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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST PLATOON, COMPANY L, 14TH INFANTRY
(71ST INFANTRY DIVISION) IN A RIVER CROSSING NEAR
REGENSBURG, GERMANY, 26 - 27 APRIL 1945
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: AN INFANTRY PLATOON IN A
RIVER CROSSING

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 1st Platoon, Company L, 14th Infantry, 71st US Infantry Division, in the crossing of the Danube River near Regensburg, Germany, 26-27 April 1945, during the final phase of the war against Germany.

A brief discussion of the major events preceding this action will serve to orient the reader.

In the latter part of March and through the first half of April 1945, the western frontier of Germany was breached by Allied armored divisions which raced to the east and northeast across Germany and were closely followed by infantry divisions. The foot units mopped up centers of resistance and rounded up many thousands of prisoners from the woods and towns while the armored units isolated enemy reserves, denied use of the road and rail nets to the enemy, and almost completely severed communication between the major enemy units throughout Germany. (1)

15 April 1945, the Allies in the center of the Western Front (see Map A) from Nurnberg in the south through Chemnitz, Leipzig, Halle, Madgeburg, and to Wittenberge in the north had arrived at the line fixed by the Yalta Conference as the western boundary of the Soviet Zone of Germany. (2)

Thus, with further advance to the east not feasible, and with large numbers of the German armies holding out in the northern and in the southern parts of Germany, it was necessary for the Allied Commander to make a decision for the destruction of these German forces. (3)

(1) A-1, p. 41; (2) A-1, p. 50 & Map 16; (3) A-1, p. 50.

On 17 April 1945, the following directive was issued to the three Army Group Commanders:

"1. The 6th Army Group will continue to protect the 12th Army Group's right flank, and will occupy the parts of Germany and western Austria that are in its zone of advance.

"2. The 12th Army Group will defend the general line (right to left) Erz Gebirge Mountains - Mulde River - Elbe River and will launch a powerful attack to gain contact with the Soviet armies in the Danube Valley.

"3. The 21st Army Group will seize crossings over the Elbe River and secure Hamburg, and subsequently advance to the Baltic in the general area Kiel - Lubeck. Also, it will prepare to launch operations to liberate Denmark." (4)

In executing the directive given to him by the Allied Commander, the 12th Army Group Commander, General Bradley, assigned to General Patton's US Third Army the mission of driving southeast down the Danube Valley. (5)

General Patton elected to use his XII and XX Corps to accomplish his mission. (6)

The XX Corps had been attacking to the east in the vicinity of Chemnitz when the order was issued directing the corps to withdraw from contact and drive down the south side of the Danube Valley towards Linz. (See Map B) (7)

As the corps moved south towards the Danube, the 71st Infantry Division was assigned to XX Corps and became an operational part of that corps near Amberg, 19 April. (8)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The 14th Infantry Regiment, as a unit of the 71st Division, now became a part of the attacking front of the XX Corps' drive to cross the Danube and gain its level southern bank.

(4) A-1, p. 50; (5) A-1, p. 51, A-3, p. 71; (6) A-2, p. 1, A-3, p. 71;
(7) A-2, p. 1; (8) A-2, p. 1, A-3, p. 71.

26 April 1945, the 14th Infantry, as the interior regiment of the division, moved from the vicinity of Regenstauf southward towards Regensburg and the Danube River 16 miles away; however, the mission of the regiment was not that of crossing the river but that of continuing to destroy all enemy forces in its assigned zone. (See Map C) (9)

The three combat teams were dispersed over a wide area of the wooded hills and were still many miles from the Danube River when division received orders from XX Corps to secure a crossing over the Danube the night of 26 - 27 April, in its zone of advance. (10)

XX Corps ordered the 65th Division to force a crossing of the Danube River in its zone of advance to the west of Regensburg, then capture the city from the south. The 71st Division, less one regiment, was ordered to force a crossing of the Danube River in its zone of advance to the east of Regensburg, secure a bridgehead, and be prepared to assist the 65th Division in the capture of Regensburg by attacking the city from the east. One regiment of the 71st Division was ordered to assist the 65th Division in its attack and capture of Regensburg by fire from the north bank of the river. The crossing by both divisions was to be during the night of 26 - 27 April. (See Map C) (11)

The 71st Division plan was for the 14th Regiment to force a crossing and establish a bridgehead in the Barbing - Sarching area. The 5th Regiment was to force a crossing and secure a bridgehead in the Sulzbach^z area. Both regiments were to be prepared to continue the advance on order. (See Map C) The 66th Infantry was to assist the 65th Division by fire from the north bank to capture Regensburg and then to be prepared to cross behind either the 5th or the 14th Regiment. (12)

THE REGIMENTAL PLAN OF ATTACK

In his plan of attack (see Map D), Colonel Carl E. Lundquist, commanding (9) A-3, p. 79-80; (10) A-2, p. 6, A-3, p. 80; (11) A-2, p. 6, A-3, p. 71; (12) A-2, p. 6-7, A-3, p. 80.

the 14th Infantry, ordered the 2d Battalion to cross the Danube in the vicinity of Tegernheim, seize Barbing, and be prepared to continue the advance on order. The 3d Battalion was ordered to cross in the vicinity of Donaustauf, seize Sarching, and be prepared to continue the advance on order. The 1st Battalion would be the regimental reserve and would be prepared to cross the Danube behind either the 2d or the 3d Battalion and continue the attack on order. (13)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

It was approximately 1730, 26 April, when the order to make the crossing had been received by regiment, orders issued to the three battalions, and the battalions prepared to close into the indicated areas [?] prior to crossing. (14)

Company L was widely dispersed ^{when the Company Commander, Captain Milo Kirchbaum, received an order from the 3d Battalion to cease the present operations and move the company to Donaustauf.} (15)

This order was received over the SCR 300. The Company Commander in turn summoned his platoon leaders by SCR 536 from the various sections of the village ^{then} being searched. (16)

Radio was the usual means of communication within Company L in moving situations. Other means of communication were used only when necessary. The SCR 536 was very reliable when used within its limitations.

