

ORDEAL
in the
VOSGES

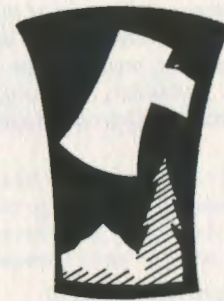


Donald C. Pence and
Eugene J. Petersen

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Donald C. Pence and Eugene J. Petersen

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DEDICATION

The 275th Infantry Regiment was one of the three U.S. 70th Division regiments which sailed from Boston early in December 1944. Having arrived in southern France after the Atlantic crossing, the Regiment soon entered combat on the French-German border under a set of extremely difficult circumstances. "Ordeal in the Vosges" is an account of this regiment's fortnight in combat which began on New Year's Eve 1944. The battle, little heralded, was fought during the opening days of 1945 in an obscure area nestled in the Low Vosges Mountains of northeastern France. While much has been written about other World War II battles--at Anzio, on Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima, in the Ardennes, Normandy, and other places--there were no war correspondents to witness the sanguinary fighting around Baerenthal and Philippsbourg and report on the grim struggle that occurred there, in the midst of precipitous mountains encrusted with snow and ice.

As soldiers of the 275th Infantry, we, the authors, saw our regimental companions fight this battle in the Vosges. Now, after over three decades, we have felt impelled to recapture in words the events which marked their and our baptism of fire. We consider that, while the Regiment's effort in the Vosges can be regarded as having achieved a military success, the more noteworthy performances during this time were made by individuals. Therefore many instances of individual courage and perseverance are described in our account, including those in which the individual lost his life. We are certain that there are many more such instances concerning which no record has become available. Unfortunately, most of these will probably never become publicly noted.

We hereby dedicate this account to all the fighting men of the 275th Infantry Regiment who participated in its European campaign of 1944-45 and especially to those whose lot it was to know little fame or glory in the cause for which they died. These men were--

Pvt Albert J. Adams
Pvt Ralph E Adams
Pfc Francisco E. Aguilar
Pvt Michael F. Alechko
S Sgt August A. Alegi
Pfc Louis M. Ambrose
S Sgt Axel J. Anderson

Pfc Peter Andrews
Pfc William H. Arndt
Sgt Francis Baird
Sgt Edward W. Baker
Pvt William M. Bateman
Pfc Frank Bealer
Pfc Robert L. Beardsley

2nd Lt Harry J. Bergmann
 S Sgt Gene R. Blackstone
 T 5 W.A. Blackwell, Jr.
 Pvt Paul E. Bland
 Sgt Harold L. Blehm
 T 5 Richard X. Bly
 Pfc Homer E. Boeve
 T 5 Thomas F. Brady
 Pfc Arthur A. Brafman
 2nd Lt Bernard Brons
 T Sgt Joseph J. Brown
 Pfc Charles L. Bruner
 T 4 George J. Buncic
 Pfc William C. Burgess
 Sgt LeRoy H. Bussmann
 2nd Lt Francis L. Buttrick
 Maj Gomez B. Cahoon
 Pvt Lawrence J. Campbell
 Pfc Ross W. Carlisle
 Pvt Alfred G. Casey
 1st Lt William E. Chesser
 Pvt Clarence W. Chester
 Pvt Frank M. Cholewa
 Capt Edison B. Christian
 Pvt Victor Chrusciel
 Pfc Lilburn H. Clark
 Sgt Louis A. Clark, Sr.
 Pfc Arthur J. Coats
 Pfc Clyde Copeland
 Pvt Carl W. Cowan
 Sgt Rice E. Crain
 Cpl Arthur B. Crow
 1st Lt Edwin J. Crites
 S Sgt Theodore R. Dailey
 Pfc Harold C. Davis
 T 5 Rayburn T. Davis
 Sgt Michael W. Deasy
 Pfc Buford I. Dews
 Pfc Guy J. Di Trani
 Pvt Frank J. Dobrzykowski
 Pvt Cecil C. Dolin
 Pvt Harry Donzeiser
 Pfc Robert D. Douglas
 Cpl Louis C. DuPuy
 Pvt Irving Einhorn
 T Sgt John Enochs
 Pfc Irwin Epstein
 Pfc Bill L. Erker
 Pvt Louis J. Falardeau
 Pvt Isidore J. Faso
 Sgt Harold Fink
 Pvt William F. Fishback

Sgt William W. Fletcher
 S Sgt William T. Flippen, Jr.
 Pvt James E. Foley
 2nd Lt Delton Fondoble
 Pvt Robert D. Freeman
 S Sgt Lee Roy C. Fulcher
 Pfc Jacob K. Fulton
 Pfc Troy L. Furr
 Carlos R. Garcia
 Pvt Guy W. Garrett
 Pfc William F. Gelske
 Sgt Burdette H. Gerken
 Sgt James D. Gidley
 Pvt Rondall H. Glaze
 Pfc James H. Goehl
 Pvt Edmund E. Golden
 Pvt Richard E. Goss
 Pfc Theodore B. Grabowski
 Pfc Donald G. Grisen
 Cpl Charles L. Guilbault
 Pfc Corbly J. Gump
 S Sgt Burch Hager
 Pvt Shelby Hagley
 Sgt Harry L. Hamlin
 Pvt Leo E. Hamlin
 Pfc Clarence A. Harrell
 Pvt Thomas W. Harris
 Pvt Joseph J. Harrison
 Sgt Arnold F. Hawvermale
 Pfc Alfred Heard
 Pfc Bert F. Hedbick
 Pvt Ottie P. Hiekkila
 S Sgt Homer L. Henning
 Pfc Joseph T. Henson
 Pfc William H. Herndon
 S Sgt Francis R. Hetzel
 2nd Lt John H. Hickey
 Pfc Lester Hiltenbeitel
 Pvt William A.O. Ho
 T 4 Philip E. Hoffhines
 Sgt Howard F. Holmer
 Pvt Herman L. Holt
 Pfc Howard E. Humble
 Pvt Martin J. Hynes
 Sgt Clifford M. Insko
 Pvt George W. Iversen
 Pvt Orda Jacobs
 Sgt Walter J. Jaje
 Pvt George R. Jarrett
 1st Lt John A. Jensen
 Pfc Carl A.F. Johnson
 Sgt Ernest D. Johnson

Cpl William P. Johnson
 Sgt Charles F. Kale
 Pfc Paul W. Keller
 Pfc Walter C. Killion
 Pvt Louis M. Kloss
 Pvt John A. Knoerzer, Jr.
 T 5 Douglas A. Koch
 Pvt Denzil W. Kreager
 Pfc Charles H. Krimmer
 Pfc Lloyd M. Koehl
 Pfc William C. Kulaga
 Pfc Steve Lacour
 S Sgt John J. Lame
 S Sgt Eldon H. Lanphear
 Pfc Paul Larrabee
 Pvt Frank D. Lee
 Pfc Eugene J. Lesniewski
 Pfc William L. Lindsey
 Sgt John C. Linz
 Pvt Wayne A. Locke
 Pfc Dale E. Loeffler
 S Sgt Bernard J. Lojko
 S Sgt Cornelius V. Long
 S Sgt Gordon F. Lossing
 Sgt Loren R. Luth
 Pvt John Luckow
 Pvt Albert F. Magrum
 Pfc William D. Manser
 Pfc Dorsey C. Marriott
 Pfc Robert L. Marrison
 Sgt Willie R. Martin
 2nd Lt Robert H. McDaniel
 2nd Lt Donald A. McDonald
 T 5 Robert R. McLeron
 Pfc George J. Mead
 Sgt William C. Mearse
 Pfc Alfredo D. Menendez
 Sgt Hugh W. Merritt
 Pvt Walter J. Mikos
 Pvt Jack H. Milconian
 Pfc Eloy A. Montes
 Pvt Arthur H. Mower
 Pvt Leo H. Murrill
 Pfc Virgil E. Neller
 1st Lt. Harold H. Nelson
 Pvt William Nicholas
 Pfc Jack M. Norris
 Pfc Harry M. Northrop
 Pfc Donald R. Obarr
 Pfc Earl E. Oliver, Jr.
 Pfc Glen B. Osborn
 Pfc Walter N. Papke

Pfc Louis C. Paschall
 Pfc Herve O. Pelletier
 Pfc William W. Peters, Jr.
 T Sgt Elmer T. Peterson
 Pfc James A. Phillips
 Pvt Joseph D. Pioli
 Pvt Thomas M. Pool
 Pvt Anthony L. Prine, Jr.
 Pfc Edward J. Provo
 T 5 Murray Pruzan
 Pfc Charles R. Quinn
 Pfc John H. Reardon, Jr.
 2nd Lt Robert H. Reber
 Pfc Robert C. Redmon
 Pvt Harvey T. Reed
 Pvt Paul E. Reynolds
 S Sgt Edward F. Richards
 Pvt Luther C. Richardson
 Pfc Sidney J. Roberts
 Pfc Walter E. Romanovitz
 T Sgt Sig Rusley
 Pvt Angelo J. Russo
 Pfc Steve F. Rutka
 Pfc Perfecto J. Sanchez
 Pvt Rafael Sanchez
 Pvt Emilio V. Sanders
 Pvt Robert H. Sawtelle
 Pfc Peter J. Schab
 Sgt William R. Scheibel
 S. Sgt Carl A. Scheich
 Pfc C.C. Schlichting
 Pvt Leonard Schlosser
 Pfc Leonard W. Schoen
 Sgt Sidney Schumer
 2nd Lt David P. Scobey
 Pfc Donald A. Scoville
 Pfc John P. Senske
 Pvt James C. Severa, Jr.
 Pfc Dale M. Sewing
 S Sgt Clifford L. Shaffer
 Pfc Rosario A. Simard
 Sgt Edric A. Simons
 Pvt George I. Sims
 Pfc James B. Sims
 Sgt Jack E. Skinner
 Pvt Eugene Sloane
 Pfc Donald C. Smith
 Pfc Ned E. Smith
 Pvt William H. Soderlind
 Pvt Charles R. Spurgeon
 Pvt James H. Stallings
 Pfc George F. Starke

Cpl Theodore G. Stathis
Pvt Walter Stavicki
S Sgt John D. Steed
Sgt Carl O. Steinle
Pvt Irwin M. Stenulson
Pvt Sampson J. Stephens
Sgt Raymond N. Stevens
Pfc David C. Storey
Pfc James C. Stowe
2nd Lt John E. Strand
Pvt George F. Strandberg
Pfc Harry M. Straswer
Pvt Dwight C. Strickler
Pvc John R. Styers
Pvt Martin J. Sullivan
Pfc Louie C. Sumpter
2nd Lt John C. Sundahl
Pfc Joseph A. Swagel
Pfc Joseph A. Sweeney
Pvt Walter Szyszka
Pvt Irving R. Tasney
Pfc Roland Tennis, Jr.
Pfc Wilbur L. Thomas
Pfc Richard A. Thompson
2nd Lt Fred P. Timmerman, Jr.
Pvt Walter F. Tobiaski

T Sgt Edgar E. Topp
Cpl Ferdinand J. Torro
Pvt George F. Townsley
Sgt Alvie L. Truex
Pfc William A. Vega
Pvt Estle D. Vickers
Pfc Claudio R. Vigueira
Pfc Norbert T. Walensa
Pfc Dale L. Wanless
Pfc Harry A. Warner
Pfc Ralph Weinstein
S Sgt Demmer G. Welch
Pvt Duward L. West
Pvt Sylvan R. West
Sgt Marvin C. Wheeler
Pvt Ernest A. White
1st Lt Howard W. White
Pfc Robert B. White
Pfc J.A. Wietrzyszowski
T Sgt James P. Williams
Pfc Lindsay B. Williams, Jr.
Pvt Norbert J. Wilson
Pvt Lewis Woodring
Pvt Eugene I. Wyka
Martin A. Yumas
2ns Lt William Zahora

PREFACE

This account has been written largely on the basis of U.S. military unit records and reports and of personal recollections of former members of Task Force Herren, the infantry elements of the 70th ("Trailblazer") Division of the Army of the United States (AUS). The contributors of personal recollections were chiefly from the 275th Infantry although significant contributions came from the other two Trailblazer regiments, the 274th and 276th. We are especially grateful to George A. Barten, Wallace R. Cheves, Thomas S. Higley, and Ross R. Millhiser for their continuing interest and encouragement and helpful counsel. In addition, particular thanks are due Richard Becker, Cornelius V. Cremer, John Cruell, Theodore G. Heck, Russel A. Holmes, William T. Long, Paul McCoy, Lawrence G. Southard and A. Stewart Wallace.

The authors wish to acknowledge also their indebtedness to Gerard Pillot of Luneville, France, a historian who contributed extremely useful research to this project. His disinterested labors provided the information used in our Prologue, which tells the historical background of the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal area. Moreover, Mr. Pillot's efforts were responsible for the procurement of local weather data presented in the book. Too, our thanks go to Wolf T. Zoepf, veteran of the German 6th Mountain Division (Nord) whose research into German military operations in the Baerenthal, Dambach and Philippsbourg areas during January 1945 provided results of importance to this work.

For basic maps employed, we are indebted to the U.S. Seventh Army, with headquarters in Heidelberg, West Germany, and to the Institut Geographique National, Paris, France.

The pertinent U.S. military unit records were found at the Army Historical Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, at the Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and at the federal government's National Records Center at Suitland, Maryland. Understandably, these documents remain as raw, unedited records which include obvious misreportings and misrecordings. Moreover, the personal recollections, collected for the past 30 years, have grown with the passage of time less precise and reliable and consequently include much that is ambiguous with respect to time, sequence and location of events. Admitting these limitations, the authors have made this review as accurate as possible, using

published reference material extensively for purposes of verification.

In order to maintain the story's continuity and coherence, it has often been necessary to supplement available information with conjecture. Where this has been done, such conjecture is labeled with limiting phrases as "it seems that" or "it appears that." Most personal accounts have been cited verbatim in order not to diminish the color or the feeling of immediacy of the reports; however, limited changes have been made on the basis of added information from the contributor which rendered such changes necessary in his original account or if clarity required minor emendations.

Insofar as information on corresponding German operations is concerned, particularly with respect to the 256th Volks Grenadier Division, the 361st Volks Grenadier Division, and the LXXXIX Corps, monographs written immediately after World War II under the sponsorship and direction of the U.S. Army Historical Division have been used. Each of these monographs was prepared by a former senior officer of the German formation concerned while he was in the custody of the U.S. Army as a prisoner of war. Concerning the accuracy of the German monographs, Mr. Howard P. Hudson, the Historical Division's senior advisor during the project, has written recently: (At the outset of the project) "I addressed the entire group (of German officer POW's) once we had them in place at the camp. I told them that we needed their cooperation in a most serious matter. I then raised the question directly: Why should they as prisoners of war cooperate with the enemy? On the surface the answer was clear. No reason whatsoever. I then told them that they had to look toward the future. They would not be prisoners forever. There would be a time when Germany and the U.S. would be friends. . . Then one day when writing their own history of the combat operations, . . . where would they turn? They would probably have access to records in the Pentagon, but what would these records show? Two-thirds of the (German) documents were known to be destroyed. They would find nothing.

"We were asking them to reconstruct documents from their own experience. We would provide maps, but not American documents. They were to develop only their side of the operations. And they would be doing this to benefit the German history of the war. How well they followed this I cannot say, but their enthusiasm was tremendous. Remember, these were magnificently trained officers. . . . That's all I can tell you. There's no way I can vouch for accuracy in what you have been studying (concerning the German NORDWIND operations). But I can say that we recognized the problem and tried to face it from the start."

The description of German operations included at or near the beginning of each chapter is based to a great extent on monographs written under circumstances outlined above. There are seemingly obvious inaccuracies in the monographs, and the inaccuracies have been included with the parts of the German story transferred to this account. Some of the more obvious errors have been pointed out parenthetically. Still the narration of German operations presented herein remains inconsistent in some respects with the corresponding account of American operations succeeding it in each chapter. Since the essential details of American operations come largely from contemporary (though not necessarily error-free) reporting, the American account is more likely to be correct in instances of conflict with the German story. However, admitting the possibility that the conflicting American version could be wrong, the authors have presented the German story as remembered by the unit monographers without distortion.

In certain chapters, a section has been included under the heading "Summary of WRECKER Operations, (date)." These "summary" sections have been included selectively on those days when the authors considered that the American operations were so detailed and complex that the reader might lose continuity in following the company-by-company review of the day's events. The reader, when coming to such a "summary" section, can expect to encounter a more detailed description of the same operations following the "summary" section and within the same chapter.

The use of personal names has been largely limited to those of members of the 275th Infantry and of other 70th Division components involved in the same actions with the 275th or in closely related ones. This is the story of the officers and men of the 275th Infantry, and it has been written from their point of view. Other Americans who became involved in either directing or supporting or being supported by the 275th's operations but who remained (in the eyes of the 275th's people) faceless functionaries whose official positions brought them into brief contact are simply identified by their official titles. The rendering of personal names has accorded with the general rule that, in his first appearance, the individual's full name and rank are given; in any succeeding appearance, his surname or title of address and surname are given.

Since the weather played such an important role throughout the period covered by the account, the computed high and low temperatures for each day are stated at the beginnings of chapters. The temperatures are based on official French records for the city of Strasbourg. To approximate the temperatures in the higher elevations in the Vosges Mountains, the daily Strasbourg temperatures have been adjusted

downward on the basis of the difference between the average recorded temperatures for Strasbourg and an unsubstantiated average temperature report for the Vosges Mountain town of Bitche during the last half of December 1944 and the first half of January 1945. The difference (24 degrees) has perhaps resulted in daily temperatures given in the account being several degrees colder than they actually were. Nevertheless, the severity of the 1944-45 winter in Western Europe, the coldest of the century until that year, was so extreme and its impact on the individual soldiers on the opposing sides so debilitating that the authors decided to use the computed temperatures, low as they seemed, without adjustment.

PROLOGUE

The villages of Philippsbourg and Baerenthal lie in the midst of the Low Vosges (Hardt) Mountains of northeastern France, which run parallel to the Rhine in a belt some 60 kilometers distant from the French border city of Strasbourg to their east. The two villages are situated in two adjacent valleys in a series of valleys cutting through the Vosges many of which run generally parallel to each other--from northwest to southeast. The heavy-duty road network in the area is largely confined to the valleys; however, the valley roads through Philippsbourg and Baerenthal are connected by a road through the intervening mountains, the distance between the two localities being about 4 kilometers. Falkenstein creek runs along the floor of the valley through Philippsbourg; Zintzel creek, through Baerenthal. From Philippsbourg there is also a road connection between the Falkenstein creek valley and the next valley to the north, this road running from Philippsbourg to Neunhoffen. Some 12 kilometers to the northwest up the valley road from Philippsbourg is the town of Bitche, around which the French prior to World War II had developed one of the most elaborate defensive complexes of their entire Maginot Line.

In the middle of the frontier zone and close to the national boundary between France and West Germany, the two villages lie in what was known during various moments in history as the Province of Lorraine. Their geographic location has frequently made them pawns in geopolitical chess games between rival powers down through the ages. Even in modern historical times, Philippsbourg and Baerenthal have undergone three changes in national identity as the result of wars in which France and Germany have been on opposing sides, the most recent being World War II. These three changes occurred within three-quarters of a century, so no citizen who lived to be fifty during the period 1850-1950 could have gone through life as a resident of Philippsbourg or Baerenthal without seeing his national flag replaced at least once.

Even before the period of conflict between the French and German national states had caused the shuttling of Alsace-Lorraine back and forth between the two, Philippsbourg and Baerenthal had acquired a wealth of experience in changing allegiances. Too they had often been visited by the wars that usually preceded the assignment of their new allegiance--and by the death and destruction that came with

these wars.

Baerenthal is evidently the older community of the two by several hundreds of years. Its earliest placename of record was Barebdal (in 1318). The first historical association between the two localities came about in 1564 when Count Philippe IV of the House of Hanau-Lichtenberg purchased part of the village of Baerenthal and the land on which Philippsbourg would later be built. He made these purchases from the once powerful Falkenstein family shortly after their castle of the same name was destroyed by fire. It is said that the fire occurred during a night of merrymaking at the castle. According to the legend, a drunken and enraged nobleman set a match to the place after his amorous advances had been rejected by a young lady of the Falkenstein family. The ruins of Falkenstein castle, about 2 kilometers north of Philippsbourg, are still a tourist attraction to this day.

Soon after his acquisition, Philippe built a hunting lodge the site of which was near the present day Philippsbourg railroad station. The lodge was subsequently expanded upon, and with this expansion the edifice came to be called a castle. Around the foot of this castle there grew up the community of Philippsbourg, which took its name from the castle.

The Thirty Years' War brought destruction to both localities. In 1622 Baerenthal was occupied and pillaged by a Protestant army under General Mansfeld, a German, during a series of battles with the Catholic forces of Austrian Emperor Maximilian. Then in 1633, the castle built by Philippe IV was destroyed by Bavarian troops. Toward the end of the century, during the War of the League of Augsburg, Baerenthal was again devastated, this time by the troops of France's King Louis XIV. During the 18th century there was at least one more change in dominion affecting this territory. This was before 1793, when it was detached from Alsace and made part of the French Province of Lorraine. This came about as the result of armed conflict between the armies of the French revolutionary government and those of the Prussian and Austrian royal houses.

For much of the 19th century the two villages were under French administration as the united villages of Baerenthal-Philippsbourg. In 1874 they were again separated--as the result of the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War, the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine were ceded to Germany--under the rule of the German Kaiser. In 1918, following World War I, Baerenthal and Philippsbourg went back to France with the recession by Germany of those areas acquired nearly 50 years before as the result of Prussia's defeat of France. Known as Philippsburg during this period of German dominion, the village reassumed its former French name Philippsbourg.

With the approach of World War II, the inhabitants of these two villages could have looked back on innumerable wars and violent consequences therefrom suffered by their forefathers for many generations. Better than most of their fellow French citizens, they could have understood what the coming of war with Germany was likely to mean to them--the certainty of personal privation and of major disruption to their lives, the probability of loss or destruction of their property, and the possibility of death or injury for them and their family members and friends.

At the beginning of September 1939, the German invasion of Poland and France's declaration of war on Nazi Germany 2 days later brought obligatory evacuation of both villages' inhabitants along with their civil administrations and records--part of the general evacuation of the defense zone embraced by the Maginot Line. Then for the next 9 months there was little combat action locally--only the continuing shuffling of French military units into and out of the two villages and the rest of the defense zone. In late April 1940, the French defenses in the sector experienced a stepping-up of enemy pressure. While up till then the opposing forces' operations had been largely limited to patrol activity, the Germans now began launching local attacks against some Maginot Line installations. In early May 1940, a major German offensive achieved a breakthrough of Allied defenses to the northwest; the German thrust through the rugged Ardennes country of Luxembourg and Belgium and the subsequent drive west to the English Channel then south into Paris forced the French high command's decision to abandon the Maginot Line defenses. German military occupation of the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal area soon followed, just ahead of the French capitulation to Hitler in the latter part of June.

The victors' efforts to re-Germanize the area were not slow in coming. In July, only a few days after the fall of France, some French soldiers were separated out in the German POW camps and allowed to return on parole to their native Alsace and Lorraine on the basis of having declared themselves to be of German descent. These personal declarations brought a wave of resentment toward the parolees from their fellow prisoners. Before the end of the year, the German occupiers took several additional steps to reidentify the two old border provinces with Germany, more particularly, with the Germany as modified by Hitler. These included: their annexation to the German Reich; the changing of placenames and street names to their German variants; the commencement of an anti-Semitic campaign; the establishment of Nazi organizations in the newly annexed territories open for joining by their citizens, organizations such as the SA (Storm Troopers), Hitler Youth, Nazi party and

others; and the launching of a campaign to eradicate the vestiges of former French national presence.

As time went by, the period of courtship by the government in Berlin of the territories annexed from France drew to a close, and the stick replaced the carrot in Berlin's approach in utilizing Germany's new citizens. In the year following the French defeat, 1941, forced labor in support of the German war effort was introduced. Then in 1942, as Germany's military fortunes began to go badly, obligatory military service in the Wehrmacht was introduced within these areas. By January 1942, Philippsbourg and Baerenthal had seen their first men inducted into the German armed forces.

Toward the end of 1944, the war's final series of devastating events began for the two villages. On December 14, 4 1/2 years after the beginning of the most recent German military occupation, the German troops withdrew and troops of the U.S. Seventh Army moved in. However, the duration of the first American military presence, a little over a month, hardly provided the citizens of Philippsbourg and Baerenthal time enough to get settled in their new circumstances. The withdrawal of the Seventh Army on January 20, 1945 was followed by the return of German forces. This German military occupation was equally brief, but both villages received attacks from Allied bombers presaging the end on March 17 of the most recent visit by German troops. There was little ground action associated with the final change-over.

Losses experienced by the two villages during World War II (probably incomplete) appear below.

Baerenthal

Killed while serving in French military forces -- 3

Killed while serving in German military forces -- 22

Civilians killed during bombing attacks -- 16

Civilians deported to concentration camps -- 46

The village of Baerenthal may have suffered less physical damage than Philippsbourg in that the former was more briefly subjected to demolition associated with house-to-house fighting or similar ground actions.

Philippsbourg

Killed while serving in French military forces -- 2

Killed while serving in German military forces (or failed to return) -- 7

Civilians killed during bombing attacks -- 7

Civilians deported to concentration camps -- 7

The village of Philippsbourg was adjudged to have been 44 percent destroyed during the war, most of this destruction having occurred during the month of January 1945.

ORDEAL

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CHAPTER I

The Prelude

On 16 December 1944, Hitler launched his Sixth Panzer Army and Fifth Panzer Army in a northwestward attack out of the Eifel section of the western German border region against the lines of the American First Army in Luxembourg and Belgium. This offensive, given the covername WATCH ON THE RHEIN, was intended to capture the major Atlantic port of Antwerp and destroy Allied forces which would be cut off to the north of the German drive to the sea. In the resulting Battle of the Ardennes, the Germans achieved some early advances, but on 22 December Patton's Third Army began its thrust into the southern shoulder of the German salient, and clearing weather the following day permitted increasing use of Allied air power to blast the attackers' front and rear. These developments and others signaled the fading prospects for a German success, the chances for which at the outset had been recognized by German commanders as being dim at best. As early as 23 December, Hitler's advisors were suggesting that he cut back his WATCH ON THE RHEIN objectives and settle for more modest achievements.

One of the first major reactions of Hitler to the Allied counteroffensive was to order a new offensive in northeastern France to take advantage of the diminishing of American strength in the area, which had resulted from the transfer to the Ardennes fighting of most of the U.S. Third Army and the consequent broadening of the U.S. Seventh Army Front. Early on Christmas Day, the commanding generals of the German XC, LXXXIX, and XIII SS Corps met with Colonel General Blaskowitz, the German Army Group G commander, at his headquarters. Blaskowitz indicated to his subordinates that WATCH ON THE RHEIN had failed and that the German forces committed in the Ardennes battle had themselves come under heavy Allied pressure. Blaskowitz stated that it was therefore the assignment of the First Army under him to attack the opposing U.S. Seventh Army, whose defensive capabilities had been weakened by Allied countermeasures taken against the German thrust into Luxembourg and Belgium.

Three days later, Hitler reviewed the war situation with his top subordinates at his command post for the Western Front. Among those present were Field Marshals von Rund-

stedt and Keitel, SS leader Himmler, and Blaskowitz. Der Fuehrer acknowledged the failure of the Ardennes operation and outlined offensive measures which would be taken to draw enemy forces away from that sector so to bring relief to his troops in the Bulge. He identified the offensive by the First Army along the Franco-German border as the principal measure to achieve this relief, since, as he said, it was in this sector of the U.S. Seventh Army front that, according to intelligence estimates, the enemy had weakened his forces more than anywhere else.

Earlier, on 24 December General Hoehne, commander of the German LXXXIX Corps, had outlined to his division commanders the plans for the Corps' part in the First Army's offensive -- designated NORDWIND. The Corps was to be comprised of the 256th Volks Grenadier (VG) Division, the 361st VG Division, and the 6th SS Mountain (Mtn) Division, the last named division being still engaged in its long move from northern Finland, on the left flank of the German Eastern Front, en route to join the NORDWIND forces. At the time, its advance elements were arriving in Denmark, having crossed over the Baltic straits from Norway. The primary objective of the Corps was to be the Saverne Gap--a mountain pass through the Low Vosges--from where the offensive would turn either east or west depending on the situation that had arisen by that time. The attack was to be launched early on New Year's Day, when American vigilance might be less than normal, to maximize the chances of achieving surprise. Surprise was to be a critical factor, as viewed by the high command, insofar as the prospects of NORDWIND success were concerned.

As for the American side, the German Ardennes offensive gave rise to a series of moves that is worth reviewing. Back on the 15th of December, troops of the U.S. Seventh Army had pushed into Germany from northeastern France. This penetration of the German homeland had occurred near Wissembourg. It was the high-water mark for 1944 of an almost continuous advance which had begun on 15 August, when the Seventh Army landed on the beaches of southern France (Operation DRAGOON). On 16 December, the German Ardennes offensive had begun. On 22 December, the U.S. Third Army began its drive north to join in this battle and reach the surrounded 101st Airborne Division and other U.S. units at Bastogne. For this purpose, the Third had, 2 days earlier, been ordered to abandon its offensive in the Sarre sector. As a consequence, the Seventh Army was ordered on 21 December to discontinue its offensive push into Germany and extend its left flank to take over part of the Third Army front. By 26 December all Third Army units had withdrawn from some 30 miles of front they had previously covered, and the Seventh Army's sector had been widened by this amount.

Its front now ran from the Rhine 84 miles westward to a point beyond Saarbruecken. In addition to this 84-mile front, the Seventh also had to cover the 40-mile sector running along the Rhine from the northeast corner of France south to the vicinity of Strasbourg--the so-called "passive front."

In an action evidently designed to facilitate the coverage of the additional front, Seventh Army on 21 December ordered the formation of Task Force Hudelson. It was tasked to cover 10 miles of the front on the left flank of VI Corps with the 45th Division on the Task Force's right. Comprising less than one combat command of the 14th Armored Division and a cavalry reconnaissance squadron as its primary combat forces, TF Hudelson was intended to provide a mobile screen covering a large share of the front where it traversed the difficult Low Vosges terrain. Its line was acknowledged by American commanders to be "paper thin."

Circumstances were such that the Seventh Army G-2 (intelligence chief) and the intelligence staff at the next higher (Sixth Army Group) headquarters were under no illusions about the likelihood of a German attack along the Seventh's front. To start with there was the vulnerability presented by the Army's extended (and thinned) lines. It was estimated that the German First Army facing the Seventh had elements of nine divisions in the forward area. Too, it had been noted that contact on the Seventh Army front with the First Army's mobile divisions--17th SS Panz Gren, 25th Panz Gren, and 21st Panz--was very light, and it was deduced from this that these units were keeping only token elements on the line and were holding the bulk of their forces in the rear for resting, refitting, and preparation for a possible attack. In addition, the intelligence chief's judgment was that the enemy could be expected to take advantage of bad weather limiting the Allies use of air power and of favorable geographic circumstances (rivers and mountains forming north-south penetration corridors and restricting lateral defensive countermovements).

Finally, positive intelligence was obtained indicating the imminence of a German offensive against the Seventh Army front. A radio message from Hitler ordering the attack was intercepted and decrypted by the British monitoring service and passed to Allied commanders. While the information helped to confirm the already strong suspicion held at the Seventh Army command center, it evidently lacked the details which would have enabled the arrangement of more precise countermeasures than were taken. In this connection, a recent review of German wartime security measures has found evidence that, after the fall of 1944, their high command adopted the practice of transmitting by telephone landlines or couriers such sensitive information as detailed opera-

tional directives, presumably because there were growing doubts about the complete security of the cryptographic system used to secure radio communications.

The WRECKER Movement to Alsace

It was late on Christmas Day when the first train-load of 275th Infantry (cover designation, WRECKER) troops came to a halt on the tracks on the west edge of Brumath, 10 miles north of Strasbourg. Towed by a smallish French steam-engine, the string of antiquated "40 et 8" boxcars had, for more than 3 days, rattled and jerked their wall-to-wall and half-frozen occupants slowly but persistently away from southern France toward a destination known only to a very few of them. This is how the Regiment, or at least most of it, moved to its assignment with the U.S. Seventh Army in the northeast corner of France, where all but a very few would experience their first taste of armed combat. The second of the two trains carrying elements of the Regiment did not arrive until the first hours of the next day. After detraining, companies assembled by the tracks for briefings by the CO's and for the soldier's traditional waiting--hours of nervous waiting. Then they set out on foot or in truck convoys for assembly areas 6-10 miles away. It was after daylight, 26 December, when a column of trucks picked up the last troops--men of the 3rd Battalion--for transporting to their assembly area at Gries. Some of these men were amused when the column took a wrong turn onto a dead-end farm road, halted, and then bumped uncertainly across the rough field to regain the correct route. Some were not amused--to them it was another Army SNAFU, tolerable back in a State-side training area, but not so now with an armed enemy in the vicinity.

Meanwhile motor convoys consisting of the Regiment's organic vehicles had departed CP-2 (camp 20 miles north of Marseilles) a day after the trains. Manned by drivers, mechanics, and guard personnel, the trucks carried or towed equipment and heavy weapons northward along the Rhone and Saone river valleys to Nancy, where they turned east toward the Rhine plain and reunions with the train-borne sections of their companies. They had followed much the same route over which, weeks before, the U.S. Seventh Army had battled and pursued the German Nineteenth Army. Devastated towns and villages, demolished bridges, and knocked-out tanks and artillery pieces had marked the path clearly. Along the way, WRECKER's men had noted clusters of wooden crosses marking graves of fallen German soldiers--thus they had been forcefully reminded that man himself, and not just his works, was vulnerable to destruction during wars.

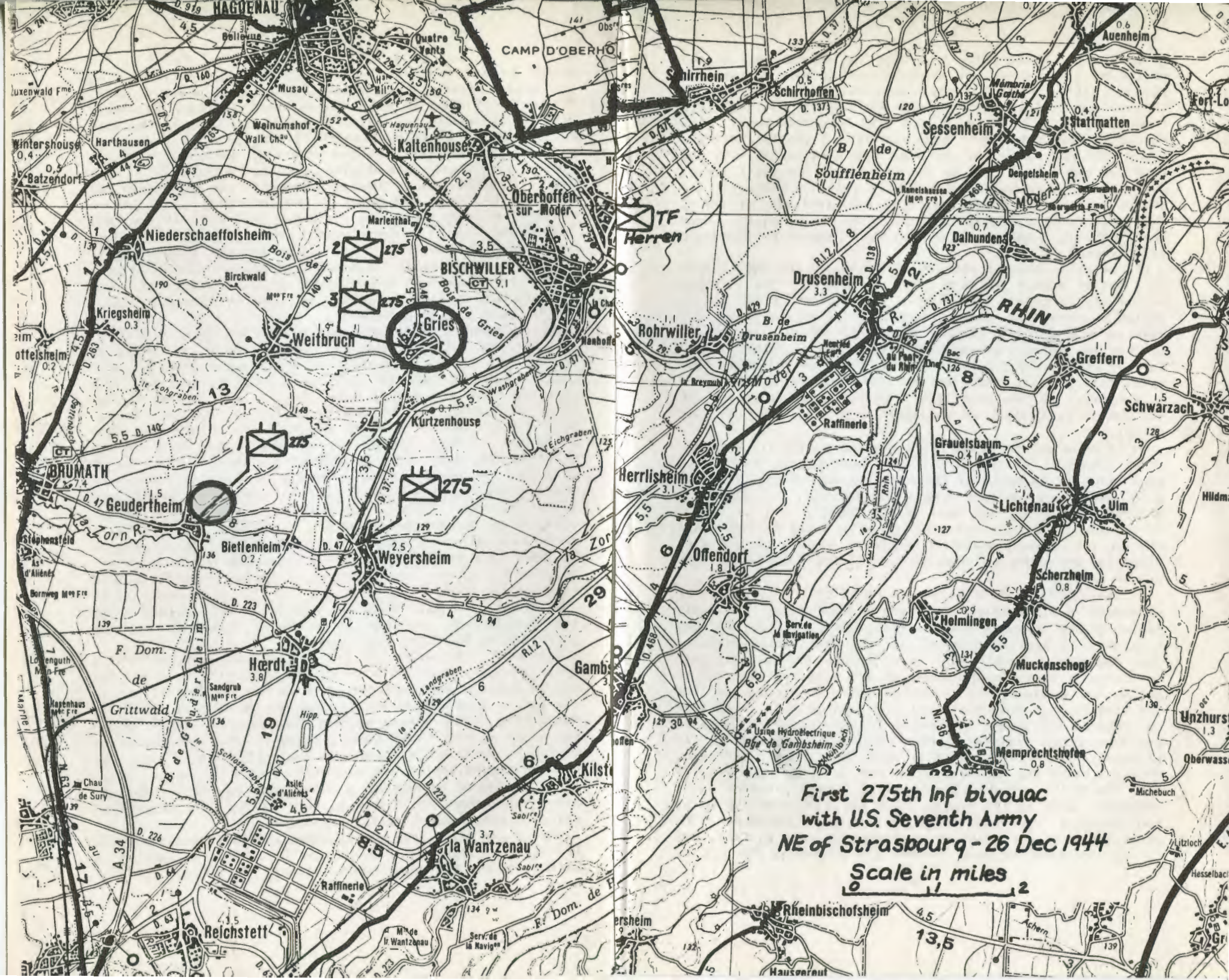
The Regiment's journey actually had started more than a

month before with its movement by train, attended by elaborate secrecy precautions, from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to Camp Myles Standish, near Taunton, Massachusetts. The arrival at Myles Standish had been on the 20th of November. At Myles Standish there had been 2 weeks of preparations for the Atlantic crossing, including showdown inspections, gas-mask drills, abandon-ship drills, and various orientations. Then on 6 December the battalions had loaded onto trains and moved to Boston's port area. There at the pier they had found the huge, grey bulk of the "USS West Point," a converted luxury liner, waiting to accept them into its bowels. Red Cross coffee, doughnut-girl volunteers, and the Division band had all provided a slightly festive touch that hadn't quite erased the grimness from the boarding operations. These had gone on without a hitch, and the ship sailed at 1600.

On 14 December their ship had passed the Rock of Gibraltar, and the following morning it had entered the harbor of Marseilles, France. Debarkation had started shortly after noon. Since Marseilles' port facilities had not yet been repaired from the damage done them by the Germans during their withdrawal several months before, it had been necessary for the men to be moved ashore from the anchored "West Point" by landing barges--one of the barges had had the unforgettable name "Chronic Bitcher." Then had come the 20 mile move by truck to CP-2 near Aix en Provence, where the Regiment had encamped with its two sister regiments, the 274th and the 276th. At CP-2 had occurred the hectic reversal of the process in which the men had engaged during their last days at Leonard Wood--everything from cannons to baseball bats now had to be de-waterproofed and made combat-serviceable again. And, instead of the garrison facilities of Leonard Wood, they had had CP-2's field conditions aggravated by cold, rain, and mud to provide a difficult, but acclimating, setting in which to make their final preparations for entry into combat.

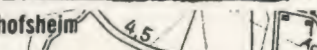
The train ride north had provided an extension of CP-2's harsh living conditions with an added feature or two. The frigid boxcars had appeared to offer no barrier at all to the wintry blasts from outside but had refused to expel any smoke from inside when a warming fire was lit; then the men had ended up with their noses pressed to cracks in the floor trying to avoid suffocation. To the cold had been added the cramped immobility of the confines -- the combination would later be judged by medical professionals as having laid the basis for subsequent injury to the feet by cold which disabled so many members of the Regiment.

The second train, the one in which the 3rd Battalion rode, had departed from the CP-2 area on 22 December. Sgt Marion D. Ross in his K Company combat history "Kingsmen," describ-



First 275th Inf bivouac
with U.S. Seventh Army
NE of Strasbourg - 26 Dec 1944

Scale in miles



ed the trip: "About 1700 that day, the Company was transported by truck down to a railroad siding near Marignaire. The men, after wading through knee-deep mud, crawled into the waiting train. Everyone had heard about 40-and-8 cars from veterans of World War I, but that was, supposedly, past history. Now it was no longer history--it was the present. Those cars must have been the same ones used in 1917-18, and they had had a hard life in the interval. The first night, everyone slept on top of each other, and only gradually did the occupants and baggage sift down into some sort of order. The train moved slowly north through the Rhone valley. From Marignaire to Lyon and Dijon; through Langres to Saarbourg and beyond."

Pfc Harry J. Mumm, I Company, had been on the same train. In a letter home a few days later, he wrote: "The trip was uncomfortable to say the least. Frequent stops and starts jolted us from what rest we were able to obtain. Long delays on sidings with little freedom of movement except to get out of the car occasionally and stretch. Other trains sped by with tanks, trucks, weapons, and, now and then, hospital cars. Still there was an atmosphere of optimism and horse-play. At one such stop a picture was taken showing Pfc Joseph F. Montani in a baggage cart pushed by Sergeant Miller."

On 25 December the train still labored toward its destination. Ross: "Christmas Day in a boxcar, and not even a good boxcar! In spite of the crowding and 10-in-1 rations, a GI can manage to have some Christmas spirit. There was singing and joking, and some of the Company went so far as to procure a chicken and cook it on a squad burner. One chicken for 20 men presents a difficult problem in distribution, and yet there are some 20 men in this company who know it can be done."

In the three 275th battalion assembly areas, the Regiment attempted to clean itself up from the train ride. The facilities in the bivouacs were limited, but conditions in them were still a big improvement over the cattle-car existence just departed. Duffle bags were brought up and equipment was issued. Here the Regiment was hit with one last requisition of personnel for transfer out--reminiscent of the training days at Camp Adair and Fort Leonard Wood, when such occurrences had seemed to become almost routine. Up to 20 men were drawn from each rifle company for sending as replacements to the Third Army--a total of 200 basic riflemen. Within 3 weeks the Regiment could look at itself and comprehend the why's and wherefore's of all those personnel outshipments back in the States which had disrupted the units and required the restarting of training programs. The recurring need for infantry replacements had, in fact, led to the decision to send to the ETO (European Theater of

Operations) the three regiments of the 70th Division, and those of the 42nd and 63rd Divisions as well, before the completion of their training. There was some mention of training's being continued for these nine regiments in the ETO where they would be more readily available in case of emergency. If that was, in fact, the plan, the emergency did occur--the Battle of the Ardennes. Thus it happened that there was little or no opportunity to resume the training--not in the sense in which the military usually applies to the term "training." However, some in the Regiment did continue to learn their combat tradecrafts, on-the-job; they learned the hard way, and fast. Many were not fast enough, unfortunately.

On 27 December, the battalions marched out of their assembly areas to their assigned sectors on the west bank of the Rhine River. On the opposite bank was the enemy, manning concrete bunkers of the Siegfried Line. They were members of the German Wehrmacht, not of the fictitious "Red Forces" encountered weeks earlier in the Leonard Wood training areas. Weapons were loaded with ball ammunition, no longer with blanks. The situation was really "tactical."

Task Force Herren comprised the three infantry regiments of the 70th Division, and it was headed up by a small staff and under the command of Brig Gen Thomas W. Herren, the 70th's Assistant Division Commander. The remaining components of the Division had stayed at Leonard Wood when the Task Force had entrained in mid-November for its Port of Embarkation, Boston. The 70th Division would not be reconstituted until February 1945, when all of its units had been reunited on the Sarre front in preparation for the drive into Saarbruecken.

In its first commitment as part of the U.S. Seventh Army, TF Herren set its command post up in Bischwiller, some 9 miles east of Brumath. On 27 December, when the Regiment moved up to relieve elements of TF Linden (42nd Division) in their defensive positions along the Rhine, two of the WRECKER battalions moved from their assembly areas in Gries to go into the line, the 2nd Battalion on the right with its CP in Bischheim, on the northern outskirts of Strasbourg, and the 3rd Battalion on the left with its CP in La Wantzenau. Moving up from Geudertheim, the 1st Battalion was in regimental reserve -- its CP was in Hoerdt.

In Geudertheim some of the C Company's doughboys had been shocked by a sudden emergency and thrilled by the quick-thinking action of their squad leader which had saved them all from probable injury, even death. Oscar Coleman, then a private in the 1st Platoon, recalled that "we were scattered in houses, with a squad of men, or thereabouts, assigned to each house. All of us carried large cargo packs, ammunition, and hand grenades in addition to our rifles. One man,

in removing his pack, pulled a grenade loose from his jacket--he had stuck it in the lapel. As the grenade came loose, the safety pin fell out and the snapping sound told the men there that the grenade would explode in 3 1/2 seconds. S Sgt Edgar E. Topp, the squad leader there, grabbed his pack and fell with it on the live grenade. It went off, but, thanks to Topp, nobody was hit. I was not in the room when it happened, but later I saw Topp's blanket which had been folded in the pack--it was in tatters. He was killed in action later."

For the next several days while WRECKER was defending along the Rhine River "passive front," things were quiet for the most part. German troops on the far side of the river were rarely observed. The Regiment's forward elements ran patrols to check west-bank areas obscured from continuing observation by its outposts. There was occasional cross-river sniping. In one unusual instance, German machine-gunners harassed a WRECKER K Co outpost with frequent bursts of fire into the house where it was located. Two men manning the outpost were kept lying on the floor, pinned down for hours. The men of I Co Weapons Platoon nearby enjoyed the hospitality of an elderly woman, who permitted them to sleep in her barn and occasionally warm themselves in her kitchen. Her plans to treat her American guests to roast goose dinner in celebration of New Year's arrival and the eviction of the "Boche" from her countryside miscarried insofar as the I Co men were concerned--they were relieved and pulled out on the eve of the feast; perhaps the relieving force enjoyed the benefits of the good Franco-American relations achieved during I Company's brief stay on the Rhine.

At Bischheim, where the 2nd Battalion set up its CP in an abandoned military hospital, the red crosses which remained on the roof were duly obliterated. The Germans across the river soon afterwards acknowledged this correct American observance of the Geneva Convention ban on the misuse of red-cross markings--by lobbing artillery rounds into the immediate area. On 27 December, WRECKER Cannon Company moved out of Weyersheim and deployed its howitzers in firing positions in the vicinity of La Wantzenau. A fire mission was received, and Capt Gordon Thomas, the company commander, sent 1st Lt Richard E. Penniman forward to climb up into a church steeple to direct the fire. The first round fired--to register the Company's guns--was claimed as having earned for the WRECKER cannoneers the honor for having sent the first 70th Division artillery shell into Germany. When the correct range to the assigned target was found, all four Cannon Company guns were fired at it. Lieutenant Penniman, in the church steeple, saw a huge explosion across the river. Evidently thus aroused, German artillery replied

firing accurately on the church and its steeple and sending Penniman scrambling down the ladder and away from the threatened building. Whatever was blown up across the Rhine was not identified with certainty--perhaps it was an enemy ammunition dump. At any rate, Col Charles S. Pettee, the regimental commander, took note of the Cannon Company's achievement by sending a bottle of spirits to Captain Thomas.

The 1st Platoon of G Company was assigned to guard a crossroads in the northern outskirts of Strasbourg--all vehicles coming to the intersection were to be stopped and scrutinized. The assignment had gone without incident until one morning when a farmer invited some of the platoon members into the courtyard of his house adjacent to the crossroads. He wanted his bull killed. T Sgt Bernard Lojko, the platoon sergeant, obliged, firing several rounds of his .45 caliber grease gun at the animal's head. The bull merely shook his head. Lojko borrowed one of his men's M-1 rifles and, with one shot, finished the job. Afterward it probably didn't take Lojko long to swap his grease gun for an M-1.

On 29 January, the 1st Battalion moved out of reserve and relieved a battalion of the 255th Infantry (Task Force Harris) on the Rhine on the Regiment's left. The 3rd Battalion's CP was moved from Hoerdt to Auenheim. During the Battalion's 2-day stay there, the members of C Co's 2nd Platoon came to recognize the "Duck Woman," so named by Broome, a sniper. There was a winding lane passing behind the 2nd Platoon foxholes which was sometimes hit in the cross-river exchange of mortar fire which developed during the 2nd Platoon's presence there. On both mornings the "Duck Woman" departed her small farmhouse on the lane and proceeded along it followed by a column of ducks in single file. The GI's would watch her and her ducks until they disappeared to the rear, ready to shout a warning to her should they hear a cough of mortar firing across the river. In the afternoon she would return at the head of her column of ducks. The Americans talked about how lucky she was, not realizing that the German mortarmen might also have found diversion from her twice-daily parade.

The next day, 30 December, the 3rd Battalion was ordered to withdraw from its positions on the Rhine. Relieved by a battalion of the 42nd Division (Task Force Linden) before dawn, it assembled at La Wantzenau and, shortly after noon, departed by motor convoy moving to Schirrhein. The 2nd Battalion, which had been in position on the 3rd Battalion's right, also withdrew from the Rhine on 30 December. The next morning it moved on foot and by truck to Camp d'Oberhoffen, on the eastern outskirts of Hagenau. The 1st Battalion remained in its Rhine line defenses one more day.

The A Company was deployed along the west bank of the Rhine at Fort Louis, a village adjacent to an ancient French fortress of the same name. The positions were a few kilometers east of Auenheim. On Sunday, 31 December, the battalion chaplain, Capt D.B. Webber, made arrangements for an evening service for the Company. Prior to the service some of the men had a laugh when an elated rifleman approached the gathering triumphantly holding aloft a rabbit he had shot. The chaplain discovered a Jewish officer in A Company who had been an organist in the States; so he sent his assistant, Cpl Eugene J. Petersen, back to Auenheim to bring the unit's portable organ to Fort Louis. On delivery, the organ was set up in a blacked-out classroom of an old schoolhouse. The chaplain's recruited organist was 2nd Lt David P. Scobey. During the previous year, he had graduated from Lehigh University, where he had been an outstanding student. Later, at Fort Benning, Scobey had so impressed the faculty of the Infantry School as a student officer that he had been offered an instructor's job. Though many young officers would have accepted this gladly, Scobey had refused it and opted for an assignment with a combat unit.

Most of the Company who were available turned out for that Sunday evening service. They sang hymns heartily, included one the soldiers' favorites, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." The chaplain spoke about Christ and His love and lined his message with hope beyond the grave. The faces of the GI's, dimly visible in the candle light, reflected the gravity of that hour. Unknown to them, the enemy's Operation NORDWIND was to strike that same night. For Lieutenant Scobey, this was to be his last time at the keyboard of an organ. Within 48 hours he was killed on a mountain northeast of Philippsbourg.

The 275th Infantry's assignment on the "passive front" was drawing to a close. All in all, those first days "in action" had been something of a let-down from what the Regiment had been psyching itself up in preparation for ever since its activation back in Oregon. There had been some patrolling, and there had been some shooting both ways, but WRECKER hadn't sustained a single combat casualty. Those who might have begun to hope that the rest of the war would be like the days just sampled were to be rudely disappointed. Those who began to wonder whether all the hard work and frustration experienced in getting ready to be combat infantrymen would go for naught, with the war winding down before the Regiment got into its first good fight, didn't have long to wait.

The average daily temperatures on the Rhine plain had ranged from 20 to 28 degrees Fahrenheit during the 5 days of the Regiment's stay.

The tempo of activity was indeed quickening. With the

U.S. Seventh Army's growing expectations that it was to be hit by a German attack there was an increasing flow of directives, and changes thereto, coming down from higher headquarters. Reflecting this, Task Force Herren on 30 December issued three different sets of orders to its infantry regiments and attached units--Field Order No. 2, an amendment to Field Order No. 2, and Field Order No. 3. The second order directed the 275th Infantry, "after being relieved by elements of Task Force Linden, to relieve the 255th Infantry and organize and defend its zone with a Main Line of Resistance along the Maginot Line" on the west bank of the Rhine. The relief of the 255th Infantry was intended to make that regiment available to bolster the Seventh Army's active front to the northwest. The third order, issued some 10 hours later, contained a significant change affecting the 275th--it too would be going to the active front. The order stated: "275th Inf, after being relieved by 274th Inf and 276th Inf, will assemble in the vicinity of Sessenheim . . . and move by motor commencing at 0800 1 Jan to an assembly area in the vicinity of Niederbronn and be attached to the 45th Div upon arrival."

The Approach of Zero-hour

The German plan for the NORDWIND offensive provided for assaults by the three corps of the First Army--XIII SS Corps to attack south through the Maginot Line in the Sarre River sector east of Saarguemines; LXXXIX Corps to attack southwest through the Low Vosges Mountains; and XC Corps to attack west out of the western slopes of the Low Vosges after penetrating the U.S. Seventh Army defenses west of Bitche. With LXXXIX Corps, the main effort was to be made by the 361st VG Division, the assignment of which was to break through the enemy main line of resistance between Eguelshardt and Hanau, rout the enemy forces in the Bannstein---Forneau-Neuf--Baerenthal triangle, and push through via Reipertswiller to the Moder River at Wimmenau. Attacking on the left of the 361st, the 256th VG Division was to push along the routes through the Low Vosges to their exits at Zinswiler, Niederbronn, and below Windstein; having reached these mountain-exit objectives, the 256th was to block any enemy attempts to send counterthrusts back along these routes. Zero-hour for the attacks by assault elements of the 361st and 256th was set for 2300, 31 December. At that time, the advance element of the LXXXIX Corps' third division--6th SS Mtn--would be just arriving in the Corps zone at the end of its long journey out of Finland. This advance element would comprise about one battalion of a special battle group organized to precede the balance of the Division and arrive in time for the NORDWIND jump-off, or as soon

thereafter as possible.

The 361st VG Division was to be committed in the same zone of action in which it had been operating for several weeks. It had been in this same general area since the beginning of December and had acquired a thorough familiarity with the Vosges terrain. Preparations by the 361st for the offensive were to include the withdrawal from the forward area of all possible combat troops for rest and training. Meanwhile minimum security forces were to be left to maintain contact with the American dispositions. In taking this measure, the German high command had been aware for several days of the absence of U.S. Seventh Army aggressiveness, and this was consistent with the German intelligence judgment that heavy reinforcements going to the Ardennes had caused weakening of the American front in this sector. By 25 December, the assignment of fortress troops to cover the 361st's front made it possible to complete the withdrawal from the front lines of all remaining combat units of the Division. Subsequently, the arrival of replacements made it possible to bring the 361st's infantry battalions up to a strength of about 400 men each.

During the last days of 1944, the 256th VG Division had been employed defending the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of Wissembourg. This followed the original commitment, in late October, of the Division in this sector--near Hagenau --and for the next several weeks it had been continuously engaged while withdrawing slowly northward under the pressure of the advancing U.S. Seventh Army. According to NORDWIND planning, the 256th was to be relieved by fortress troops in its Siegfried Line positions during the period 25-27 December. Following the relief, the Division was to march some 25-30 kilometers to rear assembly areas east of Pirmasens. This movement was completed by 30 December; meanwhile the 15-20 kilometer march to forward assembly areas had already begun, and advance elements reached march objectives during the night of 20 December. The infantry battalions of the 256th had received replacements to build them up in preparation for NORDWIND, presumably to about the same level as in the 361st VG Division. However, the 256th appears to have been less favored by circumstances with respect to the time allowed for preparation and with respect to its dispositions--the 256th closed into its forward assembly areas after extensive (2 to 3 days) marching only to move almost immediately into the attack.

In connection with its move from northern Scandinavia, the 6th SS Mtn Division was, before it was assigned to NORDWIND, destined for employment in the Ardennes offensive. However, many delays caused by actions of Allied air, naval, and resistance/special forces made it necessary to change the plans for the Division's employment in the Bulge. On 21

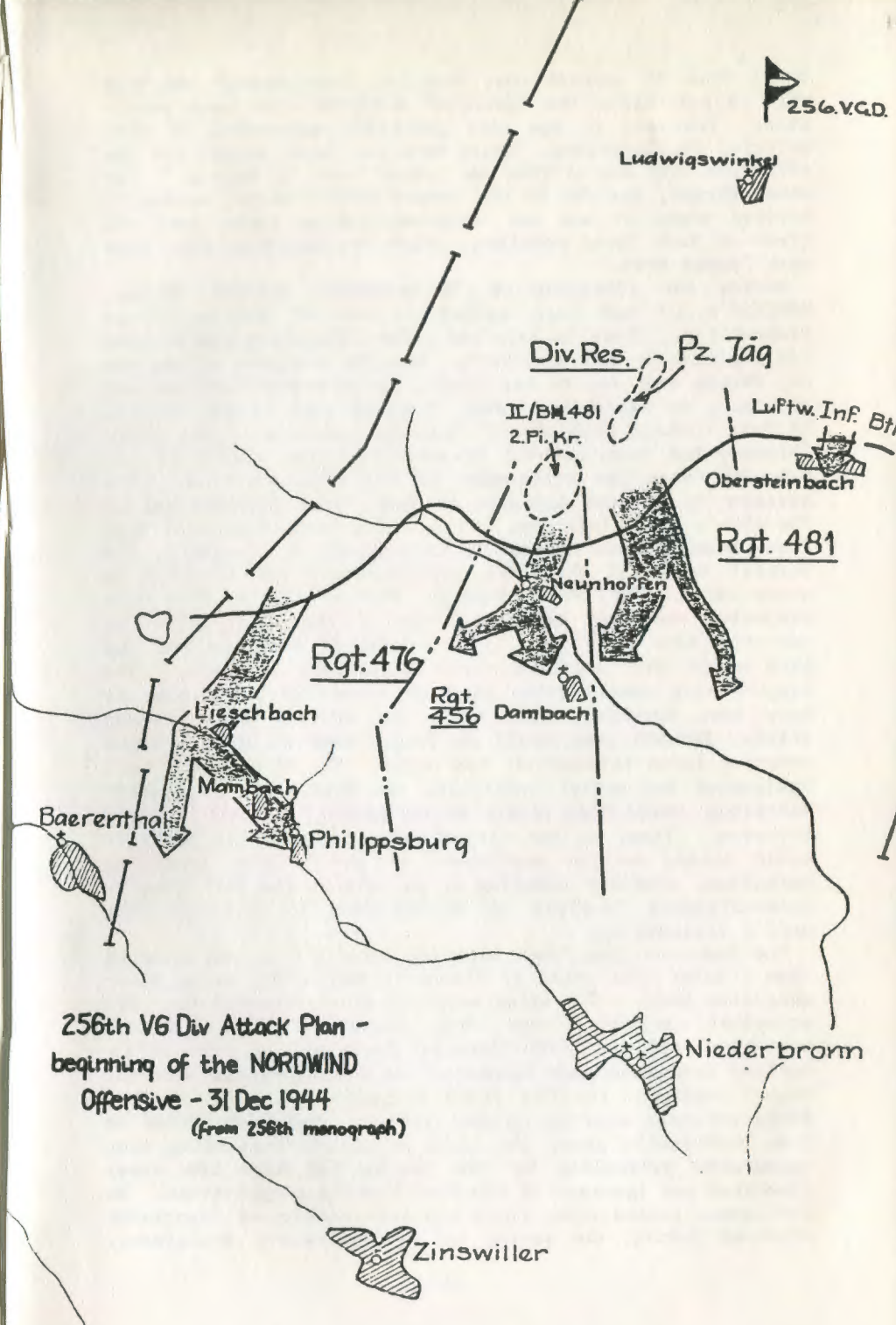
December, the 6th SS Mtn was ordered to organize a battle group to be rushed to the sector where NORDWIND was to take place. The battle group was to be composed of divisional components which had already arrived in Denmark. Consequently it included three battalions--two infantry and one artillery--as its primary elements. Under command of the CO, 12th Mtn Regiment, its first elements arrived on 30 December at the French-German border just north of the U.S. Seventh Army Front. The balance of the Division's elements would continue to arrive up until mid-January 1945 and be immediately committed in the eastern salient ("Bitche Salient") caused by NORDWIND. It was reportedly fit and at its full strength of 15,000 men. Having been uniformly successful in its operations on the Eastern Front, the morale of the 6th SS Mtn Division was high.

In preparing for NORDWIND, the German commanders took many precautions to preserve the secrecy of the intended offensive; they regarded the achievement of surprise as absolutely essential to give the operation any chance of success. Prior to 31 December, only top general staff officers were briefed on the plans. Within the 361st VG Division, the preparatory arrangements for the operation were explained to unwitting divisional personnel as being connected with the planned commitment of the Division elsewhere. No local reconnaissance was permitted until after dark on 31 December. Within the 256th VG Division, the movement of troops from the Siegfried Line to the attack sector was similarly explained as being to reach entrainment points for transfer to another sector. Later, when the movement by elements of the 256th to their forward assembly areas was ordered, the explanation given was that an American attack in the sector of the 361st VG Division was expected and a corresponding counterattack was planned. Regimental commanders were not briefed on the Division's mission and on their own regiments' assignments until the morning of 31 December; battalion and company commanders, not until that afternoon. For terrain familiarization purposes, briefings were provided to 256th troop leaders by selected personnel from the 361st in lieu of any advance reconnaissance (which, as it actually happened, lack of time would have prevented anyway.)

Within the sector of the 361st VG Division, the Americans were believed to have deployed only limited forces. Troops of the U.S. 100th Division barely reached the 361st's right boundary, the balance of the 100th being further west. An American reconnaissance battalion was identified as being immediately opposite the 361st. In the 256th VG Div sector, the American main line of resistance was believed to run through Leischbach (north of Philippsbourg) to Dambach. Forward of this line there were American defensive outposts and mobile security detachments. There had been little

American patrol activity in recent days. Meanwhile, their air operations had been focused on the strategic rear and had left the forward area pretty much alone. The German estimates were that the Americans would concentrate their forces in well fortified strongpoints, taking advantage of favorable terrain to block the routes through the mountains. Accordingly, the German planners designed the operations to ensure the seizure of strongpoints in order to open up the routes thus protected, along which routes heavy guns and supplies could then be brought up. The concept of this offensive provided for initially penetrating the American main line of resistance by infiltration and envelopment and afterwards reducing strongpoints individually by well planned assaults. Once the penetration was accomplished, forces would be quickly concentrated and pushed deeper into the American strategic rear. For the infiltration phase, the German plan envisioned a series of independent operations by reinforced battalions. For the follow-up, exploitation phase, it was anticipated that regimental commanders would direct tactical operations having reestablished firm control over their battalions.

Over on the American side, precautions were being taken as a consequence of intelligence estimates which saw the good likelihood of a German attack against the Seventh Army front. Already mentioned has been Task Force Herren's own redeployment along the Rhine to relieve Task Force Harris (63rd Division) of its river defense assignment thus making it available as a reserve force for the U.S. VI Corps. A Sixth Army Group letter on 28 December confirmed its Commanding General's (CG) earlier oral directive prescribing successive withdrawal positions which Seventh Army elements would occupy in defending against the prospective German offensive. On that same day, the 45th Division issued orders for its regiments to organize a main line of resistance along the Maginot Line which could be occupied should a withdrawal be ordered. On 30 December Sixth Army Group sent a radio message to Seventh Army: "It is possible that a hostile attack against your flank west of Bitche may force you to give ground from your main position . . ." Consequently, VI Corps alerted the 14th Armored Division to be prepared to counterattack against a possible breakthrough in the XV Corps sector (west of Bitche). Two Task Force Harris infantry regiments were moved further over to the XV Corps sector to bolster the two front-line divisions covering the threatened area. Too, the 275th Infantry's move from the Rhine passive front into the Low Vosges was such a precaution. On New Year's Eve, Lt Gen Alexander M. Patch, Seventh Army commander, went to the XV Corps command post, where he told the XV and VI corps commanders that an enemy attack was expected during the early hours of New Year's



Day. Thus it appears that American intelligence had been able to anticipate the timing of NORDWIND with some precision. However, it was only partially successful in pinpointing the locations. There were two focal points for the offensive, and one of them was indeed "west of Bitche." The other thrust, the one by the German LXXXIX Corps, evidently arrived where it was not expected--coming right into the lines of Task Force Hudelson, which the American side knew were "paper thin."

During the afternoon of 30 December, Colonel Pettee, WRECKER's CO had been called to the TF Herren CP at Bischwiller. There he received orders directing him to move his regiment to the northwest. When he returned to his own CP, Pettee sent two of his staff, his executive officer and adjutant, to Baerenthal, some 25 miles away in the Vosges, to make contact with the TF Hudelson commander. The 275th Infantry had been ordered to move into the sector of the U.S. VI Corps for attachment to the 45th Division. Its mission--to relieve elements of Task Force Hudelson and of the 45th's 157th Infantry. While the relief of part of Task Force Hudelson was ordered to take place on 1 January, the partial relief of the 157th was evidently not intended to occur until later, on 3 January. What appears to have been projected was that two battalions of the 275th would be inserted into the front line between TF Hudelson and the 45th while they relieved flank battalions of each. The step-by-step deactivation of Task Force Hudelson seems to have been intended, for, with the arrival of a German attack, Seventh Army could no longer make do with a light covering force between its two corps. The TF Hudelson unit designated for relief initially, the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion, would then revert to its parent, the 14th Armored Division. Then, as the situation warranted, 45th Division would decide on the employment of the 275th's remaining battalion, possibly ordering it to relieve the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron of TF Hudelson to continue that unit's dismantling.

The Hudelson group was deployed with its sector running from a point just south of Bitche to Neunhoffen on an east-west line about 2 1/2 miles north of its Baerenthal CP. Its principal components were Combat Command R (less one tank battalion) of the 14th Armored Division and the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. At his Baerenthal CP, Col Daniel Hudelson, the Task Force commander, received the two 275th officers sent by Colonel Pettee. Hudelson talked to them confidently about the local situation indicating that aggressive patrolling by his troops had kept the enemy flustered and ignorant of the Task Force's dispositions. As for German initiatives, there had been nothing of importance observed during the period of TF Hudelson's deployment.

Hudelson noted that his forces were pretty widely distributed and expressed disappointment at having been denied permission to make local attacks to straighten out and shorten his line. While he was undoubtedly aware of the intended deactivation of his task force and of Seventh Army's expectation of an enemy attack, he gave no indication of awareness at that time that his own defensive sector might be directly involved.

Starting the 275th's movement in truck convoys from the Rhine plain, the battalion in the lead was the 3rd. It had moved into regimental reserve 2 days before, when WRECKER had shifted north and relieved a TF Harris regiment on the Rhine defensive line. The convoy's departure on New Year's Eve was from Schirrhein at 2030 -- any impromptu GI rituals that might have been started were thus disrupted. As the NORDWIND Zero-hour had drawn nigh, indications of its imminence were accumulating in intelligence centers within the U.S. Seventh Army, and these evoked increasingly frequent countermoves. Originally, the 275th Infantry had been instructed to start its movement to join the 45th Division at 0800, 1 January. The accelerating American activity in anticipation of the German attack thus was responsible for a speeding-up by a half day of the Regiment's departure from the Rhine plain. The trucks carrying the 3rd Battalion came to a halt in Niederbronn, and its companies dismounted and moved into the doubtful shelter of an iron foundry's war-blasted buildings on the northwest edge of the town.

Meanwhile, the 2nd and 1st battalions had assembled for entrucking at Sessenheim (east of Hagenau), and their motor convoys followed the 3rd Battalion's route to the northwest. The 2nd Battalion arrived at the northwest Niederbronn foundry well after midnight, and the 1st Battalion, bringing up the rear, detrucked in the next town back along the route, Reichshoffen, where it moved into buildings of a wire factory. The three WRECKER battalions and other elements of the Regiment which arrived that night bivouaced at these two detrucking points. Emplacements of big artillery guns were no more than a stone's throw away from the two locations. By the time the WRECKER battalions arrived at their bivouac sites, the nearby guns had opened fire in reaction to the arrival of the enemy's offensive. The coughing and roaring of the big guns were added to the conditions in the drafty factory buildings to make sleep on that tense, wintry night almost impossible.

The 3rd Battalion's command group included Maj William K. Shepherd, the battalion commander; Capt Harry W. Severance, operations officer (S-3); Capt Hunter A. Copeland, adjutant (S-1); and the commanders of I, K, L, and M companies. The group had left Schirrhein at 1600 (31 December) and moved by jeep northwest through Niederbronn to arrive after dark at

Philippsbourg, 5 kilometers beyond.

Passing through Niederbronn, Shepherd and his party had entered the mouth of a defile through the Low Vosges Mountains, whose formidable ridges and mounts, set in sub-freezing temperatures, would for the next 2 weeks, combine with the efforts of a determined enemy to provide a stern trial of the Regiment's fortitude and resourcefulness. WRECKER's blocking of that defile at Philippsbourg (and of the one further west at Baerenthal) was to provide an important check to the successful execution of the enemy's plans. Initially, the Germans would probe WRECKER defenses of both defiles, seeking a soft spot; later, as NORDWIND thrusts further south were blunted, the Germans would shift their center of gravity to focus on the left wing of the 275th front, first attempting to move around the open American flank, then to punch directly through the defile itself.

CHAPTER II

The Arrival of NORDWIND

Monday, 1 Jan (-3 to +7 degrees, Fahr.)

The night was clear and starry and favored the attacker. On the left of the German LXXXIX Corps, the 256th VG Division's advance had its 476th Grenadier Regiment on the right. One reinforced battalion initially overcame the weak resistance of American outposts, then advanced laboriously through the rugged, pathless woodland north of Lieschbach, to the northwest of Philippsbourg. Arriving exhausted before Lieschbach at dawn, the assault battalion moved out of the approach march into an attack on the hamlet. It was repulsed. Waiting before Lieschbach for the arrival of the remainder of the Regiment, the assault battalion sent a small detachment to bypass Lieschbach to the west and onward to make contact with 361st VG Division elements, which were advancing on the right toward the Zintzel creek valley, in which Baerenthal is situated. At noon 476th elements resumed the assault on Lieschbach and finally took the place at dusk after a seesaw house-to-house fight. A strong reconnaissance patrol was sent at once toward Philippsbourg; the patrol returned to report that Philippsbourg was occupied by a strong American infantry force supported by tanks.

In the 256th VG Division center, the 456th Grenadier Regiment sent elements forward toward the initial objective--Neunhoffen. The objective was taken on schedule. The American defenders made a fighting withdrawal; then they placed artillery fire on Neunhoffen and counterattacked several times, putting heavy pressure on 456th troops there. Meanwhile, a 456th combat patrol was sent over the mountains from Neunhoffen toward Philippsbourg to clear the intervening ground and contact 476th elements on the right. The results of this patrol's mission went unreported.

The Division's third regiment--the 481st Grenadiers--and an attached Luftwaffe infantry battalion were employed on the 256th VG Division left. Their initial assaults on Dambach ran into difficulties against the American 45th Division defenses.

As mentioned previously, the main effort of the German LXXXIX Corps was assigned to the 361st VG Division. With the coming of Zero-hour, advance elements of the Division had been everywhere successful in arriving at jump-off points without being detected and advanced past American outposts without firing a shot. On the Division left, however, elements of the 952nd Infantry soon afterward became involved in a battle at Bannstein. The engagement continued there until dawn (1 January), when, with the aid of supporting fires of heavier guns brought up, Bannstein was taken. Elsewhere 952nd groups were more successful in reaching their objectives, arriving at them during darkness without becoming engaged with the Americans. In this manner they occupied the high ground north of Fischerhof and Baerenthal, which, patrols discovered, were held in strength. From this point the assault elements, after awaiting the arrangement of artillery support, were able to take Fischerhof at 1400 and Thalhausen at 1600. Baerenthal fell somewhat later after five assault guns had been brought up to support the attack, made on three sides of the village. The 953rd Infantry followed behind the 952nd, passing through it at Fischerhof and continuing the advance toward Reipertswiller. New Year's Day ended with the Division having executed its operations according to plan.

The leading elements of the 6th SS Mtn Division--in the strength of one reinforced battalion--were attached to the 361st when they arrived in the forward area. They began assembling in the vicinity of Melch (southwest of Baerenthal).

Major Shepherd and his 3rd Battalion command group arrived at Philippsbourg at 2100 hours and went to the CP of the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion, the unit that the 3rd Battalion was to relieve. Shepherd and his officers immediately went into a conference with the 62nd's staff. There was a brief interruption while a telephone report from one of the forward companies of the 62nd was received. It indicated that a 12-man enemy patrol, accompanied by a dog, had been spotted as it infiltrated between that company's outposts. The event was considered unusual compared with the general passiveness of the enemy observed over the previous several days. Following the conference, at which arrangements for the 3rd Battalion's relief of the 62nd early the next morning were discussed and agreed to, the members of the 3rd Battalion party dispersed to carry out their individual tasks prescribed by relief procedures.

In this regard, Garnet Oliver, M Co CO, recalls that "After the meeting in Philippsbourg involving 3rd Battalion and 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion officers, Bill Long (I Co CO) took off with one of their officers. I don't know what happened to Brown (K Co CO) and White (L Co CO). I met with the 62nd's weapons CO, looked at his dispositions, and

wondered how I could replace his weapons with mine in the positions they were occupying--Shepherd's orders. They were all over the map because of their mobility. I told the 62nd officer I would get my platoon leaders up and coordinate the relief. He agreed." The problem confronting the 3rd Battalion, of relieving an armored infantry battalion, with organization, weaponry, and operating concepts which differed from those of a regular infantry battalion, was resolved by events during the next several hours. The relief as planned at the Philippsbourg conference didn't take place.

Well after dark, New Year's Eve, I Co's commander, Capt William T. Long, his driver, and a T5 gunner departed Philippsbourg in a jeep to contact Company C of the 62nd Armored Infantry. The gunner was there to serve a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on the jeep, and having it available was comforting even though Long and his men had no inkling that they were moving into an area soon to be overrun by German attackers. Long was, of course, aware of the German patrol which was reportedly on the loose somewhere behind the 62nd's forwardmost positions. The I Co CO's mission was to reconnoiter the 62nd's C Co positions in preparation for relief of this TF Hudelson element.

Long remembers that "The road was mountainous, snow-covered, rough, and unusually crooked. We arrived at the Co C CP, which occupied a very large, two-story stone house with an enormous basement, at about 2230. As I was entering the CP, my driver and T5 gunner took leave to 'take care of the jeep' and said they would return in 30 or 40 minutes." Long joined the C Co commander in a New Year's Eve drink, something he badly needed after the long, cold ride in his open jeep, and saw to it that his two men got their braces when they returned from their mission. Long's account continues: "At exactly midnight a noisy firefight broke out in the Co C forward area. A platoon leader from a forward position called the company commander on the phone and reported that the enemy, in all-white uniforms, is advancing on our positions under cover of heavy smallarms and machine-gun fire. The Co C CO directed his lieutenant to 'blow them to hell.'" Having said this, the Hudelson officer moved his operation to the basement, which offered better protection against shellfire. In light of the latest developments, the shelling of the CP by the enemy had become a very good possibility.

Long did not follow the Co C officer to the basement, having decided to go forward to see for himself what was going on. He and his two men started toward the sounds of the firing. However, the three WRECKER men didn't get far before running into a mass of American soldiers in full retreat. As Long recalls it, "We immediately saw the hope-

lessness of the situation and turned back toward the stone house CP. The whole countryside was aflame, and it was almost like daylight from burning barns, small houses, and fences. We reached the CP, which had been almost filled by retreating soldiers. Inside men had occupied the many large windows on both floors and they were firing in the direction of the bonfires before which enemy soldiers were silhouetted. My two men had their own M-1's, and I had a .45 pistol and a 'puny little carbine.' I set the carbine aside and borrowed an M-1 from a wounded soldier. There was a great stock of ammunition and grenades in the basement, and we organized a carrying party to keep us supplied.

"The fight became less intense but continued until well after daylight, when friendly troops with medics and supplies moved up behind our building in weapons carriers. The newly arrived soldiers immediately set up machine guns at the rear corners of the stone house and began rapid fire to the front and flanks." The Long account goes on to describe the abandonment of the stone house when it became evident that it could be held no longer. The wounded were first evacuated covered by machine guns at the rear of the house. "The machine gunners at the house corners kept up their firing until all wounded were loaded into the weapons carriers. The carriers were just beginning to move out when an 88 hit from a distant tank took part of the roof off the former CP." At this the remaining defenders departed the stone house in a scramble. Long and his men joined in this exodus and set off on foot down the road which had brought them from Philippsbourg the night before. Shortly the driver and gunner located the jeep where they had concealed it; the three of them mounted up and continued the journey to Philippsbourg, the road to which was now lined with Americans retreating in apparent disorder. The Long group was to arrive back in Philippsbourg at around 1600, 1 January.

Back at Schirrhein the day before, the men of K Company and the rest of the Regiment had received a PX ration, including beer. According to the K Co history, "Kingsmen" by Sgt Marion D. Ross, everyone in the company got set to have a good time New Year's Eve when the orders came to move. K Company, along with the rest of the 3rd Battalion, departed Schirrhein by truck at 2230 and moved into the Vosges Mountains region to the northwest. Reaching Niederbronn in the middle of the night, they moved into the buildings of an iron foundry and bivouaced for the balance of the night. An account by Elmer F. Martin, an I Company rifleman, describes happenings at the Niederbronn foundry: "That night, after much milling around, hurrying, and waiting, we were to bed down in an abandoned factory, something like an iron foundry. We sat around in groups and talked some about New Year's Eves in other years. How does one toast the New Year

thousands of miles from home, with the sound of guns booming in the distance, wondering what the next day will bring or whether he'll live to see another New Year's Eve? Well, one way is to shake hands with your buddies and wish them good luck and pass around a bottle of bourbon filched from some officer's musette bag. Days before, some of the men had been assigned the duty of carrying the officers' gear from the ship during the debarkation at Marseilles. A tell-tale bulge in the musette bag had proved to be a fifth of whisky which had been transferred to this GI's person."

Back in Niederbronn, just prior to daybreak, the 3rd Battalion executive officer, Maj Robert F. O'Donnell, oversaw the assembling and entrucking of the Battalion. The truck column moved out on the road to Philippsbourg. It halted one kilometer short of that place, and the Battalion dispersed into company assembly areas on both sides of the road. During the night, the temperature had fallen from a high on New Year's Eve of 14 degrees Fahrenheit to -3 degrees at dawn.

The Revision of WRECKER Deployment Plans

At about 1000 on New Year's Day, Colonel Pettee arrived in Philippsbourg and met with his 3rd and 2nd battalion commanders and members of their staffs at an OP on the outskirts of the village. He had probably stopped at the 45th Division command post (Langensoultzbach) on his way from the Rhine to the Philippsbourg meeting and received new instructions concerning the deployment of his regiment. The German attacks during the night had compelled the 45th Division to make changes in operations plans which affected all three WRECKER battalions. Accordingly, Pettee briefed his two battalion commanders on the situation as well as he knew it and issued fragmentary orders to them. The 3rd Battalion would remain in its assembly area outside Philippsbourg and be prepared to relieve the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion on command. In this regard, the 45th Division G-3 (chief of operations) had prescribed that the division commander would have to approve the Battalion's go-ahead with this relief. Pettee ordered Lt Col George A. Barten, his 2nd Battalion commander, to move his battalion to Baerenthal via Zinswiler. Barten himself was to go to the Baerenthal CP of Task Force Hudelson and report to its CO. The further commitment of the 2nd Battalion was to be influenced by instructions received from the Task Force commander in Baerenthal. Earlier in the day Barten had moved his battalion out of the Niederbronn foundry complex to the northwest edge of town. There the companies had dispersed on the north side of the road to Philippsbourg and dug in.

The German attacks had hit Task Force Hudelson hard. On

the left and in the center of its sector, outposts of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and of the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron were bypassed and then assaulted by battalion-size groups of two German divisions. Soon after, most of the American cavalymen were driven back from their positions, leaving the left flank of the 62nd Armored Infantry exposed. The 62nd's left received the full brunt of the 361st VG Division's main effort but gave a good account of itself before being forced to retreat from Bannstein at dawn. The center and right of the Battalion's front were able to hold their main positions for the most part through noon of New Year's Day, although its A Company was forced back from Neunhoffen. In general, the Battalion was unable to prevent enemy infiltration in large numbers through gaps between its main positions.

At the outset of the NORDWIND assault, the Task Force Hudelson commander quickly realized that his lightly manned front had been hit by strong enemy forces, and he sent a call for reinforcements to VI Corps. At 0435 a VI Corps telephone call to the 45th Division G-3 had revealed the depth of the German penetration, presumably reported shortly before by Colonel Hudelson--to within 500 yards of the Baerenthal-Mouterhouse road along both roads running south from Bannstein. Evidently the enemy had bypassed the 62nd defenders of Bannstein. The VI Corps telephone call had also indicated that the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion had been detached from the 14th Armored Division and sent forward to bolster the Hudelson defenses. In addition, a company of medium tanks of the 25th Tank Battalion was being sent as reinforcements. The news of the serious threat to Baerenthal received from VI Corps may have led to the 45th Division commander's decision causing the 275th 2nd Battalion to be committed there.

A little later, about an hour before daybreak, Major Shepherd speaking from the 62nd CP in Philippsbourg, called the 45th Division G-3. Shepherd's calling the 45th Division directly was his only recourse since he had no contact with his own commander nor with his commander's staff. Shepherd indicated that the 62nd's battalion commander was asking for help and requested permission to commit his battalion, or some part of it, to bolster the 62nd's shaky lines. After discussing Shepherd's request with VI Corps, the 45th G-3 responded to Shepherd instructing him to do everything necessary to carry out, when ordered to do so, the expeditious relief of the 62nd. He was not, however, to commit any of his battalion at that time. This had been the occasion for Shepherd's ordering his battalion moved forward from Niederbronn to its assembly area outside of Philippsbourg. As part of that movement, the 3rd Battalion's CP was displaced forward from Niederbronn and set up temporarily on the road

to Philippsbourg in the midst of its companies dispersed on both sides of the road.

It should be noted that the 45th Division command post was rapidly becoming the center controlling all defensive operations at the tip and along the east side of the salient that was gradually taking form--the consequence of the penetrations being achieved by the enemy's battalions and regiments in executing the NORDWIND offensive plans. Thus the 45th's CP was dealing with the offensive actions of the entire German LXXXIX Corps and of part of the XC Corps on the right of LXXXIX Corps. In addition to its own three infantry regiments, the 45th's commanding general had at his disposal the following infantry components: 275th Infantry, 313th Infantry (less its 3rd Battalion), 1st Battalion/314th Infantry, 1st Battalion/315th Infantry, and 36th Engineer Regiment--all of these having been attached by VI Corps to the 45th Division. The 276th Infantry would be added to the list within a few hours, as would the 274th Infantry a day or so later. In addition, the 45th Division G-3 was keeping a watchful eye on the situation of Task Force Hudelson, which remained under command of VI Corps, as the hard-pressed Task Force struggled to maintain its integrity a few more hours while higher headquarters decided about and found means for replacing it in the line.

In discussions during the first two hours after daybreak on New Year's Day, the commanders of VI Corps and 45th Division came to the conclusion that a defensive line should be established "around Baerenthal-Philippsbourg-Dambach." The 45th Division's 157th Infantry had been able to hold Dambach on the eastern shoulder of the salient without much difficulty. To the west, the American 100th Division was holding fast in the vicinity of Bitché. It was in the 10-mile-wide zone between these two points where NORDWIND successes during the first 24 hours of the offensive were causing much disorder on the American situation maps. The defensive dike had to be rebuilt, and the first segment singled out was to be precisely where WRECKER was being committed. The two critical points on the new segment would be Philippsbourg and Baerenthal, in adjacent mountain defiles.

Regarding the situation in Baerenthal, the commitment prior to dawn of an armored infantry battalion and a company of Sherman tanks to reinforce Task Force Hudelson had resulted in the sending of A Company/19th Armored Infantry Battalion and two medium-tank platoons from the 25th Tank Battalion toward Baerenthal. There they were to join C Company/62nd Armored Infantry Battalion, which had withdrawn to Baerenthal earlier that morning from Bannstein. A third platoon of medium tanks was sent to Philippsbourg, where it would, some 24 hours later, assist in the extrication of the two other 62nd companies from positions north and northeast

of that village. Late in the morning, the 19th's A Company, attempting to push its way into Baerenthal, got caught up in the swirling battle to the west of the village, became disorganized, and had to withdraw to Forneau-Neuf.

Prior to noon, VI Corps seems to have assigned to 45th Division some responsibility with respect to Task Force Hudelson--at least for assisting it in its disengagement and withdrawal. At 1150 a 45th G-3 liaison officer at the Task Force's CP in Baerenthal called his G-3 requesting that reinforcements be sent there and reporting the "CP pretty well surrounded, and there's plenty of smallarms and machine-gun fire" around Baerenthal. In this regard, the G-3 stated, "We're sending all of the 275th Infantry at once. One battalion is on the Zinswiller road to where you are. One of its battalions is in Philippsbourg and will go due north. The third battalion is in Niederbronn to reinforce either of the 275th's other two battalions." The G-3 also instructed his liaison officer to call the 62nd Armored Infantry commander and have him "relieve those people as soon as he can." The G-3's intent here was not entirely clear--presumably the 62nd's commander was to arrange a relief of his companies north of Philippsbourg by elements of the 275th's 3rd Battalion. A few minutes later, Colonel Hudelson called the G-3 to report that he was unable to contact his 62nd commander--his line to Philippsbourg was out. Evidently, no instruction conveying the 45th commander's authorization--as had been indicated by the G-3--for the 275th's 3rd Battalion to be committed could have reached Major Shepherd in Philippsbourg since he was dependent on the 62nd's communications at that time.

A half hour later Colonel Hudelson advised the G-3 that he still had no communications with his battalion in Philippsbourg. Hudelson suggested that he could get his CP and forces out of Baerenthal if a rifle company could be gotten there to cover the withdrawal. The G-3's response contained some modification of the 45th's plans for employing the 275th Infantry: "The battalion at Philippsbourg is to be used in the 62nd's sector. In the vicinity of your CP (Baerenthal), the other battalion will move to the left half of your sector. The third battalion will be used to counter-attack to the north." Again there was some ambiguity, but it appears that the 45th's plans now envisioned something more than simply defending the line "Baerenthal-Philippsbourg-Dambach," as VI Corps and 45th Division had agreed early that morning. Clearly, a movement by the 275th's 2nd Battalion from Baerenthal west in the direction of Mouterhouse and, perhaps, beyond Mouterhouse was intended. Less clear were the 45th's plans, as expressed by the G-3, for the employment of the 275th's 3rd and 1st battalions. At the end of the conversation, Hudelson indicated his estimate

of where the enemy main effort was being expended--along two north-south roads, one running through Bannstein, the other skirting Lake Hanau, northwest of Philippsbourg.

At noon it had been evident that the 45th Division staff was not certain where the WRECKER CP was located and was not in contact with Colonel Pettee or any of his regimental staff. This confusion was due to NORDWIND disruption of American plans; the original destination for WRECKER CP at the completion of the Regiment's movement from the Rhine had been Baerenthal, but the threat to that village that had developed that morning had made it necessary to select a location further back--Niederbronn. The change was made by a 275th staff officer while the regimental commander had still not arrived from the Rhine. Colonel Pettee would discover the change when he came upon the relocated CP on his way up to Philippsbourg mid-morning.

At 1300 the G-3 instructed the 179th Infantry, one of the 45th Division regiments, to send trucks it was using back to Niederbronn, where they were to be used for transporting the 275th's 2nd Battalion to Baerenthal. This was, as the G-3 said, "a rush job, and we want to help them (2nd Battalion) in any way we can. The 275th's commanding officer won't know these vehicles are coming as we are out of communications with them. So tell him to use the trucks if he can. If not, bring them back here to the command post at Langensoultzbach."

A half hour later, the G-3 received a telephone call from one of his liaison officers who had located the WRECKER CP in Niederbronn. Using the telephone at the 45th Division's rest hotel in Niederbronn, he informed the G-3 that the 275th's 2nd Battalion would be ready in one hour for movement by truck from Niederbronn to Baerenthal. He relayed to the G-3 WRECKER's expressed urgent need to establish liaison with its supporting artillery. The G-3 responded: "An artillery liaison officer is on his way to report now. There are 18 trucks coming from the 179th Infantry, and these will report to the 275th commander. Right now they are moving some of the 179th to Windstein--so you might have them (the 275th) pick them up there." The WRECKER request for contact with its supporting artillery indicated an embarrassment that the 275th Infantry and its two sister regiments would experience for the next 5 weeks. Aside from that provided by their own cannon companies, the Task Force Herren infantry regiments would be operating during this period with such artillery support as was temporarily assigned to them. Lacking would be the smooth working relationships developed among the regular components of each regimental combat team within the infantry division.

