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APRIL 1945

It was Easter Sunday, 1 Apr 45. The day was cold and no different from the many preceding it. The 80th Infantry Division had been following the wake of the U.S. 6th Armored Division to which CT 318 had been attached for the move from the RHINE RIVER. The 80th Division held the left flank of the U.S. XX Corps and that of the U.S. Third Army. CT 318, with elements of CT 317 following in Division reserve, had been released from the armored division and reverted to the control of the 80th Division. The Regiment was notified that its mission was to attack N, to seize and secure the large industrial city of KASSEL. CT 319, on the right flank, was assigned to clear the heights E of the city, thus cutting off enemy escape routes to the E and NE. On the left flank of CT 318, the 80th Reconnaissance Troop was to probe the area northward and maintain contact with the U.S. First Army.

KASSEL, approximately 54 miles N of CT 318 positions in HOMBURG, is situated in central GERMANY, on a line midway between DUSSELDORF on the W and LEIPZIG on the E. The city ranked high in the manufacture of war material and also served as a vital enemy communications center. Of signal importance were four factories of Henschel & Sons which produced the monstrous Tiger Royal tanks, locomotives, aircraft engines, heavy duty trucks and 75mm antitank guns. In addition, the firm of Wegman & Company produced turrets for the Tiger tanks and 88mm antiaircraft guns.

The city had suffered severely from Allied bombing raids, particularly during the period Sep-Oct 44, from American fortresses escorted by P-51 Mustang fighter planes. Although industrial production was drastically curtailed as a result of the bombing raids, many of the factories were still operating when the city was finally captured by CT 318. The normal population in excess of 200,000 fell to about 30,000 as the American

forces approached the city.

The importance of KASSEL was evidenced by the frenzied efforts of the enemy to gather together all available manpower in a last ditch defense of the city. Hoping to halt the advance of the American troops, the German NCO Tank School "Eisenach" was brought into the area 29 Mar 45. Task Force "Eisenach" was equipped with 30 new 50-ton Panther and Mark IV tanks. Composed of four companies of combat experienced cadre and drivers plus numerous 17-year olds, the enemy unit was to be contacted only once in the entire struggle for KASSEL. Other enemy units identified in the sector were several batteries of the 64th Heavy Anti-aircraft Battalion in which each battery possessed four 88mm guns entrenched along the southern outskirts of KASSEL. The 2d Battery, 1066 Artillery Regiment of the 166th Reserve Infantry Division filled similarly located positions and possessed three horse-drawn 105mm guns. Also in positions in and around the city were 135 men of the 86th Alarm Company and 150 men of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Replacement Company.

CT 318, in positions around HOMBERG, had the 3d Battalion to the N protecting the bridgeheads over the EDDER RIVER at OBER MOLLRICH and NIEDER MOLLRICH and the bridgehead site over the EMS RIVER at NIEDERVORSCHUTZ. The 1st Battalion, with Co C leading, had moved through the bridgehead area on the EDDER RIVER at 2400, 31 Mar 45. The 2d Battalion, during the same period, closed in LUTZELWIG near the AUTOBAIN. Cannon Co, behind the 3d Battalion, closed in UTTERSCHAUSEN while Co B, 305th Medical Battalion moved to HOMBERG with the CP of the Regiment.

The main axis of the proposed attack on KASSEL was to be from HOMBERG N and NE through FELSBERG and NIEDERVORSCHUTZ. Once these towns were taken, the attack would then be continuous^{ly} northward along the main highway (Route 3/254) approaching KASSEL from the S, SW and SE. The 1st Battalion

moved through the chilly night northward from NIEDERVORSCHUTZ and through DEUTE to arrive at its objective of DISSEN by 0430, 1 Apr 45. During the advance small arms fire from enemy positions to the N was received. As the battalion continued the advance it encountered heavy fire from enemy tanks and small arms in the BESSE-HERTINGSHAUSEN vicinity; however, a general withdrawal of the enemy was evident as the latter fell back toward KASSEL. The 1st Battalion by midnight had advanced 18 miles through RINGERSHAUSEN to the vicinity just S of OBER ZWEHREN, a point 1.5 miles S of KASSEL.

The 2d Battalion ^(with 1st) had departed LUTZELWIG at 1430 and advanced along the left flank of the 1st Battalion in a northwesterly direction. By 1505, having moving against slight resistance, the battalion had cleared the towns of LOHRE, ALTENBERG, GIESMAR and MADEN. Moving swiftly, Hamper White seized the towns of RIEDN, LETZE, LOHNE and ZUSCHEN and GUDENSBURG by 1710. At 1715 leading elements were entering the LANGENBERG WALD. From this position the battalion jumped off to attack GROSSENITTE at 2250.

