Cantigny Military History Series

Blue Spaders

The 26th Infantry Regiment, 1917–1967

Cantigny First Division Foundation

Blue Spaders

Cantigny Military History Series

Cantigny at Seventy-Five
A Professional Discussion
May 28-29, 1993

No Mission Too Difficult
Old Buddies of the 1st Infantry Division
Tell All About World War II
By Blythe Foote Finke

A Weekend With the Great War
Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Great War
Interconference Seminar
September 16-18, 1994

Normandy
Proceedings of a Conference
on the Events of June 1944
March 2-3, 1994

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The 26th Infantry Regiment 1917–1967

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Parts of "Mud Hampers U.S. Platoon's Fight With Viet Cong" by John Nance are reprinted by permission of Associated Press. The photograph in the Epilogue captioned "Colonel T. Roosevelt, commander of the 26th Infantry, welcomes his son, Second Lieutenant Quentin Roosevelt, Arty, to the 1st Division, April 1941" appears courtesy of Wide World Photos. It originally appeared in *Day Before Yesterday: The Reminiscences of Mrs.Theodore Roosevelt, Jr* (Doubleday & Co., New York: 1959).

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In Memoriam

Command Sergeant Major Theodore L. Dobol, USA

1915-1996

Editor's Note

Several maps and other graphics in this volume are close copies of the originals. Imperfections in the originals—e.g., smudges, barely legible notes, roughly drawn plots and sketches—have been faithfully reproduced herein. The intent in doing so is to convey a sense of time and place, consistent with letting those who were there tell the story. For the same reason, some quoted passages—operation reports, orders, and the like—are set in type identical to or resembling the typography of the original material. Because they were derived from a range of sources, graphics as well as quoted passages may vary as to the spelling of certain terms, place names, and proper nouns. Such differences, even in the case of obvious misspellings, have been retained, along with idiosyncrasies of style and usage. With few exceptions, German words—i.e., ranks, unit designations and abbreviations, proper nouns—are set in roman type.

Foreword

The 26th Infantry Regiment—"Blue Spaders"—has a long and illustrious history with the 1st Infantry Division. Assigned to the Big Red One shortly after the United States declared War on Germany in April 1917, the 26th has been with the division ever since, compiling a record in both war and peace that has earned it a reputation as one of the finest regiments in the United States Army. Not intended as a comprehensive regimental history, this book instead focuses on key events in the 26th's combat career, with a special emphasis on the men—enlisted and officers—whose courage, devotion to duty, and battlefield performance earned them and their unit lasting renown. For the most part these events and their participants, although well known in army history circles, have received scant coverage in popular histories. For example, the First World War Battle of Soissons, described here in detail because of the 1/26th's role in it, usually takes a back seat to accounts of the later Meuse-Argonne offensive. Similarly, the 26th's defense of Bütgenbach during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 is invariably overshadowed in print by the goings-on farther south at Bastogne; and the Battle of Ap Gu, fought in April 1967 near the Cambodian border northwest of Saigon, has, like so much of the combat history of the Vietnam War, been relegated—exiled might be a better word—to publishing obscurity.

History unwritten—and, needless to say, unpublished—is history forgotten. Hence the origin, and mission, of the Cantigny Military History Series. Sponsored by the Cantigny First Division Foundation, the series is the publishing arm of a comprehensive effort to preserve and promote the history of the 1st Division, including its component units and personnel, in the broader context of twentieth century history. As the latest addition to the series, *Blue Spaders: The 26th Infantry Regiment, 1917-1967* represents a valuable contribution to this effort. But more than that, this study provides a highly readable and often riveting account of one American military unit in which excellence was a common trait. To those who labored to bring this story into print, we are grateful for your effort.

John F. Votaw
Executive Director,
Cantigny First Division Foundation
Series General Editor,
Cantigny Military History Series
Spring 1997

Blue Spaders
The 26th Infantry Regiment, 1917–1967

Table of Contents

Preface

In 1901 Congress authorized five additional regiments of infantry for the regular army to meet the nation's new responsibilities overseas in Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico: the 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th and 30th. All five regiments subsequently served the army well. The 27th Wolfhounds of the 25th Division, the 28th Black Lions of the 1st and 8th Divisions, the 29th "school troops" at Fort Benning, and the 30th Rock of the Marne of the 3rd Division—each has earned a niche in army history and the respect and admiration of generations of American soldiers. But among these, the 26th Infantry Regiment's record stands apart. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the 26th Infantry was sent to the Philippines for two overseas tours, then to the Canadian and Mexican borders. In the years since, the regiment has served mainly with the 1st Division—the Big Red One. As part of that division, it fought for a combined total of five years in Europe during the two world wars, and for another five years in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam conflict. As an honored unit organic to the U.S. Army's most famous, most decorated division, the regiment has often been instrumental in fulfilling the division's much-repeated pledge: "No Mission too Difficult, No Sacrifice Too Great, Duty First."

In World War I the 26th Infantry was among the first American units to land in France. In World War II the 26th led the amphibious assault on North Africa, fought at Kasserine Pass, landed in Sicily, invaded Normandy on D-Day, and drove across Europe into Czechoslovakia. In Vietnam the Big Red One again led the way for the U.S. Army, with the first units arriving in July 1965. Thereafter the division dominated the main force war north and west of Saigon. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry served in combat in Southeast Asia for five years, from autumn 1965 through the summer of 1970—which, when added to the four years it served in the Philippines at the beginning of the century, amounts to nearly a decade of duty in Asia.

Most of the 26th's service overseas, however, has been in Germany. It occupied that country in 1918-19 and again in 1945-50. From 1950 through 1955 it helped form the nucleus around which NATO built its defenses. After its service in Vietnam, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry rejoined NATO forces as part of a forward deployed brigade of the Big Red One. During the 1980s the 26th Infantry was assigned to TRADOC (Training and Doctrine Command), where its battalions spent several years training recruits. But now, as the U.S. Army restructures for the twenty-first century, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry is again part of the 1st Infantry Division and again stationed in Germany.

Soldiers of the 26th Infantry have come to be known as "Blue Spaders" after their distinctive unit insignia, a stylized Indian arrowhead, in blue, on a white shield.

The history of the Blue Spaders is embodied in their regimental color, the dark blue flag the unit's honor guard carries beside the American flag in parades and ceremonies. Embroidered across the center of that flag is the American eagle, superimposed on which is the unit's heraldry. At the top of the color is

the crest, the sunburst of the Katipunan flag, symbolizing the regiment's service in the Philippine Insurrection. In the center of the sunburst is the arrowhead selected by Colonel Hamilton A. Smith, regimental commander from 1917 to 1918, as an emblem of the regiment's courage, relentless pursuit of an enemy, and resourceful daring—qualities he attributed to the Mohawk Indians. The shield across the eagle's breast is white and blue, with the battlements on it representing trench lines assaulted, and the five arrowheads standing for the major First World War divisional attacks in which the 26th played a leading role: Cantigny, Soissons, St. Mihiel, the Argonne Forest, and Sedan. On the white background of the shield is a palm leaf, the ancient reward for the victor, and the eagle holds in its beak the Latin blazon "Let Him Bear the Palm Who Has Won It." Attached to the top of the flagstaff are battle streamers and other decorations, "palms" earned in the following campaigns and battles:

CAMPAIGNS

World War I	World War II
Lorraine 1917	Algeria-French Morocco △
Lorraine 1918	Tunisia
Picardy 1918	Sicily △
Montdidier-Noyon	Normandy △
Aisne-Marne	Northern France
St. Mihiel	Rhineland
Meuse-Argonne	Ardennes-Alsace
	Central Europe
	△ *Arrowhead denotes amphibious assault*

Vietnam	
Defense	Counteroffensive Phase V
Counteroffensive	Counteroffensive Phase VI
Counteroffensive Phase II	Tet 69 / Counteroffensive
Counteroffensive Phase III	Summer-Fall 1969
Tet Counteroffensive	Winter-Spring 1970
Counteroffensive Phase IV	

DECORATIONS

Presidential Unit Citation (Army), Streamer embroidered STOLBERG

Valorous Unit Award, Streamer embroidered AP GU

French Croix de Guerre with Palm (WW I), Streamer embroidered AISNE-MARNE

French Croix de Guerre with Palm (WW I), Streamer embroidered MEUSE-ARGONNE

French Croix de Guerre with Palm, Streamer embroidered KASSERINE

French Croix de Guerre with Palm, Streamer embroidered NORMANDY

French Medaille Militaire, Streamer embroidered FRANCE

Belgian Fourragere 1940

Cited in the Order of the Day of the Belgian Army for MONS

Cited in the Order of the Day of the Belgian Army for EUPEN-MALMEDY

Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1965-1968

Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Medal, First Class, Streamer embroidered VIETNAM 1965-1970

This booklet is an anecdotal account of the 26th Infantry in three wars. It is neither a comprehensive history of the regiment, nor an accurate tracing of the unit lineage in accordance with the army's combat arms regimental system. Rather, presented here are brief descriptions of some of the personalities and formative events that have shaped the ideas, myths, and suppositions that distinguish this U.S. infantry unit from others. After all, an artillery battalion is defined by its guns, an armor battalion by its tanks, an engineer battalion by its construction equipment. In contrast, an infantry unit's distinctiveness has less to do with its equipment and organization than with intangibles: with the collective pride of its members in what those who served in the unit before them accomplished in battle, and with an attitude toward themselves and outsiders that is best captured by the word "personality."

In conflicts ranging from Europe to North Africa to Southeast Asia, the soldiers who served in the ranks of the 26th Infantry developed such a personality. Despite peril, hardship, and severe casualties, they never failed to perform their mission. In the First World War they fought through intense fire amid the squalid trenches, wire entanglements, and ruined towns of Picardy and Champagne, and, in the war's final weeks, assaulted the stoutly defended heights of the Argonne Forest. In the Second World War they stormed ashore in the amphibious invasions of Algeria, Sicily, and France; drove across the mountains and deserts of North Africa and through the hills of Sicily; and pursued the retreating Germans across France and Belgium to lead American forces into Germany itself. They resolutely defended the northern shoulder of the Bulge, then cut a swath across the heartland of Germany into Czechoslovakia. In Vietnam, they fought in tropical jungles, and there mastered airmobile operations and small unit patrolling. Time after time they mastered circumstances for which they had little prior training, and defeated enemies superior in numbers or equipment. Steady in all circumstances, determined in the attack, tenacious in the defense, those Blue Spaders were feared by their foes, relied on by their commanders, respected by their contemporaries, and revered by the veterans who served before them.

It is the purpose of this book to convey to those soldiers who wear the "Blue Spade" today some idea of what it was like to serve in the 26th Infantry in three eras:

- 1917 and 1918, during the First World War
- 1944 and 1945, during the Second World War
- 1966 and 1967, during the Vietnam War

Tens of thousands of Americans wore that distinctive unit insignia during those years. Among them, thousands were wounded or killed.

Live up to their deeds, Blue Spaders. Train so that, if ordered to battle, you surpass them.

Following are three chapters:

COURAGE (1917-1918)

RELENTLESS PURSUIT (1944-1945)

RESOURCEFUL DARING (1966-1967)

Paul F. Gorman
Afton, Virginia, 1995-1996

A rifle company of the 26th Infantry marching back from Soissons

Courage: Doughboys, 1917-1918

Over There: "Sturdy Rookies" in France

In 1915 U.S. cavalrymen stationed on the Mexican border called their infantry counterparts "adobes" because of the white road-dust that powdered over the uniforms, equipment, and faces of patrols afoot. In time, the label was foreshortened to "dobies," and thence became "doughboys." So it was that all American infantrymen who served in France in 1917-18 acquired the name used then and since by the press and American public.

Soldiers of the 26th Infantry Regiment did not refer to themselves as doughboys in the two years before the war when they were patrolling along the Rio Grande, around the towns and settlements near Brownsville, Texas, or along the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railroad. Nor did the unit later use the term in France in its official correspondence and unit history. But soldiers of that regiment were quintessential doughboys: part of the first American division to arrive in France, the 26th Infantry was first to enter combat, first to sustain a casualty, first to take the offensive, and first to enter Germany after the Armistice.

The men of the 26th Infantry were nominally regulars, their unit being one of the four understrength infantry regiments of the standing army hastily grouped after the declaration of war in April 1917 to form the 1st Expeditionary Division. At that time rifle companies of the 26th were manned by some sixty soldiers. These units were subsequently stripped of sergeants (who became officer candidates or trainers for draftees), then filled with volunteers, reservists, and transfers from other units of the standing force, thus raising company strength to 150 before shipment. After reaching France strength was raised again to 200 men, and then once more to 250, the difference being made up by fillers (including draftees) from the United States. By then the regiment's veteran regulars were so few in number that they could have been no more than a leavening for the citizen soldiers who had so greatly expanded its ranks. The 26th Infantry was, in every sense of the word, raw material.

In late June of 1917 the 1st Division landed at St. Nazaire, France, as the advance element of the American Expeditionary Forces, or AEF. (The AEF had dropped "Expeditionary" from the division's name to avoid confusion with its parent organization.) This proof of American resolve consisted of a contingent of thirteen thousand combat troops that included the 16th, 18th, 26th, and 28th Infantry Regiments, plus the 5th Marines. Most of the army troops knew almost nothing about soldiering. Two out of three privates, six out of ten noncommissioned officers, and five out of ten company commanders had no prewar military service. There had been virtually no pre-deployment training. Many riflemen would not be issued their weapons until boarding the train that took them to the embarkation port; machine gunners, artillerists, and other weapon crew members would have wait until they had crossed the Atlantic, when they would receive their arms from the French.

They were the vanguard of the mighty force of over two million Americans that followed in the next sixteen months, but they inspired little confidence among those who watched them debark, their broad-brimmed campaign hats bobbing as they shouldered

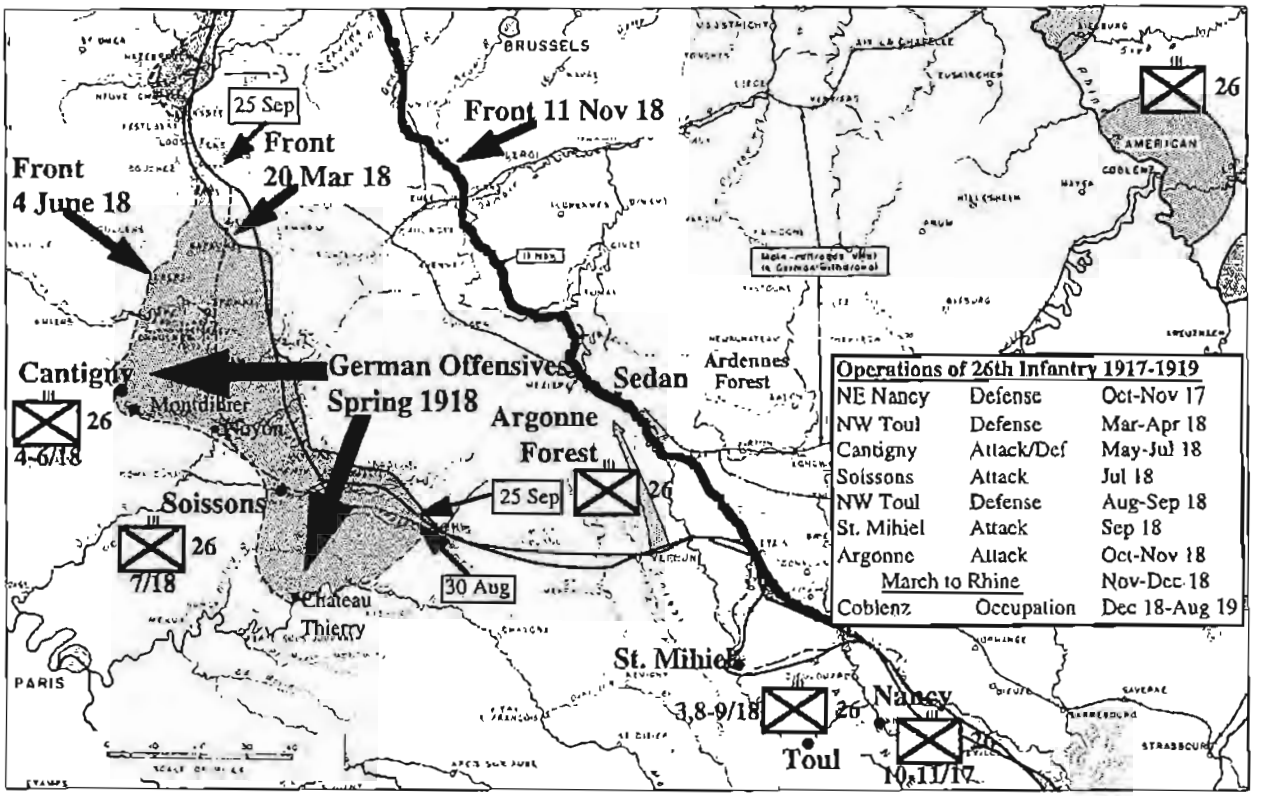


Fig. 1.1.

arms, awkwardly formed columns of four, and marched off in broken step to begin their training. Then-Captain George C. Marshall, among the first to step ashore in France, described the soldiers as "not impressive. Many of the men were undersized and a number spoke English with difficulty" (*Memoirs of My Services in the World War 1917-1918*, published in 1976 by Marshall's stepdaughter, Molly B. Winn). Similarly, Henry Russell Miller, who was also present at the division's debarkation, was gravely disappointed by its appearance, recalling that

> It did not look heroic. Physically it was less impressive than any other army outfit I have ever seen. In intelligence it was probably a little below the American average, in education certainly. It spoke a dozen tongues, and, I have no doubt, maltreated them as sadly as it did our own. Its manners were atrocious, its mode of speech appalling, its appetites enormous, its notions of why we were at war rudimentary, to say the least. (Henry Russell Miller, *The First Division* [1920])

But there were those present who recognized the potential of these men. Foremost among them was General John J. Pershing, the commander of the American Expeditionary Forces. A former commander on the Mexican border, Pershing saw them as "sturdy rookies" and promised that "we shall make great soldiers of them." Debarking with the 1st Division was Brigadier General Robert Lee Bullard, who, as a colonel, had commanded the 26th Infantry in Texas from 1914 to 1917, and who would be promoted to command the 1st Division in its early battles in 1918. After the war General Bullard wrote of the 26th that:

This regiment, for two years immediately before the war, had been stationed on the Mexican border, scattered in small detachments of from two men to two companies, over a dangerous region one hundred miles long by fifty miles wide. Never had soldiers a better chance to learn self-reliance, and they did learn it. Every man, however lowly his grade, had his function and practiced it, learned to take care of himself and others too. My orderly, a care-free, happy-go-lucky private, from this trial on the Mexican border, became in the war a First Sergeant of a company of two hundred and fifty men, and there were others like him. The regiment took to the war some six hundred of these men. Its old officers quickly disappeared by promotions early in the war; its enlisted men stayed. These, with their training and traditions of self-reliance, made the war regiment, the 26th Infantry of Soissons and Sedan. (Robert Lee Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War* [1925])

The 1st Division was to be the vanguard of the AEF in more than one sense, for Pershing and his staff were determined that the AEF's divisions would not be sent into battle piecemeal or untrained. Resisting Allied pressure to the contrary, Pershing kept the 1st Division under U.S. command and nurtured it through a rigorous training program. This regimen, which General Headquarters (GHQ) used as the model for all U.S. divisions, first put the neophyte American troops through four months of individual and small unit training before they were allowed to defend a quiet sector of the front. In the seven months that followed they alternated between trench duty and advanced unit training in "open warfare," after which they were sent into offensive action. In all that time the division also

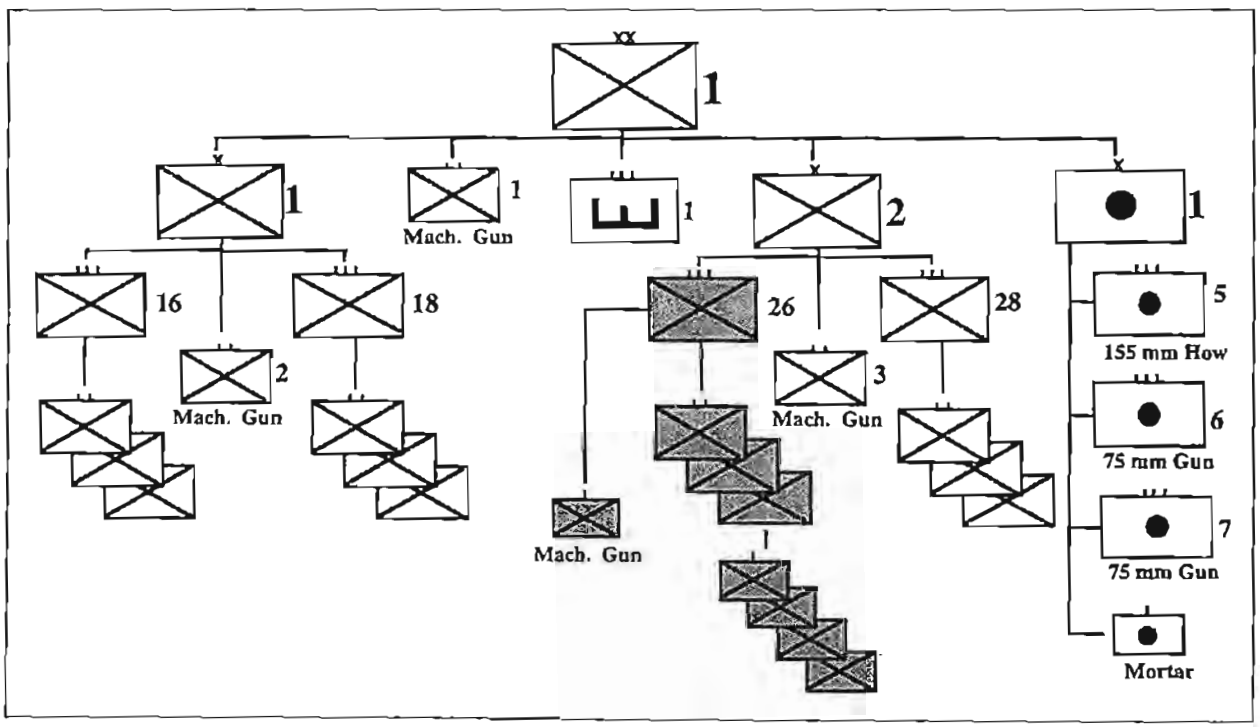


Fig. 1.2. Organization of 1st Division, 1917-19

underwent frequent restructuring, personnel turnover, and much shuffling of leaders. It then engaged in six months of intensive battle in which it suffered heavy casualties, but in doing so it vindicated General Pershing's policies and achieved victory for the United States.

In July 1917 a U.S. Army infantry division was authorized 19,492 officers and men. The army's *Field Service Regulations*—the FM 100-5 of the day—established infantry as the preeminent arm: while other arms and services could and should contribute to advancing infantry marksmen into range, ultimately aimed rifle fire would control the battlefield. Therefore, General Pershing sought and obtained for the AEF a much larger, more infantry-rich division, one that was authorized 28,059 men. Each division would be organized around three brigades, two infantry and one artillery; it would also have a machine-gun battalion of four companies and one engineer regiment (see fig. 1.2). Every infantry brigade would have two regiments and one machine-gun battalion of three companies; every regiment, three infantry battalions and one machine-gun company. Every infantry battalion would have four rifle companies (six officers and 250 enlisted in each, organized into four platoons) and detachments of 37mm man-portable cannons and three-inch Stokes mortars. The division's armament would consist of twenty-four howitzers (155mm), forty-eight guns (75mm), twelve trench mortars (six-inch), 260 heavy machine guns, and 16,193 rifles.

In actuality, neither the 1st Division as a whole nor its individual regiments ever attained authorized strength. The reasons for this are twofold. First, before commencing intensive offensive operations, the division was repetitively drained of officers and NCOs for the AEF's numerous schools, and for bolstering other divisions. Then, once in combat, battle losses outpaced replacements, and units, particularly infantry battalions and companies, usually fought understrength. Here are the relevant figures:

Total Authorized Strength

1st Division	28,059
26th Infantry	3,838

Actual Strength at End of Month, 1918

	1st Division	26th Infantry
Apr	25,332	3,327
May	23,817	2,733
Jun	22,829	2,950
Jul	17,828	1,631
Aug	26,734	3,651
Sep	25,528	3,339
Oct	21,862	2,894

Clearly, leaders of the 1st Division faced a difficult and unending training task. Moreover, training of infantry was complicated by an over-intricate table of organization for the infantry rifle company, one that anticipated that rifle platoons would be task-organized for each mission from a pool of four "sections" specialized by weapons. In practice, however, the 1st Division routinely divided the platoons into two sections, each under a section sergeant, with the platoon leader heading one section and the platoon sergeant commanding the other. Each section was, in turn, organized into four squads of six to eight men, with a corporal leading each. Figure 1.3, derived from AEF publications, shows the organization of a U.S. Army infantry battalion.

One officer who met the training challenge uniquely well joined the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry shortly after it arrived in France. In June 1918 Theodore Roosevelt Jr., son of the former president of the United States, twenty-nine years of age and a major in the reserves, traveled via Bordeaux to Paris accompanied by his brother, Archibald Roosevelt, age twenty-three, a first lieutenant in the reserves. In Paris the brothers report-

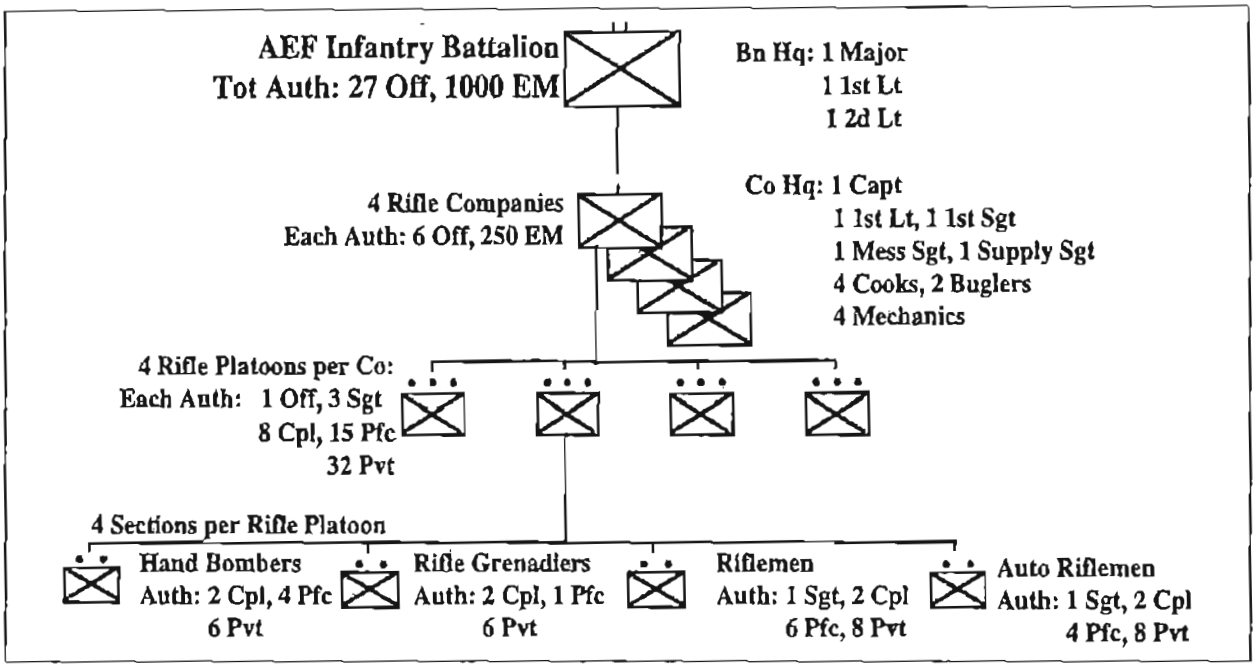


Fig. 1.3. Infantry tables of organization as of 26 June 1918

ed to General Pershing for duty with the AEF, and the general sent them to the 1st Division, where they were assigned to 26th Infantry. Both had paid for their military training at the "Businessmen's Camp" at Plattsburg, New York. (Initially a private enterprise, the government eventually split the cost of training with attendees.) Both had volunteered for active duty as soon as war was declared, and both would rise in rank in the 26th Infantry, Archibald from lieutenant to captain—"Archie" would command a company in his brother's battalion—and Theodore from major to lieutenant colonel. The older brother's book about World War I, *Average Americans,* still stands as a textbook on leadership for the American soldier and a testament to what that soldier can accomplish when properly trained and led. Published in 1920, the book is dedicated "to the officers and men of the 26th Infantry."

Major Roosevelt was one of the few reservists to command a battalion of the 1st Division—he assumed command of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry in July 1917—and at the war's end, when he was a lieutenant colonel commanding the 26th Regiment, he was the only reservist in the entire AEF in command of a regular army regiment. As the son of a former United States president—and his father was still a political force to be reckoned with—he attracted the attention of senior U.S. and French officials alike, and from all available evidence, the impression he made was overwhelmingly favorable. It is interesting to note that his wife, Eleanor (not, of course, to be confused with Franklin D. Roosevelt's wife of the same name), attracted her own share of attention when—much to the consternation of General Pershing—she took a position with the Young Men's Christian Association in France. After setting up housekeeping in Paris, she became an unofficial supply source for the battalion, responding efficiently to such telegrams as the following:

> SEND AT ONCE TWELVE BARRELS SOFT DRINKS TEN POUNDS TOBACCO PHONOGRAPH AND

RECORDS COMPLETE BASEBALL OUTFIT TWELVE PAIRS BOXING GLOVES TWELVE SOCCER BALLS SIX BASKETBALLS EIGHT FIFES EIGHT DRUMS AND STICKS GOOD SADDLE HORSE SADDLE AND BRIDLE MUCH LOVE TED

Theodore Roosevelt had an instinct for leading infantry: he had a knack for training soldiers, sound tactical judgment, and an ability rapidly to capitalize upon battlefield lessons, all of which would serve him in good stead in two world wars. (He commanded the 26th Infantry Regiment in both conflicts and also served as assistant division commander of the 1st and 4th Divisions in World War II.) In 1917 the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry became known for its aggressive, determined training, which included and was enhanced by imaginative competition between its companies. Taking advantage of routine marches to and from training areas, using its training time well, and optimizing primitive training facilities, the unit consistently exceeded assigned training objectives and strove for tactical proficiency beyond the aims of its French mentors. Roosevelt described the training experience in *Average Americans:*

> The actual training consisted of practice with the hand grenade, rifle grenade, automatic rifle, rifle, and bayonet, and in trench digging.
>
> We had a certain amount of difficulty merging the troops in with the French. It is really very hard for men who do not speak the same language to get anywhere. In addition to this, the French temperament is so different from ours. They always felt that much could be learned by our troops watching theirs. But the soldier doesn't learn by watching. His eye doesn't teach his muscles service. The way to train men is by physical exercise and explanation, not by simply watching others train....
>
> There was no one [American] in the command who had ever shot an automatic rifle [the Browning Automatic Rifle reached the 26th Infantry after the Armistice], thrown a hand grenade, shot a rifle grenade, used a trench mortar or a .37-millimeter gun. These were all modern methods of waging war, yet none of our military had been trained to the least degree in any of them. To all of us, they were absolutely new....
>
> We started a good deal of work at night, realizing how difficult it was for men to find their way, and how necessary it was for them to get used to working in the dark. This training the men enjoyed. It was all in the nature of a competition. Reconnaissance patrols would be started out to see how near they could approach to the dummy trenches without detection. In the dummy trenches other groups, with flares, etc., would keep a strict watch. Combat patrols would go out two at a time, each looking for the other. I recall one night when two patrols ran into one another suddenly. One of the privates was so overcome with zeal that he made as pretty a lunge with his bayonet as I have ever seen, and stabbed through both cheeks of the man opposite him.
>
> Our most notable characteristic was our seriousness, and running it a close second, our ignorance. I remember one solemn private who threw a hand grenade from his place in the trench. It hit the edge of the parapet and dropped back again. He looked at it, remarked "Lord God," slipped in the mud and sat down on it just as it exploded. Fortunately for him it was one of the light, tin-covered grenades, and beyond making sitting down an impossible action for him for several days following he was comparatively undamaged.
>
> Once Sergeant O'Rourke was training his men in throwing grenades. I came up and watched them a minute. They were doing very well, and I called, "Sergeant, your men are throwing those grenades excellently." O'Rourke evidently felt there was danger of turning their heads with too much praise. "Sorr, that and sleep is all they can do well," he replied.

In order to get the men trained with the rifle, as we had no target material, we used tin cans and rocks. A tin can is a particularly good target; it makes such a nice noise when hit, and leaps about so. I liked to shoot at them myself, and could well understand why they pleased the soldiers.

Why more persons were not killed in our practice I don't know, as the whole division was in training in a limited space, all having rifle practice, with no possibility of constructing satisfactory ranges. Some officers in another unit organized a rifle range in such a position that the overs dropped gently where we were training. One eventually hit my horse, but did not do much damage.

Lt. Lyman S. Frazier, an excellent officer, who finished the war as major of infantry, commanded the machine-gun company of my battalion. He was very keen on indirect fire, but we could get little or no information on it. One evening, however, he grouped his guns, made his calculations as well as he could, then fired a regular barrage. As soon as the demonstration was over he galloped as fast as could to the target, and found to his chagrin that only one shot had hit. Where the other 10,000 odd went he never knew.

Major Roosevelt once had the battalion stage a demonstration before an assemblage of the brigade's officers of what he termed "Bangler torpedoes." Because an issue version of the Bangalore torpedo—an infantry-emplaced tube of explosives designed to blast away wire entanglements—was unavailable, the battalion fabricated its own of pipe and gunpowder:

> The raiding party were picked men, whom I considered among the best in the battalion. They all crawled through the assumed "No Man's Land," holding on to one another's heels and endeavoring to look just as businesslike as possible. Their faces were blackened and they carried trench knives and hand grenades.
>
> The party that was to set off the torpedo lighted it, poked it under the wire, then leaped up and dashed through the gap in the wire to the trenches where the enemy was supposed to be. On account of amateur workmanship, only part of the charge went off, and I shall never forget my horror when I saw the party of picked men galloping gallantly through the gap over this smoking, unexploded charge. I had visions of having to reorganize the battalion the next day. Fortunately the charge did not go off and all worked out well.
>
> During the entire time we were in France we trained much along the lines indicated in the previous paragraphs, except that as we became veterans, we naturally became more conversant with correct methods of instruction. ...
>
> In the First Battalion we were particularly fortunate in this [early] period in having with us Captain Amiel Frey and Lieutenants Freml and Gilliam, all three of whom had served as N.C.O's

Fig. 1.4. Roosevelt and officers of the 1/26th, 1918.
Rear: **Lt. Cather. Lt. Barret, Lt. Vann, Lt. Floden**
Second Row: **Lt. Jackson, Lt. Weaver, Lt. Estey, Lt. Gustafson, Lt. Gaines**
Front Row: **Capt. Amiel Frey, Lt. Wesley Freml, Maj. T. Roosevelt Jr., Lt. Rexie Gilliam**

> in the regular Army. They understood close-order work, the service rifle, and the handling of men, and to them a large part of the early training is ascribable. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

Captain Amiel Frey was the senior company commander and Major Roosevelt's second in command, acting for him and signing reports in his absence. Lieutenant Wesley Freml also commanded a company. Frey, Freml, and Lieutenant Rexie E. Gilliam provided Roosevelt and the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry with a store of regular army savvy. Figure 1.4 shows Roosevelt with his three training mainstays and several other lieutenants. The photograph was taken in April 1918 at Haudivillers, Picardy, within sound of the guns in the Montdidier sector, probably at one of the officers' dinners Major Roosevelt considered an integral part of training.

The 1st Division staff, always on the lookout for ways to put the division's best foot forward, began to steer visitors and inspectors to Roosevelt's battalion. The visits they worried about the most, of course, were those by General Pershing, who wanted to keep abreast of the division's progress, and who was given to showing up on short notice. He was not always a congenial guest, often arriving bemused by other concerns and not infrequently cross with his hosts.

The general's stony silence could be disconcerting to any trainer, no matter what his rank. Roosevelt remembered in particular a certain Sergeant Murphy, an exceptionally reliable NCO, who first came to his attention when the sergeant, upon discovering a soldier of his platoon absent from his reveille formation, led a squad to the miscreant's place of slumber and caused him to be transported forthwith to the nearby creek. Sergeant Murphy could normally be expected to have the day's training well in hand, but one day General Pershing showed up to observe Murphy and his platoon at work. "Now, Sergeant Murphy could stand with equanimity as high as an officer or a colonel," Roosevelt remarked,

> but a general was one too many. He was not afraid of a machine gun or a cannon, but a star on a man's shoulder petrified him. After the General had watched for a minute, the good sergeant had his platoon tied up in thirteen different ways. The General spoke to him. That finished it; and if the General had not left the field, I think Sergeant Murphy might have. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

The Question of Tactics

Pershing's trips involved stakes higher than Major Roosevelt appreciated at the time. Certain officers in Pershing's headquarters (AEF GHQ) had decided that the 1st Division's commander, Major General William L. Sibert, was not sufficiently able and active, and that he should be replaced. GHQ made the 1st Division staff aware of its doubt over the division commander's competence. Pershing himself, during a visit to the 1st Division in September, indicated by his demeanor that he was displeased with Sibert; Marshall, Sibert's G-3, described Pershing on that occasion as being "in a thoroughly evil humor."

On another occasion, Marshall got early warning of a Pershing inspection set for the following day, Wednesday, 3 October 1917. He promptly directed 2nd Infantry Brigade to prepare to conduct a demonstration of offensive trench warfare The attacking force would use quick-fused offensive hand-grenades (called "bombs") designed to stun rather than kill, so that the attacker could rush in close behind the explosion to capture the defender.

Marshall knew that the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry had just successfully completed two exercises with such ordnance in a maze of trenches used to train the Americans for front-line duty. However, he also knew that, on 2 October, the 1/26th Infantry was miles away, conducting close-order drill at its billets—which meant that, to repeat the exercise for Pershing on the morning of 3 October, they would have to begin their march to the practice trenches in the early morning

darkness. When Marshall telephoned to propose they do just that, Major Roosevelt enthusiastically agreed. In an interview in 1957, Marshall remembered that

> It was a triumph to have anyone ready to do this because as a rule these things, like a trained chorus, took a week or more to organize for, and here we had only during the night, and the night was spent in marching. Theodore got down there with his troops. General Pershing came in on the train furious that General Sibert wasn't there. General Sibert gave me hell for going to the train ahead of him, so altogether I was in bad odor....
>
> So we went out to this place where the exercise was to be conducted. There was a trench system...they called it "Washington Center." Roosevelt was trained on that and the men were familiar with it. So he was ready to go through this exercise and quite thrilled that he was to put this on for General Pershing, and he had gotten his men all thrilled. He knew how to stir up morale all right, and he did it very well this time. So when General Pershing got out there, he had his chief of staff, and he had several new staff officers who later occupied very important positions there who had just arrived. This was their first visit to anything of this kind and their first exhibition of anything like this trench affair....
>
> The men went through the exercise. There was a lot of shooting, of course, and a lot of dashing around from trench to trench, and a lot of grenade throwing and general hullabaloo, and then it was all over.
>
> Then General Pershing said, "Assemble the officers." So they assembled the officers and he turned to General Sibert and said, "Conduct the critique." Well, General Sibert had not had a chance to even see the exercise, and he started to say two or three things and it didn't go fast enough for General Pershing, so he directed a young officer who was in charge of the exercise with Roosevelt to give some of the critique, and he made a pretty good stab at it, but it still wasn't satisfactory to General Pershing. He just gave everybody hell. He was very severe with General Sibert, very severe, in front of all the officers. (George C. Marshall, *Interviews and Reminiscences For Forrest C. Pogue* [1991])

Fig. 1.5. General Pershing remonstrating with officers of the 26th Infantry, 3 Oct 1917. The officer in the front may be Brig. Gen. B. B. Buck, 2nd Infantry Brigade.

Theodore Roosevelt, recalling the same episode, wrote that when Pershing turned to the officers of 1/26th for their views,

> The first one to answer was a game little fellow named Wortley from Los Angeles, who was afterward killed. He said that he thought everything went off well and he didn't think he had anything to criticize. The next lieutenant said that he thought a few men of his company had got a little mixed up. This was a cheerful point of view for him to have, for, as a matter of fact, two thirds of his company had gone astray. His company had been selected to deliver a flank attack over the top, but when this took place, it consisted of one lieutenant and two privates. The mistake however, was never noticed. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

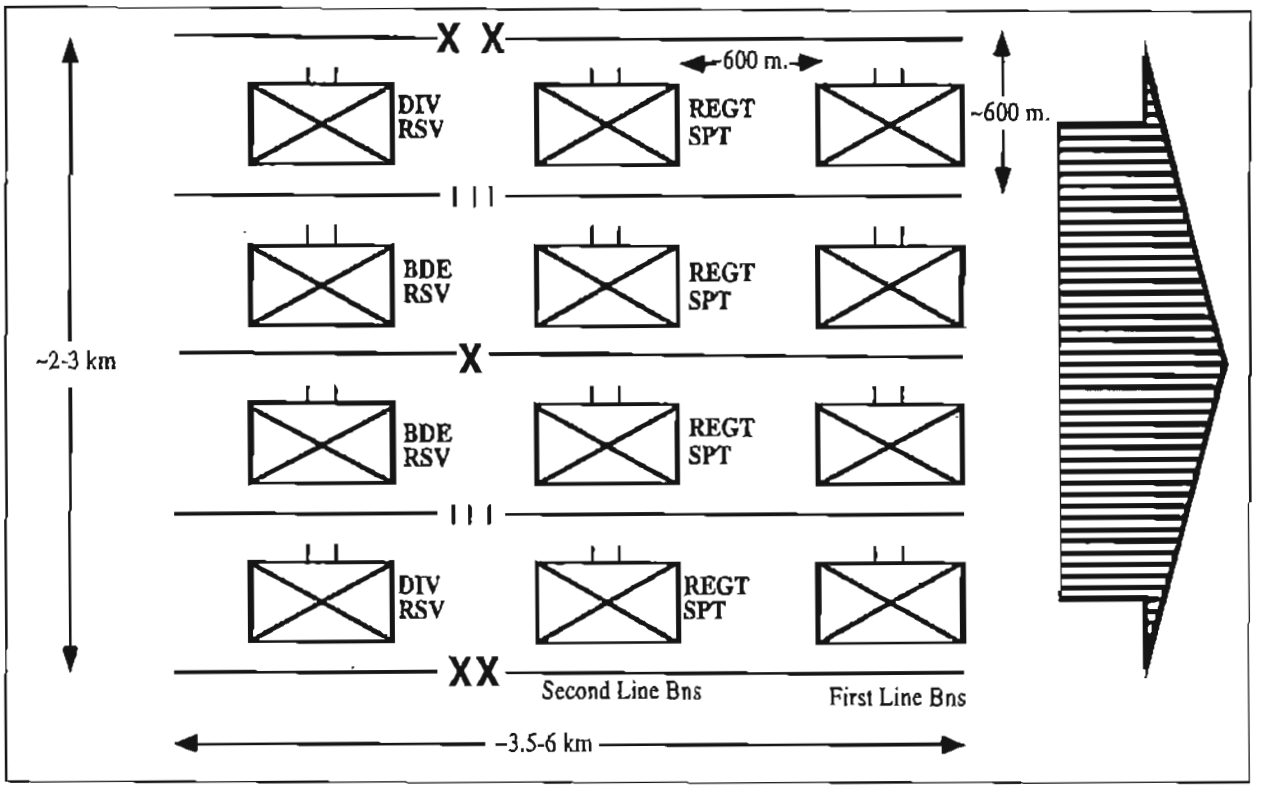


Fig. 1.6. Divisional attack array

Patently dissatisfied by what he had seen and heard, Pershing turned away and started to march off in a huff. Captain Marshall then intervened—at no small hazard to himself—and succeeded in making the point to Pershing that his criticisms of the battalion were unfair; if blame were to accrue, it should not be to the 26th Regiment or even to the 1st Division, since everyone was doing exactly what Pershing's staff had directed. The fact was, Roosevelt said, that the AEF GHQ had provided neither written doctrinal guidance nor manuals to underwrite the kind of training Pershing had advocated.

What was rankling Pershing—besides the matter of the division commander, which would be decided in December 1917 by replacing Sibert with Bullard—was his conviction, reinforced by what he had just seen, that the French were schooling the 1st Division in the finer points of trench warfare. Pershing, on the other hand, wanted American troops to prepare for open warfare, which meant learning how to attack through and beyond the kind of prepared defenses that had stymied military forces on the battlefronts of Europe since 1914. Accordingly, he had thought that the battalion's demonstration would be a rehearsal of the tactics and techniques for operations outside entrenchments. That it was nothing of the sort should have come as no surprise. The truth is, in October 1917 not even Pershing, much less the Training Section of GHQ, could articulate very well what those offensive tactics and techniques ought to be. Despite Pershing's preference for open warfare, only a few had been prescribed, and these were scarcely mentioned in manuals or training publications. Pershing, therefore, moved quickly to rectify the situation, ordering his staff to ensure that significantly more of the division's training time be devoted to open warfare.

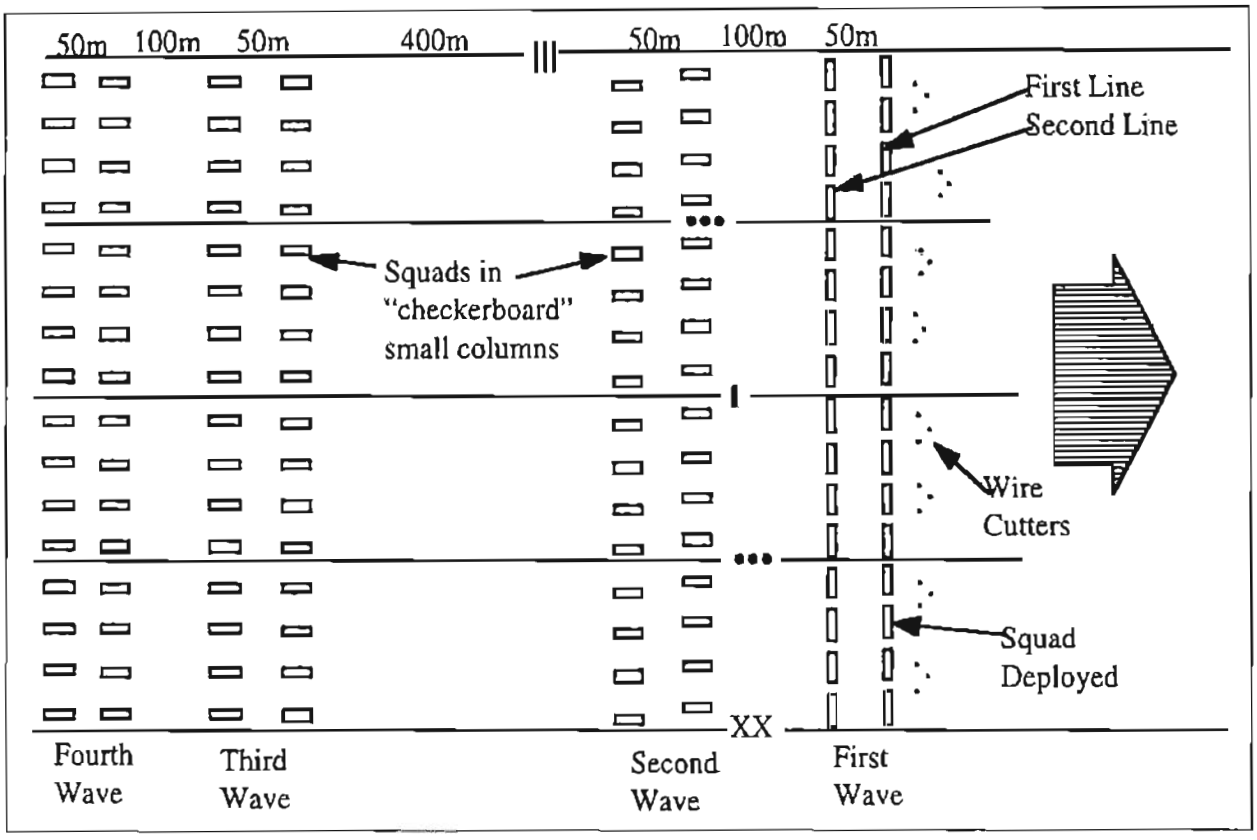


Fig. 1.7. The lead infantry battalion

On 6 October GHQ issued a directive entitled "Program of Training for the First Division, A.E.F.: The General Principles Governing the Training of Units of the American Expeditionary Forces." The program aimed at having the division fully trained by 27 January 1918, and rested on eight premises: (1) use American methods; (2) focus on offensive action; (3) follow American doctrine, as modified by the AEF; (4) consider the rifle and bayonet the primary weapons; (5) use the standards of West Point for bearing, attention to detail, and obedience; (6) train progressively from the squad up; (7) teach by application once basics are taught; (8) follow every tactical exercise with a critique.

The 1st Division in turn prescribed maneuvers—they are better understood as formation drills—in which regiments, brigades, then the entire division practiced taking up and maintaining a fixed formation as it advanced over hill and dale. The division favored attacking with its two brigades abreast, each brigade with both its regiments committed, each regiment in a column of battalions. The lead line battalion in each regiment was followed by a regimental support battalion. A third echelon consisted of battalions designated as brigade and division reserves, available for regimental missions only by permission of the higher commander. The divisional attack array, practiced again and again, is shown in figure 1.6.

The lead infantry battalion deployed two companies abreast, in lines of skirmishers, each company on a front of about three hundred meters, so that a typical regimental front was some six hundred meters. (In exercises, the skirmishers were often paced by a detail

of soldiers portraying a rolling artillery barrage immediately preceding the regiment's advancing line.) The lead companies deployed four platoons in two waves, each wave consisting of two lines, each line consisting of a single platoon; in addition, two wire-cutting parties preceded each first-wave platoon across the battlefield. A distance of fifty meters was maintained between lines, one hundred meters between waves. The remaining two companies of the lead battalion, designated support companies, followed four hundred meters to the rear. Only the first wave of two lines was initially deployed in skirmish lines. (Note that, when confined to a front of six hundred meters, sixteen eight-man squads would march with a mere four- to five-meter interval between individuals.) The succeeding echelons advanced in "checkerboard" columns of squads or sections until forced to disperse. The attack formation of the leading, or first-line battalion, is shown in figure 1.7.

The battalion in regimental support or reserve followed the first-line battalion by six hundred meters. Supporting arms were either attached to specified infantry units, or directed to support them by fire. Mortars and 37mm cannon were grouped and committed on order of the battalion commander. Machine guns followed the support companies in each battalion, and were also committed on order of the battalion commander.

The 1st Division conducted open warfare maneuvers in December, January, and early February. For the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, these maneuvers entailed long, dark marches in cold weather under full pack and interminable waiting. George C. Marshall recalled that

> The suffering of the men at this time exceeded any previous or subsequent experience. They frequently stood up to their knees in mud, snow, and ice water for hours at a time, while the large elements of the command were being maneuvered into position. They were also subjected to many experiments in training to prepare them for sudden enemy attacks with cloud gas. Tubes containing this gas were hidden in the snow and at a specified time would be suddenly opened. (*Memoirs of My Services in the World War 1917-1918*)

Theodore Roosevelt "disapproved heartily" of the maneuvers:

> I...[looked] at them from the point of view of a battalion commander, who feels that any attempt on the part of a higher command to have maneuvers on a vast scale is wasting valuable time that might be employed by him to better advantage. I am sure now that General Fiske, the head of the American training section [AEF GHQ], was right when he prescribed them and that the maneuvers contributed greatly to the ability of the First Division to keep in contact [within its formations] when it struck the [German] line. The necessity for them, of course, was based on that fact that, great as was the ignorance of our junior officers, it was comparatively far less than the ignorance of our higher command and staff. The maneuvers were bitter work for the soldiers who would be out all day, insufficiently clad and insufficiently fed. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

In a staff report dated 4 July 1918, then-Colonel Fiske (he was promoted to general in September) advocated the removal of all foreign influences over training in the interest of teaching American troops how to win. He reasoned that

> The offensive spirit of the French and British armies has largely disappeared as a result of their severe losses.... Our young officers and men are prone to take on the tone and tactics of those with whom they are associated. Whatever they are learning that is false or unsuited for us will be

> hard to eradicate later.... The French do not like the rifle, do not know how to use it, and their infantry is consequently too dependent upon powerful artillery support. Their infantry lacks aggressiveness and discipline. The British infantry lacks initiative and resource.

Pershing agreed with Fiske, but that didn't settle the issue. The question of tactics—that is, formulating a tactical doctrine that balanced aggressiveness and initiative with proper provisions for mission assurance and force protection—remained unresolved to the end of the war.

In early August 1918, just after the Battle of Soissons, Pershing himself came to wonder whether open warfare tactics as they were then understood were perhaps too costly, and ordered his chief of staff to study how best to attack into prepared defenses buttressed by machine guns and artillery. The resulting study, published by AEF GHQ on 5 September 1918, stated that trench warfare was characterized by "regulation of the space and time by higher command down to the smallest unit...[with] little initiative [taken] by the individual soldier." In contrast, open warfare was characterized by "irregular formations, scouts preceding the assault waves, and a high degree of individual initiative, [with] primary reliance upon the infantry's own firepower to enable it to get forward."

A solution to the tactical dilemma might have been found if the AEF could have provided its infantry units assured communications with supporting arms, or with a reliable automatic weapon to augment the rifle. Neither was available. Once the shooting started, the most reliable means of communications were runners or pigeons. And the AEF's foreign-made, man-portable cannons were awkward; its foreign-made machine guns bulky and unwieldy; its foreign-made automatic rifles undependable. Moreover, the U.S. Army had a conceptual hang-up about machine guns that the AEF did little to dispel: infantry drill regulations stipulated that machine guns should not be provided to first-line units, but rather emplaced where any counterfire they attracted would not fall upon the advancing infantrymen. The regulations further enjoined infantry commanders to deal with enemy machine guns by concentrating massed rifle fire on each in turn until silenced. In theory, an artillery "rolling barrage" would suppress enemy machine gunners while the infantry was maneuvering to bring their rifles to bear; but in practice, success in destroying enemy machine guns, and indeed in fighting an open warfare battle, came to depend on the energy, initiative, and raw courage of riflemen in the first-line battalions.

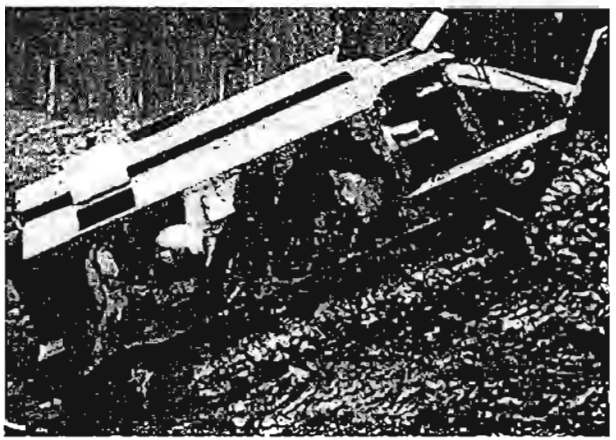


Fig. 1.8. French Schneider tank

As it turned out, Major Roosevelt and the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry were to wait eight months after Pershing's visit on 3 October before undergoing their first serious combat test in late May 1918. During that time, the battalion participated in as many as thirty exercises in open warfare. In the final exercise, conducted just two weeks before the 1st Division's attack on Cantigny, the 26th Infantry for the first time trained in open warfare with armor—French Schneider tanks, ponderous, barge-like vehicles with a 75mm cannon mounted in the right-front of the hull. The 2nd Brigade's orders for the exercise directed that a distance of ten meters be maintained between skirmishers in the leading wave, and stated that "the Commanding General, 2nd Brigade, wishes to impress

on the infantry that the tanks are auxiliary to the infantry...the infantry must proceed vigorously to the accomplishment of its mission regardless of the tank."

Throughout this period, one of the battalion's major difficulties was an ebb and flow of personnel that required it to repeat the rudiments of training for its replacements. The varying strength of the battalion, indicative of personnel changes, is illustrated in the chart below:

Reported Strength

1st Bn, 26th Infantry as of Start of Month, 1917-18

	Off.	Enl.		Off.	Enl.
Oct	14	658	May	39	1078
Nov	10	548	Jun	27	639
Dec	24	490	Jul	23	806
Jan	22	48	Aug	18	613
Feb	23	754	Sep	26	1211
Mar	24	903	Oct	29	1210
Apr	38	885			

In April 1918—a period when combat was imminent and the emphasis was on larger unit maneuvers and open warfare—the battalion received 193 replacements. From the end of the attack at Cantigny in late May 1918 to the beginning of the offensive at Soissons in mid-July, the AEF personnel system provided the battalion with 394 replacements. Although a few of these were veterans of the 26th who had returned to the battalion after treatment for wounds and illness, many more were novices.

Despite the turnover in personnel and the problems it caused, Major Roosevelt nonetheless saw to it that his battalion developed solid competence in trench warfare. On 24 October 1917 the first battalion from each of the division's four regiments relieved a French unit near Arracourt, in the relatively quiet Somerviller sector of the Lorraine front. The battalions were placed under French command. On 28 October 2nd Lieutenant D. H. Harden, a signal corps officer assigned to the 1/26th, became the AEF's first combat casualty when he was wounded in the knee by a shell fragment. Toward the end of its ten days of defensive duty, the battalion mounted a small raid on German positions, the first such American operation of the war; led by Captain Archibald Roosevelt, the raiding party came back empty-handed but proud.

Into Battle: Ansauville to Cantigny

In January 1918 the AEF approved the division's taking responsibility for the Ansauville sector northwest of Toul, marking the first time an American division became an independent actor on the Western Front. The division operated there from 16 January 1918 until 3 April, assuming full control from the French on 5 February. The 1/26th was relatively late in the rotation scheme, manning the trenches from 6-14 March. On 11 March German artillery "strafed" the company commanded by Captain Roosevelt. Expecting an attack, Captain Roosevelt was moving about the position redisposing his weapons and men when he was severely wounded in the left leg and arm.

On 14 March the battalion was relieved, but remained forward in "rest billets" as a reserve. On 19 March Secretary of War Newton D. Baker visited the battalion, and Major Theodore Roosevelt staged a review for him.

On 22 March the battalion reentered the Ansauville trenches. It marched back on 2 April, this time with a sense of trophy:

> Here we captured our first German prisoner. I doubt whether any German will ever be as precious to any of us as this man was. We had patrolled a good deal, but the Germans had either stopped patrolling in front of us or we were unfortunate in not running into any of them. We felt at last that the only way to get a prisoner was to go over to the German trenches and pull one out.
>
> One night Lieutenant Christian Holmes, Sergeants Murphy, McCormack, Samari (born in southern Italy), and Leonard, who was called

Scotty and who spoke with a pronounced Irish brogue, were designated to raid a listening post. They crawled on their bellies across No Man's Land, got through the maze of wire, and ran right on top of a German listening post. A prisoner was what they wanted, so Lieutenant Holmes, who was leading the party, leaped upon one of the two Germans and locked him in a tight embrace. The German's partner thereupon endeavored to bayonet Lieutenant Holmes, who was struggling in two feet of water with his captive, but was prevented by a timely thrust from Sergeant Murphy's bayonet. They seized the German, who was shrieking "Kamerad" at the top of his lungs, and dragged him back across No Man's Land at the double.

When they came in with him we were pleased as punch. Indeed, we hardly wanted to let him go to the rear, as we had a distinct feeling more or less that we wanted to keep him to look at. He was a young, scrawny fellow, and gave us much information concerning the troops opposite us. Lieutenant Holmes and Sergeant Murphy received the Distinguished Service Cross for this work; and well deserved it, for they showed the way and did a really hard job. Holmes told me afterwards that they had all agreed that they would not come back until they had got their prisoner. They had decided that if they did not find him in the first front-line trenches they would go back as far as necessary, but they were going to find him or not come back. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

The departure from Ansauville was hasty, for on 21 March the German army, now reinforced by divisions transferred from the Eastern Front after the collapse of the Russian army, launched the first of three offensives calculated to win the war on the Western Front before the American army could be brought to bear. The heaviest blows fell on the British sector between the Sensée and Oise Rivers, shattering an entire field army, but the French were driven back as well, and Paris came under long-range artillery fire. Pershing, prompted by concern for the continued viability of the Allied coalition, ordered the 26th (Yankee) Division to relieve the 1st Division, and the 1st Division to concentrate near Toul and to ready itself for action. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry marched to the Bois l'Eveque, a French training center where, according to Theodore Roosevelt, the men were told that they were to be "thrown into the path of the German advance":

By that time all types of rumors were current. We heard of the Englishman Cary's remarkable feat, how he collected cooks, engineers, labor troops from the retreating forces, and stood against the German advance, and how his brigade grew up overnight. Cary because of his feat, became, from captain in the Q.M.C. [Quartermaster Corps] general of infantry. We heard of the thirty-six hours during which all contact was lost between the French left and the English right, when a French cavalry division was brought in trucks from the rear of the line and thrown into the gap, and on the morning of the second day reported that they believed they had established contact with the English.

The next few days was all excitement. We formed the men and gave out our first decorations to Lieutenant Holmes and Sergeant Murphy [the French Croix de Guerre, or Cross of War].

At the same time we told them all that we knew of our plans. They were delighted. Men do not like sitting in trenches day in and day out, and being killed and mangled without ever seeing the enemy, and this promised to be a fight where the enemy would be in sight.

We had a large, rough shack where we were able to have all the officers of the battalion for mess. Lieutenant Gustafson, an Illinois boy, who had, in civil life, been a head waiter at summer

Fig. 1.9. Battalion formation, Bois l'Eveque, 5 April 1918. Left to right: Maj. Roosevelt, Lt. Holmes, Sgt. Murphy.

hotels, managed the mess. We had some good voices, and every night after dinner there was singing. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

But the battalion was soon on the move again. Momentous events were occurring. General Pershing agreed to the appointment (26 March) of French General Ferdinand Foch as commander in chief of Allied forces, with the proviso that the latter would include a separate American army. Pershing then released the 1st Division to the French to shore up their left flank in Picardy, north of Paris. The division moved by train to that sector, a novel experience for the 26th Regiment:

> We had never traveled on a regular military train before. A military train is made up to carry a battalion of infantry; box cars holding forty men or eight animals each, and flat cars for wagons, kitchens, etc. We entrained safely and got off all right....
>
> We detrained a couple of days march from Chaumont-en-Vexin.... At Chaumont we stayed for some few days, maneuvering while the division assembled. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

On 9 April the Germans renewed their offensive. They made significant gains in the weeks that followed, causing much consternation and gloom among the Allies. Toward the end of May Foch decided that the 1st Division should be sent to the front west of Montdidier, where the Germans had captured a hilltop town named Cantigny and fought off three successive French counterattacks. General Pershing ordered all officers of the 1st Division to be assembled at Chaumont so he could address them. Recalling the episode in *Memoirs of My Services in the World War 1917-1918*, George C. Marshall, the division G-3, reported that Pershing began by telling the officers that they would soon take part in a great Allied counterattack. The AEF's commander went on to say that

> You are about to enter this great battle of the greatest war in history, and in that battle you will

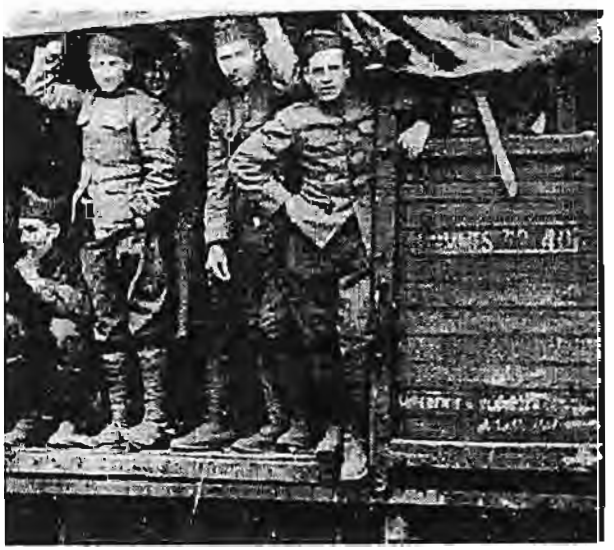


Fig. 1.10. Troops of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, en route to the front, 6 April 1918. Neck-choker blouse, tight-fitted breeches, meager pockets, cloth calf-wrappers: "Whatever talents the West Pointers who designed this smart uniform may have had, consideration of comfort or serviceability was not among them." (Lawrence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF 1917-1918* [1963])

Fig. 1.11. A rifle company of 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry marching toward the Montdidier sector, 16 April 1918

> represent the mightiest nation engaged.... Centuries of military tradition and of military and civil history are now looking forward toward this first contingent of the American Army....Our people today are hanging expectant upon your deeds. The future is hanging upon your action in this conflict. You are going forward, and your conduct will be an example for succeeding units of our army. I hope the standard that you set will be high—I know it will be high. You are taking with you the sincerest wishes of the President and all of our people at home. I assure you, in their names and in my own, of our strong beliefs in your success and of our confidence in your courage and in your loyalty, with a feeling of certainty in our hearts that you are going to make a record of which our country will be proud.

Soon the regiments were marching northward on their new mission, bound for the Montdidier sector. The men of the 26th Regiment took four days to reach their destination, in the course of which they encountered thousands of civilian refugees headed in the opposite direction, away from the advancing battlefront. The sight of those fugitives made a lasting impression on Theodore Roosevelt, who found himself reflecting on the importance of keeping war from America's shores:

> I shall never forget this march. Spring was on the land, the trees were budding, wild flowers covered the ground, the birds were singing. Our dusty brown column wound up hill and down, through patches of woods and little villages. By us, all day, toward the south streamed the French refugees from villages threatened, or already taken, by the Hun....
>
> The line at Montdidier had been established shortly after the breakthrough by the Germans, by a French territorial division which was marching north, expecting to relieve some friendly troops in front of it. They suddenly encountered, head on, the German columns who were marching south. Both sides deployed, went into position, and dug in where they were. The First Division took over from these troops. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

On 26 April the 1st Division relieved French troops defending a ragged trace of foxholes in a valley overlooked by the town of Cantigny, some five kilometers

west of Montdidier. As the doughboys moved into their new positions, Shipley Thomas, a captain in the 26th Infantry, was informed by departing French officers that "we are not turning over to you a sector, but a good place to make a sector." Thomas, writing in his book *The History of the A.E.F.* (1920), recalls that the area around Cantigny was then

> the hottest place on the western front...there were no trenches, there was no barbed wire....it was daylight from three in the morning until nine at night and the enemy fire was so intense that to show oneself was to court sudden death, so the troops holding the front line had to lie for eighteen consecutive hours each day in those shell holes, baked by the hot sun of late spring, and wait until darkness came before they could send carrying parties back for food and water. During the short night they dug furiously into the chalky soil, to make the holes deeper, and finally to connect them into a trench...the enemy threw over on an average 3,450 shells a day....in one single gas attack, 15,000 rounds were used.

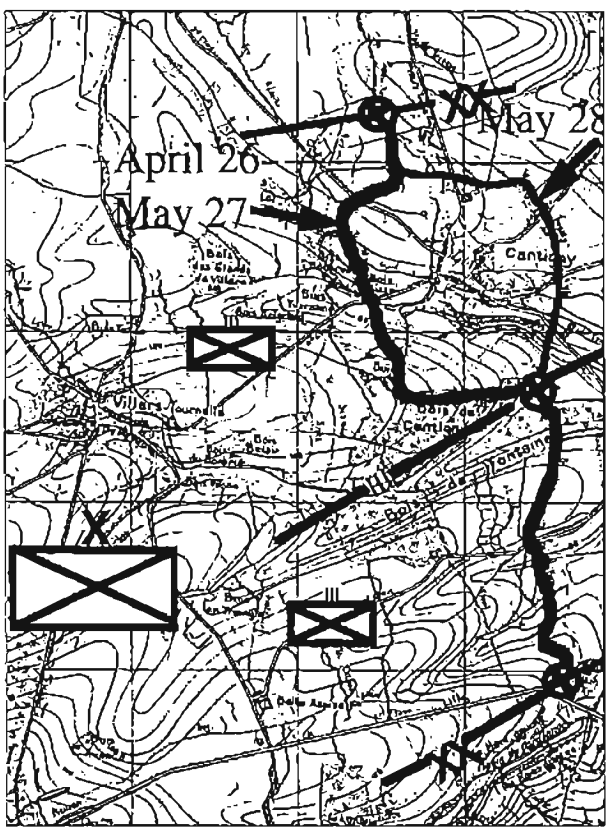


Fig. 1.12. 1st Division defenses, Montdidier sector (1,000-meter grid)

Once it got on line, the division committed one brigade with a front of two regiments, each in column of battalions. The other brigade was held in reserve, conducting exercises in open warfare preparatory to rotating its regiments into the line.

On 15 May the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry took over the division's right-flank positions, known as the "Belle Assise Ferme" subsector. Starting from the subsector's southern boundary at the Lille Road, the front-line trenches ran north across an exposed nose into a draw, and through the Bois de Fontaine to the eastern corner of Bois de Cantigny, below the town of Cantigny. Figure 1.13 shows the defenses as they were configured in late June, after the 26th had erected elaborate barbed-wire entanglements and dug an extensive network of trenches for a defense in depth. Note in the front line "Tr. Frey," a trench named for Captain Amiel Frey, commanding Company A, and "Tr. Jackson," named for a Lieutenant George Jackson; note also the support trenches named for Lieutenant Wesley Freml, commanding Company D, and Lieutenants George P. Gustafson and Grover P. Cather. All were killed in action defending these fortifications.

The Germans gave the 1/26th a rough welcome when it arrived at Belle Assisse Ferme:

> The first morning we were in the Montdidier sector the Huns shelled us heavily. Immediately after they raided a part of our front line held by a platoon of D Company, commanded by Lieutenant Dabney, a very good fellow from Louisville, Ky. The Germans were repulsed with loss. We suffered no casualties except from the German bombardment [which killed three and wounded five].

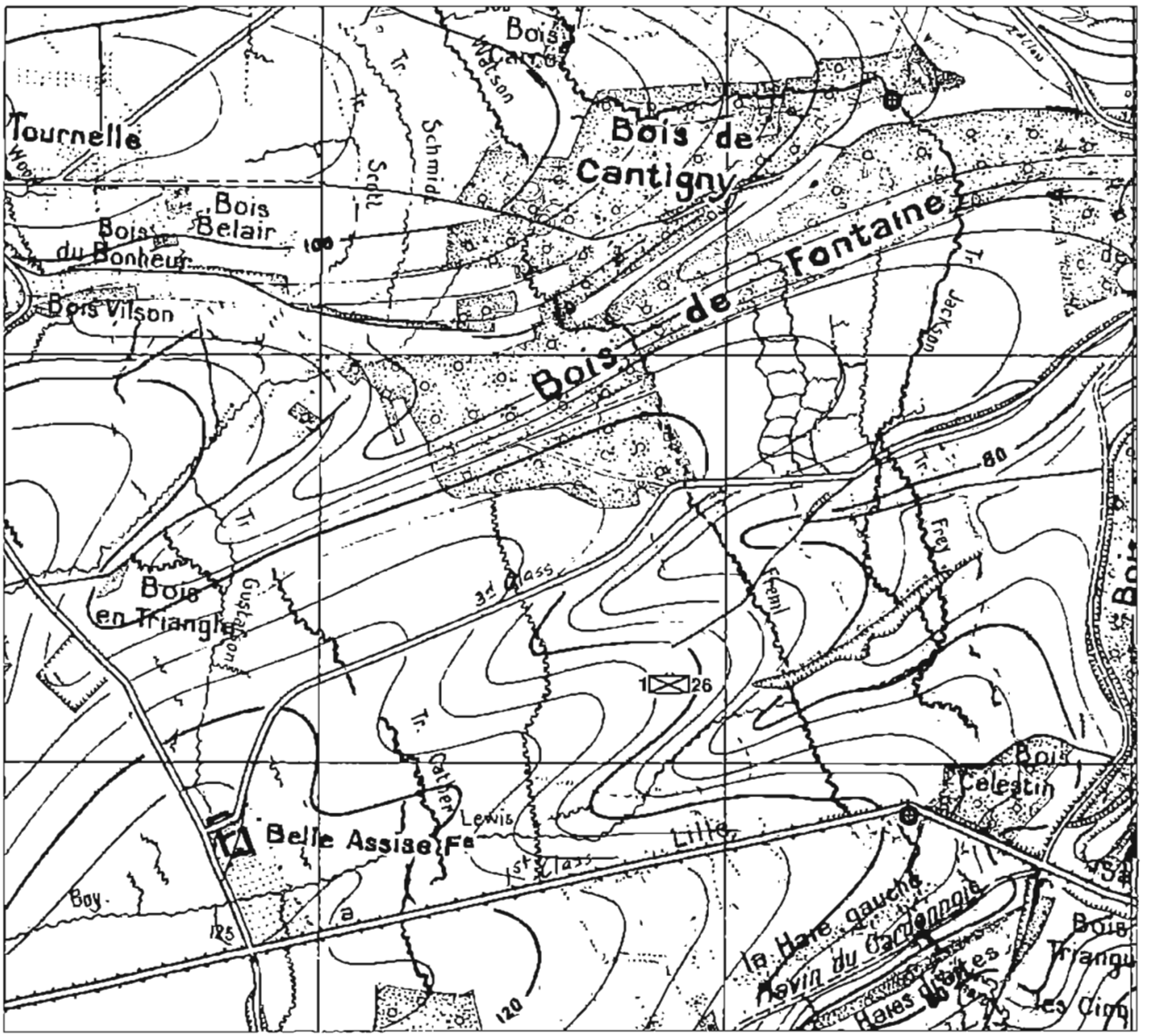


Fig. 1.13. Trench system constructed by 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, May-June 1918

> Next evening we picked up the body of the German sergeant commanding the party, whom we had killed. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

The 1st Division's staff, meanwhile, had already begun formulating plans to attack and seize Cantigny. Fifteen days after arriving in the Montdidier sector, those plans were set in motion. The 28th Infantry Regiment, manning the defenses directly west of Cantigny, was given the mission of attacking eastward through the town and establishing new defenses on its eastern edge. The attack, which was smoothly executed on the morning of 28 May, is celebrated as the first offensive action by an American unit in France; as such, it proved reassuring to the Allies and unsettling to the German High Command. The battle of Cantigny

was, however, the antithesis of open warfare. In the judgment of George C. Marshall, who as division G-3 was responsible for planning and supervising the attack, little was left to the initiative of subordinates:

> The order for the Cantigny attack is an extreme example of the extent to which minute details may be prescribed in preliminary arrangements for combat. It illustrates the maximum authority a commander can exercise over a subordinate who leads a unit in combat. In [a] war of movement, such an order would be wholly impracticable, but it was well suited to the special conditions at Cantigny. The troops were inexperienced; the objective was strictly limited; there were good maps; there was plenty of time. Therefore the higher commander, having much at stake, exercised the maximum of authority and regulated even minor details. ("Infantry in Battle," *Mailing List* 5 [1933])

The Germans reacted violently to the American incursion, firing huge concentrations of high-explosive munitions and gas, and throwing counterattack after counterattack at the 28th Infantry. Advancing from the southeast, the Germans crossed over ground dominated by the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry. As a result, the 1/26th was drawn into the fighting, to the extent that it subsequently played a major role in the battle.

Some have held that honors for the AEF's first offensive action belong to the 26th Infantry, not to the 28th. Theodore Roosevelt recalled that

> My battalion, although not actually engaged in the assault, was in support, and took over the extreme right of the line after the assault. It also helped in repelling counter-attacks delivered by the Germans and in consolidating the position. Just preceding the Cantigny show the Germans strafed and gassed very heavily the positions held by us.... After gassing us and strafing us heavily a raid in considerable force was sent over by the Germans. It was repulsed with heavy loss, leaving a number of prisoners in our hands. A company took the brunt of this, the platoon commanded by Lt. Andrews doing particularly well. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

Brigadier General Beaumont B. Buck, commanding the 2nd Infantry Brigade, remembered the same events somewhat differently:

> On May 27th, the day before the attack on Cantigny, an amusing incident occurred....The attack was all along our front but was especially fierce just south of Cantigny where my 26th Infantry were driven from their trenches which were at once occupied by the enemy. By prompt counter-attack the 26th Infantry drove the enemy out, furiously followed on their heels while the pursued Germans rushing through no-man's-land called lustily to their comrades in the trenches for help. Our men landed in the trenches with the pursued.
>
> Here, after considerable hand-to-hand fighting our men held the trenches, reversed the parapet, and prepared to stay or proceed further. The enemy's efforts to drive them out failed.
>
> These events I promptly reported to Headquarters of the 1st Division. The situation, while causing elation among our troops, was grave because it threatened to bring on a general engagement ahead of the time set by us, and might involve other divisions. Such a result was evidently not desired, for the 1st Division promptly gave orders that my men should be withdrawn from the enemy trenches, and returned to their own. This was done, leaving the 26th Infantry undaunted and eager for more. (Major General B. B. Buck, *Memories of Peace and War* [1935])

Buck, it should be remembered, was writing some seventeen years after the fact—which may account for his rather cheerful assessment of the mood of his

troops. At the time, however, most men in the 1/26th probably took a somewhat less sanguine view, one that reflected the painful number of casualties the battalion had suffered. These losses, said Theodore Roosevelt,

> were due in large part to the German artillery fire. In this operation a number of our most gallant old-timers were killed. Captain Frey, second in command of the battalion, was shot twice through the stomach while leading reinforcements to his front line. When the stretcher bearers carried him by me, he shook my hand, said "goodby," and was carried away to the rear. After they had moved him a short distance, he lifted himself up, saluted, said in a loud voice, "Sergeant, dismiss the company," and died. Sergeant Dennis Sullivan, Sergeant O'Rourke, and Sergeant McCormick, not to mention many, many others, were killed or received mortal wounds at this time....When we were moving forward to reinforce a threatened part of the line...O'Rourke was hit.... As he fell I turned around and said: "Well, O'Rourke, they've got you." "They have sir," he answered, "but we have had a damned good time." (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

Major Roosevelt was gassed, but refused evacuation; his wife reported that for a while he had to sleep sitting up to avoid the coughing fits, caused by the damage to his lungs, that inevitably ensued when he was lying flat.

After the line east of Cantigny was consolidated, the 1st Division expanded its sector by putting both brigades on line. This move freed French units for employment elsewhere while ensuring constant pressure on the German defenders, thereby fixing them in place and tying down their reserves. In seventy-two days of combat in the sector, from mid-May through early July, casualties in the 26th Infantry Regiment amounted to 122 killed in action and 712 wounded.

Operations of the 1/26th Infantry in the Montdidier sector were be no means always reactive in nature, nor were they always ordained by division. The battalion dominated its front with patrols, and occasionally raided the enemy's lines. One of the raids became something of a classic, a status achieved by virtue of the professionalism with which it was conceived and executed. It earned almost immediate renown, prompting the 1st Division to provide subordinate officers with copies of Roosevelt's order detailing the plan for the raid, and the French army to distribute a description of the action to all its units. A subsequent description found its way into the first (1934) edition of *Infantry in Battle*, a text masterminded by George C. Marshall when he was assistant commandant of the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. That book, which asserted that simple and direct plans and methods make for reliable performance amid the confusion of infantry combat, presented the 1/26th's raid as an example of "simplicity." The following is from *Infantry in Battle:*

On June 29, 1918, Company D, U.S. 26th Infantry, carried out a raid on German positions near Cantigny. The hour set for the action was 3:15 a.m., at which time there was just enough light to see. Part of the order for this raid follows:

HEADQUARTERS 1ST BATTALION 26TH INFANTRY
Field Orders France, June 24, 1918
No. 10

INFORMATION The enemy is occupying the woods to our front with one battalion, something in the manner indicated in the attached sketch.

INTENTION On J Day at H Hour, we will raid the Wood, entering the woods at the angle 22.8-30.4 (point Y on sketch), and kill or capture the occupants of trenches running north and

northeast as far as the northern edge of the woods, returning from there by the northern edge of the Bois de Fontaine.

ALLOTMENT OF UNITS The raiding party will be composed of personnel of Company D, 1st Lieutenant Wesley Freml, Jr., officer commanding raid.

(1) Lieut. Dillon
-1 Sgt. -2 Cpls. -12 Pvts. -A Party
(2) Lieut. Dabney
-1 Sgt. -2 Cpls. -12 Pvts. -B Party
(3) Lieut. Ridgley
-1 Sgt. -2 Cpls. -12 Pvts. -C Party
(5) Lieut. Freml (O.C.)
-2 Sgts.-3 Cpls. -18 Pvts. -E Party
(2 stretchers and 4 stretcher bearers)

FORMATION A, B, and C Parties will form left to right on taped ground at point marked X (see sketch) at H minus 30 minutes. They will each be in a column of files. E Party will follow in the rear in the same formation. D Party will, at the same time, be disposed in observation on the extreme eastern tip of the Bois de Cantigny.

TASK On commencing artillery bombardment, A, B, C and E parties, preserving their general alignment, will advance as close as possible to the woods.

A, B, and C Parties, in the order named from left to right, will advance directly into the woods. If opposition is encountered, B Party will hold with covering fire from the front, and A and C Parties will advance by the flanks, outflanking the resistance.

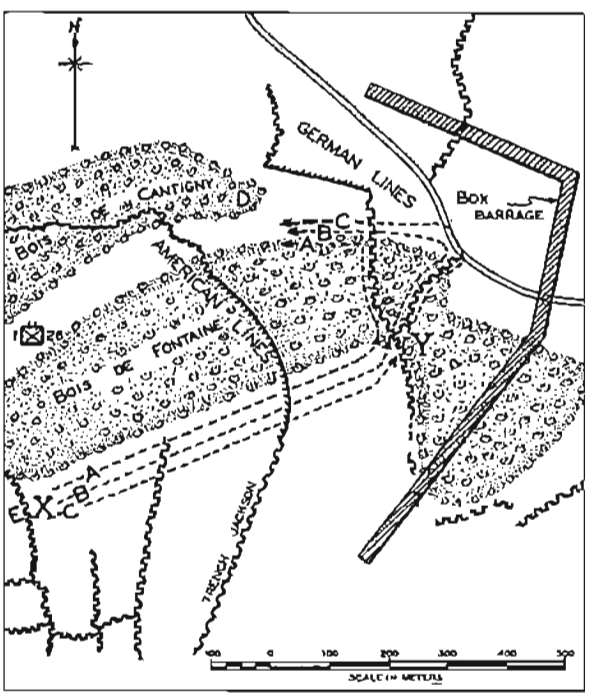
On entering the woods, A Party will split off to the left branch of the trench [and] top the north edge of the woods, capturing or killing all occupants and from that point it will return. B and C Parties will continue down the trench running to the northeast, outflanking tactics being employed when necessary. On reaching the north edge of the woods, they will function the same as A Party.

E Party will follow in rear. It shall be its particular function to guard the right flank and reinforce the assaulting parties when necessary.

D Party will remain in observation in its original position, ready to engage with fire any machine guns that may open [fire] from the slope of the ridge or northeast of the woods.

It will retire upon completion of the raid.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, JR.
Major (USR), 26th Infantry
Commanding



Information and instructions as to fire support, dress and equipment, and many other details were included. The assault parties were directed to move forward during a ten-minute preparation by

artillery and Stokes mortars. A box barrage would then be formed, while the infantry rushed the position. The plan called only for those supporting fires normally available in the sector. The position and routes followed by the assault parties are indicated on the sketch.

The raid was carried out as planned. Thirty-three prisoners were taken, including one officer, five noncommissioned officers, two artillery observers and two or three machine gunners. Several sacks of papers were secured. American casualties were one officer and one soldier killed and four soldiers wounded.

DISCUSSION: Here we have a plan that appears complicated. It requires some time and thought to understand, and yet simplicity is its underlying feature. It is obvious, then, that simplicity in tactics is not necessarily equivalent to simplicity in words.

Let us examine this plan. In the first place, the order was published several days before the raid, thereby giving all concerned ample time to digest it and make the necessary preparations.

The work planned for the artillery, machine guns, and Stokes mortars was simple. They were directed to do some shooting on a time schedule. That was all.

It is with the assault parties, however that we are chiefly concerned. Note that the southern edge of the Bois de Fontaine parallels the route of advance of these parties. To maintain direction to their objective, each group had only to follow this edge of the wood.

Arriving at the hostile position the left party turned to the left (north) following the German front line trench until it reached the north edge of the Bois de Fontaine which it then followed back to the American lines. The two right groups moved along the trench that runs to the northeast until they too, reached the north edge of this wood which they followed back to their own position. All three parties had clear-cut features to guide them and each route formed a circuit.

Thus we see the tasks for the individual groups were not difficult to carry out on the ground. The chances for possible mishaps was greatly reduced by the care taken in selecting these guiding features for the parties to follow. Their mission was clear and simple. The action of Party A did not hinge on that of Party B. The plan did not depend on any delicate calculation of time and space. It was simple and it proved effective.

Major Roosevelt's after-action report for the regimental commander, dated 2 July, is also a classic, but received comparatively little attention. He related how the raiders had crept to within seventy-five yards of their quarry, and there waited for the artillery and mortar attack to lift. They found the German barbed wire cut in numerous places by the artillery. While the box barrage was being fired, Roosevelt reports,

> The parties swung into the woods at the slow-double. It was found that there were numbers of Germans in the second line trench. B Party assaulted their flank; C Party swung around and took them in rear. The Germans were both in the trench and in funk holes hollowed in the front. They seemed to be taken by surprise, and as a rule offered little resistance. Where possible, they were captured, but where they showed any hesitance, they were immediately bayoneted or shot. In some case they came promptly from the funk holes—in others, they made no response and incendiary bombs were thrown in....

> It was at this point in the operation that Lieutenant Freml was killed. He had already given numerous instances of his courage and coolness. On assaulting the woods, he advanced with the front line in order that he might insure [*sic*] that the right direction was taken, a point on which, probably, the success of the raid depended. At the time of his death, he had gone to A Party on the left, to see that certain small posts, which we were aware of, were taken care of by them. A German jumped out of the bushes and discharged a pistol into Lieutenant Freml's chest. He died instantly. The German was killed immediately by a private, with a bayonet.
>
> Numerous instances occurred in this fight in the woods where the men showed up well. Lieutenant Dabney, leader of C Party, saw an officer and rushed to take him. While he was seizing him, he was attacked by three Germans. A private near him shot two and bayoneted the other with so much force that he pinned him to a tree where the bayonet stuck so fast that it had to be left, the only piece of ordnance lost by the assaulting party.

Major Roosevelt keenly felt the loss of First Lieutenant Wesley Freml. In *Average Americans,* he paid tribute to Freml as "an old Regular Army sergeant... [who] had fought in the Philippine Islands. After this war he was planning to return and establish a chicken farm. He always kept his head no matter what the circumstances were and his solutions for situations that arose were always practical. His men were devoted to him and would follow him anywhere." Moreover, Roosevelt noted, "the company which made this raid was composed of raw recruits who had never had even the most rudimentary kind of military training until their arrival in Europe some five months before this date. They were of all walks of life and all extractions. Many did not even speak the English tongue with ease."

Roosevelt, faced with the prospect of training a new cadre of officers and sergeants, also rued the loss of Amiel Frey. In particular, the battalion commander missed the fatherly joshing Frey exhibited in his dealings with junior officers. Most memorable in this regard was Frey's treatment of one Captain Barnwell Rhett Legge. A replacement company commander from South Carolina, Legge had seemed especially green on arrival, a judgment subsequently substantiated in one of the captain's first actions. "Once Legge took out a raiding party and captured a German prisoner," Roosevelt reported in *Average Americans;* but when it was found that the enemy soldier was all of fifty-four years old, "Frey never let [Legge] hear the last of it, asking him if he considered it a sportsmanlike proceeding to take a man that age, and saying that a man who would do such a thing would shoot quail on the ground or catch trout with a worm."

Prelude to Soissions

Neither the Germans nor General Pershing gave the 26th Infantry much respite. On 7 July the 1st Division was relieved by French units, and on the following day commenced marching back toward Paris. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was eventually directed to billets in Ver, a quaint little town complete with picturesque houses and a ruined chateau set in a maze of cobblestone streets. A stream meandered through the town, and the entire battalion promptly turned out at water's edge for their first baths in several months. In due course the stream was teeming with hundreds of naked American men, a spectacle that afforded much amusement to the inhabitants of Ver—men, women, and children—who had gathered on a nearby bridge to watch. That evening the officers laid plans for a pleasant summer in those idyllic surroundings.

But GHQ had other plans. Into Ver the following afternoon filed a long column of trucks made in Cleveland, Ohio, and driven by Vietnamese serving with the French army. The soldiers of the 26th boarded the vehicles in a holiday mood, with much loud jok-

ing and singing that continued as they rode out of the town. The French officer in command of the trucks did not know their final destination, but from talking to other officers along the way, Major Roosevelt soon deduced that the unit was heading for offensive action near Soissons.

It so happened that the 1st Division had launched its 28 May attack on Cantigny just as the Germans were beginning the latest in a series of powerful offensives aimed at achieving a decisive victory over the British and French armies before the Americans could reach the battlefield in significant numbers. The first of these offensives (21 March-4 April) had driven a deep wedge between the British and French armies in the Allied center, with Cantigny marking the point of the wedge; the second (9-29 April) punched deep into the north flank of the British Expeditionary Force. Then, on 27 May, the Germans attacked the French sector of the line east of Noyon, between Rheims and Soissons. After rupturing the defenses, the Germans thrust over the Aisne River past Soissons to Château-Thierry on the Marne River. By 4 June they had penetrated to a depth of twenty miles and opened a gap in the French defenses some thirty-seven miles across. At this point the Germans had created three deep salients in the Allied line north of the Marne, and were thus posi-

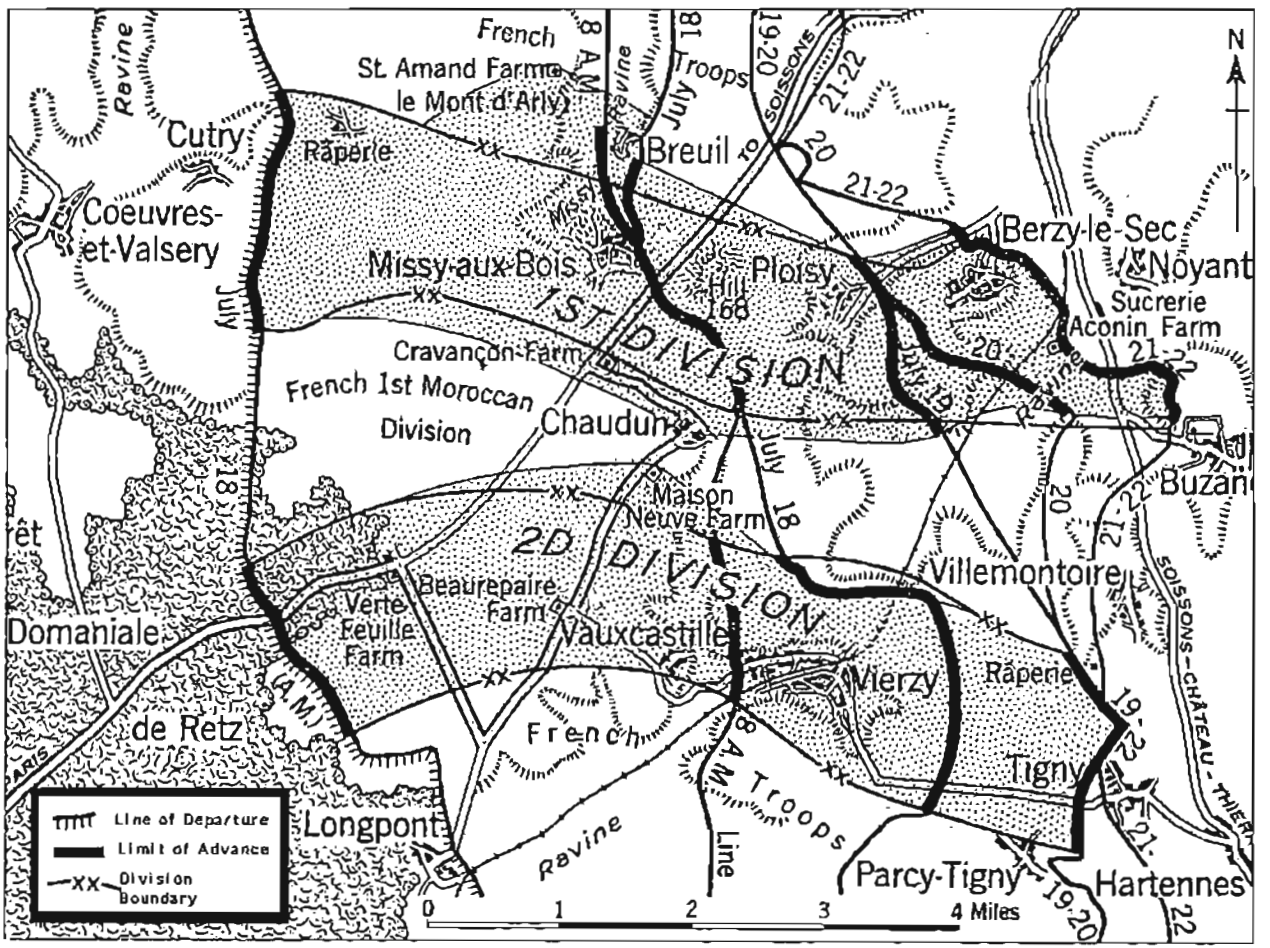


Fig. 1.14. French-American attack south of Soissons, 18-22 July 1918

tioned to undertake both the isolation of British forces in Belgium and the envelopment of Paris. To stabilize the front along the Marne, General Foch committed units of the U.S. 2nd and 3rd Divisions as reinforcements for the beleaguered French divisions.

