

By Capt H. B. Sigband

INTRODUCTION

The account of the 30th Infantry Division participation in the Battle of the Belgium bulge (as the German counter offensive became known) was divided into two distinct phases. The first, and more colorful and spectacular phase was the defensive activities of the Division from 17 to 26 December. The second, was the offensive drive that ran from 13 to 23 January. The latter was a hard, costly, drab, slugging match. It was the St. Vith offensive wherein the "Old Hickory" Division forced the enemy back, almost yard by yard for 12 slow moving miles. It was in that latter 10 day action that the Division lost almost 2,000 men; and extremely high price that is indicative of the tenacity of the enemy and his reluctance to surrender the Malmédy -St. Vith road net. ¹

The background leading to the 10 day offensive action, took place between 3rd January and "D" day, 13 January. It is therefore, imperative that the early days of January be recounted to set the stage for the primary drive.

At the opening of 1945, the 30th Division front line extended from a point slightly east of Malmédy to a short distance west of Stavelot where it joined the 82nd Airborne Division on the Salm River line. In that area, and the entire distance south to St. Vith, the terrain was much alike. Extremely hilly, steep valleys and ridge lines were

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numerous. It was on such terrain features that the enemy built his main lines of resistance.

Such points of vantage were valuable to the Germans, but he also received immeasurable aid from the weather conditions. Extremely deep snows, roads covered by ice and flanked by 6 foot snow drifts, made attacks by our forces extremely difficult. From elevated points of vantage, the Germans were in positions to observe the advance of the 30th Division troops as they plowed across country for designated objectives. It will be noted in the following narrative that almost every city taken in the Division zone in the advance to St. Vith, was dominated by a high point or ridge line ^{adjacent} to the ⁿenvirons of the community.

In addition to the ~~advantages~~ ^{advantages} gained by the enemy by the rugged terrain features pointed out, he was also favored by the heavily wooded areas. From such sections he frequently attempted to infiltrate small units into our lines, or he ^hid self propelled assault guns among the firs to ambush our vehicles as they moved by and also emplaced anti-tank weapons in ~~the~~ fire breaks. ^hose fire breaks ran thru the densely wooded Ardennes Forest and extended from eight to twelve yards in width. Besides using the fire breaks for points of vantage for anti-tank weapons, ^{emplacements,} the enemy utilized those lanes to bring armor and troops forward when their travel was prohibited because U.S. ^artillery or a 30th Division unit controlled a particular road. It was those

fire breaks, that the enemy used as roads to get thru an otherwise impenetrable forest.

From the division front lines and running south, there were adequate roads to launch a coordinated attack. However, those roads in addition to being snow and ice covered, became even worse of a hazard due to the fact that they were all severly canalized by the hill masses and wooded areas. Possession of a high point in the neighborhood of a road or a road junction, perforce equalled control of the road. Such terrain features were excellent for an employment of a delaying defensive action. For that reason special attention was directed at Houyire (K809006), Hauts Sarts (F825996), Wolfsbusch Forest (F833968), Dielburg (F810954) and Hannert (F797957). These were all points of excellent observation and good fields of fire. They contained fine opportunities for cover and concealment, possessed steep approaches and held command of the roads that passed between them.

The enemy defensive organization in this sector during January, 1945, were primarily pillbox and breastwork defenses, improvised out of logs and dirt. Trench lines were abundant and easily made to conform satisfactorily with the many rising ground areas. These trench lines and strong points when making up and MLR were on the forward slopes of steep rises. Mine fields were almost all hasty,

but because all traces of a buried mine were soon covered by the frequent snows, they proved exceedingly effective. Where roads rounded frequent turns in the Ardennes, the portion lost to view in an approach, were frequently ineffectively blocked by a series of felled trees straddling the road.

Laying the ⁶ground Work for the Division Offensive

On 3 January the VII Corps attacked in the area between the L'Ourthe and Lienne Rivers with Houffalize (P6172) as its final objective. ² At the same time, the XVIII Corps (Airborne) began, as a portion of the Corps Mission, "to conduct patrolling on D day (3 January 1945) properly supported by artillery, and in such strength as will lead the enemy to believe a general attack is being launched". ³ In the same letter, Maj. General Mathew Ridgway, XVIII Corps commander, suggested to Maj. General Leland Hobbs, an outline plan for operation that included ^{to capture of} several areas that later became 30th division objectives. ⁴ That was primarily the city and road net leading to St. Vith, that lay in the 30th Division sector.

The first phase, suggested above, patrolling and small movements, were designed to confuse the enemy as to where, in the 1st and 3rd Army sectors of the "bulge", the main American drive would be launched.

Deception was what was expected to be gained from patrol forces sent out by the 30th Division. ⁵ Those diversionary activities did not deceive the enemy to any great degree and the latter continued a careful withdrawal movement within the bulge. ⁶ First the armor was pulled out and replaced in the line primarily by Volksgrenadier units. In the 30th Division sector, as the offensive slowly began, there were no elements of the 1st SS Panzer Division to be found. The opposing unit was the 18th Volksgrenadier Division badly depleted, but nevertheless capable of a defensive rearward fight. ⁷

A diversionary activity is attempted

As 1945 began, the enemy, though definitely stopped from any further large scale drives to the west, was still to be reckoned with, insofar as the possibility of his launching an attack was concerned. In the 30th Division sector the 105th Engineer Combat Battalion had seven bridges mined for possible demolition. ⁸ Those spanned the L'Anbleve River and its subsidiaries. Roads were carefully guarded with anti-tank defenses, in the Malmedy (7804)-Stavelot (7107) sector, and in that role the 110th AAA Battalion (90mm), 823rd TD Battalion, 825th TD Company (both 3 inch) and the normal Division 57 mm AT guns were utilized.

Along with these precautions elements of the division constantly sent out reconnaissance and combat patrols. They had two primary purposes; maintaining contact with the enemy so that some idea of his activities ^would always be known and secondly, a constant drive to bring in prisoners so that identifications and possibly future plans could be gained from interrogation of the captured troops. 9

On 3 January, the main effort in the XVIII Corps was made by the 82nd Airborne Division which held a line on the immediate right of the 30th Division. To aid in diverting some of the enemy forces to the 30th Division front, the 120th Regiment of the division attacked at 0830. 3 January. At the same time, the 82nd Division moved off as the main effort in the XVIII Corps sector and met heavy resistance all along the line.

In the 120th Infantry zone, the diversionary activity was executed by three groups. Company I of the Regiment under 1st Lt. John A. Doyle seized their objective, an area of high ground, approximately 1500 yards southwest of Malmedy. Company B of the 526th Armored Infantry (attached to the 30th Division) moved off at the same time for the objective of Houyire (K807007), but met heavy enemy fire north of Hedomont, 2,000 yards from Houyire. They held that point of their furthest advance until 1800 hours of 3 January and then withdrew to their former line, slightly

south of Malmedy.

On the left of the above unit, the 1st platoon, Company A, 526th Armored Infantry seized the cross roads at X 814019, which lay immediately to the south of Baugnez. That unit withdrew to its original line at about midnight, and Company I of the 120th Infantry fell back at 1950 hours to the southern outskirts of Malmedy. That action by those three units served the worthwhile purpose of diverting some troops from the 82nd Division front. However, the results were not what was expected from the enemy in the way of artillery concentrations and troop and vehicle shifting.¹⁰ The only enemy troops contacted in the skirmish were the 2nd and 3rd Companies, 293rd Volksgrenadier Regiment, 18th Volksgrenadier Division.

30th Division crosses the L'Auibleve River

Following the small action on 3 January, the division began preparations for its consolidated offensive which began on 13 January. One of the primary needs before a concerted drive toward St. Vith could be considered in the 30th Division zone, was the necessity for gaining a firm line on the south bank of the L'Auibleve River. As the line stood on 4 January, the Division

line between Trois Ponts (675⁹87) and Mahedy (790045), was on the north bank of the River.

The plan was to first cross the L'Ambleve between Trois Ponts and Stavelot. After that right flank was secured, it was then contemplated that the drive south between the north-south grid lines of 76 degrees and 84 degrees would begin in force and not halt until St. Vith was seized.

On 4 January, XVIII Corps commander, Maj. General Ridgway, directed that plans be prepared for a crossing of the L'Ambleve between Trois Ponts and Stavelot and that a bridgehead be established in the angle which lay on the south bank of the L'Ambleve and the east bank of the Salm Rivers.¹¹ On the following day, 5 January, the 30th Division was instructed to accomplish that mission during the morning of ^{the following day.} 6 January.¹² For the operation the 112th Regimental Combat Team, of the 28th Division, was attached to the 30th Division at 051000A January.

