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#8

GL-86

30th Division
120th Infantry

(19)

REPULSE OF PANZER LEHR COUNTERATTACK, 10-11 JULY 1944.

(Following account secured by Lt. Tuttle, Historian of 120th Infantry)

On the night of July 10-11, 1944, the enemy made a concerted attempt to penetrate and over-run the 120th Infantry positions with the possible grand 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. On the evening of July 10th, the 3rd Battalion had been given the mission of taking and organizing a defense to hold the high ground around Le Rocher. 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 stiff enemy resistance in some places as they moved forward before nighfall. Reaching the point designated by the Regimental Commander, they immediately set up their degensive position and the men began digging in. With both flanks exposed, Col McCullum, C.O. of the 3rd Battalion, caused the road blocks to be set up on the most likely enemy approaches. Friendly tanks and tank destroyers were advanced out beyoun 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 any tanks before firing on them. At approximately 0030, officers from the Cannon and Anti-Tank Companies arrived at the Battalion Command Post for instructions on the disposition of their weapons in the Battalion plan of defense; these officers were 2nd Lt. James L Ashmore of Cannon Co. and 2nd Lt. Leroy H. Steelman of the Anti-Tank Co. They arrived at the CP in a Jeep driven by Pfc. Clayton Moore, with Henry A. Snotherly as machine gunner and Private Paul R. Kannan as radio operator.

At about 0130 a phone call was received from Co. "K" telling the Command Post that an enemy armored vehicle or flame-thrower had been dicovered on the road by their area and that it was firing upon them and a tank of the 3rd Armored Division. Simultaneously, a runner reported with workd from the Hill 90 road block that enemy tanks and armored vehicles were moving up the road in the direction of the Battalion CP.

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Each tank was being followed by about 20 men on foot. All Companies of the Battalion were immediately alerted and arrangements were made to knock out the tanks with bazookas and rifle grenades, while machine guns accounted for the enemy personnel.

Two of the enemy armored vehicles slipped by the CP and went down the road in the direction of Co. "K". When discovered, it was one of these vehicles which opened fire on the friendly tank at Co. "K". Our men proceeded to knock out this vehicle, killing one of the enemy and wounding several.

In the meantime, a German tank had eased up by short advances to within a few yards of the Battalion CP. Another was not far behind it and a third was farther down the road near the roadblock, with an armored car behind this last tank. The men in and around the lead tank could be heard conversing in German. One man, believed to be a German officer, was standing in the turret of the tank and attempting to send a radio message.

Lt. Pritchard opened up with his .30 cal. machine gun which was mounted on a jeep and located just inside the CP area. This precipitated all of the ensuing action and acted as a signal for the other men to go to work on the first tank. Pvt. Talarico (3rd Bn. Hq.), manning his bazooka alone, fired at it from the front and then through the hedgerow on the side. A bazooka team from Co. L opened up on it, (S/Sgt. Hagen, Pvt. Barrett, Pvt. Sewade and Pfc. Brito). Captain McCullough and Capt. Shaeffer were to swing hand grenades in the turret and at the Germans in the road. The Germans began screaming for mercy as the tank burst into flame. It made an effort to back up but did not move 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. Captain McCullough, finding himself without a weapon, grabbed a light machine gun from someone and, throwing the belt of ammunition over his shoulder, went after the third tank and the armored car. This third tank managed to get away by backing around a house, but not without damage as parts of it were found in the road the next day. The armored car was completely burned up. It became immobile in the mud and was caught there by our men.

17
The action was going on, Lt. Ashmore and Lt. Steelman with their men started back for their guns and were ambushed by the armored vehicle which had gone below the "K" Co. area. Lt. Steelman and Pvt. Snotterly were wounded, and captured with Lt. Ashmore. Pvt. Kamman and Pfc. Moore were killed. There were about fifty Germans in this group. At this point, Lt. Steelman, being wounded, asked one of the Germans officers for medical aid. The officer spoke to one of his aid men who came over and kicked Lt. Steelman in his wounded leg and pushed him into the embankment.

Since ammunition was low at the Battalion CP, Lt. Schlemmer, with some men, was sent for more. As this party approached the armored vehicle in the belief that it was one of our own, the Germans opened up with machine guns, killing Lt. Schlemmer and Private Cross and wounding Sgt. Riley. Sgt. Blankenship roaled off the jeep and into a puddle of water in the ditch, unnoticed by the Germans.

The prisoners were lined up behind the armored car, which proceeded up the road in the direction of the CP with the Germans falling in behind them. The car stopped within a few yards of a cross roads where one of our .50 cal. machine guns and a bazooka team was located and near to a "D" Co. bazooka team hidden in a hedgerow. Here, our weapons fired upon the Germans. Lt. Ashmore was wounded and Lt. Steelman was killed, while Snotterly, King, and Blankenship escaped. 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 Battalion. There were many wounded who managed to escape, while the total of the enemy killed cannot be accurately estimated. There were many of them. Our losses were slight considering the seriousness of the situation and the determined effort of the Germans to break through our lines.

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4

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