

HEADQUARTERS 318TH INFANTRY
APO #80, U.S. Army

5-2
"AFTER ACTION REPORT"
December 1944

The 318th Infantry had taken over the sector vicinity FORET PAREBERSVILLER 29 November 1944, previously held by 317th Infantry, and had immediately begun preparation of defensive positions in event of an enemy counterattack. No counterattacks were made, however, and 318th troops continued to improve their defensive positions and, at the same time, plans were formulated for an attack to drive the enemy, consisting of reorganized elements of 17th SS Pz Gr Div, from the towns and high ground occupied by them in our sector West of the SAAR RIVER.

The 17th SS Pz Gr Div, having recently suffered heavy losses in defense of METZ, was badly in need of reorganization. Since the enemy was apparently unable to withdraw them from the line for this purpose, a piecemeal reorganization of the unit while still in line was undertaken, with results not too satisfactory from the enemy's point of view. On 15 November the Division received 500 men from a Replacement Bn in EAST PRUSSIA, and 18 November 1,000 men from Bn Kurmark, the Division's normal Replacement Bn. A large part of these replacements were foreigners (Volks Deutsche) from HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA and CZECHOSLOVAKIA and, judging from those taken prisoner, their loyalty to GERMANY was questionable. On the other hand, the Division still retained many of its former personnel who had served in it since 1942, and these were still fanatical to the German cause.

During the first three days of December enemy activity consisted only of harassing artillery fire and night patrols. On 4 December 318th launched an attack on the enemy and fulfilled its mission of clearing the towns and surrounding high ground of PAREBERSVILLER, THEIDING and KOCHERY.

During the attack 197 PWs (3 of which were officers) were taken and all but 3 of them were from 17th SS Pz Gr Div. These 3 PWs were from 36th AT Bn, 36th Inf Div. Units of 17th SS Div contacted were 1st, 3d, 4th and Bn Hq Cos of 17th SS Ren Bn; 3d, 10th, 11th and 13th Cos, 38th SS Pz Gr Regt; 2d and 3d Cos, 17th SS Engr Bn; 3d and 4th Cos, 17th SS A. Bn; 17th SS Arty Regt; 17th SS AA Bn; 5th Co, 17th SS Motor Transport Bn; and 45th Fortreas MG Bn (remnants of this Bn, about 30 men, withdrawing to East morning of 4 December were high-jacked by 17th SS and attached to 3d Co, 17th SS Ren Bn.

Average company strength of the infantry units contacted was 50-60 men.

Two examples, indicative of the general state of disorganization existing in 17th SS Div at this time are: (1) On 30 Nov 44

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It was reported by higher headquarters that one whole company of Poles in 17th SS Div was relieved of their armabands, given rifles and used as infantry troops. (2) The story told to 318th PW interrogator by the CO of 3d Co, 38th SS Pz Gr Regt, 17th SS Pz Div. This officer, incidentally, was the first one in a total of 3,000 PWs taken by 318th who, on surrendering, approached his captors bearing a 'Safe Conduct' leaflet and repeated this performance with the interrogator. According to his story this officer had reported for duty with the 17th SS Div 3 Dec, been placed in command of a company consisting of 120 raw replacements and assigned a sector vicinity FAREBERSVILLER to defend. His company had no organization, no non-coms and the Lt himself had only a vague idea of his mission. Receiving orders on morning 3 December to move his company into its assigned defensive positions, the Lt could find only 30-40 of his original 120 men. With these he occupied his positions and was soon surrounded on three sides by American Infantry. Seeing that his situation was hopeless, the Lt ordered his remaining men (by this time only 20 were left) to lay down their arms and surrender. This particular officer considered himself a professional soldier and had no liking nor respect for the SS.

Main support for the 17th SS Division's infantry units against the 318th attack on 4 Dec was provided by elements of 17th SS Arty Regt and 3d and 4th Cos, 17th SS AT Bn. Each of these AT Cos was equipped with three 75mm AT guns, all of which were believed captured during the attack. The 17th SS Arty Regt was composed of three Bns; 1st and 2d Bns having 3 batteries each of 105mm Field Hows; 3d Bn composed of 7th and 8th batteries with three 150mm Field Hows each, and 9th battery with four 105mm guns (long barrelled). PWs were taken from 7th battery only, which had its 3 150mm Field Hows located vicinity DIEBLINGEN.

