

Casualties Heavy in Advance Through Siegfried Line

This story of an attack on the Siegfried Line was written by Sergeant Peter L. Detmold of the 345th Infantry, 87th Division, Third Army, now in Ithaca on furlough. He is a brother of John H. Detmold, assistant editor of the Cornell Alumni News.

By PETER L. DETMOLD

The first days of February had barely come when the sure signs of a move appeared. The weapons platoon leader, the trailer for an early morning move. The men knew that the company would soon push across the German border. Later that day the march began, past Heuren, down the hill to Schonberg ("Are we in Germany now, Sergeant?"), up a steep hill, past some wreckage where troops of the 106th Division were overwhelmed by Von Rundstedt's Ardennes push, past some dead Germans, chained to their guns, and into a small village, Laudesfeld. The entry into Germany ("Yes, this is Germany!") had been remarkably unremarkable. No one had tried to stop us; we just walked across.

Our first question to the first German was, "How far is it to the Siegfried Line?" We had been worrying about the Line ever since December when we pushed almost up to it in the Saar. None of us wanted to push through it. We all wanted the other guys to flank it and hit it from the rear for us. We had an unhealthy fear of the West-wall.

After one day at Laudesfeld we pushed on again. Kobescheid was our destination, the grapevine told us. Our German "host" told us more. Kobescheid was one kilometer from the Line. We pushed out in foggy weather, walked through Auw past some dead GIs of the 106th, killed in December but still preserved by the cold, and up a steep hill to Kobescheid. The grapevine was correct; how about the German?

Searchers for Stove Shelled

That afternoon we moved into a barn, and the next day dug in in the cold rain. In the afternoon another man and I went searching for a stove. We foolishly walked in full view of the enemy and were promptly shelled. On the first two rounds we hit the ground and sweated out the next two. Those over, we stood up only to fall again as two more shells screamed in. This time we came up running and dashed into a nearby house for safety. Neither of us was hurt but we did not get the stove. That night they told us we would attack in the morning. We were to jump off well before dawn in order to approach the Line in the dark. "Tomorrow will be Feb. 6," I told myself. "Don't forget that date." I never will forget it.

I was a gunner on the 60 mm. mortar. The company's mortar section is always at the rear when we move. Mine was the second squad, so we marched next to last. There was a steep mountain to climb up to the Siegfried Line, with the Germans looking down our throats every step. In daytime that march would have been impossible. Properly outposted, it would have been costly even at night. But the Germans had no outposts. There was a creek at the bottom of the mountain. One of the gunners lost his mortar jumping across it. One of the squad leaders passed out. We

had only two mortar squads left.

At 8 o'clock we crossed a large open field and stepped through some barbed wire entanglements, the first sure sign of the Line. Up to now we had not met any opposition; down in the valley the roar of our tanks roared up to us as the armor struggled through the mud to catch up. About half an hour later we moved forward into a field of young pines. We ran across a road singly for cover on the other side. By now the armor was clanking right behind us. Almost immediately the first German shells dropped in on us. The familiar cry of "medic" rent the air. Men were being hit. No one wanted to lie down for the ground was covered by about a foot of slushy snow. A radio operator lying next to me with his equipment strapped to his back had the radio smashed by shrapnel. A call came down the line for our platoon sergeant to join the machine gunners up front. The platoon leader had been killed by a direct hit on his head. The artillery kept pounding us while we lay there wishing we could move out from under the fire.

Finally we moved forward. And halted again just a few yards on. The section sergeant told us to dig in if we wanted to. I wanted to.

But digging in the prone position is very tiring, so I quit when I discovered water a few inches beneath the sod. And all the while the Germans pounded us relentlessly. We cursed the armor for making so much noise behind us that we could not hear the shells coming in. All around me men lay in grotesque positions, their faces whiter than the dirty snow, while the company aid men bandaged them, aided by some of the sergeants. The cries of "medic" never ceased. And then we moved up again. I barely had the mortar on my shoulder when the line stopped; I dropped the mortar, closing up behind one of the new men in my squad who was in action for the first time. The shells were falling desperately close now. I hit the ground, cautioned the man behind me to get down, and pushed my face in a hole. At that instant two shells hit almost on top of me, followed by two more just to my rear. The man behind me cried "I'm hit!" and raised a bloody glove. Another mortartman called my name and when I answered told me that he too had been hit and would try to evacuate. I called to the new boy in front of me but got no answer. I expected none, sensing that he had been killed. Just as word came back to move out, another man from my squad called me. I dodged over to him and saw that his legs had been hit several times. I told him I had to move forward but would send a medic back.

Cry of 'Medic' Heard

Only a short distance on, we stopped. A machine gunner from the heavies was moaning and call-



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