

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1947-1948

THE OPERATIONS OF C COMPANY, 319TH INFANTRY
(80TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT MOUNT TOULON, FRANCE, 7-8 October 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: RIFLE COMPANY IN THE ATTACK

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them. Now things were to be much different, as the aforesaid shortage of supplies had already become noticeable. Of the 400,000 gallons of gasoline requested for delivery on 30 August 1944 only 31,975 gallons were actually delivered and the Twelfth US Army Group notified the Third US Army that it could not expect any appreciable amounts until 3 September 1944. Throughout September an acute shortage of gasoline prevailed, together with other supply shortages resulting in slow advances against ever-stiffening enemy resistance. Consequently there was a comparatively short advancement of the Third US Army Front to a line just east of the Moselle River, or some thirty miles advance (air miles distance) since 31 August 1944. (4) (See Map B) It was of this period of supply shortage that the late General Patton said:

"At that time there was no question of doubt but that we could have gone through and on across the Rhine within ten days." (5)

"I feel that had I been permitted to go all out, the war would have ended sooner and more lives would have been saved." (6)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

By the end of September there was no longer any hope of continuing the type of warfare that had carried the Third US Army so far through the month of August and the early days of September. The Supreme Commander had directed the Third US Army to assume the defensive because of the acute supply situation. To successfully accomplish this mission the Third US Army Commander desired to concentrate on two points:

- I. Conceal this change of attitude from the enemy as long as possible to prevent the shifting of his troops to other fronts.

(4) A-2, Chapter III, August Operations, pp.16-57; Chapter IV, September Operations, pp.61-93; (5,6) A-1, p.58.

2. Possess a suitable line of departure from which to resume the offensive when the Supreme Commander so directed.

To implement the plan outlined in point number one, the Third US Army Commander directed that a thin outpost line be utilized, backed by powerful mobile reserves with no digging in, wiring, or mining. He further directed that all possible avenues of tank attack be registered in by all batteries - Division, Corps, and Army; that XIX Tactical Air Command be prepared to concentrate upon any critical areas rapidly; and that the mobile reserves have prepared counter-attack plans to not only defeat but to destroy hostile forces. (7)

Though halted by higher authority General Patton never assumed the defensive. He believed in the defensive only while preparing for an attack. (8)

To implement the plan outlined in point number two, the Third US Army Commander delineated a suitable line of departure as shown on an overlay (See Map C) to be secured by means of limited operations. (9) These principal limited operations were executed in the XX Corps Sector by the 5th and 90th Infantry Divisions. In the XII Corps Sector they were executed by the 35th Infantry Division and the 6th Armored Division on 1 October 1944, and by the 80th Infantry Division, 35th Infantry Division and the 6th Armored Division on 8 October 1944. (10)

As the subject of this monograph deals with a portion of the XII Corps Sector of the 8 October attack, launched on a twenty mile front, (II) it is advisable to outline the Corps situation as of that date. Corps had three divisions abreast - the 80th Infantry Division on the north, the 35th Infantry Division in the center, and the 4th Armored Division with attached

(7) A-3, Command Section, Annex No. 6, p.7 (Letter of Instruction No. 4, dated 25 September 1944); (8) A-10, p.96; (9) A-3, Command Section, Annex No. 6, p.7 (Letter of Instruction No. 4, dated 25 September 1944); (10) A-3, Command Section, Chapter V, October Operations, p.4; (II) A-9, p.65.

troops on the south. The interval between the 80th and 35th Infantry Divisions was held by CCB of the 6th Armored Division, with the remainder of that division in Corps Reserve just east of Nancy. It was to reduce this reentrant between the 80th and 35th Infantry Divisions and secure the suitable line of departure already mentioned, that an attack was made on 8-9 October by the 80th Infantry Division, the 6th Armored Division, and the left elements of the 35th Infantry Division. (I2) (See Map C)

XII Corps Artillery estimated that it was opposed by approximately ten battalions of light and medium enemy artillery, delivering constant heavy harassing and interdictory fires. Therefore the artillery plan for the projected attack was to incorporate a heavy counter-battery program into the planned artillery preparation. An immediate silent policy of counter-battery, limited only to active enemy locations, was put into effect to insure complete success of the projected plan. On 6 October, XII Corps Artillery was disposed as follows:

1. "One field artillery group of four battalions, general support and reinforce 80th Infantry Division Artillery." (I3)
2. "One field artillery group of four battalions, general support in northern portion of corps front." (I4)
3. "One field artillery group of four battalions, general support and reinforce 35th Infantry and 6th Armored Division Artillery with two battalions each." (I5)
4. "Groupment of two field artillery battalions, general support in the southern portion of corps sector." (I6)
5. "One field artillery group of three battalions, general support and reinforce 4th Armored Division Artillery." (I7)
6. "In addition, one field artillery group operated as Second Corps Artillery fire direction center." (I8)

(I2) A-4, p.228; (I3,I4,I5,I6,I7,I8) A-3, Artillery Section, Part IX, Chapter V, October Operations, p.9.

