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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY E, 358TH INFANTRY
(90TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT CATTENOM
(MOSELLE RIVER CROSSING), 9-12 November 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Company Commander)

Type of Operation described:
INFANTRY COMPANY IN A RIVER CROSSING

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INTRODUCTION

Approximately 1000 yards east of the serene village of CATTENOM, in the Rhineland, Company E, 358th Infantry, became engaged in an action, beginning 9 November 1944, that will long be remembered by its personnel. The MOSELLE RIVER presented a formidable obstacle, which had to be negotiated before the first phase of this action could be completely accomplished.

A brief discussion of major events, which led to this action, takes us back several months to that memorable day, 6 June 1944, on the beach of Normandy.

Two battalions of the 90th Division, reinforcing the 4th Infantry Division, landed on the sands of UTAH BEACH this date, with the Division minus, landing two days later.¹ With all elements of the division now ashore, it was time to launch its own attack. On 10 June 1944, the division jumped off. Their course led through the hedgerow country of Normandy, where a good day's gain was measured in yards and more often in hedgerows. Usually, two hedgerows up and one back was the result of the day's action. However, on the 22nd of July the 358th Infantry received the order to attack and seize the Island of SEVES, situated in a SEVES River after many severe counterattacks and tremendous losses, the 358th Infantry was able to secure the island. The stage was now set for the historical First Army breakthrough. The battle of SEVES marked the last major engagement, for the 358th Infantry, in the Normandy hedgerow country. Now, the 90th was faced with the open, rolling terrain of Interior France. On the 8th of August, the division, part of the XX Corps, which had moved so fast, seized LE MANS and at this point was ordered to cut North toward ALENCON. In this operation the division was following the 2nd Armored French Division and had the mission of blocking, to the west, any effort of the German 7th Army to escape the closing FALAISE trap. At this time, the German 7th Army was moving rapidly eastward, due to the pressure being exerted by the British and the Canadians on the north and by the Americans on the South. Their line of retreat lay along a valley, of which both sides afforded excellent observation for our forces. The Germans, realizing their plight, increased their determination not to be trapped; however, their additional efforts were in vain. Our forces, overlooking the valley, formed a bowl into which we poured the fires of eleven battalions of artillery, a tank battalion and a tank destroyer battalion. It was here that one of the artillery liaison plane pilots, in support of the 358th Infantry, uttered his classic remark. Becoming irritated at his unit's delay in getting his data on their guns, he shouted excitedly over his radio, "Stop computin' and start shootin'".² In the four days that it took to virtually annihilate the German 7th Army in the valley, the 90th Division was credited with more than 13,000 prisoners and approximately 8000 dead or wounded enemy, and suffered less than 600 casualties itself. In addition, 300 enemy tanks, 250 self-propelled guns, 164 artillery pieces and 3270 enemy vehicles were captured or destroyed.³

Immediately following this action, the first signs of gasoline shortages began to appear. The shortage plagued the entire Third Army all the way to the MOSELLE River. The advance continued; however, with foot elements walking and riding in a series of shuttle movements. Resistance was comparatively light, except for isolated enemy bands who lacked the strength and determination to detain the forward elements of the advance guard for any appreciable length of time. The division moved south of Paris, through FONTAINBLEAU, whose historical significance lies in the fact that it contained the elaborate castle of Napoleon Bonaparte. Then the famous SEINE River was crossed. They proceeded through the battlefields of the first world war, namely, the Marne, Château Thierry, the Aisne and Reims. At Reims it was necessary to call a halt to this rapid advance, as essential supplies

