

Action of the 1st Bn, 318th Regt, in the drive toward BASTOGNE, BELGIUM. The interview was conducted at the rear echelon CP of the 80th Division in OBERTEULEN, LUXEMBOURG, on 29 January 1945. Major George W. Connaughton, formerly CO 1st Bn, was interviewed. Interviewer: Capt Dello G. Dayton. Map: 1/50,000.

(NOTE: This is about the most difficult interview that I have ever conducted. The circumstances as far as physical conditions were concerned were perfect, but the state of mind of the person interviewed completely cancelled those. In the middle of the BASTOGNE drive, Maj Connaughton was relieved of the command of the Bn and he had been hurt very much by this. He was still much concerned over it--not bitter but unhappy.)

The attack on ETTELBRUCK during the period 22-24 December greatly depleted the ranks of the 1st Bn 318th and when, on the afternoon of 24 December, the Bn moved to the ^{west} ~~east~~ to assist CCA of the 4th Armad Div in driving toward BASTOGNE, its total strength was only about 450 men. All of the company commanders were new and Major Connaughton, who had been Ex O, had just taken over the Bn. In the action at ETTELBRUCK the Bn Comdr had been wounded and all the company commanders wounded or killed. (Those lost at ETTELBRUCK were: Lt Col Albert Tosi, Bn CO, wounded; Capt Joseph F Grady, CO Co C, killed; Capt Otto Schultz, CO Co A, wounded; 1st Lt John Henry Scanlon, CO Co B, wounded.)

About 1100 on the 24th of December, Major Connaughton received orders from Col MacVickar to withdraw from ETTELBRUCK and move south to BERG to entruck for a new zone of action. At the time when the order was received, the 1st Bn had Cos A and C in the line southwest of ETTELBRUCK and was helping to contain the town. Co C disengaged first with some difficulty and proceeded toward BERG. Co A had just started to disengage when Maj Connaughton was instructed to put his troops back in to the line and assist the 3d Bn, on Lopert Hill, which was receiving a counter-attack. Co C had been brought back but had not yet resumed the original position when the Major was instructed to carry out the orders of withdrawal. (Major Connaughton said that the counterattack had probably come as a result of their withdrawal. Enemy troops had followed them as they withdrew and in so doing had

hit the flank of the 3d Bn, which was on the left. The Major said further that when he finally withdrew he would not have been glad, under any circumstances, to trade places with the 3d Bn. The latter was sitting alone out on the point of Lopert Hill, northwest of LITTELBROCK, and had enemy in front of and alongside it.)

About dark on the 24th the Bn left BERG for CCA Hq of the 4th Armd Div in MARTELANGE, BELGIUM. Maj Connaughton said that at this time he knew his Bn was attached to the 4th Armd but he did not know exactly what the mission was going to be. At MARTELANGE the Major met Gen Earnest, CO of CCA, was briefed on the situation, and given the mission for the following day. The mission in brief was that at 0300 on the 25th the Bn would jump off in ^{an} attack toward the north, BASFOGNE, the first objective being the town of TINTANGE; thereafter the attack would be continuous until the final objective was reached. Gen Earnest emphasized that speed was the important thing. He gave Maj Connaughton an assembly area for the troops about 800 yds southeast of WARNACH and about midnight the men bedded down as best they could in the snow. At 0230 on the 25th, Maj Connaughton gave the following orders to his company commanders, all of them new: Leave the assembly area at 0700 in order to reach the Line of Departure by 0800; A and C will be the assault companies, A on the left, C on the right; the road between WARNACH and TINTANGE will be the left boundary of the Bn, the Belgium-Luxembourg boundary will be the right flank boundary; attack toward TINTANGE along an azimuth of about 45 degrees; the Bn will be supported by 8 tanks from the 35th Tk Bn and prior to our move into the town of TINTANGE air and artillery will be placed on the town. The general plan for the attack on TINTANGE was outlined about as follows: After crossing the Line of Departure, Co A would occupy the high knob about 500 yds southwest of TINTANGE. After securing the same would clean out the northwest portion of the town and move on to the high ground to the west; Co C would move into the remainder of TINTANGE.

while Co B moved up the deep gorge south of the town, then to the east and finally north where it would tie in with Co A.

