

80th Infantry Division European Theater Operations
April 1945

On 1 April 1945, the US 80th Infantry Division (CT-318) had been following the wake of the US 6th Armored Div NE to the vicinity S of Kassel. The Division held the left flank of the XX Corps of the US Third Army. CT 318, previously attached to the armored division, was released and had reverted to the control of the 80th Division. CT 318, with the elements of CT 317 following in Division Reserve, was notified that its mission was to attack N, to seize and secure the large industrial city of KASSEL. CT 319, to the right of CT 318, was assigned to clear the hills E of the city and to cut off the German escape to the N and NE. On the left flank of CT 318, the US 80th Recon Cal Troop was to probe the area northward while maintaining contact with the US First Army.

The city of Kassel, approximately 54 mile N of the positions of CT 318 at HOMBERG, is situated in central Germany, on a line between DUSSELDORF on the W and LEIPZIG on the E. The city ranked high in the manufacture of war material and served also as a vital enemy communications center. Of signal importance were four factories of Henschell & Son which produced Royal Tiger Tanks, locomotives, aircraft engines, heavy duty trucks and 75mm anti-tank guns. In addition, the firm of Wegman & Co produced turrets for the Royal Tiger Tank as well as 88mm anti-aircraft guns. The city had suffered numerous severe bombing raids, particularly during the months of September-October 1944, from American fortresses escorted by Mustang P-51 fighter planes. Through production as a result of the severe bombings had been drastically reduced, many of the factories were still in operation when the city was finally taken by CT 318. The normal population of 204,000 had gradually been reduced to approximately 30,000 as American forces approached.

The importance of Kassel was evidenced by the frantic efforts of the enemy to gather together all available manpower in a last ditch defense of the city. In an attempt to halt the American advance, the German NCO Tank School "EISENACH" - which was brought into the area 29 March, 1945, was equipped with 30 new Panther and Mark IV tanks. Composed of four companies of combat experienced cadre and drivers plus numerous 17 year old, Tank Force "EISENACH" was surprisingly contacted only once in the entire Kassel engagement. Other units identified in the sector were several batteries of the German 64th Heavy Anti-aircraft Training Bn, each battery possessing four 88mm anti-aircraft guns in the vicinity of Kassel. The 2d Battery, 1066th Artillery Regiment, 166th Reserve Infantry Division, 184th Res. GR. Bn 150 men and semi auto rifles was also identified and was estimated to possess three 105mm horse drawn guns in position on the S edge of the city; the 86th Alarm Company with 135 men and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Replacement Alarm Company with 150 men were also identified in the area.

CT 318, in positions around HOMBERG S of KASSEL, had closed the previous period of 31 March 1945, with the 3d Bn protecting bridgeheads over the EDDER RIVER at OBER MOLLRICH and NIEDER MOLLRICH and the bridgehead 2.5 miles N of NIEDER MOLLRICH over the EMS RIVER at NIEDERVORSCHUTZ. The 1st Bn, with Co C leading, moved through the 3d Bn bridgehead on the EDDER RIVER at 2400, 31 March 1945. The 2d Bn, during the same period, closed into LUTZELWIG near the autobahn. Cannon Co, behind the 3d Bn, closed in UTTERSCHAUSEN while Co B, 305th Med Bn, moved into HOMBERG with the CP of CT 318.

The main axis of the attack on Kassel by the elements of CT 318 was from the vicinity of HOMBERG through FELSBERG and NIEDERVORSCHUTZ and N along the main highway (Route 3/254) to Kassel from the S, SW and SE. The 1st Bn, with the objective of DISSEN (9 miles SW of Kassel) moved through the chilly night northward from NIEDERVORSCHUTZ then NE through DEUTE to arrive on the objective by 0430, 1 April 1945. Co C, B, D and A in that closing in that order. During the advance small arms fire was received sporadically from the N. As the Bn continued northward particularly heavy fire from small arms, mortars and tanks was received in the BESSE-HERTINGSHAUSEN vicinity; however, a general withdrawal of the enemy was evident from the area to the N. The battalion by midnight 1 April 1945 had advanced through RINGERSHAUSEN (18 miles), Co C cleared KIRCHBAUNA (? spelling) to the vicinity S of OBER ZWEHREN and a point 1.5 miles S of Kassel. At 1800, Co A departed DISSEN to join the 1st Bn late in the night.

