

EXPANSION OF THE REMAGEN BRIDGEHEAD, 17-21 March

BRIDGEHEAD BREAKOUT, 24-31 March

18 Inf, 1st Inf Div

Interview with Maj Edward W. McGregor, S-3 of 18 Inf

Held at Leiberg, Germany, 3 April 1945

1 - overlay, 1:50,000

Interviewer: Maj Franklin Ferriss, 2d Info. & Hist. Service

General comments In comparison to the regt's fight from the Roer to the Rhine, the fighting during this operation was decidedly tougher. This was due to the volume of supporting fire which the German infantry had - SP guns, artillery and rockets. The infantrymen themselves fought about as they had west of the Rhine, tho the presence of plenty of supporting armor and artillery steeled them somewhat. Major McGregor obviously felt that their resistance was a minor factor in delaying the advance of the 18 Inf.

Another notable difference between this operation and the last one was that here the fighting was chiefly in terms of the high ground, and towns were secondary. [West of the Rhine practically all battalion objectives were towns.]

Air support during the operation was defensive rather than offensive. Several enemy assemblies were spotted and worked over by the Air Corps.

Between 17 and 21 March Maj McGregor emphasized the fighting at Quirrenbach and Eudenbach. The "tough nut"

between 24 and 31 March was Uckerath. [Note that Eudenbach and Uckerath are on high ground, in addition to having good cover for a defense - see accompanying overlay.]

Quirrenbach Hill 310 and Quirrenbach were the initial objectives of the 1st and 2d battalions, respectively. The 2d Bn had taken over from the 78th Div in Brungsberg on 17 March, but the 1st Bn did not come up till that evening. The valley of the Quirren River separated the towns of Brungsberg and Quirrenbach. American forces having been in Brungsberg for some time, the enemy in Quirrenbach almost certainly could not be surprised by a frontal assault across the river valley. So Lt Col Williamson, CO of the 18 Inf, planned to have one company of the 2d Bn "fix" the defenders from the south. Meanwhile, the 1st Bn, followed by a second company of the 2d Bn, got behind ~~the~~ the enemy's main defenses by a wide envelopment on the left. The 1st Bn's mission was to go on and take Hill 310; the company of the second Bn was thereafter to hit the enemy in Quirrenbach from the rear. This maneuver necessitated a long march, for the most part thru woods; hence, armor had to be left behind.

The attack went off as planned, with one exception mentioned below. The 1st Bn was on its objective early in the morning, meeting negligible resistance. Company G, following the same route taken by the 1st Bn, turned south and descended on Quirrenbach from the wooded high ground north of town just as the other 2d Bn company with tank support was engaging the enemy's attention on the other side of town. It still took

quite a scrap to reduce the town, but by afternoon all fight had been atken out of the garrison. The 2d Bn took a lot of PWs here. The exception to the attack's going according to plan was the result of B Company's fourth rifle platoon - 47 colored volunteers who were attached to Company B - joining G Company without orders from anyone. They proved a very real help to Company G, disposing of at least 25 Germans. Major McGregor said the 2d Bn CO was much impressed with their initiative and fighting spirit, though ~~thri~~ their greenness did show up in an unusually high number of casualties. ("In their first two shows they lost 20 of their 47 men".)

Eudenbach This town was also an objective of the 2d Bn. Major McGregor indicated that the attack order did not come down from division in time to get the attack started before 190900 ("it takes at least 6 hours to set up any attck"). Fortunately, the 2d Bn approached the town thru woods, which covered the advance almost to the edge of town. The attackers got into the town by 1300, spent the afternoon fighting in town, and then in the evening repulsed two counterattacks. It was a "rough show" for the 2d Bn, but they held onto the town until relieved by the 26 Inf on 22 March.

Uckerath This was the only sizeable town on the next ridge to the east (see overlay). The 18 Inf, together with the 16 Inf on the left, was given the mission of securing this ridge and the road that ran along its crest, in preparation for VII Corps' attack to break out of the Remagen bridgehead, ~~xxxxxxxthatxxxxxxx~~

which was scheduled for early morning of the 25th. The 18 Inf had more than three kms of this ridge road to secure; and in view of the shape of the ridge, the only way this could be done was by a frontal assault across the valley that separated the objective from the high ground previously seized (see overlay).