were completely exhausted. Seven precious days were lost to the division waiting to be re-supplied; however, the enemy lost no time in using those days to his advantage. He was able to consolidate his forces east of the mighty MOSELLE River. With the division completely gassed and re-supplied, Corps issued, in substance, briefly, the following order: the 7th Armored Division was to lead the attack on the fortified area of METZ with the 5th Infantry Division on the right, and the 90th Infantry Division on the left. They were to seize a bridgehead east of the MOSELLE River, capturing METZ and THIONVILLE, and then to seize a bridgehead over the RHINE River, in the vicinity of MAINZ. Following this action they were to be prepared to continue the advance to seize FRANKFURT, on Corps order.⁴ Due to stiffened resistance and the enemy's determination to hold the MOSELLE line, the Corps was not able to proceed beyond the first objective. The mission of capturing the town of THIONVILLE and establishing the bridgehead at this point was given to the 90th Division. From the line of departure, in the vicinity of Reims, the 90th Division was able to advance more than half the distance to the objective, on the first day. The division occupied the line generally from TRIEUX, to AVRIL, to BRIEY. The following day saw considerable advance with light enemy resistance. On 12 September 1944, the 2nd Battalion, 358th Infantry, entered the city as THIONVILLE, from the northwest and after considerable house to house fighting, secured the entire west bank of the MOSELLE River. Plans were immediately laid for crossing the MOSELLE River at this point. The Corps Commander, realizing that his front was over-extended, ordered the 90th Division to remain on the west bank of the MOSELLE River and to extend to the south and relieve the 7th Armored Division and an infantry regiment, of the 5th Division, in the area northwest of METZ. The relief was completed by 14 September and the 90th Division was employed in holding the ground gained against the fortified area north of METZ. This static situation persisted for an entire month. Finally, the 95th Division moved north to take over the positions from the 90th Infantry Division. The 90th then moved into a rear area where a one-week training schedule was set up, on river crossings and the assault of fortified positions. This training, though very brief and condensed, was very shortly to serve in good stead in the breaching of the fortified region of METZ.⁵

THE REGION OF METZ

It was now apparent that before anything could be accomplished east of the MOSELLE River, it would be necessary to first reduce Fortress METZ and its many outlying forts.⁶

The inter-outer defenses of METZ properly constituted a series of 15 forts, the original construction of which was started in the earlier part of the 18th Century and was completed under Napoleon III, in 1866.⁷ A circular series of hills approximately 6 miles out from METZ contained 28 additional forts. Infantry units, protecting these forts, were established a considerable distance from the fortification in an all-around security pattern. The forts were underground, with large caliber guns firing from involving steel turrets and protruding only slightly above the surface of the ground. Likewise, underground passages linked all the various forts in a group. In conjunction with the METZ forts was a series of 19 forts of the MAGINOT LINE, approximately 20 miles to the north of METZ. FORK KOENIGSMACHER and D'ILLANGE were two of this MAGINOT Group, all of which dovetailed in the defensive scheme of METZ.⁸

THE THIRD ARMY PLAN

The mission of the Third Army was two-fold. First, it was to obtain the surrender of the Fortress METZ area and, second, to expel the enemy from the soil of France and push them back to the RHINE.⁹ In order to best accomplish this mission, in the light of the strength of the enemy forts in the area, it was decided that a joint offensive would meet with the greatest success. Renouncing the tremendous project of an assault on the fortress area direct, it by-passed this area on the north. On the southern prong of a double envelopment of the XX Corps, they were to be brought together some 20 miles behind the city of METZ in the FAULQUEMONT-BOULAY area. The south wing of the pincers was favored with occupying key terrain and was lacking the MOSELLE River obstacle.

This southern envelopment could afford to undertake operations of great depth on a broad front. The north wing had the very difficult MOSELLE as its barrier and, consequently, had the task of establishing small bridgeheads and then the further problem of expanding them to allow their heavier equipment to get across.¹⁰ A different time-table was set up for each wing of the pincers. The southern wing was to attack on a broad front until such time as the northern wing had established a secure bridgehead. The southern wing would then hold up and allow the northern wing to take the offensive with the greater part of its forces.¹¹

THE PLAN OF XX CORPS

The XX Corps issued its order, Field Order Number 12, on 3 November 1944. It directed the 5th Infantry Division to form the southern pincer. It was to attack from the ARNAVILLE bridgehead; by-pass the fortress area; bridge the NIED River and continue the attack north to seize the ground in the FAULQUEMONT-BOULAY area on Corps order.¹²

The 90th Division was directed to make the assault crossing over the MOSELLE River, north of THIONVILLE. They were then to execute a flanking attack along the MAGINOT LINE. They were to reduce each fort in turn and join the southern wing in the FAULQUEMONT-BOULAY area, thus completing the encirclement of fortress METZ.¹³

