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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B, 318TH INFANTRY REGIMENT  
(80TH DIVISION) DURING THE GERMAN ARDENNES  
COUNTEROFFENSIVE, 19-24 DECEMBER 1944  
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: COMPANY IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company B, 318th Infantry, 80th Division, during the German Counteroffensive in the Ardennes, 19-24 December 1944.

In order to orient the reader, it will be necessary to go back to the period just prior to this operation and give a brief resume of the events leading up to the action.

The Third US Army had been attacking steadily since the 8th of November, when it <sup>crossed</sup> jumped across the Seille River in France at dawn. Moving steadily forward in its zone against heavy resistance the Third Army reached the border of Germany on 7 December 1944. At this time, <sup>as part of the 3rd Corps Army,</sup> the 80th Division was in the line just opposite the city of Forbach, Germany. On the 8th of December, the 318th Regiment was relieved and pulled back to Munchen-Gladbach for a well earned ten-day rest. At the end of this period, the 80th Division moved back into the line as a part of the XII Corps <sup>3rd Army(?)</sup> and prepared to launch an attack on the Siegfried Line scheduled to take place on the 19th of December. (See Map A) (1)

Map A does not show this 19th Dec 1944

GENERAL SITUATION

On the 16th of December, the Third Army was ready to jump-off for a coordinated drive east through the Palatinate. <sup>P Meanwhile</sup> In the break-through area to the north, VIII Corps, under First Army, had been in a rest area for some time. Three Infantry Divisions, 4th, 28th, and 106th, the last without battle experience, were disposed on an 88 mile front, with 9th Armored Division, in reserve near the city of Luxembourg. These divisions were spread thinly over this long line, but only skeleton forces were in position. The rest were in rear areas resting. In many areas, patrolling to maintain contact with the enemy had practically ceased. At this time, detailed intelligence reports from several

(1) Personal knowledge.

sources indicated that the Germans were building up a large force in this area. On the 16th of December, the Germans launched their attack using two Panzer armies. Two main thrusts advanced on a 45-mile front between Echternach, 15 miles northwest of Trier, and Monchau, 20 miles southeast of Aachen. Twenty-one divisions were employed. By 18 December the enemy was continuing his attack in the northern sector of the VIII Corps. The southern sector of the V Corps had been penetrated to a depth of 12 miles. <sup>TP</sup> On the Third Army front there was considerable enemy activity. Enemy reinforcements were being brought forward and air recon <sup>reconn</sup> reported heavy rail movements east of Kaiserslautern. On 19 December, the Third Army was ordered to prepare to turn and move to the north. On the night of the 19th, the order was given to attack to the north. The XII Corps was to move on the left flank of the XX Corps. A thin defensive line of cavalry and infantry units were used to hold the front and screen the movement. The greater part of the army, some 300,000 troops, moved north in what has been termed as the fastest and greatest mass movement of an army in history. The 80th Infantry Division was put on trucks and <sup>with</sup> ~~it~~ and the 4th Armored Division headed north ~~in~~ ~~order~~. (See Map A) (2)

#### BATTALION SITUATION

On 20 December, the 318th Infantry entered the city of Luxembourg. The 1st Battalion was ordered to take up defensive positions on the northern outskirts of the city. Our orders were to dig in and hold at all costs. It might be well to inject here a word or two about the mental attitude of the men at this time. Since the 18th, the only information we had was that the Germans had broken through and that we were moving to attack their flank. Rumors were spreading like wildfire with fantastic tales of German paratroopers landing in Nancy and other cities far to the rear. It had been reported that German soldiers in American uniforms had filtered through our lines in great numbers. They

(2) A-1, p. 209-235; A-2, p. 723-736; A-3, p. 788-797; A-4, p. 137-164.

were reported to be hand-picked, especially-trained men who spoke English fluently. Naturally, such reports increased the nervous tension of all of us and made everyone pretty jumpy. (3)

*Not correct*

The rifle companies of the 1st Battalion spent the afternoon of the 20th digging in and improving their positions. Company B was on the right flank of the battalion position astride a road. During the late afternoon, crippled tanks and vehicles withdrew through our position and personnel in them reported heavy fighting about two miles to our front. Later on, sounds of the fighting were distinctly audible to us as we waited in our foxholes. At about 1700, Lt Col Albert Tosi of Worcester, Mass, the battalion commander, inspected B Company's position. He recommended several changes and improvements in the position and stated that there would be no withdrawal in the event of an attack. Our mission was to hold to the last man. (4)

