

BATTLE OF THE CANALS

7TH ARMORED DIVISION
27TH OCT. - 7TH NOV. 44.

87TH RCN SQUADRON
PRIOR TO ATTACK



DECLASSIFIED
Authority: NND 93529
By: W. NARA Date: 09/25/99

BATTLE OF CANALS

Operations of the 7th Armored Division
27 October - 7 November 1944

INTRODUCTION

At 0718 on 27 October the German Army launched a vigorous attack against the 7th US Armored Division guarding the right flank of the British Second Army in Southeastern Holland. For three days two powerful German Panzer Divisions clashed with the 7th Armored Division in an attempt to force a diversion from our drive on the Scheldt Peninsula to the west, or to cut our lines of communication and supply along the Holland salient toward Arnhem.

On the morning of 27 October elements of the 9th Panzer Division began the attack against the town of Meijel, Holland. When our efforts to counter his thrust had failed, the enemy, who had reinforced himself throughout the day with additional armor and infantry, launched a second attack to the north and west from Meijel. By this time the reserve of the 7th Armored Division was in position and prevented further substantial gains. During the second day of the attack the enemy was content to hold down our forces while he built up his strength by the addition of a second division, the 15th Panzer Grenadier. On the third day the enemy again struck vigorously to the north and west from Meijel. To the north he penetrated the line to capture the town of Liesel but was unable to clear the main road from Meijel to Liesel, while to the west he attempted to overrun our forces astride the road to Asten. By a firm stand in both sectors and with the invaluable assistance of the artillery of the division and attached British units the enemy attack was contained.

On the third night reinforcements arrived, and the sector of the 7th Armored Division was considerably shortened. Two days later the arrival of additional British forces still further strengthened the front. On 2 November the division on a narrow front struck back at the enemy to remove him from a part of the territory he had gained. Four days of pushing brought our troops almost to the limited division objective, but the final assault was to await the parallel attack from the north. Once again additional British units were brought up and the 7th Armored was able to return to the Ninth U.S. Army, its mission of containing the Germans along a wide sector of the British right flank having been successful.

S E C R E T

THE SITUATION

October, 1944, was a month for consolidation and preparation for the Allied forces. A prime prerequisite for any large-scale push into Germany was the shortening of our much-extended supply lines. The lightning thrust of the British armored units to the north in the latter weeks of September had caught the Germans off guard; Antwerp had been captured before extensive demolitions could be effected. Here was the needed link in our supply line. Antwerp, one of the largest ports in Europe, was close to our northern flank and could be put into operation with a minimum of reconstruction.

The German was not to relinquish his grip on this prize without a stiff fight. His trump card was control of the Scheldt Estuary, the approaches to the harbor. It was essential to remove the enemy from this area. Units for the mopping up operation were drawn from the western flank of the Holland salient and concentrated in the Antwerp sector.

The plan of action outlined for the month of October called for the 7th U.S. Armored Division to protect the right flank of the British Second Army during the Scheldt operation. (1) The commanding general of the 7th Armored Division ordered the division to establish a counter-reconnaissance screen and maintain contact with the Belgian Brigade on its right flank, and to be prepared at all times to commit the bulk of the division against any serious thrust the enemy might attempt in the sector from Deurne to Weert. (2)

Division mission

POSITION

The division front in the latter weeks of October was as follows: on the north, Combat Command B (CCB) held two bridges across the Griendtsveen canal (7018); in the center, the 87th Reconnaissance Squadron patrolled 24,000 yards of the Deurne and Nord canals from east of Liesel to the canal junction immediately to the south of Nederweert; and to the south, Combat Command A (CCA) patrolled 10,000 yards along the Wessem canal to the 90th east-west coordinate. On the extreme right (south) flank, the Belgian Brigade, attached, held a sector south along the Wessem canal to the junction with the Meuse River, and then south to Ophoven. Combat Command R (CCR) was in division reserve at Asten. The total front extended about 25 miles.

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The defenses of the 7th Armored Division along this canal line, were predicated on the fact that the Germans held the canal line, and were dug in on the east bank of the canals. The 7th Armored defenses consisted of a series of outposts ranging from 800 to 1500 yards west of the canals. In some cases these outposts were as much as 800 yards apart. During the day motorized patrols were sent up and down the road net parallel to the front, and at night foot patrols were pushed to the canals whenever possible.

The terrain in the entire division sector was extremely flat. From the enemy banks of the canal observation for 1000 to 2000 yards was not uncommon. Much of the ground was swampy, and at almost no place in the sector were tanks able to maneuver off the main roads. The net of usable roads was quite limited insofar as tanks and armored vehicles were concerned. Observation was confined to church steeples or tall houses, and these landmarks were the object of heavy fire in any contested zone.

It was in the canal area of the Deurne, Asten, Weert line that the enemy had elected to maintain a bridgehead across the Meuse River. He had chosen well, for to his rear lay Venlo, the key to the Ruhr Valley. As long as the enemy could maintain a bridgehead to the west of the Meuse, he remained a threat to our vital lines of communication. Thus did he hope to hold down forces which we might use elsewhere. (3) In this way he planned at least to postpone the day that Allied troops would thrust another wedge onto German soil. (4)

THE ATTACK

During the second and third weeks of October, little more than routine patrolling occupied the troops in the 7th Armored sector. However, for some days prior to 27 October, German activities were intensified along the front, especially in the sector of the 87th Reconnaissance Squadron. German patrols were sent against our positions, civilian reports of strong German tank and infantry concentrations filtered through the lines, and on 25 October many of the citizens of Meijel evacuated the town on the word of the burgomaster who simply said it would be well to leave. (5) On 26 October enemy tanks and vehicular movement were heard, artillery was more active, and civilian accounts of strong German concentrations continued. (6) But as yet no confirmation was available of German troop movements

GERMAN THRUST TO MEIJEL

27 OCT 1944



LEGEND

..... WITHDRAWAL

————> COUNTER-ATTACK

SWAMP
ASSAULT GUN
GERMAN THRUSTS

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By: M. NARA Date: 09/23/94

RDS

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into the sector. Bad flying weather had grounded most of our planes. The long nights and wooded areas to the east had offered the enemy ample opportunity to conceal any substantial movements. It was known that the bridge at Venlo remained intact despite repeated aerial attacks. (7)

THE FIRST DAY

The morning of 27 October was cloudy; a heavy fog limited visibility to about 50 yards. At about 0610 heavy enemy shelling commenced along that portion of the division sector held by the 87th Reconnaissance Squadron. Our troops in the area immediately were alerted to expect an attack. A particularly strong concentration was directed against the town of Meijel, headquarters of Troop C. At 0710 there came a lull in the firing, and at about 0718 a German officer of the 9th Panzer Division stood up about 40 yards east of the defensive outposts around Meijel and shouted orders. At his command, enemy troops estimated at company strength, stood up and began the attack. (8) Concurrent attacks were launched against Troop A on the right or southern flank of the squadron sector and against Troop D to the north. The latter thrust centered around Neerkant and Heitrak. But the main thrust that first day was against Meijel.

The enemy attacks

Troop C of the 87th Reconnaissance Squadron held an 8,000 yard zone of the division sector. The three reconnaissance platoons outposted the front with nine posts, each having from six to eight men, a machine gun, and in some cases a mortar. (9) Meijel itself was occupied by the troop headquarters platoon and a platoon of two assault guns.

During his barrage the enemy had managed to pass between the outposts without detection. Our troops in Meijel held their fire as the enemy advanced until he was within 30 yards. Then all the defenders, including assault gun squads, opened fire at point-blank range. The first and second waves of the enemy except for those few men who were able to filter around the flanks, were almost all killed or wounded. The third wave advanced throwing hand grenades, over-ran the local outposts, and gained the houses from where they opened fire with small arms. Meanwhile the flank platoons had been called in from their outpost positions, but in the face of the heavy enemy fire the troop commander decided to withdraw and save the vehicles. The northern flank platoon was

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cut off from the main body of Troop C but managed to circle around and join forces with Troop B the squadron reserve, as it moved forward.

The attack against the Troop D outposts to the north centered around Heittrak, Neerkant, and Hof. The first assault against Neerkant was stopped by our small arms and artillery fire. Capt. William Rau of Troop D requested artillery and it was brought down 100 yards in front of our defensive outposts. When this assault was repulsed the attackers angled to the north toward Heittrak to join in that thrust. There, the enemy was hit by the assault guns of Troop E and his attack stopped.

To the south in Troop A sector, the third enemy thrust was made. Like the other attacks this one was preceded by a heavy artillery barrage which centered chiefly at Nederweert and the banks of the Bois le Duc Canal. The enemy was attempting to isolate our troops from their support across the canal. Immediately following the artillery concentration, strong enemy patrols consisting of from 25 to 40 men came toward the first and third platoon defensive outposts. (10) But the main attack was apparently directed against the troop headquarters in Nieuw-en Winnerstradt. One of the patrols was led by a civilian. Another group of the enemy infiltrated through our outposts in the guise of American and British soldiers. (11) Two sections of the third platoon were cut off by the patrols and were not heard from again. (12) The first platoon was also surrounded but managed to escape through the German ring. The second platoon withdrew to consolidate its position on line with the remainder of the troop.

In a concurrent demonstration thrust into the sector of the Belgian Brigade, the enemy penetrated into the town of Thorn, but was driven back across the canal with losses of 33 prisoners of war, seven wounded, and three killed.

The enemy had utilized surprise to the maximum to pierce our counter-reconnaissance screen and establish a foothold on the west banks of the canals. He had successfully brought infantry in strength across the canals under the protection of the heavy barrage, had captured the town of Meijel, and was in sufficient force to meet our counter-thrusts. (13) He was ready to consolidate his position and build his bridges for further action.

At the squadron CP word of the enemy attack was received at 0720. Troop B, the squadron reserve, was immediately alerted and sent forward under the command

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of Major Charles A. Cannon, Jr., Squadron Executive Officer. About one quarter of a mile west of Meijel the major met and stopped
The Reconnaissance Squadron thrusts back Troop C Reorganization was started at once, and when the Squadron Commander, Lt. Colonel Vincent Boylan, arrived, preparations were completed for a counter attack on Meijel.

At 1010 our forces launched a dismounted attack toward Meijel with Troop B on the south and Troop C on the north of the Asten-Meijel road. Four assault guns were in support. The colonel walked down the middle of the road saying "Come on, God damn it! these dirty bastards can't hit you. Keep moving. I want to kill some of them." (14)

After a short advance Troop B reached the edge of a woods just west of Meijel, and was halted by the heavy enemy fire from the town. Troop C was screened by buildings and was able to push ahead but upon realizing that both flanks were open, 1st Lieutenant Richard D. Montgomery, Troop C.O. drew back on a line with Troop B. Heavy enemy small arms, automatic weapon, artillery, and mortar fire held our forces at this point.

Shortly after the repulse of the first attack, the light tank company of the squadron arrived. With its arrival a second attack was organized. B and C Troops moved forward in their same relative positions. One platoon of tanks was sent wide to the left to provide flank security, one went down the road and then peeled off to the left in direct support, and the third platoon followed down the road in local reserve. Some prisoners were taken by a tank of the flanking platoon as our forces moved forward. The tank gun jammed, and the Germans recognized its plight and refused to drop their grenades. A tommy gun was fired at the feet of the prisoners, but they remained adamant. (15) A tank from the second platoon was sent over to take the prisoners back, but it was hit in the rear by what was thought to be bazooka fire. Fire was also directed against the tanks on the flank, and three of them were knocked out in rapid succession. The remaining two tanks of this platoon pushed into the woods and were not seen again. When two additional tanks of the second platoon were hit by anti-tank fire, the attack collapsed and the troops fell back to the line from which they had started.

Five ten-man bazooka teams were then organized to make a coordinated attack with the remaining tanks.

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The five teams headed for a hedgerow north of the road and to the west of Meijel. They managed to reach the objective, but before the men could dig in an anti-tank gun opened fire and knocked out two of our tanks. The remaining tanks withdrew, leaving the dismounted men to face the heavy fire being directed at them. The men retreated in disorder. (16) Our first counter-thrust had failed.

Meanwhile the commanding general ordered CCR at 0730 to move out to repel the enemy. Companies A and C of the 48th Armored Infantry Battalion We reinforce our lines (AI Bn) were dispatched at 0812 to an assembly area to await further orders.

Concurrently Task Force Wemple, consisting of Companies B and D and the assault gun platoon of the 17th Tank Battalion (Tk Bn), was alerted and moved to an assembly position in the vicinity of 682127 to repel any thrust toward Liesel. At 0925 Task Force Wemple was informed that 250 Germans were crossing the canal in the vicinity of 710115. Lt. Colonel Wemple was given the mission of moving his force to the east in order to place direct fire on the advancing Germans. He placed one medium tank platoon with the third platoon of Troop D 87th Rcn near Neerkant. A second tank platoon was already with the Troop E 87th Rcn assault guns at Heittrak, and the third tank platoon of B company was north of Heittrak. The light tank company (Company D) originally in general support in the woods north of Heittrak, moved almost immediately to provide security for the 440th Armored Field Artillery Battalion which was firing from positions near Broek (698099). At 1045 the two platoons of tanks, which were with Troop D 87th Rcn, were in position firing on the enemy.

At 1200 Company C of the 814th Tank Destroyers (TD) was attached to Task Force Wemple. At the direction of Colonel Wemple, the company commander placed one platoon of the TD's directly north of Heittrak, the second platoon astride the road junction at 682128, and the third platoon just south of Liesel. Our forces to the north of Meijel were, therefore, in position by noon of the 27th to meet whatever thrusts the enemy might make.

Prior to the failure of the counter-attacks of Troops B and C, the commanding general had visited their positions and, after talking with the squadron commander, had expressed the opinion that the town could be retaken by the troops then committed. (17) He directed that if the town were not taken by 1300 CCR would be thrown into the fight. As a precautionary measure the commander of CCR dispatched Company C of the 48th AIBn at 0930 from its

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assembly area. The mission was to outpost an area due east of Neerkant and guard the northern approaches to the Meijel-Asten road. By noon Company C occupied a position generally along a small road running in a big loop off the main road from 669096 around to 680086. No enemy was sighted in this zone, but at 1330 the company received instructions to send a patrol from each platoon to investigate enemy strength in Neerkant.

Beginning about 1100 the enemy was able to bring into play his armor. By that time he had constructed the necessary bridges to move across heavy equipment, and he was beginning to build up his forces in anticipation of continuing the attack. At 1112

The enemy builds up his strength

Troop D of the 87th Rcn sighted the first enemy armor on the west side of the canal. Three tanks and other enemy vehicles were observed in the vicinity of Hoogebrug (708122). Our assault guns and artillery engaged these tanks but apparently they were not hit because at approximately 1200 an M 8 armored car of Troop D 87th Rcn observed three enemy tanks approaching its outpost behind a haystack along the Hoogebrug road. The armored car allowed the first tank (identified as a Tiger) to pass its position, and then at a range of about 15 yards, it fired six shots with its 37mm gun into the rear of the tank. The tank was ditched and the crew abandoned it. The armored car escaped up the road as the second tank approached to within 200 yards of it. (18) At 1215 Troop D reported a column of 10 enemy vehicles moving south in the vicinity of 704124. Two of the vehicles were identified as tanks; all were ingeniously camouflaged as haystacks. (19) Tank destroyers, assault guns, and artillery engaged this column, but results were undetermined. Enemy artillery and mortar fire developed after 1200, especially in the vicinity of the road junction at 682128. One of our medium tanks was hit at 1354 by the enemy in positions south of Hoogebrug. We again massed our fire in the vicinity of the enemy concentration, and nothing more was noticed from that direction. TD's fired continuously throughout the afternoon on the area to the east of the Liesel-Meijel road and to the north of Heitrak, but with undetermined results. The enemy was observed bringing up machine guns and mortars at periods throughout the afternoon, and several concentrations of enemy troops were sighted. Despite our heavy artillery fire the enemy built up his forces on the west side of the canal.