The Bn moved out of the assembly area as planned at 0700 with the 8 tanks abreast of the infantry. Gen Earnest had said the previous evening that the Bn would probably have to fight to get to the LD, and he was right. Because of the fighting the Bn was somewhat delayed and the LD was not reached until about 0830. The terrain prevented the tanks from moving right up ^{to} the LD so they had to side-slip to the left until they found a trail leading into TINTANGE. The country was badly cut up and very rugged. Over it were low pine trees under which there lay a several inch mantle of snow. The Line of Departure, selected by map reconnaissance; which was the Grande Molscht Creek, turned out to be a gorge with steep slopes on either side. The stream itself was not an obstacle, but the slopes certainly were. With difficulty the infantrymen made their way down the near slope while they drew fire from the Germans on the opposite side. Then, after they had crossed the creek, and had started up the opposite slope, the Jerries lobbed grenades into their midst and fired into them with automatic weapons. There was practically no mortar and artillery fire. With dogged determination the doughboys finally made their way to the top of the high ground south of TINTANGE. The resistance they met had been tough but many of the enemy they had encountered were in GI uniforms which had served to confuse them and thus slow their progress. As the Americans advanced the Germans withdrew to new positions from which they continued to direct fire. Having taken the high ground south of the town the troops made ready to move into the town as planned. Four P-47s bombed the town and then the artillery (66 FA in direct support) placed some concentrations on the town. After this the infantry joined with the tanks, which had meanwhile moved up via a trail, and together they moved into TINTANGE. By about 1430 the town had been taken. The attack had been planned in phases and the taking of the town was the first phase.

Therefore Maj Connaughton contacted Gen Earnest concerning subsequent movements. The Gen ordered the Major to clean out all the woods northeast of TINTANGE and to blow out any bridges that might be across the SURBACH RUISS River in that area; the main bridge which crossed the river about 1500 yds north of TINTANGE was to be contained until the Engrs could blow it. The Bn then was to secure the town and establish a line along the high ground from the vicinity of the main bridge to the northwest of TINTANGE as far as the GRANDE MOLSCHT. Most of the afternoon was spent in cleaning out the woods to the east. About dark the Engrs attempted to blow the bridge but were unsuccessful; their second trial was more successful. Road-blocks were placed across the road to the north, south and southwest of TINTANGE and the CR (574445) north of the town was covered by the tanks and the two TDS operating with the Bn. Then the Bn established the line as directed and sent out patrols to the northwest to maintain contact with the enemy during the night. The positions occupied were maintained.

While the 1st Bn 318th had been attacking toward TINTANGE during the day, elements of CCA had completed (some cleaning out had been done on the 24th) cleaning out WARMACH and the woods directly northeast thereof, and on the night of the 25th Co B 51st Armd Inf Bn was assembled along the road between WARMACH and TINTANGE and just to the east of the former town. [Early on the morning of the 26th, Co B 51st was attached to the 1st Bn for the day's attack. The Company was given four of the 8 tanks and was to attack northwest along the left flank of the 1st Bn 318th. The right flank of the company and the boundary line between it and the Bn was the Grande Molscht Creek. The attack by the company and the infantry battalion was originally scheduled to jump off at 0800 but Maj Connaughton got permission to hold the attack of the Bn until 0830. (Maj Connaughton said that Gen Earnest wanted to attack at 0800 but that he explained to the Gen if the Inf Bn, already ahead of the Armd Inf Co, jumped off the same time as the Co they would get too far ahead of the

company and thus be endangered by the fire of the company. The Gen then gave him permission to hold the Bn's jump off time until 0830. Actually, for reasons explained in the narrative the Bn did not jump off until about 0900 or 1000. Evidently Col MacVickar, CO of the 318th Regt, later learned about the delay because on the afternoon of the 26th he relieved Maj Connaughton of the command of the 1st Bn without giving the latter an opportunity to offer any explanation.) The major remained with Co B/51 until it jumped off at 0800 and then went to his Bn northwest of TINTANGE to see that it got off. The Bn S-3, a 2d Lt, had meanwhile been left with the Bn to assist in getting it off at the appointed time. When Maj Connaughton got to his Bn it was already past 0830 and the Bn had not yet jumped off. He asked the Bn S-2 what the trouble was and the latter replied, "There isn't much in the way of orders that a 2d Lt can give to captains and 1st Lts." He informed the major, however, that the delay was caused mostly because the Bn was waiting for artillery fire. Shortly after Maj Connaughton reached his Bn the artillery came but it fell dangerously close to the troops (fortunately did not injure any). A necessary adjustment of the fire delayed the next concentration and it fell way beyond the troops, outside of sight or hearing. The Bn waited for another adjustment but the third concentration was evidently a repeat of the 2d. At this point Major Connaughton called off the artillery fire and the Bn jumped off on the attack, but it was now somewhere between 0930 and 1000. Nevertheless the attack progressed satisfactorily. The P-47s bombed the Auf Berg Chateau where prisoners of war captured the previous night reported a lot of the Germans concentrated, and the Chateau was taken without opposition. (Actually, the Germans had withdrawn previous to the bombing during the early hours of the morning.) The resistance on the 26th was much lighter than it had been the previous day and by 1200 Maj Connaughton reported to the Gen that the Bn had reached Phase Line 3; he also reported that he was not in contact with B/51 on the left. Gen Earnest told the

