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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION 508TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY (82ND ABN DIV) IN THE WITHDRAWAL FROM AND RECAPTURE OF THIER-DU-MONT RIDGE, BELGIUM, 22 DEC 1944-7 JAN 1945 (ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Battalion Operations Officer)

Type of operation described: A PARACHUTE INFANTRY BATTALION WITHDRAWING FROM AND ATTACKING A RIDGE

Captain Henry Le Febvre, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO 2

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division from 21 December 1944 to 7 January 1945 during the "Battle of the Bulge".

To make the operation more easily understood, a brief discussion is presented of the situation as it existed at that time in the European Theater of Operations.

In June 1944 the Allies had successfully invaded Normandy, and after bitter hedgerow fighting had forced a breakout at St. Lo. (1) Then, after one futile counterattack by the Germans in the vicinity of Mortain, there ensued a chase across France. (2) By September the majority of our troops were on the border of Germany facing the Siegfried Line. Winter was approaching and the comparatively halcyon days of the pursuit across France were over. (3) Our armies had outrun their logistical support and were now engaged in a battle to secure the port of Antwerp and the ground west of the Rhine River. (4) (5) The U.S. First Army was faced with a problem of covering 150 miles of front with only three corps. (6) In order to concentrate the strength needed to attack vital objectives holding up the advance to the Rhine River, it was necessary to weaken the line in some sectors. (7)

The hilly, wooded terrain, lack of obvious military objectives behind the front, lack of a good roadnet and lack of apparent German strength in the area, made the Ardennes sector appear to be suitable for such a

(1) A-2, p.51; (2) A-2, p.53; (3) A-3, p.321; (4) A-3, p.320
(5) A-2, p.67; (6) A-2, p.75; (7) A-2, p.75.

calculated risk. (8) This portion of the Allied front involved an eighty mile length of the line which was thinly held by Major General Middelton's VIII Corps, consisting of four divisions and a cavalry group on the south flank of the First Army zone. (9)

It was in the Ardennes sector on the morning of 16 December 1944 that elements of some seventeen German divisions struck. (10) Three German armies were involved in this huge, all out counteroffensive -- the Sixth Panzer Army on the north, the Fifth Panzer Army in the center and the Seventh Army on the south. (11)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

At the time of the German attack, the 82nd Airborne Division was undergoing routine training, rest, and rehabilitation near Sissonne, France after having participated in the "Market" operation in Holland. During this period replacements were being assimilated, supplies and equipment were being brought to authorized strength, a program of training was maintained, and men were being sent on leaves to Paris and London. The air was anything but that of immediate committment to battle. On Sunday, 17 December 1944 at about 2000 hours, orders were suddenly received to prepare to move. (12)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

Lieutenant Colonel Otho E. Holmes, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, attached to the 82nd Airborne Division, called in the company commanders and oriented them to the situation, which at best was vague. About the only thing known was that some kind of an enemy counteroffensive was taking place on the front and that the division was to be committed. (13)

(8) A-2, p.75; (9) A-2, p.70; (10) A-2, p.103; (11) A-3, P.343;
(12) Personal knowledge; (13) A-1, Sec. II, p.1

The men and officers worked during the whole night of 17-18 December attending to all the details incident to closing a camp and preparing to move. During the night OISE Base Section was ordered to pull in the necessary number of ten ton tractor-trailers, as they returned from supply runs in the Communications Zone, to augment the division organic transportation. (14) The 2nd Battalion, as part of the division serial, left Sissone, France, at 1100 hours 18 December and arrived in Werbomont, Belgium, a distance of 150 miles, at approximately 190500 December after a miserable all day and all night ride with sixty men crowded into each trailer. After a "tailgate jump", the battalion was given its sector of the hasty defenses around the Werbomont crossroads. There was still no information available as to the enemy strength or location.