By 1630 the enemy had built up his tank and infantry strength to the point where he was capable of resuming

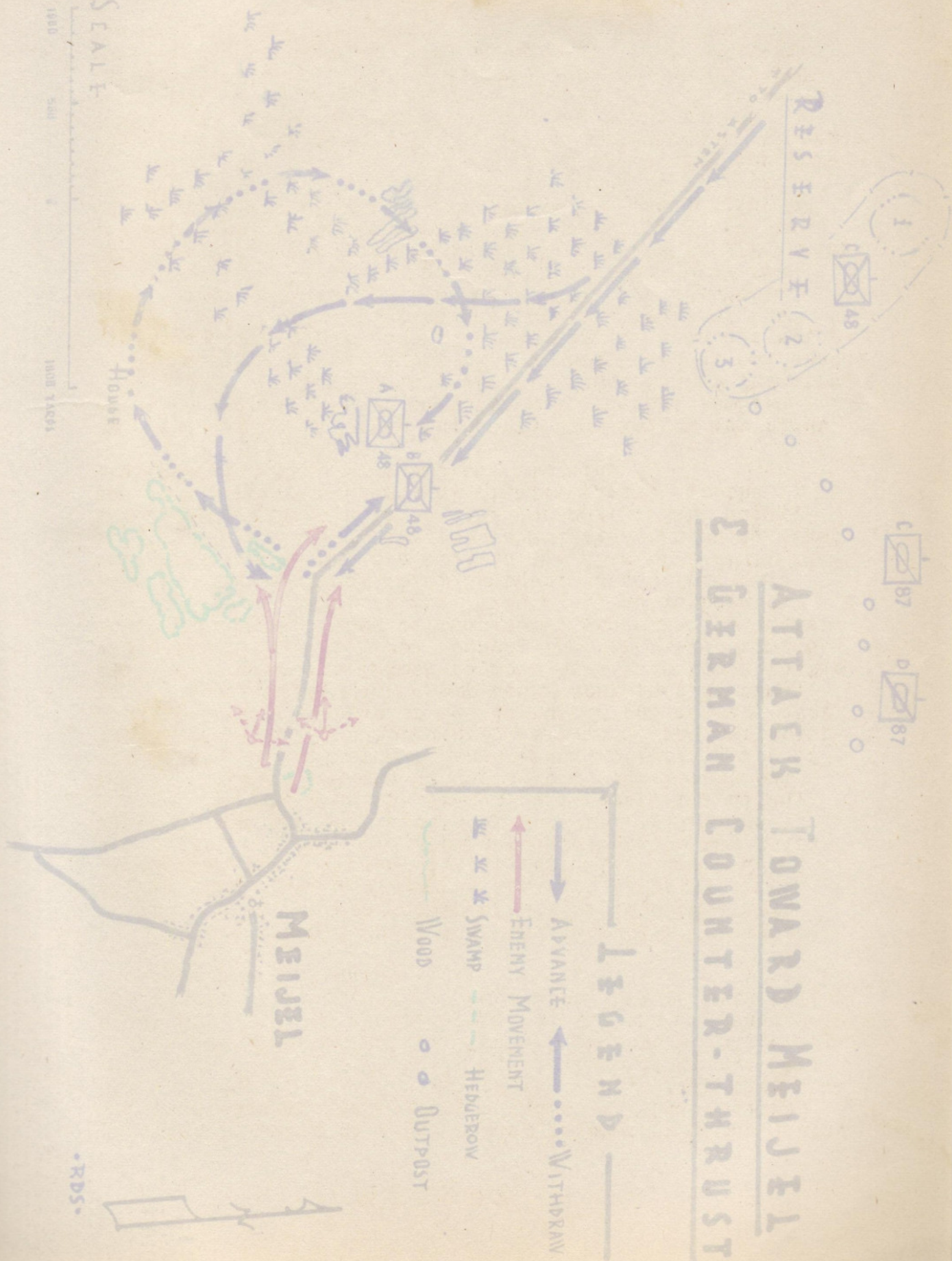
S E C R E T

the attack upon our forces. Sensing the enemy intentions Lt. Colonel Wemple had requested infantry support for the tanks, but Colonel John L. Ryan, CCR commander, informed him that no infantry was available for the job. (20) About 1645 the enemy attacked both north and west from Meijel.

At 1300 the reconnaissance squadron was still held up by the enemy fire from Meijel. Accordingly, CCR was directed to attack and seize Meijel. The plan of attack was that Companies A and B of the 48th CCR attacks AIBn and Company A of the 17th Tk Bn toward Meijel would make the attack, with Company C of the 48th AIBn in reserve. Elements of the 87th Rcn were to provide flank security. Company A of the 48th AIBn was to flank Meijel from the south while Company B advanced toward the town astride the road. The tanks were to be in direct support behind the infantry. About 1400 Company B of the 48th AIBn started down the road toward Meijel with one platoon on either side of the road and the third to the rear in support. Swamp land was on both sides of the road and the troops waded in knee deep water. Company A moved forward in a wide arc to the south of Meijel. Shortly before 1600 B Company fought its way forward to a point where it met Lt. Colonel Boylan of the 87th Rcn. who expressed his happiness that reinforcements had arrived. (21) Colonel Boylan informed the B, Company Commander that no enemy had been sighted along the road to the west of the church on the outskirts of Meijel. (22) In accordance with plans the 87th began with drawing through the 48th AIBn to take up its flank positions. (23) However, as the main body of Company B rounded a sharp curve in the road, it ran into concentrated machine gun and small arms fire directed down the road and on each side of the advancing forces. Thus ended our thrust to recover Meijel.

The enemy force attacking west from Meijel joined battle with our forces moving east on the road toward Meijel. Two enemy tanks were sent down the road toward Company B of the 48th AIBn. The enemy renews the attack to the west The tanks swung off the road behind the attacking echelons of Company B one tank on each side of the road. This maneuver cut off about two squads from each platoon. Some of these men were able to rejoin the company as it withdrew to the west, but many of them were lost. The company fell back about 1000 yards on the road, but the German tanks continued their push forward spouting fire at the withdrawing company. The support platoon of Company B had dug in on the side of the road to the rear of the advancing

SCALE
 1000 YARDS
 500
 1000 YARDS



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platoons in order to cover the approaches from the south. The remainder of the company withdrew to this position and also dug in to the right of the road. From these positions Company B was able to place considerable fire on the advancing infantry. Forward observers called for heavy artillery concentrations, and the enemy advance was finally stopped. The troops were able to hold this position for the night.

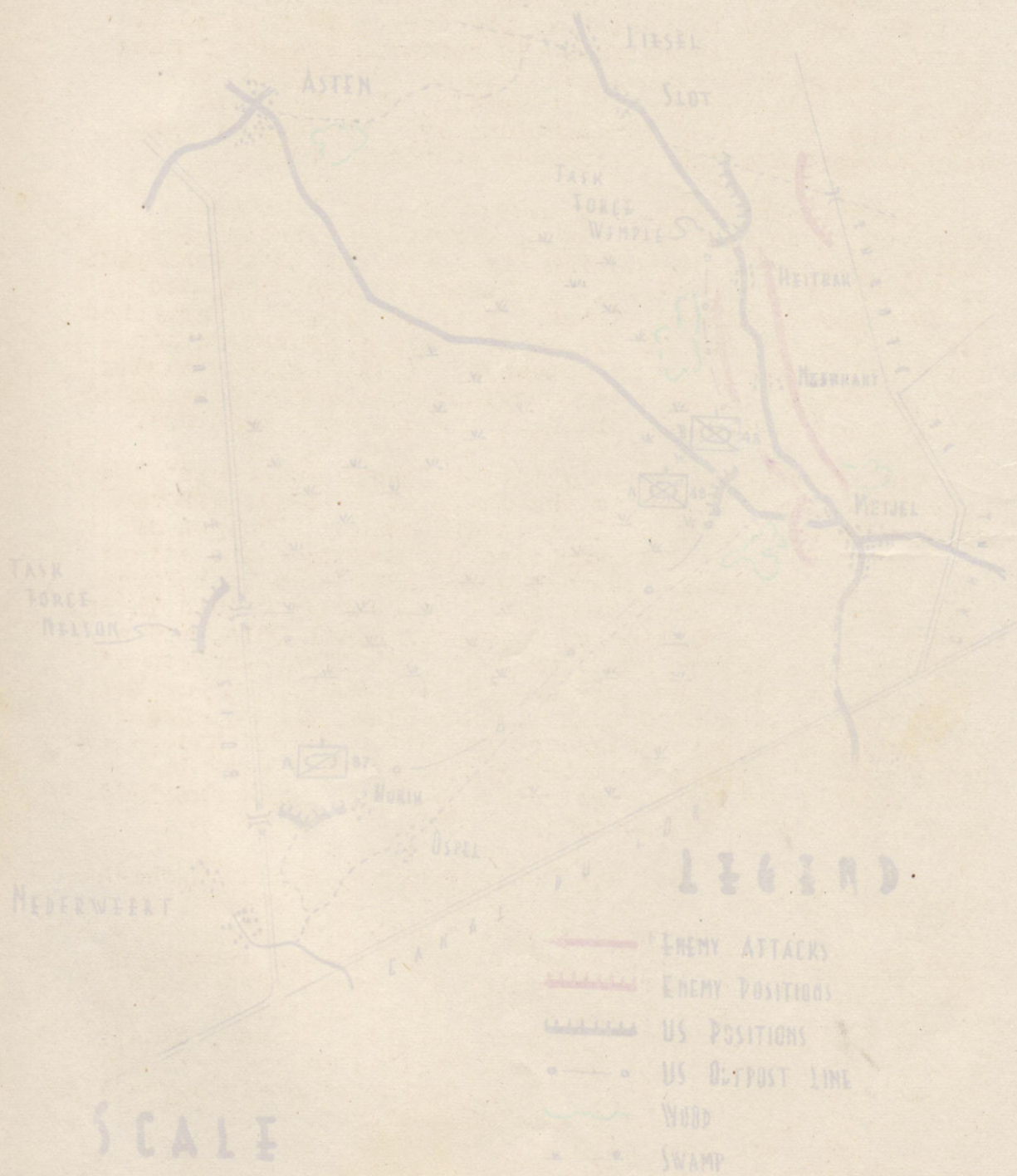
To the south Company A of the 48th AIBn proceeded to the edge of a woods south of Meijel (696069) where it also ran into heavy German tank and infantry fire. Two German tanks headed directly for the company CP and began to blast it. A runner came back to the third platoon area and very excitedly told Lt. Wells, the platoon leader, that the company commander, Lt. Allen, had been killed and the CP destroyed. The lieutenant established a perimeter defense around a small group of trees. Lt. Allen subsequently arrived at the perimeter positions, but because of wounds turned the company over to Lt. Wells. (24) The enemy tanks continued to fire, and the company was forced to move back to a house in the vicinity of 688063. (25) During the night the Germans moved around two sides of the house, and when Lt. Wells heard a large patrol on the third side, he decided to move the company back still further. One of the men who spoke German put a pistol in the ribs of a civilian and told him to lead them to the Meijel-Asten road. (26) After wading through the swamps for most of the night, the remainder of the company finally arrived in the vicinity of B Company where they dug in.

The enemy attack to the north from Meijel was first reported by outposts of the 87th Rcn at about 1645.


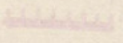
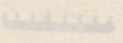
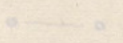

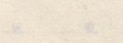
The enemy strikes north Enemy tanks, closely supported by infantry, moved up the road toward Neerkant and scored a hit on one of our tanks. When our returning fire bounced off the front of the enemy armor, our tanks withdrew. (27) The advance of the enemy cut off the third platoon of Troop D of the 87th Rcn and a platoon of Company C of the 48th AIBn which had been sent to the vicinity of Neerkant to guard the artillery for the night. Lt. George Webb, a Company C platoon leader, had just arrived in Neerkant and was talking to the crew of a tank when an M8 armored car pulled up alongside them. The commander announced that German tanks were coming up the road from the south toward Neerkant. A quick reconnaissance revealed that at least three tanks (thought to be Tigers) were approaching followed by supporting infantry in column. (28) By taking his platoon through ditches and across swamps, Lt. Webb

GERMAN THRUSTS TO NORTH AND SOUTH

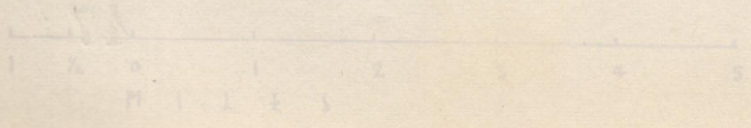
27 OCTOBER



LEGEND

-  ENEMY ATTACKS
-  ENEMY POSITIONS
-  US POSITIONS
-  US OUTPOST LINE
-  WOOD
-  SWAMP

SCALE



S E C R E T

was able to extricate his men from the German lunge. Before the end of the night his platoon was once more back with its company. The enemy tank column, which attacked at this time, was approximately twenty strong. (29)

As the Germans advanced to the north from Meijel the reconnaissance squadron established a new line to the north of Heittrak. The platoon of tank destroyers, which had been in Liesel during the afternoon, was sent to this new line to assist in the defense. By 1730 the enemy had crept toward this new position and was firing on our lines from ranges as close as 200 yards. Our tanks and TD's fired with everything they had, and artillery was called for continually. Many enemy were seen to drop and the attack was stopped. (30)

Heavy enemy artillery and small arms fire was received throughout the night, and enemy patrols were extremely active. By moving the tanks and TD's from time to time during the night, the enemy was kept confused as to their location. Several patrols closely approached our positions. One TD commander heard a nearby German call out; "Surrender my company." (31) Local security for the tanks and TD's was provided by the few dismounted troops that were available from the security sections.

To the south the enemy thrust toward Nederweert had made some progress during the day, but no major effort appeared to be expended in this direction. Troop A of the 87th Ren bore the brunt of the attack during the day until 1701 when Task Force Nelson, consisting of Company C 40th Tk Bn, a platoon of Company A 814th TD's, and a platoon of infantry from Company A 38th AIBn, arrived at the bridge across the Bois Le Duc (613052). During the night the platoon of Company A 38th AIBn, the remainder of Troop A 87th Reconnaissance and Troop B 87th Reconnaissance (withdrawn from the Meijel sector) were in line along the Horik-Meijel road, but the tanks remained on the west side of the canal. (32)

Southern thrust

At days end, the 87th Reconnaissance Squadron which had withstood the initial shock of the attack was substantially reinforced by CCR. The enemy had been successful in pushing large forces of infantry and tanks across his bridgehead, but had been unable to expand beyond the Meijel-Heittrak area. He did, however, occupy a favorable position if he were inclined to continue the attack the following day. (33) Estimated enemy casualties were 45 dead, 115 wounded, and 47 captured. Our losses for the day were estimated as two killed, 31 wounded, and 47 missing.