At 1340 the G-3's liaison officer in Baerenthal reported that the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion had radioed that it

was pulling its CP out of Philippsbourg, evidently under the threat of approaching enemy armor. He said that a platoon of medium tanks was being sent to meet the Panzer threat.

At 1530, Task Force Hudelson informed the G-3 that it was moving its CP from Baerenthal to Reipertswiller. It noted that the 275th's 2nd Battalion had not yet "closed in the assembly area here." Thirty minutes later the 45th Reconnaissance Troop's CO notified the G-3 that the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion still had its CP in Philippsbourg and had two of its companies to the northeast of Philippsbourg but had lost contact with its third company, C Company. That was the company that had withdrawn from Bannstein to Baerenthal.

The 45th G-3 still had no telephone contact with WRECKER CP at 1630. At that time he phoned his liaison officer at the Niederbronn rest hotel and told him to get instructions to the 275th's 3rd Battalion in Philippsbourg to send patrols out to contact 62nd front-line elements and report the patrols' findings back to G-3.

At 1715, the 45th Division's artillery commander called G-3 asking about the situation in Baerenthal. "I want to put some interdiction fire in there, but I can't unless I know just where those (275th 2nd Battalion) people are." The G-3 answered that the 275th was "out of contact with its forward elements, but we believe they have all-around positions at Baerenthal. They have elements about Philippsbourg also. The road to the town is open, but enemy armor has been reported 2 miles to the north of Philippsbourg." The G-3's belief that 2nd Battalion had arrived and was in position around Baerenthal was overly optimistic.

A few minutes afterwards came the first direct telephonic contact between the 275th Infantry's CP and the 45th G-3 section. Maj Clifford E. Dykes, WRECKER S-3 (operations officer), called and confirmed the information that the G-3 had just given to the artillery commander--Dykes had no contact with either 3rd or 2nd Battalion. He noted that Colonel Pettee was in the forward area and would report on the situation there as soon as he returned to Niederbronn. At 1740, the G-3 called Major Dykes and notified him that an enemy counterattack was expected at Baerenthal that night and instructed him to have the 2nd Battalion well prepared for this contingency.

At 1755 VI Corps notified the 45th G-3 of a new threat which was to have considerable impact on the left flank of the 275th's defensive sector. A report had been received of a 500-man enemy force seen headed south toward Reipertswiller from the road junction one mile west from Baerenthal. As a consequence, two battalions of the 313th Infantry were to be hurried to Reipertswiller to meet the threat. They would be ordered to attack north from Reipertswiller, one of

the attack's objectives being the closure of the gap which NORDWIND had opened just west of Baerenthal. The reported enemy force could have earlier constituted part of the threat at Baerenthal against which the G-3, only 15 minutes before, had warned the 275th.

There occurred yet another incident to demonstrate how confusion was being caused by the rapidly changing situation--one in which WRECKER was struggling to get its communications established but not getting the job done fast enough. At 2205, the G-3 received a call from the 45th's 157th Infantry and was told that a visitor from the 275th Infantry shortly before had informed the 157th staff that a 275th battalion would on 2 January be relieving the 157th's 2nd Battalion, the 45th's left-flank battalion in position near Dambach. The indicated relief had been, of course, part of the original 45th Division plan regarding the employment of the 275th, but NORDWIND had caused that plan to be scrapped. The 157th caller appeared to be unaware that the plan had ever existed, and it was apparent too that someone in the 275th hadn't gotten word of the plan's cancellation. There is no evidence specifying what element of the 275th the visitor to the 157th may have represented, but most likely it was the 1st Battalion; both of the other two battalions had already been committed against the attacking NORDWIND formations. The G-3 responded to the 157th caller indicating that a change in plans had canceled the intended relief of the 2nd Battalion/157th by a 275th battalion. As he stated it, "Those people are not to relieve your 2nd battalion--they have a bigger job. Tell them to contact their headquarters and get the correct information."

Just prior to midnight, the 45th Reconnaissance Troop's patrol in Philippsbourg reported the following unit locations to G-3: K Co/275th, on the Bitche road from Philippsbourg, 500 yards southeast of Lieschbach; L Co/275th, about half way between Philippsbourg and Baerenthal, 500 yards north of the connecting road between those two villages; A Co/62nd, one-half mile northeast of Philippsbourg; B Co/62nd, in the vicinity of the height Falkenberg on the north side of the Neunhoffer road, one mile from Philippsbourg; C Co/62nd, en route to Zinswiller from Baerenthal. (The recorded position for I Co/275th is patently erroneous, and, for that reason, it is not cited here. The wartime after-action reports and currently kept journals are unedited.)

The 313th Infantry had been tasked to meet the new enemy threat, the one moving in the direction of Reipertswiller. Assigned by the 45th Division G-3, the 313th mission was to attack north from a point south of Reipertswiller toward Eguelshardt, its objective, which was on the Philippsbourg-Bitche road about midway between these two

places. The Baerenthal-Mouterhouse road was designated the line of departure for the 313th's attack. The Regiment had two battalions available for the job, its 1st and 2nd. One had about 125 effectives; the other, 400 effectives--in all, much less than one full-strength infantry battalion.

At 1935 on New Year's Day both 313th battalions were at Reichshoffen, southeast of Niederbronn. That night, one of the battalions was moved by truck to an assembly area south of Reipertswiller. The other was sent along the next morning. Although the 313th regimental commander was under pressure to start his advance as soon as his lead battalion was in position, he informed the 45th Division G-3 that he intended to begin reconnoitering and other preparations for the advance only when daylight arrived the next morning. He was concerned about lack of contact with friendly troops on both flanks and lack of information about the enemy he would confront. Two of WRECKER's battalions were in much the same circumstances further north.

A history of WRECKER 3rd Battalion's combat experiences was done by two NCO's of that battalion, Robert W. Roti and Gaylord L. Reaser, while the 70th Division was on postwar occupation duty in Germany. The account reflects the scene in Philippsbourg and unconnected events there early on New Year's Day which were to provide the 3rd Battalion command group their first impressions of the realities of combat. Referring to the German patrol a report about which had been received during joint command conference, the account notes: "In the early morning hours, further information came back regarding the firing on this patrol and the capture of one man, who was later brought back for interrogation. In the cold, gray streaks of dawn that seemed to come just a bit earlier because of the deep snow that lay like a blanket over the Vosges on that never-to-be-forgotten New Year's Day, the four company commanders had taken off for a ground reconnaissance of the positions to which their respective companies were to be committed. Lt Florentine J. Brown, K Co CO; Capt John P. Major, L Co CO, and Capt Garnet W. Oliver, M Co CO, returned at approximately 0930, just in time to be on the receiving end of a few rounds of Jerry artillery, one of them scoring a direct hit on the 3/4-ton medical truck of the 62nd Armored Infantry, which was parked next door to the CP. Captain Major, who had just returned from his reconnaissance, was standing across the street talking to Captain Severence (3rd Battalion S-3). The L Co officer was struck in the leg by a shell fragment from this explosion and became the Battalion's first battle casualty. Severence was more fortunate, receiving only a slight scratch."

Captain Copeland, S-1 (adjutant) of the 3rd Battalion, has written: "Early on 1 January I went to Philippsbourg up

through the village to an intersection, where I decided to establish the battalion CP. Right after I had made this decision, Captain Oliver from M Company came up to inquire as to what I was doing. Having been told of my decision, he asked me if I had taken leave of my senses and pointed out that the CP should be located at the rear of the town, not in front of it. After some discussion over what the field manual had to say about what distances behind the lines were required for command posts, I decided that he, with his considerable combat experience, knew much more than I did on the subject and promptly established the CP in the other end of Philippsbourg. This was certainly fortunate for all of us since it wasn't long before the Germans took control of the upper end of town." Copeland had originally intended to establish the 3rd Battalion command post in the Restaurant-de-la-Gare, next to the railroad tracks, where the 62nd had its CP.

Dan A. Brant was on the 275th regimental staff as a liaison officer working for the S-3. Lieutenant Brant had made the trip from the Rhine to Philippsbourg as one of the Regiment's advance party. "I met with officers of the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion that we were to replace. Why I should have been there as a liaison officer for our 2nd battalion, I can't recall. My driver and I slept with a reserve platoon of the armored outfit that night, and the following day the Germans initiated an attack with mortars and tanks. From the upper story of the house you could see the enemy tanks. The soldiers there said they were coming down the railroad tracks. There were some wounded and possibly one or two killed by the mortar fire. Since I 'had no dog in the fight,' I got my driver and beat it back to Niederbronn." The tank attack by the enemy on New Year's Day was abortive; it was perhaps more of a reconnoitering probe than an attack. It was taken seriously enough by the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion, which evidently moved its CP south to the outskirts of Philippsbourg. In doing so, the 62nd vindicated the judgment of the 275th's Captain Oliver, who had objected to Captain Copeland's selection for the location of the 3rd Battalion CP, the same building abandoned by the 62nd when the tank threat developed.

Major Shepherd, commander of the 3rd Battalion, later recalled the mid-morning orders received from Colonel Pettee in Philippsbourg: "Our information was so skimpy that we knew absolutely nothing about what artillery support we might have. I recall asking Colonel Pettee to have our Cannon Company attached to my battalion since it wasn't doing anything and there seemed to be lots of other American artillery around. Cannon Company ended up doing a beautiful job and several times was responsible for driving German tanks out of the other end of Philippsbourg."

When Pettee got back to Niederbronn from Philippsbourg, one of the first things he did was send Captain Thomas and his Cannon company to Philippsbourg, where they were to be attached to the 3rd Battalion. After Thomas had reported to and conferred with the 3rd Battalion commander, he ordered his guns into position in a wooded area off the road leading to Baerenthal fairly close to its exit from Philippsbourg. Thomas: "Even before the guns were positioned, enemy artillery fire began to land in our immediate vicinity. Within 10 minutes of our arrival at this site, a German tank appeared, edging toward Philippsbourg along the road to our right-front. The threat made evident the vulnerability of the position for both guns and vehicles. I took some men and started back into the village intent on intercepting the tank. However, the tank withdrew before we reached the intersection of the Bitche and Neunhoffen roads in Philippsbourg (Main Forks). Nevertheless I decided to contact Major Shepherd to request his permission to withdraw our guns from the position where they were to one we would select--one that would be less vulnerable."

Lieutenant Penniman, of Cannon Company, had earlier gone to see Major Shepherd about the FO (artillery Forward Observer) duties he, Penniman, was to perform in support of Shepherd's battalion. "I reported to the CO and went with him to a small bar where we were making arrangements to take over from the outfit that had been there. Suddenly the door opened and someone yelled in from outside, 'Tank!' Everyone started to stuff the pot-bellied stove in the middle of the barroom with maps, sketches, and so forth. I do not recall hearing any shots being fired, and I didn't see any tank." The meetings of the two Cannon Co officers with Major Shepherd seem to have occurred in the Philippsbourg CP of the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion, the location of which was considered for use as the 3rd Battalion CP and rejected.

Thomas: "I found Major Shepherd in the battalion CP being hastily oriented by the commander of the forces we were relieving. A command car (or, perhaps, the 62nd's 3/4-ton medical truck) was burning in front of the CP, which was located very near the main intersection. I explained the situation to Shepherd, and he readily gave permission to scout a new position. Lt Richard Rueckel, our company executive officer, and I soon found a suitable spot just below Philippsbourg, off the road to Niederbronn. We 'march-ordered' the guns, went with them to the new position, and had the sections start preparations to put the Company into action. I then reported the new position to Major Shepherd." Thomas would learn later that the regimental commander had become angry when told of the change of the Cannon Co gun positions. Thomas took the first opportunity to explain the circumstances of the change to Colonel Pettee,

evidently to the Colonel's satisfaction.

Lack of information was not the only thing disconcerting the 3rd Battalion command group--they had also to contend with an inconsistency in the directions received by themselves and by the 62nd. At dawn, when Shepherd called the 45th G-3 seeking permission to commit some part of his battalion, it was evident that he had before then been ordered to postpone relieving the 62nd as originally planned. Meanwhile, Task Force Hudelson--at the time subordinated to VI Corps, not the 45th Division--had evidently not received and passed on to the 62nd notification of the relief's postponement. Captain Severance, the 3rd Battalion S-3, remembers receiving continuing pressure from the 62nd command group to get the 3rd Battalion moved up from Niederbronn and relief executed. On one occasion, while Shepherd was absent, Severance was shown orders received by the 62nd directing its immediate withdrawal and demands were made of him to order the 3rd Battalion to implement its relief plan. Severance, of course, was in no position to accommodate these demands.

As a consequence of these pressures, Major Shepherd had gotten in touch with the 45th G-3. When Shepherd had explained the situation around Philippsbourg, the G-3 ordered him to have his battalion moved up from Niederbronn, but not to commit it. Rather, it was to be held in readiness to make a relief, but nothing more. The Battalion was brought forward arriving at its detrucking point at about 0900. The companies dispersed on both sides of the road to Niederbronn from Philippsbourg, about one-half mile from Philippsbourg. Within the Battalion, 2nd Lt Howard W. White had assumed command of L Company, replacing Captain Major, and 2nd Lt David R. Turner was commanding I Company in absence of Captain Long, who had not been heard from since departing Philippsbourg the previous night on his forward reconnaissance. Long arrived back in the afternoon when the Battalion was making preparations to march into Philippsbourg.

Early in the afternoon, a 45th Division G-3 liaison officer arrived in a jeep in the 3rd Battalion assembly area. Picking up Major Shepherd, he proceeded to Philippsbourg, where the two officers were joined by one or more officers of Shepherd's staff. The liaison officer briefed the 3rd Battalion officers on the situation and relayed 45th Division instructions directing the deployment of the 3rd Battalion in an offensive operation. The basic objectives prescribed were that the 3rd Battalion would establish contact with the 2nd Battalion/275th Infantry in the vicinity of Baerenthal and would advance to the north of Philippsbourg to locate enemy forces in that direction.

The Ambush on the Bitche Road

Dwight D. Ritchie has described how he moved out of the battalion assembly area with his I Co platoon, passing through Philippsbourg en route to his initial taste of close combat. "We had dug in on a hillside. Then we went ahead and left our packs alongside the road at Philippsbourg. We had overcoats on over several layers of clothing, and, with bandoliers of ammo around our shoulders, we were still loaded down enough. We didn't have the 'big picture' but were simply marching down the road. I was normally in the 1st Platoon but for some reason was with the 2nd or 3rd that time; the 1st Platoon was ahead."

Elmer F. Martin, of the I Co's 1st Platoon, in his graphic story of the Philippsbourg experiences of his company, has written that "We walked to the outskirts of a little town that someone said was Philippsbourg. Someone called it something else. We were lined up in a field and told to drop our big packs and to change into combat boots. I made out as though I was taking off my shoepacs, but I didn't--if I was going to die, I'd have dry feet anyway. We left town and took the left (Bitche) road of the fork, past a cliff on our right. The dark mountains with woods came right down to the road's edge. On the left was a valley with open fields, with a stream winding through it and a railroad on the far side. A few buildings also lined the left side of the road. We walked on--a bend to the left and then to the right through a woods that was on both sides of the road."

William Long in his carefully detailed account describes an incident which occurred as he led his company out of Philippsbourg. During the wild action of the previous night, Long had somehow lost his overcoat. "I Company was crossing the line of departure on the outskirts of Philippsbourg and into what turned out to be its baptism of fire. I was walking with the lead scouts a few paces ahead of my lead platoon when a soldier appeared from out of the dark and handed me his overcoat saying, 'Damn it, Bill, you seem to be the only man in your company without one of these.' That soldier was our 3rd Battalion S-1, Captain Hunter Copeland."

The column that moved out the Bitche road that night included K Company, trailing behind I. It consisted of a single file of men on each side of the road, with three or four paces between men; it probably extended 500-600 yards along the road. In its route-march formation, I Company was leap-frogging its rifle platoons, each one in succession assuming the point-security duties. The rest of I Company had just passed through the 3rd Platoon as it dropped back from the head of the column. The 1st Platoon had assumed point-security duties and was in the vicinity of Lieschbach when it happened. The 3rd Battalion historical account describes the ambushing of the I-K company column, indicating that

there was a challenge of the column before the enemy opened fire: "Up ahead the men of I Company suddenly heard the barking order, 'Halt!' Maybe it was the faint accent noticed; perhaps it was the sixth sense that causes one to react quickly when he is on edge. However, it most probably was a plain case of the I Co CO's out-guessing Jerry. Captain Long seemingly suspected an ambush and quickly responded to the challenge, shouting his command, 'Hit the dirt!' This came just ahead of the staccato bark of two German machine guns spraying the road and ditches with a deadly crossfire. The advantage of that split second enabled the troops to dive into the ditches on both sides of the road for some protection from the withering fire."

John V. Skeen, platoon sergeant of the 3rd Platoon, has provided a good description of the scene: "The ground rose very sharply to the right of the road. To our left side ran a large-size stream. Beyond that, the ground flattened out for a few yards before it rose again. It was dark but the moon was out and shining rather brightly. A few seconds after we were hit, the order was passed down to fall back. We fell back 400-500 yards and quickly set up a defense. A store by the road was used as a CP. About 100 yards further back was a good-size bridge which crossed the stream and gave access from the road we were on to the far side of the stream. My platoon dug in alongside the bridge or fairly close to it."

When the firing started, Elmer Martin was at the head of the column with the 1st Platoon. He recalls moving "past two stone houses on the left and an open field ringed by woods on the right. Then--'Oh, God!' Everything began happening as if in slow motion. Flashes of light to the right and right-front. Screams of men. The rapid sound of the enemy's burp and machine guns and streaks of their tracers. The slow firing of our rifles. You fall, jump, crumble into the ditch and try to get as far down in it as you can. The whip-cracking of shots, both from the Germans and from our own men on the other side of the road, is sensed just above you." The leading 1st Platoon was taking the brunt of the punishment. Wilfred C. Gould has speculated that the enemy might have done better: "The Krauts had machine guns on both sides of the road, and, when they opened up, they fired on the 1st Platoon. I was in the 2nd Platoon. If they had waited a little, they might have gotten a lot more of us."

Martin has told what it was like after the firing started: "The men were firing as best they could. 1st Lt Fillmore Cannon was trying to call someone on his walky-talky (radio) when it was shot out of his hand. We heard him shout, 'Hey, you on the other side of the road, stop firing--I'm coming over!' Then Lieutenant Cannon took off and crossed the road with tracers flying all around him. He called back for us

to join him--some of us ran across the road." Martin, still on the other side of the road from his platoon leader, knew that some of his companions had been hit and was seeing what he could do: "As I crawled down the ditch, I found men lying where they had fallen. I shook a couple of them--no response. Then one of them asked for help. I tried to help by putting on a bandage. The wounded man exclaimed: 'Jesus, God, I hurt! Can't move my legs. ... Please don't leave me!'

"Take it easy, buddy. The medic is right behind me."

"If I could only move!"

"Then I heard Lt Cannon summon us again: 'Hey, you in the ditch, get the hell over here! Keep away from that house on the left--it's zeroed in!' I felt guilty about leaving the wounded man in the snow on what seemed to me the darkest of all dark nights of my life. I took off my overcoat and laid it on him, saying, 'The medic will be here soon, buddy. He'll know how to move you. I'll try to get help!' I took a deep breath and ran as fast as I could, scared that I would fall or not make it to the other side. All went well--I got to cover behind a stone house and leaned against its wall panting. I gulped in as much air as I could, trying not to make any noise. Then I realized there were two others leaning against the house. One was Lieutenant Cannon. He asked me, 'How many men left in the ditch?'

"Sergeant McDuffee, the medic, and one wounded."

"Then where did the rest go? Not many came over here.' As we talked, someone shot from behind us. All three of us ducked behind a set of stone steps. 'Who the hell's shooting?' No one answered. 'I'm Lieutenant Cannon, dammit! Who's there!'

"Wait a minute, Lieutenant, it's us. We just got out of the ditch. We got to get the wounded out of there.' Somehow we got them across the road and I kicked in the door to the cellar of the stone house. There were two old men standing in there, shaking and scared to death. The wounded men were brought in and first aid was given as best we could with patches and sulfa powder from our belt kits."

William Long, a Texas rancher before the war, remembers his own predicament right after the firing broke out: "At one point during the fracas, Captain Long in Captain Copeland's overcoat was draped for 40 to 60 seconds over a wire fence under the glaring light of an enemy flare while the area illuminated by it was being methodically sprayed by enemy machine-gun fire. Since the Captain survived this, he is convinced that the German gunners mistook the borrowed overcoat for a cowhide."

The hard-hit 1st Platoon, scattered and with wounded men to attend to, took much longer than the rest of the Company to get back to the defensive position down the road from the

point of ambush. A group of survivors, having reassembled and done what they could for their own wounded, started their withdrawal staying off the road on its west side. Shortly the group found their route seemingly blocked by the meandering stream bed. Elmer Martin, searching for a shallow ford across, went up to his waist in the icy water. A little further on it was discovered that the stream bent back out of the groups's path--so Martin's soaking, though the result of a well-intended effort, had been needless. Further along, as the group rejoined the rest of the Company, they found themselves near a house and barn. A jeep was parked there loaded with spare weapons and ammunition resupply. During the firefight, Martin had been ordered to take over a BAR (Browning automatic rifle) from its wounded owner; then he had found he had no ammunition for it and had discarded the BAR, having first disabled it. Now weaponless, Martin rearmed himself with a .45 caliber grease gun from the jeep. Next, to see if he couldn't do something about his wet clothing, he went in the house. In the basement he found what appeared to be something like a family reunion going on.

Martin, in his account, describes the friendly hospitality he received from the French occupants in his brief visit to the basement: "There were beaucoup kids. Present were the father, mother, grandmother, and daughters with their kids. The old man gave me some frozen apples and I gave him and the girls a bar of soap that the Red Cross had given us in Boston. A stove was going full blast. I took off my wet clothes down to my summer underwear and started to dry them by the stove. Two of the girls helped turn the clothes so they wouldn't burn. The clothes I wore were summer underwear, long-johns, summer pants, OD shirt and pants, GI sweater, combat pants, combat jacket, gloves, wool cap, helmet, four pairs of socks, and my good ole shoebags. Everything was going along fine. The people were laughing and joking. I was putting on my clothes as they dried. A couple more of our men came in to get warm. Then Lew, the jeep driver, came and said: 'The Old Man (Captain Long) wants everyone outside. Be quiet about it--something's up!'" When Martin got outside, he learned that he was going to be involved in his second ambush of the night. However, the tables would be turned--the Germans were going to be on the receiving end of this one.

Having been caught at the point of his company by the blast of enemy automatic-weapons fire, Captain Long withdrew following the 1st and 2nd platoons, which gradually collected in the area where the 3rd Platoon and machine-gun section had gone into position. Reaching the 3rd Platoon later, Long found it engaged in a brisk firefight. After the initial ambush, a temporary company CP-aid station had been

set up in one of the houses not too far removed from the bridge which was to become the scene of the ambushing of a German patrol. A group of medics, the 3rd Battalion chaplain, some jeeps and an ambulance had responded to a radio call for medical aid, and Long had supervised the gathering of wounded and dead from the site of the earlier ambush. All of these had been evacuated when the approaching enemy patrol was spotted.

The account of John Skeen tells how I Company's 3rd Platoon fell back some distance after the head of the column had been ambushed. Then the Platoon set up a defensive position on a knoll opposite the bridge just west of the Bitche road. While it is not certain to what extent other elements of the Company became involved in the engagement, the Company's machine-gun section had both of its air-cooled's in firing positions and ready to support the 3rd Platoon. Howard W. Mumm, of that section, recalls that "About 3 or 4 hours after the ambush, a German patrol of 30-40 men was seen reconnoitering in the vicinity of a farm house and out-buildings across the road from us 200-or-so yards away."

Skeen's account states: "We could see the Krauts coming down the opposite side of the stream, probably following the road-bed of the railroad tracks. They were in single file and wore white parkas. We could see them plainly in the bright moonlight. I guessed quickly that they were going to cross the bridge and try to cut us off--they probably didn't realize how far we had dropped back. Being in position, we were well prepared for them." Skeen's guess that the enemy patrol's mission was to cut off the American column's line of retreat seems logical enough. His conjecture was borne out when the enemy party remained engaged for an extended period after I Company opened fire on it.

The German patrol did turn left and approached the bridge. Skeen: "The word was passed along to let them get nearly across the bridge before we opened fire." Mumm: "Our machine guns began firing simultaneously and cut many of them down. They were clearly outlined by the moonlight and had little opportunity to escape to the cover of the buildings. The machine-gunners who took part in this action were myself and my brother as gunner and assistant gunner and, at the other gun, Elmer W. Flink and George D. Marshall."

The Skeen account indicates that the German patrol left seven dead when it hastily withdrew from the bridge and its approach. The I Co fusillade had been sudden and intense. The enemy, after the initial withdrawal, scattered and took cover, then commenced returning the fire. The fight, however, was one-sided--I Company, having achieved fire superiority, maintained it and sustained not a single casualty in the exchange. The enemy retired after a half hour.

After the German patrol's withdrawal, the Company reassembled. During the lull in the action which followed, a check was made to account for the effects of the engagements that night on I Co strength. When this was completed, the casualty count was 23--three killed, six wounded, and 14 missing. Of the missing, most of these were 1st Platoon members who had taken cover in the ditch on the east side of the Bitche road during the first ambush. A group of them had attempted to get away from the road moving to the right-front, perhaps to maneuver around the enemy machine guns that were pinning the Company down. Later it was learned that this group had quickly run into other emplaced enemy troops and had been captured. At least one of the missing 14 was later discovered to have been killed.

Ross's K Co history, "The Kingsmen", takes note of an incident during New Year's Day in which the Company was fired on by U.S. planes flown by Germans. This had occurred during the afternoon when the 3rd Battalion was moving from its assembly area into Philippsbourg. The U.S. planes were most probably black-painted P-47 "Thunderbolts" flown by enemy pilots whose missions over the sector in which the 275th Infantry was operating during its involvement with NORDWIND were noted at one time or another by nearly every man in the Regiment. K Company marched into Philippsbourg, arriving there around 1700. A CP was established in the southern end of the village, first in a shed, then in a nearby restaurant. The Company moved out after dark, marching behind I Company along the road to Bitche.

Theodore G. Heck was a 2nd lieutenant and leader of the Weapons Platoon of K Company as it marched out of Philippsbourg that night. How far out the Bitche road they had proceeded when the ambush occurred is not certain--since I Company's rate of movement ahead of K Company was slowed as it rotated its point-security platoons, it probably seemed to K's men that they had gone farther than they actually had. The best guess is that K Company was no farther than abreast of the height Mouckenkopf, which rises to the east of the Bitche road, when the trouble started. Mouckenkopf stands about one-half mile out from the north edge of Philippsbourg. Heck recalls that the enemy appeared to have let part of the column go past before opening fire--when they did, the enemy machine guns were firing from points about 200 yards west of the K Co location and to the southwest, about the same distance from it. Most of the Company found cover in the ditch bounding the east side of the road. They lay hugging the ground as the machine-gun bullets drummed into the earth or pinged off the road surface near them.

Heck remembers that Lieutenant Brown, K Co CO, called him forward and they consulted. Then Brown directed that 60 mm mortar fire be laid down on the offending enemy guns. Heck

had Sherman, his best mortar gunner, go to work on the assignment. Sherman used the mortar tube only--no base-plate--training it by instinct and making adjustments in range and azimuth as he sensed the location of shell impacts in relation to the targets. It was either the damaging hits achieved or the threat of near misses that caused the enemy guns to grow silent.

During the lull that followed came an incident that defied understanding, but stranger things have happened in combat. A lone German came walking down the road. K Co witnesses remember his behavior differently. One remembers that the German was singing to himself, apparently oblivious to the Americans in the ditch a few feet away from him. Another, that the German was swearing and shouting orders to the men in the ditch--perhaps drunk. How he had gotten past I Company, further up the road, is hard to explain. However he got there and whatever his condition, he ignored several challenges by K's amazed troopers. Then he was killed by a fusillade of rifle fire, delivered in response to a baffled Lieutenant Brown's order to "shoot the SOB." The unfortunate German's body lay beside the road for the next several days, visible to K Co men from various vantage points in and around Philippsbourg as they moved with the tide of battle. This had been the first K Co-inflicted death, and various members, for the next day or so, probably felt different emotions as they viewed the remains--awe, anger, satisfaction, regret, or sympathy. Later, when their exposure to death on the battle field had become commonplace, their attitudes may have changed--they may have glanced at the body with indifference. Or they may have even felt envious of the dead man--he needed no longer wonder about his own fate; all his troubles were over.

The lull continued and Lieutenant Brown pondered over what he should do next. Heck recalls that "During the night we could not get in contact with Battalion. I sat for a while with Brown under a rock trying to get somebody to talk with us on the radio." After a while, Brown decided to take K Company back to Philippsbourg. However, when his men stirred out of the ditch in preparation for the withdrawal ordered by him, there was a quick enemy response--machine-gun firing was resumed, directed at the company's location. K Co was again immobilized--back in the ditch. More efforts to contact Battalion were ineffective. Finally Brown resolved to move the Company up on the high ground to the east of the Bitche road, to a more defensible position. The conformation of the terrain in that direction offered some cover and concealment, and, while the movement out of the precarious ditch position went slowly, it was executed without incident. At the end of the move, the Company dug in in a defensive perimeter for the remainder of the night.

L Co's First Casualty

Richard D. Becker started out in WRECKER's battle against NORDWIND as a rifleman in L Company. He remembers that on New Year's Day, prior to 3rd Battalion's move from Niederbronn to the assembly area outside Philippsbourg, L Company had its last hot meal of "10-in-one" rations for the next 5 days. "After our morning meal, we mounted trucks and headed for Philippsbourg. I never quite did find out the exact situation when we were ordered out of the trucks and told to head for the hills and timber on the double as there was Kraut action ahead of us. We were supposed to be relieving some armored unit in Philippsbourg. If they were there, we never saw them. Whatever it was that caused our rapid detrucking passed over soon and we moved on up to the outer edge of Philippsbourg and set up in an assembly area. Our company commander, Captain Major, had gone into Philippsbourg, where he was wounded and evacuated. Lieutenant White assumed command of the Company."

As for the rumored "Kraut action" remembered by Becker as the cause of the Battalion's detrucking, Garnet Oliver's account states that he, Oliver, halted the convoy where it did because occasional shell explosions in Philippsbourg indicated that the Germans had that village under observation. Had the truck column proceeded much further than it did, there was no question that such an inviting target as it would have presented would have attracted the fire of any and every enemy gun within range. The wounding of L's company commander that morning in Philippsbourg testifies to the prudence of Oliver in taking the action.

It appears that the 3rd Battalion company commanders issued their orders with respect to the advance out of Philippsbourg just prior to the move from the assembly area. As a consequence, L Company moved into Philippsbourg with the rest of the Battalion. After a brief halt, the Company marched north along the main street in Philippsbourg, turned left just below Main Forks, and moved out of the village on the road to Baerenthal. There must have been shortages or a mix-up in the arrangements for distributing certain types of ammunition to the Company. This failure was to handicap the Company in its operations over the next 36 hours. Becker: "Our weapons consisted of M-1 rifles and two .30 caliber light machine guns with ammunition for same. No 60 mm mortar ammo or anti-tank ammo of any type or even any hand grenades. No radios--only a field telephone for communication. Each of us had one K-ration meal." After leaving Philippsbourg, the opportunists in the Company had a chance to do some scrounging: "While moving along the road to Baerenthal, we came upon a bivouac area of some U.S. unit that

had been there earlier. It had been evacuated in a hurry. Left behind had been several squad tents with cots, blankets, foot lockers, and personal gear. We even found some D-ration (chocolate) bars, which proved very valuable the next few days. Some of us picked up blankets, which also proved to have been wise.

"We moved on up the road, and there set up a bivouac area in the woods to the right of the road a short distance from the town of Baerenthal. The weather was very cold, and there was lots of snow on the ground. We had started to dig in when we began to catch artillery fire. I remember this well because the first shell killed a member of the platoon I was in--he had a wife and five children back in the States. Meanwhile, we had sent out patrols to make contact with elements of our 2nd Battalion. We also sent out another patrol toward Baerenthal; afterwards it reported back that the town was occupied by German infantry reinforced by several tanks. A patrol from our 2nd Platoon returned having made contact with the 2nd Battalion to the south of our position."

Becker refers to the projected advance by WRECKER's 2nd Battalion into and through Baerenthal which was to have been made after that battalion had arrived from Niederbronn and detrucked. The Battalion's advance had been scheduled to begin during the last hour of New Year's Day: "We had no knowledge of their commitment to attack Baerenthal, and no patrol of any type from 2nd Battalion made contact with L Company. If our battalion commander had any knowledge of the intended action, it was never passed to us. For some reason or another, the 3rd Battalion staff seemed to ignore the information we passed on to them about the enemy's occupation of Baerenthal. The 3rd Battalion commander continued to insist that we carry out our mission to support the 313th Infantry." Viewed in retrospect, the 3rd Battalion commander's seeming persistence here is understandable--the operations plan had provided that the 2nd Battalion advance through Baerenthal, it being expected that this advance would drive the enemy west from Baerenthal. Accordingly, the advance by L Company into Baerenthal would have been unopposed--assuming that the operation went as prescribed.

A late 45th Division intelligence estimate that enemy tank-infantry forces posed a threat to attack southeastward from Baerenthal toward Zinswiller caused the cancellation of the 2nd Battalion's projected advance just as it was about to get under way. This change--perhaps due to another communications failure--may not have been received by Shepherd. Too, Shepherd and his staff were, during the last hours of New Year's Day, undoubtedly preoccupied with their I and K companies on the Bitche road, from which direction sounds of intense firing could be distinctly heard in Philippsbourg.

Therefore, Shepherd and his staff may not have had much patience with L Co's Lieutenant White, whose problems may have seemed relatively mild to them. Moreover, if communications problems between Philippsbourg and Niederbronn continued to obstruct the flow of information between 3rd Battalion and Regiment, Major Shepherd may have had no alternative other than to tell his L Co commander to obey orders.

Becker recalls that "Later that night six German tanks came down the road from Baerenthal and stopped on the road within 100 yards of my platoon and shelled the 2nd Battalion on our left. We were helpless to do anything except pray that they didn't find us since we were without suitable weapons to fight them. Fortunately, they did not have infantry support or we would have met the same fate that B Company met later. After expending their ammunition, the tanks pulled back to Baerenthal."

Earlier that day Joseph F. Hardy, platoon sergeant of the M Co 1st Platoon, had moved with his platoon into its assembly area off the Niederbronn-Philippsbourg road after detrucking. An advance party had gone on to Philippsbourg to be briefed on intended M Co deployments, and, for those M Co elements that would remain in Philippsbourg, make preparations for the location and operation of weapons to support parts of the Battalion being sent beyond Philippsbourg and to defend the village itself. Hardy remembers that "the 1st Platoon arrived in the reserve area shortly after noon on 1 January. It was ordered to dig in on a hill. We moved up a ravine to our right. Soon incoming artillery was heard, and I moved the platoon to the defilade side of the hill. We were just completing our foxholes when a messenger arrived with orders for me to move the Platoon up. I asked the messenger about the situation, and he told me that we had been strafed by American planes up there. It was about 1500 and bright daylight; so I decided to wait until early dusk so that we would not be such easy targets. We arrived in Philippsbourg at dusk. A lone civilian approached me with a question, but the only word I understood was 'Boche.' I just shrugged my shoulders and he disappeared. Our point man had made contact, and I moved up to talk to Zahora (1st Platoon leader)."

Captain Oliver, M Co commander, would remember that the initial deployment of 3rd Battalion heavy weapons in Philippsbourg placed two sections of 81 mm mortars on the south outskirts of the village near the position occupied later by Cannon Company. In addition, one machine-gun platoon was located toward the north end of the village, in positions behind the road going to the right from Main Forks.

Upon receiving Colonel Pettee's order directing him to move the 2nd Battalion to Baerenthal, Colonel Barten sent advance parties into the area where he expected his troops

would go into action. He himself proceeded to Baerenthal, arriving early in the afternoon, and went to the TF Hudelson CP. Inside, the WRECKER officer reported to Colonel Hudelson, the commander. As he was receiving his instructions from Hudelson, Barten noted the packing-up of equipment and burning of papers by CP personnel--evidence that an evacuation, in some haste, of the installation was imminent.

One of the things Barten was told was that his unit's objective line would be "Mouterhouse-Philippsbourg." Only a couple of hours before, Colonel Hudelson's CP there in Baerenthal had been under threat of encirclement. While the enemy threat to the CP was now not quite so pressing, its presence was still felt. In addition Hudelson had, only shortly before, lost contact with his 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion. Since before midnight Hudelson had been feverishly busy trying to maintain a 10-mile front more than half of which was in the process of collapsing. So it could very well have been that Colonel Hudelson, beset with many problems, mistakenly understood that he was prescribing to the WRECKER officer a line to be held by the entire 275th Infantry. Considering the projected deployment of 3rd Battalion troops out along the roads toward Bitche and Baerenthal from Philippsbourg, one can quickly see its conflict with the disposition prescribed by the TF Hudelson commander--assuming that such prescription was for one battalion only. However, it never became necessary to clarify the instruction--the advance by the enemy forestalled any such movement by Barten's battalion.

The still incomplete communications net of Regiment was bound to delay the movement of 2nd Battalion from Niederbronn to Baerenthal. Consequently it was fortunate that Task Force Hudelson's midday call for reinforcements to be sent to Baerenthal was caused by a threat that abated. The WRECKER CP was opened in Niederbronn at 1220, but then it had no direct communications with the 45th Division, which had control over the trucks which were to be employed in the 2nd Battalion's move to Baerenthal. Moreover, the 45th Division G-3 did not yet know where the 275th Infantry's CP was located until 1335, and it was the G-3 who had to instruct the 179th Infantry, then using the trucks, where to send them. Since the 275th Infantry's CP had no direct communications with the CP of the 2nd Battalion, further delay could have resulted once the trucks were turned over to WRECKER. At 1530 Task Force Hudelson notified the 45th Division that it was moving its command post from Baerenthal to Reipertswiller at that time. The Task Force also noted that the 275th 2nd Battalion had not yet arrived at Baerenthal. Talking to Barten a couple of hours before, Colonel Hudelson had undoubtedly repeated to him the news he had received at noon from the 45th G-3 regarding WRECKER help on

its way to Baerenthal--"One battalion is on the Zinswiller road to where you are." Barten would have had no way of knowing then that this was misinformation. The G-3 section should have known better.

It appears that the 2nd Battalion's advance parties did arrive in the Baerenthal area even before noon and continued beyond to make preparations for the advance of the Battalion toward Mouterhouse. Such a movement by 2nd Battalion was, according to regimental records, anticipated and could have been indicated in Colonel Pettee's orders issued in Philippsbourg that morning even though he stipulated that the 2nd Battalion assignment would be modified by instructions that Barten would receive from Hudelson. In the early afternoon a rumor circulated among 2nd Battalion personnel in the advance parties that 1st Lt John A. Jensen and a noncom, both of H Company, had been killed while setting up an OP further forward. The rumor proved to be correct--the two men were undoubtedly caught up in the mid-day smallarms exchanges all around Baerenthal as NORDWIND patrols probed for a soft spot. The two from H Company fell in an area overrun subsequently by the enemy, and their bodies could not be recovered for the time being.

S Sgt Charles Ball was the H Co supply sergeant. Later, after dark on New Year's Day, Ball would walk from the 2nd Bn truck park, where he had been working, to the company CP in a nearby barn. Inside he would find 1st Sgt Adams and T Sgt Glen Shirley, platoon sergeant of the 1st Platoon. Both noncoms would appear to be in a state of gloomy preoccupation as they failed to acknowledge Ball's entrance. Ball's query about how things seemed to be going up forward would bring Shirley's response explaining his and Adams' dejection--word had been received that Lieutenant Jensen had been killed. The news would hit Ball particularly hard. He and the dead lieutenant had become good friends during the months of training in the States, Jensen having been the company supply officer and the two friends and their wives having socialized often. Too, Ball's thoughts would immediately focus on Sioux City, Iowa, where his and Jensen's wives were waiting out the war at Mrs. Jensen's home. Ball would realize that he was going to have a difficult letter to write to Sioux City.

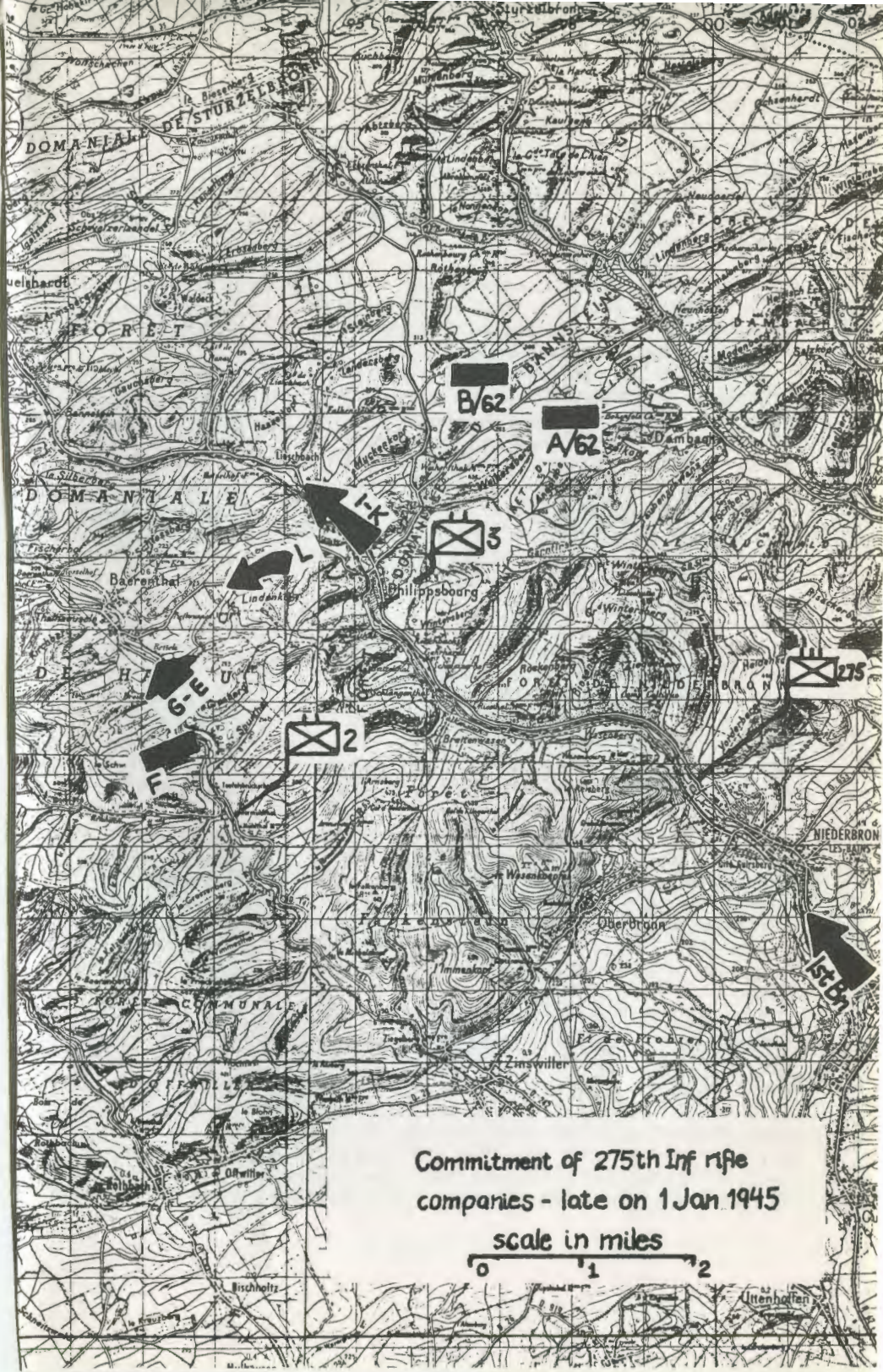
Leaving the TF Hudelson CP, Colonel Barten proceeded back along the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road to meet with his advance parties and await the arrival of his battalion. He was aware of Colonel Hudelson's intent to withdraw his CP from Baerenthal very soon and also of the presence nearby of enemy patrols. He probably had seen medium tanks of the Task Force as they moved to defensive positions around the outskirts of the village--a last-ditch perimeter defense in the making. While he waited, he observed armored vehicles,

guns, and trucks in large numbers passing him on the road headed for Zinswiler--to the rear. In time the 2nd Battalion commander became convinced that Baerenthal would fall to the enemy before his troops could arrive--the operations instructions he had received for 2nd Battalion seemed already to have become inapplicable. He ordered the truck columns transporting the men to be halted short of Baerenthal. The companies were to detruck and move to high ground south of Baerenthal--there they would dig in and await further instructions. Barten's judgment proved to be correct--it was reported that the last elements of TF Hudelson had evacuated Baerenthal at 1600 under pressure of enemy assault. That was about the time when G Company was detrucking along the Zinswiler road, the first 2nd Battalion company to have arrived.

There was an issue of heavy winter pants made at the foundry. on the morning of New Year's Day. When he was given his, Paul McCoy remembered the joke about there being only two sizes for G.I. clothing--too-large and too-small. "The ones I got were about size 44--I was only a 32 and wouldn't wear them. I guess there is nearly always one real fat guy in every platoon, but our platoon didn't have one. I had gotten the pants for the fat man that our platoon didn't have. A lot of times later I wished I had kept them."

Later that morning G Company marched toward the outskirts of Niederbronn along the street on which the foundry faced. The men were put to digging in along platoon perimeters on a ridge at the west edge of town. The word was passed around that the Germans had started a drive, and the positions they were preparing might have to serve as secondary defenses. In the early afternoon, the Company loaded into trucks lined up along the road. The motor convoy moved back into Niederbronn, then turned southwest and passed through Oberbronn before turning northwest at Zinswiler on the road to Baerenthal. It was starting to get dark when the trucks were halted. The Company detrucked on the road about one kilometer from the outskirts of Baerenthal. McCoy: "As we unloaded, we were forced to the side of the road so that a half dozen or so American tanks could get by. The tanks were coming from Baerenthal. We were told to dig foxholes alongside the road. Incoming artillery shells started exploding out in the open field about 50 yards from where we were. We didn't need any further encouragement. We dug as if we meant it. Then the artillery fire stopped."

Pfc Cornelius V. Cremer was a first gunner in an F Co machine-gun squad. He still recalls vividly the tense last moments experienced by him and his fellow squad members before the shooting started. "We were all cold, hungry, suffering from the 'G.I.'s' (diarrhea) in various degrees of severity, and, above all, we were uninformed and frightened.



Commitment of 275th Inf rifle companies - late on 1 Jan 1945
scale in miles

When the convoy reached Zinswiller, it turned northwest on the road to Baerenthal. All of the guys in my truck had wished one another a Happy New Year."

"The twisting road had a bank on one side and evenly spaced trees on the other. A stream, the Zintzel, ran along the west side of the road until we reached Untermuehlthal--there it crossed to the east side of the road. When the trucks stopped, we detrucked or, rather, fell out of the truck, cramped and frozen stiff, onto the ice-and-snow-covered road. The 1st machine-gun squad was made up of Sgt Paul Melendy, myself, Pfc Bruno B. Eisler as assistant gunner, Pfc Leonard as ammunition bearer, and Pvt Michael F. Alechko as another ammunition bearer.

"Evidently the 2nd Battalion was supposed to attack in a generally northwest direction from a starting point about 200 yards south of Baerenthal and take the town. E and G companies were to be used in the attack and F Company would be in reserve. While E and G companies were forming up for the attack, Ben Eisler and I were looking for a good place to dig in our machine gun. We found a place where we could get through the snow and frozen ground and started to dig for China. We were well fixed--gun and ammunition, food for two in No. 10 cans, and, most important, G.I. overcoats, gloves, cap, scarves, and so on."

The E Company detrucking point was near the site of the 2nd Battalion's CP at Meuhlthal. It was well after dark when the Company left the trucks. It started at once to march forward and left the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road shortly turning right onto a trail. 1st Lt Harry Weeks, leader of the 3rd Platoon, was struck by the lapse in discipline that occurred at the time. No particular attention was paid, by men and officer alike, to march security, formation, or interval between men--"We were all pretty careless." It was as though "buck fever" had suddenly seized everyone in the Company and caused him to stop functioning like a trained soldier. Then shellfire started coming in causing further disorganization. Part of the men gravitated leftward, downslope toward the creek, as they continued forward; part lagged back on the higher ground, on a reverse slope of a spur extending northwest from the height Grasberg.

A staff officer caught up with the Company, and the CO, Capt George L. Mundell, sent a runner around to have the platoons halt and remain in place while he talked with the staff officer, then departed with him to go back to the battalion CP. Lieutenant Weeks was left in charge of the Company while the CO was gone and had the men dig in. His impression at the time was that the Company's halt was temporary, that the advance would be resumed when the CO returned. The men continued digging. An occasional shell whined

in and blew up interrupting the work as men dove into their partially completed shelters.

Cancellation of 2nd Battalion's Attack

An advance through Baerenthal by 2nd Battalion was intended, and the instruction for this was apparently the one issued by the regimental commander in Philippsbourg to Colonel Barten that morning as subsequently modified by the CO of Task Force Hudelson. Under the circumstances, the 2nd Battalion plan for the operation prepared as a consequence would have been sent to Regiment in Niederbronn via courier. While some details of this plan are not remembered, a good idea of what was intended is evident in one of the first messages sent by the Battalion to WRECKER CP after communications were opened between them. The message stated: "Request 3rd Bn be notified of change in E Co plans. G Co left flank has been changed to right bank of Lake Baerenthal. E Co will be employed on right of G Co to facilitate contact. (Artillery) concentration arranged on town of Baerenthal from 2320 to 2330. G Co will advance at end of concentration." An assault through Baerenthal generally along the axis of the road to Mouterhouse with an objective at least as far west as Lake Baerenthal, at 2330 after a 10-minute preparation--these were the specifics of the attack plan.

However, earlier that evening WRECKER CP had been warned by the 45th Division G-3 that an enemy attack was expected in the Baerenthal area that night. G-3 had then instructed WRECKER to have its 2nd Battalion well prepared to meet the attack. The consequent instructions from WRECKER to 2nd Battalion could not have reached the Muehlthal CP before the 2nd Battalion message concerning its projected attack through Baerenthal had been sent, and the only explanation for this must be the continuing lack of wire communications between Niederbronn and Muehlthal until just before 2nd Battalion sent its message. Too, whatever other measures Colonel Pettee and his staff might have taken to warn 2nd Battalion must also have been ineffective. Therefore, when the message was received in Niederbronn advising Regiment that 2nd Battalion would be attacking into Baerenthal shortly, there must have been a hurried phone call back to 2nd Battalion instructing them to call the attack off. There is no record when such a phone call was made, but it could not have given the 2nd Battalion commander and his staff much time to act. However, it appears that E Company was notified of the cancellation; so the WRECKER order must have gotten to Muehlthal in time for that. If G Company was stopped, the word evidently was not gotten to one of the

assault platoons. Whatever in the way of a warning about an enemy attack was passed by Regiment to 2nd Battalion, there was little, if any, time to prepare for that. And the attack did come.

G Company had detrucked and dug in near the Zinswiler road about a kilometer from Baerenthal. Around 2230, 1st Lt Walter H. Snelling, 1st Platoon leader, briefed his noncoms on the impending attack. The objective was on the far side of Baerenthal, and the platoon would dig in after arriving at the objective. Snelling's platoon was supposed to advance along the left side of the Zinswiler road, and the 2nd Platoon was to advance to the right of it, moving parallel to the 1st Platoon. McCoy remembers that "Lieutenant Snelling led the way, and I as platoon guide brought up the rear. We arrived at a point on the reverse slope of the last ridge below Baerenthal after passing through our H Company's positions. There we lay prone on the ground for about 45 minutes while Lieutenant Snelling, with Sgt Frank Collo, went on in the direction of Baerenthal. He returned having learned that the enemy were in the village." From this point, Snelling withdrew his platoon back to the next terrain feature without any enemy pressure. Evidently he had been informed of the attack cancellation during the 1st Platoon's wait on that furthest ridge.

At their F Co machine-gun position on the next ridge back, Cremer and Eisler watched the G Co assault platoons move forward past them and looked around observing what other members of their platoon were doing. Cremer: "About 25 yards to the rear of our newly dug position was a large tent left there by an American artillery unit. Some of the guys started the stove they found in it and tried to keep warm. Then the attack began. Ben and I said good luck to some of our buddies in G Company as they passed and then disappeared over the small hill ahead of us. Slightly to our rear and to the left, the mortar section was digging in and setting up. S Sgt Lewis was supervising the activities with his usual thoroughness." Many years later, Cremer still retained the impression that the G Co men he had seen coming back from up forward were retreating after their brief assault into Baerenthal's outskirts had been repelled. If F Company was informed of the projected attack's cancellation, the word was evidently not passed around. "In about 30 minutes, we heard shots being fired in the town. Then more firing and a lot of thrashing-around on the hill ahead of us. Then G Company was coming back through our position. Then started an artillery barrage from the Germans to us. One of the rounds went through the tent to our rear and took off Alechko's head. To say the least, both Ben and I were scared. Sergeant Melendy came up to see how we were, and we told him we were okay, or some such stupid thing."

E Company had a reputation as a "good company," and its people were settling down in their new surroundings having shaken off their first-action jitters. Across the road to the east of G Company and the forward elements of F Company, Lieutenant Weeks checked around as the digging continued. Incoming shell impacts discouraged any thoughts of shifting positions to improve the formation--the understanding was that the Company would be moving forward shortly from there anyway. When Captain Mundell returned from Battalion to the forward positions, he informed Weeks that the plan for further advance of the Company had been canceled. It must have been around midnight.

G Company's 2nd Platoon was over in the creek bottom across the road from Snelling's platoon. Contact with them from the rear would have been more difficult, and, prior to the attack time, the platoon leader would have kept his radio switched off. So he seems not to have been notified to withdraw at the time when the 1st Platoon did. After the war, McCoy remembered lying there on the ridge with the rest of the platoon. "Then artillery started falling on the ridge in back of us. As soon as it lifted, Lieutenant Snelling had us move to the forward slope back on the ridge where the artillery had just been falling. He placed two squads on that slope and sent me with the other to cover the nose of the ridge, which overlooks the road. There we dug in."

Back at the 2nd Bn CP in the hamlet of Muehlthal, 2nd Lt John B. Cruell was having a busy night. He was the Battalion's A & P Platoon leader, and his routine duties, performed with the extra pains-taking required by the strangeness of the locality, the darkness of the night, and the confusion that prevailed would keep him away from his bedroll and sleepless. Having located a suitable depot, he had to break down and stow by type the Battalion's ammunition supplies as they arrived from the rear. There were shortages in some ammunition types--back at Niederbronn, they were short at the regimental supply point--and Cruell had to recompute each company's allocation so that the shortage became equally distributed. Company carrying parties arrived at different times, and Cruell had to take each party to the ammo dump, make up the company allotment, and send the porters on their way. Ominously, anti-tank rifle grenades were particularly in short supply.

Cruell also had the security outpost for the CP to take care of. Guards from his platoon had to be briefed and posted and periodically changed. In between, the CP latrine had to be dug and the canvas fly secured around it. In brief moments of respite, the lieutenant sweated out what the forward elements of the Battalion were doing and what was being done to them, divining as well as he could the

meaning of the sounds of combat that disjoined the stretches of the night's silence. Years later he remembered accurately much of the scenario for the opening of the Battalion's engagement with the enemy: "The mission of finding out who was occupying the town of Baerenthal was detailed to G Company. The right flank of the defenses was held by E Company. They were aware that somewhere to their right were our 1st and 3rd battalions. Over on the left, behind G Company, were the 1st and weapons platoons of F Company providing security for H Company's machine guns and mortars. At Muehlthal was the battalion CP with two rifle platoons of F Company, the 2nd and 3rd, in position nearby to provide security for the CP and for the Battalion's left flank and rear."

At midnight marking the close of New Year's Day, the 275th S-2 (intelligence officer), Maj Gomez B. Cahoon, recorded in the regimental Unit Report for the previous 24-hour period that the only identified enemy unit with which WRECKER was in contact was the 953rd Infantry/361st VG Division. The identification was attributed to TF Hudelson, and presumably it pertained to the 2nd Battalion's engagement on the outskirts of Baerenthal during the last hour of the period. Baerenthal had fallen to the enemy a few hours earlier, actually to the 952nd Infantry. While TF Hudelson elements had undoubtedly encountered the 953rd to the west of and at the approach to Baerenthal, that Regiment had turned south at Forneau-Neuf and became part of the NORDWIND forces fighting in the tip of the salient.

CHAPTER III

NORDWIND'S Second Day

Tuesday, 2 Jan (-10 to +4 degrees, Fahr.)

On New Year's Day, the German assault forces involved in the eastern (LXXXIX Corps) thrust of NORDWIND had been by—and-large successful. Only on the extreme left had some assault groups of the 256th VG Division fallen behind schedule or simply failed to take their objectives. Troop leaders of the 256th blamed such reverses on the circumstances, primarily stringent secrecy precautions, which had prevented reconnaissance prior to the Zero-hour. While German casualties thus far had not been severe, the rugged terrain had taken a heavy toll on the strength of the individual infantryman. The weather, on the first day of NORDWIND relatively moderate, turned sharply colder. The morning of 2 January was numbingly cold.

In the sector of the 256th VG Division, the principal objective for the second day of the offensive was Philippsbourg, and the responsibility for it fell to the 476th Grenadier Regiment. The commander planned to achieve this objective by attacking with two infantry battalions from the west (from the area between the Baerenthal and Bitche roads out of Philippsbourg). However, due to the delays to troop movements caused by the roadless terrain south of Lieschbach, the 476th commander found it necessary to attack with only one battalion from the west and ordered the second one to advance from the north. Terrain and communications difficulties obstructed coordination between the two assault battalions, and both attacks broke down before reaching Philippsbourg, hindered as much by trackless Vosges country as by the resistance of American troops. Troop fatigue was an important factor in the failure.

In the 256th center, the 456th Grenadier Regiment was assigned to hold Neunhoffen, launch a surprise raid on Dammbach, and clear the area north of the Neunhoffen-Philippsbourg road. With respect to the third-named task, the Regiment sent combat patrols into the wooded area north of the Neunhoffen-Philippsbourg road and constructed obstacles in

the road itself. On the left, the 481st Grenadier Regiment continued to make little progress against the U.S. 45th Division defenses.

Advancing further south, the 361st VG Division found it necessary, due to the lagging of the 256th VG Division on its left, to leave an infantry battalion at Baerenthal to protect the Division's flank and block the Zintzel creek defile (in which Baerenthal is situated). Elements of the 361st were experiencing severe difficulties in the mountainous terrain west of this valley to the south of Baerenthal. At Baerenthal, 1st Battalion/952nd Infantry repulsed an American attack at noon. Elements of the 256th VG Division advanced southwest from Lieschbach and made contact with the 952nd near Baerenthal. Reviewing the situation at the end of the day, the commander of the 361st considered that his division had fallen behind its *NORDWIND* schedule. He was particularly concerned about the Division's main effort, pushing in the southwest at the point of the salient. Higher headquarters now ordered the commitment of the 6th SS Mountain Division's Battle Group in the direction of Wingen. (As a consequence of this order, the two sister regiments of the 275th--the 274th and 276th--were soon to come to grips with *NORDWIND*.)

At 0100 on 2 Jan, the 45th Div G-3 called Major Dykes at the 275th's regimental CP at Niederbronn and requested that WRECKER leave a rifle company to block the road running east and west through Baerenthal to the west of its junction with the road running south to Reipertswiller. The G-3's request was responsive to one received shortly before from the 313th Infantry's commander who was concerned about the enemy's possibly moving east out of Mouterhouse to attack the advancing 313th battalions from their left flank. The G-3's wording, as documented, was not entirely clear and could have been misunderstood by Dykes, who simply stated, "Yes, sir." Dykes could have understood that the requested block was to be placed east of Baerenthal, on the road to Philippsbourg, for by that time he knew that the 275th's 2nd battalion attack into Baerenthal had been called off and that 2nd Battalion instead had been warned to prepare to defend against an enemy attack out of Baerenthal. In fact, a series of enemy tank-infantry probes out of Baerenthal had already started, but the 275th regimental CP may not yet have been informed of this development.

The 45th's G-3 then notified the 313th Infantry that "the people on your right (275th Infantry) will hold the battalion on your right (2nd Battalion) in reserve and will leave a company to block the Baerenthal road until you have moved up far enough to prevent the enemy from using it as a main threat." The G-3's appreciation of the situation in and around Baerenthal seemingly had not much resemblance with

the true state of affairs. This was in some part due to tardy WRECKER reporting, but he seemingly had forgotten his instruction to Dykes at nightfall: "We expect a counter-attack in the area of your 2nd Battalion tonight. I want you to get them well dug in, artillery massed, and all units tied in good." In the meantime, the G-3 had been notified of the developing enemy threat in the direction of Reipertswiller, and he had possibly assumed that this enemy force was the same one which earlier had been expected to push toward Zinswiller from Baerenthal.

WRECKER reporting to G-3 of the situation in Baerenthal was slow to clarify the 2nd Battalion's developing predicament. At 0240--"Our two battalions (2nd and 3rd) have made contact at 0130. Our 3rd Battalion is still in contact with the enemy." At 0319--"Our 2nd battalion reports enemy in Baerenthal. They also report armored vehicles in the town. We're going to put artillery on them." This seems to have been the first indication given by WRECKER to the 45th G-3 that the 275th 2nd Battalion was not itself in Baerenthal. Then at 0407 came the first indication of trouble--"Our people report that a tank broke through at Baerenthal and is moving south. The 645th Tank Destroyers have been notified." At 0540, Major Dykes reported to the G-3 section: "Our 2nd battalion is in pretty bad shape. The 1st Battalion will move (up to Philippsbourg) this morning." Nothing more was said about the need to block the road west out of Baerenthal, but developments in Reipertswiller in the next 24 hours would invalidate the requirement. No significant progress north out of Reipertswiller by U.S. troops, would, in fact, occur for well over a week.

Reporting by the 275th regimental CP to G-3 for the next several hours referred to the situation in Philippsbourg. At 0625, Dykes informed a G-3 section officer: "My 3rd battalion reports that the enemy has infiltrated into Philippsbourg from the right. The 1st Battalion is moving up to help." Then, at 0748, he indicated that the threat at Philippsbourg had blown over explaining that "what happened is that the Krauts infiltrated through (the gap on our right). Our 3rd battalion is out of contact with the 157th Infantry (at Dambach). We have the town of Philippsbourg pretty well cleaned out." Then, in an apparent reference to the instructions given by the 45th's Colonel Adams to Colonel Pettee at midnight, Dykes asked: "Does the plan still remain the same?"

"Yes," answered the G-3 officer, "Is the 3rd Battalion in contact with the 62nd?"

"I'll check with them again on that. Our artillery is preparing fires right in front of our positions starting at the road junction, and then we'll have a rolling barrage from there on."

"That should be watched closely because some people from the 62nd may still be out there."

At 0947 a report came to the G-3 section from the 45th Reconnaissance Troop which concerned the WRECKER deployment of forces out from Philippsbourg: "Their 1st battalion is moving up to fill the gap between the 157th Infantry and the 3rd Battalion of the 275th. The 3rd Battalion has orders to attack at 0900 to take the high ground north of Philippsbourg." The word "attack" in the report might have been understood to mean that the 3rd Bn objective was known to be enemy-occupied. Major Shepherd, in Philippsbourg, had no such information--aside from reports from his rifle companies the previous night of contact with the enemy along the Bitche road and of enemy presence in Baerenthal, he had no specific information of German troop strengths and locations.

A few minutes before this, Major Dykes had had a telephone conversation with the G-3 during which the seriousness of the 2nd Bn situation below Baerenthal became quite clear. Dykes had told the G-3, "We got a report from the 2nd Battalion that at 0830 today the enemy launched an attack on the road from Baerenthal spearheaded by tanks. We lost one anti-tank gun and have been forced to withdraw to the high ground in rear of those positions (where we last reported the Battalion's forward elements to be located)." Indicating that the 2nd Battalion's communications with its forward companies were out, Dykes had stated that the information being reported was based on the questioning of stragglers coming to the rear. He had added, "But it's definite about the enemy tanks and the anti-tank gun we lost. Do we have any tank destroyers over there?" When told by the G-3 that there were tank destroyers in the vicinity, Dykes had completed his report by stating actions ordered by Colonel Pettee in reaction to these developments: "Our CO has issued instructions to hold at the stone bridge at Teufelsbrueckerhof at all costs. The 2nd Battalion commander was told to have the platoon of engineers with him prepare the bridge for demolition to be blown on order." It was obvious that the 275th's commander considered his left flank gravely threatened. The G-3 immediately ordered tank destroyers sent to Teufelsbrueckerhof.

Shortly after 1000 hours, Major Dykes reported additional details to the G-3 section: "Our 2nd battalion was hit this morning about 0800 by six tanks that came down the road from Baerenthal. They (the 2nd Battalion) kayo'ed one tank, possibly two, but lost one anti-tank gun. One company was badly disorganized and the battalion commander has been trying to straighten it out. Their reserve company is in position just north of the original battalion CP location. The right company apparently held during the night, but we've lost

contact recently. We were in contact with G Company at 0947, when they received another tank attack, and all they had (to fight the tanks with) was rifles. At the moment I don't know where their exact location is, but it is possible that they are all on this side of the river. The battalion commander is trying to get them organized and, depending upon the situation, will do what he can." Dykes seems to have been given the impression that G Company, originally deployed on the west side of Zintzel creek along with a large part of the 2nd Bn heavy weapons, might have been driven across to the east side of the creek. This turned out to be wrong--though driven back during the night, G Company remained west of the creek and the heavy weapons as well.

Shortly after noon, the 313th Infantry commander reported to the G-3 that the second of his two battalions for use in the projected drive north from Reipertswiller had come up. He stated that "we're trying to get in touch with the unit on the left (179th Infantry/45th Division), but the enemy column is between us and them. Since I have only two battalions, I don't want to jump off until I get contact. What I want now is orders (for us to follow) after the contact." The G-3 responded: "Of course we'd like to have you attack as soon as possible. The 275th Infantry has gotten under way already on the right." The 313th commander--presumably in consideration of the weak force at his disposal, two understrength battalions--was being extremely careful to assure that the best possible conditions attended the commitment of his force in its advance, originally scheduled to have gotten under way the previous night.

Then at 1300, the 275th S-3 provided the G-3 section with details of the 1st and 3rd battalion operations that morning. The last elements of the 62nd Armored Infantry had cleared through Philippsbourg an hour or so before noon. The 275th's 1st Battalion on the right had been meeting practically no resistance. At 1200 A Company was moving northeast along the trail near the northern nose of the height Weiherberg and B Company was at the southwest nose of the height Falkenberg. L Company was 250 yards north of the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal road, half-way between those two places. In regard to the 3rd Battalion, the S-3 stated: "Something went wrong, and they didn't do so good. They got cut up badly last night, and the attack got off without coordination. L Company advanced to the point just reported, and K Company has never received word to go forward. At 1200, I Company was pulling around into the gap between L and B companies. K Company pulled back just before daylight (sic) this morning to the vicinity of Philippsbourg."

The regimental commander, Colonel Pettee, came on the line and provided the G-3 section with his appraisal of the 275th

situation: "My 1st battalion is practically on its objective. My 3rd battalion was not as aggressive as it should have been. I want permission to refuse my left flank rather than have it stick out there like that. At the present time my 1st battalion is up there with its left flank in the air, because my 3rd battalion wasn't aggressive enough. If I push my 3rd battalion out, its flank will be open. My 2nd battalion is still in position, and I think that should be my pivot. I wouldn't like to do anything (with it) until the people on the left (313th Infantry) get going." What exactly had gone wrong with the 3rd Battalion's redispersions cannot be stated, because the specifics of the instructions to it are not available. Pettee's concerns here most likely stemmed partially from what his 3rd Bn commander was unable to tell him about I Company--it had lost radio contact with the battalion CP before noon. In addition he probably had a misunderstanding concerning K Company--rather than arriving back in Philippsbourg at daybreak, as noted by Dykes in his oral situation report to G-3, K Company did not reenter Philippsbourg until 1140. So K Company had not had any time at all to proceed to its assigned objective. There may have been agreement between Shepherd and his K Co commander at 0330 that the Company's return to Philippsbourg would be delayed until daylight aided the movement--there still would have been time for K Company to return and prepare for its new advance, scheduled for 0900. Such a judgment could not, however, have taken into account the interference that the enemy did, in fact, interpose to the Company's return to Philippsbourg.

At 1350, the G-3 section called Colonel Pettee back giving the regimental commander the Division's approval of Pettee's proposed defensive positioning of his regiment, the key to which he had identified as the refusal of part of his left flank battalion--the 2nd Battalion below Baerenthal. G-3 at this time informed the 275th commander that the 313th Infantry on his left had not yet moved out of Reipertswiller. Pettee responded: "I will leave the 2nd Battalion where it is then. I haven't had any report recently on Baerenthal. Things are getting under control. I think I will tell them to dig in and hang on." The G-3 officer answered: "The Colonel (the G-3) thinks that it might be a good idea to clear out the town (Baerenthal). That's just a suggestion." Curiously, the G-3 didn't seem to be taking the WRECKER 2nd Bn situation as seriously as Pettee obviously did. However, it is evident that, had 2nd Battalion been in any condition to push the enemy out of Baerenthal, the threat thus posed to the enemy north-south supply route one mile further west could very well have affected adversely the strength of the German effort in the vicinity of Reipertswiller.

At 1445, the G-3 section queried WRECKER concerning the

accuracy of a report it had received from an artillery observer of a large number of German POW's taken in the area of Philippsbourg. WRECKER confirmed having about 150 prisoners. "Most of them have been taken in the 3rd Battalion sector; then this morning the 62nd had quite a few." On this basis, the G-3 at 1600 reported to VI Corps: "The report on the right was verified--they (275th Infantry) did take 150 POW's and are advancing against light resistance. Baerenthal is still in enemy hands. Once we have the high ground (below Baerenthal), we will try to take the town. Right now they (275th 2nd Battalion) are about one-half mile below Baerenthal on the west side of the Zinswiler road, and, in the vicinity of Baerenthal, we have troops along the road to Philippsbourg. They are waiting for the people on the left (313th Infantry) to move up." The G-3's intent here was evident--both regiments, the 275th and the 313th, were in a position to help the other. At the moment, he was depending upon each regimental commander's assessment of his own offensive strength and leaving the initiative to the two colonels. However, it soon became evident that the enemy around Reipertswiller had offensive ideas of his own.

A few minutes before the G-3's report was made to VI Corps, he had received a brief report from the 313th executive officer that one of his battalions had just jumped off. But then "we received an attack on the town on our left (Wildenguth). We now have two companies in that town." At 1905 came a report from the 313th commander that "the Germans are moving into Reipertswiller. I'm having the 2nd Battalion pull back. The Germans have tanks and infantry there. This is just a first report." A few minutes later, the 313th colonel qualified that report--the enemy in Reipertswiller was "maybe just a patrol, but we can't tell." Then at 2055, he was certain that the enemy push into Reipertswiller was being made in strength: "Reipertswiller has gotten to be quite a thing. There is tank-to-tank action and a lot of confusion. Our line to the companies in Wildenguth is out. The 2nd Battalion is pulling back into the town; we now have only B Company there with five tanks trying to clear the town. We will use the 1st Battalion of the 314th tonight or in the morning for sure." The 314th 1st Battalion was being moved down from Zinswiler, the 45th having attached it to the 313th.

The G-3 had begun pressing the 275th and 313th to establish contact with each other sending out their own patrols and using 45th Reconnaissance Troop patrols placed at their disposal for this purpose. At 2120, Major Dykes told the G-3 that "I didn't know we had a reconn troop with us--I haven't even seen them. I don't think it would be possible to make contact with the 313th Infantry tonight--the terrain is too rough between us. I do not have liaison with the

313th but will send a man over there." The G-3 advised Dykes as follows: "The 313th got up to a point 2 miles or more below the Baerenthal-Mouterhouse road but were driven back. Now there is a big gap between you, and we are worried about it. The General would like you to make contact with them on the ground. Locate the reconn troop that is supposed to be with you and use them to close the gap. If at all possible, send a patrol to them also, or you might even slide over to the left some."

Shortly afterwards there was a similar exchange between the G-3 and the 313th commander, who stated that "I couldn't send a patrol to contact the people on the right--I'm concerned with the left. The reconn troop that I had has taken off--how about attaching them to me or to the 275th, and we could use them to fill the gap. We have Jerries all around us. I'm at Rothbach and have alerted everyone available to defend the CP. I have a platoon from the 25th Tank Battalion with me, but there is a devil of a fight in Reipertswiller." The G-3 was not to be denied: "We have information that two enemy divisions are concentrating north of us, an SS division in the vicinity of Sturzelbronn (4 miles north of Philippsbourg) and a Panzer division at Ludwigswinkel (3 miles east of Sturzelbronn). General Frederick (45th Division commander) wants every effort made to contact the 275th on the ground. Another thing--I would like to have the trucks moving the 1st Battalion/314th to return to Zinswiler and remain with the 1st Battalion/315th, prepared to move them to the assistance of anyone who needs help." The SS division concentrating at Sturzelbronn was the 6th SS Mountain; the Panzer division was probably the 21st Panzer, at least one battalion of which had been reported on the move at midday.

At 2230 the G-3 section notified WRECKER that "we are starting our 45th Reconnaissance Troop in the morning through Reipertswiller to try to contact your 2nd battalion. Start a patrol out from your F Company's block to try to contact them."

Summary of WRECKER Operations, 2 Jan

During the beginning moments of 2 Jan, elements of two 275th battalions were engaged, the 2nd Battalion at the edge of Baerenthal and the 3rd Battalion to the northwest of Philippsbourg. The 1st Battalion had just arrived in Niederbronn following its move up from Reichshoffen. Some time around midnight, 1-2 Jan, the regimental CP in Niederbronn was visited by Col Paul DeW. Adams, 45th Div assistant commander. Following discussions with Colonel Pettee, the visitor assigned specific terrain objectives to be taken and held by the 275th Infantry during the next operational day.

To achieve these objectives, Pettee decided to commit his 1st Battalion from reserve and to advance certain elements of the 3rd Battalion. Meanwhile, the 2nd Battalion was, in all likelihood, expected to defend its positions in the vicinity of Baerenthal. Word that Barten's battalion was under attack had not reached the regimental CP while Adams was there.

What required the commitment of the 1st Battalion was the 45th's assignment of objectives to WRECKER the taking of which would achieve the closure of the gap between the 275th and the 157th Infantry on its right. At the beginning of 2 Jan, this defensive sector remained partially covered by elements of the 62nd Armored Infantry, but this coverage would be of short duration. By the time WRECKER 1st Battalion assault companies had moved forward on their mission, the 62nd troops were already in the process of withdrawing, some of them having to fight off flanking and encircling enemy groups. The impact of NORDWIND had made impossible the intended orderly relief of the 62nd, the original planning for which had envisioned a different timing and manner of execution and the employment of WRECKER 3rd Battalion, rather than the 1st.

According to his instructions, the 1st Battalion commander planned to cover his more-than-2-mile front by sending his A company to the northeast and B company to the north of Philippsbourg. These two companies were to establish defensive positions on the heights Angelsberg and Falkenberg, one being over one mile west of Dambach, the other, one mile west and a little north of Angelsberg. C Company was to take up battalion reserve positions in and on the eastern outskirts of Philippsbourg and block the road junction 500 yards north of Mambach.

For the 3rd Battalion, WRECKER's assigned objectives involved its taking and holding of high ground southwest of the 1st Battalion's Falkenberg objective. This mission was to be assigned to I Company. It appears that L Company was intended to move into Baerenthal behind the 2nd Bn attack which had been planned to start at 2330, 1 Jan. It is possible that K Company was to have been sent out the Bitche road almost to Lieschbach and take up defensive positions there. However, due to the tardiness of the K Co deployment in this operation, its mission may have been modified. The regimental commander had been informed that, to correct the dangerous situation on the WRECKER left flank, the 313th Infantry would advance north from Reipertswiller and close the gap in the front. The 313th's advance was intended to drive a wedge between the 2nd Battalion and the enemy force it was confronting; then the 2nd Battalion would revert to become the 275th's regimental reserve.

Earlier, at the end of New Year's Day, WRECKER I and K

companies had been northwest of Philippsbourg in the vicinity of the Bitche road, along which they had been advancing when they had been ambushed. Following the ambush, the men of I Company had slowly filtered back to the build-up of a defensive position just south of Lieschbach, where the Company had then ambushed a German combat patrol and driven it off. I Company remained in this position until 0330 the following morning, when an order was received from Battalion for it to return to Philippsbourg. The movement back to Philippsbourg was made with caution, it being expected that mobile enemy groups or another ambush could be encountered en route back to the village. I Company reentered Philippsbourg at 0630. Meanwhile, K Company had gone into a perimeter defensive position on high ground to the east of the Bitche road, where it received a pounding from enemy shellfire and some suspected short rounds from friendly artillery. Receiving a withdrawal order several hours before dawn after radio communications had been reestablished, K Company began moving back to Philippsbourg shortly before daybreak. Its arrival back in the village was delayed by several brushes with the enemy.

Above, it has been noted that the German 476th Grenadier Regiment was assigned to take Philippsbourg on 2 January and, accordingly attacked with two battalions, one from the west, the other from the north. The attack had been a failure, this being attributed to poor coordination, rugged terrain and troop fatigue, in addition to American counteraction. It is not clear what American forces might have been encountered by the German battalion attacking toward Philippsbourg from the west--perhaps the terrible terrain and troop exhaustion were the principal hindrances. On the other hand, it can be inferred that the German groups which became engaged with K Company during its withdrawal to Philippsbourg that morning were elements of the 476th Grenadier Regiment's battalion which was advancing toward Philippsbourg along the Bitche road. The series of fire-fights between the two forces which occurred could have convinced the German attackers that there was a large American force on its left flank, one that could cut off the German battalion's line of retreat should it continue to advance toward Philippsbourg. Such a judgment could have led to a decision to call off any further advance by that battalion.

Over below Baerenthal, in the 2nd Battalion's sector, there were several predawn probes into its hastily organized defenses by German tanks escorted by infantry. To the west of the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road, the German pressure caused the forward (G) company to pull back, partially disorganized, to a ridge occupied by elements of the reserve (F) company. Some of the retreating men of G Company, joined by a few from F Company, continued withdrawing until

halted by the battalion commander and other officers only a short distance north of the battalion command post at Muehlthal. At this point the stragglers were put to work preparing a secondary defense line.

Shortly after daybreak a German attack issued out of Baerenthal with a force consisting of as many as six Mark IV tanks and a battalion of infantry. The attackers moved along the Zinswiller road and fanned out to the east of it where they ran into the defenses of E Company, which had been successful in holding its positions during the predawn probes. During the engagements which ensued, two or more of the German tanks were damaged and forced to withdraw and the escorting infantry was driven back leaving behind a considerable number of dead and wounded. It is not clear just how long the enemy pressure lasted that morning, but it caused more straggling, men abandoning their foxholes and hastening to the rear. Many of them were collected at the secondary defense line and assigned to work thereon. At the 2nd Battalion command post in Muehlthal a platoon of five tank-destroyer guns arrived late in the morning having been sent up from Zinswiller to bolster the anti-tank defenses along the Zinswiller road from Baerenthal. At noon the battalion commander decided to send the tank destroyers forward to take up firing positions. At about the same time the men working on the emergency defenses were ordered to return to their companies. The 2nd Battalion spent the rest of the day reorganizing, repositioning, and working on its defenses.

At 1600, 2 January, the regimental S-2 reported that the 275th Infantry had made contact with the following enemy units during the previous 24-hour period: 1st and 2nd Bn's, 476th Gren Regt, and elements of the 456th Gren Regt, 256th VG Div; 952nd Inf, 361st VG Div; and Signal Bn, 6th SS Mtn Div. He noted that the 275th 3rd Battalion had taken 150 prisoners during the period.

Commitment of the 1st Battalion

In the 1st Battalion's movement during the final hours of New Year's Day, C Co 2nd Platoon evidently dropped out of the column as it marched from Reichshoffen to the foundry complex in Niederbronn. Turning left from the Battalion's march route, the Platoon proceeded one block to the railroad station, several hundred yards east of the foundry. Since the 1st Battalion march-up to Niederbronn was only the initial step in its commitment out of regimental reserve, the dropping-out from the column of C's 2nd Platoon was the consequence of the regimental commander's decision to save something out for an emergency. Designated the regimental reserve, the 2nd Platoon would remain in Niederbronn when

the Battalion departed en route to Philippsbourg.

A few hours later 1st Battalion marched out of town. At daybreak, not long after the start of the march, 1st Lt Karl K. Grotheer, C Co commander, was with his 1st platoon at the head of the battalion column. The moving column was met by several half-tracks coming rapidly from Philippsbourg. Leading the half-tracks was a jeep in which Lt Col Ronald J. Pierce, 1st Battalion commander, was riding. The vehicles came to a stop, and Pierce ordered the marching men halted; then he directed Grotheer to fill the half-tracks with riflemen from his company. Grotheer and his 1st platoon, or most of it, mounted up. Remembered as an irascible man, Pierce, as the C Co force was loading into the vehicles, was shouting orders and explanations which gave them to understand that there was an enemy threat in Philippsbourg and that, as those who heard him remember it, the village was being defended by rear echelon personnel only--"Nothing but cooks and clerks!"

There had, indeed, been a real threat to the village during the predawn hours that morning when the 1st Battalion commander arrived at the 3rd Battalion command post in Philippsbourg. Having preceded his battalion to join with the 3rd Battalion staff to discuss the 1st Battalion's commitment to the north and northeast of Philippsbourg, Pierce surely received a briefing on the other battalion's dispositions. So, when the enemy threat materialized on the east ridge, possibly while Pierce was still being briefed in the 3rd Battalion CP, Pierce could not fully comprehend the vulnerability of the Americans' Philippsbourg situation. The concern of the American command groups in Philippsbourg could not but have been intensified by their almost total lack of knowledge of enemy strength to the east, the direction from which the enemy group seemed to have come. Aboard the half-tracks bound for Philippsbourg, Grotheer and his men expected a hot reception when they arrived at the village. However, when their vehicles halted at the edge of town, they found the situation relatively quiet--the sound of small arms fire, but not too close, and of an occasional shell burst. The C Co group could not have been aware of the predawn events and circumstances giving rise to the emergency in Philippsbourg to which they had been called--so they wondered what all the fuss had been about.

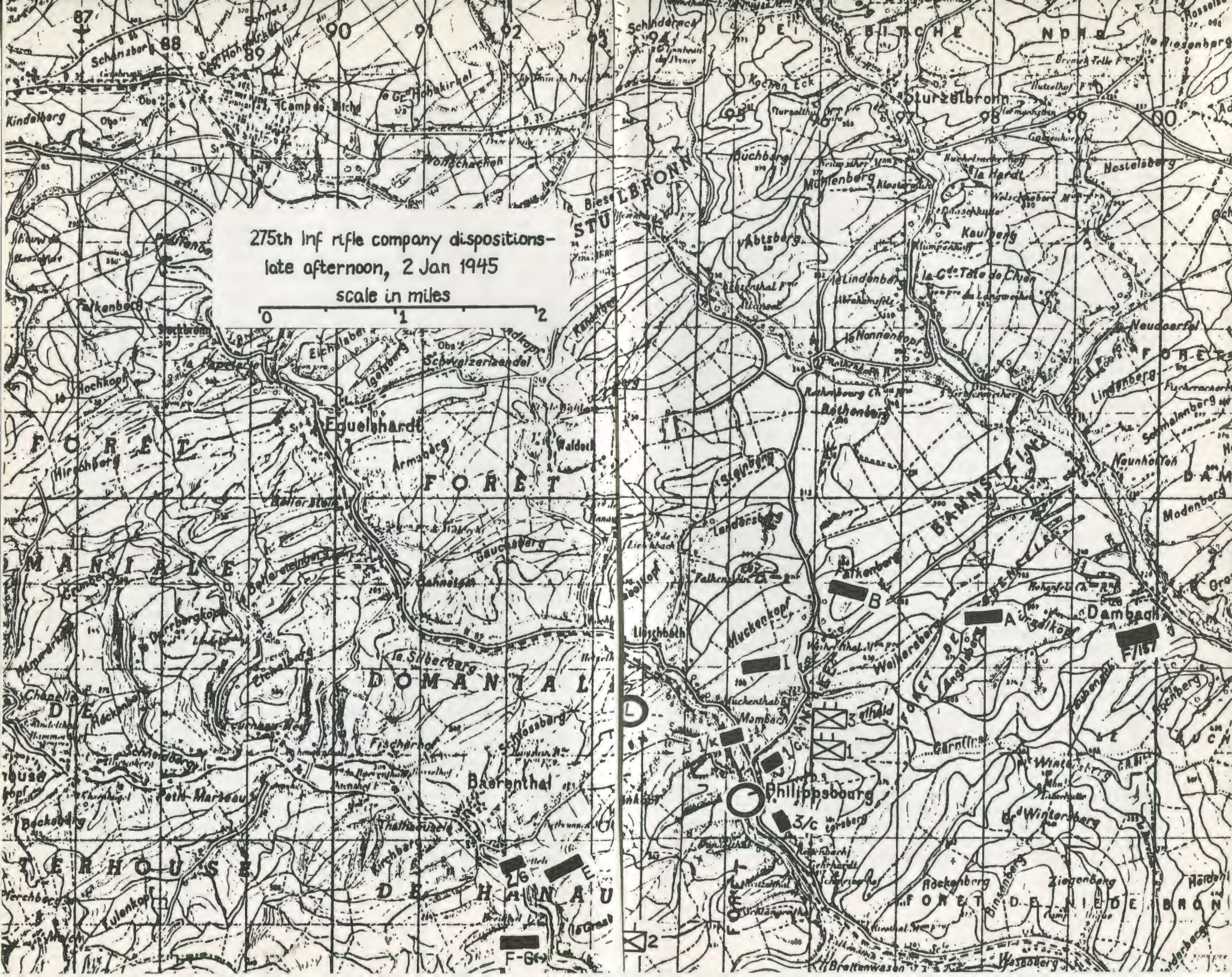
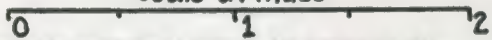
It was still early morning, and the rest of the 1st Battalion was still on the march toward Philippsbourg. It would not arrive for a couple of hours. T Sgt Melvin Purvis, platoon sergeant of the 1st Platoon, was sent out with a small patrol, probably to search the area where the German party had made its appearance before dawn. The rest of the 1st Platoon, it appears, remained at the south end of Philippsbourg in the vicinity of the battalion CP awaiting the

arrival of the main body. Grotheer selected a location for the company CP, a house on the right side of the main street, about midway between the Lutheran Church and Main Forks. The CP would be hastily moved the next morning when the German attack hit.

When the 1st Battalion arrived in Philippsbourg and was subsequently deployed, C Company was assigned as battalion reserve--its remaining two rifle platoons being directed to defensive positions covering entrances to Philippsbourg. The Purvis patrol may have not yet returned when 2nd Lt Harold H. Nelson took the 1st Platoon to its assigned location. William C. Pierce's recollection: "I was a pfc, second scout of the 3rd squad, 1st Platoon. (In the movement to the 1st Platoon position) we passed through the town and took the first road to the right. Our platoon took up positions on the hill next to the road and dug in." Nelson probably took his platoon along the trail paralleling the Neunhoffen road and running along the lower north slope of the ridge which commands Philippsbourg from its east side. Moving along the trail to the nose of that ridge, the 1st Platoon would have gone past emplaced machine guns of M Company. William Pierce: "Sometime early in the afternoon, a patrol from another company passed by our positions with about 70 German prisoners. Later that afternoon a plane came over and strafed positions near ours. Nobody was hit, although it made an awful racket. We heard a lot of mortar and artillery shellbursts, but nothing fell near us. Early in the evening our squad was pulled further up the hill, and I was assigned a position overlooking the town. There I found a foxhole already dug, by Germans it seemed--they had left some of their grenades in it." The large group of German POW's observed being escorted past the 1st Platoon positions was surely that sent back to Philippsbourg by I Company. The presence of the supposedly German-dug foxhole on the east ridge has no certain explanation--several days before NORDWIND's start a German long-range reconnaissance patrol reportedly observed Philippsbourg, probably from its east ridge, and could have left the grenades behind.

