

HEADQUARTERS 80TH INFANTRY DIVISION
AFO #80, U. S. Army

G-2 After Action Report

1 November Thru 30 November - 1944

On 1 November the 319th Infantry Regiment launched an attack eliminating the enemy pocket South and West of the Seille River between Abaucourt and Letricourt. The attack caught the Germans off guard and only a few succeeded in escaping across the river to their own lines; 120 prisoners were captured.

Interrogation of the prisoners captured in this operation revealed the strength and dispositions of the 48th Division which was responsible for the bulk of the enemy lines on the 80th Division front. The 126th Regiment of the 48th Division previously unlocated was found to be in the process of reforming while holding a front line position. As a result of this reorganization which was in progress, many of the Pts. did not know to what unit they belonged, but it soon became apparent that the 48th Division Fusilier Battalion had been adopted by the 126th Regiment as its I Bn. It was also determined that 1431st Fortress Battalion was under control of the 48th Infantry Division holding the sector to the North and West of NOMENY.

With their last foothold West of the SEILLE River gone, the enemy shortened their line by occupying the high ground in the BOIS de SECOURT, the high ground around CRAIN COURT and tying their left flank in with elements of the 559th Division in the vicinity of LEMON COURT. In the Northern sector of the 48th Division, held by the 1431st Fortress Bn, the MLR ran along the East bank of the SEILLE River, tying in with the 38th SS Regiment of the 17 SS Division at EPLY. This was the enemy disposition on the front of the 80th Division on November 7, 1944.

On November 8th, the 80th Division attack across the SEILLE River was the signal for the Allied advance along the entire front. The morning of the 8th found the SEILLE River at flood stage, and much of the low ground of the SEILLE River Valley was impassable. The German troops, the majority of whom had been told that this would be the "winter line", were caught by surprise. Our artillery barrage cut all communications and it was late in the afternoon by the time the enemy began to take counter-measures. By this time, the 1431st Fortress Battalion had been destroyed completely (388 PWs from that Bn were taken on 3 Nov). The South flank of the 38th SS Regiment of the 17th SS Division had been rolled back and was withdrawing towards METZ with the exception of a small pocket which held out in ST JURE until eliminated the morning of the 9th of November. From RAUCOURT South disorganized elements of the 48th Infantry Division fought desperately in towns and from the positions prepared on the high ground of SECOURT and CRAIN COURT. The 1st Battalion of the 126th Regiment, cut off in NOMENY, tried to withdraw to the East but was forced back into town with heavy losses where it was destroyed during the night and early morning hours. A desperate counter-attack was launched from MAILLY against the

commanding ground to the West of the town at 1600 hours by the 2d Battalion of the 126th Regiment reinforced with stragglers from other units. This attack was repulsed with heavy losses, and our troops mopped up the remnants during the night to clear MAILLY.

The morning of November 9th found remnants of the 48th Division trying to block our advance. The 127th Regiment which had managed to withdraw with some semblance of order the previous day in the South of the 48th Division sector, was unable to stand up before our attack and by 1600 hours their positions had been overrun and our troops were storming the critical heights of DELME Ridge. The towns and vineyards leading to the crest were heavily mined and booby trapped, but by evening our troops held all but the northernmost tip of the ridge. In the North of their zone, the 48th Division reinforced by the 1st Battalion of the 37th SE Division which had been rushed from a rest area, attempted to establish a line on the high ground extending North from DELME Ridge without success.

The 11th Panzer Division which had been in tactical reserve East of METZ appeared in the woods Northeast of CHATEAU SALINES early on November 9 on the front of the 35th Infantry Division and 4th Armored Division. With this Division identified the last of the enemy's immediate reserves were committed.

On 10 November, driving East from DELME Ridge, the 80th Division broke into the 48th Division rear areas capturing headquarters and supply personnel and over replacements who had arrived on the scene less than an hour before our advancing troops. The 128th Regiment of the 48th Division destroyed in September and in the process of reforming was encountered on the 10th. Captured documents had previously given the location of this Regiment as HAM-SUR-NIED and they were encountered there committed in the defense of the crossings of the NIED FRANCAISE River. The bridge at HAN-SUR-NIED fell into our hands intact making the enemy's defense of that riverline impossible. However, by this time the Germans had regained sufficient balance to organize his delaying action. Extensive mining, demolitions and roadblocks were encountered throughout the 80th Division zone of advance and successfully slowed down the speed of the attack.

To attempt to halt our advance the 36th Volks Grenadier Division was rushed to the front. The arrival of this Division from the BAUMHOLDER training area where it had been reformed after destruction in RUSSIA in 1943 was heralded by the capture of an Artillery forward observer from the 268th Artillery Regiment who stated his unit was the organic Artillery of the 36th Division and that they were moving in to establish a line West of FALQUEMONT.

