

UNIT: 2d Bn, 319th Inf, 80th Inf Div

PERIOD: 17th Dec 44 to 25 Jan 45

ACTION: Reducing the Bulge

SOURCE: Capt George W Harmon, S-1, 2d Bn, 319th Inf

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW: 2d Bn CP at ROELINGEN, LUXEMBOURG
1 Feb 45

MAPS: TRIER, ARLON, Scale 1/100,000 and 1/50,000.

INTERVIEWER: Lt S. J. Tobin

Interview conducted with records.

The 2d Bn, 319th Inf was in position at MERLEBACH west of SAAR-
BISCHEN where they were training in preparation to attacking the SEIG-
FRIED Line. On 17 Dec 44, the Bn moved to the vicinity of ROHRBACH
southeast of SAAREGUEMINES. There they were alerted to expect a
counterattack and to prepare to take URBACH as a limited objective be-
fore attacking the SEIGFRIED defenses. Later, on the afternoon of
18 Dec 44, the Bn received notice to prepare for a long motor march.
At 2300 orders came canceling all plans and alerting the battalion for
movement northward.

On the afternoon of 19 Dec 44, they were relieved by the 25th Cav
of the 4th Armd Div. Relief was completed by 1630 and the battalion
pulled back to HOELING east of ROHRBACH. There, they fed the troops
hot chow and then moved out on the march to LUXEMBOURG leaving the
town at 2000. The column passed through ST AVOLD, MERLE to
LUXEMBOURG. Their mission was to take defensive positions north and
east of the city of LUXEMBOURG.

By 1500 on 20 Dec 44, the 1st Bn 319th Inf reached BEGGIN about
15 miles south of the city. The battalion was placed in regimental

reserve and they billeted the troops and spent the night there.

On the morning of 21 Dec 44, orders were received to move the battalion to TUNTINGEN northwest of LUXEMBOURG city. At the time, the 1st and 3d Bns, 319th were there. That evening at 2100, orders came from Div for the regiment to relieve the remnants of the 28th Div which was holding a line just north of VICHTEN. They were to attack, 1st Bn on the right, 3d Bn on the left and the 2d in reserve. They had no definite objective, orders were to push to the north through the 28th Div which was holding the line in the vicinity of VICHTEN. The CO 109th Inf, 28th Div met with the Bn commanders of the 319th to brief them on the situation. The remainder of the day was spent in checking equipment.

On the morning of 22 Dec 44, the regiment moved out from the assembly area in the approach march to VICHTEN. The 2d Bn was still in reserve and they shuttled their troops by truck. The route was TUNTINGEN, BUSCHDORF to VICHTEN. The battalion closed at VICHTEN at 1000. The battalion set up in VICHTEN and began preparing defenses. Meanwhile, the 1st Bn had taken OBERFEULEN and the 3d Bn had taken part of MERZIG. At 1800, Lt Col Paul Bandy called from regiment and said to assemble the company COs and the Bn staff and to prepare to move. Capt Harmon assembled the staff, the Bn CO returned and gave them the mission which was to pass through 1st Bn lines at OBERFEULEN attack HEIDERSCHIED the night of 22-23 Dec and hold until relieved. Attached to the battalion were 2 medium tanks from Co C 702 Tk Bn, 4 SP 90mm TDS from 610th TD Bn. The Bn moved out shortly after 1800 on 22 Dec 44 in the following order: E Co as advance guard with the 2 medium tanks as direct support: 2 TDS, F Co, Hq Co, G Co and the

2 remaining TDS followed at the rear of the column. H Co had one heavy MG platoon and the mortar platoon attached to F Co and one heavy MG platoon attached to E Co. They advanced with a minimum of vehicles, the radio and command vehicles being dispersed throughout the column. The 905th FA Bn was in support and a FO was with both E and F companies. The battalion moved their infantry by truck to OBERFEULEN. There they detrucked and jumped off in ^{an} attack on HEIDERSCHIED at 2300 on the night of 22 Dec 44. Visibility was excellent, the weather was clear and very cold and there was a bright full moon. They proceeded along the road from OBERFEULEN to HEIDERSCHIED. Patrols were sent out in front of the battalion to screen the woods along the road toward HEIDERSCHIED. The patrols made no contact with the enemy and the battalion reached the high ground south east of the town by 0200 on 23 Dec 44. A patrol of 6 men from E company was sent in to scout the town. They returned shortly and reported the buildings occupied by enemy armed with automatic weapons and much vehicular activity in the town.

