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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 442D REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM
IN THE VOSGES MOUNTAINS, 29 SEPT - 20 NOV 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

The 442d Regimental Combat Team, AUS, an all volunteer unit, often called the "Nisei", was made up of Americans of Japanese ancestry. The composition of this Combat Team was as follows: 100th Infantry Battalion; (later designated 100th Battalion, 442d Infantry) 442d Infantry Regiment; 522d Field Artillery Battalion and the 232d Combat Engineer Company. The 100th Battalion was the first unit of the team to be activated. It was formed in Hawaii shortly after Pearl Harbor and immediately sailed for the States to receive its Basic Training which was completed at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. The battalion then moved to Camp Shelby, Mississippi for Advanced Training and upon completion, participated in the War Department Maneuvers of 1943. (1)

The month of August found the 100th Battalion enroute to a staging area at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and by the end of the month it was preparing to land at the Port of Oran in North Africa. One week later, 8 September, the Battalion was assigned to the 34th Division. (2)

From then on the Unit fought separately or as a part of the 442d Combat Team from the beaches of Salerno across the Volturno and Rapido Rivers through Casino, Anzio, Rome, and Leghorn.

On 1 September 1944, after forcing a crossing of the Arno River in the Pisa sector, the 100th Battalion led the left flank of the Fifth Army in its drive for the Gothic Line. A few days later the Battalion was relieved and sent to Rosignano-By-the-Sea to await the balance of the Combat Team.

Shortly after the 100th Battalion was formed, the War Department continuing its policy of allowing all Americans of Japanese extraction to bear arms for their country, activated the balance of the Combat Team;

(1) A-1, p. 3; (2) A-1, p. 5

the 442d Infantry Regiment, 522d Field Artillery Battalion, and the 232d Engineer Company. This activation took place at Camp Shelby, 1 February 1943. An intense training program was set up for these units and by the end of the year, the balance of the Combat Team was ready for the fight. (3)

In a haze of waterproofing, crates, inspections, and shipping lists, the 442d Combat Team, less the 1st Battalion, set sail--Destination, Italy.

The 442d joined the famous 100th Battalion which was now attached for operations and became a complete Combat Team attached to the 34th Division. Into battle the Unit plunged spearheading the Fifth Army attack. Villages in their turn were taken by this fighting force after bitter combat as they fought up the Italian Peninsula. After assisting in the capture of Leghorn the Combat Team was detached from the 34th Division and split for the moment with Lt. Col. Gordon Singles leading the 100th Battalion into positions on the Arno River, Pisa sector, left flank of the Fifth Army. The balance of the Combat Team, led by Col. Charles W. Pence, its Commander, took positions on the right flank of the Fifth Army along the Arno just on the western outskirts of the city of Florence.

The 2nd and 3rd Infantry Battalions of the 442d were given the mission of holding the line for the 88th Division, to which the Combat Team was attached, and at this point were committed to aggressive patrolling probing the enemy's positions day and night. This fencing and probing action continued until 1 September when the entire Fifth Army front exploded into action. Spearheading the Gothic Line drive, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions crossed the Arno River at flood tide and were pushing north along Highway "66" when they were relieved and sent to Rosignano-By-the-Sea on the west coast of Italy just south of Leghorn to join the 100th Battalion.

(3) A-1, p. 4

During all these operations the 522d Field Artillery Battalion, and the 232d Combat Engineer Company supported the Combat Team. The superb shooting of the artillery was always a great factor in the outcome of the battle, sometimes the difference between defeat and victory. The engineers never seemed to find a job too hard to tackle. Mine field after mine field was cleared, often under artillery and small arms fire. Many bridges were constructed. Whenever a river was to be forced, an engineer officer was included as a member of an Infantry Patrol. Crossings were made to the enemy side for necessary engineer information to help accomplish the mission.

Thus, a great fighting team was now assembled at Rosignano-By-the-Sea awaiting orders. The waiting time was quite short; orders were issued to move to Naples. The movement by land and sea was completed in good time. Arriving in Naples the 442d was immediately bivouacked in a staging area better known as the "Dust Bowl". Waterproofing was again in fashion. To all troops, this meant a boat ride somewhere. This proved to be correct.

ASSIGNMENT TO 7TH U. S. ARMY

The Regiment had been assigned to the 7th Army during the initial planning stage for Operation Dragoon, the Invasion of Southern France. Plans called for the Nisei to be in France by D + 45 and that was the Regiment's destination. (4)

DEPART ITALY - ARRIVE FRANCE

On 25 September, the convoy consisting of four transports and their destroyer escorts made way from the Bay of Naples up the Italian Boot through the Straits of Bonifacio lying between Sardinia and Corsica and to Marseille arriving 29 September 1944. The Combat Team debarked via the Jacob's Ladder into LCVP's and were put ashore late in the afternoon.