The 2nd Division had been training in France nearly as long as the 1st Division. It comprised two infantry brigades, the 3rd and the 4th; the latter, known as the "Marine Brigade" because it consisted of the 5th and 6th Regiments of the U.S. Marine Corps, had the highest percentage of trained infantrymen in the AEF. The 3rd Division, on the other hand, had been in France less than two months, and had not even the advantage of service in a quiet sector of the line. Nonetheless, the machine-gun battalions and infantry regiments of both divisions acquitted themselves well; those of the 3rd Division that were rushed to defend Château-Thierry earned the sobriquet "Rock of the Marne," and those of the 2nd Division engaged in the fighting in and around Belleau Wood encouraged the dispirited French and captured the imagination of the world with their performance. The German offensive south of Soissons ground to a halt on 5 June, and in the following five weeks both sides worked to improve their respective positions along the salient's boundaries, with the Germans in particular concentrating large forces in the east and southeast.

Once it was clear that the enemy's momentum had been checked, General Foch prepared a counterstroke. While assuring a strong, in-depth defense against any eastward expansion of the salient, he directed a rapid concentration of fifteen divisions southwest of Soissons. This force, designated Tenth French Army, included British, American, French, and French colonial troops, all commanded by General Charles Mangin. Mangin was to mount a counteroffensive aimed at cutting German communications to their forces in the salient facing east and south. His plan of attack called for surprise, to be achieved by utilizing the forests of the region for concealment against aerial observation, observing the strictest security over orders and messages, and foregoing the customary artillery preparations. The attack would be spearheaded by the U.S. 1st and 2nd Divisions and the 1st Moroccan Division, which included a detachment of the French Foreign Legion and several Senegalese regiments. The two robust American divisions and the comparably large 1st Moroccan Division constituted a formidable assault force. To augment its strength, Mangin had assembled more than four hundred tanks, the largest armor force yet fielded by the French.

The trucks with their Vietnamese drivers transported the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry as far as the Forest of Compiègne, west of Cutry. From then on, it was infantry work. Theodore Roosevelt remembered how, as the day wore on and the trucks drew closer to the front,

> we became more certain that our guess as to our probable mission was correct. We heard that the Foreign Legion and the Second American Division had come up on our right. We knew that our division, the Foreign Legion, and Second Division, would not be concentrated at the same point if it did not mean a real offensive. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

Both the 1st and 2nd Divisions were commanded by recently appointed major generals, Charles P. Summerall and James G. Harbord, respectively. Summerall had moved up from command of the 1st Artillery Brigade to replace Bullard, who had been promoted to command III Corps; and Harbord had been promoted from command of the Marine Brigade. The two divisions—which had both achieved recent tactical successes—were concentrated hurriedly, with the 2nd being given much less time than the 1st to array itself for battle, issue appropriate orders, and make requisite logistic preparations.

The 1st Division in its attack at Soissons employed

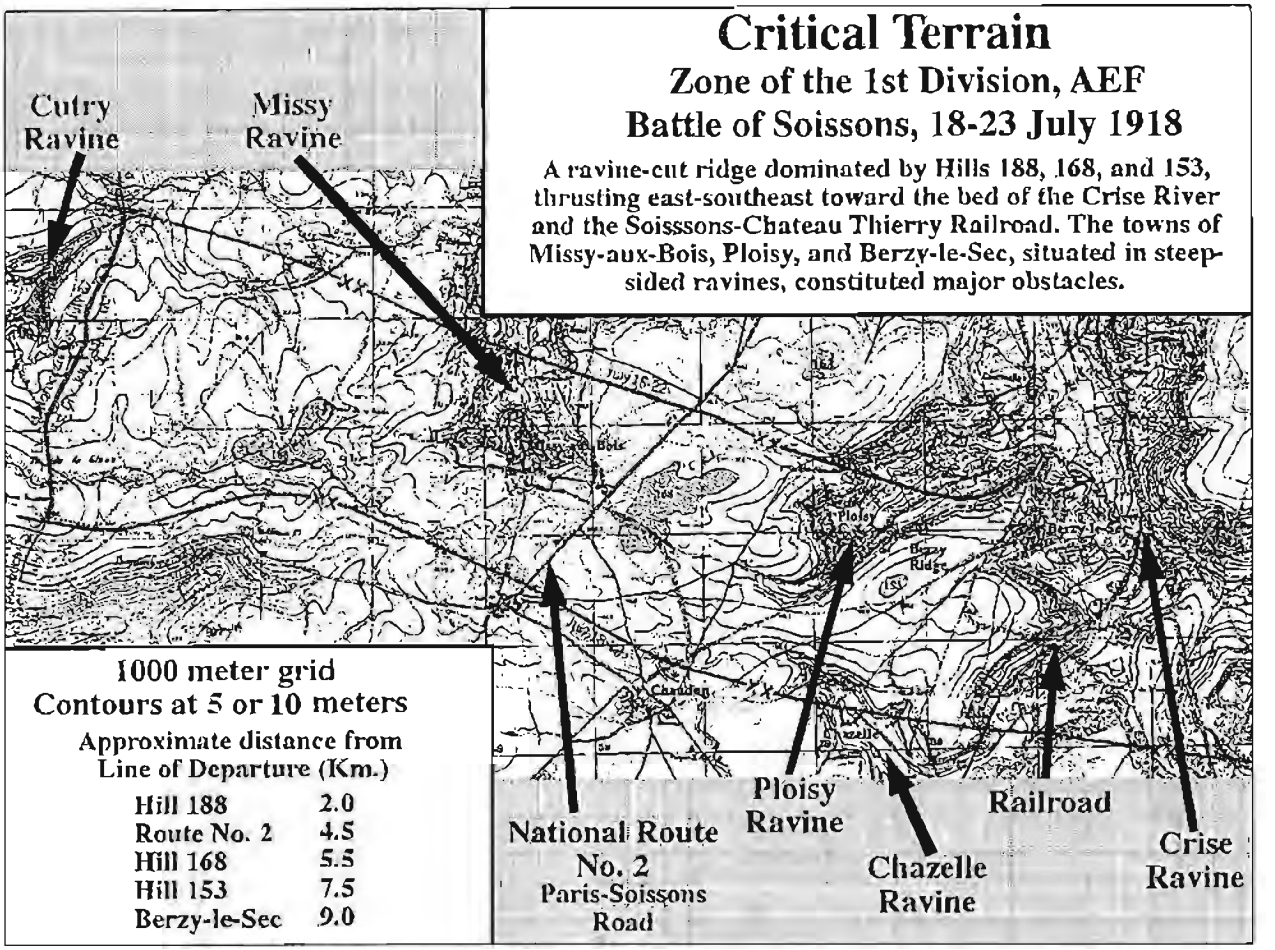


Fig. 1.15.

its well-rehearsed open warfare formation, with two brigades abreast, each brigade in a column of regiments. The 2nd Infantry Brigade was on the north, with the 28th Infantry Regiment on the left and the 26th Infantry Regiment on the right. The 1st Infantry Brigade disposed the 16th Infantry Regiment on its left—with the 26th on its flank—and the 18th Infantry Regiment on the division's right boundary. The pace of advance would be that of the division's rolling barrage simulations, one hundred meters every two minutes, or three kilometers per hour (somewhat slower than a soldier marching on a road, but exhausting when moving cross-country under combat load). The attack would be supported by French tanks, apportioned to the first-line battalions.

The division was assigned a zone oriented generally eastward through open, gently rolling wheat fields along a ridge comprising Hills 188, 168, and 153, and terminating in the Berzy Ridge before plunging into the Crise Ravine. The ridge system was a watershed that drained northward via deep ravines (which were cut by headwater erosion in the underlying limestone) toward the Aisne River, west and southwest toward the Ourcq and Marne Rivers, and east and southeast toward the Crise River. In the center of the division's zone the ridge was crossed by Route No. 2, the

Soissons-Paris highway, which ran southwest from Soissons along an intersecting ridge whose high ground overlooked the highway from the north. In the Crise Ravine ran the railroad and highway linking Soissons with Château-Thierry. The division sector was about twenty-seven hundred meters across at the line of departure above the Cutry Ravine, but narrowed to two thousand meters at the first day's objectives. The first assigned objective was the road traversing Hill 188 through Tilleul de la Glaux; the second, a line abreast the village of Missy-aux-Bois; the third, a position on line with Hill 168. The fourth and final objective was the road and railroad in the Crise Ravine beyond Berzy-le-Sec.

The zone of the 26th Infantry included some of the more difficult terrain facing the division. The regiment's attack position was in the Cutry Ravine, and its assigned axis of advance traversed the Missy Ravine (where the village of Missy-aux-Bois was located), crossed Route No. 2 to Hill 168, and proceeded through the Ploisy Ravine to Hill 153. Colonel Hamilton Smith, commander of the 26th Infantry, elected to begin the attack with the 2nd Battalion in the first line, the 3rd Battalion in support, and the 1st Battalion in brigade reserve.

The night approach march into the attack position was hellish. Roosevelt described it well:

> Apparently the idea was to stake all on one throw. Marshal Foch had decided on a counter-offensive in this part and had delegated to General Mangin, commander of the [Tenth] French Army, the task of putting it into execution. Mangin desired to make this offensive, if possible, a complete surprise. All care was used that no unnecessary movement took place among our troops in the back area. We were not to take over the position from the French troops holding the front line, as was generally customary for the attacking troops before an action, but rather to march up on the night of the offensive and attack through them. Fortunately, from the point of view of secrecy, the night before the attack it rained cats and dogs. The infantry slogged through the mud, up roads cut to pieces by trucks and over trails ankle deep in water. The artillery skittered and strained into place. The tanks clanked and rattled up, breaking the columns and tearing up what was left of the road. It was so dark you could hardly see your hand before your face.
>
> As part of the element of surprise there was to be but a short period of preparatory bombardment. The artillery was to fire what the French call "the fire of destruction" for five minutes on the front line, and then to move to the next objective. This bombardment was to commence at 4:30, and at 4:35 the men were to go over the top.
>
> The troops all reached the position safely by about 4 o'clock. Our position lay along the edge of a rugged and steep ravine. The rain had stopped, and the first faint pink of an early summer morning lighted the sky. Absolute silence hung over everything, broken only by the twittering of birds. Suddenly, out of the stillness, without warning of a preliminary shot, our artillery opened with a crash. All along the horizon, silhouetted against the pale pink of the early dawn, was the tufted smoke of high explosive shells, and the burst of shrapnel showed in flashes like the spitting of a broken electric wire in a hailstorm. After the bombardment had been going on for two minutes, D company, on the right, became impatient and wanted to attack, and I heard the men call, "Let's go, let's go!" At 4:35 the infantry went over. (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*)

Soissons: First Day, 18 July

The first objectives in all three divisions were carried in an hour or so, and columns of prisoners began to pour rearward. Mangin's expectations seemed amply fulfilled. But the 1st Division soon forged ahead of the

French formations on either flank, where the attackers were halted by the effort to clear enemy-occupied villages. The 18th and 28th Regiments, finding that they were receiving fire from enemy positions located outside the 1st Division's zone, moved to put these out of action. (The map of the operation [figure 1.14] shows this extension beyond the division boundary; note that the 2nd Division also expanded outside its assigned area, and that this movement, in conjunction with those made by the 18th and 28th Regiments, virtually pinched out the 1st Moroccan Division by the time the Americans reached their first-day objectives.)

The 1st Brigade, supported by tanks, crested Hill 188 and attacked quickly along the trench lines, originally built by the French to defend against a German attack from the north, that ran parallel to their axis of advance. The tanks and infantry were soon approaching Route No. 2. As they neared the road, however, it became apparent that German machine guns and artillery were well positioned to exact a heavy toll in casualties for any further advance. Equally apparent was the inability of the 1st Moroccan Division on the right and the 2nd Brigade on the left—which were both engaged in fighting their way across ravines and through villages—to keep pace. The 1st Brigade found itself echeloned back on both flanks, over-extended, and vulnerable to counterattack. At 0900 troops of the 16th Infantry cleared the portion of Missy-aux-Bois that lay atop the ravine, and the 16th moved its command post there.

The 26th Infantry moved abreast of the 16th Infantry and advanced through the first objective, only to be held up by stiff resistance at the edge of the Missy Ravine. At 0715 3rd Battalion passed through

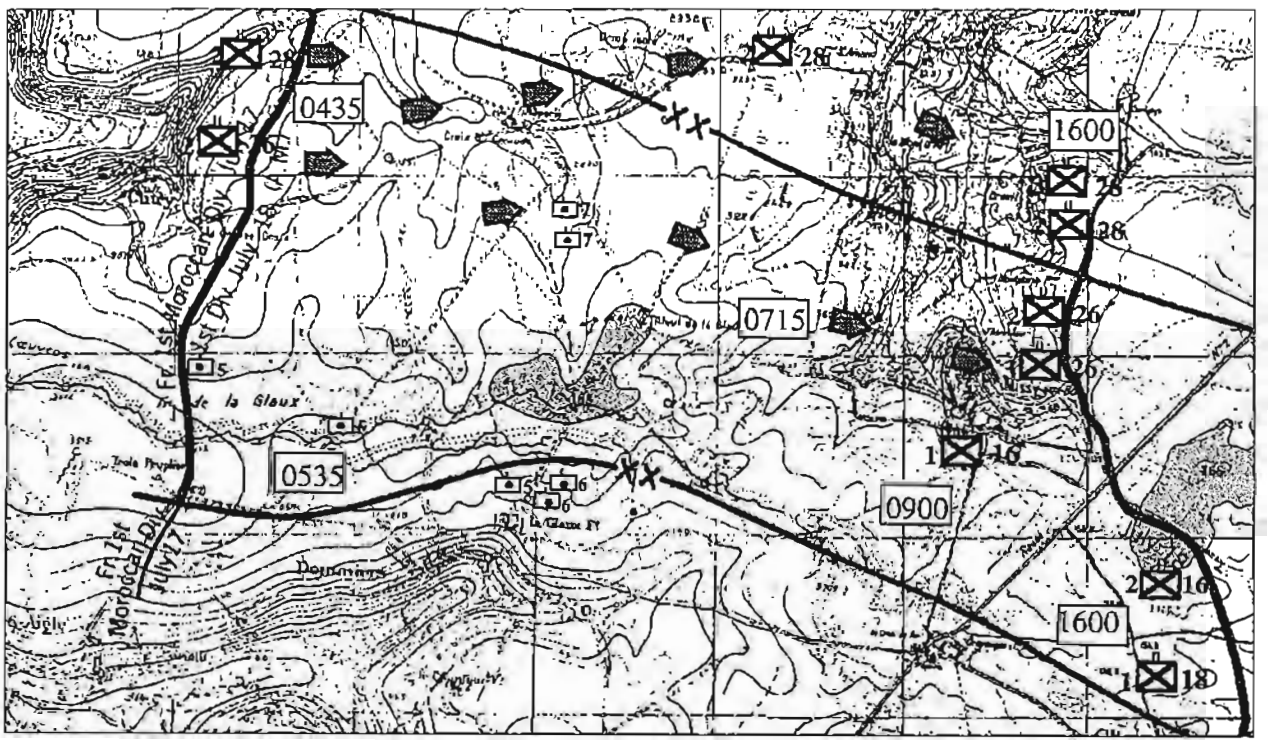


Fig. 1.16. First Day, 18 July. 1st Infantry Brigade (on right) echeloned to left, advances 1 km forward of 2nd Infantry Brigade at 1600. 2nd Brigade is delayed by slow advance of French on left and by Missy Ravine. Artillery is positioned as shown by 1600. (1-km grid, contour interval 5 and 10 m)

2nd Battalion and attacked down into the ravine. In the meantime the 28th Infantry had pressed out of the sector to clear a defended farm complex (St. Amand Ferme). Leading the way, despite the lack of French support on its flanks, was the regiment's 2nd Battalion under the command of Major Clarence Huebner. On reaching the edge of the Missy Ravine, Huebner, like the 26th Regiment on his right flank, discovered that there was no quick or easy way to get across it.

The Missy Ravine was about a kilometer wide and forty meters deep, with a deep stream coursing through a marsh approximately one hundred meters wide. Its slopes were steep and covered with trees and brush, and honeycombed with limestone caves. The Germans had developed the caves—most of which were on the western scarp, opening to the east—for housing and protection of stores, and had built corduroy roads from the cave openings to their gun positions to facilitate movement across the sodden ground. On 18 July thirty pieces of artillery were situated there, including a battery of 150mm howitzers near Le Mont d'Arly directly in the path of Huebner's battalion, one battery of six 77mm guns just south of Breuil, and another battery of 77mm guns just north of Breuil. These batteries and a heavy concentration of machine guns near Saconin-el-Breuil brought concentrated fires on Huebner's tanks and infantry. Comparable German defenses presented similar problems for the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry. The fighting was desperate: troops plunged down the near escarpment—often without noticing the caves—and waded through the marsh and thrashed through the brush, taking heavy losses from defenders both to their front and flanks, and from the caves to their rear. Nevertheless, the 26th made headway, driving through the northern section of Missy-aux-Bois, and pressing on to dig in along Route No. 2. This left a gap between the 26th and 28th Infantry. In the early afternoon a battalion from the French 153rd Infantry Division across the corps boundary arrived on the scene, relieving the 28th's left flank. What remained of the 28th's 2nd and 3rd Battalions then aligned themselves in zone with the two battalions of the 26th.

By now the four battalions leading 2nd Brigade were severely depleted. Huebner's 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry was hit particularly hard, having lost all its officers except the major, who had organized the remnants into five platoons, each commanded by a sergeant. The other three battalions were in somewhat better shape, but all four soon suffered additional casualties to the fire of enemy machine guns and artillery that covered Route No. 2 and the adjacent wheat fields. Every attempt made that afternoon to thrust across the road toward the third objective, Hill 168, resulted in heavy losses. The Germans, responding to tactical emergency in the same fashion that the Americans had responded at Château-Thierry, had thrown machine-gun battalions forward into hastily prepared positions on Hill 168 and the saddle to its north. Either by order or on their own initiative, the German machine gunners and artillerists were making a determined effort to deny any movement beyond Route No. 2. French tanks tried to cross the road, but were picked off one by one by artillery pieces firing from the northeast. The 2nd Brigade was stopped.

The 1st Infantry Brigade (Brigadier General John L. Hines commanding) had advanced one kilometer farther than the 2nd Brigade, and its losses had also been heavy. Casualties in the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry had been as heavy as those in the 2/28th Infantry: all the officers and most of two companies were dead or wounded, and the remnants of the battalion were commanded by a sergeant. And casualties were not the brigade's only problems. Nothing was going smoothly for the 16th Infantry as it extended its line to link up with the 26th Infantry, or for the 18th Infantry as it tried to reassemble units scattered by their too-deep penetration into the zone of the Moroccan Division. Confusion was rampant.

Meanwhile, Companies A and B, 5th Marines, of the 2nd Division, advancing northeast on high, open ground, came under heavy fire from the direction of

the village of Chaudun. They promptly advanced on the village. At the 2nd Division's north boundary they met a detachment of the 18th Infantry digging in under direction of an officer. The marines pressed the attack on Chaudun, and claimed to have captured it at about 0900. The 18th Infantry, however, also claimed to have taken the town. Neither assertion can be authenticated or disproved and, as result, the issue is still in dispute. What is indisputable is that the two American divisions pushed zealously out of their assigned zones, and that the dislocation of the 2nd Division exceeded that of the 1st Division. (With regard to the latter, it is interesting to note that a German unit positioned near Hill 163 northeast of Missy-aux-Bois, reporting to its headquarters around noon, said that it had identified marines and members of the 2nd Division's 23rd Infantry among the prisoners it had captured that morning.)

At the end of the day, notwithstanding the failure of 2nd Brigade to take its third objective, the 1st Division's senior commanders were satisfied with the overall effort of their subordinate units. The 1st Artillery Brigade had advanced its batteries forward of the line of departure, and were in a posture to support continuation of the attack on the morrow. The 1st Infantry Brigade had penetrated six kilometers. The 2nd Brigade had fought a tough action in the Missy Ravine, where some 24 German officers and 580 men had marched out under a white flag from a large cave near Le Mont d'Arly. The cave had also yielded a stock of trench mortars and machine guns, plus a number of horses. Every one of the thirty artillery pieces that had been firing in the ravine were in American hands. Altogether, some fifteen hundred prisoners had been taken, and enemy dead littered the battlefield. The division had uncommitted battalions, and another day ahead.

Soissons: Second Day, 19 July

At 0130 on 19 July Major General Summerall called in his brigade commanders to issue orders to attack at 0400 behind the customary rolling barrage, with the objective of advancing beyond Berzy-le-Sec. The order reached the first-line units with little time to spare before jumping off, but all went forward on schedule. By 0900 all units could report limited

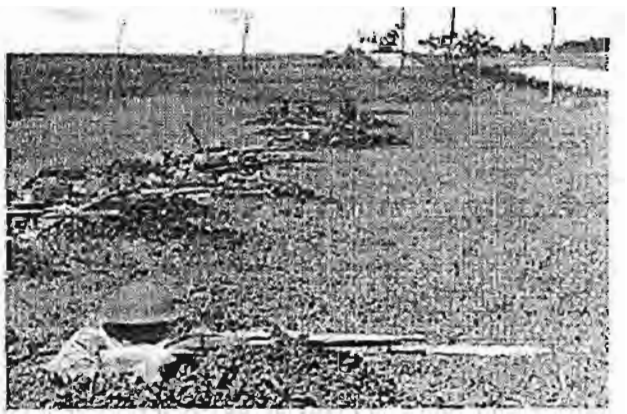


Fig. 1.17. 26th Infantry positions along Route 2, vicinity of Missy-aux-Bois, 19 July

progress. The 18th took high ground at the head of the Chazelle Ravine. The 16th advanced to a position astride the ridge leading to Hill 153. The 26th Infantry pressed across fire-swept fields to gain the cover afforded by the roadbed of Route No. 2, and the 28th Infantry moved up on its left. The 26th was hard hit: Major Roosevelt of the 1st Battalion sustained a crippling leg-wound, and Major McCloud of the 2nd Battalion and two of his company commanders were killed. Crossing the road seemed impossible. Captain Shipley Thomas recalled that

> As soon as the situation was sensed, all the available tanks were rushed to the aid of the 26th and 28th Infantry....The arrival of the tanks made things go more easily. They waddled over the road and up the slope, shooting up every machine-gun nest that lay concealed in the tall

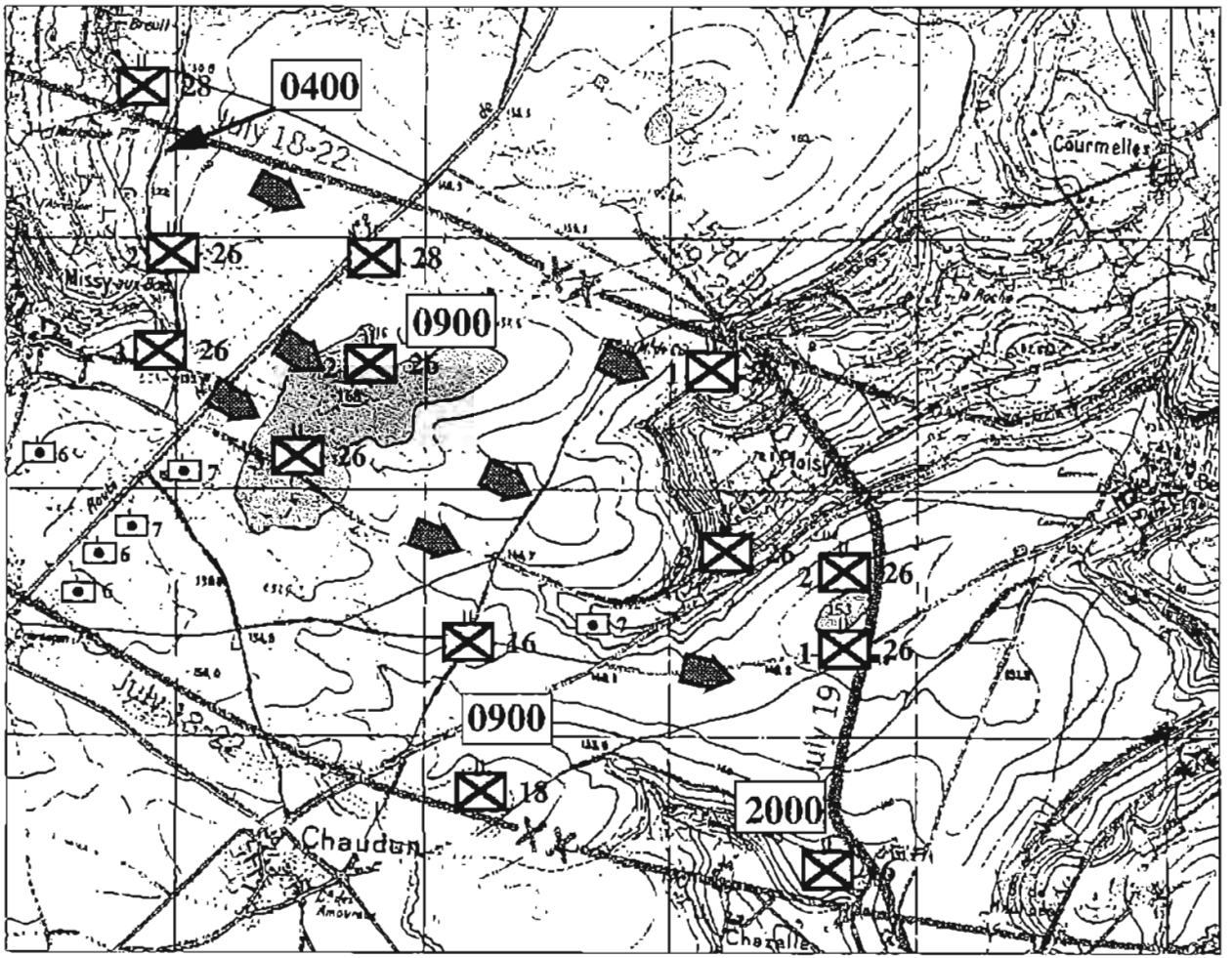


Fig. 1.18. Second Day, 19 July. Both brigades attack at 0400. By 0900 26th Infantry takes Hill 168, but advance stalls. Attack renewed at 1730 with priority of fires to 2nd Brigade. 1/26th passes through, seizes Hill 153 by 2000. Artillery reaches positions by 2000. (1-km grid, contour interval 5 and 10 m)

grass, but as they reached the summit they met a swift end. The Germans had left several 77mm field guns on the far slope, and, as tanks came up on the skyline, the Germans put them all out of action by direct fire. The presence of these guns was not known to the Allies, as all the Allied planes had been driven from the sky. The Allied infantry, which had followed the tanks closely, was now on the crest of the hill. It seemed impossible to advance, for the slightest movement brought a hail of bullets which cut down everyone standing. (Thomas, *History of the A.E.F.*)

Then the sun, the lack of food and water, as well as the disorganization occasioned by casualties among leaders, asserted themselves. The 26th and 28th halted and dug in.

A second order was issued by division calling for a coordinated attack at 1730, this time for a limited objective: to eliminate the echelonment leftward with-

in the division by seizing the high ground overlooking the Crise Ravine in the zone of the 2nd Infantry Brigade. Major General Summerall directed that all available tanks and artillery fires be concentrated to support its advance. Moreover, he directed the 1st Infantry Brigade, from the commanding positions its troops held on the right flank of the attackers, to support the advance of the 2nd Brigade with machine-gun fire. Summerall returned the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry from division reserve to the 2nd Infantry Brigade. Similarly, General Buck returned the 1/28th Infantry to its parent headquarters, and released to Colonel Hamilton Smith, the commander of the 26th Infantry, his 1st Battalion, until then in brigade reserve. Both battalions were directed to attack through the forces in contact.

The plan succeeded beyond expectations. Hugging its rolling barrage, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry led the 2nd Brigade in taking Hill 153 and coming abreast the 1st Brigade. Darkness fell with the Americans digging in above and within Ploisy, on Hill 153, and along a much-shortened 1st Brigade line extending southward to the division boundary.

Soissons: Third Day, 20 July

During the night of 19-20 July, the U.S. 2nd Division was relieved by a French division. At a coordinating conference of division commanders on the morning of 20 July, Major General Summerall informed the attendees that, although initial plans had placed Berzy-le-Sec within the zone of the French division on the left flank, General Mangin had just issued orders directing the 1st Division to seize that town as well as the high ground overlooking the town of Buzancy across the Crise Ravine. The objective was to deny the enemy use of the railroad and the highway running south from Soissons. The division was to launch its attack at 1400 that afternoon.

At 1200 all the heavy artillery available to General Summerall began to fire on Berzy-le-Sec, and at 1400 the rolling barrage began. Moving out as planned behind the barrage, the 1st Infantry Brigade swiftly advanced some two kilometers, crossing the Soissons-Château-Thierry railroad and occupying high ground overlooking the Soissons-Château-Thierry highway. The 2nd Brigade, however, made little headway.

In the 1st Division's history of World War I there

Fig. 1.19. 155mm howitzers of the 5th Artillery positioned to fire on Berzy-le-Sec

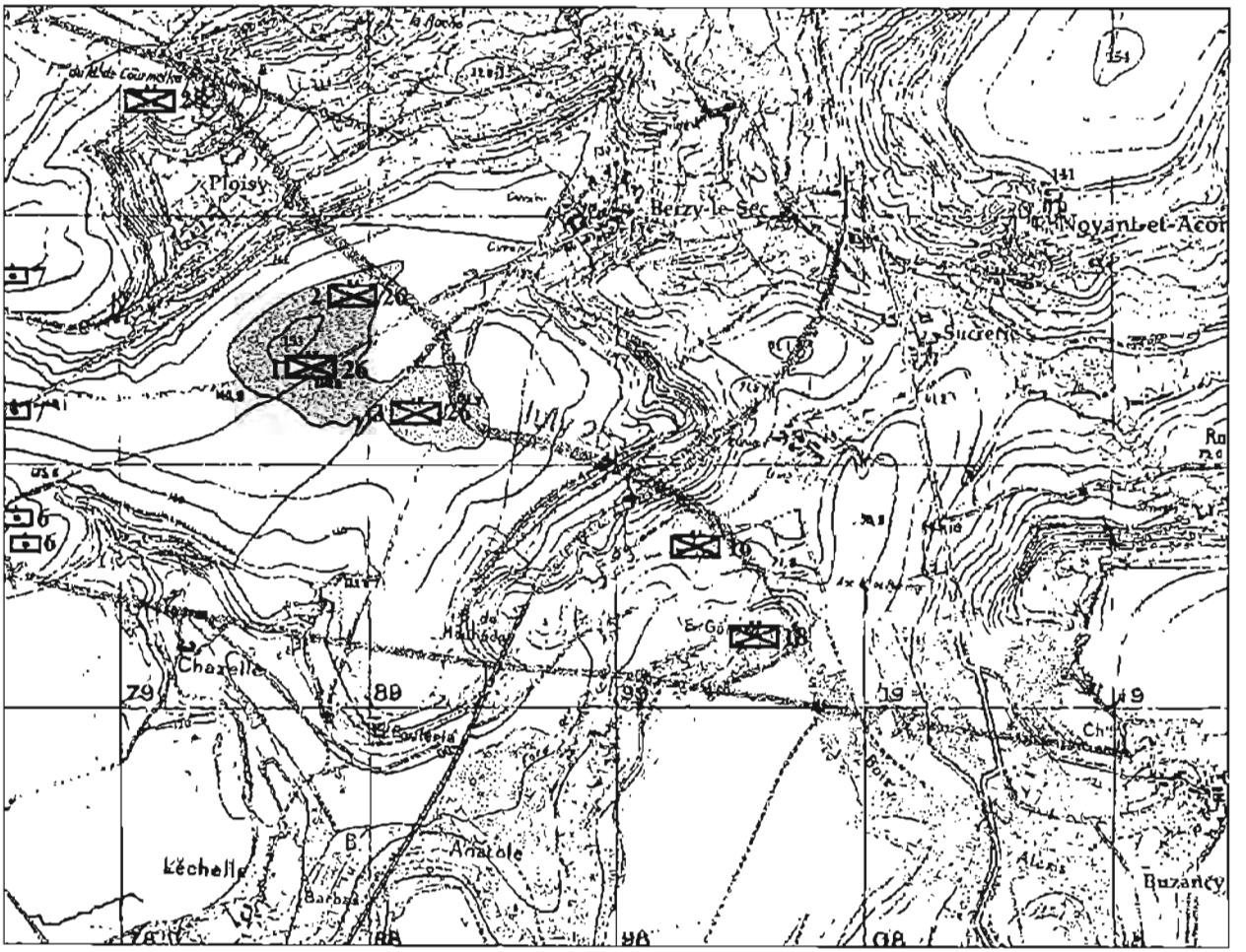


Fig. 1.20. Third Day, 20 July. 1st Brigade crosses railroad, dominates highway. Attack of 2nd Brigade on Berzy-le-Sec repulsed.

is the following account based on an eyewitness report from an "observer northwest of Chaudun":

> It was in the early afternoon of July 20th, a hot, sunny day, that the first movement of our infantry, looking to an attack on Berzy-le-Sec, was revealed. The ground along the Paris-Soissons road, until then occupied only by some of our batteries and now deserted, save for their personnel, suddenly became alive with men. Under the torn boughs of the poplars and marching toward the southeast appeared a strong force of infantry. The composition of this force was not known to the observer and he was not aware of the impending attack. Field glasses were leveled in its direction to discover its identity. Meanwhile, more of the infantry appeared and it was seen that the men were in attack formation, except that they were moving by the flank. Their pace was slow and impressive—about that at which a barrage rolls. The faces of the infantry, in the shadow of the steel helmets, appeared black, and a French officer exclaimed: "They are the tirailleurs!" referring to the Algerian regiment of

the Moroccan Division on the right of the First Division. But further inspection showed they were not tirailleurs. They were the remnants of available reserves of the First Division after three days of terrific battle. On the breast of each man was the unmistakable box respirator, and the broad American bayonets flashed in the hot July sun. The wide column slowly wound down the grassy ravine toward the Crise. It was probably somewhat over a kilometer in length and three hundred meters wide. Some time after its rear elements had cleared the Paris-Soissons road, there were some commands, whistles sounded and the column halted.

At about this time it was joined by a small force, coming from the southeast. The halt was not for long. The whole column, until then moving in attack formation by the right flank, was suddenly faced to the left toward its objective, Berzy-le-Sec. Its march thus far had been unmolested. It seems curious that this large body of infantry was not seen as it crossed the high ground of the Paris-Soissons road by the enemy's observatories south of the Aisne. Its slow and stately movement was, however, uninterrupted.

Meanwhile, our artillery had been pounding Berzy-le-Sec and the heights above it, but, to the observer at Chaudun, the effect of this fire was concealed by intervening high ground. Our leading waves now appeared approaching the crest of the ridge above Berzy-le-Sec, following the barrage. Each individual soldier in the attack was distinctly visible against the grassy hillsides. The whole mass was proceeding with the utmost regularity and precision. As the leading elements reached the crest of the ridge, a single battery of enemy 150-mm. howitzers opened fire with time shell, obviously with observed fire on the target. This battery was followed almost at once by many other batteries of 150-mm., and 105-mm. howitzers, all firing time shell. The accuracy of preparation of this fire was such that practically no adjustment was required, and, almost immediately, our infantry was shrouded in smoke and dust. Great gaps were left in the ranks as the shells crashed among them. Nevertheless, the

Fig. 1.21. German ammunition bearers watching an American attack at Soissons

advance continued in the most orderly way. It was noticed that the enemy's artillery diminished its range as our infantry advanced.

Many of our infantry passed out of sight over the ridge, accompanied by the devastating fire of the enemy's artillery. Men struck by the enemy's fire either disappeared or ran aimlessly about and toppled over. Then began to be heard also the rattle of the enemy's machine guns. The attack had met the resistance of a strong position occupied in great force by the enemy. It could not be taken at this time by our worn soldiers, and, after this advance, they could go no farther. The thin lines lay down in shell holes, while long files of wounded hobbled painfully back.

Then appeared a sight which at first seemed inexplicable. Individual men and groups of twos and threes began to wander about all over the field. They were the unit leaders, reorganizing their groups against counterattack.

Thus the afternoon passed and night fell. (*History of the First Division* [1922])

Open warfare tactics, as evolved by the 1st Division, conditioned troops to perform their mission under fire. Today's soldier knows that the response to timed artillery fire should include dispersion, the use of cover and concealment, deception, and celerity of maneuver. The 1st Division, lacking wireless communications other than blinkers and pigeons, dispersed at hazard to cohesion and coherence. Nowadays, troops are taught to respond to machine guns with fire and movement; the attack of 20 July is the first evidence that the 1st Division was learning that lesson. On the battlefields of 1918, however, the "fire response" was provided only at the divisional and regimental levels by artillery and long-range machine-gun fire, respectively; yet to come was the notion of integrating automatic weapons with the movement of the attacking squads, for the enabling weapons were not in hand. Much was wrong with the attack of 20 July 1918, but as an exhibition of sheer courage and superb discipline, it was entirely admirable.

At Soissons the German machine guns were entrenched and often concealed by waist-high wheat through which scythes of bullets, wielded by invisible reapers, cut down the Americans. What was expected of soldiers attacking across ground defended by these weapons? The answer seems to have been to advance on line. It was thought that if the whole line pressed forward, each enemy gun would inevitably be flanked, thus exposing it to attack by rifle or bayonet. Hence, failure of any one soldier to advance was a serious matter, and failure of a whole unit to advance could occasion serious delay, as was the case in the 2nd Infantry Brigade; or it could necessitate committing units out of zone to eliminate threats from the flanks, as was the case in the 1st Infantry Brigade. And so the tactic required of each leader, and of each soldier, high courage and resolute action. Roosevelt told of a newly arrived infantry lieutenant, "fidgeting and highly nervous," who said

> Sir, there is a machine gun on that hill. I don't know whether I should attack it or whether I should wait until the troops on the right and left arrive and force it out. I don't know whether it is killing my men to no purpose whatever to advance. I don't know what to do. I am not afraid. My men are not afraid.

"Given the experience," Roosevelt commented, "he would have known exactly what to do" (Roosevelt, *Average Americans*).

Brigadier General Beaumont B. Buck, commander of the Second Infantry Brigade, provided this formulation:

> After the battle is launched, battalion, company, platoon, and section commanders are the men who must carry out the purpose of the higher

command. The lives of their men, like cards in a player's hand, must be played out sparingly and with foresight, but unlike a game of cards, there is no time to weigh and consider. Decision, based upon a lifetime of experience, must be instantaneous, for upon the modern field of battle death comes so quickly from hidden sources and unexpected spots that delay means the destruction of your command. Engaged in carrying out the mission assigned them, your men suddenly find themselves bracketed by rapid artillery fire, or they are the target of a sheaf of machine gun bullets, or they have come upon a hostile infantry entrenched and firing at effective range. Their destruction is imminent. It is here your subordinate commanders come into their own. Decision! Action! Instantaneous on the part of the commander on the spot is imperative if even a fraction of the command is to be saved. And similarly, when targets present themselves to the subordinate commander he must seize the golden opportunity to inflict losses upon the enemy and to maneuver his small command into positions of superiority over the enemy. An accumulation of these occurrences will determine the outcome of a phase of a battle and weigh heavily for victory or defeat. It is only during the lulls of battle or at the conclusion of well defined phases that the master touch of the commander is felt. (B. B. Buck, *Memories of Peace and War* [1935])

One onlooker at the Battle of Soissons was a stretcher-bearer with the 1st Moroccan Division, Corporal Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the since-famous Jesuit priest and theologian. In a contemporary (1918) letter to a friend, he attempted to describe what combat was like:

> There was something implacable about all this, above all; it seemed inanimate. You could see nothing of the agony and passion that gave each little moving human dot its own individual character and made them all into so many worlds. All you saw was the material development of a clash between two huge material forces....
>
> We had the American as neighbors, and I had a close up view of them. Everyone says the same: they're first-rate troops, fighting with intense individual passion (concentrated on the enemy) and wonderful courage. The only complaint one would make about them is that they don't take sufficient care; they're too apt to get themselves killed. When they're wounded, they make their way back holding themselves upright, almost stiff, impassive, and uncomplaining. I don't think I've ever seen such pride and dignity in suffering. There's complete comradeship between them and us, born fully fledged under fire.

On the night of 20-21 July, the chow carts caught up with the front-line battalions of the 1st Division, and many soldiers enjoyed their first hot food in four days. The division commander walked the line that night promising relief the following evening, but leaving no doubt that the 1st Division had to capture Berzy-le-Sec.

Soissions: Fourth Day, 21 July

At 0445, behind a rolling barrage, the remnants of the 18th Infantry attacked across the Crise Ravine and captured the plateau above Buzancy. The 16th Infantry advanced on its left. Priority for the division's artillery was then given to the 2nd Infantry Brigade. At 0830 the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry attacked due east and fought across the railroad. The rest of the regiment established fighting positions on the forward slope of the hill through which the roadbed had been cut, overlooking the highway to the south. The 28th Infantry, reinforced by elements of the 18th Infantry, attacked eastward along the Ploisy Ravine and entered Berzy-le-Sec from the northwest. Companies and battalions were now intermixed and the assault line was filled out with engineers, cooks, and mechanics. But the final

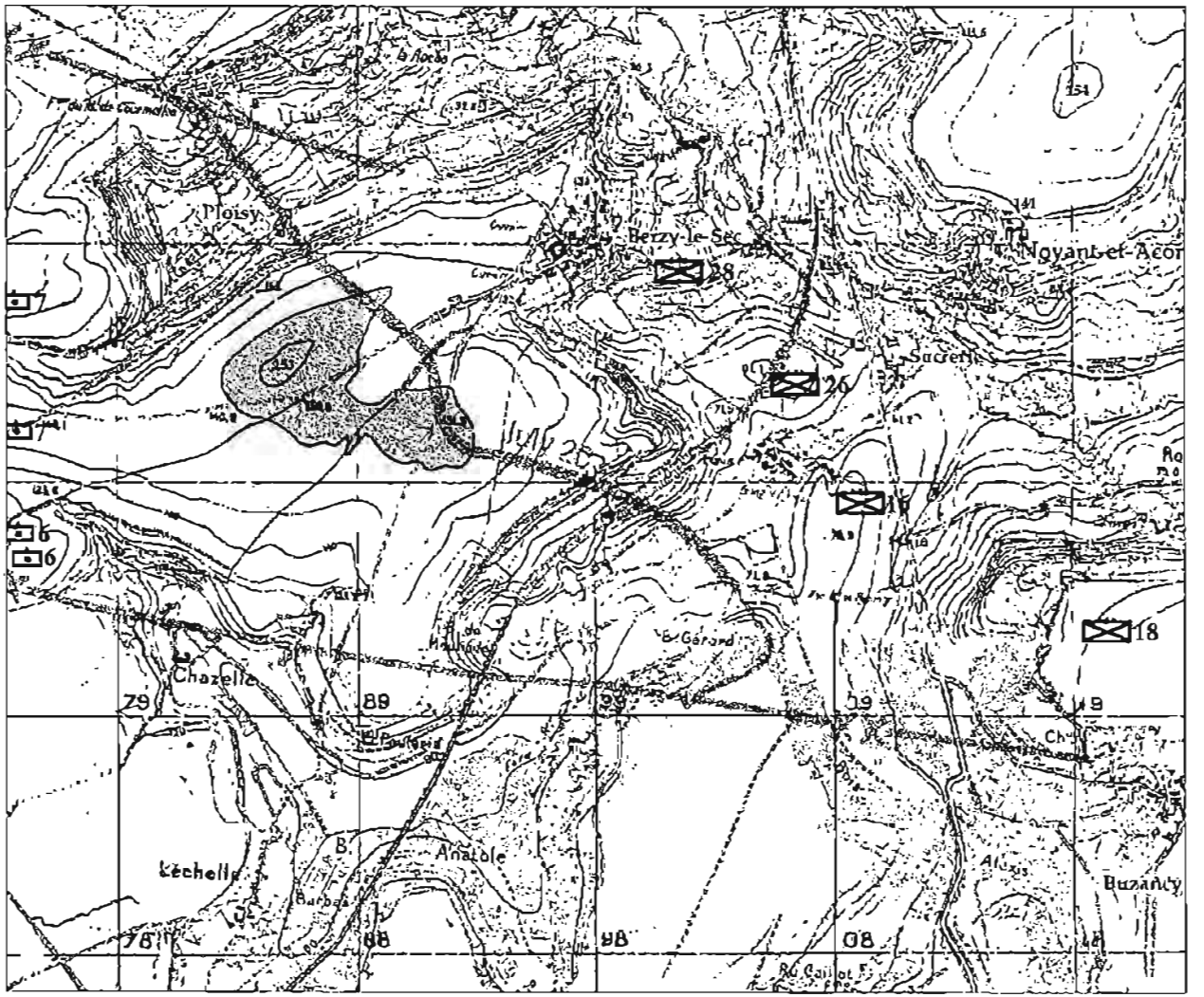


Fig. 1.22. Fourth Day, 21 July. The division mission is accomplished.

objectives had been taken: the 1st Division was astride the Crise Ravine, blocking German use of the communications from Soissons to Château-Thierry. Quoting again from *The History of the First Division:*

> The attack was preceded by a heavy fire of preparation on Berzy-le-Sec and the neighboring defenses of the enemy. The fire lasted a considerable time and at its conclusion the infantrymen rose from shell holes where they had passed the night and again advanced in attack formation on the objectives. As before, the enemy batteries... opened fire with time shell. The ranks of the infantry were again thinned by the heavy fire of the enemy's artillery. But through the clouds of dust and smoke our infantry advanced and finally every soldier in the attack able to move, disappeared from sight over the crest. The artillery fire of the enemy became visible only in drifting clouds of smoke. With the diminution of the ene-

my's artillery fire came a great increase in his machine gun fire, the droning sound of a considerable number being distinctly audible. Near the old wooden shed on the crest over which the infantry had passed appeared long files of men returning. They wore the unmistakable German helmet and were unarmed. Not long after, they passed under guard within earshot, and in reply to questions, the guards stated that everything was going finely. Shortly after, our wounded hobbled past, pale, worn, and bloody, but with the elation of victorious battle in their faces. They stated proudly that they had captured many prisoners and guns and that they had taken the town of Berzy-le-Sec, the last objective of the Division.

On this fourth consecutive day of battle the 18th Infantry captured more than two hundred prisoners in a cavern near Buzancy; the 28th Infantry overran an artillery battery that had been firing point-blank at the Americans from the edge of Berzy and captured the remnants of a machine-gun battalion that had been defending the town. Patrols were sent out toward Rozieres and Noyant, and the French divisions advanced on either flank.

At the end of the day front-line commanders of the 1st Division were informed that the promised relief would have to be postponed because the relieving unit, a British division, was still some distance from the front. But they also learned that the German High Command had ordered the withdrawal of its forces in the Marne salient—the first such retreat since the United States had entered the war. The tide had turned!

Soissons: Fifth Day, 22 July

In the morning, advance parties of the 15th Scottish Division arrived, and commenced reconnaissance and coordination for the relief. The 26th Infantry, galled by fire from snipers and machine gunners in the Sucrerie (Sugar Factory) east of the highway facing its positions, obtained approval for an attack to seize that complex of buildings. Colonel Hamilton Smith personally guided the Scots through his regiment's positions, then turned his attention to the attack. The attack succeeded, but Colonel Smith, while directing the operation, was killed by machine-gun fire. His death left the 26th without any field grade officers: the regiment's second in command, Lieutenant Colonel Elliott, had been killed the previous afternoon while directing the first, abortive attack on Berzy-le-Sec, and the rest were either dead or wounded. As a result, command of the regiment devolved upon a captain with less than two years service, Captain Barnwell Rhett Legge of the 1st Battalion—the very same Legge mentioned earlier in connection with Captain Amiel Frey and the capture of a certain aging German sergeant.

Soissons: Sixth Day, 23 July

At midnight, 22-23 July, command of the sector passed to the Scots. At dawn the 15th Division, supported by the 1st Artillery Brigade, attacked all along the front to cover the withdrawal of the infantry regiments of the 1st Division. Returning to the forest from which the

Fig. 1.23. A rifle company of the 26th Infantry marching back from Soissons

Fig. 1.24. Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt Jr. and Mrs. Roosevelt, 13 November 1918

division had issued on 18 July, the doughboys were directed by guides to their company kitchens, set up at the express command of General Summerall. In each regiment's assembly area the regimental band played popular songs. Food there was, as well as elation and pride now that the ordeal was over; and sleep, merciful sleep. But the number of men left in each company was sorrowfully small, and battalions were unrecognizable because of their losses. Every battalion commander in all four infantry regiments was a casualty, as were 62 of the 96 officers assigned to the 26th Infantry. The 1st Battalion, having given up its ranking officer to command the regiment, marched back under a second lieutenant. On 18 July some 3,100 sergeants, corporals, and privates had gone "over the top" with the 26th Infantry; on the morning of 23 July, the regiment mustered only 1,440 enlisted men, some of them replacements who arrived during the battle. Few sergeants and corporals were among the survivors, and average company strength was down to 120, less than half the nominal strength.

In an AEF order directed to be read to all units at the first assembly formation after its receipt, General John J. Pershing proclaimed that the men of the 1st Division, present and absent, had participated in "a brilliant victory that marks the turning point of the war":

> You did more than give our brave Allies the support to which as a nation our faith was pledged. You proved that our altruism, our pacific spirit, our sense of justice have not blunted our virility or our courage. You have shown that American initiative and energy are as fit for the test of war as for the pursuits of peace. You have justly won the unstinted praise of our Allies and the eternal gratitude of our countrymen.
>
> We have paid for our success in the lives of many of our brave comrades. We shall cherish their memory always, and claim for our history and literature their bravery, achievement and sacrifice.

Up until Soissons, the Germans seemed certain to win; after Soissons, they never regained the initiative. As to the price paid for the victory, Major General Summerall is reported to have been asked by a staff officer from corps whether the division, having suffered so terribly, was capable of further offensive action. Summerall replied: "Sir, when the 1st Division has only two men left they will be echeloned in depth and attacking toward Berlin."

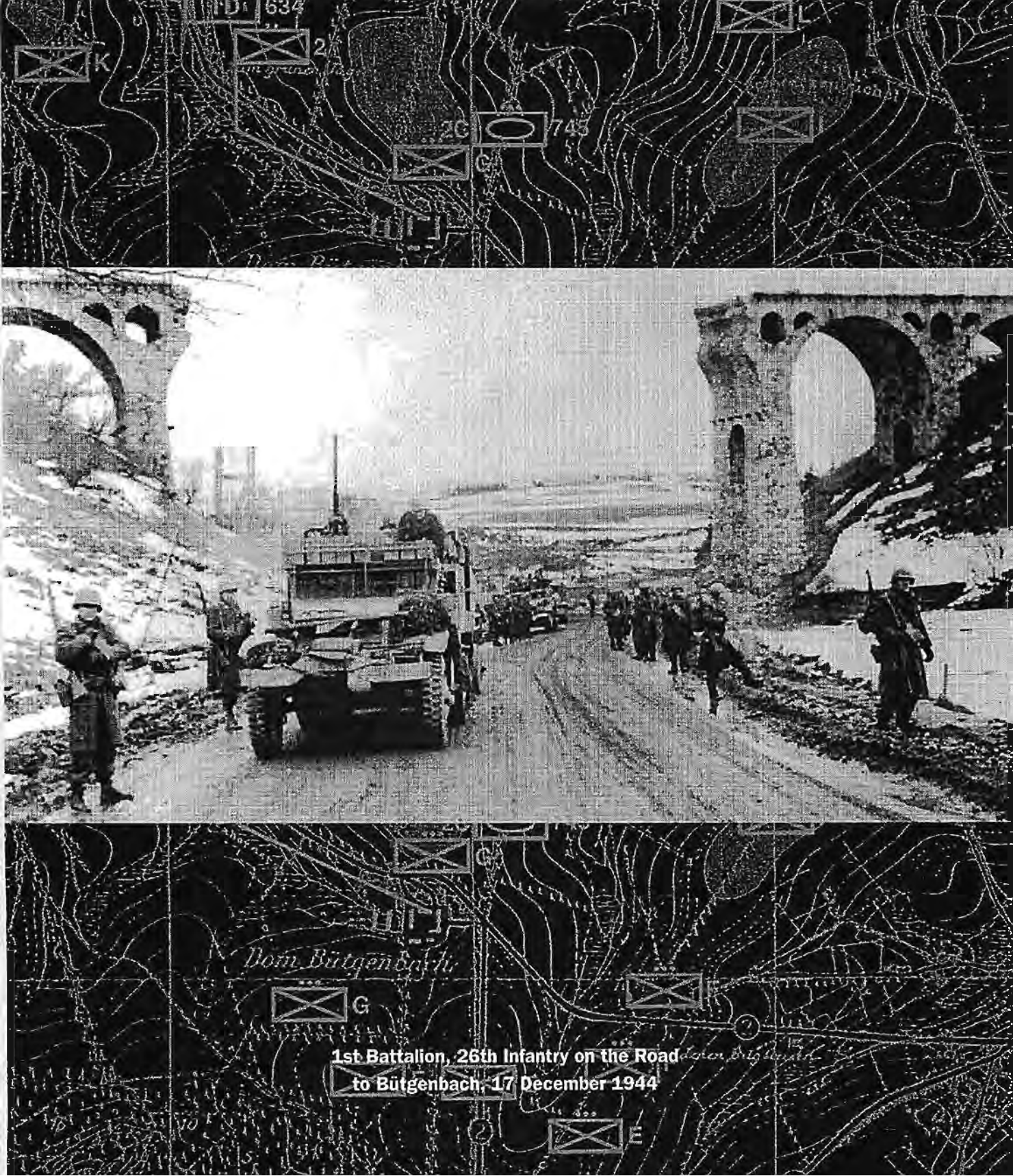
The 26th Infantry and the 1st Division went on from Soissons to fight in the last great American battles of World War I, the campaign to eliminate the St.-Mihiel salient and the arduous offensive in the Argonne Forest. The Armistice, which took effect at 1100 on 11 November, found soldiers of the 26th Infantry halting a relentless pursuit of the retreating Germans just short of Sedan. Begun at 2000 on 8 November, the pursuit

had covered seventy-five kilometers and was led by the recently promoted regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt Jr., walking with a cane.

It was Theodore Roosevelt who gave the 1st Division its special way of commemorating the battle of Soissons. His wife records that when her husband was bed-ridden with his leg-wound at their house in Paris, there came a half dozen officers of the 26th Infantry to pay their respects and report on the outcome of the combat. Mrs. Roosevelt brought "something extra-special for toasts." Bidding his guests fill their glasses, Major Roosevelt asked them to drink first "to the 26th Infantry" and then "to the dead of the regiment" (Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., *Day Before Yesterday* [1959]).

For more than three quarters of a century, toasts in that form have been offered within the 1st Division.

At Cantigny the 1st Division won undying fame. At Soissons it acquired its soul.



1st Battalion, 26th Infantry on the Road to Bütgenbach, 17 December 1944

Relentless Pursuit: Dexterous, 1944-1945

Preparing for D-Day: "Building and Rebuilding"

Major General Clarence R. Huebner became Danger 6 in Sicily on 7 August 1943. ("Danger" was the telephone call sign of the 1st Infantry Division; "6" designated a commander.) He wrote of his assumption of command that

> To me, it was a return home: a return to the Division I had served with in peacetime, which included the regiment where I had learned the first lessons of soldiering and with which I had served as a young officer through the great battles of the First World War. It was a homecoming to the organization I had watched with pride in its earlier actions in North Africa....
>
> Not quite one month before—as the preliminary step to further operations against the Italian mainland—the Allied forces had landed in strength against the island of Sicily. In the van had been the 1st Division under Major General Terry Allen. The beach defenses in the vicinity of Gela were quickly overcome, but the Division soon felt the reaction of the German reserves. Turning this threat, which was led by the tanks of the Hermann Goering Division, the First continued on through Mazzarino, Barra-Franca, Enna, Nicosia, and thence to Troina, completing the capture of that place on the 6th of August....
>
> Word had now come that the Division was to be ready for a move to England, and we all knew that England meant a cross-channel operation. The First Division was called to the biggest amphibious operation of them all. Sicily had been the biggest in history when it was launched: the experience we had gained there was to be used in the operation that would dwarf all others....The Division arrived in...England on the 8th of November, and moved directly to the vicinity of Blandford where the Command Post remained until the commitment for "Overlord" eight months later.
>
> The period in England can be compared to that of the normal training of a division in the States. The development of the skills and techniques of our weapons, the training of specialists, and the moulding of our battle teams were the primary requirements. To assist in these aims, we had the services of many combat-wise and experienced leaders who could impart to our new replacements the know-how of battle....There were small unit problems; the artillery went back on the range for battalion exercises; we rehearsed our coordination in the infantry-artillery-tank team; and we worked on our communications. And with the Navy and the Air Force there was planning and practice, for there was a triphibious landing to be made. Thus passed the days in England: building and re-building and ever looking to the day when the French coast would be over the bows of our landing craft. (Clarence R. Huebner, *Memorial Album*, Society of the First Division [1947])

For Danger 6, a key aspect of "building and rebuilding" was the selection of battalion commanders for the invasion of Europe. One pending choice was the next Dexterous Red 6 ("Dexterous" was the designator for the 26th Infantry, the regiment that Brigadier

"There was, to me one quality above all others which distinguished [the First Division] and set it apart from all others. It was—and is—a consciousness of tradition. To those who have never soldiered this may seem a trivial characteristic. But it is the backbone of military morale. A unit has esprit when it believes that it is 'the best damned squad in the best damned platoon in the best damned company in the best damned battalion in the best damned regiment in the best damned division in the whole goddamned army.' And it gets its esprit from leadership and from a sense of obligation to history....

"...Almost, the First Division has become—apart and aside from the men who make it—a living entity, a distinct personality with a past, a present, and a future. For its officers have taken care to see to it that this is so, to preserve and strengthen this sense of tradition, to impress upon its new recruits a pride of unit and an understanding—which once absorbed can never be forgotten—of the duties of the living to the dead. To some, this may seem a heavy burden—this sense of obligation to history, this maintenance of the high standards of a brave past—but to the soldier it can be steadying in a time of trouble.

"He is sustained, too—the soldier of the Fighting First—by another obligation, the obligation to his comrades. Some psychologists say that one of the dominant factors that keeps men to their guns even in the worst hell of battle is their fear of showing fear. But that is at best a negative explanation of a positive action; many soldiers perform deeds above and beyond the call of duty to help their "buddies." In few units, I think, is the sense of obligation, this spiritual development of a fighting team, carried to greater and more successful heights than the First Division.

"The First has been blessed through most of its career by leaders who understood the importance of tradition and the twin obligations each good soldier owes—to his unit, past and present, and to his "buddies"....

"Approximately 50,000 men of whom 4,325 died in battle, served in the First Division in World War II... Collectively [their] experiences form part of the soul of the division." (Hanson Baldwin, *Danger Forward* [1947])

General Theodore Roosevelt Jr. had commanded before he was promoted to assistant division commander in 1942; "Dexterous Red" was the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, which Roosevelt had commanded as a major in World War I. Dexterous White and Dexterous Blue were, respectively, the 26th Infantry's 2nd and 3rd Battalions.) General Huebner decided to honor a commitment made by his predecessor, Terry Allen, to Lieutenant Colonel Francis J. "Frank" Murdoch. Huebner was acquainted with Murdoch and knew him to be a West Pointer, an accomplished horseman, and a thoroughly professional soldier with high standards. Upon his assignment to General Eisenhower's Allied command headquarters in North Africa, Murdoch had made a point of looking up Major General Allen, who was then commander of the 1st Division: the two were old friends and fellow cavalrymen who had served together in the 7th Cavalry, played polo on the same teams, socialized in the same circles. While visiting Allen, Murdoch had met Allen's assistant, Theodore Roosevelt, and had observed the pride and professionalism the division's top commanders had imbued in the men of the Big Red One. Allen offered Murdoch a command. General Eisenhower then agreed that Murdoch could leave his staff, but only for a combat command. Allen arranged that, and Huebner actualized the assignment. Frank Murdoch considered himself fortunate indeed. But General Huebner made it clear that he faced a tough job, informing Murdoch that

> The combat soldier tends to get tired and bored, sloppy about procedures, and maintenance, and he may not want to work hard when the pressure is off. General Huebner let me know that he wanted me to go to the 1st Battalion, 26th [Infantry] to prepare it for hard combat, and that would require hard work. (Francis J. Murdoch, interview, video tape recording, First Division Museum at Cantigny [1995])

The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry that was preparing for the invasion of Normandy was very different from what that unit had been in the First World War when Major Roosevelt commanded it. Like the doughboys of 1917-1918, the GIs of 1944 were "average Americans," but in stark contrast to the former, the GIs of the 26th had been well trained before being sent overseas. By 1944 the unit had developed a battle-wise cadre of officers and sergeants, and all the company commanders were combat experienced. The battalion had been brought to full strength with replacements, and had all its weapons and other equipment. Ranges and ammunition were available. Furthermore, the battalion's stay in England had given it time and opportunity to absorb replacements and prepare for the missions ahead. Many veteran Blue Spaders, however, regarded England primarily as a place in which to indulge their desire for a well-earned rest and recreation. This attitude confronted Murdoch with predictable difficulties, and short-lived tension:

> Soon after I took over I called for a showdown inspection, a full layout of equipment in all the companies. In general, all companies were in excellent shape except one, where both the equipment and the soldiers were sloppy. So I told them I would re-inspect. When I did so, there was little improvement, and the attitude of the company commander was "I am a combat soldier, and the hell with this." So I discussed the matter with the Regimental Commander, Colonel Seitz, who kindly took the captain off my hands. I put the exec in command, who had joined the battalion in Sicily, and he turned out to be just fine....
>
> General Huebner was a stickler for attention to military detail. He emphasized maintenance and zero[ing in] of rifles, and rifle marksmanship. He also had us put in a lot of work on night attacks and night patrolling. For example, all officers had to learn the Morse code for signaling with flashlights. (We never used that in combat.) One irritation we encountered was socks. Our Army issued a light sock, but the British issued a heavy wool

Fig. 2.1. Seitz: Dexterous 6

sock, and the supply system would fill our requisitions with either indiscriminately. That, of course, meant that any given soldier's boots would not fit one type of sock or the other. I called this problem to the attention of the chain of command, and General Huebner got it fixed. But he remarked that it was too bad that a cavalry officer had to call attention to this infantry malady....

During our first exercises in England, I noticed a tendency not to take training seriously, to sort of slop through exercises, and the discipline was not too good. Well, that meant that they needed an SOB to get them ready for the landing. When they did not do an exercise correctly, I kept them in the field until they did, even if that meant staying out another twelve hours in the cold and the wet.

It turned out not to be difficult, because the leaders were experienced. Once they understood what I wanted, I won their confidence, and they saw to it that their unit did it right the first time. I wanted adherence to the infantry regulations for coordination of fires, for careful selection of fields of fire, especially for correct positioning of machine guns. I wanted proper fire and movement—it is understandable that a soldier might choose to lay quiet, without shooting, and not draw attention and thus get shot, unless he is properly trained and motivated. I wanted coordinated fire and movement, so I put my companies through realistic exercises in movement with fire support, with live bullets and mortars fired overhead—and we didn't use sandbagged machine guns or gun slings, or any other artificiality like they did in the States. I was the first to make every soldier dig a foxhole, and then stay in it when a tank was run over the top. And I insisted that officers and NCOs should practice how to call for fire from the artillery, because when they needed fire support there might be no artilleryman. And of course I wanted them hardened, so we did a lot of forced marches with a combat load of 40 pounds—6 miles in one hour, and sustained marches of 16 hours....

My executive officer, Major Francis W. Adams, was a tower of strength, and we understood each other well. He too was a cavalryman. My most experienced company commander, Captain Allan Ferry of Company C, was older and more deliberate than the other captains, but he paid attention to details, and he was genuinely fired up about infantry training and infantry tactics. He was a large man, and he had the respect of every man in his company. He and Dr. Leonard, my surgeon, had been boxers, and when the 82nd Airborne Division arrived, the two of them went off to town and came back a bit bloody, but happy. My B Company commander got his commission on the battlefield, and was a quiet, efficient company commander. My heavy weapons company, D Company, was well led, with a very strong captain and an excellent executive officer. (Later on, the company commander lost a leg at Omaha Beach, and the executive officer was killed there, so I had to try another

commander who did not work out, but we finally found the right one.) (Murdoch, interview)

Captain Allan Ferry, commander of Company C, was commissioned in 1941 from ROTC. He joined the 26th Infantry as a second lieutenant when it was commanded by Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, who made a profound impression on the young officer: "He was a gutsy guy who inspired us to do our best. Work hard and play hard. He would protect his men as long as they went in the right direction. If a guy went AWOL but was back in time for the next battle it was OK." (Allan B. Ferry, "D-Day: Careful Planning, Tough Training and a Lot of Luck," *The Jupiter Courier-Journal* 42 [October 9, 1983])

Work hard Ferry's men did in England. There was training in river crossings with the engineers, in operations with tanks and antitank units, in attack of fortified positions, and in combat in built-up areas. There was chemical warfare training, radio and wire communications practice, weapon qualification firing, and land navigation courses. As the invasion plan matured, training became more intensive and more pointed. Frank Murdoch remembers that "almost every day we would get aerial photos of our objectives, and we would study them and figure out how to attack each. We thought a lot about how to operate in Normandy, and practiced for it, and there were not many surprises when we got ashore." According to Linwood Billings, formerly of Company C, but then commanding Company L, 26th Infantry:

> Each unit carefully worked out the difficulties involved on sand tables and terrain boards. A sponge rubber terrain board, showing the area in detail, had been provided by higher headquarters. All officers and key noncommissioned officers, including squad leaders, were briefed on this board. Each platoon worked sand table problems on the complete situation. For security reasons, the names of the towns involved were not used. Battalion unit training prepared them for this for over five months. Before the 26th Infantry moved into the marshalling area in England, a regimental maneuver was held using its Normandy mission as a basis for the problem. All men in the battalion knew what was expected of them. (Linwood Billings, Monograph, "The Operations of Company 'L,' 26th Infantry at Ste. Anne, France, 8-9 June 1944," Advanced Infantry Officers Course, Fort Benning, GA [1949])

Fig. 2.2. Left to right, Lieutenant Colonel F. J. Murdoch, Major F. W. Adams, and Captain A. B. Ferry. *"Picture taken in April 1944 at the Blandford Officers Club, where we got together unofficially. Everyone was allowed one shot of hard liquor per evening, so the usual was a beer with a shot of gin."* (Murdoch, interview)

Allan Ferry recalled play as well as work, but mainly he remembered tough field exercises that built cohesion in his company:

> Excitement was high. There was a feeling like that before a thunder and lightning storm as we convoyed under cover of darkness to our points of

departure in England. In our case the jumping off point was "His Majesty's Ship Raleigh," a land-based naval station. We had said our good-byes, having shaken the hand of General Omar Bradley, and our division commander, General Huebner. We left the girls behind, and the drinking.

We had trained hard in England and according to British standards it was "better to have 10 percent casualties in training than to have 50 percent in combat." We used close-in support fires and made battle training as realistic as possible. I was never so proud of a group of men in my life as I was when we went into Normandy. You couldn't tell the veteran from the recruit. They were that good. (Ferry, "D-Day")

Frank Murdoch did not expect that his arduous training program would make him popular with his troops. He was right. A typical response to the program was voiced by a certain sergeant over supper in the dining room of a hotel located near the training area. Unbeknownst to the sergeant, Murdoch's wife—whom he had married in England—was a guest at the hotel and among those seated at the sergeant's table. The sergeant engaged the woman in conversation, during which he told her about "this SOB of a battalion commander who wanted to train them like they were raw recruits." Murdoch says that "neither she nor I took offense at that." He was firmly convinced that the hard training the sergeant (and so many others) deplored would pay big dividends in Normandy. He was right about that, too. Proof of this came shortly after the Overlord landings:

> It was the night of D+8 or 9, and I was walking through my companies checking on their fields of fire. I mistakenly approached one company from its rear, instead of through its coordination point, and I nearly got shot. That same sergeant bawled me out, and told me that I needed to be more careful. He said that the battalion could not afford to lose me. So far they had taken fewer casualties than any other outfit, and that was because of the training that I had insisted on in England. (Murdoch, interview)

In England the battalion was authorized a total of 871 men: 35 officers, 178 NCOs, 40 technicians, and 618 privates and privates first class. The battalion was organized into five companies: one headquarters company (which included battalion headquarters), three rifle companies, and one heavy weapons company. As was the case with every infantry regiment, all companies except the headquarters company were lettered sequentially, with the 1st Battalion consisting of Companies A, B, C, and D, 2nd Battalion consisting of Companies E, F, G, and H, and 3rd Battalion of I, K, L, and M. There was no J Company. Weapons and vehicles were distributed as follows:

Infantry Battalion (TO&E 7-15, 26 Feb 1944)

Weapon	Hq	Hq Co	3 Rifle Co (ea)	Hvy Wpns Co	Bn Tot
Carbine, cal 30	2	51	28	82	219
HMG, cal 30				8	8
LMG, cal 30			2		6
HMG, cal 50		2	1	1	6
Gun, AT, 57mm		3			3
Lnchr, Rkt AT 2.36 in		8	5	6	29
Mortar, 60mm			3		9
Mortar, 81mm				6	6
Pistol, auto, cal 45	2	15	10	34	81
Rifle, auto, cal 30			9		27
Rifle, cal 30, M1		56	143	50	535
Rifle, cal 30, M1903A4			3		9
Truck, 1/4 ton		9	2	19	34
Truck, 3/4 ton, wpn car		1		1	2
Truck, 1-1/2 ton, cargo		4			4
Trailer, 1/4 ton		2	2	14	22
Trailer, 1 ton		1			1

Headquarters Company supported the battalion commander and his staff, provided for its own administration, and commanded three platoons: communications, ammunition and pioneer, and antitank. Each rifle company consisted of one weapons platoon and three rifle platoons. The rifle platoon had a headquarters of five (including one officer and two NCOs) and three rifle squads, each with two NCOs, seven riflemen, and one two-man BAR team. The weapons platoon fielded three mortar squads, each with five men, and two light machine gun (LMG) squads, also with five men. The heavy weapons company had two heavy machine gun (HMG) platoons, each of two sections; each section had two squads respectively equipped with one water-cooled .30-caliber heavy machine gun. The heavy weapons company also had mortars organized into one platoon of three sections, with two mortars and two mortar squads in each section.

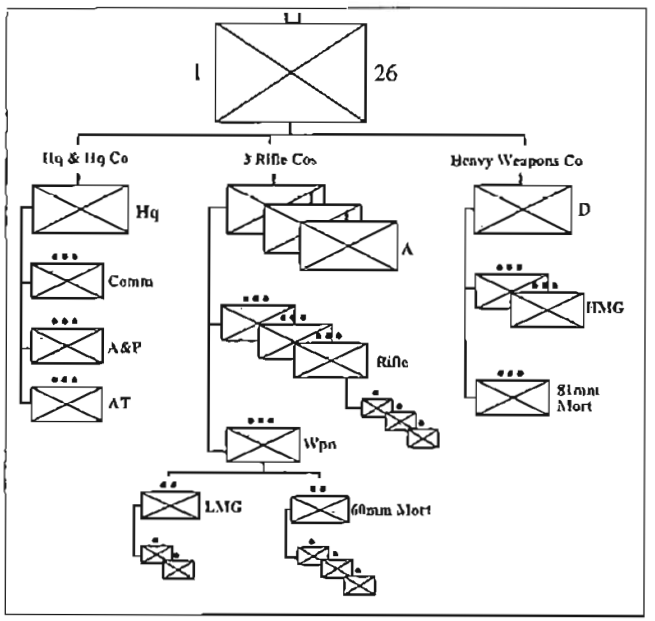


Fig. 2.3. Infantry battalion organization (per TO&Es 7-15, 7-16, and 7-17, Feb 1944)

In the same period the 26th Infantry Regiment was organized into three infantry battalions and a headquarters and headquarters company. The latter was made up of a communications platoon, the regimental band, an MP platoon, and an intelligence and reconnaissance platoon. In addition, the regiment had its own cannon company (equipped with towed short-barreled 105mm howitzers) and antitank company (towed 57mm guns). However, by 1944 the 1st Division fought in Regiment Combat Teams (RCT)—often called simply Combat Teams (CT)—formed around each infantry regiment reinforced by elements of the division's organic and attached units. The 1st Division Artillery consisted of three 105mm towed howitzer battalions—the 7th, 32rd, and 33rd Field Artillery Battalions—and the 5th Field Artillery Battalion, armed with the 155mm towed piece. Later in the war, the regimental cannon companies were routinely attached to the division artillery. Typically, the 1st Division had the 70th and 745th Tank Battalions attached to it, as well as the 601st, 634th, 635th, and 701st Tank Destroyer Battalions.

Direct artillery support for the 26th CT was invariably provided by the 33rd Field Artillery Battalion. Usually, 1st Division attached a company of the 1st Engineers, a company of tanks, and a company of tank destroyers. An example of the 26th CT's organization for combat is given in the table below. The information was extracted from Regimental Field Order Number 5, 20 July 1944, for the start of the offensive under VII Corps that would lead to the Normandy breakthrough in July. Note that because the order directs an attack by two battalion task forces in column, the lead task force is provided the tanks and tank destroyers that would otherwise have been assigned to the 2nd Battalion. Eventually, regimental orders would address what were called "battalion battle groups" when referring to the battalions and their attached units.

Troops:

26th Infantry (-2nd Bn reinforced, attached to 3rd Armored Div)
Co. C, 1st Engr Bn (-2nd Plt)

Co C, 1st Med Bn (- Det)
Det, 1st Sig Bn
Co C, 634th TD Bn (SP) (Plus 1 Rcn Plat, Hqs Co, 634th TD Bn)
Co C, 745th Tank Bn
Co C, 635th TD Bn (Towed)
1st Rcn Troop
33d FA Bn

3rd Bn, 26th Infantry (reinforced)	1st Bn, 26th Infantry (reinforced)
3rd Bn, 26th Infantry	1st Bn, 26th Infantry
3rd Plat AT Co, 26th Infantry	1st Plat, AT Co, 26th Infantry
3rd Plat, Cannon Co, 26th Infantry	1st Plat, Cannon Co, 26th Infantry
3rd Plat Co C, 1st Engr Bn	1st Plat, Co C, 1st Engr Bn
3rd Plat, Co C, 634th TD Bn (SP)	1st Plat, Co C, 634th TD Bn (SP)
2nd Plat, Co C, 634th TD Bn (SP)	1st Plat Co C, 635th TD Bn (Towed)
Rcn Plat. Co C, 634th TD Bn	1st Plat, Co C, 745th Tank Bn
3rd Plat, Co C, 635th TD Bn (Towed)	Det, Co C, 1st Med Bn
1st Rcn Trp (-Lu Group)	
3rd Plat, Co C, 745th Tank Bn	
2nd Plat, Co C, 745th Tank Bn	
Det, Co C, 1st Med Bn	
Regt I&R Plat, 26th Infantry	
Regt MP Plat, 26th Infantry	

Invasion: "Close Fighting, Fast and Furious"

The assault plan for Omaha Beach called for the 1st Division, minus the 26th Infantry but with the 116th Infantry of the 29th Division attached, to land at H-Hour (0630). The 26th Infantry was attached to the 29th Division for the Channel crossing but would form the 1st Division reserve when it reached France. Scheduled for a midafternoon landing, the 26th experienced a seven-hour delay, and it was not until 1700 that lead elements of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry debarked from their LCIs (landing craft, infantry, carrying one company per vessel). There was ample daylight and the beach was still under machine-gun and artillery fire. The battalion's orders were to advance inland until it caught up with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, then prepare to attack through those units. Many men, however, never made it to the beach. Frank Murdoch recalls what happened to them:

> The LCIs pulled in abreast, but when the men stepped off the ladders, they plunged into water over their heads. We were all wearing an inflatable life preserver like a belt around our waist, but when a soldier pulled the release to inflate the belt, it turned him upside down, especially if he was carrying a load on his shoulder, like a machine gun. We lost a lot of men that way. I was with Company D, and when our LCI commander saw what was happening, he pulled back, and tried another spot a hundred yards or so down the beach, and there the water was only neck deep, so we got ashore all right. (Murdoch, interview)

Once Murdoch was ashore, Colonel John F. R. Seitz, the regimental commander, notified him that the 1/26th had been attached to the 16th Infantry and directed him to report to that regiment's commander, Colonel George Taylor, for orders. When Murdoch found Colonel Taylor, he learned that the division's left-flank assault unit—3rd Battalion, 16th Infantry—had been out of communications with the regiment for some time and that Colonel Taylor had no information as to its location or status. Murdoch was to advance with his battalion up the left-most beach exit, Easy-3, to find the 3/16th if he could, but in any event to attack and seize the 3/16th's D-Day objective: Mount Cauvin, the high ground to the east of the beach. Mentally scrapping all his carefully rehearsed moves, Murdoch asked for a copy of the 16th's signals operating instructions (SOI). He told Colonel Taylor that his mission would be a case of the blind leading the blind. Taylor agreed, arranged for Murdoch to get the SOI, and sent the 1st Battalion on its way.

Murdoch had actually trained his battalion to deal with the unexpected, issuing orders for specific actions when troops and commanders least expected them, and working surprise into everyday training. From the battalion's first hour ashore on D-Day, that training paid dividends.

The 1st Battalion climbed onto a promontory overlooking the beach, encountering resistance along the way. Allan Ferry's unit ran into their first small-arms fire about fifteen hundred yards from the beach:

> I lost one messenger and the majority of a whole rifle squad to two Germans on patrol who ambushed us among the hedgerows. We got one of the Germans and later on made up for it by annihilating the bulk of a German platoon that we caught in an open field. The Germans had been resting or sleeping and we ran into them by accident during darkness. Hand grenades and potato mashers were popping all over the place. However, we had the protection of the hedgerows and came out well in the exchange....
>
> When we landed in Normandy the 1st Infantry Division was like the Green Bay Packers when they were on a winning streak. We couldn't lose. (Ferry, "D-Day")

By midnight the Blue Spaders had cleared the hedged fields as far as the edges of Colleville-sur-Mer. The early June daybreak found the battalion moving eastward in tactical column along the Port-en-Bessin road, headed toward Mount Cauvin. Soon the column halted. When Murdoch went forward to investigate he found the point standing before a barbed wire fence with signs that read *ACHTUNG MINEN*. The old soldiers on point had known better than to walk into a minefield and had stopped the column to allow their commander to consider their next move. Murdoch looked carefully at the field. It had been sown with some sort of grain, probably oats, and the soil did not look recently disturbed. He recalled no evidence of mining in any of the photos of that area, which he had studied before the invasion. "Follow me," he called out, then stepped over the barbed wire and walked out into the grain. With that, the whole unit advanced.

German troops were everywhere, but fortunately for the Blue Spaders, resistance was not well organized:

> As we moved along the road from Colleville to Port-en-Bessin, we encountered small groups of enemy. Usually they pulled out when they saw what they were up against, but some would stay, shooting to the last, and then try to surrender. I came across a group of five young Germans sprawled dead on the road, and when I asked what had happened, a sergeant nearby remarked that they had been too slow in getting their hands up.
>
> Near Cabourg we approached some woods, and beyond I could see a German artillery unit firing on the beach. I shouted for my naval gunfire officer—we had the destroyer Harding in direct support—but, informed that he was with the next company in the column, I started back to find him. That was a mistake, because my last order had been "follow me" and there were a lot of soldiers only too willing to move rearward. I got them straightened out, and sent a messenger for the liaison officer, who soon turned up. I showed him the German guns, and he called for fire. The response was quick. When it came, it sounded like a fast freight passing close overhead, and the explosions nearly knocked us over. Because the target was an enemy artillery battery, the Navy had assigned it to the French cruiser Montcalm, and her big guns literally blew those Germans off the face of the earth.
>
> We eventually contacted the headquarters of the battalion of the 16th Infantry we were looking for, near the village of Huppain, but they did not know where their companies were located. As darkness was falling, we attacked into Etreham, and onto Mt. Cauvin. By daylight, we had established a defense forward of Etreham and on the

south slopes of Mt. Cauvin. The next morning (8 June) Company C met a party of British commandos, so the Allies were linked up.

That morning we were returned to the control of our regiment, and Colonel Seitz ordered us to take Tour-en-Bessin, about a mile to the southeast, a town on the road to Bayeaux. But no sooner had we started to attack—and there was plenty of Germans in front of us—than Regiment stopped us because 2nd and 3rd Battalions were attacking down the Bayeaux road in back of the enemy to our front. 3rd Battalion would take Ste. Anne, and 2nd Battalion would take Tour-en Bessin. This would put all three battalions of the Regiment in close proximity, in position for a coordinated attack. This sounds confusing, but I was in good communications with Colonel Seitz, and he kept me informed about where friendly battalions were located, and what their objectives and routes of advance were. At the same time, we were intermixed with some trapped German units, and the local tactical situation was obscure. 3rd Battalion had a bloody fight at Ste. Anne.... But the Regiment rolled with the punch, and on June 9th, pushed south. (Murdoch, interview)

Upon landing, the 26th Infantry's 3rd Battalion had been attached to the 18th Infantry to shore up the right flank of the 1st Division, much as 1st Battalion had braced the left flank. The following entries from the personal journal of Captain Walter F. Nechey, a company commander in the 3rd Battalion, sketches some of the unit's experiences as it moved inland from the beachhead:

June 8th—Bn. relieved from attachment to 18th Inf. Receive orders to move from extreme right flank of division to extreme left flank...Bn. moved out at 1000 hrs. on hike of approximately 6 miles to the cross-roads near Mosles. Met no enemy resistance for we hiked laterally to front lines past the rear of 2d Bn. 18th Inf. positions to a point just in the rear of 2d Bn. 26th Inf. and by-passed Tour-en-Bessin. We have attached to us a company of tanks from the 745th Tank Bn....

Moved out at approximately 2000 hours. Order of march: "I" Co., 1st CP group, "L" Co., "K" Co., Hq. Co., "M" Co. and A.T. Pln. (with platoon from A. T. Co. attached). Formation: Inf. as advance guard with tanks rolling down in center, firing as they advanced....

June 9th—Arrived on our objective 0015 hours. St. Anne (the objective)....We find later that our battalion was the first unit in the whole Allied beachhead to reach its initial objective. We're a good outfit. We know it. We've proven it. We have something to swell up our chest about. Companies deploy to the pre-arranged positions immediately. (Walter F. Nechey, Journal, November 1942-May 1945, copy in 26th Infantry Command Post, Dinner of the Officers of the 1st Division)

As Lieutenant Colonel Murdoch had sensed, there were enemy units trapped between the 1st Battalion and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. Two hours after the 3rd Battalion reached Ste. Anne, one of these German units—subsequently identified as the 518th Battalion, 30th Mobile Brigade, with six hundred men—started to move from positions around Sully toward positions on the higher ground southwest of Ste. Anne. One German element came into Ste. Anne from the north while another approached up the Bayeux Road from the direction of Vaucelles.

First contact with the advancing enemy was made by a three-man patrol led by Technical Sergeant T. Dobol of 3rd Battalion. (Raised in Poland, Sergeant Dobol had enlisted in the U.S. Army at age eighteen, had re-enlisted for the 26th Infantry before the war, and had served in Company K through the campaigns in North Africa and Sicily.) Accompanied by two other soldiers, Privates Merritt and Smith, Sergeant Dobol had departed Ste. Anne at 0230 for the purpose of establishing contact with the British near Bayeux. Not far down the Bayeux road the three men encountered

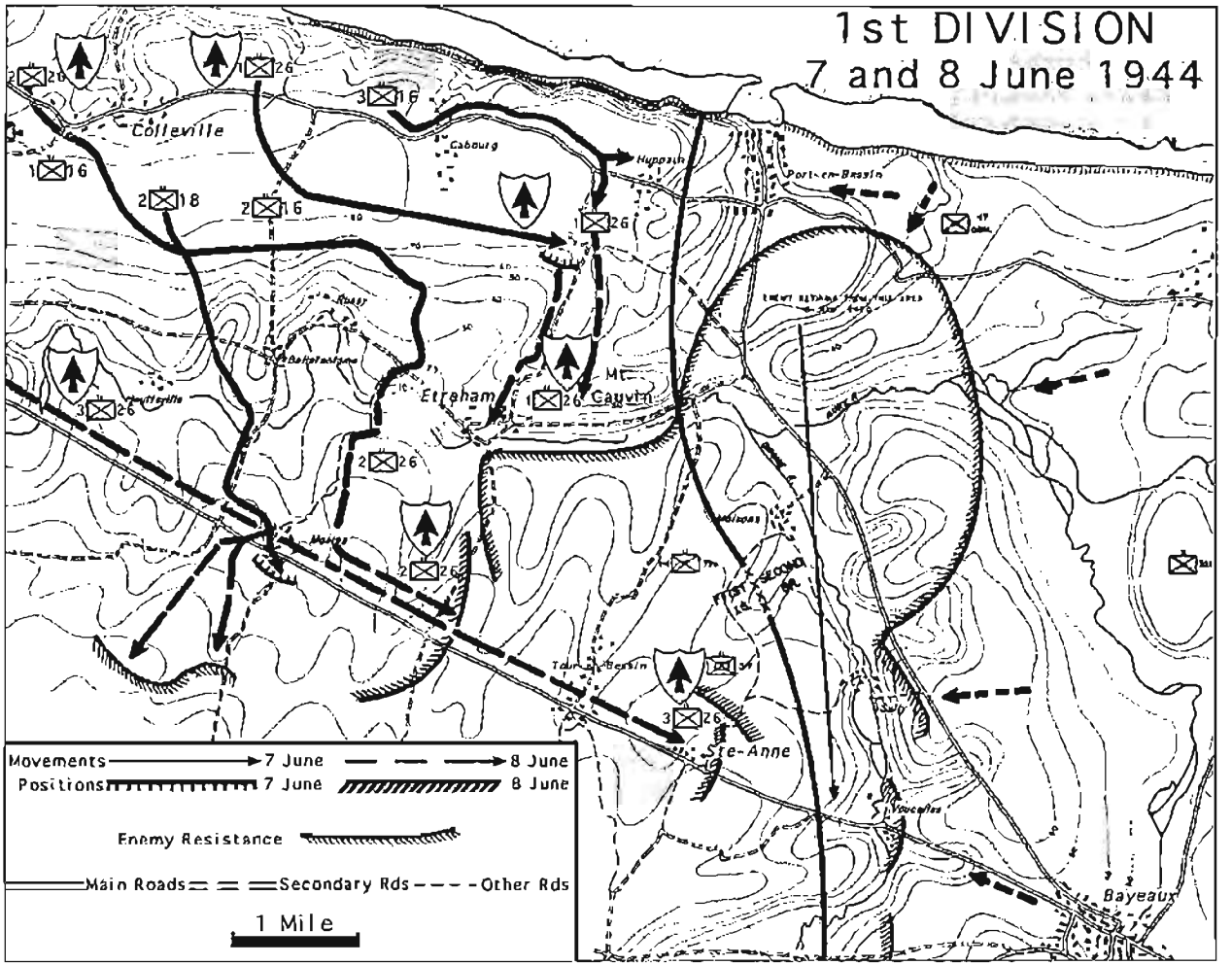


Fig. 2.4. Adapted from U.S. Army, *Omaha Beachhead* (1945)

five Germans armed with a machine gun. In the ensuing fight all the Germans were killed, but Private Smith was fatally wounded. Shortly thereafter Dobol captured an enemy soldier, who turned out to be a Pole. Dobol spoke with the prisoner in Polish and thereby learned that an enemy unit was heading for Ste. Anne. He then sent Merritt back to the battalion CP with the prisoner and a message alerting Lieutenant Colonel John T. Corley, the battalion commander, to the impending attack.

Dobol set up a solitary outpost for his battalion. Shortly thereafter a German truck roared up the road. Dobol stopped the truck and killed an officer, but was himself hit in the eye by a grenade fragment and temporarily blinded—his fourth wound of the war—and spent the rest of the night in hiding off the road. In the meantime, Merritt arrived at the CP with news of the enemy just before the fighting started. The presence of the Americans in Ste. Anne came as a great surprise to the Germans, and precipitated a mêleé the outcome of which was decided by the superior close-combat skills of the 3rd Battalion. The defense plan 3rd Battalion had implemented had been worked out in England, and was oriented against attack from the south or east.

It did not anticipate use of tanks. Hence the "pre-arranged positions" the unit occupied when it entered the town around midnight were not altogether advantageous in blocking enemy armor advancing from the north. Lieutenant Colonel Corley was repositioning his tanks when the shooting started. Walter Nechey recorded the ensuing fight and its aftermath in his journaled entry for 9 June:

> At 0300 hours. As [U.S.] tanks were moving up to [north-facing] "L" Co. position, the enemy launched an attack at the "L" Co. position. Enemy using concussion grenades and potato mashers. All except 2 platoons of "L" Co. forced to withdraw. 2d Platoon of "M" Co. overrun. Lieut. Ruby does a beautiful job.
>
> Bn. CP located in a large home next to the [Bayeux] road. Co. & Bn on one side of the house, balance of company on other side of house. Enemy forces come down main road in trucks. Leading truck full of ammunition hit by tank fire and bursts into flame right in front of CP. Two other trucks one of which tried to by-pass the first are also knocked out. Enemy on bicycles, motorcycles, and one on a horse are thrown into utter confusion. Close fighting fast and furious. Heinies are utterly demoralized, screaming, crying, and yelling as they jump into ditches along road.... Situation very critical until dawn. Grenades being thrown into CP. We learn a lesson: that building should be mouseholed so as to have communication between all elements. A mouse-hole is built between the two isolated units. At daylight naval gunfire helps break up enemy attack and routs them. We capture one officer and ninety-four enlisted men. They are scared to death, many of them under shock. Many dead "Jerries" near "L" Co. position and eight or ten in front of CP.
>
> Patrols are sent out to the south. At 1300 hours we move out toward final beach-head objective in the vicinity of Agy. We march approximately eight miles reaching Agy at 2000 hours. Only light resistance along way....Weather warm, light overcast of clouds. Morale of our troops good but they are getting tired. Many of the men have sore feet. Its been a busy day. Casualties in Bn.: Captain Uffner, Lieut. Ruby, and 36 EM WIA, 11 EM KIA, 7 EM MIA.
>
> June 10th. Just before daylight Co. "I" has a skirmish with enemy and kill approximately 80, capturing 3 officers and 92 EM. (Nechey, Journal)

V Corps then directed the division to attack south. The Blue Spaders were held in reserve for the 26th Combat Team (CT), and Colonel Murdoch told Seitz that he hoped the 1st Battalion could catch some rest, as it had been in combat continuously since its arrival in France. But sleep was out of the question, for the advance south from Tour-en-Bessin and Ste. Anne was brisk, and both General Huebner and Seitz were pressing all their commanders—including Murdoch—to move forward.

At noon on 10 June the following message was passed from Dexterous 6 to all companies of Red, White, and Blue: "Generals Montgomery, Bradley and Huebner wish to convey their pride in the 1st Division having continually been the first to reach their objective."

On 11 June the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry moved through 3rd Battalion to take the lead in the division's advance. To kick off this final phase of the attack from the beachhead, Colonel Seitz messaged that he would be at a certain crossroads on the line of departure to watch Red move out. Lieutenant Colonel Murdoch replied that he had planned to bring up the rear to make sure that all elements formed tactical column properly, and asked Seitz to see to it that his units took the correct road at the complicated junction. Seitz said that he would—and proceeded to send the battalion down the wrong road. It was fortunate that he did.