The 1st Bn held the high ground immediately west of ~~xxx~~ Uckerath (Hill 230) and consequently got the job of reducing the town. Since the battalion had over two kms to go to get to the outskirts of the town, and a stream to cross in addition, the attack was scheduled for the unusual hour of 2000 (23 March). Most of the attack was over open ground; hence, concealment was vital to a successful assault. There was a moon that night, which Major McGregor felt was beneficial in preventing confusion in the dark.

The difficult approach went about as well as could be expected, though the troops, or at least some of them, were still outside the town at daylight and smoke had to be used (4.2 chemical mortars) to conceal their movements. Resistance in the town was stubborn and the battalion was heavily engaged in and on the outskirts of the town all day. In fact, the troops had not completed mopping up Uckerath when the 3d Armored Division went thru the town early on the 25th. Major McGregor felt that by this time the 18 Inf and the 16 Inf had broken the back of the enemy's resistance. But there was no waste time! "It was a continuous action", Major McGregor said.

The resistance eased off after the armor passed

through. The series of jabs north to the Sieg River went smoothly enough. The men do not relish being relieved of what they have taken, though!

*Franklin Ferriss,
Maj., A U S.*

EXPANSION OF THE REMAGEN BRIDGEHEAD AND BRIDGEHEAD BREAKOUT
17-31 March

Headquarters, 1st Inf Div

Interview with Maj ^{John} Lawton, G-2
Capt ~~Phil Dunlay~~, Ass't G-2
Phillips Donnelly

Dunlay?

Held at the division CP at Wunnenberg, Germany, on 3 April 45

No overlay

Interviewer: Maj Franklin Ferriss, 2d Info. and Hist. Service

∟ Note: 1st Inf Div has excellent G-2 Reports, giving the G-2's best evaluation of the character and extent of the resistance along the division front. Also the 1st Div has the phones in the G-2, G-3, CG, and C/S Sections monitored. In the case of G-2, the monitored reports are submitted in carbon copy along with the After Action Report. In the case of G-3, CG and C/S, the reports are censored, with much, if not all of the color omitted. The original versions remain on file at the division. These phone journals supplement well-kept records at div hq and lay the basis for an excellent history of the div's operations. The regts of the 1st Div also monitor one or more of theirnphones. FF7

Q - What was the enemy's mission on the 1st Div front during this operation?

A - We won't know until the present pocket is liquidated, by which time we will probably capture documents that will tell the story. However, it is Maj. Lawton's belief that the enemy feared that the First Army was going to try to cross the Sieg River and advance north. He considered it vital to stop an advance

in this direction; so he aimed to upset the attack by hitting us on our right flank, i.e., from the east. As Maj. Lawton sees it, the enemy's resistance was extremely stubborn, particularly on 24 March, because of his desire to hold a good line of departure for the planned attack on our flank.

Q - What caused enemy resistance to slacken markedly after 25 March? Was it, as Maj. Smith of the 16 Inf suggested, the result of Field Marshal Montgomery's drive up north?

A - It could well be. The successful commitment of the 3rd Armd Div was also a factor.

Q - Each of the regt's of 1st Div has spoken of the over-extension of its front during this operation. Were the fronts too large for offensive operations?

A - They were large enough to make it tough for the troops. The extent to which the enemy would commit armor in this sector was not anticipated. The 1st Div met elements of 9th Pz, 11 Pz, 3d Pz Gren, 130 Pz Lehr, and 106 Pz Brig. The div took a good many casualties, but they were not heavy in relation to the damage inflicted on the enemy, e.g., PWs captured.

From First Army, 12 Army Group and SHAETF standpoint, the enemy's commitment of so much armor against the bridgehead (it amounted to the better part of his reserve) made the bridgehead a great success, since it weakened him elsewhere, e.g., up north, and reduced casualties there when the attack started on 25 March.

The stubbornness of the enemy's resistance was amazing. Almost without exception, as soon as the 1st Div would take

a piece of ground, the enemy would counterattack. His efforts reached a peak on 24 March, when 1st Div received 14 organized counterattacks.

During the operation no units of the 1st Div got thrown out of objectives once seized. Statements in the division G-3 Periodic Report about units being kicked out of Wullscheid and Eisbach is based on incorrect, preliminary reports. A check of phone journals will show that only one platoon got to Wullscheid and it held the houses it was in. At Eisbach the assault company met such heavy fire as it approached from the south that it decided to circle and attack from the north. This was done - with complete success.