Late in the afternoon of 19 December, the 508th moved to secure the high ground around Cheveron, Belgium. (15) This was part of the general plan for the division to secure the key terrain in that area. Accordingly, on the afternoon of 20 December, the 2nd Battalion was ordered to advance to a position on Thier-du-mont Ridge, and to tie in with other units of the regiment. It was to make contact on the left with the 1st Battalion near the town of Rencheux, swing around the forward edge of the ridge, and tie in with the 3rd Battalion on the right. The mission was to contact American units reportedly cut off in the St. Vith - Vielsalm area and to hold a line through which those units could withdraw. (See Map C) (16)

The commander of the 2nd Battalion, 508th, started his battalion moving toward its new area under the control of the battalion executive officer, and even though it was now dark, accompanied by his S-3, he went forward to try to make a reconnaissance. They came upon the command post of the 106th Division, whose presence at this time was unknown to the 2nd Battalion, in the town of Rencheux. They talked briefly with General Jones,

(14) A-1, Sec. II, p.1; (15) A-1, Sec. II, p.2; (16) Personal knowledge.

the commanding general of the 106th Division, and learned that the situation in his area was very vague. Two of his Regimental Combat Teams were cut off, and he had been ordered to pull back and reorganize. There were no maps available of the area which the battalion was to occupy, except the one then in the possession of the battalion commander and his S-3, as the 106th Division had burned all of their maps for fear they would fall into the hands of the Germans. (17)

The battalion commander and S-3 made a hasty reconnaissance of the area in the dark, but the area was very wooded, and anything but a brief inspection was impossible. After completing this reconnaissance, they moved down to the foot of the ridge, and upon the arrival of the battalion at approximately 2400 hours, the companies were moved to general areas for the night and prepared to shift at first light. (18)

At daylight on 21 December, the 2nd Battalion had a chance to see at first hand the unusual area it was to defend. The assigned area stretched from the contact point with the 1st Battalion near Rencheux, up a gradual rise to the front of Thier-du-mont Ridge, then it rose abruptly with a great side of the ridge a sheer drop. At the extreme tip of the ridge there was a chateau that overlooked the town of Salmchateau. From there the line carried back along the military crest of the ridge until it made contact with the 3rd Battalion near Comte. (See Map C) The trails leading over the ridge to the front line companies were so steep and impassable that vehicles could not be used to haul any supplies. As the battalion mess section lacked sufficient personnel and equipment to prepare hot meals during the stay on the ridge, that section was equipped with packboards and was used to carry necessary rations and ammunition to the front line. (19)

The position of the 2nd Battalion at this time was actually on the

(17), (18), (19) Personal knowledge.

north shoulder of the German penetration. The line faced east, then turned south at Salmchateau after which it faced south. Because of the large area which had to be covered, all three rifle companies were placed in the line. Meanwhile to the south of this position the Germans were continuing their drive to the west.

During the period 21-22 December, patrols were sent out and the defensive position was improved. However, on 23 December the Germans made an attack on Salmchateau from the vicinity of St. Maire and Provedroux in an apparent attempt to further widen the north shoulder. (20) This attack was repulsed by small arms and mortar fire from E and F companies and by artillery fire, adjusted from the Thier-du-mont heights. (21)

On 24 December an order was received to withdraw some seven miles to a position that would cause the front lines to run along the line Basse - Bodeaux - Bra. This move was a necessity, since the 3rd Armored Division lacked sufficient strength to hold the tie-in point with the 82nd Division. If the Germans should manage to force a penetration on the south flank many units in the 82nd would be cut off. (22) By withdrawing, the contact points in the north and south could be strengthened. The withdrawal of units of the 28th Division, 7th Armored Division, and the 106th Division through Allied lines had also been completed. (23)

WITHDRAWAL

There was considerable apprehension about this withdrawal because it was to be the first in the history of the Division. (24) However, the 2nd Battalion was fortunate in that the company commanders were able to make a small unit reconnaissance of the areas they were to occupy and the route they were to take. On 24 December, the battalion commander, S-3, executive officer, and company commanders were taken to the new location and shown

