

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARDEENES
SALIENT

The material for this historical monograph was gathered mainly from personal notes, made of the following activity, and the direct commanding the units. The 517 Parachute Combat Team was inactivated upon its return to the United States with U.S. Day. No after-action reports could be obtained by the writer as a broader view of the operation may have been discarded.
 could? written

The writer was, at the time of this action, the Platoon Sgt. of the Light Machine Gun Platoon, Headquarters Company, First Battalion, 517 Parachute Combat Team and was present during the entire action.

Note: put this P. on the table
 Check, under duties & assignment of
 Writer.

TOCCOA, GA
517 PRCT TRAINING CAMP



1945
1945

PREFACE:

R.L.

The combat operations of the 1st Bn. of the 517 Parachute Assault Sqd. lead from Italy ^{Part} _② to the invasion of Southern France through the M. M. Alps, and through Belgium and into Germany. The period covered in this Monograph covers perhaps the most arduous stretch of this long trail, the beginning of the "Grandes Salients". The 1st Bn. fought in its assigned sector and in staying the German advance, advancing through Marshal VON RUNDSTEDT's great counter-offensive of December 1944. This Monograph does not cover the entire period of the "Battle of the Bulge", but only the middle of the battle as regards the G. front of the Division. Following this period, the 1st Bn. rejoined the Combat Team and fought until February 1945 in the reduction of the salients.

NARRATIVE OF OPERATIONS

1ST BATTALION

517 PARACHUTE INFANTRY COMPANY

21-26 DECEMBER 1944.

Situation:

In the latter part of 1944 the German Army broke through the thin American lines in Western Europe during a demonstration of a "blitzkrieg" since 1940. The break through came in **EASTERN** Belgium, during a period of the worst weather that soldiers had known for about 50 years. This was the plan of the German High Command, make use of the bad weather to neutralize the Allied Air Forces which could stop such an attack before it could gain momentum. By utilizing the Allied Air Superiority might & the bad weather, as the Russians had done before, and by choosing a weak place in the battlefield the attack might well go to **LIEGE** Belgium, where the bulk of American supplies lay. By capturing such a wealth of material the troops could be pushed on to **PARIS**, the plans were to recapture **PARIS** before Christmas. These were well founded plans and excellent strategy. Excellent fighting troops were gathered from German forces on the front. When such specialized troops were obtained and their moral and equipment boosted to great heights the attack was begun -

At this time the 517 Parachute Infantry Combat Team was engaged in normal training at **SOISSONS** France. On 18 Dec. 44 the Regt. was alerted by **XVIII** Corp (Airborne) to be prepared to move on a two hour notice. The Regiment remained on an alert status through 19 & 20 Dec., 1944 and on 21 December 1944 received orders to move to **NAMUR**, Belgium.

21 December 1944

The 1st Bn motor convoy departed 501550N at 1800 with orders to proceed to NAMUR, Belgium where further orders were to be issued. The Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. BOYNE preceded the Battalion and at NAMUR received orders to proceed to 50Y, Belgium, and to report to Col X ~~at~~, 3rd Armored Division.

22 December 1944

The Battalion Convoy arrived at NAMUR at 0400 and then the Bn. was then moved from 4200 to the vicinity of 50Y, Belgium, where the Bn. was ordered to proceed. Three trucks were missing from the convoy, having stopped out because of mechanical trouble, and instructions were left to have these trucks proceed to 50Y. Company "C" was ordered to proceed to the 3rd Armored Div C.P. to report to Maj. Gen MAURICE ROSE. Very little information could be obtained from the staff officer, except that the situation remained vague and apparently the advance of the German forces had not been checked.

At 1600 the Battalion detrucked in the wooded area northeast of 50Y (426-716 - see attached map). The town of 50Y, in which was located the C.P. of the CCR, 3rd Armored Div, was receiving heavy and continuous artillery fire.

Lt. Col. BOYNE furnished the following information. The towns of MARCHE and LA ROCHE had been engulfed by German armor. HOTTON, manned by 3rd Armored Headquarter troops, had been bypassed and surrounded; German armor was moving astride the the main highway

with the 84 Infantry Division and none on the left with the 82 Airborne Division. Col X was holding SOY and HOTTON with depleted force (armored) which had met and momentarily stopped the German forces in their tracks.