The objective of the attack was to gain and maintain the area on the south bank of the L'Ambleve that was bounded by Spineux (K700958), Wanne (709967) and Wannerval (710975). On the right flank of the 30th Division the 82nd Airborne Division, had attacked south, and the 517th Regiment of the latter division, had possession of a line several thousand yards south of the L'Ambleve and west of the Salm River. It was therefore necessary for the 112th ROT to attack for the objectives outlined above to protect the left flank of the 82nd Division, plus giving the 30th Division a foothold on the south bank of the L'Ambleve for future operations. 13

The 112th RCT was given the burden of that operation and assigned in addition to their normal regimental attachments, Company G, 103rd Engineer Combat Battalion, Company C, 630th TD Battalion, 3 platoons (from companies D and C) 743rd Tank Battalion and in support of the entire operation, were seven field artillery battalions. ¹⁴ The tasks assigned and accomplished by the regiments of the 30th Division were, the bridgehead established by the 117th Regiment to aid the 112th RCT in their attack and the 119th Regiment and the 120th Regiment maintaining their defensive positions in the division sector.

The original plan stated that the 117th Regiment would establish two small bridgeheads at 0630 hours, 6 January and that the 112th RCT would pass thru them an hour later and seize the high ground in the vicinity of Montagnes (698995) and then continue to, and occupy Wannerenval, Wanne and Spineux.

Enemy forces opposing the 30th Division maintained their main line of resistance on the south bank of the L'Amblove. In the zone of scheduled action, (west and south of Stavelot), the 1st and 2nd Battalions, ^{293rd VG} 294th Regiment opposed the U.S. Troops, while south of Malmedy the 1st and 2nd ^{VB} Battalions, 294th Regiment were disposed, with the 295th in reserve. Those three units were

all elements of the 18th Volksgrenadier Division. Their defenses were along the ridge line and high points in the area. The roads were covered by assault guns, and blocks of felled trees, and dugouts at the sides of the roads that contained one or two men armed with an automatic weapon. The L'Ambleve, the narrow, was an extremely fast flowing river and was overlooked by a hill line in the possession of the enemy.

Under the cover of darkness, 6 January, Company G, 103rd Combat Engineer Battalion constructed foot bridges over the L'Ambleve at 684993 and 677991. Shortly thereafter, (0630) hours still under cover of darkness, Company G, 117th Infantry under 1st Lt. Charles W. Monerleff crossed at the two bridge sites established. They met no opposition and by 0700 the entire regiment was over the river and had taken up positions in the corner enclosed on the north by the L'Ambleve and on the east by the Salm River. At 0730, the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 112th RCT, supported by 3 platoons of tanks from the 743rd Tank Battalion attacked to the south. Cities of Wanne and Wanneranval were objectives of the 3rd Battalion and Spineux and Le Tombeux goals of the 1st Battalion.


The 3rd Battalion advanced 400 yards to Grand Faye (698988), where it was halted by heavy automatic weapon and small arms fire. Cutting to the left, the battalion hit the enemy on the flank and-

captured a small number and by passed the main body of resistance. They then drove south through enemy opposition at Remiheid and immediately to the east of Aisemont, where they formed an 800 yard line to the east for the night.

The 1st Battalion on the right of the 3rd moved off at the same time keeping well along the Salm River. At Dorriere Spai (676982) they encountered an enemy strong point that overlooked the route of advance. Utilizing automatic weapons they eliminated the strong point and were in possession of the area by noon. The advance to the south continued for approximately 1500 yards, where at darkness they established a front line extending from 690960 to 699968. Contact was made with the 3rd Battalion on the left and the 517th Parachute Infantry, 82nd Division on the right.

At 0900, 7 January, the 112th RCT again attacked with the 3rd Battalion on the left, the 1st on the right and the 2nd in reserve in the vicinity of Aisemont. The 82nd Division advanced on the right of the 112th and received extremely heavy fire from Spineux. It was therefore, imperative that the 112th seize that strongpoint as early as possible so that the cross fire hitting the flank of the 82nd would be eliminated.

Aiming at Wanne, as the objective for the day, the 3rd Battalion moved south with Company L on the left and Company K

on the right. Overcoming stiff resistance, the battalion was on the outskirts of Wanne by 1900 hours. Shortly thereafter they were hit by a counter attack composed of 3 tanks supported by infantry that came in from the southwest in the vicinity of Spineux. The elements of the 743rd Tank Battalion, ^{that were} attached to the battalion engaged the enemy armor, destroyed them and lost one tank from enemy fire. With that hazard eliminated, Company K  drove into Wanne from the northwest and Company L from the northeast. When well into the city, another counter attack hit the 3rd Battalion coming from the direction of Spineux, and again the 743rd tanks aided in the driving ^{back} of the Germans back. Losses for the 3rd platoons of the 743rd, that were engaged, were four tanks. One from enemy tank fire, one from friendly artillery and two from mines. ¹⁵ By dusk, Company I had consolidated their position in Wanneranval with Company ^K in Wanne and Company L on the east of Company K.

112th RCT

The 1st Battalion, 112th RCT, had jumped off at the same time as the 3rd. They pushed southeast thru heavily wooded area for almost 1000 yards, and then reached and captured the towns of Spineux and Le Tombeux by 1800 hours of 7 January. Company A of that Battalion held the right, Company B on the left and Company C in the rear in support. The difficulties encountered, in addition to the enemy action, was the extremely heavily wooded area, and

the knee deep snow thru which the advance was made. The enemy utilized these natural obstacles unfamiliar to our troops, from which to attack and fight.

By last light of 7 January, Company A was securely consolidated in Spineux, Company B in Le Tombeux and Company C to the rear center of both. The 2nd Battalion, 112th RCT, remained thruout the day, as regimental reserve with Company F in the vicinity of Aisemont, Company E in the vicinity of Grand Faye and Company G to the rear and on the right flank of the battalion.

Thus, in a two day period, the L'Ambleve had been crossed, the enemy cleared out of the Salm-L'Ambleve pocket and the first step taken in the rapid, relentless drive of the 30th Division to the vicinity of St. Vith. At 081700, ^{January 14th} the 424th RCT, from the 106th Division, was attached to the 30th Division, and began to relieve the 112th RCT. Taking over the 112th RCT's attachments, which had reverted to XVIII Corps control, the 424th RCT was to relieve the former of its positions by 2400, 8 January. ¹⁶ Due to heavy snow, extremely poor road conditions and inclement weather, the relief took until the afternoon of 9 January before it was completed. ¹⁷

The St. Vith Offensive

PHASE I

The first day, 13 January, of the ten day offensive was the most

costly for the division and an explanation in some detail is valuable for the picture it portrays of the type of German reaction met on the main line of enemy resistance.

At 0600 13 January, the 119th Regiment under the command of Colonel R. A. Baker, attacked south for its objectives of Bellevaux (783005), and Hedomont (795022). Pushing south at 0600, from the outskirts of Malmedy, the 3rd Battalion reached the northern edge of Hedomont by 0735 where it was halted by extremely strong resistance. That city, it will be remembered was to be captured before 0800, so that it would form a base for a further push south. As the situation turned out, Hedomont was not taken by darkness of the same day.

Supported by a company of tanks of the 743rd Tank Battalion, the 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry reached a point at 794023, where mines damaged several tanks and held up the ^{armor.} error. The infantry received very heavy fire from the crest (500 ^{meter} ~~feet~~) of the hill about 100 yards north of Hedomont. The infantry regrouped and with Company L striking out of the woods at the west side of the city and Company I attacking from the northeast, some gain was made. But in mid-afternoon the fire power of the defending troops drove the 3rd Battalion back.

The 1st Battalion had attacked for Hedmont at 0730, to support the unsuccessful 3rd Battalion. Advancing to the northern edge of the city, it could make no more progress than the 3rd Battalion. One platoon of tanks, supported by a platoon of infantry from Company B, attempted to edge into the city from the west side but were turned back with heavy losses. By 1800 hours a definite penetration of the city had not been made at any point and Companies L, K, and I of the 3rd Battalion, plus Company B of the 1st, were ^{in position} grouped around the northern side of the city. Companies A and C were withdrawn to the north as regimental reserves.

In a letter of instruction dated 2000 hours, 13 January, the 119th Regiment was directed to take Hedmont that same night. ²⁶
From 2200 to 2230 hours Hedmont received a terrific artillery barrage, at the conclusion of which Company I, under Capt George D. Rehkopf, again attacked from the east and Company L, led by Capt. Lawrence J. Gagliano, from the west, with Company K coming down from the north. Stunned to some extent by the terrific barrage, and the intensity of the infantry drive, the enemy fell back slowly and stubbornly. It required almost five hours of steady street fighting, but by 0920, 14 January, the 3rd Battalion was in possession of the city.

During the first days' offensive the 2nd Battalion, 119th Regiment did not experience the difficulty the other two battalions of the regiment encountered. At 0600 the 2nd Battalion moved off from its line of departure and keeping in the cover of ^{the} wooded area, proceeded 2500 yards. By 0800 they were on the outskirts of the city of Bellevaux, but received scattered fire from enemy elements who occupied portions of buildings. Throughout the day fire fights occurred in the city and at night fall, tiny enemy pockets were still ^{present.} ~~in the city.~~ At last light, Companies G, H, and K occupied positions from west to east, about 600 yards north of the city proper.

So much for the western part of the 30th Division attack on 13 January. It was the eastern portion that turned out to be so costly and even more difficult to penetrate.

