

CHAPTER THREE

BRITTANY

After being sent to the rear area to a field hospital, Sharpe returned to the 329th on 4 August by way of the congested Périers-St. Lô highway. He traveled through Coutances, down to Avranches and eventually to Dolet where the 329th was situated in preparation for its attack on St. Malo in Brittany.

During his stay in the hospital, Operation COBRA had taken place and the American forces had finally broken out of Normandy. Preceding the COBRA initiative, a very heavy tactical bombardment of the German positions took place on 25 July. Unfortunately, errors in calculation caused some bombs to be dropped short of their targets and over one hundred American soldiers were killed by mistake, with close to 500 wounded.¹ Sharpe's boyhood friend, Holt Barnwell, was one of the fourteen killed from the 9th Division.²

As part of the effort to penetrate to the Périers-St. Lô highway during the COBRA Operation, the 83d Division was used as the "pressure force". (Fig. 20) It was now a part

of the VIII Corps under Major General Troy H. Middleton. While the 83d continued to press the Germans, pushing them slowly southward, a regiment of the 83d, the 330th, was to be the pivot point for the corps to swing west and pinch out the enemy at the highway.³ The 329th Regiment was in the center of the division position, to the west of the Taute River. The 330th was on the east bank of that river and Collins' VII Corps was to the east of the 83d Division. On 27 July, the Germans disengaged and the VII, VIII, and XV Corps emerged onto the Periers highway in pursuit of the retreating German forces. The 83d was then assigned to go southward toward Brittany. (Fig. 21)

This is Sharpe's account of his return from the hospital to the 329th Regiment on 4 August, 1944:

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The big bombing had taken place, and the breakthrough had taken place, and the troops had started down the Periers highway. I was in the hospital with the holes in my arm and in my leg partially healed and the surgeon had me on the table to put the final dressings on. He wanted to stitch up the holes that were left and when they had me all cleaned up, ready for the stitching operation I said, "Wait, aren't you going to give me some novacaine or something?" and the surgeon said, "No, you're an officer,

it's not supposed to make any difference to you." And I said, "Somebody sure has misinformed you." And he said, "No I'm not going to give you anything so that when I cut around the wound I want to know when I get into the good meat. I want to trim off the old dead meat and that way I'll get a better sewing job and it'll heal better." And the truth was, that character didn't give me anything, he just went on and did just exactly what he said he was going to do. Well, that was his story, but I know they didn't have much morphine or other medicines and they were scrounging for medical supplies so they saved the painkillers for the soldiers who had serious problems.

When I heard that the bombing had taken place and we got the reports as to what was happening, a captain from Holt Barnwell's outfit happened to be in the hospital with me at the same time. We decided that we were going to go back to the front, and we went in to see the hospital commander and told him we wanted to leave. He said, "No you can't do it, you have to go back through the reception center, through the pipeline, and into a rest area. They'll let you get rehabilitated and then after that they'll send you back up to the front." And I asked, "Does that mean I'll be going back to my outfit?" and he said, "You might or you might go to wherever else they need you." And I looked at this friend of mine and I said, "This is not for me," and he said, "It's not for me either."

So I explained that it was important to me to go back to G Company. It was my company, and I had been with them from the very beginning. And I told the colonel that I was going to go one way or the other and it would make it alot easier administratively if he'd just go ahead and sign me out and I was sure my battalion surgeon could take care of the wounds and put dressings on them until everything was completely healed. And I concluded, "There's no reason for me to go back to a rehabilitation center, I don't need it."

So the hospital commander agreed. He got kind of provoked but he went ahead and released both of us.

In the meantime, the captain had gotten a message to his outfit and they sent him a jeep. So the two of us rode forward in a jeep and rode for two days, working our way up the columns. An event was happening which was unusual. It was the first time in history in which they had three corps operations going on at the same time in the same area. They had three divisions moving down one single road. It was a limited highway and they were having a mass of movement of all types of military vehicles. There were armored vehicles and supporting vehicles including those big 240mm cannons which they were pulling along in the columns. I remember when one of those turned off the road and got stuck, it just stopped everything for miles.

My friend had to turn off to go to the 9th Division,

so I continued to bum my way forward and anytime I could find anything that was going the right way, I'd take it. Eventually I found a jeep from the 83d Division going into the 331st Infantry which was Colonel Bob York's regiment, so I took it and got into his headquarters. It was late in the afternoon and he was getting ready for an attack the next morning. I asked him if I could get some transportation the next morning to go on over to my regiment, and he said, "Sure, and as a matter of fact, I'm not going to get any sleep tonight, there's my bedroll, you go ahead and sleep in that if you want to and when you get through just throw it on the jeep here. In the morning I'll let the jeep take you on over to your regiment." So that's what I did, I spent the night in his bedroll and then the next morning, took his jeep and went on over to my regiment. I arrived at the regimental headquarters of the 329th Infantry and there was the regimental commander, Colonel Crabill; and General Ferenbaugh, the assistant division commander; and General Montague, the artillery commander. And Crabill said to me, "Boy, we're glad to see you, go up and take over the 2d Battalion. The battalion commander was just wounded, the exec was just killed and they're in a bad state of shock right now." During the time I had been away, they had changed battalion commanders three times. (Fig. 22)

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In his book, The Ragtag Circus (1969), Colonel E.B. Crabill wrote, "The 2d Battalion of the 329th had had a rough time since its initial attack. From Lieutenant Colonel Bowen in the first hedgerow attacks to Captain Clifton McCarthy near Chateauneuf, it had lost a half-dozen battalion commanders. Providentially, when McCarthy was killed Captain Granville Sharpe reported back to duty from a field hospital, where he had been treated for a wound received in the hedgerows. He was put in command of the 2d Battalion. It proved to be an excellent choice."⁴