Donald Docken, BAR-man in the 1st squad of the 1st Platoon, recalls that "our squad was moved out on the edge of town to guard the main road coming from Bitche. I was put in the point position along the shoulder of the road . . . As my ammunition carrier and I dug our foxhole, everything seemed quiet, but we began to get anxious when we saw people fleeing down the road with all their possessions stacked high on horse-drawn wagons and hand-pulled carts." Docken has placed the 1st squad's position a few yards beyond Main Forks on the left (Bitche) extension of the Forks. (Here and elsewhere "Main Forks" is used arbitrarily to designate the principal Philippsbourg road intersection, at the north

275th Inf rifle company dispositions-
late afternoon, 2 Jan 1945
scale in miles



end of the main street. The left extension from the Forks goes to Bitche; the right extension passes below the north nose of the east ridge, goes through Mambach about one-half mile from the Forks, and continues to Neunhoffen. About one mile from Main Forks there is a road junction on the Neunhoffen road, a road from the north joining it a few hundred yards from the south end of the height Falkenberg. A prominent feature of the Philippsbourg geography during the fighting, Main Forks acquired several GI nicknames.)

Personal accounts of former 1st Platoon members indicate that the Platoon, after its 2 January deployment, was badly scattered. This was the consequence of the breadth of the Platoon's front and of the rugged, wooded terrain of the position. With the 3rd squad (William Pierce's) covering the northwest face of the east ridge, and the 1st squad (Docken's) down in the village in the vicinity of Main Forks, the 2nd squad was covering the west face of the ridge--there could have been no visual contact between any of the three squads. Arthur W. Rorabaugh, of the 2nd squad, recalls that he and Joseph Sueltenfuss prepared their BAR position at the point 50-100 yards behind the houses along the right side of the main street opposite a point about half-way between Main Forks and the Lutheran Church. Unlike the 3rd squad, the positions of the other two squads remained unchanged during the night 2-3 January.

When Sergeant Purvis and his patrol of 1st Platoon members returned from their mission begun during the morning of 2 January, they were escorting several Germans--the patrol had captured them during its search, but the details of the event are not remembered. A few days later Purvis was sent to the rear to receive training and indoctrination in preparation for receiving his battlefield commission as a 2nd lieutenant--one of the first such recognitions conferred in the Regiment.

Harry Durkee, 2nd lieutenant and leader of C Co 3rd Platoon, and Nils Ramstedt, staff sergeant and one of Durkee's squad leaders, have collaborated in an account of that platoon's actions during the Vosges campaign. "On arrival in Philippsbourg, the 3rd Platoon went into position on the east side of the Niederbronn road where it approaches Philippsbourg from the southeast. The Platoon was on a ridge running southwest toward the road--the ridge is the next terrain feature south of the dominant ridge on the east side of Philippsbourg. The platoon CP was located in the 'root cellar' at the foot of the east ridge, the same location to which Lieutenant Grotheer would displace the company CP under pressure of the enemy attack the next morning. The 3rd Platoon had proceeded to its assigned position area from the vicinity of the 1st Battalion command post. En route the men passed two dead GI's, and appear-

ances indicated that the pair had been laying field wire then they were killed--an up-close introduction to battlefield death for the men of the Platoon.

"The Platoon's position was exceptionally compact, all three squads being within 50-60 yards of the Niederbronn road and no more than 20-25 yards from each other. Our 1st and 2nd squads were higher up on the ridge, and the 3rd squad was lower, near the nose of the ridge and just about opposite what became known as 'the first house on the left' of the road as one approaches the village. There were some of our mortars emplaced near our 1st squad." These were probably M Co mortars, which would be displaced forward late that same afternoon and put into position on the north edge of Philippsbourg.

An incident involving C Co's 3rd platoon occurred about the time when it assumed its position on the nose of the ridge near the south entrance to the village. Edwin E. Neill, pfc and BAR-man in Ramstedt's squad, has recounted that, "When we of the 3rd Platoon under Lieutenant Durkee approached the village of Philippsbourg, I did not know we were replacing the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion. . . We were given a hearty welcome by snipers. We scattered like quail, and in a few minutes Lieutenant Durkee sent Sergeant (Nils) 'Wally' Ramstedt with fieldglasses and myself with a BAR up the mountain to snuff out the snipers. I fired as directed by 'Wally,' but to no avail. Later I heard they (the snipers) were in a cave or a series of caves and so were difficult to roust out.

"It seems all we really accomplished was to invite a heavy artillery barrage in. . . There is no gap in my memory concerning those incoming artillery shells--golly, those shells sounded like they were getting bigger and bigger, the closer they approached. Well, the treebursts started us running helter-skelter the heck out of there. The good Lord was taking good care of us that day as we soon literally fell into a World War I trench, and this saved our butts for the time being. Before the barrage was over, I think we had burrowed under at least a foot of leaves and pine needles. The barrage lifted, and Lieutenant Durkee sent someone up to see how many pieces we were in, but we were fine and dandy. Best of all, it was warm under all those leaves and pine needles. We came out of the woods and dug in--considering the frozen ground, I wonder how we did it. I guess the sound of incoming shells sort of motivates one to dig a little faster and deeper. Soon a half-track came up the road and was quickly knocked out and burning." Another account of the brush with the snipers suggests that Neill's BAR work might not have been so ineffective as he tells it.

When C Co Weapons Platoon arrived in Philippsbourg with the 1st Battalion column that morning, it was under the

leadership of T Sgt Sig Rusley, the platoon sergeant. The platoon leader, 2nd Lt Donald Claudepierre, had been evacuated for surgery the same day--appendix attack. In Philippsbourg the Weapons Platoon's primary assignment was to provide local security for the battalion CP--their machine guns and mortars were left loaded on their weapons carriers (jeep trailers) parked behind cover of buildings in the south part of Philippsbourg. Houses near the CP were selected as billets.

Sgt Billy Garrison was a member of the machine-gun section. He remembers that a group of them "moved into an old shed of some sort. Soon after we moved in an American tank stopped by, and the tankers heated water for us in a canteen cup--for Sgt Henry Scrobecki and me. Later that morning, someone else and I were sitting outside the shed cleaning our M-1's when someone on the hill west of town shot hitting the shed. We went inside and I picked up an '03 rifle and scope. Going back outside, I located the source of the sniper fire and squeezed off two or three rounds aiming at the spot. Then one of our anti-tank guns in position near Main Forks shot a couple of times at the same target. When the smoke cleared, at least three Germans emerged from their concealment on the hill with their hands up. They were taken prisoner."

Raymond W. Nelson, of the 1st Battalion medical section, has recorded a graphic description of his initial impressions of Philippsbourg. "The 1st Battalion section of the Medical Detachment, 275th Infantry, arrived there in the afternoon preceding the hell that was to break loose. We encountered a column of tanks on its way out and were told that they were pulling back and that we were replacing them in this section of the front. We were also told that we were entering a quiet area and that our combat role would be defensive. Everyone was in good spirits. I remember that the officer in charge of the medics for the armored people we were relieving was Capt Thoin, who had been our battalion surgeon back in the States. He jokingly chided us about the cumbersome equipment we had to haul around to set up our aid station with; he compared it with his own set-up--the equipment neatly and compactly arranged in a single truck, with no need for man-handling. We heard later that his neat arrangement received a direct hit by an enemy artillery shell and was completely destroyed.

"We scouted around and decided that the most suitable place to set up the aid station was in the church on the right side of the main street 150 yards or so up from the south entrance of Philippsbourg. Had we been more experienced, we would have realized that, being the most prominent structure in the whole area, the church with its tall, whitish steeple would be a certain target and reference

point for enemy artillery. Subsequent experience would seem to have confirmed such an appraisal. We spent the rest of the day unloading our jeep and 3/4-ton truck and setting up in the vestry at the north end of the church. Captain Thoin and his medics of the departing armored unit had evacuated their own wounded but had left for our attention 15-20 German wounded. They became the first combat casualties we treated. However, there wasn't much we could do for them. They were suffering from both wounds and exposure. All of them had frozen hands and feet. When necessary to do so, we removed clothing by cutting it off because it was frozen too stiff to be removed by any other means."

Harold H. Steiner, 1st Sergeant of the Battalion's Headquarters Company, has recalled locations of installations in Philippsbourg of primary concern to him. The battalion CP was in a house adjacent to a massive stone barn, and these were the first two structures on the right at the south entrance to Philippsbourg along the road from Niederbronn. Perhaps 50 paces south, perhaps more, on the opposite side of the road from the battalion command post, was a house used for the 1st Battalion radio section's operations. The Headquarters Company's command post was in the village, in a house on the left side of the main street, beyond the Lutheran Church. The battalion wire section was located in the same house.

It was mid-morning when the main body of the 1st Battalion marched into Philippsbourg from its assembly area back along the road to Niederbronn not more than a mile. There was a brief pause while instructions were issued and some designated machine-gun and mortar sections of D Company joined A and B companies as attachments. Then these two rifle companies marched out of Philippsbourg, having taken a right turn at Main Forks to follow the road toward Neunhoffen. The 1st and 3rd platoons of C Company also moved to their assigned defensive positions in and around Philippsbourg. After these deployments had been accomplished, the following 1st Battalion elements remained in Philippsbourg: a machine-gun section and a mortar section of D Company, C Co's Weapons Platoon, all of Headquarters Company, and the battalion commander with his staff.

Maj John M. Duffie, 1st Battalion executive officer, would remember that "We lost radio communications with A and B companies almost as soon as they were out of sight. At the battalion CP we didn't get worried at first since these two companies had a good distance to go and lots of deciding on how to carry out difficult assignments. Also the rough terrain was not conducive to good radio communications. As time went by and we still had no communications with the forward companies, we began considering alternatives. One patrol was sent out, but I was still not satisfied after the

patrol had returned and reported. I probably sounded off about it, and I think Colonel Pierce told me to do whatever I wanted about this situation. After dark I took two or three others and a radio on a jeep patrol out the (Neunhoffen) road running between where A and B companies were supposed to be. We stopped and called both companies on the radio--no luck. Why we weren't fired on I don't know. That may have been the time when I am supposed to have exclaimed, 'Let's get the hell out of here!' We were lucky."

Though the 1st Battalion commander and staff were understandably preoccupied with developments affecting the two assault companies--a preoccupation aggravated by the dearth of information coming back about them--there was some concern shown for the readiness of the in-village dispositions of the Battalion. B Co's Charles G. Landells returned well after dark to the barn adjacent to the 1st Battalion command post. He and Harold T. Van Horn had been sent out from the battalion command post with a message for B Company, made the delivery, and went back to Philippsbourg. Entering the barn, a lieutenant whom Landells didn't know asked him to go along as escort while the officer visited several places up the main street from the CP, then back along the Niederbronn road past the edge of the village. Having cautioned men at each of the stops to remain on the alert, the lieutenant and Landells returned to the CP. It now seems that such instances indicating that WRECKER's forces located in Philippsbourg would likely be alerted and vigilant at dawn the next morning were the exception rather than the rule. The strange lieutenant was probably from the Headquarters Company.

Several C Co veterans have remembered that a group of drunken and clamorous German soldiers swaggered into Philippsbourg one night and, having ignored an American challenge, were mowed down by one of the machine guns in position in the village. Eugene Petersen's wartime diary verifies the event and the date of its occurrence: "The diary indicates that the shooting of those stoned Jerries, smoking cigars, took place on Tuesday evening, the 2nd of January. I had driven Capt John S. Carrier, the battalion S-3, to the edge of Philippsbourg that morning. Colonel Pierce was already there when we arrived. Pierce greeted us by remarking, 'It looks like we'll have to fight for the CP.'" His remark doubtlessly had reference to the alert caused by the enemy patrol before dawn that morning.

Concerning other first impressions of Philippsbourg, Petersen on the night after his arrival there jotted down in his diary, "Jerry patrols were in the village last night, which was bleak and wintry. The ground is covered with deep snow. The only difference between the Americans at Philippsbourg and those at Valley Forge--we have shoes and

they didn't!" As for the ill-fated group of enemy carousers, this was only one of several instances during the WRECKER experience in the Vosges in which an enemy force was contacted of whom a significant part appeared to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The rumor that went around was that German small unit leaders were encouraging--or, at least, not objecting to--their troops' getting hopped up in preparation for an engagement with the other side. There was also the possibility that spirits were issued to troops to sterilize the contents of their canteens or keep them from freezing. Such practice, of course, invited abuse by individual and troop unit alike. Numerous instances in which Americans found water frozen solid in their canteens indicate that the use of alcohol as an anti-freeze would not have been completely unreasonable.

A Company, having arrived with the rest of the Battalion at the Niederbronn foundry around midnight, 1-2 January, disposed of its cargo packs and other extra gear in preparation for a tactical march and deployment. Successive briefings were held to acquaint company officers and NCO's, then their subordinates, with the situation such as it was known. The remaining hours of darkness were available for such rest as could be had in the cold, comfortless shell of a factory building. Around daybreak, the Company formed up and moved out on the road toward Philippsbourg in the 1st Battalion column. After an hour or more, it turned off the road into a ravine and dispersed. There it waited for further instruction from Capt Ross R. Millhiser, the CO, who had proceeded on to the battalion CP in Philippsbourg for his final briefing. During the break, one of the Company's lieutenants shot himself in the foot. There being a suspicion that the wound was deliberately self-inflicted, the man was sent to the rear under arrest with charges preferred against him. There would be other such cases, here and there, in the Regiment.

Ordered to move into Philippsbourg, A Company marched into the village along with other 1st Battalion elements. It remained there only briefly while heavy weapons elements were shuffled--there had been shelling there that same day and the occasional sound of smallarms firing nearby indicated the enemy's proximity. It would have been senseless to tempt enemy artillery with a bunched-up infantry column. The appreciation of the situation thus far absorbed by A Co's CO had made him expectant of early contact with the enemy and wary of an ambush. He planned his march route accordingly. With point and flankers out, the Company left the Neunhoffen road just beyond Mambach, turning east onto a trail skirting the southeast foot of the long ridge Weiherberg. It was shortly after noon.

Having turned off the Neunhoffen road, A Company had

slightly more than a mile to go to reach its assigned objective--the high ground overlooking the Neunhoffen road. The trail being followed curved left toward the north after the Company had been marching on it for about 20 minutes. Then several Germans were encountered and taken prisoner without their offering resistance. The POW's were sent to the rear, escorted by a driver and guard in the CO's jeep. The west slope of Angelsberg came into view on the right as the advance continued, and the trail A Company was following shortly ascended to the saddle between the noses of the two ridges, Weiherberg and Angelsberg. Reaching the saddle, the Company turned eastward and climbed obliquely up the slope of its objective. In its extended formation, A Company probably stretched 500 yards from head to tail. As the head of the formation neared the military crest dominating the north slope of Angelsberg, its center was fired on from the left, and the fire was returned. The enemy, evidently a small patrol, withdrew.

Captain Millhiser now went about laying out a defensive position, directing his platoon leaders to deploy their men in designated areas. His Weapons platoon leader, Lieutenant David Scobey, suggested that, since the enemy was in the immediate vicinity and aware of A Company's presence, a strong outpost ought to be set up to cover the Company while it was preoccupied with laying out its positions and digging in. Millhiser agreed and sent Scobey with a machine-gun squad and some riflemen to set up the outpost. Shortly after Scobey and his party departed on their mission, the men in the platoon perimeters heard a firefight break out downslope. Neither Scobey nor any of the machine-gunners survived this action although it is possible some of the riflemen might have. In addition to Scobey, Pfc Alfred Heard and probably others were killed. The remaining men of the Scobey party, some of them probably wounded, were taken as prisoners to the German rear.

It was mid-afternoon, and the Company was experiencing extreme difficulty in the effort to dig in--the pick-mattock entrenching tools were making little headway in penetrating the rocky, frozen ground of the position. The enemy began lobbing an occasional shell into the area. There were too few trees on the slope to afford much concealment of the position, but for the remaining couple of daylight hours, the enemy failed to take advantage of his opportunity to shell the vulnerable position more heavily. The enemy shell-fire was not much more than a nuisance. There were no serious casualties. A few of the Company, including Millhiser, received a peppering of small stone fragments sprayed out by shell explosions. The men continued to peck at their holes with picks, but few really effective shelters resulted. Periodic efforts to contact Battalion via radio were no more

successful.

B Company reached Philippsbourg uneventfully, having made the same moves as A Company--from the Reichshoffen wire factory to Niederbronn's foundry, from the Niederbronn bivouac to the forward assembly area along the road to Philippsbourg, and from there to the brief pause in Philippsbourg. Moving out of Philippsbourg ahead of A Company, B Co's troops, in approach march formation, turned right at Main Forks and moved along the road with the frozen Philippsbourg Pond on its left. As they passed below the wooded face of the steep ridge dominating the east side of Philippsbourg, they took note of M Co machine-gun emplacements on the lower part of the slope. Passing Mambach, less than a half mile from the edge of Philippsbourg, the Company came to a road junction and turned left off the Neunhoffen road onto a narrower road and followed this for a little over a half-mile. The Company's movement brought it past the south end and then along the west slope of its objective--the long, heavily wooded ridge Falkenberg, the crest of which runs north to its midpoint and thence northeast to its north end. The ridge overlooks the terrain for a mile or more to the north, northeast and east. Reaching a trail to the right, B Company turned on it and followed it up the lower, gentler slope toward B's objective; then the Company left the trail to labor up the sharp incline of Falkenberg's upper reaches.

B's company commander, Capt William C. Schmied, was disappointed by what he found on Falkenberg--the advantages of good observation normally afforded by high ground were almost totally negated by the thick woods blanketing his designated objective; the woods also complicated his maintenance of contact with the elements of his command, and they with each other. The broad expanse of the big ridge that B Company was assigned to defend added to its commander's decision-making problems. Capt A. Stewart Wallace, company commander of D Company, had accompanied B Company and his two heavy weapons sections attached to B Company in the movement to Falkenberg. Wallace has recalled that, "When Schmied reached his assigned position, it was getting rather late in the afternoon. He and I were both dumbfounded at the breadth of the position he was supposed to hold. We were unable to contact Battalion via radio because the combination of distance and hilly terrain made this impossible."

The Company's loss of radio contact had already been discovered. Back before turning off the road onto the trail approaching Falkenberg, Schmied had attempted to call Battalion without success and then had sent two runners back to carry a message reporting on the situation. Wallace: "Schmied asked me to place my section of mortars for him

since he had his hands full, and I did so on my way back to Philippsbourg. I put them behind Schmied's hill within 200 yards of the road which was his left boundary--the road that B Company had left just before starting up the slope of Falkenberg. I remember Schmied's asking me to explain to them back at Battalion how exposed B Company's position appeared to be and how difficult it was going to be because of the terrain and distances involved for the forward companies--I, B, and A-- to maintain lateral contact."

The two B Co runners sent back by Schmied were Landells and Van Horn. They arrived at the 1st Battalion CP in Philippsbourg and delivered the message from their company commander while it was still daylight. From the message, the battalion commander and his staff could have learned only that B Company was near its assigned position and had made no enemy contact. Word of the A Co situation that presumably could have been brought to Battalion by Capt Millhiser's driver and the guard with their group of POW's would have told Colonel Pierce that A Company, too, was near its objective. But the continuing ineffectiveness of the battalion radio net was a severe handicap. Van Horn remembers that he and Landells were sent back to Falkenberg by Battalion with a message for B Company. It was dark when they neared the position, and they found one of the B Co outposts with difficulty. The two runners may have left the message with the outpost--Van Horn's recollection is that they did not go into the interior of the company position. Indeed, the steep slope of Falkenberg and its dense woods would have made this an extremely difficult task in the dark, even for those familiar with the layout of the B Co position. Having delivered their message, the two runners returned to the battalion CP.

After positioning his 81 mm mortar section to support B Company, Captain Wallace returned to Philippsbourg. Wallace: "I got back to Philippsbourg after dark. Around 2200 no radio contact had yet been made with B Company; so Colonel Pierce had me take a few of my men back up to find out whether Schmied had ever established contact with I Company on his left--I was the only person in Philippsbourg familiar with the general layout of the B Co deployments on Falkenberg. We strolled up through town rather apprehensive that C Co elements providing local security for the 1st Battalion CP might fire on us. We actually proceeded far enough to pass by a half-mile the place where I had positioned my mortars--the darkness made recognition of the terrain features impossible. We retraced our steps and found the mortar section at last. These men informed me that they had seen no one else since I had left them and that they had almost fired on me and my party when we had passed them a short time before. There would have been little possibility of

finding our way in the dark up over the Falkenberg ridge to the forward slope, where B Co's rifle platoons were located. Consequently I and my party crossed the road and searched the area to the west of it but could find no sign of I Company. Reluctantly I took my party back to Philippsbourg." Wallace remembers that he got back to 1st Bn CP and reported at about 0200 the next morning.

Pfc Richard Brown was a first gunner with the D Co machine-gun section assigned to support B Company at its Falkenberg position. His recollection is that his section moved out of Philippsbourg on this mission well behind the two rifle companies (B and A) and that the machine-gun section never made contact with B Company during the following 24-hour period, which ended with Brown's and the other section members' being taken prisoner. Brown: "About one mile out the Neunhoffen road we left the road and went to the right on a narrow trail which we thought would take us to where B Company was. After an hour or so, and with sniper fire increasing, it became impossible for our weapons carriers to get through. The order was given to turn around, go back to the Neunhoffen road, and continue out it to where it turned northeast and try to come in (to the B Co position) from the other side. We returned to the Neunhoffen road, turned right, and proceeded along it until we were passing Falkenberg ridge on our left. Ahead of us we spotted German troops crossing the road from the Falkenberg side. After a brief firefight we captured 30 of them, the remainder withdrawing into the woods on both sides of the road.

"We turned around and headed back with our POW's to the road junction beyond the south end of Falkenberg. Here, as I recall, we met Captain Wallace and T Sgt Fondable, platoon sergeant of our 1st platoon. They relieved us of our prisoners and sent them back toward Philippsbourg under guard. It was now late afternoon, and we were told to go back to the junction with the Neunhoffen road of the trail onto which we had originally turned. There we were to set up our guns to cover the road. As I recall, we were told that B Company would contact us during the night in order for us to join them."

The initial mistake could have been made when Brown's section, unsure of its instructions when it left Philippsbourg, elected to follow the tracks left by the passage of A Company where the latter unit had turned off the Neunhoffen road onto the trail to the east. Later, after it had been engaged and taken prisoners, it was relieved of the prisoners and seemingly received new instructions, as Brown recalls, from Captain Wallace and Sergeant Fondable. Wallace, who had been with B Company for much of the day, would have had no doubt about its true

location. If the section was instructed at that time to take up temporary positions until contacted by B Company, it seems most likely that they would have been close to the base of Falkenberg, within the immediate reach of Captain Schmied. Brown still has the feeling that the D Co mortars attached to B Company were somewhere close to his section's machine guns after they had been emplaced. This would tend to support the notion that Brown and his section were closer to Falkenberg than he remembers.

The 1st Battalion command group's continuing inability to make radio contact with the forward companies resulted in the ordering-out of a patrol composed of C Co Weapons Platoon members. Around noon, S Sgt Norman Wallace, leader of the mortar section, received instructions from Lieutenant Grotheer regarding the patrol's mission. Most of the specifics are not remembered but the assignment involved its making contact with A and B companies. Recollections differ concerning the patrol's composition and what transpired in a few details, but agreement among several personal accounts on certain major points supports a conclusion that there were not two or more patrols but only one patrol composed primarily of Weapons Platoon members who became prisoners as the final event of its brief epic.

The apparent make-up of the patrol included a surprisingly large share of the Weapons Platoon's higher-graded NCO's-- Billy Garrison, William A. Ridenour, LeRoy Turner, Henry Scrobecki, and Richard Wansedel. In addition, there may have been two or three other members of the Platoon who went along. Finally, T Sgt Alan Heberling, platoon sergeant of the 2nd Platoon, was sent with the patrol as a last-minute assignment by the company commander. Heberling had just reported back following dental treatment away from the Regiment--arriving in Niederbronn after the treatment, he had been misdirected to Philippsbourg when actually his own platoon was still in Niederbronn. Why so many noncoms were assigned to the patrol is not explained--it seems possible that the company commander, under heavy pressure from his battalion commander to get the patrol out immediately, assigned the only men he had readily available. If so, it was a decision taken in haste and consequent penalties to Company would be severe.

The Wallace patrol probably followed the same route as A Company in reaching them. On the way, the patrol passed several German dead on the Neunhoffen road. A Company had reached its position on Angelsberg when the patrol overtook it. Sergeant Wallace found Captain Millhiser and talked to him. Heberling: "I was within arm's length of both Millhiser and Wallace when the Sergeant reported. I can still see Millhiser's face as he told us that he had ample contact with B Company." According to Heberling, some of the A Co

troops were engaged in firefight when the patrol came up and A's CO seemed preoccupied as he conferred with Wallace--probably with the engagement Lieutenant Scobey and his men were then involved in. It is difficult to understand why the Wallace patrol next acted as it reportedly did unless, as one of its former members has suggested, it was able to make radio contact with Lieutenant Grotheer to report on A Co's situation and to receive new instructions. But why should the Wallace patrol have been more successful in its radio contact with the C Company commander than the A and B company commanders, with the battalion CO? If there was no radio contact between Grotheer and the patrol after Wallace saw Millhiser, Wallace must subsequently have led his patrol according to orders received before the patrol departed Philippsbourg.

Leaving Angelsberg, the Wallace patrol retraced its outbound route back to the Neunhoffen road. At the road, it turned right, away from Philippsbourg, and went north to the road junction where the Neunhoffen road turns to the northwest from its meeting with a smaller road from the northwest. Here the Wallace patrol halted and dug in. Several of the patrol's members remember that one or two machine guns were with the defensive position it organized here. They could have been a section of D Co watercooled's.

On the west side of the junction there was a concrete bunker with embrasures faced to cover the two roads converging from the north--a Maginot Line emplacement. To the rear of the bunker was a short trench, a shallow one but sufficiently deep to provide Heberling a good head-start for digging his foxhole. It was mid-afternoon. As the afternoon progressed the men at the road junction began to receive artillery fire coming, it seemed, from the direction of Neunhoffen. LeRoy Turner has written, "Later that day we came under heavy fire from what we thought was a German 88. Their fire was getting so accurate that we were afraid a shell would come into an embrasure of the pillbox. We had some men wounded." Because of the intensity of the enemy shellfire, some of the men changed positions crossing over to the east side of the junction and moving up the slope where they found another shelter of sorts--an old gun emplacement or dugout. When night fell, the shelling eased off but did not stop entirely.

It appears that those heavy weapons of D Company which were not deployed with the 1st Battalion's assault companies remained stowed in their trailers and that the crews found billets in Philippsbourg for the night after 1st Battalion arrived there. The company CP was set up in a house on the right side of the main street very close to the 1st Bn CP.

German Attack out of Baerenthal

It must have been shortly after midnight when Lieutenant Snelling's 1st platoon, G Company, having moved to the next ridge back from its forwardmost position, started digging in. Sergeant McCoy recalls that "we had just gotten our packs off when we heard tanks approaching. They appeared on the road and stopped within 10 yards of us. They opened up with their machine guns firing on the next ridge back, which overlooks the place on the road where we had detrucked several hours before. Our support platoon was in position on that ridge. Suddenly the tank machine guns traversed around 90 degrees and opened up on our ridge with a grazing fire. I passed the word around for everyone to crawl back to the crest of our ridge. This was done. When we got to the crest, we met the rest of the platoon coming back up from the forward slope.

"We all made a hasty retreat back to the next ridge, where our 3rd platoon was, and, passing through the H Co positions on the way, warned them to pull out because German tanks were just around the nose of the ridge from them. We made no attempt to fight the tanks because we were completely exposed until we got back to the 3rd Platoon positions. Lieutenant Snelling stayed where he was on the ridge we had just left until the next morning.

"In this withdrawal, four men from our platoon did not stop when they reached the next ridge. These four continued on and evidently did not stop until they reached Zinswiller, where they joined up with one of the 79th Division battalions that was there. They would see combat action with the 79th remaining with it for about a month before returning to G Company." In the confusion of combat, the temporary switching by a man from one outfit to another was not a terribly unusual practice. If the circumstances justified such a self-reassignment, an absentee soldier's outfit would receive him back without further pursuit of the matter. That seems to have been what happened in this case of the four G Co men.

Cremer and Eisler, the two F Co machine-gunners, had remained at their gun watching as the men of G Co 1st Platoon passed them on their way to the rear. Cremer: "Then a dreaded noise--the sound of a tracked vehicle coming our way. Ben and I really didn't know what was expected of us, but we decided that if a tank came around the corner at us we would do our fighting another day. Then there it was--the biggest tank in the world, within 25 or 30 yards of us, with German infantrymen behind it. Forgetting our decision, we opened fire at the Germans. The tank's turret revolved and the long-barreled gun fired right over our heads. We were too close for the tank's gunner--he couldn't depress enough to hit us. Then our machine gun quit firing due to

improper head-space. With only our .45 pistols available now to fight off what seemed like the whole Germany Army, Ben and I picked up our machine gun and all the ammo we could carry and headed back. We did not know that much of the Company was dug in on a ridge to our rear. Not seeing or hearing anyone, we passed by their positions and kept on walking. When we got to the battalion CP, we were gathered up by the battalion executive officer. Men from other companies up forward were arriving and being assembled. We were all assigned to digging defensive positions covering the bridge where Zintzel creek crosses the road. When daylight came, we all began to feel better about what we were doing."

Over on the right, the E Co forward positions came in for their share of the night-time intrusions of German armor. T Sgt Marion R. Slater was platoon sergeant of Lieutenant Weeks' platoon. He remembers that there were three separate enemy tank-infantry probes toward the position between midnight and daybreak. One tank had moved within 50 yards and fired its big gun into a house standing between the platoon position and the Zinswiller road. A bazooka team had been sent forward to fire on the tank. They had fired once and missed and had fired again from the same position. The tank's 75 had fired then, killing one of them. Afterwards the tank withdrew. All of the German tank-infantry probes that night were quickly withdrawn after brief contact with the 2nd Battalion. In the meeting of German and American forces there outside of Baerenthal, neither side could have known much of anything about the strength and dispositions of the other side. The Panzer intrusions seemed to be the German side's technique of improving its knowledge.

During the first hours after midnight, G Company's 1st Platoon had made its second withdrawal since moving up after detrucking, this one back to the ridge originally occupied by the 3rd Platoon. There they began to dig in, but many of the men ran into rock only a few inches down. Repeated trials digging at different spots met with few successes, and, as daybreak approached, many of the foxholes remained inadequate. At dawn the roar of engines and clanking of treads announced a new approach of enemy tanks along the road from Baerenthal. McCoy recalls that "Two tanks stopped directly in front of us, no more than 75 yards away. They fired a half-dozen rounds of their 75's which burst in the treetops above us; then they moved around the curve of the road skirting the nose of the ridge we were on. Halting again, they opened up on an anti-tank (AT) gun across a little valley to the east. Our AT gun returned the fire and helped disable the lead tank. I had a Springfield rifle and called to Phillips for an AT rifle grenade. He threw it to me along with the launcher. I fired and got a hit on the

side of the tank. The tank was now disabled, and a couple of its crew bailed out and dropped behind the embankment on the far side of the road. The second tank came up and nudged the disabled tank until it was turned around. Then both tanks headed back for Baerenthal." The AT gun mentioned by McCoy was from WRECKER Anti Tank Company and had just arrived at the position from which it engaged the German tanks.

Earlier, the predawn tank-infantry probes by the Germans had caused a reaction back in Reichshoffen, where the regimental Anti Tank Company was billeted. The Company's history by Clarke E. Hess records that "At 0500 most of us awakened as the 2nd Platoon was alerted and moved out for the front--to provide anti-tank protection for the 2nd Battalion at Baerenthal. They saw action quickly. As their three guns had no more than settled into their positions (in the 2nd Battalion's forward area), the 2nd squad encountered six enemy tanks on the road coming out of Baerenthal; they were accompanied by German infantry. In the face of the tanks' murderous fire, our rifle troops were forced to retreat. The squad led by S Sgt Francis R. Byerley did not forget its mission--it remained in position and opened fire on the tanks." Many years after the incident, Byerley wrote of it: "As I recall the tank encounter, we of the 2nd Platoon were called up to replace a platoon of battalion anti-tank guns that were moved to alternate positions along with the rifle platoon elements covering them. So when we put our 57's into position, we had no rifle support to keep the enemy tanks buttoned up. Consequently we absorbed a tremendous amount of machine-gun fire, and, since the 2nd squad had the forwardmost position, we got most of it. We did get about 20 rounds into the tanks knocking the track off one and setting fire to a second one with a bazooka." The Anti Tank Company history: "The second tank of the group was knocked out by 57mm gunfire, and Pfc John C. Tallman, out in a bazooka position, knocked out the leading tank. Krauts were killed as they tried to escape. Tallman emptied his carbine into one die-hard tanker.

"The squad's position was exposed, and it became necessary to withdraw the gun when mortar shells began coming in thick and fast. The gun was put into action again, but, again, the mortars found it. Although the tank advance had been halted, one tank from the group had maneuvered into the woods where it had taken up a 'hull-defilade' position in which only its gun turret was visible. Hitching the AT gun to its truck prime-mover, the crew attempted to pull it away again, but an 88 shell ripped through the undercarriage of the truck. Pfc Martin Zimonick, the driver, lost part of his right foot; Sgt Colucci suffered a broken leg; but Byerley, also riding in the cab, was uninjured. For their

parts in this action Byerley, Tallman, and Cpl Win Clark all received the Bronz Star medal." At the time it was rumored that truck driver Zimonick showed much more concern for his stricken vehicle, in which he took great pride, than for his foot wound. After the event, Sergeant Byerley was called back to the regimental CP, where Colonel Pettee presented him with a bottle of bourbon in recognition for his having "knocked out" the first enemy tank for the Regiment. As for the remembered position exchange of battalion and regimental anti-tank guns when the latter arrived, there is reason to believe that, under the best of circumstances, the regimental guns would have arrived much earlier--in time to be deployed along with those of the Battalion to their appropriate positions. It had been, perhaps, an example showing the Regiment's inexperience.

During the WRECKER commitment in defending against the NORDWIND offensive, the only type of German tank engaged for which there are documentary identifications was the medium Mark IV, well armored and carrying a long-barreled 75mm gun and two machine guns. Whether it was the Mark IV or the heavier Mark V "Panther," also known to have been in the general area, it was a tank hard to kill with any of the manned anti-tank weapons used by American infantry--the Springfield rifle with its launcher and anti-tank grenade, the "bazooka" launcher and its rocket-propelled projectile, and the 57 mm anti-tank gun and armor-piercing shell. For more than one engagement with German tanks during NORDWIND, there are separate accounts in which different 275th infantrymen fired an AT weapon at what was evidently the same tank--each individual getting credit for having disabled it or having knocked it out. But it was the German tank's capability to withstand individual hits by any American weapon which made difficult the credit assignments for tank disablings or killings.

Such was the case related above; for the action, though briefly told, must have taken at least 15 minutes--long enough for other WRECKER doughboys to have maneuvered and taken pot shots at the same Panzer. And so the WHITE RECORD, an occupation-time newspaper published by the 275th's 2nd Battalion, carried the following: "On the morning of 2 January, four enemy tanks attacked our positions on the hills in front of Baerenthal. Sgt Andrey H. Timchuk, an H Co machine-gunner, grabbed a bazooka and fired five rounds at the lead tank. He scored two direct hits breaking up the attack. The other tanks pulled back into Baerenthal, and our troops, relieved of the armored assault's pressure, were able to reorganize. Timchuk was awarded the Silver Star." The article refers to four tanks, but there is evidence that there were more. It appears that the two tanks in the engagement described above made the

deepest penetration along the Zinswiler road and that the other tanks had lagged back along the stretch of road into Baerenthal.

Over across the Zinswiler road, forward of G Company, E Company had found itself in two clusters of foxholes dug by officers and men in locations to which they had resorted during the shelling of the previous night. This haphazard layout did not include the 2nd Platoon, which was 500 yards to the rear behind a spur extending westward from the summit of Grasberg. Captain Mundell had located his company CP with the forward-left group. Lieutenant Weeks was with the forward-right group on higher ground and a little to the rear. The approaches from the rear to the forward position areas were exposed and enemy shellfire would keep direct contact from Battalion and company-support elements during daytime to an absolute minimum. Weeks recalls that a good share of the forward foxholes were under observation by enemy infantry in their positions to the front and right flank, which were on higher ground. From his foxhole Weeks could look down on the housetops in Baerenthal.

At dawn, just before the enemy's major tank-infantry attack, there was a gathering of company officers at Mundell's foxhole to decide on changes in the layout of positions. 2nd Lt Robert H. Reber, 2nd Platoon leader, had come forward with a runner from his platoon area. Of the assembled group, only Reber was not in a shelter--he lay prone next to Mundell's foxhole. An enemy sniper fatally wounded him with a shot through the head. He was pulled, bleeding badly, into Mundell's foxhole, but his rescuers realized quickly that nothing could be done for him. Having the company CP located forward had its possible advantages--this incident showed one of its disadvantages. T Sgt Elton Barras, platoon sergeant, later took over leadership of the 2nd Platoon.

Then the big attack came. Sergeant Slater remembers that there were groups of German infantrymen trailing behind each of four tanks. The E Co doughboys opened fire on the enemy foot soldiers; G Company's men back over across the road did the same. Caught in the converging smallarms and machine-gun fire, the enemy foot soldiers were soon driven off leaving numerous casualties, dead and wounded, on and next to the road. Slater saw the Anti Tank Company's 57 exchanging shots with the tanks. Weeks recalls seeing Captain Mundell crawl forward with a bazooka and having it misfire. Then another E Co man had better success--his bazooka round hit what Weeks remembers was a German half-track. Then he saw the wounded half-track and accompanying tank withdraw back toward Baerenthal. According to Weeks, the rest of the morning was a confusion. Enemy pressure continued. There was a good deal of enemy shellfire, and there may have been

instances of enemy infantry probes. Under the pressure, some of the E Co men abandoned their holes and joined others in the trickle of stragglers to the rear.

Louis A. Hoger was a runner at the G Co CP, just back around the bend in the road to which the German tanks had penetrated early in the morning. The tanks had withdrawn as had the accompanying infantry, leaving dead and wounded in their wake. Hoger remembers that the 2nd Battalion executive officer, Maj John Bottenfield, came up to the CP after this. Seeing the left-behind casualties, the major sensed an opportunity to take prisoners for interrogation, for the Battalion had scant information on the enemy with whom they were engaged. He suggested that a party be sent forward from the CP for this purpose, but his suggestion was met with little enthusiasm. Bottenfield then asked for volunteers to accompany him on the quest. Hoger volunteered. The two started off, but then, hearing smallarms firing, Hoger stopped to determine the source and target of the firing. Having found some cover, Hoger watched as the major continued to advance in short rushes for some distance before realizing that the firing Hoger had heard was the enemy's and that he, Bottenfield, was the target. The major made a hasty withdrawal, which was joined by Hoger. Subsequent investigation determined that the enemy casualties along the road were all dead or too-far-gone to have served the intended purpose.

The enemy's all-night probes and morning-long attempts to penetrate had hit the 2nd Battalion hard in its first combat action. Most of its officers and men in the forward dispositions held or gradually withdrew, but some who could not stand and fight got out. John Cruell has written that "During the early hours, stragglers in shock and disorientation were withdrawing down the road toward the battalion CP. Barten and his lieutenants--Harry W. Lynn, Leitner, and I--and others, were gathering them up, calming them down, and reorganizing them in order to get them back to their units. All they could talk about was the intense German tank activity--tanks were moving into their position areas and firing point-blank into their foxholes. Artillery and mortar fire had also been heavy." Colonel Barten would recall that one of the G Co rifle platoons had broken after being positioned and that he personally led it back to where it belonged. The Catholic chaplain, Capt Michael F. McPhelin, had observed the incident and commended the battalion commander for his handling of the problem. Chaplain McPhelin's penchant for being where he was most needed and his effectiveness at the point of need would become legend throughout the Regiment. Another who helped on the straggler line was 1st Lt Lawrence G. Southard, an F Co officer at the time. The battalion commander personally

thanked him for his work afterward.

The 2nd Battalion aid station, in a house near the CP in Muehlthal, received a steady stream of casualties including a few Germans. One of the Germans was an officer with his leg needing amputation--it had been badly mangled below the knee. At the outset of the operation, the German rejected the attempt to anesthetize him--perhaps out of pride, perhaps out of suspicion and fear. He fainted at the first touch of the scalpel.

Close to the aid station was a barn in which were placed the Battalion's dead awaiting evacuation. During the crisis of the first couple of days in action, some 25 bodies accumulated there before some men and a couple of trucks could be spared to take them to the rear.

Witnesses remember differently as to the number of 2nd Battalion stragglers collected during the predawn and morning hours of 2 January. Perhaps there were two groups, one on the east side and one on the west side of Zintzel creek, who were set to digging positions of a back-up defense line at Teufelsbrueckerhof, 400 yards or so north of Muehlthal. If so, one group totalled 15-20, the other 40-50.

Working at the emergency defense line, Private Cremer saw five self-propelled tank destroyers (TD's) come up the road from Muehlthal around noon, sent forward to take up positions to defend the Zinswiler road against further intrusions by German armor. "All of us from F Company went along as the TD's continued on--we were going to rejoin our company. This was done quite informally--we just picked up our gear and started out. When we got back to our company we found things were still confused. The Company had been ordered to dig in on the ridge the night before and had positioned itself on the forward slope--unfortunately. The enemy tanks had had a field day. Sergeant Haynes, of our other machine-gun squad, had been repeatedly shot at by a tank--each time when he raised his head above the rim of his foxhole and then ducked. He was never the same afterward and had to be demoted. 'Bunny' Hilderbrand, also of the other machine-gun squad, was separated from us that night and ended up fighting with the 79th Division for a time before rejoining us over a month later.

"While all the fighting was going on, the mortar section had been left out in front and isolated. When at last the German attackers were beaten back into the town leaving dead and wounded in the road, the mortar section was able to escape leaving its three mortars behind. However, one man of the mortar section named Sturgis had slept through it all. Awakening in his foxhole about noon and finding he was alone, he walked over to the road and turned south on it. A wounded German on the road asked for water. Sturgis offered

him some, but his canteen was frozen solid. Sturgis continued on, going the rest of the way to our positions through enemy fire. He would continue to live a charmed life throughout our days in combat."

The G Co 2nd Platoon had evidently been the only 2nd Battalion element which did not get word of the battalion attack's cancellation the night before. From its position in the flats next to Zintzel creek it had advanced toward Baerenthal and reached a low wooded knoll only a couple of hundred years from the Philippsbourg road and opposite the road's entrance into Baerenthal from the east. The platoon remained there for 2 days, seemingly unaccounted for in the confusion. In this position the 2nd Platoon gave a good account of itself opening fire when the enemy in Baerenthal grew careless and showed themselves. The German attacks during the first half of 2 January must have bypassed the 2nd Platoon.

The postwar WHITE REPORT carried the following item: "Two pfc's, James Frysinger and Lew Buchelew, 22 and 19 years old respectively, during the evening of 2 January, when the 2nd Battalion was especially hard pressed, had dug in on the forward slope of a hill south of Baerenthal. Frysinger was a BAR-man and Buchelew was his assistant. Late that evening they spotted a column of 50 Germans moving toward the enemy (forward) positions carrying food and ammunition supplies. Frysinger opened fire and created such havoc among the enemy's carrying party that it was driven off without reaching its destination. Meanwhile the enemy had moved two machine guns into positions which particularly threatened the G Co forward positions. Seeing their movement, the Frysinger-Buchelew team opened up and eliminated the crews of both guns. The two received the Silver Star for their actions that night." Frysinger and Buchelew evidently won the medals while serving with the temporarily isolated 2nd Platoon.

3rd Battalion's Redeployment around Philippsbourg

While the previous night had been a pressure-packed one for the 3rd Battalion CO and his staff, the feverish activity demanded of them in moving the Battalion from the Rhine and in making arrangements for the relief of the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion had allowed them little time to entertain the fears and doubts that they surely would have felt had respite permitted. The next night (1-2 January) must have been for them even worse after the bulk of the Battalion had been committed out from Philippsbourg. Soon after the departure of the three rifle companies, the battalion CP began intermittently to lose radio contact with I and K companies. Shortly the sounds of the intense battle which

ensued when the two companies were ambushed were heard in Philippsbourg but went for some time unexplained. Several hours after midnight new instructions were received from the regimental CP calling for a partial redeployment of the Battalion in coordination with WRECKER 1st Battalion. It is not evident when Major Shepherd learned of the I Co and K Co situations following the ambush, but he was able to get orders to both companies by 0330 to return to Philippsbourg in preparation for the redeployment. But then the first of the two companies to return, I Company, did not arrive in Philippsbourg until 0630; K Company, not until 1140. Meanwhile L Company, over in the direction of Baerenthal, was reporting via field telephone that Baerenthal was in the hands of German infantry and tanks--certainly disturbing news. Then, prior to dawn, before either of the two companies, I or K, had arrived back in Philippsbourg, an enemy force of undetermined strength appeared above that village on the ridge to its east. This sudden threat was quickly over, and the arrival back of I Company, plus the movement of 1st Battalion up from Niederbronn, provided insurance against the occurrence of another threat to the 3rd Battalion's right flank and rear. So that night had been one of long, nervous waits for Shepherd and his aides punctuated now and then by the arrival at the command post of news that did little to ease their anxieties.

By the time K Company reentered Philippsbourg, the new 3rd Battalion deployment was already underway. I Company had already received orders to set up a defense on high ground to the north of Philippsbourg. Shepherd ordered K Co's Lieutenant Brown to secure the approach to Philippsbourg from the northwest (Bitche road) and hold the rest of his company in readiness to support the other battalion entities in their positions out of the village. M Company was split up--its elements were assigned to support the 3rd Battalion's out-of-village forces as attachments or were assigned to defend the village itself.

During the day, various special units took up their positions in Philippsbourg. Lionel J. Fourrier, platoon leader of the 3rd Bn Anti Tank Platoon, indicates in his account that his 57 mm guns relieved anti-tank weapons of the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion in defending the Philippsbourg-Niederbronn defile against penetration by German Panzers. "My platoon was sent ahead, together with some 105 mm howitzers from Cannon Company. I took my guns up and used two to cover the roads on the north side of town. The third gun was placed in a barn. We knocked a large hole in the wall and from that location covered a field north of town. While we were emplacing our guns, the rifle companies were marching up from the south." In this respect, Fourrier is probably recalling the march into

Philippsbourg of the 1st Battalion during mid-late morning, 2 January. The 3rd Battalion aid station was set up in Philippsbourg during the evening of New Year's Day--it was located in a restaurant toward the north end of town, at Main Forks.

According to the 275th's Medical Detachment history, "When the 1st Battalion moved into Philippsbourg, they chose the vestry in the church on the east side of the main street as their aid station. The withdrawing armored infantry battalion had collected and evacuated all of their own casualties but had 20 unevacuated POW-wounded in their station. These were turned over to our battalion aid station. Companies moving into position reported that additional German wounded were still in their areas."

Having received orders from Battalion to return to Philippsbourg at 0330, I Company made its preparations for the move carefully and then, with front, flanks, and rear secured insofar as the terrain permitted, made its withdrawal. Though the distance back was less than a mile, the company did not reach the village until 0630. Having arrived back, the men had a couple of hours of free time. Having attended to themselves and their equipment, many tried to get some rest. But some "shot the bull" or wandered around the village. Howard Mumm: "There was a great deal of uncertainty among all of us concerning the 'big picture.' Were we on the offensive or defensive? Where would we go next? At this improbable moment, a shipment of mail arrived for I Company. There were many letters for all of us, since the postal service had had difficulty keeping up with our almost daily changes in location over the previous 2 weeks. Letters from home were like life's blood; we read them avidly and then burned them--for warmth and intelligence security.

"We kept busy trying to stay warm. The village church offered some shelter from the cold, although it was unheated. The church served later as an aid station. On its interior walls were many memorials to war dead. On one wreath there was the inscription in German: 'Gefreiter Johann Schmidt, geboren April 16, 1923; fuer Vaterland gefallen, August 27, 1944.'" Many young men had been conscripted from Alsace-Lorraine into the German armed services. Philippsbourg lies almost on the border between the two historic provinces.

Soon the waiting was over for I Company--by 0900 it was reassembled and marching north out of Philippsbourg again. To extend the objective line to which the 1st Battalion was advancing on its right, I Company was to move to a designated terrain feature due north of the village, in the angle between the Bitche and Neunhoffen roads from Philippsbourg. William Long's review provides many details of I Company's

move to what became known to its members as "Hill No. 30."
"10:30 a.m.--We have just picked up three German soldiers who have approached us singly from a distance while waving white rags attached to the muzzles of their rifles. S Sgt Carl A. Scheick, our interpreter, has motioned them in close to the Company, whose men, after last night's experience, are extremely wary. We have placed them under guard and moved them back to the center of the column and have started forward again. We are again stopped almost immediately by one of our lead scouts, who runs back and reports that there are several white flags waving above the bushes on a hillside about 300 yards ahead and to our left-front. Sergeant Scheick moves forward to within 50 yards of the flag-wavers and orders them to come forward in groups of three. Soon we have about 45 prisoners in all. Many of them are completely smooth-faced and cannot be over 15 years old. They are a sad, starved, filthy, and unmilitary-looking group. We send them all, rifles slung, back to the rear under guard."

When I Company reached the road fork about a mile out of Philippsbourg, it took the left road and continued along it several hundred yards before turning left onto a trail running generally west and slightly south. Having moved only a short distance along the trail, the Company was halted. Long: "It is almost 1:00 p.m. and we are making a methodical search of the area, sending out small 6-man patrols on missions not to exceed one hour's total absence. At about 2:30, after the first patrols have returned and three new ones have been sent out, we suddenly begin to hear in the distance generally in the direction of where we suppose the enemy to be a faint rumble of moving vehicles."

"3:00 p.m.--All three patrols are in! The first one to return has been searching the right-front sector and has been hearing the same vehicular noises that we have heard back with the Company, but the patrol has not suspected them to be of enemy origin. However, the last two patrols to return have been searching the front, left-front, and left-flank sectors. They have heard at a much closer range the same noises. Becoming alarmed and suspicious, they have moved close enough to actually see some of the vehicles and hear the German language being spoken and shouted."

The position selected by Captain Long for defense was located on a flat-topped hill, the outline of the summit having an elliptical shape over 300 yards long. It was slightly more than a half mile from the north edge of Philippsbourg, about midway between the Bitche and Neunhoffen roads. Long's account describes the position further: "5:30 p.m.--We have arrived at the top of what I shall always call the 'Philippsbourg Hill No. 30.' I Co officers and NCO's have begun a quick reconnaissance of the area to determine an acceptable layout for a rifle company

defensive position. We are racing against time to get the positions laid out and the actual digging started on every single foxhole and emplacement before dark overtakes us. There is still very much unmelted snow, and we anticipate having to dig through 12-14 inches of frozen ground on the surface before going on down with our foxholes and emplacements.

"The rear edge of the area facing toward Philippsbourg overlooks a rather sharp drop-off which offers a welcome degree of inaccessibility. Our 3rd platoon is digging in along this rim for about 150 yards to protect our rear. It can also be available almost immediately in the event support is needed by the forward platoons. The 1st and 2nd platoons are digging in on a concave front about 200 yards in the opposite direction to cover the front approaches. A machine-gun emplacement is being dug at each flank of the frontline foxholes." In his account, Howard Mumm recalls another factor which surely spurred the digging-in process: "Artillery caught 2nd Lt William C. Breidinger, and he was evacuated. It was really pounding in."

An I Co journal notes what was to be the last contact for several days made with the Company on the Hill No. 30 position in any initiative from Philippsbourg. According to the journal, Clements N. Biven, accompanied by John E. Fridley and James George, drove a jeep and trailer loaded with ammunition to the hill-top location. The three unloaded their cargo and then started back for Philippsbourg. On the return trip they were ambushed and captured. Coupled with the enemy activity on the Bitche road to the west which had been observed by an I Co patrol, the capture of the jeep-borne party gave evidence of the approaching isolation of the Hill No. 30 position.

Abraham M. Glass, 2nd lieutenant and 3rd Platoon leader, was the one who got back to Philippsbourg with the last word of his company's situation prior to its being cut off. Then he returned to I Company with Major Shepherd's instructions. Glass: "After seeing the squads of my 3rd platoon commence the preparation of their positions, I checked with Bill Long for information concerning the situation and plans. He told me that he had lost radio contact with Battalion. I volunteered to return to the battalion CP to report that we were in position." The company commander told Glass to go ahead, and the lieutenant was quickly on his way. Having gotten through to Philippsbourg without incident, Glass went directly to the 3rd Battalion's CP. "Upon arrival there, I noted that the situation map reflected, if I recall correctly, that I Company should have been on a line with B Company. I vividly remember that the map showed Hill No. 30 as being in the target area for interdiction artillery fire during the night. Speaking with an artillery liaison officer, I asked

him to cancel that fire. He informed me that I need not worry about that--he had no artillery available for the mission."

Glass made his report to Battalion, received instructions for I Co, and returned to Hill No. 30--again without incident. "I arrived back at the Company quite exhausted and reported to Bill Long with the instructions I had received. These were for I Company to remain on Hill No. 30 for the night and maintain contact with B Company by patrolling. I then bedded down for the night. I slept through the battle that occurred that night" involving 1st Battalion elements south of Falkenberg. According to Long, the men continued working on the positions until after midnight, when they fell into their completed holes, completely spent.

The K Co defensive perimeter, occupied about midnight during the night of 1-2 January, appears to have been located on the southwest nose of the mile-long ridge Mouckenkopf. The position was probably no more than 500 or 600 yards west of the hill that I Company would occupy during the late afternoon of 2 January. The K Co history notes that "during the night the Company was under heavy enemy artillery fire plus some of our own falling short. Fortunately, no casualties resulted from this. The height was bitterly cold and the ground frozen and very difficult to dig in. Sometime during the night, contact was lost with the 3rd Platoon's 3rd squad, and some disturbance was heard in the direction of its position"--on the west end of the Company perimeter. Joseph K. Donahue and Willis C. Diece, platoon leader and platoon sergeant of the 3rd Platoon, and Lieutenant Heck, of the Weapons Platoon, went to investigate. The party found the holes that the squad had occupied empty. There was some equipment lying around but no evidence of any struggle. Heck recalls being puzzled because the ground around the position seemed to slope so steeply away from it except in the direction of the rest of the Company. Many years later while going over the old position in daylight, Heck discovered a trail providing good access to the position from the west. The squad had, it appears, been deceived by the seeming security of its position and had allowed itself to be surprised and captured by an enemy patrol.

Another incident that night provided Company members something to laugh about--a welcome tonic for the spirit of the soldier in combat, who, for the most part is beset by grim events. Robert B. Elliott, of the Weapons Platoon, remembers that, "While on this hill, I found it necessary to relieve myself and crawled behind a large rock. I took down my five pairs of pants--wind-proof, fatigues, OD's, long underwear, and shorts. As soon as I hunkered down, 88 shells began impacting all around us. One of my buddies

yelled, 'Elliott, get the hell back in this hole! Well, I crawled on my bare knees over rocky ground about 15 yards to my foxhole. I'll swear it took me 10 minutes to get my clothes back in order. Several days later when I arrived at a field hospital, they wanted to know what had happened to my knees."

When around 0330 Lieutenant Brown was, at last, able to make radio contact with Battalion, he received the instruction to bring his company back to Philippsbourg. This movement started at daybreak. "Kingsmen": "Due to the large numbers of enemy coming in from the north and west, the normal route along the Bitche road was cut off, and the Company had to make its way over a series of steep and ice-covered ridges." At one point the route took K Company from concealment on a wooded ridge across an open field. Here it was taken under fire by German machine guns in positions across the Bitche road. Charles R. Lobs, 1st Platoon squad leader, remembers that, just prior to starting across the field, the Company had paused in a wooded section. "We were pretty well scattered and took time to reorganize. My platoon leader told me to take my squad and go to the flank as an outpost during the reorganization. We were about to start off again when I heard faint calls in German; so I told my men to hold up. Out of the brush came a few Jerries, and we took full advantage of our first chance to even the score."

Of one action during the K Co withdrawal, the "Kingsmen" account states: "Pfc Leonard Schoen was killed while protecting the west flank of the Company. He had taken his BAR and gone into action when the Company was first fired on. Before being killed, he accounted for some 10-12 Jerries. Pfc Willard Middleton and Pfc Kenneth E. Whiteley advanced to support Schoen and, when he fell, Whiteley took over the BAR. Assisted by Middleton, he succeeded in wiping out an enemy machine-gun nest. Under the cover of this fire, the Company was able to reach the next hill taking only two casualties--T 5 Philip M. Harmon and Pfc Numbers fell during the crossing. Unable to get the rest of the way by himself, Numbers was brought to safety by 2nd Lt Edward H. Hamilton, leader of the 3rd Platoon, who went back and carried him to the protection of the hill." Schoen received the Silver Star posthumously and Whiteley the Bronze Star for their actions during the K Co withdrawal.

After crossing the open field, K Company turned eastward, away from the Bitche road and the threat of further harassment by enemy machine-gun and smallarms fire from that direction. Its extended-order formation allowed plenty of interval between men as the Company moved along. The formation was standard for K Company's situation, and the occasional blast of an exploding mortar shell in the vicinity

reminded K's troopers to avoid bunching up. No more casualties were experienced during the move. Reaching the Neunhoffen road where it passes through Mambach, the Company turned right onto the road and proceeded to Philippsbourg, where it arrived at 1140. Aside from the loss of the 3rd Platoon squad through capture, K Company's casualty total during its first full day in combat had been light--one killed, several wounded, and one missing.

In Philippsbourg the Company took time for chow--field rations washed down with a canteen cupfull of hot coffee. Then it was time for 2nd Lt Bernard Brons to move his 1st platoon back out the Bitche road--their mission, to set up a defensive position blocking that road. To support his platoon, Brons had with him the machine-gun section of the Weapons Platoon and one or two sections of machine guns from M Company. Arriving at the position selected, the 1st Platoon and its attachments commenced their digging-in. The rest of K Company remained in Philippsbourg, in houses along the west side of the main street and along the side street just below Main Forks. Its CP was in the restaurant opposite the Lutheran Church, on the main street. According to "Kingsmen," there was shellfire on the town including the CP area. "Sgt Rosen and his wire crew kept busy all night as telephone lines were repeatedly knocked out."

The same 3rd Battalion operations plan which sent I Company back out from Philippsbourg and had K Company block the Bitche road with one rifle platoon (reinforced) and hold its other two rifle platoons in Philippsbourg may have initially prescribed for L Company's remaining in the position it had taken up late on New Year's Day--about one-half mile east of Baerenthal, just to the north of the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal Road. This would have worked out well with the plan for the 2nd Battalion to advance through Baerenthal. The 2nd Battalion's plan provided for its E Company to support the assault company and maintain contact with 3rd Battalion on its right--that is to say, with L Company. If the 3rd Battalion's initial plan for 2 January was, indeed, to hold L Company in place, the plan was changed insofar as it affected L Company. The change would have come about as the result of the request by the 313th Infantry that 45th Div G-3 have the 275th Infantry block the road running northwest from Baerenthal. The request was approved by the 45th Division and passed as an instruction to the 275th, then to WRECKER 3rd Battalion, and, finally, to L Company, which received it telephonically, probably several hours before dawn, 2 January.

Becker recalls that L's new company commander was dumbfounded when he received the order to move his under-armed force into Baerenthal, to where he had seen, only a short while before, six German tanks return after blasting the 2nd

Battalion sector with their big guns without apparent response. Becker's high respect for Lieutenant White is evident in several letters written for use in this narrative: "White assumed command of L Company at Philippsbourg when Capt John Major was wounded and evacuated on 1 January. He was only a second lieutenant at the time, and we had two first lieutenants in the Company, formerly anti-aircraft officers. However, by virtue of his combat experience as an NCO in the South Pacific and with agreement of the two more senior officers, he assumed command. Lieutenant White was later killed in the Saarbruecken area--in the Giffertwald. He was a very dear comrade, and his untimely death left a lump in my throat for a long time."

It appears that Lieutenant White argued vigorously with Battalion about executing the orders for his company to move into Baerenthal--but without success. It also appears that the information that the 2nd Battalion attack into Baerenthal had been postponed and was itself under enemy attack wasn't passed soon enough to 3rd Battalion. The regimental CP knew about this shortly after 0300; the failure could have occurred in Niederbronn, or technical communications problems could have prevented Regiment from informing Shepherd's battalion promptly.

Becker: "The following morning, Lieutenant White informed me that we were not going to attack Baerenthal in the manner ordered. We moved (northwest) over the hill on our right through heavy woods. As we came across the ridge, we came upon six German soldiers asleep. Taking them prisoner, we questioned them and learned that they had been with an enemy company that had bivouaced there the previous night. Evidently someone had neglected to awaken them when the unit moved out in the dark. Evidently our right flank was covered--with Krauts!" The German company had probably been part of the battalion ordered to attack Philippsbourg on 2 January from the west.

"We had lost contact with 3rd Battalion. However, we left our supply sergeant in our bivouac area with a field phone and strung wire as we moved to keep in contact with him. A short time after noon, we lost contact with him. Lieutenant White sent me back down a valley we were following to see whether the wire had grounded out. When I had gone about 700 yards, I got a funny feeling in my stomach. I glanced to my right and there, along the ridge were seven Krauts. Alone and in the open with no cover around, I figured I had had it, but all of a sudden they all threw down their rifles and started waving white handkerchiefs. Shouting 'Nein! 'Nein!' they ran down the ridge toward me and surrendered. Then I faced the problem of bringing in seven Kraut prisoners without all eight of us getting shot up by my green, trigger-happy company. As I was herding them up the

valley, one of my best friends, S Sgt Jack Griffin, spotted the Krauts and started to yell. I shouted back that I had them prisoner and they were unarmed. Fortunately he recognized me and did not open fire. Later we discovered that our supply sergeant, whom we had left at the phone in the bivouac area when we departed, had been run off by these same Krauts."

L Company's movement, after following a northwesterly course a short distance toward the height Schlossberg, turned to the northeast. The Company continued in that direction until it reached the high ground overlooking the Bitche road, then turned southeast and advanced to a point about one-half mile southwest of Lieschbach. There it set up a defensive perimeter for the night. White had correctly sensed that something was wrong with Battalion's instructions received during the previous night and had decided to disregard them. While some might not have approved of White's acting as he did, clearly his decision had saved his lightly armed company from getting into a potential entrapment in Baerenthal.

Shortly after daybreak, 2 January, Joseph Hardy accompanied 2nd Lt William Zahora, M Co 1st Platoon leader, on a tour of the platoon area to check its layout in daylight. They started at Main Forks, where the road-signs caught Hardy's eye. "The sign pointing the direction toward 'Bitche' really grabbed my attention. The STARS AND STRIPES newspaper had just published headlines 'Bitch of a Battle at Bitche.' I couldn't help but feel apprehensive on account of our lack of experience. As we continued our tour, it seemed to me that the incoming shells were spaced about 3 to 5 minutes apart. The platoon area was immediately to our right and up the slope. I don't remember the locations of two of our machine guns, but the other two I remember vividly. The one on the right was emplaced where the ground around it was well worn and easily spotted. The one on the left was obvious too. There was some smallarms firing to our rear. As we moved over the platoon area, we would join men in their foxholes whenever shells came in. On our way back to the CP, I tactfully asked Zahora whether we were expecting the enemy to attack us in rowboats--the lake at the north end of Philippsbourg was in the middle of our guns' fields of fire. He immediately ordered me back to the CP and told me to stay there. That was the last time I saw him. I heard he was killed while attempting to get an anti-tank gun into action." The firing heard early that morning was probably that attending the appearance of the German patrol on the east ridge.

Two 81 mm mortar sections of M's 3rd Platoon had been set up beyond the south end of Philippsbourg. S Sgt Vach Nolder remembers that the men were "pretty jumpy. We had several

firing missions, and we were under sniper fire all day. In the afternoon things got worse when there was quite a bit of 88 fire." The firing missions could have been as the result of K Company's requests for support as it several times made contact with the enemy while it was en route, during the morning, back to Philippsbourg.

The M Co CP had been set up in the cellar of a house on the main street across from the 3rd Battalion CP. In the afternoon Captain Oliver was called to the battalion CP and shown the situation map showing the L Company position to the west on the Baerenthal road and I Company's directly to the north. The reinforced K Company platoon was to the northwest on the Bitche road. Oliver: "Either Shepherd or Severance told me to displace the two mortar sections forward to support I Company. I moved them to a reverse slope, I guess, on the northern outskirts of Philippsbourg. I tried to contact Long via radio without success. I took my radio and one man and went up to the top of the ridge after telling the mortars to dig in. I still couldn't contact Long, but I could see the Bitche road and the road junction north of Mambach (on the Neunhoffen road). I took a chance and registered the mortars, and I realize now that I may have fired into the I Co area. On my way off the ridge, I ran into a 4-5 man Kraut patrol and captured them. I took the prisoners to the base of the hill and sent them back into Philippsbourg. I told the mortars to set up a perimeter defense and keep trying to contact I Company. Meanwhile I was going back to Battalion to get permission to displace them back to our original positions, at the other end of Philippsbourg.

"By now it was dark. My radio operator and I were walking. I don't remember what I did with my jeep--probably sent it back with POW's. I walked into one of my machine guns, one covering the Bitche road and the road junction north of Mambach. There were two anti-tank guns nearby. There were no riflemen anywhere around--nothing but 'spare parts' (special purpose units). I went to Battalion and requested permission to withdraw my mortars. Shepherd told me that to withdraw my mortars would leave I Company without support. I told him we were not able to contact them (I Company). He finally agreed to the withdrawal but said that, if I moved them before morning, he would court martial me."

Several hundred yards south of the new M Company mortar position, M's 1st Platoon machine-gunners also missed the presence of nearby rifle company support. Sgt Ruben Romero of the 1st Platoon states in his account: "My most vivid recollections start on the night of 2 January when a rifle company crossed in front of us. We assumed they were going to take up positions across the narrow valley to our front.

We felt better about this move because, up to that point, we had been deployed in an exposed position, where a heavy weapons company is normally not supposed to be. Until evening arrived there had been some harassment by enemy shelling around Main Forks. A couple of our boys had been killed--the first casualties in our outfit. But it was during the night of 2-3 January when all hell broke loose on our position." It is not evident what unit Romero saw crossing in front of the 1st Platoon's machine guns--most likely he saw the two 3rd Platoon sections moving up without their heavy mortars, which could have been brought up separately, in jeeps and trailers. Perhaps wishful thinking affected Romero's assessment. There was more reassurance in believing there was a friendly rifle company in front of him--much more than he would have felt if he had realized that it was just two sections of the Company's mortars. The breaking-loose of hell that night as described by Romero, could seemingly have occurred somewhat later, at the time of the German attack's delivery--at dawn.

CHAPTER IV

The Surprise Attack at Philippsbourg

Wednesday, 3 Jan (-4 to +7 degrees Fahr.)

Following the notable failure on 2 January of the German 476th Grenadier Regiment, its commander evidently took meticulous care in planning the operations for the next day. The regimental objective was again Philippsbourg. A special motorized task force was planned to be built around the Division's elite assault group, the Fuesilier Company made up of young men with exemplary combat records screened from throughout the Division. In addition to the Fuesilier Company, the task force was to include a platoon of assault guns, a reinforced engineer platoon, and a platoon of self-propelled (4-barreled) 20mm AA guns. The plan provided for an intensive 5-minute artillery preparation, during which time the motorized task force was to move from its Lieschbach assembly area to the north edge of Philippsbourg. The supporting artillery fire, at the dawn jump-off time, was to be stepped forward in 200-meter strides into and through Philippsbourg. The task force was to advance, firing its weapons, close behind the artillery barrage. It would remain in its vehicles until it reached the southern exit of the village. Having reached the south end of Philippsbourg, a detachment from the task force comprising the engineer platoon and one assault gun with escort infantry was to seal off that approach by setting up a roadblock. The balance of the task force was to turn back toward the center of Philippsbourg to assist in mopping up remaining American resistance. The 476th's main body was to follow the task force's assault into Philippsbourg from the north, then occupy and hold the objective against expected counterattacks. Patrols were then to be sent toward Niederbronn and preparations were to be made to advance in strength along the Philippsbourg-Niederbronn road to reach the exit from the mountains at Niederbronn.

The 256th WG Division monograph credits the surprise raid on Philippsbourg at daybreak on 3 January as having been "completely successful." It states that the south edge of

Philippsbourg was quickly reached and a roadblock was set up there. It notes, however, that the suppressing of American resistance in Philippsbourg was not completed, several groups of defenders continuing to fight tenaciously and inflicting heavy casualties on the German assault companies. The area around the church on the main street was reportedly very troublesome. (The German monographer here committed evidently one of the more serious errors in his account. A number of WRECKER eye-witnesses insist that initially an enemy raiding party cut the Niederbronn road by going around, not through, Philippsbourg. They further insist that no column of enemy vehicles--weapons and personnel carriers of the task force--came bursting through the village at the onset of the attack. In all probability, the 476th plan involving the motorized task force was scrapped and one involving the infiltration of the raider force substituted--possibly because some of the heavy equipment was slow in arriving, but, more likely, because German reconnaissance disclosed gaps in the American front which could be exploited to gain the objective.)

Elsewhere in the 356th VG Division sector, the 456th Grenadiers' mission included clearing the road from Nuenhoffen to Philippsbourg. This effort reportedly met with American resistance but succeeded in reaching a point in the road where it descended into the valley northeast of Philippsbourg--evidently near the south end of the ridge Falkenberg. On the Division left, the 481st Grenadier Regiment continued to make little progress.

During the afternoon of 3 January, the 356th VG Division was ordered to take over responsibility for the Baerenthal sector from the 361st VG Division. This was accomplished that night. To achieve this change, the 256th commander ordered the 476th Grenadiers in Philippsbourg to move to Baerenthal and the 456th Grenadiers to replace the 476th in Philippsbourg. The motorized task force was to remain in Philippsbourg, now subordinated to the 456th. The sector of the 481st Grenadier Regiment was to be widened to include that which had been until then the responsibility of the 456th.

At noon the 361st VG Division commander was notified that the 256th VG Division had been ordered to take over responsibility for the front at Baerenthal. At the same time, however, he learned that his battalion which had been holding Baerenthal, the 1st Battalion/952nd Infantry, was to be sent on a mission requiring it to traverse the extremely rugged and relatively trackless terrain south and west of the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road to reach that road where it exits from the Vosges Mountains, just west of Zinswiller. During 3 January the bulk of the 361st was involved in hard and inconclusive fighting at the tip of the salient, south

and west of Baerenthal. The 361st received no word directly from the 6th SS Mtn force at Wingen, but an intercepted American radio message indicated that Wingen was in German hands.

Back at the 45th G-3 section, the first call from the 275th Infantry on 3 January came in at 0545. The caller requested that two squads of engineer troops be attached to the Regiment; he also asked for a copy of the overlay showing engineer work done by Task Force Hudelson while it occupied Philippsbourg. Evidently one of the WRECKER battalions was planning to do some work on defensive installations in or around Philippsbourg. There was no indication that anything unusual was going on or was expected there. At 0750 the 275th passed to G-3 the first indication that the Germans were up to something around Philippsbourg. Major Dykes reported that an attack was being made into the right-rear of the defenses at Philippsbourg and that the enemy was astride the Niederbronn road from Philippsbourg. Then Colonel Pettee came on the line and, referring to the situation in Philippsbourg, stated: "I would like to pull L, A, and B companies back into town and clear that stuff out." The G-3 staff officer answered: "I'll check with the Commanding General and let you know."

The 45th Division G-3 Journal entry showing the action taken on the 275th Inf commander's request to withdraw his three rifle companies stated: "Capt H. (the staff officer who had received Pettee's request) called CG and CG told him it was all right to pull those companies back as long as they weren't weakening their line north of Philippsbourg. Capt. H. called CO 275th Inf and gave him CG's decision." There was evidently no discussion between the G-3 section and the 275th command post when the 45th commander's decision was relayed, but his approval of Colonel Pettee's request included a qualification which could have been understood to mean, "You may withdraw L Company but not A and B," for it is difficult to see how withdrawal of either of the two 1st Battalion rifle companies involved could have been made without "weakening the line north of Philippsbourg." However, Colonel Pettee at that moment evidently considered the situation in Philippsbourg serious and took advantage of the discretion allowed him by the 45th commander's response. He authorized the withdrawal of L and A companies. He may have also authorized the withdrawal of B Company--however, it may have already been too late for B Company to escape the entrapment which threatened it; moreover, B Company was out of contact with its battalion command post.

At 0920, the 45th G-3 checked with Major Dykes about the situation on the Niederbronn road from Philippsbourg. Dykes was momentarily confident--apparently the report from

Philippsbourg of the enemy's main attack there had not yet reached Niederbronn. He stated: "Everything is well in hand. It was just a small raiding party. I haven't the complete details as yet. I'll call you as soon as I have the dope." Thus assured, the G-3 instructed Dykes: "Have your 2nd Battalion make contact with the 157th Infantry to plug that gap." Obviously the G-3 had misspoken himself or the record inaccurately noted his identification of the WRECKER battalion that was supposed to make contact with the 157th Infantry--at Dambach, to the northeast of Philippsbourg. He should have said "1st Battalion". Dykes evidently understood the instruction and did not seek verification. Moreover, as soon as the real situation which had arisen in Philippsbourg by this time was understood back in Niederbronn and Langensoultzbach, it would be quickly recognized that closure of the gap between Philippsbourg and Dambach would be impossible for the forces then available to WRECKER to achieve.

The G-3 quickly switched his attention to the situation at Baerenthal, asking Dykes: "Did you send a patrol to the 39th northing?" Here he was referring to the east-west grid line on the tactical map--a line running through Muehlthal--and to an earlier G-3 instruction for a patrol from WRECKER 2nd Battalion to be sent from the vicinity of Untermuehlthal to make contact with a 313th Infantry patrol moving north out of Reipertswiller. Dykes answered: "Yes sir, but we have no report from that patrol."

About an hour later, the 275th command post in Niederbronn was still unaware of the crisis in Philippsbourg. Dykes phoned the G-3 to ask about a tank unit that was supposed to be patrolling the Philippsbourg-Niederbronn road to insure that it remained open. The G-3 informed him that the tank unit belonged to VI Corps and that 45th Division had no control over it. That meant that WRECKER, if it had some way of contacting the tank unit, might make suggestions about how the tankers carried out their mission, but nothing more than that.

At 1045, a G-3 section liaison officer reported to the G-3, having just left the 275th command post in Niederbronn: "At the 275th Infantry, you know the situation on those companies--what they planned to do. Well, they're in the process of doing it now." The oblique language used by the officer typified the style employed to safeguard the substance of voice radio communications, to which the Germans were presumed to be listening. He was, of course, referring to WRECKER, L, A, and B companies, the withdrawal of which had been provisionally approved some 3 hours earlier to meet the emergency in Philippsbourg which was thought to have arisen. Now that the 275th S-3 had reported that the emergency had blown over, the G-3 might have been surprised

to learn that the withdrawal of the companies was under way. However, he seems to have taken no action to verify the report or find out why the withdrawal was proceeding--particularly in view of the G-3's instruction at 0920 to the 275th that it close the Philippsbourg-Dambach gap.

The liaison officer then reported that a 275th "patrol to meet a patrol of the 313th Infantry missed, and the (275th) patrol went to the 313th's 2nd Battalion CP. There the battalion commander sent them back to where they should have made the contact." The G-3 asked about the activity at the south end of Philippsbourg referring to the reported cutting of the Niederbronn road by enemy action. The liaison officer's answer was: "It has quieted down, but the road is not known to be clear."

It was 1105 when the first indication of the deteriorating situation in Philippsbourg was passed to the G-3 section by the 275th regimental command post. A staff officer called Major Dykes and asked what was happening there. Dykes: "I just talked to the battalion commander--he said four enemy tanks came down the road from Bitche. We KO'ed one tank, but the tanks got one anti-tank gun and one tank destroyer. The other tanks pulled back and are still firing. He was just about to give me a coordinate when the line went out, but he did say they were 800 yards from the north end of town. The tanks had foot troops with them, but they don't know how many." Dykes accepted the G-3 section officer's offer of tank support, and a few minutes later VI Corps made available a company of medium tanks to the 45th Division--A Company of the 47th Tank Battalion, the parent division of which was the 14th Armored. At 1122 Dykes was notified by the G-3 section that a platoon of five Sherman tanks from this company was being attached to the 275th and was told to get in touch with the tank company, thought to be in Niederbronn, to make arrangements for employing the Shermans. Communications problems were concealing the true gravity of the Philippsbourg situation--at noon, as far as the 275th regimental CP knew, there were some enemy tanks firing into Philippsbourg from north of town, nothing more than that.

Then at 1215 the G-3 was informed by WRECKER that its forces in Philippsbourg were in difficult straits. Major Dykes: "We're out of contact with our two battalions in Philippsbourg. We had a radio message from 1st Battalion--they say they're badly in need of help. Wonder if we can get hold of one of your battalions in Niederbronn and send them up." Told by the G-3 that no such battalion was available, Dykes turned the telephone over to his regimental commander. Colonel Pettee's elaboration on the Philippsbourg situation led to his repeating Dyke's call for an infantry battalion to bolster his force there: "The forward companies of mine are withdrawing to the woods. They have

their orders, but they don't know the situation up there. The POW's we've taken say there's only about a hundred people in there, but the communications just went out. I'd like to send this other battalion of yours in. We also have information that the enemy is coming from the west, from Baerenthal." The G-3 answered: "I'll have to check with the General on it--you see, we have the 180th Infantry (45th Div) coming out on the right and swinging over on your left, which should relieve a good part of the pressure on you. Can we help you with tank destroyers?" The rest of the conversation pertained to possible tank-destroyer and tank support that might be brought to bear in Philippsbourg.

Colonel Pettee, in reporting on the Philippsbourg situation, appeared to be most concerned about his three rifle companies, L, A, and B, which he had been given to understand were withdrawing toward Philippsbourg. His report implied a belief that the withdrawing companies were unaware of the German attack into Philippsbourg and were out of contact with their battalion commanders--hence, they could be surprised and run into trouble when they approached the village. The POW-supplied information he had cited about there being only a 100-man enemy force in the village itself must have related to the raider force, the Fuesilier Company of which reportedly had a strength of 100 men. As it actually turned out, none of the three WRECKER companies did reenter Philippsbourg. As yet the American appreciation of the size of German force attacking there did not remotely approach its actual strength--a reinforced infantry regiment.

The G-3 still seemed unconvinced that there was a serious problem in Philippsbourg. At 1217, the 157th Infantry S-3 asked him what was being done about the Philippsbourg-Dambach gap, which was on the left flank of the 157th. The G-3 answered: "The people on the left (275th Inf) will withdraw some, but will tie in with your F company on the 44th or 45th northing (that is, in the vicinity of Dambach) and then (their line will) run straight into Philippsbourg and Baerenthal. At 1300 he informed Colonel Adams, the 45th assistant commander, "It looks like we will have to continue attacking in the morning, and the 275th Infantry will also attack."

For the next several hours there was no more reporting by the 275th Infantry to the 45th G-3 section on the Philippsbourg situation--evidently the telephone line between Niederbronn and Philippsbourg remained unrepaired throughout the period. For its part, the G-3 seems not to have made any inquiries. This was understandable, for his section was quite busy with problems of the 313th Infantry, which was under enemy attack around Reipertswiller.

At 1632, the 275th CP received a disturbing message from

its 2nd battalion. It reported information from a POW source--"One battalion of enemy infantry in the vicinity of Picardie (a half mile southeast of Reipertswiller) is to move east and cut the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road at a point one mile from Muehlthal." The enemy did not take this action for 2 days and then evidently used a different battalion from the one indicated in the report. However, coming when it did to the Niederbronn command post, the 2nd Battalion's report could only have further deepened the concerns of the WRECKER commander and his staff.

At last, at 1815, Colonel Pettee called the G-3 with a report clearly revealing the crisis in Philippsbourg--the developments there had gone undeniably bad for the defenders: "We have the south half of the town; the Krauts have the north half. We have lost two tanks to anti-tank guns. We have tanks in with our people. I have no information on companies A, B, and I. Company L has joined the 2nd Battalion about 120 strong.

"I don't believe I have sufficient force to hold, and I have nothing with which to make contact on the right as you order. I recommend sending more doughboys up here, withdraw all our people from the town, and blast it with everything we have. I have a Cannon Company in position, and they are able to deliver good fire into the town. More tanks won't help--we need doughboys.

"We were hit by two battalions, and the POW's we took say there are more behind them. The situation here is not good. I don't have enough to hold now, and I'm afraid they'll infiltrate and we'll wake up to find them behind us. Then my Cannon Company will be in jeopardy." The G-3 responded: "I'll have to check with the General and let you know."

The WRECKER commander's recommendation that his forces in Philippsbourg be withdrawn was a clear indicator of his assessment of the situation--it was definitely low. However, what Colonel Pettee had in mind for the employment of the requested battalion of reinforcements can only be presumed. Most probably he foresaw counterattacking with his new force back into Philippsbourg behind the proposed artillery concentration. Since he already had three rifle companies unaccounted for and out of contact, to abandon Philippsbourg to the enemy without further contest would only further isolate these companies. But there was a gloomier aspect to his thinking evident--he had doubts that, without reinforcements, his forces would be sufficient any longer to block the Falkenstein creek defile through the Vosges to Niederbronn and the mountain exit there onto the Rhine plain. After the war, he would write to his former Cannon Co commander: "Philippsbourg was a mess. There was nothing between Philippsbourg and the open country except Cannon Company and the 275th command post. If Cannon

Company had failed, the command post would have accomplished little to save the VI Corps and its several divisions from 'serious embarrassment.' Finally, as far as plugging the Philippsbourg-Dambach gap and making contact with the 157th Infantry on the right were concerned, Pettee simply stated that he hadn't sufficient means at hand to perform the job.

The G-3 could not but have been taken aback by the 275th commander's grim report. Despite Pettee's request 6 hours earlier for infantry reinforcements, the 45th officer had continued to take a positive view of the Philippsbourg situation. He may have been judging that the WRECKER commanders concerned were overreacting because of their inexperience in combat to unfavorable reports coming in from their even less experienced subordinate commanders. Now, after the Pettee withdrawal proposal, the G-3 seems to have inquired further into the Philippsbourg situation--possibly through the 645th Tank Destroyer (TD) Battalion. At 1900, when discussing it with VI Corps, the G-3 was able to supply details which had not been included in the Pettee report: "The enemy attacked with battalion strength supported by four or five tanks. We had a platoon of tank destroyers up there, and they knocked out the first enemy tank; the second enemy tank knocked out the TD; our anti-tank guns knocked out the second tank; and the third enemy tank knocked out our AT gun. Then the enemy tanks moved in closer and we had to withdraw to the south edge of town. The enemy now holds the north part. Our people there were overrun, and they are straggling back, nothing but a mob. There are two battalion officers there, and they are trying to round them up and get things organized and defend south of the town. They (the 1st and 3rd battalions' assault companies) had gotten well beyond town before they (the defenses in Philippsbourg) were hit.

"Have you heard anything about this battalion from TF Herren? We may have to use them in Philippsbourg. The enemy will be infiltrating through the hills at Philippsbourg, and, by morning, there will be a lot of trouble there." Whoever had reported the additional information to the G-3 in the meantime had accurately reflected the negative aspects of the WRECKER performance in Philippsbourg--there had been lots of straggling which could have been described as a mob scene. However, the reporter had evidently failed to mention the pockets of defenders still active in the village and the heavy losses inflicted on the enemy assault forces. The defense inside Philippsbourg was continuing--the defense was not "south of the town." The reporter had apparently estimated the enemy infantry strength as one battalion--not two battalions as Pettee had stated. Could the G-3's acceptance of the lower (incorrect) assessment have been related to his earlier minimizing of

German attack into Philippsbourg
and 275th Inf rifle company dispo-
sitions opposing it - 3 Jan 1945



the enemy threat? The Pettee report had made an oblique reference to the American tank-infantry attack late in the afternoon--he had evidently not been informed on how it had done. The G-3 made no mention of it at all.

Reinforcement by 274th's 1st Battalion

Twenty-five minutes later, the G-3 was talking to Col Sam G. Conley, commander of the 274th Infantry, which by this time had been added to the list of regiments attached to the 45th Division. The G-3 stated, "The situation in Philippsbourg is deplorable, and we will have to have your battalion at Niederbronn. Send a liaison officer to contact the 275th's CO, and he will make arrangements for your detrucking." Conley replied, "We'll get them going in 15 minutes."

At 2055, the G-3 was talking to a VI Corps staff officer, reviewing the deteriorated Philippsbourg situation and actions being taken to improve it: "We are sending more of Herren's people there. The people there are badly disorganized and straggling back to the regimental CP and over to the 157th Infantry (sector on their right). The 157th is sending them back to their regimental CO in Niederbronn. The Herren people are on trucks, and we are having a guide from the 275th Infantry pick them up, and they are sending someone to the 275th Infantry (command post). General Herren said that his people are ready to go. We don't know if they have maps or not or if they know their way around. We can't check up on those things. Sending Herren's people up tonight may not do much good, but the Krauts would be able to push on in the morning with some armor, and this is the best we can do to stop them. The 275th executive officer is up at the town trying to get some stragglers rounded up and organized; the commander is back in Niederbronn." The VI Corps officer's response was not approving: "That battalion of Herren's may be on trucks, but I can't see how you are going to get them up there tonight and what good they are going to do once they get there. It looks like throwing good after bad. As for those stragglers, why doesn't the 157th round them up and make use of them? See if you can't get things organized up there." The last sentence in the VI Corps officer's remarks had been the only thing constructive he had to offer. His discounting of the possible utility of the 274th battalion's move by truck that night couldn't have been further off the mark.

At 2240 there was a discussion between the G-3 and the 157th Infantry's S-3 during which the principal subject was the Philippsbourg-Dambach gap, on the left of the 157th. Having been assured that the 157th's 2nd battalion was running patrols to its southwest into the area of the gap, the G-3 warned his correspondent to "keep your OP's alerted,

because they may pour down the gap."

At 2305 the 45th Division commander notified his artillery commander that he was authorized to use double his normal allotment of medium artillery ammunition during the next day. The artillery officer responded: "We had a request from the 275th Infantry and will have to use most of it on that." The General cautioned him to be sure to "cover the other" problem --presumably around Reipertswiller. The conversation provided a graphic indicator as to where in the VI Corps sector the American higher commanders were now directing their attention most often.

Since 1815, when Colonel Pettee's report on Philippsbourg had alarmed the G-3 section, there had been no telephonic exchanges between it and WRECKER--no 275th reports and no G-3 queries. Unquestionably, the G-3 and the division commander were keeping themselves continuously informed on Philippsbourg developments, but they must have been relying on other than WRECKER observers reporting through non-telephonic channels. Then, at 2320 Major Dykes called the G-3 section to find out about infantry reinforcements: "We've been expecting another battalion--which one is it?"

"It's the 1st Battalion/274th Infantry, and they began moving at 2130, leaving from La Petite Pierre (by road, some 20 miles southwest of Niederbronn)."

"No one has reported to me as yet, and I was beginning to wonder where they were."

"What's your situation there?"

"Nothing new--all we're getting (in Philippsbourg) is artillery fire. We did contact our 2nd battalion." (Dykes was referring to an exchange that morning with the G-3 about 2nd Battalion patrolling in the direction of Reipertswiller.)

"What about those (313th Infantry) patrols this morning and afternoon that were to contact your F company?"

"Don't have any report regarding them, but will check it for you."

"Has our (45th) reconn contacted you?"

"No report of it, but I'll check on that too, and, if I find anything, I'll call you back. If not, I won't." The almost total preoccupation with Philippsbourg of the WRECKER staff since daybreak couldn't have been more obvious.