Fighting continued in the town until shortly after 2400 when it was reported secured. ^{Hamper White} The ~~battalion~~ then consolidated its positions around the town and occupied the ~~villages~~ of GERTRUDENSTIFT on the NW outskirts. The 3d Battalion at FELSBERG moved to closed in NIEDERVORSCHUTZ at 1500. Cannon Co in support of the 1st Battalion had moved from UTTERSCHAUSEN to HOLZHAUSEN (1.5 miles N of DISSEN). Co B, 305 Med Battalion, remained with the Regimental CP in HOMBERG.

In the advance CT 318 had taken 17 prisoners, eight 88mm anti-aircraft guns and 26 towns. The town of BESSE was personally captured by Col. Lockett, CO of CT 318. The enemy encountered in the move northward represented the 661st and 662d Regiments, 166th Reserve Infantry Division and the 184th Reserve Grenadier Battalion. The ⁶ ~~enemy~~ units had arrived in the vicinity during 27-30 Mar 45 and were assigned the mission of defending the EDDER-

FULDA RIVER line which ran in a N and S direction. Late in the afternoon of 31 Mar 45, the ~~by enemy units~~ were directed to fall back into KASSEL leaving small delaying forces behind. The German 166th Reserve Infantry Division had been transported from DENMARK by rail 25 Mar 45, but only two of the three regiments were identified in the sector. Each regiment was composed of two battalions of 400 men each, plus three other companies in support. The 134th Grenadier Battalion was composed of five companies averaging 150 men each and armed mostly with automatic weapons.

At 2400 1 April 45, the 3d Battalion of CT 318 moved N from NIEDERVORSCHUTZ through DEUTE and DISSEN to join Cannon Co in HOLZHAUSEN by 0300 2 Apr 45. The battalion CP and Co M remained in DISSEN.

A 0400 2 Apr 45, the 1st Battalion - with Cos A and B abreast - began movement northward from the vicinity of OBER ZWEHREN. The early morning hours were cool and somewhat damp. To the N could be seen brilliant flash of artillery hits and the subsequent fires started by the artillery turned the horizon an eerie dull red as morning broke. By 0430, the lead companies entered the outskirts of NIEDER ZWEHREN. At 0455, as the assault companies entered the southern outskirts of KASSEL, the enemy launched a counter-attack with ^{more than} an estimated 100 infantry supported by 15 armored vehicles and seven tanks.

~~Just prior to the enemy assault, Cos A and B entered a plowed field which lay just outside the town. On the right flank, Co B had a quarter of a mile in the field and~~

Just prior to the enemy assault, Cos A and B were moving northward in a skirmish line adjacent to Route 3 along the left flank. To the left of the highway, some 100 yards distant, was a wooded area and the first cluster of two-storied houses. To the right of the road, across the front of the

assaulting riflemen, was a line of earthen defense works and foxholes extending from the road to the base of a steep tree-topped hill. Astride the highway, a newly plowed field extended from the edge of the woods to the base of the hill.

Through the early morning mists which rendered the outskirts of the town barely visible, the assault elements of the 1st Battalion started across the field. Patiently waiting, the German defenders in the woods and entrenchments withheld their fire until the companies were within 150 yards of their positions. Suddenly the stillness of the morning was shattered by the sharp crackle of enemy rifles and the busy chatter of enemy machine guns. The withering enemy fire cut into the American ranks which stopped momentarily and then moved forward. At this time the enemy chose to launch its armored assault.

Long-barrelled enemy 88mm guns of the Tiger Royal tanks belched shells into the assaulting rifleman. With the first shell, Sgt Esparza (Co A) fell. Pfc Valentino (Medic) moved obliquely forward across the open field under heavy fire to render aid. As Pfc Valentino worked over the battered form of the wounded man, another enemy tank bore down upon the two men at the side of the road. Just as the enemy tank tore loose with ~~another~~ a shell, Pfc Valentino threw himself across Esparza. With the explosion, Esparza was killed and Valentino mortally wounded.

Using the enemy gun flashes as objectives, Cos A and B slowly moved forward toward the enemy positions. Sgt Owen (Co A) moved to the head of the line and took up a position where he could effectively fire on the enemy. His devastating fire ~~effectively~~ killed or wounded more than 40 of the enemy. Co A then moved forward to occupy the entrenchments and the houses on the side of the road. Throughout the remainder of the morning, Sgt Johnson (Co A) sat in an enemy foxhole and continued to fire a bazooka at the passing

Tiger Royals. Unfortunately, the shells which struck the tanks did not explode. By noon, the battered elements of Co A held a weak line extending from the first house across the enemy entrenchments to a graveyard on the top of the hill. Co B, on the right flank, encountered heavy enemy fire from machine-gun emplacements. Pfc Witzman (Co B), his company halted, crawled forward through the heavy fire to attack the enemy position. In the ensuing action, Witzman killed 3 of the enemy with his automatic rifle and his company surged forward. Co C, committed when heavy losses were encountered by Cos A and B, moved across the railroad tracks in the vicinity of NIENDELR ZWENREIN in the wake of the attacking forward elements.