(4) Statement - Lt. Col. Gordon Singles, CO, 100th Bn

That evening found part of the Team bivouacked in one of the city parks of Marseille. The balance of the team including the 100th Battalion had moved to Septemes, a nearby suburb. Early the next morning trucks moved the Unit to a staging area not far from Aix. The weather, the next few days, was just a preview of what was to come. On 10 October, the Combat Team, less its 3d Battalion, moved out of the mud, entrucked, and with the rain playing a sharp tattoo on the tarpaulins of the GMC's, the two Battalions were on their way to the front. The 3d Battalion, entraining the next morning in 40' and 8's was following close behind.

The move up the Rhone Valley through Bourg, Besancon, Vesoul, and finally to Epinal was made in three wet, cold, weary days with only one incident. Passing through Montelimar the men saw the shattered remnants of a German 19th Army horse and motor convoy which had been knocked out by the 3d and 36th U.S. Infantry Divisions and which had then been well worked over by the 12th Tactical Air Force. This incident is mentioned as it was a fine morale booster and for some time after, the unit was in high spirits.

Afternoon of 12 October found the Combat Team, less its 3d Battalion, in Bivouac in a rear Assembly Area in the vicinity of Charmois-Devant-Bruyeres approximately four miles from the MLR. The next day it was made known to all troops that the team was now attached to the 36th Infantry Division, a part of the VI Corps, 7th Army.

At this time it seems apropos to acquaint the reader as to the situation existing on the 7th Army front and to give some of the underlying reasons for this situation. A waning summer found the rapid offensive of veteran 7th Army troops slowing to a halt. A stalemate was setting in. Operation Dragoon as the offensive was known, had been halted due to a lack of vital supplies. This lack of supply was also holding up the 3d Army on the 7th's left flank. They had been ordered to assume a defensive role until the necessary supplies could be accumulated so the attack could again be launched. (5)

(5) A-2, Chapter 16

The Germans were now dug in on the steep slopes and forests of the Vosges foothills. Every day that American troops remained on the defensive, allowed the Germans an opportunity to reorganize scattered troops and once again weld them into a capable dangerous force. General Devers, Commanding the 6th Army Group, wished to stage an early offensive; but due to lack of troops and supplies was unable to do so. (6)

The German Army on the other hand, was exploiting the 7th Army's situation to the utmost. Besides reorganizing their old units, fresh troops were brought in to the front line positions and with their short supply lines the Germans were putting the finishing touches on the main fortifications higher up in the Vosges Mountains.

During the latter part of September General Patch's 7th Army was increased by the transfer of the XV Corps to the 7th Army. With the assignment of the XV Corps the 7th Army now consisted of two Corps. (7) The 7th Army issued Field Order #6 which directed the VI Corps to advance on the German winter line on the Meurthe River and to take the key city, hub and communications center St. Die. (8)

It was at this time the 442d Combat Team now attached to the 36th Division joined in the attack. With the issuing of Field Order #6, it wasn't long until VI Corps put out Operation Instructions #1 on 11 October, outlining operations to secure the Meurthe River line, the first objective, the City of Bruyeres.

OPERATION TO CAPTURE BRUYERES

A warning order 13 October from 36th Division Headquarters readied the 442d for further action. The 13 and 14 October was spent in reconnaissance of the forward areas by all commanders with the expectation of receiving attack orders momentarily. The missing 3d Battalion finally arrived on 14 October, and was immediately oriented. The attack order was received from Division on 14 October, and that afternoon the Regimental Commander issued his attack order. In general, it was as follows:

(6) A-3, p. 48; (7) A-2, p. 336; (8) A-2, p. 360.

Pass through forward elements of 36th and 45th Divisions and attacked^K Bruyeres from the west, 100th and 2d Battalions on the line, 100th Battalion on the left, 2d Battalion on the right, 3d in Reserve. (9) The left flank of the Regiment was Division's left which gave the mission of flank protection and maintaining contact to the left to the 100th Battalion. The 179th Infantry of the 45th Division was on the Regimental left and the 143d Infantry of the 36th Division on the Regiment's right. In direct support was the Combat Team's 522d Field Artillery Battalion and the 252d Combat Engineer Company. Mission -- to capture that part of Bruyeres in assigned sector. Time of attack, 0800 hours, 15 October. The attack of the 442d was to be the main effort.

Bruyeres' natural defenses are good. Southwest of the town flows the Vologne River approximately thirty-five feet wide. A number of irrigation ditches from the river turn the surrounding land into a marsh thus restricting movement to the roads. High trees growing along the secondary roads leading south had been fallen to block travel. Covering these road blocks were buildings organized as strong points and extensive use was made of mines and booby traps. Anti-tank guns and automatic weapons were employed in great numbers. Inter-locking bands of machine gun fire on the edge of town made penetration rather a rough go.