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So the purpose now was to go up and find out where the battalion was, get command of it and get it into an attack. I got the distinct impression that Jim Bagley, who was the regimental S-3, was delighted that I was going to do it and he didn't have to. He would probably have been asked to take it over because he was a real fighter, he was an outstanding soldier and a real fighter. I don't think anyone would have wanted to take over the battalion at that point because it was in such bad shape. Anyway, Bagley was good enough to take me up to the 2d Battalion under heavy enemy fire and he showed me what he could find of the

remnants of the battalion. At least he got me into what was left of the battalion headquarters. E Company, F Company, and G Company, all three, had been committed and they were in a line surrounding the little town of Chateauneuf in France, just a few miles from St. Malo. (Fig. 23) Chateauneuf was part of the defenses designed to keep St. Malo from being attacked from the land. This was where the antitank defenses were which protected the port area of St. Malo. The commander of G Company had been wounded and he was in shock, his name was John Devenney. So I made him the S-1 of the battalion, that is the personnel officer, which meant he was responsible for running the command post and he wouldn't have to go back into the fight right away. I realized that he wasn't in any condition to go and fight a company just then. I gave G Company to a lieutenant named Samuel Hastings, Hastings was an excellent officer and did a good job. G Company was going to be on the left, F Company was on the right, and they were astride the main highway going into the town. They had taken tremendous casualties because they were being fired on by the big 16 inch naval gun from off of the island of Cézembre. Cézembre was an island just off the coast and they were firing in support of the German position. Those were huge guns. I heard those shells come in and they sounded like a freight train with a trailer on it. It just went Roo, Roo, Roo, Roo, and finally when it

exploded it was like a bomb going off. When I found F Company it was in a bad way because they were being fired on by that thing so it was hard to get them going. But we got them organized and an officer named Raymond Grice who was in command did a fine job once things were straightened out and going again.

About this time a lieutenant showed up with a platoon which had five snub-nosed 75mm howitzers and he was looking for the 3d Battalion. Those guns look like tanks, but they're really just armored weapons carriers and they have a nice 75mm cannon on the front of them. This tank outfit was part of an Armored Reconnaissance Battalion and they usually broke down into smaller units which were support platoons. These platoons furnished close assault support for the troops as they went in to attack a position. The regimental commander had told them to attach themselves to the 3d Battalion, I just told them I was glad they had found us, that their timing was perfect, and that we needed them to help us make the assault on the town of Chateauneuf. I said, "What I want you to do is to spread out along here in this hedgerow and get ready to go up out of the hedgerow and into the town. I'm going to put infantry with each one of you so that you'll have local protection and they won't be able to get close to you, and you're supposed to furnish the immediate assault artillery fire right into the town." So they were happy about that

and they got ready and spread their tanks out, down behind that hedgerow.

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Roy Wilkinson, the company aid man and medic liason for the 2d Battalion, remembered the same event: "There was understandable confusion with our loss of leadership until Captain Sharpe arrived at the crossroad with his Company G. I was standing practically at his elbow as he sized up the situation and at just about that very moment, a column of light tanks with sawed-off 75mm howitzers mounted in their turrets, came racing toward us from an oblique direction to the crossroad. Captain Sharpe stepped out into the exposed road, raised an arm as a traffic cop might, and the column ground to a halt. The Armored Company CO was standing in the open turret of the lead tank and when Captain Sharpe asked where the armor was headed, their leader said, '3d Battalion, 330th'. And our new battalion CO said, 'You found it!', and asked if our people could 'mount up' aboard the armor and when told we could, had us climb on for the tankers new destination, across that field toward the farmhouse."⁵

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And then I started assigning infantry to the tanks. However, everything was in such a state of confusion, all I was doing was just getting soldiers. I didn't identify who they were or anything. I came to this one group of soldiers, led by a Corporal Max Saltzman, and I said, "Okay, six of you go with this tank." And they looked at me and said, "We can't do that, we're mortar men. we're 60mm mortar squad." And I said, "60mm mortar squad or not, you're going with this tank and you're going to furnish support. You're going to do that. You can leave your mortar and come back and get it later, but you're going with this tank until it gets into that town." They didn't like it, but that's what they did, and they performed well and were a credit to their specialty. To continue with the story of the assault, G Company was on the left, F Company was on the right, and at the time we made the attack, what was left of E Company was not even known. I hadn't found enough of them to get a clear picture as to what had happened to them. Later on that afternoon, we did find E Company and assembled them and it came out alright.

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E Company had been around on the far left of Châteauneuf and attacked the town from the flank. The survivors of the company went through the far edge of the

town and were waiting for the battalion on the northern side.⁶

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As we advanced into the town, Lieutenant Samuel Hastings led the attack in Ft. Benning style. He called "Follow me", and out of the sunken road they went and started into town.⁷ I had been given artillery support and we had what they call a TOT which was a 'time on target' when all the artillery that was in support of the whole division was fired on this one little town at a specific time. Consequently, the enemy fires were suppressed for a few minutes while this barrage lighted on them. It went well, both of our companies attacked simultaneously and closed on the town and we lifted the fire just as they came in and we were able to take the town.

As soon as we were in the town the platoon of tanks was released and continued on their way to the 3d Battalion of the 330th. We had delayed them only slightly but they were extremely helpful in our successful assault on Chateaufneuf.

The town was one of those typical European towns with everything on the left or right of the road as you go through. It was long and skinny. Chateaufneuf had two roads parallel to each other, and we were attacking the

entrance to the larger road.⁸ So going down the line of that road, I followed G Company into town and was trying to observe what was happening. We had soldiers on the right and left and they were going from house to house, digging out the enemy. It was going well, but it was going a little slowly. It was then that I noticed a fantastic gunfire situation beginning to take place. There was a BAR man on the right-hand side of the street and a BAR man on the left-hand side of the street, and these BAR people were firing cross fire. The one on the right was firing on the upper windows of the houses on the left and the one on the left was firing on the upper windows on the right. And these men were literally draping enemy soldiers, just shooting them right in their places and draping them in the windows. They went right down through the town, systematically taking house after house. They carried on this beautiful fire support, followed immediately by the American soldiers. As quickly as the BAR men would get one under fire, the soldiers would go in and take over the place. Because I was so impressed with the fire support by these two men, after the battle was finished I found out who they were. It turned out that they were BAR men who had been on the Ft. Benning demonstration squad at the Army Infantry School. They had been at Benning for a long time and were outstanding with everything they did with the BAR. Then they came over as replacements and fortunately we got

them both. They knew each other and had worked together at Benning, and now they were both in G Company. In those days the BAR was the squad's main support weapon. You had one in every squad. The funny part was, the smallest man always seemed to end up with the BAR, and it was the heaviest weapon. One of those two men was wounded soon after that and I lost track of him, but the other one later became a squad leader. But he wouldn't give up his BAR, he kept it as a squad leader and got another BAR for one of his men in the squad. But he wouldn't give up his own. That story is an example of what two well-trained soldiers can do.

