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Action of the Third Battalion
(July 11, 1944)

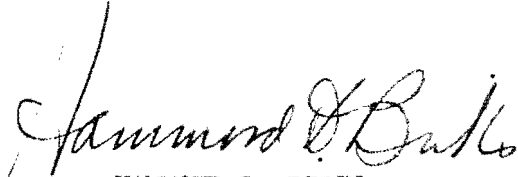
1st Ind.

HDB:dr

HEADQUARTERS 120TH INFANTRY, APO 30, US Army, 28 July 1944

TO: Commanding General, 30th Infantry Division, APO 30, US Army.

Approved.



HAMMOND D. BIRKS
Colonel - 120th Infantry
Commanding

10 Incl:

- 1 - Sketch of le Rocher area
- 2 - Certificate of Captain James W. Smith
- 3 - Certificate of 1st Lt. Charles E. Fritchard
- 4 - Certificate of Lt. D. R. Kuchenrither
- 5 - Affidavit by T/Sgt. Harry Peters
- 6 - Affidavit by Pfc. Joseph Aloysius King
- 7 - Additional affidavit by Pfc. Joseph Aloysius King
- 8 - Affidavit by Pvt. George Talarico
- 9 - Affidavit by S/Sgt. Hagens
- 10 - Affidavit by Sgt. Cecil Blankenship

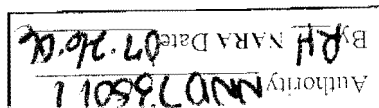
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Authority
Date 07.26.44
B. H. NARA Date

Resume of Action of the Third Battalion in breaking up the counter attack by Tanks of the Panzer Lehr Division of the German Army on the morning of July 11, 1944 near Le Rocher, France.

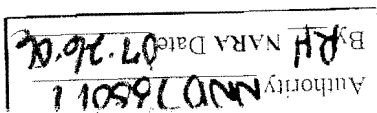
The following resume was compiled from all available sources to complete the story of the breaking of the German Counter Attack by the Officers and Men of the Third Battalion, 120th Infantry, 30th Division during the early morning hours of July 11th, 1944 near Le Rocher, France.

The evening of July the 10th the Third Battalion, 120th Infantry had been given the mission of taking, and organizing a defense to hold, the high ground around Le Rocher. The Battalion had been in Regimental Reserve all that day. They moved up, in two elements, one on foot and one on the Battalion Organic Transportation. The foot elements were making a steady advance meeting in some places stiff enemy resistance as they moved forward before nightfall. The Battalion by passed the 1st Battalion in their advance. The 1st Battalion being slowed down temporarily by determined enemy action and artillery fire. The 3rd Battalion reached the point designated, by the Regimental Commander and immediately set up their defensive position and the men began digging in. The 3rd Bn out in front with both flanks exposed, Col. McCollum, C.O. of 3rd Battalion, set up road blocks on the most likely enemy approaches. Friendly tanks and tank Destroyers were advanced out beyond Le Rocher in the direction of Hill 90 and were maneuvering about in that area. This information was passed along to the men on the road block in that direction with the added precaution to make sure of the identification of the tanks before firing upon them. The time then was about midnight. The night was extremely dark. Heavy enemy



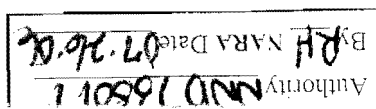
Artillery and Mortar fire was falling in the area of the Battalion C.P. and had been falling intermittantly since their arrival in the area with increasing intensity. Routine work of the Battalion Staff was in progress. Fire plans with the Artillery Liaison Officer were being perfected. It was about this time, between 2400 and 0100, that the Officers from the Cannon and Anti-Tank companies arrived at the C.P. for instructions upon the disposition of their weapons in the Battalions plan of defense. These Officers were 2nd Lt. James L. Ashmore of Cannon Co. and 2nd Lt. Leroy H. Steelman of the Anti-Tank company. They arrived at the C.P. in a jeep driven by Pfc. Clayton G. Moore, Pfc. Henry A. Snotherly the machine gunner and Pvt. Paul R. Kannan the radio operator.