In this connection, Company G's (16 Inf) holding of Geisbach is outstanding. Here the enemy ~~gt~~ into town despite a hell of a lot of friendly artillery fire. Company G just went into the cellars of Geisbach and stuck it out while our artillery plastered the town and eventually persuaded the enemy to withdraw.

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On 4 April the foregoing was read and approved by Maj. Lawton with the following observations:

The enemy exhibited determination to hold every bit of ground only during about a three day period, 23-25 March. This type of fighting had not been encountered by the 1st Div since before the crossing of the Roer River.

The 1st Div captured a movement order of a tank regt of the Pz Lehr Div putting elements of the tank regt into an assembly area facing the 1st Div front (see the div G-2 Periodic Report).

The enemy's big counterattack never came off.

Maj. Lawton also added the following enlightening comment:

The div has not had a single case of wire-tapping. In order to get complete details re the locations of our positions, the div officers have to grill the regimental officers. The use of ~~of~~ a slidex in this grilling process is impractical. The danger of the enemy's tapping is small and the hindrance to operations is great if the slidex is used. It is otherwise when radio is used, which makes radio communication a very poor substitute.

Franklin Ferriss

Franklin Ferriss, Maj., AUS

EXPANSION OF THE REMAGEN BRIDGEHEAD, 17-21 March
BRIDGEHEAD BREAKOUT, 25-29 March

26 Inf, 1st Inf Div

Interviews with:

Col. _____ Seitz, CO of 26 Inf (24 March, CP near Wiese, Gy)
Maj. Henry Clisson, S-3 (do do)
(3 April, CP at Meiste, Gy)

Circumstances: The first interview on 24 March, at which I was able to talk to both Col Seitz and Maj Clisson, was held while the regt was out of the line, resting in preparation for the attack to break out of the bridgehead. The second interview was held after the 1st Div had broken out of the bridgehead and made a long motor march to the vic of Buren.

1 - overlay, 1:50,000

Interviewer: Maj Franklin Ferriss, 2d Info. & Hist. Service

Col. Seitz stated that the main opposition encountered by the 26 Inf from 17 to 21 March was artillery, rockets (nebelwerfers) and SP guns. Most of the artillery was of small and medium calibre, tho there was at least one 320 mm gun which harassed the troops a good deal without causing many casualties. The rockets also really do not cause many casualties. Their weird noise, however, has quite a psychological effect, and most of the men would rather be under shelling. Col. Seitz himself feels otherwise.

Col. Seitz thinks that the German SP guns are very clever. Their rapid movement from spot to spot makes counter-battery action difficult. They are also good on indirect fire missions. At all times they are cagey about our AOP's. They

never fire when the latter are overhead. Most of the SP's are 88 mm SP's, but some are 75mm and some are 105mm. The average doughboy refers to all of them as "88's".

Maj. Clisson also spoke of how much artillery the enemy had during the period 17 to 21 March - too much for the AOP's to spot it all. He also emphasized the SP guns, pointing out that the enemy used them directly against our infantry, even one doughboy. Artillery does not bother them much except when they come out into the open. But in the rough terrain of the bridgehead, which he characterized as the biggest difference between the fighting west of the Rhine and that on the east side, the SP guns have plenty of covered positions, as well as covered routes to and from these positions. It has proved very difficult to spot their exact location on this account.

Maj. Clisson felt that the foregoing factors, plus the wide regimental front, explained the slowness of the advance from 17 to 21 March (cf front of 26 Inf on overlay on this point).

During this advance the big fights, according to Maj. Clisson, were (1) securing the RJ with the autobahn at (713280), (2) seizing Hill 363, and (3) surrounding the airfield at (7431). The 1st Bn had the mission of taking the RJ at (713280). Starting from the vic of Hill 335, the two assault companies moved down the road toward their objective. This road was flanked by woods most of the way, giving the attackers a false sense of concealment. The attack had begun before daylight, but ~~as~~ as it approached the vic of the RJ, the movement

was no longer hidden by darkness. Suddenly, the road was blanketed by enemy artillery fire. Prearranged concentrations fell in and around the axis of advance. The company commanders deployed their men to right and left as rapidly as possible, but the two attacking companies took 77 casualties from the concentrated artillery. Further casualties were avoided by smoking Hill 363 on the east side of the autobahn (see overlay) with the 4.2 chemical mortars. This did not reduce the volume of artillery fire, which continued to rain in on the RJ and the road approaching it from the west; but it did deny the enemy's observation of the movement to right and left and permitted the 1st Bn to reach the autobahn north and south of the RJ.