We got through the far end of town, and we had lost very few people. As I recall, no one was killed, but we had some wounded. At the north end of town we got a good defensive position and consolidated in case the Germans decided to counterattack. They did not, so the rest of the 2d Battalion passed through G Company and we went into an assembly area. The battalion was put into regimental reserve and we spent the rest of 5 August and part of the 6th in getting the 2d Battalion back into the organized unit that it should be.

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William K. Van Hoy was a member of K Company of the 3d

Battalion, 329th, and recalled the battle for Chateauneuf. "I do remember the 2d Battalion at Chateauneuf in Brittany. The 3d Battalion was in reserve on a nearby hillside. It was a hot summer day; my canteen was empty before noon. It was a costly fight and two captains of the 2d Battalion had been lost. When the 2d Battalion had the town secured, the 1st Platoon of Company K entered on the east side of town. Railroad tracks crossed the road near town and several 2d Battalion men lay dead by the tracks. They had tried to remove some metal barriers. In the town the Germans started to fire on our 1st Platoon, so we hid at the edge of some buildings while a tank came down the street shooting out all the second floor windows. The railroad tracks are still in the same place today."⁹

Therefore, while the XII Corps (General Manton S. Eddy), the XV Corps (General Wade H. Haislip), and the XX Corps (General Walton H. Walker) of Patton's Third Army were advancing south and east toward the Loire and Seine Rivers, General Middleton's VIII Corps was occupied in Brittany. No military planner imagined that the fight for the Breton ports would take an entire month. But during the month of August while the Allies were involved in the effort to close the Falaise Pocket, the 83d Division was occupied at St. Malo. Patton thought that the 83d would soon be free for use elsewhere, but the conflict in Brittany was very time-consuming.

The Battle of St. Malo

Among the individuals in the US higher command, there was some disagreement about the necessity of capturing the coastal port cities of St. Malo and Dinard on the beaches of Brittany. By early August, Generals Omar Bradley and Troy Middleton decided that Germans based in St. Malo could disrupt the successful supplying of the American troops through Brest. Another aspect which prompted the decision to attack that coast was the surprisingly strong resistance produced by the Germans in the region of St. Malo. The Germans had obviously planned to use the port as a strong point and it had been heavily staffed and fortified. French intelligence reported ten thousand German troops in the garrison, American intelligence suspected three to six thousand, but the actual number of Germans proved to be twelve thousand.¹⁰ Hitler had initiated his fortress policy which instructed fortress commanders of port cities to defend their garrisons to the death. The port citadels were to protect the submarine bases at Brest and St. Nazaire, keep the Americans from being able to use the ports, and to keep the American troops occupied as long as possible.¹¹

The city of St. Malo had many different parts. (Fig. 24) The center of the town was the ancient walled city protected by the Chateau of Anne of Brittany built in the

Fifteenth century. (Fig. 25)¹² Parame, east of the old city, was the modern section of St. Malo. Across the harbor, south of the city, was St. Servan; the fishing port of St. Malo. On a promontory in the harbor was the fortress called the Citadel. Three miles northeast of the city was the fortified position of Fort de la Varde.(Fig. 26)¹³ North of the city were three small islands which provided fire support for the Germans. They were Fort du Grand Bey, Fort National, and three miles away the island of Cezembre. In addition the Channel Islands of Jersey, Guernsey, and Alderney were able to supply the German port by water.¹⁴ The Rance River empties into the ocean at the tip of the peninsula. On the eastern side of the river is St.Malo and on the western bank is the resort city of Dinard. (Fig. 27)

On the landward approach to the peninsula were the natural obstacles of canals, ponds, and swamps plus enemy-constructed defenses such as minefields, belts of wire, and rows of steel gates, all protected by fire from hidden pillboxes.(Fig. 28)¹⁵ The first line of German defenses ran across the base of the peninsula and through the town of Chateauneuf. As a part of the landward defenses, the St. Malo peninsula was guarded by a fortress on high ground just north of the town, by enemy positions on both sides of the town, and by the naval guns from the isle of Cezembre.

On 9 August, the 3d Battalion of the 329th advanced through the city of St. Servan. The 1st Battalion had taken the town of La Bouralais the day before and Sharpe's 2d Battalion, still in reserve, spent the day reducing small pockets of resistance in the area. The next night, 10 August, the 2d Battalion was put in division reserve and was moved by trucks to St. Coutombe for an operation against Fort de la Varde.¹⁶

The 83d Division had made progress by the 9th of August but the strongest points of resistance in St. Malo had not yet been penetrated. The Americans had captured St. Servan and Parame in the city and reduced the enemy vantage point on St. Joseph's Hill. The old walled town, the Citadel, Forts Ideuc and La Varde, the town of Dinard, and the supporting islands remained in German hands. Taking the 331st Regiment of the 83d and the attached 121st Regiment from the 8th Division, General Macon personally directed the assault of the strongly held town of Dinard. In the meantime, the assistant division commander, General Ferenbaugh coordinated the attack on the objectives in St. Malo. (Fig. 29) The 329th Regiment operated in St. Servan and Parame and attacked the Citadel defended by the diehard German Colonel Andreas Von Aulock, while the mission of the 330th Regiment was the old walled town of St. Malo across the causeway. One battalion of the 329th, Sharpe's outfit, was sent to attack Pointe de la Varde, and the two islands,

National and le Grand Bey.

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On 12 August, we got the message to hook on to the side of the 330th Infantry and move up to the north and extend their right flank, and then go up and contact the Free French. We were to meet the French leader in the little town of Rotheneuf. I went along with my S-3 in a jeep, escorted by another jeep with a machine gun. When we got there, met the French, and spread the map out on the hood of a jeep, we were having difficulty communicating with our broken French and their broken English. We could each point at the map but that was all anyone could understand. Time was passing and we needed to get this thing settled, and it was important that we get it right. My S-3, Captain Antonio J. Gaudio, was Italian and he came from California. As a matter of fact, his father produced motion pictures in Hollywood. Anyway, as things dragged on with the French, in his frustration at trying to be understood, Gaudio let out an Italian oath and the Frenchman said, 'Ah! Italiano,' and they immediately went into Italian and settled the whole thing. In five minutes we had all the information passed around and we had the coordination made for the continued attack. They were going to watch our right flank and report to us any problems they had.