The 95th Division was ordered to have an infantry battalion stage a demonstration in force at UCKANGE, just south of THIONVILLE, in order to deceive the enemy and distract his attention from the main effort of the 90th Division further north. On Corps Order, the 95th Division minus was to attack and seize the city of METZ.¹⁴

The 10th Armored Division was to pass through the KOENIGSMACHER bridgehead and also execute a flanking attack southeast to BOULAY. It was to remain on the outside of the 90th Division.¹⁵

The 3rd Cavalry Group was ordered to screen the river line to the north of THIONVILLE, then follow the 10th Armored across after the bridgehead was established. Its mission across the MOSELLE was to relieve the flank protecting elements of the 90th Division on the north.¹⁶

The XX Corps Artillery was strong in the support of the 90th Division in its bridgehead operation. Artillery ammunition was available for expenditure, in quantity. Relocation of Artillery was

carried out extensively with the majority of the batteries being transferred to the BOIS D'OTTANGE area to support the 90th Division bridgehead at KOENIGSMACHER.¹⁷ In the new positions silence was imposed, firing being limited to registration by a single gun in each battalion. Normal activity was simulated in the old positions with two guns per battalion being left behind to continue their firing and not to rejoin their battalions until the night preceding the attack.¹⁸ Surprise being essential in this night attack, no artillery preparation was to be fired. A detailed program of counter-battery and prearranged fires had been prepared however, and was to be fired by all artillery supporting the 90th Division. It was scheduled to start at H-hour and continue until H plus 120. Strong support was to be maintained thereafter on enemy artillery locations and upon, "on call" missions from the division.¹⁹

Attached to the 90th Division was one light artillery battalion. In general support there were twenty-six battalions available, made up of medium, light and heavy artillery, plus the organic artillery of the 10th Armored Division and one 8-inch gun battery. In addition to the above, eight 100 mm fortress guns were included.²⁰

THE ENEMY SITUATION

There was known to be four enemy divisions on the east side of the MOSELLE, opposing the XX Corps. Their disposition was: the 416th Infantry Division opposing the left flank of the 90th Division, holding the sector from KOENIGSMACHER to the XX Corps north boundary. The 19th Infantry Division held the central sector from KOENIGSMACHER to within 5 miles of METZ. The 462nd Volksgrenadier Division, reinforced with OCS and special fortress troops, held the fortified area immediately surrounding METZ. Opposing the 5th Division in the south was the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division.²¹

The 416th Infantry numbered 8300 men. The 19th Infantry Division numbered 5000 men. The 462nd Volksgrenadier Division, reinforced, numbered approximately 9000 men. The 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division had approximately 6000 and the General Headquarters and Service Units scattered throughout the area were estimated at 2000 men. They totaled, in all, 30,000 troops.²²

On the 1 November the enemy deemed it advisable to replace the XIII SS Corps, in the METZ sector with a LXXXII Infantry Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General HOENNLEIN. Lt. General KITTEL, an expert in fortress defense, arrived from the eastern front to command the 462nd Volksgrenadier Division. KITTEL'S arrival was detained and upon assuming command he found the XX Corps attack well underway and his defensive shell already split.²³

THE DIVISION PLAN

As revealed by the Corps Order, the 90th Division was to make the main effort.²⁴ Plans were immediately laid to relieve the Division from its holding engagement in the METZ area. The 95th Division assumed this duty and the 90th moved to the AUDUN-AU METZ-MORFONTAIN-MEREYLE BAS area, in the rear, to conduct an intensive training schedule. This training was to be on river crossings and the assaulting of fortified positions.²⁵ The XX Corps Engineer attachments were to

join and train with the assault elements. The 1139th Engineer (C) Group was assigned in direct support of the river crossings and the assault operations.²⁶

The 358th Infantry was to be on the right, crossing in the vicinity of CATTENOM. The 359th Infantry was to be on the left, to cross in the vicinity of MALLING. The 357th Infantry, in reserve, was to cross on Division order in the vicinity of CATTENOM.²⁷ The reinforced division artillery (27 battalions) could not fire preparation without compromising the mission. However, at H-hour a heavy program of destructive fires was to be held on the KOENIGSMACHER fortifications and on the close-in towns of BASSE-HAM, HAUTE HAM, KOENIGSMACHER, METRICH, MALLING and HUNTING.