Corps Artillery battalions prized highly the role of reinforcing a direct support battalion. This enabled them to get into the fight actively by coordinating and working directly with the Infantry companies. Thus they could stay in closer contact with the actual battle, rather than receive missions through long, devious channels, in the role of general support. (19)

When the 8 October attack was launched XII Corps Artillery fired an intensive preparation "consisting of eighty-nine battalion concentrations upon thirty-three enemy artillery locations from H minus forty-five to H hour, followed by 124 battalion concentrations on forty-nine enemy artillery locations from H hour to H plus ninety-five." (20) "Supporting fires included two eleven battalion and one ten battalion time-on-target concentration upon Jeandelincourt," (21) (See Map D) a heavily manned and defended enemy town nestled in the foothills forward of the 80th Infantry objective. (22)

Further in support of this XII Corps attack, air-ground cooperation was provided by the 510th Squadron P-47 fighter bombers from the 405th Group XIX Tactical Air Command of the Ninth Air Force. (23) The strikes of these planes are credited with breaking up a projected enemy counter-attack in the form of a column of enemy vehicles and troop concentrations. Later reports indicated that these strikes further helped immeasurably in the capture of 2,500 prisoners. One of these prisoners, an enemy company commander, stated that only 20 of the men in his company had survived and that in 5 years of war this was the heaviest bombing he had experienced. (24)

(19) A-12, p.1; (20;21) A-3, Artillery Section, Part IX, Chapter V, October Operations, p.9; (22) A-5, p.27; (23) A-6, p.830; (24) A-2, Annex No. 3, October, p. XVI.

THE DIVISION SITUATION

The objectives assigned to the 80th Infantry Division (in addition to being essential for the possession of a suitable line of departure) were the last dominating features between the Moselle and Seille Rivers in the recently established 80th Division Moselle River bridgehead. (25) Much attention, including that of the Germans, was focused on this division in its crossing of the Moselle River and establishing the bridgehead. (26) Hard fighting had been required to establish a limited foothold across the Moselle. (27) That the Germans were thinking about this division to a considerable extent will be clearly brought out by a later description of their use of psychological warfare, just prior to the attack. (28)

Attachments to the division at this time included: a tank battalion; a tank destroyer battalion; an AAA AW battalion; and a chemical mortar company. (29)

The division plan of attack was as follows: "80th Inf Div Atks 0600 A 8 Oct 44 to drive enemy N SKILLE R in conjunction with other XII Corps units; Organize ground for defense. 3I7 Inf (less 2d Bn) with Co D 702 Tk Bn Atchd Atk seize Mt St. Jean from SW and NW. Subsequently Rel Elms CCB 6 Armd Div. attacking Medvrons and Jeandelincourt in conjunction with Division effort. 2d Bn 3I7 Inf support Atk by fire on Mt Toulon and Mt St. Jean from present position. 3I8 Inf with Co B 702 Tk Bn Atchd Atk seize high ground Vic Clemery and N of Manoncourt. 3I9 Inf Atk seize Mt Toulon. Brigadier General Jay W. Mac Kalvie, commanding the 80th Inf Div Arty, recommended a fifteen minute preparation with thirty minute accompanying fire." (30) (See Map D)

(25) A-5, p.3I; (From statement dated 2I July 1945 by Lt. Col. Ives, 1st Bn, 3I9th Infantry Regiment); (26) A-4, p.200; (27) A-II, p.30I; (28) Personal knowledge; (29) A-5, pp.27-28 (Attack on Mt St. Jean); (30) A-5, p.27 (Attack on Mt St. Jean).