Next, I got a message from division to report to the command post of the 331st Infantry in order to get instructions about the next day's operation. I arrived there and General Ferenbaugh, who was assistant division commander, informed me that General Macon was going to command the part of the division which was over on the left side of St. Malo, on the Dinard side and that he, General Ferenbaugh, was going to be temporarily responsible over here on the right side. The general informed me that the 330th and the 331st were going to move left toward St. Malo and I was to take my 2d Battalion and be responsible for taking the fortified position called Pointe de la Varde. It was on the north coast of the Brittany peninsula, east of St. Malo. He told me they had pillboxes, they had barbed wire, and they had mines.(Fig. 30) He said, 'You've got alot of artillery to support you and just go barrel it into them.'

On 12 August, we had moved up to Rotheneuf and had met with the French and had them on our right flank and everything was going well. We had some small skirmishes but nothing of any consequence. And then we arrived at the little town which surrounded the fort. The fort itself was actually a huge pillbox made of reinforced concrete.

At this point, I would like to make some comments about the tactics used at Fort de la Varde. Army training has a systematic set of procedures for capturing a

fortified enemy position. First, you make a reconnaissance of the area and see what you can find. You send out patrols, the patrols are carefully handled so that they have specific missions to see what they can find, plus draw fire from the enemy to see what weapons they are using, and also determine which things are camouflaged.

The minute that they open fire, the procedure is to drop smoke rounds on the enemy positions so that they can't see the situation, and then move your patrols back under cover and then you get ready to patrol again. When you find out where a gun placement is located, you smoke the other areas to keep them from supporting. Then you fire into the slits with machine guns to keep the enemy from manning the guns if you possibly can, and then you bring your big guns to bear and try to knock out the emplacement itself. The big guns we had were 57mm antitank guns. Initially that was the biggest thing we had. They also gave us some tank destroyers which were towed, and of course we had to manhandle them around to a firing position. They have a big 3 inch gun on them, and it's a sizeable weapon. In addition to that we had procured some 50 calibre machine guns and these were strong enough to fire into the pillbox slits and cause damage. The regular 30 calibre machine gun didn't do much in trying to reduce a fortified position. H Company, our weapons company, had smoke and they also had white phosphorus. If you've got

troops in the open, the white phosphorus is excellent, otherwise smoke is just as good and you don't have to worry about starting fires. They also gave us the direct support of an 8 inch artillery battalion and these big weapons are very useful for attacking a fortress.

On our initial reconnaissance we found a heavy mine field around the entire area, plus heavy barbed wire entanglements. So we began firing into a few slits to open up some of those, and we fired on the encircling area to get the mines to go off and also to get the barbed wire torn up. The next procedure was to see if we could get their guns to fire. The patrols did their work, and we systematically approached the task in the prescribed way. When we'd find a gun that would open fire, we would smoke the others and then we would fire on that one. In each case, we were firing the TDs from 800 yards away. We found that the TDs at 800 yards weren't powerful enough to reduce the machine gun pillboxes. They were steel cupolas and the shells would not penetrate. Our 57mms had bounced off and now the TDs were doing the same. Later after the war, in 1962 I went back and looked at the position and found that the 57mm shells had embedded themselves into the steel cupola and the shots were still sticking in it.(Fig. 33) In other words they didn't penetrate the metal but they did stick into the skin of the pillbox. In some cases they ricocheted off but some were actually sticking into the

skin. So, I ordered the TDs moved closer into the town, behind a building and we got a better position. When they had a chance, they could push and pull the TDs out from behind the building, fire two rounds into the slit, and then immediately pull back out of position while we smoked the Germans until we could get the gun back in a safe place.

That's the general procedure but to do this and to do it under coordination, we set up five OPs in buildings around the town in a semi-circle and we tied them in with radios and telephones. This way we could coordinate all the movement of people and fires. (Fig. 32) As we moved through the day with this procedure we reduced one after another of the main enemy positions. We weren't making the progress that we liked to make, so F Company, which was on the right, decided they would send some patrols down on the water side to see if they could get into the fort from the back. The patrols did a good job, but when the tide started coming in, they lost their operational area and realized that the beach approach was not going to be effective. The fort sat on a steep, rock cliff and there was no way to get into the fort or get into a firing position behind it. So we gave this up as an alternative and continued with our original plan.

About this time the psy war team¹⁷ showed up with their vehicles and their public address system. We had one

of their experts use the equipment and speak to the Germans and tell them that it was hopeless for them to continue to try to hold out and that they should surrender. The Germans responded to this psy war approach with more fire and we concluded that they weren't interested

After lunch we pursued the standard approach until about 15:30 in the afternoon when it appeared that everything we could find had been reduced. There was one unfortunate exception to an otherwise safe operation. We had told the weapons crews, each time after they fired, they were to go back under cover. We had one exception to this. A 57mm gun crew, after firing at one of the gun positions thought that this was the last of the German operational emplacements and they thought that their firing would have knocked it out, so they didn't take their weapon out of position but left it in. When the smoke lifted, the Germans were not out of action. They had a 37mm gun in the emplacement and they fired on our gun crew--killed one and wounded seven. These were our total casualties up to this point on this reduction of a fortified position.

