

30th INFANTRY DIVISION
117th Infantry Regiment
"B" Company, 1st Battalion

14
BREACHING THE SIEGERIED LINE

(Interviews and terrain walks with the following:

- a. Lt. William J. O'Neil, platoon leader of A & P platoon, 1st bn.,
17 Oct. 1944
- b. Capt. Robert C. Spiker, Company Commander of B Company
Lt. Jay Manley, platoon leader of weapons platoon
Pfc. Irving Sinensky, rifleman in support detachment, 1st platoon
Pvt. Brent Youenes, flame-thrower in assault detachment, 1st plat.
S/Sgt. George Dail, platoon guide, 2d platoon
T/Sgt. Howard Wolpert, actg. platoon leader of 3d platoon after
wounding of Lt. Whitney Refvem on 2 Oct.
Pfc. Francis Cashman, light machine gunner in weapons platoon
- 29 Oct. 1944

Interviews with the following:

- a. Lt. Col. Robert E. Frankland, Bn. Commander, 1st Battalion and
his staff, 12 Oct. and five other occasions to 30 Oct. 1944
- b. Lt. Elwood Daddow, Executive Officer of B Company
S/Sgt. Robert D. Hunter, platoon guide of 1st plat.
Pvt. William House, radio operator, 1st plat.
Pvt. Norman Jandreau, satchel charge-bearer, 1st plat. 2d, and more
Pfc. Walter C. Turner, BAR man, 1st plat.
Pfc. Melvin C. Shaw, asst. BAR man, 1st plat.
Pfc. Herschel D. Jones, BAR man, 1st plat.
Pfc. John Morris, 1st scout, 1st platoon
Pvt. George Mentzer, 2nd scout, 1st platoon
Pvt. Pasquale Vitale, ammunition-bearer, 1st platoon
Sgt. B.E. Clark, squad leader, 1st platoon
Pvt. Willis Jenkins, pole-charge bearer, 1st platoon
Sgt. Daniel Preston, BAR man, 1st plat.
Pfc. Edwin Knowles, scout in support squad, 1st plat.
Pvt. Raymond Vanwinkle, bazookaman, 1st plat.
Pvt. Berlan Slater, rifleman in support squad, 1st plat.
Pvt. William P. Lisenby, rifleman in support squad, 1st plat.
Sgt. Fred Burt, asst. squad leader, 1st plat.
Cpl. John Curtis, BAR man, 1st plat.
Pvt. Victor Kuinis, flame-thrower, 2d platoon
Pvt. Merle Hasenkamp, pole charge-bearer, 2d platoon
Pvt. Andrew Chuckalovchak, assistant flame-thrower, 3d platoon
Pvt. Henry Hansen, flame-thrower, 3d plat.
T/Sgt. Albert Maudice, support squad leader, 3d plat.
Pvt. Edward O'Brien, pole-charge bearer, 3d platoon
Pvt. Freeman Hensen, satchel-charge bearer, 3d platoon
Lt. Clarence Graeser, platoon leader of 1st plat., "D" Company
Lt. Ray Hart, Executive Officer of "D" Company
Capt. Stanley Cooper, Company Commander of "D" Company (hvy wpns)
Sgt. Lloyd Hamilton, weapons platoon of "B" Company
Pvt. Richard Ballou, weapons platoon of "B" Company

- 29-31 Oct. 1944

... Capt. Hechler

On 2 October, "B" Company had the mission of advancing abreast of "C" Company of the 117th Infantry Regiment to advance east from the vicinity of Scherpenseel and cross the Wurm River, breach the Siegfried Line and seize an area in and on the eastern edge of Palenberg. "B" Company was to advance to the left (north) of "C" Company.

"B" Company was at full strength on the day of the jumpoff, and had its full quota of equipment. The men were in excellent fighting trim and their morale was superior. There was some of the usual good-natured joshing when rations of cigarettes and chocolate were issued on the night of 1 October and early morning of the 2d, and more than one man remarked: "They're fattening up the pigs for the kill, it looks like."

Prior to the operation, preparation in the "B" Company area had been extensive, in planning and acquainting the men with the detail of terrain and enemy fortifications, training, dry runs, patrols; and preparatory fires delivered in the company sector.

The training and drilling which the men received prior to 2 October was carried out on a specially-constructed sandtable maintained at the 1st battalion, 117th Infantry Regiment, and each man in the company was acquainted with the location of the enemy pillboxes, the position of the river, the route to be taken, terrain to be covered and tactics to be employed. On 25-26 September, the company withdrew with the remainder of the battalion to positions about 3 km. west of Scherpenseel, where they had intensive work with pole and satchel charges, flame-throwers, bangalore torpedoes, dry runs for assaulting pillboxes and river-crossing practice, along with practice

firing of all infantry weapons and practical work with the additional engineer equipment. (Cf. Interview with 1st battalion staff, 12 Oct. 1944) "I for one feel that the sandtable and the training we received was the most thorough we ever had for any operation," said Pfc. Sinensky of the 1st platoon.

Dry runs for the river crossing had been made with specially-constructed foot bridges, 15-20 feet in length and about 18 inches wide, studded with cleats to help the men keep their footing. (Cf. Interview with 1st battalion staff and Interview with Lt. William J. O'Neil, 17 October 1944).