Key terrain and critical features were four hills in the vicinity of Bruyeres. For tactical reference they were lettered A, B, C, D. Under cover of a early twilight the Regiment moved into forward assembly areas just short of the Line of Departure.

Sporadic shelling of the area throughout the night caused some casualties and twenty men of Company A, the reserve Company of the 100th,

(9) Statement - Lt. Col. Gordon Singes, CO, 100th Bn

were hit before arriving at the L/D. At hour 15 October found the Regiment surging into action. The 100th Battalion, with C and B Companies on the line, moved from its positions in the Forêt-de-Faite up a narrow trail toward its 1st objective, Hill A, passing through the 3d Battalion, 179th Infantry. Only a short distance was covered when the Kraut opened up with small arms and automatic weapons. Net result for the day, approximately a quarter mile gain with the 1st objective yet to be taken. (10)

The 2d Battalion fared no better. Moving out through similar wooded areas, the 2d Battalion encountered heavy small arms fire and gained very little.

Both battalions were being subjected to intensive mortar and artillery fire. Accurate harassing fire from enemy artillery allowed the Nisei little chance of even fitful sleep. Dawn of 16 October, the Regiment pushed on with little change in the situation. Road blocks were reduced and cleared of enemy by the infantryman; but when the engineers came to tear the road blocks down, they would again be covered by die-hard Krauts who would hide until the attack had passed by and then re-man the road blocks necessitating additional fighting by the engineers to clear the road blocks again.

K and F Company of the 2d Battalion had occupied Hill 555, a small hill northwest of Bruyeres, by 1100 hours 16 October but were pinned down by devastating fire when they attempted to push on Hill B. Two counter-attacks of battalion strength supported by artillery, mortars, self-propelled guns and tanks were repelled. One attack came at dusk and the other the next morning just after dawn. Forward observers with the Battalion brought down a rain of artillery fire from the 522d Field Artillery and 4.2 mortars. This fire broke the back of the attacking force, but the Companies were still flushing Germans out of their defenses an hour or more after the attack. Six bazooka teams had been formed to

(10) Statement - Lt. Col. Gordon Singes, CO, 100th Bn

give battle to the German armored threat.

The 100th beat off a hard hitting counter-attack in their sector after an hour of nip and tuck fighting, where it appeared for a time, the enemy would break through the positions. (11) Neither of the battalions were able to make any advances toward Hill A and B. Prisoners from the 19th S.S. Police Regiment and the 223d Grenadier Regiment who were captured by the 100th Battalion knew little of the big picture but talked rather freely of the situations existing within their companies. All were quite certain of one thing; they knew every unit had been ordered to hold until the last man.

The night of 16 October the rain began to fall whipped by a cold wind. Intermittent enemy artillery fire added its shrill evil voice to a miserable night. On the morning of 17 October the 100th and 2d Battalions attempted to resume the offensive but were stopped as soon as the assault companies moved into the open toward Hills A and B. Elements of the 2d Battalion worked down to the base of Hill 555 which they were occupying and managed to clear a few houses but could not advance due to the heavy automatic weapons fire.

The 3d Battalion moved into position on the right of the 2d Battalion the night of 17 October. The next morning all three battalions smashed on into the attack behind fire from the 522d Field Artillery Battalion and other elements of Division Artillery. The 100th Battalion threw its weight against Hill A and after sharp close in fighting secured the hill at 1400 hours killing many Germans, capturing twenty automatic weapons, and taking one hundred and nineteen Prisoners of War. (12) After six and one-half hours of fighting elements of the 2d Battalion knocked out the key machine gun in the defense of Hill B with 60mm fire, and this hill located about 200 yards north and west of Bruyeres was cleared.

(11, 12) Statement - Lt. Col. Gordon Singles, CO, 100th Bn

With the clearing of Hill B, L Company pushed into Bruyeres fighting bitterly for each house and finally linking up at 1830 hours with the 1st Battalion, 143d Infantry which had attacked the town from the south. All the afternoon of 18 October and part of 19 October, was spent in house to house fighting. No quarter was given and none was asked. The German fought desperately and would not even permit aid men to care for or evacuate the wounded.

Finally, with the 1st Battalion, 143d Infantry, the 442d Infantry, against savage machine gun and mortar fire, crushed the last island of resistance in the center of Bruyeres and the town belonged to the Americans.

Prisoners taken in the town fighting were members of the 736th Grenadier Regiment. Several prisoners taken were from Fortress Machine Gun Battalion #49. Machine Gun Battalions normally were not used unless the Germans intended to set up a permanent defensive position. Bruyeres was definitely no exception to this rule.