Now we had to breach the wire and the mine fields so that the infantry would be able to go up to the fort. So we began doing this by smoking the position and sending the demolition teams in and breaching one place for E Company and one for G Company. This was finished and it was time to make our final assault. I had the word passed that

everybody was to prepare for the assault and just then I got a distress call from G Company which said that they couldn't attack right then, that they were eating. I went over to see what had happened. The chow trucks usually stayed under battalion control and when we notified them from the command post that it was okay to feed, then we would turn the trucks loose and let them go to the companies. But in this case, since we had been in the same place for a day, this company chow truck knew where his company was so he didn't need anybody to control him and he decided to go on up to his soldiers. Well, many of them were in the mess line and they had their kits and everything and I had to say to them, sorry, but no chow now. They weren't happy about it, but they laid all their mess gear down and we began to get the attack under way. We fired on the fort and charged the position, and when we lifted our fire so that our troops could get up the hill, the Germans got up in the top of their parapets and threw down stick grenades just like rain. Hundreds of them came over the wall and these grenades were cracking exactly where the troops were located at the bottom of the hill and consequently caused much confusion in our attack. The stick grenades are concussion grenades; they have small fragments but not very much real killing power. They did disrupt the operation and most of our troops who got under this inundation had flesh wounds. Many of them were

bleeding but no one was hurt seriously. In the meantime, the camouflage had come off of the German position and we were now able to see the ramp on the right-hand side of the fort which the troops would be able to ascend. The soldiers were so close to it that they couldn't see it, so I got on the PA [public address] set and told G Company to move to the right, that they would be able to find a ramp over there. They did this and went up the ramp, assaulted the position, and E and G Companies took Pointe de la Verde. Afterwards, the German major in charge concluded that this was the only way his position could have been taken and he was very complimentary. As the final assault was made, I had the psy war team put the "Stars and Stripes Forever" on their PA set and play the victory march. As the final cry of the soldiers as they were mounting the wall and going up the ramp to make the assault, the customary screams came forth, 'Haba, Haba.'¹⁸ At first, twenty-four Germans came out and held up white flags. Then they indicated that the others wanted to come out too, so we waved them all out and we took a total of 197 prisoners off of Fort de la Verde. (Fig. 33)

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In Combat Digest, the battalion history, there is a complete description of the fortifications at Fort de la

Varde. The landward approach to the fort was circled with fifty yards of mines and barbed wire with eight heavily reinforced concrete bunkers behind the wire entanglements. The bunkers were all connected with open trenches, so the Germans could move from one to another. The fort itself was 200 feet across and 12 feet deep. The walls were 2 feet thick at the top and 5 feet thick at ground level. Fort de la Varde provided living quarters for 300 men. The interior of the fort came complete with a warehouse, wireless room, and machine shop. In the underground ammunition dump, the 2d Battalion found 2000 rounds of 75mm cannon, 100,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and 300 grenades.¹⁹

In his book, The Ragtag Circus, Colonel Crabill recalled, "Captain Sharpe introduced something new into the regiment's tactics. . . . [He] had in some way secured a sound truck, and when he attacked Fort de la Varde he had it play, 'The Stars and Stripes Forever.' This, together with the 'haba, haba, haba' shouts of the attacking troops so unnerved the defender that the fort surrendered at the first assault."²⁰ Figure 34 shows how Sharpe's hometown newspaper reported the battle.

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The next order of business was to attend to the

little islands of Grand Bey and Fort National. Grand Bey was in the operational sector of the 3d Battalion but they had been delayed. Colonel Crabill was trying to wrap up the whole St. Malo peninsula project so he called me and gave me the mission. Grand Bey was a small fortress about a hundred yards out into the water from the old town wall, and Fort National was the island right beside it. There were steps that led down from the town wall to the sand and at low tide you could walk across to Grand Bey. At the time I got the message the tide was in. I took one infantry company and one mortar platoon and one machine gun platoon as support and trucked them into the old wall next to the island. Then I requested support from the artillery commander. We went down to the dock headquarters and looked at the tide sheet and it told us when the tide would be out and we made our plans accordingly. The plans called for us to get our weapons in position first and then smoke the island so the Germans couldn't see what we were doing, put our troops in position at the base of the island, and then be ready to storm it. When we got the smoke going we started firing the artillery, the mortars, and machine guns. When we lifted the fire, the soldiers stormed up the hillside, up the side of the cliff and took the position. It went very smoothly because the enemy was surprised, they didn't know we were coming, and they weren't ready. We then took Fort National which was right next to Grand Bey.

But then the boys got involved in doing a little looting and overstayed their time and had to come back with wet boots and trousers because they got caught on the island by the incoming tide. Altogether it was a very successful operation. The soldiers got a few bottles of wine and apparently everybody was happy except the 3d Battalion. They felt that an injustice had been done by the 2d Battalion coming into their area and making a successful attack.

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All of the military literature treats the capture of la Grand Bey and Fort National briefly. The regimental history said, "The 2d Battalion attacked the Island of la Grande Bey, during the low tide; after this effort over 150 prisoners and more equipment were taken without a shot being fired."²¹ This account does not appear to include the artillery and mortar bombardment before the assault. Sharpe says that more than likely the statement in the regimental book means that the Germans did not fire a shot in response.

In Martin Blumenson's book, Breakout and Pursuit, he quoted an 83d Division G-3 Journal entry for 16 August. Referring to the assault on Grand Bey, "Went in under a smoke screen, took them by surprise, tossed a few hand

grenades, and they gave up."²²

At the end of the conflict on the coast of Brittany, many of the goals which led the American military to attack throughout the peninsula had not been realized. The port of St. Malo had been destroyed and the idea of using it as an auxillary port for Allied supplies was no longer possible. The Germans had tied up the 83d Division for almost a month when the original plan had been for the 83d to quickly subdue St. Malo and then help with the American attack on Brest. At the end of August, Brest and St. Nazaire were still in German hands. However, the Americans had captured over 12,000 Germans in St. Malo, enemy soldiers who would not now be at their backs, between the eastward advancing Allies and the sea.²³ The victory at St. Malo cleared a great swath through the Germans' western defenses. Hitler's static fortress strategy, while causing great delay for the American forces, also produced the possibility for the United States to demobilize and imprison many more German troops than would have been possible had the Germans operated on the move.