A consolidation of all regimental fire plans, based on individual schemes of maneuver, was developed by division artillery into a final plan as follows:

1. "Direct support and reinforcing artillery battalions were assigned missions within their regimental sector." (31)
2. "General support artillery was used for special targets and for areas not covered by the direct support and reinforcing artillery. (32)
3. "Tank destroyers from the towed tank destroyer battalion were used to fill in gaps." (33)
4. "The anti-aircraft battalion was given the mission of emplacing their 50 cal M 51 quadmounts so as to fire on Mt St. Jean." (34)
5. "The chemical mortar battalion was given a dual role of providing a smoke screen on call and firing HE projectiles on Mt St. Jean." (35)
6. "The Infantry cannon companies and mortar platoons were also assigned missions within Infantry regimental sectors." (36)
7. "One anti-aircraft artillery gun battalion and one 105 mm howitzer battalion were assigned missions to the north of the main effort as a diversionary preparation." (37)

THE REGIMENTAL ATTACK

In conformity with the division attack order, the 319th Infantry Regiment crossed the line of departure at 080600 October 1944 with 1st and 3rd Battalions abreast, 3rd Battalion on the right. The 2nd Battalion with one Gun Platoon of Anti-Tank Company attached, supported both by fire. During the attack, the 3rd Battalion controlled artillery fire; cannon company fire; the supporting fires of the 2nd Battalion, 319th Infantry; and 2nd (31,32,33,34,35,36,37) A-5, pp.27-28 (Attack on Mt St. Jean)

Battalion 317th Infantry, which was supporting its other two Assault Battalions.

The artillery fired from 0600 to 0615 on enemy positions along the road in the zone of advance, then shifted to the Northwest slope of Mt. Toulon to be lifted on call. From 0600 to 0630 other artillery fired on Lixieres and Sarrieres, and from 0600 to 0645 on Mt. Toulon and Mt. St. Jean.

At H hour the chemical mortars fired smoke on the crest of Mt. Toulon with such excellent results that Mt. Toulon, to its base and including the town of Lixieres, was covered in about twenty minutes, lasting for approximately two hours due to ideal weather conditions.

At H hour the multiple fifties fired their role of ground support on the western slope of Mt. Toulon. (38)

C COMPANY SITUATION

Due to the location of the 319th Regiment in the defensive line, (See Map E) just prior to this operation it was necessary to move it west and south in order to be within its regimental boundaries for the coordinated attack, as planned by the Division Commander. (39)

During the month of October the 26th Infantry Division, a new division, came to XII Corps. (40) Elements of this division closed in the XII Corps Sector 5 October 1944 and members of its 328th Infantry Regiment began relieving elements of the 319th Infantry Regiment. (41)

Because of its position, C Company could not be relieved during daylight hours. The terrain it occupied just west of the Seille River was much lower than that occupied by the enemy on the east bank, and the only concealment was that afforded by scattered trees and fence

(38) A-5, p.30 (From statement dated 5 July 1945 by Major Wevers, S-3, 319th Infantry Regiment); (39) Personal knowledge; (40) A-4, pp.228-230; (41) A-2; Chapter V, October Operations, p.101.

lines. Relief was effected on the night 6-7 October 1944. It was quite some time after dark before the relieving unit arrived. Being a new unit, together with the fact that none of its members were familiar with the ground or positions, the relief was a slow and time-consuming process. (42)

Upon completion of relief C Company marched as a unit to the rear assembly area. (See Map E) It was around midnight before the unit arrived at its designated place and began bedding down.

The following day, 7 October 1944, provided a much needed opportunity for cleaning up, caring for weapons and equipment, getting hot meals and general relaxation. Rations and ammunition for the following day's attack were distributed. Just before moving out that evening for the forward assembly area (under cover of darkness) water for the canteens was issued.

Welcome as was the time for all other essentials, the most important thing afforded by this relief was the briefing of every man on the coordinated attack plan. It gave platoon leaders the opportunity to see, during daylight hours, the forward assembly area and view from the line of departure the attack area and its objective. Upon returning from this reconnaissance, platoon leaders were able to go over the battalion and company attack plan in detail, with all the members of their respective platoons. It was a unique experience for this unit to have so much time available for preparation, for briefing, for personal ground reconnaissance and for acquainting every man, in detail, with the attack plan.