The 2d Bn had departed the vicinity of LUTZELWIG at 1430 and had advanced along the left flank of the 1st Bn

in a NW direction. By 1505, the battalion, moving against slight resistance, had cleared the towns of LOHRE, ALTENBERG, FELSBERG, GIESMAR and MADEN. By 1700 the towns of RIEDE, METZE, LOHNE and ZUSCHEN were cleared and the battalion was advancing N from GUDENBERG (2 miles from NIEDERVORSCHUTZ). At 1715 leading elements were entering the LANGENBERG WOODS N of GUDENBERG and, by 2250, the battalion units were in an attack GROSSENRIITTE. Fighting continued house to house in the town until shortly after 2400 when the town was reported secured. The battalion then consolidated its positions in the town for the night. The 3d Bn assembled as Regimental reserve in the vicinity of FELSBERG shortly after the 1st Bn had passed through the battalions positions, the latter moved 2 miles NW to close in NIEDERVORSCHUTZ at 1500. Cannon Co moved from UTTERSCHAUSEN to HOLZHAUSEN by 1930 and then moved N through NIEDERVORSCHUTZ to close in DISSEN behind the 1st Bn. Co B 305 Med Bn remained with the Regimental CP in HOMBERG.

The advance of CT 318 had captured 17 prisoners, eight 88mm anti-aircraft guns and 26 towns, one (BESSE) was personally captured by Col. Luckett CT 318 C.O. and personally with a little help from Co G. Enemy encountered in the move northward were members of the 661st and 662d Regiments of the 166th Reserve Infantry Division and the 184th Reserve Grenadier Bn. These units had arrived in the vicinity during 27-30 March 1945, and were assigned the mission of defending the EDDER-FULDA RIVER Line, but had received orders late in the afternoon of 31 March 1945, to withdraw to KASSEL and vicinity. The 166th Reserve Infantry Division had been transported from Denmark by rail 25 March 1945, but only two of the regiments were identified in the sector. Each regiment was composed of two battalions of 400 men each, plus three other companies in support. The 184th Grenadier Bn was composed of five companies, averaging 150 men each, armed with automatic rifles.

At 2400 2 April 1945, the weather being cool and hazy, the 3d Bn moved from NIEDERVORSCHUTZ via DEUTE and DISSEN to HOLTZAUSEN by 0300, 2 April 1945. The battalion CP and Co M remained in DISSEN as the remaining elements moved N. At 0400, the 1st Bn, with Co A and B abreast, began movement northward from the vicinity of OBER ZWEHREN and, at 0430, the battalion was in the town of NIDER ZWEHREN. At 0455, as lead elements were entering the southern outskirts of Kassel, the enemy launched a counterattack with an estimated 100 infantry plus 15 armored vehicles supported by seven Tiger Tanks. While the enemy attack did not break the lines of CT 318 it did succeed in driving down the gap between and behind the 3d and 1st Bns on the right and the 2d Bn on the left. The 2d Bn, early in the morning hours had moved from its positions N of GROSSENRIITTE in an attack directed N toward ALTENRIITTE which was cleared in a short time. The 2d Bn then moved NW toward the high ground in BRASSELBERG WALD and BRASSELBERG. The 3d Bn, behind the 1st Bn, had just moved northward to an area S of OBER ZWEHREN when the enemy attack occurred.