As the company was assembling, Captain Kirchbaum oriented the platoon leaders:

"Battalion called on the SCR 300. We are to move to Donaustauf immediately. I do not know what is up." (17)

The formation for the company was announced and the unit moved out. ^{what type}

Even though this move was through a wooded, hilly, unscreened area, the company moved rapidly, arriving at a small unnamed village by 1830.

(13) A-2, p. 6-7; (14) A-3, p. 80, A-4, p. 10; (15, 16, 17) Personal knowledge.

a distance of 3 miles or so.

A fact Move for Wilyly dispersed Company!

While the company was taking a three-minute break, Captain Jones, 3d Battalion S-3, contacted the company. Captain Jones led the company by a series of trails over the hills forming the northern side of the Danube Valley at the same rapid rate the company had maintained during the first hour. (18)

Just prior to 1930, a 3d Battalion outpost at the edge of the woods over Donaustauf informed Captain Kirchbaum that German forces were across the river and had observation of the area between the woods and the town, and that artillery fire had fallen near the town. The open area, about 300 yards, was negotiated by infiltrating a squad at a time, widely dispersed, into the town. Once inside the town, enemy observation was nullified by the buildings facing the river. (19) The company did not draw artillery fire entering the town.

The troops within rapidly searched the town for German troops and restricted the civilians to specific buildings to prevent interference with our operations. The latter were handled by the Battalion S-2, Lieutenant Jack G. Null. (20)

Battalion informed the Company Commanders that the division was planning to cross the Danube during the night of 26 - 27 April and that detailed orders would be issued later. This information was passed down to the men of Company L so that plans could be started. (21)

As has been previously mentioned, the buildings facing the river concealed all movement within the town from the Germans on the south side of the river. This fact caused battalion to issue orders that no one was to go beyond the town. *thus preventing* Reconnaissance of the river bank ~~was not to be made.~~ (22)

The night of 26 April was relatively quiet along the northern bank.

(18) Personal knowledge; (19, 20) Personal knowledge; Statement of Capt Jack G. Null, then Bn S-2; (21) Personal knowledge; (22) Statement of Capt Jack G. Null, Bn S-2; Personal knowledge.

The 3d Battalion had closed within a perimeter about Donaustauf. While no small arms fire ^{occurred} fell in the area, an occasional mortar and artillery round did. This harassing fire killed a squad leader of the 3d Platoon, but no other casualties were suffered by Company L. Each platoon was maintaining two or three outposts. Between 2230 and 2300, the platoon leaders were notified to report to the Company CP. (23)

On reporting to the CP, the Executive Officer stated that the Company Commander had been called to the Battalion CP for the operation orders for the next day, and since the Executive Officer anticipated his return shortly, he had called for the platoon leaders.

At this point, a description of the Danube Valley in the vicinity of Regensburg will be of help in understanding the situation confronting this battalion. Regensburg is situated on the southern bank of the Danube River. In this area, the northern bank of the river is bordered by steep hills which rise abruptly 600 feet and higher over the valley floor. To the south of the river, there are no elevations for miles. This wide river valley is extensively cultivated and is dotted with small villages. The river flows within stone and earth dikes throughout its course in Germany. In the Regensburg area the river is approximately 150 yards wide; the channel is deep and the current swift. Water power is used for electricity and mill works. North of the Danube are heavy cultivated woods; however, across the river on the valley floor, there are only sparse clumps of woods. (24)

THE COMPANY ORDER

Captain Kirchbaum returned to the Company CP within two or three minutes and immediately issued his orders for the coming operation.

"As you expected, we are going to cross the Danube.

"Here is my map with the boundaries on it. You can refer to it as I go along. (See Map E)

(23) Personal knowledge; (24) A-2, p. 2; Personal knowledge.

"The estimated enemy strength on the corps front is 5-6000 men with a few armored vehicles. A part of the 2d Panzer Division and the 11th Panzer Division may appear in the area. The strength of the 11th Panzer Division is believed to be 2000 men and 20 tanks. The mayor of Regensburg refused to surrender the city yesterday. During the afternoon, our Battalion CP observed enemy digging-in near Sarching and in the fields closer to the river. SS troops are known to be in Regensburg.

"The division will cross the river at 0200 to establish a bridgehead and to assist the 65th Division, if necessary, by taking Regensburg from the east. The 65th Division will cross the river west of Regensburg and capture the city from the west. Corps artillery will be available to support our division crossing. Company A, 81 Chemical Mortar Battalion, is attached to the 71st Division. The 71st will cross with the 14th Infantry on the right (west) and the 5th Infantry on the left (east). The 66th Infantry will initially support the 65th Division by fire from the north bank of the Danube. On order, they will move to either the 5th or 14th Infantry's crossing site and will be prepared to continue the division's advance in either regimental zone of advance. The 14th will cross with the 2d Battalion on the regimental right (west) and the 3d Battalion on the left (east). 1st Battalion will be in reserve. 608th Field Artillery will be in direct support. 3d Battalion will cross with Company L on the right (west), Company I in the center, and Company K on the left (east). Company M will remain on the north side of the river under battalion control.