At about 0130 a phone call was received from company "K" at the Battalion C.P. telling them that an enemy Armored vehicle or Flame Thrower had been discovered on the road by their area and was firing upon them and a tank from the 3rd Arm. Division. The Battalion Commander gave them orders to knock the vehicle out of action and destroy the enemy. Simultaneously with this information from "K" company a runner reported to the C.P. with word from the Sgt. at the road block on the road leading to Hill 90, that enemy tanks and armored vehicle were moving up the road in the direction of the Battalion C.P. That the men at the road block had at first thought them to be our own tanks, and that each tank and vehicle was being followed by about twenty men on foot. Also that two armored vehicles and one tank had passed the road block going in the direction of the C.P. All companies were then notified of this situation and alerted. Arrangements were made to knock out the tanks by bazookas and rifle grenades with machine guns against the enemy personee.



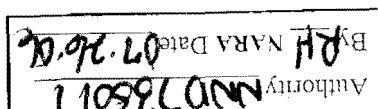
The action that followed happened in such rapid succession of events it is extremely difficult to get them down in order of occurrence. The two armored vehicles had passed the Battalion C.P. and gone on down the road in the direction of company "K". One of these vehicles opened fire on the tank and company C.P. upon being discovered. Company "K" men knocked out this vehicle, killing one of the enemy and it was believed wounding several. The second armored vehicle had advanced ahead of the "K" company area and stopped in a draw at the foot of the hill by a house. This was the vehicle which fired upon the Jeep carrying Lt. Ashmore, Lt. Steelman, Pfc. Snotherly, Pfc. Moore, and Pvt. Kannan. They killed Pfc. Moore and Pvt. Kannan and wounded Lt. Steelman and Pfc. Snotherly. This vehicle also was the one which later fired upon the Jeep carrying Lt. Schlemmer, Pvt. Cross and Sgt. Riley of company D, and Sgt. Blankenship of the third Battalion Headquarters company.

In the meantime the following is an account of what was taking place on the hill at the C.P. When Battalion was informed that there were enemy tanks coming up the road the men were still digging in and there had been considerable noise heard from the direction of Hill 90, which was believed to be friendly tanks. One German tank had eased up by short advances to within a few yards of the Battalion C.P. Another was not far behind it and a third was further down the road near the road block. There was an armored car behind the last tank. The men in and around the tank could be heard conversing in German. One man, believed to be a German Officer, was trying to send a Radio message. He was standing in the turret of the tank. Sounds were heard as if they were loading an Ammunition Belt into a machine gun. At this point there



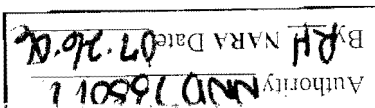
were the following Officers and Men around the C.P.; Capt. Chris McCullough, Col. McCollum, Capt. Shaeffer, Capt. Smith, Maj. Adams, Sgt. Peters, Pvt. Talarico, Lt. Pritchard, Lt. Ashmore, Lt. Steelman, Pfc. Moore, Pfc. Snottherly, Pvt. Kannan and Sgt. Blankenship. Co. "L" had a Bazooka team in the hedge row across the road opposite to where the 1st tank stopped. Those men were S/Sgt. Hagen, Pvt. Barrett, Pvt. Sewade and Pfc. Brito. Company "D" had a 50 Cal. machine gun and a Bazooka team on the cross road at the C.P. just a few yards ahead of where the tank stopped. On the 50 Cal. was Pvt. Max Hamilton and Pfc. Wisnewiski. The Bazooka was manned by Pfc. Stiles and Pfc. King. "I" company had a group of men along beside the road in their area. The names of these men were not given. "D" company had two bazooka teams in the hedge row by the road in their area. Pvt. Talarico of 3rd Bn Headquarters was manning a bazooka alone. Lt. Pritchard was manning his 30 cal. machine gun which was mounted on his jeep just inside the Bn C.P. area.

When Lt. Pritchard heard the Officer in the turret of the tank giving orders and trying to send the radio message he opened up with his machine gun on the turret of the tank. This precipitated all ensuing action and acted as a signal for the other men to go to work on the 1st tank. Pvt. Talarico fired at it, first from the front, then through the hedge row on the side. The "L" company bazooka team opened up on it. Capt. McCullough and Capt. Shaeffer were tossing hand grenades in the turret and at the Germans in the road. The Germans began screaming for mercy and squealing like stuck pigs. The tank burst into flame. It made an effort to back up but did not move very far. The Germans, in behind the tank, ran down to the next one to warn them