On the afternoon of 19 October Hill D was taken by the 3d Battalion and on 20 October the 100th Battalion unleashed a vicious attack that drove the German from Hill G, concluding the operations to capture Bruyeres. (13)

OPERATIONS TOWARD EAST AND O'CONNOR TASK FORCE

With the Corps mission of taking the Winter Line in mind, Division ordered the Combat Team to continue the attack. Without a pause the team pushed to the east. Hill D as aforementioned, was taken by the 2d and 3d Battalions. In so doing the battalions had been forced to by-pass strong areas of resistance to continue the attack and fulfill their mission. As the 2d and 3d Battalions drove forward, fire on the command posts and reserve companies was received and when the battalions were held up along a railroad embankment east of Bruyeres on the edge of the Forêt-de-Belmont, the reserve companies fought to eliminate these pockets of resistance.

(13) Statement - Lt. Col. Gordon Singler, CO, 100th Bn

Initially, the resistance had developed slowly but once the battalions had contacted the Kraut battle positions along the railroad embankment, the fight was again raging. By 1800 hours, 19 October the leading companies were dug in on the west side of the embankment, stopped by enemy dug in on the east side who were determined to hold. At 1030 hours 20 October, the enemy launched a strong counter-attack on the regimental front supported by tanks and artillery. The attacking force withdrew after one of the tank's had been knocked out by bazooka fire. On the afternoon of 20 October, an enemy armored column was spotted moving down the road from Belmont toward the regimental flank. Colonel Pence, Combat Team Commander, sent a Tank, Tank Destroyer, Infantry task force to meet this threat. Before the two armored units met in battle four thunder bolt fighters bombed and strafed the enemy. Seven hits were reported on the column.

At 1710 hours the 2d and 3d Battalions attacked preceded by an artillery preparation. This time the two battalions crossed the railroad embankment to the edge of the Forêt-de-Belmont where they were pinned down by heavy fire from the forest. The adjoining regiments on either flank had not advanced in proportion to the 442d; consequently, the 2d and 3d Battalions were a salient extending 2000 yards into enemy territory.

Believing a frontal attack would be too costly the Regimental Commander, aided by recently captured documents showing enemy defense positions, evolved a plan to hit the enemy on the left flank and at the same time push a frontal attack with the two battalions. Picking the reserve companies F and L, Colonel Pence selected Major Emmett L. O'Connor to command this task force. After presenting his plan to its leaders, he named the grouped units "Task Force O'Connor" and had the unit move out.

The task force was to move to the south end of Hill 505 held by the Germans and at dawn on 21 October move to the top of the ridge and attack the enemy flank at 0900 hours. The plan worked with clocklike precision.

The attack was launched down the wooded north slope of the ridge. Company L, leading the assault, defeated a security group in a short sharp action capturing several prisoners. Then, by prompt use of rifle grenades and mortars, the garrisoned houses just outside the woods were quickly reduced. The capture of these houses was an important factor in the success of the mission as it gave the task force observation on the ground to the enemy's rear. To complete its work, the task force now had to intercept enemy movement, drive a wedge through the forces resisting the Combat Team, and effect a junction with the main force. Heavy casualties were inflicted by artillery fire directed by the task force's forward observer on the enemy positions. Then assault groups began to clear the defenders from houses to the north of La Broquaine. The capture of these houses divided enemy forces and trapped large numbers of enemy between the task force and the Combat Team. That afternoon the operation was complete with the O'Connor Task Force rejoining the attacking battalions at La Broquaine where the last of the enemy resistance had been met. A disorganized enemy fled up the valley toward Belmont and temporary safety. This action advanced the Divisional front lines about 2500 yards, produced eighty dead Germans, and fifty-six Prisoners plus materiel. (14)

During this time the 100th Battalion had not been idle. Moving from a reserve position it followed the O'Connor Task Force down the same trail two hours later, while the O'Connor Force turned to the left the 100th Battalion, kept going up the trail following the ridge line to the north-east. The Battalion objective was to cut the Belmont-Biffontaine Road by seizing the high ground around Biffontaine. The remaining enemy must surrender or be driven into the sector of the 7th Infantry, 3d Division now on the Regiment's left. The 100th Battalion cut the Belmont-Biffontaine road net and then moved two companies to the high ground north of Biffontaine and two companies to the high ground southwest of Biffontaine.

(14) A-5, Eye witness

The 100th Battalion, unobserved by the enemy, dug in to hold these positions until the 3d Battalion continuing the attack could clear the ground between Belmont and the 100th. Belmont at this time had just been taken by an American Armored Task Force.

On 22 October the enemy discovered the 100th Battalion positions and launched a counter-attack. The counter-attack was not of sufficient strength to penetrate positions held by the 100th; the situation was becoming critical as the 100th Battalion was out of food and water and was running out of ammunition. Attempts to resupply the Battalion by Tank-Infantry forces were not successful. However, considerable quantities of German small arms, MG's, AT Guns, and panzerfausts with ammunition were captured so that the 100th Battalion reequipped itself with German weapons and continued to fight without a great deal of inconvenience. On the following day a carrying party managed to slip through the enemy's lines over a mountain trail and effect resupply.

