

G-L-3030D

30th Inf Div
120th Inf

Co. "B" at Tessy-sur-Vire July 31, 1944

#21

Interview in the field with Capt. Howard W. Greer, CO Co. "B", in vic Huest, Aug. 26, 1944.

Co. "B", of the 120th Infantry, had moved on Division order to within 3 miles of Tessy-sur-Vire and held up, waiting to be relieved by elements of the 117th Infantry. Reports received from 30th Division Headquarters indicated that the 2nd Armored Division was heavily engaged outside of Tessy. Co. "B", waiting to be relieved, suddenly received Division orders to "take off" for Tessy. "So we took off," said Capt. Greer.

There was no artillery support---the company simply moved off on its own, advancing across country on a sunken road to within one miles of Tessy. Here the company hit high ground and immediately became the target of enemy artillery and mortar fire. As Co. "B" deployed in a defensive set-up and worked its way toward town it encountered machine gun fire. To add to the hot fire hitting the company, Co. "I" of the 22nd Infantry, off at the left in an assembly area, opened up on Co. "B" by mistake.

It was at this time, as the company reached the outskirts of the town, that it was helped by an individual exploit of one of its own men, Pvt. Carlos J. Ruiz. The advance stalled by an enemy machine gun nest, Pvt. Ruiz, acting as leading scout, killed two of the enemy machine gun crew and as the other took flight Pvt. Ruiz pursued him, leaped over a hedgerow, landing squarely on his quarry and finished him off, too. As one of the enemy killed by Pvt. Ruiz was an officer, it is believed by Capt. Howard W. Greer, CO of Co. "B" that this was of inestimable aid in paving the way for Co. "B" to slip on into the town.

As the enemy dropped back, they shot green flares and their artillery would fire just ahead of the flares at the advancing Americans. Co. "B" responded by placing mortar fire on the flare points and pushed its advance another 400 yards, where it again was stopped by heavy fire ^{this time} from an AT gun firing down the road. Again, another individual act cleared the way when Pvt. Lonnie M. Groves, armed

with a rifle grenade, crawled down a hedgerow, and knocked ~~the~~ ^{the} out ¹ AT gun. The enemy pulled out now from the immediate front and Co. "B" pushed on another $\frac{1}{2}$ mile into town, still receiving heavy artillery fire. Then, at ¹⁹³⁰ 0730, as it advanced into the town itself, in the words of Capt. Greer, "we got fire from everywhere." [A prisoner taken in the vicinity reported that an engineering company originally holding the town had been reinforced by two SS companies which had just arrived and which, according to the prisoner, had 16 machine guns.]

Co. "B" continued its drive into Tessy by sending two platoons down the main road and the weapons platoon down another. The troops driving into town by the main road used two deployed squads, with the other platoon deployed to the left, and worked from house to house with rifles, bazookas, and grenades. An enemy halftrack towing an 88 attempted to open fire on the advancing American troops, but Pvt. Francis L. Kimmel knocked it out with a BAR. An armored car with an AA gun was encountered also and knocked out with rifle grenades.

It had been supposed by Capt. Greer, based on his information from Division Headquarters, that the 2nd Armored Division was in the town and the mission of his company was to occupy roadblocks. But as Co. "B" fought from house to house, they realized that the 2nd Armored could not possibly be in town because of the intensity of enemy fire that was being encountered. [However, Capt. Greer's force continued to push the enemy back toward the river, until a counterattack, supported by 88s and mortars from the high ground across the river, not only stopped Co. "B", but shoved it nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ out of town. ^{The men retreated} ~~The Co. "B" platoons were~~ shoved back into some gardens and ditches on the ^{northern} edge of town, but here they braced, dug-in, and held, although completely pinned down ~~here on the northern end of town.~~ Artillery support came to their aid and the enemy mortar positions were shelled. Either these mortars were hit or they were "scared off", for their fire ceased. Friendly artillery also poured $\frac{1}{2}$ fire on the enemy machine gun nests across the river and knocked these out. But enemy troops occupied buildings all through Tessy, and [the situation for a resumption of the advance through town remained bad, from Co. "B's" viewpoint.]

As Co. "B" was holding in its defensive positions, Capt. Greer was contacted by an officer of ~~CCB~~^{CCA}. Capt. Greer told him that the situation was bad and that he was out of contact with the rest of the battalion, because the wire patrol had not been able to get through. The ~~CCB~~^{CCA} officer believed that the shelling in the town was too heavy for tanks to function, but finally agreed to give Capt. Greer 4 tanks. At Capt. Greer's order, the tanks pushed off for town to take the platoon leaders to their roadblocks. Making a loop through town, the tanks succeeded in achieving this objective, and, in addition, gave the enemy some pause. "The tanks could have wooden guns," said Capt. Greer. "When they rolled through town they were a big morale factor for us and just the opposite to the enemy." Men dug in at the roadblocks with the tanks. After dark the tanks were relieved by "SP ATs."

Meanwhile the rest of the 120th Infantry had been alerted and was trying to relieve the pressure on Co. "B". Co. "A" organized the high ground north of town, and Co. "C", which got underway at 1600 hours, ran into the same enemy resistance that had stalled Co. "I" of the 22nd Infantry, but finally pushed on past into the outskirts of town.

Capt. Greer still could not get any communication through to the battalion. The wire patrol had not been able to get through. An air raid shelter was found in which one platoon was lined up, while the remainder of Co. "B" occupied a building nearby. The wounded were evacuated by elements of the 2nd Armored Division. Engineers had not been able to clear the mine fields. A sniper was captured who, it was discovered upon interrogation, had 60 rounds and orders to hold his position for ten days. Another sniper, located in a church steeple, was left there rather than hurt the steeple. "He didn't hurt anybody," said Capt. Greer.