Two important patrols provided vital intelligence material on the nature of the terrain, barbed wire, enemy defenses and the Wurm River. The first was led by Lt. Robert P. Cushman, platoon leader of the 1st platoon on 22 September (Cushman was the first to cross the river on patrol). This patrol ascertained that the river was no more than 20 feet wide at the place "B" Company planned to cross, was not over $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep, and that enemy troops had not entrenched yet to the west of the river. (Cf. Interview with Pvt. Brent Youenes on results of this patrol, 31 Oct. 1944) Lt. Don Barton, platoon leader of the 2d platoon, led a second patrol on 27 September which obtained additional information about routes of approach to the river and up to the railroad track.

For a week prior to 2 October, artillery and mortars of various calibers fired into the sector where B Company was to penetrate. The 118th Field Artillery Battalion laid down barrages with its 105mm. towed howitzers, M2. The 258th Field Artillery Battalion fired indirect fire with 155 mm. self-propelled howitzers, M12, on 7 pillboxes in the area of B Company's assault, and at range⁵ of 2100-3570 yards scored 55 target hits and claimed 17 penetrations on these seven. (Cf. Report of 258th

Field Artillery Battalion to XIX Corps, 5 October 1944). The 62d Armored Field Artillery Battalion fired its 105mm self-propelled howitzers, M7, for a week prior to the jumpoff, but claimed little credit in destroying or damaging pillboxes. (Cf. Interview with Lt. Col. D.V. Bennett, 10 Oct. 1944). C Company of the 803d Tank Destroyer Battalion fired its 3-inch guns, M10, at six possible enemy OP's in the B Company area and for a week prior to the jumpoff fired 300 rounds per day. (Cf. Interview with Capt. Robert Sinclair, 21 October 1944). D Company (heavy weapons) of the 1st battalion, 117th, fired 300 rounds of 81mm mortars per day at various targets in the 1st battalion area, covering the B Company area of advance. The 4.2 mortars of the 92d Chemical Battalion also assisted in firing during this week's preparatory build-up.

On the day of the jumpoff, B Company was supported in its advance by intensified fires by all of these units. The 118th Field Artillery Battalion counted on the doughboys covering 100 yards every five minutes; they actually went faster, and most of the fire was checked in time by the forward observer of the 118th. (Cf. Interview with Maj. Raymond W. Millican, 5 October 1944). However, several individuals testify that B Company rushed so fast to the river that they got some air bursts from our own artillery, and also some rounds were coming in to the houses in Marienberg ^{while} B Company was passing the town; no casualties are believed to have been caused by our own artillery. The infantry followed the preparation very closely, and they also followed the rolling barrage delivered by the 4.2 and 81mm mortars very closely.

The preliminary saturation and dive-bombing was a disappointment to the men. "We had heard stories about thousands of planes that

were supposed to have come and destroyed the pillboxes, but we only saw a few of them and the damage was slight," says Pvt. Ballou of the weapons platoon. The assault squad of the 1st platoon, first to reach the pillboxes, minimized the effectiveness of the medium bombers, but stated that the fire bombs dropped by the P-38 fighter-bombers may have caused some of the ^{enemy} personnel to take cover within the pillboxes and in any ~~extent~~ provided good cover ^{for our men} in the craters (cover which the assault squad needed and appreciated).

Company "A" of the 743d Tank Battalion was supporting the 117th Infantry Regiment, and their route and time of advance was planned to coincide with the route of Company "B" to the river. As it worked out, the tanks became mired in the mud at the river and caused "B" Company more harm than good by drawing enemy artillery and mortar fire on the support and weapons platoons. (Cf. Interview with Lt. Col. William D. Duncan, 5 Oct. 1944).

Company "A" of the 105th Combat Engineer Battalion attached twelve men to Company B, four with each platoon. These men carried bangalore torpedoes and accompanied the assault squads; it was planned to have them blow gaps in the tactical wire, but the wire which had not already been destroyed by 4.2 mortar fire was actually cut by infantrymen armed with wire-cutters and the bangalore men were not used. The 105th Combat Engineer Battalion constructed the foot bridges used by B Company, and provided a flame-thrower, 2 25-lb pole charges and 2 25-lb. satchel charges for each platoon's assault squad. The flame-throwers, demolitions, and foot bridges were carried by the infantrymen and operated by the infantrymen.

The enemy had brought up recent reinforcements to the positions in pillboxes and their vicinity, and had brought up artillery in an arc which could fire from the north, east and south of the B Company

sector. The enemy artillery and mortar fire, although not as intense as in the C Company sector, was believed by many men to be a more formidable opponent than the pillboxes themselves.

Approximately two companies of enemy infantry, reinforced by heavy machine guns, were in the regimental sector. The men in B Company estimate that the Germans were outnumbered in the immediate B Company area, but B Company also received opposition from the flanks which had not yet been cleared when they moved forward. The two leading elements represented in the enemy line were the 330 Regiment of the 183d Division, and the 42d Fortress Machine Gun Battalion. The latter came into the line 30 September, after having been organized at Duesseldorf on 15 September from previously wounded soldiers discharged and recalled into the service.

The quality of the infantry troops opposing B Company was mixed; there were some fanatics sprinkled through the lot, but many were young and old men, some decrepit or bewildered, and most of them seemed willing to surrender after a brief show of resistance.

There were nine pillboxes capable of delivering fires into the B Company area. They could deliver mutually supporting fires from a ridge overlooking the area through which B Company had to advance. None of the pillboxes contained any heavier caliber gun than a machine gun. Because of the limited visibility inside the pillboxes, the enemy placed personnel in trenches around the outside of the pillboxes. Many of these were driven to cover by the bombing, artillery and mortars, but there were several machine gun positions outside of the pillboxes with which B Company had to contend.

