

16 Aug 44

Interview: Cap. Freeman, Hq Co, 1st Bn, 117th Inf

Statistics on Counterattack at Mortain, 7 Aug 44

On 6 Aug the Bn strength was as follows:

800 EM, which included 190 replacements, received on Thursday and Saturday of that week.

28 O (T/O strength 35) These 28 included two new Os in C Co.

Casualties: 352 men

7 officers

25 men returned via straggler line, following our artillery back, i.e. going back in the direction of the sound of our artillery. These 25 men were from C Co

Casualties broken down:

A Co	2 officers	(leaving 140 & 12 men)
B	1	leaving 30 & 120 men
C	3	leaving 10 & 33 men
D	1	leaving 50 & 145 men
Hq		leaving 30 & 90 men

The road block to the North was manned by: 3 AT guns
1 pl of B Co
1 sec HMGs
1 bazooka team

} All interest with Lt. Cushman

Those to the South and southeast manned by: 1 bazooka team
squad of Inf
No guns

Roland G Ruppenthal
Capt Inf

17 Aug 44

Interviews with: 1/Lt Robert Cushman, cmdg 3rd Pl, B Co, 117th Inf
T/Sgt Donald F. Renshaw, Pl Sgt, AT Pl, Bn Hq, 1st
Bn, 117th Inf

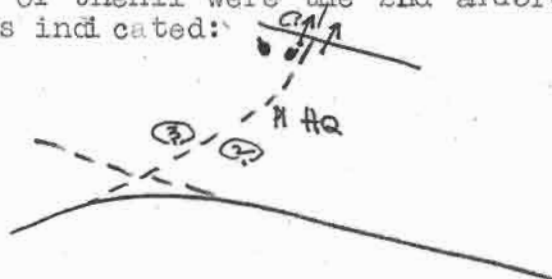
GL-347 (5)

Mortain Counterattack, 7 August 44, Action at the
Crossroad North of le Fantay

At the CR were the following: 2 57mm AT guns
2 HMGS
1st Squad, 3rd Pl, B Co (incl
1 BAR team
2 men with AT grenades)

Along the trail was the 3rd Pl Hq---Pl Sgt, runner, Pl guide,
and Lt Cushman

Near the top of the hill were the 2nd and 3rd squads of the Pl,
as indicated:



All was quiet in the afternoon. The 1st Div Arty observer, with whom we talked before his departure, said ~~he~~ thought there were tanks to the North, but there was nothing more said or heard about it. At about 2030-2100 2 or 3 half track cycles were seen at the curve in the trail beyond, and tanks were heard in the distance. Later more tanks were heard, after dark, and they came up the trail within firing range, but we didn't fire for fear of revealing our position. One of the gunners of the MG section came up the hill to Lt Cushman and asked for artillery fire on the tank positions, which was requested, but none was delivered at the time. At about midnight or shortly after, the tanks returned, this time advancing up the trail, with grenadiers. At the same time enemy mortars fired on us. Sgt Renshaw's 57 now fired about 10 rounds of AP and 5 HE and hit the tank. In the meantime the tank began firing on us, and also bazookas,

ion at the North CR, 117th Inf

killing two of our men, one of them the #3 man of the gun crew.

The #2 man was wounded, and Lt Bookter (who commanded the AT platoon) was also hit. The position was untenable, and Lt Bookter ordered the group to withdraw, for German infantry was advancing now and our MG section had fired all its ammunition. The group moved up the hill to B Co's CP to get aid for the wounded men. Col Frankland ordered B Co to reestablish the position, however, so Lt Cushman, 3rd Pl ldr, formed a patrol of 9 or 10 men and started back down the hill, advancing to a position where they could hear the Germans talking, almost to their original position. The Pl Sgt had had trouble getting the men to return. They were hesitant, so Cushman finally gathered 8 men, took them down to the right of the position. Five of the riflemen were out of ammunition, however, and had to be pulled back to get ammunition. By that time our artillery began hitting the RJ. Some of the rounds fell short and wounded 3 of them. Lt Cushman said he was so upset by that time that he never did get them back to the position they were supposed to hold. Four of his men had been posted on the right to contact A Co, but he found the hedgerow deserted. By this time it was about 0430, and 3 men from the original road block group returned to the position half way up the hill. Pvts Dan Kolton, Cecil Mitchell and Ratliff had remained in their foxhole at the roadblock, undiscovered. At one time German tanks, maneuvering at the road block, had almost overrun their covered foxhole on the other side of the road, and Kolton was ready to surrender. But the 3 held out and finally started back to the position on the hill. One German shouted "Halt" as they worked their way up, but the 3 jumped a hedge, laid low for a minute, then went back. They had no weapons. By daylight the platoon had suffered several casualties---the platoon Sgt and 2 riflemen from our own artillery, the 4 on the right had