By the 14th of November, the enemy had managed to establish the semblance of a line based on the Forest of REMILLY on the North and running through the towns of MAINVILLIERS - CHEMERY and VEILER. By the 16th of November, the 36th Division had taken over the entire line in the zone of

advance of the 80th Division and the battered remnants of the 48th Division disappeared from contact. However, our attack the 16th of November overran the line the 36th Division was desperately trying to establish and forced them to fall back once again with heavy losses. To fill the gaps caused by these losses, several combat groups made up of remnants of the 559th Division and the 48th Division and hastily forced to companies pulled from the SIEGERIED Line defenses made brief appearances on the Division front.

By November 20, the badly battered 36th Division pulled its lines behind the barrier of the NIED ALLEMANDE River. Our approach to the river was met by heavy artillery and mortar fire and again demolitions and road blocks hampered our advance. On the 21st of November, our troops drove across the NIED ALLEMANDE River and the important town of FALQUEMONT was cleared of enemy.

Having lost the line of the NIED ALLEMANDE, the enemy attempted to utilize the high ground on which the MAGINOT Line had been constructed. The old fortifications were used as GPs and troop shelters and field fortifications were prepared around these strong points. An anti-tank ditch, dug by impressed civilian labor from nearby towns ran the length of the Western slope.

The 80th Division attacked the MAGINOT Line in its sons of advance on 25 November. Manning the hastily about-faced line was the 36th German Infantry Division reinforced by two Battalions of the 347th Infantry Division which had been rushed down from the quiet TRIER sector to bolster these defenses; the 3d Battalion of the 860th Infantry Regiment and the 3d Battalion of the 861st Regiment. The story of this attack is best told by the captured Battalion Commander of the 3d Battalion, 861st Regiment -

Battalion received its orders, including maps of their prospective defense sector while en route from GERMANY with a final briefing immediately upon detraining 23 November. Bn CC was told that he, and he alone was responsible for the defense of his area, and that he could not count on reinforcements or relief by any other unit, of its own or any other Div while in line. They were told that an American attack was imminent and that they would be temporarily attached to the 860 Inf Regt during the course of this action. Their mission was to hold along the MIR consisting of MAGINOT Line bunkers assigned to them and to delay our forces as long as possible along this line.

Conforming to this order the Bn took up positions on high ground NW of BALLEIDESTROFF from (170580) to (193558). These positions were on the extreme SE flank of the Div line with the regulary Bns of 860 Inf Regt to the N, protecting LONGVILLE L-S ST AVOLD (190580), and the 36 Inf Div on the SE flank. Thus Bn SE boundary coincided with 347 Div/36 Div boundary which ran along road from (191552) to (219579), 23/25 November.

MAGINOT Line bunkers occupied by Bn are described by Bn CO as strong concrete bunkers but in bad state of neglect and disrepair. Unit relieved by Bn (165 Inf Regt) did not improve positions any and although Bn worked very hard at laying mines, wiring in positions, etc. the time necessary to complete making the fortifications enable was in a way granted to them before the actual start of the attack. A further disadvantage of the bunkers was that they were designed for an attack from the East and thus were facing the wrong way. As a matter of fact, Capt HAUCKE, the Bn CO, stated that he would have much preferred to defend from field fortifications constructed according to his ideas and under his direction. But his orders were to occupy MAGINOT Line bunkers and so he had no choice.

Prior to the start of our attack, Bn CC was very uneasy both concerning our own dispositions about which he had no report from either Regt nor DIV and the state of his SE flank, where no contact with 36 Div had been made as yet through the regular channels. He therefore decided to send out two patrols during the night of 24/25 Nov. One to make a Rcn of BAMBIDSTROFF and surrounding villages to ascertain our strength and dispositions, and the other to definitely establish contact with elements of 36 Division to the East. The patrol which was to Rcn our lines never returned and the 36 Div had withdrawn to new positions further back leaving the SE anchor of his line in the air, and exposing one of his flanks. He was now faced with a dilemma. His choice was either to withdraw also and reestablish contact with the 36 Div, in direct contradiction to his orders or to trust that our attack would not start for another day and that it would be possible to readjust the line in the course of the day. He decided in favor of the second alternative for several reasons; it was in line with the orders received, his contact on his NW flank with the 860 Regt was good; he had made provisions of establishing radio communications with Regt, in case anything should happen to his telephone lines, he trusted that since he had seen no sign of any impending action on our part he would have more time reinforcing his protective installations, and it was the established way of doing things, through channels.

Our preparatory Artillery barrage started on 0800 26 November. The immediate consequence was a complete disruption of all telephone communication. In conjunction with an Inf attack starting immediately upon its cessation, it forced back the 860 Regt in the direction of LONGEVILLE. Thus the other, NW flank of the 3 Bn was now exposed. The CO immediately attempted to notify Regt of this state of affairs by radio, but his wave-lengths were jammed. He then tried to send runners, they never reached their destination. It was now clear to him that his position was becoming increasingly untenable, especially since our Artillery was interdicting the valley immediately to his N, through which any reinforcements would have to come from the rear.