Results of first day

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THE SECOND DAY

Conferences between the commanding general of the 7th Armored Division and Lt General O'Connor, Commander 8 (British) Corps, were held on the afternoon 27 October. By mid-afternoon the second German thrust had made plain the intent of the enemy to pursue his aggressive policy in the sector of the 7th Armored. To counter the enemy force, now firmly established across the bridgehead, it would be necessary to throw in more troops than were then available to the division. Almost the entire force of CCR had been committed during the day. CCA would have to remain in position to guard against a thrust in its direction, and CCB was committed in the bridgehead sector. The most readily available force was CCB, within easy distance and on the flank. Accordingly the corps issued an order relieving CCB of its responsibility in the Griendtsveen bridgehead sector along the Deurne-Amerika road. The right flank of the British 11 Armored Division was moved south to include the sector formerly held by CCB. At 272045 the relief by the British was complete, and CCB moved to assembly positions in the vicinity Rinkveld-Leensel-Liesel preparatory to attack the next day.

Plans

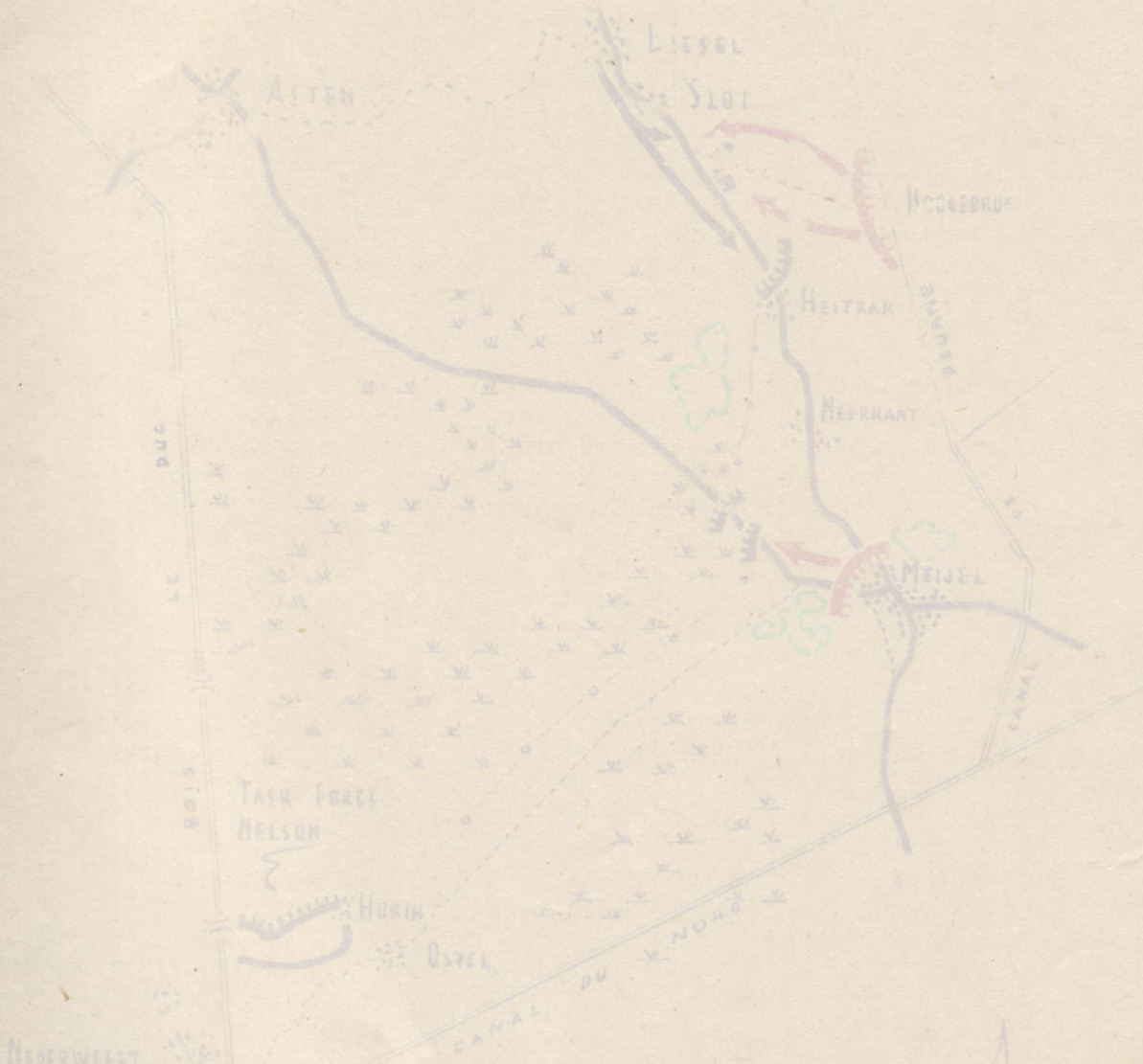
The division issued operations instructions at 272100. The assigned mission was to attack and seize Meijel and drive the enemy from the division zone. The attacking forces were to include CCR, CCB, and Task Force Nelson of CCA. CCR was composed of the 48th AIBn, a platoon of medium tanks from the 17th Tk Bn, Troops B and C of the 87th Rcn, a platoon of engineers, and a platoon of tank destroyers. CCB absorbed Task Force Wemple, and had in addition the 23rd AIBn and the 31st Tk Bn. CCB was to establish liaison with the British 11 Armored Division on the north. CCA, with the exception of Task Force Nelson, was to continue its present holding mission. The Belgian Brigade was to do likewise.

Enemy potentialities were still not clearly determined. During 27 October definite identification was made of only one company of the 9th Panzer Division. Other units, consisting of an assortment of paratroop and ground force elements, were still active on the front as far as could be determined. (34) Although the enemy was capable of reinforcing his strength in this sector, it was decided that he was not yet strong enough to withstand our coordinated assault.








Our forces were in control of the two major roads converging on Meijel. Our attacks were of necessity focused down these routes because of the extremely swampy

ACTION SECOND DAY

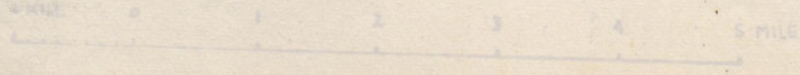
28 OCTOBER



LEGEND

-  US ATTACKS
-  ENEMY ATTACKS
-  US POSITIONS
-  ENEMY POSITIONS
-  OUTPOST LINE TROOP "D" 87th REG
-  WOOD
-  SWAMP

SCALE



•RDS•

S E C R E T

terrain. Tanks were capable of operating on the main roads, but could not maneuver off them any great distance without becoming bogged down. While the sky was cloudy, visibility was good.

The plan was for CCR to attack down the Asten-Meijel road, to seize and hold the southern portion of Meijel, and to secure the line of the Deurne and Nord canals in its assigned zone. CCA was to attack across the Bois le Duc canal to seize that portion of the Nord canal in its zone. The main effort was to be made by CCB, which would attack astride the Liesel-Meijel road, pass through Task Force Wemple which would hold in its present positions, and continue on to Meijel to seize the north portion of the town and secure the line of the Deurne canal in its zone. H hour was to be 280700.

The attacking force of CCB consisted of three companies of the 23rd AIBn and two companies of the 31st Tk Bn. The scheme of maneuver adopted by the commanding general CCB was for Companies A and C of the 23rd AIBn to proceed astride the road toward Meijel with Company A of the 31st Tk Bn in immediate support; while Company B of the 23d AIBn, Company C of the 31st Tk Bn, the assault gun and mortar platoons of the 31st Tk Bn, a platoon of TD's, and a platoon of engineers branched off the main road at 682129 and attacked southeast along the Hoogebrug road to destroy the bridge the enemy had erected across the canal. Company D of the 31st Tk Bn was to remain in reserve in the assembly area. (Company B of the 31st was still in division reserve.)

The main effort

The attacking force moved out at 0700 as planned. The dismounted infantry was disposed on either side of the road with Company A on the left, Company C on the right, and the tanks following. The forces progressed about 1000 yards to Slot by 0815 against little more than light artillery, some mortar, and a slight amount of machine gun fire. At Slot the artillery fire noticeably increased in intensity, especially to the east of the road. In addition considerable small arms and automatic fire was directed at Company A. The fire became so intense that the company was stopped. With some difficulty. Company A disengaged itself from the enemy and crossed over to the east of the road behind Company C. After passing the road junction where Company B branched off for the canal, Company A was once more able to cover its assigned zone on the left side of the road, and the advance continued.

S E C R E T

By 1400 Company C on the right had reached the outskirts of Heittrak, and had dug into position to await the arrival of Company A. Mortar, machine gun, and artillery fire directed from the flank against Company A was extremely heavy. Those rounds which didn't land in the Company A sector went over into the Company C sector. At 1400 General Hasbrouck, the CCB commander, ordered the suspension of all offensive actions. (35) Company C was drawn back on the high ground to its rear on line with Company A after a temporary gap between the companies had been filled by the heavy machine gun and reconnaissance platoons of the battalion headquarters.

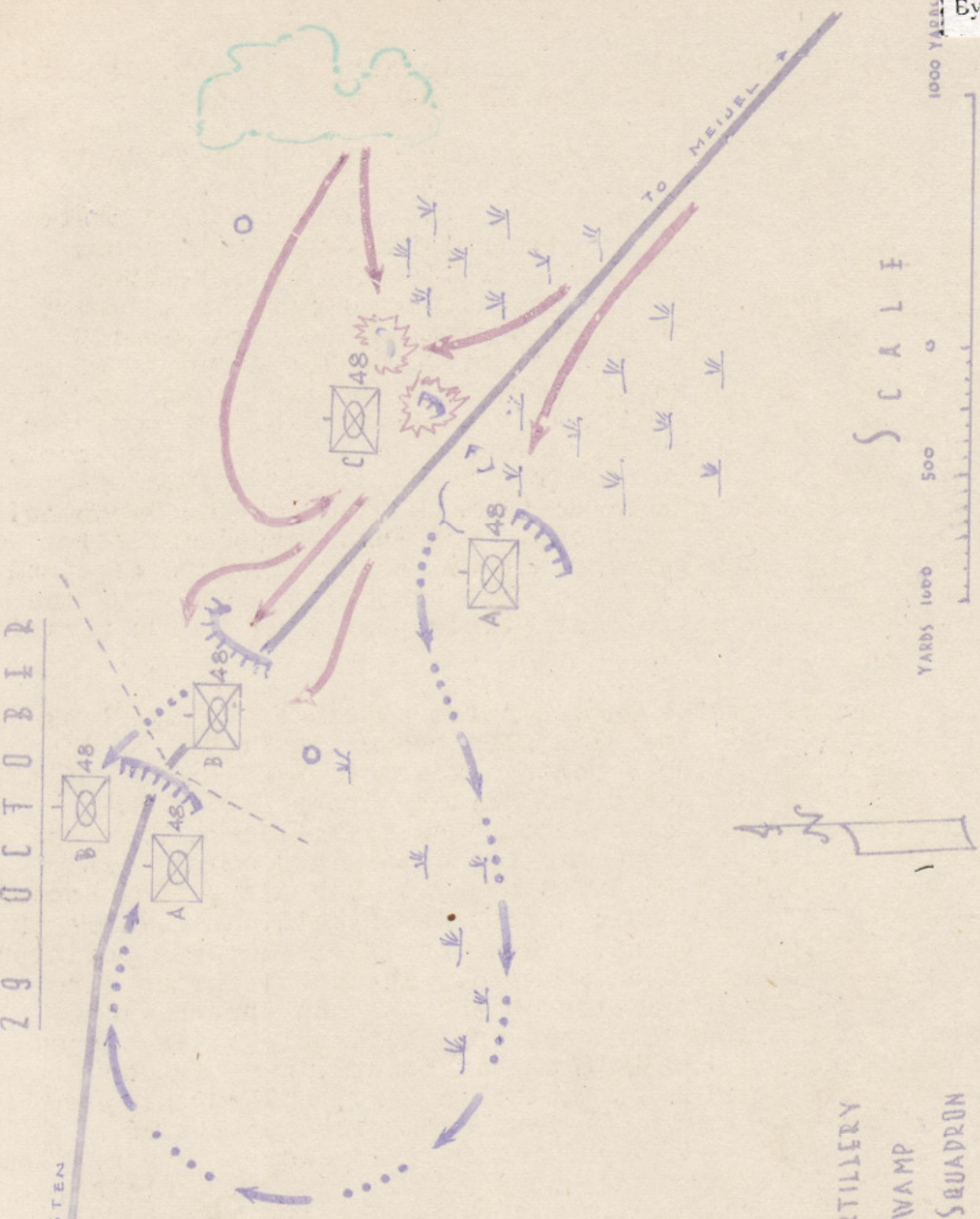
Meanwhile the force heading for the canal at Hoogebrug immediately ran into heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. The enemy had a planned concentration for the road junction at 682129 which he laid down any time troops attempted to pass it. As the force moved across the junction, the enemy fire was so intense that the platoon of the 814 TD's, which was to protect the left flank of the advancing force, was unable to see the road junction 50 yards away. (36) Enemy machine gun, small arms, artillery, and mortar fire increased as the force advanced. Soon direct fire weapons were brought to bear on the tanks which had gotten slightly ahead of the infantry, and in a short time five of the tanks were knocked out. (37) Lt. Whiteman of Company B called for a rolling barrage. The infantry followed the barrage at 100 yards. (38) The barrage moved forward 600 yards. Our attack progressed 600 yards. Then the heavy enemy fire forced our troops once more to dig in. They held in those positions for the rest of the day. Considerable enemy movement was noticed to their front, and much artillery fire was called for.

Concurrent with the main thrust down the road from Liesel to Meijel, CCR was to push down the Asten-Meijel road. The attacking force was to consist of Companies A and B of the 48th AIBn with Company A of the 17th Tk Bn. Company C of the 48th Our secondary thrusts AIBn was to be in reserve, but was not relieved of its flank mission until 0500. Consequently it arrived too late to receive the attack order, and it set up defensive positions astride the road. With it were several tank destroyers and a platoon of tanks. The attack by CCR was never launched because of the strong enemy pressure to the front.

In CCA sector Task Force Nelson was directed to attack to the south and east on order. An attack started but made little progress. The forces were

ENEMY ATTACK TOWARD ASTEN

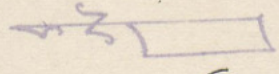
29 OCTOBER



LEGEND

- ENEMY ATTACKS
- WITHDRAWAL
- ALLIED HEAVY ARTILLERY
- WOOD
- SWAMP
- OUTPOSTS 87th RECON SQUADRON
- PLATOON POSITIONS CO "C"

SCALE
1000 YARDS
500



S E C R E T

successful in pushing to the vicinity of Horik. Positions were established along the Horik-Meijel road.