Co A of the 1st Bn, astride the road moving northward, with woods on the left and a hill on the right with a small graveyard, scattered to groups to buildings on the edge of town and left side of road, when an enemy tanks opened fire. From the second floor of one of the buildings a tank was fired on with two rounds of a bazooka, both hit the tank, but they were duds. Co A was just S of the park, Co B was 400 yards N of RR on the left of Co A. The 1st Bn destroyed one Tiger Royal and Mark IV tanks. This enemy counterattack, advancing southward along the left flank of the 1st Bn, CT 318, disrupted the Regimental communications. The enemy armor succeeded in destroying six tank destroyers of the 811th Tank Destroyer Bn, four battalion 57mm anti-tanks guns and a jeep. The enemy moved swiftly S to the town of ALTEBAUNA and to the vicinity of KIRCHBAUNA (1 mile SE) behind the line companies and the Regimental train. The attack was finally broken up at by the combined action of CT 318 and CT 317. Two enemy tanks were burning having been knocked out at 1305 by the 314th Field Artillery. At 1540 another counterattack developed in the vicinity of WAHLERSHAUSEN (S on the outskirts of KASSEL) which drove SE from Kassel to NIEDER ZWEHREN. The 1st Bn of CT 318, had lost all its TD's by 0700, but with the assistance of the 3d Bns TD's and the 314th FA Bn, destroyed six enemy tanks after which the remainder of the enemy forces withdrew N to Kassel. The 3d Bn had been thrown into the gap, and by evening, with all battalions in attack, the battle raged on with CT 318 succeeding in reaching the southern outskirts of Kassel. By nightfall of 2 April 1945, CT 318 had beaten the enemy back into Kassel against heavy opposition. The 1st Bn continued its fight on the southern outskirts of the city throughout the night against severe fire from small arms, anti-tank and tank positions. The 2d Bn continued to move against enemy tank fire and fire from 20mm flak guns and finally secured BRASSELBERG by 2010. The battalion then moved N to secure the high ground W of KASSEL and by the close of the day was reorganizing on the W outskirts of the city of KASSEL preparatory to assaulting the city from that side.

The 3d Bn, advancing in the gap between the 1st Bn (on the right) and the 2d Bn (on the left) had pushed N from OBER ZWEHREN along the railroad line to the SW outskirts of the KASSEL. Fierce enemy resistance was encountered along the way with Co I engaging 9 enemy Tiger Royal tanks, with the TD's knocking out one of them, but by nightfall, elements of the battalion held positions in the railroad yards on the SW side of the city and was still pressing northward.

On 2 April 1945, CT 318 had captured 212 prisoners and five towns, and had destroyed six enemy tanks, four 88mm anti-aircraft guns, one Volkswagen, two half tracks, and four supply trucks. The Regiment had encountered heavy resistance from small automatic arms, tanks and fire from anti-aircraft guns, and had repulsed two counterattacks. By the close of the day CT 318 was well entrenched in the southern outskirts of Kassel (1st Bn), on the W (2d Bn) and on the SW (3d Bn).

Enemy resistance during the day was identified as coming from Task Force "EISENACH", several 88mm anti-aircraft batteries of the 64th Heavy AA Bn, batteries of the 166th Reserve Infantry Division, the 86th Alarm Company, and the 15th Panzer Grenadier replacement Alarm Company. The enemy strong points had centered chiefly in the towns and key terrain along the southern approaches to Kassel. CT 318 encountered delaying tactics as the enemy blew bridges and withdrew into the city. Throughout the night CT 318 continued to clear its zone of advance in preparation for continuing the attack early the next morning. During the night of 2-3 April 1945, numerous explosions indicated demolition of important installations.

With Rain falling at 0500, 3 April 1945, all battalions of CT 318 moved forward to continue the battle for possession of the city. The 1st Bn at this time attacked along the Regimental right flank northeastward within the southern portion of the city. Launched at 0500, the attack of the 1st Bn moved along FRANKFURTERSTRASSE running northeasterly into the city adjacent to the KARLSAUE PARK on the battalion right. When the 1st Bn reached the southern edge (at 0700) of the park stiff opposition was encountered from the KRAFTFAHRER and INFANTRIE KASERNE on the left of FRANKFURTERSTRASSE and the advance slowed. At midnight heavy fighting continued in the KASERNE BARRACKS area. Captured was a Gas Mask factory at 1604, and cleared the factory at 1756, then moving across the tracks ran into a German tank.