The 1st Battalion was ordered ~~to~~ immediately to attack at 1715 along the highway leading S.W. from SOY to HOTTON. The gravity of the situation was so severe that no rest could be considered although they had been traveling for 23 continuous hours; no time could be used to prepare a hot meal.

The Battalion moved to SOY, and crossed the line of departure, the North-South road through SOY, and jumped off in the attack toward HOTTON.

Effective strength of the Battalion present at this time was

COMPANY	OFFICERS	MEN
HEADQUARTERS	8	153
"A"	10	141
"B"	11	131
"C"	3	29
TOTAL	<u>32</u>	<u>454</u>

(6 Officers and 117 C.M. of Company "C" had been detached and reported to Gen. Rose at Hignean)

Enemy forces had cut the 504-HOTTON highway and were well dug in in the woods on the commanding ground around the R.S. at HAID-HITS. The mission of the 1st Bn was to capture this commanding ground; to capture the high ground at 50R-LES-HYS, commanding the road net at HOTTON; to clear the woods on each side of the road; to establish an M.K.R. between 504 and HOTTON; and to break through to the HOTTON Garrison.

(It might be of interest to the reader at this point to state briefly the equipment of this unit, in view of the mission to be performed)

Vehicles - 1 Jeep for messenger and evacuation.

Rifles	-	260	} The crew served weapons personnel carry carbines for the most part. The no. of 30cal. carbines in this case was about 110
BAR	-	19	
LMG	-	12	
60mm mortar	-	6	
81mm mortar	-	4	
ROCKET LAUNCHERS	-	10	

Organic in the 1st Bn. are medics - 3 per rifle Co. and a Bn. Aid Sect. (A Communications platoon)

The Battalion moved west to point (406897) (see map) Company "A" leading, Company "B" echeloned to the left. The remains of Company "C" were used as a reserve force. Headquarters Company 81mm mortar platoon into position at (492897). At this point enemy fire was received from machine gun emplacements at 405893, 399891 and 397895. Flat trajectory fire was received from approximately (399890) and (396895) from an estimated six (6) self-propelled guns, possible tank fire. Artillery and mortar fire fell over the entire area.

company

Lt. Col. BOYLE ordered Co "B" to move across the road to the South, Deploy and attack on the left flank. Co "B" in the action to follow reduced two (2) machine gun positions and killed or drove out a platoon of enemy from positions at (465 893) but drew on attack from six (6) tanks. One tank was knocked out and the others were forced into retirement. The reason is not apparent for the heavy armor was impenetrable to our rocket launcher. The one damaged tank resulted from a lucky hit.

Weather for the period - Freezing with snow flurries
Terrain. & Up to this point the En. had moved only a short distance because the terrain was bare of trees and the ground only gently sloping, affording practically ~~nothing in the way of~~
no cover and concealment.

ON 23 DECEMBER 1944

* At about 0030, it was felt by Lt. Col. BOYLE that continued frontal assault on these excellently prepared positions would be a needless waste of time and life. He was granted permission from Col X to take Company "A" into HOTTON by the road leading through NY. For this move (4) medium tanks and (2) halftracks were placed at the disposal of Lt. Col. BOYLE & 2 Platoon of Co "A" and the section of LMG's (4) moved to and mounted the vehicles. The remainder of the Battalion, under the command of the Executive Off. Maj. FRASER was disposed of as follows, Co "C" (32 men) to the high ground overlooking R. D. at (416 892) and to supply protection for five of our tanks (Bro Div) that were concealed in a position north of the road; Company "B"; and 1 platoon of Co "A" were to move to position at (710 900); All to be prepared to launch

attack toward HOTTON along the 307 - HOTTON R.R., jumping off from the vicinity of 405901. At 403899 German self-propelled, high velocity guns, that had been used as anti-personnel guns the previous night, opened up from wooded positions to the S.W. and within a few minutes six (6) of the tanks were knocked out. At the same time heavy mortar concentrations were laid down by the Germans further wounding tankmen and the supporting paratroopers. The entire remaining force assembled in the woods at 400900 picked their wounds and again continued the determined push through the wooded area, south, along the railroad. This was extremely thick undergrowth and not suitable for tanks. The remaining tanks returned to the vicinity of 304.