In addition to his gun positions within the pillboxes, the enemy delivered considerable harassing fire from the houses, initially

in Marienberg and later in Palenberg.

The terrain through which B Company made its advance presented several problems. The initial advance was across an open field planted with beets and turnips, for about 1500 yards. Troops in this field could not be observed from ^{most of} the pillboxes, but could be seen easily from two large slag piles east of Palenberg, or from numerous houses in Marienberg and Palenberg. The enemy had a ^{single} pillbox close to the edge of Marienberg, commanding the approach across this field, but did not choose to defend vigorously here; ~~only~~ only one man was in the pillbox when B Company jumped off.

At the eastern edge of the open field, there was an abrupt ~~drop~~ drop and then a gradual slope of 300 yards down to the Wurm River. The slope was sufficiently wooded to provide good concealment, and the natural route was a draw running northeast toward the river. The draw was open, but was lined with thick woods which cut off the enemy view from the pillboxes. However, enemy stationed in Palenberg houses could observe this draw and thus direct artillery and mortar fire on it.

Immediately to the left of the draw, on a high hill, was the hamlet of Marienberg, which also afforded observation on the draw and good positions for snipers in the houses. From the edge of the woods at the end of the draw east to the river bank was about 250 yards, cut by a dirt road running north-south, and some ~~single~~ single-strand barbed wire fence which did not prove much of an obstacle. The river itself was 15-18 feet wide at the point of B Company's crossing, about 4 feet deep, swift, and with muddy banks which were made slightly muddier by rain on 1 October. It is difficult to dignify this little brook as a river, and may be difficult to understand why such elaborate preparations were made to cross it. The point is that the enemy could fire from the pillboxes on the area around the river, and had prepared artillery concentrations adjusted on the river area. In the words of

Col. Frankland, 1st battalion commander, the river crossing turned out to be almost as important as the taking of the pillboxes, because the enemy was surprised and thrown off balance by the sheer aggressiveness of the speedy crossing of the river.

On the far side of the river, there was another stretch of open ground sloping slightly upward for 250-300 yards to the railroad track. The track was set on a high embankment, the west side of which provided cover and concealment from the pillboxes. The bank was lined with a high hedge and some single-strand barbed wire, neither of which proved obstacles. Across the railroad there was an upward slope, grown over with beets, which extended up to the enemy's main line of pillboxes at the top of a ridge. This ridge commanded the terrain (west as far) as the edge of the wooded draw, with the exception of brief defiladed spots like the railroad embankment, and some spots just east of the railroad track where dips in the ground gave cover from the pillbox fire. The pillboxes were on the ~~southern~~ southwestern edge of the town of Palenberg, and the houses in Palenberg on the left of the B Company sector of advance afforded good fields of fire for snipers.

The company assembly area was northwest of Scherpenseel, between Siepenbusch and Grotenrath, with the Company CP located at (833607) in Scherpenseel. At 1030, the 1st and 2d platoons moved down into Scherpenseel and at the company CP they were issued flame-throwers, satchel and pole charges. These items had been kept under cover to keep them dry.

The line of departure was a north-south cow trail which cut the open fields about 400 yards east of the main road toward Geilenkirchen. The plan of attack for the 30th Division was to have the 117th and 119th Regiments advance abreast. The plan of attack for the 117th Regiment called for a line of battalions, with the 1st battalion the assault battalion,

The plan of attack for the 1st battalion was for B and C Companies to advance abreast, with B Company advancing on the left immediately south of Marienberg. The plan of attack for B Company was for the 1st platoon and 2d platoons to advance abreast, with the 1st platoon on the right and the 2d platoon on the left. The 1st platoon was to take pillboxes 2 and 8 on the right flank, the 2d was to take pillboxes 3 and 7 in the center, and the 3d (support) platoon was to come up on the left and reduce pillbox #4 which was actually in the town of Palenberg.

n / The Company Commander, a 23-year old ROTC officer from the University of West Virginia, had led his company since just after the crossing of the Vire River. Capt. Spiker's virtues as a company commander are thoroughness, coolness and a certain quiet efficiency which has won the admiration of his men. One of the company officers said of him: "What makes Capt. Spiker is the fact that he's a commander and knows the difference between a commander and a leader. He knows where to be in order to maneuver his platoons and keep tabs with all developments. We had one company commander who grabbed a bazooka and charged some enemy tanks; he didn't last two minutes because he tried to be a leader. Also, Spike's got a good theory about artillery which really worked in this operation. He figures the enemy is going to chuck them in the rear in order to get our brains and our support wiped out; so he just works the whole company ahead fast enough to get under their own artillery and it drops behind us." (Interview with Lt. Elwood Daddow, B Company Executive Officer, 30 Oct. 1944).

The line of departure was reached promptly at 1100, which was H-hour. Lt. O'Neil and men from his A. & P. platoon supervised the carrying of the improvised foot bridges, which had been painted green for camouflage and hidden in the haystacks the night before.

Two ~~20-foot~~ 20-foot ladders and 8 15-foot ladders were carried along for B Company. When they were being uncovered from the haystack, a few bullets started to sing from the pillbox on the main Marienberg-Palenberg road. A couple of B Company riflemen had wandered forward to the haystack and one of them groaned: "Hey, I'm not supposed to be in on this ladder-carrying detail." Lt. O'Neil yelled back: "You ~~son of a~~ ~~bastard~~ get going and get moving or we'll all be plugged."