"The company mission is to secure a bridgehead by crossing the river and advancing to phase line "Y", about 2000 yards inland from the river. It is shown here on my map. And then be ready to continue the advance on orders. Our zone is shown on the map also.

"1st Platoon, you will be on the right flank. Cover a frontage of 250 yards. Keep contact with the 2d Battalion. You will cross just below the

blown bridge which is the right boundary of the company and of battalion. You will have three assault boats.

"3d Platoon, you will be on the left flank. Cover a frontage of 250 yards. Keep contact with Company I. Guide on the 1st Platoon. You will cross about 200 yards downstream from the 1st Platoon. You will have three assault boats.

"2d Platoon, you will be in support and will follow the 1st Platoon as soon as they cross the river. You will use the first boats that return from the first wave.

"4th Platoon, you will attach one light machine gun to the 1st Platoon and one light machine gun to the 3d Platoon. You will cross with the mortars as soon as the 2d Platoon releases their boats. Company Headquarters Group will cross with you.

"Field Artillery Observer and his radio man will cross with the 3d Platoon.

"I and my two radio operators will cross with the 1st Platoon.

"The company will move out at 0130 to follow the road towards the bridge to the boats. We will be ready to cross by 0200. Forward reconnaissance is still prohibited.

"Each man will carry two-thirds "C" ration with him. Evacuation will be to the south river bank after we cross where battalion will have boats and will take charge of further evacuation. Battalion aid station will remain at its present location until the south bank has been secured. 1st and 3d Platoons will have a guide report here at the Company CP at 0100 to go with the engineers and the boats to the location of the crossing sites which the engineers will actually pick. The guide will then return here to guide their own platoon to the proper boats. 2d and 4th Platoons will furnish six men each to assist the engineers to unload the boats; these men will report here at the CP at 0100. Each assault boat will carry 15 men

according to battalion. The estimated speed of the river is 4 miles per hour. Company transportation will remain under battalion control until after the vehicles have crossed the river. Radio silence until after crossing the river.

"After reorganizing on the other side of the river I will be between 1st and the 3d Platoons." (25)

THE PLATOON LEADER'S ACTIONS

After issuance of the company order, the platoon leaders were released to return to their platoons where they issued their orders for the coming operations.

The 1st Platoon was dispersed in three squad groups, each squad maintaining one outpost along the southeast edge of the battalion perimeter. Using a blacked-out room in the Platoon CP building, the platoon leader assembled one squad at a time, including the light machine gun squad, to hear the order with a map of the area spread out so all could observe it, and pointed out locations as he issued the order. (See Map E) This procedure was not normal with this platoon for the situation seldom permitted the assembling of a squad to hear an order, but in this operation the platoon leader was very anxious to speak to each man. Other units of the regiment had made assault crossings; this was to be the first time for the 3d Battalion. (26)

In his orders to the men of his platoon, the platoon leader repeated the orders of the Company Commander from the notes he had taken, then added the following:

"The three boats allotted to this platoon will go one to each squad. The platoon sergeant will go in the 2d Squad boat. The platoon guide, the platoon runner, and the aid man will go in the 3d Squad boat. The light machine gun squad will go in the 1st Squad boat. The Company Commander and (25, 26) Personal knowledge.

his two radio operators will go in the 2d Squad boat.

"If we launch the three boats at the same time, the order will be 1st, 2d, 3d Squads from right to left. If we launch only one boat at a time, the order will be 1st, 2d, 3d Squads. The engineers will tell us where and how to launch the boats.

"After crossing the river, I want the platoon to reorganize as quickly as possible in the order 1st, 2d, 3d Squads from right to left.

"We have been told that the river is moving about 4 miles per hour; hence, all the boats will drift downstream a little. How far, I do not know. No matter where you land, you can guide on the bridge. Speed and silence will be the deciding factors.

"The map shows here that the black top road goes out of town by our outposts, then down to the river where the bridge is blown out. On the other side, the road cuts into our company zone slightly but we shall use it as a guide for our right flank.

"The map also shows that the terrain on the south side of the river is flat for miles, with no woods in our zone. The map also shows that the phase line "Y" is about 2000 yards inland from the river and corresponds with the road connecting Sarching and Barbing. This road will be the first improved road you will cross. There will probably be lanes in the fields.

"The light machine gun squad will follow the 2d Squad about 20 yards after landing. In the event of a fire fight, the machine gun squad will be committed on order. In case you do not receive orders, and the advance of the platoon is delayed, the machine gun squad leader will employ his weapon so as to assist the platoon to advance.

"Absolute silence will be maintained until contact with the enemy is made.

"I will send a runner to alert each squad 10 minutes before we move out. Be ready to move out.

"Squad leaders arrange for as much sleep for your men as possible. We will maintain the same three outposts until we move out of town." (27)

The platoon leader found at the time of issuing the orders that not one member of the platoon had received training in the use of assault boats. Only two or three had ever paddled a canoe. The platoon leader explained the general shape and size of the boat and the general method of paddling. He also explained that the engineers would have two or three men with the boat, one to steer and the others to help the steersman to return the boat to the launching site for the next wave. (28)

A case of M-1 ammunition was issued to the men in the platoon to replenish that expended the preceding two days and to provide an additional amount for each man. This amounted to a full cartridge belt and a partially filled bandoleer for each rifleman. Each automatic rifleman and his assistant carried a full belt of magazines, plus extra magazines in their pockets. (There were five automatic rifles in the platoon.) The machine gun squad had its full normal load.