During this time the 2d Battalion which had been in reserve had been put in the line to protect the flank of the 100th. This mission was accomplished in the nick of time as the Germans had moved bicycle troops down the Biffontaine Valley during the night to cut off the 100th Battalion. A short but bitter fight ensued and the German attack was repulsed with six prisoners captured. On 23 October after a house to house, room to room fight the 100th Battalion took Biffontaine killing a number of Krauts and capturing fifty eight prisoners. (15)

The following day, 24 October, all units of the Combat Team were relieved by other elements of the 36th Division and put in Corps Reserve near Belmont for rest, hot baths, and hot meals which the men needed desperately. In these ten days of fighting the enemy guns were never silent day or night and even Corps Reserve was under fire from the enemy's heavy artillery.

(15) Statement - Lt. Col. Gordon Singler, CO, 100th Bn

ACTIONS TO RELIEVE THE LOST BATTALION

The weapons of the regiment had hardly cooled when the Division Commander directed the Regimental Commander to relieve the 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry, immediately. Accordingly, Colonel Pence ordered the 2d Battalion into the fight again. With less than two days rest all of which was spent under fire from enemy artillery the 2d Battalion effected the relief at 0300 hours 26 October. The relief was made on the extreme left flank of the division sector. There was a reason for this urgent relief of the 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry. The 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry had over extended itself into enemy territory by three miles in a push down a heavily wooded ridge that was the controlling terrain feature of the valley from Biffontaine to La Houssiere. A strong enemy force had infiltrated behind the Battalion and had it cut off. The Battalion was ordered to fight its way back but was unable to break the steel ring of enemy fire from automatic weapons by which it was hemmed in.

The 2d and 3d Battalions of the 141st Infantry driving with all the will and fire power they possessed were unable to break through to the Lost Battalion. This was the reason for putting into the fray some of the most aggressive troops in the Army of the United States with the mission--- Save that Battalion.

The balance of the 442d Regiment relieved the remainder of the 141st Infantry at 0400 hours on a pitch black night 27 October. Losing no time the 442d launched its attack, 2d Battalion on the left, 3d Battalion in the center, 100th Battalion on the right. Attached to the 3d Battalion was Company D, 752d Tank Battalion and Company C of the 3d Chemical Weapons Battalion (4.2 mortars). Attached to the 100th Battalion was Company B, 752d Tank Battalion, Company D, 83d Chemical Weapons Battalion (4.2 mortars) and Company C, 636th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Fire of the Combat Team's own 522d Field Artillery Battalion was reinforced by that of the 133d

Field Artillery. The battalions were to be given as much fire support as could be mustered at this time. (16)

Progress was slow. At 1400 hours, 27 October all battalions were abreast, but a large gap existed between the 2d and 3d Battalions. The enemy took advantage of this situation and made a tank-Infantry counter-attack. The attack hit I and K Companies with K Company receiving the brunt of the attack on its left flank. The attack was repelled only after three hours of furious action in which the Armor penetrated to within seventy-five yards of the leading Companies spraying the area with fire at point blank range. When the Germans withdrew one disabled Mark IV Tank was left behind.

Before continuing this action it is necessary to give a word picture of the terrain over which the Combat Team was fighting. The hills were exceedingly steep 600-700 feet in elevation covered with gigantic trees reaching high into the sky with heavy foliage cutting off most of the light. Between these trees were second growth trees from one to two feet in diameter. Interlaced throughout the area and around the trees to the height of sometimes three feet were tough fibrous vines with long needle-like thorns. These thorns were weapons in themselves and canalized much of the movement to narrow trails. In turn, these trails would be mined and covered by automatic weapons fire by a clever enemy. This was the country that protected the approaches to the Meurthe River and the German Winter Line.

The next morning 28 October the attack continued. The fury of the fight was intensified and casualties were soaring, caused in the main by tree bursts from enemy artillery and mortar fire. There was no way for the attacking troops to escape this fire. Aid men showed great heroism disregarding any safety they might have with front line platoons. Time

(16) A-1, p. 26, A-2, Chapter 16

and again they exposed themselves to enemy small arms fire in an attempt to aid a comrade. Many were wounded or killed following the unwritten code of a front line medic. The only way aid could be given to the fallen was to push on forcing the enemy to retreat allowing the aid men to reach the casualties.

As soon as the enemy lost a portion of ground, he would bring down accurate concentrations of mortar and artillery fire almost immediately on the advancing troops. In the 100th Battalion sector enemy troops pulled back across a draw. As riflemen of B and C Companies started after them, the Krauts dumped an hour long barrage in the draw that killed and wounded twenty of the men caught in the trap and brought the attack in the 100th Battalion zone to a stand still.