The 2nd Bn at 0500 continued the attack from the W. The battalion was attacking to the N but, at 0800 in the vicinity of the N portion of the city, it turned E and penetrated to the FULDA RIVER in the center of the city and by 1255 Co G was clearing out the area W of the railroad, with Co F clearing out the houses. By midnight the battalion had seized the entire northern portion of KASSEL. (At 1645 the captured Power Plant was still running, German Engineers being captured before the installation could be blown.) Arriving at the FULDA RIVER elements of the battalion attempted at 2028 to seize a footbridge and a vehicular bridge over the FULDA RIVER, and at 2345 fighting was still continuing.

To the right of the 2d Bn, the 3d Bn plus a platoon of tanks from the 702nd Tank Battalion attacked NE, with Co K, L and I abreast, into the city from its position in the railroad yards of BANHOFF WILHELMSHOHE. Against opposition of well placed snipers, the battalion moved northward at 1430 to the WILHELMSHOHE ALLEE - HOHENZOLLERNSTRASSE junction where the battalion then swung E to reach the FULDA RIVER. In the late afternoon the enemy launched two counterattacks, one along each street, in a desperate effort to stem the advance of the 3d Bn. At 1635 both attacks were repulsed and, at the close of the day, the battalion was still advancing E with most of the western portion of the city in its possession.

The fighting during the day had been characterized by fierce house to house encounters with marked advances despite heavy and stubborn resistance. As a result of the three pronged attack by CT 318 on Kassel from the S, N and W, a record number of prisoners were taken plus a tremendous amount of equipment and numerous installations. Included in the latter was the large city radio station, a large power plant, a gas mask factory, an arms factory, the railroad yards, a footbridge across the FULDA RIVER.

Throughout the cold night of 3 April 1945 and into the dark morning hours of 4 April 1945, all battalions of the Regiment attempted to complete the conquest of the city. Probably the most stubborn resistance in the city

was encountered by Co A and Co B of the 1st Bn which at 0015 were fighting in the KRAFTFAHRER-INFANTERIE KASERNE area E of the KARLSAUER PARK. Intense fire from small arms, automatic weapons, as well as liberal use of grenades were employed by the enemy in the defense of the barracks. By daylight this strong point was reduced and over 200 prisoners were taken from the buildings. Pushing on from this area after daylight at 0856 W of the Park, the 1st Bn cleared the park and the heart of the city NE along the W bank of the FULDA RIVER. By noon elements of the battalion had reached the large air raid shelter in which the last remnants of the German garrison had prepared to make a last stand.

The 2d Bn continued mopping up the NE section of the city W of the FULDA RIVER. By morning elements of the battalion had crossed the vehicular bridge in the center of the city at ALT MRKT, capturing it intact and, at 1010, established contact with elements of CT 319 driving N along the E edge of the river in the vicinity of UNTER NEUSTADT. A drive was then initiated by the 2d Bn S along the W bank to establish contact with the 1st Bn thrusting N along the W bank from KARLSAUER PARK. By noon, elements of the 2d Bn were forming the northern portion of a circle to entrap the German garrison driven into the air raid shelter by the 1st Bn.

The 3rd Bn, supported by the armor, continued its drive E along WILHEMSSORRE (? spelling) ALLEE, through the city along the main avenues. House to house fighting delayed the battalion which moved slowly W to E to join elements of the 2d Bn on the river line. The junction was completed by noon.