After the St. Malo campaign, the 3d Battalion of the 83d Division's 330th Infantry Regiment joined General Earnest's Task Force A to capture Brest, while the remainder of the 83d was convoyed to Angers for a new objective. The 329th Infantry was ordered to protect General Patton's right flank and rear while he took Paris.²⁴

CHAPTER FOUR

LOIRE VALLEY AND LUXEMBOURG

After breaking out of the Normandy peninsula, the American forces deployed rapidly in an endeavor to trap the Germans who were obliged to withdraw toward the Seine River. The American advance to the south and then toward the east successfully flanked the German 7th Army. The maneuver to trap the Germans was attempted in the area of Falaise and the Germans were confined in what was named the Falaise Pocket. Unfortunately, the Allied pincer movement was delayed and on 19 August at least 20,000 Germans escaped through a small unprotected gap before the Allied encirclement was completed.¹

Four US corps, the Canadian First Army, and the British Second Army were involved in surrounding and then closing the Falaise Gap, while the 83d Division as part of General Middleton's VIII Corps was fighting in Brittany. During the same time the XII and XX Corps of Patton's Third Army were swinging down toward the Loire River and then clearing a path to the Seine. By 25 August the Americans had secured the line along the Loire and established five

bridgeheads across the Seine River above and below Paris.

After the St. Malo campaign, in order to fulfill the mission of protecting Patton's flank, the 329th Infantry was ordered to remain in Angers and defend the city as well as prevent the withdrawing German 7th Army and 5th Panzer Army from filtering to the north of the Loire River. The Germans were being threatened from the south by General Alexander Patch's Seventh Army which had landed at Marseilles and was advancing up the Rhone valley toward the Loire River.

The 329th had been through two very difficult campaigns and the assignment to Angers was planned as a period of relief and reorganization. After Normandy, the men had been transferred immediately to Brittany with no chance of proper integration of replacements. There were 160 officers in the regiment when it arrived on Omaha Beach; by 20 August, forty-five had been killed and ninety-four wounded.

During the assignment along the Loire, the regimental sector stretched for 130 miles, from west of Angers to Orleans.(Fig. 35) The defense lines were so far from the command post that many of the "chow" trucks had to travel 110 miles to serve a meal. By the time the trucks returned from one run, it was time to start back on another trip. On 7 September, the commander of the German forces south of the Loire, General Erich Elster, surrendered 20,000 German

troops to a lieutenant and his platoon of twenty-four men from the 329th Infantry. When the surrender was arranged and the German forces began to arrive, the 329th found itself with the problem of what to do with the 800 horses that were a part of the predominantly horse-drawn German contingent. A call went out for any American cowboys to report to headquarters. Before long, more than twenty soldiers from Oklahoma and other western states had rounded up the horses.

By 23 September the 83d Division was again on the move, this time toward Luxembourg over 300 miles away. Their assignment was to patrol the line of the Moselle-Sauer Rivers and to protect the left flank of Patton's army. At this time the 83d was attached to the Third Army with the Ninth Army on its left. On 10 October, the division reverted to the control of the Ninth Army. The 329th Infantry was assigned to the area around the city of Echternach, just south of the Ardennes. Although there were constant engagements with enemy forces, this position was considered an assignment where the troops could be retrained in preparation for reentry into more intense combat. There were many replacement soldiers who needed training, as well as the seasoned veterans who could use review in basic techniques after the unusual hedgerow combat of Normandy. At this point, a very good program of training was instituted in which each battalion was sent

to the old Maginot Line and rehearsed in the procedures for assaulting a fortified line.

Echternach was on the Siegfried Line, called the West Wall by Hitler. (Fig. 36) The fortifications formed the western defense of Germany proper. The heavily reinforced buttresses extended from Nijmegen, Holland, south to just north of Basel, Switzerland. The Allies were unaware that Hitler was massing thirty-six divisions and 600 tanks behind the Siegfried Line in preparation for his all-out offensive through the Belgian Ardennes on 16 December. The Siegfried Line was made up of miles of concrete, fitted with pillboxes which had interlocking fields of fire. The emplacements were fronted by thick wire and mine hazards, and then concrete projections called "dragon's teeth" patterned the front line of the fortifications.(Fig. 37)

Unaccountably, the exhausted American divisions which had been in intensive combat for months were sent to the Belgian Ardennes sector of the Siegfried Line to recoup and reorganize. It was thought that the thick forest and mountain terrain would prevent the Ardennes from being an avenue of approach for the enemy army. From his book, The Siegfried Line Campaign(1963), Charles MacDonald explained, "The VIII Corps' front in the Ardennes was at once the nursery and the old folks' home of the American command. To this sector came new divisions to acquire their first taste of combat under relatively favorable conditions.

Here too came old divisions licking their wounds from costly fighting like that of the Brittany peninsula and the Huertgen Forest."² The 2d Battalion of the 329th Infantry would fight in both of these costly campaigns. The First Army controlled these sparsely concentrated and debilitated troops which were strung out along the portion of the frontier that would receive the full force of the December attack. The Ninth Army was inserted briefly on the southern edge of the sector, but was moved north before the German attack. Echternach was situated at the base of the bulge which the Germans would create through the American lines and the Huertgen Forest was just north of the bulge.

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While the 1st and 3d Battalions were collecting prisoners off of the Citadel at St. Malo, the 2d Battalion was getting ready to leave and head for Angers, 160 miles southeast of St. Malo. It was the 19th of August and we moved by the conventional motor convoy with about twenty soldiers on each truck. The division mission was to protect General Patton's Third Army's right flank and rear and be sure that no Germans got behind him. In actuality we had the Loire River as our front. The 2d Battalion was strung out about seventy-five miles along the river and we had our headquarters in the town of Angers. Our mission

was to search for Germans along the river and keep them on the southern side of it. The way we did this was to break the battalion down into companies with supporting units and spread them along as thinly as we could to maintain the observation and patrolling on the river. We set up our headquarters in a beautiful chateau that the Germans had had in the town of Angers right next to a pretty little lake in front of the house. We even had our own big generator to furnish lights when the town light system went out, which was most of the time.

We relieved a regiment of the 80th Division which had not seen any combat but the commander was a real stickler for discipline and he had the place in good order so we were fortunate. Our stay there was quite nice but not uneventful.

Right off the bat, I think it was the second day, one of the companies reported that someone had just stolen a jeep. The problem was that the French needed transportation and one of our lieutenants stepped out of his jeep and went into a store and when he came out the jeep was gone. That required a complete reevaluation of the way we would handle our vehicles. We had to watch everything. We realized that people would steal us blind if we didn't take care of the things that we had. So the word went out and everyone became especially cautious and we had no more problems with stolen vehicles.