At 0230 on 23 Dec 44, the battalion deployed for the assault on the town. F Co on the right and E Co left, with G Co in reserve. The attack jumped off from the high ground and was met by heavy automatic small arms fire from the road intersection (737445) in the south-east part of the town, an assault gun (75mm) and 2 long's, one on each side of the road guarded the approaches from that direction. As the leading elements of E Co approached within about 100 yards of the position, the MG on the assault gun and the two supporting MGs fired tracers at the attacking forces. Burp gun fire was directed at the targets indicated by the tracers.

E Co was held up and they called up the 2 leading tanks. The tanks moved up along the road and ran into a mine field at (742441). The regimental mine platoon which was with the battalion was sent down to clear the field. Meanwhile, the assault gun in town fired at the tank but missed striking the mine field in front of the tank, and exploded the field. The tank fired at the flash from the assault gun setting it on fire. The resulting illumination enabled E Co to drive the Germans away from their positions and take the Gendarme Hostel, a large stone building next to the assault gun position. The tanks moved through the gap in the mine field and by 0500 E Co held four houses in the southeast corner of town.

Meanwhile, F Co was tied down by mortar and automatic small arms fire. Artillery was out of range and they were not able to contact Div artillery by radio, the distance being too great. At 0630 F Co was ordered to move around to the left and enter the town from the west. This they did and by house to house fighting the town was cleared by 1130. 15 PWs were taken and the enemy withdrew toward the northwest of the town. A civilian reported 200 enemy had been in HEIDERSCHEID. At about 0900, 2 enemy recon cars and a half-track came toward the town from the direction of KEHMEN, to the northeast. They withdrew when fired on by the TDS which had come up during the previous action.

The town had just been cleared when an enemy armored column of tanks and half-tracks was observed going toward ESCHDORF to the southwest along the road crossing the ridge at (705456). They moved the TDS and Bn AT platoon to the southwest of HEIDERSCHEID where they fired on the column for a duration of about 20 minutes. During the action, they hit and stopped 3 of the enemy vehicles.

At about 1200 the battalion had begun to prepare defenses about the town when a counter attack struck. About 200 enemy infantry (PW statement) attacked up the wooded draws from the north and northwest of the town. E Co which was defending the north sector of the town killed the CO and the radioman of the attacking enemy infantry unit in addition to inflicting other numerous casualties on them. They withdrew back down the draws and did not show themselves during the rest of the day.

At the same time as the infantry started to attack, 11 enemy tanks attacked the town, 7 attacking from the northeast coming cross country while 4 tanks moved in along the road from the east. The men on the east section started to run, but were stopped by Major Samuel L. Williams Bn Exec and Capt William H Chamberlin, CO of F Co, who got them back to their positions. The tanks were attacking without infantry support and when they moved up within range of bazookas 2 were knocked out by the men of F Co. The tanks found their position untenable and started to withdraw about 1230.

Meanwhile Major Samuel L Williams ran back and got the TPs into position to fire on the enemy tanks and defend the town where they knocked out 4 tanks as they retreated. In addition another enemy tank was knocked out by our tanks. All together 7 of the 11 attacking enemy tanks were knocked out.

After 1300, the enemy action bogged down and the battalion spent the rest of the day reorganizing and preparing defenses.

During the day, the 1st Bn took KEMMAN and the 3d Bn took HEIDERSCHNEIDERGRUND and TADLER.

At 2300, 23 Dec Dec 44, the Battalion received orders to send G Co at 0500 on the 24th to relieve I Co of the 3d Bn at HEIDERSCHNEIDER-

GRUND.

At 0400 the following morning, an enemy plane dropped two bombs straddling a TD. The concussion damaged the firing mechanism of the gun. G Co pulled out to relieve I Co at HEIDERSCHNEIDERGRUND taking two 57 mm guns with them. The Company had just pulled out when an artillery and mortar barrage hit the town at 0530. In ten minutes time over 100 rounds fell. After a lull of 10 minutes duration, the enemy sneaked up from the direction of ESCHDORF and attacked from the southwest, where they knocked out the tank which was protecting the southwest part of the town. The enemy followed up this infantry attack with tanks and 20mm guns mounted on halftracks which drove up and down the road south of the town firing at the buildings. The enemy infantry pressed its attack into the very sector where G Co had pulled out on the south edge of town. Everybody fired out of the windows and drove the enemy back. Twice they got in close enough to throw grenades in the windows of the buildings. The battalion was hard put for anti-tank defense for they had lost one of their tanks and the firing mechanism was damaged on one TD. This TD commander was tracking the enemy vehicles and trying every way possible to fire his weapon pushing the switch, kicking the pedal and even hitting the firing mechanism with a hammer. One tank of the battalion got into position and knocked out 3 enemy halftracks and one enemy tanks, ~~the~~ the artillery Lt O, Capt Thomas A Mason, had made contact the night before with Div Arty and arranged for support. At the time the enemy attacks were pressing dangerously near, the Bn ordered fire called on their own positions feeling that they were partially protected by being in buildings. The 905th FA was still out of range and the mission was given to the 315th FA, 155mm how. The 315th shelled the

area from 0800 to about 0830 with devastating effect. By 0900 on 24 Dec 44, the enemy were repulsed and withdrew toward EICHENDORF. Enemy dead counted were 76 and 26 wounded. PW were cleared through the 1st Bn medical channels. A German medical halftrack made several trips to the area during the fighting to evacuate wounded.

