battalion, 11th Infantry) in the line between Companies L and B on the bridgehead's north flank. Then, in the afternoon, two platoons of Company L staged a raid on the bald crest of Hill 325 on the Côte de Faye, driving off an enemy defensive force of about twenty men who had been dug in and were supported by machine guns. Some twenty minutes later the same Germans counterattacked, but all were either killed or wounded. A larger enemy group counterattacked from the left flank about ten minutes later. Inasmuch as the Company L attack had been intended merely as a raid to discover the enemy positions and the bare hill could be con-

trolled by fire, the two rifle platoons were ordered to withdraw to their positions on the lower southeastern slopes of the hill.

The 5th Reconnaissance Troop, which had crossed the day before and failed to complete its mission of patrolling south along the east bank of the river, tried again on 14 September and sent a patrol through Arry without enemy opposition except for artillery fire. Pushing out along the Arry-Lorry road, the patrol encountered an enemy pillbox. Two enemy soldiers were talked into coming out of the pillbox and surrendering; eighteen remained inside, and heavy mortar fire from beyond the hill forced the patrol to withdraw. Although Arry was still free of enemy, once again the Americans failed to occupy it.

On this date XX Corps issued a new field order that instructed the 5th Division to expand its bridgehead and continue the attack to capture Metz, while the 7th Armored Division was to cross into the bridgehead and make a swinging movement around the right flank through Mardigny. The armor was to force a hook around Metz from the southeast while the 5th Infantry Division attacked almost due north against the city. Already relief of elements of the 7th Armored had been started west of Metz by the 90th Division and eventually the 2d Infantry was to be returned to the 5th Division. But for the time being CCB's attachment to the 5th Division remained in force.

Although the weather began to improve during the afternoon of 14 September, a second delay in the attack was granted to permit regrouping and to allow further preparations. Regardless of weather, the attack was to be launched

the next morning, 15 September. The original 5th Division attack plan had to be altered somewhat when XX Corps protested that it was not ambitious enough to meet the orders assigned the division. As finally decided, CCB was to pass through Arry to capture Mardigny and subsequently to move northeast to take the village of Marieulles; the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry, was to capture Hill 396; and the remainder of the division was to build up on a line of departure for continuation of the attack on Metz. This line ran from north of Corny east and southeast to Marieulles, but no actual movement toward the line was made on the first day of the attack.<sup>3</sup>

*Attack in the Fog—15 September*

The morning of 15 September was cloudy, and the bridgehead area was covered with a heavy ground fog so dense that visibility was often reduced to between ten and fifteen feet. Elements of CCB began moving from their assembly area at 0903, and, despite the fog, the thrice-delayed attack to expand the bridgehead jumped off toward the south. (*Map 7*)

For the attack CCB had been divided into two forces. Force I, under Colonel Erlenbusch, consisted of the 31st Tank Battalion (less Companies A and D);

Company B, 23d Armored Infantry Battalion; and Battery B, 434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. It was to pass through Arry, capture Hill 385 to the south of Arry, then move on to take Hill 400 in the Bois le Comte, and be prepared to capture Lorry and Mardigny on order. Force II, under Lt. Col. William H. G. Fuller, consisted of Company A, 31st Tank Battalion; the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion (less Company B); and the 434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (less Battery B). Its mission was to attack south down the main Metz–Pont-à-Mousson highway to capture the village of Vittonville. The two forces were then to tie in at a trail junction on the southern nose of Hill 400 southwest of Mardigny.

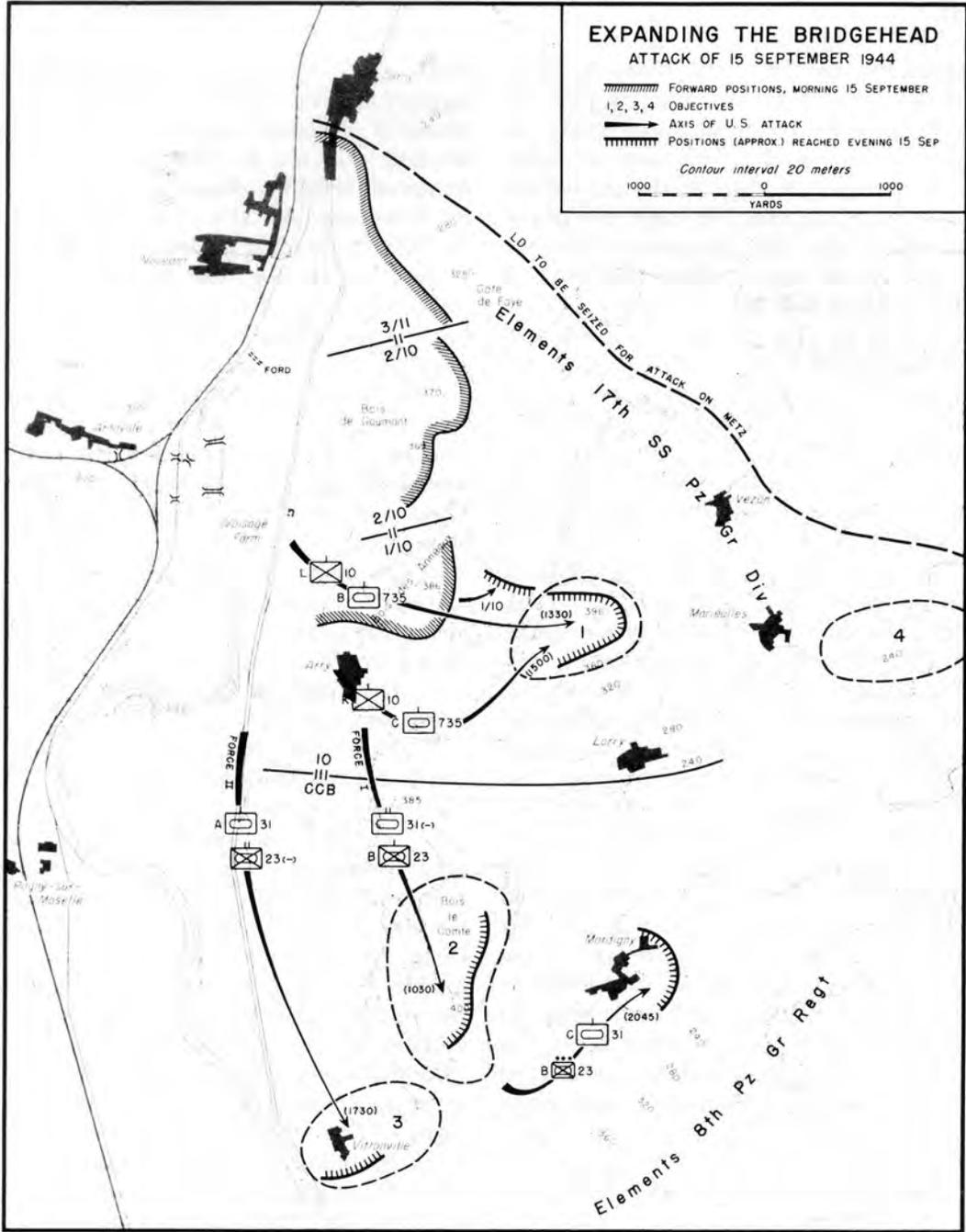
Initially CCB's Company B, 33d Armored Engineer Battalion, was not to be broken into attachments but held in the original bridgehead assembly area with Company D, 31st Tank Battalion, as the combat command reserve.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Company B, 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion, was initially to remain in the original bridgehead area and provide fire support on call. Except for Battery B, which had already crossed the river and was to fire from positions within the bridgehead, the 434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was to support the attack from firing positions on the west-bank hills south of Arnaville. Additional support was to be provided by 5th Division and corps artillery units. For thirty minutes before H Hour, all the medium and heavy artillery was to direct counterbattery fire against located and suspected enemy artillery positions. Thereafter counterbattery fire would be

<sup>3</sup> This section based on the following sources: CCB, 7th Armd Div, 5th Div, 434th Armd FA Bn, 10th Inf, 11th Inf, AAR's, Sep 44; 7th Armd Div and 5th Div G-3 Jnls and Files, Sep 44; *Tenth Infantry*; Moselle River Crossing; General Notes on Arnaville operations; Combat Interv 38 with Birdsong, Simpson-Lynch-Lathrop. See XX Corps FO 11; 5th Div FO 9; 5th Div Telephone Jnl; 5th Div Opns Instructions 14. All four in 5th Div G-3 Jnl File, 14 Sep 44.

<sup>4</sup> Records fail to show when either of these units crossed into the bridgehead.

# EXPANDING THE BRIDGEHEAD ATTACK OF 15 SEPTEMBER 1944

- FORWARD POSITIONS, MORNING 15 SEPTEMBER
- 1, 2, 3, 4** OBJECTIVES
- AXIS OF U.S. ATTACK
- POSITIONS (APPROX.) REACHED EVENING 15 SEP



MAP 7

T. Brooks

continued by the 203d Field Artillery Group. From H Hour to H plus fifteen minutes, concentrations were to be fired along Hill 385, and on other critical terrain features in the immediate area, including Hill 396, objective of the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry. Concentrations were then to be shifted to Hill 400 and the Bois le Comte from H plus fifteen to H plus thirty. Harassing fire on Lorry, Mardigny, and Vittonville was to be continued at intervals from thirty minutes before H Hour until H plus thirty. The line of departure for the attack was to be an east-west line from Arry to the river, and the hour of attack 0900.<sup>5</sup>

By 0915 Force I, led by the tanks of Company C with Company B, 31st Tank Battalion, and the infantry of Company B, 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, following, had inched its way through the fog into Arry. Once past the town, the column began to encounter occasional resistance from small enemy groups, but these appeared eager to surrender when pressed. The main difficulty was still with fog and mud. A number of prisoners had been taken by the time the first objective, Hill 385, was reached. At 1030 the head of the column was on the second objective, Hill 400, in the Bois le Comte, and by the time the sun began to break through, shortly before noon, the remainder of Force I had moved forward and begun to consolidate its positions in preparation for attack on Lorry, Mardigny, and Marieulles.

Meanwhile Force II had proceeded

south along the main east-bank highway toward Vittonville. Initially a dismounted infantry attack, Force II's advance was led by Company A, 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, supported by Company A, 31st Tank Battalion. By 1225 the leading elements, hampered at first by the fog and later by time-consuming ground opposition, including small arms and mortar fire, had progressed no farther than a point due east of the west-bank town of Pagny. Apparently in an effort to speed the attack in view of the success of Force I, the tanks passed through the infantry; but still the attack moved slowly. It was not until about 1600 that the tanks and infantry halted on the northern edge of Vittonville to permit supporting artillery to fire a preparation against the town. In an hour and a half Vittonville was secured. The attack had cost Force II four men killed and five missing.

A confusion in orders delayed Force I's attack against Mardigny, and Lorry and Marieulles were left to be taken the next day. Force I was ordered at 1510 to prepare to attack Mardigny, but before a movement order was received CCB reverted to control of the 7th Armored Division. At 1740 Force I was told to remain on Hill 400 until relieved by elements of the 5th Division, whereupon Force I was to capture Mardigny. At 1845 this order was negated by another ordering the immediate capture of Mardigny. This time Company C, 31st Tank Battalion, accompanied by a platoon of Company B, 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, moved out in the attack. Against only token ground opposition, Mardigny was captured and outposted by 2045. The remainder of Force I held for the night on Hill 400 in the Bois le

<sup>5</sup> CCB, 31st Tk Bn, 434th Armd FA Bn, 10th Inf, AAR's, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 15 Sep 44; CCB Unit Jnl and File, 15 Sep 44; Moselle River Crossing; Interv with Otto.

Comte and was relieved early the next morning by elements of the 5th Division.<sup>6</sup>

*Objective—Hill 396*

In conjunction with CCB's attack to the south, the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry, supported by Companies B and C, 735th Tank Battalion, was ordered to capture Hill 396. This was the dominant terrain feature in the vicinity of the bridgehead, rising east of the 1st Battalion's long-held positions on Hill 386. From Hill 396 one could observe the entire bridgehead and on clear days see as far north as Metz.

Scheduled to begin at 0900, like the CCB attack, the 3d Battalion's attack was to follow an artillery barrage beginning at 0830 against Hill 396. The barrage was to shift later to enemy towns beyond the first hill mass. At first, the two tank companies were to lead, Company B, 735th Tank Battalion, on the left and Company C, 735th, on the right. Close behind the left tank company was to be Company L, 10th Infantry, and behind the right tank company, Company K. While the two left companies advanced through the 1st Battalion lines on Hill 386 in order to take advantage of some woods cover, the two right companies were to enter Arry and follow initially the Arry-Lorry road to a trail that branched to the northeast toward the objective, Hill 396. Company I, 10th Infantry, was to move northeast from the friendly positions on Hill 386 and block to the north in a wooded draw

which separated Hill 386 from Hill 396, a logical avenue for enemy counterattack.

Despite heavy ground fog and muddy footing, the attack moved off on time. On the right, the tanks of Company C, under Capt. Floyd R. Miller, followed by the infantry of Company K, passed through Arry by 0930. Moving along the Arry-Lorry road toward the trail they were to follow to the objective, the tanks encountered a barricade across the road and reported to Major Shipley, the 3d Battalion commander, that they could not pass. An exchange of messages followed between the tankers, Major Shipley, and the regimental command post, in which the infantry commanders expressed doubt about the impregnability of the barricade. At 1025 the tanks had not yet moved forward, and Colonel Bell ordered the 3d Battalion to continue its attack without them.<sup>7</sup>

As the tanks had first moved out, the 3d Battalion's two assault companies had followed closely. When the right tank company halted at the barricade, heavy enemy shelling centered to the rear of the tanks, catching the infantry in the open and causing heavy casualties and confusion, particularly in Company K. By the time the companies had reorganized, the value of the preliminary artillery barrage against Hill 396 had been lost, and Lieutenant Dutko, the 1st Battalion artillery observer, had another barrage fired against the hill. The assault began.

On the left, 1st Lt. Robert Brown's Company B tanks preceded the infantry by approximately 300 yards. The ad-

<sup>6</sup> CCB, 31st Tk Bn, 23d Armd Inf Bn, 434th Armd FA Bn, AAR's, Sep 44; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 15 Sep 44; Moselle River Crossing; General Notes on Arnaville operations.

<sup>7</sup> 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 15 Sep 44; Ltr, Col Bell to Hist Div. Company C, 735th Tank Battalion, had habitually worked with the 11th Infantry while Company B had worked with the 10th Infantry. This was Company C's first combat experience with the 10th Infantry.

vance moved without incident until it reached the ruins of the barrack-type buildings to the 1st Battalion's left front, which had housed a radar station and had served as a base for previous enemy counterattacks against Hill 386. There the Americans overcame token opposition by second-rate troops, thirty of whom soon surrendered, and the attack moved on toward the crest of the objective. Meeting fire from enemy pillboxes which had evidently been constructed for training by the Metz military schools, the tanks fired to button up the defenses as the infantry stormed them. When the armor at one point got too far ahead of the infantry, one tank herded a group of prisoners back toward the advancing infantry while the others waited for the foot soldiers to catch up. By 1330, both Company L's infantry and Company B's tanks (except three that had mired on the muddy slopes of the hill) were firmly established on the objective.

On the right, the attack had gone more slowly. Although Company K planned to advance without tank support, the Company C platoon of 1st Lt. James C. Blanchard, Jr., was ready to join it. But two of Lieutenant Blanchard's tanks mired early on the muddy slopes, and the others wandered off in the fog in the direction of Lorry, not to rejoin Company K's infantry until the objective had been taken. It was not until about 1500 that Company K was established on its portion of the hill. Later, two American tanks on the hill were damaged by enemy artillery fire; after Lieutenant Blanchard's tank arrived, an armor-piercing round from an enemy tank or antitank gun knocked it out as well.

Hill 396, the dominant terrain feature in the vicinity of the bridgehead, was at

last in American hands. Perhaps because artillery missions were fired almost continuously against reported enemy assembly in woods northeast of the hill, expected German counterblows did not develop immediately on the ground. The enemy did react during the night and the next day with obviously pre-planned artillery concentrations. By this time Companies K and L had dug in deeply on the bald forward crest of the hill and suffered only minor casualties. The battalion headquarters was set up in the sole remaining barrack-type building, and Company I reorganized its blocking position in the draw between Hills 386 and 396 to form a reserve for the 3d Battalion's defense. The tanks of Company C, 735th Tank Battalion, were withdrawn to an assembly area near Arry, and Company B's tanks remained in reserve with Company I.

Not until early morning on 17 September did the Germans launch their counterblow on the ground, hitting Company L from the northeast. Here for the first time in the Arnaville bridgehead area the Germans used troops from the Metz military schools. Coming in through the darkness, a number of enemy troops succeeded in moving into Company L's positions. Close-in fighting resulted, and the battalion command post was threatened before Major Shipley committed his reserve company, Company I, and one platoon of Company B, 735th Tank Battalion. An attack by the reserve units up the northwest side of the hill restored the situation.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Moselle River Crossing; General Notes on Arnaville operations; Combat Interv 38 with Shipley-McCluskey-Bradley-Baughman; *Tenth Infantry*; 10th Inf Unit Jnl, 15 Sep 44; 10th Inf, 735th Tk Bn, 46th FA Bn, AAR's, Sep 44; Ltr, Col Bell to Hist Div; Ltr, Col Shipley to Hist Div; Ltr, Lt Blanchard to

*The Bridgehead Is Secure*

With a firm northern anchor in Corny, southern anchors in Mardigny and Vittonville, possession of the vicinity's dominant terrain features, Hill 396 and Hill 400, and two substantial bridges providing ready access, the Arnaville bridgehead could be considered secure. Five days of bitter fighting had brought XX Corps its first successful Moselle crossing at a cost to the 10th Infantry Regiment alone of approximately twenty-five officers and 700 men. The ill-fated Dornot crossing, which had cost the 11th Infantry Regiment and the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion almost as many casualties, had been an important element in the 10th Infantry's success, for it had held the enemy's attention during the initial stages of the Arnaville crossing.

After the successful attacks of the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry, and CCB on 15 September, the bridgehead was strengthened as relief of 7th Armored Division units to the northwest was continued and

elements of CCR began crossing the Arnaville bridges. On 16 September CCA began to cross, and the 2d Infantry also began to move in. The 11th Infantry, relieving its 1st Battalion (less Companies B and C, plus Companies I and K) in the defense north of Dornot with the reconstituted 2d Battalion, sent the 1st Battalion into the bridgehead the afternoon of 16 September and assumed command of the original bridgehead area.

The attacks to break out of the bridgehead and capture Metz began again in early morning, 16 September, with the capture of Lorry by elements of CCB. Enemy guns were still able to shell the bridgehead area, including the bridge sites, and some of the fiercest fighting either the 5th Infantry or 7th Armored Division was to see in World War II remained before Metz itself fell. Not until 22 November did the battle for Metz, which had seen its real beginning in the river crossings at Dornot and Arnaville, come to a close with the formal cessation of hostilities and the fall of the city. Four of the major forts still held out and it was not until 8 December that the last of them, Fort Driant, capitulated.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For an account of this later action, see Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, Chs. III, VI, VIII, and IX.

Hist Div; Interv with Shipley and Hays; Ltr, Maj Charles W. McClean (formerly S-3, 3d Bn, 10th Inf), to Col Shipley, 15 Apr 50, copy in OCMH files through courtesy of Col Shipley; Sum of Sit Rpt (telephoned), *First Army*, 1835, 17 Sep 44, found in *Army Group G KTB 2, Anlagen I.IX.-30.IX.44*.

# Order of Battle

## *5th Infantry Division*

Headquarters, 5th Infantry Division  
Headquarters, Special Troops  
    Headquarters Company  
    705th Ordnance Light Maintenance Company  
    5th Quartermaster Company  
    5th Signal Company  
    Military Police Platoon  
5th Infantry Division Band  
5th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, Mechanized  
7th Engineer Combat Battalion (less Companies A, B, and C)  
5th Division Artillery, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery  
    21st Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)  
5th Medical Battalion (less Companies A, B, and C)  
2d Regimental Combat Team (attached to 7th Armored Division)  
    2d Infantry Regiment  
    50th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)  
    Company A, 7th Engineer Combat Battalion  
    Company A, 5th Medical Battalion  
10th Regimental Combat Team  
    10th Infantry Regiment  
    46th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)  
    Company B, 7th Engineer Combat Battalion  
    Company B, 5th Medical Battalion  
11th Regimental Combat Team  
    11th Infantry Regiment  
    19th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)  
    Company C, 7th Engineer Combat Battalion  
    Company C, 5th Medical Battalion

## *Attached to 5th Division*

1103d Engineer Combat Group  
    150th Engineer Combat Battalion  
    160th Engineer Combat Battalion  
    204th Engineer Combat Battalion  
    551st Engineer Heavy Ponton Battalion  
    989th Engineer Treadway Bridge Company

537th Engineer Light Ponton Company  
623d Engineer Light Equipment Company  
84th Chemical (Smoke Generator) Company  
Troop C, 3d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron  
284th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)  
449th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion  
818th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled)  
735th Tank Battalion (Medium)  
Combat Command B, 7th Armored Division  
31st Tank Battalion (Medium)  
23d Armored Infantry Battalion  
434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer, Self-Propelled)  
Company B, 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled)  
Company B, 33d Armored Engineer Battalion

*In Support of 5th Division*

Headquarters, XX Corps Artillery  
5th Field Artillery Group  
695th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer, Self-Propelled)  
558th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Gun, Self-Propelled)  
274th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer, Self-Propelled)  
204th Field Artillery Group  
177th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)  
773d Field Artillery Battalion (4.2-inch Gun)  
943d Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)  
33d Field Artillery Brigade  
203d Field Artillery Group  
739th Field Artillery Battalion (8-inch Howitzer)  
989th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Gun)  
999th Field Artillery Battalion (8-inch Howitzer)  
270th Field Artillery Battalion (240-mm. Howitzer)  
277th Field Artillery Battalion (240-mm. Howitzer)

# Bibliographical Note

Soon after the Arnaville action, 2d Lt. F. M. Ludden, of the 3d Information and Historical Service, conducted a series of combat interviews with the battle participants. One such interview was contributed by Capt. Harry A. Morris. These combat interviews, together with preliminary narratives written by Lieutenant Ludden, make up the basic material from which "River Crossing at Arnaville" was constructed. The interviews are with eleven officers and enlisted men of the 10th and 11th Infantry Regiments and with unnamed soldiers of the 735th Tank Battalion and the 1103d Engineer Combat Group. The same file contains also a particularly valuable preliminary narrative entitled Engineer Operations at Arnaville, a narrative by Lt. Col. Levin B. Cottingham entitled Employment of a Smoke Generator Company in an Assault Crossing of the Moselle River, and preliminary notes by Lieutenant Ludden on the Arnaville crossing.

The 10th and 11th Infantry preserved not only their regimental journals but several battalion journals, containing messages and orders. The 5th Division G-3 Journal includes occasional transcripts of telephone conversations which reveal the tense atmosphere that sometimes prevailed. The After Action Reports, compiled at the close of the month, are susceptible, as are most such reports, to error and the palliative powers of hindsight. A notable exception is the After Action Report of the 551st Engineer Heavy Ponton Battalion, which gives

detailed and apparently reliable information on bridge construction. After Action Reports, unit journals, and journal files of all units involved, from battalion through corps, were examined. All such unit records, as well as the combat interviews, are in possession of the Historical Records Section, Office of the Adjutant General. Company morning reports, which usually contain little information that is not more readily available elsewhere, were examined to determine the casualties in the Dornot battle. Photostatic copies of these are filed with the Office of the Chief of Military History (formerly the Historical Division, Special Staff, U. S. Army).

A preliminary study by Dr. Paul W. Pritchard for the Historical Section, Office of the Chief of the Chemical Corps, was the basic document for constructing the story of the 84th Chemical (Smoke Generator) Company. This study is generally excellent, despite a slight tendency to overemphasize the importance of the screening operations. Another valuable source on this subject is an article by Colonel Cottingham, entitled "Smoke Over the Moselle" and published in *The Infantry Journal*.

Primary source for air material was the Operations File of the XIX Tactical Air Command. Air records are in the Historical Archives, Historical Division, Air University Library, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

A number of published unit histories exist but have been used in this study only as secondary sources. These his-

ories, apparently prepared from Lieutenant Ludden's combat interviews and from unit records, are unofficial and have a tendency to color the action, at times to the point of error in basic fact. The Third U. S. Army After Action Report, a work about which such criticism is not applicable, is useful for background information.

Because the combat interviews and unit records left a number of major gaps in details of the action, the author conducted several postwar interviews and extensive correspondence with surviving participants. The information thus elicited proved valuable, especially in presenting the confused command picture in the vicinity of Dornot on 7-8 September. In no instance, however, has the historian accepted postwar material as refutation of any fact which can be established from contemporary records. These letters and interviews have been filed with the OCMH.

Sources for German material were postwar manuscripts prepared by captured German officers; letters, orders, and reports found in an annex to the *KTB* (War Diary) of *Army Group G*; and a detailed account of the Dornot action found in war diary pages constituting part of a miscellaneous file of the *2d Battalion, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*. The postwar manuscripts, prepared under the direction of the Historical

Section, U. S. Forces, ETO, and depending almost entirely on the unaided memories of their writers, add immeasurably to knowledge of the enemy operations. MS # B-042 (Krause), of particular value in preparing this study, is detailed and apparently accurate and unbiased. The annexes to the *KTB* of *Army Group G* are at a level of command too high to be of much value in a small unit account such as this, but in some instances they were the only German documentary source available. Because few enemy records at a small unit level survived the war, the war diary pages of the *2d Battalion, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, constitute an almost unique source. This source was used extensively to provide an enemy account of the Dornot action which is admittedly out of focus with the level of narration of the enemy story in the Arnaville battle, but its intrinsic interest and value were considered sufficient to warrant such irregularity. German manuscripts are to be found in the OCMH files, and official German records are in the German Military Documents Section, Departmental Records Branch, Office of the Adjutant General. Additional material on the enemy side was obtained from G-2 Journals and files of the 5th Infantry and 7th Armored Divisions. Prisoner of war reports, when checked against enemy materials, proved generally accurate.



# BREAK-THROUGH AT MONTE ALTUZZO



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*the story of the 338th In-  
fantry Regiment, 85th In-  
fantry Division, in the  
penetration of the Gothic  
Line in Italy.*

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by SIDNEY T. MATHEWS

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## CHAPTER I

# Developing the Gothic Line (10–13 September)

This is the story of an American breakthrough in the mountains of Italy. It describes the main effort of an army that numbered 262,000 troops and included ten combat divisions. Of this mighty force, less than a thousand men—one third of 1 percent—made the principal attack. The assault force that actually closed with the enemy and bore the brunt of the fighting at the critical point was sometimes as small as a single platoon and never larger at any one time than two rifle companies of some 350 men. When a prize fighter strikes a blow against his opponent, his fist alone makes contact. So it is with the main effort of a modern military force: a fraction of its bulk acts as the fist and delivers the punch in the name of the entire army.

On 10 September 1944, the II Corps of the Fifth United States Army launched an attack across the Sieve River in an effort to reach the next major German defenses, the formidable Gothic Line stretching east-west across 170 miles of the rugged North Apennine Mountains.<sup>1</sup> (*Map III*) For almost a year the Germans had been using forced labor to

reinforce the natural defensive strength of the mountains with pillboxes, mine fields, and tank barriers, particularly along the limited number of mountain roads. Because terrain along north-south Highway 65 through the Futa Pass did not afford an effective natural barrier, some of the strongest positions had been concentrated in front of it.

Since the British Eighth Army had already broken through a portion of the Gothic Line along the Adriatic coast, the Fifth Army's attack was designed to supplement and exploit the British advance. It was originally scheduled to be launched against the Futa Pass; when intelligence information revealed the German strength there, the main Fifth Army effort by the II Corps on 10 September was directed instead at il Giogo Pass, on Highway 6524, seven miles southeast of the Futa Pass. A penetration through the Giogo Pass could be expected to outflank the enemy strength at the Futa Pass.<sup>2</sup>

It was recognized that any successful attack against the Giogo Pass would

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<sup>1</sup> The name "Gothic Line" (*Gotenstellung*), used by the Germans throughout the first half of 1944, was changed to "Green Line" when the Allies began to threaten the position. The former designation only will be used herein.

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<sup>2</sup> AAI Opns Order 3, 16 Aug 44, Annex B from Capt John Bowditch, *Fifth Army History*, Pt. VII (Washington, 1947), pp. 201–04; II Corps FO 23, 5 Sep 44, Fifth Army G-3 Jnl Files, Sep 44. This volume of the *Fifth Army History* contains an excellent description of the North Apennines Campaign, within the limits of documents available during the war.

require capture of the dominant terrain features on either side of Highway 6524: the Monticelli hill mass on the west (left) and Monte Altuzzo on the east (right). (*Map IV*) The 91st Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. William G. Livesay), spearheading the American drive, was scheduled to reach the outpost line in front of these two mountains, there to be relieved partially by the 85th Infantry Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. John B. Coulter, which was then to make the main effort on a narrow front against the dominating peak, Monte Altuzzo. The 91st Division was to co-ordinate by taking Monticelli while one of its regiments and the 34th Infantry Division made holding attacks farther west. Armor concentrations and heavy air action around the Futa Pass were designed to deceive the enemy into thinking the main attack was to be launched there, but II Corps artillery was to give maximum support to the effort at the Giogo Pass.<sup>3</sup>

The 363d Infantry of the 91st Division crossed the Sieve River and advanced to the Gothic Line against relatively light German resistance. On the night of 11 September the regiment found itself approximately 2,000 yards south of Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo.<sup>4</sup> Since stiff opposition had failed to develop, the II Corps commander, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, kept the 85th Division in reserve and ordered the 91st Division to continue its attack the next morning (12 Septem-

ber). It was to advance as far as possible toward the two dominating peaks.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Terrain and the Enemy*

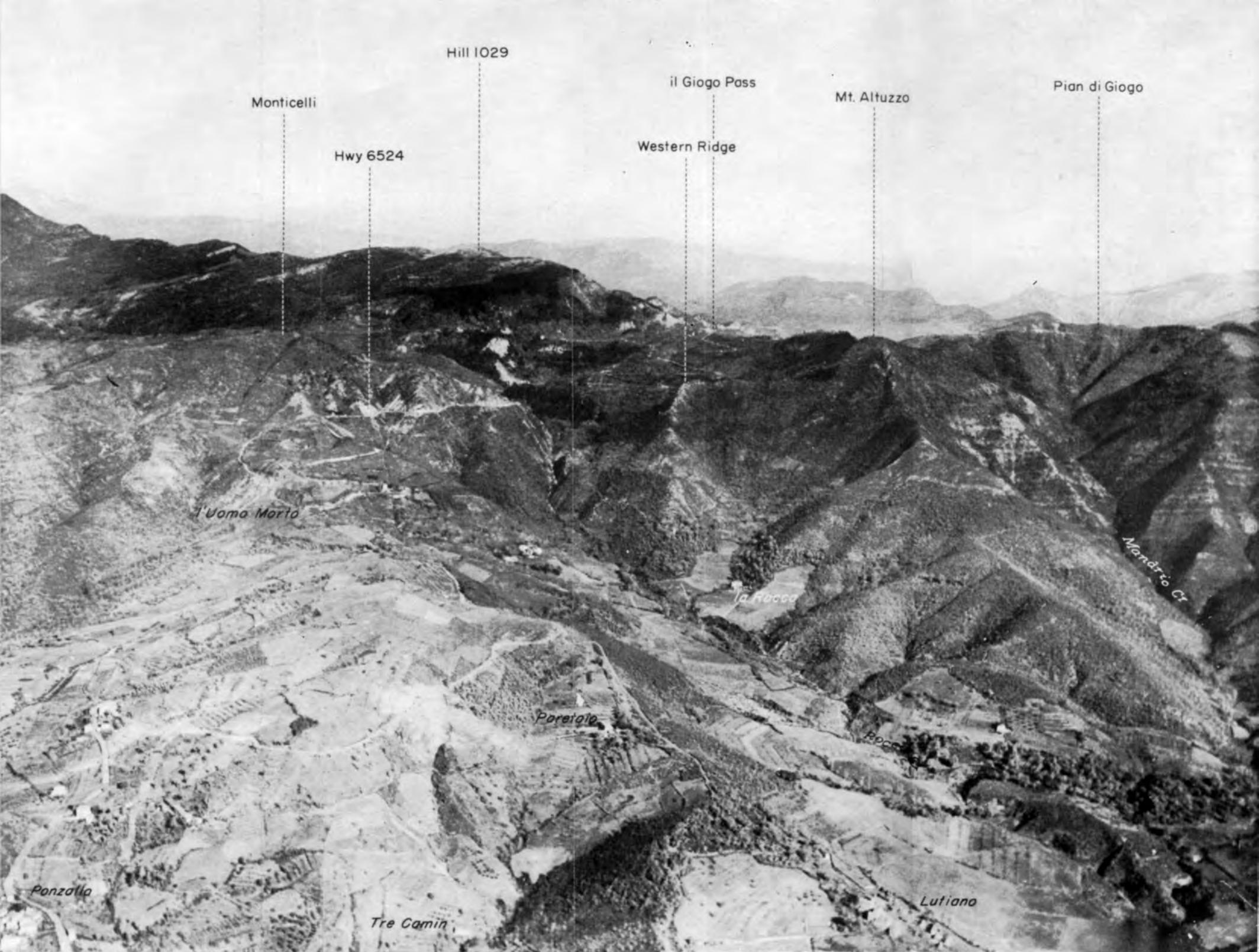
The German defense of the Giogo Pass sector of the Gothic Line was based on a group of 3,000-foot peaks, including Monte Altuzzo and Monticelli, which flanked either side of the pass. From these peaks eroding streams had cut north-south spurs and ridges parallel to the planned axis of advance, dividing the terrain into compartments and pockets that provided excellent defensive locations. Heavy stands of pine trees covered the northwest slopes of Monte Altuzzo and the area west of the pass, and oak trees grew on the lower slopes of Monte Verruca (east of Monte Altuzzo). Elsewhere the ridges were overlaid with rocky soil, low brush, or grass, sparsely interspersed with scattered trees. What little concealment there was for an attacking force came from the unevenness of the slopes; and the high peaks gave the defenders observation for miles to the south.

The only possible route for an armored attack against the Giogo Pass was the main road, Highway 6524, which was narrow, full of sharp turns, and flanked by the bare slopes of Monticelli and by Monte Altuzzo. Since antitank weapons could easily bring effective fire on the highway, enemy engineers had devoted most of their efforts to developing strong infantry positions and had constructed heavy pillboxes and bunkers on the adjacent mountains. Some positions had been blasted from solid rock; others had been dug into the ground and built of heavy logs. In many positions, machine

<sup>3</sup> II Corps FO 23, 5 Sep 44.

<sup>4</sup> 1st Lt Ralph E. Strootman, 363d Inf Unit History, MS, Ch. III, "The Gothic Line" (hereafter cited as Strootman MS). Lt Strootman wrote this study in early 1944. Unofficial Notes of Capt Robert F. Muller, S-3, 3d Bn, 363d Inf (hereafter cited as Muller Notes). Capt Muller made these notes during the Gothic Line battles.

<sup>5</sup> 91st Div and 85th Div G-3 Jnls, 11-12 Sep 44; II Corps AAR, Sep 44.



Monticelli

Hwy 6524

Hill 1029

Western Ridge

il Giogo Pass

Mt. Altuzzo

Pian di Giogo

*l'Uomo Morto*

*la Rocca*

*Mondrìo Cr*

*Poreto*

*Bocca*

*Ponzallo*

*Tre Camin*

*Lufiano*

THE BATTLEGROUND

guns had been placed for interlocking cross fire, and in a number of cases barbed wire and antipersonnel mines had been laid across the approaches. Behind the main firing positions other bunkers, primarily of thick log construction, had been built, generally on the north slopes of the mountains, to house mobile counterattack reserves.

Towering above the highway southwest of the pass, the Monticelli hill mass was a long, steep, backbone ridge with a concave southern slope. East of the highway, Monte Altuzzo was a high conical peak that rose to 3,037 feet, 181 feet above Monticelli, and curved 650 yards north-northwest down to the Gigo Pass. From Monte Altuzzo's highest peak, Hill 926, a main north-south ridge ran south 2,500 yards, a wavy, undulating hill mass with narrow draws cutting its slopes into uneven arms. Along this main ridge line were at least seven distinct hills or knobs, five of them south of Hill 926; from south to north, they were Hills 578, 624, 782, two unnumbered knobs which will be called Knobs 1 and 2, Hill 926, and another unnumbered knob which will be known as Knob 3.

Along the entire main ridge south of Hill 926, the ridge line was extremely narrow, varying in width from one to ten yards. North of Hill 782, any advance up the eastern slope toward the crest, Hill 926, was virtually impossible. Although this slope was not an escarpment, the gradient was too steep and the rocks were too precipitous. Besides, from higher points on the main ridge—from Pian di Gigo, which stretched between the northern slopes of Altuzzo and Monte Verruca to the east, and from the western arm of Verruca itself—the enemy could

observe and cover with fire any attempt to advance up Altuzzo's eastern slope. On the western side of the mountain beyond Hill 782 the slope was less precipitous but even more exposed to enemy fire. In this area the Germans had built a main line of resistance (MLR) along the upper rim of a huge bowl, formed by the main Altuzzo ridge and a prominent spur curving west and southwest from Hill 926, which extended 200 yards north and 500 yards west of Hill 782. The prepared positions of this line ran from Knob 2, about 250 yards short of the crest of the mountain, for 200 yards northwest along a trail which skirted the top of the bowl to the peak of the western ridge extending 500 yards to the west of Hill 926. On the peak of the western ridge German engineers had blasted bunker positions out of rock. Two bunkers covered the bowl, including the slopes of the main ridge north of Hill 782; about halfway down the bowl other mutually supporting positions could bring fire on the lower ground around the base of the bowl. Well screened by camouflage, trees, and heavy brush along the upper slopes, the main German positions covered the exposed approaches over the lower slopes of the bowl and along the main ridge line north from Hill 782. Scattered trees, bare rocks, and low brush along the lower slopes of the bowl offered scant concealment for attacking troops, and north of Hill 782 the narrowness of the ridge line offered no room for deployment.

About 300 to 500 yards in front of the main line of resistance, the enemy had erected an outpost line on the southwest slopes of Hill 782. Consisting of three log bunkers and an open zigzag trench, these outer defenses were spaced at

irregular intervals and were covered by a weak barrier of barbed wire. From them the Germans could place effective rifle and machine gun fire in the draws on either side of the mountain and on the lower slopes of the main ridge. Besides utilizing this outpost line, the Germans had attempted to canalize any attack against Monte Altuzzo by erecting a band of barbed wire fifteen to twenty yards deep across the western ridge of the mountain (the west side of the bowl). No wire had been laid across the central and eastern slopes of the bowl, evidently because the enemy relied on the mutually supporting machine gun and rifle positions to beat back assaults.<sup>6</sup>

Facing the American attack was the *4th Parachute Division* of the *I Parachute Corps* of the *Fourteenth Army*. Except for a small nucleus of experienced paratroopers who had been combat-schooled at Anzio, most troops in this division were inexperienced boys with only three months' training. The division's reserves were green troops who had never fired ball cartridges, so inexperienced that the commander of the *I Parachute Corps* stated his intention to use the reserves as pack animal drivers.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Notes of numerous terrain reconnaissances of the Altuzzo and Giogo Pass areas by the author, including those with the following: Lt Col Willis O. Jackson and his three rifle company comdrs, Capts Robert A. King, Maurice E. Peabody, Jr., and Redding C. Souder, Jr.; several plat ldrs and plat sgts; Capt Peabody and several of his NCO's; 2d Lt William A. Thompson and enlisted survivors of Co C, 338th Inf. (Ranks given for personnel interviewed are those held at the time of the interview. Ranks given in the text and index are those held at the time of the action. Detailed information concerning terrain reconnaissances and combat interviews may be found in the Bibliographical Note.)

<sup>7</sup> Entry of 13 Sep 44, *Armeeoberkommando 14, Kriegstagebuch Nr. 4* (War Diary 4 of Headquarters Fourteenth Army), 1.VII.-30.IX.44 (hereafter cited as *Fourteenth*

The *Fourteenth Army* as a whole had suffered heavy casualties in the Allied breakout from the Anzio beachhead and the pursuit to the Arno River. Although the halt of the Allied offensive at the end of July had given the Germans as well as the Americans a chance to absorb reinforcements and equipment, *Fourteenth Army's* strength was well below that of the Fifth U. S. Army. It had been weakened even further after the British Eighth Army had launched its earlier Adriatic coast attack and four German divisions had been shifted to the *Tenth Army* on the east to meet this threat. At no more than half strength, each division left in the *Fourteenth Army* held a long front averaging ten miles, and the army's reserves were reduced to two battalions of the *Grenadier Lehr Brigade*.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the shortage of front-line troops and reserves, the enemy intended to hold the Gothic Line as long as his limited resources would permit. On 8 September each soldier in the *12th Parachute Regiment, 4th Parachute Division*, had received orders that ". . . the position is to be held to the last man and the last bullet even if the enemy breaks through on all sides as well as against strongest artillery or mortar fire. Only on au-

*Army KTB 4*). German information used in this account, except that taken from intelligence files, is based primarily on this war diary.

<sup>8</sup> Entries of 10-13 Sep 44, *Fourteenth Army KTB 4*; 338th Inf and 85th Div Intel Sums, IPW Rpts, and misc Intel Rpts, Sep 44; MID, The German Operation at Anzio, filed in OCMH. This last publication is based on earlier volumes of the *Fourteenth Army* war diary.

The so-called *Lehr* units in the German Army were composed of picked men and were originally used to demonstrate tactics at service schools in the zone of interior. Because of the growing manpower shortage, however, many of these units were transferred intact to active theaters and used in combat. Cf. *Artillery Lehr Regiment*.

thority of the company commander may the position be abandoned.”<sup>9</sup>

*The 363d Infantry Attacks*

The 91st Division launched its 12 September attack in the early morning with the 363d Infantry making the main effort up Highway 6524 to capture Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo. While the 1st Battalion kept pressure on the enemy on the left flank, the 3d Battalion attempted to seize the two objectives. Company K pushed toward Monticelli; Company I toward Fonte Fredda along the highway between the two mountains; and Company L toward Monte Altuzzo.

German resistance stiffened, and neither of the division's attacking regiments got farther than the enemy's outpost positions.<sup>10</sup> The II Corps commander, General Keyes, thereupon ordered his original plan for a co-ordinated attack to go into effect at 0600 the next morning. While the 34th Division on the left wing and the 91st Division in the center kept pressure on the enemy, the 85th Division, taking over the attack zone east of Highway 6524, would make the main effort to seize Monte Altuzzo and the Giogo Pass. The weight of the 91st Division attack was to fall against Monticelli along the west side of Highway 6524. General Keyes ordered the 91st Division to continue pressure on the enemy through the day of the 12th and to advance as far as possible before the 85th Division launched the main effort. The II Corps commander realized that there would be confusion when the 85th Division units

passed through the 91st Division before the latter was ordered to halt its attack. He believed, however, that uninterrupted pressure against the enemy was necessary until the 85th Division took over the main effort.<sup>11</sup>

Although the 91st Division commander was not anxious for the 363d to attack that night, the 363d Infantry commander wanted to take Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo and secured division approval to continue the operation.<sup>12</sup> He ordered his 3d Battalion to continue the regiment's principal mission. The battalion planned to jump off again shortly after dark on 12 September in a night attack. Company I, 363d, was to capture Monticelli; Company L, Monte Altuzzo.<sup>13</sup>

Again the attack met with little success. Company I, after making an encouraging early advance, was pushed back to the cluster of houses at P'Uomo Morto on Highway 6524.<sup>14</sup> Company L's commander became confused in the darkness and led his company by mistake to the southwestern slopes of Monte Verruca. Some time after midnight he radioed his error to his battalion headquarters and then moved his company

<sup>11</sup> II Corps Opns Instns 23, II Corps G-3 Supporting File, Sep 44; Memo, Lt Col Thomas R. McDonald, 85th Div G-3, 12 Sep 44, regarding a conference of G-3's of the 85th Div, 91st Div, and II Corps, in 85th Div G-3 Supporting File, Sep 44; 85th Div and 91st Div G-3 Jnls, 12-13 Sep 44; Interv with Col Robert W. Porter, II Corps DCofS, 30 June 50.

<sup>12</sup> Interv with Col W. Fulton Magill (formerly CO, 363d Inf), Washington, D. C., 5 Jul 49 (hereafter cited as Interv with Magill); Interv with Maj Gen William G. Livesay (formerly CG, 91st Inf Div), Fort Knox, Ky., 5 May 50. All interviews in this study were conducted by the author.

<sup>13</sup> Interv with Magill; Muller Notes; Combat Interv with Capt Thomas M. Draney; Strootman MS.

<sup>14</sup> Strootman MS; Muller Notes; 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 12 Sep 44.

<sup>9</sup> Captured order to soldiers of *12th Pcht Regt (4th Pcht Div)*, 8 Sep 44, 338th Inf S-2 Files.

<sup>10</sup> Strootman MS; 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 12 Sep 44; Fifth Army G-3 Jnl File, 12-13 Sep 44.



INFANTRYMEN IN FULL FIELD EQUIPMENT *advancing toward the Gothic Line on 10 September 1944.*

west. Not long before dawn he reached Hill 578, the lowest knob on the main Altuzzo ridge line. There again the company commander lost his bearings; he reported that he was on Hill 782 and that the crest of Monte Altuzzo (Hill 926) was the next rise straight ahead. Actually the peak before him, hiding the crest from his view, was Hill 782. With orders to push on, Company L moved up the southern slope of Hill 782 until its leading platoons reached barbed wire defenses and received fire from German machine guns in bunkers forming the outpost line of the main line of resistance. Shortly after daylight on 13 September, Company L, after a stiff fire fight, captured six prisoners and silenced three bunkers before heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire halted the attack.<sup>15</sup>

In taking the three enemy bunkers, the troops of the 363d Infantry created a confused situation. Soon after the night attack had begun, wire communications to the 363d's battalions had failed, and at daylight the regiment knew almost nothing of its 3d Battalion's location. Only a half hour before the 85th Division was to launch its attack, the 363d Infantry reported its Company L on the eastern slope of Hill 782 approximately 200 yards from the crest of the hill. Even then the regiment knew nothing of Company L's situation.<sup>16</sup> The 85th Division's 338th Infantry, scheduled to take over Company L's zone for an 0600 attack and to use the 91st Division's farthest advance as its line of departure, was thoroughly confused by meager, contradictory, and

indefinite reports.<sup>17</sup> Thus the II Corps attack against the Gothic Line began in confusion.

As Fifth Army drew up to the Gothic Line, the Germans deduced from armored and heavy bombing attacks that the Americans would make their main attack in the Futa Pass area. To meet the threat *Fourteenth Army* on 11 September shifted the left flank of the *362d Grenadier Division* to the east and requested *Army Group C* to hold one regimental group in readiness for use at Futa Pass. At the risk of straining its west coast defenses, *Army Group C* announced on 12 September that it would speed withdrawal of a regimental group from the *16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* for movement to the Futa Pass. The enemy had not yet ascertained that the main American effort would be made against the Giogo Pass.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Attack Preparations, 338th Infantry*

At approximately 0915, 12 September, Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, Fifth Army commander, and General Keyes stopped at the 338th Infantry command post and talked briefly with Lt. Col. Willis O. Jackson and Lt. Col. Robert H. Cole, the 1st and 2d Battalion commanders, and Maj. Sherburne J. Heliker, the regimental S-3. General Clark told the infantry commanders: "You had better get on your hiking shoes. I'm going to throw you a long forward pass into the Po Valley, and I want you to go get it."<sup>19</sup> Such was the long-range importance of the Giogo Pass attack.

<sup>15</sup> Combat Interv with Draney; Rpt, unidentified soldier, Co L, 363d Inf, in 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44.

<sup>16</sup> 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 12-13 Sep 44; Combat Interv with Draney; Interv with Magill.

<sup>17</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Jackson and Capt Thomas M. Quisenberry; 1st Lt Dawson L. Farber, Jr.; Peabody.

<sup>18</sup> Entries of 9-12 Sep 44, *Fourteenth Army KTB 4*.

<sup>19</sup> Combat Intervs with Cole and with Jackson.

About noon on 12 September, the regimental commander of the 338th Infantry, Col. William H. Mikkelsen, went to the 85th Division command post (CP) to receive the attack order.<sup>20</sup> It called for the 338th Infantry on the left to take over part of the 363d Infantry zone for the main effort against Monte Altuzzo. On the right the 339th Infantry would attack Monte Verruca. On the assumption that the main objective in the Giogo area, Monte Altuzzo, would still be in enemy hands at H Hour, the 338th Infantry was to jump off from whatever forward positions elements of the 91st Division reached during the night.<sup>21</sup>

Between one third and one half of the 338th Infantry had experienced two months of combat against the heavy Gustav Line near the Garigliano River and in the drive through the mountains to Rome. Nearly all had at least been indoctrinated during a ten-day period in August with patrols and holding action along the Arno River. The regiment then had been out of the line for several weeks of rest and training in mountain assaults. During the II Corps advance toward the Gothic Line, the 338th Infantry and the other elements of the 85th Division had moved on the night of 11 September by motor convoy across the Arno River at Florence and up Highway 65 to Vaglia, some ten to twelve miles south of the 91st Division's front lines.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Combat Inters with Mikkelsen and with Jackson.

<sup>21</sup> 85th Div and 91st Div G-3 Jnls, 12 Sep 44; II Corps FO 23, 5 Sep 44; Fifth Army G-3 Jnl Files, Sep 44; Memo, Col McDonald, regarding G-3 conference, 85th Div G-3 Supporting File, Sep 44.

<sup>22</sup> Combat Inters with all surviving offs and EM, 1st Bn, 338th Inf; 1st Bn, 2d Bn, 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnls, Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, Sep 44; 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 11-12 Sep 44.

Since the 338th had known for several days that it would make the main attack against Monte Altuzzo, its officers had initiated preliminary plans based on detailed map study. An intelligence summary had been distributed to the battalions indicating that, although the enemy had not done as much work on the Giogo positions as on other parts of the Gothic Line, they formed nonetheless a "formidable defense sector." A second intelligence summary put out with the 338th's attack order indicated that the enemy's intentions regarding defense of the pass were not yet clear. It alluded optimistically to the poor quality of enemy troops. From prisoners of war captured by elements of the 91st Division it had been learned that the *12th Parachute Regiment, 4th Parachute Division*, was defending the area.<sup>23</sup>

In midafternoon of 12 September Colonel Mikkelsen, the 338th commander, issued the regimental attack order. The 1st Battalion, commanded by Colonel Jackson, was to make the main effort, seizing Hill 926, the crest of Monte Altuzzo. The 2d Battalion, under the command of Colonel Cole, was to attack on the left along Highway 6524 to Point 770, between Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo. The theory was that pressure along the highway would assist the main effort against Monte Altuzzo. In reserve the 3d Battalion, commanded by Maj. Lysle E. Kelley, was to follow the 1st up the main ridge. All battalions were to move soon after dark to forward assembly areas from which they were to launch the attack at 0600 the next morning. All three were at full strength, carried normal allowances of equipment and combat

<sup>23</sup> S-2 Memo on the Giogo Pass Defenses, 7 Sep 44, Annex to 338th Inf FO 3, 10 Sep 44.

loads of ammunition, and could be reinforced from a regimental replacement pool of 250 men.<sup>24</sup>

The artillery plan for the attack involved use of the 329th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. howitzers) for direct-support fires on call from the 338th Infantry. In general support of the entire division were to be two other field artillery battalions of the 85th Division, the 328th (105-mm. howitzers), prepared to mass fires on call in either of the 85th Division regimental sectors, and the 403d (155-mm. howitzers) for precision and destruction fires and for long-range neutralization and harassing missions in the division zone. (The remaining battalion of 85th Division artillery was in direct support of the 339th Infantry.) Reinforcing fires would be provided by the 752d Tank Battalion (Medium) and the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled), which had also the mission of providing antimechanized defense. Also in general support of the 85th Division was to be the 178th Field Artillery Group, which included three 155-mm. howitzer battalions and one 4.5-inch gun battalion. For long-range counterbattery fire and especially for knocking out heavy enemy fortifications, the 423d Field Artillery Group, consisting of two battalions (less one section) of 240-mm. howitzers, three sections of 8-inch guns, and two battalions of 155-mm. guns, was to provide general support

<sup>24</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson, Cole, and Mikkelsen, and postwar interv with Kelley; 1st Bn, 2d Bn, 3d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR's, and 338th Inf AAR, Sep 44. Although the regimental replacement pool was always available during the battle of Monte Altuzzo, the commanders considered it unwise to send replacements forward over the exposed terrain or to try to integrate them into rifle companies during heavy front-line action. See Ltr, Col Cole to Hist Div, Nov 48, filed in OCMH.

along the entire II Corps front. On 11 September the long-range artillery had moved into position in the vicinity of Vaglia and the medium-range corps artillery and the 85th Division artillery to positions near the Sieve River. Maximum fire was to be placed on known and suspected enemy fortifications in the attack zone; and general support battalions, in addition to maintaining destructive fires on enemy defenses, were to place fire on roads and other routes of entry into the area behind Monte Altuzzo to harass movement of enemy supplies and reserves. No plans were made initially for a preparatory barrage.<sup>25</sup>

During the afternoon of 12 September both commanders of the 338th Infantry's attacking battalions reconnoitered the forward area. Colonel Jackson, 1st Battalion commander, and Capt. Thomas M. Quisenberry, his operations officer, went forward by jeep at 1730 to select a final assembly area, make a reconnaissance, and secure information from the 3d Battalion, 363d Infantry, whose Company L was in the zone the 1st Battalion was to take over the next morning. Before leaving his command, Colonel Jackson told his executive officer to start his companies marching north at 1800 on the road to Scarperia; he would meet the battalion later and guide it to a final assembly area.

Arriving at the command post of the 3d Battalion, 363d Infantry, about 200 yards north of the village of Ponzalla, Colonel Jackson found the situation perplexing. The commander of the 3d

<sup>25</sup> 85th Div Arty Opns Memo 18, 11 Sep 44, 85th Div G-3 Supporting File, Sep 44; FA Annex to 85th Div FO 21, 10 Sep 44, in 85th Div Arty Rpt of Opns, Sep 44; Arty Jnls, II Corps Supporting File, Sep 44; Annex 4 to II Corps FO 23, 5 Sep 44, Fifth Army G-3 Jnl Files, Sep 44; Combat Interv with Farber.

Battalion, 363d, had not yet been informed that the 338th Infantry was to pass through his units, and he was planning his own attack to secure Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo. Company L, 363d, was scheduled to make a night attack against Altuzzo, and the battalion operations officer predicted that the capture of Altuzzo that night would be easy and that Company L would hold the objective by dawn.

After selecting his forward assembly area in the vicinity of Tre Camin Farmhouse, about 400 yards east of Ponzalla, Colonel Jackson sent a message for his company commanders to come forward. When they arrived shortly after dark, he oriented them as best he could under the handicap of the meager information he obtained from the 3d Battalion, 363d, and the lack of opportunity to make a detailed ground reconnaissance. Darkness had closed down before he could survey the routes of approach to his objective, or even the objective itself, the crest of Monte Altuzzo. Until the next morning he would have to base his route of advance on map study and what he had seen of the hills from the CP of the 3d Battalion, 363d. Jackson still felt that he could find out from the 363d Infantry at least the route of approach to the objective. At all events there was the possibility that the 363d Infantry would have captured Monte Altuzzo before dawn.

Jackson's plan of attack was to employ a column of companies, A, B, and C, with one heavy machine gun platoon of Company D attached to each of the two leading companies. He adopted this flexible plan because of incomplete information on the amount of resistance that would be encountered and because

of uncertainty as to the location of the troops through which his battalion was to pass. The six 81-mm. mortars of Company D were to support the attack from positions on the slopes below Paretaio Farmhouse.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Confidence in the 338th*

There seemed to be an air of confidence—almost overconfidence—in the conversations of Colonel Jackson and his 1st Battalion company commanders. Based partly on the intelligence appreciation by the 338th Infantry that the German troops on Monte Altuzzo were inferior, the confidence also stemmed from the optimism of the 3d Battalion, 363d, which expected to take Monte Altuzzo without much of a struggle before the 338th should be committed. The overlays of enemy positions which the officers had seen showed only a few defenses on Monte Altuzzo, much less formidable than on Monticelli. The fact was that the German positions on bare Monticelli were more easily identified than those in the brush and woods of Monte Altuzzo. None of the overprints showed the heavy fortifications on the peak of Altuzzo's western ridge or the ring of positions around the Altuzzo bowl. The confidence of the 1st Battalion officers was strengthened by events at large—day after day, newspapers and radio had blared the news of victories on other fronts, the British had already cracked the Gothic Line below Rimini, and *The Stars and Stripes* had announced that the German Army in Italy was finished.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson and Quisenberry.

<sup>27</sup> S-2 Memo on the Giogo Pass Defenses, 338th Inf, 7 Sep 44, Annex to 338th Inf FO 3, 10 Sep 44; Memo, The Defense of the Giogo Pass, 12 Sep 44,

During the night of 12–13 September, Colonel Jackson could not help worrying about the obscure situation of Company L, 363d Infantry, which was supposedly attacking up the Altuzzo ridge. Although he kept contact with the 3d Battalion, 363d, he was never able to secure accurate information about Company L and therefore did not know where his line of departure would be at 0600 the next morning. His battalion was faced with passing through a unit which had not been located and whose success against his own objective was not known.<sup>28</sup>

The men of the 1st Battalion, 338th, arrived just before midnight at their forward assembly area in the vicinity of Tre Camin Farmhouse. Loaded down with full packs and blanket rolls, they had marched on foot from Vaglia, twelve miles up and down hills. Despite their fatigue, they did not seem depressed about the impending attack. Few suspected that a hard fight lay ahead, and most shared the confidence of their officers. After digging in, the men dropped off to sleep.<sup>29</sup>

Colonel Cole, commander of the 2d Battalion, which was to assist the 1st Battalion's main effort against Monte Altuzzo by attacking up Highway 6524 between Altuzzo and Monticelli, experienced much the same difficulty as

Colonel Jackson. When Colonel Cole issued his attack order around midnight, designating two companies forward, one on either side of the highway, he still did not know his line of departure, for Company I, 363d Infantry, was still making a night attack toward Monticelli.<sup>30</sup> The 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry, awaited its morning attack in a forward assembly area, one to two hundred yards north of Ponzalla. The 3d Battalion, 338th Infantry, moved up during the night to an assembly area about one mile south of Ponzalla and made plans to follow in reserve behind the 1st Battalion up the main Altuzzo ridge.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Preparations of Company A, 338th*

As daylight approached on 13 September, the men of Company A, 338th Infantry, who were to lead the 1st Battalion's movement against Monte Altuzzo, roused from their short sleep at 0430, ate K ration breakfasts, and prepared their equipment for the attack. Each man folded his shelter half and blanket into a U-roll. The new infantry packs were left on the hillside behind the Paretaio Farmhouse. Stripped down to the barest gear needed, the men shivered a little. The night air was cool, and the old field jackets, olive drab uniforms, and summer underwear in which they had sweltered the day before were no proof against the cold morning drafts that swept over the hills.

The company commander, Capt. Robert A. King, the 2d Platoon leader, 2d Lt.

338th Inf S-2 Jnl Files, Sep 44; Defense Overlays showing enemy positions in the Giogo Pass area, 5-12 Sep 44, in 338th Inf AAR, Sep 44; Combat Inters with Jackson, Peabody, King, Souder, and surviving plat ldrs and EM, 1st Bn, 338th Inf; 1st Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44; Regtl and 1st Bn, 2d Bn, and 3d Bn Aid Station Logs, 1-11 Sep 44; *The Stars and Stripes* (Med Edition), 6 Sep 44.

<sup>28</sup> Combat Inters with Maj Vernon A. Ostendorf, and with Jackson and Quisenberry.

<sup>29</sup> Combat Inters with the following: Jackson, Peabody, King, and Souder; plat ldrs of Co A, 338th Inf; enlisted survivors in Cos B and C, 338th Inf.

<sup>30</sup> Combat Interv with Cole; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; 3d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44.



RELAXED FOOT SOLDIER of 338th Infantry in forward assembly area. Members of the 338th Infantry, resting and waiting, were not depressed by the impending attack.

Harry R. Gresham, and the platoon runner, Pfc. Bernard C. Van Kleeck, met Colonel Jackson near the Paretaio Farmhouse and went inside for map orientation. Lieutenant Gresham's 2d Platoon was to spearhead Company A's attack. Pointing on his 1:25,000 map to a small trail that seemingly led north to the objective, Colonel Jackson designated it as the battalion's route of advance and gave Captain King and Lieutenant Gresham last-minute information. On the whereabouts of Company L, 363d Infantry, he could say only that elements of that company were somewhere on the mountain.<sup>32</sup>

Lieutenant Gresham's platoon sergeant, T. Sgt. Adron G. Stevens, had in the meanwhile been leading the 2d Platoon toward the farmhouse. Lieutenant Gresham met them outside and assembled his squad leaders and platoon headquarters for a conference.

After establishing communication by SCR (Signal Corps Radio) 536 with Company A headquarters, the 2d Platoon leader, his squad leaders, and platoon headquarters, followed by the platoon itself, walked thirty-five yards beyond a rock wall above the Paretaio Farmhouse to a little road that ran northwest to a junction with Highway 6524. Light was beginning to break on the lower slopes of the Altuzzo ridge. Although the crest of Hill 926 was still not visible, the wooded slopes to the north along the highway could be seen for several hundred yards.

Halting his platoon, Lieutenant Gresh-

am relayed to his squad leaders information about the enemy and the route of advance designated by Colonel Jackson. He assigned S. Sgt. Ira W. Wilson's 2d Squad as the scout squad of a squad column formation, to be followed at an interval of fifty yards by platoon headquarters, the 1st Squad, and the 3d Squad, in that order. The lieutenant selected as the first bound for the scout squad a clump of trees some 600 yards north of Paretaio near the head of a little fork of Rocca Creek west of the open fields and olive orchards that lay along the west side of the main draw.

At approximately 0600 the 2d Platoon moved out. Sergeant Wilson's scout squad had walked about fifty yards up the little road when Lieutenant Gresham discovered that it led to the left instead of to the right toward Monte Altuzzo, as his map reconnaissance with Colonel Jackson had indicated. Accordingly he ordered Wilson to strike cross country to the right in the direction of the selected bound. Leading his men across a scrubby slope east of the little road, Wilson found and followed a trail which ran high on the eastern slope of Hill 577, below the highway, to the south and eastern slopes of Hill 606 near l'Uomo Morto. (*Map 8*) Possibly because the advance was shielded by heavily leafed trees and thick underbrush on either side of the path, Lieutenant Gresham ordered the platoon to decrease the distance between men. The leading squad filed down the trail across a little hump in the slope and over a small branch of Rocca Creek to the first bound, the clump of trees on the nose of Hill 606. There Sergeant Wilson halted his men and observed the open wheat field and olive grove facing them. Bounding the field

<sup>32</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Gresham; T Sgt Adron G. Stevens; S Sgt Walter J. Michalek, Jr.; S Sgt Edmond H. Carter, S Sgt Ira W. Wilson, S Sgt Stanley G. Hillier, and S Sgt Kenneth C. Pickens; Jackson and King.



and olive grove was a V-shaped draw chiseled by the winding mountain stream.

Wilson passed word down the column to Lieutenant Gresham that he had stopped. About one hour had passed since the jump-off, and still there had been no fire or sign of the enemy. When Lieutenant Gresham came forward, he noted that observation of the whole Altuzzo ridge was good and for the first time saw the highest peak of the mountain, Hill 926. He reported his position to Captain King: he was at a point some 1,200 yards southwest of Monte Altuzzo's crest.

Studying the terrain briefly with his platoon sergeant and leading squad leader, Lieutenant Gresham selected the main creek bed of the Rocca directly across the open field as the next bound for the scout squad. For the scout squad's protection, he moved the 1st Squad to covering positions in the clump of trees and directed the 3d Squad to close up in rear of the 1st.

Because he feared mines in the fields and draws ahead, Lieutenant Gresham directed Wilson to move his squad across the open field in single file. The platoon leader then led Sergeant Stevens, Private Van Kleeck and Pvt. Donald R. Smith, platoon runners, and Pvt. Edmond H. Carter, an automatic rifleman, to the nose of Hill 606, and prepared to help cover the scout squad's movement. These were routine precautions. Gresham and his men still thought that Company L, 363d Infantry, was on Monte Altuzzo and that the 2d Platoon would merely pass through Company L.

#### *Enemy Fire*

It was nearly 0800 when Sergeant Wilson moved his squad from the clump

of trees into the open field. Sunlight striking the western slopes of the Altuzzo ridge had helped dispel the morning haze, and the mountain ahead was clearly visible. The squad had advanced about seventy-five yards across the field when a machine gun from an enemy outpost on the southwestern slope of Hill 782 directly above la Rocca Farmhouse suddenly opened fire. The first bullets struck the ground about twenty yards in front of the squad. There was little concealment in the field, and Lieutenant Gresham, back at the covering position on the nose of Hill 606, could see the squad plainly. As the men hit the ground, the lieutenant shouted to Sergeant Wilson to move into the creek bed about fifty yards away; an instant later, as if the platoon leader did not know what was happening, Sgt. Edgar A. Parks, the assistant squad leader, called back, "There's somebody shooting at us, Lieutenant!"<sup>33</sup> For the moment the machine gun fire was so intense that the men could not reach the creek bed, though they were able to dash forward to a little drainage ditch, two feet deep, which ran through the field.

Soon Private Carter, the automatic rifleman with platoon headquarters, located what he thought was the enemy machine gun position about 600 yards away on the southwest slope of Hill 782. Carter opened up with his Browning automatic rifle (BAR), and the enemy weapon soon ceased fire. Sergeant Wilson's squad ran forward quickly to take cover in the main bed of Rocca Creek. The action had taken about one hour, and the 2d Platoon found it had four men wounded.

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<sup>33</sup> Combat Interv with Gresham.



MONTE ALTUZZO AREA *on right flank of the Giogo Pass.*

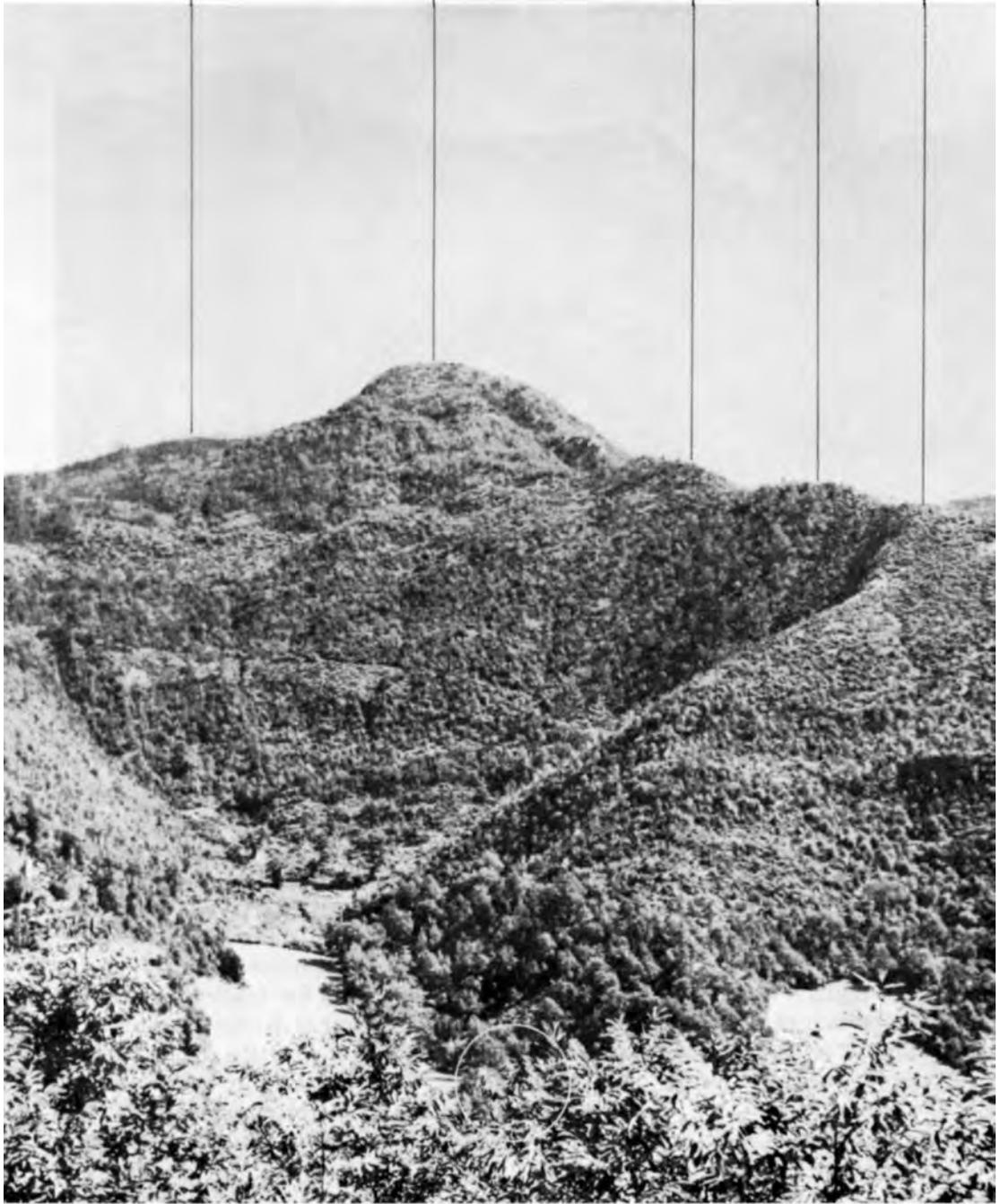
Knob 3

Monte Altuzzo (926)

Knob 2

Knob 1

Hill 782



*La Rocca Farmhouse area, hidden by trees, is indicated by circle.*



INFANTRY APPROACH OVER OPEN FIELD. *This area, under direct observation from Monte Altuzzo, was where the first enemy fire hit Lieutenant Gresham's platoon.*

Lieutenant Gresham was convinced that the movement of more men across the open field would unnecessarily expose them. He therefore decided to send the rest of the platoon, now some 200 yards behind the advance squad, off at a sharp angle to Sergeant Wilson's route. The 1st and 3d Squads would push southeast down the branch of Rocca Creek, which ran beside the southwest side of the open grainfield to the main creek bed some 500 yards away.<sup>34</sup>

Before moving again, Lieutenant

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Intervs with Stevens and with Michalek-Carter-Wilson-Hillier-Pickens.

Gresham radioed company headquarters, and Captain King came forward. The company commander told the platoon leader to continue the advance and promised to have the 1st Platoon cover the advance from the edge of the open field until Gresham made contact again. Promising to call for artillery fire on the entire area from la Rocca to the top of Monte Altuzzo, Captain King radioed Colonel Jackson, who in turn asked for the support fire from regiment.<sup>35</sup> The request was passed through channels to

<sup>35</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham, King, and Jackson.

the 363d Infantry, which refused to allow the fire because its Company L was still somewhere on Monte Altuzzo.<sup>36</sup>

Minus the 2d Squad, which had taken cover 300 yards to the northeast in the Rocca Creek bed, Company A's 2d Platoon moved out on its selected route down the dry branch bed leading southeast toward the main draw. The leading men had advanced only about 150 yards when 120-mm. mortar shells began to shower the banks and bed of the branch creek. Shouting for the men to take cover, Lieutenant Gresham hit the ground. Up and down the creek bed the men could see the shells kicking up the dirt a few yards away or hear them plopping in the hay fields above the banks. As the mortar fire continued, the 1st Squad leader, whose nervous condition had worried Gresham before, asked permission to return to the company command post. Realizing the sergeant was unfit for duty, Gresham sent him back and ordered the assistant squad leader, Pfc. Ray C. Collins, to take command.

During and after the mortar concentration, Lieutenant Gresham tried in vain to reach the company commander by SCR 536. The platoon leader then sent back his runner, Private Van Kleeck, to report the platoon's position and the route it expected to take as it continued.

The main body of the 2d Platoon again moved down the creek bed. About 200 yards farther, the lieutenant called a halt. He sent two men ahead to tell Sergeant Wilson—still with his 2d Squad on the other side of the field in the main Rocca Creek bed 300 yards to the north—to begin moving down the creek bed to

meet them. There was a dugout in the side of the bank where the platoon leader had halted his men. Inside were about a dozen Italian civilians, and outside lay the still-warm bodies of a chicken, a dog, and a cow, killed by the mortar barrage. Assisted by Pfc. Joseph Farino as interpreter, Lieutenant Gresham questioned the civilians. They knew that Germans occupied the territory into which the platoon was moving, but had seen no Americans either on the slopes of Monte Altuzzo or in the Rocca draw.

Again Gresham tried to make contact by SCR 536 with Captain King; again he failed. Since Private Van Kleeck had not returned, the platoon leader sent another runner, Pvt. Richard E. Finkle, to the company command post, which presumably was still following down the slope north of Paretaio. About 1000 the platoon finally made SCR 536 contact with the Weapons Platoon leader, 2d Lt. Henry F. Robbins, who was at the company CP. Lieutenant Gresham reviewed the progress of his platoon and said he planned to continue moving down the creek bed.

The two men who had gone to make contact with Sergeant Wilson returned after a round trip of about forty-five minutes, and Lieutenant Gresham and the 1st and 3d squads moved out toward Sergeant Wilson's squad. The two groups joined forces around 1100, and the entire platoon ate K ration dinners in the creek bed at the base of the big western finger of Hill 624.

#### *Advance to Hills 624 and 782*

With the 1st Squad in the lead, Lieutenant Gresham moved his platoon single file up the left branch of a Y-shaped draw

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 12 Sep 44.

which mountain streams had carved through the western slope of Hill 624. The men walked up the creek bed, barely wetting their boots in a water-course that months of rainless days had cut to a trickle. Leaving the creek bed, they moved across the south side of the finger of Hill 624, rounded the nose, and pushed on toward a grove of gnarled chestnut trees on the slope about 250 yards west of Hill 624. Going uphill for the first time since the jump-off, the men trudged slowly, their bedrolls, cartridge belts, bandoleers of ammunition, and M-1 rifles seeming even heavier than before. The ground was rough and uneven, and the slope was steep.

When the platoon reached the chestnut grove on the slope of Hill 624, enemy machine gunners and riflemen in the outpost positions on the southern slope of Hill 782 near the ridge line must have spotted the men's heads bobbing through the heavily foliated but widely spaced trees. The Germans fired sporadically but caused no casualties. Instead of returning the fire, Lieutenant Gresham halted the column, and the men stretched on the ground to rest.

A wild cry came suddenly from the higher slopes of Hill 624. Four men sent to investigate found a dazed soldier from Company L, 363d Infantry. He had lost his rifle, helmet, and field jacket, and was in a semicoherent condition. He told Gresham that the night before his company had made an attack to the right of where the Company A platoon was now resting. His company, the soldier said, had run into strong enemy resistance and had been driven back with heavy casualties. He had become separated from the rest of the company and had no idea where it was. Sending the

man to the rear with a guide, Gresham radioed the information to Captain King.<sup>37</sup> The company commander replied that he still thought the platoon would meet only light opposition and instructed the platoon leader to keep moving toward the top of the mountain.<sup>38</sup>

Before pushing forward again, Lieutenant Gresham roughly marked the next bound and route of advance. From the chestnut trees on the northwestern slope of Hill 624, he could see a large finger extending down from Hill 782. The platoon leader located on his 1:25,000 map a clearly marked trail that wound from the top of Hill 624 northwest to and around the finger. He designated the finger as the next bound. Although foliage and scrubby undergrowth prevented locating the trail on the ground, Gresham decided to move the platoon in a northeasterly direction anyway, hoping this would bring his men to the trail.

Shortly after noon Gresham's troops, in single file, the 1st Squad still leading, moved forward again. They met no resistance as they passed between stunted trees and bushes across the western slope of Hill 624. The leading men had gone about fifteen yards when they came upon the trail near the head of a creek that flowed down the slope. Following the trail, the 1st Squad moved along the southwestern slope of Hill 782 and, after rounding the first of its two fingers, came to the bend in the trail on the second, larger, finger which stretched down from Hill 782 to la Rocca Farmhouse. When the squad halted, Lieutenant Gresham joined Private Collins, the squad leader,

<sup>37</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham, Stevens, and Michalek-Carter-Wilson-Hillier-Pickens.

<sup>38</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham and King.

and called the other two squad leaders forward. From the bend Gresham could see a peak to the left on a ridge that seemed to extend east toward Hill 926, the crest of Monte Altuzzo, which still was not visible. Rather than push directly toward the objective, Gresham decided he would move his platoon to the western peak and then swing right toward the top of the mountain. His men could walk along the trail to the western ridge, then straight up the ridge to the peak.<sup>39</sup>

After this decision Gresham radioed his plan to his company commander. Captain King, still confident that the enemy would not put up a stiff fight, approved Gresham's plan and urged the platoon to move along quickly.<sup>40</sup> Earlier that morning, at 1007, Colonel Jackson had prematurely reported to regiment that Company A's leading platoon had reached the lower southwest slope of Hill 782.<sup>41</sup>

Again Lieutenant Gresham's platoon moved out, going around the bend and down the trail that ran to the base of the bowl, which was formed by the large finger of Hill 782, the western slope of the main ridge, and the western ridge. The men of the leading 1st Squad were dispersed along either side of the trail in a squad column formation, and behind them in single file came the 3d and 2d Squads. Between men there was an interval of ten yards, and the squads had visual contact. Thick undergrowth of bushes and small trees along the trail concealed the men from the enemy who, unknown to the advancing platoon, lay in wait behind the semicircular ring of

defensive positions across the upper half of the Altuzzo bowl.

About 150 yards from the bend of the trail, the 1st Squad came to more open ground where the overhanging foliage thinned and the path became clearly exposed to enemy view from the west side of the bowl. About forty yards straight ahead the trail led downward to the base of the bowl, then curved toward the slope of the western ridge. At the bottom of the bowl, bare rocks jutted out from the uneven surface. Across this space sprawled the trunks of thick trees which the enemy had felled to provide fields of fire. The slope beyond the clearing became steeper, and tiny mountain streams had cut small, narrow draws in it and had left many arms of land which gave the *galleria*, as the Italians called it, a rough, uneven appearance when the sun was playing on it. Beyond the right top center of the bowl towered Hill 926, Altuzzo's crest.

Reaching this open part of the trail, Private Collins halted his squad and waited for instructions. Lieutenant Gresham came forward quickly and directed Collins to lead his men up the eastern slope of the western ridge toward the rocky peak 500 yards west of Hill 926. To cover the 1st Squad, he directed the 3d, under S. Sgt. Stanley G. Hillier, to disperse at the edge of the brush. The 2d Squad took cover off the trail to the rear.

#### *Fire Fight in the Bowl*

While the rest of the 2d Platoon was going into position, Collins led the 1st Squad from the edge of the brush into the open space. The men went about a hundred yards before the enemy opened

<sup>39</sup> Combat Inters with Gresham, Stevens, and Michalek-Carter-Wilson-Hillier-Pickens.

<sup>40</sup> Combat Inters with Gresham and King.

<sup>41</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 12 Sep 44.

fire with machine guns and rifles from three directions: the left flank, front, and right flank—from positions on the top and halfway up the rocky western peak, from the upper west slope of the bowl, and from the main Altuzzo ridge line north of Hill 782.

At the first sound of fire, the 1st Squad hit the ground and scrambled for cover. Some men crawled behind a big chestnut tree which the enemy had left standing; others pulled themselves behind rocks and logs. There were no holes to hide in and the uneven ground provided little concealment. In a short time the men were aware that the enemy looked directly down upon them from behind rocks and prepared positions along the higher slopes and the top of the bowl. One man, lying beside the big chestnut tree on the left front of the clearing, was wounded.

Soon after the 1st Squad was fired upon, the rest of the platoon at the edge of the brush also received fire. Lieutenant Gresham ordered the men around him to take whatever cover they could find and return the fire. In the 3d Squad Pvt. Diego Martines, attempting to move across the trail, was hit in the chest by small arms fire and instantly killed. Private Van Kleeck, who had rejoined the platoon, began to carry the SCR 536 to Lieutenant Gresham at the edge of the brush. Two bullets struck him in the leg, forcing him to the ground. As the heavy small arms fire continued to saturate the area, Gresham ordered the 3d Squad to move back around the bend in the trail on the large finger of Hill 782. Most of the 3d Squad and platoon headquarters pulled back. Private Finkle, who had also been slightly wounded, stayed with Private Van Kleeck

in what seemed to be a relatively safe position.

Although the men of the 1st Squad in the open space were at first pinned down, Private Collins managed to direct them individually back to the head of the wooded draw through which a branch ran down beside a grainfield to la Rocca Farmhouse. Lieutenant Gresham then shouted to Collins to move back down the creek bed and rejoin the platoon behind the crest of the large finger that ran from Hill 782 to la Rocca. While the 1st and 3d Squads withdrew to this position, the 2d Squad, which had taken no part in the action, remained dispersed in covering positions on either side of the bend in the trail.<sup>42</sup>

At 1315 the 338th Infantry command post learned from the 1st Battalion that Company A was in a fire fight but was moving slowly forward. From his observation post in front of Paretaio Farmhouse, Colonel Jackson, 1st Battalion commander, could see the battle, and fifteen minutes later correctly reported that his forward elements were at the base of the bowl just beyond the large finger of Hill 782 some 500 yards southwest of Hill 926.<sup>43</sup>

About 1345, after he had moved his platoon behind the bend in the trail, Lieutenant Gresham reported to Captain King by SCR 536, relating the story of the fire fight at the base of the bowl and stating that it would be impossible without artillery support to move farther in the direction of Monte Altuzzo's crest. Captain King, promising to relay the artillery request and to send two litter

<sup>42</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham, Stevens, and Michalek-Carter-Wilson-Hillier-Pickens.

<sup>43</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 12 Sep 44; Combat Interv with Jackson.

squads to care for casualties, ordered Lieutenant Gresham to hold where he was, just above the trail behind the crest of the large finger of Hill 782.<sup>44</sup>

### *Supporting Fires*

The request for artillery support was quickly passed back to the regimental commander, who again asked the 91st Infantry Division for clearance. At 1350 the 363d Infantry gave permission, stating that its Company L had recently withdrawn from Monte Altuzzo.<sup>45</sup> In addition to this artillery fire, both Colonel Cole (2d Battalion, 338th) and Colonel Jackson requested that three medium artillery battalions and the direct-support 329th Field Artillery Battalion place TOT (time on target) fire on the area north of the Giogo Pass. The mission was fired with undetermined results. (*Map 9*) Through the remainder of the day, the 329th fired on enemy machine guns and mortars in the Altuzzo area and laid down harassing fire.

Other close artillery support during the day was designed to fulfill the missions of neutralizing and destroying enemy defenses and isolating the battlefield from enemy reinforcement and supply. The 403d Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. howitzers) placed harassing fires on the highway through the Giogo Pass and a small road running from the north slopes of Monte Altuzzo to the highway. The 178th Field Artillery Group fired missions against German infantry in the Altuzzo vicinity, mortars, and a radio tower near the Giogo Pass and neutralized guns 1,000 yards south

of Firenzuola. Since the enemy held the dominant ground observation, both 85th Division and II Corps artillery depended primarily on air observation posts, which were in position to observe only a small percentage of the missions fired.

By midafternoon additional fire support was being provided by Company B, 752d Tank Battalion (Medium). At 1530 the 1st Platoon, Company B, moved into firing positions about a thousand yards northeast of Scarperia and reportedly knocked out one pillbox on Monte Altuzzo with direct fire. The 3d Platoon, Company B, moved into direct firing positions east of Montagnana, about two thousand yards northeast of Scarperia, and fired on pillboxes, claiming two direct hits.

Besides the tanks, the 338th Infantry requested the 85th Division to attach one platoon of tank destroyers to the tank company, a request later fulfilled. Company B, 84th Chemical Battalion (4.2-inch Mortar), which had also been attached to the 338th Infantry, remained in an assembly area nearly seven miles to the rear and fired no missions on 13 September. Company B, 310th Engineer Combat Battalion, maintained supply routes in support of the infantry regiment.<sup>46</sup>

Assistance was also received from tactical air support. Having received word early in the morning from division that fighter bombers could be secured on short notice, Colonel Mikkelsen, 338th commander, had requested planes to

<sup>44</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham and King.

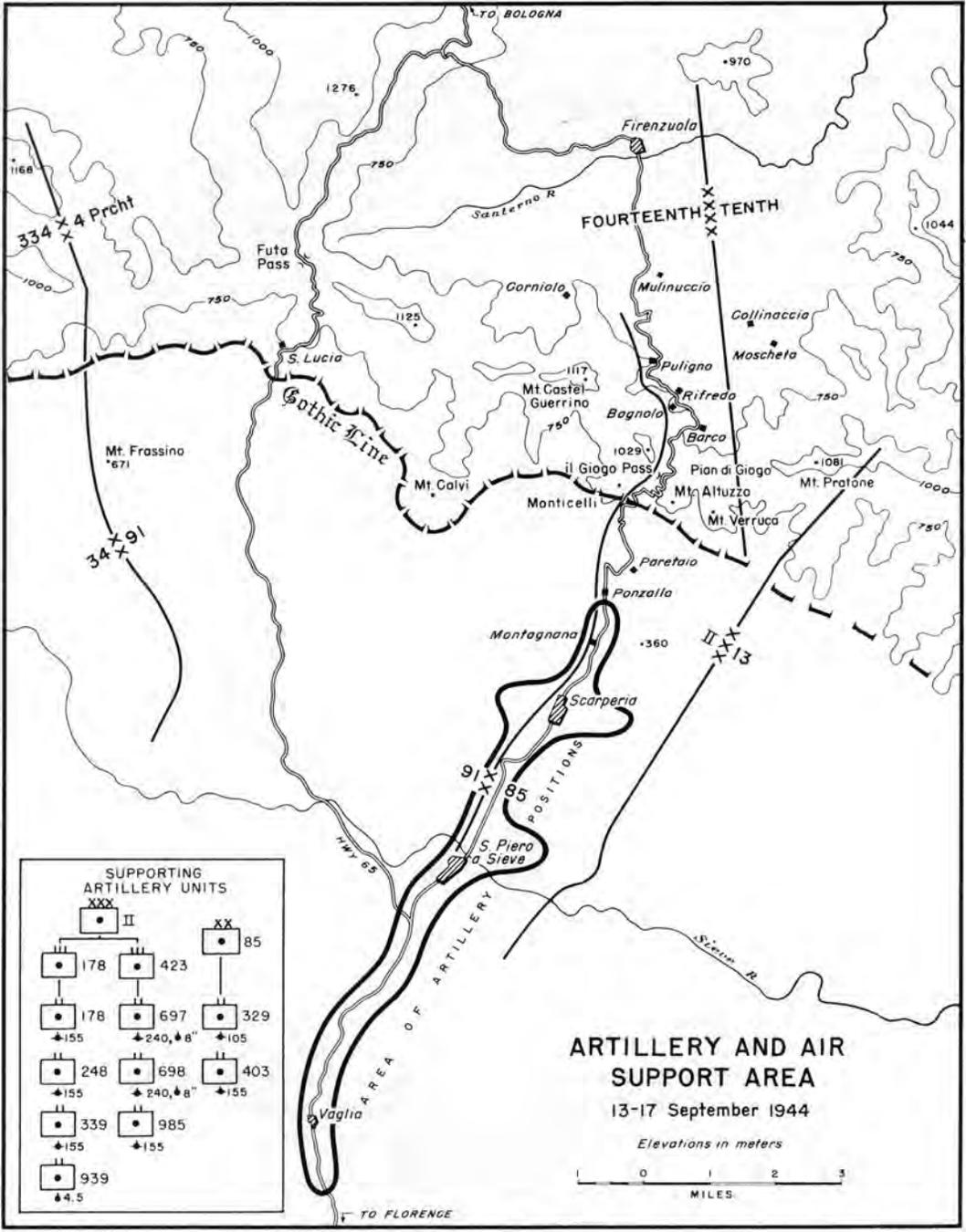
<sup>45</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44; 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 13 Sep 44; Combat Intervs with Jackson and Farber.

<sup>46</sup> 338th Inf, 339th Inf, and 2d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnls, 13 Sep 44; II Corps Arty Jnl, 13 Sep 44; 403d FA Bn and 178th FA Gp Unit Jnls and Mission Rpts, 13 Sep 44; 329th FA Bn Unit Jnl and AAR, Sep 44; 752d Tk Bn AAR, Sep 44; 84th Cml Bn Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44, and AAR, Sep 44; 310th Engr (C) Bn Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44.



HOWITZER AND TANKS MOVING FORWARD. *A 240-mm. howitzer being towed into position (above) and a medium tank (below) fording Sieve River under cover of smoke screen.*





MAP 9

R. Johnston

operate north of Monte Altuzzo. During the day missions against enemy artillery, vehicles, supply and ammunition depots, and troop concentrations were flown by the 239th and 244th RAF (Royal Air Force) and the 7th SAAF (South African Air Force) Wings of the Desert Air Force. The 7th SAAF Wing reported good results from six missions against enemy strong points and also bombed and strafed buildings one and one-half miles north-northeast of Monte Altuzzo. When gun areas two to three miles northeast of the Giogo Pass were bombed and strafed, two direct bomb hits caused a large explosion. The 7th SAAF Wing also destroyed one troop carrier and two motor transports. The 239th Wing attacked a motor transport park 1,500 yards southwest of Firenzuola and guns three miles north of the pass. Shortly after noon fighter bombers bombed and strafed enemy troops near Bagnola at a point a mile north of the Giogo Pass, and a short while later tactical aircraft bombed and strafed three gun batteries at Corniolo, three miles northwest of the pass. Other missions were flown against a house at Collinaccia, 4,500 yards north-east of the pass, and against a self-propelled gun on the Firenzuola highway 3,200 yards north of the pass.<sup>47</sup>

#### *Company A at Hill 782*

While Lieutenant Gresham's platoon had been advancing to the lower slopes of Hill 782, the 1st Platoon, Company A, 338th Infantry, had followed within connecting distance. It reached the lower

slopes of Hill 782 without incident, arriving at a point where the trail crossed the crest of the large second finger of the hill. (*See Map 8.*) There, about 1600, the platoon leader, 1st Lt. John R. MacMinn, Jr., and his platoon sergeant, T. Sgt. Nelson B. Van Horne, halted the platoon and went forward themselves to establish physical contact with the 2d Platoon. About an hour later, Lieutenant MacMinn received orders from Captain King to pass on the right of the 2d Platoon and advance as far as possible up Hill 782 toward the crest of Monte Altuzzo. If fire was received from the western ridge, the 2d Platoon was to support the 1st by fire.

About 1730 the 1st Platoon moved out in a column of squads—2d, 3d, 1st—up the draw between two fingers of the western slope of Hill 782. Spaced about ten yards apart in single file, the men climbed the steep slope, sometimes in a half-crouch, sometimes crawling, and nearly always having to clutch bushes and branches of small trees for support. Passing the 2d Platoon where it had halted on the slope of the large finger about 450 yards from Hill 782's crest, the men continued toward the head of the little draw. When they reached the barbed wire entanglement which stretched all the way across the west slope, they moved through without difficulty, encountering three strands of ankle-high wire about seven yards wide. Although stakes for three other strands stuck out waist-high above the ground, the wire had not been strung.

As the leading men passed through the wire, they spotted a camouflaged machine gun bunker thirty-five to forty yards away at the head of the little draw. Halting the platoon, Sergeant Van Horne

<sup>47</sup> 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 13 Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44; MAAF Central Med Daily Operational Sum, 13 Sep 44; 57th Fighter Group Operational and Intel Sum, 13 Sep 44.

crawled forward to the right of the position. He could see that it was a bunker constructed of heavy logs and covered with layers of logs and dirt and a wooden platform that had a manhole for an entrance. Branches had been thrown across the top of the platform. Crawling closer, Sergeant Van Horne saw two Germans, one in the manhole and one inside the bunker, visible through the embrasure. Evidently alerted, the German in the manhole entrance was holding a rifle and scanning the little draw where the 1st Platoon had halted just above the barbed wire. In order to fire effectively Sergeant Van Horne had to crawl within three yards of the position. When he tried to push the safety off his rifle, for an agonizingly long moment it would not budge. At what seemed like the last split second before discovery, for the German could almost reach out and touch him, the sergeant shoved off the safety catch and pulled the trigger. The German dropped from sight into the bunker.

Unable to bring fire on the other German inside the position, Sergeant Van Horne shouted to the 2d Squad leader, S. Sgt. David C. South, to bring up a hand grenade. Van Horne directed the two scouts into position to protect him to the front and the rest of the 2d Squad to form a ring around the bunker. Pfc. Jerome J. Straus called out in German for the enemy to surrender or be blown up with grenades. There was no answer. Noting that a trench led up the hill from the bunker, providing a second entrance into the position, Sergeant South pulled the pin from a grenade and tossed it through the trench entrance. Only the sound of the exploding grenade came from the position.

Sergeant Van Horne and the leading men of the 2d Squad then moved about ten yards past the bunker toward the ridge line along a rock ledge that stretched across the brow of the finger leading to the crest of Hill 782. It was still daylight, and as the men moved their route of advance became more bare. Weighing these factors and the fact that the rest of Company A was a hundred yards down the hill, Lieutenant MacMinn ordered Sergeant Van Horne to withdraw and pulled his platoon back below the barbed wire to a point where a little rise provided some concealment.<sup>48</sup>

When his men had returned to this position, Lieutenant MacMinn retraced his steps to the 2d Platoon and talked with Lieutenant Gresham and the leader of the 3d Platoon, 1st Lt. Charles T. Holladay, who had by this time also come forward. The three lieutenants decided that, instead of moving out into the confusion of approaching darkness without further orders from Captain King, they would set up defensive positions where they were. They established their three rifle platoons from the brow of the large finger of Hill 782 across the little draw to the next finger to the right, above the trail on the southwest slope of Hill 782. The 2d Platoon was on the left on the large finger, the 1st in the center in the draw, and the 3d on the right on the other finger.<sup>49</sup>

Several hours after darkness, about 2230, Captain King and the Weapons Platoon under Lieutenant Robbins moved the Company A command post from the slope west of Rocca Creek to the large

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<sup>48</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: MacMinn; Van Horne; South and S Sgt Harry B. Whary; King.

<sup>49</sup> Combat Intervs with MacMinn, Van Horne, Gresham, and King.

finger. During the advance of the rifle platoons, the light machine guns and 60-mm. mortars of Company A had remained as a covering force on the southern slope of Hill 606 near where the 2d Platoon had first received its fire that morning. When Captain King reached his rifle platoons, he expressed disappointment that they had not advanced farther.

*Confused Reports from the 363d*

Throughout the morning and even into the afternoon of 13 September, poor communication between the leading platoons and the Company A command post, plus confused reports regarding Company L, 363d Infantry, had made it difficult for Colonel Jackson and Colonel Mikkelsen to keep abreast of events or to issue intelligent orders for the attack. At 0900 the 363d Infantry reported that its forward elements (Company L) were on Hill 926, the crest of Monte Altuzzo, and estimated that the elements of the 85th Division would not come abreast before 1400. Although Colonel Jackson learned in midmorning that Company L, 363d, was digging in on Hill 782, to the 338th Infantry it was reported at 1055 that Company L was on the top of Monte Altuzzo. Again at 1135 the 363d Infantry reported to its division headquarters that it had captured Monte Altuzzo and was then clearing out remaining snipers.

As time went on, the story gradually came back that, far from being a push-over, the enemy had put up stiff resistance and had driven Company L, 363d, back from the crest of Monte Altuzzo. About 1400 the 338th Infantry informed Colonel Jackson that Company L, 363d,

had withdrawn from Monte Altuzzo. At 1440 a soldier from the company reported to the 338th Infantry that his platoon had advanced to within 150 yards of the peak of Monte Altuzzo the night before, had knocked out three bunkers, and had captured six prisoners, all paratroopers.<sup>50</sup>

These conflicting reports left Colonel Jackson confused about both the enemy situation and Company L's true location. Though his liaison officers tried all day to find out Company L's true position, such information was not available at the 3d Battalion, 363d.<sup>51</sup> What had actually happened was that, in an attack about dawn, Company L had advanced only to the barbed wire on the southwest slope of Hill 782. Shortly after midday it had withdrawn some 500 yards down the main Altuzzo ridge. Until the picture cleared as to what had happened to Company L and what the enemy's intentions were regarding Altuzzo's defense, the 338th Infantry's plans continued to be fluid and were based on the belief that the Germans would not resist strongly.

Colonel Jackson held the remainder of his battalion throughout the day behind the Paretaio Farmhouse. Before Company A jumped off, he had planned for Company B to follow at a 500-yard interval. By the time Company A had cleared the line of departure, the morning haze had lifted and Jackson felt movement of Company B before darkness would invite needless risks.

Throughout 13 September the 1st Battalion, 338th, had thus cautiously

<sup>50</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44; 85th Div and 91st Div G-3 Jnls, 12-13 Sep 44; Combat Inters with Jackson, Mikkelsen, Quisenberry, Peabody, King, Souder, and Draney.

<sup>51</sup> Combat Inters with Jackson and Quisenberry; 1st Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44.

committed only one company to the advance against Monte Altuzzo. The attack had been a developing movement to reach the Altuzzo ridge without heavy casualties, pass through Company L, 363d Infantry, and locate the enemy positions. By the end of the day the battalion had sustained about twenty casualties.<sup>52</sup>

While the 1st Battalion had been making the 338th Infantry's main effort against Monte Altuzzo, the 2d Battalion advanced along Highway 6524 about 1,200 yards to P'Uomo Morto, almost on a line with the 1st Battalion's farthest advance. The 2d Battalion's two assault companies were stopped by heavy mortar and artillery fire and some small arms fire. They were hampered by being unable to get clearance for supporting artillery fire because elements of the 363d Infantry (Company I) were in the area and their exact location was unknown. At the end of 13 September the battalion was still 1,100 yards short of its objective, Point 770.<sup>53</sup>

On either flank of the 338th Infantry adjacent units made some progress but in all cases failed to take their objectives. On the left the 363d Infantry attack up the slopes of Monticelli had bogged down about 1,500 yards short of the crest. On the right flank the 339th Infantry (85th Division) had had no more success against Monte Verruca.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson, Quisenberry, and Draney (who interviewed the other offs and NCO's of his company after his return from hospitalization); 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 13 Sep 44; Msg, Actg CO, Co L, 363d Inf, in 910th FA Bn Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44; 1st Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>53</sup> Combat Interv with Cole; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44.

<sup>54</sup> 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 12-13 Sep 44; Strootman MS; Muller Notes; 339th Inf Unit Jnl, 12-13 Sep 44.

All along the II Corps front on 13 September the enemy had shown that he was not withdrawing from the Gothic Line without a struggle. In the area of the Giogo Pass there were already signs that the fighting would be hard and costly. On 12 September the 363d Infantry (91st Division) had sent two battalions against Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo, and twenty-four hours later six battalions from both the 91st and 85th Divisions had been committed against the same features.<sup>55</sup> While the attacks of 13 September had served to locate some of the enemy positions, many others still remained to be identified, and the task of reducing them had barely begun.

#### *The Enemy Situation*

During the afternoon of 13 September the 338th Infantry learned through prisoners of war that a company of eighty men held a front of about two thousand yards from Monte Altuzzo to Monte Verruca. Although this force would not have been sufficient to man all the prepared positions in the area, it was large enough to occupy a number of strong points in the main line of resistance. In view of the small number of troops in position when the American attack was launched, the Germans were evidently waiting to see where the heaviest blow would fall.

During the night of 13-14 September, replacements arrived for the companies on Monte Altuzzo and on the other mountains in the Giogo Pass sector. At least one group of two officers and thirty men arrived at the companies of the *12th Parachute Regiment*. Shortly after dark on

<sup>55</sup> 85th Div and 91st Div G-3 Jnls, 13 Sep 44.

13 September, air reconnaissance identified fifty enemy motor transports moving south from Firenzuola, ostensibly loaded with paratroopers whom Partisans had reported as having been sent to Firenzuola a week earlier.

Although some radio intercepts and prisoner of war reports had indicated an enemy withdrawal, the II Corps G-2 discounted such movement as being of a local nature only. Intelligence was received that all three battalions of the *12th Parachute Regiment* were withdrawing, but the reported withdrawals were interpreted to be from outpost positions to the main line of resistance. On Monte Altuzzo the enemy's defenses were still intact except for the outpost positions which elements of the 363d and 338th Infantry had knocked out during the day. Even these positions were remanned during the night.<sup>56</sup>

The *Fourteenth Army* was still not aware that the Fifth Army's main effort was being made up Highway 6524 toward the Giogo Pass. Expecting the principal attack at Futa Pass, the Germans planned to send one battalion of the *Grenadier Lehr Brigade* on the night of 14-15 September to the area south of Loiano as *I Parachute Corps* reserve. A second battalion was alerted for shipment the following night. Impressed by the needs of his *Tenth Army* on the Adriatic front, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, commander of *Army Group C*, ordered the *16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* to prepare for a speedy withdrawal from the western coastal sector of *Fourteenth Army* into army group reserve.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 13 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 Jnl and G-2 Rpts, 13-14 Sep 44; IPW Rpts and Intel Sum, 14 Sep 44.

<sup>57</sup> *Fourteenth Army KTB 4*, 13-14 Sep 44.

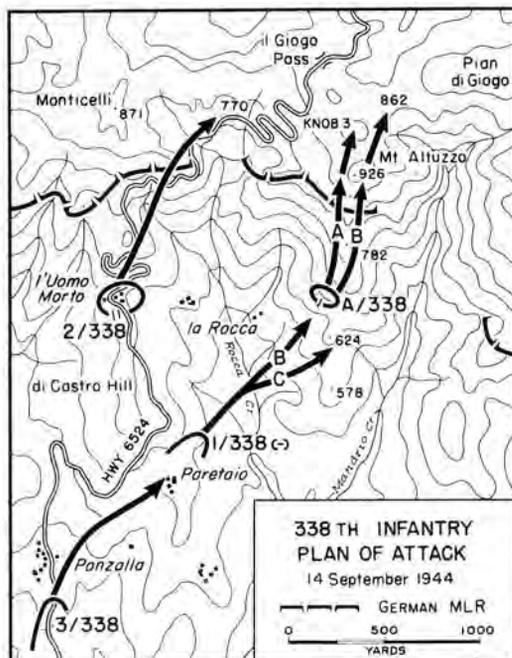
## CHAPTER II

# Peabody Peak (14 September)

After failing for two days to breach the Giogo Pass defenses, II Corps prepared to continue the attack on 14 September, using the forward positions as the line of departure. On the left of Highway 6524 the 91st Division, employing elements of two regiments, was to try again to capture Monticelli and Hill 844, which guarded Monticelli's western flank. On the right of the highway the 85th Division, with two regiments abreast, was to renew the attack at 0530. While the 338th Infantry was again to make the main effort against Monte Altuzzo, the 339th Infantry was to continue its attack up the eastern and western arms of Monte Verruca. The 337th Infantry was to remain in division reserve.<sup>1</sup>

In the 338th Infantry's zone the 2d Battalion was to drive along the highway to take Point 770, while the 1st Battalion was to strike again up the main ridge of Monte Altuzzo to capture the crest of the mountain. (*Map 10*) The 3d Battalion, in regimental reserve, was to move at 0500 from its assembly area near Scarperia to the rear of the 1st Battalion. It was to follow the 1st up Monte Altuzzo on order, prepared to push north-northeast to the hills about two miles beyond the Giogo Pass. Supplies of K

rations and small arms ammunition had been brought to Ponzalla by jeep from the regimental supply point in Scarperia and hand-carried the rest of the way to the rifle battalions.



MAP 10

By midafternoon of 13 September Colonel Jackson had worked out a new plan for the 1st Battalion's attack against Monte Altuzzo. Still regarding the effort as a developing movement, he

<sup>1</sup>85th Div and 91st Div G-3 Jnls, 13-14 Sep 44; 337th, 338th, and 339th Inf Unit Jnls, 13-14 Sep 44.



81-MM. MORTARS IN POSITION. *Infantrymen of the 338th cleaning their mortars outside of Paretaio Farmhouse. Note trenches in background.*

thought the cost in troops would be light. Company B, with one platoon of Company D's heavy machine guns attached, was to leave the forward assembly area at Paretaio Farmhouse at dark, cross la Rocca draw, and come up abreast of Company A on Hill 782. Together the two companies were to attack at dawn up the main Altuzzo ridge to the crest, Hill 926, Company A on the west slope and Company B on the east. After capturing Hill 926, Company A was to continue to the knob on the north (Knob 3) while Company B was to send a platoon

to Hill 862 to block any counter-attack from Pian di Giogo on the battalion's right front. The six 81-mm. mortars in position behind Paretaio Farmhouse were to fire on call at suitable targets.

While no preparatory artillery concentration was scheduled, artillery support was to be available on call after H Hour minus 10 minutes. The 338th Infantry's Cannon Company was to place harassing fire in the area 1,000 to 1,800 yards behind the switchbacks on the highway. At 0700 two platoons from the 84th

Chemical Battalion, which had moved its 4.2-inch mortars to positions a few hundred yards south of Ponzalla, were to start firing on selected targets in the Altuzzo area. For air support Colonel Mikkelsen, 338th commander, requested missions against German artillery positions and strong points 4,000 yards north and northeast of the pass and on the roads north of the pass from Barco to Firenzuola.<sup>2</sup>

During the night prior to the next attempt to take Monte Altuzzo, both corps and division artillery were busy firing harassing and TOT (time on target) concentrations on areas around Gigo Pass, most missions apparently designed to hamper enemy reinforcement and supply. Every hour the 403d Field Artillery Battalion placed harassing fire on areas around Barco Village. Besides firing three harassing missions on the north side of the Firenzuola road on either side of the pass, the 403d fired 180 rounds on Hill 1029 northwest of the pass and placed a TOT mission just beyond it. Three battalions of corps medium artillery put 485 rounds of harassing and TOT fire in front of the 338th Infantry. The targets were Hill 926, the north slopes of Monte Altuzzo, the slopes north of the pass, road junctions on the main Firenzuola road at Barco and a thousand yards north of the pass, and other sensitive points in the enemy's lines of communication. Although none of the missions were observed, the volume of fire

would seem to indicate that they materially hampered enemy movement.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Communication Failure*

The failure of Company A's SCR 300 about 2230 the night of 13 September cut off Captain King's only means of direct communication with the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry. After a hurried examination showed the batteries were not functioning, King sent three runners to the battalion command post to secure replacement batteries. On the way the runners came under artillery fire in the Rocca draw, delaying their arrival at the battalion CP until 0200. Although they secured new batteries and started back toward the Company A command post, only one of the men arrived and then not until well after daylight the next morning. Even with the new batteries the radio would not function. Further examination showed that the trouble lay with the receiver. Another runner was sent back for new parts, but it was afternoon before they were received. Not until 1430, 14 September, was the radio put back into operation and communication restored with battalion. The platoon SCR 536's, which worked spasmodically, would not transmit over such a distance in the mountains, and telephone wire, strung during the morning of 14 September, was knocked out by enemy mortar or artillery fire almost as soon as it was put in.<sup>4</sup>

Captain King, despite his communications failure on the night of 13 September, went ahead with plans for the attack the

<sup>2</sup> Combat Intervs with Cole, Jackson, Peabody, and King; 338th Inf and 2d Bn and 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnls, 13-14 Sep 44; 338th Inf and 2d Bn and 3d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR's, Sep 44; 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 14 Sep 44. Two direct bomb hits and two near misses were subsequently scored by planes on enemy positions north of the pass.

<sup>3</sup> II Corps Arty Jnl, 13-14 Sep 44; 403d FA Bn Jnl and Mission Rpts, 13-14 Sep 44; 178th FA Gp and 423d FA Gp Rpts and Jnls, 13-14 Sep 44.

<sup>4</sup> Combat Intervs with King, Jackson, and Gresham; 1st Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44.

next morning. At a conference of his platoon leaders at the company command post, he outlined the formation to be used. The 1st Platoon on the left and the 3d Platoon on the right were to push up the large finger and the draw to the top of Hill 782, then swing left and advance just below the ridge line on the western slope of the main Altuzzo ridge to Hill 926. While these platoons were advancing, the 2d Platoon, following the 1st, was to advance to a place from which it could support the attack by fire. One hour after the jump-off the Weapons Platoon was to pass through the 2d Platoon and follow the 1st to give support in event of counterattack. Captain King expected that as soon as Company B, which had left Paretaio before Company A's radio went dead, reached the slope of Hill 782 the Company B commander would make contact with him.

While Captain King briefed his platoon leaders and tried to restore radio contact with the battalion commander, back in the foxholes the men of the company snatched a few hours of fitful sleep or stood watch through the dark night. In each foxhole the two or three men took turns at guard duty, and at all times at least three men from each squad were on the alert. Notwithstanding the fact that they had not occupied the crest of Monte Altuzzo or run into the company of the 91st Division through which they had been scheduled to pass, the men and officers of Company A were still in high spirits. They still expected the attack the next morning to be an easy one.

As the hours passed, the confidence of Captain King and his platoon leaders was tempered by anxiety over the whereabouts of Company B and their own

failure to restore contact with battalion. Nothing had been heard from the runners who had started back to the battalion CP for new radio batteries. Because he expected the return of the runners at any moment, Captain King did not even consider stringing wire between the rear Company A command post on the nose of Hill 606, where the executive officer, 1st Lt. Joseph E. Pizzi, was located, and the forward CP on the lower slopes of Hill 782, where the rest of the company was in position. Besides, if wire were laid, when his men pushed up the crest of Monte Altuzzo the next morning they would soon outstrip the company's supply of telephone wire.

#### *Company A Attacks the Outpost Line*

Left to his own counsels by the break in communications, Captain King finally decided during the early morning hours of 14 September that even if Company B did not make contact with him Company A would move up alone just before dawn and occupy the next peak, Hill 782. Further advances would then await the arrival of Company B or the re-establishment of communications with Colonel Jackson. In line with this decision, Company A, with two platoons abreast, the 3d on the left and the 1st on the right, moved out at 0500 up the southwest slope of Hill 782 between the first and second fingers that ran down from the ridge line. (*Map 11*) Both platoons moved in close column of squads formation; the morning was too dark and initially the ground too bushy for dispersion.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: King, MacMinn, and Gresham; S Sgt Joseph K. Colosimo, S Sgt Gordon K. Grigsby, Sgt Hubert G. Albert, T Sgt Darius L. Daughtry, Van Horne, South, and Whary.



MAP 11

1ST BATTALION ATTACK, 14 September 1944.

With the 3d Squad in the lead, followed by the 2d and 1st, the 3d Platoon walked slowly up the slope of Hill 782, so steep that, to keep their balance, the men frequently had to crouch close to the ground and grasp underbrush for support. As soon as the leading squad reached the barbed wire entanglement, the men stepped over it, only to run almost head on into a German bunker. At the head of the column, the two scouts and Pfc. Hubert G. Albert, acting 3d Squad leader, could see only the bare outline of the German position through the darkness. The squad leader halted his squad and signaled to the platoon leader, Lieutenant Holladay, who was the fourth man in the column.

Anxious to avoid a fire fight, the platoon leader ordered the two scouts to withdraw below the barbed wire and move to the left. In compliance, the column moved about twenty yards to the left and the leading men started to cut through the wire with a wire cutter. As the last strands were being cut, the men saw a roving enemy patrol on the skyline about twenty-five yards away. They ducked below the entanglement, and Lieutenant Holladay directed them to move farther to the left to avoid the patrol. Before they had gone more than a few yards farther, the first eight or ten men lost contact with the rest of the platoon. As the leading men halted to regain contact, they heard the sounds of a fire fight to their right and began to receive hand grenades and light mortar fire. Still unable to penetrate the darkness very far, the men could not make out any Germans to the front. Finally, after four men had been wounded, the 3d Platoon received orders from Captain King to withdraw to its old positions

below the barbed wire in the draw between the first and second fingers on the southwest slope of Hill 782. All reached safety except Pfc. John Lakowicz and Pvt. Marvin D. Beazley who lost their way near the rock formations and stayed there the rest of the day within a stone's throw of the enemy.<sup>6</sup>

On the right of the 3d Platoon, the 1st Platoon of Company A in a column of squads—1st, 3d, 2d—had pushed up the slope of the hill. Stepping easily through the low-strung barbed wire, the 1st Squad had gone a few yards beyond it when a German suddenly shouted, "*Halt!*" At the sound every man hit the ground, and S. Sgt. Herbert H. Davis, the squad leader, unable to determine the source of the cry, sent word back to the platoon leader for instructions. Lieutenant MacMinn relayed instructions for the squad leader to move his men over to the right. As the leading squad started out again, three Germans shouted at them. Pvt. Bruce A. Petty replied with his M-1 rifle, killing one German with his first shot and another with his second. Other Germans replied furiously, seemingly with every weapon they had. From close-in positions on the front and right front they lobbed grenade after grenade into the area. Mortar shells fell all around, and a machine gun in a dugout to the right front began to find the range. One grenade wounded Pvt. Murray C. Faller and knocked the rifle from the hand of Private Petty, blowing him off the bank of the slope.

The fire fight went on. In the darkness neither side could see the other well, and for both Germans and Americans the unevenness of the slope severely

<sup>6</sup> Combat Intervs with Colosimo, Grigsby, and Daughtry.

limited effective fields of fire for small arms. The enemy nevertheless had some advantage in the grenade exchange because of his higher position and better knowledge of the terrain. As dawn approached Lieutenant MacMinn observed that his platoon held a very exposed position in the bare area beyond the barbed wire, and daylight could be expected to improve the enemy's chances. Thus, for the sake of better cover, the lieutenant, with Captain King's approval, ordered the platoon to withdraw to the positions from which it had jumped off about forty-five minutes earlier. While the platoon withdrew, Platoon Sergeant Van Horne, who had been tending a wounded man, Pfc. Raymond J. Charron, halted the 2d Squad a few yards below the barbed wire. Hearing German voices and movement on the slope above, Sergeant Van Horne and the 2d Squad fired in the direction of the sounds, but with undetermined results.<sup>7</sup>

All the platoon finally reached the jump-off point safely except Pvt. James R. Hickman of the 1st Squad, who had received no word from the men around him about the withdrawal. By the time he discovered that he had been left behind, daylight had come and he was afraid to move because of the exposed terrain. All day long he remained alone in this position thirty yards above the barbed wire near the German dugouts, only an eighteen-inch bank hiding him from enemy view. Frightened at first, he became more composed as the day wore on, finally rolling into his blanket, which he had carried with him in the attack. Above, he could hear the Germans; below, the men of Company A.

<sup>7</sup> Combat Intervs with King, MacMinn, Van Horne, South, and Whary.

Through the longest day he had ever spent he was sustained only by a couple of swallows of water, one stick of chewing gum, and the urge to get back to his outfit. After dark, he crawled back through the barbed wire and rejoined his platoon.<sup>8</sup>

After Company A's attack began, the machine gun section of the Weapons Platoon could not find the 2d Platoon, through which it was supposed to pass before taking up supporting positions behind the 1st Platoon. At the barbed wire, the platoon sergeant, T. Sgt. Thomas A. Culpepper, saw what looked like a mine and steered the machine gunners some distance, perhaps fifty to seventy-five yards, to the right. As the men started through the wire again, they heard the enemy open fire on the 1st and 3d Platoons, who were in the lead on the left. The Germans evidently spotted the machine gunners too and covered the area near them with flares, mortar fire, and grenades. Though his men miraculously escaped casualties, Sergeant Culpepper knew they were in a difficult position. In any case, before the Weapons Platoon could be of much assistance to the company, the platoon sergeant would have to get in contact with the other platoons. He decided to withdraw his men and try to regain contact with the company commander or the rifle platoon leaders. Too far to the right to reach the positions held the night before on the slopes of Hill 782, the machine gun section withdrew to a trail northeast of la Rocca; and before Culpepper regained contact with the rest of the company, the short-lived attack had ended.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Combat Intervs with Van Horne and Hickman.

<sup>9</sup> Combat Interv with Culpepper.

After its abortive attack, Company A stayed in covered positions on the southwest slope of Hill 782 below the barbed wire throughout 14 September. Captain King, out of communication with the remainder of the battalion, was in no position to co-ordinate with Company B, which had been scheduled to make contact with Company A before both units jumped off toward the crest of the mountain.<sup>10</sup> At 1415 the 338th Infantry CP was informed that Company A was on the west slope of Monte Altuzzo beyond Hill 782 and on the upper central part of the bowl, some 250 yards north of its actual position on the southwest slope of Hill 782. The report also stated that Company A had been forced to pull back because of a pillbox and well-emplaced riflemen.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Company B Moves Out*

On 13 September, after Colonel Jackson had decided to commit Company B in a dawn attack with Company A, Capt. Maurice E. Peabody, Jr., Company B commander, ordered his 2d Platoon leader, 1st Lt. John M. Neuffer, to send a reconnaissance patrol to locate a suitable route of advance to the main Altuzzo ridge. The patrol left at approximately 1600 (13 September) from the vicinity of the battalion command post at Paretaio. It was headed by S. Sgt. Hugh C. Brown, 2d Squad leader, and included Sgt. Gamelil Mullins, Pfc. Harold Cetel, Pfc. Marion L. Boston, and Pfc. Kenny R. Beverage. Having followed the high trail from Paretaio to the thick woods that lay at the edge of the open field where the leading squad of Company A

had first received fire that morning, the patrol crossed the woods and spied a little irrigation ditch that led across the open field toward the main draw of Rocca Creek. By use of this route, Sergeant Brown concluded, Company B could gain the shelter of the creek bed and once there would be at the edge of the lower slopes of Monte Altuzzo.

After the patrol returned with this information, Captain Peabody decided there would be no difficulty in moving his men to the position which the battalion commander had told him Company A occupied on the slopes of Hill 782. Since the main Altuzzo ridge was the only ridge in sight along the route his men would take, Peabody saw no need to ask for guides from Company A. He felt confident that he could make contact with Company A by SCR 300 when he came within radio distance.<sup>12</sup> So sure, in fact, was Captain Peabody that, when he was asked how he knew he could find Company A, the Company B commander replied, "Oh, I'm an old hunter—I can't miss."<sup>13</sup>

Before the jump-off, Captain Peabody was also confident regarding the outcome of the attack. Although he had always regarded intelligence information skeptically, he had concluded on the basis of information he had received that the enemy held Monte Altuzzo only lightly and that the positions were far less formidable than those at the Futa Pass. A Partisan report, which Captain Peabody

<sup>12</sup> Combat Inters with Brown, Mullins, and Peabody; Inters and Notes of terrain reconnaissance with Peabody, T Sgt Herman Ledford, and 1st Sgt Charles J. Dozier; Capt Maurice E. Peabody, Jr., Narrative of the Attack on Peabody Ridge, MS, Nov-Dec 44 (hereafter cited as Peabody MS), 1st Bn, 338th Inf, S-1 Files.