The 120th Regiment attacked at 0800. The objective of the 3rd Battalion was Houyire, the dominating piece of terrain between Malmedy and Ligneuville and commanding the Malmedy-St. Vith road. The first ^{goal} for the 2nd Battalion was Thirimont and the 1st Battalion was to support those two battalions with its fire. Coming down the main highway as far as Baugnez, the 3rd Battalion cut to the west, through the woods and with Companies K, L, and I abreast, hit the forward slope of the hill and drove the enemy off

by noon. ^{By} 1400 positions were consolidated with a road block, emplaced, and with Company L on the south or reverse slope, Company K on the west and Company I on the east.

Also at 0800, 13 January 1945, the 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry moved to the east, and then when north of Thirimont, ^{attacked} directly south toward the city. Thirimont was expected to be seized that day. That was not the case, however, and it took that day and almost two more, before the mission was accomplished. It must be remembered in following the action around Thirimont, that enemy resistance came not primarily from the city proper, or from forces coming in to reinforce the city from the south, but from the east; from the exposed left flank of the 30th Division. When the division moved off in the attack on the morning of 13 January, the 106th Division on the right flank, moved south in a complementary action. On the left flank, however, the 1st Division did not move and as elements of the 30th advanced south, their left flank was exposed to enemy artillery and infantry attacks coming from the direction of Ondenval (850001), and Faymonville (865017).

With Company G on the left, Company F on the right and ^{Company} Company E in reserve following closely, the 2nd Battalion attacked toward Thirimont. While it was still rather dark, Company G slipped past the

outer ring of defenses of the city and got into the city proper. Company F moved down the Weisner³ to Thirimont road, but was not as fortunate. Caught by a road-block set up in the road ^{at 831015} and on both flanks ^{at 831015}, the company, led by Capt John M. Jacobsen, was hit by small arms fire, automatic weapon and artillery fire. The artillery fire came from the east, estimated to be west of Faymonville by approximately 2000 yards. Because Hauts Sarts was a hill overlooking Thirimont and all approaches to it, it was logically assumed that enemy observers, from posts on the crests, 1800 yards south of Company F, communicated fire direction information to artillery, 2000 yards east. ²⁷

If Company F had had some armor support, they may have gotten by the road block. But the 2nd Battalion armor of one platoon of tanks and 2 platoons of tank destroyers were all held up near the line of departure when the lead vehicle hit a mine and stopped the entire column. Therefore the attack was launched with ~~no~~^{out} armor support. ²⁸ In any event, Company F slugged at the strong point at 831015 until about noon, and then badly depleted, they were forced to retire.

Company G, attacked to the left of Company F and bypassed the road block at 839011 and was in the city of Thirimont by first

full light. If the left flank had been secure, and German reinforcements could not have come from that exposed enemy held area, such a maneuver of bypassing a strong road block under the cover of early morning darkness would have been excellent. Once in Thirimont, Company G took up positions in the ^{cellars of buildings} building cellars. Fire fights were continued throughout the day and artillery fell heavily in the city. Enemy artillery came from the vicinity of Ondenval and Lt. Charles W. Moneriewick called for artillery fire by radio throughout the day. He directed that fire capably, and frequently called for concentrations that landed among enemy troops in the house next to the one he was occupying. ²⁹ Throughout the day, 13 January, attempts were made by the 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry to reinforce Lt. Moneriewick's position. Company F could not get by the road block and enemy outpost positions in the vicinity of 839011. An attempt was made by 1st Lt. Walter A. Wert Jr., to push Company E through the woods and around the right of Company F to Thirimont. The woods were almost impenetrable and German troops in dugout positions effectively halted small groups from infiltrating.

The fighting in Thirimont continued throughout the day and Company G's casualties were mounting. In a telephone conversation made at 1215, 13 January, to the Corps Commander, General Hobbs said,

" I had come under the assumption that the big unit (1st Division) on our left would do something to relieve the pressure on our left. ~~---~~ If anything can be done to have some elements on the left push along and take the pressure off, it is essential." During the early hours of darkness small groups of Germans got into the city which they approached from the east. Then at approximately 2000 hours, under complete blackness, the enemy launched a counter attack of seven tanks supported by over 100 infantrymen. Monerieff called for artillery fire and posit type ammunition was utilized. It was very effective in eliminating the enemy infantry, but the tanks were not damaged to any appreciable extent. Shortly after the initial counter attack, larger groups infiltrated into Thirimont from Ondenval.

At about 2200 hours, Lt. Monerieff called back to Battalion requesting permission to withdraw from the city with the men that remained. Permission was granted and Monerieff led his Company back through the woods, along snow covered trails and in inky blackness. Approximately 40 officers and enlisted men returned, of the force of about 110 that had moved out with Company G at 1700 that morning.³⁰ The strength of Company G on 13 January was 163 enlisted men and 5 officers. On the 14 January it was 84 enlisted men and 3 officers. Included in

the 84 enlisted men was the company headquarters, cooks, mechanics, etc. 31

At about midnight, 13 January, the 2nd Battalion, 120th Regiment had withdrawn to their position occupied before the morning attack had been launched. At 0030, 14 January, the 1st Battalion, 120th Regiment, under Lt. Colonel Ellis W. Williamson attacked through the badly mauled 2nd Battalion, for the objective, Thirimont. The battalion encountered extreme difficulty in attempting to move through the blackness of the night, the woods, and the heavily falling snow. At almost 0600, 14 January, the battalion had advanced through the enemy outposts on the outskirts of Thirimont. The temperature was dropping steadily, and a further difficulty was encountered with radio communication. The cold caused the radios to malfunction in many cases and radio control of the units became difficult. 32 Coupled with the fact that enemy artillery still rained down, ^{German} from their positions in the vicinity of Ondenval, very little progress was made against Thirimont.

30th Division artillery played an important role during the 14th and leveled a large amount of artillery fire on enemy vehicles, batteries and infantry units. The fire was directed almost entirely by air observation and was doubtless costly to the enemy. From noon

of 13 January to noon of the following day, division artillery units fired almost 10,000 rounds of 105 and 155 mm ammunition. ³³ The use of the artillery Cub planes for directing the fire was profitable and as Colonel Purdue, CO of the 120th pointed out, the planes also called back by radio important enemy movements, the results of friendly artillery fire, and served to keep enemy artillery batteries silenced for fear of being spotted by Cub plane observers, who in turn would call down artillery fire on such batteries. ³⁴ Throughout 14 January, the 1st Battalion, 120th ^{Regiment} Battalion, supported by the 2nd Battalion, hammered away at Thirimont unsuccessfully. An attempt was made to strike at that city from the west by the 3rd Battalion, with Hauts Sarts as the base. Groups of the enemy had infiltrated, during the night of 13 and 14 January, from the east, and had reinforced the already strong group on the steep hill that over looked Thirimont. The Germans maintained communication back to Ondenval, and artillery fire on friendly troops fell through ^{out} the morning of 14 January. At 1150 hours, Companies I and K attacked for the hill, but were beaten back. Under ordinary conditions, driving an enemy from such a superior defensive position as afforded by the crest of a hill would have been difficult. But attempting to advance up the side of a barren slope against snow, ice, and wind against a firmly entrenched enemy

was an almost impossible task. The attackers were forced to a halt 500 yards from Hauts Sarts. This objective was very valuable to the enemy, for not only did he use the crest for an OP to direct fire on troops moving toward Thirimont, but he could also direct artillery fire on anything in the area moving on the Malmedy-Ligneuville road south of Gerxmont.

On the west side of the Malmedy-Ligneuville road, the hill and vicinity designated as Houyire had been taken on the previous day by the 3rd Battalion, 120th Regiment. Early the morning of 14 January, the 2nd Battalion, 117th Regiment skirted the east slope of Houyire, and attacked south with Ligneuville as the objective. The original plan had contemplated the 119th and 120th Regiments of the division as handling the 1st phase of the St. Vith offensive and committing the 117th Infantry, through the 119th after the latter had advanced as far south as the 96th east-west grid line. The unexpected resistance around Hauts Sarts and Thirimont, held up the advance of the 120th and in an attempt to cut past the enemy at Thirimont, the 117th was committed to the attack.

Moving south toward Ligneuville from Houyire, the 2nd Battalion, 117th Infantry, avoided being observed to any great degree by advancing along the west side of the Malmedy-Ligneuville road. The

trees were thick, the knee deep snow drifts were higher by 3 or 4 inches more of snow that had fallen during the night and communication was difficult. At 1200 hours, 14 January, the battalion was in the outskirts of Ligneuville. They were met by scattered units that were displaced in the stone buildings of the city. Fire fights continued throughout the afternoon in the city of Ligneuville, but by 1600 the enemy had been driven out. Moving through the city quickly, on the St. With road, Company E approached the bridge spanning the L'Ambleveⁿ river. The bridge, at 806987, had been prepared for demolition by the Germans, but the Company E commander, Capt. George H. Sibbald, cut the wires and led his troops across. With all three companies in the city, the 2nd Battalion, 117th Infantry, consolidated their positions and were not taken unaware by the German counter attack launched at 2000 hours. Estimated at a battalion of infantry and supported by six tanks, the enemy attempted to regain Ligneuville. They were unsuccessful, however, and were forced to withdraw.