Briefly this was the Division plan. It was published in conference to commanders and staff down to, and including, battalions on the 3 November.

THE DIVISION PREPARATION

Regimental, separate unit and Battalion Commanders immediately made a reconnaissance of the area of future operations. All reconnaissance was limited, however, since security considerations were paramount. In the training area, infantry staff and commanders planned, down to the last detail, the composition of the boat waves and the number for the individual boat loadings. Upon leaving the rear assembly areas, each man knew his wave and boat number, also his boat Captain.²⁸ All supply echelons had an operational plan for maintaining and providing evacuation for their regiments, by assault and motor boats, should vehicular ferries or bridges fail.²⁹ Every consideration was given to the problem of signal communication. Engineer and traffic control nets were organized and linked together in addition to a double tactical net. Extra stocks of batteries were accumulated in the realization of the heavy and unusual demands that would be placed on the radio system. Wire was laid to forward assembly areas under the cover of darkness. At the divisional level, supply agencies were prepared for the movement of supplies further forward than is normal. The reason for this was to allow unit echelons to concentrate their efforts forward of the regimental dumps.³⁰ Trained engineer teams were to give demonstrations on the proper method of assaulting and reducing pillboxes and instructions in the use of flame throwers.

At Division Headquarters the field order was being drafted. At 2200 6 November, it was issued.³¹ The assault of the MOSELLE was to take place during darkness on the morning of 9 November.

THE BATTALION PLAN

The plan of the regiment called for an assault crossing with the 1st Battalion, on the right, and the 3rd Battalion, on the left. The 1st Battalion had, for their mission, the storming of Fort KOENIGSMACHER. The 3rd Battalion was to capture and contain the town of KOENIGSMACHER. The 2nd Battalion drew the reserve and was to remain there [west of the river] initially, until the town of KOENIGSMACHER had been taken. This being accomplished, it was to cross the MOSELLE River, pass through the 3rd Battalion, and continue the attack.³²

On the 3rd of November the Battalion was situated in an old French barracks near MORFONTAINE. Extensive training was carried out in this area. At this time, the Corps engineer attachments joined the regiment. Company A and Company C of the 179th Engineer (C) Battalion were assigned to the handling of the assault boats. The ferrying of supplies, and the evacuating of the wounded for the 358th Infantry Regiment. Company B was charged with the responsibility of constructing the bridge at the CATTENOM crossing site.³³ These were the men the regiment adopted. With their assistance, training was conducted on land in the proper techniques of river crossings, the correct procedure in boat loading, and a method to be followed in paddling.

Acting upon instructions from the Battalion S-4, E Company submitted a complete list of lost, damaged or destroyed equipment. On 6 November replacement equipment was issued. On this date also, the company weapons were inspected and repairs or replacements made by a division ordnance team.

At noon, 7 November, the Battalion Commander, in a conference with his staff and Company Commanders, issued the plan. The Battalion, initially in reserve, would be prepared to move out any time after 2000 hours, to march to an assembly area in the CATTENOM Woods. It was not until this conference that maps, of the area of future operations, were made available to Company Commanders. It was the plan to send company guides forward, just at dusk, with the Battalion S-1, to select company areas in a series of old barracks on the edge of the designated woods. In this area, absolute black-out was to be maintained, and, during the day of 8 November, no one was to expose himself. Arrangements were made to have the kitchen trucks brought up and concealed in the proper areas before the arrival of the companies. Three hot meals were to be served on 8 November. Strict radio silence was to be observed. It was stated further, that E Company was to be the Battalion reserve.