<sup>13</sup> Combat Interv with Souder.

<sup>10</sup> Combat Inters with King and Gresham.

<sup>11</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44

had seen, emphasized the weakness of the enemy's defenses in the Giogo Pass area. The defenses consisted, so the story ran, of hasty machine gun fortifications lacking even protective mines or barbed wire. Having little confidence in the 363d Infantry, Peabody turned a deaf ear to the reports that its Company L had met heavy resistance during the day. The night before when he had visited the 3d Battalion, 363d, he had noted the conflicting statements which that battalion's staff officers had made about the location of its rifle companies.

As darkness neared, Company B made final preparations for attack. Captain Peabody briefed his platoon leaders, and before dark all commissioned and non-commissioned officers except the assistant squad leaders, who remained with the men, went to the top of the hill above the battalion command post and were shown their objective, the highest peak of Monte Altuzzo, Hill 926, and the ridge which led up to it. From their observation point the objective stood out like a giant inverted funnel, towering above the narrow valley and the smaller peaks around it. None of the men suspected that any other part of the mountain could ever be mistaken for Hill 926.

Throughout the day the men of Company B had been ready to move at a moment's notice. Each rifleman had been issued two bandoleers of .30-caliber ammunition totaling twelve clips or ninety-six rounds, each light machine gun squad 750 rounds, and each rifle squad three or four hand grenades.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Combat Intervs with Peabody and with 2d Lt Clemens M. Hankes, 2d Lt William J. Kelsey, and all surviving EM in Co B, 338th Inf. At the start of the Gothic Line operations, the 85th Division had twelve flame throwers; but since these weapons weighed seventy pounds when filled with fuel they

During the early evening most of the men ate a K ration supper, drank water, and received the daily issue of a package of cigarettes, a tropical chocolate bar, and a stick of chewing gum. To make sure that valuable information identifying the outfit did not fall into enemy hands, each man was checked by squad and assistant squad leaders for unit recognition material. The arrival of mail not long before the jump-off boosted morale, though it was too dark to read the mail and security too urgent to permit distribution. While three of the platoons left their mail at the battalion aid station, the 3d Platoon took its mail along in the care of the platoon guide, who later gave it to an assistant squad leader, Sgt. David N. Seiverd.<sup>15</sup>

At 2115, while Company B was forming for its attack, the enemy shelled the area around Paretaio Farmhouse but caused no casualties. Fifteen minutes later the company, with the 2d Platoon of heavy machine guns from Company D attached, crossed its initial point at Paretaio in a single column and walked north along the wooded slopes that stretched east of the Scarperia-Firenzuola highway. The company mission was clear: to reach Company A on the lower slopes of Hill 782 and, after making contact, to advance up the eastern slope of the main Altuzzo ridge while Company A advanced up the western slope until Hill 926 was occupied.

Leading Company B was the 2d Platoon, followed by the 3d Platoon, com-

were not considered suitable offensive weapons in mountainous terrain where every extra pound counted and where the problem of fuel resupply was great. Memo, Maj Charles L. Badger to 85th Div CofS, 14 Sep 44, 85th Div G-3 Jnl File, Sep 44.

<sup>15</sup> Combat Intervs with all surviving offs and EM in Co B.

pany headquarters, the Weapons Platoon, the attached heavy machine gun platoon, and the 1st Platoon. At the end of the column was a five-man detail which, as it moved, laid light telephone wire from the battalion CP. Because of the difficulty of movement over the rough terrain, the attached 2d Platoon of Company D carried only two heavy machine guns instead of its normal complement of four. Although the whole column easily extended 500 yards on the ground, Captain Peabody considered the formation necessary for strict control because of the dark night (one could see scarcely ten yards ahead), the rugged terrain, and the narrow routes of approach to the line of departure and the objective.

Following the high trail that wound along the slope northeast of Paretaio, Company B struck a steep, narrow draw cut by a branch of Rocca Creek. Here the men turned east, crossed the branch, and stumbled and groped their way down the hillside toward the grainfield and olive orchard that stretched beside the main Rocca Creek. Reaching the edge of the field, the column followed a path across the open ground to the deep, broad draw of the creek bed at a point where large trees lined the stream. As the column moved across the draw, some mortar fire fell near by but did not delay the advance.

Throughout the march, contact between men was frequently broken. In most cases the break occurred at the rear of the column in the 60-mm. mortar section and the attached heavy machine gun platoon where the heavy loads made it hard for the men to keep pace with the riflemen. Every time contact was lost the whole column had to stop until it could be restored. During these periods

of waiting, some men fell asleep and dozed until the column was ready to move out again. The delay would have been even worse without the constant use of SCR 536's between platoons and company headquarters.<sup>16</sup>

When Company B left the main Rocca Creek bed it moved up the steep, rocky slopes of the finger of Hill 624 on the lower part of the main Altuzzo ridge. The first two or three men who started up the hill grasped bushes for support, but their heavy weight pulled the bushes out of the rocky ground and those who followed had to help each other up the slope. After passing up their rifles, they gripped hands together and raised each other from one level to the next.

At the head of the column the 2d Platoon, going east toward the ridge line, moved about thirty yards past a trail on the slope of Hill 624 before the company commander ordered the men to come back to the trail and follow it through a group of big chestnut trees. Although the night was pitch black when the column reached this area on the northwest slope of Hill 624, Captain Peabody could see the crest of Monte Altuzzo limned against the skyline. He decided to follow the trail and guide on the peak in the belief that this course would bring him to Company A.<sup>17</sup> At 0025, 14 September, the 338th Infantry telephoned the 85th Division G-3 that Company B was on the southwest slope of Hill 782 about 500 yards below the peak.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: 1st Lt Roberts Clay; all surviving offs and EM of the Altuzzo action in Co B, 338th Inf; Peabody. See also Intervs and Notes of terrain reconnaissance with Peabody *et al.*; Peabody MS.

<sup>17</sup> Intervs and Notes of terrain reconnaissance with Peabody *et al.*

<sup>18</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44; 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 13-14 Sep 44.

*Another Prominent Ridge*

Moving along the trail, Captain Peabody lost sight of the main Altuzzo ridge and the highest peak, which the steep slope and the dark night now hid from view. As the trail wound back and forth around half-circle bends, it was hard for the company commander to be sure of the direction in which the column was moving. When he reached the lower slopes of Hill 782 on the trail near where he thought Company A was located, he tried in vain to raise Captain King on the SCR 300. The Company B commander then directed his men to continue around the last bend of the trail on the large finger of Hill 782. Reaching the base of the bowl where a big tree lay sprawled across the trail, he stopped the column to get his bearings and to mark out the route of advance.

Captain Peabody noticed now for the first time that there were two equally prominent ridges, one to his left and one to his right, both running in a north-south direction. He could not even see the highest peak of Monte Altuzzo, for it was now hidden by trees and the steep slope that led to it. Even in daytime the ridge line on the left would have seemed from the base of the bowl higher than the main Altuzzo ridge on the right, because the peak, Hill 926, was obscured from view. The sight of two equally high parallel ridges was a new and confusing idea to Peabody. Before leaving Parettaio, he had studied the terrain with field glasses, maps, and aerial photographs, and there had been no question in his mind but that the main Altuzzo ridge was the only prominent feature between Monte Verruca and Highway 6524 to the west.

After another unsuccessful effort to raise Company A on the radio, Peabody radioed Colonel Jackson that he was uncertain as to his location. So that he could orient himself, he requested one or two smoke rounds on the highest peak of Monte Altuzzo; but when the smoke was fired Peabody could not see the rounds land and could only faintly hear their explosions.

With smoke failing to identify his objective, the Company B commander decided that the peak he wanted to reach must be on the left. If so, he deduced, Company B was then on the slopes of Monte Verruca. Since the 339th Infantry was scheduled to place a thirty-minute artillery barrage on that feature and then attack it at 0500, he didn't want to prolong his stay in the area.

Before moving out again, he notified Colonel Jackson that he would lead his men to the ridge on the left, which he thought was Monte Altuzzo. The battalion commander, still out of communication with Company A and in no position to dispute Captain Peabody's judgment of his location, gave his approval.<sup>19</sup>

At the 1st Battalion CP, information regarding Company B's location was meager but highly optimistic. At 0200 Captain Quisenberry, the battalion S-3, reported Company B on the east slope of Hill 926 and Company A in the saddle to the north. Although he surmised that the two companies controlled the crest of the mountain, he awaited confirmation before reporting that information officially. On the basis of this report, the 338th Infantry at 0215 notified the 85th

<sup>19</sup> Combat Intervs with Peabody and Jackson; Intervs and Notes of terrain reconnaissance with Peabody *et al.*; Peabody MS; 338th Inf and 339th Inf Unit Jnls, 14 Sep 44.



JAGGED CREST OF WESTERN RIDGE leading to the summit of Hill 926. This is the route taken by Captain Peabody's men. Note rock slabs jutting out from the bare ridge line.



CAMOUFLAGED LOG BUNKER on western ridge. From this position effective fire could be placed on lower slopes of bowl and across la Rocca draw.

Division G-3 that the 1st Battalion, 338th, controlled Hill 926, with Company A on the left and Company B on the right of the peak. In the advance, the report indicated, neither company had met resistance except harassing mortar fire. The regiment reported that, while its companies might be even farther along, these locations were definite. It was 0430 before the 338th Infantry learned that its leading companies were not nearly so far forward.<sup>20</sup>

The ridge which Captain Peabody had selected as his objective was a boomerang-shaped spur of the main Altuzzo ridge. Branching off from Hill 926, the spur ran for some 500 yards almost due west and culminated in a rocky peak. From there it curved to the southwest and, continuing roughly parallel to the main Altuzzo ridge for another 700 yards, formed the western rim of the bowl at whose base Peabody stood.

About 100 yards long and 2,650 feet high, the rocky peak of this western ridge was studded with enemy positions which had been blasted from solid rock and covered the main ridge, the bowl on the east, the eastern arm of Monticelli, and the highway. For ninety yards across the top of the peak, about ten feet below the crest, a zigzag trench, three feet wide and six feet deep, connected heavy log bunkers. Covered with two layers of six-inch logs, the trench was topped by heavy rock fragments and soil which so merged into the natural rock formation that on first glance it was not visible from the outside. From two of the connecting bunkers, camouflaged with green matting and facing toward the road some 400

yards to the west, effective fire could be placed on troops attacking along the highway up the bare ridge that led to the crest of Monticelli. Another position—a double pillbox with apertures for two machine guns—faced toward the main Altuzzo ridge and could cover a large part of the bowl with flanking fire. A fourth pillbox faced south and covered the draw between the western ridge and the highway. Spaced at intervals along the connecting zigzag trench were two observation posts that faced the bowl. From them observers could detect movement up the main ridge from the crest of Hill 782 past the main line of resistance on Knob 2. German riflemen in these lookout posts might easily fire across the main ridge line and the slopes of the bowl.

South of the western peak a series of rock slab ledges extended down the ridge line for a hundred yards before giving way to bushes and trees for another thirty to forty yards. South of the wooded area more rocks jutted out for another twenty-five yards to the south. Below these rocks and almost halfway down the ridge was a bare, treeless, rockless area of about fifty yards. About midway through this open space, the enemy had erected a fifteen- to twenty-yard band of barbed wire which ran along the western slope of this ridge, across the ridge line, and over its bare eastern slope into the bowl. Consisting of several strands, the knee-high barbed wire was covered in the center of the ridge line by a manhole trench and on the east flank by a log pillbox. A machine gun from this pillbox could fire down the ridge line over the barbed wire and bring flanking fire across the lower half of the bowl, espe-

<sup>20</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44.

cially the lower western slope of the main Altuzzo ridge. Another log bunker had been placed fifteen yards to the right rear of the first on the edge of the ridge line and sited to rake the lower half of the bowl.<sup>21</sup> On the night of 13–14 September Captain Peabody was completely in the dark about these positions and the configuration of the hill he had chosen as his route of advance.

By the time Captain Peabody had made his decision to go to the ridge on the west, the hours of darkness were fast running out. No one in Company B remembered the exact hour, but it must have been well toward dawn. Much time had been lost traversing the rough ground. There seemed to Peabody no good reason for delaying further by trying to reach Company A with radio, which had failed, or with patrols, which had not been tried. By this time he had the feeling that no matter what he did he would miss Company A. His primary concern was to lead his men out of the draw to his left onto high ground before daylight. From experience he knew that when dawn came the enemy covered draws and lower slopes with mortar and artillery fire.<sup>22</sup>

Stepping over the felled tree at the base of the bowl, the men of Company B walked up a trail that led west up the rocky western ridge. Reaching the ridge

line, the 2d Squad of the leading 2d Platoon moved steadily northeast on the east slope until it ran into several strands of concertina barbed wire that stretched directly ahead across the eastern slope. Halting his squad, Sergeant Brown, the 2d Squad leader, began to cut the strands with wirecutters, but before the job was finished Lieutenant Neuffer, the 2d Platoon leader, decided that too much wire stood in the way. To find an easier route he ordered the platoon to about-face, swing to the southwest, and advance to the nose of the ridge line. Once there it would turn north and push up toward the peak of what presumably was Monte Altuzzo. Swinging in an arc along a little trail, the 2d Platoon soon reached the southern end of a bare, open space that ran straight up the ridge line for fifty yards. On the march to this point the company had sustained two casualties; an automatic rifleman in the 1st Platoon had wrenched his knee, although he continued to limp along in the column, and a Weapons Platoon ammunition bearer had been slightly injured when he fell from a steep ledge.

As soon as the 2d Squad, still in single file at the head of the 2d Platoon, reached the ridge line, the men moved just to the left of the crest and walked across a little dip in the open ground up to the barbed wire. There the file halted momentarily while Sergeant Brown, who had misplaced or left his wirecutters down on the east slope, sent for a pair carried by the assistant squad leader, Sergeant Mullins. After clipping the wire, Sergeant Brown reached the northern end of the entanglement and almost stumbled on a manhole trench hidden by a mesh camouflage net. While the

<sup>21</sup> The discussion of terrain and defenses on the western ridge is based on at least ten trips to the area by the author from November 44 to April 45. Particularly valuable reconnaissances were made with Lieutenant Kelsey and Sergeant Dozier, 23 December 44, and with Captain Peabody, Sergeant Ledford, and Sergeant Dozier, 24 March 45.

<sup>22</sup> Peabody MS; Combat Interviews with Peabody and all other surviving officers and EM in Co B, 338th Inf.

squad leader covered, the third man in the column, Private Beverage, probed with fixed bayonet into the position. It was empty.

### *Fire Fight at the Barbed Wire*

Again the 2d Platoon's 2d Squad moved forward, but before the men had taken more than a few steps a German with a machine pistol in a dugout about twenty feet away on the right front opened fire. The first burst wounded Private Beverage in the left arm and killed Private Cetel, the rifle grenadier. Although the rest of the squad hit the ground, other Germans in the same dugout began to find the range with hand grenades. Both Pfc. Abraham Rubin, BAR man, and Lieutenant Neuffer were painfully wounded in the face and hands, and the platoon leader was temporarily blinded.

A moment later, from the right front a machine gun in the dugout above the barbed wire fired close to the men who were hugging the ground in the middle of the entanglement. Most of this fire went over the men's heads, but two other machine guns on the main Altuzzo ridge fired from the right flank and right rear, causing a number of casualties among the company's rear platoons. The most deadly fire came from a bunker which was dug into the side of the large finger of Hill 782. Again and again a machine gun from this bunker raked the bare ridge, making it worth a man's life to move.

As the enemy's defensive fire began in earnest, Lieutenant Neuffer, his face and hands covered with blood from his grenade wounds, ordered Sergeant Brown to pull the leading men of the 2d Squad

back through the barbed wire and build up a skirmish line. The other two squads of the 2d Platoon built up on the left flank and right rear of the 2d Squad, and the entire platoon returned the enemy's fire.<sup>23</sup>

As soon as the fire fight began, Captain Peabody ordered the 3d Platoon to move up abreast of the 2d, build up a skirmish line on its left flank, and attack up the ridge line. Because of the heavy fire which raked the exposed ground, the 3d Platoon leader, 1st Lt. Clemens M. Hanks, formed a skirmish line to the left rear of the 2d Platoon at the southern end of the bare spot, which dropped sharply from the hump to a steeper slope and thus gave some protection from the enemy fire.<sup>24</sup> The rest of Company B and the machine gun platoon of Company D had been stretched out in a zigzag column down the eastern slope of the ridge. At the sound of the first fire, the men in the rear had scattered for cover, hiding behind rocks and in little depressions in the ground.<sup>25</sup>

While the fire fight was still in progress, a German soldier shouting "*Kamerad*" popped out of nowhere and surrendered to the 2d Platoon's leading men. While Pvt. Frederick Koss, a BAR ammunition bearer, covered the enemy prisoner, Pvt. Idelmo Salmestrelli, an assistant squad leader, stripped him of a grenade belt

<sup>23</sup> Combat Inters with Peabody, Brown, Mullins, and Pvt Idelmo Salmestrelli; Inters and Notes of terrain reconnaissance with Ledford; Peabody MS.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Inters with the following: S Sgt William E. Ford, Lusk, Pfc Patrick H. McDonald, Jr., and Pfc Willie E. Guy; Hanks.

<sup>25</sup> Combat Inters with the following: T Sgt Arthur O. Tomlet, T Sgt Louis S. Campbell, S Sgt Joseph T. Barrow, S Sgt James M. Burrows, S Sgt John D. Brice, Pfc John S. Ptaszkiwicz, Sgt Howard C. Pecor, Sgt Alvin L. West, Pfc James W. Wright, and Pfc Arthur E. Collins, Kelsey-Dozier.

and tossed it out of reach. The 2d Platoon sergeant, T. Sgt. Fred C. Lang, quizzed the prisoner and learned that the enemy had posted about fifty men on the hill. Not far beyond the barbed wire, the German said, mines were planted on the left and right of the ridge line, but there were none in the center.

Before the brisk skirmish was over, the wounded platoon leader, Lieutenant Neuffer, went down the hill, leaving Platoon Sergeant Lang in command. Armed with the information supplied by the prisoner, Sergeant Lang realized that his men would have to push up the ridge and take the peak before the approaching daylight enabled the enemy to place accurate fire on the ridge and perhaps sweep Company B back down the mountain. Failing to reach the company commander by SCR 536, he directed the platoon guide, S. Sgt. Herman Ledford, to lead the way up the ridge with a small patrol and promised to follow close behind with the rest of the platoon.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Ledford's Patrol*

Taking with him four men from the 3d Squad, Sergeant Ledford moved through the barbed wire ahead of the rest of the 2d Platoon. In fear that the Germans who had put up the short but stiff fight were lying low while the patrol passed, Ledford's men examined the outpost position which covered the wire entanglement and the bare spot on the hill below. Just past the entanglement Sergeant Ledford looked into a bough-lined slit trench right on the ridge line and found it empty. On the right Pfc. Anthony J. Odierna examined the dugout from which the grenades and the close-in

machine gun fire had come and found only a single dead German slumped inside, a hole through his head.

Followed by the rest of the patrol, Sergeant Ledford continued up the mountain through a space of brush and scattered trees a few yards to the left of the ridge line. Reaching the first rock slab ledge above the barbed wire, he placed his two rear men in a position to cover the further advance of the rest of the patrol. Then, followed by Private Odierna and Pvt. William C. Brodeur, he moved through a relatively open brush-covered space to a second rock ledge. Private Brodeur, a heavy man well into his thirties, was panting heavily and looked as if he could not continue. The other two men stopped suddenly at a path which crossed the ridge line and examined a sign tacked on a tree. The sign read: "*Minen.*"

Because he believed what the prisoner had reported, that there were mines only on the east and west slopes and none in the center of the ridge, Ledford was not inclined to heed the sign's warning. He judged—correctly—from the way the sign was placed that the enemy intended it as a ruse to deny use of the trail.

Undeterred by the mine warning, Ledford motioned for the two men who were still in covering position at the first rock ledge to join him. When they arrived, he posted them as guards at the path to protect the rear while he and Odierna and Brodeur continued up the ridge.

Before moving out again, Ledford asked Brodeur, who had been well winded by the first leg of the journey, if he could continue. Although the older soldier did not answer, when Ledford and Odierna started out they noticed that

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<sup>26</sup> Combat Intervs with Ledford and Salmestrelli.

Brodeur was still with them. Advancing on the left of the ridge line, the three men passed through brush and small trees and finally worked their way into a rocky area. The higher they went, the steeper became the slope. Brodeur was now feeling the pace strongly and dropped from sight of the other two. Ledford and Odierna continued to climb upward, most of the time on their hands and knees over rocky ledges. They could hear the fire and watch the tracers from machine guns farther up the ridge firing over their heads down the mountain.

When they finally reached the bottom of the last rock slab ledge below the southern end of the ridge's peak, they paused briefly to get their breath and take stock of the situation. Just above them beyond the top of the ledge they could see dust raised by bullets from a German machine gun and could hear its staccato bursts. Sergeant Ledford climbed noiselessly up the face of the rock slab and stuck his head over the edge. There, in full view and a scant ten yards away, was the muzzle of the German gun.

Pulling his head down behind the rock ledge, Sergeant Ledford called for Private Odierna to pass up hand grenades. If the grenades failed to silence the machine gunner, Ledford whispered, Odierna was to finish the job with his rifle. While the gun above continued to sputter away, Ledford again edged up to where he could see and flipped a grenade to his right front inside the position. The machine gun abruptly ceased fire. Almost at the same moment, Odierna, who had seen another German through the embrasure of a bunker to his left front, warned Ledford to watch for action from that side.

Since no sound came from the left position, Sergeant Ledford thought that any Germans there were merely biding their time before opening fire. To make sure that they would not fire, he again crawled over bare rock to the top of the ledge. Crouched between the two positions, he tossed a hand grenade into the left bunker. Following the explosion, all was quiet.

Over in the right position the German moaned and jabbered. Aware that the near-dead sometimes miraculously spring to life, Ledford decided to make sure that both the gunner and his gun were out of action. Tossing another grenade into the right position, he quickly moved toward the barrel of the machine gun, which protruded from the embrasure. Keeping one eye on the German gunner, slumped inside but still moaning, he grasped the overheated barrel, unlatched the barrel and firing mechanism, detached them from the mount, and pulled the gun from the bunker.

Private Brodeur, who had fallen behind in the ascent, had by this time caught up and taken position near the other two men. Private Odierna investigated the left bunker and reported finding a badly wounded German, evidently felled by Sergeant Ledford's second grenade. Not long afterward another German came out of a position behind the two bunkers and a few yards nearer the ridge's peak. First to see this new target, Ledford killed the German with a shot from his rifle.

The sudden appearance of the last German whetted the desire of the men in the patrol to investigate the positions on the peak. Both Ledford and Brodeur climbed through the embrasure into the right bunker and strained their eyes

through the darkness, but inside the position all was quiet. They probed to find an interior exit; but in the inky blackness the rough-hewn chamber seemed a dead end, and they crawled back outside. Had they pressed the search, they might have discovered that the position was connected by a log-and-rock-covered trench with the bunker on the left and other positions farther up the peak.

By the time Ledford and Brodeur came back into the open, the movement around the two bunkers, if not the earlier shots and exploding grenades, had attracted the enemy on the upper slope of the bowl southwest of Hill 926. There on the right front where the Germans held positions in rocks and pine trees, enemy rifles and a machine pistol opened fire on the bunker area where the three Americans crouched. Although Sergeant Ledford replied with rifle fire, he had fired only a clip or two before a bullet wounded him in the nose and face. With blood streaming from his ears and nose, he called to Brodeur and Odierna, "I'm hit!" and started down the ridge.<sup>27</sup> Odierna and Brodeur remained near the two positions at the southern end of the peak, taking cover alongside the German bunkers.<sup>28</sup>

#### *2d and 3d Platoons Move Up*

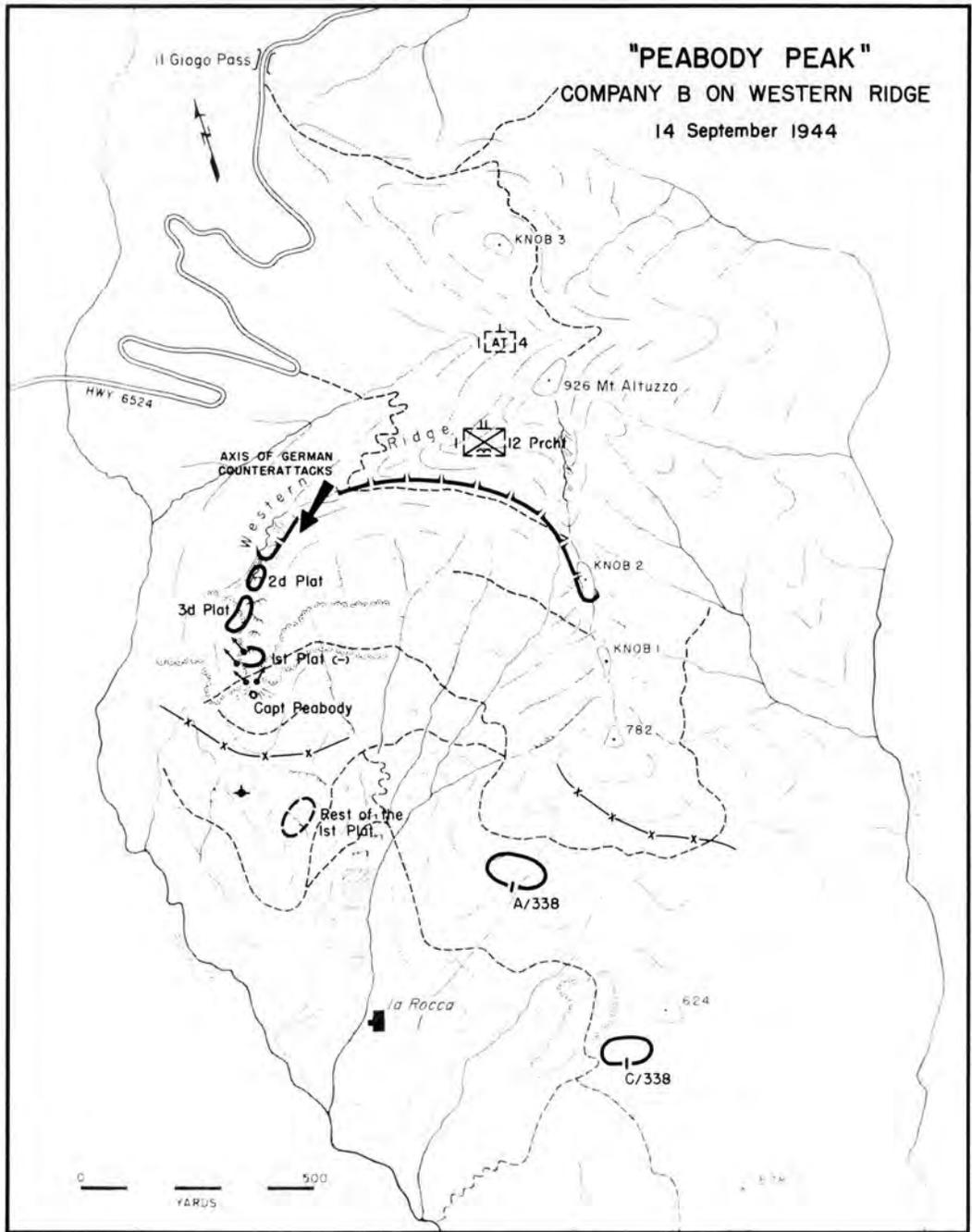
As the wounded platoon guide walked down the hill, the rest of the 2d Platoon was moving up the ridge above the barbed wire. After the first skirmish, Sergeant Lang had ordered the rest of his men to advance up the ridge, directing them to fire high in order to spare their

comrades in the patrol but still to pin down the enemy. Dispersed in small groups and keeping no regular skirmish line or other formation, the men moved as rapidly as the steep slope would permit. A few at a time, they ducked through the low brush, the rocks, and the trees and pulled themselves from one level to the next. Although they fired occasional shots, most men saved their ammunition in case they should later run into stiff opposition. Early daylight was streaking the hillsides, but the morning haze screened the men from the enemy on the main Altuzzo ridge and along the slopes beside the highway. Because of limited visibility, the enemy put only harassing fire in the area, and most shots passed harmlessly overhead.

About one hundred yards above the barbed wire, the 2d Platoon passed through a heavily wooded area that stretched across the ridge line and up along the west slope toward the peak where a heavy rock formation dropped off sheer into a gorge. Beyond the trees the men came to another rock ledge where some took up positions. Others continued past waist-high rock slabs stretching across the ridge line. To keep their balance as they climbed, the men dropped almost to their knees. Another group walked to the left of the rocks through small, heavily foliated trees until they came to a space between the top of the third rock ledge and another higher ledge lying just a few yards below the south end of the peak. Here most of the 2d Platoon stopped, but a few, including Pfc. Albert E. Wilson, Pfc. David R. Leon, and Pvt. Jules D. Distel, the 3d Squad's BAR team, climbed above the last rock ledge where they could see Brodeur and Odierna just above them.

<sup>27</sup> Combat Intervs with Brodeur and Ledford.

<sup>28</sup> Combat Interv with Brodeur.



MAP 12

After checking his men's positions, Sergeant Lang tried in vain to reach the company commander by SCR 536.<sup>29</sup>

Shortly after the 2d Platoon had reached these positions, but before the men had dug in, the two leading squads of the 3d Platoon came up to the third rock ledge. (*Map 12*) Singly or in groups of four or five men, they advanced up the hill in the face of only harassing fire. The squads kept no formation, and only about fifteen men went the whole way to the advanced positions. Of those that did, some stopped at the northern edge of the wooded area on the ridge line just to the rear of the 2d Platoon, and others took up positions between the second and third rock ledges from the peak on the left flank in the bushes and small trees to the west of the ridge line. With these men came T. Sgt. William A. Scheer, the 3d Platoon sergeant, who joined Sergeant Lang and organized his own men in defensive positions before he was hit in the arm by a burst of machine gun fire.<sup>30</sup>

Not long after the 3d Platoon reached the positions of the 2d, Private Brodeur, who from the highest rock ledge had the best observation, spotted an enemy tank moving from behind a house on the highway to the front. It moved off the road and came to a halt 500 yards to the north of and below Company B's advanced positions.

While the tank was still too far away to make a good target, Brodeur called down to Sergeant Lang for a bazooka, and the platoon sergeant relayed the

message to his bazooka team. Pfc. Leslie H. Albritton and his assistant bazooka man moved up to Sergeant Lang, but when the sergeant described the tank's location and the exposed position from which the men would have to fire the assistant bazooka man protested. Sergeant Mullins, assistant squad leader of the 2d Platoon's 2d Squad, heard the protest and told the soldier to hand over the ammunition. Taking the two rounds, Sergeant Mullins followed Brodeur and Albritton to a small bare spot between the two top rock slabs. Brodeur pointed out the target, and Albritton crawled five yards farther to place the bazooka in firing position amid a clump of bushes. With Sergeant Mullins loading, Albritton fired; the first round landed a hundred yards short.

The enemy tank started its motor and drove around a bend in the road. Again Sergeant Mullins loaded the bazooka, and Albritton fired. The second rocket fell within twenty-five yards of the target, bringing from the tank a quick answering round that barely missed the men on the western slope of the ridge. Having fired their only ammunition, the bazooka men withdrew.<sup>31</sup>

The infantry-tank exchange was scarcely over before the men in the 2d and 3d Platoons saw a half-dozen Germans walk nonchalantly down the highway to the northwest. At the same time the 3d Platoon leader, Lieutenant Hankes, and the 2d (support) Squad of the 3d Platoon, who were farther down the hill but on their way up, saw the same movement. Both groups of Company B opened fire. An automatic rifleman, Pfc. Ira Jones, killed one of the enemy, but the others

<sup>29</sup> Combat Intervs with Ford, Mullins, Salmestrelli, Pfc John E. Catlett, Pfc Leslie N. Albritton, Pvt George Itzkowitz, Distel, Leon, Wilson, and Pvt Thomas H. Sherman.

<sup>30</sup> Combat Intervs with Ford, Lusk, Guy, and McDonald.

<sup>31</sup> Combat Intervs with Brodeur and with Mullins, Albritton, Catlett, Salmestrelli, and Itzkowitz.

hit the ground quickly and deployed along the road or in the woods. One of the Germans remained there almost forty-five minutes while the Company B riflemen tried to pick him off. Finally the man rose, ran off a short distance, and plunged or fell into a ditch, possibly a victim of Company B's fire. A short while afterward the survivors of this German group set off a detonation which blew up a section of the highway just beyond the U-bend across the draw from the Company B positions.

All the while the men in the 2d and 3d Platoons were becoming more exposed to fire from the flanks and rear. As the day grew brighter, the aim of German riflemen from the main Altuzzo ridge and the slopes near the highway grew better. No matter how small the men managed to make themselves against the hard rock or bare ground, enemy sharpshooters picked them off at frequent intervals. German riflemen even tried to creep up and surprise them and before being driven away caused several casualties. Most men had cover on the front, but few had protection on the flanks or rear. Their attempts to dig foxholes in the rocky soil succeeded in little more than scraping away the topsoil. Sgt. Harvey E. Kirkes, acting 1st Squad leader, 3d Platoon, and Pvt. Willie L. Guy, his rifle grenadier, tried to dig a double slit trench in front of a big rock ledge. At first Private Guy dug while his companion watched for the enemy. When the hole was about six inches deep, they shifted places. Taking up the entrenching tool, Sergeant Kirkes had lifted it only a few times before a German from the left near the highway killed him with a rifle shot in the chest.

The German marksmen from the main Altuzzo ridge and the slopes near the highway fired often at Sergeant Lang, who moved around more than the others, giving orders and organizing the defense. When the sergeant's position became too hot, he moved to the middle of the two platoons and dug another shallow hole in the rocks. At two different times Sergeant Lang and Private Salmestrelli discovered Germans on the west slope trying to creep up on them but in both cases drove them away by fire.<sup>32</sup>

After the unsuccessful effort to knock out the tank, Sergeant Lang and his runner, Pvt. Thomas H. Sherman, tried repeatedly to reach Captain Peabody by SCR 536. Fully aware of his difficult and exposed position, the 2d Platoon sergeant wanted to have artillery fire placed on the tank, report the discovery of the Germans who had blown the road, and request reinforcements from the 1st Platoon, which, although he did not know it, was still below the barbed wire. After every effort to use the radio had failed, probably because its batteries were weak after all-night operation, Sergeant Lang told Private Sherman to go down the hill with a message.

As the platoon runner moved down the hill and reached the lower end of the wooded area where the mine sign hung on a tree, he met Lieutenant Hanks, 3d Platoon leader; Pfc. Noble R. Mathews, his runner; and Pfc. Morris H. Kruger, a rifleman, who were coming up the ridge. Behind them the 2d Squad of the 3d Platoon was still moving forward,

<sup>32</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Hanks and Seiverd, Mullins, Catlett, Leon, Guy, Lusk, Salmestrelli, Itzkowitz, and Wilson; Pfc. Alton Mos and John Campbell; Brodeur and Pfc William Alberta.

although the squad had not yet come in sight. Private Sherman told Lieutenant Hankes about Sergeant Lang's message to Captain Peabody, but he could not make clear the tank's exact location. Lieutenant Hankes felt that if Sherman showed him the way to the positions which the 2d and 3d Platoons held, he himself could locate the tank's position exactly so that accurate artillery fire could be placed on it. Blocking off the trail near the mine warning sign and leaving his runner, Private Mathews, to steer the support squad away from the mines, the platoon leader followed Private Sherman up the hill.<sup>33</sup>

Accompanied by Sherman and Kruger, Lieutenant Hankes had gone only a short distance when he ran almost head on into three Germans. Although both groups hit the ground quickly, the Germans had had the first view, and scarcely before the three Americans had time to duck behind a low rock ledge a German grenade landed at Kruger's feet. Unharmful by the grenade but knowing that the Germans had seen where they hit the ground, the three men shifted slightly to the right. The move gave no immediate relief, for more concussion grenades struck within a few yards of them. Stretched out on the ground, Lieutenant Hankes watched one five-second grenade land a foot away from his legs. At first he started to pick up the grenade and throw it back, but as he hesitated, fearful that the grenade might blow off his hands or face before he could get it away, it exploded. When he regained his senses, he found that he had been wounded in both legs.

Suspecting that the enemy was curious

<sup>33</sup> Combat Intervs with Hankes and Sherman.

to know the effect of the grenades, the lieutenant poked his carbine over the ledge. The Germans fell for the trick. First a machine pistol, then a head, rose slowly above the edge of the rocks. Lieutenant Hankes fired, killing the inquisitive German. Then Private Sherman worked his way into a better position and fired. From the high-pitched scream that followed, he judged that he had killed another German.

With two of the three enemy disposed of, Lieutenant Hankes decided that Kruger and Sherman could manage the lone German that remained. Hampered by the wounds in both legs, the lieutenant wormed his way down the hill about thirty yards. When he examined his pack, he found that bullets and grenade fragments had ripped the cans in his K rations and splattered food over the inside of his pack.

After taking sulfanilimide wound tablets, the lieutenant continued down the hill to the company command post, found Captain Peabody, and explained to him the plight of the 2d and 3d Platoons. In their exposed position, he pointed out, they had suffered heavy casualties and needed reinforcements and artillery fire against the tank. Their rear, he added, was threatened continually by German riflemen wandering almost at will over the ridge. Peabody directed the lieutenant on to the battalion aid station and ordered the acting 1st Platoon leader, Sgt. William J. Kelsey, to move his platoon up the ridge, clear out the snipers who held out in rear of the lead platoons, and set up defensive positions on the flanks of the advance platoons.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Combat Intervs with Peabody, Kelsey, and Dozier.

*First Counterattack*

Farther up the hill, before the 1st Platoon moved up to carry out its mission, Sergeant Lang and his men near the top of the ridge were hit by a barrage from 50-mm. mortars, opening the first German counterattack. The men ducked for whatever cover they could find behind rocks or in their shallow holes. Pfc. Lucien Harpin was wounded in the back by shell fragments, and Pfc. William C. Leonard, Jr., was killed.

After a few minutes of uneasy quiet, the men were struck suddenly from the right front by approximately forty Germans. Machine guns and rifles on the front and right flank blazed away, and hand grenades zoomed through the air, tearing up bushes on the left and nicking the rocks on all sides. For the most part the aim of the German grenadiers was good; but casualties were few, apparently because the grenades were concussion-type instead of fragmentation.

Using BAR's, M-1's, and rifle grenades, the 2d and 3d Platoons returned the fire. On the right front the men could see the Germans darting from rock to rock, getting closer all the while. Every time a German came into view, Sergeant Lang's men fired back, and throughout the counterattack they kept area fire on the enemy force. Some men on the left, not in position to return the fire, moved a few feet to the right where they took cover behind rock slabs and joined the fight. Because of the danger of hitting their comrades, only a few of whom could be seen from any one point, none of the Americans threw hand grenades.

During the fire fight a few mortar shells landed in the area, and the Amer-

icans spotted one of the mortars on the left rear in the draw just west of the ridge. An automatic rifleman, Pfc. Alton Mos, kept the position covered the rest of the time. At intervals when the Germans would come out to man the mortar, which stuck out nakedly in open ground, Private Mos drove them back with rapid bursts from his BAR. Finally, after his fire had wounded one German, the enemy abandoned the mortar.

The superior firepower of the 2d and 3d Platoons finally beat off the counter-attack and drove the Germans back to their bunkers and dugouts farther up the hill. Both sides had sustained several casualties, but neither knew the exact damage it had dealt the other.

Although alert and resolute action had stood off the first enemy counterattack, Sergeant Lang knew that his force had gained only a temporary respite and that if he were to continue to hold he needed reinforcements and more ammunition.<sup>35</sup> He sent a second messenger, Pfc. John E. Catlett, to ask Captain Peabody for assistance. At the company CP below the barbed wire, Private Catlett, unable to find the company commander, delivered the message to the executive officer, 1st Lt. George O. Erkman. Lieutenant Erkman started up the ridge, but rifle and machine gun fire turned him back at the southern edge of the barbed wire. He returned to the CP and directed his headquarters men to set up security.<sup>36</sup>

Up the hill Sergeant Lang was growing more anxious. No messengers had returned and no reinforcements had arrived.

<sup>35</sup> Combat Intervs with Brodeur-Alberta and with Ford, Seiverd, Mullins, Lusk, Guy, Distel, Leon, Wilson, Salmestrelli, Itzkowitz, and Catlett.

<sup>36</sup> Combat Interv with Catlett.

He sent two more men, Pfc. Donald J. Brown and Pfc. Patrick H. McDonald, Jr., with the same message for help. Although the two men started out together crawling over the rocks, Private Brown stopped for a moment to take a shot at a German. When Private McDonald looked back again, he saw that Brown had been shot and was lying on his back. Seeing that his companion was beyond help, McDonald moved on down the ridge. As he crossed the barbed wire under fire and approached the CP area, he met S. Sgt. George D. Keathley, 1st Platoon guide, and about seven other men from the 1st Platoon moving up the ridge. There too he found Captain Peabody and delivered Sergeant Lang's message.

Captain Peabody replied that help was on the way and that he himself was going up the hill at once. To remedy the ammunition shortage he radioed the battalion commander for resupply, and Colonel Jackson promised to send ammunition at once. He directed the Company B commander to hold his position at all costs. From the battalion command post Colonel Jackson sent a volunteer ammunition detail of twelve men carrying six boxes of ammunition. When the detail entered the open field beside la Rocca draw, small arms and artillery fire killed the leading man, wounded two others, and forced the rest to turn back. Captain Peabody himself sent two men to Company C for help. Heavy fire turned them back as well.<sup>37</sup>

Before dawn Colonel Jackson had reported that Companies A and B had been almost on top of Monte Altuzzo

during the night and that he had ordered them to occupy the crest. By 0655 he had learned from Captain Peabody that Company B was in a fire fight, had sustained casualties, and was receiving effective small arms fire from Monte Verruca (actually Monte Altuzzo).<sup>38</sup>

#### *1st Platoon Moves Forward*

Soon after the first counterattack had ended, part of the 1st Platoon of Company B had responded to Captain Peabody's order to move up the hill to assist the advance platoons. Earlier, when the enemy had first opened fire on Company B at the barbed wire, the 1st Platoon had been stretched out behind the 3d Platoon and had scattered in search of cover. At the sound of the fire fight, Sergeant Keathley, the platoon guide, had told the leading squad leader, S. Sgt. Oliver N. Summerton, to remain in position while he made contact with Sergeant Kelsey, acting 1st Platoon leader, who was somewhere up ahead. Taking with him Sergeant Summerton's assistant squad leader, Pfc. Vincent C. Clarke, and six other men from the leading squad, Sergeant Keathley moved around the eastern slope below the bare spot and the barbed wire to the hump, where he found Sergeant Kelsey and Captain Peabody. For some time, certainly until well into the morning, this handful of 1st Platoon men remained in these positions while Peabody tried in vain to reach the 2d and 3d Platoons by radio.

Lieutenant Erkman, the company executive officer, attempted with more success to locate and concentrate the rest of the company around the command

<sup>37</sup> Combat Intervs with all enlisted survivors in Co B, 338th Inf, and with Jackson and Peabody; 1st Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44; Peabody MS.

<sup>38</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44.

post, including the Weapons Platoon and the heavy machine gun platoon of Company D. All except the main part of the 1st Platoon, which had so dispersed that the men were out of contact with each other, were readily located and instructed to put out security and lie low for the time being. Most men of the 1st Platoon were scattered over the eastern slope out of sight of each other and out of the physical control of their squad leaders. Accurate enemy rifle fire on the area added to the confusion and lack of control.

After Captain Peabody's order for the 1st Platoon to move up the hill, Sergeant Kelsey, the platoon leader, sent forward Private Clarke and six other men from Sergeant Summerton's squad, who had been below the hump. Sergeant Keathley, the platoon guide, then returned to the eastern slope to assemble the rest of the platoon. Finding Sergeant Summerton, the platoon guide ordered him to move out with the rest of his men and to pass word back to the other squads to follow.

Sergeant Summerton notified the squads behind him and started forward with the two or three men remaining in his squad. He had taken scarcely one step forward before enemy fire from the main Altuzzo ridge wounded him. The two men nearest him, Pfc. Arley Perkey and Pvt. Hamilton Adams, moved back toward the company command post. Although Private Adams was wounded on the way, Private Perkey reached the CP, obtained a BAR belt from 1st Sgt. Volley Casey, and started again over the hump toward the barbed wire. As he entered the bare space, heavy small arms fire drove him back for the second time to the vicinity of the CP.

Despite the dispersion of the 1st Platoon, the message to move up filtered back to the other two squad leaders, Sgt. Nelson L. Simmons and S. Sgt. Charles J. Dozier. They, in turn, tried to pass word back to their men, but lack of a direct line of contact hampered their efforts. In all, only half the men of the 2d and 3d Squads responded to the order and followed their leaders. A few men, like Pvt. Louis S. Campbell and Pfc. Joseph T. Barrow, of Sergeant Dozier's squad, did not receive word that their platoon was moving up but, seeing men farther up the ridge, decided to join them. Others may not have heard the call, as they said, and some men either heard it or saw other members of the platoon ahead of them move out while they themselves stayed in place, afraid to follow because of the rifle fire the enemy was placing on the slope. Although one acting assistant squad leader heard a man shout from the slope above him that the 1st Platoon was moving up, he did not want to believe his ears and shouted back to the man above to find out more about the movement. Hearing no reply and seeing no movement, the assistant squad leader decided to stay where he was with the three men around him until somebody in authority came down and personally told him to move up. All in all, some twenty men of the 1st Platoon remained on the east slope or below the company CP throughout the day. Occasionally, one or two would return rifle fire against the main Altuzzo ridge; most made themselves as inconspicuous as possible and took no part in the action.

That half of the 1st Platoon which went up the hill had little trouble in crossing the bare space at the barbed wire

and sustained only two casualties before reaching the top of the wooded area. On the way, one group of the platoon, led by Sergeant Kelsey, had advanced to a point just past the lowest rock ledge when a machine pistol opened fire, killing the platoon radio operator, Pfc. Angelo F. Crespi. Dropping to the ground, the rest of the men briefly exchanged fire with the German and then pushed on up the hill to the north edge of the wooded area. There Pvt. Kenneth T. Moore was killed by a German rifleman who slipped in close on the left flank.

About seventeen men of the 1st Platoon reached the north edge of the wooded area and took up defensive positions. Private Clarke and six men went into position on the right flank on the east slope, Sergeant Dozier's squad on the left flank in the rocks just above the wooded area, and Sergeant Simmons, with four or five men, in the center.<sup>39</sup> Only a BAR team was sent all the way up the ridge through the higher rocks to the direct assistance of the 2d and 3d Platoons; the others were, in effect, only guarding the rear of the forward positions.<sup>40</sup> If the 1st Platoon had pushed out on the right flank of the 2d and 3d Platoons and tied in on a tight defensive line, the result might well have been disastrous. The eastern slope of the ridge where the 1st Platoon would then have been was exposed and, because of

heavy underbrush to the front, had no field of fire. Even the rocks in the center, which offered some cover to the 2d and 3d Platoons, thinned out on the east slope. Although the heavy band of trees on the west slope would have offered concealment, it would have allowed the 1st Platoon no chance to observe enemy movement through the trees or to prevent surprise attacks.

From the positions which the platoon did assume in the center rear and right rear of the forward platoons, it could at least place area fire and, in some cases, direct fire on enemy counterattacks moving across the eastern slope. Still the 1st Platoon's coverage of the area was far from complete, and the right flank of the 2d and 3d Platoons remained exposed. Thus, owing largely to the open ground and the configuration of the hill, the 1st Platoon could not round out a perimeter defense for Company B.<sup>41</sup>

Neither Sergeant Kelsey, acting 1st Platoon leader, nor Captain Peabody knew how far ahead of the 1st Platoon were the 2d and 3d Platoon positions. Neither went up to find out or to see whether the rear and forward defenses were tied in tightly, and the men in the forward positions were left to wonder where the 1st Platoon was.<sup>42</sup> Certainly they had no reason to believe that it had come to their relief or was even in a supporting position.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Combat Inters with the following: Kelsey-Dozier; Dozier, Campbell, Barrow, Burrows, Simmons, and Casey; Pecor, Pfc Luther Ingram, Marvin Cobb, James O. Brooks, Joseph T. LaMonica, Arley Perkey, and Pvt Edward L. Lazowski.

<sup>40</sup> Inters and Notes of terrain reconnaissances with Kelsey-Dozier; Combat Inters with all survivors from 1st, 2d and 3d Plats, Co B, 338th Inf, especially Salmestrelli.

<sup>41</sup> Terrain information based not only on interviews, but on several trips by the author to the western ridge from November 1944 to April 1945.

<sup>42</sup> Combat Inters with Peabody and Kelsey and with all enlisted survivors in Co B, 338th Inf. Captain Peabody stated that he never realized until he went over the ground with the author how far ahead of his position were his 2d and 3d Platoons.

<sup>43</sup> Combat Inters with all enlisted survivors in 2d and 3d Plats, Co B, 338th Inf.

*Machine Guns and Mortars Move Forward*

After half of the 1st Platoon had set up its defensive positions at the north edge of the woods, the Weapons Platoon and the heavy machine gun platoon of Company D followed suit, each going forward by squad bounds. Walking through the barbed wire one man at a time, Sgt. John D. Brice's light machine gun squad did not receive fire until the last man, Pvt. Raymond M. Babbitt, was hit in the hand. On the way up the ridge the same squad tried repeatedly to silence a German machine gun that kept firing from the main Altuzzo ridge.

The machine gun section leader, S. Sgt. Arthur O. Tomlet, went up near the 2d and 3d Platoons' sector to locate firing positions, while his two squads proceeded to the north edge of the wooded area. Returning from his reconnaissance, Sergeant Tomlet directed that the two guns be placed at the far end of the woods where they would face the road and cover the left flank. The forward gun was placed in the rocks at the southern edge of the third rock slab ledge. The second was set up ten yards to its rear and about halfway through the woods. In the rocks ahead and on the east slope, the section leader had found, there was neither zone of fire, cover, nor concealment for his guns. Hardly had the second gun been put in position before Sergeant Tomlet was wounded in the knee and toe by a rifle bullet.

Although the machine gun positions of the Weapons Platoon were useful for fire on the draw between the western ridge and the highway, they could not be used for repelling counterattacks except on the extreme left flank, because of the danger of hitting the riflemen on the

ridge up ahead. At intervals throughout the day the machine gunners placed harassing fire on the left flank, but most of the time they found the uncovered firing positions too dangerous to man. Almost every time a machine gunner moved, enemy fire wounded or killed him.<sup>44</sup>

Behind the light machine guns the two heavy machine guns of Company D were moved up the hill a short distance above the east-west trail where they were set up in heavy brush at the southern edge of the woods. Although one heavy gun faced up the eastern slope of the ridge and the other up the western slope, neither was of much help to the Company B riflemen. For one thing the machine guns had to fire through woods, and thus fire could not be accurately observed. Except for some harassing fire, the guns were used only when Germans were actually seen—and none were seen until late in the afternoon. The disadvantages, moreover, of firing these weapons straight up the ridge line were considerable. Had they tried to cover the ridge line and the riflemen near the peak, the guns would have had to be moved into the open where they could have been easily knocked out. Even if the machine guns had shot straight up the ridge line, they could have covered only a small part of it, for the layers of rock ledges restricted observation and prevented accurate firing.<sup>45</sup>

However limited the usefulness of the machine guns to the defense of the ridge, use of the 60-mm. mortars was even more so. At the time of the 2d Platoon's fire

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<sup>44</sup> Combat Intervs with Brice and with Ptaszkiwicz, Collins-West.

<sup>45</sup> Combat Interv with Clay.



GERMAN TRENCH AND OBSERVATION POST, *part of the enemy's main line of resistance along Highway 6524. Portion of the western ridge of Monte Altuzzo is visible in the background.*

fight at the barbed wire, the mortar squads had been several hundred yards down on the lower east slope of the ridge. They remained below the hump until nearly noon when they received an order from Captain Peabody to move into firing positions above the barbed wire.

As the mortar men grabbed their equipment and started forward, German riflemen and a machine gunner on the slope west of the highway raked the ground around them with fire. After the Americans hit the dirt, the machine gunner soon stopped firing, but the enemy

riflemen were persistent. Although most of the mortar men had some concealment, none had any cover. Only two men were wounded, one of whom was hit three times, but others had close calls. A bullet tore through the heel of one man's shoe, and others struck the clothing or equipment of at least four men. Digging in below the hump, the mortar squads stayed there the rest of the day, lack of communication with the forward platoons preventing use of their weapons.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Combat Interv with Sgt Lester F. Wise.

*Second Counterattack*

Not long after the machine guns and the 1st Platoon had taken positions in the wooded area above the barbed wire, the Germans launched a second counter-attack. Although men of the 1st Platoon's right flank joined the defense with harassing fire, the main brunt of the attack was borne again by the 2d and 3d Platoons. Like the first counterattack, the second began with a mortar barrage, followed by heavy fire from automatic weapons on both the western peak and the main Altuzzo ridge. Machine pistols fired from close by, and a barrage of grenades landed among the men in the higher rocks. In greater force than before, the Germans pressed their counterattack while Sergeant Lang's men replied with BAR's and rifles, continuing to fire even though their ammunition was rapidly dwindling.

Because of the uneven slope and the rocks, the men on the right front caught only fleeting glimpses of the enemy. Those on the left saw no Germans at all but fired back over the rocks as the sounds of the battle came down to them. Suffering heavier casualties than before, the men in the forward positions finally managed to drive the Germans back to the peak. In the process individual supplies of ammunition were almost exhausted, and the men used the only means to refurbish the supply: those who were still in fighting condition removed clips from their dead and wounded comrades.

While the second counterattack was still in progress, Sergeant Lang more than ever felt the urgent need for reinforcements and resupply. The radio still would not work and, as far as Sergeant

Lang knew, every effort to get word to Captain Peabody by runner had brought no results. Since he did not know where the company commander was or when help could be expected,<sup>47</sup> he decided to send another messenger, Private Salmestrelli for help.<sup>48</sup>

After climbing over two or three rock slab ledges, Private Salmestrelli reached Sergeant Kelsey and the half-dozen men of Sergeant Dozier's squad of the 1st Platoon, who were in the lowest rocks at the north end of the wooded area. Upon receipt of the message, Sergeant Kelsey sent one BAR team, Pfc. John C. Garlitch and Pfc. George J. Van Vlack, to bolster the defense. Pointing the way to the two men, Salmestrelli started out behind them, but he had not gone far before rifle fire turned him back. Returning to the 1st Platoon sector, he helped Sergeant Kelsey remove two men, who had just been killed, from slit trenches about five yards apart. As soon as the holes were cleared, two other 1st Platoon men hopped in them. Private Salmestrelli and the 1st Platoon men in this area who had no holes then began to dig, but they were able only to scratch away the topsoil of the rocky ground. Hit in the head by enemy rifle fire, the 1st Squad's automatic rifleman, Pvt. George J. DiFabbio mumbled a few words and fell over dead into Sergeant Dozier's arms at the edge of his slit trench. Watching this, Private Salmestrelli tossed away his shovel and began to cry. He moved down the ridge until he met Captain Peabody above the barbed wire at the southern edge of the

<sup>47</sup> Combat Intervs with Ford, Seiverd, Mullins, and with Lusk, Guy, Salmestrelli, Distel, Leon, Wilson, and Alberta.

<sup>48</sup> Combat Interv with Salmestrelli.

woods. Almost hysterical and badly shaken by his experience, he cried that he could not stay on the ridge any longer. Realizing the man was a nervous exhaustion case, Peabody told him to go down below the barbed wire to the company command post.<sup>49</sup>

### *Third Counterattack*

Sometime after noon, the enemy, using fewer men than in the second counter-attack, launched a third against Company B's right front. Again the 2d and 3d Platoons felt the full force of the assault as mortar shells, grenades, and automatic weapons fire landed among the rocks. Again the Germans were repulsed, but before withdrawing to the peak they had inflicted several more casualties upon the two forward platoons.<sup>50</sup>

During and between counterattacks, while the casualties in Company B mounted, the platoon aid men worked constantly to bandage the wounded, ease their pain with shots of morphine, and bolster the morale of the more serious cases until evacuation could be accomplished. Until the 2d Platoon aid man, Pfc. Edward J. Babbitt, Jr., was wounded after the first counterattack, he moved back and forth under fire giving first aid. The rest of the day the wounded in the two forward platoons either treated themselves or were tended by their comrades. At times ingenious devices were improvised. To help T. Sgt. William A. Scheer, bleeding freely from a machine gun bullet wound in his arm, Private Albritton and Sergeant Brown took a

shoe string which was being used in place of a lost carbine strap and applied it as a tourniquet. In some cases the men were too seriously wounded to respond to first aid treatment or were in positions too exposed to receive it. Because of the lack of litters, evacuation of the more seriously wounded to the battalion aid station, or even to the company command post below the barbed wire, was impossible. Even with litters it would have been a strenuous, costly task to carry the wounded over the steep, exposed ground.<sup>51</sup>

Although all the ambulatory casualties moved down the hill under their own power, for a long time most of them dared not cross the bare space at the barbed wire. In the area directly above the wire, Pfc. Joseph F. Bertani, 3d Platoon aid man, did yeoman service bandaging wounds and administering other first aid. By early afternoon some nine or ten wounded men had gathered in the brush above the entanglement. After several hours' wait, the bandaged men removed their helmets, stripped to the waist to show they were noncombatant, and passed through the wire behind Bertani, who improvised a white flag from a triangular bandage. The enemy let them pass without firing a shot.<sup>52</sup>

### *Company B's True Location*

Through most of the struggle on the ridge, much of Company B's distress arose from the fact that no one except the Germans had correctly located its position. All day long Captain Peabody had reported to the battalion commander that his men were on the eastern slope of

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Interv with Dozier.

<sup>50</sup> Combat Intervs with Ford, Seiverd, Mullins, and with Lusk, Guy, Distel, Leon, Wilson, Alberta, and Brodeur.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Interv with Albritton.

<sup>52</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Bertani, Mos, Alberta, and Pfc Donald Brouters.

Monte Altuzzo just below the peak.<sup>53</sup> At 1130 the 338th Infantry reported that Company B was inching forward on the southeast slope of Monte Altuzzo. Two hours later the 338th stated that the company was on the east slope of the "first nose of Hill 926." Again at 1500 the 338th operations officer reported to the 85th Division that Company A was on the west side of Hill 926 and Company B on the east side. Actually, at the time of the report Company A was 500 yards southwest of the crest, Hill 926, and Company B was 700 yards west and 100 to 200 yards south of the location where it was reported.<sup>54</sup>

It was only by chance that Colonel Jackson discovered Company B's true location. Sometime during the afternoon Captain Peabody reported to battalion that he was receiving heavy fire from the west—the left flank—and asked for artillery fire to silence the enemy positions. As he weighed Peabody's call for help, Colonel Jackson decided that this fire must be coming from Altuzzo's western ridge, and he accordingly ordered fire placed there. When the shells began to land, Peabody radioed that the fire was falling just right—about two hundred yards straight ahead of Company B. For the first time Colonel Jackson knew that Peabody was not on the main Altuzzo ridge but on the ridge to the west. The company commander still insisted that he was on the main ridge,<sup>55</sup> and it was that night before the men of Company B learned that they had never been on their objective.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Combat Interv with Jackson.

<sup>54</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44; 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 14 Sep 44.

<sup>55</sup> Combat Interv with Jackson.

<sup>56</sup> Combat Intervs with all enlisted survivors of Co B, 338th Inf.

### *Supporting Fires*

Notwithstanding the erroneous information at higher echelons about Company B's location, throughout the day supporting arms delivered heavy fire on the Altuzzo and Giogo Pass areas. (*See Map 9.*) During the day II Corps directed its divisional and corps artillery to maintain the "absolute practicable maximum of artillery fire" in the attack zone of the corps' main effort until the Gothic Line was breached. At the same time II Corps listed the priority of fires in this order: observed, counterbattery and countermortar, interdictory and harassing, and fires on known enemy positions, installations, or works.

During the day the 329th Field Artillery Battalion in direct support of the 338th Infantry fired numerous TOT and observed missions on enemy mortars, machine guns, and personnel, including five enemy vehicles, 1,000 yards north of the pass. During the morning a 155-mm. howitzer battalion of the 178th Field Artillery Group fired five unobserved TOT missions of twenty to forty rounds each north of Monte Altuzzo on what were presumably suspected reserve positions, assembly areas, and enemy batteries. At 1145 the 338th infantry requested TOT on the area north of Altuzzo's crest and along the highway 300 yards northeast of the pass where counterattacking forces were thought to be forming or moving. Shortly after noon another battalion of the 178th Field Artillery Group fired two missions on enemy personnel between the crest of Monte Altuzzo and the Giogo Pass and in an area 500 yards northeast of the pass. Again the fire was unobserved.

Other supporting units were also ac-

tive. Beginning at 0800 all suspected mortar locations were brought under fire by the 85th Division's countermortar section, which included 4.2-inch mortars and artillery. As a result, the 338th and 339th Infantry noted a considerable decrease in enemy mortar fire. From 0615 to 1700 the 3d Platoon, Company B, 752d Tank Battalion, from positions 2,000 yards northeast of Scarperia, fired ninety-two rounds of high explosive in the Altuzzo area. During the day the 1st Platoon, Company B, 84th Clerical Battalion, in support of the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, fired twenty rounds of white phosphorus in the draw east of the Giogo Pass and on the slopes of Pian di Giogo. In direct support of the 338th Infantry, Company B, 310th Engineers, worked on supply and tank routes. One platoon with a bulldozer worked on a trail that supplied the 1st Battalion, 338th, from Highway 6524 north of Ponzalla over the lower slopes of di Castro Hill as far as Paretaio Farmhouse. Another engineer platoon cleared the road of mines from Scarperia to Ponzalla, and a third platoon worked on a bypass to a firing position for tanks west of the highway and about 1,100 yards south of Ponzalla.<sup>57</sup>

In support of the attack, fighter bombers of the 239th RAF and 7th SAAF Wings of the Desert Air Force were active against enemy artillery and defended positions. The 239th RAF Wing flew four missions south and southwest of

Firenzuola, resulting in good concentrations and several direct hits which destroyed five buildings and caused a large explosion in a gun pit. The RAF 239th also bombed and strafed pits and diggings 2,300 yards north-northwest of the pass and another area on the Firenzuola road. The 7th SAAF Wing bombed defended areas at Firenzuola and exploded an ammunition dump and hit a German self-propelled gun and command post at Collinaccia, two and one-half miles northeast of the Giogo Pass. At 1805 tactical aircraft bombed and strafed troops in woods and buildings two and three miles north of the pass.<sup>58</sup>

#### *Plight of the Forward Platoons*

By midafternoon Company B, 338th Infantry, was hard pressed to hold on to its gains on Altuzzo's western ridge. (See Map 12.) At the end of the third enemy counterattack, the situation of the 2d and 3d Platoons, which had reached advanced positions near the peak of the western ridge, was almost desperate. Not only was their stock of ammunition dangerously short, but the repeated enemy assaults had reduced morale to a low ebb and their combined fighting strength to about twenty-five men. It seemed the longed-for relief would never come, and rifle bullets continued to spatter the rocks and cause casualties. Seeing the deadly accuracy of the fire—no doubt influenced by the clear, hot weather that provided excellent observation—many men felt they would not live through the day. As time dragged on, they talked freely of their situation,

<sup>57</sup> Memo, II Corps for divs and II Corps arty, 14 Sep 44, 85th Div G-3 File, Sep 44; II Corps Arty Jnl, 14 Sep 44; 178th FA Gp Jnl and Mission Rpts, 14 Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44; 752d Tk Bn Opns Rpt, Sep 44; 84th Cml Bn AAR and Jnl, Sep 44; 310th Engr (C) Bn AAR, Daily Sit Rpt, and Jnl, Sep 44; Combat Inters with Jackson and Farber; 329th FA Bn AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>58</sup> 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 14 Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44; MAAF Daily Central Med Operational Sum, 14 Sep 44.

asking one another and wondering to themselves why help did not come. Nerves that had been on edge all day were now strained almost to the breaking point. Two privates cried out that they could not stand it any longer, but Sgt. Albert A. Lusk grabbed both men and kept them near him.

Unless they received substantial reinforcements and supplies of ammunition, Sergeant Lang knew his men could not withstand another assault. Although the radio was useless and no messengers had returned from their mission of making contact with the company commander, the 2d Platoon sergeant still hesitated to leave his men. Finally, with his patience exhausted and his mind made up that he could delay no longer, he decided that he himself must go down the hill to see the captain. He must either obtain men and ammunition or secure permission to withdraw the two platoons to less exposed positions.

Since he wanted to be able to give the company commander the latest and most accurate information, Sergeant Lang ordered Sergeant Lusk to send a BAR man and a rifleman to the top of the peak. From there the men could observe enemy activity and note whether another counterattack was forming. As the two-man patrol moved up toward the peak, Sergeant Lusk directed two riflemen to cover on the right flank and a BAR man on the left. If the patrol was fired on, it could withdraw between the cone of fire formed by the covering men.

As soon as the BAR man of the patrol reached the peak, he stood upright, raised his gun to his shoulder and fired to the right down into the bowl. He had fired only two or three rounds when he was struck by automatic fire from the

upper end of the main Altuzzo ridge. As he crumpled to the ground, the rifleman, who had followed closely, looked up at the top of the peak but could detect no enemy movement. Hesitating only for a moment, he scrambled down and reported what had happened.

### *Sergeant Lang Goes Down the Hill*

When the patrol failed to disclose German intentions, Sergeant Lang, assuming that the enemy would be back again before long, told his men he was going down to the company commander. Assuring them he would be back within thirty minutes, he ordered them to hold until he returned. He left S. Sgt. John B. Spears, the senior squad leader, in command and started down the hill.

For a while after Sergeant Lang left, the men of the 2d and 3d Platoons felt more at ease. From experience they knew that the platoon sergeant was a man of his word and would do everything possible to relieve them from their precarious position. But as time wore on the men became anxious. A half hour passed; then an hour. Still Sergeant Lang did not return. Anxiety turned to premonition and then to certainty that their acting platoon leader had been either wounded or killed.

By this time the men seemed to themselves to be in a hopeless position. Down to their last few clips of ammunition, they could only watch and duck while the German snipers on the ridges to the east and west continued to pick men off. No one knew the whereabouts of the rest of the company. Each passing moment made them more certain that Sergeant Lang, whose courageous leadership had sustained them through the most hectic

day of their lives, would not return. It was thus little wonder that all the men wanted to withdraw; they waited only for permission from someone in authority. Some did not wait silently for that but pleaded fervently with the senior non-commissioned officer, Sergeant Spears, to give the withdrawal order.<sup>59</sup> But neither Sergeant Spears nor the only other squad leader remaining, S. Sgt. William E. Ford, wanted to take the responsibility as long as Captain Peabody's and Sergeant Lang's orders to remain continued in effect.<sup>60</sup>

Farther down the hill at the lower end of the 2d Platoon's positions, a handful of men did withdraw about twenty yards soon after Sergeant Lang had started down the hill. Apparently out of contact with the main group of the 2d and 3d Platoons, these men started back because their ammunition was nearly exhausted. Sergeant Mullins, among those who withdrew, had only two clips left, and others in the group had even less. As soon as the men reached the northern edge of the wooded area they met Sergeant Kelsey, acting 1st Platoon leader. "You men will have to go back," Sergeant Kelsey said. "We have orders to hold the hill and we will hold it." The men returned to their positions.<sup>61</sup>

When Sergeant Lang descended the hill, he found Captain Peabody beside a rock at the southern edge of the wooded area and reported to him the desperate plight of his men. As the platoon ser-

geant and the company commander lay stretched out on the ground, a rifle bullet struck Lang in the head, killing him instantly.<sup>62</sup>

Calling to Sergeant Kelsey, acting 1st Platoon leader, Captain Peabody instructed him to take charge of all the men in the company's forward defense, including the 2d and 3d Platoons' advanced positions. When Sergeant Kelsey made his way through brush, trees, and rocks back to the northern edge of the wooded area, he ordered Sergeant Keathley, 1st Platoon guide, to take command of the 2d and 3d Platoons. Sergeant Keathley started up the ridge.<sup>63</sup>

#### *Fourth Counterattack*

Shortly after Keathley arrived at the rocks just a few yards below the 2d and 3d Platoon positions, the Germans launched another counterattack—their fourth and strongest. At the first sound of small arms fire and exploding grenades, Sergeant Keathley called down to the 1st Platoon to send up reinforcements. Enemy mortar shells began to explode in the rocks around him, and the sergeant was forced to take cover in a slit trench with a 3d Platoon rifleman, Pvt. William B. Herndon. As the fight continued, an exploding mortar shell blew Private Herndon out of the hole, and another shell, or possibly a grenade, exploded against Sergeant Keathley's abdomen, almost blasting his intestines from his body. Dropping his rifle and pressing his side, the sergeant stumbled down the

<sup>59</sup> Combat Intervs with Ford, Lusk, Mullins, Distel, Leon, Guy, Brodeur, Itzkowitz, and Seiverd.

<sup>60</sup> Combat Intervs with Ford and Guy. Guy's position was very close to Spears' foxhole.

<sup>61</sup> Combat Intervs with Mullins, Kelsey, and Dozier. Both Kelsey and Dozier confirmed the action as related herein but added certain details which the author was unable to substantiate.

<sup>62</sup> Combat Intervs with Kelsey-Dozier and Peabody; 1st Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44; Peabody MS. Sergeant Lang was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

<sup>63</sup> Combat Intervs with Peabody, Kelsey, Collins, and Burrows.

hill to the last rock above the wooded area and fell into a slit trench. Seeing him fall, Sergeant Dozier came to him. Writhing in agony, the wounded sergeant panted a request that Sergeant Dozier remove his watch and send it back to his wife. A moment later he was dead.<sup>64</sup>

Farther up the hill the fourth counter-attack had hit the 2d and 3d Platoons hard. Physically and mentally exhausted, the men were almost out of ammunition and deprived of decisive leadership. Grenades and small arms fire landed close to their positions, and the men knew that a further stand was impossible. On the right flank and in the center, the attack seemed heaviest and at closest range. Soon after it began, Sergeant Spears, the ranking noncommissioned officer, called out to one of the other two squad leaders, Sergeant Ford: "If we don't pull off here, we're all going to get killed. The Jerries are overrunning our positions."<sup>65</sup> He was going to withdraw, he shouted. Though no one heard Sergeant Spears give an actual order to withdraw, they did hear the shouting between the two sergeants. At that stage, the men needed no urging. When Sergeant Spears led the way, the men around him followed.

While Sergeant Spears' squad peeled off from its positions and started down the hill, the other men higher up and on the left front followed suit, some spontaneously and some at the orders of Sergeants Lusk and Ford. They formed a rough file that hurried down the moun-

tain on the west side of the ridge line. When they came to the third rock slab ledge from the peak, which ran straight across the crest of the ridge and faced downhill, they turned west and walked through occasional trees and bushes along the upper side of the rock, the high rock slab shielding them against machine gun fire from the south. No fire came from the slopes along the road or from the draw to the west.

After moving west for approximately twenty-five yards along the upper side of the rock slab, the retreating men came to a place where the rock dropped off sharply. Since the rock at this point no longer shielded them from the south, the men stopped and bunched up at the opening, afraid to continue through it. As the machine gun fire from the south sounded ever closer, the Americans could see no way to get through the rock ledge without exposing themselves dangerously. The harsh sound of German voices floating up from the northwest added to the uneasiness. Having no idea that the 1st Platoon and their own company's machine guns were less than twenty-five yards away, the men were ready to believe the Germans had surrounded them. Some took off their ammunition belts and began to cry, "*Kamerad.*"

An assistant squad leader, Sergeant Seiverd, afraid that he would be captured and with him the 3d Platoon's mail, which he had stuffed in his shirt, stopped in the brush beside a tree near the ledge and covered the letters with dirt. Finding a few moments later that he had not buried them all, he covered the rest hastily with brush, hoping thereby to keep from the Germans any intelligence information the letters might contain.

<sup>64</sup> Combat Intervs with Mullins, Burrows, Kelsey-Dozier, and Collins. Collins' statement of Keathley's action was based on information given him by Herndon. Sergeant Keathley was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

<sup>65</sup> Combat Interv with Ford.

When the three squad leaders, Sergeants Lusk, Ford, and Spears, reached the opening in the rock slab, none of them tried to exercise firm control over the men, nor did they pause long at the opening. Braving the danger of fire from the south, they merely led the way, calling out that it was possible to get through and letting anyone follow who wished. No one knew how many men remained and were captured, but altogether there must have been about fifteen men in the group who went through the opening and withdrew safely.<sup>66</sup>

As fast as these men arrived at the 1st Platoon and Weapons Platoon positions, Sergeant Kelsey met them and began to place them in a new defense which Captain Peabody ordered set up at the north edge of the wooded area. But before they could form a new line the German counterattack hit them again. Many of the Company B riflemen could not return the fire because their ammunition was gone; others had only a clip or two left. The most effective small arms fire came from Sergeant Mullins, Private Wilson, and Private Barrow, who had found several BAR magazines and kept the barrels of three automatic rifles hot with bullets.

Despite the efforts of these men, the Germans, using hand grenades and rifle fire to good effect, overran a portion of the right flank. The other men heard cries of "*Kamerad.*" Many thought at first the sound came from the Germans but soon saw that Company B men were surrendering. As the men who continued to hold looked up the hill, they saw a column of about fifteen men file up the ridge through the rocks. In the

<sup>66</sup> Combat Intervs with Seiverd and with Ford, Lusk, Distel, Guy, Itzkowitz, Leon, Wilson.

lead was an American private holding a stick with a roll of white toilet tissue streaming from it. As the men surrendered, Private Wilson, an automatic rifleman, wanted to fire on them, but Sergeant Simmons, a 1st Platoon squad leader, forbade it. Some of those surrendering might be wounded men, and, in any case, Sergeant Simmons thought, the Germans would kill all the prisoners if the remaining Americans opened fire. Although someone yelled, "Put that G...D... flag down!" the cry went unheeded. The prisoners continued to climb over the rock ledges toward the peak and finally disappeared from sight.<sup>67</sup>

#### *Help from Artillery and Mortars*

Weakened by the capture of these men, especially by the collapse of the whole right flank, the rest of Company B was saved only by timely artillery and mortar fire. After the counterattack had begun, the forward observer of the 329th Field Artillery Battalion, 2d Lt. Joseph P. Lamb, who was with Captain Peabody, had radioed to the command post of the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, reporting tersely, "Counterattack," and then had snapped off his radio. On the receiving end of the message Lieutenant Farber, artillery liaison officer, who had learned from Colonel Jackson earlier in the afternoon the correct location of Company B, called for fire on neighboring German positions and the counterattacking forces.<sup>68</sup>

At 1650 two 155-mm. howitzer battalions of the 178th Field Artillery Group

<sup>67</sup> Combat Intervs with Kelsey-Dozier, Mullins, Ford, Seiverd, Burrows, Barrow, Simmons, Lusk, Campbell, Leon, Distel, Guy, Wilson, Itzkowitz, and Collins-West.

<sup>68</sup> Combat Interv with Farber.

fired a total of 184 rounds on the slopes between Hill 926 and the peak of the western ridge. In midafternoon the 403d Field Artillery Battalion had fired a total of 141 rounds of harassing fire on enemy machine gun positions along the highway northwest of the western peak and on other suspected enemy positions generally north of Monte Altuzzo. Most of the missions by the 403d were unobserved, and their part, if any, in influencing the local situation on the western ridge cannot be definitely determined. From the forward battalion observation post in front of the command post at Paretaio, 2d Lt. Robert P. McGraw of Company D had noticed the movement of the enemy against Company B and had directed 81-mm. mortar fire in its support. Though the mortar and artillery shells landed dangerously close to Company B, none of the men were injured. Giving ground to the accurate and close-in fire, the Germans finally abandoned their fourth counter-attack.<sup>69</sup>

A few minutes later Captain Peabody reported to Colonel Jackson that Company B had left only fifteen effective riflemen, two light machine gunners, and a platoon of heavy machine gunners. The report did not include the 1st Platoon riflemen or the mortar men below the barbed wire and the hump. The 1st Battalion commander ordered the company to remain on the ridge until dark and then to withdraw to the battalion command post at Paretaio. By 1630 the regimental command post had received the report that Company B had been

counterattacked from three directions and was off the peak of Monte Altuzzo. Colonel Mikkelsen, 338th commander, still did not know Company B's exact location.<sup>70</sup>

When the fourth counterattack was over, Captain Peabody ordered what was left of his company to withdraw to the southern edge of the woods and build up a defensive position around the two company D machine guns. Using a perimeter defense, the company commander had the machine guns set up on either flank and the riflemen face up the ridge between them. On the left and right flanks of the guns the ammunition bearers of the Company D platoon stood guard, while on the rear another handful of Company B riflemen took over the same job. Other riflemen were assigned to cover the trail that crossed the ridge line south of the new defensive position.

With the defense reorganized, Captain Peabody and 1st Lt. Roberts Clay, commander of the attached machine gun platoon, discussed withdrawal to the Company B command post below the barbed wire. The memory of the capture of the fifteen men still fresh in their minds, both officers recognized the necessity for controlling the movement strictly. They planned for the riflemen to infiltrate across the open space at the barbed wire while the machine guns covered the crossing. To screen the movement the company commander asked battalion to place smoke at the head of the draws to the northeast and northwest of Company B's position. The first rifleman started off and, although fired on by a sniper,

<sup>69</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Peabody, Clay, Kelsey; all enlisted survivors in Co B, 338th Inf; 1st Lt Robert P. McGraw. 403d FA Bn and 178th FA Gp Mission Rpts, 14 Sep 44.

<sup>70</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson and Peabody; Peabody MS; 1st Bn, 338th Inf, Rpt of Opns, Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44.

safely reached the southern edge of the wire. Other riflemen followed.

The withdrawal was still in its initial stages when a German rifleman opened fire from the left front near a bend in the highway. When Lieutenant Clay, the machine gun platoon leader, failed in pointing out the German position by rifle fire, he grabbed the left machine gun himself and began to fire it. Although the tracers kicked up dirt all around the sharpshooter, they all missed the mark. As soon as the platoon leader would cease firing, the German would resume fire at anyone who tried to edge across the open space at the barbed wire. Only a handful of Company B men and none of Company D had managed to filter through the wire. Some were still north of the entanglement when Captain Peabody decided to abandon the attempt to withdraw until after dark. When night did come, the remainder of the company and the attached platoon were at last able to withdraw.

Before all the men had reached the CP area, they came under misplaced American artillery fire. Captain Peabody radioed Colonel Jackson, who at 1900 telephoned the 2d Battalion that artillery fire which was being used to stop a counterattack against Company E was falling short on Company B. The fire was promptly raised.

As Company B prepared to continue its withdrawal from the western ridge, Private Bertani, 3d Platoon aid man, with the assistance of several other men, improvised two litters from blankets stretched between rifles with fixed bayonets. Two nonambulatory wounded men were placed on them, but Peabody decided that their evacuation with the rest of Company B would hamper the with-

drawal. He ordered that the wounded be left there until litterbearers could be sent back from the battalion aid station. Pvt. Charles C. Smith, one of the wounded men, guessed what was happening. "You're going to leave me here, aren't you?" he asked. Private Bertani could only assure him that litterbearers would return soon to complete the evacuation.

After reorganization was completed, Company B and its attached machine guns moved off in a column of twos through the darkness. Utterly fatigued, but relieved from the tension that had gripped them all day, the men walked directly down the ridge through la Rocca draw and up the slopes along the highway, arriving at the 1st Battalion command post at Paretaio after a three-hour march. There the men were fed hamburgers and hot coffee and sent to the slopes south of the farmhouse, while litterbearers evacuated the wounded who had been left on the ridge.<sup>71</sup>

### *The Day's Action*

For the second day the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, had failed to breach the enemy's main line of resistance on Monte Altuzzo. Instead of the co-ordinated assault which Colonel Jackson had planned, Companies A and B had made separate attacks on the main ridge and the western ridge of the mountain. Major factors in the outcome were the failure of Company A's radio and Captain Peabody's mistake in judging his

<sup>71</sup> This section is based on the following: Peabody MS; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44; Combat Inters with Clay, Bertani, and all enlisted survivors of the action still in Co B, 338th Inf. Direct quotes are from Clay and Bertani.



PEABODY PEAK looking to the south. Dust from Highway 6524 can be seen in background. Photograph was taken 22 September 1944.

location. Despite its lack of communication with the battalion and with Company B, Company A had at least jumped off at dawn toward the peak of Hill 782, but after a brisk fire fight and a short advance the two leading platoons had drawn back to their starting positions. Notwithstanding repeated efforts to restore communication, the company had remained out of touch with the battalion commander until midafternoon and knew nothing about Company B's plight on the ridge to the west.

During the day-long battle, Captain Peabody's men had penetrated the main

line of resistance on the western ridge but had not occupied the main bunkers on the peak. Since they had not consolidated their gains, the attack was abortive. The company's flanks had been exposed continuously, because the units on its right and left were too far away to be of assistance or were out of contact. The only tangible gain from Company B's attack was the development for the first time of the strong enemy defense on Altuzzo's western peak.

By the end of the day Company B could not have held its gains without reinforcement, for the day's casualties

had sharply reduced its fighting power. Out of its strength at the jump-off of about 170 men, it had suffered ninety-six casualties including twenty-four killed, fifty-three wounded, and nineteen captured or missing in action.<sup>72</sup> Even the survivors were in no condition to continue the battle or stand another harrowing day like 14 September. Under the circumstances Colonel Jackson had no choice but to withdraw Company B and renew the attack against Monte Altuzzo with fresh troops. To the men who had fought there so hard, the western ridge came to be known as Peabody Peak.<sup>73</sup>

While Company B had been making its heroic but futile effort near the peak of Altuzzo's western ridge, the units on its flanks likewise failed to break through the enemy's defenses. On the 338th Infantry's left wing the 2d Battalion made isolated advances along the highway but in every case gave up the ground and at the end of the day found itself back at its old positions near l'Uomo Morto.<sup>74</sup> On the 338th Infantry's left flank the 91st Division's 363d Infantry had attacked up the western slopes of Monticelli but had been stopped short of the enemy's main line of resistance. East of Monte Altuzzo the 339th Infantry of the 85th Division still was unable to take Monte Verruca despite extensive use of artillery, tanks, and tank destroyers.<sup>75</sup> In front of the Giogo Pass the troops of II Corps had failed everywhere on 14 September to breach the enemy's MLR

and take the objectives which would outflank the Futa Pass.

### *The Enemy Situation*

By the morning of 14 September the German forces on Monte Altuzzo were numerically stronger than they had been the day before. During the night (13-14 September) the *1st Company, 4th Antitank Battalion (Kampfgruppe Hauser)*, with a total strength of between 90 and 150 men, was sent to reinforce elements of the *1st Battalion, 12th Regiment, 4th Parachute Division*. Although these men sustained some casualties while moving into position, most of them arrived in Altuzzo's forward bunkers and were attached either as individuals to the *1st Company* or as a separate unit under the regiment. Initially forty-two men from the *4th Antitank Battalion* were committed on the east flank of the *1st Company, 12th Parachute Regiment*, but casualties reduced the number of effectives to twenty-five. Though originally armed with 75-mm. assault (antitank) guns, the company had only its complement of ten machine guns for its Altuzzo defense.

Besides these reinforcements, the enemy had at least three understrength companies of the *12th Parachute Regiment* in the vicinity of Monte Altuzzo: the *1st Company* with forty-four men and the *3d* and *11th Companies* with fifty to sixty men each. The enemy's MLR on Altuzzo was manned by 250 to 300 men in all—numerically the equivalent of one understrength German battalion or one and one-half companies of American infantry. Because of the terrain, poor communications, and lack of control, at no single time during the five-day battle did the Americans throw as many troops into

<sup>72</sup> Co B, 338th Inf, Morning Rpt, 14 Sep 44, in 1st Bn, 338th Inf, S-1 Files, Sep 44.

<sup>73</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson.

<sup>74</sup> Combat Interv with Cole; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>75</sup> 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 14 Sep 44; 339th Inf Unit Jnl, 14 Sep 44; 339th Inf AAR, Sep 44; Strootman MS.

action on Monte Altuzzo as did the defenders.

By noon of 14 September American intelligence reports indicated that the *1st Battalion, 12th Regiment*, plus reinforcements, was on Monte Altuzzo, the *2d Battalion* extended east from Monte Verruca, and the *3d Battalion* was on Monticelli. Even at this point every battalion of the *12th Regiment* plus the *3d Battalion's* reserve had been committed, although the enemy still maintained a mobile reserve counterattack force of combat engineers. Though forced to bring up various noninfantry units for reinforcement, the local German commanders had decided to hold Monte Altuzzo and the mountains on the east and west of the Gigo Pass with all the strength they could muster.

During the day civilian and prisoner reports and air observation located many enemy weapons which were supporting the German infantry in the Gigo Pass sector. In the afternoon a Mark IV tank with a short 75-mm. gun was reported 200 yards north of the pass. It may have been the same tank that Company B, 338th Infantry, tried unsuccessfully to knock out during the morning with a bazooka. At 1430 eight artillery pieces in position at Barco less than a mile north of the pass moved two miles north up the Firenzuola highway to a cluster of houses at Molinuccio. Three batteries (twelve guns) of 150-mm. caliber were at Corniolo three miles northwest of the pass. In addition, the *12th Parachute Regiment* was supported by two 170-mm. guns from the *Artillery Lehr Regiment* in position about 700 yards west of Firenzuola. The enemy fired only a small amount of artillery into the 85th Division area on 14 September, but most

of that received, mainly 88-mm. and 170-mm., was directed against the 338th Infantry.

The main enemy effort on Monte Altuzzo during 14 September was directed toward dislodgment of Company B from the rocky western ridge. Besides heavy machine gun cross fire from both flanks, the enemy struck with counterattack forces from behind rocks and over the most covered approaches. After the first counterattack between 1000 and 1100, the *12th Parachute Regiment* reported that Monte Altuzzo was again in its hands. At 1150 the *1st Battalion, 12th Regiment*, was ordered to reassign strength along the MLR and commit all reserves. That the other three German counterattacks of the afternoon cost it heavily is attested to by the *1st Battalion's* later report that it unconditionally needed a reserve company. Among those killed was the commanding officer of the *1st Company, 12th Regiment*.

During the night of 14-15 September a squad of German engineers laid mines facing the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, on Monte Altuzzo and the 339th Infantry on Monte Verruca. On the main Altuzzo ridge S-mines were laid in the barbed wire on the southwest slopes of Hill 782, but the mission was carried out only partially—the mines neither were numerous enough nor covered an area large enough to slow subsequent advance.

Although prisoner statements indicated that the highway from the Gigo Pass to Firenzuola had been knocked out by American bombers, on the afternoon of 14 September the enemy was reported to have that main supply route open. Thereupon the 85th Division asked II Corps to put the road out by bombing, and II Corps approved the request,

adding that if air power could not knock it out harassing artillery fire would be placed on it. Evidently one or the other was effective, for the enemy's front-line positions did not obtain rations on 14 September. At 2300 that night TOT artillery fire was placed on the knob north of Monte Altuzzo's crest.<sup>76</sup>

At the end of 14 September the *Fourteenth Army* was well aware that the *4th Parachute Division* was bearing the brunt of the Fifth Army attack against the Gothic Line. But in light of *Fourteenth Army* reports the enemy had clearly not realized that Fifth Army's main effort was restricted to the Giogo Pass area. The reports indicated that the main effort was on a nine-mile front from

<sup>76</sup> Foregoing information on the enemy situation is based on IPW Rpts, radio intercepts, and other intel info in 338th Inf Unit Jnl and 85th Div G-2 Jnl, 14 Sep 44, and in 85th Div G-2 Rpts, 14-18 Sep 44; Intel Sums and IPW Rpts in 338th Inf Jnl Files, Sep 44.

Monte Frassino southwest of the Futa Pass to Monte Altuzzo. The pressure along the whole II Corps front was such that the Germans still had not divined Fifth Army's plan of outflanking the Futa Pass by breaching the Gothic Line at the Giogo Pass.

Because of the anticipated withdrawal of the west flank of the German *Tenth Army*, the *I Parachute Corps* was told during the day to prepare for withdrawal of its east flank to the crest of Monte Altuzzo. For reinforcement of the *4th Parachute Division*, the *2d Battalion, Grenadier Lehr Brigade*, which had been in *I Parachute Corps* reserve, was entrucked the night of 14-15 September. Preparations were made also to send the *1st Battalion, Grenadier Lehr Brigade*, which had been in *XIV Panzer Corps* reserve, to the *4th Parachute Division* the following night.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Entry of 14 Sep 44, *Fourteenth Army KTB 4*.

## CHAPTER III

# Shellfire and a False Message (15 September)

After the attempts of 14 September had failed to break through the Gothic Line, elements of II Corps prepared again to assault the high ground on either side of the Giogo Pass. Instead of attempting another simultaneous effort along the whole front, individual units of the 85th and 91st Divisions planned to attack at different times the night of 14 September and the early morning of 15 September. On II Corps' right wing the 339th Infantry (85th Division) was to attack at midnight on 14 September to take Monte Verruca. The next morning at 0900 the 338th Infantry was to attack to take the crest of Monte Altuzzo and to advance astride Highway 6524 toward the Giogo Pass. West of the highway the 363d and 361st Infantry (91st Division) were to try again at 0500 to seize Monticelli and Hill 844 to the west.<sup>1</sup>

The 13-14 September attacks had demonstrated the enemy's intentions to defend Monte Altuzzo firmly and had dealt heavy casualties to Company B, prompting Colonel Mikkelsen, 338th commander, to consider dropping the 1st Battalion into reserve and using the fresh 3d Battalion to attack through the 1st's positions. When this proposal was presented to Colonel Jackson, the 1st Bat-

talion commander, he argued against it. Colonel Jackson well recognized that Company B was no longer an effective fighting force, but he was equally aware of the fact that his A and C Companies were in good condition. Company A had sustained only a few casualties in developing the Altuzzo defenses, and Company C had not yet been committed. Jackson insisted therefore that his battalion could and would take Monte Altuzzo the next day. Yielding, Colonel Mikkelsen gave the order to try again, this time with Companies A and C. As soon as the two companies should reach Hill 926, the 3d Battalion was then to pass through and the 1st to drop into reserve.<sup>2</sup> Resupply of rations and ammunition from the regimental distribution point at Scarperia was to continue to be made by jeep to the slopes behind Paretaio Farmhouse.

### *Preparations for Attack*

Because study through field glasses and conversation with Captain King had shown that the main Altuzzo ridge was too narrow to accommodate more than two platoons initially, the 1st Battalion

<sup>1</sup> 338th Inf and 339th Inf Unit Jnls, 14-15 Sep 44; 85th Div and 91st Div G-3 Jnls, 14-15 Sep 44; Strootman MS, Ch. III; Muller Notes.

<sup>2</sup> Combat Intervs with Mikkelsen, Lt Col Marion P. Boulden, and Jackson. Colonel Jackson did not recall this incident but thought it entirely possible that he had taken the position herein described.



COMMAND POST AT PARETAIO FARMHOUSE. *In this 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, CP, the man on left using telephone is 1st Lt. Roberts Clay, Company D, 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry; next to him, in foreground is 1st Lt. William H. Alston, Jr., 1st Battalion S-2; 2d Lt. Joseph P. Lamb can be seen on extreme right, and next to him, using the telephone, is 1st Lt. Dawson L. Farber, Jr., both of the 329th Field Artillery Battalion. In the background, second man from left, bending over the table is Cpl. Mark Kolesar of the 329th. The other two men are not identified.*

commander decided that one platoon each from Companies A and C would attack abreast up the main ridge from Hill 782. The other platoons of each company would follow by bounds. Beginning at H Hour, 500 smoke rounds from 105-mm. howitzers would screen the movement for about one hour.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson and Farber.

For half an hour before the infantry attack, mortars and light, medium, and heavy artillery were to soften up the entire mountain position. For the heavy 240-mm. howitzers and 8-inch guns, which were most effective against the prepared defenses of the Gothic Line, II Corps had given the 85th Division priority in fire and a large ammunition allotment. Cannon Company, 338th,

was assigned harassing missions in the area behind Hill 926, and the 81-mm. mortars of Company D, 338th, and the 4.2-inch mortars of the 84th Chemical Battalion were to fire on targets west of Altuzzo's western ridge and east of the main ridge which could not be reached by artillery fire. Two machine guns of Company D were to support the attack from Hill 624. After the preparatory barrage, all artillery concentrations were to be fired on call.<sup>4</sup>

At dawn tanks and tank destroyers were to strike at those pillboxes which had been located on the two ridges of the mountain. During the night of 14-15 September one tank from Company B, 752d Tank Battalion, was dug in and camouflaged in the vicinity of Hill 360, 1,500 yards south-southwest of the lower end of the main Altuzzo ridge. Although two other tanks were earmarked for use near the Paretaiio Farmhouse, the tank liaison officer found later that tanks could not move into the planned positions. At 0430, 15 September, the 1st Platoon, Company B, 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled), was attached to Company B, 752d Tank Battalion. To assist the tanks in firing on pillboxes and targets of opportunity, the tank destroyers moved at 0845 up Highway 6524 more than a mile beyond Scarperia and took positions just north of Montagnana, 4,200 yards southwest of Monte Altuzzo's crest.

During the night artillery fire was placed on the crest of Monte Altuzzo every fifteen minutes. At 2300 artillery fired TOT on the north hump, Knob 3,

north of the peak of Monte Altuzzo; and the 403d Field Artillery Battalion let loose a TOT on an area just south of the Giogo Pass and at Bagnolo, one mile north of the pass. Every fifteen minutes during the night the 403d put harassing fire around the pass, along the highway north and south of it, and on Hill 926. From 0400 to 0600 three guns fired each mission every fifteen minutes and walked up and down the Firenzuola highway for two miles north of the pass.

Although the 338th Infantry requested a number of bombing missions, poor visibility forced postponement. Throughout the day bad weather was to prevent flying of most bomber missions on the entire Fifth Army front.<sup>5</sup>

As soon as attack plans were completed, the 1st Battalion commander gave the warning order to the Company A commander, Captain King, and the Company C commander, 1st Lt. Redding C. Souder, Jr., and described the formation and supporting fires to be used. Specifying that the two companies maintain physical contact, he left the company commanders to work out their own boundaries and exact routes of advance.<sup>6</sup>

After the briefing, Captain King and Lieutenant Souder, each without the other's knowledge, apparently came to different views regarding the nature and probable outcome of the attack. Anxious to push all the way up the main Altuzzo ridge, Captain King understood his mission to be the capture of Hill 926. This time, he was sure, his men would break through the enemy's main line of

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 14-15 Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14-15 Sep 44; II Corps Arty Jnl, 14-15 Sep 44; 403d FA Bn Mission Rpts, 14-15 Sep 44; 752d Tk Bn and 805th TD Bn AAR's, Sep 44.

<sup>5</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14-15 Sep 44; 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 14-15 Sep 44; MATAF Intel and Opns Sum, 15 Sep 44; MAAF Central Med Daily Operational Sum, 15 Sep 44.

<sup>6</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson, King, and Souder.

resistance. Lieutenant Souder, on the other hand, looked upon the attack more as a developing movement. He understood that Hill 926 was the assigned objective but anticipated that the two companies would go only as far as they could without sustaining heavy casualties. Having heard that Company B had suffered heavily the day before, he was far from sanguine about the possibilities of another attack. He doubted that his men could reach the peak and certainly did not believe they were being called upon for an all-out effort.<sup>7</sup>

Captain King ordered that Company A attack in a column of platoons, the 2d Platoon leading, followed in order by the light machine gun section, the 1st Platoon, and the 3d Platoon. For Company C Lieutenant Souder directed the 1st Platoon to lead, the 2d Platoon and the light machine gun section to follow, and the 3d Platoon to bring up the rear. During his conferences with his platoon leaders, each company commander, in some measure at least, must have passed on to his officers his own feelings about the impending action, for the two platoon leaders, Lieutenant Gresham and 1st Lt. William S. Corey, who were to lead the Company A and C formations, respectively, reflected the opinion of their company commanders. Aggressive and self-confident, Gresham felt sure he could take Monte Altuzzo the next morning. The more cautious Corey was skeptical about the possibility of success.<sup>8</sup>

Company A was resupplied during the night with water, K rations, and ammunition. The only shortage remaining

was in hand grenades. Some had been dropped on the way by men who wanted to lighten their loads, or had been lost during the attacks of the first two days. There had been no resupply. Shortly after dark Captain King sent a small patrol beyond the barbed wire to the ridge line of Hill 782, and the patrol reported considerable enemy movement.<sup>9</sup>

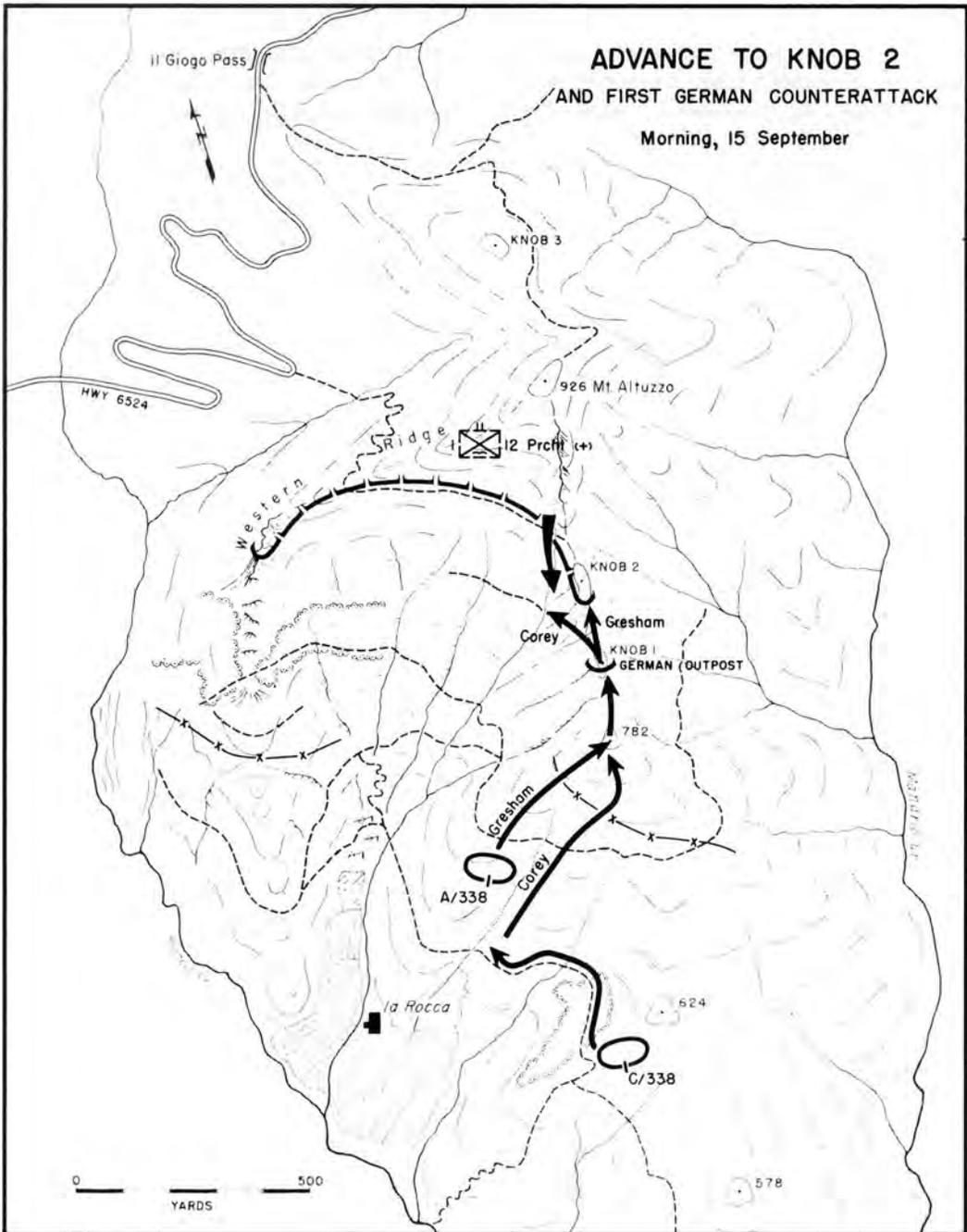
Company C started forward at approximately 0300 from its positions on the southwest slope of Hill 624. (*Map 13*) Following the upper trail that wound along the slopes to the north, the company stopped just before dawn near the first finger on the southwest slope of Hill 782, about 150 yards to the right rear of Company A. There Company C established contact with Company A and strung telephone wire between the two command posts. Captain King and Lieutenant Souder arranged that the leading platoon of Company C would advance up the slope ahead and move to the left until it came abreast of the leading platoon of Company A at the rocks fifty yards below the peak of Hill 782.

From Hill 624 the men of Company C had brought with them ammunition, water, and rations for the next day. Each man still had one belt and one bandoleer of .30-caliber ammunition but like the men of Company A lacked a full supply of hand grenades. The leading platoons of both companies were four or five men short of full strength. In Company C's 2d Platoon, which was to follow its 1st Platoon, the effectives were reduced by the evacuation of five nervous exhaustion cases as H Hour approached.

<sup>7</sup> Combat Intervs with King, Gresham, and Souder.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Intervs with Corey and with 1st Lt David M. Brumbaugh.

<sup>9</sup> Combat Intervs with Van Horne, King, and enlisted survivors in Co A, 338th Inf, and Gresham; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 14-15 Sep 44.



MAP 13

While the 1st Battalion made its last-minute preparations to attack, the 3d Battalion, 338th Infantry, in reserve, moved to Hill 624 from Lutiano southeast of Paretaio Farmhouse. From this position the 3d Battalion was to follow Companies A and C closely and pass through them after capture of Hill 926. Companies K and L, each with one machine gun platoon of Company M attached, reached Hill 624 at 0600, made contact with the rear elements of Company C, and learned the route of advance. Company I, in 3d Battalion reserve, and the mortar platoon of Company M remained near Lutiano.

After daylight, the two company commanders and platoon leaders of the 1st battalion assault force issued final instructions. Lieutenant Corey, who was to lead Company C's 1st Platoon, told his men to move up to the ridge line, then swing to the left and go north a few yards until contact was made with Company A's leading 2d Platoon. The movement would be slow, Lieutenant Corey warned, because the location of the enemy was not known. Having never seen the terrain ahead except at a distance, the lieutenant had no idea that the ridge line was as narrow as it actually was.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Gresham and Corey Move Forward*

Anxious to have his Company A assault platoon at the rocks above the barbed wire at 0900, when he was scheduled to meet the leading platoon of Company C, Lieutenant Gresham di-

rected his men to move out in single file at 0830 from their positions on the large finger of Hill 782. The 3d Squad was in the lead, followed by platoon headquarters, the 2d Squad, and the 1st Squad.

Stepping over the low-strung barbed wire, the men came upon the dugout that Sergeant Van Horne had knocked out the afternoon of 13 September. It was now unoccupied. Continuing past the position, they reached the rocks just below the peak of Hill 782 about 0850. Although they had looked for Company C's 1st Platoon, it had been hidden from them by the steep, uneven slope to their right. After a five-minute wait at the rocks, Lieutenant Gresham saw several men of Company C approaching up the hill from his right rear.<sup>11</sup>

Approximately seventy-five yards to the right of Company A's 2d Platoon, the 1st Platoon of Company C had moved out about the same time from the trail on the southwest slope of Hill 782. In a column of squads—the 1st, 2d, and 3d, in that order—the men walked up the ridge in an open squad column and stepped across the low-strung barbed wire. Past the wire the leading squad found unmanned enemy emplacements reinforced with logs and covered with dirt. On the way up the hill, the 1st Squad, which was supposed to maintain visual contact with Company A, could see Lieutenant Gresham's men occasionally, but most of the time the slope hid them from view. As the head of the column came within twenty yards of the ridge line, the 1st Squad leader, S. Sgt. James O. Orr, stopped his squad and told his two scouts, Pfc. Lawrence F. Markey,

<sup>10</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Gresham-Stevens; Michalek-Carter-Wilson-Hillier; Sgt Tony L. White; Souder, Thompson, and Corey. 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 14-15 Sep 44; 1st Bn and 3d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR's, and 338th Inf AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>11</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham, Stevens, and Carter-Wilson-Hillier.



*TAKING A BREAK. These men of the 338th Infantry are taking a brief rest on the slopes near their CP. Note the supply of 60- and 81-mm. mortar shells in center.*

Jr., and Pfc. Willie Burnett, to reconnoiter. Reaching the crest and peering over the ridge line, the scouts noted only a sheer drop just beyond it on the eastern slope of Hill 782 and several German positions on the next mountain to the east, Monte Verruca.

By this time Sergeant Orr had noticed the 2d Platoon of Company A on his left flank. The Company A platoon seemed to be too high on the ridge to permit Company C's platoon to swing left, move abreast, and proceed north up the mountain without walking on the ridge line

exposed to heavy flanking fire from Monte Verruca. At the report of visual contact Lieutenant Corey directed his 1st Squad to move on to Company A's 2d Platoon at the rocks, and in a few minutes Sergeant Orr made contact with Lieutenant Gresham.<sup>12</sup>

The preliminary artillery barrage, which had begun at 0830, was now in full swing. Every few minutes the 8-inch and 240-mm. shells, designed to knock out enemy pillboxes, were landing on the higher

<sup>12</sup> Combat Intervs with Orr and with Gresham.

slopes of Monte Altuzzo. Wherever the heavy projectiles hit, they sent up a mingled mass of smoke, dirt, and rubble and rocked the ground around the men of the 1st Battalion, scarcely 300 yards away. At 0855 the 338th Infantry reported that a 240-mm. howitzer had neutralized one pillbox on Hill 926. From 0815 to 0930 the 403d Field Artillery Battalion fired harassing missions of twenty to thirty rounds each every twenty minutes on the upper slopes of Monte Verruca and the slopes to the north. Beginning at 0830 this 155-mm. howitzer battalion placed harassing fire every five minutes on Hill 926 and from 0925 to 0950 on the northern slopes of Monte Altuzzo near the pass and along the highway just south of the pass. Before the attack jumped off, tanks and tank destroyers, despite a delay in getting into position, fired on fifteen pillboxes in the Altuzzo area.<sup>13</sup>

Wishing to make the most of the barrage while it lasted, Lieutenant Gresham decided not to wait for Lieutenant Corey and the rest of Corey's platoon. The Company A platoon leader wanted to take his men up the ridge while the artillery still pinned the enemy to his holes and pillboxes, and for fifty yards ahead there was an area in which his platoon could move in some concealment through the rocks to the peak of Hill 782. Directing his men to move out, Lieutenant Gresham told Sergeant Orr to ask that Lieutenant Corey have the 1st Squad of the Company C platoon follow Company A's 2d Platoon until it halted.

Using a leapfrog system, Lieutenant

<sup>13</sup> Combat Intervs with Farber, Gresham, and Jackson; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl and 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 15 Sep 44; 403d FA Bn Mission Rpts, 15 Sep 44; 752d Tk Bn and 805th TD Bn AAR's, Sep 44.

Gresham's platoon moved slowly through the rocks. As the leading squad advanced, the other two rifle squads and one machine gun squad of the Weapons Platoon covered until a designated bound was reached. The covering squads then displaced forward. Behind the machine gun squad came Sergeant Orr's squad of Company C and, within visual contact, the rest of the Company C platoon. Supported by the artillery fire the leading men reached the peak of Hill 782 without difficulty. There the two platoon leaders joined forces.

Corey and Gresham noted the sheer drop of the eastern slope and agreed that the ridge ahead of them was too narrow for two platoons to move abreast. They decided that Lieutenant Gresham's 2d Platoon, Company A, would lead the way, single file, followed by Lieutenant Corey's 1st Platoon, Company C.<sup>14</sup> As the 2d Platoon started forward from the rocks on the peak of Hill 782, smoke shells began to land on the ridge ahead and in the draw to the west. Although the first shells fell too far to the left, Lieutenant Gresham was able to adjust the fire of the 105-mm. howitzers. In the heavy morning air the smoke clung to the ground like gas. At 0930 the 329th Field Artillery Battalion reported that smoke on Monte Altuzzo was good and should be continued. While it did not prevent the attackers from seeing one another or the route of advance for a few yards ahead, the smoke did severely limit German observation.

#### *Fire at Knobs 1 and 2*

After moving under the smoke screen about seventy-five yards beyond Hill 782

<sup>14</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham, Orr, and Corey.

to another little rise on the ridge line, Knob 1, the 2d Platoon of Company A was hit by enemy fire for the first time. It came from a position about a hundred yards away on the left flank to the west of the ridge line. Pfc. Joseph Farino returned the fire, and the platoon leader himself sent a few rounds from his carbine in the same direction. The enemy fire ceased, and Lieutenant Gresham directed the 1st Squad, which was second in the column, to take the lead and continue forward.

As soon as the 1st Squad started off it came under close-in fire from the front. The squad leader, Pfc. Ray C. Collins, sent two men out to his left to sneak up on the Germans from the rear. When the two men found an enemy machine gun, one covered while the other threw a hand grenade, rushed the position, and shot the single German he found inside.

The enemy fire and the discovery of the machine gun position led Lieutenant Gresham to believe that his men had struck the main line of resistance. Knowing that his left flank was exposed, he halted, passed word back for Lieutenant Corey to come forward, and reported what had happened to Captain King. The Company A commander, who had moved above the barbed wire beyond the dugout just below the rocks on Hill 782, kept urging the lieutenant to "Go ahead! Go ahead!" It seemed safe enough, for the smoke still hung heavily over the battlefield on the front and left flank.<sup>15</sup>

Heeding Captain King's urging, Lieutenant Gresham ordered his 2d Squad leader, Sergeant Wilson, to move his men through the leading 1st Squad. Walking

in an open squad column toward the next bound, a rock formation on the next rise in the ridge line, Knob 2, the squad had gone only a few yards up the forward slope of the second knob when machine guns and rifles opened fire from the left flank and front. On the front the enemy positions were in the rocks squarely on the ridge line approximately thirty yards ahead of Sergeant Wilson's squad.

These positions at Knob 2, located about 250 yards north of Hill 782 and 300 yards south of Monte Altuzzo's crest, comprised the east anchor of the German lines. Most were placed on or a few yards west of the ridge line. The first was a fourteen-foot-wide, zigzag trench without overhead cover about five feet below the ridge line, providing vantage points from which riflemen or machine gunners could fire down the ridge line or into the bowl. A few yards north of the trench and to its right rear on the ridge line was a large rectangular hole, ten feet deep, eight feet wide, and twelve feet long, which had been blasted from solid rock but had no overhead cover. It could be used easily as a light mortar position and could give concealment to a number of troops. In front of the big hole were rocks piled two feet high and deep on the front and west flank as concealment for a machine gun, which was sited to fire down into the bowl. A few feet to the east of the piled rocks were heavy rock slabs three to four feet high; behind these the enemy could fire down on the east slope of the main ridge south of Knob 2. Directly to the rear of these positions on the upper slopes of Knob 2 was a series of rock slabs five to ten yards wide. From these the enemy could fire across the northern end of the bowl toward the western ridge of the mountain

<sup>15</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, Sep 44; Combat Intervs with Gresham, Jackson, Hillier, and King. Quotes are from Gresham and King.

and across the steep and inaccessible rock formation on the east slope of the main Altuzzo ridge.

A few yards to the west of the big hole on the upper west slope of Knob 2 were a few large rocks and slit trenches. Some ten yards west and below the big hole the enemy had a small trench about two feet deep with stones piled up on the sides which faced southwest and south. This position covered the trail that ran up the west slope of Knob 2 from the ridge line to the south.

From Knob 2, which was 300 yards south of the crest of the mountain (Hill 926), the enemy MLR ran along the trail northwest around the upper end of the bowl to the peak of the western ridge. Along the trail the Germans had set up a number of machine gun and rifle positions from which they could fire down the main ridge line, into the heart of the bowl, or onto the western ridge. About thirty yards northwest of Knob 2 on the trail the enemy had the advantage of a rock slab seven feet long and three feet high, behind which he had set up a double machine gun position by digging two slit trenches and blasting a deep hole out of the rock. Northwest of the double position were other large rock slabs behind which the Germans could fire into the bowl and onto the western ridge. Halfway down the bowl in front of these positions along the trail was at least one other prepared position—a log bunker which merged into near-by trees so well that from a distance it could hardly be identified.

In addition to the frontal defenses along the trail, the enemy had flanking positions along the west side of the bowl on Monte Altuzzo's western ridge, where Company B had been stopped the day

before. Except for the general location of these western positions, Gresham and Corey knew little about the enemy defenses on either ridge. Some were so well concealed that through the whole battle the assault troops failed to locate them.

When the fire began from the left flank and Knob 2, the leading squad of Lieutenant Gresham's platoon dropped to the ground. At the head of the squad Sgt. Ira Wilson and his first scout, Pvt. Donald M. Getty, located a machine gun near the ridge line. Facing down the bottom of the draw to the west, the machine gun had no overhead cover; but on the left front a big stone and small bushes gave it some concealment. Private Getty was so close to the machine gun that he could almost touch the barrel. As he opened fire with his rifle, other Germans in the position behind the rocks began to throw hand grenades at the squad. Pulling back about ten yards, Sergeant Wilson and Private Getty sent word to Lieutenant Gresham, who was just behind the 2d Squad, to pass up grenades. Though the supply was short, several were promptly passed forward. Private Getty and Pvts. Oscar Maynard and George W. Schroeder pegged them toward the enemy. The Germans replied with more grenades, causing no casualties but bringing several close calls. Pvt. James S. Dorris deflected one grenade with his hands. Another landed between the legs of the assistant squad leader, Sgt. Edgar Parks, but he kicked it away before it exploded.

With the Germans still reacting violently, Private Getty tried to work his way around the right flank of the machine gun position where stones did not shield it. As he crawled forward, he almost

bumped head on into a German who had just emerged from the position. The German surrendered. Sergeant Wilson told Getty to prod the prisoner back down the ridge line; and, as he left, the other men in the 2d Platoon menacingly waved their rifles, yelled, and swore at the prisoner.

At intervals during the grenade exchange the Germans inside the position tried to make a break to the rear. Each time they tried, the forward men in the 2d Platoon picked off one or two Germans with small arms fire. At the head of Sergeant Wilson's squad, Private Schroeder and Pvt. Waymon A. Banks shot one man who was directly to their front, and Lieutenant Gresham, firing point-blank with his carbine, killed another.

After the first flurry of machine gun fire, the enemy's use of small arms was sporadic but close-in, although most of the bullets went wide of their mark. Gresham ordered his men to fix bayonets for close-quarter fighting and moved his 1st and 3d Squads forward to join the 2d. With the 1st Squad on the left, the 1st and 2d Squads together tried to root the Germans out of the positions while the 3d Squad supported the attack by fire. With a few well-aimed shots, the men flushed a few more Germans, killing several and driving the rest farther up the ridge. As the two squads came within a few yards of the rocks on the top of Knob 2, heavy rifle and machine gun fire again halted the advance. No longer held in their dugouts by the artillery fire, the defenders had crawled to better positions on the platoon's left flank. For the men of the 2d Platoon this was the more dangerous, because the smoke screen had lifted and an overcast sky was not enough

to cut off enemy observation from the top of the bowl. From the front the Germans again tossed hand grenades, and from the left flank machine guns on the western ridge began to rake the area.<sup>16</sup>

### *Flanking Attempt*

Since the flanking and frontal fire was getting heavier and a few men had already been wounded, Lieutenant Gresham told his unit to take cover while he assembled his squad leaders for a conference. As he was outlining the next move, Lieutenant Corey came forward to join them. Gresham proposed that while the 2d Platoon of Company A kept pressure on the enemy's front the 1st Platoon of Company C advance on the left, enveloping the rock-protected Knob 2 positions. Corey approved and returned to bring up his platoon.

As the Company C platoon came forward, Gresham made contact with Sergeant Orr, Corey's 1st Squad leader, and told him to build up on his platoon's left. While the two leading squads of Gresham's platoon continued to keep pressure on the enemy by fire to the front, Orr directed his men one at a time out to the left along the trail that wound over the western slope of Knob 2, approximately twenty-five yards away from the ridge line. They walked single file fifteen to twenty yards down the trail past a dead German, then dispersed in a skirmish line, building up on the left flank and left rear of the Company A platoon. Each man in turn moved a little farther to the left along the trail.

Sergeant Orr's men were no sooner in position than Lieutenant Corey arrived

<sup>16</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham, Wilson, and Corey.

and told the sergeant to move his squad farther to the left so that the 3d Squad could build up between the 1st and the Company A platoon. Also, Corey said, the 2d Squad would build up on the left of the 1st. As soon as all men were in place, they would crawl forward and outflank the Knob 2 positions.

The 2d Squad, which had followed the 1st to the saddle on the ridge line where the trail turned left, passed through and around Sergeant Orr's men and kept on down the trail. At the far left flank of the 2d Squad, Pvt. Albert C. Borum, Jr., led up the path, followed by Pfc. Reginald W. Parrish and Pfc. Carl E. Hinrichsen. To the right rear of these leading men, the rest of the 2d Squad began to build up a skirmish line. After rounding a bend in the trail, Private Borum stopped and passed word back to his squad leader, S. Sgt. Jay E. Garner, asking if he had gone far enough. Sergeant Garner told him to go "a little farther," but as Borum and Parrish started off again they heard sounds of the enemy moving in for a counterattack. Standing erect, Parrish demanded the Germans' surrender.<sup>17</sup>

The Germans replied promptly with close-range fire from rifles, machine pistols, and machine guns. Near the left flank of the 2d Squad, the men saw three Germans bearing a white flag and shouting, "*Kamerad*." Pfc. Edwin L. Buechler cried out, "What did you say?"<sup>18</sup> The trio did not bother to reply, for the familiar ruse had gained all the time they needed. Jumping into a trench

fifteen to twenty yards away from Sergeant Garner's men, the Germans quickly set up a machine gun and opened fire. The first burst wounded Pfc. Kenneth L. Fankell in one leg, and the fire that followed drove others in the squad to more concealed positions. For better protection, the leading men, Privates Parrish and Borum, crawled back behind the bend in the trail.