German forces lodged in Meijel began to indicate their aggressive intentions early in the day. To the west of Meijel the enemy appeared to be content with holding down our forces. The enemy counters toward Asten His tanks patrolled the Meijel-Asten road and in addition forces of infantry with machine guns and mortars covered any attempts by Companies A and B of the 48th AIBn to move. Company A observed seven enemy tanks which were firing in all directions. At periodic intervals the tanks aimed rounds down the straight road. (39) CCR requested an air mission on the column of tanks and smoke was fired to mark them for the Typhoons. The attack was carried out. One tank burned and three others were seen burning. (40) Enemy pressure remained strong throughout the day, but Companies A and B of the 48th were able to maintain their positions in the vicinity 690078.

Further east a German force attempted to outflank the positions of the 48th AIBn by moving around to the north. Around 1000 a force estimated at 65 enemy built up to attack the positions held by Troop C 87th Ren. This enemy force was blasted back by artillery fire and assault guns. At 1600 another determined thrust was made against Troop C and Company C 48th AIBn. The second platoon of Troop C held positions slightly in advance of the other two platoons. The enemy flanked these positions on both sides and then charged. The heavy mortar fire had caved in the foxholes of the men and thrown dirt into almost all of the weapons. With only a few weapons functioning and the enemy on both sides, the platoon leader, Lt. Charles A. Robertson, Jr., ordered his men to withdraw to a ditch between the first and third platoons while he covered their withdrawal with a machine gun. The lieutenant was wounded but continued firing, and the men successfully withdrew. The lieutenant was not seen again, and the platoon retired past the positions of the other two platoons. The enemy continued forward and was partially successful in penetrating our lines. Our tanks engaged the advancing armor and one of our mediums was knocked out, another damaged, and the other two abandoned until nightfall when they were recovered. (41) Despite this penetration the enemy was not able to exploit his advance because of the considerable artillery fire which was placed on his positions.

Enemy thrusts north from Meijel drove Troop D 87th Ren out of its outposts during the morning. The troop

S E C R E T

withdrew to the vicinity of Liesel. Enemy infantrymen with mortars and machine guns were observed advancing, and were taken under fire. The church steeple at Neerkant became an enemy OP until tank artillery and TD fire chopped it down. But the main enemy pressure was brought to bear on the flank facing the Deurne Canal.

Company B of the 23d AIBn and supporting tanks ran into strong enemy opposition as they approached the canal down the Hoogebrug road. Apparently the enemy intended to use this route to attack our forces on the flank. His attacking force met with ours and was driven back slightly. The enemy then attempted to circle to the north of our force, cutting between them and Liesel. Tank destroyers engaged some of the enemy tanks and knocked out two with the loss of two of their destroyers. (42)

The assault platoon of the 31st Tk Bn, which was guarding the left flank of Company B, 23d AIBn, spotted a column of German tanks. The platoon knocked five of them out with the loss of only one assault gun. (43)

The heavy artillery concentrations called for by the forward observer with Company B helped stop the enemy advance. At dusk Company B of the 23d was given an order to withdraw 500 yards along the Hoogebrug road in order to shorten the line between its forces and those along the road to Meijel. Even with this shortened line, our defensive positions were dangerously thin. The gap was plugged with dismounted troops of the 814th TD's. Troop D of the 87th Ren was sent around from Liesel to fill the gap along the right flank of the CCB sector, and it outposted between Company C of the 23d AIBn and Company B of the 48th AIBn. Thus the lines were somewhat consolidated, but the territory between the main body of CCB to the north of Heittrak and Company B of the 23rd AIBn on the road to Hoogebrug presented a dangerous wedge which if exploited by the enemy, could result in severing the CCB forces. (44)

At the close of the day CCR forces had held their ground, but were in a precarious position because of strong enemy infiltrations on the north flank and along the Meijel-Asten road. Results of second day CCB forces were dug in defensively along a broad front, and had generally contained the German thrust from Meijel and around its north flank. However, it was known that the enemy was in considerable strength to the east of our lines along the Hoogebrug road.

S E C R E T

Enemy casualties for the day were estimated at 100 dead, 150 wounded, and 71 captured. For the same period our casualties were estimated to be nine killed, 45 wounded, and two missing. (45)

There was more air activity on both sides. Six missions were flown in the sector on division call, and three more on corps call. Tanks were hit five times, bridges three times, and Meijel once. Results were generally unobserved because of dust kicked up by the 60 pound rockets of the Spitfires and Typhoons. (46) German planes in their first appearance in this sector bombed and strafed positions of our troops in the Asten area. Damage and casualties were inflicted on the landing strip for the artillery liaison planes.

THE SECOND NIGHT

At 281600 enemy strength was still calculated to consist of the 9th Panzer Division plus miscellaneous units previously holding in the area. The commanding general believed that the enemy forces could be driven back. The 25 (British) Field Artillery

Our plans Regiment was now in support of our troops, and one brigade of the 15 Scottish Division was moving to the vicinity of Vlierden-Asten. Accordingly the division issued operations instructions directing that the attack be continued in the morning. CCB was to seize and hold Miel and secure the line of the Deurne and Nord canals. CCR was to consolidate and hold its present positions and then clear the enemy from its assigned zone, securing the line of the Nord canal in its sector.

By the end of the second day, elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division were engaged on the division front. Enemy tank strength across the bridgehead was estimated at from 20-30 tanks, and prisoners stated that there were some 76 tanks with the attacking forces. (47)

Evaluation of the reason for the German thrust was revised as a result of the identification of this second enemy division. At first it had been thought that the enemy attack was a diversion to release pressure on the Tilburg-Hertogenbosch area. Such a diversion might be accomplished by a division which could break through our screen and disrupt our defense in the sector. But with two divisions available and committed, it was logical to presume a larger goal. A probable explanation

NIGHT ACTION - SECOND DAY

28 OCTOBER

LEGEND

- ENEMY ATTACKS
- US WITHDRAWAL
- WITHDRAWAL POSITIONS
- PLATOON POSITIONS OF CO "E"
- WOOD
- SWAMP
- INUNDATED AREA



25

DECLASSIFIED
Authority: NND 935217
By: MNAEA Date: 09/25/99

S E C R E T

was that this was an attempt to reestablish a firm bridgehead across the Meuse around Venlo which, if reinforced and maintained, would threaten our lines of communication and force us to shift our forces to this bridgehead before any other major offensive could be launched. (48) It might furthermore be presumed that the enemy was hopeful that, if he could maintain surprise in his attack, he might be capable of forcing a major breakthrough which could be exploited into a counter-offensive to cut the Holland corridor or at the least recapture Eindhoven. (49)

During the night the enemy further indicated his aggressive intentions by increasing activity along both CCB and CCR sectors. In the CCR sector enemy tanks in large numbers were heard on the Meijel-Asten road, artillery fire was very intense, and patrolling was active. The forces of Companies A and B of the 48th AIBn observed or heard additional German infiltrations. They were soon aware that enemy troops were on three sides of them. Word was sent back to battalion headquarters where Lt. Colonel Chappuis had received permission from Col Ryan, who had talked to the general, to withdraw his troops before they were completely cut off. Lt. Tucker, the battalion motor officer, volunteered to lead a four-man patrol to the positions of Companies A and B and guide them back to the battalion CP. A box barrage was to be fired to screen the withdrawal. Lt. Tucker and one man were successful in reaching the forward positions, and at midnight the companies began the withdrawal. Lt. Tucker led with the two companies in single file behind him. (50) A break occurred in the file, and Company B with some of Company A found itself without a leader in territory known to be occupied by the enemy. Guiding on the flash of the friendly artillery, two burning houses, and a burning haystack, this latter group struck off across country to return to the battalion CP. Both sections were successfully withdrawn, and before dawn were dug in defensive positions. Company A dug in on the right flank of Company C, and Company B was dug in behind the two forward elements. (51)

As the enemy pressure began to increase during the early evening of the 28th and his intentions were re-evaluated, it became apparent that enemy potentialities for the next day were extremely favorable to the attack. In addition to the 9th Panzer and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions on our front, the XLVII Panzer Corps had recently established headquarters in Venlo, and the 116th Panzer Division was identified in the vicinity of Steinstrass about 35 miles distant.

Revision of our plans

S E C R E T

The commanding general of CCB in evaluating his position found that the loss of 10 to 12 medium tanks had so weakened his forces that an attack in strength would not be possible. If he attacked toward the bridge at Hoogebrug he would need to reinforce his effort by a medium tank company and a company of infantry. That would leave the southern attacking force with only one infantry company and part of a tank company. Any attack to the south would present a long flank to the enemy. (52)

In the light of this information the division revised its orders at 282100, and directed all forces to consolidate and hold their present positions.

THE THIRD DAY

During the early morning 29 October, enemy activity throughout the sector was marked by aggressive patrols and intermittent artillery fire. Listening posts heard considerable movement of enemy vehicles. At 0410 a guard at the vehicle park for CCB in Liesel heard tracked vehicles moving to the west. Going to another guard, he asked him if he noticed the noises, but the second guard replied: "Oh hell, its the British." (53)

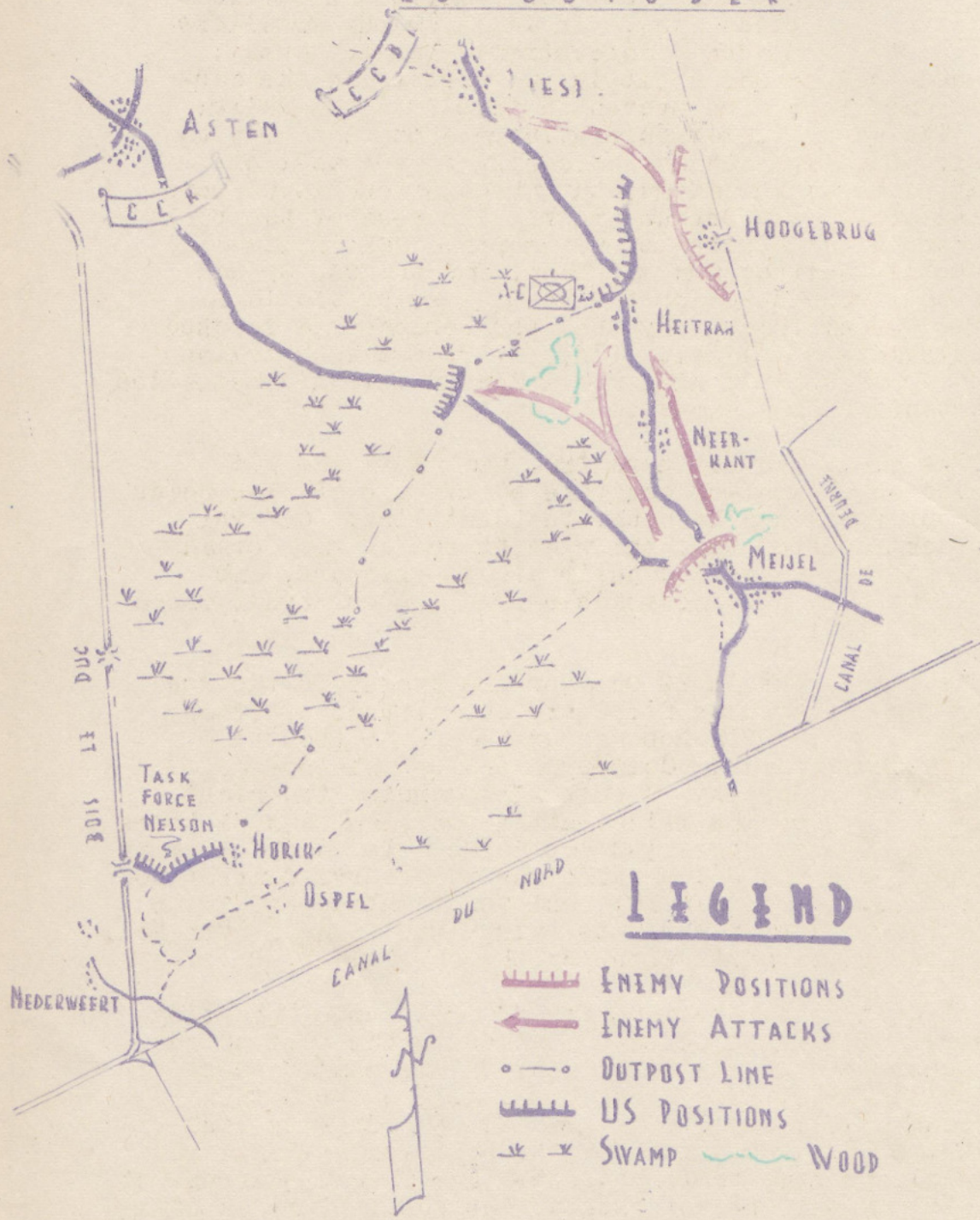
The enemy attacks However, at 0715 Company D of the 17th Tk Bn, which was screening directly to the east of Liesel, reported 150-200 enemy troops, accompanied by four tanks, approaching from the east. The tanks were very possibly those which had been heard at 0410. To the south in the sector of Company B 23d AIBn, astride the Hoogebrug road, a strong enemy patrol advanced in the dark and set fire to the barn in which the company CP was located. Guided by the fire the German troops attacked. The fire provided the necessary light for Company B to lay down a heavy volume of machine gun and small arms fire on the advancing waves and columns of enemy. Lt. Whiteman and the forward observers called for artillery and mortar fire to be placed on the enemy. Numerous casualties were inflicted, and at about dawn the enemy retreated to a row of trees to the east of our defensive positions.

The enemy was launching a double attack against our defenses. One prong of the attack was aimed at Asten up the Meijel road, and the second prong was directed toward Liesel, and could either angle west to Asten or north to Deurne. Subsequent events showed that his scheme of maneuver called for a flanking thrust at Liesel to cut off the defending forces along the Meijel-Liesel road.

Shortly after the pre-dawn attack against Company B 23d AIBn on the Hoogebrug road, an enemy force was

THE ENEMY ATTACKS LIESEL AND TOWARD ASTEN

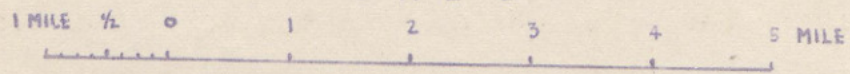
29 OCTOBER



LEGEND

- ENEMY POSITIONS
- ENEMY ATTACKS
- OUTPOST LINE
- US POSITIONS
- SWAMP
- WOOD

SCALE



-RDS-

DECLASSIFIED
 Authority: *WNAFA*
 By: *WNAFA*
 Date: *09/25/95*

S E C R E T

sighted turning off the road from the Hoogebrug bridge on to a small road leading to Liesel.

The attack
against
Liesel

The turning column was hit by machine gun fire from our positions about 1000 yards away. In addition our artillery placed a concentration on the enemy.

The enemy column was split in two parts, and the continued artillery fire prevented them from rejoining. (54) The enemy formation continued along the road to Liesel. Our light tanks, screening to the east of Liesel, engaged the enemy, but three of our tanks were knocked out by the German armor. The rest of the tanks were forced to withdraw to the north. CCB in Liesel was hastily alerted for movement, and the CCB CP and motor pool were moved to the west, leaving the town for the German force. By 0840 the Germans had reached the outskirts of Liesel. (55) At 0900 the battalion commander of the 23d AIBn was informed that his battalion was cut off from the rear.