After 318th troops occupied their objectives 4 December, enemy activity consisted only of light harassing artillery fire.

On 6 December the 318th moved from FAREBERSVILLER to a rest area in FREYING (taking over area previously held by 42d Cavalry) where they remained until 18 December out of contact with the enemy.

Moving from FREYING to BETTMILER 18 December 318th Infantry, with the rest of 80th Division, relieved U.S. 12th Armored Division. No enemy contact was made during the night 18-19 December and on the following day U.S. 12th Armored Division reoccupied its positions vicinity BETTMILER due to 80th Division having been ordered to move immediately to LUXEMBOURG where a grand scale German counter offensive was in progress.

The 318th Infantry arrived in LUXEMBOURG 20 December, stopping in the town of HELDANGE. From there the Regiment moved 21 December to MERSCH and on the following day into GOILMAR, where it was committed to action with mission of taking ETTLEBRUCK.

All enemy units contacted by 318th in this sector were from 352d Volks Gr Div. This Div, previously destroyed in ST LO area, had been reformed in GERMANY with Naval and GAF personnel and had taken part in the offensive 16 December. According to higher headquarters, this Division was believed to have been reorganized along regular Volks Gr T/O with a total strength of 10,950 men and, prior to commitment, an effective combat strength estimated at 7,000 - 8,000 men. It was composed of 914th, 915th and 916th Gr Regts, 1352d Arty Regt, 352d Engb Bn, 352d Signal Bn, 352d AT Bn and 352d Fusilier Co. Each Regt had two Bns, a 13th (Inf How) and a 14th (AT) Co. In addition, at least the 916th Regt had a 15th (Assault) Co. The 4th and 8th Cos of each Regt had 8 88Gs and 6 81mm mortars. The Arty Regt had 4 Bns; 1st Bn having 18-27 75mm AT guns; 2d and 3d Bns with 12 105mm Hows each; and 4th Bn 8-12 150mm Hows.

On morning, 22 December the 914th Regt was on line with two Bns on high ground vicinity Hill 403, 1st Bn West of HAUPERDSCHOF and 2d Bn East of there, with mission to penetrate Southwest and hold high ground between WICHTEN and BISSEN. Covering the right flank was 915th Regt with two Bns abreast between MERZIG and GROSBORS. The 916th Regt was on line with two Bns in column, with mission to attack along the RIZER and ATTERT Valleys from GRENZEN to BISSEN. The 1st Bn had mission to occupy and hold BISSEN, 2d Bn to occupy and hold SELMAN.

According to PWs our attack on morning 22 December came as a complete surprise and the troops were utterly confused by our advance. One PW stated that the Regimental CO of 914th, after being wounded, ordered his adjutant to contact Div Hq and ask for immediate reinforcements of infantry and artillery. Apparently the troops as well as the gun batteries were on move at time of the attack, resulting in our artillery effecting more than the usual number of casualties. Two Bns of 1352d Arty were on road between DICKINCH and WUNDER FESLEN when they were fired on by our Arty and forced to withdraw to Northeast. After our attack was launched the enemy infantry was ordered to prepare defensive positions along high ground South of the road EITELBRUCK - MERZIG - GROSBORS. This task was evidently frustrated by the advance of our troops and by 1800, 22 December the enemy was forced from the high ground Southwest of EITELBRUCK.

In this encounter the 914th and 915th Gr Regts were contacted by 318th and heavy resistance was met. During the day 90 PWs were taken, nearly all of which were full-blooded Germans and an appreciable number were Naval personnel. Their morale was fair to good, due primarily to successes during the preceding week.

Several PWs stated that the 352d Gr Div was scheduled to be either supported or relieved by an SS Panzer Division. An officer PW stated that the roads in rear of their Division had been held clear for two days in anticipation of the arrival of the expected armor support.

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On 23 December the enemy, reinforced by additional troops from DIERIKON during the day, resisted our attack on STEINBRUCK with tanks, assault guns and small arms fire. Two of our Companies advanced against heavy resistance into the town but were withdrawn later in the day. At end of day the enemy still held STEINBRUCK. An enemy counterattack made during the day was repulsed. On this second day of our attack, 23 December, 145 PWs were taken and their morale remained fair to good despite heavy casualties and dispersements.