During the remainder of the day the battalion remained in REIDER-SCHIED and improved their positions. That night at 2100 orders were received to take RINGEL the next day. Their mission was to attack through the 1st Bn which was holding the high ground southwest of KEMMEN (758453), seize RINGEL and take the high ground north of the town.

On the morning of 25 Dec 44, the battalion moved out at 0600 with F Co in the lead followed by E, A, and G respectively. They had 3 TPs, 2 medium and 3 light tanks in support. They moved into RINGEL and secured the town with very little resistance by 1400 and occupied the high ground north of the town.

At 1500, the Germans launched a counterattack with about 50 men. They came up from the draw from the west in a column of twos. As they approached the battalion outposts, the men, thinking they were coming in to surrender, "Kamerad"? One of the Germans called "No, American Kamerad". The outpost opened fire with a machine gun and mowed down a large number of Germans before they could take cover. Meanwhile, the town was receiving artillery fire from across the river. Capt George WHarmon brought up a medium tank to the east edge of town and placed direct fire on the Germans. The action subsided about 1630 and Capt Harmon sent the tank back to the cover of the buildings in the center of town. The rest of the day was spent improving the defenses at RINGEL and preparing for any other counterattacks. The ex-

pected attack came at 2300 from the same direction as before firing machine pistols. Meanwhile, artillery concentration circling the town had been arranged for and registered. Artillery was called for and came immediately with good effect. In addition one TD which was guarding the eastern approach fired armor piercing shells at the advancing enemy. These shells ricocheted with a terrific screaming roar. This TD moved into several alternate firing positions. Capt Harmon said "The Jerries must have thought we had a new secret weapon." At Div Arty, the FDC gave them support by all 4 Bns. The Germans were routed leaving over 40 men out of their estimated company strength dead. The enemy was entirely routed by 2130.

On the morning of 26 Dec 44, the battalion was given the mission of clearing the woods between RINGEL and the SURE River. At 1200, F and G Cos moved out to sweep the wood. They attacked with F on the left and G on the right. E Co remained in town. K Co from the 3d Bn was sent up to take G Co's position in the town while G sweep the woods. The attacking units caught the Jerries as they were just beginning to dig in and they withdrew without any organized opposition. Main opposition was mortar and MG fire from the ridge and high ground west of BOURSCHNEID. This was silenced by artillery fire. By 1700, the woods were cleared between RINGEL and DIRBACH to the SURE River. The returning units reported the bridge at DIRBACH blown. In clearing the woods 58 PWs of the 212th Regt of the 79th VG Div were taken. The companies returned to RINGEL at 1800. The 1st Bn relieved the 2d Bn on the line relief being completed by 2230. The 2d Bn withdrew to HEDERSCHNEID closing at 2330.

The 27th and 28th Dec were spent in reserve at HEDERSCHNEID.

At 1000 on the morning of 29 Dec 44, information was received that the battalion would relieve both the 1st and 3d Bns on the line. The 3d Bn was at TADLER and would leave I Co to help. The 1st Bn was still at RINGEL. The Bn moved out and completed the relief of the other two units by 2130. Unit dispositions were as follows: E Co in RINGEL, G Co south of RINGEL, AND F Co in the area 7545 protecting their supply lines to RINGEL and TADLER. F Co CP was at the town 752452. After E Co had gone into position, their outposts captured an enemy 3 man patrol who stated that an attack was coming in battalion strength that night or early next morning. Outposts were strengthened and located to cover the approaches from all directions. Div Arty was contacted and arrangement for protective fires were made. They were allotted the fires of Div Arty and the 404th FA Gp as well, a total of 3 Bns including several medium Bns. Arty planned fires to cover the entire area.