(20) A-1, Sec.III, p.3; (21) Personal knowledge; (22) A-1, Sec.III, p.6; (23) A-1, Sec.III, p.13; (24) A-1, Sec.II, p.7.

their positions so that they could move to them immediately upon arrival. After this party returned to the battalion command post, the battalion plan of withdrawal was issued. Each rifle company was to leave one platoon to occupy the present company position. This covering force was to be under the command of the company executive officer, who was to have the company's SCR 300 radio. The three platoons to be left behind, which would constitute the battalion covering force would be under the command of Major Royal Taylor, the battalion executive officer. Each battalion left an identical covering force, and the entire force was to be under command of the regimental executive officer. The covering force was to withdraw at 250400 December, while the remainder of the battalion would assemble on the north slope of Thier-du-mont Ridge at 242300 December. This assembly area was near the present battalion command post. From there the battalion would move under its commander to the new defensive area and would be in position by the time the covering force had returned through the lines. (25)

One of the hardest jobs of all was that of explaining to the men the necessity for the withdrawal. The Thier-du-mont Ridge line offered a beautiful defensive position overlooking all the towns and terrain in the area. However, when the men realized that all this would mean nothing if the division should be cut off in the rear, they got in and pitched as always. At 2300 the first company began to wind down from the ridge and took its place at the head of the column. It was at this time, while waiting for all the companies to arrive that the tension was the greatest. A German document which had been captured on this day indicated an enemy attack, and this would be a most inopportune moment for it to be launched. (26)

It was a bright moonlit night, and about 2300, just as the battalion

(25) Personal knowledge; (26) A-1, Sec. II, p.5.

assembled and started to move, some Nebelwerfer 41 rockets were launched. Fortunately they landed farther north in the vicinity of Gorrone, however, it was about this time that the Germans launched an attack against the 1st Battalion in the vicinity of Vielsalm. There was a fast burst of German machine pistols and friendly light machine guns and everyone wondered for a while if they were going to make it or not. The battalion moved down into Goronne and through Aberfontaine and Odrimont without incident. Near Noirfontaine, however, it ran into trouble. Withdrawing units which had just previously passed over this route, had felled some large trees across the road to make a road block. When an attempt was made to go around the obstruction, mines were discovered throughout the branches of the felled trees. About one hour was lost while a route was selected through the mines, but from here the battalion moved without incident to the new defense position. (27) (See Map D)

The route followed a road that ran generally along the valley, but it had been a hard march through snow and bitter cold, and there had been no breaks. Now there was to be no rest, for it was only a matter of time until the Germans would arrive. The new position was reached about 250500 December and work began immediately on the defensive positions. Concern was now felt for the covering force, as to whether they had been successful in their attempts to hold the enemy and then to break contact with them. (28)

THE COVERING FORCE

As stated before, the covering force was under the command of Major Royal Taylor. He had with him the S-2, 1st Lieutenant Walter Wakefield, a radio operator, and a messenger at the covering force command post, which had been the old battalion command post. From this position he could

(27), (28) Personal knowledge.

observe the 1st Battalion positions in Rencheux and the regimental command post area in Goronne. His orders were to hold until called on the radio to withdraw. When it did withdraw, it was to assemble at Goronne where it would establish a delaying position. From there it was to fall back to other delaying positions in order to give the main body the maximum amount of time before being hit by the Germans. The only means of communication was to be SCR 300 radio. (29)

When the main portion of the battalion departed about 2300, all communications were in and things were fairly quiet. Then at approximately 2400, after an intense artillery preparation, the Germans struck. Their main effort was directed at the 1st Battalion positions, in the vicinity of Rencheux, since they apparently intended to drive up the valley road. The 1st Battalion was hard pressed to contain the German effort, and after about forty-five minutes, Major Taylor could observe German machine pistol and machine gun tracers through the town. He notified the regimental executive officer, who told him to stay in position until ordered to withdraw. At about 0130 the SCR 300 radio went out, and Major Taylor was unable to contact either his own troops or the regimental executive officer in Goronne. At this time he could see German tracers in the vicinity of Goronne, and he dispatched his S-2 and the messenger to contact the platoons of the 2nd Battalion covering force, and gather them on top of Thier-du-mont Ridge. (30)