The enemy on top of the knob joined the action by tossing grenades close to the Company C platoon. Pvt. Truett J. May, ammunition bearer in the 2d Squad's BAR team, was wounded slightly and fell back to the platoon aid man for first aid. Farther to the right the 1st Squad of Lieutenant Corey's platoon felt the force of the grenades even more than the 2d and 3d. Though no one was wounded or killed, many were badly shaken by concussion. As Pfc. Richard M. Feeney was crawling across a little rise in the slope above the trail, a grenade exploded close by and shook him up considerably. Numbed, he shouted for the man directly behind him, Pvt. Subastian D. Gubitosi, to pull him off the small rise. A few moments later, after the two men had crossed a small open space where the enemy had observation, another grenade exploded near by. The concussion this time gave Private Feeney a severe headache and knocked the camouflage netting from his helmet. Three concussion grenades landed almost on top of Pvt. Robert H. Kessell, shaking him up and sending him scurrying down the slope below the trail. Three grenades, one of which hit his helmet, another his rifle, and the third the ground near by, convinced Private Markey that he had better move his position. Sliding down the slope to the trail, he ran to the right to the CP

<sup>17</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Orr, Thompson, Corey; S Sgt Clifford P. Marx, Pfc Richard M. Feeney, and Pfc Robert H. Kessell; Borum; Gresham.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Interv with S Sgt Kenneth L. Fankell.

of the Company A platoon. After obtaining a rifle from a wounded soldier and casually smoking a cigarette, for he was in no hurry to return to the hot spot he had just left, he crawled back up the slope. Farther up the knob he spotted what appeared to be a German position and called down for a bazooka. When the bazooka man arrived, he and Private Markey discovered to the latter's embarrassment that the enemy "position" was only an overturned tree stump.<sup>19</sup>

On the extreme right of the Company C platoon, the 3d Squad, which Lieutenant Corey had ordered to fill in the gap between the 1st Squad and the Company A platoon, had just reached the dead German's body on the trail when the counterattack began farther up the hill. Although the grenades and small arms fire were not landing dangerously close, the squad leader, S. Sgt. George E. Price, halted his men and directed them to wait until the situation appeared safer before continuing up the slope to tie in with Company A.<sup>20</sup>

During the counterattack only a small number of men in Lieutenant Gresham's platoon were in a position to fire, for the Germans were moving in from the left front on the western slope of Knob 2. But the three men on the left, Privates Maynard, Schroeder, and Banks, could observe the attack and did yeoman service with their rifles. By the time the counterattack was in full swing, Gresham's men had exhausted their supply of grenades. Corey's men did not use their meager supply at all because of the danger of hitting their own men who

were stretched out on the slope above the trail.<sup>21</sup> In the end the Germans were beaten back, but the advantage gained was slight compared with the damage inflicted on Lieutenant Corey's platoon during the counterattack by the explosion of a single shell.

### *Misplaced Shellfire*

After the 1st and 2d Squads of Company C's 1st Platoon had built up a skirmish line, but while the 3d Squad was still moving into position, fire either from artillery or from a direct-fire weapon such as a tank or a tank destroyer began to land on the southwestern slope of Knob 2. As the first shell struck a few yards below the platoon, S. Sgt. Donald B. Smith, assistant leader of the 2d Squad, who was on the right flank of his men, called out, "That's our own stuff falling short!"<sup>22</sup> A few minutes later a second shell landed in the middle of the 2d Squad, spraying the nearest men with fragments and wrecking the morale of others near by.

Possibly because of the noise from exploding grenades, Private Borum, who was on the squad's left below the trail, did not hear either shell strike the ground. As the dirt raised by the second shell flew over his head, Private Borum turned over and saw that his squad leader, Sergeant Garner, had a gaping hole in his upper arm, shoulder, and chest. Garner was calling, "Get me out! Get me out!"<sup>23</sup> Borum shouted that he would go back for help. As he crawled

<sup>19</sup> Combat Intervs with Fankell, Borum, Feeney, Kessell, Markey, S Sgt Kyle F. Priestley, and May.

<sup>20</sup> Combat Intervs with Sgt Loyd J. Duffey, Pfc Louis J. Hart, Pfc Jackson P. Bagley, and with Corey.

<sup>21</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Corey, Thompson, and all enlisted survivors still in 1st Plat, Co C, 338th Inf; Gresham and Stevens-Michalek-Carter-Wilson-Hillier-Pickens.

<sup>22</sup> Combat Interv with Borum.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

down the slope toward the right, he noticed several other men lying motionless near the trail and heard another, Pvt. Joe M. Self, moan for attention. Borum reached Lieutenant Corey and reported what had happened.

When the shell hit the 2d Squad, most of the survivors were badly shaken up by the concussion, and all withdrew so quickly to the platoon CP that they did not stop to find out the effects of the shell. Although Sergeant Smith and Private Borum, two of the uninjured men, both knew the toll had been heavy, neither could say at first how many or how serious the casualties were. To get the facts, Lieutenant Corey sent the two men back up the trail to the left. Coming to the wounded Private Self above the trail, they poured water down his throat and examined the men around him. They saw at a glance that Sergeant Garner was dead. Going a little farther to the left, they saw Private Parrish die just as they reached him. Four more men were counted dead, and another besides Private Self was wounded. All together, they discovered, the single shell had killed six men, including the squad leader, and wounded two others. Sergeant Smith reported the casualties to Lieutenant Corey at the platoon CP, and the Lieutenant marked them off in the little notebook in which he kept the names of his platoon.

The platoon aid man, Pfc. Boyd A. West, moved out to do what he could for Private Self, but as he walked up the slope above the trail the Germans opened fire. Although the shots went over his head, the aid man waved a bandage so that the enemy would discover his non-combat mission and cease fire. If the Germans saw the impromptu flag they

gave no sign, continuing to shoot over the aid man's head. Despite the fire, Private West reached the wounded man and bandaged his knee, which had been hit by a shell fragment. When he had finished, he withdrew to the platoon CP.

Lieutenant Corey was certain that the shellfire which hit his platoon was American fire. He tried to get word back to Lieutenant Souder, the company commander, to have the fire lifted, but neither his radio nor his sound-powered telephone raised the company commander. The telephone had failed when the shell had exploded, fragments having killed Pvt. Frank A. Jordan, who along with Pvt. George Balog had been carrying the wire. Private Balog had scampered back down the slope to a more secure position, and when he returned to the platoon CP the telephone would not function. With his own communications out, Corey sent a messenger to Lieutenant Gresham, urging that Gresham tell battalion to get the shelling lifted and that he himself come down at once to Corey's CP. Lieutenant Gresham, accompanied by his runner, moved the thirty-five to fifty yards back to the Company C platoon's CP and noted the disorganized situation. Although his own radio had been out during the counterattack, Gresham tried it again; this time it worked, and he relayed Corey's request to Captain King.<sup>24</sup>

The news of what had happened to Lieutenant Corey's platoon shocked Colonel Jackson and Lieutenant Farber, the liaison officer from the 329th Field Artillery Battalion to the 338th's 1st Battalion, into immediate action. Both

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Intervs with the following: Balog and West; Feeney, Corey, Priestley, Gresham, and King.

tried through regiment, the 329th Field Artillery, and the divisional and corps artillery to get the fire lifted. Lieutenant Farber felt sure that the two rounds had come from somewhere in the Sieve River valley, but the offending gun could not be located. Because a number of tanks and tank destroyers were in support of the 1st Battalion attack but under regimental (338th) control, the liaison officer guessed that one of them had been the source of fire which had not been given enough range to clear the mountain and had landed in the midst of Company C's 1st Platoon.<sup>25</sup> Lieutenant Corey's men felt certain that American artillery was responsible. The riflemen disagreed only over whether the two rounds came from a 105-mm. howitzer, from a 240-mm. howitzer, or from an 8-inch gun.<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the weapon, everybody agreed that it was American, not German. Before long the news of what had happened reached all the firing battalions, and no more shells landed in the area. It is possible, however, that the shells were enemy, for in the middle of the afternoon both the 85th Division G-2 and division artillery reported that German shells had fallen on Monte Altuzzo.<sup>27</sup>

Although only a single round had struck Lieutenant Corey's platoon, the resulting confusion and the belief that it was friendly fire had a demoralizing effect upon those who survived. The shell had dazed and shaken up most of the men left in the 1st and 2d Squads, including the 1st Squad leader, Sergeant Orr. After the second shell exploded,

all the men had withdrawn quickly, at least as far as the saddle between Knobs 1 and 2 where the trail turned left away from the ridge line. Some men had rushed wildly down the mountain for 150 yards, and a handful had gone all the way to the covered positions below the peak of Hill 782 on its southwestern slope where they joined the 2d Platoon, Company C.

Lieutenant Corey tried now to bring order out of chaos, to reorganize the platoon's defense, and to bring back all the men who had run down the ridge. With the assistance of his platoon sergeant, Sgt. William A. Thompson, and the platoon guide, S. Sgt. William S. Trigg, the platoon leader directed those men who had withdrawn to the saddle between Knob 1 and Knob 2 in the trail to build up a defense covering both sides of the ridge line. All together not more than eighteen men set up the new defense thirty-five yards to the rear of Company A's 2d Platoon. A few yards farther to the rear in the rocks on the top of Knob 1, Sergeant Trigg, an extra automatic rifle team, and the bazooka team continued to guard the platoon's rear and the extreme right flank.

After the shellfire had come in, Sergeant Price, 3d Squad leader, had sent four or five riflemen and his BAR man to positions on the slope above the trail to the left rear of Company A's 2d Platoon. Except for Pfc. Michael Burja, who assisted Gresham's men on the right flank, at no time while in these positions did the group fire at the enemy. The rest of the 3d Squad either remained with the assistant squad leader, Sgt. Loyd J. Duffey, below the bend in the trail or straggled farther down the ridge.

While Lieutenant Corey remained to

<sup>25</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson and Farber.

<sup>26</sup> Combat Intervs with all enlisted survivors still in 1st Plat, Co C, 338th Inf.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Intervs with Jackson and Farber; 85th Div G-2 Jnl, 15 Sep 44.

direct the defense at the bend of the trail, Platoon Sergeant Thompson went down the ridge with the platoon runner, Pfc. Randolph H. Bishop, to bring back those men who, after the shellfire, had withdrawn past Knob 1 as far back as Hill 782. Going back to the rocks at the peak of Hill 782, Sergeant Thompson found several men, including an assistant squad leader, and brought them back up the ridge. This assistant squad leader had been so unnerved by the shelling that he had walked on down the mountain between Knob 1 and Hill 782 and seated himself right on the ridge line in full view of the enemy. All he could think about was that Sergeant Garner, his best friend, had been killed in one lightning stroke. He remembered bitterly that that day, 15 September, was Sergeant Garner's birthday.

Sergeant Thompson failed to find some of the stragglers, because they had gone even farther down the hill to the southwestern slope of Hill 782 just above the barbed wire. One man whom he did find refused to return on the ground that his back hurt and that he had to go to the company CP for medical attention. In all, the 1st Platoon sergeant made three trips down the ridge to round up the half-dozen stragglers he brought back. Upon their return they filled out the platoon's positions, but such shaky, nervous men did little to strengthen the defense.<sup>28</sup>

While the defense of the 1st Platoon, Company C, was being reorganized, Lieutenant Gresham informed Lieutenant Corey that his 2d Platoon, Company A, would try to move men to the rear of the Germans in the rocks on Knob 2.

Hoping that another attempt at envelopment might break the enemy resistance, Gresham asked that Corey's platoon protect the left rear of his men. Gresham's plan awakened no enthusiasm in Lieutenant Corey, who doubted even the value of holding on in his bare, rocky position. Haunted by the heavy losses Company B had taken the previous day, he feared that if his men remained they would suffer a similar fate. In spite of these misgivings Corey promised that his men would hold and would support Gresham's attack.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Long-Range Fire and Counterattack*

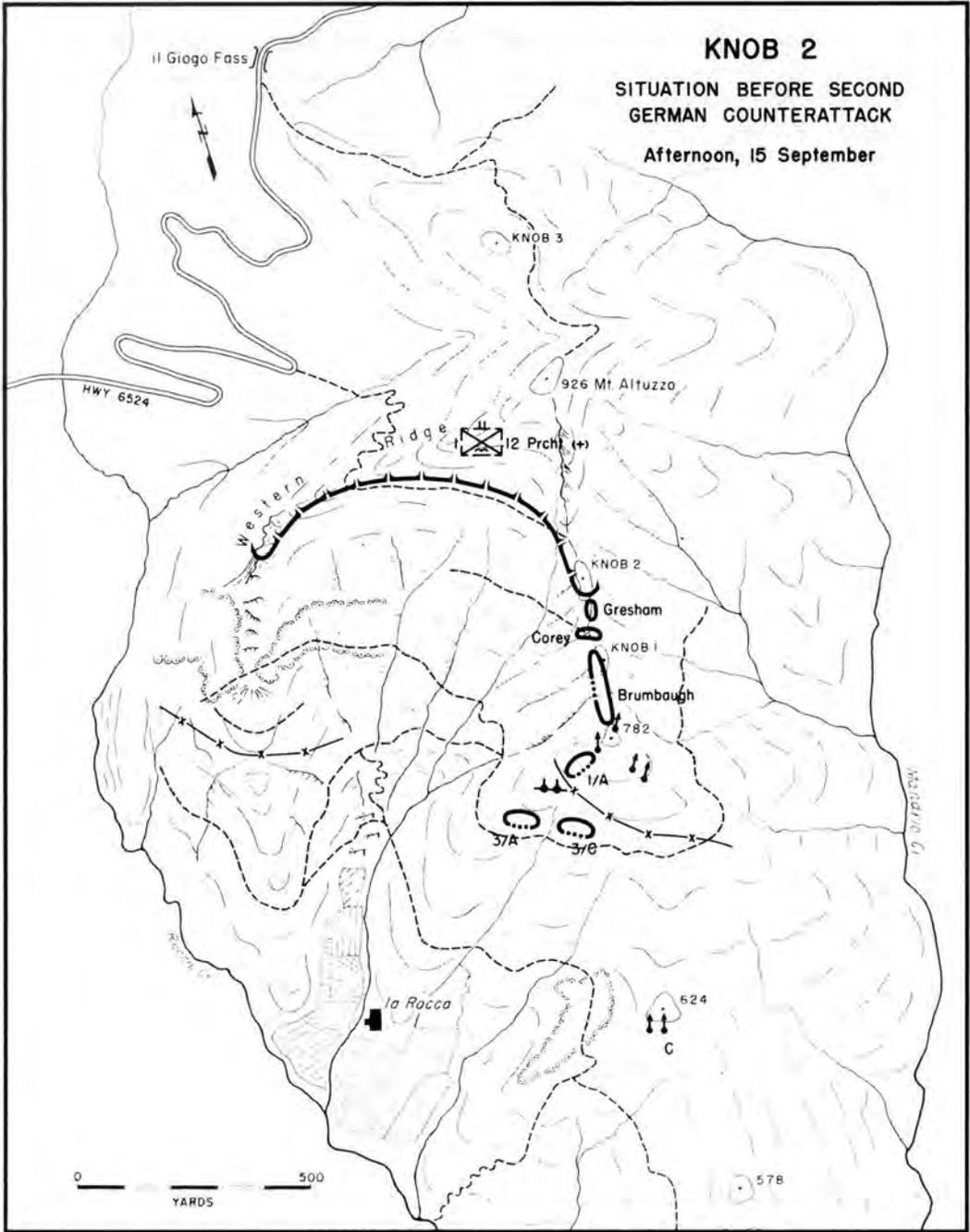
Before Lieutenant Gresham could move his platoon forward again, the Germans opened fire from the right rear and left flank, keeping the Company A men on the defensive. The rear guard of Gresham's platoon, Platoon Sergeant Stevens and five other men, began receiving enemy fire from two machine guns on the western slopes of Monte Verruca. Although Sergeant Stevens' group quickly silenced one of the guns with return fire, the other continued to harass them for some time. Soon the group spotted five more Germans with a machine gun moving up to the right rear about 500 yards away on the eastern slope of the Altuzzo ridge southeast of the peak of Hill 782. Bringing a BAR and rifles to bear, the platoon's rear guard killed or wounded two of the enemy and drove the rest to cover.

Scarcely had the long-range action ceased, when about fifteen Germans counterattacked on the left flank of Gresham's platoon.<sup>30</sup> (*Map 14*) Word

<sup>28</sup> Combat Intervs with Duffey, Feeney, West, Borum, Bagley, Hart, Marx, May, Bishop, Burja, Pfc Earl B. Gray, Corey, Thompson, Orr, and Priestley.

<sup>29</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham and Corey.

<sup>30</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham and Stevens.



MAP 14

had already come from an enemy radio intercept that the Germans were going to counterattack soon from the north or northeast. Although the 85th Division artillery reported at 1440 that it had placed fire on the area where the enemy force was forming, the Germans still struck.

At 1320 the Germans on Monte Altuzzo had radioed that Hill 926 was firmly in their hands. They stated that their "blocking position" ran from the trail crossing at the north end of Knob 2 for about 200 yards west-northwest. The blocking position was being extended by the *2d Battalion, 12th Parachute Regiment*, to an observation post north of the peak of the western ridge near the switchbacks in the highway. Adding that the troops that had broken through at Hill 782 were surrounded, the *3d Battalion, 12th Regiment*, which occupied the main line of resistance, declared it would throw the Americans back to the southwest. The reserves were to counterattack on the line from Hill 624 to Hill 782.<sup>31</sup>

The first word Lieutenant Gresham's men had of the counterattack came from the Company C platoon, which reported enemy movement to its left front and fire from a bend in the trail. The Germans were moving in from the western slope of Knob 2, abandoned by Company C's platoon after the second shell had burst. Using rifles, machine pistols, and grenades, the Germans came in close, sometimes advancing within a few yards of the rear Company A men. Lieutenant Gresham's men not only fired point-blank whenever a German came in sight but also reacted with area fire. Although

the 1st Platoon, Company C, was not in position for effective fire, a few men did fire in the direction of the attack. Several men in Gresham's platoon were wounded, though a few with light injuries continued to fight. In the end superior fire power, mainly from the Company A platoon, drove the Germans back up the ridge.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Supporting Platoons on Hill 782*

During the advance of the two leading platoons and during the enemy counterattacks, the rest of Company A and Company C had remained aloof from the battle, staying for the most part in concealed positions behind the peak of Hill 782. The narrow, exposed route of advance west of the main ridge line and the sheer drop-off on the eastern slope left no room for the deployment of more men. Behind Lieutenant Corey's 1st Platoon (Company C) had followed in single file Company C's 2d Platoon. After the forward advance was stopped, the 2d Platoon leader, 1st Lt. David M. Brumbaugh, halted his men just west of the ridge line from Knob 1 to Hill 782, fifty yards to the rear of Corey's platoon. From that area the 2d Platoon could see the fight in progress up the ridge but could not give supporting fire without taking the chance of hitting the assault troops. The 1st Platoon of Company A had remained on the slope of Hill 782 between the barbed wire and the peak; the other rifle platoons, the 3d of Company A and the 3d of Company C, had stayed below the entanglement near the company command posts.

<sup>31</sup> 85th Div G-2 Jnl, 15 Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 15 Sep 44.

<sup>32</sup> Combat Inters with Gresham, Stevens, Priestley, Marx, Duffey, Markey, Feeney, Bagley, Hart, Burja, and Borum.

While the attack was going on, none of the machine guns were able to reach firing positions from which they could support the leading riflemen. One machine gun squad of Company A had followed Lieutenant Gresham's platoon to the top of Hill 782 but had not fired because of its exposed position. The other squad set itself up briefly on the slope below the peak of Hill 782. To the right the light machine guns of Company C stopped above the barbed wire, where they had some concealment but lacked good firing positions.

Although the 60-mm. mortars of both Companies A and C were set up in defilade on the slopes of Hill 782 and Hill 624, respectively, they were never used because the company commanders were afraid their fire would fall on the attacking rifle platoons. But while the attack was in progress 1st Lt. Merlin E. Ritchey and T. Sgt. Zealin W. Russell, Weapons Platoon leader and platoon sergeant, Company C, with good observation up the Altuzzo ridge, directed artillery fire on the big rock escarpment between the enemy's main line of resistance on Knob 2 and the highest peak of the mountain, Hill 926.<sup>33</sup>

Back at the battalion and regimental command posts Colonel Jackson and Colonel Mikkelsen had received fragmentary reports of the 1st Battalion's progress. At 1030 the 1st Battalion reported that Companies A and C were about 500 yards from the top of Monte Altuzzo and were still moving forward under mortar fire. An hour later the

<sup>33</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: MacMinn, King, and T Sgt William H. Kohler; Ritchey, Russell, and T Sgt Dale E. Burkholder; MacMinn, White, and S Sgt Robert W. Kistner, Jr.; Van Horne, South, Whary, Colosimo, Grigsby, Albert, and Brumbaugh.

1st Battalion reported that its troops, having struck resistance on the crest of the mountain, were on the west slope of the main ridge at a point a hundred yards beyond their actual positions on Knob 2. Again at 1206 the 1st Battalion reported that its attacking troops were on the "1st Knob" of Monte Altuzzo, calling for lots of artillery fire on the "2d Knob." Finally, at 1405, Companies A and C were reported by the 338th Infantry to have one platoon each closing for the assault against Hill 926 with one platoon from each company ready to follow.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Withdrawal*

While Lieutenant Corey was reorganizing the 1st Platoon, Lieutenant Brumbaugh (2d Platoon, Company C), who was behind a rock on Knob 1 and near Corey, called Lieutenant Souder, the company commander, on his SCR 536. Brumbaugh asked permission to withdraw his platoon, which was stretched out in column to the rear of the 1st Platoon between Knob 1 and the crest of Hill 782. If his platoon withdrew to the southwestern slope of Hill 782, Brumbaugh said, his men could have better cover and could still come to the assistance of the 1st Platoon if needed. Before giving permission, Souder said he would have to get battalion approval. While Brumbaugh waited for the answer, Corey said to him, "I don't see why we all don't withdraw."<sup>35</sup> A few minutes later the battalion commander approved the original request on the condition that Lieutenant Brumbaugh keep abreast of

<sup>34</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 15 Sep 44; 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 15 Sep 44.

<sup>35</sup> Combat Intervs with Brumbaugh and Souder.

the 1st Platoon's situation. The order did not apply to Lieutenant Corey's men, who were to remain in position farther up the ridge and continue the attack with the 2d Platoon, Company A.

Leaving Lieutenant Corey at his platoon CP on Knob 1, Lieutenant Brumbaugh moved his 2d Platoon single file 250 yards to positions among the rocks on the southwest slope of Hill 782, below the peak. Placing the 3d Squad leader, S. Sgt. Joseph S. Adams, in charge, the lieutenant and his platoon sergeant, T. Sgt. Tony L. White, continued down below the barbed wire to the company CP, where the platoon leader explained to Lieutenant Souder his reasons for requesting withdrawal.<sup>36</sup>

It seemed ironical that a platoon which had sustained only one casualty before withdrawing to better concealment should now suffer casualties. Enemy mortar shells began to pelt the area where Lieutenant Brumbaugh's men were digging in. The mortar concentration killed two men and wounded eight, including some from the 1st Platoon who had run down the mountain after the stray artillery shell had disorganized their platoon. Besides inflicting these casualties, the enemy shelling also wounded Lieutenant MacMinn, 1st Platoon leader, Company A, and wiped out one Company A machine gun squad. The machine gunners had just set up below the peak of Hill 782 to guard the right flank when one mortar shell wounded two men and killed the other three.<sup>37</sup>

After the 2d Platoon, Company C, had withdrawn to the slope below the

peak of Hill 782, a cry passed up to Lieutenant Corey and his 1st Platoon: "Withdraw!"<sup>38</sup> Although the message traveled by word of mouth from man to man, no one remembered who started it, only that it had come from somewhere on the slope below. Making no effort to check the message, Lieutenant Corey assumed it was authentic. His men peeled off spontaneously as soon as they heard the cry. To the platoon leader and the men alike the withdrawal "order" was welcome, for it told them to do what everyone apparently wanted to do. Corey started down the ridge behind his men.<sup>39</sup>

Since no message for Lieutenant Corey's platoon to withdraw had been passed up from the 2d Platoon, it seems likely the cry originated with some member of the 1st Platoon who had seen the 2d withdraw and thought or wished the movement to apply to him. When the withdrawal started, Sergeant Thompson and the platoon runner, Private Bishop, were between the 1st and 2d Platoons on the ridge line between Knob 1 and Hill 782, still trying to bring back stragglers who had run down the hill after the misplaced shellfire. Had the cry for

<sup>36</sup> Combat Intervs with all enlisted survivors in 1st and 2d Plats, Co C, 338th Inf, and with Corey.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* Although he did not so state in the first interviews held with him, Lieutenant Corey stated later (13 April 45) that just before the cry to withdraw was heard he had sent a note by runner to Lieutenant Souder, requesting permission to withdraw. Corey said he reasoned that the attack had bogged down, that his men had sustained heavy casualties, and that sounds from the left flank indicated that his platoon was being surrounded. No reply had been received, the lieutenant said, when his platoon withdrew. If such a message was sent, it never reached the company commander. The historian was unable to find any officer or enlisted survivor in Company C besides Lieutenant Corey who knew that such a message was sent. Cf. Combat Intervs with Souder.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Intervs with Jackson, White, and Kistner.

<sup>37</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson, White, Kistner, Brumbaugh, MacMinn, King, and Kohler.

withdrawal come from the 2d Platoon, which was below them on the slope, the platoon sergeant and his runner would certainly have heard it. They heard nothing, only saw the main body of the 1st Platoon above them moving fast on the way down the ridge. They followed suit.

When the withdrawing men reached the peak of Hill 782, they saw the casualties which the 2d Platoon had suffered from mortar fire, and some men assisted the ambulatory casualties down the ridge. Others loaded themselves with extra rifles and went below the entanglement halfway down the slope to the company CP. A few men of the 1st and 2d Platoons tried to improvise a litter of field jackets and rifles, but the effort failed because the wounded man they tried to put on it was too tall. Pending later evacuation, they hid him in the bushes and hurried down the slope to join the rest of the company. For lack of litters, the other nonwalking wounded were left on the slope above the barbed wire.<sup>40</sup>

As the 2d Platoon reached the company CP, Lieutenant Souder, the company commander, noticed that some 1st Platoon men were arriving too. They could tell him only that word had come up the line to withdraw, and they had obeyed. When Lieutenant Corey appeared, Lieutenant Souder said he had given no such authorization and had received no request from Lieutenant Corey for the 1st Platoon's withdrawal. Although he was angered by the platoon's abandonment of its position, it was now

an accomplished fact about which he could do nothing.<sup>41</sup>

After Company C had started to withdraw, Sergeant Stevens and the rear guard of the 2d Platoon, Company A, spotted two German squads of four men each below the peak of Hill 782 on the eastern slope of the main ridge. Although the Germans were carrying litters, Sergeant Stevens suspected that machine guns were hidden on them and he directed his men to fire. Their shots killed two of the Germans and drove the rest to cover. A moment later, as if to confirm Sergeant Stevens' guess about the loads the Germans were carrying, two machine guns opened fire from the same vicinity, wounding several men in Lieutenant Gresham's platoon.<sup>42</sup>

In the midst of this new fire from the rear, Lieutenant Gresham received word that Company C had withdrawn. The cry to pull back had reached the rear men of his platoon, and, as a few of Lieutenant Corey's men who were farthest up the hill began to withdraw, some of Gresham's men started to follow. Alert to what was happening, Gresham promptly pulled his men back and sent two scouts down to check with Corey's platoon. The scouts confirmed Company C's withdrawal. The lieutenant tried in vain to reach Captain King by radio and then decided that in the face of the continuing heavy fire it would be costly, if not impossible, to remain unaided in the Knob 2 positions. He told his squad leaders his decision and sent the 3d Squad to protect the platoon's rear and to make contact with Company C. Moving some distance down the

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<sup>40</sup> Combat Intervs with Corey, Orr, Priestley, Marx, Bagley, Hart, Burja, Feeney, Thompson, and Borum.

<sup>41</sup> Combat Intervs with Souder and Corey.

<sup>42</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham and Stevens.

ridge, the squad sent word back that the Company C platoon could not be found.

While machine gun fire from the right rear continued, Gresham ordered the rest of his men to move back quickly down the ridge. To speed their withdrawal, the men dropped their blanket rolls, brought along in the attack. The time was well into the afternoon, probably about 1530. The withdrawal down the ridge was well organized, and all the platoon's wounded were evacuated except Private Dorris, who was left behind until a litter could be brought. Private Banks, who had shell fragments in his legs and stomach and should have waited for litter evacuation, ran all the way down to the company area below the barbed wire because he feared being left on the mountain. Almost the first man to reach the bottom of the hill, he collapsed at the company command post and had to be carried to the battalion aid station.<sup>43</sup>

When Lieutenant Gresham, bringing up the rear of his platoon, reached the rocks just below the peak of Hill 782 where he had met the 1st Platoon, Company C, that morning, he saw Captain King and explained to him the circumstances which had brought about withdrawal. Captain King approved his action. Colonel Jackson in turn approved the withdrawal of the two companies and told them to prepare for the next assault.<sup>44</sup>

After the rifle companies' withdrawal, litter squads were sent up to evacuate the wounded who had been left behind. A smoke screen cover was fired by the 403d Field Artillery Battalion. Guided

by Pfc. Clifford P. Marx, 1st Platoon, ten men returned for the wounded of Company C. Five of them found Private Hinrichsen above the barbed wire and pulled him out while the smoke was still thick. Although the other five continued up the ridge in an effort to reach Private Self, they moved only a few yards past the peak of Hill 782 before the smoke lifted and a machine gun from the front drove them back. Private Self was subsequently captured. While the smoke lasted, several men of Company A's mortar section moved up the ridge and evacuated Private Dorris.<sup>45</sup>

During the battle Company A had lost three men killed and fifteen wounded, and Company C nine killed, twenty-one wounded, and one missing in action—a total for the two companies of forty-nine. While these losses were not excessive, they were felt strongly in a battalion which had already lost more than half of Company B. The strain of battle was beginning to tell, and the number of exhaustion cases was increasing. That night an enemy mortar concentration close to the 1st Battalion aid station hit a near-by outbuilding at Paretaio Farmhouse, killed one litterbearer, and wounded several others.<sup>46</sup>

### *The Day's Action*

The fourth attack against Monte Altuzzo on 15 September had brought the farthest advance yet on the main ridge. The leading platoons of Companies A and C had been within 250 yards of the top of the mountain (Hill

<sup>43</sup> Combat Intervs with Gresham.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Intervs with King, Jackson, and Souder.

<sup>45</sup> Combat Intervs with Marx and Gresham; 403d FA Bn Mission Rpts, 15 Sep 44.

<sup>46</sup> Cos A and C, 338th Inf, Morning Rpts, 16 Sep 44; 1st Bn, 338th Inf, Aid Station Log, 15 Sep 44.

926) and had come under the nose of the main German defenses at the top of the bowl on Knob 2. Yet the attack had failed to knock out the heavy semicircle of positions guarding the top of the bowl. A major factor was the shellfire which had inflicted heavy casualties on Company C's 1st Platoon and had demoralized most of the survivors.

In spite of the repeated failures, the cumulative effect of American efforts was being felt. The infantry and the artillery were inflicting casualties on the enemy, wearing down his powers of resistance, and forcing him to commit first the battalion and regimental reserves of the *12th Parachute Regiment*, then divisional and finally corps reserves from other sectors of the front.<sup>47</sup>

As on the day before, effective artillery, tank, and tank destroyer fire had been placed on the enemy bunkers on Monte Altuzzo. Several hits had been scored, and a few positions had been severely damaged. Heavy artillery—240-mm. howitzers and 8-inch guns—was credited with placing destructive fire on several positions.

In midmorning the 403d Field Artillery Battalion fired 112 rounds against enemy activity on the slopes north of Monte Verruca and six rounds at German mortars between Hill 926 and Pian di Giogo to the east. The 329th Field Artillery Battalion in direct support contributed a number of harassing missions, three TOT's, and observed fire on enemy pillboxes, personnel, mortars, and machine guns in the Altuzzo area. It also fired a concentration to repel a counter-attack against the 1st Battalion, 338th.

With a ground observation post adjusting, a battalion of heavy corps artillery scored four target hits on the crest of Monte Altuzzo and three target hits on pillboxes on the western ridge, claiming at least one pillbox destroyed. At 1500 the 85th Division artillery placed harassing fire on Monte Verruca and the area between Altuzzo and the highway.

During 15 September the 1st Platoon, Company B, 84th Chemical Battalion (4.2-inch mortars), in support of the 1st Battalion, 338th, fired harassing missions of seven rounds of high explosive and forty-two rounds of white phosphorus. The 2d Platoon fired sixty rounds of high explosive near the highway. In addition, the 81-mm. mortars behind Paretaio Farmhouse fired in the draws east and west of Monte Altuzzo.

From positions north of Scarperia, Company B, 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, using forward observation, fired about 1,000 rounds during the day at suspected pillboxes and machine gun positions at the long range of 4,000 yards. For the most part the destroyers' targets were east of the highway in the Giogo Pass area and on the slopes of Monte Altuzzo. The tank destroyers claimed destruction of one pillbox. Because the pillboxes were high on the steep mountains and good firing positions could not be reached by roads or the adjacent slopes, the tank destroyer guns had to shoot at long range with a high angle of elevation. Hits in the rock were damaging but not destructive; hits in the aperture were more effective. The 76-mm. gun on the destroyers had a good percentage of hits with both high explosive and armor-piercing ammunition.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> IPW and S-2 Rpts, 338th Inf Unit Jnl, Sep 44; Radio Intercepts, 338th Inf Unit Jnl, and 85th Div G-2 Jnl, 13-15 Sep 44.

<sup>48</sup> Mission Rpts in 403d FA Bn, and 178th and 423d FA Gps, Unit Jnls, 15 Sep 44; 84th Cml Bn



CAMOUFLAGED TANK DESTROYERS (M-18) MOVING UP. *These destroyers of the 805th are en route to positions north of Scarperia.*

Many positions, especially the heavy rock slabs and other open positions around the top of the Altuzzo bowl, remained unidentified and untouched by supporting fires. Even where the bunkers were hit by light and medium artillery, most of the personnel inside probably survived. Unless the bunkers

were severely damaged they could be remanned as long as the Germans had the troops.<sup>49</sup>

While the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, was making the main effort to capture the crest of Monte Altuzzo, the units on its flanks were equally unsuccessful in attacks against defenses in the rest of the Giogo Pass sector. On the 338th's right

Unit Jnl and AAR, 15 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 and G-3 Jnls, 15 Sep 44; 805th TD Bn AAR, Sep 44; Combat Intervs with Capt Clarence D. Brown and other officers of Co D, 338th Inf; 752d Tk Bn AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>49</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 15-18 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 and G-3 Jnls, 15-18 Sep 44; Notes of several reconnaissances of the area by the author from Nov 44 to Apr 45.

flank the 339th Infantry at midnight on 14 September attacked Monte Verruca, but the assault companies were stopped by mines and barbed wire and then driven back by mortar and machine gun fire. West of Monte Altuzzo along Highway 6524, the 2d Battalion, 338th, made no advance from l'Uomo Morto. West of the highway the 91st Division's 363d Infantry attacked up the western ridge of Monticelli during the early morning of 15 September, but failed to breach the enemy MLR. Even the 361st Infantry, striking on the west of the 363d, failed to outflank Monticelli. At the end of 15 September the 85th and 91st Divisions had everywhere failed to break through the Gothic Line.<sup>50</sup>

#### *The Enemy Situation*

During three days of fighting, the *12th Parachute Regiment* and the rest of the *4th Parachute Division* had sustained heavy casualties. By the end of 15 September the paratroopers of the *1st Battalion, 12th Regiment*, in the Altuzzo sector were in dire need of reinforcement. The *1st Company* had suffered especially heavy losses, including the company commander's death on 14 September. A prisoner captured later on Monte Altuzzo reported having seen eleven men killed and many others wounded in the *1st Company* between 13 September and the morning of 16 September. On 15 September the *1st Platoon, 1st Company*, alone had five killed and ten wounded. While infantry attacks had caused a number of the casualties, artillery fire had been more

effective by killing and wounding German reinforcements as they moved into position. For example, as the *Engineer Platoon, 12th Regiment*, came into the forward area, American artillery fire killed four men and wounded seven.

The *12th Parachute Regiment's* reserve and the reserve of the *3d Battalion* had definitely been committed. Since the division's reserve troops were being sent in to strengthen the forces on Monte Altuzzo and Verruca, it seems likely that the reserves of the *1st* and *2d Battalions* had also been committed. The enemy admitted during the evening that the *4th Parachute Division* had committed its last reserves and claimed that these had been used successfully to block local penetrations.

Even with the reinforcements of 14 September the companies of the *12th Regiment* were still short their normal complements. Their ranks were filled with noninfantry replacements or paratroopers who had had short training and no specialized work, among them all headquarters and service personnel of the *4th Parachute Division* who could be spared. During the night of 15–16 September the Monte Altuzzo sector was reinforced by the *10th* and *15th Companies*, the *Engineer Platoon* of the *12th Regiment*, and a miscellaneous group of twenty men from the *4th Antitank Battalion, 4th Parachute Division*. (Though the *15th Company's* total strength on 10 September was eighty men, American artillery fire had by the night of 15 September caused 20 percent losses.)<sup>51</sup>

In addition to bringing up division reserves, the enemy began on the night

<sup>50</sup> 2d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnls, 14–15 Sep 44; 85th Div and 91st Div G-3 Jnls, 14–15 Sep 44; Fifth Army G-3 Jnl File, 14–15 Sep 44; Combat Intervs with Cole; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>51</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, IPW Rpts, and Intel Sums, 14–18 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 and G-3 Jnls, 15–18 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 Rpts, Sep 44.

of 15–16 September to move units from as far west as the sector north of Lucca where the front was relatively quiet. After the enemy realized that the *12th Regiment* alone could not hold the Giogo Pass sector, the *2d Battalion, Grenadier Lehr Brigade*, which had been in corps reserve north of Lucca, began to move by trucks and horse-drawn vehicles to Firenzuola from where it could be sent to the forward positions. During 15 September the *2d Battalion, Grenadier Lehr Brigade*, arrived at the *I Parachute Corps*, but the *1st Battalion* was still on the march. Although by the morning of 16 September this small group of reinforce-

ments was on the way to the front-line positions, these reserves were hardly strong enough to enable the enemy to hold the Giogo Pass defenses for any prolonged period. Furthermore, they would not be available for more than three or four days. Sometime on 15 or 16 September, Field Marshal Kesselring, commander of *Army Group C*, changed his orders, allowing the *16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* to remain in *Fourteenth Army's* coastal sector. A condition of this change in order stipulated that the *Lehr Brigade* would go to the *Tenth Army* during the nights of 18–19 and 19–20 September.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Entries of 14–16 Sep 44, *Fourteenth Army KTB 4*.

## CHAPTER IV

# Advance to the Crest (16 September)

Although he still wanted another chance to take the crest of Monte Altuzzo, Colonel Jackson reported to the 338th Infantry after his 1st Battalion had been stopped at the enemy's main line of resistance on 15 September that his rifle

companies had sustained considerable casualties and needed an opportunity that night for rest and reorganization. Since Colonel Mikkelsen had been sick with a cold and nervous exhaustion and was confined to bed with a high fever,



PAINTING OF MONTE ALTUZZO AREA *from the slope in front of Paretaio Farmhouse. Painting by Sgt. Ludwig Mactarian, combat artist of the Fifth Army.*

the 338th executive officer, Lt. Col. Marion P. Boulden, was left to shoulder most of the routine work. The plans were worked out by the assistant 85th Division commander, Brig. Gen. Lee S. Gerow, who had commanded the regiment during the training period in the States. The night of 15 September Colonel Jackson told General Gerow that Monte Altuzzo could not be taken without a co-ordinated divisional attack.

General Gerow agreed to Jackson's recommendation that the 2d Battalion attack abreast of the 1st the next day, and tentative plans were made later that night. They called for the 2d Battalion to advance up the highway at 2100, while the 1st Battalion would resume its attack against Hill 926 at midnight. The 3d was to pass through the 1st after Altuzzo's crest was captured.<sup>1</sup> These plans were canceled by the 85th Division commander, General Coulter, in order to await the outcome of an attack by the 363d Infantry, 91st Division, against Monticelli at 0600 the next morning.<sup>2</sup> A co-ordinated attack by the two assault battalions of the 338th Infantry was to follow as soon as Monticelli was secured. To prepare for this later operation, Company F of the 2d Battalion attacked just before midnight to secure a little knob

along the highway 400 yards north of l'Uomo Morto on Monticelli's eastern arm. Although Company F knocked out two machine gun positions and tried until dawn to advance, the attack failed.<sup>3</sup>

While infantry plans were being shaped, corps and division artillery continued to harass the enemy's lines of communication. During the night, for example, the 403d Field Artillery Battalion put eleven TOT concentrations of thirty-six rounds each on the slopes of Hill 926, Pian di Giogo, Monte Verruca, and areas along the highway north of the Giogo Pass, and fired other harassing missions in the vicinity of the pass.<sup>4</sup>

During the night of 15-16 September the 1st and 2d Battalions, 363d Infantry, which had been attacking Monticelli, were hard-pressed to repulse five enemy counterattacks; well after dawn the next morning the 3d Battalion, 363d, scheduled to make an 0600 attack for which the 338th Infantry's attack was waiting, had not yet pushed off. About 0800, reports that the enemy on Monte Altuzzo, reinforced by the *10th Company, 10th Parachute Regiment*, was planning a counterattack led the 85th Division to alert the forward infantry elements and artillery observers. The threat never materialized and did not interfere with the plans for resumption of the American attack.<sup>5</sup>

#### *General Gerow's Plans for the 338th*

On the morning of 16 September General Gerow visited the 363d Infantry

<sup>1</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson, Boulden, and Cole; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 15 Sep 44; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 15-16 Sep 44.

<sup>2</sup> According to 85th Division records, the 91st Division requested that the 338th Infantry delay its attack on Altuzzo until Monticelli was taken. Records of the 85th Division make no note of the fact that a vigorous attack against Altuzzo might have helped the 91st Division effort. Evidence from General Gerow and from the 91st Division tends to contradict this entry in the 85th Division records. 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 15-16 Sep 44; 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 15-16 Sep 44; Combat Interv with Gerow; Ltr, Maj R. H. Gordon, 91st Div historian, to the author, 10 Mar 45.

<sup>3</sup> 2d Bn, 338th Inf, and 338th Inf Unit Jnls, 15-16 Sep 44; Combat Interv with Cole.

<sup>4</sup> 403d FA Bn Mission Rpts, 15-16 Sep 44; 178th FA Gp and 423d FA Gp Mission Rpts, 15-16 Sep 44.

<sup>5</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 15-16 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 and G-3 Jnls, 15-16 Sep 44; 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 15-16 Sep 44; Strootman MS, Ch. III. See also Intervs with Strootman.

command post about 0800 and learned of the counterattacks that had delayed the 363d's attack. The regiment still could not move. While he was at the CP, General Keyes, the II Corps commander, came forward and stated that he wanted the 85th and 91st Divisions to make a co-ordinated attack at once against Altuzzo and Monticelli. After four days of unsuccessful attacks, he was most anxious to capture the pass and complete the corps mission.

General Mark W. Clark, the Fifth Army commander, had become even more impatient as each day passed without a break-through of the Gothic Line. After observing the successive failures of II Corps to crack the defenses in front of the Giogo Pass, Clark decided upon an envelopment on the right flank of the main effort. He ordered the 85th Division to commit its reserve regiment, the 337th Infantry, against Monte Pratone, northeast of Monte Altuzzo. The attack was launched on the afternoon of 16 September, only to bog down a thousand yards short of its objective.

Though General Keyes had not objected to General Clark's effort to out-flank the Giogo Pass defenses, the corps commander still expected the troops along Highway 6524 to make the main break-through.<sup>6</sup> To his request at the 363d Infantry CP for an immediate co-ordinated attack against Altuzzo and Monticelli, however, General Gerow replied that the 363d was not yet ready or able to push up Monticelli. A co-ordinated attack, Gerow maintained, was therefore out of the question, but he would direct

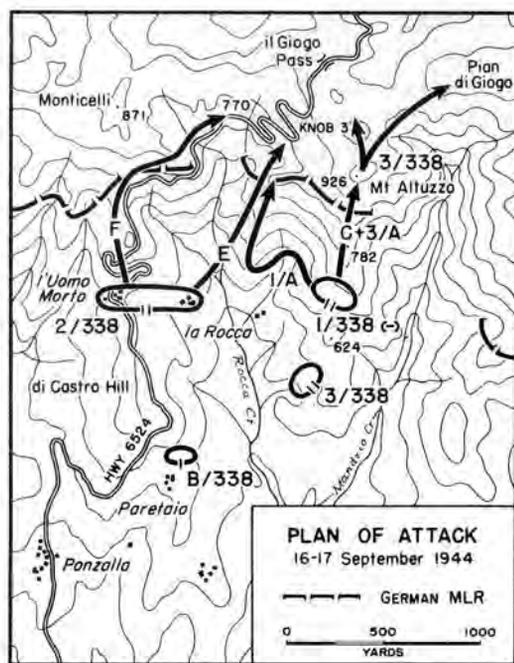
his 338th Infantry to proceed with its attack against Altuzzo.

As he left the conference, General Gerow saw no solution but to give the 338th Infantry the entire task. From the time General Gerow had commanded the 338th Infantry during the training period in the States he had known its ranking officers well. Jackson had been his regimental adjutant and Cole, a battalion commander. Through intimate association in training and in combat, Gerow had formed a high estimate of both officers, and felt that the two battalion commanders could perform any mission assigned them. Gerow, however, had misgivings about Maj. Lysle Kelley, the 3d Battalion commander, and felt that, with Kelley in command, he could not rely on the 3d Battalion to break the crust of German resistance on Monte Altuzzo. As for the 2d Battalion, deployed along Highway 6524, the pressure of time and the open terrain precluded its use in the main effort.

Again, therefore, he decided to have the 1st Battalion make the main effort. (*Map 15*) Despite the battering it had taken, Gerow considered the unit ably commanded and still strong enough to seize the crest of Monte Altuzzo. He worked out in his mind the plan of attack: during the day Colonel Cole's 2d Battalion would push up the highway to locate enemy positions which might bring flanking fire against the main effort up the Altuzzo ridge, and under cover of darkness the 1st Battalion would resume the advance to seize Hill 926. Before dawn the next morning the 3d Battalion would pass through the 1st and seize the knob north of Hill 926.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Interv with Col Robert W. Porter, II Corps DCoFS, 30 Jun 50; 85th Div G-3 Jnl, 15-17 Sep 44; 337th Inf Unit Jnl, 15-17 Sep 44.

<sup>7</sup> Combat Interv with Gerow; Interv with Gerow, 3 Dec 48.



MAP 15

H Damon

About 0900 General Gerow went to the CP of the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry, and ordered Colonel Cole to jump off as soon as possible, locate the enemy positions along the highway, and push up abreast of the 1st Battalion. Gerow envisioned the 2d Battalion advancing as far as possible without sustaining heavy casualties. If the 2d was unable to knock out enemy positions located, it was to call for artillery support to neutralize them. The battalion's assignment was tough, undramatic, and could be costly; its flanks would be exposed, and its route of advance lay over open terrain.<sup>8</sup>

#### *The 2d Battalion Attack*

The 2d Battalion's attack up the highway, beginning at noon, did not move

<sup>8</sup> Combat Interivs with Gerow and Cole.

far. Company F, which made the attack, spotted some machine gun positions and called for artillery fire but did not advance abreast of the 1st Battalion's positions on the main Altuzzo ridge.<sup>9</sup> General Gerow became impatient for the decisive movement, the 1st Battalion's attack. He was most anxious for the 1st Battalion to reach its objective during the night and for the 3d to pass through the 1st before dawn. Changing his previous orders, he told Colonel Jackson to push out before dark so that if he received fire from the left flank in the 2d Battalion zone Colonel Cole could knock out the enemy positions or pinpoint them with supporting fire. Despite the fact that the 1st Battalion had suffered numerous casualties, General Gerow felt that the battalion could take Hill 926; in any case, he knew that the 2d Battalion by its own efforts could never break through on the exposed highway until the two mountains on its flanks were secured.

#### *1st Battalion Prepares To Attack*

At 1450 General Gerow told Colonel Jackson that the 2d Battalion's advance had been stopped and suggested that the 1st Battalion launch its attack at 1530. Although Colonel Jackson agreed, he found that the attack preparations required more time than he had estimated and accordingly set H Hour back to 1630. General Gerow's order called for the 1st Battalion to take the crest of Monte Altuzzo during the night and hold it until the 3d Battalion passed through. Then the 2d Battalion's Company E, reinforced, would move to the switch-

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR and Unit Jnl, Sep 44.

backs on the highway as Company F advanced along the left of the highway to Point 770.<sup>10</sup>

Having received the attack order, Colonel Jackson arranged for supporting fires from the artillery, mortar, and direct-fire weapons. He arranged also for smoke to screen the daylight period of advance. The sectors to be screened included Monte Verruca on the right and the area along the highway on the left, for the weather was clear and observation excellent. For the new attack the artillery plan was to isolate the German infantry on Monte Altuzzo from resupply and reinforcement by concentrating maximum fire on the higher slopes of the mountain mass in the vicinity of the Giogo Pass as far north as Rifredo. Medium artillery was to harass supply routes and destroy communications north of Monte Altuzzo. On the western slopes of the mountain, including the western ridge, the 105-mm. howitzers were to place time fire in the rocky, wooded areas to wipe out Germans in open positions or in process of moving into position. Once more the 8-inch guns and 240-mm. howitzers were to concentrate against the dug-in and prepared positions located on both ridges and the slope between them. The 81-mm. mortars of Company D and the attached 4.2-inch mortars were to fire on close targets that were masked from the artillery.<sup>11</sup>

Already during the morning the heavy artillery had scored with telling effect in counterbattery fires. Using a ground observation post, a battalion of heavy corps artillery made three direct hits on a gun

on Monte Castel Guerrino, 3,200 yards northwest of the Giogo Pass. This same battalion later fired on four heavy guns north of Firenzuola, scored two target hits, and had effect on all the guns. According to the air observation post, another heavy battalion neutralized four enemy guns one mile southwest of Firenzuola. In midafternoon, before the new attack was launched, the 178th Field Artillery Group fired a harassing mission in the draw between the Giogo Pass and Barco. Farther north along the Firenzuola highway, harassing fire from a heavy corps battalion traversed the area from the pass to Rifredo and Puligno, one and one-half miles to the north.

Twenty minutes before the 338th Infantry's new attack jumped off, the 403d Field Artillery Battalion completed firing a preparation of ninety-four rounds on the peak of Altuzzo's western ridge. Then, from 1610 to 1715, the 403d screened the western peak and the slope along the highway to the west with nearly 600 rounds of smoke. At the same time the 1st Platoon, Company B, 84th Chemical Battalion, smoked the area from Hill 926 to the pass. During the first hour of the attack, the 403d Field Artillery Battalion also fired harassing missions on Altuzzo's western peak, the highway, and the north slopes of Monte Altuzzo between Hill 926 and the pass.

On the night of 16 September, Company B, 752d Tank Battalion, in support of the 338th Infantry, moved one platoon to the 339th Infantry's sector in order to have a better position from which to fire on Monte Altuzzo. The tanks were to open fire at daylight on 17 September. During 15 and 16 September, Company B, 310th Engineers, continued to main-

<sup>10</sup> Combat Intervs with Gerow, Jackson, and Cole.

<sup>11</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson and Farber.

tain supply routes to the 338th's battalions.<sup>12</sup>

For air support the 338th Infantry acted on information received the night before that on 16 September the close air support program would operate from 1130 to 1330 and from 1430 to 1830. A few minutes before the 1st Battalion launched its attack, the 338th Infantry requested bombing missions against pill-boxes and other defenses at Collinaccia, 6,000 yards north-northeast of the Giogo Pass; gun positions at Moscheta, 4,500 yards northeast of the pass; and mortars in a draw near Barco, about 1,600 yards northeast of Monte Altuzzo. An hour and a half later fighter bombers strafed and dropped four bombs in the area of the mortars. During 16 September the 239th Wing attacked bivouac areas between the Futa Pass and the Giogo Pass, and the 7th SAAF Wing bombed bivouac and defended areas near Puligno about 3,000 yards north of the Giogo Pass.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Last-Minute Instructions*

Because of the narrow route of approach up the main ridge to the crest of Monte Altuzzo and the necessity for maintaining close contact in darkness, Colonel Jackson directed that his 1st Battalion's attack proceed in a column of platoons, designating Company C, which still had one fresh platoon, to make the principal effort. Behind Company C the 3d Platoon of Company A was to follow; during the night another

platoon of Company A was to swing to the left to secure Altuzzo's western ridge. Company A's 2d Platoon was to remain in battalion reserve on the slopes of Hill 782, prepared to go as reinforcement to either the main or western ridge. The 81-mm. mortars and two heavy machine guns were to support the attack from their respective positions behind Paretaio Farmhouse and the top of Hill 624.<sup>14</sup>

Because of the casualties during the previous days, neither Company A nor Company C, even including weapons platoons and headquarters personnel, was at more than two-thirds normal strength. Instead of 120 men in its three rifle platoons, Company A had seventy-six men and Company C, seventy-two. Company A had borne the brunt of attacks on 13 and 15 September, although not more than one platoon of each company had been engaged in actual fighting. During the attack of 15 September, Company C's 2d Platoon, although still in reserve, had suffered many casualties from a mortar concentration. The two assault companies could count on no support from Company B, which had sustained such heavy losses on 14 September on the western ridge that it was in no condition to make another major attack.<sup>15</sup>

Colonel Jackson left the co-ordination of the advance to Captain King and Lieutenant Souder, commanding Companies A and C, respectively. Each company commander then planned his own attack formation. Company C was to advance in a column of platoons, the

<sup>12</sup> 403d FA Bn, 423d FA Gp, and 178th FA Gp Mission Rpts, 16 Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 16 Sep 44; 752d Tk Bn AAR, Sep 44; 310th Engr (C) Bn AAR, Daily Sit Rpt, and Unit Jnl, Sep 44.

<sup>13</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 15-16 Sep 44; MAAF Central Med Daily Operational Sum, 16 Sep 44.

<sup>14</sup> Combat Inters with Jackson, Souder, and King.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Inters with the following: 1st Lt Albert J. Krasman; 2d Lt Walter M. Strosnider and T Sgt Pat H. Hinton; Gresham, Van Horne, Colosimo-Grigsby-Albert, Corey, Thompson, and White.

fresh 3d Platoon leading. Following the 3d was to be the section of light machine guns, the 2d Platoon, and the 1st. Captain King of Company A ordered Lieutenant Holladay with the two squads left in his 3d Platoon to follow Company C. He designated Sergeant Van Horne to take the 1st Platoon, the 60-mm. mortar section, and the single machine gun squad left in the Weapons Platoon to the western ridge. The 2d Platoon was to be in battalion reserve.

In last-minute instructions to his platoon leaders, Lieutenant Souder outlined the disposition of his platoons when they should reach the crest of the mountain. The 2d Platoon, Company C, was to take up positions on the left and make patrol contact with Sergeant Van Horne's 1st Platoon, Company A, which would be on Altuzzo's western ridge; the 3d Platoon, Company C, was to be in the center on the peak of Hill 926; to its right was to be the 1st Platoon, Company C, and the 3d Platoon, Company A. Although he had never had a close view of Hill 926, Souder believed that four platoons, all considerably understrength, could get abreast near the top of the south slope of Hill 926. After the 3d Battalion had passed through the 1st on Hill 926, the men of Company C could then come back down the mountain to the vicinity of the battalion CP, relax, reorganize, and eat a hot meal.<sup>16</sup>

Leader of Company C's 3d Platoon, which was to spearhead the attack, was 2d Lt. Albert J. Krasman, a former platoon sergeant with a good deal of combat experience and an officer in whose leadership Lieutenant Souder had full con-

fidence. At the beginning of the drive he had been an excess Company C officer at the regimental replacement pool in charge of approximately forty 1st Battalion replacements and had thus made no thorough map or intelligence studies. On 14 September when the company executive officer had been wounded by a shell fragment, the 3d Platoon leader had replaced him and Lieutenant Krasman had been called to take command of the 3d Platoon. Although the lieutenant had seen no defense overlays of the enemy positions, he secured enough information from Lieutenant Corey and Sergeant Thompson of the 1st Platoon about the positions they had encountered on 15 September to realize that in a new attack Company C could expect resistance at any point from halfway up the Altuzzo ridge to the crest. On the night of 15-16 September, after Lieutenant Souder had been informed that Company C might have to bear the brunt of the next attack, Lieutenant Krasman was sent with a small patrol to reconnoiter 400 to 500 yards in front of the company. He found a telephone wire which Company B had laid two nights before on the lower slopes of Hill 782 and followed it to the western ridge. There the patrol saw men of Company B who had been killed the day before and examined a bunker near the top of the western peak. Although Lieutenant Krasman searched several dead Germans, he found nothing of importance. From what he had seen himself on this patrol and from what he had heard from others, he expected a tough struggle before he took Hill 926 and anticipated that his men would encounter heavy cross fire from the left as they advanced up the main ridge.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson, Souder, King, Van Horne, Corey, Brumbaugh, Thompson, Krasman, and Grigsby.

<sup>17</sup> Combat Intervs with Krasman and Souder.



**ENEMY CASUALTIES.** *These paratroopers of the 12th Parachute Regiment were found on the slopes of Monte Altuzzo.*

The thirty men of Lieutenant Krasman's 3d Platoon were generally in good physical condition as H Hour approached. Most had had some combat experience, although only a handful had engaged previously in a hard fire fight; hence the men could scarcely imagine what a real attack would be like. Most of the noncommissioned officers and riflemen were aggressive and in high spirits. Platoon Sgt. Richard E. Fent and S. Sgt. Walter M. Strosnider, the 1st Squad leader, who was to lead the point of the attack, were both intelligent, combat-wise, and full of courage. The morale of

some 3d Platoon men had been somewhat depressed the day before by news that the 1st Platoon had sustained heavy casualties from artillery fire, presumably American, and that the 2d Platoon, which had not even been engaged, had suffered almost as heavily from a German mortar concentration. Two men in the platoon became emotionally unfit for combat and did not join in the attack.<sup>18</sup>

In the other rifle platoons of Company C (the 1st and 2d), the survivors from

<sup>18</sup> Combat Interviews with Pfc's Alfred D. Lightner, Loman B. Pugh, Frank Bury, Paul Myshak, and John K. Britton; Strosnider, Hinton.

the previous day's attack still carried vivid impressions of what had happened then, but most were in good spirits and could stand a hard fight. Because of the previous casualties and the evacuation of a number of nervous exhaustion cases, the two platoons were far understrength, the 2d having eighteen men, the 1st, twenty-four. One squad of the 1st Platoon was sent by the company commander to bring the 2d Platoon up to greater strength, and the loss left the 1st Platoon with only a single squad, the equivalent of one squad having previously become casualties.<sup>19</sup>

In Company A morale was still high in the 1st and 3d Platoons, which were to participate in the new attack, but three days in the line had depleted effective strength by almost half. Moreover, what had happened to Company B on the western ridge on 14 September had inspired caution in Sergeant Van Horne, who was to lead the 1st Platoon, Company A, to the western ridge.<sup>20</sup>

During the morning of 16 September, the 3d Platoon, Company C, pushed up the southwest slope of Hill 782 to a small stretch of level ground forty yards below the barbed wire, where it relieved a squad of the 1st Platoon, which had set up outposts the night before. There the men of the 3d Platoon dug slit trenches while awaiting the order to jump off. They received some mortar fire, restricting movement but causing no casualties.

As the attack hour drew near, the men of Company C had supplies for a limited time only. Each man had the normal

load of ammunition (one bandoleer of forty-eight rounds and one belt of eighty rounds), but hand grenades, which could be expected to be useful for close-in mountain fighting, were in short supply. Some men had lost or dropped grenades on the way to Hill 782; others had used them in the 15 September attack; and no resupply had been made. Although the 1st and 2d Platoons gave their remaining grenades to the leading 3d Platoon, the 3d Platoon still had only about twenty-five. During the day of 16 September refilling the water supply from Rocca Creek 300 yards to the rear was an arduous and slow process. Along the route artillery shells were falling throughout the day, and only a few men could get water at a time. Some were on outpost duty and could not go down to the creek, and because of the warm day the men drank more water than usual. They knew they were going to attack but did not know the jump-off time, and thus many did not go down at all for water. During the night K rations and a resupply of ammunition were brought up by the 1st Battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon, and each of Lieutenant Souder's men was issued a day's K ration.

A few minutes before the attack was to begin, the enemy, from temporary outpost positions on the southwestern slope of Hill 782 near the ridge line, opened fire on Company C's 3d Platoon outposts. The men in the forward positions withdrew a short distance down the hill while Platoon Sergeant Fent moved up to find out what had happened. Fent could not find his outposts and surmised that they had been captured. Keeping on past the small stretch of level ground where the outposts had

<sup>19</sup> Combat Inters with White, Thompson, Orr, Brumbaugh, Corey, and all enlisted survivors in 1st Plat, Co C, 338th Inf.

<sup>20</sup> Combat Inters with Van Horne, South-Whary, and Grigsby.

been, he went several yards beyond the barbed wire, hid for a few moments behind a bush, and looked up the ridge. Spying a German soldier, Fent put his rifle to his shoulder and fired, but he could not tell whether he killed the German. Other Germans from positions on the slope above replied with small arms bursts, forcing the sergeant to return to his platoon.<sup>21</sup>

### *Capture of the Outpost Line*

A few minutes later, at 1630, the 1st Battalion jumped off up the southwest slope of Hill 782. In the lead the 3d Platoon, Company C, moved in a skirmish line, two squads abreast, the 1st Squad on the left, the 2d on the right. (*Map 16*) The 3d Squad followed the 1st in an open squad column and protected the left flank. Although smoke shut off enemy observation from the crest of the mountain, the 3d Platoon's observation on Hill 782 was good, and Lieutenant Krasman's men could see as well as the steep, uneven slope permitted. They crossed the barbed wire through gaps cut in earlier attacks, and on the platoon's right flank the 2d Squad saw several dead soldiers from Company L, 363d Infantry, with their equipment strewn near the entanglement.

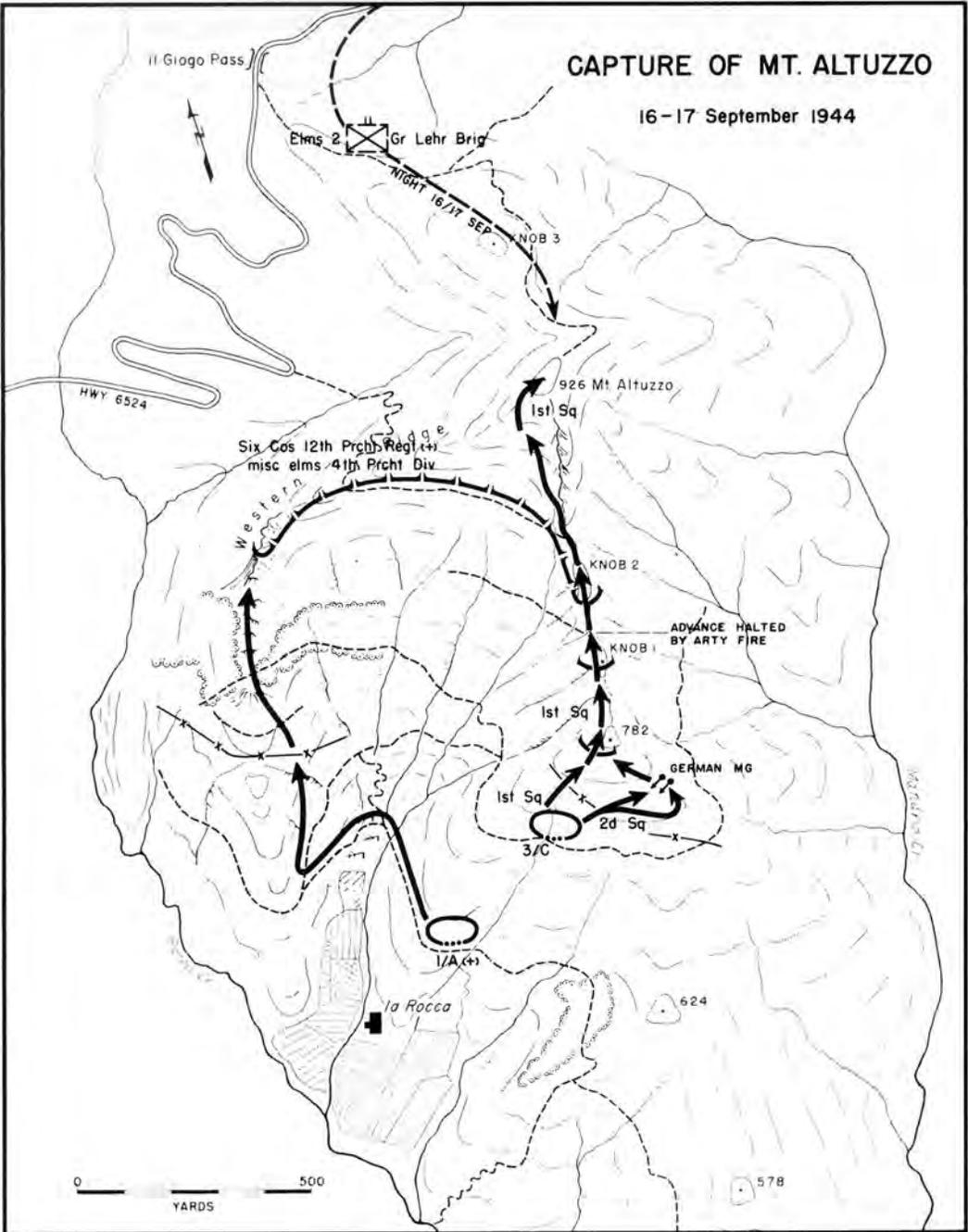
On the platoon's left flank, Sergeant Strosnider's 1st Squad had moved a few yards past the barbed wire when several German riflemen in trenches near the ridge line of Hill 782 opened fire. Their shots wounded Pfc. Albert W. Parker in the left ribs and raked the ground close to the rest of the men. As the squad hit

the ground, the center and right flank men fired back in the direction from which they thought the enemy fire was coming. At first they could locate no one, but as they strained their eyes for the enemy an Italian soldier from the slope above came down and surrendered. He said there had been a few Germans with him.

The men of the 1st Squad began to crawl forward, only to be met by a barrage of hand grenades from the slope above them. About the same time a machine gun from the right front near the ridge line opened fire, kicking up dust at Sergeant Strosnider's feet. The sergeant shouted to the whole squad to throw hand grenades, and the men quickly tossed grenades up the slope toward where they thought the enemy to be. The BAR man, Pfc. Russell G. Elston, and his assistant, Pvt. Frank Bury, saw a single German in a patch of light brush to the front and fired at close range. Five Germans, eager to surrender, were flushed out. They had been in hasty positions on the ridge line south of Hill 782. The German machine gunner, who had fired only one long burst, had evidently escaped up the ridge. Two enemy soldiers were killed and six captured in the brief fire fight; the 1st Squad had one man wounded.

On the 3d Platoon's right wing the 2d Squad had engaged the enemy outpost positions on the southeastern slope of Hill 782. Although smoke hung heavily over Monte Verruca to the east, as well as over the western ridge of Monte Altuzzo to the west, the squad could see clearly up the southwest slope of the main ridge. Shortly after the leading men had crossed the barbed wire, Germans on the right front began to throw

<sup>21</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Lightner and Pfc Carl Schwantke; Thompson, Krasman, Hinton, Strosnider, Orr, White, and Lightner-Myshak.



MAP 16

hand grenades and opened fire with rifles. As the men hit the ground, the squad leader, S. Sgt. Pat H. Hinton, sent forward the first scout, Pfc. Paul Myshak, to reconnoiter. Crawling to the ridge line about 150 yards below the peak of Hill 782, Myshak saw nothing except the outlines of Monte Verruca to the east. Moving back toward his squad, he spotted a trail leading to the left a few yards below the ridge line. On the slope below the trail, he saw a lone German lying on the ground with his rifle pointed downhill. As the scout crept toward him, the German looked up; Myshak had him covered, and the German surrendered. Back with the 2d Squad, Pvt. Karl Adler quizzed the prisoner in German, eliciting information that two machine guns were on the right front just over the ridge line on the east slope of Hill 782.

Platoon Sergeant Fent decided that with the 2d Squad he could knock out the two machine gun positions. He planned to move with two men of the squad to the right and then to the left toward the positions while Sergeant Hinton and the rest of the squad went to the left. Each group was to support the other with covering fire so that both could get near the enemy positions. While Sergeant Fent and his two men would try to knock out the machine guns, Sergeant Hinton and the main body of the squad would cover by fire, catching any Germans who tried to escape up the ridge. Taking with him Pfc. Walter W. Iverson, the automatic rifleman, and Pfc. Kermit C. Fisher, second scout, Sergeant Fent crawled to the right and over the ridge line. Before the three men knew it, they were almost face to face with two Germans who were in the first position and another who

was lying beside it. It was camouflaged by bushes and harbored a machine gun. The two startled Germans jumped out of the position and ran to the left. The third man did not move so quickly, and, when Sergeant Fent motioned for him to get up, the German reached instead for his rifle. Fent fired point-blank, killing the German instantly, and moved then to investigate the other position. Sergeant Hinton and the remainder of the squad had come up in a skirmish line about twenty yards to the left. With their arrival the other two Germans surrendered, and the squad damaged the two machine guns by denting the firing pins and housing with intrenching tools.

Heading back with the prisoners below the ridge line to the western slope, the squad began to receive machine gun fire from Hill 624, where Company M's supporting machine guns were positioned. As soon as the fire was reported, it was stopped. By this time the 1st Squad had advanced to the north to a point where the route of approach up Hill 782 became very narrow, pinching out the 2d Squad. The 2d now followed the 1st.<sup>22</sup>

While the 2d Squad was taking the machine gun positions, Sergeant Strosnider's 1st Squad, which had captured six prisoners after a grenade exchange, had paused to reorganize. Continuing forward again, the men turned left in a skirmish line and approached the rocks near the peak of Hill 782. As they neared the peak, the skirmish line became too extended for the narrow approach and the men fell in behind Sergeant Strosnider in a single column.

Straight ahead the men saw a bush-flanked rock slab facing downhill. Notic-

<sup>22</sup> Combat Intervs with Krasman, Lightner, Schwantke, Strosnider, Hinton, and Bury.

ing something unnatural about the camouflage around the rock, Sergeant Strosnider looked closely and made out the muzzle of a machine gun pointing out over the slabs some ten yards away. Strangely, there was no fire from the position. After the squad leader heaved a grenade over the rock slab, there was still no sound or sign of life. Again Sergeant Strosnider threw a grenade; it did not explode. Assuming that the Germans were down behind the rocks, he drew back to get another grenade from his leading scout, Pfc. Carl Schwantke, and ran to the right of the position to throw it. Close behind the grenade's explosion Strosnider charged the position with his rifle at his hip. As he reached the rock slab and looked inside, he found that he had been tossing grenades at four enemy machine gunners, all dead. A small shell hole near the gun indicated that the crew had been killed by a mortar shell.

#### *Fire Fight at Knob 1*

Soon after the remainder of his 1st Squad had joined him, Sergeant Strosnider spotted two Germans at the next rise on the ridge line to the north, Knob 1. Both were walking south straight down the mountain. By this time the shadows had begun to lengthen and darkness was approaching. Thinking that the two Germans might need little urging to give up, Sergeant Strosnider directed Private Schwantke, who spoke German fluently, to shout to them to surrender. As Schwantke called out, the two Germans stopped dead in their tracks, for a moment replying with neither words nor fire. Again Schwantke called out. One of the Germans dropped suddenly to the

ground and fired two bursts from a machine pistol; the other merely stood erect with his rifle in his hands and kept staring down the ridge at the Americans. Sergeant Strosnider, Private Elston, and Pvt. Fred D. Mingus opened fire with M-1 rifles and Pfc. Alfred D. Lightner with a carbine. The standing German slumped to the ground.

During the shouting and firing, two or three more Germans had come along the higher western slope of the ridge to the top of Knob 1. Schwantke and Lightner fired at them, while Sergeant Strosnider called for Pfc. Zemro F. Benner, rifle grenadier from the 2d Squad. Strosnider himself fired the rifle grenade and was certain that he hit one German. Two others on Knob 1 sprang up from the ground and ran back up the ridge line to the north.

Strosnider called for the Weapons Platoon leader, Lieutenant Ritchey, to bring up a machine gun and rake the area. He wanted the machine gun to put overhead fire on and north of Knob 1, from which the Germans had fled, while his rifle squad pushed on from Hill 782 to the knob. Lieutenant Ritchey, who with his machine gunners had followed closely behind the 3d Platoon, came up promptly. The lieutenant decided that overhead fire would fall too close to the advancing riflemen. Instead, after setting up his machine gun in the big rock slab at the peak of Hill 782, he ordered harassing fire on Knob 1, before the attack.

Thus far the 3d Platoon had received no machine gun fire either from the two Altuzzo ridges or from Monte Verruca on the right. By this time the darkness had become too deep for the enemy to see the advancing men or to place accurate fire on them. While Lieutenant Ritchey

fired the machine gun, the rest of the 3d Platoon remained in single column behind the leading squad. Lieutenant Krasman, 3d Platoon leader, was among the rocks in the middle of the leading squad. The lieutenant had adopted this column of squads in single file after reaching Hill 782 because the narrow route up the ridge line prevented wider deployment. He knew the formation would be useful for keeping contact between individuals and squads and for protecting the platoon's flanks and rear so that the enemy could not encircle his troops.

During the advance up Hill 782, a 3d Platoon runner had laid wire, and Lieutenant Krasman had a sound-powered telephone with him all the way. He used the telephone all night and during the next day, not having to employ his SCR 536. To the immediate rear of the 3d Platoon, the 2d Platoon stayed within visual contact.<sup>23</sup>

#### *American Shellfire*

After Lieutenant Ritchey had placed machine gun fire on Knob 1, the 3d Platoon (Company C) again moved out from Hill 782. At the head of the column were Private Schwantke, Private Lightner, and Sergeant Strosnider, in that order. They had gone about fifty yards along the trail just below and west of the main Altuzzo ridge line when harassing fire from American supporting weapons—artillery, tanks, or tank destroyers—began to fall about fifty yards to the front. Strosnider and his scouts stopped, afraid to continue up the ridge in the face of this fire. The sergeant sent word back to Lieutenant Krasman, who was several

spaces to the rear in the 3d Platoon column, and the lieutenant relayed the message to the company commander, who promised to have the fire lifted. The shells continued to land near the leading 3d Platoon men, who had stopped in a saddle on the main ridge line between Knob 1 and the next rise, Knob 2, at a point where the trail turned to the left around the west slope of Knob 2. The shells were landing close to the rock-hewn positions of the enemy MLR on Knob 2, positions which Sergeant Strosnider's men had not yet located.

As the American shells continued to fall and one of his men was slightly wounded by a fragment, Sergeant Strosnider went back himself to Lieutenant Krasman and insisted that his squad could not advance until the fire was lifted. The lieutenant again called Lieutenant Souder and was again promised relief. Fearing a repetition of the 1st Platoon's unhappy experience of the day before, Krasman held up his platoon for more than an hour to make sure that the shellfire had stopped. He guessed that it was only harassing fire, which might mean that more rounds would land at any time.<sup>24</sup>

As soon as the shelling report was received at the 1st Battalion CP, Colonel Jackson promised to have the fire lifted and ordered the 3d Platoon, Company C, to wait until he called back before resuming the advance. The 329th Field Artillery liaison officer, Lieutenant Farber, checked division and corps artillery without being able to find the unit which had fired or even the direction from which it was firing. When this search failed, all artillery in the II Corps was ordered to

<sup>23</sup> Combat Intervs with Ritchey, Strosnider, Lightner, Bury, Krasman, White, and Brumbaugh.

<sup>24</sup> Combat Intervs with Krasman, Lightner, Schwantke, Strosnider, and Souder.

cease firing for half an hour in the Altuzzo area and 1,000 yards on either side of the main Altuzzo ridge line.

After the no-fire interval, Colonel Jackson reported at 0125 to the 338th Infantry that artillery was still firing in the area where his men were advancing. He believed it came from the rear and at about half-hour intervals. After this report, the artillery no-fire line was pushed from the crest of Monte Altuzzo 1,000 yards to the north. When no additional fire came in, Colonel Jackson ordered Company C to push on up the mountain. The time then was approximately 0200.<sup>25</sup>

#### *1st Squad at Knob 2*

As the leading squad of Company C's 3d Platoon again moved forward, Sergeant Strosnider and his two scouts heard the sound of German voices to the front. Warning his men that they were nearing the enemy positions, the sergeant instructed them to move quietly and to use grenades and rifles as a last resort. The night was so dark that the men did not have to crawl in order to keep their approach screened. Advancing slowly forward in a crouch and straining their eyes for the enemy, the men proceeded in single file from Knob 1 up the forward slope of Knob 2. In the lead and so close together that they touched each other were Privates Schwantke and Lightner and Sergeant Strosnider. Coming closer to where they thought they had heard German voices, they dropped to their hands and knees and crawled over the brush-covered slope a few feet to the left of the ridge line.

Schwantke and Lightner suddenly

<sup>25</sup> Combat Inters with Jackson, Krasman, and Farber; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 16-17 Sep 44.

found themselves almost under the nose of a German machine gun sticking from a pile of rocks. No sign of life came from within the position. Sergeant Strosnider joined the two men. On the way up he had heard whisperings over on his left, but the night was too dark to determine the source. The cover of darkness had enabled the leading men of Company C to advance to the main German positions on Knob 2 without being discovered. Nor did the Americans discover the enemy positions until they had almost stumbled over them.

Strosnider whispered for Schwantke to toss a grenade behind the rocks and for Lightner to go to the right of the rocks to protect the flank. When Schwantke pulled the pin and threw his grenade, its explosion brought a howl from a German in a big hole a few feet away, directly behind the machine gun and the piled rocks. Another German, who evidently had been manning the weapon but had not detected the American's approach, cradled the machine gun and dashed up the ridge about ten yards to the higher and rockier part of Knob 2. As he fled, Private Lightner bounded after him and captured him just as the German was setting up the gun to fire. About the same time a machine pistol opened up from straight ahead on the higher part of Knob 2. Private Schwantke fired one burst in that direction but stopped when Sergeant Strosnider told him to use a grenade instead. After he threw a grenade, the machine pistol ceased fire.

Sergeant Strosnider heard noises to the left of the piled stones and tossed a grenade in that direction. Although he could not see anyone, he heard one German cry out in pain while another ran. The two had been in slit trenches fifteen

yards below and to the west of a big square hole in the center of Knob 2's ridge line. Following the explosion of Sergeant Strosnider's grenade, Private Schwantke called out to the Germans that they would be safe if they would come out with their hands up. One German asked who was calling. Schwantke replied that the Americans were all around them; they had better surrender. When a group of Germans fled up the west slope of the mountain to the left of the main positions, Schwantke called out again that the Americans had them surrounded and it was futile to try to escape. From below, on the upper western slope of Knob 2, the Germans answered, and eleven returned to give themselves up. Strosnider, Schwantke, and Lightner had surprised the enemy and seized three positions on Knob 2, had killed or captured several Germans, and had driven the rest from the MLR. These prepared positions were the last German defenses to the north except the bunkers and observation posts on the crest of Hill 926. But to the northwest along the wooded upper slopes of the Altuzzo bowl the enemy still manned positions behind tall rock slabs.<sup>26</sup>

Soon after the capture of the Germans, an enemy machine gun from somewhere in the woods to the left front opened fire and then suddenly stopped. Private Schwantke called to the German crew to surrender, and Lieutenant Krasman ordered all men in the platoon to fire if the machine gun opened up again. When it did, the 3d Platoon returned the fire until abruptly the German weapon ceased. Presumably it had been knocked

out or the 3d Platoon's fire was too heavy for the enemy to continue the exchange.

After placing two guards at the big hole on Knob 2 to watch the eleven German prisoners, Lieutenant Krasman ordered the platoon to resume its advance to the crest of the mountain. The fire fight on Hill 782, the exchanges with the enemy on Knob 1, the delay caused by American shellfire, and the capture of the three positions on Knob 2 in the enemy MLR had all taken time. When Company C's 3d Platoon jumped off again, it must have been at least 0300.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Advance to the Crest*

Starting forward, Company C's 3d Platoon moved from Knob 2 on the slope to the left of the big hole. Still in the lead, Sergeant Strosnider's 1st Squad walked along a path that ran ten to fifteen yards to the left of the ridge line on the west slope of Knob 2. The squad came next to an east-west trail where it crossed the main ridge line at the lower end of a rock escarpment leading straight up to the peak, Hill 926.

Climbing a few yards up the steep rocks of the escarpment, the men of the leading squad could see that the ground was much higher on their right front and an advance straight up the ridge line would only silhouette them as they climbed. On the left the slope, although steep, was more gradual, and the advantages of defiladed and easier approach through heavy brush and trees prompted Sergeant Strosnider to turn his men to the left of the rock escarpment. Moving across the rocks to a little draw west of

<sup>26</sup> Combat Inters with Lightner-Schwantke, Lightner, and Strosnider; Notes of terrain reconnaissance with Krasman and Strosnider, 21 Dec 44.

<sup>27</sup> Combat Inters with all enlisted survivors in 3d Plat, Co C, 338th Inf, Apr 45, and with Lightner-Schwantke, Krasman, and Strosnider.



ARTILLERY-SHELLED AREA. *Medical aid man pauses in his search for casualties under pine trees sheared off at uneven lengths by supporting artillery fire.*

the escarpment, the men reached covered ground on a finger to the southwest of Hill 926. The heavy underbrush on this finger made progress difficult, and after advancing about a hundred yards the 1st Squad took a short rest at a charcoal clearing to enable the other two squads to catch up. At the rear of the column near the east-west trail, a roll of telephone wire got out of control of the man who was carrying it and rolled down the east slope of the main ridge; a new roll was brought up and wire laid

along the route the leading squad had taken.

Its short rest over, the 3d Platoon pushed on toward Hill 926. Initially the route was steep, rocky, and wooded. The underbrush was thick except for the last fifty yards, where the southern slope of the peak was pock-marked with shell holes and bomb craters. Passing large rocks and brush and then through a stand of large pine trees sheared to uneven lengths by artillery fire, the men at last emerged on the bare southern slope of

Hill 926, the long-sought crest of Monte Altuzzo.

### *Defensive Arrangements*

Coming to a zigzag trench on the west side of Hill 926, the three leading men in the 3d Platoon, Private Schwantke, Private Lightner, and Sergeant Strosnider, turned right to a big crater that had once been a German observation post. They stopped there only a moment and then walked a few yards up the slope until they reached the top of the peak. Though dawn was fast approaching, it was still dark; when they heard voices close by to the front, they could not locate the source. The sounds actually came from a bunker a few feet away, half underground, and dug into the crest of Hill 926, but Sergeant Strosnider and his scouts did not discover that until later.<sup>28</sup>

Although a few of the leading men began to dig in, word came up the line for them to withdraw and dig in on the southern slope of the hill. As soon as they had moved back a few yards from the top of the peak to the southern slope, Lieutenant Krasman, the 3d Platoon leader, approached Sergeant Strosnider and asked why he had withdrawn. Sergeant Strosnider explained about the voices and the message.

While Sergeant Strosnider had been at the top of the hill, Lieutenant Krasman and Lieutenant Ritchey, the Weapons Platoon leader, had disagreed about where Company C should take up positions. Krasman wanted to occupy the exact crest of the mountain; Ritchey thought a better defense could be set

<sup>28</sup> Combat Intervs with Krasman, Strosnider, Bury, and Lightner.

up by withdrawing slightly and digging in on the south slope.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that some members of the 3d Platoon, hearing the discussion between the two officers, passed the message forward for the leading men to withdraw. Krasman called Lieutenant Souder, reported that the 3d Platoon was on the crest of Monte Altuzzo, and asked what defense should be set up. When Souder asked if he were sure of his location, Krasman assured him there was no doubt. Ordering his platoon leader to put out security, the Company C commander promised to check with Colonel Jackson and call back.<sup>30</sup>

Aware that 17 September was the battalion commander's birthday, Lieutenant Souder called Colonel Jackson and said, "Colonel, I've got a birthday present for you. We've captured Mount Altuzzo." Remembering vividly that, three days before, Captain Peabody had been equally sure Company B was on the crest of Monte Altuzzo, Colonel Jackson was dubious. But Souder insisted that Krasman was certain of his location. Reassured that finally his troops had gained the objective for which they had been fighting for four days, Colonel Jackson ordered Company C to set up a rear-slope defense at the southern end of Hill 926 and hold it until the 3d Battalion passed through.<sup>31</sup>

### *2d Platoon Follows to Hill 926*

While Company C's 3d Platoon had been advancing to Hill 926, the other

<sup>29</sup> Combat Intervs with Strosnider, Hinton, and Ritchey.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; Combat Intervs with Krasman and Souder.

<sup>31</sup> Combat Intervs with Jackson and Souder.

units in the 1st Battalion column—except Company C's 1st Platoon—had stayed within contact distance all the way up the ridge but had taken no part in the action. Directly behind the 3d Platoon, the leading man of Company C's 2d Platoon had stayed close enough to touch the last man in the 3d Platoon. Only once during the night had the 2d lost contact, just after the 3d Platoon had seized the main enemy defenses on Knob 2 and had started up toward the crest of Hill 926. The platoon sergeant had then followed the wire laid by the leading platoon until contact was regained.<sup>32</sup> The machine gun section of Company C followed the 2d Platoon and was in turn followed by two squads from the 3d Platoon, Company A, commanded by Lieutenant Holladay. In this Company A platoon were Sgt. Gordon K. Grigsby's squad of ten men and another squad of eight men led by Private Albert. Four men from the platoon took over from Company C the task of guarding the prisoners at the big hole on Knob 2.<sup>33</sup>

At the start of the attack one squad of the 1st Platoon, Company C, had been attached to the rear of Company C's 2d Platoon. The remaining squad of the 1st Platoon stayed with Lieutenant Corey and protected the right flank of Company C on the eastern slope of Hill 782. On the way up the mountain the leader of Company C's 2d Platoon had heard noises and movement on the flanks and had passed word down to Lieutenant Holladay (3d Platoon, Company A) to put out security on both flanks. Having heard noises himself, Holladay told the

platoon guide of the 2d Platoon, Company C, S. Sgt. Robert W. Kistner, Jr., who was with the attached squad from the 1st Platoon, Company C, to move out as rear security for the column. In the movement to the rear of the column Kistner and the squad lost contact. When they reached a point just north of Knob 2 where the telephone wire forked, one strand going to the left and another to the right, they were unable to decide which wire to take. Afraid that if they advanced on a route different from Company C's 3d and 2d Platoons, they would be mistaken for Germans, Sergeant Kistner and Sergeant Price, the squad leader, decided to hold where they were. Not long afterward the squad was joined by the rest of the 1st Platoon, Company C—one squad—under Lieutenant Corey, the squad which initially had been used to guard the right flank on Hill 782. Corey had also come forward by following the telephone wire. Thus the understrength 1st Platoon was now back together at the east-west trail at the north end of Knob 2. The sound of digging reached the platoon from the left not far away, and in the belief that it might be coming from the 2d and 3d Platoons, which he knew were somewhere ahead, Lieutenant Corey called out. The digging stopped and all was quiet.

In order to prevent interception of his radio transmissions by whoever had been digging, Corey pulled his two squads back about fifty yards. He then tried to reach Lieutenant Krasman on the SCR 536 to ask for guides to lead his men up Hill 926. Failing, he radioed the company commander, who relayed his request. Krasman sent guides promptly for both the 1st Platoon and the 3d Battalion, whose leading men were just to

<sup>32</sup> Combat Inters with White and Brumbaugh.

<sup>33</sup> Combat Inters with the following: Ritchey and Colosimo-Grigsby-Albert; Albert; T Sgt Dale E. Burkholder.

Corey's rear. Within half an hour six guides from Hill 926 arrived. Dropping off Pfc. Charles F. Gregory as guide for the 1st Platoon, the other five continued down the ridge to the companies of the 3d Battalion.

#### *1st Platoon's Advance*

With Private Gregory at the head, the 1st Platoon (Company C) moved out again from Knob 2 up the Altuzzo ridge. To the guide's rear in single file came Lieutenant Corey, the 1st Platoon leader; Sergeant Kistner, the 2d Platoon guide; and the rest of the 1st Platoon. The first five men advanced twenty-five yards past the east-west trail up the rocks and into a little draw directly west of the escarpment on the ridge line. At that point the enemy opened up with hand grenades and a machine gun from the front and left on the west side of the draw not more than a hundred yards away. The rest of the 1st Platoon was east of the rock escarpment. One of the first shots killed Private Gregory, and the other men hit the ground. The night was still dark. Unable to go back and rejoin the rest of the platoon because of the exposed terrain, Lieutenant Corey and Sergeant Kistner followed the telephone wire laid by Company C's 3d Platoon. The other two men who had entered the draw with them climbed up over the rocks on the main ridge line to the right.

The rest of the 1st Platoon—less than one squad—opened fire with BAR's and rifles from the rocks on the right of the draw. After a few minutes of this return fire, the German resistance ceased. Reorganizing, the little group from the 1st Platoon, minus Lieutenant Corey and Sergeant Kistner, who had followed the

telephone wire on ahead, moved east of the rock escarpment and pushed on to the crest of the mountain.<sup>34</sup>

After the three rifle platoons and the machine gun section of Company C, reinforced by two understrength squads of Company A, reached the southern slope of Hill 926, they set up a rear-slope defense in accordance with Colonel Jackson's order, and Lieutenant Krasman disposed the men as Lieutenant Souder had directed. The 2d Platoon, which had the equivalent of two understrength squads, took up positions on the left flank. In the center was the 3d Platoon, which set up three outposts, one in the left zig-zag trench, one in the center, and one on the right near the crest of Hill 926. Lieutenant Ritchey, the Weapons Platoon leader, placed his one light machine gun twenty yards to the right rear of the rifle platoons in a position that could cover the right rear and flank. On the right flank the defense was manned by the handful of men from the 1st Platoon, Company C, and the two squads from the 3d Platoon, Company A. The 60-mm. mortar section of Company C and the two machine guns of Company D were still in position on Hill 624.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Advance up the Western Ridge*

While Company C, reinforced by two squads from Company A, had been advancing to occupy the crest of the mountain, Hill 926, the 1st Platoon, Company A, had moved from Hill 782 to Altuzzo's western ridge. Starting out about dusk while the leading elements of Company C

<sup>34</sup> Combat Inters with Corey, Thompson, Kistner, Marx, Markey, and Orr.

<sup>35</sup> Combat Inters with Krasman, Souder, Ritchey, and Burkholder.

were at the top of Hill 782, Sergeant Van Horne, acting platoon leader, led the twenty-two men of his platoon as the attached units followed. These consisted of a light machine gun squad, a 60-mm. mortar squad, and several wiremen who laid telephone wire along the route of march. The total force numbered some thirty men. They moved in a column of squads, the 3d Squad forward. Leaving their foxholes on the lower southwest slope of Hill 782 just north of la Rocca, they moved across the open space at the base of the bowl to the lower end of the western ridge. Then, going seventy-five to a hundred yards from the ridge line on the east slope of the western ridge, they encountered occasional mortar fire until they reached the barbed wire entanglement. The only casualty was S. Sgt. William Nowakowski, a rifle squad leader, who was wounded by a mortar shell.

When Sergeant Van Horne at the head of the column reached the barbed wire, he halted the men while he searched for trip wires. Because of the depth of the entanglement at this spot, Van Horne moved to the right, only to find more barbed wire in even greater depth. Crossing the wire without further search, the platoon continued up the ridge without drawing enemy fire. About twenty yards east of the ridge line, the men climbed in single file over rocks up the steep slope until they came within fifty yards of the western ridge's rocky peak. The early morning was still so dark that the men could see only a few yards ahead.

Sergeant Van Horne did not yet know what progress Company C had made and had heard no sounds which might indicate that Hill 926 had been taken. Cautious, in view of Company B's experi-

ence on the same ridge three days before, he directed his men to dig in and wait until dawn when he could see and determine how to get up to the peak. Although Van Horne's force was merely to protect the left flank of the 1st Battalion's main attack force, throughout the night he and his men kept thinking that they had been given the mission of taking an objective which a whole company three days before had been unable to take and hold.

While the troops were still digging in fifty yards south of the western ridge's peak, two bursts of machine gun fire from the main Altuzzo ridge in the vicinity of the enemy's MLR hit about fifty yards to their rear. The men did not return the fire but waited for dawn and word that Company C had occupied the crest of Monte Altuzzo.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Bypassed Pockets*

During the advance of the main body of the 1st Battalion to Hill 926, the 3d Battalion had waited until Colonel Jackson's leading troops had reached their objective before advancing from Hill 782. About 0315 Company K, in the lead, was notified of the 1st Battalion's success and ordered to follow the telephone wire up the slopes of Altuzzo until it met the guides sent down from the crest. Companies L and I were to follow in that order.

Moving in single file, Company K crossed the barbed wire on the southwest slope of Hill 782 and before daylight advanced to Knob 1, some 300 yards short of Hill 926. When the company reached the east-west trail which crossed the ridge

<sup>36</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Kohler and S Sgt James F. Reid; Van Horne and South-Whary.

line just north of Knob 2 and 250 yards south of the peak, it came under small arms fire from the left front around the top of the Altuzzo bowl. Not certain that it was German fire, the company commander did not permit his men to fire back but directed them to find cover on the right among the rocks beyond Knob 2. Company L, following with the rest of the 3d Battalion, lost contact. Well after dawn the leading elements of the 3d Battalion were still 200 yards short of the 1st Battalion on Hill 926.<sup>37</sup>

Daylight of 17 September thus found the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, on its objective, the crest of Monte Altuzzo, and the 3d Battalion strung out behind it on the main Altuzzo ridge subject to enemy fire from bypassed Germans along the top of the Altuzzo bowl to the west and Monte Verruca to the east. Besides the German troops who remained to be cleared from this area, other small groups were in the bunkers on the crest of Monte Altuzzo and on the knob north of Hill 926 in position to counterattack. Although much hard fighting still lay ahead before all German resistance in front of the Giogo Pass could be overcome, large gains had been made. Slowed by enemy resistance and shellfire, presumably American, Company C had nevertheless knocked out the defenses on Hill 782 and Knob 2 and had killed, captured, or driven back the forces manning the MLR on the main ridge. After this success, the bulk of the 1st Battalion had infiltrated under cover of darkness past the other rifle and machine gun positions around the bowl and the western peak to

the crest of Monte Altuzzo. Colonel Jackson's force of barely a hundred men had seized the main Fifth Army objective and made the first penetration of the Gothic Line in the zone of the planned break-through.

The fact that the 1st Battalion advance had been slower than anticipated delayed the 3d Battalion's approach march. Two of its companies lost contact with each other, and the battalion failed to push forward aggressively. As a result, the 3d Battalion, which General Gerow had ordered to pass through the 1st Battalion at dawn, was not in position to exploit the success of Jackson's assault force. Gains elsewhere in front of Giogo Pass by the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry, and the 363d Infantry, on the left, and the 339th Infantry, on the right, had been negligible.<sup>38</sup>

#### *The Enemy Situation*

By the time that the 1st Battalion, 338th, launched its attack late on 16 September, enemy reserves available for defense of the Giogo Pass had been seriously depleted. The *1st Battalion of the 12th Parachute Regiment* radioed its lower units on Monte Altuzzo that the American attack had to be held at all costs because no more reserves could be sent. A loose chain of outposts was to be established that night to give warning of the attack.<sup>39</sup>

Besides small elements of the *4th Parachute Division* and a Lithuanian labor bat-

<sup>37</sup> Combat Inters with the following: 1st Lt Mack L. Brooks and T Sgt Willie L. Kingsley; Maj Lysle B. Kelley and Souder. See also 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl and 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 16-17 Sep 44.

<sup>38</sup> Combat Interv with Cole; 2d Bn, 338th Inf, AAR and Unit Jnls and 339th Inf AAR and Unit Jnls, 16-17 Sep 44; Strootman MS; 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 16-17 Sep 44.

<sup>39</sup> 338th IPW Rpts and Intel Sums, 16-18 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 Jnl and Rpts, 16-18 Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 16-18 Sep 44.

talion, which could not be relied upon, the only unit available was the *Grenadier Lehr Brigade*, the *I Parachute Corps* reserve, which was still on the way to the pass sector and would not be free much longer. For the defense of the Giogo Pass area, Generalleutnant Richard Heidrich, the *I Parachute Corps* commander, considered essential the retention of the *Lehr Brigade* for three or four more days. Heidrich's need for his reserve was outweighed by the desire of the *Army Group C* commander, Field Marshal Kesselring, to use it to reinforce *Tenth Army* on the Adriatic coast. Kesselring in fact had agreed to leave the *16th SS Panzer Grenadier Division* with *Fourteenth Army* only on the condition that the *Lehr Brigade* would be sent to *Tenth Army* on the nights of 18–19 and 19–20 September. Because of the Allied pressure on the Adriatic coast, Kesselring warned *Fourteenth Army* that the *Lehr Brigade* had to go to *Tenth Army* on schedule. *Fourteenth Army* accordingly directed the *I Parachute Corps* to put the *Lehr Brigade* in position where it could be disengaged quickly.<sup>40</sup>

During the night of 16 September more replacements were sent into the *12th Parachute Regiment's* sector. Obviously throwing in any troops that could be spared from other areas or the rear, the enemy committed small units piecemeal. At 2300 a machine gun platoon of about twenty-five men who had just come from a battle school at Cucciano joined the Monte Altuzzo defenses with three heavy machine guns. During the day both battalions of the *Grenadier Lehr Brigade*—except the horse-drawn elements—had arrived at the *I Parachute Corps*, and that night the *2d Battalion* of

the brigade moved into position on Monte Verruca and Monte Altuzzo, arriving about the same time that the *1st Battalion, 338th Infantry*, was pushing up the mountain. From a large group of 360 to 430 Lithuanians who had come from Southern France, approximately seventy-five replacements went into the Altuzzo sector the night of 16–17 September, twenty men going to each company of the *1st Battalion, 12th Regiment*. Although the Germans watched the Lithuanians closely, about forty of them took the advice of their Lithuanian lieutenant to desert at the first chance.

Against movement of replacements to forward positions, American artillery was most effective. One group of thirty-three replacements, for example, had thirteen casualties on the way from Firenzuola to positions in front of the Giogo Pass. Prisoners captured from the *6th Company, Grenadier Lehr Brigade*, said the heavy artillery fire demoralized their unit and inflicted heavy casualties as it moved into position on Monte Altuzzo during early morning of 17 September. According to the daily report of the *Fourteenth Army* on 16–17 September, American artillery, supported by unremitting attacks of Allied planes, was so heavy that on the east flank forward elements of the *Grenadier Lehr Brigade* negotiated the last kilometer to the front line only by crawling forward in small groups.<sup>41</sup>

Late in the afternoon of 16 September a battalion of the *178th Field Artillery Group* fired thirty-two rounds at an estimated twenty-five to forty German

<sup>40</sup> Entry of 16 Sep 44, *Fourteenth Army KTB 4*.

<sup>41</sup> 338th Inf IPW Rpts, Intel Sums, and Unit Jnl, 16–18 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 Jnl and G-2 Rpts, 16–18 Sep 44; Entries of 16–17 Sep 44, *Fourteenth Army KTB 4*.

troops along the Firenzuola highway northeast of the Giogo Pass, and the air observation post reported good coverage of the target area. The 403d Field Artillery Battalion reported it had caught approximately twenty-five Germans in the open 1,200 yards north of the pass and wiped them out with 108 rounds. During the evening, as 200 Germans moved south of Firenzuola, they were brought under artillery fire with undetermined results. Just before midnight another battalion of the 178th Field Artillery Group fired three unobserved TOT missions on Monte Verruca, Pian di Giogo, and the slopes along the highway between Monticelli and Monte Altuzzo.

From 2100 to 0500 a battalion of the 178th Field Artillery Group put forty rounds of unobserved harassing fire on suspected enemy artillery positions in the vicinity of Molinuccio. During the night another battalion fired on enemy guns along the highway north of the pass and in the vicinity of Rifredo. The heavy guns of the corps artillery placed harassing and TOT fire on selected areas along the highway. The 403d Field Artillery Battalion fired twenty-eight harassing and nine TOT missions on

areas around the pass as far away as Barco and Rifredo, and the 329th Field Artillery Battalion fired numerous observed missions on enemy pillboxes, mortars, and personnel.

About dawn on 17 September Colonel Jackson (1st Battalion, 338th) reported a general enemy withdrawal across his front,<sup>42</sup> but the report was premature. His troops had breached the enemy's main line of resistance and occupied positions in its rear, but the Germans still held on to main defenses along the upper part of the bowl, and the infiltration past these defenses had not caused the enemy to make wholesale withdrawals. Although weakened by four days of fighting, the enemy still intended to hold Monte Altuzzo by committing additional reinforcements. From radio intercepts the 338th Infantry learned that remnants of the *3d Battalion, 12th Parachute Regiment*, which had been relieved by the *Lehr Brigade* at 0300, would be sent to reinforce the *2d Battalion* on Monticelli and the *1st Battalion* on Monte Altuzzo.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 17 Sep 44; 403d FA Bn, 178th FA Gp, and 423d FA Gp Mission Rpts, 16-17 Sep 44; 329th FA Bn Unit Jnl, 16-17 Sep 44.

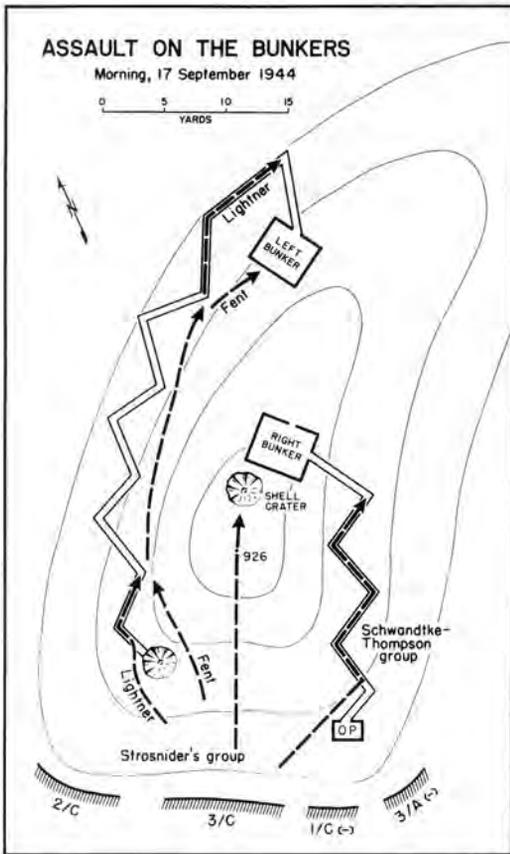
<sup>43</sup> Entry of 17 Sep 44, *Fourteenth Army KTB 4*; 338th Inf Intel Sums and Unit Jnl, 17 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 Rpt and G-2 Jnl, 17 Sep 44.

## CHAPTER V

# Counterattacks (17 September)

On Hill 926 the Germans had observa-  
tion posts and bunkers for housing rein-

forcements and counterattacking forces. (Map 17) A few yards south of the crest they had had two observation posts, which provided commanding views of the terrain to the east and west and as far south as Scarperia. They had three-inch slits on the south side for observation. By the time the 1st Battalion (-), 338th Infantry, reached Hill 926, the westernmost observation post had been reduced by heavy artillery fire to a gaping shell hole. Originally both observation posts had been connected by zigzag trenches, running on either side of the crest, to heavy bunkers behind the peak. Built of heavy timber, the bunkers were roofed with four layers of ten-inch logs, capped with dirt. The right bunker (looking from the Company C positions) was dug into the top of the peak and the left bunker into the rear slope some ten to fifteen yards away from and below the first. Since the bunkers could withstand direct hits by medium artillery, they provided good protection for counterattacking forces. Each position could accommodate as much as one platoon. Inside, the enemy had radio and telephone communication facilities with higher headquarters and subordinate units, including telephones to the observation posts. Beyond the crest of Monte Altuzzo all the way down the wooded slopes that ran northwest to the Giogo Pass and then onto higher ground, Hills 1029 and 1041, the enemy had con-



MAP 17

forcements and counterattacking forces.  
(Map 17) A few yards south of the crest

structed trenches and log bunkers that faced toward the highway.<sup>1</sup>

While the Germans on Hill 926 had not yet discovered the nighttime approach of the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, and while the 3d Battalion was strung out behind the 1st on the main Altuzzo ridge, the men of Companies A and C began to dig their holes on the hill's southern slope. Their entrenching tools made little headway in the rocky soil; after hard digging most of the holes were only twelve to eighteen inches deep, barely enough to cover a man's body and too shallow to provide much protection against shell fragments.

Lieutenant Krasman was checking the holes dug by his 3d Platoon (Company C) when his platoon sergeant, Sergeant Fent, reported the discovery of a dugout which he wanted the platoon leader to see. Taking with them Private Schwantke, the German-speaking scout, Krasman and Fent went to the near-by position, a well-camouflaged observation post (the right OP). After inspecting it briefly, they started to follow a connecting zigzag trench on the east side of Hill 926 to determine where the trench led. As they neared a bend in the trench, they spotted a German a short distance ahead. Schwantke called out for his surrender. The startled soldier darted back down the trench toward a bunker (the right bunker). Krasman and Fent fired and the German slumped to the ground. A quick investigation of the trench revealed two 50-mm. mortars, a machine gun, and several packs with food, convincing Krasman that more Germans must be on the northern slope of Hill 926.

<sup>1</sup> Combat Intervs and Notes of terrain reconnaissances with Krasman and Strosnider, and with all enlisted survivors in Co C, 338th Inf.

#### *Assault on the Right Bunker*

Instead of conducting a search by themselves, the three men returned for help from the southern slope. After Lieutenant Krasman called to his non-commissioned officers to hurry to the peak with some men, Sergeant Strosnider and about fifteen soldiers from Company C rushed quickly to the top of the mountain. Private Schwantke, followed by Sergeant Thompson (1st Platoon, Company C) and several of his men, dashed to the right side of the crest of the hill and moved down the zigzag trench. As the men neared the last bend, machine gun fire from near the entrance to the right bunker halted their movement. Several times Private Schwantke tried to go past the bend, but each time a machine gun burst drove him back. Lieutenant Krasman joined Sergeant Thompson in tossing hand grenades at the enemy machine gun and at other Germans below the north end of the trench. The grenades had no visible effect.

On the crest Sergeant Strosnider and his group continued for a few yards before taking cover in a large shell crater. Scarcely a yard away they saw the upper edge of a dirt-covered log bunker. There were doors on two sides but no firing aperture. The sound of the movement in the crater evidently carried quickly to the Germans inside the bunker, for they soon cracked the door opening to the north and began to toss concussion grenades toward the crater. Some near misses jarred the handful of men in the crater, but the only grenade to land inside was a dud.

While several of the attackers, including Sergeant Strosnider, remained for a few moments in the bomb crater, Pfc.

Elmer J. Kunze and Pfc. Lawrence Markey, Jr., worked their way along the western slope when suddenly a German wearing an American helmet popped from the entrance of the right bunker. For a moment both the German and the two Americans were startled. Markey threw his rifle to his shoulder, but hesitated a moment too long in squeezing the trigger. The German tossed a grenade first. Caught off guard, Markey and Kunze darted back a short distance where they met Sergeant Strosnider and asked him for hand grenades. With the squad leader's last grenade, the two men moved back on the west slope within a few yards of the right bunker. After a brief lull a German inside the bunker opened the door and again tossed grenades at the two men. Kunze promptly replied with his M-1. The German drew back inside, then opened the door at intervals and threw out grenades, slamming the door each time before Kunze could fire. Sgt. Harvey E. Jones and Pfc. Ernst H. Becker, both of the 2d Platoon (Company C), who had been on the left slope of Hill 926 near the crest, had moved toward the entrance of the right bunker, some ten feet from where Kunze was firing. Some of the German grenades landed within ten feet of Jones, and one slightly wounded Becker. The two men decided to try the right side of the bunker. After advancing halfway to the right zigzag trench they hit the ground as a German machine gun from the left front on Knob 3 north of Hill 926 sprayed the area. Jones and Becker crawled to the west side of the crest and found cover in the big shell crater which had once been the enemy's western observation post.

Back at the right bunker Markey paid little heed to the sound of the machine gun fire. While Kunze provided covering fire, Markey sought an opening into which he could toss a grenade. As he moved to the top of the bunker, a rifle bullet struck him in the right shoulder.

About the same time, Pvt. Anthony W. Houston, who was with Sergeant Strosnider's small group in the crater, put a grenade on his rifle and prepared to fire. Before he discharged the grenade, a machine gun burst from Knob 3 sliced into him. After the burst the others in the shell crater spotted Schwantke below, at the corner of the trench leading to the bunker. As Pfc. Kermit C. Fisher called out, "There's Schwantke; let's go over and help him," he raised his head above the crater to climb out. A bullet from the enemy machine gun struck him in the throat, and he fell back dead. The rest of the men in the crater crawled back slowly to the 3d Platoon's positions on the southern slope and to the right zigzag trench.

On the crest of Hill 926 and along the right zigzag trench, Sergeant Strosnider's men had failed to dislodge the Germans from the right bunker. Instead of rushing the position they had waited outside to grenade or shoot the enemy. In the end machine gun fire from Knob 3 had forced them to retire. The men with Lieutenant Krasman and Sergeant Thompson in the right zigzag trench, including Private Schwantke, had been stopped short of the bunker by machine gun fire from even closer range.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Jones, Becker, and Pfc John A. Palmer; Krasman, Schwantke, Thompson, Strosnider, Hinton, Markey, and Pugh.

*Assault on the Left Bunker*

During this action, Sergeant Fent (3d Platoon), Private Lightner, and Pvt. Peter Kubina, Jr., moved to the left flank on the west slope of the peak to locate enemy positions. Joining up in the zigzag trench west of the peak, Lightner and Fent pushed over the bush-covered slope, where they discovered the left bunker. A bespectacled German officer was on top. As Lightner moved toward the lower side of the bunker near the exit to the trench, Sergeant Fent climbed up and shot the German. The shot aroused the enemy in the right bunker, who began to throw grenades at Fent. Dashing back across the top of the bunker, the platoon sergeant dropped again into the left zigzag trench, followed quickly by Lightner. The two men then withdrew about halfway up the trench. They fired at the right bunker, but without success. Again they pushed forward in the trench toward the left bunker, Lightner returning to the entrance and Fent again climbing on top. Hearing voices inside, Fent called out in German for the men in the position to surrender.

As Lightner covered the entrance—a two-part door that folded together—a German rushed out, hurling hand grenades. Lightner fired back with his carbine as the grenades sailed overhead. The first shot hit the German in the stomach. Slumping to the ground, he reached for his pistol, but before he could draw it Lightner shot him again in the stomach and the hand, knocking the pistol away. To make sure the man was dead, Lightner pumped four more bullets into him. Picking up the pistol, Lightner withdrew to his firing position at the corner of the trench.

On top of the bunker Fent continued to call for the enemy inside to surrender, and after a few minutes the Germans began to file out, one by one. Urged on by the platoon sergeant, fourteen Germans, including a first sergeant, marched out. Lightner searched them, and the two men marched them back to the bomb crater that had been an enemy observation post.<sup>3</sup> When interrogated, the first sergeant said that the Germans were going to counterattack soon and would try to hold Monte Altuzzo at all costs. They had been surprised, he said; otherwise, they would never have let the Americans get past the MLR to the crest of the mountain. The German soldiers inside the bunker had wanted to surrender after they had first heard the Americans outside. Their lieutenant refused, and kept his men under control until he was put out of action by the American fire.<sup>4</sup>

*Return to the Bunker*

Lightner and Fent again started back to the left bunker, leaving the fourteen prisoners in the charge of other Company C men. Just before they reached the position, ten Germans led by a medical aid man came up to surrender. They had come either from Knob 3 to the north or from the wooded area on the north slope of Hill 926. After searching the prisoners, Lightner moved them back to the bomb crater while Fent covered the bunker.

As soon as Lightner returned, both he and Fent went inside the bunker, there to discover a large store of German equip-

<sup>3</sup> Combat Intervs with Krasman, Lightner, and Jones-Becker.

<sup>4</sup> Combat Interv with Becker.

ment: weapons, radios, telephones, and rations. A telephone rang while they were investigating. Sergeant Fent answered, but the German at the other end of the line, evidently recognizing the American accent, slammed down the phone. Sure that the incident had tipped off the Germans that Americans were in the bunker, Fent and Lightner shot holes in the radios and ripped up the telephone wires, so that the enemy could not use the communications if he reoccupied the position.

Fent and Lightner found fresh bread and cans of sardines, and ate greedily, for neither had tasted food since the day before. Gathering up other spoil, Lightner slipped several watches on his wrist and stuffed his belt full of knives. The two men spent about twenty minutes in the bunker before rejoining Company C on the southern slope of Hill 926.<sup>5</sup>

After the second group of prisoners was brought back to the south slope of the hill, Lieutenant Krasman, feeling that he could not spare men to take them to the rear, put the prisoners on the open slopes below the Company C fox-holes. Two men were ordered to guard them from their holes. Although the German first sergeant protested, Krasman warned that his men would shoot if the prisoners tried to escape; they would have to take the chance of getting shot by their own troops.<sup>6</sup>

When all the men who had been attacking the bunkers had returned, the platoon leaders made further dispositions to meet the counterattack predicted by the German sergeant. Attempting to round out the defense on the left flank, Sergeant Strosnider directed Private

Kubina, 3d Platoon automatic rifleman, into the left zigzag trench on the west side of the peak to cover straight down the trench, and farther to the left on the extreme left flank Pfc. Elmer Mostrom, another automatic rifleman, to cover toward Altuzzo's western ridge. Sergeant Strosnider himself took position in the pines on the western slope of the peak.<sup>7</sup>

The predicted enemy counterattack struck soon after the new dispositions had been made. (*Map 18*) Under a screen of long-range machine gun fire from Knob 3 to the north, a platoon or more of Germans advanced to within thirty yards of Company C's position. They tried to work around the flanks into or near the bunkers and then around the side of the left zigzag trench. Although relying primarily on rifles and hand grenades, they received direct support from 50-mm. mortars and machine guns. The main enemy effort came from the front and flanks, but Germans from the rear, who had been bypassed and still remained along the top of the bowl, also placed fire on the south slope of the hill.

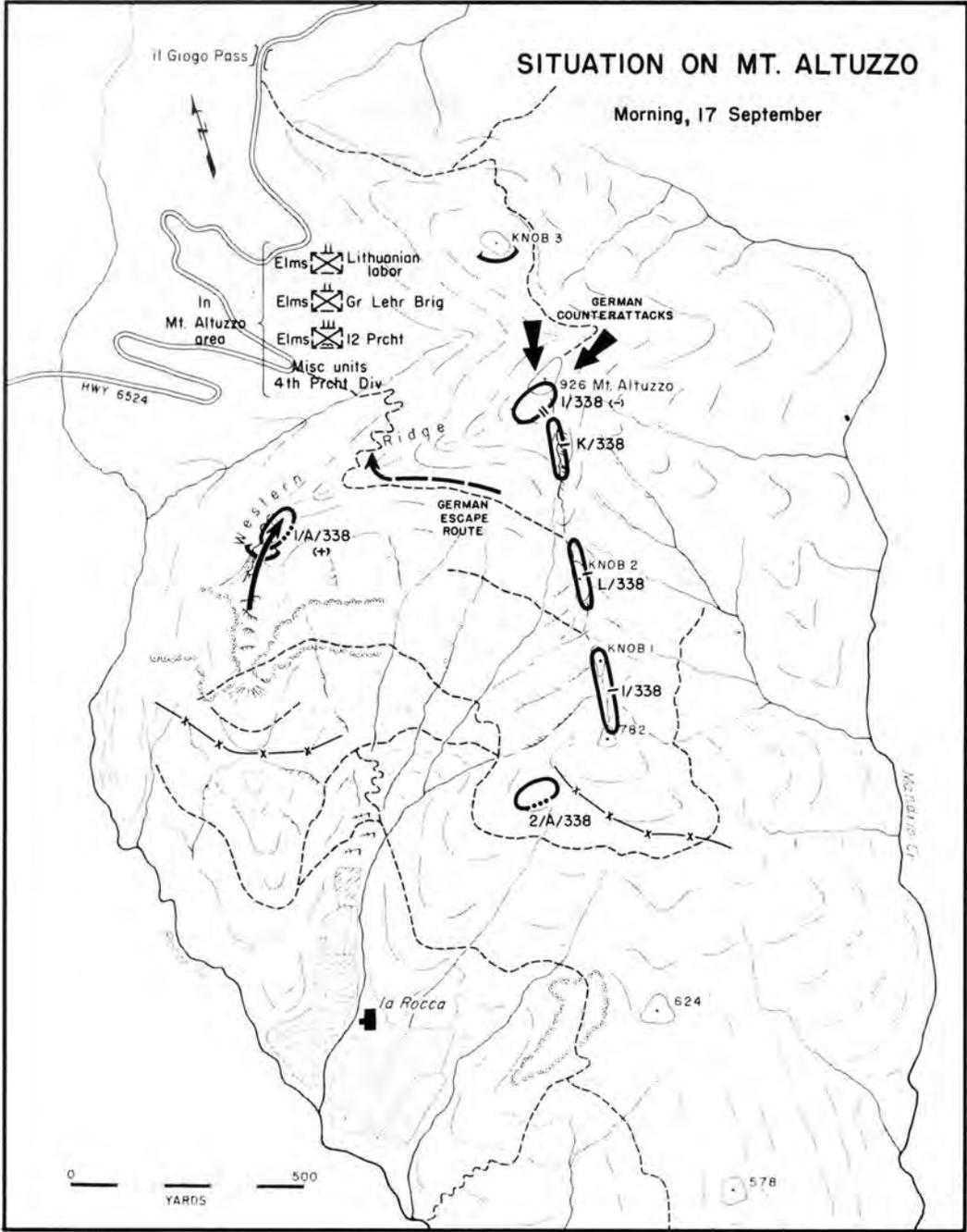
During the height of the counterattack, the 1st Squad, 3d Platoon, Company A, was moved to Company C's left flank to fill a gap. As in other counterattacks that followed, these men frequently had to stand or kneel to shoot, exposing themselves to fire. After what seemed like an eternity the men on Hill 926, aided by the harassing fire of supporting artillery, drove off the first counterattack.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Combat Intervs with Strosnider, Krasman, and Thompson; Notes of terrain reconnaissance with Krasman, Strosnider, and Thompson.

<sup>8</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Sgt John R. Maiorana, S Sgt Bruno G. Pegolatti, and S Sgt John Paludi; Krasman, Strosnider, Lightner, Hinton, Myshak, Colosimo-Grigsby-Albert, White, Pugh, and Pfc Francis A. Kaufman.

<sup>5</sup> Combat Interv with Lightner.

<sup>6</sup> Combat Intervs with Krasman.



MAP 18

*Search for Spoil*

With the counterattack ended, Privates Lightner and Kubina, in search of adventure and souvenirs, headed again toward the left bunker. As they crept north along the slope near the left zigzag trench, a German from the right bunker began to throw grenades. Although Kubina replied in kind, he was unable to lob his grenades into the bunker. Both men edged back to the left trench, while the German tossed two more concussion grenades. The first grenade did not explode; the second landed on Lightner's helmet, blowing off the camouflage net and knocking him to the ground. Kubina thought him dead and rolled him over. Lightner had only been dazed and, except for a throbbing headache, quickly recovered. Together the two men followed the trench to the left bunker.