The 2d Battalion, earlier in the morning, had attacked N from GROSSENRIITTE toward ALTENRIITTE which was rapidly cleared of the enemy. The attack was then continued NW against increasing enemy resistance toward the high ground in BRASSELBERG WALD and BRASSELBERG.

The 3d Battalion, following the 1st, had just moved to assault positions on the southern edge of OBER ZWENREIN when the enemy attack occurred. As the enemy smashed into the 3d Battalion, Sgt Sheffield (Co I) directed his squad into positions to repel the attack. For three hours, exposing himself to the enemy, he effectively distributed the fire of his squad which resulted in the death of 57 of the enemy and the wounding of 28 others. The battalion then continued the attack NW toward WEHLHEIDEN where heavy fire was encountered. Pfc Daffer (Co L), as several of his comrades fell wounded, charged the enemy position located in a nearby house. Capturing 7 of the enemy, Daffer returned with his prisoners and forced them to carry his wounded to the rear. Pfc Miller (Co L), in another area, ~~remained for 10~~ ~~hours~~ elected to remain with the company casualties. For 10 hours, without food or contact with his company, Pfc Miller continued to administer aid to the wounded in full view of the enemy until the casualties were moved.

The enemy attack, while it did not fully break the lines of CT 318, succeeded in driving down the gap between the 1st and 3d Battalions. The enemy continued the advance southward along the left flank of the 1st Battalion. Communications of CT 318 were disrupted and the enemy armor destroyed 6 tank destroyers of the 311 Tank Destroyer Battalion and four 57mm antitank guns. Swiftly striking S, enemy armor seized ALTENBAUNA and moved SE to the vicinity of KIRCHBAUNA. The attack was finally nailed down by fierce defensive measures of CT 318 and a pincer movement from the W by CT 317.

The battalions of CT 318 continued the attack northward along the outskirts of KASSEL. At 1540, another enemy assault was launched SE from the town in the vicinity of the 1st Battalion. Assisted by the deadly accuracy of the 314th Field Artillery Battalion, the 1st Battalion succeeded in destroying 6 enemy tanks while the remainder of the attacking force withdrew into KASSEL.

By nightfall CT 318 had beaten the enemy back into the KASSEL bastion against heavy oppositions. } The 1st Battalion continued its fight on the southern outskirts of the city against severe fire from small arms, anti-tank and tank positions. The advance of the 2d Battalion continued against enemy tank fire and 20mm flak guns in BRASSELBERG which was finally taken at 2010. The battalion then sent Cos F and G to clear the adjacent woods while Cos E and H secured the town. Late in the night, the 2d Battalion continued northward to seize the high ground adjacent to the ~~western side~~ of KASSEL. The 3d Battalion, advancing between the 1st and 2d, pushed N from OBER ZWEHREN along the railroad line leading into KASSEL from the SW. Fierce enemy resistance was encountered all the way but, by the close of the period, the battalion held positions in the railroad yards of KASSEL and was still pressing northward.

During the day, CT 318 had captured 212 prisoners and five towns, had destroyed six enemy tanks, four 88mm anti-aircraft guns, one Volkswagon, two halftracks and four supply trucks. The enemy fought fiercely against the advance and, despite two heavy counter-attacks, was unable to halt the progress of CT 318. The success of CT 318 thus far was not without it's cost. The 1st Battalion had lost 14 killed, eight of which were members of Co A, and a large number wounded. The 2d Battalion lost 3 killed and numerous others wounded. The 3d Battalion sustained 5 killed and a number wounded. The Anti-tank Co of CT 318 sustained a number of casualties and lost several 57mm anti-tank guns. By the end of the period CT 318 was firmly established in the outskirts of KASSEL on the S (1st Bn), on the W (2d Bn) and on the SW (3d Bn).

Enemy resistance during the day included Task Force "Eisenach", several 88mm batteries of the 64th Heavy Anti-aircraft Battalion, batteries of the 166th Reserve Infantry Battalion, the 86th Alarm Company and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Company. The enemy strongpoints were centered chiefly in the towns and on key terrain guarding the southern approaches to KASSEL. CT 318 encounteredd fierce delaying tactics as the enemy blew the bridges and withdrew northward into KASSEL.