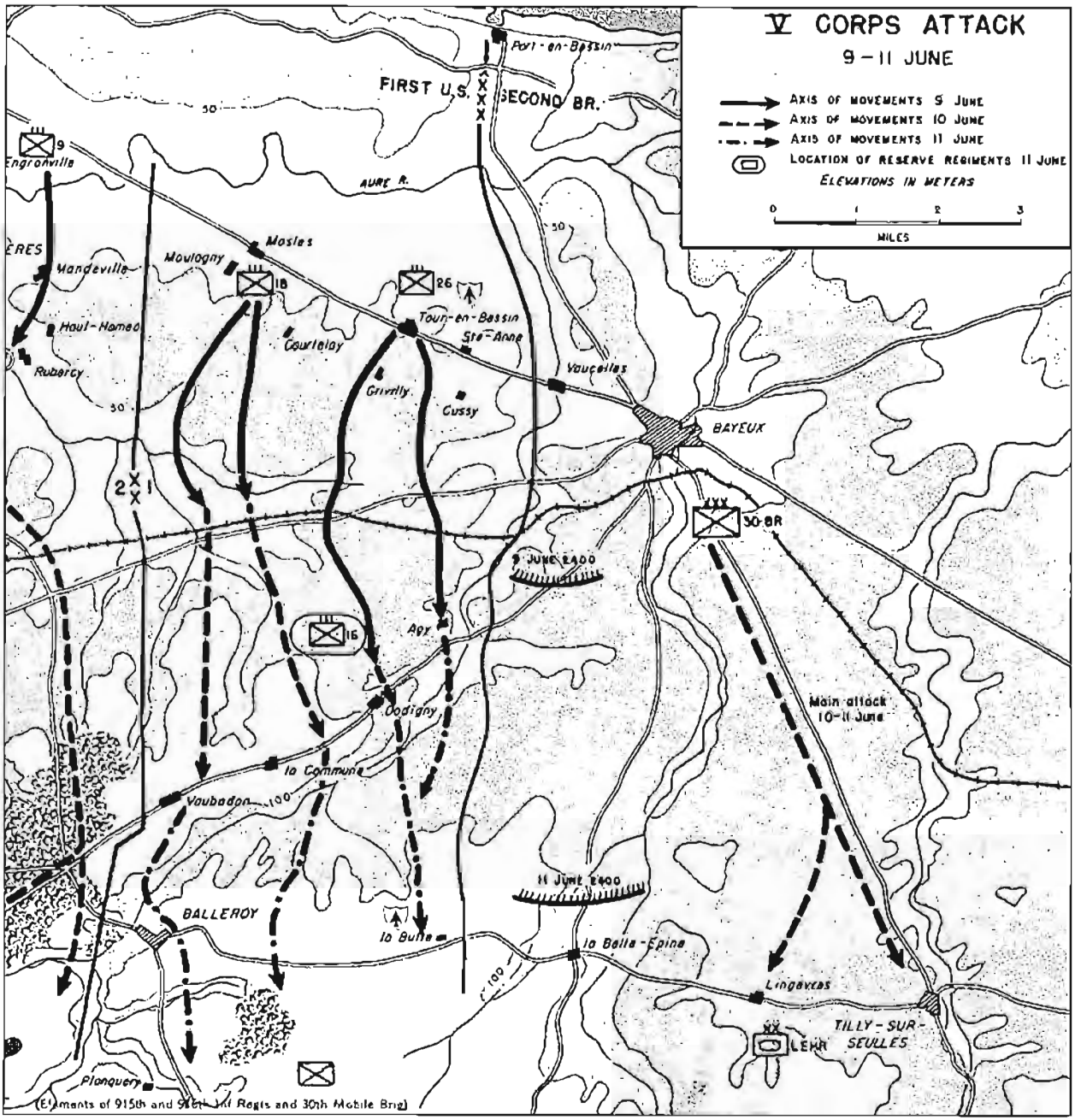


Fig. 2.5. Adapted from *Omaha Beachhead*

Allan Ferry (Dexterous Charlie 6), explaining how Seitz's mistake actually worked to the 1/26th's advantage, remembered an incident in Sicily when the division's assistant commander, Brigadier Theodore Roosevelt Jr., ordered Ferry's company into a ravine:

I had previous orders from my battalion com-

> mander and I ignored the general's order. Had I put my company in the ravine...we would have been blown to bits...by enemy artillery fire. In Normandy I was ordered into the approach march to seek out and make contact with the enemy as I advanced on our D-Day plus objective. As it happened, I took the wrong road. My battalion commander and my regimental commander stood by, while I took the wrong road, thinking as I did that it was the right road. As it so happened, by taking the wrong road I outflanked a German unit and got in behind it, where we worked a squeeze play and took many prisoners. Had I taken the right road we should have run into the Germans head-on with the chance of greater American casualties. (Ferry, "D-Day")

Following behind Company C down the wrong road, Lieutenant Colonel Murdoch encountered a British officer who pointed out that the battalion was out of the U.S. sector. Murdoch was told that he might find it useful to coordinate further movements with British headquarters lest the unit get the same treatment the British were giving to Germans in the vicinity. The battalion was redirected, coordination was accomplished, and the thrust south began in earnest.

Attacking without surcease, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry pushed toward Caumont l'Eventé, a crossroads town on high ground with good fields of observation and fires to the south. Early in the morning of 13 June it seized that town as well as Le Repas, a small settlement that was equally well sited on Caumont's eastern outskirts. There the 1st Division ordered the 26th CT to halt and dig in while General Bradley, commander of First Army, brought the other divisions of First Army abreast on the line Caumont-St. Lô. The 2nd Battalion went into positions on the right of the 1st Battalion, which stretched itself eastward from Caumont to establish and maintain contact with the British. At the same time the 3rd Battalion positioned itself rearward of the 1st Battalion where it could cover the open flank with the British.

From mid-June until late July Caumont remained the point of deepest penetration from the beach. As the linchpin between the British Second Army and the American First Army, it immediately drew German counterattacks from the 2nd Panzer, Panzer Lehr, and 3rd Parachute Divisions. One determined thrust at 1st Battalion involved a reinforced German infantry battalion supported by scout cars that succeeded in penetrating one company's position, only to be ejected by a tank-led counterattack. The 26th's position held firm. The British attempted to capitalize on the Caumont salient by attacking eastward from it with their 7th Armored Division, but the Germans beat them back.

There followed a period of position warfare, with the 1st Division dug in on favorable ground and the Germans lacking the strength to dislodge it. There was much artillery and mortar firing by both sides. For the 1st Battalion, it was also a period of intensive patrolling. The division's commander prodded his commanders, as Frank Murdoch recalled:

> General Huebner told us that in World War I the 1st Division would think up ways to keep the Germans off balance, and he urged us to devise ways to irritate the Germans every night, and to keep them guessing. So we worked out and implemented plans for bringing our half-track mounted quad-50s—our anti-aircraft weapons—forward of the lines where they could hose down German positions in a fire-and-move mode. We did similar operations with tanks. And we sent out infantry patrols to dig into slopes facing the enemy positions canisters containing bazooka rounds—anti-tank rockets. These the patrol would wire together, retire from the scene, then detonate the rockets. These operations were designed to convince the Germans that they were under attack, to cause them to trigger their defensive fires and counter-attack movements. (Murdoch, interview)

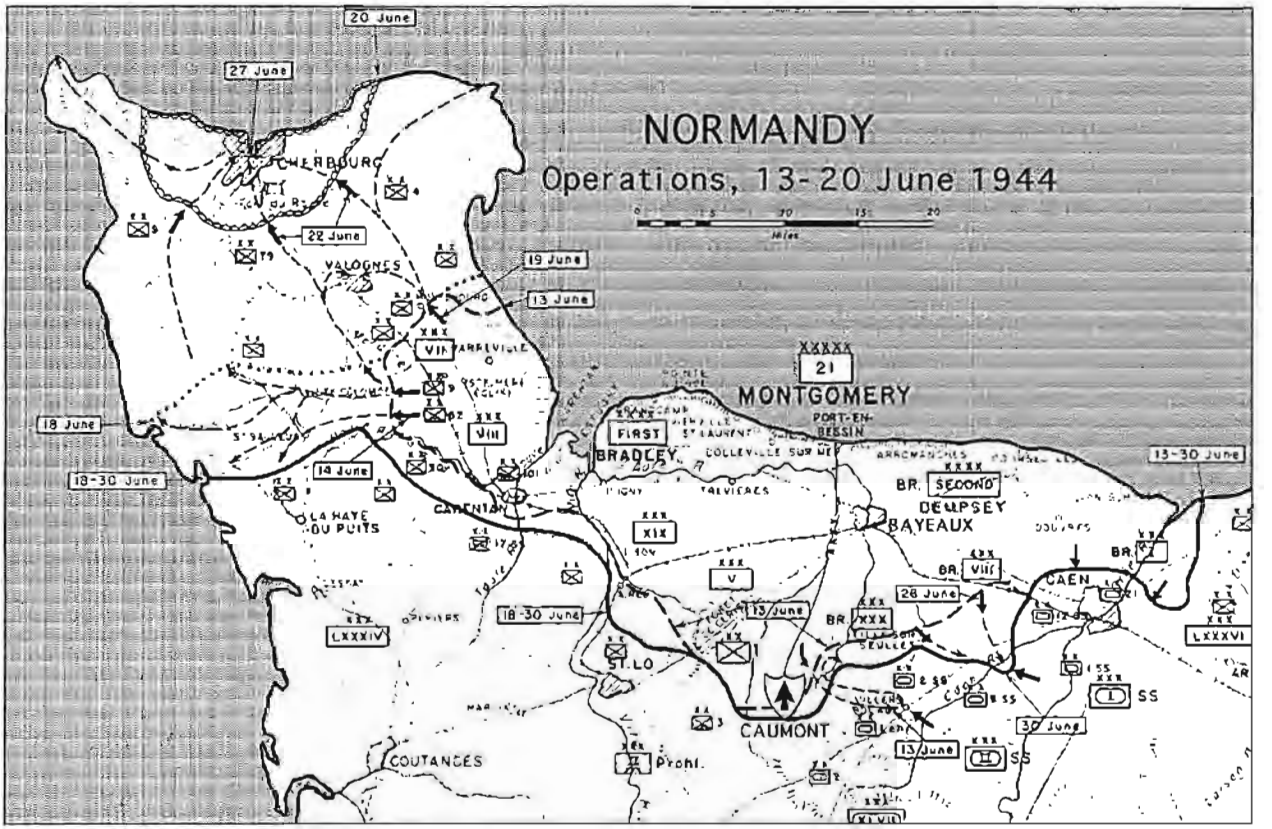


Fig. 2.6. Adapted from United States Military Academy, *A Military History of World War II, Atlas* (1953)

A Company C rifleman remembers one such attack by fire:

> On July 4th, 1944, at 11:00 a.m. while in position in Caumont everyone in Company C was ordered to fire their weapons towards the enemy lines...all other weapons in our sector including artillery, mortars, tanks and TDs also fired at that moment. It sounded like Word War III was about to start. [I] have often wondered how the Germans reacted to those tactics. (Rocco J. Moretto, letter, 25 March 1996, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

1st Division headquarters was always eager to interrogate prisoners and thereby learn about the order of battle facing Caumont. The 1st Battalion had a uniquely successful POW source in the person of one Sergeant Shelf, whom Murdoch remembers as a laconic Texan who insisted on going out on patrol single-handed, armed with only a pistol. Shelf was remarkably successful, more often than not returning with a German; once he even brought back a hard-core paratrooper from the 3rd Parachute Division. There were, of course, larger patrols. Murdoch recounts one that produced unexpected results:

> Once I decided to conduct a platoon-sized raid on the main German position so we would know who was there. We trained a platoon for that purpose, and sent them out one night. Their approach was detected—maybe our deceptions increased their alertness—and the Germans fired their final protective fires. The Sergeant leading the platoon pulled them back, and when he could, took a head count. One man was missing, and several soldiers said they saw him drop into a ditch. So the

Sergeant reported in at midnight with one KIA, and then our artillery let loose on the Germans by way of retribution for our loss.

Well, around 0500 the missing soldier came back into our lines, and I asked to talk to him to find out what had happened. He turned out to be a recent replacement, a South Carolinian named Willie Cass. Willie told me that he was new in his platoon, and that he had been told to do like the others, but when the machine gun tracers danced around him and the mortar rounds sounded like they were ten feet away, he jumped into a ditch. The Germans continued shooting, so Willie figured he'd wait until things quieted down, then sneak away. Then, he told me, the most remarkable thing happened. American artillery began shooting at the Germans, and truly slayed them. And it was the most skillful shooting imaginable, because rounds would land to the right of Willie, or to the left of Willie, but always avoided the ditch in which he lay. The artillery subdued the Germans, so Willie sneaked back—and that was all there was to tell. (Murdoch, interview)

Murdoch believed that the 1st Division intimidated German commanders, because no matter what the Germans tried the 1st Division managed to get the best of them. He observed that enemy prisoners were "scared to death" of 1st Division soldiers. He noted too that units of the 1st Division were always advantaged tactically by information concerning the Germans volunteered by French farmers or members of the French Resistance. But mainly it was just basic soldiering that made the Big Red One formidable.

Cobra: Breakthrough and Exploitation

On 6 July 3rd Battalion relieved 1st Battalion on the line at Caumont. Then on 13 July the 26th CT was relieved by the 5th Division's 11th Infantry Regiment and sent to a rest area for what was called "reorganization, reequipment, and recreation." One week later, on the evening of 20 July, the 1st Battalion moved by truck to a tactical assembly area near St. Jean-de-Daye, north of St. Lô, with orders to observe strict camouflage discipline. The following day the soldiers' web gear was sprayed with green paint, and leaders began to plan forthcoming operations. After some delay, Operation Cobra—First Army's plan to break out of the Cotentin Peninsula—was launched on 25 July with a massive air assault. A soldier in the 26th Infantry's I Company provided a vivid description of American air power in action that day:

> At about 1000 hours this morning the sky was literally filled with flight after flight of our P-47s. They flew south, rid themselves of their bomb loads and returned for another supply of bombs. Soon after this, a tremendous droning sound filled the air and we observed many formations of heavy bombers, both [B-24] Liberators and [B-17] Fortresses approaching. We could see them as far back as it was possible to detect them, and this proved only the beginning. They flew south and by careful observation we could see them release their bombs....For two hours planes came in formations averaging thirty-six planes each and the sky was alive with huge bombers and their escorts, coming and going. Tremendous clouds of smoke arose from the bombed areas and we thought it impossible for any form of life to exist in that holocaust of destruction....Heavy bombers were immediately followed by formations of medium and light bombers and before the show was over, we had witnessed upward of three thousand aircraft....Following the bombers were several flights of P-47s and P-38s. These were used for ground strafing and bombing of anyone or anything that might have escaped....It must have been a hell on earth for those Jerries, but we felt no sympathy for them. (Anonymous, *History of Company I, 26th Infantry*, unpublished manuscript, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

The saturation bombing affected a rectangular area, eight kilometers long and three kilometers deep, that paralleled the front lines. The plan called for the three divisions on line—the 9th, 4th and 30th—to advance and seize key terrain, and to facilitate the passage of the VII Corps breakthrough force. The latter consisted of the 1st Division (motorized, with Combat Command B [CCB] of the 3rd Armored Division attached), the 3rd Armored Division (-), and the 2nd Armored Division. A few bombs had fallen among U.S. troops, causing casualties and minor delays in crossing the line of departure. The advance was discouragingly slow because German resistance in the bombed area proved much stiffer than expected. However, Lieutenant General Joseph "Lightning Joe" Collins, Commanding VII Corps, sensed a lack of coordination among the Germans, and decided late on 25 July to commit his mobile reserves the following morning. Accordingly, General Bradley assigned all available air strikes to VII Corps. Collins directed 1st Division to take Marigny and 2nd Armored to capture St. Gilles, each attack to be preceded by a strike of two hundred fighter-bombers. Attacking with CCB and the 18th CT abreast, the 1st Division reached the edge of Marigny by nightfall—disappointing progress at best. On the other flank, however, Combat Command A (CCA) of the 2nd Armored Division, with CT 22 of the 4th Division attached, took its objective by midafternoon and rolled southward. Collins directed the attack continue through the night of 26-27 July.

The 1st Division made little progress that night. The following morning General Huebner directed CCB of the 3rd Armored to bypass Marigny and take high ground dominating the approaches to Coutances. The 18th Infantry was to continue the attack through Marigny and join CCB on the high ground, while the 16th CT was to move west and, echeloned to the left rear of CCB, join the attack toward Coutances. The 26th Infantry was to follow. Marigny was cleared on 27 June.

The U.S. forces were operating amid disorganized but still actively belligerent German units, and resupply was hazardous. That night General Bradley assigned Coutances to VIII Corps, and the following day CCB turned south and east to encircle the Germans opposing the 18th and 16th CTs. The German defenses quickly collapsed. In the meantime General Huebner committed the 26th CT, ordering it to sweep the 1st Division's left flank. Passing through Marigny around noon on 28 July, the 26th CT advanced rapidly through countryside infested with German stragglers and remnants of units. The operation had moved from breakthrough to exploitation.

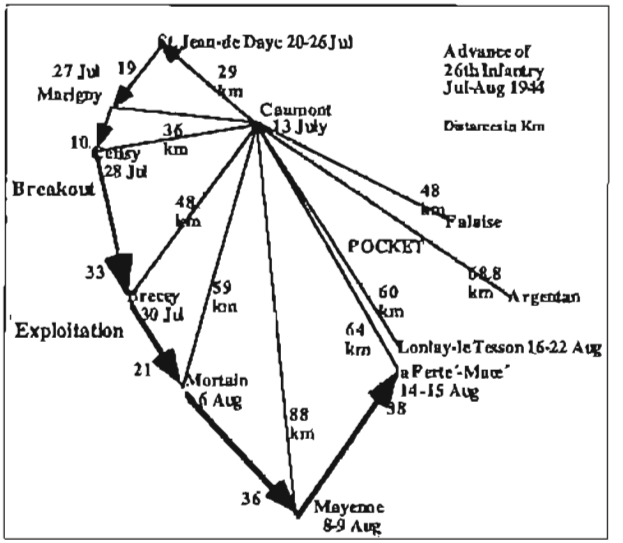


Fig. 2.7. Advance of 26th Infantry, July-August 1944

The 26th CT was to drive further south than any other unit of First Army as it wheeled to encircle the German forces in the Argentan-Falaise pocket. Near Mortain, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was attached to CCB. Dexterous Red 6 was summoned to the armor CP to account for his unit. On arrival he was told that, although the attachment had been in effect for hours, the tankers had seen not one Blue Spader. Frank Murdoch explains why:

> When they [the armor units] stopped, they "coiled" in a field so they could refuel easily, and

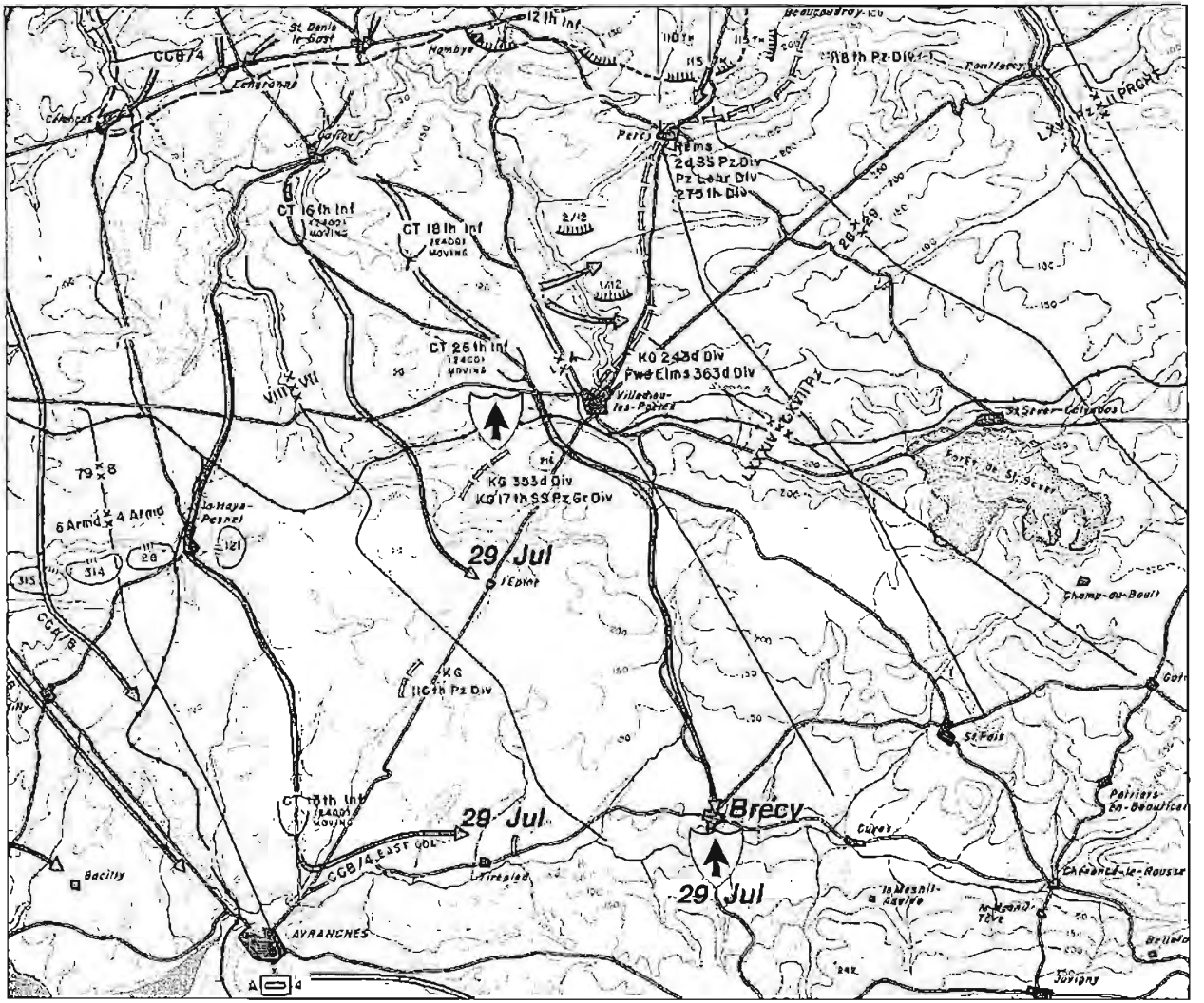


Fig. 2.8. Situation, 30-31 July, 26th Infantry in the van of First and Third Armies. Adapted from Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit* (1961).

their SOP called for their infantry to set up a security perimeter around them. I hope we taught them a lesson there at Mortain. I told them that if I found any of my troops on their perimeter I would jump the responsible company commander, because my companies were moving to establish control of the area, well away from that gaggle of vehicles which presented such a lucrative target for air attack or artillery. Our job was to keep the whole unit secure from counterattack and harassment, not to stand guard on tanks.

At daylight the Germans started shelling. Colonel Seitz called, and wanted to know what was happening. I told him that a counterattack was underway, because over the past few days the German artillery was plainly shooting up ammunition on position, then pulling back. But this fire was increasing, and I knew from its accuracy that

it was observed fire. CCB got out of there, with many losses among the armored infantry as they had taken position with the tanks. We got out with no losses, and we moved on towards Mayenne. The counterattack developed as I thought it would. The 30th Division, which had been west and north of us, caught the main thrust of the attack. The Germans tried to drive through to the coast at Avranches. The 30th stopped them, but I am told it was a tough fight. (Murdoch, interview)

"It was definitely mobile warfare," Murdoch says of the succession of battle and movement that characterized that period:

> We did a lot of fighting on foot, and a lot of that at night, but mostly we were on trucks, and rolling rapidly. We'd get a line of march and start out, and then we might get called and assigned an attack objective. Col. Seitz would leapfrog his battalions, and pressed us hard. It was push, push, push, with fighting from time to time.
>
> I had a technique that I found very useful. For any objective we were attacking, I would plan ahead with my artillery liaison officer from the 33d Artillery a set of defensive fires, and as soon as we were on the objective he would fire confirming rounds just to be sure that the guns had the right data. Then if a counterattack developed—and that was doctrine and practice in the German Army—we could bring down barrages all around us. One time, though, when he fired the confirming rounds, the explosions flushed a German unit, and to hit them before they could escape, I ordered the liaison officer to fire the barrages. Well, regiment heard that we had called for our final defensive fires, assumed that we were about to be overrun, and went berserk. After that, I just called those fires "concentrations," and it worked as well.
>
> I did not believe in shooting artillery into every little town we came across. Even if enemy were suspected in the town, I preferred to shoot only on definite targets, and if that was impossible, to attack into the town after dark, on foot, rather than just bombard the place. We would move silently into the town, then bring in our tanks. Usually, the Germans would pull out or surrender. But it was always clear to me that artillery was a key element in our success. I can truthfully say that no objective assigned to my units went untaken, and once we were there, nothing the Germans could do could drive us back. We never lost an objective. (Murdoch, interview)

At Mayenne the 26th CT turned northeast, hooking around to attack the south flank of the German units in the pocket that was rapidly forming around Falaise. According to General Dwight Eisenhower, the enemy's strategy at Falaise was "to line the southern lip [of the pocket] through Argentan with his armor to defend against the American forces as he extricated what he could through the gap." In the meantime,

> a strong defensive barrier against the Canadians was established with the 12th SS Panzer and 21st Panzer Divisions at Falaise. By this means, resisting fiercely, he managed to hold open the jaws of our pincers long enough to enable a portion of his forces to escape. As usual, he concentrated on saving his armor and left the bulk of his infantry to their fate—a subject of bitter comment by prisoners from the latter units who fell into our hands.... Those armored forces which escaped did so at the cost of a great proportion of their equipment. (General D. D. Eisenhower, *Report by the Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944-8 May 1945*)

North of the town of La Ferté Macé units of the 26th CT observed that the Germans were moving

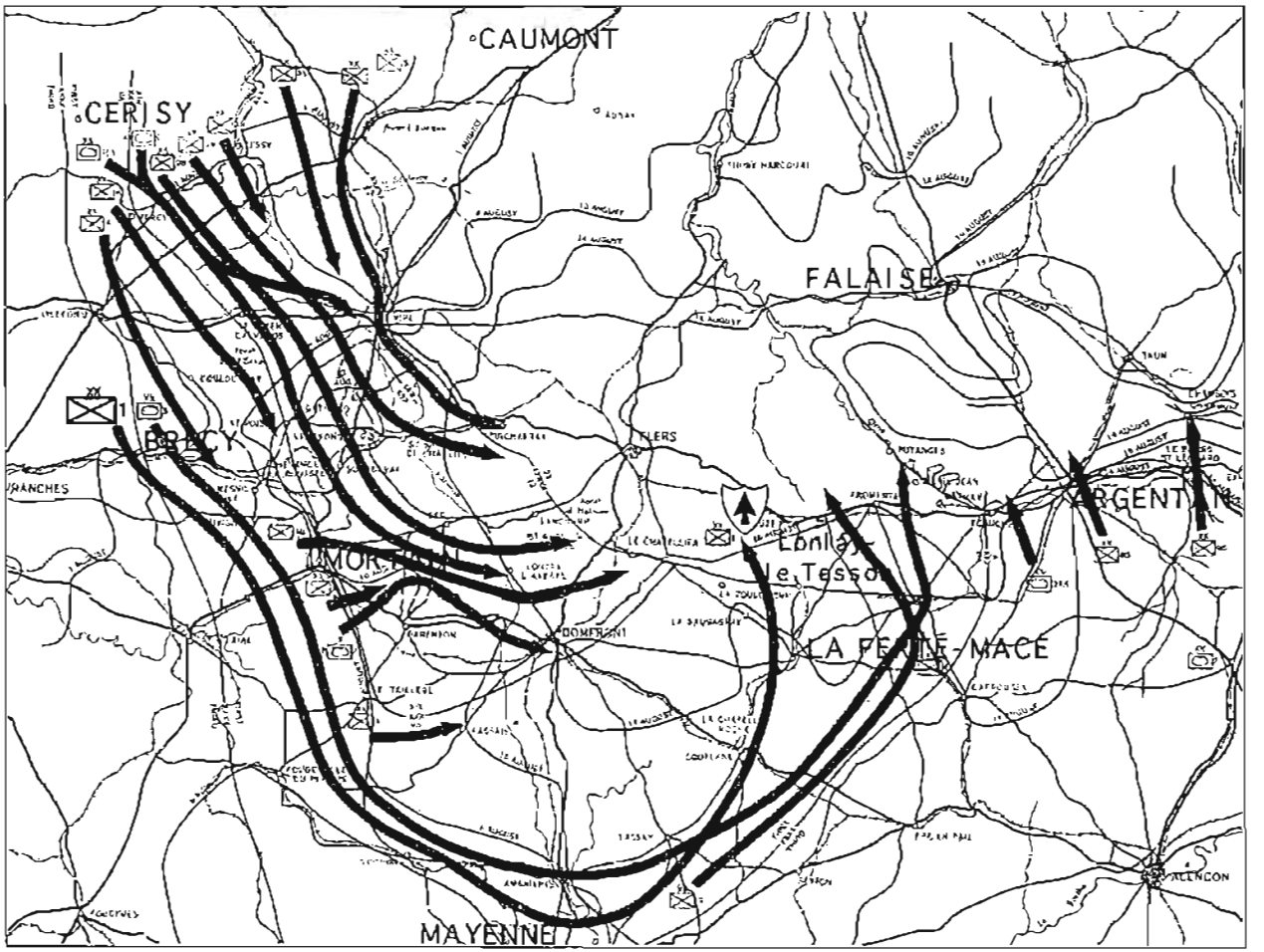


Fig. 2.9. Adapted from First U.S. Army, *Report...11 Aug 44-22 Feb 45*

unmolested across their front in an easterly direction. The Blue Spaders could not fire on the enemy for fear of causing Allied casualties on the other side of the German columns. "We did our job," a captain in one of those units recalled with frustration;

> we were right on the ball....We could see the Germans were escaping. [But] we couldn't fire on them because of the [Allied] operations.... It was a sickening thing to see....Vehicles, hundreds of them going down the road.... Almost a German Corps and we couldn't do anything about it. We were looking right at them. (T. J. Gendron, video tape interview, First Division Museum at Cantigny [1995])

On 15 August 1944 Frank Murdoch was wounded while trying to adjust artillery fires on a German armor unit that had pulled in under a clump of trees to hide from Allied air strikes. He was out checking company positions when he spotted the Germans, whereupon he hastened to his advanced command post—which was in a house with a good view northward—and summoned his artillery observer. The latter reported that he had a battery of 155mm guns ready to fire, so Murdoch took him to the yard in front of the house to

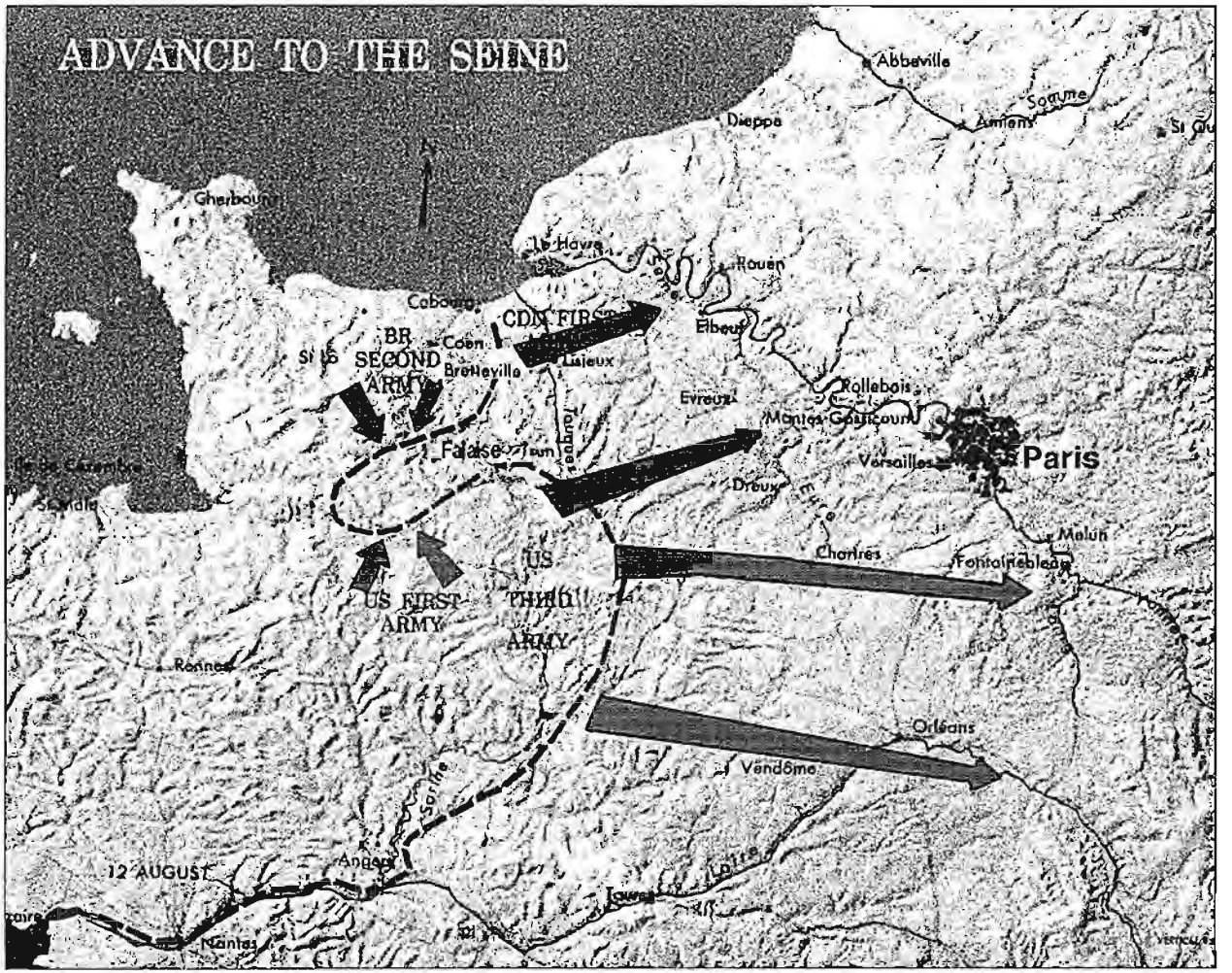


Fig. 2.10. Adapted from General D. D. Eisenhower, *Report by the Supreme Commander* (1945)

point out the target. It was there that a small-caliber bullet, fired at long range, hit Murdoch in the ankle.

Murdoch was evacuated, but the fire mission was executed. Colonel Seitz directed his own executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Edwin V. "Van" Sutherland, to take over, and the 1/26th attacked north to Lonlay-le-Tesson under Sutherland's command. Sutherland remembered that the Blue Spaders captured a German truck convoy loaded with French liqueurs at La Ferté Macé, so it was probably just as well that the next orders for his jubilant troops were to stand down for rest and reorganization. Sutherland turned the 1/26th over to Major Francis W. Adams and resumed his duties as executive officer of CT 26.

First Army's job was done, and the battle now belonged entirely to Third Army. Eisenhower summarized the course of that battle as follows:

> All became chaos and confusion.... Our air forces swept down on the choked masses of transport, and there was no sign of the Luftwaffe to offer any opposition. With the Third U.S. Army on the Seine, the German fighter force had been com-

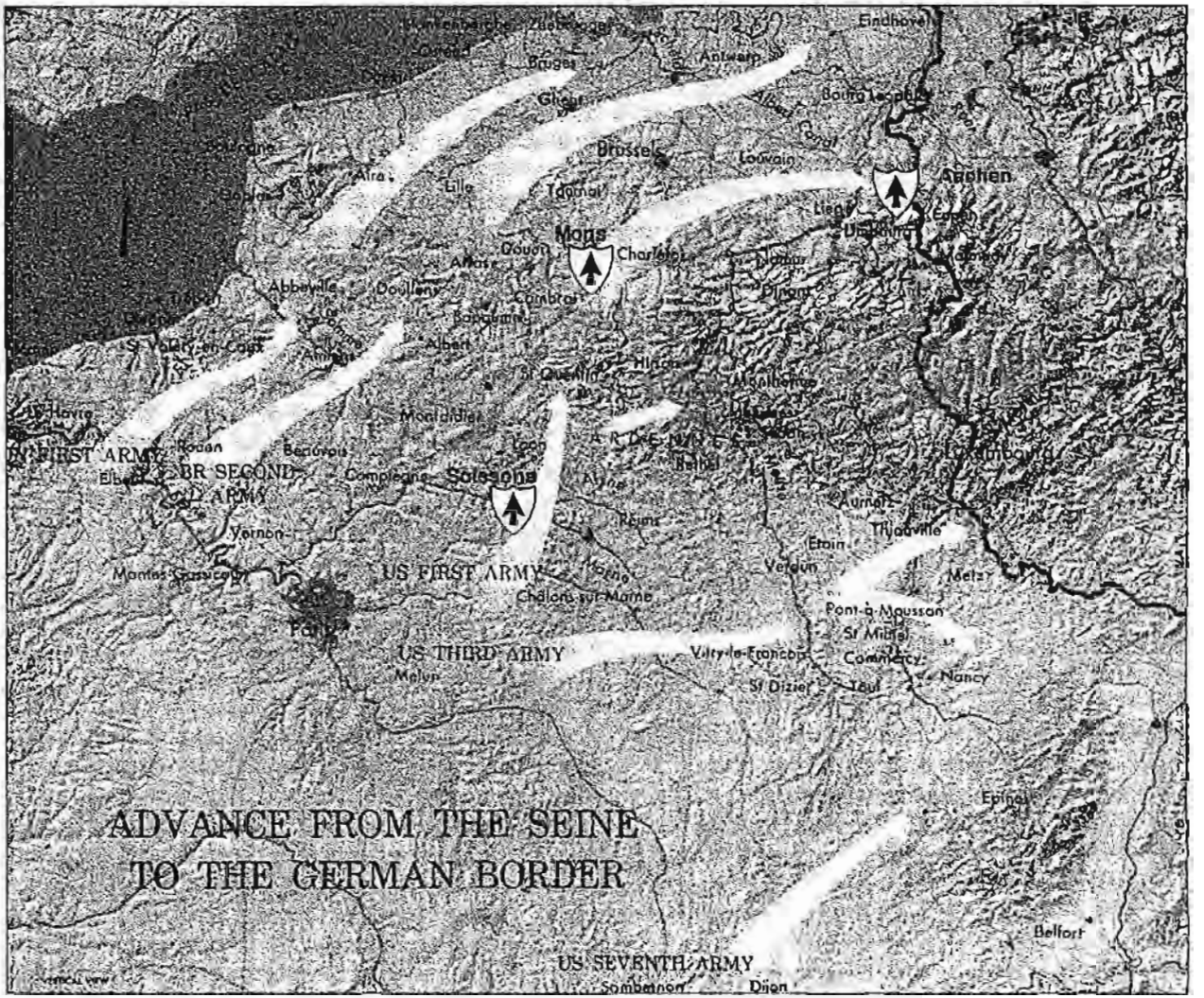


Fig. 2.11. Adapted from *Report by the Supreme Commander*

pelled to retire to airfields in the east of France, too far away.... By 25 August, the enemy had lost [in Normandy] 400,000 killed, wounded or captured, of which total 200,000 were prisoners of war. (Eisenhower, *Report*)

Pursuit to Germany

With Third Army on the attack, the divisions of First Army—including the 1st Division, which remained assigned to VII Corps—were given a few days respite from battle. Plans were formulated for a drive that would cross the Seine east of Paris, then turn north to plunge into the heart of Belgium to intercept German forces retreating from the Channel coast. First Army was to move swiftly to prevent the enemy from retiring behind the Siegfried Line fortifications along Germany's border with Belgium. Exploitation had become pursuit. Eisenhower wrote that

It was our plan to attack northeastward in the great-

Fig. 2.12. Major General Huebner revisits Soissons, August 1944 (*Memorial Album*)

> est strength possible. This direction has been chosen for a variety of reasons. First, the great bulk of the German Army was located there. Secondly, there was the desirability of capturing the flying bomb area.... A third reason for the northeastward attack was our imperative need for the large port of Antwerp, absolutely essential to us logistically before any deep penetration could be made into Germany. Fourthly, we wanted the airfields in Belgium. Finally, and most important...the lower Rhine offered the best avenue of approach into Germany, and it seemed probable that through rapidity of exploitation both the Siegfried Line and the Rhine River might be crossed before the enemy could recover sufficiently to make a definite stand.... Strong United States forces marched abreast of the Northern Group of Armies to the northeast, while three United States Divisions were completely immobilized in order to supply additional logistical support for the Northern Group. At the same time the entire airborne forces were made available to Field Marshal Montgomery. (Eisenhower, *Report*)

On 24 August, after nearly a week without action, the 1st Division commenced a long drive. VII Corps advanced in its assigned zone with the 9th Division on the right flank, the 3rd Armored Division in the center, and the 1st Division on the left. The 3rd Armored Division, given priority for crossing the Seine, soon forged ahead of the two infantry divisions, which were hard-pressed to keep up with the fast-moving tank columns. Combat there was, but compared to Normandy, it amounted to mere skirmishes. Marches were usually by day; the weather was hot and usually sunny; the roads were dusty. Sometimes the infantrymen walked, or shuttle-marched with organic trucks. The operations journal of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry records advances during the last week of August 1944 totaling 272 miles from Lonlay-le-Tesson, skirting southeast of Paris and thence northeast to an assembly area near Soissons:

Date	Location (end day)	Miles	Operations
24 Aug	St.Arnoult-en-Yvelines	95	Trucked
25 Aug	St. Vrain	71	Trucked
26 Aug	Corbeil-Essonnes	14	Foot march (crossed Seine R.)
27 Aug	Ozoir-la-Ferriere	21	Mounted on tanks, trucks
28 Aug	Crégy le Meux	25	Mounted on tanks, trucks
29 Aug	Villers Coterets	30	22 miles by truck, 8 on foot
30 Aug	Soissons	16	Trucked

The final movement to the assembly area was made along Route No. 2. As they neared Soissons the men of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry passed the roadside where, on 19 July 1918, their predecessors had dug in under fire; just beyond were the fields in which Majors Theodore Roosevelt and Clarence Huebner had been wounded. Huebner appreciated the historical significance of that place, both for himself and the division that he now commanded. He took time to visit the monument erected there by the Society of the First Division to honor the 2,213 killed and 6,347 wounded in four days of battle at Soissons in 1918.

Huebner no doubt looked for familiar names on the bronze tablets, and perhaps took some satisfaction

in the fact that the 1st Division still lived up to Pershing's praise, inscribed on the monument: "The Commander-in-Chief has noted in this division a special pride in service and a high state of morale, never broken by hardship nor battle."

Associated Press correspondent Don Whitehead, who accompanied the 1st Division in the Normandy campaign and afterward, met Huebner for the first time in June 1944. Writing in *Danger Forward: The Story of the First Division in World War II* (1947), Whitehead described the general as a man with

> a kindly face and direct blue eyes that twinkled with humor. I judged that he was in his early fifties. He was physically fit and there was an air of confidence about him that I liked.
>
> I found that Huebner had a great love for his 1st Division. He enlisted as a young man in the 18th Regiment and had come up the hard way through the ranks, distinguishing himself in the First World War. He knew the job of every man in his division as well or better than the men [did] the jobs—because he had once held those jobs himself.
>
> The general wanted his division to be the best in the entire Army. It wasn't entirely a matter of personal pride because Huebner knew that the toughest, straightest-shooting division won its objectives with the least loss of life. And if he was stern in his discipline, it was because battle casualties have a direct relationship to discipline.

During the last week of August Allied pilots reported that German armor was withdrawing to the east and northeast, away from the British Second Army and

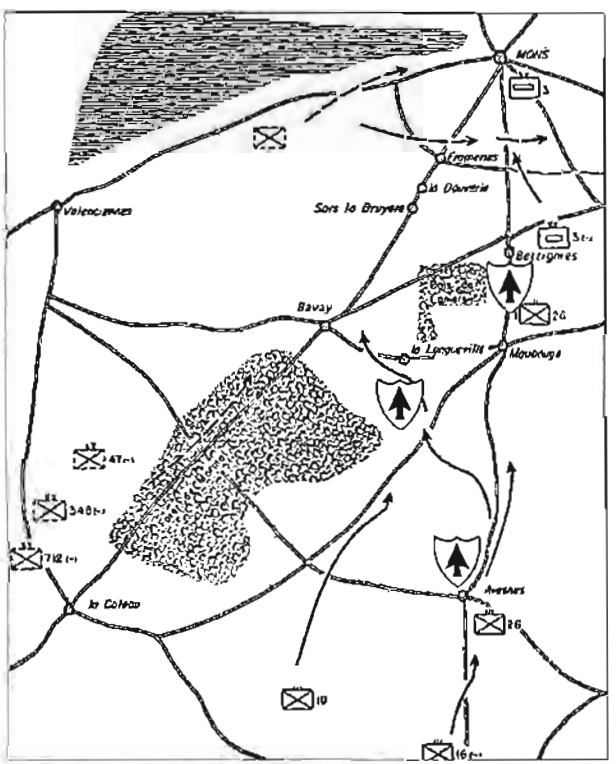


Fig. 2.13. Mons, Situation 3 Sep 1944

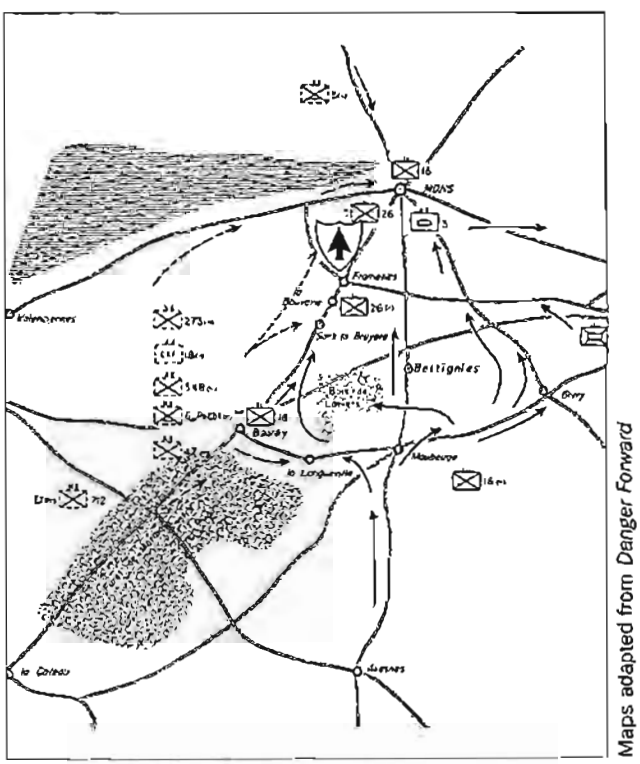


Fig. 2.14. Mons, Situation 4 Sep 1944

Maps adapted from *Danger Forward*

across the front of the U.S. First Army. Sensing a chance to disrupt this movement, and to forestall employment of these forces in an organized defense, General Bradley decided to reorient the axis of First Army's advance from the northeast to due north, into Belgium. First Army then directed VII Corps to seize Avesnes, Maubeuge, and Mons; meanwhile, V Corps was to advance on VII Corps' left (west). General Collins ordered the 3rd Armored Division to spearhead VII Corps' attack with a rapid advance to Mons, bypassing any resistance it encountered en route; the 1st and 9th Divisions would mop up behind it while the 4th Cavalry Group advanced on its right. The latter was instructed to maintain contact with Patton's neighboring Third Army, thereby preventing gaps from developing between that force and VII Corps, even as it kept Collins' options open for a drive to the Rhine.

General Bradley's maneuver produced brilliant but unexpected results. So swift was V Corps' advance that it obviated a planned airborne operation at Tournai. The German forces in its path retreated east, for the most part successfully, but in doing so moved into the zone of VII Corps. Thousands of Germans, comprising remnants of the three corps of Fifth Panzer Army plus assorted stragglers, swarmed into the area southwest of Mons, hoping to escape eastward. The 3rd Armored Division, sensing their intent, trapped them by setting up a series of roadblocks along the Avesnes-Maubeuge-Mons road, leaving the 1st Infantry Division, thrusting northwest from Avesnes, to fall upon what amounted to a confused, blinded, heterogeneous mass of enemy units. This head-on encounter came as a surprise to both sides. The Americans had communications, air superiority, and unit cohesion; the Germans had none of these. The battle was one-sided, the results inevitable.

Combat Command A, 3rd Armored Division entered Mons on the afternoon of 2 September. Alerted by Allied air to the presence of long enemy columns marching toward Mons from the southwest, CCA began to set up roadblocks. During the night, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was attached to CCA, and directed to move out early on the morning of 3 September to join the command in Mons. With tanks attached and the infantry mounted on trucks, the battalion departed Avesnes at 0700. The order of march, by company, was A, C, B, HQ, and D. The battalion's operations journal contains the following entries for that day:

1020 Bn contacted large enemy force in vicinity of Maubeuge. Enemy attacking left flank of Co B at France-Belgium border [about four miles north of Maubeuge]. Co A led the attack to the outskirts of Maubeuge. Enemy launching numerous counter-attacks along entire Bn column, all being beaten off with extremely heavy casualties to the enemy.

1200 Hundreds of PWs being sent back to the rear of column.

1400 Attached AT Plat knocked out head vehicle of enemy column coming up road on our left flank. Bn Hq Co .50 cal MG covering road knocked out 9 German vehicles of the column and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy personnel.

The battalion took up positions along the road to Mons between Maubeuge and Bettignies, near the Belgian border, blocking all junctions with roads from the west. There it was attached to the 16th CT as that unit came north. The battalion's journal records the capture of some twenty-five hundred Germans on 3 September, with negotiations underway for the surrender of hundreds more. Clarence Huebner describes the ensuing actions:

> Our division...sent a battalion of the 26th through Maubeuge to support the armor. This battalion, by some miracle of timing, moved along through the town in a gap of German columns going east to the Siegfried Line, and quickly ran into resistance. The battalion strung out along the highway,

its companies in a row, and caught the enemy as he came from the west. This engagement cost the enemy 200 dead and 2400 prisoners. Meanwhile, the Regiment, mounted on anything that could move, headed up the Bavay-Mons road, hitting a long column of German foot troops and transports at La Bouverie. This column, moving in administrative march formation, was broken into small sections with extensive casualties. Over 3000 prisoners were taken in this action. The 26th became completely engaged when its field trains brushed an enemy column to the rear. (Huebner, *Memorial Album*)

At 0700 on 4 September, in accord with the terms of an agreement struck the night before, some one thousand Germans walked into captivity through the division's positions; during the remainder of the day another four hundred followed them. That afternoon, as the 3rd Armored Division dispatched its first elements eastward, Major Adams sent a platoon into Mons to help guard thousands of prisoners in a makeshift cage set up by the 3rd Armored Division's provost marshal. That evening the battalion marched into Mons. Shortly after arriving, Major Adams was alerted for movement east.

On the following morning, however, the 1/26th was heavily engaged. An entry in the battalion's journal for 5 September records what transpired:

> 0912. Msg to 16th Inf fr Bn CO: All my strong points with the exception of the one at Bellan were hit intermittently by groups of enemy ranging from a few up to 50 to and a 100. Approx 100 PWs have been taken. Some of the PW state they started out at dark last night w/regt of inf. They were split up during the night by our units. At our CP location we captured a Col, a Mjr, a Capt, and a Lt. I have requested Lt. Col. Hogan, CO 3rd Bn, 33 Armd Regt to move Co of tks into the vic of my CP to act as a mobile reserve. My entire outfit is committed on my strong points. I do not have a reserve of infantry except thru Col Hogan. I am quite anxious to have you take over the PW's in the cage. I think they should be sent back as soon as possible. They have not had food and I do not have any to give them.

That day the battalion captured another 273 Germans. At 1825 Major Adams received notice that his battalion had been detached from the 16th CT and reattached to the 3rd Armored Division. The 26th's 2nd Battalion was to assume the mission of the 1st Battalion in Mons.

By then there was little fight left in the Germans around Mons, and the 1st Division was largely occupied with the problem of rounding up what was left of twenty German divisions and moving them rearward. In summarizing the battle, the U.S. First Army's Report of Operations observes that

> Some 25,000 prisoners were collected in the pocket and several thousand more were killed. In addition, tremendous quantities of enemy matériel were captured or destroyed under effective combined air and ground attack....The fact that these units might have been available to man the defenses of Germany itself opened up a great opportunity. Those defenses would be just that much less strongly held if we could reach them before reinforcements could be brought up. This circumstance caused a quick readjustment in the army plan to be made even before the captures southwest of Mons were entirely complete.

On 3 September the 3rd Armored Division had been ordered to move toward the German border vicinity Aachen; its lead elements departed on 4 September. On 5 September the 1st Division was ordered to the left of 3rd Armored, where it would simultaneously advance and protect VII Corps' north flank. The division complied with columns consisting of

16 CT on the north, 18 CT on the south, and 26 CT (-) echeloned to the left rear for flank security.

On 6 September the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry reassembled and was attached to Combat Command B of the 3rd Armored Division. The Blue Spaders continued their advance through Belgium mounted on the 3rd Armored's tanks and other vehicles. They were back in combat the next day, capturing 215 Germans. On 8 September the battalion fought in Liège, where 552 Germans were taken prisoner. Between 9 and 12 September the battalion advanced with CCB to Eupen, Belgium, as part of Task Force Hogan (named for Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Hogan, commanding the 3/33rd Armored Regiment). Progress was unopposed except for occasional snipers; however, some delay was caused by the jubilant Belgian citizenry, who welcomed the Americans with plenty of "cognac, champagne, and pretty girls," according to the 3rd Armored Division history, *Spearhead in the West*. But as the CCB approached the German border, the welcomers became muted and the snipers more persistent.

Typically, the 1/26th Infantry marched intermixed with a tank battalion, one rifle company and one heavy machine gun section attached to each company of tanks. The infantry battalion (-) traveled on organic transportation as a separate march unit in the column. The lead tank company usually sent a section of tanks without infantry forward of the column as a reconnaissance and security element. In the event that these were fired upon or encountered other opposition, the infantry would dismount, move forward on both sides of the road, and help clear out the resistance. Through 12 September, the combination of tanks and heavy machine gun fire was usually sufficient to assure a resumption of the advance.

Into Germany: Nütheim to Stolberg

On 11 September VII Corps directed the 1st Division to conduct a reconnaissance in force of the Aachen area. Accordingly, on the following day CT 16 and CT 18 sent forward probes, both of which encountered stiff resistance. Nonetheless, CT 16 crossed the German frontier, punched through the forward portion of the Siegfried Line (the Germans called it the *Westwall*), and captured a number of pillboxes. On the same day the 3rd Armored Division reached the Siegfried Line defenses some six miles southeast of Aachen. Even from a distance, it was clear that the nature of the war was about to change; after the division crossed the German border on 12 September, General Huebner, surveying Aachen from a hill outside the city, realized that the city would be a "hard nut to crack." He was right:

> We didn't know that it would be the 21st of October before the last German surrendered and the Imperial City of Charlemagne would be ours. The Siegfried line defenses were a spur of the main defenses which were to the rear of the city, but they were the same type: dragon's teeth to hamper tank action, pillboxes and casements from which were sited the automatic weapons, and mines and wire entanglements. (Society, *Memorial Album*)

Captain Armand R. Levasseur, S-3 of the 1/26th, noted similar forebodings among the troops: "The men generally realized that the picnic, wine and flowers campaign of France and Belgium was at an end. Now, at last, the German was fighting on native soil, so resistance was expected to stiffen." Even so,

> the end now seemed within our grasp. Optimism was high, in fact too high in view of the tough battles that lay ahead. Sound tactical doctrine dictated that the enemy's defenses, reached at the close of a pursuit which had turned into a rout, be penetrated as rapidly as possible. The enemy was to be given no breather to recover from the staggering blows struck in France and Belgium. For this reason no time was available for specialized training so valuable to the success of an attack on permanent type defenses. Also, at battalion level,

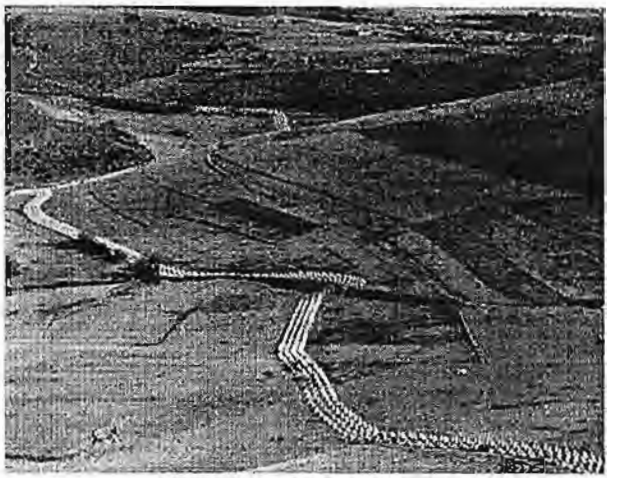


Fig. 2.15. Dragon's teeth on the *Westwall*. Adapted from Charles B. MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign* (1963).

> little was known as to the nature of construction, strength or depth of the fortifications. (Armand R. Levasseur, *Operations of the 1/26th Infantry...13-20 September 1944*, monograph for the Advanced Infantry Officers Course 1947-1948)

In fact, the German frontier fortifications around Aachen were arranged in two belts, an outer array of antitank obstacles and bunkers called the "Scharnhorst Line" and a deeper, more extensive system, the "Schill Line." Clearly visible from the Belgian side of the frontier were the "dragon's teeth," belts of concrete obstacles intended to bar mounted attack. Not visible, however, were the overwatching fortifications: the extensive array of underground bunkers the Americans called "pillboxes" (see figure 2.16). Captain Levasseur described these in some detail:

> The outer perimeter consists of several rows of pyramidal concrete blocks rising above the ground to form an effective antitank barrier. Where roads crossed the barrier, steel gates had been installed or iron rails had been cemented upright into the road.
>
> Immediately to the rear of this obstacle, pillboxes were located so as to cover the barrier with fire, thus preventing breaching with demolitions. Depth of the defenses was dependent on the defensive strength of the terrain. Where terrain favored the attacker, the defenses were proportionately greater in depth. In the area a few miles south of Aachen the first belt extended to a depth of 3000 yards.
>
> Pillboxes were located on ground providing mutual support and best observation and fields of fire. Distances between pillboxes varied from fifty to several hundred yards. Generally, pillboxes were blind from the rear except when the rear door was open. Firing embrasures permitted only a 50-degree angle of fire. Some contained only one opening whereas other could cover both flanks or contained two mutually supporting guns. Antitank gun emplacements were constructed to accommodate small caliber guns, which had become obsolete against tanks. The standard 88 mm gun had to be dug in outside the position.
>
> Inside each pillbox, separate living and sleeping compartments were provided, their number and size dependent on the number of troops for which it was designed. Observation and command posts in forward positions were combined in one installation which in some instances were four stories deep and contained a half dozen or more separate rooms. This type of fortification was entirely underground save for a small cupola to permit observation. Communication between all positions was provided by underground cables.
>
> The defense, as a whole, presented a formidable obstacle to an attacking force. Over a period of several years since construction, nature had provided the works with a natural camouflage which concealed many positions until after they opened fire. Added to this, some were built to resemble garages, cottages and other deceptive installations where they would be inconspicuous. The only part of the pillbox appearing above the surface was that [which was] essential to meet its tactical require-

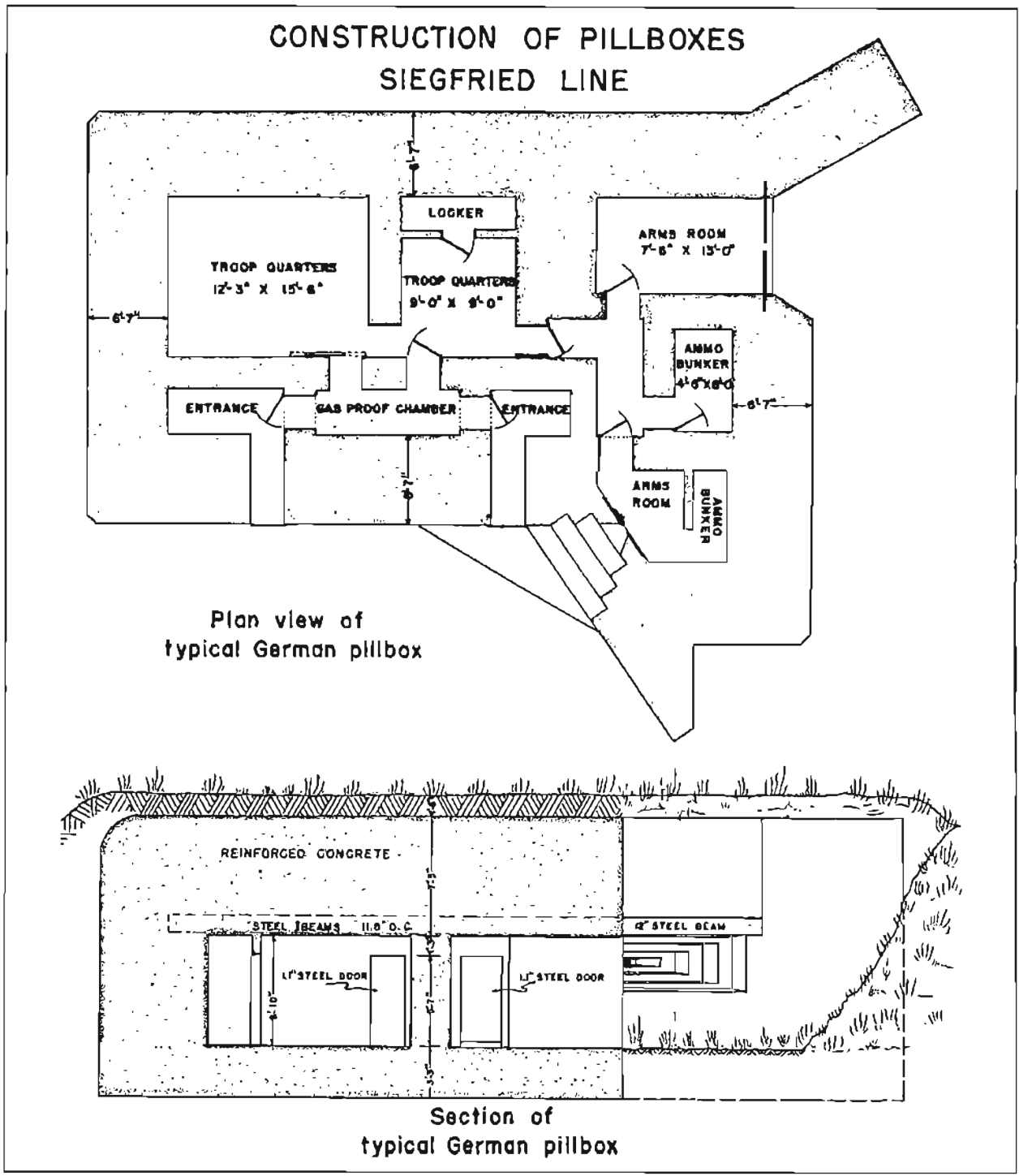


Fig. 2.16. Adapted from *The Siegfried Line Campaign*

ments plus overhead cover consisting of several feet of reinforced concrete, which could withstand tank fire at point-blank ranges. (Levasseur, *Operations*)

While it was true that the Germans had allowed many Siegfried Line bunkers to fall into disrepair, and had moved guns and other equipment to coastal defenses in France, the fortifications had been well sited, and still possessed inherent defensive strength. Moreover, the Germans were stripping 88mm guns from antiaircraft missions and moving them to the Aachen area, and hastily manning its defenses with units collected from all over Germany or transferred from the Russian front. Collectively, these guns, men, and fortifications were to present a "formidable obstacle" indeed to VII Corps.

Just as troubling to the American Commanders as the strength of the Siegfried Line defenses was the condition of the combat units that would assault them. After more than ninety days of battle the men in these units were tired, their vehicles and guns were worn and battered, maintenance was lagging, resupply was faltering. Allied forces had dealt the Germans severe blows, but they were at the end of their logistical tethers.

The intent of VII Corps was to thrust toward Cologne and the Rhine, but to do so it first had to control Aachen and its environs. And so, on 12 September VII Corps, despite severe logistical constraints, attacked with three divisions abreast: the 1st Division on the left was to encircle Aachen; the 3rd Armored Division in the center was to advance and seize the high ground north of Stolberg; and the 9th Division was to attack along the edge of the Hürtgen Forest to capture the

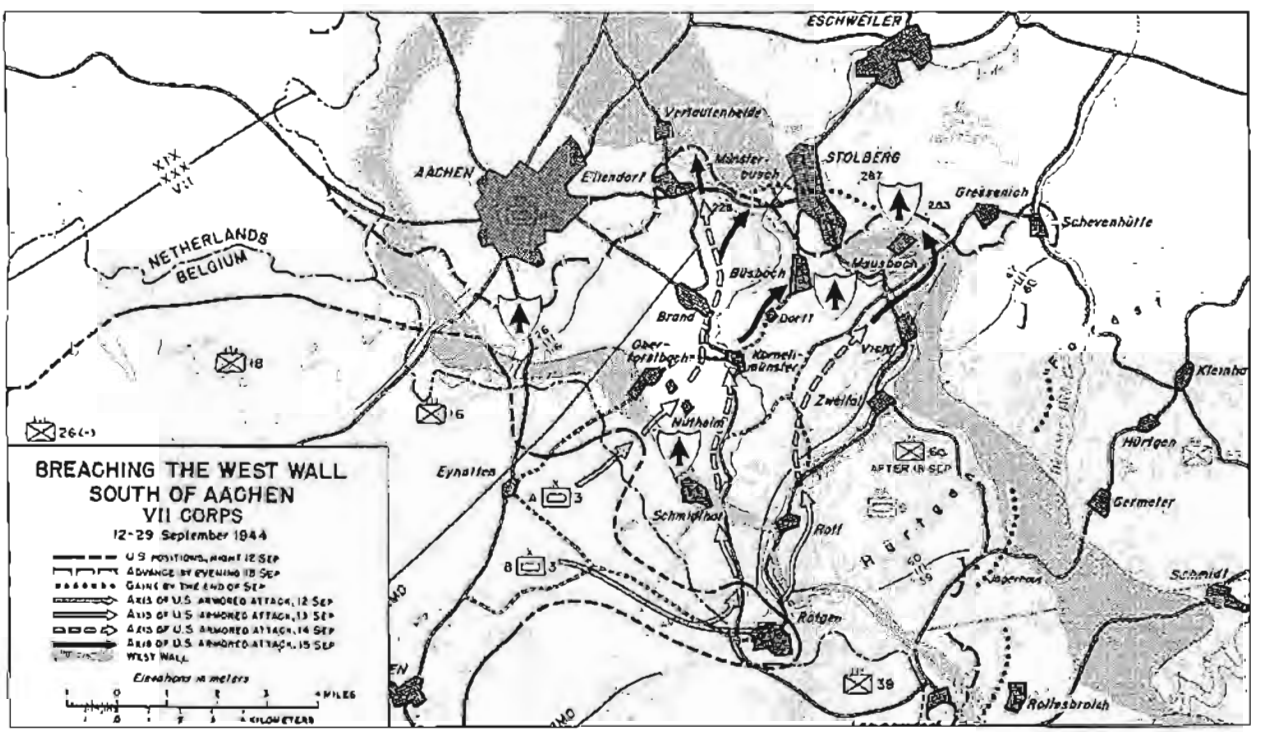


Fig. 2.17. Adapted from *The Siegfried Line Campaign*

towns of Hürtgen and Kleinhau, and to establish control over the road extending southeast from Schevenhütte.

On the morning of 13 September the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was detached from Task Force Hogan and put directly under the command of CCA's Brigadier General Doyle O. Hickey. The battalion was then ordered to assemble in the Eynattener Forest at the German border and prepare to attack the outer defenses of the Siegfried Line. Hickey's forces, exploiting the effect of air strikes, were to drive through German defenses in the vicinity of Nütheim and strike toward Münsterbusch, occupying the hills in that area. The 3rd Armored's CCB was to attack on the right to take the high ground east of Stolberg—hills 287 (Donnerberg) and 283 (Weissenberg).

An initial objective was the town of Nütheim itself, situated on higher ground some two thousand meters beyond the dragon's teeth. The planned air strikes were delayed, but at the northeast corner of the Eynattener Forest the tankers found a roadway of gravel-fill atop the dragon's teeth, probably built for the convenience of farmers; they launched an attack over it and succeeded in getting their vehicles across the obstacles onto the open ground below the pillboxes. But enemy fire, direct and indirect—small arms and 88mm guns, mortars and artillery—forced CCA's armored infantry to pull back to the woods and destroyed twelve of its tanks. By 1830 more tanks and armored vehicles had crossed the dragon's teeth and were engaging the pillboxes at close range, but with little effect: one tank destroyer pumped more than fifty rounds directly into a pillbox without neutralizing it. At that juncture Hickey committed his reserve, ordering the Blue Spaders to attack Nütheim from the west and to clear out the positions holding up the tanks.

The positioning of the roadway forced the armor to attack Nütheim frontally. Major Adams figured that enemy bunkers would be well sited to cover that approach, and therefore chose to attack northeast toward the settlement of Nersheid so as to keep a low ridge between his troops and Nütheim. He ordered an advance in a column of companies, with Company A (Captain T. W. Anderson commanding) in the lead, followed by Companies B and C. The command group was initially to be with Company B.

A tank platoon had been assigned to support the battalion. To do so it would first have to cross over the dragon's teeth on the gravel-fill roadway, located south of the battalion's line of departure (LD) at the edge of the woods, then swing north to rejoin the infantry. As it happened, only one tank got across the dragon's teeth in time to participate in the attack, arriving at 2000; fortunately, it was the artillery forward observer's tank.

Company A crossed the LD in twilight and advanced toward the belt of dragon's teeth about three hundred meters away. As soon as the troops emerged from the trees they were met with heavy mortar and machine gun fire from their front and right flank. Three platoon leaders were hit almost immediately, and the formation was disrupted. Word was passed to make for a burning barn to the north near Nersheid, and Company A pressed toward that landmark despite its losses. In the gathering darkness Company B, followed by Company C, started across the dragon's teeth, both companies taking mortar fire on the way. Company B, Captain Edgar Simon commanding, overtook one platoon of Company A short of the burning barn; unable to determine the whereabouts of the rest of Company A, Simon integrated the platoon into his own unit. Expecting to catch up with Captain Anderson's force near the objective, Simon turned eastward at the burning barn and moved toward Nütheim.

Captain Anderson and Company A (-), however, had advanced northward beyond the burning barn until reaching the surfaced road west of Kroitzheide. The company turned onto the road and headed toward what Anderson thought was the edge of Nütheim. The Americans found telephone wires alongside the road and cut them. Soon a German soldier on a bicycle came pedaling down the road, searching for the break in the wire; he was taken prisoner. Within a minute or

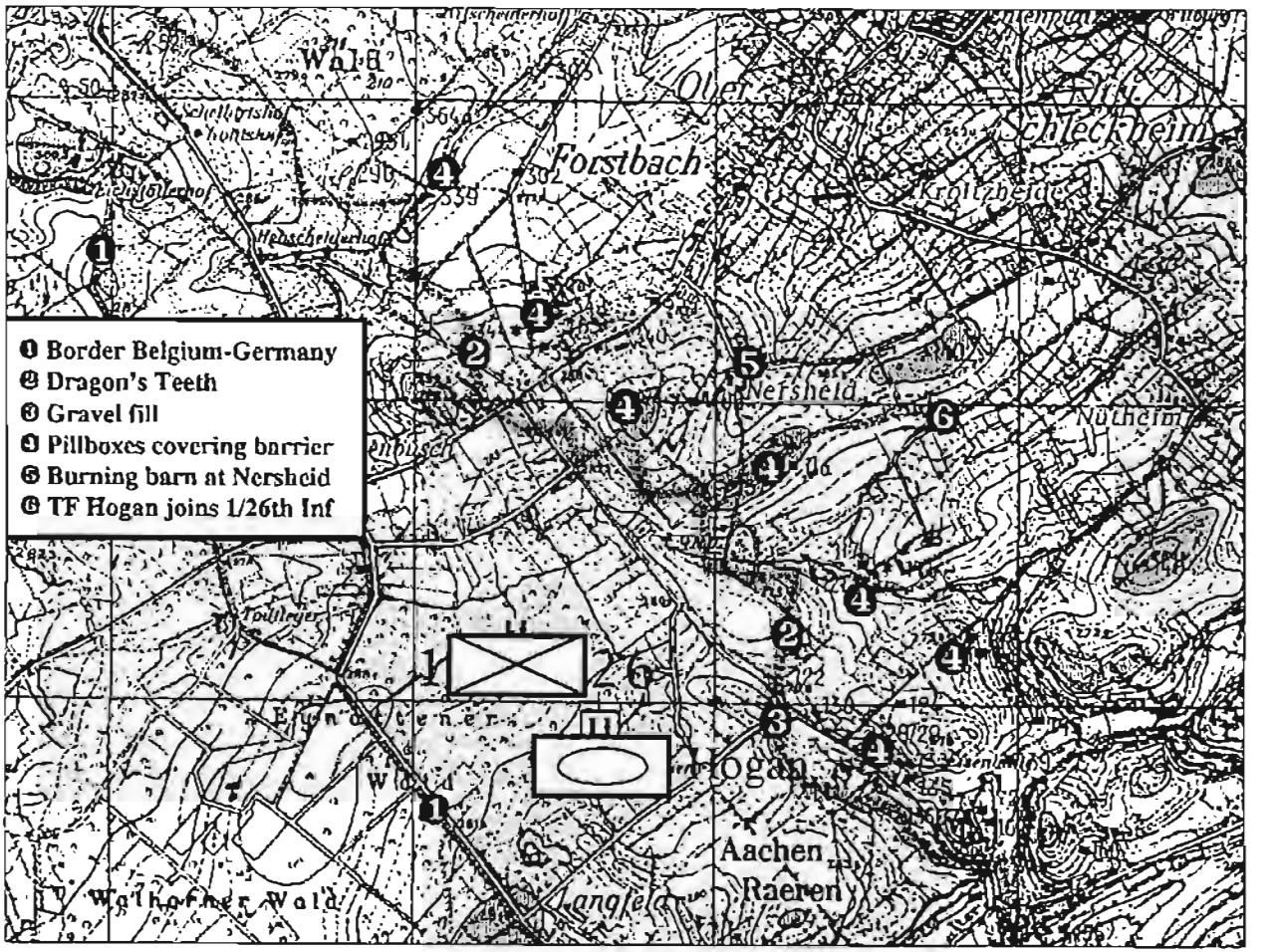


Fig. 2,18. German military map, 1944 (1,000-meter grid)

two a motorcyclist appeared, also apparently searching for the break; he too was captured. Anderson concluded that the wires ran to an artillery or mortar position in Nütheim and positioned his units for attack, deploying one squad on either side of the road and one on the road itself. The latter was to advance straight down the road into the town center while the flanking squads worked their way in behind the buildings. Moving forward as directed, the squad on the road came upon an enemy position with no posted security; the German soldiers occupying it were eating supper. They were captured without incident. The squad on the left side of the road captured an artillery piece and two mortars; the squad on the right bagged a pair of 88mm guns. The gun and mortar crews taken in the operation explained their complacency: they had thought the Americans would attack Nütheim first, and that the sounds of battle in the town would warn them of any threat to German positions along the road. That information, and a map check, convinced Anderson that he had overshot his objective, so he decided to go back to the burning barn. He also decided to forgo the destruction of the captured ordnance, a noisy undertaking that might alert the surrounding Germans to the American presence in their midst. In the event, Company A came under heavy small arms fire from all

sides, and withdrew in a running gunfight, reaching the burning barn at about 2100.

In the meantime the rest of the battalion had quietly proceeded toward its objective, capturing a few Germans outside of bunkers but bypassing all suspected strongpoints. To the south, tracers and explosions indicated that the tankers were doing their utmost to push through and link up with the Blue Spaders. Around 2100 Company A was heard on the radio. Captain Levasseur took a patrol back to guide Anderson and his men to the battalion, and they rejoined it around 2200. About an hour later tanks under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Hogan reached the battalion. Hogan and Major Adams decided to halt until daybreak, when the tanks could support the attack on Nütheim.

During the night 3rd Armored engineers brought up welding torches and cut the rails the Germans had cemented in the roadways to block vehicular traffic. Shortly after dawn on 14 September the new avenues thus opened were filled with trucks carrying food and ammunition to the 1/26th and CCA. At daybreak Company B, supported by tanks, cleared Nütheim, then occupied strongpoints in anticipation of a counterattack. Predictably, one soon developed, but it was repulsed, and twenty-two prisoners were taken. Meanwhile Company A patrolled south and eastward and Company C cleared pillboxes to the west.

Most of the pillboxes were not mutually supporting, but those with embrasures permitting crossfire proved hard to approach with hand grenade or bazooka. Various combinations of fire and movement were tried. One successful method was to position riflemen to shoot into each and every opening to suppress shoulder-fired antitank weapons, and then to roll up a tank to shoot into an embrasure.

Around noon a 155mm self-propelled (SP) gun with a new type of concrete penetrating shell was employed against one of the pillboxes. The projectile only penetrated about eighteen inches, but the concussion was of such force that the men inside were rendered incapable of further resistance, resulting in their immediate surrender. Thirty-five Germans subsequently emerged from the pillbox, all of them bleeding from the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. At noon the area was declared to be cleared, and CCA continued its attack. The 1/26th Infantry was then attached to Combat Command Reserve (CCR).

On 15 September, to cover a gap developing between the 3rd Armored and 1st Division, CCR formed a task force comprising Lieutenant Colonel Hogan's tank battalion and Major Adams's 1/26th Infantry, with the latter riding in trucks. The task force set up roadblocks around Dorff, about two miles northeast of Nütheim, and remained there throughout the day. On 16 September the task force was ordered to clear Büsbach, located about a mile to the north within the Schill Line. As the task force approached the outskirts of Büsbach, its lead elements were fired on by a machine gun in the church steeple. The gun was quickly silenced by a direct hit from the 155mm SP. Three large pillboxes northeast of the town were then neutralized by the rifle fire-tank gun method.

At 1700 the task force was directed to send a rifle company to CCB at Diepenlinchen, located three miles to the northeast near Mausbach. Company C, Captain Allan B. Ferry commanding, mounted on trucks and reported as ordered at about 1900.

Ferry was informed that the advance of CCB's armor had been stopped by several antitank guns and supporting infantry in the hamlet of Weissenberg, on Hill 283 north of Diepenlinchen. A battalion of the 36th Armored Infantry Regiment had gone up the hill to seize the position, but had been driven off by an enemy counterattack. Elements of the 36th were believed to be still holding out on the hill. Captain Ferry's mission was to establish contact with those elements, evacuate their wounded, and recover any abandoned weapons. By then it was dark and Ferry had

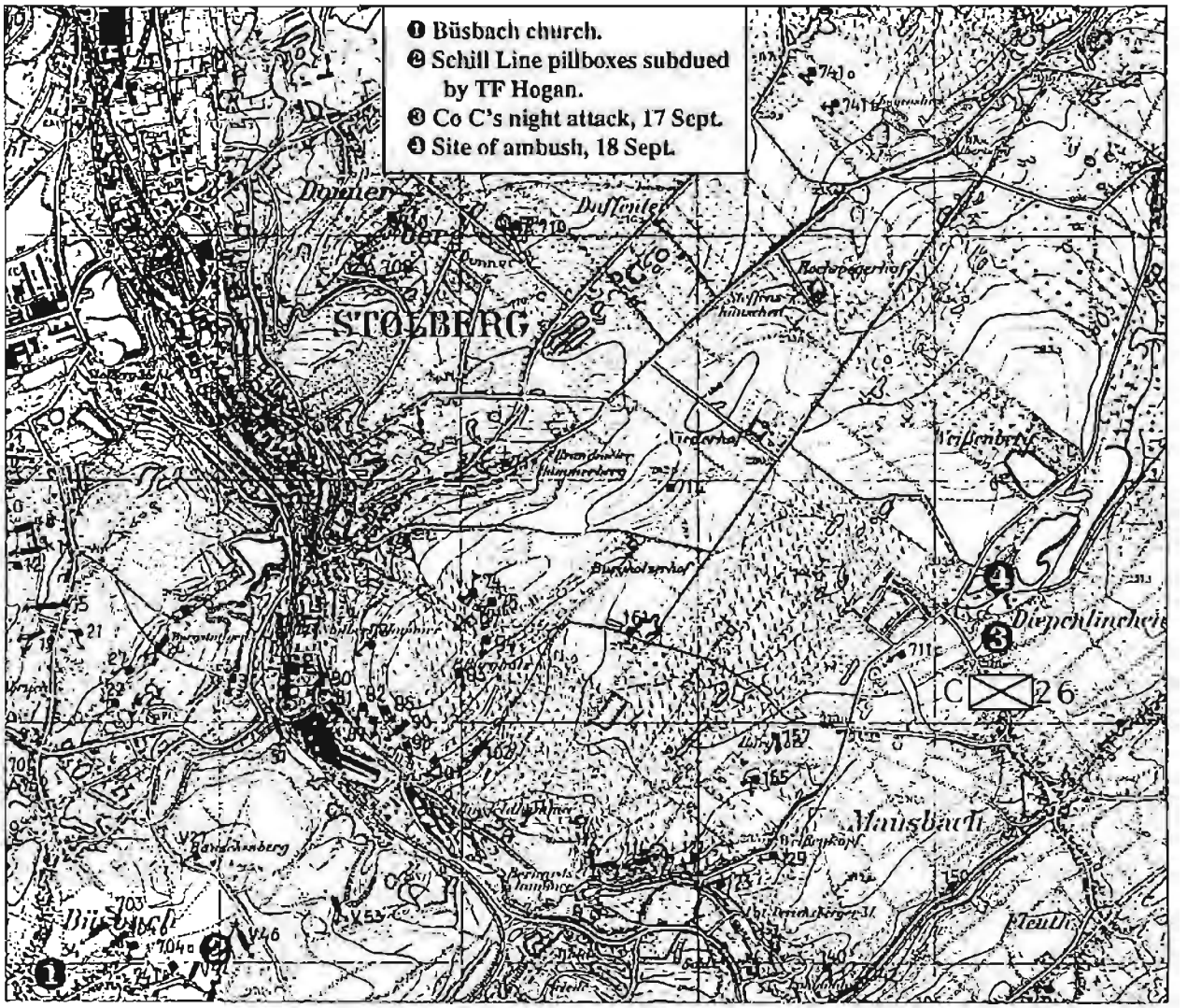


Fig. 2.19. German military map (1,000-meter grid)

time for only a cursory map reconnaissance.

In addition to the usual dwellings and gardens, Diepenlinchen and Weissenberg had in their immediate environs a number of deep, steep-sided excavations, huge piles of rock and sand, and factory buildings, some of substantial brick construction. At 2000 Company C started forward with a platoon of tanks attached, seeking to skirt the east side of the factory north of Diepenlinchen. Almost immediately the Blue Spaders encountered German infantry, and triggered a storm of defensive fires. Captain Ferry decided to pull back to the edge of Diepenlinchen and await daybreak. During the night he made a thorough map reconnaissance, and concluded that a more direct, stealthy approach was preferable.

At dawn on 18 September, in a dense fog, Ferry

led his company around to the west of the factory area, leaving his tanks behind to avoid warning the enemy of his approach. Just as the column had worked its way through the rock piles to the slope immediately below Weissenberg, the fog lifted to reveal a company of enemy infantry coming down a trail from a bluff some fifty feet high. They were moving directly toward the Americans.

Seeking to avoid a meeting engagement with an enemy advantaged by higher ground, Captain Ferry immediately ordered the company to withdraw with the lead element covering the movement. His men were pulling back in good order when automatic weapons suddenly opened up on them from the factory/mining complex on their right flank. The Americans also came under mortar and artillery fire, obviously pre-planned. Ferry had word passed to the front of the column that the withdrawal should continue. Most of the Americans escaped, but not Ferry and his men, now bringing up the rear, who were trapped and forced to surrender. They were initially reported as missing in action, but the battalion subsequently learned that they had been captured.

(Lieutenant Emory Jones assumed command in Ferry's absence, but when the unit was returned to CT 26, Colonel Seitz gave Company C to Captain Donald Lister. One veteran wrote that "he made the invasion of North Africa as an NCO, and was given a battlefield commission as a 2d Lt in [Sicily]. He had been in so many patrols that he had lost count. Whenever any man in Company C wanted to brag, he would first say that he served under Don Lister" [Major Donald E. Rivette (Ret.), letter, 1 April 1996, First Division Museum at Cantigny].)

In the meantime the task force at Büsbach had been relieved. It was ordered to an assembly area in the woods southwest of Diepenlinchen, one thousand meters west of Mausbach, and arrived there at 1035 on 18 September. Lieutenant Colonel Hogan and Major Adams were informed that Company C had been attacked by a heavy force, had sustained many casualties, and had lost Diepenlinchen and failed to take Weissenberg. However, elements of Company C were believed to be holding out in Diepenlinchen. A plan to retake Diepenlinchen was immediately formulated: Company B would advance on foot northeast through the woods while supporting tanks would move up the road on the right rear of the infantry. When the company came abreast of Diepenlinchen it would attack to the east, joining the tanks in a coordinated operation to clear the town from west to east. Company A would follow Company B until the latter attacked into the town, then continue to the northeast edge of the woods facing Weissenberg, and from there secure the left flank of the attacking force.

The attack, supported by mortars and artillery, was successful. But progress was slow: the infantry had to fight from house to house, and it was dark before the town was cleared. Forty-nine prisoners were taken, and troops from Company C were recovered during the advance. In the course of the fighting Company D's 81mm mortar platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Steven B. Phillips, expended all its ammunition; urgent requests for resupply had to be submitted up the chain of command, eventuating in the arrival the next day of a truckload of mortar ammunition driven straight through from Paris, two hundred miles away.

Shortly after dark on 18 September an enemy counterattack developed from the woods around Weissenberg, apparently seeking to turn Company A's exposed left flank. The 1/26th's Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon was thrown in to strengthen that flank, and the attack was beaten off.

The following morning, 19 September, Company B continued its attack into the factory area north of Diepenlinchen, a confusion of thick walls, rock piles, and other obstacles. The enemy defended tenaciously,

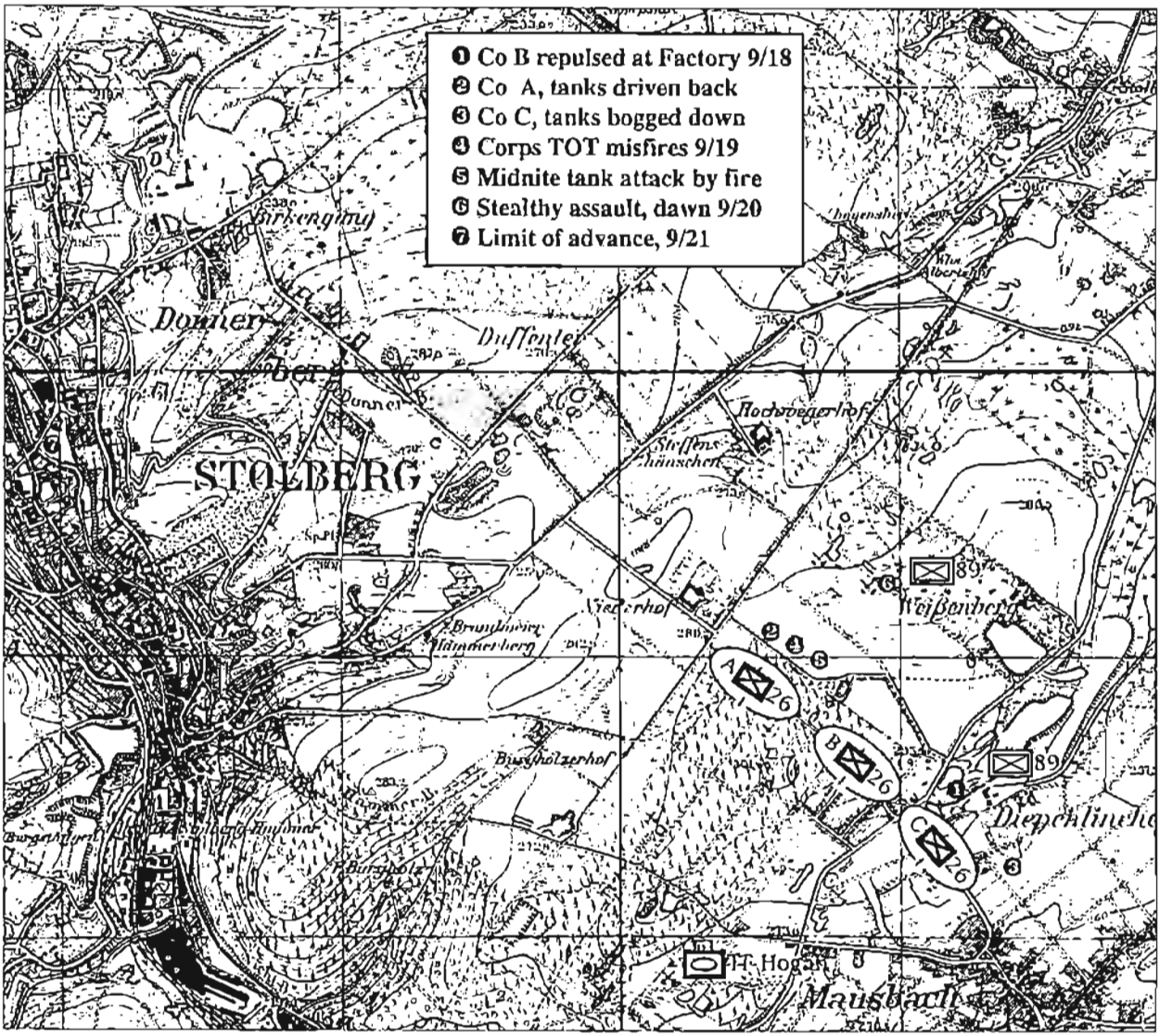


Fig. 2.20. German military map (1,000-meter grid)

and progress was slow and costly. At 1005 Major Adams sent the following message to Colonel Seitz:

> It is recommended that my Bn be returned to the unit so that I can get replacements and reequip. My unit has suffered hvy battle casualties and yesterday and today I am beginning to get men suffering from combat fatigue. As of this AM my fighting strength was as follows: A-99, B-91, C-62, D-96. Yesterday I suffered very heavy casualties as follows: 8-KIA, 50-WIA, 57-MIA. I am still attacking today against an objective that is very difficult to take. I shall undoubtedly suffer further hvy casualties today. At the present rate I am rapidly losing my combat effectiveness. I would like to return to the outfit so that I can

> get my Bn back in shape. Yesterday C Co was placed on an independent mission and was caught in a trap. The Co Cdr is MIA, Lt. Emory P Jones is in command. He has one other officer. The company has 55 MIA's.

After advancing about three hundred meters into the factory area, Company B broke off the attack and pulled back. Lieutenant Colonel Hogan then decided to bypass the enemy in the factory area by ordering Company A, 1/26th Infantry, with a company of tanks attached, to attack from its position in the woods on the left to seize Weissenberg.

Company A jumped off with two rifle and two tank platoons abreast, supported by the remainder of the force from the woods. However, as the platoons deployed into the open area southwest of Weissenberg, they were deluged by fire from a variety of weapons, including 20mm cannon. Lieutenant Colonel Hogan stated after the war that "I have never seen such a concentration of German artillery before or since." Both the infantry and the tanks pulled back into the woods.

CCB's commander, Brigadier General Truman E. Boudinot, then directed an envelopment around the right flank to seize Weissenberg from the southeast. Hogan pointed out that he had previously considered such a plan, but rejected it because his personal reconnaissance had revealed that the ground to the southeast and east of the factory area was boggy and therefore unsuitable for tanks. The commander of CCB nonetheless directed him to attack at once.

At about 1400 the sixty-two men who made up what was left of Company C, previously the task force reserve, deployed to attack Weissenberg. Four tanks accompanied them. Emerging into the open area east of the town, this small force drew heavy fire and the tanks became mired. The infantry pulled back and the tankers abandoned their vehicles, which were destroyed in place.

Boudinot resolved to try again, this time attacking on the left—but with more firepower. The second attempt to take Weissenberg was to be preceded by a ten-minute preparation by all VII Corps artillery within range, concluding with smoke to conceal the advancing infantry and tanks. Company A was forming on its line of departure—the edge of the woods southwest of Weissenberg—when the preparation began. A number of rounds fell short, resulting in tree bursts in and near Company A; its soldiers promptly sought cover. A thirty-minute delay was called to permit all forward observers to register on target. When the preparation resumed, however, concentrations were again observed to be searching back toward the friendly position, and tree bursts again drove the infantry to cover. The tanks jumped off on schedule and succeeded in crossing the open area, but as they approached the woods before Weissenberg two were hit by cannon fire from the left flank, and a third was taken out from short-range by a shoulder-fired rocket. The remaining tanks, lacking infantry protection, retired.

Captain Levasseur attributed these failures to the absence of the usual 1st Division infantry-artillery teams:

> The commitment of Company C at Diepenlinchen on a mission which had proved beyond the capability of a battalion earlier only resulted in further losses. The lack of its accustomed normal supporting fires on this mission materially reduced its fighting effectiveness.
>
> In this connection, Company A experienced similar difficulty with supporting artillery the following day when shell fire twice disorganized its attack at jump-off time. The supporting artillery consisted of 105mm self-propelled howitzers. The artillery personnel believed the shelling received by Company A was enemy counter-fire, which sounds logical when it is recalled that the area involved had recently been occupied by an alert enemy. However, to an observer witnessing the concentration, it appeared that the shell bursts searched toward our own troops as the concentration developed. This could be understood when it is considered that the self-propelled guns were firing from muddy standing, causing the rear

> of the mount to sink in the mud with each round fired. Failure to adjust the piece after each round, under such circumstances, would result in each succeeding round dropping closer to our lines. (Levasseur, *Operations*)

It should be noted however, that the gunners had to solve a tough problem: many of the pieces firing that mission were probably sited where the gun-target line passed directly over the high ground to Company A's immediate rear—Hill 301— rendering mask clearance over tall trees problematic.

Lieutenant Colonel Hogan considered launching a night attack, but decided against it when information extracted from German prisoners indicated that another enemy counterattack on his left flank was in the offing. Instead, Hogan adopted a plan to have his tanks suddenly sally into the open saddle and there cut loose with all guns at the woods concealing the German position before Weissenberg, then pull back before the German defensive fires could be called down. In the morning a deliberate tank-infantry attack, with strong artillery support, would then be launched.