The Germans were using "big stuff" on Co. "B's" positions. A 150mm shell went clear through the company CP and crashed into a wall, but, fortunately, turned out to be a dud. 75mm fire from the tanks, ^{directed against} the machine guns across the river helped to ease the situation somewhat, but Co. "B" sat tight throughout the night. The Germans started some armor into town toward dark, but never followed

through with this threat, as XIX Corps Artillery gave their road of approach such a pounding that the enemy armor quit.

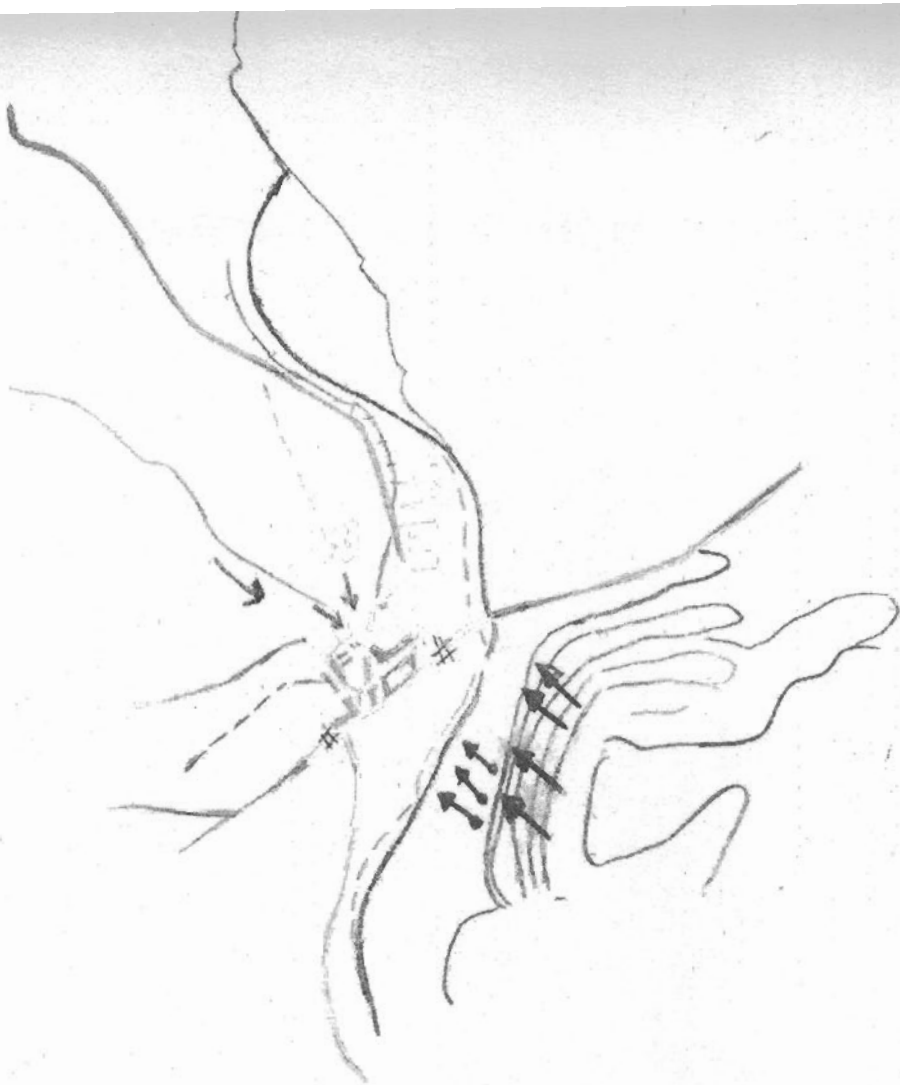
Early the next day, the Commanding General of ~~CG~~^{CCA} arrived at the Co. "B" CP to ascertain the situation. Capt. Greer told him that troops could not get into Tessy without being shot up. The CG of ~~CG~~^{CCA} was under the impression that his armor had penetrated into town and, meeting a different version from Capt. Greer, called the commanding officer of the 25th Reconnaissance Troop on the phone and asked him what time he had entered the town. The CO of the 25th Reconnaissance Troop said that he had not entered the town at all. The misapprehension of what force had entered Tessy and at what time was thus cleared up.)

The situation remained at a deadlock in Tessy until the following day when the 35th Infantry, with accompanying tanks, ~~came in on the right and took over~~ the high ground across the river. The enemy guns had displaced by the time the tanks arrived. The deadlock broken, Tessy was thereupon occupied without further resistance.

It is Capt. Greer's belief that the enemy meant to defend Tessy against our armor and infantry, and that the fight at this town was not a delaying action. The death of an enemy officer at the very start of Co. "B" penetration into town helped the company to get into town in the first place. But the SS troops fought a last ditch battle until the tanks arrived. Capt. Greer added that the SS troops are afraid of artillery and mortar fire~~power~~.

The situation would not have been bad, Capt. Greer thought, if the 35th Infantry had been up on the high ground across the river. The enemy, in possession of this vital terrain, ~~were~~^{was} able to make Tessy the hot and deadly place it turned out to be. One of Capt. Greer's platoons suffered 17 casualties out of 32 men, another lost 8 out of 25, the machine gun section had 1 man left, the support platoon lost 4 men and the mortar section lost 3. Co. "D" suffered casualties also.

Tessy-sur-Vire was "a big mouthful for Co. "B"."



TRSSY-SUR-VIRE, July 31, 1944.

Advance of Co. "B" ---- →

Roadblocks #

Source and direction of enemy artillery and mortar fire. →

MCS - →

Based on Map of Tassy - 1:25,000. SHEET 34/14 SW

NOTE - This sketch to be checked.