Moving further to the right, or west, into the 119th Infantry sector, it will be recalled that during the early morning hours, 14 January, after a terrific 30th Division artillery barrage on Hedmont, the city was captured by the 3rd Battalion. At first light,

14 January, after a terrific struggle, Lt. Colonel Robert H. Herlong's 1st Battalion passed through the 3rd and attacked south for Lamoriville (790005). The Battalion met practically no resistance at Lamoriville and went through it rapidly. Still moving south from Lamoriville, with Companies A and B leading and Company C in the rear, the battalion headed for Reulemont (785995). Shortly before noon they were halted north of the city by very accurate and damaging mortar fire and artillery. With the support of tanks from the 743rd Tank Battalion, the enemy line was broken north of Reulemont and 50 PW's were captured.³⁵ With tanks leading the way, Companies A and B took up positions in Reulemont at dusk. With a firm base in the city, Captain Donald R. Fell led Company C through the town and by darkness had gone another 1000 yards south to reach the north bank of the L'Ambleve River. Thus in one day, the 1st Battalion, 119th Regiment had pushed, slugged, and battered their way through snow, woods, ice, and a determined enemy for a gain of approximately 4000 yards. Their casualties were relatively high, but so were the entire 30th Division's on 14 January.

The 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry, moved off at 1000 hours, 14 January with Company G on the right and Company F pushing further into Beàlevaux. Under 1st Lt. G. L. Farris, Company G skirted

Belleveaux on the west and attacked Thioux (761004). They were met by heavy small arms fire but prior to noon they had possession of the city. Company F in Belleveaux was troubled during the morning, not only by the enemy, but also by the American Air Corps. A small group of medium bombers mistakenly dropped several bombs on the city, but caused no serious casualties of 2nd Battalion troops. ³⁶

Shortly after 1300 hours, a platoon was sent out by Capt. Edward C. Arn of Company F for the purpose of securing a river crossing site. They crossed the L'Ambleve at 1330 and shortly thereafter Companies G and E followed, and secured a bridgehead in the vicinity of Plache (775999). Working in smooth coordination, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry, which had been the reserve company throughout the day, then moved past Company G and seized Villers (759996), which lay 1800 yards west of the river crossing site. In the vicinity of Villers, Company E established contact with the 517th Parachute Infantry, 106th Division at 756997. With Company E in Villers, Company G attacked Beaumont (781994) ^{which lay} lying 200 yards south of Villers. The enemy troops in Beaumont, had doubtless been reinforced by those who had withdrawn from Villers and by midnight, 14 January, Company G had not ^{yet} been successful in taking the city.

By ^{2400 hours,} midnight, 14 January, the 30th Division had made most of its progress on the right flank of the Division sector. Two bridge heads

had been established; one at Ligneuville (K805986) and one at Planche (775999) and plans for 15 January were stated in a letter of instruction.

The most important factor mentioned was that the 1st Infantry Division, on the left flank of the 30th Division, would attack south prior to daylight, 15 January. 37

In the 117th Infantry sector, 15 January was relatively quiet. The 2nd Battalion remained in Ligneuville and eliminated scattered enemy groups in their zone that were found on the south bank of the L'Ambleve River. The 3rd Battalion passed through the 2nd and proceeded south against light resistance for approximately 2000 yards and reached an area in the vicinity of 810967 by 1800 hours.

The 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry had been attached to the 117th and during 15 January moved in a line along the southeast section of Ligneuville and set up positions of defense along the Malmady-St. Vith road. Further, they established outpost groups in the woods in an attempt to capture or destroy a few enemy harassing patrols and several German self propelled assault guns that had been bypassed or had infiltrated back into the lines and were causing some ^{dis} disturbance.

The other two battalions of the 119th Infantry continued to attack in the Regiment's sector throughout the 15 January and by nightfall, had reached the line marking the termination of the first phase in the St.

Vith offensive. The 1st Battalion, 119th Infantry used Companies A and C primarily during 15 January. Company A's platoons worked between Borgueuscheid (790991) and the L'Ambleve River, hunting out harassing patrols and scattered enemy units. Company C supported by a platoon of tanks of the 743rd Tank Battalion, swung east from Lamorville and crossed the bridge in Ligneuville (805988) spanning the L'Ambleve. Once across the bridge, Capt. Fell moved west in the direction of the objective, Pont (794977). The outskirts of Pont were reached before noon and an attack for the city was launched immediately. Driving the enemy out of the houses, Pont fell by 1430. 28 PW's were taken during the assault on the city. ⁹⁸ Moving south out of Pont, the same unit of the 119th Infantry advanced ~~on Brucken~~ ^{toward} (794972). An ineffective natural road block of 22 heavy trees ^{had been} ~~cut and fell~~ across the road, between Pont and Brucken by the retreating enemy. They were quickly ^{removed} ~~eliminated~~ and Brucken was occupied by dusk. ^{the company continued until}

In the 2nd Battalion, Company F had continued to attack against Beaumont until 0200, 15 January. At 0745, Company G passed through Company F, at Beaumont and advanced along the Beaumont-Houvegnex road. The company met very strong small arms fire and very heavy mortar concentrations. Also encountered, in lesser amounts, were artillery and rocket fire. By 1100, Francheville was taken and the attack

pressed to the south to capture another small village, Houvegnex. The woods became thicker and the enemy resistance stronger. Division artillery fire was called for in greater volume by the 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry and following it, Company G pushed into Houvegnex where it captured over a score of stunned prisoners. The total number of PW's taken by the 119th Infantry during 15 January numbered 108. 39

In the 120th Regiment on 15 January, the attack against Thirimont continues. The 1st Battalion managed to get into the city with armor support by noon. The enemy defended from houses in the city that had been made into strongpoints of defense. It was against such defenses that Company B of the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion assaulted. Those brick houses in the city had been turned into veritable pill boxes and heavy machine guns and other automatic weapons emplaced in them. If it had not been for the supporting tanks from the 743rd Tank Battalion and the TD's from the 823rd, it would only have been at an exorbitantly high price of infantry that the city would have been taken on 15 January. 40

The 3rd Battalion of the 120th Infantry attacked Thirimont at the same time as the 1st Battalion. Hitting at the city from the northeast. The battalion met very heavy sniper, small arms and automatic weapon fire, not only from the city, but also from the east. The 1st Division, on the left flank of the 30th

Division attacked south the same morning, but did not advance fast enough to relieve the pressure on the 120th Infantry. Toward noon, 15 January, fire on the 3rd Battalion increased to such an extent that it was necessary to call for help from the 2nd Battalion.

The 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry had moved off early the same morning on the right flank of the 3rd Battalion and headed for the Wolfsbusch forest area. That objective contained a hill whose elevation was almost 600 meters high and easily dominated the area. Lt. Colonel Cantey had moved his 2nd Battalion down the Malmedy St. Vith road when he was intercepted about 500 yards out of Ligneuville at 816984, and ordered to return to the Thirimont area and support the right flank of the 3rd Battalion. ⁴¹

Throughout the day (15 January) fighting continued unabated. By nightfall the 120th Infantry was finally in possession of Thirimont and Harts Sarts. Division artillery expended over 11,000 rounds of 105 mm and 155 mm ammunition that day, and most of it was called for and directed at the enemy in the Thirimont area. The job the support tanks and tank destroyers accomplished cannot be minimized and the final capture of those two strong points, in a large measure belongs to them. The rate of casualties for the 120th for that day was high and the total number for 13, 14, and 15 January amounted to over 450 killed, wounded and missing. ⁴²

Because of the nature of the terrain, that is the sharp rises and falls, plus the knee deep snow, ice, and heavy forest, litter bearers found it necessary to frequently carry wounded several thousand yards. Ambulances in many cases couldn't get any where near the wounded. However, the 105th Medical Battalion improvised and borrowed sleds from farmers in the neighborhood. Frequently, the ^{sleds} ~~letter~~ were pulled by horses and served admirably to get the wounded to ambulances for further evacuation. 43

With the fall of Thirimont, at the close of 15 January, all objectives in the first phase of the St. Vith offensive in the Division zone had been captured. The operation had gone according to schedule, except on the left flank where the cost had been high; unexpectedly high in fact. The 30th Division can only be commended highly for the job they did while operating with an exposed left flank. It can safely be assumed, that had the 1st Division on the 30th Division left flank, been ordered to attack at "H" hour, "D" day, 0800, 13 January, in coordination with the 30th Division, the losses sustained by the latter would have been much lighter, and the advance more rapid. When the 1st Division did attack, two days later, 15 January, they quickly eliminated the strong automatic weapon and artillery positions in the vicinity of Ondenval and Faymonville that had been striking at the side of the 30th Division for two days.