On 24 December the 318th was ordered to leave one Bn (3d) in its present positions, with mission to take and then hold STEINBRUCK, and move with the other two Bns to SAUVILLERS, BELGIUM.

Arriving night 24-25 December in U.S. 4th Armored Division sector, 1st Bn, 318th was attached to CGA, 2d Bn, 318th attached to CGB, U.S. 4th Armored Division with mission to drive a wedge into German lines to relieve our troops encircled at BASTOGNE. Attacking daily for next five days against heavy opposition from 5th Parachute Div and unknown armored elements, 1st Bn, 318th took towns of WARECH, TINFANGE, HOLLANGE, MONVILLE, LIVARONCHAMPS, SAENLEZ; while 2d Bn, 318th, after extremely heavy resistance, captured CHALMONT, GRADINVS, ROMICHAMPAGNE, MONTRE and SALVACOURT. The 2d Bn, 318th, through a combat patrol led by 1st Lt Alexander L. Bowers, established first contact with the encircled U.S. 101st Airborne Division, obtained their dispositions and subsequently drove a wedge connecting with the beleaguered garrison.

While armored resistance from tanks, half-tracks and 88mm guns was continuous during the operation, none of these units could be identified. Infantry opposition stemmed mainly from the 5th Para Div, the following units of which were identified: 13th, 14th and 15th Para Inf Bn's, with three Bns each, plus 13th, 14th and 15th Cos; the 5th AT Bn, with two Cos, armed with AT grenades only; 5th Engr Bn, with three Cos, all committed as infantry; 12th Para Army Regt with a 5th Bn apparently composed of AA Btries. The 408th Army Corps was attached to 5th Para Div. This Corps was composed of six Bns - four light Bns, with three firing Btries per Bn and 6 75mm guns per Btry (guns similar to AT guns, but equipped with sights for indirect firing also); two heavy Bns with two firing Btries each, equipped with 6 150mm Gun Hows per Btry.

On 27 December the 2d Bn, 104th Pz Gr Regt, 15th Pz Gr Div was encountered in defense of MONVILLE. No other elements of this Div were contacted. This Bn had not been reorganized, nor received replacements, before commitment in this sector from the COLOGNE area.

The 18th Nebelwerfer Brigade (rocket projectors), composed of 21st and 22d Nebelwerfer Regiments, was encountered along entire South flank of German wedge and also in zone of all three of our Battalions. Each regiment composed of three Bns, with the Hq and three firing Btries each. In 1st Bn were 6 150mm projectors per Btry; 2d Bn with 6 210mm projectors per Btry; 3d Bn with 6

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300mm projectors per Btry. Number of barrels per projector unknown. Exact disposition of elements of this Brigade could not be established.

As a result of actions 25th through 28th December, the 5th Para Div was largely disorganized and 1st & 2d Bns, 318th, together with U.S. 4th Armored Div, took 769 PWs, all of which were handled through 4th Armored Division cages.

The 3d Bn, 318th entered ETTLEBRUCK, from which miscellaneous units of 352d Div withdrew to Northeast, capturing 43 PWs. The enemy also withdrew from heights immediately North - Northwest of ETTLEBRUCK and took up positions just South of BURDEN, with defensive mission. These elements of the 352d Div were eventually relieved by the German 79th Div, which had the mission of protecting the enemy's South flank and to cut off the U.S. 3d Army penetration. In attempting to carry out their mission the German 79th Div attacked, unsuccessfully, the 317th and 319th Regiments. The 3d Bn, 318th suffered no counterattacks. They maintained aggressive patrolling to the North and Northeast but were unsuccessful in taking PWs.

On 29 December, their mission having been successfully completed, 1st & 2d Bns, 318th were relieved from attachment to U.S. 4th Armored Division. The two Bns, with Regt'l Hq, moved immediately back to GELMAR.

At close of the month, with another Bn in line relieving 80th Div Rcn East and Southeast of ETTLEBRUCK, it is believed that elements of the German 79th Volks Gr Div opposed our forces, so far on the defensive.

There are no comments or observations for the period.

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