Throughout the second night of continued fighting the "Fraser force" pressed the attack through increasingly dense undergrowth and scrub cedar bushes that limited visibility often to 10 yds and never more than 30 yds.

Casualties to date - 6 officers - 48 E.M.

Weather Near Zero

note.

Major Fraser had with him on 24 Dec 1944

187 men

With Major FRASER at this time were 187 officers and men from the three companies. The attack continued throughout the night with every inch of the wooded area between 400900 and 397891 fanatically defended by enemy fire groups in excellent prepared positions. Enemy strength was later

and the defenders killed in position. As a manifestation of the excellent morale and determined resistance to the enemy, the machine gunners, as they fired bursts at the attacking Americans, shouted loudly the words they had been taught "Merry Christmas, American Bastards." Although this German gesture was meant to disrupt the attack it greatly antagonized and encouraged the attackers for many had not realized that it was Christmas Eve and someone was going to pay it through the nose for the miserable conditions that were to make up a miserable Christmas. 50 enemy soldiers paid, with their lives in their foxholes. The remainder of the Germans beat a hasty retreat to new positions closer to HOTTON.

Capitalizing on this bloody success, the FRASER force regrouped at 0600, brought up two medium tanks and moved out. Two enemy tanks at 297890 wheeled on the force to open fire but were knocked out before one of our tanks before either could get their gun trained. The force continued on the north side of the road to HOTTON hampered by many snipers and hastily formed a main group of about squad strength. Advancing with marching fire, all resistance along the road held up and at point 287880 two self propelled guns firing on the "BOYKE force" in HOTTON were knocked out and the supporting infantry fled in ~~disorganization~~ ^{badly disorganized}.

By 1130 hours "FRASER force" had joined FORCE force in the outskirts of HOTTON, relieving most of the pressure on the beleaguered garrison.

at 1130 hours the battle continued in intense

wearied with two days and two nights of continuous fighting in freezing weather, the entire force pushed off to further clear the SOY-HOTTON highway, while the enemy was still reeling and disorganized. The remaining enemy did not stand to fight, but fled before the advancing 1st Bn. which overran the high ground at SUR-LES-HYS (395897) commanding ground overlooking HOTTON, and controlling the road net work at HOTTON. Company "B" and one platoon of Company "A" were left to occupy SUR-LES-HYS, to set up an MLR and to defend it against possible attack from the south. (A Pz. Division was reported en route to the town of HOTTON from the south, but, was intercepted by the American 84th Division before it could get there). At the road junction of HAID-HITS, six (6) German tankmen, fighting as infantry, were captured. Company "B" was further assigned the mission of establishing a road block at this point. It was later determined that the enemy who had thus far escaped probably with a view to the vicinity of WERDIN.

The remainder of the Battalion (2 plts of Co. "A" and 1 plt. of Co. "C" returned to SOY. The 1st Bn. Co. 81MM mortar plt. moved into SOY, 1/2 of the LMG plt was attached to "B" Co on the MLR.

Here these men received their first warm meal since departing SOISSOISS, France.

This group of the 1st Bn. was placed in reserve for the forces of Col X, which now included the 200th Infantry Regt, 75th Div. just attached.

The German drive to the North had been stopped, the forces in HOTTON had been relieved; enemy elements between SOY-HOTTON had been destroyed and the banks around

had been established from which an attack to the south could be launched. The mission of the 1st Battalion had been completely accomplished.

Total casualties since beginning of action

0-8 EM. 93

Weather - Freezing to Zero

The First Battalion began a well deserved breather, holding the line it had established and constituting Col X's reserve. The 2nd Infantry was to attack to the South.

