

THE CLOSING OF THE AACHEN GAP ON 16 Oct 44

(The following account is a composite of the stories related to Captain Ferriss on 15 November 44 by Lt Edward C. Arn of Company F and Lt Warne R. Parker, CO of Company E.)

Prior to 16 Oct the 116th Inf had been attacking south on the west side of the Alsdorf-Aachen road in an effort to make contact with the 1st Infantry Division. The 116th Infantry's progress had been slow, and the regiment's efforts to advance ^{were} made more difficult by the fact that the further it advanced, the longer its exposed left flank became. At the close of operations on 15 Oct the 116th Infantry's line ran along an east-west street on the western side of the town of Wurselen (see attached overlay). [The 2d Bn, 119th Inf, was assembled about 1 km north of the 116th Inf, most of the men being in a housing project. About 160400 Oct the companies in the ^{2d} battalion were alerted for an attack to commence at 0600. The battalion was given two objectives: the first objective was high ground on the right flank of the 116th Inf, and the second was the next high ground to the south. This final objective was approximately 2 kms south of the assembly area (see attached overlay). The plan of attack was for E Company to secure the first objective and then F Company to pass through E Company, on regimental order, to secure the second objective.

The bulk of E Company ^{was} ~~were~~ in the cellars of the houses in the housing project, and the hostile artillery and mortar fire which was being received in the vic was so heavy that Lt Parker had a difficult job in leadership to organize his company and start the men southward down the road to "hell's corner," which was the line of departure. Lt Parker, nevertheless, managed to get his company across the LD at 0615, only 15 minutes after H hour. The 3d platoon led off, with the

1st platoon behind, and the 2d platoon in support. The company had a platoon of M-4's assigned to it for the operation. The hill, which was the first objective, had 7 pillboxes on it. Though no one pillbox commanded all the approaches to the hill, every avenue of approach was in the field of fire of at least one of these 7 pillboxes. The pillboxes were manned, and so were the adjoining trenches. The 3d platoon attacked toward the hill from the vic of "hell's corner," but soon bogged down. One of the great difficulties that morning was that it was raining very hard, and the combination of the rain and the slope of the hill made tank movement very difficult. Some of the tanks got bogged and none ^{was} ~~were~~ able to get into position to silence the hostile small arms fire coming from the top of the hill. Lt Parker then committed the 1st platoon, on the right of the 3d platoon, but it made no better progress than the 3d platoon. Both pinned-down platoons were now subjected to very heavy artillery fire from the east and took a considerable number of casualties. Lt Parker then brought up the 2d platoon, in charge of S/Sgt Holycross. S/Sgt Holycross secured the assistance of two tanks which had not become mired and proceeded to assault the hill from the right flank, attacking almost due south, instead of southwest (the direction of the other two platoons' attack). Employing the same assault technique which he had used in fighting south of Ubach, S/Sgt Holycross successively reduced all 7 pillboxes and captured 40 to 50 prisoners. All three platoons of E Company then rushed the hill and set up defensive positions, as indicated on the attached overlay. During the course of the morning the company had 6 men killed and 19 men wounded -- all but 2 of the casualties being from artillery fire.

In the meantime, F Company had occupied that part of the first objective on the left of E Company, and F Company was now ordered to advance on to the second objective. ^{It had the support of 4 M-4's under Lt. Henderson.} The intervening distance was covered in about an hour and a half. ^{Some} ~~Only a small amount of~~ small arms fire was received, ^{which the tanks took care of.} Mortar and artillery fire from the east continued very heavy, ~~and~~ and casualties probably would have been extremely severe if Captain Wiltz G. Kirklin had not swung the company

resistance from these pillboxes was half-hearted, however, and they were captured without difficulty.

around to the west. Apparently, the enemy was firing a prearranged concentration, and by this maneuver Captain Kirklin got out from under the worst of the hostile fire. *Company F encountered several pillboxes moving from the first to the second objective. The* During this advance, E Company consolidated its position on the first objective and provided a base of fire which supported F Company's advance. After F Company reached the second objective, G Company pulled up on F's left, and then E Company came up to occupy the northern half of the objective. The 99th Inf Bn had relieved E Company on the first objective. (See attached overlay for final positions of the three companies on the second objective.)