James T. Willis, then commander of the 1st Battalion/274th Infantry, recalls having his battalion, in the midst of a movement by trucks to a different destination, redirected to Niederbronn for attachment to the 275th Infantry. "On the afternoon of 3 January, I was ordered to move my battalion by truck from a reserve position in Bischwiller (near the Rhine) to La Petite Pierre, the move to be made that night. Just before we arrived at La Petite Pierre, I was ordered to reroute my battalion to Niederbronn and (myself) to report

to General Herren at the Task Force command post in La Petite Pierre. There I received instructions that my battalion was attached to the 275th. I was to report to Colonel Pettee, the 275th commander, at Niederbronn." It was nearly midnight when the 1st Battalion truck column was halted on the narrow, icy road outside La Petite Pierre, turned around under nearly impossible black-out conditions, and started back toward Niederbronn.

The 45th G-3 Periodic Report for 3 January summarized that section's impressions of what had happened in and around Philippsbourg that day: "275th Infantry--1st and 3rd battalions continued to attack in sector and met light to strong resistance throughout the day. An enemy counter-attack estimated (to have been) one battalion in strength, supported by tanks, attacked Philippsbourg from the north, and, after heavy fighting in which heavy casualties were suffered, our troops withdrew to the south edge of town. Enemy infiltration into the sector was successful and, at the close of the period, each company was fighting desperately to clear the scattered groups from their respective areas. The 2nd Battalion remained in blocking positions on the south edge of Baerenthal and conducted reconnaissance patrols to adjacent units to prevent enemy infiltration." The underestimation of the strength of the enemy's attack into Philippsbourg persisted. As for the commitment of the defending WRECKER force to its work, the G-3 section's appraisal appeared to have been revised upward. The report was not clear as to where the opposing forces were in contact at the end of the day. The corresponding 275th report was somewhat more enlightening: (There was) "heavy fighting in and around the town all day. Units were cut off, and the situation became critical. Fighting subsided at dark. Companies B and I are unaccounted for. At the end of the period, the enemy held the north half of Philippsbourg."

The eruption of heavy fighting in Philippsbourg caused a noticeable increase in the flow of civilian refugees through Niederbronn. Frank Barquist, a WRECKER Service Co corporal, was with a truck loaded with field rations en route to Niederbronn from further to the rear: "About half-way there, we ran into a lot of civilians heading the opposite way with all their belongings, and we learned that the Heinies had broken through and were headed our way. Well, all we could do was to keep on going--those were our orders. With the freezing cold the pavement was icy and slick. Suddenly a civilian car that was being used by the French military spun around right in front of us. To avoid it, we had to put on the brakes, and that caused us to slide right into a couple of carts loaded with refugees' belongings. It knocked them all over the road in addition to pushing in the

front ends of two trucks. The civilians just picked up their stuff and went on as if nothing had happened.

"Having fixed our trucks, we were on our way again. When we got to Niederbronn, we found that almost all of Service Company had left for a location a couple of towns back. However, we had to stay there with the rations. The heavy artillery was set up all around us, and they were really blasting away." Near the regimental CP, Captain Pence, the WRECKER adjutant, watched at the side of the road from Philippsbourg while several refugees labored past with what possessions they could carry. An elderly woman came out of a house on the opposite side of the road and stood peering fearfully in the direction of Philippsbourg. "I walked over to her and asked her what the trouble was. 'I'm scared!' she exclaimed, tears streaming down her face. I tried to assure her that the Germans wouldn't get further than Philippsbourg, but she didn't seem convinced. The bad reports we were getting from Philippsbourg might have been reflected by my face."

There are few numbers available showing the dimensions of German losses during the attack of 3 Jan on Philippsbourg, but surely they were heavy. Interrogations of POW's did provide a couple of indices. The 2nd Battalion/476th Grenadiers was the battalion which attacked into Philippsbourg along the Bitche road, the 1st Battalion having attacked into the west side of Philippsbourg from the direction of Baerenthal. The 7th Company/2nd Battalion, with a strength of 90 men, was the lead company in the attack and was "nearly wiped out." The 256th VG Division's Fuesilier Company, with two platoons totalling about 100 men, was the nucleus of the raider force which made the dawn attack behind Philippsbourg. Its 1st platoon was "wiped out"; the remnants of the 2nd Platoon and the company commander were captured at the south end of Philippsbourg at the site of the ill-fated roadblock.

Listed in the 45th Div G-2 summary of the enemy situation at the end of 3 Jan were the following units in contact with U.S. forces--"Philippsbourg area: 1st Battalion/456th Regt, 1st and 2nd battalions/476th Regt. Southwest of Bannstein: 2nd Battalion/456th Regt. Baerenthal: 2nd Battalion/952nd Inf, 815th Battalion."

Summary of WRECKER Operations, 3 Jan

It was around 0300, 3 January, when the D Co mortar section at the foot of Falkenberg discovered enemy troops in large numbers all around them. The mortarmen grabbed what equipment they could in the darkness and withdrew to Philippsbourg, where they reported the enemy presence on the

lower slopes of the ridge on which the B Co positions were situated. The Germans had been part of the force that later attacked B Company, shortly after daybreak. B Company repelled the attacks after having inflicted a number of casualties. B Company also took losses, including the company commander, wounded. The Company's positions were consolidated and a combat patrol was sent in the direction of Philippsbourg. The patrol encountered an enemy unit also moving toward Philippsbourg and became engaged with it. The patrol pulled back to the Falkenberg crest having found routes to the south blocked by the enemy.

A Company on Angelsberg, southwest of the B Co position, continued to receive occasional shells throughout the night. At daybreak, the shelling intensified causing a number of casualties and making tenure of the exposed position extremely hazardous. Shortly after daybreak, a messenger returned with instructions from Battalion for the Company to withdraw. A Company moved off Angelsberg as quickly as possible taking its wounded including several litter cases with it. The Company proceeded southwest, and soon the sounds of heavy fighting in the direction of Philippsbourg could be heard. The march route was turned directly south bringing A Company past Philippsbourg well east of it and to the Niederbronn road in the vicinity of the hamlet Schweizerhof. Receiving instructions from Battalion at this point, A Company entered the road and marched toward Niederbronn arriving there after dark.

C Company, in 1st Battalion reserve, quickly became engaged as the German attack broke into Philippsbourg around daybreak; the Company's elements were deployed generally along the east ridge overlooking Philippsbourg. Elements of its 1st platoon were driven back and scattered during the morning. Its 2nd platoon had remained behind in Niederbronn as regimental reserve when, the day before, the Battalion had marched to Philippsbourg. In the late afternoon of 3 January this platoon accompanied by five Sherman tanks moved from Niederbronn to Philippsbourg and attacked up the main street penetrating almost to Main Forks by nightfall. The 2nd Platoon then moved to the east ridge and took up defensive positions there.

Early that morning, the K Co platoon blocking the Bitche road was quickly overrun by the German attack or driven back from those of its positions which were on the high ground to the west of the road. The larger part of the 1st Platoon found its way to the 3rd Battalion sector, where it was employed in that battalion's defensive operations during the next couple of days. The smaller part of the Platoon, including the platoon leader, was able to infiltrate back through the German occupied part of Philippsbourg that night and rejoin the rest of K Company there. The two other rifle

platoons and the K Co Weapons Platoon battled against enemy assaults from the west side and north end of Philippsbourg, maintaining their hold of houses along the main street but being forced out of some along the side street which crosses the tracks just south of the railroad station. In the afternoon K Co men in the village participated in at least one counterattack up the main street but abandoned such gains as were made, withdrawing at nightfall to positions held before the counterattack.

L Company, northwest of Philippsbourg, probed along several routes, attempting to follow its instructions—to return to Philippsbourg. Each avenue investigated was found to be blocked by enemy troops. Convinced that he and his men were cut off from Philippsbourg, the company commander decided to take his force southwest in the direction of the 2nd Battalion. After a day-long struggle bucking through deep snow on a route which found practically no favorably oriented trails, the exhausted Company encountered a 2nd Battalion patrol. Directed to Muehlthal, L Company was quickly incorporated into the 2nd Battalion's defensive arrangements.

I Company in its defensive position north of Philippsbourg spent 3 January improving the foxholes as field fortifications and as tolerable shelters from the freezing cold. Too it sent out patrols to find out what the enemy was doing, with respect not only to "Hill No. 30" but also to friendly forces in and around Philippsbourg. In addition, there was patrolling to find an open route for the Company which could be used to rejoin the rest of the Battalion. The reconnaissance revealed that the enemy attack on Philippsbourg had achieved some success, to the extent of capturing a sizeable quantity of U.S. vehicles and weapons, and that there was evidently no way to rejoin the Battalion except by fighting through enemy forces.

The 2nd Battalion continued its reorganizing of units shaken up by enemy offensive actions of 2 Jan and building up of defenses to block the corridor through the mountains and to protect its open flank and rear to the west and southwest. Patrolling was initiated to detect enemy movements all around the Battalion's defensive complex and to make contact with the distant 313th Infantry, the nearest friendly force on the 2nd Battalion left other than reconnaissance parties--some 3 1/2 miles over the mountains.

The Calm before the Storm

For those WRECKER men in Philippsbourg who were up and around early that Wednesday morning (3 Jan), there was a deceptive calm over the village as the darkness yielded to

the first glimmerings of dawn. T 4 Nelson: "The next morning I visited the latrine and was observing a couple of our other medics tinkering with a tire or something on one of the trucks. It seemed like a nice quiet morning when suddenly there were whines and explosions all over the place. We medics were indeed getting our baptism of fire by enemy artillery. Needless to say, I completed my visit to the latrine in a real hurry and ran to the comparative safety of the aid station. Soon we were hearing shouts from various directions--the summons that was to become familiar, 'Medic!' Capt Arthur C. Ferree, our battalion surgeon, took one man and left to answer a call and our other officer, 1st Lt. Lewis A. Dougherty, and the jeep driver also departed in response to another. Both doctors failed to return as the shelling continued. At some point the sounds of machine-gun and smallarms firing were heard to suggest that our infantry and the enemy's had become engaged."

As the morning advanced the enlisted medics at the 1st Battalion aid station continued to worry about the two absent doctors. T 4 Nelson: "Then a German tank rolled into town and stopped about a half block from the church. There it became engaged with one of our tank destroyers parked just outside the church." Further up the street the appearance of the German tank had just caused a hasty evacuation of the 3rd Battalion's aid station from the tavern at Main Forks. The sound of the tank's approach had been muffled by the din of gunfire and shell explosions, and one of the medics looked out the front door just as the tank pulled up. He gave the alarm and everyone ran out the back door of the tavern and climbed over the wall behind it. The last to make it over the wall was a chaplain who, being short of stature, found himself unable to clamber unassisted over the wall. Some frantic yelling for help by the chaplain brought the assistance needed to get him out of his predicament. When the aid station personnel reassembled at a safer location toward the south end of Philippsbourg, some of them enjoyed a brief chuckle remembering the shrill anxiety voiced by the chaplain a few moments before while in the midst of his close-shave.

The reaction at the 1st Battalion aid station to the German tank's approach was much like that of the 3rd Battalion medics. T 4 Nelson: "It was when this German tank appeared that some of the fellows decided to leave the aid station. Sgt Place urged: 'Come on, let's get out of here!' 'Where will you go?' I asked, 'We're better off here than out in the woods. Besides, it's against regulations to leave wounded men unattended.' We had about a dozen wounded men, half of them German, in the station. However, some of our people left, and we had remaining there with the wounded just Pfc Piel, another soldier, a 45th Division ambulance

driver, and myself.

"While we weren't occupied attending the wounded, we watched what we could see of the action in the street. In the engagement with the German tank, the tank destroyer had been hit and was burning. One of the crew lay wounded nearby--he had been hit by rifle fire as he attempted to escape the burning vehicle. A call for a medic came from a nearby house. I decided that I was elected. Scared stiff, I asked the 45th Division driver to go along. Then I mumbled something to him about medics not being supposed to go out ahead of the infantry. He promptly set me straight: 'Those fellows are doing the fighting in this war, and the least we can do is pick them up when they are hurt.' Having been thus told off, I high-tailed it out the rear of the church and headed for the nearest house, 40-50 yards to the south.

"In the house (the 3rd Bn CP) I found several officers including a captain who was a 3rd Battalion staff officer. He wanted the wounded tank destroyer crew member rescued. I wondered how I was going to get the man to safety--the street was at a much lower level than the house we were in and there was a long flight of stairs from the street up to the house. Then the captain offered to help, and we two went down the steps, two and three at a time. We each took an arm of the wounded man and dragged him unceremoniously along the street and up the stairs to the house. Having dressed his wounds and tagged him, I told the captain that I had no way of getting him to the aid station and that we couldn't evacuate anyone anyway. The hills and woods around the village seemed to be full of enemy troopers, and our side, it seemed, was making little progress in correcting a dangerous situation. I went back to the church." Nelson had, indeed, done his best for the wounded man--he couldn't get a doctor for him; both of the 1st Battalion professionals were still absent from the aid station in the church.

The captain of the 3rd Battalion staff who had joined Nelson in rescuing the tank destroyer crewman was Hunter Copeland. After Nelson had left to go back to the church, Copeland sensed that the wounded man was still in a bad way--he was in acute pain with a stomach wound. Knowing that the 3rd Battalion medical group had withdrawn from the aid station at Main Forks, Copeland went looking for them--back out in the open, which was alive with whizzing metal. Locating the group at the south end of the village, Copeland returned to the CP with 1st Lt Bernard R. Brennan, one of the 3rd Battalion doctors, who gave additional attention to the man.

For Steiner, first sergeant of 1st Battalion's Hqs Company, the startling change in the situation wrought by the enemy dawn attack made a lasting impression. "After a

comparatively quiet night, we found ourselves surrounded in the morning with the Germans controlling both ends of the street with machine-gun fire. Around daylight I started to the battalion CP down the street and was startled to see tracers streaking past my legs." Having delivered his report, Steiner was back at his company CP when the German tank made its mid-morning appearance up the street. "A German tank started down the street. The battalion A & P Platoon's leader and I went up in the attic and fired several bazooka rounds at him. He withdrew. The lieutenant and I had gotten one hit but the round failed to detonate." In most instances in which German tank thrusts into Philippsbourg were turned back, it must have been the cumulative effect of the numerous hits from American-operated weapons that turned the trick. Unless they fortuitously hit a vital spot, the American bazooka round and anti-tank rifle grenade were no match for the German Mark IV's armor.

Sergeant Steiner's was one of the numerous WRECKER groups who found themselves partially isolated that morning in houses south of Main Forks. The house walls that protected each group from the firings outside were also barriers, both physical and psychological, inhibiting control by commanders and leaders and cooperation among groups. Steiner: "The German infantry pressure was continuous. They seemed to be trying to get to our rear by moving along the ridge above the village. From the house sheltering our CP we could cover a firebreak across the enemy's path and we were largely successful in preventing them from crossing it. Sometime during the morning part of the battalion Anti Tank Platoon joined us and boosted our fire power with a BAR they brought, along with some M-1's and rifle grenades. Now we could bring a lot of fire to bear on that firebreak.

"Once that morning one of our Hqs Co men, Herbert Thiesen, dashed across the street for some ammo. He was hit and fell in the street. Someone else went out to help Thiesen. Reaching the wounded man, the would-be rescuer took one look at Thiesen's wound and then scampered back to the CP. Thiesen was dead, he reported. A few moments later we watched amazed while Thiesen rolled over and struggled up and back the rest of the way across the street under his own power. He had been hit in the right temple, the bullet going through his helmet, barely penetrating the skin, and exiting behind his right ear. It was fearful looking wound. Pvt Farmer made several trips across the street that day to carry ammunition. He was a slightly built man but one of the most courageous ones I ever saw."

At the 1st Battalion aid station in the church, one of the medics who had remained was Pfc James E. Mulholland. He remembers the intensity of the enemy shelling in Philipps-

bourg: "The 88's were really pouring in on the town. I was huddled against the wall of the church. There next to me was a 45th Division ambulance driver. He had to shout to make himself understood above the din when he told me that it was hotter there in Philippsbourg than it had been in Anzio (Italy) where he had been under fire before." Later in the afternoon the firing slackened.

As night fell the firing died away almost entirely, and out-of-doors activity became less restricted. At the church, T 4 Nelson remained the man in charge of 1st Battalion's aid station in view of the continuing absences of his superiors--some of which seemingly were justified, some not. The 45th Division ambulance driver went outside and checked his vehicle. When the driver came back in, Nelson was faced with a new trial: "The 45th Division driver announced that his ambulance was full of holes but the motor ran. He was going to take off with a load of wounded. Several more wounded had been brought in in the meantime, and it fell to me to decide which ones would go. Several begged to be included, but which four of them had the most urgent need for the early attention? The boy who had received a direct blast shattering his glasses and driving their fragments into his eyes was my first choice. I picked four and we loaded them into the ambulance. Off it went. Our 3/4-ton truck was shot up completely and would not run. Our jeep was gone. What was I supposed to do with the rest of the wounded?"

"Then Captain Ferree returned. More wounded were brought in, and we became too busy to worry about anything other than attending to them. A man with an elbow wound was bleeding badly, and we worked hard on him. A sergeant with one leg practically blown off was brought in. The captain and two of us technicians completed the amputation with bandage scissors." Mulholland: "Sgt Smith, of Hqs Company, or, maybe, Service Company, was carried in badly wounded with shoulder and leg wounds. We all felt bad about this--Smith was a popular guy and an excellent soldier. Captain Ferree decided to amputate to save him. After the operation, the amputated leg with the combat boot still on it was deposited next to the door, where it made a gruesome sight when the door was shut. We left the door open as much as possible."

The wounded were brought in in a continuing stream, and the undermanned medical staff worked feverishly to keep up. T 4 Nelson: "One of our men, T 4 Steve Vargo, an aid man with one of the companies, came in with a burn for treatment. When he saw what a fix we were in at the aid station, he pitched in to help. T 4 Elmer Zimmerman also returned. At midnight Regiment set up a truck, and we started sending the wounded back. The sergeant with the amputation was

still alive--we had given him four of five units of plasma. Later we found out that he didn't make it."

During the first hours after midnight an occasional shell arrived, bursting near or within the area of the A Co position and keeping the men on edge as they resisted as well as they could another foe on Angelsberg's barren slope--the freezing cold. Shortly after midnight, Captain Millhiser sent Sergeant Pannell back to Battalion to report on the Company's situation and to request that it dispatch a wire crew to lay a telephone line to the A Co position--the persistent failure to achieve radio contact with Battalion was no longer tolerable. Pannell must have arrived at the 1st Battalion CP around 0300. This was about the same time as when the D Co mortarmen reached Philippsbourg from Falkenberg having been chased away from their firing positions by enemy troops gathering on the lower slope of Falkenberg in preparation for their assault after daybreak on the B Co positions higher up on the ridge. The word brought by the mortarmen that a German force was between B Company and Philippsbourg appears to have convinced Colonel Pierce that not only was B Company in a dangerous position but also A Company was threatened. Instead of ordering the stringing of the requested wire, Pierce sent Sergeant Pannell back to Angelsberg with orders for Captain Millhiser to withdraw his company back to Philippsbourg--once it reached Philippsbourg, A Company could be used to assist in dealing with the enemy force threatening B Company on Falkenberg or to join the 1st Battalion defenses on the east side of Philippsbourg or both. Pierce didn't know whether B Company was aware of the threat to its rear--there was still no radio contact with B Company.

Sergeant Pannell arrived back at the A Co position while it was not yet daylight and delivered the battalion commander's message to Captain Millhiser. It appears that the A Co commander elected to wait for daylight's assistance in gathering equipment and making other preparations for the withdrawal. At daybreak, however, there was a stepping-up of the rate of enemy shellfire and an improvement in its accuracy. The Company began taking casualties at an alarming rate. No further time was lost--word was sent to the platoons to prepare to move out. Then, at this inopportune moment, Captain Millhiser's driver arrived bringing with him a packet of personal mail for the Company and news that the captain's jeep had just been disabled by an enemy shell. Mail Call had to be held on the move, during the course of the Company's withdrawal.

At the beginning of the movement, Millhiser led his men obliquely downslope to the left onto the saddle between the two heights, Weiherberg and Angelsberg. There was a pause while a final fruitless search was conducted for the still

missing members of the Scobey party. The extended column turned southwest along the trail in the valley between Weiherberg and Angelsberg. It moved slowly--not only were its still able-bodied men weary from labor and sleeplessness but there were some walking wounded and several wounded men on litters borne by some of the POW's taken during the previous night. During the first couple hours of the march, there were several brushes with enemy parties--small patrols. On each such occasion, firing broke out as one of column's outguards spotted the enemy and started shooting or as the enemy detected the Company's movement and opened fire. With each firefight the Company halted and sought cover, those men joining the engagement who were in the part of the column involved. Then, after the column reached the end of Angelsberg, there were no more contacts with the enemy.

The company executive officer was 1st Lt Perry B. Woodward. He has written that "When the Company got near the junction of the trail with the Neunhoffen road, we realized that Philippsbourg was partially occupied by a good-size force of Germans. We turned left and climbed over the height Staengelhald, the next terrain feature south of Weiherberg. The Company continued to move with caution not only because of our earlier contacts with enemy patrols to the west of us but also because now we could hear the smallarms and artillery firing in Philippsbourg to the southwest and had to be prepared to encounter enemy to our front. Our bearing must have remained generally southward as we followed various trails. A Company arrived at a point overlooking the Niederbronn road after skirting along the foot of Wintersberg's east slope. Late in the afternoon we saw a jeep coming from Philippsbourg with an American driver and concluded that the town was still held by our forces." Millhiser remembers that A Company remained halted at its overlook observing the Niederbronn road for a lengthy period--meanwhile he was pondering his next course of action. Then the jeep appeared, and the A Co commander stopped it. In it the 1st Bn supply officer--the S-4--was riding. Following a brief discussion, the S-4 turned about and returned to Philippsbourg. A few minutes later the battalion executive officer, Major Duffie, drove up having come from the battalion CP.

After Duffie and Millhiser had talked, the decision was made--A Company moved out again, entering the road and turning left on it in the direction of Niederbronn. It arrived there after dark and took a break in the foundry, which it had departed from some 34 hours before. During the period since that departure the Company had sustained (including those of its D Co attachments) 42 casualties, including 14 men killed in action. Captain Millhiser

proceeded to the regimental CP, where he reported to Colonel Pettee at 1945. Having made his report and received instructions, Millhiser returned to his company. After turning over its wounded and prisoners to the appropriate regimental facilities and obtaining resupplies, A Company moved back out of Niederbrom to its next assignment--back toward Philippsbourg, near where it set up security outposts protecting WRECKER Cannon Co firing positions and the right-rear of the Regiment's dispositions in Philippsbourg.

B Co's Situation on Falkenberg

Memory does not serve to pinpoint with any precision the location of B Co defenses on Falkenberg's long ridge, which extends for nearly 2 miles on the north side of Neunhoffer road to within a few hundred yards of that village. Most probably B Co's forwardmost platoon was positioned on the northeast slope of the broader, higher part of the ridge, which extends from its southwest end to half-way up its length.

The enemy assault on the B Co positions came shortly after daybreak and seems to have achieved surprise, for former members of the Company have no impression of a direction from which the attackers came--the enemy appeared to be "all around us." Captain Schmied was checking his platoon defensive perimeters when the Germans struck and was wounded almost at once--his right arm was badly mangled by a burst of automatic-weapons fire. During the days of B Company's besiegement that followed, Schmied would be unconscious for the most part, becoming aware of what was going on only fitfully. Direction of the Company in the conduct of its defense fell to the executive officer, 1st Lt Edward F. Groffie, who also was wounded but still able to carry on.

Groffie remembers that, in the over-all defensive set-up, "There was supposed to be a company from the 3rd Battalion on our left and B Company was responsible to maintain contact with them. We sent several patrols westward looking for them, but not one was successful." There is some evidence that I Company, the 3rd Battalion unit which B Co patrols were attempting to contact, was not in its prescribed position--hence the lack of success of the B Co patrolling. While its actual location was reported to the 3rd Battalion commander late on 2 January, the total loss of contact between Philippsbourg and B Company thereafter made it impossible that the misunderstanding could have been corrected. Groffie recalls, however, that there was radio contact between B and A companies during the night of 2-3 Jan.

When the Germans attacked B's Falkenberg positions the

following morning, Groffie was awakened from a brief nap--having been up most of the night, he was trying to catch some sleep. Evidently Schmied was away from the CP, and Groffie had been awakened when the first signs of the attack developed. His waker took Groffie to a vantage point overlooking the Neunhoffer road and handed him a pair of field glasses while gesturing in the direction of the road. The B Co officer quickly spotted German troops on the road, large numbers of them as well as he could tell. Returning to the command post, Groffie called A Company on the radio to ensure that they too were alert. He addressed himself to Captain Millhiser: "Ross, this is Ed. Ross, this is Ed." When Millhiser responded identifying himself, Groffie asked him, "Can you see what's going on between us?" Millhiser answered, "Yes, and I'm getting the hell out of here!"

By now Groffie had learned that a German assault had already hit at least one of the platoon perimeters and that this part of the Company's defenses could not be reached since enemy troops were blocking the access. The company commander was thought to be in the cut-off part of the Company's sector. While Groffie had not drawn the inference from his radio exchange with Millhiser that the A Co commander had been attempting to convey advice or instructions to him, the B Co exec concluded that, since his company seemed to be cut off from A Company and Philippsbourg as well, an effort should be made to reach the forward company from 3rd Battalion on the B Co left--perhaps through that company Groffie could get in touch with Battalion and advise Colonel Pierce of the B Co situation; perhaps he could obtain reinforcements to relieve the cut-off part of the Company. Groffie could not know that, communications-wise, the 3rd Battalion company on his left was no better off than was B Company and that, in general, that company was only slightly better off--I Company was practically cut off by the enemy advances toward Philippsbourg on 3 January. Groffie issued instructions to implement his plan.

2nd Lt Ray M. Broughton was leader of the B Co 3rd Platoon, emplaced along the east slope of the Falkenberg ridge. He remembers that "When I awoke the morning after we climbed up on the ridge, the road between Falkenberg and the next ridge (Weiherberg) was literally streaming with Germans. I don't recall with certainty, but I seem to remember that Lieutenant Groffie gave me the order--I was to take my platoon and, perhaps, other B Co elements out of there. I asked about Schmied and was told he was wounded." Broughton's recollection here is a dim impression partially corroborating what Groffie remembers of the B Co situation--according to this impression, Captain Schmied was either

still on the ridge but with part of the Company which was out of contact or was with a group of B Co troops that had already departed from Falkenberg. The duality of his recollection here surely reflects the confusion that prevailed on the ridge after B Company was hit by the enemy.

According to Broughton, "The plan was to move back to the road via the back (northwest) side of Falkenberg and try to rejoin our main force or, failing that, to move further west and south to join another element we thought was operating there. I believe we thought that the latter was the more likely possibility because of the large number of German troops and vehicles we had observed on the Neunhoffen road. I put out a point and we managed to work our way down the back side of Falkenberg. I took the lead. We had no more than sighted the road paralleling the Falkenberg ridge on its west side than I heard what I quickly came to know as the mechanical sound of a burp gun being readied for firing. I sensed that we had been spotted by the enemy. My men were strung out some distance to the rear, and there was no opportunity to form them in a frontal position facing the road before the enemy column came into view marching along the road. Evidently not yet aware of our presence, they appeared to be as many as a rifle company. I hastily got a few men into firing position, including at least one with a BAR. We opened fire, surprising them, and killed or wounded quite a few before they could scatter. Then their flankers, whom we had not noticed before, began firing on us, killing at least one and wounding one or more. An Irishman named Kelly caught a round which pierced his helmet but came away from the action with only a headache--the bullet had exited the side of his helmet. We joked about his hard Irish head.

"I expected that the Germans would attack, but all we received was plenty of smallarms fire. I asked the radio operator to see whether he could get some artillery fire to support us--a faint hope because we had only a vague idea of our position on the map. But in it came. The exploding shells were too close for comfort--only 50 yards or so away--but very effective. Then it ceased and we began receiving more enemy smallarms fire; so I ordered more artillery, this time with more confidence. The response came down right where it was needed. The Germans withdrew, and then it was quiet. It was getting late when we pulled back up to what I believe was the southwest nose of Falkenberg, where there were some entrenchments. I went to the radio operator, Johnny Giles and thanked him for somehow getting the artillery fire. He answered: 'But Lieutenant, I didn't do it; the radio was shot up before you gave the order.' Years later I would learn that our own mortars had provided the support.

"As I recall, we rested in some old entrenchments, then started out again in an effort to cross the Neunhoffen road. When we had approached close enough to the road to see it through the woods, we spotted a concrete emplacement that was probably part of the Maginot Line. I sent a scouting party across the road after darkness had fallen. It returned about an hour later to report that we could not cross at that point--there were too many Germans in the area. We made our way back climbing up the Falkenberg slope, onto the nose of its south end. There we ran into the rest of the Company. Schmied was there, badly wounded. He had been helped to a place high up in the rocks. We dug in as well as we could, running into solid rock when we got down about 18 inches. I believe that it was during our second night on Falkenberg that four men either volunteered or were ordered to try to make it past the enemy to Philippsbourg, where it was to report the B Co situation to Battalion."

Lieutenant Groffie appears to have been with the same group as Broughton. During the action along the road on the west side of Falkenberg, Groffie was wounded in the foot, but it wasn't a disabling wound. Following the action, the B Co group climbed back up the Falkenberg slope to a point further southwest from where it had taken its original positions. Groffie believes it was at this time that he first learned that Schmied had been wounded. Hearing this, Groffie proceeded downslope to where he found the wounded captain. There was a dead B Co medic nearby--Groffie was told that the medic had been in the act of treating Schmied when he was fatally shot.

It was still dark at the road junction south of Falkenberg when one of its sentries alerted other members of C Company's Wallace patrol--a group of men had been detected coming down the road from the northwest toward them. As they drew closer, the men approaching were recognized as enemy troops, a large patrol, and the Americans opened fire. Firing back, the Germans dispersed, and a lengthy firefight ensued. When at length daylight arrived, it was evident that the Americans had the upper hand. The Germans' firing had weakened considerably, and cries of their wounded indicated that they had taken casualties. Aside from a couple of wounded--neither serious--inflicted during the shelling earlier during the night, the American force at the junction was unscathed. An exchange of shouts between the two sides ended with the remaining Germans emerging from cover with their hands up. Some 20 prisoners including several wounded were placed under guard. Other German casualties--their dead--were left where they had fallen. Wallace's men and the machine-gunners settled back in their positions. Wallace was expecting new instructions and,

pending their receipt, would stay where he was--for a while anyway.

Captain Wallace of D Company had slept only an hour or so after returning from his midnight visit to the approaches of Falkenberg. Then he was awakened at the company CP at the south end of Philippsbourg by some of the mortar men he had talked to during that visit. They had just arrived back from their mortar positions to the rear of B Company having been driven off by the sudden appearance of German troops all around them. Having heard their fragmentary accounts, Wallace hurried to the battalion CP nearby. There he summarized to the duty officer, then to the just awakened Colonel Pierce and others of his staff, the report he had composed from what his men had told him. Wallace: "They said that there were Krauts all over Schmied's hill and all around their own position, and they thought that some members of the section had been hit or captured. I do recall that either the battalion commander or higher headquarters decided before daylight to commit all or part of C Company to move northward to try to establish contact with B Company. Orders were issued, but before anybody could move out, the entire town was hit by Krauts, including the battalion CP itself."

The proximity of the D Co mortar positions to the road junction where the Wallace patrol was located and the experiences of these two groups--and, as well, of the D Co machine-gun section of which Richard Brown was a member--during the first few hours of 3 January suggest that the same enemy force was involved with all three groups, seemingly in separate engagements and at different times over a 4- or 5-hour period. There was evidently much confusion and none of the three American groups seems to have been certain of the presence and/or locations of the other two. Consequently it seems likely that some of the bullets that menaced each of the three had issued from American weapons. Doubtlessly the firing was heard by men of B Company up on the ridge high above. Probably thought was given to sending a patrol down when daylight came to check into the affair. However, such B Co plans, like 1st Battalion's in Philippsbourg, had to be shelved when the enemy took the initiative at dawn.

With regard to the predawn activity in the vicinity of Falkenberg, Richard Brown, the D Co machine-gunner, would recall that "during the night, probably around 0300 to 0400, we heard movement from behind us coming down the trail. We at first believed this to be B Company displacing, and, when we heard Germans talking, we thought they were POW's with B Company. It was soon realized that it wasn't B Company when they stopped and started digging in behind us, on both sides of the trail and in the woods on the hill to our right.

Just before dawn we could make out moving forms as some of the Germans walked closer to our position. It was decided that we would be sitting ducks when daylight came if we stayed put. So our section leader S Sgt Koy ordered us to move across the road. We did this with some difficulty--first, in moving the guns silently so that the occupants of the nearby enemy positions wouldn't hear us and, second, in gaining cover and concealment from the fire of a German patrol which spotted us as we crossed the road.

"The guns were set up in the woods on the side of a hill facing toward the road. Daylight came and we could see some of the troops who had dug in during the night--we guessed they amounted to an enemy infantry company. We could hear heavy fighting going on back towards Philippsbourg and off in the woods across the road from us. ... We still believed that B Company was on the high ground across the road from us, beyond the Germans in the positions where they had dug in during the night. Sergeant Koy talked it over with two squad leaders, Albert Bartolomoelli and Harrah, and they decided we should open fire. The order was given, and all hell broke loose.

"We eventually ran out of ammunition, and it was decided to disable our guns and try to work our way back toward Philippsbourg. We were now aware that there were also Germans in the woods behind us. Due to the extreme cold I found it impossible to get the bolt out of my machine gun; so I shot at the bolt mechanism with my pistol. My assistant gunner George I. Sims had been shot in the leg and later in the head. We were still under fire as Sergeant Bartolomoelli helped me in dragging Sims in an effort to get to cover. In avoiding the Germans behind us, we took to the ditch next to the road and crawled along it--we were surrounded and captured where the ditch petered out leaving us without cover. Sims was taken to a German aid station. However, I was saddened during a tour of Europe in 1979 to learn that he hadn't survived. I found his grave at the American military cemetery at St. Avoird, France."

During the early hours of 3 Jan in Philippsbourg, Kern Dibble, the C Co machine-gunner, had been on guard duty at the 1st Battalion command post. "I was picked to stand guard at the CP from 0200 to 0400. It was very cold and there was lots of snow on the ground. When it's cold like that, sound carries a great distance. Standing outside the CP, I could hear the clinking of metal on metal in the woods across the valley and also in the hills behind us. When I went off duty at 0400, I told someone, either the sergeant or the OD (Officer of the Day), that there were men in the woods all around us. He just laughed and told me to go upstairs and get some sleep. I did." Dibble's recollection here suggests that the defenders of Philippsbourg were not

without some warning of the impending enemy attack on the village, enough to have caused the alerting and readying of everyone to repel the enemy when they attacked. That there was insufficient heed paid was, it seems, largely a consequence of WRECKER greenness. Officer and man had yet to acquire through experience the sensitivity which would enable them to discern what was normal in combat and what was not and to react accordingly.

Dibble's report as he went off duty might have been passed to someone in the 1st Battalion CP prior to Capt Wallace's arrival there with word of the German activity on Falkenberg. Whatever second thoughts the Dibble report might have given rise to may have been forgotten as battalion commander and staff discussed and made arrangements to resolve the apparent B Co plight. Clearly the C Co 3rd Platoon, in position on the ridge a hundred yards or so to the south, was alerted. Captain Wallace, the only man in Philippsbourg who had been up on B's Falkenberg positions, was assigned to the task force. The two B Co runners at the battalion CP were alerted. Other 1st Battalion elements there in the village were earmarked--C Co's Weapons Platoon and, perhaps, the section of D Co machine guns. It seems possible that the German commanders intended their actions at Falkenberg as diversion from the main effort--the attack on Philippsbourg itself. Certainly it had that effect.

Then the German attack into Philippsbourg arrived, announced by the artillery preparation which burst upon the north edge of the village and stepped southward through it immediately ahead of the task force--the surprise raiders. Available evidence indicates that the first American awareness of the task forces' action was acquired only when the German group had passed around Philippsbourg and reach its objective on the Niederbronn road, at what became known as the "first house on the left" which was encountered as one approached the entrance to the village from the southeast. Former members of C Co's 3rd Platoon, who were quite close to the "first house," are certain that no Germans arrived there in vehicles and that evidently there was a change in the enemy attack plan which caused them to move on foot to the objective.

Lieutenant Durkee recalled that quite early on 3 January C Co's 3rd Platoon received orders to move out. The orders received by Durkee were consequent from the 1st Battalion's plan to take counteraction in the direction of Falkenberg, where reported enemy action appeared to threaten B Company. Durkee had taken the initial steps to get his platoon assembled when its 3rd squad, whose positions were nearest to the Niederbronn road, began receiving smallarms fire from two directions. One source was the "first house on the left," and the other was from the direction of the village.

Durkee brought up his other two squads to support the assault of his 3rd squad. The 3rd Platoon's subsequent success in reducing the German roadblock at the "first house" appears to have been achieved with some assistance--from WRECKER Cannon Company, from the section of D Co machine guns, and from some unattached individuals up around the battalion CP (all described elsewhere). In subduing the enemy force in the "first house," Lieutenant Durkee seems to have struck the telling blow when he fired a bazooka rocket into the building. Afterward the remaining enemy began coming out to surrender--finally, seven or eight had come out with hands raised.

In the 3rd Platoon's action early that morning, it had taken four casualties--two men killed, including Pfc Sidney Roberts, and two wounded. Some attributed Roberts' death to the recklessness with which he had advanced on the enemy as he fired his BAR. He was an immigrant, a Polish Jew with a fierce hatred of the Nazis. Roberts was the Anglicized version of his Polish name, now forgotten.

The impression of Major Duffie was that when the German attack was first detected, "The first American shots fired were by a sentry in front of the battalion CP. Enemy troops were seen crawling along using the cover of the slope which falls way on the far side of the street in front of the CP." Duffie recalls that this was happening while the darkness of the previous night had not yet been completely displaced by the light the new day. The sentry who first fired was soon wounded but was gotten to cover inside the CP building. The initial fighting in the near vicinity of the battalion CP was over by the time of full daylight's arrival. The enemy troops involved in the first round of action--those at the "first house" and those observed in the depression across from the 1st Bn command post--must all have been from the raider force. This is the only conclusion allowed by the German account of the action and the enemy operational plan for 3 January.

After going off duty at 0400, Kern Dibble had gone to sleep upstairs in the house occupied by the 1st Battalion CP. "At daybreak I was awakened by plaster falling from the ceiling into my face. The Germans had us surrounded and were shooting into the windows. I went downstairs, where bullets were flying down the hall and through the windows. I could see German helmets bobbing up and down across the street, from where they were firing at us. I threw a feed-bag by the edge of the front door to rest my rifle on and began looking those Germans over. A major across the hall from me asked me what I was doing. I answered that I was 'just looking those fellows over.' The major said I'd better get to shooting them, but I didn't see him shoot any. Well, I started shooting them--hit some of them in the

helmet and made it hot so that some others started to run. I hit some of them too. There were lots of Germans in the field across the road, and I hit some of them. A German stuck a machine pistol in the window behind me and gave me a burst. Luckily only the first round hit me, piercing my helmet and helmet liner and knocking me unconscious--the rest of the burst stitched up the wall over my head. He left me for dead. Out in the alley, Sig Rusley had heard the burp gun and was ready when the German came around the corner of the house. Sig knocked him down for good and took his medals, pistol, and combat-knife. He brought them in the house and, when I came to, gave them to me. Sig told me that the German had had me dead-to-rights."

The first flurry of fighting close to the 1st Battalion CP was over, and the enemy pulled back. Meanwhile the effort to reduce the German roadblock at the "first house" still continued. Van Horn, the B Co messenger, remembers that he and Major Duffie went out to a jeep parked in front of the CP and dismounted a .50 caliber machine gun from it. Hauling the .50 to the rear of the house, where the ground rose to provide better observation and field of fire, the two men steadied their podless weapon on top of a fence and blazed away at the "first house," from which fire was being received. Duffie was aware that, higher on the same slope, were two D Co machine guns firing on the same target. Observing that Lieutenant Durkee's men were closing in on the house, the ad hoc .50 caliber crew ceased fire.

It now seems that the early morning lull in the action must have followed the beating-off of the troops of the task force and have preceded the arrival of the enemy's main assault force supported by tanks. Where the survivors of the German task force pulled back to can only be guessed at. Most likely they found cover in the low depression--several acres of farmland traversed by the creek and two irrigation canals--to the left of the main street, in the houses on the west side of the village, and on the wooded slopes above it. They left behind them a large number of dead and a sizeable group of POW's. Many of the prisoners reportedly later fell victims of intensified German shelling of the village when their American captors forced them to remain outside or expelled them from overcrowded shelters--there may have been no alternative available to the captors.

The arrival of the enemy tank(s) and infantry in their mid-morning penetration past Main Forks quickly convinced the C Co command group that its CP was in an exposed and useless location--the enemy penetration had isolated it for all practical purposes. Lieutenant Grotheer and his group withdrew, moving along the lower trail on the east ridge past the church and the 1st Battalion CP to a nearby underground shelter, which was to become called the "root

cellar." Providing somewhat better access to the battalion CP and some of C Co's own elements, the "root cellar" would become intermittently isolated and no better off for command purposes than other company command posts in Philippsbourg.

On the ground floor of the house where the 1st Battalion CP operations were being conducted in the basement, Dibble, Sergeant Rusley, and other Weapons Platoon men were subsequently embroiled in the flare-up of fighting which attended the new enemy penetration into town. Dibble: "We fired at a lot more Germans, but they were making it hot for us. Several 88 shells and Panzerfaust (anti-tank) projectiles hit the house, which was quickly being knocked into bad shape. Two Mark IV tanks up the street were scoring hits on the next house to ours; then, when a shell caved in the roof of ours, we had to get out. Sig Rusley and I ran out as tank fire began to hit our house. I ran up on the ridge behind it and dug in there." S Sgt Peter Wysocki was a Weapons Platoon mortar squad leader, who along with other platoon members were fighting in the vicinity of the 1st Battalion CP. He remembers that Rusley instructed him to take the group he was with up on the ridge to the rear of the battalion CP and prepare a defensive position there. This was accomplished while the area of their position was receiving heavy fire from mortars and artillery. During a brief lull in the shelling, Wysocki moved around from one would-be foxhole to another checking his men. Wysocki: "I found them to be as well off as I could have expected. Our position overlooked the village, and I was not over a couple hundred yards from the 'root cellar,' with which we were able to maintain contact."

Dibble had found his own way to the same area where Wysocki and his men dug in. Having completed his digging, Dibble was better prepared for the enemy shelling that most: "I had four slit trenches and would jump from one to another. Sometimes a shell would land in one of the trenches right after I had left it. I was blown out of one by the explosion of a big mortar shell. I could hear it hissing down right above me, and I lay on my side and hollered because I knew it was going to be real close. I was knocked unconscious again when it hit. Pete Wysocki came to check up on me just as I was waking up. His face was covered with blood. He asked me if I was okay, and I told him I was better off than he was." It was a mortar shell exploding next to Wysocki's own foxhole that had drawn his blood, blowing off his helmet and knocking out a tooth. Dibble advised him to go back to see the medics, but Wysocki remained with his Weapons Platoon group there on the east ridge.

Sergeant Rusley also led a small group of Weapons Platoon men to the east side of the village. He took his party up

the draw at the foot of the east ridge. The draw runs away from the Philippsbourg main street from the point where the house in which the 1st Battalion command post was situated stands. Reaching a low knoll at the head of the draw, perhaps 400 yards away from the main street, Rusley and his men dug in. It now appears that the 1st Battalion commander and staff, in consideration of the uncertainties connected with the B and A company situations, drew up around mid-morning a defensive plan employing elements of C Company to defend the east side of the village. The deployments of the Wysocki and Rusley groups could have been consequences of such planning--their positions taken during the morning complemented those of the 3rd Platoon south of the village and east of the Niederbronn road. Then the deployment of the C Co 2nd Platoon late that day after it arrived in Philippsbourg would add a section to the defensive screen which ran around the south and east sides of the village. It was a patchwork structure but about as good as could be slapped together under the circumstances.

Up on the north nose of the east ridge, C Co's 1st Platoon had the night before been deployed on a broad front with squad positions widely separated. William Pierce: "Early the next morning the shelling was coming much closer to us, and smallarms fire picked up a great deal. Within the first 2 hours of heavy shelling, I was wounded twice--once in the shoulder and later in the small of the back. Guess I was too cold to think about going to the aid station. I was able to move freely, without pain, and able to fire my weapon." Over in the center of the platoon position it was much the same. Rorabaugh: "At daybreak things began to happen. We began to receive mortar and artillery fire much heavier than before--then smallarms fire." Consistent with the German attack plan, there appears to have been little if any infantry pressure on C Co's 1st Platoon during the first phase. Then, apparently during the advance into Philippsbourg of the two German infantry battalions--one of them supported by tanks--the 1st Platoon situation deteriorated.

Rorabaugh remembers that it was around mid-morning when an enemy machine gun on the ridge on the west side of Philippsbourg opened up on the town. He and Sueltenfuss fired up a BAR magazine of tracers at the machine gun and it became silent. However, the enemy had evidently seen the tracers and pinpointed the BAR's position--the immediate area around Rorabaugh and Sueltenfuss became a focal point for intense smallarms fire and shelling. Rorabaugh: "Arthur J. Coats came struggling up from his position below us with his arm practically shorn off. We dressed the wound as well as we could and then resumed our observation of the close-in fighting in the village below. The enemy had penetrated down the main street and was about half-way to

the church from Main Forks. Then we sighted Germans up from us on our own ridge. We decided to withdraw rather than get cut off. With shells bursting and bullets snapping all around us, we moved slowly along the trail, straining at our awkward task of taking our badly hurt and enfeebled comrade with us."

The trio passed the church below them and continued southward to the draw into which the east ridge slopes down. To the right the draw ran down to the Niederbronn road where it enters Philippsbourg's south end. Looking to the left, Rorabaugh could see at the end of the draw, a hundred or so yards away, a low knoll. Several GI's were dug in around the slender rock formation sticking up from the crown of the knoll. The three men moved to join them, spanning the distance in a series of short, slow-motion rushes. At the knoll they found Sergeant Rusley, Pfc Harold W. Mitchell, and several more Weapons Platoon members prepared to defend the position with M-1 rifles. Coats was in bad shape and asking for water. In response Rorabaugh drew his canteen from its cover and found it holed by a bullet and the water remaining in the bottom frozen solid. Coats did not last long. An emplacement was dug for the BAR at the base of the rock so that it could cover the draw and the end of the east ridge. The Rusley group would remain there until the end of the WRECKER engagement at Philippsbourg. Shellfire caused occasional explosions nearby, but there was no direct contact with the enemy. Two days later the group on the knoll withdrew having been ordered into Philippsbourg.

There is insufficient information with which to reconstruct a sequential account of other 1st Platoon actions on the east ridge after the enemy's main assault hit Philippsbourg during the morning of 3 January. Around noon William Pierce, already hit twice that morning, had his left leg nearly torn off by an exploding shell which also killed another man, the company mail clerk. Pierce was attended by a medic and gotten off the ridge by litter. Enemy action that morning further scattered the 1st Platoon elements on the ridge. One remnant, including Oscar Coleman, withdrew to a small knoll to the south of his original position by several hundred yards. The Coleman group was joined here by one or more machine-gun crews with their guns, probably from the M Co platoon which had been in positions on the east ridge's north slope. Coleman remembers that they prepared an elaborate defensive position, inspired in their digging by the shelling that visited frequently. An officer with the group some part of the time at these positions was 1st Lt Thomas E. Brentnall, remembered as having been with the WRECKER Hqs Company in the Communications Platoon. It can only be assumed that the continuing communications problems between Philippsbourg and Niederbronn somehow had brought

Brentnall on a trouble-shooting mission onto the east ridge.

The 1st Platoon's 1st squad had taken up positions just beyond Main Forks when the 1st Battalion initially deployed in and around Philippsbourg. Docken, the BAR-man, has described his group's experiences during the German attack: "That morning the Germans attacked the town from the rear. They had broken through the lines on the flanks and had infiltrated behind us. The sergeant of our platoon--Purvis--came running up to our foxhole and told us we were needed in the back of the town to repel the Germans. We set up a position in a house looking across the valley to the west and began firing on the enemy, who were running from house to house." Docken has placed the house from which he and others from his squad were firing as being across the street from the Lutheran church, opposite its north end; the houses Docken and his companions fired on were along the railroad tracks, at the foot of the west ridge.

Docken: "Suddenly we discovered that the Germans were also attacking down the Bitche road, which we had just left. My chances of survival would have been pretty slim, especially sitting in the lead foxhold. To counter this turn of events, we quickly set up a line of defense in the middle of the town in the houses." The new position was at the break in the line of houses, about 50 yards north of the church. In Docken's seemingly accurate recollections, enemy efforts to penetrate southward along the main street never achieved a firm lodgment at or past this line. Docken's account continues: "By this time the town was completely surrounded. On the left (west) ridge high above the town, German snipers had a clear field, firing on anything that moved. On the right (east) ridge, which was right next to the village, the Germans were seeking to move into the town.

"The main street became a vicious alley of flying lead and shells, as the Jerries tried to come down the main street. Several things stopped them from my point of view. For one thing, a .50 caliber machine gun was set up in the middle of the main street near the church by several of our brave soldiers and officers. They would run out (from cover in the houses) right in the middle of that hail of fire and shoot the .50 down the road toward the Germans." Several personal accounts mention the effective work of the WRECKER men who operated that .50 caliber machine gun.

Docken continues his enumeration of actions he judges to have been instrumental in stopping the German attack on the 3rd of January: "Secondly one of the squads of our company occupied a house that had a field of fire up the right side of the village on the slope. A group of Germans tried to advance along this slope (behind the houses on the main street east side) to outflank our defense. The BAR-man saw them and let go a stream of fire which cut down several of

the Germans and completely scattered the whole bunch. Thirdly, the heavy weapons company--D Company--got an observer up in the tower of the church and directed fire on the enemy positions until he was forced down by heavy fire. However, the mortars had their correct readings and poured in the rounds. Fourthly, a part of C Company (elements of the Weapons Plat) was dispatched up on the top of the right (east) ridge, and they were able to pick off many infiltrating enemy soldiers." There is reason to doubt that it was a C Co rifle squad that stopped the German group advancing behind the houses--it was more than likely a K Co squad.

Sgt Wallace's Quandary

Over at the junction on the Neunhoffen road northeast of Philippsbourg the Wallace patrol and the machine-gunners waited with their prisoners. Among them were several wounded men, Americans and Germans. There was shelling, but the German infantry, though they were expected, made no further appearance. Noon passed. Heberling: "Later that day, Sergeant Wallace asked what I thought should be done since we had no further instructions and no contact with any other unit. My opinion was that we should take the prisoners and wounded back to the company CP in Philippsbourg."

In the middle of the afternoon there was still no word when Sergeant Wallace decided to move back to Philippsbourg. A couple of the patrol's former members recall that a jeep and trailer there became employed as an ambulance for the wounded during the withdrawal. The shellfire continued to fall intermittently and the party was strung out along the road to provide a healthy interval between men. There were pauses now and then in the movement when the shelling intensified. The first men reached Mambach, a few scattered houses along the road. Ridenour: "We didn't see any Germans until each of us came to the log palisades at the edge of and on each side of the road--parts of a roadblock set-up. As each man came to the palisade gate, a German stepped out from behind it pointing a burp gun." Evidently each American as he was captured was hurried out of sight around a house corner before the next man came to the barrier. There was no opportunity to put up a fight.

Heberling remembers that their captors there at Mambach questioned their countrymen who only moments before had been the Americans' POW's. Told that the Americans' treatment of their German POW's had been proper, the Germans there became, it seemed to Heberling, less severe in their attitude toward the new prisoners. Billy Garrison has written about how the just freed Germans mocked the Americans--their

former captors--waiting there in Mambach to be escorted to the German rear.

It remains difficult to positively identify the parent unit of the machine-gunners who, with Sergeant Norman Wallace's C Co patrol, were in defensive positions at or near the junction on the Neunhoffen road throughout the morning hours of 3 January. Although his D Co machine-gun section is presumed to have been fairly close to that junction in its last engagement, Richard Brown is certain that there were no friendly troops collocated with the section's guns at any time during that day. Stewart Wallace in a 1962 effort to reconstruct the initial Philippsbourg dispositions of D Company wrote: "Most of the heavy weapons of D Company were attached to the forward rifle companies (B and A).... I believe we had one section of 81 mm mortars and a section of .30 caliber water-cooled machine guns remaining with D Company in Philippsbourg.... It was at the earliest 1500 hours when B Company reached its (Falkenberg) ridge line. A Company had split off earlier as its disposition was designated on the right flank. I never did get to visit A Company (in its right-flank positions), but if its situation was as difficult as that of B Company, then it certainly was bad. B Company's ridge was long, steep, and heavily wooded. Fields of fire were limited and the Company's boundaries so widely separated that there simply had to be gaps in the line left undefended. Just a proper reconnaissance of the ridge to organize a defensive position would have taken a couple of hours. Schmied had only about an hour and a half of daylight to place his men and get them dug in. He did the best he could, and I helped him place machine guns. (Whether these were Schmied's or D Company's guns--Wallace didn't specify in his wartime notes.).... So that Schmied could complete his work with the main part of his defense line, I took my mortar section with me and found a position for it on his left flank on my way back to Philippsbourg at nightfall. Schmied furnished a man or two (Landells and Van Horn?) to accompany me back to the battalion CP."

Stewart Wallace's remarks above, written 18 years after the event and other available evidence provide basis for speculating further about the 1st Battalion's heavy weapons dispositions to the north of Philippsbourg on 2-3 Jan. One of that battalion's assigned tasks was the blocking of the Neunhoffen road at the junction just south of Falkenberg. Colonel Pierce, considering the broken terrain of his assigned sector and its great breadth could have assigned the third of his battalion's three heavy-machine-gun sections deployed out of Philippsbourg to cover that junction. Realizing that this machine-gun section was unattached and so would be without supporting riflemen,

Pierce could have belatedly ordered the Norman Wallace patrol to join the section at the junction to provide such support as an interim measure--after B and A companies had their defensive positions organized, perhaps a squad or two of riflemen could be spared by one or the other to support the machine-gunners at the road junction allowing Wallace's C Co patrol to return to Philippsbourg. If this was, in fact, the arrangement, it would explain why Sergeant Wallace kept his patrol at the junction throughout the morning of 3 January expecting new instructions (as is remembered) or perhaps relief by riflemen sent by one or the other forward rifle company. One can suppose that the firefights involving the C Co patrol and the two D Co machine-gun sections at or near the junction on the Neunhoffen road grew out of efforts by the enemy's 456th regiment to carry out its mission for that day--to clear that road into Philippsbourg. The German account indicates that this mission was not completed, and this permits a conclusion that the WRECKER 1st Battalion's jury-rigged defense at and near the road junction was responsible for the failure.

It was around 1400 when, back at the Niederbronn railroad station, 2nd Lt Russel A. "Bussy" Holmes, platoon leader of C Co's 2nd platoon, received orders to report to the regimental CP--outside a jeep was waiting, dispatched by Regiment to give him a ride to his destination, only a few hundred yards away. That transportation had been provided to cover the distance of a 5-minute walk might have struck Holmes as unusual and signaled to him that something special was up as he climbed into the jeep. Any such Holmes suspicions would have been quite correct. At the CP Holmes was immediately taken to the regimental commander. Colonel Pettee quickly briefed the lieutenant and gave him his orders, which prescribed that Holmes' platoon and a platoon of five Sherman tanks would make a combined attack into Philippsbourg that afternoon. Holmes remembers that the task force's objective, in Pettee's words, was to "secure Philippsbourg." The meeting was brief, and the jeep was waiting for him when Holmes emerged from the CP. Starting back for the railroad station, his thoughts about the task assigned to the 2nd Platoon were momentarily distracted when a strafing and bombing attack by several American P-47 fighters struck the streets and houses of Niederbronn. Manning a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on the jeep, Holmes contributed its fire to the response from the ground. He may have already been informed, or would learn later, that a number of captured P-47's were at the time being operated by enemy pilots.

The distraction was brief, and Holmes was soon back at the railroad station briefing his squad leaders on the platoon's mission. Meanwhile the rest of the platoon was preparing to

move out. Shortly the 2nd Platoon marched to its rendezvous point with the tanks on the edge of Niederbronn and mounted up. The Shermans started on the road toward Philippsbourg. What Colonel Lettee could have told Holmes about the situation in Philippsbourg would not have provided much comfort. Too, among all the members of the platoon, there was little, if any, practical experience with friendly tanks in any tactical mode. Holmes: "As we neared Philippsbourg, we could see the guns of our Cannon Company. The column halted and I sent our infantrymen into a field to the right to disperse. I went on into Philippsbourg and found the battalion CP. There Colonel Pierce gave me my orders--to move up the main street with the platoon of tanks. I talked some more with Major Duffie and then started back for the tanks and my platoon. It was late in the afternoon."

The tanks had also dispersed off the road when the column halted outside Philippsbourg. It is remembered that, when the tanks were being moved back onto the road, one of the Shermans skidded into a ditch and became stuck--there were only four tanks left then to make the attack. The infantrymen were now dismounted. S Sgt Floyd F. Bondy, a 2nd Platoon squad leader, recalls that "As the platoon approached Philippsbourg, it came to the 'first house on the left.' Some of us rushed the house. In the basement we found some Germans, wounded and disabled with frozen hands and feet. They surrendered readily." The Germans' weapons, mostly burp guns, were thrown into the street.

Up until this time things had seemed to the 3rd Platoon's members to be relatively calm--only sporadic smallarms firing had been heard when the occasional halting of the column caused the deafening roar of the tank engines to subside. The task force was ready to enter Philippsbourg at about 1600. The situation that obtained in Philippsbourg at this time cannot be defined with precision. It seems that the lower half of the main street--to the break in the houses 50 yards north of the Lutheran Church--was in American hands. In addition, there may have been some other isolated American-held houses further north along the main street and, less likely, on the side street to the left. It is clear that the enemy held the north end of Philippsbourg--north of Philippsbourg Pond--and the west side of Philippsbourg--the houses all along and in the vicinity of the railroad track. The enemy's holding along the main street extended from Main Forks south to the break in the line of houses and along the side street as well but was probably far from complete--as indicated above, there may have been pockets of American resistance in some of the houses along these stretches.

The tank-infantry task force started up the main street, the first tank in the lead followed by S Sgt Tom S. Higley

and his squad. Lieutenant Holmes was also with the lead tank. Then came the other tanks with infantrymen interspersed. Higley: "My first scout, Pfc Jerry Foster, was out in front on the right side of the street. Robert L. Beardsley, my second scout, was also in front of me at the start, but he couldn't keep up--he was dead-tired and not a very big guy. I had him drop behind me." The 2nd Platoon doughboys passed the American half-track, still burning from the hit by the German tank that morning. Then the shells started coming in, and one of the first explosions killed Beardsley and stunned Higley. Two of the Shermans were hit. While this was happening, the C Co men were dispersing and finding cover. The advance stalled there, abreast of the church, and the artilleryman George Turner performed some of his heroics enabling the crews, or most of their members, to escape the two stricken tanks.

Charles Landells, one of the B Co runners, remembers that he and some others at the 1st Battalion command post were assigned or decided themselves to join the advancing C Co doughboys accompanied by the tanks. As the force passed the CP, they simply fell in with the formation. Landells was one of several men who were knocked down when the enemy guns opened fire on the tanks after they had rounded the slight bend in the street to come in line of sight from Main Forks, where a German tank and anti-tank gun were waiting. Stunned by the concussion from the impacting shell, Landells lay in the street watching as the two Shermans were knocked out.

At the C Co 3rd Platoon positions at the south edge of town, Pfc Edwin E. Neill was one of three or four men in his squad who received word to move up with the tanks and moved out promptly on this mission. It appears that these were the only 3rd Platoon men to become involved in the attack--why only these three or four went is unexplained. Neill: "I left my pack at my foxhole and joined the others with the tanks at the edge of town. As I started up the street, I looked around and was surprised to recognize only 2nd Platoon men among those there--none of my 3rd Platoon buddies. I passed a burning half-track and ducked into a doorway. Further up the street an American tank tried to pass an open area, where there were no houses, and a barrage of mortar shells, if I recall correctly, bracketed the tank, and it started to smoke. With the smoke and flames and the sounds of incoming shells, I thought to myself, 'This can't be for real--I must be dreaming.'

"Well, the illusion that I was dreaming was soon shattered--an impressive looking officer darted into the street and shouted for another tank to come up the street into the town. Well, that was all right with me, but his next shout gave me goose pimples and a strong desire to be someplace--any place--else. 'Get a BAR-man up behind that tank!' Pre-

sumably the officer's idea was to have a few rounds thrown at the mortar crews or whoever was throwing that stuff at the tanks. I thought that this was a nutty thing to do, but, with misgivings, I followed the tank in its short journey up the street.

"When we reached the open space between the houses, I cranked up my BAR and fired a few rounds into the wide-open spaces. Actually, I could see nothing but the field and a few distant houses. A bucket-size ball of flame appeared at my feet, and I felt like I was sort of floating--perhaps I simply fell, but that was how it felt. My hands flew up to cover my eyes and I felt blood squirting out above and below them. My nose and chin were bleeding. Shrapnel had neatly sliced off the bottom half of my right eyelid and punched a hole the size of your thumb between my eyes. I called for an aid-man but got no response for a long time, it seemed--however, the circumstances probably made it seem longer than it actually was. Then strong hands lifted me to my feet and walked me to the aid station. There, though I couldn't see, there seemed to be an undercurrent of fear because of the shells landing nearby. I thanked the unseen man with the strong hands and asked who he was. I thought the answer was quite ironic: 'Sergeant Mercy.' Mercy was acting as the platoon sergeant of C Co's 2nd Platoon while Sergeant Heberling was still absent--with the C Co patrol that had left Philippsbourg the day before.

Neill has elaborated on his account. The first two tanks were up the street and around the bend out of sight when he followed the tank as directed by the officer; so the tank up ahead that Neill saw smoking was the third tank in the original formation. The open space between houses was on the left side of the street and the field with the houses on the far side on which he fired was also on the left. This probably means that the fourth tank, with Neill behind it, passed the two knocked-out tanks and that Neill was firing at the houses and ridge on the west side of Philippsbourg when he was hit. Since none of the 2nd Platoon men who advanced after the two Shemans were knocked out remembers seeing either of the other two tanks afterwards, they must have already advanced beyond the open space by the time the third and fourth tanks came up.

Holmes remembers that while the first two tanks were engaged and being knocked out he crawled into a ditch and lay there trying to decide what to do next when he was joined by Major Duffie and Captain Carrier. It may have been from this location that Duffie moved out on a sortie that he remembers well. With a lieutenant and a soldier, neither of whom he knew, Duffie worked his way forward with the houses along the street concealing the movement. The three men reached an opening between houses through which

they could see a German tank with its big gun trained down the street. The soldier mounted a rifle grenade on its launcher and prepared to fire at the tank, but Duffie, concerned lest a poorly aimed shot do no more than call the enemy tank gunner's attention to their exposed position, interrupted the soldier's actions to question him about his marksmanship with a rifle grenade. Receiving the confident assurances of the would-be grenadier, Duffie told him to go ahead and fire. According to Duffie, the soldier did not disappoint--his grenade struck the point of juncture of the German tank's turret with hull and blew the turret off. A somewhat similar incident remembered by members of C Co's 2nd Platoon occurred when Sgt Paul Reardon of that platoon blew up an enemy tank that evening. According to others from his platoon, the second of two rifle grenades fired by Reardon entered the barrel of the tank's gun, passed through the presumed open breach, and exploded in the turret. These were, perhaps, slightly different versions of the knocking-out of the same enemy tank.

It appears to have been after the two American tanks had been knocked out when Docken and others of his squad were sent to the fourth position they occupied on 3 January: "...our squad was asked to take up better positions to improve our field of fire. We climbed out of the windows of the house on its west side and dropped to the ground. The German snipers on the left (west) ridge saw us right away and opened up with rifle fire and directed mortar shelling on us. A mortar shell landed right in front of me, but, miraculously, nothing hit me. All I felt was stinging in the face and a temporary deafness in my ears. In the jump from the window, the stock of my BAR was broken, but I picked up another in the next position and had it in working order within minutes." The several shiftings of Docken's squad on 3 January add to indications that there was a Philippsbourg defense plan being evolved and some degree of control over its components was being exercised.

As darkness approached, the firing died down and the men of the 2nd Platoon reformed and advanced again, past the houseless stretch on the right where the slope pushes out to the edge of the main street, and reached the clustering of houses extending south from Main Forks. Some of the men were relieved that the Shemans were no longer with them to attract enemy shells. But it was so quiet--too quiet! The advance was halted, and the platoon was started back down the main street. When he ordered the turn-about, perhaps Holmes had recognized that something was amiss; or perhaps he had realized that his platoon had reached its objective. Suddenly the enemy opened fire again--"All hell broke loose!" Their rate of withdrawal accelerated by the German fusillade, the men of the Platoon turned left at the church

and climbed up on the east ridge behind it. The thick hail of fire, surprisingly, inflicted no casualties, or, at least, none is remembered. A line of squad positions was laid out above the lower trail, and the platoon dug in. It was dark. The position paralleled the main street, extending from a point from where it overlooked Main Forks down to the church--perhaps 250 yards in length.

The ground was frozen and, in places, rocky; darkness and the men's exhaustion were other factors--the shelter of the holes dug by the Platoon under these circumstances could not have sufficed in many cases. Strangely, the Germans did not react to the commotion Holmes' men made. But then the Americans did not realize that the enemy was at the time probably preoccupied with its relief operation in and around Philippsbourg. The German assault regiment in the attack that day was being replaced by another regiment of the same division. Sergeant Bondy's squad was furthest north on the ridge, overlooking Main Forks: "During the night a short round from our artillery caused a tree burst, wounding Sergeant Reardon and Pfc Burroughs. I pulled the squad back about 50 yards as more short rounds continued to fall on the area of our initial position. Several unarmed Germans appeared. We took them prisoner and I sent them back guarded by Pfc Roberts. My squad was down to eight men."

Higley's squad was adjacent to Bondy's and was grouped obliquely up the slope a little north of the church. In passing the area around the church's main entrance earlier Higley had noticed the bodies of GI's neatly lined up under a light cover of snow. Equipment, rifles, and ammunition, were also neatly arrayed along the wall. Higley: "I suddenly realized that we were very short of ammunition. I had checked with each man and found that we were down to a few clips. We didn't know how and when we would receive a resupply. I asked Mearse to go with me; so he put aside his BAR and borrowed someone's rifle. We sneaked down to the front of the church, half expecting to be discovered by the enemy--we could plainly hear low voices while we were there. We loaded ourselves with bandoliers from along the wall. Mearse was very nervous and tugging at my sleeve to get moving as I tarried hunting for special ammo for our rifle grenades. There was some light thrown on us from burning houses on the other side of the church. However, we got back to the position without difficulty." Considering the fluidity and confusion of the situation in Philippsbourg into which C Co's 2nd Platoon had been thrust only a few hours before, one can easily understand why these two men thought that their venture was taking them into an enemy controlled area. Actually WRECKER's 1st Battalion aid station was still occupying the vestry of the church, only a few feet away from the two ammo scroungers. The voices they

heard could have come from the vestry.

The Wallace-patrol members and the machine-gunners with them were marched as prisoners from Mambach to a collection point on the Bitche road. It was dark when they arrived there and found a large number of American POW's--probably 200 or more. Marching along the Bitche road to the collection point, Heberling had taken note of the many enemy artillery pieces in firing positions adjacent to the road. He was helping to carry one of the wounded men. Spotting a two-wheeled cart in a barn near the road, he made signs to one of the escorting guards. The guard signaled back his understanding and agreement that the cart be taken and used as an ambulance. Later some of the prisoners, including Heberling, were loaded on a captured American truck. The Americans in the rear of the truck soon realized that its German driver had little experience with motor vehicles. They felt grim satisfaction as they listened to the crashing and grinding sounds of offended metal caused by the driver's abuse of the transmission. Soon the truck was out of commission, and the Americans were on foot again.

Edward A. Cloonan was section sergeant in a D Co machine-gun platoon. He remembers that his section had been alerted and was preparing to move out at daybreak from Philippsbourg. Their mission--to relieve or help out one of the companies on the outskirts of town, B Company. "Then the enemy opened up on us from all sides. I became busily engaged in moving and setting up our machine guns at various locations in the village--this lasted the better part of the morning." Cloonan has explained that the firing positions were chosen so as to take advantage of the protection afforded by one or another Philippsbourg structure--within it a gun would be set up to fire through some convenient opening, a window, doorway, or hole in a wall.

Sgt Kelly's Machine Guns

Major Duffie has recalled that, at daybreak, "The heaviest fire came from the south, especially from the vicinity of a house across the road 200 yards or so away. A D Co sergeant came to me and begged to be allowed to set up a section of machine guns and go into action against this enemy target. I was apprehensive at first because visibility was still poor and we weren't sure where our people were. However, he promised to get high up on the ridge in back of the battalion CP so as to fire over friendly dispositions closer in." Sgt Joseph P. Kelly was with the section of D Co machine guns remaining in the village. His own account indicates that it was he who got Duffie's approval to get his guns

into the fight.

Kelly: "It was around daybreak. The terrain in the village was fairly flat, but we had mountains around us on the east, west, and north. With the help of the first gunners, I managed to get our two machine guns up on the ridge. I had to press some mortarmen into action because some of our supposedly tough machine-gunners didn't care too much about leaving a fairly safe berth in a farmhouse. We were in the south end of the village, and the ridge on which we went into action protected us somewhat from the shell-fire. On that frigid, snow-covered ridge, digging foxholes was, under the circumstances, out of the question--I had to get those guns firing pronto. The enemy fire was coming from the rear--machine guns and smallarms. After we opened fire, the enemy guns gradually grew silent. We began to notice the artillery fire coming in from the opposite direction. Then we had the time and the inclination to work on our foxholes. We lost some boys to treebursts."

Cloonan remained busy all day shifting one machine gun or another to meet some enemy threat. "Some of the German groups that had infiltrated surrendered as we cut them off. But we had to keep the prisoners with us right there at our gun positions. We couldn't spare someone to escort them back, and the thick shot and shell were another factor discouraging any venture out-of-doors other than those absolutely essential. The enemy had excellent observation from the surrounding high ground. They used it to advantage and responded to any move we made. Their artillery caused us many losses and much damage to the town." Cloonan remembers the arrival of the Sherman tanks that afternoon and the change for the better in the situation that came about then.

The German shelling of Philippsbourg continued all night. Available information indicates that, until sometime during the morning of 3 January, the WRECKER force in Philippsbourg and around it had only the Cannon Co 105 mm howitzers on call for artillery support. Then the 499th Armored FA Battalion moved up to Niederbronn, having been assigned to support the 275th. When, after some difficulty, communications between Philippsbourg and the 499th were established, the critically needed artillery support was increased. Too, establishment of this commo link gained for the 275th back-up artillery support to the Philippsbourg sector from several additional artillery battalions. The 499th was a component of the 14th Armored Division. Later it was to appraise the month of January 1945 as having been the most important and difficult period of its wartime service. A 499th history takes special note of a 90-minute continuous concentration fired on Philippsbourg--it was presumably fired on 3 January during the major German attempt to take

the village.

Of the intensifying artillery duel on 3 January, the 3rd Battalion historical account states: "Communication became almost impossible as the shells knocked out the field wire again as fast as it was repaired. Every available man was used to maintain wire communications for the feverishly working forward observers calling for artillery fire missions. Perhaps a circuit would be open for only 5, 10, or 15 minutes, but there was always the hope that it would stay open long enough to enable the bringing-in of effective fire." The preoccupation at the 3rd Battalion CP with artillery support and communications was interrupted at daybreak when the enemy ground attack into Philippsbourg got under way.

The 3rd Battalion history's account of the German assault states, "A swift series of events placed the 3rd Battalion in desperate straits. The Jerries had infiltrated into the northern end of town and occupied many buildings. From the left flank, in the direction of L Company, masses of enemy streaming out of the woods on the high ground fanned out and occupied buildings while some cut across the open ground to set up machine-gun positions to our left and rear. The town was practically surrounded. Enemy tanks were sighted moving down the road from Bitche. Our anti-tank guns had taken up positions commanding the principal road junction. In the sudden blasting fury of hell that roared out when these guns began exchanging blow for blow, the AT guns were knocked out. The M Co machine guns and mortars emplaced to defend the village were overrun after the enemy tanks cut through and penetrated to the edge of Philippsbourg." 2nd Lt Lionel J. Fourrier, 3rd Bn's Anti Tank Platoon leader recalls: "We never did get full rifle company coverage before the Germans came at us full tilt. We lost our guns, trucks, and one whole squad in the initial encounter. Such was my baptism of fire."

An American half-track arrived in front of the 3rd Battalion CP on the main street in the midst of the action. In it was 499th Armored FA Battalion's liaison officer and, with him, his driver and a radio operator, whose radio was shot-up and useless. It is not certain from what direction it had come or just when it arrived. Most probably it had come from Niederbronn, around noon or shortly thereafter. It could have gotten through from that direction once the roadblock established by the German raiders had been eliminated. M Co's Captain Oliver recognized the 499th artillery lieutenant as a man he had known at the Anzio (Italy) beachhead. Hastily exchanging greetings with the lieutenant, Oliver took him into the 3rd Bn CP to get him into contact with his guns.

The contact was effected, but whether it was by telephone

or radio is not certain--problems were being experienced with both types of links between Philippsbourg and WRECKER CP in Niederbronn that day. The wire was knocked out more than once. In this regard, the 3rd Battalion's exec, Major O'Donnell, has written: "I recall the calm and cool courage of Harry Severance (battalion S-3) as, with all communications to the rear out, he experimented, changing the frequency on the radio transmitter until he finally contacted an artillery unit and directed the fire on German elements that were moving into town." Oliver, on the other hand, remembers having to interrupt the phone conversation of a superior officer in order to put the artillery lieutenant in touch with his battalion. Having achieved the contact, the two officers "map-shot" defensive fires to supplement WRECKER Cannon Company's support to the hard-pressed WRECKER force engaged in Philippsbourg's defense.

The German threat to drive the American defenders out of Philippsbourg may have reached the critical moment that morning when two German Mark IV's moved into the north edge of town and continued down the main street, blazing away at any building from which WRECKER resistance was evident. Finally, the lead tank was within 50 yards of the 3rd Battalion CP. There is some indication that, at the point, there may have been serious consideration given to evacuating the CP, and some preparations for the move were probably made. But then Pfc George B. Turner, of the 499th Armored FA Battalion, stepped into the breach. His actions, described elsewhere, were instrumental in stemming the tide at this critical moment.

It must have been about this time when an incident remembered by Major O'Donnell occurred: "I recall seeing from a window in Philippsbourg one of our soldiers lying wounded in the street. One of our medics, plainly marked with red crosses, came from across the street to recover the wounded man. As he bent over him, the medic was shot--apparently by a sniper from the direction of the church (probably from the ridge behind it). Now two wounded were in the street. Another medic came out and, slowly and methodically, carried one to safety and then returned and carried the other to safety. This was pure courage."

K Co's 1st Platoon, with its supporting machine guns, was the first WRECKER element to be hit by the German attack at daybreak on 3 Jan. It had arrived at its roadblock position on the Bitche road the previous afternoon and started to receive enemy shellfire soon after it arrived. The shelling continued all night long. At 0630, 1 1/2 hours before the attack, the Platoon's telephone line into Philippsbourg was knocked out--as it had been several times during the previous night. Charles Lobs was with the larger part of

the roadblock force, his group being in position on the high ground west of the Bitche road. The platoon leader, Lieutenant Brons, was with one rifle squad and a machine-gun section in position adjacent to the road. Lobs: "During the night we had heard tank movements. When daylight came the air became filled with tracers and mortar and artillery shells. The attack on the town was on, and the roadblock was quickly outflanked. My position was about 400 yards away from and above the road. I watched a German battalion marching toward Philippsbourg and ordered everybody not to shoot. An enemy cyclist came along the road and stopped by a command car. The cyclist started talking to someone in the car. Then Pfc Medlin, my sniper, picked that German off the motorcycle as though he were no more than 10 feet away, and then we were in for it. Everything except flame throwers was firing stuff our way. When the shooting let up, there were Germans in front and on both flanks of our position. Word came to withdraw for regrouping."

Lobs went further up the slope; then stopped and looked back. He has described the scene: "From where I was, I could see all the enemy movements. In the first 10 minutes it seemed like I saw his every weapon. I counted seven companies of infantry walking boldly down the road toward town. They were 600 yards away--an artilleryman's dream. But no artillery was to be had since we had no communications. We were cut off up on the ridge and had to leave 10 men trapped in a house down by the road. Later they miraculously escaped." Lobs has explained his hold-fire order as being part of a plan to entrap a German attack force in a cross-fire from the ridge and from another direction, perhaps from the M Co 1st Platoon's positions near Main Forks. His impression of having seen so many different types of enemy weapons right at the beginning of the attack was probably gained as, from his excellent vantage point, he looked far up the Bitche road, along which the attackers surely assembled much of their heavy equipment prior to the jump-off. Furthermore, he undoubtedly saw many of the German artillery pieces and mortars which were viewed in their firing positions later in the day by WRECKER men who had been taken prisoner and were escorted to the rear along the same road--these weapons are mentioned in several accounts of former POW's.

It now seems that the German raider force reached its objective at the south entrance to Philippsbourg by passing around the village to the west of it--the opportunity to achieve the movement undetected would have been much better on that side. It was evidently accomplished under the cover of darkness and did, in fact, achieve the desired surprise. Undoubtedly, the K Co force that was in the village heard the firing as the enemy became active at the roadblock and

then came under attack by C Co's 3rd Platoon and other elements. However, the first sighting by K Co in-village defenders that is remembered was of Germans on the west ridge. Lieutenant Hamilton, 2nd Platoon leader, has recalled that "The first sighting of the enemy on the 3rd was when we spotted them moving into a shed on the west side of Philippsbourg. We opened up on the shed with a ground-mounted .50 caliber machine gun firing tracer ammunition. The shed caught fire, and, as the heat drove the German occupants out, one or two at a time, we shot them. We must have killed 10-15 of them, probably half the occupants of the shed."

The briefness of the record in "Kingsmen" for 3 Jan is an indicator of the wild confusion prevailing in Philippsbourg on the day of the major German attack there. "The Germans attacked the town. The fighting of the day took place around the CP and in its immediate vicinity; the CP seeming to be at times ahead of the front lines. The Germans moved tanks into town, and it looked as though they could advance right through it." The impression that the K Co CP was out in front of the lines being defended was, of course, caused by the surprise raid, but the timely reduction of the enemy's roadblock eliminated this aberration in the battlefield's perspective. But then the enemy's main effort hit Philippsbourg, and the situation became serious. For K Company and for some other WRECKER elements, the 3rd of January may very well have been the war's longest day.

Mentioned above is the arrival at the 3rd Battalion CP of the half-track with the 499th artillery liaison officer, his driver, and radio operator. After his lieutenant and M Co's Captain Oliver had gone in the battalion CP, the radio operator, Pfc George Turner, walked diagonally across the street to the K Co CP, entered, and chatted with the occupants. Since his radio had been shot to pieces, he had nothing else to do--for the moment. An hour or so later, Turner found something to do.

At 1400 a new German tank-infantry attack was launched into Philippsbourg along the axis of the Bitche road. This one involved two Mark IV tanks accompanied by an estimated two companies of infantry. Reaching Main Forks, the tanks continued to advance, firing their long 75's, until they were no more than 50 yards from the 3rd Battalion CP. The German infantry was not far behind. Meanwhile, Private Turner had spotted a bazooka in the corner of the K Co CP with a stack of ammunition for it beside it--he had found a job for himself. Obtaining the assistance of a K Co man as loader, Turner took up a firing position in the street. With machine-gun and smallarms fire crackling around him, he put a hit into the lead tank; then he hit the second one. Having fired 10 bazooka rounds, all that were then avail-

able, Turner switched to rifle grenades and scored more hits. Still able to move under their own power, the two Mark IV's withdrew--their commanders had had enough of the one-man anti-tank force confronting them. Turner went back to the K Co CP and took a break.

When the 3rd Battalion was committed at Philippsbourg on New Year's Day, K Co's Weapons Platoon had somehow already scrounged several light machine guns more than the authorized two. One of these was set up in the house adjacent to the one in which the company CP was located in Philippsbourg. This and such firing positions--at windows, doorways, or fortunately located holes in walls--as had been selected with foresight or were found when the emergency arose early that morning constituted K Co's in-village defenses. Sometime during that afternoon there was a K Co counterthrust up the main street. It could have followed immediately after the repelling of the enemy tank-infantry attack in the early afternoon, or it could have been made in conjunction with the American tank-infantry advance later in the afternoon. Edward J. Fischer, Wpns Platoon, recalls that "there was another company there with our tanks." His description of K's counterthrust here may relate to the C Co advance with tanks--perhaps not. Fischer has written that he and Lieutenant Heck, each of them armed with one of the Weapons Platoon's surplus light machine guns which they operated without ground mounts, participated in the push back up the street. That they reached as far as Main Forks is doubtful. If the K Co group did, indeed, join C Co's 2nd Platoon, C's men don't remember the presence of other than members of their own platoon after the Shermans had been hit in front of the church. If the K Co counterthrust of 3 January was earlier, its purpose was probably to drive back German infantry and take pressure off K Co groups in houses along the main street to the north of the CP. Such relief would have permitted defenders who might have been driven into basements during the enemy's early afternoon attack to return to street level and resume the fight. At the end of its advance, the K Co group returned to its positions in and around the company CP.

The Heroism of George Turner

The above-mentioned American tank-infantry assault up the main street raised the curtain on the second act of one of the most dramatic events in the WRECKER combat experience--the performance on 3 January of the visiting artilleryman, Pfc George Turner. Turner was a World War I veteran, 45 years old at the time. He was awarded the Medal of Honor in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the American defense of Philippsbourg. The official

citation issued in support of the award was prepared on the basis of testimony given by Lieutenant Donahue, K Co, and Lieutenant Brennan, WRECKER 3rd Bn surgeon.

The American tanks were a platoon of five Sherman mediums from the 47th Tank Battalion, which had been attached to the 275th Infantry earlier that day. They had been joined by C Co's 2nd Platoon in Niederbronn, and the combined force had moved up to the southern outskirts of Philippsbourg just prior to the start of the attack. The actions of C's infantrymen in this counterthrust are recounted elsewhere. The advance into Philippsbourg started at 1600. The two Sherman tanks furthest forward soon were exchanging cannon shots with German guns up the street. In this regard, the 3rd Battalion history states: "Two American tanks rolled up the road from the south edge of town. At about the same time the Jerries moved a self-propelled gun (SP) supported by a Mark IV tank to the north edge of Philippsbourg. They took up positions in the street intersection (Main Forks) barely 250 yards away. The first American tank crawled around the curve and continued on up the street to where it was abreast of the 3rd Battalion CP. There it was drilled by the first shot from the German tank." The tank platoon leader moved from the stricken lead tank to the next one back and brought it forward--it too took a hit and started to burn.

From the 3rd Battalion history: "Then occurred an action in which the greatest courage was displayed. Out of the burning tank popped one of the occupants. He dove headlong for the K Co CP, just to the left of the tank, which was fast becoming a firetrap. Then there appeared the figure of a man, who groped feebly for some support to assist himself from the fiery tank. With great effort he pulled himself up until the upper half of his body was outside the turret. But he hadn't strength enough to pull himself free." According to his official MH citation, Private Turner, after both American tanks had been hit, rushed into the street firing a machine gun from the hip to cover the abandonment of the vehicles by such crew members as were able to. The 3rd Battalion history states, concerning the man trapped in the turret, "Seeing the man's plight, a GI (Turner) braved the hail of machine-gun and smallarms fire to drag him free of the tank and into the battalion CP. The rescued man was wounded. He reported that the third occupant of the tank was dead." Turner's MH citation indicates that the tank's ammunition began exploding at the moment when he was in the act of pulling the wounded man out of the turret, Turner receiving a wound as a consequence. According to "Kingsmen," K Company's Pfc Jim C. Franklin assisted Turner during the rescue of the wounded man from the tank.

Following the knocking-out of the two Shermans and the

withdrawal of the remaining ones, the only armor left in Philippsbourg was German--the SP and the Mark IV tank, up around Main Forks. In addition the Germans had obtained a lodgment on the west side of Philippsbourg, in buildings along the railroad tracks. They probably had also occupied some of the houses along the side street being the road to Baerenthal. Too they seem to have been in one or more houses on the main street south of Main Forks. K Co's 3rd Platoon held some of those houses on the west side of the main street, to the north of the K Co CP. Whether K's 2nd Platoon was able to retain any hold along the side street at that time is uncertain. As well as it can be reconstructed, that was the situation when the American advance up the main street was resumed, conducted by infantrymen only. It was growing dark. How far this push progressed is not certain--possibly it reached Main Forks; but more than likely it fell short of that intersection. When the advance stopped, the C Co men withdrew to the ridge on the east side of the village and the K Co men, to the positions they had held before, if this was indeed this afternoon counterthrust in which they participated. The abandonment of such gains as had been achieved by this advance was, presumably, intended to avoid over-extension and potential entrapment of any Philippsbourg defenders--there were none to spare.

However, Colonel Pettee, the WRECKER commander, had not been misinformed concerning the effectiveness of his Cannon Co's work that day and, as has been noted, he even regarded Thomas' guns as the keystone to the defenses blocking the enemy's evident intent to penetrate along the Falkenstein creek valley to Niederbronn. Cannon Co effectiveness throughout that critical day of 3 January and, particularly, during the early-morning enemy attack was recognized in an official citation: "The Germans had set up two machine guns near Philippsbourg covering the main road (from Niederbronn) over which reinforcements and supplies went to the troops ahead. Captain Thomas left his position in an old barn and ran across the road in the face of enemy rifle and machine-gun fire. Crawling to a high point, he directed cannon fire on the enemy gun positions, bringing fire upon himself because of his proximity. Still under fire from enemy riflemen, he signaled the (friendly) infantry forward to mop up. One German was killed and two captured as the remainder abandoned their guns and fled, leaving the road open for a steady flow of men and materials." The action described in the citation surely pertained to the elimination of the enemy roadblock at the "first house."

The Cannon Co performance that day became the talk of the Regiment. Richard Becker, of L Company, which was, of course, not involved in the fight in Philippsbourg, would recall what he had been told later after L Company rejoined

the 3rd Battalion after spending 2 days in action with the 2nd Battalion below Baerenthal: "The attack (was made) on Philippsbourg by approximately one hundred Germans led by an English-speaking lieutenant colonel. They infiltrated to the rear of the town, regrouped, and tried to attack it. Captain Thomas and his Cannon Company really tore hell out of them. The German officer was captured, and during his interrogation, indicated that their intelligence as to the troop strength of the Americans in Philippsbourg at this time was as bad as ours." This account probably related to the reduction of the enemy roadblock at the "first house"--the commander of the 100-man Fuesilier Company involved was, indeed, captured, but he was a lieutenant, not a lieutenant colonel.

Colonel Malloy, the WRECKER exec, was in Philippsbourg on 3 Jan as he would be on the two succeeding days. Years later he would be not averse to telling a story which did not put him in the best possible light: "That afternoon I was in the CP of K Company on the main street. A couple of our tanks had been hit and were burning--some of their crews got out, and, I guess, some were trapped. I took a soldier with me who had a bazooka to see what could be done about the enemy anti-tank fire. We moved down the steep bank behind the CP and worked our way long the creek bottom toward the upper end of the village. When we reached a point where I thought we could go up and have a look-see, my bazooka-man and I realized that we had brought along no ammunition for his weapon. We returned to the CP."

Gordon Thomas' impressions of the battle back at the Cannon Co gun positions and in Philippsbourg are: "During the day we had been firing almost continuously. Stragglers were walking into our gun positions with grievous wounds, and it was obvious that a major battle was under way. We expected a ground attack from our right through the woods at any time. Lost GI's made their way to us from this direction, but we were never attacked from this flank. Because we had lost communications with our observers, we were unable to fire for a short period. Lieutenant Rueckel and I turned the guns over to T Sgt Albert Hubbard and took a task force of several men into Philippsbourg. The situation there was chaotic. Germans were occupying part of the town. We managed to locate Lieutenant Penniman and took him with us out of Philippsbourg. 1st Lt Robert Miller reported in with two enemy prisoners shortly after we arrived back at the gun positions. Lieutenants Penniman and Miller, their observer crews, and I established three OP's on the high ground south of Philippsbourg afterwards.