The next crisis pertained to E Company on the little island of Pont de Ce which was about three miles south of Angers.(Fig.38) The Germans had come onto the island during the early morning hours in the fog and captured the fifteen-man outpost and had taken them back across the river. The American unit that had been in Angers ahead of us had said there were not very many Germans around and that they had an agreement that they'd fire a few rounds each day and that was the end of it, nobody would really shoot the rest of the day. If we didn't shoot them they wouldn't shoot us, that was supposed to be the agreement. I couldn't buy that at all, our mission was to get rid of the Germans, so I had to take the thing much more seriously especially now that they had fifteen of my men. Also in consideration was the fact that the waterworks across the canal was furnishing water for the whole town of Angers and my higher ups were concerned that the Germans might destroy the waterworks.

So we set up an attack situation to see if we couldn't reduce some of the Germans and move them back away from the waterworks. We started a fire plan to systematically move up and down the canal and fire right into their positions.

Their defenses were close up against the far side canal bank, which meant that when we fired artillery shells they were just barely clearing the roofs of the houses on the near side of the canal and so we had to start using

more mortars than artillery because we had to have something with a high trajectory on it. The mortar and artillery gun positions are normally 1500 plus yards behind our front lines. The forward observers are positioned close to the front lines so as to be able to adjust the fire onto the enemy. In effect, the observer sees some enemy, calls back to the gun positions by radio, gives the enemy location by the use of map coordinates and tells the guns to fire one or more volleys and they will adjust.

So as we started firing on the left flank and worked our way up the canal we started flushing the Germans out and as we did they would move one way or another and each time we would just track them with the mortar fire and eventually got quite a few of them.

My battalion OP was in the upstairs on the third floor of a dwelling and we had good observation of the other side of the canal. They also had good observation of us and every now and then they would give a blast of machine gun fire on our observation post.

The cannon company commander was firing in support of our battalion with his 105mm snub-nosed Howitzers. His guns had the capability of getting a high elevation, almost as high as our mortars. However, according to the firing tables we were too close for safety. But he had the Germans on the run, and he was having his own little battle with the Germans across the way. He had good radio

communications with his gun positions and he was calling for additional fire and asking them to move them closer to the canal banks. As he moved the strike of the rounds closer to the canal they would be coming closer and closer to the roofs above our heads. The gun position responded over the radio, "unsafe to fire." The cannon company commander took the mike away from his radio operator and said, "it's me," he was infuriated and said, "listen, if I'm here and willing to call for the volley, the least you can do is fire it, now fire it like I said," and right away we heard the guns go off and here came the rounds directly in. Fortunately they didn't hit the buildings but they were extremely close because they had that characteristic whistle of rounds that are about to hit your position. Anyway, they did a good job of flushing out the Germans one more time, but we all agreed that the range was too close for more rounds to be fired.

Then E Company commander came in and proposed that we put up a white flag and have a conference with the Germans and maybe we could get them to surrender. He didn't think that a lieutenant would have much clout so he asked me for a set of my captains bars. I gave him a set and he put on his green jacket and pink trousers and went over with a white flag flying to have a conference with the Germans. He didn't have much success, they didn't come to any real agreement but he was able to get a few of his men back.

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That night the Germans withdrew from the area of the waterworks. Our objective had been to reduce the German threat as much as possible and to be able to put our outpost back over the canal to protect the waterworks, which we did.

Next we directed our attention to getting the patrols out every day and night. The patrols drove hundreds of miles daily along the river line. They were required to check in with the French and particularly the Free French now that they were helping us. Anytime they located German soldiers they would turn them in to our units.

One of our biggest problems was administrative. The kitchen trucks would start out in the morning with their breakfast and by the time they distributed and returned to the kitchen area it was time to leave with supper. For lunch we usually ate K rations, occasionally some C rations. The K rations were packaged in a cardboard box 3x7x1 inches. It contained a can of the main entre (chopped eggs, cheese, chopped ham), as well as crackers, a stick of gum, toilet paper, and three cigarettes. In effect we received two hot meals and one cold meal per day. Our rule was to feed hot meals whenever possible. Actually, our battalion had a good record of feeding two hots per day throughout the war and our soldiers were delighted. (Fig.39)

One day as I was out along the seventy-five mile run

checking my units I came to this little town and it had a bridge across the river. Right in the middle of the river the center span of the bridge had been knocked out. I was talking to one of the local Frenchmen and was telling him that the bomber had made a perfect hit on the center span of the bridge. I was inferring that our bombs were well placed. But he quickly corrected me by saying, "Oh, no, look at all of those bomb craters near the river. It seemed that the bombers were going to destroy the town while trying to hit the bridge, so we went out and blew up the middle span ourselves so that the planes would stop trying to bomb the thing and keep hitting our town."

We were about two weeks along the river and at no time was there really an enemy attempt to drive us away from our positions. Permission was granted by the higher headquarters to authorize a few leaves in our situation. It permitted us to let some soldiers go into town every night and have a good time. It was just a matter of a few each time. It was the first pass privileges any of our men had experienced since we came on the continent, so they were a welcome respite.

On 5 September, the battalion received orders to move to Vendome, France just east of Orleans. When we went into Vendome the battalion headquarters was established in a beautiful old home which had been used as a German brothel before the Americans arrived. Of course there was no sign

of any of the earlier activities but it was well equipped for comfortable living. It had a good kitchen and good beds.

As our mission in Vendome, we were instructed to get as much training and reorganization as we could since we had not been able to train while strung out along the river. The number of replacements we received will give you a feel for the condition our unit was in. Out of the 160 officers in the regiment when it crossed Omaha Beach, thirty-five had been killed and ninety-four had been wounded. That was 129 of the original 160. Out of the 3300 enlisted men who started with the regiment, 340 had been killed and 1716 had been wounded. That meant that 2056 enlisted men had been lost; we had only 1254 left of our original members. Colonel Crabill felt that all promotions in combat should be made at the front, that is, the people who proved themselves in combat should be promoted first. The net result of this policy was that the regiment requested enlisted privates as replacements for all losses. Also under this policy, some sergeants were awarded battlefield commissions to second lieutenant. We only received one such officer, Second Lieutenant Marvin Hughes.(Fig.40) Occasionally we would get some officers, of course, but in most cases they would be second lieutenants. Not one of the company commanders or battalion commanders who started in the regiment was still

in his original positions.