Fire continued to come from the pillbox until the company moved out across the beet fields, and then a dingy German soldier was observed running south from the pillbox. He got about thirty yards down the north-south road which cuts through the beet fields by the pillbox and then was caught in our 4.2 mortar rolling barrage. When he was reached, he had been killed by a mortar.

The 2d platoon proceeded north of the main Marienberg-Palenberg road almost to the town of Marienberg before cutting south across the road. The 1st platoon advanced parallel to the 2d platoon on the south side of the road. The weapons platoon followed the 1st platoon. The 3d platoon, in support, followed the route of the 2d platoon. Each platoon occupied a front of about 75 yards. The men, bearing in mind what Col. Frankland and Capt. Spiker had emphasized, moved forward double-time. The leading elements reached the brow of the hill 3-5 minutes after the jumpoff, having speeded across the beet and turnip fields.

The 2d platoon leader, Lt. Don Borton, was, as usual, at the head of his platoon. Borton was a big, awkward, 225-pounder, a University of Washington product, whom men followed because he looked and sounded like a leader. He was a veteran army man who had fought in the Aleutians and participated in the simulated ~~attack on~~ Kiska battle of ~~the Aleutians~~. He knew how to make his men go forward with him and was a real leader. Less than a week after the jumpoff Borton was lost in the attack on Mariador

The platoon leader of the 1st platoon, Lt. Robert P. Cushman, did not look like a leader, nor did he use the same techniques as Borton. He was a Washington State graduate, had done some post grad^{uate} work at Uni-
versity of Washington in some of Borton's classes, and then taught reform school in Walla Walla. For a year or so while Borton was fighting in the Aleutians, Cushman was warming a soft spot as a division personnel officer. This background seemed to pay off when he took over the ^{1st} platoon, where his influence will probably live long despite the fact he was wound and evacuated during the heavy artillery pummeling in Ubach two days after his platoon broke through the outer crust of the Siegfried Line. For Cushman fought for and with his men and knew everybody's problems. He kept a little black book with all his men's home addresses and personalities. He was one of the few officers who actually got a thrill out of censoring the mail of his men. "I'd do anything for that man; I'd follow him anywhere," said Pvt. Vitalone. "If you were out there, he was always either with you or ahead of you," says Private Knowles. "I was supposed to be first scout, but he was always the first in everything," said Pvt. George Mentzer.

Ten minutes before the company jumped off on 2 October, Lt. Cushman had received a telegram announcing the arrival of his baby boy. The men figured that was one of the reasons he hurried the platoon so fast that day, because he said laughingly that he was in a hurry to get it over and get back home. He moved his platoon so fast that they had no casualties until after they had taken their first pillbox.

Neither assault platoon had any casualties prior to moving down to the river. Going down the draw, the 1st platoon skirted the edge of the woods to the right, and the 2d platoon moved down the center of the draw. The 3d and weapons platoons moved down the left side of the draw.

By now the enemy was throwing in mortars and artillery, although more seemed to be descending on C Company over on the right. The enemy fire had little effect on the speeding assault platoons, but the 3d and weapon platoons both suffered some casualties when they stayed in position perhaps too long. They had the disadvantage of coming through at a time when the enemy had the area well adjusted for artillery, while the assault platoons rushed through so fast that they literally kept ahead of the enemy fire.

The first B Company casualty came just as the 2d platoon was crossing the north-south road on the outskirts of Marienberg. As Lt. O'Neil says, "Its only result was more speed-- we took off like big-assed birds."

The 1st platoon wheeled south at the edge of the clump of woods bordering the draw, then turned sharply southeast on a beeline for the river. The 2d platoon wound through a slightly longer route on the left, but the speed was still high. There was a single-strand barbed wire across the open space before reaching the river, but infantry wire-cutters speedily took care of this.

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When the 2d platoon ~~reached~~ the river, the men started to complain that they were ~~had~~ tired from the fast pace, and the load of carrying the ladders. Lt. O'Neil ^{said:} "Lt. Borton yelled 'Let's go, guys', and ran down across the north-south road and on toward the river. I was behind him. For some unknown reason everybody stopped at a wire fence which ran north-south across our route. The shelling got heavier. Men were getting killed all around me... I picked up a shovel and smashed it down on the wire fence yelling: 'Jesus, let's get out of here.' " Lt. Borton ran to the river, waded across and slammed one of the bridges firmly on the far bank. In the training area, three 15-foot ladders had been used, placing two in the stream as a V-shaped base and using the third over the top fork the walking surface. But after

Lt. Borton had plunged into the Wurm River and put the ladder from bank to bank, he jumped out of the water, put his hands on his hips and turned around toward his men with the words: "There's your god-damned bridge."

In the 1st platoon area, Pvt. Slater relates that a single bridge was also used for the crossing. In this case, a 15-foot length was used, and because it did not stretch far enough out of the water the men of the 1st platoon double-timed across in about four inches of water.

Meanwhile, the 81mm. mortars and heavy machine guns of "D" Company were delivering supporting fires. After delivering their fires preparatory to the jumpoff, and when the infantry had moved to the river, the heavy mortars displaced forward to the western edge of Marienberg on the north side of the main road and fired on pillbox #2 in the 1st platoon sector and pillboxes 3 and 7 in the 2d platoon sector. The heavy machine guns of the 1st platoon of D Company were all supporting B Company directly, and they set up at the edge of the woods bordering the north side of the draw on the southern edge of Marienberg. Although enemy artillery fire caused six casualties among the heavy machine guns in this draw, they moved forward to the river and later along the west bank of the railroad track to continue firing at the pillbox embrasures and aid in the support of the assault squads.