The enemy had hit hard from the flank and had achieved an element of surprise by the use of back roads which our tanks had been unable to utilize. General Hasbrouck asserted that the wide treads on the German tanks materially reduced their ground pressure, and allowed them to utilize roads over which our tanks could not move. (56)

As dawn broke on 29 October the troops in the CCR sector were arrayed as follows: one platoon of Troop C 87th Ren was on the right (south) flank; Company A and one platoon of Company C 48th AIBn were on the right of the Meijel-Asten road, and two platoons of Company C 48th AIBn were on the left of the road; Company B 48th AIBn was in reserve further to the rear astride this road; and the remainder of Troop C with a few light tanks, was tying into Troop D 87th Ren, which was on the south flank of the CCB forces.

The attack
against
Asten

At dawn large enemy forces of tanks and supporting infantry moving from the large woods to the east of our positions attacked the left flank of the main forces astride the road. The tanks completely overran the positions of Company C 48th AIBn and the defense line was shattered. A TD fired at the approaching tanks but was unable to stop their advance. The TD was overrun but shot its way out and got back up the road. (57) A 57mm gun was dug in guarding the approaches to the road, but could not be turned to fire to the rear where the Germans were approaching. (58) One German tank commander put his

S E C R E T

gun in the window of the house where the company CP was located, and forced the surrender of all but two men who ran down a ditch outside the house. Although heavy enemy fire was falling on the right flank, no enemy tanks came into that sector.

With the collapse of the other flank Company A and the remaining platoon of Company C concluded that their position was hopeless. An immediate withdrawal was begun toward the battalion CP. Lts. Wells and Webb, assuming that the enemy tanks and infantry had continued on up the road toward Asten, made a wide arc through the swamps so as not to come up behind this force. Eventually they were successful in reaching the battalion headquarters where they immediately reorganized their men, hastily appointing squad leaders and establishing new squads. (59)

Company B of the 48th AIBn now the front line troops, could see the Germans advancing from the east. They could also observe a large force of infantry in a solid column advancing on the road about 1000 yards to the southwest of the main road. Some few men at this time became panicky and went forward to the German lines with their hands up. (60) However, the main group was consolidated and formed into a hook-shaped defense running north of the road at 673095. German tanks were cruising up and down the road to the east, and enemy infantry was already on both sides of Company B's position. Major Frazier, the battalion S-3, went back at this time to form a strong point about 500 yards to the west of the Company B position. He told Captain Vogelsang Company Commander, Company B to hold until the new force could be gathered together, and then to withdraw to the new position. (61)

Meanwhile the enemy forces had been receiving a very severe artillery concentration. A forward observer with Troop D of the 87th Rcn was able to obtain excellent observation of the German columns, and he called for all the fire he could get. Six enemy tanks were seen to burn. (62)

Our heavy artillery, augmented by two more British artillery regiments, slowed the German advance and gave our troops time to reorganize after the breakthrough. Major Frazier assembled three tank destroyers, five tanks, and about 80 infantrymen, including the remainder of Company A, and set up a perimeter defense around the road junction at 669096. Company B withdrew to this position.

S E C R E T

The Germans continued the assault with both tanks and infantry. The defending force knocked out seven enemy tanks and three armored vehicles. (63) Several artillery forward observers were present and directed heavy concentrations on the Germans with extremely effective results. Subsequent PW and other reports indicated that a battalion of Germans had barely completed movement into the woods to the west of our position and had not dug in when we placed a heavy concentration on the woods. Nearly the entire battalion was wiped out by our fire. The mortars and machine guns of the battalion, later augmented by the heavy machine guns, were utilized and the strongpoint was able to repulse further enemy advances.

Despite the loss of Liesel the main force of CCB remained in position astride the Meijel-Liesel road.

Attack Pressure against Companies A and C of
against CCB the 23d AIBn to the south was light during the morning, although PW's reported enemy tank concentrations in Heittrak. At 0900 the tanks of Company B of the 17th Tk Bn were withdrawn on order of the battalion commander, but at 1125 four of the tanks were sent back to the infantry. About 1300 Companies A and C of the 23d AIBn moved back to more favorable positions a few hundred yards to the north.

Late in the afternoon a large tank battle started. German tanks, closely followed by infantry, again began moving from the south toward our positions astride the Heittrak-Liesel road. Eleven enemy tanks were seen by Company A of the 23d AIBn and others were observed to the front of Company C. Our tanks duelled with the enemy but results were inconclusive. (64) Heavy artillery concentrations were placed on the enemy formations. (65)

At dusk Company E of the 23d received its heaviest counter-attack of the day. Our tanks had just withdrawn to cover positions when the enemy, estimated at company strength, began to approach Company B. One column headed for them on the road, and the others came across the fields in a skirmish line. Our machine guns were able to deliver cross-fire on the field, and had a machine gun trained down the road. The Germans were driven back with heavy losses. Our artillery forward observer called for and received artillery fire 100 yards in front of the defending positions. (66)

Immediately after the loss of Liesel the commanding general CCB sent a company of medium tanks from the 31st

S E C R E T

Tk Bn, a platoon of TD's, and a company of the 33rd
Engineers to reinforce our lines to
We counter the west and north of the town.
at Liesel Three German tanks were knocked out
by these forces. (67)

At about 1330 this force was ordered to attack
and clear the enemy from Liesel. The attack was to
be from the north so that the long axis of the town
would be presented to the attacking troops. In this
way less fire could be placed on our troops as they
advanced. (68) With the assault gun platoon and the
TD's firing supporting mission, Company B of the engineers
began to work its way through the town. They had pro-
gressed about half-way when they were ordered to halt.
About this time the division received word of the
proposed relief by the British. When the British in-
dicated they would set up defensive lines to the west
of Liesel, the commanding general decided to abandon
the attack. (69) The troops were withdrawn and on
CCB request, an air mission flown over the town.

Enemy pressure and intentions forced a decision
to strengthen the sector. Conferences between the 7th
Armored Division and 8 (British) Corps
The relief commanders resulted in the decision to
shorten the front of the 7th Armored by
bringing in a new division to take over
part of the sector. Orders were issued by the division
at 1630 29 October directing movement of CCB and CCR
to assembly areas upon relief by the 15th Scottish
Division. Relief was to be effective after dusk on the
29th.

Immediately after dusk British forces established
positions to the rear of our forces. One position was
about 1000 yards to the west of our strongpoint on the
Meijel-Asten road, and the other position was on the
Liesel-Asten road about 2000 yards to the rear of our
forward positions.

The night of the 29th was a brilliant moonlight
night. The forces in the CCB sector were faced with the
difficult task of disengaging themselves from an enemy
in close proximity to their front and astride the main
road to their rear. A small road with a log bridge was
discovered to the west of the main road, and plans were
made for the withdrawal over this road. Subsequent testing
proved that the bridge was not strong enough to hold the
vehicles, so a peep was driven into the creek to serve
as a foundation. Logs were placed over the peep, and a
substantial bridge thus constructed. However, the tank

forces were unable to cross over the bridge. Another bridge was discovered about 500 yards south of Liesel, and the tanks were able to utilize that route even though it was perilously close to the enemy. One company of light tanks circled the German positions at Liesel, crossed the Meijel-Liesel road and passed through the woods. The enemy was not inactive. Tankers reported the artillery concentrated on the woods through which they passed was the heaviest they had encountered since they had been in action. (70) Companies A and C of the 23d AIBn were finally successful in disengaging themselves despite the precarious maneuver of withdrawing across the front of the enemy. (71)

Major share for the successful withdrawal went to the combined British and American artillery which fired a continuous screen in front of the troops. The barrage in front of the CCB sector was so effective that the British did not make contact with the enemy until the next morning. (72) In the CCR sector the barrage started in front of the British positions and moved down about 200 yards to the front of the defensive positions. (73) The artillery could fire 2 rounds per minute or 8 to 10 rounds per minute as the situation required. (74)

Enemy casualties for the day amounted to an estimated 115 killed, 165 wounded, and 13 captured. Our casualties were seven killed, 54 wounded, and 233 missing.

Losses (75) A heavy toll was taken of enemy armor on the 29th. Seventeen enemy tanks were confirmed, six were probable, and 17 more were hit from the air with undetermined results. (76) In addition three enemy assault guns and three 88 mm AT guns were destroyed. The 7th Armored lost seven medium and six light tanks, five TD's, one medium tank, M4 with 105 mm assault gun, five half-tracks, one armored car, and nine other vehicles.

DAMAGE ASSESSED

In three days of heavy fighting the enemy had enlarged his bridgehead across the Meuse river, but at a heavy cost in personnel and armor. His offensive power had been stayed, and the new bridgehead contained short of the first objective, Asten. (77) Our forces had withstood the thrust long enough to allow Army to bring up the needed reinforcements. (78)

Observed enemy losses in equipment for the three day battle were five anti-tank guns, six 88mm guns, ten Mark V tanks, and 20 Mark VI tanks. Our losses were 32 medium tanks, 13 light tanks, 5 Medium tank M4 with 105 mm assault gun, 14 half tracks (personnel carrier), two M8

armored cars, 2 M8 Assault guns, seven tank destroyers, three half track mortar carriers M21 and 45 peeps. (79)

WE COUNTERATTACK

Relief of the 7th Armored Division from the northern zone of its canal line sector did not materially alter the mission of the division. Operations in the Scheldt Estuary and to the south of the Maas River were drawing to a conclusion, but no major counter-thrusts against the Germans were to be made until additional units were returned from the western Holland sector. Consequently 8 (British) Corps decided to make a limited attack to restore the line of the Deurne and Nord canals to insure protection of the lines of communication pending the conclusion of the Scheldt operation.

Prelude

The 8 (British) Corps commander decided upon a coordinated attack by the 7th U.S. Armored and the 15 Scottish Divisions to restore the line of the Deurne-Nord canals. The corps plan was that the 15 Scottish Division would recapture Meijel while the 7th Armored attacked to the south, clearing the enemy along the Nord canal. The attack was to take place at dawn 31 October.

As plans went forward for the attack on the 31st, additional information and identifications of the enemy caused a revision of the original scheme of maneuver. By the time relief of the 7th Armored by the 15 Scottish Division had been completed, all four Panzer Grenadier Regiments of the 9th Panzer and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions had been identified, and in every case with substantial support from tanks and artillery. (80) The 9th SS Panzer Division and the 344th Infantry Division were both reported in the general vicinity of Roermond and the 116th Panzer Division was reported in Steinstrass. (81) During the night 30-31 October the enemy indicated his aggressive intentions by constructing a footbridge across the Wessem canal at 640957, and constructing other smaller bridges and cuts and various points in the canals. (82) It was entirely possible for the enemy to make a new thrust against our right flank along the Wessem canal. This thrust would have seriously endangered our supply lines which paralleled the front line for a considerable distance.

The commanding general of the 8 (British) Corps in a meeting with the commanding general of the 7th Armored

S E C R E T

Division emphasized the importance of Nederweert, Weert, and Bree to the Allied plan of operations for this area. He instructed the 7th Armored Division to watch carefully the area to the south and be ready to send troops there if any enemy thrust should be made in the direction of Weert, Bree, or Kimroy. (83)

In the light of the enemy potentialities, the attack scheduled for dawn of the 31st was postponed. A further regrouping of the forces was deemed necessary prior to any coordinated attempt to remove the enemy from his new canal bridgehead. The 4 British Armored Brigade was attached to the division on 30 October, and on 31 October it assumed responsibility for the sector along the Wessem canal. On 1 November the 158 Brigade of the British 53 Division relieved the 4 Armored Brigade, and responsibility for the Wessem canal sector passed to the 53 Division. Attachment of the Belgian Brigade also ended effective 1800 31 October.

At 2400 31 October Major General Lindsay McDonald Silvester was relieved of his command and Brigadier General Robert W. Hasbrouck assumed command of the division.

PLAN OF ATTACK

Regrouping of the forces having been effected, 8 (British) Corps issued orders to attack 2 November. At 2300 1 November the division distributed operations instructions directing an attack by CCA at 021000A to secure the Canal du Nord, destroy all crossings of the canal, and clear enemy resistance from the division zone. (84) As the enemy was cleared CCA was to be relieved of the responsibility of securing the Canal du Nord to its rear. CCR was to support the attack of CCA by fire from the west banks of Bois le Duc.

It was estimated that about 540 men or a battalion of enemy of the 344th Infantry Division were to be found to the front of the attackers. These troops were thought to be of the Hermann Paratroop Regiment. (85)

The terrain was not favorable to our attack. The division was familiar with the sector inasmuch as a week previously the territory had been occupied by Troop A of the 87th Rcn. Almost half of the sector was swamp land, and the useable road net was extremely limited. Several small towns dotted the landscape, and a minor road net connected them. To the left a large swamp and a peat works formed an almost impenesable barrier to the foot troops, and was certainly impenetrable by armored vehicles.

S E C R E T

The personnel strength of the division was 95%. The shortage in assigned strength was 452 men and in effective strength was 562 men. (86) Combat efficiency was excellent despite the rough fighting of the previous several days. Supplies were adequate, but the effective strength of medium tanks was 65%. In view of the nature of the terrain to be attacked this shortage was not critical because tanks were utilized to a minimum. (87)

CCA was to be composed of the 40th Tk Bn, the 38th AIBn, the 48th AIBn, Company A of the 33d Engineers, Company A and the Reconnaissance Company of the 814th TD's, and Troop A of the 87th Reconnaissance. The division engineers were to be prepared to construct a bridge across the Bois le Duc at 617023 and then prepare the bridge for destruction.

The plan of attack involved the use of two task forces, Fuller and Brown. TF Fuller was composed of the 38th AIBn, Companies A and C of the 40th Tk Bn, and a platoon each of the 814th TD's and 33d Engineers. Task Force Brown consisted of the 40th Tk Bn minus Companies A and C, the 48th AIBn, and a platoon each of the 814th TD's and the 33d Engineers.

The division was to attack and secure a canal line, the opposite side of which was held by the enemy. An attack directly to the east would expose its flank to the enemy during the entire operation. In view of this danger the plan of attack adopted was to attack from the north toward the enemy held canal line, progress through a series of objectives until the canal on the south was reached, and then withdraw to the north to peel off another piece. If the enemy resistance during the first thrust appeared light then the attack might be swung east along the canal bank. (88)

THE FIRST DAY

H hour was to be at 021000A, the line of departure being the outpost lines which had been established several days previously. However, the attack was delayed slightly because the 48th AIBn had difficulty getting to the line of departure. At 1110 TF Brown crossed the LD, and at 1117 TF Fuller jumped off, Companies A and C in squad column with the tanks behind. Ground fog had shrouded vision, but at H hour the fog lifted and two tanks of Company C 40th Tk Bn were knocked out by cross fire of AT guns located in the vicinity of Horik.

COUNTER-ATTACK

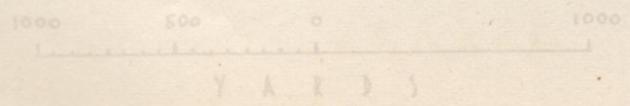
2 - 3 NOVEMBER



LEGEND

- LD — LINE OF DEPARTURE
- ← US ATTACKS
- OUTPOST LINE
- SHADED AREAS INDICATE OBJECTIVES

SCALE



ea

S E C R E T

Task Force Brown was formed in a column of companies with A leading, C following, and B outposting on the left flank as the attack progressed. By 1320 TF Brown was on the 03 grid line approaching Horik. Two enemy tanks had been reported in Horik, and the fire from these tanks or anti-tank guns slowed up the advance on the left flank. Contact between TF Fuller and Brown was temporarily lost, and Fuller, which had met almost no enemy opposition except the cross-fire from Horik, was forced to hold up. Contact was soon reestablished and the advance continued slowly, but at 1430 both forces were slowed down by small arms and anti-tank fire and numerous mines.