3 Mortain, Action at N CR, 117th Inf
disappeared, so Chenman decided to withdraw farther up the trail,
joined Co Hq. By that time the German tanks were in the fields and
on the road. The Lt met Col Frankland on the hill, who ordered him to
move his platoon back to trail 280 to build a line. Two guns of the
AT platoon had been lost, and the 3rd couldn't be retrieved and was
knocked out the following day.

In the meantime the 1st Platoon of B Co had been sent to relieve
C Co leaving a gap on the left. Tanks appeared in the trail to the
northwest, firing up the hedges and threatening our flank, the
2nd platoon. The AT gun was knocked out and the squad had withdrawn.
T/Sgt Grady Workman (2nd Platoon) ordered his men to withdraw. Six
of his men, in the center, either failed to get the message or felt
they couldn't move and stayed in their position while the rest withdrew
at 0830. The enemy didn't discover them, however, and the 6 men held out
during the typhoon attack, forming a U S with their raincoats
to tell the friendly planes of their position. Those 6 men remained
in position till 1700, when they worked their way back to our lines.

Roland G. Suppenthal
Capt Inf

17 Aug 44

Interviews with: S/Sgt James C Wright, 1st pl, A Co, 117th Inf
Pvt Bryne Jones, Wpns Pl, A Co
Pvt Nicodemus Natale, 3rd pl, A Co
Sgt Francis R Banner, 2nd squad, 1st Pl
S/Sgt Abbie Révière, 3rd squad, 1st pl.

GL-347(2)

Co A's (117th Inf) Action in the Mortain Counterattack, 7 Aug

(The following facts are of interest in considering the action: the CO of A Co, Lt MacArthur, had been with the Co only a week; the 3rd platoon had no officer; it was commanded by Sgt Carl Brizidine. The Co had a strength of 135 men, having received 55 replacements (green men) on the preceding 2 days. It claims to have had no bazookas and no artillery support.)

Co A took positions, as indicated on the sketch, on Sunday afternoon, relieving men of the 1st Div. The men they relieved told them they knew of only a few enemy out front, "but they gave us hell last night." Co A was in position only a short time when it received artillery fire, which continued sporadically that night, and during the night "burp guns" could be heard. The men were in general in 2-man foxholes, with one man remaining on watch. At 0430 all men were awake and up.

At 0600 tanks approached A Company's position from the trail to the Northeast and up the road from the northwest, having forced the road block to the north. A Company's block to the east had also been overrun, being a rather weak outpost manned by a few riflemen and a bazooka team. The 3rd platoon was hit from the rear, by tanks. Sgt Robert O'Malley, 1st squad of the 3rd platoon, sent 2 men back to the CP to let them know what was happening. In the meantime, however, the fight became so hot that one squad headed back toward B Co. Five men succeeded in making good their escape, the only men of the 3rd platoon to do so, the remainder being either captured, wounded or killed.

In the meantime the 2nd platoon was surrounded by tanks and infantry, coming ~~from~~ up both roads, from the northeast and northwest,

in Counterattack, A Co, 117th Inf

and was captured. The Co CP with its Hq personnel suffered the same fate. Capt MacArthur, 1/Sgt Clarence Hall and all the Hq personnel including the mail orderly, medics and cooks, and the radios, were captured.

To the northwest tanks had also fanned out into the fields held by the 1st platoon, striking between the 1st and 3rd squads. One tank blew a gap in the hedgerow directly in front of S/Sgt Abbie Reviere and his 3rd squad. It was very foggy and the tank couldn't be seen until very close. Sgt Reviere was in a hole with Sgt (platoon guide) Wright. Wright said "Should we shoot him, Abbie, should we shoot him?" But Sgt Reviere thought it best not to expose themselves, nor to attempt escape through the gap in the hedgerow to their rear. So they decided to make a leap over the hedgerow. Before doing so, Reviere told the Ass't squad leader, Sgt Francis F Vadrine to withdraw also. But Vadrine attempted escape through the gap, along with two other men, one of whom was killed. Vadrine was wounded. Reviere then proceeded to pull the squad back himself, having his men jump the hedge.