"All we knew on the 3rd was that we were being attacked from the hill at approximately 11 o'clock from our position. The enemy, quite visible to our forward observers, was

attacking in the direction of the Philippsbourg-Niederbronn road. Had this attack been successful, we would have been completely cut off from our only access road. Our guns were firing so rapidly during this attack that the gun crews had to fill shelter halves with snow to keep the barrels as cool as possible. We knew we were raising hell with the Germans.

"Some time during the action we received counterbattery fire from German artillery, which grew heavier as time went by. However, we were able to get away (with staying in action where we were) only because of the gun positions, which we believed to be so bad when we went into them. Because of the cliff only a few feet to our rear, hundreds of German shells burst harmlessly in the ravine behind." The Cannon Co history notes: "Philippsbourg was where we expended better than 500 rounds a day, and in one 24-hour period topped 800 with four guns."

Thomas: "On the 3rd, one of our perimeter guard groups, led, I believe, by Sgt Joseph Intervallo, brought in a German officer and two aides as prisoners. I was up at the OP at the time and did not see them. I heard later that the officer was high-ranking."

The German Tank-Infantry Assault

The night-long shelling that preceded the German attack made a lasting impression on M Co's Ruben Romero. "We were groggy when morning finally came. I was positive that we must have lost men by that time, but much to my surprise, all of my section was there." A little earlier, probably during the German artillery's preparatory fire just ahead of the ground attack, a shell landed in the midst of the 1st Platoon positions. Romero: "I was gunner and Sylvian Olsen was my assistant. The squad leader was Sgt Burkhart and platoon sergeant, Turlock. I called to Burkhart to tell him about the shell that had just landed between his hole and the one that Olsen and I were in. He answered by throwing out his rifle--the stock had been shattered by the force of the explosion. The shell had joined our two foxholes."

A period of deceptive calm ensued there at the 1st Platoon positions, this apparently resulting after the enemy artillery had advanced its barrage in steps through the village and ceased firing when the raider task force reached the lower end of Philippsbourg. Romero: "As the sun came up, things became peaceful and our spirits rose again. We were soon making coffee and had no premonition of what was in store for us." The advance of the German battalion into Philippsbourg to follow up the success of the raider force thus appears to have been tardy. Romero's description here suggests that movement of German infantry down the Bitche road, accompanied by tanks, must have lagged by as much as

15-20 minutes behind the assault south of Philippsbourg by the task force. Unnoted in the German account, this respite, surely unintentional, may have allowed the dazed defenders of Philippsbourg to recover and prevent the overwhelming of all in-village installations. The mistake could have been critical.

Romero: "I was drinking coffee when I noticed a line of tanks coming down the road. I saw crosses on their sides. Since nobody was shooting at them, we surmised that they were probably captured tanks. Within moments they hit us with the heaviest concentration of fire power we would ever experience. At first it looked like the Germans were heading into a trap. The infantry was coming into the little valley between our positions on one hill and what I thought was the position of the rifle company (most likely M Co's mortarmen) that had crossed that valley the night before. As soon as the friendly company opened fire, we could catch them between us. In the meantime, I concentrated my fire on the tanks. All of our guns in close to the crossroads were knocked out by direct fire from the tanks. Among those killed were gunners Corbly J. Gump and Robert D. Douglas and our platoon leader Lieutenant Zahora."

Further forward, on the north edge of Philippsbourg, the two M Co mortar sections had become engaged earlier. Sergeant Nolder: "They came walking and riding bikes through machine-gun fire and artillery and mortar shells. The only thing that seemed to stop them was white phosphorus--they slowed down then. When we thought we had them stopped, the next thing we knew there were tanks behind us, and they had us under direct fire. We took off to our front and to the left up the hill. All we took with us was our M-1's and the sights for our mortars. We were surrounded--tanks to our rear and infantry on either side. So we hid out, 12 or 13 men and 2nd Lt Dan Popovac. He was a swell officer. Later we kept going clear back to the enemy artillery positions and had three or four firefights on the way. We would scatter out in a long skirmish line so they wouldn't know how few of us were there." This group succeeded late on 3 Jan in joining the 2nd Battalion to the west in front of Baerenthal. A 2nd Battalion message to Regiment reported that Popovac and his men had arrived in the 2nd Battalion area; however, the message made no mention of L Company, whose Richard Becker has recounted that his company was joined by a group of M Co mortarmen prior to his company's making contact with 2nd Battalion and being attached to it.

Late the night before, Captain Oliver had gone to sleep leaving orders to be aroused at 0500, daylight's arrival being expected several hours later. Oliver: "I got up and started for my mortars; then the Krauts hit with tanks and

infantry. They ran over my mortars, knocked out the anti-tank guns, and those machine guns I had remaining in town." The Romero account vividly describes the abandonment of M Co's 1st Plat machine-gun positions: "The enemy infantry was now to our immediate front and within 50 yards of our guns. From our left-front came tank, artillery, and mortar fire. Sergeant Turlock decided on his own to order the platoon to fall back. When I got the order, I didn't like it one bit. Our position seemed good and I realized that to leave it in full view of the enemy would be suicide. To our rear was a steep mountain, and we would have to scale straight up the slope in making the withdrawal as ordered. I tried to get the men to move instead to our right flank, but no one seemed to hear me. The men had started back, and I had no choice but to follow. How many shells hit within a few feet of me I'll never know. It was my job to carry the tripod, and I hung onto it for dear life. When I finally got to the top Sgt Romig told me there were no guns to mount on it.

"Earlier while I was scaling the slope, half-way up, it seemed to me impossible that I could survive. Men were lying all around--I couldn't tell whether they were wounded or dead. I felt the hot blast of explosions and shell fragments were cutting tree limbs which fell on me. I fell and lay there waiting for the hit that would end it all. I felt a tug at my clothing--it was Olsen asking me what was wrong. When I told him that nothing was wrong with me, he exclaimed, 'Get up, you yellow bastard!' I got up and went on. Reaching the top, I looked back and saw Olsen crawling upslope leaving a trail of blood in the snow behind him. Many of the men who had reached the top had lost their weapons; so I went back down to where I could see some rifles and carried as many as I could back up. I passed them around as we organized a defensive position in the trees. I got some men to help move the wounded, knowing that our new position would soon come under fire. We must have had about 10 badly wounded men, including our squad leader, Sergeant Burkhart. I more or less took command of what was left of the squad.

"Later I and Sergeant Romig had the men fall back again, and we moved across a valley to a mountain on the other side. The move was made none too soon, for as soon as we had gotten across the valley, the enemy opened fire on the position we had just left. By this time we had picked up several men from other outfits. One of them was from the anti-tank group that had been at the crossroads. He said that he had gotten a tank with a round of his 57 mm gun--and then ran. Most of the anti-tank guncrews had surrendered. I think his name was Lopez. I later saw him after he had received a battlefield commission."

The 3rd Battalion aid station, in the hotel-restaurant building at Main Forks, had fighting going on all around it by the middle of the morning. Its medical staff evacuated the station, going out the rear of the building, when an enemy tank pulled up in front. Consequently, the building in which the K and M company CP's were colocated soon began receiving wounded to shelter. Oliver: "My CP in the cellar was full of wounded and our aid man was there, but no morphine. When I left the States, my bedroll was shipped loaded with scotch, bourbon, gin, rum--you name it. I turned it over to the aid man and told him to use it on anyone who didn't have a chest or belly wound. We couldn't evacuate them because the Krauts had a roadblock behind us."

The German attack into Philippsbourg was delivered while Cpl Raymond Stanley and M Co mortar section leader 2nd Lt Vasek were out of the village with Stanley's jeep on a mission the purpose of which Stanley does not recall. When the swelling uproar of the battle reached them, Vasek decided to curtail the mission. They started back for the village. Stanley: "When we could go no further in my jeep, Lieutenant Vasek continued on foot. I was instructed to stay with the jeep. To this day, I don't know whether he made it back to the company CP." Stanley and the lieutenant had apparently reached the northern outskirts of Philippsbourg where fighting at close range, which was to be the pattern for the next 60 hours, was already raging. Stanley parked the jeep next to a building and entered its cellar to take shelter.

A "commo sergeant" became Stanley's companion there for the next several hours until they were both captured. Stanley: "The sergeant knocked the daylight out of me three times for firing at the enemy. He didn't want our position given away. While we were there, my jeep was blown up by an artillery shell and I began cussing. The sergeant told me not to worry about the jeep, that if we got out of the fix we were in, I could always get another jeep. I told him that I wasn't upset about the jeep--what had upset me was that I had had 10 bottles of beer blown up with the jeep." The sergeant's evident concern about attracting the enemy's attention through an act of belligerence was not too uncommon. While he might have been on an assignment which required that he avoid becoming involved in a firefight, that would appear to have been unlikely.

To the east of Philippsbourg, Romero, Romig and several others from M Co's 1st Platoon plus some GI's who had been with other defensive dispositions at Main Forks, found a cabin and sought refuge from the cold in it. They had several wounded with them, including Olsen, Romero's assistant gunner. Romero and Romig started out from the cabin for the village to get medical help. Romero: "When Romig and I

and I got down in the valley, we found it was still in American hands. We first had to convince a suspicious American patrol that we were not Germans, but GI's. Romig looked very German, but my black Mexican-American hair turned the trick. In the village, we asked for an ambulance but were told that there were none available--dead and wounded were everywhere.

"After a fruitless afternoon of trying to get a vehicle, I decided to go back up the mountain along with another man. It was late in the evening when we started. Ours was no easy undertaking since we were going into an area in which armed men from both sides were ready to shoot first and ask questions later. Too there was the deep, drifted snow, not to mention the steep, wooded slopes to be overcome in accomplishing our purpose. When we finally found the cabin, it was empty. There was nothing left to do but to go back to 3rd Battalion CP. Soon after, we were reunited with the remnants of our company and moved back into position along the main road into Philippsbourg. We had six sergeants on one machine gun--all that was left of the section." Romero's account of his determined effort to obtain medical aid for his wounded comrades points to a dilemma faced by every unit in ground combat: How much effort can a combat unit afford to divert from its primary purpose in battle--the defeat of the enemy--in order to bring aid and comfort to its wounded? How does the unit's leader recognize that the point has been reached when he can no longer afford to make any such expenditure?

Early that morning, Joseph Hardy, platoon sergeant of M's 1st Platoon, had broken radio silence to give the warning that an enemy tank attack was developing. There had been no radio response. Around noon Hardy and two others, platoon messenger Humble and Pfc David K. Walker, a medic, were captured at the platoon CP. After being held that afternoon in a shed at Main Forks, Hardy and other American POW's had carried a wounded German on a ladder out the road toward Bitche to an enemy aid station. Hardy: "When we put him down in front of their aid station, the wounded man began to moan and call for water. He gave a German guard a picture and a letter and said something to him. The guard stuffed them in his pocket. A German doctor motioned for us to bring the guy inside and gestured for us to dump him. The doctor laughed at me for trying to handle him gently. I'm sure the poor devil didn't last long."

The march of the American prisoners in the direction of Bitche was resumed. Hardy: "The column rounded the nose of the ridge on our right and saw a bunker about three stories high housing one of those long-range guns. Its muzzle looked big enough for all of us to crawl into. Walking on, we came across one of those short-barreled cannons mounted

on what looked like wagon wheels. The gunner was in a frenzy, jumping up and down and motioning for us to move to one side. We ignored him, but we surely weren't laughing. Parallel to the road was a series of German mortar emplacements, each with a trap door which, when closed, concealed the emplacement. After we had walked for about 30 minutes, we came to another house. It turned out to be a German command post. One of the guards asked whether we were infantry, but we made out as though we couldn't understand. Just then we were surprised as what looked like an entire section of our company's mortar platoon was marched into the yard. The march was resumed and we walked and walked until well after dark."

After I Company had arrived on Hill No. 30 the day before, Martin had been sent out as an outpost while the Company was digging in to prevent its being surprised. Returning to the position at dusk, Martin had joined a medic in his foxhole and had gone to sleep. Awakened mid-morning of the next day, 3 January, Martin was told that the company commander wanted to see him. Martin went to the CP, an over-size foxhole, and found Long there. "You wanted to see me Captain?"

"Yeah, last night there was firing all around us. You go out with two others and see what's going on. Can't get a damn thing on the radios.' Very carefully three of us started down through the snow below the ridge. We moved southwest from the company position. We came to a cliff facing on the left fork (Bitche) road. From there we could see all kinds of equipment coming back along the road from Philippsbourg. Some of it was being towed; some of it was being driven under its own power. An ambulance, trucks--jeeps up to '10-by's'--field pieces, and so on. All American equipment, and the Germans had it. Below us on the side of the road, the Germans were setting up an artillery piece." Having been able to penetrate into the north half of Philippsbourg, the Germans were wasting no time in evacuating usable American equipment that they had captured.

The heavy snow which came on 3 January was received as a mixed blessing by I Company on Hill No. 30. Long: "We are now in the midst of a blinding snowstorm. Our officers visited every third foxhole about mid-morning and spent a few moments conversing with the occupants. From this comes recognition of the need to arrange an exercise plan for foxhole occupants. However, if the heavy snowfall continues so as to cover tracks quickly, the men can get out and move around a bit, pick up small sticks, dust the snow off, and store the sticks in foxholes for supplying small coffee and warming fires later on." The I Co command group was also aware of the potential negative effects of the heavy snow--its aggravation of discomfort and its deterring of

physical activity.

As he recalls it, Martin's view of life in the foxhole was positive: "As with all soldiers, as soon as we dug our holes, we kept improving them to make life easier and to have something to keep our thoughts off what is happening or what can. It wasn't long before holes were dug in the foxhole wall to make shelves and a place to sit on. A couple of rocks made a rest for the steel helmet--this, with a lighted candle underneath, made a little stove. You were always dirty, and your clothes were dirty, and the dirt came right through everything. It was warmer below ground, and I could really sleep. We had no food to speak of--some of the guys had some leftovers from their rations or Nescafe or lemonade. Snow was eaten in place of water. Actually, my canteen had been shot off on the night of the ambush."

Captain Long kept sending patrols out to observe developments from the cliff--along the Bitche road and down into Philippsbourg. Martin: "Lieutenant Glass made all the patrols. He didn't let anyone salute him or in any way show he was an officer. He claimed Jerry would try to pick off the officers first. One GI commented, 'Hell, Jerry tries to knock us all off!' Anyway, Lieutenant Glass had on a GI overcoat and carried an M-1. He had a muffler wrapped around his neck. He'd go and do anything his men would do. From the cliff we watched as Jerry fought for the town and as he was shelled off a hill (west ridge) across the valley from us. It was like watching a giant movie of the war. But then a shell would land near us and remind us that we too had parts in it and that it wasn't a movie we were in--this was actually happening."

When darkness came Sergeant Skeen took a 4-man patrol from the 3rd Platoon down the hill. "We were in hopes of making contact with our own troops or seeing a possible way to get through the enemy. Shortly after reaching the bottom, we picked up the sounds of voices and then saw a faint light in the distance. Moving slowly, we soon discovered plenty of Krauts. It must have been a crossroad, for there were three trucks and a tank and we could see the silhouettes of several buildings. There was no way of going farther; so we returned to the company position. We found out that patrols from other platoons had had no better luck."

Lieutenant Turner, I Co exec, remembers that "the Company killed one German and captured another when they approached our position. The captured German told us he had found William C. Schaefer of our 1st Platoon in a farmhouse. Schaefer had a face wound he had received in the ambush on New Year's Day. The German had at one time been a medic and had given Schaefer first aid and seen him evacuated. He told us that Schaefer's eyes would be okay. He reported that eight other boys from I Company had been found killed

or wounded along the road after the ambush."

The developments of 3 January had afforded the I Co CO and his officers and men nothing to be pleased about. From what they had observed, it appeared that the tide of battle in Philippsbourg was running against the 3rd Battalion. Under this circumstance, the I Co mission--to defend the ground where it was--seemed to have lost its validity. Yet extensive reconnaissance had failed to find an avenue around or through the enemy along which the Company could withdraw and rejoin its battalion without running a serious risk of becoming engaged with the enemy. In such an eventuality, I Company, having no communications, would be unable to call for artillery or heavy weapons support.

The L Co Dilemma

Two nights before, L Co's Lieutenant White had received, via telephone, sufficient briefing to realize that I and K companies had run into difficulties during their combined operation on the Bitche road late on 1 Jan. That same night he and his company had observed the apparent pounding of WRECKER 2nd Battalion by the guns of a German tank column. From this evidence alone he could have judged that things had not been going well for the 275th Infantry since its arrival in the Vosges Mountains. Then, during the next day, after the Company had lost communications with Battalion, the several L Co contacts with small enemy groups had given White some reason to believe that his company was about to be cut off from Philippsbourg, if that wasn't already so. As soon as he had determined the location for the L Co bivouac that night (2-3 Jan) White sent a patrol to try to get through to Philippsbourg to report L's situation and obtain instructions. The patrol got through and back--White's instructions from Major Shepherd were for him to get L Company back to Philippsbourg.

Becker: "We waited until the following morning before moving out. Moving with great care, we tried to circle back toward Philippsbourg. While we were passing through heavy woods, we were spotted by an 81 mm mortar squad of M Company. They came across a small clearing and joined us. They informed us that their unit had been overrun by Germans in the attack into Philippsbourg at dawn that morning." The situation confronting White and L Company was not dissimilar in some respects from that which was perplexing Long and I Company--both companies were cut off, or nearly so, from 3rd Battalion and had no commo link with its commander; such knowledge of the situation in Philippsbourg as was had by each company was discouraging; and the orders directing each company's operations were of questionable validity since they pertained to a situation which had obviously changed

since their issuance.

Becker: "Evidently, the men of the mortar squad had been spotted by the enemy, because in a few minutes we started catching 88 fire as we moved up a hill. Several rounds hit in a tree right above us. I guess the good Lord was holding my hand because every man immediately around me was either wounded or killed. I never got a scratch. I remember that six men, including 1st Lt William E. Chesser, all of the 2nd Platoon, were zapped. They had all been near me. We kept trying to get back to Philippsbourg but couldn't seem to find our way past the Germans. For some reason which I never understood, Lieutenant White sent a patrol back with our wounded to try to get through using a different route. I guess that he figured that a patrol had a better chance of making it. Later we found out that they were successful even though they encountered a Kraut patrol and got in a firefight with them."

The Company tried several different routes in its attempt to reach Philippsbourg only to discover the way blocked by sizeable contingents of the enemy, which by mid-morning controlled much of the high ground dominating Philippsbourg from the west. At last White elected to steer his company for the 2nd Battalion sector. Becker: "Late that same night we made contact with a 2nd Battalion patrol, and they led us to their area. We were in poor condition, men suffering from frostbite, stomach problems from using snow for drinking water, no food for over 2 days, and general fatigue from wading through deep snow over rough terrain. I remember Lieutenant White's asking the 2nd Battalion CO for permission to rest the men for the balance of the night--he got chewed out by Col Barten, who told him, 'I don't give a damn about the condition of your men; all I can care about is winning this war!' He then ordered part of the Company into a defensive position on his battalion perimeter and the rest of it to start patrolling the battalion supply route."

The roar of battle in Philippsbourg ebbed away with the daylight on 3 January, and uneven intervals of ominous silence, lengthening as the night progressed, gradually prevailed. These intervals were punctuated by the distant thunder of cannon, the less remote cough of a mortar, and the subsequent booms of their impacting shells, both near and far. By such means, both sides sought to prevent the other side's unhampered use of darkness to achieve some advantage or overcome some disadvantage, the additional dividend being, of course, the denial of relaxation and rest to the other side's exhausted man in the foxhole. Compared to the violent storm of sound which had continued through the hours of daylight, the quiet of the night was a remarkable contrast which made a lasting impression on the 3rd Battalion commander, William Shepherd: "I recall one

unusual night. The Germans were in the north end of town, and we were in the south end. Our 'front lines' were maybe 25 or 50 yards apart. It was a night of utter silence. Anyone venturing outside moved with stealth and exceeding caution. We would not get challenged by a guard until we were right up on him. Then the guard would actually whisper the challenge in our ear. The next morning we started moving the Germans out of town."

In Philippsbourg that night one of the periods of silence was broken by the final K Co action of note for 3 January. A platoon-size enemy combat patrol came down the main street and was shot up and scattered in an ambush. Lieutenant Heck remembers that his platoon's machine gun crew in the house adjacent to the K Co command post played an important part in the affair. George Turner, the artilleryman who, in two separate incidents earlier in the day, had performed splendidly, did too. Lieutenant Donahue, the 2nd Platoon's leader, in a statement supporting the Medal of Honor recommendation on behalf of Turner, testified: "Later that night, I suggested to Turner that he find his artillery unit and rejoin them, but he chose to remain with my infantry platoon. At approximately 2000 hours, a German combat patrol worked its way down the street. ... Turner spotted the patrol and directed fire on the enemy, killing 11 of them and compelling the remainder to take cover."

Subsequently, perhaps the next morning, Donahue was reportedly tipped off by one of the few local natives who had not fled the village as to the location of the refuge in which the enemy patrol survivors had found concealment--in the basement of a house on the edge of the village. Going to the entrance, Donahue engaged the still unseen enemy group in a discussion to obtain their surrender. This was accomplished after Donahue had first shot and killed the die-hard officer with the group. Seventeen Germans emerged from the basement with their hands up.

After darkness had fallen on 3 Jan, the 3rd Platoon of the regimental Anti Tank Company was sent forward to Philippsbourg from Niederbronn in partial replacement of the 57 mm guns defending the village, all of which had been lost to enemy action during the attack that day.

The Settling-down of 2nd Battalion

Colonel George Barten had two major tasks to pursue the day after his green battalion had successfully turned back the enemy's determined tank--infantry thrusts out of Baerenthal. The first was to reorganize his companies and reposition them into a defensive posture. Related to this was the second task--to make position adjustments to meet the threat posed by the gap on the left of his battalion. Two days

before, this gap was being created by the NORDWIND advance southward as Barten's battalion was moving toward Baerenthal from Niederbronn.

The enemy action, extending from before midnight at the outset of 2 January until late that morning, had caught the 2nd Battalion, just arrived in the area, in an imperfect deployment which it had hastily assumed in darkness in preparation for its own attack. The 2nd Battalion attack had evidently been called off only minutes before it was due to have been opened; so its forward elements were ill-prepared for what came. It might have been presumed that the Germans were in Baerenthal, but nobody could have been certain. The enemy had achieved surprise coming out of the village with infantry and tanks in substantial force. Initially there had been tentative probes. Then, shortly after daybreak, had come the big push--an infantry battalion support by 4-6 tanks. The 2nd Battalion elements to the left of the Zinswiller road had recoiled, become intermingled and, in some part, disorganized. There had been a considerable amount of straggling. But the Battalion had held. The work had begun before noon--of restoring order, recovering abandoned equipment, and building a defense along the Zintzel creek valley against an expected enemy effort to penetrate it.

Now on 3 January that work continued. However, the night before, Regiment had informed Colonel Barten that the 313th Infantry, given the job of attacking northward for Reipertswiller to close the gap and secure the WRECKER left flank, had become embroiled in a hard fight at Reipertswiller on 2 January and had made no progress from there. Reipertswiller was about 3 1/2 miles to the southwest of Baerenthal--that roughly was the width of the gap. Consequently Barten's defensive problem acquired additional dimensions--he also had an exposed left flank and rear to be concerned about.

An adjunct to flank and rear protection was patrolling. Theoretically, a battalion commander in Barten's situation would, on his own initiative, have sent out probes from his defenses in the making, particularly in the directions of threat to which he was most vulnerable. But the gap to the left of the 2nd Battalion was being nervously watched from higher up, by the generals at the command posts of the 45th Division and VI Corps. Consequently 2nd Battalion had received specific instructions pertaining to patrolling to its left-rear. One of the Battalion's patrols was sent to make contact at a designated point between Baerenthal and Reipertswiller, the contact to be made with a corresponding patrol from the 313th Infantry. The patrol, presumably from F Company, reportedly missed its rendezvous and continued toward Reipertswiller, near where it found the 313th's 2nd Battalion CP. There was, perhaps, a tinge of condescension

about the veteran 313th Infantry's report of the incident--the WRECKER patrol had been sent back to the designated point of contact. The report failed to mention whether there had, indeed, been a corresponding 313th patrol waiting at the right place and time. One F Co patrol sent out 3 January picked up some prisoners. One, an officer, stated that his company had almost been wiped out in the attacks out of Baerenthal the day before.

Max A. McCord was a first gunner on an E Co light machine gun in position with the Company's forward elements. McCord recalls that the day after Lieutenant Reber had been killed by sniper fire, McCord and others in nearby foxholes had been kept on edge by subsequent sniper firings from a position or positions which they had been unable to locate. Then someone noticed smoke coming from the chimney of a farmhouse to the left-rear--over near the Zinswiller road. Conversation back and forth among the men who could see the house from their foxholes brought agreement that no one had seen smoke coming from that chimney previously. This caused the house to be studied more intently. It was noted that a roof tile seemed to be slightly out of place--perhaps shifted to provide a firing aperture for a sniper hidden in the attic. These suspicions caused a call for mortar fire on the house.

As the explosions of answering mortar shells approached the farmhouse and told its unseen occupants that they were being taken under fire, they made a hasty evacuation. However, deeply drifted snow on a steep embankment in their chosen path of escape caused a slowing-down and bunching-up of 8-10 Germans. Rather than give away his machine gun's position, McCord held his fire, but rifleman Harry M. Northrup blazed away with his M-1 in a show of fine rapid-fire marksmanship. He accounted for nearly all of the would-be escapees. The enemy's occupation of the sniper house had probably occurred during that first hectic night of the 2nd Battalion's deployment below Baerenthal. Northrup was killed in action during the subsequent campaign south of Saarbruecken. A few days after this incident, McCord was evacuated with frozen feet.

The enemy attacks of 2 January had emphasized the 2nd Battalion's need of strong anti-tank defenses along the Zintzel creek defile. The first reaction on the American side had been the commitment of a WRECKER Anti Tank Co platoon of three 57 mm guns--described elsewhere. Then at noon five self-propelled 76 mm tank destroyer (TD) guns had been sent forward, these having been sent by the 45th Division to Muehlthal that morning. Doughboys who were then returning from the Teufelsbrueckerhof emergency defenses to their units up forward observed the cautious advance of the tracked guns. As one of the foot soldiers there described

the move afterward: "The TD's just kept moving up along the narrow, winding road and nosing around the corners, where they hoped not to find an 88 waiting with its barrel aimed down their throats."

Various other precautions against tanks were taken. The bridge at Teufelsbrueckerhof was mined for demolition. A crater was blasted to create a tank trap and trees were felled to block the road running west from Untermuehlthal. Trees were also felled to block other potential tank-penetration routes from the Zinswiller road into company defensive perimeters.

John Cruell was the 2nd Battalion's staff officer most involved with these preparations. He remembers another anti-tank-related job he did, the placement of mines on the Zinswiller road opposite the G Co CP, at the end of the spur running almost due east from the height Schwarzenberg. "Approaching the G Co CP, you had to move quite rapidly over the final 50-75 yards as it was fairly open and under enemy observation. Adjacent to the rear of the CP, a TD was in position, and just forward was one of our 57 mm anti-tank guns. Things were still pretty hectic. Soon after one of my squad leaders and I arrived, another artillery and mortar barrage came in; so rather than personally go over the ground we planned to mine we had to study it from the remoteness of the G Co CP. Then, as we waited for the barrage to end, someone there commented that during the first night the G Co positions had received artillery fire from the Germans and our side as well. We dashed back down the road when the barrage ended.

"After dark we went back taking two additional men with us. We had decided to lay the mines in 'daisy chains' a little farther up from the CP. Two of my men assembled the chains, each one a train of four or five anti-tank mines linked together with a length of rope. Meanwhile, I and my other man in camouflage dress fashioned from white sheeting shuttled between the CP and the site being mined and dragged successive chains across the road on top of the snow. We were relieved when we drew no enemy fire. A later snowfall covered the mines over."

During the late afternoon the first of three groups of WRECKER 3rd Battalion men arrived in the 2nd Battalion area, all three having been overrun or cut off by the German attack which had broken into Philippsbourg that morning. The first group included part of the M Co Mortar Platoon and one of its officers Lieutenant Popovac. After nightfall part of K Company's 1st Platoon and most of L Company arrived separately. Elsewhere has been related the incident at the time of the L Co arrival, when the L Co CO's request for time to give his men some rest was sharply denied by the 2nd Battalion commander. Reminded of this many years later,

Barten commented: "My only flashback is that, in the situation we were in, the only 'rest' was 'eternal' and that was not in the best interests of the individual, the U.S. Army, or the next of kin. One thing I tried to do in my youthful way was to consider the well-being of the men."

As the result of new positionings accomplished by the end of 3 January, 2nd Battalion's dispositions confronted the enemy in Baerenthal with a refused left flank which extended to the left-rear to the battalion CP at Muehlthal. On the right, the E Co location remained unchanged, but the 2nd Platoon had moved forward to extend the company front to the right. It was supported by two sections of machine guns of H Company's 1st Platoon. G Company was on the forward slope and toward the end of the Schwarzenberg northeastward spur. It was supported by H Co 2nd Platoon machine guns and protected the H Co mortar sections, whose positions were in the draw behind the spur. F Company had one rifle platoon on the east side of the Zinswiller road at Teufelsbrueckerhof, another about 500 yards up the road west from Untermuehlthal, and the third at Muehlthal. AT and TD gun positions were distributed along the Zinswiller road from Untermuehlthal north for about a half mile.

Throughout the day, Barten and his staff heard practically nothing from Niederbronn, where the WRECKER regimental staff was preoccupied with the crisis in Philippsbourg. It would remain much the same for the next two days while that critical situation persisted.



This 70th Division review held at Camp Adair, Ore. in 1944 was pictured in the Division's TRAILBLAZER magazine in a special Christmas holiday issue in miniature size for mailing home to the men's families.



70th Division soldiers gathered outside a Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. chapel—1944.



Men of the 275th's G. Co take their ease outside Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. barracks—summer 1944.



Thomas W. Herren, commanding general of Task Force Herren, shown observing an action during the Vosges Mountains campaign.



Robert F. O'Donnell (exec, 3rd Bn, 275th). Photo was taken in Korea, where O'Donnell was on duty in 1953.



Hunter A. Copeland (S-1, 3rd Bn, 275th) at Hofheim, Ger.—1945.



John T. Malloy (executive officer, 275th) in picture taken while he was on duty at the Presidio (San Francisco) in 1958.



Charles S. Pettee (CO, 275th) while serving with the U. S. Fifth Army on organized reserve duty in Iowa—1948.



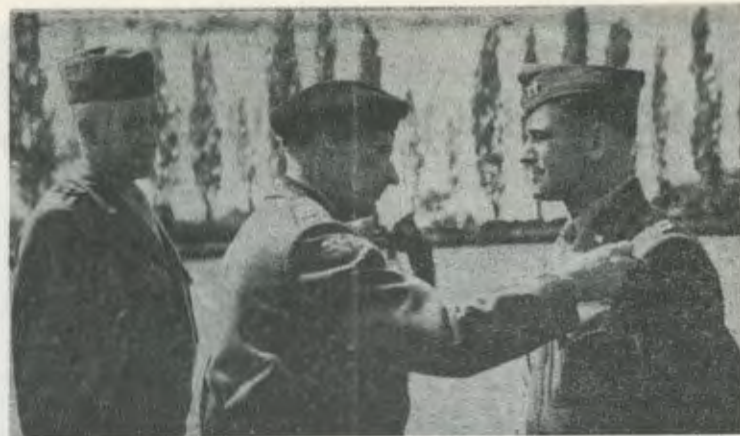
William T. Long (CO, I Co, 275th), who, with two men from his company, became the first in the Regiment to become engaged with attacking NORDWIND infantrymen.



Richard Becker (L Co, 275th) in Korea—1953. Becker, promoted from rifleman to acting platoon leader during the Philippsbourg action, became a 30-year career soldier who saw combat in Korea and Viet Nam.



275th I Co pair at Statler Hotel, Boston, social gathering on the eve of Regiment's embarkation for Europe. L to R—Burdette H. Gerken, unidentified friend, Elmer F. Martin. Gerken was killed in the New Year's Day ambush on the Bitche road—one of the 275th's first combat deaths.



Joseph K. Donahue (K Co. 275th) receiving from British Field Marshall Montgomery the Military Cross at Wiesbaden, Ger. in a 1945 postwar ceremony. General Omar Bradley looks on.



Harry W. Severance (3rd Bn S-3, 275th). Maj Shepherd and Severance were pressured to commit the 3rd Bn early on New Year's Day despite contrary orders to Shepherd.



275th 3rd Bn officers in front of shell-torn building at Spicheren, France, just south of Saarbruecken—March 1945. L to R—Eugene Vacek, Donald Diekman and Clayton A. Rugg.



Charles R. Lobs (K Co, 275th) at Nice, France on holiday leave—December 1945. Lobs was with K Co 1st Platoon, cut off by the enemy's attack into Philippsbourg on 3 Jan 45.



Three 275th M Co NCO's and company medic in Germany on V-E Day—8 May 45. Standing (L to R)—Ruben Romero, Cox, and Novotny. Squatting—Kraft, medic.



Theodore G. Heck (K Co, 275th) at Fort Leonard Wood—summer 1944. Heck is shown firing a 60 mm mortar without baseplate or sight. Sherman, one of his mortar men, used the technique to good effect in the first K Co action in the Philippsbourg area.



Edward J. Fischer (K Co, 275th) in Germany after war's end. Fischer, an NCO in the Weapons Platoon at Philippsbourg, was soon after awarded a battlefield commission.



275th K Co command group display Nazi banner in Eppstein, Ger. on occupation duty. L—Forrest O. Tatlock, 1st sergeant. R—Edward H. Hamilton, CO.



Joseph F. Hardy (M Co, 275th) at Waynesville, Mo., near Fort Leonard Wood. Hardy was critical of positions selected for his platoon's machine guns prior to the enemy attack into Philippsbourg—3 Jan 45.



Wilfred C. Gould (I Co, 275th) in photograph taken of him at Camp Roberts, Cal.—1943—prior to his assignment to the 70th Division.



Willis Diece (K Co, 275th) in photograph taken overseas after the end of the war. Diece and his platoon leader, Joseph K. Donahue, assisted Colonel Malloy in his direction of the American counterattack in Philippsbourg on 5 Jan 45. Soon after, Diece received a battlefield commission.



275th medics Bill Boyd (L) and Russell A. Newton (R) posing with company mascot "Doc" while assigned to L Co, on occupation duty at Frankenberg, Ger.—1945.



275th I Co twins, machine-gunners Howard W. (L) and Harry J. Mumm. Snapshot was taken at Montana State College campus, while they were in the Army Air Corps student training program (ASTP) in 1943. When the ASTP program was curtailed, the Mums were with many who were consequently diverted to the 70th Division from the Air Corps.



Lionel J. Fourier (3rd Bn AT Platoon leader, 275th) at regimental encampment CP-2, north Marseilles—December 1944. All three of his platoon's 57mm guns were knocked out or overrun in the enemy's attack into Philippsbourg—3 Jan 45.



S Sgt Vach Nolder (left) and 2nd Lt Dan Popovac of the M Co/275th 3rd Platoon, whose mortars on the north end of Philippsbourg were overrun by the German attack at daybreak on 3 January. Afterward, Nolder was with Popovac as the lieutenant led his section in a daring escape to the 2nd Bn sector below Baerenthal. Snapshots were taken in Saarbruecken in March 1945 after the 70th Division captured that German city.



ABOVE
Two different views of railroad facilities at Brumath, where the Task Force Herren regiments detained—25-26 Dec 44—after move from southern France. Boxcar on siding is reminiscent of "40-and-8's" ridden in 1944. Snapshot taken in July 1978.

RIGHT
The three-story building in the northwest part of Niederbronn is thought to have housed the first 275th Infantry command post in that town. Snapshot was taken in 1969. It is a short distance from the Dietrich iron foundry, where men from both the 274th and 275th rested briefly before going into battle.



ABOVE
Dietrich iron foundry complex in Niederbronn. Buildings were war-blasted already when 275th troops began to arrive in the town on New Year's Eve 1944. Snapshot was taken in 1979.



ABOVE
Reichshoffen wire factory, where 275th 1st Bn bivouacked on New Year's Eve 1944 after its movement from the Rhine plain to the eastern foot of the Vosges Mountains. Snapshot was taken in 1969.



ABOVE
Niederbronn hotel to which the 275th CP was moved by 5 Jan 45. Subsequently the enemy reoccupied Niederbronn, then later (March 1945) withdrew, leaving explosives planted in the building. Badly damaged in the blast, the hotel has been since rebuilt and renamed. Snapshot was taken in 1969.



ABOVE
George A. Barten (CO, 2nd Bn, 275th) in 1945 after reassignment to the 78th Division, on occupation duty at Carlshafen, Ger.

BELOW
275th G Co marching through the Alsatian village of Weitbruch en route to the 2nd Bn assembly area at Gries on Christmas Day 1944.



RIGHT
275th G Co during break in Christmas Day 1944 march. In foreground is 1st Sgt Bauditz. Bulky footwear visible are shoepacs—worn with heavy insulating stockings, they afforded good protection against cold and wetness but were unsatisfactory for long marches.



RIGHT
John Cruell (2nd Bn staff, 275th) at Hadamar, Ger. mass-burial cemetery—August 1945. A patrol led by Cruell reestablished contact with G Co on Schwarzenberg mountain, 12 Jan 45.



James A. Phillips (G Co, 275th) in Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. barracks area—summer 1944. Phillips was killed during the heavy shelling on Schwarzenberg mountain, 11 Jan 45.



275th G Co group in Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. barracks area—summer 1944. William Manser, receiving haircut, was killed below Baerenthal on 7 Jan 45. Bernard J. Lojko, partially concealed by manser, was killed below Baerenthal, 5 Jan 45.



Max A. McCord (E Co, 275th) while on duty guarding German POW's in a rear area in France—spring 1945. McCord was not reassigned to the 70th Div after recovering from frozen feet in an evacuation hospital.



Marion R. Slater (E Co, 275th) in Limburg, Germany at the end of the war—May 1945. Slater received a battlefield commission while serving with the Regiment.



275th H Co group in Wiesbaden, Ger.—spring 1945. L to R—"Chet" Trangrud, Charles Passe, "Morrie" Aspen, and Charles Ball. Ball remembers well the deaths of the first two officers killed from his company.



Dan A. Brant (275th liaison officer) in picture taken while on leave in Paris—March 1945. Brant witnessed enemy tank action on New Year's Day 1945 which caused the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion to change its CP location in Philippsbourg.



Cornelius V. Cremer (F Co, 275th) at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.—September 1944. Cremer and his machine-gunner assistant Bruno B. Eisler were caught up in the enemy's tank-supported attack out of Baerenthal early on 2 Jan 45.



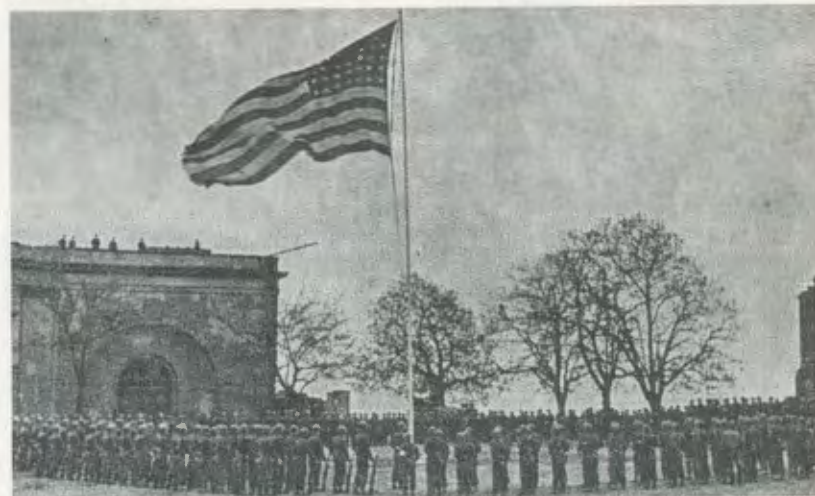
Jacob O. Tveter (G Co, 275th) while he was on military police duty in San Francisco—1943. Tveter was wounded near Baerenthal when he went to assist his platoon which had become engaged in a firefight with an enemy combat patrol—7 Jan 45.



Lawrence G. Southard (F and G Co's, 275th). Photograph of him was taken in Hawaii while he was with an anti-aircraft artillery unit in 1943. Southard was assigned to command G Co and led a supply party on a difficult mission to bring relief to his new unit on 13 Jan 45.



L—Frank P. Collo, R—Ernest N. Duet (both of G Co, 275th) outside Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. barracks—summer 1944.



This ceremony was pictured in a postwar TRAILBLAZER issue which included the following description: "We (the 70th Div) took part in the drive that carried our armies to the Rhine. When, for the first time since our Army of Occupation lowered it in 1923, Old Glory was raised again over the Rhine, the Trailblazer Division took part in that historic ceremony pictured above. This was overlooking the famous 'German Corner' of Coblenz and nothing could be more typical of the triumph of American arms. For since Bismarck this was termed 'the most German' spot in the Reich while our soldiers there were a cross-section of every Yankee unit that shared in the victory."



Michael F. McPhelin (chaplain, 275th) and two soldier altar boys at Catholic mass, Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.—summer 1944.



275th AT Co men stand in front of a 57 mm anti-tank gun in a Fort Leonard Wood training area—summer 1944. L to R—Morris E. Bell, Francis R. Byerley, Arnold, Dmitruk, and Roy J. Geisel. Byerley and his gun crew received recognition for knocking out the 275th's first enemy tank.



Two 274th C Co NCO's at CP-2 following debarkation at Marseilles—December 1944. Andrew J. Martinez (R) and Marcel J. Baumgartner were with the C Co 3rd Platoon when it took the west ridge adjacent to Philippsbourg on 4 Jan 45.



L to R—Paul McCoy (G Co, 275th), Thomas S. Higley (C Co, 275th), and Eugene A. Stout (I Co, 275th) at a VFW 1977 Veterans Day get together—Tucson, Ariz.



James T. Willis (CO, 1st Bn, 274th). Willis and his battalion executed a difficult night-time motor march to Niederbronn, from where they moved, hardly pausing, into an attack on both sides of Philippsbourg soon after daybreak on 4 Jan 45. The attack brought timely relief to the beleaguered 275th force defending the village.



275th Cannon Co members at Zinzing, France (south of Saarbruecken)—February 1945. L to R—Clifford Engstrom, Richard E. Penniman, and Raymond Thompson. Penniman served as observer for the Company when it fired the first 70th Division artillery shells into Germany in December 1944.



Two men of 274th C Co at Wiesbaden, Ger.—June 1945—William R. West (L) and William H. Martin. Martin was with the small assault group which captured the bunker near the end of the enemy's resistance on the west ridge adjacent to Philippsbourg—4 Jan 45.



Grave of American soldier near the Neunhoffen road from Philippsbourg, evidently buried by German troops. The printing on the crude marker reads "Unbekannter Amerikaner"—unknown American. Snapshot was taken in July 1945.



Restaurant in Baerenthal where Task Force Hudelson is remembered to have located its command post which it evacuated New Year's Day 1945. Snapshot taken in November 1969.



Approach to Baerenthal along the road from Philippsbourg. Late on New Year's Day 1945, 275th's E Co took up positions to the left of the road here. The crest of the height Schwarzenberg is the prominent elevation on the horizon. Snapshot taken in July 1978.



Intersection on the west side of Baerenthal. Road to Zinswiller runs to the right behind the road sign. Snapshot taken in November 1969.



View to the northwest along Zinswiller-Baerenthal road past the house in which the 275th G. Co command post was located 2-9 Jan 45. Snapshot taken in November 1969.



LEFT Looking south from the direction of Baerenthal toward the position, west of the Zinswiller road, originally occupied by 275th G Co late on New Year's Day. Snapshot taken in July 1978.



ABOVE Mosaic view to the northeast from the height Schwarzenberg. Edge of Baerenthal is visible below the horizon on the left. Snapshots taken in July 1978.



ABOVE One of the numerous German graves found by American battlefield search parties that went back over the area west of Muehlthal immediately after the war's end.



ABOVE Trail scouted by 275th 2nd Bn during the "Operation Zinswiller" crisis on 5 Jan 45 to find an alternate supply route to the rear. The trail joins the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road near Untermuehlthal. Snapshot taken in July 1978.



View of the wrecked hamlet of Obermuehlthal in the spring after the battle.



House in Obermuehlthal being revisited by 275th 2nd Bn search party in June 1945. Late during the 275th's campaign in the Vosges Mountains the 3rd Platoon of G Co had its CP in this house.



Castle Ruin (partially restored) on high ground overlooking the Zintzel creek valley in the vicinity of Muehlthal. During the NORDWIND campaign the enemy took advantage of his familiarity with the area to position artillery OP's on isolated heights such as this. Snapshot taken in July 1978.



275th's regimental CP in Zinswiller was in the building with shutters. Factory buildings behind it have been built since 1945. Silhouetted against the sky are the Vosges. The Zinswiller gateway to the Rhine plain from the mountains became a primary NORDWIND objective after the week-long German efforts at the tip of the Bitche Salient were finally repulsed. Snapshot taken in 1969.



R—John W. Duffie (exec, 1st Bn, 275th) and a Captain Dodd of another 70th Division regiment—at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., 1944.



L—John S. Carrier (1st Bn S-3, 275th), R—A. Stewart Wallace (D Co CO, 275th) during battlefield search visit to Philippsbourg—July 1945.



Ross R. Millhiser (A Co CO, 275th) in snapshot taken of him in 1943 while he was at Camp Ritchie, Md. Intelligence school in 1943.



Bonnie H. Pannell (A Co, 275th) in "ID" picture taken at Fort Benning, Ga.—1959. Pannell was Weapons Platoon NCO who brought message from 1st Bn CO ordering A Co's withdrawal from Angelsberg on 3 Jan 45.



Oscar Coleman (C Co, 275th) while on guard duty at the battalion command post in Frankfurt, Ger.—May 1945.



Brinton W. Herbst (1st Sgt of A Co, 275th) in prewar (April 1939) snapshot while he was with his Regular Army unit at Chilkoot Barracks, Alaska.



275th D Co soldiers Joseph H. Mansfield (L) and Edward A. Cloonan (R) at Usingen, Ger. (north of Frankfurt) railroad station—July 1945.



Russell A. Holmes (C Co, 275th) while at Fort Leonard Wood—September 1944. Holmes led his gallant rifle platoon in an attack on the last WRECKER objective during the 275th's Vosges campaign—Hill 364.



275th C Co group in Boston, Mass. restaurant on eve of Regiment's embarkation for Europe—December 1944. L to R (front to rear) Cyrus M. Thomas, Leonard L. Roberts, Paul D. Reardon, unidentified British officer who joined party; (rear to front) Reginald B. Desiderio, Thomas S. Higley, Alan W. Heberling, and Charles R. Quinn. Except for Desiderio, all Americans pictured were killed, wounded, or captured in Europe. Desiderio was killed in Korea and awarded the Medal of Honor.



William A. Ridenour (C Co, 275th) while on leave from Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.—summer 1944.



L—Henry Skrobecki, R—LeRoy E. Turner at Lake Placid (N.Y.) Club—August 1945. Club was used as rest hotel for former POWs. The two men were members of the 275th C Co patrol led by Sgt Wallace, captured near Philippsbourg on 3 Jan 45.



Two Lutheran ministers, both former members of 275th C Co, shown together at Passion Play festival, Oberammergau, Ger. in 1980. L. Donald Docken (L) and Harry Durkee (R).



275th C Co group on visit to Springfield, Mo.—September 1944. L to R—Harold W. Mitchell, Edwin E. Neill, "Fred" (LNU), and Kern C. Dibble.



Floyd F. Bondy (C Co, 275th). Photo was taken of him at Camp Adair, Ore.—June 1944. Bondy was severely wounded in fighting on 4 Jan on the east ridge adjacent to Philippsbourg, an action that left only two men in his squad fit to continue.



Richard L. Wansedel (C Co, 275th). Snapshot was taken of him at his Michigan home while en route to join the 70th Division at Fort Leonard Wood.



James E. Mulholland (1st Bn medic, 275th) after regiment's move into Saarbruecken, Ger.—March 1945.



275th medics outside a battalion aid station in Germany during occupation. L to R—Raymond W. Nelson, Russell A. Newton, and Albert H. Piel. Nelson and Piel were among the few who stayed in the Philippsbourg church after enemy action had caused others to abandon their posts at the aid station there. Newton had a 2nd Bn assignment at that time.



Harold T. Van Horn (B Co, 275th) in Germany—spring 1945. Van Horn was one of the last WRECKER men to reach the B Co position on Falkenberg height before enemy action isolated Captain Schmied's company.



Charles G. Landells (B Co, 275th) at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.—summer 1944. One of the few men of his company who were not caught in the entrapment around Falkenberg height, Landells fought in the defense of Philippsbourg as a member of the mixed force in the village.



D. B. Webber (1st Bn chaplain, 275th) in Germany after the war's end—1945. Webber enlisted Lt Scobey as an organist at a New Year's Eve service as the Regiment was on the verge of moving into the Vosges Mountains.



View into the south end of Philippsbourg shows "first house on the left," where enemy roadblock was established. First two buildings to the right of the road served as joint aid station and 1st Battalion command post, respectively. Also visible is Lutheran church tower used as a 275th D Co mortar OP for a short time after the aid station was evacuated from the church. Snapshot taken in the summer of 1945.



View into Philippsbourg from the south shows main street almost up to Main Forks. Rock formation faintly visible on the skyline is on the ridge north of the village—274th A Co's objective on 5 Jan 45.



View at the south entrance of Philippsbourg showing house used as the 275th 1st Bn command post (directly behind sign) and barn used as a combined aid station to its right. House partially hidden by white-shuttered house was 275th 3rd Bn command post. Woods on east ridge (behind houses) show evidence of fierce shelling, and repairs to several battle-damaged roofs are apparent. Snapshot taken in summer of 1945.



Summer 1945 view north along Philippsbourg main street showing cluster of houses just below Main Forks, most of them still unrepaired from burning and shell-blasting of previous January. Prominent silhouette on skyline is rock formation on ridge north of town on which German OP was located.



View south along Philippsbourg main street from below Main Forks. The considerable distance to the Lutheran church from Main Forks is evident. Snapshot taken in summer of 1945.



Restaurant-de-la-Gare from across the railroad tracks in Philippsbourg. It housed the command post of the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion when advance elements of 275th 3rd Bn arrived. Snapshot taken in summer of 1945.



View to the northwest from the north end of the east ridge. Philippsbourg Pond, north end of village, and (behind shattered tree) ridge which was 274th A Co objective on 5 Jan 45 are visible. Snapshot taken in 1953.



View out the Bitche road from Main Forks in Philippsbourg. "Shed" in which Colonel Malloy and his two K Co assistants operated late during the morning of 5 Jan 45 stands in the angle to the right of the Bitche road. Snapshot taken in 1969.



View along the Neunhoffen road from the north end of the east ridge adjacent to Philippsbourg. Far height in the notch between two nearer slopes is the southwest end of Falkenberg ridge, on which 275th B Co was entrapped after the German attack on 3 Jan 45. Snapshot was taken in 1953.



Maginot Line bunker at the foot of the west ridge adjacent to Philippsbourg. This was the bunker taken by 274th C Co during its attack on the west ridge on 4 Jan 45. Girl in pictures was the granddaughter of the wartime proprietor of Restaurant Muller at Main Forks, used as the 275th 3rd Bn aid station until evacuated when the German attack broke into Philippsbourg on 3 Jan 45. Snapshots taken in 1979.



American Sherman tank knocked out on Philippsbourg main street on 3 Jan 45. After the tank was hit and abandoned by surviving crew members, the turret rotating mechanism reportedly continued to function causing the gun to swing around wildly for some time. This can explain why the gun is trained south, away from where the enemy armour was located at the time of the action. Snapshot taken in July 1945.



Clifford E. Dykes on shipboard during his return from peace-keeping assignment in China—April 1947. Dykes was 275th Inf S-3 during the Regiment's campaign in the Vosges Mountains.



Entrance to the "root cellar" at the south end of the ridge east of Philippsbourg. Used as 275th C Co command post 3-5 Jan, the dugout may have originally been constructed as a troop shelter rather than for storage of farm products, as its GI-assigned nickname implied.



Typical Vosges Mountains village scene during NORDWIND offensive which shows fire resulting when German shellfire hit an American truck. Note buildings damaged and snow blackened by shellfire, also roadside manure piles the far-reaching odor from which presaged any entry of such a locality from downwind.



Battered and burned north end of Lutheran church in Philippsbourg. Snapshot was taken in summer of 1945. Vestry in church was used at 275th 1st Bn aid station until the morning of 4 Jan 45, when it was evacuated.



R—Donald C. Pence (S-1, 275th), with father Col Charles W. Pence at West Point, N.Y. following the son's graduation—June 1943.



Eugene J. Petersen (chaplain's assistant, 275th) at Salem, Ore.—1943.



Robert W. Roti (3rd Bn staff, 275th) in Corvallis, Ore.—June 1944. Roti and Gaylord L. Reaser wrote their battalion's combat history frequently cited in this account.

CHAPTER V

The Start of the American Counterattack

Thursday, 4 Jan (+6 to +13 degrees, Fahr.)

On the following day, 4 January, the 476th Grenadier Regiment/256th VG Division engaged in relieving elements of the 361st VG Division in the Baerenthal sector. The change-over was accomplished around daybreak. The 476th was, of course, the same outfit that had, on the previous morning, thrust its forces into Philippsbourg along the axis of the Bitche road and from the west side of the village as well. This regiment had been relieved by the 456th Grenadier Regiment, the unit on its left, whose main body had arrived in the Philippsbourg area during the first hours of 4 January. The 456th had been delayed in its movement from Nuenhoffen by harassing American groups and by the necessity to remove mine fields encountered on the road to Philippsbourg. The forceful reminder that there were American forces of undetermined strength--north of Philippsbourg and on the high ground northeast of Mambach--which threatened the 256th's rear area caused considerable concern. The 456th's regimental reserve was formed into combat patrols tasked to pin down these American forces and, if possible, eliminate them. American counterattacks in Philippsbourg put heavy pressure on the newly arrived regiment there, but it was "able to maintain its position."

It should be noted here that the author of the 256th VG Division monograph was a former staff officer of that division. Like other German WW II unit reports, it was written after the war largely from memory, the work being done under the direction of the U.S. Army. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the monographs contain obvious errors. The 256th monograph incorrectly represents that the 456th Regiment was able to maintain its hold of all of Philippsbourg until 8 Jan, when it was relieved by elements of the 36th VG Division.

The third 256th VG Division regiment, the 481st, reinforced, registered its first significant gains during

the offensive having been able to push into Dambach and down the valley from there to the southeast. Even here, the dimensions of the success were overstated. Records of the U.S. 45th Division indicate that its 157th Infantry yielded positions in Dambach but took no special note of enemy pressure along the Schwarzbach valley that day—two German tanks shelling from positions in Dambach, yes, but nothing more.

In the vicinity of Baerenthal, where elements of the 476th Grenadier Regiment had relieved the 361st VG Division's 1st Battalion/952nd Infantry, that battalion was earmarked to conduct "Operation Zinswiler." Word of this impending commitment came as a disappointment to the 361st's commanding general, who, learning that his battalion at Baerenthal was to be relieved, had made plans to add its weight to the Division's effort down in the tip of the salient. According to the "Operation Zinswiler" plan, the 1st Battalion/952nd Infantry was to assemble at Thalhaeuseln (just west of Baerenthal) after withdrawing from its Baerenthal defenses and move southward around and to the rear of the American defensive complex below Baerenthal, then continue on to reach the exit from the mountains near Zinswiler. Its route would take the Battalion through the rugged and practically pathless terrain west of the Baerenthal-Zinswiler road, which was known to be so difficult that the Battalion would use man-drawn sleds to haul supplies and equipment. The Battalion started on its mission on 0800, 4 January.

Elsewhere, hard fighting continued throughout the 361st VG Division sector as the *NORDWIND* forces struggled to regain the initiative but were, by-and-large, frustrated by the increasing occurrence of American counterattacks. The 361st Division's command ratio net had become progressively less effective; occasionally, messages could be gotten to or received from front-line battalions via relay through the artillery net. Like their American adversaries, the German troops were finding the hardships imposed by the weather and terrain difficult to endure. Casualties due to freezing and exhaustion were common. Rifle companies were reduced in strength to 20-30 effectives. Continuing efforts to procure more winter clothing had been unavailing. A German prisoner taken by the 2nd Battalion/275th Infantry near Baerenthal remembered with seeming envy the fur-lined jackets with hoods worn by some SS troops he had seen 2 days before.

Summary of WRECKER Operations, 4 Jan

The principal operation in the 275th Infantry sector on 4

January was the first phase of the American counterattack in and around Philippsbourg, which was designed to evict the enemy forces from the village. During the night of 3-4 January, the 1st Battalion/274th Infantry had been diverted to Niederbromm while in the midst of a motor movement and, on arrival, had been attached to the 275th Infantry. The fresh battalion was immediately assigned to move to Philippsbourg and there attack the heights dominating the east and west sides of that village. Another thrust, up the village's main street, was to involve WRECKER troops remaining in the village. They were to be supported by tanks escorted by two squads of the 274th's riflemen.

In and around the village, part of WRECKER C Company was committed to search and clear the crest and north slope of the east ridge where enemy troops were thought to have been coming in since the day before. The clearing operation quickly ran into strong enemy resistance, and the C Co troops involved were withdrawn to the south end of the village from where they participated in a late afternoon push up the main street. The remainder of C Company continued to hold defensive positions on the southeast and south edges of Philippsbourg.

The 1st Battalion/274th counterattack on the left made steady progress against moderate enemy resistance from the west side of Philippsbourg and from the west ridge. It was late in the afternoon when the assault company, C Company, arrived on its objective, the west ridge, having lost two men killed and five wounded in the course of its advance. Tasked to take the summit on the east ridge adjacent to the village, the 274th's A Company ran into heavy shellfire at the outset, as it emerged from the woods onto the open ridge due south of its objective. Then, having managed to reach the wooded base of the ridge from which its objective rose, the Company's skirmishers became engaged with pockets of enemy infantry. Day-long efforts to clear the ridge of stubbornly resisting Germans achieved some gains, but late afternoon arrived with the enemy still in possession of the summit—the A Co objective. The company commander called for an artillery concentration on the objective, then ordered his men forward at the end of the barrage. Darkness was falling as the Company arrived on the summit to find it abandoned by the enemy. A Company had taken 10 casualties, two men killed, eight wounded.

In Philippsbourg, the tank-supported assault at the beginning of the attack was quickly halted when enemy shellfire caused the tanks and the accompanying riflemen to disperse. This force remained pinned down by continuous mortar and artillery fire through most of the day. In the afternoon parts of WRECKER C and K companies and probably other elements launched a new assault up the main street,

which was supported by at least one tank. At nightfall, this advance had probably penetrated to Main Forks and a short distance along the side street to the left. At the end of the advance, the assault force withdrew, K Co's men to the positions held at the beginning of the day, C Co's to outposts on the main street before Main Forks and to one or more outposts on the side street.

North of Philippsbourg, I Company continued its grim struggle to sustain itself in the freezing weather. The company commander sent out patrols and, late in the day, held a meeting with his officers at which it was decided that the Company, the next day, would withdraw back to Philippsbourg to rejoin its battalion, fighting its way through whatever enemy resistance it might encounter. B Company, on the height Falkenberg, a little over one-half mile to the northeast of I Company, was in similar circumstances except that enemy pressure on its defenses was more active. A patrol attempting to infiltrate into the Company's perimeter was ambushed and driven off.

In the WRECKER 2nd Battalion sector, below Baerenthal, the day was spent improving defensive positions and driving off enemy patrols which were continuously probing at various points along its extended and exposed perimeter. An alert in the early afternoon caused by the sighting of a large enemy force just west of Baerenthal came to nothing when the expected enemy action failed to materialize. The most memorable event of the day was a bombing and strafing attack by a large group of American F-47 aircraft which was focused largely around the 2nd Battalion command post, at Muehlthal.

Reviewing the action of 4 Jan, the 275th Infantry's Unit Report stated: "In the vicinity of Baerenthal constant enemy patrolling and steady pressure against the 2nd Battalion were effected by small groups. A group of about 500 enemy was sighted by friendly air reconnaissance at 1100; the enemy force was located on the west outskirts of Baerenthal. Artillery fire was ordered on the area. There were no sizeable counterattacks launched by the enemy at any point of contact. In the vicinity of Philippsbourg, the 1st Battalion/274th Infantry made slow gains against terrific mortar fire, apparently coming from commanding ground surrounding the Philippsbourg perimeter on the east, north, and northwest sides. This mortar fire was very effective and the mortar positions could not be picked up. Daylight patrols were encountered, but the greatest opposition came from hidden enemy mortar positions and artillery fire."

The regimental report included an assessment of the combat readiness at the end of the day of its various elements as follows: 1st and 3rd battalions/275th Inf: poor; 2nd Battalion/275th Inf: excellent; Cannon Company: excellent; I & R Platoon: excellent; 1st Battalion/274th

Inf: fair. The basis on which the last-stated rating was assigned does not readily reveal itself--just possibly it had to do with the command status of the unit rated; the 1st Battalion/274th was a close relation to WRECKER, but it was, after all, "attached." This battalion seems to have done nearly everything asked of it on 4 January and its losses had been slight. It was a matter of opinion, and commanders, in general, were not thought to be scrupulously even-handed in their treatment of "attached" units compared with their own.

Commitment of WYOMING 1st Battalion

Arriving at Niederbronn about 0400 in the morning of 4 Jan, Colonel Willis, CO of the 1st Battalion/274th Infantry (regimental cover-name--WYOMING) reported to Colonel Pettee at the WRECKER command post. Willis was oriented on the situation in Philippsbourg and given orders for his battalion to attack. He only had time for a hurried map reconnaissance before issuing orders to his company commanders, who had preceded the motor convoy bringing their men. His orders were:

"The enemy occupies the northern portion of Philippsbourg. C and K companies of the 275th are along the southern edge (sic) of town.

"This battalion will attack at 0900 and capture the hills west and northeast of town.

"Charlie (C) Company will capture the hill west of town.

"Able (A) Company will capture the hill east of town and then continue to the one northeast of town.

"Baker (B) Company will furnish two squads to go with the tanks down the main road into Philippsbourg. The rest of the Company will dig in on the outskirts of town.

"One (D Co) heavy-machine-gun section will be attached to both Able and Charlie. The rest of Dog (D) Company will follow.

"Any questions? Let's go! We don't have much time!"

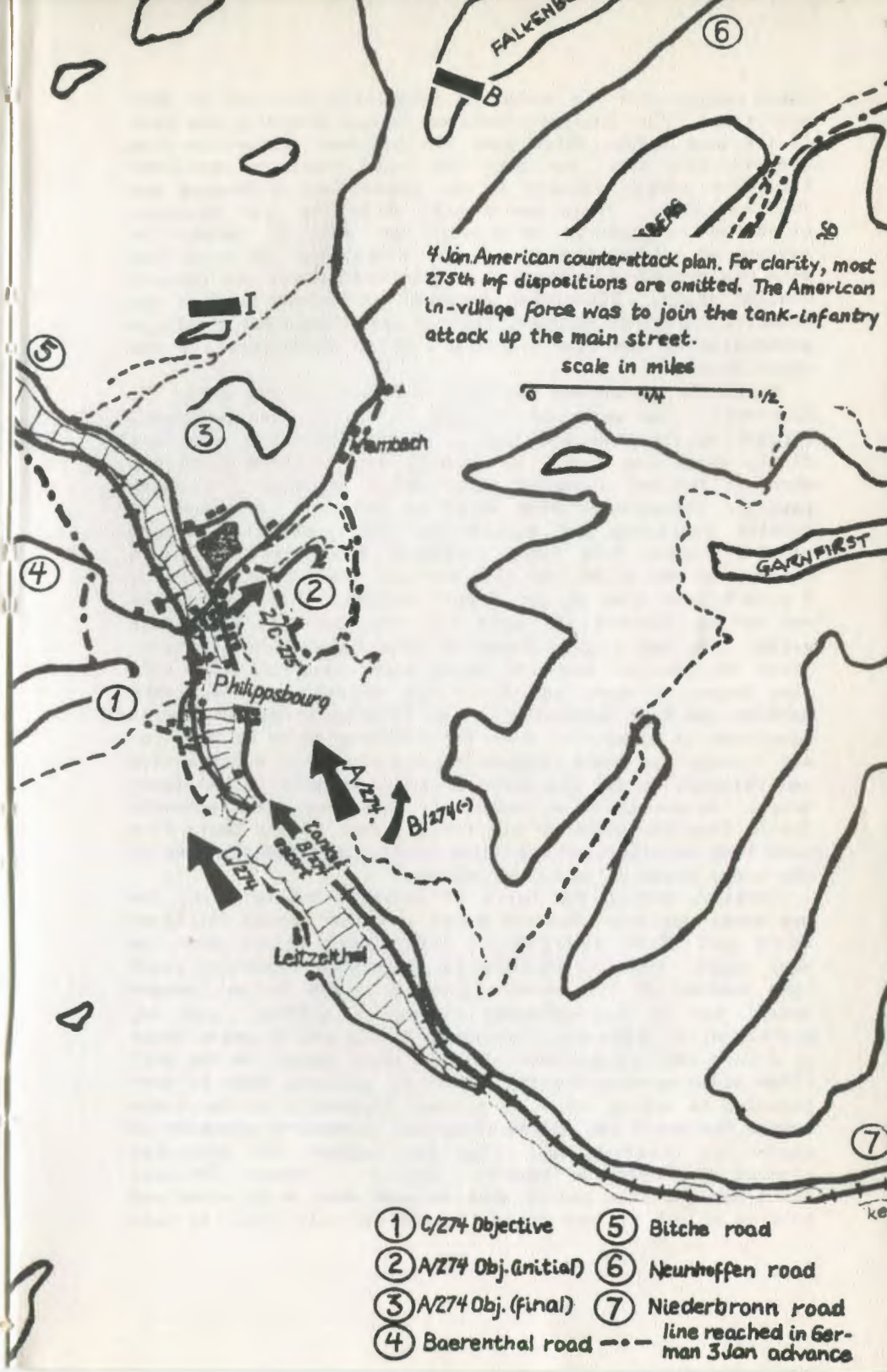
Andrew J. Martinez was a platoon sergeant in C Company/274th Infantry. Remembering that night, he has written: 'After a miserable, cold, all-night ride in amphibious DUKW's, better known as 'ducks' among the GI's, our 1st battalion arrived in Niederbronn. In the distance we could hear the sound of smallarms fire and the crash of artillery shells. Cold and miserable after the ride, we dismounted stiffly, stomping our feet and moving our arms hoping to stir some circulation in our numb bodies. We moved into some big factory buildings out of the piercing cold. My men, after checking equipment, began to stretch

out and try to catch up on a little sleep. 2nd Lt William A. Brogan, my platoon leader, was just getting comfortable when a company messenger came in and told him to report to the CO, Capt Jack B. Wallace." When Brogan returned, he informed his platoon that the Battalion was going to attack. (Jack Wallace was the brother of the 275th's D Co commander, Stewart Wallace. Jack would be killed in Philippsbourg on 13 January).

Martinez: "The Battalion moved out in a column of companies down the road to Philippsbourg behind some tanks, on which some of our men were riding. The tanks had some difficulty staying on the icy road, thus slowing our progress and giving the infantrymen on board a rough ride. We finally reached a point where the terrain permitted us to deploy into an attack formation. C Company deployed on the left of the road, while A Company went to the right, the tanks continuing down the road. In our company, my 3rd platoon was in the lead as the attacking platoon. Off in the distance, we could see smoke from the chimneys in Philippsbourg. The sound of machine guns firing and the constant rattle of smallarms grew louder as we drew closer. Artillery shells began to drop with increasing frequency closer to us. So far, no one had fallen among our troops, but we knew that, as soon as we came into range, we would begin to get it."

1st Lt Roy L. Vaught's A company, on the right, had to cross an open field to reach the next hill. Enemy artillery opened up as soon as the men emerged from the concealment of the woods and moved out into the open. Gordon H. Randall was a squad leader in the Company. He has written, "I don't believe any of us in A Company can ever forget moving past the 275th Cannon Co position that first morning of the attack. Sgt Harry E. Clark, of that unit, was an old schoolmate. Later he told me that he thought it was inconceivable that any of us could live through the shelling we sustained shortly after we crossed the line of departure. As I recall, we didn't sustain more than two or three wounded out of the platoon while moving across the open space. Then, just as we hit the base of the high ground, the mortars took over. I'll never forget one burst that hit about 20 feet from me, knocking me to the ground, and the weird feeling that came over me as the body of the GI it had landed under came floating to the ground." Cannon Co/ 275th's Lieutenant Penniman would remember the incident: "An outfit was coming up the valley in full-field gear. We tried to signal and yell for them to get out of the open terrain, but to no avail. The Germans poured in shells, and quite a few guys were hit."

The raw power of the first barrage which was apparent to nearby witnesses doubtlessly made an impression on some



which exaggerated the number of casualties received on that bare ridge. The Company continued forward reaching the foot of the next ridge, which gave the men some protection from the artillery fire, but then they began receiving smallarms fire from enemy infantry in the woods that A Company was just entering. There was a halt while the rear elements closed up; afterwards an attempt was made to resume the advance by moving directly up the ridge, but the resulting gain was modest--the enemy fire grew hotter and the Company stalled again. Subsequent attempts to advance by fire and maneuver made some headway, but the enemy remained firmly in possession of the crest--A Co's initial objective. It was about noon.

Meanwhile, C Company had started forward on the left. Martinez: "As we moved forward, I, as platoon sergeant, brought up the rear and kept a sharp lookout to our left flank, which was open. We finally sent a flank guard out when we reached a wooded area which afforded the enemy possible concealment from which to hit us. We began to receive smallarms and machine-gun fire, and our advance slowed. About this time, artillery fire began to hit A Company on our right and also our own leading skirmishers. I didn't have time to get scared because I had to keep the men moving forward and keep the momentum of the attack going. We had a good bunch of boys in the 1st Platoon. After the initial shock of being under fire had worn off, they began to move and fire like veterans. One pesky machine gun kept harassing us; so Lieutenant Brogan sent a squad out to flank it. With the flanking squad in position and firing, the enemy machine-gun was caught in a cross-fire and withdrew to the buildings on the west side of Philippsbourg. We continued on toward our objective under sporadic firing from the enemy to our front. Most of the heavy fire came from buildings on our right flank, toward which most of the enemy ahead of us had withdrawn."

Earlier, during the hours of darkness before dawn, the new enemy regiment that had moved into and around Philippsbourg just after midnight had infiltrated troops onto the east ridge. How the WRECKER 1st Battalion commander could have learned of the enemy's presence there is not remembered, but he had--probably through a patrol. And so, shortly after daybreak, Lieutenant Holmes and Sergeant Mercy of C Co's 2nd Platoon were visiting their squads on the east ridge slope overlooking Philippsbourg alerting them in preparation to moving out. An advance diagonally up the slope toward the north end of the ridge was planned--a movement to assist in clearing the ridge and support the projected advance of WYOMING A Company. Higley: "'Bussy' (Holmes) and I had a little set-to when he came over to my squad and told me to get the men ready to move off with him. He said

we were going to attack again. He also said that the Germans had come right through us during the night. I told him he was crazy as hell--no Germans had gone through my squad. He muttered something about their being all over the place and to get going."

Just to the north, Sergeant Mercy, while visiting Bondy's squad, spotted an enemy sniper close by and fired several rounds at him without evident effect or response. The two other squads closed on Higley's in the center in preparation for the advance. Bondy: "The platoon then started a short displacement to the north and up higher on the ridge. Almost immediately we were hit by enemy burp-gun and machine-gun fire. We could see the muzzle of one gun poking out of an aperture in the rock cliff above us--it was only a few yards away." Quickly six members of the squad, including Sergeant Bondy, were hit, one of them killed. After being hit, Bondy rolled down the slope toward the lower trail.

Higley's squad followed by Thomas' was moving up behind when Bondy's squad was shattered by the sudden downpouring of automatic-weapons fire. Higley saw Bondy hit and tumble downslope out of sight. Some of Bondy's men were seen to fall, and then there were casualties occurring in the rest of the Platoon as the hail of enemy fire continued from above. Holmes' men returned the fire as well as they could, but the enemy above held a clear advantage. Holmes ordered his platoon back, and the men withdrew laterally along the ridge.

The 2nd Platoon had taken some punishment during its attack of the previous afternoon. Now after the brief but furious flurry of firing it had been reduced to two undermanned squads--Bondy's squad, with only two survivors fit for duty, had been wiped out for all practical purposes. The advance of the Platoon had been short-lived--it had been stopped cold, with heavy losses, by the fierce enemy fusillade. Having withdrawn a short distance, it was no longer receiving smallarms fire. But then explosions from intense shellfire were occurring all around.

Higley: "We pulled back a short distance and dug in, well spread out. 'Bussy' sent our two runners, Pfc Arthur A. Brafman and Pfc Theodore B. Grabowski, with a message requesting artillery fire. We stayed in our shallow holes waiting for quite some time amid exploding artillery and mortar shells. No help arrived. 'Bussy' crawled over and said something like, 'Come on, "Hig", we have to make it back to the CP and get artillery fire. One of us has to make it!' So we took off with mortar shells landing all around us. One blew me into a snowbank, and 'Bussy' had to pull me out. I don't know how, but we made it back to the CP. 'Bussy' got Grotheer, and the two of them sprinted to the battalion CP, a few yards away from the 'root cellar.'

I was right behind and followed them into the CP, in the basement of a house. There were some cots with men asleep. I went back to the basement entrance--I had noticed a guard I knew outside at the corner of the house. As I went outside to speak to him, he fell, shot through the head and killed by a sniper bullet. Soon friendly artillery was going overhead and onto the ridge--our communications were in working order, and our call for support had gotten through.

"Then we went back to the 'root cellar.' Inside I noticed three C Co men sitting against the wall in the dim light of the entrance tunnel. As 'Bussy' and I were about to leave on our way back to the Platoon, I asked him to wait a second. I turned and stood over those three and I told them to 'Get the hell out of here and follow me!' They did. I never knew whether their being there was okay or not--all I could think of just then was that Bondy and all the others were lying out there, wounded or dead, in the snow." During the round-trip to get the artillery support, Holmes and Higley learned why the earlier mission for the same purpose had apparently been fruitless and why the two runners had failed to return--the bodies of Brafman and Grabowski were found near the foot of the ridge; the two had been killed by shell fragments before they could reach the CP.

The action since dawn had been frantic, and it was not much after 0900 when Holmes and his sergeant got back to the Platoon on the ridge. En route back from the "root cellar," they had observed the beginnings of the A Co/274th assault as the two had glanced back to the south across the draw at the foot of the east ridge to the open slopes beyond. They had seen enemy shells begin impacting into the coverless terrain upon which the A Co skirmishers were just then venturing; but the C Co pair, who had had their own urgent business to attend to, had continued on their way after only a brief pause. Arriving back at the Platoon's position, Holmes and Higley found an improved situation--the enemy's shellfire had eased off, and there had been little new pressure from his infantry. At the "root cellar" CP, Lieutenant Grotheer had ordered his 2nd Plat leader to move his men once again. Consequently, Higley and his assistant Sgt Jamie Relph were passing the word around to what was left of the battered squad when they saw Sergeant Bondy, who had been missing for an hour since being hit. When he appeared, Bondy was crawling slowly along the ridge's lower trail. From higher up the slope, Higley and Relph hurried, slipping and sliding, to the stricken man. There they were joined by S Sgt Nick Markionni, of C Co's scattered 1st Platoon, and the three men moved Bondy to a vacant foxhole. The 2nd Platoon noncoms could not stay--their platoon was moving out--so they left Bondy with Markionni.

A medic, T 5 W.A. Blackwell, arrived at the foxhole to treat Bondy. That he happened to come at that time was fortunate for Bondy but fatal for Blackwell. In the midst of his attentions to the wounded man, Blackwell was mortally wounded by a sniper bullet. Some men of the 2nd Platoon may still have been near enough to witness this happening, or perhaps the Platoon had already moved off and simply were told later of the shooting of the 18-year-old medic. However they came to know of the event, it further hardened attitudes toward the enemy. Markionni was finally able to assist Bondy to the battalion aid station.

The enemy resistance to WYOMING A Company's advance on the east ridge forced repeated halts. However, after a couple of hours it had wedged the German force away from some of the WRECKER positions there. The displacement of Holmes' platoon after finding Sergeant Bondy was surely facilitated by the WYOMING men's action. Whatever contact occurred between individual troopers of the two Trailblazer regiments, it must have been fleeting--nobody had time for pleasantries. Indeed, it seems doubtful that there had been any opportunity for the WRECKER doughboys to learn about what friendly troops were nearby. The east ridge was to become known among members of the 274th's 1st Battalion as "Bornstein's Knob," named after 1st Lt Manuel Bornstein of its C Company for some unremembered reason. Insofar as the men of 275th's C Company were concerned, their appreciation for the assistance given by the WYOMING troops that morning would have to be felt after the event.

The last position on the east ridge taken by Holmes' platoon was on its south slope, fairly close to the edge of the woods. Arriving there and beginning to dig in, the men of the 2nd Platoon soon realized that there were other foxholes with friendly occupants in their immediate vicinity. Markionni and perhaps others of C Co's 1st Platoon had foxholes there. In this new location the 2nd Platoon was certainly quite close to the Wysocki Weapons Platoon group, but the duration of the two C Co elements' close proximity to each other evidently was so brief as to prevent recognition or remembrance of the other's presence nearby. Soon Holmes and his men moved again; Wysocki and his stayed in place. Meanwhile the pressure of the WYOMING advance forced the German infantry to withdraw further up the ridge; in reaction the enemy intensified his mortar fire apparently assured that his own troops had been evacuated from that part of the ridge.

The WYOMING B Co commander had selected his 3rd platoon to provide two squads of riflemen to escort the platoon of Shermans up the main street of Philippsbourg that morning. The Platoon's squad leaders had flipped coins to see which two squads would make the attack and the men thus chosen

climbed on the tanks and rode at the head of the Battalion's column from Niederbronn to Philippsbourg. South of the village there was a halt while the assault companies of the Battalion deployed to the east and west of the road. Then the advance started again. The enemy shellfire started coming down around the tanks and their doughboy passengers as the column approached the south edge of the village. The tanks quickly halted and the doughs scrambled off them searching for cover.

In a few moments, the tank drivers were also moving their big vehicles to get them off the road and concealed--they had been sitting-ducks where they had stopped in a column at the edge of the village. Cpl Hilliard H. Penland described the action later: "Our tank backed up, and we took cover in a shallow, sunken roadbed. It wasn't much protection and we didn't feel very secure, but it was the only place near. The enemy evidently spotted our artillery OP on the hill above us--about 150 yards away--for they zeroed in on that location. For the next 30 minutes, their artillery pounded all around us. The concussions were terrible, and we rolled and bounced with the steady eruptions. Then our batteries opened up, and an artillery duel kept up most of the day while we lay there helpless. We wanted to move but couldn't.

"A little later, 12 P-47's bearing faint white crosses, swooped over us. I first thought they were our planes until two of them peeled off and dropped their eggs on our artillery positions behind us. Then the enemy heavy guns started zeroing in on all possible places of cover. Chunks of steel were flying around like snow. The fragments clipped the limbs off trees, and we were getting well camouflaged with the flying debris that fell around us. A piece of shrapnel struck my helmet and my ears rang for 30 minutes. I thought they might start traversing along the sunken road; so I ordered my men to leave one at a time to seek cover on the other side. We spent the rest of the day there."

The heavy barrage that Penland remembered as having hit the "artillery OP" may have been aimed at WYOMING A Company and at WRECKER Cannon Company, both of which took much pounding that day. As for the attack by the P-47's, the event was coincidental with a similar, but evidently more intense attack from the air on the 2nd Battalion, over below Baerenthal. Penland's identification of the aircraft as P-47's accords with that made by WRECKER troops to the west. His supposition that they were enemy-operated is supported by some WRECKER accounts--others assert that the strafing-bombing strike on the 2nd Battalion's rear was a blatant U.S. Army Air Corps blunder. When the advance of infantry and tanks into Philippsbourg was stopped even before it

entered the village, whatever offensive action may have been projected to cooperate in Philippsbourg with it seems to have died in the burning. The heavy shelling, particularly by mortar fire, which responded to any movement in the village kept the WRECKER forces there inactive, for the most part, until well into the afternoon.

Over on the left, it was late afternoon when the 274th's C Company became engaged with enemy defending the Maginot Line bunker on the west side of Philippsbourg at the foot of the Company's objective. Martinez: "The 3rd Platoon was leading the attack for the Company when we ran smack up against a pillbox firing down the railroad tracks and in our direction. By concentrating the fire of our platoon on the embrasures, we were able to maneuver one squad into position to assault it. Under heavy fire from the buildings in Philippsbourg, a group from one of the squads, composed of Pfc Owen Lloyd, Pfc Mathias DeWald, Pfc William Jones, T 5 Thomas J. Kirk, and Sgt William Martin, made a successful assault and put the pillbox out of action. The Germans inside were taken prisoner." Of this incident, Sgt Marcel Baumgartner would later recall that "several Germans holed up under a ledge surrendered, and, for a few minutes, we had a dispute amongst ourselves as to whether we should take them back or just shoot them. The decision was to take them back as prisoners. S Sgt Joseph M. Gonzales was wounded, and I helped him up the hill so that he could be evacuated." Eighteen Germans had emerged from the bunker to surrender. Moments later the POW's and their American captors came under shellfire that started falling near the concrete shelter that the Germans had just left. Men from both sides were hit. But then the prisoners were hustled to the rear, the wounded evacuated, and the Company moved up on the objective. Martinez remembers that it was around 1700 when the ridge was cleared and the Company's dispositions were made in preparation for holding its objective.

The argument over what to do with just-taken enemy prisoners suggests the frustration often felt among attacking troops toward defenders after an action in which the assault force has taken casualties. It was natural enough to want to even the score against the enemy in general, but especially against the individuals who, having inflicted losses on the attacking party, would seem to be escaping their comeuppance through offering surrender.

Martinez: "Our company had secured the hill to the west of Philippsbourg, our final objective, after a hard struggle. Our platoon was deployed in dug-in positions around the eastern portion. Our CP was set up in a cave-like hole in the side of the hill. Across the valley we could see into Philippsbourg. Lieutenant Brogan had his shoepacs off and was changing his socks. I was trying to

contact the Company's CP on our radio. A couple of messengers were beginning to eat a supper of K-rations. There was a big flash and explosion outside our cave! We hugged the ground and held our breaths. We heard a report from the direction of Philippsbourg and, an instant later, another flash-explosion, again in the vicinity of our cave. Lieutenant Brogan was hopping around trying to find his boots and socks; the messengers had scrambled out of the cave. It was a frantic few minutes. I could see the flash of a tank gun coming from a part of Philippsbourg which we knew to be in our hands, and I realized that we were being fired on by our own troops. Only because of poor visibility had we not yet received a hit. After what seemed like an eternity, I contacted our company CP. It in turn contacted Battalion, and the firing was stopped, but not until we had grown a few years older in a matter of minutes. It seemed that someone had forgotten to tell the tankers that our hill was in friendly hands."

Over on the east ridge, WYOMING A Company had spent a frustrating afternoon. Repeated efforts had been unsuccessful in dislodging the enemy from their dug-in positions on the top of the ridge. Then Lieutenant Vaught had called for artillery to be placed on the objective. The A Co men watched and listened while friendly guns zeroed in on the target with tentative firings. Then, having satisfied themselves that the range was right, the artillerymen opened up with many guns. Pfc Clifford E. Warre would remember later that "Round after round crashed down on the Krauts' positions. This kept up until late afternoon. By then, there weren't many of them left alive, and the rest had pulled back. We moved up without any trouble and took over the hill." The east ridge with "Bornstein's Knob" crowning it was the A Co initial objective for that day. By the time the Company was on the initial objective, it was too late to continue on to the final objective, the hill which rose above the north edge of town. Darkness was close at hand.

Early on the morning of the 4th, Sergeant Steiner, of WRECKER 1st Battalion Hqs Company, made his usual visit to the battalion CP to deliver the morning report. "Emerging from the CP, I was amazed to see Sgt Schrage and Cpl Eucker herding a dozen or more German prisoners from the house where the radio crew was located. The Germans had infiltrated back there the night before and had gotten into the basement." The event was probably a sequel to the action in which K Co's Lieutenant Donahue made his capture of the survivors from the enemy patrol which had been ambushed the night before. What seems likely was that Donahue turned the POW's over to the two noncoms who were readily available at the scene of the capture.

That morning there was a final episode marking the end of the magnificent George Turner's unofficial tour with WRECKER. An affidavit of 1st Lt Clark M. Richardson, 3rd Bn/275th Inf surgeon, describes the event: "At approximately 0900 hours on the morning of 4 Jan, I was in the 3rd Battalion command post when an extremely heavy concentration of mortar and artillery fire began to fall on us. Capt Andrew F. Landen, a 275th Infantry medical officer, came in and informed me that it was necessary to evacuate several severely wounded men from the 1st Battalion aid station in the church--on which the enemy had registered its artillery--to the more secure location of the rear aid station. I asked for a volunteer. Immediately a man climbed into the truck, turned it around, and backed it up the street to the church. Then he helped load four litter cases and eight walking-wounded into the back of the vehicle. Completely ignoring the terrific enemy bombardment, this man climbed into the truck cab and fearlessly drove to the rear aid station. He was Pfc George B. Turner, 499th Armored Field Artillery Battalion."

The moving of the wounded may have been a preliminary step in the evacuation of the aid station from the church. T 4 Nelson has described other activities there that morning: "At daylight several fellows from the regimental aid station arrived in a truck. They announced that the Battalion's medical team was being replaced to go back to Niederbronn with the truck to take a break. I doubted that it would really happen that way, but still I was in favor of it. Things had been quiet for several hours, and the men seemed in good spirits. Suddenly another barrage started. One of the first shells made a direct hit on the front of the church. Rubble fell into the sanctuary and the whole building was filled with dense black smoke. A battalion staff officer came in and shouted at us to get out of there. The whole crew who had just arrived from Niederbronn ran out and down the embankment to the street and piled into the truck. It took off.

"Captain Ferree and I were left there. There were still a few German wounded left in the station, and I asked the captain what to do about them. We couldn't go out the front door, and the hall in the rear was too choked with debris to permit taking a litter that way. The staff officer came in again and started shouting to get out and leave the Germans. He made up our minds for us. We headed for the door in the back. On the way I passed a wounded German officer, who made a sign for me to stop. He grinned widely when I did, reached into his overcoat pocket, and handed me a potato-masher hand grenade. I just gaped at him, took the grenade, and went on. The German's grin seemed to be saying: 'You see, I could have blown us all up if I had chosen to!'

"Captain Ferree went out the door and turned to go down the embankment toward the street. I called him back to suggest that we had better take the path through the woods, where there would be less firing. He followed me then, and we went past the house I had visited the day before and reached our battalion CP. We were told to take the first vehicle we could to go back to Niederbronn. It turned out to be a jeep. When we got out of Philippsbourg, I felt relieved to be heading away from the action. We passed a column of infantry moving the opposite way, single file on both sides of the road. I learned later that they were probably part of the 1st Battalion/274th Infantry."

After the abandonment of the WRECKER 3rd Battalion aid station at Main Forks during the morning of 2 January, its staff had set up operations in the stone barn adjacent to the 1st Battalion command post at the south end of Philippsbourg. It was a better location under the circumstances that had developed, and personnel of the 1st Battalion medical staff who had left their aid station still in operation at the church up the street appear to have gathered at the aid station in the barn, where they made themselves useful or were put to work. There was a steady influx of casualties to keep everyone busy and little opportunity or inclination to find out where people belonged and send them there. Consequently a joint 3rd-1st battalion aid station seems to have evolved and to have been in business by the time the station in the church was finally evacuated.