At this same time "C" rations were issued. One-third was eaten, two-thirds were to be carried. (29)

Following the issuance of the order, each squad resumed its security mission. (30)

About 2230 hours, a runner from the Company CP arrived with the message that the time of the crossing had been changed from 0200 to 0400 and that the move from town to the boats would be at 0330. (31)

THE OPERATION

The company was formed at 0330 and quickly moved towards the river with the 1st Platoon leading, followed by the 3d and at a short interval the remainder of the company. The boat guides from the two assault platoons had returned to their platoons as the company formed. The guides led their (27, 28, 29, 30) Personal knowledge; (31) Personal knowledge, A-3, p. 80, A-4, p. 11.

platoons to the engineer truck and trailer. (32)

On the move from Donaustauf to the boats, the guide stated that the boats were just then being taken from the truck and that the engineer officer had not shown the guides the route to follow to the river with the boats. (33)

On arriving at the engineer truck, it was found that only one boat had been set on the ground, and that the second was in the process of being put down. The 1st Platoon leader checked with the engineer officer who confirmed the statements of the guide. At this same time, the engineer officer stated to Captain Kirchbaum that it would be necessary for one platoon to cross upstream from the bridge as there was not enough room below the bridge for both platoons in the company area. (34)

Captain Kirchbaum directed the 1st Platoon to cross above the bridge.

The 1st Platoon leader instructed the platoon sergeant to move the three boats forward to the river while he, the platoon leader, went forward to make a reconnaissance. Having only two or three minutes to make his reconnaissance before the boats arrived, the platoon leader found no good launching sites. (35)

The platoon carrying the boats arrived and the platoon leader directed the boats be set into the river immediately. It was now 0400. The launching was another time-consuming problem due to the raising and lowering entailed by the dikes mentioned previously. In this area, the dikes were about 3 feet above the ground level and about 5 feet above the river level. After getting the boats into the water as quietly as possible, great difficulty was experienced in holding the boats against the vertical bank while loading the personnel. Four miles per hour had been a very poor estimate of the river's speed. Once loaded, it was impossible to hold the boat against the bank. (36)

(32, 33, 34, 35, 36) Personal knowledge.

The first and second boats loaded with their assigned personnel moved away from the bank almost at the same time; however, it was impossible to wait for the third boat. The 3d Squad had been the last to arrive at the bank and were naturally later in loading. (37)

The platoon sergeant notified the platoon leader, while the boats were being launched, that there were no engineer personnel to accompany the boats.

The lack of training with the boats was apparent as soon as the boats moved away from the bank. The current caught the boats and spun them about as they were carried downstream out of control. After getting the paddlers coordinated, forward progress was slow and control difficult in the varying currents. At no time were the boats able to overcome the downstream push of the river.

On reaching the center of the channel, the first and second boats were swept rapidly downstream. Suddenly the remains of the blown bridge loomed into sight as the boats were carried towards it. Both boats managed to head downstream in time to avoid being swept broadside into the debris. Girders and steel cables struck the boats and personnel, but neither boat was seriously damaged. Luckily, there were no casualties among the men. Two helmets and a carbine were knocked overboard. (38)

Once below the bridge, the boats were out of the swift current and reached the south bank about 500 yards below the bridge.

Lacking personnel to return the boats to the launching site, the platoon leader had the boats lifted on to the bank so that they could be recovered in daylight. (39)

It was now 0410 or 0415. The third boat had not been seen since leaving the opposite bank. There had been no sign or sound of the 3d Platoon. As the men came over the bank and deployed, the platoon leader made a mental (37, 38, 39) Personal knowledge.

note of the forces remaining:

The 1st and 2d Squads complete, each with 12 men.

A light machine gun squad of 5 men.

The platoon sergeant.

Missing from the platoon were:

The 3d Squad complete with 12 men.

The platoon aid man.

The platoon guide.

The platoon runner with the platoon's SCR 536. (40)

No resistance had been encountered. The Company Commander ordered the 1st Platoon forward as soon as the men were deployed. (41)

The company's assault wave now consisted of the part-strength 1st Platoon, plus the Company Commander and his two radio operators. (42)

At this time I would like to acquaint the reader with a few of the conditions in this sector at 0415, 27 April 1945. Sunrise would be at 0500. The night had become overcast with low clouds and was cold. The moon was almost full but the clouds nullified its light. It had rained intermittently during the night and continued to do so throughout this operation. At the present time, the only sounds were the normal night sounds and the river, with the exception of shell bursts 4-5000 yards to the west in the vicinity of Regensburg. The terrain seemed to be as level as the map had indicated. The area was cultivated and young grain stood about 4 inches high in the company zone. Although it was not shown on the map, the road forming Company L's right boundary was 6-8 feet above the field level near the river and decreased in height to 3 feet above field level where this road crossed the Barbing - Sarching Road (battalion phase line "Y"). The Barbing - Sarching Road was 3 to 3½ feet above the field level in this area. (43)

(40) Personal knowledge; (41) Personal knowledge, A-3, p. 80; (42, 43) Personal knowledge.