The tank foray was conducted around midnight. The force withdrew without loss when the German counterfire began.

At dawn on 20 September a dense fog covered the area. Captain Levasseur then proposed to his commander an unsupported, stealthy assault with fixed bayonets, pointing out that the Germans, after a night of constant pounding, might be less than alert. Lieutenant Colonel Hogan and Major Adams decided to advance with infantry only. The artillery preparation was canceled and the tanks were ordered to stand fast. Company A advanced alone. This impromptu action succeeded admirably: Company A took thirty-three prisoners, many of whom were caught sleeping in their foxholes. A number of the prisoners stated that their unit had been forming for a midnight assault when the American armor attacked it, inflicting many casualties. Companies B and C came up to Weissenberg, and the battalion occupied the German defenses. The enemy reacted violently, directing heavy mortar and artillery fire onto his former positions, but did not counterattack.

(Under interrogation, German prisoners revealed that the units commanded by Major Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Hogan—the 1/26th Infantry and 3/33rd Armored, respectively—had been opposed by first-line troops: the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 89th Grenadier Regiment, 12th Infantry Division. Starting on 14 September the German 12th Infantry Division—one of the divisions Hitler had personally selected for modernization in 1944—had moved from East Prussia to the Aachen sector by railroad and, thanks to bad flying weather that interfered with Allied air interdiction, had arrived expeditiously, well trained, at full strength, and with all its heavy weapons. One battalion had been sent into position at Weissenberg, the other to the Diepenlinchen factory/mining complex, and both had the mission of driving the Americans back out of the Schill defenses and reoccupying these against further penetrations.)

After dark on 20 September a battalion of the 9th Division relieved the 1/26th Infantry. Task Force Hogan then moved to an assembly area west of Mausbach, where the troops were fed a hot meal and allowed to sleep. Unit leaders prepared for an attack into Stolberg on the morning of 21 September.

Stolberg is a long, narrow town at the bottom of a meandering, steep-sided valley. The attack encountered very strong enemy resistance, including heavy artillery and mortar fires. Nevertheless, on the first day the battalion advanced four kilometers, fighting from building to building through nearly half the town and capturing twenty-five prisoners. On 22 September

Company A, attacking up the main street, was stopped by a combination of intense indirect fires and tank and machine-gun fires from both flanks; Company B, advancing on a parallel, smaller street, ran into the same enemy fires. Supporting armor—Lieutenant Colonel Hogan's battalion then mustered about a dozen tanks—was held up by mines hastily laid by the enemy on the street surface, but concealed by dirt and debris. Company C came up on the right, but even with all its units on line the infantry battalion, by then at 42 percent of TO&E strength, could make little progress. Task Force Hogan had become embroiled in a larger fight, for higher stakes: the German 12th Infantry Division, having established a defensive line incorporating the Donnerberg (the high ground east of midtown) with adjacent positions in Stolberg, was hotly contesting ownership of the area with CCB. At 1700 the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was relieved in place, and on the following day, 23 September, it returned to the 1st Division and the 26th CT.

The Presidential Unit Citation awarded to the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry for operations in the period 13 through 22 September speaks of the unit's "unwavering courage and matchless aggressiveness in the face of tremendous odds in gaining every objective"; the citation further states that the 1/26th's "unconquerable spirit and extraordinary heroism...in accomplishing all attack missions against five important German towns, paved the way for more deadly blows against the Germans." However, the battalion did not receive the citation until after the war, when most of the Blue Spaders were more concerned with the civilian life they had since rejoined than any honors due them as soldiers. In September 1944 the accolade that counted came from Major General Huebner: told that the battalion had returned to the 26th CT, the Big Red One's commander simply said, "the 1st Battalion did a fine job over there and I am proud of them."

Battle for Aachen

The depleted 1/26th Infantry was designated 1st Division reserve, and put to work reorganizing, reequipping, and training hundreds of replacements.

The Germans sent more reinforcements into the Schill defenses around Aachen and, as September drew to a close, counterattacked with increasing frequency and ferocity. October came, bringing cold that added to the misery of mud and rain. VII Corps continued to press toward its original objectives, but it soon became evident that the Germans would not surrender Aachen even were it totally ringed by American forces. On 10 October 1944 an ultimatum, carried into Aachen under a white flag, notified the German commander that the city was surrounded and that if he did not surrender it promptly and unconditionally "American Army Ground Forces and Air Forces would proceed ruth-

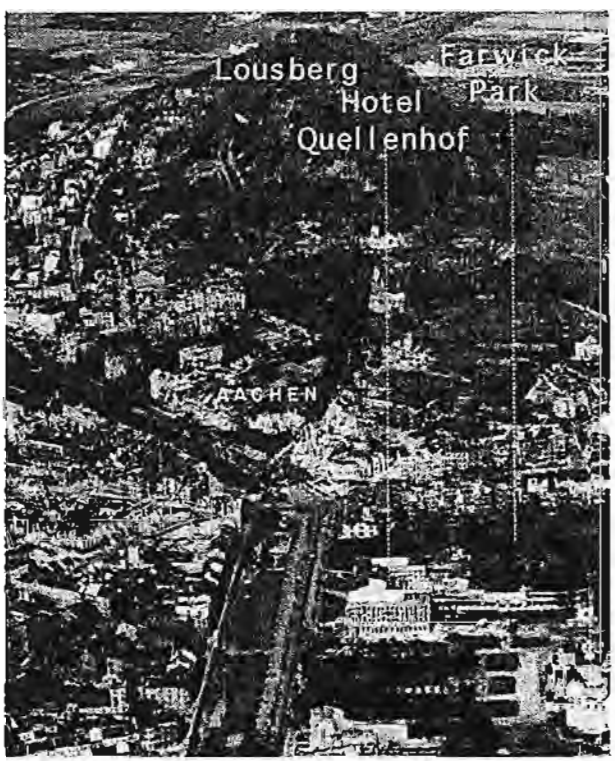


Fig. 2.21. Aerial view of Aachen showing objectives of the 3rd Battalion, 26th Infantry, October 1944

lessly with air and artillery bombardment to reduce it to submission." The ultimatum was rejected; hence, on 11 October some three hundred fighter-bombers dropped sixty-two tons of bombs on the city. On 12 October VII Corps artillery as well as the air force delivered even more high explosive. Yet despite all this punishment the Germans remained unshaken in their resolve to defend the city.

On 13 October Major General Huebner committed the 26th Infantry—less the 1st Battalion, which he kept as his reserve—to a two-pronged attack to seize the core of the city. Lieutenant Colonel John T. Corley, commanding the 3rd Battalion, was ordered to take Lousberg, a prominent hill that served as a public park, known to the Americans as Observatory Hill. The 2nd Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Derrill M. Daniel, was to attack through a zone two hundred yards to Corley's left (south) that extended into the rubble and the ruins of the city center. The U.S. Army's official history describes the ensuing battle:

> The fighting in Colonel Daniel's sector quickly fell into a pattern. Dividing his resources into small assault teams, Colonel Daniel sent with each infantry platoon a tank or tank destroyer. These would keep each building under fire until the riflemen moved in to assault; thereupon, the armor would shift fire to the next house. Augmented by the battalion's light and heavy machine guns firing up the streets, this shelling usually drove the Germans into the cellars where the infantry stormed them behind a barrage of hand grenades. Whenever the enemy proved particularly tenacious, the riflemen used other weapons at their disposal, including demolitions and flame throwers employed by two-man teams attached to each company headquarters. The men did not wait for actual targets to appear; each building they assumed was a nest of resistance until proved otherwise. Light artillery and mortar fire swept forward block by block several streets ahead of the infantry while heavier artillery pounded German communications further to the rear. To maintain contact between units, Colonel Daniel each day assigned a series of check points based on street intersections and more prominent buildings. No unit advanced beyond a check point until after establishing contact with the adjacent unit. Each rifle company was assigned a specific zone of advance; company commanders in turn generally designated a street to each platoon.
>
> After a few bitter experiences in which Germans bypassed in cellars or storm sewers emerged in the rear of the attackers, the riflemen soon learned that speed was less important than pertinacity. The sewers posed a special problem; each manhole had to be located and thoroughly blocked and covered. Another special problem stemmed from the glass and other litter that punctured tires on jeeps used for evacuating wounded. Medics found a solution in weasels (M-29), tracked, lightly armored cargo carriers.
>
> Colonel Corley's battalion, which was driving west toward the high ground marked by the Lousberg (Observatory Hill) and Farwick Park, found the route blocked by the first day by stoutly defended apartment houses. The men measured their gains in buildings, floors, and even rooms. Someone said the fight was "from attic to attic and from sewer to sewer."... Having discovered the first day that some apartments and air raid shelters could withstand the fire of tanks and tank destroyers, Colonel Corley called for a self-propelled 155-mm rifle. Early the next morning the big weapon proved its worth in the first test when with one shot it practically leveled one of the sturdy buildings. Impressed, the regimental commander, Colonel Seitz, sent one of the big rifles to support his other battalion as well. (Charles B. MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign* [1963])

The Germans in Aachen capitulated on 21 October

Fig. 2.22. Tank-infantry team fighting down a street in Aachen. Note the German prisoner on the right.

1944. In fighting through the city, the 26th Infantry captured 3,473 Germans, but suffered 498 casualties, including 75 killed and 9 missing. "It had been a long, slow, costly battle," Huebner later observed;

> but by moving around to the east and then north of the city, we had avoided the enemy's main prepared positions in the south. We had taken much punishment from artillery and strong counterattacks, but by forcing the enemy to give up his first major city, we had achieved a strong psychological advantage after the repeated vows of Hitler that the city would not be taken. (Huebner, *Memorial Album*)

"Aachen was a great battle," correspondent Drew Middleton declared in *Danger Forward.* Noting that "it was first German city to be taken by an invading

army in over a hundred years," Middleton correctly asserted that

> the effects of this blow to German pride were widespread and important. For battles are not great because of the numbers engaged or their duration but because of their effect on the contestants. The best history of a war would be a record of what went on in the minds of the opposing commanders.
>
> If such a history were to be written of world War II I am sure we would find the capture of Aachen by the 1st Division ranked high among the defeats which convinced the high command of the German Army that it had lost the war. The battle was unique in two other respects; it was fought and won almost entirely by the 1st Division and at that time the Division had been in action almost continuously since June 6 and was very tired.
>
> Despite this it fought with more precision, skill, and more surely, I think, than ever before.

Hürtgen Forest: "Miserable, Relentless, Treacherous"

The victory at Aachen, hard won, was only the beginning of a period of tough combat for the 1st Division and the 26th Infantry.

On 5 November Major Adams and Captain Levasseur, then the commander of A Company, I/26th Infantry, were reconnoitering forward positions when they encountered mines. Adams was killed and Levasseur was wounded. Major Jacob K. Rippert succeeded Adams as battalion commander.

To free the 1st Division for employment to the east, VII Corps brought into the Aachen-Stolberg sector the 104th Division, newly arrived in Europe and just assigned to First Army. On 8 November Lieutenant Colonel Gerald C. Kelleher, who had commanded 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry during the Tunisian campaign, paid a call on the 1st Battalion's command post. Kelleher was accompanied by Captain Beard, formerly of Company C. Both visitors were assigned to the 104th Division, commanded by none other than Major General Terry Allen, who had commanded the 1st Division in North Africa and Sicily.

The 1st Division would fight its next battle in the Hürtgen Forest, located southeast of Aachen, as part of continuing attacks by First Army aimed at securing the Roer River crossings. General Huebner deemed the forest "among the important approaches to [the crossings]," one that

> stood out as an ominous block of mud, denseness, and closely coordinated fire power. Of the seven U.S. divisions which attempted to break Hürtgen, only two—the 78th and the Big Red One—went all the way. This, the Division's most unpredictable engagement, got underway on November 16th as 8th Air Force bombers began saturating the area in preparation for the infantry advance.
>
> [The] Division mission—taking the Gressenich-to-Langerwehe area—was a complicated one made more so by excessive rains and frenzied, desperate enemy resistance. With [the] Division CP located at Vich, the 16th Infantry moved out toward Gressenich and the 26th began its extensive plodding through the Gressenich Woods to the east. The entire advance was marked by a bloody, inch-by-inch, tree-by-tree grind; casualties were heavy and gains figured in yards. (Huebner, *Memorial Album*)

As of 16 November the VII Corps front in the vicinity of Stolberg still stood along the line established by the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry in its attacks on Weissenberg (Hill 283) and in Stolberg itself. On that date the 414th Infantry Regiment of the 104th Infantry Division launched attacks that would finally wrest control of Donnerberg (Hill 287) from the German 12th Infantry Division. Meanwhile the 1st Division, following a massive aerial and artillery preparation, opened an attack on units of the German 12th Division in the

Schevenhütte vicinity. The 1st Division's mission was to open the road to Jüngersdorf, and access to crossings of the Roer River some two miles east of Langerwehe. CT 16 was initially on the left, while CT 26 attacked on the right, in the Hürtgen Forest. In late November the 1st Division broke through the forest to the valley of the Roer River, but German paratroopers (5th *Fallschirmjäger* Regiment) repulsed the 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry at Merode.

U.S. Army historian Charles B. MacDonald chronicled the operations of the 26th CT as follows:

> An attack by the 26th Infantry on the division's right wing moved into an area which had been accorded little of the preliminary bombardment. Preparation fires had been limited in front of the regiment because trees and undergrowth restricted identification of targets, not because the 26th's attack was any the less important to accomplishment of the 1st Division's mission. No matter how successful the 16th Infantry's advance west of the Weh Creek and the vital Schevenhütte highway, the road could not be used without control of four wooded hills within the Hürtgen Forest along the right of the highway. After taking these hills, the 26th Infantry was to continue to Langerwehe and Jüngersdorf.

Like many another unit which fought within the Hürtgen Forest, the 26th Infantry engaged in an almost unalloyed infantry battle. Trees and undergrowth so limited observation that the effectiveness of artillery was reduced severely. Mud and a dearth of roads restricted armored support. The inevitable hazards of forest fighting—shell bursts in the trees and open flanks—plagued the regiment from the start. Though the lead battalion gained but a few hundred yards, it still was necessary as

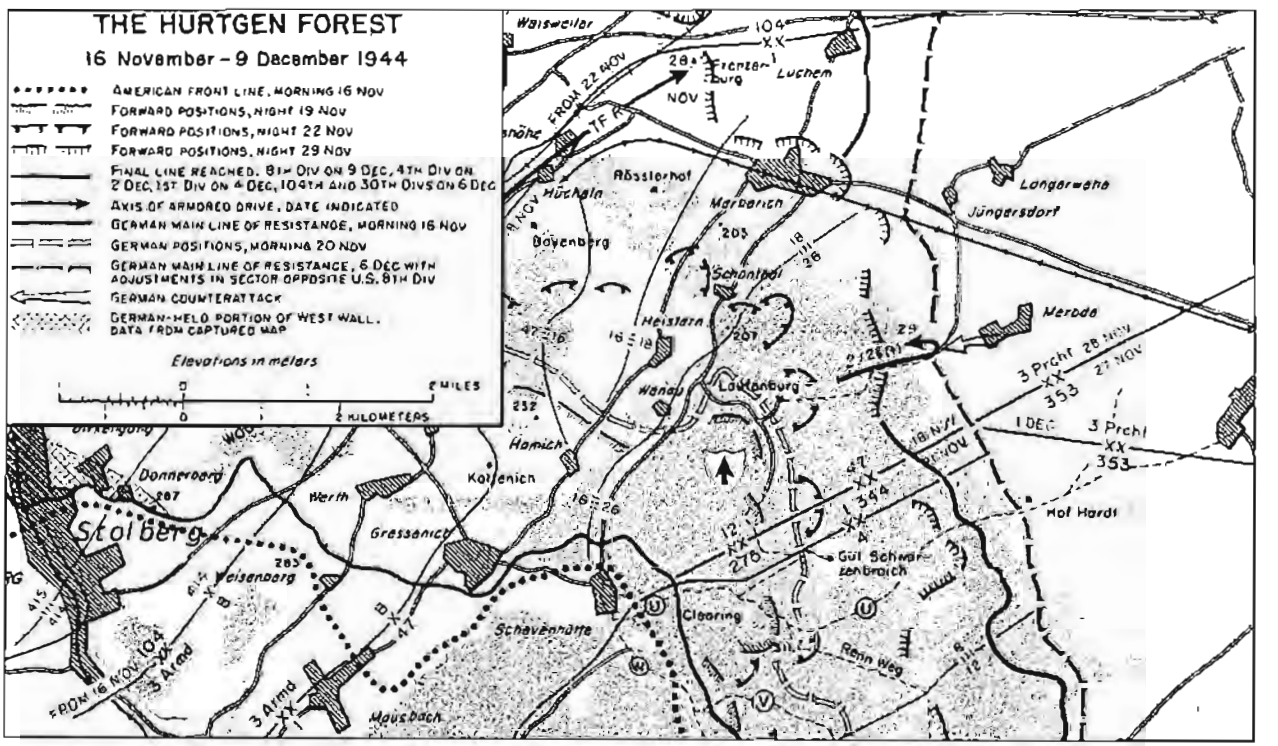


Fig. 2.23. Adapted from *The Siegfried Line Campaign*

night came to commit another battalion [the 1st] to bolster the lead unit's flanks.

Inching forward on the second day, the 26th's lead battalion under Lt. Col. Derrill M. Daniel gained only a few hundred yards more. Two days of fighting had brought an advance of little more than a mile. Return of wet weather on 17 November had eliminated any hope of getting tanks or tank destroyers forward along the muddy forest trails.

A second battalion [1st Battalion] joined the attack early on the third day, 18 November. Still the enemy yielded his bunkers grudgingly. Early on the fourth day, as the regimental commander, Colonel Seitz, prepared to commit his remaining battalion, the Germans struck back....

Nowhere in the Hürtgen Forest fighting was the stamina and determination of American infantry more clearly demonstrated than here as Colonel Daniel's depleted battalion of the 26th beat off this fresh German force. Among the numerous deeds of individual heroism, the acts of Pfc. Francis X. McGraw stand out. Manning a machine gun, McGraw fired until his ammunition gave out, then ran back for more. When artillery fire felled a tree and blocked his field of fire, he calmly rose from his foxhole, threw his weapon across a log, and continued to fire. Concussion from a shell burst tossed his gun in the air, but he retrieved it. His ammunition expended a second time, McGraw took up the fight with a carbine, killed one more German and wounded another before a burst from a burp gun cut him down. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor....

No sooner had Colonel Daniel's men beaten off the enemy than the 26th Infantry's fresh battalion under Colonel Corley pressed an attack that carried northward more than a mile. Not until they had reached an improved road less than 500 yards from a castle, the Laufenburg, did the men pause for the night. The castle marked the center of the four forested hills which were the 26th Infantry's objective. (MacDonald, *Siegfried Line Campaign*)

Toward the end of November mounting casualties forced the Germans to resort to what Clarence Huebner characterized as an "odd group" of infantry replacements that included service troops, engineers, and even veterinarians. With these additions to their ranks, the Germans

> launched a series of tough, "anything-goes" counterattacks during the period 20 to 27 November. After a last attempt to form a super counter-attack with paratroopers on November 27th, the Langerwehe position was gained as the 18th Infantry pushed over the heavily defended Hill 203...the 16th was occupied at Merberich on the left with German paratrooper reinforcements; and the 26th, further south, moved toward Merode. At the close of November, enemy artillery was an estimated equal to our own; and, in Merode, the Germans had eliminated two companies of the 26th and were successfully holding the town. But they had lost Hamich, Heistern, and Langerwehe....On December 3, in a surprise advance, elements of the 16th Infantry entered Luchem and cleared it by 3 o'clock that afternoon. The loss of Luchem brought about a decline in enemy activity....
>
> And so—after the miserable, relentless and treacherous fighting in the Hürtgen Forest—the Division captured all of its objectives and was relieved on December 7th, again by the 9th Infantry Division. Three days later I, too was relieved by Major General Clift Andrus. (Huebner, *Memorial Album*)

(Huebner had been designated to command V Corps, replacing Major General Gerow, who had been designated the commander of the newly formed Fifteenth Army. The change of command at V Corps took place on 15 January 1945; from 10

December until that date, Huebner served as V Corps' deputy commander.)

As the weary infantrymen of the 26th Infantry marched rearward to meet transportation, they passed fresh troops marching to the front lines. The following account by Leroy N. Stewart, a sergeant in Company K, 26th Infantry, captures a mood reported by other veteran Blue Spaders:

> We were relieved and walked back four miles to get on trucks. We were a sad sight...our clothes were all muddy and torn. We hadn't shaved or bathed...and our equipment was all beat up. We still had on summer clothes or ODs, and it was getting cold. I found a pair of 4 buckle overshoes but...had them tied together with some of my phone wire. I also had gotten a leather aviator style helmet. Some of us were wearing German equipment.... We were all feeling good to think we were coming off the line and just knew we would be given a long rest....We started to meet Co. after Co. of new men coming up to go on the line for the first time. They looked real sharp with all the new and clean clothes and equipment they had. We didn't look like we were in the same army.... We got in columns of twos and...when we got close to the Cos. coming up we would come to attention and start marching in step. The First Sergeant and I were at the head of the column and when we came even with the new men we would salute and give them an eyes left. The shock and surprise at the way we looked and acted showed on the new men. (L. N. Stewart, *Hurry Up and Wait*, World War II Veterans Survey, U.S. Military History Institute [1974-75])

Major General Huebner called a press conference to announce his departure, and used it to remind reporters that the 1st Division had been in action 182 days, during which it had been out of contact with the enemy only five days. The motive power of the division being its soldiers, he introduced Sergeant Walter D. Ehlers, who was decorated for gallantry in action in Normandy and again in Stolberg. In the battle for Stolberg Ehlers strode to the middle of a city street and, firing off-hand, picked off German infantrymen atop a tank as calmly as though he were shooting rabbits on the farm in Kansas. Correspondents asked whether he liked killing Germans. The sergeant's reply was slow in coming, but as on the mark as his shooting: "Sir. I don't hate anybody," he said. "And I don't like to kill anybody. But if somebody gets in my way when I have a job to do so I have to kill him to get on with it, why then I kill him, and that's all there is to it."

Ehlers' reply, quoted by correspondent Iris Carpenter in her article "As I Saw It" in *Danger Forward*, made a forceful impression on her. "No man ever said so simply how little and how much it takes to be a soldier," she wrote;

> it was because of such soldiering that the Division record was what it was before the men went back to their rest camp near Vierviers... went back for the first chance in six hellish months to live like human beings, went back to showers, to the benison of clean clothes, to the bliss of staying in houses for long enough to get not only dry but warm.

Ardennes Counteroffensive

When Lieutenant Colonel Frank Murdoch was wounded in the foot on 15 August at La Ferté Macé, he was evacuated by ambulance to a field hospital in Avranches where he underwent surgery. Afterward he was shipped to an orthopedic convalescent center in England. By late November he was walking tolerably well. He was then told that he would be sent to a retraining center to make him fit for combat. Murdoch would have none of that, and promptly left the center with the aim of rejoining the 26th Infantry, even though he was not authorized to do so. Aided by old army acquaintances, he made his way through the maze of replacement depots and centers, hitching rides on all sorts of transportation. A

sergeant in the 18th Infantry delivered him to the 26th after a ride across Belgium in the back of a jeep.

In going absent without leave (AWOL) to return to his unit, Murdoch was acting in one of the most venerable—if officially unsanctioned—1st Division traditions. During the First World War hundreds of 1st Division soldiers, reassigned to different units after recovering from wounds, had taken similar action. Theodore Roosevelt Jr. was one of them. After a leg-wound received in the Battle of Soissons had healed, Roosevelt simply left his new assignment to the AEF school and went back to the 1st Division, presenting his superiors with a *fait accompli* that was only later confirmed by orders. Murdoch was merely following in the footsteps of such men. And so was T. J. Gendron, who admitted that "we had a great deal in the 1st Division" precisely because their errant behavior was tolerated. However, in return for that tolerance, soldiers were expected to abide by one unwritten rule:

> It's okay that you go AWOL as long as you go towards the enemy. That's true. I went AWOL. I was wounded outside Aachen and I had surgery, and the chief of the team...said, "Tom, we've got to send you to Paris to recuperate." I said, "I'm in the 1st Division, we go AWOL. We don't go away from the enemy, we go towards the enemy...." They put me down for Paris, but I didn't go. I went right into the Battle of the Bulge....I had my jeep driver left and Colonel Daniel then, my battalion commander. I was in the Battle of the Bulge all bandaged up. Wind, snow, ice. But I did the right thing. Go to Paris? I'm a 1st Division man, what are you talking about? (Gendron, interview)

Frank Murdoch rejoined the 26th Infantry in early December in Aubel, Belgium, some eighteen kilometers southwest of Aachen. The regiment had just been withdrawn from the Hürtgen Forest, and put in reserve for much needed reorganization, reequipment, and rest. The 1st Battalion had been hard hit outside of Aachen and had suffered additional losses in the Hürtgen Forest. The 3rd Battalion took severe losses in Aachen and in the Hürtgen Forest as well. But the 2nd Battalion was the most seriously depleted. The U.S. Army history records that in the fighting at the eastern edge of the Hürtgen Forest near Merode in early December

> Companies E and F had been virtually annihilated, Company G shattered. Now the 2d Battalion rifle companies were nine-tenths replacements and numbered not more than one hundred men each. All told there were seven officers in the battalion who had been on the roster at the beginning of December. Two of the heavy machine gun platoons were manned by inexperienced gunners. There was a shortage of BAR's and grenade launchers. (Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes* [1965])

At Aubel, replacements of men and matériel awaited all the worn battalions of the 26th Infantry. The tired veterans were well provided for. Passes were available for Verviers and even for Paris. A number of soldiers who had been with the unit since Africa were given furloughs in the United States, among them the much-wounded Technical Sergeant Theodore Dobol of Company K. The men received decorations and awards, attended church services, viewed motion pictures, opened Christmas packages from home—there was a relaxed, even festive air in the regiment.

Colonel Seitz went on leave, appointing Frank Murdoch his "deputy for operations," an unauthorized position. Officially, Lieutenant Colonel Edwin "Van" Sutherland, Seitz's executive officer, was the acting commander. Murdoch and Sutherland organized a schedule that, with time and replacements, would restore the fighting potential of the unit and boost the morale of its soldiers.

Meanwhile, important events were unfolding—though the Blue Spaders, like most soldiers, knew nothing about them. On 15 December General Eisenhower was notified of his promotion to General of the Army and donned his new five-star insignia.

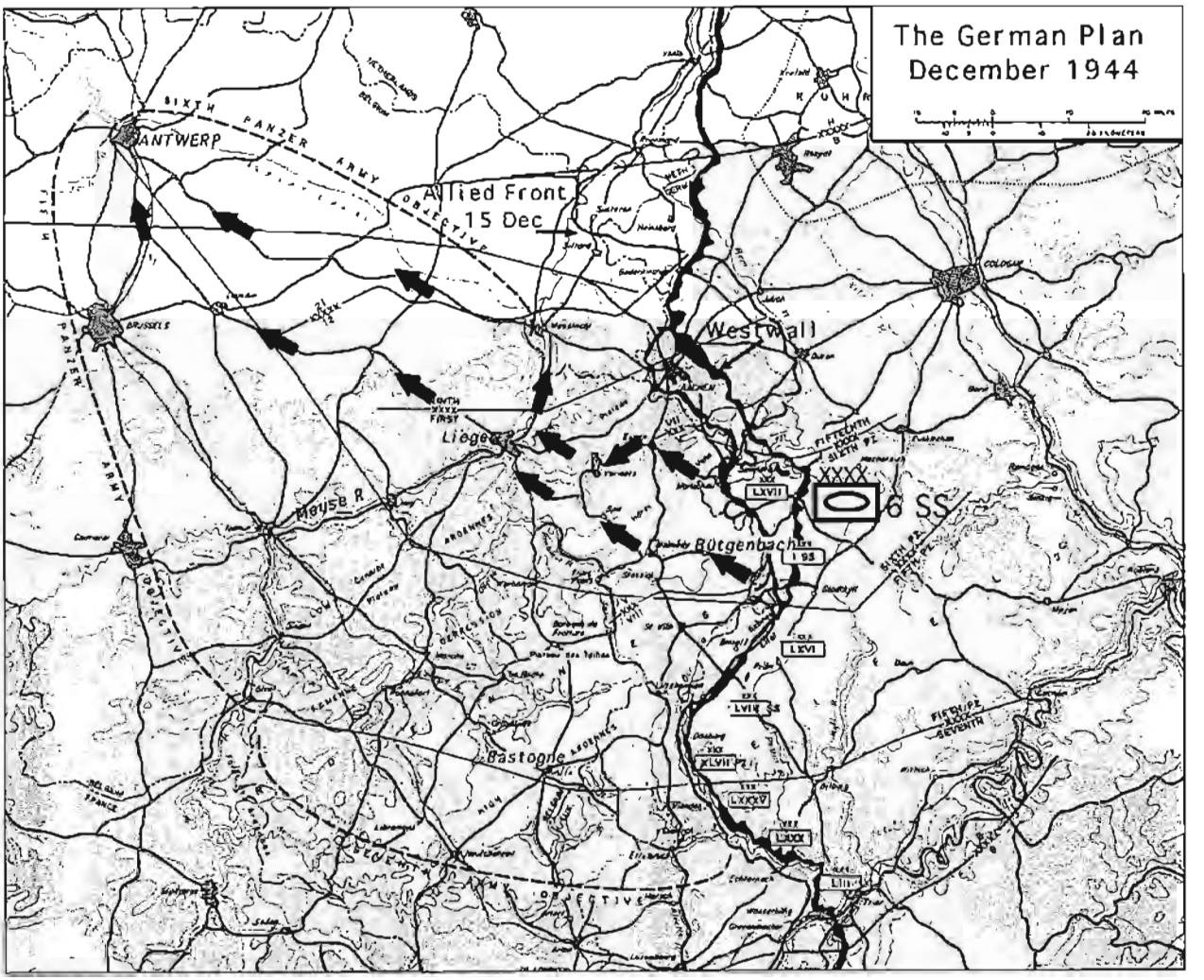


Fig. 2.24. Adapted from Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes* (1965)

Readily approving Christmas leave in England for Field Marshal Montgomery, Eisenhower jocularly refused to pay Monty a five-dollar wager he had made that the war would be over by Christmas 1944, claiming that there was still time for capitulation. Celebration and relaxation seemed in order at Allied Command Europe as well as at Aubel. The Germans, however, far from considering surrender, were preparing a massive counteroffensive.

Beginning in September, at Hitler's personal order, three German armies in the forested, mountainous Eifel region behind the Westwall were reinforced with fresh corps and divisions and quietly repositioned for a strategic gamble: a fifteen-division thrust northwest through the Ardennes Forest of southeastern Belgium. Their aim was to capture the port of Antwerp, to neutralize the U.S. First and Ninth Armies, and to encircle and destroy the British and the Canadian armies before the American leadership (particularly the political leadership) could react. Field

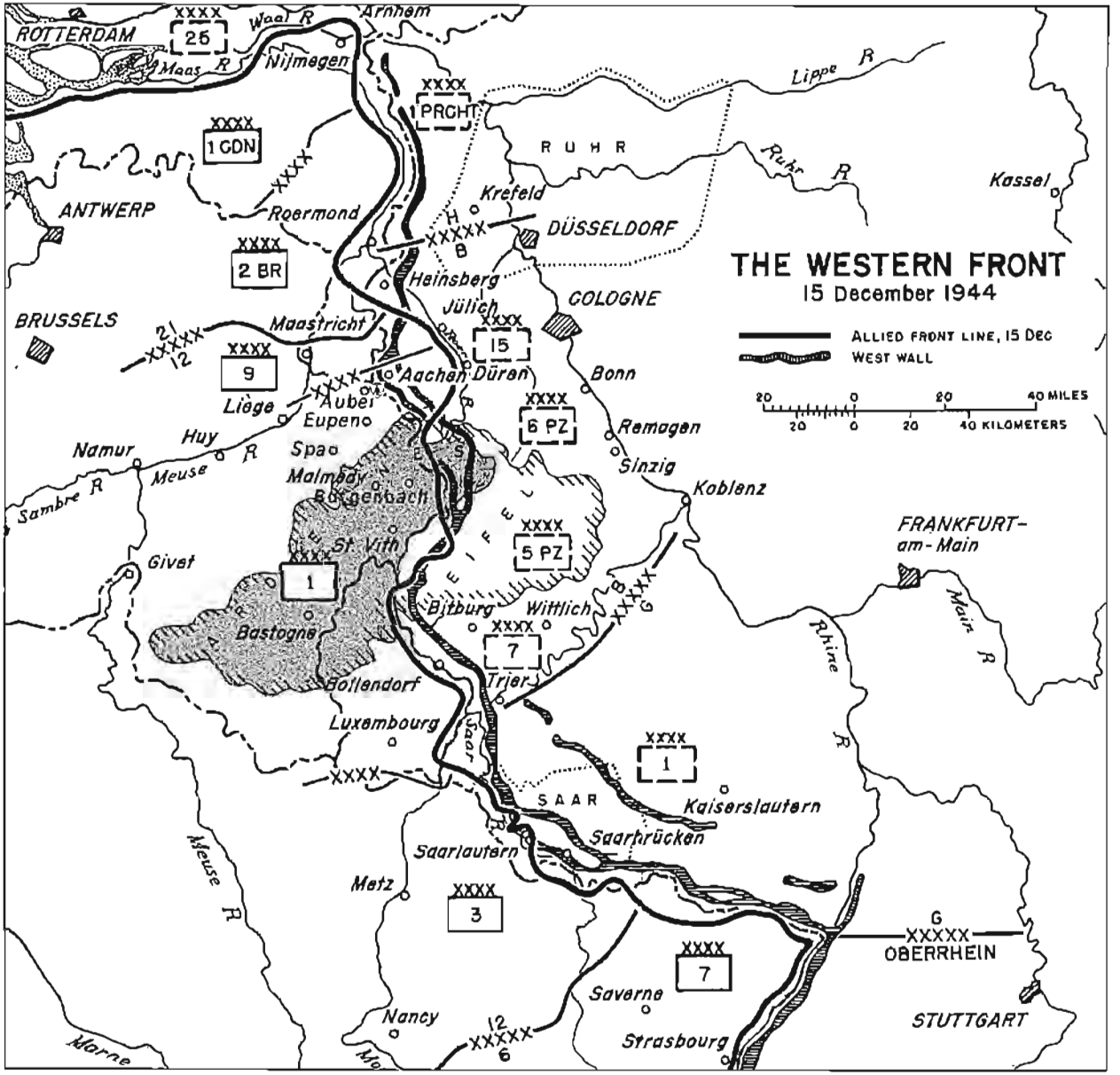


Fig. 2.25. Adapted from *The Ardennes*

Marshal Walter Model, commanding Army Group B, was to oversee the offensive, which would be conducted by the Seventh Army (General der Panzertruppen Erich Brandenberger), the Fifth Panzer Army (General der Panzertruppen Hasso von Manteuffel), and the Sixth SS Panzer Army (Generaloberst der Waffen SS Josef Dietrich).

The main attack was to be delivered by the Sixth SS Panzer Army, newly created in October and consisting of four of Hitler's elite SS armored divisions—

1st Liebstandarte, 2nd Das Reich, 9th Hohenstaufen, and 12th SS Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth)—plus the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, the 3rd Parachute Division, and four Volks Grenadier divisions (VGDs). The army's commander, Josef "Sepp" Dietrich, was an old political crony of Hitler's who had received his appointment from the führer himself. Hitler had seen to it that Dietrich's army received the best available men and equipment. The German dictator's intentions were plain: he wanted Dietrich's well-trained and highly motivated SS troopers to play the major role in defeating the armies of the Western Allies, thereby winning for Hitler a political victory over the German army. Sixth SS Panzer Army was thus given about five hundred tanks and armored assault guns, including ninety PzKw VI Tiger tanks, and an exceptionally heavy grouping of artillery. There were some deficiencies: Dietrich's combat engineers were ill-trained and poorly equipped, and there were shortages of infantry assault weapons and self-propelled artillery. But the force appeared to have enough infantry to punch through the Americans' thin front-line defenses in the Ardennes to paved roads over which German armor could advance swiftly to capture the bridges over the Meuse River near Liège. Dietrich's time-table was demanding: he gave his commanders one day to break through the American defenses and one day to pass their armor through the mountains; on day three they were to have reached the Meuse River and, by day four, they were to be across the Meuse and advancing on Antwerp.

Sixth SS Panzer Army would direct the operations of two corps: I SS, which was to drive towards Liège via Büllingen, Malmédy, and Spa; and LXVII, which was to advance in the north via Monschau and Eupen, and to guard the north flank of the I SS. In the path of the German offensive stood the U.S. First Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges. From his headquarters in Spa, Hodges directed the operations of three corps along the German frontiers with Belgium and Luxembourg: VII Corps in the north, V Corps in the center, and VIII Corps in the south. The First Army was organized as follows:

U.S. First Army

(15 Dec 44)

VII Corps	V Corps	VIII Corps
104 Inf Div	8th Inf Div	106th Inf Div
9th Inf Div	78th Inf Div	28th Inf Div
83rd Inf Div	2nd Inf Div	9th Armd Div (-)
5th Armd Div	99th Inf Div	4th Inf Div
1st Inf Div (rsv)	CCB, 9th Armd Div	CCR, 9th Armd Div
3rd Armd Div(-)(rsv)		

The Allied front line in the Ardennes extended some sixty miles over difficult terrain in which forested hills were the dominant feature. V Corps had assigned one third of that front to the 99th Division, just arrived in Europe, to provide it with combat experience. VIII Corps to the south had assigned a second third to another newcomer, the 106th Infantry Division. However, VIII Corps had also attached the 14th Cavalry Group to the 106th Division to assist in securing its mutual boundary with V Corps. This boundary coincided roughly with the line separating the German Fifth Army and Sixth SS Panzer Army.

As for U.S. operations, VII Corps had advanced to the banks of the Roer River on 15 December and was planning to cross it. V Corps had opened a new attack toward the Roer dams on 13 December: the 2nd Infantry Division had moved to the vicinity of Elsenborn, then pushed northeast through the 395th Infantry, the northernmost of three regiments on line in the 99th's zone. The axis of the 2nd Division's attack was the road that ran north from the joined villages of Rocherath and Krinkelt, and the division command post was in nearby Wirtzfeld. Aided by two battalions of the 395th Infantry Regiment, the 2nd Division had overcome problems caused by bad weather, poor visibility, and difficult terrain to drive a salient into the German defenses. It was about to renew its attack when the Germans began their offensive with an artillery bombardment. These were the Sixth SS Panzer Army's

preparatory fires, misinterpreted by some inexperienced troops of the 99th as "outgoing" in support of the 2nd Division. The date was 16 December 1944.

Sixth SS Panzer Army's onslaught began at 0530 on 16 December and fell mainly on the 393nd and 394th Infantry Regiments, which were holding the center and south of the 99th's front. General Dietrich's plan depended upon rapidly gaining access to two critical roads. One, designated *Rollbahn C*, was to be the primary axis of advance for the 12th SS Panzer Division; it ran through Losheim to Büllingen (called Bullange by the Belgians) and thence to Bütgenbach and Malmédy. The other road, designated *Rollbahn D*, was for the 1st SS Panzer Division; it was a secondary but generally passable road that ran roughly parallel to "C" from a junction north of Lanzerath through Honsfeld, Moderscheid, Schoppen and Faymonville.

Dietrich's infantry did not measure up to his expectations: they were sluggish in following up their artillery, and their tactics were clumsy enough to be countered by the inexperienced Americans. Where

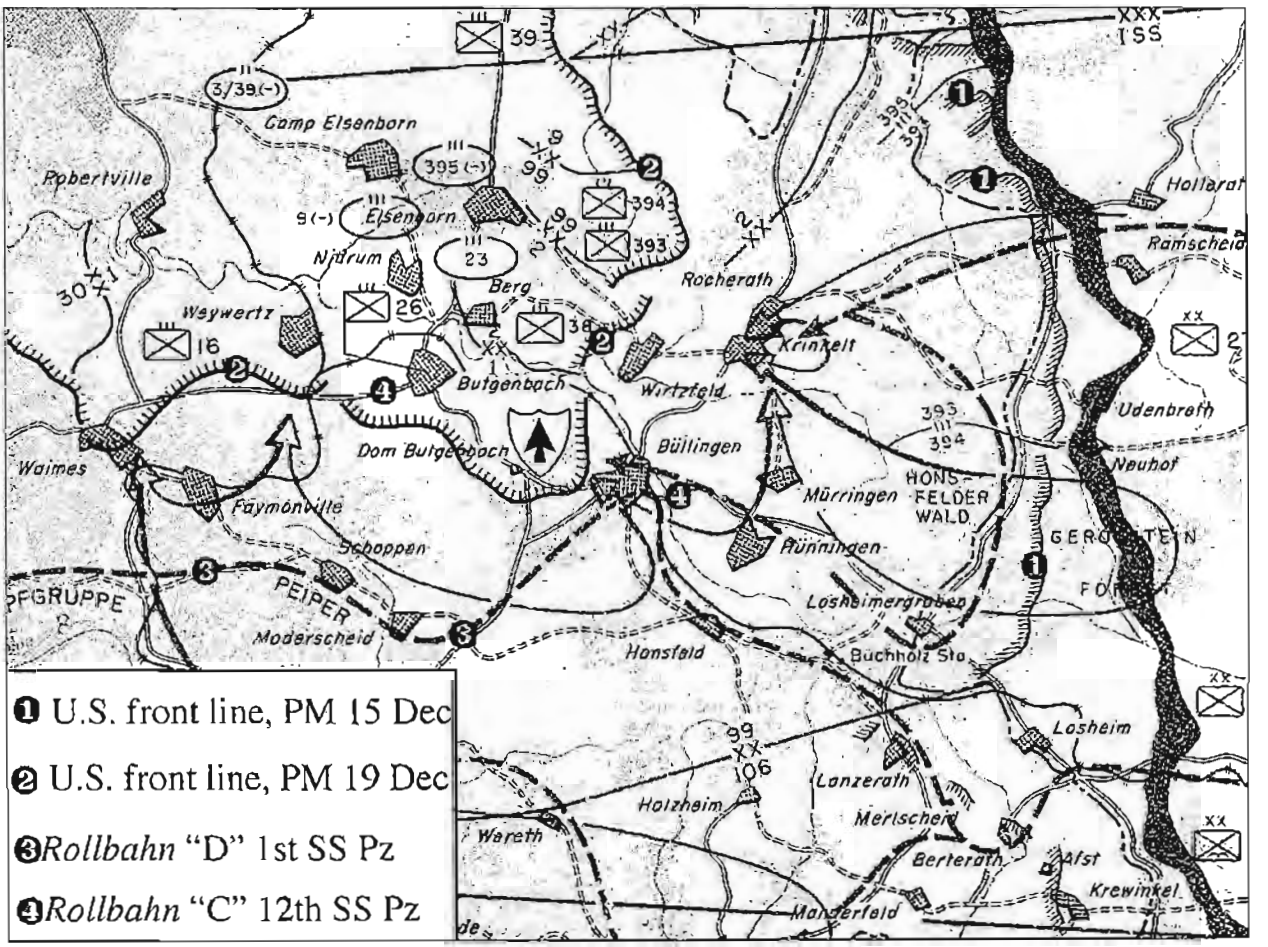


Fig. 2.26. Adapted from *The Ardennes*

the 99th's positions were penetrated, it was mainly because the defenders had been overwhelmed by superior numbers rushing from the concealment of nearby woods. At the end of the first day German losses were high and the Americans still denied key crossroads to the waiting 12th SS Panzer Division. But at dusk on 16 December the Germans took Lanzerath, thus gaining access to *Rollbahn D*.

The American reaction at the VII Corps was to alert the Blue Spaders. The U.S. Army history reports that

> As early as 1100 [on 16 December] word of the German attacks on the V Corps front had produced results at ...VII Corps. The 26th Infantry of the uncommitted 1st Infantry Division, then placed on a 6-hour alert, finally entrucked at midnight and started the move south to Camp Elsenborn. The transfer of this regimental combat team to the V Corps would have a most important effect on the ensuing American defense. (Cole, *The Ardennes*)

At 0500 on 17 December the lead kampfgruppe (battle group) of the 1st SS Panzer Division, (designated KG Peiper for its commander, Obersturmbannführer Joachim Peiper) advanced on "*D*" into Honsfeld. Peiper's men seized the town virtually without a fight from a panicked garrison made up of various antiaircraft, cavalry, and administrative units. Peiper, informed by his scouts that the road between Honsfeld and Moderscheid was in poor condition, and that 12th SS Panzer Division was not yet using "*C*," swung north to Büllingen, crashed through the town, and then, around 1030 on the 17 December, turned southwest toward Moderscheid and his assigned route "*D*." KG Peiper's turning puzzled a group of American combat engineers that was digging in on a hill to the west of Büllingen so as to dominate the main road to Bütgenbach. Soon other elements of the 1st Panzer SS Division followed KG Peiper.

At about 0730 the V Corps commander, Major General Leonard T. Gerow, had contacted Major General Walter M. Robertson, commanding the 2nd Infantry Division, in the latter's command post near Wirtzfeld. Gerow directed Robertson to organize the defense of the Elsenborn ridge, and to withdraw those 2nd Division units that had advanced to the northeast lest they be cut off in the salient they had formed. Robertson was also directed to shore up the 99th with two battalions from his division reserve, the 23nd Infantry. Robertson promptly ordered the 23rd's battalions to move, and directed his headquarters commandant to organize against an attack from Büllingen. The latter scratched together a makeshift force just in time to repulse a German tank platoon and accompanying infantry in halftracks advancing north out of Büllingen toward Wirtzfeld. Shortly thereafter the 2/23rd Infantry, 2nd Infantry Division, arrived on the scene and organized a proper defense of Wirtzfeld.

In the meantime the German 12th VGD succeeded in fracturing the defenses of the U.S. 394th Infantry and, despite severe losses, pressed on until they encountered the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry of the 2nd Infantry Division. Taking up positions near Hünningen, the 1/23rd and supporting tank destroyers successfully fought off seven assaults.

Toward the end of 17 December the 99th Division began to withdraw through the twin villages of Rocherath-Krinkelt to Elsenborn. At about the same time, the 1/23rd Infantry received orders via the 2nd Division radio net to pull back.

Amidst the confusion of the 99th Division's withdrawals, four infantry battalions of the 9th and 38th Infantry Regiments of the 2nd Division had taken up defensive positions around Rocherath-Krinkelt to protect the columns emerging from the salient to the northeast. Under the command of the 38th Infantry, these battalions stubbornly defended the twin villages through the night of 17-18 December against a wild succession of piecemeal attacks.

The increasingly impatient 12th SS Panzer

Fig. 2.27. 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry on the road to Bütgenbach, 17 December 1944

Division decided to reinforce the 277th VGD with its tanks, which substantially increased the effectiveness of the enemy attacks. But the Germans had not reckoned on the tenacity of the 2nd Infantry Division, which fought off repeated attacks throughout the day of 18 December. At 1800 V Corps attached the 99th Division to the 2nd Division. The 2nd Division continued to control Rocherath-Krinkelt for another twenty-four hours, beating back one determined German assault after another. During the night of 19-20 December it pulled back in good order to defensive positions along the Elsenborn ridge behind Wirtzfeld.

By this time Army Group B was in high dudgeon over the failure of Sixth SS Panzer Army to commence its march along "C." Led by KG Peiper, the 1st SS Panzer Division had driven down "D" twenty miles behind American lines to the vicinity of Stavelot; and the thrusting columns of Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army, having surrounded two regiments of the 106th Infantry Division and broken through the 28th Infantry Division's lines, were rolling toward the Meuse. Moreover, the attack by Sixth SS Panzer Army 's LXVII Corps in the north through Monschau had been repulsed with heavy losses, compelling Dietrich to commit the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, previously poised to exploit a breach at Monschau, to the fighting in Rocherath-Krinkelt. Dietrich decided to pull the 12th SS Panzer Division out of that battle and have it swing south to follow Peiper's route, with the intention of gaining "C" somewhere to the west. However, I SS Corps persuaded him that opening the Büllingen-Bütgenbach road was still the best approach. And so, late on the 18th of December, Dietrich ordered the 12th SS Panzer Division to circle back as quickly as the poor road net permitted to Büllingen, then advance to seize Bütgenbach—a repositioning that occasioned another day of delay.

Although the Waffen SS had demonstrated that it was a superior fighting force in countless engagements on battlefields far and wide, in this combat it exhibited a slavishness to plan. An early attack toward Bütgenbach on the 17th or towards Elsenborn on the 18th might have unhinged the whole U.S. defense. Moreover, it appears that the SS units of Sixth SS Panzer Army could not compete with major leaguers like the 2nd Division. The U.S. Army history observes that

> The appearance of the 2nd Infantry Division at the twin villages probably came as a complete surprise to the German command. German intelligence had failed completely as regards the location of this division and believed it was in reserve at Elsenborn. Peculiarly enough, the fact that the 2nd was to attack through the 99th positions never was reported to Sixth SS Panzer Army headquarters. Dietrich expected, therefore, to break through the 99th and meet the 2nd somewhere to the rear or possibly to the right rear of the 99th. This may explain the German failure to attempt an end run and drive for Elsenborn. (Cole, *The Ardennes*)

Dietrich was in for another surprise. He did not know that during the night of 16-17 December the 26th CT of the 1st Division had moved thirty-three miles by truck from Aubel to Camp Elsenborn, an abandoned cantonment with buildings that had roofs but no windows or doors. So not only had the U.S. 2nd Division joined the fight against the Sixth SS Panzer Army—now the U.S. 1st Division was also on the battlefield. Had he been aware of these developments, Generaloberst der Waffen SS Dietrich—himself a veteran of World War I—might have had long second thoughts about what they portended for the future of the German offensive: the Sixth SS Panzer Army was about to take on the same combination of forces that in July 1918, at Soissons, had demolished Ludendorff's end-the-war offensive between the Aisne and the Marne. The U.S. 1st and the 2nd Divisions would be fighting shoulder to shoulder for the first time since World War I, and their mission was to stop his forces in their tracks.

While CT 26 was trucking down from Aubel, Lieutenant Colonels Sutherland and Murdoch reported to V Corps headquarters near Eupen, where Major General Huebner was waiting to take command from Major General Gerow. After a meeting that Sutherland characterized as "inconclusive," Huebner pulled him aside and said, "Don't let them have you do anything you know you shouldn't." Sutherland and Murdoch then proceeded to the 99th Division's command post in Elsenborn.

Early on 17 December Major General Robertson, commander of the 2nd Division, had conferred with the 99th Division's commander, Major General Walter E. Lauer, at the latter's command post. Robertson later reported being dismayed by the noise and seemingly aimless motion that characterized activity there. When Sutherland and Murdoch arrived their reaction to the din of the place was similar to Major General Robertson's. Sutherland remembers "something like a Gilbert and Sullivan opera...a big crowd of officers all with map cases, binoculars, gas masks, etc., milling about. Nobody knew anything useful...even where the enemy was to any certainty." However, Murdoch recalls, when he and Sutherland walked in, Sutherland stopped the show: the voices and bustle quieted and everyone turned to look at the newcomer. And no wonder. Sporting a red handlebar moustache, wearing the Blue Spades of the 26th Infantry on his epaulettes and the Big Red One patch on his left sleeve, Sutherland cut an impressive figure that could not be ignored. Having thus gained their attention, he looked around, then announced in a loud voice: "You need worry no longer. The 1st Division is here. Everything is under control."

Murdoch and Sutherland then had a disquieting interview with Lauer. "Bad news," was how Murdoch described it. "He just had no idea where his battalions were. He told us to move through Bütgenbach until we met the enemy." As the Blue Spaders were leaving, Lauer's deputy exhorted Sutherland to "Go down and kill those sons o' bitches!" Sutherland thought of Huebner's advice, and decided not to count on the 99th Division for much help.

Sutherland and Murdoch then met with the 26th CT's battalion commanders: Rippert of the 1st, Daniel of the 2nd, Corley of the 3rd, and Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Brown of the 33rd Field Artillery. Together they plotted a wedged-shaped defense centered on the crossroads at Dom (Domäne) Bütgenbach, a large manor encompassing a stone residence and substantial outbuildings. Their left would extend northeast to tie into the 2nd Division's right flank and to occupy the high ground overlooking Büllingen; their right would reach westward to include the town of Bütgenbach. The intent was to block both the main Büllingen-Malmédy road and the road running north from Moderscheid. Sutherland directed that the regiment commence its march to occupy key terrain around Bütgenbach at 1200.

The move down from Aubel was harrowing.

Sergeant Rocco J. Moretto of the 1/26th's C Company—which was temporarily attached to the 2nd Battalion—remembers traveling by both foot and truck to reach their destination, Dom Bütgenbach. On the way

> we encountered many American troops who had been overrun, were disorganized and in full retreat....Some of the men related weird accounts of what was going on. The one account that has always stuck in my mind was that Tiger tanks were being dropped by parachutes...[which] turned out to be false...and that German paratroopers dressed in American uniforms who spoke perfect English were dropped behind the lines. This turned out to be true. This and other stories we heard made us wonder what we were headed for.
>
> We arrived at Dom Bütgenbach late at night on December 17th and immediately started to set up a defense. The area had been occupied by an American field hospital which had recently evacuated the area. They had departed in an awful hurry leaving behind a few tents, partially eaten food, and all sorts of clothing including women's unmentionables. (Rocco J. Moretto, *Memorable Experience*, undated manuscript, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

Another soldier in the 26th, Sergeant Leroy Stewart, recorded similar impressions, noting that

> The American troops that had been in the town had taken off without firing a shot. We found all their duffel bags with their clothes and things in them. We even found a room full of maps and all their colors and records. There was all kinds of equipment and rations. It looked like they had just dropped what they were doing and took off. Our whole Co. was fighting mad. Not so much at the Germans but at the Americans that had put their tails between their legs and ran. I think at that time if we had a choice who we wanted to fight it wouldn't have been the Germans.
>
> We had all been set for a long rest behind the lines but because some GI's hadn't stood their ground, here we were right in the middle of the war again.
>
> At no time while I had been with the 1st Division did the idea ever come to us or was it ever mentioned when or how would we ever retreat. There had been times when it would have been a lot easier to retreat but we knew the ground would have to be retaken so we hung on. (Stewart, *Hurry Up and Wait*)

Captain Don Lister, Rocco Moretto's company commander, set up his command post in one of Dom Bütgenbach's houses. Lister, recalled Moretto, was briefing the company's leadership and setting up the defensive alignment when a brigadier general walked into the room. The general, said Moretto,

> introduced himself and asked who was in charge. Captain Lister [replied that] he was. The general then said that he had 16 tanks outside, and that he was in full retreat because there was a big German armored column six miles down the road. He invited us to follow him.
>
> Captain Lister then proceeded to give the general what the First Division was all about and...[told him] "the First Division never retreats." That ended the conversation.
>
> The general very calmly said he was leaving with his tanks, and was gone and never seen again. Each and every man in that room was disgusted by the incident. With 16 tanks you could have held on forever. Further, I'm proud to say that this unit always maintained a positive attitude. (Moretto, letter)

On 17 and 18 December other retreating units passed through positions of the 26th Infantry. A few, informed that the Blue Spaders intended to stand and fight, joined them, and to this day it is not altogether clear what the 26th CT's composition was during the

battles for Bütgenbach. Moreover, the 2nd Division shuffled tank destroyer units in and out of the CT as it sought to meet changing threats. For example, initially there were a number of three-inch towed guns in the sector, but these were pulled out on the 18th. On the 19th two platoons of Company C, 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, arrived with eight M-10 vehicles, four mounting three-inch guns and four mounting 90mm guns—welcome and most useful support.

Amid growing apprehension and punishing cold, the 26th CT dug in. Sergeant Stewart recorded that

> As we went on checking the town we knew we had beaten the Germans to it but we didn't know where they were. We were told to push on to the high ground to the east of town and set up a defense. It was real cold and [there was] a lot of snow on the ground and [the] thought of staying out in it didn't sound too good to me.
>
> Luck was with us when we got to the high ground [the position of Company K, see figure 2.28]. There were...a lot of two and three man holes already dug. They must have belonged to some artillery outfit to have had the tools to make that type of holes. The one we took was a three man hole and I thought that three of us in it wouldn't be so cold.
>
> When it got dark it started to get colder. After we got all the lines ran [telephone wire laid] we felt half frozen. While two men rolled up in the hole, one had to stand outside to guard. At first we thought that with each of us having one blanket, we could put one down and two over us but we soon found that the guy outside on guard had to have one to wrap around him or he just couldn't take it. We hoped that after a few days we could get used to the cold and it wouldn't be so bad but it didn't work that way. We were always cold.
>
> All of our rations and drinking water froze. I tried putting my canteen inside my shirt to keep it from freezing but it was so cold I had to take it out. I tried eating snow but it seemed like it just made me want water that much more. I never thought much about wanting a drink in the winter but when there wasn't any [water and] I was always wanting some....We started to lose a lot of men to frostbite. We were to take our shoes off every so often and rub our feet to keep them from freezing but very few men did. There was a big chance we would come under attack when you had your shoes off. (Stewart, *Hurry Up and Wait*)

The 2nd Battalion began arriving at Dom Bütgenbach at about 1400 on the 17th and established positions to control the roads converging there. The 3rd Battalion occupied the high ground on either side of 2nd Battalion, with Companies I and L on the left and Company K on the right. The 1st Battalion put two companies (A and B) south and southwest of Bütgenbach town, and the regiment positioned Company C (-) as its reserve to the north of the town. The regimental CP was set up in the town itself.

Figure 2.28. (map with overlay) shows the dispositions of the 26th CT as of dusk on 19 December. (The overlay dates from the war; the map is recent. The overlay is initialed by Lieutenant Colonel Henry "Red" Clisson, S-3 of the 26th, whom Sutherland regarded highly and characterized as "a skilled and hard-working officer.") Also located on the overlay are significant tank-killing components of the CT: Company C, 745th Tank Battalion (two tanks), on the east side of the hill immediately to the north of Dom Bütgenbach; 3rd Platoon, 634 Tank Destroyer Battalion, equipped with the M-10 self-propelled 90mm gun, on the west side of the same hill; and two three-inch-gun TDs separately identified with an arrow and the notation "3." The U.S. Army history describes the CT's dispositions as follows:

> In Bütgenbach, forty-five hundred yards straight west of the 2d Division anchor point at

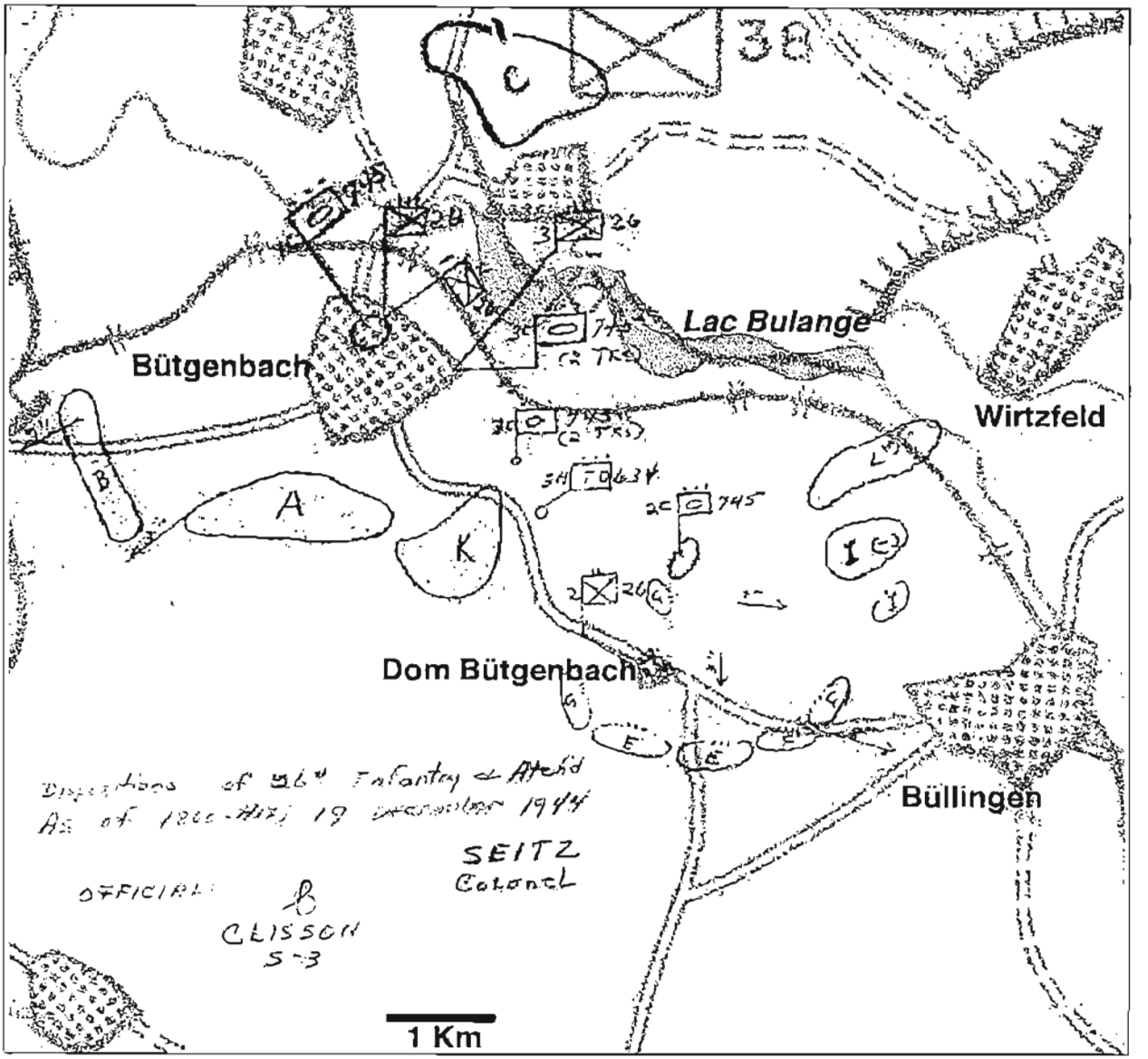


Fig. 2.28. Dispositions as of 1800, 19 December 1944. Contemporary overlay. Adapted from *The Ardennes*.

Wirtzfeld, the 26th Infantry of the 1st Division covered the 2d Division's flank and rear. The area between the two villages was neutralized, insofar as enemy operation was concerned, by a large lake (Lac Bullange) and a series of streams. To build a defense in depth along the Büllingen-Bütgenbach section of the Malmédy Road [*Rollbahn* C] and secure a place on high ground, the 2d Battalion had pushed forward to a ridge near Dom Bütgenbach, a hamlet astride the highway. When the enemy failed to follow up his earlier sorties from Büllingen, American [Company K] patrols scouted on the 18th in the direction of that village and established that it

still belonged to the Germans.

The 26th Infantry held a none too favorable position. It was separated from its own division, and could expect little help from the 99th, under which it had occupied Bütgenbach, or from the 2d Division. Isolated action as a regimental combat team, however, was not unknown in the regiment's history for it had been so committed during the Kasserine fight and at Barrafranca in Sicily.

Although the lake reservoir gave some protection on the left flank the position held by the forward battalion, the 2d, protruded beyond this cover. The regimental right flank was bare—at least no infantry had been brought in to solidify this section of the line—and in theory the 26th was responsible for the defense of the four miles to the west of Bütgenbach and the town of Waimes. (Cole, *The Ardennes*)

Concern about its open west (right) flank prompted the 26th CT, (which was generally oriented to the south, on the north shoulder of the Bulge), to ask the 1st Division for help. The division responded by sending the 16th CT, which went on line in time to fend off late-afternoon (19 December) probes at Waimes from the German 3rd Parachute Division. (It should be noted that on 18 December, the 26th CT had reverted from control of V Corps to the 1st Division, which had set up its CP at Elsenborn; moreover, Colonel Seitz had

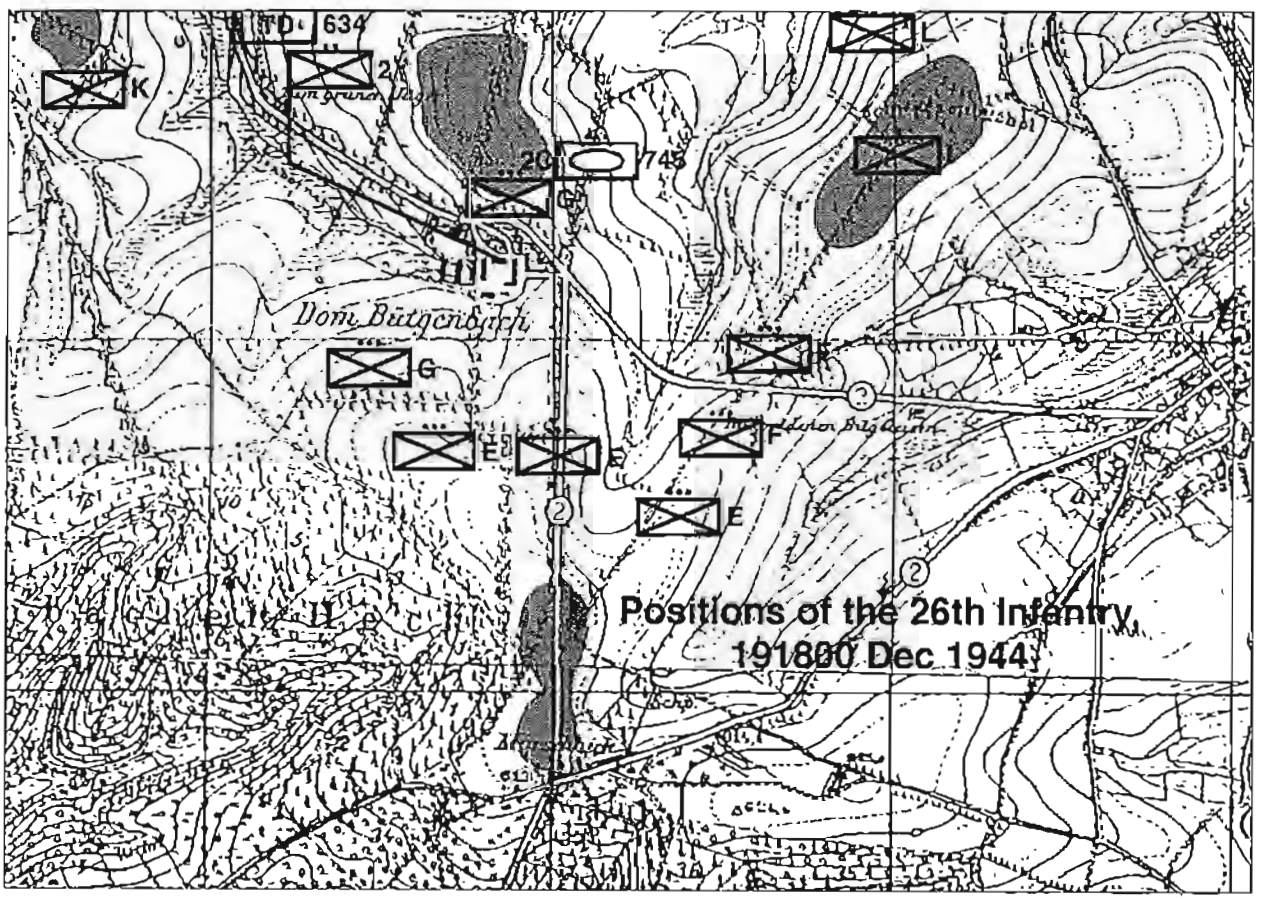


Fig. 2.29. Contemporary map, 1,000-meter grid. Contour interval unknown, hilltops highlighted.

returned from leave to resume command of the regiment.) The division informed the 26th CT that V Corps had committed the 30th Division west of the 16th CT, around Malmédy, and that the westward progress of the 1st SS Panzer Division had been arrested by the 82nd Airborne Division.

The good news from the west was welcome to the 26th, but did not change the fact that the regiment's most urgent threat lay to the east and had begun to materialize. On the 18th German armor scouted the Dom Bütgenbach position and the 12th SS Panzer Division established a forward command post in Büllingen after nightfall. During the night at least one battalion of the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment also took up positions in the town. The bulk of the 12th SS, endeavoring to reorient itself from Rocherath-Krinkelt, was struggling toward Büllingen on roads churned to mire. On the 18th and 19th of December, mud was the best ally of the 26th Infantry. "Fortunately," Hugh M. Cole observed in *The Ardennes*,

> the 2d Battalion had been given ample time to prepare for defense. The rifle platoons had dug deep, covering the holes with logs and sandbags; wire [telephone communications] was in to the 33d Field Artillery Battalion, emplaced to give support; and the artillery observers were dug in well forward.

Cole's optimistic assessment of the situation, although accurate, was made years after the fact. On 19 December, however, the outlook seemed far less promising. With an SS panzer division bearing down on them, it is doubtful that the men of CT 26 thought they had been afforded "ample time" for anything, especially for laying antitank minefields. The regiment had a little more than two short days in adverse weather to prepare to contest the ground. The regiment's official account of the action at Bütgenbach, prepared in 1945, describes what this entailed:

> Racing against time, the men scooped out deep foxholes, covered them with logs and timber, fashioned two portholes from which two riflemen could furnish crossfire and protection to foxholes on either side. As the hours passed, and the foxholes became deeper, the regiment sent out patrols, one of these going as far as Krinkelt in the sector of the adjacent division to gather information. In addition a strong combat patrol attacked the railroad station at Büllingen, rescuing twenty-two Americans of an anti-aircraft organization that had been overwhelmed the day before. (Headquarters, 26th Infantry, *Detailed Description* [1945])

Battle of Bütgenbach: "The Bitterest Kind of Fighting"

Around 0200 on 19 December some twenty truckloads of German infantry moved out from Büllingen on the roads to the west and southwest, formed up behind a dozen tanks, and advanced in a low-lying mist toward the left and center of CT 26's positions. That initial foray was beaten off by coordinated fires. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel reported during the action: "much happening out there. We are killing lots of Germans."

The 2nd Battalion's original positions were close around the Dom, in what amounted to a rear slope defense. At dawn Lieutenant Colonel Daniel moved some rifle platoons eastward onto a ridge from which the fields of fire extended to Büllingen itself. Around 1000 that same morning the 2nd Battalion was probed from the south by an estimated battalion of panzer grenadiers supported by panzers and jagdpanzers (tank destroyers), and from the east by a second battalion of panzer grenadiers and a company of jagdpanzers. Another concerted defense by all arms threw the enemy back. American casualties on the line necessitated further repositioning. That afternoon U.S. P-47s dropped bombs in the vicinity of Lac Bullange, cutting CT telephone lines, and the 2nd Battalion had another brush with German armored reconnaissance vehicles. The situation around Dom Bütgenbach as of that evening is shown in figure 2.29.

Company F was dug in on a ridge athwart the main road from Büllingen; Company E was on its right astride the roads from the Morscheck crossroads, one kilometer to the south. Company G guarded the 2nd Battalion's right flank and command post. The 3rd Battalion's Companies I and L and Company K were positioned on the high ground to the left and right of the 2nd Battalion. The 2nd Battalion's complement of regimental 57mm antitank guns was doubled. Both the 3rd Battalion and the 26th CT held reserves of tanks and tank destroyers to the west, in and around Bütgenbach.

In addition to supporting tanks and tank destroyers, the 26th CT had other antitank weapons, including 2.36-inch rocket launchers (the bazooka), antitank mines, and towed 57mm antitank guns. The 57s looked puny, but every gun crew had available a half dozen or more rounds of British-made discarding sabot (DS) ammunition. Designed originally for the British two-pounder, the rounds had been fitted with a sleeve that snugged into the larger American barrel and dropped off after exiting. As a result, the projectile emerged with a muzzle velocity of 4,200 feet per second, as compared with the 2,900 feet per second of American rounds. This gave it the kinetic energy (which is a function of the square of velocity) sufficient to penetrate approximately six inches (154 mm) of armor at a 30-degree slope. Consequently, crews of even the PzKw V Panther tank (80mm frontal and 110mm turret armor), and its tank-destroyer variant, the Jagdpanther, had to be wary of the 57mm gun. At Bütgenbach, the DS rounds knocked out or immobilized both types of vehicles. Obviously, they were most lethal when accurately aimed at a vulnerable spot from close range. Artillery could also destroy armor, especially with observed fires. German tankers were therefore reluctant to advance without infantry to eliminate observation posts and suppress antitank weapons, in particular the infantry weapons which were difficult to locate. Limited visibility due to the woods and weather conditions forced the 2nd Battalion to position its 57mm guns well forward, and to move its heavier antitank guns up close behind the main line of resistance. Captain Donald E. Rivette, commander of the 26th's Antitank Company, wrote after the war that

Fig. 2.30. 57mm towed antitank gun guarding a tree-lined road much like the one running north into Dom Bütgenbach

> It was decided that the AT guns would have to stay on the MLR [main line of resistance], organizing the positions to cover as much terrain as possible and still provide interlocking fire. The antitank guns were to establish the first line of defense, stopping the enemy armor before it could chew up our front-line troops, and at the same time point out targets to the M-10s [tank destroyers] and tanks situated 300 yards back. This target designation mission was an important factor at that time as fog and mist of early morning made it almost impossible for our armor to see the approaching enemy tanks. (Donald E. Rivette, *The Hot Corner at Dom Bütgenbach* [1945])

The Germans renewed their assault before dawn on 20 December. The regiment's account of the day's events conveys the desperate nature of the fighting by soldiers on both sides:

Coming out of the mist which cloaked movements but seventy-five to a hundred yards away, the enemy tanks loomed up in front of the riflemen, who fought back with anti-tank guns, grenades, and rocket-guns. The massed tanks broke through the curtain of fire from the infantrymen and the immediate supporting fires laid down by the artillery and tank and tank destroyer elements, and overran the company main lines of resistance. Machine gunning the foxholes, the tanks sought to open a wedge for the following German infantry. Overrun and out-gunned, many riflemen died at their posts. Mortar crews left their weapons and joined the riflemen in repelling the German infantry. Machine gunners directed heavy and accurate streams of fire at the enemy. The smashing of machine-gun emplacements by the tanks that rode over the positions failed to halt the fire of the remaining machine gunners. Assistant gunners took over the positions of the "E" and "F" Company machine guns when the gunners became casualties. Ammunition bearers manned the weapons or fought as riflemen against the German tanks. The hostile armor rode back and forth across the gap, but failed to silence the riflemen who still fought off the German infantry. In the close fighting that followed, German tanks confidently made for the group of buildings housing the battalion CP, and two company CPs. Locked in combat, the opposing infantry forces hurled every available man into the struggle. (Headquarters, 26th Infantry, *Detailed Description)*

Two additional companies of the 26th Panzer Grenadier Regiment assaulted the 2nd Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel called forward his reserve, Company G (-), to brace the line of foxholes. Colonel Seitz repositioned tanks and tank destroyers to cover the breach, and as the morning fog lifted their fire became increasingly effective. Seitz also moved mortars and machine guns from the flank battalions to reinforce the 2nd Battalion. Then, yet another company of SS infantry charged the overrun portion of the line; brandishing bayonets, the SS troopers engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the Americans. Colonel Seitz committed his own infantry reserve, Company C (-).

> The two platoons [of Company C] moving forward were under heavy fire every step of the way as enemy mortar crews spotted their movement, and German tanks ranging the road machine-gunned the platoons. Tank destroyers took on the tanks, and the two "C" Company platoons moved into position in time to join the riflemen of the entire battalion that swung over into an attack that drove the enemy out of the main line positions.
>
> In back of the main line, a fight as bitter as that between the infantry forces was being decided. Eight German tanks had pierced the lines, and these had ranged in back of the lines until the German infantry had closed in and locked hand to hand with our infantry. They [the tanks] had then struck at the group of houses in which two company CP's and the battalion CP were located. Under direct tank fire that leveled the walls of several buildings, the CP personnel organized rocket-gun teams and by daring use of these weapons forced the tanks to take cover behind some brick buildings. Tank destroyers and tanks then combined efforts, and in intense fighting drove the tanks from cover to cover until supporting tanks from other sectors of the regiment arrived to close with the enemy armor. Under intense fire...the German tanks withdrew...."I" Company positions were placed under intense cannon and machine-gun fire as the German tanks sought to rejoin the enemy infantry forces. Not a squad budged from position. The fire-power of the entire company leveled at the German armored vehicles forced these to sheer off....Next to be subjected to pressure was "L" Company's platoons. Repulsed in this sector, the tanks turned

back to do battle with our armor. Two of our tanks were lost, and five of the enemy's left blazing wrecks as the two survivors raced from the gap in "F" Company's positions and moved towards the protection of Büllingen...the remnants of the battered panzer battalion made two more attempts. Under our accurate artillery fire, and up against the stonewall defense of the entire regimental line, the enemy was forced to abandon the field with his mission unaccomplished. (Headquarters, 26th Infantry, *Detailed Description*)

The fighting having abated, the Americans were able to take stock of the situation. "For the men of 'E' and 'F' companies," reports the regiment's official account,

> there was grim satisfaction in the sight of row upon row of German dead that lay in front of their positions; of blazing German tanks that lay to their front and behind them. These two companies had a grudge to settle. A few weeks before they had been encircled at Merode...and the men in them had been either killed, wounded, or captured....Returning battle-tried veterans from the hospital and newly assigned reinforcements headed by capable, efficient lieutenants that had been picked from the ranks and given battlefield promotions, composed the force that was now settling the score. These newly formed companies had taken the initial shock of the SS tank and infantry attack and had sent the enemy back with crippling losses. (Headquarters, 26th Infantry, *Detailed Description*)

Combat engineers worked through the night laying antitank minefields in front of the 26th CT's restored MLR. Weapons and ammunition were distributed and, based on intelligence of enemy armor moving to the south, the CT braced for another attack from that direction.

General Dietrich was still determined to open "C," the Büllingen–Bütgenbach–Malmédy road. He was convinced that he had at his disposal the combat power to defeat an understrength American infantry regiment, and he planned to use it all in a final attack by moving his maneuver forces along "D" far enough to enable a double envelopment of Dom Bütgenbach. During the night of 20-21 December the Blue Spaders endured a nightmare of artillery and rocket fires, intensifying around dawn. Covered by these fires, two battalions of the 26th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and a battalion of the 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, supported by some thirty tanks and tank destroyers, moved to attack Dom Bütgenbach from the south. The 3rd Parachute Regiment probed the 26th CT's right (west) flank. Once again, however, the 12th SS Panzer Division was denied its objectives. The battle of 21 December can be summarized as follows:

- 2nd Battalion relived its experience of the day before: some German tanks penetrated the foxhole line, but ultimately the whole enemy force was driven back. The 18th Infantry, just arrived in the area, attached its Company E to the 26th CT, and Seitz sent the company to Daniel to replace his reserve.

- 1st Battalion, reinforced by Company K, repulsed the 3rd Parachute Regiment.

- 3rd Battalion (Companies I and L) drove back four separate assaults by the 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment. The Germans reached the line of foxholes and some hand-to-hand fighting ensued, but the MLR was not penetrated and the enemy withdrew with heavy losses.

Once again, 2nd Battalion faced the problem of killing tanks that were menacing Dom Bütgenbach and the 2nd Battalion CP. As mentioned, the CP was in the farm's stone house, which faced a square on either side of which were barns with thick masonry walls. These tanks pulled in behind the barns, emerging from

time to time to fire into the CP building. Rocco Moretto of Company C took refuge in the cellar under the CP, but soon became an active participant in the fight with the German tanks:

> Colonel Daniel was personally directing artillery fire over the radio....He was even asking for corps artillery and at one point he yelled over the radio, "Get me all the damned artillery you can get."
>
> There is no doubt in my mind that Colonel Daniel almost singlehandedly slowed the German advance until reinforcements slowly began to arrive and started to build on our positions. Thanks to Colonel Daniel and fortunately for us the German infantry had taken all sorts of casualties from the artillery fire and were unable to penetrate our defenses in any number.
>
> When Colonel Daniel was informed that tanks had penetrated to within twenty yards of the building, he asked to be kept advised of their movement. I would inch up the cellar stair and when the tank crews [spotted] me they would turn the 88s and fire a round. But before they did, I would come flying down those cellar steps.
>
> The situation remained that way [for what] seemed...an eternity. Colonel Daniel continued with the artillery fire and then called for fire directly on our positions in an effort to knock the enemy off us. He then called for volunteers to knock out the tanks with a bazooka. One young soldier somehow, with help, managed to get on the roof of the farmhouse and miraculously disabled one tank. It seemed like an impossible task but somehow that kid got the job done. The remaining tank stayed for awhile and then turned tail, probably realizing that he was stuck out like a sore thumb without support. It was fortunate for us that our artillery inflicted so much damage to German infantry—otherwise we would have surely been outflanked. (Moretto, *Memorable Experience)*

On this day too, the make-weight in the defense was the artillery. Nor did artillery's contribution go unrecognized by the men on the battle line:

> In the late afternoon, when the German assault was dwindling, the 2d Battalion commander paid the infantryman's heartfelt compliment to the guns: "The artillery did a great job. I don't know where they got the ammo or when they took time out to flush the guns but we wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for them. ...A hundred [Germans] ...came at one platoon and not one of them got through."
>
> The regimental cannon company, the 1st Division Artillery, the 406th Field Artillery Group, and reinforcing batteries from the 2d and 99th Divisions fired over ten thousand rounds in support of the Dom Bütgenbach defenders during an eight hour shoot on the 21st, plastering the enemy assembly areas and the road net and plowing up fields across which the German attack came. For one period of three hours all communication between the hard-pressed rifle battalion and the artillery broke under German fire, but the American shells continued to arrive with devastating effect. A patrol sent into the woods from which had come the final assault reported a count of three hundred dead enemy infantry—the reason, perhaps, why the tanks that penetrated to the 2d Battalion Command Post came alone. At any rate, the 12th Volksgrenadier Division had had enough. The division commander told his superiors that no more attacks could be made unless a promised assault gun battalion arrived to ramrod the infantry. The total German casualty list must have been high, and after three days of battle heavy inroads had been made in the tank strength of the 12th SS Panzer Regiment. (Cole, *The Ardennes*)

The U.S. Army history also notes that in the battle for Dom Bütgenbach the 26th CT used every

weapon available to it. One mortar section of the 2nd Battalion fired 750 rounds before it was blasted by close-in tank fire

That night (21-22 December) the 26th CT wrestled with the problem of bolstering rifle strength in the 2nd Battalion. Such bolstering was needed, as evidenced by the unit journal's end-of-day tallies that showed Companies E, F, and C with seventy-five men each and Company G with fifty-eight men. General Andrus informed Lieutenant Colonel Murdoch that one officer and fifty-one hospital returnees were on their way down to the regiment. "Hold on," urged the general; "we will back you to the limit."

During the day on 21 December contingency plans had been discussed for establishing an alternate, more compressed position to the north. Lieutenant Colonel Murdoch contended that the CT ought to stay where it was despite the fact that rifle company strength was low: the present position's commanding ground with good fields of fire and minefields argued for defending in place rather than trying to prepare another position to the north. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel agreed. Colonel Seitz decided to stand fast. The problem of having too few men was somewhat alleviated when the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry relieved Company B of the 1/26th on the right (west) flank, and Company B was repositioned southeast of Bütgenbach, behind Company K, to lend depth to the defense as a reserve.

Dietrich, having failed three times to open the Büllingen-Malmédy road by attacking Dom Bütgenbach, decided to strike at Bütgenbach, advancing down the secondary road "*D*," then hooking north to gain access to "*C*" at the town. His plan for 22 December was to conduct holding attacks on the left and center of the 26th CT, with the main attack on the extreme right (west) flank to be delivered by the entire 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, attacking in a column of battalions, supported by the best panzers and jagdpanzers remaining in the 12th SS Panzer Division

Dawn on 22 December found the 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment advancing amid falling snow on CT 26's defenses before Bütgenbach. The 26th Infantry account records that

> Panther tanks carrying cargoes of grenadiers on their backs appeared out of the morning mist in front of "A" and "K" companies....The enemy tanks striking at the left flank of Company "A," 26th Infantry overran the platoon positions and allowed the infantry to come to close grips. Fighting to the last in their foxholes, the entire platoon took a heavy toll...before sheer weight of numbers overwhelmed the group. The right platoon of this company...refused to bend under the intense enemy pressure. The enemy attacks broke against the rock-like defense....
>
> The first sign of the attack for "K" Company had been the appearance of a huge Panther tank loaded with grenadiers. The tank destroyer backing the company had taken the tank in its sights and blasted both tank and its supporting infantry. Other enemy infantry pushing the attack swarmed over the "K" Company positions, and the line withdrew only to reform immediately in a slight draw...the bitterest kind of fighting raged: men stabbed and slashed each other with bayonets, hurled grenades at close range, and the enemy tanks lumbered their way to the front and sides of the hard-pressed companies.
>
> Now the Combat Team commander moved "B" Company from a support position in the rear of 2nd Battalion through the town of Bütgenbach. The attack by the lone company was made in open sight of the enemy, and the move accomplished under heavy fire. But the Company moved implacably forward, and reaching the hill, drove the enemy from it. Every man of the 26th Regimental Combat

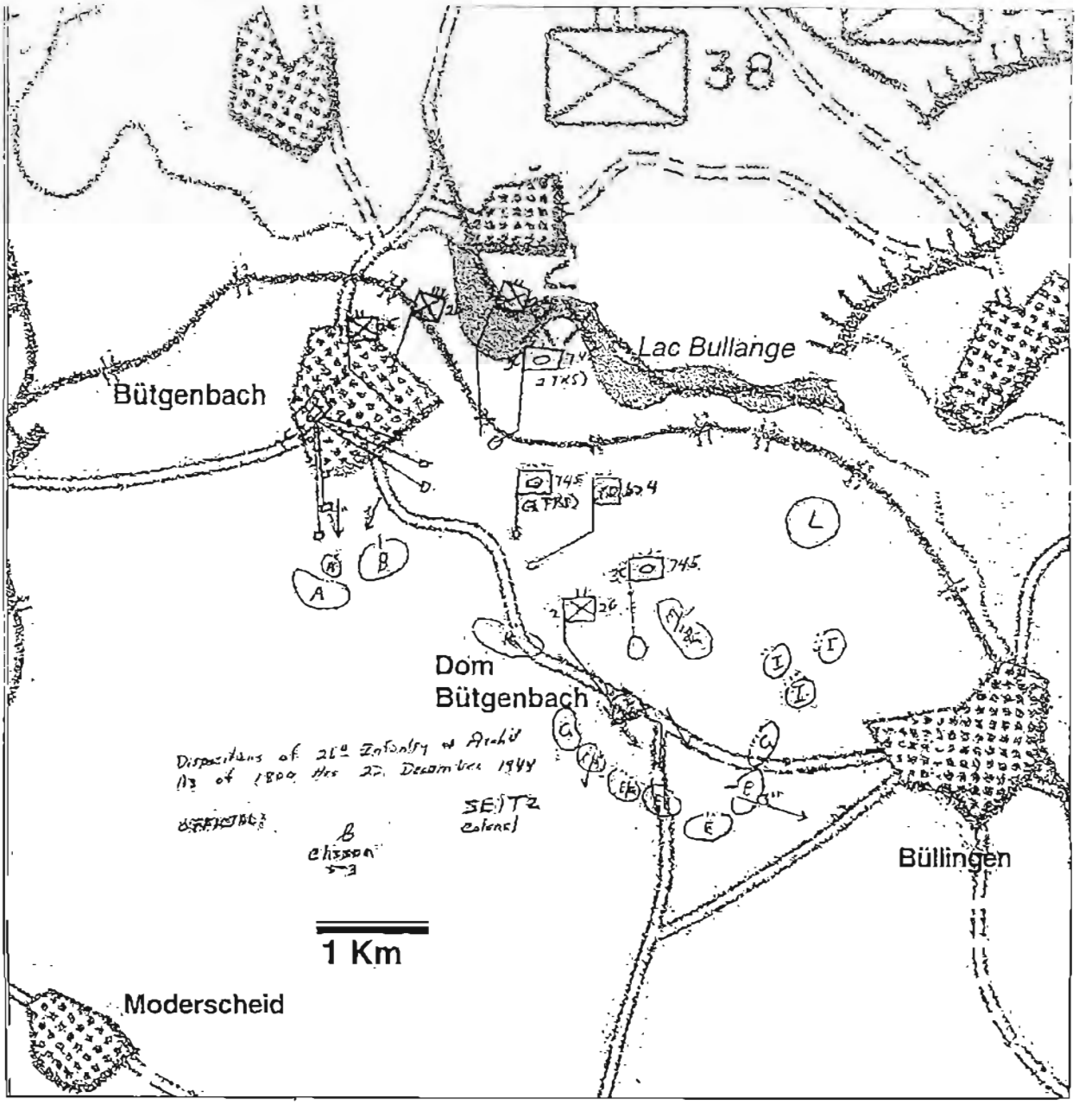


Fig. 2.31. Dispositions as of 1800, 22 December 1944. Contemporary overlay. Adapted from *The Ardennes.*

Team had been committed. (Headquarters, 26th Infantry, *Detailed Description*)

Iris Carpenter pointed out in *Danger Forward* that the Sixth SS Panzer Army actually won its objective, and held it for a few hours, when the attack by the 26th Panzer Grenadiers on the morning of 22 December broke through to the road Dietrich coveted:

> The gap was driven between "A" and "K" Companies....It was 800 meters wide, and carried the vital road to Waimes and Malmédy. Through it the Germans could have poured men and tanks to change the whole combat story of the Battle of the Bulge.

They did not do so, Carpenter reported, because the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry scratched together a force consisting of fifty men from Company A—led by a company commander with wounds in both legs—to plug the gap with Company K, while Company B, using the houses of the town for cover and concealment, assaulted the enemy from an unexpected direction to restore the position on the hill where the lone platoon of Company A still held out.

Again German infantry was stripped away from the penetrating armor, but this time the tanks went for the regimental CP in the town. No vulnerable unit or installation was hit, however, and the attackers were driven off. Artillery and mortar fires destroyed or disabled a few, and sent the remainder running south. By 1430 the battle for Bütgenbach was over. The 18th Infantry arrived in force on the right flank of the 26th. The whole 1st Division was now on line along the northern shoulder of the Bulge. Sixth SS Panzer Army halted its attacks.

Colonel Seitz sent to Major General Lauer the U.S. unit colors his troops had picked up in the Bütgenbach vicinity, with this message: "Found these—one I believe belongs to you—the other your MC [Medical Corps] can care for."

Casualties to the 26th CT from 16 to 22 December amounted to thirty-three killed in action, one dead of wounds, sixty-two missing, and 177 wounded. Including injuries, total losses were 307. The overlay for 1800 on the 22 December (Figure 2.31.) shows the positions of the under-strength line units.

Unit leaders started immediately to document decorations. There were many soldiers to recognize, but few proved more deserving than Corporal Henry F. Warner, a quiet, red-headed West Virginian in the 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry. After the war, his commander described Warner's exploits as follows:

> At 0600, December 20...about twenty enemy tanks attacked through the fog and mist of early morning....The tanks were close when the antitank crews crawled from their muddy foxholes...the first gun squad, commanded by Staff Sergeant Stanley Oldenski, observed two enemy tanks approaching its position. Sending a bazooka team to his right, Sergeant Oldenski took over the job of assistant gunner and ordered Corporal "Red" Warner, the gunner, to commence firing....Corporal Warner put four rounds into the nearest tank, setting it on fire and putting it out of action. A second tank then appeared out of the mist in an attempt to overrun the main line of resistance....Warner sighted and fired. The tank was evidently surprised to find an antitank gun in the MLR, and three more rounds knocked [the tank] out. On the last round the breech block failed to close....A minute later a third tank appeared from the right, spattering machine-gun bullets at the antitank gun. The gun crew dived for its foxholes except for Corporal Warner, who remained at the gun. The enemy tank swung left and came head on in an attempt to overrun the emplacement. When about ten feet away the German tank commander stopped his tank and stuck his head and shoulders out of the turret.... Warner, still trying to free the breech block, drew his pistol, fired at the head of the tank commander and quickly ducked into his gun pit. Expecting to be run over and crushed any minute, Warner crouched in the bottom of the narrow pit....He heard the tank gun its motor as it started to move toward him, slowly clanking its track. As it was about to hit the gun, the tank reversed itself and began to move back toward its own lines. Stealing a quick look, Warner could see...its commander

slumped out of the hatch, evidently killed by Warner's .45. (Rivette, *Hot Corner at Dom Bütgenbach)*

What the preceding passage reveals, in addition to Warner's courage, is the balky nature of his antitank gun. The fact that Warner defeated a German tank with his sidearm rather than the weapon designed for that purpose is illustrative of the problems American infantry experienced in dealing with the enemy's armored fighting vehicles. Throughout the war, German guns and German armor put American infantrymen at a distinct disadvantage. The U.S. Army history of the Battle of the Bulge records that:

> The infantry antitank weapons employed in the defense of Krinkelt-Rocherath varied considerably in effectiveness. The 57-mm... guns—and their crews—simply were tank fodder. The mobility of this towed piece which had been a feature of this gun on design boards and in proving ground tests, failed in the mud of forward positions....At the close of this operation both the 2d and the 99th Divisions recommended the abolition of the 57-mm as an infantry antitank gun....
>
> Cpl. Henry F. Warner...fought the German tanks [at Bütgenbach] for two days, often by himself, and destroyed three panzers, but finally was killed by a machine gun burst from one of the panzers he was stalking. Warner was awarded the Medal of Honor. (Cole, *The Ardennes*)

Fig. 2.32. A 26th Infantry 57mm antitank gun in action at Bütgenbach

It seems certain that Corporal Warner and his fellow Blue Spaders would have welcomed a more lethal weapon than the 57mm towed antitank gun, were one available. But, lacking such a weapon, they fought with what they had—which included just about everything they could shoot or throw at the Germans. The result was an important victory.