Earlier in the morning, barely an hour after the commencement of the Regimental attack, the German garrison commander General Major Erzleben had asked for a three hour truce to permit the evacuation of civilians from the city. Because two-thirds of the city was already in the hands of CT 318 the truce was denied. An ultimatum by Col. G. W. Smythe and Lt. Col. Elegar was delivered to the German Commander and at 1245, the German General, with remnants of his garrison surrendered. The air raid shelter, in the cliff upon which the old part of the town had been built, was cleared. A total of 1,325 enemy prisoners were taken during the day. In the four day drive (1-4 April 1945) which ended in the capture of Kassel, CT 318 had advanced northward 20 miles, captured 3,791 prisoners, conquered 36 towns, and had captured or destroyed a tremendous amount of enemy equipment and material. In the capture of the city's industrial works, all the blue prints of the Royal Tiger tanks were seized in the plant of HENSEL & Son which continued to function during the assault.

With the surrender of KASSEL at 1245, the US 80th Infantry Division made preparations to continue the drive E. The southern Division boundary ran along the line WELLERODE (5.5 miles SE of KASSEL) eastward 12 miles to DOHRENBACH (2 miles S of WITZENHAUSEN) on the GELSTER RIVER. The left flank remained as it existed prior to the city's surrender on a N/S line approximately 15 miles W of KASSEL. The Division was on the left flank of the XX Corps and the US Third Army, with elements of the First Army on the left and the US 76th Infantry Division on the right.

Prior to 1800 4 April 1945 (1510) the 1st Bn of CT 318 received orders to relieve elements of CT 319 E of the FULDA RIVER bridge site in the vicinity of BETTENHAUSEN. By 1800 the relief was completed and the battalion was billeted in houses for the night. The 2d Bn remained in KASSEL maintaining law and order, establishing road blocks, and sent roving motorized patrols throughout the city during the remainder of the day. The 3d Bn patrolled the city to the NE and established road blocks in that vicinity.

The morning of 5 April 1945 was murky, hazy and damp with CT 318 occupying KASSEL with elements of the Regiment also occupying the outlying towns. The 1st Bn had sent Co B and Co C to guard installations in OCHSHAUSEN (3 miles SE of the bridge site) while Co A and Co D patrolled BETTENHAUSEN. Co E of the 2d Bn, supported by a platoon of tanks of the 702nd Tank Battalion, occupied IHRINGSHAUSEN (N of KASSEL), moving into those positions at 0730. Co I and Co K entered and secured HARLESCHAUSEN (NW of KASSEL). At 1330 elements of the US 69th Infantry Division began to relieve CT 318 in KASSEL. Col. Luckett, C.O., CT318, was placed in command of all troops of the relieving 271st Infantry Regiment until the relief was completed. The relief move continued throughout the night.

By 1120 6 April 1945, the morning being cloudy damp and hazy, CT 318 was completely relieved of the occupation

of KASSEL and elements of the Regiment prepared for movement via Route 7 through GREUZBURG and EISENACH to a forward assembly W of GOTHA in the vicinity of MECHTERSTADT, FRIEDRICHSWERTH and ETENHAUSEN. The 52 mile ESE movement began at 1735 with the 2d Bn leading, followed by the 1st Bn at 2145 and the 3d Bn at 2200.

Movement to GOTHA

By 1120, 6 April 45 CT 318 was completely relieved of the occupation of KASSEL and elements of the Regiment prepared for movement to Gotha in the vicinity of MECHTERSTADT, Friedrichswerth and Ettenhausen. The weather was cloudy, damp and hazy. The 52 mile ESE movement began at 1735 with the 2d Bn leading, followed by the 1st Bn at 2145 and the 3d Bn at 2200. Elements of CT 318 completed the move by 1000, 7 April 45. CT 318 Hqs and Hqs Co with Service Co closed into the town of SATTELSTADT. Having closed into the vicinity of MECHTERSTADT, forward elements of the Regiment again began to move forward in the early afternoon to relieve elements of the US 4th Armd Dv at Gotha (12 miles E). Relief of the Armd unit, which was smashing E was completed by 2200, at which time the responsibility for the area reverted to CT 318. The Regiment controlled Gotha to a point 500 yards S of the Reich-Autobahn. The 3d Bn closed 1.5 miles E of Gotha as Regimental reserve in SIEBLEBEN with Hqs CT 318. The 1st Bn closed in the right Regimental sector 4 miles to the SE in WECHMAR. The 2d Bn outposted the Regimental left (N) flank 4.5 miles ESE in SEEGEREN. Cannon Co reached GOTHA by 2015 while Co B 305th Med Bn closed in the Hqs CT 318 area.