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After darkness, 7-8 October 1944, the company moved out to its assigned place in the forward assembly area along well-marked routes (white tape placed by battalion). (43) It was in position directly behind the line of departure by 2300. (44) (See Map E) Shortly after having settled

(42,43) Personal knowledge; (44) A-5, p.31 (From statement dated 21 July 1945 by Lt. Col. Ives, 1st Bn. 319th Infantry.

and bedded down the unit received a "serenading" of German propaganda. It is believed that it was directed by loud-speakers from the vicinity of Lixieres. (45) It was a good example of Nazi radio propaganda of nihilism, directed toward a limited but vital objective. (46) The broadcast, delivered in perfect English by a hollow, mysterious, sepuchral-like voice, was solely for the purpose of terrifying the Americans and creating confusion within their ranks, since later events showed that in reality the enemy did not know whereof he spoke. In effect the message was; "Members of the 317th, 318th, 319th Infantry Regiments, we know where you are; we are waiting for you; we are waiting for you. When you come bring your canteen cup, knife, fork, and spoon." (47) This message was repeated over and over and provided a grim source of amusement to the men.

So confident was the unit of the secrecy of its movement that no attempt was made to provide cover. Instead the men slept on top of the ground. Proof of the complete secrecy was evidenced by the fact that only a few scattered rounds of enemy artillery landed in this assembly area during the night, and that did no damage. (48)

C COMPANY IN THE ATTACK

By 080530 October, C Company was disposed in battle formation on the line of departure. (See Map F) From there it observed the tremendously impressive and effective volume of preparatory fires that preceded the attack. Virtual streams of fire from the multiple fifties and the supporting machine-guns poured into the enemy-held objectives. Past experience had revealed the effectiveness and dependability of such supporting fires, but this awe-impelling spectacle was undoubtedly the greatest proof ever witnessed by the company.

(45) Personal knowledge; (46) A-8, p.18; (47,48) Personal knowledge.

The confidence inspired by the massed fire power was extremely apparent in the high morale of the men as they left the line of departure and pressed the attack. They went to work with a will, using various phrases from the previous night's propaganda broadcast as a battle-cry. Up and down the line could be heard the repeated phrases: "We are waiting for you" and "Bring your knife, fork, and spoon." It would have taken a lot to have stopped C Company now. The morale of this unit had never been higher, within the experience of the writer, than during this operation.

At 0600, C Company jumped off with the First and Second Platoons abreast, Second on the right and Third behind the Second. The machine-gun section of the Weapons Platoon was attached to the Second Platoon and the 60mm mortar section placed in battery to support the attack. The First Platoon had as part of its mission maintaining contact with B Company whose objective was the town of Lixieres. The Second Platoon had as part of its mission maintaining contact with, and guiding on, the 3rd Battalion 319th Infantry.

As the 3rd Battalion objective was Mt. Toulon itself, C Company attacked in a frontage of over 500 yards with its objective being the north slope of Mt. Toulon.

The 60mm mortar section set up initially just forward of the line of departure and fired on known enemy dug-in positions along the improved road which ran perpendicular to the wide company zone of advance, midway between the line of departure and the objective. (See Map F) Though during ground reconnaissance of the previous day, little enemy activity was observed about these positions along this roadway, knowledge of German tactics presupposed these positions to be well-manned. In anticipation of enemy preparedness, this roadway had been assigned as the first target area for the 60mm mortars so they opened fire as soon as the company crossed the line

of departure. The company moved forward rapidly, taking up the assault fire from a short range on the aforesaid roadway. The 60mm mortars were constantly displacing to positions right behind the leading troops and firing continuously to the immediate front of the advancing company. The fire of these mortars effectively covered the zone of advance for the company after the supporting fire had lifted. They added to the already dazed condition of the enemy and helped keep them in their holes until the positions were over-run. The mortars continued to fire and displace until their observation was blinded by smoke, some time later.

A brief pause was made at the roadway to route out the dazed and shaken enemy from dug-in positions along the entire zone of advance. As far as is known, the enemy in these positions had not fired a shot. Very little attention was paid them other than get them out and start them to the rear. This pause was further utilized to align the leading platoons before pushing on again. As the company left the roadway, and started across the open field to its front, it was hit by extremely accurate small-arms fire. A number of casualties was inflicted, including the company aid-man while giving first-aid to the wounded. The only cover available in this open field was that afforded by the rows and foliage of a large turnip patch that extended from the roadway almost to the orchards and vineyards on the western slope of the ridge. (See Map F) Though it could not be determined, it was believed that the fire came from the town of Lixieres and the orchard and vineyard just referred to. (49) By this time all supporting fires had been lifted. They were controlled by 3rd Battalion (as was shown earlier) which sent back an order at 0645 to lift all fires from Mt. Toulon. (50)