As for the enemy tactics during the first phase; they have been

touched on above. One of the most troublesome items needs additional emphasis. That was the mines the Germans laid in roads and possible routes of approach. In most cases, because of the haste of their withdrawal, the enemy made no attempt to lay mines in any careful or strategic pattern. They were again favored by the weather on this score for shortly after the mines were laid, they were covered by snow. Ice followed, more snow and again ice. That meant that scores of our vehicles would roll over the mines without setting them off. After a road became accepted as "safe", by the number of vehicles that had gone over it, a light jeep, or a heavy tank would unexpectedly detonate the mine. As for infantry field positions occupied by the enemy, they were also aided by natural terrain features. Concealed wooded areas, roadside dugouts, approaches to roads, firebreaks and trench lines on hill crests were only a few utilized. In the cities, infantry positions were invariably taken in stone houses. All in all, the entire sector was admirably suited to, and offered every tactical and strategic advantage to defending troops. In the two day period from 13 January to midnight 15 January, the Division captured 497 PW's. ⁴⁴

The caliber of the enemy soldier on the division front had risen materially from the attack hour on 13 January. At that time almost all of the opposition was estimated to be from the 18th Volksgrenadier Division. But shortly after the initial attack by the 30th Division, elements of the 3rd Parachute Division hit the left flank of the 90th.

In the area around Thirimont, four battalions of the Parachute Division were identified. ⁴⁵ The fact that the enemy opposition on the left flank of the 30th Division were paratroopers, as compared with 18th Volksgrenadier Division soldiers on the right portion of the Division sector, may help to explain the severity of the fighting and the tenacity of the resistance encountered by the 30th Division ^{the former sector} in ~~that~~ sector.

St. Vith Offensive

Phase II

By midnight of 15 January the first phase line, which had been designated as such in the Division plan, had been reached. That line ran roughly along the L'Ambleve River where it crossed the Division zone. The line that marked the completion of the second phase ran from east to west and was south of the L'Ambleve, on the left flank, approximately 8,000 yards and on the right flank, 11,000 yards. Within that area, 13 goose egg areas had been listed as objectives points. Of that number three were high points that ran in a rough east west line and possessed an elevation of 530 meters (Dillburg) 540 meters (Hunnert), and (Wolfsbusch) 590 meters. That line would probably have been utilized as a

main line of resistance by the enemy, if he had had adequate time for preparations. However, the rapid drive through extremely difficult natural ^e conditions, by the 30th Division, caught the enemy off balance and kept him in that condition all the way to St. Vith.

In a letter of instruction issued at 2200, 15 January, the 117th Regiment was directed to attack south, the following morning, to secure the ridge line situated approximately 2,000 yards south of its front. The 119th aimed to the west with the primary objective the MSR between Font and Recht.

The 1st Battalion, 117th Infantry with Companies A and C leading and Company B in reserve, attacked for Dillburg (812954). At 0900 the group left from the vicinity of Ligneuille and advanced against very light opposition to a point approximately 400 yards north of Dillburg. ^{about} Approximately 1,000 yards to the southeast and enemy concentration of armor and infantry was observed at the road junction at 823950. That road junction turned out to be an extremely hard nut to crack in the days that followed. It was the intersection of the Malmedy-St. Vith road with the route from Recht. On the 16th January, the enemy began to fortify that point as a road block in strength. That activity was noted and Division artillery put a concentration of fire on it from 105 mm and 155 mm guns, plus a good many rounds from eight inch howitzers fired by the 264th Field Artillery Battalion.

The 2nd Battalion, 117th Infantry, under Major B. T. Ammons,

moved south at the same time and on the right of the 1st Batt alion.
South of
~~Going through Bücken, a very small town south of Pont,~~ the Battalion advanced slowly through the exceedingly thick forest area. The base of Runbert (795956) was reached by midafternoon and Capt. Sibbald's Company E out to the east slope of the hill, while Company G under Capt. Victor Salem, went to the west. Company ^F remained in battalion reserve throughout the day and followed midway between Companies E and G.

Meanwhile, the 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry had been attached to the 117th Infantry, and under the latter's direction attacked in coordination with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 117th, the morning of 16 January. Advancing east from Ligneuville, a road block was established at 825983. The battalion was then disposed by Major C. E. Stewart with the three companies abreast. The advance was almost directly south with Company L on the left, I in the center and Company K on the right or east. By noon the base of the Wolfsbusch hill (830967) was reached. An attempt was made to advance up the slope, but it was pushed back by the enemy. Throughout the afternoon, fire fights continued and when darkness fell, the positions occupied by the 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry, were essentially the same as they had been at noon. The 3rd Battalion, 117th Infantry remained in regimental reserve throughout 16 January. Just south of Pont, the companies were disposed from east to west, Companies L, K, and I respectively.

On the right, the two battalions of the 119th Infantry (the 3rd Battalion had been attached to the 117th Infantry) also did not make any great strides ~~or meet any stiff resistance~~. The 1st Battalion held a defensive position throughout the day, regrouping and refitting. Companies C and B maintained positions immediately southwest of Font and Company A attempted to get some rest on the north side of the L'Ambleve. The 2nd Battalion, on the right flank of the 30th Division, moved off at 0900 and advanced south almost 1,000 yards from Houvegniez. Company E led, and with Company F on the left, the heavy woods were searched. One tank of the 743rd Tank Battalion was lost from direct fire of an enemy self-propelled gun. Those SP's were met in some number in the next week and always proved troublesome. They were 75 mm guns mounted on a Mark IV chassis. Not too large they drove through the forest fire breaks easily and maneuvered without too much difficulty in the snows. In any event Company E pushed to 765959, where they made contact with the 517th Parachute Infantry, 106th Division, at ~~last~~ ^{at last night} light.

The activity of the 120th Infantry, on 16 January, was much like the other two regiments. Primarily resting and maintaining defensive positions. From slightly east of Thirimont to west of Hauts Sarts positions ^were held by the 1st, 3rd and 2nd Battalions respectively. Each had two companies in line and one in reserve. The following day, 17 January, there were ^{again} no great advances

made anywhere on the Division front. Again, as on the previous day, short movements were made, but regrouping and some rehabilitation were carried on primarily. In the 117th Infantry, Lt. Colonel R. E. Frankland's 1st Battalion further consolidated their position on the Dillburg hill 530. Companies A and C covered the entire elevation, clearing out a few of the enemy that had infiltrated during the night, and then took up positions in a line on the reverse slope. At 0915 an estimated 50 enemy infantrymen, supported by 5 light tanks, and designated Combat Team Hoffman, were encountered. A relatively short fire fight ensued, in which several PW's were captured and the enemy routed. Company B took up a position, in battalion reserve, slightly to the north of the other two companies. The 2nd Battalion, 117th Infantry attacked for Hunnert, which was more correctly the designation of a 540 meter high elevation. On the previous day, 16 January, the battalion had been unsuccessful in its attack on the objective. However, on the morning of 17 January, they again struck at the hill. Because the objective was in the center of an extremely heavily wooded area, the enemy found adequate cover and concealment. An estimated 50 troops defended the hill. ⁴⁶ They were broken into small groups and each group had an assault gun set up in either a dug out or a fire break. Companies G and E attacked and drove them off and then patrols went down to Recht to make a reconnaissance ^{ance}.

The 3rd Battalion took a crack at the road ~~block~~ ^{strong point} at 820955.

but were no more successful on the 17 January than they were on the previous day. The difficulty in any attempt to ^{take} raise the block was not so much from the large amount of fire power set up, but from the tactical disposition and organization of the strong point. On the east side of the Malmedy-St. Vith road, in the vicinity of the road block, the undergrowth was very thick. Because of the ^{fact} factor it was quite impossible for troops of the 3rd Battalion to bring up any armor or heavy weapons on that flank. Further the enemy had a series of machine guns, light and heavy, set up among the trees and in the fire breaks. On the west side of the road, peculiarly enough, there was an open area which prohibited an advance in any force to cross it. Any attempt of that nature was immediately met by fire that came from the road block defenses. That fire, and fire on any friendly groups in the vicinity that came down the main highway or other approaches from the north, was observed from east of the road block on an elevated position. Such observations were then communicated to the gun positions at the road intersection. 47 That was the reverse of the usual situations where the observer was near the target and the guns in the rear. ~~In that case, the 3rd Battalion 117th Infantry attacking the road block, the enemy guns were in the proximity of the target and the observer in the rear.~~

In the 119th Regiment the only active battalion was the 2nd. ^{the} 1st assembled in Pont and the 3rd, released from attachment to the 117th Infantry, closed into Malmedy. Companies F and G of the 2nd Battalion

maintained their position in the vicinity of Houvegnen. Capt. Wayne E. Parker's Company E sent out a strong combat patrol to establish a road block at Oehsenbaracks, (782953). That point was on the road from Pont to Recht and the ^{most} furthest advanced position of the Division. The Company pushed to the road block position slowly and carefully following ^{ed} a course through the woods. The strength of the road block was made up of a platoon of infantry from Company E, 2 heavy machine guns, two self propelled TD's and three anti-tank guns. ⁴⁸ Once the road block was set up and consolidated, outposts were sent out and contacted the 517th Regiment on the right and the 117th on the left.

¹On the 120th Regiment the 1st Battalion remained in the vicinity of Thirimont with Companies A and B in the line. A combat patrol was sent down to reconnoiter the objective that enclosed Lier Venn (vic 831940), some 2500 yards from Wolfsbusch. The enemy was met in force a good distance north of the objective, and the patrol was forced to return to their starting point.

The 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry, took over the occupation of the Wolfsbusch hill and relieved the 3rd Battalion, 119th Infantry that had taken that objective on the previous day.