The 1st squad, under Sgt Wm H Jenkins, was cut off from the rest of the platoon as a result of the tank drive up the hill. No escape was possible to the east or through town. Although losing some of his men to MG fire he decided to take a chance on extricating his squad (5 men) by going North through the enemy. Sgt Jenkins assisted by Sgt George Cap (Ass't squad leader), therefore began to lead his men down the hill through enemy territory to the north and northwest, and succeeded in getting most of the squad back to B Co, although he says "a machine gun chased us most of the way." They came upon a tank in a trail, saw that it was camouflaged and thought it was friendly. They stopped for a moment, then saw its barrel slowly rise,

main Attack, A Co, 117th Inf

decided to get out. Lt Leonard Murray, pl 1 leader, was with this group and had his carbine shot in two on the way back.

Just to the front of the 3rd squad a section of LMGs had taken position on the edge of the road. When the tanks came up from below the section had to pull off the road and soon it realized it was surrounded by enemy. Then the Air Force began to bomb. The section decided to split. One group tried to return to friendly territory by going up the hill through town, seeking cover in barns. Pvt's Bryne Jones and Raymond Cizmowski decided to take a longer route, but one they considered safer. Their choice proved good, for the remainder of the section was never heard from again. Jones and Cizmowski headed north into the draw, staying there till dark. Bombs from British Typhoons dropped pretty close to them and Cizmowski had his BAR blown out of his hands, but Jones said "it was better than being captured." The two men finally struck out to the east, circled around South to A Co which was being reorganized the following day, whence they were sent to the Regimental CP.

With the exception of about 6 men in the 3rd platoon, only the 1st platoon returned to the rear in any strength. All of the 2nd platoon was lost, the entire Hq group, and most of the 3rd platoon also. A Co now had a strength of 28 men. After 4 days fighting the Co consisted of 1 officer and about 15 men.

Roland G Ruppenthal
Capt Inf

18 Aug 44

Interviews with: Lt Col Samuel T MacDowell, CO, 3rd Bn, 117th Inf
1/Lt John Prejean, CO, I Co, 117th Inf
Capt Edward B Parrish, CO L Co, 117th Inf

GL-347 (6)
The 3rd Bn, 117th Inf, in the Counterattack, 7 Aug

The 3rd Bn (4G Co) held positions as indicated on the sketch. This Bn plays a relatively unimportant role in the Counterattack, but does play a part nevertheless. Col MacDowell states that the 119th Inf was supposed to be to the north, filling the gap between the 117th Inf and the 39th Inf (?), but that the 119th wasn't there, so the Col ordered patrols sent out to contact the 39th. He says he felt very exposed, with nothing to the north.

Lt Prejean of I Co states that the Mayor of le Mesnil Tove (and other Frenchmen) came to him on Sunday and warned him of the assembly of Germans in the vic of Bellefontaine (which was wooded, high ground), including tanks (about 100). Lt Prejean reported this to Col MacDowell, who passed it on up to Division. Prejean was finally told not to spread rumors! However, Lt Prejean sent patrols out, mainly to the northwest. One, of 14 men under Sgt Robert Davis, went to Juvigny, with the mission of working Northeast. They encountered a German patrol northeast of Juvigny, which got one of our men.

On the afternoon of the attack Col Johnson reported that Germans had infiltrated from the Southeast and had reached the Cannon Co behind the regimental CP. Col MacDowell sent a platoon of K Co, 1 squad from L Co plus 4 cooks and 2 other men of G Co---all under Capt Salem of G Co to aid in cleaning out the enemy. They killed 6 Germans, wounded 1 and took one PW. The group came back and spent the night behind L Co, in the 3rd Bn area.

The enemy kept infiltrating from the north into the 3rd Bn area, for 2 or 3 days after. In general they came up the trails and draws

2 3rd Bn 117th Inf in Mortain attack from the north. One patrol of 14 from I Co found a group of Germans at Juvigny trying to set up a MG and a road block there. Another patrol of K Co captured and wounded some Germans in the wooded draws to the North. At la Chaumondiere L Co established a road block (consisting of a bazooka team, a BAR and 6 riflemen) to keep German traffic off at night, but it was not maintained during the day. The Jerries dug in right around the position.

Much of the German activity was apparently reconnaissance. German scout cars got up to our AT guns Southwest of la Fieffe.

The Bn Hv Wpns were behind K, to cover draws to the front.

In general, the 3rd Bn activity took the form of patrols, met infiltrating Germans and reconnaissance elements.