Eight waves, consisting of eight assault boats per wave, each boat with 12 infantryman and three engineers, were to accompany the 2nd Battalion. F Company was to make up the first two waves; G Company the third and fourth; E Company, the fifth and sixth; H Company, with elements of the Battalion Headquarters, to make up the seventh and eighth. Company F was to reorganize along the BASSE-HAM, KOENIGSMACHER Road, tying in its left with the 3rd Battalion, who was containing the town of KOENIGSMACHER. Company G was to reorganize along the same road, tying in with F Company on its left and the 1st Battalion on its right. E Company, with H Company and Battalion Headquarters, were to reorganize in the vicinity of the cement factory on the railroad.

Upon Battalion order, Companies F and G were to attack abreast, and secure the first phase line, the high ground, 15[?] yards to the east, which dominated the entire river valley.

All companies were to be alerted at 1400 hours, 9 November, and be prepared to move into the village of CATTENOM, to await their crossing of the MOSELLE.

The Battalion moved from its rear assembly area at MORFONTAINE at 2030 hours by shuttle. Rain, which had commenced two days previously, was continuing at an even greater tempo, causing the narrow roads to become slippery. Artillery, struggling to get its pieces in position before daylight, 8 November, added to the congestion on the roads. As a result, the companies did not reach the forward assembly area until 0400 hours, 9 November.

Company E personnel were immediately issued their bedding roles for the remainder of the night. A hot breakfast was served at 0800 hours, that morning. At 0900 hours, a meeting of all Company Commanders was called. Observing from a third story window, overlooking the enemy territory to the east, the Battalion Commander oriented his Company Commanders. Although it was still raining, it was possible to observe the crossing site, 2000 yards away. The town of KOENIGSMACHER, the 3rd Battalion objective, and the Fort of KOENIGSMACHER, the 1st Battalion objective could be plainly seen. It was difficult, however, to observe the high ground to the east, which constituted the 2nd Battalion's initial objective. This observation post did serve to better orient the Company Commanders.

During the course of the day, all E Company Platoon Leaders, Platoon Sergeants and Squad Leaders were oriented at similar windows. All men in the company were thoroughly familiarized with the mission before them and each knew his job well. A hot lunch was served at 1200 hours and again at 1800 hours. K rations, sufficient for two days, were distributed and the men were instructed to rest as much as possible.

The situation, the preparation and the mission have been outlined. Now, a brief description of the terrain. The CATTENOM Forest was very heavily wooded. Upon leaving this forest, the ground to the east tapered off to the edge of the MOSELLE RIVER. It was completely devoid of trees and afforded little cover or concealment. Along the river no covered boat assembly points were available. Hence, CATTENOM village provided the only assembly point in the area. On the far side of the MOSELLE the same devoid, sloping terrain was to be found, as far as the railroad tracks. To the southeast and, as if it were man-made, the hill containing Fort KOENIGSMACHER rose to a height of approximately 700 feet within a distance of 1000 yards. Some 3500 yards to the northeast and situated on equally key terrain was METRICH, another member of the MAGINOT group. To the southeast some 5000 yards, stood FORT D'ILLANGE, also of this group. The MAGINOT line formed a belt which actually extended from these forts to BOULAY, the division objective. All in all, there were some 19 Forts in this belt, each capable of mutually supporting the other with heavy artillery fire. It developed then, that the high ground supporting Forts METRICH and KOENIGSMACHER was the 2nd Battalion's first phase line.

THE CROSSING

The two assault battalions were to start their crossing at 0330 hours. The 1st Battalion was to assemble at HUZANGE, pick up their boats and physically carry them 1500 yards to the river. The 3rd Battalion was to assemble in CATTENOM and from there, secure their boats and proceed to the river. Their carry was 900 yards. Elements of the 3rd Battalion passed through E Company around 0100 hours, en-route to CATTENOM. All the men in the company were awake for, from this point on, sleep seemed out of the question. They knew they, themselves, would be taking this same route in a short time.

At 0145 hours, the company was ordered on the road. At 0200 hours it moved out. Rain was not falling, however, there was a slight drizzle. The Battalion order of March was; G,F,E,H and Headquarters Companies. The total darkness, the drizzle, the silence, except for the swishing of the men's raincoats and gear, coupled with the knowledge of the assignment before them, all seemed to

blend into a premonition of what was to happen. The column moved slowly. By 0250 hours, Company E had traveled only 1500 yards of the 2500 yards to CATTENOM. Word was filtering back through the column that the entire town was flooded. This hardly seemed possible since only a few hours before, during daylight, the MOSELLE was observed flowing rather peacefully along its course. Granted, the recent rains caused to rise some but from the observation post, it certainly did not look dangerous.