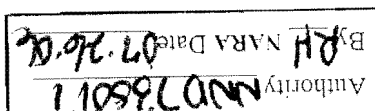
but our men were upon them with bazookas, hand grenades, pistols, rifle grenades, and machine guns. Capt. McCullough ran out of ammunition for his automatic pistol. He climbed upon the tank and threw it in the turret. Capt. Schaeffer climbed upon the tank and was tossing hand grenades in the turret and at the men in the rear of it. Capt. McCullough, finding himself without a weapon, grabbed a light machine gun from some one and, throwing the belt of ammunition over his shoulder, went after the third tank and the armored car. The third tank managed to get away by backing around a house but not without great damage as parts of it were found in the road the next day. The armored car was completely burned up. It was stuck in the mud and caught there by our men. The total number of Germans killed in this action cannot accurately be estimated but there were many - and many more wounded. Several were taken Prisoner, one of them an Officer.

While this action was going on Lt. Ashmore and Lt. Steelman with their men started back for their guns and were ambushed by the armored vehicle below the "K" company area. This was the action in which Lt. Steelman and Pfc. Snotherly were wounded. Pvt. Kannan and Pfc. Moore were killed. Lt. Steelman, Lt. Ashmore, Pfc. Snotherly were taken prisoner. There were three more prisoners taken by these men in the attack of the other armored vehicle upon the "K" company C.P. Two of these men were identified as a Sgt. from the 3rd Armored Div. and Pfc. Joseph A. King of 3rd Bn Hdqs. Co. The third was an Officer from the 3rd Armored Div. The estimated number of Germans at this spot by the house was around fifty. It was at this point that Lt. Steelman being wounded asked one of the German Officers for Medical Aid as he had been shot



through the leg by the machine guns from the Armored vehicle. The German Officer spoke in German to one of his aid men. The aid man came over and kicked the Lt. in the leg and pushed him into the embankment. The ammunition having run low at the Battalion Lt. Schlemmer and his party were sent for more. As they approached the armored vehicle, thinking it one of our own, the Germans opened up with machine guns and killed the Lt. and Pvt. Cross, wounding Sgt. Riley. Sgt. Riley was left in the ditch. Sgt. Blankenship rolled off the jeep and into a puddle of water in the ditch and remained unnoticed by the Germans. The Germans searched their prisoners and lined them up against a wall or embankment. Later they lined up their prisoners behind the armored car and, with the exception of the driver and machine gunners in the car, fell in behind them and moved off up the road in the direction of the Bn C.P. The car stopped within a few yards of the cross roads where the 50 cal. M.G. and Bazooka team was located and near the other D company bazooka team in the hedge row. The Germans were reported to have shot a flare. Others say it was a flame thrower. ^{It was established the next day that this was definitely a flame thrower.} The Bazooka's and the 50 cal. M.G. opened up on the vehicle. Lt. Ashmore was wounded and Lt. Steelman killed. Snotherly, King and Blankenship made their escape and it is supposed the Officer and Sgt. from the armored division. The Germans scattered. Some were killed, many were wounded and several captured. The armored vehicle was put out of action and burned.