In the mid-afternoon the commanding general visited the battlefield and observed that the supporting artillery was not being utilized to the maximum extent. (89) Subsequently he ordered the entire division artillery to strike the town of Horik, and to discourage any enemy who might have pulled back to the next town of Ospel, he called for an air mission there. The line was pushed forward until at nightfall our troops were just short of Horik on the left, and had reached the old bridge site along the canal on the right (617023). Here they buttoned up for the night after establishing outposts along the front.

Our losses for the day were three medium tanks and one light tank. Casualties were 11 wounded. Enemy casualties were unknown.

From 0600 to 0645 on 3 November, the division placed a heavy artillery concentration upon Horik. At the end of this barrage the attack was resumed. Company A of the 48th AIBn split into two columns and converged on Ospel, clearing out houses as they went. By 1400 they had reached Ospel. Little active enemy opposition was encountered, although he had strewn the area with anti-personnel and anti-tank mines laid in a haphazard manner which made their detection very difficult.

Task Force Fuller continued the advance along the Bois le Duc with Companies A and C of the 38th AIBn in the lead. Four snipers were driven out of one house in a charge by a lieutenant who thought he had his whole platoon with him but ended up with only eight men. One of the snipers turned to surrender and attempted to persuade his friends to do likewise. He was shot through the stomach by his comrades. (90)

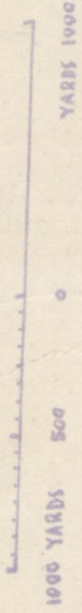
COUNTER-ATTACK CONT'D

3 NOVEMBER

LEGEND

- () ASSEMBLY AREA TASK FORCES
- US ATTACKS
- ▄ MLR 1830 HOURS
- - - LINE OF DEPARTURE
- - - TASK FORCE BOUNDARIES
- ≡ SWAMP

SCALE



(FULLER)

(BROWN)



DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 935217
By MNAFA Date 09/23/99

S E C R E T

By mid-afternoon both forces had reached the third objective of the initial attack. One platoon of Company A of the 48th AIBn worked its way to the banks of the canal where it was able to observe some of the German positions and several log bridges across the canal. (91)

When the final objective of the initial attack was reached, the commanding general decided that, in view of the light enemy resistance, he would speed up the operation by turning the forces and attacking westward rather than withdrawing to the north to peel off another slice. Accordingly assembly areas were designated at Kriejel and Westskamp, and Task Forces Fuller and Brown were to jump off in the afternoon as soon as reorganized to capture the intermediate division objective. Attack on the final objective was changed to be on corps order, so that it might be coordinated with the advance of the 15 Scottish Division toward Meijel.

The revision of the division plan of attack necessitated a modification in the combat command scheme of maneuver. German observation of the entire terrain over which Task Force Brown on the right was to operate was excellent because of the flatness of the land. Operations were shaped by these limitations. Task Force Fuller was to attack and seize the high ground to the west of Nederwerterdijk. Task Force Brown was to attack to the west seizing ground along the 67th north-south grid line. Lt. Colonel Fuller placed Companies A and C of the 38th AIBn in the lead with his tanks still in general support, while Brown placed Company C of the 48th on the right next to the canal and Company B on the left. Company A was to outpost toward the canal as the attack moved forward. The tanks were situated inland from the canal to avoid the German anti-tank guns along the flank.

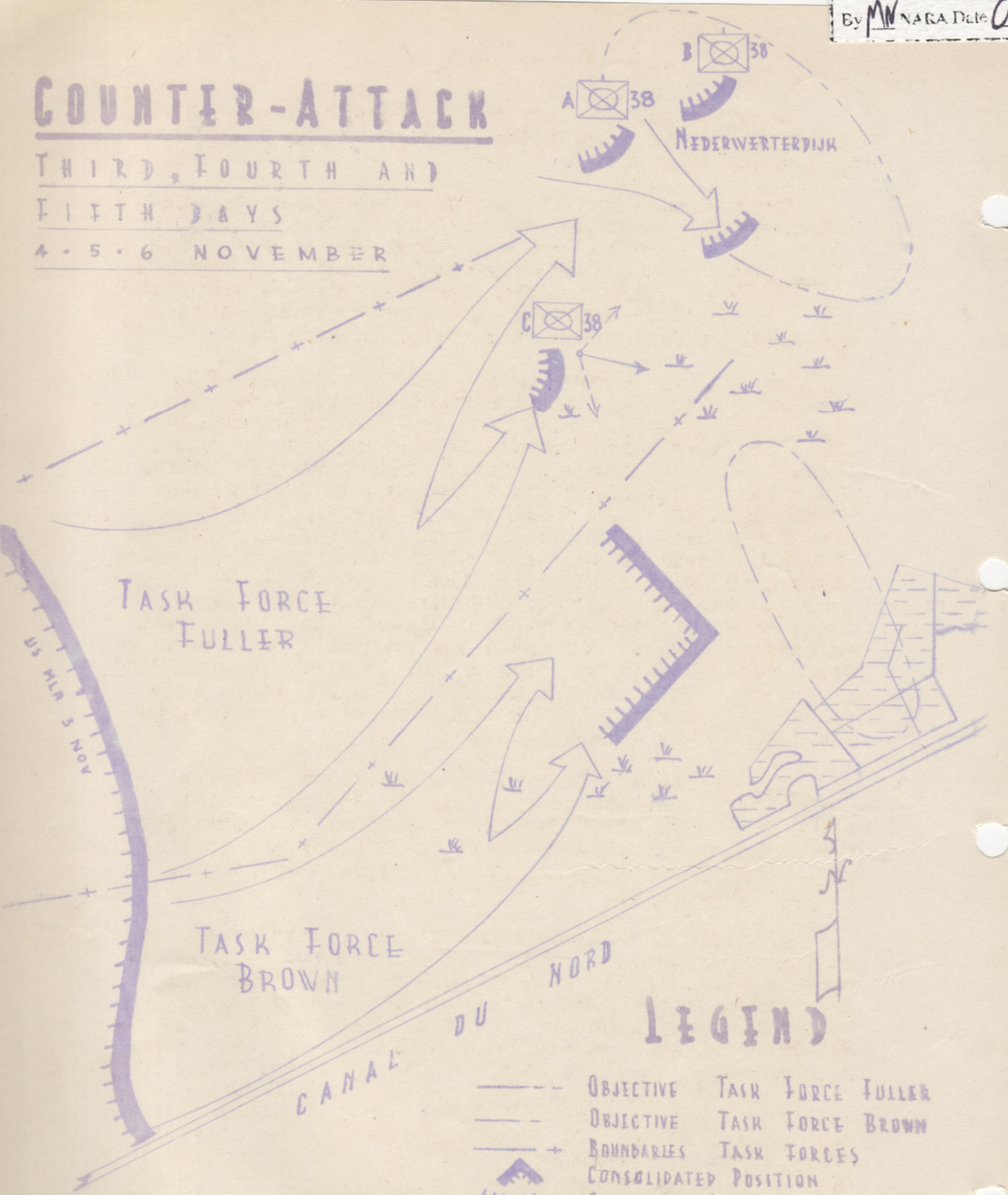
Assembly of the forces was slowed by the mines and by the necessity of gathering in platoons from widely separated areas, but at 1505 TF Fuller was ready to move and at 1550 TF Brown began the advance. Both forces made small gains before the order was given to button up for the night.

Meanwhile the 33d Engineers had erected in five hours a second bridge across the Bois le Duc canal. This new bridge considerably shortened the lines of supply and communication from the division to the task forces. Reconnaissance troops of the 814 TD's patrolling the left flank of the CCA sector reported enemy strongpoints in the bogs to the west of their positions approximately abreast of the advancing troops. (92)

COUNTER-ATTACK

THIRD, FOURTH AND
FIFTH DAYS

4 - 5 - 6 NOVEMBER



LEGEND

- OBJECTIVE TASK FORCE FULLER
- OBJECTIVE TASK FORCE BROWN
- BOUNDARIES TASK FORCES
- CONSOLIDATED POSITION
- COMPANY POSITIONS
- INUNDAED AREAS
- SWAMP

SCALE

YARDS 1000 500 0 1000 YARDS

S E C R E T

Enemy casualties for the day were unknown. Eight prisoners of war were taken. Our casualties were five killed and 46 wounded.

During the night the 23d AIBn was detached from CCR and moved to positions west of Bois le Duc to be prepared to support the attack the next day should its assistance be required. At the same time the 87th Ren Squadron was relieved from CCR to establish security along the canal du Nord behind the advancing forces.

At 0645 the attack to the east continued. The mission was to seize the intermediate objective, secure it, and await corps order to attack the final objective. (93) The task forces in operation remained the same. Phase lines were set up. During the morning TF Fuller encountered only light artillery, but on the exposed right flank TF Brown received considerable fire from across the canal. The enemy from well dug-in positions along the banks of the canal placed observed small arms, mortar, 88 mm, and other artillery fire on our advancing forces. Company C of the 48th was completely pinned down and was forced to withdraw leaving Company A with an exposed flank. Company A had been able to advance to its positions only by crawling the last 300 yards. (94) TF Fuller, with infantry still leading and tanks in general support, soon ran into the same kind of opposition, and its advance was also held up.

The division laid down heavy artillery fire on enemy positions, at one time firing 116 guns on the woods to the front of Task Force Fuller. The artillery was considerably reinforced by the British who at the request of General Hasbrough had supplied additional forward observers.

During the afternoon the attack continued slowly as the enemy artillery fire was neutralized by counter-battery fire. About 1400 TF Fuller encountered enemy opposition in the form of three machine guns in the vicinity of the high ground at the final objective. The artillery fired on these positions. Contact with the reconnaissance company of the 814th TD's, providing left flank security along the peat bogs, was lost temporarily, and the advance again was held up until a patrol reestablished liaison. The task force was on the alert for a potential enemy thrust between the left flank of Fuller and the reconnaissance screen in the bogs. This danger was increased with the indication of an enemy strongpoint, noticed in the form of fresh digging, to the west of a woods near the Task Force Fuller objective. The advance was halted for the night slightly beyond the third phase line.

S E C R E T

One air mission was flown against enemy tanks in the vicinity of Canal du Nord. Three fires were observed.

In preparation for the final assault on the Meijel area, which had been converted into an enemy strongpoint, the division issued operation instructions at 041700A. The capture of the corps objective was to be effected by a coordinated attack at 050730A. The 15 Scottish was to attack to seize that portion of the corps objective in its zone. The 7th Armored was to attack after 050900 to secure the area to the south of Meijel. CCA was to seize the final objective and secure the north bank of the Nord Canal. CCR was to assure the security of the Canal du Nord progressively as the north bank was cleared. (95) For this latter task the 87th Rcn was attached to CCR.

The presence of considerable numbers of anti-personnel and vehicle mines in the vicinity of Ospel-Kreijel-Budschop and at other scattered places had made progress of supplies and troops a slow operation. Engineers were immediately put to work, but due to the vast numbers of trails the job was a difficult one. A small number of the trails were used for transport purposes. To insure a flow of supplies to the area additional bridges were to be built across the canal at the north division boundary, and roads were to be maintained by combat commands.

The CCA commander decided to have TF Brown hold the right flank from dug-in positions about 1000 yards north of the canal in a line which tied in to the swampy area in the vicinity of 6704. TF Fuller was to continue the advance and seize the intermediate objective on the high ground, and then swing to the south and work to the canal and the final division objective. Company A of the 48th AIBn was to follow along and drop outposts who would dig in and protect the right flank of TF Fuller, and would cover with cross-fire the low ground leading up to the swamp to which TF Brown had tied in its left flank.

During the night TF Brown dug into the defensive positions indicated, and the next morning found themselves subjected to very heavy observed artillery, anti-tank, small arms, and mortar fire from south of the canal. TF Fuller, with three companies of the 38th AIBn on line and the tanks and TD's in the rear in reserve, moved toward the high ground from which three enemy machine guns had been observed the previous day. Company B on the left flank with Company A in the center was to swing around the flank while Company C with a machine gun platoon and the reconnaissance section was to lay down a

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base of fire from the vicinity of 069050. Company B was able to maneuver around the flank of high ground and occupy its section of the intermediate objective. Company A in the center ran into many mines and was considerably slowed up. Company C was running into undetermined enemy resistance from the woods to its front, including some machine gun fire. A patrol of three men was sent out to determine the extent of the resistance. When the patrol did not return after several hours the company commander called for smoke and artillery fire on the woods in an attempt to relieve the patrol from the fire pinning it down.

By 1300 word from the 15 Scottish Division on the left indicated that its attack on Meijel had been slowed down with the loss of 23 tanks hit or bogged down and that it was consolidating for the day. The commanding general of the 15 Scottish recommended that the assault on the objective be postponed until a coordinated attack could be resumed once more. (96) In view of the slow progress made during the day due to mine fields, heavy artillery, mortar and machine gun fire, and enemy ground resistance, the division directed that the attack on the final objective would be on division order.

Losses for the day were one tank, one armored car, and one jeep. Estimated personnel losses were two killed, 17 wounded, and one missing. Two enemy wounded were known.

During the night, the 23d AIBn took over the defensive positions held by the 48th AIBn, while the 48th Fifth day AIBn took over the reinforcing positions in the CCR sector. Relief of the 48th AIBn was completed at 0445.

During the day the division generally consolidated its positions, awaiting word from the 15 Scottish Division on the progress of its attack toward Meijel. Task Force Fuller advanced slightly on the high ground to its front, but was held up considerably by mines covered by small arms fire. Sporadic enemy artillery and mortar fire were received.

CONCLUSION OF THE OPERATION

On 6 November the 7th Armored Division was informed that it was to be relieved in the Venlo bridgehead sector by the 15 Scottish and 51 British Highland Division. The mission of the 7th Armored had been successfully carried out; the enemy had been contained along a wide front

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for sufficient time to allow the British units to clear out the Scheldt Estuary to the Meas River. When the enemy had attacked along the thinly-held front, the 7th Armored had contained him until reinforcements could be sent. With the conclusion of the western Holland campaign, units were free for regrouping for the next push on the road to Berlin. The 7th Armored Division was able to leave the British Second Army and return to the U.S. Ninth Army with the feeling of a job well done. (97)

Relief of elements of the 7th Armored Division was completed during the night 7-8 November, and at 080600A responsibility for the canal sector passed to the 15 Scottish and the 51 British Highland Division.

NOTES

1. FO No. 13, 7th Armored Division, 4 October 1944.
2. Ibid.
3. Intelligence Summary, 8 (British) Corps, 1 November 1944.
4. Ibid.
5. After Action Report, 87th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized, 31 October 1944.
6. G-2 Journal, 7th Armored Division, 26 October 1944.
7. After Action Report, 7th Armored Division, 1-31 October 1944.
8. After Action Report, 87th Ren., 1-31 October 1944.
The defenders reported the enemy appeared drunk or doped as they attacked.
9. For detailed defense scheme see attached aerial mosaic.
10. See Appendix A for details of this attack.
11. Capt. Slade, Major Cannon, Major Hiland, Capt. Wells to Lt. Merriam, 31 Oct. 44.
12. When American troops later reoccupied this area the grave of the platoon leader was discovered. Dutch civilians were arrested who had shown the Germans where our men had been hidden for three days.