They found it unoccupied, and after their search had produced several pocket watches Kubina looked out the entrance and saw eight Germans headed up the path toward them. The Germans were carrying machine gun parts and seemed to be moving in for another counterattack. As Kubina continued to watch, four of the Germans disappeared from view; the other four continued straight toward the bunker entrance. Discovering that his BAR was down to less than one full magazine, Kubina grabbed a loaded Italian carbine and opened fire, while Lightner fired with his own carbine. Their combined fire quickly killed the four Germans. A few minutes later, Lightner saw another German approaching the bunker door, but when the German saw the American he threw his P-38 pistol to the ground, raised his hands,

and shouted, "*Kamerad.*" As he stepped inside the door to surrender, Private Kubina's back was turned; Kubina wheeled around to see the German entering and was so startled that he shot quickly, hitting the German several times in the stomach. Kubina and Lightner helped him to a double-decker bunk and then resumed their search for spoil, taking turns at watching for the enemy. Before long their quest ended. Sergeant Fent came down to the bunker and shouted into the door for them to come out.<sup>9</sup>

*Action on the Western Peak*

Shortly after daylight Sergeant Van Horne's 1st Platoon, Company A, pushing to take the western ridge, had received word from Captain King by sound-powered telephone that Company C had taken Hill 926 and that the 1st Platoon should move on and occupy the peak of the western ridge. Before Sergeant Van Horne could get started, Captain King passed the word that a machine gun on the western peak was firing on the main Altuzzo ridge. He told Van Horne to knock out the gun at once.

Armed with a bazooka and submachine guns, Sergeants Van Horne, South, and Whary moved up the ridge, followed by the 1st Squad. Already South had spotted the Germans, who continued to fire intermittently toward the main ridge. Moving in single file, the sergeants approached the position. They noted that the machine gun was behind rocks and logs near the crest. It was connected with dugouts and bunkers farther up the

<sup>9</sup> Combat Interv with Lightner.

peak by a log-covered tunnel camouflaged with dirt and rocks. As they neared the position, the machine gun stopped firing, but the two gunners were lying flat on the ground at the entrance to the covered trench and observing intently toward the main ridge. So engrossed with the troops on the main ridge were the Germans that they did not see Van Horne and his men crawling toward them about ten feet away. The three sergeants were close upon the right rear of the machine gun before the Germans spotted them. The gunners hurriedly tried to swing the machine gun around, but before they could do so South killed them both with two bursts from his submachine gun.

Whary set out to investigate the covered trench. Moving along the top, he saw large shell holes, which either artillery or direct fire weapons had knocked in the trench, and dead German soldiers sprawled inside and outside. As he peered down one hole into the trench, he noticed a German lieutenant with a rifle. Standing directly above the enemy officer, Sergeant Whary killed him with a burst from his submachine gun.

After the remainder of Van Horne's platoon had reached the position and searched the dugouts and connecting trench, the platoon sergeant placed the men in a perimeter defense. One light machine gun was placed on the peak, and the 60-mm. mortar just south of the peak.

Before S. Sgt. William H. Kohler, machine gun section leader, and Pfc. James F. Reid, machine gun squad leader, found suitable positions for their weapons, they heard the blast of a motorcycle on the highway to the north. Both men opened fire at the sound. When the motorcycle came into view moving

fast toward the first house on the highway before the first switchback, Reid stood up and fired, felling the German driver with one shot from his carbine. The motorcycle bounded over the hillside. Sergeant Whary, lying near the machine gunners at the top of the peak, noticed movement in a pile of brush on the north side of the ridge. While he hesitated momentarily before firing, a German noncommissioned officer rose from the brush, and Whary cut him down with a well-aimed burst.

Thus, by midmorning of 17 September, the 1st Platoon (Company A) had taken its objective, Altuzzo's western peak, after one minor skirmish. One German machine gun crew had been killed, its weapon put out of action, and a German officer and noncom also killed. It was apparent from what Sergeant Van Horne and his men saw that most of the enemy on the peak had already been killed by shellfire or had withdrawn to other positions. The dead who littered the hill bore testimony to the effectiveness of the supporting fires.

Early in the morning, after the haze had lifted, Sergeant Van Horne could see the main force of the 1st Battalion on the south slope of Hill 926. During the day, he and Lieutenant Krasman kept abreast of each other's activities by telephone communication with their respective company command posts.

The principal mission remaining for Company A's 1st Platoon and its attached mortars and machine guns was to hold the western ridge and fire on the enemy who were still to the rear of the 1st Battalion around the upper slopes of the Altuzzo bowl between the two ridges. During the day, especially in the afternoon, scattered groups of Germans tried

to break out of these positions to a path leading from the western slopes of the mountain north toward the Giogo Pass. With good observation on the escape route which was completely open at one point Van Horne's force picked off fifteen to twenty Germans during the day. The Americans received sporadic fire from the western slope of the main ridge where small groups of Germans still held out.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Action at Hill 926*

About a platoon of Germans moved in at approximately 1000 for a second counterattack against the men of Companies A and C on Hill 926. Although probably a little weaker than the first attack, the second was nevertheless made with vigor. The enemy relied on 50-mm. mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire. Just before the Germans opened up, Sergeant Strosnider, on the left flank, saw a machine gun squad of five men coming through a small space in the tall pines toward the left zigzag trench. Before he could fire, the leading German, who was carrying the machine gun, moved out of sight, but Sergeant Strosnider fired his M-1 at the assistant gunner, killing him instantly. His comrades then dropped their weapons and ammunition and ran back in the direction from which they had come.

As the counterattack opened, other men of Company C placed effective small arms fire on the enemy. Private Mostrom, BAR man, shot one man who he thought was an Italian. Private Bury and other riflemen in positions near the pine trees on the left fired down the slopes

to the west between the two ridges on Germans trying to infiltrate the left flank.

Soon after Sergeant Strosnider had routed the approaching German machine gun squad, enemy machine gun fire began to strike the left-flank positions, clipping the bushes around the handful of Americans. Private Mostrom and Pvt. Bruce Cohn, with BAR's, and Pfc. John Paludi, with an M-1 rifle, returned the fire. When Private Cohn was hit in the ankle by a .30-caliber bullet, Lieutenant Brumbaugh told him to jump into a hole on top of Sergeant Strosnider. Another German bullet struck Cohn's back, which still protruded above the level of the ground. The men in the right zigzag trench, having run out of their own grenades, began to use enemy grenades lying close by, and the surviving Germans soon made a hurried withdrawal.

The slight respite only gave the 1st Battalion troops on Hill 926 time to feel their thirst more keenly. They had no water other than the meager supply taken from Rocca Creek the day before, and many canteens were completely dry. Up to this time the Americans on the hill had suffered about fifteen casualties; the wounded were in slit trenches under the care of medical aid men. In the hope of preventing another counterattack, Lieutenant Krasman and Sergeant Strosnider combined as reporter and observer to direct artillery fire on the area north of the mountain's crest.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Enemy Pockets and the 3d Battalion*

While the 1st Battalion on the crest of Monte Altuzzo assaulted the bunkers and

<sup>10</sup> Combat Intervs with South-Whary, Kohler-Reid, Van Horne, King, and Souder; Notes of terrain reconnaissances with Van Horne, King, and Souder.

<sup>11</sup> Combat Intervs with Krasman, Strosnider, Maiorana, Pegolatti, Paludi, Brumbaugh, Hinton, and Thompson.



*GERMAN MATERIEL. American troops passing a knocked-out armored tracked vehicle (above) on the road near the Giogo Pass, and examining dual-purpose machine guns and radio equipment (below) in a dugout position.*



repelled German counterattacks, the main body of the 3d Battalion was still stretched out down the main Altuzzo ridge, under enemy fire from the flanks. Pockets of Germans, still holding out around the top of the Altuzzo bowl, on Monticelli, and on Monte Verruca, raked the battalion with automatic weapons.

Despite the fire, the 1st Platoon, Company K, which was leading the column, worked up on the right flank of Company C on the south slope of Hill 926 during the morning, and one squad took up positions in the right zigzag trench with a handful of men from Company C. During the remainder of the morning and into the afternoon the rest of Company K was strung out in a column behind the 1st Platoon. The company suffered six casualties when a single mortar shell exploded in the midst of a platoon conference, killing the platoon sergeant and wounding the platoon leader, the platoon guide, and the three squad leaders. By 0900 Company K had sustained ten casualties in all.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the morning and early afternoon General Gerow and Colonel Mikkelsen, who had sufficiently recovered from his indisposition to take a more active part in the operation, kept their fingers on the pulse of the 3d Battalion. During frequent long visits to the 3d Battalion CP they badgered Major Kelley, insisting that he pass his troops through the 1st Battalion and attack beyond the crest of Monte Altuzzo to Knob 3. Neither Gerow nor Mikkelsen was satisfied that the 3d Battalion was exerting itself to close up to the forward positions of 1st Battalion, or that Major Kelley was aggressively pushing his rifle

companies to carry out his mission. Before launching his attack, Kelley argued, he wanted his troops to clear out the pockets of resistance which, Company K reported, were holding up its advance. Kelley ordered Company I, in battalion reserve, to send out one platoon to do the job. The platoon went out but failed.<sup>13</sup> The main body of the 3d Battalion stayed below the crest of Monte Altuzzo, well short of the assault elements of the 1st Battalion on Hill 926.

Not until midafternoon did Major Kelley apply enough pressure to get his troops started. At 1518 he notified Company L that smoke would be placed in its area so that it could move. A few minutes later, after the 339th Infantry on the right flank reported that large numbers of Germans were withdrawing through the Giogo Pass, Kelley ordered Company L to move ahead immediately. Company M was directed to put fifty rounds of mortar fire on the withdrawing troops, and chemical mortars were requested to lay smoke for Company L's movement. At 1601 the Company I commander reported that the enemy was withdrawing on the north slope of Hill 926. As a result of the smoke-screen cover and German movement out of the area, all of Company K was soon able to reach the leading elements of the 1st Battalion, pass through them, and jump off toward Knob 3 beyond Hill 926.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Company K Attacks Knob 3*

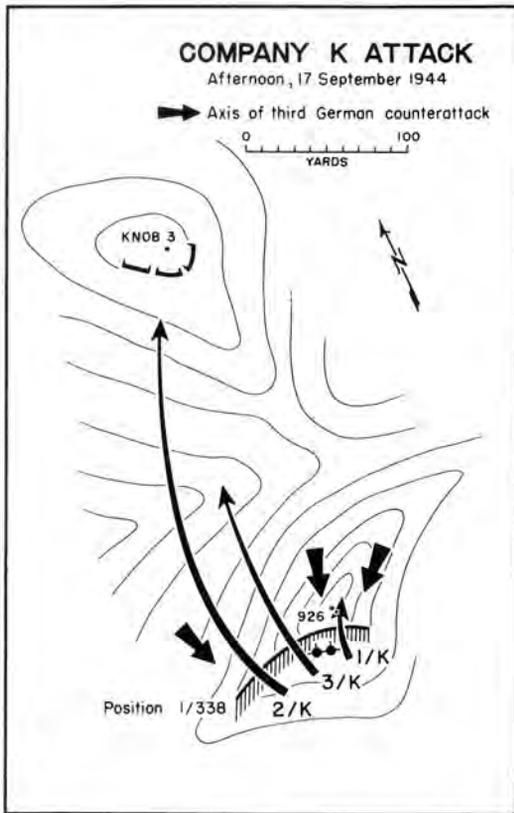
Late in the afternoon, with its three rifle platoons abreast, the 2d and 3d

<sup>13</sup> Interv with Kelley, 1 Aug 45; Interv with Gerow, 3 Dec 48; 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 17 Sep 44.

<sup>14</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Peterson, Brooks, Krasman, Strosnider, Kelley, and Gerow. See also 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 17 Sep 44.

<sup>12</sup> Combat Intervs with Brooks and Pfc Harold W. Peterson; 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 17 Sep 44.

Platoons going west of the crest of Hill 926 and the 1st Platoon east of the crest, Company K attacked toward Knob 3. (*Map 19*)



MAP 19

Although the enemy had made some withdrawals in the area, these evidently did not include troops on the north slopes of Hill 926 or on Knob 3. After moving only a few yards, the 1st Platoon on the right was halted by fire from the vicinity of the right bunker. Elements of the 2d Platoon on the left pushed almost to the crest of Knob 3 despite stiff enemy resistance and harassing fire from both the left and right bunkers to

their rear. The 3d Platoon in the center reached a draw between the two hills where fire from the bunkers halted the advance. With the enemy threatening to cut off both the advance platoons, the company commander ordered a withdrawal to the starting point.<sup>15</sup>

The withdrawal came none too soon. Striking from the front and from both flanks, the Germans made a determined effort—their third counterattack—to encircle the troops on Hill 926. The enemy came in close, hurling hand grenades into the right zigzag trench and causing some casualties. The 1st Battalion (–) and Company K fought back with small arms and hand grenades, but the supply of grenades was soon exhausted. Still the Germans came on.

During the height of the counterattack, Lieutenant Ritchey, Weapons Platoon leader (Company C), cradling a machine gun, ran forward to the men in the right zigzag trench. Setting up the machine gun at the first bend in the trench, while near-by riflemen held ammunition belts for him, Ritchey unloaded several bursts at the attackers. The Germans replied with grenades which landed so close that Lieutenant Ritchey and the other men in the trench were forced to withdraw to less exposed positions on the southern slopes a few yards to the rear.

On the left flank the men of Company C came under German machine gun fire which began before and continued through the third counterattack. As the enemy attempted to work around the left flank between the crests of the two ridges, many Company C men exhausted their

<sup>15</sup> Combat Inters with Brooks, Peterson, Kingsley, and S Sgt John S. Warzala; 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnl, 17 Sep 44.

ammunition in trying to halt the attack. During the counterattack a German tank moved around in the draw north of Altuzzo's western peak and south of the highway, firing ineffectively toward Hill 926.

As soon as Company K's platoons, which had been attacking toward Knob 3, had returned to the south slope and the enemy counterattack had begun, the Company K commander, 1st Lt. Mack L. Brooks, directed his 60-mm. mortar men to fire at the enemy. The Company K mortar men checked to see that the riflemen were in their holes and then began lobbing shells some forty to fifty yards in front of Company C. Firing almost straight up into the air, the mortars put heavy concentrations on the enemy to the front and right front. After the first shells landed, the attacking Germans moved to the left. The mortar section then adjusted fire and showered the enemy with an effective, close-in concentration. As usual the supporting artillery put down timely concentrations on the Germans. Between 1700 and 1800 the 403d Field Artillery Battalion alone fired three missions totaling 277 rounds north of Monte Altuzzo's crest. The combination of artillery, mortars, and small arms proved too much for the Germans, and they abandoned the counterattack. Against the strongest enemy effort to recapture Hill 926 the little band of Americans had held firm and the way was now cleared for moving on to Knob 3.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Combat Intervs with Thompson, Hinton, Ritchey, Krasman, Strosnider, Brooks, Kingsley, and all survivors still in Co C, 338th Inf, 1-10 Apr 45; 338th Inf and 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnls, 17 Sep 44; 403d FA Bn Battle Mission Rpt, 17 Sep 44.

### *The 3d Battalion Mops Up*

After the last counterattack against Hill 926 had been repulsed, the 3d Battalion, 338th Infantry, assumed responsibility for holding the crest of Monte Altuzzo and pushing on to the north. A twenty-five man patrol from Company K went out after dark and found the right bunker on the north slope unoccupied. When this information was transmitted to the rear, new orders were issued for Companies I and L to continue the attack to take Knob 3.

Company I experienced difficulty in finding its way in the darkness, but Company L jumped off successfully and advanced toward Knob 3. Its first opposition came from a small entrenched enemy force at the top of the objective, but this group's three machine guns were quickly knocked out. Several prisoners who were taken directed the men of Company L to two dugouts close by and assisted them in calling for the occupants to surrender. In the attack and mopping up of Knob 3 the company captured sixty-four prisoners in all at the cost of one man wounded and two killed. Shortly after dawn on 18 September, Knob 3, the last remaining part of Monte Altuzzo, was securely in American hands.

On the morning of 18 September the 2d Battalion, 338th Infantry, advanced along the highway and occupied high ground north of the highway between the Giogo Pass and Monticelli. During the day Companies I and L of the 3d Battalion continued their advance to the town of Barco, 1,600 yards north of the Giogo Pass.<sup>17</sup> (*See Map IV.*)

<sup>17</sup> Combat Intervs with the following: Sgt Meredith R. Jenkins; Brooks, Kingsley, *et al.* See also 2d Bn and 3d Bn, 338th Inf, Unit Jnls, 17-18 Sep 44.

*Break-Through on the Flanks*

After the 338th Infantry had reached the crest of Monte Altuzzo, other units of II Corps completed the break-through by seizing the peaks on either side. To the east, elements of the 339th Infantry (85th Division) secured all of Monte Verruca by noon of 17 September. Farther to the east, on the 85th Division's right wing, the 337th Infantry captured Monte Pratone during the afternoon. West of Highway 6524 and the Gigo Pass, the 91st Division fought hard throughout the night of 16–17 September and the day of 17 September to reach the crest of Monticelli in the afternoon. The last German resistance on the mountain ended by the morning of 18 September.<sup>18</sup>

Monte Altuzzo had been captured and the Gothic Line breached. The unit which had battled to reach the crest of the mountain, the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, had sustained 223 casualties. In repelling German counterattacks once Hill 926 was taken, the battalion had suffered twenty-nine casualties — two killed and twenty-seven wounded, all in Company C except two wounded in Company A. The 3d Battalion, which had figured briefly in the abortive effort to push to Knob 3 north of Hill 926 and the battle to hold the southern slope of Hill 926 and then had captured Knob 3, had sustained thirty-eight casualties, including three killed, four missing in action, and thirty-one wounded. Most of the 3d Battalion's losses had been sustained while it was stretched out to the rear of the 1st Battalion on the main

Altuzzo ridge. During the five-day struggle to take and hold Monte Altuzzo, including Knob 3, the 338th Infantry had suffered a total of 290 casualties—252 in the 1st Battalion and thirty-eight in the 3d—a figure that could not be considered excessive in view of the importance of Monte Altuzzo to Fifth Army break-through plans.<sup>19</sup>

In the battle of Monte Altuzzo supporting units had played major roles. Artillery, tanks, tank destroyers, chemical mortars, and the tactical air force had all made important contributions to weakening the German positions and hampering movement of reinforcements to the threatened area. Several hits had been scored on enemy bunkers on the mountain, the tanks alone claiming to have knocked out seven bunkers during 17 September. The effectiveness of the hits undoubtedly was exaggerated, because light and even medium artillery would not penetrate the heavy bunkers. Far more effective in the struggle had been accurate, well-placed artillery time fire, which killed many Germans while they were in open emplacements or moving into position.

As indicated by the large number of enemy dead on the upper slopes of Monte Altuzzo, American shellfire had served to disperse and disorganize the Germans and to inflict heavy casualties. For four days and nights, prisoner reports indicated, artillery fire and air support had prevented front-line troops from receiving supplies of food and water. Propaganda leaflets, fired by supporting artillery, proved less effective. Although many enemy soldiers had read these leaflets—

<sup>18</sup> 85th Div G-2 Rpts, G-2 and G-3 Jnls, 17-18 Sep 44; 337th Inf and 339th Inf Unit Jnls, 17-18 Sep 44; 91st Div G-3 Jnl, 17-18 Sep 44; Strootman MS; Muller Notes.

<sup>19</sup> 1st Bn, 338th Inf, Morning Rpts, 17-18 Sep 44; 338th Inf, Casualty Rpts, Sep 44.

which included safe-conduct pamphlets and sheets headed, "Why fight in Italy when the Allies are in Germany?"—their morale had not been appreciably weakened.

Besides killing and wounding a large number of Germans, the 338th Infantry captured many prisoners. Although an accurate breakdown of prisoner of war figures is not possible, probably close to 200 men were captured by the regiment. By 1200 on 18 September seventy-three prisoners had passed through the regimental cage since the start of the Gothic Line offensive, and during the twenty-four hours ending at 1200, 19 September, the total rose to 212. In view of the time required to process the prisoners and send them to the rear, the 338th Infantry's action was probably responsible for the capture of most if not all of them.<sup>20</sup>

The basic point was that the 338th Infantry and its supporting units had left the Germans with inadequate force to man their positions or to maintain a prolonged defense. The *12th Parachute Regiment*, as well as the reserves of the *4th Parachute Division*, had suffered heavy losses. Men of the Lithuanian labor battalion had deserted in large numbers. Even the *2d Battalion, Grenadier Lehr Brigade*, the *I Parachute Corps* reserve, had lost many men from artillery fire while moving into position on Altuzzo and Verruca and had not proved able to hold the defenses. Even had it had no casualties, the battered *Grenadier Lehr Brigade*

could no longer be employed in the Gothic Line positions: Field Marshal Kesselring, the commander of *Army Group C*, had ordered the unit shifted to the *Tenth Army* to aid the hard-pressed troops along the east coast. When the *Grenadier Lehr Brigade* left the area, no reserves remained to recapture that part of the Gothic Line which had been lost. By 1920 on 17 September *Fourteenth Army* had directed the *I Parachute Corps* to abandon its positions and build a new defense in the heights beyond Firenzuola. Before midnight, 17 September, the forward troops of the *12th Regiment* had received the order to withdraw.<sup>21</sup>

By the morning of 18 September, the troops of II Corps had seized an area seven miles in width on either side of the Giogo Pass. The Germans, hard hit by heavy losses and the lack of reserves, were in full retreat toward the heights north of Firenzuola and, in the days following the break-through, offered only light rear guard resistance as II Corps drove north to reach the Santerno River valley on 22 September. The rapid movement exploiting the decisive breakthrough in front of Giogo Pass completely outflanked the strongly fortified Futa Pass, which fell the same day without heavy fighting. By that time the American II and British 13 Corps of Fifth Army had broken completely through the Gothic Line on a thirty-mile front and were ready to continue the attack toward the Po Valley.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> 752d Tk Bn, 805th TD Bn, 178th FA Gp, and 423d FA Gp AAR's, Sep 44; 338th Inf Unit Jnl, 17 Sep 44; 329th FA Bn Arty Jnl, 17 Sep 44; 85th Div G-2 and G-3 Jnls, IPW Rpts, Intel Sums, and G-2 Rpts, 13-18 Sep 44; all Combat Inters and terrain reconnaissances; 338th Inf IPW Rpts and Intel Sums, 13-18 Sep 44.

<sup>21</sup> 338th Inf IPW Rpts and Intel Sums, Sep 44; Entries of 15-17 Sep 44, *Fourteenth Army KTB 4*; 85th Div G-2 Jnls and Div Arty Rpt, Sep 44; 339th Inf AAR, Sep 44.

<sup>22</sup> Fifth Army G-3 Jnl and Files, 18-23 Sep 44; II Corps G-3 Jnl and Supporting Files, Sep 44.



**BREAK-THROUGH.** *Troops of the 338th Infantry advancing along Highway 6524 near the Giogo Pass on the morning of 18 September.*

# Order of Battle

## *85th Infantry Division*

Headquarters, 85th Infantry Division

Headquarters, Special Troops

Headquarters Company

785th Ordnance Light Maintenance Company

85th Quartermaster Company

85th Signal Company

Military Police Platoon

85th Infantry Division Band

85th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, Mechanized

310th Engineer Combat Battalion (less Companies A, B, and C)

85th Division Artillery, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery

403d Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)

310th Medical Battalion (less Companies A, B, and C)

337th Regimental Combat Team

337th Infantry Regiment

328th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)

Company A, 310th Engineer Combat Battalion

Company A, 310th Medical Battalion

338th Regimental Combat Team

338th Infantry Regiment

329th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)

Company B, 310th Engineer Combat Battalion

Company B, 310th Medical Battalion

339th Regimental Combat Team

339th Infantry Regiment

910th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)

Company C, 310th Engineer Combat Battalion

Company C, 310th Medical Battalion

## *Attached to 85th Division*

752d Tank Battalion (Medium)

805th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled)

84th Chemical Battalion (4.2-inch Mortar)

105th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion

*In Support of 85th Division*

Headquarters, II Corps Artillery

178th Field Artillery Group

178th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)

248th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)

339th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)

939th Field Artillery Battalion (4.5-inch Gun)

423d Field Artillery Group

697th Field Artillery Battalion (240-mm. Howitzer and 8-inch Gun)

698th Field Artillery Battalion (240-mm. Howitzer and 8-inch Gun)

985th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Gun)

*91st Infantry Division*

363d Regimental Combat Team

363d Infantry Regiment

347th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)

Company C, 316th Engineer Combat Battalion

Company C, 316th Medical Battalion

# Bibliographical Note

Alone among the studies in this volume, "Break-through at Monte Altuzzo" was written by the historian who obtained the basic source material, combat interviews with more than 150 survivors of the action. The first interviews were conducted during ten days in late November, 1944, when the 338th Infantry was in a rest center. In early December more interviews with Lt. Col. Willis O. Jackson and the rifle company commanders of the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry, were conducted on the Altuzzo terrain. From 20 to 25 December 1944, the author conducted additional interviews in the rest center and visited the scene of the battle with all surviving platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and leading squad leaders of the 1st Battalion. The author spent an additional week in the Altuzzo vicinity in February 1945, in company with an artist and a draftsman.

When a preliminary narrative revealed gaps in the material, the author visited the 338th Infantry again from 20 March to 14 April 1945, conducting extensive interviews with all surviving enlisted men in Companies B and C and with some officers who had not yet been interviewed. During this period he made two additional reconnaissances of the Altuzzo battlefield, one with Capt. Maurice E. Peabody, Jr., Company B commander, and several of his noncommissioned officers, and the other with all survivors of Company C. Interviews with personnel of the 363d Infantry and the 2d and 3d

Battalions, 338th Infantry, and with 338th Infantry and 85th Division commanders and staff officers were conducted from time to time during the entire period. Combat interviews on this operation are filed in the Office of the Chief of Military History (formerly the Historical Division, Special Staff, U. S. Army).

Unit records were useful for some additional material and for checking statements in the interviews. All three battalions of the 338th Infantry wrote relatively full After Action Reports. The 2d and 3d Battalions and the 338th Infantry kept fair unit journals of messages sent and received, while the 1st Battalion kept only a sketchy journal which contains no record of messages and is of little value. Unit journals and supporting papers of adjacent units and the 85th Division provided the basic material for accounts of those units. Unit records were likewise the primary source for artillery, tank, tank destroyer, chemical, and engineer actions. The journals, mission reports, and After Action Reports of the artillery battalions and groups are relatively good. The exception is the records of the 329th Field Artillery Battalion, which are meager, but this is largely compensated for by interviews with 1st Lt. Dawson L. Farber, Jr., liaison officer with the 1st Battalion, 338th Infantry. All unit records to include Fifth Army were examined and are in the possession of the Historical Rec-

ords Section, Office of the Adjutant General.

The basic source for German material was the text volume of *Fourteenth Army War Diary Number 4 (Armeoberkommando 14, Kriegstagebuch Nr. 4)*, covering the period of 1 July to 30 September 1944. It is filed in the German Military Documents Section, Departmental Records Branch, Office of the Adjutant General. Although the *4th Parachute Division* records were not captured, much reliable information about the lower German units was obtained from radio intercepts recorded in 338th Infantry and 85th Infantry Division records. Prisoner of war interrogations provided considerable information about the nature of enemy dispositions, the condition of the combat elements, and the effect of American artillery fire.

Primary sources for air material were the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces Daily Central Mediterranean Operation Summaries for 1 to 20 September 1944, and the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force Intelligence and Operations Summaries for the same period. Air records are in the Historical Archives, Historical Division, Air University Library, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

Postwar interviews to clear up minor points in the narrative were conducted by the author with three officers who participated in the operation. These may be found in OCMH.

A unit history of the 363d Infantry was published in 1948, but was not used in the preparation of this study. Instead, the author used *History of the 363d Infantry*, a manuscript by 1st Lt. Ralph E. Strootman, 363d Infantry historian, which was the basis for the published history.

*Complete List of Combat Interviews*

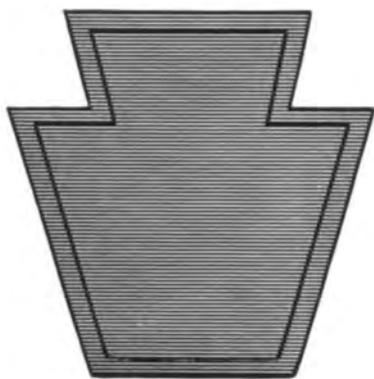
- I. 338th Infantry
  - A. Regimental Headquarters
    - Col William H. Mikkelsen, CO; Lt Col Marion P. Boulden, Ex Off; Maj Robert E. Baskin, Jr., S-2; Capt Franklin M. Ludwig, S-1
  - B. 1st Battalion
    1. Battalion Headquarters
      - Lt Col Willis O. Jackson, CO; Maj Vernon A. Ostendorf, Ex Off; Capt Thomas M. Quisenberry, S-3; 1st Lt William Alston, S-2; T Sgt Wayne Brown, sergeant major
    2. Company A
      - a. Company Headquarters
        - Capt Robert A. King, CO
      - b. First Platoon
        - Capt King and 1st Lt John R. MacMinn, Jr., plat ldr; Lt MacMinn; 2d Lt Nelson B. Van Horne, plat sgt; S Sgts David C. South, Harry B. Whary, Herbert H. Davis, and William J. Nowakowski; Pfc James R. Hickman
      - c. Second Platoon
        - 1st Lt Harry R. Gresham, plat ldr; T Sgt Adron G. Stevens, plat sgt; S Sgts Walter J. Michalek, Jr., Ira W. Wilson, Edmond H. Carter, Stanley G. Hillier, and Kenneth C. Pickens
      - d. Third Platoon
        - T Sgt Darius L. Daughtry, plat sgt, S Sgt Joseph K. Colosimo, S Sgt Gordon K. Grigsby, and Pfc Hubert G. Albert; Pfc James J. Burkiewa; Pfc Albert

- e.* Weapons Platoon  
T Sgt Thomas A. Culpepper, plat sgt; T Sgt William H. Kohler and S Sgt James F. Reid
3. Company B
- a.* Company Headquarters  
Capt Maurice E. Peabody, Jr., CO; 1st Sgt Volley Casey; Pfc George H. Friesenborg; Pfc John C. Jones
- b.* First Platoon  
2d Lt William J. Kelsey, acting plat ldr, and 1st Sgt Charles J. Dozier; Sgt Dozier; T Sgt Louis S. Campbell; S Sgt James M. Burrows; S Sgt Joseph T. Barrow; Sgt Nelson L. Simmons; Pfc Arley Perkey; Pfc Marvin Cobb; Pfc Luther Ingram; Sgt Howard C. Pecor; Pfc James W. Wright; Pfc Joseph T. Lamonica and Pvt Edward J. Lazowski; Pfc James O. Brooks
- c.* Second Platoon  
T Sgt Herman Ledford; S Sgt Hugh C. Brown and S Sgt Gamelil Mullins; Sgt Mullins; Sgt Albert A. Lusk, Pfc William C. Brodeur, and Pfc William Alberta; Pvt Idelmo Salmestrelli; Pfc John E. Catlett; Pfc David R. Leon; Pfc Albert E. Wilson; Pfc Willie L. Guy; Pfc Leslie N. Albritton; Pfc Jules D. Distel; Pfc Alton Mos; Pvt George Itzkowitz; Pvt Thomas H. Sherman
- d.* Third Platoon  
1st Lt Clemens M. Hanks, plat ldr; S Sgt William E. Ford; S Sgt David N. Seiverd; T/4 Joseph F. Bertani; Pfc Patrick H. McDonald, Jr.; Pfc John Campbell
- e.* Weapons Platoon  
T Sgt Arthur O. Tomlet; S Sgt John D. Brice and Sgt Lester F. Wise; Pfc Arthur E. Collins, Pfc John S. Ptazkiewicz, and Pfc Donald Brouthers; Pfc Ptazkiewicz; Pfc Collins and Sgt Alvin L. West
4. Company C
- a.* Company Headquarters  
Capt Redding C. Souder, Jr., CO.
- b.* First Platoon  
1st Lt William S. Corey, plat ldr; 2d Lt William A. Thompson, plat sgt; S Sgt James O. Orr; S Sgt Clifford P. Marx; S Sgt Kyle F. Priestley; Sgt Loyd J. Duffey; S Sgt Kenneth L. Fankell; Pfc Randolph H. Bishop; Pfc Earl B. Gray; Pfc Richard M. Feeney; Pfc Boyd A. West; Sgt Albert C. Borum, Jr.; Pfc Michael Burja; Sgt George Balog; Pfc Louis J. Hart; Pfc Lawrence F. Markey, Jr.; Pfc Jackson P. Bagley; Pfc Truett J. May; Pfc Robert H. Kessell
- c.* Second Platoon  
1st Lt David M. Brumbaugh, plat ldr; Sgt Tony L. White, plat sgt; S Sgt Robert W. Kistner, Jr.; S Sgt Harvey E. Jones and Pfc Ernst H. Becker; S Sgt John Paludi; S Sgt Bruno G. Pegolatti; Pfc Francis A. Kaufman; Sgt John R. Maiorana; Pfc Robert H. Adams

- d.* Third Platoon  
 1st Lt Albert J. Krasman, plat ldr; 2d Lt Walter M. Strosnider; T Sgt Pat H. Hinton; T Sgt Hinton and Pfc Alfred D. Lightner; Pfc Lightner and Pfc Carl Schwantke; Pfc Lightner; Pfc Walter W. Iverson; Pfc John K. Britton; Pfc Loman B. Pugh; Pfc Frank Bury; Pfc John A. Palmer; Pfc Paul Myshak
- e.* Weapons Platoon  
 1st Lt Merlin E. Ritchey, plat ldr; 2d Lt Zealin W. Russell, plat sgt; T Sgt Dale E. Burkholder
5. Company D  
 Capt Clarence W. Brown, CO; T Sgt Rayford H. McCormack, 1st Plat sgt; 1st Lt John R. Ciccarella and 1st Lt Robert P. McGraw, mortar sec ldrs, and 1st Lt Lawrence S. Carpenter, Mortar Plat ldr
- C. 2d Battalion  
 Lt Col Robert H. Cole, CO
- D. 3d Battalion  
 1. Company K  
 1st Lt Mack L. Brooks, CO; T Sgt Willie L. Kingsley; S Sgt John S. Warzala; Pfc Harold W. Peterson
2. Company L  
 T Sgt Meredith R. Jenkins
- II. 363d Infantry  
 3d Battalion  
 Capt Thomas M. Draney, CO, Co L; 1st Lt Ralph E. Strootman, historian, 3d Bn, 363d Inf (later historian, 363d Inf)
- III. 85th Infantry Division  
 Division Headquarters  
 Maj Gen John B. Coulter, CG; Brig Gen Lee S. Gerow, asst div comdr



# OBJECTIVE: SCHMIDT



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*the story of the 112th In-  
fantry Regiment of the 28th  
Infantry Division in the bat-  
tle for Schmidt, Germany.*

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by CHARLES B. MACDONALD

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## CHAPTER I

# Attack on Vossenack (2 November)

By October 1944, the First United States Army in Western Europe had ripped two big holes in the Siegfried Line, at Aachen and east of Roetgen.<sup>1</sup> (*Map V*) Having captured Aachen, the army was next scheduled to cross the Roer River and reach the Rhine. It planned to make its main effort toward Ducren in the zone of VII Corps south and east of Aachen and thence toward Bonn on the Rhine. But east of Roetgen, where the 9th Infantry Division had breached the Siegfried Line and parts of a forest mass known generally as the Huertgen Forest,<sup>2</sup> V Corps was first to launch a limited flank operation. The 28th Infantry Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. Norman D. Cota, was ordered to make the V Corps attack; its initial objective was to be the crossroads town of Schmidt.

Schmidt was an important objective. Lying on a ridge overlooking the upper Roer River, it also afforded a view of the

Schwammenauel Dam, an important link in a series of Roer dams which the Germans might blow at any time. The rush of floodwaters thus unleashed would isolate any attack which had crossed the Roer in the Aachen vicinity. Located in rear of the main Siegfried Line defenses in the area, Schmidt was an important road center for supply of enemy forces. The capture of Schmidt would enable the 28th Division to advance to the southwest and attack from the rear the enemy's fortified line facing Monschau, while a combat command of the 5th Armored Division hit the line frontally. Thus V Corps could complete the mission assigned by First Army—clearing the enemy from its area south to the Roer River on a line Monschau–Roer River dams. In enemy hands the Roer dams remained a constant threat to any major drive across the Roer downstream to the north.

The Schmidt operation was expected to accomplish four things: gain maneuver space and additional supply routes for the VII Corps attack to the north; protect VII Corps' right flank from counter-attack; prepare the ground for a later attack to seize the Roer River dams;<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Although the official German name for the fortified belt along the western German frontier was *Westwall*, it was known to American troops as the Siegfried Line.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A misnomer. The "Huertgen Forest" was actually only a small part of a forest mass extending from southeast of Eschweiler (Meroder Wald) to the area Lammersdorf–Rollesbroich–Steckenborn. It included the Wenau Forest, the Roetgen Forest, and other subdivisions. Since the entire forest mass was known to American troops as the "Huertgen Forest," this term is used throughout this narrative.

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<sup>3</sup> Although this objective has come to be considered one of the more important of the Schmidt operation, neither V Corps nor 28th Division attack orders mentioned it. According to an interview with Col

attract enemy reserves from VII Corps, thus preventing their employment against First Army's main effort.

Because the permanent boundary between V Corps and VII Corps intersected the planned zone of operations, First Army on 25 October designated a temporary boundary to run just south of Kleinhau and north of Huertgen. This would keep the Schmidt operation entirely within the bounds of V Corps. Between the northernmost positions of the 28th Division and the new corps boundary, the defensive line was being held with a series of road blocks in the Huertgen Forest by the 294th Engineer Combat Battalion; south of the planned zone of operations the line was being held by the 4th Cavalry Group.

Taking over the 9th Infantry Division's sector on 26 October, the 28th Division found itself facing roller-coaster terrain that was to play an even more vital role than usual in the attack on Schmidt.

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Carl L. Peterson (formerly CO, 112th Inf), Bradford, Pa., 21–22–23 Sep 48, the Roer dams "never entered the picture." While the First United States Army Report of Operations—1 August 1944–22 February 1945 (hereafter cited as FUSA Rpt) does say that the Schmidt attack was "a preliminary phase of a plan by V Corps to seize the two large dams on the Roer River . . .," 28th Division troops probably did not consider the dams an objective. Just when the American command fully realized the importance of the dams is not clear. The German command thought the 28th Division attack was aimed at them, and the violent German reaction was based primarily on fear of losing the dams. See postwar German accounts, MSS # A-891 and A-892 by Generalmajor Rudolf Freiherr von Gersdorff (formerly CofS of *Seventh Army*); MS # C-016 by General der Infanterie Erich Straube (formerly CG of *LXXIV Corps*); European Theater Historical Interview (hereafter cited as ETHINT) 53 of Gersdorff; ETHINT 56 of Gersdorff and Generalmajor Siegfried von Waldenburg (formerly CG of *116th Panzer Division*). For a fuller discussion of the question, see *The Siegfried Line*, a volume under preparation in the series UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II.

(*Map VI*) Its front lines extended generally along the Huertgen–Germeter–Rollesbroich road from Germeter through Richelskaul to the vicinity of a forester's house, Raffelsbrand. To the north and south lay dense forests, the southern forests hiding numerous enemy pillboxes and the town of Simonskall. To the east from Germeter ran a ridge topped by the town of Vossenack, surrounded on three sides by deep, densely wooded draws with wooded fingers stretching up toward the town itself. To the northeast was the Huertgen–Brandenberg–Bergstein ridge, dominating the Vossenack ridge. (In 9th Division operations in this area, one battalion had attacked between these two ridges and secured positions in the woods north of Vossenack, but a violent enemy counterattack in the woods southwest of Huertgen had forced the advance battalion's withdrawal.) Through a precipitous wooded gorge to the east and southeast of Vossenack ran the Kall River, a small, swift-flowing stream emptying into the Roer near Nideggen. Although a river road ran generally north-south alongside the Kall, only a small woods trail, very difficult to locate on the available maps and aerial photographs, crossed the river in the direction of the 28th Division's attack. That trail led across the river and up another ridge on which were seated the towns of Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. This ridge also dominated the Vossenack ridge, and Schmidt in turn commanded Kommerscheidt. The Brandenburg–Bergstein ridge line, northeast of Vossenack and north of Kommerscheidt, was lower than the highest point of the Schmidt–Kommerscheidt ridge but overlooked its lower slopes where the towns of Schmidt and Kommerscheidt were situated. Schmidt

and Kommerscheidt were also surrounded by dense woods and deep draws.

Two important considerations influenced the planners of the Schmidt operation. First, air support could isolate the battlefield from large-scale intervention of enemy reserves, especially armored reserves. Thus the Schmidt action would remain an infantry action inasmuch as crossing tanks over the Kall River was a doubtful possibility. The air task, extremely formidable because it involved neutralization of a number of Roer River bridges—and bridges are a difficult target for air—was assigned to the IX Tactical Air Command of the Ninth Air Force. Second, artillery support could deny the enemy the advantages of the dominating Brandenberg–Bergstein ridge. While the planners displayed great concern about enemy observation from this ridge, V Corps had too few troops to assign the ridge as a ground objective. Neutralization of the ridge by artillery would require almost constant smoking of approximately five miles and still could not be expected to eliminate the most forward enemy observation. But neutralization by artillery was apparently the only available solution.

The 28th Division was strongly reinforced for the operation. Major attachments included the following units: the 707th Tank Battalion (Medium); the 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled) (minus one company); the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed); the 86th Chemical Battalion (4.2-inch mortars); and the 1171st Engineer Combat Group. The 1171st consisted of the 20th, 146th (minus one company), and 1340th Engineer Combat Battalions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The 1171st Engr (C) Gp also included the following: the 502d Engr Lt Pon Co, the 668th Engr Top

Artillery in direct support was to include the 28th Division's organic artillery (the 107th, 109th, and 229th Field Artillery Battalions of 105-mm. howitzers and the 108th Field Artillery Battalion of 155-mm. howitzers); Battery A, 987th Field Artillery Battalion of 155-mm. self-propelled guns; 76th Field Artillery Battalion of 105-mm. howitzers; 447th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion; and the attached tank destroyers and tanks. Two 155-mm. howitzer battalions of the 187th Field Artillery Group of V Corps were later assigned in direct support and a battalion of 4.5-inch guns in general support. Also to furnish general support were the 190th Field Artillery Group of V Corps, consisting of one 155-mm. gun battalion and one 8-inch howitzer battalion, and the 188th Field Artillery Group of VII Corps, consisting of one 155-mm. gun battalion and one battalion (less one battery) of 4.5-inch guns.

The 28th Division's employment of its regiments was virtually dictated by V Corps.<sup>5</sup> The 109th Infantry was to attack north toward Huertgen in order to prevent repetition of the enemy counterattack that had hit the 9th Division from that direction. It was also to carry out a secondary mission of securing a line of departure overlooking Huertgen from which another division might later cap-

Co (detached during this opn), the 993d Engr Tdwy Br Co, and the 2d Plat, 610th Engr Lt Equip Co. These units performed rear area duties and are not mentioned further in this narrative.

<sup>5</sup> Combat Interv 77 with Cota. This dictation by V Corps was apparently based on the limitations of terrain, number of troops involved, and missions of the attack as originally decided by First Army and 12th Army Group. (All combat interviews on the Schmidt operation are by the 2d Information and Historical Service and were conducted in November 1944 or early December 1944.)

ture the town. This later attack on Huertgen was to be a part of the main First Army attack by VII Corps, and the securing of a line of departure for the later attack was specifically assigned by First Army. The 110th Infantry was to attack through the dense woods to the southeast to secure a road from Schmidt to Strauch that would ease the problem of the tenuous supply route from Vossenack to Schmidt. The road could be used also in the later phase of the operation, the planned co-ordinated attack to roll up enemy defenses facing Monschau. One battalion of the 110th Infantry was to be held out initially as the division's only infantry reserve. The 112th Infantry was to make the division's main effort toward the east and southeast to Schmidt. Two major factors influenced this deviation from the tactical doctrine of a convergent attack: (1) the lack of troops available for the operation and (2) the necessity for performing the three initial missions: (a) protecting the north flank against counterattack and securing a line of departure overlooking Huertgen, (b) clearing the main route south toward Strauch in preparation for the latter phase of the attack, and (c) capturing the initial division objective, the town of Schmidt.

Attached to the 112th Infantry in the main effort to capture Schmidt were: Company C, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion (organic); Companies B and D, 86th Chemical Battalion (4.2-inch mortars); and Company C, 103d Medical Battalion (organic). In direct support were: the 229th Field Artillery Battalion, reinforced by Company C, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed); the 20th Engineer Combat Battalion; and Company C, 707th Tank Battalion (Medium).

The 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled) and the remainder of the 707th Tank Battalion (minus Company D, which was to assist the 28th Reconnaissance Troop in maintaining contact with the 4th Cavalry Group in defensive positions to the south) were to reinforce fires of the general support artillery.

The artillery plan called for conventional fires on known and suspected enemy locations, installations, and sensitive points, the bulk of them in the Huertgen area to the north. The preparation was to begin at H minus 60 minutes all along the V Corps front and the southern portion of the VII Corps front to conceal as long as possible the specific location of the attack. At H minus 15 minutes, fires were to shift to local preparation, and after H Hour fires were to be supporting, chiefly prepared fires on call from the infantry. Since weather limited air observation before the attack, counterbattery fires were based primarily on sound and flash recordings, which could not be considered accurate because of unfavorable weather and wooded, compartmented terrain. Ammunition was limited but considered adequate, and antitank defense was also included in the artillery plan. Artillery units were located in the general area Zweifall-Roett-Roetgen, from which all expected targets would be within effective range.

The engineer plan revolved around the attached 1171st Engineer Combat Group. One battalion of this group was to support the 110th Infantry and one was to work on rear area roads. The 20th Engineer Combat Battalion, in support of the 112th Infantry, was assigned the primary engineer mission of opening the trail from Vossenack across the Kall River to Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. In the

planning phases, engineer responsibility for security of the Kall River crossing was emphasized, but the engineer plan as issued by the 1171st Group on 30 October did not charge any engineer unit with security of the crossing. The plan stated only that, because of the disposition of friendly troops, *local* security would be required. The written engineer plan, including this statement, was nevertheless approved by the 28th Division commander, the division engineer, and the corps engineer.<sup>6</sup>

The 28th Division, whose men wore the red Keystone shoulder patch that revealed the division's Pennsylvania National Guard background, had participated in the latter stages of the Normandy battle and had pursued the enemy across France and Belgium. Rested after almost a month along a relatively inactive sector of the Siegfried Line to the south, the division was nearly at full strength, although there had been many replacements after an unsuccessful effort to penetrate the Siegfried Line opposite Pruem at the close of the pursuit across Belgium. The major supply shortage was in all types of artillery ammunition, chronic throughout First Army since September when the Siegfried Line battles had begun. The supply of arctic overshoes was also far under requirements; only about ten to fifteen men per infantry company were equipped with them. There was little patrolling before D Day, partially because of the proximity of enemy lines and partially because of the

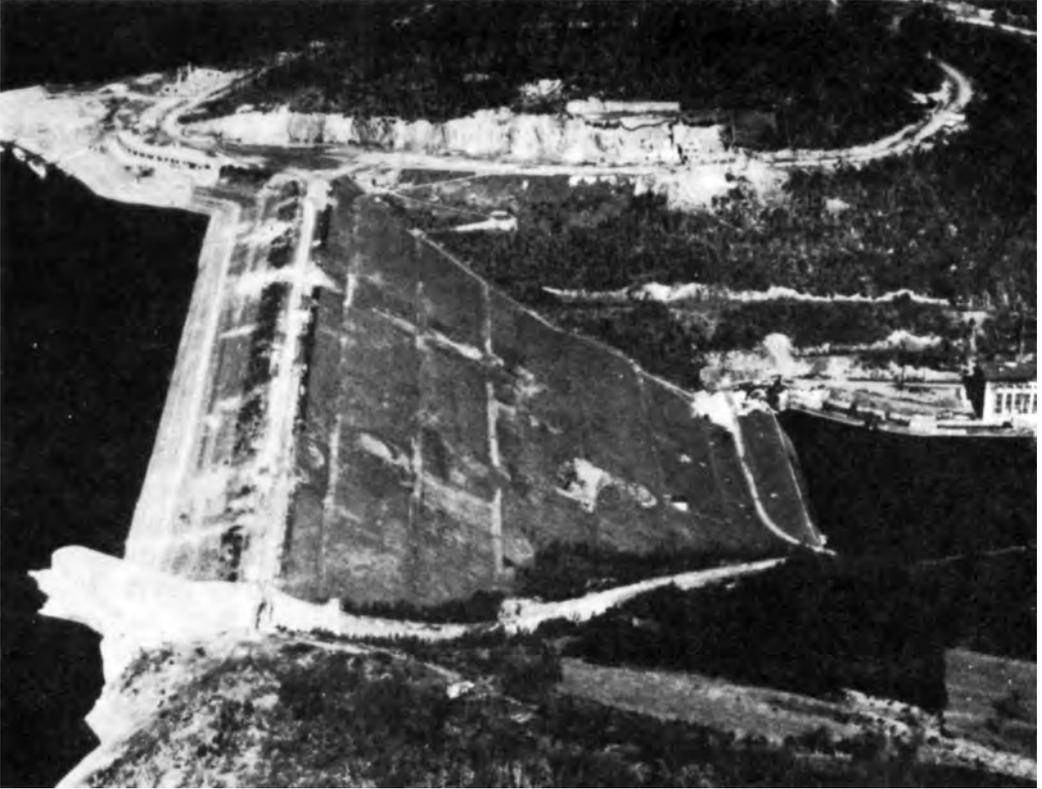
limitations of the densely wooded terrain; but intelligence information obtained in the area by the 9th Division was turned over to the 28th. Maps to be used were primarily the standard 1:25,000 (Germany, revised), which could be considered generally accurate, but aerial photographs were usually not available in lower echelons.

When the 28th Division moved into the area on 26 October, the men found themselves in a dank, dense forest of the type immortalized in old German folk tales. All about them they saw emergency rations containers, artillery-destroyed trees, loose mines along poor, muddy roads and trails, and shell and mine craters by the hundreds. The troops relieved by the 28th Division were tired, unshaven, dirty, and nervous. They bore the telltale signs of a tough fight—signs that made a strong impression on the incoming soldiers and their commanders. After the operation the 28th Division commander himself, General Cota, recalled that at the time he felt that the 28th's attack had only "a gambler's chance" of succeeding.<sup>7</sup>

The 28th Division G-2 estimated that to the immediate front the enemy had approximately 3,350 men, to the north 1,940, and to the south 1,850, all of whom were fighting as infantry. Enemy reserves capable of rapid intervention were estimated at 2,000 not yet committed and 3,000 capable of moving quickly from less active fronts. The G-2 estimate did not mention that holding Schmidt and the Roer River dams was an important fundamental in the German scheme for preventing an Allied break-through to the Rhine.

<sup>6</sup> Engr story is from the following: V Corps Factual Study, Opns of the 28th Inf Div, Engr Sec, 2-9 Nov 44 (hereafter cited as V Corps Study); Engr Plan, 30 Oct 44, 28th Div G-3 Jnl File, Oct 44. For a further discussion of the security problem, see below, Ch. III, n. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Interv with Cota, Washington, D. C., 15 Sep 48.



THE SCHWAMMENAUEL DAM located southeast of Schmidt. The holders of this dam controlled the flow of water along the Roer River and could flood a wide area along its path.

Although the 28th's attack was originally scheduled to be launched on 31 October, rain, fog, and poor visibility necessitated postponement. Despite continued bad weather, the attack was ordered for 2 November to avoid the possibility of delaying the subsequent VII Corps attack. The 109th Infantry was to initiate the action by launching its northerly thrust at 0900.<sup>8</sup> While the 110th Infantry and two battalions of the 112th were not to attack until H plus

3 hours (1200), the 2d Battalion, 112th, was to join the 109th in the H Hour jump-off—0900, 2 November.<sup>9</sup>

Facing the planned American attack was an enemy determined to hold the Huertgen-Vossenack area for several

<sup>8</sup> All clock time given is that officially designated by the Allies; during this period it was British Summer Time.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise noted, this introduction is based on the following sources: FUSA Rpt; V Corps Opns in the ETO, 6 Jan 42 to 9 May 45; V Corps Study; V Corps FO 30, 21 Oct 44, and V Corps Ltrs of Instn, 23 Oct 44 and 30 Oct 44, V Corps G-3 Jnl and File, Oct 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl and File, 26 Oct-2 Nov 44; Combat Interv 77 with Cota; Combat Interv 74, General Notes on 28th's Opns; 28th Div AAR, Nov 44; V Corps G-2 Jnl and File, Oct 44; FO 25, 28th Div G-3 File, 29 Oct 44; Intervs with Peterson and with Cota.

reasons now apparent: the threat to the Roer dams; the dominating terrain of the ridges in the area; the importance of Dueren as a road and communications center; the threat to plans already made for an Ardennes counteroffensive; and the neutralizing effect of the Huertgen Forest against American superiority in air, tanks, and artillery. The unit charged with the defense was the *275th Infantry Division* of the *LXXIV Corps* of the *Seventh Army* of *Army Group B*.

That an attack was imminent was already known from obviously preplanned American artillery fires and from reports and observation of American troop movement in the rear of Roetgen. It was also known that the new American unit in the area was the *28th Infantry Division*, although the Germans thought the division a part of *VII Corps* instead of *V Corps*.

North of the *275th Infantry Division* the line was held by the *12th Volks Grenadier Division*, and to the south by the *89th Infantry Division*, which was scheduled to be relieved soon by the *272d Volks Grenadier Division* so that the *89th* could be re-equipped. To the north, in *Army Group B* reserve in the Muenchen-Gladbach area, was the *116th Panzer Division*. Although the Germans believed an American attack imminent in the Vossenack area, no specific precautions had been taken in movement of troops, because timing and direction of attack were still unknown.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> MS # A-891 (Gersdorff); MS # A-905 (Waldenburg); ETHINT 53 (Gersdorff); ETHINT 56 (Gersdorff and Waldenburg); ETHINT 57 (Gersdorff); *I c* (G-2) Sit Map, 1 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST Kriegstagebuch, Anlagen* (War Diary Annexes), *Befehle und Meldungen, 1.-10.XI.44* (hereafter cited as *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44*). *OB WEST* was the abbreviation of the headquarters of *Oberbefehls-*

### *The 112th Makes the Main Effort*

In the center of the *28th Division* zone the *112th Infantry*, making the division's main effort, was assigned the capture of *Kommerscheidt* and *Schmidt*. It had the secondary mission of protecting its own north flank by the capture and defense of *Vossenack* and the *Vossenack* ridge. After the planned artillery preparation beginning at H minus 60 minutes, the *2d Battalion, 112th*, was to attack at H Hour (0900) to capture *Vossenack* and the forward (northeastern and eastern) nose of the ridge. The *1st Battalion, 112th*, attacking at H plus 3 hours, was to move in a column of companies through defensive positions occupied by the same regiment's *Company A* at *Richelskaul*. Then it was to attack southeast through the wooded draw south of *Vossenack*, crossing the *Kall River* in a cross-country move and taking *Kommerscheidt*. The *3d Battalion, 112th*, was to follow the *1st Battalion* on order and capture the final objective, the town of *Schmidt*.<sup>11</sup>

The *2d Battalion's* plan for seizing *Vossenack* and the *Vossenack* ridge called for an attack with two companies abreast (*Company G* on the left, *Company F* on the right) from the line *Germeter-Richelskaul* east through *Vossenack*. *Company G* was to move along the open northern slope of the ridge to the nose

*haber West*, Commander in Chief in the West. See also Relief Schedule, *Abloesungsplan*, 28 Oct 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlage 50 I.VII.-31.XII.44.*, Vol. I, 24.X.-31.XII.44.

<sup>11</sup> No copy of *112th Inf FO 30* can be found. This information is based on *112th Inf Atk Overlays*, 31 Oct 44, *28th Div G-3 File*; *28th Div G-3 Jnl*, Oct 44; *112th Inf Atk Overlay*, *1st Bn Plan of Attack*, 31 Oct 44, *112th Inf S-3 File*, Nov 44; all combat intervts for the period. The general plan is supported by *FO 25, 28th Div G-3 File*, 29 Oct 44.

northeast of Vossenack; Company F was to take the town itself and the eastern nose of the ridge; and Company E was to follow and complete mopping up of the town. One platoon from Company F was to protect the battalion's right flank by advancing along the open southern slope of the ridge and was to be followed by one platoon of Company E.<sup>12</sup>

This 2d Battalion attack was to be assisted by a company of medium tanks, Company C, 707th Tank Battalion. The five tanks of Company C's 1st Platoon, plus two tanks from its 2d Platoon, were to attack with Company G, 112th, on the left; the three other tanks of the 2d Platoon were to attack with Company F, 112th, on the right. The remaining tank platoon was to assist Company E in its mop-up operations. Two towed guns of Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and five 57-mm. antitank guns of the Antitank Company, 112th, all in position around Richelskaul, were to be prepared to assist the attack by fire. Company B, 86th Chemical Battalion, equipped to fire high explosive shells, was to support the attack from positions along the Weisser Weh Creek in the wooded draw west of Germeter. The night before the attack Company C, 103d Engineers, was to clear paths through

friendly mine fields to the east of Germeter.<sup>13</sup>

The regiment's eighteen 81-mm. mortars were grouped under Company H for preparation and supporting fires against Vossenack. After capture of the town, they were to revert to their respective battalions. The Company D mortars were to concentrate their fire on the draw south of Vossenack, Company H on the houses in the town, and Company M on the wooded area north of the town, firing to begin twelve minutes before H Hour. The Company H machine guns were attached to the three rifle companies, the entire 2d Platoon going to Company G on the left, the 1st Section of the 1st Platoon to Company F on the right, and the 2d Section of the 1st Platoon to Company E for the mop-up.<sup>14</sup>

Before the attack Company E, 112th Infantry, was outposting the town of Germeter, while the remainder of the 2d Battalion was in an assembly area in the woods approximately 300 yards southwest of Germeter. (*Map VII*) On the left (north) the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry, held Wittscheidt on the Huertgen road and was to attack almost due north at H Hour. On the right (south) Company A, 112th, held the Richelskaul road junction and was to be passed through at noon (H plus 3 hours) by other elements of the 1st Battalion, 112th, and the 3d Battalion, 112th, in the attack southeast toward Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. The 112th's Cannon Company was to

<sup>12</sup> Combat Interv 75 with the following: Maj Richard A. Dana, S-3, 112th Inf; Capt John D. Pruden, Ex Off and later CO, 2d Bn, 112th Inf; 1st Lt James A. Condon, Ex Off, Co E, 112th Inf; 1st Lt Eldeen Kauffman, CO, Co F, 112th Inf. The attack overlays dated 31 October 1944 in the 28th Division G-3 File indicate that another platoon of Company E was to advance through the edge of the woods north of Vossenack to protect the battalion's left flank, but this plan evidently did not develop. No mention of it is made in the OCMH combat interviews or unit journals, and the interview with Colonel Peterson indicates that he recalls no such arrangement.

<sup>13</sup> Combat Interv 76 with the following: 1st Lt James J. Leming, 2d Lt William D. Quarrie, S Sgt Paul F. Jenkins, and 1st Lt James J. Ryan. All of Company C, 707th Tk Bn. See also V Corps Study; Combat Interv 75 with Condon.

<sup>14</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Capt Charles L. Crain, CO, Co H, 112th Inf.

provide supporting fires from positions in the woods some 2,000 yards west of Germeter. The 112th Infantry command post was in a captured pillbox along the Weisser Weh Creek west of Germeter.<sup>15</sup>

### *The 2d Battalion Attacks*

The morning of 2 November dawned cold and misty, not quite freezing, but damp and uncomfortable. At 0800, an hour before H Hour, artillery along the entire V Corps front and the southern portion of the VII Corps front roared into action. Fifteen minutes before jump-off time direct support artillery shifted to targets in the immediate sector and was joined by heavy weapons of the 112th Infantry. By 0900 V Corps and VII Corps artillery had fired over 4,000 rounds, and 28th Division artillery had fired 7,313 rounds. Artillery liaison officers watched the preparation from the 112th Infantry observation post in an attic in Germeter, where the 112th regimental commander, Lt. Col. Carl L. Peterson, prepared to watch the attack.<sup>16</sup>

At 0900 the riflemen of Companies G and F, accompanied by the tanks of Company C, 707th, began to pass through the outpost positions in Germeter. Almost as soon as the prepara-

tory American artillery fire shifted to more distant targets, the Germans replied with a heavy artillery concentration of their own upon the line of departure, and the attacking companies sustained a number of casualties. Nevertheless the attack continued, and the men and tanks moved out into the shell-pocked open fields leading east to the objective, plainly marked in the morning mist by the shell-scarred tower of the Vossenack church. With the tanks taking the lead, the infantrymen fell in close behind, stepping in the tank tracks as a precaution against antipersonnel mines. Scattered small arms fire from Vossenack sprayed the tanks, and the Germans fired light mortar concentrations; but neither stopped the advance.<sup>17</sup>

### *Company G on the Left*

On the left in its attack along the open slopes north of Vossenack toward the northeastern nose of the ridge, Company G started out with its 3d Platoon on the left, its 1st Platoon on the right, and its 2d, which was considerably understrength, in support. Its seven attached tanks initiated the movement by swinging into a line formation and firing four rounds each at the Vossenack church steeple, presumably to discourage any enemy observation from the steeple.

Two gaps had been cleared in the friendly mine field in the Company G sector. Although the southernmost gap near the center of Germeter was poorly marked and difficult to locate initially, it was used because it was more directly

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<sup>15</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Condon and Capt John T. Nesbitt, S-1, 2d Bn, 112th Inf; 112th Inf Atk Overlay, 31 Oct 44. Information on the 112th Infantry Cannon Company is meager. Maj. Albert L. Berndt, 112th Infantry Surgeon, in a letter to the Historical Division, 18 Oct 48, says the company continued to support the operation from its original positions throughout the attack. Records show that in later stages of the operation Cannon Company, 112th, was attached to the 109th Infantry.

<sup>16</sup> Interv with Peterson; V Corps Opns in the ETO; V Corps Arty S-3 Jnl, 2 Nov 44.

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<sup>17</sup> Combat Interv 75 with 112th Inf personnel; Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan.



VOSENACK. *The damaged tower of the Vossenack church could be seen by men approaching from the northwest across the shell-pocked open fields.*

along the proposed route of advance. The assault platoons moved through the gap close in the wake of the seven tanks, about a squad of infantry following each tank. The advance had only just begun when the driver of the lead tank on the left, that of the tank platoon sergeant, T. Sgt. Audney S. Brown, misread the mine-field markings and blundered out of the cleared gap. The tank hit a mine and blew a track. When the assault platoons and their six remaining tanks again moved forward, the platoon leader's tank mired in a muddy patch of ground in the north-south draw which creased the ridge between Germeter and Vossenack, again halting the advance. The tank company commander, Capt. George S. West, Jr., seeing the difficulty, came forward in his command tank, picked up the platoon leader, 2d Lt. William D. Quarrie, and took position on the right of the formation. Again the attack moved forward.<sup>18</sup>

With infantrymen following close in their tracks, the tanks fired as they advanced. A provisional platoon of .50-caliber machine guns supported the advance from Germeter, its fire clipping the edge of the woods north of Vossenack; fire from supporting 81-mm. mortars was well co-ordinated and fell about a hundred yards in front of the attack formation.

Even as the tanks were having their difficulties, the company headquarters of Company G and the attached machine guns from Company H ran into trouble. Either the light enemy mortar fire or harassing small arms fire from Vossenack

wounded the machine gun platoon leader shortly after the machine gunners left Germeter, and the platoon sergeant took over. A few minutes later the last man in Company G's headquarters group stepped on a booby trap or a mine. When a man from the machine gun platoon moved up to see if he could help, he stepped on still another booby trap or mine and was killed. The explosion set off about five antipersonnel mines simultaneously. Of the twenty-seven men who had been in this group, twelve were injured or killed in the mine field. Only two noncommissioned officers, both corporals, remained out of the machine gun platoon's leaders. Although slightly wounded, they reorganized the platoon and continued forward.<sup>19</sup>

The assault rifle platoons also suffered casualties, both the 1st and 3d Platoon leaders being hit within approximately 400 yards of the line of departure. That the leaders should be wounded seemed ironic, for as the advance continued the only enemy opposition came from light mortar fire. The supporting tanks fired as they moved, and many of the Germans in Vossenack, already weakened by long days and nights of American artillery fire and now faced with a co-ordinated tank-infantry assault, fled north, east, and southeast. Past outlying farms and through the open fields north of Vossenack the Company G assault pushed on quickly and soon reached its objective, the nose to the northeast of the town. In an attack for which the planners had allowed three hours, Company G and its supporting tanks and machine gun platoon had taken only one hour and five

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<sup>18</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan; Combat Interv 75 with 1st Lt Clyde R. Johnson, Co G, 112th Inf.

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<sup>19</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Crain; Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan.

minutes, gaining the objective shortly after 1000 hours.<sup>20</sup>

Having reached the nose of the ridge, the company began to reorganize and to dig in against counterattack. Its assigned zone included a trail—actually an extension of Vossenack's main street—northeast of the town. The trail was in the defensive sector of the 3d Platoon, which planned to tie in later with Company F on the right. The 1st Platoon took up positions on the left of the 3d; the 2d Platoon, which had been in support in the attack, came up almost an hour later and extended the semicircular perimeter to the left and left rear. The two light machine guns went into position with the 1st Platoon to cover the company's front with cross fire. When the platoon of heavy machine guns came forward, it was placed in position with the 3d Platoon on the right to fire across the company front in the other direction, thus forming a final protective line. The 60-mm. mortars were moved up during the afternoon and placed in slight defilade about 200 yards behind the company. All defenses except the 60-mm. mortars were on the exposed forward nose of the ridge, in accordance with the battalion order; despite this exposed terrain, the men were virtually ignored by the enemy for the rest of the day. The six supporting tanks churned around on the forward slope of the ridge and fired to the northeast toward Brandenburg-Bergstein, as if the attack were going to continue in that direction. Company G's advance had been surprisingly easy; its principal casualties had been incurred in a mine field; only minor casualties had resulted from the artillery shelling at the line of

departure, light mortar fire, and the occasional harassing small arms fire.

#### *Company F on the Right*

While Company G was launching its successful attack on the left, Company F had also moved out at H Hour in a column of platoons preceded by its three supporting tanks. The lead platoon, the 3d, under 1st Lt. Eugene S. Carlson, was to advance along the open southern slope of the Vossenack ridge as the battalion's right flank protection. Since the area south of the Richelskaul-Vossenack road was deemed too exposed to suspected enemy positions in the southern woods in front of Richelskaul, the 3d Platoon and its three tanks planned to advance north of the road initially, then turn south on the outskirts of Vossenack, cross the road, and resume their movement to the east. Company F's 1st Platoon was to follow the lead platoon closely until it turned south. The 1st Platoon was to continue east through the town itself. The 2d Platoon was to remain in Ger-meter as support to move forward on call. The section of light machine guns and two 60-mm. mortars were attached to the leading 3d Platoon; the other mortar was attached to the 1st Platoon. Also with the company was a section of heavy machine guns from Company H. The three supporting tanks were under the command of 1st Lt. James J. Leming, the 2d Tank Platoon leader and acting company executive officer.

The assault force moved out at H Hour, the infantry platoon following so closely behind its column of spearheading tanks that for the first 500 yards the infantry platoon leader, Lieutenant Carlson, had his hand on the rear of Lieu-

<sup>20</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Johnson; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 2 Nov 44.

tenant Leming's tank. There was no resistance except from light enemy mortar fire. When the tanks and the lead riflemen passed the Germeter-Vossenack-Richelskaul road fork, the column veered to the south across the main Vossenack road as planned. Beyond the road the third tank in the column continued too far to the south before turning east again and ran into surprise German opposition from the wooded draw to the south. A *Panzerfaust* at the edge of the woods knocked it out. The two remaining tanks and the accompanying infantry platoon continued to the east, the tanks firing toward the southern woods line at possible enemy positions. They had gone approximately 300 yards past the first wooded finger pointing toward Vossenack from the south when the 75-mm. gun on Lieutenant Leming's tank jammed. The tank's coaxial machine guns and bow guns incurred stoppages that "immediate action" would not clear, and the antiaircraft gun also failed when its bolt jammed from overheating. The advance stopped. Lieutenant Leming radioed for 2d Lt. Joseph S. Novak, platoon leader of the 3d Tank Platoon with Company E in reserve, to come forward in his tank and lead Leming's one remaining tank forward.<sup>21</sup>

Back nearer the line of departure, Company F's 1st Platoon had followed about 200 yards behind the lead platoon and its tanks. In an approach march formation with the 2d and 1st Squads forward and the 3d in close support, the 1st Platoon passed through the gap in the mine field and neared the Germeter-Richelskaul-Vossenack road fork. At this point, a sudden burst of fire came

from two or three hitherto undetected German machine guns emplaced near a group of buildings at the road fork. The Germans had evidently held their fire when the preceding tanks and infantry had passed.

This first burst of enemy fire hit the 1st Squad heavily, wounding or killing all but three men. Although the 2d Squad and the remnants of the 1st built up a base of fire, the Germans continued to resist. To break the deadlock, the infantry platoon leader, 2d Lt. John B. Wine, crawled to within twenty-five yards of the position and knocked out at least one machine gun with a hand grenade. At the lieutenant's signal the two advance squads assaulted the position, overcame the German gunners, and captured four or five prisoners.

Reorganizing his platoon quickly, Lieutenant Wine continued without opposition into the outskirts of Vossenack. One squad began to operate on each side of the main street. The men sprayed the entrances of the houses with fire, tossed in hand grenades, and assaulted each building in the wake of the grenade explosions. At least one Company F man was wounded and another killed as the enemy threw in scattered artillery fire.<sup>22</sup>

The Company F commander, 1st Lt. Eldeen Kauffman, had followed the 3d Platoon to a point just past the gap in the mine field. He waited there for the 1st Platoon and then followed it through the action at the road fork and on into Vossenack. When he heard over his intracompany SCR 536 that the 2d

<sup>21</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan; Combat Interv 75 with Kauffman.

<sup>22</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Kauffman and S Sgt Charles W. Cascarano, Co F, 112th Inf. See also 28th Div citation recommendation for Lt Wine in Combat Interv 75 File.

Platoon, in support at the line of departure in Germeter, was receiving intense enemy artillery fire, he ordered the platoon to join him in Vossenack.

Lieutenant Wine's 1st Platoon, continuing its advance, had almost reached the main crossroads marked by the church in the center of Vossenack. (*Map VIII*) At this point it was held up by small arms fire from the house on the left just short of the crossroads. Supported by fire from the rest of the platoon, half of one squad assaulted the house and netted between thirty and fifty prisoners. The town of Vossenack as far east as the crossroads was then in American hands.

Upon the arrival of the 2d (support) Platoon, Lieutenant Kauffman, the company commander, ordered it to pass through Lieutenant Wine's unit, which had become disorganized in its fight at the crossroads. Except for three men lost to artillery fire in Germeter, the 2d Platoon was at full strength. The exchange in assault platoons was made about 1030 at the crossroads, approximately an hour and a half after the jump-off. Though the advance had been rapid, the leading elements of Company F had covered only a little more than half the distance to their objective, whereas elements of Company G had already reached the northeastern nose of the Vossenack ridge.<sup>23</sup>

The 3d Platoon was still waiting on the exposed slope south of the town for Lieutenant Novak to come forward with his tank from Germeter to assist the one remaining operational tank of Lieutenant Leming's platoon. When the assistance arrived, it developed that Lieutenant Novak had evidently misunderstood the

request and, instead of coming forward himself, had sent S. Sgt. Paul F. Jenkins with the 3d Tank Platoon's 2d Section, two tanks instead of one.

The advance continued and the three tanks came abreast of the town's main crossroads. Seeing what they suspected to be an enemy mine field ahead, the tankers changed their route of advance and moved north with their accompanying infantry through the center of Vossenack. They followed the open northern slope over which the tanks with Company G had passed earlier. Without opposition the three tanks and Company F's 3d Platoon moved just to the right of Company G on the eastern nose of the ridge. There the infantrymen began to dig in on their objective.<sup>24</sup>

While the 3d Platoon was taking its roundabout route forward, the 2d Platoon under 1st Lt. George E. Scott continued its advance past the crossroads in Vossenack. From a house on the left, two or three houses east of the crossroads, a German "Burp gun" (machine pistol) opened fire and halted the Americans with its first burst. As Lieutenant Scott moved up to one of his squads to meet the situation, another burst killed him instantly. The platoon sergeant then tried to organize a flanking force, but he too was hit and seriously wounded. A squad leader was killed and his second in command seriously wounded in an attempt to shift their squad to where it could flank the position from the north.

Back at the Germeter line of departure, the remaining three tanks of Lieutenant Novak's 3d Tank Platoon had started forward shortly after Sergeant Jenkins left with the platoon's 2d Section.

<sup>23</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Kauffman.

<sup>24</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan.

Novak's tanks, scheduled to assist Company E in the Vossenack mop-up, moved too quickly for the infantry to keep pace and reached the crossroads ahead of the reserve company. There Lieutenant Kauffman seized the opportunity and commandeered one of the tanks to help in demolishing the burp gun resistance. The tanker fired two rounds at the building indicated by Lieutenant Kauffman, and the F Company commander and his runner, Pfc. Bud Kern, charged the house close behind the tank fire. Inside they found seven men and two German officers, one of whom was already wounded. Kauffman and Kern killed the other officer, and the German enlisted man promptly surrendered.

Lieutenant Novak, meanwhile, had turned south with his tank, apparently intending either to use the southern slope and so avoid the town as he moved eastward or to help knock out the burp gun by firing on the house from another direction. As he neared the southern edge of the town, his tank struck a mine and was immobilized. Since it could still be used as a stationary firing point, Lieutenant Novak stayed with his vehicle, while his two remaining tanks went on with Lieutenant Kauffman and Company F.

With the German burp gun resistance now out of the way, the advance continued. Lieutenant Kauffman tossed a grenade into the basement of the next house as a routine precaution, with the result that a group of Germans, who proved to be staff members of the battalion charged with the defense of Vossenack, came out in surrender. When questioned, one of the German officers pointed out the town's defensive positions on a map. There had been five thirty-

man companies in Vossenack, he said, and despite high losses another company had the mission of counterattacking to retake the town.

Lieutenant Kauffman shifted Company F's 1st Platoon, now reorganized, back into the attack echelon and returned the 2d Platoon to its original support role. Accompanied by the two tanks of Lieutenant Novak's tank platoon, Lieutenant Wine's men continued down the main street, charging each building close behind assault fire from the tanks. The Germans fired only a few desultory shots in return, and by 1230 the 1st and 2d Platoons had joined the 3d Platoon on the final objective, the bald eastern nose of Vossenack ridge.<sup>25</sup>

Lieutenant Kauffman set up his Company F command post in the last house on the right (south) side of Vossenack's main street. The 2d Platoon began to dig in on the left next to Company G's right flank. On the 2d's right was the 1st Platoon, its depleted 1st and 2d Squads combined into one and designated to defend a wooded draw that stretched up toward the town from the Kall River valley. The 3d Platoon dug in on the 1st's right on a little exposed nose projecting east between two draws. The section of light machine guns dug in with the 2d Platoon on the left, the 1st (machine gun) Platoon from Company H with the right platoon, and the provisional .50-caliber machine gun platoon alone on the ridge farther to the southwest. One section of Company H 81-mm. mortars had moved up to firing positions to the north of Vossenack as soon as Company G had reached its

<sup>25</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Kauffman, Condon; Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 2 Nov 44.

objective; after Company F completed its advance, the other sections displaced to the vicinity of the church. Through this day and the next, forward observers from the mortar platoon were with all three rifle companies. Later, because of enemy shelling, observers were pulled back to a central observation post in a house near the eastern end of the town.<sup>26</sup>

### *Company E Mops Up*

The mission of Company E was to follow Company F at an interval of approximately 300 yards to Vossenack. There it would complete the mopping up of German resistance in the town. One platoon was to move along the edge of the woods on the south behind the right platoon of Company F in order to assist in protecting the battalion's right flank. The 3d Tank Platoon under Lieutenant Novak was to precede Company E into Vossenack and assist in mopping up. One section of machine guns from Company H was also attached.

When the acting company commander of Company E, 1st Lt. James A. Condon, saw Company F moving out at 0830 in preparation for its attack, he began to assemble his men. Lieutenant Condon assumed that Company E was to wait until all of Company F had gone forward, and as time passed Company F's support platoon still did not advance. Company E's premature assembly had brought the men out of their holes and buildings ready to move forward, and thus they fell easy prey to the German artillery and mortar fire which centered on the line of de-

parture. The company suffered a number of casualties.<sup>27</sup>

Company E's 1st platoon, assigned the right flank security mission, preceded the forward movement of the company's main body, following behind the right flank platoon of Company F about 0920. (*See Map VII.*) The platoon leader, S. Sgt. Edward J. Beck, employed two squads forward and one back with the assault squads in skirmish line and the support squad in squad column echeloned to the right rear.

Evidently not aware of the previous decision to use the more defiladed route north of the Richelskaul-Vossenack road instead of the southern route, Sergeant Beck's men had gone only about 300 yards past the line of departure when two enemy machine guns located in the edge of the woods to the south opened fire. The Company E platoon was pinned to the ground. Although Beck directed his men to work forward by individual rushes, the enemy stopped even that forward movement by plastering mortar fire on the exposed position. One man was killed and several were wounded, including Sergeant Beck.

Several men, one of whom was hysterical and obviously suffering from shock, made their way back individually to the acting company commander in Germeter with varying accounts of what had happened. Finally, as Lieutenant Condon was starting the remainder of his company toward Vossenack, an assistant squad leader, Sgt. Henry Bart, returned from the hard-pressed platoon and said he was now senior noncommissioned officer in the platoon and in command.

<sup>26</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Kauffman, Crain, Cascarano. There is no available information on placement of Company F's 60-mm. mortars.

<sup>27</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Condon, Crain, Pruden, 1st Lt Clifton W. Beggs, Co E, 112th Inf; Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan.

When Sergeant Bart said there were only a few of his men left, Lieutenant Condon told him to "pick up the remnants," evacuate the wounded, and follow the tail of the company through Vossenack. Bart returned to his men, but the enemy fire blocked evacuation. Not until about noon, when the 1st Battalion attacked southeast from Richelskaul and thus relieved the pressure against Company E's 1st Platoon, did two men, Sergeant Bart and Pfc. Clyde Wallace, manage to work around behind the German machine guns and take them from the rear. Private Wallace went back to the battalion command post in Germeter with two prisoners, and the remainder of the platoon, reduced now to about thirteen men, continued into Vossenack.<sup>28</sup>

While the 1st Platoon was still pinned down in the open field, the remainder of Company E and its attached machine gun section continued on the mission to mop up in Vossenack. (*See Map VIII.*) In a column of twos on either side of the main road, the men advanced cautiously, checking all buildings and cellars and taking occasional prisoners. Only one man was wounded, a 2d Platoon rifleman, hit in the arm by a shell fragment.<sup>29</sup>

Lieutenant Novak's three tanks, which were supposed to accompany Company E in the mop-up, soon outdistanced the riflemen and instead assisted Company F in clearing the eastern portion of Vossenack. About 1040, shortly after Company E must have first entered the outskirts of the town, Captain West, the tank company commander, who had moved with Company G to the northeastern nose of the ridge, received a radio

message asking for tank support for Company E. On his way back via the southern route to help out, his command tank hit a mine just south of the church, probably in the mine field which Lieutenant Leming's tanks had previously suspected and avoided. Captain West dismounted and found that his battalion headquarters tank had come up. It was near by performing forward observation for the tank battalion's assault gun platoon. West took over the headquarters tank to assist Company E in completing its mop-up. Back on the northeastern nose of the ridge, the tanks that had reached the objective maneuvered around in rear of the infantry positions. There Lieutenant Quarrie's tank threw a track, and the crew could not replace it.<sup>30</sup>

About 1530 Company E finished its attack mission in Vossenack and began to prepare for the defense. Lieutenant Condon placed his 3d Platoon on the left (north) of town, generally along the line of houses on the northern side of the street, and his 2d Platoon similarly on the right (south) side of town. The remaining men of the 1st Platoon faced to the west in a defense within the town itself, denying the battalion rear. Light enemy artillery fire fell as the company was going into position, and two men were killed, one of them Private Wallace, who had assisted Sergeant Bart in overcoming the German resistance southeast of Germeter and had returned after taking two prisoners to the battalion CP.<sup>31</sup>

During the afternoon a tank retriever that was sent into Vossenack to tow out

<sup>28</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Condon and Col Gustin M. Nelson, CO (after 7 Nov 44), 112th Inf.

<sup>29</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Condon.

<sup>30</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan.

<sup>31</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Condon.

Lieutenant Novak's damaged tank near the church was itself damaged by a direct hit from enemy artillery. With his own tank Lieutenant Leming tried to tow out Lieutenant Quarrie's tank, but his efforts were unsuccessful. The tank company received permission about 1600 to draw back to bivouac positions in the western edge of Vossenack and there went into a circle defense for the night and effected gasoline and ammunition resupply.<sup>32</sup>

The forward battalion command group had followed the attack closely and by 1630 had established a command post in a house approximately 300 yards east of the church in Vossenack on the south side of the main street. The rear battalion command post moved up after dark, every available man being pressed into service to carry an extra load of ammunition for resupplying the companies.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Artillery in the Vossenack Attack*

The 229th Field Artillery Battalion in direct support of the 112th Infantry fired a total of 1,346 rounds from 0800 to 1200 on 2 November, thus providing continuous artillery support on call during the entire Vossenack attack. In addition to the preparation fires, missions were harassing, counterbattery, and targets of opportunity. Company B, 86th Chemical Battalion, fired 274 high explosive and 225 white phosphorous rounds with its 4.2 mortars, and at various times during the day Vossenack was reported burning and covered with a haze of smoke. Company D, 86th Chemical

Battalion, did not fire, having pulled out of firing position to be prepared to follow the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th Infantry, to Schmidt.<sup>34</sup>

#### *The 1st Battalion Attacks at H Plus 3 Hours*

When the 28th Division moved into the Vossenack-Schmidt area, the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, had initially been in regimental reserve, but on 1 November Company A had relieved elements of the 110th Infantry in defense of the junction of the Richelskaul-Rollesbroich road with the Simonskall road to the south. The rest of the battalion had remained in an assembly area a few hundred yards west of Richelskaul. (See *Map VII*.)

The 112th Infantry's attack plan for 2 November designated the 1st and 3d Battalions to attack cross country at H plus 3 hours (1200) in a column of battalions, the 1st leading. They were to move generally through the wooded part of the southern slope of Vossenack ridge, cross the Kall River, and seize Kommerscheidt. The 3d Battalion was then to take Schmidt, and both were to be prepared to continue the attack toward the southwest and Steckenborn. This was the division's main effort.<sup>35</sup>

The 1st Battalion, under the command of Maj. Robert T. Hazlett, was to lead the attack in a column of companies, Company B leading and passing through

<sup>34</sup> 28th Div Arty Jnl, 2 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 2 Nov 44; Hq and Hq Co, 28th Div Arty, AAR, Nov 44; 86th Cml Bn AAR, Nov 44.

<sup>35</sup> Combat Interv 75 with the following: Dana; S Sgt Nathaniel M. Quinton, 1st Sgt Harvey B. Hausman, T Sgt George A. Lockwood, S Sgt Stephen J. Kertes, and Sgt Travis C. Norton. Last five of Co A, 112th Inf. See also 112th Inf Atk Overlay, 31 Oct 44.

<sup>32</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan.

<sup>33</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Nesbitt.

Company A's Richelskaul defenses. Company C was to follow Company B on order, and, after Company C had passed through, Company A was then to leave its defenses to follow. Attached to Company B for spearheading the attack was the 1st (machine gun) Platoon of Company D. The 2d (machine gun) Platoon was to support the attack by firing up the wooded draw to the east from positions with Company A at Richelskaul. The 81-mm. mortars were to support on call from a position in a draw in the woods 900 yards behind the line of departure.<sup>36</sup>

No preparatory artillery barrage preceded the men of Company B as they passed through the Richelskaul defenses shortly after noon in a column of platoons—1st, 3d, 2d, Weapons. The first phase line had been designated as a generally north-south trail, some 400 yards east of Richelskaul, which ambled south from Vossenack's western outskirts to a juncture in the southern woods with the road to Simonskall. As the 1st Platoon advanced toward that trail, it was fired upon from woods in the vicinity of the trail and pinned to the ground by intense enemy fire from small arms and entrenched automatic weapons. The 1st Platoon leader, 1st Lt. Ralph Spalin, acting as point for his platoon, was instantly killed.

Capt. Clifford T. Hackard, the Company B commander, committed his 3d Platoon to assist the 1st, but in the attempted advance the 3d Platoon leader, 2d Lt. Gerald M. Burril, was hit by the

enemy fire. Despite a broken leg, Lieutenant Burril dragged himself into a hole from which he directed mortar fire with his SCR 536. He was not evacuated until after dark when one of the men of his platoon and an aid man brought him out on a litter. Either the loss of its platoon leader or the enemy small arms fire, or both, kept the 3d Platoon from advancing farther.

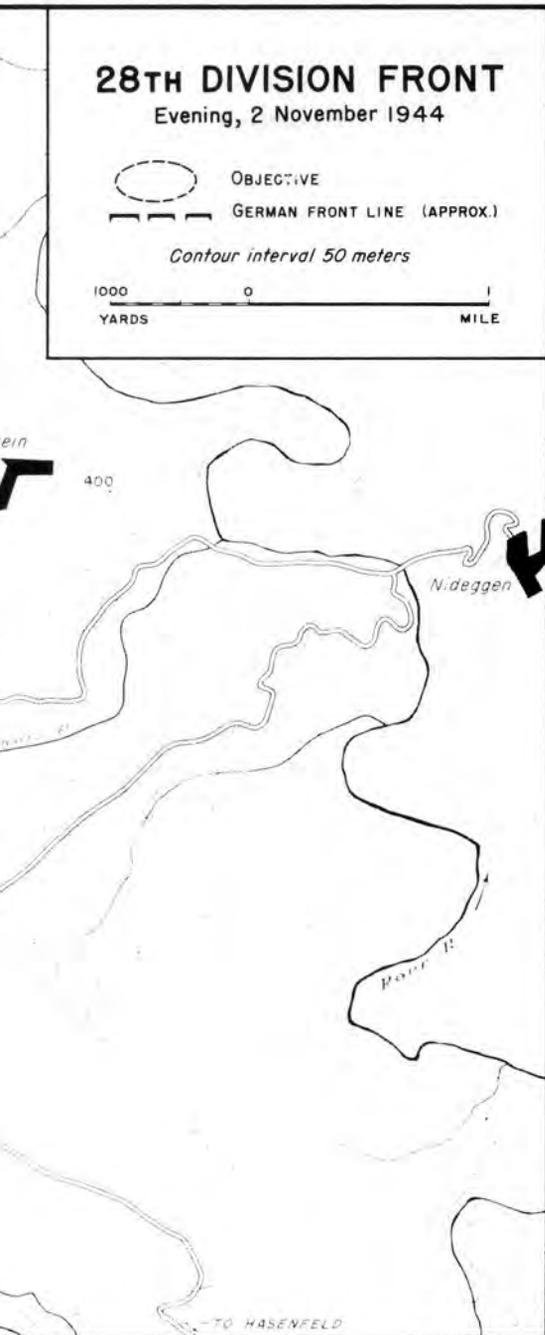
About one and one-half hours after the jump-off, Captain Hackard committed his 2d Platoon to the action. One squad from the 2d Platoon managed to work its way far enough forward to cross the trail; there it too was stopped by the intense small arms fire. Despite heavy supporting fire from Company D's 81-mm. mortars, the attack was stalemated. At 1510 one concentration of twenty-four rounds was fired by the 229th Field Artillery Battalion at enemy machine guns along the trail just south of Company B's attack route. This was seen by a forward observer and reported as "excellent," but no further mission was recorded as having been fired in this area during the day. Company B still could not advance.<sup>37</sup>

The 1st Battalion commander, Major Hazlett, went to the regimental command post about 1500 and talked with Colonel Peterson, the regimental commander. On his return, Major Hazlett announced that most of the gain of the day would be held. Because of plans he had received

<sup>36</sup> Combat Interv 75 with the following: S Sgt Eugene Holden, 2d Bn Hq Co, 112th Inf; S Sgt Joseph R. Perll, Co C, 112th Inf; Capt Richard Gooley, S-1, 1st Bn, 112th Inf; 1st Lt Jack E. Kelly and Sgt Thomas G. Hunter. Last two from Co D, 112th Inf.

<sup>37</sup> Combat Interv 75 with S Sgt Roy W. Littlehales and Pfc Clarence J. Skain. Both of Co B, 112th Inf. See also Combat Interv 75 with Holden, Kelly-Hunter; 28th Div Arty Jnl, 2 Nov 44. The combat interviews do not specifically state the commitment of the 2d Platoon, although they do state that one squad of this platoon worked its way across the trail. No mention is made of the use of Company B's attached heavy machine gun platoon from Company D.





R. Johnstone

for the next day, however, he did not want to leave Company B “stuck so far out front.”<sup>38</sup> When Captain Hackard made his way back about dusk, Major Hazlett told him to pull back his advance elements (evidently the 2d Platoon) to the remainder of the company, which now was in a small patch of woods about 200 to 250 yards in front of the line of departure, and to dig in there for the night. This move was accomplished after nightfall.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the 28th Division’s main effort had been halted after its one attacking company had hit stiff German resistance. Except for one mission, artillery support had not been utilized, and neither the other two rifle companies of the 1st Battalion nor any part of the 3d Battalion had been committed. The battalion and regimental commanders apparently decided that, in view of the stiff opposition encountered by Company B and the comparative ease with which the 2d Battalion had taken Vossenack, the attack should be shifted to pass through Vossenack and avoid the resistance facing Richelskaul. At any rate, those were the plans for the next day.<sup>40</sup>

#### *109th and 110th Infantry Regiments Attack*

To the north of the 112th Infantry’s divisional main effort, the 109th Infantry had jumped off at H Hour in its attack to protect the division’s left flank and secure a line of departure overlooking Huertgen. (*Map 20*) By 1400 the 1st

<sup>38</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Holden.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 2 Nov 44. There is little mention of this attack in either combat interviews or unit journals, and some combat interviews indicate that some men even thought it was a “limited ob-

Battalion, on the left, had two companies on its objective, the woods line west of the Germeter–Huertgen road. The 3d Battalion had attacked generally up the Huertgen road and committed all three rifle companies. They gained only about 300 to 500 yards before being stopped by a wide enemy mine field. After two companies of the regiment's 2d Battalion had moved up to a close reserve position a few hundred yards behind the 1st Battalion, ostensibly to cover a gap between the 1st and 3d Battalions, the regiment buttoned up for the night.<sup>41</sup>

The 110th Infantry in the woods to the south had attacked at 1200, its 3d Battalion moving generally southeast in the cross-country direction of Simonskall and its 2d Battalion aiming for eight or ten pillboxes astride the main road south toward Rollesbroich. These pillbox defenses later became known as the Raffelsbrand strong point. Both battalions were stopped after almost no gain by determined resistance and heavily fortified pillboxes. The 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry, was the division's infantry reserve and was not committed. The 110th's attack to reach the Strauch–Schmidt road and thus open the way for the latter phase of the Schmidt operation

(the capture of the Strauch–Steckenborn area) had made virtually no progress.<sup>42</sup>

### *Air Support*

A vital mission in the Schmidt operation, that of isolating the Vossenack–Schmidt battlefield from large-scale intervention of enemy armor, had been assigned to the aircraft of the IX Tactical Air Command. Although the IX TAC was to continue its usual large-scale offensive against enemy transportation and communications, its main single effort was to be support of the 28th Division. The air plan involved use of five fighter bomber groups—the 365th, 366th, and 368th (P-47's), and 370th and 474th (P-38's)—and the 422d Night Fighter Group (P-61's).

On the first day of the 28th Division attack, a third of the IX TAC aircraft were to perform armed reconnaissance on all roads leading out of Schmidt to a limit of 25 miles, and another third were to attack special targets and drop leaflet bombs in support of the division. But weather conditions prevented the first planes from taking off from their base at Verviers, Belgium, until 1234. Two of five group missions were canceled and two others were vectored far afield in search of targets of opportunity. One mission did succeed: twelve P-38's of the 474th Fighter Bomber Group attacked Bergstein at 1445 and continued on to hit barges on the Roer River, a Roer bridge at Heimbach, and two factories east of Nideggen. The 28th Division air control officer reported that one squadron mistakenly bombed an American artillery

jective" attack. General Cota knows of no reason why this attack was not pushed with more vigor; it was not his intention that it be abandoned. See Interv with Cota. According to Colonel Peterson, it was not to be a major attack. See Interv with Peterson. The applicable FO is missing (see n. 11 above), but the attack overlays agree with the version as herein presented and are substantiated by Ltr, Brig Gen George A. Davis (formerly asst div comdr, 28th Div) to Hist Div, 27 Dec 49, which says, "This was definitely the main effort and it was not to pass through Vossenack."

<sup>41</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 109th Inf personnel; 109th Inf S-2 and S-3 Jnls, 2 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 2 Nov 44.

<sup>42</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 110th Inf personnel and Notes on Opns of the 110th Inf; 110th Inf, S-2 and S-3 Jnls, 2 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 2 Nov 44.



OBJECTIVE: PILLBOXES. *Troops of the 110th Infantry, on 2 November, moving through the woods (above). One of the heavily fortified pillboxes near Rollesbroich (below).*



position near Roetgen and caused twenty-four American casualties (including seven killed) before attacking Schmidt.<sup>43</sup>

### *The Enemy Situation*

On 2 November staff officers of *Army Group B*, the *Fifth Panzer* and *Seventh Armies*, and several corps and divisions, including the *116th Panzer Division*, were meeting with Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model, *Army Group B* commander, at Schlenderhan Castle, near Quadrath, west of Cologne, for a map study. The subject of the study was a theoretical American attack along the boundary of the two armies in the Huertgen area. Not long after the meeting began, a telephone call from the chief of staff of the *LXXIV Corps* told of actual American attacks north of Germeter and in the direction of Vossenack. The message said the situation was critical and asked for reserve troops from *Seventh Army* because *LXXIV Corps* did not have the men available to close the gaps already opened up by the American attacks. Field Marshal Model directed the *LXXIV Corps* commander to return to his command and ordered the other officers to continue the map study with the actual situation as subject.

As the map study continued, reports of the 28th Division's attack continued to come in, and it was decided to commit immediately a Kampfgruppe of the *116th Panzer Division* to assist local reserves in a counterattack against the 109th Infan-

try's penetration north of Germeter. The remainder of the *116th Panzer Division* was to follow later from its rest area near Muenchen-Gladbach. The chance presence of the various major commanders at the map conference facilitated preparations for this counterattack. It was designed to hit at dawn on 3 November to eliminate the 109th Infantry's northern penetration and to push farther south so as to cut off the Vossenack penetration of the 112th Infantry. This was virtually the same type of counterattack which had threatened the 9th Infantry Division when it had held this area.<sup>44</sup>

### *Summary for 2 November and Night of 2-3 November*

Beginning with a heavy artillery barrage at 0800 on 2 November, the 28th Division attack on Schmidt had met varying degrees of success. The 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, had made one of the more notable advances of the day in seizing Vossenack and the Vossenack ridge. Although the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, had attempted an attack south-east from Richelskaul toward Kommerscheidt and Schmidt, its one committed company had been held up by small arms fire and the attack not pursued, although the remainder of that battalion, plus the entire 3d Battalion and a company of medium tanks, had been available. During the night plans were issued for a new attack the next morning to take the same objectives via a different route.

To the north one battalion of the 109th

<sup>43</sup> FUSA and IX TAC Sum of Air Opns, 2 Nov 44, in Unit History, IX Fighter Command and IX TAC, 1-30 Nov 44 (hereafter cited as FUSA and IX TAC Sum); V Corps Study, G-3 Air Sec; Combat Interv 74 with Maj Edwin M. Howison, Air Ln Off from IX TAC to 28th Div; 28th Div G-3 Air Jnl, Nov 44.

<sup>44</sup> MSS # A-891 and A-892 (Gersdorff); MS # A-905 (Waldenburg); ETHINT 53 (Gersdorff); Noon Sit Rpt, 3 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44*.

Infantry had reached the woods line overlooking Huertgen, while another had been held up by a previously unlocated mine field. To the south the 110th Infantry in a two-battalion attack had gained nothing except comparatively heavy casualties and the knowledge that its opposition was much stiffer than had been expected.

Although artillery support had been excellent, except in the attack of the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, where it was not requested, air support had been negligible. Attached engineers had concerned themselves primarily with maintenance of roads in rear areas, although Company C, 103d Engineers, had cleared mines east of Germeter and had gone into Vossenack after dark for road clearance.

After dark all three regiments buttoned up for the night, evidently confining

themselves to resupply, for there was no record of any patrolling. Meanwhile, the Germans, their defense facilitated by a chance map conference at *Army Group B* headquarters, were planning a dawn counterattack to eliminate both the 109th and 112th Infantry penetrations.

The 28th Division's main effort for Kommerscheidt and Schmidt had on 2 November been pushed with a surprising lack of vigor, presumably because a decision was made somewhere in command channels that the original attack plan would not be followed. Although this decision was probably based on success in Vossenack as compared with stiff opposition on the original route of advance, it had nevertheless set back considerably the hour by which Schmidt might be taken. But on 3 November the 112th Infantry would make another attempt to capture the objective.

## CHAPTER II

# The Main Effort Continues (3 November)

After the 112th Infantry's 2 November attack through the draws south of Vossenack was abandoned, in its stead was substituted an advance in a column of battalions through Vossenack, thence to the southeast into the Kall River gorge, up the slope to Kommerscheidt, and on to Schmidt. (*Map 21*) The 3d Battalion was to lead, the 1st to follow on order, and the 2d to continue to hold in Vossenack. With the Germeter-Richelskaul road as a line of departure, the attack was to be launched at 0700 on 3 November.

Company K, with one heavy machine gun section from Company M's 2d Platoon attached and supported by the 3d Tank Platoon of Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, was ordered to spearhead the 3d Battalion's advance. Echeloned 300-400 yards to the left rear of Company K was to be Company L, with the other section of Company M's 2d (machine gun) Platoon attached and the 2d Tank Platoon, Company A, 707th, in support. Company I was then to follow Company L, and the 1st Tank Platoon, Company A, 707th, was to be in mobile reserve. After the advance units had cleared Vossenack, the 81-mm. mortars were to go into position in a small draw north of Vossenack, while the 1st (machine gun) Platoon of Company M was to fire from the southeastern nose of Vossenack ridge

to support the movement across the river valley and up the Kommerscheidt-Schmidt ridge line. The so-called "Greene Hornets," a special patrol group of eleven men under 1st Lt. Jack B. Greene, assistant S-2 of the 3d Battalion, was to patrol the woods to the north between Wittscheidt and Vossenack to provide flank protection. From its positions just east of Richelskaul where it had made its short-lived attack the day before, Company B was to provide a demonstration by fire at H Hour and would not accompany the 1st Battalion when it followed the 3d.<sup>1</sup>

The day of attack brought again the type of weather that characterized almost all the Schmidt operation: cold, but not quite freezing, with a heavy mist hanging about the wooded draws. The mist, threatening to turn at any moment to drizzling rain, made visibility poor and employment of aircraft doubtful. A morass of mud blanketed the area, miring vehicles on rear supply routes and sticking to the boots of the infantry.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 112th Inf FO 31 and Atk Overlay, 2 Nov 44, supported by subsequent entries in 112th Inf S-2 and S-3 Jnls, 3 Nov 44, and 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44; Combat Interv 75 with Dana, Greene, and Capt Guy T. Piercey, CO, Co M, 112th Inf; Combat Interv 76 with the following: Capt Bruce M. Hostrup, 1st Lt Raymond E. Fleig, and 2d Lt Richard H. Payne. All from Co A, 707th Tk Bn. See also V Corps Study, G-3 Sec; 112th Inf Sit Rpt, 3 Nov 44.

Since Vossenack, the first objective for the new attack, was already held by the 2d Battalion, there was no artillery preparation before the attack except for continuation of normal harassing missions. Unheralded by the big guns, the riflemen crossed the Germeter line of departure and shifted into the accustomed five-yard interval between men. The movement was uneventful until about 0730 when the formation halted at the church in Vossenack to begin reorganization and adjustment to a new line of departure, the main street of Vossenack. As the direction of the move was shifted from east to southeast, a brief but intense enemy artillery concentration struck the battalion. The troops took cover in near-by buildings and, except for one man wounded in Company L, escaped casualties.<sup>3</sup>

While the infantry reorganized, the supporting tanks of Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, were scheduled to pull ahead to the nose of the high ground southeast of Vossenack and fire their machine guns at the woods line to the southeast in order to neutralize any enemy opposition which might be present. The 3d Tank Platoon accomplished its mission without difficulty. The 2d Tank Platoon moved farther east than had been planned, and the lead command tank of 2d Lt. John J. Clarke struck a mine 300 yards east of the church and was immobilized. The other tanks in the platoon pulled back, turned to the south,

and joined in spraying the woods line with fire as the infantry pushed forward.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The Spearhead Advance of Company K*

Company K moved out across the open space to the south of Vossenack, its left flank guiding on the Vossenack-Kommerscheidt trail. Shells from light enemy mortars fell with muffled explosions in the muddy ground, but there was no artillery fire. The men moved rapidly, and by 0845 the lead elements had entered the woods, their presence masking the fire of the supporting tanks. According to plan, the tankers raised their fire, using their hull guns as direct fire artillery against Kommerscheidt beyond the wooded Kall River gorge.

Descending the steep wooded slope toward the Kall River, the men of Company K were hit by enemy artillery fire. Tree bursts among the tall firs heightened the effectiveness of the shelling. One man was wounded and three were killed. Occasional sniper fire also began to harass them, and a man laying telephone wire was wounded in the leg and a staff sergeant killed.

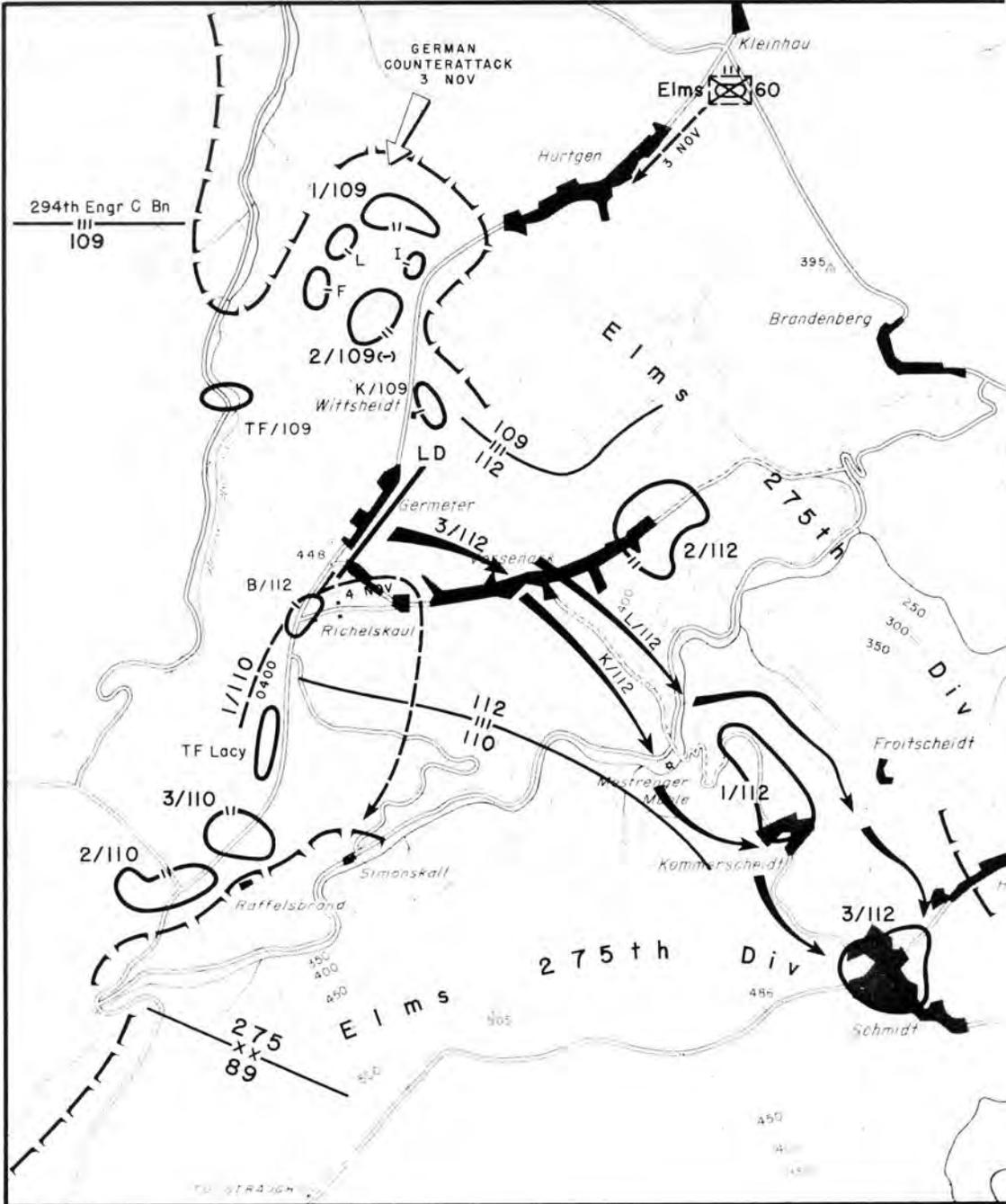
At the Kall River the scouts came upon ten Germans and opened fire, killing one. The other nine surrendered. The enemy offered no other ground opposition, and the men of Company K, surprised with the ease of their attack thus far, waded out into the chilling water of the Kall to continue their advance. They forded the river at a point just south of a mill, Mestrenger Muehle, shortly after 0900.

The Germans continued to shell the wooded valley with sporadic eruptions of artillery that failed to halt Company

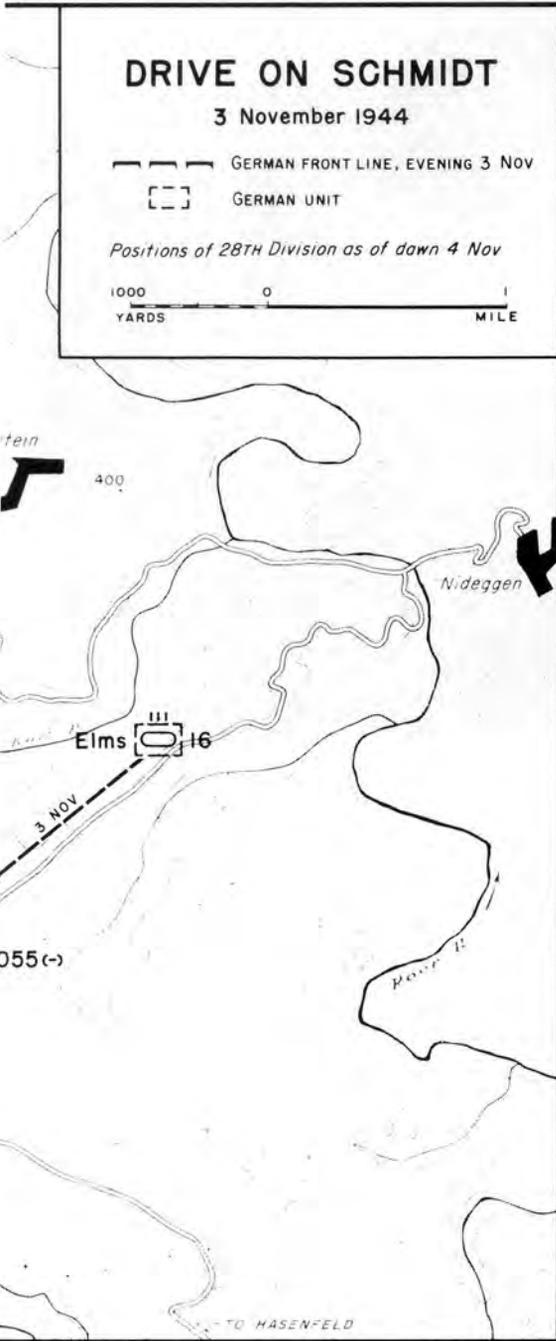
<sup>2</sup> 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 Sec; Ltr, Col Edmund K. Daley (formerly Comdr, 1171st Engr (C) Gp) to Hist Div, 20 Sep 48.

<sup>3</sup> 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne; Combat Interv 75 with Capt Jack W. Walker, CO, Co L, 112th Inf, and 1st Sgt Robert C. Toner, Co I, 112th Inf.

<sup>4</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.



MAP 21



K's advance up the steep slope east of the river. When the men reached the edge of the woods slightly southwest of Kommerscheidt, they saw the little town clearly. Shells from the supporting tanks near Vossenack were falling among the scattered buildings. A small group of Germans fired desultorily from the open field between the woods line and the town. Company K returned the fire, and eight Germans came forward to surrender. As the Germans moved in, Company K's scouts deployed across the open and into the village to reconnoiter, the supporting tank fire lifting as the tankers spotted the scouts moving across the field. The scouts signaled all clear, and Company K moved into the first objective, a drab little community of scattered houses. It had captured the initial objective, against virtually no opposition, by 1300.

Schmidt, the final objective, was clearly visible from Kommerscheidt. It was perched on the sloping eastern portion of the Kommerscheidt-Schmidt ridge line (the highest portion of the ridge was southwest of Schmidt). Woods on all sides fringed the ridge, and between the two towns there were several pillboxes along a dirt road. A group of Germans ran from a pillbox on the right that was marked by the wreckage of an American airplane which had crashed almost on top of it. Opening fire, the Americans drove some of the Germans back into the pillbox and others into a wooded draw to the west.

The Company K commander, Capt. Eugene W. O'Malley, had begun to reorganize his men to continue into Schmidt when the enemy fired a short but violent artillery concentration into Kommerscheidt, holding up the advance



HUERTGEN FOREST. *Enemy artillery fire falling over the heavily wooded slopes caused many casualties from tree bursts.*

momentarily. As soon as the fire lifted, the company headed down the main road toward Schmidt, only occasional shots from enemy rifles contesting the advance. A base of fire from the attached machine gun platoon and flanking fire from a group of riflemen disposed of the Germans who remained in the pillbox marked by the crashed airplane. At the outskirts of Schmidt Captain O'Malley split his company, one group continuing through the town's center and the other going to a small sector of the town on the southwest along the Schmidt-Strauch road.

They found the enemy in Schmidt, but little resistance. The attack was evidently a complete surprise to the Ger-

mans. Some were captured in the houses where they were eating or had just eaten, and some were reported drunk. Others were caught as they rode bicycles or motorcycles into the town, and still others were taken as they strolled along the main road into town from the west without any apparent thought of danger.

In slightly more than seven and one-half hours—the time now: 1430—Company K had advanced to Schmidt, the division objective. In neither Komerscheidt nor Schmidt had there been appreciable German resistance, although G-2 sources determined later that a battalion of the 275th Division with a strength

of 8 officers and 276 men had been charged with the defense.<sup>5</sup>

*Company L Also Advances*

At the start of the move from Vossenack to Schmidt, Company L was echeloned to the left rear, its 2d and 3d Platoons forward. As Company K entered the Kall woods, Company L was still in the open between the town and the woods and received heavy mortar concentrations, probably because Company K's movement had alerted the enemy. Once inside the woods the men could hear artillery fire falling near by but could not see it, and their movement was unimpeded except by the steepness of the slope and the wooded terrain.

The 3d Platoon on the right guided along the main Vossenack-Kommerscheidt trail and neared the river. Spotting a lone German near a bridge across the stream, one of the scouts shot him, and the platoon joined the remainder of the company in fording the river 300 yards north of the bridge, finding the river narrow and shallow with sloping banks and a rock bottom. The company's advance was keeping pace with Company K, which at about the same time, 0900, was fording the stream to the south near the Mestrenger Muehle.

Company L, with two platoons forward, continued up a steep slope beyond the river, keeping inside the woods in order to skirt the open fields to the north of Kommerscheidt and come upon the town unobserved from the east. One

stray enemy soldier was taken prisoner, and later, about noon, some of the men reported they saw Germans in the houses of Froitscheidt, a small settlement across a shallow wooded draw to the east. The company halted almost abreast of this settlement, set up two heavy machine guns, and fired on one of the houses. Nothing happened; so the company commander, Capt. Jack W. Walker, sent a patrol to the buildings only to find the settlement unoccupied.

The Americans continued and by 1400 had reached their assault position in the edge of the woods east of Kommerscheidt. When Captain Walker checked in with his battalion headquarters, he learned that Company K had already taken Kommerscheidt and that Company L was to move on immediately to assist in taking Schmidt.<sup>6</sup>

Walker shifted his unit's attack formation to put the 1st and 2d Platoons forward and the 3d in support, and Company L moved south again toward Schmidt, staying within the woods line east of the Kommerscheidt-Schmidt clearing. It met no opposition. Two German troop shelters with smoke coming from them lay on the route of advance, but they housed no enemy except for one wounded German whom the men deemed beyond assistance.

It was now well after 1500, and another message from battalion said Company K was already in Schmidt and directed Company L to move ahead quickly. The men pushed on and entered Schmidt at the junction of the Bergstein and Harscheidt roads on the east, taking approximately thirty prisoners from the first houses. Darkness, which came early

<sup>5</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Dana, Walker, and 2d Lt Richard Tyo, Co K, 112th Inf; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 Sec; V Corps AAR, Nov 44.

<sup>6</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Walker.

in the forests during the misty winter days, began to increase, joining with harassing sniper fire to hamper the company in its mop-up of the town. Finally, complete darkness and a battalion order to shift to the defense halted the mop-up. Sniper and machine gun fire still came from a group of buildings at the extreme southeast of town along the Hasenfeld road.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Company I Follows in Reserve*

The 3d Battalion's reserve company, Company I, minus its 1st Platoon, which was on security guard at division headquarters, was still in Vossenack when the mortar concentrations in the open area between the town and the Kall woods hit the two leading companies. As Company I started to follow the advance, mortar fire fell on its column as well, causing the company's 60-mm. mortar section at the rear of the column to lose contact. The rest of the company entered the woods before the section leader could re-establish contact. Since mortar fire continued on the open ridge and since he had no knowledge of his company's assigned location beyond the Kall, the section leader kept his group in Vossenack and attached it to Company H. The main body of Company I had no difficulty in the advance after entering the Kall woods and closed into Schmidt shortly after 1600.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Company M Moves to Schmidt*

When the Company M commander, Capt. Guy T. Piercey, received word that

Company K had captured Kommer-scheidt, he directed his 81-mm. mortars in Vossenack and his machine gun platoon on the Vossenack ridge to move up quickly in order to provide close-in fire support for the subsequent attack on Schmidt. Company K's later advance into Schmidt was so rapid, however, that there was no reason for the weapons men to halt in Kommerscheidt, and they moved directly into Schmidt. It was well after dark when they arrived.<sup>9</sup>

#### *3d Battalion Medics*

At the start of the attack on Schmidt the 3d Battalion medical aid station was located in the woods west of Germeter. After the battalion reached Vossenack in early morning, 2d Lt. Alfred J. Muglia, Medical Administrative Corps, established a forward collecting point in the Vossenack church. He used two jeeps and an M-29 weasel to transport patients back to the rear aid station west of Germeter. That afternoon, when the 3d Battalion had reached Schmidt, Lieutenant Muglia and several enlisted medics moved forward in a weasel to reconnoiter for another aid station site. On the narrow and slippery Vossenack-Kommerscheidt route through the Kall woods the weasel threw its tracks and had to be abandoned, blocking the trail. Lieutenant Muglia returned to Vossenack, secured a litter squad and a jeep, and drove back for several patients, possibly wounded men of Company K, who had been attracted to the weasel's Red Cross flag. He evacuated all of them and, since it was almost dark, instructed the

<sup>7</sup> Company L story is from the following: Combat Interv 75 with Walker, Piercey, and S Sgt Frank Ripperdam, Co L, 112th Inf; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44.

<sup>8</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Toner.

<sup>9</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Piercey; Interv with Capt Wayne E. Barnett (formerly 81-mm. mortar sec ldr, Co M, 112th Inf), in Kane, Pa., 22 Sep 48.

litter squad to dig in for the night along the edge of the woods. Then he returned to Vossenack and assisted evacuation there during the night.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Greene Hornets*

The special patrol group of twelve volunteers, nicknamed the "Greene Hornets," served in effect as an intelligence and reconnaissance platoon at the disposal of the 3d Battalion commander. Led by Lieutenant Greene the group moved out early in the morning on its mission of patrolling the woods north of Vossenack just as the 3d Battalion was leaving Germeter. Lieutenant Greene and his men traveled north to Wittscheidt, crossed the Huertgen road, and entered the woods to the east. They found an abandoned German antitank gun and later came unexpectedly upon an enemy outpost defended by two machine guns and a burp gun. So close did the patrol come before either group discovered the other's presence that the resulting fire fight became a hand grenade duel. The Americans quickly demolished the outpost, killing one German, severely wounding another, and putting the rest to flight. Greene's men suffered no casualties.

After investigating a draw in the woods, the patrol moved back into the open and into Vossenack. Lieutenant Greene decided against carrying out a secondary mission of reconnoitering to the southeast for an alternate supply route across the Kall River because of heavy enemy shelling in the area. For

the same reason he made no effort to rejoin his battalion across the river in Schmidt.<sup>11</sup>

### *The 1st Battalion Follows the 3d*

The 1st Battalion, minus Company B, moved out of Germeter about noon on its way to Vossenack. Company B, after completing its demonstration east of Richelskaul, had withdrawn into Company A's former positions around the Richelskaul road junction. The rest of the battalion, in the order A, Battalion Headquarters, C, and D, reached Vossenack by 1330. There it changed direction at the church and moved out across the open space toward the Kall woods. Enemy artillery fire hit the column while it was in the open and killed a Company D messenger. In the woods sporadic enemy shelling continued, severely wounding a sergeant of Company A and killing a mortar section runner.

Probably because the river was to be used as a reorganization phase line, Company A halted just north of the bridge site and began to dig in to protect itself against enemy artillery fire. Upon reaching the river farther to the south, Company C too began to dig in. When orders were soon given to continue, Company C shifted to the lead in the column of companies and advanced across the bridge and up a winding trail toward Kommerscheidt. Darkness was rapidly approaching. At the woods line overlooking the open fields leading into Kommerscheidt, Company C halted and again began to dig in, and Company A and the remainder of the column passed through and into Kommerscheidt.

<sup>10</sup> 2d Lt Alfred J. Muglia, MAC, Rpt of Evacuation to 28th Div Surgeon, 11 Nov 44, in Combat Interv File 76 (hereafter cited as Muglia Rpt).

<sup>11</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Greene.