Later in the day Lieutenant Richardson, the 3rd Battalion surgeon, established an aid station in a farmhouse some distance to the south of town. A procedure was established according to which immediate treatment was administered at the forward station in the stone barn, then the treated wounded were taken back to the rear station whenever the situation permitted. Second-echelon evacuation--to facilities providing longer-term treatment--by ambulances was conducted from the rear station. The 1st and 3rd battalion medical sections continued their combined operation for the remainder of the 275th Infantry's stay in Philippsbourg.

With the east ridge partially cleared of enemy during the morning, it was possible to get the one D Co mortar section remaining in Philippsbourg into firing positions in the draw at the south end of the ridge. The emplacement of the mortars posed a problem of finding an OP from which to direct their fire, and the D Co commander, Captain Wallace, selected the bell tower of the church as his solution. It could have been Wallace himself (although he doesn't remember doing so) who twice ordered the two 1st Battalion medics remaining in the church to get out. He is certain that the

aid station had been evacuated from it when he climbed up into the tower leaving a radio man in the vestry below to relay his instructions to the mortar firing positions. He recalls that his targets were distributed from Main Forks--closest in--to the rocky prominence on the ridge beyond Philippsbourg Pond. Wallace: "Lieutenant Heck of 3rd Battalion was on the ground outside the church shouting up target-change advice--I could not see all of the points we were trying to hit at Main Forks. After we had been in operation for some time, we drew some pretty accurate artillery fire, including some hits on the church, and I decided it was time to get out. When I left the church, I noted at least one apparently severely wounded German soldier lying partially under a pew." Wallace estimates that his stay up atop the tower lasted about 45 minutes, which was long enough to get the mortars registered on the most attractive targets. Other arrangements for directing the section's fire were evidently made after he left the tower. Docken, the C Co BAR-man, would remember that the mortar fire continued to be effective after Wallace came down.

It was probably around midday when, descending from the east ridge, WRECKER C Co's 2nd Platoon proceeded into the south end of the village and dispersed up the main street among the houses. Part of the 1st Platoon was already there--including Docken and other members of the 1st squad. The 3rd Platoon remained in its foxholes on the nose of the adjacent ridge to the south, just to the east of the Niederbronn road. It was to stay there, guarding the south entrance to Philippsbourg and the command and support installations clustered at the end of the village, until the 1st Battalion moved out of Philippsbourg after nightfall a day later. The Wysocki and Rusley groups from C Co's Weapons Platoon also remained in place, respectively, on the west face of the east ridge and at the south end of that ridge. Another group which included Oscar Coleman and other 1st Platoon members was in the same general area.

The Afternoon Assault up Main Street

The origins of the late afternoon attack up the main street of Philippsbourg are unexplained in any regimental records. It was, perhaps, organized by Colonel Malloy, who is known to have been in the village that day. Tanks, the same Shermans that had been driven to cover by the 88's that morning, were involved, or at least their involvement was intended. There seem to have been four to five tanks in the morning assault; so the platoon of the 47th Tank Battalion employed in the 3 January attack either received one or two

replacement tanks and crews or was relieved during the interim by another platoon. During the morning attack, the tanks had been driven to cover at the south end of the village.

The tankers had received a bad mauling during their first day in Philippsbourg. Too, they were undoubtedly aware that the American infantry with which they were teamed was without battle experience. That they showed little enthusiasm for the fight on 4 January or the following day is understandable--though not excusable, no matter whether it was the same or a replacement tank platoon. Their attitude may have been exemplified by one tank commander who refused, in no uncertain terms, to obey the WRECKER 1st Battalion CO's order to reassemble in preparation for the afternoon attack. Whether or not this tank did, in fact, remain out of the action that afternoon is not known--moreover, it is not known whether more than one of the tanks advanced. One tank did advance; perhaps others did and withdrew. At the end of the day's action one tank remained on the main street and was posted there overnight opposite the church.

During the night of 3-4 Jan Lieutenant Brown had taken stock of his K Co resources remaining after the previous day's action. The close-in fighting had been pretty hot. Lieutenant Brons and 39 of his 1st platoon, in addition, some part of the Company's machine-gun section, and one or two sections of M Co's 2nd Platoon heavy-machine-gun crews all had been missing ever since the German attack at dawn. Rosen, the commo sergeant, had also been missing after day-break, but then had reappeared late in the afternoon. He had been trapped in a house while attempting to get the telephone line to the 1st Platoon patched up. Tec 5 George J. Buncic, a medic, was also missing. (Buncic later would appear unscathed. He would be killed the following month during the drive on Saarbruecken.) Six men had been wounded and evacuated. According to "Kingsmen," "Just before midnight, good news had come to the CP. Lieutenant Brons and one man had arrived there after making their way through the enemy lines. Five more men had waited to see whether the other two would get through. Brons went back for them and brought them out shortly after midnight. It seemed to Lieutenant Brown that these were the only remaining effectives from the force which had manned the roadblock on the Bitche road. Brons and the other six had become separated from the rest of the force during the withdrawal from the roadblock position at daybreak." Brown had maintained contact with groups of the Company's 2nd and 3rd platoons fighting from houses near the company CP after the German forces had entered the village. However, contact with the more remote groups had become increasingly difficult. K Co's losses up to that time appeared to Brown to have been

about 40 percent.

No details are remembered or recorded concerning K Co's involvement with the Americans' morning counterattack into Philippsbourg, the one initiated by four or five Sherman tanks accompanied by two squads of riflemen from B Company/274th. Similarly, this advance appears to have had no noteworthy effect on the Company's dispositions in the village. "Kingsmen": "The 4th saw continued attempts by the Germans to drive us out of the town. With the Company greatly depleted, we were able to hold our positions south of Main Forks and around our CP. In the afternoon, Pvt Rafael Sanchez of the 2nd Platoon was killed by snipers while defending a post along the main street to the north of the CP. Heavy mortar and artillery fire fell on the south part of town continuously, and the CP took a good many hits. Late in the afternoon, we made a push forward through the town with tanks in support. However, when we were ordered to withdraw, such gains as had been made were abandoned. The Company retired to positions held at the beginning of the day." Heck, the Weapons Platoon leader, remembers that he and other K Co members participated in this tank-infantry advance late in the day, when daylight was dimming. Other American foot troops were present, but he didn't know who they were. In the confusion, the group Heck was with was fired on from the rear--perhaps from an isolated enemy pocket, perhaps from American-operated weapons. This may have been, in some part, responsible for the decision which brought the K Co force to give up its gains from this advance and return to its former positions.

K Co's troops had not only to contend with just the enemy lodgment in Philippsbourg from which they pressed on K's defenses along the main street from the north. At the K Co CP Heck was conscious of the enemy's presence in the west side of town, along the railroad tracks. Earlier in the day, he spotted a German moving stealthily from that area to go up on the west ridge, also in enemy hands. The German threw caution to the winds and scampered full speed up the slope as Heck fired up a full magazine from a captured burp gun, churning the ground all around the fleeing German. The skedaddler apparently made it to cover having suffered nothing more than loss of breath. Later that morning, the enemy threat from the west side of Philippsbourg was eliminated by the advance of the 274th Infantry's C Company to its objective on the ridge to the west of the village.

When the American in-village force went into their positions for the night after the completion of the tank-infantry attack, one Sherman remained in the main street in the vicinity of the K Co CP, where it could be covered by WRECKER sentries. Any other tanks in the attack must have withdrawn to the south end of Philippsbourg. Edward

Fischer, S Sgt in K's Wpns Platoon, has recalled that during the night he and his men at the machine-gun position adjacent to the K Co CP spotted a German patrol as it moved down the street toward the remaining tank. They mowed down or dispersed the intruders with machine-gun and rifle fire; afterwards three of the enemy patrol members lay in the street near the tank. At daybreak Fischer and Sgt Harold B. Hall left their position to go out in the street and check the three--two of the Germans were wounded, the third one unscathed--and took them prisoner. During the action in which the capture was made, Hall had the seat of his pants chewed up by machine-gun fire, but received not a scratch. One of the German POW's stated that his patrol's mission the night before had been to attack the American tank with anti-tank grenades.

In the late afternoon attack up the main street, the C Co/275th force which participated included the 2nd Platoon and part of the 1st Platoon, perhaps as much as a squad. Casualties taken the day before and during the morning of 4 Jan had reduced Holmes' 2nd platoon to about half strength. Along with the group from K Company which made the advance, there were probably some others--individuals from the 1st and 3rd battalion headquarters and heavy weapons elements who had voluntarily attached themselves or had been assigned to the assault troops.

The advance started up the main street from the south end of the village while the enemy mortar and artillery fire continued to rain down--it was about 1530. How and when the tank(s) advanced and relative positions of tank(s) and infantry are not remembered. The enemy infantry reacted firing from their positions in houses as the attackers passed the church. Higley of C Company would later remember that "the German artillery and mortars quit firing as we moved in close to their riflemen in the houses. The duel from house to house was on again. Germans came scrambling out and were taken prisoner. However, Mearse, my BAR-man was still thinking about our young medic killed by a sniper that morning and was chopping some of them down before they could surrender. The going was slow, and it was almost dark when we halted.

"At the end of the advance, my squad was at a house on the right side of the street within 100 yards of Main Forks. Obliquely across the street from us was a stairway leading down from the street level to the flats behind the houses on that side. At the head of the stairway was the frozen body of a German sergeant in his greatcoat. His body was still there the next day when we left Philippsbourg. Shortly before the attack ended, I had taken some men around a house and, preceding them around a house corner, I came face to face with a German officer leading some men toward the same

corner. We both hit the ground firing and we both missed. Then he and his men scurried back the opposite way--I and my men did likewise. My squad outposted the house where we had halted. Thomas' squad did the same in a house across the street from ours. The Germans were just up the street. Up around the corner from us, the group from our 1st Platoon, and perhaps some others, were in a house on the side street. Abruptly, the crashing of shells into the village died down. The whispering of projectiles passing both ways overhead and the booming to the north and south of us were evidence that the artillery duel continued."

Elsewhere there is a brief description of K Co participation in this attack. Members of K Co who participated in this and in other attacks up the main street gained the impression that it was their own unit which gave the most weight to each of these offensive efforts. They remember only that other GI's were also there--from what units they did not know, or perhaps they've forgotten. C Co veterans of these actions have similar recollections. The disorganization of the 275th Infantry forces in Philippsbourg, which was consequent from enemy pressure and recurring communications problems, surely resulted in there being less coordination among attacking elements than anyone there would have liked to admit. This, as much as anything else, could have given rise to the individual doughboy's belief that it was his unit that was bearing the brunt of the fighting.

When darkness came the C Co 2nd Platoon outposts on the main street prepared for the night's vigil. Higley: "Thomas had posted a guard in the doorway almost directly across the street, and we posted one in our house's street-front doorway. Occasionally the guards fired at Germans up the street who seemed to be trying to work their way toward us. For my squad there were two guards on the ground floor at all times while the rest of us were in the basement getting some sleep for a change. Some of us field-stripped our M-1's and cleaned them in the dark--I did mine, which had become balky that day. Around midnight, while I was taking my turn in the doorway, I halted a jeep coming north on the main street. There was an American full colonel next to the driver and another officer in the back seat. When I explained that we held the last American position on the street and that the Germans were up the street just a little way, the colonel thanked me and told his driver, 'Let's get the hell out of here!'" The driver needed no further urging. Higley was to learn later that the colonel was the 274th Infantry commander, Sam Conley, who had been looking for the command post of his 1st Battalion at the time. Along with Conley in the jeep was Capt Bernard A. Nurre, of his staff, and T 5 Stanley H. Pratte, his driver. Pratte was slightly wounded during the drive up the main street and

back that night. Years later Nurre would remember the drive as one of the more anxious times of his first days in combat.

During the night, the enemy attempted to overcome a C Co outpost in the house on the side street up and around the corner from the Higley and Thomas outposts. The third outpost had evidently been set up at the end of the advance that evening at the same time as those organized by the two 2nd Platoon squad leaders. Private Howard Leonard, of C Co's 1st Platoon, was standing guard at the third outpost and detected the enemy's first stealthy probe. The crash of Leonard's M-1 going off told the enemy raiders that their attempt to surprise the outpost was a failure. Opening fire, the raiders launched a series of one- and two-man rushes to close in on their objective. Leonard met each new thrust with quick shots from his Garand, and presently the enemy abandoned the effort. A body count the next day of Germans strewn along the side street who were thought to have fallen to Leonard's fire came to a dozen. He was awarded the Silver Star.

The extemporaneous manner in which various WRECKER men took a hand in the battle is exemplified by the account of Virgil C. Williams, a Service Co truck driver. "As best as I can remember, Sgt Malvern Irwin and I were in a stone house at one end of the town. We had spent a bitter cold night there. Early the next morning, we figured the Germans would attack again. There was an American tank in front of the stone building that had been hit and burned the day before. All personnel were dead about the tank. Sergeant Irwin--'Cheroot' as we called him--and I decided to get the .50 caliber machine gun off the tank and be ready to use it. So we did. It had been badly burned but would fire two rounds and quit. After trying to set the head-space and adjust the barrel to make it fire better and a few drinks of Schnapps to warm us up, we saw the Germans coming down the hill through the woods. In Sergeant Irwin's words, 'Here come the so-and-so's in their long, grey overcoats, Pappy. I'll feed the gun! You fire it!' After a couple of tries, with the gun firing two rounds and then quitting, we poured some oil on the bolt mechanism. All at once, thank God, it began to fire steadily, spitting hot oil. So Sergeant Irwin and I, to the best of my knowledge, helped turn back a lot of Hitler's forces."

Williams' description of the event suggests that the enemy troops seen and engaged were probably on the west ridge and may, under pressure of the WYOMING C Co advance on that ridge, have been withdrawing into the west side of the village when he and Irwin succeeded in getting their balky weapon to open up.

Two nights before Sgt Mort Herbert, a mortar squad leader

in A Co's Weapons Platoon, had been sent by Captain Millhiser with another man on a westward patrol from Angelsberg to contact B Company. The two had started out in the darkness of the predawn hours. Herbert remembers well the incessant shelling of the A Co position on the hill during the night when he left on the patrol. The darkness combined with their lack of familiarity with the terrain to thwart the pair's efforts to find B Company--other such failures that night by patrols whose members were more knowledgeable of B's location have been noted elsewhere. Probing their way in the dark, the two men were doubtlessly reminded of the enemy's proximity by the clamor of nearby firefights. The search had been continued after daylight had arrived on 3 January. Herbert: "We found a weapons carrier and its driver. The vehicle was stuck up to its wheel hubs in mud, ice, and snow. We tried to help the driver freeing it, but it wouldn't budge. However, we decided to stay there--we knew there were German troops close by, and there was a .50 caliber machine gun on the vehicle. Sure enough, it wasn't long before we were spotted. We were able, however, for a day or more, to make any enemy who appeared keep a respectful distance from us--they wanted no part of that .50. We finally surrendered under the guns of an approaching German tank."

By the time Sergeant Herbert and the two GI's with him were taken prisoner, A Company had long since departed its position on the height Angelsberg and had probably deployed in defensive outposts securing WRECKER Cannon Company's gun positions just southeast of Philippsbourg. Falkenberg, the objective of Herbert and his companion when the two had left Millhiser, had become effectively cut off after the enemy recognized the threat to his rear posed by the American force (B Company) on that ridge and took precautions in this regard.

It was before dawn, the morning after B Company's 4-man patrol had left Falkenberg in an effort to reach Philippsbourg, when Lieutenant Broughton received word from the company CP to alert his men to hold their fire should a small party approach--"Our patrol was expected back from Philippsbourg." After daybreak one of Broughton's men passed the word that he had spotted some movement. Broughton: "As I scrambled downslope to have a look, one of my men whispered to me: 'Sir, he's coming.'

"'German or American?'

"'German!'

"Shoot him!' He did, and that started the battle. My men had held their fire, and, as a result, the whole German patrol was out in the open and exposed when we opened up. We killed many of them before they withdrew and took no casualties ourselves. Our first man to fire did so when the

lead German was within 20 yards--he had shot his man between the eyes. I supposed this was the mark of good training--then, remembering my man's hesitance to pull the trigger at that range, decided we still had a few things to learn. At any rate, the enemy gained some respect for our marksmanship and didn't try that approach again."

In Philippsbourg Major Duffie tied up some routine loose ends left by the B Company's isolation. He appointed Sprat, B Co supply sergeant, as acting first sergeant to handle B Co administrative matters. In addition to the Company's kitchen and supply sections, Sprat was now responsible for some B Co men who had somehow gotten back from Falkenberg after the German attack. Among these were the four members of the patrol sent back the previous night, including S Sgt Glendon C. Longworth, Sgt Clifford M. Inscho, and Pfc Menth.

On Hill No. 30, Captain Long and his officers were taking stock of the situation. Long: "The five officers--Long, Cannon, 1st Lt Edward W. Moeller, Turner, and Glass--do a lot of serious thinking, talking, and planning while huddled in this round, air-cooled hole dug for a CP, and each of us spend a great deal of time as a third man in each foxhole explaining the procedures we have drawn up and visiting with the men. We would spend even more time with them if we could afford the risk of too much disturbance of our camouflage. The men's eyes appear to be growing larger and their faces shrinking. We have not had the total equivalent of one full meal per man since leaving our assembly area in Philippsbourg--almost 48 hours ago."

Most of the Company had foot problems in varying degrees of severity, having switched from shoepacs to better-marching but less protective combat boots before their initial departure from Philippsbourg, at nightfall on 1 January. In its council of war, the command group addressed itself to the dilemma confronting the Company. The continued pursuit of its defensive mission, with the possibility of relief or resupply apparently diminishing, seemed to be bringing I Company inexorably toward ruin. On the other hand, the enemy, whose appearances indicated was having the better of it in the engagement to the south, was deployed squarely in the way, blocking any I Co withdrawal route. So a withdrawal, no matter how well executed, ran a high risk of involving I's enfeebled personnel in another ambush. Its lack of communications was a factor denying to the council any appreciation of friendly forces' capabilities and intentions. This lack would also prevent I Co from coordinating with friendly forces actions it might take based on any decision the council might make. Finally the council broke up having reached a decision--a withdrawal would be made the next day, the Company being prepared to fight its way through whatever counteraction the enemy might

offer.

Dwight Ritchie, the 1st Platoon rifleman, has remembered the privations of Hill No. 30 besiegement: "I had one K-ration meal, which I ate the first night. I saved my candy and sugar and shared it with my foxhole partner for the next couple of days. While in this spot, we heard that B Company was wiped out and we didn't hold out much hope. There was mortar fire which came quite close but hit no one I can recall." Howard Mumm's account elaborates: "Going without food for 3 days is difficult, and the uncertainty of the situation took its toll on us, as did the bitterly cold weather. On one occasion, we saw an enemy patrol of about 12 men approach in single file. They were about 300 yards away and seemed to be unsure to our exact location. We had carefully sited our machine guns and had them covered perfectly, but held our fire. One of our men decided we were doomed--the strain was too much for him. Days without food, water, communications, and with frequent shelling while he watched their effects on his companions had made a nervous wreck out of him. He prepared to surrender to the patrol--removed his ammunition belt, dropped his rifle, and announced his intention to walk toward the Germans with hands raised. At that precise moment the German patrol halted and, after a short discussion, turned about and retraced its approach route, finally disappearing."

The Martin story indicates that even this doughty soldier was thinking that I Co's chances of avoiding capture weren't good: "I think that it was on the second morning when Captain Long's runner woke me up. On my way to the CP foxhole, I noticed a Jerry POW in a foxhole. His arms were tied behind him with telephone wire. 'What in the hell are you doing tying up a POW?! Those bastards don't need much of an excuse to kill us! But this will really cook our goose!' The prisoner was untied. The Jerry thanked me--he could speak a little English. He gave me a notebook which listed the names of our men wounded in the ambush two nights before. I took this to Captain Long."

Following the council decision to withdraw the Company from its Hill No. 30 position back toward Philippsbourg, Captain Long had decided to send out a 3-man patrol to reconnoiter a route for I Company to follow in its break-out maneuver--the reason for Martin's being summoned to the CP foxhole. Lieutenant Glass, S Sgt Merlin L. McDuffee, and Martin were sent on this mission. Moving west and south from Hill No. 30, the 3-man party approached the crest of the high ridge that dominates the north side of Philippsbourg. A German artillery OP team on the west end of the ridge failed to notice the American coming up behind them. Martin: "One German with field glasses was running around a big rock calling back corrections and targets for the others

to radio back to their artillery. There were six of them in all. Why they didn't see us, I'll never know. Then, as I was signaling for Lieutenant Glass to go in from my right and Sergeant McDuffee to go in from my left, the one who was spotting looked right at me. With a yell, I jumped up firing the grease gun and running toward the Germans. They all took off, but four fell, tumbling down the steep slope. The other two were still running with great strides as my magazine ran out of ammunition. Reloading, we grabbed the maps, shot up the radio, and took their abandoned weapons. We headed back for the I Co position. Shells were starting to come in from both ways."

Evacuation of German Casualties

During the first 2 days of fighting in Philippsbourg, the enemy had suffered serious losses, but there are few statistics by which to measure their dimensions. D Co's Captain Wallace appears to have been assigned the task of dealing for his battalion with the large accumulation of POW's and enemy wounded. In this regard, Wallace remembers that there were many enemy dead in the streets and ditches. "We had 50 or 60 captured Germans and many wounded on the second day of the battle. We kept them in a barn for many hours before sending them to the rear. Our battalion surgeon was too busy to handle the enemy wounded--he couldn't keep up with our own casualties." Late in the afternoon Wallace ordered the evacuation of POW's on hand, giving the job to his Sergeant Cloonan. Cloonan: "Before dark, I was assigned by Captain Wallace to take a detail of men and a jeep with a .30 caliber machine gun mounted on it to escort all the captured German prisoners back to the regimental headquarters in Niederbronn. On the way back, German soldiers continued to surrender to us. They came out of the ditches and down out of the woods, signaling with white pieces of cloth tied to their weapons." On a postwar visit to Philippsbourg, one of the WRECKER veterans was told by a local resident that the German side during the battle had, under cover of darkness, hauled many wagon-loads of dead and wounded out of the village.

One of the German prisoners captured by WRECKER A Company of Angelsberg indicated during his subsequent interrogation that his regiment, the 456th, may have had plans to push through the Dambach-Philippsbourg gap--plans which apparently were canceled when the 456th had been sent on 3 January directly to Philippsbourg to relieve the 476th there. The information disclosed by the POW pertained to the 456th's 1st Battalion, which was engaged in and around Philippsbourg on 4 January. The 3rd Company had 60-70 men left; the 2nd

Company had been about 80-men strong on 1 Jan. Each of the three rifle companies in the Battalion had two heavy machine guns attached to it from the 4th Company. Before leaving Neunhoffen en route to Philippsbourg on 3 January, the Battalion, according to the POW, had had supporting it two Tiger tanks, two or three 75 mm anti-tank guns and one 88 mm gun. (The 45th Div G-2 section, in recording the information supplied by this POW, noted that his identification of the two enemy tanks as "Tigers" was suspect.)

For Service Co's Corporal Barquist and Private Hofstra, 4 January turned out to be quite eventful. Barquist remembers that he and Hofstra, shortly before midnight, had crawled in the back of a truck to get some sleep--in Niederbronn. "Right away the captain (Marvon Glosop) ordered the trucks unloaded, and it was one o'clock in the morning. Unload them we did. Then we had to go along as guards with supplies being sent up forward. As we drove toward the front, reinforcements were marching along in the same direction. It was dark until we reached the front (at Philippsbourg). There we found several houses burning, also several trucks and one tank. We parked the truck and saw wounded being brought out of the woods where there was fighting. The wounded were being loaded on trucks as bullets whizzed around in a night that was lighted up bright as day. I was expecting to stop a bullet most any time, but we got two of the trucks loaded with wounded Americans and the last one, with Jerries--14 of them.

"The truck loaded with Jerry prisoners was so crowded that I had to sit on the tailgate (while guarding them). We stopped up the road a piece and picked up three more POW's--one of them was shot in the guts and was bleeding pretty badly. We threw him into the truck and left the two unwounded Jerries lying on the ground as we took off again. The first hospital that we came to took all of the Americans but would not take the Jerries. Almost all of them had some sort of wound, although I did not know it at the time." Barquist went on to relate how, after an all-night 100-mile-long search, the truck driver was finally able to find medical facilities able to accept the wounded Germans. All of them were already overcrowded with American casualties.

T 5 Nelson and Captain Ferree, after a hectic 36 hours in Philippsbourg at the 1st Battalion aid station in the church, had been sent back to Niederbronn. They had hitched a ride in a jeep to make the trip. Nelson: "Back in the comparative quiet of the regimental aid station, we were greeted by the rest of our crew, who had arrived earlier in the truck with the wounded evacuated from the church. Also there were those medics who had left the church in such a hurry during the action the day before. I was relieved to see that they had gotten back okay. Most of us just lolled

around resting and listening to all kinds of rumors. I finally got up enough ambition to join a few others in shaving and cleaning up a bit. I had hardly gotten started when orders came for us to return to the front. Where would we go? We (the 1st Battalion medics) had lost both vehicles and all of our equipment. It was decided that we would work out of the 3rd Battalion aid station. We found their house on the outskirts of Philippsbourg--a much quieter place than the one we had picked. At least they hadn't gotten out ahead of their battalion command post." As noted above, the aid station at which Nelson arrived at the edge of Philippsbourg, was operated jointly by the medical staffs on both WRECKER battalions there.

Maj Ezra I. Silver was the 275th Inf regimental surgeon. He recalled that, after the German attack had broken into Philippsbourg on 3 January, his regimental station in Niederbronn became "the rear evacuation facility for the two battalions in Philippsbourg, just a few miles north of us. My battalion aid stations there had been overrun and captured. Casualties were coming through my aid station at a rapid rate, and all of the chaplains were busily engaged in trying to comfort the wounded men. I cannot recall the name of the chaplain of the Methodist denomination who was with us. (It is believed that the following incident described by Silver involved Chaplain D.B. Webber, a Baptist.)

"I always remembered him as a very stiff and unyielding person. He had constantly lectured the boys on the vices of drink, gambling, and smoking. He was with me as I gave care to a very badly wounded infantryman, with a shattered leg and wounds in the lower abdomen. I had just finished my splinting and dressing of the wounds and started plasma going. The morphine which I had administered earlier was beginning to take effect. The pain was diminishing, and this young boy turned to me and said: 'Have you got a cigarette, Doc?' This strait-laced minister took a package of cigarettes out of his own pocket, placed one between the lips of the wounded man, and held a lighted match to it. The boy took two drags on the cigarette. Then every muscle in his body tensed, his eyes rolled back, and, in a moment, he had passed on--from a blood clot which had reached his lung. The chaplain went outside the aid station and wept." The chaplain wasn't the only one deeply affected--a regimental staff officer remembers talking to a very dejected Major Silver a few minutes after the young soldier's passing.

There were innumerable instances during the war in which fire was exchanged between aircraft and ground troops of the same side. On 4 January such an incident occurred in the vicinity of Muehlthal. An American air strike was expected by 2nd Battalion, and its companies had been alerted. Lieutenant Southard, leader of the F Co platoon at

Teufelsbrueckerhof, "received a message to put out our ground panel--the Air Corps was expected to do a job for us up the valley. In a short time, 12 to 14 American P-47's showed up flying over the valley we were in. All of the men nearby came out of the holes and houses to cheer them. They flew on, and then we heard the Germans shooting with everything they had. Soon they were back over us flying single file, in a great circle. The lead aircraft suddenly banked into a dive heading in our direction--his machine guns were blazing and, then, bombs fell away from his underside."

Cruell: "I happened to be across the valley from the battalion CP. Several planes came low down the valley from the west. During their first firing pass, we recognized them as P-47's and I yelled at the men who were firing to stop. However, when the planes returned firing again, everyone opened up, including me. If you've ever tried to hit a fast-moving aircraft firing a .50 caliber machine gun with someone holding the front legs of its ground mount up in the air to give you enough elevation, then you'll understand why we did no visible damage. I believe it was on the third pass when they released at least two bombs, one of which fell directly on the culvert wherein an Anti Tank Co man had taken cover. We dashed over there, but there wasn't much we could do.

"During one of the passes, a jeep came racing north along the road. When the driver saw the plane coming, he swerved the vehicle sharply to the right into the ditch, almost turning it over. It was our motor officer, Lieutenant Leitner, and his driver. Leitner later joked about his driver's nearly killing him saving his life."

The WRECKER Anti Tank Co history records concerning the P-47 incident: "On 4 January we were subjected to strafing and bombing by P-47 aircraft. Our T Sgt Joseph J. Brown was killed when a bomb made a direct hit on a bridge under which he had taken cover. Two planes, supposedly manned by Germans, attacked the gun positions of the 3rd squad, 3rd Platoon, at Philippsbourg. One bomb hit 75 yards in front of the gun and directly opposite the bazooka position of Pfc Eugene Lewandowski. He came out of the smoke and fallen trees unharmed, but badly shaken." Anti Tank Co 2nd Platoon's Sergeant Byerley would recall concerning the P-47 affair that his platoon had its gun positions in the vicinity of Teufelsbrueckerhof close to where his squad's 57 mm gun had engaged the enemy tanks on the morning of 2 Jan. Byerley: "There we were bombed by captured P-47's. We lost five men in that fracas, including Brown, our platoon sergeant."

The Anti Tank Co view accords with that of others whose impression was that the aircraft, painted black, were enemy operated. L Company's Richard Becker disagrees--"They were

our planes all right. I came by the information later that they had been given a mission of bombing a valley next to the one that the 2nd Battalion was in. They circled several times trying to pick out the correct valley. Well, they erred. I recall there was an American artillery observer's 'Cub' plane circling overhead. The P-47's never bothered him. These planes had the standard white-star insignia."

Becker became actively involved with the aircraft during the strike: "We had set up our L Co command post in a farmhouse. After the planes' bombing run, I took the mail clerk upstairs, and the two of us started firing out the windows with our rifles. One of the P-47's made a firing pass at the house, and, afterward, I couldn't find Pvt Williams, the mail clerk. After I called for him several times, he came crawling out from under a bed. I thought that was funny—a feather bed sure wasn't much protection from .50 caliber bullets!

"We later were informed that this was a mistake made by the Army Air Corps. Well, there are a couple of things that happened showing that is was more than just a mistake—it was a careless mistake. Two of the bombs hit quite close to the aid station, clearly marked with a huge red cross on a white canvas background. After the bomb run, a tank destroyer with a large white star on its top was pulled out in an open field to show the pilots we were friendly troops. Still they came back again and strafed the area. We could see their markings plainly—so they should have seen ours on the ground."

Some recall that a formal Air Corps complaint was made about the firing at their aircraft by U.S. troops in the Muehlthal area that day. Regarding this, Becker has commented: "No one fired on the planes until they made their strafing run. Then the Air Corps was unhappy about our firing back. We knew that the Krauts had captured some of our P-47's and were flying them with American insignia (sic). We had to assume that they were Krauts, especially after they bombed the aid station." Most WRECKER witnesses remember that the German-operated P-47's seen during this period were black with small white crosses as markings. However the dilemma posed to the WRECKER foot soldiers in this situation is self-evident. The adjacent valley reportedly being sought by the P-47's for their strike could have been the one to the east, wherein the 275th 1st and 3rd battalions and the 1st Battalion/274th were having all they could handle with the enemy force that had broken into Philippsbourg the day before; or it could have been the valley to the west, the one which leads southward to Reipertswiller, where two battalions of the 313th Infantry were equally hard-pressed.

After the war, the WRECKER 2nd Bn WHITE PAPER described

another happening during the Air Corps strike of 4 Jan, one that surely gave rise to some after-action merriment. At the beginning of the raid a 2nd Battalion staff officer was talking on the CP telephone. The aircraft roared directly overhead on their first pass causing a blast of sound and vibration to come slamming into the building. The alarmed lieutenant raced for the basement furiously gripping the telephone headset, which he had wrenched loose from its connections. In the basement the lieutenant tried briefly to resume his interrupted conversation over the now-dead telephone, then saw the folly of his action.

As a consequence of the enemy threat to drive down the corridor from Baerenthal or envelop Barten's exposed left flank, the 45th Division had allocated a high priority for artillery defensive fires to the sector. Full advantage was taken of this by the 2nd Battalion staff in planning the nighttime securing of the positions with coordinated interdiction firing, not only of supporting artillery but also of the 81mm mortars of H Company. Years later Paul McCoy of G Company remembered keeping track of time at night during his foxhole vigils by counting the friendly artillery rounds whispering overhead. "As I recall, the time between each round was 2 minutes—so 60 rounds meant 2 hours and it was time to wake up your buddy in the foxhole with you to serve his 2-hour tour."

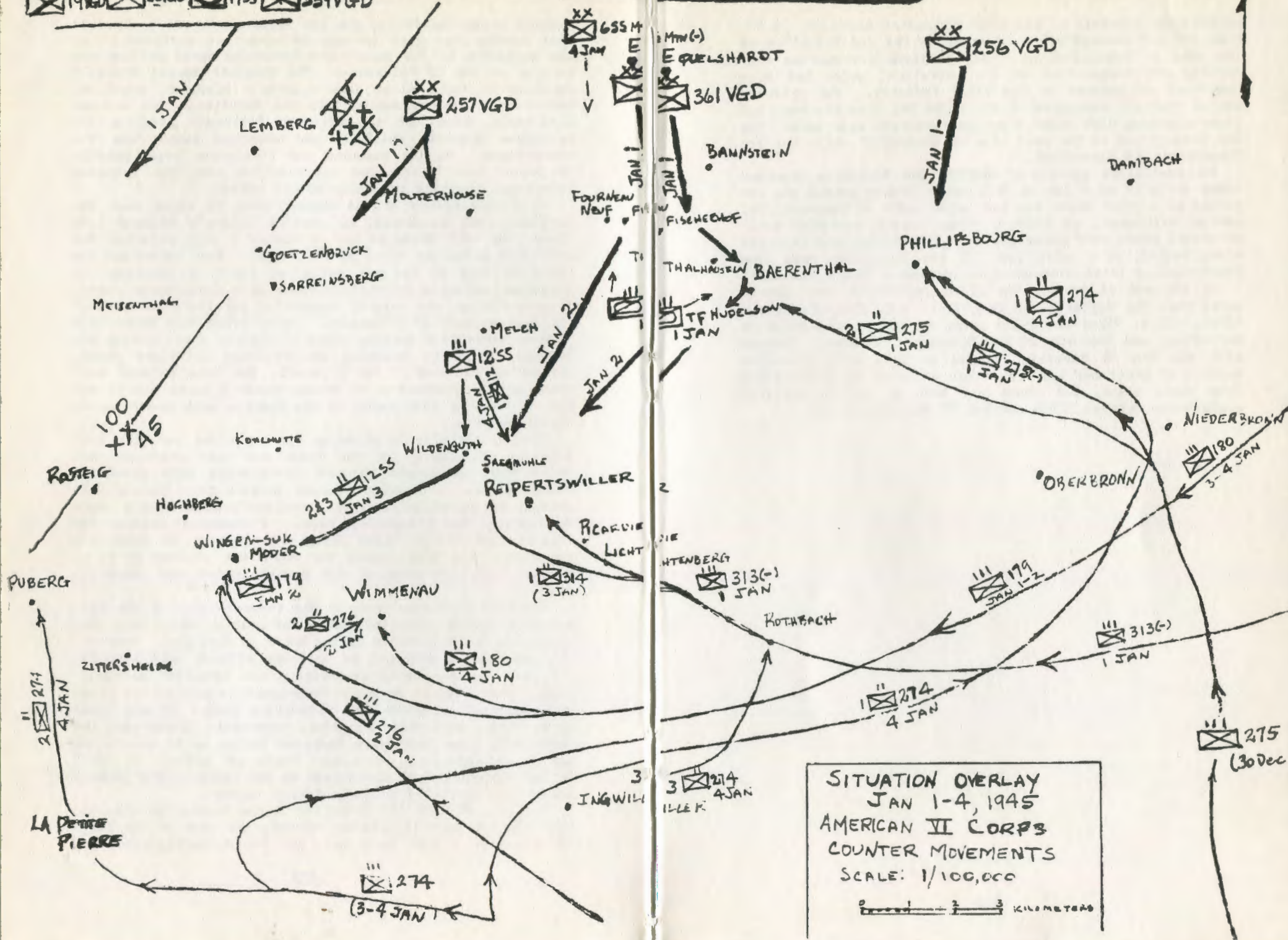
The 2nd Battalion's planning for nighttime security took account, of course, of the flank and rear exposure, and there were consequent patrols coordinated with defensive mortar fires. L Company's Becker recalls that "during this period, we patrolled the 2nd Battalion's main supply route back along the Zinswiller road. I remember leading two separate patrols at night along this route. We never met any enemy, but both nights the route was covered by 81 mm mortar fire, and many of the rounds landed real close to us."

The E Co positions over on the forward-right of the Battalion's sector remained under observation which kept men pinned in their foxholes during hours of daylight. However, the concealment afforded by darkness allowed some movement and gave opportunity to investigate the immediate surroundings. There was an American half-track, stuck in the ditch and abandoned alongside the Zinswiller road. It was found to be loaded with spare clothing, presumably thrown into the vehicle by some Task Force Hudelson outfit as it was in the act of withdrawing. Lieutenant Weeks and members of his E Co 3rd Platoon helped themselves to the tanker field jackets which they preferred to the infantry version.

Opposing WRECKER 2nd Battalion in the Baerenthal area had been the 1st Battalion/952nd Infantry and part of the 815th AA Battalion. Then on 4 Jan, the 1st Battalion/952nd was

XX 19 VGD XX 36 VGD XX 1755 XX 359 VGD

"OPERATION NORDWIND"



SITUATION OVERLAY
 JAN 1-4, 1945
 AMERICAN VI CORPS
 COUNTER MOVEMENTS
 SCALE: 1/100,000
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relieved by elements of the 476th Grenadier Regiment. A PO from the 3rd Company/815th AA taken by the 2nd Battalion on the edge of Baerenthal on 4 Jan provided information concerning the composition of his battalion, which had been committed in support of the 952nd Infantry. The prisoner stated that all companies of the 815th AA, like his own, had three platoons with three 37mm anti-aircraft guns each. The 2nd Company was on the west edge of Baerenthal while the 3rd Company was in Baerenthal.

Reconnaissance patrols of WRECKER 2nd Battalion reported enemy activity on 4 Jan as follows--a 30-man patrol was observed at a point about one half mile south of Obermuehlthal moving northeast; at 1400 a 5-man patrol carrying anti-personnel mines were dispersed by counteraction and left its mines behind, at a point just off the Zinswiller road from Baerenthal, a little over one mile northwest from Zinswiller.

At the end of 4 Jan, the 275th Infantry's Unit Report noted that the Regiment was in contact with elements of the 456th, 476th, 952nd and 953rd enemy regiments; the 815th AA Battalion; and the 6th SS Mtn Division. However, contact with the 6th SS Mountain appears to have been minimal--several of their men had been taken prisoner while separated from their units, but there had been as yet no tactical engagements between 275th and 6th SS Mtn formations.

CHAPTER VI

The Clearing of Philippsbourg

Friday, 5 Jan (+3 to +7 degrees, Fahr.)

According to the 256th VG Div account, the 456th gren Regiment repelled American counterattacks in Philippsbourg on 5 January. In addition, that regiment sent long-range reconnaissance patrols along both sides of the Falkenstein creek valley toward Niederbromm. American resistance halted an attempt by the 456th to start an advance out of Philippsbourg toward Niederbromm. (Unless German probes to the north and east of Philippsbourg repelled by elements of the 1st Battalion/274th Infantry can be interpreted as an attempt advance toward Niederbromm, American accounts take no note of such an action.)

On the left side of the 256th divisional sector, the 481st Grenadier Regiment was busy consolidating its gains of the previous day. In addition, the Regiment was directed to patrol and secure the wooded area between Dambach and Phillippsbourg.

On the right, mobile elements of the 476th Grenadier Regiment were committed in strong reconnaissance patrols in the Baerenthal area in the direction of Obermuehlthal. These operations were facilitated by the arrival in Baerenthal of a Luftwaffe infantry battalion. Attached to the 476th, it was assigned to defend Baerenthal. It spent its initial day there pinned down by continuous American artillery fire. Reconnaissance patrol reports indicated that both slopes of the Zintzel creek valley (the Baerenthal-Zinswiler defile) were strongly defended by American forces.

At daybreak on 4 January, a German battalion of the 952nd Infantry had set out from Thalhaeuseln (on the northwest outskirts of Baerenthal) to move through the gap on the west side of American deployments defending the Zintzel creek valley. Its objective was the exit from the mountains just west of Zinswiler. Its men dragged their heavier equipment and supplies on sleds over some of the roughest terrain in the region. There were some footpaths buried in deep snow; otherwise the German battalion was unassisted in its grim

struggle against the formidable natural obstacles arrayed along its route. Reaching its objective some 24 hours after its departure on the mission (designated "Operation Zinswiller"), the force during the morning of 5 January set up roadblocks along the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road, one of them about 1 1/4 miles from Zinswiller and the second one 500 yards closer to Zinswiller. It was the same battalion that had attacked out of Baerenthal three nights before against the just-arrived WRECKER 2nd Battalion.

The 1st Battalion/952nd Infantry was, in all probability, the "group of about 500 enemy" spotted by American air reconnaissance before noon on the 4th, but the aerial observer's estimate was a gross exaggeration--the Battalion had taken heavy losses in actions around Baerenthal, and its strength most probably ran somewhere between 100 and 200 men. Early the next day the Battalion was able, through a momentary radio contact, to report to its division commander that it had reached its objective--the mountain exit near Zinswiller. During this contact, the roadblock force reported observing heavy American vehicular traffic both ways on the roads from Zinswiller to Baerenthal and to Rothbach (southwest of Zinswiller). Later the 1st Battalion/952nd would report itself to be of insufficient strength to carry out its mission further and would then be recalled.

In addition to the continuing arrival of 6th SS Mtn elements from the north, the 361st VG Division was given reinforcement through the attachment of an infantry regiment of the 257th VG Division, the left flank division of the German XC Corps, which was on the right of the LXXXIX Corps. The NORDWIND attack further west having been generally blunted, the German high command was shifting forces from XC Corps into the Bitche Salient, where NORDWIND had been more successful. Much of the 361st account for 5 January was devoted to outlining its plans for renewing offensive actions at the tip of the salient.

VI Corps G-2 Report of Panzer Threat

The 45th Division G-3 section received a call at 0514 from the 275th Infantry reporting that the previous night had been uneventful -- "We had some patrol action, but that's about all." The WRECKER report was almost identical with those coming in from other units--the enemy had been generally inactive; in one aggressive action, an attempt to infiltrate past forward positions in the 179th Infantry sector, the enemy had been thwarted; and not much else had happened.

About an hour after daybreak, the 45th Division G-2 received a warning from VI Corps based on information

received from Seventh Army. The G-2 judged that the information had come from clandestine agent reporting. The VI Corps message stated: "The enemy may attack Rothbach and Zinswiller any time now. He will probably commit Panzer divisions, possibly the 21st and 25th. They may use the road from Baerenthal to Zinswiller. Some parts of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division may be used; their infantry is pretty chewed up, but they still have 25 tanks and 25 assault guns." Shortly afterward, TF Herren provided additional information on the enemy which added some substance to the threat of attack out of Baerenthal: "Elements of the 951st Infantry are just west of Baerenthal. ... We have also identified elements of the 952nd Infantry just north of Baerenthal." While WRECKER had previously been in contact with the 952nd at Baerenthal, the 951st was a new unit to it, and its alleged appearance near Baerenthal reported to the 45th Division by a source different from the one providing the Panzer-threat report caused added concern.

As for the Panzer units identified in the American VI Corps report, the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier had been committed early during NORDWIND with the XIII Corps further west. American intelligence judged the 17th to have been weakened--but not so the other two divisions, the 21st and 25th. It was the disengagement of these two divisions in December (and of the 17th as well) which had been a factor contributing to General Patch's estimate that the enemy would probably mount an offensive against his army. Unlike the 17th, the 21st and 25th divisions had remained uncommitted. Shortly after noon, the 45th G-2 received another report from VI Corps indicating that aerial reconnaissance had spotted a 70-vehicle column moving southwest from a point about 6 miles north of Philippsbourg--the road network south of the enemy vehicles provided the column access to Baerenthal, Philippsbourg, or other possible objectives. The VI Corps report concluded: "A lot of stuff is coming from the north." These were the rudiments of the strategic-tactical intelligence picture seen by the 45th Div G-3 on 5 January. The threatening enemy armored offensive did not materialize, but an awareness of the threat could be seen in the G-3's instructions to WRECKER and adjacent units.

At 1015 the G-3 mentioned when he received a call from the 313th Infantry's S-3 that "The Corps commander has said it is possible that the enemy may attack through the gap between you and the 275th Infantry to capture Rothbach and Zinswiller. It might be wise if you moved some of your people over to the right in anticipation of that attack." At 1122, the G-3 was talking to a 191st Tank Battalion staff officer. Noting a report that there had been enemy infiltration across the road between Zinswiller and Rothbach, he ordered patrolling by 191st light tanks of the road network

west of Rothbach. An hour later the G-3 was discussing the same threat with the Division's tank destroyer battalion commander.

At 1235, the operations officer of the 157th Infantry called the G-3's attention to a report that a column of 500 enemy troops had been sighted moving toward Philippsbourg and later was seen turning toward Neunhoffen. The 157th officer commented that, if the report was true, he thought the enemy column would turn straight south through the Philippsbourg-Dambach gap. The G-3's response indicated his belief that the 275th Infantry would be unable to close the gap and warned the 157th officer that his regiment might have to use its 1st (reserve) battalion to guard its open flank. It turned out that the 157th's 1st battalion had already been alerted. By contrast, the WRECKER commander could at that time have regarded as his regimental reserve part of one rifle company--B Company/274th, whose 2nd platoon remained far to the rear as security guard at the TF Herren command post. At 1313, the 45th Division G-2 advised VI Corps of air reconnaissance observations of enemy activity in the 275th Infantry sector. A column of 300 troops had been spotted on the north-south road along the western foot of Falkenberg, on which WRECKER B Company remained isolated. Four tanks had been seen just north of Baerenthal at 1100. Whether the 500-man column and the 300-man column referred to in separate reports were the same or different enemy bodies of troops was not clear, but either case gave support to the intelligence that the Germans were up to something big somewhere along the front held by WRECKER.

By 1345, the 45th Division command group had become aware of the enemy's "Operation Zinswiller." The G-3, talking to the 191st Tank Battalion S-3, stated: "The Baerenthal-Zinswiller road has been blocked at several places, one place is one mile below Muehlthal and another is 500 yards closer to Zinswiller. There are about 12 enemy infantrymen with machine guns and machine pistols, no bazookas. We want some tanks to clear that out and keep it clear. The General wants to use that company of medium tanks of the 25th Tank Battalion in Zinswiller. Colonel Adams went to Zinswiller to see them." The 191st officer indicated that he would "also get a section of light tanks working" on the problem.

A few minutes later, the G-3 called the chief-of-staff of VI Corps. The G-3 seemed to consider developments as pointing to serious enemy threats at Zinswiller and Rothbach: "You have a battalion of the 14th Armored disposed along the Zinswiller-Rothbach road. We would like to get permission to use those companies to clear and block those roads. The enemy is infiltrating and taking up positions along it. It is getting worse." The VI Corps officer's response was curt and unpromising: "We knew that at 0800, and you told me you

were taking care of it. I'll have to speak to the General about it."

At 1405, the G-2 received word of the Philippsbourg situation from an unlikely source, the S-2 of the 313th Infantry: "An enemy withdrawal has been reported to me--the enemy was seen to leave Philippsbourg moving to the northwest and the northeast." The report was accurate--the Unit Report of the 275th Infantry for 5 January stated that Philippsbourg had been retaken at 1440.

At 1415, the G-3 passed a grim warning to the WRECKER commander: "We have information that the enemy is infiltrating toward Niederbronn and Zinswiller and Baerenthal. The (Baerenthal-Zinswiller) road is cut by machine-gun fire. You will move what force you feel necessary to close the gaps between Philippsbourg and Dambach and between Baerenthal and Philippsbourg. It must be closed tonight or it is possible you will lose your whole regiment at Philippsbourg."

At 1420, the VI Corps chief-of-staff responded on the 45th Div G-3's request to use 14th Armored troops to clear the road between Rothbach and Zinswiller. The VI Corps answer wasn't directly to the point: "What about the company of tanks at Reipertswiller--couldn't you use them? Even if we put a company of tanks on that road, they couldn't stay there without infantry protection. You already have two companies of tanks, and General Brooks (VI Corps commander) feels we can't be piddling tanks away everywhere. You do the best (you can)." The G-3: "That company (of tanks in Reipertswiller) is not up to strength and a platoon of it is already being used elsewhere. We are patrolling the road, but don't have enough infantry to put on it. If that is the General's wish, we will do what we can--it will just be harder this way."

During the next half hour there occurred two conversations which explained, to some extent, the concerns which had given rise to the G-3's stern warning to Colonel Pettee. At 1440, the G-3 was talking to the 191st Tank Battalion: "There is an enemy battalion 2 miles west of Zinswiller, and they are withdrawing north and northeast in the direction Philippsbourg. They will surely cross the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road, and we want you to patrol that road and either sack up these Krauts or kill them off." Ten minutes later General Frederick, the 45th Division commander, was talking to the regimental commander of the 157th Infantry, whose sector ran east from the vicinity of Dambach. Frederick: "I've given orders to the CO of the 275th to close that gap between his people and Dambach as well as the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal gap. Could you go to his command post and tell him what to do and give him any help you can. I'm concerned about this enemy battalion (from) south of

Reipertswiller; POW's say they are withdrawing to the north and northeast.... Tell them (the 275th) that the enemy is cut off, and a little effort on their part will bring in this whole enemy battalion." It seemed that the 45th Division command group's earlier worry about a potential Panzer assault from the north had faded--what worried them now was how WRECKER troops would react to being hit unexpectedly from the rear by an enemy battalion pulling back from the tip of the Bitche Salient. The enemy "Operation Zinswiller" force seems to have been identified at the moment with the enemy battalion thought to be withdrawing from south of Reipertswiller.

At 1500 the G-3 was called by Colonel Pettee, who reported: "Philippsbourg has been cleared, and the hill to the north was occupied about one-half hour ago. By opening a trail from south of Baerenthal to the road northeast of Philippsbourg, we will have patrol contact." The G-3 in response, advised Colonel Pettee of the withdrawing enemy battalion to the west of Zinswiller, then instructed the WRECKER commander: "Be prepared to engage this enemy battalion when they come through, and, with a little effort, you can sack them up, as they are the ones that are cut off--not your troops. We are worried about the Philippsbourg-Dambach gap, and it must be closed before tonight. Also the Baerenthal-Philippsbourg gap." Pettee: "I'll start patrolling out of E Company."

At 1535, the 157th Infantry operations officer reported to the G-3 section concerning plans to cover the Philippsbourg-Dambach gap, presumably the result of consultations between the regimental commanders of the 275th and 157th infantries: "We are bringing those (275th) people in with guides and putting them into positions. I think it will be A and C companies of the 275th. They will be placed generally along the line from the northeast nose of the height Taubenschwanz to the north spur of the height Garnfirst, about 500 yards east of Angelsberg." A half hour later Major Dykes confirmed this information in a report to the G-3: "We are getting two companies over to extend the left of the 157th; their officers are guiding us into position. We expect to start shooting on that deal at 1630."

Somewhat earlier the G-3 section had received a message from a motorized patrol of the 45th Reconnaissance Troop. Signed at 1400, the message had been relayed to the G-3 section; it reported on the situation at the enemy roadblocks on the Zinswiller road from Baerenthal: "Patrol was temporarily halted by machine-gun fire at a point on the road one mile from Zinswiller. The situation was relieved by an armored car. A dismounted patrol was fired on by the same enemy unit. This patrol deployed and continued on its mission. A POW reports there are 40 enemy entrenched

several hundred yards west of the Zinswiller road opposite their roadblocks. The 2nd Battalion/275th commander is dispatching a strong combat patrol, approximately 30 men, to clear the area." Then, at 1730, a report came to the G-3 section from the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion which stated: "Went up the Baerenthal road from Zinswiller and report it clear as of 1700. Went up as far as the 2nd Battalion/275th forward positions on that road."

At 1830 the G-3 section received a situation report from its liaison officer at the 275th command post in Niederbronn: "The town of Philippsbourg is clear. A Company/274th Infantry is on the high ground just north of town, C Company/274th is on the high ground on the west side of town, B Company/274th is on the crest of the high ground on the east side of town. I Company/275th pulled back from positions they were occupying for the past 2 days and is now in Philippsbourg in pretty good condition (sic--70 percent of I Company's men were soon evacuated for medical reasons) having not lost many men. A Co/275th is moving to positions on the height Angelsberg and is maintaining contact between the 275th and 157th. (The report was obviously in error here--Angelsberg was the objective of C Company/275th.) C Company/275th is in the vicinity of Reitenbach on the Niederbronn road from Philippsbourg. L Company/275th--one platoon is at the midpoint between the Baerenthal-Zinswiller and Philippsbourg-Niederbronn roads and is maintaining contact between the 2nd Battalion/275th and 1st Battalion/274th; the remainder of L Company is going down to investigate the high ground west of the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road opposite where the enemy roadblocks were reported earlier.

"E Company/275th is on the wooded high ground 500 yards due east of Baerenthal. G Company/275th is on the ridge just west of Breitthal on the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road. F Company/275th--one platoon is 200 yards west of Untermuehlthal; the rest of F Company is on the east spur of the height Schwarzenberg."

At 1850 the G-3 section received a report from the 157th Infantry which indicated that WRECKER A Company had arrived in its new position: "We led A Company/275th Infantry to their position, and they plan to bring their C company to the left of A Company. Our F company was quiet (on the left flank of the 157th's sector) except for what they observed in Nuenhoffen. They put artillery on that town and will interdict it all night. They saw nine guns being moved in there."

An hour later, Major Dykes called the G-3 section. After reporting on WRECKER 1st Battalion's situation, Dykes asked: "could anything be sent in the morning to our left between the 2nd Battalion and the battalion on its left? There is a gap of about 2000 yards there, and there could be a lot of

enemy in that area." The G-3 section officer answered: "We are watching that area closely, but right now we have nothing to put in there. We have outposts on prominent features on a line from a point one-half mile west of Rothbach to a point on the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road one-half mile west of Zinswiller. Every 2 hours patrols go through the area and they maintain radio contact. The 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion is under control of the 14th Armored Division, and we don't know what they are doing." The 62nd was presumably the battalion use of which the 45th G-3 had asked VI Corps for earlier in the day--the request had been denied.

At 2000 Major Dykes talked to the G-3: "I just got a call from the S-3 of the 274th, who said there is an outpost line (in the area where the enemy battalion was reported withdrawing earlier) to the west of Zinswiller. We have given clearance to the 499th artillery to fire into that area. If there is anything there, we will have it stopped. Do you know anything about it? The G-3: "The information we have is that the 45th Reconnaissance Troop has a line there, but the battalion (command post with whom they are working) is back at Rothbach. I suggest you call the 313th Infantry and get the dope from them direct." The emergency which had been expected should the withdrawing enemy battalion hit into the left-rear of the WRECKER sector had thus far failed to materialize.

A few minutes later, the G-3 section notified the 45th G-2 concerning the last action which occurred in the course of the enemy's "Operation Zinswiller." "A 275th Inf patrol at dusk reported routing several enemy from a point about a half mile south of Obermuehlthal. The patrol observed holes dug for approximately 150 men."

Summary of WRECKER Operations, 5 Jan

On 5 January, Philippsbourg continued to attract the major share of the 275th Infantry's attention--the counterattack to expel the Germans from the village, begun the previous day, was to continue. However, events in the Baerenthal sector would serve as reminders that the 2nd Battalion had a war on its hands too. Then there were pressures from higher headquarters concerning the need to close the gaps in the regimental front--between Philippsbourg and Baerenthal and on the Regiment's right flank as well.

The attack plan for the 5th was much the same as for the day before. A Company/274th Infantry was to advance from the east ridge to the ridge dominating the north edge of Philippsbourg. In the village, an advance up the main street by WRECKER troops would be supported by medium tanks under escort of a rifle platoon from B Company/274th. C

Company/274th was to maintain its position assumed on 4 January and support by fire the offensive efforts to the east of it--up the Philippsbourg main street and from the east ridge to the north end of town. The WRECKER executive officer was to be in Philippsbourg to coordinate these efforts.

The enemy held his fire as the advance started but soon opened up and stalled both offensive thrusts. There followed one or 2 hours of ineffectual efforts to get the two assault forces moving again, but heavy enemy shelling continued as an immobilizing factor subsequently made more imposing by machine-gun fire. Then the miscellaneous American groups in the village started to move, gathered momentum, and reached Main Forks; the WRECKER exec's coordinating efforts had begun to control the action. A group was sent to clear the side street; a tank was gotten up to Main Forks to bolster the supporting fire; and artillery fire was focused on pockets of enemy resistance. Thus the stage was set for renewing the advance of A Company/274th under direction of its battalion commander. The Company swept across the open area surrounding Philippsbourg Pond to the north end of town and up the slope to its objective. It was soon after 1400 when the high ground was reached.

Part of B Company/274th had, the previous night, skirted around the south end of Philippsbourg to the reverse slope of the west ridge to protect the open left flank of the forces in and around Philippsbourg. It had come from its reserve position, below the village and east of the Niederbronn road. Soon after noon it was moved laterally across the village to the east ridge at its north end to cover the gap which was being left by the advance of A Company/274th.

On its objective to the north of Philippsbourg, A Company/274th organized a defensive position and sent out patrols to cover this work. There were brief firefights as enemy rearguards were encountered during the course of the afternoon. As darkness approached, a WYOMING A Co patrol made contact with WRECKER I Company. Soon after, I Company received orders and withdrew from "Hill No. 30," ending its 3 days of isolation. When it arrived back in Philippsbourg, I Company moved on to take up positions outposting the guns of WRECKER Cannon Company after having lost 70 percent of its complement through medical evacuation--preponderantly due to frozen feet. The men evacuated had been examined at the joint aid station at the south end of the village.

At nightfall, WRECKER A Company, which for nearly 2 days had held a protective screen to the front and flanks of the Cannon Co gun positions, assembled and moved to the Niederbronn road, where it entrucked and motored to a rendezvous

north of Niederbronn with 157th Infantry guides. Having detrucked, the Company followed the guides to a new position southwest of Dambach, which would extend the front of the 2nd Battalion/157th Infantry on its right. Meanwhile WRECKER C Company had assembled at the south end of Philippsbourg and begun an all-night march with the objective of occupying and setting up defenses on the height Angelsberg--to the west and slightly north of A Company.

After the enemy had been cleared out of Philippsbourg and WYOMING A Company had reached its objective beyond the north end of the village, WRECKER K Company withdrew from the vicinity of Main Forks back to the houses along the main street from which it had operated over the previous 2 days. It remained there for the rest of the afternoon and well after nightfall. An hour before midnight, having gathered its equipment, the Company assembled and moved back along the Niederbronn road to the sawmill complex, about 2 miles from Philippsbourg.

In the 2nd Battalion's sector, 3rd Battalion elements serving as attachments--mainly L Company, but also parts of K and M companies--were ordered to rejoin their battalion below Philippsbourg. This order probably arrived from Niederbronn in the middle of the afternoon while the larger part of L Company was preoccupied with the enemy roadblocks on the Zinswiler road, which had been discovered around noon that day. The movement, on foot through the mountains to the Niederbronn road, took most of the night. Having completed their enemy-roadblock-related missions, L Co elements caught up with their one platoon which had started earlier, and the reunited company continued on to join the assembling 3rd Battalion.

The 2nd Battalion spent the second half of 5 January dealing with threatening developments on its left flank and rear and taking measures to provide for the contingency that the enemy's blockage of the 2nd Battalion supply route could not quickly be eliminated. A large part of L Company was committed against the roadblocks in an effort evidently coordinated with that by tanks and other armored vehicles sent to the trouble spot by the 45th Division. The positions of the Battalion's reserve company, F Company, were shifted as was part of its forward-left company, G Company, these adjustments being made to take advantage of an opportunity to intercept an enemy battalion thought to be withdrawing from the south--an opportunity which failed to materialize that day.

The Leadership of Jack Malloy

The plan for continuing the counterattack in and around

Philippsbourg again called for a jump-off at 0900, that is, an hour after daybreak. The departure was to follow a 30-minute artillery preparation. The 274th's A company on the right was to advance northward from the forward slope of the high ground it had taken on the previous day. Its route of advance would take the Company across the open area surrounding Philippsbourg Pond just north of Main Forks. Prior to the attack, Colonel Malloy, WRECKER executive officer, met with Colonel Willis and Lieutenant Vaught on the east ridge and briefed them on the operations plan for the day. The plan prescribed for C Company/274th to hold its positions on the west ridge and, from there, support by fire the advance of the forces to the right of the Company. Part of B Company/274th was to remain on the reverse slope of the west ridge pending receipt of further instructions.

In the attack in the village, what was left of the tank platoon was to advance up the main street from the south end of Philippsbourg escorted by the 1st Platoon of B Company/274th. This force was to be joined by the in-village WRECKER groups as it came abreast of their positions. Colonel Malloy would be in the village to co-ordinate the entire operation. In this regard, the regimental commander had observed the action in and around Philippsbourg on 4 January and, as a consequence, had prescribed that Malloy personally coordinate the over-all operation. Accompanied by K Co's Lieutenant Donahue and Sergeant Diece, one of them carrying an SCR 300 radio, Malloy would supervise the action while remaining in the forefront observing as the attack started, stalled, and finally succeeded. On the right, the advancing skirmishers of WYOMING A Company were to be inspired by the personal example of their battalion commander, Colonel Willis.

As for the WRECKER dispositions in Philippsbourg, part of the January 4 assault force had returned to positions held at the beginning of the attack that day. However, those elements of C Company involved in that attack had taken up outpost positions on or not far behind the line of farthest advance. The situation for the WRECKER troops in the village was somewhat better compared with that of the previous day. For one thing, thanks to the successes of the 274th Infantry's assault companies on 4 January, the east and west ridges no longer provided the enemy with vantage points from which to direct fire down into the village. In addition, the German presence in the village had been eliminated on the southwest side, south of the side street's crossing of the railroad. Still the enemy occupied houses along the side street and a few on the main street around Main Forks and a little below it. Moreover, he retained the high ground to the northwest and north of Philippsbourg which gave him good artillery observation from these quarters and

positions for which to harass the Americans with machine-gun and sniper fire. On the right, the WYOMING A Co plan of attack called for its 1st and 3rd platoons to attack from the wooded slope. William F. Hill recalls that "We had started across the field on the double and were about half-way across when the first enemy artillery started falling. It came thick and fast, and quite a few men dropped. Enemy machine guns opened up, and more men were hit. 2nd Lt. Ralph C. Hollstein and only a handful of men made it across to a building on the far side." Most of the men hit the ground and remained pinned down in the open area; some withdrew to the concealment of the wooded slope from which the attack had departed.

Joseph W. Marshall remembers that he and another pfc, Lester Ekstrom, were leading the way in the advance up the main street of the platoon from WYOMING B Company with the tanks. The houses they passed seemed empty and there was no firing except for that directed at A Company, up to the right of Main Forks. Then the suspense was over as the Germans commenced firing down the street at the advancing doughboys. Marshall: "A machine gun opened up from down the road, and bullets came flying through the street. They were slapping against the buildings and then ricocheting into the snow. We dove for cover and waited while the machine gun chattered away." (There are no specifics available concerning the relative positioning at this point of WYOMING platoon, the Sherman tanks they were supposed to be escorting, and the WRECKER troops already in the village at the beginning of the attack that morning. Marshall's account permits a judgment that he and other B Co men were close to Main Forks when the enemy opened fire on them and that the tanks had lagged far behind, around the bend of the main street below the church, where they would have been to some extent concealed from enemy observation. What is likely is that Colonel Malloy and a group of WRECKER troops had already cleared the few houses held by the Germans below Main Forks and reached that road junction. Malloy had sent some of these troops along the side street to eliminate an enemy machine gun firing from that direction. How this had happened, as well as can be reconstructed, follows.)

Some minutes after the American artillery preparation ended, a group of WRECKER troops led by K Co's machine-gun-toting Lieutenant Heck started up the main street from the vicinity of the church. Enemy along the main street and north of the village quickly responded driving the attackers to cover. A few of the doughboys, seemingly having given up any idea of resuming the advance and being engaged in a withdrawal down the main street, encountered Colonel Malloy moving the opposite direction. Malloy, by vigorous word and gesture, caused the would-be stragglers to rejoin the



assault group.

The attack was stalled for quite some time after the flare-up of enemy fire. The problem was that the enemy for the moment had achieved fire superiority--any American attempt at movement or return of fire drew immediate enemy counterfire. Heck remembers that "I was lying on the steps in front of one of the houses, firing my light machine gun (without its supporting tripod) and having a hell of a time controlling it as it flopped around on its pintle. I was shooting and getting shot at." It was a time-consuming problem, but gradually the WRECKER men wrested the initiative away from the enemy. Presently it was the enemy whose position had become the more anxious. Led by Heck, the K Co group and whoever else was with it moved steadily up the street, house to house. Reaching the side street, part of the force, including Heck, took cover momentarily in the massive structure on the south corner made by the side street with main street--named the "bakery" by the GI's.

Colonel Malloy, who had witnessed at close range the Heck performance, is reported to have exclaimed: "Who is that crazy guy!? Let's get him a medal!" Asked about the incident years later, Malloy agreed he probably said something like that. "I remember well the actions of the big officer with the LMG who led the attack up the main street that morning. He was quite aggressive and fired that gun all over the place. I think I sent him down the side street to the west side of the village, from where we were receiving fire. I just sent him--if he picked up anyone to go along, he did that part on his own." Heck does not recall being assigned the mission on the side street.

A light machine gun, this one with a ground mount, was brought forward and set up to fire from the "bakery." However, it was quickly discovered that the potential fields of fire from the position selected were inferior. So it was decided to move the gun to the north side of the intersection, from which vantage point there would be access to more lucrative targets. One by one--each man carrying part of the gun or boxes of ammunition for it--the men crossed the street. Heck, then Sergeant Hall and Corporal Howard darted across the street reaching cover just ahead of the angry bursts of fire from an enemy machine gun located down the side street to the left. T Sgt Elmer T. Peterson was next to make the attempt but failed. He fell, sprawling in the street, riddled by German machine-gun bullets.

The WRECKER assault force had arrived at Main Forks. Colonel Malloy had taken note of the enemy machine gun firing down the side street from the left and had seen Sergeant Peterson fall. Quickly he appointed a lieutenant to go after the offending gun. The appointed officer picked several men nearby to accompany him including Sergeant

Higley. The lieutenant was a stranger to Higley; so he surely wasn't from WRECKER C Company--probably he was from K Company.

Higley remembers that early, during the beginnings of the assault that morning, it had been faltering and ineffective--there had been little, if any, teamwork among the in-village groups. "However, order was restored and the attack became organized when Colonel Malloy took charge. When I first saw him, I wondered what in the hell a lieutenant colonel was doing there. I soon found out.

"Ordered by Malloy to do so, a strange lieutenant took what was left of my squad and a few other men and put us to work clearing the houses on the side street, which runs to the west side of Philippsborough from its junction with the main street just below Main Forks. I will always remember how horrified I was when, as we moved off with the lieutenant, I suddenly realized how few my squad had become. None of the others with us were known to me.

"Our objective was the last building on the left side of the street, which we later realized was a tavern (Restaurant de la Gare). An enemy machine gun was firing toward the main street from that building. We moved back from Main Forks past the intersection to the stairway where the dead German sergeant lay and descended it. Turning right, we moved along the creek with a stone retaining wall and the backs of the main street houses on our right. Reaching the house on the side street, we entered a basement which, down in the flat, was a ground level. We climbed up to street level and were ready to start clearing houses. The lieutenant was an aggressive man and pushed us hard as we moved from house to house. Breaking into one of the houses, we found an elderly man and woman who somehow made the lieutenant understand that the Germans had pulled back shortly before.

"We went on to the last house, our objective, and found it seemingly vacant. The lieutenant found the stairs down to the basement and ordered me down to check it out. As a precaution, I threw a grenade downstairs. After the explosion, I hurried down with my rifle at the ready. When the smoke cleared and the dust settled, I found that I had blown up the establishment's wine cellar. What a mess! After a quick look-around, I went back upstairs. Very shortly, to our surprise, an American medical lieutenant and enlisted man came up those stairs. They told us that they had been cut off there a couple of days before when the house had been occupied by Germans. They had hidden in the very back of a chicken coop at the far end of the cellar. One of them had had a very bad cold and had had to time his coughing to occur with the cackling of the chickens. He said he had almost choked to death holding back his coughing

on more than one occasion." The two medics were undoubtedly Lieutenant Dougherty and his driver, who had left the 1st Battalion aid station on the morning of 3 January to answer a call for medical assistance.

At Main Forks it was shortly after noon. Many years later Malloy would describe the situation: "On the 5th our troops had cleared the houses on the right and left of the main street. The Germans had withdrawn to the high ground on both sides of the Bitche road. Our troops were on the high ground on the east side of Philippsbourg. The Germans were withdrawing, but their artillery fire on the Philippsbourg area was very heavy. I got myself into a position in a little shed in the northeast corner of the intersection formed by the Bitche road and the road to Neunhoffen with the main street in Philippsbourg. Joe Donahue and Sergeant Diece were with me. Joe was handling communications for me. We contacted our troops on the high ground to our right and ordered them to move forward across the field below them to the high ground, where the remaining Germans seemed to be mostly artillery observers. However, we got no action, chiefly because of heavy artillery fire."

In addition to artillery fire, WYOMING A Company was having problems with enemy machine guns. Colonel Willis, their battalion commander, recalled: "I moved up to the front of A Co's position and found that the flat open valley between the hill east and that on the northeast of Philippsbourg was swept by enemy machine-gun fire from both directions."

Malloy: "I had Donahue contact our supporting tanks. I guess they were gun-shy after their experience 2 days before. A tank leader came forward in his tank to the corner where the three of us were in the shed. I got out of the shed and told him to order his tanks forward. He said he wouldn't; so that's when I went into my act with the .45 pistol and told him to move his tank up the Bitche road--with this persuasion, that is what he did."

Joseph Marshall, the WYOMING B Co rifleman, lay where he had hit the ground when the enemy opened fire on his advancing platoon. "There was a barn across the way and inside a colonel from the 275th--Colonel Malloy--was directing operations over a radio. After a while he looked out. 'Where is the rest of your company?' he hollered. 'Where is your CO? Go bring up the rest of the Company!'"

Private Marshall crawled back down the street and, after some difficulty, succeeded in getting some of the men to start forward. Then he moved back to the ditch near the building occupied by Malloy and his two K Co aides. "I heard Colonel Malloy trying to get the tanks to move up the road. He gave them a direct order, but they still wouldn't budge. At last, after much bickering, the tankers agreed to

go, provided they had some infantrymen with them. Colonel Malloy rounded up a few of us and told us to go forward with the tanks. We worked well together--we would point out the target and they would blast away."

It now appears that the tank brought forward by the platoon leader was the only one to become engaged that day. Colonel Willis has remembered that its supporting fire was instrumental in silencing the enemy machine-gun fire that had been holding up his A Company. In addition, he had his A Co commander bring concentrated smallarms fire on two of the more troublesome guns--one on each flank--and, under this cover, advance a rifle squad of the Company across the field. The procedure was then repeated many times until the whole company had reached the far side.

Malloy: "The tank started forward, and the unit on the right did too. Lieutenant Donahue, Sergeant Diece, and I moved right along. Just to the north of Main Forks, some 15-20 Germans came out on the road with their hands up. I simply waved them to the rear, and they needed no further urging. About halfway from the shed at Main Forks to the line of houses at the north end of Philippsbourg, I was hit again, this time with shell fragments. (Malloy had taken a bullet in the shoulder in the action around Main Forks.) Donahue and Diece helped me get to a basement of a house at the north end of the village. I had been hit in the leg and had tough time moving on my own." The tank had advanced with Malloy team to this point. As soon as the tank commander saw that Malloy was out of action, he had his driver put the machine in reverse and back it down the road toward the south end of the village.

There is conflict in the evidence concerning the commitment of B Company/274th from behind the west ridge around noon or shortly thereafter. Clearly B Company, by the end of the afternoon, had reached the east ridge. However, the route it took to get there, the specifics of its mission en route to the objective, and whether its 1st Platoon entered Philippsbourg that day along with the rest of the Company or came into the village with the tanks along the Niederbronn road (as has been related above)--each of these elements essential to the B Company account can only be reconstructed by including large measures of conjecture. The explanation that best fits the story of the clearing of Philippsbourg as it has been related above is that only the 3rd and Weapons platoons of B Company moved from the west ridge to east ridge by the most direct route and that these two platoons passed through Main Forks en route to their objective after the ground action had been transferred to the slopes below the A Company/274th objective. The B Co 1st Platoon, on the other hand, seemingly did enter Philippsbourg along the Niederbronn road with the tanks but

quickly found themselves without tanks to escort as the tankers refused to advance their vehicles far enough along the main street to expose them to enemy artillery firing directly down the Bitche road into the heart of Philippsbourg. According to the reconstruction of this part of the action being represented here, the two B Co platoons were ordered to move over from the west to the east ridge only when it became evident that WYOMING A Company's taking of its final objective was well assured. The purpose of the move was presumably to protect the flank and rear of A Company and block the entrance to Philippsbourg along the Nuenhoffen road.

On the west side of town in the Restaurant de la Gare, the two 1st Bn medics had just emerged from their basement hiding place after the lieutenant and his pick-up assault team had occupied the building on the heels of the withdrawing enemy machine-gun crew. The discussion of the medics' ordeal with their liberators was interrupted when, according to Higley, 'The corner of the building was hit by an artillery shell, caving in that part of the structure and knocking me into a heap of rubble. Pulled out of the debris by others, I found that my eyeglasses had been shattered and I was deaf in one ear--otherwise, I was all right. I fetched a spare pair of glasses out of my fatigue pockets. The medical lieutenant, pointing out that some wounded men don't realize it when they've been hit, insisted on examining me. He found nothing very wrong.'

After that bit of distraction, the lieutenant leading the assault group, Higley, and their doughboys turned their attention back to the job at hand. Higley: "The lieutenant had decided what our next objective was to be and was briefing us on his plan. This time we were to go after a building some distance away which stood next to the railroad tracks. It was probably the railroad station. Gathered there in the tavern, we could look through the gaping hole blasted by that artillery shell and get a good view to the north and west.

"Suddenly the lieutenant exclaimed: 'My God! It looks like a whole battalion!' It was a beautiful sight--the first body of GI's looking organized that I had seen for some time! They came down the slope to the west of us in proper extended order formation heading right toward us. Crossing the railroad tracks, the formation veered a little to its right and descended into the flats between the tracks and the main street. Some of us in the tavern went downstairs and to the rear of the basement, from where we could continue to watch them. Once in the flats, they continued forward but closed over to the left thus taking better advantage of the cover afforded by the steep embankment and the houses on the south side of the side street. The head

of the formation halted and the rear closed into the flats. We later learned that this was the 274th's B Company. After halting there in the flats for a time, the force moved out again, climbing up to the side street near its junction with the main street, where there was a ramp-like slope from the flats up to the street level. I don't recall where they went from this point."

By this time it was evident that the German resistance in Philippsbourg itself was over. Although shellfire, now at a reduced rate continued (and would continue to plague the village for days), the smallarms firing in its streets had died away. However, from the slopes ringing the northeast quadrant of the town the sounds of occasional smallarms flurries could be heard as A Company/274th completed the clearing of its objective and sent patrols probing beyond it. The realization that the enemy's evacuation of his troops from the village was complete or nearly so caused the lieutenant to cancel the projected assault on the railroad station. Instead, he and his little force returned to the main street to find some new assignment or to disband and become involved in the sorting-out of WRECKER troops and the recovery of equipment which would ensue. It was an hour or so after noon.

Early in the day over on the west ridge, WYOMING C Company was waiting for the starting time for the attack, in which it would play a supporting role. During the previous night there had been adjustments in the Company's defensive positions on the ridge, and, as a consequence, the 1st Platoon's command post had been moved from the cave to a two-man foxhole shared by Sergeant Martinez and his platoon leader. Martinez: "Lieutenant Brogan had relieved me on the watch. He was sitting on the parapet with his legs dangling inside the foxhole opening, stretching his limbs in an attempt to restore circulation a little. I lay down inside the foxhole, wrapped myself in my blanket, and drew my legs up close to my body for warmth. I had just closed my eyes when I heard an explosion outside the foxhole and the thuds of metal fragments punching into the earth where my legs had been only a few seconds before. Then I heard the Lieutenant moan and exclaim: 'Martinez, I'm hit!' Scrambling out of the foxhole, I found Lieutenant Brogan lying there holding his crotch. He was wearing his raincoat to help ward off the early morning chill. I began to cut away the clothing to see the extent of the injury, and what I saw looked anything but pleasing. As I cut away, I could see the red, gooey mess. Lieutenant Brogan seemed to be pale with shock and pain.

"I kept cutting the clothing away. But somehow the red, gooey stuff didn't seem like flesh and blood anymore--it was too sticky, and there seemed to be glass fragments mixed in

with it. Finally we figured out what had happened--a shell fragment had hit a jar of strawberry jam that was in the pocket of Lieutenant Brogan's raincoat. The fragment had gone through the jar and its contents and still had enough force to nick him inside the thigh. It had made a small hole, but not the horrible one that he and I had imagined. Lieutenant Brogan was evacuated and rejoined us months later, when we were on occupation duty." Otherwise, the C Co experience on 5 January there on the west ridge was uneventful.

After being wounded for the second time, Colonel Malloy had been assisted by Lieutenant Donahue and Sergeant Diece to the basement of a house at the north edge of Philippsbourg. Malloy remembers there were some Frenchmen, old men and women, holed up in the same basement. "After a while, a medic came and gave me a shot, which, combined with the Schnapps from the natives, did much to relieve the pain. About that time, Joe Donahue got word on the radio that I was to withdraw the Regiment. I told him to tell them, 'Hell no!' After getting our objective and losing many men doing it, it didn't sound right to me. I was evacuated shortly thereafter, and I don't know what happened. It was about 1600 at the time, and we had won a real battle." In all likelihood, only part of the instruction got through to Malloy--the 275th Infantry was indeed to be withdrawn, but the gains of the 4th and 5th were not being given up. The 1st Battalion/274th was going to defend them and was to be protected on both flanks by elements of the 275th as the consequence of the WRECKER 1st and 3rd battalions' withdrawal from Philippsbourg and their subsequent redeployment.

Colonel Malloy was taken back to Niederbronn, where he visited the WRECKER regimental command post and reported to Colonel Pettee before continuing his rearward movement in medical channels. His words--"...we had won a real battle"--were true enough, and he left it for his fighting companions, officers and men alike, to accord to Jack Malloy a large share of the credit. He was subsequently awarded the Silver Star medal for his performance that day.

The End of I Co's Isolation

The WRECKER I Co ordeal on "Hill No. 30" started into its fourth day about noon on 5 January. While the escape plan for the Company was still being formulated by its officers again huddled in the CP foxhole, word of the plan still had not been disseminated to the rest of the Company--that was supposed to be done that afternoon. However, the men were probably aware that something was up, and so their mood might have acquired a tinge of expectancy. Contributing to

this new feeling, the sounds of the battle in Philippsbourg must have hinted that the struggle there was, by noon, approaching a decision. Something heard or seen from the 3rd Platoon area, on the Philippsbourg side of the Company's perimeter, was reported to Captain Long--it seemed that an American attack was underway in the village. Long decided to have a closer look and listen, to extend his eyes and ears beyond the bounds of the perimeter, to where contact with advancing friendly skirmishers could be effected with less risk of unfortunate consequences. He called for what seems to have become his team of scouting specialists. The I Co escape operation had been overtaken by events.

Martin was one of those summoned for the mission. He was apprehensive, for he knew the company commander could have only one reason for sending for him--another patrol. Martin remembers the conversation with Captain Long: "'Reporting as ordered, Captain.'

"'Why so formal, Martin?'

"'Well, it's just that you got all these other guys and you send me all the time.'

"'You're one of the few left with good feet.'

"'Captain, you'll have my blood before this is over!'

"'Not you, you'll outlive us all.'" That ended Martin's protest--when the patrol departed the company area, Martin was with it. Martin: "Lieutenant Glass, Sergeant McDuffee, and I went off to see if contact could be made with our men. We had almost reached the rocks where the German OP had been when the shells started to come in, real thick and fast. I got in between two big rocks with Lieutenant Glass. Trees and branches were falling. The force of the explosion pounded us into the ground." According to Glass, it was friendly artillery that did the patrol in. The three of them had been observing from the crest of the slope down to the north edge of Philippsbourg. At the foot of the slope there were some Germans in foxholes, and American artillery shells were exploding around them. Quickly, the shellbursts searched up the slope to where the I Co patrol was. It seemed that American observers had spotted them. Martin heard Glass' shout: "'Martin, McDuffee's been hit! Let's get him!' I started out from our cover as did Lieutenant Glass. Then I tried to breathe and couldn't. How long I was out there after the shell hit, I don't know. I joined McDuffee and Glass in yelling for a medic." Glass had been hit too. How the Company on "Hill No. 30" learned of the patrol's plight is not recorded. Long remembers having sent out two 3-man patrols, one of them being the Glass patrol. Perhaps the other patrol gave the alarm. Lieutenant Turner took a team to the spot and brought the wounded men back to the perimeter.

It was after dark when there was contact between two

American patrols, one from I Company, the other from A Company of the 274th Infantry. Subsequently, jeeps with litters were brought forward from Philippsbourg, and I Co's wounded were evacuated. The A Co commander, Lieutenant Vaught later recounted: "Their I Company was surrounded, but it had been in an ideal position to help us if they had known where to shoot. Their company commander told me he couldn't tell friend from foe and was afraid to shoot for fear of hitting us. We were never able to make contact with the other company of the 275th which was isolated further to the north." The "other company" had evidently been WRECKER B Company.

Some time after contact was made, Captain Long left the Company in the charge of Lieutenant Turner and departed to find his way in the dark to Philippsbourg, where he intended to report on his company's condition to Major Shepherd. Stumbling down the steep slope just north of the village, Long ricocheted off several trees and then fell over the frozen body of a German soldier. Picking himself up, Long continued down the slope and into Philippsbourg, managing to avoid other dead bodies he encountered. He located the CP and went in.

The 3rd Battalion staff's Captain Copeland recalls Long's arrival: "During the night, Bill Long came into the CP. After he had described to me the serious condition of his men, I suggested to him that he go get them and bring them back along the same route he had followed. Long left and, within 10 minutes, returned with blood coming out of his eyes, ears, and nose. He had just run over a German mine, and it had blown the jeep in which he had been riding higher than the rooftops. I think Long and I went back and pulled his driver out from under the jeep. I am not certain what happened from that point, but I believe Long went back up to his company's position and brought his company back to Philippsbourg."

Long recalls being provided a jeep and driver at the battalion CP and hitting the mine as his driver swerved to avoid a dead horse in the roadway. He remembers being deafened by the blast and going to the assistance of his driver, but little else that happened after the mine exploded. An unofficial I Co log indicates that Captain Long was probably evacuated from Philippsbourg soon after he and his driver ran over the mine.

It was well after dark when I Company arrived back in Philippsbourg. It had been a particular hardship for nearly three-quarters of the men, but all except for litter cases completed the withdrawal from "Hill No. 30" on foot. On arrival most of the men were sent to the aid station to have their feet examined. After being examined 99 men were declared unfit for duty and evacuated for frozen feet or

trench-foot. The remainder--three officers and 33 men--resumed the march to the rear and reached the sawmill complex at 0100 the next morning.

Earlier that day the attack up the main street of Philippsbourg had reached Main Forks, probably around 1030 or 1100. For WRECKER K Company this was to have been the principal action of the day. However, before the day was over, it would receive at least two more casualties. According to "Kingsmen," Pfc John H. Reardon, the company bugler, was killed by a shell fragment while he was on guard near the company CP. Pfc Charles P. Hein was severely wounded while guarding a group of POW's--none of the prisoners was hit. Up in the vicinity of Main Forks, the doughboys who had earlier cleared the main street--for some of them, it had been their third advance up that street under fire--held their gains and supported by fire the subsequent advance of A Company/274th.

Lieutenant Heck would be awarded the Silver Star medal for his performance in Philippsbourg on 5 January. The citation: "With his company assigned to clear the enemy from strong positions in Philippsbourg, Lieutenant Heck, armed with a light machine gun, courageously led the hazardous attack, pouring concentrated fire into each position, throwing hand grenades and covering resistance points so his men could move in for knockout blows. His leadership and clear thinking under fire inspired his men to such heights that the mission was successfully accomplished with surprisingly light casualties."

At the end of the fighting in the village, there were things to be taken care of--a final check to examine all houses thoroughly for Germans who might still be there in hiding, an accounting for all personnel in the Company, and the recovery of all equipment and supplies. Meanwhile, according to "Kingsmen," "enemy shellfire continued to fall on Philippsbourg. It was a nerve-wracking evening. Finally an order was received to withdraw from the town. Very quietly, the Company assembled, taking as much equipment as could be carried by each man. At about 2300, the column moved out down the road toward Niederbronn. Fortunately, there was no artillery fire as the column moved down the road. We marched about 2 miles to a sawmill." There the company bivouaced for the remainder of the night.

After enemy action on 3 and 4 January had forced the evacuation of both battalion aid stations from their original Philippsbourg locations, a combined aid station had been set up in the barn next to the 1st Bn CP at the south end of the village. In addition a rear aid station had been established about a mile to the south. The station in Philippsbourg was employed on the 4th and 5th to give immediate treatment to casualties, who were then taken back to the

rear facility when conditions permitted. From there they were evacuated further to the rear. The system worked well, but the steady arrival of wounded placed heavy pressure on the medical personnel and facilities during the last 2 days of WRECKER 1st Battalion's assignment in Philippsbourg. T 5 Nelson remembers that on 5 January "Late in the day we were overwhelmed at the aid station by an influx of men nearly all of whom had frozen feet. They were all members of I Company--they had gotten pinned down and had been lying in the snow for 2 or 3 days. I never saw man so grateful for a cup of hot chocolate.

"Our own Lieutenant Dougherty returned and told how he and Corporal Munoz had holed up in a basement of a house full of Germans and how our mortar fire had razed the building. The enemy had evacuated the building and the two of them got out. Dougherty got away, but Munoz had been wounded and captured." The incident as Nelson remembers Dougherty's telling it differs in a couple of details from the one related by C Co's Sergeant Higley. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the two incidents were, in fact, one and the same. It is difficult to see how, under the circumstances that obtained at the time, Munoz could have been captured.

After the clearing of Philippsbourg, the task of defending the village was assigned to the 1st Battalion/274th, which continued its assignment as an attachment to the 275th Infantry. Colonel Pettee ordered both WRECKER battalions committed around Philippsbourg to be withdrawn late on 5 January in preparation for their redeployment. The WRECKER commander's first tactical measures were intended to correct the faults in the Regiment's frontal coverage which had been of great concern to him and to higher headquarters--the gap between his right-flank elements around Philippsbourg and the left flank of the 157th Infantry, near Dambach, and the uncovered expanse between WRECKER 2nd Battalion below Baerenthal and WYOMING 1st Battalion around Philippsbourg. However, the most critical flaw was, in his view, his open left flank and rear southwest of Baerenthal; but in the over-all scheme of things the responsibility for closing that gap there was not the 275th Infantry's.

The first gap-filling deployment ordered by the WRECKER commander involved WRECKER A Company. A Company had spent the previous 2 days outposting the Cannon Co firing positions--a task which had been performed without particular incident. In view of the heavy volume of counterbattery shellfire being attracted by Captain Thomas' howitzers, Captain Millhiser had prescribed that his platoons' emplacements be laid out with plenty of distance separating them from Cannon Company's firing positions. As a result the A Co riflemen had received only a few errant shells

where they were dug in. Not infrequently GI's from the battalions in Philippsbourg had emerged from the wooded slopes on their way to the rear. Most of them had been in bad shape from exposure and some had been wounded. They had been directed by the A Co outposts to the rear battalion aid station, assistance being given for those seemingly needing it. Some Germans had also appeared and, relieved of their arms, had then been handled in much the same fashion.