Following the order by Captain Kirchbaum, the platoon moved forward but quickly halted when word was passed to the platoon leader that the scouts to his right had encountered foxholes. (See Map F)

Both squads were moved forward quickly to surprise the enemy; however, none were found. The positions were apparently only partially dug. (44)

Believing that the delays of the crossing had caused the company to fall behind the remainder of the battalion, the Company Commander ordered the 1st Platoon to move forward again. The Company Commander's SCR 300 operator and radio had received a hard blow by one of the cables while passing through the blown bridge and the operator had some difficulty in establishing contact with the Battalion CP at this time. (45)

Moving away from the river, the platoon gained enough depth to use the formation which it generally adopted during its pursuit operations across Germany. This formation was two squads on line with each squad in a loose diamond. Each squad had its scouts out to the general front as far as the situation dictated. It might be stated here that the squad leaders rotated their personnel in the position of scouts. The platoon leader was between the two squads and usually on line with the head of the diamonds or farther up. The platoon runner who also operated the platoon leader's SCR 536 was in the near vicinity of the platoon leader. The platoon sergeant was normally near the support squad where he could supervise the employment of that squad and where he would not be pinned down by the same fire directed on the leading personnel. The platoon guide and the attached aid man followed the rear of the support squad. (46)

As the third boat had not appeared as yet, the formation was still without a support squad, the platoon guide, the aid man, and the runner with the radio. (47)

(44) Personal knowledge, A-4, p. 11; (45, 46, 47) Personal knowledge.

The next 300 yards were uneventful. Visibility was still restricted to 15-20 yards. The time was approximately 0430. While moving inland, the platoon had been working to the right (upstream) towards the road. After reaching the road, a small patrol had been sent across the road to contact the 2d Battalion. They now reported back that the 2d Battalion was on the south bank and moving forward. They also reported that the 2d Battalion had not advanced as far inland as had the 1st Platoon. (48)

As soon as this information had been delivered to the 1st Platoon leader and the Company Commander, activity occurred in front of the 1st Squad. One of the scouts had challenged an unarmed German soldier. Fearing a ruse, the platoon leader directed both squads to build up towards the front and the flanks. While this was in progress, Captain Kirchbaum questioned the prisoner as he was being searched. (See Map F)

In broken English and German the prisoner tried to explain that the rest of his platoon was in the area, that they did not wish to fight, and that he had been selected to surrender first. Captain Kirchbaum tried to assure the prisoner that we would treat all our prisoners properly and ordered him to call to his platoon to stand up with their hands over their heads. After a few moments of the German's shouting, about 15 Germans stood up in compliance with the prisoner's instructions. As these prisoners were being rounded up and processed by 4 or 5 men, the remainder of the platoon worked over the area but could locate no other Germans in the immediate area. (49)

The Company Commander was unable to obtain information regarding other German troops farther inland. The platoon continued on towards the objective while two men marched the prisoners back to the river bank. (50)

0450 hours, the platoon was 600 yards in from the river with visibility slowly increasing. Objects on the skyline were now taking shape. The clump (48, 49) Personal knowledge, Statement of Maj Alvey, the CO Co ; (50) Personal knowledge.

of woods in Company I's zone formed a silhouette to the platoon's left rear. Just prior to this time, Company I notified Captain Kirchbaum by SCR 300 that the 3d Platoon, Company L, had landed in Company I area and was crossing behind Company I on its way to join Company L. (See Map F)

Sporadic small arms fire could be heard in the distance on both sides of the platoon now.

A fire fight broke out around the clump of woods in Company I's area. The fire was from rifles and machine guns, both US and German. Very soon German 20-mm guns were heard, and tracers were passing just over the platoon. (51)

The 2d Squad was immediately able to fire into the woods by virtue of the diamond formation they were in. The 1st Squad was directed to move forward and to the left, thus passing around the right flank of the 2d Squad and placing both squads in a position where they could deliver fire on the woods. (52)

Both squads were ordered not to fire except on command.

While the platoon leader was maneuvering his platoon, the Company Commander had contacted Company I by radio. Company I stated that they had the enemy under fire and were moving in on the woods from the river side.

The Company Commander observed from the tracers passing overhead that they were all over head high. He ordered the company to resume its movement towards the phase line. (53)

Within a few minutes the fire fight was finished back in the Company I area.

The sporadic firing in the 2d Battalion's area had increased in tempo somewhat.

Company L, still consisting of the 1st Platoon, was perhaps 1000 yards inland from the river now. Visibility had increased to 75 yards. A light (51, 52, 53) Personal knowledge.

rain was still falling. The night fog had not cleared but was thinning.

Captain Kirchbaum notified the platoon leader that the 3d Platoon was now in radio contact by SCR 536 and was to our rear; that Company I was again advancing towards their objective, and that the 2d Platoon had reported in by radio that they were across the river but had been held up by finding sleeping German personnel in foxholes near the river bank in the company zone. (See Map F) (54) The 2d Platoon also reported that the missing squad from the 1st Platoon was with them, having been rescued from the bridge debris in the middle of the river when their boat sank. The 2d Platoon also reported that the 4th Platoon was in the process of crossing the river. (55)

The 1st Squad continued to report the 2d Battalion to be less far advanced. Small arms and mortar fire made it obvious that they were encountering more resistance than the 1st Platoon.

A fire fight could be heard from the vicinity of Sarching. (56)

The platoon leader was visualizing a flank attack against the west end of Sarching when a new and much closer group of German machine guns and small arms opened fire from the platoon's right front. Apparently, this group was entrenched on the top of the road along the company's right boundary. (See Map F) This fire caused the platoon to hit the ground. The tracers indicated that the fires were less than head high but also indicated that the weapons were employing traversing fire. The platoon's exact position must not have been known. (57)

The platoon had been in its usual formation of two squads on line at the time of this fire burst. Both squads were ordered to hold their fire until they were at close range to avoid giving the Germans a more definite target in the haze. The 2d Squad was ordered to move forward and to the right so as to come on line with the 1st Squad. The 1st Squad was ordered

(54) Personal knowledge, Statement of Capt Jack G. Null, then Bn S-2;
(55, 56, 57) Personal knowledge.

to move directly towards the firing positions. (58)

While waiting for the 2d Squad to move into position, the platoon leader was joined by Captain Kirchbaum. Another study of the tracers indicated that the German positions were beyond the road but on the same elevation. The road was, in fact, providing defilade for the 1st Platoon. The maneuver of the 2d and 1st Squads was halted and the direction of advance changed back towards the objective. (59)

The preceding maneuver had consumed another few minutes. It was now 0520 and the company had covered 1400 yards from the river.