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13. According to G-2 initial crossings were made in assault boats.
14. Lt. Colonel Boylan to Lt. Merriam, 1 November 1944.
15. Capt. Slade to Lt. Merriam, 7 November 1944.
16. After Action Report, 87th Rcn, 1-31 October 1944.
17. Major Cannon to Lt. Merriam, 31 October 1944.
18. Capt. Rau, Troop D, 87th Rcn, to Lt. Merriam, 1 November 1944. The cavalry commander was S/Sgt. Stanley Merrick, killed the next day. The gunner was T/5 Leslie Clark.
19. G-3 Journal, 27 October 44; Capt. Rau to Lt. Merriam, 31 October 1944.
20. After Action Report, 17th Tank Battalion, 1-31 October 1944.
21. Capt. Vogelsang, Company B, 48th Armored Infantry Battalion, to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944.
22. Despite the knowledge that the 87th was to withdraw through B and C companies of the 48th, the sight of this rearward movement created an apprehension in the minds of the infantry men which evidenced itself in a lack of aggressiveness. Report of C.O., CCB, to the commanding general, 13 November 1944.
23. Capt. Vogelsang to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944.
24. Lt. Wells, Company A, 48th Armored Infantry Battalion, to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944.
25. Lt. Wells to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944. During this action one sergeant fired four rounds with a bazooka at a Tiger tank. He hit the tank each time but couldn't stop it. Frontal fire at Tigers did not prove effective above 100 yards range.
26. Lt. Wells to Lt. Merriam 9 November 1944.
27. After Action Report, 87th Rcn., 1-31 October 1944; Lt. Webb to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944.
28. Many tanks identified at the time as Tigers turned out upon subsequent investigation to be Mk IV's or MK V's (Panthers).

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- 29. Capt. Rau to Lt. Merriam, 31 October 1944. Pvt. David E. Spangler, D Troop, 87th Rcn, was cut off from his unit at the time of the attack on Neerkent. For several hours he lay in a ditch along the road. During this period, he counted 20 enemy tanks going by his place of concealment.
- 30. After Action Report, 17th Tk Bn, 1-31 October 1944.
- 31. After Action Report, 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion 1-31 October 1944.
- 32. After Action Report, 87th Rcn, 1-31 October 1944.
- 33. G-2 Periodic Report, 7th Armored Division, 27 October 1944.
- 34. Ibid. Units identified on the division front prior to 27 October included 15th L/W Fortress Bn, Para Lehr Regiment, Hubner Para Regiment, 1st Bn Grostehl Para Regiment, 1st Bn Menzel Para Regiment.
- 35. General Hasbrouck to Lt. Merriam, 14 November 1944.
- 36. After Action Report, 814th TD, 1-31 October 1944.
- 37. Major Lohse, S-3, 31st Tank Battalion to Lt. Merriam, 4 November 1944.
- 38. Lt. George A. Taylor, Company B 23rd AIBn, to Lt. Merriam, 11 November 1944.
- 39. Lt. Wells, Company A 48th AIBn, to Lt. Merriam, 10 November 1944. Five men became dazed and got out of the foxholes to surrender. Lt. Wells was forced to get them down again by strong language and pleading. These men were spotted by the Germans, and the fire became heavier than ever.
- 40. It was the unanimous agreement that the air support offered by the RAF was excellent. Officers time and again expressed the sentiment that despite occasional strafings of our own troops by the planes, and regardless of the results of the attacks, the very presence of the aircraft was a tremendous boost to the morale of the fighting troops. (Lt. Col. Rhea and assembled officers, Lt. Wells to Lt. Merriam.) In the mission against the tanks despite the fact that one man was killed by a smoke shell which landed on his head, the plane attack was a great morale booster for the men.

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- 41. Lts. Webb, Johnson, Company C, 48th AIBn to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944.
- 42. After Action Report, 814th TD, 1-31 October 1944.
- 43. Major Lohse, S-3 31st Tk Bn to Lt. Merriam, 4 November 1944.
- 44. General Hasbrouck to Lt. Merriam, 14 November 1944.
- 45. G-1 Journal, 7th Armored Division 28 October 1944.
- 46. G-3 air to Lt. Merriam, 28 October 1944. G-3 air described the ground alert system as being very effective, with 30 minutes required from alert to target.
- 47. G-2 Periodic Report, 7th Armored Division, 28 October 1944.
- 48. Intelligence Summary, 8 (British) Corps, 1 November 1944.
- 49. Ibid.; Major New, Ass't G-2, to Lt. Merriam.
- 50. Lt. Webb, Lt. Wells to Lt. Merriam, 4 November 1944.
- 51. Capt. Vogelsang, Company B 48th AIBn Lt. Wells Company, C 48th AIBn, 8-10 November 1944.
- 52. S-3 Journal, Combat Command B, 28 October 1944.
- 53. Lt. Col. Rhea, C.O. 23rd AIBn, to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944.
- 54. Lt. Taylor, Company B 23rd AIBn, to Lt. Merriam, 10 November 1944.
- 55. One medic, in a peep, intent on getting a casualty to an aid station followed this column nearly all the way into Liesel before being discovered and fired upon.
- 56. General Hasbrouck to Lt. Merriam, 1 November 1944. Subsequently cleats were added to our medium tanks. These cleats are said to reduce ground pressure by 17 to 19 percent.
- 57. After Action Report, 814th TD, 1-31 October 1944.
- 58. Lts. Webb and Johnson, Company A 48th AIBn, to Lt. Merriam, 8 November 1944.

59. Lt. Webb had a particularly difficult time in the reorganization of his platoon because he was a replacement officer recently arrived, and was not familiar with his men nor they with him.
60. Capt. Vogelsang to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944.
61. Ibid.
62. After Action Report, 87th Rcn, 1-31 October 1944.
63. Major Frazier to Lt. Merriam, 10 November 1944.
64. Of interest was the surrender of two Germans to the British 30 October because they couldn't face our tank fire another day.
65. In this engagement troops of the 23rd AIBn encountered for the first time a weapon which they described as a gun which shot an oil or jelly petrol. As described by Lt. Joseph Zang, Battalion Motor Officer, and his platoon sergeant, who viewed the weapon through binoculars at from 600 to 700 yards range, the weapon at first appeared to be an 88 mm gun towed by another 88 mm gun. On closer examination it became apparent that a tracked vehicle, which the lieutenant likened to the tractors which tow our 240 mm guns, was towing a gun mounted on a wheeled carriage. Both men said the gun appeared to be larger than the 88 mm. Evidence of this was offered when attempts to hide it behind a building were unsuccessful because the barrel extended beyond the building. When the weapon was fired it made a screeching noise, like a plank being ripped loose from nails or like chalk scratch on a blackboard. No flame was observed while the projectile was in flight, but when it hit it was as if some gasoline had been poured on the ground and lit. A huge flame immediately burst out.
The weapon was brought into position in the company of four tanks. A group of approximately 12 men were around the gun, but it was not apparent whether the men were the crew of the gun. Two shots were fired while the men were observing. One shot hit a building, and the building immediately burst into flame. The other hit a haystack about 25 to 50 yards from the sergeant. The sergeant said he observed no shrapnel effect.
66. Lt. Taylor, Company B 23rd AIBn, to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944. The artillery forward observer was credited with a large part of the success in the defense of this position.

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- 67. After Action Report, 814th TD, 1-31 October 1944.
- 68. General Hasbrouck to Lt. Merriam, 13 November 1944.
- 69. Ibid.
- 70. Major Lohse to Lt. Merriam, 3 November 1944.
- 71. Lt. Col. Rhea, Battalion Commander, 23rd AIBn to Lt. Merriam, 11 November 1944.
- 72. General Hasbrouck to Lt. Merriam, 13 November 1944.
- 73. Major Frazier to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944.
- 74. General Hasbrouck to Lt. Merriam, 13 November 1944.
- 75. G-1 Journal, 7th Armored Division, 29 October 1944. Many of our men were reported missing due to the confusion. A large number of them subsequently rejoined their units.
- 76. Air support for the day consisted of eight missions in addition to corps missions which knocked out all of the enemy bridgeheads across the canals.
- 77. G-2 Periodic Report, PW report.
- 78. See attached letter General Dempsey to General Hasbrouck, Appendix B.
- 79. G-4 Report, 7th Armored Division.
- 80. G-2 Periodic Report, 7th Armored Division, 29 October 1944.
- 81. Ibid; 30 October 1944.
- 82. Destruction of the enemy footbridge across the Wessom canal was accomplished by a daring squad of engineers from B Company 33d Engineers. The following account of the foray was given by Captain Hochberg, CO Company B, 53rd Armored Engineers.
At 310030 the company received orders to blow up the bridge. The platoon leader, Lt. Ralph S. Favor, moved the squad to an assembly area in the vicinity of the bridge. T/5 George W. Schultz, 34192557 and Pvt. Judson P. Turner, 31106460, left the squad and made their way toward the bridge. In the movement to the bridge noises attracted the attention of the Germans on the bridge, and the enemy opened fire with a light machine gun. But Cpl. Schultz and Pvt.

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Turner continued to work their way forward until they were actually under the bridge. A charge with a fuze delay igniter was set under the bridge while the Germans were still firing from above at the suspected location of the squad. The charge was set and Schultz and Turner returned to the squad assembly area. An artillery concentration was brought down simultaneously with the explosion. Considerable German fire was received from along the canal, but the entire squad escaped without injury. Upon investigation the next day a patrol discovered that the bridge was totally destroyed, and six dead Germans and a wrecked machine gun were seen in the debris.

- 83. Summary of conversation between Generals O'Conner and Silvester, 30 October. 1944.
- 84. Operations Instructions, 7th AD, 1 November 1944.
- 85. Col. Hermann was a 1st Lieutenant at the time of the invasion of Crete. He performed several heroic acts in that operation for which he received high awards from the German army. Subsequently he was in charge of the forces which freed Mussolini after the capitulation of Italy.
But the fighting qualities of Col. Hermann's men were not like his original paratroopers. As an example two half companies or a total of 70 men attacked our positions along the east banks of the Bois le Duc on 31 October with the apparent intent of removing our small foothold remaining on the east bank. At this time the sector was outposted by CCA, Companies A of the 38th AIBn, C of the 40th Tk Bn, and A of the 87th Ren. Our forces established a narrow line running parallel to the Bois le Duc, and the enemy attacked in waves of about 25 men. One group was brought under heavy tank fire and surrendered almost to a man. A second group was subjected to tank and artillery fire and was almost completely eliminated. The third group was either captured or killed. Some few managed to escape to the south.
- 86. G-1 Report, 7th Armored Division, 1 November 1944.
- 87. Major Whalen, S-3 CCA, said to Lt. Merriam on 4 November 1944 that tanks weren't doing anything in this operation (2-7 Nov.) except getting bogged down.
- 88. General Hasbrouck to Lt. Merriam, 3 November 1944.

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- 89. Conversation at TF Fuller CP, Lt. Merriam present, 2 November 1944.
- 90. Lt. Col. Fuller, CO 38th AIBn, to Lt. Merriam.
- 91. Lt. Wells, Company A 48th AIBn, to Lt. Merriam 9 November 1944. This platoon was caught by enemy fire and was able to extricate itself only after a strong artillery concentration had been placed on the enemy.
- 92. G-3 Journal 7th Armored Division 3 November 1944.
- 93. Operations Instructions, 7th Armored Division, 3 November 1944.
- 94. Lt. Webb, Company C, 48th AIBn, to Lt. Merriam, 9 November 1944.
- 95. Operations Instructions, 7th Armored Division 041700A November 1944.
- 96. G-3 Journal, 7th Armored Division, 6 November 1944.
- 97. Attached letters from Commanding Generals, British Second Army and 8 (British) Corps, testify to the importance of the holding action of the 7th Armored Division. See Appendix B & C.

S E C R E T

APPENDIX A

THE GERMAN THRUST AT NEDERWEERT

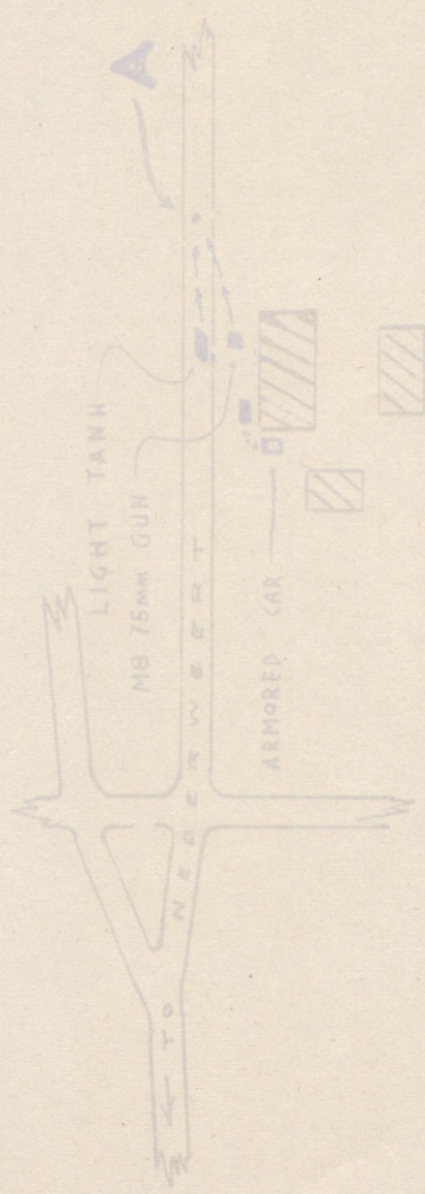
27-30 October

Troop A of the 87th Reconnaissance Squadron was assigned an 8,000 yard frontage in the 7th Armored Division sector of the 8 (British) Corps during the latter weeks of October when the main effort of the British Second Army was being expended in the Scheldt Estuary zone.

Like the other troops of the 87th Ren, Troop A was charged with the maintenance of a counter-reconnaissance screen along a canal line, the other side of which was held by the enemy from dug-in positions. The Troop A zone ran from the canal junction south of Nederweert east along the Canal du Nord to a small settlement called Stokers Horst. The defense consisted of a series of outposts of six men, each with a light machine gun, and in some cases a mortar. The points were spaced 500 to 800 yards apart and were from 1000 to 1500 yards to the north of the canal line.