That evening the 3d Bn passed through the first Bn, and by shooting one company around to the east of the hill, managed to take this essential high ground before daybreak the next day (18 March). Possession of Hill 363 gave the 26 Inf observation over all the surrounding country-side, including the final regimental objective, the airfield at (7431).

Meanwhile, the 2d Bn was given the mission of seizing the two towns just north of the road/that leads from RJ (713280) to the airfield. The second of these towns, Wullscheid, ~~had to be~~ required the use of ~~had to be~~ smoked by the chemical mortars, as the attacking companies (F & G) were unable to close with the enemy before daylight. The smoke was placed on the high ground east of the airfield, from which the enemy otherwise could easily observe the advance of tanks across the open ground south of Wullscheid.

The next big job was securing the airfield at (7431), a job which was never quite completed by the 26 Inf for reasons explained below. The plan of maneuver was for the 2d Bn to cut the road on the north side of the airfield, while the 3d Bn overran the road south of the field and then swept around the east end to hook up with the 2d Bn on the NE side of the field (see accompanying overlay).

The 2d Bn moved out from Wullscheid before daylight on the morning of 19 March. It had to ~~advance~~ cross the creek and advance uphill onto the next ridge to the east. Enemy resistance was very heavy. The battalion fought all day without reaching its objective. Then after dark the attack was resumed and in the early morning hours the road was reached. Subsequently, the battalion spread out to hold about a mile of the road, still under heavy pressure. This was primarily an infantry fight.

At the same time that the 2d Bn was launching its night attack, the 3d Bn attacked thru the 1st Bn. The terrain over which it was attacking was fairly level, and there was a good road for the supporting armor. But hostile resistance was as strong or stronger than it was on the north side of the airfield. The attack enveloped the south and half of the east side of the field, but fell short of cutting the road from the north east. (This was necessary in order to cut off all enemy reinforcements to the defenders of the airfield.) The regt was now told that it was imperative to take Germscheid, one km south of the field. Col. Seitz gave priority to the seizing of this objective, as he felt it unwise to try to seize both objectives

simultaneously. So while the 3d Bn held defensive positions on the south and east sides of the airfield, the 1st Bn hit for Germscheid in a very early morning attack on the 21st of march. Company C reported the town clear by 211200.

(1st & 3d Bns)

The 26 Inf/was relieved late on the 21st by the 413 Inf, which thereafter cut the road on the NE side of the airfield. The 2d Bn was pulled out the next day.

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The VII Corps' attack to break^{out} of the Remagen bridgehead began on the morning of the 25th of March. The 26 Inf was recommitted that morning with the mission of blocking to the north as far as the Sieg River. The three battalions attacked more or less abreast (see accompanying overlay), advancing down the ridge lines toward the Sieg River. The progress of the 2d Bn on the right was interdicted by fire from Hill 225 on its east flank, and the 3d Bn had a similar experience with fire coming in from its west flank. In both cases it proved necessary to envelop to right and left, respectively, to eliminate this fire. ~~In~~ The flanking fire was under control by the 26th of March, when the regt closed to the Sieg River without difficulty except for regular street fighting in clearing Eitorf. Altogether the resistance in this operation was not as great as had been feared.

On the afternoon of 27 March the regt was moved east to clean out the large bend in the Sieg River. In clearing this zone to the 42 E-W grid, little resistance was met.

Franklin Ferriss

Franklin Ferriss,
Maj., Inf.

EXPANSION OF THE REMAGEN BRIDGEHEAD AND BRIDGEHEAD BREAKOUT
20-31 March 1945

16 Inf, 1st Inf Div

Interview with Major Albert H. Smith, S-3

Held at the regimental CP at Buren, Germany, on 3 April 45

1 - overlay, 1:50,000

Interviewer: Maj Franklin Ferriss, 2d Info. & Hist. Sv.