The unit resumed its formation and the advance towards the objective. Rifle fire from the direct front at an approximate range of 400 yards caused the platoon to again hit the ground. The lateral spacing of the reports indicated 6 to 10 rifles were firing at the platoon. (See Map G) (60)

The platoon was still dispersed over the company front when the firing began. The platoon leader was almost on line with the scouts. Laterally, the platoon extended for 200 yards and in depth for 75 yards. There was a wide gap between the two squads. The haze was thinning out more. Visibility was perhaps 150 yards.

A glance at each squad showed the platoon leader that both squads were building up towards the front. The scouts had fired a few rounds. Two of the scouts reported that they saw gun flashes to the front. One scout thought that he had seen a man move to the front. (61)

As yet, the platoon leader had identified nothing as a target except the sound of the firing and the rounds hitting the area. It is worthwhile to mention that the platoon leader was experiencing difficulty keeping his glasses clear enough to see at a distance, although he used two different pairs. (62)

Relying on the information given to him by the scouts, the platoon leader ordered both squads to move forward by individuals and to maintain (58, 59, 60, 61, 62) Personal knowledge.

the squad's fire. If one German had moved, it was hoped that fire and maneuver by the platoon would cause more of the Germans to disclose their positions.

This proved true. The platoon had advanced forward 75 to 100 yards when the enemy withdrew a short distance to the road which marked the battalion phase line "Y". The riflemen now had a definite target area, if not a specific position at which to direct their fire. The road level could now be seen 3 to 4 feet above the field level. (See Map G) (63)

The enemy rate of fire increased with ^{his} withdrawal, both in rate and number of weapons.

Control by the platoon leader was very difficult during this firing and movement because of the distances between men and the wide interval between the two squads. In the battle confusion, the fire fight was such that voice commands were not clearly heard more than 15 yards. Orders were relayed from man to man to the squad leaders who were in the center of their squads, up to 75 yards from the platoon leader. This communication was slow at the best and would have been inaccurate had any of the commands been intricate. Usually, the only indication that an order had reached the proper person was the execution of the order. This control difficulty was experienced by the squad leaders as well. (64)

This difficulty was appreciated by at least one of the men. Pfc William Alexander, a scout of the 2d Squad, had a ruptured cartridge the first round he fired when the present fire fight started. He quickly realized that he had no means to remove the forward part of the ruptured cartridge. As the platoon was now deployed, Pfc Alexander was the closest member of the 2d Squad to the platoon leader. The platoon leader saw the trouble that Pfc Alexander had experienced and as Alexander could no longer fire his weapon, the platoon leader ordered Alexander to remain in place until the fire fight had progressed beyond him far enough to allow him to return to the (63, 64) Personal knowledge.

river bank for another weapon. Pfc Alexander refused to obey this order, stating that he was necessary to relay commands. The platoon leader did not push the matter any further. (65)

The platoon had advanced to within 350 yards of the objective. Light was increasing and the men were moving slower. A member of the 2d Squad was wounded very painfully. The wounded man, losing control of himself, started screaming for the aid man (who was not present with the platoon). With the shouting of the casualty, the 2d Squad ceased their forward movement and with the exception of one or two men, ceased firing.

When shouted orders to the 2d Squad failed to get results, the platoon leader ordered the 1st Squad to continue on to the front while he tried to get the 2d Squad moving again.

The squad leader had started to go to the assistance of his casualty but was stopped by the platoon leader who ordered the squad leader to resume the fire fight. In the meantime, the casualty was partially quieted by a nearby squad member. The squad leader was able to restore the volume of fire, but the men were hesitant to move until Pfc Alexander moved forward as the squad leader forcefully moved two others. Once inertia was overcome, the squad moved rapidly once more. (66)

The platoon was pressing within 150 to 200 yards of the road when the enemy again was seen to withdraw, but immediately the volume of their fire was increased, indicating that they had not withdrawn very far and that more rifles were firing. In addition to the rifle fire, two machine guns were now employed against the platoon. Judging by the sound, it appeared that the entire fire of the enemy facing the platoon was now centralized to the front. (See Map G) (67)

The 1st Squad was ordered to move to the right around the curve as it moved towards the road. The 1st Squad was also ordered to cross the road so as to deliver flanking fire on the enemy position.

(65, 66, 67) Personal knowledge.

Platoon squad should be shown

The 1st Squad lost a man killed just before crossing the road. (68)

While the 1st Squad was moving by fire and maneuver to cross the road, the 2d Squad was closing up to the protection of the road and maintaining a heavy volume of fire on the general enemy position to assist the 1st Squad. The enemy's general position could be seen about 45 yards beyond the road, but specific targets were difficult to locate.

As the 2d Squad was closing up, the machine gun squad went into action on the right flank of the 2d Squad in the gap between the two squads. The machine gun maintained a high rate of fire into the general enemy position, which was without a doubt a great asset to the platoon. (See Map G) A moment after going into action, the machine gun squad leader reported a metal pillbox a short distance across the road. The metallic noise of rounds hitting heavy metal caused the platoon leader to call for AT grenades to be fired by all the launchers in the 2d Squad as they started the assault.