By 0945 8 April 45, with the weather cool, damp and cloudy, CT 318 had completed the relief of the US 4th Armd and 89th Infantry Dv and the Regiment patrolled and maintained its positions throughout the day with only slight changes in dispositions of the 1st and 2d Bns. Moving by foot at 1135 the 1st Bn dispatched Co C from WECHMAR to the high ground N of MUEHLBERG in the vicinity around and of HILL 393 located in the wooded area ROENBACH overlooking the Autobahn. The company established roadblocks astride the highway facing E. The move made the Company C the most forward element of the Allied troops on the Western Front. The remaining elements of the battalion continued to patrol the vicinity of WECHMAR and to outpost the town to the E and NE. The 2d Bn moved Companies F and G to the NE of SEEGEREN to outpost the town of TUTTLEBEN 2 miles distant. The movement placed these units astride the GOTHA-ERFURT Highway (Route 7). The 3d Bn remained in reserve positions in SIEBLEBEN, with Regimental Hqs and Co B 305 Med Bn. Cannon Co remained in Gotha.

On 9 April 45 the weather was cool and clear with the enemy forces opposing the Division in the vicinity of ERFURT (18 miles E of the forward Regimental positions) were elements of the divisional six German Combat Team "FELLER". This unit consisted of CT "OPITZ", CT "GRAU", the 71st Panzer Group Replacement Bn, the 105th March Bn, the 124th Airport Operations Company, Alarm Company "HINDERSLEBEN", and other miscellaneous units. In support of these enemy units were tanks, self-propelled guns and artillery. This enemy force of 90 Infantry and 10 assault guns made a counter-attack but was destroyed shortly after it got under way. Enemy lost 6 assault guns and 75-80 PW's. CT 318 also on 9 April 45, attacked E on a limited objective. A line was established generally N and S from GAMSTADT (4 miles E of TUTTLEBEN on Route 7) to SULZENBRUCKEN (0.5 miles S of the Autobahn - 3 miles E of Hill 393). The 1st Bn moved E along the Regimental route from its positions at WECHMAR at 1130. By 1330. By 1515, Co B, followed by Co A, had moved 3 miles E to take WANDERSLEBEN without opposition. Leaving Co A to secure and outpost the town, at 1400 Co B moved 2.5 miles E to take APFELSTADT against slight resistance by 1745. Co C moved E from the high ground of Hill 393 to take SULZENBRUCKEN (3.5 miles E) against light opposition. Co D remained with the 1st Bn CP in the vicinity of WECHMAR. The 2nd Bn, at 1315, moved E along the attack route and on the Regimental left (N) flank parallel to Route 7. Co E, at 1450, was just W of GROSSRETTBACH in the vicinity of the village of COBSTADT. At the same time Co G was W of GRADSLEBEN N of the Rot River along the high ground near Hill 286 (.5 miles S of the Autobahn). By 1515 Co E had overrun COBSTADT and was moving E against light opposition when they were strafed uncomfortably close by P-47's and had to use identification panels. GROSSRETTBACH and KLEINRETTBACH enroute were seized by the rifle company. Co G took GRABSLEBEN at the same time. The 2d Bn halted for the day with its elements holding those towns and contact was established with CT 317 in the vicinity of GAMSTADT to the N on Route 7 at 2145. Companies F and H remained as security for the 2d Bn CP in SEEGEREN.

The 3d Bn, in reserve, moved E at 1500 from SIEBLEBEN to close in SEEGEREN at 1610. Cannon Co departed Gotha