The company reached the town at 0320 hours and was sheltered in several buildings on the northwest edge. The Battalion Commander stated that radio silence would be lifted at 0345 hours. He stayed just long enough to state that the 3rd Battalion was having trouble. The MOSELLE River was flooding and had already risen to within 400 yards of the town. This meant that the 3rd Battalion had to drag and sometimes swim, with the boats, for a distance of 500 yards before reaching sufficient depth to float them. To add to the difficulty, what had been estimated to be a 2 or 3 mph current, was now thought to be closer to 6 to 8 mph.

The leading assault elements of the 3rd Battalion arrived at the river at 0330 hours and started their crossing. The current in mid-stream carried their first and second waves 1500 yards down-stream. Succeeding waves were likewise carried down-stream. As a result, no boats were coming back. By 0400 hours, the 3rd Battalion had cleared the west bank and had been swallowed up in the darkness and the river. There remained only sufficient boats for one company of the 2nd Battalion to cross. Up to this time, not a single shot had been fired. It was apparent that the enemy never suspected a crossing under these conditions.

Prepared positions on the enemy side of the river were inundated and left unmanned. Enemy mine fields, which would normally have been exposed, permitted the boats to float over them. In this, the weather in the river proved a friend. To some soldier has been attributed the saying, "In war, the weather is always neutral." However, in this situation, nothing could be further from the truth as obviously bad weather was the enemy of the aggressor.³⁴

Company E reached the river's edge in water, some places now knee deep. A few boats were being worked back with great difficulty. The 1st Platoon was sent down-stream 500 yards to assist in the return of boats. The 1st Battalion, on the right, was experiencing the same difficulty with the result that a number of their boats were floating past in midstream, unmanned. The 1st Platoon was able to recover about 15 boats but not before the enemy became aware of our efforts. Mortar and artillery fire was now landing in the Battalion area. Several rounds landed in F Company, seriously wounding the Company Commander and eleven men. Amidst the confusion, Company E loaded the available boats and started the wild ride down and across the river.

The Company Executive Officer was sent with the 2nd Platoon in the first wave. Waves now consisted of no set number but were contingent upon what boats, with paddles, were present. Every effort was made to maintain tactical unity. A small measure of success was possible since each boat contained a squad. The First Sergeant was sent with the 3rd Platoon, which constituted the second wave. With the arrival of four additional boats and sufficient paddles, it was possible for the 1st Platoon, the 4th Platoon and the remainder of Company Headquarters to start in the third wave.

I would like to point out, at this time, that the engineers assigned to assist in this crossing were doing an excellent job under the existing conditions. Company E of the 179th Engineer (C) Battalion

made repeated attempts, under heavy mortar and artillery fire, and in water waist deep, to establish a footbridge. This proving impossible, they took to retrieving lost boats. In a few cases they went so far as to swim into midstream when a boat could not be reached otherwise.

E Company Headquarters touched ground on the eastern side of the MOSELLE River at 0630 hours at a point approximately 1000 yards downstream. The problem was, now, to reach the area designated for reorganizations. Although very foggy, daylight was just breaking. The faint outline of the town of KOENIGSMACHER could be seen directly to the front. Considerable rifle fire was heard in and around the town. Moving in the direction of the cement plant, two squads of the 2nd Platoon were found, knee-deep in water. A little further than the third squad joined. Things were beginning to look better. Company Headquarters and the 1st Platoon arrived at the reorganization area around 0730. The 1st Platoon Leader reported that the Executive Officer and First Sergeant were looking for the other Platoons.

A small pumping station located on rather high ground, next to the river, opened fire on elements crossing. One squad was sent to silence this fire. Another was supporting them by firing into the apertures that were visible. The first squad had little difficulty in neutralizing the pumping station and capturing the 18 Germans it contained. Since it was impossible to send the prisoners across the river, at this time they were brought forward and contained within the cement plant. The third squad was sent forward to the KOENIGSMACHER-BASSE-HAM Road to furnish security to the front and to contact the friendly elements on the left. At this time it was not known just who did occupy the town. F Company was also having difficulty reorganizing on the west of the river. Radio contact was established with the battalion whose rear CP was still in CATTENOM. The Battalion Executive Officer was informed as to the situation.