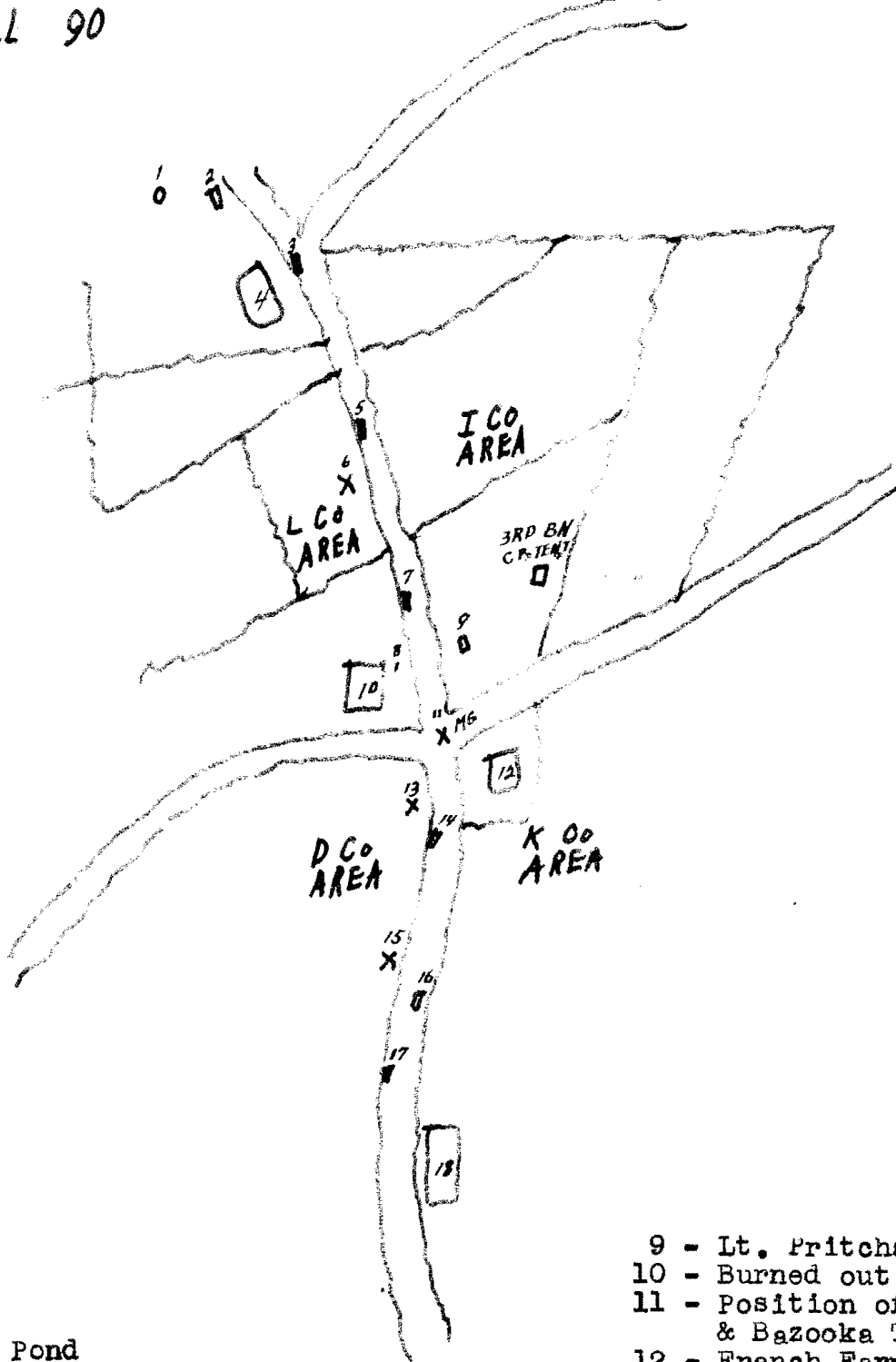
There were some sixty odd prisoners taken in this action by the 3rd Bn. There were many wounded who got away and the total of the enemy killed cannot accurately be estimated. There were many of them. This Gallant action by the Officers and Men of the 3rd Battalion epitomises the spirit and determination of combat warfare and unconquerable faith in their own zeal to meet the enemy and destroy him. Our losses both in men and material were light considering the seriousness of the



situation and the determined effort of the Germans to break through
our lines.

Authority: NND735017
By: RH NARA Date: 07-26-00

HILL 90



- 1 - Pond
- 2 - German Armd. Vehicle
- 3 - German Tank
- 4 - Burned out Fr. Farm House
- 5 - German Tank
- 6 - "L" Co. Bazooka Team
- 7 - German Tank
- 8 - Location of "D" Co. Mortars

- 9 - Lt. Pritchards jeep with M.G.
- 10 - Burned out farm building
- 11 - Position of 50 cal. M.G. & Bazooka Team of "D" Co.
- 12 - French Farm Building
- 13 - "D" Co. Bazooka Team.
- 14 - German Flame Thrower or Armd. vehicle.
- 15 - "D" Co. Bazooka Team
- 16 - 3rd Armd. Div. Tank
- 17 - German Armd. vehicle
- 18 - French Farm House in Draw.

C E R T I F I C A T E

The First Battalion was the assault echelon of the Regiment that day. The 3rd Battalion was in reserve on the following overlay: 45.9271.60. The battalion stayed in this position until around 1600. At that time the regimental commander ordered that we move to the vicinity of 46.1576.90, stating that one regimental staff officer would be there with orders. Upon arriving at this point, the battalion received orders that we would continue down the road from the cross roads in the direction of Southwest. The enemy resistance of the 1st Battalion had been broken at that time. The Battalion continued the advance to the cross roads of Le Rocher, preparing security measures for the battalion on order from Custer 5. Disposition of the battalion after reconnaissance had been made and security measures as per sketch attached. That time was approximately at 2245.