25 December 1944

Just prior to midnight, 24 December 1944, the 2nd Infantry pushed off in a night attack from the 504. HOTTON MLR manned by Company "B", reinforced. Two Bns of the 298th were attacking abreast, southward, with objectives on the high ground at LA ROUMIERE OR FAGNE (406877) and the nearby town of WY. The 1st Bn of the 298th was assigned to the right objective and the 2nd Bn was assigned the left objective.

This regiment, part of the 75th Infantry Division was receiving its "baptism of fire" facing the fanatical, inspired troops of Marshal Jean Bastien-Lapierre in weather bitter cold and spitting with snow storms, had two strikes on it before it crossed the line of departure.

At 1200 hours, 25 December 1944 Col X informed Lt. Col BOYKE that the left Battalion had all but taken the town of WY, but that the right Battalion had failed to accomplish its mission. The regimental reserve battalion

failed to reach the objective and was badly disorganized.

Lt. Col BOYLE was given orders to attack and take the objective LA ROUMIERE ON FAGNE.

The assets of Col BOYLE consisted of Company "A" with 30 men, Company "C" with 21 men and 22 men of the LMG pl. (The 81mm mortar pl. went into position at 413897 the night before to support the MLR so it remained there). It was now vital for Company "B" to remain in its present position on the MLR. Col BOYLE made plans to attack the enemy position on the right flank with Company "A", Company "C" was to support. The two Battalions of the 390th were somewhere in the area south of the objective; it was reported that all soldiers of that unit that had reached the objective had apparently been killed.

At dusk the men of the First Battalion were on the objective, the enemy annihilated.

Jumping off from 417893 at 1700 hours, the First Battalion moved through the thickly wooded approaches from the northeast protected by artillery. Initial progress was slow, as the high ground was approached, due to intense small arms fire from machine guns, rifles, and a high proportion of machine pistols.

Knowing that to be pinned down would invite mortar fire, the men charged across the stream LISBENNE and up the slope through intense fire, engagement with the enemy was close enough for wide use of hand grenades. The Battalion, suffering the loss of 46 men, slashed through and folded up the enemy positions facing them, outflanked and made untenable all others and by 1730 regained the objective and reestablished the forward

Information from prisoners indicated that the objective was occupied by an enemy battalion reinforced. Further information, received from prisoners, taken later in the night, indicated that none of the occupying enemy troops escaped. An exact count of the enemy cannot be quoted inasmuch as the 1st Bn was relieved the following morning. The entire enemy Battalion was, as near as any one can discern, completely annihilated. The determination with which the German forces fought can be measured by the fact that not more than 15 prisoners had been taken by all of the attacking forces.

26 December 1944

The early part of the night was spent in patrolling in the wooded area, on the forward slopes, to wipe out the remaining scattered enemy groups. During the night Col. X placed Lt. Col. BOYLE in command of all the troops on the objective including the two Battalions of the 290th Infantry.

Col BOYLE with his staff and Company officers orientated each of the company commanders of the 290th Battalion, assisted them in reorganization, and placed them in defensive positions along the south edge of the woods on the objective. At 0600 as one of the companies was placed in position a counter attack was launched from the south by an estimated platoon; they were completely routed, fifteen (15) of them killed, and four (4) prisoners were taken, without loss. Enemy artillery fell on the hill throughout the remaining time that the First Battalion occupied the position.

At 0600 the First Battalion was informed

of the 290th on the hill; this relief was completely effected by 1600. The battalion was assembled from its position on the MNR-304-HOTTON Highway and LA ROUMIERE OR FAGNE and marched back to 304.

SUMMARY:

The First Battalion, 517 Parachute Infantry Center Team, called to action as the German offensive gained momentum, established a stable Main Line of Resistance in a 6000 yard front between 304 and HOTTON. In accomplishing its mission the 1st Battalion fought the greater share of three day and nights, in bitterly cold weather, without sleep, and with only a meagre amount of "K" rations; they stopped a fanatical, advancing enemy; they drove the enemy from their sector; they relieved the beleaguered town of HOTTON; on the fourth day the 1st Battalion was further committed in a critical situation which threatened to neutralize all it had done; it accomplished with only a handful of men a mission in which two battalions had failed and been repulsed.