Around 0800 hours, the 3rd Platoon reported with all but two men present. During the platoon reorganization, a mortar shell, landing in the area, had seriously injured the two men. Engineers, who had been handling the boats, assisted in evacuating them. By 0900 hours, the reorganization of Company E had been completed when the Executive Officer reported with the weapons platoon.

The 3rd Battalion, now across the river, reorganized and experienced little difficulty in capturing the town of KOENIGSMACHER. The Regimental Commander, witnessing the rising water and the difficulty of the 2nd Battalion in securing sufficient boats to cross, ordered the 3rd Battalion to continue. They were, now, to secure the 1st phase line, which was a high ground to the rear and east of Fort KOENIGSMACHER.

At 1200 hours, the reorganization of the 2nd Battalion was complete and disposed as follows: F Company occupied the town with two platoons. The 3rd platoon was along the KOENIGSMACHER-BASSE-HAM Road. G Company tied in with the 1st Battalion, at the road junction on the right, and with F Company on the left. Company E remained in reserve in the vicinity of the cement plant. At 2100 hours, the Regimental Commander issued his order that the Battalion CP the 2nd Battalion was to relieve the 3rd on the 1st Phase Line. It was to be prepared to continue the attack to VALMESTROFF, on order.

THE COUNTERATTACK

At 2300 hours, the battalion, with E Company in the lead, worked its way around the base of the Fort KOENIGSMACHER Hill. Flares, shot from within the Fort, were coupled with sporadic machinegun fire, which would force all men to hit the ground. However, the entire battalion was able to pass within 500 yards of the rear door of Fort KOENIGSMACHER without being observed by those inside. Upon reaching the 3rd Battalion it was found they had repelled three counterattacks in five hours. They had also suffered considerable losses and were short of ammunition. The wounded were being carried to the cement plant. However, evacuation was very slow. The aid station was still across the river.

Since continued counterattacks were expected, work was immediately begun on digging positions and clearing fields of fire. The hill mass that formally contained one battalion, now held two. The two battalions were very busy setting up a perimeter defense. This called for considerable reshuffling of companies. E Company was assigned the northeast sector of the hill, presently held by a portion of I Company. The 1st Platoon in E Company was to tie in on the right with the left platoon of K Company. The first Platoon Leader of E Company was mistaken for the enemy, while checking his positions, and was killed by an I Company man. The 2nd Platoon occupied the central company sector. The 3rd Platoon, minus one squad, occupied the left sector.

A section of heavy machine guns was placed on the right of the 1st Platoon. B Company's light machine guns were placed on the left of the 3rd Platoon. The 60 mm mortars were dug in, 50 yards behind the center platoon.

At 0630 hours, the enemy made preparations for the counterattack. This consisted of five minute artillery and mortar concentrations. Due to the heavily wooded area, these concentrations took their toll. The battalion Forward Observer and his Sergeant, both occupying the same hole, were killed. Numerous casualties were inflicted upon the battalion. E Company lost six men. After a 20 minute lull, the enemy moved up the heavily wooded hill in the E Company sector. Now that it was light, it was discovered that the fields of fire were not good. This enabled the enemy to get within 50 feet of some of the defensive positions of E Company. Since the fields of fire were so limited, the heavy machine guns in the right platoon were almost useless. A fierce firefight ensued, resulting in a penetration in the 2nd Platoon area. The fighting determination of this platoon caused the enemy to withdraw with considerable losses. Fields of fire were immediately improved. A better battalion fire plan was established and coordinated. Artillery concentrations were placed in the draws and were to be fired on call.