Regular CP routine duties prevailed within our area until darkness. Security for the CP was under the supervision of Lieutenant Charles E. Pritchard. Captain Boss, Field Artillery Liaison Officer and I were in the CP at that time working on defensive fires. At that time a messenger entered the tent to inform me that I had a phone call. I went to the switch board to receive the phone call. The message was that enemy tanks were approaching within the vicinity of our CP. This message was from Company K. I relayed the message to the Battalion Commander. I then phoned the Commanding Officer of Company K and told him to place bazooka teams on the flanks of the tank and knock them out. In the distance we heard another rumble of a tank and voices. The language spoken was German. We then knew we were receiving an attack at night. Our bazooka teams and defense within the CP and battalion area was alerted for a stand-to. Approximately 25 yards from the road junction at LaRocher the tank and enemy group stopped. We could hear the voices very plainly and it sounded like an officer's voice giving an order. We could also hear the click of placing ammunition into an automatic weapon. Lieutenant Pritchard was standing on his jeep which had a 30 caliber light machine gun mounted on it. He was manning the gun. He opened his fire upon the tank, left flank, and upon the forms as could be seen against the sky. He fired approximately a full belt of ammunition, 250 rounds, and 2 bursts. After the two bursts I could hear moaning, hollering. The tank automatically started to smolder and backed down the road in the direction of south, the direction from which it came. Each company was then alerted by runner to insure the protection within each company area and road blocks of the battalion of a mechanized attack. The Infantry bazooka teams within each company area, and men armed with Anti-Tank rifle grenades worked in perfect harmony and brought about the success of stopping the mechanized threat to our front and flanks.

/s/ James W. Smith
/t/ JAMES W. SMITH
Capt., Hq. Co., 3rd Bn.

THIS IS A CERTIFIED TRUE COPY.

Harry L. Jackson
HARRY L. JACKSON, Capt., Infantry.

Authority: MND 735011
Date: 07.26.00
By: RH NARA

hind the fence. Gallic was hit by five in each leg. He rolled into the ditch alongside the road, while the others in the party escaped. Gallic hoped that the Germans would withdraw and that our men would return and pick him up. However, the Germans commenced to lay antitank mines in front of a gate near by and when they had finished this job one of them discovered Gallic in the ditch. One of them touched his legs and remarked that he was still warm.

Gallic then relates: "They shot two rounds point-blank at my head. I thought I was finished. I felt the blood spurting from my neck and I was surprised that I didn't lose consciousness. I was lying there motionless, with blood flowing slowly out of many wounds and with only one thought . . . to get away from this spot. I pulled my raincoat off and crawled to the other side of the road. The Germans were only two yards away from me. I couldn't by-pass the gate. The only place for me to go was a field opposite it which was also occupied by the enemy. In great pain, I scaled the hedgerow and let myself fall down in the field. There I found a few German grenades of the egg-shaped type. I unscrewed one and tossed it in the direction of the Germans, only six yards away. Then I started crawling in the direction I thought our area was. I crossed three fields thinly occupied by Germans. They were lying on the bare ground fast asleep. I crawled painfully, hiding behind their sleeping forms while their flare pistols lit up . . ."

When daylight came, Gallic had worked his way into some low ground which was apparently no-man's land. At about 0900 he heard some of our machine guns firing. He crawled in that direction where he was discovered and sent to the hospital. By September, however, he was doing fine and scheduled to be soon on his feet.

As one GI remarked, "Some guys is sure lucky."

COUNTERATTACK AT LE ROCHER

The 3d Battalion CP was settling down at 0230. Sentries had been posted, Sergeant Major Peters was straightening out his papers, and the staff was going over plans for the next day's attack. Lts James L. Ashmore and Leroy H. Steelman, of Cannon and Anti-tank Companies, respectively, had arrived, received instructions, and were out bringing up their guns to go into action. Word had come from higher headquarters that friendly tanks and tank destroyers were farther forward in an area to the battalion's front.