Our attack is described as almost perfect, both as far as utilizing the tactical advantages gained by exposing both his flanks was concerned, as well as camouflage discipline and cooperation of our troops, both Inf and armor with all their supporting heavy weapons. The height on which the

the Bn was entrenched was soon surrounded, the tanks applied increasing pressure from the flanks, while the Inf slowly and systematically mopped up bunker after bunker. 9 and 10 Cos on the flanks were quickly decimated, and what was left of them as well as 2 Platoons of 11 Co attempted to hold ground the command-bunker in which Bn CP had been established. In the meantime, One Lt and 36 men from 9 Co, 860 Regt had also fought their way through to the same area and these remnants attempted to make a final stand in and aroused the bunker. Our tanks had in the meantime penetrated to this region and soon it became apparent to Bn CC that further resistance was useless. Thus at 1700 Capt HAUCKE was forced to say to an American officer: "My Bn is no more".

By 1300 hours 25 November, all the principal forts of the MAGINOT Line were in our hands and the enemy had been driven from the high ground. Our troops entered LONCEVILLE LES ST AVOLD late in the afternoon and early the next morning the remnants of the 2d Bn of the 165th Regiment launched 5 small counter-attacks. These were successfully repulsed and many PWs were taken. In the Northern part of the sector token resistance was offered by the remnants of the 3d Battalion, 860th Regiment and 3d Battalion, 861st Regiment who were trying to rejoin their parent units to the North. Resistance in the Southern part of the 80th Division sector was completely broken and only small groups of enemy and a great number of demolitions and road blocks combined with the limited road net impeded our advance toward the SAAR River.

The remnants of the 36th Division retreating in a Northeasterly direction held the high ground Northwest and East of ST AVOLD had succeeded in holding our attack toward ST AVOLD from the East during the afternoon of the 26th with heavy direct artillery fire and enfilading machine gun fire. By the morning of the 27th all the high ground South of ST AVOLD was in our hands and the enemy defense of the town collapsed. With the end of the defense of ST AVOLD, all organized resistance ceased until our advance elements reached the line of the MAUDERBACH River. Here the 17th SS Division Ren Battalion reinforced by elements of the 38th SS Regiment of the 17th SS Division using the town of PFARREBERSWEILER as a strong point succeeded in halting our advance. The morning of the 29th a counter-attack by the enemy was repulsed and our lines were established on the high ground West of the MAUDERBACH River.

After the loss of ST AVOLD the 36th Division withdrew its remnants to the North and established a defensive line running from CITE L'HOPITAL through MERIEBACH to FORSACH. This line along the North flank of the 80th Division zone of advance was tied in with the position of the 17th SS Division East of the MAUDERBACH River. This was the enemy positions at the end of the month.

MII Team #444-G

O/C - 2d Lt Erich Deczer

Prior to our attack on 6 November, MII established contacts with civilians who know the area of interest to our plans and secured valuable information concerning roads, bridges, and other terrain. During the

advance, tactical information and additional terrain information was secured from refugees and inhabitants of liberated localities.

IPW Teams Hou 75 & '6

O/C Team #75 - Capt Paul Loeper, Jr.

O/C Team #76 - 1st Lt Theodore Gutman

As proven by previous experience, prisoners of war remained the best source of enemy information. Through interrogation it was possible to determine the exact dispositions of the enemy and his defensive plans prior to our attack of November 8th. All of this information was proven to be correct during the course of the action.

PI Team #69

O/C Team - Capt Michael E. Derbin

Aerial photographs were available in sufficient quantities to give all organizations of the Division complete coverage of their areas of interest. Interpretation gave valuable terrain information, and the PI Team worked very closely with the Division Engineer and the Division Artillery.

OB Team #34

O/C Team - 1st Lt Armand V. Paolino

During the month of November the 80th Division Order of Battle Team obtained much information of strategic as well as tactical value from captured documents. The Order of Battle Team also provided information of the enemy throughout the ETO for use in the daily "briefings" held at the Division Headquarters.

CIC Detachment

O/C Det - Capt Thomas R. McMillen

Throughout November the CIC Detachment maintained offices in 19 LORRAINE towns. Counterintelligence investigation and coverage was provided for an additional 40 towns, and civilian guards were established in all of these, with payment obtained through the 20th Military District (French) in NANCY. One enemy agent with a radio transmitter was arrested, leading to valuable information concerning time-bombs in ST AVOLD; and four suspected agents were sent to higher headquarters. Ten Nazi leaders and officials were arrested, along with approximately 250 deserters from the German Army and 250 other individuals deemed unsafe for Allied security. Two cases of wire tapping, one case of sabotage, and one case of booby trapping were investigated.