The 1st Battalion was having difficulty cracking the Fort KOENIGSMACHER defenses. The Regimental Commander ordered the 2nd and 3rd battalions to occupy the first phase line until the 1st Battalion had accomplished its mission. On the 10th and 11th of November the 2nd and 3rd battalions occupied this hill. The hill was subjected to periodic artillery and mortar fire. Several counterattacks were successfully repulsed with the aid of the planned artillery concentrations. The enemy, having been forced out of METRICH by the 359th Infantry, attacking in this area, was attempting to effect the relief of the Fort KOENIGSMACHER Garrison.

On the morning of 12 November, Fort KOENIGSMACHER fell. The 2nd Battalion was ordered to attack the next phase line; the town of VALMESTROFF. Thus ended a 3 day operation. A major river had been crossed; repeated counterattacks had been repulsed; and a bridgehead had been safely established under the most adverse conditions.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The fortified area of METZ had been tested and proved to be tougher than anything the Third Army had, as yet, encountered. Obviously, the Germans intended to hold this line at all costs. Confronted with these fortifications, the plan for a double envelopment was an excellent solution for the reduction of this area.

All troops, in this operation, were given adequate orientation and training. Unit commanders, down to and including platoons, were given the opportunity to observe and study the area of their future operations. Coordination with the attached Engineers, in the training area and in the actual operation, was excellent.

The success of this operation was contingent upon many factors. Possibly, leading in importance, was secrecy. With the artillery, while displacing, maintaining normal fire; with the continuation of normal patrolling missions, and two, with the moving of all units under the cover of darkness, the enemy was given no warning of impending operations.

Although the boat haul from CATTENOM to the river was approximately 1000 yards, the area offered nothing better. CATTENOM, at least, furnished cover.

Initially, the MOSELLE River, itself, proved the greatest obstacle. In the relatively short period of six hours, it had flooded its banks and inundated the valley from 1000 to 1500 yards. No plausible explanation can be offered as to why this should happen on the very morning of the crossing. In planning, emphasis was placed on the immediate construction of a bridge at this site. The MOSELLE River now forced the abandonment, temporarily, of this important project. Criticism, if any, might be traced to the Army Engineers, who were undoubtedly consulted in the planning phase. It would seem that their responsibility should include a thorough knowledge of the seasonal characteristics of all rivers in the Army area. Had the enemy been alert, a bridgehead could have been established, only after a tremendous loss of life and material. The flooded MOSELLE River gave the German defenders a false sense of security, which permitted the successful establishment of the all-important bridgehead.

A boat haul of 1000 yards, normally, would be considered excessive. However, under the existing conditions, no shorter haul would have been feasible. Here again, an alert enemy could have disrupted the operation and thrown back the assaulting forces.

The 2nd Battalion Aid Station did not arrive when it was most needed. Attempts to evacuate litter cases, back across the river, were impossible in the early stages of the crossing. The cement factory would have served as an excellent location for this aid station. Medical personnel did arrive around 1800 hours; however, their services were needed long before this.

The difficulty in establishing a defensive position, at night, is clearly brought out here. Adequate fields of fire cannot be cleared until daybreak, and then it may be too late.

In concluding, I would like to quote the Commendation received by the Commanding General, 90th Division, from the Commanding General, Third U.S. Army:

"The capture and development of your bridgehead, over the Moselle River, in the vicinity of Koenigsmacher, will ever rank as one of the epic river crossings of history."

LESSONS

1. Exploit every possibility and probability before attempting a major operation, over a river, during the area's rainy period.
2. The element of surprise always works for those who employ it, regardless of the size or the scale of operations.
3. Orient every man on his mission and explain, as thoroughly as possible, the situation, in order that he may more intelligently accomplish this mission.
4. Where the operation is of a specialized nature and employing additional troops in close support, such as engineers, ample training time is necessary to permit of understanding and proper coordination between the units.
5. In this instance, fewer men in the assault boats would have made better progress in crossing the river; however, it would have been at the sacrifice of what tactical unity there was.
6. Standardized methods common in the attack, allows the enemy to learn your habits and to prepare for your operation.
7. Every effort must be made to allow for sufficient daylight reconnaissance, when on either the offense or defense, and to include, if possible, all unit Commanders.
8. Wounded should be evacuated as expeditiously as possible.
9. Medical installations should always be located along routes of evacuation and be readily accessible.

END NOTES

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