Shortly before dark on 5 January, A Company assembled and marched to the Niederbronn road and entrucked there. The truck convoy bearing Millhisers' men rolled back into Niederbronn; midway through the town, it turned left onto the road to Jaegerthal. Reaching Jaegerthal, the trucks turned northwest toward Dambach but almost immediately turned left onto a narrow mountain trail with sharp bends bounded by sheer drop-offs. The column halted and the Company detrucked. There were guides there from the 2nd Battalion/157th Infantry, the unit that would be on the right of A Company. Led by the guides, the A Co platoons proceeded to their designated positions, which were on two adjacent ridges south of Dambach, named Taubenschwanz and Bornberg. Some accounts indicate that the field fortifications had been ready and waiting when some of the WRECKER 1st Battalion men arrive at their assigned locations. It may have happened that the Battalion moved into positions there which had been prepared by 45th Division engineer troops in accordance with orders issued more than a week earlier as indications were growing that NORDWIND was about to strike. When A Company reached its positions it was at least an hour since nightfall, 1800 or thereafter.

Back at the south end of Philippsbourg, darkness was falling when the locating and gathering-in of WRECKER C Company's scattered troops and equipment were called to a halt. Lieutenant Grotheer remembers that the Company assembled in the vicinity of the "root cellar" in anticipation of moving out on its next assignment. This was to be in the rugged hills to the northeast of Philippsbourg. Preoccupied continuously by concerns about the deadly action involving his men, Grotheer had not noticed the absence of his first sergeant over the previous 2 days. "Only while we were making arrangements to get the Company assembled and preparations for our movement out of Philippsbourg did I realize that Sgt Frederick C. Nentwich had been taken sick and evacuated on the 3rd. I appointed Glenn Price as our new first sergeant.

"It was dusk when we moved out to the southeast, our route being parallel to the Niederbronn road. The march was the most difficult one of my time with C Company. We marched all night up and down icy trails arriving at what I judged to be our objective before daybreak." There probably would

have been difficulty in Grotheer's finding his objective in daylight had the other circumstances of the march been the same. However, the march was in the dark, under black-out conditions, and it would have been an extraordinary achievement for him to find on the ground the spot marked on his map. He didn't miss by far, but he missed.

The C Co commander may have elected to keep his company off the Niederbronn road to avoid exposing it to possible shellfire. Shortly after moving out from the "root cellar" vicinity, the Company was fired on by a friendly outpost, but no one was hit. Grotheer is remembered to have issued a furious tongue-lashing to the offending sentry--an uncharacteristic action for the usually taciturn company commander. The Company continued on and, reaching the vicinity of Reitenbach on the Niederbronn road, turned northward straight into an area which had had no friendly troops occupying it for several days. On the contrary, such information as there was on the area would have caused Grotheer to expect an encounter with enemy forces. That had probably been the reason for the lateral direction of the march's first leg.

During the 1st Battalion commitment in and around Philippsbourg, approximately half of D Company was fighting with A and B companies as attachments to them, and these heavy weapons men shared in the same experiences as the rifle companies. The remaining D Co sections were caught with heavy weapons still stowed in their carriers by the enemy attack on 3 January as it broke into the village. Machine guns were deployed with difficulty under circumstances which lessened their effectiveness. The mortar section was belatedly deployed, and some details in this respect are related above. So the D Co account of Philippsbourg, as it appears here, is relatively brief. Captain Wallace kept notes on his company's casualties, presumably to assist himself in writing letters to their families. At the time when the 1st Battalion withdrew from Philippsbourg, Wallace's notebook could have reminded him that he had lost half of his officers--one killed, two wounded, and one missing. Wallace would have, of course, needed no such reminder.

The bulk of L Company along with other 3rd Battalion elements was serving as an attachment to the 2nd Battalion when the successful effort to clear the enemy out of Philippsbourg was exerted. However, there was one group of L Co doughboys involved in ending the Germans' partial occupation of the village. Becker: "Going back to the period when the Company was probing for a route back to Philippsbourg--probably on 3 January--we sent a patrol with our wounded to get them back to the battalion aid station. The patrol was successful in getting through, and its members who had provided the escort later took part in the

counterattack in Philippsbourg which was led by Colonel Malloy. I recall that one of the men told me about Malloy's trying to get them started toward Philippsbourg from the saw-mill on the Niederbronn road. He didn't meet with too much success until someone mentioned that the Christmas mail had come into Philippsbourg just before the Kraut attack into town and occupation of that part where the mail was deposited. That was the spark that set them off, and back they went." Malloy remembers nothing of the incident--possibly the embellishment of some GI's off-hand remark, it could have been largely a fabrication which would be included with the Malloy legend. On the other hand, it could have really happened.

The "Operation Zinswiller" Alert

January 5th was to be the day when the enemy's potential to threaten actively the 2nd Battalion's open left flank was realized. Colonel Barten's continuing awareness of this vulnerability was evidenced mid-morning when he requested that Regiment contact the 45th Reconnaissance Troop commander to arrange for him to go to Muehlthal to confer with Barten. The Reconnaissance Troop had sent outposts and patrols into the area west and southwest of the 2nd Battalion sector, and Barten wanted to get all particulars of their observations and full understanding of their operations plan. It was probably soon after Barten had made the request when the enemy made known its presence back along the Zinswiller road by opening automatic-weapons fire on vehicular traffic. Thus the only road open from the rear of the 2nd Battalion defensive sector had been cut. The time was about noon. It was learned eventually that there were two roadblocks, the first about one mile from Muehlthal, the second about 500 yards beyond.

It appears to have been a cavalry reconnaissance vehicle patrolling toward Zinswiller from Muehlthal that found the route barred. After being fired on, the mounted patrol returned to Muehlthal and advised 2nd Battalion of the incident. An armored car was sent through and received fire from both roadblocks, but the firing proved to be harmless--it seemed evident that the blocking forces were lightly armed. At the same time, a 2nd Battalion reconnaissance patrol close by was reportedly fired on. This was presumably an L Co patrol, routinely checking along the Battalion's supply route. When he learned that the Zinswiller road was blocked, Colonel Barten sent a 30-man combat patrol led by L Co's Lieutenant White and perhaps a second L Co patrol to go after the enemy force. All of these actions had taken place prior to 1400.

The enemy raider battalion had not been able to arrive in the area in which it set up its roadblocks undetected. Late the previous afternoon a 2nd Battalion patrol had observed enemy movement about one mile to the northwest of the location where the blocks would be established the next day. The WRECKER patrol reported seeing an enemy 30-man patrol with entrenching tools and two machine guns. Earlier that afternoon another 2nd Battalion patrol had seen a 5-man enemy patrol carrying mines only a few hundred yards west of the eventual roadblock sites. However, these sightings had not been sufficient basis to conclude that a considerable enemy force was on the loose to the 2nd Battalion's left-rear--certainly not as much as a battalion. Later the enemy force would prove to have been the same battalion that had taken Baerenthal late on New Year's Day and had, just before midnight, begun an offensive action against the just arrived 2nd Battalion in the area below Baerenthal. The enemy battalion was far understrength as the result of serious losses sustained in these two actions around Baerenthal.

Colonel Barten had sent his own combat patrols to attack the roadblocks and was probably aware that tanks were being sent from Zinswiller to drive off the blocking force from the other side. Now there were precautions to be taken against the eventuality that the enemy might be able to sustain and even strengthen his blocking positions. Cruell recalls that "We were informed that we had been totally cut off to the rear. At the orders of Barten, we were to ration out the ammunition until further notice and collect and store food stocks found in houses and barns in the locality. I don't remember the ammo limits we placed on each category, but they were modest--two rounds per bazooka, for example. We gathered up all foodstuffs we could find in the small communities around, mostly chickens and jars of preserved vegetables and fruits. We also found a hog. My men hauled it in squealing at the end of a 10-foot rope. They would have butchered it right then, but I stopped them--the hog had to be saved for emergency eating only." And so the incipient barbecue was postponed.

The hog incident was just a brief diversion from the seriousness of the situation. Cruell: "We even made preparations to destroy classified papers at the CP. Later Barten thought we should try to find an alternate supply route toward the east. He and I got in his jeep in which we climbed up the embankment about 100 yards north of the CP. From there we started off along a trail which, according to the map, went through the mountains to the Philippsbourg-Niederbronn road. We hadn't gotten very far when we came to a tight wire stretched across the trail--a booby trap. We stopped and I got out. I ducked under the wire and went on a few yards more, then found another tight wire. I reported

this to Barten, and he suspended the search." The booby traps seemed to have been installed by American troops, and the 2nd Bn commander sent a letter through channels calling attention to the failure of the last U.S. unit in the area to provide record of its anti-personnel mine placements which Cruell and he had found that afternoon.

A prisoner had been taken from the enemy blocking force, possibly by the 2nd Battalion patrol briefly engaged near the roadblocks just after noon. The prisoner reported afterward that the enemy had 40 men entrenched several hundred meters west of the roadblock sites, presumably in addition to the men manning the roadblocks themselves and others at one or more outposts back along the raider battalion's route from the Baerenthal area. By mid-afternoon there was a section of light tanks from the 191st Tank Battalion working with the 45th Reconnaissance Troop in reducing the roadblocks. At nightfall the road was reported cleared. Meanwhile, the L Co patrol led by Lieutenant White had worked along the back trail of the German force and, at dusk, attacked an outpost which it found where the larger German patrol had been sighted the day before. The Germans took to their heels after they had suffered 20-30 casualties. White afterwards reported finding some 150 unoccupied foxholes in the area--probably the previous night's bivouac area for the enemy battalion.

The day had gotten off to a poor start for Sergeant Ball, the H Co supply sergeant. He was having something for breakfast at the H Co command post when his CO, Capt Edison B. Christian, checked with him to find out whether the equipment needed by the weapons sections--lost in the initial day's hard action below Baerenthal--was being replaced quickly. Christian was dissatisfied by Ball's report and dressed the sergeant down before moving forward from the CP to inspect his gun positions. Ball had done all he could to get replacement equipment from the hard-pressed regimental supply facilities, but the company commander's impatience distressed him. It was the final exchange between Captain Christian and Sergeant Ball--an uncharacteristically unpleasant one in a long-standing relationship of generally friendly and effective cooperation. A short time afterward, word came back to the CP that Christian had been killed by an incoming artillery shell.

Concerning the roadblock crisis, L Company's Richard Becker recalls that "Lieutenant White was issued orders to run the enemy off. He took part of the Company to carry out this mission. While he was gone, orders came from Colonel Barten for the rest of us to depart immediately on a route taking us in the direction of Philippsbourg. All of the company officers were on the mission to drive the Germans off the supply route, and there was about one platoon of the

Company remaining. When we asked for permission to wait for the rest of L Company to return so that we could all move off together, we were told to move immediately--the rest of the Company would follow later. Well, we did. We moved out along the route prescribed for us, and, as soon as we were clear of the 2nd Battalion sector, we stopped, dug in, and waited for Lieutenant White and the rest. He joined us several hours later, after dark."

Actually, the L Co group that Becker was with seems to have been assigned the mission to move to a point midway between the Zinswiller road from Baerenthal and the Niederbronn road from Philippsbourg. From there it was to have run contact patrols back toward the 2nd Battalion and onward toward the left flank of the defensive complex around Philippsbourg. When at 1500, Colonel Pettee had called 45th Division to inform it of the clearing of Philippsbourg, the G-3 had informed Pettee of several worries that concerned him about the WRECKER situation, one of these being the gap existing between 2nd Battalion and Pettee's forces in and around Philippsbourg. In response the 275th commander had stated that he would start sending patrols from 2nd Battalion to maintain the requisite contact. Subsequently, that job was evidently given to the L Co group which included Becker when it left Muehlthal. Then the plan was changed, for when Lieutenant White arrived with the rest of L Company at the point from where the Becker group was to start its patrols, White ordered them to join the column in its march back to rejoin the 3rd Battalion. That had been well after nightfall. L Company took the rest of the night struggling through the deep snow to get through the mountains and reach the sawmill on the Niederbronn road, where it found one of its own squads and the rest of the Battalion assembled. The L Co squad was the one that had taken some wounded men through to Philippsbourg on 3 January.

Early in the afternoon Regiment had been alerted by the 45th Division G-3 concerning an enemy battalion believed to be withdrawing along a route which would bring it across the Baerenthal-Zinswiller road from the south. It is not clear whether the G-3 had by then received identification of the enemy force blocking the Zinswiller road as a battalion. However, it is clear that in his warning to Colonel Pettee, the G-3 was referring to another enemy battalion retreating from an engagement further south. The word had been passed by Regiment to 2nd Battalion and relocations were accomplished to cut off the enemy's retreat. As a consequence, one of G Company's platoons was on the ridge to the north of Schwarzenberg--it had moved northwest from its previous position about 500 yards. F Company now had a rifle platoon on the low hill 200 yards west of Muehlthal, another on the slope to the west of the Zinswiller road a little to the

north of Teufelsbrueckerhof, and its remaining rifle platoon about 500 yards to the west on the south slope of Schwarzenberg. E Company's positions remained unchanged. Colonel Barten was evidently relying on the heavy patrolling by friendly armor of the Zinswiller road south of Muehlthal to detect an enemy breakout between Zinswiller and Muehlthal--his battalion's new deployments were in the anticipation that the enemy battalion might attempt to side-slip north from its last reported location.

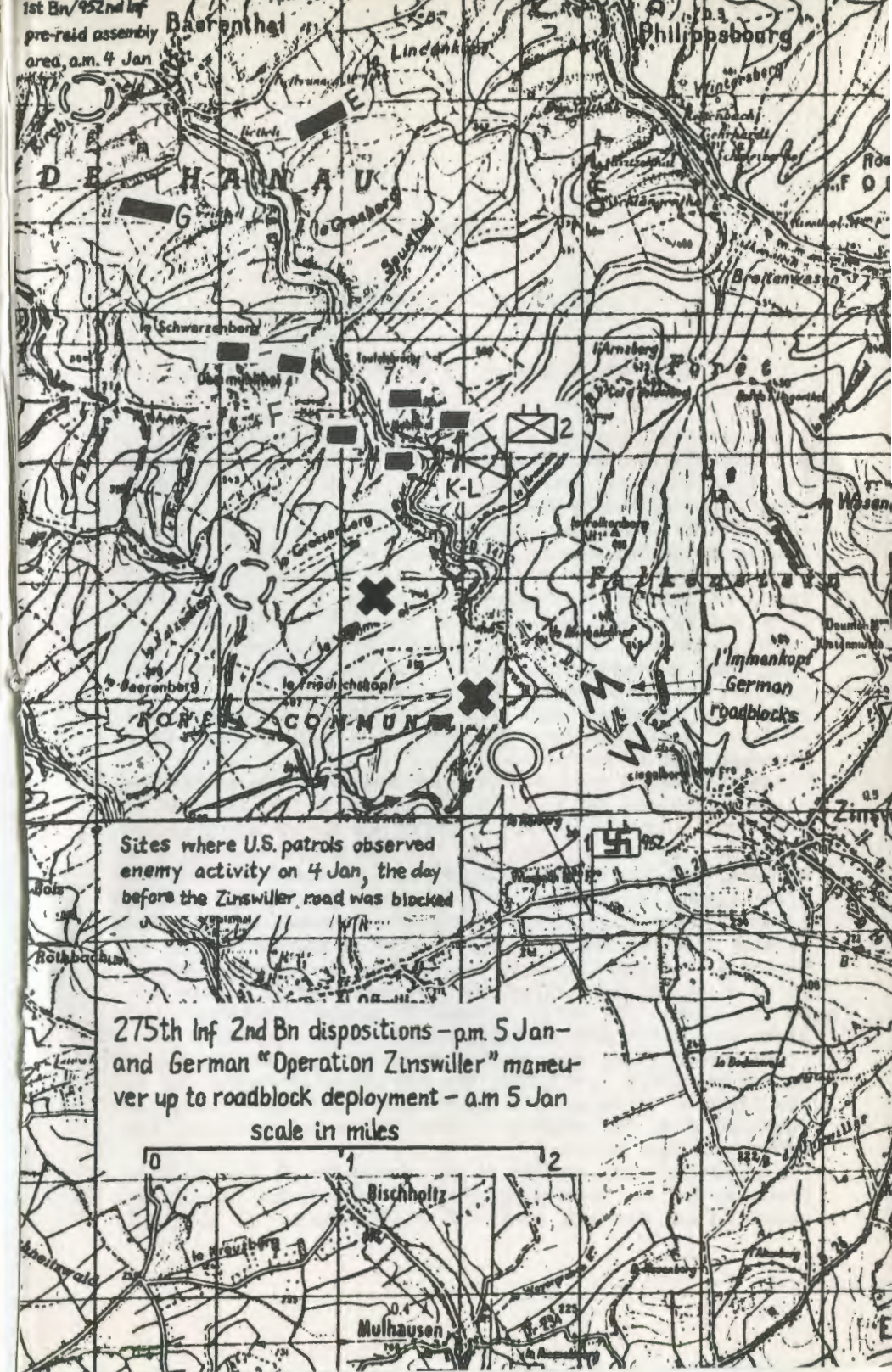
Cremer, the F Co machine-gunner, was evidently with the rifle platoon on the hill west of Muehlthal. He remembers a rumor he heard at this location: "We were supposed to block the valley to the west down which the Germans were going to drive some 800 or so displaced workers." Word of the true assignment--the blocking of an enemy battalion's retreat--seems to have been distorted before reaching Cremer, the GI in the foxhole. Neither the displaced workers nor the retreating Germans made an appearance that night. Instead Cremer remembers receiving a shelling as active as he ever would experience. As for the enemy roadblock force, the remnants of that battalion would withdraw starting on 6 January, but its route would be in the direction of Baerenthal. The heavy shelling to which Cremer and others were subjected had been designed, perhaps, to interdict the area through which the retreat would be made.

Some local residents had remained in the 2nd Battalion area for the first several days of action that had followed New Year's Day. Then two families totalling 10 persons fled Obermuehlthal on 5 January. The rest of the population--another 12 persons--would leave the next day. They had endured the nearby shellings, bombings, and strafings having been able, presumably, to identify such occurrences as being normal for a combat rear area. Cruell believes that "when the remaining natives saw us fell trees and blast a tank trap on the road, they decided that the town would be caught in the crossfire of an imminent front-line battle." One of the 2nd Battalion's foraging parties going through the supposedly deserted houses found an elderly man lying nude and paralyzed in his bed--hanging at the foot of the bed was a German uniform from the War of 1870 era. The battalion surgeon, Capt Kurt Lekisch, evacuated the man to Zinswiller. When, a few days later, Lekisch had occasion to visit the regimental aid station, which had by then been moved to Zinswiller, he would locate the Obermuehlthal mayor among the refugees and give him a stern lecture for having abandoned one of his citizens. The mayor would explain that the old man had insisted on being left behind. The antique uniform presumably had been left out as a credential for the old man in anticipation of the German infantry's arrival. As for the Obermuehlthal citizenry's judgment when they had

decided to flee their homes, that proved to be unerring. A week later the little community, which had shown few scars of warfare at the time of the exodus, had become a scene of shell-torn wreckage.

The assignment given by 2nd Battalion to the L Co platoon to patrol between the right flank of 2nd Battalion dispositions and the left flank of the 1st Battalion/274th at Philippsbourg was reassigned to WRECKER E Company. That night, one such E Co patrol was stalked by an enemy raiding party as the patrol returned to the E Co perimeter. Following close on the heels of the patrol, the raiders surprised and captured the two E Co occupants of an outlying foxhole. This and other incidents showed the advantage held by the combat-wise enemy infantry over the inexperienced WRECKER doughboys during the latter's first days in combat. The advantage was short-lived as the Americans were not slow in learning the tricks of the trade.

As of 1600, 5 January, the 275th Infantry Unit Report noted the following enemy units as being in contact with the Regiment: Elements of the 476th, 456th, 952nd, and 953rd regiments. In this connection, it is appropriate to mention that an enemy column comprising an estimated 500 men was spotted by an American air observer on 5 January as it moved south from Sturzelbronn toward Philippsbourg. News of this sighting was received at the WRECKER Niederbronn CP around mid-day, while the American counterattack in Philippsbourg remained stalled; consequently it caused much concern to the 275th commander and his staff. Other subsequent reports received there probably pertained to the same enemy unit. One noted that a German column moving along the road north of Philippsbourg had been struck hard in a bombing attack by American aircraft. At the WRECKER CP, the apparent failure subsequently of the enemy to reinforce his troops under attack at Philippsbourg was attributed to the American air strike's effectiveness. Thus it had happened that on successive days the operations of the U.S. Army Air Corps caused WRECKER resentment and then earned WRECKER gratitude. There is no certain identification of the enemy unit or units reported to have been sighted north of Philippsbourg on 5 January. Possibly it or they were elements of the 36th VG Division arriving in the area--elements of the 256th VG Division were relieved by the 36th in the Philippsbourg area beginning on 7 Jan.



CHAPTER VII

The Finish on Falkenberg

Saturday, 6 Jan (-4 to +3 degrees, Fahr.)

The 256th VG Division monograph indicates that the principal activity for the 476th and 456th regiments on 6 January was reconnaissance patrolling. The 456th in the Philippsbourg area reportedly learned from its patrols that, despite considerable American vehicular traffic both ways on the Philippsbourg-Niederbronn road, there had been no indication of a build-up of forces in and around Philippsbourg. Also the area between Philippsbourg and the Rothenbach valley (the Philippsbourg-Dambach gap) appeared to be clear of American troops. The 476th Regiment in the Baerenthal area reaffirmed through its patrols that the American defenses remained echeloned in depth along the Zintzel creek defile. Patrolling had been unable to penetrate the defenses north of the Zintzel; however, one patrol did reach a point above Obermuehlthal to the south.

Both regiments continued to comb through their supporting elements for men who could be reassigned as replacements to their rifle companies, most of which had become badly understrength. In this respect, the results of combings-out were becoming counterproductive--such men as could be diverted often became, because of age or physical disability, burdens to their front-line units. The 476th continued to take punishment from "incessant artillery fire on Baerenthal and its vicinity." A large part of its infantry reserve was retained in a Maginot Line troop shelter northeast of Baerenthal. On the right, the 481st regiment's security outposts were often in contact with American reconnaissance parties.

The German First Army headquarters approved the recommendation of LXXXIX Corps that the 1st Battalion/952nd Inf of the 361st VG Division, the "Operation Zinswiler" force, be recalled from its mission. That battalion conducted its withdrawal that night.

A matter of some concern to the commander of the 256th VG Division was the continuing presence of American "groups of undetermined strength north of Philippsbourg (I Company/

275th) and on the high ground in the vicinity of Mambach on the approach to the northeast of it (B Company/275th). The 45th Grenadier Regiment committed its regimental reserve formed into combat patrols to deal with the problem. The American group "in Maginot Line fortifications on the height Falkenberg surrendered after a struggle."

On Falkenberg WRECKER B Company had reached the end of its resources. As had been the experience of I Company, whose siege on "Hill No. 30" had ended the day before, few of B Company's complement did not have serious foot problems. There had been no ration resupply since the Company's arrival on the giant ridge 4 days before. What water they had came from melted snow, which had its pernicious effect on their weakened stomachs. The Company was starving. Its active defense earlier had contributed to the lengthy delay of the enemy's 456th regiment in its movement on 3 January from Nuenhoffen to relieve the 476th regiment in Philippsbourg. Its continuing operation on Falkenberg forced the commitment of troops to secure the German rear and, if possible, to eliminate the problem.

B Company had moved out of Philippsbourg during the late morning of 2 January. The German "surprise raid" into Philippsbourg came at dawn on 3 January, and the American situation there had deteriorated to the point when, late on 3 January, the 275th's commanding officer had recommended withdrawing all troops from the village and then bombarding it with artillery concentrations. Nevertheless, after the German attack into Philippsbourg had forestalled in its incipience the WRECKER 1st Battalion's attempt to go to beleaguered B Company's rescue, American commanders and staffs in Philippsbourg and Niederbronn redirected their thoughts again and again to the Falkenberg situation and what could be done about it. Perhaps it was the relatively greater remoteness of the B Co location compared to I Company's that caused more concern to be directed at Falkenberg than to "Hill No. 30." Perhaps it was the certainty that B Company, in addition to being cut off, was under enemy pressure. However, whatever measure suggested itself as a solution to the Falkenberg problem brought with it the realization that WRECKER had its hands full just hanging onto what it had--there were no spare physical means available after Colonel Pettee had committed his single rifle platoon--the regimental reserve--and the just-attached tank platoon during the afternoon of 3 January. With the attachment of the 1st Battalion/274th Infantry to the 275th, the operations of 4 and 5 January had been planned with the objective of not only clearing Philippsbourg but also of bringing relief to B Company/275th (and to I Company as well). Then the movements during the night of 5-6 January of B Company/274th and C Company/275th would evidently be designed to promote the

liberation of Schmied's company, Long's having already been liberated.

On Falkenberg, WRECKER B Company had ambushed and shot up a German combat patrol which evidently was trying to infiltrate into its position from the rear. As the siege went on, B Company's dilemma had become much the same as I Company's--the lack of information on the situation in Philippsbourg, of new instructions, and of resupply combined with the aggressions of the freezing weather and of the enemy to pose a perplexing problem--what should the Company do? Too, B Co's severely wounded CO, unconscious much of the time, was consequently unable to give of his leadership and judgment in the conduct of his company's operations.

There had been numerous casualties in addition to Captain Schmied. Some of these were remembered and written down by Walton C. Thibodeaux in a diary he kept during his days as a POW--2nd Lt Harry J. Bergmann, Wpns Plat leader, killed; S Sgt Edward F. Richards, killed; Cpl Louis C. Dupuy, killed; Mayfield, wounded. One of the B Co medics, either T 5 Murray Pruzan or Pfc Steve Rutka, had been killed while attending to the wounded company commander. There had been many others, but the circumstances of the B Co survivors' captivity following their surrender made it all but impossible that any written records would not be lost.

With the passing days, the Company, despite its increasing enfeeblement, remained constantly on the alert--particularly at night, when the German patrols were especially active. It was on 6 January when realization came that B Company had reached the end of the line. There had been no sign that any relief force had been, or was about to be, sent from Philippsbourg. Ammunition of all types was practically gone. There was a discussion among B Co leaders, including Captain Schmied, who was conscious at the moment, and it was agreed that further resistance was pointless. Lieutenant Groffie, also wounded, would remember that "it was the lack of food and ammunition which made the Company's surrender a foregone conclusion. Before doing so, the men disabled their weapons and hid them in crevasses in the rock formations on the ridge. A few years later, I went back to the ridge and found quite a bit of our discarded equipment--grenades and other items. However, someone had found our weapons where they had been cached--they were all gone."

After the decision was made, a man was sent to signal to the enemy in positions nearby the Company's intent to surrender. By this time, there had been an accumulation of about a dozen German prisoners being held by B Company. When the German POW's realized that a surrender was to be arranged, several of them made evident their anxious opposition to the idea. Presumably, they did not relish the prospect of again being infantrymen in combat. The prisoners'

dissent was ignored and contact with the enemy was made. Several German officers entered the B Co perimeter accompanied by an armed escort. The negotiation was brief, and then the Americans were marched off the hill having left all equipment behind. That night they halted in Fischbach, 12 miles away, across the border in Germany. It was 2000-2100 when the Company reached its destination.

One of the German POW's released when B Company laid down its arms had been a member of a wire crew when he was taken prisoner. The postwar 256th VG Division monograph took notice of the just-released man's report of a clever deception he was thought to have achieved as a prisoner of the Americans on Falkenberg. During his interrogation by his American (B Co/275th) captors--so his story went--the POW had presented an overblown and awesome picture of powerful German forces facing Philippsbourg. The 256th VG Division account went on to express the presumption that the consequent report, passed from the American force on Falkenberg to Philippsbourg and on up the chain of command, became responsible for the Americans' remaining in a defensive posture in the Philippsbourg sector. Perhaps the German ex-POW did not realize that B Company never sent a report recounting his horror story back to Philippsbourg--and had practically no capability of doing so. Perhaps he did. In this connection, there is evidence that at one time--presumably during the first week of fighting around Philippsbourg--German intelligence estimates held that the rest of the American 70th Division was poised immediately to the rear of its 275th regiment in the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal sector. This illusion may have been caused to some extent by the initial commitment of only the 275th and the several days intervening before the 276th and 274th regiments came into contact with NORDWIND contingents elsewhere in the Bitche Salient. Having judged that the Americans had a capability to attack through Philippsbourg or Baerenthal with the two sister regiments of the 275th Infantry, the German commanders would have been understandably concerned and would have wondered why the Americans didn't. Seen in this light, the German wire crewman's report following his liberation from American captivity on Falkenberg was likely to have found his superiors receptive and approving. The report was well remembered and included in disproportionately complete detail in the 256th VG Division monograph. Thus the wire crewman seems to have achieved a deception--but of his own division staff. For one or another reason, such could have been his purpose.

In the WRECKER C Co column marching up into the mountains that night, Sergeant Higley was still thinking about the Company's after-action muster near the "root cellar" at nightfall. Counting himself, his squad had then numbered

six men, survivors of two days of fighting in Philippsbourg. As for the rest of the battered 2nd Platoon, Sergeant Thomas' squad had been somewhat better off, but Bondy's had been wiped out, the two men remaining fit for duty having been assigned one each to Higley and Thomas. Casualty-wise, the other platoons of C Company had not lost so many. Like the rest of the Battalion, C Company had had scant opportunity for sleep or rest and had been constantly exposed to freezing temperatures since its commitment into Philippsbourg 2 or 3 days before. It had received no hot chow since New Year's Eve. At midnight the march was only half completed; continuing until nearly dawn, it was a memorable horror.

The C Co march objective was Hill 471, also named "Angelsberg" on the tactical maps. It was situated on the northern edge of a cluster of tangled ridges to the northeast of Philippsbourg. It was the same piece of high ground on which A Company had taken up positions 3 1/2 days before, A Company having been, however, further forward on the northern slope of the hill. Had it been possible for C Company to follow the same route A Company had taken to Angelsberg, the march would not have been such a hardship; but now the enemy blocked that route. The new route took C Company southeast along the edge of the massif, then turned it northward into the heart of the rugged area. The trails were seldom level and were blanketed by deep snow adding to marchers' labors. Often the wind had blown it in deep drifts through which the head of the column had to plough a furrow. Those stretches blown clean were frozen and icy adding treacherous footing on the steep inclines and declines to the troubles of the march.

It was nearly dawn when the exhausted men finally halted on what was thought to be the objective. A Company was, as far as Lieutenant Grotheer knew, somewhere to the east. The 1st Battalion command group, which also had moved by vehicle from Philippsbourg back through Niederbronn along the same route taken by A Company, was supposed to be over behind A Company. C Company was completely out of contact. Its movement that night had been tactical--to check the area along its march route for the presence of enemy troops. Over to the east the 1st Battalion commander and his staff would soon have a new worry--B Company was still missing and unaccounted for, and C Company would become another statistic of the same category.

It was during one of the halts, probably the one at the presumed march objective, when Sergeant Higley looked for Sergeant Rusley. During the previous segment of the march, Higley had lost his footing and fallen, and the muzzle of his rifle, slung on his shoulder, had been jammed into the ground and befouled. Now Higley wanted to borrow the garri-

son-type ramrod which Rusley, the complete soldier, always carried sticking out of his pack. Finding Rusley, Higley explained what he wanted and the loan was made--but not before Rusley had delivered himself of some caustic comments about the supposed clumsiness of the other noncom. Rusley had not been joking. His no-nonsense approach to soldiering had earned some resentment against Rusley from his fellow enlisted men back during training days. Now in the deadly seriousness of actual combat, new respect was replacing hostility in the men's attitude toward the tough sergeant.

Back in Philippsbourg, the joint battalion aid station in the barn had been kept open after both WRECKER battalions had been withdrawn from the wrecked village. There were still rumors coming in about wound cases in some of the more remote areas of the battlefield. These had to be checked out by litter teams. To receive whomever the teams found, Nelson, the 1st Bn medical technician, was at the station with a medical officer and another technician. They had only a couple of wound cases at the station--activity was at a low ebb.

The enemy's mortar fire had rained down on the village for much of the night, signaling that he still had Philippsbourg under observation and had noted the activity as WRECKER 1st and 3rd battalions had made their preparations and then pulled out of the village. During the night one of the hits received by the sturdy stone structure had jammed the entrance to the joint battalion aid station. It could not be readily cleared, and so a new site for the station had to be found. During the subsequent search, Nelson and the other man hit upon the "first house on the left" down the road. Entering it, the two men found the interior choked with German dead and a jumbled mixture of equipment and used and unused ammunition--the vestiges of the enemy's brief roadblock defense several days before. The two men were still stepping gingerly over and around bodies and wreckage wondering whether and how to start with the clean-up of the place. Then the relief medics arrived for the day shift, and Nelson and his teammate departed immediately, glad to be delivered from their dilemma. Nelson never went back to Philippsbourg afterward; so he never learned how the problem of the aid station relocation was resolved.

Enemy Reaction of Loss of Philippsbourg

A Company/274th organized its defensive positions on its final objective, taken on 5 January--the hill which rises at the north end of Philippsbourg. The first enemy counterattack to hit the Company came at 0400 the following morning. According to the 274th Infantry history, "Snow, Ridges, and Pillboxes," the Germans still retained a hold of some part

of A Company's hill at the end of the 5 January attack. They started their predawn counterattack from their positions on the hill and continued their pressure until daybreak. Meanwhile they were able to work some men up a draw to the rear of the A Co positions and cut them off from the rest of the Battalion. Lieutenant Vaught obtained supporting artillery and mortar fire which was delivered with sufficient intensity to relieve the enemy pressure on his company. During the night, T 4 Nason M. McCoy took a wire crew forward from Philippsbourg to get a line to A Company and establish telephone contact with it. McCoy remembers that "Pfc Edward J. Leyer and Pfc Walter W. Saeger were with me as we approached what we thought was an A Co outpost. Saeger sighted some men coming down the road. Just to play it safe, we sought cover in a nearby ditch--except Saeger, who hid behind a woodpile. Sure enough, it was a German patrol." A German spotted Saeger and demanded his surrender. Instead, Saeger shot and killed the German. That appears to have been the end of the exchange between the wire crew and the enemy patrol.

At nightfall on 5 January, WYOMING B Company had been on the crest of the east ridge above Philippsbourg, having moved there from the west side of the village some time during the course of the action that day. Colonel Willis recalls: "That evening I was ordered to send B Company to occupy the second hill east of town (Staengelwald, just east of Mambach). This hill was supposed to be unoccupied. B Company moved out during the night and found that hill very much occupied but managed to take them by surprise, killing or capturing them and proceeded to occupy the hill." The hill thus gained was not to be easily kept.

Having bivouaced in Philippsbourg part of the night, two B Co platoons moved from the village and reached the foot of Staengelwald on its south side by moving along a wagon trail. One of the scouts of the leading 1st Platoon was challenged in German. The scout hastily withdrew without seeing his challenger and reported his experience. Patrols were sent out and quickly became engaged with the enemy. The Platoon moved ahead aggressively and succeeded in taking its objective and 10 German prisoners in addition. The rest of B Company moved up, and the entire force began to dig in.

The Company had hardly settled into its new positions when an enemy counterattack against the hill was delivered. It was shortly before dawn. According to Joseph Marshall, of the 1st Platoon, "They came from our right-front and overran the 1st and 2nd squads' positions before we realized that they had struck." Three men were captured by the first German sweep. The Americans fought back, but there were more casualties. Marshall: "We kept firing at the Krauts. However, there were too many of them, and we knew we couldn't

hold them off too long. We had just about decided to pull back when we learned that 1st Lt Walter M. Bjork had sent out flanking patrols around the left. Then the Weapons Platoon came up, and together we drove them back." S Sgt David R. Mann has recalled that "T Sgt Phillip P. Ignazewski and S Sgt Chester L. Cosner led that attack. Ignazewski had a machine gun on his hip and kept blazing away with it as we moved forward. The gun was really coughing lead!"

Ignazewski's work on that and other days was much admired. Winifred N. Bollinger, a rifleman, would write that "One of the real heroes of Philippsbourg was Sergeant Ignazewski. Whenever we got into trouble, he would pull off his right glove and put it in his other hand, call for someone to follow him with spare ammunition, and using the machine gun like a water hose, he would cause many of the enemy to retreat, die, or surrender." He was awarded the Silver Star medal, the citation being dated 6 January 1945. The following March, Phillip Ignazewski was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant having received a battlefield commission.

The real contest for Philippsbourg was over. However, enemy probes and limited counterattacks would continue the pressure on Colonel Willis' battalion. Within a few days the 1st Battalion would revert to the command of Colonel Conley after both other 274th battalions had come up on line on the right of and adjacent to the 1st Battalion. The 274th would continue to hold this sector until 20 Jan, when it was voluntarily abandoned in the course of the U.S. Seventh Army's planned withdrawal.

The withdrawal of WRECKER 3rd Battalion elements from Philippsbourg, which had commenced late on 5 January, continued into the early hours of the next day as the scattered units of the Battalion gradually reassembled at the sawmill complex back along the Niederbronn road from Philippsbourg. The remnants of I Company arrived there at 0100, followed 2 hours later by K Company. Both companies bivouaced there for the remainder of the night.

According to "Kingsmen," "The morning of the 6th was spent at the sawmill reorganizing. There was a happy return of many of the men who had been considered lost. Most of the missing from the 1st Platoon and from the LMG section attached to it returned having made their way over the hills where they had been fighting with the 2nd Battalion. The effects of the cold and exposure began to take a serious toll on the Company--mainly due to trench foot."

The various 3rd Battalion components which had been attached to the 2nd Battalion for 2 days most likely assembled at Muehlthal and marched as a single body toward the reunion with the rest of the Battalion at the sawmill. L Company's Becker recalls: "We spent most of the night working our way through the hills and thick woods, wading through deep snow.

We arrived at the rear of Phillipsbourg at daylight. I can't tell you how relieved I felt at being back with our own battalion. We were given our first hot meal since New Year's Day--the best turkey and dressing I have ever eaten.

"While we were eating, a couple of stray 88 rounds came in our direction. I had just completed digging a good, deep two-man foxhole. When I heard the familiar whistle, I bit down on a turkey leg I was eating and dove for my foxhole with my rifle in both hands. Three men piled on top of me. Afterward Lieutenant White said to me: 'Becker, I sure am glad you dig a deep hole--I was the top man!' Only a few rounds passed over us and it was all over in a few minutes. I had found myself at the bottom of the pile-up in the foxhole with a mouthful of mixed turkey and dirt, but it still seemed funny to me."

The respite was short-lived. Shortly after noon, 3rd Battalion moved its companies out of the sawmill area. It had been assigned to a back-up defensive role in supporting the units defending Philippsbourg and in securing the defile through the mountains toward Niederbronn. According to the 3rd Battalion history, a check of the companies prior to the departure from the sawmill revealed that the Battalion was at approximately half-strength, I, L, and M companies being the hardest hit. The I Co present-for-duty strength--36 officers and men--was pathetically small compared with others. However, as the days in those frigid, bloody mountains dragged by, the statistics for other rifle companies in the Regiment were steadily ground down to make such a number not so unusual.

David Turner: "I Company moved up toward the front again having been organized into three squads with an officer in charge of each squad. Lieutenant Turner, as former exec, had earlier taken over command of the Company, replacing Captain Long." On the right of the 3rd Battalion's reserve position, I Company's assignment included the protection of WRECKER Cannon Co gun positions. When K Company moved up from the sawmill in the afternoon, it took up positions near where it had dug in on New Year's Day just prior to moving into Philippsbourg for the first time. The 3rd Battalion CP was located at the sawmill, to where it had been displaced after the withdrawal from Philippsbourg. It also had a forward element, opened closer to Philippsbourg by the battalion at the same time as when the rifle companies moved back up.

In its new dispositions, L Company was attached to the 274th 1st Battalion assisting in the latter unit's mission to cover the right wing of the WRECKER regimental front. Becker: "L Company set up a defensive position on a high wooded hill (Lindenkopf) to the left of Philippsbourg. There was a large gap between us and the 2nd Battalion, to

which we had been attached less than 24 hours before."

In the 2nd Battalion sector facing into Baerenthal there was a rotation of one of the forward companies, E Company, which exchanged positions with F. Concerning the routine, George Barten has commented, "As a matter of equity, I kept rotating the lead companies in attack and those on line in defense. My intention was to distribute the risk." F Company's Cremer recalls that, the day after his company had been deployed to block the valley which runs west from Untermuehlthal, it was sent back to the forward area near Baerenthal. "Instead of returning to our old positions, we replaced E Company on the east side of the Zinswiller road, almost immediately adjacent to the Baerenthal-Philippsbourg road. Our task was to keep the Germans from attacking through our positions, which were on a reverse slope in an open field. The Germans had a 20 mm AA gun which gave them grazing fire on our supply route. The cooks, mail clerks, chaplain, and any others who came up took a chance every time. The only chaplain we ever saw was McPhelin, the priest."

Lieutenant Cruell was impressed by the frequent shelling around the battalion CP at Muethlthal, although it was located over a mile behind the forward companies. "The Zintzel valley was shelled almost continuously during the whole time we were there. Every time there was activity on the road from 100 yards south of the command post up to where the Obermuehlthal road joined it in would come enemy artillery. We soon decided that this stretch of road was under enemy observation. Even though a large number of shells fell close to the CP, none actually hit the building in which it was situated. The latrine, 30 feet away, was hit and its canvas screen was shredded and scattered to hang like Christmas ornaments on the surrounding orchard trees. The building to the front of the CP was thoroughly etched by flying shell fragments. We guessed that there was a slight protuberance of the hill mask between the CP site and the enemy artillery guns which made the building immune, but clearly it did not protect the area immediately around it." Early during the CP presence at Muehlthal, a dismount point was established down the road. Unarmored vehicles were required to halt there; and their occupants could then proceed on foot using a trail the concealment of which proved to be effective enough. Some days later a German artillery officer would be captured--his interrogation proved that the 2nd Battalion staff's suspicions about the road stretch's being under enemy observation had been correct. The enemy artillery observer (FO) belonged to the 361st VG Division, which had operated in the same area prior to the end of 1944. The enemy had taken good advantage of his familiarity with the terrain by placing an observation post (OP) on a height

southwest of Muehlthal, far from the support of any German infantry. Concealment and the rugged terrain had been relied on to protect the observer team.

Col Charles S. Pettee was relieved of command of the 275th Infantry on 6 Jan. He was replaced by Lt Col John H. McAleer, previously commanding officer of the 315th Infantry/79th Division.

The 275th Unit Report listed the following enemy units as being in contact with the Regiment as of 1600, 6 January: Elements of the 456th Grenadier Regiment, 476th Grenadier Regiment, 952nd Infantry, 481st Grenadier Regiment, and 815th AA Battalion.

CHAPTER VIII

The Chaplain's Foxhole Visits

Sunday, 7 Jan (-4 to +5 degrees, Fahr)

During the night of 6-7 Jan, the commanding general of the German 256th VG Division received from LXXXIX Corps two tactical objectives which he was to assign to his forces for taking. The objectives were the mountain exits at Niederbrom and Zinswiler at the end of the Falkenstein and Zintzel creek valleys, and this meant that his division would have to push from Philippsbourg and Baerenthal through the U.S. 275th Infantry defenses along both defiles. In the case of the Falkenstein valley, the general could make a reasonable presumption that the Americans had blocked the defile with defensive obstacles extending from the prospective attack's line of departure to its objective. In the other case--the Zintzel valley--reconnaissance by the 476th Grenadier Regiment had already determined that the Americans' blockage along it extended to a considerable depth. The former staff officer of the 256th VG Division who prepared that unit's monograph recalled that his commanding general considered his means to be woefully inadequate. He judged his division's infantry to be in such bad condition that it would have to be rested and reorganized before it could have any prospect of achieving even one of the two objectives. There was a delay, and the general had a small opportunity to rest his foot troops. However, the situation demanded early offensive action to regain a firm grip on the initiative, which had been slowly slipping into the hands of the Americans since the end of *NORDWIND*'s second day. The respite would not be nearly enough.

In the 361st VG Division sector, the 1st Battalion/952nd Infantry made its withdrawal back to Baerenthal from its "Operation Zinswiler" deployments. Arriving at its withdrawal objective during the course of the night 7-8 Jan, the Battalion was in wretched condition. It had taken serious losses from exposure of men already weakened because of inadequate rations--these in addition to the combat losses before and during the mission. The Battalion was judged to be

unfit for any employment until after rest and reorganization.

By 7 January all but one or two of the nine TF Herren infantry battalions were serving as attachments to the 45th Division. However, in a day or so General Herren and his staff would start reassuming command of the Task Force's scattered troops. Battalions which had been, during the first days of NORDWIND, shoved, individually, into various threatened spots were grouped together, again subordinated to their own regimental commanders. In turn the regiments were gradually shifted and reassembled so that, before the end of the week, the three 70th Division infantry regiments had become deployed on an uninterrupted front, the 275th, 274th, and 276th from left to right. An operations instruction issued by the 45th Division on 7 January set in motion a series of moves involving 275th and 274th battalions which on 10 Jan would put the two regiments on line with the 275th on the left, the point of contact between them being the western edge of Philippsbourg.

After the repositioning of two of its battalions on 6 January, the 275th Infantry's frontal dispositions were as follows: The 2nd Battalion was on the left; WYOMING 1st Battalion with WRECKER L Company attached was in the center; WRECKER 1st Battalion was on the right. WRECKER 3rd Battalion (less L Company) was in regimental reserve and backing up the defenses along the Falkenstein creek valley. The 2nd Battalion, on the left, was about to receive some relief from the earlier exposure of its flank and rear. All three battalions of the 276th Infantry would soon move into the large area of no-man's-land to the south of Obermuehlthal. There they would provide security against the enemy's sending a force into it enveloping around from the Baerenthal area or directly north from the tip of the Bitche Salient. At the moment the expanse--some 5 square miles of wooded, mountainous terrain--remained without opposing fronts very well defined. It continued to invite offensive or defensive deployments by the contending sides, the Germans being just as sensitive about the vulnerability of their north-south (Forneau Neuf-Reipertswiller) supply line as the Americans were about the enemy's capability to assemble a force in the area and break out of the mountains at Zinswiler or Rothbach.

The morning after relieving E Company in the 2nd Battalion forward-right sector below Baerenthal, F Company's commander decided to send hot chow up to the front-line platoons for breakfast. Pfc Russell A. Newton was a medic with one of these platoons and recalls quite well what happened. "I went with some of the men down into a ravine lined with overhanging rocks. The hot-food containers had been brought up and arranged there in expectation of feeding breakfast.

Although it was still dark, the enemy spotted the movement and started shelling the area, and we had to dash for cover in the rocks. Luckily we had no casualties. That was the end of the idea of serving us hot chow in that situation."

In daylight the isolation of the men in F Company's forward foxholes was almost complete. Lieutenant Southard has remembered that they "could not raise their heads above the rims of their holes without drawing fire. The Germans were on higher ground across the road and had good observation. The 7th being a Sunday, Chaplain McPhelin arrived at the F Co CP to hold a service for our Catholics. The situation of our forward platoons was explained to him--it just wasn't possible for men in those positions to come back for his service. Hearing this, the father said, 'Well, if that's the case, I will have to go to them. That's my job.' Then he went up forward and crawled to every hole, where he had a word or two for each occupant. While there was every expectation that it would come, there was no firing from the Germans that morning. They could undoubtedly see the American moving from foxhole to foxhole--perhaps they realized what was going on and held their fire for their own spiritual reasons or out of respect for a brave man."

Reminded of the incident many years later, Father McPhelin would comment, "Remarkable that Lawrence Southard remembered my visit to F Company on that Sunday. I've remembered it too but not the heroics. I first visited the crest of the hill where Lawrence was dug in with some of his men and recall that any movement drew fire from German snipers not far away. Unless my memory deceives me, my movement did draw attention and possibly caused the death of a 2nd lieutenant, killed by a single bullet through the head shortly after I had been with Southard. That is why I have not forgotten the day." (Father McPhelin's recollection here seems to relate to the death of Robert Reber, of E Company, several days earlier in the same vicinity. The shooting of Lieutenant Reber by an enemy sniper occurred under circumstances to which the Chaplain's presence could not have contributed. His evident witnessing of the event is simply another indication of McPhelin's propensity to be where the men were under fire.)

McPhelin: "When visiting men in foxholes as they were, I carried the Bread of the Eucharistic Sacrament with me just as any Catholic chaplain would. Going from position to position, I could absolve the Catholic men of their sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and then offer Holy Communion and say a few words to remind them that God the Father knew they were there and kept a providential eye on them. You know the theme--'No sparrow falls from heaven....'" In this connection, Richard Becker, an L Co rifleman at the time, would recall that part of his company, then attached

to the 2nd Battalion, was inserted into the Battalion's defensive perimeter. At this time he saw Chaplain McPhelin during one of the father's visits to the front-line troops and being much impressed by the man's devotion to his task. Nonetheless, Becker called out to McPhelin as the latter approached Becker's squad area, "You're wasting your time around here, Mike--nobody but Protestant heathens in this outfit!" or some such jaunty GI impudence.

G Company had been on the front line continuously since New Year's Day, although its platoons had shifted defensive positions several times during the period. Shellfire and patrolling by both sides had become a major part of the routine. Paul McCoy remembers that "We had several men picked off by a sniper as they descended from the ridge west of the Zinswiler road en route to the company CP--in a house adjacent to the road behind our ridge. H Co mortars were in the draw behind our ridge, and we had felled many trees near the mouth of the draw to prevent enemy tank penetration into it from the road. Sgt Wayne Davis, a good soldier, accidentally shot off one of his fingers as he was about to clean his rifle. It was a loss for our platoon. He rejoined us later.

"Then on 7 January we were alerted--a German patrol was in the area. S Sgt Bernard J. Lojko, our platoon sergeant, led the Platoon in a search for them." A couple of hours before the alert, Jacob O. Tveter and James A. Phillips, both of them privates in the 1st Platoon, had been sent back to the company CP on a water-hauling detail--a 2-mile trip made this long by the need to take a circuitous route which afforded concealment from enemy snipers; as the crow flies, the command post was no more than 500 yards from the 1st Platoon's area. Tveter: "Arriving back at the platoon CP, Phillips and I learned that our platoon was off looking for an enemy patrol, and we went after them to help out. When we caught up, we found our guys engaged in a firefight. The Germans seemed to have the advantage of position and could see Phillips and me as we moved up to join the others." McCoy: "Lojko and Tveter took off to find a spot from which they could observe and fire into the enemy, whom we could not see at all from where we were. The two men were ambushed--a German machine gun opened up, and Tveter was wounded. Lojko tried to get back to the Platoon but was cut down--killed instantly. We could not give covering fire because we could not see the machine gun and were afraid of hitting Tveter, who seemed to be only a few yards away from it. We finally drove the Germans away so we could get to Tveter. We carried him back on a litter made from two rifles and a blanket. We found the German machine gun where its crew had left it when they took off." Tveter: "The firefight had occurred around noon, but they didn't get me

back to the company CP until later in the afternoon. The fellows who carried me out surely were gutsy." It had been an action from which Tveter and Phillips could have sat out, and no one would have blamed them. Phillips was killed a few days later.

The demands for the 2nd Battalion commander's attention during these days were innumerable. George Barten: "I was busier than I knew--so busy, I forgot about time and meals. I finally told my driver, Cantor, to be sure and hand me something to eat a few times a day. The next thing I knew, Cantor was fixing me hot stews and other things which he had concocted from jars of preserved foods gotten from various cellars in the locality."

The 2nd Battalion situation had become somewhat static, but it was one of constant danger from enemy shellfire, patrols, and snipers. The struggle against the relentless cold was constant--regardless of efforts taken, by individuals and units, the functioning of the front-line soldier's body and mind was always below normal. It occasionally happened that a man would wound himself with his own weapon; then it was hard to tell whether it was accidental or intentional. E Company's Sergeant Slater one night was getting his men rounded up for a patrol. "One of my men shot himself in the leg right after I woke him up. The blast nearly tore his leg off." F Company's Cremer recalls that "One day we heard a shot ring out and later learned that one of the platoon sergeants had shot himself in the foot with his grease gun, which had been at sling-arms at the time. His reward was a few days off and reduction to private.

"Another oddity of this self-contained war was the person who, dressed as a civilian, would leave a house on the Zinswiler road and walk into Baerenthal each day. We fired on him a few times with our carbines--we machine-gunners had gotten rid of our .45 pistols--but never hit him or seemed to bother him. During this time we had the responsibility of sending night patrols to the east to make contact with our units around Philippsbourg. The ones I went on were uneventful."

The WRECKER S-3, Major Dykes, at 0005 on 7 Jan was talking on the telephone with Colonel Adams, assistant commander of the 45th Division, informing him of the situation in the 275th sector. "I just checked with all battalions, and they report all quiet. The attack this afternoon was primarily on the 1st Battalion of the 274th Infantry, and they did not lose any ground. A Company (275th) has swung around and is now in position. C Company (275th) has been ordered to move forward, but we do not know if they are in position as we are out of contact with them." Colonel Adams: "Tell that battalion commander that C Company is not to stop until they

get out to that hill. Get the battalion commander, his staff, and his whole headquarters (on the matter) if necessary. And he is to contact C Company and get them into position tonight. Connect me with your regimental commander."

Colonel Adams now spoke with Colonel McAleer, who had come on the line: "There is something we must get straightened out. This morning C Company moved out for Hill 471 (Angelsberg) at 0800. At 1000, when I was there (presumably at the 1st Battalion command post), everyone assured me that C Company was in contact with A Company on the right and with B Company/274th on the left. Now I'm notified that they don't know whether C Company is in position or not, as they are out of contact! God damn it, man, this business of sending a company out and losing contact and forgetting all about it has got to stop! There has been too much of that in your outfit these last 3 or 4 days. Now this is a good instance where we can show them that such things aren't done. Now get that battalion commander out of bed, get all his headquarters necessary out of bed, and locate C Company and then see that they get out on that hill! This is an order! We've got to put the heat on these birds to do things, and this must be done tonight." Colonel McAleer's response was not recorded in the 45th Div G-3 Journal, from which the above exchange was extracted.

Colonel Adams' understanding did not accord in every respect with the Karl Grotheer's recollections of C Company's movements after Philippsbourg was cleared on 5 Jan. As indicated above, Grotheer remembers that he and his company departed Philippsbourg at nightfall, 5 January, and marched all night to arrive at what he judged to be Angelsberg, the march objective, before dawn. The Company was out of contact with its battalion commander and his staff and with A Company, these having moved into the area east of Angelsberg by a different route. It is apparent that C Company remained out of contact with the rest of the Battalion at 1000, when Colonel Adams evidently visited the 1st Battalion command post, and was still out of contact at the end of 6 Jan, when 1st Battalion seems to have reported on its situation to Major Dykes.

The repercussions of the 45th Division's assistant commander's sternly delivered instructions to Colonel McAleer must have hit the 1st Battalion command post within minutes. There is no evidence as to what efforts had been made by the battalion commander or by either of the rifle companies adjacent to it to contact C Company on 6 January nor of C Company's efforts in this regard. Whatever they had been, there was no contact obtained. Surely there had been no lack of concern about C Company among the 1st Battalion's command group, but the confusion of tangled

ridges, thick woods, and deep snow in the vast new area now occupied by the Battalion had surely been baffling. It seems unlikely that anyone had to be gotten out of bed when the call from Regiment came to Colonel Pierce's command post, but it did cause the convening of an anxious staff conference, in which Major Duffie, of course, took part. When the conference dragged on producing nothing other than frustration, Duffie became irritated and exclaimed: "Hell, I can find them!"

Duffie got the job and took Captain Carrier, the S-3, with him. When at last they came upon a trail of trampled snow marking the passage of a large body of troops, Duffie sent Carrier back to make arrangements to bring rations up to C Company, the trail of which he judged he had found. Carrier departed on his mission, and Duffie continued along the beaten path. Soon he came upon the missing company. All of its personnel appeared to Duffie to be in miserable condition wrought by the near-zero weather on the windy mountain ridge on which it had dug in. Talking to Lieutenant Grotheer, Major Duffie suspected that the C Co commander had contracted pneumonia. Having shown the lieutenant where his company was located on the map, Duffie passed on the orders which had come from the 45th Division--C Company was to double-time to the correct location.

Years later, John Duffie remembered that, "Then I told Karl that, if it were my company, I wouldn't move it a damn step until after the rations had arrived." As the former battalion exec remembers it, C Company hadn't received any rations since leaving Philippsbourg, and it wasn't so far out of position as to make a great difference to the Battalion's defensive posture. He was skeptical of all the fuss that was being made over C Company's positioning--"Somebody wanted to have the situation map prettied up." Now that the Company had been found, the more important thing in Duffie's view was its well-being. Later, when Colonel Pierce found out why C Company hadn't moved promptly to Angelsberg after having been located, the battalion commander wouldn't agree--he was furious at Duffie.

Insofar as enemy action on 7 January was concerned, the 275th Unit Report for the date stated: (There was enemy) "Patrolling to the front of and within our lines. Sniping and occasional (smallarms) exchanges along the Baerenthal and Philippsbourg fronts. Quiet in the sector of the 1st Battalion west of Dambach. Occasional artillery falling in the Philippsbourg area. No contact with the enemy on the right flank except for occasional visual sightings north of (our) positions." In reaction to an influx of civilian refugees into Philippsbourg occurring since the clearing of that place, orders were issued that the refugees be stopped

and searched for weapons and ammunition. The Unit Report noted no changes in the enemy order of battle in the 275th's sector.

CHAPTER IX

The Abortive Attack toward Zinswiller

Monday through Wednesday

8 Jan (-3 to +8 degrees, Fahr.)

9 Jan (Zero to +10 degrees, Fahr.)

10 Jan (-10 to +5 degrees, Fahr.)

On the German side, the exhaustion and depletion of the infantry forces of the 256th and 361st divisions led to a high level decision to commit the 21st Panz and 25th Panz divisions, which had been since the beginning of *NORDWIND* retained in First Army's reserve. Such commitments were, however, conditional--before the Panzers could go into action, the Zintzel creek valley had to be penetrated by infantry attack to the edge of the mountains near Zinswiller. The 256th VG Division was assigned this task, and, to enable the 256th commander to concentrate his forces at the points of attack, part of the Division's sector was to be turned over to the 38th VG Division, which, in addition to relieving the 256th in part of its sector, was also tasked to support the 256th's main effort by advancing on its left flank. Comparing his new mission with the one which it replaced, the 256th commander surely must have considered that his chances of success were improved--he now had only one of the two objectives previously assigned. The 38th's relief operation was begun during the night of 7-8 Jan, and it enabled the 481st Regiment/256th to reach its assembly area the following morning--in the vicinity of Baerenthal. During the next night, the 456th Grenadier Regiment/256th was relieved in its positions opposite Philippsbourg, after which it moved to an assembly area near the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal road to the north of the height Lindenkopf. The attack would actually take place around daybreak on 10 January.

Down in the tip of the Bitch Salient, the 361st VG Division's attacks were continued without success. Its commanding general obtained permission to discontinue his attacks and withdraw his battalions from the Moder River area to a

less exposed line.

On 8 January, Task Force Herren assumed command of the 275th and 274th regiments, the 275th reverting to its control at 0800. The reassumption of command of 274th battalions was to become effective later in the day after they had been relieved and moved--the 2nd Battalion moved from Wingen by motor to Oberbronn, where it arrived at 1615. After holding blocking positions north of Rothbach during the day, the 3rd Battalion was relieved and moved to an assembly area 2 miles east of Rothbach, where it closed at 2045. In its initial instruction to WRECKER, TF Herren ordered that regiment to "send patrols to secure the following information: location, strength, disposition of enemy forces in Baerenthal and the surrounding high ground; also Philippsbourg and the high ground to the north. Report by 1800 the location, strength, disposition of enemy forces to your immediate front and on the assigned objectives. Report on roads suitable for tanks. Patrol aggressively as far north as grid line '47' (east-west line through Eguelshardt and Neunhoffen). Reports are desired as soon as obtained; first report on (the situation to your) immediate front not later than 1800."

The content of the instruction from TF Herren suggested that enemy offensive action was expected. This expectation was evidently confirmed separately, for a message sent by Major Dykes, the regimental S-3, to the three WRECKER battalions and to WYOMING 1st Battalion stated, "Enemy attack from the northwest may be expected first thing tomorrow. Sector commander of the right sector--CO/274th Inf; sector commander of the left sector--CO/275th Inf. 1st Battalion /275th Inf is attached to the 274th Infantry. 3rd Battalion/274th Inf is attached to the 275th Infantry. It is in the process of assembling one-half mile southwest of Zinswiler..... 2nd and 3rd battalions/274th prepare to counterattack north through Philippsbourg and Baerenthal. 2nd Battalion/274th move out of town into the woods if command post is in town. ... 275th regimental CP is to move to position designated (Zinswiler). Alert all officers that the situation is critical... ."

It is evident that the G-2's of 45th Division and VI Corps had acquired intelligence indicating that the German LXXXIX Corps was preparing an attack. In all likelihood, the movement of the 36th VG Division into the area northeast of Philippsbourg had been detected. The expectation that the attack would occur on 9 January was probably based on solid evidence and could very well have reflected the timing envisioned in the German attack plan--a timing that may have had to be postponed due to some delay. The German account is not specific in this regard. Too, the fact that one of the assault regiments (481st) reached its assembly area on the

morning of 9 January suggests that the attack's start may very well have been planned for that date. The fact that the other assault regiment (456th) was not relieved north of Philippsbourg until that night could explain why there was a postponement of the attack until 10 January.

As the consequence of intensive patrolling on 8 January, the 275th Unit Report for the date noted the following enemy activity observed: "Considerable movement of small groups was seen in the Philippsbourg area. Small troop columns were seen moving from Dambach toward Philippsbourg. Troops, horses and wagons were seen moving south along the roads into the Philippsbourg area." Nothing noteworthy was reported from the Baerenthal area, but this could have been because the enemy assault regiment was already in place, having arrived there that morning, probably before daybreak. The Unit Report stated concerning the enemy capability during the next 24-hour period: "Attack, from the northwest and northeast, probably in battalion strength. Continued patrolling and harassing rifle and mortar fire. Shelling CP's and OP's." The WRECKER estimate reflected about the same degree of expectation of an enemy attack as had been present in the unit reports for the several days preceding the 8th. In view of the warning from higher headquarters which evidently called the situation "critical," the WRECKER unit-report entry suggested that Colonel McAleer and his staff had not seen much that confirmed that view in the results of WRECKER patrolling.

WRECKER 1st Battalion's several days of plugging the Philippsbourg-Dambach gap while deployed on the lofty ridges in that area were extremely cold and windy. The temperature never got higher than a few degrees above zero, and the blast of steadily strong winds produced a fearfully low wind-chill factor throughout the time. Many of the men in the Battalion found field fortifications already prepared and available for use when they arrived at their assigned positions. However, there had been no friendly troops in the immediate area when they arrived; so those who acquired a ready-made foxhole might have wondered about whose efforts had spared them from the digging-in ritual that usually followed the doughboy's arrival at a new position.

In the relentless cold of the period, an assignment to a patrol and the physical activity that went with patrolling came as a relief--or, at least, a change from the monotony--to the rifleman in his foxhole, where enforced inaction allied itself with cold to dull his head, stiffen his body, and numb its extremities. But then emergence from the shelter of the foxhole brought direct exposure to the icy winds which watered his eyes, froze the oozings from his nostrils, and drove chills stabbing through his body. However, the active battle against the cold above ground seemed

to be the better existence compared with that found in the deep-freeze of the foxhole.

Aside from the demands for vigorous reconnaissance which were included regularly in the instructions from higher up--a consequence of intelligence indicating an imminent enemy attack in the area--there were numerous contact patrols, run more frequently than normally to compensate for the Battalion's being spread so thin. With only two rifle companies available, it had been necessary to employ one of A Co's rifle platoons as battalion reserve. In addition, D Co's losses in and around Philippsbourg had left the Battalion lacking in most of its heavy weapons which would have been so helpful in this situation to cover flanks and fill gaps with machine-gun and mortar fire. The extraordinary amount of patrolling required had had one saving grace, however--everyone in the Battalion was convinced of the need for physical activity on those frozen ridges.

One of the patrols remembered was run by C Company and included sergeants Rusley and Rorabaugh in its complement. Rorabaugh remembers that he and the other were moving through the woods near the crest of a ridge when they sighted an enemy patrol downslope on the same ridge, their grey greatcoats silhouetting them starkly against a snowy backdrop. A firing-line was quickly set up, and upon signal--a shot fired from Rusley's carbine--they opened up dividing their fire between the ends of the single-file enemy column and then traversing toward the center. The impression was that none of the half dozen or so Germans escaped. It could have been this or another patrol remembered by Kern Dibble during which he marveled at Rusley's marksmanship while the sergeant accounted for three enemy troopers.

An item of clothing noticed by the WRECKER men shortly after the Regiment's arrival in the Seventh Army area had been the knee-length reversible parka worn white-side-out for snow-camouflage purposes. Some of the troops of veteran Seventh Army divisions had them. Seen through the eyes of the WRECKER new arrivals, the white-parka-clad troops wore them with a jaunty, even superior air about themselves. Then the Regiment had moved into the snow-covered Vosges, and the men had quickly seen how the standard issue O.D. garments pin-pointed their wearers against the prevalent whiteness in the mountains, and some of the WRECKER men began to feel short-changed and disadvantaged. True enough, not too many of the enemy's infantrymen had been seen dressed in camouflage clothing, but a few had been; and among some of the 275th troops the exception became, by word of mouth, the rule. Then during A Company's deployment near Dambach, it received an issue of the reversible parkas, enough for one platoon to wear in its outposts and then loan

them to members of patrols. For those who felt that way about it, veteran's status had been acquired.

On 8 January came a report ending lingering hopes that B Company/275th Infantry might still be holding out on Falkenberg. A patrol sent out by B Company/274th from its positions on Staengelhald reported on return that the area where Schmied's company was thought to have been located was now in enemy hands. Approaching Falkenberg, the patrol had been fired on and had had to withdraw.

On 10 January, when WRECKER 1st Battalion was relieved and withdrew from the positions near Dambach, D Co's Captain Wallace counted his company strength as 87 officers and men, less than half of its number, 180, when it had entered Philippsbourg, on day more than a week before. Most of the Company's losses had been suffered during the action in and around Philippsbourg, and a large share of these losses had occurred among the members of D Co attachments with A and B companies.

In the struggle to resist the pressures generated by the enemy's NORDWIND offensive, the 3rd Battalion had already experienced its most difficult hours when the Germans had been expelled from Philippsbourg. For the next 3 days after moving out from the sawmill, the Battalion ran patrols, worked on its defensive positions, and sought to ease the effects on its personnel of the relentlessly bitter cold.

Of the patrols during this period, one was particularly memorable. Lieutenant Brons, leader of K Co's 1st Platoon, who had performed with distinction during the first hours of the German attack into Philippsbourg, was lost while leading a patrol into the area north of that village on 8 January. "Kingsmen": "Lieutenant Brons took five men. As they approached enemy positions, they were fired upon. A fire-fight ensued and friendly mortars opened up in an attempt to silence a German machine gun. Lieutenant Brons was wounded in the leg, it was thought, by a short round from one of our own mortars. Another member of the patrol, Pfc Calvin Nullet, was also wounded." Despite his wound, Brons continued to move forward crawling toward the enemy machine-gun position after ordering his men to withdraw with Nullet to a less exposed area. The lieutenant failed to return, and a search was conducted of the area where he had last been seen by members of his patrol. The search proved fruitless. Carried on official records as missing long after the event, Brons received the Silver Star medal posthumously. His body was recovered weeks later when American troops reoccupied that area.

With the 274th's 1st Battalion, WRECKER L Company up forward was preoccupied with patrols--those that it ran and those run by the enemy as well. Becker: "During this period, we patrolled the area to our front and between us

and the 2nd Battalion on our left."

The enemy's blocking of the Zinswiler road for several hours on 5 January had given evidence of his awareness of the gap on the 2nd Battalion left and of his willingness to exploit it. Three days later the 45th Division commander prepared to take aggressive action to correct this fault in the Division's front, committing the entire 276th Infantry for this purpose. At the end of 8 January, two 276th battalions had assembled in the rear of WRECKER 2nd Battalion--the 1st Battalion was just south of Muehlthal, on both sides of the Zinswiler road; the 3rd Battalion was about one-half mile to the south. They were scheduled to attack before dawn the next day moving on objectives to the west. Now that the problem on WRECKER 2nd Battalion's left was being taken in hand, there remained its big concern with the enemy's potential to drive down the Zintzel creek valley.

The 45th Division's commitment of the 276th Infantry eased the defensive burden of WRECKER 2nd Battalion, and it served to compensate for the reduction, several days before, in the level of artillery support that had been provided to Barten's battalion during the first days of its stand before Baerenthal. In this regard, Barten remembers that "during the first 4 or 5 days I had unlimited artillery support, particularly at night. After that it was no longer available in such magnitude, and I had the feeling that maybe the situation had improved. Consequently, I commenced to scour the area with patrols. At night, when I managed a few hours in my bedding roll in a room without a roof, I had rested more comfortably during the first few days, when our artillery was laying down defensive fires. Later, when there was no such artillery fire, I was restless."

There were frequent reports received at Barten's CP of German patrols moving in and around the Battalion's sector. Often an alert would be called, and all but a very few of the CP personnel would have to rush to assigned defensive outposts and wait for hours for a possible raid. One such vigil had lasted all night, but the visit by the expected enemy patrol had failed to materialize. Then, on 8 January, an enemy patrol did intrude far back and fired on the CP area briefly before withdrawing. It was probably the same day, in the evening, when F Company, up forward, captured a German machine-gun crew, with gun and ammunition, as it attempted to infiltrate into the rear area. The Germans' messkits contained only a piece of black bread and a slab of margarine. It appeared that the enemy soldiers were, by and large, having to get by on very short rations. That was one reason why a number of Germans voluntarily surrendered. This usually happened over on the left, where G Company was then deployed. There the dense woods provided a better opportunity for a would-be deserter to get away from his unit

and approach close enough to the Americans' positions to make his intention known to them. G Company's McCoy remembers that "At daybreak it was not unusual for a German soldier or two to attempt surrendering to our men in the more remote foxholes. They somehow signaled what they wanted to do--by yelling, waving something white, or emerging from concealment with hands raised. They, of course, took the chance that their prospective captors, for whatever reason, might shoot, but I don't think any of our fellows ever did.

"During these days our cooks did a good job of getting hot chow to us once a day plus a package of K-rations for each man. The morale of our soldiers was good, and there was little complaint. We were settling down after our baptism of fire and coming around to the point where we were better able to accept our losses. To Lojko and Davis were added several more 1st Platoon casualties, all of them wounded. Also Lieutenant Snelling was evacuated with frozen feet--for some reason, he had no shoepacs." Concerning this time, the WHITE PAPER would state, "Baerenthal was the place where you stayed awake at night and threw hand grenades at the slightest noise. But G Company's Tony Barajas was always coming out of his hole long enough to yell, 'Stay in your holes--don't you know there's a war on!' His sergeant, Nicholson, continually harped about the field rations moaning, 'Why do they put these damn cigarettes in? I don't smoke!'" GI humor, not always of top quality, not only helped sustain the doughboys, but its presence was an indicator of good spirits in a unit.

Late on 8 January, the 2nd Battalion received instructions from Regiment to conduct long-range reconnaissance patrols into areas north of the Bitche road out of Philippsbourg. The instructions reflected concerns felt up the chain of command that the enemy was on the verge of resuming his offensive. The next evening F Company's Cremer, at his machine-gun position in the forward-right part of the battalion sector, saw his company commander talking with Colonel Barten at a nearby vantage point. "Colonel Barten was pointing in the direction of the tree line across the Philippsbourg road from us. The captain was shaking his head in disagreement. From what we were able to gather later, it seemed that Barten had been giving guidance as to an attack to cut the road and the captain had been saying no. Within a few days, the captain was gone." What Cremer remembers hearing seems to be slightly inaccurate--it was probably a long-range patrol that Barten had been discussing with the F Company commander. Toward the end of the WRECKER assignment in this sector, there was planning done on a northeastward advance by the 2nd Battalion, but it appears never to have gotten past the talking stage.

Over on the left side of the 2nd Battalion sector, the advance of the 276th's 1st Battalion southwest from Obermuehlthal was giving rise to a problem on the WRIGGLE Battalion's right (northern) flank, where an enemy threat developed to push south into Obermuehlthal behind it and around the flank of WRECKER 2nd Battalion. At 1915 on 9 January there was discussion of the problem and its solution between Lt Col James L. Richardson, TF Herren G-3, and the 45th Div G-3. Richardson: "As it looks to me, we have three possibilities, one of which is to let the 1st Battalion/276th clean up that thing (the enemy threat at Obermuehlthal) tomorrow morning before they start on again, which will hold them up a little while. The second is to leave a company (of the 1st Battalion) in there to clean it up while the rest of them go ahead. The third possibility is to have the 275th send a company over from their 2nd battalion, and that is going to open the northwest (Zinswiller-Baerenthal) road."

"You have your (WRECKER) G and E companies on either side of that road, don't you?"

"But they are afraid of them (the enemy) coming in behind them."

"Well, if they (WRECKER 2nd Battalion) get in the town (Obermuehlthal), there isn't much danger of them coming up in there, is there?"

"They (the enemy) come down those trails. The 275th's 2nd battalion extends just about as far to the left as it is supposed to, and they are spread pretty thin. The (WRECKER) 1st Battalion is in the process of being relieved tonight and won't be available till tomorrow morning. We are going to put the reserve at approximately 8840 (sawmill complex on the Niederbronn-Philippsbourg road) or quite possibly a little further to the southeast. But it won't be available until tomorrow."

"How about F Company/275th taking over that job at first light and letting the other people (1st Battalion/276th) scoot on?"

"Actually, F Company is up on the line now. E Company is behind and has his platoons spread along the (Zinswiller-Baerenthal) road. If he moves anything out, then he leaves the road wide open, and it is open right straight to the west (into Baerenthal)."

"Well, you have your 1st battalion/275th over there to mop up any time before noon."

Richardson evidently considered it risky to expect that WRECKER 1st Battalion, then about to be relieved by 3rd Battalion/274th in positions west of Dambach, could be gotten promptly enough into a reserve position from which to back up WRECKER 2nd Battalion in its blocking of the Zintzel creek valley. He stated, "Here's the thing that I don't

understand. The 276th has contact all the way across the (Obermuehlthal-Lichtenberg) line. It doesn't spread him too thin, and the 1st Battalion/276th hasn't committed their reserve yet. C Company is in there with A Company on the left."

"The General wants to get him (1st Battalion/276th) up on his objective as soon as possible, and he doesn't want to delay if he can help it. I will talk to the General and see what he says."

"My recommendation would be to let the 276th clean that (problem near Obermuehlthal) up in the morning and go on from there. F and G companies/275th have contact and E Company has contact with both F and G from the rear." A few minutes before this conversation, the commanding generals of the 45th Division and VI Corps had been discussing the general situation. General Brooks, the VI Corps commander, had stated, "There are indications that we are going to get hit all the way around the clock tomorrow. I feel that you may be hit between Baerenthal and Dambach. You might be set for an attack on the right flank around Baerenthal. You might get something up there to reinforce that." The 45th Division G-3 now informed Colonel Richardson concerning these indications. Apparently referring to the just-mentioned threat at Baerenthal, Richardson asked, "Do you think it advisable to move those companies out of there tomorrow?"

"I think the best place for that company is 836397 (Hill 364, one-half mile west of Obermuehlthal). Then we have the ground covered." In this response, the G-3 had indicated which one of Colonel Richardson's three suggested possibilities was going to be chosen to take care of the enemy threat at Obermuehlthal--the one that involved sending a WRECKER 2nd Battalion company. He had not been dissuaded by Richardson's final question about the advisability of pressing the 276th attack despite the expectation of any enemy attack out of Baerenthal. The 45th Division G-3's reference to Hill 364 had been the first occasion of note in which the approaching WRECKER involvement with this terrain feature was anticipated. When the next 72 hours had elapsed, three rifle companies would have been sternly tested on the approaches to Hill 364 and the flanking hill to its north.

At 2005 the 45th Division G-3 called Colonel Richardson: "I was just talking to the 276th about the town (Obermuehlthal). They say the town is cleared up. Now all you have to do is occupy the town." Richardson asked, "Do you want us to send someone over from the 275th to take care of that?" "That's right," answered the G-3. Richardson concluded: "We will do that."

To effect the relief of the 1st Battalion/275th in its

positions west of Dambach, the 3rd Battalion/274th marched out of Niederbronn at 1700, 9 January. It took the relieving battalion 4 hours to reach its march objective, having covered only 4 or 5 miles slogging generally uphill through snow and slipping on icy stretches of the trails it followed. Having been relieved, the 1st Battalion appears to have wasted no time in executing its withdrawal. It reportedly closed into an assembly area on the southwest outskirts of Niederbronn around 2200, 9 January. It is evident that there had been minimal time of overlap of the two battalions in the area of defensive positions where the relief took place. Karl S. Landstrom, commander of the WYOMING battalion, remembers concerning the relief that "I had gone up in advance during the daylight hours, walking the last several hundred yards (having left his jeep). On approaching what looked like the top of the hill, I saw troops of the 275th and coming toward me was the 1st Battalion commander. He took one look at me and said, 'Ah! My relief!'

"With those of my staff who were present, we examined the situation and learned of the intelligence on the enemy forces and the dispositions of the 275th from Colonel Pierce and his staff. I particularly noted a dugout, completely covered by logs, brush, and dirt, that had been prepared either by the 275th or one of its predecessor units in the area. The dugout was being used as battalion operations center by the 1st Battalion/275th and, of course, I occupied it both as our battalion operations center and as my personal quarters for the week or so we were there."

The 256th VG Div Attack Plan

According to the 256th VG Div account, the feature of the plan for the 10 January operation was to be the pincer assault directed at penetrating around the high ground dominating both sides of the entrance of the Zintzel creek valley below Baerenthal. The twin thrusts were intended to reach two lateral valleys branching off from the Zintzel valley--the Rehbach valley through Obermuehlthal on the west side and the Spurthal valley behind the height Grasberg on the east side--and then to converge along these valleys toward the Zintzel. The left attack group--the 456th Grenadier Regiment reinforced by elements of the 36th VG Division--was to drive around American defenses on the height Lindenkopf and thence along the Spurthal to its junction with the Zintzel creek valley. The right attack group--the 481st Grenadier Regiment--was to advance southward from its assembly area at the foot of the north slope of the hill

immediately north of Hill 364 to the Rehbach valley, then push eastward along that valley to Obermuehlthal. In the follow-up phase, the center attack group--the 476th Grenadier Regiment--was to push down the Zintzel creek valley from its positions in and around Baerenthal. Special emphasis was given to planning artillery support to the offensive using not only the batteries of the 256th VG Division but those of the two adjacent divisions whose positions permitted them to do so--a total of 13 batteries.

Shortly before dawn on 10 January, the left and right attack groups advanced according to plan. Supporting artillery held its fire until the Americans' increasing resistance made it evident that they had recognized that the German attacks were in progress. At first the 456th Grenadier Regiment encountered only light American resistance. Then there was a rapid deterioration of radio contact and the situation on the left became obscure, although it had already become evident to the 256th VG Div command group that progress had become increasingly difficult. On the right, the 481st encountered American reconnaissance patrols at the outset of its advance and only slow progress was made. Having reached Hill 364, the forward assault elements ran into strong American forces as the Germans began descending into the Rehbach valley. On the left, the 481st troops encountered American defenses on the height Schwarzenberg; on the right, they ran into an American force in the bend of the Rehbach valley west of Hill 364. Forward progress ceased, with elements of the 481st holding Hill 364 and the hill immediately north of it. To the right of the 256th VG Division, the exhausted and badly depleted battalions of the 361st VG Division were falling back under strong American pressure from the south. Under these circumstances, the 256th commander decided to postpone any further attempts to continue his attack and ordered his troops to hold such gains as had been made by setting up a main line of resistance running southeast from the head of the Rehbach valley to Hill 364, then north through the hill adjacent to Hill 364 to Baerenthal, thence northeast to the 36th VG Div sector opposite Philippsbourg. Strong defensive outposts were to be left in the vicinity of the height Lindenkopf. The holding of Baerenthal was considered to be of critical importance.

The TF Herren operations report for 10 January indicated the assignment of the following missions to the 275th Infantry for that date: 1st Battalion, in its assembly area near Niederbronn, was to plan and reconnoiter in preparation to move to a position from which it could support both other battalions of the Regiment; elements of the 3rd Battalion were to relieve part of the 1st Battalion/274th in the vicinity of Philippsbourg; and the 2nd Battalion was to

occupy Obermuehlthal and assist the 276th Infantry's resumption of its attack--begun at 0700 that morning--which was planned for late afternoon. In addition, TF Herren alerted the 275th Infantry to be prepared to attack the following day (11 Jan). While previously it had been intended for the 275th Infantry's 1st Battalion to move on 10 January to an assembly area in the vicinity of the sawmill complex on the Niederbronn-Philippsbourg road, the Battalion was kept in Niederbronn throughout the 10th, evidently to give higher headquarters greater flexibility in determining its disposition should the expected German attack occur on 10 January.

After the 45th Division-TF Herren discussion on the previous night (cited above), it had been decided that the 2nd Battalion/275th would send a force to Obermuehlthal to relieve C Company/276th thus freeing that unit to join its battalion in an attack to the southwest. When the instruction from TF Herren regarding relief of the 276th rifle company at Obermuehlthal was received by Colonel McAleer, he conferred with Colonel Barten. They considered that to send the entire reserve company to Obermuehlthal would dangerously weaken the back-up defenses along the Zintzel creek valley. They hit upon sending a reinforced rifle platoon instead. Shortly after nightfall on 9 January, Barten's E company had relieved G Company as the forward company on the left of the Battalion's sector, G Company then pulling back into battalion reserve. Thus it fell to G Company to provide the force to make the relief in Obermuehlthal.

There is a disappointing shortage of detail in unit records and personal accounts concerning the defensive work of WRECKER elements involved in repelling the German attacks of 10 January. Nothing in the reporting by TF Herren to the 45th Division G-3 section that morning indicated that it had been informed by the 275th Infantry that an enemy attack was being received. Indeed, the attention of both higher headquarters that day was to a large extent focused on the attacks by the three 276th Infantry battalions in the area south and west of Obermuehlthal. In that connection, the 45th Division G-3 section queried TF Herren several times about the relief of C Company/276th in Obermuehlthal. When, at 0810, TF Herren informed the G-3 section that G Company/275th had relieved C Company at 0300, the G-3 staff officer asked, "What took over from G Company then?" The TF Herren officer answered, "I don't know; I don't have the overlay on it yet." G-3 staff officer: "That leaves a great big gap then." This comment reflected the same concern expressed by Colonel Richardson the night before, but the 45th Division commander had chosen to accept the risk of weakening the WRECKER defense of the Zintzel creek valley in order to free 276th troops for that regiment's attack.

At nightfall the two 276th Infantry assault battalions

were ordered halted. The 1st Battalion, which had been advancing southwest, had its advance elements about one-half mile south of Hill 364. The 2nd Battalion, advancing northwest, was 500 yards south of the 1st Battalion's advance elements. The 3rd Battalion remained in reserve to the east.

Early in the day, the 3rd Platoon of G Company was assigned the mission of moving to Obermuehlthal and there relieving C Company/276th. Attached to the 3rd Platoon were the Company's machine-gun section and a 60 mm mortar squad. The relief was accomplished at 0300, and C Company moved out to join its battalion's main body a few hundred yards to the southwest. It was probably elements of the 1st Battalion/276th and undoubtedly G Co's 3rd platoon/275th which the German patrols advancing ahead of the enemy's right assault regiment that morning encountered in the Rehbach valley and on the height Schwarzenberg. The 3rd Platoon reportedly received the assault of a large enemy combat patrol and captured 12 prisoners while driving off the rest of the enemy party. T Sgt Sandoval, the platoon sergeant, distinguished himself in the action. He would be one of the first men in his company to receive a battlefield commission.

One reason why the enemy's right assault regiment failed to press its attack with greater determination may very well have been the thorough artillery pounding administered to the area from which the attack was staged. WRECKER F Company, on the forward-right of the 2nd Battalion sector had an OP on the nose of the wooded hill just to the rear of the front-line platoons. Lieutenant Southard was at the OP before dawn on the day of the attack. He was aware that an F Co patrol the night before had reported observing and hearing extensive enemy activity on the roads north and east of Baerenthal. Southard: "The OP was well situated, and we could see from it almost any German troop and vehicular movements in or around Baerenthal. Prior to dawn, I noticed quite a bit of activity in Baerenthal. I called back on the field telephone and talked to some major. I asked him to get some artillery fire on the town. None came immediately. While I waited, I noticed that the enemy activity was growing more feverish. I called the major again and told him that it looked like we were going to get hit very soon with enemy tanks and infantry. In a little while, the major called to say that they were going to fire a 'TOT' on the area I had reported. He told me to get out of the OP and to warn the men in the forward positions to stay down in their holes.

"I did as he had suggested; then I went back to the company CP and reported. Somebody asked me what a TOT was, and I had to say that I didn't know but would find out. So

I called the major again and asked him. He explained that 'TOT' stood for 'time on target' and that, with a TOT arranged for the target area near Baerenthal at 0830, every artillery gun behind us that could reach the target would begin firing so that its first shot arrived precisely at the scheduled time--0830. The TOT arrived on schedule that morning. Back at the company CP, the sound of it was beautiful." This system of massing artillery fire--also called a "serenade"--was terribly awesome and effective. Seen from a distance, the arrival of a TOT caused a sudden eruption of exploding shells blanketing the target area, which permitted scant opportunity for those in the area to find cover. This eruption would continue for the specified duration of the mission. The 45th Division had at least 11 battalions of medium and heavy artillery at its disposal on 10 January, and the situation was such that a report from the 275th Infantry about the enemy's being up to something around Baerenthal doubtlessly would have received the artillery commander's immediate and undivided attention. The result--the firing at maximum rate of over 100 artillery pieces sending their projectiles, the smallest of which would have been 25 pounds of metal and explosives, into the area designated by Southard--must have been devastating.

Further to the right, L Company/275th was in defensive positions on the height Lindenkopf, which was a key terrain feature in the 10 January operations plan of the enemy's left assault regiment. Since writing what follows, L Co's Richard Becker has related much of it to the 10 January action: "A few days after we occupied this position, I found myself in charge of a chewed-up rifle platoon and two light-machine gun squads occupying the forward nose of a very large wooded hill with a valley going along both sides. The two light machine guns were stationed at the forward nose of the hill to cover the area in front of us where the two valleys merged. The balance of the Company and the command post were on the reverse slope of the same hill. We were really able to effectively use this position as we ambushed several German patrols. We let these patrols pass down the valleys past my position, and then our troops on the reverse slope intercepted them. There was no escape for them back past my position. None of them ever got away from us. We practiced strict camouflage discipline and were very well dug in.

"While we were in this position, one of our patrols discovered a number of Krauts assembled several hundred yards to our front behind a small hill, along the road between Philippsbourg and Baerenthal. Lieutenant White called in their location and requested artillery fire. He was told that another unit had priority for artillery fire and none was available." Becker has since estimated that the assem-

bled enemy force was of battalion size--in all probability, it was the much depleted 456th Grenadier Regiment. It is not hard to imagine that it was Lieutenant Southard further west, whose call for artillery support was given priority over Lieutenant White's. Becker has also noted that the enemy assembly area was given a good going-over by mortar fire. However, he doesn't remember whose mortars they were or how they happened to fire on the enemy force in front of L Company. In the afternoon, after the enemy had ceased his attack, WRECKER F Company sent a contact patrol eastward toward L Company on Lindenkopf. No enemy defensive outposts, which, according to the 256th VG Division account, were to have been left in the vicinity of Lindenkopf by the withdrawing assault elements, were encountered. Instead, the patrol found that trails and logs along the trails had been booby-trapped--evidence of the earlier presence of the German attackers.