Although the height of the road concealed the 1st Squad from the sight of the platoon leader, the change in sound of their firing indicated that they had crossed the road and had turned to the left. (69)

Only one AT grenade had been found in the 2d Squad and the rifleman was still trying to place his launcher on the rifle; therefore, the order was given to the 2d Squad to cross the road and assault the enemy position beyond. The machine gun squad was ordered to maintain its fire from its present position.

While crossing the road, the 1st Squad could be seen approaching from the right flank and the metal pillbox changed shape to that of a trailer loaded with steel pontoons partially camouflaged. (See Map G) (70)

The members of the 2d Squad halted momentarily after they jumped off the road, a drop of about 4 feet.

This was a fortunate pause for it allowed the platoon leader to regain (68, 69, 70) Personal knowledge.

control of the squad and cease its fire. While jumping off the road, he had noticed the 3d Platoon moving up onto the enemy position from the left flank. Fire from the 1st Squad was ceased a few moments later. (71)

By SCR 536, Captain Kirchbaum had directed the 3d Platoon to pass 200 yards to the left of the 1st Platoon and then attack the enemy from the flank. Apparently, the maneuver had passed undetected by the enemy. The surprise was so complete that most of the enemy were still firing at the 1st Platoon when 3d Platoon rifle butts interrupted them. The loss of the SCR 536 in the 1st Platoon prevented the platoon leader from being aware of the maneuver of the 3d Platoon. (72)

The enemy on this position numbered about 18 prisoners, including three or four wounded by small arms fire, plus five dead. Of the prisoners, all but one were under 21 years old, with less than three months' service. The one exception was an SS noncommissioned officer who had been in charge of the provisional detachment.

The casualties suffered by Company L in this engagement were one killed and one wounded in the 1st Platoon and one wounded in the 3d Platoon by a random shot while moving to the left of the 1st Platoon. (73)

The 3d Platoon was sent about 500 yards to the left to organize a defensive position near the Sarching Road while the 1st Platoon was ordered to prepare a defensive position on the elevation previously held by the enemy.

The platoon leader deployed his two squads and the machine gun squad, then checked the ammunition supply of the platoon. The average was less than two clips remaining per man. The machine gun had two boxes left plus part of the belt in the weapon. This fact was immediately relayed to Captain Kirchbaum who, in turn, notified battalion of our situation and requested immediate resupply. (74)

The time was now 0700. Battalion directed Company L to hold fast on the position and be ready to continue the advance on order.

(71, 72, 73, 74) Personal knowledge.

Fearing a counterattack with the acute ammunition shortage, the platoon leader ordered the men to use the German weapons, including the two machine guns.

This was done with limited success during the next hour to fire on personnel withdrawing from Barbing; however, the platoon was not able to fire sustained fire from the machine guns, although single rounds were fired. (75)

No enemy action was directed against Company L's position.

It was approximately an hour before additional M-1 ammunition was brought to the company by battalion. By that time, the operation was complete as far as securing a bridgehead. (76)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

As this monograph is primarily concerned with the actions of the 1st Platoon of Company L, the analysis will generally be confined to the actions of that unit.

If the reader will recall, the platoon leader of the 1st Platoon returned to his command after receiving the Company Commander's order. Once in the platoon area, he immediately transmitted the complete company order, plus those additional orders necessary for the operation within the platoon. Not only were the squad leaders present, but also every man including the attached machine gun squad. At the time of issuance of the orders, all the men were briefed on a map showing the forthcoming operation. It is believed that all the known information was passed on by the platoon leader and that the lack of confusion on the enemy bank was largely due to this briefing.

That confusion which existed on the friendly bank before crossing was not the fault of the platoon, but of the engineers in failing to provide the normal personnel to supervise the boats and failing to arrive on time.

The lack of engineer reconnaissance was responsible for the 1st Platoon being swept into the blown bridge. Perhaps the speed of the river could
(75, 76) Personal knowledge.

have been more accurately ascertained and the location of a suitable launching site for the 1st Platoon found had the 3d Battalion commander permitted representatives of Company L to make a reconnaissance.

The lack of training with assault boats by an infantry unit was a serious error on the part of command beginning with the platoon leader. This lack of experience cost the platoon one-third of its strength. Overloading the boats in the swift current was perhaps the reason the boats were difficult to control.

Lack of a visual reconnaissance the preceding afternoon was a handicap in the operations of this platoon for such a reconnaissance would have disclosed the elevated height of the roads in the company's zone. Also, the height of the retaining walls along the river could have been anticipated.

Ammunition was issued to the platoon; however, no inspection was held to ascertain the status of the other munitions normally carried by the platoon such as rifle and hand grenades. The quantity of ammunition carried by each individual was not sufficient for such an operation. The platoon leader was responsible as well as the company commander for this neglect.

To continue forward under fire as Pfc Alexander did, without a weapon, after being ordered to withdraw was more than commendable; however, the cause for such action was that of command. As the reader is aware, in the hours preceding the operation, none of the leaders inspected the weapons of the men. The ruptured cartridge was without a doubt caused by a dirty breach.

The use of guides to go with the engineers to the boats certainly expedited the movement of the squads to their own boats and greatly reduced the noise and confusion that would have occurred.

The assignment of personnel by the platoon leader to the three boats maintained tactical unity of the squads while dispersing the elements of command to provide for the presence of command in all eventualities. It was unfortunate that the runner with the platoon radio was in a different boat than the platoon leader for the SCR 536 would have been of great

assistance to the platoon leader.

In its investigation of the foxholes near the river bank, the platoon was too superficial in the poor light. Sleeping personnel huddled at the bottom of the holes under blankets were mistaken to be earth. Had this enemy personnel been aggressive, great damage could have been committed.