The weapons platoon of B Company also aided the advance by delivering supporting fire. The machine gun section of the weapons platoon was set up initially on a rock pile just west of the north-south road which parallels the Wurm River. The machine guns were equipped with BAR bipods which had been attached in the hedgrow country instead of the ordinary tripods, to enable higher firing; in this case they enabled the

machine gunners to deliver overhead fire and sweep from the Marienberg bridge site all the way south to Pillbox #8. The second position taken by the machine guns was at the river crossing point, east of the river, with the guns concentrating on Pillbox #4 and the Palenberg area to the north. The guns then went to the ~~west~~^{west} bank of the railroad track and fired almost directly at Pillbox #4 while the 3d platoon was assaulting that box. The final position of the light machine guns was also on the west bank of the railroad track, some distance south, covering any threat in the 1st platoon area around the pillboxes. (See map.)

The mortars were set up for firing initially at the edge of the draw and woods southeast of Marienberg, firing on and around the pillboxes in the 2d and 3d platoon areas. "Of course a 60mm mortar shell would bounce off a pillbox like a peanut, but they caused the personnel in the firing trenches to duck inside the pillbox," explained Lt. Manley, the weapons platoon leader. The mortars displaced three times, the first time to the west bank of the river, then due east to the west bank of the railroad track, and finally south along the railroad track to a point opposite the 1st platoon sector; however, mortar fire ~~was~~^{was} throughout delivered on the pillboxes in the 2d and 3d platoon sectors.

Just as the ~~1st~~^{1st} platoon started to cross the river, two groups of Germans ran up to surrender-- six in one group and five in another. They had evidently been dug in not far across the river, because bullets had been churning up the water just before they ran out to surrender. They had no guns, and one was bald and helmetless; they yelled: "Ve iss Polanders; no Deutsch; no Deutsch."

The open area between the river and railroad track was well covered with artillery and mortar fire from enemy positions when the assault platoons hurried across. Some small arms and sniper

fire was encountered. On the houses in Palenberg and a few scattered shots from the woods to the right front, but this did not bother the men as much as the artillery. The 3d platoon and weapons platoon, pinned down at the edge of the draw, began to lose some men when they stayed in an area where the artillery was coming in heavier. The situation was complicated when radio contact between the 3d platoon and Capt. Spiker was lost. *Both platoons* ~~The whole left side of the line~~ wavered.

Continuing his mad pace, Lt. Cushman worked his way up to a hedge bordering the railroad track and personally cut the single-strand barbed wire to allow his platoon to advance. "Where in ~~X~~ Hell is that assault squad?" yelled Lt. Cushman as Pvt. Youenes and his assistant flamethrower, Pvt. James Smith, came puffing up. Cover was lacking in the field west of the railroad track, but some men secured concealment by sneaking around some of the cows that had been disemboweled by the shelling. This roundabout route, along with the fact that there was only one gap in the barbed wire, accounted for the fact that Lt. Cushman had to yell for his assault squad.

One by one, Lt. Cushman and his assault group sprinted across the railroad tracks and flopped down in defiladed positions in the beet fields just across the tracks. *In crossing the railroad tracks, they met only a small amount of s.a. fire.* They were lucky; they did not know it at the time, but later the engineers removed several shoe mines and booby traps from these beet fields. The charmed life which accompanied the 1st platoon stayed with it. Lt. Cushman then directed: "Bring up that support," and the support squads crossed the track and quickly took up ~~positions~~ positions along the east side of the railroad track directly facing the pillboxes on the right side of the company sector. The platoon leader had done a remarkable job in herding his boys across the railroad track less than forty-five minutes from the time they had left the line of departure.

The 2d platoon had a little more difficulty between the river and the railroad track, because of the intense artillery and mortar fire, but they ran the 1st platoon a close second in getting up to the embankment. Crossing the railroad was more difficult for the 2d platoon because the small-arms fire from the left was directed to a greater extent at this sector.

shifted

The 1st platoon ~~shifted~~ into high gear after crossing the railroad track, and proceeded to reduce and neutralize five pillboxes with the loss of one man killed and one slightly wounded. There were many outstanding individual performances in accomplishing this feat. There was also some excellent teamwork.

A flamethrower contributed materially to the taking of the first two pillboxes. Pvt. Brent Youenes, with only two or three hours of practical work with the weapon, used it effectively. On the speed railroad track, journey to the ~~pillbox~~ Pvt. James Smith carried the flame thrower and then Youenes took it over in the final rush up to the first pillbox. Youenes was a fearless character who was "interested" in an inquisitive way in what it would feel like to be that close to the breaching of the Siegfried Line; hence he had volunteered for the job, or had come as close to volunteering as the army system works on such choices. He is a University of Washington and ASTP product, sharply observant and aggressive. A minute after crossing the track, he ran up to Pillbox #6 and squirted two bursts into the front embrasure from a distance of ten

He was lucky. No enemy dared uncover himself to fire at Youenes as he sprinted up to the pillbox.

Pvt. Willis Jenkins then rushed forward when the flame had cooled, placed a pole charge, on the run, through the embrasure and ducked off to the right to wait for the explosion. "I taped the ign just before crossing the railroad track," explained Jenkins. "I was damned tired from running a mile with all that poundage that I didn't

filled the igniter and have any time to think. But I put it right into the pillbox and I'm sure it did its work."