About this time, Cpl Marvin Hayes entered the tent; he had been on guard. He said that some tracked

vehicles had passed his post, and he was afraid they were enemy. Of course, that meant that the enemy had passed close to the CP, and Hayes was barraged with excited questions. Lt Col McCollum urged everyone to take it easy, since the tanks were in all probability some friendly reconnaissance unit, or American TDs. Hayes then explained that he had thought so too; he had called T/5 Harry Schmeier when the tanks first approached, and they had decided that the Germans on the vehicles were prisoners. But when he heard the tankers talking German as if making plans among themselves, Hayes had decided not to delay notifying the CP. Almost simultaneous with this revelation, a telephone call came from Company "K," saying that a German armored vehicle had been discovered on a road in their area, and was firing at the doughboys and at a tank from the 3d Armored Division.

Possibly the enemy sensed how precariously the 3d Battalion was situated, and chose just that time for a strong push headed at St. Jean de Daye. In any case, the men at the CP quickly realized that the route which the enemy had chosen led north into Le Rocher along a road which, though covered by a Company "I" roadblock, came close by the Battalion CP and curved slightly into the flank of Company "K's" line. Obviously the enemy vehicles had slipped by the Company "I" roadblock and the CP, and some were already reaching Company "K." Germans were no doubt infiltrating past the headquarters that very moment.

There was no time to lose; Peters called all the companies to alert them, and called for all bazooka teams available. Men picked up their weapons hastily and left the tent, headed for the road. The night was still quiet, but at the road there was the rumble of armored vehicles. Not far from the CP by a hedgerow was a wire jeep with a mounted .30-caliber machine gun. Into this jeep slipped Lt Charles E. Pritchard, Communications Officer, of Headquarters Company; his hands clasped his weapon in readiness.

At that moment a German tank had slipped up a few yards from the Battalion CP. Two others were spaced behind, farther down the road, following the first as it crept forward, apparently unaware that it was on top of an American installation. Several hundred yards from the CP, men of the Company "I" roadblock still thought the parade of tanks was friendly. One of their number was on his way to the CP to explain the dubious situation, but he never arrived. Too many things happened first.

Fifteen feet in front of his jeep, Lt Pritchard

could make out a German, probably an officer, standing in the turret of the tank trying to deliver a radio message. He thought he heard the click of a belt being fed into an automatic weapon, and he squeezed his trigger. There was a vicious clatter from different guns, several times. A few seconds later, the enemy's gun was silent; Lt Pritchard's gun was still rattling in the night.

There had been much hushed activity in the area meanwhile. Lt Col McCollum speedily organized his men for defense of the immediate area. Maj Adams, executive of the battalion, was moving about to make sure the men were in best positions.

Pfc George F. Talarico was hugging a bazooka at a crossroad close to the CP, when "Major Adams told me to follow him. We both duckwalked towards one of the tanks that had stopped on the road beside the CP. As we were creeping up the Major stepped on a twig and one of the tankers challenged."

At this moment Lt Pritchard had heard the click of the enemy weapon, and even as he fired, Talarico was loading a bazooka round, and within the minute he had fired squarely into the tank's turret. From inside voices screamed and moaned and men shouted unintelligibly. From then on the night was loud with small arms and voices, and hard fighting. The hedgerows rustled with movement; here and there men scurried for cover. Peters had meanwhile made his way to a roadblock manned by Company "D," then attached to the battalion, and had procured from it a bazooka team, which was creeping up on the other side of the tank from Talarico and Maj Adams. Two explosions lit up for split seconds the same tank, and then there was no doubt that it had been destroyed. The moans from it faded. Lt Arnold Snyder, who with T/Sgt Peters had led his Company "D" bazooka team forward, saw that Pfc Omer W. Franklin, who had fired the bazooka and thereby knocked out the tank, was burned by the backflash and sent him to the rear.

By this time, the company commanders of both Companies "I" and "D" were on the scene, since the enemy had struck their area. Capt McCullough, of Company "I," reached the roadblock hastily and ordered the men to stay in their holes, lest in the confusion of the night men begin shooting their own comrades. He also ordered that the road be so covered with fire that no more tanks could either penetrate or withdraw from the position. With two enlisted men, he headed for the still active tanks.

Capt Shaeffer had just ordered Talarico to assault



Hebecrevon was torn to pieces

the second tank with him, but Talarico had first gone to procure more bazooka ammunition. He was coming back when he found Captains Shaeffer and McCullough about to rush the tank. "Capt McCullough of Company 'I' came over," Talarico told later, "and said, 'Good shot. Let's get the other bastard!' I went down to the hedgerow along with another bazooka man from Company 'I.' We both fired at the tank. I fired my carbine between bazooka blasts. Col McCollum was beside me and he directed some of my shots." Still on the other side of the road, Lt Snyder had a bazooka man, this time S/Sgt Albert Hutman of Company "D," who fired a shot at the same time as Talarico. The tank was on fire.