There was little other activity on 17 January, although more trouble was caused to our vehicles by road mines, that were laid in scattered patterns. From 13 to 16 January the 90th Division

had 15 tanks disabled by anti tank mines. ⁴⁹ The mines, buried under several inches of snow and ice were not located by mine detectors. Therefore a request was made of XVIII Corps for the use of "mine busters". ⁵⁰ These were secured and used to excellent purpose on the Division roads. They were valuable because of the effectiveness with which they performed their primary function; detonating AT mines. They were also of great aid for the psychological effect they had on jeep, tank and truck drivers. Those men felt the road was safe, once a "mine buster" had gone over it, and as such, their task of driving, with the nervous strain eliminated, was made easier.

The "mine busters" of the 738th Tank Battalion, utilized were of two types. One type had two sets of discs weighing 30 tons, mounted on the front of a medium tank. Each set contained five disks and each disk was almost nine feet in diameter. Each of the two sets were mounted directly in front of the tank's treads. Thus an empty space was present between the two sets and mines which lay below that area were not exploded. That was the primary fault of the M3. It was rectified by the T1E1 type that had three sets of disks mounted on the front of a standard medium tank retriever. These three sets contained six discs each, but their diameter was less than half of those mounted on the M3. They were mounted with a set in front of each tank tread and the third set to the fore of those, and in the center of the tank. Thus the road in the front of the tank was com-

pletely "rolled" and performed its task more satisfactorily than the E3.

There is a great deal of interest that may be attached to the tremendous number of AT mines that were found scattered in the Malmedy sector. Almost every one of these mines was found under heavy snow and ice. Inasmuch as the first heavy snow did not occur in that sector until 26 December, one may assume that the Germans abandoned the plan to attack through the Malmedy sector in the direction of Liege, by Christmas. 51

The Drive Continues

After two days, in which a short opportunity for some rest and refitting were snatched, the 30th ^D Division on 18 January again began to drive south. In a Division directive the 120th Regiment was assigned an objective labeled "q", (vic 825937). The goose egg shaped area enclosed a portion of the Malmedy-St. Vith road and also a hill 522 meters in height. The whole was approximately 2,300 yards east by southeast of Recht (796945) and also contained the tiny village of Lier Venn, (831939). The 117th Infantry, with the 2nd Battalion of the 119th attached, was to take Recht and if both regiments had

completed their assignments satisfactorily, they were to attack for Eackelsborn (810930), which was situated approximately 1,200 yards south by southeast of Recht. ⁵² To aid in the operation, and to insure coordination of movement on the Division right flank, the 517th RIF (minus 2nd Battalion) was attached at 1800 hours, 17 January. ⁵³

Before the 117th Infantry could attack for Recht it was perforce necessary to eliminate the road block which was, as stated earlier, near the junction of the Recht and St. Vith road. Lt. Colonel Samuel T. McDowell's 3rd Battalion was still attempting to knock out the road block at 820955. "K" Company under Capt. Hammonds, was not able to eliminate the strong point, however, elements of his company did infiltrate behind it and were successful in laying some AT mines. Under cover of darkness the enemy withdrew from that first position and set up an even stronger block about 300 yards south on the same road at 823950. Again mines were laid behind the road block and attempts were continued to force the enemy to withdraw. The resistance, if anything, increased and the number of assault guns and automatic weapons delivered an extremely punishing fire on the attackers. ⁵⁴ During 18 January the road block was not reduced and consequently the attack for Recht was not made. The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 117th Infantry maintained their defensive ^{lines} positions on the elevated positions of Dillburg and Hunnert, respectively.

The 119th Regiment accomplished little during 18 January. The 1st Battalion remained assembled in the vicinity of Pont, and the 2nd Battalion retained their lines on the extreme right flank of the Division. Companies K and L of the 3rd Battalion remained in Malmedy and Company I under 1st Lt. John A. Doyle Jr., moved from there to take over the high ground of Huass Sart, relieving the 3rd Battalion 120th Infantry from that position.

There was much more activity in the 120th Regiment on 18 January. At 0930 the 1st Battalion advanced south for objective "Q" in the vicinity of 831939 and two hours later it was followed by the 3rd Battalion. The attack was made on the objective from the northeast, thus bypassing the enemy held road block at 823950. By early afternoon the area was captured and occupied by both battalions in a semi circular line by 1500 hours. Company I was placed on the extreme east slope and from east to west, Companies A, L, C, and B, were disposed with Company K in reserve. At just about dusk, the enemy counterattacked in strength from the south with an estimated seven tanks and at least 100 infantrymen. Artillery was called down on the infantry and they were broken up and scattered at 827939, a point on the St. Vith road approximately 400 yards south of the 1st and 3rd Battalion front line. Groups of our infantry fanned out and attacked the tanks with bazooka and small arms. Company C knocked out two, and three additional tanks were destroyed. ⁵⁵ Of the five, two were mounted with 105 mm

assault guns on a Mark IV chassis and the other three had 75 mm guns on the same type chassis. ⁵⁶ Though unusual, that illustrates that carefully directed infantrymen can destroy enemy light tanks with bazooka and small arms fire, ^{without any aid from armor.} While this counter attack was in progress, Company K, which had been in the rear of the line and consequently the nearest to the enemy road block at 823950, turned north to assist the 3rd Battalion, 117th Infantry in their attack on that strongpoint. Driving at the road block from the north and south, elements of Company K of the 117th and Company K of the 119th got scattered ^{groups} elements behind the road block and planted AT mines and harassed the strong enemy concentration, but did not eliminate it.

The 2nd Battalion, 120th Regiment, on 18 January maintained their position on the Wolfsbunch hill, via 833968, and aided in bringing up supplies to the 1st and 3rd Battalions. The following day, 19 January, the 2nd Battalion was relieved by the 1st Battalion, 119th Infantry. The second then moved south 2,000 yards, through the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 120th Regiment and at 1415 attacked for their objective, Eeckelsborn and the area in the vicinity. Eeckelsborn lay 1200 yards southeast of Recht on the Recht-St. Vith road. The attack was made after Recht had been captured that morning and the road block at 823950, eliminated. The 2nd Battalion with Company E on the east, Company F on the west, and Company G in the center met light resistance and was consolidated in the city by 1700.

The 1st and 3rd Battalions, 120th Infantry maintained their defensive positions in the vicinity of objective "Q". Company K, of the 3rd Battalion, under 1st Lt. Melton Smith, again assisted the 3rd Battalion, 117th Infantry in the final reduction of the road block at 823950 which took place during the morning of 19 January. 57

The 1st Battalion sent patrols to objective "T" to attempt to determine the size of the enemy force that was in possession of that important area. The goose-egg "T" enclosed the junction where the Ligneville-St. Vith road converged with the Recht-St. Vith road at 829917. From that area, reconnaissance was made 1,200 yards to the west by the patrols.

On the right of the 120th, the 117th Infantry on the morning of 19 January prepared to attack to seize Recht in compliance with Division instructions. 58 At 0600 the 2nd and 3rd Battalion, 117th Infantry attacked. The former left Hunnert with Companies E and F on line and in 20 minutes were on the outskirts of Recht. Resistance was light and consisted mainly of small arms fire. In a very short time the enemy troops defending Recht were driven out. Company K led by Cpat. Sibbald took a center route with Company G on the northwest. By 0930 the 2nd Battalion was in possession of the city and sent patrols to the east to assist the 3rd Battalion in the final reduction of the road block at 823950.

The capture of Recht in such a short time, was not wholly due

to the fighting capabilities of the infantry and the excellent tank and tank destroyer support. An exceedingly heavy artillery barrage was laid on the city prior to the attack. 9th Division artillery hit the town heavily in a well planned pattern. First the outlying section of the city was bombarded and then the shells moved south, catching the center of the city and the area of building concentrations. 59 Because of that terrific barrage, it was not surprising that the enemy who did remain to defend the city capitulated in approximately one hour.

In the 119th Regiment, as stated earlier, the 1st Battalion relieved the 2nd Battalion, 120th Regiment on the Wolfsbusch hill. The 2nd Battalion retained their position on the right flank and maintained contact with the 517th on the right and the 117th Infantry on the left. During 19 January new enemy troops were identified on the Division front that had most probably been brought in as reinforcements. 60

At 0800 the 1st Battalion, 117th Infantry Regiment, crossed their line of departure and attacked south for their objective. That was another goose egg area, about 2,000 yards south of Recht and enclosed an area of dominating terrain. The terrain it contained was very heavily forested and an advance on the objective was very difficult. However, the battalion met only small arms resistance and advanced easily against it. By early afternoon, consolidation on the objective had taken place.