The original plan called for him to go to Goronne, but he could see that it would be useless now. He was actually worried about getting through the battalion lines ahead of the Germans, who were already past his position and were heading west on the road through the valley. Major Taylor organized his force on top of the ridge, and by making his way west along a narrow trail, he was able to lead his men to a position west of

(29), (30) Statement of Major Taylor, 10 January 1949.

Goronne before turning north to reach the road the main part of the battalion had travelled. By skillful leadership, Major Taylor was able to bring this force thru the lines about 0700, 25 December, without loss of a man. (31)

As the covering force came through, the 2nd Battalion was busily preparing for the attack to come. Logs were cut and placed over foxholes for protection from mortar and artillery fire, mines were placed in front of dangerous avenues of approach, fields of fire were prepared, tactical wire was placed in front of the main line of resistance, combat outposts were established, and reconnaissance patrols were sent out. The battalion was on the main line of resistance as shown on Map D, from the road junction west of Reharmont to the town of Erria where they tied in with the 3rd Battalion. Company D was on the left, F on the right, and E in reserve. (32)

On 26 December, at approximately 2300, the German launched an attack on the road junction west of Reharmont in the area of Company D. This enemy force was an estimated two companies of infantry supported by four half-tracks. (33) A small bridge in front of D Company's position which had been set for demolition failed to go off, and the bazooka men's rocket launcher failed to fire, so there was some fierce close quarters fighting. The advantage of good fields of fire for the Americans, an apparently unplanned night attack by the attackers, and a lot of small arms fire proved too much for the Germans and they withdrew after about three hours of fighting. The battalion reserve had been alerted, but Dog Company was able to contain the attack without help. (34)

On the evening of 27 December, about 2300, a strong enemy force estimated at two battalions of infantry from the 9th SS Panzer Division hit the small town of Erria, which was the contact point of the 2nd and 3rd

(31) Statement by Major Taylor, 10 January 1949; (32) Personal knowledge; (33) A-1, Sec. III, p.4; (34) Personal knowledge.

Battalions. (35) F Company was becoming involved in the attack and it became apparent that this was a major attack in that area. A report from Fox Company command post stated that that company was firing into the flank of the Germans who were entering the town, and that they would be able to hold their present position. Reports from the 3rd Battalion indicated that their left company, G, although it was staying in position, was going to be overrun. The 2nd and 3rd Battalion reserves were committed in a counterattack to help drive out what enemy had gotten into the town of Erria. Company E moved to F Company's position, and by using the right flank of Fox company as a line of departure, launched a counterattack. By 0430 the enemy had been driven from the town, and the main line of resistance was restored. German casualties were heavy in this attack as some sixty-two bodies were removed from one field alone in front of the position. (36) Some of the captured Germans said that they attacked shouting and yelling and that usually the troops they thus attacked broke and ran. They were surprised to find people who stayed in their positions. (37)

The front then remained quiet except for heavy enemy shelling and patrol activity until 3 January 1945. During this quiet period defensive preparations were continued. Overhead protection for foxholes paid great dividends, for there were many tree bursts, and as a result of the covered foxholes no casualties were sustained from this usually deadly fire. On 1-2 January the division received orders to prepare to attack to the east. The 2nd Battalion was to be attached to the 505th Parachute Infantry, one of the initial attacking regiments.

(35) A-1, Sec. II, p.9; (36) A-1, Sec. II, p.9; (37) A-1, Sec. II, p.9.