The support squad stormed up the beet fields and did excellent work in covering Youenes and Jenkins. "It was great to watch," describes Pvt. Richard Ballou, an ammunition-bearer in the weapons platoon. "I was dug in back at the river, and we all said: 'Those infantrymen have guts.' They were walking up the hill just as though they were going up to greet somebody and we really prayed for them." Pvs. Vitalone and Sgt. Billings were left to guard Pillbox #90 after the pole charge went off, and they were told to stay there until relieved by Company "A". Vitalone was standing behind Billings in one of the rooms of the pillbox, when he happened to notice some movement through a ~~xxx~~ firing slit into the next room. Suddenly jerking Billings backward, Vitalone fired a shot which wedged between the metal frame and the door and then curved downward. Summoning a German prisoner taken earlier, Vitalone had him go in to persuade the others to surrender, and five Germans soon filed out shaking and saying: "Kamerad."

With Pillbox #90 reduced, Pvt. Youenes started to the left and across the road toward #2. He transferred his flamethrower to Pvt. Smith at this point. He had just started for #2, when he observed two German helmets outside of Pillbox #6 south in the A and C Company sector, and a German light machine gun opened up on members of the support squad. Sgt. Daniel ~~_____~~ Preston killed one of the men, a corporal, with a rifle shot and the other ^{German} entered the pillbox. Three ~~of these men were~~ ^{men,} Sgt. Radzio, Pvt. Isadore Polansky and ~~Sgt.~~ Pvt. Jandreau, then crawled up along the edge of the woods to approach the pillbox from the blind side on the south. Lt. Cushman and the support squad were covering the advance. Pfc. Herschel D. Jones of a BAR team fired a rifle grenade into the dirt

in front of the pillbox, being afraid to aim too high lest the grenade strike above the ~~entrance~~ ^{embrasure} and explode in his face. Radzio and Polansky crept up to throw grenades, and Jandreau rounded the pillbox with a satchel charge. Cpl. John Curtis and Sgt. Fred Burke rushed up to the right side of the pillbox, armed with smoke and hand grenades. Radzio threw his first grenade at the pillbox, but it turned out to be a yellow signal smoke; he cursed whoever had "figured that a pillbox was just like one of our airplanes-- to wave at", and then threw a live grenade into the front embrasure. Polansky started prancing around on top of the pillbox; part of the prancing may have been due to a bullet wound which Polansky would not admit he had in his thigh, but he threw a grenade down the ventilator.

Meanwhile, Youenes, who had started for Pillbox #2 with Pvt. ^{Carrying} Smith the flamethrower, had observed the sunlight flashing on the two German helmets and the resulting commotion. He turned to the platoon sergeant, T/Sgt. "Big Mac" McClurkin, who was peppering rifle fire in the general direction of Pillbox #6 and said: "Don't shoot us, Mac." "Don't worry, boy, I won't, I won't," replied "Big Mac", and Youenes, Smith and the flamethrower started over to aid the assault on Pillbox #6. Polansky was on the top of the box and Radzio near the front when Youenes and Smith came up; Polansky was warned to watch out for exposing himself to small-arms fire in his silhouetted position; he got down, and then Youenes held the nozzle of the flamethrower and gave the front opening a long burst. Jandreau slammed a satchel charge into the rear door, which was open and evidently could not be closed. As observed subsequently, this satchel charge ripped ragged holes around the edges of the concrete just inside the door.

Youenes started around to the rear by going to the left of the pillbox, with Smith two feet behind him toting the flamethrower. "I

figured that there must be an opening in the ceiling rear, and decided to give that a burst, which I did when I rounded the pillbox. The only result was a feeble 'Ph-t, ph-ht-tt' of escaping nitrogen. Just then I saw the blurred head of a German officer come out of the pillbox and he fired three shots with his pistol, killing Smitty. When Smitty fell he jerked me backward with the flamethrower. As I struggled to get ahold of my rifle, which Smitty had, the officer fired two more shots into Smitty and shortly after that started hightailing it over toward Pillbox #90. I tried to get my bloody rifle out of Smitty's hands, but he was clenching it too tight, and it was the first time I had ever gotten sick at the sight of blood."

The officer, helmetless and wearing a sweater, stumbled out along the ridge, arms and legs akimbo. Radzio screamed: "He killed Smitty, the son of a bitch, he killed Smitty, he killed Smitty." Everybody within sight fired at the officer. Lt. Cushman knelt down, took cool and deliberate aim, and fired. Youenes and Jandreau alternated with Jandreau's rifle, struggling to try and get as many shots as possible. After the officer was wounded, Lt. Cushman said: "All right, don't shoot a wounded man," but the suggestion went unheeded and the officer was riddled with bullets even after he was dead.

"Hey, lieutenant, now I've got a pistol for myself," chirped Pfc. Edwin Knowles, a rosy-cheeked, bespectacled youngster who was first scout of the support squad. "Oh, f--k the pistol and get over there to the right of Pillbox #6," was the reply, for there was still work to be done in cleaning it out. If the Germans had seen what happened to their officer, it is the consensus that they would not have come out so peacefully, but six filed out and were sent back to the rear. Youenes and Jandreau were left to guard the pillbox.

The 1st platoon now turned its attention to Pillbox #2. Somebody remarked to the platoon leader that the 1st platoon had already

taken two pillboxes, but Lt. Cushman joked: "Well we haven't actually taken any of those assigned to us yet."