At the same jump-off time, Lt Colonel Samuel T. McDowell's 3rd Battalion, 117th Infantry, moved south on the left flank of the 1st

Battalion, from the vicinity of Eeckelsborn. They advanced for an ^{approx.} area that measured approximately 600 yards in a north-south direction and 1,400 yards in an east-west direction. The objective was about 1,000 yards south of Eeckelsborn and enclosed a portion of the secondary Fecht to Rodt road. With 1st Lt. Gale Daugherty's Company L leading, and then Companies I and K, the battalion encountered a small amount of enemy fire just south of Eeckelsborn. Made up of about a company of infantry supported by three light tanks, they were easily routed and the 3rd Battalion moved on their objective. Once they consolidated, they were on an approximate 2,000 yard line with the 1st Battalion. At 1530, on division order, both battalions attacked to take a large area designated as "Willie" and "Willie", which lay about 500 yards south of the areas taken earlier in the day. The 1st Battalion hit it on the west and the 3rd Battalion on the east. The latter met very little resistance and was in control of their objective by 1730 with Companies K, L, and I, echeloned to the northeast. The 1st Battalion, with Companies A and C leading, met fairly stiff resistance consisting of approximately a company of infantry employing some automatic weapon, but primarily small arms fire. By last light they had possession of the reverse slope and had made contact with the 3rd Battalion by 1925 hours. The objective was important, for its center point was a steep elevation which provided observation of Rodt and led right into that city.

On the right of the 117th, the 119th Infantry swung into action early the morning of 20 January. Lt. Colonel Robert H. Herlong's 1st Battalion was relieved of the defensive position it held on the Wolfsbusch hill at 1000 hours by the 30th Mezz Recn Troop. Plowing through heavy snow a distance of approximately 5,000 yards the battalion at 1330, arrived at 782927, an area 1,000 yards southwest of Recht. The position straddled the road leading out of Recht, and was designed as a reserve point to back up the attack planned for the other two battalions of the regiment.

The 2nd Battalion, also moved by foot, from the vicinity of Houvegnex (765958) to an assembly area about 6000 yards to the south. The 3rd Battalion, working in coordination with the 2nd, left its rest area in the vicinity of Malmody and was transported by truck to a point about 1,200 yards northwest of Recht on the Pont-Recht road. There Major Hal D. McCown had his battalion detruck and led them south where they took up a position on the left of the 2nd Battalion. In that area two platoons each, from the 749rd Tank Battalion and 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion drove into position and at 1415 hours a combined attack was launched. Striking to the south, the 2nd Battalion with armor attachments hit Wolkeshardt (782893), and drove as far south as Weisoy[~] Berg, (775884). The 3rd Battalion swinging in from the northeast, bypassed the second and captured Oberst Crembach (788885).

Both battalions met elements of the 12th VG Division whose resistance consisted primarily of small arms and automatic weapons fire. Their armor support was not well displaced and did not hold up our advance to any appreciable extent. Nevertheless, it was almost 1900 hours before the objectives were captured. The difficulties encountered were not only confined to the resistance of the enemy, ^{but also} The long march, ^{which} the men had undergone earlier in the day had sapped their strength to a considerable amount. It was not the distance of the march, but the weather conditions that proved such an obstacle. Plowing through a thickly forested area, through snow that was at least knee deep, and carrying heavy combat arms and equipment, the men were fatigued by the time they arrived at their line of departure. When the attack terminated, and consolidation was made during darkness, many hours were spent in digging fox holes and gun emplacements in frozen ground. The use of the trite phrase, "the attack was made under difficult conditions," was in this case, a definite understatement. In any event, this salient was the most advanced in the division sector at that time. The two battalions took up their final positions the night of 20 January in the shape of a rough "V", or echeloned to the north on the flanks. From west to east positions were held by Companies G, E, and F of the 2nd Battalion, and Companies L and I of the 3rd. Company K under the temporary direction of 1st Lt.

Robert J. Katz established a road block at 826894; a point approximately 1,200 yards north of Redt on the primary road.

In the 120th Regiment, the 1st Battalion at 0730, again sent patrols to objective "P", which they had reconnoitered on the previous day. That area as explained above, enclosed the two roads from Recht and Ligneville where they converged and ran into the St. Vith highway. The patrols found the objective held fairly lightly and at 1030 the battalion moved down to the attack. Companies A and C led and keeping along the Recht road, the objective was hit on the north west. Primary resistance came from self propelled 75 mm guns, which were attacked and driven off. By mid-afternoon the western portion was in possession of the 2nd Battalion and the companies began to "dig in". The 3rd Battalion then moved down the Ligneville-St. Vith road and occupied positions on the east side of the objective, with Companies L and I to the south and Company K echeloned to the northeast. By last light a line with the first battalion had been drawn up and consolidated.

The 2nd Battalion, 120th Regiment ^{remained} ~~received~~ in the vicinity of Eeckelsbern and ran down two self propelled guns that were in the rear of the front line and from hidden forest positions frequently fired a harassing round of ammunition. Company G took over the road block on the Milmody-St. Vith road at 826935 and relieved Company C, 1st Battalion, of the tank.

With all assigned objectives for 20 January captured by 30th Division troops, another phase in the drive on St. Vith had been completed. Through extremely dense woods and mountains of snow, the Division had plugged its way forward. Buried AT mines were a constant source of trouble and in the seven day period from 13 to 20 January, the 155th Engineer Battalion removed well over 200. ⁶¹ But the many hardship and unusual problems were met and solved. Snow caps, special winter clothing, sleds for evacuation and many other ingenious items were utilized and on 21 January the "Old Hickory" Division could almost see St. Vith.

All that remained to be captured in the last phase, were four objectives north and west of St. Vith and several to the south of the key city. On the right of the Division the 82nd Airborne Division had been pinched out by the 75th Division. On the left, the 7th Armored Division had just begun to move through the 1st Division, and over one of the roads in the 30th Division sector preparatory to positioning themselves for the strike on the "I lum", St. Vith.

REF ID: A66333

St. Vith Offensive Phase III

The day of 21 January 1945 marked the termination of over a week of fighting for the 30th Division. In that time they had fought step by step, approximately nine miles. Their losses were high, the enemy a determined fighter and the weather conditions an extremely difficult obstacle. The military tactics had slipped into a pattern by that date, and for that reason, the line battalions had a rough idea of what to expect when they launched a battalion or two battalion attack. The small villages were usually defended most strongly on the outskirts from the protection offered by heavy undergrowth and dugouts. The cities themselves usually contained only a small number of troops who defended from behind the protection of any stone houses available. More difficult to capture were hills or ridge lines, *in the possession of the enemy.* ~~with well displaced positions and the support of mortar and artillery fire.~~ 30th Division troops very frequently found a great deal of difficulty in dislodging a stubborn enemy, *from well displaced positions that were supported by mortar and artillery fire.* An ever present obstacle were the anti tank mines that were buried in roads and covered over by snow and ice. As stated earlier, the "mine busters" were employed to good advantage.

The cold and wetness of the weather were combated by the use of little tricks the men had learned and what comforts were readily available. Commanding officers took advantage of all available cover for their troops, and the artillery battered farm houses did

not offer too many conveniences, they nevertheless blocked a good portion of the winter blasts. The regular enlisted type overcoat was frequently found to be a hindrance, rather than an aid in warding off the cold. Soldiers found that the coats easily became moist or even wet from contact with the snow, and shortly thereafter froze almost solid and had to be discarded. Digging foxholes or gun emplacements near or on the front lines in the frozen ground was not only very hazardous, but a back breaking job.

With the beginning of the last phase in the operation, the Division was tired, but near their final objective line which ran roughly 2,000 yards south of St. Vith along the Braunlauf river. The boundary line between the 7th Armored and the 30th Division in the area ran along in the vicinity of the 84th north-south grid line. *St Vith lay in the 7th Armored sector approximately 1,000 yards east of the boundary line.* ~~In the neighborhood of St. Bith, that meant it put that city within the 7th Armored sector by about 1,000 yards.~~

On 21 January, there was little advance made by any of the Regiments of the Division. In the 117th Infantry the 2nd Battalion remained in Recht, obtaining some much needed rest. The 1st and 3rd Battalions remained on the objective taken on the previous day with Companies A, K, L, and I, on the line from west to east. Company E on the right or west flank and Company B in reserve. Under cover of dusk reconnaissance patrols went down to Rodt (619889), Hundheim

(825889), and Steinerberg (828887), and reported them apparently well held.

The 119th Regiment on 21 January, for the most part consolidated on the position they had seized on the previous day. Company F, under Capt Edward O Arn occupied positions in Oberst-Drombach^h, and there ran into small elements of the enemy. They ^{German} were scattered in houses, but and were soon routed out of the city or captured by the attacking company. By darkness the area was firmly held with Companies E, F, L, I, and K holding a semi-circular line to the northeast and Company G in reserve.