THE RETURN TO THIER-DU-MONT

At 1645 on 3 January, the 2nd Battalion, attached to the 505th Parachute Infantry, moved out toward the town of Fosse. The 505th Regiment contacted the enemy in the vicinity of Fosse and became engaged in a fire fight. It was then getting toward evening and the 2nd Battalion troops dropped in place, while their commander went forward to talk to the regimental commander of the 505th. The regimental commander desired to attempt to handle the situation rather than try to commit the 2nd Battalion in what would amount to a night attack by the time any reconnaissance could be completed. The departing words of the regimental commander were that the unit would probably be committed in the morning. At 040600 January, the 2nd Battalion was used to help clear out the last scattered resistance of two battalions of the 62nd Volksgrenadier Division, which had been defeated the previous day. (38)

After this action the battalion was released from attachment to the 505th Regiment and returned to regimental control of the 508th in the vicinity of Reharmont. The 508th was in division reserve. (39) The thoughts of the 2nd Battalion were on Thier-du-mont Ridge, as they were certain this would be the eventual goal. The battalion remembered well the fine defensive positions there and knew the German positions would be just as good. Through 5 January, the 508th remained in division reserve while other units of the division advanced. (40) Then, on 6 January, the division consolidated its position, and the 508th Parachute Regiment received orders to move to the woods between Noirfontaine and Odrimont. From there the regiment was to attack through the 325th Glider Infantry, one of the regiments of the 82nd Airborne Division, which by now had taken the ground between Lieuneux and Abrefontaine. (41) (See Map E) At last the time had come. Some two weeks earlier the battalion

(38) Personal knowledge; (39) A-1, Sec. III, p.2; (40) Personal knowledge; (41) A-1, Sec. III, p.2.

had plodded over this same snow covered road, only then it was going toward the rear, making the first withdrawal in the division history, in the early morning of Christmas Day. Even though it was known that this attack was to be a bitter one, the morale was high. There is something satisfying about going back to retake a position from which you have had to withdraw. The positions which the retreating Germans had left were indeed luxurious. They had very deep dugouts lined with mattresses which had been taken from the surrounding villages. The companies were instructed to take over these quarters while waiting, and the company commanders were to report to the battalion command post. (42)

The battalion commander and S-3 had gone earlier to regiment to receive the attack order. The regiment was to move out at 0600 the following morning, 7 January 1945, in the attack. The formation was to be a column of battalions up to the line of departure, which was to be the road which ran from Goronne, southeast to Grand Sart. From this position the 3rd Battalion would move west on the south side of Thier-du-mont Ridge and down a small trail that led to the town of Comte. (See Map E) They were to seize and hold the town of Comte. The 1st Battalion would attack west on the north side of Thier-du-mont Ridge, clear it of enemy, and advance to the western edge of the ridge. They would then tie in with the 505th Regiment near the town of Rencheux on the left and with the 2nd Battalion on the right near the crown of the ridge. The 2nd Battalion was to follow the 3rd Battalion as it began to go down on the south side of the ridge and pass through the gap that would be created when the 3rd Battalion turned south toward Comte, then the 2nd was to continue west along the south side of the ridge, clear the enemy in its area of responsibility, and advance to the western edge of the ridge. This meant that the 2nd Battalion was to return to the same area it had previously occupied,

(42) Personal knowledge.

however, the left flank would not be extended so far this time. The tie-in on the left flank was to be with the 1st Battalion in the vicinity of the peak of the ridge and on the right with the 3rd in the vicinity of Comte. (43)

After coordinating with the commanders of the 3rd and 1st Battalions, the 2nd Battalion commander returned to issue his attack order. The Battalion was again fortunate in that it knew the terrain over which it would operate including the location of trails leading to the objective. The plan was to move behind the 3rd Battalion in column until it crossed the line of departure, then to move up the ridge toward Thier-du-mont with two companies abreast, E on the left, D on the right, and F following D by 200 yards. This would put the companies in the same relative location they had formerly occupied when they returned to the position. The two forward companies each had a section of light machine guns attached. The four 81mm mortars were to be emplaced as far forward as possible to give maximum coverage for the attacking companies with a minimum number of displacements. In addition, the two leading companies were to have a forward observer from the mortars with each of them. The enemy's strength in the area was unknown but it could be assumed he would defend, at least in some places, along Thier-du-mont Ridge, as positions there could cover the whole valley, in which the towns of Vielsalm, Rencheux, Goronne, and Abrefontaine were located. After the battalion order was issued, the light machine gun crews and mortar forward observers joined the units to which they had been attached. The company commanders then briefed their companies for the following day's mission. (44)