During the night, the enemy continually kept our position under artillery fire. The forces to our front continued to hold and dawn found us still waiting for the attack to reach our position. At about 1000, on the 21st, the battalion was ordered to pull back and move to the NW. No definite attack order was given. We started to move in a column of companies back through the city of Luxembourg and out to the NW. We no sooner reached the outskirts of the city, when we were halted, assigned zones, and ordered to dig in again. Later on, the company commanders were summoned to the battalion command post and were given the order for an attack, which would take place the following morning. The remainder of the afternoon was spent making a reconnaissance and orienting the platoon leaders. Contact had not been made with the enemy as yet, and our plan of attack was merely to move to the NW. (5) (6)

(3) Personal knowledge; (4) Personal knowledge; (5) Personal knowledge;  
(6) Statements of Lt Col A. Tosi, then Battalion Commander, in February 1945.

### BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

The 1st Battalion's plan of attack was to form on the main road leading NW out of the city of Luxembourg, at 0600, on the 22nd, and move forward on foot towards the town of Ettelbruck until contact was made with the enemy. The battalion was to move in a column of companies with Company A leading mounted on a platoon of tanks from the tank company supporting the regiment. Company B and C were to follow in that order. The battalion command group was to move in vehicles with the column. The battalion moved out, as planned, at 0600. (7)

The march was uneventful and the column moved along slowly for about two or three miles. At about 0830, word was passed back for the company commanders to go to the head of the column to meet the battalion commander. The column was halted and the troops were moved off to the sides of the road. The company commanders went forward and found the command post temporarily located in a house just off the road. This point was about two miles from Ettelbruck. Here, the company commanders were told the situation and given an order to move to the attack in our present formation. S-2 gave us the information that there were no more than sixty or seventy enemy soldiers in Ettelbruck. We were to cross the river at E (see Map B) and move on down the road to Ettelbruck. A Company was to stay on the tanks until contact was made with the enemy. B Company was to follow and be prepared to move up and assist A Company, if needed. C Company was to be in reserve. (8)

### THE ATTACK ON ETTELEBRUCK

The column moved along towards Ettelbruck. At about 0930, movement halted and word came back that A Company had been hit by the enemy and that two tanks had been knocked out. The troops had dismounted from the tanks and were pinned down by fire from automatic weapons and direct fire weapons. Several casualties were reported, among them, the company commander. At this time, B Company was on the road near point A (see Map B) and the company commander was ordered to report to Lt Col Tosi, the battalion commander, who was with his command group near a small

(7) Personal knowledge; (8) Personal knowledge.

group of buildings at point W (see Map B). With the group was Colonel Lansing McVickar, the regimental commander. B Company was ordered to move up the trail to the west and then attack to the NE and hit Ettelbruck on the flank of A Company. The company moved out immediately in a column of platoons - 1st, 2nd and 3rd. The company machine guns were attached to the 1st and 2nd platoons. We had no mortars, at this time. The column moved along the trail for about six hundred yards and, then, halted. The company commander, who was at the rear of the 2nd platoon, moved forward to see what was wrong. When he reached the head of the column, he learned that the 1st platoon was pinned down by fire from points B and C (see Map B). After a quick estimate of the situation, the company commander decided that maneuver was impossible under the circumstances and called back to battalion by radio asking for assistance from the tanks. In about ten minutes, a tank destroyer came up and fired on the enemy positions at B and C. Under cover of this fire, B company moved back into the woods near point N (see Map B) and moved on up the hill to point F (see Map B). No resistance was encountered and the company moved on to the road at point Z and proceeded down towards Ettelbruck. (See Map B) (9)

As the company moved down the road, enemy troops could be seen pulling out of positions at D (see Map B). They were fired upon immediately. At this time, B Company was hit by a heavy mortar barrage and several men were wounded or killed. Moving on through the barrage, we reached point P (see Map B) on a hill leading down into the town. Here we contacted two or three men from A Company, who had lost contact with their units, and they moved on with our company. As we moved on down the road into Ettelbruck, several more casualties were inflicted on the company when a German ammunition truck blew up on the road. In this explosion, our artillery forward observer was critically wounded. (10)

Upon entering the town, a group of about sixty Germans were surprised and captured. These men were herded into a cellar until men could be spared to take them to the rear. It was now about 1630 and