The Beginnings of the Advance on Hill 364

At 1810, 10 January, the WRECKER S-3, Major Dykes called the 45th G-3 section--presumably, he had been instructed by TF Herren to make his report directly to the 45th Division. Dykes: "We have a platoon of G Company in Obermuehlthal, and they have been getting a little sniper fire and some patrol action. We were to secure the town while that (276th Inf) attack was going on, but it had not progressed very far, although we don't know why. About dark, we were told to help them out, and we had our left battalion go in that direction. They (the 276th Infantry) were getting smallarms fire from the high ground to the northwest. ..." The commitment of some part of WRECKER 2nd Battalion in the direction of Obermuehlthal--in addition to G Co's 3rd platoon--was consistent with the Battalion's assigned mission, to assist the 276th Infantry's resumption of its attack. With WRECKER 1st Battalion now scheduled to move from Niederbronn into the Zintzel creek valley the next morning, it was evidently considered that to commit the entire 2nd Battalion reserve to support the 276th attack involved taking an acceptable risk.

Following their relief the night before by elements of E Company, G Company's 1st and 3rd platoons had withdrawn to positions along the Zinswiller road--one was at Untermuehlthal and the other, about 800 yards further forward. G Company's Paul McCoy recalls that, after nightfall on 10 January, he, the company commander, and Sergeant Jakobovicz with his squad of riflemen were called to the 2nd Battalion command post. There they were given a briefing which intro-

duced a 3-day assignment. The assignment would turn out to be a bad experience for the Company, would bring the end of combat for a large share of its personnel, and would result in the company commander's being relieved. Initially Jakubovicz was to take his squad and check the slope of the mountain on the north side of the Obermuehlthal road to determine whether there was any enemy in the area to the east of Obermuehlthal, where the 2nd Platoon of G Company had been sent much earlier in the day. If Jakubovicz's patrol found the area clear, the 1st and 3rd platoons were to move out following the same route the next morning. McCoy recalls that the patrol went out shortly after midnight and returned in a few hours having encountered no Germans.

That same night an E Co patrol returned from a reconnaissance in the direction of Baerenthal. Reaching the Company's perimeter, it passed through the positions of the 2nd Platoon. Immediately behind it came a large enemy patrol, members of which surprised and captured the two occupants of an isolated foxhole, privates Devine and Bradley. The two doughboys in the nearest foxhole heard something of the commotion. Calling out to Devine and Bradley, they started out of their foxhole only to be driven back by enemy automatic weapons fire. The Germans continued firing frequent bursts to discourage any other attempts to thwart their evident prisoner-taking mission. The intruders were gone with their two prisoners in a few, brief minutes.

It may have been during the action on 10 January when Russell Newton, the F Co medic, heard a call for help. Grabbing his medical bags, Newton left his foxhole running toward the one, 100 yards away, from where the call had come. "I was running downslope when a machine gun opened fire on me. I hit the dirt and crawled for a while. Then the firing stopped and I got up and ran to the foxhole. The man was hit in the head, and I dressed his wound as well as I could. Having finished the dressing, I called for help to the men in the nearest hole. We fashioned a litter using an overcoat and, loading the wounded man on it, carried him over the rocky ground back to the woods. The entire carry was attended by enemy smallarms and artillery fire which came pretty close to us. In the woods we loaded the wounded man on a jeep which evacuated him." The enemy sometimes respected the red cross markings worn by the combat medics--on their helmets and arm brassards. Sometimes he did not.

Over on the extreme right of the regimental sector, WRECKER 3rd Battalion moved forward from its reserve position on 10 January. K Company relieved C Company/274th on the ground which C Company had taken during the attack on 4 Jan--the west ridge adjacent to Philippsbourg. The K Co

rifle platoons took up positions on its crest and reverse slope, and its mortars were set up in the cemetery at the foot of its south slope. I Company moved up to positions between, and somewhat to the rear of, K Company and L Company, the latter having remained on Lindenkopf. L Company reverted back to the command of Major Shepherd, 3rd Battalion CO. In view of his seniority, Lieutenant Cannon was assigned to command I Company, replacing Lieutenant Turner, who returned to his job as company executive officer.

The 275th Infantry's Unit Report for 10 January noted the following enemy units as being in contact with the Regiment: elements of the 256th VG Division; elements of the 952nd Infantry/361st VG Div; 477th Infantry/257th VG Div; and 815th AA Battalion.



275th Inf and 276th Inf dispositions -
late morning, 10 Jan
scale in miles



Uttenhoffen

CHAPTER X

The Trouble on Schwarzenberg

Thursday, 11 Jan (-13 to -6 degrees, Fahr.)

According to the 256th VG Division account, the events of 11 January were: "The 481st Grenadier Regiment--This regiment was engaged in inconclusive fighting for control of Hill 364. However, by evening the hill was again in the hands of the Regiment.

"The 476th Grenadier Regiment--The Regiment and the attached Luftwaffe infantry battalion had a quiet day (in and around Baerenthal).

"The 456th Grenadier Regiment--Attached 36th VG Division elements reverted to the command of their own division. The Regiment, having left strong outposts in the vicinity of Lindenkopf, withdrew to the designated main line of resistance."

(The German account of events on 11 January, in noting that the 481st Regiment had successfully repelled an American effort to take Hill 364, was inaccurate. In its indication that the hill was an American objective, the account was correct enough, but American operations against Hill 364 on that date did not go beyond preliminary maneuverings. The actual assault to take Hill 364 would not take place until 12 January.)

At the beginning of 11 January--the coldest day of the entire WRECKER Vosges Mountains episode--it fell to WRECKER G Company initially to carry out the Regiment's offensive mission that day--to maintain contact with the 276th Infantry on the left and assist by fire the WRIGGLE attack. In addition, WRECKER 3rd Battalion was to maintain contact with the 274th Infantry on the right. Further, the 275th Infantry, in accordance with instructions from TF Herren, was to patrol intensively to determine enemy troop dispositions and be prepared to attack on order.

At 0820, the 276th Infantry's executive officer reported by telephone to the 45th Division G-3 concerning the Regiment's readiness to launch its attack. "Communications are in and all battalions are set to go. The 1st Battalion is jumping off at 0830 for a limited objective so as to be in position for the 0900 push-off. If we can walk that far,

we should reach our objectives (Hill 415, one mile south of Hill 364, and subsequently Hill 390, about one-half mile to the northwest of the initial objective, Hill 415). At 0920, Col Albert C. Morgan, the 276th commander, called the G-3 section: "Has the 275th Infantry anything in the 8439 square (encompassing Obermuehlthal and the height Schwarzenberg to the north of it)? Artillery is being directed on me from there, and I was going to move a sizeable force but can't until that area is cleared up. Division assured me last night that it would be taken care of. The going is damn tough right now, and I don't want to move until that (problem on the right) is cleared up. Check on it and call me back." Minutes later, the G-3 section was talking to TF Herren's Colonel Richardson: "You will have to move something northwest of Obermuehlthal. The 276th Infantry is getting fire from that high ground. Probably just some observers there. It is holding them up. Get a patrol out there and clear that area."

At 1235, TF Herren received a call from the 45th G-3: "The General wants you to capture the two hills, at 834398 (Hill 364) and 835402 (the adjacent hill to the north of Hill 364) as soon as possible." The TF Herren officer (unidentified) answered: "Just got a call from the 275th Infantry that it was being held up by a force of about 80 to 90 enemy and was receiving artillery fire which was quite accurate, believed to be directed by a forward observer. It has been directed that the 275th Infantry take that hill (364) just northeast of the (regimental) boundary. The boundary was changed so that the hill is in the 275th Infantry's sector. We are asking for a cub plane to go over the area and also are getting artillery fire up there."

Nearly 2 hours before the above exchange (at 1050), the 45th Division's G-3 had instructed Colonel Richardson, "Our CG just called your chief of staff about some resistance at 842397 (west end of height Schwarzenberg). Now he wants your people to get out there and reduce that resistance, and they should patrol to Hill 364 and clear that off so that the 276th Infantry can push right ahead." This had become the mission assigned to WRECKER G Company. Apparently G Company was the force referred to by TF Herren in the subsequent conversation as being "held up" by German infantry and artillery.

Earlier, shortly after daybreak, the G Co task force comprising its 1st and 3rd platoons moved out on an operation which seems to have been designed to carry out the WRECKER mission--to maintain contact with the advancing 276th Infantry and assist its advance by fire. The route it followed paralleled the original left boundary of the 275th Infantry, a boundary which was shifted to the left during the morning so as to include Hill 364 in the WRECKER sector.

The routing of the G Co task force must have been planned not only to support the 276th Infantry but also to prevent the enemy from using the east-west valley skirting the north foot of the height Schwarzenberg to slip in behind E Company, on the ridge just north of the east-west valley.

G Co's Paul McCoy recalls that the task force started out in the morning with the 1st Platoon in the lead moving parallel to the Obermuehlthal road along the mountain side to the north of that road. The slope was covered with 8-10 foot pines their boughs decked with a thick blanket of snow. The column arrived at a point immediately above Obermuehlthal and turned north to follow the contour around the nose of the mountain along which it had been moving. Then the force climbed onto the saddle at the east end of Schwarzenberg. From there it continued north following a trail which gradually turned west along the lower north slope of the mountain. The north side of the mountain was in places bare of tree cover. Then the trail bent sharply to the north to circle around the prominent spur which extends northeast from the summit. Continuing along the trail, the column had just turned west rounding the spine of the spur when it began receiving shellfire. The company commander ordered his force to dig in. In addition to the artillery fire, the task force was receiving long-range smallarms fire coming from the northwest, where there were enemy positions across the valley. It was probably shortly before noon. The situation, described via field telephone to Battalion, was in the report passed to the 45th G-3 section at 1235.

The G Co CO sent two of his sergeants, Jakubovicz and McCoy, upslope from the position to scout around the crest of the mountain. Before reaching the crest, however, the two noncoms surprised two German soldiers who were heating coffee over a small fire. The Americans started shooting, and one of the Germans surrendered at once. The second tried to find concealment in a wooded area near their cook fire but emerged with his hands up when one of McCoy's searching shots grazed him. Jakubovicz and McCoy then escorted the two POW's back to the G Co task force's location.

Having arrived back in the area where the men were digging in, McCoy learned that an artillery lieutenant had arrived at the position during Jacobovicz' and his absence on the patrol. The artilleryman was trying to get information about the location of an enemy OP thought to be on the mountain. Since McCoy had already acquired some familiarity with ground higher up, the company commander sent him with the lieutenant back up the mountain to find a vantage point from which a visual reconnaissance for the enemy artillery OP could be made. The two men found a huge rock near the crest and scaled to the top of it to see what they could see.

They had been there only a few minutes when a 4-man enemy patrol filed past the base of the rock. McCoy realized he was down to only four rounds left in his rifle; he had forgotten to pick up some spare clips during his brief stop back at the G Co position. Nevertheless he opened fire and scattered the German patrol. He and the lieutenant quickly withdrew before the Germans had an opportunity to take counteraction. Thus the search for the German OP was interrupted before anything could be learned about its location. When McCoy and the artilleryman got back to where the G Co men were attempting to dig foxholes, the lieutenant left, going back down the trail along which the G Co force had originally come.

The enemy shellfire continued to pummel the immediate area sporadically during the afternoon. There were some wounded and several killed, including Phillips, who with Tveter several days before had voluntarily sought out his platoon and joined it while it was in the midst of a firefight--an action in which Tveter had been wounded and their platoon sergeant, killed. After several hours of being shelled, the company commander called his platoon leaders together. Answering the summons were 2nd Lt William R. Taddei, 3rd Platoon leader, and McCoy, acting leader of the 1st Platoon. 2nd Lt Eric B. Denton, Weapons Platoon leader, was also there, although the larger part of his platoon was with the 2nd Platoon holding Obermuehlthal. The company commander asked these men what they thought ought be done about their situation. McCoy remembers speaking up: "I said it was pointless for us to stay where we were and just take it. I suggested that we assault the area where we suspected the OP might be from which the shelling of our position was being directed. I said we should support the assault with a base of fire. When our two lieutenants nodded their agreement, the company commander proposed that I plan and direct the operation. Being only a staff sergeant in the presence of three officers, I was astounded. However, they seemed to be sure that was what they wanted." It would not be the last recognition of McCoy's leadership abilities--given a battlefield commission soon after this action, he would end the war as a captain and company commander.

McCoy: "So I told Lieutenant Taddei to move his platoon to a position from which they could bring flanking fire to bear on the suspected area while I readied the 1st Platoon to make the assault. When I was sure that Taddei and his men were set, I moved out with my platoon advancing steadily. Our movement took us westward and diagonally upslope until we reached the crest of Schwarzenberg at its west end. During the advance, we captured a third prisoner and drove off some other Germans from what we supposed to have been an OP. Having reached the crest, we dug in and bivouaced for

the night." Telephone contact with Battalion had been lost during the afternoon and could not be restored; so the G Co CO sent a messenger back reporting that the objective (the enemy OP) had been taken at 1600. He had reassumed command of his company upon the completion of the assault led by Sergeant McCoy. At Muehlthal, the G Co messenger was instructed to return to the task force taking with him a message for the company commander. The message assigned to the task force its next objective, the hill north of and adjacent to Hill 364. Undoubtedly, the instruction to the G Co commander mentioned WRECKER A Company, which by this time had been committed on the south side of Schwarzenberg to the left of the task force, and anticipated a coordinated assault on Hill 364 and the hill north of it, by A Company and the G Co task force respectively. Afterwards there was no further contact that day between Battalion and its G Co task force. Colonel Barten could not be sure that his last order to the task force had been delivered.

By mid-morning WRECKER 1st Battalion had completed its assembly on the outskirts of Niederbronn and started its foot march toward an assembly area further forward. For the time being it was to continue to function as the regimental reserve. The Battalion's route took it southwest from Niederbronn to Zinswiller. At Zinswiller the column turned right on the road to Baerenthal. Colonel Pierce jeeped ahead to Muehlthal, where his driver failed to heed the 2nd Battalion's sign instructing vehicles to halt and riders to proceed on foot. The jeep's movement to the 2nd Battalion CP building quickly drew enemy fire, and fragments from an exploding mortar shell did much damage to the rear of the vehicle and to some of the 1st Battalion commander's belongings stowed there. The distraction which this caused was momentary, for instructions from Regiment were soon coming into the Muehlthal CP which involved both battalion commanders there, Barten and Pierce. The two colonels were quickly absorbed in them.

The requirement for more support to the 276th Infantry coming through Regiment from higher headquarters now made necessary the commitment of something from WRECKER 1st Battalion--with Barten's reserve (G) company already assigned to support the 276th, 2nd Battalion had nothing further that could be diverted from its primary mission of defending the Zintzel creek valley. The decision was made to assign WRECKER A Company, and Colonel Pierce sent orders back to his marching column directing that Captain Millhiser halt his company and await further instructions while rest of the Battalion continued to the march objective.

Receiving the order from the 1st Battalion commander, Captain Millhiser moved his company into a draw to the right of the road from Zinswiller and had it halt just off the

road. He understood that a task was being prepared for A Company by Colonel Pierce and his staff, who were then further up the road, at Muehlthal, where they were coordinating an impending operation with 2nd Battalion. Since noon was approaching, Millhiser sent word to the battalion train directing that his mess sergeant bring the kitchen truck to A Co's location--on it the sergeant was to load the hot meal he would otherwise have served his company when the Battalion reached the march objective. In a short time the kitchen truck arrived where A Company was waiting, and the sergeant and his cooks began unloading the hot food containers. Right behind the kitchen truck came a jeep with a battalion staff officer bringing orders for the immediate move of Millhiser and his men. The Company was reformed while the containers with their contents still untouched were being reloaded on the kitchen trucks. There was much disappointment; a good many were angry and said so. But the orders were specific and urgent, and, amid much muttering, A Company moved out.

Millhiser's Company had been ordered to move westward in preparation for a coordinated assault which it and the G Co task force would launch. It now appears that the orders were fragmentary, specifying only that the Company should move to a forward assembly area on the south face of Schwarzenberg above Obermuehlthal and should await further instructions at that point. From the march-halt point, Millhiser led his company westward in approach-march formation, with point and flankers out. Crossing the Zinswiller road, the Company quickly came to Zintzel creek, which it forded, then turned north on a trail and followed it to reach the east-west road through Obermuehlthal. Having turned west on the road, A Company began to receive artillery fire--just an occasional shell at first, it grew in intensity. When the column reached Obermuehlthal, it turned right on the dead-end road along which most of the houses of the hamlet were scattered. An enemy mortar barrage now added its weight to the shelling and caused the men to disperse in search of cover. The Company became immobilized as the pounding continued. Colonel Pierce came into the hamlet and, spotting Millhiser, shouted to him to get his men up the draw which extended from the dead-end road toward the Schwarzenberg summit. Gradually, some of the noncoms were able to get the men to move again--one or two at a time, then in larger groups--up the draw. At its far end the draw was blocked by steep slopes to the front, left, and right. As they reached that point, the men began scaling up the mountain side, fanning out in several directions. It was a 200-foot climb up to the logging trail above the draw, made doubly difficult by the thick blanket of snow and underlying outcrops of sheer rock, and the men

could make progress for much of the ascent only by dint of using both arms and legs--pulling and shoving--with weapons slung on their backs. It was exhausting. Fortunately, the steep sides of the draw provided the men shelter from the shellfire, which continued to rain down on Obermuehlthal below them.

When Captain Millhiser reached the trail at the end of his climb, much of the Company was still behind him, struggling up out of the draw. Others had completed the climb but were scattered back along the trail wherever they had come to it at the end of the climb. He sent a couple of his sergeants to round them up. While he waited there, he was joined by a battalion staff officer--probably Captain Carrier, the S-3--and an artillery officer, sent forward to be A Company's forward observer (FO) during the projected attack. The staff officer had brought with him the attack order for A Company. As Millhiser remembers the order, it prescribed that A Company was to attack to seize its objective, Hill 364, and the company commander could set the time of attack at his discretion, but not later than daybreak on the following morning. He does not remember what the order might have said about G Company, but the circumstances and some evidence indicate that coordinated attacks by A Company and the G Co task force on their neighboring objectives were intended.

Daylight was fading as Captain Millhiser contemplated his map and the order he had just received. If he was correctly oriented with respect to A Company's position on the map, the objective lay beyond the next spur of the mountain on which he stood, and the line of departure for the prospective attack was on the forward side of that spur. The order's requirement that the attack be begun no later than daylight meant that the Company's approach to the line of departure from its location at that time--apparently a distance of 600-700 yards--would have to be made in the dark. The availability of an artillery FO to direct supporting fire for the company--unprecedented in the A Co commander's combat experience--made it compelling that the A Co position on the ground be precisely pinpointed on the map. An examination of the terrain up to the line of departure appeared to be called for.

The A Co commander asked his first sergeant to assemble an escort to accompany him on the reconnaissance, and Herbst presently was back with a squad from the 2nd Platoon, a half dozen or so men. It included one rifleman who, early that morning, had been an assistant cook; all of the rifle squads were under strength, and he was one of several who had been diverted from the Company's rear echelon as replacements. Some of the A Co foxhole soldiers who might have envied the new rifleman's former relative safety and comforts with the

kitchen could now feel some sympathy toward him for his sudden change in profession as he filed out with his new squad behind the company commander.

Captain Millhiser started westward along the trail with the crest of Schwarzenberg, 300 feet higher, on his right. He halted at intervals to make comparisons between terrain and map. Darkness came quickly shortly after his and his escort's departure, and now he squatted to make his checks with map and flashlight concealed under his overcoat. Arriving at what he judged to be the line of departure, he halted, turned about, and started back along the trail. Millhiser had stopped to make a final check, moving to the side of the trail while his escort walked past. At point-blank range, the Germans opened fire! They seemed to be firing from both sides of the trail. The Americans dispersed in all directions and attempted to return the fire. Some 500 yards back along the trail, the A Co main body heard the firefight break out and could easily distinguish between the angry buzz of the German burp guns and the slower cadence of the American M-1's and BAR. In a short time, the burp-gun fire was heard to predominate, and then there was silence.

Millhiser had scrambled ahead and upslope off the trail when the enemy opened fire. He had put his carbine aside in preparation for making his map check just previously, and, when he hit the ground, he realized that the carbine lay down next to the trail. He was in a slight depression which afforded partial cover from the bullets churning up the snow around him and even gnawing at his clothing. Remembering a .45 pistol that he had in a pocket by happenstance, he got the weapon out with some difficulty. He pulled back the slide to load the chamber, but the slide stuck, locked in the back position. His cold-benumbed fingers refused to disengage the lock. Then a German trooper was standing over him with a burp gun ready, and Millhiser realized why he had been unable to detect any enemy movement during the action--the German was wearing white camouflage clothing. Rising to his feet, Millhiser was motioned by the German to return to the trail, where the American found his men already assembled by their captors. Two members of his patrol had been wounded. Quickly the Americans were marched to the rear, where, separated from his men, Millhiser would spend the rest of the night in a bunker. The ambushing of the Millhiser party seems to have been carried out by an enemy patrol whose members had concealed themselves along the trail when the approach of the Americans was detected, perhaps even allowing them to pass on the outbound leg of their mission and then slamming the trap shut when they returned.

Earlier, when the A Co commander and his squad had left

the main body, the gathering of scattered troops on the forested mountain side had continued. There was a bright moon that night, but little of its light filtered through the veil of snow-laden pine boughs to reach the men underneath as squads and platoons were sorted out and positioned. Then 15 minutes, perhaps longer, after the reconnoitering group's departure, they heard the firefight. Lieutenant Woodward, the executive officer of A Company, sent out patrols to scour the area after the firing stopped. There was no trace found of the Millhiser party, nor was any further contact made that night with the enemy.

Years later, Father McPhelin wrote of the event: "I can recall many an hour at Barten's fairly roomy (battalion) CP in Muehlthal. There's where I wrote a letter to Ross Millhiser's wife, Eleanor--a discouraging one--when we learned that Ross was MIA. The reports were grim, first of mixed American and German gunfire; at the end, only burp-gun fire. Later when an A Co officer led a small patrol to discover what had happened, he found no sign of Ross or his men. Bad news."

Early that afternoon, the 1st Battalion's column had arrived in its assembly area in the valley extending to the northeast from Teufelsbrueckerhof. After A Company had dropped out of the column, the Battalion had continued along the Zinswiller-Baerenthal road only a short distance before turning to the right onto a series of trails which it had followed to reach the march objective. In the assembly area, a defensive perimeter was laid out and the men dug in. Meanwhile patrols were sent out to reconnoiter routes to the northeast which the Battalion could follow in going to support the defenders in and around Philippsbourg if that became necessary.

The commitment of troops from WRECKER G and A companies on 11 January had been consequent from the 275th Infantry's mission to support the attack of the 276th Infantry on its left. Shortly after nightfall on the 11th, all three 276th battalions were reported to be in the general vicinity of Hill 403, a little over one-half mile south and slightly west of Obermuehlthal. All three battalions were in contact with the enemy. Their rate of advance during the early hours of the day had been slowed by increasing enemy resistance and, then, growing darkness. The 3rd Battalion was some 500 yards southeast of its objective, the ridge extending north from Hill 415, west of Hill 403. The 2nd Battalion's objective was Hill 415 itself. The 2nd Battalion, on the left, was tasked to reestablish contact with the 313th Infantry/79th Division and maintain it. It was part of a larger complex of American offensive thrusts to the north and west, which, pivoting on WRECKER 2nd Battalion below Baerenthal, was battering back the east side of the enemy's

Bitche Salient.

While the Americans seemed to have regained the initiative on the east side the Bitche Salient, they were not everywhere as successful. Down in the tip of the salient the 6th SS Mtn Division unleashed a four-battalion attack on 11 January, which forced elements of the 45th and 79th divisions to give ground. Over on the eastern side of the VI Corps sector the enemy was also on the offensive--in the area of the Gamsheim Bridgehead, which had been established on the west bank of the Rhine River on 5 January; and also in a drive toward Hagenau from the northeast, which had started on 9 January. Consequently, the VI Corps commander was confronted with an enemy capability to launch a drive eastward out of the Bitche Salient to effect a link-up with one or both of the German offensive actions on the right side of his sector.

On 11 January, the day after L Co's Lieutenant White had sought in vain to bring artillery fire on the German troop concentration across the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal road from the Company's positions on Lindenkopf, he and his men experienced the consequences of a decision, apparently belated, to bring artillery fire on that target. By then, however, the Germans were gone from the area. Richard Becker recalls that "the shells from the friendly artillery were hitting in the treetops over my position and not one round seemed to actually hit the target area where the Krauts had been. Naturally, Lieutenant White was raising hell over the field telephone trying to get the artillery to lift their fire. We had no forward observer with us to help. Fortunately, we were well dug in and had no casualties. But those trees around us sure were chewed up.

"The next day a lieutenant colonel from some artillery unit--the one that had fired the mission--came up. Moving around our position, he began picking up shell fragments, which I knew came from our 105 howitzer shells. When I asked him about this, he chewed me out. He said the fragments could have come from German shells. Of course he gave no explanation as to how some German guns got to our rear and fired 105 mm projectiles from that direction into our position."

During this time there was another artillery-related incident--this one in the 2nd Battalion sector. Barten remembers a visit by a staff officer from some higher headquarters on a mission to recover some U.S. artillery ammunition of a new type. During the first day or so of *NORDWIND*, a supply of it was thought to have been abandoned by an artillery unit in the Baerenthal area as it was pulling out. The novelty about this ammunition was its fuze, called the VT (variable time) fuze, which sensed the discharged shell's approach to a physical object and set off

the shell's detonation while it was still in the air thereby dispersing its lethal fragments over a larger area. Remembered to have been introduced into use about the time of the Battle of the Bulge under conditions of tight secrecy, the new weapon gave the Western Allies a capability which the enemy could have countered only by learning of the technique and developing a similar fuze of his own. Higher headquarters' concern about the compromise of the VT fuze should the abandoned ammunition have fallen into German hands was given clear expression by the visiting staff officer.

Some WRECKER troops had occasion to marvel, during the latter days of their NORDWIND involvement, at a technological achievement of the German side. This was embodied in the first turbojet fighter--the Messerschmitt 262--to become operational during the war, and its commitment in strength occurred during this time. On 10 January, the 45th Division's artillery commander had taken note in a conversation with the Division's G-3 of their appearance: "We had some cubs up a while ago, and they located a (German) self-propelled gun. But these jet-propelled planes are chasing the cubs down as fast as they go up." The sight and sound of one of the low-flying jets as it whistled over the head of a doughboy in his foxhole--so fast that he had trouble keeping track of it with his eyes--made a lasting impression on him.

On 11 January, the K Co positions west of Philippsbourg also received heavy shelling, all of which appeared to have been originated from enemy guns. Treebursts resulted in the serious wounding of two pfc's, Henry C. West and Layman, while the Company was still working on improving its new positions. During these last days of the K Co deployment near Philippsbourg there occurred an incident which gave rise to a bit of diversion and a change in diet from standard field rations. A cow wandered into the cemetery on the west side of the village and was slaughtered by the men of Weapons Platoon who had their mortars in position there. Some alleged that the cow had been hit by an incoming shell and the slaughtering had been an act of compassion to end her suffering. Higher headquarters had issued orders to protect local livestock against the troops' foraging activities; therefore there was some skepticism about how badly hurt the cow had been before being dispatched. One of the Company's resourceful GI's produced a supply of potatoes that he had been able to scrounge. A fire was built near the mortar positions, and several steel helmets were employed as skillets. The resulting meal of steak and French fries was shared throughout the Company as far as it went.

The 275th Infantry's Unit Report for 11 January indicated that the enemy order of battle--units with which the Regi-

ment was in contact--now included elements of the 18th Infantry/36th VG Division. During the same 24-hour period, contact had been lost with the 477th Infantry/257th VG Division. There was no other change to the previous list.

CHAPTER XI

The Final Actions in the Vosges

Friday, 12 Jan (-9 to -1 degrees, Fahr.)

Saturday, 13 Jan (-1 to +7 degrees, Fahr.)

During the night of 11-12 January, relief operations were conducted in which the 256th VG Division's left-flank regiment, the 456th, was replaced in its positions by elements of the 36th VG Division and the boundary between these two divisions was shifted to the right to the eastern outskirts of Baerenthal. On the opposite side of the 256th sector, the division boundary was also shifted to the right to include Hill 420 (Ebersberg), about one mile west and a little south of Hill 364. Having been relieved that night in its positions in and around Baerenthal, the 476th Grenadier Regiment passed behind the 481st to assume responsibility for the newly acquired divisional front on the right, this having been taken over from elements of the 361st VG Division.

The 256th VG Division monograph indicates that the Division was in wretched condition, particularly its infantry battalions, so depleted that none could have mustered enough riflemen to fill a company. It was a scant force to apply to its task of defending some 12 kilometers of front extending over thickly forested and mountainous terrain. According to the account, the operations on 11 January had the following results: "The 476th Grenadier Regiment--Local enemy thrusts were repelled. The 481st Grenadier Regiment--Hill 364 was lost and was recaptured in the evening after a flanking movement. Hard fighting for this hill continued. The 456th Grenadier Regiment--The day was uneventful."

On the American side, the 45th Division's operations instruction issued late on 12 January reassigned the 276th Infantry, which had been operating directly under the 45th Division's commanding general, to the command of General Herren. Elements of TF Herren were to relieve the 157th

Infantry/45th Division and the 36th Combat Engineers. In turn, the 157th Infantry was to relieve the 276th Infantry, and the 36th Engineers were to relieve the 275th. The 157th and 36th were then to prepare for resuming the attacks which the 276th, supported by the 275th, had been conducting since 11 January. The 45th's instruction thus prescribed the end of the WRECKER commitment in the Vosges Mountains to become effective on 13 January. The Regiment's offensive operations on 12 January were pretty much confined to the pursuit of objectives previously assigned. However, the experiences of the three WRECKER rifle companies involved were harsh and costly--as if signifying that, while the 275th Infantry might be fading out of the NORDWIND picture, the outcome of the battle that had started on New Year's Eve was not yet clearly decided. Indeed, the German high command would not call off its offensive until the last week in January.

Colonel Barten had had no further contact with the G Co task force after receiving the company commander's message reporting the taking of the objective on Schwarzenberg at 1600, 11 January. Shortly after midnight, 11-12 January, he sent his exec, Major Bottenfield, and a wire crew to find the task force, laying a wire to reestablish telephone communications with it, and determine what progress was being made in the direction of the final objective. Over 2 hours passed at the battalion command post without word having come back from the Bottenfield party. Around 0300 the battalion commander decided to wait no longer and summoned Lieutenant Cruell, leader of the 2nd Battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon. Cruell: "Colonel Barten briefed me on the Bottenfield patrol's route and told me to follow it with another patrol. The route ran directly west from the junction of the Obermuehlthal road with the Zinswiler road, on the slope north of and moving parallel to the Obermuehlthal road. We started out--myself and three of my men. We had barely completed the climb up the slope and gone on a couple of hundred yards when we ran into the Bottenfield patrol. They had lost their bearings, and, after several hours, had come across their own telephone wire thus learning that they had gone in a circle. We all returned to the Muehlthal command post.

"Back at the CP, Barten told me to take a patrol including a wire crew. My mission was to find G Company, determine its status, and establish wire communications. I took three A & P Platoon members and two wire crewmen. We went to Obermuehlthal, where G Co's 2nd Platoon was in position. We found several of the 2nd Platoon members in the first house and discussed G Company's probable location with them. Nobody knew for certain; it was thought that they were last moving west on the other side of the mountain. It was now shortly before dawn.

"One of the men from the 2nd Platoon agreed to guide us part of the way in our search for the rest of his company. We went on through Obermuehlthal, turned northward to climb up to and cross over a saddle. Our guide gave us the direction from there and then turned back toward Obermuehlthal. We headed westward along the north slope of Schwarzenberg observing in the dim light at daybreak the valley on our right and the ridge on the far side of it. As we approached the mouth of the valley opening from the west, the sounds of smallarms and mortar fire came to us from up ahead, but they seemed to die away as we continued on. Along our route we came upon signs of G Company's passage that way and of its ordeal--bodies of GI's, shell craters, and shattered trees. As we moved west, we had climbed higher until we were well up the slope of Schwarzenberg.

"We had proceeded a couple of hundred yards after the sound of firing had ceased when we came face to face with some GI's, about seven of them. They turned out to be the G Co task force's rear guard. They were obviously jumpy and had almost fired on us when they saw us. They probably would have if Lieutenant Denton, the Weapons Platoon leader, who was with them, had not recognized me. We were at the west end of Schwarzenberg fairly high up and close to the crest--where the G Co group had bivouaced the night before. Denton wanted to know where in the hell we had come from and how we had gotten through. I didn't understand and answered we hadn't had any trouble. When I asked why we should have had trouble, Denton explained that he and his men had repelled a German attack only 5 minutes before, an attack that had come from the identical direction of my patrol's approach. No wonder they had been so ready to fire on us!

"I explained our mission to Denton--to find the G Co task force, get the telephone wire to them, and check with the CO about his force's situation. However, Denton said that he would get word to the CO that I had been there and insisted that I take my men and get out of the area at once. He asked that we take one of his men with us--the man had just been seriously wounded. In answer to my question, he told me that the G Co group had only about 25 men left. When Denton would have it no other way, I left the wire with him and started on the return journey with my men. We took his wounded man with us on a litter." The only explanation for Lieutenant Denton's behavior imaginable is that he had been instructed by his CO to prevent any nonessential troop movement, since any movement might be an attraction for further enemy shelling. German mortar and artillery fire had already inflicted serious losses on the G Co task force. Denton's estimate of the Company's strength there on Schwarzenberg--25 men--indicated that the 1st and 3rd platoons had suffered at least 50 percent casualties since departing on

their mission less than 24 hours before. (Lawrence Southard has noted that the total G Co strength at the end of Vosges action was 72. Of this, the G Co task force--1st and 3rd platoons--probably had 40 to 50 left. Even so, the task force's losses on the afternoon of 11 Jan could have been nothing less than serious.)

An entry in the 275th Infantry's Narrative Report for 12 January states: "At 0605 A Company reported contact with G Company. G Company had not yet reached its objective. Later contact was (to be) maintained by messenger. (G Company was) 1000 yards from their objective. They planned a dawn attack to take it. At 1010 A Company was 500 yards short of their objective. There they met the enemy and came under smallarms fire." These remarks permit some inferences--that the G Co task force had indeed received Colonel Barten's instruction sent via messenger the night before; that the instruction to the G Co task force most probably had been along the same lines as that received by the A Co commander at nightfall on 11 January; that, at the time of the A Co-G Co contact, the task force was still in its bivouac area, near the crest at the west end of Schwarzenberg; and that the instructions to both units envisioned continuing contact between the two and coordination of their actions.

A Company had continued all night to receive shellfire in its perimeter defense on the south slope of Schwarzenberg near the rim of the steep drop down into Obermuehlthal. The enemy's persistent shelling of the Rehbach valley was intensified shortly after midnight, and the men in the part of the perimeter closer to Obermuehlthal received a share of this. The fruitless search for the Millhiser party was called off around 0400. In this regard, Pannell recalls that the apparent loss of their highly respected company commander had a generally depressing effect on the men. During the night a battalion wire crew was able to bring a telephone wire forward to the perimeter, and it was hooked up with the phone kept in the foxhole shared by Pannell and Herbst, the first sergeant. Afterwards, Lieutenant Woodward, the one remaining A Co officer, reported periodically to Battalion on the Company's situation.

The history of the 275th Medical Detachment describes the problems in handling the evacuation and treatment of the heavy casualties taken on 11-12 January: "The troops passed through the small village of Obermuehlthal and proceeded up the slopes ahead. The (medical) collecting company had sent two teams of litter bearers to the 1st Battalion. These were sent up the hill in the wake of the troops, who were proceeding under heavy artillery fire. The two remaining four-man litter teams from the (battalion) aid station also followed the troops. Once the ridge was reached, a new

attack order made the exhausting, many-houred litter evacuation from the hill impractical. A long, steep, and deeply rutted trail, navigable by jeep, was scouted to the hilltop. Plans were made for the (battalion) aid station to set up a (forward) aid station in a basement in Obermuehlthal with a collecting point further forward at the jeep trail's terminus atop the hill.

"The sorting of casualties for priority of evacuation was difficult in the dark. ... a patient walked into the forward station with fractures of both legs and both arms. A casualty with a sucking wound in his chest carried in another man who had only minor wounds. We borrowed other jeeps from within the (1st) Battalion to expedite evacuations to Obermuehlthal. From there we called ambulances waiting at Muehlthal whenever a load was ready. They raced into the hamlet, which was under constant shellfire, were quickly loaded, and raced back out." The 2nd Battalion aid station's problems in evacuating the numerous casualties of the more remote G Co task force could have been resolved with no less difficulty.

Shortly after daybreak, there was a noticeable lessening in the shellfire raining down on Obermuehlthal, and A Co's Lieutenant Woodward took advantage of the respite to leave the Company's perimeter and go to the rear for a conference with the battalion commander. During his absence, an A Co jeep came careening up the same trail along the mountain side that was being used for medical evacuations. Halting at the casualty collecting point, the jeep occupants off-loaded some cases of K-rations, jockeyed their vehicle in a frantic turn-around and beat a hasty retreat down the trail. The two A Co noncoms, Herbst and Pannell, walked back from the perimeter, picked up a case of rations each, and returned to the perimeter. Herbst received a head wound and had part of his ear clipped off by a shell fragment during the course of the carrying mission and was subsequently evacuated.

Following a brief meeting with Colonel Pierce, Woodward returned to the A Co perimeter and issued orders for the Company to prepare for moving out. Gathering their equipment, the men formed in extended order and started forward. Though the substance of the Pierce-Woodward discussion is not remembered, it seems that the order for A Company to attack had been iterated, and consequently, the Company was now marching to reach the line of departure in preparation for its attack. Rounding the western nose of Schwarzenberg, the Company turned northward, moving parallel to the trail. To their left, across a deep ravine, the men could see their objective, Hill 364, 500-600 yards away. Then the enemy opened up with smallarms fire, and the A Co doughboys sought cover and attempted to return the fire. This was the situ-

ation at 1010, as reported by A Company to Battalion (cited above). Soon the enemy added mortar fire to the smallarms fusillade that was peppering the Americans. The toll of casualties began to mount again, keeping the Company's medics busy. Circumstances made it extremely difficult to evacuate a wounded man. Among those killed was S Sgt John E. Sweeney, a much admired rifle squad leader whose death was another demoralizing loss. Any initiative to get the men started forward again brought quick enemy reaction to their first stirrings in the form of intensified mortar fire. For all practical purposes, the Company was pinned down.

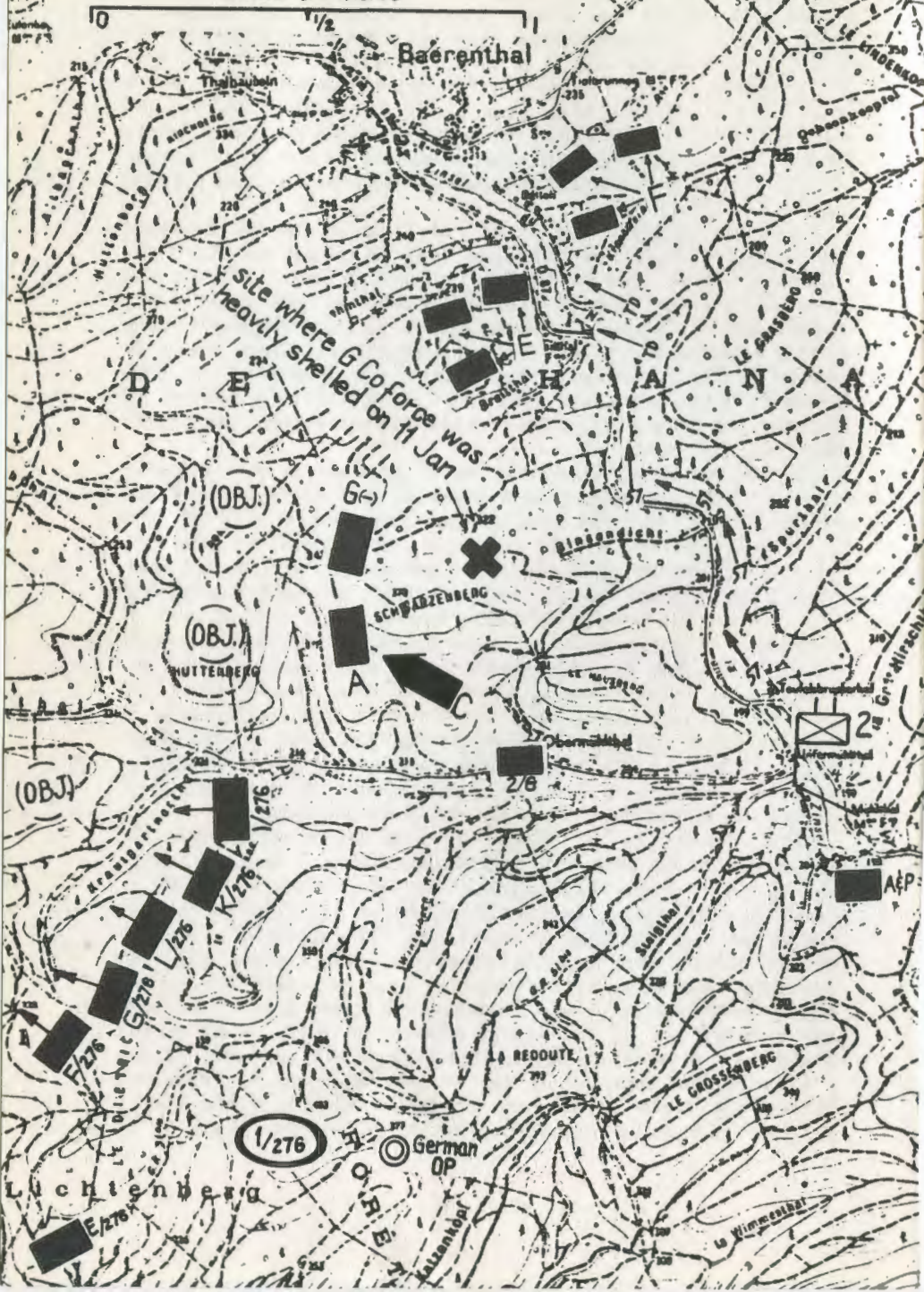
The hours dragged past, and the A Co situation remained unchanged. Lieutenant Woodward managed to get to the rear, where he again conferred with Colonel Pierce. There had been no further contact with G Company on the right since before dawn. Woodward's description of his company's condition convinced Pierce that an additional force would be needed if Hill 364 was to be taken. At Muehlthal he proposed to Colonel McAleer that the 1st Battalion's reserve, C Company, be committed. The regimental commander concurred. The time was 1430.

Shortly after daybreak that morning, when on the opposite side of Schwarzenberg from A Company, 2nd Battalion's Lieutenant Cruell had had his strange discussion with G Co's Lieutenant Denton, Cruell had speculated that his patrol's approach from the rear of the enemy combat patrol had surprised the German party and had been at least partially responsible for its withdrawal--how far, he had no way of knowing. Thinking that he ought to take a different return route to lessen the chance that his small party would encounter the enemy raiders, Cruell had asked Denton about the possibility of passing over the crest to the south slope of Schwarzenberg and turning east along that side of the mountain. Cruell: "Neither Denton nor anyone else seemed to know what was over on the south slope; so I decided to return along the same route by which we had come.

"Starting out on our return trip, we hadn't gone more than a hundred yards when all hell broke loose. Germans across the valley on the high ground to our northwest began to blast us with mortar and artillery fire, and we were receiving occasional volleys of smallarms fire as well. The incoming shells were causing treebursts all around us. It probably took us a little over an hour to reach the saddle above Obermuehlthal, but it seemed to take ages. Carrying the wounded man on the litter slowed us down, or we surely would have arrived at the saddle much, much sooner. It was a miracle that none of us was even wounded--shell fragments ripped one man's jacket and gouged another's rifle stock. We dove for cover repeatedly as we heard the sound of an

275th Inf 1st and 2nd battalions' dispositions and 276th Inf attack - 1600 12 Jan

scale in miles



approaching shell--behind fallen trees or even a corpse or two when no other shelter was handy. As we moved through trees, we could hear and see shell fragments plugging into nearby tree trunks. When we arrived in Obermuehlthal, a heavy artillery barrage came in, and we had to wait for a while before continuing on to the battalion command post. When at last we got back to Muehlthal, I learned that Battalion was in telephone contact with G Company."

Perhaps it had been the intrusion at daybreak of the enemy combat patrol at the rear of the G Co task force's bivouac perimeter that caused the postponement of the planned dawn attack by the task force. Paul McCoy recalls that the company commander, just prior to dawn, assigned a three-man detail to escort the German prisoners back to Muehlthal. The party had no sooner made its departure than it became embroiled in the firefight which erupted when the enemy combat patrol approached the rear of the G Co perimeter. Two of the guards, one of them being Pfc Mann, were wounded in the action. After the enemy patrol withdrew, the POW detail resumed its journey with two replacement guards assigned to it. Cruell does not remember seeing the guards and German prisoners. Perhaps they passed while he was preoccupied in his discussion with Lieutenant Denton. The detail arrived back at Muehlthal without sustaining more casualties. Whether it encountered difficulties similar to those of the Cruell patrol is not known.

Telephone contact with Battalion having been reestablished shortly after daybreak by the arrival of the Cruell patrol, the G Co commander presumably reported the recent presence of Germans in rear of his force's position to Colonel Barten and received instructions conceived in light of this enemy threat. Evidently the task force waited for 2 or 3 hours before moving out, perhaps to see whether the enemy would repeat the attempt to hit the G Co rear, perhaps to give the battalion commander time to make E Co position changes in order to give some protection to G Company's rear.

According to McCoy, the G Co task force had breakfast in its bivouac area. Afterward it formed in extended order and started downslope to the west. The movement covered no more than a few hundred yards before the formation was halted, low on the western slope of Schwarzenberg. The order to dig in was passed around. McCoy understood that they were on their objective. The position, in his view, was unfortunate--observation and fields of fire were badly obstructed by dense woods. Digging of individual shelters continued past noon and into the afternoon.

McCoy: "Then the word was passed around to get ready for another move. Shouldering our packs, we formed and started west again. We had barely gotten out of the area of our last position when the artillery came in heavy. We quickly

became disorganized and scattered--some of the men returned to the slit trenches they had left only a few moments before. Pfc Coleman was badly wounded as were several others. That ended the action for G Company that day. We were badly shaken and had little notion of what we were supposed to do. We were hungry and discouraged. The officers with us did little to improve our situation." For the time being, the G Co task force had lost its effectiveness as a combat unit. The advances made by it on 12 Jan, as described by McCoy, were carried out without evident planning or announced purpose; for McCoy, as an acting platoon leader, certainly should have been informed of any such details. The aggressive spirit of the unit, first dimmed by the fearful shelling and losses it had taken on the previous afternoon, seems to have been completely spent in the assault, led by McCoy, on its initial objective an hour or so before darkness.

C Company's Attack on Hill 364

Back in the 1st Battalion perimeter near Teufelsbrueckerhof, C Company had been alerted around noon on 12 January to prepare for a movement to the west. At 1430, the order to march came from Battalion, and the Company moved out. The shelling of the Obermuehlthal area by the enemy continued, and, warned about this, Lieutenant Grotheer led his troops onto the ridge on the north side of the Obermuehlthal road and moved westward along it. At the end of the ridge, he turned north to reach the saddle at the southeast foot of Schwarzenberg. Here Grotheer turned west leading his company on the trail which traverses the south face of Schwarzenberg about half-way up the mountain. It was 1600 when C Company passed through the A Co perimeter at the western end of the mountain. Shortly afterward, the C Co doughboys caught sight of some of G Co's men off to their right. The shellfire experienced by Grotheer's company during the march had not been particularly bothersome, but as it had passed around the west end of Schwarzenberg the men noted many shattered trees and shell craters--evidence of the hard pounding that A Company had taken the night before.

Almost immediately after passing near the G Co positions, the point of the C Co march formation received a flurry of smallarms fire from the right. At this the forward part of the formation recoiled back on the rear and there was confusion. However, order was quickly restored and two of the rifle platoons, the 1st and 3rd, deployed to form a frontal position facing toward Hill 364 and straddling the trail along which the Company had guided its movement. Immediately the two platoons began digging in. There was no more than an hour of daylight remaining; therefore Grotheer had

no time to waste. He summoned the leaders of his other two platoons--Lieutenant Holmes of the 2nd Platoon and Sergeant Rusley of the Weapons Platoon--and issued them an attack order prescribing a maneuver to envelop the objective. At the end of this movement Rusley's machine guns were to be set up to the right of the intended route of advance of Holmes' riflemen, then were to open fire on the objective. When Rusley commenced firing, Holmes and his men were to assault the objective on Hill 364. The lieutenant and sergeant hurried back to their platoons.

When Lieutenant Holmes arrived back where his platoon waited, he hurriedly briefed his platoon sergeant and two squad leaders on the plan and then moved out with his men following, now a 16-man force. Sergeant Rusley and the two machine-gun squads had already gone ahead. The movement brought the 2nd Platoon from the rear passing through the other two rifle platoons as they dug in. Some of the diggers paused to give encouragement--by word of mouth or gesture--to Holmes and his men. Higley remembers being bade "good luck" by one of the mortarmen, a "buck" private who had once been a top company noncom--a platoon sergeant--back in the States before losing his stripes in a disciplinary action. Then Harry Durkee, the 3rd Platoon leader, urged Higley to "go get 'em" as the assault force passed out of the perimeter.

As the 2nd Platoon left the rest of the Company, it moved away from the trail it had been on, climbing uphill to reach another trail, evidently on the lower slope of the hill due north of Hill 364. Sergeant Rusley and his machine-gunners were waiting there as the riflemen struggled up the steep slope through deep snow to reach the rendezvous. Higley and his squad were the last to arrive, and an impatient Rusley cursed them when they paused for breath a few yards below the trail. An indignant Higley replied in kind. Tempers were short, but the men couldn't afford to give full voice to them--the enemy was supposed to be only a few hundred yards away, and the maneuver force was intent on achieving surprise.

Now Holmes and Rusley talked the plan over. They probably knew that there was an enemy force on the objective. A Co's Lieutenant Woodward had reported to Battalion that his men had seen enemy activity that morning on Hill 364, and surely this had been passed to Lieutenant Grotheer. Undoubtedly the two C Co men discussed details of the intended assault in terms of terrain as they viewed it, between their position and the objective. Then Rusley and the MG Section moved out. Moments later the 2nd Platoon followed. Their route took them only a few yards along the trail on which they had rendezvoused before they left it, turning left and continuing downslope onto the saddle--Hill 364's approach

from the north.

Kern Dibble, the machine-gunner, has described in detail the action late that afternoon, the final occasion on which he and Rusley would work as a team. "Lieutenant Grotheer sent Sig and the MG Section to the right of the trail leading up the mountain. I carried one machine gun and Pfc John Kayate, our Indian we called 'Chief', carried the other. We walked to the top of the ridge and turned to the left, proceeded for perhaps 100 yards (more likely 300-400 yards), and stopped on a knoll covered with pines." At this point the Rusley party appears to have been near the crown of Hill 364 with the area of the reported enemy defensive positions downslope to the left of the party's most recent routing. From there they moved away from the crown, slowly, to its rim, from where they could see downslope, through the trees, German soldiers, perhaps a dozen of them. Studying the scene below, the Americans made out some foxholes amid a scattering of fallen logs. The Germans were not in the foxholes, not the Germans Dibble first noticed, but it seemed to him that they had an expectant attitude as though they had seen or heard something which had made them suspicious.

Rusley signaled the deployment of the two machine-guns--they were of the type equipped with a bipod ground-mount, easily enough moved and operated by one man. Kayate was to be on the left of Dibble, about 20 yards away. On the sergeant's signal, both guns were to open fire and then to be stepped forward, Dibble's gun first, while the other gun covered its movement. Dibble: "I aimed the gun at those Germans, Sig dropped his arm, and I pulled the trigger. It was so cold that the gun would not fire automatic. So I held the trigger down with my left hand and worked the bolt with my right. After about five rounds, the gun took off on automatic and knocked my hand away from the bolt. With the first shot, the Germans had reacted, jumping into foxholes, dropping behind logs, or running out of my field of vision."

The Germans started returning the fire as soon as they reached cover and made it hot for Dibble at his gun. Still he advanced his gun, but then Kayate did not and it was realized that the other machine gun was not firing. Rusley sent Dibble back to Kayate's position to find out why. Leaving his assistant, Harold W. Mitchell, firing the gun, Dibble went back to Kayate's position and found him wounded. Dibble hurried back to his own gun and resumed firing at the enemy, whose positions were from 50 to 100 yards away, to the front, left-front, and right-front. Judging by the number of enemy guns which Dibble could make out by their muzzle flashes, he guessed there were quite a few more Germans in the defensive position than he had first seen. A machine gun in an enemy bunker he had not previously noticed had opened fire.

The 2nd Platoon had followed the Machine-gun Section downslope onto the saddle, Higley's squad now leading. Approaching the juncture of saddle to hill, the column obliqued to the left and, moving slightly downslope, came onto the objective hill, not yet far enough around its perimeter to see the area where the enemy was reported to be. Then the firing started, and, moving forward, Higley quickly had enemy positions in view. From what he could see, there seemed to be two machine-gun positions, each one in an earth-and-log bunker, supported by riflemen and burp-gunners in nearby foxholes. Out in front, Higley had his BAR-man, William Mearse, and a rifleman, Jerry Foster, with him. Very soon he was joined by Lieutenant Holmes, who had come up from the rear. To Higley it seemed that other squad members were lagging back, and he yelled an angry order to get themselves moving. The enemy firing was intense but, fortunately for the furthest advanced doughboys, was aimed a little higher up, the enemy fire was hitting among them causing casualties. Those with the little group out front could hear the screams of wounded men to their rear.

Many years later, Lieutenant Holmes wrote of the action, "I joined Sergeant Higley's squad halfway down the slope. At this point the German machine guns opened fire. Sergeant Higley fired a rifle grenade at the (machine-gun) emplacement. Then I fired another grenade (at it). The emplacement was busted." Having knocked out the gun in the bunker on the left, Holmes returned the rifle with grenade launcher to Higley and started working his way to the right in the direction of his men from the other rifle squad. He had just started when a German burp-gunner in a foxhole near the knocked-out bunker began directing effective fire at the furthest advanced Americans. Higley was hit in the foot, and it seemed that the German, given a few more seconds, could not fail to get them all. Then Mearse rose up with his BAR and emptied a magazine in the burp-gunner's direction--no more firing came from that German's position.

Lieutenant Holmes resumed his movement to the right, running and crawling alternately as the cover afforded by the terrain seemed to allow. Sergeant Higley attempted to follow, but then realized he was wounded in the foot and couldn't keep up. Holmes: "I left Higley and moved over to my other squad and Sergeant Rusley. Artillery started to come in bursting high in the trees overhead. I spotted another enemy machine gun (evidently in the bunker seen earlier by Dibble on the right) just as a shell cut a big tree in half and the top fell where some of Thomas' squad and Rusley were. There was no movement afterwards from underneath where it had fallen. Another treeburst came closer to me, but I wasn't hit. Sgt Harry L. Hamlin, Thomas'

assistant, came crawling toward me and was hit by fire from the third machine gun. He was about 20 feet from me, and I rolled myself toward him attracting fire as I did. He screamed for me to get back--his last words." After seeing Hamlin killed, Lieutenant Holmes crawled back to the left in the direction of where he had last seen Sergeant Higley and his two men.

Meanwhile, Kern Dibble and his assistant Harold Mitchell had been busy with their machine gun. Dibble: "Sig was a few feet away on my left, firing his carbine and motioning me to fire the machine gun in the same direction. I did, but, when I swung the gun to the left, Germans behind the logs popped up and fired, then dropped down in back of the logs. In another direction there were two Germans higher up--I thought they were up in trees, but maybe they weren't. They also took turns firing at us whenever I wasn't shooting at them. I was firing in different directions as fast as I could, and Mitchell and Sig would holler for me to fire here and fire there--I could hardly hear myself think. I didn't dare quit firing for fear that they would get a better chance to aim at us.

"A German behind a log was firing real close to me. So I swung the gun around on the log and cut it until I got the man behind it. Our bearers would throw a box of ammunition to us and then jump back to some foxholes we had seen on the way up. We burned up three or four ammo belts, nearly all that we had. Sig dropped out of sight, and we did not know then that he had been hit. I continued firing and got down to 30-40 rounds left in our last belt. I told Mitchell to take off while I covered him with what was left. He ran to the rear with machine-gun bullets stitching the ground around his feet. I fired up the last of the belt and then ran back to where Mitchell and the bearers were. I was half-blinded by flying bark when a bullet hit a tree trunk near my head. I stopped and rubbed my eyes until an ammo bearer yelled at me to get the hell out of there. So I ran."

Sergeant Higley, after realizing he had been hit, lay there pondering what ought to be done and what his foot would permit him to do next. Looking about himself to determine where the positions of the others were, he saw 1st Lt Reginald B. Desiderio, the company exec, over to his right--he must have come up from the Company's main position. Sergeant Mercy, the platoon sergeant, was with Desiderio along with a few others. Lieutenant Holmes was seen crawling, coming back over to the left. Higley came to a decision--he had to move and did, crawling forward. It was the final effort. "All the men were crawling and firing--those who had come up and hadn't been hit. An enemy machine gun responded firing to our right and traversing its

bursts over toward us. Desiderio was leading the advance on the right, and 'Bussy' was leading on the left." Darkness was already falling as the advance got under way and quickly it was dark. That seemed to end it.

Higley: "When 'Bussy' returned to where I was, it was much too dark to see a target or a whooping thing. I yelled to 'Bussy,' 'Let's get the hell out of here.' Since we were under heavy fire--even though I knew they couldn't see us by then--we both crawled back a ways. I know Mearse was with me soon and helping me. Then we were back with some others. Someone on each side of me walked me back the rest of the way, and I realized I was using my leg with the wounded foot."

The forwardmost C Co skirmishers probably never got closer than 30 or 40 yards from the enemy positions. Two of the three German machine guns had been knocked out. Holmes had gotten one at the outset of the action--the bunker on the left. It is Holmes' belief that Higley, after being wounded, smashed the middle bunker firing two grenades into it. A check of the contents of Higley's rifle-grenade carrier after the action seemed to bear Holmes out--only one grenade of the original five remained. The enemy bunker on the right seems to have been undamaged--its machine gun was presumably the one that had chased Dibble's assistant, Mitchell, up over the rim of the hill as the two of them were in the act of disengaging their own machine gun.

Dibble: "Back down off the hill, Mitchell and I ran into each other. Big shells were falling all around. A rifleman who was there said Sig was dead, hit in the head and body." Years later Harold Mitchell, pointing out that the redoubtable Rusley, who, as Weapons Platoon leader, was performing double-duty in leading the noncomless MG Section in that action, wrote his opinion that Rusley had acted "beyond the call of duty." Rusley's case did, indeed, illustrate the point that Colonel Barten would make in reviewing the first days of the Regiment in combat--until everyone became accustomed to the norms of individual behavior under fire, many acts of heroism would go inadequately rewarded or, as in this incident involving Rusley, would go without any official recognition whatsoever.

Some of the men gathered on the saddle extending north of Hill 364 and, from there, started back toward the Company's position in single file. Dibble remembers that he was next to last in the column, the last man being Francisco Burns, of the MG Section. There was shelling around them with resulting treebursts. One treeburst close behind Burns caused his backside to be peppered with flying tree fragments. Spurred ahead by the effects, Burns hit Dibble from the rear and practically carried him to the top of the rise. In the darkness, Dibble and Mitchell became separated from

the others and, finding a foxhole, climbed down in it to wait for dawn. Reviewing the hour-long action they had had that late afternoon, Dibble realized that his section had lost three of its eight or nine men.

Well after nightfall most of the members of the assault force who needed accounting for had gotten back to the Company. Lieutenant Holmes found the company commander and reported that the operation had gotten two of three enemy machine guns--he could not be certain what had happened to the third one. After reporting, Holmes went to check on his wounded men. Meanwhile Lieutenant Grotheer had been joined by an artillery officer, a forward observer. After determining that there was practically no possibility that any surviving member of the assault force was still on Hill 364, Grotheer asked the FO to hit the objective hard. Consequently, the already battered hill was battered again. Colonel Pierce came up and reviewed the situation with his company commander. Afterward, he concurred in Grotheer's recommendation that C Company hold its position and make no further attempt against Hill 364 that night. To account for the German 256th VG Division monograph notation that the hill was temporarily lost on the evening of 12 January, one may speculate that the artillery that hit the hill while the C Co assault force was withdrawing, was placed there by the enemy after its defenders of Hill 364 had been withdrawn under American pressure. There is no way of knowing whether the American barrage that subsequently was fired hit an unoccupied Hill 364 or hit German troops after they had reoccupied their defensive positions there.

Back at the C Co main position, Sergeant Higley was sitting in the snow next to a big tree, taking the shoe pack and stockings off from his injured foot. Lieutenant Durkee came over and helped the sergeant treat his wounds with sulfa powder--there was little blood, the foot being nearly frozen in the subzero weather. Nearby a mortar shell landed close to a shallow foxhole whose occupants were Sergeant Relph and Pfc Leo T. Pederson. Pederson was badly wounded and knocked unconscious; Relph was cut up and dazed. Lieutenant Holmes ordered Relph and three other walking-wounded's to evacuate Pederson using a blanket as a litter. He told Higley to go along with them. Somehow they managed to get Pederson back to the collection point on the mountain side above Obermuehlthal--a distance of a half mile or more. There the party found a jeep with a lieutenant waiting in it, alone in the dark. Pederson was loaded on, Higley got in, and perhaps one or two others. The remainder could have been directed to continue on foot down the mountain side to the aid station in Obermuehlthal.

It was not long before midnight when the jeep arrived at the regimental aid station at Zinswiller. Still uncon-

scious, Pederson was taken inside, and Higley followed. Higley waited impatiently to have his foot examined and treated so that he could get started back to his company. When at last the medic had finished with him, he told Higley that he wouldn't be getting back to C Company very soon--he was being moved in the opposite direction, in medical evacuation channels. Several years earlier a different physical problem had interfered with Tom Higley's plans. Prior to Pearl Harbor, each of the armed services had rejected his attempts to enlist--poor vision. Finally his continuing efforts had been instrumental in getting himself drafted into the U.S. Army. Now, on 12 January 1945, history was repeating itself--this time it was gunshot wounds. Official records indicate that Pederson, although badly wounded, survived.

Lt Southard's Assignment

To start the day, Lieutenant Southard was with F Company, deployed up forward holding the right half of the 2nd Battalion's frontal defensive sector. A message was received during the morning from Battalion directing Southard to report to Colonel Barten at his command post. When he arrived at the Muehlthal CP, Southard was told by a staff officer to get himself a shave--he was going to meet the new regimental commander. Existence in the foxholes up where F Company was--exposed to constant observation by an enemy ready to shoot at the American positions should any target offer itself--discouraged the practice of shaving. Having shaved, Southard reported to Barten and was introduced to Colonel McAleer. Southard: "Colonel McAleer told me that I was now the company commander of G Company and led me over to a map on a table. He pointed out two hills on the map saying that the first hill was the last known position of G Company, ... which was out of food, water, and ammunition. I was to take supplies, find them, and be on the other hill by nightfall. Colonel Barten told me that about 10 or 12 men from G Company were holed up in a house about half a mile from his CP with food, water, and ammunition already there." The two hills referred to in the regimental commander's briefing of his new company commander were evidently Schwarzenberg and the G Co final objective, the hill just north of Hill 364. The 10-12 men with the supplies were from G Co's 2nd Platoon, posted in Obermuehlthal 2 days before.

Southard proceeded to Obermuehlthal and found the house with his carrying-party men waiting inside. Having packed the supplies, Southard and his party ventured out to find the rest of the lieutenant's new company. It was around noon. The group had barely gotten started when mortar

shells started falling nearby, and it quickly returned to its starting point. There followed a 2-hour wait while the enemy mortar barrage spent itself. When it seemingly had, Southard had his men shouldered their cargo-packs and led them forth again. "This time we made it well up into the mountains. The sergeant leading me to G Company's last known position indicated that we were near it; so I stopped the men." The sergeant acting as Southard's guide most likely had come by his understanding of the G Co task force's location from the Cruell patrol, which had stopped in Obermuehlthal that morning en route back to the battalion command post after making contact with Lieutenant Denton.

Leaving his carrying party where he had halted it, Southard and the sergeant continued on and soon found the G Co bivouac area of the previous night, but the occupants had already departed. During this move, the two passed a number of corpses, recognized by the sergeant as G Co members. Still in the bivouac area, the two searchers were probably looking for tracks in the snow telling them the direction taken by the departing G Co men when the enemy started shelling the mountain side. Southard: "It was about 1600. The sergeant and I jumped into a hole and stayed there until the shelling stopped. We then went back to get the men with the supplies, but they were gone and the supplies were scattered down the trail from where I had halted the carrying party." Evidently the enemy barrage had been intense in the area where Southard's carriers waited, probably in the vicinity of the place where the G Co task force had taken such a fearful pounding at about the same time the previous day. If so, the carriers would have had in their view graphic evidence of artillery's effectiveness on that bare and coverless area of the mountain side--many dead GI's.

Southard decided to return to Obermuehlthal to make a new start on the mission. "Getting more supplies together, we started out again about 2000. As we departed, one of the men told me he had seen a suspicious light on the side of the mountain. We later found out that Germans were in a cave behind our lines directing fire on us. ... Back up into the mountains we went. With some luck, we found the remaining men of the Company at 0300 or thereabouts the following morning." The new G Co commander had no opportunity to carry out the second part of his mission--the attack on the final objective. Before dawn he received instructions by telephone to withdraw his force--the Battalion was being relieved. Had he been given time to attack, there is reason to doubt that it could have been effective. Southard has indicated that he found the physical condition of the 1st and 3rd platoons' survivors to be bad and the state of discipline, unsatisfactory. Remedial actions taken would have fast and favorable results, but not until the WRECKER men

had moved out of the Vosges Mountains and had been committed elsewhere.

Close by, C Company was making preparations to withdraw shortly after dawn on 13 January. The two machine-gunners, Dibble and Mitchell, had become lost the night before and gone to sleep in a foxhole that they had stumbled upon. At daybreak they awoke and were unable to get their bearings as to the probable direction of the Company from them. Mitchell: "We heard voices on the trail near us. In a little while, we realized that the voices were speaking in English--what a welcome sound! We joined them--it was C Company--as they were pulling back."

Bonnie Pannell, who acted as A Co's Weapons Platoon leader on 12 January, recalls that his machine gun and mortars had given supporting fire as C Company moved up for its assault on Hill 364 that afternoon. However, poor visibility had limited the effectiveness of the fire and made it necessary to cease fire much too soon. A Company had remained in the same position until the next morning, when it withdrew. Estimates vary as to the number of able-bodied survivors retained by the Company at the end of the Vosges campaign, but all of them agree that it was well below half-strength. Lieutenant Woodward was the only remaining officer of six.

The actions on Schwarzenberg and Hill 364 had been the final engagements of significance involving WRECKER elements with the enemy's NORDWIND forces. The 275th Infantry's Unit Report for 12 January recorded that "At dark C Company and parts of A and G companies occupied positions just short of the objective(s)." Insofar as the operational concept of higher headquarters had been concerned, these WRECKER actions had been subsidiary to the central events on the eastern side of the Bitche Salient--the attacks of the three 276th Inf battalions on the immediate left of the 275th Infantry. Meanwhile neither of the WRECKER objectives had been firmly secured but the underlying purpose of the tasking assigned to WRECKER was being well served--by the German account, the German regiment defending the critical Hill 364 was pressured and preoccupied throughout the day. Therefore it could ill afford to divert any strength for opposing the American main effort to its right by the battalions of the 276th Infantry.

The 36th Engineers, a separate regiment which had been fighting as infantry for an extended period, was designated to relieve the 225th Infantry, one battalion at a time, beginning on the morning of 13 January. The relief of the 1st Battalion/275th by the 1st Battalion of engineers was completed by 1430 that day, and the WRECKER battalion was subsequently moved to relieve the 2nd Battalion/36th Engrs at Lampertsloch, 7 miles east of Niederbronn. After being relieved, WRECKER A Company passed back through Obermuehlthal

en route to its entrucking point, and its men were awed by the destruction they could see had been wrought by the enemy shellfire on that hamlet during the previous 48 hours. The place was totally wrecked.

On the same morning, WRECKER G Company's task force withdrew from its forward positions back to Obermuehlthal, where it rejoined the 2nd Platoon with its three attached weapons squads. The balance of the 2nd Battalion remained in defenses facing Baerenthal during the night of 13-14 January. Although the relieving engineer battalion came up behind WRECKER E and F companies during the night, the relief was not executed until after daybreak. Then the 2nd Battalion moved by truck to the vicinity of the sawmill complex on the Niederbronn-Philippsbourg road, where it went into an assembly area in which it was to serve as the TF Herren reserve.

The 3rd Battalion on the Regiment's right remained in its positions through the hours of daylight on 13 January. After nightfall, the relieving 36th Engineers battalion came up, and the WRECKER battalion moved to an assembly area on the Niederbronn road south of Philippsbourg, where it bivouaced for the remainder of the night. On the following morning, it entrucked to move to the Lampertsloch area.

For the two WRECKER battalions remaining in place after noon on the 13th, there was little action of consequence. An enemy combat patrol probed the 3rd Battalion's defenses on the right Lindenkopf but was quickly ejected. A 2nd Battalion patrol observed an enemy bicycle unit of some 300 men digging in just south of Thalhauseln, and the sighting may have been a reason why the relief of Barten's battalion was delayed until daybreak the next day. On 13 January an American engineer officer who had been trapped behind enemy lines for a week escaped and reported what he had observed of the German defenses in Baerenthal. Its defense force numbered 100-200 men and was supported by dug-in tanks and anti-tank guns; all approaches to the village were covered by machine guns.

L Co's Richard Becker had marched into Philippsbourg on New Year's Day as a rifleman. Two weeks later he had been put in charge of one of his company's rifle platoons with two machine guns supporting it. He would later become a career soldier and add combat in Korea and Viet Nam to his service record before retiring as a master sergeant with over 30 years. Becker's description of events during his company's relief on the night of 13-14 Jan by a company from the 36th Engineers: "I sent word to the two light machine guns to move back to the rear and report to their platoon sergeant. Meanwhile some young 2nd lieutenant engineer was shouting at his men, and both he and they were making a loud commotion and using flashlights. When I tried to inform him of the (exposed nature of our) location and the importance

of light discipline, he told me that they had been fighting Germans since North Africa and he needed no advice from me. Well, we moved out of there in one hell of a hurry because I knew the Krauts were going to spot them ... on that high terrain feature. Sure enough, we had only vacated the area a short time when they got their welcome ceremony by German artillery. It wasn't until daylight that I discovered that the same lieutenant had ordered one of my machine-gun squads to remain in position. They had been unable to move out with the rest of us."

Becker ends the account of the incident, recalling that, when the machine-gun squad got to the rear the next morning, its leader vented his anger at Becker for leaving the squad up on the ridge to receive, along with the engineer company, the Germans' welcoming barrage. Fortunately, none of the machine-gunner stay-behinds had been hit. The reported boldness of the engineer company as it made its relief that night might have been calculated to intimidate the enemy, which the engineer troops must have known was watching nearby, or it might have been simply undisciplined foolhardiness. The enemy's response seemed to prove which of the two possibilities was the more likely one.

The 275th Infantry's Unit Reports for 12 and 13 January noted only one change in the enemy order of battle. The report for 13 January added the 51st Special Battalion (not further identified) to the list of enemy units elements of which the Regiment was in contact with.

Epilogue

The 275th Infantry's 2-week trial amid the frozen crags of the Vosges Mountains was over, but the battle along the rim of the Bitche Salient would continue for more than a week after the WRECKER departure. On the American side; efforts would continue to flatten the NORDWIND-created bulge. On the German side, the high command's attention remained focused on the exit to the Vosges at Zinswiller. In theory, a German drive along the Zintzel creek valley to Zinswiller could break out onto the Rhine plain and continue south-eastward to form one prong of a double-envelopment around American forces between the Vosges and the Rhine. On the night of 13-14 January, the 6th SS Mtn and 256th VG divisions conducted relief operations which resulted in the two divisions' exchanging sectors of responsibility. As a consequence, elements of the SS division moved into the Baerenthal area. On the same date these two divisions, along with the 361st VG and 36th VG divisions, were assigned to the XC Corps, which had been tasked to conduct the attack through Zinswiller, and the corps commander's swapping of division sectors to bring the 6th SS Mtn Division into the Baerenthal area was consequent from the selection of that unit to make the main effort.

The German planned offensive through Zinswiller was delayed for several days while 6th SS Mtn elements were diverted to meet American counterattacks southwest of Baerenthal. There the German mountain troops were able to seal off a battalion of the U.S. 45th Division--3rd Battalion/157th Inf, plus C and G companies--the remnants of which surrendered on 20 January. Then the U.S. Seventh Army's execution of its planned withdrawal during the night of 20-21 Jan to the line of the Moder River obviated the need for the attack planned by the German XC Corps--the American withdrawal left Zinswiller abandoned. Along with Zinswiller, other Vosges towns and villages with which the WRECKER doughboys had become acquainted were left open to occupation by German troops including Philippsbourg, Dambach, Niederbronn, and Reichshoffen.

The Seventh Army's Operations Instruction No. 65 dated 20 Jan 1945, stated:

1. Confirming VOCC, Seventh Army, this date, VI Corps is authorized to withdraw to the general line: road junction one-half mile northeast of Althorn--Rothbach--Niedermodern--Hagenau--Bischwiller--Weyersheim at the

discretion of the corps commander.

"2. Effective immediately, the following point is designated as a limiting point between VI and XV corps:

road junction one-half mile northeast of Althorn."

Actually this withdrawal was one that was already in the planning stages when, on New Year's Eve--2 weeks earlier--the 275th Infantry had entrucked for movement from the Rhine plain to the Vosges Mountains. Consideration of a withdrawal had started before Christmas, when the Seventh Army was directed to discontinue offensive operations and to adopt a defensive posture. As a result of this change in attitude, General Patch and his staff realized that the same geographic features which the Seventh Army had been exploiting while on the offensive would cause problems for the Army now that it was in a defensive mode. The Seventh Army active front was split by the 10-12 miles wide Vosges barrier; on the right flank, the Rhine River passive front now afforded the enemy opportunities to achieve bridgeheads by infiltrating forces across the river from their sanctuary of the Siegfried Line; and, on the left, favorable terrain features of the Sarre River basin could be exploited by the enemy to execute a telling thrust.

In recognition of this new situation, the Sixth Army Group on 28 Dec 1944 had sent an instruction to the Seventh Army and to the First French Army which envisioned a series of withdrawals by the two armies to the eastern slopes of the Vosges Mountains. Consequent orders, issued by Seventh Army on 2 Jan, had identified three lines to which the Army would be pulled back prior to reaching the Vosges defense line prescribed by Sixth Army Group. The third line was identified as Bitche--Ingwiller--Strasbourg. It is mentioned here to highlight the point that it was the intense opposition of the French high command to the intended laying-open of Strasbourg to German reoccupation when the final withdrawal was completed that caused SHAEF on 3 January to order the holding of Strasbourg. The withdrawals previously planned were then modified and the schedule delayed. Finally, only two withdrawals were made as the consequences of this planning--one on 2 January, when VI Corps elements east of the Vosges were withdrawn from a point across the German border back to the Maginot Line, and the second on the night of 20-21 January. It is interesting to note that, in planning NORDWIND the German high command attempted to take advantage of the same vulnerabilities which the U.S. Seventh Army had discerned in its own situation days before the German attack was delivered. One concept that surely was present in the American withdrawal planning was that the enemy would be first made to pay dearly for such ground as was yielded to him before the planned withdrawals were executed. And, if that was so, it followed that General

Patch had the option to decide whether and when the situation had reached the point warranting the execution of the withdrawal's next phase. At any rate, that is how the battle which grew out of the NORDWIND offensive seems to have been managed on the American side.

Within the constraints of higher level strategy, the commanders of the U.S. VI Corps and 45th Division waged an active defense, launching counterattacks to recover lost ground, regain the initiative, and punish the enemy wherever encountered. Indeed, the VI Corps-wide operational plan undertaken some 24 hours after the German offensive arrived seems to have been intended to establish the American MLR along the Maginot Line, the line designated by Seventh Army for the first-phase withdrawal. Thus, while the 45th Division was making limited withdrawals of its own battalions to that line to the right of the newly created Bitche Salient, other American battalions along the periphery of the Salient were attempting to advance to that line. Among these were WRECKER 3rd Battalion from Philippsbourg and 2nd Battalion from Baerenthal.

It was within the context of this active-defense strategy that the 275th Infantry, after its commitment in the Vosges during New Year's Day, took on the bulk of the German 256th Division and fought it to a standstill. At the conclusion of their first 5 days in action, the WRECKER battalions--reinforced during this time by the WYOMING 1st Battalion--had inflicted heavy losses on this German division--so heavy that, when on 10 January it launched its important and carefully planned attack to reach Zinswiller, the German high command quickly realized that the 256th was too weakened to accomplish anything and called the attack off within a few hours after its start. A week before, the attack on Philippsbourg by one of the 256th regiments had been formidable and came close to succeeding. However, the 10 January attack by two regiments of this same division, now badly depleted, was so feeble that the WRECKER defenders, after brushing it back, failed to mention the event in any after-action report.

In the larger perspective, it is worth remembering that the mission of the German First Army in undertaking the NORDWIND offensive had been to force the American high command to divert troops away from the Bulge, where, 2 weeks after two German armies had launched their drive for Antwerp, they had become stalled and were themselves under heavy pressure from Allied counterattacks. How much relief did the NORDWIND offensive bring to the Germans' situation in the Bulge? A succinct answer is revealed in statistics cited in the U.S. Seventh Army's "Report of Operations"--on 7 Jan 1945, when the German offensive in the Vosges was in full swing, SHAEF was allocating reinforcements in a ratio

of about eight for the U.S. Twelfth Army Group (deployed around the Bulge) to one for the Sixth Army Group (which included the Seventh Army). Moreover, there was no shifting of American combat units away from the Bulge to bolster the defenders of the Bitche Salient--not before 8 January, when the German withdrawal from the Bulge began, and not before 16 January, when two advancing American armies linked up at Houffalize to reduce the Bulge to less than a third of its maximum depth. It is clear then that Hitler's NORDWIND diversion completely failed its purpose. Too, it was an expensive failure, for the German divisions employed all suffered fearful losses--losses which could not be replaced. They would be sorely missed during the next 2 months, while the U.S. Seventh Army and other Allied armies were driving the tattered remnants of German units back to the Rhine. Afterward the thin defensive shell of the Wehrmacht facing the Western Allies could offer only token resistance as they broke across that river into the heart of Germany to end the war.

These were consequences for which the WRECKER doughboys who had held Philippsbourg and guarded Zinswiller could feel pride in having a good share of responsibility. That both villages were yielded to the enemy in the course of the Seventh Army withdrawal of 20-21 Jan may have dismayed some whose courage and perseverance had prevented its happening during the first 2 weeks of NORDWIND. Only much later would they have been able to understand that the purposes of denying these places to the enemy had already been effectively served.

From the point of view of the American high command, the giving-up of territory in northern Alsace-Lorraine during the withdrawal was strategically desirable. If some American combat troops, not privy to or much interested in the big picture, wondered about the wisdom of first defending bitterly and then voluntarily yielding a large area, they could not have been nearly so perplexed as the French natives who then underwent another German occupation. Dr. Jean Beck, a native of Niederbronn and today a professor at the University of Arizona, has described the experience: "Until 20 Jan, it was pretty quiet in Niederbronn; that was a Saturday. The Americans retreated southeast in the direction of Pfaffenhoffen. All Sunday long, there was not one soldier left in town. However, in the night of Sunday-Monday we heard shooting (from the direction of Philippsbourg). On Monday at about 10 a.m., the Germans came from Philippsbourg. In front were a few cars pulled by horses, the Germans being out of gas. Then came a cannon pulled by horses. Everybody else was on foot. We could not understand why the American had retreated.

"Gradually, the Germans took over everything. In our

house they located the headquarters of an infantry regiment. Fortunately, they were not fanatical Nazis; otherwise I would have fared ill, because in November 1944 I had received an order to report to the Waffen SS. I ignored it and from then on had to keep in hiding.

"On 15 March, the Americans returned, preceded by planes and bombs, two of which were released over our house but hit the house below us, killing four people. The Germans retreated without a fight, but they laid explosives--among other places in the Grand Hotel, where the Americans (afterward) installed a field hospital. A big explosion occurred there and there were many dead--half the hotel was in ruins." Some Frenchmen remember the January 1945 American withdrawal to this day and ask for explanations from visiting American World War II veterans. That some resentment still remains was illustrated in 1979, when the factory guard at the gate of the Dietrich iron foundry in Niederbronn turned away a group of WRECKER veterans who were seeking to revisit their 1944 New Year's Eve bivouac site. He explained his uncooperative attitude in a scolding about the January 1945 American abandonment of Niederbronn. It seems doubtful that any native of Niederbronn who remembers the pitiful German force that entered his town behind the retreating Americans and the further devastation that soon followed would be much impressed by any explanation.

The three 70th Division regiments met their baptism of fire in the midst of the most difficult period of the U.S. Seventh Army's World War II combat experience. During its 10 months in action, the Army suffered by far its greatest numbers of casualties during the months of December 1944 and January 1945--12,113 and 15,275 in killed, wounded, and captured. In January, the bloodiest month, the combined three TF Herren regiments, among 12 division-size units assigned to the Seventh Army, ranked along with the veteran 45th and 79th divisions as having suffered the highest number of killed and wounded--approximately 1100 each. On 1 Jan 1945, the 275th Infantry had a strength of 2972 officers and men. Ten days later that number had been diminished by over a thousand to 1899. About half of the reduction in numbers was accounted for by losses in the killed, wounded, and missing categories. It appears that the other half can be attributed to temporary absences from duty, mostly of men undergoing treatment for trench foot and frozen extremities. So the WRECKER veterans, along with those of their two sister regiments, do not have to kid themselves and their grandchildren when recounting the story of their initial trial in combat--the going could not have been tougher. Not to be forgotten in the telling of the WRECKER story were the natural conditions of the setting--the remorseless hostility of those rugged mountains bound in the freezing snow and the

ice of the harshest European winter of the century. To protect himself in this environment, the doughboy rarely had more than his fortitude and the clothing he wore.

It was an unrelenting trial of the human spirit. In a letter written to his parents in mid-January 1945, the C Co BAR-man, Donald Docken, described the doubt and the rededication which attended his soul-searching during the Vosges action: "Things have been pretty hot for us in the past two weeks, and I haven't been able to get a letter off. My mind is absolutely stripped of any traces of reason for war--as if there was any there in the first place. Maybe the overall picture justifies what goes on up here, but, from an infantryman's point of view, it is hard to see. A lot of friends are not here anymore, which is a terrible reminder of the evil or war. It makes more solemn the fact that they should not die in vain. Every once in a while, I have to stop and justify what goes on here by thinking of the great cause we are fighting for."

While undergoing his own personal trial, the individual soldier had occasion to observe how others were faring with theirs--in the fighting, the men had to depend on each other for accomplishment and survival. Cornelius Cremer, the F Co machine-gunner, would review his judgments of his fellow soldiers: "Some bright spots shine through, even after all these years. Lieutenant Hunt, our Wpns Plat leader, was one of the finest officers I have ever known. Also fine soldiers were Sergeant Dawson, our platoon sergeant (later a 2nd lieutenant); Pvt Jim Hooley (later staff sergeant); Sergeant Howe of one of our rifle platoons (later a 2nd lieutenant); Private Jones (later a staff sergeant). There were those of us who went where we had to and tried to get the job done; others loved the adventure of war and killing; others were cowards. It was these last, officer and men alike, who made life rough on the rest of us in F Company. I had great respect for Colonel Barten and sympathy--if privates can have sympathy for battalion commanders--for the terrible task he had in trying to get his battalion to fight effectively." Cremer continued to serve after the war in the U.S. Army Reserve program. He retired in the late 70's as a full colonel, having been the assistant division commander of the 104th Division (USAR).

A few days after its relief in the Vosges, the 275th Infantry moved westward to the Sarre Front, where it and its sister regiments were assigned to the XVth Corps, on the left flank of the Seventh Army front. There on 6 February the 70th Division was reconstituted and Task Force Herren was deactivated. In the middle of the month the Division began a limited offensive to drive northward to capture the heights along the Sarre River south and southwest of Saarbruecken. By the end of February, the Division had largely

achieved its objectives, but not without some hard fighting and considerable losses. Transferred to the XXIst Corps in late February, the 70th Division was assigned to take Saarbruecken to open the XXIst Corps mid-March offensive, the objective of which was to break through the Siegfried Line and invade the German Saarland. The achievements of the previous month's hard fighting now had their effect. These preparations and the threat of the U.S. Third Army's eastward thrust to the north of the German defenses along the Siegfried Line caused the abandonment of Saarbruecken, and the troops of the 275th and 276th regiments entered that city on 19 March without a single loss. That was the beginning of the end. The 70th would remain with the Seventh Army for a few more weeks, but the hard fighting was over.

GLOSSARY

A & P	Ammunition and pioneer (platoon)
AT	anti-tank
BAR	Browning automatic rifle
Bazooka	AT rocket launcher
bn	battalion
burp gun	German machine pistol
CG	commanding general
co	company
CO	Commanding Officer
CP	command post
div	division
duck or DUKW	amphibious truck
88	German 88 mm gun
81	81 mm mortar
ETO	European Theater of Operations
FA	field artillery
57	57 mm anti-tank gun
FO	(artillery) forward observer
GI	American soldier
G.I.	Government issue
G.I.'s	diarrhea
G-3	senior staff section for operations or its chief
G-2	senior staff section for intelligence or its chief
grease gun	M-3 sub-machine gun
HMG	heavy machine gun
hq	headquarters
I & R	intelligence and reconnaissance (platoon)
IP	initial point (at the start of a march by foot or vehicle)
KIA	killed in action
LD	line of departure (in an attack plan)
LMG	light machine gun
MG	machine gun
MIA	missing in action
MLR	main line of resistance (in a defensive arrangement of forces)
M-1	standard rifle for U.S. infantry troops, also known as the Garand
OD	officer of the day or olive-drab (color)
105	105 mm howitzer
OP	observation post (at which an artillery FO operates)
OPLR	outpost line of resistance (in a defensive arrangement of forces)
PX ration	periodic issue of personal supplies, including toilet articles and beer

ranks (in ascending order)

pvt	private
pfc	private first class
cpl	corporal
t 5	technician 5th grade
sgt	sergeant
t 4	technician 4th grade
s sgt	staff sergeant
t sgt	technical sergeant
1st sergeant	first sergeant
2nd lt	second lieutenant
1st lt	first lieutenant
capt	captain
maj	major
lt col	lieutenant colonel
col	colonel
brig gen	brigadier general
maj gen	major general
lt gen	lieutenant general
regt	regiment
SP	self propelled (artillery gun)
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force

staff designation (battalion and regimental levels)

S-1	adjutant
S-2	intelligence officer
S-3	operations officer
S-4	supply officer
60	60 mm mortar
Springfield	special U.S. infantry rifle used for grenade launching and sniping--also known as the '03, for 1903, its model year
TD	tank destroyer, a self-propelled anti-tank gun
TE	table of equipment (prescribed for each type unit)
TO	table of organization (prescribing personnel allowances for each type of unit)
TOT	time-on-target, a heavy concentration of artillery fire planned with precision timing
VOCG	(action authorized by) verbal order of the commanding general
WIA	wounded in action

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ABOUT THE COVER

In early December 1944 the American 275th Infantry Regiment (70th Division) was assembled at Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts, making preparations to embark for its Atlantic crossing at the end of which it would enter combat in France. The pictured group, from the 275th's C Company, gathered at a restaurant in nearby Boston a night or so before embarkation to celebrate the event. The man at the top was a table-hopping British flight officer who bought drinks for his American allies. Two months after the 275th entered combat, all but one of these C Company men had been killed, wounded or captured.

The much decorated exception became a casualty some six years later, killed while helping stem the Chinese offensive of late November, 1950, in Korea, for which he received the Medal of Honor, posthumously. The same picture appears with identifications in the photograph section inside.