In its victory, the unit, had paid a dear price of 157 casualties, but in doing so accounted for at least 210 enemy dead took 18 prisoners, knocked out 3 tanks and 9 self propelled guns, destroyed over the period, in actual engagement one of each of the following, a half track, an armored recon car, a walk wagon, and an ammunition truck.

400

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~~STATEMENT~~ OF OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "C"

ATTACHED TO "TASK FORCE KANE"

(The writer was not a part of Company "C".)

Company "C", 517 Parachute Infantry (less one platoon) was temporarily dispatched by Maj. Gen. MAURICE ROSE, Commanding General of the Third Armored Div., to join "Task Force Kane" on the evening of 22 December 1944. The company moved by truck, and arrived at FREYNEUX, Belgium, at 1900 hours that night.

The paratroopers found the Armored Task Force holding two small villages (NAMORMENIN and FREYNEUX) which they had taken during the afternoon. Lt. Col. KANE, commanding the task force, had received the mission of pressing the attack to the south and capture of the strategic road crossing at DOCHAMP, 3 miles distant. It was planned accordingly that the paratroopers would launch an immediate infantry assault, to be followed by the tanks when they reached their objective.

The difficulties confronting the paratroopers were numerous. They had to attack at night, over terrain not previously recognized, against an enemy which was revealed to be six times their strength, a determined reinforced Battalion of the Second SS Panzer Division. Nevertheless Company "C" moved out, with fixed bayonets, at 2200.

The paratroopers first encountered resistance at a wooded hill two-thirds of the way to the objective, on which an enemy platoon was serving as outpost for their main body. After an initial setback, caused by an enemy patrol to their rear, the paratroopers cleared the wood engaging in extremely close combat with

(2)

Killing sixteen (16) Nazis and suffering losses of one man killed and three (3) wounded. The company then proceed toward their objective.

The enemy held in force ^{pos. strength} the high ground surrounding the village, covering the open fields leading to it with grazing crossfire of machine guns. The paratroops were in plain sight, under a bright moon, and their dark uniforms stood out against the snow covered field.

As the company closed in on the objective the enemy machine guns opened fire, pinning them down in the open field. At the same time the flank security reported an enemy column moving against their right rear. Seeing that the element of surprise had been lost, that his seventy (70) men were out numbered, the Company Commander ordered a withdrawal to the wooded area they had left, where the paratroops dug in and prepared to renew the attack with tank support in daylight. Throughout the remainder of the night the small force received intermittent mortar and machine gun fire.

At dawn, an enemy force of approx. forty men launched a coordinated attack upon the American force from the rear. (It being very likely the column which the flank guards had reported during the night) The paratroops, momentarily surprised, opened to their weapons and dispersed the attack, killing thirteen (13) and capturing two (2). At this time a runner reported that the village of HAMORMENIK, a quarter of a mile to the east, was under attack and badly in need of infantry support. Without hesitation the paratroop took, under heavy small arms fire, to their march to the village and taking

elements in dispersing the enemy attack. The enemy then proceeded to Post Mark VI tanks on the high ground on three sides of LAMORMENIL, taking the town under accurate tank fire. As the day drew to a close, the task force commander, making an estimate of the situation, decided that continuation of the attack was impractical. The towns of FREYNEUX and LAMORMENIL, eight hundred (800) yards distant from each other, were organized for defense. However, no further enemy attack developed, during the night, although the tank fire continued to take its toll of horses and men.

During the night information was received from Higher Headquarters that the enemy armored drive had swept past and to the rear, capturing ODEIGNE to the east, MANHAY to the north, GRANDMENIL to the north and west, and LA FOSSE and LE BATTY to the west. The paratrooper-armored garrison was completely isolated.

Next day, 25 December 1944, the enemy launched a determined tank-infantry attack on FREYNEUX from the north (which was the direction of the friendly lines). The attack consisted of a Battalion of infantry supported by Tiger Tanks. The approaches to FREYNEUX were taken under machine gun fire from LAMORMENIL, but the enemy pressed on. A platoon of Company "C", under supporting 37mm. gun fire, moved out to the assistance of the beleaguered village of FREYNEUX. The enemy had succeeded in gaining a foothold in the outskirts of the village, desperate house to house fighting ensued, with the enemy finally dislodged. The Germans then took up positions in the woods close to the town and kept the streets hot with accurate sniper fire.