At 1614 the 28th Division chief of staff sent a message to Colonel Peterson, the 112th Infantry commander, instructing him to send his 1st Battalion to Schmidt to assist the 3d. These instructions accorded with the regiment's original attack plan. Regiment must have changed plans, however, for the 1st Battalion made no effort to continue past Kommerscheidt. The battalion, minus Company B back at Richelskaul and Company C at the northern woods line overlooking Kommerscheidt, closed into the town about 2100. Division must have concurred in the change, for at 2255 Colonel Peterson reported to it that he had a battalion in Schmidt and a battalion in Kommerscheidt, and division issued no further recorded instructions. A division letter of instructions for 4 November (evidently prepared during the night of 3 November) instructed the 1st Battalion to continue to hold in Kommerscheidt.<sup>12</sup>

The night was black, and the enemy harassed the defensive preparations in Kommerscheidt with fire from heavy mortars. The Company A commander, whose men composed the bulk of the town's defenders, deployed his platoons as best he could in the darkness, the 1st Platoon defending to the east, the 2d

Platoon to the south, and the 3d Platoon to the southwest. A gap of several hundred yards between the 2d and 3d Platoons was partially closed with a thin cover of personnel from the battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon, and Company A's light machine guns went into position with the 2d Platoon to cover the main road to Schmidt.

Company D's machine gunners and mortar men had found the going slow and arduous in the darkness and over the rugged terrain on the slopes of the river draw. Arriving in Kommerscheidt almost an hour behind Company A, the men set up their defenses as best they could. The blackness of the night added to the normal confusion of moving into strange territory. The move was finally completed, one section of machine guns going to the left flank (east) and one to the right (west), and the 81-mm. mortars going into position in the rear (north) of the town. The other machine gun platoon had been left with Company B at Richelskaul.

The 1st Battalion command group, including the battalion commander, Major Hazlett, was established in a small, partially covered, trench-type dugout, in an orchard near a road junction on the northern edge of the town. Thus the 1st Battalion prepared for the night, its Company B still defending far back at the line of departure at Richelskaul, its Company C in a support position at the northern Kommerscheidt woods line, and Companies A and D (minus one machine gun platoon) in Kommerscheidt itself.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Perll and Quinton-Hausman-Lockwood-Kertes-Norton; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44. Colonel Peterson has notes from a 3 November conference saying only, "3d Bn to be supported by 1st." He says it was his plan to send the 1st Battalion behind the 3d by bounds, and he does not recall that he ever planned to send the 1st Battalion to Schmidt, because he wanted to provide a defense in depth in deference to the regiment's exposed salient into enemy territory. He does not believe the battalion would have stopped if it had not had orders to do so, for "Major Hazlett [the 1st Battalion commanding officer] was a man who had the courage to do what he was told to do." See Interv with Peterson.

<sup>13</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Perll, Holden, Kelly-Hunter, Quinton-Hausman-Lockwood-Kertes-Norton, and Sgt Tony Kudiak, A and P Plat, 1st Bn Hq Co, 112th Inf; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44.

*1st Battalion Medics*

The 1st Battalion medical personnel followed the battalion's initial advance from Germeter to Vossenack and there set up a forward aid station. Within an hour, the medics were ordered to follow the battalion in a continuation of the advance. Knowing neither the proposed route nor the destination, Capt. Paschal A. Linguiti, the battalion surgeon, and his Medical Administrative Corps assistant, 2d Lt. Henry W. Morrison, joined the rear of the battalion column with their medical personnel and a weasel carrying aid station equipment. The advance proved to be cross-country toward Kommerscheidt, and they were forced to abandon the weasel as they entered the Kall woods, five of the medics transferring the equipment to their own backs. They reached Kommerscheidt about 2200 and selected for their aid station the cellar of a house on the northern edge of town.<sup>14</sup>

*Artillery Support*

Requests for supporting artillery missions were few on 3 November, probably because the 3d and 1st Battalions advanced with comparative ease. The 229th Field Artillery Battalion in direct support did fire 132 missions, most of them harassing. At 1340 Battery C, 229th, displaced forward farther east in the woods west of Germeter. Although

<sup>14</sup> Capt Michael DeMarco and Capt Paschal A. Linguiti, Report on Evacuation of Wounded from Vossenack, Kommerscheidt and Schmidt, 2-11 Nov 44, to 112th Inf surgeon, 11 Nov 44, in Combat Interv File 76 (hereafter cited as DeMarco-Linguiti Rpt); Capt Linguiti, Report on Misuse of Aid Station Site, to 112th Inf surgeon, 16 Nov 44, in Combat Interv File 76 (hereafter cited as Linguiti Rpt).

it was planned to displace the other two firing batteries, later developments showed that proper support could be given from the original locations.<sup>15</sup> Company B, 86th Chemical Battalion, in direct support of the 112th Infantry, fired only seventy-one high explosive and sixty-three white phosphorous rounds during the day, while Company C, in general support of the entire division, smoked the open ridges around Strauch and Steckenborn to the southwest of Schmidt. Company D was scheduled to follow the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, in its early morning attack, but in the open between Germeter and Vossenack the mortar men were pinned down by enemy machine gun, mortar, and small arms fire from the woods north of Vossenack. With tank support, the company was finally able to move into firing positions near Bosselbach Farm. There the enemy fire continued, and the chemical mortar men were forced to defend their position with rifles and bazookas throughout the night.<sup>16</sup>

*Vossenack*

While the 3d and 1st Battalions advanced to Schmidt and Kommerscheidt, the 2d Battalion, bothered but little by enemy artillery the first night in its Vossenack ridge positions, retained its defensive role. The men noted an increase in enemy shelling on 3 November, and those on the forward slopes of the exposed ridge discovered they could not move from their holes in daylight without drawing the fury of enemy artillery and mortars. The ridge became more and

<sup>15</sup> 28th Div Arty Jnl, 3 Nov 44; V Corps Study, Arty Sec.

<sup>16</sup> 86th Cml Bn AAR, Nov 44.

more pock-marked with the eruption of shells, many of them from self-propelled guns on the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge, and the building housing the battalion command post was hit several times. The supporting tanks of Captain West's Company C, 707th Tank Battalion, remained inside the town, seeking cover alongside the battered buildings. Communications to the rear were difficult, heavy shelling cutting telephone wires almost as soon as they were put in. Night brought intermittent relief from the shelling and became a period of almost frantic resupply.<sup>17</sup> Sometime during the day the 2d Battalion was ordered by regiment to send one platoon east into the Kall gorge to secure the north-south river road north of the Kall trail, but for some unexplained reason the mission was not carried out.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Engineers and the Kall Trail*

In close support of the 112th Infantry's Schmidt attack was the 20th Engineer Combat Battalion of the 1171st Engineer Combat Group. The battalion's mission was the development and maintenance of a main supply route from Germeter through Vossenack, across the Kall River, and on to Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. (*Map 22*) Company B, 20th Engineers, was to be responsible for opening and maintaining a one-way road from Richelskaul to Vossenack to the Kall River

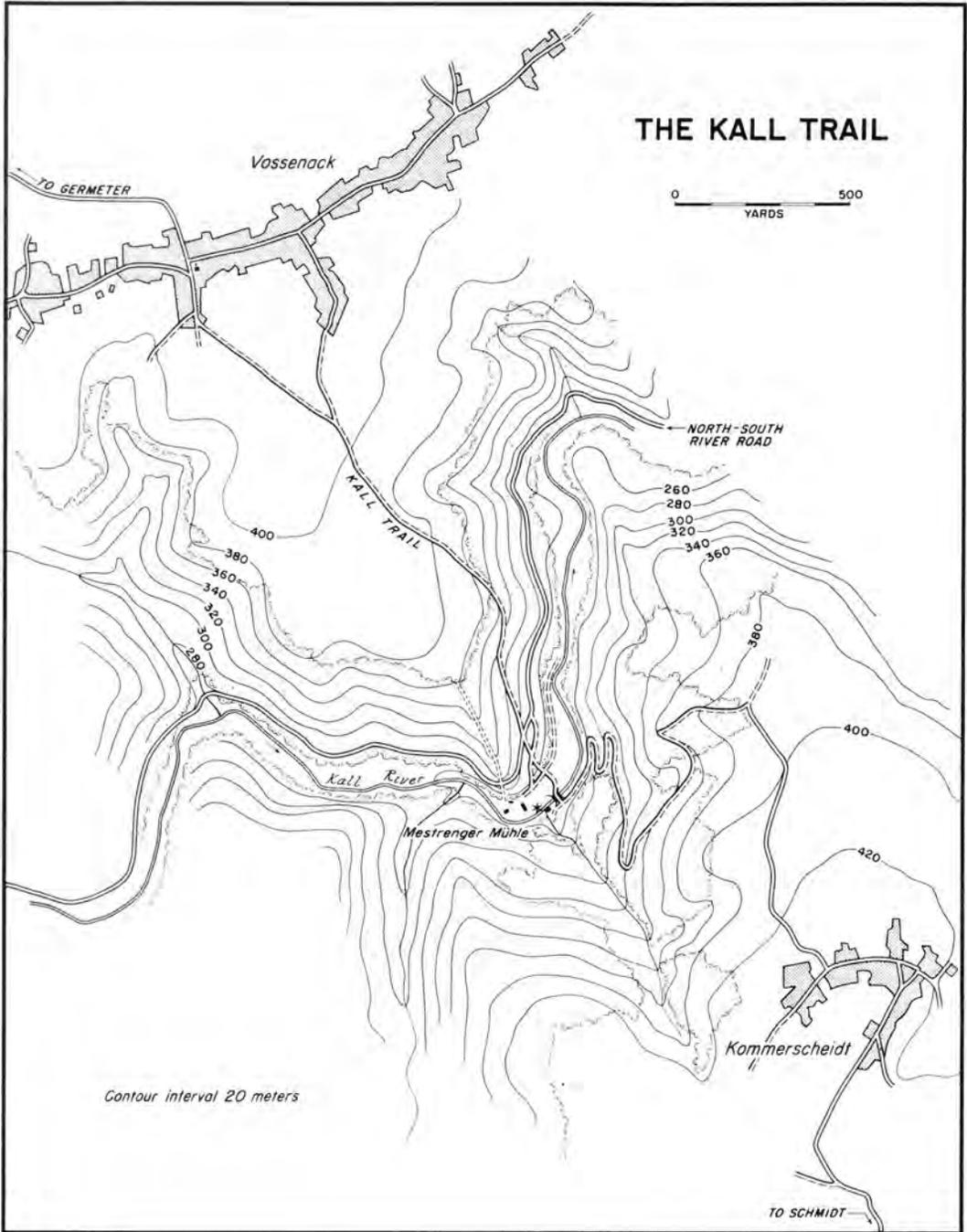
bridge, while Company A was charged with bridging the Kall, if necessary, and opening and maintaining a one-way road from the river through Kommerscheidt to Schmidt. Company C was to be held in battalion reserve in the woods west of Germeter with the stipulation that it not be committed except with approval of the group commander. Battalion headquarters was to furnish three reconnaissance teams, each composed of an officer, an SCR 300 operator, and an additional man for security.

Attack planning had decreed that, because of the expected poor condition of the Kall trail and exposed nature of the Vossenack ridge, engineer vehicles (with the exception of three-quarter-ton weapons carriers and quarter-ton jeeps) could not accompany the leading engineer troops. To meet this problem, a forward tool dump was established in the woods just northwest of Richelskaul. Engineer troops near by were to be on the alert to hand-carry the proper tools and equipment after preliminary reconnaissance should determine the type needed.

The first information that the engineers could go into action came on the morning of 3 November with a message that a street clearance project in Vossenack needed attention. Capt. Edwin M. Lutz, commander of Company B, 20th Engineers, and Capt. Joseph W. Miller, battalion liaison officer, went forward with a platoon of Company B and a reconnaissance team, reaching the Vossenack church about 1300. When they found the road leading south toward the Kall from the church blocked by two disabled American tanks (probably those of Captain West and Lieutenant Novak) and a fallen wall, leaving only enough

<sup>17</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Condon, Beggs, Pruden, Nesbitt, Cascarano, Johnson, Crain, Kauffman, Nelson, and 1st Lt Melvin R. Barrilleaux, CO, Co E, 112th Inf.

<sup>18</sup> Overlay, 112th Inf to CO 2d Bn, 3 Nov 44, 112th Inf S-3 Jnl and File, 3 Nov 44. Although the situation overlay for 4 Nov, 112th Inf G-3 File, 4 Nov 44, shows this platoon in position, it is not supported by either journals or interviews.



R. N. Hanson

MAP 22

space for a jeep to pass, the Company B engineer platoon began immediately to clear a path around the block.

At a company command post of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, Captain Miller and Captain Lutz were informed that the Kall River bridge shown on their maps did not exist but that the river was fordable, provided corduroy was supplied for the approaches. Radioing back to the tool dump for another platoon of Company B to come forward, Lutz and Miller left on foot for a reconnaissance of the bridge site. After the trail from Vossenack entered the woods, it became very steep, and a weasel with a thrown track (Lieutenant Muglia's abandoned weasel) blocked the narrow route. The trail was a kind of shelf, a dirt wall with rock obstructions rising on the right. On the left the bank dropped off sharply. It would be a tight squeeze for tanks, the two captains calculated, but once the weasel was removed tanks might pass by hugging the right bank. At the bridge site itself they found that, contrary to the information they had received, there was a Class 30 stone arch bridge in good condition.<sup>19</sup>

The two engineer officers returned to Vossenack about 1600 and reported their findings to Company A of the 707th Tank Battalion. The tank company commander, Capt. Bruce M. Hostrup, and his men, whose fire had been masked by the advance of Company K, 112th Infan-

try, into Kommerscheidt about 1300 (3 November), had taken cover in a slight defilade around the southernmost houses of Vossenack. On hearing that the trail across the Kall gorge was passable, Hostrup with one of his tank platoons raced across the open southern slope to the woods line in the gathering darkness. He then halted the platoon and went forward in his command tank to test the trail.

About a quarter of the way from the woods line to the river Captain Hostrup found the trail becoming narrow, precipitous, and slippery. The trail's left shoulder, which dropped sharply toward the draw, began to give way under the weight of the tank. Although the road was nine feet wide, so was the tank, and rocky formations jutting out of the right bank confined movement to the trail itself. The tank slipped and almost plunged off the left bank into the draw. Reversing his tank, Captain Hostrup returned to his platoon at the woods line and reported to his battalion commander that the trail was still impassable. About 1900 the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Richard W. Ripple, radioed that the engineers were to work on the trail all night and that Captain Hostrup's tanks should be ready to move through to Schmidt at dawn. The tankers returned to the slight defilade near the southern edge of Vossenack, and spent an uncomfortable night. Throughout the hours of darkness, considerable enemy artillery and mortar fire plagued them. Shell fragments blew off sirens and headlights and perforated bed rolls and shelter halves on the outside of the tanks.

Sometime during the afternoon, as Captain Hostrup's tankers had waited for word that the trail across the Kall

<sup>19</sup> Combat interviews do not make clear that the bridge was checked for demolitions, but in Colonel Daley's letter to the Historical Division he says that, in compliance with the engineer plan, engineers of 103d Engineer Combat Battalion should have been with the assault battalions and presumably did the checking. A Class 30 bridge, capable of supporting a load of approximately thirty tons, could be expected to meet the weight requirements put on it by an infantry division.

was open, one of the tanks had thrown a track and another had bellied on a sharp ridge in the open south of Vossenack. These mishaps together with the loss of Lieutenant Clark's tank (immobilized by a mine in eastern Vossenack at the start of the 3 November attack) left the tank company with only thirteen of its original sixteen tanks when it had to move forward at daybreak.<sup>20</sup>

To the engineers the approach of dusk gave an opportunity to cross the open ridge without danger of receiving observed enemy artillery fire. Led by 2d Lt. Robert E. Huston, the B Company platoon that had been working on the Vossenack road block moved down into the woods with instructions to remove the damaged weasel. With picks and shovels, the engineers were to clear the road as best they could by morning. They knew from preliminary planning that they would have to provide their own security while working: the infantry would not take time to mop up in the woods and would leave no troops there for defense.

Another platoon of Company B, under 1st Lt. George E. Horn, arrived shortly after Lieutenant Huston's platoon had moved out, but it holed up for the night in Vossenack. Captain Miller and Captain Lutz returned to their battalion command post to report the situation (including their belief that the road was passable for tanks as it stood) and to request a bulldozer in order to whittle down some of the right bank and widen the trail. From six miles in the rear, both a bulldozer and an air compressor reached the work site about 0230. By this time Lieutenant Huston's men had

pushed the damaged weasel from the trail by hand. The bulldozer proved of little value, for after about one hour's work it broke a cable and could not be used further.

Meanwhile, late in the afternoon, information had reached Company A, 20th Engineers, that it could proceed to its work beyond the Kall, and the company moved toward Vossenack. As the men crossed the open space between Germeter and Vossenack, small arms and artillery fire killed one engineer and wounded another. In Vossenack, the main body of the company waited while the 2d Platoon under 2d Lt. Robert K. Pierce reconnoitered the bridge site and as far as it could toward Schmidt.

Lieutenant Pierce and his men returned about 2230 with news that the bridge was in good condition. They had gone as far as the positions of Company C, 112th Infantry, at the top of the hill east of the river. The road, said the platoon leader, was clear except for some debris and abatis and possible mines. Under no apparent pressure except to get the trail open by daylight, Company A remained in Vossenack for several hours, suffering three men wounded and another killed by enemy artillery as it did so. At 0200 the 1st Platoon under 1st Lt. John O. Webster went out with mine detectors to clear the trail from the river toward Schmidt, and the remainder of the company joined the 1st Platoon beyond the river at approximately 0600.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne, Lutz.

<sup>21</sup> Engr story from Combat Interv 75 with the following: Daley; Lt Col James F. White, Ex Off, 1171st Engr (C) Gp; T/4 James A. Krieder, Co A, 20th Engr (C) Bn; Maj Bernard P. McDonnell, S-3, 20th Engr (C) Bn; Lutz; Capt Henry R. Doherty, CO, Co A, 20th Engr (C) Bn. See also Maj Bernard P. McDonnell, Rpt of Bn Activity from 29 Oct-9 Nov 44, 14 Nov 44 (hereafter cited as McDonnell

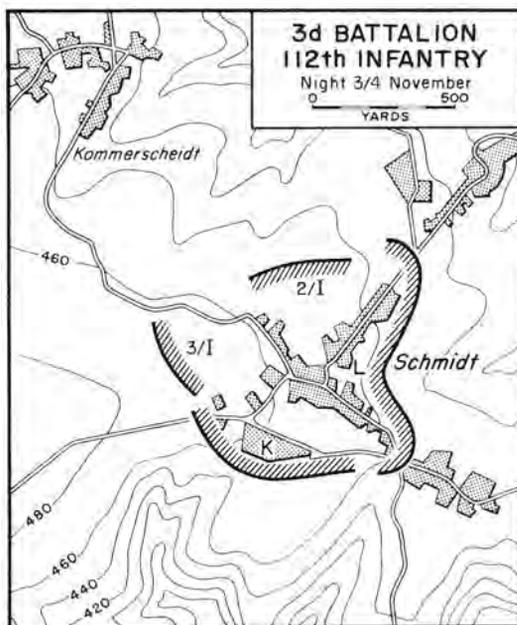
About midnight an infantry supply train of three M-29 weasels loaded with rations, ammunition, and sixty antitank mines negotiated the supply trail across the Kall and moved on to Schmidt. Since capture of the division objective some ten to fifteen hours earlier, very little had been done to improve the admittedly precarious supply line that led to Schmidt. No vehicular traffic other than the three supply train weasels managed to get through on the night of 3 November.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Night in Schmidt*

The men of the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, who had found their afternoon entry into Schmidt virtually uncontested, suspended their mop-up operations shortly after dark because of the darkness and the necessity for readying their defense. Sniper fire continued to hamper defensive efforts the remainder of the night, and Company L drew some machine gun fire from the uncleared houses along the southeastern Hasenfeld road. But in general the night was quiet, and the infantrymen felt a natural buoyancy over their easy afternoon success.

Company L established its 3d Platoon astride the Hasenfeld road to the south-

east, its 2d on the left of the 3d, and its 1st Platoon on the 2d's left at the Harscheidt road on the northeast. (Map 23) The company's two light machine guns and a section of heavy machine guns from Company M were tied into the defense, and contact patrols operated between rifle platoons in order to cover the assigned ground adequately.



MAP 23

Company K, whose aggressive movement had landed the first American troops on the division objective, drew the defensive assignment on the south and southwest and placed its three rifle platoons on line to cover the Strauch road and the open area between the Strauch and Hasenfeld roads. With the company went a section of heavy machine guns from Company M. Stray Germans, apparently unaware that Schmidt had been captured, continued to wander

Rpt); Statement, Capt Lutz, relative to the opn of the engr plan, n.d. (hereafter cited as Lutz Statement); Statement, Capt Doherty, relative to opn of engr plan, n.d. (hereafter cited as Doherty Statement); Statement, Capt Miller, relative to engr opns 2-3 Nov 44, n.d. (hereafter cited as Miller Statement); Lt Col J. E. Sonnefield, CO, 20th Engr (C) Bn, Personal Opn Rpt on Bn Activities from 29 Oct-10 Nov 44, 14 Nov 44 (hereafter cited as Sonnefield Rpt); Statement, Col Sonnefield, relative to opn of the engr plan, 6-10 Nov 44, n.d. (hereafter cited as Sonnefield Statement). All in Combat Interv File 75.

<sup>22</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Dana; V Corps Study, G-4 Sec.

into the Company K positions from the southwest and were taken prisoner. All together Company K collected forty-five prisoners and placed them under guard in the basement of a house. They were to be removed after daylight by regimental military police. Occasional sniper fire and one or two light enemy shellings hampered Company K's night defense preparations, and the company commander, Captain O'Malley, was hit in the stomach by an enemy bullet.

The reserve company, Company I, dug in on the north of town with its two rifle platoons and light machine gun section, one platoon extending Company L's left flank to the left rear and the other extending Company K's right flank to the right rear. Because of the all-around nature of the Schmidt defense, Company I was reserve company in name only, and none of the three rifle companies had been able to hold out a support platoon.

Company M's 81-mm. mortars were emplaced in the yard of a house about one fourth of the distance from Schmidt to Kommerscheidt. Near by, facing northeast to assist one platoon of Company I, was the remaining machine gun platoon of Company M. The mortar men dug in their weapons adequately but were so fatigued that they postponed digging individual foxholes and prepared to pass the night in a small building in the yard near their mortars.

The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Albert Flood, in a pillbox along the Kommerscheidt road, which served as his command post, wanted to get tanks or tank destroyers, or even 57-mm. anti-tank guns, into the Schmidt positions before daylight; but the hours passed and no reinforcement arrived. The battalion had to content itself with the sixty anti-

tank mines brought by the three-weasel supply convoy after midnight. The mines were placed on the three hard-surfaced main roads into the town. No camouflage was attempted, but organic bazookas and small arms fire covered the mines and defensive artillery fires were plotted around the town. Distribution of the water and rations that arrived with the three-weasel convoy was to await daylight.<sup>23</sup> According to available records, no staff officer or headquarters representative of either the 112th Infantry or the 28th Division visited either Kommerscheidt or Schmidt during the night.

#### *109th and 110th Infantry Summaries*

Northwest of the 112th Infantry's sector in the early morning of 3 November, the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry, was renewing its attack to get through the mine field along the Wittscheidt-Huertgen road and reach the woods line overlooking Huertgen. Just as the attack was beginning, the Germans counter-attacked the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry, in its woods-line positions west of

<sup>23</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Dana, Piercey, Walker, Ripperdam, Tyo, Toner, and 1st Lt Leon Simon, asst S-3, 3d Bn, 112th Inf; Interv with Barnett; Interv with S Sgt Robert E. Black, 1st Plat, Co I, 112th Inf, Bradford, Pa., 22 Sep 48 (hereafter cited as Interv with Black); V Corps Study, G-3 and TD Secs. The V Corps Study says the Antitank Company commander tried to get forward with three weasel-towed 57-mm. guns but could not because of the "blocked MSR," but other records show that the main supply route was never blocked until just before dawn, except for Lieutenant Muglia's medical weasel, which was removed shortly after dark. Although the 112th Infantry S-3 Jnl for this date indicates the battalion was in communication with regiment, no request for tanks is recorded. Such a request was sent to the rear by the three-weasel supply train, but this train obviously would not reach regiment until almost dawn or later.

the road. (*See Map 21.*) Beginning about 0730 the enemy hit twice with approximately 200 men each time. Although both attacks were repulsed, the 3d Battalion heard the battle and, misinterpreting a message from regiment, sent two of its companies to the 1st Battalion's aid. These two companies then dug in behind the 1st Battalion while the remaining rifle company stayed at Wittscheidt. Since the 2d Battalion remained in reserve, the 109th Infantry's effort to complete its northern mission had thus been temporarily thwarted.<sup>24</sup>

In the woods to the south the 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry, was partially committed during the day in a defensive position along the Richelskaul-Raffelsbrand road. It engaged in no offensive action, however, and was still considered division reserve. The 3d Battalion made two attacks during the day toward the southeast while the 2d Battalion hit again at the Raffelsbrand pillboxes, but neither battalion gained and both took heavy casualties. Later in the day General Cota, the division commander, ordered the 110th's 1st Battalion to move the next morning to Vossenack and attack due south to seize Simonskall. Such a move might be expected to weaken the Raffelsbrand resistance by threatening the enemy rear. To fill the gap that would be left when the 1st Battalion moved out, Task Force Lacy was formed, consisting of a total of sixty-six men from the Anti-tank Mine Platoon, the Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon, and a special patrol group, all under 1st Lt. Virgil R. Lacy. Commitment of the 110th's 1st

Battalion would leave the 28th Division with no infantry reserve.<sup>25</sup>

#### *Air Support*

Although weather on 3 November again prevented any large-scale air support, one armed reconnaissance mission by twelve P-47's of the 366th Fighter Group was over the target area at 1235 and claimed three armored vehicles destroyed and three damaged northwest of Huertgen. The same squadron claimed a house believed to be a headquarters, five motor transports, and three motorcycles destroyed northwest of Huertgen, three light flak positions destroyed northeast of Kleinhau (one mile northeast of Huertgen), a barracks strafed south of Heimbach, and a radio tower damaged in Kleinhau. Another squadron of the 366th Group was prevented from attacking in the 28th Division area because of weather conditions. It dropped its bombs far afield in the Zuelpich area.<sup>26</sup>

#### *The Enemy Situation*

On 2 November the Germans had met the American offensive with resistance from the 275th Division and plans for a Kampfgruppe of the 116th Panzer Division to join local reserves in a counterattack against the 109th Infantry's penetration northwest of Germeter. Utilizing approximately 200 men (according to American estimates), the counterattack took place at dawn on 3 November but admittedly experienced little success.

<sup>24</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 109th Inf personnel; 109th Inf S-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44.

<sup>25</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 110th Inf personnel; 110th Inf S-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 3 Nov 44.

<sup>26</sup> FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 3 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 Air Sec; Combat Interv 74 with Howison.

The higher German commanders, still engaged in their map study at Schlenderhan Castle, ordered one regimental combat team of the *116th Panzer Division* to move immediately to the Huertgen area. The remainder of the division was to follow that night and the night of 4 November. As a precautionary measure, major elements of one regimental combat team of the *89th Division*, which had begun to move out of the line for refitting after being relieved by advance elements of the *272d Division*, were held at Harscheidt, northeast of Schmidt, since the American attack now appeared to be aimed in that direction. The map conference was discontinued at noon.

When Schmidt itself was captured by the Americans during the afternoon, elements of the *1055th Regiment* of the *89th Division* waited at Harscheidt and prepared for commitment. The *3d Battalion, 1055th Regiment*, dug defensive positions astride the Harscheidt-Schmidt road and that night sent reconnaissance patrols toward Schmidt. The *2d Battalion, 1055th Regiment*, had not completed its move from the west to Harscheidt; when it did arrive in the vicinity before daylight on 4 November, it took position astride the Schmidt-Strauch road west of Schmidt. Several prisoners captured on 3 November by other units of V Corps had indicated that this German regiment was in process of relief, and the 28th Division had been so informed.

When details of the 112th Infantry's success at Schmidt reached *Seventh Army*, a dawn counterattack on 4 November was ordered to eliminate the American advance. It was to be launched by the *1055th Regiment*, assisted by assault guns and an armored group of about twenty to thirty tanks from the *116th Panzer*

*Division's* tank regiment, *16th Panzer Regiment*, which had already been en route south and now was moved quickly to the Harscheidt area.

Meanwhile, the *60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (116th Panzer Division)* reached the Huertgen area and laid plans to counterattack at dawn on 4 November against the 109th Infantry's penetration north of Germeter. Because of the difficulties of terrain and their own mine fields, the Germans planned to commit the *116th Panzer Division's* grenadier regiments on the north flank of the American bulge as infantry. A sizable part of its tank regiment was to fight with the *89th Division* around Schmidt and Kommerscheidt.<sup>27</sup>

*Summary for 3 November and  
Night of 3-4 November*

Since the 28th Division had no knowledge of these extensive German preparations, the 112th Infantry's situation as daylight approached on 4 November looked surprisingly good. Its 3d Battalion had moved with almost amazing facility to the division objective, Schmidt; its 1st Battalion had advanced and halted in Kommerscheidt and along the woods line to the north of Kommerscheidt; and its 2d Battalion had held and

<sup>27</sup> MSS # A-891 and A-892 (Gersdorff); MS # A-905 (Waldenburg); ETHINT 53 (Gersdorff); ETHINT 56 (Gersdorff and Waldenburg); Sit Rpts, 2-4 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44*; 28th Div G-2 File, Nov 44; Order of the Day commemorating the battles of Kommerscheidt and Schmidt, entitled "Division Review of the *89th Division*" (hereafter cited as *89th Division Order of the Day*). This captured document is available only in translation by V Corps IPW Team 11, as reproduced by Maj. Henry P. Halsell in his unpublished manuscript, Huertgen Forest and the Roer River Dams.

consolidated its defenses in Vossenack. Supporting engineers had begun work on the main supply route through the Kall valley, although their work thus far had been minor; and a company of tanks was poised to move over the Kall trail at dawn to join the Schmidt defense. Another company of tanks was present to aid the Vossenack defense.

The division picture was not so bright, because two stubborn interrelated facts persisted: abominable weather was preventing isolation of the battlefield by air—indeed, preventing all but minor air activity; although no major enemy armor had been sighted and prospects were good for getting American tanks to Schmidt, those American tanks still were not there. The 109th Infantry to the north had experienced limited success; the 110th Infantry to the south had made no gains.

It was logical to assume that, if the

Germans were going to hit back against the forces across the Kall, they would have to strike soon. Otherwise the 28th Division would be ready to start its push to the southwest toward Strauch and Steckenborn; in fact, a G-3 letter of instructions the night of 3 November initiated plans for such a push.<sup>28</sup> Already the capture of Schmidt had cut the enemy's supply line to troops manning the forts north of Monschau, and it would be illogical to expect the Germans to accept this situation with only a minor display of resistance.

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<sup>28</sup> 28th Div G-3 Jnl and File, 3 Nov 44. Despite his division's early success at Schmidt, General Cota never actually expected to be able to execute this second phase of the attack without assistance. With all his troops already committed, he had no unit with which to attack toward Strauch and Steckenborn unless he took the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th, thus leaving what would become the 112th's rear (Schmidt and Kommerscheidt) completely undefended. See Interv with Cota.

## CHAPTER III

# Action at Schmidt (4 November)

### *Tanks Try To Cross the Kall*

Before daylight the next morning (4 November), the tankers of Captain Hostrup's Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, warmed up their motors for another try at traversing the precipitous trail across the river. The 1st Platoon, commanded by 1st Lt. Raymond E. Fleig in the forward tank, was to lead.

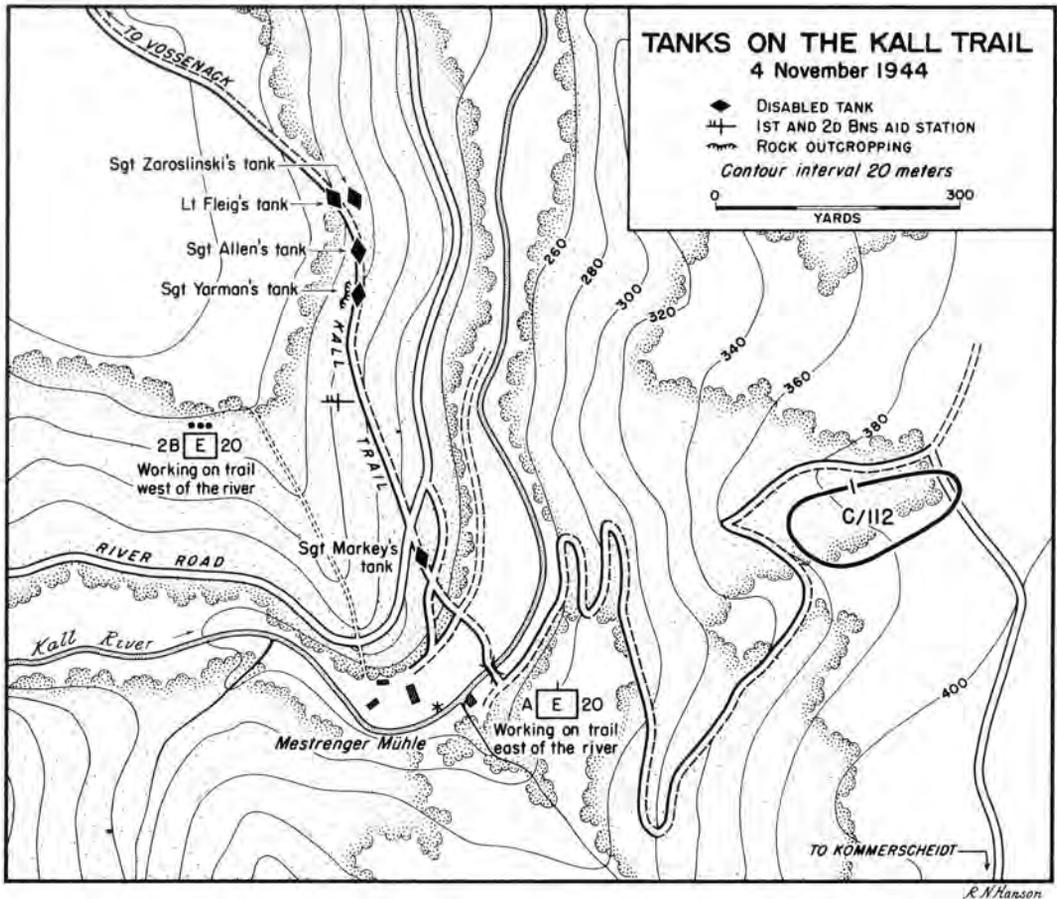
Lieutenant Fleig's tank had only just entered the woods and begun to advance along the slippery narrow woods trail when it was jarred suddenly by an explosion. It had struck a mine which had evidently gone undetected when the engineers had swept the road. Although no one was injured, the mine disabled a track, and the tank partially blocked the trail. (*Map 24*)

The platoon sergeant, S. Sgt. Anthony R. Spooner, suggested winching the other tanks around Lieutenant Fleig's immobilized tank. Using the tow cable from Fleig's tank and the tank itself as a pivot, Spooner winched his own second tank around and back onto the narrow trail. Fleig boarded what now became the lead tank and continued down the trail, directing Sergeant Spooner to repeat the process to get the remaining three tanks of the platoon around the obstacle.

As Lieutenant Fleig continued to inch his tank down the dark trail, sharp curves

in the road which had not been revealed in previous map studies necessitated much stopping and backing. The lieutenant noticed that his tank was tearing away part of the thin left shoulder of the trail but considered the damage not serious enough to hold up vehicles in his rear. With slow, painstaking effort, he made his way toward the river, crossed the bridge, and proceeded up the opposite slope. There the route presented little difficulty except for three switchbacks where Fleig had to dismount and direct his driver. It was just beginning to grow light when his tank churned alone into Kammerscheidt.

Back at the start of the wooded portion of the trail, Sergeant Spooner succeeded in winching the three remaining tanks of the platoon around the disabled tank. Sgt. Jack L. Barton's tank in the lead came to a sharp bend made even more precarious by a large outcropping of rock from the right bank. Despite all efforts at caution, Barton's tank partially threw a track and was stopped. Captain Hostrup came forward to determine the difficulty and directed the next tank in line under Sergeant Spooner to tow Sergeant Barton's lead tank back onto the trail. The expedient worked, and the track was righted. Using Spooner's tank as an anchor, Barton successfully rounded the curve. When he in turn



MAP 24

anchored the rear tank, it too passed the obstacle and both tanks continued.

Making contact with Lieutenant Huston, whose engineer platoon from Company B, 20th Engineers, was working on the trail, Captain Hostrup asked that the engineers blow off the projecting rock. The lieutenant had no demolitions, but he made use of three German Teller mines that had previously been removed from the trail. The resulting explosion did little more than nick the sharpest projection of the rock.

The last tank in line, Sgt. James J.

Markey's, in spite of difficulty with a crumbling left bank, arrived at the rock outcropping a few minutes later. The engineer platoon assisted in guiding it safely around the bend. Although four tanks were now past the initial obstacles of the narrow trail, the last three had some distance to go before they would be in a position to assist the defense of Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. It was still not quite daylight.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig Payne and Ripple.

*Action at Schmidt*

Sunrise on 4 November was at 0732. A few minutes before came the noise of enemy artillery pieces opening fire, and a hail of shells began to crash among the hastily prepared defenses in the southern edge of Schmidt. The shelling walked back and forth through the town for more than thirty minutes. Coming from at least three directions—northeast, east, and southeast—the fire was so intense that it seemed to many of the infantry defenders to originate from every angle.

In line to meet the expected enemy counterattack the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, as previously noted, was in a perimeter defense of the town. (*Map IX*)<sup>2</sup> To the east and southeast Company L defended the area between the Harscheidt and Hasenfeld roads. To the south and southwest was Company K between the Hasenfeld and Strauch roads. Company I, with only two rifle platoons and its light machine gun section, had its 2d Platoon on the north and its 3d Platoon on the northwest. A section of heavy machine guns from Company M was with Company L and another with Company K, while the remaining heavy machine gun platoon was on the north edge of town covering an open field and wooded draw to the north near the 2d Platoon, Company I. The 81-mm. mortars were dug in on the northern edge of town near the machine gun platoon, and the battalion command post was in a pillbox just west of the Kommerscheidt road 300 yards from Schmidt. Antitank defense consisted of

uncamouflaged mines hastily strung across the Harscheidt, Hasenfeld, and Strauch roads and covered with small arms and organic bazookas.

Probably the first to sight enemy forces was Company I's 2d Platoon on the left of the Harscheidt road. Shortly after dawn a runner reported to Capt. Raymond R. Rokey at the company CP that observers had spotted some sixty enemy infantry in a patch of thin woods about a thousand yards northeast of Schmidt, seemingly milling around forming for an attack. Having no communication with his platoons except by runner, Captain Rokey left immediately for the 2d Platoon area. Although the artillery forward observer at Company I's CP promptly put in a call for artillery fire, for some reason the call produced no result until much later.<sup>3</sup>

Company M machine gunners with the left flank of Company L on the east fired on ten or fifteen enemy soldiers who emerged from the woods and dashed for a group of houses at Zubendchen, a settlement north of the Harscheidt road. From here the Germans evidently intended to regroup and make their way into Schmidt. A section of 81-mm. mortars directed its fire at the houses, scoring at least one or two direct hits, and observers saw Germans crawling back toward the woods.

Other enemy infantrymen continued to advance from the northeast. Company I's 2d platoon employed its small

<sup>2</sup> No overlays or maps showing the disposition of the 3d Bn, 112th Inf, can be found. Positions and movement as shown on Map IX are approximate as determined from unit journals and combat interviews.

<sup>3</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Toner; 28th Div Arty Jnl, 4 Nov 44; V Corps Study, Signal Sec. The V Corps Study quotes the division artillery communications officer as saying that no request for fire failed to be transmitted during the entire Schmidt operation. This artillery forward observer with Company I was killed, and reason for failure of artillery in this instance cannot be determined.



KALL TRAIL SUPPLY ROUTE *between Vossenack and Kommerscheidt on Vossenack side of gorge. Note thrown tank tracks on the right.*

arms weapons to repulse a wavering, un-co-ordinated effort, preceded by light mortar fire, which was launched against its northeast position, possibly by the group seen earlier readying for an attack.

A heavier assault struck almost simultaneously against the right-flank position of Company L along the Hasenfeld road on the southeast. Automatic riflemen with the defending platoon opened up as the enemy crossed a small hill to the front. A German machine gun less than fifty yards away at the base of a building

in the uncleared southeastern edge of Schmidt returned the fire. When a squad leader, S. Sgt. Frank Ripperdam, crawled forward with several of his men until he was almost on top of the enemy gun, five enemy soldiers jumped up, yelling in English, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" Sergeant Ripperdam and two other men stood up to accept the expected surrender, only to have the Germans jump back quickly into their emplacement and open fire with the machine gun. Dropping again to the ground, the sergeant directed a rifle



KALL TRAIL SUPPLY ROUTE with *Kommerscheidt* side of gorge in the background.

grenadier to fire at the machine gun. Ripperdam saw the grenade hit at least two of the Germans, but still the machine gun fired. One of the Company L men suddenly sprang erect and ran forward behind the slight concealment of a sparse hedgerow, firing his rifle in a one-man assault. The Germans shifted their gun and raked his body with fire, killing him instantly. Sergeant Ripperdam and the remaining men withdrew to their defensive ring, but the Germans too had evidently been discouraged, for there was no more fire from the position.

Holding the enemy to their front with

small arms and mortar fire, the men on Company L's right flank could see Germans infiltrating on their right through the Company K positions. An enemy machine gun opened fire from a road junction near the uncleared houses on the Hasenfeld road and prevented even the wounded from crossing the street to the north to reach the company medics. On all sides of Schmidt except the north the enemy was now attacking.

Supporting artillery of the 229th Field Artillery Battalion was engaged in harassing fires until 0823 when the air observation post called for and received twelve

rounds on enemy personnel in the vicinity of Harscheidt. A previous call from the forward observer with Company I still had produced no results. At 0850 American artillery joined the battle with its first really effective defensive fires, 216 rounds of TOT on a concentration of enemy tanks to the east, just south of the Harscheidt-Schmidt road. From that time on, artillery played its part in the battle, the 229th alone firing 373 rounds until 1000, and supporting corps artillery and the 108th Field Artillery Battalion of 155's joining the defense.<sup>4</sup>

Enemy tanks suddenly entered the battle, obviously determined to exploit the minor successes won by the advance infantry. With the tanks came other German infantry: five tanks and a battalion of infantry were reported along the Harscheidt road and another five tanks and battalion of infantry along the Hasenfeld road.<sup>5</sup>

The defenders of the two main roads opened up with their rocket launchers, but the enemy tanks rumbled effortlessly on, firing their big guns into foxholes and buildings with blasts whose concussion could kill if the shell fragments did not. On the Hasenfeld road, at least one Company L bazooka scored a hit on one

of the tanks; it stopped only briefly, swung off to one side, and clanked on its methodically destructive way. Such seeming immunity demoralized the men who saw it.

The attack against Company K on the south had spilled over to the southwest, and was joined by other enemy infantry attacking from the west. Company I's 3d Platoon on the right of the Strauch road found itself under assault. A runner reported the situation to Captain Rokey, the company commander, who was still with his hard-pressed 2d Platoon on the north. Rokey sent word back for the 3d Platoon to withdraw from its foxholes in the open field to the cover of the houses.

Along the Harscheidt and Hasenfeld roads the German tanks spotted the feeble rows of mines, disdainfully pulled off to the sides, and skirted them. Then they were among the buildings of the town and the foxholes of the defenders, systematically pumping round after round into the positions. On the south and southwest the situation rapidly disintegrated. Company K's defenses broke under the attack.

American riflemen streamed from their foxholes into the woods to the southwest. As they sought relief from the pounding they moved, perhaps unwittingly, farther into German territory. They were joined in their flight by some men from Company L.

Another Company K group of about platoon size retreated into the Company L sector and there told a platoon leader that the Germans had knocked out one of Company K's attached heavy machine guns and captured the other. The enemy had completely overrun the company's positions.

The Company L platoon leader sent

<sup>4</sup> 28th Div Arty Jnl, 4 Nov 44. Battery C, 229th, displaced forward on 3 November, and no breakdown on its firing for 4 November is available. During the entire period between 0600 of 4 November and 0600 of 5 November Battery C did fire a total of 189 rounds; therefore some of these rounds would have come during the period mentioned here.

<sup>5</sup> This estimate of enemy force is based primarily on American estimates in combat interviews in OCMH, but agrees basically with German material except that the Germans made no mention of an attack from the direction of Hasenfeld. These troops may have come originally from Harscheidt and in the course of the attack moved over to the Hasenfeld road.

three men to his company command post in the vicinity of the church in the center of town to get a better picture of the over-all situation. The men quickly returned, reporting that they had been prevented from reaching the company CP by fire from Germans established in the church. The three men had the impression that everyone on their right had withdrawn.

The enemy tanks plunged directly through the positions of the 1st Platoon, Company L, in the center of the company's sector on the east. They overran the company's 60-mm. mortars and knocked out two of them with direct hits from their hull guns. Notifying the company command post that they could not hold, the Americans retreated to the woods on the southwest where they had seen Company K troops withdrawing.

Now the retreat of small groups and platoons was turning into a disorderly general exodus. Captain Rokey ordered his 2d Platoon, Company I, to pull back to the protection of the buildings, but the enemy fire was so intense that control became virtually impossible. The men fled, not to the buildings as they had been ordered, but north and west over the open ground and into the woods in the direction of Kommerscheidt, there finding themselves intermingled with other fleeing members of the battalion. It was difficult to find large groups from one unit.

In the Company K sector, 2d Lt. Richard Tyo, a platoon leader, had noticed the withdrawal of the company's machine gun section and 1st Platoon. On being told by the men that they had orders to withdraw, Lieutenant Tyo took charge and led them back through the houses of Schmidt toward the north and

Kommerscheidt. On the way they passed two men from the company's 3d Platoon, one with a broken leg and the other lying wounded in his foxhole. The wounded men said their platoon had gone "that way" and pointed toward the woods to the southwest. Tyo and his group continued north, however, and joined the confused men struggling to get back to Kommerscheidt. There was no time to take along the wounded.

The headquarters groups of Companies L and K tried to form a line in the center of Schmidt, but even this small semblance of order was soon confusion again. Someone in the new line said an order had come to withdraw, the word spread quickly, and none questioned its source. A Company K man remembered the forty-five prisoners in the near-by basement, and two men headed them back double-time toward Kommerscheidt. The other men joined the mass moving out of Schmidt.

The 81-mm. mortar platoon on the northern edge of town had received its first indication of counterattack shortly after daybreak when a round from an 88-mm. gun crashed against the house near the dug-in mortars, seriously wounding a man outside the small building in which the mortar men were sleeping. The mortar men then joined in defensive fires on call from the rifle companies and were so intent on their job that they did not notice that the rifle companies were withdrawing. Well along in the morning a lieutenant from Company I stopped at their position and told them the rifle companies had all fallen back and enemy tanks were only a few houses away. Carrying the seriously wounded man on a stretcher made from a ladder, the mortar men withdrew. Once the with-



GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR *being escorted to the rear by military policemen on 4 November. Forty-five prisoners were captured the day before during the assault on Schmidt.*

drawal had begun, it lost all semblance of organization; each little group made its way back toward Kommerscheidt on its own.

The time was now about 1000, and with or without orders Schmidt was being abandoned. The battalion commander notified those companies with whom he still had contact that the battalion CP was pulling its switchboard and that they should withdraw.

Little could be done for the seriously wounded unable to join the retreat. The battalion aid station was far back, at the

moment in the Kall River gorge. Several company aid men stayed behind with the wounded to lend what assistance they could. The bodies of the dead were left where they had fallen.

Most of the American troops who were to get out of Schmidt had evidently done so by about 1100, although an occasional straggler continued to emerge until about noon. By 1230 the loss of Schmidt was apparently recognized at 28th Division headquarters, for the air control officer directed the 396th Squadron of the 366th Group (P-47's) to attack the town. The

squadron termed results of the bombing "excellent."<sup>6</sup>

### *Struggle With the Main Supply Route*

While the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, was engaged in its battle for survival in Schmidt, other troops of the regiment and supporting units were engaged in activity which weighed heavily on the 3d Battalion's battle.

The 3d Battalion aid station had received a message from Colonel Flood, the battalion commander, at 0500 to displace forward from Germeter where, except for a forward collecting station under Lieutenant Muglia, it had remained even after its battalion had taken Schmidt. The aid station troops responded to the order by establishing themselves at the church in Vossenack while Muglia took some of the equipment and personnel on to the edge of the woods alongside the Kall trail. He had left one litter squad there the night before. Sending all available litter bearers to comb the area for casualties, the lieutenant and T/3 John M. Shedio reconnoitered for an aid station site.

Beside the trail about 300 yards from the Kall River, Muglia found a log dug-

out approximately twelve by eighteen feet in size. (See Map 24.) The entire dugout was underground except for a front partially barricaded with rocks. The roof had been constructed of two layers of heavy logs, thus providing excellent protection from all shelling except direct hits. While the runner went back to Vossenack for the battalion surgeon, Capt. Michael DeMarco, and the remainder of the 3d Battalion medical personnel, Lieutenant Muglia displayed a Red Cross panel at the cabin and patients began to collect. An ambulance loading point was established at the trail's entrance into the woods.<sup>7</sup>

The three-weasel supply train which had reached Schmidt after midnight had been under the command of 1st Lt. William George, the 3d Battalion motor officer. Just before dawn the three weasels returned to Germeter, carrying those men who had been wounded in the Schmidt capture and mop-up. Lieutenant George then agreed to return to Schmidt with the battalion Antitank Platoon leader to take back a miscellaneous load of ammunition. On reaching the entrance of the main supply route into the woods southeast of Vossenack shortly after dawn, the party found the trail blocked by Lieutenant Fleig's abandoned tank. Although other tanks had previously passed this obstacle, the group gave up its supply attempt when the enemy shelled the area and one of the supply sergeants was killed.<sup>8</sup>

The abandoned tank gave trouble as well to those tanks of Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, which had not yet passed the initial obstacles of the supply route. Four had managed to get through (at

<sup>6</sup> The Schmidt counterattack has been reconstructed primarily from combat interviews, which are admittedly sketchy because of the confused situation and number of casualties among key personnel, both at the time and later, before they could be interviewed. Delay in information reaching the rear or failure to record it leaves the unit journals of little assistance. See Combat Interv 75 with Dana, Piercey, Toner, Ripperdam, Walker, Tyo; Intervs with Barnett, with Peterson, and with Black; 112th Inf S-2 and S-3 Jnls, 4 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44, 28th Div Arty Jnl, 4 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3, G-4, Signal and TD Secs. The air strike against Schmidt was set by the 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44, at 1236, and by FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 4 Nov 44, at 1230.

<sup>7</sup> Muglia Rpt; DeMarco-Linguitti Rpt.

<sup>8</sup> Combat Interv 75 with George.

least one was in Kommerscheidt at dawn), but the rest were still struggling with the narrow trail. The 2d Platoon, which had only three tanks left, began its journey before daylight. In S. Sgt. Anthony S. Zaroslinski's lead tank rode Lieutenant Clarke, whose own vehicle had been immobilized by a mine the day before in Vossenack. When his tank reached Fleig's abandoned tank, Sergeant Zaroslinski, unaware that the 1st Platoon had successfully bypassed the obstacle by winching its tanks around it, attempted to pass on the left. The venture ended disastrously: Zaroslinski's tank slipped off the road, and the sergeant found himself unable to back it up because of the steep and slippery incline. The crew dismounted to investigate, and enemy shells struck home, killing Zaroslinski and wounding Lieutenant Clarke.

Sgt. Walton R. Allen, commanding the next tank in column, decided to try squeezing between the two disabled tanks, using Sergeant Zaroslinski's tank as a buffer on the left to keep his own tank from sliding into the draw. Succeeding, he dismounted and turned his tank over to Sgt. Kenneth E. Yarman, who commanded the next tank in the column. Allen then led Yarman's tank through, boarded it, and continued down the trail.

Sergeant Yarman, now commanding the lead tank of the 2d Platoon, reached the bend where the rock outcropping made passage so difficult. As he tried to pass, his tank slipped off the left of the trail and threw its left track. The next tank under Sergeant Allen reached a point short of the outcropping and also slipped off the trail to the left, throwing both its tracks. About the same time, Sergeant Markey, who commanded the

last tank of the leading 1st Platoon and was presumably already past the Kall, reported back to his company commander, Captain Hostrup, at the rock outcropping. His tank had gotten stuck near the bottom of the gorge and had also thrown a track.

Only one tank, commanded by Lieutenant Fleig, had reached Kommerscheidt. Two others were now past the river. But behind them and full on the vital trail sat five disabled tanks. Still farther to the rear and waiting to come forward were the four tanks of the 3d Platoon. While the armor remained stymied on the Kall trail, precious time was slipping by. For some time now the crewmen had been hearing the battle noises from Schmidt, and by 1100 occasional stragglers from the Schmidt battle had begun to pass them going toward the rear.<sup>9</sup>

Still working with hand tools on the Kall trail were Lieutenant Huston's platoon from Company B, 20th Engineers, and all of Company A, 20th Engineers. Five Germans surrendered voluntarily to Company A's security guards as the unit worked east of the river. Occasional enemy artillery fire wounded six of its men. Huston's Company B platoon, informed by the tankers that they thought they could replace the tracks on their disabled tanks without too much delay, worked to repair the damage done by the tanks to the delicate left bank of the trail. Although almost twenty-four hours had elapsed since Company K, 112th Infantry, had first entered Schmidt, higher commanders still seemed unaware of the poor condition of the Kall trail. Only one engineer company and an ad-

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<sup>9</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.

ditional platoon, equipped with hand tools and an air compressor but no demolitions, were working on the trail, and no one was blocking the north-south river road, both ends of which led into enemy territory.<sup>10</sup>

While the struggle with obstacles on the supply route went on and while the battle raged in Schmidt, the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, continued to hold its Vossenack ridge defenses. An enemy patrol in force hit Company F at approximately 0630 but was beaten off with small arms fire and artillery support on call from the 229th Field Artillery Battalion.<sup>11</sup> When daylight came, the defenders had to steel their nerves against relentless enemy shelling. It seemed to the soldiers forward of Vossenack that the enemy concentrated his fire on each foxhole until he believed its occupants

knocked out, then moved on. The shelling forced the 2d Battalion to move its command post during the day to an air-raid shelter about a hundred yards west of the church on the north side of the street. The companies initiated a practice of bringing as many men as possible into the houses during daylight, leaving only a skeleton force on the ridge.

In the western end of Vossenack, troops carried on their duties and traffic continued to flow in and out of the town. Someone coming into Vossenack for only a short time, perhaps during one of the inevitable lulls in the fire, might not have considered the shelling particularly effective. But the foot soldiers knew different. To them in their exposed foxholes, a lull was only a time of apprehensive waiting for the next bursts. The cumulative effect was beginning to tell.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Lutz, Doherty; Sonnefield Rpt; Sonnefield Statement. There was evidently confusion as to who was responsible for defending the two flanks of the vital Kall trail. While infantry commanders seemed to think this a job assigned the engineers, the engineers interpreted the direction of providing their own security to mean close-in security as their men worked. Colonel Peterson provides a possible explanation for the confusion in pointing out that originally the 112th Infantry was to have placed a number of defensive outposts to block both ends of the Kall gorge, but division had approved cancellation of this plan before the attack started to permit the 112th its full strength for the Schmidt attack. The resulting increased need for greater engineer security measures was evidently not understood by the engineers. See Interv with Peterson. Par. 1b(3) from the Engineer Plan, 30 October 1944, makes the engineer position clear: "Due to disposition of friendly troops it is possible for enemy patrols to infiltrate through our lines . . . especially . . . during the hours of darkness. *Local security will be required.*" (Italics supplied.)

<sup>11</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Kauffman. Although several enemy patrols hit the 2d Battalion during its stay in Vossenack, records are hopelessly confused on the times and number of such patrols. For this reason, no further mention is made in this narrative of such patrols except for one against Sergeant Cascarano's Company F squad.

### *The Battle for Kommerscheidt*

At dawn on 4 November, just before the Germans counterattacked at Schmidt, the officers of Companies A and D, 112th Infantry, took stock of their defensive situation in Kommerscheidt and made minor adjustments to the positions they had moved into the night before.<sup>13</sup> (*Map X*) The Americans found themselves situated on the lower portion of the Kommerscheidt-Schmidt ridge, with dense wooded draws on three sides, and another wooded draw curving around slightly to their front (southeast). Their defenses were generally on either flank of

<sup>12</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Kauffman, Johnson, Crain, Pruden, Nesbitt, Condon; 2d Info and Hist Sv Hist Off, personal observations on arty fire.

<sup>13</sup> No overlays or maps exist showing the Kommerscheidt defenses. Positions and movement as shown on Map X are approximate as determined from unit journals and combat interviews.

the town and south of the houses along the town's main east-west street. Lack of troops had caused them to forego occupying the houses along the southern road toward Schmidt. Company C was in a reserve position in the edge of the woods to the rear, and Company B and a platoon of Company D's heavy machine guns were still back at Richelskaul. They had tank support initially from only one tank, that of Lieutenant Fleig, Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, but just before noon Fleig's tank was joined by those of Sergeants Barton and Spooner. The battalion command post was in a shallow, partially covered dugout in an orchard just north of the town, and the aid station was in the cellar of a house on the northern edge of town. After daylight the enemy harassed the Kommerscheidt positions with occasional light artillery and mortar concentrations, but it was from the direction of Schmidt that the men could hear the heavier firing.

By midmorning it was evident that something disastrous was happening in Schmidt. Small groups of frightened, disorganized men began to filter back through the Kommerscheidt positions with stories that "they're throwing everything they've got at us." By 1030 the scattered groups had reached the proportions of a demoralized mob, reluctant to respond to orders of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of Companies A and D seeking to augment the Kommerscheidt defenses.

Within the mass of retreating men there were frantic efforts to stem the withdrawal, and when the enemy did not immediately pursue his Schmidt success groups of 3d Battalion troops began to reorganize to assist the 1st Battalion. Company I, withdrawing through the

wooded draw southeast of Kommerscheidt, found it had about seventy-two men, and, with a few stragglers from other companies, stopped in Kommerscheidt and joined the center of the defense on the south. Approximately twenty-six men with Sergeant Ripperdam of Company L, augmented by a small group of battalion headquarters personnel, went into position on the northwest fringe of town, facing slightly south of west, on the right flank of the 3d Platoon, Company A. The remnants of Company K, including the group which had retreated with Lieutenant Tyo, were organized into two understrength platoons: one, with a strength of about fourteen men, dug in to the rear of Kommerscheidt (north); the other faced the northeast to guard the left flank. The Company D commander, Capt. John B. Huyck, made contact with Captain Piercey, Company M commander, and co-ordinated the fire of Company D's weapons with those surviving from Company M, three 81-mm. mortars without ammunition and three heavy machine guns. The latter went into position on the southwest edge of Kommerscheidt. Despite these efforts at stopping the retreat, many men continued past Kommerscheidt. Some were stopped at the Company C woods-line position, but others withdrew all the way to Vossenack and Germeter. Rough estimates indicated that only about 200 men of the 3d Battalion were reorganized to join Companies A and D in defending Kommerscheidt.<sup>14</sup>

Even as the 3d Battalion was being knocked out of Schmidt, the battalion's

<sup>14</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Kudiak, Holden, Quinton-Hausman-Lockwood-Kertes-Norton, Perll, Piercey, Kelly-Hunter, Ripperdam, Tyo, Dana; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.

assistant S-3, 1st Lt. Leon Simon, was making his way forward with a regimental order which instructed the 3d Battalion to hold temporarily in Schmidt while the 110th Infantry continued its attack against Raffelsbrand. Lieutenant Simon got no farther than Kommerscheidt and there was directed by Colonel Flood, the 3d Battalion commander, to return and tell regiment he absolutely had to have more tanks. Despite radio communication with Kommerscheidt, the Schmidt action was a confused blur at regimental headquarters west of Germeter along the Weisser Weh Creek. Before Lieutenant Simon returned, the regimental executive officer, Lt. Col. Landon J. Lockett, and the S-2, Capt. Hunter M. Montgomery, accompanied by two photographers and a driver, went forward in a jeep in an effort to clarify the situation. When Simon returned to regiment, there had been no word from Colonel Lockett's party. Colonel Peterson, the regimental commander, told Simon to lead him to Kommerscheidt; and shortly after they left, the assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. George A. Davis, and his aide also departed for Kommerscheidt.<sup>15</sup>

Although the enemy did not immediately pursue his attack against Kommerscheidt, artillery fire and direct fire from tanks in Schmidt harassed attempts at reorganization. Then, about 1400, at least five enemy tanks,<sup>16</sup> accompanied by a small force of infantry, attacked from the wooded draw on the southeast. There could be no doubt now: Kommerscheidt held next priority on the German schedule of counterattacks.

<sup>15</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Dana, Simon; Interv with Peterson.

<sup>16</sup> If later claims of enemy tanks destroyed are correct, there were probably more than five which entered this battle.

The enemy tanks, Mark IV's and V's,<sup>17</sup> imitated the tactics they had used so effectively earlier in the day in Schmidt, standing out of effective bazooka range and firing round after round into the foxholes and battle-scarred buildings. Artillery observers with the defenders called for numerous concentrations against the attack, but the German tanks did not stop. From Schmidt other German direct-fire weapons, possibly including tanks, supported the assault.<sup>18</sup> From 1000 to 1700 the 229th Field Artillery Battalion fired at least 462 rounds in the vicinity of Kommerscheidt-Schmidt, and fires were further augmented by the 155-mm. guns under corps control and the 108th Field Artillery Battalion. Capt. W. M. Chmura, a liaison officer from the 229th Field Artillery Battalion, said these supporting fires were "terrific."<sup>19</sup>

As the attack hit, Lieutenant Fleig (whose tank had been the first to arrive in Kommerscheidt) and the two other

<sup>17</sup> Status report on tanks and armored vehicles of 116th Panzer Division, 9 Nov 44, found in file *General Inspekteur der Panzertruppen, Zustandsberichte* (Inspectorate General of Panzer Troops, Status Reports). This is a collection of detailed status and combat efficiency reports on the Army panzer divisions for November and December 44. Although IPW reports, found in 28th Division G-2 File, November 44, and in V Corps G-2 File, November 44, as well as almost all combat interviews on the Schmidt operation mention "Mark VI" tanks, this source reveals that at this period the only combat tanks in the 116th Panzer Division were Mark IV's and V's. V Corps G-2 files indicate that a few Mark VI tanks had been absorbed by the 116th from *Panzer Regiment Grossdeutschland*, but most evidence seems to indicate that only Mark IV's and V's were employed in this operation.

<sup>18</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Ripperdam, Dana, Piercey, Kudiak, Tyo; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.

<sup>19</sup> V Corps Study, Arty Sec. See also, 28th Div Arty Jnl, 4 Nov 44. See above, n. 4 concerning Btry C.

tankers of Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, were in a partially defiladed position in a slight draw in the open just northwest of Kommerscheidt near the western woods line. The tankmen pulled their Shermans up on a slight rise and fired at the enemy tanks, Fleig claiming two of the attackers knocked out and his companions a third. Noticing that the infantry was retreating from the left flank of the town, Fleig moved in that direction into a sparse orchard just in time to see a Mark V Panther coming into position. At a range of 200 to 300 yards, Fleig fired, hitting the German tank twice; but he was using high explosive ammunition, and the Panther's tough hide was not damaged. The lieutenant discovered then that he had no armor-piercing ammunition available, all of it being outside in the sponson rack. When the German crewmen, evidently frightened by the high explosive hits, jumped out of their tank, Fleig ceased firing and turned his turret to get at his rack and the armor-piercing ammunition. The Germans seized the opportunity to re-enter their tank and open fire, but their first round was a miss. Working feverishly, Lieutenant Fleig and his crew obtained the armor-piercing ammunition and returned the fire. Their first round cut the barrel of the German gun. Three more rounds in quick succession tore into the left side of the Panther's hull, setting the tank afire and killing all its crew. Fleig returned to the fight on the town's right flank.<sup>20</sup>

The surviving enemy tanks continued to blast the positions around the town. One tank worked its way up a trail on the southwest where Sgt. Tony Kudiak,

a 1st Battalion headquarters man acting as a rifleman, and Pvt. Paul Lealsy crept out of their holes to meet it with a bazooka. Spotting the two Americans, the German turned his machine guns on them, then his hull gun, but both times he missed. Kudiak and Lealsy returned to get riflemen for protection, and then came back. While they were gone, the tank approached to within twenty-five yards of a stone building in the southern edge of town, a second tank pulling into position near where the first had been initially. Just then a P-47 airplane roared down and dropped two bombs. The first German tank was so damaged by the bombs that it could not move, although it still continued to fire. Sergeant Kudiak finished it off with one bazooka rocket which entered on one side just above the track, setting the tank afire. The second German tank backed off without firing.<sup>21</sup>

The supporting P-47's were bombing and strafing so close to Kommerscheidt (the German tank was knocked out virtually within the town) that the riflemen felt that the pilots did not know American troops were there. They welcomed the support, but they threw out colored identification panels to make sure the pilots knew who held the town. The P-47's were probably from the 397th Squadron, 368th Group, which was over the Schmidt area from 1337 to 1500. The squadron reported engaging a concentration of more than fifteen vehicles, and claimed one armored vehicle destroyed and two damaged.

In the midst of the battle, Colonel Peterson arrived on foot at the northern woods line. He had abandoned his regi-

<sup>20</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Ripple, Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.

<sup>21</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Kudiak, Piercey.

mental command jeep just west of the Kall River because of the trail difficulties. At the woods line he took charge of about thirty stragglers who had been assembled there from the 3d Battalion and led them into Kommerscheidt.

With the arrival of air support and the continued hammering by artillery, mortars, small arms, and the three tanks, the German assault was stopped about 1600. The defenders had sustained numerous personnel casualties, but in the process they had knocked out at least five German tanks without losing one of their own three. Just how big a role a small number of tanks might have played had they been available for the earlier defense of Schmidt was clearly illustrated by the temporary success at Kommerscheidt.<sup>22</sup>

General Davis, the assistant division commander, who had also come forward during the afternoon, conferred in Kommerscheidt with Colonel Peterson and the battalion commanders in order to get a clearer picture of the situation. He then radioed information to division on the condition of men and equipment involved in the fight beyond the Kall. He spent the night in a Kommerscheidt cellar and returned to the rear the next morning.<sup>23</sup>

As night came, the men of Companies A and D and the remnants of the 3d Battalion worked to consolidate their Kommerscheidt positions in the face of continued enemy artillery harassment. Colonel Peterson, also deciding to spend the night in Kommerscheidt, warned Lieutenant Fleig not to withdraw his tanks for any reason, including servicing.

He feared an enemy counterattack that night and was concerned that, if even this small tank force were withdrawn, the nervous infantry might pull out too.

About 1500 that afternoon division had ordered the units in Kommerscheidt to attack to retake Schmidt, but apparently no one on the ground had entertained any illusions about immediate compliance. The problem then had been to maintain the Kommerscheidt position.<sup>24</sup>

### *The Kall Struggle Continues*

While the infantry and tanks fought on in Kommerscheidt, the engineers were proceeding with their job on the main supply route. Company A, 20th Engineers, continued to work on the switchback curves east of the Kall, and Lieutenant Huston's platoon from Company B, 20th Engineers, struggled with the even more difficult west portion of the trail. Although explosives had now been brought forward for use on the rock outcropping, Huston's men could do no blasting for fear of further disabling the tanks that were being worked on near by.<sup>25</sup>

Captain Lutz, the Company B commander, sent a six-man patrol under Lieutenant Horn from Vossenack to check on a supposition that there was an alternate route to the Kall farther to the southwest. The patrol returned after having become involved in a fire fight during its reconnaissance. It had killed three Germans and captured four prisoners. The proposed alternate route, Lieutenant

<sup>22</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Tyo, Perll, Toner; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne; Interv with Peterson; FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 4 Nov 44.

<sup>23</sup> Ltr, Gen Davis to Hist Div, 11 Dec 49.

<sup>24</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne; Combat Interv 75 with 1st and 3d Bn, 112th, personnel; V Corps Study, G-3 Sec; 28th Div G-3 File, 4 Nov 44.

<sup>25</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Lutz, Doherty; Sonnefield Statement. Reason for not blowing rock outcropping is given by Lutz.

Horn reported, was a swampy firebreak blocked by felled trees. Captain Lutz then ordered Horn to move with his platoon to the assistance of Huston on the Kall trail.<sup>26</sup>

Company A's commander, Capt. Henry R. Doherty, satisfied with the work done by his men on the trail east of the river, decided about 1430 to move his company back across the Kall and into the woods south of Vossenack to bivouac for the night. As he started the company back and reached the exit of the trail from the woods southeast of Vossenack, he met General Davis going forward to Kommerscheidt. The general ordered the company to take up a specified defensive position on either side of the trail and to "guard the road near the bridge." Captain Doherty reluctantly obeyed the order, placing his 3d Platoon under 1st Lt. Aurelio Pellino in the woods north of the trail near the western edge of the woods and the 1st and 2d Platoons generally astride the trail where it entered the woods. The 3d Platoon was told to put a security guard of three men under T/4 James A. Krieder beside the bridge itself. Except for the location of this guard, the positions designated were of little value in defending the supply route, for a thick expanse of woods separated the defenders from the bridge and the defense covered only one part of the trail, that near the entrance into the woods.<sup>27</sup>

By noon on 4 November the tankers of Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, had accomplished little toward putting back into commission their five disabled tanks along the Kall trail west of the river. The company commander, Cap-

tain Hostrup, found that Sergeant Markey's tank, nearest the bridge, could not be pulled out, but he discovered a complicated switchback trail running to the left that would permit passage around it. (*See Map 24.*) Sergeant Yarman's tank, lead vehicle of the 2d Platoon, was at the sharp road bend where the rock outcropping hindered passage and had a thrown track which the tankers considered could be replaced. Approximately 150 yards behind was Sergeant Allen's tank with both tracks thrown. Captain Hostrup felt that maintenance personnel would be necessary to put Sergeant Allen's tank into operation, although with the aid of Lieutenant Huston's engineer platoon the right bank of the trail beside it could be dug away sufficiently to allow other traffic to pass. The other two tanks were those abandoned by Lieutenant Fleig and Lieutenant Clarke (Sergeant Zaroslinski's tank) near the entrance to the woods, but other tanks had successfully maneuvered past them.

After several hours of trying, the tankers finally managed to replace the track on Sergeant Yarman's tank. Yarman pulled ahead about ten feet and the tank again threw the track, this time damaging the left idler wheel. Again the track was replaced, again Yarman drove a short distance ahead, and again the track jumped off. By this time it was almost 1600 and men from the Kommerscheidt action were pouring back along the trail, bringing with them tales of the fierce pounding to which they had been subjected. Radioing Colonel Ripple, his battalion commander, Captain Hostrup insisted that, if more tanks were to get through to Kommerscheidt, more engineers were needed. Colonel Ripple

<sup>26</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Lutz.

<sup>27</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Doherty.

radioed back just at dark (about 1730) that more engineers were forthcoming and that maintenance crews for the tanks were on the way.

The Company A, 707th, maintenance officer, 1st Lt. Stanley Lisy, his crew, and the battalion maintenance officer, Capt. George A. Harris, reached the disabled tanks about 1900. Starting to work immediately on Sergeant Yarman's tank near the rock outcropping, Lieutenant Lisy's crew had the troublesome track on again by 2200. The tank moved twenty-five yards farther and off came the track. Diagnosing now that the difficulty lay in the damaged idler wheel, the men secured a good idler wheel from Lieutenant Fleig's abandoned tank at the head of the trail and went to work to install it on Sergeant Yarman's tank.<sup>28</sup>

Soon after dark a tank supply group of five weasels with quarter-ton trailers loaded with rations, tank ammunition, and .30-caliber ammunition for the infantry had started for Kommerscheidt from Germeter. Learning in Vossenack that difficulties still existed on the main supply route across the Kall, its officers, Capt. William H. Pynchon, S-4, 707th Tank Battalion, and 1st Lt. Howard S. Rogers, Reconnaissance Platoon leader, Headquarters Company, 707th, directed resupply of the tanks of Company C, 707th, in Vossenack and went on ahead by jeep to reconnoiter the Kall trail. They returned later for the supply train, and the jeep and five weasels with trailers reached the woods entrance of the trail shortly after midnight. A guide carrying a white handkerchief went on foot in front of each vehicle. At a point where the trail slanted perceptibly toward the

left and was jagged with sharp rock projections, the lead weasel threw a track. It took about fifteen minutes to replace the track before the column could continue.

Enemy artillery fire constantly harassed the trail area, but the supply column reached Sergeant Yarman's tank without casualties about 0100. Intensifying its efforts to install the new idler wheel on the tank, the maintenance crew completed the job at approximately 0200. As the tank started forward, success at last within the grasp of the exasperated crewmen, it moved only about ten yards before the left shoulder of the trail gave way, and once more off came the track. There was scarcely any alternative except to comply with a message that had been brought Captain Hostrup, the tank company commander, by Captain Pynchon: "Holiday 6 [General Cota, division commander] wants to give you all the time possible to retrieve your vehicles, BUT that main supply route must be open by daybreak. If necessary, you will roll your immobilized tanks down the slope and into the draw."<sup>29</sup>

Captain Hostrup ordered Sergeant Allen, whose tank was 150 yards up the hill, to fasten the tow cable of his tank to a tree and pull himself as far off the road as possible. (Jeeps and weasels could pass Sergeant Allen's tank while larger vehicles could not.) Sergeant Yarman's tank at the rock outcropping was also pulled off to the left with tow cables fastened on trees, although digging on the right bank was still necessary to provide sufficient space for passage. At Lieutenant Fleig's and Sergeant Zaroslinski's abandoned tanks near the beginning of

<sup>28</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.

<sup>29</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Ripple, Hostrup-Fleig-Payne, Pynchon, and Rogers.

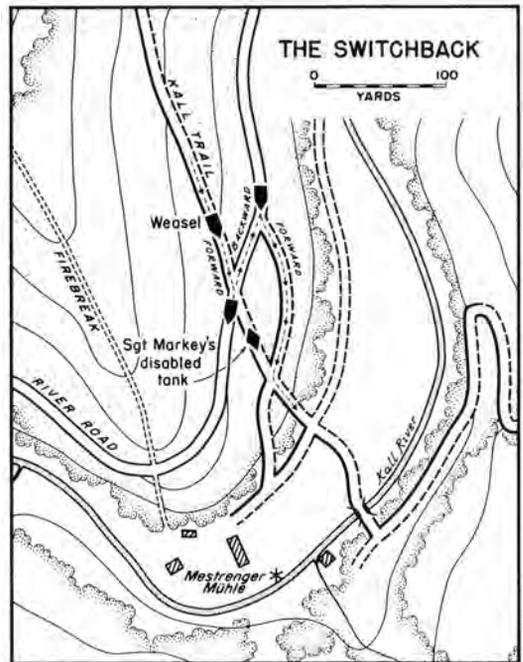
the difficult section of the trail, it had already been determined that tanks could pass, and at Sergeant Markey's tank nearer the bottom of the draw, the complicated switchback to the left would provide passage without necessitating removal of his tank.

Captain Pynchon's men assisted in the digging at Sergeant Yarman's tank near the rock outcropping, but not until about 0300 was passage assured. The men of the supply train were getting worried, for they hoped to complete their mission to Kommerscheidt and return before daylight provided the enemy visibility on the open slope southeast of Vossenack. The moon was up by the time they moved out again, and visibility in the wooded river draw had improved.

As they reached Sergeant Markey's tank at the switchback, first glance showed that the heavily laden quarter-ton trailers would have to be manhandled around abrupt bends in the trail, and even then the weasels would have to do a good deal of slow backing and turning in order to manage the tortuous route. (Map 25) Bisecting the trail above and below Sergeant Markey's tank were two branches of a road fork formed, some seventy yards to the north, by the north-south river road and a road leading to the Mestrenger Muehle. To pass Sergeant Markey's tank, each weasel had to be detached from its trailer, then backed up the river road to the north because the short turn at the intersection of the Kall trail and the river road was too abrupt for a forward turn. At the sharp junction seventy yards to the north the weasel's trailers were reattached after having been pulled by hand over the slippery, rock-studded trail; and the weasels and trailers then continued to the south along

the Mestrenger Muehle trail and back onto the main trail. The movement was slow, tedious, and exasperating.

Beyond the Kall the supply train encountered two more switchbacks which necessitated 180-degree turns, and the laborious task of manhandling the heavy trailers had to be repeated. Despite these difficulties, the supply group reached



MAP 25

Kommerscheidt about 0430. It was just beginning to get light when the weasels returned to their supply assembly point back at Germeter.<sup>30</sup>

### *The Engineers*

Earlier in the evening, before Captain Pynchon's supply train had gone for-

<sup>30</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Pynchon, Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.

ward, the 3d Platoon, Company B, 20th Engineers, under 2d Lt. Reynold A. Ossola, was sent to assist Lieutenant Huston's and Lieutenant Horn's engineer platoons on the difficult western section of the Kall trail. With the 3d Platoon went a second air compressor, 300 pounds of TNT, and a second bulldozer. After the tanks were partially removed from the trail and Captain Pynchon's supply column had passed, the engineers blasted the rock outcropping. By 0400 the trail was completely open. Ossola's platoon remained for maintenance work on the trail, and Huston's and Horn's platoons returned before dawn for rest in Vossenack.<sup>31</sup>

Company C, 20th Engineers, originally in battalion reserve, had moved during midmorning of 4 November to a forward bivouac area near Germeter, and the company's 2d Platoon had gone out about 1330 on a mine-clearing mission for the 109th Infantry. The headquarters group and 1st Platoon, under the company commander, Capt. Walter C. Mahaley, were ordered to move beyond the Kall to a defensive bivouac preparatory to assisting Company A, 20th Engineers, on supply route maintenance the next day. They left Germeter about 2330 on foot and by 0300 (5 November) were in bivouac near Company C, 112th Infantry, where the main supply route formed a large wooded loop on the hill above the east-bank switchbacks. One squad of the 3d Platoon had been ordered to remain at Germeter to guard a rear explosives dump. The other two squads were to move by truck with 5,000 pounds of explosives to

the vicinity of the Kall bridge. There they were to be prepared to blow pillboxes in the Komerscheidt-Schmidt area. Under the platoon leader, 2d Lt. Benjamin Johns, these two squads, the 1st and 3d, arrived in Vossenack after midnight, learned that the Kall trail was still clogged with tanks, and returned to the forward bivouac area near Germeter.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Command and the Kall Trail*

Misinformation throughout the day of 4 November had kept division headquarters ill-informed about the condition of the vital main supply route across the Kall gorge. Most reports repeatedly asserted that the supply route was open, thus contributing to failure of commanders to realize the seriousness of the situation. Neither regiment nor division had liaison officers on the spot. Not until approximately 1500 had General Cota intervened personally by ordering the 1171st Engineer Group commander, Col. Edmund K. Daley, to send a "competent officer" to supervise work on the trail. Colonel Daley not only visited the area himself but ordered the commander of the 20th Engineer Combat Battalion, Lt. Col. J. E. Sonnefield, to take personal charge. Although the 28th Division chief of staff ordered the division engineer at 1730 to take charge of the engineer operations in the Kall gorge, the real supervision apparently came from Colonel Sonnefield.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Combat Interv 75 with White and Sgt William O'Neal, 3d Plat, Co C, 20th Engrs; Sonnefield Statement.

<sup>33</sup> 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44; Combat Interv 75 with Daley; Sonnefield Statement.

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<sup>31</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Lutz; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44.

*893d Tank Destroyer Battalion  
Joins the Action*

The 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, attached initially to the 28th Division as indirect artillery support but prepared to move forward to repel enemy tank attack, had only two gun companies available for commitment—Companies B and C. Throughout the action Company A was attached to the 102d Cavalry Group to the north. One Company C gun had developed a leaking recoil mechanism while firing the initial jump-off concentrations on 2 November and was evacuated. A total of twenty-three destroyers remained for commitment.

Until 4 November the tank destroyers were in indirect firing positions just south of Zweifall and north of Roetgen and were co-ordinated with the 28th Division artillery. By noon on that date the Company C destroyers had moved to new indirect firing positions 2,500 yards west of Richelskaul from which a reported German tank repair and maintenance shop in Nideggen would be within range. A Reconnaissance Company platoon leader attached to Company C, 1st Lt. Jack W. Fuller, went ahead to reconnoiter the Kall trail in the event the destroyers were later ordered to Kommerscheidt.

At approximately 1530 the 28th Division antitank officer, Maj. William W. Bodine, Jr., ordered Capt. Marion C. Pugh's Company C to send two platoons into Vossenack as antitank protection. After a preliminary reconnaissance, 1st Lt. Goodwin W. McElroy's 3d Platoon moved into Vossenack about 1700, going into positions on the south of town near the church. The 1st Platoon under 1st Lt. Turney W. Leonard took up a posi-

tion of readiness near Germeter, and the 2d Platoon remained in the indirect fire positions west of Richelskaul.

Company B, 893d, started forward just before dark from the indirect fire positions south of Zweifall to move to the Germeter vicinity as further antitank protection. Several of the company's destroyers bogged down on the narrow, muddy forest road. When the remaining vehicles reached a point about a thousand yards southwest of Germeter, they met the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Samuel E. Mays, who ordered them off the road into indirect fire positions. The area farther forward, Colonel Mays told them, was already too cluttered with personnel and equipment. Moving his guns into position, the Company B commander, Capt. John B. Cook, made arrangements for a T-2 retriever to recover the destroyers that had bogged down, and all the company's guns were returned during the night. Two towed guns of Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion, were set up during the night near the Vossenack church and six towed guns were put into position along the Richelskaul-Germeter road.

About 2315 Captain Pugh, Company C, 893d, was ordered to prepare his company for movement to Kommerscheidt. Company B, 893d, would take over the antitank support of Vossenack. Lieutenant Fuller and Capt. Sidney C. Cole, commander of the Reconnaissance Company, 893d, made another reconnaissance of the Kall trail and returned about 0200 with news that the route was still clogged with disabled tanks but would probably be open by daylight. Company C's 1st and 3d Platoons went into an assembly area near the entrance of the Kall trail into the wooded valley, ready to move to

Kommerscheidt upon the opening of the trail. The 2d Platoon under 1st Lt. Curtis M. Edmund started moving to the western edge of Vossenack about 0530 in order to be ready to follow the other platoons across the Kall River. En route one of Lieutenant Edmund's destroyers struck a mine near Richelskaul and had to be abandoned. The platoon, now with only two guns left, did not arrive in Vossenack until 0730.

Company B, 893d, designated to replace Company C in Vossenack, moved up about 0430, picking up guides from the rifle companies of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, which its platoons were to support. The 2d Platoon went into position just north of the houses across the street from the Vossenack church. The 3d deployed north of the road and west of the 2d. The 1st Platoon, under 1st Lt. Howard C. Davis, moved toward the northeast of Vossenack. Its infantry guide stood in the turret of Davis' destroyer. As the platoon moved, heavy enemy artillery fire fell in the area. One shell exploded against the counterbalance of Davis' vehicle and blew away half the infantry guide's head.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Air Support*

Weather was again the controlling factor on 4 November in air support of the Schmidt operation. The first air attack of the day hit Schmidt at 1235 after the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, had been driven out. Schmidt and its environs, including Harscheidt, were

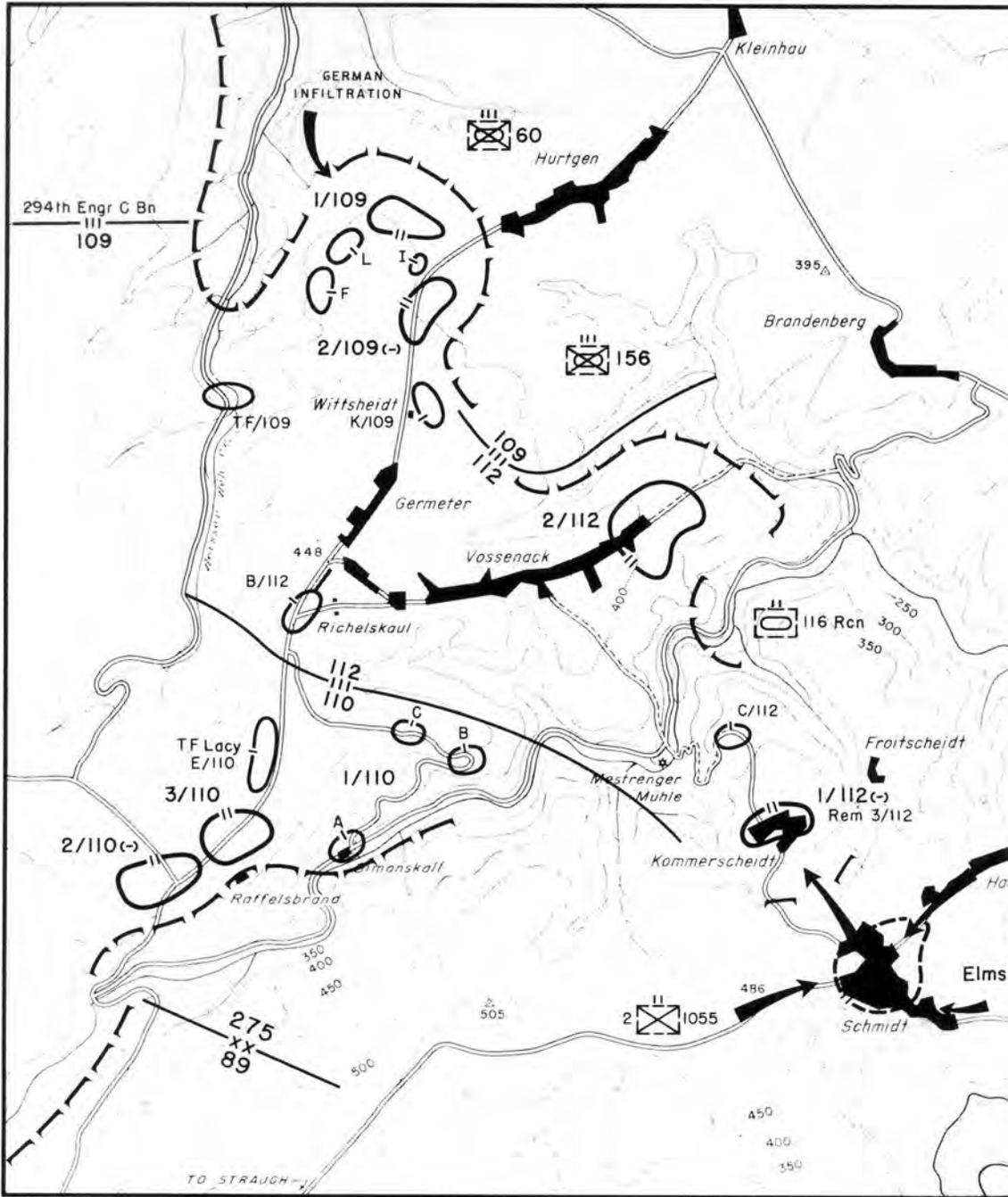
bombed and strafed by two other squadrons during the day, and air claimed one armored vehicle destroyed and two tanks damaged. Two other squadrons were to fly missions against Schmidt; one had to cancel its mission because of weather and the other squadron was vectored to different targets. The latter squadron eventually had to jettison its bombs when the weather closed in. A mission against Nideggen claimed one motor vehicle and four armored vehicles destroyed. In the difficult weather, these might have been termed satisfactory results; but the large-scale intervention of enemy armor was proof enough that air support was not accomplishing the vital mission of isolating the Schmidt battlefield.<sup>35</sup>

#### *109th and 110th Infantry Summaries*

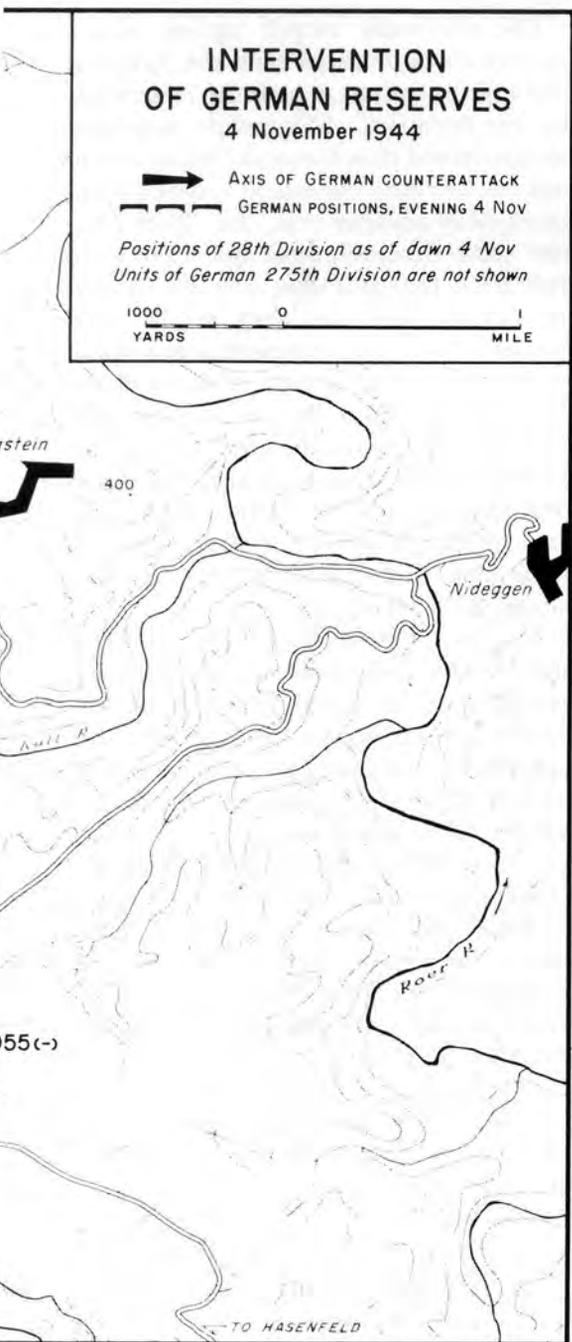
Early on 4 November the Germans launched what some men called a counterattack, but it was probably an attempt at infiltration against the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry, in the woods southwest of Huertgen. (*Map 26*) The Germans were beaten off but not before they had infiltrated the battalion's rear and surrounded the battalion observation post, capturing or killing about fifteen men, including most of the battalion staff and the artillery liaison party. Two companies of the 2d Battalion later attacked almost due east in another attempt to take the remaining part of the original regimental objective east of the Huertgen-Germeter road. They were stopped by mines and small arms fire along the road. A special task force from the 109th Antitank Company, the 630th Tank

<sup>34</sup> Tank destroyer story is from the following: Combat Interv 76 with Fuller, Cole, Pugh, Davis, Sgt Hammet E. Murphy, and S Sgt William B. Gardner. All from Co B, 893d. See also V Corps Study, TD Sec; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44.

<sup>35</sup> FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 4 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 Air Sec; Combat Interv 74 with Howison.



MAP 26



Destroyer Battalion, and the 103d Engineers failed in an effort to capture a German road block to the regiment's left at a junction of two roads in the draw of the Weisser Weh Creek.<sup>36</sup>

In the woods to the south the 110th Infantry held with two battalions and attacked with the other (the 1st) from Vossenack south to Simonskall in an effort to turn the stiff opposition at Rafelsbrand by threatening the enemy rear. The attack was launched before dawn and before the 112th Infantry was hit so disastrously at Schmidt. The battalion took Simonskall by 0900 against negligible resistance. About noon one company was committed to clean out the east-west portion of the Richelskaul-Simonskall road, and the 2d and 3d Battalions sent out patrols supported by artillery fire. These units found the enemy still facing them in force and showing no inclination to withdraw despite the 1st Battalion's movement toward his rear. Although the 1st Battalion's new position sealed off one end of the north-south river road, there was nothing to indicate that the move had been designed to protect the Kall gorge from the south. That it served to prevent enemy movement along this road from the south is apparent, but the enemy still had access to the Kall trail area from the south through hundreds of yards of unprotected woods.<sup>37</sup>

### *The Enemy Situation*

With the execution of two early morning counterattacks against the 28th Divi-

<sup>36</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 109th personnel; 109th Inf S-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44; 109th Inf AAR, Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44.

<sup>37</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 110th personnel; 110th Inf S-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 4 Nov 44.

sion's penetrations, German reserves had made their first prominent entry into the Schmidt action. At dawn German troops attempted to infiltrate the 109th Infantry's salient north of Germeter but were repulsed. But also at dawn the *1055th Regiment (89th Division)*, assisted by an armored group of the *16th Panzer Regiment (116th Panzer Division)*, launched its counterattack against the Americans in Schmidt.<sup>38</sup> The *1st* and *3d Battalions, 1055th Regiment*, supported by tanks and assault guns, attacked from Harscheidt against Company L, 112th Infantry, and the 2d Platoon, Company I. According to American accounts, this attack spilled over to the Hasenfeld road against elements of Company L and Company K. The *2d Battalion, 1055th Regiment*, which had not completed its move from the southwest when the Americans took Schmidt, attacked from the west against elements of Company K and the 3d Platoon, Company I. The first German troops actually to re-enter Schmidt were one platoon and a communications section, plus tanks and assault gun support, of the *3d Battalion, 1055th Regiment*. The *1055th Regiment*, still assisted by armored elements of the *16th Panzer Regiment*, continued its attack that afternoon against Kommerscheidt. A battalion of the *347th Infantry Division*, adjoining the *89th Division* to the south, had been moved into a defensive position astride the Hasenfeld-Schmidt road, but there is no indication that this battalion participated in the attacks.

<sup>38</sup> *89th Division Order of the Day* states that the *2d Battalion, 60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, participated in this attack, but the only 28th Division prisoner identification of this unit on 4 November was on the 109th Infantry front north of Germeter. 28th Div G-2 File, 4-5 Nov 44. See also V Corps G-2 File, and MS # A-905 (Waldenburg).

The afternoon assault against Kommerscheidt penetrated only the southern edges of the village, which the Americans had not occupied. Meanwhile, news had been received that Simonskall had fallen, and the German command ordered commitment of another unit, the *1056th Regiment (89th Division)*, although there is no indication that this unit actually entered the action until the next day.<sup>39</sup> The availability of this regiment was a result of the continuing arrival of units of the *272d Volks Grenadier Division* to relieve the *89th Division*. At some time during the day the *156th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* (third regiment of the *116th Panzer Division*) moved into the woods north of Vossenack and thus faced the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry.

Also on 4 November, *Army Group B* and *Seventh Army* sent several artillery, assault gun, antitank, and mortar battalions into the sector, and *LXXIV Corps* committed the artillery and antitank guns of those of its divisions not affected by the 28th Division's attack (possibly the *347th Infantry Division*, the *272d Volks Grenadier Division*, and the *12th Volks Grenadier Division*). These were in addition to the organic artillery and antitank weapons of the three committed German divisions, the *116th Panzer*, the *89th*, and the *275th*, plus the assault guns of the *116th Panzer Division*. These additions in supporting troops probably accounted for the marked increase in German artillery fire noted on this date.

<sup>39</sup> At this time the *89th Division* had only two infantry regiments, the *1055th* and *1056th*, both badly mauled in the battles in France and reconstituted from conglomerate units, plus assorted engineer, antitank, reconnaissance, artillery, signal, anti-aircraft, and *Landesschuetzen* (local security) units. See MS # P-032a by Generalmajor Walter Bruns, formerly CG of *89th Infantry Division*.

The over-all German plan, designed to restore the *status quo* which had existed on the opening day of the American offensive, had now begun to take shape. Initially that plan had directed only a counterattack from the Huertgen area to cut off the American penetration in Vossenack, but when the move to Schmidt had revealed the strategic aim of the offensive the plan had been broadened. *Seventh Army* had ordered that the wings of the salient be held firmly against further widening, that the *89th Division* (assisted by the *16th Panzer Regiment*) retake Schmidt and Kommerscheidt,<sup>40</sup> and that the *116th Panzer Division* launch a concentric attack to retake Vossenack. With Schmidt recaptured, the Germans planned the next day (5 November) to renew the attack against Kommerscheidt, to continue the build-up of the *156th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* against Vossenack on the north, and to send the *Reconnaissance Battalion* of the *116th Panzer Division* down the Kall gorge from the northeast. The latter move was designed to accomplish two things: to put troops into position to assist a later attack against Vossenack and to cut off the Americans in Kommerscheidt by linking up in the Kall gorge with elements of the *1056th Regiment (89th Division)*, which had been ordered to close a gap in German lines created by the capture of Simonskall. The Germans did not realize that their attempt at a link-up in the Kall gorge

<sup>40</sup> MS # A-905 (Waldenburg) shows only an "armored group" comprising twenty to thirty tanks of the *16th Panzer Regiment* at Schmidt and Kommerscheidt, but this "group" was commanded by the regimental commander and was a sizable part of the regiment. While other elements of this regiment apparently operated north of the American penetration, reference to the armored group at Kommerscheidt is hereafter made as *16th Panzer Regiment*. See also MS # A-891 (Gersdorff).

would meet little resistance—the 28th Division had taken virtually no defensive measures against the obvious possibility of such a maneuver.<sup>41</sup>

*Summary for 4 November and Night of  
4-5 November*

This day of 4 November had been established as a dark moment in the 28th Division's battle for Schmidt, at least in the sector of the main effort being made by the 112th Infantry. One planned phase of the operation, isolation of the battlefield by air support, could already be considered—no matter how explainable by implausibility of the original mission or by weather difficulties—a distinct failure. Still, all was far from lost, and though the man in the foxhole in Vossenack or Kommerscheidt or working the difficult supply route might wonder if success were possible, preparations were being made to retake the territory lost during the day.

The enemy had dealt the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, a swift counterblow in Schmidt that morning; still, Companies A and D and three tanks and the remnants of the 3d Battalion had managed to hold in Kommerscheidt, although the picture had looked dark when the Germans struck there about 1400. But the Germans had reeled back from Kommerscheidt, having lost at least five tanks and an unestimated number of men.

Still virtually intact was Company C, 112th Infantry, in the edge of the woods north of Kommerscheidt, and supporting

<sup>41</sup> MSS # A-891 and A-892 (Gersdorff); MS # A-905 (Waldenburg); MS # C-016 (Straube); ETHINT 56 (Gersdorff and Waldenburg); Sit Rpts, 2-4 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44.*; 28th Div G-2 Jnl and File, Nov 44; *89th Division Order of the Day*; MS # P-032a (Bruns).

it was the 1st Platoon, Company C, 20th Engineers, farther down the trail toward the river. But neither unit was in a position to defend the vital Kall bridge, and Company A, 20th Engineers, ostensibly given such a mission, was in a defense in the edge of the woods southeast of Vossenack with only a four-man security guard actually in a position to cover the bridge.

The Kall trail was now presumed to be passable again after another day and night of work, and one five-weasel supply train from the 707th Tank Battalion had passed and returned. Poised to move across the river along this route were the remainder of Company A, 707th Tank Battalion (only five tanks, plus the three already in Kommerscheidt), and Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, with ten M-10 tank destroyers.

Although persistent enemy shelling had demoralized the defenders of Vossenack, the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, was still in position there. Assisting it were a platoon of tanks from Company C, 707th Tank Battalion (the other tanks of Company C had moved to ready positions near Germeter), and Company B, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, with twelve newly arrived tank destroyers. Company B, 112th Infantry, except for the losses in its initial attack on 2 November was still intact in its Richelskaul defense to the rear.

Medical evacuation from Kommerscheidt and Vossenack was evidently proceeding successfully, although with difficulty from the hazards of the Kall trail and shelling along the Vossenack ridge.

Communication by telephone <sup>42</sup> had been consistently poor because of heavy enemy shelling, but radios were generally giving satisfactory service, although the engineers in the Kall gorge had found reception poor in the low areas. Nevertheless, all requests for artillery fire were apparently getting through. Weather was still hampering all operations, particularly air support, and, if it had not already been deduced that air could not isolate the battlefield, continued enemy commitments would certainly prove it.

The 109th Infantry had met with little success in completing its mission in the woods to the north but had held against another determined German counter-attack. To the south the 110th Infantry had met its first success in this battle with the capture of Simonskall, but the attack had used the division's only infantry reserve.

Artillery of the 229th Field Artillery Battalion in direct support of the 112th Infantry fired missions throughout the night against possible enemy assembly areas in the Kommerscheidt-Schmidt area. The commanders hoped to discourage expected continuation of enemy countermeasures against Kommerscheidt.

<sup>42</sup> On 3 November the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, had laid telephone wire by hand as it advanced to Schmidt, and the 1st Battalion, 112th, laid wire to Kommerscheidt. On 4 November both circuits apparently broke down, and despite efforts to replace them enemy shelling and patrol action kept the wire out for the rest of the operation. Circuits between Germeter and Vossenack were repaired at least twenty times, but there were still long periods with no telephone communication to Vossenack. See V Corps Study, Com Sec.

## CHAPTER IV

# More Action at Kommerscheidt (5 November)

The men of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th Infantry, remained in position in their Kommerscheidt defenses in early morning of 5 November. (*See Map X.*) They strove to get a few fitful moments of sleep despite the intense cold which came just before dawn. Many had no overcoats or blankets to keep them warm and tried to dig their foxholes deeper to ward off the icy temperatures. Just at dawn the enemy's artillery and mortars suddenly roared again into intensity, and the disheartened infantrymen dreaded what they believed would follow. Their positions were at best hastily organized with a haphazard intermingling of companies and platoons, and they had only three tanks in support. A previous estimate that there were 200 men of the 3d Battalion in position was scaled down to 100. In addition, there were combat-depleted Company A and the surviving heavy weapons of Company D. Company C was in reserve along the woods line to the north but in position to contribute little by direct fire toward repelling an attack against Kommerscheidt itself, and Company B and one heavy machine gun platoon were still back at Richelskaul.

It was just after dawn when the enemy fire lifted, and through the early morning mist observers could see at least five German tanks emerge from their Schmidt hide-out and head toward Kommer-

scheidt, firing as they moved. A small force of enemy infantry came out of the wooded draw to the southeast and launched an attack against Company A's left flank positions. The 1st Platoon and its heavy weapons support engaged the infantry with small arms, machine gun, and mortar fire; and supporting artillery of the 229th Field Artillery Battalion fired several heavy concentrations. The German infantry attack was stopped, but the tanks on the south continued on.

Lieutenant Fleig and his three tanks from Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, were in the shallow open draw on the northwest flank of Kommerscheidt. While the German tanks were still at long range, the three American tanks moved to the crest of the little rise south of the draw and fired, scoring seven hits on one German Mark V and immobilizing it. The remaining enemy tanks continued to fire but did not press the assault. Supporting American artillery continued to fire concentrations on enemy tanks and troops in Schmidt. At the cost of a number of casualties, among them both the company commander, Captain Rokey, and the executive officer of Company I, Kommerscheidt had held again.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Toner, Holden, Kelly-Hunter, Piercey, Quinton-Hausman-Lockwood-Kertes-Norton; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44; 28th Div Arty Jnl, 5 Nov 44.



*TANK DESTROYERS M-10 of 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, moving up over a narrow, muddy forest road west of Germeter.*

*Tank Destroyers Try for Kommerscheidt*

The preceding night the tank destroyers of two platoons of Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, had moved to ready positions southeast of Vossenack to await word that the main supply route through the Kall defile was clear of disabled tanks. That word came after the engineers had blasted at approximately 0400, and Lieutenant Leonard, accompanied by Lieutenant Fuller, reconnaissance platoon leader, led out before dawn with his 1st Platoon. As Lieutenant McElroy's 3d Platoon followed, one of his destroyers threw a track in moving out of the muddy assembly area, but the others continued, finding that the supply route had indeed been cleared but that to traverse it still took time-consuming caution. Leonard's platoon reached Kommerscheidt about 0930. By the time McElroy reached the woods line overlooking the town from the north, his destroyer had developed an oil leak and was overheating. He halted to work on his destroyer, holding up the vehicles of his platoon behind him; but eventually he pulled his gun off the trail and joined another crew as the column continued into town. The 3d Platoon, 893d, joined the 1st in Kommerscheidt about 1000, making available a total of seven destroyers.<sup>2</sup>

*Another Enemy Attack*

About 0920 a message from General Cota, the division commander, had reached Kommerscheidt, ordering Colonel Peterson to renew the attack to recapture Schmidt without delay. That was as far as the order got. As the mes-

sage arrived the men in Kommerscheidt were being subjected to another German attack. Whether it was a new attack or a continuation of the stalled dawn attack, the infantrymen could not tell in the confusion. They did know that enemy infantry again assaulted the left-flank positions, coming in from the wooded draw to the southeast. The enemy tanks joined this attack only with supporting fire from Schmidt, although several tanks moved about out of sight on a road in the woods to the east, their engines racing and sirens blasting, apparently trying to unnerve the Americans.

This second German assault of the day was in full progress when the self-propelled guns of Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, arrived in the town. Lieutenant Leonard and Lieutenant McElroy co-ordinated immediately with Lieutenant Fleig, the tank officer, placing Leonard's 1st Tank Destroyer Platoon near the three tanks on the right (west) flank of town and the other platoon, the 3d, on the left (east) of town. The destroyers joined with the three tanks in firing back at the supporting enemy tanks in Schmidt, but without reported success.

On the left flank, where the German infantry had again assaulted, 2d Lt. Ray M. Borders, Company M, seized an abandoned automatic rifle and sprayed the infantry attackers, knocking out almost two full squads of German machine gunners. Small arms, machine gun, mortar, and supporting artillery fire, plus the timely arrival of the tank destroyers, halted the half-hearted German effort. Once again Kommerscheidt had held.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Pugh, Fuller, and Lt Col Samuel E. Mays, CO, 893d TD Bn.

<sup>3</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Piercey, Quinton-Hausman-Lockwood-Kertes-Norton, Ripperdam, and Kelly-Hunter; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne, Pugh, Mays.

*Events Along the Kall Trail*

Except for some .30-caliber ammunition brought up by Captain Pynchon, 707th Tank Battalion, the first infantry supplies to reach Kommerscheidt after the Schmidt withdrawal arrived just before dawn on 5 November before the Germans had launched their first attack of the day. The load included enough emergency rations for all the infantry in the town and much-needed small arms ammunition. In charge of the supply convoy was Lieutenant George, motor officer of the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, who had earlier led the three-weasel supply train to Schmidt. He had moved through the main supply route without undue difficulty after the tanks had been pulled off the trail.

George and his supply party started back shortly after dawn. At an ammunition supply point established by the lieutenant at the exit of the Kall trail onto the open Vossenack ridge, the group met a force of tank destroyers on its way to Kommerscheidt. George secured the assistance of the destroyers in transporting additional mortar shells and miscellaneous ammunition which had been requested and then returned to the regimental motor pool west of Germeter. There the regimental S-4 put him in charge of getting all supplies to Kommerscheidt.

Intending to lead another supply train forward after dark that night, Lieutenant George first planned a reconnaissance of the trail in the hope of taking two-and-one-half-ton trucks forward. With S. Sgt. John M. Ward, Company I supply sergeant, he again approached the entrance of the supply route into the Kall woods and was surprised to see in the distance

two figures in German uniforms and another in American uniform. The American-dressed figure waved and yelled to them. Cautiously, Lieutenant George and Sergeant Ward advanced. They found that two of the men were German medics and the third a wounded American officer whom they recognized as the 112th Infantry S-2, Captain Montgomery.

Captain Montgomery had gone forward the day before with Colonel Lockett, regimental executive officer, two cameramen, and a jeep driver and had not been heard from since. Now Captain Montgomery revealed that the party had proceeded toward the Kall and had been nearing the Mestrenger Muehle when it had run into a German ambush. Captain Montgomery had been wounded by the firing, and the entire party had been captured. The uninjured Americans were led away and Montgomery was left behind. Two German medics had come upon him later, and, while they attended his wound, he had talked them into surrendering.<sup>4</sup>

*The Tanks*

About 0700, Captain Hostrup, Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, started for Kommerscheidt with six tanks, including his own command vehicle. He incorporated into one full platoon the four tanks left of the 3d Platoon, under 2d Lt. Richard H. Payne, and the one tank of Lieutenant Clarke's 2d Platoon. The 2d Platoon tank was apparently one of those that had bellied or thrown a track in the open south of Vossenack the day before. Hostrup put Lieutenant

<sup>4</sup> Combat Interv 75 with George, Dana; 112th Inf S-2 and S-3 Jnls, 5 Nov 44.

Payne at the head of the column, and his command tank followed in the rear. Payne arrived at the woods line overlooking Kommerscheidt about 0900 and halted there at the direction of Lieutenant Fleig in Kommerscheidt. Still on the Kall trail between Company C, 112th Infantry, and the river, Captain Hostrup's tank developed engine trouble, stalled, and could not be started again. The hill mass prevented direct radio communication with Fleig, but using Payne's lead tank as a relay Hostrup directed Fleig to take command of the company until he could get forward in his own tank. Fleig summoned the five tanks under Payne into Kommerscheidt about 1300, assigning them the right flank positions. He and his three veteran tanks moved to the left flank.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Action Again in Kommerscheidt*

Enemy artillery against Kommerscheidt continued intermittently after the second German attack of the morning. Then, about 1400, word passed almost electrically through the thin line of riflemen in foxholes and buildings: "Tanks!" The fear of enemy tanks had become almost a psychological terror. A number of men jumped from their foxholes and headed for the rear. Only quick action by NCO's and officers prevented a general flight.

The report that enemy tanks were approaching was half rumor, half fact. The Germans did employ tanks at intervals throughout the afternoon, one or two tanks supporting small infantry forces in what were apparently probing efforts against various sectors of the line; but no

general tank attack developed. The enemy tankers contented themselves with firing, often with deadly effect, from their dominating Schmidt positions some 800 yards away.

With the arrival of six tank destroyers (one was still at the woods line) and five more tanks, six destroyers and eight tanks were present for the defense. One destroyer was knocked out during the afternoon by enemy tank fire, leaving five. The infantry was strengthened slightly by the 2d Platoon of Company C, 112th Infantry, under T. Sgt. Carl Beckes, moving up from the woods line on the north.

An air strike by American P-47's hit the Germans in Schmidt in midafternoon, and men of Company D, 112th Infantry saw a P-47 blast a German tank with a bomb at a crossroads in the northern edge of Schmidt. This was probably part of an attack by a squadron of the 365th Group. At one time during the afternoon, a group of Germans tried to come in on the left flank of the Kommerscheidt positions over an exposed knoll, but mortars of Companies D and M, despite an alarming ammunition shortage, broke up the attack before it could gain momentum.

The enemy's probing efforts continued through the afternoon but accomplished little other than harassment of the already fatigued defenders. Toward dusk came the usual intense enemy mortar and artillery barrage, succeeded by routine noise of early night movement and intermittent shelling. The riflemen could hear enemy tanks churning around to their front, and the voices of German soldiers gave the impression that the enemy was collecting his dead. One group of Germans got so close to the

<sup>5</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.

defensive positions that the Germans called out for the Americans to surrender. A determined burst of small arms fire was the response.<sup>6</sup>

*Company B, 112th, Moves Up*

The success of the 110th Infantry's flanking drive the day before to take Simonskall was considered to eliminate the necessity of holding Company B, 112th Infantry, at Richelskaul. With Lieutenant Simon, assistant S-3, 3d Battalion, leading, the company and its attached heavy machine gun platoon moved out at midday in single file, proceeding cautiously along the edge of the woods south of Vossenack, down the Kall trail, and into Kommerscheidt. The only casualty came when a stray round of artillery fire fell as the company moved between the northern woods line and Kommerscheidt.

Company B, minus one platoon, went into position on the southeast between the 3d Battalion elements and Company A. The other rifle platoon under T. Sgt. Bruce Pitman was to go in with Company L and the 3d Platoon, Company A, on the southwest. The platoon waited on the edge of town for Sergeant Pitman to find out from Captain Walker, Company L commander, what the platoon sector was to be. As the men waited, the Germans threw in their usual early evening shelling, driving the Americans to cover. When Pitman returned, he reorganized his men in the darkness. One man was missing, and the sergeant

again told the platoon to wait while he made a search for him. A burning house on the edge of town lent an eerie atmosphere to an already tense situation, and the men, feeling that every move they made was silhouetted against the flames, scattered again. When Sergeant Pitman failed to return, a squad leader and the platoon guide, S. Sgt. Roy Littlehales, went to look for him. They found him about twenty-five yards away; he had been hit by an artillery shell and was beyond medical assistance.<sup>7</sup>

*The Tank Destroyers*

The remaining platoon of Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, Lieutenant Edmund's 2d Platoon, with only two guns, was delayed in reaching Kommerscheidt because the company commander, Captain Pugh, wanted to make a personal reconnaissance of the situation before committing his last two guns. Edmund's two vehicles finally reached the northern Kommerscheidt woods line between 1600 and 1630. Captain Pugh placed them in the edge of the woods in a reserve position with orders to go into Kommerscheidt at daybreak. He had been unable to find his two lieutenants, Leonard and McElroy, in Kommerscheidt and left for Vossenack to try to get at least one replacement officer and to form a party for resupply of his guns.

Five operational tank destroyers were now in Kommerscheidt and three were behind the Company C, 112th Infantry, positions. One of the latter three was Lieutenant McElroy's with an oil leak. These were all the remaining guns of

<sup>6</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Dana, Ripperdam, Kelly-Hunter, Perll, Holden, Piercey, Walker, Toner; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44; FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 5 Nov 44.

<sup>7</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Simon, Littlehales-Skain, Walker, Kelly-Hunter; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44.

Company C, 893d.<sup>8</sup> Although the infantry did not feel that the destroyers were sufficiently aggressive, an opinion shared by the infantry regimental commander, the addition of tank destroyers had substantially strengthened the Kommerscheidt defense.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Command in Kommerscheidt*

A forward command post group under Maj. Richard A. Dana, S-3, 112th Infantry, moved up about noon to the vicinity of the Company C, 112th, positions and later shifted slightly to the rear to a hunting lodge alongside the Kall trail. While this forward displacement could be expected to assist the Kommerscheidt defense in both command and morale, it nevertheless left the rear command post virtually nonoperative, primarily because communications were poor and because no one was left in nominal command. The S-1, S-4, and regimental surgeon had to base most of their information on hearsay from stragglers and wounded and from occasional supply groups that got through to Kommerscheidt.<sup>10</sup>

During the day Colonel Flood, the 3d Battalion commander, was evacuated for slight wounds and combat exhaustion. Before his evacuation Maj. R. C. Chris-

tensen, executive officer, assumed command. The 1st and 3d Battalions had lost so many men and had become so intermingled that Major Hazlett, the 1st Battalion commander, was placed in over-all command of both battalions. Captain Walker, Company L, was placed under him in command of all infantry elements on the right flank, consisting now of one platoon of Company A, elements of Companies I and L, and, after dark, Sergeant Pitman's platoon of Company B.<sup>11</sup>

Telephone facilities to the rear had become almost nonexistent on 5 November. Communications consisted primarily of radios, with some use made of messengers. After dark Lieutenant Simon, assistant S-3, 3d Battalion, was sent back with a message from Colonel Peterson to General Cota, delivered at about 2300. In effect, the message said that the 1st and 3d Battalions were pretty well disorganized, that the men were shell shocked, that the armor in Kommerscheidt was not as strong as desired, that the tank destroyers were not sufficiently aggressive, and that he (Peterson) would try to reorganize and hold the town. He added that if possible he would try to retake Schmidt; but apparently such optimism on the part of the regimental commander was forced.<sup>12</sup>

#### *The Engineers*

The 1st Platoon of Company C, 20th Engineers, which had dug in the night before with its company headquarters group to the rear of Company C, 112th Infantry, early on 5 November began

<sup>8</sup> One tank destroyer had developed a leaking recoil mechanism on 2 November; another had hit a mine near Richelskaul on 4 November; a third had thrown a track southeast of Vossenack; a fourth was knocked out in Kommerscheidt that afternoon by enemy tank fire.

<sup>9</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Simon, Kelly-Hunter; Combat Interv 76 with Pugh. In view of the enemy's terrain advantage and the lack of armor on tank destroyers, there seems to be insufficient evidence to characterize the destroyers as nonaggressive.

<sup>10</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Dana; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44; Ltr, Maj Berndt to Hist Div.

<sup>11</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Walker, Simon, Dana.

<sup>12</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Simon; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44; Interv with Peterson.

maintenance of the main supply route from the bridge to Kommerscheidt. Just before dark a nine-man mine detector detail attempted to check the roads within the town, but enemy artillery fire discouraged its efforts. Lieutenant Os-sola's platoon of Company B, 20th Engineers, continued maintenance and revetment of shoulders of the supply route west of the Kall. Company A, 20th, which had gone into defensive positions designated by General Davis in the edge of the woods on the southeastern nose of Vossenack ridge, left one platoon, the 3d, in the defense and sent the others to work on the trail east of the Kall. Some men of the company assisted Company B with the bulldozer and air compressors, and the four-man security guard remained on the river bridge.<sup>13</sup>

#### *The Greene Hornets*

Lieutenant Greene's "Greene Hornet" patrol squad had been inactive since its first flank security patrol mission on 3 November, thus ceasing virtually the only patrolling in which the regiment engaged during the period. On the night of 4 November Greene received orders to lead a group of officers and enlisted men, who had returned from Paris passes, to their units in Kommerscheidt. The lieutenant volunteered to take an SCR 300 forward with him. He delivered it in Kommer-scheidt after its aerial had been "snapped by rifle fire" in the Kall valley; after approximately ten minutes' operation, the radio refused to function. Greene then returned to the rear, stopped at the forward regimental switchboard in the former German barracks at Germeter,

<sup>13</sup> Combat Interv 75 with White, Lutz, Doherty, Krieder.

and began to assist the operators in placing calls. When a party from the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, discovered that his operator was Lieutenant Greene, he asked the lieutenant to relay fire missions—his own communications to supporting fires had been knocked out. For the remainder of the operation, while his patrol group worked at bringing in prisoners, carrying rations, and performing general supply tasks, Lieutenant Greene continued to act as a fire relay which became known as the "Greene Hornet Switch" from his melodramatic answer to all calls: "This is the Greene Hornet."<sup>14</sup>

#### *Tank Supply*

At approximately 2000 a 707th Tank Battalion supply party with one jeep, three weasels, and one two-and-one-half-ton truck carrying gasoline, rations, water, two batteries, and a tank generator reached the entrance of the Kall trail into the valley woods. With a white handkerchief tied around his helmet, Captain Pynchon, battalion S-4, led the way on foot. The column moved slowly, often being held up to allow medical jeeps to pass toward the rear. Some 300 yards past the river bridge, the party was subjected to eight or nine rounds of enemy shellfire. One helmet was blown off.