Major Donald E. Rivette states that of forty-seven German tanks destroyed in four days of combat, eleven should be credited to the 57mm gun—two kills by the 2nd Battalion's antitank platoon, and nine by the regiment's Antitank Company. He has a photograph of one German heavy tank, a PzKw VI Tiger, penetrated by sabot ammunition fired by Sergeant Irvin Schwartz at a range of about twenty yards and striking the tank's side at 60 degrees. (Rivette, letter of 1 April 1996). And so, in the final analysis, it was less the mobility, range, and striking power of U.S. weapons that decided the outcome of the battle for Bütgenbach, than the superior skill and resolve of the men using those weapons—men like "Red" Warner, Irvin Schwartz, and hundreds of other dedicated, well-trained soldiers wearing the Big Red One and the Blue Spade.

On the German side, the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend had not been well-led, being committed to a succession of attacks over a period of four days, not one of which threatened more than a portion of CT 26's position, thus leaving Colonel Seitz free to maneuver reinforcements and fires to counter its thrusts. Had Dietrich ordered the attack on Bütgenbach earlier than 22 December, before CT 18 arrived on the scene, and before he had frittered away his armor in repeated probes at Dom Bütgenbach, the outcome might have been quite different. Moreover, the performance of German infantry was as poor as it had been at the frontier: they proved unable to exploit penetrations of the American line made by their armor on three successive days, and to suppress American antitank guns

and artillery observation posts. Although it might be said that *Hitlerjugend* was only a shadow of the redoubtable division that had stymied the British in Normandy, it is also true that the 26th Infantry Regiment had been severely depleted at Stolberg, Aachen, and the Hürtgen Forest. American indirect fires more than offset the discrepancy between the combat power of the 12th SS Panzer Division and CT 26. Colonel Seitz's juggling of his tanks, tank destroyers, and antitank guns was masterly, the performance of the crews manning these weapons doggedly heroic. Moreover, the strength of the fortifications on CT 26's main line of resistance, and the fortitude of its riflemen and machine gunners in manning firing ports after

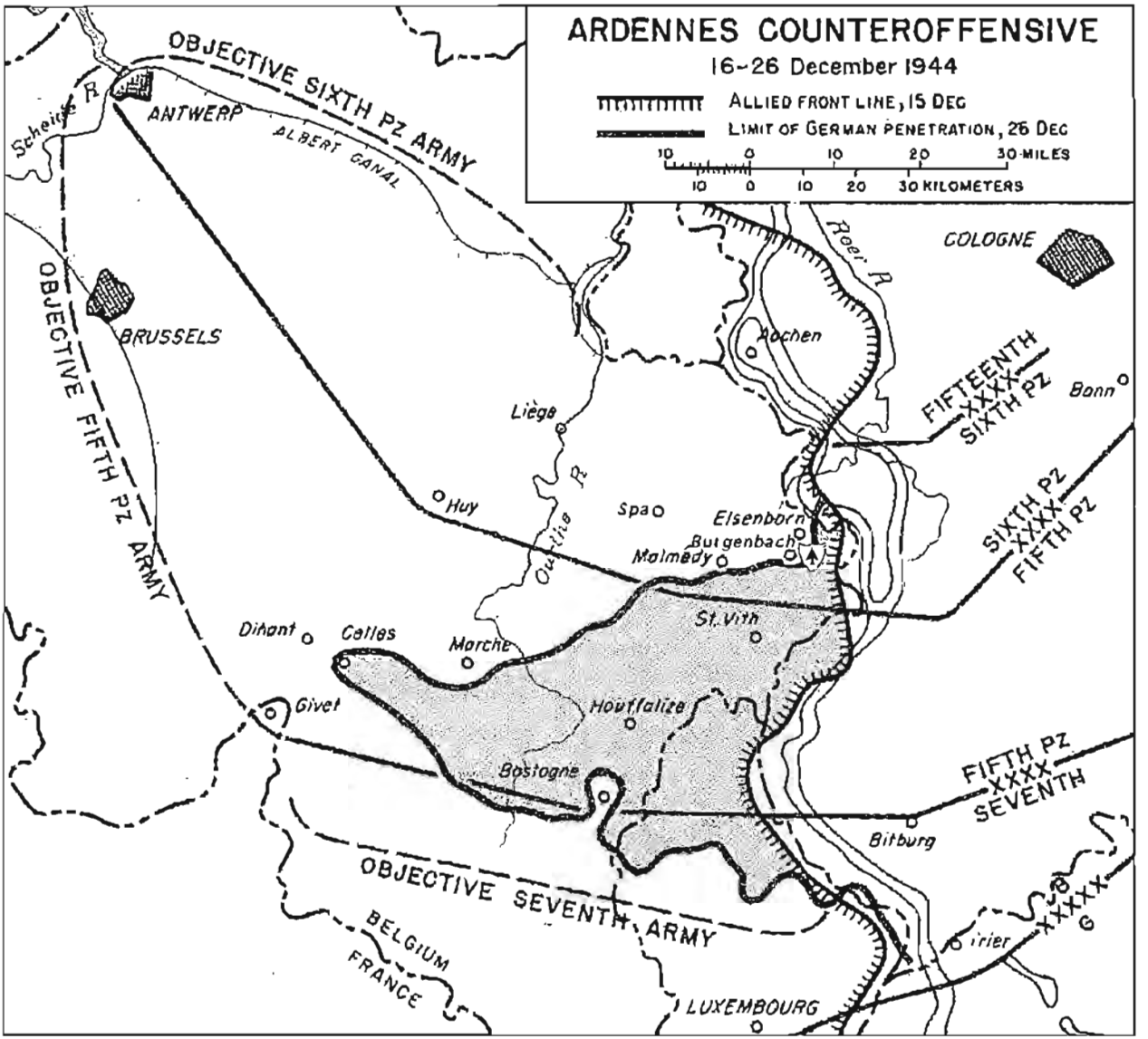


Fig. 2.33. Adapted from *The Ardennes*

being overrun by tanks, were also decisive in the battle's outcome. The Blue Spaders who dug those foxholes and defended them so tenaciously played a major role in turning back the 12th SS Panzer Division, disrupting Sepp Dietrich's plans, and frustrating Hitler's grand design.

Allied Counteroffensive: "Always Advancing, Always Gaining Ground"

On 24 December the German Ardennes offensive ran out of thrust, and on 26 December the Allied counteroffensive got underway. The U.S. Army history states that

> The American troops who had jammed the right shoulder of the Sixth SS Panzer Army knew they had made a fight of it. They could hardly know that they had knocked a part of Hitler's personal operations plan into a cocked hat. The elite SS panzer formations on which the Führer so relied would continue to play a major role in the Ardennes counteroffensive but no longer could be charged with the main effort: that had passed on 20 December to Manteuffel, and the Fifth Panzer Army. And if, as Manteuffel later suggested, the Führer wanted to see an SS and regular panzer army competing, it could be said that he had his answer. (Cole, *The Ardennes*)

Iris Carpenter reported that General Eisenhower had been very concerned that the north shoulder of the Bulge might collapse, but General Bradley had reassured him: "The Germans cain't [*sic*] break through. I've got the 1st Division there." Actually, American forces on the north shoulder during the Battle of Bütgenbach were under the command of Field Marshal Montgomery. The latter was as confident of the Blue Spaders as Bradley; in fact, Montgomery left them defending Bütgenbach for over a month while he applied pressure elsewhere, certain that he had, in the 26th CT, an unyielding anvil on which to hammer the enemy.

On 23 December the 1st Division had detected armor moving on the German side of the line. In addition, horse-drawn equipment was observed in Büllingen, indicating the arrival of an infantry division. The Germans launched small probes, but as these were not pressed, they were interpreted as cover for replacement of the battered SS armor units. By 28 December the 26th CT had confirmed that it was now facing the 3rd Parachute Division and the 12th Infantry Division—its old adversary at Stolberg, Aachen, and the Hürtgen Forest.

With the turn of the year, the weather grew steadily colder, the snow cover deepened, and strong winds often blew. For the first three weeks of January, activity on both sides in the Bütgenbach vicinity consisted of artillery attacks and patrolling. On 10 January Lieutenant Colonel Corley left for furlough in the United States and Lieutenant Colonel Murdoch took command of the 3rd Battalion.

On 15 January the 1st Division commenced an offensive that swung forward like a gate, with the 26th Infantry serving as the hinge on which 16th and 18th Regiments turned. The latter pushed the Germans south and east out of Faymonville and Schoppen; then, on 24 January, the 26th pivoted abreast of the division advance and the 1st Battalion captured the German position at the Morscheck crossroads south of Dom Bütgenbach. Rocco Moretto describes the activities of his unit during that period:

> The [crossroads] area was heavily defended by self-propelled guns, tanks, artillery, and mortars, and an oversized company of German infantry....
>
> Company C was relieved and taken out of the defensive line at Dom Bütgenbach on January 22 and moved back to Bütgenbach, where we could get a good night's rest, receive equipment such as shoe packs, camouflage snow suits, and a half-pound of dynamite for each man to be used for breaking up the frozen ground so that the men could more easily dig their foxholes in the shortest

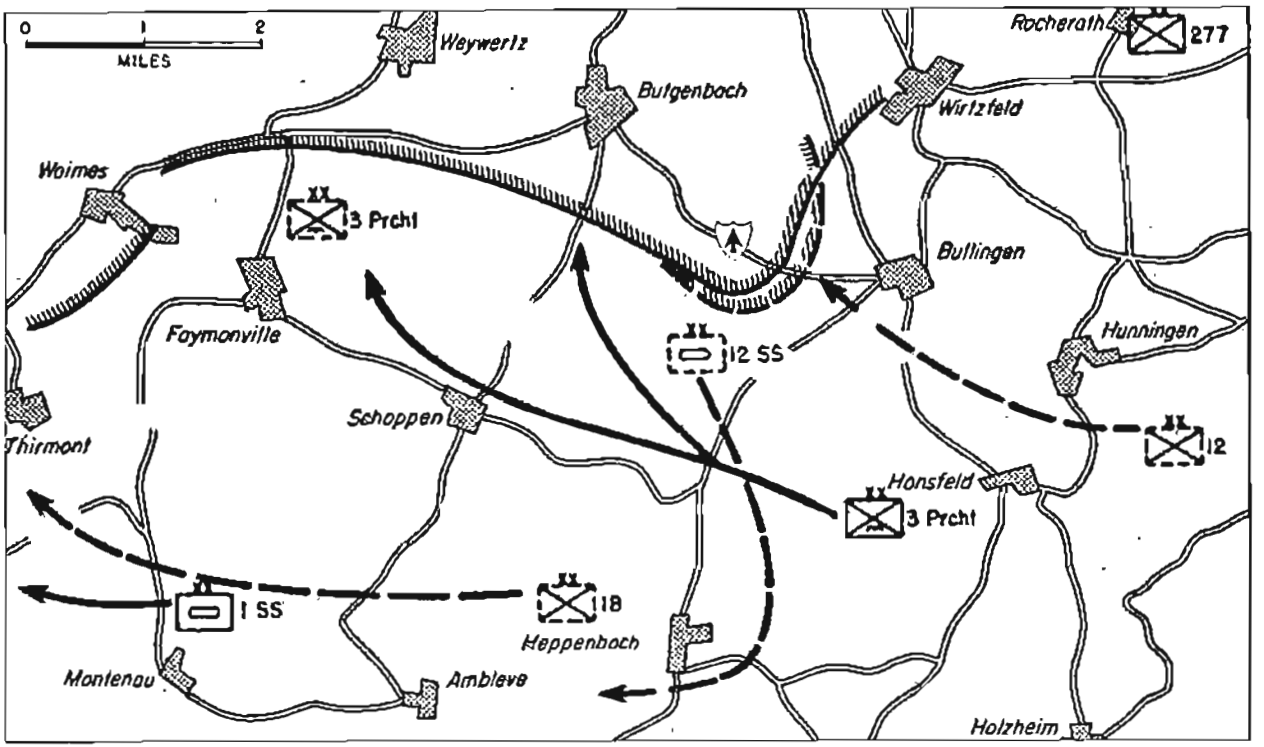


Fig. 2.34. Bütgenbach vicinity, situation in late December 1944. Adapted from *Danger Forward.*

possible time after securing their objective....

Captain Donald Lister, Company "C" commander, immediately organized a patrol for the night of January 22 which consisted of 16 men and one officer. A radio operator carrying a SCR set was also included....The patrol went out at 2200 hours and returned with the following information.

The snow in some places was four feet deep. The enemy had a series of dugouts which were probably used as strong points....There were footprints in the snow.... Antitank mines were observed...[and the] road would not be passable for vehicles until cleared of mines....

Armed with the above information, Captain Lister laid out his plan....The Company was to be awakened at 0100 and receive a hot meal and last minute instructions.... At 0300 we started out in what was the coldest weather that I'd ever experienced in my whole lifetime. It was so cold that the snowsuits were frozen stiff and crackled as you moved....The snowsuits blended in perfectly with the snow as they moved down the road, and no opposition was met till the 1st platoon swung to the east. At that point they were met with fire from two machine guns and about a squad of riflemen. We very quickly gained fire superiority, killing four of the enemy and six were taken prisoner....

The 2nd platoon, in the meantime, ran into enemy [troops] around the house and, after a brief fire fight, two were killed and five more were captured.

Additional Germans were caught in their dugouts [and] surrendered without firing a shot. As a matter of fact...the dugouts [were] heated with cans of sterno and [the Germans] had even taken their boots off for more comfort. They prob-

Fig. 2.35. A Blue Spader attacking south of Dom Bütgenbach, 24 January 1945

> ably never expected an attack under such horribly cold conditions. It was a textbook attack. (Moretto, *Memorable Experience)*

The 3rd Battalion moved beyond 1st Battalion to take another complex of dugouts, which turned out to be former American artillery positions. The Germans pounded the 1st Battalion with artillery, and at 1600 counterattacked in battalion strength. Division artillery and the 3rd Battalion's mortars intercepted these troops in the open and forced them to retire. (While there is no record indicating what ordnance was used, the variable time fuse—the radar-triggered detonator—was then in use by U.S. artillery for the first time, in effect subjecting troops in the open to all the vulnerabilities of troops being shelled under trees.)

On 29 January the 3rd Battalion attacked at 0200 to seize Büllingen. It was a clear, moonlit night, very cold and windy, with blowing snow. The anonymous writer of Company K's journal entry for that day described the ensuing action:

> The Germans opened up on us. The moon was very bright and even though we wore the camouflage capes and followed the hedgerows the enemy must have seen our shadows moving....Most of [our] weapons were frozen solid, however almost every person carried a pistol either G. I. or foreign [and] those are the weapons the 1st Platoon used to drive a wedge into the enemy positions....
>
> We found a lot of abandoned G.I. equipment that had 2d Division markings on them...G.I. LMG [light machine gun] A1 and A6 guns all oiled and fully loaded. Apparently the enemy figured on using them, however they did not use them very much. During the night bulldozers came up and cleaned out the mines....No one slept because they expected a counterattack which never came. (*History of Company K, 26th Infantry,* First Division Museum at Cantigny)

The 3rd Battalion took 212 prisoners in its assault on Büllingen. In his account of the action, Leroy Stewart described the method for defending himself against the weather, an enemy that was proving to be almost as formidable as the Germans:

> In the attack on Büllingen there were 22 German machine guns in one quarter mile of hedgerow...the Germans said that they didn't think anyone could attack in that weather....
>
> By any means I could I had gotten some winter clothes to wear....First I had a pair of wool long johns and two GI sweat shirts, next OD shirts and pants and a wool sweater Mom had made and sent to me. Over the OD pants I had a pair of wind and almost waterproof pants that we had been issued....I had on a field jacket and wool overcoat. I had a wool scarf around my neck that I could pull up over my face. I still had the sheep lined helmet to wear under my steel helmet. We had...wool knit mittens with a trigger finger in them. Over these we had a pair of leather mittens...They were warm but [we] couldn't do much with them on....With all the clothes I had on and the deep snow, there wasn't any way I could move very fast. All the other men that were on the line very long had different

clothes on trying to keep warm. (Stewart, *Hurry Up and Wait*)

Figure 2.37 shows the position of the front line on successive dates as the division moved back into Germany and through the Siegfried Line. "Most of the attacks," said Clift Andrus, "were at night and the blizzards, rains, fogs, mud, ice, sleet and enemy resistance did not let up as the division, with the 16th in reserve, fought ahead relentlessly" (Andrus, *Memorial Album*). The division was always advancing, always gaining ground, never losing it—a source of pride for Leroy Stewart, considering "all the attacks we were under and the weather we lived thru [*sic*]." Especially the weather:

> Every time I think of the Bulge, the thing I think of most is the weather we lived in. There wasn't any way to describe what the men in the [infantry] went thru that fought in the winter campaign. From Büllingen there was only one way to go and that was into Germany. Between us and Germany was the Siegfried Line that we would have to go thru again. (Stewart, *Hurry Up and Wait*)

Bert Morphis, a soldier in Company B, 26th Infantry, provided this remembrance of the counteroffensive to eliminate the Ardennes salient:

> We started pushing the Bulge back slowly. We would move forward a short distance and dig in, advance again and dig in, and so on, sometimes three or four times a day, if memory serves. It was bitterly cold, and the ground was covered with two to three feet of snow. So we carried quarter pound blocks of TNT with detonators to loosen the frozen crust. With a pickax we would dig a small hole to accommodate the TNT, set it off then proceed to dig our foxhole. For this purpose we carried full size picks and shovels to expedite the frequent digging in. Moreover, since we were fighting in dense forests, we carried axes and crosscut saws. An open foxhole provided little protection from "tree bursts" from artillery shelling. Frequently we would no sooner finish a shelter that we would move and leave it. I don't recall ever being so tired....I think everyone's most vivid memories are of the numbing cold. Mine certainly are! (Bert H. Morphis, World War II Veterans Survey, U.S. Military History Institute)

Fig. 2.36. Bringing in German prisoners at pistol point, Büllingen, 29 January 1945

In February the weather grew warmer, resulting in rain and melting snow. But the rise in temperatures, instead of easing the infantryman's lot, only created more problems for him. Leroy Stewart remembered that

> Our holes would fill up with water. I would try to dig my holes so they sloped to the foot so the water would drain that way. I would dig a deeper spot at the front to catch the water so I could dip it out. The water would melt out of the sides and top and drop all over me. It was ice water and we would about freeze. After I got a hole dug, I would try to find pine branches or anything to lay on the bottom of my holes to keep me up out of the mud and water. When we had been on the hill [in Bütgenbach] freezing, all we could think of was warmer weather and now here it was and we weren't much better off....We got ready for the attack on the Siegfried Line....I have never been

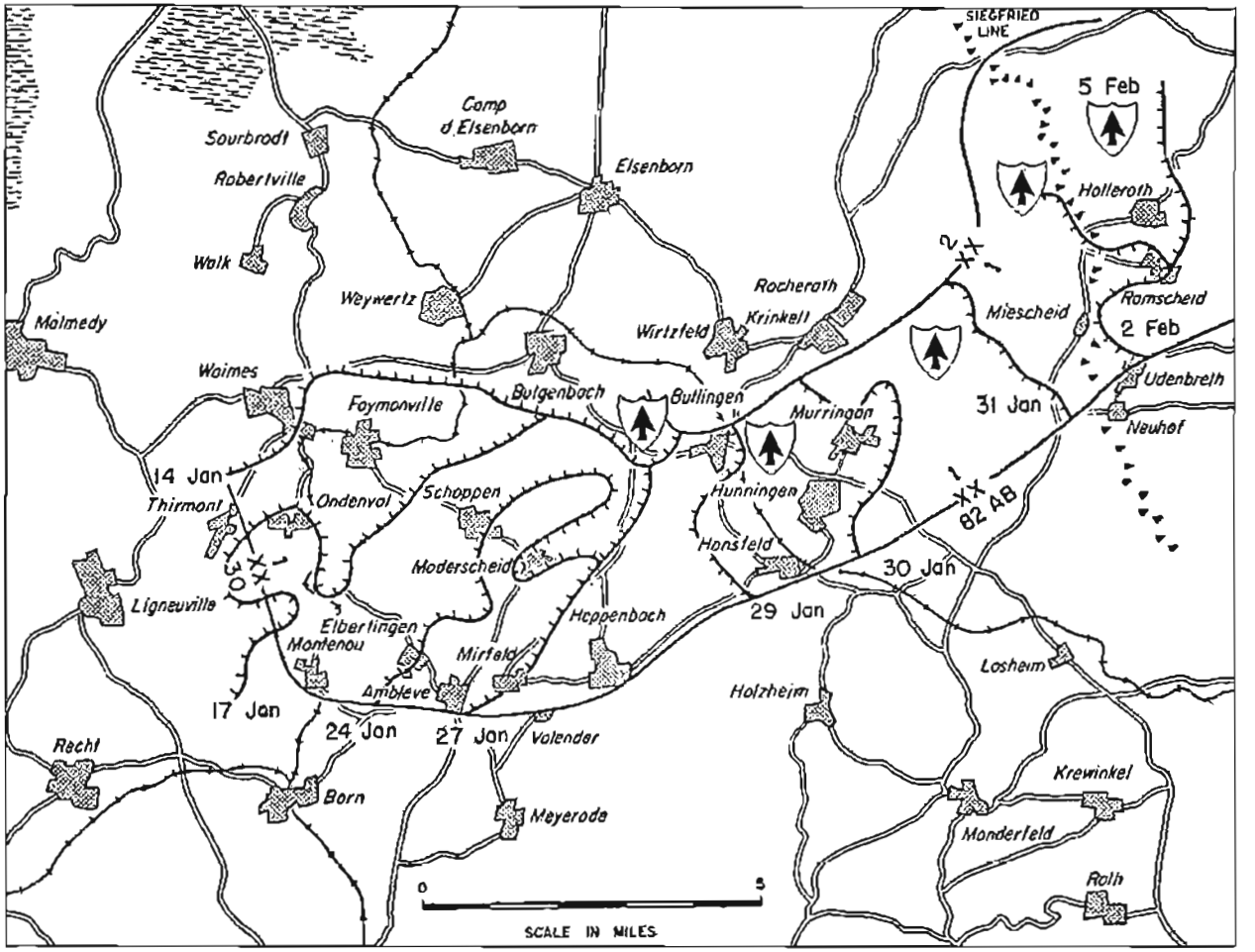


Fig. 2.37. 26th CT movements, January–February 1945. Adapted from *Danger Forward*.

able to understand it but we got thru the whole thing without any fight at all. The Germans pulled out....We moved into the town of Hollerath...on the edge of the [Siegfried] line. (Stewart, *Hurry Up and Wait*)

To War's End: "The Fightingest, Most Aggressive Outfit"

In February the 1st Division was moved north through the Aachen-Stolberg corridor to assume a position along the Roer River, south of Düren. The river, swollen by melting snow and ceaseless rain, was at flood stage, and mud hampered operations. Crossing was not possible until the end of the month. Clift Andrus summarizes the division's activity in that period:

> From the 6th to the 24th of February preparations were made to cross the Roer and start the drive across the Cologne Plain to the Rhine. Command changed to III Corps which planned to attack with the [1st] division on the left. On 23 February the great Allied offensive started way to the north and as far as VII Corps on our left. The division was assigned the mission of protecting the right of VII Corps and attacking in its zone of

> operations....Rather than make a costly frontal assault across the river in the face of strong positions, a clever scheme was adopted that ensured success and saved many lives. The 16th Infantry, strongly reinforced, used VII Corps bridges, and then swept up the east bank of the river. The 18th used bridges put in behind the 16th, the 26th crossed in the 18th zone and the 9th Division, on the right, started its crossings on bridges behind the 26th. This resulted in a peculiar attack formation in column of battalions echeloned to the right rear. At times the front covered 20,000 yards and the great gaps between infantry battalions were covered by artillery....Resistance stiffened as progress was made towards the Rhine. The open country favored night attacks, and most of the fighting was of that type....The capture of the Remagen bridgehead changed the situation abruptly. The 9th Division was sent across the Rhine and the 1st took over its mission of capturing Bonn. (Andrus, *Memorial Album*)

On 15 March the 26th CT crossed the Rhine in LCVPs; on the following day, it attacked north to enlarge the Remagen Bridgehead. Of course, this was not the first time the 26th Infantry Regiment had crossed that river: it had previously done so in December 1918, at Koblenz. Moreover, in 1919, as part of the Allied forces occupying Germany, it had established its headquarters at Montabaur—only thirty kilometers south of its zone of operations in March 1945.

Enemy resistance was surprisingly determined, but steady progress was made. The division advanced into the Westerwald, then swung eastward toward the Rothaar Mountains. "The division now entered into one of the most grueling experiences in its battle-starred career," wrote Clift Andrus:

> Starting on a small one battalion front it expanded its share of the beachhead until, as at Aachen, every man was on the front line...it was bitter fighting. The determined enemy fired up to 10,000 shells a day into our area and his infantry had to be exterminated as the slow and inexorable advance continued.
>
> The climax came on 24-25 March. The division attacked at 2000 on the 24th and ran head-on into a supreme German effort scheduled to jump off at 0800 the next morning. The force consisted of five divisions, a strong nebelwerfer [rocket-launcher] brigade, and with Panzer Lehr in reserve. It was Hitler's all out effort to push the Americans back across the Rhine. It was touch and go all day but by 0400 on the 26th a hole had been punched through for the 3d Armored Division and the 26th Infantry was assembled for the break-through. (Andrus, *Memorial Album*)

Leroy Stewart recalled that the fighting was "very hard" and the going slow before they broke out:

> We lost a lot of men and equipment. [But] the push never stopped. After we took a town, another Reg't. would push thru us and keep the attack going.
>
> The idea was never to give the Jerrys time to rest and regroup. The Germans used the nights to bring up men and supplies because anything on the roads in the day light got [a] going over by our air force. The plan did keep the Germans from getting any rest but we didn't get much either. We could get a town about clean and get some rations and ammo up to us and get ready to rest and we would move out. Sometimes we would walk. Other times we would ride on tanks, half-tracks, trucks, etc. About like we did in going across France. (Stewart, *Hurry Up and Wait*)

The 3rd Armored Division was ordered to take the lead with the 26th CT following behind the armor to eliminate pockets of resistance and to gather up prisoners. "We kept moving northeast," Stewart recalled; "some of our moves were very long. Almost 100 miles without a stop. Most of the long rides were on trucks. It wore us out just riding that long at a time."

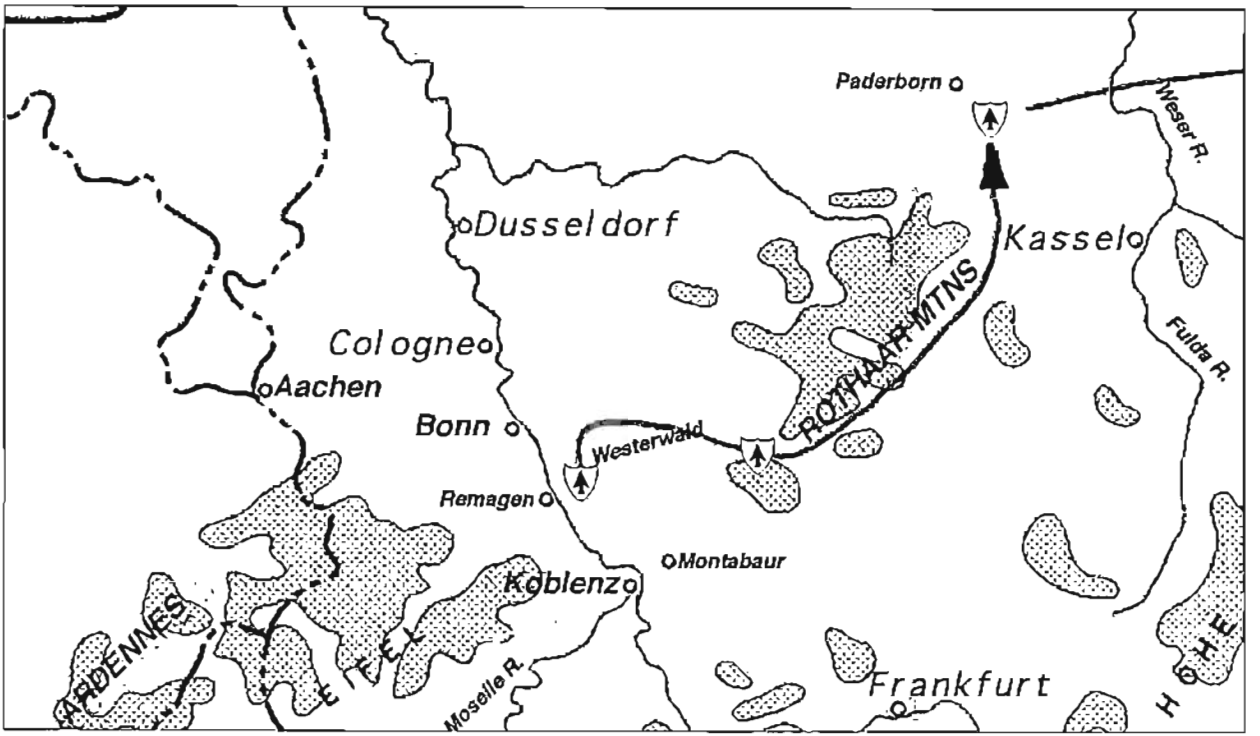


Fig. 2.38. 26th CT movements, March-May 1945

By this time, herding refugees and "displaced persons" had become a major distraction:

> As we got deeper into Germany we ran into a lot of displaced people from other countries that Hitler had taken over. They didn't have very good clothes and hadn't been eating too good. As we would take a town and find these D.P.s as we called them...the first thing we did was get them food and fix them up with something to wear. If we could find something in the German homes for them we gave it to them. (Stewart, *Hurry Up and Wait*)

The 3rd Armored Division passed rapidly up the eastern side of the Rothaar Mountains to Paderborn. On 1 April the 3rd Armored positioned the Blue Spaders as a blocking force on the southeast side of a German formation surrounded near Sennelager, the SS panzer training area at Paderborn. (The encirclement was known as the Rose Pocket after Major General Maurice Rose, commander of the 3rd Armored, who was killed in action on 30 March near Paderborn.) Simultaneously, other U.S. divisions, including elements of the 3rd Armored, had ringed the remnants of Model's Army Group B in what was called the Ruhr Pocket. Model subsequently disbanded his command and committed suicide. On 18 April resistance in the Ruhr Pocket ended and over 317,000 Germans marched into captivity in what was one of the largest mass surrenders of the war. The Rose Pocket collapsed at about the same time.

Then another menace developed: the German Eleventh Army, a force assembled originally to break through to Model, but now supposedly fortifying a redoubt from which guerrilla-type gangs, termed "werewolves," were to prey on Allied units. The 1st Division reoriented toward the east and the Harz Mountain redoubt.

On 7 April, as the fight through the Harz

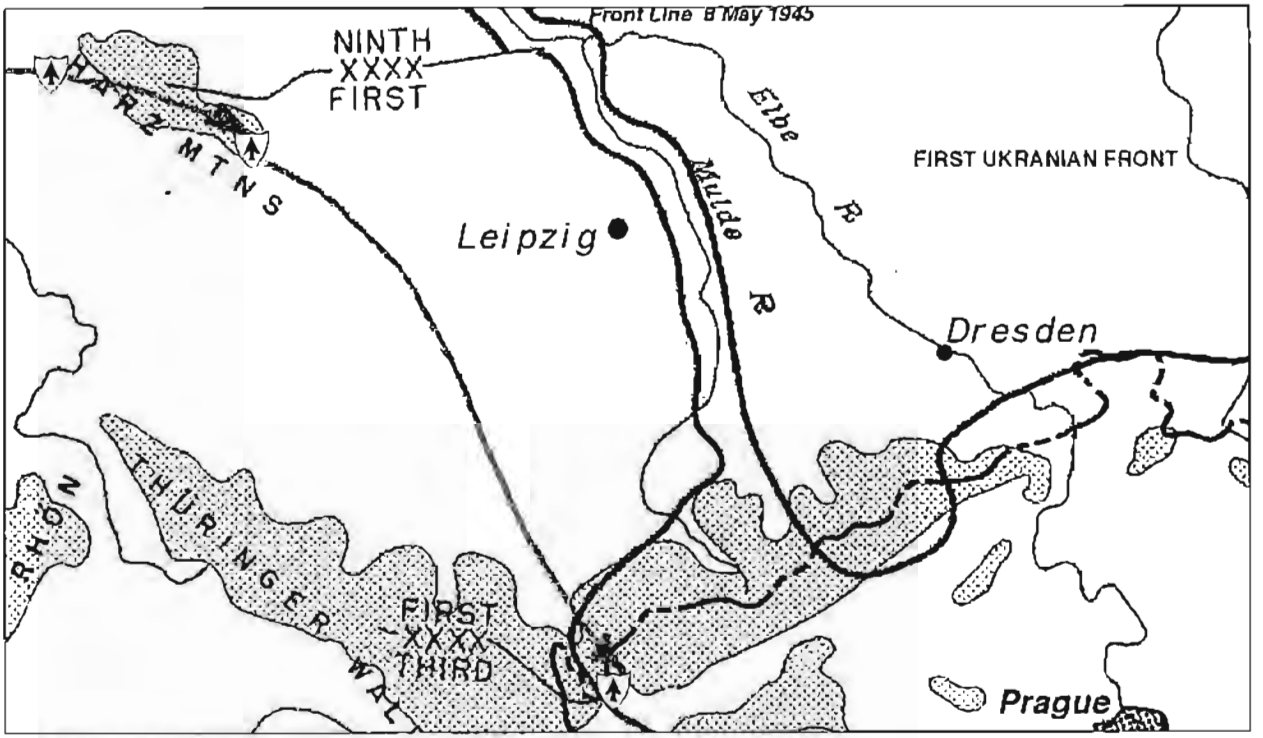


Fig. 2.38. 26th CT movements, March-May 1945

Mountains was about to get underway, Colonel Seitz turned over command of the 26th Infantry to Lieutenant Colonel Frank Murdoch. Clift Andrus describes the next phase of the 1st Division's advance:

> From Paderborn began the final march into Germany....The initial plan showed open country in the Division zone of advance south of the Harz Mountains, but, as on the Cologne Plain, directions changed, and the 1st ran smack into the rugged mountains and somewhere near 200,000 Germans liberally supplied with tanks and SP artillery. It was during this little-known battle that our MP platoon displayed our 100,000th prisoner....Enemy resistance steadily increased and the fighting was difficult and costly. In fact many of the infantrymen claim that it was the equal of Hürtgen. Eventually, other divisions joined the fight, and the enemy collapsed. (Andrus, *Memorial Album*)

Frank Murdoch remembers the battles in the Harz Mountains as infantry-versus-armor combat:

> We were supposed to attack along winding roads between steep wooded hills "mopping-up" behind the 14th Cavalry. Well, after they had lost the first several tanks to hidden Panzers, antitank guns and Panzerfausts, they decided that the 26th could go first. And that worked. We sent out tank hunting teams equipped with bazookas, and leapfrogged infantry companies, but it was slow work.
>
> One day a colonel from corps showed up and wanted to know why the operation was being paced by infantry, and why all my battalions weren't engaged. He told me that his commander expected this to be an all out attack with all three of my battalions and all of the 14th Cavalry fully committed all the time. Fortunately I had already discussed my plans with my division commander,

Fig. 2.39. Three commanders of the 26th Infantry Regiment (left to right): Lieutenant Colonel Francis J. Murdoch (7 April-24 September 1945), Lieutenant Colonel Edwin "Van" Sutherland (8 October 1945-31 January 1946), Colonel John F. R. Seitz (28 December 1943-7 April 1945; 15 July 1950-16 October 1951).

so I was able politely to tell him that I was doing what my commander wanted, and that he should understand that with only one or two roads available, we couldn't get more forces to bear no matter what corps wanted. There was further higher level fuss about all that, but the division commander told me later that we were entirely in the right.

There were some tough times in the Harz Mountains. I usually traveled with an RTO [radioman], my S-2, and—on the advice of John Corley—a bodyguard. I still had the soldier who had been with John. He was an outstanding youngster. During the attack on Büllingen when the Germans opened up on us as we approached their positions, he dropped to one knee and got off five aimed shots with his M-1 before I even hit the ground. In the Harz Mountains he was hit by artillery and wounded in that last month of the war.

Colonel John McDonald of the 14th Cavalry had my Company C attached to him most of the time during that operation. He thought the world of Captain Lister and his men. He told me they were the fightingest, most aggressive outfit he had ever seen. He found Lister amazingly attentive to details that made a tactical difference, like check-firing weapons at the start of an operation.

There's a lesson there. Don Lister had been a private in the 26th, a BAR man [automatic rifleman] with natural leadership ability, and he eventually became a platoon sergeant. There were a lot of officer casualties, so Lister was promoted to 2d Lieutenant. He eventually became my Communications Officer in the 1st Battalion, and, as you know, he took Captain Ferry's place after Stolberg, and led that company very ably through the rest of the war.

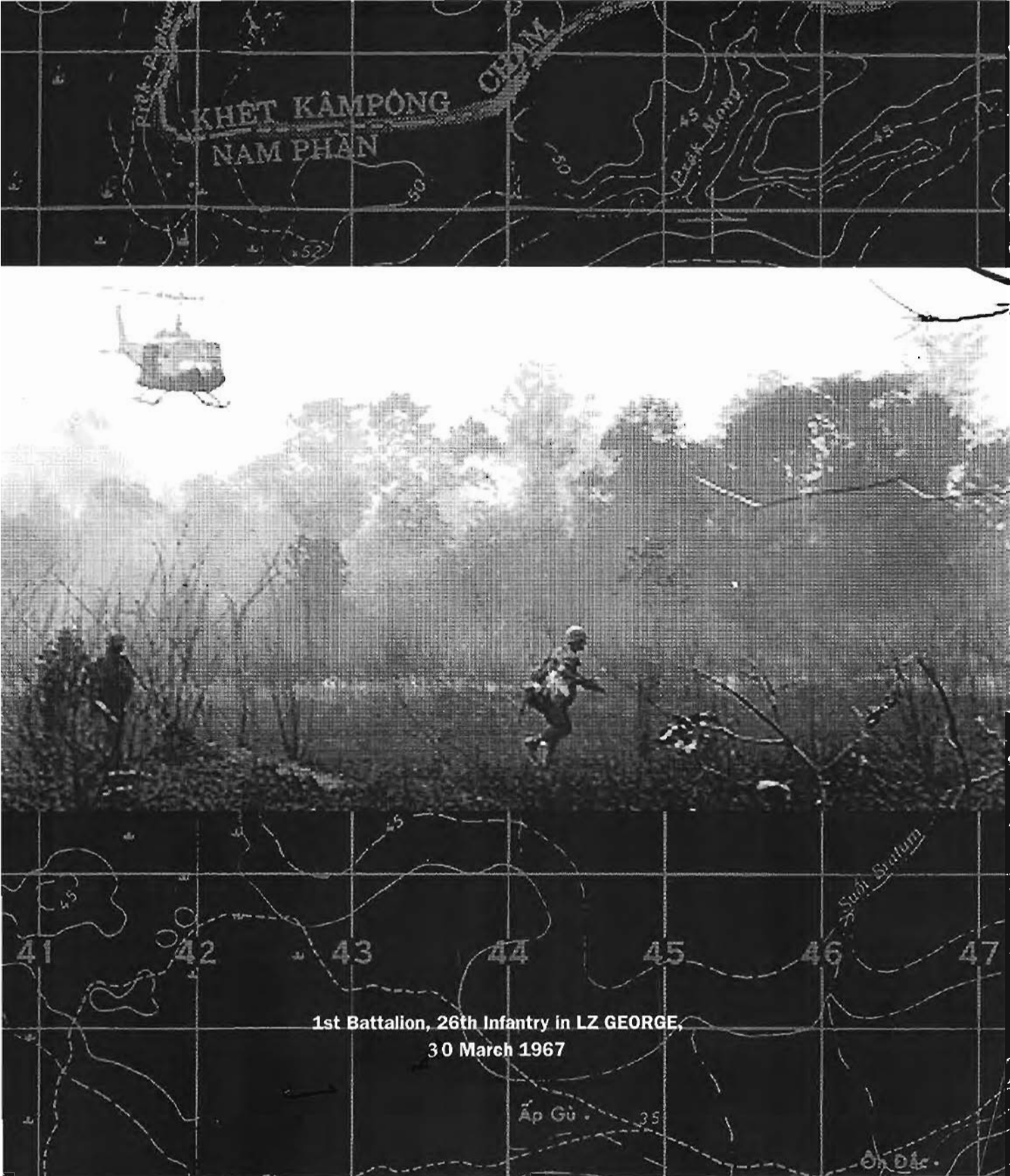
I strongly suspect that a lot of the strength of the 1st Division was in its high proportion of officers—more than half in the line companies—who had come up through the ranks. (Murdoch, interview)

When the fighting died down, the 1st Division was led to believe that it would rest in place for a while. However, new orders soon arrived directing it to relieve a division on the Czech border. That necessitated a long journey by truck—over one hundred miles—on 27 April to the vicinity of the Cheb Gap. On 29 April the 26th Infantry commenced combat oper-

ations in Czechoslovakia. Hostilities ceased in Europe on 9 May 1945. Forward elements of the 26th Infantry were then operating in the vicinity of Kraslice, Czechoslovakia. Clift Andrus recalled the denouement of the 1st Division's war in Europe:

> This affair was on a very wide front and was spotty in intensity. But it was also the last place that the Germans were putting up a fight. When the order came to stop the advance, Division CP was in Cheb, Czechoslovakia....Combat training ceased until June of 1946....
>
> At 0500 on a May morning less than one week after VE Day...nearly 600 high-point veterans assembled to start their return home and civilian life. Many had been in every operation from Oran to Cheb. They had earned the respect and admiration of the Army and the Nation. Several of all grades had come to me with their common problem. Should they go home or stay with the division until the end [of the war in the Pacific]?
>
> The answer was plain. By all means go home as a reward for a dangerous and difficult duty performed in a superior manner. The standards they had maintained and which were established by those who had worn the Red 1 before them would be jealously guarded by those who would follow.
>
> The 1st Division has a soul which will live on though the individuals in it continually change. (Andrus, *Memorial Album*)

Fig. 2.40. T/Sgt. Theodore L. Dobol, Color Guard, 26th Infantry, VE Day, Czechoslovakia, 1945



1st Battalion, 26th Infantry in LZ GEORGE,
30 March 1967

Resourceful Daring: Dobol, 1966-1967

To Vietnam: "As Green as the Jungle Around Us"

When the 1st Division departed for Vietnam in 1965, it left behind Command Sergeant Major Theodore L. Dobol, a soldier who had been in the Big Red One for over a quarter-century. Dobol had enlisted in the 26th Infantry in 1940 and served with distinction in that unit through its training for deployment overseas, and in its campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, France, Belgium, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. Along the way he had earned, among other awards and decorations, four Silver Stars, five Purple Hearts, and eight battle stars on his campaign medal. After the war, while the 26th Infantry first performed occupation duties in Germany and was then involved in the early stages of building NATO's defenses, Sergeant Dobol rose to become the regiment's sergeant major. In that capacity he brought the unit home to Fort Riley, Kansas, in 1955. On 1 April 1959 he was chosen as the first to be promoted to the newly created rank of Command Sergeant Major (CSM). When the 1st Division was reorganized in 1963, only the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry remained assigned, as a mechanized infantry battalion. When the 1st Division received orders to deploy to Southeast Asia, the Blue Spaders turned in their armor, and Command Sergeant Major Dobol was restationed to the Third Regiment, U.S. Corps of Cadets, U.S. Military Academy.

Command Sergeant Major Dobol was well known throughout the United States Army of that era. He had trained some of the 1st Division's greatest noncommissioned officers, including William O. Woolridge (1st Division CSM, August 1965-October 1965, then appointed the first Command Sergeant Major of the Army); Walter C. Cannon (1st Division CSM, November 1966-October 1967); and Joseph A. Venable (CSM, October 1967-September 1968, killed in action 13 September 1968 with 1st Division commander Major General Keith L. Ware). Amazingly, during World War II Woolridge, Cannon, and Venable had served together in the same squad of the 1/26th's Company K—with Dobol as their squad leader.

The 26th Infantry did not forget Command Sergeant Major Dobol. As had been the practice during World War II, each unit of the 1st Division had a call sign beginning with the letter "D." Thus, division headquarters was "Danger," 1st Brigade was "Devil," 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry was "Defiant," and 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry was "Dracula." The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry elected to be known as "Dobol"—an unprecedented tribute to a man who had contributed so much to the battalion's history. In July 1966 Lieutenant Colonel Paul F. Gorman, then commanding the battalion—his call-sign on the division's radio networks was "Dobol 6"—wrote to the superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy requesting permission for Command Sergeant Major Dobol to visit the unit in Vietnam. In late July 1966 CSM Dobol traveled to Vietnam in the company of the Chief of Staff of the Army, rejoining his old unit on 30 July for several days.

Command Sergeant Major Dobol learned during his stay that the previous February the Blue Spaders had fought a battle consistent with their heritage, beating back a determined enemy assault at a settlement called Tan Binh. He was also briefed about

Operation LAM SON II, a May-June offensive by the 1/26th against the guerrilla infrastructure in the Phu Loi area. At Phuoc Vinh he participated in a 26th Infantry Organization Day held in his honor, and visited troops in the field during Operation CHEYENNE (2-5 August 1966), where he heard from the division commander, Major General William E. DePuy, how the Blue Spaders' patrols, defensive fires, and carefully prepared positions had forestalled a major Viet Cong attack. The CSM's visit did much to boost morale and unit pride among officers, sergeants, and riflemen alike, for it gave them the opportunity to cast their experiences in Vietnam as "war stories" for an intensely interested listener. Dobol also bade farewell to the first large group of Blue Spaders to be sent home at the end of their tour in Vietnam, and welcomed the first large group of replacements.

Fig. 3.1. CSM Dobol (right) at Camp Weber, Phuoc Vinh, RVN, August 1966

The Blue Spaders had sailed for Vietnam in September 1965, three months after lead elements of the Big Red One landed at Vung Tau near Saigon. The division's deployment to Vietnam was part of an effort to counteract widespread insecurity in that country, as described in the U.S. Army's *American Military History* (1969) by C. P. v. Luttichau and C. B. MacDonald:

> Beginning early in 1965, the Viet Cong, reinforced by North Vietnamese Army units, opened a series of savage assaults. Under attacks that destroyed on an average a battalion a week, the South Vietnamese began to crumble. Leadership failed. Desertions increased In the Delta and Central Highlands the Communists demonstrated their strength by seizing and temporarily holding some district and provincial capitals. A Communist push from the highlands to the sea to cut South Vietnam in half and isolate Saigon appeared in the offing. The morale of the people dropped sharply, and some observers gave the nation six months to live.
>
> Having reaffirmed U.S. commitment to South Vietnam upon taking office after the death of President Kennedy, President Johnson viewed these developments with grave concern. When in February 1965 the Viet Cong attacked a U.S. compound and helicopter base in the Central Highlands, the President ordered retaliatory air strikes against selected military targets in North Vietnam.... As the situation continued to deteriorate, the President concluded that only by introducing U.S. combat troops could Communist domination of the Republic of Vietnam be prevented. In response to a specific request from the South Vietnamese government, increased U.S. commitment began on March 6, 1965, as two battalions of U.S. Marines went ashore in the northern part of the country.

The marines were followed by the army's 173rd Airborne Brigade, then by the 1st Infantry Division in July. According to Luttichau and MacDonald,

> The U.S. combat troops arriving in South Vietnam moved at first to occupy and secure key positions and existing U.S. installations and begin preparing a logistical base for whatever additional troops might be needed later. Creating a logistical base was particularly difficult in a coun-

try where the only major port, Saigon, was already clogged with shipping, and where only Tan Son Nhut airport outside Saigon could handle jet traffic, where the only major railroad had ceased to function, and where use of roads was at best minimal. Ports, warehouses, cantonments, airfields, maintenance facilities, communications—all had to be built where there was at the beginning almost nothing....

The logistic system expanded swiftly ... An average of 850,000 short tons of supplies arrived each month. Troops consumed 10 million field rations per month, expended 80,000 tons of ammunition and 80 million gallons of petroleum products. Manning a highly sophisticated military machine, the individual American soldier in Vietnam received about 96 pounds of supply per day, more than twice the amount per man in the Pacific theaters of World War II....

The strategy adopted by the U.S. commander, General William C. Westmoreland...was [a] holding action combined with spoiling attacks to keep the enemy off balance and gain time needed to build base camps and logistical facilities. This accomplished, U.S. units with assistance from ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] were to engage in search and destroy operations designed to eliminate Communist main force units and their base areas rather than to seize and control ground permanently. The operations were to provide a shield behind which other ARVN forces could operate against the local guerrillas in support of the rural pacification program.

After landing at Vung Tau in October, the Blue Spaders staged through the air base at Bien Hoa, then moved to Phuoc Vinh, northeast of Saigon on the western edge of War Zone D ("war zone" was a Viet Cong term for the part of Vietnam they controlled). There the battalion constructed a cantonment that was later named for Sergeant Willis Weber, the first Blue Spader killed in action in Vietnam. "Camp Weber," situated in a clearing cut from jungle fringe, was an integral part of the complex established for the 1st Division's 1st Brigade. (On arrival, the division's first order of business had been to build its bases. The 1st Brigade's infantry battalions had each constructed its own fortified encampment, spending much time—several months, in fact—erecting bunkers, digging trenches, and chopping out fields of fire from the encroaching foliage.) Carl Bradfield, a grenadier in the 1/26th's Company B, arrived at Phuoc Vinh to find that

> everybody was busy hacking down elephant grass, which can grow as high as twelve feet and is so dense, one cannot see two feet in any direction ... there was only one tool used, to clear as much high grass away as possible before nightfall—the machete ... men chopped, hacked and sliced the tall elephant grass down...as the machetes worked hard and fast, the high grass and the jungle undergrowth began to form a clearing....

The Blue Spaders worked until sundown, when they occupied fighting positions that were only knee deep and a few meters from the wood line. "We could hardly see the foxholes on either side of us," recalled Bradfield;

> Nevertheless, work had to stop because "Charlie" (VCs) would be visiting us in the dark....Sergeant Lentz, Noah and I huddled together in that shallow fighting position, wide-eyed with fear all night long. Our teeth chattered, our knees actually banged together, and we shook with every movement we made. Our whispers caused our teeth to bang together, sometimes painfully. At times I tried to use my hands to hold my jaws shut.... Rifle shots could be heard in many directions throughout the darkness. Flares ... would light up

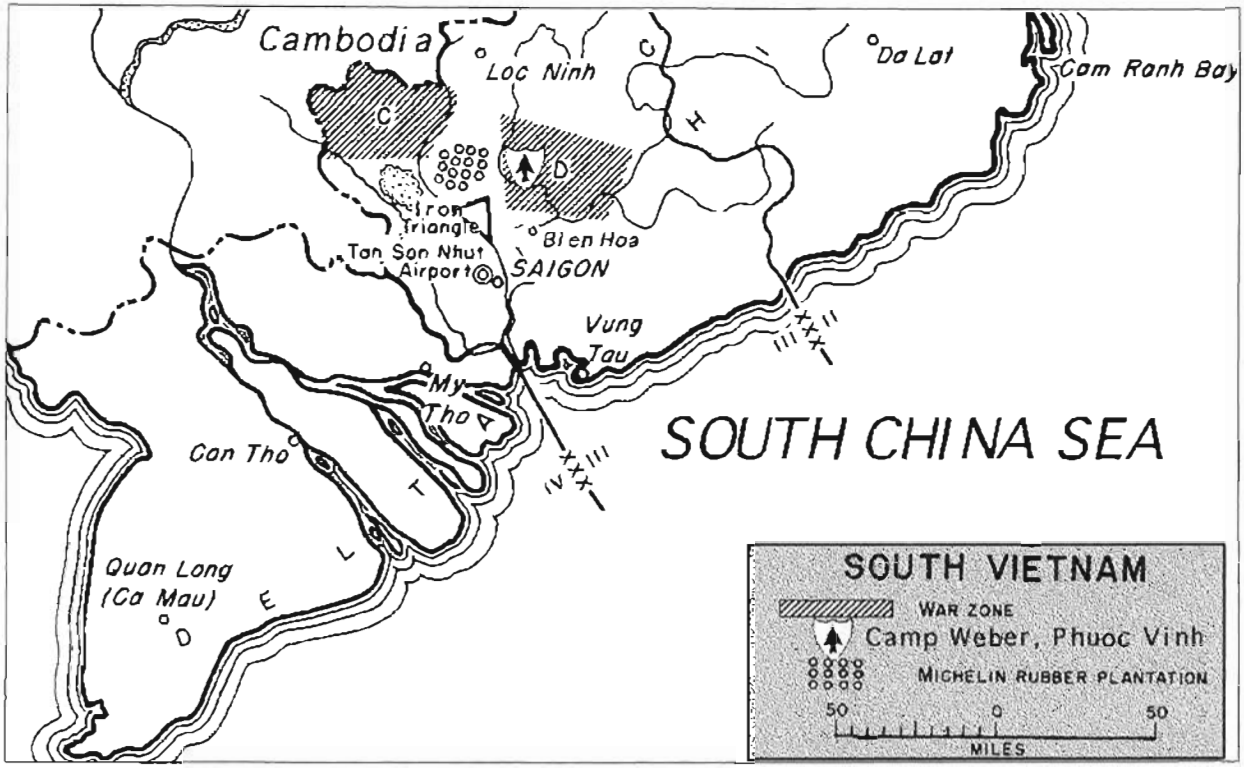


Fig. 3.2. War Zones C and D. Adapted from C. P. v. Luttichau and C. B. MacDonald, *American Military History*

> the darkness. Occasionally, on those first hot sticky nights, a burst of rifle or machine-gun fire came in our direction. We were a whole brigade of greenhorns, so it wasn't clear who was shooting at us. A burst of rounds came our way, and we sent a burst of rounds in reply. (Carl Bradfield, *The Blue Spaders in Vietnam* [1992])

According to Bradfield, Company B's positions faced those of the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, which were some two hundred yards distant and obscured by a patch of jungle. "I think we may have inflicted a casualty or two on the enemy by causing the Vietcong to laugh themselves to death," said Bradfield:

> One of Charlie's favorite tricks was to enter the foliage area that separated us, fire one shot at each battalion, then crawl out, leaving us to fight a skirmish with one another. That went on for several nights before we on the "line" made the correction. All of us were as green as the jungle around us.

Over time, tents were erected with cement floors and wooden frames, kitchens were established, and hot meals became routine. Showers and latrines were fabricated, and by November Company B's street was decoratively lined with spent shell casings from 105mm howitzers and identified by an ornate gateway with a painted sign. Still, Bradfield was painfully aware of his unit's amateurism:

> After we cleared the wood line back maybe one hundred meters, we continued to fortify our base camp. Bunkers, which eventually replaced foxholes, had to be built out of sandbags, logs and

PSP [pierced steel planking] metal plates used to build temporary airfields. I know I must have filled a couple of thousand sandbags. The bunker hole had to be dug deep enough to cover a man to chest level.... The many sandbags were laid, as a mason might lay bricks. It took a three-sandbag thickness to stop one incoming bullet. If anything bigger hit the bunker, like a mortar round or rocket, it would be almost no protection at all....

All of our units were sort of disorganized in our construction of the perimeter. Apparently no platoon in the battalion was watching the others as to how the defense line was materializing. When we finished building the bunkers, our line of defense looked like a waving flag—to our disadvantage. Our own bunker was on a corner of the whole 1st Brigade perimeter. When we completed it, it stuck out so far from the rest of the line, we feared being attacked from the rear as easily as from the front. So we nicknamed it the Alamo. We knew that if the enemy ever launched an attack on that bunker, we were dead. (Bradfield, *Blue Spaders in Vietnam*)

Fig. 3.3. Bunker "Alamo" on the Phuoc Vinh perimeter, destroyed by VC rockets in June 1966 (Photo by Carl Bradfield)

Tan Binh: "The First Big Battle"

Periodically, logistical imperatives required that the 1st Brigade deploy its infantry to open roads south of Phuoc Vinh linking its new base with the port and airfields near Saigon. One such road, "Route Orange," ran southwest to Phu Cuong, the provincial capital (see Fig. 3.4.). Safeguarded against enemy snipers and sappers by infantry patrols, military engineers refurbished the road's surface and drainage, and convoys of supplies and construction materials proceeded to Phuoc Vinh from supply depots in the Saigon-Bien Hoa vicinity. The brigade also from time to time opened a second road, "Route Red," which branched from Route Orange at the hamlet of Tan Binh to run southward directly toward Bien Hoa.

In early 1966 the 1st Brigade expanded operations into the jungles. In February the Blue Spaders were sent on a "search and destroy" mission beyond the Phuoc Vinh perimeter into War Zone D, and there captured large stores of rice—larger, the division claimed, than any to that point in the war. Toward the end of the month the brigade reopened Route Orange and ordered the Blue Spaders to move on foot to the hamlet of Tan Binh. Carl Bradfield remembered that place as two lines of "hooches" (grass-roofed huts) on either side of a narrow dirt road. On the night of 22-23 February the battalion dug in to defend the 1st Brigade command post located in the hamlet. The Blue Spaders' portion of the defenses faced northwest, overlooking rice fields and a stream at the edge of the Bong Trang (Trang Jungle). "Most hamlets or villages in Vietnam were surrounded by a small dirt-packed wall, about chest high," wrote Carl Bradfield;

> It was called a "berm," and it was Tan Binh's berm that we dug fighting positions in. Some twenty meters to the front of those foxholes was one of the dikes in their rice paddies, also good for fighting behind. We placed our concertina wire perimeter there. Before "Charlie" could reach that dike, then the berm—and our positions—he

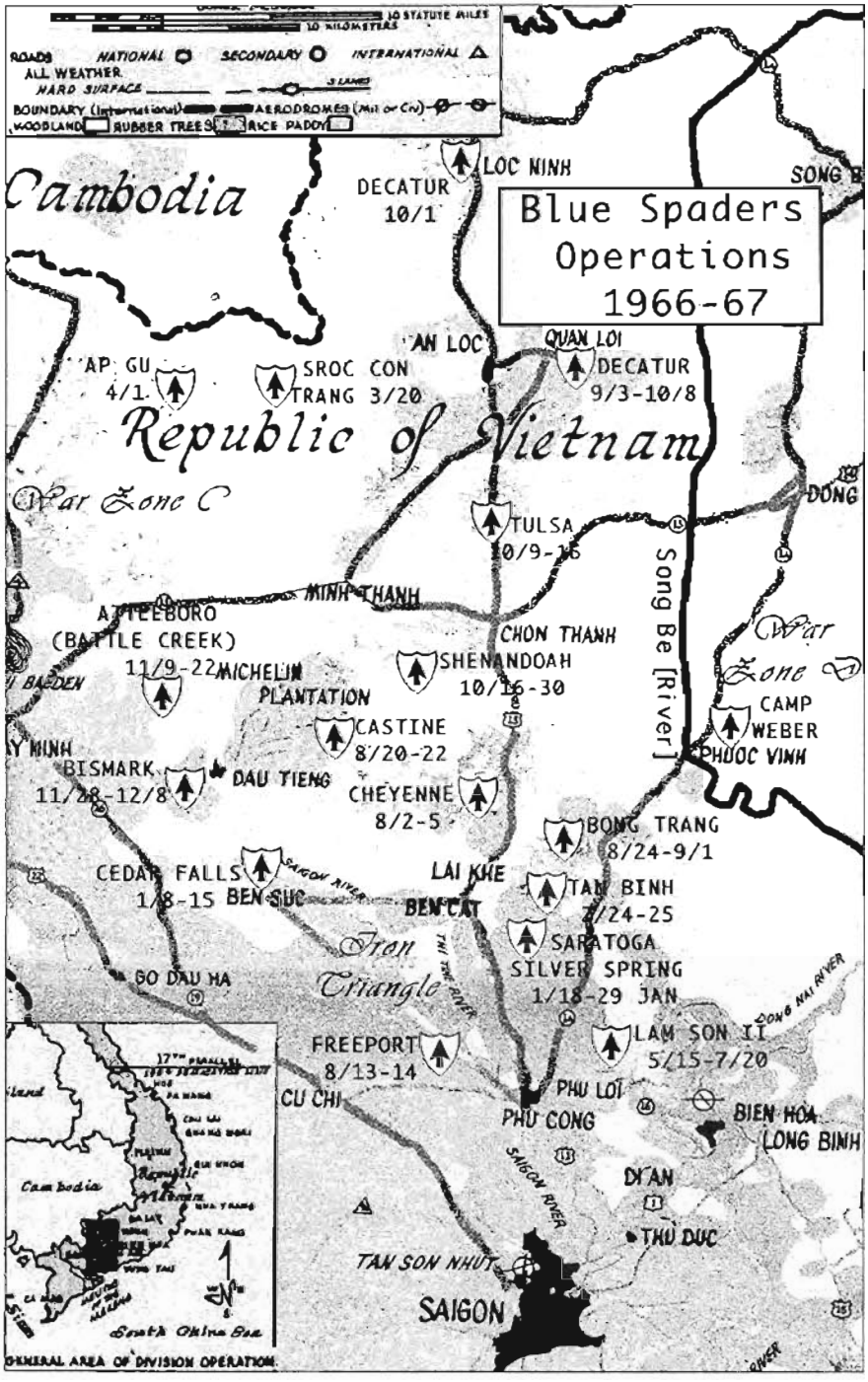


Fig. 3.4. Adapted from *First Infantry Division in Vietnam, July 1965-April 1967*, vol. 1 (1967)

had to penetrate the wire. But that didn't prove to be much of a challenge for him, because he used the dike for cover for the probing attack that took place. (Bradfield, *Blue Spaders in Vietnam*)

Bradfield remembered that a listening post (LP) detected VC probers approaching the division's perimeter after nightfall on 22 February. A whispered radio transmission from the men in the listening post informed battalion HQ that they were pulling back twenty-five meters, and word of their withdrawal was passed up and down the foxhole line. Somehow, though, the message changed in transit to "everybody pull back 25 meters," with the result that "half of the battalion climbed out of their foxholes and retreated to the rubber trees behind us." At this juncture the enemy threw grenades into the (then empty) front-line foxholes, and a white star cluster went up to signal that the enemy was inside the perimeter. When Bradfield's first sergeant—"[who] could get plenty upset when things didn't go right"—realized what was happening, he began "waving his arms like an ape out of shape, yelling his head off while running from squad to squad":

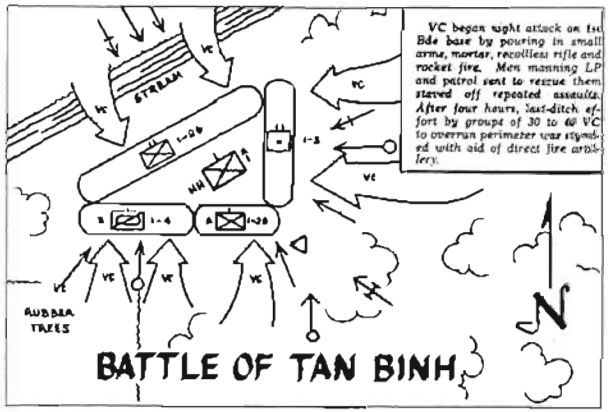
> "What are you men doing? Get back to the line!" he bellowed at everyone. "They told us to move back twenty-five meters," someone replied.
>
> So back to the line we went.... We were unaware of the half-dozen VCs crouching behind the dike to our front. And their presence was unknown to us simply because we failed to understand the White Star Cluster.
>
> At dawn [23 February] our units set out after the force that attacked us. We learned after the main battle, from intelligence gathering later, that was their plan. "Charlie" counted on it.... Their plan was to draw us out (which they did), overrun our firebase, destroy the tanks and artillery batteries, and of course, kill all the GIs left behind. (Bradfield, *Blue Spaders in Vietnam*)

Fortunately, however, that afternoon intelligence units supporting the division alerted the brigade that an attack was imminent; as a result, most of the brigade's infantry units were recalled in time to re-man the Tan Binh defenses on the evening of 23-24 February. Then, says Bradfield, "We became engaged in the first big battle for our division. A real honest to goodness banzai charge with all the screaming Communist fruitcakes sprinting while shooting straight into our guns." The following description of that battle is adapted from the magazine of the 1st Division, *Danger Forward* 1, no. 1 (May 1967):

The Battle of Tan Binh was a fierce engagement in which three Viet Cong battalions repeatedly threw themselves at a brigade base area in the dark, early morning hours of 24 Feb 66. The battle marked the first time that VC main forces had elected to attack a major US unit in the field in the III Corps area. The action resulted in a striking defeat for the insurgents ... [at the village of Tan Binh, near a rivulet named the Sui Bong Trang (stream of the Trang Jungle)].

At 0145 hours, the enemy forces launched their attack under the cover of heavy darkness against the 1st Brigade base located opposite a stream at Tan Binh, some seven miles south of Phuoc Vinh. The position was occupied by Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade; elements of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry; elements of Headquarters, B and D batteries, 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery; B Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry; and elements of B Company, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry ...

At the outset of the battle the southern and southwestern portions of the perimeter began receiving a heavy volume of small arms fire and mortar fire. Sporadic small arms fire was initiated against the north and northwest sides of the perimeter. By 0215 hours, the entire perimeter was being swept with intense fire



from small arms, automatic weapons, mortars, recoilless rifles and rockets. This barrage of fire did not diminish until approximately 0245 hours.

The 26th Inf section of the perimeter started to receive a heavy volume of fire from all types of weapons at 0300 hours. From this time until 0430, groups of VC were seen by the light of flares in assault formations as close as 75 meters from the friendly positions. On all occasions the VC were repulsed by small arms, automatic weapons and mortar fire. The east side of the perimeter was receiving sporadic fire during this time.

Between 0430 and 0530 hours there was a lull in the fighting. The 1st Brigade commander directed all units to fire on positively identified targets only, and to conserve ammunition in anticipation of a pre-dawn attack. Evacuation of the wounded, repositioning of personnel within the perimeter and redistribution of ammunition was accomplished.

In a final all-out effort to overrun the US lines, the VC launched an intense attack at 0530 hours. Mortar rounds landed inside the perimeter and the artillery and 26th Infantry engaged assault groups of 30 to 40 enemy soldiers forward of their positions. Close air support was not used because it would have required the lifting of artillery and mortar fire. On several occasions, the artillery batteries lowered the barrels of their 105 mm guns to fire point blank into the oncoming VC.

The Viet Cong broke contact at 0645 hours, as the morning light revealed their positions. Search-and-destroy forces, air reconnaissance and artillery were immediately used in an attempt to locate and block the fleeing enemy.

From documents found on VC dead, three enemy battalions were identified as having been in the battle. It is believed that two additional battalions also participated in the action. The estimated strength of the Viet Cong was placed at a minimum of 1,500 and an added force of 1,000 was scheduled to take part in the battle but did not arrive.

The American forces dealt the enemy a severe blow, killing 142 VC by body count and wounding 15. The VC also lost a large number of weapons of various types, as well as a great deal of ammunition.

Carl Bradfield, who helped drag enemy bodies to a common grave on the morning of 24 February, believed that the 1st Division's official count of enemy dead seriously underestimated the carnage. The men in a listening post that had remained hidden from the attackers told him that they observed ox-carts hauling away piles of VC corpses, and he noted that no wounded were among all the bodies he saw strewn across the battalion's front, an indication that "either 'Charlie' did an outstanding job of extracting his men, or he killed his wounded to keep them from talking after capture."

Bradfield's view differed from that of critics of the war, who have held that American officers consistently overestimated enemy casualties. What is true is that "body count" by American forces in Vietnam was inexact, given the necessity of compiling reports from the battlefield, where, after a stiff fight, leaders were concerned with matters more pressing than enumerating enemy cadavers, and where numbers submitted by each of numerous participating units could readily lead to double counting. What is also true is that the enemy grossly exaggerated his own body count of American troops supposedly killed in action. In 1966 General Van Tieng Dung, chief of the general staff of the Vietnamese Peoples' Army (the army of North Vietnam) trumpeted that in the battle at Bong Trang [Tan Binh] on 24 February of that year "two battalions and their operational C.P., First Infantry Division [were] completely wiped out" (Van Tieng Dung, *The U.S. Imperialists Are Facing Military Defeat* [Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1966]).

Carl Bradfield, as part of his duties in policing the Tan Binh battlefield, was detailed to pick up "hundreds, maybe thousands" of small packets, scattered amidst the VC dead, containing a white substance that his officers identified as heroin. Helmets-full of these packets were burned—one lieutenant told Bradfield that the heroin he had collected had a value approaching one million dollars. Bradfield recalled that when the battalion sent off its water trailers to be refilled that morning, the convoy of cooks and drivers encountered dozens of exhausted VC sprawled alongside the road, weapons lying about; both sides retreated hastily from that encounter without a shot fired.

After the battle at Tan Binh, Bradfield's leaders promised Company B three days of rest in Phuoc Vinh. But, as Bradford explained, this respite was hardly restful:

> Now to those who are misinformed, what the military calls rest for privates isn't what civilians think of as rest. If nothing else, there would be "beautifying the company area." That meant, among other things, picking up a rock and carrying it "over there." An hour later we'd pick up the same rock and carry it back where it had been. Then we'd paint it. One officer wanted the rock "over there," another officer thought the rock looked better "over here"—you have a couple of bosses like that, don't you? (Bradfield, *Blue Spaders in Vietnam*)

In the event, the troops were soon sent back to the field. Their departure was occasioned by a daring coup the enemy had launched in Phu Cuong, the province capital: in broad daylight teams of VC infiltrated a government compound and stole fifteen U.S.-supplied tanks from under the noses of soldiers of the Republic of Vietnam and their American advisors. The Blue Spaders, dispatched to recover the tanks, brought back all save one without mishap. (Years later, the remaining tank was found buried not far from where it was stolen.)

The Strategic and Tactical Context: A "Very Big War... A Very Difficult War"

On 13 March 1966 Major General Jonathan O. Seaman left the Big Red One (he had been in command since January 1964) to take command of II Field Force, the U.S. corps-echelon headquarters directing the operations of the 1st Division and other U.S. units around Saigon. Succeeding him was Brigadier General William E. DePuy, formerly Westmoreland's J-3 (operations officer)—and a man with a definite agenda:

> It was my idea to go after the Main Forces wherever they could be found and to go after them with as many battalions as I could get into the fight—what was later called "pile-on."
>
> To do that required a very agile and fast moving division, a division which was, in fact, airmobile. My initial efforts were to create just such a division. I took it as my main mission to defeat or disrupt the activities of all the VC Main Forces north of Saigon in the III Corps zone. As a mini-

mum it was essential to keep the 9th VC division entirely out of the populated areas....

General Westmoreland also wanted the 1st Infantry Division to be mobile. His idea was that he was bringing in US troops to turn the war around. He wanted them to go ... wherever it was likely that the VC/NVA main force units were operating at the time. His philosophy, with which I entirely agreed, was that the US units were there to fight the enemy "big boys," the big regiments that were tearing up the ARVN and destroying the pacification effort.... Now, if you ask me if General Westmoreland told me precisely to do these things, he didn't. But, we had worked together closely for two years. It was clear to me that he wanted me to get cracking.

So, as soon as I got there, I moved the division around a lot. I even moved it sometimes when I really didn't have very good intelligence on which to base the move. I just moved it to get it moving. I moved my CP to Phuoc Tuy, then to Tay Ninh, then to An Loc and Quan Loi, and then to Dau Tieng, because I wanted the division to be mentally mobile as well as physically mobile. I wanted a division that could pile-on. I visualized a division commanded from a helicopter in flight. And, I looked for people who could do that, and for people who thought that way. Also, I looked for people who couldn't think that way so that I could send them on to other duties. (William E. DePuy, *Changing an Army: An Oral History of General William E. DePuy, USA Retired,* United States Military History Institute and United States Army Center of Military History, CMH Pub 70-23, 1988)

Commissioned into the infantry from ROTC in 1941, DePuy had served overseas in World War II with the 90th Infantry Division, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel in command of an infantry battalion. After the war General George Patton asked him to serve as his aide-de-camp, but when DePuy explained that he was on orders to attend the Command and General Staff College, Patton told him to get the education, and to stay in the army. Subsequently, DePuy commanded another infantry battalion and a battle group in Germany, and served in intelligence assignments. He was arguably the best prepared of all the army's division commanders then in Vietnam. DePuy recalls that, in terms of his preparation for assuming command of the 1st Division,

> The greatest influence on me was the impact of my two years as J-3 MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam). It was a period of transition from counterinsurgency support to direct American combat involvement. I had a unique opportunity to learn about the organization and tactics of the VC. Also in that period we developed together with the GVN [Government of Vietnam] a pattern of response to that particular threat—an Asian insurgency organized and executed by world class revolutionaries. We didn't know at the beginning that the North Vietnamese Army would intervene massively. We saw three levels of threat. At the bottom the guerrillas in the hamlets and villages. In the middle the local forces such as the district companies or battalions, and at the top the Main Force regiments and divisions.
>
> In late 1964 through '65, we helped the GVN organize a multi-layer attack against this structure in the area of Saigon. Called HOP TAC (cooperation/coordination), it involved three kinds and levels of operation. At the center the police and intelligence agencies sought to root out the VC infrastructure—the terrorists and subversive cells and the VC political organization. This operation was called "securing." Around and outside the secure center was an

area shaped like a doughnut in which the ARVN regular battalions and regiments sought to destroy or chase away the VC guerrillas and local forces. This was called "clearing." The idea was that once the area was cleared, Popular and Regional Forces would be organized at the village and district level to maintain security and the central secure area would be expanded. Thus, pacification would be extended throughout the country. But, the VC Main Forces were organized to defeat this concept. For example, VC provincial battalions like our friends in the Phu Loi battalion or regiments like the 271 and 272 from War Zones C and D, would move in on short campaigns or single battles to tear up the Popular and Regional Forces and defeat the ARVN. They did this often and well. These attacks demoralized the entire GVN civil and military structure, and defeated pacification efforts. Indeed, by late 1964 and early '65 they had nearly won the war. Therefore, the third element of the HOP TAC plan was for the elite units of the ARVN—airborne, marines, and rangers—to operate outside the doughnut area, and to go after the Main Force VC to destroy or to disrupt their operations and thus protect the pacification effort. These operations were called "Search and Destroy."

I tell you all this because the original purpose and mission for US troops was this third mission. All this was not without controversy. The Chief of Staff of the Army thought he was sending the 1st Division to practice counterinsurgency—that is, clearing and securing, civic action and Psy Ops. MACV wanted the 1st Division for Search and Destroy.

We did not do a good job in MACV in explaining this to incoming divisions. (DePuy, *Changing An Army*)

MACV's problems in this regard were understandable given the nature of the conflict; as Luttichau and McDonald explained, the Vietnam War, "while not foreign to American experience ... was by any standards unusual." It was, say the authors,

> a war without clearly defined front lines. The enemy could be anywhere and everywhere and [was] often indistinguishable from the native population. Without the usual standards for measuring success or failure, substitutes had to be devised—how many Communists killed by "body count," how many hamlets and villages "pacified," how many miles of essential highways open to travel. These provided some but no certain indication of developments.
>
> It was a war with no shot fired at Fort Sumter, no sinking of the Maine, no Zimmermann telegram, no Pearl Harbor, no massed armies crossing the 38th parallel to afford a clear call for American involvement. Toward this war some Americans developed a new form of isolationism, a fear of becoming mired in war on the Asian mainland, reinforced by Communist success in picturing an aggressive North Vietnam as a "Little Belgium"—these and other factors produced loud dissent from a vocal minority of Americans.
>
> It was the first war that Americans viewed in their homes on television; and in base camps in Vietnam U.S. troops also had television. Many men flew to war by commercial aircraft. U.S. civilians of the State Department, the U.S. Information Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Agency for International Development were involved close alongside the soldiers. There was no censorship of the soldier's mail nor any involuntary censorship of the American press. Tourists were free to visit the war zone. The Army contracted some of its con-

struction work with U.S. civilian firms. The American commander, General Westmoreland, had no command authority over ARVN or allied troops. As in Korea, the United States imposed a number of restraints on its forces lest the war spread.

How the U.S. Army fought the war was also unusual. All U.S. divisions and separate brigades had fortified base camps. From these they might operate in neighboring districts on security and pacification missions. At other times, leaving a security and housekeeping cadre behind, they might shift far afield, there to construct a temporary base camp and forward fire support bases from which divisional artillery could support far-ranging search and destroy operations. On many of these missions, particularly in the thick jungles of the highlands, companies and battalions would be far from any road or trail and wholly dependent upon the helicopter for resupply and evacuation. If fire support bases came under attack, artillerymen often had to employ their pieces in point-blank fire. Long-distance patrols on which small groups of men might be away for several days were common. Ambush and counter-ambush were familiar tactics on both sides.

The helicopter and radio communications were the two essential ingredients that made it possible for the U.S. Army to engage in this kind of combat successfully. There were, too, sophisticated weapons and items of equipment—C-130's and CV-2 Caribous [fixed wing aircraft] capable of carrying large loads of men and equipment; the light, automatic M16 rifle; recoilless rifles; a one-shot antitank rocket; the Claymore mine that was activated electrically and spewed hundreds of dart-like projectiles [actually steel balls]; an armored personnel carrier modified to serve as a fighting vehicle; the Patton (M48A3) tank; chemical defoliants and the Rome plow, the latter a bulldozer equipped with a special blade capable of demolishing all but the biggest giants of the forest, the two employed to deny the enemy and his base camps the concealment of the jungle; a powerful grenade launcher firing a 40mm projectile; and highly complex electronic fire control and infrared surveillance devices. In sharp contrast to the sophistication of other items, barbed wire and the sandbag came back into use to a degree rivaling that of their use in World War I.

The enemy also had excellent weapons, mainly Chinese Communist copies of Soviet models. In the automatic AK47 rifle he had an admired individual weapon. The enemy had ample mortars and heavy rockets, but other than along the demilitarized zone, he employed no artillery and, except in defense against U.S. air strikes on North Vietnam, no aircraft. He also had recoilless rifles and a Chinese version of the Claymore mine, and he was a master of the booby trap, including sharpened bamboo spikes called "punji stakes." (Luttichau and MacDonald, *American Military History*)

Colonel Sidney B. Berry, who had been an adviser to an ARVN division, and who commanded the 1st Division's 1st Brigade from June 1966 to February 1967, afterwards wrote a paper "to assist other soldiers to prepare themselves for service in Vietnam, particularly at brigade level." He cited five main aspects of the war:

> First, commanders must understand and always be sensitive to the political purposes and aims of the Allied effort in Vietnam.... Secondly, the helicopter is central.... Thirdly, this is a war of dots and circles, rather than the more familiar linear war. Commanders visualize and maps portray a war of tactical areas of operations, landing zones, defensive perimeters, patrol and fire support bases, 6400 mil range fans, and blocking positions. Fourthly, this is a war of quick reaction.... Finally, the war is characterized by vast differences of ter-

> rain, enemy, and local conditions in the various parts of Vietnam. The experience of each individual and each unit must be viewed in the context of the particular circumstances, time, and place in which they take place. (Sidney B. Berry, *Observations of a Brigade Commander* [1967])

Overall, in terms of the sacrifice it exacted from the 1st Division, the Vietnam war was little different from World Wars I and II except that in Vietnam the number of casualties per year was lower. The following casualty figures from the three wars illustrate this point:

1st Division: Killed and Wounded

1917-1918	22,320
1941-1945	20,770
1965-1970	20,659

U.S. casualties in Vietnam, however, were in many ways different from those in World Wars I and II. An improvement in non-combat medicine meant that disease and accidents—which had caused about one death in four in the Second World War—were responsible for only one death in six in Vietnam. Similarly, steady improvement in combat casualty care had changed the principal cause of fatal wounds from anaerobic infection in the extremities in World War I, to intra-abdominal injury in World War II, to head wounds in Vietnam. (R . F. Bellamy, M.D., "Combat Casualty Overview," draft [1996]). The helicopter ambulance had dramatically improved evacuation from the battlefield, making it possible for most of the wounded in Vietnam to reach a fully staffed medical facility—a field or evacuation hospital, or a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) —within one hour of being hit. Causes of casualties had changed, with bullets supplanting exploding ordnance as the main cause of death; as figure 3.5 shows, in Vietnam enemy small arms—in particular, the Soviet-style AK-47 assault rifle—were deadly in close encounters in the jungle, accounting for half of all U.S. fatalities. The guerrilla's weapons of choice—mines, booby traps, and punji stakes—accounted for only one-sixth of all casualties. Wounding by penetrating metal fragments from exploding ordnance (rockets, mortars, grenades) remained prevalent, causing one third of fatal wounds and two thirds of all non-fatal wounds.

As Colonel Berry pointed out, however, the nature of the war in Vietnam differed from place to place, and from time to time. For instance, the following table shows that in 1966, when U S. divisions were on the offensive against enemy main force units, the causes of casualties were different from what they were in 1970, when U.S. divisions were mainly on the defensive:

Percent Total Combat Casualties (KIA + WIA)

Cause	1966	1970
Bullets	42	16
Fragments	50	80

Fig. 3.5

	% Killed in Action (KIA)			% Wounded in Action (WIA)		
Cause	**1917-18**	**1941-45**	**1965-70**	**1917-18**	**1941-45**	**1965-70**
Bullets	8	32	51	14	20	16
Fragments	92	53	36	85	61	65
Mine/traps	–	2	11	–	4	17
Other	–	13*	2*	–	15*	12*

* Crews of armored vehicle and aircraft destroyed or damaged by enemy action.
Data from *Conventional Warfare: Ballistic, Blast, and Burn Injuries*, chap. 2, ed. R. Zajtchuk, D. P. Jenkins, R. F. Bellamy, C. W. Quick. Textbook of Military Medicine Series, Office of the Surgeon General of the Army, Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Washington, D.C.: 1991. Chapter 2.

In Major General DePuy's estimate, the 1st Division encountered difficulty in the spring of 1966 in shifting to the offensive—that is, in redirecting operations from base construction and protection to attack of the enemy main force. Years later he remarked that "I knew the difference between what the division was doing and what was expected of it," and he began looking for commanders who could enable the division to meet his expectations: "people who were flexibly minded, didn't need a lot of instructions, would get cracking, and would get out and do something useful on their own once they were given a general direction." (DePuy, *Changing An Army*)

One of the infantry battalion commanders DePuy selected was a write-in: in March, shortly after DePuy assumed command, he received a personal letter from a student at the National War College requesting consideration for battalion command. Though he did not know the writer personally, DePuy—after consulting with Colonel Berry (who did)—responded: "You're on. Report for duty as soon as possible. We have in mind your commanding the 1st of the 16th or 1st of the 18th Infantry." Thus, Lieutenant Colonel Paul F. Gorman arranged to get himself posted to the 1st Infantry Division. His assignment to command, however, took an unexpected turn shortly after his arrival at Tan Son Nhut Airport in the early morning hours of 9 June 1966. The G-1 from the 1st Division headquarters met him at the airport and drove him across the Saigon River to Di An, where Division Rear was located. Gorman was informed that as soon as he finished in-processing, he was to assume command of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, which was then under the OPCON of Div Arty, with the battalion CP located in nearby Phu Loi. The G-1 was very solicitous to Gorman:

> He told me that the Division Commander had removed the previous commander, and that a Major was temporarily in command pending my arrival. He offered to help in any way he could to obtain key leaders for me, and told me to call him personally as soon as I knew what I needed. That put me on the alert, so I listened carefully to the talk as I was passed among the staff principals. The general attitude of my informants when they learned that I was the new DOBOL 6—that was to be my call sign on the Division command net—was doleful sympathy, as if they had been informed that I had a fatal malady. I was given to understand that first, relief of battalion commanders, especially infantry commanders, was not uncommon; and second, among infantry units, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was lowest in the CG's regard, and had been assigned a "pacification" mission guarding the Division rear because it was not considered capable of hunting enemy main force units.

Gorman then received what he termed a "classic introduction to a new unit," courtesy of an unkempt sergeant from the 26th who picked him up in an ill-maintained jeep. The sergeant, remembered Gorman,

> chose to drive me past the division's mortuary unit at Phu Loi, and to comment lugubriously that it had been busy of late. But when we reached the nearby battalion CP—an indifferently erected, cluttered squad tent—it was like coming home after a long stay away—familiar people were there: company commanders, staff officers, NCOs, soldiers. With most of them, I was instantly comfortable, and they were responsive.
>
> I arrived expecting to take over a savvy outfit, since the unit had been in Vietnam for nine months, was a veteran of a number of battles, and should have known the enemy and the terrain. I was sorely disappointed. What I found was a pretty run-of-the-mill leg infantry outfit, not too sharp professionally, inclined to be pro forma rather than proactive. When we drove up,

I noted that the CP's 292 antenna was missing ground planes. More importantly, the staff was kind of down in the mouth, conveying to me in their briefings a consensus that the battalion had been dumped on. Throughout the unit, I found few who were upbeat about the current mission. I figured that I would have to work on that, and decided to put out periodically a written review of what the unit had done so that soldiers could read about their achievements, and mail it home if they wanted to.

I soon appreciated, however, that the Blue Spaders were willing to learn, and eager to do the job right. Also, they had a great cadre of NCO's and lieutenants. We learned together. My time in command was one long learning experience. (P. F. Gorman, USAWC/USAMHI Senior Officer Oral History Program, Project No. 1991-4)

All of the 1st Division was learning. In 1967, after Major General DePuy returned to the United States, he was asked to comment on "pacification," by that time referred to as the "other war." He pointed out that it had taken the 1st Division a number of months to appreciate that in truth there was only one war, and that missions of pacification were in many respects more demanding than fighting the main force. "There are some oversimplifications and some generalizations being used with respect to [the 'other war'] that really do not fit the facts on the ground, he said:

> In the first place it is not another war, if by that we mean it is a civilian war, and that the Marines and the Army and the Koreans are going to fight just the main forces....
>
> I would venture to say that in the 1st Division we spend more than half our time on the other war.... What it is, it is the war against the local forces. By that I include provincial, district, village, and hamlet.
>
> It is a very, very big war. There are a lot of provincial battalions, district companies, and village and hamlet guerrillas.
>
> It is a very difficult war. I had some statistics pulled together for me before I left, and I found that we were killing about 5.8 VC per battalion day when we fought the big boys, but we were killing about 1.8 per battalion day when we were fighting the little ones. It is harder work. You get fewer, and your casualty ratios are not as satisfying because it is a boobytrap kind of war....

DePuy went on to address the notion that the "other war" was no business of the United States military forces but rather should have been fought by the Vietnamese. "It is not feasible to think [about the war] in those terms," he asserted, "because the problem of the 'other war,' the local war, is still too big a problem for the Vietnamese to handle alone. Once the problem is squeezed down to a smaller problem, the time will come when, I think, they can handle it. We are nowhere near that right now."

In explaining why that goal was still distant, DePuy observed that two different approaches to the other war' were attempted in the area in which he worked, both involving the 1st Infantry Division and the 5th ARVN Division. In general, said DePuy, the Americans tried to do the things the ARVN units could not do; and, on one occasion, "we tried together to completely clean up one set of villages. Then, having done that, we hoped to sort of expand the perimeter." But this did not work very well: "It was kind of a waste of time because you are sort of trying to redecorate the kitchen while the living room is on fire. It is not a productive way to go about your business." As a result,

> We changed, to take a bigger area, so that we could put pressure on the whole VC provincial system at one time. In other words, we would go after the provincial battalion and the local companies, and the village and hamlet guerrillas on a sustained basis with large forces over a long peri-

od of time. It was a real war; it is beyond the capabilities of the Vietnamese to do it alone; it is a lot harder than going out fighting the big battles....

For some reason or another some people feel it would be easier for the Vietnamese to do that kind of fighting, but I can assure you that it takes a better battalion of infantry to patrol seven days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year with squads and platoons and companies than it does to go out every three months and have a big hoe-down with the Viet Cong.... You have to have a lot of good sergeants and lieutenants to patrol all the time with squads and platoons, and the leadership potential of the Vietnamese Army is not up to it.... So it really boils down to the fact that the United States forces go out after the big boys when it appears profitable to do so or it is necessary to drive them back into the jungle, and immediately go right back into the populated area....

DePuy then tackled the issue of how to remove guerillas from a given area, starting with the premise that "you know the village guerrillas are going to be near the village" which is both their home and base of operations. Usually, DePuy noted, "they are as close [to the village] as they can get. In other words, if they can dig a little tunnel or base camp only 10 meters outside the village, that is exactly where they will do it. They will have 5, 6, or up to 10 of these little hiding places for 10 or 20 people. You must get rid of those.... We bulldozed down the jungle around the villages...."

But this can cause another problem:

> [T]he guerrilla may go inside the village while you are out mowing down the jungle. I think almost everybody in Vietnam has tried to solve that or has solved by repeated cordon and search operations at various times of the day or night. I can think of four or five villages that were cordoned and searched up to 15 times in a period of 7 months; every time the minimum take was 3 guerrillas. (Selected Papers of General William E. DePuy, ed. R. M. Swain, Combat Studies Institute, USAC&GSC [Fort Leavenworth, KS: 1994])

LAM SON II: "We Made It Up As We Went Along"

In June 1966, while the division commander was going to school on the operational level of that war, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was struggling with its primer. Its mission in Operation LAM SON II involved cooperating with units of the ARVN 5th Division to establish a zone of security around, and commence "Revolutionary Development" within, one set of villages—an "oil spot" or "*tache d'huile*," a concept from the French experience with African counterinsurgency. The battalion's seventy days in LAM SON II—the name is that of an epic battle in Vietnamese history, the equivalent to America's Battle of Bunker Hill—helped the division to understand the need for a more comprehensive approach. In the process of learning how to be successful in supporting Revolutionary Development, the Blue Spaders worked hard at basic military skills.

Reproduced below is the first of the operational summaries published by the battalion for distribution to every soldier, intended to describe to him what the unit had accomplished.

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345

22 June 1966

SUBJECT: Operation LAM SON II
TO: Each Blue Spader

1. So that every Blue Spader is kept abreast of our notable progress during operation LAM SON II, the following operations summary is provided for your information.

2. Enemy activity has subsided significantly as our persistent efforts continue to provide increased security throughout the Phu Loi area. Following is a summary of the past 24 days of operations:

a. 402 ambush patrols.

b. 321 platoon size search & clear operations

c. 5 hamlets sealed for MED CAP, PSYOP/CA (Binh Chuan, Tan Phuoc Kanh, Hoa Nhut, Vinh Trong and Binh Quoi)

d. 5,839 rounds of indirect fire support.

e. One 48-hour search and clear operation covering a distance of 16 km (to include ambush patrols and one engagement against an entrenched insurgent element.)

In addition, the battalion provided continuous security for routes along with physical security for cadre teams, engineer units and reconnaissance parties working around the base area.

3. Operation LAM SON II is considered highly successful to date. Indications are that our activities have seriously undermined enemy morale. To maintain our hold on this area, continued alertness and hard work will be required from every individual.

4. This summary may be mailed home or kept for personal reference. However the document will be burned if it is not kept.

FOR THE COMMANDER:
DISTRIBUTION. 1 ea Mbr
1/26th Inf

ROBERT L DAVENPORT
Captain, Infantry
Adjutant

Years later, Gorman remembered that LAM SON II was not a "glamorous" job, and that "plainly the CG's attention, and that of his staff and his brigade commanders, remained concentrated on the main force war well to the north, along Highway 13"; consequently, the Blue Spaders got scant help in figuring out what they were supposed to do. Nevertheless, said Gorman, "I saw it as a great chance to raise the professionalism of the battalion, and I sold it to my company commanders and staff principals as a challenge to their soldiering skills." Gorman emphasized that "ours was a mission that had to be successful if the division's support bases were to function without enemy harassment and interference—in short, we were as vital to the success of the division's campaign against the main force as any of the battalions operating up north." But despite the mission's importance,

> It was grubby work: lots of patrolling, much of it at night. Small unit fights against handfuls of VC. Mines and punji pits, claymores and mortar attacks—the grungiest sort of combat. But it gave me an opportunity right at the outset of my command to spend about one half-day on patrol with each rifle platoon, observing its technique, and assessing its professional skills. Soon I had worked out my teaching objectives, and began, through the company commanders, to provide remedial on-the-job-training.

The main lesson, said Gorman, "was to think through each situation and deal with it in its own terms." Time after time, he observed,

> officers and NCOs tried to apply some procedure or tactic they had learned elsewhere in a circumstance where a moment's thought would have shown them it would be disastrous. They wanted rules or maxims they could invariably apply, and I tried to bring them to understand that there were few such rules or guidelines, and their first concern had to be for the urgencies of the moment. Ours was a new form of war, I said, and so we had to invent new ways of fighting. I praised

innovation, and lauded initiative, especially if it worked. I preached that every leader had to think on his feet as he acted. In fact, that became our motto in the Blue Spaders: "We Made it up as We Went Along."