General Comments During the first 5-6 days of this operation the 16 Inf encountered the toughest opposition it has run into since the Hurtgen Forest, mainly because it was a meeting engagement between the 1st Inf Div and a panzer outfit [I believe Maj. Smith was referring to the fighting on 24 and 25 March in ~~making~~ speaking of a "meeting engagement" - FF7] The enemy's artillery was organized, the batteries being located on the north side of the Sieg River. To illustrate how rugged the artillery was, Maj. Smith said that in one day Company B in Adscheid received 500 rounds of medium artillery fire and 500 ~~xxxx~~ rounds of rocket fire. Casualties, however, were surprisingly low in view of the amount of fire the enemy was expending. "Jerry didn't seem to know just where he was putting the artillery. It certainly was not observed fire". One good reason it was not observed was that the 16 Inf smoked the north bank of the Sieg River, thus making it possible to use the roads on the south bank.

The 16 Inf was continually bothered by rockets throughout the operation. These were not accurate and hence not very

effective. But they are weird-sounding things and are quite harassing.

The regt also met quite a lot of tank and SP fire. TD's and AT guns of the 16 Inf accounted for a goodly share of these. In this connection, Maj. Smith commented that light artillery has proven quite ineffective against the German armor, even when it lands as close as 5 yards away. In contrast, medium artillery, if properly adjusted, will turn the enemy armor around and if close, it will knock them out. Chiefly by this means, the 16 Inf beat off several counterattacks of the Panzer Lehr and 11th ~~XX~~ Panzer Divisions. In four days of fighting, the regt knocked out 22 tanks and SP's; it also took a lot of PWs and killed a lot of Jerry infantry. The latter were attacking and hence exposed themselves.

The hardest fight in the whole operation was securing, and particularly holding the road that runs SE from Hennef to Uckerath. After the regt got it, it was subject to constant attacks from the NE. It was bitter fighting, but no part of the regt was forced back from any objective.

A most important factor bearing on the severity of the fighting was the width of the regimental front, described by Maj. Smith as a 7000 yard front. In view of the hostile armor committed against the regt, this was too great a front. It necessitated keeping all three battalions on the line. As a result, the men were dead tired, especially the 1st Bn. For high combat efficiency, troops have got to get 12 hours' sleep every two days. But the 1st Bn attacked four days in a row.

The 16 Inf employed close air support, 15 to 30 minutes before assaulting an objective, and found it very helpful on each occasion. At Rott and Soven it was used and came only three minutes before the attack on the towns - just a little close! The same thing was done at Bierth, which was a particularly sore spot. Six to ten tanks of the Panzer Lehr Division attacked out of there and were stopped by air support. Maj. Smith feels that such support is particularly valuable when hostile armor is being encountered.

Another highspot in the repulse of the enemy attacks launched against the regiment's hold on the road that runs SE out of Hennef was the stopping of the six tanks and approximately 150 infantry that advanced out of Shriefen toward this road. At the time the 1st Bn had no AT defense other than bazookas with which to defend this position, as the men had not had time to bring them up. The artillery observer was not in a position to see this counterattack, but Lt Col Edmund F. Driscoll, the CO of the 1st Bn, was able from his CP in Westerhausen to see the attack ~~forming~~ approaching. He proceeded to contact the supporting artillery Battalion, the 5th FA, and adjusted fire on the attacking enemy. The distance was so close that advance elements had gotten to within 100 yards of the American positions/ before the artillery rained in on them. This plus infantry action threw the Germans back.

German pressure eased the night following ^{the} big push of VII Corps (25 March). Maj. Smith thought this was probably due to the attack of the British and the Ninth U.S. Army in the Wesel area on 24 March.

Resistance was light from this time on until the regt was motorized on 31 March and moved 120 miles in one day to the Buren area. Though the trucks did not pass the IP until 0900, the battalions were all in their assigned positions in the new area by dark. Maj. Smith was well pleased with this, especially as there was a two hour delay in the road march caused by a pocket of resistance near Hasselbach which the 3rd Armd Div was liquidating. Word of this was received from TF Wellborn of the 3rd Armd Div through the regimental I. & R. platoon, which was in constant radio contact with the armd task force, and the regimental column was thereupon rerouted to by-pass the pocket.

Franklin Ferriss

Franklin Ferriss, Maj., Inf.