Reaching the woods line north of Kommerscheidt shortly after 2200, Capt. Donald C. Kelley, Headquarters Company, 707th Tank Battalion, and 1st Lt. Charles S. Weniger, Service Company transportation officer, continued with the weasels to the slight draw just northwest of Kommerscheidt. There they went on

<sup>14</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Greene.

foot from tank to tank distributing the supplies. Lieutenant Fleig asked them to report to Captain Hostrup that the tankers in Kommerscheidt would not use their radios except under absolute necessity, because they had been under almost constant shelling all day and felt, rightly or wrongly, that the radios were drawing fire.

Now that passage of the main supply route with a two-and-one-half-ton truck had been proved feasible, Lieutenant Weniger left with a weasel for Germeter in order to get additional trucks to bring up more ammunition while it was still dark and establish a forward ammunition supply point. The lieutenant's weasel threw a track immediately upon starting back, and he had to return for another. The second time he continued without mishap. Captain Kelley believed the excessive number of thrown weasel tracks was due to the fact that the drivers were hastily converted infantrymen who had had only three days' experience with their vehicles.

Captain Pynchon, Captain Kelley, and the Headquarters Company supply sergeant, S. Sgt. Curtis E. Walker, remained in the Kommerscheidt area, and Lieutenant Rogers left for Germeter with the remaining empty weasel, the jeep, and the two-and-one-half-ton truck just after midnight. The return column came under enemy mortar fire near the Kall bridge but escaped unscathed. At the exit of the trail from the woods southeast of Vossenack the truck found difficulty in climbing the steep, slippery grade. An engineer bulldozer close by was called to assist, and the two big vehicles drew spasmodic machine gun fire from the woods line to the southwest. There were no casualties, and the column was soon

able to move on. It came under heavy enemy artillery fire in Vossenack but eventually reached Germeter safely about 0330 (6 November).<sup>15</sup>

### *Infantry Supply*

Lieutenant George, who was in charge of supplying the infantry in Kommerscheidt and who had earlier in the day come upon Captain Montgomery and the two German medics, went forward again around dusk with a supply force of one two-and-one-half-ton truck and several weasels. Once the group reached the wooded part of the Kall trail, Lieutenant George put Sergeant Ward, the Company I supply sergeant, in charge of the train and himself returned to Germeter for another supply train. It consisted of two trucks, one jeep, and three weasels, two of which towed 57-mm. antitank guns from the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry. Once again reaching the entrance of the trail into the woods southeast of Vossenack, Lieutenant George told his men to take cover in abandoned foxholes near by while he made a reconnaissance on foot. Farther along the trail he found Sergeant Ward and was told by him that the advance supply train had gone through, although one weasel had thrown a track. The intense artillery fire in the area had affected Ward's nerves so badly that George sent the sergeant to the rear to report to the medics.

Returning to his supply train, Lieutenant George slowly and cautiously led his vehicles along the treacherous trail. Nevertheless, one of the weasels threw a track. While the men detached the antitank gun, attached it again to the

<sup>15</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Pynchon, Hostrup-Fleig-Payne, and Kelley.

jeep, and began to transfer the weasel's supplies to the other vehicles, one squad of the 3d Battalion Antitank Platoon under S. Sgt. Leo L. Cannon moved on ahead in one of the remaining weasels.

The main column under Lieutenant George started forward again and had almost reached the bottom of the gorge when the men saw a sudden bright glow up ahead and heard an explosion. A few minutes later a man from Sergeant Cannon's antitank gun crew staggered back to them. Burned almost black, the soldier said the squad had been ambushed. The Germans had blasted their weasel with three phosphorous grenades or shells. Moving forward to investigate, the remainder of Lieutenant George's supply group saw no Germans but found another antitank soldier burned slightly and two others seriously injured. Sergeant Cannon could not be found.

With this warning fresh in mind, the column put out security for the continuance of its movement. Six rounds of artillery fell near it at the switchbacks east of the river, but it reached the forward regimental command post unmolested. Lieutenant George established an ammunition supply point in the vicinity of the Company C, 112th Infantry, positions, and the men dug in for the night, the two 57-mm. guns going into positions with the near-by infantry.

The time was now about midnight. Although the enemy ambush indicated that the Germans planned to infiltrate the supply route, the empty vehicles of Lieutenant Rogers, 707th Tank Battalion, moved through it without mishap after midnight. There was even an engineer bulldozer working in the area as the column passed.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Combat Interv 75 with George.

### *Tank Destroyer Supply*

Back in Vossenack to check on supply and to try to get officer replacements, Captain Pugh, commander of Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, received a radio message about 2200 from Lieutenant Edmund, 2d Tank Destroyer Platoon leader, in the edge of the Kommerscheidt woods. The 1st and 3d Tank Destroyer Platoons from the town had by this time joined Edmund's and all three were planning to move to Kommerscheidt before daylight. But now, Edmund reported to Pugh, an unidentified infantry captain, claiming that the infantry in Kommerscheidt were pulling out without the presence of the destroyers, was ordering them back into Kommerscheidt immediately. Captain Pugh told Lieutenant Edmund to hold the destroyers where they were.

A few minutes later Captain Pugh received another radio message—to report to the forward regimental command post. The trail to the command post across the Kall was blocked by a supply train, and Pugh had to wait. Lieutenant Edmund radioed again: the same infantry captain was again insisting that the tank destroyers move back into Kommerscheidt. Radioing Colonel Mays, 893d commander, for concurrence, Captain Pugh again ordered Lieutenant Edmund to remain where he was. As the company commander still waited to cross the Kall, the 1st Tank Destroyer Platoon sergeant, S. Sgt. Arlie W. Wilson, radioed that the infantry captain was "raising hell," even threatening court-martial if the destroyers were not moved forward. Captain Pugh repeated his orders, but the 1st and 3d Platoons went back into town shortly after the last call—they had apparently

tired of wrangling. Hearing an explosion in the Kall gorge that meant one of the supply vehicles ahead had hit a mine, Pugh gave up his attempt to get forward that night and returned to Vossenack.<sup>17</sup>

While Captain Pugh was waiting to cross the river, Lieutenant Fuller, reconnaissance platoon leader for the tank destroyers, attempted to move forward in an armored car to resupply the tank destroyers in Kommerscheidt. When he reached the valley trail and found it blocked by a weasel and three or four other vehicles, he returned to Vossenack with ammunition and planned to make another attempt to go through the next day. Apparently both Lieutenant Fuller and Captain Pugh had come upon the tail of Lieutenant George's last infantry supply column.<sup>18</sup>

Back at the division command post, Colonel Mays, 893d commander, had received what must have been a delayed report that an infantry supply train was moving to Kommerscheidt about midnight. He radioed his Company B in Vossenack to be alert for this train and to attach one of its platoons to it. The train had evidently passed before Company B received the message, for the company never saw the supply column.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Medics*

On 5 November the aid station of the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, was still in a basement in the northern edge of Kommerscheidt, while the 3d Battalion aid station remained in the log dugout along-

side the main supply route in the Kall gorge west of the river. In Kommerscheidt the 1st Battalion surgeon, Captain Linguiti, had been disturbed by continued concentration of fighting personnel and equipment around his aid station site. After a supply train had deposited its load near the aid station entrance before daylight and distribution had taken place from there for several hours, he had no doubt about the cause of an enemy shelling that centered on the house, injuring several patients and killing three medics.

During the afternoon medical weasels and available jeeps, including that of the 3d Battalion chaplain, were used to shuttle patients from the Kommerscheidt aid station to the 3d Battalion station alongside the main supply route. When all patients from the forward site had been evacuated, the medical officers decided to abandon the 1st Battalion station except as a forward collecting point and to combine the two battalions' medical facilities in the log dugout. Eight litter bearers from the 1st Battalion and a driver with his jeep were left to man the collecting point.

Many walking wounded were evacuated past the 3d Battalion aid station. They were sent on foot to the edge of the woods southeast of Vossenack where ambulances from Company C, 103d Medical Battalion, maintained a forward loading point. Lack of weasels and litter bearers prevented further evacuation of many litter cases, although all personnel of the regimental aid station who could be spared had already been sent forward as substitute litter bearers.

The first indication the medical personnel had of any impending infiltration of the Kall trail came near midnight.

<sup>17</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Pugh.

<sup>18</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Fuller.

<sup>19</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Mays, Davis-Murphy-Gardner.

Pfc. Delmar C. Putney, leading a group of walking wounded from Kommerscheidt, was stopped by enemy medics on the trail east of the river. The Germans forced him at gunpoint to carry a wounded German soldier for some distance along the trail. They then released Putney, and he made his way to the log aid station and told his story.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Formation of Task Force R*

By noon of 5 November wishful rumor had spread among the fighting men in Kommerscheidt that division was forming a special task force to take over their positions. They were to be relieved! The first indication of positive action along such lines did not come until late afternoon when Colonel Ripple, commander of the 707th Tank Battalion, was informed by General Cota that he was to command such a task force. Ripple's men, however, were not to relieve the defenders of Kommerscheidt but to pass through them and recapture Schmidt. The Kommerscheidt defenders were to follow and assist in holding Schmidt at all costs. The attack was to be launched before noon the next day, 6 November.

Colonel Ripple learned that his task force was to consist of the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry, already weakened by fighting in the woods to the south; Com-

pany A, 707th Tank Battalion, already in Kommerscheidt with nine remaining tanks; Company D, 707th, the battalion's light tank company; Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, already in Kommerscheidt but reduced by four destroyers and possibly a fifth (Lieutenant McElroy's with an oil leak at the Kommerscheidt woods line); and one platoon of Company B, 893d. An SCR 193 was to provide direct communication with division.

The infantrymen, only recently removed from a grueling battle against fortified positions in the wooded 110th Infantry sector, left on foot from Germetter for Kommerscheidt about 0245 (6 November). They numbered approximately 300, a third of whom were heavy weapons personnel. The platoon of tank destroyers from Company B, 893d, was the unit that received orders from Colonel Mays too late to attach itself to an infantry supply train moving through Vossenack about midnight. Just when the light tanks of Company D, 707th Tank Battalion, were to move to Kommerscheidt was not made clear, for they had been assisting the 28th Reconnaissance Troop in blocking in the woods southwest of the 110th Infantry and did not leave those positions until 8 November.

In Vossenack the infantry column was delayed by enemy shelling. On the southeastern nose of Vossenack ridge, it was met by Captain Pugh, Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, who asked for at least a platoon of infantry to accompany a platoon of Company B's destroyers down the Kall trail. Colonel Ripple refused. He considered his infantry force already too far understrength and planned to take his column down the firebreak to the river instead of using

<sup>20</sup> Linguiti Rpt; Muglia Rpt; DeMarco-Linguiti Rpt; Maj Albert L. Berndt, 112th Inf surgeon, Report on Medical Evacuation, to division surgeon, 10 Nov 44 (hereafter cited as Berndt Rpt), Combat Interv File 76; Ltr, Maj Berndt to Hist Div. Major Berndt says that Germans throughout this operation wore Luger or "P-38" pistols. Later, as a German prisoner, he noted all German medics wearing pistols as "a part of the uniform." Once when an American officer asked to see one of the pistols, he found its bolt rusted tight. Berndt also said he never heard of German medics firing.

the trail. Almost as soon as the infantry column entered the woods at the fire-break, it became engaged in a small arms fight which lasted almost the length of its trek through the woods to the river. With the approach of daylight, Task Force R's infantry component was still fighting to get across the Kall.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Engineers*

After dark on 5 November the two platoons of Company A, 20th Engineers, which had been working on the Kall trail east of the river, returned to their former defensive bivouac just inside the woods on the southeastern nose of Vossenack ridge, leaving the company's four-man security guard at the bridge. Lieutenant Ossola's platoon of Company B continued to work on the supply route west of the Kall and near the bridge, while the other two platoons of Company B remained all day in Vossenack. The 1st Platoon, Company C, was dug in near Company C, 112th Infantry, on the east bank near the Kommerscheidt woods line; the 2d Platoon was still on a mine-clearing mission with the 109th Infantry. The 3d Platoon, Company C, under Lieutenant Johns, whose mission to transport TNT to a forward dump had been postponed the previous night, left Germeter about 2200 with two trucks, one loaded with

<sup>21</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne, Pugh, Ripple, Davis-Murphy-Gardner, Mays, and Capt George H. Rumbaugh and S Sgt Martin J. Joyce, 3d Bn, 110th Inf; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44; 707th Tk Bn S-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 and TD Secs. According to Colonel Ripple the task force included Company C, 707th, instead of Company A, 707th, but the 28th Division G-3 Journal states that it was A, 707th. Since Company A was already in Kommerscheidt, it is assumed the G-3 Journal is correct. V Corps Study and V Corps Operations in the ETO mention neither company as part of the task force.

5,000 pounds of explosives and the other with two squads of men. A third squad remained to guard the rear explosives dump at Germeter.

After unloading the explosives near the Kall bridge some time after midnight, the two squads crossed the river to join their company's 1st Platoon near Company C, 112th Infantry, for the night. A heavy shelling hit them near the east bank switchbacks, wounding two men and killing another, and Lieutenant Johns returned to the Kall's west bank to deposit his wounded at the log aid station. The remaining members of his two squads began to dig in near the trail about thirty yards west of the Kall bridge. Except for the four-man security guard at the bridge, they thus constituted the only obstacle to uninterrupted north-south German movement through the Kall gorge.<sup>22</sup>

Lieutenant Johns' two squads had been digging in on the west bank near the bridge for only about ten to fifteen minutes (they thought the time was about 0230 or 0300, 6 November), when a German jumped out on the trail some fifteen yards away, blew two shrill blasts with a whistle, and shouted something in German. The whistle blasts were the signal for a maze of German small arms fire which seemed to the engineers to come upon them from all sides.

Before the firing started Sgt. William O'Neal had been digging a foxhole with another soldier on the left flank of the engineer squads. They struck a rock and decided to try another spot. O'Neal had his hands full of equipment when the enemy struck. One German with a burp gun began firing from about seven yards

<sup>22</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Doherty, Krieder, Lutz, O'Neal; Sonnefield Rpt; Sonnefield Statement.

away. Unable to fire because his rifle was at sling arms, O'Neal half jumped and half rolled into a small patch of scrub pine. When the enemy began to send up flares, he could see some of the engineers of his platoon lying on the ground near by, whether wounded or dead, he could not tell. It seemed to him that the Germans must have destroyed most of the two squads with their first blasts, for what little fire the Americans returned seemed to come from the other flank of the position. Waiting until the shooting diminished some thirty minutes later, Sergeant O'Neal crawled off through the trees and came upon another member of his platoon who had been left as a guard at a pile of shovels. He had tried to warn the squads, this man said, but had lost his way trying to find them. The Germans, he said, had passed right by him on their way up the trail.

Lieutenant Ossola's 3d Platoon, Company B, 20th Engineers, had been working on the trail near Lieutenant Johns' platoon. When enemy artillery fire began to fall dangerously close, the men took cover in a ditch near a culvert. Because they had put out no local security, the appearance of the Germans took them by surprise. The enemy set up machine guns only a few feet from the ditch, but the engineers held their fire for fear of revealing their presence.

Beyond the river, men of the 1st Platoon, Company C, 20th Engineers, could hear German firing in the river valley, but they were afraid to return the fire and run the risk of hitting other Americans. And at the bridge the four-man security guard under T/4 Krieder heard the first whistle blasts and the subsequent firing. Five Germans later ran across the stone bridge, followed almost immediately by

twenty-five or thirty Germans, but Krieder and his men also feared revealing their presence to this superior force and did not fire.<sup>23</sup>

About 0300 there was a knock at the door of the log dugout which the two infantry battalions shared as an aid station. The visitor proved to be a German private who quickly called up a German NCO. A 3d Battalion medical clerk who spoke German, Pfc. Joseph Cally, talked with the Germans, telling them that these were American medics caring for wounded. The Germans asked if they had rations. When Cally replied that they had enough for one day, the enemy noncom said he would return with more rations and some German medics; in the meantime, the Americans must remain. To insure compliance, a German guard was left at the door. At intervals throughout the remainder of the night the aid station personnel could see German patrols near their dugout, including one group which mined the Kall trail; but at daylight the German guard at the door was gone.<sup>24</sup>

#### *The Situation in Vossenack*

On 5 November the situation of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, in Vossenack repeated that of the day before except that the condition of the men under the intense enemy shelling became more and more critical. Occasional enemy patrols hit the exposed forward position of the

<sup>23</sup> Engr story is from the following: Combat Interv 75 with O'Neal, Lutz, White, Krieder, Doherty, and Cpl Marion Martone, Co B, 20th Engrs; Lutz Statement; Doherty Statement.

<sup>24</sup> 2d Lt Henry W. Morrison, MAC, 1st Bn, 112th Inf, Report of Medical Evacuation, to div surgeon, 10 Nov 44 (hereafter cited as Morrison Rpt), Combat Interv File 76; Berndt Rpt; Linguiti Rpt; Muglia Rpt; DeMarco-Linguiti Rpt.

Vossenack ridge, and shattered nerves gave rise to many reports of enemy counterattacks which did not actually develop.

Early in the morning the 2d Squad of the 1st Platoon, Company F, under S. Sgt. Charles W. Cascarano, in position at the head of a shallow wooded draw leading into the positions on the east, saw about twenty Germans moving in a column of twos through the wooded draw toward its positions. The squad's automatic rifleman sprayed the Germans with fire, wounding nine, killing four, and putting the rest to flight. The wounded Germans lay where they had fallen for about four or five hours, moaning and crying, before five German medics with a cart picked them up.

The enemy shelled the open ridge with artillery from the direction of the Brandenberg-Bergstein ridge and with self-propelled guns and tanks, sometimes firing twenty or thirty rounds at one foxhole before shifting targets. The men noticed no lessening in the fire even when American planes were overhead. In the Company E area, four men who were using a barn for shelter were buried in an avalanche of baled hay when the upper part of the barn collapsed from a direct artillery hit. Frantic efforts by others of the company to dig out the men were unavailing, and the building burned.

The regular Company E commander, 1st Lt. Melvin R. Barrilleaux, who had returned the night before from a Paris leave, visited his platoons after dark. He found most of his men so affected by the shelling that he felt they all should be evacuated. Many were in such a shocked, dazed condition that the platoon leaders had to order them to eat, and one platoon leader was himself evacuated for

combat exhaustion. Virtually the same situation existed in the other three companies.

Intrabattalion communications were very poor: when Lieutenant Barrilleaux reported to the battalion CP after the building that housed his company CP had burned, the battalion officers were amazed to see him; they had thought him dead in the fire. Communications to regiment consisted of only sporadic radio operation, and the artillery's wire to the "Greene Hornet Switch" operated only occasionally.

The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Theodore S. Hatzfeld, had himself become a virtual combat exhaustion case. He insisted on remaining at his post, but Capt. John D. Pruden, the battalion executive officer, conducted the major command functions.

Just before dark enemy shelling methodically wiped out six men in two-man foxholes of Company G along the trail that was an extension of the town's main street. When the men near by saw their companions blown to bits, some pulled back to the houses, leaving an undefended gap of more than a hundred yards in the center of the defense. Efforts by officers of both Company G and Company F to fill this gap went for nought. The troops ordered into the holes, utterly fatigued, their nerves shattered, many of them crying unashamedly, would return to the dubious protection of the houses.

The company commanders reported the situation to battalion; battalion informed them it was being reported to regiment; and no relief came.<sup>25</sup> Higher

<sup>25</sup> Colonel Daley says that, after having seen the situation in Vossenack on 4 November, he was so concerned that he stopped by the 112th Infantry rear CP and reported it, possibly to the regimental S-3. See Ltr, Col Daley to Hist Div.

headquarters may have failed to act because there was no adequate regimental or divisional reserve. One possible remedy, pulling the defenses back from the exposed forward nose to the line of houses, was not tried, and the regiment's situation report for the day listed the combat condition of its command as "excellent."

Two towed guns of Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion, in position near the Vossenack church, were damaged by the enemy shellfire. They were towed out during the night. Three 57-mm. antitank guns of Antitank Company, 112th Infantry, went into the town during the day but were supplied with only armor-piercing ammunition and never fired. The 2d Battalion's medical aid station had been set up in the former German barracks at Germeter under Capt. Morris Katz, battalion surgeon, and a forward collecting point was being maintained near the Vossenack church. Casualties were evacuated by jeep to Germeter.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Armor in Vossenack*

The ten remaining tanks of Company C, 707th Tank Battalion, had withdrawn from Vossenack with battalion approval during the night of 4-5 November to a bivouac-ready position near Germeter. Lieutenant Leming's 2d Platoon moved up again at dawn on 5 November to fire into the wooded draw north of Vossenack because enemy small arms and mortar fire had been reported from that direc-

tion. One of Leming's tanks was hit by high explosive fire that put its 75-mm. gun out of action, wounded the assistant driver, and killed the driver. The remainder of the tanks returned to Germeter.

About 1300 1st Lt. James J. Ryan, company maintenance officer, went forward with a T-2 retriever from the battalion maintenance section in an effort to fix a tank that had hit a mine on 2 November. Enemy artillery made it impossible for the repair crew to work except during occasional lulls, and the tank was eventually towed back to Germeter.

When the tankers were notified of a reported counterattack against Vossenack about 1400, both Lieutenant Leming's 2d Platoon and Lieutenant Quarrie's 1st Platoon went back into town. No counterattack materialized, and Leming's tanks withdrew again to cover positions near Germeter. Quarrie's platoon stayed in town in conformance with recent orders that the company had to keep at least one platoon of tanks in Vossenack at all times.<sup>27</sup>

Until 5 November Company B, 707th Tank Battalion, had been attached to the 110th Infantry in its attack to the south; but because the heavily wooded terrain in that sector limited maneuver, its tanks had been employed only as close-support artillery. About noon of 5 November the company commander, Capt. George S. Granger, was ordered to move his platoons to Germeter preparatory to relieving Company C, 707th, in Vossenack. Delayed by mud and by telephone lines strung almost in the trails, for the indiscriminately mined forests had

<sup>26</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Pruden, Nesbitt, Condon, Beggs, Barrilleaux, Kauffman, Cascarano, Johnson, Crain, and Cpl Joseph E. Philpot, Co G, 112th Inf; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44; V Corps Study, TD Sec; Ltr, Maj Berndt to Hist Div.

<sup>27</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan.

prompted communications men not to hazard movement off the trails when laying their wires, the tankers arrived in Germeter shortly after dusk.

Plans were made between the two tank companies for Company B to take over the mission of keeping one platoon in Vossenack, and about 0500 the next morning (6 November) the 1st Platoon of 1st Lt. Carl A. Anderson, Jr., moved forward. Anderson had difficulty in the dark finding the route used by the Company C tankers around the north of town. Not knowing where he would find the front-line foxholes, Lieutenant Anderson shifted his tanks into a line formation. Several infantrymen running toward the rear passed them. As the tanks crossed a slight rise before coming out on the northern nose of the ridge, the crewmen saw incoming small arms tracers from the draw northeast of Vossenack. Confused and alarmed by the running infantrymen, the small arms fire, and the lack of orientation, the tankers opened fire with their machine guns on the wooded draw to their front.<sup>28</sup>

The three tank destroyer platoons of Company B, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, which had moved into position with the rifle companies in Vossenack at dawn on 5 November, found the area saturated with enemy mortar and artillery fire. Before noon all four destroyers of Lieutenant Davis' 1st Platoon with Company G, 112th Infantry, had been hit at least four times. The platoon's infantry guide had been killed as the destroyers moved into position and six men had been wounded.

Shortly after dark the 2d and 3d Tank

Destroyer Platoons were moved back to ready positions near Richelskaul. The 1st Platoon, still in Vossenack, was alerted about midnight to move to Kommerscheidt with an infantry supply train. There was no sign of the supply train, and Lieutenant Davis' destroyers remained on the Vossenack ridge. An hour or so before dawn the crewmen were alarmed to see infantrymen moving back from their foxholes.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, Captain Pugh, commander of Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, and Lieutenant Fuller, whose attempts earlier in the night to resupply the destroyers in Kommerscheidt had failed, moved out again about 0530 with two jeeps in another effort to get ammunition and rations to Kommerscheidt. Fuller rode in the first jeep and Pugh in the second with a driver and 2d Lt. Louis J. Izzo. Izzo was going forward to take command of either the 1st or the 3d Tank Destroyer Platoon in Kommerscheidt; both platoon leaders, Lieutenant Leonard and Lieutenant McElroy, were presumably missing.

Lieutenant Fuller, driving his own jeep and accompanied by two enlisted men, had gone about 300 yards south of Vossenack on the open southeastern nose when he spotted what seemed to be about forty Germans armed with machine guns, grenades, and at least one *Panzerfaust*. Captain Pugh, Lieutenant Fuller, and the Germans seemed to act at once. Pugh yelled, "Look out!" and fired his jeep's machine gun, but the weapon jammed. Fuller stepped on the gas, and his companion in the front seat fired about ten rounds from the jeep's machine gun. Captain Pugh jumped out of the

<sup>28</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Anderson, S Sgt Letford W. Walling, and S Sgt John B. Cook. All of Co B, 707th Tk Bn.

<sup>29</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Davis-Murphy-Gardner.

left side of his jeep almost at the same time that a *Panzerfaust* rocket grazed the top of the jeep, wrecking the windshield. A husky German then came at him with a bayonet. He batted it away, suffering only a gash across three fingers, and ran back toward Vossenack. His driver and Lieutenant Izzo also escaped and soon joined Captain Pugh in the town.

The Germans turned their machine guns on Fuller's jeep and hit Fuller's gunner as well as the enlisted man riding in the back seat. The lieutenant yelled for another burst from the jeep's machine gun, but the gunner answered, "I can't, Lieutenant; I'm dying right here!" Unable to give any assistance at the moment, Fuller made his way back to the southern edge of Vossenack. There he found Captain Pugh, the driver, and Lieutenant Izzo and told them he wanted to go back for the two wounded enlisted men.

At that moment Pugh and Fuller spotted several tank destroyers heading out of Vossenack toward Kommerscheidt. These were from 2d Lt. Horace L. Smith's 2d Platoon of Company B, 893d, which had been ordered forward from Germeter to join Task Force R in Kommerscheidt. Captain Pugh and Lieutenant Fuller commandeered two of them and went forward again. It was still dark, and the atmosphere was foggy. Near the ambush site, they fired the destroyer's machine guns, killing several of the Germans and putting the others to flight. The rescue party found Pugh's jeep wrecked. The man in the back seat of Fuller's jeep was badly wounded, and the gunner in the front seat was dead, shot through the stomach. A short time later the infantry of Task Force R under Colonel Ripple, 707th Tank Battalion,

arrived on the southeastern nose in their move toward the Kall firebreak and Kommerscheidt.<sup>30</sup>

This action along the western portion of the Kall trail took place at a time when 28th Division headquarters thought the entire trail open to traffic. Colonel Daley, 1171st Engineer Group commander, had made the first report of enemy infiltration at 0355 (6 November) but at 0445 had informed division that the route was open and that the 20th Engineers had been told to keep it open. At 0635 Colonel Daley again reported to division that the road was open at 0500. At 0715 General Cota ordered the engineer group commander to provide security for the bridge, and at 0747 Colonel Daley reported that the 20th Engineers had men along the road. Not until 0800 (6 November) did Colonel Daley get what was apparently accurate information on the situation along the Kall trail. He immediately ordered the 20th Engineers: "Get every man you have in line fighting. Establish contact with the Infantry on right and left. . . ." Nothing was done to comply with this order, for by this time another crucial situation farther to the rear had altered the picture.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Artillery Support*

During 5 November the 229th Field Artillery Battalion, in direct support of the 112th Infantry, spent one of its busiest days, firing heavy and frequent concentrations in the Kommerscheidt-Schmidt vicinity. The battalion fired

<sup>30</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Fuller, Pugh. Quotes are from Fuller.

<sup>31</sup> 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 6 Nov 44; Combat Interv 75 with Daley; Sonnefield Statement.

249 missions totaling 3,947 rounds, including 247 neutralization missions, one registration, and one TOT. All companies of the 86th Chemical Battalion reverted to attachment to division artillery except Company D, which spent its time withdrawing from its precarious position at Bosselbach Farm and did no firing.<sup>32</sup>

#### *109th and 110th Infantry Summaries*

There were virtually no changes on 5 November in dispositions of the 109th Infantry. Engineers cleared a path through the mine field facing the 2d Battalion along the Huertgen-Germeter road far enough to enable one company to place outposts on the road. (*Map 27*) The enemy made limited counterattacks against almost all companies; most of them turned out to be patrols in force, and all were beaten off. During the night the regiment carried out its wounded and brought up supplies. The carrying parties had to fight their way in and out through infiltrating enemy patrols.<sup>33</sup>

To the south in the 110th Infantry sector the 1st Battalion company that had tried unsuccessfully to clear the east-west portion of the Simonskall-Richelskaul road the day before was joined by a company from the 2d Battalion. The two units reduced several pillboxes and then attempted to attack due south in order to close the gap between the 1st and 3d Battalions. Their attack was stopped when they lost direction and hit the same defenses that had been holding up part

of the 3d Battalion. During the afternoon Task Force Lacy, the small group formed to defend along the Richelskaul-Raffelsbrand road, was moved to the gooseneck curve where the Simonskall road turned south. When the 3d Battalion received orders to withdraw for commitment with Task Force R to recapture Schmidt, the battalion disengaged and crossed its line of departure in Germeter about 0245 (6 November). As daylight approached, it was fighting its way down the firebreak paralleling the 112th's main supply route toward the Kall River.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Air Support*

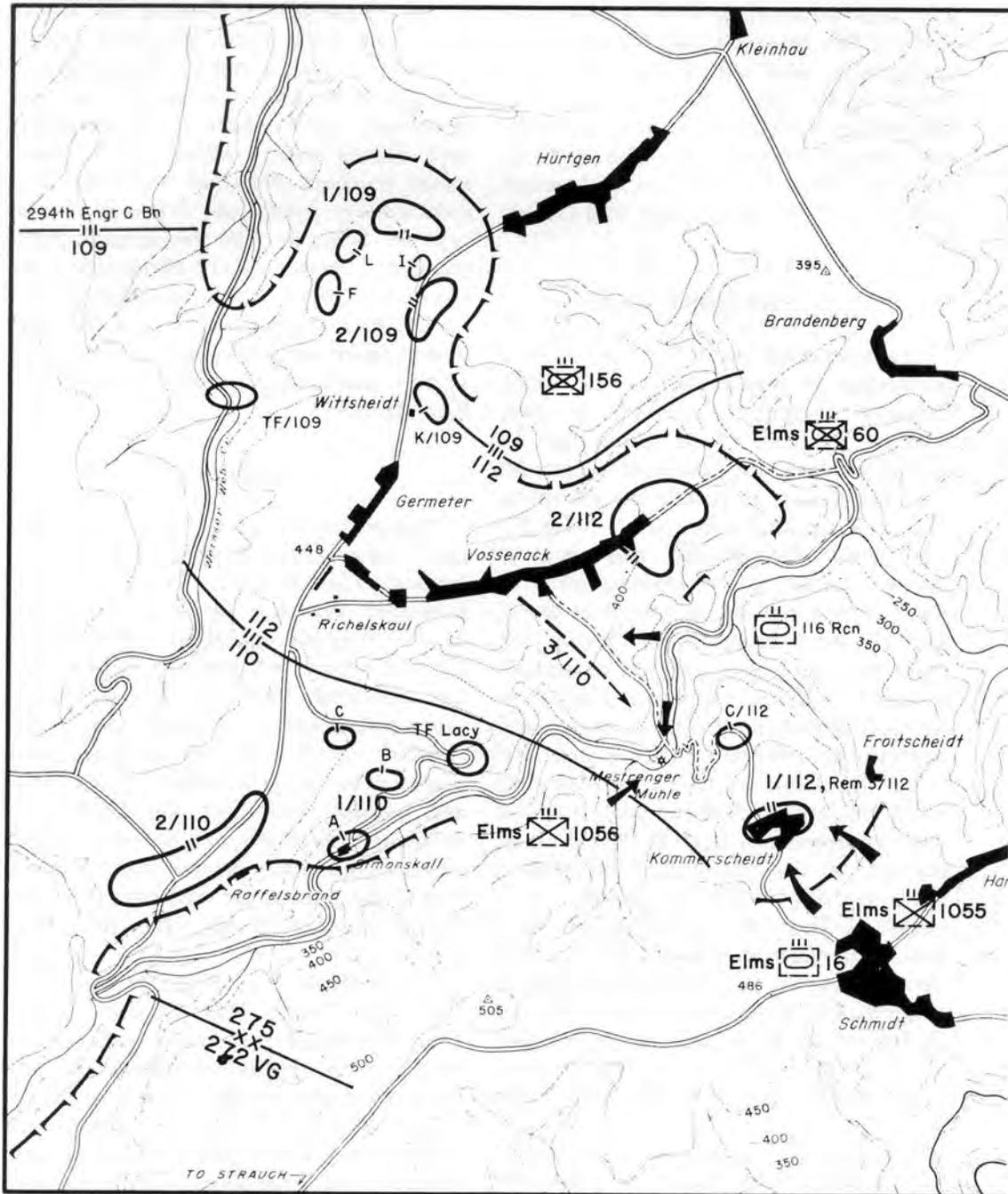
Supporting aircraft were over the target area as early as 0835 on 5 November and as late as 1625. It was the most favorable day thus far for air support in the Schmidt operation. The 474th Fighter Group had thirty-six P-38's over the area from 0835 to 1015, attacking tanks and troops at Schmidt and in the Schmidt vicinity. Smoke and dust prevented observation of results. The P-38's also bombed Heimbach and Schleiden, southeast of Schmidt, and Strauch, southwest of Schmidt. Enemy flak downed two of the planes, the first aircraft to be lost in support of the 28th Division's attack.

About noon a squadron of P-47's of the 365th Group bombed and strafed armored vehicles just north of Brandenburg, but no results were observed. In early afternoon another squadron of the 365th bombed twelve to fifteen armored vehicles in a forest east of the Roer and southeast of Nideggen. The squadron

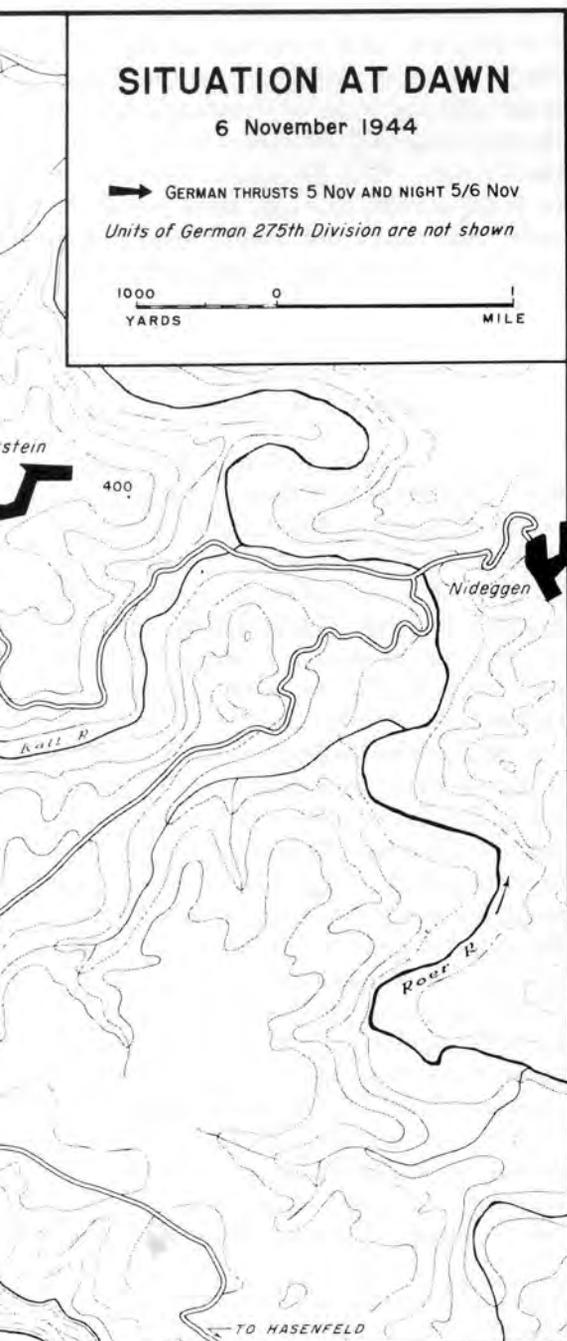
<sup>32</sup> 28th Div Arty Jnl, 5 Nov 44; V Corps Study, Arty Sec; 229th FA Bn AAR, Nov 44; 86th Cml Bn AAR, Nov 44.

<sup>33</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 109th personnel; 109th Inf S-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44.

<sup>34</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 110th personnel; 110th Inf S-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44.



MAP 27



claimed ten vehicles destroyed. The same squadron also attacked fifty motor transports south of Gemuend and claimed eleven destroyed, eight probably destroyed, and two damaged. In mid-afternoon the 365th sent twelve P-47's against Schmidt. This squadron claimed that all its bombs hit in the center of the town and that two motor transports were destroyed. The last mission of the day, the bombing of Bergstein, was also by the 365th. Except for small fires started, no results were observed.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Enemy Situation*

On 5 November the German counter-measures lost impetus temporarily. The 60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (116th Panzer Division) sent only piecemeal attacks against the 109th Infantry north of Germeter. Less determined attacks than before were launched against Kommerseidt by the 1055th Regiment (89th Division) and 16th Panzer Regiment (116th Panzer Division). The 1055th Regiment made note of the first prisoners it had taken in the woods near Schmidt into which elements of Companies K and L, 112th Infantry, had retreated on 4 November.

Late in the day elements of the 89th Division,<sup>36</sup> pushing up from the southwest, and the Reconnaissance Battalion of the 116th Panzer Division, thrusting down the Kall gorge from the northeast, met at the Mestrenger Muehle. The Germans had established contact through the gorge,

<sup>35</sup> FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 5 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 Air Sec; Combat Interv 74 with Howison.

<sup>36</sup> It is indefinite whether these troops of the 89th Division were from the 1055th Regiment or the 1056th Regiment. See MSS # A-905 (Waldenburg), A-891 (Gersdorff), and P-032a (Bruns), and Sit Rpts, 5 Nov, found in OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44.

but American accounts indicate that a definite line along the river or across the American supply route had not been formed.

The Germans claimed gains during the day by the *156th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (116th Panzer Division)* and elements of the *60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* against Vossenack, but American reports indicate that such progress was confined to moving up in the wooded draw north and northeast of the town. To the south, elements of the *275th Division* continued to hold in the Raffelsbrand area, and elements of the *1056th Regiment* were committed to the defense along the Kall gorge from southwest of Simonskall northeast to the Mestrenger Muehle. The *272d Volks Grenadier Division*, south of the battle area, had been continuing its relief of the *89th Division* in the sector that the *89th* had held before its commitment in the Schmidt fight. By the end of 5 November twenty-nine of thirty-four troop trains bringing the *272d Division* from a training area near Berlin had been unloaded; the rest of the trains arrived the next day. The *272d Division* assumed responsibility for the sector at noon on 5 November.

Although the German command believed that the attacks of the *116th Panzer* and *89th Infantry Divisions* had effected "a firm containment" of the American penetration, they nevertheless on 5 November completed establishment of a secondary defensive line on the north and northeast as an added precaution. This line, running from Grosshau through Kleinhau to Brandenburg and Bergstein, was manned by "fortress troops and emergency units."

In the evening of 5 November the German commanders readied an attack

to be launched by the *156th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* and elements of the *60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* from the woods north and northeast of Vossenack against the shell-battered defenders of the Vossenack ridge. The Germans had sought to build a road through these woods in order that tanks and assault guns might join this attack, but their efforts had failed.<sup>37</sup>

*Summary for 5 November and  
Night of 5-6 November*

As dawn approached on 6 November, the situation in Kommerscheidt was relatively stable. The infantry had held throughout the preceding day against a number of minor German assaults, and defenses had been bolstered by addition of five tanks (making a total of eight) and nine tank destroyers, although one destroyer had been knocked out during the day and one abandoned at the Kommerscheidt woods line, leaving only seven. Company B, a heavy machine gun platoon of Company D, and a rifle platoon of Company C, all 112th Infantry, had been moved into the Kommerscheidt line. Behind the town at the northern woods line sat the remainder of Company C, 112th Infantry, one platoon of Company C, 20th Engineers, the forward regimental command post, a tank (Captain Hostrup's command tank), and two 57-mm. anti-tank guns. On the way forward was a decimated battalion of the 110th Infantry, and scheduled to join this battalion was a company of light tanks and another

<sup>37</sup> MS # A-905 (Waldenburg); ETHINT 56 (Gersdorff and Waldenburg); Sit Rpts and rail movement schedules, 1-6 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44.*; 28th Div G-2 Jnl and File, Nov 44; *89th Division Order of the Day*; Entry, 5 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB 1.-30.XI.44.*

tank destroyer platoon which, together with tanks and destroyers already in Kommerscheidt, were to form Task Force R to retake Schmidt. The attack was to jump off sometime before noon, 6 November.

In the Kall gorge the Germans had gained the upper hand. They had infiltrated the main supply route and had mined the trail, leaving both the 3d Platoon, Company B, 20th Engineers, and two squads of the 3d Platoon, Company C, 20th Engineers, unaccounted for. Company A, 20th Engineers, was still virtually intact in a defensive bivouac near the entrance of the trail into the woods southeast of Vossenack. A four-man security guard was presumably still at the Kall bridge, but for all practical purposes the enemy controlled the vital river bridge. The combined 1st-3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, aid station still functioned in the log dugout in the Kall gorge, although the Germans were all over the area. No vehicle that had tried to use the supply route since about 0200 (6 November) had been able to get through, not even medical jeeps and weasels. The 28th Division's G-2 Periodic Report for 5 November, in making estimates of enemy capabilities, had failed to mention the possibility of such enemy action coming down either end of the undefended Kall gorge.

At Vossenack the situation was perhaps worst of all, though its seriousness was perhaps not so readily apparent. Remnants of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, still held the town, but they had been subjected to three days and four nights of murderous fire from German artillery,

self-propelled guns, and mortars. The men had undergone about all they could stand. The company commanders knew the situation in Vossenack, and the battalion staff knew it (the staff had a combat exhaustion case of its own in its battalion commander); but neither regiment nor division seemed to appreciate the situation fully.

One tank platoon of Company B, 707th Tank Battalion, Lieutenant Anderson's, was moving onto the Vossenack ridge as dawn came. Lieutenant Quarrie's tank platoon of Company C, 707th, and Lieutenant Davis' platoon of Company B, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, were already there. Also in Vossenack were two platoons of Company B, 20th Engineers, and three 57-mm. antitank guns.

The situation of the 109th and 110th Infantry Regiments (except for assignment of the 3d Battalion, 110th, to Task Force R) remained basically the same. The important development as dawn came on 6 November was still in the 112th Infantry sector, for there the infantrymen of the 2d Battalion on the forward nose of Vossenack ridge were leaving their holes. At the same time the Germans were planning a dawn attack against them.

The 28th Division's activities on this date had not lacked supervision from higher commanders. The V Corps commander and later the First Army, V Corps, and VII Corps commanders had visited General Cota early on 5 November. No instructions from these officers were recorded.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 5 Nov 44.

## CHAPTER V

# Action at Vossenack (6 November)

On the Vossenack ridge the harassed company commanders of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, their men unnerved by three days and four nights of intense enemy shelling, were apprehensive of what dawn would bring on 6 November. As daylight came the men of Company G, in the most exposed positions of all on the northern portion of the ridge (*Map XI*), became suspicious of a strange silence. The Germans had been showering them every morning before dawn with a concentrated artillery barrage, and today there was no fire. The mysterious portent of the quiet made some of the riflemen almost yearn for the usual shelling. They knew that their comrades in other units were as nerve-shattered as they were themselves, and they knew also that a gap of over a hundred undefended yards separated them from Company F. In ones and twos and threes some Company G troops had been sneaking back into town during the darkness.

There was a burst of small arms fire. One of the men let go a piercing scream; then again everything was quiet. About thirty minutes later, as daylight increased, German guns spoke, and artillery shells plummeted in upon the shell-punctured nose of the ridge. Small arms fire, whether from the distance or from near

by the Americans could not tell in the confusion, joined in. The men of Company G had enough. Panic-ridden, many of them suddenly grabbed wildly at their equipment and broke for the rear. Word spread quickly that the Germans were attacking and the company could not hold. Those who held initially saw others running back toward town, and they too fled. The disorderly retreat became a snowball, carrying with it any who chanced to be in its path.

The Company F commander, Lieutenant Kauffman, witnessed the retreat from his own command post in a building near the eastern edge of town and immediately realized that it endangered the situation of his own unit. His platoons on the right of Company G were receiving small arms fire from the wooded draws to the front and he feared that with the defection of Company G his men might be wiped out or captured. There could be no doubt that the Company G position had collapsed. Kauffman ordered his platoon leaders to withdraw their men to the line of buildings and there to hold. The platoons began to withdraw in small groups, but there was no control. The mushrooming effect of the retreat had spread too quickly, and the men could not be stopped when they reached the houses. Although no one

professed to have seen any enemy soldiers,<sup>1</sup> the troops of both Company G and Company F were convinced the Germans were attacking.

In the Company E command post, farther to the west in Vossenack, Pfc. Russell G. Ogborn had been operating the company SCR 300, forming a relay between the battalion command post and Company G. The latter unit's radio would not reach battalion. Ogborn heard the Company G commander, Capt. George N. Prestridge, report that the enemy was attacking and that his company was withdrawing. A few minutes later the Company F commander broke in on the channel to say that Company F, too, was pulling out.

The Company E command group rushed outside its cellar command post. Coming down the road from the east were panicky men from all four companies of the battalion, pushing, shoving, throwing away equipment, trying madly to outrace the enemy artillery fire and each other down the main street. Some were helping the slightly wounded to run, but when the more seriously wounded collapsed they were left where they had fallen. Although the Company E officers tried to question the men in their flight, they could discern only one coherent fact: withdrawal.

At his 2d Platoon command post, Lieutenant Barrilleaux, the Company E commander, located Lieutenant Kauffman. The two officers could reach only one decision, that with everyone pulling back it would be useless to try to hold. Lieutenant Barrilleaux sent messengers to his other platoons telling them to withdraw.

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this question see below, pp. 354-55, 371-72.

The machine gunners of Company H, who had been with the rifle companies, attempted to cover the withdrawal of the riflemen and then joined the flight themselves. When the company commander, Capt. Charles L. Crain, realized the ubiquitous nature of the withdrawal, he ordered his 81-mm. mortar men to move back also. Artillery fire hit the mortar men as they started out, causing a number of personnel casualties and the loss of four mortars.

German soldiers still had not appeared. Sergeant Cascarano, whose squad had defended a draw on the northeast in the Company F sector, said he saw no enemy soldiers at all. Lieutenant Condon, the Company E executive officer, said it was his opinion that there was either no enemy attack or one too small to have caused such a rout. The men, Lieutenant Condon thought, had simply reached the limits of endurance.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Armor in Vossenack*

When the rout of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, from the Vossenack nose began, available armor in the town consisted of the 1st Platoon, Company C, 707th Tank Battalion, whose tanks were under Lieutenant Quarrie with Company F on the northeast, and the 1st Platoon, Company B, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, whose destroyers were under Lieutenant Davis on the eastern edge of town. Arriving at just about the time the attack supposedly hit was the 1st Platoon, Company B, 707th Tank Battalion, under Lieutenant Anderson. This

<sup>2</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Johnson, Kauffman, Barrilleaux, Condon, Crain, Philpot, Cascarano, Beggs, Pruden, Nesbitt; Combat Interv 76 with Davis-Murphy-Gardner.

unit had come up on the north side of town into the Company G positions and was under orders to relieve Lieutenant Quarrie's platoon.

Word of the supposed German attack reached Captain Granger, Company B, 707th, commander, in Germeter soon after the retreat began. He started forward in his command tank and was followed some fifteen to thirty minutes later by his company's 3d Platoon. The remaining two platoons of Company C, 707th, consisting now of about six or seven tanks, including one taken over by Captain West as his command tank, started forward shortly after Captain Granger. The remaining platoon of tank destroyers, the 3d, and the remaining tank platoon of Company B, 707th, the 2d, stayed in ready positions near Germeter. Thus, one full-strength platoon of tank destroyers and five platoons of tanks (less about five vehicles) were either in Vossenack when the infantry retreat began or became available shortly thereafter.

When the infantry began to fall back, Lieutenant Davis' tank destroyer crewmen questioned a number of the fleeing men but could determine only that there were no more men left in the line. The tank destroyers remained in position for approximately thirty minutes after the retreat began; their crews saw no enemy attack materialize nor any enemy attempt to occupy the abandoned 112th Infantry positions. Lacking infantry for protection, Lieutenant Davis received permission to withdraw his platoon from Vossenack to positions west of the town. It moved out shortly after 0815, thus leaving no tank destroyers in the town.

On the northeastern nose of the ridge, Lieutenant Quarrie's tank platoon of

Company C, 707th Tank Battalion, knew little about the situation except that everything was suddenly confusion. Lieutenant Anderson's tanks fired as they approached and thus added to the turmoil. Quarrie's men felt that this fire was wild and at random. The two platoons nevertheless exchanged positions and Quarrie's platoon, except for Sergeant McGraw's tank, which had backed into a shell hole, withdrew to Germeter. Unable to move his tank, Sergeant McGraw radioed Captain West and was told to have Lieutenant Anderson's platoon take his crew back to Germeter. Anderson evidently interpreted this message to mean that his entire platoon was to take McGraw's crew back. He placed one man from the crew in each of his tanks and began withdrawing slowly, firing occasionally in withdrawal at gun flashes on the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge.

As this withdrawal took place, Captain West, arriving in his command tank, drove up beside Lieutenant Anderson's tank and shouted: "You shot your own infantry in the back, and now you're running off and leaving them." West ordered Anderson's tanks back to the nose of the ridge, accompanying them himself. When they approached the initial positions, heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire seemed to register directly on them, and there were no infantry, friendly or enemy, in sight. Captain West turned his tank around and yelled to Lieutenant Anderson: "Let's get the hell out of here."

The next tanks to move forward to Vossenack in answer to the message of enemy attack were those of Captain Granger, Company B, 707th, and his 3d Platoon under 2d Lt. Danforth A. Sher-

man. Lieutenant Sherman's tank developed a hydrostatic lock at the start and would not budge. The platoon leader joined another crew and the remaining five tanks moved to the Vossenack church, then continued east via a route south of the town. Arriving in the eastern end of the town, the crewmen saw three or four tanks of Company C (evidently those of Lieutenant Quarrie which had been relieved by Lieutenant Anderson) withdrawing west along the north side of town; but they could see no infantry. Captain Granger now received a request by radio from Lieutenant Anderson for permission to move back to Germeter with some wounded and with the crew of Sergeant McGraw's disabled Company C tank. The captain approved and Anderson's tanks started back (probably in the movement to which Captain West objected). Granger saw Anderson's platoon making its withdrawal, drove up to West's tank, and asked the situation. Standing in the turret of his tank, West replied, "Counter-attack." Granger could see no signs of enemy attack other than heavy mortar and artillery fire. Just at that moment a heavy shell came in close, and Captain Granger ducked. Rising again, he saw that the hatches on the turret of Captain West's tank were gone and that the Company C commander had been instantly killed.

As Lieutenant Anderson's platoon continued its withdrawal, Lieutenant Sherman's 3d Platoon, Company B, remained among the buildings in the eastern end of Vossenack, and Captain Granger himself drove into the center of town to search for the infantry command post. Meanwhile, Company C's understrength 1st and 3d Platoons had come into town.

Lieutenant Leming soon withdrew his 1st Platoon back to Germeter, and the 3d, whose commander, Lieutenant Novak, still occupied his immobilized tank near the Vossenack church, halted in the vicinity of the church. Lieutenant Sherman radioed Captain Granger from the eastern end of Vossenack that "we're all alone out here," and Granger in turn radioed Anderson in Germeter to bring his platoon back up. Towing Lieutenant Sherman's disabled tank, Lieutenant Anderson brought his platoon forward again, moved south of the church, and then turned east again to join Lieutenant Sherman's platoon. An enemy tank or self-propelled gun scored a direct hit on one of his tanks, setting it afire. The remainder of the platoon continued to the east, firing as it progressed. Again the Company C tankers still in town felt that this fire was indiscriminate and claimed it hit among those of the infantry who had not reached the church.

Lieutenant Davis' tank destroyer platoon, which had withdrawn early from Vossenack, received orders at approximately 0900 to return to town to act as overwatchers for the tanks. Moving back in and attempting to find cover, one of the destroyers backed into a building on the north side of the main street and crashed into a cellar. Its gun pointed straight into the air like an anti-aircraft weapon. The remaining three guns withdrew once again to Germeter.

Thus, by about 1000, when the infantry had abandoned the eastern half of Vossenack, two platoons of Company B, 707th (Lieutenant Sherman's and Lieutenant Anderson's), were in the eastern edge of town. In the vicinity of the church was the 3d Platoon, Company C, 707th, under Lieutenant Novak, who

himself operated from his immobilized tank on the southern edge of town. The remainder of both Companies B and C was in the rear near Germeter, along with two platoons of Company B, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion. The other platoon of tank destroyers still waited at the entrance of the main supply route into the Kall woods in its effort to join Task Force R in Kommerscheidt.<sup>3</sup>

### *Engineers in Vossenack*

When Captain Lutz, Company B, 20th Engineers, who still had two engineer platoons and his company headquarters in Vossenack, saw the disorderly infantry withdrawal early on 6 November, he sent his administrative officer, 2d Lt. Henry R. Gray, to the infantry command post to determine the situation. Lieutenant Gray evidently had not reached the command post before he met an infantry captain who told him that he and his small group of men were the last ones around, and they were leaving.

By this time the engineer battalion commander, Colonel Sonnefield, had arrived at the Company B command post. He told Captain Lutz to move his men back to Germeter, collect the infantry weapons they had left in the rear, and then take up a defense in Vossenack. Sonnefield also ordered Company A, 20th Engineers, to pull out of its defenses at the entrance of the supply route into the Kall woods and return for its heavier weapons.

The situation was chaotic, and as

<sup>3</sup> Armor story is from the following: Combat Interv 76 with Mays, Ripple, Davis-Murphy-Gardner, Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan, Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook. Direct quotes accredited to Captain West are from Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook interview.

Captain Lutz's engineers left town it seemed that they were the last to leave. Tanks also were withdrawing. Just outside of Vossenack an artillery shell landed near the column and knocked Captain Lutz unconscious. When he revived and crawled forward to where Lieutenant Gray was lying, he found the lieutenant dead.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Situation at Kommerscheidt*

The defenders of Kommerscheidt were also having their difficulties on 6 November. With the coming of dawn came the routine thunder of German shelling, and through the early morning mist the men could see at least three enemy tanks moving toward them from Schmidt and a large group of German infantry milling around on the dominating Schmidt hill. Radio appeals for artillery fire brought what many felt to be their most effective artillery support of the period, preventing the German infantry from joining the big tanks in the attack. The tanks themselves advanced no farther than the northern edge of Schmidt but from there poured direct fire into the houses and foxholes of Kommerscheidt. On the left flank in the Company A positions at least seven men were killed by this fire, and Company A's 3d Platoon was forced to move its command post when tracers set fire to the building that housed it. Three men from Company L were killed in their foxholes by the shelling, and a round from one of the tanks tore through the Company L command post, wounding the first sergeant and killing the company commander's runner.

The tank and tank destroyer support in Kommerscheidt occasionally peeked

<sup>4</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Lutz, Sonnefield, Doherty.

over the shallow defilade provided by the northern part of the hill and fired at the German tanks, but without noted success. Some of the infantrymen felt their armor was letting them down, but others took into account the dominant positions held by the Germans. It was clear to almost all that the friendly armor was accomplishing at least one thing favorable: its presence made the enemy infantry seem reluctant to accompany their own armor in the attacks. In their turn the American infantry showed an increasing tendency to desert their foxholes unless their armor was up forward. A number left their foxholes now, but the exodus was stopped before it could spread.

Word passed among those who had not heard it during the night that small arms fire was originating from the Kall valley to their rear—a development that meant they were surrounded. In the Company C, 112th Infantry, positions at the northern woods line the firing in the river valley was more apparent, and the men feared they would be attacked from that direction.

The enemy tanks soon seemed to tire of their target practice, and the situation once again settled down to intermittent artillery and mortar fire. But this fire was enough to keep the riflemen pinned to their holes, each man living out his personal hell within himself. It was cold and wet, and men were forced to dispose of excrement in K ration boxes, pieces of paper, or handkerchiefs and throw it out when the chance came, for it was worth a man's life to be seen.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Ripperdam, Perll, Tyo, Toner, Simon, Kudiak, Walter, Quinton-Hausman-Kertes-Lockwood-Norton; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne, Pugh; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 6 Nov 44.

### *Task Force R*

The 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry, which was to constitute the main body of Task Force R in the attempt to retake Schmidt, crossed the Kall River about 0815. Almost three hours later the troops finally arrived at the Company C, 112th Infantry, positions along the woods line north of Kommerscheidt. They lost two officers and fifteen men out of their already-reduced ranks to enemy small arms and artillery fire as they fought their way across the river gorge. Making contact with Colonel Peterson, the companies were told to dig in temporarily along the woods line. Peterson felt after seeing the battered battalion that was to be his main striking force that the planned attack would in all probability fail; he nevertheless fully intended to go through with it.

In order to avoid the exposed open ground north of Kommerscheidt, Lt. Col. William Tait, the infantry battalion commander, his S-2, and S. Sgt. Martin J. Joyce, intelligence sergeant, chose a route along the edge of the woods to the southwest and moved on toward the 112th battalions in the town. They had reached a shallow draw just northwest of Kommerscheidt when enemy riflemen in a square patch of woods beyond opened fire. Both Colonel Tait and his S-2 were wounded. The S-2 was unable to seek cover because of his wounds, and the Germans fired again, killing him with a bullet through the head. Only the timely intervention of Sgt. Marshall F. Pritts's tank destroyer saved Sergeant Joyce and the battalion commander, whose right arm had been shattered by a bullet. As the tank destroyer fired into the woods, one German was killed and

two others came out with their hands up, one of them pointing to the S-2's body and whimpering that he had not shot that wounded man.

The tank destroyers of the 2d Platoon, Company B, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, which were to supplement the armor of Task Force R, had tried to secure infantry assistance in moving down the Kall trail. Such assistance had been refused, and the platoon decided to go on alone. Just inside the woods the armored troops met a group of engineers who told them the road was blocked by damaged weasels and mined. The destroyers pulled back to the edge of the woods southeast of Vossenack and waited. Company D, 707th Tank Battalion, the light tank company which was also to join Task Force R, apparently never left its defenses with the 28th Reconnaissance Troop southwest of the 110th Infantry positions.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Tank Demonstration in Kommerscheidt*

About noon the enemy tanks in Schmidt resumed their deadly harassment of the Americans in Kommerscheidt. Again infantrymen began to leave their positions. Some men were so shaken and unnerved by this time that the mere sound of an enemy tank racing its motor caused them to run for the rear. With more and more infantrymen pulling out, the situation was fast becoming critical. In an effort to stabilize the situation, Colonel Peterson ordered the tanks and tank destroyers to take the German

tanks under fire. In compliance the 1st Platoon of tank destroyers and Lieutenant Fleig's tanks on the right of town proposed a maneuver whereby the tanks would move up the crest of the hill to draw fire from the enemy tanks as the destroyers made a flanking movement along the woods line to the southwest. While the enemy's attention was directed at Fleig's tanks, the destroyers were to sneak in on his flank.

Lieutenant Fleig's three tanks moved out and almost immediately began to draw fire from Schmidt. The tanks returned the fire, but the tank destroyers did not follow. The platoon leader, Lieutenant Leonard (whom Captain Pugh had thought missing but who had turned up later in the command post of the 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, with slight wounds), dismounted in the face of small arms fire from an enemy pillbox and attempted to lead his destroyers into position. Still they failed to come up. Fleig saw Leonard move back to his vehicles and gesture at the gun commanders to follow him; again nothing happened. Captain Pugh, the tank destroyer company commander, said later that the destroyers had bellied on the hidden stumps of a hedgerow that ran across a field to the southwest of the town. Lieutenant Fleig withdrew his tanks to the slight defilade of the shallow draw. The proposed demonstration had not gone as planned, but in exchange for jammed turrets on two of the American tanks one German tank was claimed destroyed and the enemy tanks had ceased firing.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Combat Interv 77 with Capt George H. Rumbaugh and Joyce, 3d Bn, 110th Inf; Combat Interv 76 with Pugh, Ripple, Fuller, Mays, Davis-Murphy-Gardner; Combat Interv 75 with Krieder; 707th Tk Bn S-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44; Interv with Col Peterson.

<sup>7</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Pugh, Hostrup-Fleig-Payne. For heroic action in the Kommerscheidt area during 4-5-6 November, Lieutenant Leonard, who was subsequently seriously wounded, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.



*IMMOBILIZED ARMOR near the beginning of the Kall trail between Vossenack and Kommerscheidt. Kommerscheidt is the village on the horizon.*

Except for continuation of the heavy shelling, there was no more German action against Kommerscheidt for the day. The defenders became more and more conscious of the enemy's excellent observation, both from Schmidt and Harscheidt to the south and southeast and from Brandenburg and Bergstein to the north; and enemy shelling was costly. Infantry casualties mounted, and two more tanks suffered jammed turrets. Only three tank destroyers remained fully operational. The most seriously hit was Sergeant Wilson's; one of its motors was knocked out and the vehicle immobilized. Adopting it toward late afternoon as his company command post, Captain Pugh had the crewmen of his damaged destroyers dig in near by as riflemen. One crewman who had been wounded was placed under the destroyer for protection. About fifteen minutes later an artillery shell landed less than ten feet from the rear of the vehicle, killing him.<sup>8</sup>

#### *The Planned Attack on Schmidt*

The late arrival of the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry, in the Kommerscheidt area ruled out the possibility of launching the Task Force R attack against Schmidt at the scheduled time, noon of that day. Colonel Peterson and the task force commander, Colonel Ripple, still planned the attack, although the infantry commander, Colonel Tait, was seriously wounded, the S-2 was dead, the S-3 had been wounded the day before and had not even come forward, and the battalion itself had less than 300 effectives. And only the tanks and tank destroyers then

in Kommerscheidt could be expected to be present as armored support.

Colonel Peterson issued hasty orders about noon and sent the infantry company commanders to reconnoiter their Kommerscheidt line of departure. There the battalion executive officer, Maj. Robert C. Reynolds, was wounded in the right hand and chest and the Company I commander was killed. Such misfortune convinced Colonel Peterson that without supplies, without armor, and with an understrength infantry force, an attack on Schmidt was more futile than ever. He therefore ordered the 110th Infantry battalion to consolidate its positions with Company C, 112th Infantry, thus strengthening the American defense in depth, and canceled the attempt to retake Schmidt.

That night Kommerscheidt was quiet except for the sound of enemy artillery. During lulls in the shelling the fatigued riflemen could hear enemy tanks churning about to their front.<sup>9</sup>

#### *A New Defense Attempted in Vossenack*

There had never been any order originating from headquarters of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, for the riflemen on Vossenack ridge to withdraw; but in early morning (6 November) when the battalion officers saw men streaming by the command post, they knew what must have happened. Running into the street, they attempted to halt the pell-mell retreat. The few men they managed to stop were sent into position on an east-west line running generally across the CP building about a hundred yards west of

<sup>8</sup> Combat Interv 75 with 1st and 3d Bn, 112th, personnel for the period; Combat Interv 76 with Pugh, Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.

<sup>9</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Ripple; Combat Interv 75 with Ripperdam, Dana, Kudiak; Combat Interv 77 with Rumbaugh-Joyce; Interv with Col Peterson.

the church. But many men continued toward the rear, and many of those who were stopped resumed their flight as soon as the officers had turned their backs. The battalion adjutant and Captain Pruden, the executive officer who was the 2d Battalion's acting commander because of the combat exhaustion of Colonel Hatzfeld, divided responsibility for the line at the main street, each endeavoring to build up a line on his side of the street.

The 2d Platoon, Company E, under 1st Lt. Clifton W. Beggs, had been among the last to leave the eastern half of Vossenack. Beggs attempted to build up another line near the church. In the attempt at least two of his men were wounded. Lieutenant Barrilleaux then arrived with word that the line was being formed near the battalion CP. The platoon, one of the few groups which had maintained any semblance of order and command in withdrawal, followed the company commander's directions.

Company H managed to salvage two of its .30-caliber machine guns, one without a water jacket and the other without a tripod, and set them up along the CP line. Tied in with them was the fire of a .50-caliber machine gun still in position near by.

Sergeant Cascarano, along with the platoon guide of his Company F platoon, held up at the new defensive line. The two men occupied the same foxhole until an intense German artillery concentration hit their area and they looked up to see a number of men still running down the road to the rear. With the impression that everyone was leaving again, they joined the retreat, stopping only when they reached the battalion rear aid station in Germeter where several lieutenants were trying to form a unified

group to move back into Vossenack. It was night before that group was brought back.

Despite continuous withdrawals of individuals and small groups, by about 1030 a line had been established with approximately seventy men, who, fortunately, had retained their weapons. No one seemed to have any illusions about the solidity of such a defensive force, but at least for the time being the retreat had been blocked.

By this time all infantrymen who could get out of the eastern end of Vossenack had apparently done so. American tanks were still there, however. A call for artillery support was sent in by someone who either thought the armor had left or simply ignored it. The first concentration of approximately four volleys was short, and American shells fell among the handful of defenders at the battalion CP line.<sup>10</sup> One shell hit a barn in which men from Company E's 1st Platoon had taken cover with their platoon sergeant, T. Sgt. Donald Nelson. Of the group one man was killed and three seriously wounded. As far as Sergeant Nelson knew, only he and one other man were left of the platoon and the pair withdrew to the Germeter aid station.

Lieutenant Barrilleaux, Company E commander, with a group of his men who were taking shelter along the west wall of a house in order to avoid the full thrust of continuing German artillery fire, was thus fully exposed to the short American rounds. He rushed inside the battalion CP to try to get the firing stopped. Just as he stepped back outside another round

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<sup>10</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Nelson, Condon, Barrilleaux, Nesbitt. Artillery records are too indefinite to determine what American unit, if any, fired this concentration.

exploded near by, killing his company first sergeant and wounding the lieutenant himself in the face and leg. He moved back to the Germeter aid station.

Lieutenant Beggs, Company E, was wounded slightly in this firing and also reported to the aid station in Germeter. There his wounds seemed to him so minor alongside of "so much real misery" that he decided his place was back with his platoon and returned to Vossenack.

Quick calls to the rear lifted the American artillery fire after the four volleys. The few officers remaining with the battalion's infantry forces checked their defenses and found that more men had withdrawn and their line was now thinner than ever. But the retreat had been stopped for the moment, and at noon the American infantry still held half the town of Vossenack.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Was There a German Attack?*

Armored elements in Vossenack reported that they had never encountered German infantry at any time during early morning of 6 November. Many of the infantrymen also stated that they felt there had been no real enemy attack. The impression of attack had been created, however, and that in itself proved enough to give half the town to the enemy.

Lieutenant Condon, Company E executive officer, believed that there was no actual German attack; if there was, it had not been large enough in itself to cause the rout that followed. He explained that the Germans shelled the

forward nose, then lifted their fire in favor of long-range machine gun fire from the woods to the east and north. Next, as the small arms fire slackened and the defenders rose in their holes to meet an expected attack, the artillery let loose again, causing more casualties. That process, the lieutenant said, gave the illusion of attack. Major Bodine, division antitank officer, was in Vossenack from 1000 to 1300 and said he saw no enemy infantry or tanks. The 2d Battalion men told him they were driven from position by artillery and mortar fire.

Lt. Clyde R. Johnson, the Weapons Platoon leader of Company G, insisted there was a German attack. When the retreat started, he and two other men were in a covered hole that had been used as the company observation post. As they began to climb from the hole, he said, a German soldier stepped over the cover, yelling something that sounded like a command. The three Americans, Lieutenant Johnson, Pfc. I. Ortiz, and T. Sgt. Kenneth Jones, remained in their hole, all the while hearing German voices, until about 2000 that night, when they ventured out and eventually made their way back to Germeter.

Presence of at least some German infantry on the extreme nose of the ridge was inferred by Lieutenant Kauffman, Company F commander. Five of his men on the forward nose of the ridge were captured, he said, and were kept in the house in which his old company command post had been located. Kauffman hazarded no guess as to the time of their capture. After nightfall, two of these men, S. Sgt. George A. Christian and Cpl. James Klinginsmith, escaped and made their way back to American positions.

<sup>11</sup> Infantry story is from the following: Combat Interv 75 with Pruden, Nesbitt, Barrilleaux, Condon, Beggs, Crain, Cascarano, Nelson, Philpot, Kauffman; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 6 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 Sec.

That the Germans did eventually follow the Americans into the eastern half of Vossenack was confirmed, for by noon German infantrymen were definitely established as far west as the church. But that there must have been some time lag between the American retreat and the German occupation is apparent from the tankers. Both Lieutenant Sherman's and Lieutenant Anderson's platoons of Company B, 707th Tank Battalion, were in the eastern edge of Vossenack until at least midmorning. It is possible that the presence of armor prevented the Germans from exploiting the infantry withdrawal.

German sources indicate that an early morning attack (0400) was planned but agree generally that the attack was delayed, by failure of either the infantry or the artillery to be ready on time. The S-2 of the 229th Field Artillery Battalion reported that the attack, according to one prisoner, jumped off at 0835. Some sources say there was "hand-to-hand combat" in the town, but presence of enemy troops as far west as the church cannot be definitely established prior to noon. Capture of the first sizable group of German prisoners was not reported until 1630 in the afternoon.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Armor Builds Up a Line*

By the time the infantry had built up some semblance of a defense along the line of the battalion command post, Cap-

tain Granger, Company B, 707th Tank Battalion, located the infantry command post. Colonel Hatzfeld, the infantry battalion commander, was sitting inside with his face in his hands, and Captain Pruden, the executive, told Granger what he knew of the confused situation. Later in the day Hatzfeld reported to the Germeter aid station, and Pruden assumed actual command.

Soon after Captain Granger's visit to the infantry command post, at approximately 1100, Lieutenant Sherman radioed from the eastern edge of town: "Captain, it's getting too hot to handle out here. We are just taking fire and doing no good." Captain Granger told him to withdraw his tanks to the vicinity of the church and the battalion CP and go into position with Lieutenant Anderson's 1st Platoon, which by this time had gradually worked to the rear until it was now near the church on the south side of town. Also in position in this area were Lieutenant Novak's immobilized tank and his 3d Platoon, Company C, 707th Tank Battalion.

As Lieutenant Sherman was withdrawing with his tanks along the northern route, he saw a column of infantry emerging from the woods on the north flank almost due north of the infantry CP. Since he could not definitely identify the column as friendly or enemy, he did not open fire.

Lieutenant Anderson's platoon on the right flank was receiving antitank fire from the vicinity of Harscheidt on the Kommerscheidt-Schmidt ridge. Captain Granger made contact with the artillery liaison officer at the infantry CP and had artillery fire placed on the enemy gun flashes. Then he returned to his command tank where he heard Sgt. Arthur

<sup>12</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Beggs, Pruden, Condon, Johnson, Cascarano, Kauffman; Combat Interv 75 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne; Pugh; Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook; Davis-Murphy-Gardner. See also 28th Div G-2 Jnl, 6 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 File, 6 Nov 44; MS # A-905 (Waldenburg); MS # C-016 (Straube); ETHINT 56 (Gersdorff and Waldenburg); Sit Rpts, 6 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44*.

Claugh's tank (in Anderson's platoon) open fire with its machine guns on the buildings in the eastern end of Vossenack. Lieutenant Novak, Company C, opened fire at the same time on the woods line east of the town. When Captain Granger checked to see if Sergeant Claugh was sure he was firing at Germans, the sergeant replied: "Hell, yes, I'm sure," and added hastily, "Sir."

At almost the same time, Lieutenant Sherman's tanks arrived from the north side of town. Captain Granger directed them into position with Lieutenant Anderson and Lieutenant Novak.

At approximately 1140 an infantry officer ran to Captain Granger's tank and asked for tank support on the north flank. Granger moved with his command tank some twenty-five yards north of the infantry CP. Coming up toward the town out of the wooded draw to the north were fifteen to twenty Germans, evidently the same unidentified column seen earlier by Lieutenant Sherman. When the command tank opened fire, the German infantry hit the dirt, and Granger's gunner put two rounds of high explosive into the area where they had fallen. An enemy antitank weapon from somewhere in the northern draw fired, one round ripping the ground directly in front of Granger's tank. He returned the fire, and the antitank weapon did not fire again.

Now there were three tank platoons in Vossenack, all just south of town and on a general line with the infantry defense. One tank, Captain Granger's, was just north of the infantry CP. It was the only tank covering the north side.<sup>13</sup>

In midmorning, after all tank destroyers had pulled out of Vossenack, General

Davis made contact with Colonel Mays, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion commander, and asked why there were no destroyers in the town. Colonel May's explanation that the destroyers had found no targets there and did nothing but draw enemy fire did not satisfy the general. He ordered all of Company B, 893d, back into town, asserting that its presence was necessary for infantry morale.<sup>14</sup> When Major Bodine, the division antitank officer, talked with General Davis, the assistant division commander relaxed his requirement, and only one platoon, the 1st under Lieutenant Davis, was ordered back into Vossenack. Davis placed two of his guns on the right side of the main street west of the church and the third on the left to cover the north flank. (The fourth gun was the one which had earlier fallen into a cellar.)

A second platoon of destroyers, the 3d, moved just east of Germeter, fired on reported enemy mortar locations in the draw north of Vossenack, and then pulled back to the rear of Germeter. One gun from this platoon later moved south of Vossenack and joined Lieutenant Smith's 2d Platoon, which still was waiting at the entrance of the main supply route into the Kall woods in its effort to reach Kommerscheidt and join Task Force R.<sup>15</sup>

About 1245, tankers in Vossenack displayed their identification panels while American planes strafed the eastern end of the town and bombed the draw to the northeast. Enemy artillery ceased com-

<sup>14</sup> "... many enemy targets of opportunity suitable for TD fire were not engaged. A few well-placed guns, each with alternate firing positions, could have duplicated several times the destruction of enemy armor accredited to [the American tank destroyers]." Ltr, Gen Davis to Hist Div, 27 Dec 49.

<sup>15</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Mays, Davis-Murphy-Gardner.

<sup>13</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook.

pletely as the American planes buzzed the area, the first time in the Schmidt operation that the presence of American aircraft seemed to have any appreciable effect in silencing enemy guns.

After the air strike, the tankers continued to fire intermittently at enemy personnel in the eastern end of town, at the wooded draw to the northeast, and at gun flashes on the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge line. About 1615 either a German Mark V tank or a self-propelled gun fired from the vicinity of Mausbach-Froitscheidt and knocked out one of Lieutenant Anderson's tanks. Although Anderson returned the fire, the range was too great for his weaker American guns.

At approximately 1800 Lieutenant Quarrie came into town with his 3d Platoon, Company C, 707th Tank Battalion, and evidently a portion of Lieutenant Leming's 1st Platoon, for he had six tanks. He relieved Lieutenant Anderson's platoon, and all of Company B, 707th, then withdrew to Germeter. Except for Lieutenant Novak's immobilized tank, Novak's Company C platoon also withdrew, and Quarrie's reinforced 3d Platoon, plus one immobilized tank, remained as tank support for the defense of Vossenack's western half. Also present as darkness came was Lieutenant Davis' platoon of Company B, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion.<sup>16</sup>

#### *The Engineers Act as Riflemen*

Major units of the 1171st Engineer Combat Group were the 20th, 146th

(minus one company), and 1340th Engineer Combat Battalions. The 146th Battalion had been assigned road maintenance work in the rear areas, a task which became most formidable because of the muddy conditions of the forest trails. The other two battalions were in direct support of the 112th and 110th Infantry Regiments. One company of the organic 103d Engineer Combat Battalion had also been attached to each of the three infantry regiments. Engineers of the 1171st Group were to be prepared at any time upon four hours' notice for commitment as riflemen.

In view of the chaotic situation in Vossenack, the three engineer battalions were alerted at various times during the morning of 6 November by various commanders, including General Davis and Colonel Daley, 1171st Group commander. The first alert came early in the day, before Colonel Daley knew that Captain Lutz's two platoons had withdrawn from Vossenack, when the group commander alerted Company C, 1340th Engineers, for movement into Vossenack. General Davis met the Company C commander, Capt. Ralph E. Lind, Jr., about 1100 as he was taking his company into a forward assembly area<sup>17</sup> near Richelskaul preparatory to moving to Vossenack. Davis ordered the company to go instead to the Kall bridge and secure it. He also ordered a platoon of Company A, 20th Engineers, which had withdrawn from the main supply route on Colonel Sonfield's orders, to accompany it.

Shortly after issuing these orders, General Davis apparently changed his mind.

<sup>16</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook, Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan; Combat Interv 75 with Condon, Pruden. Although no reference to air attack against Vossenack is made in IX TAC records, this information is accepted because it comes from ground troops who saw the action.

<sup>17</sup> At the time General Davis met these troops "they were not moving into assembly areas—they were on the road moving away from the action." Ltr, Gen Davis to Hist Div, 27 Dec 49.



**CORDUROY ROAD.** *Adverse weather conditions required extensive road maintenance work by the engineers.*

When he met Colonel Daley and his engineer battalion commanders near Richelskaul, he told Daley to send Company C, 1340th, and those men of the 20th Engineers who had withdrawn from Vossenack, back into Vossenack to report to the infantry commander. After establishing that the situation in the town was secure, Daley was to take them on to recapture the bridge area. Since these orders conflicted with the general's previous instructions to Captain Lind, the 1171st S-3 left the meeting early to overtake Lind's company. He passed on the new order and Company C, 1340th, headed for Vossenack about noon.

When Colonel Daley and the 1340th

commander, Lt. Col. Truman H. Setliffe, left the meeting, they also overtook Company C, 1340th, to accompany it to Vossenack. On the way they met Lieutenant Pellino of Company A, 20th, who was leading about thirty men back from the Kall trail area. Pellino and his men joined the column, thus giving it two platoons of Company A, 20th. From Pellino Daley learned that there had been no enemy action when the lieutenant had left his defensive bivouac on the Kall trail. This information, the colonel felt, changed the situation enough to warrant letting Company C, 1340th, and the two Company A, 20th, platoons continue to the bridge before the Germans

moved there in force. He could send Company B, 1340th, to Vossenack. Colonel Setliffe continued with the column and Colonel Daley returned to the 1340th command post at Richelskaul. Captain Lind, receiving his third change of orders, headed once again for the Kall bridge.

When Colonel Daley reached Richelskaul, he found Company B, 1340th, ready to move and awaiting orders. He told the company to proceed to Vossenack and then, after the situation there was cleared up, to go to the bridge to assist Company C.

Learning then that the two companies of the 146th Engineers were moving into an assembly area about 700 yards west of Germeter, Colonel Daley gave orders there to the battalion's advance party to have the battalion move to the edge of the Germeter woods with the prospect of commitment in Vossenack. He and the 146th commander, Lt. Col. Carl J. Isley, then headed for Vossenack to reconnoiter the situation.

With the 146th Engineers thus preparing for commitment in Vossenack, Colonel Daley radioed Company B, 1340th, to bypass the town and move directly to the Kall valley to assist Company C, 1340th, at the bridge. This order completed commitment of all the 1171st engineers, for the 146th had only two companies and Company A, 1340th, was engaged in road repair and in occupying captured pillboxes in the 110th Infantry sector to the south. This company was not considered for commitment in the 112th Infantry sector at this time because the extent of the German operation was not known. The enemy might also be threatening on the 110th Infantry front.

Colonel Daley and Colonel Isley arrived in Vossenack to reconnoiter shortly after 1300. Daley was wounded slightly in the leg by shell fragments—not seriously enough to require evacuation. The two engineer commanders made contact at the infantry battalion CP with Captain Pruden, fully in command of the remnants of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, since Colonel Hatzfeld's evacuation. Pruden said he had to have relief within thirty minutes; he could not be responsible for holding the hastily contrived line any longer than thirty minutes with his demoralized force, now reduced to about forty men plus the tank support. Enemy infantry were in full contact. When Colonel Isley said it would take at least one and a half hours to get his men forward, Captain Pruden asked him to hurry, saying he would hang on as best he could.<sup>18</sup>

After Colonel Daley and Colonel Isley had gone into Vossenack, General Davis came upon Company A, 146th Engineers, moving into its assembly area where it had been directed by Colonel Isley to await further orders. With the company was Maj. Willard B. Baker, 146th S-3, who said General Davis told him: "Go in. Drive the enemy out of the town. Move. Get going."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Story of engineer commitment is from the following: Combat Interv 75 with Daley, Pruden, Isley, Capt Thomas F. Creegan and 1st Lt Lumir T. Makousky, 1340th Engrs, and 1st Lt Clarence White, 20th Engrs; Lt Col Truman H. Setliffe, Rpt of Opns of CO, 1340th Engrs (hereafter cited as Setliffe Rpt); Sonnefield Rpt; Statement, Maj John G. Auld, Ex Off, 1340th Engrs, to Hist Off (hereafter cited as Auld Statement); Maj Robert L. Argus, S-3, 1171st Engr (C) Gp, notes on operations of 6 Nov 44 (hereafter cited as Argus Notes); Ltr, Col Daley to Hist Div.

<sup>19</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Baker.

Many of the men were still wearing their hip boots from road work and the commanders knew nothing of the Vossenack situation. The company commander, Capt. Sam H. Ball, Jr., issued instructions to his platoon leaders as they moved forward. He sent out several men as a point and told his 1st Platoon under 1st Lt. William J. Kehaly to take the right (south) side of Vossenack's main street, his 2d Platoon under 1st Lt. Kenneth J. Shively to take the left (north), and his 3d Platoon under 1st Lt. William A. Anderson to be in support. Advancing in a column of platoons, one file on either side of the Germeter-Vossenack road, the company entered the western edge of Vossenack and Captain Ball directed the lead platoons to continue to the church and assume defensive positions. He himself reported to the command post of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, with Colonel Daley, Colonel Isley, and Captain Pruden. Because of General Davis' orders and the lack of preliminaries, troops were getting into town in less than the infantry captain's requested half-hour.

As the 1st and 2d Platoons passed the infantry CP, they began to receive harassing rifle fire from the eastern end of Vossenack. Pvt. Doyle W. McDaniel climbed atop a shed roof on the north side of the street in an effort to locate this fire; he jumped down again and landed almost on top of a German, whom he shot. When his platoon reached the crossroads at the church, McDaniel climbed another building in another attempt to spot the enemy riflemen, only to be seen first himself and killed.

The 1st Platoon on the right (south), using "run and duck" tactics which involved advancing in short rushes singly

or in pairs, reached the crossroads and captured the church, taking eight or ten German prisoners at the cost of approximately five engineers wounded. Other men of the platoon took a building on the right of the church. By nightfall the company had established itself completely in everything west of the church. It held the church as well, one house beside it on the south, and three houses on the west side of the street leading from the church toward the Kall gorge.<sup>20</sup>

Company C, 146th Engineers, followed Company A into Vossenack just before dusk. Capt. Vincent L. Wall, the company commander, was directed to take over defense of the north side of the main street, leaving Company A free to defend the south side. Captain Wall and the battalion S-3, Major Baker, went forward to reconnoiter after darkness had already come. As they attempted to go around the eastern side of the church, a German threw a hand grenade at them, wounding Captain Wall. Both officers pretended to be dead until a German rose up, evidently to determine the effect of the grenade, and in so doing silhouetted himself. Rising quickly to one knee, Captain Wall shot the German with his carbine, and the two officers ran back around the corner of the church.

Because of his wounds, Wall turned his company over to 1st Lt. Richard R. Schindler, who then established the Company C platoons in the buildings on the north side of the street—in the order 1st, 2d, 3d—from east to west. All pla-

<sup>20</sup> One of the German prisoners captured in Vossenack said his company commander had tried desperately to determine the identity of these new-type American troops who wore this new-type equipment—the hip boots.

toons of Company A then shifted to the south side of the street.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile about thirty-five men of Company B, 20th Engineers, who had withdrawn that morning from Vossenack upon Captain Lutz's order, had been assembled near Germeter and were ordered by General Davis to assist the Vossenack defense. Tying in with the defense of the 146th Engineers, they went into position south of Vossenack and west of the crossroads where a wooded draw pointed finger-like toward the town from the south.

After the arrival of Company A, 146th Engineers, in Vossenack, Colonel Daley had continued back toward Germeter, met General Davis, and explained the disposition of his command. When General Davis objected to the decision to send the two companies of the 1340th Engineers to the bridge area before reinforcing Vossenack, Colonel Daley radioed the 1340th column to turn back. But, he discovered, Company C, 1340th, had already reached the bridge. He then ordered Colonel Setliffe, the battalion commander, to leave whatever force he felt was necessary to hold the bridge and return the remainder of the two companies to Vossenack. Setliffe decided that all of Company C was necessary to hold the bridge.

Colonel Daley next telephoned General Cota and reported the situation. General Cota directed the 1171st commander to take command of all troops in Vossenack and to assume responsibility for defense of the town. Since the 1340th Engineers seemed to have control

of the bridge area and the 146th seemed adequate for the defense of Vossenack, Colonel Daley set up two command groups, one under Colonel Isley controlling all troops in Vossenack and one under Colonel Setliffe controlling all in the bridge and Kall trail area.<sup>22</sup>

The 1340th column had moved out about noon for the Kall valley. The two platoons of Company A, 20th Engineers, dropped off at their former defensive bivouac at the entrance of the main supply route into the gorge. Company B, 1340th, had started out somewhat later than Company C, and reached only the Company A, 20th, positions when Colonel Daley's radio message instructed it to go back to Vossenack. While the men of the company dug in near Company A, 20th, their commanders went to Vossenack and talked with Colonel Isley, who now was in over-all command of troops in the town. Even though the positions now being occupied by Company B, 1340th, were not very satisfactory, it was decided that the men should remain in them rather than find new ones in the dark. Next day offered the possibility of improvement.

In the meantime Company C, 1340th, with approximately ninety-two men and five officers, had reached the Kall bridge without fighting and was in a defensive position by about 1830. The 3d Platoon under 2d Lt. Jack H. Baughn and one squad of the 1st Platoon crossed the bridge and dug in east of the river; the 2d Platoon on the west bank dug in near the bridge and the Kall trail, facing gen-

<sup>21</sup> Story of 146th Engrs is from the following: Combat Interv 75 with Isley, Baker, and Ball; Capt Ball, Rpt of Action of Co A, 146th Engrs, in Vossenack (hereafter cited as Ball Rpt), Combat Interv File 75.

<sup>22</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Lutz, Isley, Daley; Sonnefield Statement; Setliffe Rpt; Col Isley, Notes on Opns of the 146th Engrs in recapture and defense of Vossenack (hereafter cited as Isley Notes); Ltr, Col Daley to Hist Div.

erally northeast in a platoon perimeter defense. The remaining two squads of the 1st Platoon dug in south of the 2d but still north of the bridge, facing generally south and southwest. The company had six machine guns, nine bazookas, and its usual complement of M-1 rifles.

Thus, despite initial confusion and contradictory orders, the engineers had by nightfall established themselves in defense as riflemen. In Vossenack were Companies A and C, 146th Engineers. Remnants of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry—some forty men—provided local security for what became a combined infantry-engineer command post. A few stragglers in Germeter were organized into a platoon and moved up after dark.<sup>23</sup> At the Kall bridge was Company C, 1340th Engineers. At the entrance of the Kall trail into the woods southeast of Vossenack two platoons of Company A, 20th, and all of Company B, 1340th, were deployed. Farther west and south of Vossenack along the woods line approximately two platoons of Company B, 20th, were in position.

Still beyond the river and tied in with Company C, 112th Infantry, was one platoon of Company C, 20th Engineers, as well as the company's headquarters group. One squad of this company still guarded a rear explosive dump near Germeter, one platoon was on mine-clearing duty with the 109th Infantry, and two squads had been decimated the preceding night by German infiltration in the Kall gorge. One platoon of Company B, 20th, had also been lost in the Kall action. Company B, 146th, was on detached service with the 102d Cav-

alry Group, and Company A, 1340th, was still working with the 110th Infantry, although its company commander had been warned during the afternoon that his company might be pulled out at any moment to join the other engineers in the Kall gorge or at Vossenack.<sup>24</sup>

### *The Command Level*

Throughout the morning of 6 November 28th Division headquarters seemed to be aware of the withdrawal of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, from Vossenack but failed to appreciate the withdrawal as the rout it actually was. Orders were given early that armored units be utilized fully to stabilize the situation. At 1130 General Cota instructed General Davis to secure both the Kall trail and Vossenack and to use the engineers, if necessary, as riflemen. General Davis had been on the scene all morning, at least since about 0830, and acted either before receiving these orders or immediately thereafter.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the entire Schmidt operation, V Corps had kept in close contact with division headquarters, often by telephone conversations between the V Corps commander and General Cota. In the light of what division recorded in its journals, however, little accurate information was available to pass on to corps. The division's G-3 Periodic Reports, from which much of the corps estimate of the situation could be expected to be gleaned, seemed designed to soften the effect of the various reverses.

<sup>24</sup> Combat Interv 75 with White, Daley, Bane, Makousky, Doherty, Isley, Creegan, S Sgt Benjamin A. P. Cipra, Jr., Co C, 1340th Engrs; Sonnefield Statement.

<sup>25</sup> 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 6 Nov 44; Combat Interv 76 with Cole.

<sup>23</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Pruden, Nesbitt.

On 6 November, for example, when telling of the rout of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, the G-3 Periodic Report stated: "2d Battalion received very heavy and concentrated artillery fire, withdrew to reorganize and then regained their original position." Actually the 2d Battalion had been routed, recovered none of the ground it had lost, and had been destroyed as a fighting unit.<sup>26</sup>

*The Night in Vossenack: Armor*

Armored elements in Vossenack after dark consisted of a composite platoon of six tanks under Lieutenant Quarrie, Company C, 707th Tank Battalion; Lieutenant Novak's immobilized tank; and a platoon of tank destroyers under Lieutenant Davis, Company B, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion. At approximately 2000 General Davis and Captain Granger, Company B, 707th, checked the positions of Lieutenant Quarrie's platoon. Sometime during the night Sgt. John B. Cook, Company B, 707th, went into Vossenack and drove out a tank that had been damaged that afternoon by artillery fire and temporarily abandoned by his unit.

Lieutenant Quarrie asked Colonel Isley, now in command in Vossenack, for either infantry or engineers to outpost his tanks, and a lieutenant and ten to twelve men from Company B, 20th Engineers, were designated for the job. They dug in underneath each tank, and the engineer lieutenant entered Lieutenant Quarrie's tank. About 0300 it received a mortar or artillery hit on the turret, another tank was hit on the engine compartment, and the engineer guards

left. The engineer lieutenant left Quarrie's tank, ostensibly to make an inspection of his men, but did not return.

Quarrie was called to the infantry-engineer CP about 0500 to give recommendations on employing his tanks the next morning to help retake the eastern end of town. He told the planners that his platoon was to be relieved at daylight by a platoon of Company B, 707th. Because of exposure to enemy fire from the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge, he advised against using tanks on the north.

The 2d Platoon, Company B, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, reinforced by one destroyer from the 3d, had waited through the afternoon at the entrance to the Kall valley for word that the supply route was reopened. At dusk the platoon withdrew to Germeter to refuel and await further instructions. Lieutenant Davis' 1st Platoon remained all night in Vossenack.<sup>27</sup>

*The Night in Vossenack: Engineers*

When General Davis visited his infantry-engineer CP in Vossenack at 2100, Colonel Isley explained to him the disposition of his troops. General Davis reminded the engineer commander that his mission in Vossenack was to defend the supply route running through the town and that he couldn't defend a supply route by sitting on it. Indicating generally on a map with a sweeping motion of his finger the ground just southeast of the eastern edge of the town, the general ordered Isley to put a company "out here." Captain Pruden pointed out that this was the area where his in-

<sup>26</sup> 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 2-9 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Periodic Rpt, 6 Nov 44.

<sup>27</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Davis-Murphy-Gardner, Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook, Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan, Fuller; Combat Interv 75 with Isley.

fantry had found the positions so exposed that they proved untenable. The general said the engineers could choose their own exact locations but they had to put someone in the vicinity he had indicated.

To carry out these instructions, Colonel Isley ordered Company C, 146th Engineers, to take over the defense of both sides of the Vossenack street. Then Company A, 146th, guided by two infantry sergeants who had been in the forward eastern position, was to move to the area indicated. In compliance, Lieutenant Schindler, Company C commander since Captain Wall had been wounded, sent his 3d Platoon to take over the eastern-most defenses of Company A.

Before Company A moved out on its new mission, Lt. Col. James F. White, executive officer of the engineer group, arrived at the infantry-engineer CP and gave instructions for the next day. At daylight the 146th was to clear the eastern end of Vossenack and then defend the northern flank of the town. Company B, 1340th, the remaining elements of Company A, 20th, and the two platoons of Company B, 20th, were to move up after the town was cleared and defend the south flank, and tanks were to be placed at the eastern nose of the town.

Despite this announcement of plans for the next day, Colonel Isley felt that General Davis' instructions to occupy the exposed nose of the ridge still had to be executed. Thus, Company A and its two infantry guides moved out about 2315.<sup>28</sup> In a tightly closed single-file column because of the darkness, the Com-

pany A engineers moved to the south of Vossenack for about 400 yards to avoid the light from burning buildings near the church, and then turned east. The company had passed Vossenack's second main north-south street when Captain Ball, the company commander, discovered that the infantry guides did not know where their former positions were. They were lost. The company halted as Lieutenant Kehaly, the 1st Platoon leader, and one of the guides moved ahead in an effort to find the positions. They returned in about fifteen minutes without having succeeded. Thinking they had gone too far to the east, Captain Ball pulled the company back to within about twenty yards of a promontory of houses alongside the second main north-south street and again sent Lieutenant Kehaly and the guide to search for the positions.

The lieutenant and the guide had gone no more than forty feet when Captain Ball at the head of the waiting column caught sight of a man squatting in a field not far away. As the man stood up and fastened his trousers, Captain Ball told the soldier beside him to call out to him. The man said something in reply—Captain Ball thought it was in German—turned, and ran. When Captain Ball fired, the man fell and lay moaning. Ball noticed another man moving alongside a hedge near the first houses; a shot from another American rifle rang out, and there was no further sound from the hedge.

Seeking to avoid what must be enemy positions in the houses, the captain passed word down his line of men to withdraw about 200 yards down the slope to the southeast. As they did so, about four burp guns opened fire, but the shooting was high and the convex contour of the

<sup>28</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Isley, White, Baker-Ball, and 1st Lt Bernard E. Meier, Co C, 146th Engrs; Lt Meier, chronological acct of events in Vossenack (hereafter cited as Meier Acct), Combat Interv File 75.

slope provided protection. Then the Germans fired flares, the first coming from the promontory of buildings near which the Americans had seen the two Germans. Other flares, accompanied by sporadic machine gun fire, rose from the Kall woods to the south. Still others shot up from the west near the church, giving the impression that the Company A engineers were surrounded.

Lieutenant Kehaly and the infantry guide had rejoined the company. Calling a conference of his platoon leaders, Captain Ball concluded that, without being able to find the old infantry positions, his troops could not accomplish their mission and should return to the western end of town. The Germans obviously knew they were on the ridge now and would be alert for any new move.

With Lieutenant Kehaly and Captain Ball leading, the men moved farther toward the draw to the south in order to avoid detection from Vossenack. They reached a point a few yards south of a road fork which formed the supply trail and spotted two Germans who appeared to be laying mines. The Americans yelled at them, just to make sure they were Germans, and then fired. The Germans took flight and disappeared into a slight dip in the trail. Tossing a grenade toward the dip, and then another, Lieutenant Kehaly and Captain Ball rolled over to where they could see into the depression. They saw only one German walking unconcernedly up the trail toward Vossenack. Captain Ball fired at him and the German fell.

As sleet and rain began to make the cold night even more uncomfortable, the column started forward again. When Captain Ball passed the fallen German, he glanced back just in time to see that

the German was not dead and seemed to be preparing to shoot. Both Captain Ball and his runner fired again. This time the German lay still.

Returning with his company to the western end of Vossenack, Captain Ball reported to Colonel Isley and was told that new plans were being readied for an attack in early morning. It was then about 0300, and the engineer company took cover in the battered houses west of the command post.<sup>29</sup>

When Company C, 146th Engineers, had relieved Company A in its defense of Vossenack to allow the flanking movement, the 3d Platoon under 1st Lt. Charles F. Rollins, Jr., had taken over the defense of the church and the Company A positions. About 0200 a machine gun position of this platoon slightly southwest of the church was hit by a German hand grenade, and the machine gunners withdrew to a near-by alternate position from which they still could cover their assigned target area. Taking advantage of the darkness, the Germans about the same time infiltrated into the east portion of the church and opened fire with burp guns on the 3d Platoon men in the other side of the church. One engineer was killed, the others withdrew, and the much-disputed church once again changed hands.<sup>30</sup>

Southeast of Vossenack at the entrance of the Kall trail into the woods, Company B, 1340th Engineers, and Company A, 20th Engineers (now reduced to about thirty officers and men), were harassed throughout the night by enemy artillery fire pounding on the ridge behind them. Because the shelling centered approximately a hundred yards away, the

<sup>29</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Isley, Baker-Ball.

<sup>30</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Meier; Meier Acct.

engineers had few casualties. Two machine gun outposts were established along the Kall trail between the woods and Vossenack.

Back in Vossenack Colonel Isley planned a meeting for 0530 to co-ordinate for an early morning attack (0730) designed to retake the eastern half of the town. The tank officer who was to relieve Lieutenant Quarrie did not arrive at the command post until 0645, and the original attack hour was therefore delayed until 0800.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Medics and Engineers Along the Kall*

Because the Kall River supply route remained mined and insecure during the daylight hours of 6 November, the combined 1st-3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, aid station in the log dugout beside the trail made no use of vehicles for evacuation. Several groups of walking wounded did make their way along a wooded cross-country route that led around the south of Vossenack ridge up the draw to Richelskaul.<sup>32</sup>

T/4 Krieder, the engineer in charge of the security guard at the Kall bridge, had no further contact with American troops after the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry (infantry element of Task Force R), crossed the bridge about 0815. Moving back up the hill to report to their company commander, Krieder and his men came across five men from the 707th Tank Battalion who had remained with their disabled tanks through the enemy patrol action the night before. One tanker, Sergeant Markey, whose immo-

bilized tank had necessitated use of the complicated switchback west of the Kall, said he had remained inside his tank and could hear the Germans knocking on the tank and talking. They had made no effort to look inside.

When Krieder's group reached the exit of the main supply route from the woods, it found no trace of its company (Company A, 20th Engineers), which had by this time obeyed Colonel Sonnefield's orders to withdraw. Since heavy shell-fire was falling over the route they would have to follow to get back to Germeter, the men took cover in abandoned fox-holes along the woods line. They made contact with their company in the afternoon when it returned to its positions. Despite a general belief that the Kall trail was in German hands through the day of 6 November, T/4 Krieder made no mention of having seen any Germans after daylight.<sup>33</sup>

That afternoon when the men of Captain Lind's Company C, 1340th Engineers, moved toward the Kall bridge, they made no enemy contact. By 1830 they had established their defense near the bridge: the 3d Platoon and one squad of the 1st across the bridge on the river's east bank; the 2d Platoon on the west bank along the Kall trail; the remaining two squads of the 1st Platoon on the west bank facing south and southwest. (*Map 28*) Five men reconnoitered the Mestrenger Muehle east of the river and found it unoccupied.

At dusk the company commander, Captain Lind, sent two mine detector crews with several men as security to sweep the trail leading from the bridge

<sup>31</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Creegan, Doherty, Isley; Ltr, Col Daley to Hist Div.

<sup>32</sup> Muglia Rpt; Morrison Rpt; Ltr, Maj Berndt to Hist Div.

<sup>33</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Krieder; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne.

back toward Vossenack. About 200 yards above the bridge, between the bridge and the infantry aid station, the men spotted four to six Teller mines which had evidently been laid hastily in the mud of the trail. Before they could remove the mines, a burp gun from the right flank opened fire. Although it was fast growing dark and the men

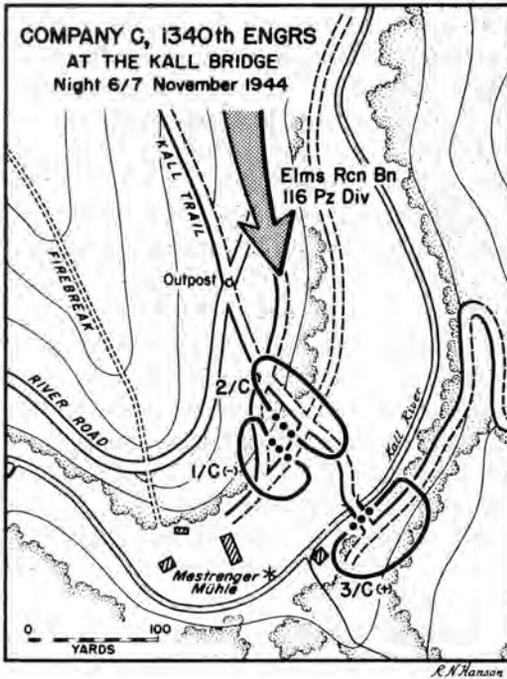
It was well after dark before any enemy artillery fire hit the engineers' bridge positions. Later, about 2330, a particularly heavy concentration showered the area. Close on its heels came a group of about twenty-five Germans, following the artillery so closely that they were almost atop the 2d Platoon position on the west bank when the shelling lifted. They opened fire with burp guns, machine guns, and grenades, killing the squad leader of the 1st Squad and wounding the 1st Platoon leader and Corporal Hamlett.

The engineers' return fire seemed to disrupt the patrol's attack, although individual Germans continued down the river road toward the southwest. The intense preliminary shelling had caused the heaviest American casualties. Some of the engineers left their foxholes during the fire fight and retreated up the hill toward the positions of Company A, 20th Engineers. Nevertheless, the enemy attack was stopped, and next morning the remaining engineers counted nine dead Germans.

The enemy continued to harass the Company C, 1340th, engineers at the bridge the rest of the night with artillery and mortar fire. Counting its heavy casualties of the night and the number who had retreated during and after the patrol action, the company found itself reduced to about half its original strength the next morning.<sup>34</sup>

While the engineers suffered no more direct attacks during the night, other Germans were in the area. An enemy squad stopped at the log aid station, inquired about the type of installation, and then offered rations or any supplies that

<sup>34</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Makousky, Cipra; Setliffe Rpt.



MAP 28

could not spot the enemy gunner, Cpl. Thomas W. Hamlett, in charge of the detector crews, shot a full clip from his rifle into the undergrowth, and the German did not fire again. The company executive officer, 1st Lt. Lumir T. Makousky, directed the detector crews to move back to their platoons and told Corporal Hamlett to establish an outpost at the intersection of the Kall trail and the north-south river road.

might be needed. As long as there were no firearms around, the Germans said, they would not fire upon the aid station.<sup>35</sup>

### *Supplies Cross the Kall*

In the rear the assistant S-3 of the 110th Infantry, Capt. George H. Rumbaugh, was called into his regiment's operations room about 1930. Word had been received there that both Colonel Tait, commander of the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry, which had become a part of Task Force R, and Maj. Robert C. Reynolds, executive officer, had been wounded. Since the extent of their injuries was not known, Captain Rumbaugh was to go to the 3d Battalion near Kommerscheidt, taking with him two weasels loaded with water, food, and medical supplies. If he found both officers seriously wounded, he was to assume command of the 3d Battalion.

As Captain Rumbaugh readied his jeep and two weasels for the trip, he learned that five weasels and one jeep from the 112th Infantry were going forward under the command of 1st Lt. Robert W. Pratt. The two groups consolidated and moved out about 2300. In Vossenack and on the open ridge southeast of the town, the supply column received some harassing small arms fire but continued, although two of the weasels overturned in a sharp gully on the dark ridge and a third threw a track. The remainder of the column (two jeeps and four weasels) entered the valley portion of the trail, only to be delayed after entering the woods by felled trees of varying sizes, all of which had to be

pushed or pulled out of the way before the column could proceed.

As the column paused in the vicinity of the aid station, Captain Rumbaugh thought he heard guttural voices farther down in the draw. Flattening themselves under their vehicles, the men could see two figures silhouetted against the abrupt drop to the left. When Captain Rumbaugh challenged, one of the figures tossed a hand grenade up the slope. The convoy personnel answered with fire from their individual weapons, and Captain Rumbaugh tossed a grenade, ending the trouble. Four dead Germans were later found near the location.

The party lost a jeep and trailer somewhere along the route, but finally crossed the river about 0200. Beyond the Kall the column was delayed about an hour by a large fallen tree which had to be removed with hand power, ropes, and axes. Still later, another weasel threw a track attempting to bypass three tanks of Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, which had withdrawn to the woods after their turrets had been damaged during the day by enemy artillery fire in Kommerscheidt.

Captain Rumbaugh eventually reached the 112th Infantry forward command post, which had moved into the northern edge of Kommerscheidt, with just three weasels and his own jeep—all that remained out of the original nine-vehicle convoy. The time was about 0300 (7 November). In Kommerscheidt Rumbaugh found that Colonel Tait had already been evacuated to the combined aid station in the Kall gorge and that Major Reynolds had wounds in his right hand and chest and was in no condition to continue his duties. Major Reynolds was placed in one of the weasels to be

<sup>35</sup> Morrison Rpt.

returned to the rear, and Rumbaugh assumed command of the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry.

Lieutenant George, motor officer of the 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, who had led a supply convoy to Kommerscheidt the night before and had not yet left the town, took command of Lieutenant Pratt's three empty weasels, adding them to his two two-and-one-half-ton trucks, jeep, and two weasels. The column moved out about 0400 (7 November), carrying as many wounded as possible on what was to be Kommerscheidt's last casualty evacuation by vehicle.<sup>36</sup>

The jeep driver was killed by artillery fire soon after leaving Kommerscheidt, but the remainder of the column continued. Despite darkness, intermittent shelling, and a driving rain, the convoy snaked its way past the east bank switchbacks, across the bridge, and up the precipitous west bank trail. Approximately a hundred yards from the western edge of the Kall woods, the big trucks had to be abandoned because a heavy tree blocked the road. The wounded were transferred from the trucks to the weasels. On reaching the edge of the woods, the column discovered that a group of Germans had dug in on the open ridge to the right (slightly south of east from Vossenack). Lieutenant George saw only one way out. With the wounded instructed to "fire like hell" in the direction of the Germans, the vehicles gunned their motors and raced across the slippery open ridge, avoiding Vossenack itself by following the ridge south of the town all the way to Richelskaul.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Combat Interv 77 with Rumbaugh-Joyce; Combat Interv 76 with Hostrup-Fleig-Payne, Ripple; Combat Interv 75 with George; Setliffe Rpt.

<sup>37</sup> Combat Interv 75 with George; Berndt Rpt.

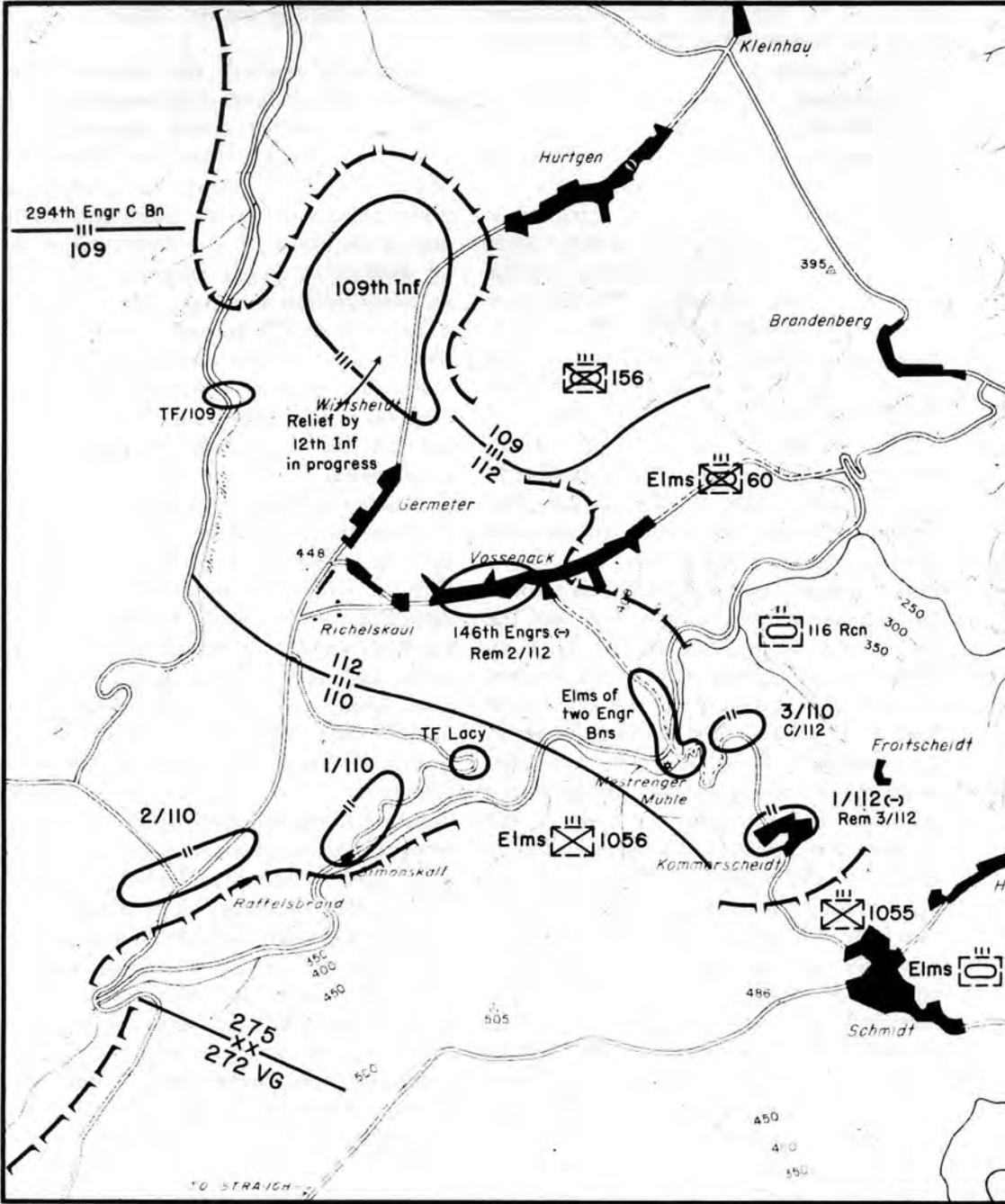
### *Artillery and Air Support*

American artillery fire during 6 November was credited with breaking up at least one German attack against Kommerscheidt and assisting the Vossenack defense by firing numerous concentrations in the woods to the north and northeast of the town after withdrawal of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry. Despite an ammunition shortage, the 229th fired a total of 3,949 rounds, but counter-battery fire was reduced critically.<sup>38</sup>

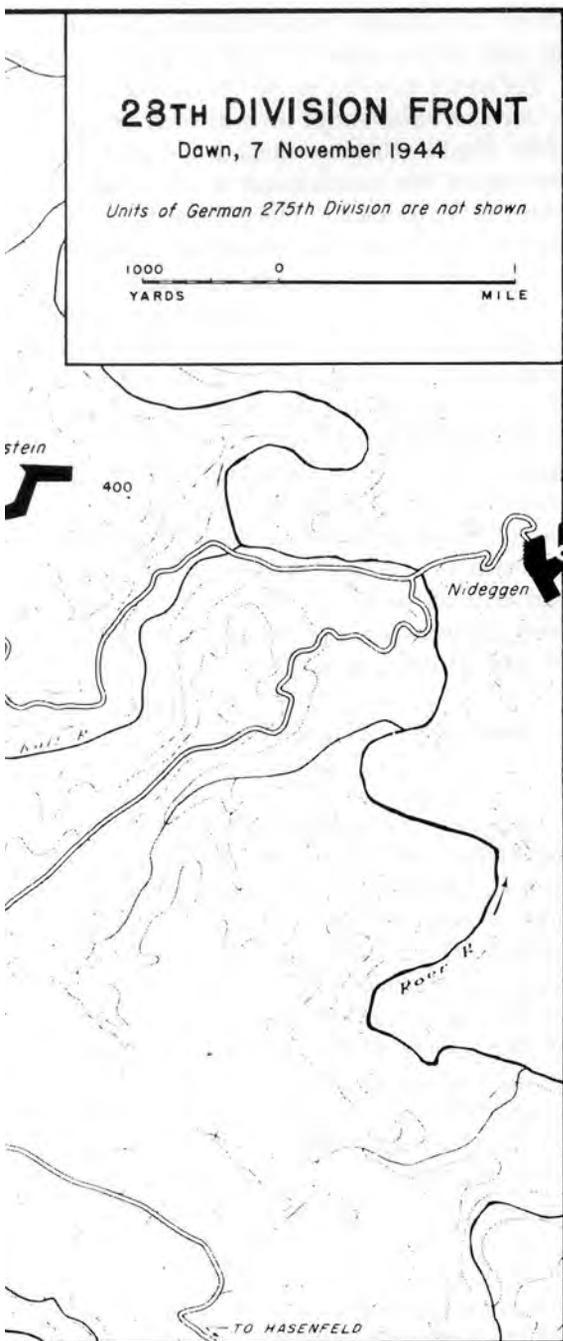
Adverse weather again hampered aircraft on 6 November, and the day's first mission did not reach the target area until noon. Twelve P-47's of the 365th Group bombed reported armored vehicles just northwest of Harscheidt as marked by red smoke from American artillery. Results were not observed. Another squadron of the 365th bombed smoke-marked tanks in Schmidt from 1310 to 1430, and still another squadron of the same group took up the Schmidt attack at 1425 and continued until 1520. No results of either mission were observed. Thirty-six P-38's of the 474th Group bombed smoke-marked troop concentrations in the northwestern edge of Bergstein and in the Brandenberger Wald, north of Brandenburg. The last recorded mission of the day, completed at 1627 and also with no results observed, was by twelve P-47's of the 365th Group which bombed camouflaged tanks in the edge of the woods northeast of Schmidt and southeast of Kommerscheidt. One other mission, reported by tankers and infantrymen against the eastern end of Vossenack, was not recorded.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> 28th Div Arty Jnl, 6 Nov 44; V Corps Study, Arty Sec; 229th FA Bn AAR, Nov 44.

<sup>39</sup> FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 6 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 Air Sec; Combat Interv 74 with Howison.



MAP 29

*109th and 110th Infantry Summaries*

R. Johnstone

Although the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry, beat off what seems to have been an enemy patrol action at dawn on 6 November, enemy infiltration in rear of the forward companies continued. Early in the morning three 109th companies attacked generally northwest in an attempt to clear the wooded road network in that direction for the establishment of road blocks. None of the units made appreciable gains, and they all withdrew to their starting positions. The 109th Infantry received a message from division at 1500 that it would be relieved during the night by the 12th Infantry of the 4th Infantry Division.<sup>40</sup> (*Map 29*)

The 110th Infantry's 3d Battalion was committed during the day as a part of Task Force R, and no other change took place in 110th dispositions except renewal of the attack by two companies to close the gap between the 1st and 2d Battalions. Control in the dense forest was so difficult that by nightfall these companies had not accomplished their mission.<sup>41</sup>

*The Enemy Situation*

German records and 28th Division G-2 sources indicate that an attack by the *156th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* and elements (the *1st Battalion* and probably the *2d*) of the *60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* was scheduled for 0400, 6 November, from the woods north and northeast of Vossenack. The Americans withdrew in the early morning, but enemy troops, so

<sup>40</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 109th personnel; 109th Inf S-3 Jnl, 6 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 6 Nov 44.

<sup>41</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 110th personnel; 110th Inf S-3 Jnl, 6 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 6 Nov 44.

far as records can definitely establish the fact, did not enter Vossenack until sometime between midmorning and noon. Even then the Germans held only the eastern half of the town as far as the church.

The Germans reported a temporary reverse in the Kall gorge. The *Reconnaissance Battalion* of the *116th Panzer Division* had been pushed back by Task Force R when Colonel Ripple's group had fought to cross the Kall River in order to carry out plans to recapture Schmidt. The Germans claimed this American "attack" had "tank support," probably referring to the incident before dawn on the open ridge southeast of Vossenack when Captain Pugh and Lieutenant Fuller, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, had dealt with a German ambush by using a platoon of tank destroyers. The Germans issued orders in the afternoon to counteract this Kall gorge reverse, but unrestricted movement of the 1340th Engineers to the bridge area in late afternoon indicates that enemy units did not actually move back into the area until well after dark.

Troops of the *275th Division* and the *1056th Regiment* maintained their Raffelsbrand-Simonskall defense throughout the day against the 110th Infantry, while elements of the *60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* or of several fortress and engineer battalions<sup>42</sup> that had been moved into the area kept up heavy pressure north of Germeter against the 109th Infantry. At Kommerscheidt the *1055th Regiment* and the *16th Panzer Regiment* continued their

efforts to dislodge the remnants of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th Infantry.

Either on this day or on the day before, a German officer and several men of the *116th Panzer Division* carried a radio to the edge of the woods south of the western edge of Vossenack. Here they had an unrestricted view for directing artillery fire against Vossenack and Germeter.

In the evening of 6 November the commanding general of the *89th Division* convened his commanders and ordered that the Americans at Kommerscheidt *must* be annihilated. The *1055th Regiment* and the *16th Panzer Regiment* were to renew their efforts there at dawn the next day (7 November), while the *1056th Regiment* was to continue its efforts to maintain contact with the *116th Panzer Division's Reconnaissance Battalion* near Messtrenger Muehle in the Kall gorge.<sup>43</sup>

*Summary for 6 November and Night of  
6-7 November*

Lack of success in the 109th and 110th Infantry sectors added to the 112th Infantry's difficult situation to make 6 November and the night of 6-7 November another dismal period in the 28th Division's battle for Schmidt. In Kommerscheidt the remaining men of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th Infantry, although having withstood several minor German attacks during the day, together could hardly have mustered two full-strength rifle companies. In their rear at the northern woods line were the remnants of Company C, 112th Infantry (less one platoon, which was in Kommerscheidt),

<sup>42</sup> The 109th Inf made prisoner identifications in this area of the following units: *18th* and *20th Luftwaffe Fortress Battalions*, *600th Army Engineer Battalion*, and *253d Engineer Battalion*, plus elements of the *275th Division*. 28th Div G-2 Jnl, 6 Nov 44.

<sup>43</sup> MS # A-905 (Waldenburg); ETHINT 56 (Gersdorff and Waldenburg); Sit Rpts, 5 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44.*; 28th Div G-2 Jnl and File, 6 Nov 44; *89th Division Order of the Day*.

and the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry (now numbering less than 300 effectives), one platoon of engineers (Company C, 20th), and two 57-mm. antitank guns with crews. The supporting armor for this Kammerscheidt defense now consisted of only three fully operational tank destroyers (one had been completely knocked out, five partially damaged) and four tanks (three had pulled back to Company C, 112th Infantry, as rear guard after receiving damaged turrets). Only one supply convoy (three weasels and a jeep under Captain Rumbaugh) had gotten forward during the period. The problem at hand was no longer to recapture Schmidt but to hold in Kammerscheidt against the enemy's continuing attacks, which might well be expected to begin again at dawn, 7 November.