THE ATTACK

The 2nd Battalion was on the move at 0500 following the 3rd Battalion. As it passed through Abrefontaine, it came under long range artillery fire. Some casualties were sustained, but the battalion pushed on thru the town, (43), (44) Personal knowledge.

and as it continued in column the shelling became more intense. Reports from regiment indicated that no resistance had been met at this time, but that enemy artillery observers on the ridge must be adjusting fire on the column. Regiment and the leading battalions were placing fire on the ridge trying to neutralize the positions. At this time, two Mark VI tanks were observed leaving the town of Goronne, headed for the 1st Battalion. Two tank destroyers from the unit attached to the 1st Battalion engaged them. A hit put one of the Mark VI tanks out of action and the other withdrew. At this time the 1st and 3rd were deploying and starting up the eastern edge of the ridge. (45)

Because of the shelling, the column had become quite extended and the 2nd Battalion commander was concerned about the length, because it was essential that his battalion pass through the gap created between the 1st and 3rd as soon as it was created. If this were not done the Germans could shift into the gap and place fire on the flank of the 3rd Battalion, as well as opposing the 2nd Battalion advance. The 2nd was able to close up except for the mortar platoon which was having a difficult time hand carrying the mortars and ammunition. (46) Following the 3rd, and just in front of the 2nd Battalion, was a section of two tank destroyers to give armored support and antitank protection. Suddenly, from the crest of the ridge, came the familiar crack and thump of an 88. Before anyone could react, about four shots had been fired, and one tank destroyer was going up in flames. The other tried to pull up behind the burning wreck for protection. This was to no avail, for before the 88 could be located, it fired again and the second tank destroyer was ablaze. This was the end of the anti-tank support. The 88, since it had been discovered, then started shooting at individuals. It was joined by about three others in the area of the ridge. Once these positions were disclosed, all men and

(45), (46) Personal knowledge.

automatic weapons placed their fire on them and succeeded in silencing the guns. This was not done, however, before they had succeeded in killing a number of our men. This attack on individuals, however, only served to add to the spirit of the men in their attack. (47)

As the 3rd Battalion began moving toward the town of Comte, the 2nd Battalion passed through the gap, and became involved immediately in a fire fight, and both E and D Companies were engaged with enemy riflemen and automatic weapons. The area was extremely wooded and mountainous, so it was a matter of fighting from tree to tree. Visual contact was hard to maintain between the two forward companies, but the radios were working well, and by reference to old positions and check points the companies were able to tell where they were in relation to each other. The enemy firing was now dying down a bit but there was still the problem of getting to the western edge, the objective, by darkness. The attack thus far had lasted all day and it was now approximately 1600 hours and there was still some 1500 yards to go. The men pushed forward firing from the hip and spraying all likely hiding places with fire. (48)

The Germans were using the Panzerfaust in addition to small arms fire, and although none of these hit the men, many hit large trees and the resulting explosions were terrific. The men became accustomed to this, however, and pushed rapidly on. After one more hot exchange of fire a group of the Germans surrendered. A brief interrogation revealed that they were trying to hold, while the remainder of the unit withdrew. With this information the battalion continued moving forward, and just as it was getting dark, secured the final objective, the western edge of Thier-du-mont Ridge. Patrols were sent out, contact was established with the 1st and 3rd Battalions, and so ended a bitter struggle for this high, wooded, cold, rocky piece of ground. (49)

(47), (48), (49) Personal knowledge.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. A study of this operation reveals that the Airborne soldier makes an ideal reserve. He is an aggressive, self-sufficient soldier whose training has taught him to operate even though cut off from supporting troops. He is accustomed to the confusion and lack of information resulting from those first few days of battle which tend to lower the morale and fighting efficiency of the soldier who has not had the benefit of such training.