By 1630 F Company had consolidated its position. When Captain Kirklin so reported to Lt Col Cox, the latter ordered him to send a patrol at once across the valley to the positions held by the 1st Infantry Division on the east side of the Alsdorf-Aachen road. This mission was given to a 10-man patrol of the 2d platoon of F Company commanded by S/Sgt Karvel. ~~The~~ Leading elements of the patrol got across the road and also the railroad just east of the road. Private Krauss and Private Whitis were the patrol's scouts. Behind them came S/Sgt Karvel, and the rest of the patrol was deployed to the rear of Karvel. At this point strong machine gun fire from both right and left flanks was received. It presumably came from pillboxes on the slope of the hill, of which the 1st Infantry Division held only the crest. In the face of this fire the last 7 men of the patrol were unable to cross the road and railroad, and S/Sgt Karvel was ~~fatally wounded.~~ He motioned to Private Krauss and Whitis to continue their advance, shouting "keep going, make the contact." The two scouts thereupon continued their advance under the interlocking fire from machine guns on right and left and eventually stumbled into the 1st Division's positions. That night they led a patrol from K Company, 18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, back to their own company CP under cover of darkness. This 1st Division patrol consisted of S/Sgt Chastain, Cpl Holt, Pfc Messner, and Pfc Kunz.

As a result of F Company's operations on 16 Oct, the following casualties

were suffered: 2 KIA, 10 WIA, and 1 MIA. Nearly all of these casualties were ~~also~~ the result of artillery fire.

The contact made that night between the 30th Inf Div and the 1st Inf Div was no more than ~~this~~ bare patrol contact. The next day A Company of the 99th Inf Bn was given the mission of establishing road blocks on the Alsdorf-Aachen road, approximately at the point where S/Sgt Chastain's patrol had crossed. * [The enemy, anticipating that we would make an effort to firmly secure this narrow exit from the Aachen pocket, placed extremely heavy artillery and mortar fire on A Company's positions. At the same time, 40 to 50 hostile infantry, supported by two tanks, attacked the two road blocks set up by A Company from the southwest. A Company found it impossible to hold ^{its} ~~their~~ positions under the combined direct and indirect fire and withdrew ^{in disorder,} having suffered a great many casualties.

That same day the 2d Bn, which was still holding the second objective of the previous day's operations, was counterattacked by about ^{full} a company of infantry and three tanks. The attack was not spotted in time to stop the tanks from advancing up the street that leads from the Alsdorf-Aachen road to the high ground held by the 2d Bn. Most of the infantry were stopped by our mortar and artillery fire before they could advance west of the Alsdorf-Aachen road, though approximately 50 got through. [The hostile tanks knocked out 3 friendly anti-tank guns which were covering the street up which the enemy advanced. One of these tanks was now knocked out, but the remaining two "worked back and forth" and could have run through the 2d Bn's positions if they had known how disorganized the men were. Apparently fear of anti-tank weapons and the lack of supporting Jerries eventually decided them to retire. ^{The 2d Bn had 1-2 platoons of M-4's of the 743d Tank Bn in support; + their presence was also a factor.}

On 18 October E Company wisely placed its outposts further in advance of its positions; hence, when a counterattack of between 300 and 400 infantry, supported by quite a few tanks, got under way, the counterattack was "stopped cold" in the hollow on the east side of the Alsdorf-Aachen road. "It was a massacre. Afterwards we found about 200 Jerries dead, and 5 tanks knocked out by our

* In view of the enemy's command of the low ground where Co A/99th was ordered to set up its road block, Maj. H. D. Mc Conn, S-3 of 115th, called it a "suicidal mission".

artillery." Both of these counterattacks were preceded by very heavy mortar preparation.

This same day the 3d Bn established a firm contact between the 30th Div and the 1st Div by organizing a line across the valley separating the 2 divisions. It is interesting to note that Lt Col Courtney Brown, CO of the 3d Bn, made this contact with the 18th Inf of the 1st Inf Div, which was Lt Col Brown's regiment prior to joining the 30th Inf Div.