In the Kall gorge only a few men and officers of Company C, 1340th Engineers, remained in defense near the river bridge. Although the combined 1st-3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, aid station still operated there, it was without any adequate evacuation system. Only walking wounded had gotten out during the period. Enemy patrols still moved almost at will across the wooded portion of the vital main supply route. At the head of the wooded portion of the trail, Company B, 1340th Engineers, and elements of Company A, 20th Engineers, held defensive positions which did little to defend the trail after it entered the gorge.

In Vossenack the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, had been driven out of the eastern end of the town, whether by actual German attack or by artillery fire alone no one seemed able to ascertain. What was definite was that this battalion, reduced to something like forty to fifty effectives, could now be considered out

of the action. Thrown into the Vossenack battle in almost cavalry-like tradition had been Companies A and C, 146th Engineers, who had established a defensive line along the crossroads at the church in the center of town. Supported by the tanks of one platoon and the tank destroyers of another, these engineers were to attempt at daylight to retake the eastern end of Vossenack.

South of Vossenack and contributing little to any part of the action were about thirty men of Company B, 20th Engineers. Available in Germeter in ready positions to move to Vossenack on call were two tank destroyer platoons of Company B, 893d; an almost full-strength tank company, Company B, 707th; and less than a platoon of tanks of Company C, 707th.

During the afternoon the 28th Division had received from V Corps a letter of instructions providing for the relief of the 109th Infantry by the 12th Infantry of the 4th Division during the night of 6-7 November and the attachment of this regimental combat team to the 28th Division. The 12th Infantry was to take over the mission of the 109th, that of protecting the north flank, and was not to be used for any other mission. Upon relief the 109th Infantry was to be employed as directed by corps. But by daylight of 7 November relief of the 109th Infantry had not been completed.<sup>44</sup>

For the moment in the 112th Infantry sector there were two immediate tasks at hand. While the 146th Engineers were to attack to retake the eastern half of Vossenack, the defenders of Kammerscheidt must brace in expectation of another strong German attack at dawn.

<sup>44</sup> V Corps Ltr of Instns, 28th Div G-3 Jnl and File, 6 Nov 44.

## CHAPTER VI

# Action Again at Kommerscheidt (7 November)

As daylight approached on 7 November a cold winter rain added to the miseries of combat, and the Germans began to bombard Kommerscheidt with what the hard-pressed men of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th Infantry, felt was the enemy's heaviest artillery barrage since their arrival in the battered town. Americans estimated that the Germans employed four or five artillery battalions, and one officer checked the rate of fire. In a one-and-one-half-minute period he counted about fifty explosions. The fire lasted approximately thirty minutes.

About eighteen enemy tanks then approached, many of them so close behind their artillery fire that some men were not aware of their presence until they opened fire. Enemy infantry variously estimated at from one to two battalions accompanied them, and other tanks or self-propelled guns supported the assault from advantageous positions at Schmidt.<sup>1</sup>

On the left flank in the Company A positions one enemy tank moved up close, fired straight at the company command post, and put direct fire into the foxholes of both the 1st and 2d Platoons. Among those wounded was the company commander, Capt. Seth R. Frear. On the right (west) flank as a tank moved in close against men of Company B, an

assistant squad leader, Sgt. John Ostrowski, killed three of the accompanying infantry with his M-1 rifle and then hit the tank with a rocket from a bazooka. Black smoke billowed up, and the tank backed away to disappear in the noise and confusion of the battle. The four remaining machine guns and two of the 81-mm. mortars of Company M were knocked out by the enemy tank fire. The tank that fired on the mortars was in turn knocked out by the Company M commander, Captain Hackard, with a bazooka rocket.

Lieutenant Payne, platoon leader in Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, spotted one of the German tanks moving around the right flank of the town. Although shell fragments the previous day had damaged the elevating mechanism of Lieutenant Payne's gun so that he was unable to depress it sufficiently to hit the hull of the enemy tank, his tank was still mobile and scored two hits on the German's turret. Still the enemy tank kept coming. Only when two American tank destroyers came to Lieutenant Payne's aid, each getting two rounds home, was the German tank stopped.

In the center of town Lieutenant Edmund's tank destroyer knocked out a Mark V at a range of only thirty yards, and another unidentified destroyer knocked out three enemy tanks. Crew-

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<sup>1</sup> V Corps Study, G-3 Sec.

men estimated they killed or wounded with their machine guns about forty of the accompanying enemy infantry. But Lieutenant Edmund's tank destroyer and two others were knocked out shortly thereafter by the enemy tanks.

Outside the combined 1st-3d Battalion CP in the dugout in the orchard just north of Kommerscheidt, the 1st Battalion Headquarters Company commander, Capt. Ross Martin, was seriously wounded. As Colonel Peterson and Major Dana, regimental S-3, dragged him into the CP hole, Colonel Ripple, Task Force R commander, called from outside, saying a German tank was approaching the dugout. Leaving a medic with Martin, Peterson, Ripple, and Dana walked back toward the northern woods-line positions, consciously not running because they wanted to avoid starting a general withdrawal. Shortly after they had left, the German tank approached and fired almost point-blank into the CP dugout.

Major Hazlett, the 1st Battalion commander, moved among both the 1st and 3d Battalion positions encouraging the troops to hold. By about 0830, however, German tank and infantry infiltration had so unnerved many of the men that they were leaving their holes to run toward the rear and the situation was fast becoming critical. Back at the woods line to the north, a jeep messenger sent by Colonel Peterson relayed instructions to Captain Rumbaugh, 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry, that he organize his harried battalion and move it forward to assist the Kommerscheidt defense.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This information is from Combat Interv 77 with Rumbaugh-Joyce and Combat Interv 76 with Ripple. According to Colonel Peterson there was no such plan to counterattack. He had planned his defense in depth because he felt all along that his troops

Before the battalion could be assembled, Peterson himself appeared—he had withdrawn from the orchard dugout only a few steps ahead of the approaching German tank. The colonel now changed his orders to Rumbaugh, having decided instead to commit the remainder of Company C, 112th (one platoon was already in Kommerscheidt).

Before Company C could be committed, Colonel Peterson received a written message transcribed by the division radio operator, who had come up the day before with Task Force R, that he was to report immediately to the division command post. He did not question the message for two reasons: (1) feeling that the true situation in Kommerscheidt had been misrepresented to division, he welcomed the opportunity to clear it up; (2) he had heard a rumor that he was to be relieved of his command and that a colonel recently assigned to the division was to replace him. Designating Colonel Ripple to take over the Kommerscheidt defense, Colonel Peterson left with a jeep driver and one other enlisted man for the division CP.<sup>3</sup>

would be pushed out of Kommerscheidt. See Interv with Peterson.

<sup>3</sup> Information on this message is from Combat Interv 77 with Cota and Rumbaugh-Joyce; Combat Interv 76 with Ripple; Intervs with Gen Cota and with Col Peterson. General Cota says definitely that Colonel Peterson was not to be summarily relieved of his command, that is, in the sense that his performance had not been satisfactory. Just who sent the message cannot be determined, but General Cota, although originally doubtful, established to his satisfaction that it was sent. Colonel Peterson, later wounded, did not know there was any doubt about the message until well after the war was over. The message, he says, was left in the pocket of his overcoat, which was taken from him as he was being evacuated. The possibility that it might have been a German ruse, Peterson discounts, although he cannot remember whether the message had been authenticated by its sender.

After the infantry commander's departure, Colonel Ripple ordered Company C, 112th Infantry, to move into Kommerscheidt, but the Company C commander and his men seemed too dazed to be capable of carrying out that order. Ripple himself attempted to lead them forward, but they would not move. He told them to hold where they were.

More and more men in Kommerscheidt were leaving their foxholes and running toward the rear. Some of the retreating men cried out to Lieutenant Payne that German tanks were overrunning the left flank; so Lieutenant Payne's tank and another under Sgt. Andrew J. Lipe moved in that direction. Spotting an enemy tank among the houses in the eastern edge of town, Sergeant Lipe opened fire, hitting the German tank with his first round of armor-piercing ammunition. With enemy fire coming dangerously close to Payne's tank, the lieutenant radioed Sergeant Lipe to withdraw and himself pulled back into the shallow open draw northwest of Kommerscheidt. Apparently Sergeant Lipe did not hear. Another German tank advanced through the center of town, fired, and knocked out both Sergeant Lipe's tank and another under Sgt. Marvin S. Olson. Sergeant Lipe dismounted and took over a tank destroyer whose crew leader had been killed or wounded. He remained with the destroyer until it too was knocked out.

Minus two tanks and three tank destroyers lost in the enemy attack, the remaining American armor began to withdraw toward the northern woods line. In withdrawing two more tanks threw their tracks. One of these was Lieutenant Payne's, which had bellied

on a sharp ridge in the ground. Now there remained only two tank destroyers and one tank.

With the departure of the scant armored support, the infantry situation deteriorated even more. Major Christensen, the 3d Battalion commander, ordered the few remaining men on the right flank to withdraw, and Captain Piercey left with about fifty men. An enemy tank and two machine guns fired at them as they retreated, and at least one of the group was hit by the machine gun fire. A shell from the tank blew another man almost straight up into the air. The open field over which the men withdrew was soft from the rain, and it seemed to the retreating soldiers that it took a lifetime to get across.

On the left flank, about seventy-five men from Company A pulled back, but only about fifteen withdrew safely to the Company C, 112th, positions. Three men, Pfc. Nathaniel M. Quinton, Company A, and Clarence J. Skain and Lewis Gardner, Company B, were pinned down by the enemy fire and could not get out when the others did. Later they turned back several local assaults by enemy infantry before Gardner was killed by a shot from a near-by building. Quinton threw a grenade into the building and silenced the German marksman. He and Skain then made a run for it, crawling toward the woods on the east and eventually making their way back to the northern woods-line positions. They escaped from Kommerscheidt sometime after midday, apparently among the last Americans to leave the town.

Evidently most of the remaining men who had held and had not heard Major Christensen's orders to withdraw either saw or heard of the enemy tank at the

CP dugout in the orchard. There a group of American soldiers stood around the tank with their hands raised in surrender, a white flag clearly visible. This seemed to convince any who still held in the buildings or foxholes that all was lost, and the final withdrawal was on.

As one such group under Captain Walker, Company L, withdrew, a soldier told Captain Walker that "a tall major" wanted to see him. The major proved to be Major Christensen, who told Captain Walker to try to build up another line in the open field north of Kommerscheidt. But the badly shaken men hesitated for only a few minutes before continuing on toward the rear, and any hope for another line in the open field was lost. Captain Walker saw Major Christensen turn and walk slowly back into German-held Kommerscheidt.

Not all the men fell back on the northern woods-line positions. Many retreated into the woods to the west where they either met more German fire or continued across the Kall. Lieutenant Tyo of Company K was with one group of about twenty-one men, nine of whom were wounded. A heavy enemy artillery concentration wounded five more men in Tyo's group as it approached the Kall bridge. Two were so badly hurt that the others were forced to abandon them. Tyo was later told by medics that these men were recovered. The others forded the river. One man went across with half of a foot gone; all that was left to wrap the stump in was a dirty handkerchief. Across the river the wounded were left at the log cabin aid station, and Lieutenant Tyo and the six remaining men dug in with a group from the 20th Engineers.

Frantic reorganization was now taking

place among the infantry positions of the 3d Battalion, 110th, and Company C, 112th, at the woods line north of Kommerscheidt. Between 150 and 200 survivors of the action in the town had reached them and were hastily formed into a provisional company and placed in a hasty defense. One tank, two tank destroyers, and two 57-mm. antitank guns supplied their support. Although there were no illusions about the status of Kommerscheidt (Colonel Ripple had sent division a message at 1125 that the town was considered lost), the woods-line defenders were still reluctant to call down their own artillery on the town. They knew that many of their wounded had been left there and that other Americans had been captured and still might be in Kommerscheidt.

Throughout the morning's fight in Kommerscheidt American artillery support had been on the job and it continued now to fire on approaches to the town and on Schmidt. Its communications appear to have been constant throughout, for response to calls for fire had been prompt and accurate. Nevertheless, the shelling had failed to stop the enemy tanks. With some missions directed in the Vossenack vicinity, the 229th Field Artillery Battalion during the day fired 205 neutralizations, three TOT's, and fifty-two harassing missions.<sup>4</sup>

Although enemy artillery and mortar fire continued through the afternoon, the

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the Kommerscheidt story is from the following: *Combat Interv 75* with Dana, Kelly-Hunter, Tyo, Quinton-Hausman-Lockwood-Kertes-Norton, Littlehales-Skain, Piercey, Kudiak, Walker, Ripperdam, Cipra; *Combat Interv 76* with Ripple, Hostrup-Fleig-Payne, Pugh; *V Corps Study, G-3 and Arty Secs*; *Interv with Col Peterson*; *Combat Interv 77* with Rumbaugh-Joyce; *28th Div Arty Jnl, 7 Nov 44*; *229th FA Bn AAR, 7 Nov 44*.

Germans did not press their advantage on the ground against the woods-line defenders until about 1830 when they fired flares that revealed four or five tanks followed by infantry approaching across the open field from Kommerscheidt. The enemy poured marching fire into the woods-line positions, but the defenders called for supporting artillery, and the lead German tank was knocked out within a hundred yards of the woods line. The other tanks milled about to escape the artillery fire and eventually withdrew. A prisoner captured later said that the assault had been made by a fresh infantry battalion but that the tanks, while maneuvering to escape the American artillery fire, had backed over and killed some of their infantry, disorganizing the attack. The regimental S-3, Major Dana, attributed the failure of the enemy attack to this lack of co-ordination as well as to the fact that through the afternoon supporting artillery and aircraft had pounded a rectangular patch of woods west of Kommerscheidt which the Germans seemed to be using as an assembly area.

As the night wore on the Americans still held, though the German shelling continued and there were more casualties that could not be evacuated because of the situation in the Kall gorge to the rear. Some of the wounded died from lack of medical attention, and many men felt they all would be either killed or captured. Pfc. Joseph R. Perll, Company C, 112th, using a rock, hammered out the "H" which indicated his religion on his identification tags.

Thus, on the night of 7 November the remnants of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th Infantry; the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry; one platoon of Company C,

20th Engineers; and one tank, two tank destroyers, and two 57-mm. antitank guns held the woods line north of Kommerscheidt. During the day they had been driven from their town defenses at a cost of many wounded, captured, and killed, including the entire staffs of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th Infantry.<sup>5</sup>

#### *A New Commander for the 112th*

Even as Kommerscheidt was being lost, Colonel Gustin M. Nelson, formerly trains commander in the 5th Armored Division but desiring a more active combat assignment, was reporting to the 28th Division CP. There he was assigned as commander of the 112th Infantry and told to make his way forward to his command in Kommerscheidt. Colonel Nelson subsequently tried at least four different times during the afternoon and early evening to reach his new command. Each time he was stopped, once because of a guide's failure to find the unit he was to accompany, and three times because of enemy shelling.

Colonel Peterson, whom Colonel Nelson was to relieve, had not yet reported to either the 112th rear CP or the division CP. There was evidently no apprehension, however, since no one at either CP seemed to know that he was supposed to leave Kommerscheidt, although he had left there between 0900 and 1000 that morning.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Dana, Perll; Combat Interv 76 with Ripple, Pugh, Hostrup-Fleig-Payne; Combat Interv 77 with Rumbaugh-Joyce; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44; V Corps Study, Arty Sec. The time of the German night attack is established from the division artillery journal, 7 November 1944, which notes enemy flares near Kommerscheidt at 1835.

<sup>6</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Nelson; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44; 112th Inf S-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44.

*Along the Kall Trail*

At dawn on 7 November as the battle for Kommerscheidt had begun anew, remnants of Company C, 1340th Engineers, still held a defensive position around the Kall bridge. The German shelling and attack during the night had taken a heavy toll of the company. Near the western entrance of the main supply route into the Kall woods were Company B, 1340th, and some thirty men of Company A, 20th Engineers.

At approximately 1000 the men at the bridge saw about twenty or thirty Americans, evidently from the Kommerscheidt battle, cross the bridge in single file and head toward Vossenack. A lieutenant accompanied them. The men moved hurriedly, although there were no shots being fired at them and no shelling, and the engineers at the bridge did not know quite what to think. Shortly thereafter the engineers heard shouts from their own 3d Platoon, which with one squad from the 1st Platoon was defending across the river. These men soon came racing back across the bridge, a machine gun from the vicinity of the mill firing at them as they ran. The sight of these men running and the sound of the firing reacted on others among the engineers, and almost all the few remaining men headed for the rear. Among them was S. Sgt. Benjamin A. P. Cipra, Jr., 1st Platoon, who stopped about noon at the Company B, 1340th, positions at the western edge of the woods. Cipra reported to the Company B commander, Capt. Thomas F. Creegan, that all of Company C had retreated from the bridge.

But at the bridge six men, including the company commander, Captain Lind,

and a platoon leader, had remained. They hid behind a slight embankment and observed small groups of Germans working down from the direction of the mill and clustering around a knocked-out American jeep.<sup>7</sup>

*Company A, 1340th Engineers*

When the other engineers of the 1171st Engineer Combat Group had been committed the day before as riflemen, Company A, 1340th Engineers, had been garrisoning pillboxes and doing road repair work behind the 110th Infantry to the south. The company commander, Capt. Frank P. Bane, reported to Colonel Setliffe, 1340th commander, early on 7 November and was told to move his men to a reserve position in the wooded draw just south of Vossenack. On its arrival, the company was hit by enemy artillery fire and sustained approximately twenty casualties, including one man killed.

Between 1300 and 1400 Colonel Setliffe learned that the Kall bridge had been deserted. He immediately ordered Captain Bane's company to move to the bridge and "stay there." Preceding the main body of the company, the battalion S-3 took charge of the company's 1st Platoon and moved down the firebreak toward the river. Halfway down the hill the unit encountered six Germans digging in a machine gun. The 1st Platoon overcame the Germans and then dug in along the firebreak as a flank guard for the main supply route. From the woods near by the S-3 heard a voice call out,

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<sup>7</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Cipra, Makousky, Creegan, Maj Bruce Renfroe, S-3, and S Sgt Earlis S. Gillespie, Co C, 1340th Engrs; Setliffe Rpt.

"I have a message for (or from) General Cota." Thinking the call came from a wounded German or that it was a German trick, the S-3 did not investigate.

Captain Bane and the remainder of Company A, 1340th, moved on down the Kall trail, passing through the positions of Company A, 20th, and Company B, 1340th. They were joined by a platoon of Company B under 1st Lt. Kelsey C. Manin, six or seven men of Company C, 1340th, under Lieutenant Makousky, and a provisional platoon from the remnants of Company B, 20th, under Lieutenant Horn, which had been defending the southern draw leading up toward Vossenack. The column met no opposition and finally reached the bridge area where Captain Bane made contact with Captain Lind. The two officers decided that they did not have enough men to occupy both sides of the river. Captain Bane's two platoons of Company A, 1340th, dug in on a small knoll just to the north (left) of the Kall trail near the junction with the north-south river road, and the remainder of the engineers were echeloned up the hill toward the northwest, adding depth to an all-around defense. Although patrol contact was maintained with Company B, 1340th, at the western edge of the woods, no contact was made with the infantry at the Kommerscheidt woods line across the river.

As the engineers began to dig in about 1500, they could see Germans digging in on the other side of the river and fired sporadically to harass them. After dark there was occasional German shelling but no attack. The remaining elements of Company A, 20th, and Company B, 1340th, at the western edge of the woods southeast of Vossenack also experienced

nothing more unusual than occasional enemy shelling.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Colonel Peterson's Return Trip*

With Colonel Peterson when he left the northern Kommerscheidt woods line in midmorning to report to the division CP were two enlisted men, Pfc. Gus Seiler, 1st Battalion Headquarters Company, and a second soldier whose name the regimental commander did not know. At the second elbow bend in the Kall trail, heavy enemy small arms fire forced the trio to abandon their jeep and cut cross country through the woods. Coming again upon the winding trail near the river, they saw several abandoned weasels and the bodies of two Americans who had fallen on the trail and been run over by a vehicle. They pulled these bodies off the trail and removed several others from the abandoned weasels. As soon as they had finished this task, Germans somewhere along the river opened up with small arms fire.

Colonel Peterson and the two enlisted men plunged into the woods. They headed south, hoping to ford the river farther upstream. Avoiding occasional groups of Germans, they were finally able to cross the stream, only to come again under small arms fire on the west bank. When they headed once more into the woods to the southwest, they narrowly avoided being hit by enemy mortar fire. Shortly thereafter they engaged in a brief small arms fight and killed two Germans, only to have another mortar concentration come in. A shell fragment hit Peter-

<sup>8</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Bane, Creegan, Lutz, Manin, Makousky, Doherty; Setliffe Rpt; 1340th Engr Jnl, 7 Nov 44.

son in the left leg. At the time, the colonel thought only that he had irritated a piece of metal still in his leg from World War I. The second enlisted man asked permission to go ahead of the others in order to obtain help. Colonel Peterson refused, but the soldier went ahead as a point and kept on, outdistancing the others.

Partly because Peterson's left leg was giving him trouble and partly because they believed the woods were full of Germans, the colonel and Private Seiler dropped to their knees and began creeping. Fire from a German machine pistol to the left front tore through Seiler's body. Since Peterson had been on the right, the soldier's body served to shield him from the fire. Edging closer, he put an ear to Seiler's chest—the man was dead.

Another hail of mortar fire fell in the area. This time Peterson felt a burning pain in his right leg; when he tried to move, he found the limb useless. Dragging himself laboriously, unable to use one leg at all and the other only partially, he retraced his route across the river, not knowing exactly what he planned to do after crossing, but hoping vaguely to find another route to the rear and avoid the Germans who seemed everywhere in this section of the woods.

As he pulled himself from the water on the east bank, three Germans passed near by. The third man in line spotted him. Although Peterson was so dazed that he could not remember actually shooting, he knew that he must have fired his submachine gun, for the three Germans fled.

Again the officer dragged himself across the river to the west bank. Still

edging forward slowly because of his paralyzed right leg, he crossed an open space and entered the woods. American voices and the sound of someone using a pick in the earth reached his ears, and more shells fell. He prayed and had the impression he must have fainted. When he revived he heard Americans talking again and called out for assistance. The picking stopped; again shells fell in the area. Discouraged and hardly aware of any reason for his actions, he again dragged himself to the river, crossed, and then recrossed. When he reached the west bank again a little farther to the north, he saw two Germans walk down the river road and sit down. Later two Americans came along the road and took the Germans prisoner. Colonel Peterson called to them, and the two Americans dropped into firing positions. Hearing nothing further, they walked away with the prisoners.

The officer had no energy to drag himself farther. Sure now that it was only a matter of time before he would die, he began to call out in a desperate effort to make himself heard: "General Cota . . . Colonel Peterson." Two Americans, apparently the same pair that had taken the Germans prisoner, came out of the woods again. This time they spotted him and took him into their position. After an engineer corporal had administered morphine and plasma, they carried him on a stretcher to the rear.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Attack To Retake Vossenack*

At approximately 0530 on 7 November Colonel Isley, commander of the 146th

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<sup>9</sup> Interv with Peterson.

Engineers, whose two companies now held the western half of Vossenack, held a meeting with his company commanders, Captain Ball of Company A and Lieutenant Schindler of Company C. Although the tank commander on the scene, Lieutenant Quarrie, did not attend the meeting because his platoon expected to be relieved at daylight, the engineers had promise of tank support for an attack to retake the eastern end of the town. The relieving tank platoon leader, 2d Lt. Clarence A. Johnson, 2d Platoon, Company B, 707th Tank Battalion, and his company commander, Captain Granger, arrived about 0645. Orders were then hastily issued and the attack was scheduled for 0800.

The engineer plan called for preparatory artillery and mortar fire (including that of the 86th Chemical Battalion) for approximately thirty minutes before the attack. Company A was then to recapture the church. (*See Map XI.*) Company C's 2d Platoon was next to take all buildings on the left (north) of the main street, while the company's 3d Platoon was to follow through the first building and attack across the street to take the first building east of the church on the south side of the street. Next objective of the 3d Platoon included all buildings on the south side. Company C's 1st Platoon was to follow in a support role. Company A, after taking the church and providing supporting fire to help Company C take its first buildings, was to move behind Company C and garrison the recaptured buildings. The platoon of tanks was to move along the south side of town, firing two rounds from its 75-mm. guns into each building just before the engineers assaulted. The platoon leader of Company C's 1st

Platoon, Lieutenant Rollins, was to coordinate with the tank platoon leader, Lieutenant Johnson, by means of a series of simple hand signals: if he wanted more tank fire, he was to point to the building; if he did not, he was to point down the main street.

According to Company A's plan to take the church, one squad of its 1st Platoon in the initial move would furnish a base of fire from the second floor of the first building west of the crossroads. Under cover of this fire, the other two squads were to cross the north-south street. The remaining two platoons were to wait under cover until called up to garrison the buildings behind Company C.

No radio or wire communications were available for the attack—the 146th Engineers had been so hastily committed the day before that this equipment did not reach the unit. Nor were hand grenades available. A case that had been brought up in response to a request lacked fuses.

The preparatory artillery and mortar fires got off on time; but near the 0800 jump-off hour one of the engineer platoon leaders said he could not be ready, and the attack was postponed until 0815. Just as the American artillery ceased fire, enemy artillery opened up on the western half of the town with a barrage that prisoners later said was to have preceded a German attack. The 2d Platoon, Company C, under 1st Lt. Bernard E. Meier, poised to attack on the left of the main street, had several men slightly wounded, seven wounded badly enough to require evacuation, and three killed in this enemy barrage.

In Company A's assault against the church, the men moved out at 0815, the two assault squads rushing across the



REMAINS OF CHURCH AT VOSSACK. *After changing hands several times, the church was retaken on 7 November by Company A, 146th Engineers.*

street in ones and twos under cover of fire from a third squad. Not a man was hit. No one entered the church until a full squad had built up across the road. Then the men entered one at a time, firing through the main door, rushing inside, dodging to one side, firing again, and ferreting out the enemy in the church's rubble-strewn remains. They killed a number of Germans and took sixteen prisoners. The squads next overcame a machine gun in the cemetery behind the church and took up firing positions to support the Company C advance on the left.

Lieutenant Meier's 2d Platoon, Company C, which had been hit heavily by the German artillery fire, was to take the buildings on the left of the main street. As the men made ready to assault the first building, they saw the muzzle of a machine pistol projecting from the only window in the western wall of the structure. The supporting tanks could not fire on this particular building, because an orchard obscured their view. Lieutenant Meier therefore sent word to Company A on the right to divert the Germans' attention by firing into the front of the building, thus allowing his men to rush the machine pistol.

Company A opened fire, and the muzzle of the machine pistol was withdrawn. Meier and five of his men dashed across the street and flattened themselves against the wall. When the machine pistol reappeared, Lieutenant Meier was on one side of the waist-high window, and Cpl. J. W. Crayton, an assistant squad leader, was on the other. Signaling to the lieutenant, Corporal Crayton jumped out in front of the window and fired his M-1 rifle from the hip, putting five slugs into the German. His body slumped

forward on the window sill, and Crayton pushed it aside. As he prepared to enter, another engineer yelled to wait—he had found an American hand grenade. Lieutenant Meier pulled the pin, but before he could throw the grenade a white flag was waved from the window and a lone German came out in surrender.

Hearing other Germans moving inside, Lieutenant Meier called again to give them a chance to surrender, and then tossed the grenade. The explosion was followed by scuffling of feet and moaning. As the men prepared once again to enter the window, the company commander, Lieutenant Schindler, ran forward with the first German who had surrendered. The prisoner called out to his comrades, and nineteen more enemy soldiers filed out of the window. A search of the building revealed only one other German, his body almost in shreds.

Meier's 2d Platoon now found itself separated from the next building on the left of the main street by a large garden. Under covering fire provided by the company's machine guns, the platoon moved across the garden and found the Germans in the next house ready to surrender without much show of resistance. Inside the house the men discovered two cases of American hand grenades and divided them with the 1st Platoon. Continuing, the 2d Platoon took the remainder of the houses on the left with comparative ease, repeating the process of covering each assault with machine guns and also receiving assistance from the tanks on the south of town. The engineers found few prisoners, the Germans evidently retreating house by house ahead of the American advance. When the platoon neared the eastern end of town, a large number of Germans at-

tempted to escape across the open field toward the woods to the north. The combined fire of Lieutenant Meier's platoon and the Company A men who were following to garrison the buildings accounted for most of those who fled. As soon as the platoon reached the military crest of the hill, approximately four houses from the end of town, it halted because these last houses did not appear to be occupied. The time was about 1500.

Lieutenant Rollins' 1st Platoon, Company C, had followed Lieutenant Meier's men into the first house on the left of the main street. Supported by fire from the tanks on the south, Rollins' troops stormed across the main street to the first house east of the church and found that the Germans had retreated to the cellar. When the Germans heard the Americans on the first floor, they begged to surrender, and the platoon took twenty-two prisoners. The unit then systematically reduced the remaining houses on the south side of the street, delayed only once when Lieutenant Rollins had to stop to work out signals with the tankers for supporting machine gun fire. The lieutenant was slightly wounded about 1400, but the platoon sergeant, S. Sgt. Donald O. Gray, took command and finished the attack.<sup>10</sup>

As the five tanks of Lieutenant Johnson's 2d Platoon, Company B, 707th, had advanced south of Vossenack in support of the engineer attack, one round stuck in the gun tube of Sergeant Cook's tank. The shell casing came off, but the projectile refused to budge. The

crew had to use a sledge hammer against the rammer staff to free the round. Enemy fire opened a leak in the gas tanks of another Sherman. The tank stayed in the fight even though its floor was flooded with gasoline.

Farther forward the tanks began to receive bracketing shellfire and were forced to maneuver well back to the rear and then go forward again closer to the buildings. As Sergeant Cook's tank approached the second north-south street, the engineer platoon sergeant cried out to him to watch for an enemy *Panzerfaust* behind the building to his left front. Almost immediately a round from a *Panzerfaust* hit just to the right of Sergeant Cook's tank. Cook quickly replied with two rounds of high explosive. The first missed but the second struck the corner of the building just as another *Panzerfaust* was thrust around the corner to be fired.

Another of the tanks, Cpl. Nick P. Orlando's in rear of the platoon, ran over a mine and was disabled. The crew dismounted and took cover in a building east of the church.

The armor reached the extreme eastern end of town and apparently intended to advance beyond the engineers, who had held up with four houses yet to go. At this point, however, the tanks began to receive direct fire from self-propelled guns or tanks on the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge line. When Lieutenant Johnson reported this fire to Captain Granger, the tank company commander requested an air strike against the enemy gun positions. The request was answered with twelve P-47's of the 365th Group. Most of the planes bombed and strafed the assigned target, but at least two of the P-47's bombed and strafed Vossenack

<sup>10</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Baker-Ball, Isley, Meier; Isley Notes; Combat Interv 76 with Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook; 28th Div G-2 File, 7 Nov 44.

itself. Sergeant Cook saw the planes circle Vossenack twice. Then the lead plane dived straight at the town, opened fire with its machine guns, and released its bombs. One bomb hit the road just in front of Cook's tank; the other dropped beside the main street farther to the rear. The second plane also peeled off and dived on the town, its machine guns chattering. One of its bombs landed in the road, and the second hit the house in which Corporal Orlando's tank crew had taken cover. One man was seriously wounded, and the tank driver was killed. Three of the engineers were slightly wounded; another was covered with debris by one bomb and uncovered by the blast from another. The IX TAC reported this mission against Vossenack as being "at the request of the controller" and also reported that "at request, also bombed and strafed . . . Bergstein."<sup>11</sup>

After the misdirected air strike, the engineers in the eastern end of town, fearing counterattack, were concerned about the small number of men they had left after their attack. Late in the afternoon Lieutenant Meier went to the infantry-engineer CP west of the church and rounded up those men who had been sent back as escorts for the wounded and as guards for prisoners. The infantry survivors of the 2d Battalion, 112th, took over the defense of the church to allow an additional platoon of Company A, 146th, to join the easternmost defenses. Before dark the tank that had been leaking gasoline retired to Germeter and Lieutenant Johnson's tank blundered into a bomb crater, thus leaving

three operational tanks tied in with the engineer defense.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Task Force Davis*

After the 12th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Division assumed responsibility for the 109th Infantry's wooded sector north of Germeter at 1250 on 7 November, it held in place the remainder of the day and night. To the south two companies of the 110th Infantry tried again to close the gap between Simonskall and Raffelsbrand, but without success.<sup>13</sup>

The three 109th battalions assembled in the woods west of Germeter. Soon after dark the 2d Battalion relieved the 146th Engineers of its defensive role in Vossenack, and took up positions in and around the houses. Neither the 2d nor the 3d Battalion had received any replacements, and both were thus far below strength. The 1st Battalion had received some 200 men and was to constitute part of a force designed to recapture Schmidt, a force to be known as Task Force Davis.

On the evening of 6 November General Davis had given Colonel Mays, commander of the 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion, a number of rather indefinite references to a second major task force. Its first official designation or recognition was in Field Order 26 dated 070830, specifying a renewal of the attack to capture and hold Schmidt. The task force was to be under the command of General Davis and would consist primarily of the

<sup>11</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Condon, Isley, Meier; Combat Interv 76 with Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook; FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 7 Nov 44.

<sup>12</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Meier, Isley; Combat Interv 76 with Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44.

<sup>13</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 110th Inf personnel; 110th Inf S-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44.

following units: the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry; the 112th Infantry (minus the 2d Battalion); the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry; Companies A and C, 707th Tank Battalion; Companies B and C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion. Small detachments of medics, engineers, signalmen, and chemical mortar men would complete the list. On paper, this force seemed imposing. Not one of the infantry, tank, or tank destroyer units, however, was anywhere near full strength; indeed, only the battalion of the 109th could be termed an effective fighting force, and that only because it had been strengthened during the night of 6-7 November by replacements.<sup>14</sup>

About noon on 7 November Colonel Mays was called to the Task Force Davis CP (set up with the 112th Infantry rear CP) to report on the location and status of his destroyers. Colonel Mays informed General Davis that only two tank destroyers remained in the Kommerscheidt area, and only one of them was capable of maneuver. In the Germeter vicinity there remained seven destroyers of Company B and four replacement destroyers of Company C. Four guns of Company B under Lieutenant Davis were stationed throughout the day in the western end of Vossenack.

The mined and enemy-held Kall trail, Colonel Mays explained, had prevented other tank destroyers from getting to Kommerscheidt. The general nonetheless insisted that all remaining destroyers must cross the Kall immediately. On the grounds that no infantry were available, Davis refused the tank destroyer com-

mander's request for a company, or even a platoon, of infantry to accompany his vehicles through the river gorge. Mays protested that, although the destroyers had machine guns, they were .50-calibers on anti-aircraft mounts and were thus difficult to use against infantry at close range; the tank destroyers needed protection to cross the Kall. General Davis said he wanted a platoon of tank destroyers to leave Kommerscheidt immediately, regardless of whether they had accompanying infantry; it was a direct order.<sup>15</sup>

As a preliminary to Task Force Davis' move to Kommerscheidt, the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry, was ordered to move immediately to the Kall bridge and secure it. Although the battalion moved out about 1500 and at 1735 reported it was in position, it was learned later that night that the battalion had lost its way in the woods west of Germeter and had dug in about a thousand yards southwest of Richelskaul in rear of the 110th Infantry.<sup>16</sup>

Movement orders for the main infantry component of Task Force Davis, the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry, were not issued through the night. The remaining tanks of Companies B and C, 707th Tank Battalion (seventeen tanks), had been alerted for possible movement to Kommerscheidt but received no specific orders. News of the withdrawal from Kommerscheidt had by this time circulated in the rear areas, and there was an increasing feeling around the combined 112th rear-Task Force Davis CP that the projected attack,

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<sup>15</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Mays; TF Davis Jnl, 7 Nov 44. Indirect quotes are from Mays.

<sup>14</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Mays; Combat Interv 77 with 109th personnel; 109th Inf S-3 Jnl, 6-7 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44; 28th Div AAR, Nov 44; TF Davis Jnl, 7 Nov 44.

<sup>16</sup> TF Davis Jnl, 7 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44; Combat Interv 77 with 109th personnel; 109th Inf S-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44; Ltr, Gen Davis to Hist Div, 27 Dec 49.

should it ever be launched, would prove fruitless. And in the meantime, General Davis had received word from division to await additional instructions before issuing further movement orders.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Tank Destroyers Try To Cross the Kall*

After General Davis during the afternoon had specifically ordered one platoon of tank destroyers to get to Kommer-scheidt immediately, Colonel Mays had instructed his 2d Platoon, Company B, 893d, under Lieutenant Smith and assisted by Lieutenant Fuller, to attempt to run the Kall gantlet. Earlier in the day Fuller had gone forward in a half-track and determined that the main supply route was still blocked; but preparations were made with four destroyers to obey the general's order. Loaded with extra ammunition, rations, medical supplies, four additional machine guns, and with several men from the Reconnaissance Platoon as security, the four destroyers moved out about 1500.

They had little difficulty getting through Vossenack, now held by the 146th Engineers. When they turned south at the church and attempted to speed across the 1,200 yards of exposed ridge between the town and the woods, German artillery shells, direct fire from self-propelled guns, and long-range machine gun fire showered upon them. Two of the M-10's received direct shell hits and were knocked out. Another was hit by a shell on the left driving sprocket and veered off the road. The last destroyer neared the

woods but was going too fast and skidded on the wet slope, plunging out of control over the left bank of the Kall trail and down toward the wooded gorge. The crewmen smashed their radios, removed gun parts, and withdrew toward the rear through the wooded draw south of Vossenack, their attempt at crossing the river a failure.<sup>18</sup>

### *Armor in Vossenack*

The 2d Battalion, 109th Infantry, had assumed responsibility soon after dark for the defense of Vossenack. To avoid drawing enemy artillery fire on the town, the battalion commander and the tankers decided to keep all tanks in ready positions near Germeter. Lieutenant Johnson's tank platoon withdrew to Germeter, and about 2100 the lieutenant's tank was towed out of the bomb crater into which it had fallen.<sup>19</sup>

Lieutenant Davis' 1st Tank Destroyer Platoon had remained in Vossenack through the day. After dark the tank destroyer men, using a T-2 retriever, attempted to evacuate the destroyer that had fallen into a cellar on the north side of the street the preceding day. The T-2 eased quietly into position, the tow cables were fastened, and the retriever gunned its motor to pull out the destroyer. At that moment heavy enemy mortar fire came in and one round landed on the nose of the destroyer, wounding two men and killing the driver of the retriever. The attempt at evacuation was abandoned, and Lieutenant Davis' platoon

<sup>17</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Mays; Combat Interv 77 with 109th personnel; Ltr, Gen Davis to Hist Div, 27 Dec 49.

<sup>18</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Fuller, Davis-Murphy-Gardner, Cole, Mays; V Corps Study, TD Sec.

<sup>19</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook.

passed the remainder of the night uneventfully.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Command*

After Colonel Peterson was taken to the rear, he was removed to the division CP at Roett, whereupon he asked to see General Cota. The general appeared, and Peterson explained the Kommer-scheidt situation, rather incoherently. He told of the message directing him to report to the division command post. General Cota had sent no such message. At the time, he believed firmly that the regimental commander had abandoned his troops. Although he never determined who sent the message, the general later did establish to his "complete satisfaction" that Colonel Peterson had actually received instructions to return to the rear.

Conversations later that afternoon between General Cota and General Davis and between General Cota and the V Corps and First Army commanders resulted in Cota's positive recommendation that all his troops be withdrawn west of the Kall River. Both the army and corps commanders concurred. V Corps ordered that the 28th Division continue to hold the Vossenack ridge and that part of the Kall gorge west of the river, while withdrawing from the east bank. One regiment was to continue to work toward the south, while a third regiment was to be committed later with the 5th Armored Division to the south to assist in taking Strauch and Steckenborn. Late that night General Cota ordered that the 112th Infantry pull back to an

assembly area for reconstitution; that the 3d Battalion, 110th, revert to the 110th Infantry; and that the 109th Infantry continue to hold the Vossenack ridge and move troops into the river gorge.<sup>21</sup>

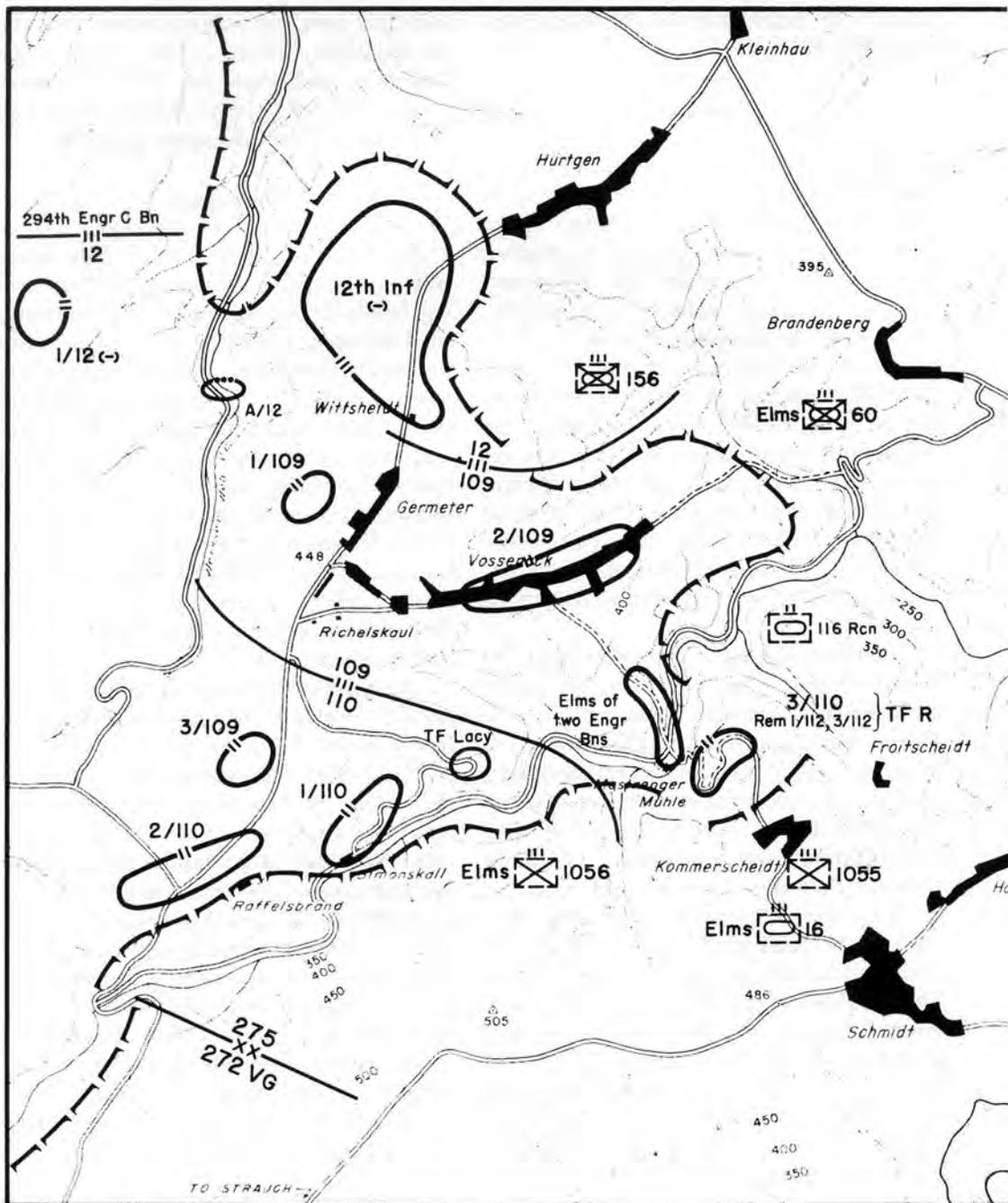
#### *Air Support*

The first air mission of 7 November was at 1115 by a squadron of P-47's of the 365th Group against smoke markings in Ruhrberg, southeast of Strauch, with no results observed. Shortly after noon, thirty-six P-38's of the 370th Fighter Group blaze-bombed eight suspected gun emplacements in the vicinity of Grosschau (some two miles northeast of Huertgen) as marked by smoke from American artillery. Pilots reported smoke and fire blanketing the entire area, and the ground control officer said the targets were well covered by bombs. One aircraft was lost to enemy flak.

The misdirected mission against Vossenack by twelve P-47's of the 365th Group lasted from 1230 to 1350. Pilots reported "one observation post believed destroyed by bombing, no results observed on strafing." One light gun position was claimed probably destroyed in Bergstein, and the town was left burning. In midafternoon another squadron of the 365th bombed on smoke markings in the "west edge of Schmidt," possibly the mission praised by Major Dana, 112th Infantry S-3, for having bombed a square patch of woods west of Kommer-scheidt. After dark the 422d Night Fighter Group flew an intruder mission over the 28th Division sector, giving par-

<sup>20</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Davis-Murphy-Gardner.

<sup>21</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Ripple; Intervs with Col Peterson and with Gen Cota; 110th Inf S-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 7 Nov 44.



MAP 30

## 28TH DIVISION FRONT

Dawn, 8 November 1944

Units of German 275th Division are not shown

1000 0  
YARDS MILE



R. Johnstone

ticular attention to enemy road movements east of Schmidt; no results were recorded.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Enemy Situation*

On 7 November the *1055th Regiment*, supported by the *16th Panzer Regiment*, finally succeeded in driving the Americans from Kommerscheidt to the northern woods line. This news in enemy reports was tempered somewhat in that the *156th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* and elements of the *60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* had lost the eastern half of Vosse-nack. The Germans had been planning an attack to take the western half of the town at the same time the Americans struck to recapture the eastern half, and in the battle that followed German losses were "considerable." The attack in the Kall gorge during the night of 6-7 November against the 1340th Engineers had been made by the *Reconnaissance Battalion* of the *116th Panzer Division*, which claimed to have taken the Mestrenger Muehle again after having sustained "considerable losses" in the face of "strong enemy resistance."

On the northern and southern shoulders of the American penetration the enemy situation remained relatively the same. The Germans claimed that the effective employment of mines and mortars stopped another thrust toward Huertgen and that an American attack in company strength was repulsed at Raffelsbrand. Prisoner identifications by the 28th Division on this date indicated that all three battalions of the *1056th Regiment* roamed the Kall gorge between Simon-skall and Mestrenger Muehle and that

<sup>22</sup> FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 7 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 Air Sec; Combat Interv 74 with Howison.

elements of the 275th Division and miscellaneous fortress units continued to hold in the vicinity of Raffelsbrand.<sup>23</sup>

*Summary for 7 November and  
Night of 7-8 November*

At daylight on 8 November the 28th Division was making plans for major readjustments in its lines, including withdrawal of all its troops from east of the Kall River. But many of the division's troops were still in a critical condition. The remnants of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th Infantry, had finally lost Kommerscheidt after a disastrous enemy tank-infantry attack but then had held along with the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry, at the northern woods line overlooking Kommerscheidt. (*Map 30*) Only two tank destroyers (one of them immobilized), one tank, and two 57-mm. antitank guns remained for antitank defense.

In the Kall gorge one engineer company (Company C, 1340th) had been virtually annihilated. Four engineer platoons now held positions along the Kall trail, with two of the platoons located so that they could fire on anyone entering the bridge area. A fifth engineer platoon held to the south on the firebreak that ran parallel to the main supply route. The enemy held the Mestrenger Muehle, however, and the American engineers had no contact with the forces along the Kommerscheidt woods line. Approximately three more platoons of engineers were at the entrance of the Kall trail into the western edge of the Kall woods.

The combined 1st-3d Battalion, 112th, aid station still operated in the log dugout alongside the trail in the gorge, but only walking wounded had been evacuated during the period. Although a charge by four tank destroyers had been attempted, no resupply of any sort to the Kommerscheidt force had been effected across this trail.

In Vossenack the eastern half of the town had been recaptured during the day in a well-executed maneuver by two understrength engineer companies supported by a platoon of tanks. The engineers, Companies A and C, 146th, had lacked radios, grenades, and mortars. At dark they had withdrawn along with the handful of survivors of the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry, to assembly areas west of Germeter. The 2d Battalion, 109th Infantry, already battered from a long fight in the woods to the north, had taken over defense of the town. It had been relieved north of Germeter by the 12th Infantry.

The 109th Infantry had ordered its 3d Battalion to the Kall bridge, but the battalion lost its way behind the 110th Infantry. Although the 1st Battalion, 109th, had been assigned as a part of newly formed Task Force Davis, it was still in an assembly area west of Germeter. The task force had for all practical purposes been abandoned during the night after its mission to retake Schmidt had been negated by corps and army decisions to withdraw from beyond the Kall.

New orders now awaited the 28th Division. The immediate problems were to withdraw those troops still east of the river and to reinforce the defenders of the Kall bridge area.

<sup>23</sup> Sit Rpts, 7 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44.*; 28th Div G-2 Jnl and File, Nov 44; 89th Division Order of the Day; ETHINT 56 (Gersdorff and Waldenburg).

## CHAPTER VII

# Withdrawal Across the Kall (8 November)

General Davis on the morning of 8 November ordered the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry, which had been unable to find its way to the Kall gorge the day before, to try again. It was to secure the area in preparation for the subsequent withdrawal of the American troops from the Kommerscheidt woods line. Accompanied by General Davis and Colonel Nelson—the latter was still attempting to reach the remaining elements of his new command, the 112th Infantry—the battalion moved out of its position in rear of the 110th Infantry. It advanced along the Simonskall road in the 110th sector to the gooseneck curve, thence cross country through the woods to the north-south river road. At this road Company L dropped out of the column to serve as flank protection while the battalion moved on to the bridge area, arriving between 1300 and 1330. The men dug in near the Kall trail.

Company L forded the river almost due west of Kommerscheidt and moved along the east bank toward the bridge on its mission of providing flank security. It met stiff resistance and suffered heavy casualties in a fight that lasted about three hours. Unable to advance, the company eventually withdrew to the west bank and dug in east and slightly north of Task Force Lacy's position, which was at the gooseneck curve in the Simonskall road.

After the main body of the 109th bat-

talion had reached the bridge area and while Company L was still engaged on the east bank, General Davis asked for a volunteer patrol from Company K, 109th. Its mission was to lead Colonel Nelson across the river to the Kommerscheidt woods line and thus to reconnoiter a route of withdrawal for the forces remaining across the river. Those who volunteered were 2d Lt. Edward W. Tropp, T. Sgt. Robert McMillin, Sgt. Alexander Bretal, and Pfc. Lester Sunburg.

General Davis' orders to Colonel Nelson were to reach the American force beyond the Kall and lead it in a withdrawal to the west bank. There Nelson's men were to assemble temporarily with the 3d Battalion, 109th, and then complete the withdrawal to an assembly area near Richelskaul. Using a diamond formation, the patrol and Colonel Nelson moved out about 1445. They had gone approximately 700 yards to the north (downstream) when they encountered a six-man German patrol. Lieutenant Tropp opened fire with his carbine, and the Germans answered with a machine pistol. Firing his M-1 rifle from the hip, Sergeant Bretal hit one of the Germans, and the others retreated quickly, dragging their wounded comrade with them.

Turning east, Lieutenant Tropp's patrol forded the river and proceeded up a steep, clifflike slope beyond, through another stretch of dense woods, and

eventually, without further encounter with the enemy, into the American woods-line positions. Colonel Nelson made contact with Colonel Ripple, who had been commanding the composite forces beyond the Kall since Colonel Peterson's departure, and then sent Lieutenant Tropp's patrol back across the river.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Day at the Kommerscheidt Woods Line*

The remnants of the 1st and 3d Battalions, 112th Infantry; the 3d Battalion, 110th Infantry; Company A, 707th Tank Battalion; Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion; and the 1st Platoon, Company C, 20th Engineers, had spent a comparatively quiet morning and afternoon in their hastily organized defenses along the northern Kommerscheidt woods line. Although occasional enemy artillery and mortar fire had harassed them and there had been more casualties, the shelling was nothing like what they had experienced before Kommerscheidt itself was abandoned. In the early morning, six enemy tanks had maneuvered from northeast to southwest across the front at a distance of 300 to 500 yards, but the Americans had called for artillery fire and the armored threat had not materialized. Again that afternoon six enemy tanks had appeared in the open north of Schmidt; these were all reportedly destroyed by tank destroyer fire from Vossenack.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 109th personnel; Combat Interv 75 with Nelson; TF Davis Jnl, 8 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44.

<sup>2</sup> Combat Interv 75 with 112th personnel; Combat Interv 76 with Pugh, Hostrup-Fleig-Payne; Combat Interv 77 with Rumbaugh-Joyce; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44. Information on the destruction of enemy tanks is from Combat Interview 76 with Davis-Murphy-Gardner and is told in greater detail later in the narrative.

Shortly before Colonel Nelson arrived at the woods-line defenses, Colonel Ripple had received a coded radio message from division ordering him to withdraw his remaining troops to the west bank of the Kall. He was still awaiting reply to a request for information about the situation to his rear along the main supply route when Colonel Nelson arrived with Lieutenant Tropp's patrol. The two officers issued joint withdrawal orders, asking for volunteers to carry out the wounded and designating Company L, 110th Infantry, as a covering force. Colonel Nelson stipulated that the column of wounded was to proceed directly down the Kall trail just at dark. Another column of effectives was to go cross country some thirty minutes later over the route he had followed into the area. The colonel's theory was that the Germans, who evidently had patrols all along the east bank, would let through a column made up entirely of wounded and litter bearers but would fire upon a column that included effectives. Every man was ordered to strip down to absolute essentials. All abandoned equipment, including the remaining tank and two tank destroyers, was to be damaged as much as possible without the use of explosives. Supporting artillery, which had been so effective that Colonel Ripple felt he "could not have remained in the woods line pocket for twenty minutes without it," was to fire a heavy concentration against Kommerscheidt at 1800 to conceal noise of the withdrawal.

About two hours remained for preparation. The men worked hurriedly to prepare litters for the wounded by putting saplings through overcoats and blankets donated by the effectives. They booby-trapped the tank, tank destroyers, and



**SUPPORTING FIRE** rendered effective aid to 112th Infantry. Gun crew of 987th Field Artillery Battalion firing a 155-mm. self-propelled gun (above), and men of the 86th Chemical Battalion firing a 4.2-inch mortar (below).



57-mm. antitank guns, destroying those parts which could be destroyed quietly. The tank was put on the Kall trail to serve as a road block. Use of a demolition kit was ruled out for fear of the noise it would create; it was buried. On four remaining jeeps blocks were smashed and tires slashed. To cover the withdrawal Company L, 110th, had to move to the positions of Company C, 112th. The move was accomplished by exchanging small groups in order to avoid bunching up the men and possibly panicking the other troops should they see all of Company C, 112th, withdrawing at once.

There were approximately 300 to 350 effectives in the group, about twenty walking wounded, and thirty litter cases. Colonel Nelson and Captain Rumbaugh, 110th, planned to lead the column of effectives, with Colonel Ripple bringing up the rear and checking for stragglers.

Just before the withdrawal was to begin, Captain Walker, commanding the provisional 112th company, saw the column of wounded preparing to leave and thought the withdrawal had already begun. He ordered his men out on the trail, clogging it while the wounded were trying to get through. When Company I, 110th, which was to lead the column of effectives, saw this activity it too moved out on the trail, and only after some fifteen minutes was the confusion straightened out. In the near-darkness, the procession of wounded continued down the trail toward the river, and Company I, 110th, led by Colonel Nelson, started cross country at the head of the column of effectives.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Nelson, Dana; Combat Interv 76 with Ripple; Combat Interv 77 with Rumbaugh-Joyce. Direct quote is from V Corps Study, G-3 Sec.

### *Along the Kall Trail*

While the woods-line defenders held north of Kommerscheidt and prepared for withdrawal, the engineers dug in along the main supply route also suffered from enemy artillery fire but experienced no ground action. About noon a heavy artillery concentration hit the positions of the 3d Platoon, Company B, 1340th Engineers, near the western edge of the woods, killing twelve men, including the 1340th medical officer and the executive officer of Company A, 20th Engineers, and wounding thirteen others. That afternoon the Company B, 1340th, commander, Captain Creegan, went to a rear aid station with trench foot, leaving 1st Lt. Carl B. Setterberg in command.

When the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry, moved into the area in the afternoon, General Davis told Colonel Setliffe, 1340th commander, to have the trail cleared from Vossenack to the bridge in order that the wounded could be evacuated. After a lieutenant from Company A, 1340th, checked all abandoned vehicles on the trail to determine if they were booby-trapped, had three medical vehicles removed, and cut out one road block of felled trees, Colonel Setliffe reported about 1700 that the trail was open.

Lieutenant Tyo, Company K, 112th Infantry, and a group of seven men had spent the night before with the engineers along the trail after having retreated from the Kommerscheidt fight. In the morning the men were suffering so intensely from exposure and their feet hurt so much from the cold and dampness that Tyo decided to continue to the rear. Accompanied by a wounded engineer, the lieutenant led the men along the gorge toward the south in a circuitous

route that eventually led into the 110th Infantry sector. On the way they passed through a former enemy position that was littered with equipment and two dead Germans. Lieutenant Tyo in the lead passed safely, but the man behind him stepped on a buried grenade or anti-personnel mine that was booby-trapped to another. Both exploded at once. The man behind the lieutenant lost a foot, Tyo was thrown to the ground, the wounded engineer's leg was broken in two places, and another man was blinded. Too fatigued to carry the wounded, the others left the two with leg and foot wounds and led the blinded man with them. As soon as they reached a battalion CP of the 110th Infantry, they sent back four aid men with two litters and a man with a mine detector for the two wounded. All others of the group except Lieutenant Tyo and a sergeant were evacuated with trench foot.

Near the Kall bridge, two platoons of Company K, 109th Infantry, were ordered just before dark to go to the bridge and secure it for the withdrawal. They were to knock out a German machine gun that covered the bridge (possibly the machine gun at the mill). By the time the platoons were organized for the move, it was well after dark, and when the first of the platoons reached the bridge, the men found the withdrawal already in progress.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Vossenack*

In Vossenack the usual heavy enemy shelling continued on 8 November. The infantry of the 2d Battalion, 109th,

escaped heavy casualties because they were holed up in cellars and buildings away from the forward slope that had proved so disastrous for the 2d Battalion, 112th Infantry. There was no enemy ground action. Just before dark Company B, 109th, moved into the western half of Vossenack while the remainder of the 1st Battalion, originally designated as a part of Task Force Davis, set up a defense in Germeter.

By arrangement with the 2d Battalion, 109th, all tanks had withdrawn from Vossenack the night of 7 November, and the tank destroyer platoon of Lieutenant Davis withdrew just before dawn. Three guns of the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion (towed) and nine of the 109th Infantry's Antitank Company were installed in the town. Despite this arrangement, the tanks and tank destroyers were called back into Vossenack numerous times during the day because of reports from both infantry and tankers of enemy tank movement on the ridges beyond the town. While most of these reports were evidently erroneous and prompted by unsteady nerves and unfamiliarity with the positions of destroyed and disabled American tanks, they nevertheless served to keep a steady procession of American armor moving in and out of Vossenack throughout the day. Once during the morning Lieutenant Anderson's platoon of Company B, 707th Tank Battalion, radioed for Lieutenant Davis' tank destroyers to come back into town to fire on enemy tanks near Schmidt. The destroyers responded, only to claim that the reported tanks were clumps of bushes. Later Anderson's tankers fired on the suspected enemy tanks and claimed several hits. Anderson then called for an air strike against the suspected tanks,

<sup>4</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Bane, Makousky, Tyo, Creegan; Combat Interv 77 with 109th personnel; Setliffe Rpt.

planning to use artillery smoke markings to assist the planes in spotting the target. When the planes appeared about 1030, several rounds of smoke fell near Vossenack and in rear of Germeter. The planes hit their target, but one aircraft dropped a bomb near a tank in Vossenack and several bombs fell in rear of Germeter. The planes were probably P-38's of the 474th Group, vectored from a mission of bombing gun positions north of Bergstein.

In the afternoon Lieutenant Davis' tank destroyers again moved into Vossenack in answer to a request for fire on enemy tanks near Bergstein. The suspected tanks turned out to be a house and a pillbox. Remaining in town, about 1600 Lieutenant Davis spotted one Mark IV and four Mark V's moving in the open near Kommerscheidt. His No. 1 gun fired one round at the Mark IV, striking a little to the left. A second round hit the target, and the German crew jumped out. All four destroyers then began firing high-explosive ammunition. Lieutenant Davis' No. 3 gun hit one of the Mark V's with its second round, spinning the enemy tank halfway around and setting it on fire. The Americans turned their fire on the three remaining Mark V's. The occupants of one jumped out and were immediately killed or wounded. A second German tank caught fire. Since the tank destroyers had a few rounds of high velocity armor piercing (HVAP) ammunition, they depressed their muzzles to allow for the greater muzzle velocity of the HVAP projectiles and scored several direct hits on the one remaining Mark V. It did not move again.

That night the destroyer crewmen had difficulty in starting their motors. They

had no antifreeze, and the long periods of standing with motors off in the cold had worn down their batteries. Only after a long and hard session of towing by the company's 3d Platoon did Lieutenant Davis succeed in starting his vehicles.

During the day Company D, 707th Tank Battalion, the light tank company, was withdrawn from support of the 28th Reconnaissance Troop to the southwest, and one platoon was sent to Germeter. During the night eight more towed guns of Company B, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion, entered Vossenack. Two of these guns were knocked out by enemy artillery fire before they could be placed in position.

Although one platoon of tanks or one platoon of tank destroyers was in Vossenack at all times during the next few days, this was virtually the last active participation of armor in the Vossenack fight while 28th Division troops remained in the area.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Withdrawal*

After the initial confusion at the start of the withdrawal from the northern Kommerscheidt woods line, the column of wounded and volunteer litter bearers began to make its way slowly down the east-bank trail toward the river. At the same time, the column of some 300 effectives, led by Colonel Nelson, Captain Rumbaugh, and Company I, 110th Infantry, moved cross country toward the

<sup>5</sup> Combat Interv 76 with Granger-Anderson-Walling-Cook, Mays, Davis-Murphy-Gardner, Leming-Quarrie-Jenkins-Ryan; Combat Interv 77 with 109th personnel; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44; 109th Inf S-2 and S-3 Jnls, 8 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Air Jnl, 8 Nov 44; 28th Div Arty Jnl, 8 Nov 44; 707th Tk Bn S-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44; V Corps Study, TD Sec; FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 8 Nov 44.

northwest to avoid the column of wounded. There was apparently no designation of advance, flank, or rear guards. The order of march for withdrawal of the effectives was as follows: Company I, 110th; the provisional 112th company under Captain Walker; the tank, tank destroyer, and engineer personnel; Company C, 112th; and the covering force, Company L, 110th. Company M, 110th, was evidently sandwiched into the column, and the few remaining men of Company K, 110th, acted as litter bearers.

Darkness enveloped the column rapidly under the covering of dense trees. To maintain contact each man placed one hand on the preceding man's shoulder. The route lay through an area that had been intensively shelled. Shattered tree branches and trunks and debris combined with nature's own obstacles, the steep hill and the darkness, to make progress very difficult. Colonel Nelson, who was leading, had to go forward a few steps at a time with his head lowered, using his helmet as a shield to keep his eyes from being gouged out by jagged branches, then pause to look up to see where he was going.

In stripping down his equipment, Colonel Nelson had lost his compass. At one point he reached an open area that in the darkness looked like a large lake. He had heard that there were dams and lakes in the vicinity of Schmidt and suspected that without his compass he had lost his way and come upon the edge of one of the lakes. Taking a tentative step and fully expecting to find himself in water, he discovered that the "lake" was simply sky-glow coming through leafless branches of deciduous trees. The contrast when coming out of the fir forest had given the illusion of water.

Not long after the column of effectives started out, enemy mortars fired into the river valley and in rear of the withdrawing column. Many men scrambled for cover, breaking the column into several large groups. The darkness and woods and debris made it impossible to re-establish contact all along the line.

Only a small group remained with Colonel Nelson in what had been the lead of the column. They came to a big rock surface and, investigating, found a sheer drop below it. Leading the men around the big rock, Colonel Nelson found himself back on the Kall trail and amidst the column of wounded. He halted his group to let the wounded pass, hoping that the main body of the column of effectives would find him. Eventually he decided to wait no longer. Taking his little group past the column of wounded, Nelson reached the bridge, crossed over, and reported to General Davis in the 109th defensive area.

The column of wounded, with its roughly improvised litters and heavy loads, had had a difficult time descending the steep hill. As the men neared the bridge area approximately five rounds of enemy mortar fire fell, wounding five men. The litter bearers continued nevertheless and reached the bridge. There they found four German soldiers guarding it and smoking openly. These guards had apparently taken their posts at the bridge since Colonel Nelson's little group had passed over. At first the Germans protested that only two men per litter would be permitted to cross, but an unidentified American medic talked with them and arranged for all to pass, including many of the litter bearers who still had their rifles.

One group of effectives under Captain

Rumbaugh had by this time been joined by another group of approximately eighty men under Colonel Ripple. Both had been separated from Colonel Nelson's lead group by enemy shelling. Together, Captain Rumbaugh and Colonel Ripple headed their men down the trail, not knowing if the bridge were held by the Germans, but determined to cross even if they had to fight their way through. They had gone only a short distance when another enemy shelling began, scattering the men again and disrupting the last semblance of organization that remained after the earlier shellings. From this time on, a column as such did not exist.

Colonel Ripple, Captain Rumbaugh, and a few men moved to the north in order to ford the river. As they approached the edge of the stream, Ripple fell about twenty feet down a steep rocky slope and was temporarily dazed. In a short while he recovered, and the group forded the river. Ripple continued with a few men into the area of the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry. Before Rumbaugh went on, he sent a lieutenant back across the stream to search the east bank for any other men he might find. The lieutenant returned shortly with seven or eight men. Not having heard about the temporary assembly area with the 3d Battalion, 109th, Captain Rumbaugh directed these men to guide on burning buildings in Vossenack and move on to the rear. He and several other men made another quick search of the riverbank but found no other Americans. They continued their withdrawal then up the west portion of the valley trail. On the way Rumbaugh and his small group were stopped by an American soldier who told them of the temporary

assembly area. They joined the 3d Battalion, 109th, and dug in for the night.

Captain Hostrup and Lieutenant Fleig, Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, had about fifty men with them when they were separated from the main column. Unaware of the orders to dig in on the west bank, they crossed the river and continued on to Vossenack, arriving there about 2300, probably the first group of appreciable size to make its way to the rear.

Other groups had varied experiences in their withdrawal. Some stopped off with the 3d Battalion, 109th; others continued straight to the rear. The cold and the rain as well as the continuous enemy shelling drove some of those who took temporary refuge at the assembly area to resume their journey to the rear. One group of eight men, including Sergeant Toner of Company I, 112th Infantry, found upon arrival in Vossenack that two Germans had somehow become intermingled with them in the darkness. Another group with Private Perll, Company C, 112th, wandered about almost the entire night before crossing the river. This group reached the west-bank positions about 0530 the next morning. A mortar section leader from Company M, 112th, 2d Lt. Wayne E. Barnett, reached the river despite having been wounded by the enemy mortar fire. As he tried to cross, another man grabbed him around the neck and almost drowned him before he could break away. Finally in Vossenack, Barnett and two other men were fired on by replacements of the 2d Battalion, 109th Infantry, before they could establish their identity.

Those who elected to remain through the night with the 3d Battalion, 109th,

were assembled just before dawn (9 November) and guided to the rear. When later reorganization took place, it was learned that almost all who had started the withdrawal had finally made their way out, even though the Germans finally demolished the Kall bridge during the night of 8–9 November. A few individuals continued to straggle to the rear for the next two days, swelling to more than 300 the number of men that had been extricated from the pocket at the Kommerscheidt woods line.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Medical Evacuation*

The engineers and the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry, had apparently made no effort to include the combined 1st–3d Battalion, 112th, aid station within their defenses near the main supply route. The aid station was thus situated in a kind of no man's land between the American foxholes and the Germans, and the enemy continued to send patrols to the dugout. Two large groups of walking wounded had nevertheless made their way out during 8 November, although there had been additional casualties from enemy shelling and sniper fire.

In the rear 1st Lt. Loyd C. Johnson, an ambulance platoon leader from Company C, 103d Medical Battalion, had made

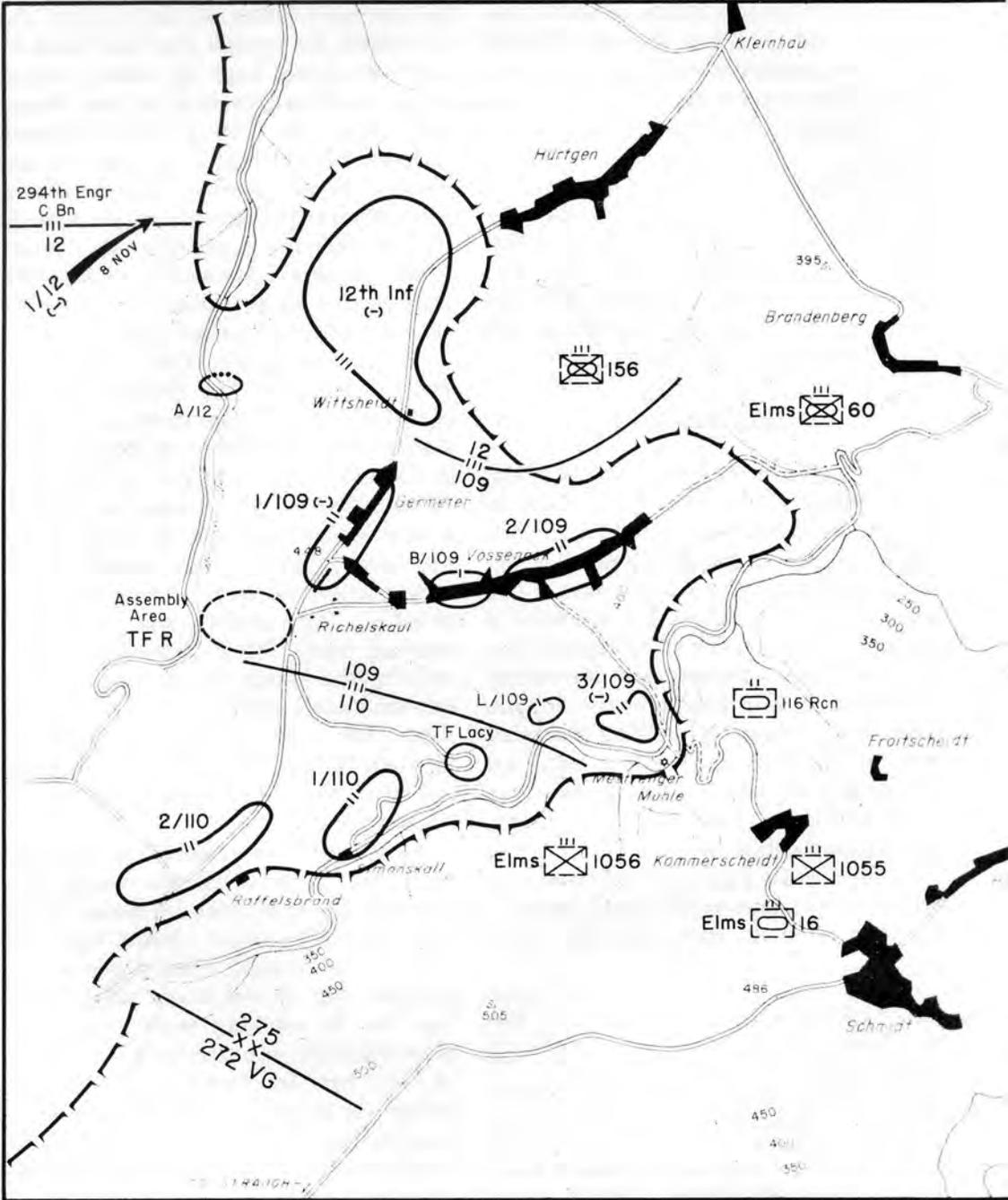
five attempts during the day to reach the aid station by weasel, but each time he had been turned back by enemy shelling on the southeastern slope of the Vossesnack ridge. At 1300 the 112th Infantry surgeon, Maj. Albert L. Berndt, recommended to the division surgeon that a truce be arranged to evacuate the wounded. Neither this suggestion nor a subsequent request addressed to the 112th Infantry S-4 for an attempt to supply the aid station by air was heeded.

At approximately 1500 Lieutenant Johnson left with five ambulances and eight litter teams to go down the Simonskall road along the route taken earlier by General Davis and the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry. He planned to establish a new ambulance loading point at the gooseneck curve on the Simonskall road, even though locating it there meant a one-mile litter carry over two high wooded hills. After dismounting and entering the woods, the litter bearers ran into an intense enemy mortar concentration. The difficult terrain plus the German fire convinced Lieutenant Johnson that the route would be all but impossible.

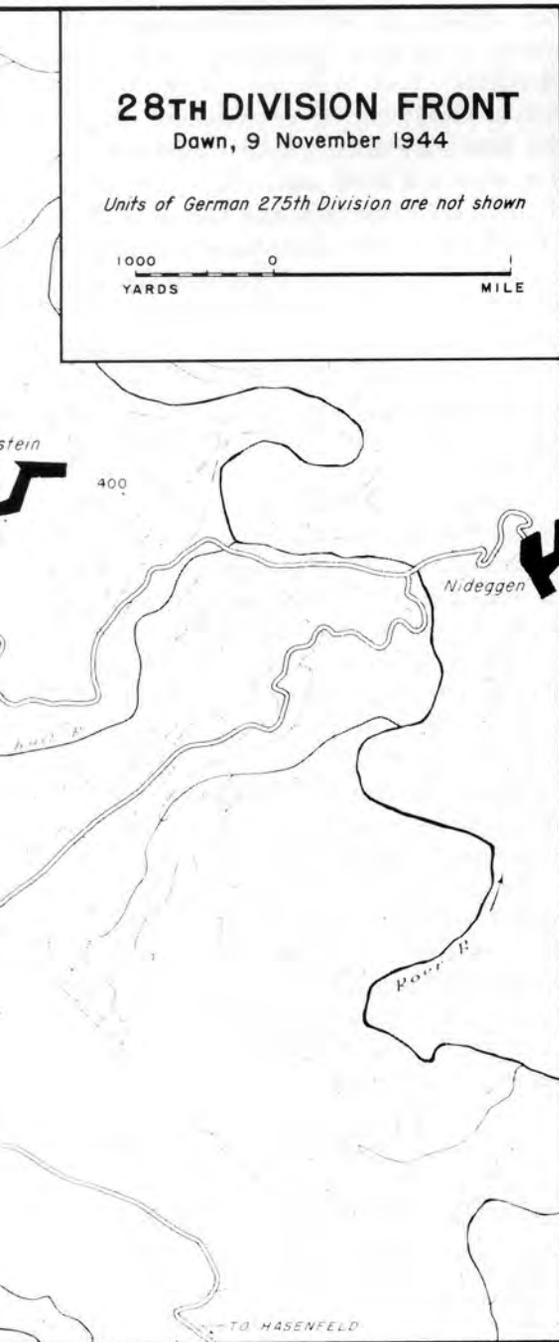
After dark the column of wounded from the Kommerscheidt woods line began to stream into the aid station alongside the valley trail. Since their aid station was already choked with litter patients, the medics made no effort to care for the walking wounded, merely directing them on to the rear. They had to place new litter patients on the trail beside the dugout with guards near by holding Red Cross flags. All available blankets were taken from patients and other men inside and used to cover those lying outside exposed to the rain and cold. In all, there were about sixty

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<sup>6</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Nelson, Perll, Toner, Dana, Quinton–Hausman–Lockwood–Kertes–Norton, Kudiak; Combat Interv 76 with Ripple, Hostrup–Fleig–Payne, Pugh, Kelley; Interv with Barnett; Combat Interv 77 with Rumbaugh–Joyce; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44; Rpt of Interv with 2d Lt Henry W. Morrison by George Hicks in an electrical transcription of a news broadcast over Radio Station WJZ (New York) and the National Broadcasting Company Blue Network, 12 Nov 44, copy in OCMH through courtesy of Radio Station WPAY, Portsmouth, Ohio, and Albert L. Berndt, M.D., Portsmouth, Ohio.



MAP 31



*R. Johnston*

litter patients. Some of the men from the Kammerscheidt defense who had served as litter bearers in the long haul down the east-bank slope were relieved of their weapons and informed that for the present they were medics. The others were told to move on to the Americans troops to the west.<sup>7</sup>

About 2300 the division surgeon telephoned Major Berndt that G-4 had ordered thirteen weasels with an armed guard to proceed immediately to the log aid station to evacuate the wounded. When both Major Berndt and the regimental S-4 protested the arming of the convoy, the plans were changed to send it forward unarmed. The convoy reached the woods just north of the entrance of the supply route into the wooded gorge about 0245 (9 November), but in the darkness the men could not locate the trail. Enemy small arms fire lashed the American vehicles, killing a medic who had volunteered to go along as a guide and forcing the convoy to withdraw.

A four-weasel medical convoy, unarmed except for Lieutenant George, 3d Battalion, 112th Infantry, motor officer, also attempted to reach the aid station after dark, but these vehicles were attacked by Germans with hand grenades and driven back without evacuating any wounded. Lieutenant George felt it unreasonable to attempt the evacuation at night when no one could see the Red Cross flags. Thus, as daylight approached on

<sup>7</sup> Muglia Rpt; DeMarco-Linguitti Rpt. Major Berndt suggests that, had the withdrawal from the Kammerscheidt woods line come off in an orderly manner, these wounded might have been evacuated on to the rear rather than added to the burden of the aid station. But darkness, shelling, and general confusion had prevailed. See Ltr, Maj Berndt to Hist Div.

9 November, there had been no relief for the growing group of wounded in the aid station alongside the Kall trail.<sup>8</sup>

#### *12th and 110th Infantry Summaries*

On 8 November the 12th Infantry of the 4th Division, which had relieved the 109th Infantry in the wooded sector north of Germeter, attempted to eliminate the enemy salient along the Weisser Weh Creek by attacking with one battalion east through the road blocks held by the adjacent engineers. Heavy enemy resistance prevented appreciable gains, and the battalion withdrew to its original assembly area. (*Map 31*) To the south the 110th Infantry planned a new attack against the pillboxes of the Raffelsbrand strong point. With the 1st Battalion holding in Simonskall, the 2d Battalion launched what was supposed to be a coordinated two-company assault against Raffelsbrand, but when one company got its attack time mixed up, jumped off early, and was repulsed, the other company's attack was canceled.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Artillery and Air Support*

During 8 November division artillery battalions continued to fire primarily at targets of opportunity upon request while the corps and general support battalions concentrated on counterbattery. At 1100 fourteen battalions fired a TOT on

the woods just west of Kommerscheidt where Lieutenant Anderson, 707th Tank Battalion, had reported enemy tanks; results could not be determined. Since the first American smoke rounds of the day were not fired until 1115, the smoke that fell on Vossenack and Germeter and caused the misdirected American bombing at 1030 must have been from German guns. The 229th Field Artillery Battalion, in direct support of the 112th Infantry, during the day fired twenty-seven neutralizations, two TOT's, two registrations, and forty-two harassing missions.<sup>10</sup>

Thirty-five P-38's from the 474th Group flew the first air support mission of 8 November. They hit gun positions in the woods north of Bergstein and dropped twenty-seven bombs on Schmidt and Harscheidt and twenty-one on Nideggen, all three strikes starting fires. One aircraft was lost, probably to enemy flak. Some of the P-38's that started on this mission were vectored from it to attack enemy tanks as called for by Lieutenant Anderson, 707th Tank Battalion.

The day's second mission was directed against suspected enemy tanks, but the pilots of twelve P-47's from the 365th Group could not find their target because of low clouds and instead bombed a highway bridge at Untermaubach, north of Nideggen. This was only the second recorded attempt during the Schmidt battle to hit any of the important Roer bridges. Another squadron of the 365th bombed a small town in the Zuelpich area and attacked two warehouses at Gemuend, setting them ablaze. Ten P-38's of the 474th Group later hit the

<sup>8</sup> Berndt Rpt; DeMarco-Linguitti Rpt; Muglia Rpt; Combat Interv 75 with George; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44; 1st Lt Loyd C. Johnson, Casualty Evacuation Report (hereafter cited as Johnson Rpt), Combat Interv File 76.

<sup>9</sup> Combat Interv 77 with 110th Inf personnel; 110th Inf S-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44.

<sup>10</sup> 28th Div Arty Jnl, 8 Nov 44; V Corps Study, Arty Sec; 229th FA Bn AAR, 8 Nov 44.



CARGO CARRIER M-29 (WEASEL) pulling a jeep out of the mud near Vossenack. Vehicles such as this were used for evacuation of litter patients as well as for supply operations during the battle for Schmidt.

same small town in the Zuelpich area, and a fifth mission by twelve P-38's of the 474th was recalled because of weather.

This was the last major participation of air support in the Schmidt operation. Several missions scheduled for the next day were canceled because of bad weather, and after 9 November the IX Tactical Air Command returned to its primary mission of attacking transportation and communications deeper in Germany.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> FUSA and IX TAC Sum, 8-9 Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-3 Air Sec; Combat Interv 74 with Howison.

### *The Enemy Situation*

German activity on 8 November consisted primarily of patrolling and mopping-up operations near Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. With the support of two assault guns, elements of the 89th Division launched another attack against those men of Companies K and L, 112th Infantry, who had been surrounded since 4 November in the woods southwest of Schmidt. The Germans claimed to have taken 133 prisoners in their attack. The rest, they reported, were annihilated.

“The results of this stubborn and bitter fighting,” the *89th Division* said, “justify the losses which we, too, suffered.”<sup>12</sup>

*OB WEST* on this date ordered *Army Group B* to provide for the “speedy transportation of booty” taken in the Kommerscheidt and Vossenack areas “to Wahn [Training Area] for purposes known to this command.” Some of this American equipment was probably turned against this same 28th Division approximately one month later in the German counteroffensive along the Belgium–Luxembourg borders.<sup>13</sup>

*Summary for 8 November and 8–9 November*

This day and night had seen the evacuation of all American forces from east of the Kall River. Although the withdrawal had not gone smoothly, more because of the difficulties of terrain and darkness than because of enemy action, between 300 and 350 men had made good their escape.

The 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry, had

<sup>12</sup> Daily Sit Rpt, 8 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.–10.XI.44.*; *89th Division Order of the Day.*

<sup>13</sup> This passage is based on a secret order of 8 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.–10.XI.44.* This order was issued by the *OB WEST* chief of staff upon receipt of a telephone call from Generalmajor Horst Freiherr Treusch von Buttler-Brandenfels, a member of the *Armed Forces Operations Staff.*

joined the four engineer platoons in their defense of the west-bank supply route, but even the addition of this understrength battalion had not eased the situation of the combined aid station alongside the trail. About sixty to sixty-five litter patients, more than could be housed inside the dugout, had accumulated, and medical evacuation was evidently to remain a major problem.

In Vossenack the 2d Battalion, 109th Infantry, had continued to hold, while the surviving tanks and tank destroyers of the 707th Tank Battalion and 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion brought long-range fire against suspected enemy tanks. During the afternoon Company B, 109th Infantry, moved into the western end of Vossenack and the remainder of the 109th's 1st Battalion took up a defense of Germeter.

Both a limited-objective attack by the 12th Infantry to the north and a one-battalion attack in the 110th Infantry's sector against the Raffelsbrand strong point had failed. Another division field order was issued during the afternoon, calling for reorganization of the 112th Infantry and assigning holding missions to the 109th Infantry and the attached 12th Infantry. The 110th Infantry was directed to work south toward Rollesbroich.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 8 Nov 44.

## CHAPTER VIII

# Conclusion (9–20 November)

Before the dawn of 9 November weather conditions, already bad, became worse. The cold rain that fell on the litter patients outside the combined 1st–3d Battalion aid station in the Kall gorge changed to snow, which continued after daylight. No relief vehicles had managed to get through, and the medical officers therefore decided to attempt their own evacuation.

About 200 yards up the trail they found two two-and-one-half-ton trucks which had been abandoned the night of 6–7 November by Lieutenant George, 3d Battalion motor officer, when he could not get them past a road block of felled trees. The trail was too precarious to permit backing these trucks down to the log dugout for loading, but patients could be hand-carried to them. Then the vehicles would have to take their chances in running the gantlet of open ridge southeast of Vossenack. Not far from the trucks the medics found also a weasel that, despite several holes in its gasoline tank, could be used if someone continually poured gasoline into the tank. They located five cans of gasoline and loaded the weasel as well as the trucks with patients, finding space for all but about ten of the litter cases.<sup>1</sup>

Back at the regimental rear command post Major Berndt, the 112th Infantry surgeon, was unaware that the wounded had been withdrawn from the Kommer-scheidt woods line the night before. Telephoning G-4, he volunteered to go under a white flag into the German lines to arrange a truce in order to evacuate any wounded still at the woods line. The offer was turned down. Berndt was told instead to determine the attitude of the enemy toward such a truce and to leave details and official confirmation for later.<sup>2</sup>

With T/4 Wheeler W. Wolters acting as flagbearer and interpreter, Major Berndt left Vossenack about 0950 and arrived at the aid station without having been fired upon. (*Map 32*) He found the medical personnel loading the wounded onto the two trucks and the weasel. Major Berndt did not know it but division had meanwhile changed its mind and authorized a truce.<sup>3</sup>

Leaving the aid station, the medical major and T/4 Wolters continued to the river, where they found that the bridge had been destroyed. As they stood on the broken abutment debating the possibility and advisability of fording the river, a German rifleman stood up in a foxhole a short

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<sup>1</sup> Muglia Rpt; DeMarco-Linguiti Rpt; Berndt Rpt; Morrison Rpt.

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<sup>2</sup> Ltr, Maj Berndt to Hist Div.

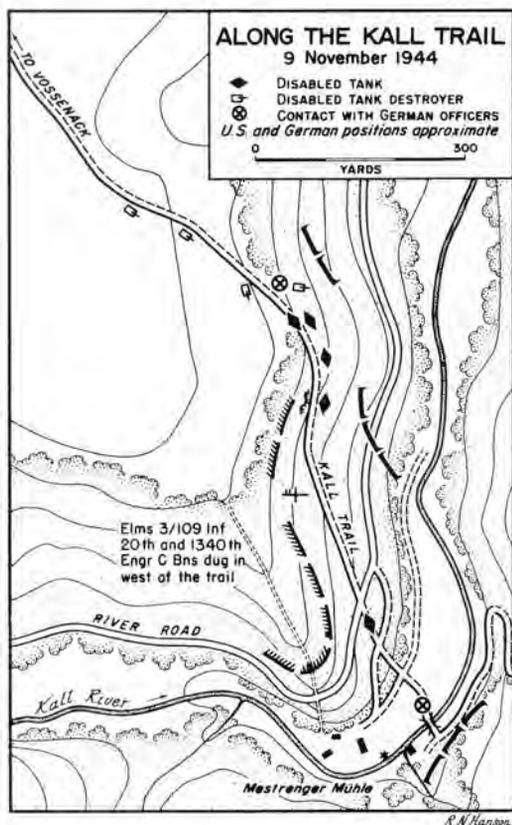
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

distance beyond the bridge site on the east bank and called to them. Wolters shouted back the purpose of their visit, whereupon the enemy soldier jumped from his foxhole, ran south along the river bank, and disappeared into the woods. Several minutes later approxi-

This time it was an American soldier leaning against a tree and obviously wounded; a slit in his right trouser leg revealed a large field dressing on his thigh. "Hey, Major," he called, appearing to be crying, "come over and get me." Major Berndt replied that he could not come just then. A few minutes later two American aid men, each carrying a five-gallon water can, walked nonchalantly down the Kall trail and asked the major if they could fill their water cans at the river. He told them to go ahead and, if possible, to get the wounded American from the east bank.

When Berndt asked the German lieutenant for a truce to evacuate the wounded from the woods line and from Kommerscheidt, the lieutenant replied that all American wounded had been evacuated. There remained, however, the problem of the wounded in the log aid station. The German offered to evacuate these men, but Major Berndt declined, for fear of giving the enemy an opportunity to capture the American medical personnel. The lieutenant then said that evacuation vehicles could pass without interference from his men, but he could not vouch for his artillery fire because at the time the Germans were having communication difficulties with their artillery. With this arrangement, the two officers exchanged salutes, and Major Berndt and T/4 Wolters retraced their steps up the Kall trail, stopping at the aid station to report the results of their conference.

The two American medics who had gone to fill their water cans at the river succeeded in getting the wounded soldier from the east bank. When they reached the west bank again, some of the Germans who had been present at Major



MAP 32

mately six Germans, including a lieutenant, ran toward the two Americans from the stream's west bank. They asked if the Americans were armed and accepted their word that they were not. Through his interpreter, Major Berndt began to explain his mission when he heard another hail from across the river.

Berndt's conference assisted them in carrying the wounded man toward the aid station. The engineers dug in north of the trail saw this mixed group of Americans and Germans and opened fire. A shout from one of the medics—"Hold your — — — fire! We're bringing in a wounded man"—stopped the shooting.<sup>4</sup>

### *Evacuation*

While the truce arrangements were being conducted, the weasel and trucks with their load of American wounded farther up the trail to the west began their journey toward the rear. They moved without undue difficulty to the crest of the hill where the trail emerged from the western edge of the Kall woods. Beyond this point the route was blocked by abandoned American vehicles. The weasel could get by, but the trucks could not. While the trucks waited, Lieutenant Morrison, 1st Battalion medical administrative officer, passed through with the weasel and five patients and reached Vossenack.

Major Berndt and T/4 Wolters returned from the Kall gorge on foot, reaching Vossenack well past noon. Lieutenant Johnson, the ambulance platoon leader, was waiting in the town with one ambulance and had others available in Germeter. Learning about the partial truce from Major Berndt, Johnson was concerned about the German artillery, which had been the principal reason for the failure of evacuation across the brow of the Vossenack ridge. His concern was tempered, however, by a realization that the continuing snowfall was steadily

decreasing visibility—to American advantage. The lieutenant obtained a volunteer driver for his ambulance and made a test run out across the open ridge. The enemy-held hills were shrouded in a haze of falling snow, and Johnson knew then that his mission would succeed.

New difficulties had arisen at the western edge of the Kall woods where the loaded trucks waited on the blocked trail. A German captain and about ten German enlisted men had arrived on the scene.<sup>5</sup> The enemy officer wanted to see the medical officer in charge and talked at length with Captain DeMarco, 3d Battalion surgeon. It was obvious that this German officer knew nothing of Major Berndt's previous truce arrangements, and he insisted that only seriously wounded and medical personnel could be evacuated. He said that slightly wounded and nonmedical personnel (probably those men who had been retained as litter bearers after the withdrawal from the east bank) would be taken prisoner.

Lieutenant Johnson arrived with his ambulance, evidently while this discussion was taking place. The Germans gave him no difficulty as he loaded his ambulance with wounded. Returning to Germeter, he secured eight ambulances for completion of the task and led them back to the blocked trucks, arriving there about 1615.

As the eight ambulances were loaded, the Germans checked the seriousness of the patients' wounds and the validity of the medics' Red Cross cards. They allowed Lieutenant Muglia, 3d Battalion

<sup>4</sup> Ltr. Maj Berndt to Hist Div; Hicks, National Broadcasting Company transcription, 12 Nov 44, OCMH.

<sup>5</sup> These Germans had been dug in near the entrance of the trail into the woods for some time and no attempt had apparently been made to dislodge them. They had been reported for two previous nights by Lieutenant George, motor officer of the 3d Battalion, 112th. See Ltr, Maj Berndt to Hist Div.



EVACUATION OF WOUNDED *over the muddy ground of the Huertgen Forest.*

medical administrative officer, to accompany the ambulances, but not the two battalion surgeons, Captains DeMarco and Linguiti, nor Chaplains Alan P. Madden and Ralph E. Maness. They were being held, the Germans said, because a large group of Americans whom the Germans had surrounded might need attention from both medics and chaplains.<sup>6</sup> The German captain did agree that an ambulance might return about noon the next day for the four American officers. As the ambulances pulled away with the last of the American wounded from the aid station, men in the rear ambulance heard Chaplain Madden shout, "Come back for us tomorrow."<sup>7</sup>

The surgeons and chaplains returned to the log dugout. Heavy shelling and occasional small arms fire in the area wounded still more Americans and increased the number of patients who gathered at the aid station. By the next day there were twelve casualties in need of evacuation.

<sup>6</sup> The surrounded Americans were probably the men of Companies K and L, 112th, who had retreated into the German-held woods southwest of Schmidt on 4 November when the 3d Battalion, 112th, was knocked out of Schmidt. The *89th Division Order of the Day* says 133 of these men were captured on 8 November. It is possible the Germans here had not learned of this capture, since it took place only the day before. Before dawn on 9 November, three Americans from the trapped group returned to the 28th Division. They reported that, when they had left the group two days before to look for help, the men had neither water nor rations and were under heavy enemy mortar and artillery fire. The possibility that any were still resisting, according to the three men, was remote.

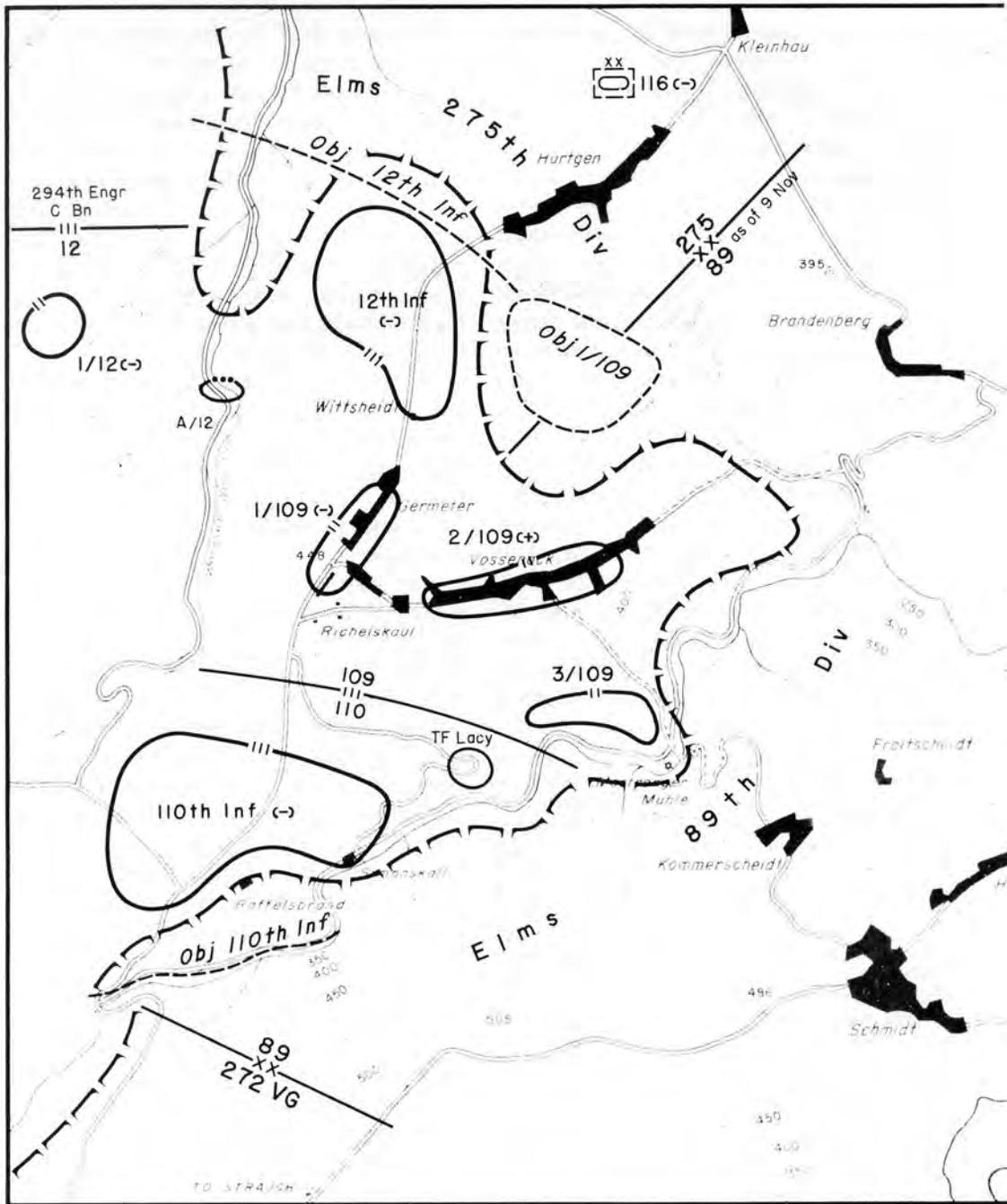
<sup>7</sup> What happened to the less seriously wounded and the volunteer litter bearers is not made clear. Neither is it clear what the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry, and the dug-in engineers were doing all this time. Their positions did not include the ambulance loading area where the difficulty with the German captain arose. Major Berndt states he saw no Americans along the trail as he went forward on his truce mission.

The next day, 10 November, the officers went back to the top of the hill and again talked to the German captain. Now the German officer insisted he would not release them unless the Americans returned all the slightly wounded Germans whom they had evacuated and unless all the Americans in the area surrendered. As the parties conferred, they were shelled. The Germans ran for their foxholes and ordered the Americans back to the aid station.

That same morning the Germans sent Chaplain Madden into the 3d Battalion, 109th Infantry, positions south of the Kall trail with a surrender ultimatum; it was refused. The next day they again sent the chaplain with an ultimatum; it too was refused.

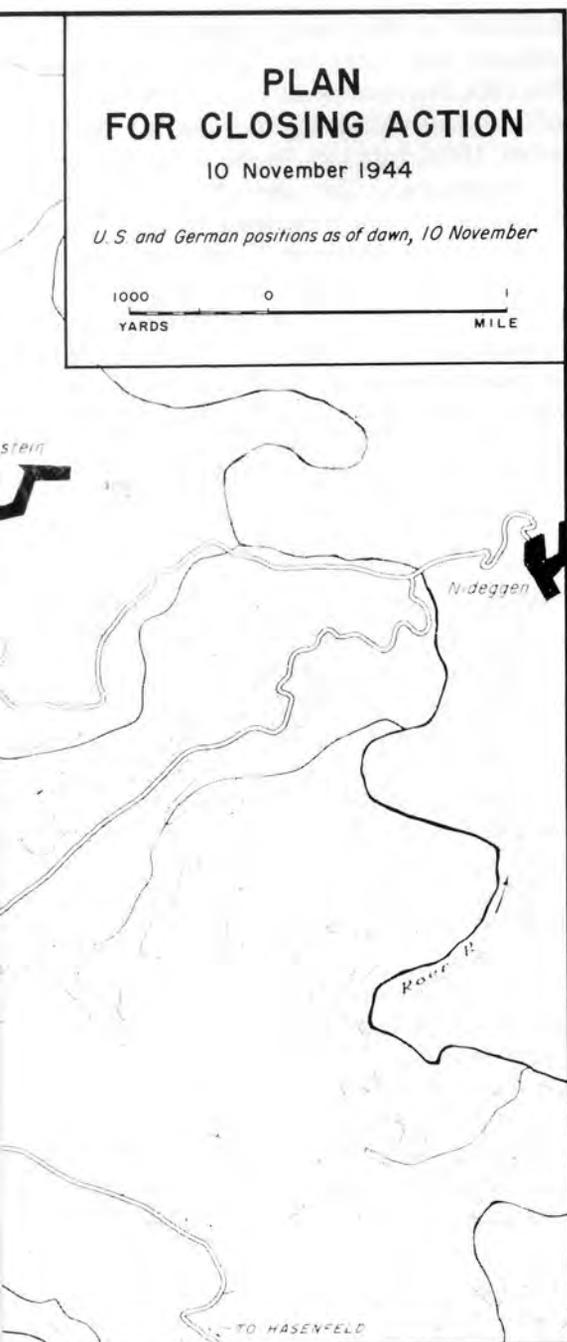
The day of the second surrender demand, 11 November, a German medical officer at the bottom of the Kall gorge requested a truce in order that the Germans might collect their dead. Having had no contact with the German captain near the exit of the main supply route from the woods, this officer told the Americans that they could evacuate their wounded at the same time. Several litter teams that had reached the aid station on foot took advantage of the unexpected opportunity and evacuated their wounded via a roundabout route through the woods to the south. They thus avoided the hostile German captain and his men. Despite continued American and German artillery fire—for the truce was only between medics—the last casualties as well as the two surgeons and two chaplains finally reached the safety of the rear.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Johnson Rpt; Morrison Rpt; Muglia Rpt; DeMarco-Linguiti Rpt; Berndt Rpt; Ltr, Maj Berndt to Hist Div.



MAP 33

*Summary of Closing Action*



On 9 November the troops of the 146th Engineers, who had gone into an assembly area after their infantry role in recapturing the eastern half of Vossenack, resumed work on rear-area roads and laid a mine field for the 109th Infantry on the eastern nose of the Vossenack ridge. The remainder of the 1171st Engineer Combat Group stayed in the Kall gorge as riflemen until 10 November when they also withdrew and began rear-area road maintenance.

The 112th Infantry Regiment was reorganized on 8 November with the addition of 515 replacements and was alerted to attack due north from Vossenack to seize the woods overlooking Huertgen. When G-1 intervened because the 112th had such a large number of replacements, the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry, was ordered to attack instead. (*Map 33*) Both the 1st Battalion, 109th, and the 12th Infantry (4th Division) attacked on 10 November to close up on the Huertgen woods line. The 1st Battalion, 109th, succeeded partially after costly and determined enemy resistance. The 3d Battalion, 109th, remained in the Kall gorge while the regiment's 2d Battalion held in Vossenack. Both units did occasional patrolling. To the south the 110th Infantry tried through 12 November to improve its positions and reduce the Raffelsbrand strong point, but its companies were so depleted and its attacks such feeble, piecemeal efforts that virtually no change in the line was effected. All these actions were the result of a directive issued orally by V Corps on 9 November and given written confirmation the next day. They were apparently designed to secure a line of departure

overlooking Huertgen and to improve the 28th Division positions in general.<sup>9</sup>

### *The Enemy Situation*

On 9 November the Germans changed their counterattack plans against the 28th Division. They returned to their original idea of cutting off the Vossenack penetration at its base by means of a drive against the penetration southwest of Huertgen. On the same date the *89th Division* and elements of the *275th Division* relieved almost all of the *116th Panzer Division* in the Kommerscheidt-Vossenack area, and the panzer division began to assemble in the vicinity of Huertgen. During the night of 9-10 November a new boundary between the *89th* and *275th Divisions* was designated to run northeast just north of Bosselbach Farm. The *89th Division* was charged with responsibility for the area from just north of Strauch up to the new boundary, although some elements of the *275th Division* remained in the Raffelsbrand area. The *275th Division's* sector ran from the new boundary near Bosselbach Farm north and northwest to its original right boundary, but those elements in the Huertgen area where the *116th Panzer Division* was to attack were attached temporarily to the panzer division. German artillery was regrouped to support the *116th's* impending attack.

For three days, from 10 through 12 November, a Kampfgruppe of the *116th Panzer Division*, seriously depleted by the Schmidt-Vossenack battles, attacked

southwest of Huertgen against the 12th Infantry but with only limited success. The *89th Division* meanwhile reacted with stiff counterattacks against the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry, in the woods north of Vossenack. To the *89th Division* elimination of this American advance became "a point of honor." Although the Germans did surround elements of the American battalion, a relief patrol broke through on 15 November to foil the German attempt at annihilation. This was the last major enemy development before the 28th Division was relieved and passed to control of VIII Corps.<sup>10</sup>

### *Relief of the 28th Division*

When the 2d Ranger Battalion was attached to the 109th Infantry and moved to the Germeter vicinity on 14 November, all elements of the 112th Infantry were relieved, and the regiment moved south into defensive positions in VIII Corps' Luxembourg sector. The 110th Infantry was relieved by elements of the 8th Infantry and moved south on 17 November. Relief of the 109th Infantry was completed by the 8th Division on 19 November, and the entire 28th Division was relieved of responsibility for the Vossenack-Schmidt area.<sup>11</sup>

The Schmidt operation had developed into one of the most costly division actions in the whole of World War II and represented a major repulse to American arms. Exact casualty figures are difficult to determine because casualties were re-

<sup>9</sup> Combat Interv 75 with Doherty, Lutz; Setliffe Rpt; Combat Interv 77 with 109th and 110th personnel; Engr Gp Periodic Rpt and V Corps Directive, 28th Div G-3 File, Nov 44; 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 8-15 Nov 44; 110th Inf S-2 and S-3 Jnls, 9-15 Nov 44.

<sup>10</sup> MS # A-891 (Gersdorff); ETHINT 56 (Gersdorff and Waldenburg); Entries of 10-12 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB 1.-30.XI.44.*; Sit Rpts, 9-10 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen 1.-10.XI.44.*

<sup>11</sup> 28th Div G-3 Jnl, 14-20 Nov 44.

ported by the month and the Schmidt operation covered only a portion of a month. However, after leaving this area, the 28th Division went to a relatively inactive sector of the VIII Corps line where casualties for the rest of November were admittedly few. The majority of the month's casualties, therefore, can be considered to have occurred in the Schmidt operation.

Hardest hit of the three infantry regiments was the one that made the main effort, the 112th Infantry. It had 232 men captured, 431 missing, 719 wounded, 167 killed, and 544 nonbattle casualties—2,093 officers and men lost in all. Troops attached to the 28th Division suffered, at a conservative estimate, more than 500 casualties, while losses in the division itself for November were 5,684. The one-division assault, therefore, had claimed a toll in killed, wounded, missing, captured, and nonbattle casualties of more than 6,184 Americans.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 28th Div, 109th Inf, 110th Inf, 112th Inf, and 893d TD Bn AAR's, Nov 44; 707th Tk Bn S-1 Jnl, Nov 44; Engr Sec, V Corps AAR, Nov 44. V Corps Study, G-1 Section, estimates total casualties (battle and nonbattle) to the 28th Division and attached troops for the period 2-8 November 1944 at 3,684, but many casualties which occurred in this period were admittedly not reported until later, probably because of a general policy of delaying reports until the last possible date in the hope a missing or wounded man might return to duty. Also, this study did not include casualties from 8 to 20 November, although these occurred in the Vossenack-Schmidt area. A tabulation from German situation reports reveals 536 prisoners captured between 5 and 10 November, but an entry for 10 November raises the figure to 641. The 89th Division Order of the Day claims 535 prisoners. In MS # P-032a, Bruns states that the 89th Division captured 600 prisoners at Schmidt and Kommerscheidt. Only Straube, in MS # C-016, makes an exorbitant claim, speaking of "several thousand prisoners." See Sit Rpts, 5-10 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen I.-10.XI.44*; 89th Division Order of the Day; MS # P-032a (Bruns); and MS # C-016 (Straube).

No accurate comparison between German and American casualties can be made because German casualties are purely an estimate and for a shorter period. From 2 November through 8 November, 913 German prisoners were captured and an estimated 2,000 enemy casualties of all types were inflicted. On the basis of these figures it is apparent that American losses were much higher, approximately 3,000 more than the German.<sup>13</sup>

American matériel losses in the Schmidt action included sixteen out of twenty-four M-10 tank destroyers of the 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion and thirty-one out of fifty medium tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion. Other victims of both enemy fire and the treacherous terrain included bulldozers, trucks, weasels, 57-mm. anti-tank guns, machine guns, mortars, and individual weapons.<sup>14</sup> Figures on expenditure of artillery ammunition are available only for the period 2 November through 8 November. Counting tank and tank destroyer ammunition fired

<sup>13</sup> 28th Div AAR, Nov 44. These figures make no allowance for German nonbattle casualties. The German losses in *LXXIV Corps* since 2 November were estimated in a situation report of 7 November as approximately 2,000. The only other available source of German casualties, records of the Surgeon General of the German Army, gives cumulative totals, but a tabulation from these shows that the total killed and wounded in the entire *Seventh Army* from 1 to 10 November was 3,863. The "missing" figure for this same period is 40,782, completely irreconcilable except for the possibility that the Germans were absorbing in their figures great numbers of men missing from the fluid actions of late summer in France and Belgium. See Sit Rpt, 7 Nov 44, found in *OB WEST KTB Anlagen I.-10.XI.44*; and Cumulative Casualty Figures by the Surgeon General of the German Army, found in *Der Heeresarzt, OKH/Org.Abt., Arzt Meldungen, Monats-Meldungen I.VII.43-20.IV.45*.

<sup>14</sup> 893d TD Bn and 707th Tk Bn AAR's, Nov 44; V Corps Study, G-4 Sec.

indirectly and 4.2 chemical mortar ammunition, 92,747 rounds were expended.<sup>15</sup>

The original primary mission of the 28th Division had been to capture Schmidt and be prepared to advance to the southwest to assist the 5th Armored Division in taking the Strauch–Steckenborn area. The division was also to guard against counterattack from the north, secure a line of departure for a later attack by another division against Huertgen, and secure another supply route to the south for the later attack on the Strauch–Steckenborn area. Although the 109th Infantry, assigned the mission on the north, did guard against counterattack, before it was called out to assist the 112th Infantry it had not succeeded completely in securing the desired line of departure for the proposed Huertgen attack. The 110th Infantry to the south, attempting to secure the Schmidt–Strauch road in preparation for a later division advance to the Strauch–Steckenborn area, experienced a bloody, costly action that netted little except the capture of Simonskall. The 112th Infantry, making the division's main effort, captured Schmidt but failed to hold it. The regiment's only final accomplishment in terms of territory gained was the capture and defense of Vossenack, and in that action the unit had assistance from the 146th Engineers acting as riflemen. The 109th Infantry, in this same sector, did later establish itself in the woods north of Vossenack and along the trail in the wooded Kall gorge.

The mission of drawing enemy reserves to the area and away from a planned

major First Army attack in the VII Corps zone to the north had been accomplished—all too well. Because of weather conditions, the VII Corps attack failed to get off on time, and air support failed to keep enemy armored reserves from the Schmidt area. Thus the 28th Division, making the only attack in progress on both the First and Ninth Army fronts, was left to the wrath of enemy reserves. By the time the VII Corps attack was launched, the *116th Panzer Division* had returned to reserve and the *89th Division* had taken over defense of Kleinhaus–Brandenberg–Bergstein.

A group of V Corps officers, designated by the corps commander to study the action soon after the battle, concluded that, despite the divergent nature of the Schmidt operation, tactical planning was sound under the existing circumstances. Many of the successes won by American arms from the Normandy landings onward had begun as gambles. Schmidt was a gamble that failed. A number of factors had combined to bring failure, not the least of which were the violent German reaction, adverse weather conditions, an inadequate and unprotected main supply route, lack of regimental and divisional reserves, the wide frontage and divergent missions, and the inability to neutralize the Brandenburg–Bergstein ridge. In the opinion of the V Corps commander, Lt. Gen. Leonard T. Gerow, few if any infantry divisions could have achieved more against these obstacles than did the 28th.<sup>16</sup>

The town of Schmidt remained in German hands until the 78th Infantry

<sup>15</sup> Artillery estimate from V Corps Study, Arty Sec; Mortar, TD, and tank estimates from the following: 86th Cml Bn AAR, Nov 44; V Corps Study, TD Sec; 707th Tk Bn S-3 Jnl, Nov 44.

<sup>16</sup> V Corps Study; Interv with Gen Gerow, 4 May 48, Fort Meade, Md. General Gerow was the commanding general of V Corps at the time of the Schmidt operation and at the time of the interview was the commanding general of the Second Army.

Division captured it in February, 1945—*after* the Brandenburg–Bergstein ridge had been captured. The 78th Division's attack came down the Strauch–Schmidt road and was assisted by a simultaneous attack from the direction of Brandenburg–Bergstein.<sup>17</sup>

As for the 28th Division, from Schmidt it moved south into Luxembourg along

<sup>17</sup> For a story of this later attack and a higher-level account of the 28th Division battle and events preceding it, see *The Last Offensive: Rhineland and Central Germany and The Siegfried Line*, volumes now under preparation in this series.

the grand duchy's border with Germany. For more than two months this relatively inactive sector of the Western Front had been used for the orientation of new divisions and the recuperation of old. In December, less than a month after arrival of the battered division for rest and reorganization, the Germans wrote a sequel to the Schmidt battle, casting the 28th once again in a tragic role. This time the division lay directly in the path of the enemy's counteroffensive in the Ardennes.

# Order of Battle

## *28th Infantry Division*

Headquarters, 28th Infantry Division  
Headquarters, Special Troops  
    Headquarters Company  
    728th Ordnance Light Maintenance Company  
    28th Quartermaster Company  
    28th Signal Company  
    Military Police Platoon  
28th Infantry Division Band  
28th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, Mechanized  
103d Engineer Combat Battalion (less Companies A, B, and C)  
28th Division Artillery, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery  
    108th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)  
103d Medical Battalion (less Companies A, B, and C)  
109th Regimental Combat Team  
    109th Infantry Regiment  
    107th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)  
    Company A, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion  
    Company A, 103d Medical Battalion  
110th Regimental Combat Team  
    110th Infantry Regiment  
    109th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)  
    Company B, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion  
    Company B, 103d Medical Battalion  
112th Regimental Combat Team  
    112th Infantry Regiment  
    229th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)  
    Company C, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion  
    Company C, 103d Medical Battalion

## *Attached to 28th Division*

1171st Engineer Combat Group  
    20th Engineer Combat Battalion  
    146th Engineer Combat Battalion (less Company B)  
    1340th Engineer Combat Battalion  
    502d Engineer Light Ponton Company  
    993d Engineer Treadway Bridge Company  
    2d Platoon, 610th Engineer Light Equipment Company

12th Regimental Combat Team (4th Infantry Division)  
12th Infantry Regiment  
42d Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)  
1st Platoon, Company B, 4th Engineer Combat Battalion  
Company A, 801st Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled)  
707th Tank Battalion (Medium)  
630th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed)  
893d Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled) (less Company A)  
447th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion  
86th Chemical Battalion (4.2-inch Mortar)  
Battery A, 987th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Gun, Self-Propelled)  
76th Field Artillery Battalion (105-mm. Howitzer)

*In Support of 28th Division*

Headquarters, V Corps Artillery  
17th Field Artillery Observation Battalion (less Battery B)  
187th Field Artillery Group  
187th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)  
953d Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Howitzer)  
941st Field Artillery Battalion (4.5-inch Gun)  
190th Field Artillery Group  
190th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Gun)  
997th Field Artillery Battalion (8-inch Howitzer)  
188th Field Artillery Group  
981st Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm. Gun)  
172d Field Artillery Battalion (4.2-inch Gun)

# Bibliographical Note

The primary source for writing "Objective: Schmidt" was a series of detailed and comprehensive combat interviews conducted soon after the battle by Capt. William J. Fox, Capt. John S. Howe, and 1st Lt. Harry Jackson, of the 2d Information and Historical Service. Although their work was interrupted when the 28th Division was hit by the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes, they nevertheless produced more interviews on this action than were obtained for any other specific ground operation in the European theater.

These interviews, so essential in a narrative at the small-unit level, are generally excellent, and, where checked and supplemented by unit records, can be considered highly reliable. Although the interviewers were in the general area at the time of the battle, they were not able to go over the terrain with the survivors and had to rely on map study when conducting their interviews. The vagaries of the Huertgen Forest terrain added to the problems of locating positions on a map. The only major gap in the interview material is the lack of interviews with artillery troops. Because of the limitations in scope of this study, detailed interviews with 109th and 110th Infantry personnel could not be fully utilized.

After Action Reports of infantry units proved of little value: they are too general and they tend to minimize reverses and overemphasize successes. The latter tendency is true only to a limited degree of the armored units' After Action Re-

ports. Those of the artillery units were the basic source for accounts of artillery action, and their only major fault is in lack of detail. No battalion journals of the 28th Division were turned in for permanent record, and entries in the 112th Infantry regimental journals are often sketchy, erroneous, or even non-existent at vital phases in the operation. The division journals are generally excellent, and the journal of the 1171st Engineer Combat Group often provides valuable messages, orders, and reports. A study of investigation, the V Corps Factual Study, conducted soon after the battle on almost every phase of the operation by designated officers of V Corps, is comprehensive, but its statements do not correspond in all cases to contemporary sources. All combat interviews, unit records, and the V Corps Factual Study may be found in the Historical Records Section, Office of the Adjutant General.

Postwar interviews with Maj. Gen. Norman D. Cota and Col. Carl L. Peterson and correspondence with Brig. Gen. George A. Davis, Maj. Albert L. Berndt, and Col. Edmund K. Daley proved extremely valuable. These are in the files of the Office of the Chief of Military History (formerly the Historical Division, Special Staff, U. S. Army).

Maj. Henry P. Halsell's unpublished manuscript, Huertgen Forest and the Roer River Dams, provides a thorough study of the Schmidt operation. Valuable assistance was gained also from a preliminary manuscript entitled The

Siegfried Line, which was prepared immediately following the war by the Siegfried Line Subsection, Historical Section, ETO. Those portions most helpful in writing the Schmidt narrative were prepared by Capt. Frank C. Mahin, Jr., and Maj. Fred L. Hadsell. Neither of these manuscripts was used as a primary source, but both were helpful as indexes to original material. They also may be found in the OCMH.

Sources for German materials were primarily postwar manuscripts prepared by captured German officers; entries found in the *KTB* (War Diary) of *OB WEST*, and letters, orders, and reports found in annexes to the *KTB*; and a document issued by the *89th Division* as an Order of the Day, giving an account of the battles for Schmidt and Kommerseid. The original of this captured document cannot be found, but a translation is reproduced in Major Halsell's manuscript. The information it gives is of a public relations nature and must be checked carefully against other sources; the translation itself is awkward in places and contains a number of minor errors, some of them possibly typographical. The manuscripts by the German officers are of limited value for a narrative written at the level of "Objective: Schmidt." They are often vague and muddled and sometimes biased, but are nevertheless useful to substantiate and elaborate upon information gained from official German sources or known from the American side of the story. None of the manuscripts compare favorably in reliability and factual reporting with the Krause manuscript on the Arnville action, although the quality of the Gersdorff manuscripts is readily apparent in his reporting of

high-level strategy and the broad outlines of the Schmidt battle. The most trustworthy enemy information is to be found in the *KTB* and the annexes to the *KTB*. The annexes are particularly valuable in determining times of enemy action and units involved and in pinpointing locations. The manuscripts are in the files of the OCMH, and the official German records in the German Military Documents Section, Departmental Records Branch, Office of the Adjutant General. Additional information on the enemy side came from S-2 and G-2 journals and files of the 112th Infantry and the 28th Division. When checked against the German material, these proved valuable in locating movements and positions of enemy units.