2. During this entire operation, the only orders issued were fragmentary. The initial events happened too fast for any written orders to be published. This was unusual in the case of airborne troops who normally have very extensive briefing on an operation before being committed. It was interesting to note that, despite this lack of information, units successfully accomplished all their missions.

3. The policy of the division of being able to go at a moments notice paid great dividends in this campaign. Even at the training camps, rations and a basic load of ammunition were always at hand. This accounted for the rapid move that the division was able to make from its base camp into the combat zone, some 150 miles, in a day and a half.

4. The initial positions on Thier-du-mont Ridge were manned by three companies abreast, with no reserve. Conditions of extended frontages caused this disposition of troops to be made, and although not in line with current doctrine it was believed to be justified in view of the reasons mentioned.

5. The system of a battalion mess was once again proved inadequate in this operation. Over a long period of time, and under conditions of extended frontages such as were encountered in this operation, a battalion mess section is not capable of feeding hot meals. It does not have the personnel or the proper equipment. This has been changed in the organization of the airborne division now, however.

6. In a withdrawal requiring the last unit over a route to establish obstacles, a great deal of coordination is required to insure that all units have passed over that route. The 2nd Battalion was indeed fortunate that it was able to get through the road block without any casualties. The loss of an hour's time could have proved disastrous, however.

7. The withdrawal, although successful, had some flaws in the covering force. When the radios went out there was no alternate means of communication. The last word the covering force commander had was to hold until given permission to withdraw. He could see the 1st Battalion covering force being overrun, and being unable to contact the regimental covering force commander, he withdrew directly to the battalion position. Had he not been able to physically see the situation, he might have withdrawn to his first delaying position which was then in German hands.

8. When the regiment passed through the 325th Glider Regiment for the return to the ridge, a lack of adequate reconnaissance with reference to the German position was apparent. The battery of 88's on the hill held its fire until the tank destroyers were in line of fire, then neutralized them both. These positions were met as a complete surprise and caused many casualties which could have been avoided.

9. In the recapture of the ridge, units were assigned their former positions as objectives. This one step alone contributed greatly to the successful accomplishment of the mission. The units were then familiar with the ground over which they were going to attack.

10. Once again, proper training is due a large share of the credit for a successful operation. Although this was the first withdrawal in the division history, and the men openly criticized it, this type of operation had been included in the training schedules, and the officers and men knew the principles involved. The Division Commander said of the operation, "In all the operations in which we have participated in our

two years of combat, and they have been many and multitudinous types, I have never seen a better executed operation than the withdrawal on Christmas Eve. The troops willingly and promptly carried into execution all the withdrawal plans, although they openly and frankly criticized it and failed to understand the necessity for it. But everybody pitched in and the withdrawal went smoothly." (50)

LESSONS

1. Training must be continuous and must cover all phases of combat.

2. In snow and extremely cold weather conditions, hot food, although not essential, does much to help maintain a man's strength as well as his morale.

3. A combat unit must be ready to move into action on a moments notice, even though it is in a rest area.

4. No unit should rely on only one means of communication.

5. Orientation of all personnel on the situation is greatly desired, but a well trained unit can often accomplish its mission without this step.

6. Certain special conditions require a deviation from current military doctrine.

7. A rapid interrogation of prisoners, immediately after capture, will often produce needed information.

8. If an 81mm mortar platoon must hand carry weapons and ammunition for any length of time, extra personnel are needed to assist or the mortars will fall behind.

9. Marching fire is an important and necessary part of the assault.

10. Esprit de Corps and an aggressive attitude will often carry a unit thru despite climatic conditions or the tactical situation.

11. Insofar as is possible, when retaking a position, units should be assigned their former positions as objectives.

(50) A-1, Sec. II, p.8