By a prearranged plan, coordinated so as to be most effective, the two captains meanwhile fired antitank grenades at the tank, and finally rushed it. Capt McCullough was wounded in the leg by fragments of one of the grenades, but he swung himself onto the tank and threw fragmentation and phosphorous grenades into the hatch. In the fury of the moment, he even pulled out his pistol and bashed it down upon the tank commander's head. It slipped out of his hand and fell into the tank. With Capt Schaeffer he struggled to pull the enemy from the turret; the German had already lost his left leg, however, and he dropped limply back into the hatch.

Small-arms and automatic fire was still whirring through the air from every direction, and Capt Shaeffer in a hurry to quit the tank dropped inaccurately and caught his hind parts on the bayonet of a rifleman standing close to the tank. The two enlisted men with Capt McCullough also had been wounded in the fast fight at the tank.



We pause at a hedgerow before taking the next

There was still a third tank to take care of, and it was firing its utmost. S/Sgt Hutman dodged to a position close by and fired a round which damaged it. Capt McCullough also slipped up and fired some anti-tank grenades at it, but it was not destroyed for at last it rumbled aside to the shelter of a building and later escaped.

It had become apparent by now that there were approximately one hundred infantrymen following behind and attempting to protect the tanks. They had fired consistently throughout the desperate battle, but they had been slowly driven back. When the third tank limped off, the Germans on foot abandoned the cause; they withdrew into the night, leaving dead and wounded behind.

Capt McCullough was heading back to the Battalion CP for medical aid, and after he had called his executive officer, Lt Burton K. Fox, he was administered sulfa pills and bandaged by the omnipresent Talarico, until a medic arrived. When Lt Fox arrived, he and Capt McCullough stepped outside the tent, and the captain must have been explaining briefly what had happened.

It was about this time that a loud commotion was heard in the rear of the Company "I" lines. Apparently the vehicles, discovered to be a halftrack and two scout cars with infantry, which had pierced the lines before the tanks and reached the Company "K" positions, realized they could not go farther and had

turned about to make a return trip. They advanced past the CP with guns clattering, and the lead vehicle, the halftrack, was spraying flame from four nozzles, lighting up frightened faces in brilliant orange billows about fifty feet long. Capt McCullough hit the ground hard, and when the flame swept close to him, he had to roll into a ditch to avoid the searing fire. Meanwhile some Company "D" men, who had established a roadblock some distance away, turned their .50-caliber machine gun upon the halftrack and Pfc Sigmund Wisnewski fired about a hundred rounds into it. It burst into flame, its nozzles ceased functioning, and the billows rose skyward rather than earthward. The .50-caliber then turned its aim upon the two vehicles behind, and shortly both were destroyed.

There was great turmoil while the German infantrymen endeavored to escape and ran wild in the area around the CP. Still very much alive in spite of his wound, Capt McCullough got to his feet, went to a light machine gun near by, and in Hollywood style, threw the ammunition belt over his shoulder. Then, still furious because of the vicious flame which had so nearly seared him, he strode down the road toward his company's roadblock, shooting at the ditches and the bushes which might have held cowering Germans. He reached the roadblock again and checked the positions. They were almost intact. He returned to the battalion CP again, and turned himself over to the medics.

It was becoming quiet, but a small fire fight continued through the night until approximately 0615. Nobody had much sleep that night. Cpl Hayes must have been happy, though, that he hadn't slept when the first tank passed his position. He would sleep better now.

The enemy had used armor and infantry to make a concerted attempt to penetrate with the apparent intention of breaking through to St. Jean de Daye and recovering all the ground he had lost south of the Canal de Vire et Taute. His final objective was the town of Isigny on the coast, as revealed by captured orders and maps. In his report for the 12th of July, the Regimental S-2, Capt Ezekiel L. Glazier, listed eleven enemy tanks and one armored halftrack knocked out. By 1030, the 11th of July, the enemy had been thrown back with great loss and had given up any attempt to continue his attack.

The morning of the 11th of July found the men of the 3d Battalion sleepy and tired. But food and water had to be brought forward, and T/Sgt Peters picked