A unit history of the 28th Division was published in 1946 but was of little value in preparing this study. A number of journalistic accounts appeared in U. S. newspapers soon after the action in 1944, but these too are lacking in accuracy and objectivity. The following two works are useful for background information: V Corps Operations in the ETO, 6 January 1942 to 9 May 1945, and First U. S. Army Report of Operations, 1 August 1944 to 22 February 1945, Volume I, in the Historical Records Section, Office of the Adjutant General.

Primary sources of air information were the 28th Division G-3 Air Journal; the Unit History of the IX Fighter Command and IX Tactical Air Command; and a combat interview conducted by Captain Howe with Maj. Edwin M. Howison, air liaison officer to the 28th Division from the IX TAC. The 28th Division G-3 Air Journal and the Air Corps records are sometimes in disagree-

ment. The interview and the air journal are in the Historical Records Section, AGO, and the other air records in the Historical Archives, Historical Division, Air University Library, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

Information on terrain is based on maps and photographs in OCMH files, combat interviews, the V Corps Factual Study, and a visit by the author to the area some five years after the action.

# Glossary

AAI	Allied Armies in Italy
AAR	After Action Report
Actg	Acting
AF	Air Force
<i>Anlage</i>	Appendix or annex
A and P	Ammunition and Pioneer
AR	Army Regulations
Armd	Armored
Arty	Artillery
AT	Antitank
Atchd	Attached
Atk	Attack
Bailey bridge	Portable steel bridge of the "through" type. The roadway is supported by two main trusses composed of ten-foot sections called "panels" pinned together to form a continuous truss. Capacity may be increased by adding extra trusses alongside the first, by adding an extra truss on top of the first to make a second story, or by both means.
Bn	Battalion
BAR	Browning automatic rifle
Bazooka	Recoilless antitank rocket launcher, hand-carried
Bazooka pants	Additional armor to protect tank tracks from antitank fire
Br	Bridge
Btry	Battery
Burp gun	A colloquial term applied by American troops to German submachine guns of the MP ( <i>Maschinenpistole</i> ) 40 type
(C)	Combat
CCA	Combat Command A, one of the major, flexible combat formations in armored divisions
CCB	Combat Command B, in armored division
CCR	Reserve Combat Command, in armored division
CE	Corps of Engineers
CG	Commanding General
Cml	Chemical
CO	Commanding Officer
Co	Company
CofS	Chief of Staff

Comdg	Commanding
Comdr	Commander
Com	Communications
CP	Command post
D Day	Target date for the beginning of a specific military operation
Div	Division
EM	Enlisted men
Engr	Engineer
Equip	Equipment
ETHINT	European Theater Historical Interview of former German military personnel
ETO	European Theater of Operations
Ex Off	Executive Officer
FA	Field Artillery
<i>Fahnenjunkerschule</i>	German officer candidate school
<i>Feldgericht</i>	Military tribunal of summary nature
FO	Field order; forward observer
FUSA	First United States Army
G-1	Personnel officer or section of divisional or higher staff
G-2	Intelligence officer or section
G-3	Operations officer or section
G-4	Supply officer or section
Gp	Group
<i>Gren</i>	<i>Grenadier</i>
H Hour	Exact minute for the beginning of a specific military operation
Hist	Historical
Hq	Headquarters
Hv	Heavy
Inf	Infantry
Info	Information
Instn	Instruction
Intel	Intelligence
Interv	Interview
IPW	Interrogation Prisoners of War
Jnl	Journal
Kampfgruppe	German combat group of variable size
KIA	Killed in action
K ration	One of several types of emergency field rations
<i>KTB</i>	<i>Kriegstagebuch</i> (War Diary)
<i>Landesschuetzen</i>	German local security units, designed for rear-area service but later pressed into front-line duty.
Ldr	Leader
Ln	Liaison

Lt	Lieutenant; light
Ltr	Letter
(M)	Medium
M-4 (Sherman)	American medium tank
M-10 (Tank Destroyer)	American vehicle, lightly armored, mounting a 3-inch gun, highly maneuverable
M-18 (Tank Destroyer)	Same as M-10 but mounting a 76-mm. gun
M-20 (Smoke Generator)	A generator for making smoke from fuel oil under combat conditions
M-29 (Weasel)	Tracked, lightly armored cargo carrier
MAAF	Mediterranean Allied Air Force
MAC	Medical Administrative Corps
Machine pistol	German submachine gun, known to American troops as a "burp gun"
Mark IV	German medium tank
Mark V (Panther)	German heavy tank
Mark VI (Tiger)	German heavy tank
MATAF	Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force
Med	Medical; Mediterranean
MIA	Missing in action
MID	Military Intelligence Division
MLR	Main line of resistance
Mm.	Millimeter
Msg	Message
Mtr	Motor
<i>Nachrichtenschule</i>	Signal school
NCO	Noncommissioned officer
<i>OB WEST</i>	<i>Oberbefehlshaber West</i> (Highest German ground headquarters on the Western Front)
OCMH	Office of the Chief of Military History
Off	Officer
OKW	<i>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht</i> (Armed Forces High Command)
OP	Observation post
Opn	Operation
Panther	German Mark V heavy tank
<i>Panzerfaust</i>	Recoilless German antitank rocket, hand-carried. A "one-shot" weapon.
Pcht	Parachute
PL	Public Law
Plat	Platoon
Pon	Ponton
Pz	Panzer
RAF	Royal Air Force
Rcn	Reconnaissance
Regt	Regiment
Ret	Retired

Rpt	Report
S-1	Personnel officer or section of regimental or lower staff
S-2	Intelligence officer or section
S-3	Operations officer or section
S-4	Supply officer or section
SCR	Signal Corps radio
Sec	Section
SG	Smoke Generator
Sherman	American medium tank, M-4
Sit Rpt	Situation Report
S-mine	German antipersonnel mine
SP	Self-propelled
SS	See <i>Waffen-SS</i> .
Subj	Subject
Sum	Summary
T-2 retriever	Tank recovery vehicle of the M-31 series
TAC	Tactical Air Command
TD	Tank destroyer
Tdwy	Treadway
Teller mine	German antitank mine
TF	Task force
Tiger	German Mark VI heavy tank
Tk	Tank
Tns	Trains
TOT	Time on target, a method of timing artillery fire from various points to fall on a given target simultaneously.
Tp	Telephone
Trps	Troops
TUSA	Third United States Army
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USAF	United States Air Force
<i>Waffen-SS</i>	Combat arm of the SS ( <i>Schutzstaffel</i> —Elite Guard); in effect a partial duplication of the German Army.
Weasel (M-29)	Tracked, lightly armored cargo carrier
WIA	Wounded in action
Wpns	Weapons

# Basic Military Map Symbols\*

Symbols within a rectangle indicate a military unit, within a triangle an observation post, and within a circle a supply point.

## Military Units—Identification

Antiaircraft Artillery . . . . .	
Armored Command . . . . .	
Army Air Forces . . . . .	
Artillery, except Antiaircraft and Coast Artillery . . . . .	
Cavalry, Horse . . . . .	
Cavalry, Mechanized . . . . .	
Chemical Warfare Service . . . . .	
Coast Artillery . . . . .	
Engineers . . . . .	
Infantry . . . . .	
Medical Corps . . . . .	
Ordnance Department . . . . .	
Quartermaster Corps . . . . .	
Signal Corps . . . . .	
Tank Destroyer . . . . .	
Transportation Corps . . . . .	
Veterinary Corps . . . . .	
Airborne units are designated by combining a gull wing symbol with the arm or service symbol:	
Airborne Artillery . . . . .	
Airborne Infantry . . . . .	

\*For complete listing of symbols see FM 21-30, from which these are taken.

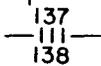
## Size Symbols

The following symbols placed either in boundary lines or above the rectangle, triangle, or circle inclosing the identifying arm or service symbol indicate the size of military organization:

Squad . . . . .	•
Section . . . . .	••
Platoon . . . . .	•••
Company, troop, battery, Air Force flight . . . . .	
Battalion, cavalry squadron, or Air Force squadron . . . . .	
Regiment or group; combat team (with abbreviation CT following identifying numeral) . . . . .	
Brigade, Combat Command of Armored Division, or Air Force Wing . . . . .	X
Division or Command of an Air Force . . . . .	XX
Corps or Air Force . . . . .	XXX
Army . . . . .	XXXX
Group of Armies . . . . .	XXXXX

### EXAMPLES

The letter or number to the left of the symbol indicates the unit designation; that to the right, the designation of the parent unit to which it belongs. Letters or numbers above or below boundary lines designate the units separated by the lines:

Company A, 137th Infantry . . . . .	A		137
8th Field Artillery Battalion . . . . .			8
Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division . . . . .	A		1
Observation Post, 23d Infantry . . . . .			23
Command Post, 5th Infantry Division . . . . .			5
Boundary between 137th and 138th Infantry . . . . .			

## Weapons

Machine gun . . . . .	
Gun . . . . .	
Gun battery . . . . .	
Howitzer or Mortar . . . . .	
Tank . . . . .	
Self-propelled gun . . . . .	

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# Index

- Aachen: 251  
Abbéville: 6  
Adams, Pvt. Hamilton: 158  
Adams, S. Sgt. Joseph S.: 195  
Adler, Pvt. Karl: 213  
Aerial photographs: 56, 252, 255  
Aid stations. *See* Medical aid men.  
Air attack. *See* Air squadrons; Air support.  
Air commands. *See* Tactical Air Commands.  
Air observation: 30, 125, 174, 206, 225, 254, 299  
Air reconnaissance: 132, 272. *See also* Aerial photographs.  
Air squadrons. *See also* Fighter Bomber groups; Fighter-bombers.  
23d: 38, 52  
396th: 302  
397th: 308  
406th: 83  
492d: 61, 75  
512th: 60  
Air support: 28, 30, 38, 38n, 52, 60, 61, 75, 83, 125-28, 135, 135n, 178, 207, 239, 253, 272, 275, 292, 294, 302-03, 308, 315, 319-20, 339-41, 356-57, 357n, 369, 385-86, 389-91, 397, 404-05, 416. *See also* Bombing; P-47's; Strafing.  
Air-identification panels: 17, 308, 356  
Albert, Pfc. Hubert G.: 138, 220  
Albritton, Pfc. Leslie H.: 153, 163  
Allen, Sgt. Walton R.: 304, 310, 311  
Allison, Lt. Col. Leslie: 6, 14, 14n, 20, 30  
Amanvillers: 8, 13  
Ambush: 57, 57n, 330, 337-38, 372  
Ammunition. *See also* Artillery, ammunition; Short-ages, ammunition.  
armor-piercing: 308, 336, 376, 398  
individual allotment: 54, 141, 177, 179, 210  
Ancy-sur-Moselle: 7, 12, 13, 35  
Anderson, 1st Lt. Carl A., Jr.: 337, 343, 345-47, 355-57  
Anderson, Capt. Lewis R.: 59  
Anderson, 1st Lt. William A.: 360, 397, 404  
Andrews, Pfc. Walter A.: 79  
Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalions  
447th: 253  
449th: 8  
Anzio: 106  
Ardennes: 257, 417  
*Armed Forces Operations Staff*: 406n  
Armies, U. S.  
First: 251-52, 253n, 254, 255, 343, 416  
Third: 3-4, 8, 28, 42, 52, 76  
Fifth: 103, 106, 132, 239  
Ninth: 416  
Armored Divisions  
4th: 81  
5th: 251, 378, 389, 416  
7th: 4, 5, 6, 8, 13, 14-16, 17-20, 21, 25n, 28, 80, 88, 89, 95  
Armored Field Artillery Battalion, 434th: 13, 17, 83n, 90  
Armored Infantry Battalion, 23d: 6, 7, 9, 12-20, 14n, 22, 23, 26, 32, 38, 39, 81, 83, 88, 90, 95  
Army Group, 12th: 52, 253n  
Arnaville, terrain: 40  
Arno River: 106, 110  
Arry: 40-41, 42, 46, 47-55, 60, 77, 81-83, 87-93  
Ars-sur-Moselle: 7, 12, 75  
Artillery, American. *See also* Field Artillery Battalions; Field Artillery Groups.  
adjustment of fire: 20, 183, 198, 238  
ammunition: 61, 76, 255  
blanket concentration: 17  
check concentration: 42, 46  
counterbattery fire: 61, 90, 164, 206, 254  
effect on enemy fortifications: 25, 30, 61, 239  
fires propaganda leaflets: 239-40  
forward displacement of: 28  
harassing fire: 134, 135, 170, 178, 183, 198, 203, 206, 215, 225, 377, 404  
liaison officers: 20, 25n, 42, 169, 259, 355  
liaison planes: 30, 67  
observation: 46, 47, 53, 60, 61, 64, 77, 164, 169, 170, 203, 269, 297, 307, 369  
plans: 41-42, 62, 90-92, 111-20, 164, 176-78, 206, 253, 254, 257  
preparation: 16, 42, 90-92, 93, 177, 178, 206, 254, 259, 382  
registration of fire: 339, 404  
request for: 28, 75, 76, 120, 124-25, 297, 297n  
short rounds: 25, 25n, 26, 171, 188-91, 195, 215-16, 353-54  
smoke: 253, 389, 397-98  
support: 16, 26, 36, 41, 60, 61, 77, 79, 83, 90-92, 164-66, 169-71, 177-78, 182-83, 253, 268, 275, 285, 338-39, 369, 377, 404  
tank hull guns used as direct fire artillery: 277  
TOT: 125, 135, 164, 175, 178, 198, 203, 225, 300, 339, 377, 404  
57-mm. antitank: 20, 55, 57, 57n, 60, 77, 84, 258, 291, 291n, 336, 342, 343  
75-mm. tank guns: 382  
76-mm. tank destroyer guns: 198  
105-mm. howitzers: 111, 177, 183, 206, 253  
155-mm. howitzers: 111, 125, 164, 169-70, 183, 253, 307  
155-mm. guns: 84, 111, 253, 307

- Artillery, American—Continued  
   240-mm. howitzers: 60, 111, 177, 183, 198, 206  
   4.5-inch guns: 111, 253  
   8-inch guns: 60, 177, 182, 198, 206, 253  
 Artillery, German: 12–13, 59, 61, 62, 65, 67, 72–77,  
   81–83, 84–86, 88, 93, 94, 117–20, 135, 174, 259,  
   281, 297, 301, 318, 335, 343, 344, 354, 367, 374,  
   382  
 Assault boats: 7, 16–20, 28, 35, 36–37, 40, 41, 44, 46,  
   50, 56, 62, 70, 81. *See also* Ferrying operations.  
 Attack plans  
   army: 103–04  
   corps: 3–4, 88, 89–90, 107, 133, 176, 251–52  
   division: 8–9, 13–14, 80–81, 90, 253–55, 416  
   regiment: 8–9, 109–11, 176–78, 203, 204–05, 256,  
     257–59, 268, 284  
   battalion: 16, 42–43, 93, 107, 112, 113, 130, 207,  
     236, 257–58, 352  
   company: 23, 135–36, 140–41, 262  
   platoon: 122–23, 213  
 Attack plans, German: 23, 35  
 Augny: 22, 25–26  
  
 Babbitt, Pfc. Edward J., Jr.: 163  
 Babbitt, Pvt. Raymond M.: 160  
 Bagnola: 128  
 Bailey bridge: 72, 84  
 Baker, Maj. Willard B.: 359, 360  
 Ball, Capt. Sam H., Jr.: 360, 364–65, 382  
 Balog, Pvt. George: 189  
 Bane, Capt. Frank P.: 379, 380  
 Banks, Pvt. Waymon A.: 186, 188, 197  
 les Baraques: 39  
 Barbed wire: 23, 105, 106, 109, 128, 129, 130, 138,  
   139, 140, 146, 147, 148–49, 151, 154, 156, 157,  
   158, 160, 161, 162, 163, 170, 174, 179, 181, 184,  
   194, 195, 197, 200, 210, 211, 222  
 Barbuto, 1st Lt. Rocco J.: 57n  
 Barco: 135, 174, 206, 207, 225, 238  
 Barnett, 2d Lt. Wayne E.: 400  
 Barrilleaux, 1st Lt. Melvin: 335, 345, 353  
 Barrow, Pfc. Joseph T.: 158, 169  
 Bart, Sgt. Henry: 266–67  
 Barton, Sgt. Jack L.: 295, 306  
 Base of fire: 263, 280, 350, 382  
 Battle fatigue. *See* Combat fatigue.  
 Battle School at Cucciano: 224  
 Baughn, 2d Lt. Jack H.: 361  
 Bayonets: 47, 186, 338  
 Bayonville: 40, 42, 64  
 Bazooka: 47, 51, 52, 54, 62, 77, 79, 84, 153, 174, 190,  
   232, 291, 297, 300, 307, 308, 374  
 “Bazooka pants”: 26  
 Beazley, Pvt. Marvin D.: 138  
 Beck, S. Sgt. Edward J.: 266  
 Becker, Pfc. Ernst H.: 228  
 Beckes, T. Sgt. Carl: 325  
 Beggs, 1st Lt. Clifton W.: 353, 354  
  
 Bell, Col. Robert P.: 40–41, 52, 54, 76, 93  
 Benner, Pfc. Zemro F.: 214  
 Bergstein: 252, 262, 272, 281, 286, 335, 341, 342, 346,  
   352, 357, 363, 369, 385, 398, 404, 417. *See also*  
   Brandenberg–Bergstein ridge.  
 Berndt, Maj. Albert L.: 259n, 401, 403, 403n,  
   407–09, 411n  
 Bertani, Pfc. Joseph F.: 163, 171  
 Beverage, Pfc. Kenny R.: 140, 148  
 Bills, S. Sgt. Cline: 79  
 Birdsong, Maj. William H.: 55–59, 79  
 Bishop, Pfc. Randolph H.: 191, 195  
 Bitney, 1st Lt. Raymond W.: 36  
 Blanchard, 1st Lt. James C., Jr.: 94  
 Boats, rubber reconnaissance: 35, 36–37  
 Bodine, Maj. William W., Jr.: 314, 354, 356  
 Bois des Anneaux: 41  
 Bois des Chevaux: 6  
 Bois le Comte: 90–93  
 Bois de Gaumont: 50, 59, 77, 79  
 Bois des Ognons: 6  
 Bombing: 38, 38–39n, 52, 75, 83, 109, 128, 135n,  
   165, 174, 302–03, 308. *See also* Air support.  
   of dams: 75  
   of friendly troops: 272–74, 385–86, 389  
 Borders, 2d Lt. Ray M.: 323  
 Borum, Pvt. Albert C., Jr.: 187, 188–89  
 Bosselbach Farm: 284, 339, 414  
 Boston, Pfc. Marion L.: 140  
 Boulden, Lt. Col. Marion P.: 203  
 Boylan, Lt. Col. Vincent L.: 5  
 Brandenberg: 252, 253, 262, 286, 335, 339, 342, 346,  
   352, 357, 363, 369, 385, 416, 417  
 Brandenberg–Bergstein ridge: 252, 253, 262, 286,  
   335, 342, 346, 357, 363, 385, 416, 417  
 Brandenberger Wald: 369  
 Brest: 28, 30, 52, 61  
 Bretal, Sgt. Alexander: 393  
 Brice, Sgt. John D.: 160  
 Bridges  
   Bailey bridge: 72, 75, 86  
   double treadway: 72  
   floating: 70  
   steel truss: 70  
   submerged: 62  
   treadway: 20, 74, 81  
 Bridging operations, 9–14 September: 63–86  
 British units. *See also* Royal Air Force.  
   Army, Eighth: 103, 106  
   Corps, 13: 240  
 Brodeur, Pvt. William C.: 149–53  
 Brooks, 1st Lt. Mack L.: 238  
 Brown, T. Sgt. Audney S.: 261  
 Brown, Pfc. Donald J.: 157  
 Brown, S. Sgt. Hugh C.: 140, 147–48, 163  
 Brown, 1st Lt. Robert: 93  
 Brumbaugh, 1st Lt. David M.: 193–95, 234  
 Buechler, Pfc. Edwin L.: 187  
 Bulldozers: 71, 72, 165, 289, 313, 328, 329, 330

- Bunkers: 104-05, 128-29, 138, 146-47, 148, 150-51, 185, 198, 199, 217, 219, 226-27, 229-30, 234-36, 237, 239. *See also* Pillboxes.
- Burja, Pfc. Michael: 190
- Burnett, Pfc. Willie: 182
- Burril, 2d Lt. Gerald M.: 269
- Burp gun. *See* Machine pistol.
- Bury, Pvt. Frank: 211, 234
- Buttlar-Brandenfels, von, Horst Freiherr Treusch: 406n
- Buxières: 6, 8, 9
- Calley, Pfc. Joseph: 334
- Camouflage, German: 31, 105, 128, 146, 147, 213, 214, 227, 232-33, 369. *See also* Deception, German.
- Campbell, Pvt. Louis S.: 158
- Cannon, S. Sgt. Leo L.: 330
- Carlson, 1st Lt. Eugene S.: 262-63
- Carr, 1st Lt. Francis L.: 46
- Carter, Pvt. Edmond H.: 117
- Cascarano, S. Sgt. Charles W.: 305n, 335, 345, 353
- Casemates: 24. *See also* Bunkers; Pillboxes.
- Casby, 1st Sgt. Volley: 158
- Casualties. *See also* Medical aid men; Wounded, evacuation of.  
 comparison between German and American: 415  
 by friendly fire: 25, 25n, 171, 188-91, 215  
 summary of: 414-15, 415n  
 trench foot: 397
- Casualties, nonbattle: 415, 415n. *See also* Combat fatigue.
- Catlett, Pfc. John E.: 156
- Cavalry Groups  
 4th: 252, 254  
 102d: 314, 362
- Cetel, Pfc. Harold: 140, 148
- Chafin, T. Sgt. Harry O.: 57, 57n
- Chambley: 6, 41
- Charron, Pfc. Raymond J.: 139
- Chemical Battalion, 86th: 253, 258, 339, 382
- Chemical (Smoke Generator) Companies  
 84th: 8, 42, 61, 63-67, 74, 74n, 134-35, 178  
 161st: 67
- le Chêne: 7, 12-13, 14, 17, 30
- Chmura, Capt. W. M.: 307
- Christensen, Maj. R. C.: 327, 376-77
- Christian, S. Sgt. George A.: 354
- Church, Capt. Ferris: 23-25, 27
- Cipra, S. Sgt. Benjamin A. P., Jr.: 379
- Clark, Lt. Gen. Mark W.: 109, 204, 289
- Clarke, 2d Lt. John J.: 277, 304, 310, 324
- Clarke, Pfc. Vincent C.: 157, 159
- Clough, Sgt. Arthur: 355-56
- Clay, 1st Lt. Roberts: 170-71
- Cohn, Pvt. Bruce: 234
- Cole, Lt. Col. Robert H.: 109, 110, 113, 125, 204
- Cole, Capt. Sidney C.: 314
- Colegrove, Capt. Eldon B.: 28
- Collinaccia: 128, 165, 207
- Collins, Pvt. Ray C.: 121, 122, 123, 124, 184
- Cologne: 274
- Column  
 of battalions: 268, 276  
 of companies: 268-69, 283  
 of files: 181, 183, 186, 193, 195, 213, 214-15, 216, 221, 222, 232, 326, 364  
 of platoons: 179, 181, 207, 262, 360  
 of squads. *See* Squad columns.  
 of threes: 236  
 of twos: 136, 267
- Combat Commands  
 A, 7th Armored Division: 6, 7, 8, 13, 81, 88  
 B, 7th Armored Division: 6-9, 13-17, 21, 39, 80-83, 88-93, 95  
 R, 7th Armored Division: 6, 7, 13, 95
- Combat fatigue: 38, 56, 67, 87, 89, 121, 122, 163, 168, 179, 197, 209, 210, 255, 266, 325, 335, 343, 345. *See also* Morale.
- Combat teams  
 2d Infantry: 17, 81, 88  
 11th Infantry: 8-9
- Communications: 32, 44, 53, 62, 109, 130, 135, 135-36, 140, 143, 158, 171-72, 173, 189, 206, 286, 297, 297n, 320, 320n, 327, 335, 362, 382. *See also* Radio; SCR's; Telephones.
- Concertina barbed wire: 147
- Concealment: 30, 40, 46, 47, 52, 53, 65, 75, 117, 123, 124, 129, 139, 159, 160, 161, 183, 184, 185, 187, 194, 195, 299
- Condon, 1st Lt. James A.: 266-67, 345, 354
- Cook, Sgt. John B.: 314, 363, 385, 386
- Corey, 1st Lt. William S.: 179-84, 185, 186-91, 193, 194-97, 208, 220, 221
- Corniolo: 128, 174
- Corny: 12, 22-23, 25, 37, 38, 41, 47, 53-59, 57n, 79, 83, 84, 87, 89, 90
- Corps, II: 103-04, 107, 109, 110, 111, 125, 131-33, 164, 173, 174-77, 204, 215-16, 239, 240
- Corps, V: 251, 251n, 252-53, 253n, 257, 259, 293, 343, 362, 373, 389, 413, 416, 416n
- Corps, VII: 251-52, 253-57, 259, 343, 416
- Corps, VIII: 414, 415
- Corps, XII: 8, 27, 28, 40, 52, 59
- Corps, XX: 3-5, 3n, 8-9, 14, 21, 27, 30, 52, 59, 81, 90, 95
- Cota, Maj. Gen. Norman D.: 251, 255, 271n, 311, 313, 323, 327, 332, 338, 343, 361, 362, 375n, 380, 389
- Côte de Faye: 41-43, 54, 57-59, 84, 89
- Cottingham, Lt. Col. Levin B.: 63-64, 67, 74n
- Coulter, Maj. Gen. John B.: 104, 203
- Cover: 12, 20, 28, 46, 47, 50, 53, 61, 72, 74, 75, 79, 93, 120, 123, 124, 139, 140, 148, 154, 156, 157, 160, 161, 168, 185, 194, 223, 227, 237, 285, 329, 334, 365, 366
- Crain, Capt. Charles L.: 345
- Crayton, Sgt. Arch H.: 35

- Crayton, Cpl. J. W.: 384  
 Creggan, Capt. Thomas F.: 379, 396  
 Crespi, Pfc. Angelo F.: 159  
 Cucciano, Battle School at: 224  
 Culpepper, T. Sgt. Thomas A.: 139  
 Cuppeli, 1st Lt. Ralph R.: 54
- Daley, Col. Edmund K.: 313, 336n, 338, 357-59, 361  
 Dams: 74, 75, 251, 251-52n, 255, 257  
 Dana, Maj. Richard A.: 327, 375, 378, 389  
 D'Anillo, S. Sgt. Carmine F.: 77  
 Davis, Brig. Gen. George A.: 307, 309, 310, 328, 356, 357-58, 359, 361, 362, 363, 364, 386, 388, 389, 393, 396, 399, 401  
 Davis, S. Sgt. Herbert H.: 138  
 Davis, 1st Lt. Howard O.: 315, 337, 343, 345-46, 347, 356, 363, 388-89, 397  
 Davis, Capt. William B.: 46, 51  
 Deception, German: 25, 31, 149, 187, 196, 228, 379-80. *See also* Camouflage.  
 Defense positions, American: 26, 47-51, 54, 57-59, 83, 87, 93, 94, 95, 129, 148, 154, 155, 157-58, 159, 160-61, 169, 170, 193-94, 219, 221, 222, 230, 233, 234-36, 262, 265-66, 268, 272, 283, 284, 284n, 290, 291, 297, 305-06, 306, 309, 310, 320, 321, 326, 328, 347-48, 352, 356, 356n, 357, 360, 361-62, 364, 365-66, 377, 379, 380, 389, 392, 394  
 Defense positions, German: 4-5, 7, 23-24, 54, 103, 104-06, 109, 110, 112, 123, 124, 131-32, 140-41, 146, 173-74, 184-85, 193, 198, 199, 216, 217, 223, 225, 226-27, 238, 240, 257, 293, 342, 369, 372, 414  
 De Marco, Capt. Michael: 303, 409  
 Devine, Brig. Gen. John M.: 88  
 Di Castro Hill: 165  
 Di Fabbio, Pvt. George J.: 162  
 Di Loreto, Capt. Panfilo C.: 34  
 Di Pietro, Cpl. Emidio: 57n  
 Dickey, Pfc. George T.: 27  
 Diersing, 2d Lt. John A.: 26  
 Dille, 1st Lt. Eugene N.: 52, 54, 54n  
 Direction, loss of: 143, 147, 339, 364, 387  
 Distel, Pvt. Jules D.: 151  
 Dodson, Pfc. Wilbur H.: 50  
 Doherty, Capt. Henry R.: 310  
 Dornot bridgehead: 3-39  
 Dorris, Pvt. James S.: 185, 197  
 Dozier, S. Sgt. Charles J.: 158, 159, 160, 162, 168  
 Drake, 1st Lt. Nathan F.: 20, 23  
 Dubuisson, Lt. Col. James G.: 6  
 Dueren: 251, 257  
 Duffey, Sgt. Loyd J.: 190  
 Dutko, 1st Lt. George: 46, 47, 60, 77, 93
- Edmund, 1st Lt. Curtis M.: 315, 326, 330, 374-75  
 Einem, von, Col. Kurt: 54n
- Elston, Pfc. Russell G.: 211, 214  
 Engineer Combat Battalions  
   7th: 70, 72n  
   20th: 253, 254, 286, 338, 357, 377  
   103d: 288n, 357  
   146th: 253, 357, 359, 361, 373, 382, 388, 413, 416  
   150th: 28  
   160th: 56, 70, 75  
   204th: 37, 41, 70  
   294th: 252  
   310th: 165  
   1340th: 253, 357, 361, 372  
 Engineer Combat Groups  
   1103d: 8, 20, 28, 41, 63, 70, 72, 86  
   1171st: 253, 253n, 254-55, 357, 359, 379, 413  
 Engineer plans: 20, 41-42, 44, 72, 254-55, 382  
 Engineers: 254-55, 327-28, 333-34. *See also* Engineer units.  
   act as riflemen: 357-62  
   Equipment: 75, 113, 122, 141, 415. *See also* Supplies.  
   Equipment Co., 623d Light: 70  
 Erkman, 1st Lt. George O.: 156, 157  
 Erlenbusch, Lt. Col. Robert C.: 6, 90  
 Eschweiler (Meröder Wald): 251n
- Faller, Pvt. Murray C.: 138  
 Fankell, Pfc. Kenneth L.: 187  
 Farber, 1st Lt. Dawson L., Jr.: 169, 189, 215  
 Farino, Pfc. Joseph: 121, 184  
 Feeney, Pfc. Richard M.: 187  
 Feldman, Capt. Emanuel: 34  
 Fent, Sgt. Richard E.: 209-11, 213, 227, 229-30, 232  
 Ferrying operations: 21, 41, 44, 55, 56, 70. *See also* Assault boats.  
 Fey: 83  
 Field Artillery Battalions  
   19th: 8, 13, 17, 27  
   21st: 17  
   46th: 17, 41, 42, 53  
   76th: 253  
   107th: 253  
   108th: 253, 300, 307  
   109th: 253  
   229th: 253, 254, 268, 285, 299, 305, 307, 320, 321, 338, 355, 369, 377, 404  
   284th: 17, 28  
   328th: 111  
   329th: 111, 125, 164, 183, 189, 190, 198, 225  
   403d: 111, 125, 135, 170, 178, 183, 197, 198, 203, 206, 225, 238  
   558th: 17  
 Field Artillery Groups  
   178th: 111, 125, 164, 170, 206, 224-25  
   187th: 253  
   188th: 253  
   190th: 253  
   203d: 92  
   423d: 111

- Field Orders  
 XX Corps: 4, 89  
 28th Infantry Division: 406
- Fifth Army: 175, 223
- Fighter Bomber Groups  
 365th: 272, 325, 339–41, 369, 385, 389, 404  
 366th: 272  
 368th: 272  
 370th: 272, 389  
 371st: 83  
 406th: 52  
 474th: 272, 339, 369, 398, 404, 405
- Fighter-bombers: 52, 54, 165. *See also* Fighter-Bomber Groups.
- Finkle, Pvt. Richard E.: 121, 124
- Firenze: 125, 128, 132, 135, 141, 165, 174, 178, 201, 206, 224–25, 240
- First aid: 163, 189. *See also* Medical aid men.
- Fisher, Pfc. Kermit C.: 213, 228
- Flak: 339
- Flak tank: 22n
- Flame throwers: 141n
- Flank security: 17, 28, 35, 42, 170, 205, 220, 222, 230, 251, 254, 258, 264, 266, 276, 306, 373, 393
- Fleig, 1st Lt. Raymond E.: 295, 303–04, 306, 307–09, 310–11, 321–23, 325, 329, 350, 400
- Fléville: 6
- Flood, Lt. Col. Albert: 291, 303, 307, 327
- Florence: 110
- Fog: 90, 92, 93, 94, 256
- Fog oil: 65, 70
- Fonte Fredda: 107
- Footbridges: 44, 81
- Ford, S. Sgt. William E.: 167, 168, 169
- Fort Driant: 7, 12, 13, 25n, 35, 41, 80, 84, 95
- Fort Jeanne d'Arc: 13, 80
- Fort Marival: 13, 80
- Fort St. Blaise: 12, 13, 16, 17, 30, 38, 41, 52, 83  
 advance to: 23–27
- Fort Sommy: 12, 16, 17, 23, 30, 38, 41, 52, 83
- Fortress Metz: 3, 4–5
- Franco-Prussian War: 4
- Frear, Capt. Seth R.: 374
- Froitscheidt: 281, 357
- Fuller, 1st Lt. Jack W.: 314, 323, 331, 337–38, 372, 388
- Fuller, Lt. Col. William H. G.: 90
- Futa Pass: 103, 109, 140, 173, 175, 207
- G-2: 4, 255, 343, 371. *See also* Intelligence.
- G-2 Periodic Reports: 343
- G-3 Periodic Reports: 362–63
- Gardner, Lewis: 376
- Garigliano River: 110
- Garlitch, Pfc. John C.: 162
- Garner, S. Sgt. Jay E.: 187, 188–89, 191
- Gasoline shortage: 3–5, 61
- Gearhart, T/5 Charles R.: 29
- Gemuend: 341, 404
- George, 1st Lt. William: 303, 324, 329–31, 369, 403, 407, 409n
- German units  
*Army, Fifth Panzer*: 274  
*Army, Seventh*: 274, 293, 318, 319, 415n  
*Army, Tenth*: 106, 132, 175, 201, 224, 240  
*Army, Fourteenth*: 106, 109, 132, 175, 201, 224, 240  
*Army Group B*: 257, 274, 275, 318, 406  
*Army Group C*: 109, 201, 224, 240  
*Battalion, 4th Antitank*: 173, 200  
*Battalion, 1st, 12th Parachute Regiment*: 173–74, 200, 223, 224, 225  
*Battalion, 2d, 12th Parachute Regiment*: 174, 193, 200, 225  
*Battalion, 3d, 12th Parachute Regiment*: 174, 193, 200, 225  
*Battalion, 18th Luftwaffe Fortress*: 372n  
*Battalion, 20th Luftwaffe Fortress*: 372n  
*Battalion, 1st, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*: 26, 30  
*Battalion, 2d, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*: 22–23, 25, 30, 34, 38n  
*Battalion, 3d, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*: 31  
*Battalion, 4th, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment*: 30  
*Battalion, 1st, 60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*: 371  
*Battalion, 2d, 60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*: 318n, 371  
*Battalion, 103d Tank*: 80  
*Battalion, 208th Replacement and Training*: 26, 31  
*Battalion, 282d Infantry* (“*Battalion Voss*”): 22–23, 31, 54, 80  
*Battalion, 2d, 1055th Regiment*: 293, 318  
*Battalion, 3d, 1055th Regiment*: 293, 318  
*Battalion, 253d Engineer*: 372n  
*Battalion, 600th Army Engineer*: 372n  
*Battalion Berg*. *See* *Battalion, SS Signal School Metz*.  
*Battalion, 1st, Grenadier Lehr Brigade*: 175, 201  
*Battalion, 2d, Grenadier Lehr Brigade*: 175, 201, 224, 240  
*Battalion, Reconnaissance, 116th Panzer Division*: 319, 341, 372, 391  
*Battalion, SS Signal School Metz* (“*Battalion Berg*”): 5n, 22, 23, 25, 26, 31, 80  
*Battalion Voss*. *See* *Battalion, 282d Infantry*.  
*Brigade, Grenadier Lehr*: 106, 106n, 132, 223–24, 224, 225, 240  
*Corps, I Parachute*: 106, 132, 175, 201, 224, 240  
*Corps, XIII SS*: 54, 54n  
*Corps, XIV Panzer*: 175  
*Corps, XXXVII Panzer*: 54  
*Corps, LXXIV*: 274, 318, 415n  
*Division, 3d Panzer Grenadier*: 4, 54, 55n, 60, 80  
*Division, 4th Parachute*: 106, 175, 200, 223, 240  
*Division, 5th Panzer Grenadier*: 80  
*Division, 12th Volks Grenadier*: 257, 318  
*Division, 15th Panzer Grenadier*: 4, 80  
*Division, 16th SS Panzer Grenadier*: 109, 132, 201, 224  
*Division, 17th SS Panzer Grenadier* (“*Goetz von Berlichingen*”): 4, 5, 22, 60, 80

## German units—Continued

- Division, 89th Infantry:* 257, 318–19, 318n, 341–42, 341n, 372, 405–06, 414, 415n, 416  
*Division, 116th Panzer:* 257, 274, 293, 372, 414, 416  
*Division, 272d Volks Grenadier:* 257, 293, 342  
*Division, 275th Infantry:* 257, 280–81, 292, 318, 342, 372, 392, 414  
*Division, 362d Grenadier:* 109  
*Division, 347th Infantry:* 318  
*Division Number 462:* 3n, 4, 5n, 22, 26, 31, 54, 80  
*Regiment, 8th Panzer Grenadier:* 54  
*Regiment, 12th Parachute:* 106, 110, 132, 173, 174, 198, 200, 224, 240  
*Regiment, 16th Panzer:* 293, 318, 319, 319n, 341, 372, 391  
*Regiment, 37th SS Panzer Grenadier:* 22, 30–31, 34, 35  
*Regiment, 60th Panzer Grenadier:* 341, 342, 372, 391  
*Regiment, 115th Panzer Grenadier:* 59, 80  
*Regiment, 156th Panzer Grenadier:* 318–19, 342, 371, 391  
*Regiment, 1010 Security:* 5n  
*Regiment, 1055th:* 293, 318n, 341, 341n, 372, 391  
*Regiment, 1056th:* 318, 318n, 319, 341n, 342, 372, 391  
*Regiment, Artillery Lehr:* 174  
 Germeter, terrain: 252  
 Gerow, Brig. Gen. Lee S.: 203–05, 223, 236  
 Gerow, Lt. Gen. Leonard T.: 416, 416n  
 Gerrie, Capt. Jack S.: 27, 35, 36  
 Getty, Pvt. Donald M.: 185  
 Giogo Pass, il: 103, 109, 125–28, 131–35, 140–41, 164–65, 173–75, 178, 198, 201–04, 206–07, 223–25, 226, 234, 236, 238–39, 240  
 Gorze: 6, 7, 9, 14, 17, 28, 39  
*Gotenstellung.* See Gothic Line.  
 Gothic Line: 103, 103n, 104, 106, 109–10, 112, 131, 164, 176–77, 200, 204, 223, 239–40  
 Granger, Capt. George S.: 336, 346–47, 355–56, 363, 382, 385  
 Gravelotte: 6–7, 12  
 Gray, S. Sgt. Donald O.: 385  
 Gray, 2d Lt. Henry R.: 348  
 “Green Line”: 103n  
 Greenberg, 2d Lt. Karl: 44  
 Greene, 1st Lt. Jack B.: 276, 283, 328. See also Greene Hornets.  
 “Greene Hornet Switch”: 328, 335  
 Greene Hornets: 276, 283, 328. See also Greene, 1st Lt. Jack B.  
 Gregory, Pfc. Charles F.: 221  
 Gresham, 2d Lt. Harry R.: 113–25, 128, 179–86, 188, 189, 190–94, 196–97  
 Griffin, S. Sgt. Leslie W.: 77  
 Grigsby, Sgt. Gordon K.: 220  
 Gritzmacher, T. Sgt. George A.: 37  
 Grosshau: 342, 389  
 Gubitosi, Pvt. Subastian D.: 187  
 Gustav Line: 110  
 Guy, 1st Lt. Robert B.: 47  
 Guy, Pvt. Willie L.: 154  
 Hackard, Capt. Clifford T.: 269, 271, 374  
 Hollowell, 1st Lt. William H.: 53, 77  
 Hamlett, Cpl. Thomas W.: 367  
 Hand grenades  
     American: 46, 51, 129, 141, 150, 156, 162, 167–68, 169, 179, 184, 185, 188, 210, 211, 214, 216, 227, 230, 232, 234, 237, 263, 265, 283, 365, 376, 384  
     German: 57, 59, 138, 139, 148, 155, 156, 163, 169, 185, 186, 187, 188, 193, 211–13, 221, 227, 228, 229, 232, 237, 360  
 Hand signals: 382  
 Hanks, 1st Lt. Clemens M.: 148, 153, 154–55  
 Hansen, 1st Lt. Carl E.: 51  
 Harpin, Pfc. Lucien: 156  
 Harris, Capt. George A.: 311  
 Harris, 1st Lt. Leo E.: 46, 47  
 Harscheidt: 281, 290, 293, 297–300, 300n, 352, 355, 369, 404  
 Hasenfeld: 282, 290, 297–300, 300n, 318  
 Hatzfeld, Lt. Col. Theodore S.: 335, 353, 355, 359  
 Haughey, Maj. Wilfrid H., Jr.: 42, 46, 53  
 Hazam, 1st Lt. Mitchell J.: 79  
 Hazlett, Maj. Robert T.: 268, 269, 284, 284n, 327, 375  
 Heidrich, Generalleutnant Richard: 224  
 Heimbach: 272, 339  
 Heliker, Maj. Sherburne J.: 109  
 Hembree, Sgt. Claud W.: 26, 27, 37  
 Herndon, Pvt. William B.: 167  
 Hickman, Pvt. James R.: 139  
 Highway 65: 103, 110  
 Highway 6524: 103–04, 107, 110, 115, 131, 132, 133, 143, 165, 176, 178, 200, 204, 239  
 Hill 325: 41, 43, 50, 51, 57, 77, 79, 83, 89  
 Hill 360: 178  
 Hill 366: 35  
 Hill 369: 41–43, 47, 50, 54, 60, 75, 87, 88  
 Hill 370: 41, 43, 50–51, 59, 67, 75, 77–79, 83, 87, 88  
 Hill 385: 81, 90, 92  
 Hill 386: 41–43, 46–50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 60, 67, 77, 87, 88, 93, 94  
 Hill 396: 41, 83, 88, 90, 92, 93–94  
 Hill 400: 90–92, 95  
 Hill 577: 115  
 Hill 578: 105, 109  
 Hill 606: 115–17, 130, 136  
 Hill 624: 105, 122–23, 142, 178, 179, 181, 194, 207, 213, 221  
 Hill 782: 105–06, 109, 117, 121–30, 134, 136–38, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 146, 148, 172, 179–84, 190–97, 207, 208–15, 217, 220, 221–23  
 Hill 844: 133, 176  
 Hill 862: 134  
 Hill 926: 105, 109, 110, 115, 117, 123, 124, 130, 134, 135, 136, 141–42, 143–46, 164, 176, 177–79, 181, 183, 185, 193, 194, 197–98, 203, 204–05, 206, 208, 217–23, 226–28, 229–39  
 Hill 1029: 135, 226  
 Hill 1041: 226

- Hillier, S. Sgt. Stanley G.: 123  
 Hillyard, 1st Lt. Johnny R.: 31  
 Hinrichsen, Pfc. Carl E.: 187, 197  
 Hinton, S. Sgt. Pat H.: 213  
 Hip boots: 360, 360n  
 Hitler: 4  
 Hoffman, Capt. John M.: 33-34  
 Hogan, Thomas E.: 32  
 Holladay, 1st Lt. Charles T.: 129, 138, 208, 220  
 Horn, 1st Lt. George E.: 289, 309-10, 313, 380  
 "Horseshoe woods": 17, 22, 23, 25, 26, 30, 36  
 Hostrup: Capt. Bruce: 288, 295, 295-96, 304, 310, 311, 324, 329, 342, 400  
 Howard, Maj. Thomas L.: 75  
 Howitzers. *See* Artillery.  
 Huertgen Forest: 251, 251n, 252, 253, 254, 256-57, 258, 271-72, 274, 275, 283, 293, 315, 319, 389, 391, 413-14  
 Huston, 2d Lt. Robert E.: 289, 296, 304, 309, 310, 313  
 Huyck, Capt. John B.: 306
- Identification panels: 17, 308, 356  
 Infantry battalions  
 1st, 10th Infantry: 41, 42-43, 44, 51, 52, 53, 54, 59, 60, 65, 70, 77, 87, 93  
 2d, 10th Infantry: 41, 43, 44, 50-51, 57, 59, 65, 70, 77, 79, 87  
 3d, 10th Infantry: 40, 41, 52-53, 54-55, 56, 70, 83, 87, 88, 90, 92, 93, 94, 95  
 1st, 11th Infantry: 9, 13, 34-35, 40, 80, 83  
 2d, 11th Infantry: 13-17, 14n, 20, 20n, 21, 24, 27, 28, 32, 33n, 38, 39, 80, 83, 88  
 3d, 11th Infantry: 8, 9, 13, 14n, 16, 17, 20, 21, 23, 29, 32, 34, 55-56, 57, 79, 84, 87  
 1st, 109th Infantry: 271-72, 291-92, 315, 371, 386, 387, 392, 397, 406, 413  
 2d, 109th Infantry: 272, 292, 315, 339, 386, 388, 392, 397, 400, 413  
 3d, 109th Infantry: 258, 272, 291-92, 386-87, 392, 393, 396, 400, 401, 406, 411, 411n, 413  
 1st, 110th Infantry: 272, 292, 317, 339, 371, 404  
 2d, 110th Infantry: 272, 292, 317, 339, 371, 404  
 3d, 110th Infantry: 272, 292, 317, 326, 332, 339, 343, 349, 352, 366, 368, 368-69, 371, 373, 375, 378, 387, 389, 392, 394  
 1st, 112th Infantry: 257, 258, 267-71, 274-76, 283-85, 284n, 293, 294n, 306, 321, 327, 331, 343, 350, 366, 372-73, 378, 392, 394, 397  
 2d, 112th Infantry: 256-58, 271, 274-77, 285-88, 293-94, 305, 315, 320, 328, 336, 343, 344, 345, 352-53, 359, 362, 363, 369, 373, 386, 392, 397  
 3d, 112th Infantry: 258, 268, 271, 274-76, 282-85, 284n, 290, 293, 294n, 297, 303, 306-07, 315, 319, 320n, 321, 324, 327, 329, 331, 343, 366, 369, 372-73, 375, 378, 392, 394, 403, 409n, 411n  
 1st, 363d Infantry: 107, 203  
 2d, 363d Infantry: 203  
 3d, 363d Infantry: 107, 109, 111, 112, 113, 130, 203  
 1st, 338th Infantry: 110-13, 124, 130-31, 133-35, 146, 169, 171, 174, 176, 181, 183, 189, 190, 194, 198-99, 202, 203, 204, 205, 207-08, 215, 220, 222-24, 227, 233, 234-36, 239  
 2d, 338th Infantry: 110, 113, 131, 133, 171, 173, 200, 203, 204-05, 223, 238  
 3d, 338th Infantry: 110, 113, 133, 176, 181, 203, 204, 205, 208, 219, 221, 222-23, 227, 234-39  
 Infantry Division, 4th: 371, 373, 404, 413  
 Infantry Division, 5th: 4, 8-12, 13-14, 17, 20, 25n, 28, 30, 63, 70, 80-81, 88, 89-90, 92, 95  
 Infantry Division, 9th: 251, 252, 253, 255, 274  
 Infantry Division, 28th: 251-54, 252n, 255-57, 259, 268, 271-75, 284, 291-94, 302, 314, 317-18, 319, 338, 343, 362, 372, 373, 378, 389, 391, 392, 398, 406, 411n, 415, 415n, 416, 417  
 Infantry Division, 34th: 104, 107  
 Infantry Division, 78th: 416-17  
 Infantry Division, 80th: 8, 27  
 Infantry Division, 85th: 104, 107-11, 125, 130, 131, 133, 141n, 142, 143-46, 164, 165, 173-76, 190, 193, 198, 200-204  
 Infantry Division, 90th: 4, 7, 8, 80, 88, 89  
 Infantry Division, 91st: 104, 107-10, 125, 131, 133, 136, 173, 176, 200, 203, 204, 239  
 Infantry Regiments  
 2d: 8, 13, 80, 81, 89, 95  
 8th: 414  
 10th: 13, 27, 29, 34-35, 40, 54, 56-61, 62, 63-65, 79, 87, 88, 93n, 95  
 11th: 8, 13-14, 16, 21-22, 29, 30, 32, 35, 43, 55-59, 93n, 95  
 12th: 371, 373, 386, 392, 404, 406, 413  
 109th: 253, 256, 271-72, 274-75, 291-93, 313, 318, 320, 339, 341, 343, 362, 371-73, 372n, 386, 387, 389, 392, 399, 404, 413-16  
 110th: 254-56, 268, 272, 275, 291-92, 294, 317, 320, 326, 332, 336, 339, 342, 343, 350, 352, 357, 359, 362, 372, 379, 386, 387, 389-92, 397, 404, 406, 413, 414, 416  
 112th: 254-59, 268-71, 275-76, 286, 291, 293-94, 304, 319-20, 335n, 338-39, 343, 346, 357, 359, 368, 372-73, 378, 387, 389, 393, 404, 406, 407, 413-16  
 337th: 133, 204, 239  
 338th: 109-13, 124, 125, 130-34, 142-46, 164-65, 174, 176, 178, 194, 200-204, 206-07, 216, 225, 239-40  
 339th: 110, 111, 131, 133, 143, 165, 173, 174, 176, 199-200, 206, 223, 236, 239  
 361st: 176, 200  
 363d: 104, 107-10, 125, 130-32, 141, 173, 176, 200, 203-04, 223  
 Infantry supply: 329-30  
 Infantry support rafts: 20, 70, 72, 75, 81  
 Infiltration: 25, 60, 223, 234, 299, 305, 315, 318, 331, 338, 339, 343, 362, 365, 371, 375  
 Intelligence: 4, 5, 13, 103, 110, 112, 132, 140-41, 149, 174, 190, 208, 255, 283

- Irwin, Maj. Gen. S. Le Roy: 8, 9, 13-14, 16, 27, 30, 35, 40, 55, 76, 80-81, 83, 88  
 Isley, Lt. Col. Carl J.: 359, 360-61, 363-66, 381-82  
 Iverson, Pfc. Walter W.: 313  
 Izzo, 2d Lt. Louis J.: 337, 338
- Jackson, Lt. Col. Willis O.: 109-21, 123-25, 130, 133-34, 136, 140, 143, 157, 164, 169-73, 176, 176n, 189-90, 194, 197, 202-03, 204-06, 207-08, 215, 216, 219, 221-23, 225  
 Jenkins, S. Sgt. Paul F.: 264  
 Jensi, T. Sgt. Walter E.: 51  
 Johns, 2d Lt. Benjamin: 313, 333  
 Johnson, 2d Lt. Clarence A.: 282, 385-86, 388, 409  
 Johnson, Lt. Clyde R.: 354  
 Johnson, Lt. Col. James R.: 42, 53, 76  
 Johnson, 1st Lt. Loyd C.: 401  
 Johnson, T. Sgt. Robert M.: 54-55  
 Jones, Sgt. Harvey E.: 228  
 Jones, Pfc. Ira: 153  
 Jones, T. Sgt. Kenneth: 354  
 Jordan, Pvt. Frank A.: 189  
 Jouy-aux-Arches: 12, 16, 22, 23, 25, 34, 37  
 Joyce, S. Sgt. Martin J.: 349
- Kall River, described: 252  
 Kall Trail, described: 288  
 Katz, Capt. Morris: 336  
 Kauffman, 1st Lt. Eldeen: 263, 264-65, 344, 345, 354  
 Keathley, S. Sgt. George D.: 157-58, 167-68  
 Kehaly, 1st Lt. William J.: 360, 364  
 Kelley, Capt. Donald C.: 328, 329  
 Kelley, Maj. Lysle E.: 110, 204, 236  
 Kelsey, Sgt. William J.: 155, 157-58, 159, 162, 167, 169  
 Kern, Pfc. Bud: 265  
 Kessell, Pvt. Robert H.: 187  
 Kesselring, Generalfeldmarschall Albert: 132, 201, 224, 240  
 Keyes, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey: 104, 107, 109, 204  
 King, Capt. Robert A.: 113-15, 117-20, 122-23, 124, 128-30, 135-40, 143, 176-79, 184, 189, 196, 197, 207-08, 232  
 Kirkes, Sgt. Harvey E.: 154  
 Kistner, S. Sgt. Robert W.: 220, 221  
 Kleinhau: 252, 342, 416  
 Klinginsmith, Cpl. James: 354  
 Knob 1: 105, 184, 190-91, 193, 194, 195, 214-15, 217, 222  
 Knob 2: 105, 146, 184-87, 188, 190-94, 196, 198, 215, 216-17, 220-21, 223  
 Knob 3: 105, 134, 178, 228, 229, 230, 237-39  
 Kohler, S. Sgt. William H.: 233  
 Kommerscheidt, terrain: 252-53  
 Koss, Pvt. Frederick: 148  
 Krasman, 2d Lt. Albert J.: 208-09, 211, 215, 217, 219, 220-21, 227-28, 230, 233, 234  
 Krause, Generalleutnant Walther: 3n
- Krieder, T/4 James A.: 310, 331, 366  
 Kruger, Pfc. Morris H.: 154, 155  
 Kubina, Pvt. Peter, Jr.: 229, 230, 232  
 Kudiak, Sgt. Tony: 308  
 Kunze, Pfc. Elmer J.: 228
- Lakowicz, Pfc. John: 138  
 Lalopa, Pfc. Frank: 27  
 Lamb, 1st Lt. George R.: 65  
 Lamb, 2d Lt. Joseph P.: 169  
 Lammersdorf: 251n  
 Landesschuetzen (local security units): 318n  
 Lang, T. Sgt. Fred C.: 149, 151-57, 162, 166-67  
 Latham, Lt. Col. Robert H.: 84  
 Lealsy, Pvt. Paul: 308  
 Ledbetter, Maj. Homer C.: 9  
 Ledford, S. Sgt. Herman: 149-51  
 Leming, 1st Lt. James J.: 262-64, 267-68, 336, 347, 357  
 Lemmon, Lt. Col. Kelley B., Jr.: 14-16, 14n, 20, 25n, 27, 27n, 31n, 35, 36  
 Leon, Pfc. David R.: 151  
 Leonard, 1st Lt. Turney W.: 314, 323, 326, 337, 350, 350n  
 Leonard, Pfc. William C., Jr.: 156  
 Lewakowski, Pvt. Joseph I.: 37-38  
 Lightner, Pvt. Alfred D.: 214-17, 219, 229-32  
 Lind, Capt. Ralph E., Jr.: 357, 358, 359, 366-67, 379, 380  
 Linguiti, Capt. Paschal A.: 285, 331, 411  
 Lipe, Sgt. Andrew J.: 376  
 Lisy, 1st Lt. Stanley: 311  
 Lithuanian labor battalions: 223-24, 240  
 Litter bearers: 29, 34, 171, 197, 282-83, 303, 331, 398, 399, 401-03, 409, 411, 411n  
 Littlehales, S. Sgt. Arthur: 326  
 Livesay, Maj. Gen. William G.: 104  
 Lockett, Lt. Col. Landon J.: 307, 324  
 Loiano: 132  
 Loing: 8  
 Lorry: 54, 77, 89-95  
 Losses, matériel, total: 415  
 Lowry, 1st Lt. Stephen T.: 31  
 Lucca: 201  
 Lusk, Sgt. Albert A.: 166, 168, 169  
 Lutiano: 181  
 Lutz, Capt. Edwin M.: 286, 288, 289, 309, 348, 357, 361  
 Luxembourg: 417  
 Luzerailles Farm: 16, 23
- M-2 smoke generator: 65, 70  
 MacDaniel, Pvt. Doyle W.: 360  
 McDonald, Pfc. Patrick H., Jr.: 157  
 McElroy, 1st Lt. Goodwin W.: 314, 323, 326, 332, 337  
 McGraw, Sgt. Joseph L.: 346  
 McGraw, 2d Lt. Robert P.: 170

- Machine guns  
 American: 44, 47, 50, 51, 53, 59, 77, 130, 134, 139, 141, 158, 160, 171, 178, 179, 181, 185, 194, 207, 208, 214, 220, 221, 222, 233, 237, 258, 261, 262, 265, 266, 267, 276, 277, 281, 284, 290, 297, 353, 355-56, 365-66, 387  
 German: 25, 31, 46, 59, 77, 104-05, 106, 109, 117, 122, 123-24, 128-29, 146, 148, 156, 168, 185, 186, 187, 191, 198, 200, 217, 221, 224, 227, 228, 232-33, 234, 237, 263, 269, 298-99, 323, 354  
 Machine pistol: 162, 216, 264-65, 333-34, 364, 365  
 McMillin, T. Sgt. Robert: 393  
 MacMinn, 1st Lt. John R., Jr.: 128, 129, 138, 139, 195  
 Madden, Chaplain Alan P.: 411  
 Maginot Line: 5  
 Mahaley, Capt. Walter C.: 313  
 Mail: 141, 168  
 Main Effort  
 American: 5, 103, 104, 107, 109, 110, 132, 133, 175, 199, 204, 207, 251, 252, 254, 257-59, 268, 271, 271n, 272, 275, 276-77, 319, 416  
 German: 174  
 Main line of resistance: 27, 105, 109, 146, 171, 172, 173, 174, 178-79, 185, 193, 194, 200, 202, 217, 222, 223, 225, 229  
 Makousky, 1st Lt. Lumir T.: 367, 380  
 Maness, Chaplain Ralph E.: 411  
 Manin, 1st Lt. Kelsey C.: 380  
 Map study, German: 274  
 Maps: 12, 13, 44, 112, 115, 122, 208, 252, 255, 293  
 "Marching fire and bayonets": 47, 47n  
 Mardigny: 83, 88-92, 95  
 Marieulles: 83, 89, 90, 92  
 Mark IV tank. *See* Tanks, German.  
 Markey, Sgt. James J.: 226, 304, 310, 312, 366  
 Markey, Pfc. Lawrence, Jr.: 181-82, 187-88, 228  
 Marly: 22  
 Marshall, 1st Lt. Richard A.: 36, 37  
 Mars-la-Tour: 6  
 Martin, Capt. Ross: 375  
 Martines, Pvt. Diego: 124  
 Marx, Pfc. Clifford P.: 197  
 Mathews, Pfc. Noble R.: 154-55  
 Mausbach: 357  
 May, Pvt. Truett J.: 187  
 Maynard, Pvt. Oscar: 185, 188  
 Mays, Lt. Col. Samuel E.: 314, 330, 332, 356, 386, 387, 388  
 Medical Administrative Corps: 282, 285. *See also* Medical aid men.  
 Medical aid men: 25, 27, 29, 33-34, 62, 197, 282-83, 285, 299, 303, 324, 331-32, 332n, 334, 367-68, 373, 375, 392, 401-04, 407. *See also* Wounded, evacuation of.  
 Medics. *See* Medical aid men.  
 Meier, 1st Lt. Bernard E.: 382-85, 386  
 Mestrenger Muehle: 277, 281, 312, 324, 342, 366, 372, 391  
 Met fortifications: 3, 4-5  
 Metz military schools: 4-5, 5n, 80, 94, 106n. *See also* German units, *Battalion, SS Signal School Metz* ("Battalion Berg"); Training, German.  
 Metz Officer Candidate School: 5n  
 Mikkelsen, Col. William H.: 110, 125, 130, 135, 170, 176, 194, 202, 236  
 Military police: 291  
 Miller, Capt. Floyd R.: 93  
 Miller, Capt. Joseph W.: 286-88, 289  
 Mine detection crews: 328, 366, 367  
 Mines  
 American: 258, 259  
 German: 59, 103, 105, 139, 149, 155, 165, 174, 200, 259, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 267, 272, 275, 289, 291, 295, 297, 300, 315, 333, 336, 339, 343, 362, 387, 397  
 Mingus, Pvt. Fred D.: 214  
 Mizer, 2d Lt. Tyrus L.: 33  
 Model, Generalfeldmarschall Walter: 274  
 Molinuccio: 174, 225  
 Monschau: 251, 254, 294  
 Montagnana: 125, 178  
 Monte Altuzzo, terrain: 104-06  
 Monte Castel Guerrino: 206  
 Monte Frassinio: 175  
 Monte Pratone: 204, 239  
 Monte Verruca: 104-05, 107, 110, 131, 133, 143, 173-76, 182, 183, 191, 198-200, 203, 206, 211, 214, 223, 224, 225, 236, 239, 240  
 Montgomery, Capt. Hunter M.: 307, 324, 329  
 Monticelli: 104-05, 107, 110, 112, 131, 133, 146, 173, 174, 176, 200, 203-04, 225, 236, 238, 239  
 Moore, Pvt. Kenneth T.: 159  
 Morale, American: 37, 112, 113, 136, 141, 163, 165-67, 168, 179, 191, 198, 209, 255, 290, 300, 305, 306, 309, 320, 321, 334-35, 356, 359-61. *See also* Combat fatigue.  
 effect of enemy tanks: 325, 350, 375  
 effect of friendly fire: 350  
 effect of friendly tanks: 349  
 effect of mail: 141  
 Morale, German: 224, 239-40, 349  
 Morrison, 2d Lt. Henry W.: 285, 409  
 Mortars: 161, 169-70, 238  
 60-mm.: 194, 221, 222, 238, 262  
 81-mm.: 44, 46, 47, 112, 134, 198, 206-07, 258, 261, 265, 269, 276, 284, 297  
 4.2-inch: 125, 165, 198, 206, 253, 268  
 Mortars, German: 121, 164-65  
 Mos, Pfc. Alton: 156  
 Moscheta: 207  
 Moselle Battery: 12  
 Moselle Canal: 40, 44, 62, 67, 70-71, 86  
 Moselle River, as a military obstacle: 5, 56, 70-71, 72, 74  
 Moselle Valley: 12  
 Mostrom, Pfc. Elmer: 230, 234  
 Muenchen-Gladbach: 257, 274

- Muglia, 2d Lt. Alfred J.: 282-83, 288, 291n, 303, 409  
 Mullins, Sgt. Gamelil: 140, 147, 153, 167, 169  
 Myshak, Pfc. Paul: 213
- Nancy: 52
- Negro units:  
 84th Chemical (SG) Company: 8, 42, 61, 63-67, 74, 74n, 134-35, 178  
 161st Chemical (SG) Company: 67
- Nelson, T. Sgt. Donald: 353  
 Nelson, Col. Gustin M.: 378, 393, 398, 399  
 Neuffer, 1st Lt. John M.: 140, 147-49  
 Nideggen: 252, 272, 314, 315, 339, 404
- Night attack  
 American: 107-09, 113, 216, 238  
 German: 26-27, 30, 77-80
- Night Fighter Group, 422d: 272, 389-91
- Ninth Air Force: 52, 253
- Noren, Sgt. Frank: 35
- Normandy: 8
- North Apennine Mountains: 103
- Novak, 2d Lt. Joseph S.: 263-68, 286, 347-48, 355, 356, 357, 363
- Novéant: 6, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 40, 56, 66
- Nowakowski, S. Sgt. William: 222
- OB WEST*: 4, 406, 406n
- Observation, American: 12, 28, 53, 63, 93, 117, 141, 160, 165, 194, 206, 211, 233, 297, 339, 372. *See also* Air observation.  
 dominant: 20  
 forward: 198  
 observation posts: 32, 64, 124, 146, 170, 198, 206, 217, 259, 266, 315
- Observation, German: 104, 105, 183, 187, 226, 228, 253, 259, 352  
 dominant: 30, 59, 63, 65, 70, 125  
 observation posts: 146, 226, 227
- O'Connell, S. Sgt. James: 62
- Odierna, Pfc. Anthony J.: 149-51
- Officer Candidate Schools, German: 4. *See also* Metz military schools.
- Ogborn, Pfc. Russell G.: 345
- Olson, Sgt. Marvin S.: 376
- O'Malley, Capt. Eugene W.: 279, 291
- O'Neal, Sgt. William: 333-34
- Onville: 13, 88
- Operations Instructions 13, 5th Division: 88
- Orlando, Cpl. Nick P.: 385
- Orr, Sgt. James O.: 181, 183, 186, 190
- Ortiz, Pfc. I.: 354
- Ossola, 2d Lt. Reynold A.: 313, 328, 333, 334
- Ostrowski, Sgt. John: 374
- Outposts  
 American: 6, 17, 57, 104, 210, 221, 223, 258, 339, 363, 366  
 German: 44, 105, 109, 122, 132, 136-40, 149, 210, 211-14, 283
- P-38's: 272, 339, 369, 389, 398, 404-05  
 P-47's: 38, 52, 54, 61, 75, 83, 272, 302-03, 308, 325, 339, 341, 369, 385-86, 404
- Pagny-sur-Moselle: 40, 70, 81, 92
- Paludi, Pfc. John: 234
- Panzerfaust*: 263, 337, 385
- Paratroopers, German: 106, 130, 131, 132. *See also* *Regiment, 12th Parachute* under "German units."
- Paretaio Farmhouse: 112, 113-17, 121, 124, 130, 134, 136, 140, 141, 165, 170-71, 176, 178, 181, 197, 198, 207
- Parker, Pfc. Albert W.: 211
- Parks, Sgt. Edgar A.: 117, 185
- Parrish, Pfc. Reginald W.: 187, 189
- Partisans: 132, 140-41
- Passage of lines: 7, 9, 46, 117, 131, 136, 176, 187, 203, 205, 208, 219, 236, 258, 264, 269, 332  
 lines undetermined: 107, 112, 113
- Patrols, American: 7, 20, 21, 35, 40, 50, 87, 110, 140, 149-51, 166, 179, 208, 238, 255, 276, 283, 290, 309, 317, 320n, 328, 393, 414
- Patrols, German: 22, 138, 293, 305, 305n, 339, 367, 371, 373, 393, 394
- Paulishen, 1st Lt. Andrew H.: 46, 50
- Payne, Lt. Col. Charles J.: 27
- Payne, 2d Lt. Richard H.: 324-25, 374, 376
- Peabody, Capt. Maurice E., Jr.: 140-41, 142-47, 148, 154-58, 159-64, 167-72, 219
- Pellino, 1st Lt. Aurelio: 310, 358
- Pennsylvania National Guard: 255
- Perimeter defense: 159, 170, 297
- Perkey, Pfc. Arley: 158
- Perll, Pfc. Joseph R.: 378, 400
- Pestridge, Capt. George N.: 345
- Peterson, Col. Carl L.: 251-52n, 259, 269, 271n, 284, 284n, 305n, 307, 308-09, 323, 349, 350, 352, 375, 375n, 378, 380-81, 389, 394
- Petty, Pvt. Bruce A.: 138
- Photomaps: 44. *See also* Maps.
- Pian di Giogo: 105, 134, 165, 198, 203, 225
- Pierce, 2d Lt. Robert K.: 289
- Piercey, Capt. Guy T.: 282, 306, 376
- Pillboxes: 94, 103, 104, 125, 146, 182, 198, 272, 279, 280, 339, 379, 404. *See also* Bunkers.
- Pitman, T. Sgt. Bruce: 326, 327
- Pizzi, 1st Lt. Joseph E.: 136
- Planning. *See* Artillery, American, plans; Attack plans; Engineer plans.
- Po Valley: 109, 240
- Point 770: 110, 133, 206
- Polich, Capt. George S.: 42
- Pont-à-Mousson: 12, 41, 71, 90
- Ponton Battalion, 551st Heavy: 41, 70, 84
- Ponton bridge: 84-86
- Ponton Co., 537th Light: 20, 70, 72, 75, 81, 84
- Ponzalla: 111-12, 113, 133, 165
- Pratt, 1st Lt. Robert W.: 368, 369
- Price, S. Sgt. George E.: 188, 190, 220
- Prisoner identifications: 372n, 391

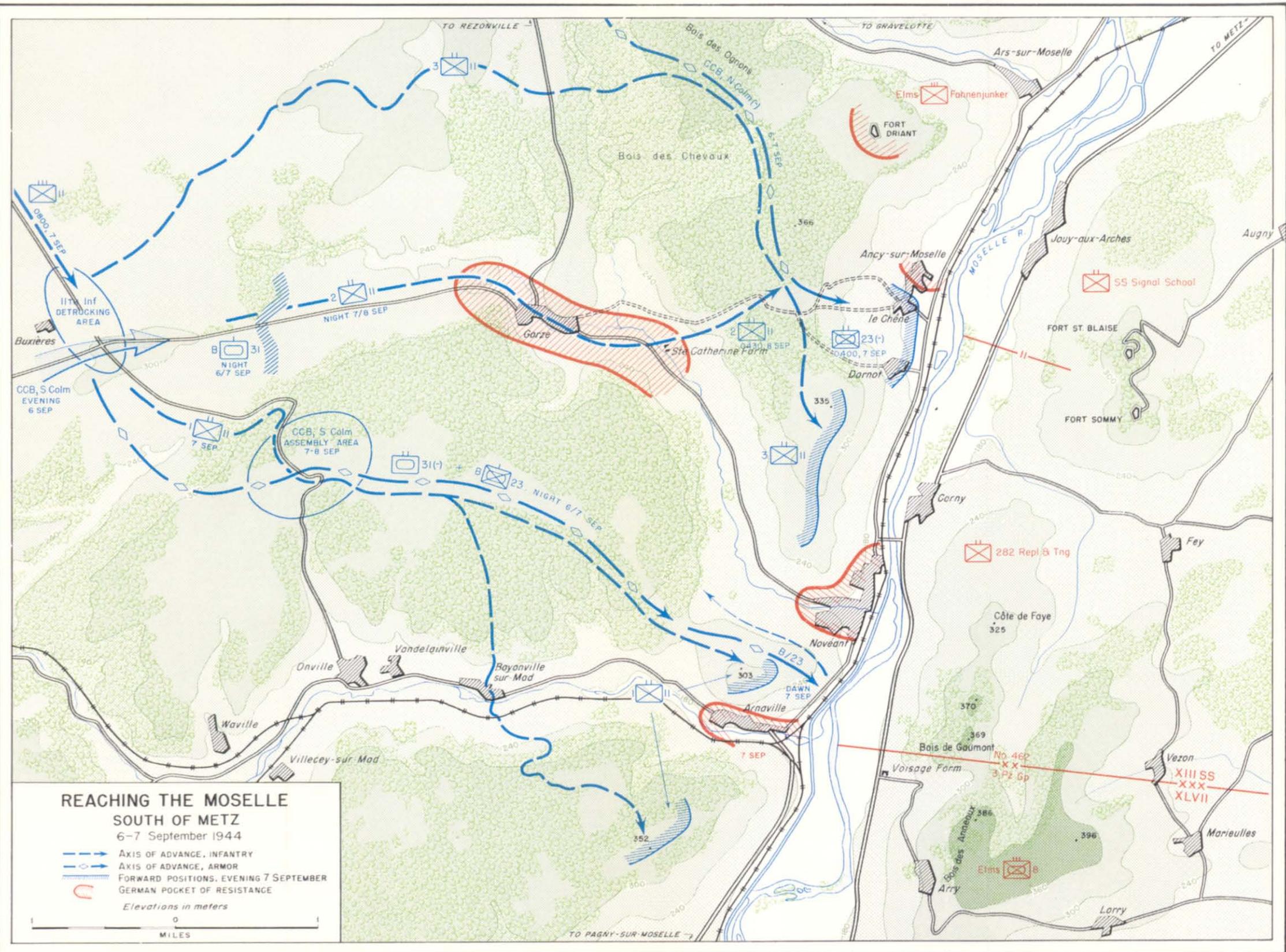
- Prisoners of war  
   American: 57n, 169  
   German: 54n, 57, 110, 132, 174, 240, 415, 415n  
 Pritchett, 2d Lt. T. H.: 29  
 Pritts, Marshall F.: 349  
 Propaganda leaflets: 239–40, 272  
 Pruden, Capt. John D.: 335, 353, 355, 359, 360, 363–64  
 Pruem: 255  
 Pugh, Capt. Marion C.: 314, 326, 330–31, 337–38, 350–52, 372  
 Puligno: 206, 207  
 Putney, Pfc. Delmar C.: 332  
 Pyle, 2d Lt. Edwin R.: 29  
 Pynchon, Capt. William H.: 311–12, 312–13, 324, 328, 329  
  
 Quadrath: 274  
 Quarrie, 2d Lt. William D.: 261, 267–68, 336, 343, 345–47, 357, 363, 366, 382  
 Quinton, Pfc. Nathaniel M.: 376  
 Quisenberry, Capt. Thomas M.: 111, 143  
  
 Radar station: 60, 94  
 Radio, American: 25, 32, 35, 53, 59, 64–65, 115, 120, 164, 169, 171, 196, 220, 267, 288, 320, 327, 329, 345, 347, 348, 372. *See also* Communications.  
   failure of: 147, 154, 157, 162, 171–72, 328  
   intercepts: 132, 193, 225  
 Radio, German: 223, 226, 230  
 Raffelsbrand: 252, 272, 307, 317, 339, 372, 386, 391, 404, 406, 413  
 Ranger Battalion, 2d: 414  
 Rea, T/5 William G.: 32, 36  
 Reconnaissance Troops  
   5th: 87, 89  
   28th: 254, 332, 350, 398  
 Red Ball Express: 63  
 Reid, Pfc. James F.: 233  
 Repair. *See* Tanks, American, repair.  
 Replacements  
   American: 39, 89, 111, 111n, 386, 387  
   German: 200, 224  
 Reserves, American: 50–51, 54, 83, 87, 90, 94, 104, 110, 113, 133, 176, 181, 204, 207, 208, 254, 268, 272, 276, 282, 291, 292, 313, 321, 336, 379  
 Reserves, German: 106, 111, 132, 174, 175, 198, 200, 201, 223, 224, 240, 253, 255, 274, 318  
 Reverse slopes: 47, 51, 52, 53, 80  
 Rex, Pvt. Dale B.: 32, 36  
 Reynolds, Major Robert C.: 352, 368–69  
 Rezonville: 6, 7, 13  
 Rhine River: 4, 251, 255  
 Richelskaul: 252, 257–58, 266–67, 268–69, 271, 274, 276, 283, 284, 286, 306, 314, 315, 317, 321, 327n, 337, 339, 357, 359, 366, 369, 387, 393  
 Rifredo: 206, 225  
 Rimini: 112  
 Ripperdam, S. Sgt. Frank: 298, 306  
  
 Ripple, Lt. Col. Richard W.: 288, 310, 332–33, 338, 352, 372, 375–76, 377, 394, 400  
 Ritchey, 1st Lt. Merlin E.: 194, 214–15, 219, 221, 237  
 River Site 1: 71, 72, 84  
 River Site 2: 71, 72, 75, 81, 84  
 Road blocks: 9, 53, 54, 252  
 Road maintenance: 275, 357  
 Robbins, 2d Lt. Henry F.: 121, 129  
 Robertson, 1st Lt. Robert L.: 23  
 Rocca Creek: 115–21, 122, 129, 140, 210, 234  
 la Rocca draw: 134, 135, 142, 157, 171  
 la Rocca Farmhouse: 117, 122, 124, 139, 222  
 Rocket launchers: 62. *See also* Bazooka.  
 Roer River dams: 251, 251–52n, 255, 257  
 Roetgen: 251, 254, 257, 274, 314  
 Roetgen Forest: 251n  
 Roett: 254, 389  
 Rogers, 1st Lt. Howard S.: 311, 329, 330  
 Rokey, Capt. Raymond R.: 297, 301, 321  
 Rollesbroich: 252, 268, 272, 406  
 Rollins, 1st Lt. Charles F., Jr.: 365, 382, 385  
 Rome: 110  
 Ropes, used in crossing river: 29, 35, 36  
 Royal Air Force: 128, 165, 207  
 Rubin, Pfc. Abraham: 148  
 Ruhrberg: 389  
 Rumbaugh, Capt. George H.: 368, 369, 373, 375, 396, 398, 399–400  
 Rupt de Mad: 70–75, 84, 86  
 Russell, T. Sgt. Zealin W.: 194  
 Ryan, 1st Lt. James A.: 336  
  
 Saarlautern: 22  
 Saghbazarian, Pfc. Harry: 79  
 St. Lô: 8  
 Ste. Catherine's Farm: 17, 28  
 Ste. Marie-aux-Chênes: 6  
 Salmestrelli, Pvt. Idelmo: 148–49, 154, 162–63  
 Santerno River: 240  
 Sarre River: 3, 4, 5, 13  
 Scarperia: 111, 125, 133, 141, 165, 176, 178, 198, 226  
 Scheer, T. Sgt. William A.: 153, 163  
 Schindler, 1st Lt. Richard R.: 360, 364, 382, 384  
 Schleiden: 339  
 Schlenderhan Castle: 274, 293  
 Schmidt, terrain: 251, 252–53, 279  
 Schroeder, Pvt. George W.: 185, 186, 188  
 Schwammenauel Dam: 251  
 Schwantke, Pfc. Carl: 214, 215, 216–19, 227, 228, 255, 286, 289, 330, 334  
 Scott, 1st Lt. George E.: 264  
 SCR–193's: 332  
 SCR–284's: 32  
 SCR–300's: 28, 32, 143, 286, 328, 345  
 SCR–536's: 32, 115, 121, 124, 135, 142, 149, 154, 194, 215, 220, 263, 269  
 Security: 255, 286, 289, 330, 334  
 Security guards: 304, 305n, 320, 328

- Seiler, Pfc. Gus: 380, 381  
 Seine River: 8, 43  
 Seiverd, Sgt. David N.: 141, 168  
 Self, Pvt. Joe M.: 189, 197  
 Setliffe, Lt. Col. Truman H.: 358, 361, 379, 396  
 Setterberg, 1st Lt. Carl B.: 396  
 Shaw, 2d Lt. Warren G.: 46, 53  
 Shedio, T/3 John M.: 303  
 Sherman, 2d Lt. Danforth A.: 346-47, 355, 356  
 Sherman, Pvt. Thomas H.: 154, 155  
 Sherman tanks: 491  
 Shipley, Maj. Alden P.: 54, 55, 93, 94  
 Shively, 1st Lt. Kenneth J.: 308  
 Shortages  
   ammunition: 61, 83, 88, 157, 162, 165, 167, 169,  
     237-38, 254, 255, 325, 369  
   assault boats: 16  
   bridging equipment: 76  
   hand grenades: 179, 382, 392  
   litters: 163, 179, 382, 392  
   maps: 44  
   overshoes: 255  
   radios: 382, 392  
   weasels: 331  
 Siegfried Line: 4, 251, 251n, 255  
 Sieve River: 103, 104, 111, 190  
 Silvester, Maj. Gen. Lindsay McD.: 4  
 Simmons, Sgt. Nelson L.: 158, 159, 169  
 Simon, 1st Lt. Leon: 306-07, 326, 327  
 Simonskall: 252, 268-72, 317-20, 326, 372, 386,  
   391-93, 401-04, 416  
 Simpson, Maj. William E.: 43-44, 51  
 Skain, Pfc. Clarence J.: 376  
 S-mines: 174  
 Smith, Pvt. Charles C.: 171  
 Smith, S. Sgt. Donald B.: 188, 189  
 Smith, Pvt. Donald R.: 117  
 Smith, 2d Lt. Horace L.: 338, 356  
 Smoke: 16, 74, 74n, 170, 183, 184, 197, 206, 211, 285.  
   *See also* White phosphorus.  
   and bridging operations, 9-14 September: 63-86  
   generators: 65, 70, 75  
   screen: 61, 186, 197  
 Sonnefield, Lt. Col. J. E.: 313, 348, 357, 366  
 Souder, 1st Lt. Redding C., Jr.: 178, 179, 189, 194,  
   195, 196, 207-08, 210, 215, 219, 221  
 South, S. Sgt. David C.: 129, 232  
 South African Air Force: 128, 165, 207  
 Spalin, 1st Lt. Ralph: 269  
 Spears, S. Sgt. John B.: 166, 167, 168, 169  
 Spooner, S. Sgt. Anthony R.: 295, 306  
 Squad columns: 123, 128, 136, 181, 184, 211, 215,  
   222, 266  
 Stanley, 1st Lt. Ross W.: 37  
*Stars and Stripes*: 112  
 Steckenborn: 251n, 268, 272, 285, 294, 294n, 389, 416  
 Stevens, Sgt. Adron G.: 115, 117, 191, 196  
 Stone, S. Sgt. William J.: 47, 60  
 Storey, 1st Lt. Issac H.: 51, 55  
 Strafing: 52, 60, 83, 128, 165, 207, 292, 308, 315, 339,  
   356, 385-86  
 Strauch: 254, 272, 280, 285, 290, 293, 294, 294n, 297,  
   300, 339, 389, 414, 416, 417  
 Straus, Pfc. Jerome J.: 129  
 Strength, of troops. *See* Troop strength.  
 Strosnider, S. Sgt. Walter M.: 209, 211, 213-19,  
   227-28, 230, 234  
 Summerton, S. Sgt. Oliver N.: 157, 158  
 Sunburg, Pfc. Lester: 393  
 Supply: 30, 33, 61-62, 111, 133, 165, 179, 254, 255,  
   268, 275, 283, 286, 290, 291, 291n, 294, 303-05,  
   309-12, 323, 324, 328-31, 333, 337, 348, 356,  
   363, 366, 368-69  
 Switchbacks: 134, 193, 205-06, 233, 295, 309, 310,  
   312, 330, 366  
 T-2 retriever: 314, 336, 388  
 Tactical Air Commands  
   IX: 253, 272, 357n, 386, 405  
   XIX: 52, 61  
 Tactical air support. *See* Air Support.  
 Tait, Lt. Col. William: 349, 352, 368  
 Talange: 7, 13  
 Tank Battalions  
   31st: 17, 87, 88, 90  
   707th: 253, 254, 320, 324, 332, 366, 406, 415  
   735th: 8, 74  
   752d: 111  
 Tank Destroyer Battalions  
   630th: 253, 397  
   805th: 111  
   818th: 8, 74  
   893d: 253, 254, 314-15, 356, 372, 386, 406, 415  
 Tank destroyers: 79, 178, 183, 198, 239, 253, 323,  
   326-27, 327n, 346, 350, 352, 356, 356n, 387,  
   397-98, 406.  
 Tank-infantry co-operation: 7, 9, 92, 93, 261, 262-63,  
   265, 382  
 Tanks, American.  
   effect on morale: 325, 349, 350, 375  
   repair: 310-11, 336  
   used against pillboxes: 178, 183  
 Tanks, German  
   effect of bazookas on: 51, 54, 84, 153, 174, 300,  
     307, 308, 374  
   Mark IV: 174, 398  
   Mark V: 47, 307, 308, 321, 374, 398  
 Task Forces  
   Davis: 386-88, 397  
   Lacy: 339, 393  
   R: 332-33, 333n, 339, 342-43, 349-50, 356, 366,  
     368, 371, 375  
 Telephone wire: 32, 62, 142, 220, 222, 286  
 Teller mines: 296, 367  
 Terrain: 12-13, 40-41, 70, 104-06, 252-53  
 Thionville: 4, 8  
 Thompson, Brig. Gen. John B.: 6-7, 14-17, 14n, 21,  
   21n

- Thompson, Sgt. William A.: 190, 191, 195, 208, 227, 228
- Tiger tanks: 51
- Time fire: 61, 239
- TNT, use of: 313
- Tomlet, S. Sgt. Arthur O.: 160
- Toner, 1st Sgt. Robert C.: 400
- Training  
   American: 110  
   German: 94, 106, 106n, 200
- Tre Camin Farmhouse: 112, 113
- Treadway bridge: 20
- Treadway Bridge Co., 989th: 20, 70, 72, 75, 81
- Tree bursts: 51, 61, 277
- Trench foot: 397
- Trenches: 146, 154, 184, 185
- Trigg, S. Sgt. William S.: 190
- Troop quality, German: 4-5, 22, 80, 110
- Troop strength, depleted by combat  
   American: 17, 56, 80, 87, 176, 179, 197, 210, 264, 321, 327, 332, 342, 349, 362, 367, 372, 386-87, 413  
   German: 22, 106, 173
- Tropp, 2d Lt. Edward W.: 393, 394
- Troyes: 65
- Truces: 163, 407-08, 409, 411
- Tyo, 2d Lt. Richard: 301, 306, 377, 396-97
- Untermaubach: 404
- l'Uomo Morto: 107, 115, 131, 173, 200, 203
- Vaglia: 110, 111
- Van Horne, T. Sgt. Nelson B.: 128-29, 139, 181, 208, 210, 221-22, 232-33
- Van Kleeck, Pfc. Bernard C.: 115, 117, 121, 124
- Van Vlack, Pfc. George J.: 162
- Vandelainville: 42, 53
- Verdun: 3, 5, 6, 83
- Verdun Group: 12, 30, 34
- Verneville: 8, 13
- Verruca: 200
- Verviers: 272
- Vezone: 59, 79
- Vick, Capt. Elias R., Jr.: 44-46
- Villecey: 42
- Villecey-sur-Mad: 42
- Vittonville: 90, 92, 95
- Voisage Farm: 41, 43-57, 62, 70, 79, 80, 87
- Vossenack, terrain: 252-53
- Wahn (Training Area): 406
- Walker, S. Sgt. Curtis E.: 329
- Walker, Lt. Col. George H.: 28, 67, 67n, 70, 74n, 75-76, 81
- Walker, Capt. Jack W.: 281, 326-27, 377, 396, 399
- Walker, Maj. Gen. Walton H.: 3, 14n, 30, 81
- Wall, Capt. Vincent L.: 360, 364
- Wallace, Pfc. Clyde: 267
- Ward, S. Sgt. John M.: 324, 329
- Waville: 42
- Weapons. *See entries for various types of weapons.*
- Weasels: 282, 290, 311, 320, 328-30, 331, 407, 409
- Weather: 63, 89, 256, 259, 272, 276, 294, 315, 320, 365, 369, 398, 405, 407, 416
- Webster, 1st Lt. John O.: 289
- Wehrkreis XII: 5n
- Weisser Weh Creek: 259, 307, 317, 404
- Wenau Forest: 251n
- Weniger, 1st Lt. Charles S.: 328, 329
- West, Pfc. Boyd A.: 189
- West, Capt. George S., Jr.: 261, 267, 286, 346-47
- Westwall. *See Siegfried Line.*
- Whary, Sgt. Harry B.: 232
- White, Lt. Col. James F.: 364
- White, T. Sgt. Tony L.: 195
- White phosphorus: 165, 198, 268, 285
- Williams, Capt. Robert H.: 56
- Wilson, Pfc. Albert E.: 151, 169
- Wilson, S. Sgt. Arlie W.: 330, 352
- Wilson, S. Sgt. Ira W.: 115-21, 184, 185
- Wine, 2d Lt. John B.: 263, 264, 265
- Withdrawal  
   authorized: 6, 25, 35-39, 54, 55, 57n, 76, 77, 84, 129, 139, 170-71, 173, 194-95, 237, 271, 339, 345, 346, 364, 366, 371, 376, 377, 393-417  
   unauthorized: 65, 167, 168-69, 190, 195-97, 195n, 219, 301, 306, 350, 352-53, 354, 362, 375, 376, 379
- Witt, Capt. Eugene M.: 46, 50
- Wittscheidt: 258, 276, 283
- Wolters, T/4 Wheeler W.: 407-08
- World War I: 4, 5, 381
- Wounded, evacuation of: 28, 29, 33-34, 62, 163, 171, 197, 269, 320, 373, 392, 394-97, 401-04, 407-11.  
*See also Casualties; Medical aid men.*
- Wright, 1st Lt. James E.: 36
- Yarman, Sgt. Kenneth E.: 304, 310-11
- Young, 2d Lt. Frank W.: 65
- Yuill, Col. Charles W.: 8-9, 13, 14-17, 14n, 20, 27, 29-30
- Zaroslinski, S. Sgt. Anthony S.: 304, 310, 311
- Zubendchen: 297
- Zuelpich: 404
- Zweifall: 254, 314







**REACHING THE MOSELLE**

**SOUTH OF METZ**  
6-7 September 1944

- - - - - AXIS OF ADVANCE, INFANTRY
- - - - - AXIS OF ADVANCE, ARMOR
- / / / / / FORWARD POSITIONS, EVENING 7 SEPTEMBER
- C GERMAN POCKET OF RESISTANCE

*Elevations in meters*

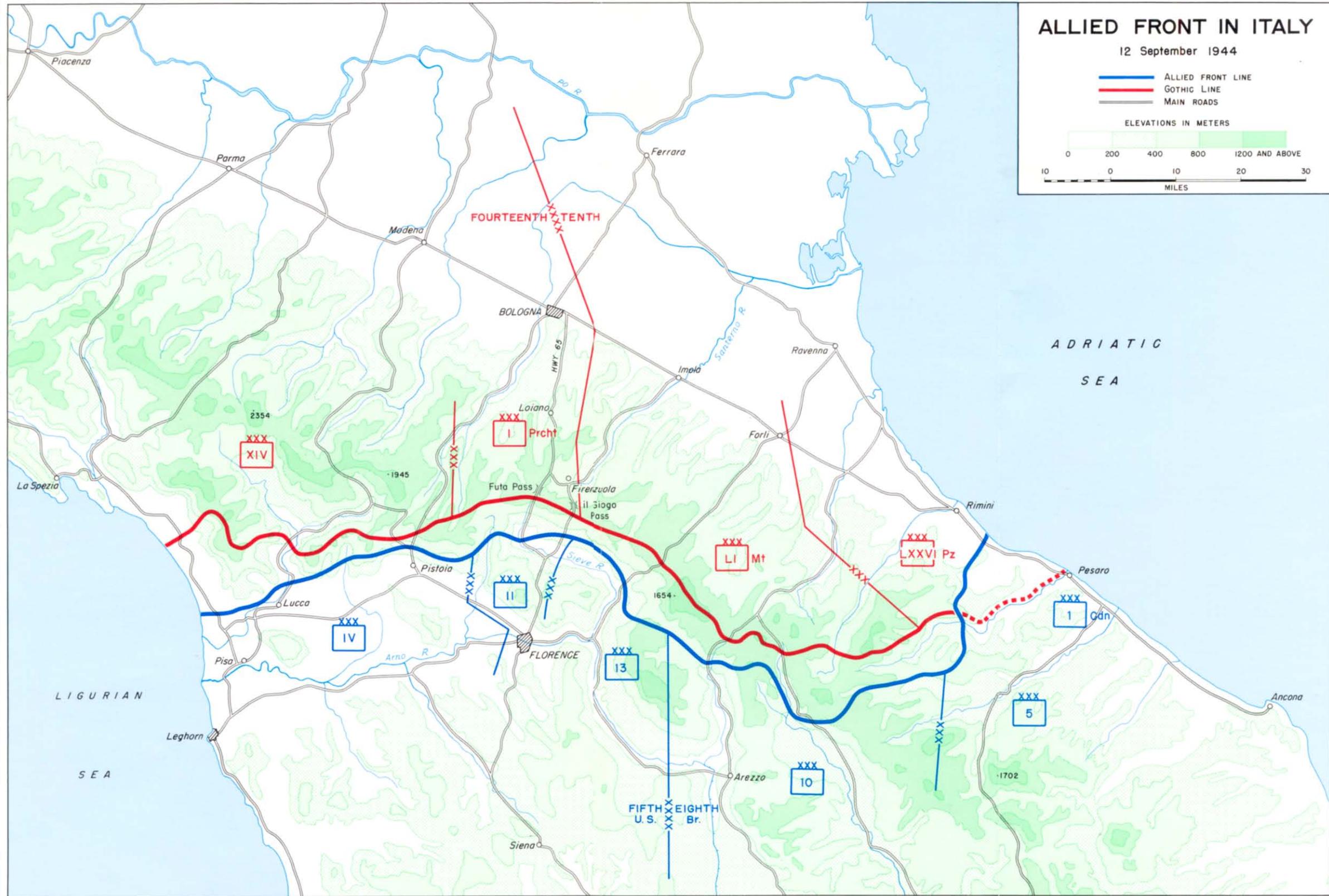
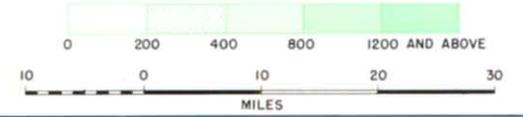


# ALLIED FRONT IN ITALY

12 September 1944

- ALLIED FRONT LINE
- GOTHIC LINE
- MAIN ROADS

ELEVATIONS IN METERS



# SITUATION IN MT. ALTUZZO AREA

0600, 13 September 1944

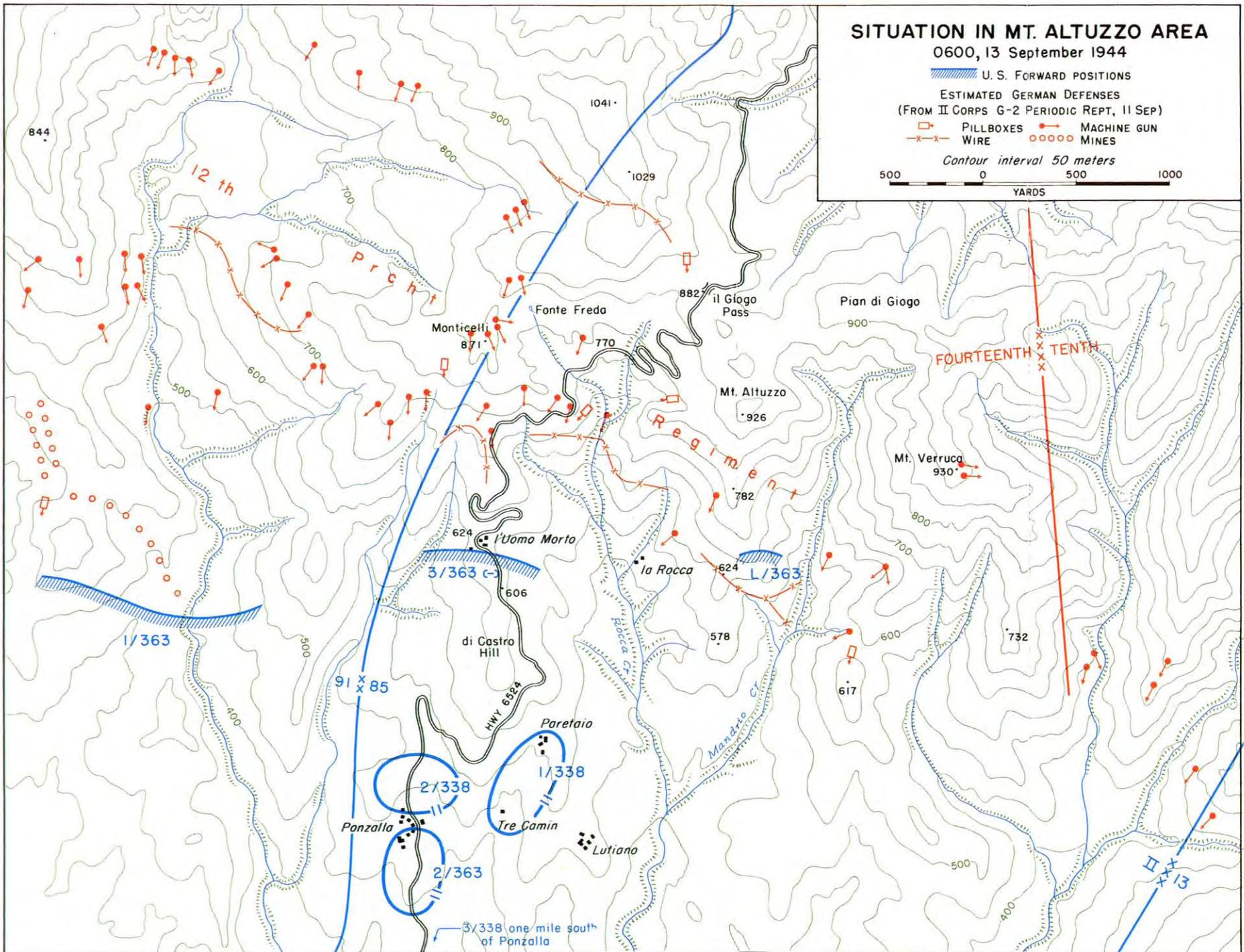
U. S. FORWARD POSITIONS

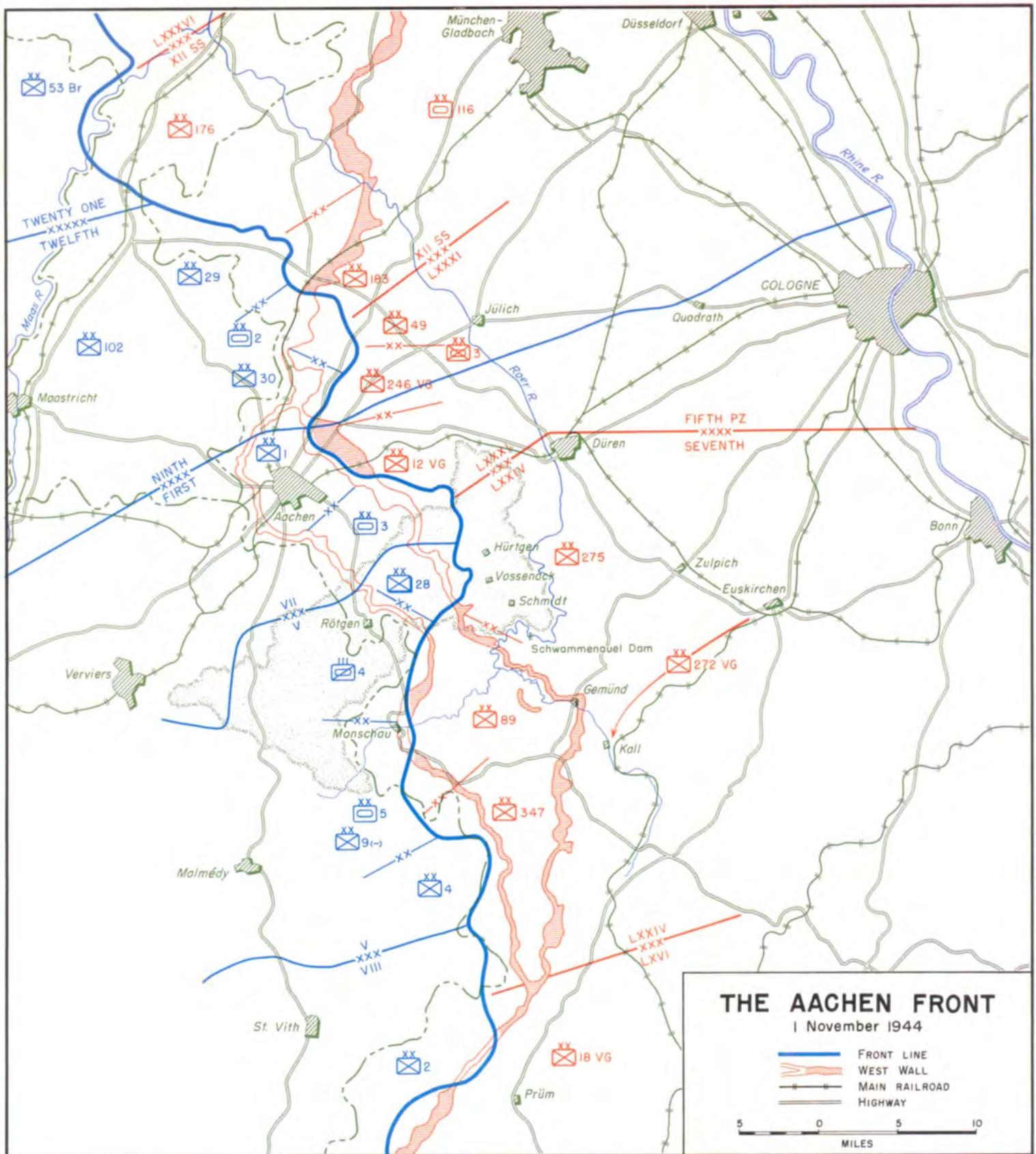
ESTIMATED GERMAN DEFENSES  
(FROM II CORPS G-2 PERIODIC REPT, 11 SEP)

PILLBOXES    MACHINE GUN  
WIRE        MINES

Contour interval 50 meters

500    0    500    1000  
YARDS

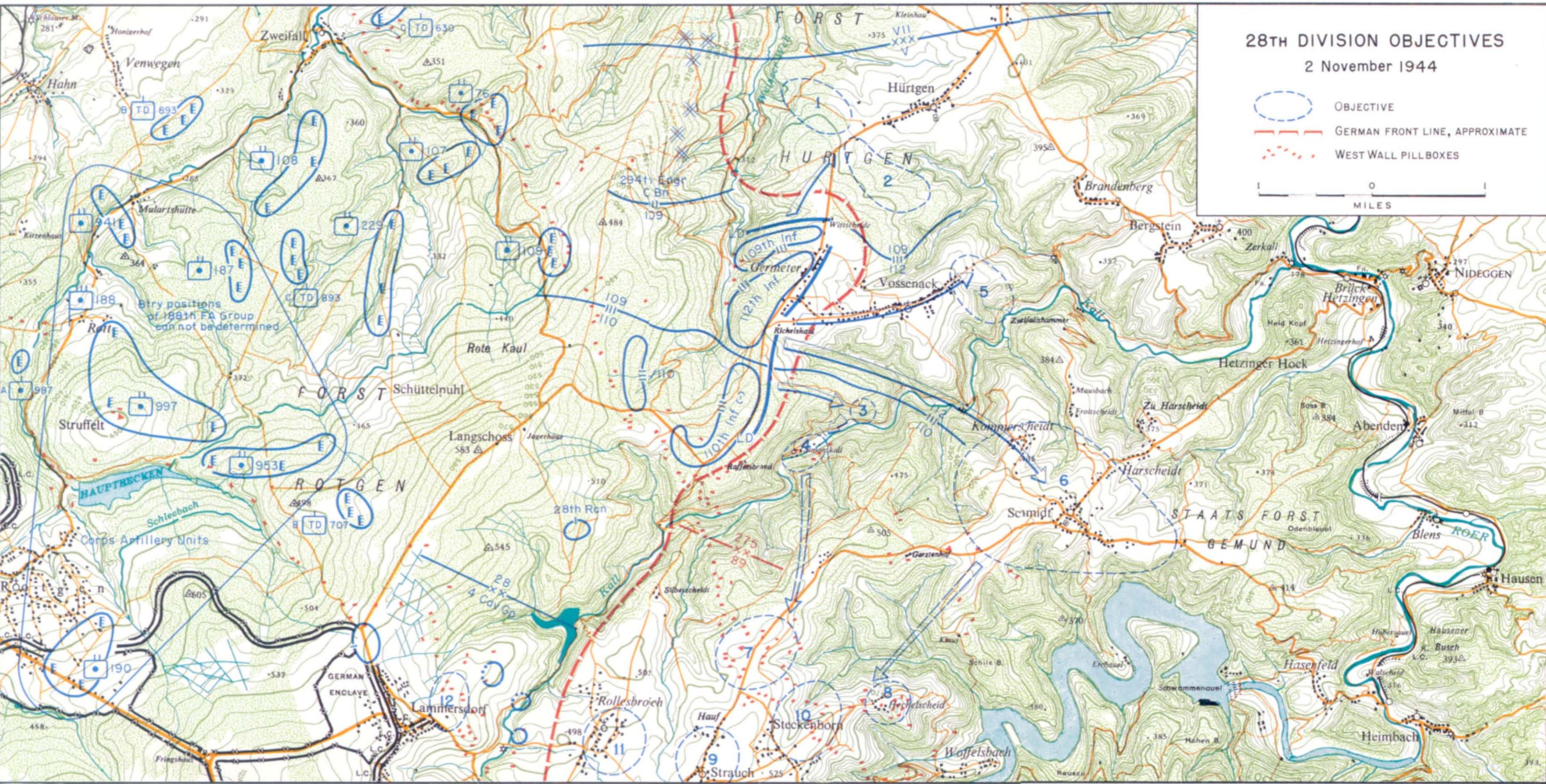




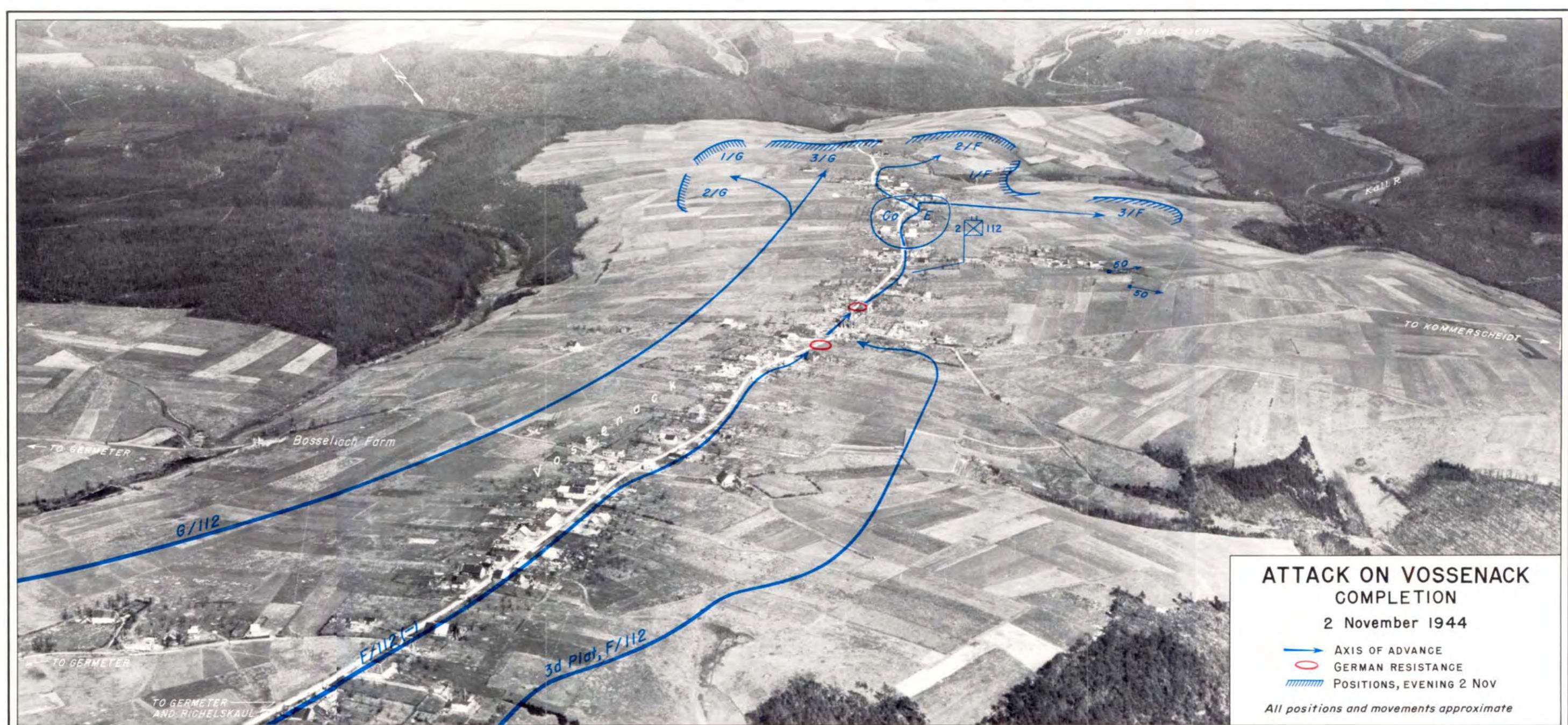
28TH DIVISION OBJECTIVES  
2 November 1944

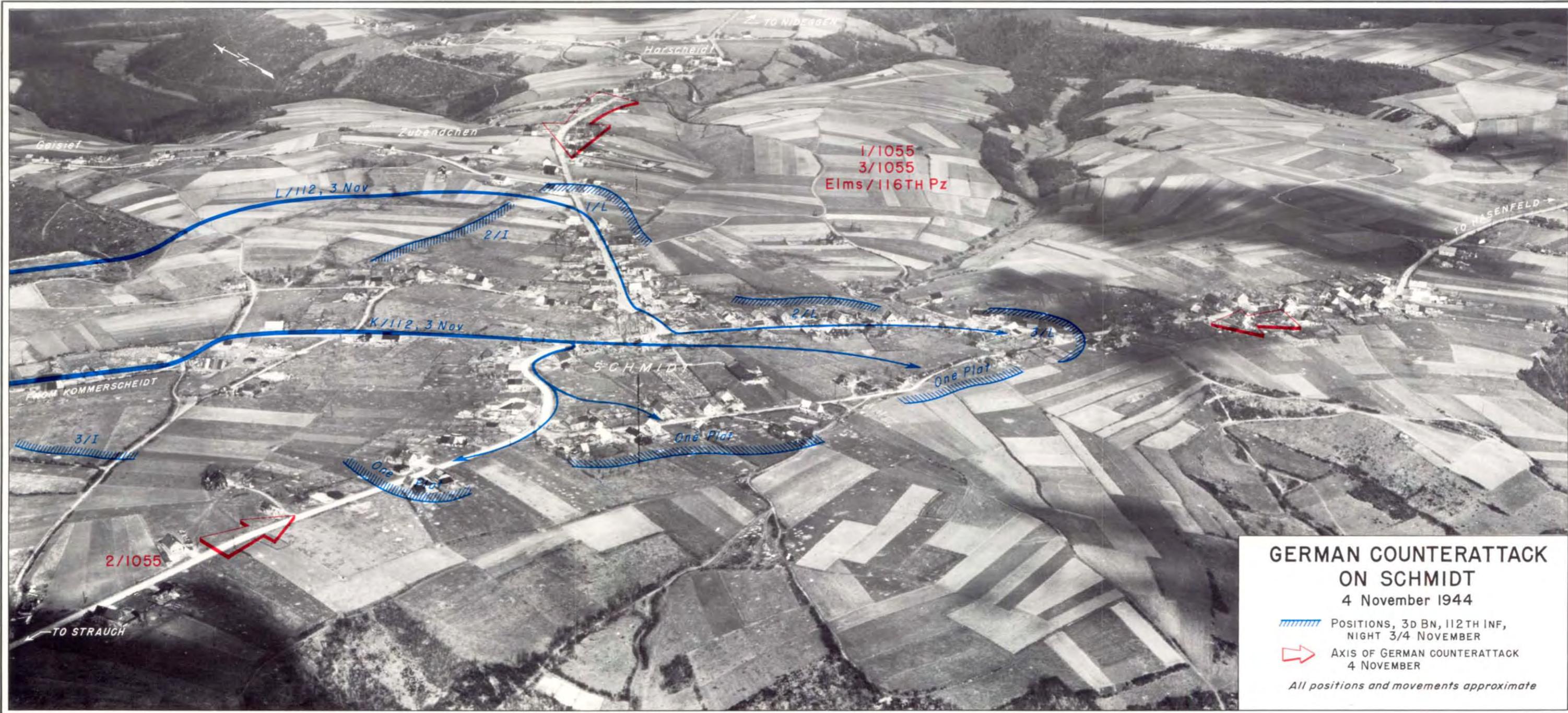
OBJECTIVE  
GERMAN FRONT LINE, APPROXIMATE  
WEST WALL PILLBOXES

0 1  
MILES









**GERMAN COUNTERATTACK  
ON SCHMIDT  
4 November 1944**

-  POSITIONS, 3D BN, 112TH INF, NIGHT 3/4 NOVEMBER
-  AXIS OF GERMAN COUNTERATTACK 4 NOVEMBER

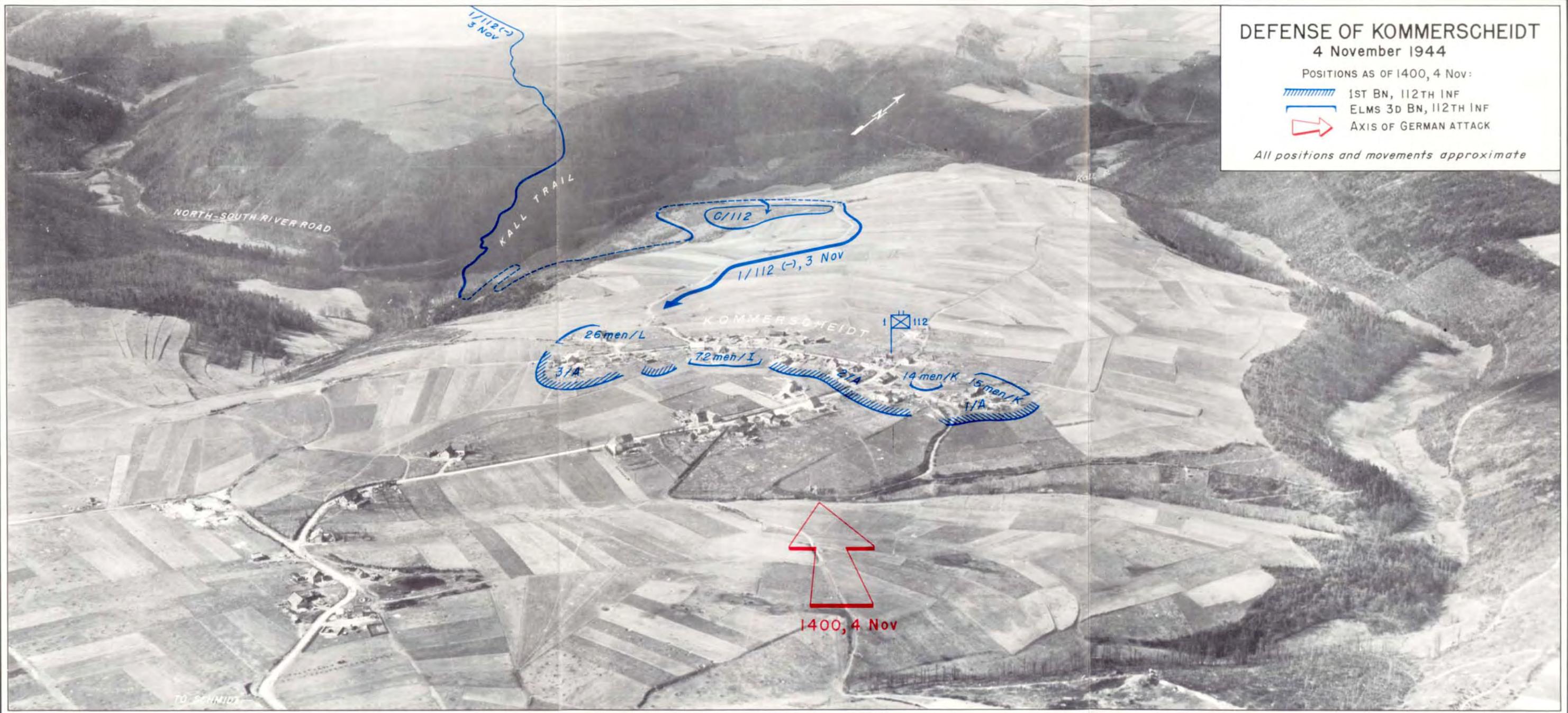
*All positions and movements approximate*

**DEFENSE OF KOMMERSCHIEDT**  
**4 November 1944**

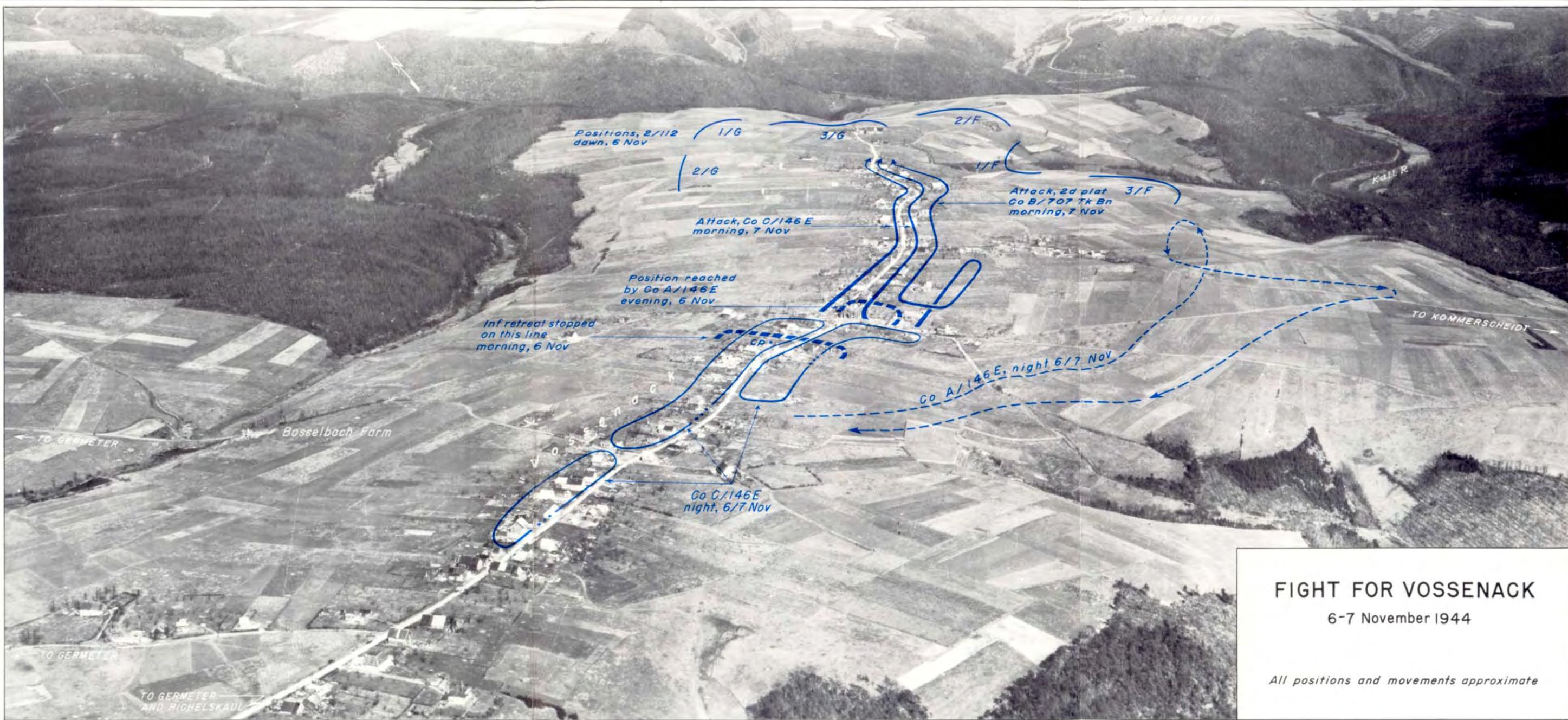
POSITIONS AS OF 1400, 4 Nov:

 1ST BN, 112TH INF  
 ELMS 3D BN, 112TH INF  
 AXIS OF GERMAN ATTACK

*All positions and movements approximate*



TD SCHMIDT



**FIGHT FOR VOSSENACK**  
6-7 November 1944

*All positions and movements approximate*