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Sheroef

GERMAN BREAKTHROUGH

16 to 20 Dec. 1944

423d Inf Regt, 106th Division

Interview with 1st Lt Ivan H. Long, platoon leader of I & R platoon, 423d Infantry

Vicinity of Desnie, Belgium, 6 January 1945

Captain K.W. Hechler, 2d Info & Hist Sv. (VIII Corps)

During the first day of the attack, Lt Long acted as a liaison officer between the 422d and 423d Regiments. The attack did not hit the 423d frontally, but swept around the flanks down from Auw and north from Bleialf toward Schonberg. No armor came through the positions of the 1st 3d battalions on the line, and the infantry probing did not drive the battalions from their positions.

Few people realized the larger picture on the attack, at least on the 16th. The front line battalions did not wish to give up their emplacements and held where they were. On the 17th, the regimental CP moved forward from Buchet to a position closer to its front line troops, because there was nothing to protect the regimental CP from the rear. C Co was then pulled out of the 1st battalion to protect Buchet and to keep an eye on Brandscheid; C Co had no fire fight or activity around Buchet, however. In fact, the only units heavily engaged during the first two days were the service and Anti-tank Co's which were situated near Bleialf and were caught in the southern pincer of the enemy flanking movement and badly shot up.

On 17th Dec, the 2d Bn was deployed along high ground in the vicinity of Halenfeld. Up to this time, the 2d Bn had been in reserve. There were rumors on 17 Dec that CCB of the 9th Armored Division would come in from the west to open up a route to the 423d, and the general feeling was

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still optimistic.

On the 18th Dec, Lt Long tried to drive up the road northeast from Halenfeld to Schlausenbach to get his bedroll from the 422d Inf CP. "I passed one of our burned-out tanks and an officer tried to wave me down, but I couldn't believe that there were any enemy up there. But enemy infantry was pouring down through the crossroads (005877); they pointed rifles at me, but I held up my hand for them not to shoot and looked over them with field glasses, then backed up very fast in my jeep."

On Monday,¹ Lt Long received news that the 423d was going to try and move out to Schonberg, and he was given orders to meet them coming through the road junction at Halenfeld and provide security for the column. The 2d Bn, under command of Lt Col Puett, had by this time moved north with the mission of providing left flank security for the 422d Inf. The 1st Bn passed through Halenfeld by foot and went cross-country toward Radscheid, while the 3d Bn came through by road and went northwest toward the new forward regimental CP at (975869) on the Radscheid road.

After dark on the night of 18 Dec., Lt Long proceeded with his platoon as far as the rear regimental CP at Oberlascheid, where he talked with the regimental executive officer, who stated that communication with the forward CP was extremely difficult; the regimental executive officer further said that the regiment was pulling out of its positions and was going to try and go toward the northwest. Long was then given orders to go to Radscheid with his platoon and establish a roadblock facing southwest toward Bleialf, with the mission of keeping the enemy from harassing the tail of the 1st Bn, as it went northwest cross-

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¹ December 18, 1944 was a Monday.

country.

Before establishing the roadblock, Lt Long contacted the regimental commander, who told him the plan of the regiment was to move toward Schonberg to break out of the trap which the enemy had sprung. "See what your regimental commander has to ride in," said the Colonel, pointing to two bullet holes through the windshield of his jeep, but drove off before Lt Long could offer his jeep as replacement.

Between Halenfeld and Radscheid, Lt Long had heard considerable small arms fire late on 18 Dec, and he feels that when the 1st Bn went through that area they may have been hit on the flank by an enemy infantry force. On the morning of 19 Dec., he heard additional small arms fire in this area, but the fate of these troops is unknown.

In accordance with orders, after dark on 18 Dec., Lt Long's platoon established the Radscheid roadblock. Three hours were spent felling a tree across the road, machine guns were placed semi-circularly facing south, and a tank destroyer with a burned-out gun was put on the block with its .50 cal pointing south. There was no activity at the roadblock that night. The next morning, two platoons of F Co of the 422d Inf were observed dug in on the high ground north of Radscheid; their company commander, Capt Stuart, said they had become separated from the rest of the regiment.

On the morning of 19 Dec., Lt Long told his men to set up a defensive position around the hill, to dig in, and put automatic weapons out for security. He started to make a reconnaissance up a small trail running in the direction of Schonberg, but several shots were fired at him and he returned. He then decided to load his men into the vehicles (one TD, one 2½-ton truck, one half-track, and 4 jeeps) and make a

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break toward Schonberg. At this point a medic came back and said: "Don't do it and don't try it, lieutenant, because artillery has wrecked vehicles all along the road and you'll never be able to get by." Realizing that chaos existed along the road, Lt Long decided at this point that it would not be practicable to try and rejoin the regiment. It was then that he decided to make a break for freedom independently.

Artillery barrages then started dropping on his positions, so Lt Long decided to move out. Shots were fired through the blocks of all the vehicles, all surplus equipment and supplies were discarded and they started out toward the northeast, descending the reverse slope of the hill to escape the observed artillery fire which had been dropping on them.

Lt Long trained his glasses on a jeep observed coming out of Oberscheid, and it turned out to be Maj Helms, 423d regimental S-4 who told Lt Long that he had wanted to try and break out but that his suggestion had been vetoed by the other officers who were in favor of staying and defending the town of Oberlascheid. Capt Nauman with A Co. of the 423d, elements of the 422d Regiment, and 4 towed TDs had set up a perimeter defense of Oberlascheid. Another meeting of officers was then held, and it was decided to abandon Oberlascheid at noon on 19 Dec. and try and break out.

At this time, Lt Long's plan was to start northeast, making a wide flanking movement and then cut west to the north of Schonberg and fight through if necessary. Capt Nauman started out with his company in the lead, followed by Lt Long's platoon, and then 20 men led by Lt McKinley, A & P. platoon leader of the 1st Bn., 423d Inf. No sooner had they left the village when an 88 fired on the column; the gun had been concealed in Oberlascheid in one of the buildings. Several vehicles

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were hit, drawing additional artillery fire. Considerable argument ensued about the vehicles, and finally Lt Long's, Lt McKinley's and Capt Nauman's group separated from the others. A thick woods soon broke contact with A Co., and shortly thereafter a fire-fight was heard in their direction.

Following high ground, Lt Long's platoon, which later became separated from Lt McKinley's, worked due west toward St Vith. They followed the compass and the direction of the buzz-bombs, which they knew passed almost directly over St Vith. Travelling at night, dodging enemy tanks and trucks, and bluffing their way past enemy outposts, and by luck picking the only possible gap in the 7th Armored Division's minefields in front of St Vith, all but two of Long's platoon reached St Vith on 21 Dec. The other two came in with Lt McKinley's group, which followed their footsteps. They then joined in the defense of St Vith and were the last organized group to leave town.

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