The Americans, in a command conference, then decided upon two plans of escape; (1) To burn the vehicles and infiltrate through the enemy lines in small groups; (2) To have the paratroopers mount the vehicles and fight their way out. It was decided that the latter plan was preferable; therefore immediate patrolling was begun by the infantry, and was carried on through the night and the following day, probing for a route of escape, or a soft spot in the enemy line. All of the patrols consisted of paratroopers, as they were the most experienced scouts present. Working day and night without food or rest, the small patrols reconnoitered in all directions, encountering enemy forces blocking all of the main roads.

At 1500 on the 26 of December the "break" was found. It consisted of a small trail through the heavy woods, west of LA FOSSE, held by a small group of enemy. The patrol returned immediately with their information, and based upon it, the plan for escape was made.

At 1900, 26 December 1944 supporting American Artillery threw down a heavy white phosphorous barrage (this barrage was radiolocated at about 1630) on three sides of LAMORMENIL and FRENEUX, effectively screening the area from observation. The paratroopers jumped on the tanks, determined to fight their way through. At LA FOSSE, the enemy group opened fire with small arms upon the leading vehicle, but was quickly dispersed by return fire. The entire column then passed through to the safety of the American lines.

Company "C" was then released from its attachment to the Task Force and proceeded to join the remainder of the Battalion.

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Before beginning his attack to HOTTON, Lt Col BOYDE had no time for a reconnaissance of the area. The Battalion was under constant ^{ambush} observation with the enemy from the time it detrucked until it became dark, during the approach march from the detrucking point to the line of departure the Brv. was fired upon by at least 2 heavy machine guns.

It was extremely necessary to launch the attack immediately in order that the enemy would not gain a better stopping stone to frustrate its attack to LIEGE Belgium, and to relieve the handful of troops who were bottled up in HOTTON. After leaving the P.D. the Battalion was in constant contact with the enemy until 26 December 44, except for the brief reprieve on Christmas Eve and the morning of Christmas day.

Surely the commanders of these units combined all of the known methods of attack to gain the objectives assigned, by combining fire, movement and shock action, by utilizing the terrain to attain maximum effect and to conserve personnel.

Except for the flanking of the German dispositions and moving through NY to HOTTON the attack may have been in vain or may have taken too long a time and been too costly in lives. The mass of the unit's means were not used to flank the German lines, but, the apparent reason for that decision rests on the lack of transportation, without which speed would have been hindered to a point that the element of surprise was lost.

The terrain advantages in both actions remained with the enemy in that he had

in the area and commanded all of the roads and open fields with predetermined final protection lines.

Again in the action on LA ROUMIERE ON FAGNE Lt. Col **Boyle** displayed wise judgment when he flanked the German strong point which had proved fatal to the elements of the 290th Inf. Regt. Once atop the objective had not an immediate reorganization taken place, the hill may have been lost again for it is thought that the small counter-attack by about 1 platoon was the sign of bigger things to come. However, when that attack failed the enemy fell back to another line of defense.

The commanding officer of Company "C" Capt **CHARLES E LA CHAUSSE** is again to be commended for his aggressive action in combatting such superior forces with the men and equipment at his disposal. Without the shock action of fire and movement employed by him the entire task force may have been lost.

CONCLUSION:

It is to be recommended to the reader, if this historical report reaches persons who are not acquainted with the battle of the Argonne, that the cards were all stacked against the American forces for the first few days. During the initial assault of VON RUNSTEDT, there was such a mighty rush to plug the hole in the American line that such items as food and sleep and anything else the troops were hardly thought of. The German troops had undergone such a period of suffering that it is a small wonder the first phase of the attack on MEUSE Belgium was not a complete success.

I do not believe, in view of the situation, namely the constant threat of superior and highly mobile forces and the ever present sleeping weather, that these aforementioned units could have been employed to a better advantage. With the means at his disposal Lt. Col. BOYLE with the aid of Major FRASER accomplished a spectacular task.