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The enemy fire was so accurate and so difficult to locate that it could have held up the company indefinitely and at the same time taken

(49) Personal knowledge; (50) A-5, p.32 (Statement of Lt. Col. Cheston, 3rd Bn. 319th Infantry, dated 3 July 1945).

serious toll of company strength. However, the perfect coordination that characterized this attack throughout was still in evidence (plus a little assistance from the elements) as the highly effective smoke screen (referred to earlier) had become so intense that it virtually blotted out the daylight and completely screened all movement. The company immediately pressed the attack under complete control, for as in keeping with this perfect attack the very unreliable 536 radios worked perfectly. Shortly thereafter the company reached its objective. (51)

One anti-tank gun with its crew, well camouflaged in a grape-vineyard, was captured intact without having fired a shot. (See Map F) As far as is known, those enemy rifle men who had occupied the ridge withdrew into Lixieres under cover of the smoke screen. No other resistance was encountered by C Company as it moved toward its objective, except for scattered shots fired blindly into the smoke. (52) One authority stated that: "The 1st Bn 319th Inf (less Co B) reached its objective (Mt Toulon) at 0655" (53) but the writer recalls that it was some time later.

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see list*

C Company immediately consolidated on its objective and rounded up scattered enemy along the ridge. Eight or ten were routed out of a concrete pill-box affair that was part of the town water system. (See Map F) These men had been standing in water up to their waists and had apparently gone into this place for protection from the preparatory fires.

It was known that B Company was having an extremely difficult task in entering Lixieres and that the town had to be gained house by house. Some of the enemy attempted to withdraw to the north along a small stream. These were noted by C Company so the automatic weapons and the 60mm mortars plus a section of D Company's machine-guns which had recently displaced forward, all opened up on the hapless enemy. No further attempts to

(51,52) Personal knowledge; (53) A-5, p.28.

withdraw were made. The enemy elected to hold out as long as possible in Lixieres. (54)

Though B Company was in Lixieres by 0955 the stiff resistance encountered was so effective that by 1120 one house still remained to be cleared of the enemy. (55)

C Company organized a hasty defense on the ridge line, resupplied it ammunition, and now awaited further orders. (56)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The high degree of success attained in this operation is quite apparent. It was a coordinated attack so it is necessary to touch upon the operation as a whole to more clearly emphasize the success of its parts. The carefully planned attack jumped off on schedule and in an incredibly short time all units had reached their objectives. Though this attack was made across open ground, against difficult terrain strongly held and favorable to the defender, the results were amazing. The division suffered fifty casualties as compared with the one-hundred-eighty prisoners taken by the 319th Regiment alone. (57)

The outstanding success of this operation can be attributed to various factors. These include to a great degree: the surprise element achieved; the well-executed counter-battery fires; the careful planning and coordination; the time allowed for ground reconnaissance; the time for briefing all personnel concerned; and probably most important of all, the highly effective massiveness of supporting fires. (58) To emphasize this latter point, the density of supporting fires, in terms of rounds expended, was as follows: (59)

I. 3,531 rounds Division Artillery

(54) Personal knowledge; (55) A-5, p.28; (56) A-5, p.30; (57) A-5, p.28;
(58) Personal knowledge; (59) A-5, p.28.

LESSONS

Throughout this entire monograph it has been the intent to emphasize the importance of planning and coordination, and to stress the necessity of making time available for this purpose to all small units. This is believed to be the most important lesson to be learned from this historical example of a unit attack. Other important well-founded military doctrines reiterated as lessons emphasized in this study are as follows:

1. There is no substitute for a well-planned and well-coordinated operation.
2. The success of an attack depends to a great degree on the effectiveness of the supporting fires.
3. Once an attack has been launched it must move forward with all possible speed.
4. In a coordinated attack contact must be planned and maintained.
5. Effective, massed supporting fires, in addition to neutralizing the enemy, promote a high state of morale based on confidence.
6. Effective counter-battery fire is an important factor in reducing casualties.
7. Prior ground reconnaissance, by unit leaders, is essential for the proper employment of their units.
8. Secrecy and surprise are highly important principles of warfare.
9. A clearly defined line of departure should be designated and known to all concerned.
10. Operation orders should be given and made known to all concerned.