The concomitant of that motto was my maxim that "every day in combat is a day in training." A commander ought to be able, at the end of every action, to recite what he had learned, and to describe what he had done to insure that good performance among his troops was praised, poor performance identified, and ameliorative action prescribed. I often called for such a review myself. (Gorman, Oral History)

Gorman eventually came to understand that fighting the main force required the same set of basic skills. "Innovation and initiative was as necessary against the main force as it was against the village guerrilla. I think the techniques we worked out applied to both, whether it was making a night approach march in column holding onto a rope, or constructing foxholes that were invisible from the front and secure from overhead fire." He concluded that there were a set of small performances that together "made a significant difference no matter what the enemy force." Among these were:

> Communications. In mid-June, the 26th simply was not getting full measure from its radios. Companies did not routinely carry the 292 antenna, and I discovered that few soldiers in the battalion knew how properly to erect same. We eventually got every company in the field equipped with a 292 complete with carrying case and instructions. Many an officer and NCO had misappropriated an antenna section to use as a pointer—a practice I stopped by offering an Article 15 fine for anyone who used one in my sight. Field maintenance for radios was deplorable, but when I began demanding that companies stay in the field for a week at a time, commanders began paying attention to preventive maintenance and spares. We learned to wrap handsets in a plastic bag secured with a rubber band, and to change swiftly from blade antenna, to whip, to 292 depending on the movement posture of the unit. We learned brevity of transmission, and we learned to assure 24-hour continuity of communications. We learned to carry and to signal using air panels and pyrotechnics. In short we got serious about using what the Army had provided, and that made us better in any sort of operation....
>
> Weapons. I was thoroughly dissatisfied with what I found with the handling of infantry weapons and ammunition. There was a general practice of carrying machine gun belts Pancho Villa-style across the chest, and of diverting machine gun ammo cans to almost any use except to protect ammunition from dirt and wet. I collected examples of MG belts twisted and mired to the point that a stoppage was patently guaranteed, and when I could, I staged demonstrations of the difference in firepower that accrues to a unit that carries its MG ammo boxed versus one [that] does not: I simply caused two platoons to cross a rice paddy by fire and movement—almost invariably gunners with the cross-chest belts would jam up their gun, while the boxed-ammo shot reliably. Now, that helps no matter what the fire-fight. And there was the M-16, the rifle newly arrived in the 26th, and foreign to most of its officers and NCOs. On my initial checks in the field, I found no cleaning rods, patches, or lubricants. We eventually got that fixed, with assistance from the division G-4, and a lot of help from the mail bags—the troops wrote home for help. (Gorman, Oral History)

On 20 June 1966, during a forty-eight-hour continuous "search and clear" operation that entailed the battalion's advancing with three companies abreast through

a swath ten miles in depth, Company A became involved in a small unit action that stressed the need for attention to such basics. "It was around mid-day," recalled Gorman, "and I had been walking with one of Company B's rifle platoons, when DOBOL Alpha 6—that's the company commander—radioed that Alpha was in contact, and that the company had taken casualties." Gorman's helicopter, an H-13, was inbound to pick him up,

> so I got airborne and flew to where the action was. I found Company A in a long column, with considerable distances—around 500 meters—between platoons. The commander had apparently been with the lead platoon when it was fired on from a trench-line hidden under some scrub beyond which was an open field. Our troops returned the fire, and succeeded in getting into the trench, but the enemy had successfully withdrawn southward across the field, and were firing from the opposite woodline. Alpha 6 told me on the radio that the field was mined, and that one of his soldiers had been wounded by a mine or booby trap. The VC were firing automatic weapons at them from what appeared to be another trench-line, and had them pinned down. I asked Alpha 6 what he was going to do, and he said that he was bringing up the rest of his company, and that he intended to attack around to the left when they came on line. I told him to get some fire on the enemy to fix them in place, and that I would try to hasten the arrival of his platoons.
>
> Well, it was a hot, bright afternoon, and the next platoon was plainly visible some 500 meters north of there, moving slowly along a trail in two columns. They were in the open, and the grass was low, so I could see that they were ambling—a very deliberate walk, not a forced march. I landed and talked to the platoon leader, an NCO. I told him that his commander urgently needed his platoon forward, and showed him on the map what I knew of the situation. I then got airborne again, and the platoon resumed its march. I could see no difference in their demeanor, just more ambling.
>
> I then called my FAC (Forward Air Controller) and told him what we were up against. Within minutes I could see him flying off to my left. I asked Alpha 6 if he had called for artillery, and he said he had, but that his FO had not yet received clearance to fire. The FAC broke in to report that he had an aircraft on station with CBU (cluster bomb units) and napalm, so I directed Alpha 6 to throw smoke, and the FAC to mark the target for an east-west run along the far treeline. The FAC fired a white smoke rocket exactly where the VC gun flashes had been seen, and the fighter rolled in and laid the CBU right along the edge of the trees, then turned around and delivered the napalm in the same place.
>
> The enemy fire stopped, and Company A advanced (Gorman, Oral History)

The sketch in figure 3.6 was drawn on 21 June 1966, the day after the skirmish. North is to the right; Company A was advancing southward at the moment of its initial contact. The area had once been cleared of vegetation, but was now overgrown with low trees and shrubs, except for a grassy field—the space shown on the sketch traversed by the two curved arrows between the primary and secondary trenches. The VC plan was to delay an attacker from the primary trench while the secondary was manned, but to engage him seriously when he tried to cross the open field, which was strewn with obstacles and mines. Accompanying the sketch is this note:

> Operation LAM SON II is a pacification campaign with the objective of returning the PHU LOI area to governmental control. The Viet Cong had controlled the area for several years. The mission of 1/26th Inf was to provide a secure environment within which the normal processes of community life could be restored, and Vietnam-

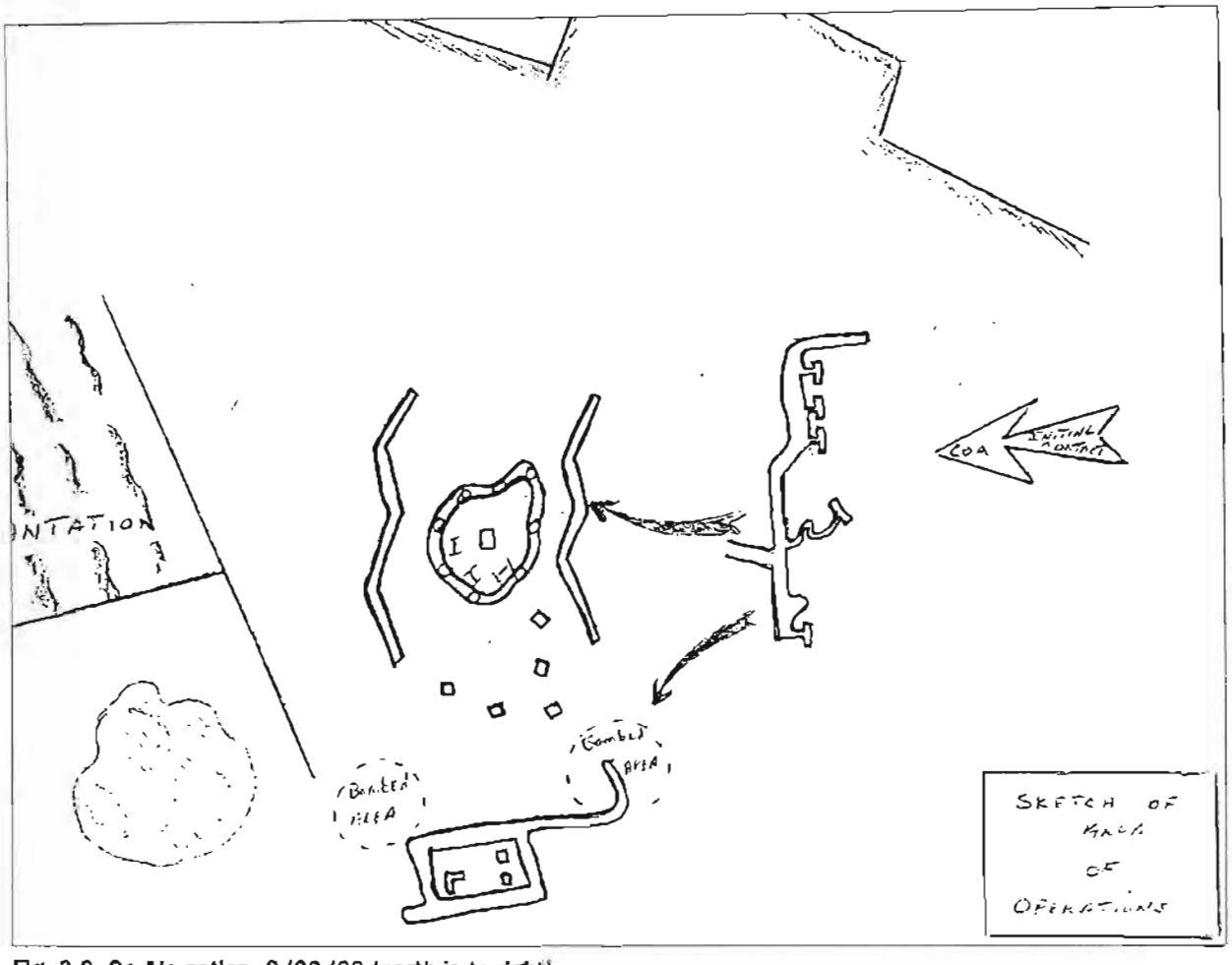


Fig. 3.6. Co A's action, 6/20/66 (north is to right)

ese government activities could be conducted without VC interference. On 20 June 1966, Co. A, 1/26th [Infantry] while on a search and clear mission encountered an estimated Viet Cong squad, well dug in, in a fortified position.

The photograph in figure 3.7 looks south from the first trench-line across the open field toward the main positions. The shadowed spots on the surface of the field mark "punji pits," foot traps lined with stakes.

Gorman described the fortifications beyond the field as a "well built local force base camp", and although "each was different from the others ... they

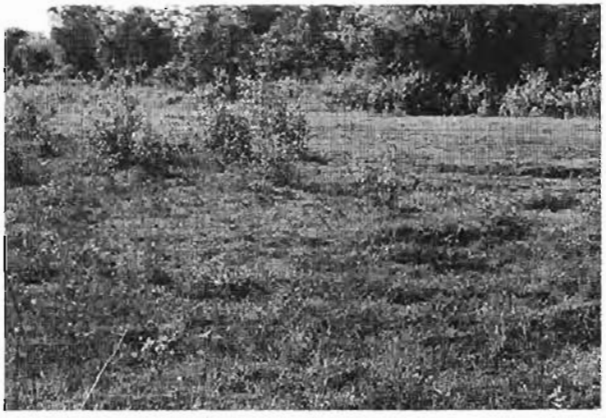


Fig. 3.7. The VC killing zone

Fig. 3.8. Punji spikes

usually featured narrow trenches, and neat, sod-covered, nearly invisible bunkers and tunnels." Corman remembered that

> This one sure had those features. In the aggregate, there was enough overhead cover to accommodate a battalion, but probably the place was used from day to day only by a guard detachment of local guerrillas. That detachment was what Company A had encountered. Its members all got away, but not without loss: Company A found pools of blood and fresh bloody bandages. (Corman, Oral History)

Figure 3.8 shows what "punji pits" often contained: barbed spikes embedded in concrete slabs. Beyond the punji pits there were precisely crafted trenches and bunkers from which the enemy could fire from cover.

Carl Bradfield was favorably impressed by Viet Cong field engineering, allowing that the enemy's fighting positions "were much better dug than ours," which "were as shallow and crude as one could get away with." In constructing such positions, the Americans were not deliberately courting danger: "We didn't want to get zapped," said Bradfield, ". . . nor did we want to hear our top sergeants pass those stupid remarks that often bellowed out of their mouths" when they saw what a poor job the troops had done. Even so,

> Usually we didn't put a great effort into digging firebase positions. We would be in the area only a day or so, and foxholes were defensive lines, used for protection at night. During daylight we went on the offensive, and "Charlie" had to worry about defense. When we overran an enemy base camp, however, we were always impressed by the neatness of their fighting positions. The sides of the foxholes were very smooth and had what might be described as a small alcove dug into the side, about shoulder width. This was a bomb shelter with room enough for one or two men to squat down tightly against the wall. The Vietcong had a lot more to fear—heavy bombs, mortars, hand

Fig. 3.9. Enemy trench with shelter dug into side

grenades, napalm bombs, and American ground-pounders. (Bradfield, *Blue Spaders in Vietnam)*

Paul Gorman was also impressed by the enemy's field engineering: "Just walking through that VC base camp [after the 20 June action] taught me some powerful lessons," he said, one of them being that "if we were going to outfight these peasants, we had to upgrade our field craft." The Viet Cong, Gorman realized,

> were masters at building trenches and bunkers. We had to match or surpass them. I had always believed that the Army's standard, open-front foxholes were exactly wrong, and that the sandbag castles of bunkers we built in Korea—or that I later saw in Phuoc Vinh—were disastrous. It turned out that General DePuy believed, as I did, that our troops should dig deep, invisible holes with overhead and frontal cover, and with ports for firing across in front of flanking positions. In that kind of defense, teamwork and interdependence were as important as in the attack. I resolved then and there to make DOBOL a premier defender as well as an effective predator. During LAM SON II we didn't need to defend often. Nonetheless, we talked about defenses, and we planned same. But only afterwards did we have opportunity to apply what we had learned. (Gorman, Oral History)

On 15 July Gorman published a directive to his commanders noting that in some 40 days of operations during LAM SON II, the battalion had conducted 700 night operations with only 15 contacts with the VC, but 464 day operations with 162 contacts. He emphasized the importance of being seen by the townspeople during the day, but he also ordered increased deception:

> By day, I want you to emplace small ... ambushes either by the stay-behind technique, by night march to position, or by using concealed avenues of approach. These should characteristically observe and control with claymores and other weapons a killing zone across a suspected VC route. Nearby, station a platoon-size support to act as an encircling or blocking force....
>
> By night, I will expect heavy, lethal ambushes on routes close in to the towns. My orders will assign the town(s) and may specify the approaches I want to ambush. (Headquarters, 1/26th Infantry, Commander's Notes #2, 15 July 1966, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

CEDAR RAPIDS Through FREEPORT: "Valiant, and Learning By Doing"

The battalion was relieved in LAM SON II by the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry. The Blue Spaders were reattached to the 1st Brigade for one of its periodic road-opening operations, this one termed CEDAR RAPIDS (17-22 July 1966), along LTL 16, Route RED, north of Tan Uyen. The Blue Spaders took that assignment in stride—the operation was not different in kind from those of preceding weeks. Then they were returned to Camp Weber, Phuoc Vinh.

When Gorman arrived at Phuoc Vinh, he found the camp in a deplorable state, with "ridiculously vulnerable bunkers and washed out trench-lines." But his ire was especially aroused by the shanties the officers had built:

> I found out that individuals or groups had paid out substantial sums—up to hundreds of dollars—to buy wood and sheet metal to fashion these, and to equip them with lights and air conditioners. The expectation was that as each "owner" left, his "turtle" or successor would recompense him for the original investment. This cost would then roll over to the next arrival, with no depreciation, and in more than a few cases, some plus up. That bred more than a few arguments. I became aware that this practice was causing significant trouble; I even got a formal letter from a departed officer complaining that an officer had failed to honor a

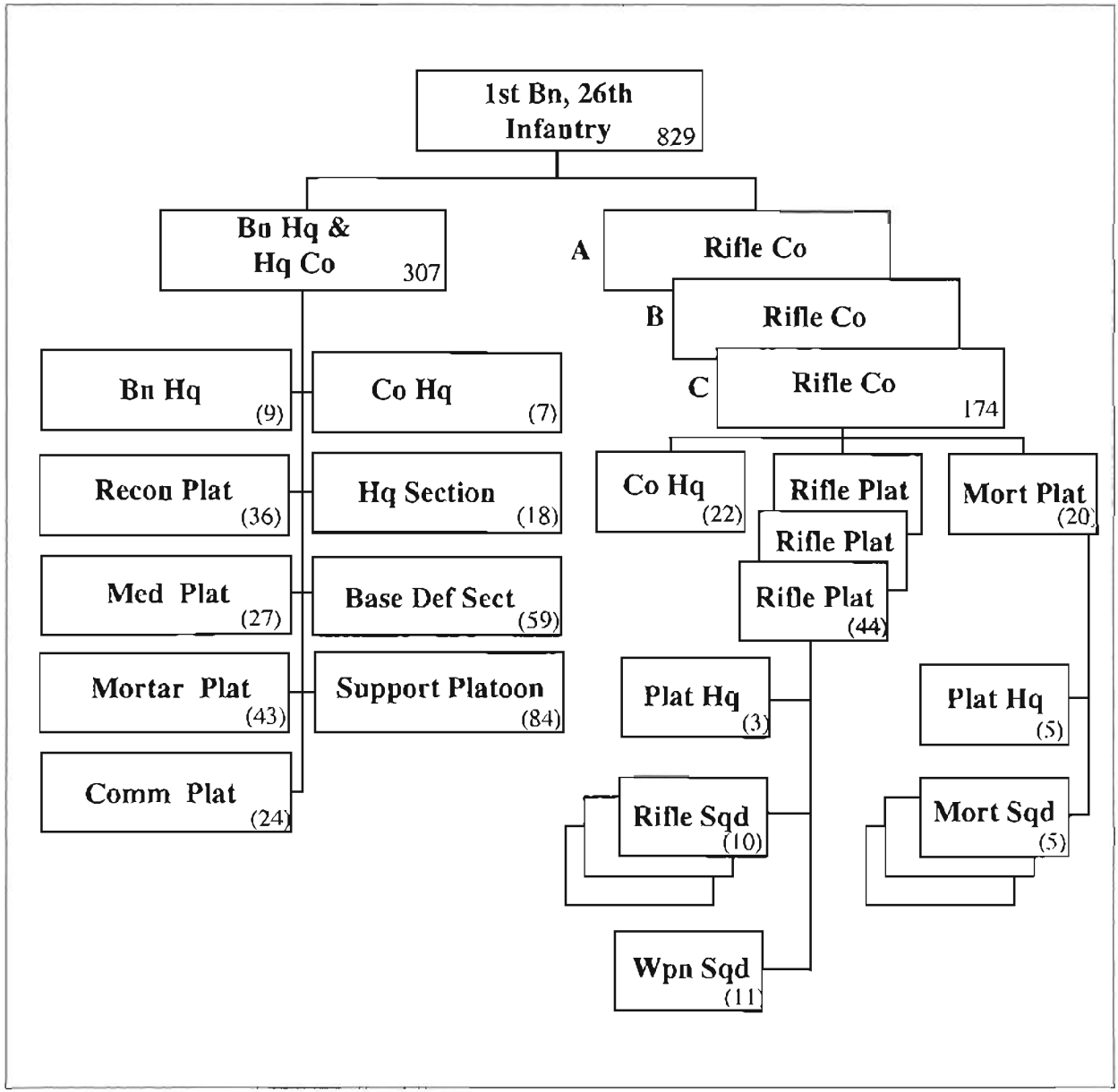


Fig. 3.10. Organization of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, August 1966

debt, and demanding that I take official action. Well, I wrote him that I had taken charge of the post, and that from my perspective all structures within view were government property, so there was no debt. I had copies circulated to all officers. There was a particularly elaborate hut that had belonged to the former commander. This I converted into the 26th Infantry Room, and had the unit colors displayed there, together with a map of the division area where new arrivals could be

briefed. I set up my office and a cot in a hex tent.

That short period at Phuoc Vinh was useful in several other ways. We practiced airmobile operations, and we worked out an airmobile SOP (standard operating procedure) and we streamlined the TO&E. (Gorman, Oral History)

The Modified Table of Organization and Equipment under which the battalion was organized authorized three rifle companies, and a headquarters and headquarters company, with a total strength of 829; Gorman reduced the strength of the rifle companies by ten spaces each, to 174 per company, and transferred those authorizations to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, raising its strength to 307. Hence in mid-1966, after these changes were implemented, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was organized as shown in figure 3.10.

With the approval of the division commander, the Heavy Mortar Platoon (4.2-inch mortars) was attached to the 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery. The table below compares the armament of the 1/26th with that of its predecessor in World War II:

	TO&E 7-15	USARPAC MTO&E
	2/26/44	1966
Launcher, grenade, 40mm	0	88
HMG, cal. 50	6	0
LMG, cal .30/7.62mm	6	40
Mortar, 60mm	9	0
Mortar 81 mm	6	9
Rifle, .30 cal/5.56mm	535	591

As may be seen, the number of automatic weapons had been significantly increased. The 5.56mm M-16 rifle could fire in the automatic as well as semiautomatic mode. Moreover, the number of machine guns had been trebled, and these weapons were typically distributed down among the rifle squads. For indirect fire, the launcher for lobbing the 40mm grenade had superseded the 60mm mortar, and the 81mm mortar was provided three per company, instead of six per battalion as in 1944. As for anti-armor ordnance, in 1944 the infantry battalion was issued twenty-nine 2.36-inch rocket launchers plus three 57mm antitank guns; in 1966 it had eighteen 90mm and eight 106mm recoilless rifles. (In Vietnam, where armor was rarely employed by the enemy, recoilless rifles were used almost exclusively for defense of permanent bases, firing high explosive and antipersonnel rounds that made them formidable in that role.) Individual soldiers could also carry the M72 Light Antitank Weapon (LAW), a one-shot shoulder-fired rocket.

Gorman also reduced the battalion's reliance on wheeled transportation. The 1/26th had been authorized 108 trucks—one for every eight men. Although most of these vehicles were not used in operations, it was the battalion's practice to leave a driver for each at Camp Weber, along with an appropriate number of mechanics and supervisors. "I wanted to be wholly airmobile," Gorman said, "and we needed to free up manpower for use in the field"; so, he turned over to division 71 trucks and 59 trailers. In addition, he stripped each rifle company of a squad's worth of spaces to build, around the antitank weapons, a consolidated Base Defense Section in Headquarters Company. In doing so he put all the defense of Phuoc Vinh under one commander, thus allowing rifle company commanders to focus on the out-of-base war. "My intent," said Gorman, "was that the rifle companies and the Reconnaissance Platoon should be wholly dependent on outside vehicles, mainly helicopters" (Gorman, Oral History).

One bright spot for the battalion during its stay in Phuoc Vinh in late July and early August was CSM Dobol's visit. Without any calendar-based justification, the battalion held in his honor a 26th Infantry Organization Day, featuring company cook-outs and soldier competitions—among them, setting up a 292 antenna for time and accuracy.

Then, on 2 August, the battalion was unexpectedly ordered to defend an artillery fire base at Bau Bang in support of the division's Operation CHEYENNE along Route 13 north of Lai Khe. Bau Bang, like Tan Binh, had been the site of a major clash between the newly arrived Americans and VC main force units, and the division's intelligence units had reason to believe that the artillery there was a likely target for another large attack. From 2-5 August 1966 the 1/26th defended the 2nd Battalion, 33rd Artillery at Bau Bang. Here the Blue Spaders dug a defensive position of the sort they had been contemplating, with the battalion commander and the company commanders together examining each foxhole and critiquing its cover, concealment, and fields of fire. On the first night the battalion fended off determined probing by the VC. The enemy's effort earned the respect of Major General DePuy, who later wrote that

> We should do like the Viet Cong did at Bau Bang against Paul Gorman's battalion: probe around and find the general configuration of the position, and determine whether it's fortified or not, then report back to the next higher headquarters. That way you don't get so enmeshed that you can't shoot at it, or you can't drop a bomb on it. The best thing to do would be to bring up more force and try to surround it, but don't surround it too tightly; that way you can still bomb it. Now, we often tried to do that. Sometimes we made a real mess of it. Sometimes everything went wrong. By the way, the VC decided not to attack Paul Gorman. They were smart. He was loaded for bear. (DePuy, *Changing An Army*)

Upon returning to Phuoc Vinh, the Blue Spaders were ordered by the 1st Brigade to commence airmobile operations to the east and south, along the densely jungled banks of the Song Be (a major river running generally north to south). Almost immediately the Blue Spaders clashed with well-armed enemy units apparently stationed in the area to block approaches to War Zone D and to guard the VC's "rice route" into the Saigon region.

Training to conduct helicopter assaults into defended landing zones (LZ) was not easy in a division like the Big Red One, which had only a few helicopters of its own. Unlike the 1st Air Cavalry Division, which had hundreds of helicopters organic to its units, most

Fig. 3.11. CSM Dobol discusses the M-16 rifle with Dobol 6, Bau Bang, August 1966

Fig. 3.12. Devil 6 (right) issuing an order to Dobol 6, Song Be, 11 August 1966 (Photo by Sgt. Clair W. Harmony)

of the aircraft used by the Blue Spaders came from outside the division, and the aircrew were unfamiliar with the division's tactics and techniques. Lieutenant Colonel Gorman frequently had to brief the aviator in command of the helicopters on the mission while they were flying to the point of assault, and often the sequence of fires and maneuver had to be changed literally on the fly to adapt to unanticipated circumstances. The aviators of that era were like the infantry: green, but valiant, and learning by doing.

On 13 August Major General DePuy directed 1st Brigade to fly 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry in heavy-lift helicopters to the Phu Loi airfield, there to prepare for an airmobile attack. The battalion had been rehearsing for this sort of abrupt change of mission. Captain Jim L. Madden, commanding Company C, remembers that

> It had been set as SOP that within two hours of the last troops arriving back into Phuoc Vinh from any operation, we had a full layout of equipment. Everything had to be cleaned, including the basic load of ammo. The weapons were hung on loops over the cot. All our gear, including radios, batteries and rations was readied for a no-notice departure. Everyone had to have a shower and a clean uniform, and everyone was inspected—I mean open ranks and a walk through of the bunks.
>
> We taught the troops that airmobility was a state of mind, and that they had to be prepared for a sudden, violent insertion, followed by rapid maneuvering at a decisive point. We stressed the need to move out quickly from the LZ ... to screen subsequent waves. (Jim L. Madden, video tape interview, First Division Museum at Cantigny, February 1996))

On 13 August that training paid off. It so happened that the division had acquired a VC defector, a lieutenant from a unit called "Q2" or the "Capital Liberation Battalion," that operated against Saigon itself. The defector reported that his battalion had assembled on the bank of the Saigon River north of Tan Son Nhut airport and was staging for an attack. Colonel Berry then took the defector on a helicopter ride along the river to the site of the enemy troop concentration. As they flew over it, the defector pointed to a larger house amid a cluster of huts at the river's edge, identifying it as Q2's command post.

Berry then flew into Phu Loi to meet with Major General DePuy and the commanders of the 1/26th. Madden remembered that DePuy spread a map on the hood of a jeep and told them that their mission was to kill or capture any VC in or near that larger house. A dozen HU1H utility helicopters—popularly known as the "Huey"—had been collected to fly the Blue Spaders to the VC staging area and set them down on the west bank so as to surround the supposed command post. The lift ships would require several round trips to insert the entire battalion, but the flight-time distance from Phu Loi was only a matter of minutes. Helicopter gunships were to block any escape by way of the river.

Lieutenant Colonel Gorman then issued a fragmentary order calling for the battalion companies to land in the sequence B, C, and A. Company B was assigned the larger house and its cluster of huts; Company C, the terrain and structures adjacent to the south; and Reconnaissance Platoon, the terrain to the north. Company A was to act as battalion reserve. Madden recalled that he couldn't see the map, and had to elbow in past Major General DePuy for a look at where his company was to land. The map was a 1:25000 "pictomap," and what he saw looked much like figure 3.13.

Madden didn't know that the body of water on the map was the Saigon River; "that area could have been Cambodia as far as I knew," he recalled;

> But that didn't phase me and it didn't bother the troops. We knew that we were to hit an LZ behind and to the right of Company B, and we knew we had to attack to the southeast. I heard talk about an enemy battalion, but I had no idea

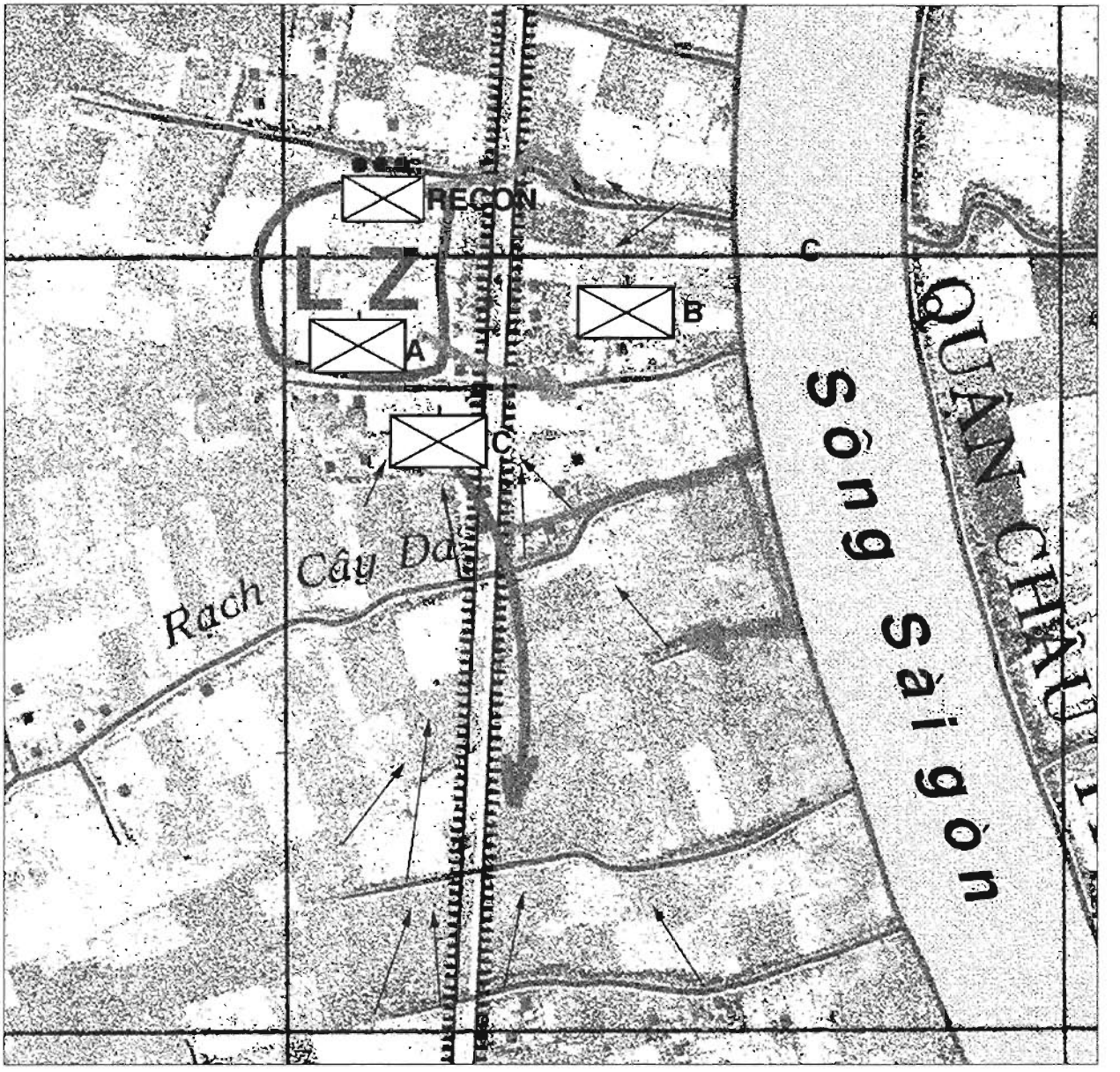


Fig. 3.13. The attack of 13 August 1966. Contemporary map, oriented north (1,000-meter grid).

of what we'd run into on the ground. That was fine with us. We knew all we needed to know.

On that operation, and on any other, I was completely confident. I understood that we were the point for the whole 1st Division. Even when we were isolated, and we couldn't see any other troops on the ground, we knew that there was air support and artillery on instant call, and that if we ran into a big enemy unit, the entire division would come in to back us up. I knew that even as

> we were getting the order to attack, other battalions were being alerted for movement to reinforce us if we needed help. (Madden, interview)

Talking about that mission long after the war, Gorman stated that it was remarkable to him how well the soldiers responded to such hurried orders. Such behavior, he notes, was a tribute to their discipline and their esprit. "We were in a phase of the war in which there was underway a fundamental change in the mission of the infantry: from 'close with and destroy the enemy,' the job became 'find the enemy.' The troops never hesitated...."

Gorman recognized that "there was a fine art ... [to] issuing orders for these operations. We had little definite information in any event, and time was of the essence. There was no point in long, five-paragraph orders because no matter what, it would be different on the ground. So we'd get everybody prepared to make their initial moves, and then make it up as we went along" (P. F. Gorman, video tape interview, First Division Museum at Cantigny, February, 1996).

Gorman knew that the objective for the attack of 13 August was in the zone of the 25th Infantry Division, but he assumed—incorrectly—that the 1st Division had coordinated the attack with its neighbor. In 1969 Lieutenant General Fred Weyand, who commanded the 25th Division in the summer of 1966, told Gorman that on 13 August he was eating a late lunch in his mess at Cu Chi, which looked out over rice paddies toward the Saigon River, when the sky was suddenly filled "with gunships and jets, all kinds of tracers filled that air, ordnance exploded, and a column of troop helicopters came out of the east and began to invade my division's zone, right under my nose." The VC may have been as surprised as General Weyand, but they were prepared to oppose the landing, opening fire with machine guns and mortars even as the lift ships were on the final approach to the landing zone. (Gorman, interview).

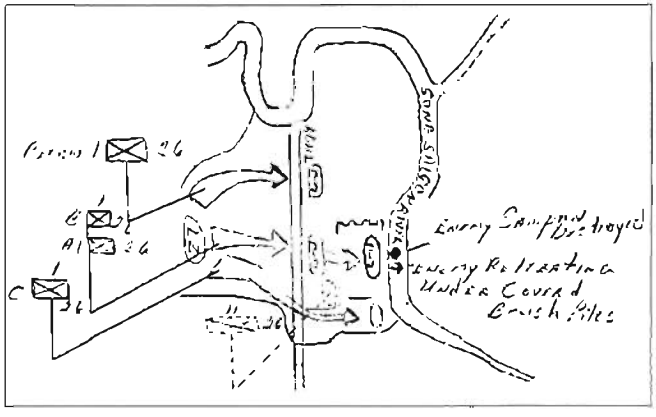
Colonel Berry, in a letter dated 14 August 1966, wrote that "we found the VC where the defector said we would. A quick hasty hipshoot operation, planned on the spur of the moment ... these quick ones always have their rough edges."

About a week after the engagement, by then known as Operation FREEPORT, the battalion published the following report:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345
20 August 1966

SUBJECT: Operation FREEPORT
TO: Each Blue Spader

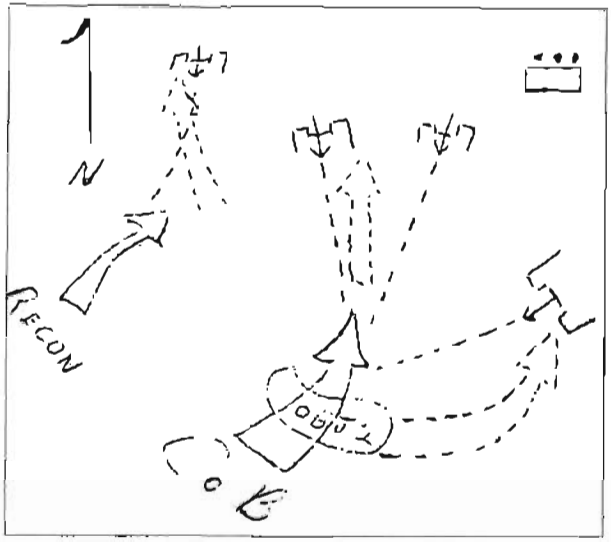
On the morning of 13 August, the battalion was put on a two hour alert for possible movement to Binh Duong which is located just south of Phu Loi along the Saigon River. The first company began to move to Phu Loi about 1200 hours. After our arrival in Phu Loi, the helicopters were refueled and the operation order was given. During this period a great number of air and artillery preparations were put into the landing zones and suspected VC locations. Company B was lifted to its L.Z. first; followed by Company C, Recon, and Company A. With Company B on the left and Company C on the right we began to sweep East toward the Saigon River.



Company A followed Company B clearing the pockets of resistance, searching and destroying huts and bunkers. While Companies B and C were attacking together, the Recon Platoon moved down the northern creek line on the left of Company B screening that flank and clearing the enemy positions in that area. Company B on receiving small arms fire gained fire superiority, and maneuvered to take its objective on the banks of the Saigon River.

While moving over its objectives A and B Companies found many recently lived in huts and bunkers containing food, clothing, ammo, medical supplies, and documents. Within 30 minutes the entire battalion had attacked, overrun and consolidated on its objectives between the L.Z. and the river. A sampan was seen by the command group. The sampan was taken under fire, sunk, and its occupant apparently killed. B Company spotted five clumps of bushes moving against the current of the river. These clumps were fired upon killing 2 VC and probably killing three more. Shortly afterwards Companies A and B began receiving increased small arms fire from the North along the river. Company B at this time began to sweep North while Company C began to sweep South along the river. Company A began its sweep to the Southwest along the creek which had originally been C Company's night limit.

Company B was moving North towards the location of a suspected VC battalion CP. While moving the company made contact with an estimated VC platoon in fortified positions, receiving fire from the front and both flanks. The Recon Platoon attacking on the left of B Company, also came under fire from fortified positions. The maneuver element of Company B encountered heavy fire, but under the cover of artillery fires and air strikes, Company B was



able to over-run the enemy positions. On conducting a thorough search of the area a rice cache was discovered and destroyed. As darkness was approaching Company B was recalled to assume its night defensive position.

Simultaneously C Company began its sweep South with the Saigon River as its left limit. C Company, after receiving sniper fire from the creek line, moved forward of the creek line where it made contact with an estimated VC platoon armed with machine guns and mortars. Air strikes and artillery fires were directed against the enemy. Company A, which was assigned the mission of clearing and destroying suspected VC positions to the Southwest, was directed to assist C Company in maneuvering.

As darkness closed in A and C companies were directed to break contact and move to establish defensive positions in the battalion perimeter. The night defensive positions of the battalion were located around the objective over-run by A and B Companies that afternoon. Negative contact was reported during the night of 13-14 Aug.

During the morning and early afternoon of 14 August, the battalion conducted company size search and destroy operations in the areas they had worked the day before. Numerous air strikes and artillery fires were directed against known and suspected VC positions. Company C found one K.I.A. who had apparently been killed by the artillery fires or the air strikes as his body was still warm. Numerous caches in bunkers and huts were discovered. These caches included weapons, ammunition, grenades, food, clothing and medical supplies. All caches were destroyed and all huts burned. The many documents that were found during the operation were turned over to the 1st Brigade S-2.

At 1340 hours, the battalion terminated operations and was airlifted to Phu Loi and from there to Phuoc Vinh.

Enemy Losses:

V.C. K.I.A.	Confirmed:	1
V.C. K.I.A.	Probable:	10
V.C. Prisoners		2
V.C. W.I.A.	Probable	35

Weapons-1 Russian Carbine M1944, US & Chicom Grenades-4, (15 destroyed), S/A ammo-[illegible] rounds, Magazines-2 (30 Cal), Pistol Belts-31 Structures-18, Canteens-21 Boots-1, Medical Aid Bags-4. Ampules-50, Vial (medical)-300, Bandages-50 (gauze), Sampans-2, Bicycles-1, Motors-1 (1.5 HP), Rice-438 bags (50 kilo), Salt-12 bags (50 kilo), White Crystal Substance-15 bags (50 kilo), Grain-1000 lbs., Milk-200 cans(8 oz.), Fatigue Uniforms-3, Numerous Documents.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

Ralph J. Rasmussen
Captain, Infantry
Adjutant

Carl Bradfield was among the first troops of Company B to land on what was, for obvious reasons, known as a "hot LZ," touching down at around three o'clock in the afternoon. He remembered his pilot bellowing, "All right, you guys, I'm going to skim the grass and you'll have to jump for it. I'll tell you when." But according to Bradfield,

> Those Huey pilots never did gauge the height of the ground right. Below us was a sea of grass with some five feet to drop. I had to go first on my side. I should've expected it, but somehow I thought it was solid ground down there. As my boots touched the grass and sank, I realized then I was in a newly planted rice paddy. I didn't stop sinking until the water line reached my solar plexus. I sank up to my hips in the mud beneath the water. By the time I managed to move that first muscle, the rest of the squad splashed down nearby.
> "What's that smell?" a replacement asked.
>
> "That's boob, Daddy-O, human waste. These people use it straight out of the outhouse, too," I replied.
>
> Moving in that stuff was no easy task. The weight we carried prevented us from darting out of the muck with the speed we wanted. But once we started our feet on those first difficult steps, we could pick up a slow-motion momentum. But if a guy stopped, he was stuck solid again. No one thought too much just then about the fighting going on. Our concentration centered on the slurping sounds each footstep made. We couldn't hold our noses; our hands were filled with equipment. Finally we slurped and stumbled our way onto the dike, helping one another out of a sticky situation....
>
> The Hueys in Vietnam were supposed to allow us ten seconds to get on or off before they took off. But if they were coming in on a hot LZ,

> they wouldn't land at all. They'd skim the ground once and lift off, whether the men were on or off. On that day we didn't get ten seconds, and they didn't land. We had to jump about five feet down into newly planted, water-covered rice fields.... I watched from a distance as one guy, who was half on and half stepping out of one Huey, went head over heels, face down into that muck. The chopper pilot didn't even give him time to jump, because bullets were flying everywhere. (Bradfield, *Blue Spaders in Vietnam)*

To the south of Company B's LZ, where Company C was inserted, the water was clearly visible above the rice. "It was like jumping into a lake," Madden said. Although the LZ was under fire, Madden remembered that all he could think about was struggling foot by foot to gain the apparently solid ground of the dike.

John Nance, a correspondent for the Associated Press, landed with Company C and later filed a vivid report of the action, during which he was wounded. "Machine gun tracers flashed red above a handful of U.S. infantrymen trapped and nearly buried in the mud of a flooded rice paddy," he wrote;

> The dirt dike they sprawled behind shook as slugs thudded into it. Chunks of earth chewed out by the bullets rained over them.
>
> A young soldier flung his arms over the dike from the other side. "Ooh," he gasped, "ooh," and hauled himself up and flopped into the foot-deep mud alongside his comrades. The panting soldier had flailed through 100 yards of muck and enemy bullets. His platoon was caught in a blistering Viet Cong crossfire. One squad radioed back that all its weapons were jammed with mud. It was late Saturday afternoon. It was gray and rainy. Acres of sticky brown mud surrounded the soldiers. The young soldier, a radioman, was the first of his platoon to get back....
>
> Bullets continued to crack overhead. "We're in a mess," Madden barked into a phone.... "Give us air. We need air strikes."
>
> Air Force jets that had been circling screeched across the nearly dark sky. Load after load of bombs tore through the trees covering the enemy positions 150 yards away. The firing

Fig. 3.14. Captain Jim L. Madden directing air strikes (Wide World Photo)

Fig. 3.15. Radioman of Company C, 13 August 1966 (Wide World Photo)

stopped. But when the planes left, the Viet Cong gunners resumed firing.

The pause had given more troops of the forward platoon a chance to get back. One by one they rolled over the dike into the mud. Several had been wounded. The platoon leader, a lieutenant with two slight wounds, crawled up to Madden. It was his first day in command of the platoon and his first day in combat. Mud caked his strained face. "Everyone's back, sir. Except for the dead. We just couldn't—the mud...."

Now it was dark and the machine gun tracers seemed to arc more wildly above the crouching men. "We've got to get the wounded out of here first," Madden said. "All right, give the wounded a hand. Don't stand up. Stay flat—and move out." Men began swimming through the muck, tugging and pushing the injured with them....

Charlie Company slogged through paddies to a village where trees and houses had been shattered by artillery and air strikes just before the troops landed. Two captured Viet Cong suspects said many Viet Cong had been in the area recently but that they had left the day before. The company pushed toward the river. Men slipped and slithered along paddy dikes, occasionally tumbling into the thick brown mud. They came up covered with it. Their feet moved as if they were weighted by iron. Weapons and equipment dripped as if they had been dipped in chocolate.

At a small creek crossed by a narrow makeshift bridge, the company met Viet Cong fire. Mortar shells ripped in, causing injuries. The unit pulled back. Jets streaked in with bombs, napalm and cannon fire. Smoke and flames engulfed the jungle on both sides of the creek. Charlie Company moved ahead through the charred trees. The bridge was intact.

"What a break," Madden said, and sent his lead platoon across it. On the other side the men slipped along the edge of paddies toward the tree-

Fig. 3.16. Bringing in a prisoner (Wide World Photo)

line. A rifle shot cracked from a position on higher ground. One American went down. He was carried back and laid behind the paddy dike. A buddy cradled his head while a medic worked over him. Blood flowed from his chest and left arm. The platoon kept moving. Suddenly firing seemed to erupt all around. Later, Specialist Eric Williams, 21, of Chicago, recalled: "We couldn't see them, we didn't know where to fire. Every time we raised up, the fire got hotter. It seemed like several machine guns all firing at once."

Madden had moved the company headquarters unit across the bridge. He leaned across the dike where the wounded soldier lay, and tried to comfort him. Then a machine gun flashed fire on the command group. Men plunged into the mud. The Viet Cong fire increased, snapping and cracking and flicking up dirt. It was getting dark.

Madden grabbed a telephone to size up the situation forward. The platoon leader said several men had been hit. A couple were dead, but they could not find the bodies. "Get those men," Madden shouted, "do everything possible to get them." Then came the report that one squad of the forward platoon was paralyzed because its weapons were clogged with mud. Madden ordered the men back.

The wounded had to be taken to safety by going underneath the bridge through waist-deep water. The most seriously hurt was in a poncho carried by five men. He and two others needed hospital attention desperately. The closest helicopter landing zone was the battalion command post, a few hundred yards through jungle and paddies. The poncho, slick with mud, twice slipped from the grasp of the soldiers carrying it and the wounded soldier hit the ground screaming in pain. They put him back and struggled on....The man in the poncho was transferred to a stretcher and carried to the landing zone Under the light of red flares, battalion medics worked over the wounded. A helicopter clattered down and took them away.

Back along the creek, Capt. Madden had pulled his company into defensive positions. They huddled in their muddy clothes, tried to clean their weapons, and sat out the long night. (John Nance, "Mud Hampers U.S. Platoon's Fight With Viet Cong," Associated Press, 20 August 1966)

Jim Madden remembered that when he was trying to pull back his forward elements, two bold VC joined them and tried to slip through his line; both were killed by alert sentinels. On the morning of 14 August Company C advanced, recovered its dead soldiers, and cleared the enemy positions it had run up against the previous evening. By midday the battalion's area had been searched, and the enemy was quiet. Helicopters arrived and extraction of the companies began. Apparently the division had diverted some of the helicopters to another operation, for Company A, the last out, sat in its pickup zone for over two hours. During that time the VC registered mortars and, when the aircraft finally arrived, opened fire, but to no effect.

CASTINE: "To Locate and Destroy"

When the Blue Spaders returned to Phuoc Vinh they immediately underwent a Command Maintenance Management Inspection (CMMI), conducted by a team from the 1st Division. In announcing the results, Major Hefler, the team chief, rated maintenance of ordnance and vehicles as "outstanding ... this is the best example of care achieved by an infantry battalion in the division" (1st Division information release 523-8-66).

This time, however, there was to be no long stay in Phuoc Vinh. On 19 August the battalion was ordered to conduct an air assault into a triangular clearing on the eastern edge of the Michelin rubber plantation, where it would protect two artillery batteries supporting the 3rd Brigade's Operation CASTINE. (The clearing is indicated in the center of the figure 3.17.) The overall objective of CASTINE was to encircle a regiment of the 9th VC Division. The battalion's report follows:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345

23 August 1966

SUBJECT: Operation CASTINE 20-22 August
TO: Each Blue Spader

The success of Operation FREEPORT on 13 and 14 August 1966 was recently enhanced when intelligence was received from a VC defector. The defector, a member of the Q2 battalion, the unit which had been operating along the Saigon River in the area the 1st of the 26th assaulted on 13 August 1966, stated that during the 13-14 August engagement 22 of his comrades had been killed, 25 more wounded and the entire

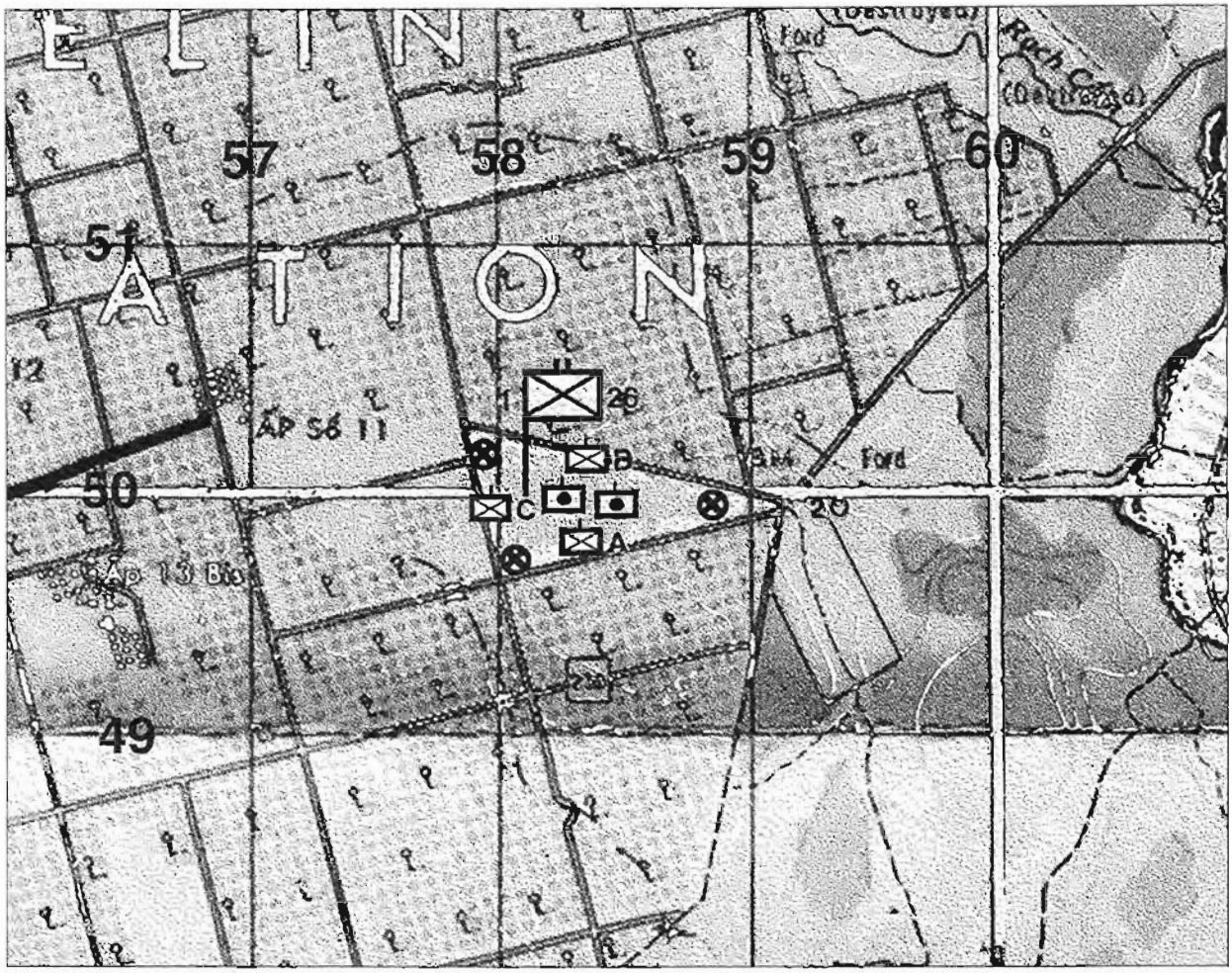


Fig. 3.17. The CASTINE position (1,000-meter grid)

unit broken up and scattered. Many of the VC in Q2 battalion had defected, and those who had not were attempting to escape to the NW. Q2 battalion was no longer an effective Viet Cong fighting force.

Another feather in the "Blue Spaders" cap.

At approximately 2100 hours 19 August 1966, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was alerted to stand by for possible deployment to an area northwest of Lai Khe to assist the 3rd Brigade in Operation CASTINE to take place in that area.

The battalion moved at 0900 on the following day, 20 August 1966, to a location vicinity coordinates XT 582500. The mission was to establish a defensive perimeter to provide security for 2 artillery batteries who were to fire in support of the 3rd Brigade operation to the east. Intelligence had detected the presence of elements of a VC regiment and the 3rd Brigade's mission was to locate and destroy this VC regiment.

The "Blue Spaders," after being helilifted into their objective area, secured it and began preparation of their defensive perimeter. Patrols were immediately dispatched by all companies. The 5th ARVN Recon Company was attached to us for this mission and was utilized for patrolling deep into the area around our perimeter.

Our patrolling proved highly successful and netted us the following during the 3 day period:

VC KIA (BC)	4	
VC KIA (Prob)	1	
VCC	3	[VC Captured or POW]
VCS	37	[VC Suspects]

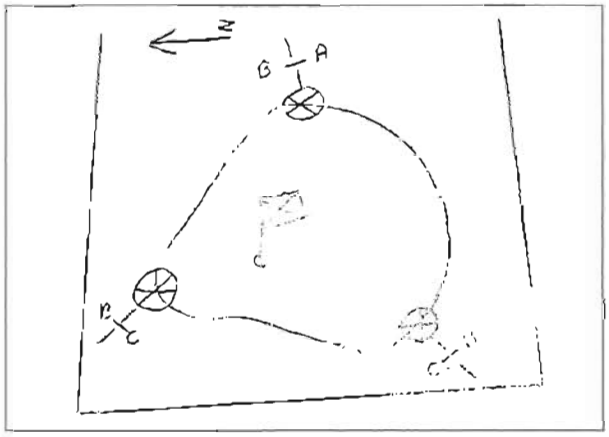
Weapons—2 rifles, Grenades 1,
Punji stakes—1 bundle
Numerous documents
Assorted Ammunition
Bicycles 2

In addition to our patrolling successes we were complimented by the 3rd Brigade CO, Colonel Marks, the Division CG, Major General DePuy and by General Hamilton Howze (US Army Ret) who visited our area [and commented on] professional quality of our bunkers and defensive positions. General Howze remarked that they were the best defensive positions he had seen in 35 years.

Operation CASTINE ended for the "Blue Spaders" the morning of 22 August 1966. We were extracted and returned to Phuoc Vinh to prepare for future operations in the vicinity of Phuoc Vinh.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

RALPH J. RASMUSSEN
Captain Infantry
Adjutant



Among the battalion's visitors during CASTINE was Moshe Dayan, the famed Israeli warrior, who was far less complimentary. Dayan was contemptuous of Dobol's defenses, holding that the artillery ought to defend itself, and that all the infantry should be out in the jungle hunting the enemy down.

The 1/26th's participation in CASTINE had delayed a long-planned opening by the 1st Brigade of the roads to Phuoc Vinh. The 1st Brigade began that operation—known as AMARILLO—as soon as the 26th Infantry was returned to its control.

AMARILLO: Hard-Won Victory

In this operation the 1st Brigade was to secure Route Red (the road numbered LTL 16 by the Vietnamese), running southeast from its intersection east of Tan Binh with LTL 1A and Route Orange (TL 2A). Supply convoys would then proceed east from the division's bases around Phu Loi to the town of Tan Uyen on the Song Dong Nai, and thence up LTL 16 to Phuoc Vinh. On 23 August the 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry was trucked from Phuoc Vinh to the vicinity of Phuoc Hoa (on the Song Be), where one company secured an artillery position while the rest of the unit moved on foot to the south, clearing mines and booby traps along the road and adjacent areas. A large culvert the enemy had blown to cut the road was replaced by Company A

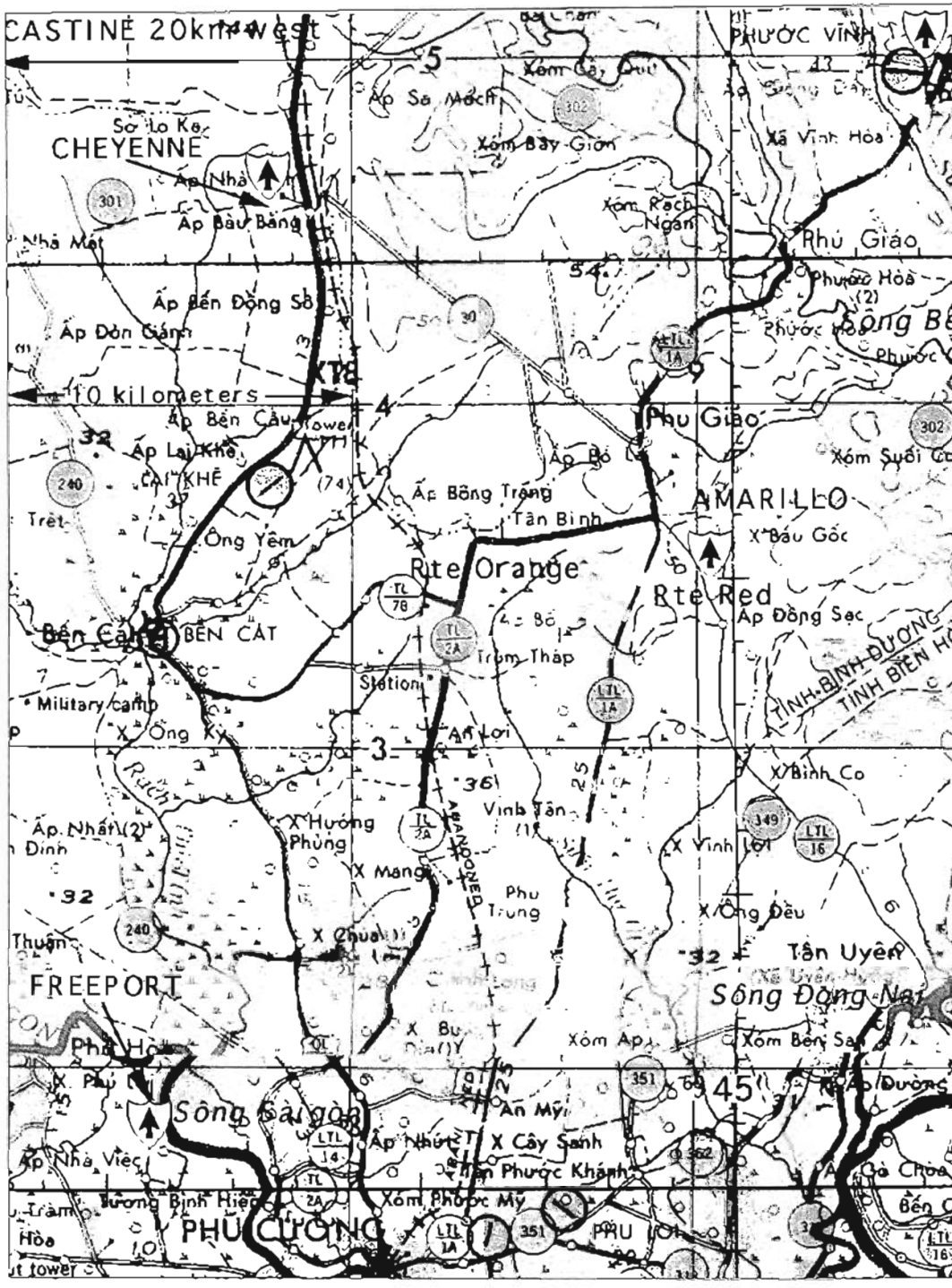


Fig. 3.18. Operations, August 1966

of the 1st Engineers, and by midafternoon the road was open for traffic. Battery D, 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery moved south on the repaired road to set up a second artillery position in the center of the 1st Brigade's sector, collocated with the brigade's command post.

Early on 24 August the Blue Spaders deployed by helicopter to two landing zones along LTL 16 and, in cooperation with the 1st Engineers, opened the road south to the village of Binh Co. (To the south of that point, the road was opened and secured by the 48th ARVN Regiment.) Rain fell, turning the road to mud and forming pools that hampered the work of the engineers. Company C lost one soldier killed and another wounded to a pressure-fused mine; otherwise, the road and the area adjacent to it were cleared without incident. At the end of the day the battalion went into two night defensive positions around its LZs, where its mortars had been positioned. At first light on 25 August Companies B and A redeployed along the road. Truck convoys were scheduled to move beginning later that morning. There was some ground fog, but the sun soon cleared it away.

Company C was held in reserve near the battalion command post, planning to conduct training in "cloverleafing," a technique for advancing through dense jungle in which the main body of a unit halts periodically while small patrols circle outward fifty to one hundred meters to the front, flanks, and rear, moving quietly and cautiously, wary of mines or enemy in ambush, and searching for the tell-tale shadow close to the ground that might be an enemy bunker. Colonel Sidney B. Berry, the brigade commander, wrote at the time that:

> This is virtually a new division now that we are in the midst of rotating personnel who came to Vietnam with the division and replacing them with newcomers. To train new soldiers, rebuild units and fresh commanders, and bring them to an acceptable level of combat effectiveness, we must concentrate on small unit actions so that new leaders can learn to command their units in combat. (S. B. Berry, letter, 23 August 1966, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

It turned out that Company C got more training that day than had been planned. Around 0700, shortly after the men moved out for their exercises, they received word that the battalion had monitored transmissions on the brigade net indicating that there was a U.S. patrol in trouble to the north, and that the company was to remain close to the command post, ready to assemble and move. At 0731 the company was told to assemble and prepare for action. At 0813 it was ordered to move north toward the point of engagement in the 8438 grid square. At 0826 the brigade alerted the entire battalion for movement north. Paul Gorman remembered that

> My battalion was along Route Red, south of Tan Binh. I had two companies deployed along the road with elements of the 1st Engineers. My headquarters and Company C, in reserve, were south and east of Tan Binh. To the north of us, DRACULA [call-sign for 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry] was securing that portion of Route Orange between the Song Be and Tan Binh. Late on the 24th, DRACULA CHARLIE had sent a small patrol westward—I think there were fifteen men in all—to scout the jungle beyond the rubber plantation. As I remember it, Bill Mullen, the company commander, had obtained some camouflaged fatigues—we called them "tiger suits"—and formed his own Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol or "Lurp." As far as I know, it was their first outing. They snooped a ways westward from the road, and then hunkered down for the night. The next morning they found that they had over-nighted in a VC base camp of some size and that they were surrounded by armed VC. Sometime around 0700 they radioed

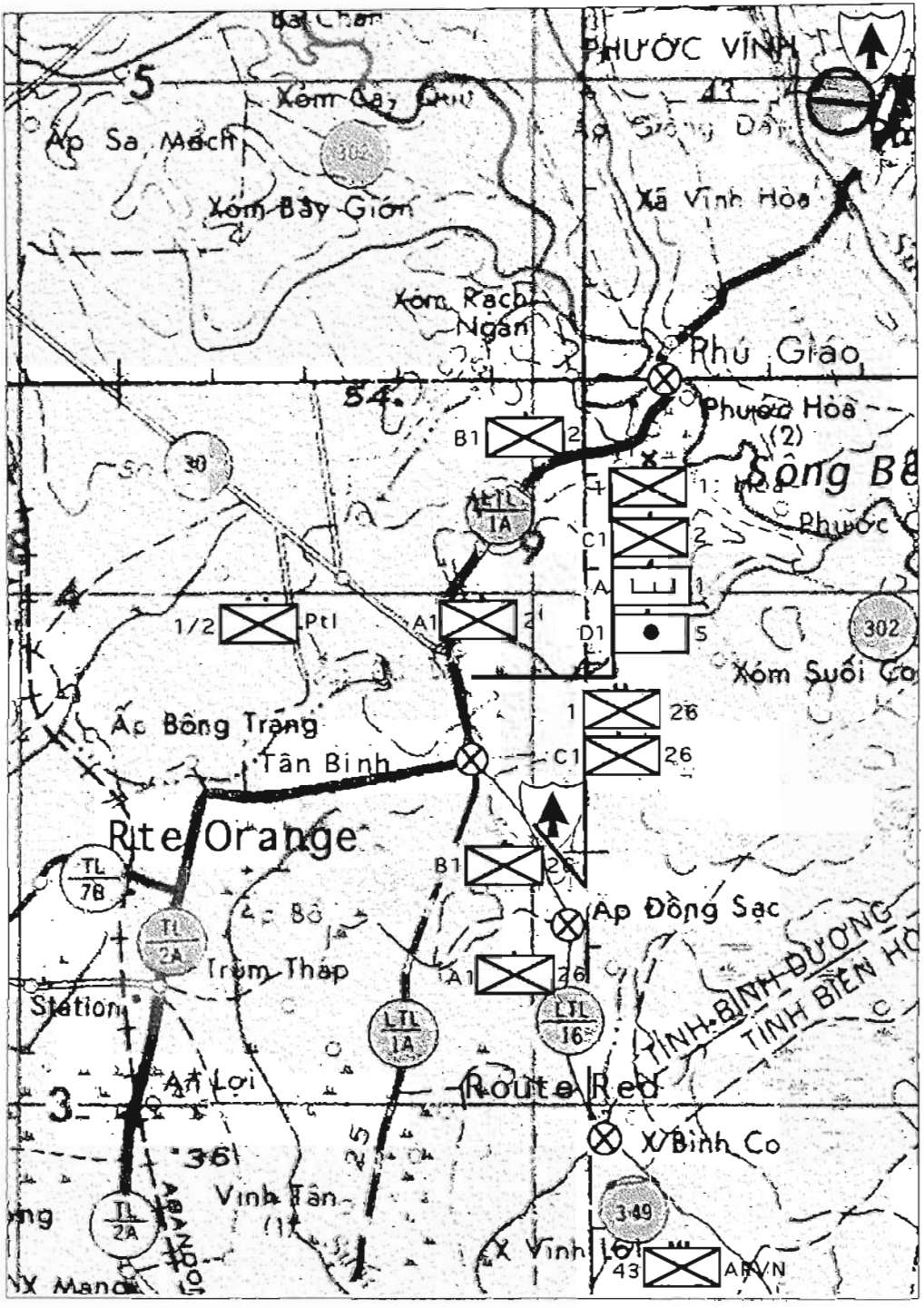


Fig. 3.19. Situation at daybreak, 25 August 1966

Mullen, and told him the good news. Then the enemy discovered the patrol, and attacked it.

Captain Mullen informed his battalion that he was going with his company to rescue his patrol, mounted his troops on vehicles of Troop C, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, and started.

1st Brigade ordered me to dispatch my battalion reserve to assist Mullen. Division had declared a tactical emergency, which meant that all helicopters supporting the division were diverted to support 1st Brigade, but 1st Brigade allocated only one H-13 to us. So I mounted Company C on whatever vehicles I could find, moved them to Tan Binh, and, the vehicles finding the stream bed un-fordable, put the company on foot due south of the last reported position of the patrol. I steered the column from overhead in an H-13 helo, and landed to give Jim Madden a last minute update.

I hadn't paid much attention to DRACULA up to that time, because they'd been mainly operating up north against enemy main force units. They wore a black kerchief like I had in Navy boot camp. Their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Dick Prillaman, was a very experienced soldier, having been in Vietnam for nearly two

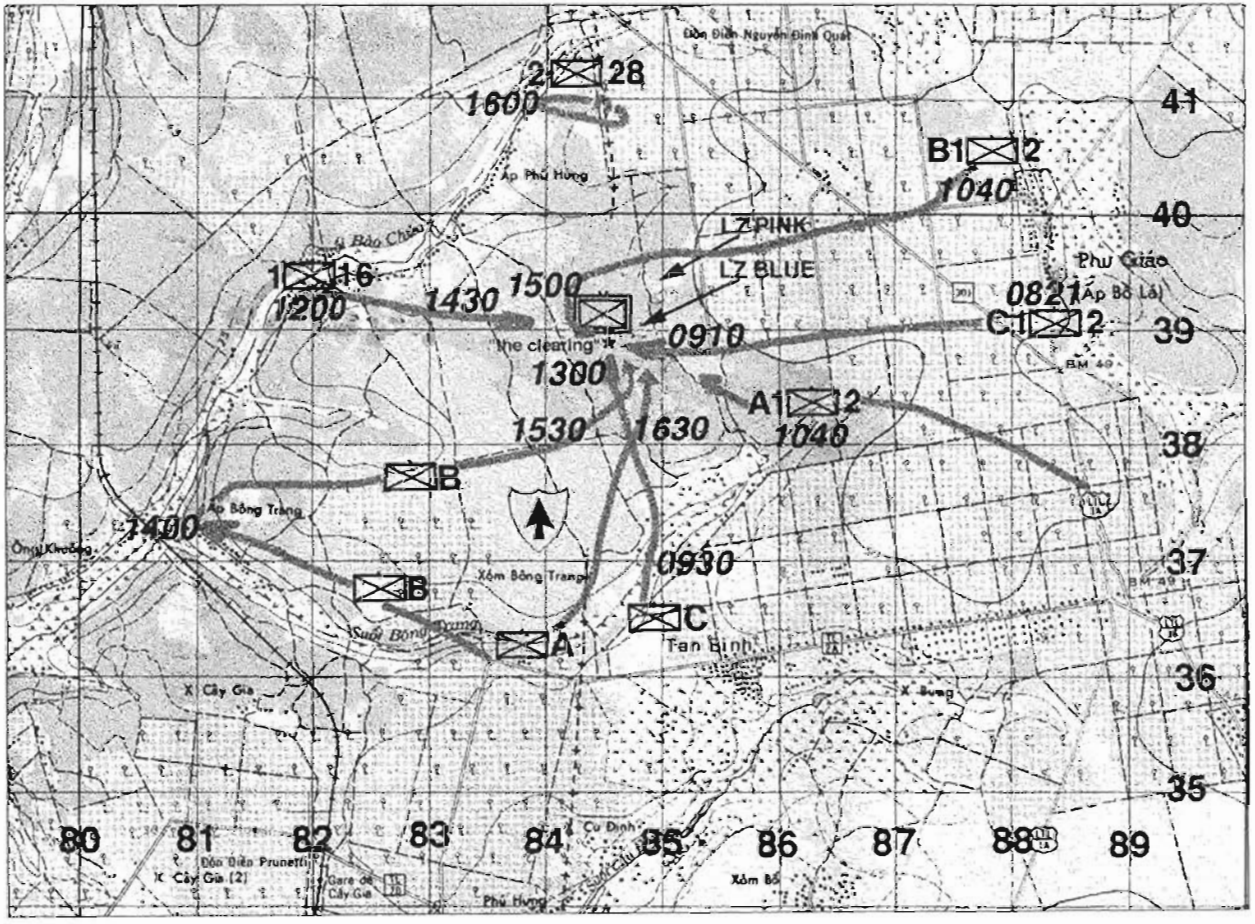


Fig. 3.20. Maneuver of 1st Brigade, 25 August 1966 (1,000-meter grid)

years, but I don't think I knew that at the time he was on leave in Hong Kong, and that DRACULA was under the command of Major Clark, Prillaman's executive officer.

Well, Mullen crashed into the base camp, and immediately got enmeshed with a very determined and numerous enemy. The patrol was still missing. (Gorman, Oral History)

The 1st Brigade had instructed that Company C was to be passed to operational control (OPCON) of the 1/2nd Infantry when the company reached the 37 E-W gird line. At 0930 the Brigade's *Daily Staff Journal* records that OPCON had been assumed by the 1/2nd. Company C was at that time moving by foot through dense brush. It was slow going.

The accompanying map (Fig. 3.20.) depicts the commitment of the entire 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry to the rescue of the beleaguered patrol in the vicinity of "the clearing." Around 1300 the 1/26th's Company C reached "the clearing" from the south, followed around 1600 by Companies B and A of the Blue Spaders. The 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry closed on the fight from the west.

On 26 August Captain Jim Madden of Company C, then hospitalized for reasons that will soon become apparent, wrote in a letter to the battalion commander his recollections of what happened:

> Just after you left us [around 0930] the 3d Platoon found a VCS [Viet Cong suspect] hiding in the creek without an ID or weapon. He looked prime however as he wore the black shirt and shorts and appeared to have just worked up a sweat. We took him all the way with us and he was still alive when I last saw him.
>
> We had a platoon "clover leaf" every five hundred meters and it worked perfectly. About 1000 meters south of the main battle we found a new (30 days?) heavy duty bunker, however there were no fresh tracks around it.
>
> Closing in on Dracula Charlie was a little rough as they were rather trigger happy by that time. When I was about 200 meters south of them my point man, armed with a shot gun, came up on the flank of two VC and with one quick shot blew one's head off and caught the other one in the leg. This is the fifth time in a row my point man has gotten the drop on VC. The shotgun is the solution to that first round hit!
>
> The VC which was hit in the foot had a duffel bag full of one of the most fantastic sets of medical equipment I have ever seen, drugs, instruments, pills and so on. His billfold and several notebooks which were in the duffel bag were turned over to Lt. Paar [Company C] for safe keeping. One of the notebooks had a map of Saigon like the one we found by the Saigon River [in Operation FREEPORT]. (Jim L. Madden, letter, 26 August 1966, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

As Company C advanced north toward the fight, the rest of the 1/26th moved west from Tan Binh. The

Fig. 3.21. Captain Madden with the Company C point. Note shotgun, double canteens, and rations carried in sock tied to harness.

battalion commander's original order, recorded by 1st Brigade at 1146, called for Companies B and A to converge on Company C. But within minutes, Captain Mullen informed the 1st Brigade that the enemy to his front was withdrawing. Gorman then changed the orders he had previously issued, later explaining that

> I had been monitoring the brigade command net, and concluded that there was at least an enemy battalion involved. Around 1000 1st Brigade ordered the whole 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, to reinforce Captain Mullen. About the same time, division provided DEVIL 6—Colonel Berry—with two additional reinforcing battalions, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, and 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry. My estimate was that Sid Berry had more than enough infantry. The judgment appeared confirmed when, around noon, Mullen reported that the VC had broken contact.
>
> Then Jim Madden's point element took a prisoner, who reported that the enemy wounded were being evacuated to Ap Bong Trang, and that the rest of the unit would rally there. Figuring that it was Berry's intent to surround and annihilate the enemy, I determined to head off the exfiltration. So I had called DEVIL 6—Colonel Berry—and proposed that my Company B immediately move to Ap Bong Trang, to intercept what I figured would be a whipped and retreating enemy. Colonel Berry agreed. I mounted Company B—George Joulwan's company—on the vehicles of Troop A of the Quarter Horse, that had just come up Route Orange, and had been attached to me.
>
> Here's an eerie coincidence for you: as you may know, the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry was mounted on M-48 tanks and M-113 armored personnel carriers. Those APCs of Troop A on which Company B went into battle on 25 August had once belonged to the Blue Spaders when they were at Fort Riley. We knew that because on at least eight of them, the old 26-I bumper markings were still clearly visible. Anyway, Joulwan's company mounted up, and set off west from Route Orange where it turned south, into the underbrush, proceeding to Ap Bong Trang. That's a move of about eight kilometers from Route Red to Ap Bong Trang. I was again overhead in my H-13, helping the column to navigate. Company A was mounted on engineer dump trucks, and moved to a position north of Tan Binh near Xom Bong Trang, then dismounted....
>
> Both places [Xom (hamlet) Bong Trang and Ap (village) Bong Trang] were dry holes. There was just nothing there. Not even a sign that there had ever been buildings, or a railroad, let alone VC wounded. No tracks, no trace of the enemy. We were searching around Ap Bong Trang when I got an urgent order from Berry to "get up here as soon as possible" and I could tell from his voice that he meant it. I remounted Company B, turned it northeast on its armored vehicles, and told Company A to start marching on foot north, hoping that the battalion could converge on Company C. Bravo had about three kilometers of jungle to traverse on vehicle, while Alfa had to hoof it about the same distance. (Gorman, Oral History)

It had developed that, as DOBOL attacked westward, DRACULA's situation had become critical. Instead of withdrawing, the enemy had attacked with renewed vigor. Colonel Berry recorded that he landed from his helicopter (at around 1430, according to the 1st Brigade's *Staff Journal*) and, accompanied by his command sergeant major, walked into the engagement. Writing a few days later in a letter home, he described how, as the morning progressed, the companies took "what seemed to be an interminable time to fight their way through the jungle"; in the meantime,

> we became more and more worried about the fate of the patrol. Finally, our lead company reached the vicinity of the patrol's last reported location and immediately became heavily engaged

with the enemy. A second 1/2 company arrived and became engaged. Then a company of the 1/26 arrived. Three companies were engaged in heavy, close quarter fighting and no battalion headquarters was there to command the battle. As a fourth company [from the 2d Infantry], drew near the fight and was nearing a one-helicopter landing zone in the jungle, I landed in my helicopter and joined the fourth company and had the acting 1/2 commander land from his helicopter....

Landing about 40 meters from the fight, we fought our way into the three companies. We followed a trail a tank with one of the rifle companies had crashed through the undergrowth. We literally fought our way in, for the VC lined the track. We arrived to find a scene of carnage, death, destruction, and the worst fight I have ever personally seen. The companies had fought their way into the middle of a VC base camp replete with elaborate trench systems, bunkers and fortifications.... The jungle was so thick that the fighting was often at the range of 5-10 meters. Many dead lay around a small clearing. In the clearing was a helicopter that had been shot down and a smoldering APC (M-113 armored personnel carrier) that a rocket had knocked out. Thirty or forty wounded had been partially loaded into APCs, other wounded were on the ground, and more were being wounded every minute. Mortar and rifle grenade fire was coming in, and snipers with rifles and automatic weapons were in the overlooking trees. With no battalion commander there, there was no central command and control. The situation was chaotic.

As I walked across the clearing with the acting battalion commander, a sniper's bullet struck him in the head and killed him instantly. (S. B. Berry, letter, 28 August, 1966, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

Captain Jim Madden and Company C had worked their way to the scene of the fight by 1300, more than an hour before Berry's arrival. Madden moved forward to confer with Captain Mullen and, amid sequential disasters, the two captains were coordinating a plan of action when Colonel Berry showed up. Madden's company was arrayed in a column of platoons, with the lead platoon just at the edge of the clearing, or "DZ" (Drop Zone, as Madden referred to it). The following sketch (fig. 3.22), annotated by Madden, shows the

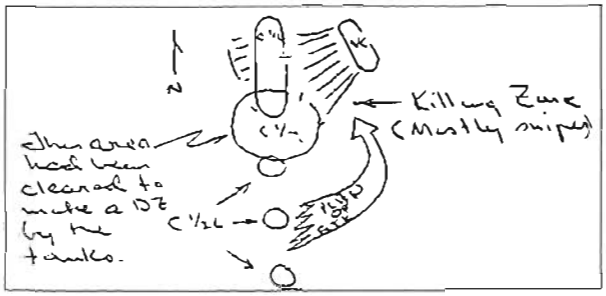


Fig. 3.22. Company C at "the clearing," 25 August 1966

situation when Company C made contact with the other American units in the DZ.

It was obvious to Madden that his first order of duty was to sweep around and hit the snipers from the right flank. He was discussing with Mullen how to do this when he was hit in the leg, probably by a mortar fragment: "Although I don't remember hearing one go off, it must have been a mortar as they were going off all afternoon." But, he remembered,

> As luck would have it one damn thing after another kept me from executing my intended plan. Just as I bandaged my leg a Pedro chopper [a U.S. Air Force search-and-rescue helicopter equipped for jungle extraction] was shot down and landed not more than 15 meters from us. We got the crew out and into a hole not far from us. About that time I got a report that a VC machine gun had killed

either one or two of my men but that another one of my men had knocked it out. Just as my two southern elements closed into the area we had secured on the south flank, and I had given my order, the CO of C 1/2 [Captain Mullen] reported that B 1/2 was right outside our perimeter but that he didn't know their location. Well, needless to say this was all I needed at this time as I could envision B 1/2 and C 1/26 running head on into one another right in the middle of the [VC] killing zone.

Just ahead of the time B 1/2 finally made it into the perimeter (from the north, as we expected, but couldn't be certain of!) Colonel Berry showed up and after looking over the situation approved my plan. (Madden, letter)

Fixing the exact location of the 1/2nd's Company B was complicated by casualties to its leaders. The company commander was wounded and succeeded by the battalion's S-2, who was himself hit and succeeded by the battalion communications officer. According to the After Action Report of the 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry (dated 11 September 1966), fourteen soldiers were on their feet in the company's last thrust to punch through to Captain Mullen's force. Had Madden executed his plan, his troops would probably have had to pass through elements of the 1/2nd's Company A, because that unit had was advancing from LZ Blue to reach Madden's force. Captains Madden and Mullen had only vague information about the situation on the south and east.

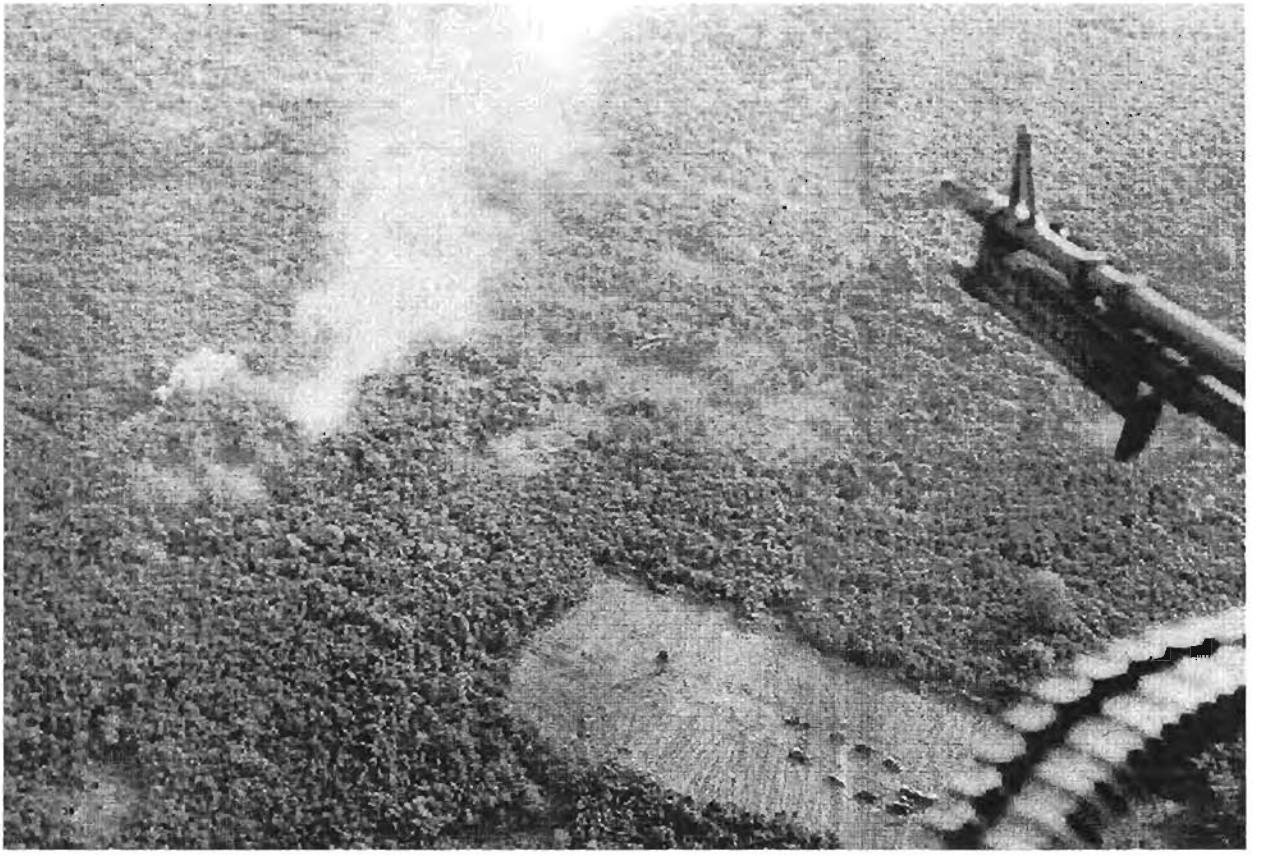


Fig. 3.23. "The clearing" and LZ Blue, afternoon of 25 August 1966

Figure 3.23, a photograph taken from the southeast by a circling helicopter in the late afternoon of 25 August, shows LZ Blue, carved out of the jungle by engineer bulldozers, with the APCs used to evacuate the wounded grouped within. The view is generally northwest, and "the clearing" is at left center, the VC fortifications marked by the white smoke seen rising through the jungle just to the north.

In his letter of 26 August 1966, Captain Madden stated that he had planned to sweep with two platoons, leaving his third platoon to control the fires of the three other companies—a tactic, wrote Madden, that "is not in the book but was certainly called for." However, just as he was leaving Colonel Berry to give the final plan to his platoon leaders, who were about twenty meters away,

> I got hit in the chest by a sniper and thought I had had it as it knocked all of the wind out of me. Upon inspection however it was a flank shot and had penetrated only three or four inches of my right chest. I slipped on a bandage and was ready to go. It was a real shock to me when Col. Berry ordered me to turn over my company to Lt. Harrison as the wounds weren't that bad and I had good control of myself.... Col. Berry had called off the flank attack. (Madden, letter)

Colonel Berry himself had a close call: he and Madden were crossing the clearing on the run when Madden was hit. "I pulled him out of the clearing," recalled Berry,

> and over his protest, put him aboard an APC for transport to the med-evac LZ and evacuation. (I later learned that he had already been hit in the leg.) About that time, the burning APC exploded when I was about 20 feet from it. I thought I'd had it for certain. Pieces of armor fell all around and killed a couple of men. The heat was fearsome. Gas grenades in the track burst, and we all got a snoot-full of nauseous gas.

Somehow Colonel Berry emerged from the explosion unscathed and, despite the hail of bullets, continued to move about in order to locate leaders and restore subordination. "Finally, after two or three hours—I can't remember the exact time—just like the cavalry in the movies, Paul Gorman came riding on a tank deck" (Berry, letter, 28 August 1966).

Gorman, like Berry, is unsure about exact times. However, he clearly remembers why he showed up on a tank instead of in the H-13 helicopter from which he had previously been directing his column's movements. At some point en route, the H-13 began to run low on fuel, confronting Gorman with a serious problem:

> I knew that without my being overhead to help steer the column [Company B] from clearing to clearing, the going would have been much slower. Sometime around three o'clock my helo landed me just ahead of the lead tank, and left to get fuel. I got out carrying a PRC 10 (radio), and as the helo took off, I became aware that a shadow to my immediate front was in fact the aperture of a bunker, built low to the ground and very nearly invisible. Fortunately, it was unoccupied, but I was mighty glad when that tank drove up.
>
> From then on we traveled through an extensive fortified zone, from time to time running into manned positions, but we pushed through hastily.... I climbed on the back deck of the lead tank, and we pressed on. Once there was a loud explosion, and I tapped the tank commander on the helmet and told him that I'd appreciate being warned before he used his main gun. He said that he hadn't fired, but that a VC rocket had just struck the gun mantle. The sound of small arms firing was now very close. I told [Captain] George Joulwan [Company B] to stop in place, to collect his elements, to find Company A if he could, and

to position them just to his rear. I would, I said, take my battle staff forward, and send further orders once I assessed the situation. I then advanced with one tank, and I think an APC with my S-2, my S-3, and our radio operators....

I wanted that tank to lead, so I got on the rear deck again, and rode it right into the east edge of the clearing where the downed helo was. Colonel Berry ran over to me, reached up to shake my hand, and wished me happy birthday. It was a good thing I leaned over, because just then some sniper started pinging the bustle rack right where I had been standing. I got down in a hurry, and the two of us ran across the clearing to a trench on the west side. My staff followed, but out in clearing some snipers wounded my S-3 and my radio operator.... [The S-3 was] Captain Peter Boylan. He recovered well, [and] subsequently served in the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry. (Gorman, Oral History)

Colonel Berry then left to coordinate the rest of the brigade, instructing Gorman to assume command over all the units around the clearing. It was no small task; within a few yards of his position Gorman encountered soldiers from four companies: Troop C of the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, and from C Company of three different battalions—the 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry, the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry; and the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry. DOBOL was the only cohesive unit then in the fight at the clearing. Attacking through Company B of the 1st Battalion 2nd Infantry, Company A of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry suffered a bloody repulse, losing its company commander and all the platoon leaders. Other elements of the 1/16th had become separated, with their exact location uncertain. The battalion nonetheless sought to maneuver in search of the northwest flank of the VC. By nightfall the bulk of that battalion was nosed up against VC fortifications north and west of Gorman's position. (Captain Q. L. Seitz, "Operations of Company B, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry ... 25-26 August 1966...." Monograph, U.S. Army Infantry School, January 1968). The 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry was moved into blocking positions some two thousand meters to the north of the enemy fortifications.

Lieutenant Colonel Gorman ordered his Company B and Company A to move forward on line with Company C, extending the cordon around the VC to the east. Darkness was gathering fast. The enemy continued to snipe whenever Americans exposed themselves. Gorman remembered that

> I got everyone on my side [of the fortifications] to dig or to take cover in the VC trenches, and I started to prepare a sketch of who was where using radio messages, runners, and staff officers. There was mass confusion, particularly as to the whereabouts of the various parts of 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry.
>
> Soon I was relieved to hear Colonel Berry on the command net, who directed me to contain the enemy during the hours of darkness, and to plan for an attack in the morning. We agreed that we would use napalm, as the weapon most likely to drive the VC out of their fortifications, or down into their underground tunnels, and then go in after [the enemy]. He told me that we would have a flare ship overhead all night, that he would arrange for a rapid infusion of resupply and medical aid once we secured the VC base camp. (Gorman, Oral History)

It was a long night, punctuated by bursts of small arms fire. Americans were moving around trying to find their units, and there may have been exchanges among friendlies, although none were reported. Enemy mortar and rocket fire ceased, but the enemy continued shooting with small arms, and enemy soldiers alone and in small groups seemed to be moving. It was not clear, however, what the enemy activity portended:

exfiltration or infiltration, or the gathering of trapped units for a breakout assault.

In a typical encounter, around midnight three soldiers of Company B observed what appeared to be a "glowworm" approaching them. They challenged, and first one, then a second human figure fled into the darkness. Uncertain about the first figure, the Americans held their fire, but shot at the second. The following morning they found to their front the body of a VC armed with a carbine, a pencil flashlight near his hand (1st Division information release 714-8-66). Similar incidents occurred throughout the night, and at dawn the enemy was still sniping. (Gorman and Rudolf H. Egersdorfer, video tape interview, First Division Museum at Cantigny, February 1996).

The sun rose on 26 August at 0643, and at 0700 jet fighters, guided by smoke grenades used to mark the front lines, commenced to douse the VC fortifications with napalm. Simultaneously, the 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry was lifted in helicopters to LZ Pink. Some twenty-two cans of napalm were dropped, two of which fell off-target, inflicting friendly casualties. Gorman remembered that

> About half of the [napalm] cans went in without incident. Then I looked up and saw one gleaming through the trees right above me, and the tree burst into flames, and started raining napalm. My map and my radio were literally burned up, and I got singed a bit. I asked that they keep laying the napalm in, and they did. Some five or ten cans later, another can fell into nearby positions. Colonel Berry then decided to call off further strikes. I ordered my battalion to assault, but shortly after we began to move, we encountered a terrific blast of fire from the northeast. It was the 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, much closer to us than I had imagined. I got them to cease fire so that we could resume our attack. We then cleared the complex, and policed the battlefield.
>
> At 0800 the survivors of the patrol from Company C, 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, walked into the landing zone to the east of the action [LZ Blue]—about nine of the 15 lived, as I remember. That's about the end of the real story.

But there was another story, that of friendly casualties from napalm—a story, Gorman contended, that was "misconstrued ... and blown out of proportion." Gorman recalled that one press report cited 22 killed and 36 wounded by napalm, contrary to figures provided by the 1st Brigade, which listed 3 killed and 9 wounded. Gorman personally knew of 2 killed and 3 wounded. He attributed the inflated figures to reporters who "soon began arriving in the clearing where the dead from the previous day still lay, corpses charred initially in the explosion of the APC, and then burned by the napalm." The reporters, said Gorman,

> immediately assumed napalm had caused all the deaths, and in the confusion of reorganizing after the battle and evacuating the wounded, no one set them straight. I sure didn't think about that at the time, although I do remember stopping a video team from shooting close-ups of the dead. In any event, we did it to ourselves twice, once with mis-aimed napalm, and the second time with poor press-handling. (Gorman, Oral History)

The resulting furor drew the commander of the 1st Division to the daily press conference in Saigon on 26 August 1966. In his briefing to the press, Major General DePuy stated that "this was not a happy battle." He said that the final airstrikes had been designed to hit enemy close-in to the American infantry, and that the division, understanding well that the margin for error was about fifty yards, had accepted the risk. "We would have lost many more than we did had we not used napalm," DePuy concluded (Tom Quinn, *Stars and Stripes*).

The word-picture of the battle by the unit itself, reproduced below, differs markedly from the lurid accounts occasioned by the napalm incident:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 963452

2 September 1966

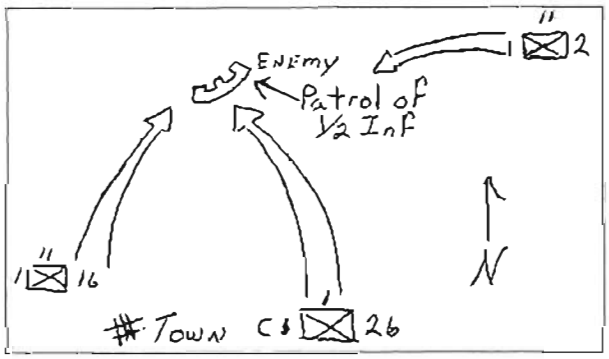
SUBJECT: Operation AMARILLO 24 August-
1 September 1966

TO: Each Blue Spader

On 24 August 1966, 1st Battalion 26th Infantry deployed by air from Phuoc Vinh along Highway 16 to take part in a road clearing-convoy operation, which began uneventfully except for normal enemy mines and booby traps.