Pvt. Jenkins was the spearhead in the taking of Pillbox #2. Jenkins was the coolest individual in the lot. While all the yelling, noise and excitement was going on, Jenkins was looking around for another demolition to use on the next pillbox. He had already used his pole charge, and Jandreau had used his satchel charge; the second satchel charge man had been lost or borrowed by another platoon. There only remained the second pole charge, and Jenkins found it near Pillbox #9 where Pvt. Vitalone had dropped it. "Could you blame me?" asked Vitalone. "I ran for a mile with five bandoliers of ammunition, 4 anti-tank grenades, 2 regular grenades, 1 rifle-launcher, and 1 pole charge. Could you blame me for dropping the pole charge when I had to fire my rifle and throw some grenades?"

Jenkins was tired himself after the long run, but lost no time in running toward Pillbox #2. He rounded the left side of the box and thrust the pole charge into the embrasure. The explosion tore a hole about eight inches in diameter, into which Jenkins pitched several grenades while Cpl. Curtis went around to do the same thing at the rear. The Germans offered no resistance at this pillbox. #8

The entire platoon was now swarming around ~~the other~~ pillbox and there was no opposition from within. The supporting fires had done their work in keeping enemy firers away from the embrasures, the mortar and artillery had driven defenders inside the pillbox, the concussion intimidated those inside, and now hand grenades were plentifully used as the final persuasive gesture. The 1st platoon by less than two hours after the jumpoff had reduced all opposition in five pillboxes.

Lt. Borton's 2d platoon on the left was proceeding with its work of attacking the pillboxes assigned-- #3 and #7. 1st Sgt. Grady

Workman led the assault echelon of 16 men, whose attack was spear-headed by the flame-thrower, Pvt. Victor Kuinis, and two pole-charge carriers, Pvts. Harold Zeglien and Merle Hasenkamp. While the support group under the direction of T/Sgt. George Dail moved up to the railroad tracks and deployed as a line of firers on the two pillboxes, Kuinis, Zeglien and Hasenkamp led the double-time charge across the beet patch, ~~and~~ the rest of the assault echelon followed.

The weapons platoon, heavy weapons company, and artillery had done their work well, for no fire was received from ^{either} ~~any~~ of the pillboxes. The work of the supporting elements seemed to have taken most of the fight out of the occupants of the pill boxes who had been cowed and retired to the living quarters without offering opposition.

Initially, all sixteen of the assault group concentrated their attention on #3, the left pillbox, and the coup de grace was delivered by Zeglien, who placed his pole charge in the embrasure facing west. Following the detonation, four Germans ran from a rear door of the pillbox and started through the shallow communications trenches toward the south. A yell from Sgt. Dail halted the quartet and they gave up.

At this point, Sgt. Dail switched the fire of his supporting riflemen toward the right pillbox, #7, and Lt. Borton and Sgt. Workman also turned their attention to the second objective. Pvt. Hasenkamp moved over rapidly and placed his pole charge at the embrasure on the northwest side of the pillbox. Realizing that the main portion of the pillbox was not manned and the occupants were huddled into the living quarters, Pvt. Gregory worked his way into position to fire a bazooka round into the doorway of the living quarters. This round failed to do any damage, but it seemed to irk somebody inside and for the first time the enemy fired from the pillbox. An unfortunately well-placed machine gun bullet killed Pvt. Gregory for the only fatality which the 2d plato

suffered all day.

At this time, Capt. Spiker arrived on the scene with his operations sergeant, Sgt. Theodore Lassoff. Unaware that the living quarters were still occupied, Capt. Spiker started to move around the right of the pillbox and once again the machine gun opened up from the rear and Capt. Spiker hit the ground just in time. Sgt. Lassoff, who spoke German, then directed a German prisoner to go in and tell the occupants that if they didn't come out and surrender, they would be burned to death with the flamethrower. The reply came back that they would come out if they were given cigarettes when they emerged. Capt. Spiker agreed to this deal, and then when ~~some~~ nine prisoners came out of the pillbox, Capt. Spiker obliged ^{only} the German who had done the persuading with one single cigarette. The others had a plentiful supply of German cigarettes inside the pillbox, but apparently had reasoned that if they were promised tobacco the Americans would not kill them.

The last of the eight pillboxes which B Company reduced was #4, and it caused the 3d platoon ^{a great deal of} ~~much~~ trouble, ~~then any of the~~ ~~pillboxes which the other platoons had neutralized.~~ The 3d platoon was in a weakened condition as a result of the pasting it had received from mortar and artillery fire, and it was disorganized for a brief spell by the breaking of communication with the company, and the loss of its platoon leader, Lt. Whitney Refvem. A large amount of small-arms fire coming from the Palenberg railroad station had held up the advance of the platoon, and when this was cleaned out and the advance elements of the platoon had built up along the west bank of the railroad, Lt. Refvem was badly wounded. He called for his platoon sergeant, T/Sgt. Howard "Tony" Wolpert, who had previously been designated to lead the assault group and was then waiting in a wooded area just east of

the river, to come up alone. Sgt. Wolpert states that he covered the 200 yards of open territory to the railroad in "nothing flat". Realizing the extent of his injuries, Lt. Refvem ordered Sgt. Wolpert to take over the platoon and suggested that he move along the west side of the railroad bank and contact Capt. Spiker for any additional orders as to how to assault Pillbox #4.