major to move ahead into HONVILLE. Maj Connaughton planned to assault the town with two Cos after it was bombed. B Co was to swing around and come in on the east side of the town after C Co supported by the four tanks had assaulted the town from the west. The air mission was called for but did not arrive. The attack jumped off without it and took HONVILLE. The Cos were just moving into the town when Maj Connaughton was met by Col MacVickar. The latter asked the major what time the attack in the morning had jumped off. Maj Connaughton replied, "About 0930 or 1000." The colonel then told the major he was being relieved because he had failed to carry out an order. Maj Connaughton attempted to explain what the delay had been but he did not have a receptive listener. Capt Gaking took over the Bn from Maj Connaughton. Maj Connaughton was not familiar with the details of the following day's action but he said the Bn remained in the vicinity of HONVILLE during the night of 26 December. On the following day it took LIEVERHANS and moved up on the high ground northwest thereof where it remained until it returned into the LUXEMBOURG sector from which it had come. The Bn did not go into BASTOGNE.

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Supplemental Notes

On the right flank and to the south of the 1st Bn 318th were elements of the 26th Inf Div. Since this Div did not advance abreast of the Bn, the latter's right flank was exposed. The boundary on the right of the Bn was the SURBACH RUISS river which is also the boundary between BELGIUM and LUXEMBOURG (see overlay). As indicated, immediately left of the Bn was B/51 and beyond this Co were other elements of CCA, 4th Armd Div. Further to the west, and north, CCB, 4th Armd Div, was advancing with 2d Bn 318th, attached, on its right flank. Beyond CCB was CCR. Maj Connaughton said CCR of the 4th Armd "rang the bell at BASTOGNE and was the first unit to get into the encircled troops." He said further that the troops of the 318th played an auxiliary role.

The 1st Bn 318th took 161 PWS in its action against TINTANGE on Christmas Day, the biggest haul the Bn has ever taken in a single day. At the end of that day's fighting the three rifle Cos in the Bn had a total of 124 men--one Co had 65, another 37, and the other 22. (These figures subject to question. The Major could not attach the figures to the Cos nor was he sure about them. Company commanders during BASTOGNE action were:

Co A - 1st Lt Gordon D. Goerke
 Co B - Capt Reid McAllister
 Co C - 1st Lt John C Santner

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The following miscellaneous notes were obtained from Capt George W Harwood, who, at the time of the BASTOGNE action, was Bn Med O of the 1st Bn 318th. He is now Surgeon, Sp Trs, 80th Div. He was present when I interviewed Maj Connaughton and gave me the medical notes below:

During the attack on TINTANGE on 25 Dec 70 casualties went through the Bn Aid Station. Most of the men were treated for small arms wounds--more wounds of this type were noted than had been seen since the action about NOMENY, FRANCE, in September. The following day, 26 Dec, some men came into the aid station from the 28th Div which early had been overrun by the German drive. Some of these men's shoes were frozen to their feet and had to be cut off.

When the 1st Bn began its action at ETTLEBRUCK on 22 Dec, it had 29 men (3 short) in its medical detachment. From then until December 27 the detachment suffered 7 men killed and 8 wounded--more than 50 percent loss in 5 days.

Evacuation worked smoothly while in the BASTOGNE action. The Bn used two ambulances which took the casualties to CCA Hq in MARTELANGE; 4th Armd evacuated from there to the Clearing Station. Capt Harwood said he had never worked with an outfit so cooperative and helpful as the 4th Armd Div.