Chaplains of the 442d showed no fear often going where the brave feared to tread. Such was their devotion to the men to whom they gave moral courage.

The 3d Battalion ran into the first of a series of antitank blocks on a wagon trail they were following. A company of infantry usually manned these block using Panzer Faust, machine gun, and mortar fire to delay advancing forces. Deadly enemy sniper fire took a high toll in officers and men. German snipers were expert marksmen and most of the casualties were from rifle shots placed between the eyes or in the area of the heart. The road block was cleared by heroic actions of individuals and the use of the regimental cannon company. A Forward Observer from the Cannon Company brought direct hits down on the block destroying the barrier and a number of enemy.

The two battalions, 100th and 3d had captured seventy prisoners by nightfall of 28 October and were 1500 yards nearer the Lost Battalion but only accomplished this with terrible loss of life.

The 2d Battalion was fighting a similar war and in addition was protecting both its right and left flanks as there were large gaps on each side of the Battalion. The 2d Battalion Commander, setting the stage for the capture of Hill 617, had Company G dig in near the base of Hill 617 on its west side. The Company was spaced widely apart and gave the appearance of a Battalion entrenched. Companies E and F moved in two squad columns abreast along a wagon road from Grebefosse, north through Halley in the 7th Infantry's sector. They swung east to avoid crossing open ground which was under enemy observation and then south again cutting across Hill 585 occupied by G Company, 7th Infantry and up the ridge mass that ran into Hill 617. At this time it was twilight and both Company E and F dug in and held their positions astride the ridge.

The Commander, Company F thinking he had moved down the ridge to a point just above Company G (which was dug in at the bottom of the hill) decided to send a platoon out to contact G Company, thereby encircling the enemy dug in on Hill 617 between the top of the ridge occupied by E and F Company and the bottom where G Company was. Moving down into the forest from atop the ridge, the platoon worked its way forward about 300 yards when it ran into heavy automatic weapons fire. Attempting to advance further, the platoon met small arms fire from camouflaged fox holes. It was soon apparent from the fire being received that the enemy was infiltrating around the unit.

By this time it was nearly dark so the Platoon Leader decided to try and cut through the enemy lines to friendly positions at what was believed to be the weakest point. Using two squads to hold off the closing Kraut, the 3d squad was sent to open a path through the encircling enemy. This was accomplished after bitter fighting which, as the darkness increased, became hand to hand combat. Fighting its way out of this trap the Platoon cut the Kraut wire line and killed an estimated ten of the enemy capturing

twenty prisoners. The Platoon had two casualties. One of the prisoners captured was the Commanding Officer of the 202d Mountain Battalion whose unit was opposing the 2d Battalion.

Enemy forces opposing the 100th and 3d Battalions were the 933d Regiment, 538th Infantry Division and the 198th Fusilier Battalion. Opposite the 2d Battalion was the 202d Mountain Battalion newly arrived in the sector. (17)

The 100th and 3d Battalions jumped off on 29 October, cleared one knoll and ran into the enemy's main defensive position. The Kraut had dug in positions astride the ridge at its narrowest part. Maneuver was impossible as the sides of the ridge were too steep and were mined at this point. There was room for two companies in a frontal assault. At this time all battalions received a message from higher headquarters that the Lost Battalion's situation was becoming desperate and that relief must be effected immediately. The 100th Battalion echeloned to the right rear, elected to go around the mine field and attempt to envelop the position deep on the flank. (18)

The position of the 3d Battalion allowed no alternative but to attack frontally. The attack was launched. The Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Alferd A. Pursall ordered his Company Commanders to turn the enemy's right flank, but the slopes were so steep the men could not move with any rapidity and many were killed by small arms fire as they attempted to pull themselves to the top of the ridge by the growth along its sides.

A platoon of tanks came up. The men regrouped and tried a frontal assault under the cover of direct tank fire but could not make the summit. Part way up this time they could neither move up or down. Mortar fire was covering the Battalion front. Colonel Pursall taking a gamble ordered

(17) A-2, Chapter 16; (18) Statement - Lt. Col. Gordon Singles, CO, 100th Bn

fix bayonets and prepare to charge. I and K Companies moved forward in a frontal attack up the slope firing assault fire from the hip. The enemy fired as rapidly as his guns would permit. Men were blown to bits but others took their places. American dead and wounded lay where they had fallen over enemy trenches they were assaulting, inside enemy dug outs, on top of enemy already dead or dying. The Kraut had enough; he fled from the positions leaving one hundred of his own dead and fifty-five wounded and all his automatic weapons behind.