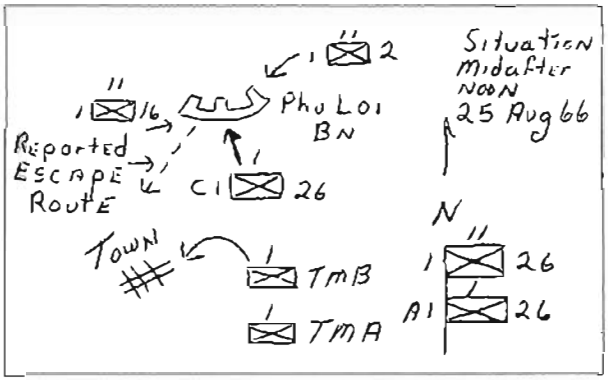
On 25 August, however, a reconnaissance patrol of the 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry, became heavily engaged with an estimated Viet Cong Company about 10 kilometers northwest of the Spader sector. First one company of the 2nd, and then the entire battalion was sent in to assist the patrol. By noon it was clear that the enemy force was much larger than originally estimated.

The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was alerted to join the fight, and Company C was committed, moving to an attack position by armored personnel carriers, and then attacking north to relieve the 2nd Infantry patrol. At about the same time, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry was air landed west of the battle area, and attacked east, while 1st of the 2nd attacked west.



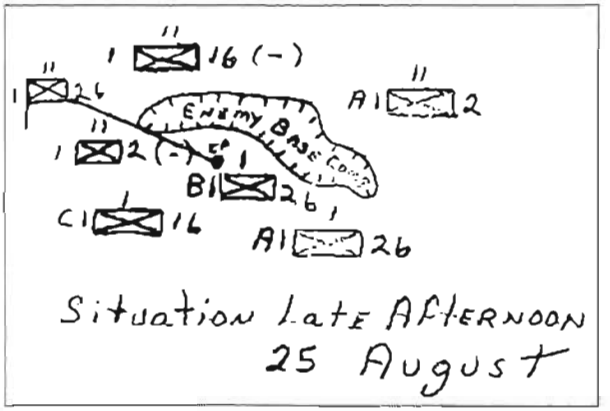
The enemy position shown was very well fortified, and located deep in dense jungle. As friendly forces closed the encirclement, the enemy reacted violently, pouring withering mortar, rocket, and small arms fires on our forces. Prisoners taken early in the battle, as well as documents captured in overrun bunkers established that we had in our net the famed enemy Phu Loi Battalion of hard core Viet Cong, very well armed, well trained, and battle hardened. Prisoners further asserted that the enemy was trying to escape to a town to the southwest.

When the CO, 1st Brigade heard of the enemy escape attempt, he sent the 26th on a lightning stab to cut off their retreat. Company B loaded aboard engineer dump trucks, raced 12 kilometers to the northwest, formed two attack teams with Troop A, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, and attacked west. The Battalion CP and Company A moved up behind Company B.



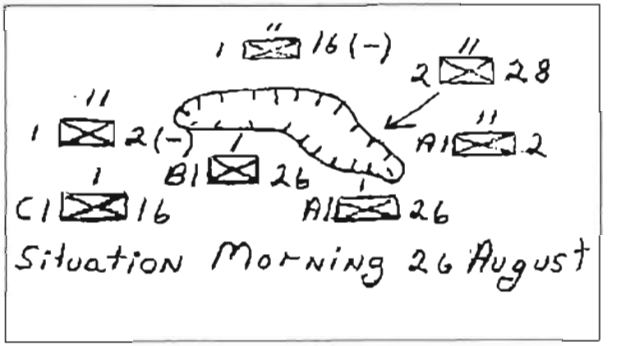
At this juncture, the situation around the enemy position turned very serious for the U.S. attackers. Many officers and noncommissioned officers were wounded or killed, and in the dense jungle, control of maneuver became

most difficult. Accordingly, CO 1st Brigade ordered the 26th to commit its reserve, and to turn Co B (Team B, with two rifle platoons and a platoon of cavalry) to the north. This was quickly accomplished, and by late afternoon with the arrival of Co B and the Battalion Command Post on the battlefield, the situation was restored.



All units on the battlefield except 1/16th Infantry (-) were attached to 1st Battalion 26th Infantry, and throughout the night flares were burned over the encircled enemy to preclude his sneaking away. At dawn the attack was resumed. Another battalion, 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry landed by air and attacked into the enemy positions, while 1/26th brought down intense air strikes on the Viet Cong. During the attacks, some napalm accidentally fell on the U.S. position, but considering the closeness of the combat and the very well dug enemy positions, no other weapon would have permitted our forces to advance. As it turned out, the napalm and bombs crushed the enemy resistance, and 26th and 2/28th Infantry advanced quickly into the enemy fortifications.

The battle field was then policed, 1/2 Infantry and 1/16th Infantry withdrawn, and 2/28th



Infantry and 1/26th Infantry returned to the road clearing operation on 27 August.

SUMMARY: The 26th Infantry accomplished all assigned missions with speed and efficiency. We dominated the battlefield and did so through the heaviest volume of enemy fire received by the Blue Spaders since World War II. The Viet Cong's famed Phu Loi Battalion suffered its first defeat in battle—and it should be noted that these hard core VC were recruited originally from the same area where we conducted our successful LAM SON II Pacification Campaign; our victory over the enemy unit in the field adds to the security of that pacified area around Phu Loi. As a result of the punishment the enemy took, he was unable to interfere with six days of steady convoy operations to Phuoc Vinh—the longest, most successful road clearing operation since the 1st Division's arrival here in Vietnam.

The following information has been received from the Commanding General, 1st Infantry Division, and is reproduced here for your information:

"Reliable confirmation has just been received that the action conducted on 25 and 26 August during operation AMARILLO destroyed approximately one third of the elite Phu Loi battalion with attached C62 Company.

"The following specific figures of KIA's suffered by the Phu Loi Battalion and attached company have been verified:

UNIT	25 AUG	26 AUG	TOTAL
PHU LOI BN	65	36	101
C62 Company	35	35	70
TOTAL	100	71	171

"Although no figure is available as to the number of enemy wounded, it is evident from the above that the Phu Loi Battalion was severely hurt.

"Each and every member of the Division who participated directly or indirectly in this hard won victory can be justly proud in his personal contribution and in the Big Red One."

FOR THE COMMANDER:

RALPH J. RASMUSSEN
Captain, Infantry
Adjutant

After the battle, as was its custom, DOBOL sought to learn from its experience. (It is fair to say that some of the participants are still learning.) Captain Rudolf H. Egersdorfer, a naturalized American who had won his commission through Office Candidate School, had been the only staff officer with the battalion commander on the night of 25-26 August. He was the battalion S-2, and the officer who made the most thorough investigation of the Phu Loi Battalion's defenses after the battle. Observing that defenses were "awesome," he said that

> They were designed around large bunkers capable of holding twenty or more men, with deep trenches radiating out to smaller fighting bunkers, all connected by trenches in a ring. The firing apertures were narrow and low, so small that no American could use a weapon through them. The fields of fires were really fire tunnels, cut by clearing lanes in the underbrush nearest the ground, and tying the bushes above together. No GI walking through such a lane could know that from the belt down he was perfectly visible to the VC in bunkers. When the firing started, the safest move for our troops would have been to climb up a tree three or four feet, but what we usually did was hit the ground, and that was exactly the wrong move.
>
> The bunkers themselves were masterpieces. They were built not of large logs, like we Americans usually used, but of laminated layers of saplings, arm-thick, with three or more feet of dirt packed on top. They were neat, durable, and equipped with creature comforts like picnic tables.
>
> I really believe that the only way we could have driven them out is with flame, and preferably very precise flame throwers. (Rudolf H. Egersdorfer, video tape interview, First Division Museum at Cantigny, February 1996)

Fig. 3.24. Phu Loi Battalion commander's bunker. The shelter was immediately adjacent to the trench used as the command post by the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, from about 1630 on 25 August to 1430 the following day.

Within days of being wounded in the late afternoon of 25 August, and in keeping with 1st Division tradition, Jim Madden went AWOL from his hospital to return to the battalion, first to serve as S-3 and then (again) as the commander of Company C. In 1967 he returned to Vietnam for a second tour, once more with the 1st Division, and was assigned as the commander of the Lam Son Task Force, which by then was a standing headquarters controlling a rotating group of 1st Division and ARVN units dedicated to the security of the area bounded roughly by Di An (the division's headquarters), Phuoc Vinh (1st Brigade headquarters), and Lai Khe (3rd Brigade headquarters). Madden discovered among the division's prisoners of war an individual who had commanded a company of the Phu Loi Battalion in the battle of 25 August 1966, and who had lost an eye in the fighting. The two former adversaries hit it off at once, and Madden arranged for the former VC to be assigned as his advisor.

In conversations (through an interpreter) with his counterpart, it became apparent to Madden that he was dealing with a truly professional soldier. The man had been at war all his adult life, his service dedicated to the unification of Vietnam. When he was wounded on 25 August 1966, he had been carried northwest from the battlefield to a hospital in Cambodia; afterwards, he was put through what Madden characterized as an officer's advanced course, then sent back to South Vietnam. He proved to be thoroughly familiar with weapons, tactics, and techniques. He deprecated the M-16 rifle—the Phu Loi Battalion, he said, had tested the weapon thoroughly and found it inferior to the AK-47 for fighting at close quarters in jungle because the American rifle's .22 caliber projectile was more easily deflected by brush. He also ridiculed the propensity of American soldiers to "hit the dirt" (that is, to assume a prone position under fire), which he assumed was inculcated on flat, open ranges—and which always assured that the Americans would shoot high and render themselves immobile in a killing zone. The men of the Phu Loi Battalion, he said, were taught, when surprised, to kneel and shoot from behind trees, so that the fire was level and lethal. In ambushes, the VC battalion preferred to engage either at ground level from within a prepared position, or from up in trees. Madden concluded that the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, whatever its technological advantages, had encountered a very capable adversary on 25 August 1966 (Madden, interview).

Fig. 3.25. Phu Loi company commander conferring with Captain Madden, 1967

For Devil 6, one primary lesson learned was that his command had failed to exploit its mechanized advantage. Colonel Berry, in the "Commander's Analysis" section of the 1st Brigade's *After Action Report*, dated 18 December 1966, held that

> This battle presented on a grand scale the tactical difficulty often previously encountered at company level in the jungle: the tendency to bring up units on line for frontal attack instead of enveloping the enemy position by wide maneuver; e.g., C 1/2 became frontally engaged with the PHU LOI Battalion.... Again, when B1/26 Inf, aboard the armor of 3d Platoon, A 1/4 Cav, approached the battle in mid-afternoon, it initially successfully assaulted the enemy's east flank, punched into the enemy bunker/trench system, and was in a

position to penetrate the base camp from inside its perimeter. Co A, 1/26 Inf, was en route to a position eastward of Co B. At this juncture, however, the situation around C1/2 Inf had deteriorated through loss of its leaders to the point that orders were issued to concentrate all of the 1/26 Inf on the C 1/2 battle. These orders eventuated in bringing B 1/26 Inf and A 1/26 Inf abreast of C 1/26 Inf and into frontal confrontation. By the same token, the splintering of the cavalry troops among the infantry facilitated rapid transport of the latter forward, but rendered impossible the massing of armor for an assault into the enemy position. The armored vehicles, like the infantry, tended to converge piecemeal on the same point, and to become locked against the same resistance. A better solution would have fed an armor reserve of tanks advancing abreast into the flank of the enemy about where B 1/26 Inf's initial contact took place.

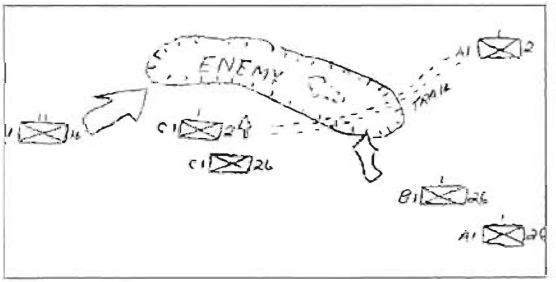


Fig. 3.26.

A predominantly armor attack (dotted arrow, see fig. 3.26) could have safely rolled across the front of the engaged US units, enfilading the enemy trenches, and crushing his defensive bunkers.... No more than one force should be planned for a move through an enemy position, and that assault force should be armor protected. The fixing force should hold contact by shallow probes and reconnaissance; blocking forces, if employed, should stand off at least 1000 meters to permit full use of firepower within the area of contact. The concept of operations should provide for assault of the objective only after thorough preparation by artillery and air.

The Blue Spaders, alone among the friendly battalions engaged in the Bong Trang, was poised for such decisive action.

DECATUR: Keeping the Enemy Off Balance

September was the twelfth month since the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry had departed Fort Riley, Kansas, for Vietnam. It was a tribute to the 1st Division's replacement planning that at no time during that month did the overall strength of the battalion fluctuate and that the rotation of personnel was accomplished smoothly, without any interruption in operations. Moreover, the Blue Spaders were fortunate in that their operational missions were conducive to dispatching the veterans on time, and to receiving and orienting the incoming properly. However, with regard to noncommissioned officers, the input was not equivalent to the outflow, forcing the battalion to consider training its own leaders at squad and platoon levels. Shortly after the first of September, the battalion was flown to Quan Loi to launch an operation that facilitated that training. The following is the battalion's summary of what was known as Operation Decatur:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345
9 October 1966

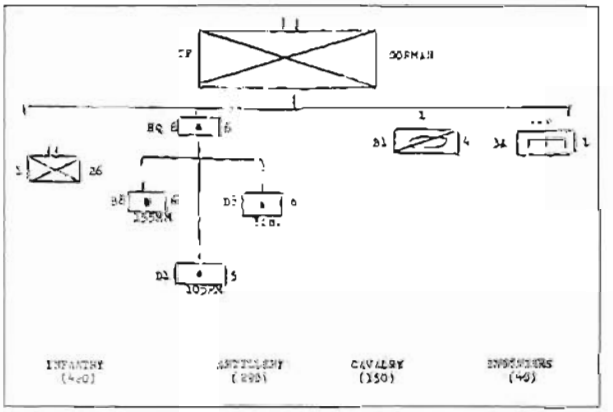
SUBJECT: Operation DECATUR 3 September-
8 October

TO: Each Blue Spader
Each Trooper, Bravo Quarter Horse

On 3 September 1966, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was deployed by USAF assault transports from Phuoc Vinh to the 1st Division base

at Quan Loi. The base centers around a small airfield, and is set amid rolling hills in the largest producing rubber plantation in Vietnam. The clay soil gives the place its French name—"Plantation Terres Rouges," the Plantation of the Red Earth, and indeed before long the Blue Spaders were all reddened from helmet to boots, and remained so through the end of the operation.

The 26th was the nucleus and senior headquarters of a 950 man task force, organized as follows:

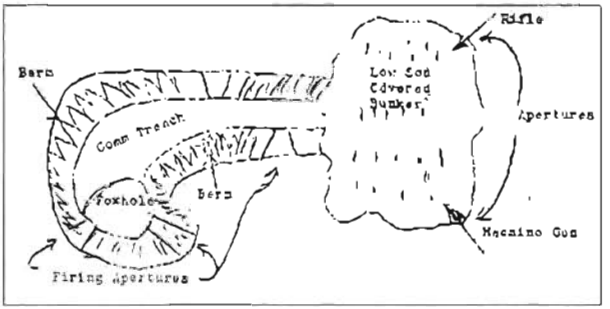


In addition to the combat arms units shown, the Task Force included a Forward Support Unit of the 1st Supply and Transport Battalion, a detachment of Pathfinders of the 1st Aviation Battalion, a Forward Contact Team of the 701st Maintenance Battalion, and various small detachments. All told, they constituted at Quan Loi and nearby An Loc a small city, complete with telephone service, police, a laundry, hot showers, hospital service, a small store, and even a municipal swimming pool (courtesy of our French Landlord). During the month of September our little one-tent Post Exchange grossed $10,127.05. We served out over 60,000 meals (only about 4,000 of them C rations), and "sold" 86,000 gallons of gasoline and diesel oil. Our small, self-sufficient community surrounded by the scenery of the Annamese Highlands had a resort air about it which often caused envious remarks by visitors. But Quan Loi had a deadly serious purpose. It stands but 10 miles from the CAMBODIA -VIETNAM border, literally on the frontier of Freedom. Our mission was to outpost that frontier, bolstering with American combat power the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) regiment and the two US Special Forces camps which also guarded the region. All through the day and night, our artillery thundered at Viet Cong infiltration routes and base camps—7000 rounds of all calibers during DECATUR. Our cavalry troop patrolled steadily the excellent road network within the plantation, and along National Route 13, and the 26th Infantry defended and patrolled.

Infantry's primary mission includes seizing and holding ground, and we did our best to insure that the QUAN LOI-AN LOC outposts remained in the hands of the "Big Red One." Although there had been six other infantry battalions at QUAN LOI before us, the positions they left behind were in many instances indefensible and badly deteriorated. We rebuilt all the defenses, relocating them for greater economy of force and better fields of fire, and redesigning them for better protection and camouflage. Blue Spaders hollowed out the tees of the French plantation golf course to make nearly invisible, nearly invulnerable machine gun nests, and tunneled under hedgerows and into embankments. We built over 50 low sodded bunkers, which with their communications trenches and supplementary fighting positions, set a new standard for field fortifications for the Division. Many of the details of our bunkers we borrowed from the enemy:

bamboo reverting and laminated roofing copied from the PHU LOI Battalion's base camp. A typical position:

We used 5000 sandbags, and set out 3000 meters



of barbed wire fencing, using 624 rolls of concertina wire.

But our main contribution was the patrolling which is also setting new division standards. Six other infantry battalions preceded us here, but none succeeded in finding the enemy base camps we ferreted out within 6000 meters of QUAN LOI. Other battalions had patrolled the jungle American style—flying in and out by helicopter the same day, or stopping for resupply by helicopter daily. But each of our companies walked into the jungle and scouted the thickets living off of their backs for three to five days at a time, on as little as two cans of food daily, drinking water from jungle streams. Again we borrowed a leaf from the Viet Cong book, and tested the enemy at his own game. In 4 weeks, we accomplished more than 2000 man-days of reconnaissance patrolling, and we found over 400 enemy bunkers, a regimental command post, a hospital, a training school, and over a ton of rice. Our Cavalry captured one Viet Cong, and within the past week four VC have given themselves up because our hounding them out of base camps in which they had felt themselves perfectly safe. But above all, we have kept the enemy completely off-balance and on the defensive, instead of probing at our outposts.

We have over the past month, then, moved ahead a notch in our abilities both offensive and defensive. The work has been hard, perhaps the hardest it has yet been for the 26th, but we have to show for it a distinctly stronger U.S. outpost at QUAN LOI, and definitely weakened Viet Cong opponents in the QUAN LOI vicinity.

Operation DECATUR ends with our relief by another infantry battalion and the opening of Operation TULSA.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

KENNETH V. BRESLEY
Captain Infantry
Adjutant

Describing the "Dobol defenses" at Quan Loi, First Lieutenant James Vawter cited the lessons learned from the Phu Loi battalion: "Those Viet Cong had been digging for years perhaps, and their tunnel network was amazingly beautiful. Our bunkers here were not as elaborate, but they were better camouflaged and thus offer the men more security." Vawter pointed out a grassy knoll on the edge of the airfield that had been tunneled into by a team under Specialist Four Eugene Givens. Drawing on the expertise of coal miners among their number, they drove poles into the knoll at calculated angles, then carefully dug from the rear using the poles as guides. The firing ports were virtually invisible amid the undisturbed sod. (1st Division Information Office, release 1126--10-66)

Specialist Givens' knoll/bunker was used as a golf tee for an exhibition of trick shots by Paul Hahn, sponsored by the United Services Organization (USO). After Hahn finished his act for the troops, he was shown

that he had been performing from the top of a well-concealed fighting position. He was made an honorary Blue Spader, and in return he promised that he would have a picture of the 26th Infantry color printed on six hundred Christmas postcards for the troops to send home. Hahn kept his promise. His postcard lists every Christmas the 26th Infantry spent at war—1901, 1917, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1965, and 1966—with the caption "that men might know Freedom and Peace on Earth."

Not recorded in the report on DECATUR were two significant aspects of the operation. One was an epidemic of a strain of falciparum malaria that was resistant to the prophylactic pills the troops had been ingesting weekly. The area around Quan Loi proved to be one of the most contagious in all Vietnam, particularly for infantrymen. U.S. Army Vietnam reported that of all cases of malaria in 1967, 58.5 percent occurred among light weapons infantrymen (Military Occupation Specialty 11B), although these then constituted only 15.3 percent of total strength (*Internal Medicine in Vietnam,* Medical Department, U.S. Army, vol. 2, 284-285). In Company B malaria afflicted old soldiers more often than the young, causing the hospitalization of most of its senior NCOs—fortunately, for only a few weeks.

Rocket attacks by the enemy constituted the other significant aspect of DECATUR, in that it provided a first warning to the American command in Vietnam of the intent and ability of the Viet Cong to use this weapon in future actions. Task Force 26's intelligence reports described enemy supply columns traversing the jungle north of An Loc and Quan Loi, using trails originating in Cambodia to the west and terminating at the Song Be River on the east (which flowed southward toward Saigon); the men in these columns, stated the reports, were burdened with long, green metal cylinders or tubes. Several months later these cylinders were identified as canisters containing 122mm artillery rockets to be used in attacking military targets around Saigon, or, ultimately, for indiscriminate attacks on the city itself.

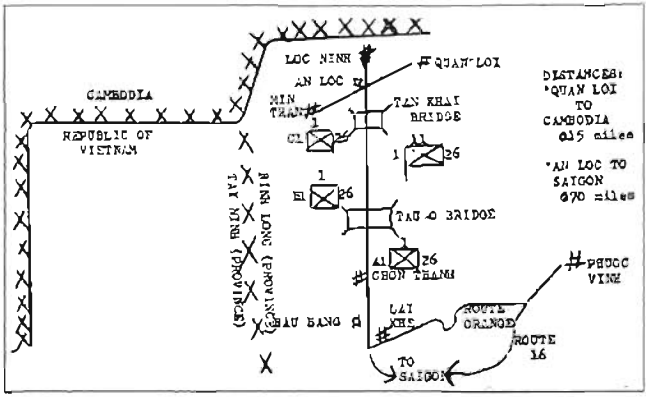
TULSA and SHENANDOAH: "How Professionals Do It"

From DECATUR, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry moved into Operation TULSA, followed by SHENANDOAH. Operation Tulsa is described in the following report:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345
17 October 1966

SUBJECT: Operation TULSA 9-16 October 1966
TO: Each Blue Spader

National ROUTE 13, from LAI KHE north to AN LOC is one artery vital politically and economically to the Republic of Vietnam. "The Plantation of the Red Earth," at QUAN LOI, and other plantations around AN LOC produce 60% of Vietnam's exported rubber, and the region's proximity to Cambodia enables the Viet Cong readily to contest government control, and to terrorize and to tax the populace at will.



Route 13 vicinity has been the scene of many bitter battles for years, offering classic ambush sites, where the paved road is lined with dense bamboo thicket for miles and the jungle runs from the road's edge in a lush car-

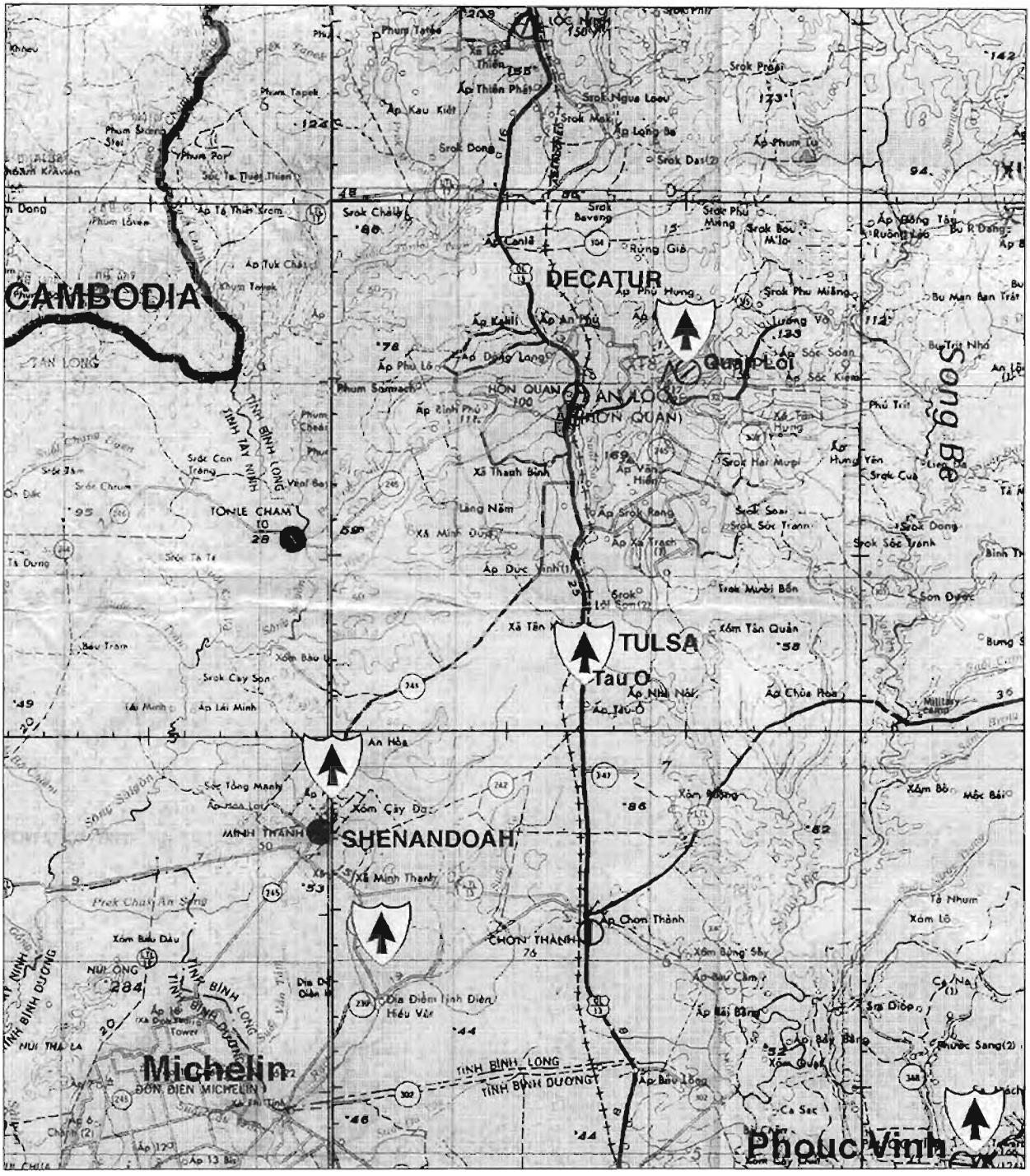


Fig. 3.27. Operations, September-October 1966

pet impenetrable to air observation to the Cambodian border. In the past 6 months the 1st Division fought three stiff engagements with Viet Cong main force units on or near ROUTE 13: one vicinity of the TAU O BRIDGE, a second between AN LOC and LOC NINH, and a third between AN LOC and MINH THANH. In each of these battles the Big Red One severely mauled its attackers, and succeeded overall in shattering the enemy Ninth Division, as well as opening Route 13 for rubber and other commerce south, and rice for the rubber plantations north.

The 26th is no stranger to the center part of ROUTE 13, for in early August we fought near BAU BANG, north of LAI KHE, but LAM SON II kept us out of the big battles of June and July in the north, and not until September and DECATUR were we called upon to man the outposts at QUAN LOI and AN LOC. Then Operation TULSA thrust us deep into the enemy ambush country.

On 9 October the Reconnaissance Platoon moved south from AN LOC and commenced scouting landing zones vicinity of the TAN KHAI and TAU O BRIDGES. On 10 October Companies A and C pounced by helicopter onto the road south of TAU O, while Company B, aboard the armor of Troop B, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, thrust down ROUTE 13 from AN LOC to TAU O.

Initially, our job was to clear the road of enemy bushwhackers and mines. We had to contend with both a wily foe and difficult terrain. The Viet Cong did not materialize in force, but singly and in pairs, the enemy attempted to snipe at our vehicles on the road, or to emplace claymore-type anti-personnel mines. His purposes were well served by the battle-scarred landscape, an eerie, swampy stretch of half-dead bamboo, parched vine, shell-shattered stumps and leafless scraggly hardwoods. The water-table was so high that shovel's depth holes in the sandy soil oozed full in minutes, and our defenses had to be built largely above ground, and to be anchored on our attached tanks and armored personnel carriers. The enemy succeeded in detonating two claymores against us, and in sniping at us occasionally, but we had no serious casualties.

Our counters to the enemy and terrain were firepower and patrolling—and plenty of both. Each round of sniper fire or a claymore was met with a mortar volley, artillery blocking fires, and tank guns as well as infantry weapons. Our patrols combed both sides of the road, driving the enemy back from his vantage points, and out of his ambush lairs. We forced him to lay his claymores hastily and badly aimed so that they were ineffective. Our patrols found, and our engineers blew in place, antitank mines and other enemy ordnance before it could hurt us.

As in Operation DECATUR, our patrols penetrated the jungle further and scoured it more thoroughly than any of the many battalions, U.S. and Vietnamese, who had preceded us in that area. Company A located a freshly dug enemy base camp just east of ROUTE 13, with 52 bunkers; Company B located a regimental size camp with 623 bunkers, and logistic facilities; Company C located a camp with 170 bunkers and 30 graves; the Reconnaissance Platoon located a camp of 10 bunkers. All told, we located and subsequently bombed and shelled 855 bunkers. Most of these were, of course, part the enemy preparations for his 8 June ambush; but it is quite true that, undiscovered, they could have been used to ambush our convoy. They were, in fact, being used by small Viet Cong forces—probably by the men who harassed us with sniping and mines. Their use by a large force is now questionable, for the Viet Cong realize we have pinpointed his hid-

ing place. Our ferreting out these strongholds plainly reduced the maneuverability of Viet Cong main force units in the vicinity of ROUTE 13.

At any rate, we secured our part of the road over a week and helped guarantee safe passage of hundreds of U.S. and Vietnamese vehicles. Among our other tasks we cut back the jungle from the road at the TAU O BRIDGE to open out a wide helicopter landing zone. On the morning of 16 October in a large lift of 30 helicopters, we used this new "airfield" to fly out for PHUOC VINH.

The Brigade Commander sent us his congratulations for a smooth and efficient operation. But perhaps the highest compliment we have received in recent months was paid us today by the Division Commander, at whose suggestion units bivouacking in QUAN LOI are inspecting our DOBOL Defenses to "learn how professionals do it."

FOR THE COMMANDER:

KENNETH V. BRESLEY
Captain Infantry
Adjutant

Major General DePuy and Colonel Berry were both disappointed that Operation TULSA did not see the enemy commit large forces to interrupt convoy operations, as the VC had done the previous spring. With the weather now phasing into the dry season, DePuy and Berry believed that the enemy was preparing to launch an offensive; therefore, following the clearing of Route 13, the division dispatched two brigades into the region north of Lai Khe and commenced extensive patrolling in the jungles west of the road for the purpose of striking preemptively at enemy forces and base camps.

Fig. 3.28. A machine-gun crew in the vicinity Tau O Bridge, October, 1966. The gunner (foreground) carries compass and claymore mines.

The Blue Spaders were initially on the sidelines, but upon taking the field they achieved the only success the division had all month in finding an enemy main force unit and bringing it to battle. Despite being depleted by malaria, Company B led the way. The battalion operation report for SHENANDOAH follows:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345
1 November 1966

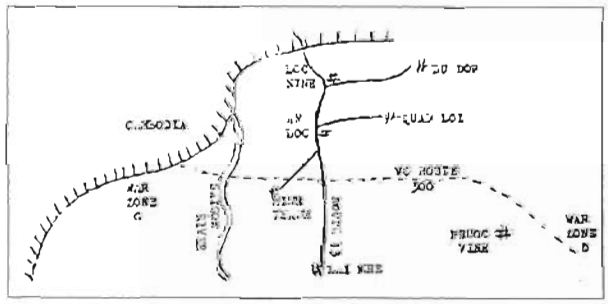
SUBJECT: Operation SHENANDOAH,
16-30 October 1966

TO: Each Blue Spader and Each Soldier,
Defiant Charlie

Operation SHENANDOAH was a major divisional operation involving Third and First Brigades, designed to exploit the armored task force move up ROUTE 13 during Operation TULSA, and conducted in three phases: (1) Armor reconnaissance in force from the QUAN LOI area

north to the Cambodian border; (2) an armor thrust south-west to MINH THANH followed by infantry operations from MINH THANH; and (3) movement of the armored task force south down ROUTE 13 to LAI KHE. At this writing parts (1) and (2) of SHENANDOAH are history. 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, participated in the first phase as 1st Brigade reserve at PHUOC VINH. On 22 October the battalion moved by USAF aircraft to MINH THANH, and took up a more active role in events, operating in that vicinity through 30 October. On the latter date we were flown back to PHUOC VINH by USAF to begin local patrolling on 31 October.

SHENANDOAH, PART (1): First Brigade conducted a reconnaissance in force with the 1/4th Cavalry

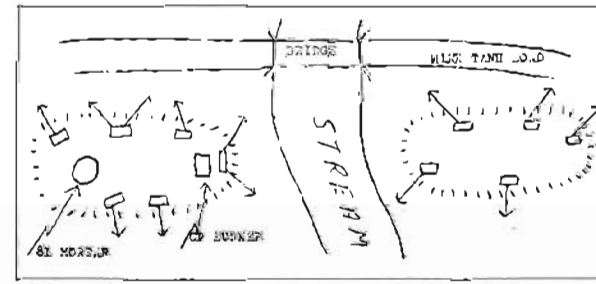


Squadron from QUAN LOI to LOC NINH and from LOC NINH up the BU DOP road. Artillery was moved into position to support operations, and to fire into areas that have heretofore been beyond the reach of U.S. or ARVN guns. Infantry was landed by air to search for an enemy rice cache north-east of LOC NINH. These operations accomplished three things: they opened up roads within five KM of Cambodia that U.S. troops had seldom before operated over and permitted us to shell sanctuary areas near the border in which the Viet Cong had felt very secure; they further reduced VC prestige in a region vital, because of the rubber plantations, to the future of the Republic of Vietnam; finally, they strengthened the local peoples' will to resist VC Tax collectors and terrorists.

The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, at PHUOC VINH for a well deserved rest after six weeks and two major operations (DECATUR and TULSA) acted as Brigade Reserve. DOBOL spent those days in cleaning up, inventory and refitting for operations that might come (we know from experience) any minute.

SHENANDOAH (2): This phase of the operation began with the positioning of 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry at MINH THANH on 22 October. On 24 October, while we secured the south end of road from AN LOC to MINH THANH, 1st Brigade launched an armored column down to MINH THANH.

Company C, occupying the anchor position at the south end of the road, constructed a unique defensive position. The company's mission was to protect a key bridge, and the Company Commander elected to defend from old abutments which paralleled and overlooked the existing approaches, tunneling into the embankments from the top, cutting firing apertures through the sides.



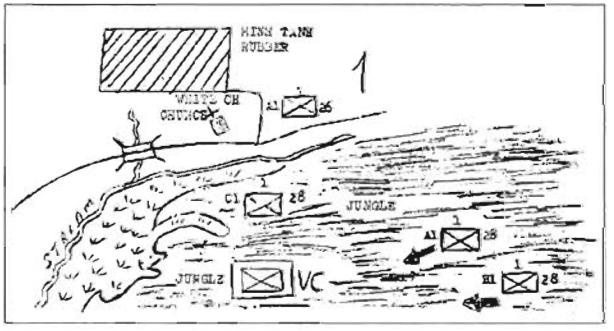
Once again the Division Commander praised a DOBOL Defense, saying that he had long hoped to see soldiers tunneling out field fortifications in that fashion. With 292 radio antennae erected and gun ports bristling, the position

looked like a land-locked battleship. Its linear shape lent itself well to close air support on both sides, while its vertical walls commanded the bridge and its approaches "a vertical-linear defense" which appears in no field manual yet written—one more Blue Spader innovation.

After the 1st Brigade's armor column completed its passage to MINH THANH without incident, 1/26 Infantry with 1/28 and 2/28 Infantry patrolled VC ROUTE 300; 1/28 looked for rice caches along the river to the west of MINH THANH; 1/26 Infantry's Reconnaissance Platoon and Company C patrolled a rain-drenched, snake and tarantula-infested jungle area northwest of MINH THANH.

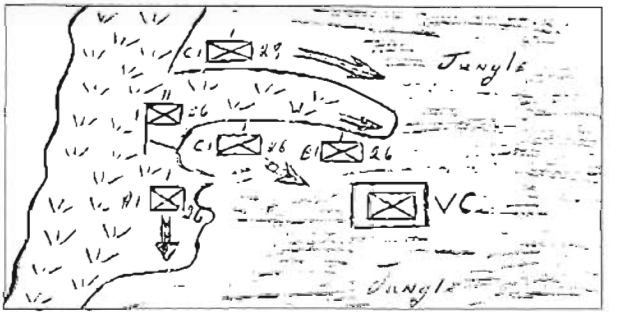
On 28 October, while "C" and Recon were still out in the jungle, 1st Brigade's intelligence indicated that a Viet Cong force was located southeast of MINH THANH, and the Brigade Commander began moving forces to encircle the enemy.

First 1/28 Infantry moved into the jungle north and east of the suspected quarry. Then



Company A, 1/26 was sent south aboard armored personnel carriers of Troop A, 1/4 Cavalry to an abandoned white church. Streams and broken bridges blocking further progress aboard the armor, Company A dismounted and continued south afoot. In the meantime, Company B was loaded on helicopters at MINH THANH, and after an intense bombardment of a landing zone by air and artillery, the company assaulted the clearing nearest the VC. The helicopters then swung far to the north, picked up Company C and Reconnaissance Platoon, and landed them behind Company B. Finally, they picked up Company A, still en route on foot, and put them into the same zone. Company C, 1/28 Infantry was attached to 1/26 Infantry, so that by mid-afternoon the situation was as follows:

Company B advanced eastward with its Third Platoon 100 meters inside the jungle edge, paralleling a trail, and its Second Platoon on



the edge of the clearing. Suddenly, left flank security of Third Platoon heard voices on the trail, and alerted the platoon. All together, its soldiers faced left and opened fire, neatly ambushing an enemy column of about 50 well armed men coming down the trail. Reeling from this Third Platoon volley, the enemy fled back up the trail, only to be caught again in the flank by Second Platoon, which had hooked toward the sound of the firing.

Again the enemy recoiled, only to back into another volley from Third Platoon. A wild exchange of fire ensued, with Company B's mortars coming into play with deadly effect. Smoke grenades were thrown to mark the

Company B lines, and two minutes later a well aimed air strike plowed into the enemy, bombs falling within 50 meters of the most advanced Company B troops

As this action was fought out, a Reconnaissance Platoon OP engaged another enemy party, a flanker element for the larger force on the trail, hitting several. Company C, 1/28 Infantry swung into a blocking position north of Company B, 1/26. Air strike after air strike pounded the enemy, and when the last sortie struck, artillery was called in. The artillery air observer reported a column of Viet Cong struggling south away from DOBOL, lugging dead and wounded. The 155mm guns then took over where USAF had stopped, relentlessly crashing into the jungle about the enemy. As the fires rolled southward, Company B advanced into the enemy position, capturing an enemy light machine gun, a wheeled carriage for a medium machine gun, assault rifles, and carbines-all first class weapons. The enemy corpses were in blue uniforms with well-made, uniform web gear-indications of a Viet Cong Main Force unit. As darkness and a thunder storm closed in, Company B concluded its search of the battlefield, and the battalion moved into ambush positions for the night, hoping to trap any enemy attempting to escape to the north or west through our positions. Additional battalions of the Division landed by air to the southwest and south to close the ring.

The night passed without incident however, and early the following morning Company C advanced through Company B to press the search of the battle area further. Almost immediately a prisoner was taken, a wounded Viet Cong carrying documents labeling him a member 3rd Battalion, 272 Regiment, one of the regiments of the VC 9th Division. Subsequently, this prisoner told of his battalion being badly battered by air and artillery, and his company being sent to cover the withdrawal of dead and wounded. Then he and his comrades were caught in deadly small arms cross fire. He and four men around him were hit by this fire, and he was carried back for several hundred yards. Finally his bearers dropped him, shouting to him that they would return after they got the weapons out. Then the U.S. air struck. He crawled under a napalm can and hid there until he was found the following morning. He was a squad leader of the 2nd Platoon, 2nd Company of his battalion, and believed that his unit had been sent to attack Americans near ROUTE 13.

Company C then moved deeper into the jungle, and entered a large base camp, well constructed and furnished, strewn, with the litter of a bloodied and hasty withdrawal. Documents here confirmed the identification of 272nd Regiment. The enemy left his rice, meat, medicine, clothing, personal packs, hammocks, entrenching tools, and hundreds of other items behind as he fled. Company C carefully searched the bunkers and tunnels for other surviving VC without success.

In the meantime, Company A, pushing south from its positions, found two more base camps, one complete with a school-blackboard, desks, and such military training aids as wooden 82mm mortar rounds and practice hand grenades. All three of these camps were marked for aerial observers, pin-pointed on the map, and scheduled for air and artillery destruction. So extensive were these installations that the entire day was required to search them thoroughly, and to destroy or remove useable equipment, food, and structures.

That night DOBOL again ambushed, this time in the base camps where we could catch any enemy

trying to get to food or medicine. Again the enemy failed to show. The 272nd had to lick its wounds into the forests to the south and southwest. The next morning (30 October) we were lifted to MINH THANH by helicopter, remaining there on alert for several hours while 1st Brigade pulled its armor northward to QUAN LOI, and then flew to PHUOC VINH, and a picnic supper served by Red Cross girls.

SUMMARY: The battalion delivered a sharp spoiling attack into one of the best of the Viet Cong units, and whipped it. It will be a long time before 3rd Battalion, 272nd Regiment will be in fighting condition again. Altogether, 1st Brigade accounted for 74 enemy dead, of which 1/26 Infantry is credited with 42. An estimated 90 other enemy were killed. It is especially significant that this hard core unit—unlike the elite PHU LOI Battalion—broke and ran under our attack, abandoning, its prepared positions, leaving weapons, dead and wounded on the battle field.

From the Division Commander to each Blue Spader, and to each member of Company C, 1/28 Infantry attached to 1/26 during the battle:

"Well done."

FOR THE COMMANDER:

KENNETH V. BRESLEY
Captain Infantry
Adjutant

Regarding Operation SHENANDOAH, Paul Gorman recalled that "I often told my company commanders that every day in combat is a day in training.' We made it so, and every day we tried to get a little better. For example,

> the day before Company B went into the jungle on SHENANDOAH at the end of October, they trained at Minh Thanh, where the Special Forces had a firing range. They set up a bunch of targets—probably tin cans, like Teddy Roosevelt used in 1917—and practiced what we called "musketry," in which they were trying to get across how a rifle platoon could deliver maximum aimed, sustained fire. The following day they got to repeat their musketry practice on the VC. I really could feel the battalion pulling together, and increasing in skill. The parts fitted together like those of a fine watch. Let me quote from some correspondence I received at the time: Colonel Berry ... considered us "a battalion of high combat effectiveness which could always be relied upon to accomplish its mission with dash, imagination and a high degree of military professionalism." General DePuy wrote about the same time that the battalion "undertook operations which ordinarily would require a brigade ... companies operated and covered ground equivalent to a battalion ... [and] consistently ... made contact with the VC in areas where other battalions did not." That's pretty heady praise, but I truly believe the battalion's performance earned it. I give credit to the officers and noncommissioned officers. We had great leaders. I had four First Sergeants who had fought in both World War II and Korea. I may have waived the baton from time to time, but the company leaders played the instruments, and they made the music. (Gorman, Oral History)

(There was to be another, darker chapter to the SHENANDOAH story: one year later [October 1967] the 271st Regiment of the 9th Division—by then largely North Vietnamese in composition—while operating in the same locale from the same base complex, ambushed the 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Terry D. Allen, son of the 1st Division's commander in North Africa and Sicily, was killed in that action.)

Fig. 3.29. Captain Storey, battalion surgeon, ministering to a prisoner of war, 29 October 1966

BATTLE CREEK (ATTLEBORO): "Continuously in Battle"

The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry returned to Camp Weber following SHENANDOAH. In early November 1966 Lieutenant Colonel Gorman transferred several of his key subordinates: among them, Captain George A. Joulwan went from command of Company B to become the battalion's operations officer (S-3), with 1st Lieutenant Hammer R. Hansen from Reconnaissance Platoon replacing him in Company B. Spurred by reports that the expected enemy offensive had been launched to the west in the 25th Division's zone, the battalion trained replacements and readied its equipment. Following the custom established by Major Roosevelt in World War I, the officers took the time to hold a formal dinner. In the absence of the 26th Infantry's silver—which was kept in the First Division Museum at Fort Riley, Kansas—the officers used a stock pot for a punch bowel, mess cups for glasses, and a machete instead of a saber. There was wine with dinner, however, and Teddy Roosevelt's toasts after Soissons—"to the 26th Infantry Regiment" and "to the dead of the 26th Infantry"—were repeated in a manner that would certainly have earned his approval. Blue Blazer initiations were conducted, with the traditional toast, pronounced after gulping down a flaming jigger of brandy, "once a Blue Blazer, always a Blue Blazer; once a Blue Spader, always a Blue Spader."

Staff Sergeant David H. Puckett—twenty-four years old and fresh from an assignment teaching mortars at Fort Benning—joined the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry during this respite from combat. Reporting to the orderly room of Company B for assignment to its mortar platoon, Puckett remembers feeling somewhat discomfited because of the jungle fatigues he wore. Such clothes, he notes, "were not made for you to look good in and allow you to project a professional, sol-

Fig. 3.30. Officers' dinner, 3 November 1966. Left to right: Lt. Paar, Chaplain Luedee, Major Martin, Captain Springer.

dierly image. They were made to be practical in a tropical climate. They were, by design, loose fitting and sloppy looking." By contrast,

> The short man who got up from his desk to greet me as I walked in couldn't have been more professional in his set of tailored dress greens. First Sergeant Jerry Head was about five foot eight or nine. His starched jungle fatigues looked to be custom fitted. I noticed the coveted CIB (Combat Infantryman Badge) with the star between the wreath worn above his left pocket, which attested to the fact that he had been under hostile fire in two conflicts.

First Sergeant Head took Sergeant Puckett to the mess hall for coffee, and laid out for him the following estimate of the situation:

> "I've been in this man's army almost twenty years, Puckett," he began. "I've seen a lot of good units and bad units in that time. I was a squad leader in the 3d Infantry [Division] during the Korean conflict. I've held every job there is in an infantry unit, all the way from recruit to company commander." He paused and took a swallow of his coffee.
>
> "I've been the first sergeant of this outfit for six months. It's a good company; best in the battalion. I'd even go as far as to say the best in the brigade. Our casualty rate is low, and we always get the job done. The company commander is a young first lieutenant due to make captain in a few months.... He takes care of the troops, and he's coolheaded under fire. You'll like the way he operates....
>
> "Now for the bad news....The company is understrength [the malaria patients were still hospitalized]. Most of the rifle platoons have twenty-three, twenty-four, or twenty-five men right now. We have only two officers besides the old man. Two of the platoon sergeants are very young buck sergeants who were PFCs when they got here. Don't get me wrong, they're doing a jam-up job; its just that we don't have the senior leadership we should have. You're the fourth oldest man in the company right now.... You've got thirteen men in your platoon. That's counting you.... You don't have a platoon leader right now.... You've got one good fire direction man and two good squad leaders that have been here five or six months. The others have been around for a month or two ... you've only got two tubes [mortars] to work with. Other than that, we ain't got many problems."
>
> I learned an awful lot in that ten minutes. I also have to give credit to 1SG Head for the knowledge I gained during my tour with the "Blue Spaders." He was a first sergeant in every sense of the term. He was liked and respected by all the men in the company. You always knew he would be there when, and if, you needed him. He never stayed back in basecamp when the company was out on an operation; he was with the troops. I remember several occasions when I had to become almost disrespectful to keep him from walking point on search-and-destroy missions. (MSG David Puckett (Ret.), *Memories* [1987])

Puckett also formed a high opinion of his company commander, Lieutenant Hansen, describing him as the "type of commander every mortarman dreamed of working for. He knew his men; their capabilities, and in turn, gave us full confidence in the use of our weapon. Perhaps the best example of this is exemplified by the fact that support from our mortars was always requested by Dobol Recon when they were operating within our range." But he was also

> a stern task-master and expected a great deal from his platoon leaders during operations.... Although normally calm, cool and collected, he had the ability to move at a rapid pace and make life-and-death decisions that considered both the mission and the welfare of his men. Although Vietnam could not be described as a "pleasant" experi-

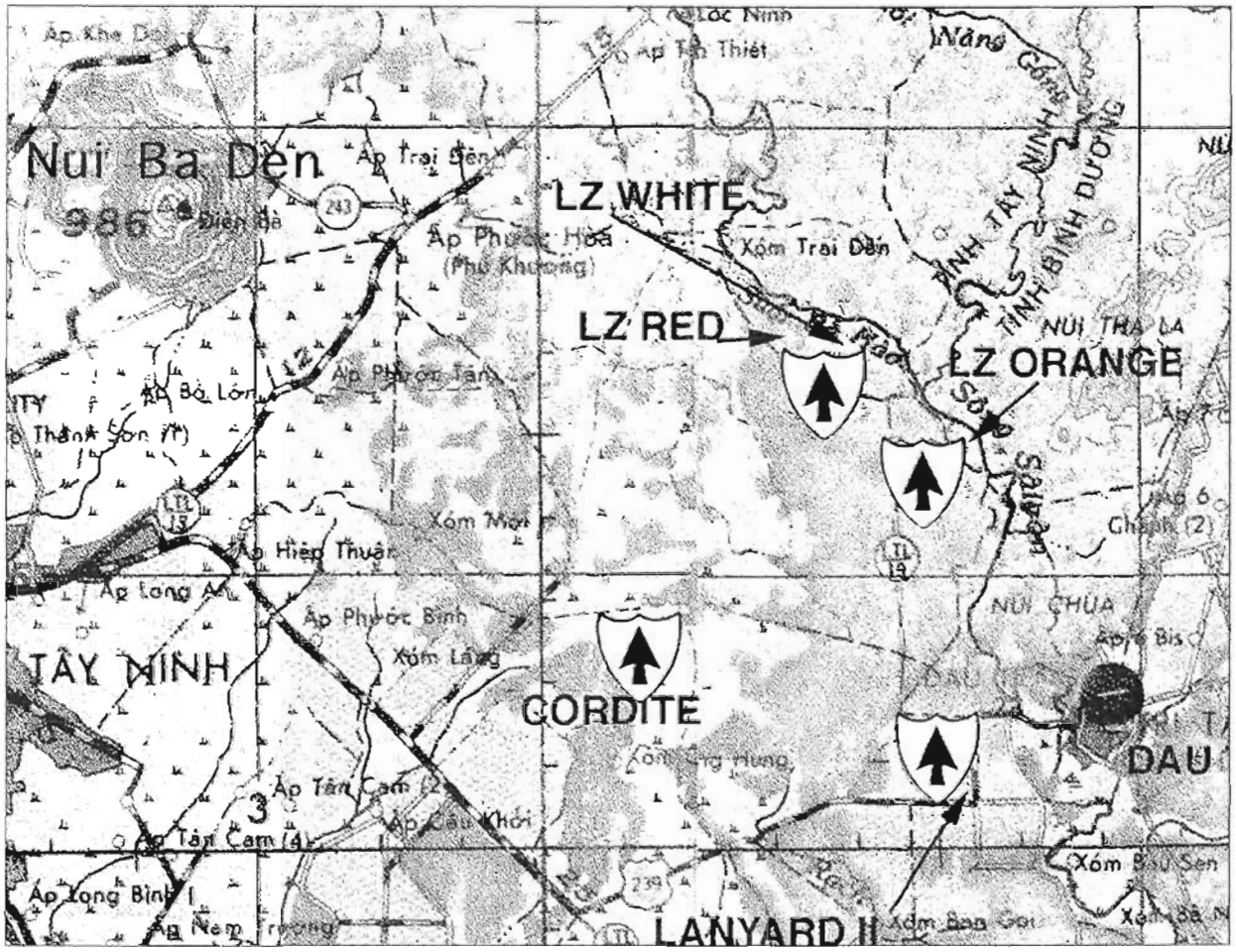


Fig. 3.31. Operations, November 1966

ence, it was a pleasure to work with a commander who allowed me to do my job. (Puckett, letter, 26 July 1996, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

The Blue Spaders were soon airborne again, this time flying to the area at the head of navigation on the Saigon River, between Dau Tieng and Tay Ninh, to begin Operation BATTLE CREEK (ATTLEBORO). The report for that operation follows:

HEADQUARTERS
1st BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO, SAN FRANCISCO 96345

27 November 1966

SUBJECT: Operation BATTLE CREEK (ATTLEBORO)
9-22 November 1966

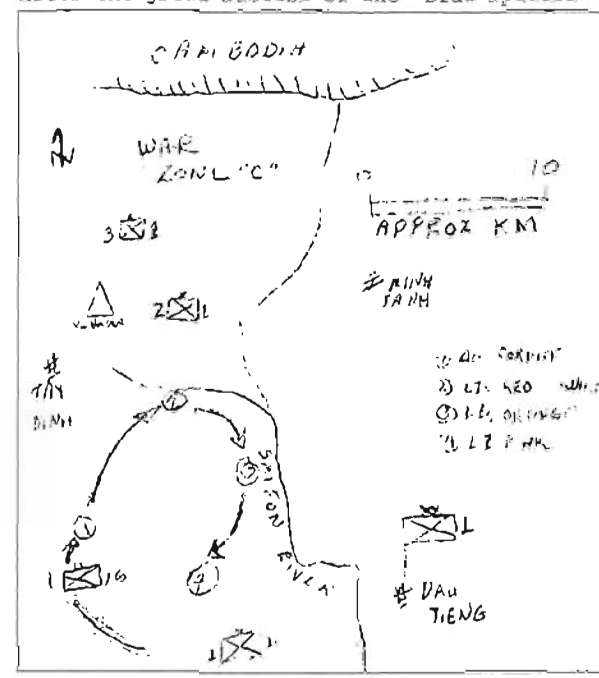
TO: Each Blue Spader

BATTLE CREEK/ATTLEBORO was the largest battle of the Vietnam war to date. Operation BATTLE CREEK was the 1st Division's offensive follow-up to Operation ATTLEBORO, a search and destroy mission undertaken in late October by

the 196th Infantry Brigade. During ATTLEBORO, the 196th was heavily engaged by elements of the 9th Viet Cong Division northwest of DAU TIENG. Moving swiftly on what appeared to be the start of a new VC offensive, the Big Red One's Third and Second Brigade landed by air assault astride the enemy's lines of communications, opening several of the sharpest battles of the war. On 9 November the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was called out of reserve from PHUOC VINH to lead the 1st Brigade into the battle. On 11 November the battalion landed by air assault west of DAU TIENG, and thereafter remained continuously in battle until 22 November, mounting successive air assaults deep into enemy jungle strongholds. We Blue Spaders penetrated one of the largest Viet Cong supply centers, capturing or destroying large amounts of materiel vital to the enemy, including more than one year's food supply for seven Viet Cong battalions. Overall the 1st Division in BATTLE CREEK killed nearly 1,000 Viet Cong (Body Count) and left uncounted hundreds more killed and wounded; the operation also led to the capture or destruction of 130 VC weapons, 1,200 mines, 25,000 grenades, and other war supplies.

The SAIGON River is navigable to a point 10 kilometers above DAU TIENG, providing a means of moving large quantities of rice from the rice-rich delta area of the South to the VC troop concentrations in War Zone "C" near the Cambodian border, and of ferrying war materials from the arsenals of War Zone "C" down to the SAIGON district and south. The head of navigation of the SAIGON River lies in a densely jungled area, but through the forest years ago roads had been cut. These roads, plus a network of trails developed over the past decade by the Viet Cong, made it possible for the VC to maintain there an efficient, major supply and transportation depot completely hidden under the jungle canopy from aerial observation. This jungled area northwest of DAU TIENG and east of TAY NINH was the theater of operations for the 26th Infantry.

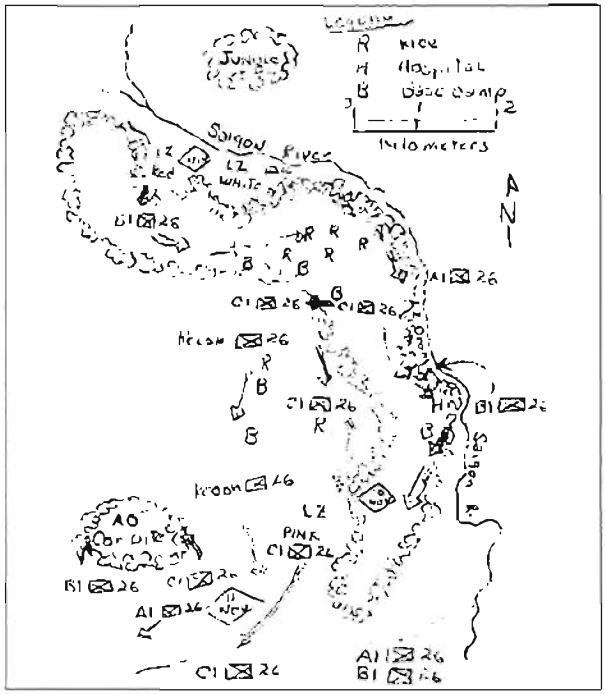
After the great success of the "Blue Spaders"



in landing zones Red, White, and Orange, we were selected to move to Lanyard II, another critical area of Operation Battle Creek. We secured the road between Dau Tieng and Tay Ninh, Route 239, for five consecutive days.

We located the battalion in close proximity of two known VC villages, Ben Cui II and Ben Cui III. Immediately upon arriving on the road we dispatched reconnaissance patrols to find the VC and seek out his supplies.

The "Blue Spaders" continued to secure Route 239 through 25 November 1966, to enable large divisional artillery and engineer units to move safely. The road was secured daily and the battalion continued to patrol. The results



were most gratifying. We captured over two tons of rice, 800 pounds of salt, several documents, and engineer supplies such as paint, tar and building materials in the vicinity of Lanyard II. Each day the 26th patrolled and found the VC. Several air strikes consisting of napalm bombs and CBU (bomblets) were used to force the VC from his entrenched bunkers. Over 2500 rounds of artillery were used to support the maneuver of the rifle platoons against the enemy. This definitely made the area untenable for the VC and once again we left the enemy knowing the "Blue Spaders" and the "Big Red One" knew how to find their base camps and supply points.

With every "Blue Spader" working hard at his assigned mission, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry captured, extracted or destroyed over 1400 tons of rice, 4 tons of tin, 19 tons of salt, 1 tractor with a lawn mower, clothing supplies, and ammunition such as grenades, and claymores.

We ended this operation with the traditional Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings, one the "Blue Spaders" justly deserved.

Upon returning to the Blue Spader base camp the soldiers of the battalion can now enjoy a theater constructed with materials belonging to the 9th VC Division. Further we have the use of a Viet Cong tractor and lawn mower to maintain the appearance of Camp Weber and assist in constructing an athletic field.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

KENNETH V. BRESLEY
Captain Infantry
Adjutant

Paul Gorman, in the immediate aftermath of BATTLE CREEK (ATTLEBORO)—which he described as a "terrific success"—remembers that "I was really enjoying myself by then because everything was easy. George Joulwan was a great S-3, and the rest of the staff was well teamed with him." But the situation soon changed:

> Without warning, on Thanksgiving Day 1966—or at the least on the day we were celebrating [that holiday]—General DePuy flew in and announced that I was to turn the battalion over to Al Haig,

Fig. 3.32. Some of the 800 tons of rice captured by the Blue Spaders during BATTLE CREEK

and to assume Al's responsibilities as division G-3. I was thunderstruck. It was one of the most professionally devastating blows I had ever taken. I was literally in a daze for days.

We were flown back to Camp Weber, where we had a change of command ceremony, and by the first week in December, I was the Division's general staff officer for Operations and Plans. (Gorman, Oral History)

BISMARK: "Fighting Spirit and Combat Momentum"

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander M. Haig, who became the fifty-fifth commander of the 26th Infantry, took his troops back to the field almost immediately. Major General DePuy had two priorities: first, to replenish the brigade bases at Phuoc Vinh and Lai Khe and reassert control over the intervening roads and settlements; second, to prepare (in secret) for another U.S. offensive, scheduled to begin with the New Year, that would exploit the success of BATTLE CREEK (ATTLEBORO). This operation, known as BISMARK, is summarized in the following report:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96345

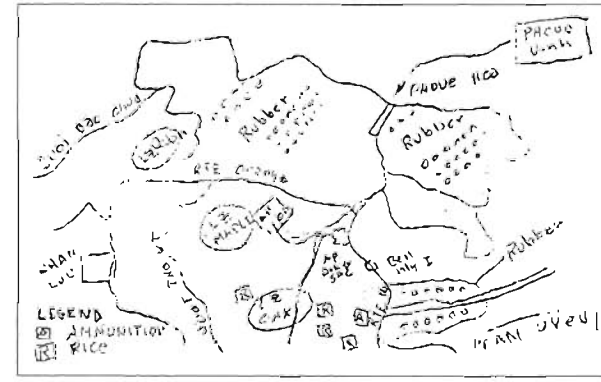
11 December 1966

SUBJECT: Operation BISMARK 28 Nov-8 Dec 65
TO: Each Blue Spader

Operation BISMARK was the 1st Brigade's offensive operation to open ROUTE 16 for the resupply convoy. Two infantry battalions, three batteries of artillery and two cavalry troops with engineer support were used directly on ROUTE 16. The 26th Infantry was selected to screen the west flank of the road and conduct search and destroy operations in an area of approximately 80 square kilometers.

The 26th Infantry commenced with an airmobile operation the morning of 28 November into landing zone Maple, conducted operations in area "Lion."

With two companies immediately deployed north and south, the Blue Spaders detected the pres-



ence of the VC. The effective unit patrols received small arms fire. Instantly artillery fires were requested and placed on the enemy. Throughout day and night the VC were dislodged from their so-called secure base camps, his supplies were uncovered and he felt the fire

power directed by the "Blue Spaders" .

The area of operation was cleared of VC and the 26th Infantry moved further south to landing zone Oak. With the fighting spirit and combat momentum generated each and every Blue Spader pushed hard with tireless effort to clear the entire area. In so doing the convoy moved freely and with ease north and south along ROUTE 16.

The professional and thorough search operations conducted by the fighting 26th Infantry continued to uncover large base camps and remove from the grasp of the VC much needed supplies of weapons, ammunition, rice and hardware tools as well as communications implements.

Through the effective utilization of the combined arms team, artillery, air power and the 26th Infantryman, we completely destroyed two battalion size base camps, captured several wounded VC and deprived him (the enemy) the security and comfort of his fighting position and his control over the populace in the area.

Throughout the operation Blue Spader elements maneuvered using the "clover leaf" technique complete with the inherent "overwatch" method of fire and movement to find the enemy. In so doing the battalion was deployed tactically to enable airstrikes consisting of 500 pound bombs, napalm, and 20mm cannons to destroy and force the VC out of his concealed fighting position. During the nights at Landing Zone Oak several probes of the perimeter were made by the VC to no avail. Instantly artillery and mortar blocking fires were brought upon the fleeing VC. Results, 2 dead VC and three wounded. Three VC were captured the following day by aggressive Blue Spaders.

The "Blue Spaders" ever alert, dispersed and moving with sound tactical formations searched the area, captured and destroyed (the enemy's) stock-pile of supplies. The 1st Division "tunnel rats" were flown in by helicopter and assisted in searching the fortified positions within the base camps.

During Operation BISMARK over 340 helicopter sorties were flown in support of the "Blue Spaders." These sorties accumulated 53 minutes of combat assault time that each 26th Infantry man on the operation will count toward his award of the air medal. Other sorties provided continuous resupply of barrier materials, change of clothing, mortar and small arms ammunition, not to mention class "A" meals of steak, fried chicken, and ice cream.

From 28 November to 7 December 1966 the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry killed 24 VC, wounded 8, captured 7 prisoners, 5 weapons, 18 claymores, 44 grenades, 2 shape charges, 44,400 pounds of rice, 2000 pounds of salt, 14 bundles of documents that included rosters of VC, 5 boxes of medical supplies and five burlap sacks of clothing. Twenty-two bicycles used as transportation by the VC and 3 pigs were taken from the base camps. It must be noted, Major General DePuy, the Commanding General, 1st Infantry Division, graciously accepted one of the bicycles and is presently using it at Division Headquarters.

On the afternoon of 7 December the 26th Infantry moved by helicopter to Landing Zone Cedar and prepared for a night "seal and search" operation of Chan Luu.

The entire battalion moved at 2200 hours toward the village and completed the seal of the village at 0630, 8 December 1966. An armored cavalry troop was immediately brought forward to strengthen the sector of the "Blue

Spaders." While the rifle companies sealed the village the Reconnaissance Platoon screened the east flank on the Suoi Tho Ut creek. Within this creek area, 5 VC were captured, evidently attempting to flee from the village.

The seal and search resulted into 8 VC and 123 suspects extracted, thereby denying the VC the satisfaction of feeling secure whenever the "Blue Spaders" are present.

The Commanding General, General DePuy, personally asked the Battalion CO to commend each and every Blue Spader for an outstanding job during the operation, and in particular for the professional night move. Again the Blue Spaders accomplished each and every mission assigned.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

KENNETH V. BRESLEY
Captain Infantry
Adjutant

Lieutenant Colonel Haig was pleased by the 1/26th's performance in BISMARK. He later noted that, upon assuming command, "no unit in Vietnam had a more valiant record in combat"; for that reason,

> I kept the wise rules [Gorman] had introduced: No cigarette packages, lighters, or anything else in the helmet-cover rubber; no signs or mottoes on the helmet cover itself; no belts of machine-gun ammunition draped across the chest as the troopers had seen it done in movies before they came over. All ammo was carried in the original unopened boxes; otherwise the rounds got dirty and knocked out of line, causing weapons to jam and costing lives. I added one more rule that I knew would be more unpopular than all the rest combined. I banned the drinking of beer on combat operations. It was the Army's practice to fly a hot meal to men in the field and to include two cans of cold beer per man. Two cans of beer usually is not enough to intoxicate, but that was not the problem. Every outfit had its drunkards. They bought or traded for other men's beer and often obtained enough to become intoxicated. A drunk in combat is a source of mortal danger to every man in his unit.
>
> Because he respected the [1st of the 26th] for its splendid combat record ... and because he knew me well, DePuy made it the shock battalion of the division, putting it in the lead in most operations in the months that followed. The officers and men of the battalion always did the job. (A. M. Haig, *Inner Circles* [1992])

In early December, when Operation BISMARK ended, some American units in Vietnam began to relax in anticipation of a truce reported to be in effect from Christmas through New Year's Day. But not the Blue Spaders—Haig saw to that. Staff Sergeant Dave Puckett, who liked his new commander, remembered that Haig "was taking no chances of allowing the Viet Cong in our area to strengthen their position during the lull. Instead of making booze runs to Saigon or sunbathing on top of our perimeter bunkers, we found ourselves conducting local patrols in an effort to safeguard our base camp and abide by the cease-fire." Puckett recalled that Haig, who would soon be jump-promoted to four-star rank,

> lit his shooting star as commander of the Blue Spaders. He was a brilliant tactician and a polished leader who led by example. He was stern but fair to all, which gained him the respect and admiration of his men, who, out of no disrespect, called him "Big Al."
>
> It was not uncommon on a long march through the jungle to feel a hand on your shoulder and turn to hear LTC Haig asking how you were

making it. He didn't make his office in a C&C chopper high above his men, as some battalion commanders did. He preferred to be on the ground, where the action was. (Puckett, *Memories*)

Once Phuoc Vinh had been restocked, the division committed the 1st Brigade to a larger version of the operations the 26th had inaugurated during LAM SON II. This time, however, intelligence was more timely, and much more relevant to the task. Haig noted that January and February of 1967 was a period of almost constant action, often against the "hydralike" Phu Loi Battalion, which replenished its losses with North Vietnamese and by conscripting youths from the countryside, and which struck back again and again at the Blue Spaders.

Staff Sergeant Puckett remembered one aspect of that contest that became very "up close and personal" for Blue Spaders on night watch:

> The VC had recently added a new trick to the already full bag of goodies. Before they began a probe of our perimeter, they would locate the position of our claymores. At that point, if they were sure they had not been detected, they would very carefully pick the claymore up, turn it around, aim it back at our position, and stick it back in the ground. After they had repositioned as many as they safely felt they could, they would move away from the back-blast area and make enough noise to hopefully cause the unsuspecting grunt to fire his claymore.
>
> Unfortunately, until the word got around, it worked more times than it failed. If the GI was trying to see the results of his handiwork when the claymore went off, his chances of being killed or wounded were very good. Those 600 little steel balls didn't have eyes; they could care less which way they went or who they hit when they were fired. On more than one occasion it had also backfired on the VC while he had the claymore in his hands. At that distance it didn't make any difference which way it was pointed....
>
> In an attempt to try and stay one step ahead of Mr. Charles, we used a small piece of reflecting tape attached to the right rear of the claymore. If the tape could not be seen by the grunt who placed the claymore in position, he knew without a doubt that somebody was messing with it and could take proper precautions if he did have to fire it. Using the tape eased a lot of nighttime nerves. Some units went one step further and booby trapped the claymore with a hand grenade when they set it up. This was very effective too, until Charlie grew to expect the hand grenade. (Puckett, *Memories*)

In the meantime, the division was quietly readying itself for a major blow at the enemy headquarters of what the VC called Military Region IV—the area north of Saigon, centered on the so-called Iron Triangle, between Phu Cuong and Dau Tieng. To mislead the enemy, elaborate preparations were made to open Route 13, and just after the New Year's Day, troops and artillery were concentrated between Phu Cuong and Lai Khe on the east, while the 25th Division commenced operations along its bank of the Saigon River to the west.

CEDAR FALLS: Hammer and Anvil in the Iron Triangle

In 1974 Brigadier General Bernard W. Rogers, one of DePuy's two assistant division commanders, wrote a monograph for the Chief of Staff of the Army on the 1st Division's operations from December 1966 through April 1967, entitled *CEDAR FALLS-JUNCTION CITY—A Turning Point* (Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 1974). In it, Rogers recorded that

the planning guidance for the major units involved instructed them to undertake "deceptive deployments on seemingly routine operations" that would, in fact, mask prepositioning units for a violent and decisive "hammer and anvil" attack. The anvil, reported Rogers,

> would be positioned first and the hammer would then swing through the Iron Triangle. The objective area would be sealed tightly throughout the operation to prevent enemy escape. The triangle itself was to be scoured for enemy installations, stripped of concealment, and declared a specified strike zone. The destruction of the enemy's Military region IV headquarters was the principal objective of the operation....
>
> CEDAR FALLS was to be conducted in two distinct phases. Phase I, 5-8 January, consisted of positioning units on the flanks of the Iron Triangle-Thanh Dien forest area. D-day was set for 8 January when an air assault on Ben Suc would take place. Ben Suc was to be sealed, searched, and after evacuation of its inhabitants and their possessions, destroyed. Phase II of the operation was to start on 9 January with an armored force attacking west from the vicinity of Ben Cat to penetrate the Iron Triangle. Simultaneously, air assaults in an arc around the Tanh Dien forest from Ben Cat to Ben Suc would complete the northern portion of the encirclement of the triangle. Forces would attack south through the entire objective area to the confluence of the Saigon and Thi Tinh Rivers. All civilians would be evacuated from the area which would be cleared and the tunnels destroyed. Phase II was planned to last from two to three weeks.

The Blue Spaders, tasked to seal Ben Suc, flew to Dau Tieng on 7 January and took off in sixty HU1H helicopters after daybreak on the 8th. Traveling at eighty-five miles per hour at treetop level in two V-formations, with three flights of ten Hueys in each V, the aircraft burst into view over the village at exactly 0800. There were no preparatory fires. The helicopters swooped into landing zones between the town and the jungle, putting 420 Blue Spaders into action in less than one and one-half minutes. Surprise was complete. (Rogers, *CEDAR FALLS-JUNCTION CITY*)

Alexander Haig reported that the entire village had been searched and secured by 1030. The Blue Spaders, he recalled, encountered light resistance; most of the Viet Cong had "scampered into the tunnels and escaped." The VC's departure left only 688 men in the village;

> Of these, twenty-eight were classified as Viet Cong after interrogation by intelligence teams, and seventy-eight others were detained for further questioning. Nearly all were low-ranking local guerrillas who could provide little useful information. Forty Vietnamese presumed to be Viet Cong were killed, many by fire from helicopters. Our casualties were light but included two of my men killed moments after landing by a large booby trap located in a tree. Enemy wounded were flown by helicopter to the Army general hospital in Saigon.
>
> A number of North Vietnamese were taken prisoner, including some cadre members from Hanoi, who were noticeable because they were better dressed than the peasants. One of these was an English-speaking professor of mathematics who told us, after he was captured while attempting to escape across a paddy field, that he had been educated at the University of Peking. The search of the village's underground storehouses, some of them three levels deep, revealed 3,294 tons of rice; large caches of medical supplies, including 800,000 vials of penicillin; 447 weapons; 1,087 grenades; and 7,622 Viet Cong uniforms.
>
> ....A total of 582 men, 1,651 women, and 3,754 children were evacuated before sundown to

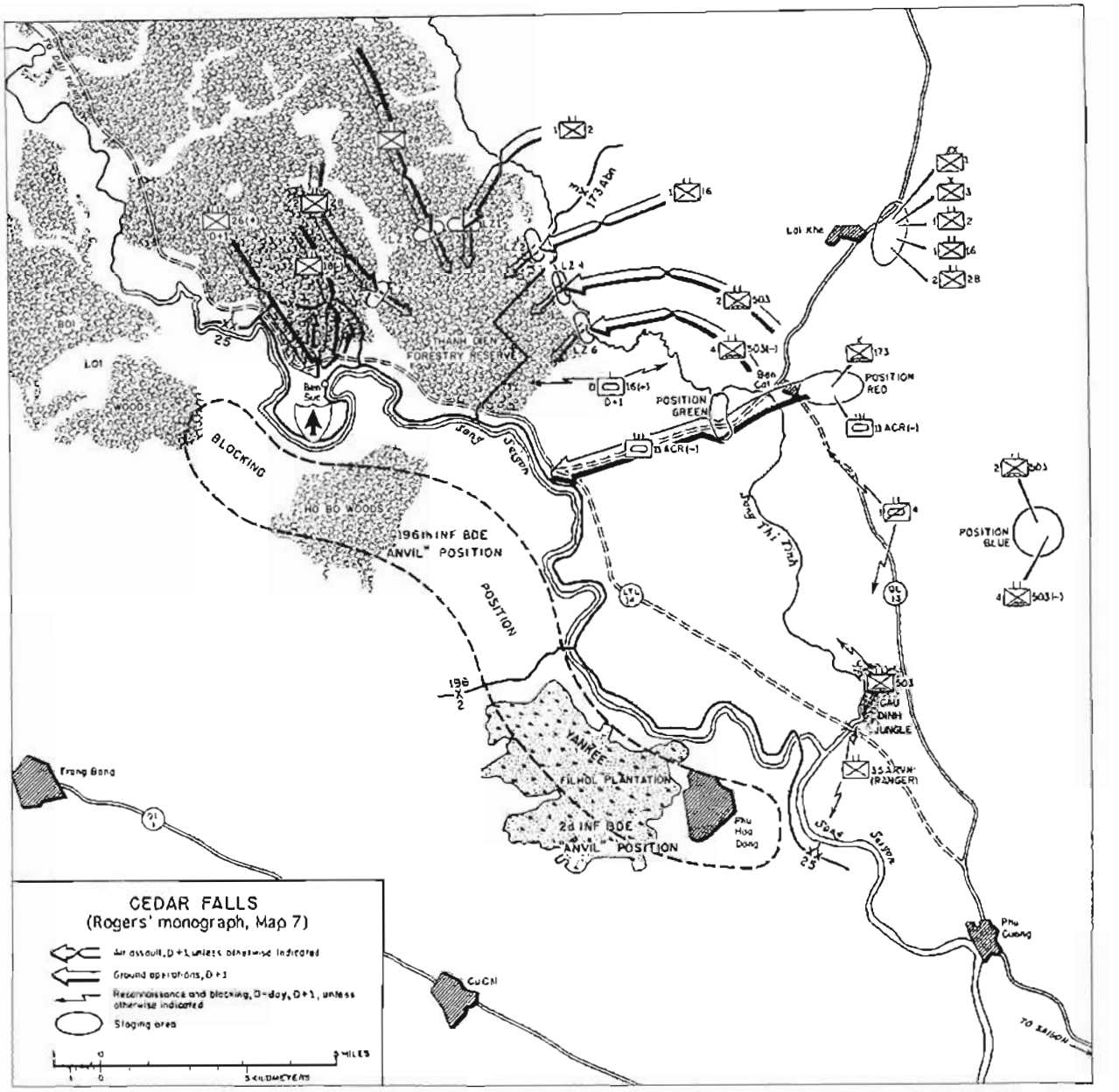


Fig. 3.33.

a relocation center near Phu Cuong, the provincial capital. Most made the trip in huge double-rotor Chinook helicopters and aboard U. S. Navy riverboats, taking with them 247 water buffalo, 225 head of cattle, innumerable pigs ("I want that sow and her brood reunited by 1700 hours!" DePuy ordered ... on hearing the frantic squealing of a mother pig that had been separated from its young), 158 ox carts, and 60 tons of rice from the recent harvest. (Haig, *Inner Circles*)

The operation report for CEDAR FALLS follows:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345
23 January 1967

SUBJECT: Operation Cedar Falls,
8-15 January 1967
TO: Each Blue Spader

SECTION I

The Blue Spaders of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry have just completed one of the most successful operations of the war. Acting as the Spearhead Battalion of the largest American force ever assembled during the Vietnamese conflict, the Blue Spaders set in motion Operation Cedar Falls centered in and around the formidable Viet Cong stronghold known as the "Iron Triangle."

The men of Dobol initiated the multi-division destruction mission at 8:00 A.M. on 8 January when they raided and sealed the town of Ben Suc by airmobile assault. The operation consisted of the simultaneous landing of three rifle companies in multiple landing zones surrounding the so-called "nerve center" of V.C. Forces in the "Iron Triangle" area. Because of the mass, precision and violence of the landings, complete surprise was achieved and a steel ring was snapped around the V.C. village of some three thousand in just 45 seconds. With the exception of the unsuccessful and convulsive attempts of small V.C. bands to break the seal, the V.C. were forced to seek refuge in the countless bunkers and tunnels which blended ingeniously throughout the village landscape.

In describing the 26th's landings both Major General W. E. DePuy, 1st Division Commander, and Lieutenant General Jonathan Seaman, Commanding General of Second Field Force, agreed that the raid on Ben Suc was "the most successful airmobile operation" that they had seen in the war to date.

The three day operations around Ben Suc were replete with individual and small unit actions of the type which test the mettle of every Blue Spader. In one of their more daring attempts to rupture the 26th's seal, on the night of 10 January, eleven V.C. attempted to break out through Bravo Company's lines by stampeding a herd of water buffalo, while following close behind firing their carbines, M-79's and hurling grenades. Bravo's response was deliberate and effective. Results:

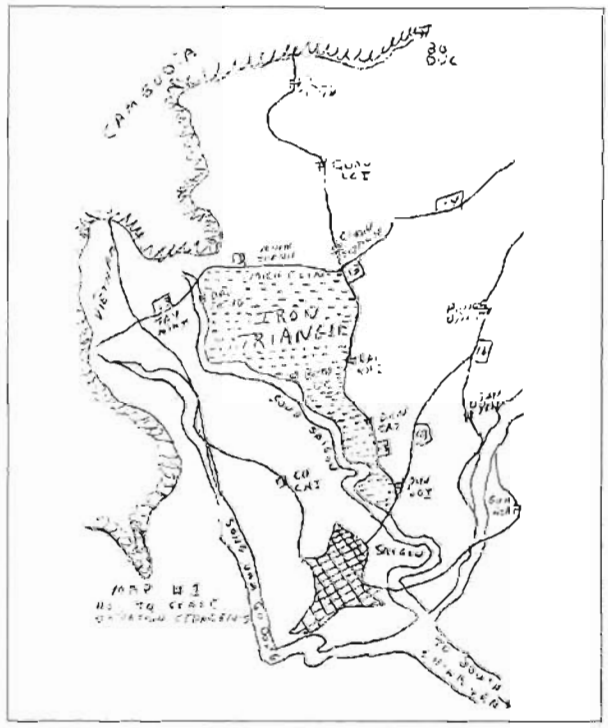
2 VC KIA 2 M-79's Captured
4 VC WIA 1 Carbine Captured
5 VC Captured

In addition to the fruitless efforts of the V.C. within the Dobol seal to break out, persistent efforts were made by VC elements outside the seal to open the cordon and relieve the pressure on their trapped comrades. Each night V.C. mortars, claymores, and infantry probes were initiated against the Dobol perimeter. In every case the V.C. were repulsed with heavy casualties. With the assistance of ARVN search forces, Ben Suc was methodically searched and cleared, its non-military population removed to New-Life Hamlets to the South and the network of tunnels and bunkers completely destroyed. Operations by the 26th in the Ben Suc area netted the following:

149 Detainees (many later confined as VC)	
45 VC KIA	12 rifles
11 VC WIA	3 machine guns
18 VC Captured	89 sampans
400 Bolts of material	66,900 pounds of rice
6,830 uniforms captured	

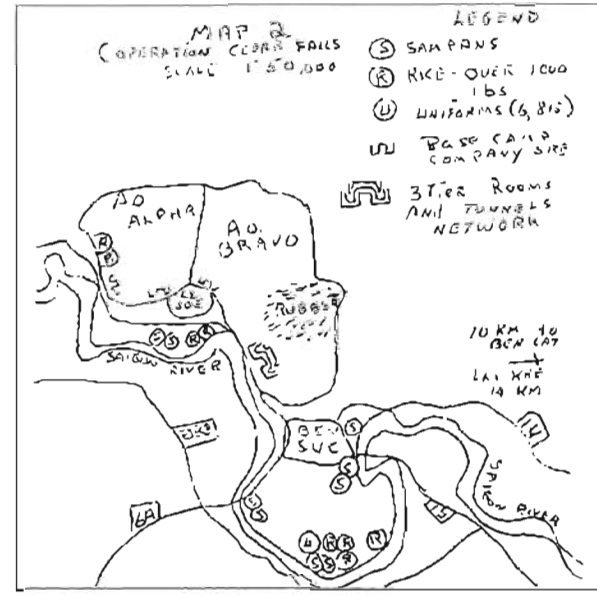
2 bundles NVN currency 220 pounds of salt

On 11 January 1967 the "Blue Spaders" moved



west of Ben Suc and North along the Saigon River. The Battalion, less C Company, moved by airmobile assault and C Company by ground movement. In their ground move to the Northwest C Company discovered a very large tunnel network and base area. The complex included subsurface rooms and tunnels three tiers in depth. The rooms connected by the tunnels were 10 ft long, 5 ft wide and 7 ft high. They were reinforced with concrete beams and steel trap doors. Several airstrikes and hundreds of rounds of artillery were fired on the target. Utilizing automatic weapons, claymores and grenades, the V.C. occupying the camp fought viciously to repel C Company's advance. The men of C Company continued to advance, however, and the defenders were forced to retreat to the North through their extensive tunnel system. Artillery was registered at the tunnel exits and a heavy toll was exacted.

Simultaneously, B Company made contact to the Northwest of landing zone Joe. A second base camp was located. Again the devastating fire power of air and artillery was released. Hours later and some 200 meters North of landing zone Joe, a third base camp was located by elements of Company A. Napalm airstrikes coupled with three batteries of 105mm and 155mm artillery were unleashed and all camps were overrun and destroyed.



These actions by the "Blue Spaders" opened the dense jungle allowing engineer, demolition teams, accompanied by the infantry, to proceed through the fortified positions. With the use of demolitions the tunnels and sophisticated room structures are no longer usable by the Viet Cong.

Results of engagement during the period 11 January to 15 January 1967, include the following:

44 VC KIA 4 uniforms captured
26 VC WIA 419,187 pounds of rice captured
8 Detainees 8 sampans destroyed
19 Claymores & mines captured or destroyed
Numerous documents captured

Again sound training, hard work, and effective leadership have brought success to the 26th. Testimony of its accomplishments is provided by the array of distinguished officials who personally visited the battalion during Cedar Falls to extend their congratulations:

Honorable Stanley R. Resor,
Secretary of the Army
General Earl G. Wheeler, USA,
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
General William C. Westmoreland, USA, COMUSMACV
Lieutenant General John A. Heintges, USA,
DEPCOMUSMACV
Lieutenant General Jonathan O. Seaman, USA,
Commander, II FFORCEV
Major General William E. DePuy, USA,
Commanding General, 1st Division
Brigadier General James F. Hollingsworth, USA,
Assistant Division Cdr.
Brigadier General Bernard Rogers, USA,
Assistant Division Cdr.
Brigadier General Richard T. Knowles, USA,
CofS II FFORCEV
Lieutenant Commander Glenn Ford, USN,
Well known movie actor

FOR THE COMMANDER:

DONALD A MODICA
1 LT, INFANTRY
Assistant Adjutant

After CEDAR FALLS, Major General DePuy directed publication of the following personal letter, addressed to every soldier in the division and in its attached units:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION
APO 96345
AVDB-CG

27 January 1967

SUBJECT: Results of Operation CEDAR FALLS
TO: Every Soldier in the Big Red One

1. As you know, the Division initiated Operation CEDAR FALLS on the 8th of January with the raid on Ben Suc by the 1st Battalion 26th Infantry, followed on the 9th by six air mobile assaults north of the Iron Triangle and an armored cavalry thrust across the middle and down the west side of the Iron Triangle. The operation continued until midnight on the 26th of January.

2. During this operation, the 173d Airborne Brigade and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment were under the operational control of the 1st Division..

3. Frankly, we had no idea at the beginning that it would turn out to be the most significant operation thus far conducted by the 1st Division. It is most significant in many respects. First, of all, it was aimed at the Headquarters, Military Region IV. This Headquarters is responsible for operations in and around Saigon. For example, the Headquarters conducted the attack on Tan Son Nhut Airbase. It was also responsible for the bombing of US troop billets inside Saigon itself.

4. The 25th Division and the 196th Infantry Brigade operated on the south side of the Saigon River and they also enjoyed a tremendous success. In fact, it was an element of the 196th Brigade which found what was apparently the main command post of MR IV.

5. Because the 25th Division started two days earlier than we did, the bulk of the personnel of Military Region IV came across the river to the north, in the operating area of the 1st Division.

6. Although the 1st Division killed twice as many VC in Operations El Paso and Attleboro, the number of VC who were captured and who surrendered in Operation CEDAR FALLS, when added to the killed, brings the grand total to the largest achieved in any single operation in the III Corps Tactical Zone. The comparative statistics between Operations Birmingham, El Paso, Attleboro and Cedar Falls are set forth below:

7. The full statistics of CEDAR FALLS alone are also set forth below:

VC	
KIA	389
PW	180
CHIEU HOI	471
DETAINEES	365

RICE	3,347 Tons

AMMO	
Mortar	219 rds
Grenades	1,496 rds
Small Arms	49,593 rds
Arty	28 rds

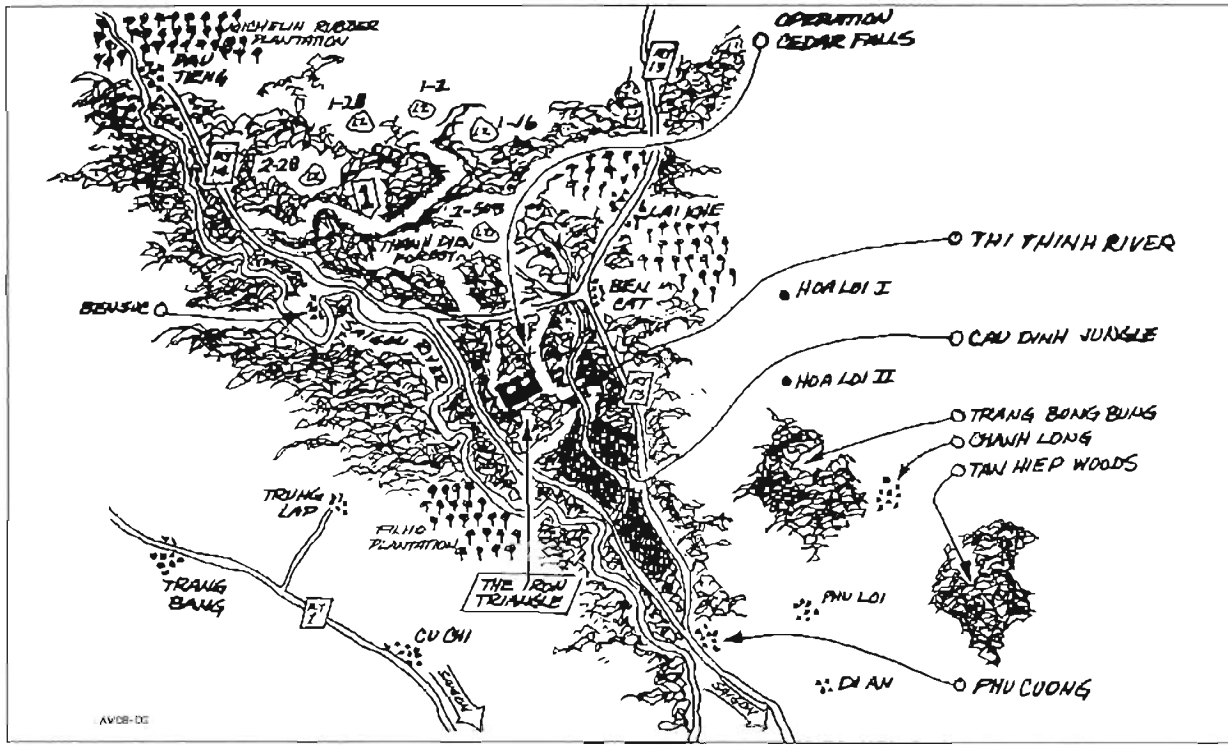
EQUIPMENT	
Radios (PRC 10)	10
Sampans	189
Uniforms	7,622
Bangalore Torpedoes	15

WEAPONS	
Small Arms	429
Machine Gun	18
Mortars	6
Recoilless Rifle	2
M-79	3

MINES (330)	
Claymore	51
AP	122
AT	15
CBU	142

MEDICAL SUPPLIES	
625,000	Vials Penicillin
100,000	Ampules Antibiotics
50,000	Ampules Vitamins
100	Bottles Glucose
100	Bottles Saline Solution
1	Case of Surgical Instruments

	CEDAR FALLS 8-26 Jan 67	ATTLEBORO 5-25 Nov 66	EL PASO II 25 Jun-13 Jul 66	BIRMINGHAM 24 Apr-17 May 66
VC KIA	389	845	825	119
PW	180	12	37	28
CHIEU HOI	471	14	1	30
TOTAL:	1,040	871	863	177
Rice (tons)	3,347	1,139	1,522	2,106
Weapons	458	143	152	131
Mines	330	552	6	161
Grenades	1,497	25,049	210	363
SA Ammo	49,593	2,737	3,920	4,009
Sampans	189	-	15	63



8. The forces involved captured, mostly in tunnels and caves, the vast majority of the records and plans of Military Region IV. As of yesterday the MACV Documents Section had processed 235,000 pages of MR IV documents. Some of these documents describe in detail the activities of MR IV from 1962 through 1966 and their intelligence value is tremendous. These documents contain the strengths of VC units, the names of their members, the towns and villages in which they operate, some of their meeting places, and a great amount of information on exactly how they operate and what their future plans are.

9. In the course of the Operation, 7,000 refugees were resettled from the area. These refugees who were mostly VC families, provided the labor corps and the logistic support for VC units throughout the entire area. The facility discovered by the 1st Battalion 28th Infantry contained medical supplies in a depot on which all the main force regiments in the III Corps area drew for their principal support.

10. For the first time in the history of the war in Vietnam infantry-engineer bulldozer teams cut their way through the jungle, finding and destroying base camps, creating landing zones, pushing back the jungle from roads which can now be used for rapid re-penetration of the area. One entire jungle area was completely eliminated. All in all, the engineers cut down 9 square kilometers of solid jungle. This is a technique which will be used again in the penetration of other VC war zones and base areas—a technique pioneered by the 1st Division. Everyone who worked with the engineers recognizes the tremendous contribution

they made to the success of the operation.