Sgt. Wolpert did a capable job of reorganizing the scattered elements of his platoon. He was an old hand at the army game, having been in the infantry for 11 years and possessing a permanent T/Sgt. rating. He knew his men and their capabilities, and knew where a few words would do the most good in reducing the confusion. It took only a few minutes and a few orders to make the 3d platoon once again a smooth-functioning machine.

Capt. Spiker directed Sgt. Wolpert to bring his platoon over the route which the sergeant had just covered in moving south along the railroad track. Pillbox #4 had embrasures that permitted firing only to the north and west, so Capt. Spiker directed that the 3d platoon move up ~~as~~ as far as the Palenberg-Rimborg road, then pivot left and move north against what was evidently the blind side of the pillbox. By this time, the 1st and 2d platoons had reduced the pillboxes in the area along the Palenberg-Rimborg road.

Sgt. Wolpert sent the support ahead single file and well-dispersed to build up a ~~gun~~ line generally along a hedge running east-west about 100 yards from the pillbox. At this point, S/Sgt. Walter B. Webb fired a rifle grenade at the southwest corner of the pillbox, but it failed to produce a result or reaction. T/Sgt. Albert "Old Man" Maudice deployed eight riflemen along this hedge and delivered small-arms fire at the sides of the pillbox. The flamethrower was carried by Pvt. Andrew Chuckalovchak and operated by Pvt. Henry E. Hansen.

Hansen tested the flamethrower before he moved out, and then advanced to the south side of the pillbox. Hugging the wall, he worked around to the west side. "Two squirts ^{in the embrasure} ~~did~~ the trick there," stated Hansen. He then went to the north side and gave that embrasure two additional squirts. Both Hansen and Chuckalovchak decided it would be expedient to return at this point, but Hansen, after he had reached the south side of the pillbox, decided to take a quick look at the rear (east) side again. One German seemed to be lying in wait there for him, with raised pistol. Hansen was in position to burn the German from the rear. One squirt caused the enemy to whirl and one more full in the face caused him to pitch forward into the open door of the pillbox.

Pvt. Edward O'Brien then advanced on the run with his pole charge, which he thrust into the ~~door~~ ^{door} on the ~~west~~ ^{east} side. As he was returning, he passed Pvt. Freeman Hansen on a dead run with a satchel charge heading for the pillbox. O'Brien and everybody around him yelled for Hansen to stop, but he said "I didn't hear anybody yelling at me," and charged onward before O'Brien's pole charge had gone off. There was a faint pop when the pole charge went off, causing little damage and not injuring Hansen. "Then I threw my satchel charge into the rear door," said Hansen, "and there was a terrific explosion, with wood, dirt and metal flying into the air." Pvt. O'Brien said: "I had expected Hansen's arms and legs to come ~~com~~ ^{come} flying back at us when he ran into that pole charge, but what probably happened was that only 3 lb. of the TNT in the pole charge actually went off, and then the satchel charge set off the rest."

Two riflemen then charged the open doorway into which the satchel charge had been tossed, and a rifle shot fired by Pvt. Andrew Svetlowics ricocheted off and caused Pvt. Nauss to be a casualty.

Following this, Pvts. Svetlowics and ~~Ray~~ Ray Casto were left to guard the pillbox. The others had proceeded toward a reorganization point, when Hansen decided it was no use carrying away a flame-thrower with anything left in it, so he went back with Chuckalovchak and sprayed the embrasures until the weapon was empty. About fifteen minutes later, Casto noticed some smoke and flame coming out of the rear door; he had heard ammunition popping inside, and suspects that is what caused ten Germans to surrender. They were turned over to F Company, which by now had ~~reached~~ reached Palenberg and was moving north toward the Marienberg-Palenberg bridge.

The 3d platoon then reorganized and moved south to reestablish contact with the 2d platoon; a gap of 150 yards between the two platoons was filled by shifting a squad of the 3d platoon over to the right.

While the 1st and 2d platoons were waiting for the 3d to clean up its resistance, the two great platoon leaders, Cushman and Borton, compared notes on the day's operations in the ^{1st} ~~2d~~ platoon's CP. There was a friendly rivalry between the two in comparing results, but the boys of the 1st platoon said, in the words of Pvt. Youenes: "We felt pretty proud, and we know that Lt. Cushman felt proud too that we got out five before they did." Cushman got up suddenly and said: "Comon, Don, get that fighting 2d of yours and let's get on to our objective." So they moved on.

The day's fighting produced some amusing incidents of what men may do when fighting a bitter battle. Pvt. Ballou of the weapons platoon, with heavy artillery fire dropping all around him, took out pad and pencil and made an elaborate drawing of how the river, railroad track and pillboxes looked to him from the banks of the river.

Sgt. Lloyd Hamilton stopped short in the open field between the river and the railroad track, removed his pants and complied with the strictest principles of field sanitation while answering nature's call amid a steady barrage of artillery. "I wasn't scared, it was just necessity," stated Sgt. Hamilton when interviewed 29 days after the event.

Pvt. Youenes, after he had sprayed the first pillbox with his flame-thrower, had a sudden urge to zero in his M1 rifle; he suspended operations long enough to fire three or four shots against the side of a neighboring pillbox, making the necessary adjustments before proceeding with his mission.

Casualties for the day's operations were heaviest in the left side of the line, where the 3d platoon and the weapons platoon had been caught in the mortar and artillery fire. The assault platoons between them ~~suffered~~ suffered only two killed and eight wounded in reducing seven pillboxes. The remainder of the casualties in the company were one killed and eighteen wounded, distributed about equally between the 3d and weapons platoons.