On 29 October the 2d Battalion moved from astride its position on the ridge connecting Hill 617 and from information gained by the Platoon of F Company the day before they fought down the slopes into the German positions on Hill 617. The Kraut made it a rough fight all the way but could not stop a determined attacker. The 2d Battalion killed an even one hundred Germans and captured forty-one prisoners. The attacks of 29 October had inflicted disastrous losses on the Germans. In maintaining their stand to the last man as ordered by Hitler, over three hundred and fifty Germans were captured or killed on this day. (19)

Thirty October found the 442d Infantry within 700 yards of the Lost Battalion. The terrible fighting on 29 October had broken the back of German resistance. Against sporadic small arms fire and deadly tree bursts from increasing German artillery fire the Regiment moved on. At 1500 hours a patrol from I Company led by Technical Sergeant Takeo Senzaki broke through the last Kraut resistance and made contact with the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry, The Lost Battalion. A few minutes later a platoon of Company B made contact on the Lost Battalion's other flank. One-half hour later the main bodies of both units were joined, and the impossible had been accomplished.

Immediately both battalions dug in using a circular defensive position around the hill-top where contact had been made. Two hundred and forty men of the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry, had been trapped

(19) A-1, Eye witness

in that tightening ring of steel. When relief was effected, 193 men of the Lost Battalion, 28 of which were wounded, walked or were carried out alive. The Combat Team had arrived just in time.

CAMPAIGN'S END

On 31 October with battalions at less than 50 per cent normal strength an attack was launched. The 2d and 3d Battalions attacked down the same long ridge mass on which they had been fighting. It was finally cleared that afternoon with the battalions killing more Germans and capturing eight more prisoners. During the next three days all units remained where they were holding defensive positions and probing the enemy's line to find out the disposition of his forces. While this patrolling was going on Jerry poured in hundreds of rounds of artillery and the ranks grew thinner with each passing day.

Three November the enemy attacked lightly held positions in the 3d Battalion sector. I and L Companies caught the Krauts in a cross fire, forcing them to abandon the attack.

From 3 November to 8 November the 2d and 3d Battalions tried to run the Kraut all the way down hill and into the valley but met with only partial success. The 442d Regiment at this point was not the strength of a full battalion having about seven hundred men in all. Company strength averaged about thirty-five men. Company I had a total of five riflemen. Company K was commanded by a Staff Sergeant. Most of the men still with the unit were suffering from trench-foot and respiratory diseases due to the almost complete lack of winter clothing. (20)

The regiment was relieved on 8 November and moved to an area near Lepanges where the men bathed and received new clothes. (21) On 10 November the 100th Battalion was detached and sent to a rest area. (22)

(20) A-1, p. 32; (21) A-1, p. 32; (22) Statement - Lt. Col. Gordon Singles, CO, 100th Bn.

From 8 November to 12 November, the balance of the Combat Team rested.

The morning of 13 November the Team took over holding positions on the Division left flank in weather of ice and sleet, 2d Battalion on the line, 3d Battalion in reserve. Fifteen November found the 100th Battalion on a surprise move now several hundred miles to the south taking over positions in the high Alps on the Franco-Italian frontier. (23)

General White, 7th Army Chief of Staff, after discussing the physical condition of the 442d personnel with Sixth Army Group, decided the Unit needed a warmer climate and so the 442d Regimental Combat Team was withdrawn from the line on 17 November, 1944. By 20 November they were on their way to Nice in Southern France. (24)

During the Vosges Campaign, the 442d Combat Team through fighting, was cut to a shadow of the unit that had landed in Southern France a short two months before. In this campaign alone for individual heroism ten Distinguished Service Crosses were awarded, four Presidential Citations and one Division Citation were received. Numerous other decorations were also given. (25)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

Critiquing the operations of the 442d Combat Team in the Vosges Campaign it will be well worth noting that all missions assigned this unit were extremely grueling in nature and called for men with the highest type physical and mental stamina. It may be noted that Corps and Division Commanders were aware of the capabilities of the Team and exploited it to the utmost.

1. Certain missions assigned often called for the battalions to fight with their flanks exposed to the enemy most of the time. The primary cause for this was lack of Infantry units available for front line duty. Commanders stretched their lines to the breaking point but

(23) Statement - Lt. Col. Gordon Singles, CO, 100th Bn; (24) A-2, p. 377;
(25) A-1, p. 43, A-2, Chapter 16, A-5

still large gaps existed between units. Other causes were lack of coordination between units with regard to their boundaries and future movements.

2. Before the battle of Bruyeres, leaders had time to make a thorough reconnaissance and did so. This contributed greatly to the successful outcome of the engagement. Leaders had a good knowledge of where they were and when fighting deep in the forests did not lose their direction. Constant reconnaissance by battalion commanders and subordinate leaders although often limited because of the dense forest paved the way to a successful completion of all missions.