Roland G Ruppenthal
Capt Inf

21 Aug 44

Interview: Capt. Richardson, S-3, 1st Bn., 39th Inf.
Lt. Robert Bell, S-2, 1st Bn., 39th Inf.
Capt. Charles Sheffel, CO, C Co., 39th Inf.

GL-347 (12)

1st Bn., 39th Inf. in German Counter-attack, 7 Aug 44

On Aug 4-6 the 1st Bn had attacked northeast from the vicinity of Juvigny toward Cherence le Roussel and had as its objective the high ground in the vicinity of le Mont Turgon. By Sunday evening the Bn. had reached the lines indicated on the sketch. [Although Co. C had reached its position by a somewhat peculiar route, Cos. C and B had attacked north abreast from Juvigny, and both had drifted somewhat to the east, especially C Co. Capt Sheffel said his Co. had drifted east at la Bernardaye on Saturday, in the direction of Gd. Dove and la Soufficiere. No preliminary reconnaissance had been made, and he found he was considerably off his course. He decided, therefore, to follow the 50 or 60 meter contour upstream then cut back towards la Gallerie in order to avoid the lowest ground in front of the German positions. He received 6 tanks to support the Co's movement. They were sent up the le Mesnil Tove road east and at dusk one platoon of C Co. was sent down the Barthelemy - le Roussel road with instructions to cross the bridge and join up with the rest of the Co. at les Forges. However, the tanks stopped at the bridge (it was getting dark), and the lone platoon was ordered to continue on and join B Co., for the remainder of C was still to the east. C Co. ran into Jerry at the trail junction west of la Poignerie at 2400. The next morning Col. Tucker moved B to C's left flank after C ran into difficulty with the enemy. C finally came south to the main road, west to the trail running north from the "V" in the Cherence le Roussel and took the position indicated on the sketch].

In reaching this position the Bn. had run into sharp opposition, so that at nightfall, as Capt Richardson said, "the Bn., was in a very weak position, on low ground, with both flanks open." The Co. C line ran around the orchard just south of le Mont Turgon and then south across the main road from Barthelemy and was 500 yards in front of B and B. The whole Bn was on ground nearly 100 meters below the crest of the hill, with the enemy looking down their throats.

At 2230 Sunday night 2 German reconnaissance motorcycles came up the #3 road toward le Charence and passed right through C Co's line. They were knocked out by B Co. About midnight C Co men heard armor going by 1000 yards to the South (road from Gd. Dove to le Mesnil Tove) but thought it was friendly. The first German attack came at about 0200 Monday morning, following artillery fire. This attack was by infantry, initially, from direction of le Mont Turgon, but tanks also fired from the north and to the south tanks hit the two road blocks in front of C Co -- one on the main road consisting of 2 tanks, mines, 1 section HMG and riflemen of C Co., and the other at the trail junction at la Galerie, consisting of mines, ^{infantry} 1 section HMG and 1 tank. Germans attacked C Co's position in the orchard, set fire to two houses there, so that "the whole damned place was lit up like a Christmas tree", according to T/Sgt. Edward Carney of the 3rd platoon. Both le Mesnil Tove and le Roussel were under fire also and the 9th Ren pl's road block west of Gd. Dove was forced, and an M 8 hit. At 0300 C Co lost contact with B Co and shortly after was driven back to the rear of the orchard. B

had been alerted and plans were made to tie the left flank of C with B.

It had become clear that the main attack of the German armor was not coming up the #3 road past Co. C - no tanks appeared on this road after the first attack - but along the parallel roads to the south.

Just before 9400 German tanks, horsedrawn carts and infantry were reported heading west towards le Mesnil Tove on the #4 road from Gd. Tove; at 0400 German tanks were reported advancing on Cherence le Roussel; and an hour later 10 to 15 were reported fanning out just southeast thereof. The main line^s of advance apparently were the #4 road and the parallel trail just to the north which Capt. Richardson described as just as good as a No 4 road.

At 0415 A Co was attacked from the hill, and ~~was~~ withdrew about 300 yards. Apparently this was simply diversionary, however, or intended as a holding action.