To the left, in the 120th sector, the 3rd Battalion received a strong counter-attack. The Battalion occupied a position in the general area of 837922 near the Malmédy-St. Vith road. At 0958 the 1st Battalion, 352nd VG Regiment, 246th VG division, supported by three self propelled guns attacked on the front of Companies K and L.⁶² The enemy came up from Ober Emmels, using the available woods to furnish cover and concealment. The 1st Battalion, 120th Infantry had been occupying a position on the right or west of the 3rd. Thus when the attack struck, the 1st Battalion flanked the enemy on the right and the 3rd Battalion closed in on the left. By 1050 hours, the attackers retreated leaving eight PW's, 16 wounded an estimated 70 Germans killed, and one SP gun.⁶³ Later in the same day patrols from the 1st Battalion were sent south to

reconnoiter the next day's objective; Ober Emmels (827906) and Nieder Emmels, (898908). They were driven off, however, by strong enemy automatic weapon fire. ⁶⁴

On the left flank of the 30th Division, the 7th Armored drove south on 20 and 21 January in excellent coordination. ⁶⁵ The key city of Born (850935) had been cleared by Brig. General Hasbrouck's armor and the defending enemy troops fell back to St. Vith. The same was true in the 30th Division sector; the enemy retreated to St. Vith. On 21 January, large groups of Germans began to evacuate that city on the primary high way leading south. The road was jammed with troops, vehicles armor and guns and the IX Tactical Air Command had wonderful "targets of opportunity". Working with the 7th Armored, the 366th and 404th. Fighter Groups destroyed an enormous number of vehicles, tanks, artillery, troops, and horse drawn wagons, utilizing 500 pound general purpose and 200 pound fragmentation bombs for the job. ⁶⁶

The next day, 22 January, the 120th Regiment's objective was the area containing ^{Nieder} ~~Nieder~~ Emmels and Ober Emmels. The former was the larger of the two and had the St. Vith road running through it. In the early afternoon, the 2nd Battalion, supported by the fires of the 1st Battalion, attacked the city. Flanking the city cautiously, resistance from infantry and assault guns were met, but to no appreciable extent. By 1600 hours the city was in the possession of the 2nd Battalion. Company F, had left the mopping up of the city to Companies E and G and had proceeded, at 1515 hours, to the west to seize Ober Emmels. The company encountered resistance ^{however,} and was unable to advance.

896895, with the 7th Armored that had pushed down during the day to a line about 3,000 yards north of St. Vith.

The advance south continued all along the Division front and on the right flank the 119th Regiment made subsequent gains, keeping pace with the other two regiments of the Division. In a coordinated attack the 2nd and 3rd Battalions 119th Regiment, advanced from their line of departure at 0800, 22 January. The 2nd Battalion left the area of Missen Berg and ran into scattered small arms fire. The battalion advanced south through a wooded area and an hour after "jump off" time they had cleared the woods at 788878. Companies E and F advanced on a line, with the former Company on the right. Once under observation, the two companies came under extremely heavy automatic weapon and artillery fire that emanated from the high ground immediately south of Kapelle (785860). Artillery fire was called for and brought down on observed enemy locations. Support tanks of the 743rd Tank Battalion were brought up and the battalion assaulted Kapelle in the mid-morning. By 1315 hours the city had been cleared of the enemy.

The 3rd Battalion, which had jumped off with the 2nd at 0900, had as their objective the fairly large city of Hinderhausen (797877). Capt. George D. Rehkopf's Company I, led the attack and had elements in the city by 0845. Once on the outskirts of

the city, Company L on the right of Company I met strong small arms and automatic weapon fire. The enemy was cleared out of the houses, slowly and methodically, and it wasn't until noon that the 3rd Battalion had covered most of the city. Even then, artillery fire lit the city throughout most of the afternoon every once in a while, a particularly ardent Nazi would infiltrate back into Hinderhausen, or suddenly come to life and begin sniping from a second story window. However, such fire was only harassing in nature and contact was quickly made on the left with the 117th Regiment. On the right, the 2nd Battalion spread their line east from Kapelle and as darkness closed down on 22 January, the companies were displaced from west to northeast, E, F, L, and I. Companies G and K maintained a reserve position.

The enemy, throughout 22 January fell back to St. Vith as the 30th Division advanced. Ending at midnight 22 January, for the preceding 24 hours, the Division captured 286 prisoners. ⁶⁷ Interrogated at the PW cage, it was determined that most of them had been members of the 326th Volksgrenadier Division, with a small number from the 10th and 24th VG Divisions. Almost every one of the PW's were partially incapacitated insofar as his locomotive abilities were concerned. Frost bite and trench foot were prevalent. They all looked badly and many complained of

having been in the line for over a month. At least half of the dirty, unshaven Germans carried a loaf or a portion of a loaf of brown bread clutched under his arm or protruding slightly from his overcoat pocket. They of course, had no idea that they would, shortly after capture, be eating better than they probably had in the preceding 4 years. Those who were not killed or captured retreated toward St. Vith, and on 22 January, as on the day before, the roads leading out of St. Vith were hit by heavy 30th Division artillery concentrations and elements of the IX Tactical Air Command. 68

On the same day the 7th Armored advanced into the outskirts of St. Vith and during the next day, 23 January, drove into the city. Once the 30th Division had captured Rodt, Hinderhausen and Hundheim, the city of St. Vith was hardly tenable. Those last few cities seized in the 30th Division sector were situated on dominating terrain. From Rodt, one could easily look down on St. Vith and the Division artillery units were in a position of observation of the primary roads and the railroad leading into the city. It is not meant to imply that once the 30th Division "ringed" St. Vith on the north and west the 7th Armored had merely to walk into the city, and take possession. That was hardly the case, however, it is well to note the fact again that once the 30th Division captured the roads, villages, and ridge

lines 2,000 to 5,000 yards north and west of the city; the great retreat from St. Vith began.

St. Vith Offensive

The Final Drive

The "final objective" line of the XVIII Corps in the St. Vith operation, ran roughly along the Braulauf River. The River flowed from west to east about 2,000 yards south of St. Vith.

To reach that line in the 30th Division sector, required the "Old Hickory" outfit to attack south from their 6,000 yard front line for a distance of three to five thousand yards. The area that was to be captured was for the most part, open ground that contained relatively small sections of heavily wooded areas. The four objectives in the area were labeled with the code names of "Daisy", "The", "Little", and "Abner". Three of them enclosed dominating ground. One south of Weisten (803059), another south of Krombach, (810860), the third southeast of Neundorf, (329869), and the last was a section of high ground between Krombach and Neundorf.

"H" hour 23 January was 1,000 hours. At that time the 117th and 119th Regiments attacked abreast. The 120th Infantry had been

pinched out on the previous day and had returned to an assembly area for some well deserved rest and refitting. In the 117th Regiment the 2nd Battalion was given the primary mission of the day by Colonel Walter M. Johnson. The 1st Battalion secured the left flank of the Regiment and the 3rd Battalion remained in Regimental reserve. The 2nd Battalion under Major Benjamin T. Ammons attacked at 1000 hours with the town of Heunderf and the high ground to the southeast ^{of the city as objectives. The battalion hit the outskirts of the city} ~~with the town of~~ 1100 hours with Company G on the right, and Companies F and E on the left. The battalion, by noon, had taken up positions throughout the city and the enemy had withdrawn. Once the Germans were out of the city, the 2nd Battalion 117th Infantry, came under a terrific barrage of mortar fire. It proved to be extremely accurate and came from the high ground to the southeast of ~~the city~~ ^{Heunderf}. That was the area and not Heunderf, that was designated by the division as the regimental objective. About 1300, Capt. W. E. Barker led Company F to the east to seize the high ground. Company G advanced along with Company F, and attacked up the forward slope. The enemy employed machine gun and mortar fire in a desperate attempt to stop the slugging dough-~~fect~~ feet. However, the German position was flanked and most of them were taken prisoner. At 1650 hours the enemy counter attacked with a force of about 50 men and three tanks. They were repulsed by

our heavy machine guns and at least one tank was damaged. By late afternoon the objective had been completely cleared of the enemy. On the left of the 2nd Battalion, the 1st Battalion had cleared the woods of scattered German automatic weapon emplacements and held the left forward flank of the Division.

Over on the right, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 119th Infantry, were directed to attack at 1000 hours by Colonel R. A. Baker. The 1st Battalion advanced for the high ground slightly south of Krombach. They met practically no resistance and were successful in taking over 20 PW's from the houses in Krombach. About 1500, Company C, under Capt. Floyd B. Spurlock, moved to the dominating ground and immediately made contact with outposts of the 117th Regiment on the left.

Jumping off at the same time, the 2nd Battalion encountered a strong enemy line on the northern edge of Weisten (vic 802855). An assault was made with Companies E and G on line. Almost 30 PW's were captured and the push into the city completed. ⁶⁹ The battalion moved southeast out of Weisten and over the rail road line running northeast to St. Vith. At the road junction at 805847, Company E on the right flank was hit by German ^aArmor, supported by infantry. Division artillery fire was called for and at the same time tanks and tank destroyers, supporting the

2nd Battalion, moved into position.

With all that fire, plus automatic weapon fire directed at the enemy concentration, it soon dissolved and withdrew after leaving 26 PW's. With the possession of those final objectives, the 50th Division activities in the operation had been completed. Since 2400 12 January, 1,460 PW's were captured.⁷⁰ Losses had been heavy, however, and in the three regiments of the Division there were 1,151 officers and men, killed, wounded or missing in the 10 day period, 13 to 23 January. Plus that number there were 707 officers and enlisted men listed as non-battle casualties.⁷¹ A total of almost 2,000 men lost; certainly high for a ten day operation.

During the same day, 23 January, the 7th Armored Division had taken full possession of St. Vith and pushed to the south of it pursuing the enemy out of the remaining, but very small, area still left in the Belgium Bulge; ~~the ill-fated dream of Von Rundstedt.~~