3. Engineer troops in the fighting before Bruyeres were sent out to tear down a road block. This block had already been cleared of enemy by the infantry. Nevertheless, it was remanned by the Germans. In retaking the road block the Engineer Company suffered casualties which it could not afford to lose. It is thought that in forest fighting road blocks should be held by infantry until the Engineers can take them over. This would prevent an infiltrating or hidden enemy from remanning the barriers and inflicting casualties on critical troops. Engineer troops being critical due to the long period of time it takes to train an efficient combat engineer and because of the shortage of such troops in a theater of operations.

4. Aggressiveness of all leaders during the nip and tuck fighting in and around Bruyeres was responsible for impetus needed by the troops to cross the line that spells victory. Individual actions to further the advance without regard to the danger involved was a great factor in maintaining the morale and esprit de corps of the Regiment.

5. The discovery of a machine gun battalion in the defense of Bruyeres alerted U. S. Intelligence that the Kraut intended to make a permanent stand in this sector. Machine gun battalions were never used

unless the enemy was attempting to hold the position permanently.

6. Although it was necessary to by-pass pockets of enemy resistance in the vicinity of Hill D near Bruyeres, at the same time it proved to be a dangerous action. All battalions were fighting at the time when forward companies became engaged in a heavy fire fight. The reserve companies were fired on from the rear and were attacked by the by-passed Germans on Hill D. Shortly thereafter, a counter-attack hit the Regimental left flank. There are no unfavorable criticisms regarding the actions of the Combat Team Commander in by-passing pockets of enemy on Hill D as it was anticipated that all reserve elements would be needed to keep the attack moving. Generally, units should not pass around an area of resistance without leaving troops to contain the enemy. Had the counter-attack on the flank not been repulsed with a small armored force at hand it is conceivable that the enemy would have turned the tide of battle by his attack on the flank and rear of the Combat Team.

7. A criticism of German tactics was that German counter-attacks normally were not in sufficient strength to be successful.

8. The 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry moving out on a battalion strength reconnaissance mission lost contact with its Regiment, over extended itself and was beyond the range of its own support. Tactically this was wrong; however, it is thought the Commanding General 36th Division erred in requesting a man size mission of a small boy. The fighting had been intense during this period and enemy positions were not exactly known. To send a company or battalion out by itself on reconnaissance was inviting a lost battalion, just what happened.

9. Medical Aid men were to be praised for their courage in going to the exposed wounded during a fire fight. They suffered numerous casualties in actions of this type. Casualties in aid personnel would not have been as great had these men waited until the fight had passed by.

10. The loss of a number of men from sniper fire and the accuracy with which the shots were placed indicated the German Sniper was well trained in marksmanship.

11. In helping rescue the Lost Battalion Lieutenant Colonel Pursall whose men were pinned down by automatic weapons fire knew that to allow them to stay where they were would be disastrous. Accordingly he ordered them to fix bayonets and move out. This move follows an unwritten law in the U. S. Army, right or wrong do something. Lieutenant Colonel Pursall's order was right as the position was taken at once.

12. Poor supply of a critical Class II item, winter clothing, was responsible for much of the trench-foot and respiratory diseases.

The number of Germans killed or captured, the decorations won, attested to the aggressiveness and the will to win spirit of the 442d Combat Team. It was a superior fighting force.

LESSONS LEARNED

Certain lessons have been picked from this monograph because they show with clarity the right and wrong use of tactics and the violation or the following of certain principles as taught in the United States Army.

1. Coordination of units with regard to their boundaries and future movements is essential to prevent gaps from occurring between units.

2. Reconnaissance must be continuous as shown in the preceding monograph. A Company Commander believing he knew his location did not make a reconnaissance before ordering a platoon forward into enemy territory. Result, the platoon nearly met disaster.

3. Road blocks if not destroyed immediately should be held by friendly troops until the engineers destroy them.

4. Men should be so trained and disciplined that they are capable of aggressive individual action in an emergency and able to

function against the enemy at a moments notice.

5. Simple tactical plans in combat work the best. Example:
O'Connor Task Force.

6. Expert Intelligence personnel may obtain important information from seemingly trivial matters. Example: Machine Gun Battalion used in Defense of Bruyeres, gave notice that the Germans were planning to try and hold Bruyeres as a permanent position.

7. By-passed enemy should be contained.

8. Command Posts of Battalions and larger units should be placed where they do not come under direct fire.

9. All infantry units should contain expert marksmen trained as snipers.

10. Strong aggressive leadership and common sense wins battles.

11. Forward observers if allowed to do their job will make the advance of the infantry a great deal easier by the use of Artillery fire.

12. Never underestimate the enemy's capabilities.

13. Supply must function to furnish the proper clothing consistent with the weather, terrain and mission.

14. Company Aid Men should be trained to wait until the fire fight has passed on and then render First Aid to the wounded. Dead Aid Men are of no value to the units needing their service.

15. Engineers, when supporting Infantry, should be prepared to fight like Infantry and when operating near the front line be on the alert for hostile forces.