The enemy had been active in the Troop A sector for some days prior to the general attack on 27 October. Our forces had reason to believe that the enemy had positions, or at least observation posts, on the north side of the canal line. To probe the enemy defenses and to look for an observation post, a dismounted patrol of 12 men, led by Lt. George W. Monaghan, was sent south on 25 October. Lt. Monaghan split his patrol into two sections of six men each. The advanced section had small arms and a radio, and the rear section had a mortar and a machine gun. The patrol advanced down the road from Nederweert toward the canal and had reached a point near the canal at 630998 when a German patrol in ambush opened fire with a machine gun. The first section had advanced slightly beyond the line of fire of the machine gun when the initial burst was fired. All men immediately took to the ditch along the road. The second section was caught in the fire. The mortar crew rolled into the ditch, set up the gun, and was able to fire five rounds at the machine gun before a German mortar opened fire on them. No more rounds were fired by our mortar. The enemy machine gun and mortars continued their fire, and only one man of the second section was able to escape. In the meantime the first section, led by Lt. Monaghan, had found a small ditch in the middle of a beet field. The beet leaves hid the ditch, and by crawling up this slight defile for nearly 1000 yards they were able to reach the Kreijel-Waatskamp road and return to the CP.

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Authority: NND 935217
By: MNAFA Date: 09/23/95



PATROL ACTION

Troop "A" ~ 87th Rcn
26 OCT 44

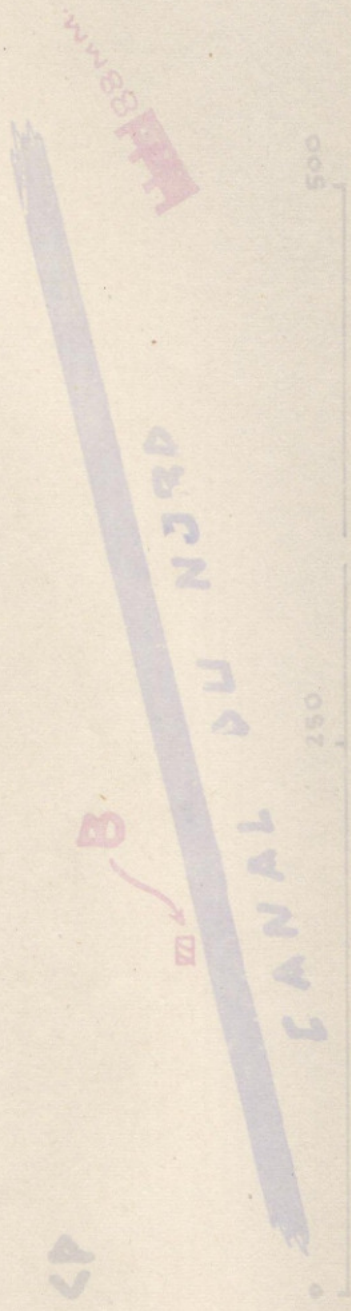
LEGEND

A. FIRING POSITION OF

TANK & ASSAULT

GUN.

B. ENEMY CP



S E C R E T

On the next day Troop A commander, Capt. John W. Wells, Jr., decided to dispatch another patrol to the same general vicinity to ascertain if possible the strength of the enemy on our side of the canal. Accordingly, Lt. Second Patrol Charles W. Rogers organized a patrol consisting of two armored cars, three light tanks, and an M8 75mm. assault gun. The patrol was halted behind some houses in Budshop while Lt. Rogers and two men made a dismounted reconnaissance of the enemy positions along the canal. Lt. Rogers watched a German officer inspect the enemy canal positions. He could see the officer question each man. Lt. Rogers withdrew from this position without engaging the enemy and continued the patrol along the road from Budshop to the east.

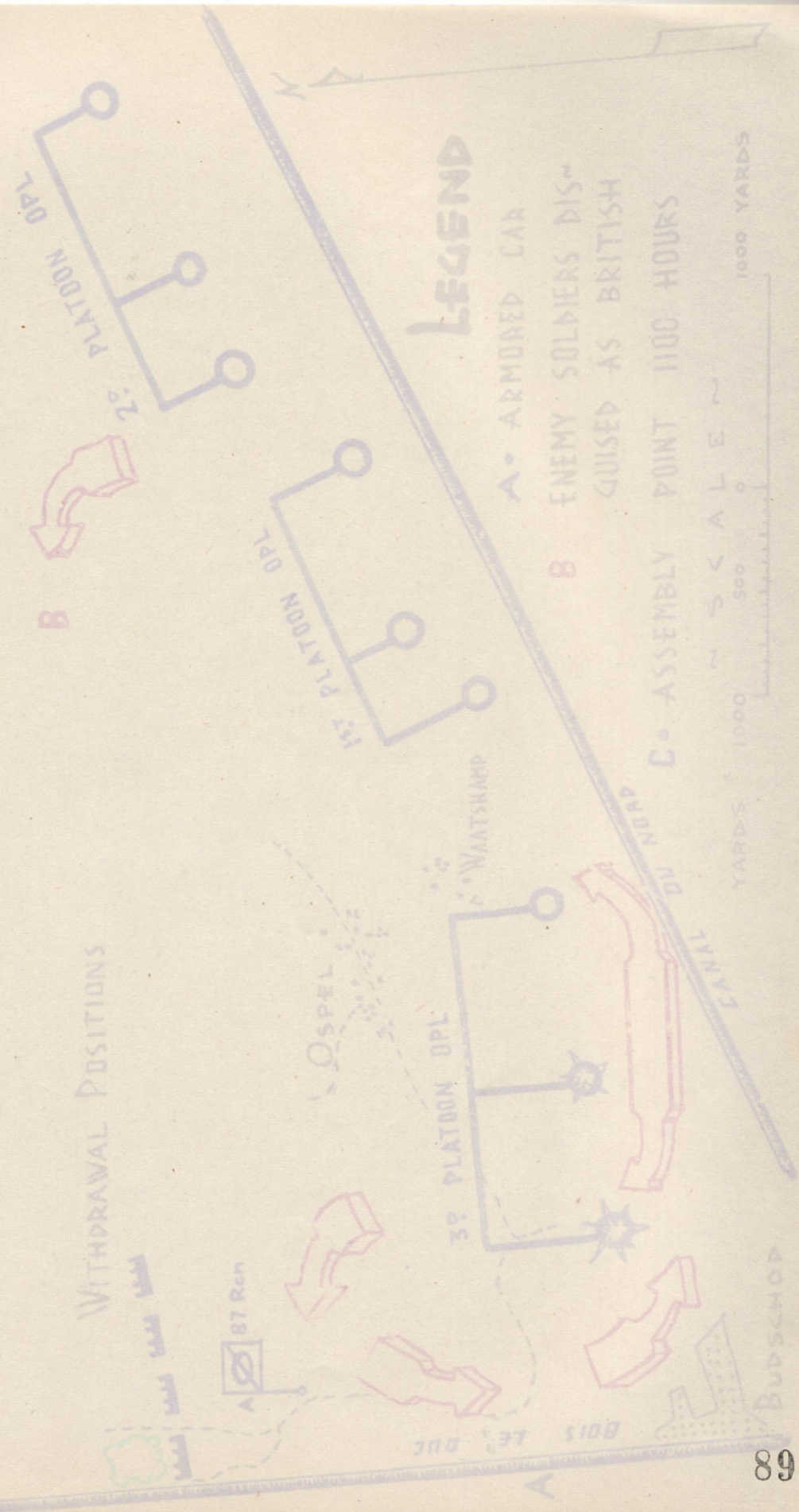
When the patrol reached a triangular fork in the road at 629003, the vehicles were once more halted behind the shelter of the buildings while Lt. Rogers made a second foot reconnaissance to attempt to locate the enemy CP. While looking around the corner of a house, he noticed four men enter a shack on the north bank of the canal about 500 yards to his front. On the chance that the shack was the enemy CP, Lt. Rogers immediately brought up his armored car, a light tank, and the assault gun, and hid them behind and beside the house. The armored car at the side of the house moved behind the shelter after an anti-tank gun opened fire on it. Lt. Rogers brought the gunners with him on foot as he moved around the side of the house. There, from behind some shrubs, he pointed out the target and presented his plan of action.

The assault gun was to draw out on the road beyond the house and open fire on the shack. The tank was to face down the road to the east, still behind the house, and guard against any possible enemy activity to the left flank. The assault gunner returned to his vehicle and the gun was moved into position. Four rounds were fired at the shack in rapid succession. One man was seen to run out of the shack. He was engaged by Lt. Rogers and two enlisted men, but the range was too extreme for their carbines, and the man escaped. On the fifth round, the assault gun jammed. The gun was immediately pulled back behind the house, and the tank, without any instructions, moved out to the identical position that the assault gun had occupied.

By this time, German gunners were zeroed in on the location. As soon as the tank moved into position a gun, presumed to be an 88mm opened up and scored a direct hit on the tank, killing two of the men and wounding the other two. About this time an enemy mortar shelled the

TROOP ACTION

TROOP "A" ~ 87TH REGT ~ 27 OCT 44



LEGEND
 A. ARMORED CAR
 B. ENEMY SOLDIERS DISGUISED AS BRITISH
 C. ASSEMBLY POINT 1100 HOURS

YARDS 1000 500 0
 SCALE
 1000 YARDS

WITHDRAWAL POSITIONS

DECLASSIFIED
 Authority NND 935297
 By M. NARA Date 09/23/99

S E C R E T

house. The wounded men were rescued from the tank and placed in the armored car. The armored car was facing east, and in order to turn it was necessary to back into the position from which the car had been moved because of the anti-tank fire. Fortunately, the enemy did not fire again, and Lt. Rogers led the assault gun and the rest of the patrol out of the vicinity. The shack and three of its occupants had been destroyed.

On the morning of 27 October at about 0645, guards at troop headquarters (622021) noticed a German patrol of 15 to 20 men in a field to the east. Enemy Probe The headquarters was alerted, and the combined fire of the personnel located there turned the German patrol to the south where they were taken under fire by the maintenance armored car on the west side of the canal and the right flank outpost of the third platoon. At the same time, the third platoon discovered about 150 men to their front. They were surrounded on three sides. Those who could withdrew. None of the right outpost of the third platoon escaped, but two men in the center outpost and all six in the left outpost of the platoon were successful in getting through the German ring. One of the men came through the enemy positions in the bottom of a cart driven by a Dutch civilian. At this time the left flank platoon was attacked by twenty dismounted men. The platoon outposts placed considerable mortar and machine gun fire on the Germans advancing in a wave, and the enemy was held back.

In the second platoon zone no enemy attacked, but recognizing the serious situation, the platoon leader Lt. McMillan, sent back two men for assistance. However, when Troop C on the left flank of Troop A withdrew from its positions after the attack on Meijel, it became apparent that a withdrawal to shorten the lines was necessary. Capt. Wells gave orders for the withdrawal to an assembly area vicinity of 615042. The first and third platoons were to withdraw together, but the first platoon leader started ahead on his own. During this withdrawal, Lt. McMillan observed some men he identified as British, and he stood up to talk with them. They were Germans, and the lieutenant was killed. A fire fight ensued, and the enemy was driven back.

By 1100, the first and second platoons and the remainder of the third platoon had assembled at the designated point. The troop headquarters was at the bridge site, vicinity 613055. Capt. Wells ordered this force of approximately 40 men to move south to recontact the enemy. The force moved south along the canal to the

S E C R E T

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NV 69 3507
By MW NARA Date 09/23/94

woods at 618028. A patrol moving ahead of the main body discovered enemy activity to the south of the woods. The captain decided to establish a line along the south edge of the woods running east for a distance of about 500 yards. Four positions were set up and dug in. From this position, our forces had excellent observation of the enemy and were able to bring down accurate artillery fire. During the afternoon several enemy attempts were made to organize for an attack, but each time our artillery fire broke up the formation.

During the night, enemy activity was limited to artillery and mortar fire. Our forces held their four points. At 0200, one officer and 23 men of the 1st Platoon, Company A, 38th Armored Infantry Battalion arrived to reinforce Troop A. CCA issued orders for the entire force to attack to the south on the morning of 28 October and secure the Horik road from the canal to the east, including Horik. The force was divided into nine patrols, each consisting of about six men. Three machine guns were available for the entire group. At 0530, the advance began. No opposition was encountered, and by 0600 the road had been secured. Due to the limited number of men, it was once again necessary to set up a series of outposts, and each of the nine patrols dug in along the road or occupied buildings.

The enemy engaged our positions as soon as he discovered them, and heavy artillery and mortar fire were brought to bear. He also immediately began to infiltrate between our positions. By 0715 all of the outposts with the exception of two had been cut off by the enemy. The remaining two withdrew to their original positions along the line east from the woods.

Enemy attempts to storm the strongpoints themselves were unsuccessful. The flat terrain offered excellent fields of fire for our machine guns and riflemen, but the positions were untenable. By this time a company of medium tanks from the 40th Tank Battalion, which had been dispatched by the commanding officer of CCA to the area the previous afternoon, was across the canal. Several attempts were made by the tanks during the day to relieve the pressure on the isolated elements, but each time the enemy artillery fire drove them back to covered positions.

In Horik itself Lt. Lee A. Mestas, the second platoon leader, found himself in an uncomfortable position. He was established with his patrol and a machine gun in one house, while the enemy was in a second house about 60 yards away with their machine gun. Neither force was able to attack the other because of the open ground in

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TROOP ACTION

TROOP "A" ~ 87TH R^{CM}

28° 29° 30° OCT 1944



DECLASSIFIED
Authority: NND 93521
By: W. NARA Date: 09/25/99

S E C R E T

between. Finally at dusk Capt. Nelson, the tank commander, sent the tanks forward under the protection of a very heavy artillery concentration to bring back the isolated units. As the concentration was fired, the tanks advanced and picked up the men in the forward positions. Many of the men rode on the outside of the tanks. Lt. Mestas' platoon was in the most difficult position and presented the hardest problem of extrication. The tanks approached to within 30 yards of his position. Under cover of the dusk and a neighboring building, the men were able to crawl to the waiting tanks. Lt. Mestas mounted one tank and hung on the outside. When the tank reached the rear area, the lieutenant dismounted. The tank hatch was opened and seven men from his platoon, and the five man crew tumbled from the inside.

Upon withdrawal the troops were set up along the line occupied during the previous afternoon, but the posts were now established for a distance of 1,000 yards east of the Bois le Duc Canal. This line was held throughout the night of the 28th, and the next day. During the next day repeated enemy attempts to attack were broken up. Our artillery fired concentrations for the entire front. These concentrations were adjusted by the forward platoon leaders each time the Germans came up in columns and deployed. The Germans were not able to get within 300 yards of our positions. However, as the enemy strength built up, it appeared that the extended line with the small number of troops was dangerous, and consequently, during the night a new line was set up to the rear along the road running east from the canal at 616044.

During 30 October, activity was limited to patrolling. One patrol of three men was cut off by the Germans and either killed or captured, and another ran into a machine gun about 75 yards to its front. The men in the latter patrol crawled up a ditch filled with water and returned to their position. During the afternoon the platoon of infantry was withdrawn from the line, leaving a gap. Tank destroyers were sent down to assist the Ren forces, and they were successful in stopping a patrol of about 20 Germans which attempted to infiltrate through the gap. During the afternoon a large patrol consisting of troops of the 15 Scottish Division Reconnaissance unit and Troop A assault guns was sent to clean out the peat works to the east and slightly north of the defense line. The Germans had infiltrated behind our positions and were menacing us from the rear. The site was cleaned out at a cost to the enemy of ten dead and five captured.

Preparations were made by division for an attack to the south on 31 October, and during the night of 30 October,

S E C R E T

Troop A was withdrawn from the zone east of the canal after four days of dogged fighting against an enemy force estimated to be a battalion of the Hermann Paratroop Regiment.