At 0430 on the morning of 30 Dec 44, the 4-man outpost located in the draw west of the town (756474) reported that approximately 250 enemy attacking up the draw. The enemy engulfed the outpost and their attack carried right on into the town. Sixteen enemy got into the house next to the Bn CP in RINGEL. The situation was desperate. The enemy had closed so quickly that the artillery fires planned for the perimeter of the town and adjacent area did not stop them. Therefore, the Bn called for fire directly on the town of RINGEL itself. This fire demoralized the enemy completely and dispersed them. A Pfc charged the house occupied by the enemy next to the CP, threw in grenades and with a Tomay gun captured the remaining occupants of the house. The artillery fires killed 36 enemy, wounded 5, at a cost of 4 casualties to the Bn -- 2 men killed. Capt Harmon said that without the ~~artillery their positions would have been untenable. The enemy who~~

artillery their positions would have been untenable. The enemy who were in town were completely demoralized -- 58 PWs came out into the open from buildings they had occupied after the barrage, and five enemy even went over to TADLER and surrendered. All activity ceased by 0530. The weather at the time was clear, cold, and visibility was excellent as there was a full moon. The battalion stayed at RINGEL during the 30th--no enemy action was observed other than sporadic artillery fire. On the 31st at 1800 they were relieved by the 1st Bn and withdrew to regtl reserve at HEIDERSCHEID. They remained in HEIDERSCHEID during 1 Jan and on the 2d they relieved the 1st Bn at RINGEL and TADLER, taking up the same positions as before. Relief of the first Bn was completed by 1800. They remained in position with no enemy activity during 3 and 4 Jan 45.

On 5 Jan at 2300 they were relieved by the 3d Bn, 317th Inf and withdrew to HEIDERSCHEID where they were in regtl reserve. On 6 Jan 1st and 3d Bns moved out to attack GOESDORF and DAHL. The 1st Bn left HEIDERSCHEID at 1500 and moved into GOESDORF then moved on to DAHL at 1600. The 2d moved to GOESDORF. On the morning of the 7th, E Co was given the mission of taking BOCKHOLZ. They moved out at 0900 along the road and were fired on with MG and mortars from the woods in the vicinity of 737486. They withdrew on order from battalion after having lost 16 men including 3 killed in the resulting fire fight. They arrived back in GOESDORF with 5 PWs at 1300. The PWs said that 2 Bns of 26th Regt 79th VG Div were planning an attack on GOESDORF. The Bn moved their transport out of town and secured additional ammunition including 1,000 rounds of mortar ammo and prepared for the attack. The attack came on 8 Jan at 0500. The enemy came from three directions: East, Northeast, and south. Artillery fires were called for and ob-

tained excellent effects. Our small arms fire was very effective chiefly because of the advance notice and preparations that the battalion had. The attack was over at 0700. At the same time the 1st and 3d battalions in the vicinity of Dahl were attacked in strength. The rest of the day was quiet. The battalion remained in position at GOESDORF maintaining defensive positions on the 9th and 10th.

On the 11th E Co was again given the mission to take BOCKHOLZ. They pushed off at 0700 and went through the woods and along the road. They got into the town of BOCKHOLZ without the enemy receiving any warning. They entered the enemy CP capturing the entire CP group taking 25 PWS in the building. From other building other PWS were taken by surprise, the entire town being cleared by 0900 and a total of 78 PWS were taken. Only 5 rounds of ammunition were fired. A BAR man killed one German who offered resistance. The entire area around BOCKHOLZ was cleared by 1500. E Co set up defensive positions in BOCKHOLZ. ~~The~~ ^{The} enemy had placed so many mines and booby traps in the town that it took the unit two days to clear them. The battalion remained in its respective positions in BOCKHOLZ and GOESDORF from the 12th to the morning of the 18th.

On the morning of the 18th at 0500 the 3d Bn attacked NOCHER with G Co, 2d Bn attached. Enemy artillery was very severe and caused 47 casualties to G Co. NOCHER was in our hands by 1200. 2d Bn dispositions on the evening of the 18th are as follows: E Co in BOCKHOLZ; F Co, H Co, and Hq Co in DAHL; G Co in NOCHER. Positions were maintained during 19 Jan 45.

On the 20th F Co occupied the ground southeast of NOCHER and one Plat of G Co was sent to the high ground above BESCHEND (768512).

On the 21st the 3d Bn received the mission of attacking MURKOWIS.
The 2d Bn received the mission to attack KAULTENBACH and ALSCHIED. F
Co moved out at 0800, and became involved in a fire fight at KAULTEN-
BACH lasting all day. By night 2/3 of the town was in our hands.
The fight continued all day on the 22d, the entire town being cleared
shortly after dark.

On the 23d F Co continued mopping up the area around KAULTENBACH
and E Co crossed the stream and attacked ALSCHIED. They met consider-
able resistance in the town including 20mm AA fire from the high ground
across the river. The town was occupied by 1500. The 24th was spent
mopping up the area around KAULTENBACH, ALSCHIED, and patrolling.
The Battalion was relieved by the 2d Bn 318th Inf on the morning of
25 Jan, relief being completed by 0350.