11. In addition to the destruction of the base area of Military Region IV, the most significant and unexpected result was the surrender, as of last night, of 471 Viet Cong. This has never happened before in the war in Vietnam, and in this area, at least, is a reflection of the complete breakdown in confidence and morale on the part of the VC.

12. Although I do not expect the war to end quickly, I believe this has been a decisive turning-point in the III Corps area; a tremendous boost to the morale of the Vietnamese Government and Army; and a blow from which the VC in this area may never recover. I want to congratulate and commend every soldier involved in this Operation, both those soldiers of the Big Red One, and those of the 173d Airborne Brigade and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and our attached and supporting engineers. To all hands—a job magnificently well done!

W. E. DePuy
Major General
USA Commanding

SARATOGA and SILVER SPRING: "The Aggressive Spirit of the Blue Spaders"

Following CEDAR FALLS, the Blue Spaders were again sent to the LAM SON area to assist the division's pacification task force, and to open the roads for logistic convoys. A division briefing chart (Fig 3.33) depicted operations there 19 January-2 February.

The following report summarizes the LAM SON operations, which comprised Operations SARATOGA and SILVER SPRING:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345
2 February 1967

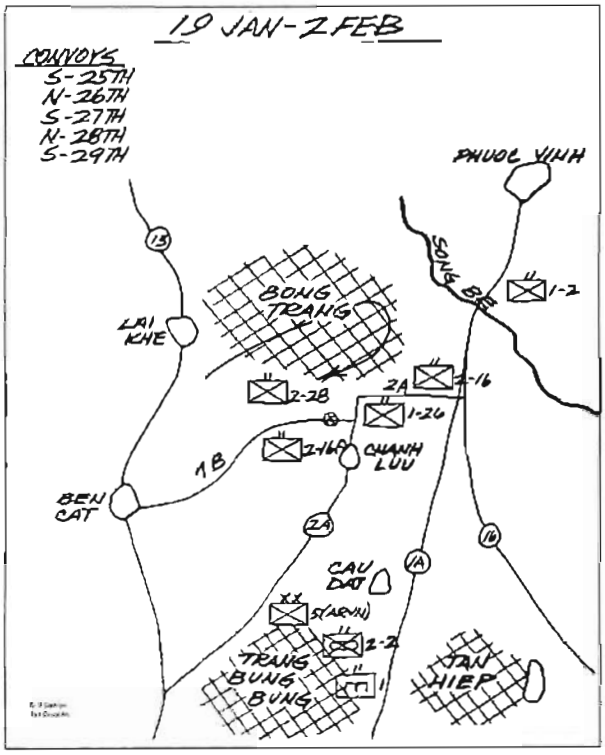


Fig. 3.33. Division briefing chart

SUBJECT: Operation Saratoga
(18-20 Jan; 23-29 Jan)
Operation Silver Spring (20-23 Jan)
TO: Each Blue Spader

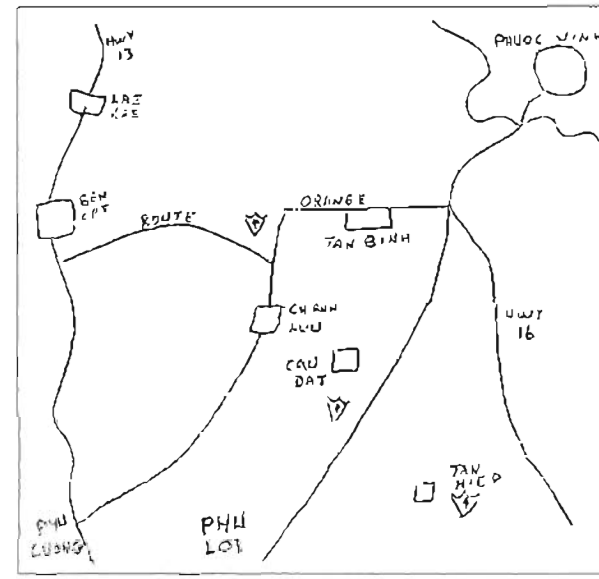
Capitalizing on the success achieved by Operation Cedar Falls in the Iron Triangle area, the Blue Spaders of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry returned to the division TAOR and continued to exert pressure on local VC forces by participating in Operation Saratoga—a seal and search operation followed by a road clearing search and destroy operation along Route Red; and Operation Silver Spring—a blocking and search and destroy operation south of Chanh Luu in the vicinity of the XOM GO jungle.

Operation Silver Spring was a 2nd Brigade operation in which the Blue Spaders airlifted

into multiple LZs vicinity Tan Hiep in order to block VC forces moving north from the village, and to conduct search and destroy operations in the same area. This operation met with immediate success as the five well chosen LZs along the stream bed completely blocked the VC escape route. Several VC were immediately engaged and killed. One group of 7 VC were observed attempting to break the seal, and were taken under fire resulting in the capture of a large number of important financial records. This four day operation again characterized by the precision and speed of execution which has become a Blue Spader trademark. Results of this operation were:

4 VC KIA	1 Carbine captured
4 VC WIA	19 Bunkers destroyed
2 VC Captured	Miscellaneous clothing, documents, and equipment captured.

Under 1st Brigade control, the men of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry participated in operation Saratoga. Beginning with an air assault to seal the eastern portion of Cau Dat, the Blue Spaders were once again the mainstay of the brigade operation, continuing to inflict losses on the Viet Cong and deny him the sanctuaries and freedom of movement he once enjoyed. After conducting an effective seal of the assigned sector, the battalion then conducted search and destroy operations east of the village. On 23 January the battalion airlifted to its assigned sector between Chanh Luu and Tan Binh with the mission of conducting road clearing and search and destroy operations in support of the 1st Brigade convoys from Di An to Phuoc Vinh. The battalion successfully performed its mission, allowing 498 vehicles to pass unhindered to Phuoc Vinh. The



aggressive spirit of the Blue Spaders was evidenced by the results achieved over the twelve day period which are as follows:

13 VC KIA	43 Bunkers Destroyed
3 VC WIA	5 Carbines Captured
9 Detainees	12 Tunnel complexes destroyed
5 Base Camps discovered	Numerous documents and items of miscellaneous equipment captured

Once again, the battalion has displayed the kind of professionalism for which it is famous. Responding in true Blue Spader fashion, the Dobol soldiers quickly adjusted to different and varied missions, accomplishing each one with the same pride and esprit which continues to spell defeat for the Viet Cong.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

KENNETH V. BRESLEY
Captain Infantry
Adjutant

Two "war stories" emerged from SARATOGA/SILVER SPRING. The first is Staff Sergeant Puckett's rueful account of an operation in a rubber plantation one peaceful, dry, moonlight night. His unit's mission was to seal a village;

> We were to move about twenty-five hundred meters, under cover of darkness, through a thick, abandoned rubber plantation, completely encircle a village, and get into positions that would block anyone trying to escape from the village the next morning when an ARVN battalion moved in to search the village for suspected VC. All this was to be accomplished with a group of approximately two-hundred-fifty grunts (my battalion) and quietly.
>
> Sounds simple, right? Wrong!...
>
> We had been on the move all day and couldn't really get fired up for such a dangerous trek. We hoped that the rubber plantation was, in fact, abandoned. It could have been the base camp of the unit we were searching for. The latest intelligence reports indicated that the plantation had not been worked for months, and no enemy activity had been reported since that time.
>
> As it turned out, the moonlight was not a real hindrance. The thick canopy of the rubber trees didn't allow one moonbeam the chance to hit the ground. The darkness inside the plantation was unbelievable. I had been in dark places before and many since, but none to match that night. It was so dark you couldn't hold your own hand in front of your eyes and even make the shape out. If I had a nickel for every whispered cuss word that night, I'd be on vacation in Honolulu right now. I probably voiced enough to pay for the airline ticket myself.
>
> To make matters worse, somebody in battalion had a brainstorm on how we could maintain contact with each other during the march. Right before dark, we all got in a long line in the order of march. The lead man in the column had commo wire tied to the back of his pack. Each man behind him was connected to the commo wire on some part of their equipment at four- or five-foot intervals. So here we were, Alpha Company, Bravo Company, and Charlie Company, tethered to each other like a herd of elephants, fixing to cover twenty-five hundred meters through a rubber plantation in the dark! We all made bets on how long the line would remain connected....
>
> The two hundred-yard bet was the winner. The line was broken and abandoned before our lead man in the column entered the plantation. I found out why twenty-five yards into the woodline. A ravine about twelve feet deep crossed our path. I can imagine what it must have felt like to suddenly find yourself yanked down the slope and becoming part of a human landslide! It was a miracle that Alpha Company didn't have some serious injuries before judgment took over and the commo wire link was cut. We ultimately had to reply on shouted whispers being passed down the line to warn us of upcoming obstacles. Our efforts to be quiet lacked conviction.
>
> After numerous collisions with the radio on Cud's back, I grabbed a strap of the radio harness and managed to keep upright for the remainder of the trip. Behind me, Reb had a death grip on my pistol belt and was constantly stepping on the heel of my boots.
>
> The motion of the long column was much like that of a yo-yo.... When the lead element hit a clear area and sped up, we had to hang on for dear life; when they slowed down or stopped, we stopped abruptly.... We reached our blocking position about 0300 that morning.... At first light, we were surprised to find that we were all linked up and the seal was complete. The RVN battalion

showed up at the right time and right village and began the search. The people in the village, who were known to be VC sympathizers, were surprised, and a large number without proper identification were detained. Ten or twelve were killed in the village or while making an attempt to escape. The mission had been a success, but it sure could have been a disaster. (Puckett, *Memories*)

It is interesting to note that Rudolf Egersdorfer recalled several occasions during LAM SON in 1966 and 1967 when the battalion provided control during a night approach march by passing ropes or commo wire down its column—but the men were not tied to the rope itself. Rather, they held onto it with one hand, and used it to guide themselves, allowing it to slip through their grip when they needed more time, and catching up with the man ahead when the terrain favored rapid movement. (Egersdorfer, interview)

Lieutenant Colonel Haig provided a somewhat more humorous account of the LAM SON operation; it concerned John Marsh, a congressman from Virginia (and later counselor to President Ford and secretary of the army under President Reagan). The congressman, said Haig,

> visited my battalion command post during Tet, the Vietnamese lunar New Year, in February 1967. Although a cease-fire was theoretically in effect in observation of the holiday, my CP was located in a notoriously bad area where the Phu Loi battalion had long been active. I advised against the visit, but Jack Marsh, an old friend from Pentagon days, dismissed the danger. He arrived in a Huey helicopter, escorted by an Air Force lieutenant colonel carrying a bottle of champagne to celebrate the Vietnamese New Year. I showed the visitors into my tent, pitched over a bunker and heavily sandbagged up the sides. The Air Force man seated himself on a bunk and went to work on the champagne bottle—just as he popped the cork, a claymore mine detonated by the Viet Cong went off, removing the entire top of the tent. Fortunately, the blast passed above our heads and no one was injured. An enemy mortar barrage commenced at the same time, and we dodged through this to a nearby bunker, where Marsh and I spent the next four hours as Viet Cong attackers ran through the camp, firing Kalishnikov assault rifles and hurling grenades. After they had been driven off, we went looking for the Air Force lieutenant colonel across ground littered with the enemy dead. The unfortunate fellow had dived into a slit-trench latrine, an act that saved his life (who would think of looking for him there?) but that must have left him with pungent memories of Army hospitality.
>
> Next morning, we choppered to a rendezvous point near a supposedly pacified village so that Marsh, a firm believer in winning hearts and minds, could study the results of this program firsthand. We landed in a field about half a mile from the tree line. A jeep driven by the man detailed to escort Marsh, Maj. Robert L. Schweitzer, the commander of the division's Revolutionary Development Task Force, emerged from the tree line and approached the helicopter at top speed. The pop-pop-pop of enemy automatic fire was audible; enemy rounds followed the jeep, kicking up the dust. Schweitzer skidded the jeep to a stop beside the helicopter, saluted smartly, and shouted in a military manner, "Schweitzer reporting as ordered, sir! jump in, Congressman!" The jeep's windshield had been shot out and its body dented in many places by machine-gun rounds. Running such gauntlets was all in a day's work to Schweitzer, who was in the midst of his third voluntary tour of duty in Vietnam. But Marsh, who

had seen more action in a few short hours than most other visitors from Capitol Hill experienced in the entire war, wisely decided to pass up the scheduled visit to a pacified village and to return to Saigon. (Haig, *Inner Circles*)

JUNCTION CITY, PHASE I: Going After COSVN

On 10 February 1967, Major General John H. Hay succeeded Major General DePuy as commander of the 1st Infantry Division, and Colonel William B. Caldwell III took the place of Colonel Sidney B. Berry in command of 1st Brigade. The mood was then one of quiet optimism: the enemy was apparently badly hurt, and while defectors in the division's area of responsibility never exceeded 88 in a single month during 1966, in January 1967, 576 of the enemy had there voluntarily entered the *Chieu Hoi* program, that is, accepted the Republic of Vietnam's "open arms" and became ralliers, or *Hoi Chanh*. Moreover, another, larger U.S. and ARVN offensive was in the offing.

The pending U.S. offensive was originally called GADSDEN. Then, because of a suspected compromise, that name was deceptively applied to the 25th Division's initial positioning moves on the west, to be conducted concurrently with TUCSON, a similar 1st Division operation on the east. The main operation was renamed JUNCTION CITY. General Rogers wrote that the latter was to be the largest of the war to that date: a massive invasion of War Zone C, the "80 x 50-kilometer area bounded on the west and north by Cambodia, on the east by Highway 13, and on the south by an east west line drawn through Ben Cat and Tay Ninh extending to the Cambodian border." The objective was the destruction of enemy forces and installations in that region, including the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the main enemy headquarters.

Among the 1st Division's objectives during TUCSON was the conversion of Minh Thanh into a forward operational and logistics base, to be covered by search and destroy operations in the same area as SHENANDOAH the previous October. The attacking units made sporadic contact with guard elements in enemy base camps, uncovered evidence that elements of the VC 9th Division had recently been in the area, and captured stocks of enemy supplies. The Blue Spaders acted as division reserve in the vicinity of Lai Khe and Minh Thanh (1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, After Action Report 5-67, 5 April 1967).

By the end of the third week in February, 1967, forces and supplies were in position at Minh Thanh, and the offensive was launched.

General Rogers described the operation as casting a ring of forces around the Cambodian edges of War Zone C, followed by a two-brigade attack into the area thus enclosed. In *CEDAR FALLS-JUNCTION CITY*, Rogers wrote that

> Phase I of JUNCTION CITY would commence on 22 February with five U.S. brigades forming a horseshoe-shaped cordon in the western half of War Zone C.... The 25th Division would block on the west along the Cambodian border, and on the east along Provincial Route 4 would be the 1st Infantry Division with the 173d [Airborne Infantry] Brigade attached. On D plus 1 a brigade of the 25th Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (attached to the 25th), which had positioned themselves on the southern edge of the horseshoe the previous day, would attack north into the horseshoe. The horseshoe forces would conduct search and destroy operations in their areas. Simultaneous with the detailed and thorough search, a Special Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp [and airfield] near Prek Klok would be established for future interdiction of enemy sup-

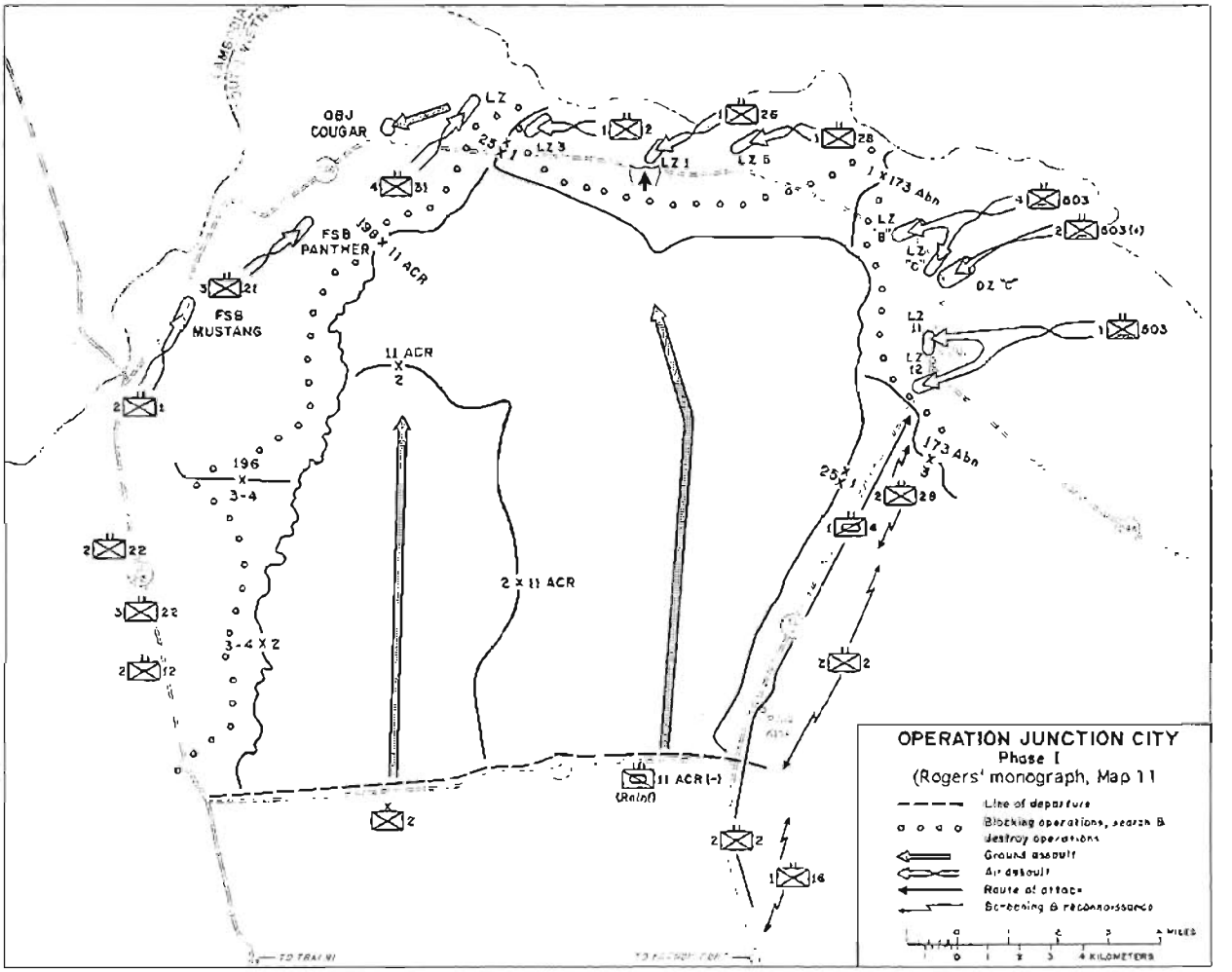


Fig. 3.34.

ply and infiltration routes in War Zone C. A second similar [camp and] airfield would be constructed in the vicinity of Katum....

During Phase II, II Field Force elements would focus their attention on the eastern portion of War Zone C, conducting search and destroy operations against COSVN, Viet Cong, and North Vietnamese forces and installations. The Saigon River was to be bridged at its intersection with Route 246 west of An Loc. At that site a Special Forces and Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp with an airstrip for C-130's was to be built....

Operation JUNCTION CITY would demonstrate the ability of American forces to enter areas which had been Viet Cong sanctuaries to conduct successful search and destroy missions and construct facilities in these strongholds. In addition, in the weeks forthcoming each of the four enemy regiments under the 9th Viet Cong Division would be met and defeated.

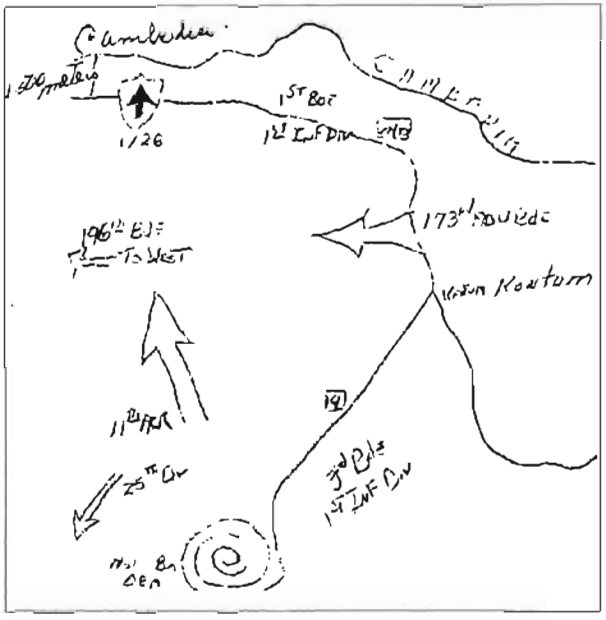
The operation report of Phase I of Junction City follows:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345
11 March 1967

SUBJECT: Operation Junction City,
Phase 1 22 February-3 March 1967
TO: Each Blue Spader

Following a six day security mission at Lai Khe, the 1st Bn 26th Infantry moved by fixed wing to a forward base at Minh Thanh in preparation for an airmobile assault near the Cambodian Border. At 1205 hours on 22 February 1967, utilizing 60 helicopters, the Blue Spaders landed in their designated LZ 15 km NW of Minh Thanh as part of Operation Junction City. With the same speed and precision which has characterized previous DOBOL operations, the LZ was secured. Subsequently that afternoon B Battery, 1/5 Artillery joined the Bn in its defensive perimeter.

Over the next several days the battalion improved defensive positions around the base and aggressively patrolled the area in search of the elusive VC and his base areas. Small but significant finds of VC equipment and facilities were reported each date until 24 February when C Company discovered a large base camp area and adjacent territory was carefully searched, revealing a very large sophisticated base area believed to be the COSVN Intelligence Staff Section Headquarters. COSVN is the overall directorate for Communist activity in South Vietnam. All units made significant finds of food, facilities and equipment. A Company uncovered numerous structures and base areas to the northeast and east of the base area containing supplies and weapons. The Recon Platoon continued their outstanding performance by searching successfully to the southwest and southeast, making significant finds of VC equipment. Throughout the period Blue Spaders were very ably assisted in their search and destroy mission by the 2nd Platoon, B Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cav. The heaviest contact however was made by C Company when on 26, 27, and 28 February 12 VC were killed in



battles surrounding another large base camp area. On 1 March, B Company uncovered a base camp containing an extensive headquarters and office complex with a large amount of medical supplies. Throughout the period numerous unsuccessful attempts were made by the VC to probe the DOBOL defenses. In all cases the VC were repulsed by the alert Blue Spaders by the effective use of listening posts, ambush patrols, claymores, trip flares, mortars and supporting artillery.

Following nine days of thorough and successful search and destroy operations, the Blue Spaders, on 3 March moved by helicopter to Minh

Thanh in preparation for Phase II of Operation Junction City. The DOBOL soldiers had conducted, by far, the most successful of the 1st Brigade's portion of the operation. Following is a list of our accomplishments of which every Blue Spader should be justly proud.

Personnel	Facilities	Weapons
15 VC KIA(BC)	8 Base Camps	9 Rifles
50 VC KIA(Probable)	147 Bunkers	4 Carbines
3 VC WIA	300 Structures	3 Sub MG
1 VC Captured	7 Tunnels	1 LMG

Ammunition

11,395 Small Arms Rounds	7 Rounds 81mm Mortar
173 Rifle Grenades	3 Claymores
4 Recoilless Rifle Rounds (RPG-2)	
2 Rounds 60mm Mortar	2 Butterfly bombs

Tools & Equipment

52,480 lbs rice	70 shirts
885 lbs salt	182 pair pants
400 lbs peanuts	100 yds plastic
139 lbs fish	71 bicycles
21 gallons cooking oil	5 boxes bicycle parts
40 cans tomatoes	3 rolls commo wire
22 pigs	103 entrenching tools
69 chickens	80 reams paper
7 ducks	1 three HP engine
2 lbs tobacco	4 lbs nails
5 lbs soap	5,457 batteries
33 lrg transistor radios	1 PRC-10 radio
1 tape recorder	1 walkie talkie
52 uniforms	80 lamps
1,750 erasers	40 pots and pans
4 telephones	700 pencils
78 sheets of tin	500 pens
80 light bulbs	5 picks
5,500 paper plates	4 saws

Medicine and Documents

10 bottles penicillin	95 lbs documents
750 bottles of vitamins	100 books
4 bundles misc medical equipment	

FOR THE COMMANDER:

DONALD A MODICA
1 LT, INFANTRY
Assistant Adjutant

JUNCTION CITY, PHASE II: Into the Fishhook

On 7 March the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry conducted an airmobile assault into the site of the bridge over the Song Saigon southwest of An Loc. Through 17 March the battalion operated under 1st Brigade, providing security for engineer units constructing the bridge and for Fire Support Base B. On 18 March the unit returned to Minh Thanh and prepared for its offensive role in JUNCTION CITY II on 20 March. For that operation the battalion would be attached to 2nd Brigade and would lead its attack along Route 246.

The second phase of the offensive was launched on the morning of 18 March 1967. On 19 March, during an airmobile assault by elements of the 25th Division at Suoi Tre, the enemy destroyed three helicopters and damaged six with command-detonated mines implanted in the landing zone. (Subsequently the 272nd Regiment of the VC 9th Division stubbornly attacked the American units there, but were beaten back with severe losses.) General Rogers noted that such an LZ mining mishap might have befallen the 1/26 on the 20th, had it not been for a warning from an alert division intelligence staff and some fine infantry work by Blue Spaders. Told of the mined LZ at Suoi Tre, and warned that there might be a plan to mine the LZ at Sroc Con Tran (an objective assigned the 1/26th Infantry, and the place selected as the site for Fire Support Base C), Lieutenant Colonel Haig ordered an approach march to FSB C on foot—even though, as General Rogers later noted, "It was unusual for forces of the Big Red One not to make an airmobile assault into such an area." Fortunately, Company A, with engineers and armor in support, had cleared the road (Route 246) of mines, so the maneuver went smoothly.

Coming in behind the 1/26th, the 36th South Vietnamese Ranger Battalion, among other units, occupied and helped secure the area. As recounted by General Rogers, the 36th Rangers, on 21 March, discovered batteries and a wire in the woodline near the fire support base; they followed the wires to four holes filled

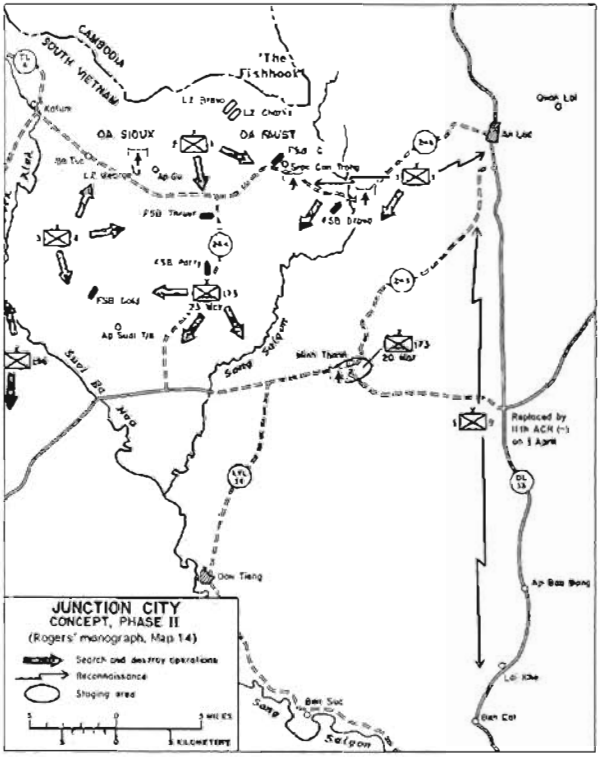


Fig. 3.35.

with explosives. "There was a center hole," said Rogers,

> and radiating from it was wire leading to three other holes at a distance of about twenty-five meters. In each hole [were] the necessary detonating caps. In the center one were also the following rounds: eight 75-mm., seven 81-mm., fourteen 60-mm., and 105 pounds of TNT. The other holes had similar but smaller loads: only 35 pounds of TNT each and various numbers and types of US ordnance. It was all set to be command detonated. (Rogers, *CEDAR FALLS-JUNCTION CITY*)

On 26 March 2nd Brigade alerted the 1/26th to be prepared for an airmobile assault into LZ George, located in a large, open grassy area, inundated in the wet season, some fourteen kilometers west of FSB C, and between five and six kilometers south of the

Fig. 3.36. A "Huey" landing elements of the 1/26th Infantry in LZ George, 30 March 1967 (Photo by Sgt. Clair Harmony)

Cambodian border. (The nearest place-name on the topographic map was that of an abandoned settlement, Ap Gu.) The battalion was informed that there was reason to expect contact with enemy main forces in that vicinity. Its mission would be to secure a landing site for the 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry, then to conduct search and destroy operations. On 29 March, the day before the scheduled assault into LZ George, the 2nd Brigade moved three batteries of artillery westward to FSB Thrust, thus halving the range to the LZ.

On the morning of 30 March low clouds and fog delayed the assault until after noon, when the Blue Spaders landed without opposition. Early reconnaissance around the LZ disclosed that small enemy forces had been in the area, but there was no contact. The battalion dug its night defensive position (NDP) beside LZ George, in a parched grove surrounded by grassy fields.

The two measures cited above—responsive artillery and field fortifications—largely determined the outcome of battles the Blue Spaders were to fight within the next 36 hours.

U.S. intelligence considered the 271st Regiment of the VC 9th Division the most dangerous combat force

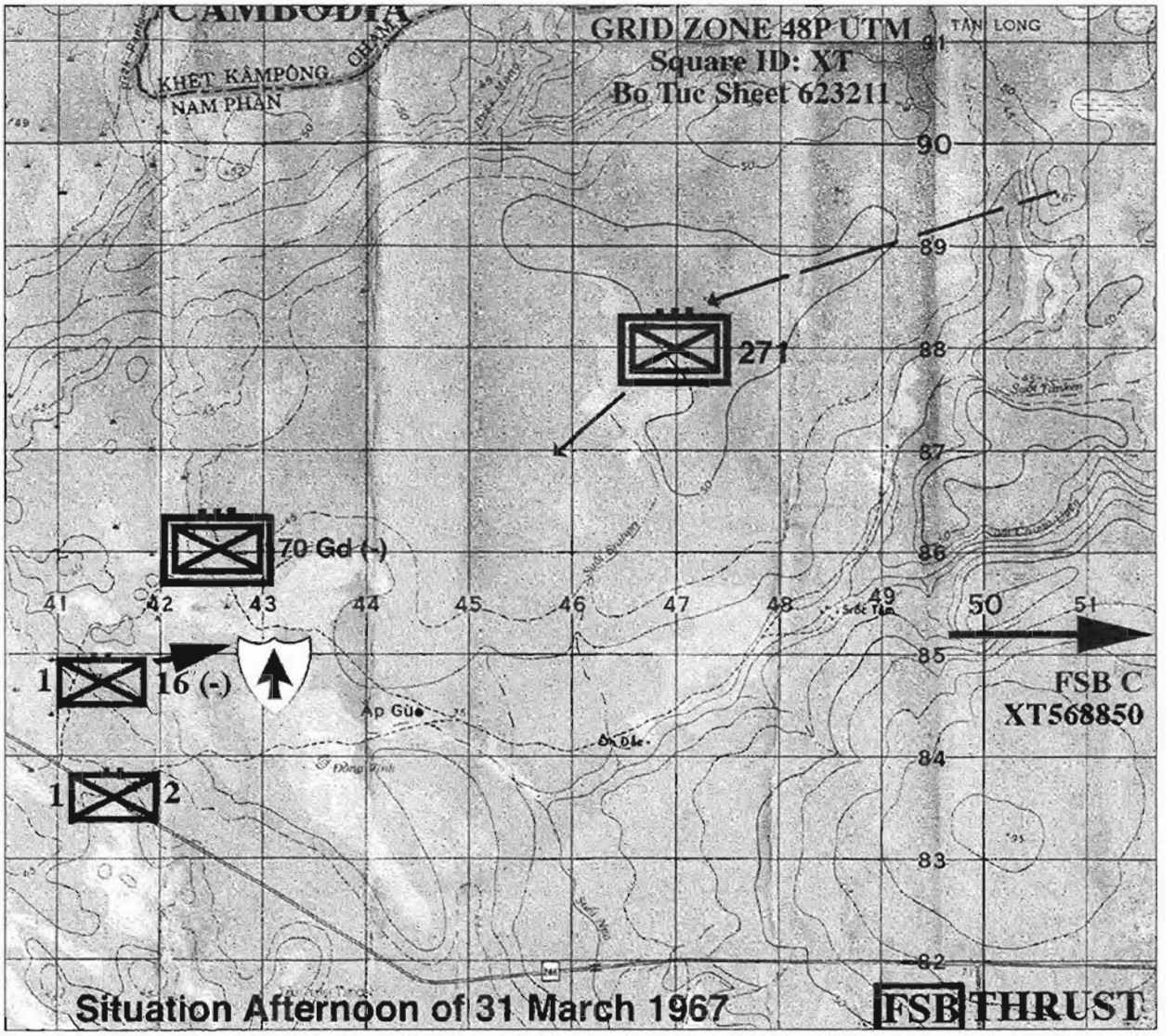


Fig. 3.37.

opposing them in War Zone C. Around 23 March that regiment moved swiftly eastward to the vicinity of a bend in the Cambodian border known as the "Fishhook" and seemed poised to strike at FSB C. Then, on the 30th, the 271st moved rapidly to the southwest toward LZ George with the intent, as it turned out, of decisively defeating the lone battalion there.

The enemy planned to attack FSB C with rockets and mortars in order to shut down its artillery. Simultaneously, the position of the 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry would also be attacked by fire to pin the 1/2nd in place and prevent its mortars from firing in support of the 1/26th. Enemy infantry would then overwhelm the Americans in LZ George. But the enemy commander apparently did not know about, or was simply unable to react to, the artillery at FSB Thrust, for while

his forces successfully suppressed FSB C (wounding the commander of the 2nd Brigade, Colonel James A. Grimsley Jr.), FSB Thrust was not attacked. The forces at FSB Thrust were thus able to respond immediately and with telling effect to DOBOL's call for defensive fires (Gorman, Oral History).

As for field fortifications, few American units other than the Blue Spaders had expended more physical and mental energy on how to use dirt to foil the enemy. Staff Sergeant Puckett, a relatively recent arrival, was initially skeptical of such efforts; however, he was soon converted to the Blue Spaders' way of thinking, becoming "a firm believer in adding a covered section to our [mortar] pits for ammunition storage and equipment. They took a little longer to complete," he observed, "but when rounds ... started zipping in, it was sure nice to know you didn't have to leave the safety of the pit to get a resupply of mortar rounds."

The success of these protective measures resultant in constant improvements: "Work never stopped on our gun pits," said Puckett;

> As soon as the pits were deep enough and the gun had been fired in, work began on the ammo addition. When that was finished, we began to connect the pits by a trench line. Time permitting, trench lines would be completed connecting the FDC bunker and other personnel areas. Within two or three days each position in the platoon could be reached without exposing ourselves to enemy fire. The many hours of extra work proved to be invaluable on many occasions. Our mortar positions became a trademark in the battalion.
>
> About this same time, the entire division adopted a new fighting position that got a lot of publicity, both good and bad. It became known as the "DePuy," or "1st Division Fighting Position." [Puckett was unaware of its antecedents in "Dobol Defenses."] Diagrams and directions for the construction of the positions were printed and distributed to non-divisional units with a strong recommendation that they be utilized.

Up to this time, the most commonly used infantry fighting position had been an open two-man position with a dirt or sandbag berm encircling the hole. The positions normally had no overhead to protect the grunts from rocket or mortar fragments. They did provide one thing the DePuy position did not allow for: the grunt's ability to view a full 360-degree area to his front, sides, and rear. That is the only complaint I ever heard voiced about the fighting position. Old habits are hard to break, and the grunts wanted to be able to see what was coming at them, and I sure didn't blame them for that. Once they understood the rationale of the position and experienced that first fire fight inside one, they couldn't understand how they had survived without them as long as they had.

The position basically was the same as the old position, only with overhead cover, and a firing port located at each corner. Entry to the fighting position was gained from the rear. The thick front portion of the bunker consisted of dirt, sandbags, logs, or a combination of the three to make that part as thick as possible with available materiel.

The idea was to make it strong enough to withstand the impact of an RPG or mortar round. The overhead cover was made of logs or limbs and layers of sandbags.

You might ask, "How in the world do I defend the front of my position when I can't even see to the front?" just as the grunts did at first.

This factor is what made the fighting position so unique and effective. With small firing ports located on the sides of the position, fires from one position were directed across the front of the next position. When a company or a battalion set up in a defensive posture utilizing the new fighting positions, mutual support and overlapping fires were attained. Maximum protection was provided due to the small firing ports, instead of the

whole front being open, and overhead protection from incoming mortars.

There is no doubt in my mind that the DePuy Fighting Position saved many lives after being employed. The extra time required for construction of the position was minor compared with the added security it provided. My whole battalion can attest to that after an experience on the 1st day of April 1967, at a place called Ap Gu. (Puckett, *Memories*)

JUNCTION CITY, PHASE II: Climax at Ap Gu

In *Inner Circles,* Al Haig reported that the 1/26th's mission was to find COSVN headquarters, thought to be located in the Fishhook. There, in what Haig describes as "the virtually roadless country west of An Loc and north of Highway 13," the Blue Spaders "were tasked to engage the Viet Cong and the NVA regulars protecting it." Such orders, Haig wryly commented, were "the military way of saying that we were the bait with which the U.S. Command hoped to entice an enemy force many times our size to come out of the jungle and attack us so that it could be destroyed in the open by American firepower." Landing with the 1/26th near the village of Ap Gu in the early afternoon of 30 March, Haig found that the terrain, like the plan of battle, was "classically Vietnamese," consisting of

> coarse, knee-high wild grass growing in sparse jungle, surrounded by lofty, heavy jungle. As soon as the helicopters touched down, cloverleaf patrols began probing the jungle. No contact with the enemy was made that day, but the patrols did find fortified positions in and around the landing zone. Instinct plays a strong role in combat, and I was sure that we were in for a fight. I chose a site in a grove of widely spaced, stunted, and defoliated trees for our defensive perimeter and ordered the battalion to dig in. I told the company commanders to make sure that their DePuy bunkers were properly dug and sited, and especially that the roofs of logs, sandbags, and dirt were extra strong. My belief in this bunker, always strong, had been reinforced a few days before when a shell from an enemy mortar landed on my own bunker while Joulwan and I were inside, blasting a depression the size and shape of a vegetable bowl in a sandbag but doing no other damage. When the North Vietnamese attacked, they would hit us with the biggest mortar barrage they could organize. It was not a night for sleep. After darkness fell, ambush patrols were sent out and listening posts established all around our perimeter.

Staff Sergeant Puckett remembered that, upon landing, the Blue Spaders established their perimeter in a circular cluster of trees. The center of the perimeter, however, "was fairly open and void of trees"; located directly to the west was a large clearing approximately three hundred meters wide by eight hundred meters long—the planned site of LZ George. Puckett's company, taking up position on the west side of the perimeter next to the LZ, was tied in with Charlie Company to the north and Alpha Company to our south. "Thankfully," said Puckett, "the texture of the ground was sandy"; as a result,

> we had easy digging and had managed to get both gun pits about three feet deep in less than an hour before hitting the more compact dirt beneath the surface. Having reached a normally accepted depth in such a short period of time, the guys were content and started filling sandbags to go around the pits. Work shifted to digging the FDC bunker and gathering timber for the overhead cover.

Puckett then had second thoughts about the depth of their gun pits, and ordered his men to dig down another foot and to add extra overhead cover. "It turned out to be the most important decision I have

Fig. 3.38. Lead elements of Company A approaching Recon Platoon and Company B (Photo by Sgt. Clair W. Harmony)

ever made in my life, and more importantly, in the lives of my men" (Puckett, *Memories*).

The next morning, 31 March, the 1/2nd Infantry landed in LZ George and marched approximately two kilometers southwest to establish a position on Route 246 (see fig. 3.37). Lieutenant Colonel Haig then sent out scouting missions, with Company A moving southeast, Company C heading east, and Reconnaissance Platoon probing to the north. Company B was tasked to scour the woodlines west of the NDP, and to act as battalion reserve.

Captain Rudolf Egersdorfer, commanding Company A, sensed danger. He moved his unit into the jungle slowly, clover-leafing carefully: "I told [my men] to move a short distance, then to lie down and study the jungle floor all around. The slightest irregularity, the slightest bump, the first object that did not look completely natural should lead them to suspect an enemy trap, and to take all due precautions" (Egersdorfer, interview).

While his troops were patrolling, Egersdorfer listened anxiously on the battalion net for indications of trouble from the other units. When Reconnaissance Platoon radioed that they had come upon signs in the trees saying "Americans go back or die!", he promptly called in his platoons and put them in a posture for immediate movement. At 1255, when Recon reported that it was in contact with an enemy that had automatic weapons and grenades, he started his company back to the NDP, moving as hastily as it could consistent with security. Shortly after his company began moving, battalion radioed instructions to both Companies A and C to return as soon as possible.

No sooner had Company B finished its inspection of the environs of the NDP than firing broke out to the north. Company B and the Reconnaissance Platoon habitually operated closely together, as Captain Hansen wanted to make sure that his former platoon received proper fire support and logistical assistance. Hence, when Staff Sergeant Puckett was approached by Recon on 31 March for assistance in "walking" its patrol to the north (the term refers to fires shifted along to the front of a unit entering an area in which contact is expected to disrupt ambushes and to "flush" quarry), he readily complied. His fires helped trigger an ambush, perhaps prematurely:

> We had fired about six or eight rounds to the patrol's front and right flank when the distinct popping sounds of AK-47s interrupted the quiet. The loud crash of grenades or claymores joined the increasing volume of the AK-47s.... [I ordered] pumping rounds out at the last fired position.... Heavy machine gunfire, RPGs, and

rockets could be heard clearly, mixed with small arms fire.

The radio's squelch popped and came to life. The sounds of the firefight could be heard in the background as a voice shouted, "Add two five and fire for effect! Don't stop! Keep 'em comin!"

The soldier gasped for air while the radio was still keyed and began pleading for help. "Six and Six Romeo [Platoon leader and radio operator] are dead. We've got wounded. Please get us some help! It must be a whole company.... We need some help please." (Puckett, *Memories*)

The enemy's diverse weaponry and the frantic calls for help on the radio evidently convinced Company B's commander, Captain Hansen, that he had to act. Without waiting for directions from battalion, he led his company across between three and four hundred meters of grass toward the treelines to the north-northwest where the engagement raged. A few days later Lewis Lampman, a private first class in Company B, wrote this account in a letter home:

> March 31st went out like a lion over here. It was about 12:30 and a patrol from the Recon Plt went out on a patrol and old Charley was waiting for them, and started shooting at them. Killed 2 right off, Sp4 and 1st Lt. My platoon heard the firefight and we put our gear on and started across a field to help them. They let us get into the woods and then they opened up. We started with 31 men and came back with 19 men, 1 killed, and the rest hurt. The battle lasted about an hour or more. Finally we knew we couldn't get them out of their holes—we ran out of ammo.
>
> Called in another company and we pulled back carrying our wounded with us. Sure was something and was I ever scairt, along with everyone else. (Lewis Lampman, letter, 6 April 1967, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

When Lieutenant Colonel Haig, who had gone aloft in his H-13 helicopter, learned that Company B had moved north, he promptly summoned air strikes, and assisted in directing artillery. But the situation on the ground deteriorated, with Company B's commander reporting to him that

> the enemy force he was engaging was at least a battalion in size. Our men were running low on ammunition. There was not a moment to lose. I ordered A Company to enter the jungle, pass through B Company, engage the enemy, and extract both recon platoon and B Company. Meanwhile, from the helicopter, I was calling down ever-heavier artillery and close air support with the assistance of the recon platoon radio operator, who was my eyes and ears on the ground.
>
> After several minutes of this, my helicopter, which had been flying just above the treetops, was hit by a round that disabled the engine. The ship hit the ground just at the edge of the tree line, a few yards from A Company's position. The Plexiglas bubble was cracked open like an eggshell by the impact. The pilot and I scrambled out and made a run for the A Company position through the heaviest enemy automatic fire I have ever experienced. Such moments often impose a kind of slow motion acuity on those involved in them. Rounds passed between my legs, mowing down the grass as I ran through it, and between my arms and my body, tugging at my fatigues. Bullets breaking the sound barrier in the vicinity of my helmet sounded like strings of firecrackers going off on the Fourth of July; mortar shells and grenades exploded behind us, ahead of us, and to either side of us. As I arrived inside the A Company position and dove headlong toward a large tree for safety, an enemy rocket grenade struck the trunk and exploded in front of my face in a shower of splinters. I was untouched. I was

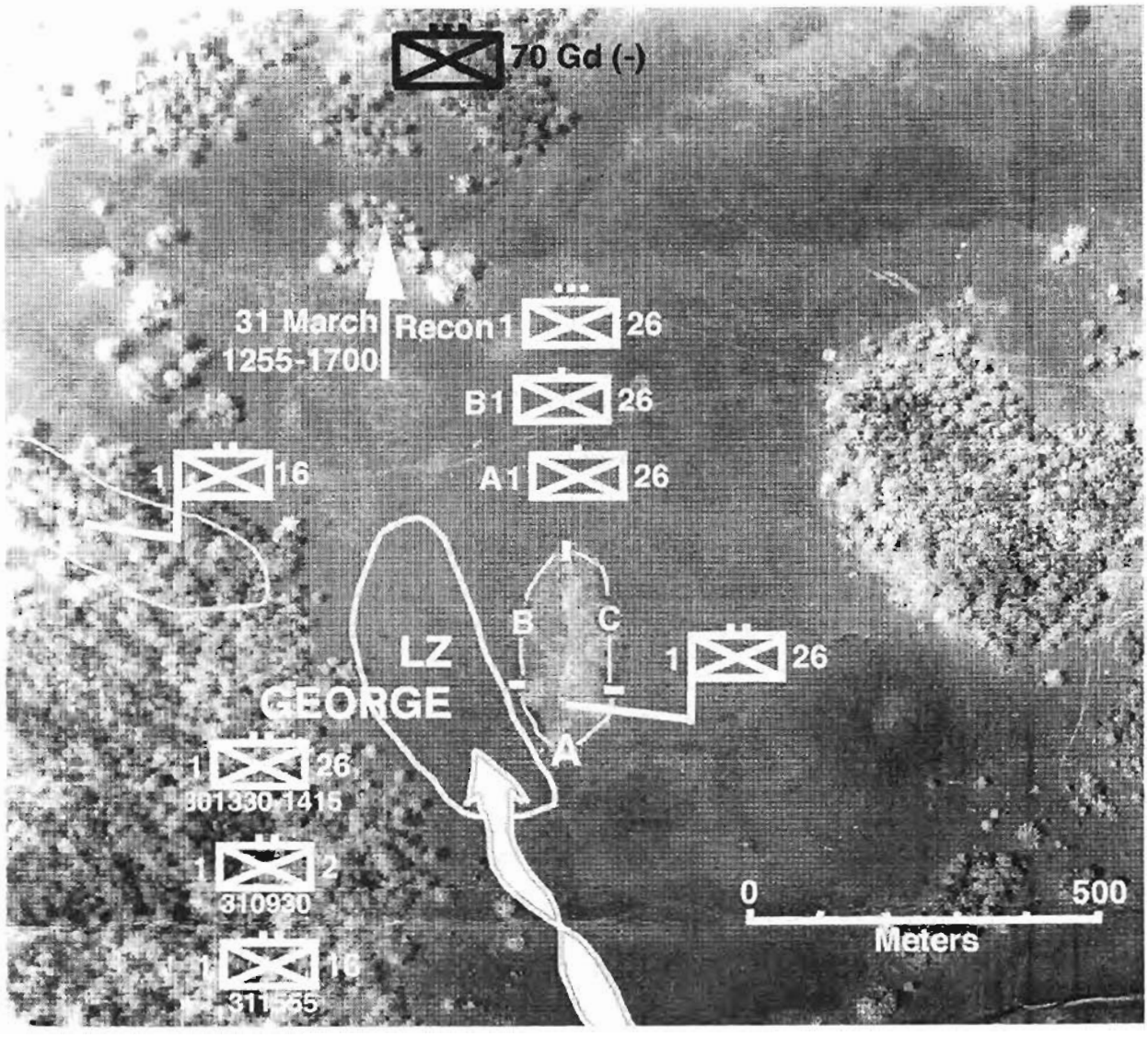


Fig. 3.39

raised to respect miracles, and I do not use the word lightly. But it seemed to me that night, when at last I had time to reflect on this experience, that only a miracle could explain my coming through all that without a scratch.

After Haig's helicopter crashed, George Joulwan, the battalion operations officer, took control of the artillery and close air support from another chopper. Meanwhile, Haig remained where he was to direct the ground fight (the commander of B Company and several others had been wounded) until the enemy broke contact, when he returned to the battalion command post. Surveying the broader situation, Haig realized that "it was obvious from the volume and nature of the enemy fire that we had found and provoked a large main force unit" (Haig, *Inner Circles*).

Fig. 3.40. Lieutenant Colonel Haig (left) and Captain Hansen under fire (Photo by Sgt. Clair W. Harmony)

Eric Wood, a private first class of the Reconnaissance Platoon, wrote a vivid account of the battle from the perspective of the lead squad:

> We left our NDP in the late morning on a very hot and dry day. We must have been at least two recon squads, maybe more.... We crossed an open area and settled into the tree line of a patch of wooded area. My vision was one of an oasis in the desert. Some oasis! There were trails cut between the trees with grass on either side. We were to clover leaf out coming back to our starting point at regular intervals. At approximately noon the two squads that I remember were there split up. Sgt. Johnny Mac ... and his squad went one way, we went another....
>
> As pace man I counted every step I took... and would know how far we were from the start or last point.... [W]e walked down one of the trails ... [and] when I got to 80 [paces] and Pete Peterson was just out of my sight the ambush was popped. I stopped counting, hit the ground and tried to get my bearings. I knew that Peterson was hit when [Sergeant] Landtroop and Hand crawled back to me. Pete had been cut down by the enemy and Landtroop later told me that he killed his killer. At the time it didn't register with me that my best friend had been killed. I believe Landtroop said that he had killed the enemy with a grenade.
>
> Time stood still. I fired at the enemy, not knowing if I got any. Then a strange thing happened ... 1LT Richard A. Hill ... came up from my rear and ran to my right, his .45 unholstered and pointing upward and his recon hat strap dangling.... He turned, looked down at me and asked, "Where are they, Troop?" I said, "They're right up there, sir" or something to that effect. With that he ran into the clearing out of my sight and was cut down....
>
> Hand and Landtroop crawled back toward me, then Hand moved over to a tree about five feet away. I watched and heard as bullets broke the sound barrier with their zings and two ripped into the tree, bark flying. Landtroop was on the radio, then Hand was. They were probably talking to the Colonel.
>
> At times like this bizarre things happen. Our ammunition magazines were filled with tracers and ball rounds [regular rounds] in a ratio of one tracer to four ball. Because it was so dry a fire started from the tracers. The olive drab towel I [wore] around my neck ... I stamped out the flames with my towel, which finally burned up. Next I used my recon hat, a soft cowboy style with one side flopped up.... I don't recall if it was before or after B Co. arrived or not, but it was clear that we were pinned down....
>
> There was an ant hill behind me. As B Co. positioned themselves to my rear a machine gun obviously didn't see me in front of the ant hill and I watched the ant hill get smaller and smaller and tree leaves flutter. Somehow I was able to move away and get to a safer position.
>
> Air strikes were called, hundreds of them.... Lt. Col. Haig came in by LOH. And when he

came in, he came in. Right into the thick of it ... he put himself in extraordinary danger. Somehow I was carrying a radio. I think it may have been Hand's. He may have gotten hit when an RPG round knocked down a tree.... I didn't know whose push [frequency] I was on but it turns out it was battalion's. A guy was screaming into it. It was Haig. What made it sound like screaming was that he was about 25 feet behind me. No wonder he sounded so close! He was so near the fighting that his helicopter ... had to be rendered useless—our men were ordered to fill it through with lead. That's what I saw anyways, our men shooting it up. (Eric Wood, letter, 23 February 1993, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

There were more enemy in the area than those in the jungle battling Company B and Reconnaissance Platoon. Egersdorfer remembered that Company A took fire well to the rear of the "oasis," as soon as his unit got into the field north of NDB. The VC, he recalls,

Fig. 3.41. Father Ludee with casualties of 31 March (Photo by Sgt. Clair W. Harmony)

were ... shooting at us from a crater or depression out to our right front. I started fire and movement by platoon, one platoon suppressing the VC while the others moved. But Colonel Haig told me that, while I was doing it right by the book, the situation of Company B was desperate, and that I had to get the company up there right away. So I did the "Follow Me!" bit, waved my arm and took off running. The whole company got up and followed. We lost one killed and eight wounded in that charge—it was a miracle.

I found Captain Hansen, who had been wounded, I think in the foot. Company B and the Recon guys were crammed into an unbelievably small space. Then Colonel Haig landed or more correctly, crashed—and ordered my company to push forward so that Company B could extricate itself and the Reconnaissance Platoon. So I put the company on line and we started to advance by rushes. There was lots of artillery coming in, so my FO really got a workout....

I can't say enough about my great FO, 1st Lieutenant Floyd Melton, DESTROYER 94 [1st Battalion, 5th Artillery]. All my officers and my troops knew that he was my second in command, and that if I was hit, he would take over for me. He was at my side all the time, and I knew from experience that he really knew what he was doing....

Anyways, we did what we were ordered to do. We advanced into the next woodline beyond the grove where Recon had been hit. The enemy pulled back and his firing died down. Company B and the Reconnaissance Platoon pulled out. Then I left a force in contact, echeloned a platoon back, and conducted a systematic withdrawal with my platoons. But in the end, the detachment in contact consisted of Lt. Parr and his two machine guns, my 1st Sergeant, and myself. We just ran back. If anyone saw a movie of that, they'd think we were running from the VC. We weren't. They

had had enough, but we wanted to get out quickly before they recovered. (Egersdorfer, interview)

There followed, of course, the task of caring for the dead and the wounded, which the battalion's chaplain, Father Renee Luedee, performed heroically when he went forward under fire to reach both.

At 1555 the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry (less a company left for security at FSB C) arrived in LZ George and went into a night defensive position to the west of the 1/26th. (The unit landed without difficulty but sustained four casualties in occupying its NDP.) Lieutenant Colonels Haig and Rufus C. Lazzell (commander of the 1/16th Infantry) coordinated their defensive plans. (Headquarters, Department of the Army, "Combat After Action Report—The Battle of AP GU 31 March-1 April 1967," 11 December 1967). Haig then looked to his own defenses. "As soon as darkness fell," he recalled,

> I visited every bunker ordering that they be improved if they were not already properly dug and sandbagged, that the firing ports be correctly aligned, that the claymore mines in front of each position, at least one for each American, be properly emplaced. I told each man to be alert and ready, because I was sure that we were in for a big fight. In some cases, the men may not have dug perfect bunkers despite my orders. They were tired. They had been in a hard fight, the temperature even at night was sweltering (it had been around 110 degrees Fahrenheit during the ambush and firefight that afternoon), and the soil was a sunbaked, concretelike amalgam of clay and laterite. But as I went along the line in the darkness, I heard the sound of entrenching tools, and I believe that improvements were made. (Haig, *Inner Circles*)

Staff Sergeant Puckett had depleted his mortar ammunition during the fighting, but helicopters arriving late that afternoon brought needed resupply, enabling him to build his stock up to about seventy-five rounds. When he turned his attention back to field fortifications, he discovered that "without a word of prompting, work quietly resumed on the gun positions and the FDC bunker. By nightfall, we had the best positions I had ever seen." (Puckett, *Memories*)

The helicopters had also brought in a welcome hot meal for all companies. But this proved a fleeting comfort, prelude to a tense night filled with reports from the listening posts of enemy movement on all sides. Then, at 0455, mortar rounds landed in front of the 1/16th's NDP. Haig and Lazzell promptly alerted their units. Five minutes later the first of hundreds of mortar rounds rained on both battalions. In the 1/26th's position, Companies C and B bore the brunt of the fires. The army's after action report states that the enemy mortars were nearby, to the northeast, and "so many mortars were firing at once that the noise they made sounded like loud, heavy machine guns." Egersdorfer described the explosions of incoming rounds as a "continuous rumble." Despite the intensity of the bombardment, the Blue Spaders suffered no casualties, while the 1/16th had twelve men wounded.

The onslaught was the start of an ordeal that was to last three hours. At 0515 the enemy shifted his mortars and commenced determined ground attacks. The outcome remained in doubt until about 0700, when the first U.S. air strikes arrived. The fighting continued for another hour as the enemy, despite frightful losses, pressed his attack through an avalanche of U.S. ordnance. Around 0745 enemy soldiers began to flee, and by 0800 the enemy unit was in full retreat.

Albert "Butch" Gearing, a fire team leader in 3rd Platoon, Company C, manned a listening post directly in the path of the enemy's main attack. On the afternoon of the 31st he had helped recover wounded from the 1/16th and from an artillery helicopter that had been shot down. Upon returning to his platoon area:

I was told my fire team was going out on LP.... Our platoon area was close to the jungle line, and we had to get out before the trip flares were set up. We move[d] about 50 meters into the jungle and waited until it was almost dark then move[d] to our right and about another 25 meters into the jungle. The four of us took turns setting up our claymore mines then set up for the night. Two awake on the radio, and two asleep. One hour on, one hour off. Early in the morning I was gently awakened with a hand on my mouth and Pvt. Threadux whispered that there were faint noises. By the time I got wide enough awake to listen we could hear mortar tubes thumping out in the jungle and incoming rounds started to hit inside the perimeter. And then all hell broke loose.

The radio was so busy we could not get on to tell them we were coming in. I got the radio on my back and we were all ready to go in when the VC hit some of the trip flares and lit up the area. We could see VC all around us. We blew all the claymores and I threw one hand grenade into a small group that was next to us. We moved out running toward the perimeter. When we got to the edge of the jungle we hit a trip flare and hit the ground low crawling the rest of the way with small arms rounds going both ways. When I found the squad leader's bunker and told him we were back in I tried to call [my] platoon leader, but the radio would not work. (Later when I returned from the hospital I was told that the radio had stopped several rounds and was no good.) Spec.4 Grant and I crawled to our bunker and started to return fire.

In approx 15 to 20 minutes I was putting my last 20 round magazine in and I turned to tell Grant and he was slumped over and would not answer.... I used up what was left of Grant's ammo and then started back to the platoon CP to get more ammo. I passed by Jimmy Pope's machine gun bunker. He was running low on ammo also. I told him I would be right back with more ammo and crawled to the platoon CP and the Platoon Sgt. helped me load up with all the ammo I could carry and I took off back to the line. I could see VC running through our perimeter and I didn't go far when I was hit in the left side of my butt with one round and went down hard. I got up [and] started for [the] machine gun bunker again and a VC just ran into me and knocked me down again. The VC were all around us. I then fought my way back to the Platoon CP. The CP bunker was blown up....

I made my way back to the mortar pits, reloaded my M-16 and started firing again. It was now light out and easier to see the VC moving in the perimeter even with the fog. Artillery shells were coming in heavy and gun ships finally got there. It seemed like things were turning in our favor. (Albert Gearing, undated manuscript, First Division Museum at Cantigny)

Staff Sergeant Puckett's battle started with the incoming mortar rounds: he and his men crawled to their guns, only to discover that a VC sniper had shot out the lights mounted on the aiming stakes and that his gun pits were under heavy sniper fire. Though it was still dark he perceived, correctly, that heavy clouds covered the area, and reckoned that there could be no close support from the air force. He concluded that his platoon had to provide fire support, and started firing to the north. When the enemy mortar barrage ceased, Puckett recalled, the silence did not last very long;

> Within seconds, the sounds of hundreds of AK-47s, machine guns, RPGs, and grenades shattered the quiet surrounding our perimeter. The ground assault had begun. The VC's main assault was from the north and northeast, directed at Charlie Company's portion of the perimeter. The volume of fire, from both the VC and our return fire, was mind-boggling.

We shifted both guns to the northeast and dropped the range to two hundred meters. We didn't have time to plot the data and lay the guns. We used good 'ole Kentucky windage, and it worked. We could see the flash when the rounds exploded and made minor adjustments to the tube. We could see the wave of VC moving toward the perimeter across the open field, as they were silhouetted by the explosions.

All sense of time was lost. There were only four or five rounds left, out of thirty-five, in our gun position.... The VC had managed to reach the perimeter at one point in Charlie Company's sector. I could see [Company C] firing toward the bunkers they had just left as they pulled back. I remember pointing out the break in the perimeter to Sergeant Worth and telling him to fire everything he had left in front of that area. (Puckett, *Memories*)

Puckett then tripped and fell to the ground so hard that he dazed by the impact. When he regained his senses, U.S. artillery was hitting in earnest. Even so, another wave of enemy infantry was advancing. "At that moment," said Puckett,

> I remember looking up and seeing the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. The gray clouds had broken up and the blue sky was visible. The jets that had been circling the area, waiting for a break in the clouds, were coming in. They dropped napalm and CBUs on their first pass, about one hundred yards out from the perimeter. Their next pass was even closer in. One jet screamed in at treetop level on our side of the perimeter and dropped CBUs no more than fifty feet from the gun pit. We stood up and cheered as if we were at a football game. (Puckett, *Memories*)

Lewis Lampman of Company B—which was backstopping Company C— remembered that the battle of 1 April began at about 4:40 a.m. when

> Charley decide[d] to mortar us and over run our base camp. So he did about 45 minutes. He dropped mortars on us and then start to over run us. He broke threw [*sic*] our lines with a *Human wave,* and almost got clear threw our perimeter, when my CO said to my Plt Sgt you are going to get them out of here if it takes every man in your plat.
>
> So the 2nd Plt start to assault them back. Us guys almost went mad as we took after Charley. There were VC 40 yards from my foxhole and I ran up to a tree and start to the next tree when I seen a VC lying on the ground, and one sitting by an ant hill. It looked to me like he was going to throw a hand grenade at me, so I shot him.... Us guys chased them back....
>
> Well, we made a count 34 VCs dead.... The woods were full of dead VCs from the air strikes and artillery. (Lampman, letter)

Ap Gu was a complex battle, accounts of which continue to change as new information is gathered. The following is the first official account, published by the battalion and issued ten days after the last shots were fired:

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 96345

11 April 1967

SUBJECT: Battle of Ap Gu,
Operation Junction City II
TO: Each Blue Spader

As part of the Division's mission in Operation Junction City II, the Blue Spaders of the 1st

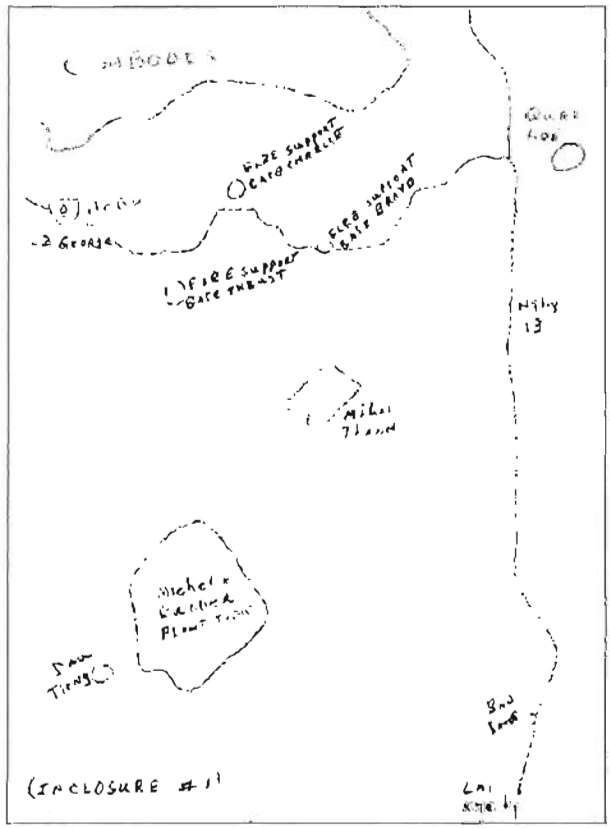
Battalion, 26th Infantry were alerted to prepare for an airmobile assault on 30 March 1967 from Fire Support Base Charlie into LZ George, approximately 6 km. from the Cambodian border. (See Enclosure 1) Following an intensive preparation of the landing zone, utilizing 10 airstrikes and 20 minutes of artillery fire, the Battalion landed using 60 sorties in 5 ship lifts. The landing began at 1330 and was completed by 1415. The Dobol soldiers moved quickly from the landing zone and immediately dispatched cloverleaf patrols from LZ George. The patrols uncovered fortified Viet Cong positions around the landing zone but made no contact. The Battalion closed to defensive positions and immediately began preparation of the Dobol defenses which were to become invaluable a day later. The Blue Spaders worked throughout the night and had the defenses nearly completed by the following morning, including overhead cover.

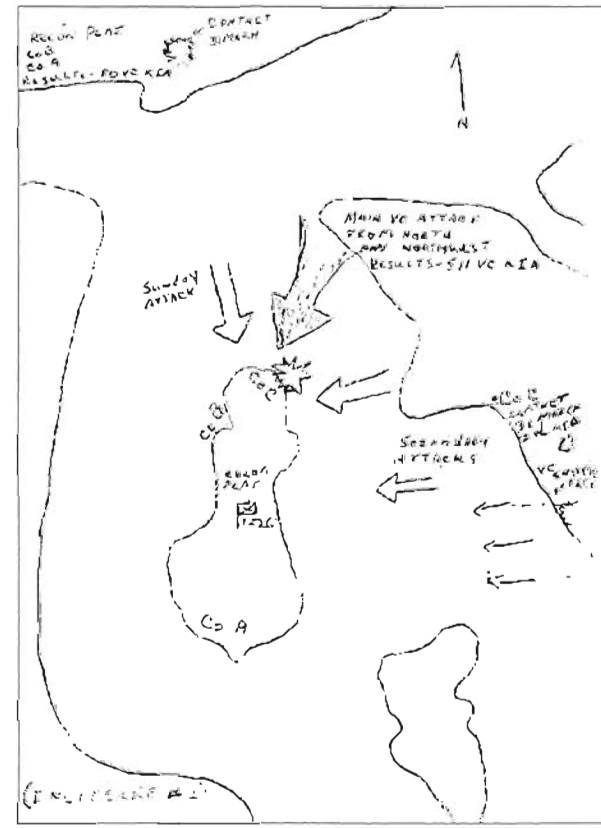
On 31 March, the Battalion secured the landing zone for the 1st Battalion, 2nd infantry, which landed and began operations to the Southwest of LZ George. Continuing the search for the elusive Viet Cong, A Company conducted search and destroy operations to the South, C Company to the East, Recon Platoon to the North, and B Company in reserve at LZ George. At approximately 1300, the Recon Platoon made contact with a strong VC force to the North and Northwest of LZ George. Receiving heavy automatic weapon fire and rifle grenades, the Recon Platoon laid down a base of fire, organized into a defensive position, and immediately called for artillery and air strikes in support. B Company was committed to assist the Recon Platoon, increasing the artillery and air as they moved into position. At this time, .50 caliber fire, RPG, mortar, claymore, and additional small arms fire was received from the insurgent positions, indicating the presence of a large, main Viet Cong force. Alpha Company was then committed to assist Bravo and Recon while Charlie returned to the perimeter, receiving small arms fire and making sporadic contact en route. Dobol Charlie accounted for 2 VC (B. C.) while returning, and captured a number of documents. The buildup of the Dobol forces, coupled with close and continuous air and artillery, forced the VC to break contact and withdraw to the Northeast at approximately 1700. Alpha Company very effectively covered the movement of Recon and Bravo by holding their positions and bringing devastating fire on the VC forces. Due to the late hour the Battalion returned to defensive positions, accounting for over 80 VC killed during the afternoon action. Elements of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry were airlifted into LZ George that afternoon, establishing positions to the Northwest of Dobol positions.

On 1 April, at approximately 0455, several incoming mortar rounds were received in the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry perimeter, indicating the possibility of registration for a major attack. The alert Dobol soldiers, already at stand-to, were immediately alerted to prepare for mortar and ground attack. At 0500 the VC attack began with the firing of approximately 400 mortar rounds into the Dobol area. Due to the alertness of the Blue Spaders, and the professionalism in preparing their bunkers, no casualties were inflicted by the VC mortar attack. Blue Spader mortarmen from Alpha, Bravo and Charlie immediately returned fire on suspected VC locations as assistance from artillery, FDC's, flareships and light fire teams were requested from the 2d Brigade. At approximately 0522, following an intensive 20 minute mortar preparation, the VC ground attack began against the Northeast por-

tion of the perimeter. The VC attack was professionally executed, utilizing claymores, M-79's, and automatic weapons against positions of Bravo and Charlie Companies. Using illumination from our mortars and supporting artillery, the Blue Spaders immediately delivered intensive fire against the VC attackers. Massing their forces, the Viet Cong effected a slight penetration into the Northeast corner of the Dobol perimeter. At this time Recon Platoon moved up into a blocking position behind Charlie Company, while elements of Bravo and Charlie fought to regain their positions, engaging in fierce hand to hand combat with the Viet Cong. Alpha's fires assisted in containing the VC as carrying parties from Alpha and Headquarters moved additional mortar and small arms ammunition to the forward positions. At this time the full firepower of the Blue Spaders along with supporting artillery and air was brought to bear on the VC attackers. Closely coordinated, massed artillery was delivered to the East flank, while napalm, bombs, and rockets were delivered by supporting aircraft to the North. The superior firepower delivered against the VC broke the attack and allowed the entire Dobol defense line to be restored by approximately 0800.

Small contact continued, mixed with sporadic sniper fire, but the VC force was in full retreat to the Northeast. Artillery and air continued to pound the retreating VC as the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry and 1st Battalion,





16th Infantry were committed through the Blue Spaders to pursue the fleeing enemy.

Once again, the training, spirit, and fighting ability of the Blue Spaders was too much for the VC as the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry concluded the most successful battle yet fought in Vietnam. Of the VC force that attacked the Blue Spaders, four battalions of the 271st VC Regiment were identified. They comprised the VC force. This was approximately three times larger than the Dobol force. The ferocious Blue Spader defense held, repulsed, and defeated the VC attackers with a kill ratio of approximately 45:1.

The results of your professionalism and combined team effort accounted for the following during the Battle of Ap Gu:

Enemy Losses:

80 VC KIA	31 March
591 VC KIA	1 April
671 VC KIA	Total
8 VC Captured	

Materiel and Equipment Captured:

11 AK 47 automatic weapons
2 RPG
4 Browning Automatic Rifles
2 Chicom carbines
2 M-79 grenade launchers
2 Machine guns
50,000 rounds small arms ammunition
50 hand grenades
2 claymores
77 magazines for AK 47's and BAR's
8 57 mm AT rounds
16 PPG rounds
30 lbs. documents
60 lbs. clothing

Congratulations and a "Well done" to every Blue Spader.

FOR THE COMMANDER: DONALD A MODICA
1 LT, INFANTRY
Assistant Adjutant

JUNCTION CITY, PHASE II: Aftermath

Recent annotation of a contemporary aerial photograph taken before the battle (fig. 3.42) provides a better depiction of the battle area than was heretofore available. U.S. information is overlaid in white, enemy in black. The larger black arrows depict the time and direction of ground attacks; thin arrows depict direct fire weapons (machine guns and recoilless rifles), and the small circle with the arrow attached shows the general location of the enemy mortars.

This depiction makes the important point that the elements of the 70th Guards—reportedly a unit dedicated to protecting COSVN—were not well coordinated with the 271st. The 70th Guards' timing plainly lagged behind the moves of its larger partner. Its infantry attack against the 1/16th came after the 271st had lost heart, and U.S. air power was easily able to beat it back. This leads to the conclusion that the battle on the afternoon of 31 March should properly be regarded as a U.S. spoiling attack on an enemy unit in an assault position, one that had the effect of seriously weakening the enemy commander's right wing and disrupting its timing.

The pictomap also indicates that 271st attacked in piecemeal fashion. Conceivably the 1/26th's mortars and the fires of the three batteries at FSB Thrust delayed and disorganized the enemy, but the outcome might have been different had the commander of the 271st launched all his secondary attacks at the same time he ordered the white star-cluster pyrotechnic to signal the main attack. After all, the 271st did succeed in breaching the Company C perimeter, and had the "human wave" exploited that breach by breaking down the shoulders of the penetration and stabbing southward towards Haig's CP, it might have inflicted a decisive defeat on the Blue Spaders. It did not even come close.

Clearly, the Blue Spaders prevailed because of the bravery and persistence of men such as "Butch" Gearing and Captain Brian Cundiff, the commander of Company C, who emerged from his CP bunker to kill

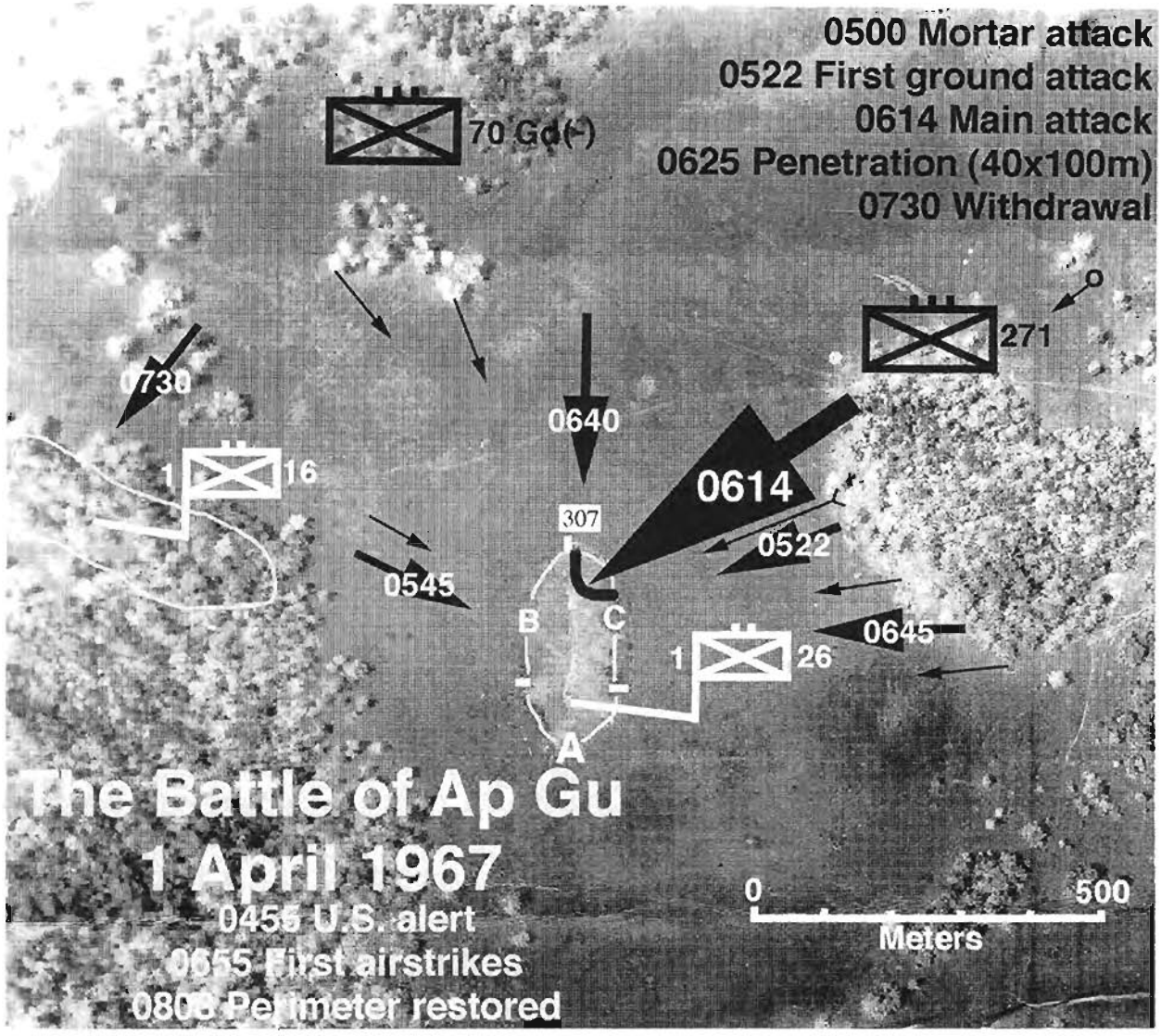


Fig. 3.42

six of the attackers and, despite being wounded three times, to rally his men until they were again in control.

The Blue Spaders had been trained to prevent penetrations, thus leaving the enemy outside the perimeter where they would be fully exposed to U.S. direct and indirect fires. At Ap Gu the enemy had achieved penetration by following closely Company C's listening posts as they withdrew, and concentrating to knock out several adjacent positions. Paragraph 13.a.(2) of the "Conclusion and Lessons Learned" section of the battalion's *Combat After Action Report* 7-67, published 20 May 1967, notes that

> The VC will always attempt to locate machine gun positions, then use 57mm recoilless rifles, claymores, .50 caliber fire, or RPG fire to knock

them out. The construction of a solid, slanted berm to the front with firing apertures to the flanks proved effective in withstanding this heavy volume of VC fire. On 1 April one fighting position had only a row of sandbags to the front, instead of a packed, slanted berm. When an RPG round hit the flat surface, the fighting position collapsed. However, those constructed with [a] solid, slanted berm withstood direct hits by 57mm recoilless rifles.

The report went on to say that a requirement in future battles was a more thorough application of these principles: defense in depth, with well-camouflaged primary positions capable of defeating both frontal and overhead attack, connected (as time permitted) by trenches to secondary sleeping and fighting positions.

Higher headquarters, however, had nothing but praise for the performance of the Blue Spaders. Lieutenant Colonel Haig was promoted to command of the 1st Division's 2nd Brigade, and both he and Captain Cundiff were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Numerous other officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers were also decorated for bravery. Ultimately, every Blue Spader who served at Ap Gu was honored by the decision of the Department of the Army to decorate the 26th Infantry color with the unit award equivalent to the Silver Star for an individual. Formal notice of the award follows:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam
APO San Francisco 96375

GENERAL ORDERS 27 October 1969
NUMBER 3992

AWARD OF THE VALOROUS UNIT AWARD

1. TC 320. The following AWARD is announced. By direction of the Secretary of the Army, under the provisions of paragraph 202.1g(2), AR 672-5-1, the Valorous Unit Award is awarded to the following named units of the United States Army for extraordinary heroism while engaged in military operations during the period indicated.

The 1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY, 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION comprised of: Headquarters and Headquarters Company including the Reconnaissance Platoon, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division

Company A, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division

Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division

Company C, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division

The citation reads as follows:

The 1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY, 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION distinguished itself by extraordinary heroism while engaged in military operations in the Republic of Vietnam on 1 April 1967. Involved in Operation JUNCTION CITY II near Ap Gu, the officers and men of the battalion courageously repelled the determined assaulting forces of the 271st Viet Cong Regiment in

a fierce two and one-half hour battle. After sustaining an intense barrage of approximately 400 mortar rounds, the American forces engaged the numerically superior enemy as the Viet Cong unit launched a vicious ground attack. Effectively utilizing claymore mines, small arms fire and artillery barrages, the members of the 1ST BATTALION, 26th INFANTRY, 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION halted the initial assault of the hostile forces. As the Viet Cong repeatedly mounted new assaults in attempting to overrun the friendly position, the personnel of the American units employed relentless firepower in close combat to thwart the communist aggressors. After receiving a vital resupply of ammunition, the infantry countered the last desperate ground attack and forced the decimated Viet Cong to withdraw and leave behind five hundred ninety-one casualties and much of their equipment. The extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty displayed by the members of the 1ST BATTALION, 26TH INFANTRY, 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect distinct credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States.

General Orders Number 3992, dated 27 October 1969, DA, Headquarters, United States Army Vietnam, APO San Francisco 96375 (Cot)

FOR THE COMMANDER:

GEORGE L. MABRY, JR.
Major General, US Army
Chief of Staff

JOHN A. O'BRIEN
Colonel, AGC
Adjutant General

DISTRIBUTION:
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I-AVHAG-AR
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Epilogue: Average Americans

In 1919, while commanding his regiment in the Allied-occupied zone of Germany, Theodore Roosevelt Jr. wrote *Average Americans*, a memoir of the war in France during the previous two years. He dedicated the book "to the officers and men of the 26th Infantry"—a regiment, he believed, that truly represented a cross section of the United States, being composed of men from all parts of the country and from all walks of life. It was a unit in a draft-supported army, but an army that earnestly sought to assign each man to the position for which he was best suited, resulting in "as close a reproduction of a real democracy as is possible." Among Roosevelt's officers were a waiter and a chauffeur; among his privates, a state senator, lawyer, and newspaper editor. "Ability to take responsibility in the present, not previous conditions, was what they were judged by," said Roosevelt.

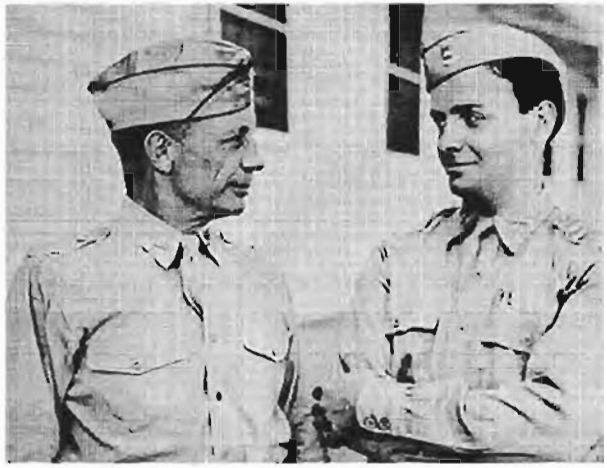
"Teddy" Roosevelt was mindful, however, that the leaders from the regular army provided the framework on which the American Expeditionary Forces were built, and said so in his book. In particular he praised his own cadre of Captain Frey and Lieutenants Freml and Gilliam, all former noncommissioned officers. He recognized that his "average Americans" could not have been transformed into a force capable of defeating Germany's army without the competence and discipline such men instilled in his soldiers.

After the Armistice and through the two decades of uneasy peace that followed, Roosevelt remained involved in the affairs of the 26th Infantry, providing continuity between the victorious regiment of 1918 and the men who wore the "Blue Spade" during the interwar period. Not only was he influential in having the 1st Division stationed at Fort Drum, New York, he was also a founder of the American Legion, a promoter of the annual dinner of the officers of the 1st Division, and an active supporter of the Society of the First Division.

In April 1941, at age fifty-four, Colonel Roosevelt re-assumed command of the 26th Infantry, then in training at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Raised to war strength by infusions of draftees, the regiment had been sent to Fort Devens to prepare for combat in ill-defined circumstances, against an unidentified enemy at time and place as yet unknown. Despite such uncertainties, Colonel Roosevelt communicated to his new command the avid interest in training, as well as the enthusiasm and pride that had characterized his doughboys of 1917-19.

Roosevelt's legacy to the 26th Infantry included several of the battalion's most important and time-honored traditions. Even now, when the unit meets for ceremonial functions, it is his toasts to the regiment and to those it lost in the Battle of Soissons that are pronounced; indeed, these toasts have been adopted by the entire 1st Division. And the unwritten rule that no 1st Division soldier who goes AWOL will be punished if in doing so he returns to his unit in combat—this, too, is a Roosevelt legacy, one established in the First World War and carried on by two men who figure prominently in this account (Frank Murdoch in World War II and Jim Madden in the Vietnam War), as well as by countless other soldiers of the Big Red One. Moreover, Roosevelt admired the professionalism of officers who came up from the ranks, and encouraged the development of leaders from within the regiment.

In 1945, after three years of war, many of the 26th's officers were recipients of battlefield commissions. Similarly, in Vietnam the regiment, although it was then subject to very different army-wide personnel policies, benefitted from the inclusion of former sergeants who were graduates of the army's Officer Candidate School, among them Rudolf H. ("Rudy") Egersdorfer.



Colonel T. Roosevelt, commander of the 26th Infantry, welcomes his son, Second Lieutenant Quentin Roosevelt, Arty, to the 1st Division, April 1941

Like Theodore Roosevelt, each of the commanders mentioned in this narrative—Seitz, Murdoch, Sutherland, Gorman, Haig—helped, in his own way, to preserve and perpetuate the 26th Infantry's ethos. But after the Second World War, the men chiefly responsible for maintaining continuity between the regiment of 1944-45 and the unit that served in Vietnam in 1966-67 were Command Sergeant Major Theodore L. Dobol and the noncommissioned officers Dobol trained during twenty years of service (divided between Germany and Fort Riley, Kansas) with the 26th Infantry. A truly great noncommissioned officer, Dobol set standards that formed the regiment's moral undergirding, and that were to a large extent the reason for its excellent performance in Vietnam.

The 26th Infantry saw a total of ten years of combat in the two world wars and Vietnam; this narrative deals with only only three of those years. Scarcely mentioned is the regiment's service in the Philippine Insurrection, its role in NATO during the Cold War, and its service in training volunteers for today's army. A more comprehensive regimental history awaits those who would write it. The three sections of this short work are titled after Colonel Hamilton's interpretation of the regiment's arrow (Blue Spade) insignia: "Courage" for the doughboys of World War I, "Relentless Pursuit" for the GIs of World War II, and "Resourceful Daring" for the grunts of Vietnam.

The chapter entitled "Courage" focuses on the events leading to the Battle of Soissons (July 1918) and the battle itself, which marked the beginning of the end for Germany in World War I. That battle also looms large in the history of the 26th Infantry, which suffered heavy losses in the fighting; according to B. R. Legge's Honor Roll of the Regiment, half the officers and over one third of other ranks killed in the war fell in the wheat fields of Soissons.

"Relentless Pursuit" chronicles the 1/26th's experiences in the war against Germany from the training period in England before the Normandy invasion through VE Day (when the regiment had advanced into Czechoslovakia). Especially detailed coverage is provided for the tough battles at Stolberg (September 1944) and Bütgenbach (December 1944), two of the most illustrious chapters in the regiment's combat history. But not, by any means, the only illustrious chapters—the 26th Infantry was in the van of Eisenhower's great sweep across Europe, and its story lends life to the arching arrows that depict the Allied advance on maps of the European campaign.

"Resourceful Daring" deals with the offensive phase of the Vietnam War (spring 1966 through spring 1967), showing how the Blue Spaders fought and defeated an unconventional enemy on his own terrain,

in the process teaching themselves to move with helicopters, to employ unprecedented firepower, and to communicate through jungles and over long distances. Two battles dominate this account: Bong Trang (August 1966) and Ap Gu (April 1967).

There are certain constants in the 26th Infantry's history, no matter the conflict in which it was involved.

One constant is that the regiment has always, in action and deed, lived up to the 1st Division motto: No Mission Too Difficult, No Sacrifice Too Great, Duty First. In all manner of terrain, including desert, mountain, hedgerow, town, city, farmland, rice paddy, jungle; in climes varying from tropical heat to bitter cold; on the attack and in defense—whatever the circumstances, soldiers wearing the Blue Spade never failed their commanders. Implacable in the face of hardship, they inevitably achieved what was asked of them. Indeed, they were inexorable: once committed to a task, they persisted until the mission was accomplished.

Another constant is the 26th's proven ability to master all forms of land combat, in doing so exhibiting a versatility few regiments, American or foreign, can match. It has fought mounted and on foot; it has used tanks and antitank weapons to advantage; it has exploited airmobility and conducted amphibious assaults. Blue Spaders have fought the enemy with rifles and sidearms, grenades and bayonets, and their bare hands; they have patrolled and attacked by day and night, in fair weather and foul, under burning sun and amid driving snow.

The Blue Spaders have been masters in the use of the shovel. The trenches built by the 26th at Cantigny in the First World War were considered "state of the art" in that era. The covered foxholes the regiment dug at Bütgenbach, with gun ports providing enfilading fire to the front of adjacent foxholes, were similar in design to the foxholes of Ap Gu. Once dug in, neither poison gas nor heavy artillery (as at Cantigny), nor armor assaults (Bütgenbach), nor human wave attacks (Ap Gu) could dislodge them. And in every instance, the 1st Division Artillery punished their attackers severely.

The Blue Spaders have a sense of community that other units often lack. The officers of the 26th Infantry have always been extremely close, as demonstrated by the evenings of song and jest in France in 1917-18, in England in 1943-44, and again in Vietnam in 1966-67. Participants in these revels soon developed formal customs to ceremonialize their gatherings; most were tongue-in-cheek rituals, but some, such as the toasts of Soissons, were serious and solemn.

The Blue Spaders have always been well served by army chaplains and medics. In their respective accounts, Roosevelt, Murdoch, Gorman, and Haig often mention the heroism and dedication of these men. Coincidentally, the Catholic chaplains who served with the Blue Spaders in both World War II and Vietnam belonged to the same relatively small, semimonastic order, the Congregation of Passionists. Father Fabian Flynn served in the regiment from 1943 to 1945, and after the war dedicated his ministry to the Catholic Relief Services in postwar Europe; he was buried with military honors in 1973. Father Renee Luedee, who won a Silver Star for gallantry in action during the engagements at Ap Gu (31 March and 1 April 1967), was an army chaplain from 1962 through 1982; but though he served with many units in those twenty years, he always thought himself first and foremost a Blue Spader. It was the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry he chose to highlight when, literally on his deathbed, he helped write the record of his military career; and, after he died in 1983, it is the 1/26th alone among all his units that was mentioned in his obituary.

The 26th Infantry has always been fortunate in the support it has received from outside the army. The mail bags from home were always full. But it was not only home that came to the assistance of the Blue Spaders. In World War I Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., then residing in Paris, headed up the work of the Young

Men's Christian Association on behalf of AEF soldiers in general and her husband's Blue Spaders in particular. In World War II the American Red Cross and British soldier support organizations looked after the regiment's noncombat needs; and in Vietnam the American Red Cross was always visible in base camp, always ready to boost morale when the troops received a moment of respite. In 1966 and '67 the town of

The American Red Cross stages a cookout for Blue Spaders at Camp Weber, autumn 1966

Baraboo, Wisconsin, adopted the Blue Spaders, and mailed tons of food, greeting cards, and other presents to the soldiers; and women in Indiana organized a campaign to mail deflated beach balls to the unit so that the soldiers could present a soccer-like ball to the Vietnamese children that flocked around them whenever they were near a settlement.

The Blue Spaders' aforementioned versatility may well be the characteristic that will best serve them in the future. Warfare has undergone profound changes through the course of the twentieth century. The 26th Infantry started the century trudging through Philippine jungles armed with bolt-action rifles and sixteen-inch bayonets. As of this writing the 1/26th's Company D is mounted on Bradley Fighting Vehicles, maintaining peace in Bosnia's Posavina Corridor as part of the 4th Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division. The 26th Infantry's color is presently in Schweinfurt, Germany, where the 1st Battalion is assigned to the 1st Infantry Division, ready for missions as diverse as evacuating American citizens from dangerous situations in Africa, to training exercises in East Europe, to missions like that of Company D. The nature of future missions, how the unit will move, shoot, and communicate, and how it will prepare itself for those missions, will depend on the capabilities of the men wearing the Blue Spade. They will need all the help the past can provide in terms of standards; but ultimately, like the "average Americans" who came before them, their courage, determination, and daring will determine whether future chapters of the regiment's history will compare favorably with the past.

One perceptive observer of American soldiers, Brigadier General Samuel L. A. Marshall, wrote that what distinguished great infantry units from ordinary outfits was not the number of campaign streamers on their flags, nor the presence in their ranks of survivors of battles past, but rather a deep sense of responsibility for, and obligation to their comrades. Like Teddy Roosevelt, Marshall believed that the American soldier's innate initiative and ingenuity gave him a natural advantage over foreign soldiers; but Marshall's study of infantry combat in World War II, set forth in his seminal book *Men Against Fire* (1947), led him to conclude that no matter how bright and creative the individual soldier, his unit had to teach him

> to act and speak at all times as a member of a team. The emphasis should be kept eternally on the main point: his first duty is to join his force to others! Squad unity comes to full cooperation between each man and his neighbor. There is no battle strength within a company or a regiment except as derives from this basic element within the smallest component....

Recently, two former commanders of the 26th Infantry met to discuss this publication, and ended up talking at length about teamwork. They remembered how one company of Blue Spaders, attacking into a dense forest, surprised and routed an entire enemy battalion. When the battle started the company's single mortar, for which every rifleman carried a round, was set up just behind the point; and as each Blue Spader ran forward into action he dropped his round next to the tube. Striking from two directions, the company drove the battalion out of the forest into view of observers of the 1st Division Artillery, which unleashed a punishing barrage on the enemy formation. It was a classic case of teamwork at multiple tactical levels! Such teamwork is what the Blue Spaders were famous for in the past, and it is what they need for tomorrow.

The chances are that S. L. A. Marshall's teamwork imperative will bear even more in the future. Modern technology may enable small American teams fighting on land against a wily enemy to execute their mission without having to resort to close combat. Such teams will probably fight dispersed over distances beyond those in any past combat, out of sight of each other, bound together, to be sure, by electronic marvels—but ultimately dependent on cooperation among the teams, faith in their commander, and trust in their unit. In such circumstances, being a Blue Spader may be as much a multiplier of combat effectiveness as it was at Soissons, at Büitgenbach, and at Ap Gu.

CANTIGNY

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