The formation adopted by the platoon of both squads on line, each squad in a diamond formation, is believed to have been the one best suited to the situation. Quick maneuver was possible with a maximum of firepower to all directions. This formation also presented a fair width to screen as much of the assigned frontage as possible with the personnel available.

The location of the platoon leader was where he would very likely be pinned down by fire directed at the scouts, but this was considered and compensated for in the location of the platoon sergeant to the rear. By being up near the lead, the platoon leader was assured of quick information and the maximum of control by leading the platoon.

Prompt handling of prisoners minimized the delay to the platoon's advance. Proper handling of the first voluntary surrender greatly facilitated the surrender of the other enemy in the forward position.

Throughout this action, it has been apparent how useful the SCR 536 was in the communications between the company commander and the 2d and 3d Platoons and how the lack of the radio prevented the 1st Platoon leader from receiving information and orders quickly in the heat of battle.

The use of tracer ammunition in automatic weapons by the enemy and Company I brought out the fact that considerable information can be gained by observing the trajectory of such rounds. Before using tracer ammunition, its disadvantages must be weighed with the advantages and the mission of the fire.

Through the 3d Platoon's SCR 536, the company commander could have communicated with the Field Artillery forward observer; however, inability to locate a target in the poor visibility and the continual movement of the

assault troops made it inadvisable to call for artillery support in this action.

The smallest unit leaders must be capable of independent action such as that of the 1st Squad in flanking the final German position.

When the platoon became involved in the fire fight, the platoon leader was unable to communicate with the squad leaders directly. Better training of all personnel could have improved the relaying of orders, and better training would have trained the squad leaders to look for orders. The same problem was faced by the squad leaders who found that they could not issue orders to the entire squad front.

The reaction by the 2d Squad to the screaming of its casualty was perhaps the result of insufficient training before or during combat. The quick recovery of the squad under aggressive leadership emphasizes the corrective steps to cure and to prevent such situations.

The machine gun squad's employment earlier in the fire fight would have assisted in a more rapid advance of the unit; however, employing the weapon would have meant restricting the movement of the riflemen on the level fields. The machine gun squad leader saw the opportune position for his weapon on the road, between the two squads, and contributed greatly to the volume of fire placed on the enemy position. The platoon leader failed to order the machine gun squad to the flank early in the fire fight. This was probably due to the lack of training with attachments in the platoon problems prior to combat. The machine gun could have been employed on the right flank from the side of the road along that boundary.

The number of the dead and wounded among the enemy is a good indication that the fire distribution by the men and fire directions of the squad leaders were effective.

The movement of the platoon by individual rushes was very successful in the poor visibility, for it failed to disclose the location of the majority of the personnel.

With the shortage of ammunition faced by the platoon after capturing the objective, the platoon leader was justified in the using of the enemy weapons. The inability to fire sustained fire with the enemy machine gun emphasizes the lack of training with the weapons. Again, this lack was the fault of command beginning with the platoon leader. Familiarization firing of enemy weapons should have been accomplished before entry into combat.

LESSONS

A single action by a small unit such as described in this monograph cannot provide us with broad general lessons; however, such actions collectively can provide the general lessons while any single one may serve to amplify the general lessons.

Some of the facts and lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. Every member of an organization should be as well oriented as time will allow. The better the orientation, the better the performance by the individual and the organization.
2. The technical services must provide supervisors when line troops use technical equipment.
3. Line troops must receive training in the use of technical equipment before using it against the enemy.
4. Visual reconnaissance is of great importance to the lower units prior to a night operation. Only under the most extreme circumstances ^{should} ~~must~~ the visual reconnaissance be denied to the lower units.
5. Commanders cannot take ammunition status for granted. It must be checked continuously. Individual loads must be checked for serviceability and for quantity.
6. Commanders must inspect to maintain proper standards for care of weapons. Combat will often ^{lead to} ~~cause~~ carelessness ~~in~~ maintenance.
7. When ^{one} unit must coordinate with another, liaison agents are indispensable even when their duty is merely to guide. ?

8. The various command elements of a unit should not be so placed that more than the minimum number are exposed at the same place and time.

9. The need for speed does not diminish the need for alertness.

(Overlooking the enemy personnel along the river might well have been costly.)

10. When moving into an unknown situation, the diamond formation for the squad is best suited.

11. If a commander places himself in a position where he may be denied movement or communication, he must make sure his unit will not be without an alternate commander.

12. Proper treatment of prisoners on the battlefield will frequently facilitate the surrender of others.

13. Radio communication between the platoons and the company commander is necessary for rapid communication in a fire fight.

14. Radio communication between the platoon leader and his squad leaders is needed.

15. Tracer ammunition has serious disadvantages which must be carefully considered before its use.

16. Leaders of units as small as a squad must have the ability to lead their unit in small independent actions and be capable of making proper decisions in the absence of orders.

17. In a fire fight, one man cannot successfully control more than eight others by his direct orders. *(depends)*

18. The psychological effect of a battle casualty upon others must be constantly guarded against by troop leaders.

19. As the opportune employment of a light machine gun cannot always be anticipated, and since the usual place of employment is with the assault elements, it would be advantageous to have such a weapon assigned to the rifle platoon.

20. Pre-combat training in fire distribution and control will insure enemy casualties even though definite targets are not visible.

21. In the moving of personnel while under enemy fire and observation, care must be taken not to disclose the location of the bulk of the unit.

22. Infantrymen must be trained thoroughly with those enemy weapons which it is assumed that they will come into contact with and may utilize.

could be better stated