(9) Personal knowledge; (10) Personal knowledge.



beginning to get dark. Mortar and artillery fire started coming in and the company commander noticed a general inclination among the men to stop where they were and move into the nearby houses for the night. Realizing the necessity to move on and secure the town, he moved forward and attempted to rally the men. A quick reorganization revealed that the platoon leaders of the 1st and 2nd platoons had become casualties and that the company strength was about 150 men. The company commander moved to the head of the column and started on into the center of town. Just as he reached a point opposite X (see Map B), a Tiger tank, located at L (see Map B), opened fire on him with machine guns and 88 millimeter guns. The company commander ran into a doorway across the road and the men behind him took cover in other buildings. Realizing that he had to get back and continue the attack, the company commander started to leave the building. Just as he reached the doorway, the tank fired on the building and the company commander was wounded by shrapnel. He soon made a break and succeeded in getting back under cover. It was almost dark, by this time, and only about twenty-five or thirty men of B Company could be located, several of whom had been wounded. These men stated that the rest of the men had pulled back to the high ground to our rear and were under the command of the 3rd platoon leader. The company commander was moved into the house at point X (see Map B) and he ordered defensive positions set up in that house and in the house across the street. A messenger was sent back to try and locate the remainder of the company and to bring the 3rd platoon leader forward to receive orders. Battalion was contacted by radio and the situation given to them. We were ordered to remain in position. At this time, we had no aid man with us and it was impossible to move the wounded to the rear. A quick check of the prisoners we had in the cellar produced a German aid man. He had no equipment, but he administered first aid as best he could. (11)

(11) Personal knowledge.

### RELIEF OF COMPANY B

At about 1800 on the night of the 23rd, a message came in from the 3rd platoon leader that the route to our position had been cleared and we were to prepare to withdraw. At 1900 a litter party came up and we were evacuated. The prisoners we had captured were taken back with us. Of the twenty-five or thirty men who had been trapped in Ettelbruck only eight were uninjured. The company had been at full strength, when the operation started. When the entire company had been relieved it was at approximately one-quarter strength. During the two days of battle the 1st Battalion had lost its commander, every rifle company commander and several platoon leaders as casualties. The journey back to the battalion aid station was slow and tortuous for all concerned. It was a pitch black night and extremely cold. Those of us who had been trapped in the house at Ettelbruck had not eaten in over twenty-four hours and the thought of a hot cup of coffee and a warm K ration was enough to combat any after-effects of the trying hours just passed. Battered and badly beaten, B Company completed its withdrawal at 2200. (13) (14)

### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Looking back on this action and analyzing it, we see that B Company failed to gain its objective and suffered many unnecessary casualties for several reasons. Mainly, the lack of enemy information. The S-2 estimate of the strength of the enemy in Ettelbruck wasn't even close. It was learned later, that the enemy had a full division in Ettelbruck reinforced with armor. We also see an error in moving into an attack without definite plans to take care of any eventuality. A plan should have been ready to be put into effect just as soon as A Company met resistance. As it was, during the time it took B Company to feel its way around the flank, A Company was badly mauled.

(13) Personal knowledge; (14) Statements of Lt Col A. Tosi, then Battalion Commander in February 1945.

As a result of the casualties suffered by the 1st Battalion, during this action, the regiment had to continue the attack without a reserve force. It is my opinion that the objective assigned the 1st Battalion, 318th Infantry was too large for a battalion and probably should have been assigned to the regiment.

The preparation and orders for carrying out the mission were hasty and incomplete. However, I do not see what could have been done to improve matters under the circumstances. Arrangements could have been made by regiment to give assistance from the start. A great deal of credit is due to the men of A and B Companies for the way they pressed the attack against a superior enemy. Although the 1st Battalion failed to capture Ettelbruck in this attack it did succeed in holding the enemy and inflicting many casualties on them. The regiment went on to greater glory by being the first American infantry unit to reach the battered garrison at Bastogne.

#### LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

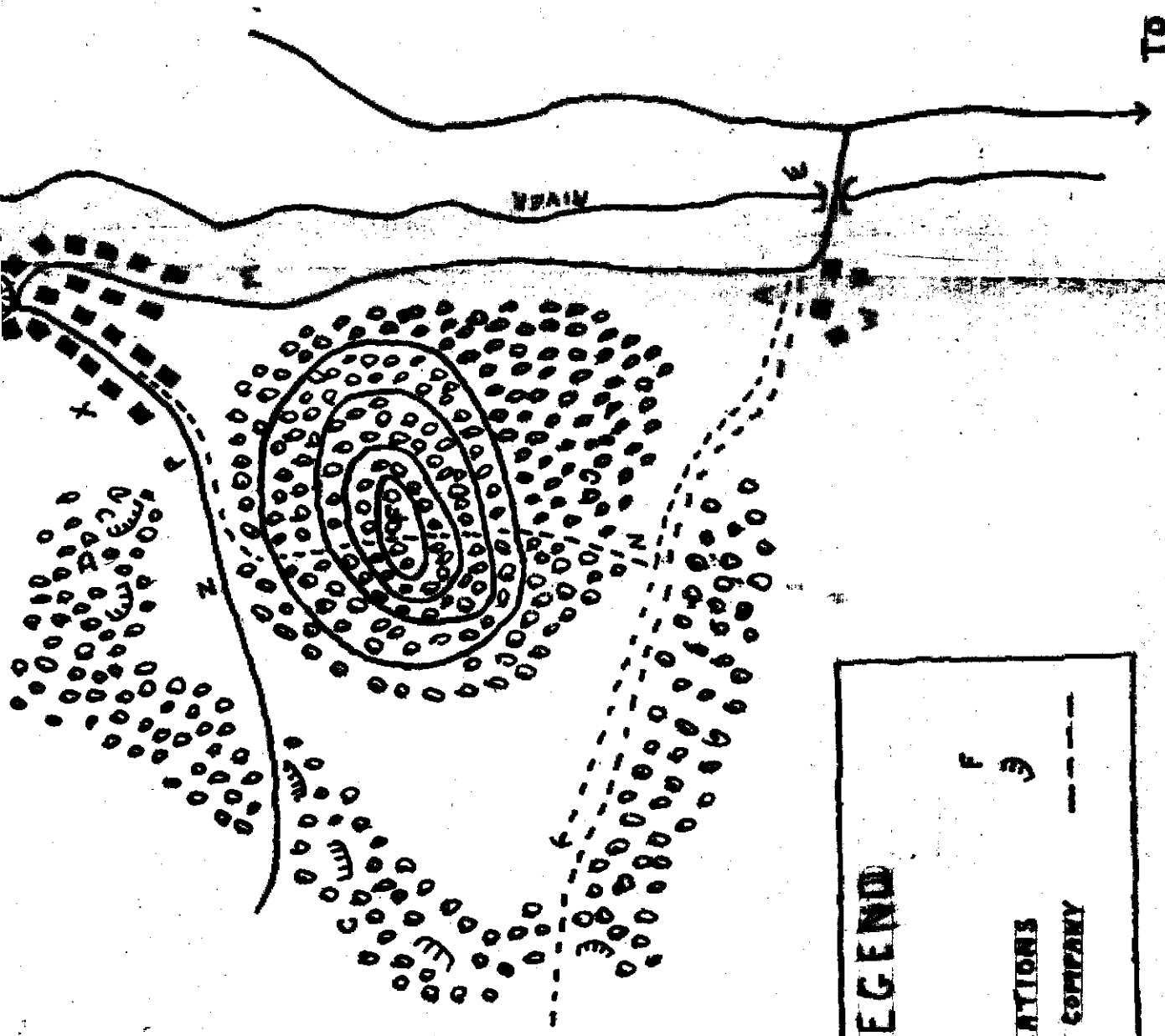
1. Never place complete confidence in estimations of enemy strength.
2. Always attack in strength, when moving to contact against unknown numbers.
3. Always have completed plans and full coordination before attacking.
4. In order to maintain fullest control over his unit, the company commander should be with the leading platoon.
5. Never halt, when under artillery fire. Keep moving forward and get inside of it.
6. When replacements are assigned, they should be placed evenly throughout the company so that they can come under the influence of men with experience.

7. The American soldier must be led into battle, he cannot be pushed.
8. Adequate communication is vital to the successful conduct of battle.
9. Reserves should be located and disposed so that they can be quickly engaged in battle.
10. Reorganization must take place during an action whenever time or necessity permit.



# MAP B

ATTACK ON EITTELBRUCK  
22 DECEMBER 1944



**LEGEND**

- HILL: F
- RM. FORTIFICATIONS: [Symbol]
- ROUTE OF B COMPANY: ---

TO LUXEMBOURG CITY