C Co. was in a vulnerable position, having an extended line, covering 2 roads and the enemy on higher ground to the front, while ~~to the south was only the 9th Ren to maintain contact with the 3rd Bn. of the 117th.~~ to the south was only the 9th Ren to maintain contact with the 3rd Bn. of the 117th. But the roadblock at la Gallerie held, aided by tanks on the 746th. Five hundred yards to the west where B Co's line crossed the road three SP TDs guarded the approach from the east, and at the houses just east of cherence le Roussel were 2 more TDS. But the north end of C Co's line began to bend under the enemy onslaught, although C Co continued to fight from the sunken trail in the rear. The Bn. begged for artillery but couldn't get it due to a shortage

of ammunition. At about 0430 an air mission on the le Roussel-Mesnil Tove road was requested for the earliest possible time after daylight, but no clearance could be obtained from Custom 6 (CG, 30th Div). Capt Richardson said "our mortars saved us again." Mortar fire was laid on "everything that moved" on the trail to Poignerie, into the draw to the Northeast and into le Mont Tugon. The enemy didn't exploit its gains in the woods at la Galleries, and by 0445 C Co was back in its old position.

At 0500 enemy tanks fanned out East and North of le Mesnil Tove, threatening the Battalion from the vulnerable South flank. But by mid-morning things looked better. The 2nd Bn had stopped an attack in its area, and the 3rd Bn was sending K Co down between le Mesnil Tove and B and C Cos south flanks. Later in the day G Co of the 8th ~~Bn~~ Infantry came down and took up a position on the trail in extension of B Co's line. F of the 8th took position south of the town and ~~1st~~ E Co south of the road at le Fontaine. G Co of the 2nd Bn, 39th Inf sent a squad behind B Co to meet any threat to B Co's road block.

The Battalion continued the fight for 4 more days, at the end of which the Germans pulled out. German infantry attacked every day and night, but without tanks. On the 8th a hedgerow between B and ~~from the main line~~ C Cos was mined, close to the road. The Germans saw it, however, and drove sheep ahead of them to detonate the mines. C Co suffered 40 casualties in the 4 days of fighting, but only 2 fatalities.

The 1st Battalion, 39th Inf, had felt the fringe of the German armored attack, the main force of which was felt to the south and had been repulsed, although with heavy losses, particularly to the 1st Bn, 117th Inf.

(Capt Sheffel told about the American supplies erroneously dropped East of la Gallerie, intended for the 2nd Bn, 120th Inf on the hill East of Mortain, which fell into the hands of Germans who left notes thanking us for the chocolate, cigarettes, the ammunition etc.

Roland G Ruppenthal, Capt Inf

18 Aug 44

Interview with: 1/Egt Grady Workman, 2nd Platoon, B Co, 117th Inf

GL-347 (7)

The Attack of 8 August 44

(Miscellaneous: On the night of the 7th Grady's platoon was sent out to protect the road and 2 enemy tanks which had been left intact. Pvt's Ray H Hill and Edwin Walsi maneuvered up to the road that afternoon and got one with a bazooka; Pfc Dan Menary got another tank on the road at the same time. The motor in one of the ~~tanks~~ tanks which had been left intact ran for several hours after the Typhoons had left. Grady's platoon took up a position from the road north---one squad on the road and the 2nd and 3rd extending left. Enemy came out to goas the tanks that night, but they didn't succeed)

On the morning of the 8th the Germans attacked again, at 0600, coming in from the right and front, against the 2nd platoon. They rushed the position, throwing potato mashers over the hedgerows, and some of them even jumping the hedges right into B Co's positions.

Two squads of the platoon, on the right, pulled back to a sunken trail to take up firing positions. Workman held his position on the left with one squad until daylight. Workman got the squad organized, told them to work back. He started up himself, looked around and saw a Jerry raiss up over the hedge, gave it to him with his Tommy Gun.

We attacked (1st and 2nd platoons), gained 3 hedges, with the aid of mortars and artillery (mortars in sunken road), but we had to return to the 2nd hedge. On Thursday, the 10th, I Co was to attack through B Co, failed to get through. Germans had tanks firing from dug-in positions, MGs, Mortars etc. On Friday we still made no appreciable advance. By Sat. however, the enemy had withdrawn, I occupied the town, in C Co's position.

2 Workman, Co B 117th Inf

On the morning of the 7th there was an ammunition shortage. Workman states that his men scavenged all over for ammunition, got some from G Co, some from the 4th Div. No vehicles could come up the road, so all supplies had to be carried from the regiment, by hand.

Platoon leaders, B Co

2nd Pl Lt Wm. Kaiser (wounded, so Sgt Workman took over)

3rd Pl Lt Cushman, till the 10th

4th Pl Lt Elwood Daddow

1st Pl Sgt J. W. Parks, till the 10th

CO of the Co.--Capt Hendrickson, till the 8th when he was wounded (?) and then Lt Spiker.

Rol nd G Appenthal
Capt Inf