Our first step when we got to Vendome was to go over our whole organization and get the best combinations that we could of people and jobs. Following this reorganization we started doing basic drills that gave the junior leaders a little bit of control and developed not only themselves but their positions of authority. Needless to say, the people that had survived the grueling experiences of Normandy and the hedgerows were not recruits anymore, they were savy, tactically wise, and amazingly mature. As a sideline, 5 September was not only the day we moved to Vendome, but the date we found out we were no longer in Patton's Third Army. We had been transferred to General William Simpson's Ninth Army. In that situation the change made very little difference to us. Our job was to begin a series of thorough training exercises in order to give our troops an edge in future combat.

One of the things that is always helpful in refresher training of troops is the conduct of close-order drill. Some sneer at the thought as if it were out of place in combat. But that's not so. When a small or large unit practices responding to the leader's voice commands with precise body movements they are accomplishing the basic fundamentals of good combat training. First, this type of training establishes the position of authority, there has to be one person in charge. Secondly, it teaches young

leaders to make quick and correct decisions which is fundamental to good command leadership. In combat there must be a willing obedience to the leader's commands. From this basic premise stems all the facets of good fire and maneuver battlefield tactics. But I hasten to add, it takes a great deal of practice in order to produce an outstanding performance.

Each time we came off of the line in combat I insisted the troops first get all of their weapons operational and clean. Then the men were to get themselves bathed and outfitted with clean clothes. Two good nights of rest usually restored a unit to good fighting shape. They were then encouraged to write home.

Good training in the fundamentals can always be made interesting and challenging, especially when you have soldiers readily available who have first-hand experience of things done correctly as well as things done poorly, and frequently with vivid memories of the consequences involved. In our refresher training we always started by polishing up our techniques of scouting and patrolling. I never got tired of giving the examples of the German patrols in Normandy. We always reminded our men that information to be of value must be timely. We told them to "Report what you have seen, get the message back quickly, and always tell what you are going to do."

Another facet of retraining included practicing rapid

deployment of small units once they were fired on by the enemy. We practiced getting on and off trucks and tanks under fire.

For the leaders I always refreshed them on how to care for and operate our radios, and the importance of having a plan ready for any emergency. They were to insure that every man dig a hole to provide some protection in case of enemy fire. We stressed to the leaders the importance of firing smoke to reduce enemy observation of our movements, and the shock action obtained from firing rifle grenades in the final assault on any position where walls were present to cause the grenades to explode.

At this point good leadership dictated a change of pace. Let the soldiers wind down from the heavy adrenalin in their systems, but don't let them get bored. I knew the French loved a parade or a party, so we sent word to the mayor of Vendome asking him to get a band together so we could put on a parade for the people of Vendome. And the mayor was invited to head the reviewing party. He was delighted and offered to get the band and prepare the field and the reviewing stand. We agreed on the music and a few days later, we put on a first class parade. (Fig.41) The 2/329 was in reserve and therefore didn't have anything except local close-in security to worry about. We weren't concerned about the Germans at the time so all our attention was devoted to putting on a good parade, and we

did. The townspeople were very enthusiastic and about 3,000 turned out for the occasion. It was quite an event for our soldiers also. The reviewing party included the governor of the province, and the mayors of the neighboring towns. The French sent newspapermen and cameramen to record the event. We were proud to display our soldiers and they enjoyed it in every regard. For the occasion the French authorities had declared it a holiday and it turned out to be good for everybody.

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Walter McGhee of H Company remembered that parade: "For the first time I was able to see the whole 2d Battalion. Combat is a very private, isolated sort of thing where it's just you and the enemy. You don't realize that there are many other people around you. There are squads and platoons and companies but you're just not cognizant of that. So up until that point we had never seen the whole battalion together. And here at Vendome we had a battalion parade complete with a French band. Well, that was very thrilling and to me very morale raising, that we were a part of a larger unit. We could see the companies pass in review and there was some pride and esprit de corps built up. And we definitely needed that after Normandy, there was no question about that."³

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The battalion enjoyed two good weeks of hard training and then on 17 September we started getting ready to receive and process the 20,000 Germans that had surrendered to the division south of the Loire River near the Beaugency Bridge. This was the largest number of troops to surrender to any American unit during the war up to that time. The next five days we were busily setting up the stockades for the captives, getting ready for feeding and then transporting them to the rear.

Our responsibility was to set up the assembly area to process the prisoners, get them separated from their weapons, and get them separated from all of their horse-drawn artillery and supply wagons. None of us had ever before done anything like this on this scale. The idea of separating the soldiers from their horse-drawn wagons presented an immediate set of requirements. Once we sent the POWs to the stockade and thence to the rear, who was going to feed, care for, and dispose of the horses? Someone came up with the idea of using cowboys, so we put out a call through the units for volunteers and quite a few responded. Before we could issue orders for the care of the horses, the horsemen were at our door with a monumental list of horse care requirements. It didn't really become a big problem because there was plenty of pasture land along

the river and the animals were happy to rest and graze until we turned them over to the military government authorities.

We acquired another vehicle after General Elster's surrender at the Beaugnecy Bridge. Lieutenant Merle Cailor, the battalion transportation officer, obtained a Ford V-8 coupe on the other side of the Loire River. He drove it along the bank until he found a Frenchman to ferry it across. Cailor painted it olive drab and lettered my name on the car door. I used it as a staff car until it was finally wrecked in the Belgian Bulge. (Fig. 42)

On 22 September we moved to a little town just out of Orleans called Chateauneuf. While we were there I visited F Company one morning to see how they were doing and noticed that they were eating fresh fried eggs. Up until that point we had only eaten powdered eggs and as anyone knows there's a tremendous difference. I asked the first sergeant where he got the eggs and he said he had acquired a sizable amount of Cointreau and other alcoholic beverages captured from the Germans back in Angers and he decided it would be better for the soldiers to have the eggs rather than the Cointreau. So he traded the liqueur to the French for fresh eggs.

Luxembourg

The move to Luxembourg was about 300 miles and as I recall, it took the better part of three days to get there. When we arrived in the early afternoon of 27 September, we went into an assembly area near the little town of Birch, Luxembourg. From there we were assigned our forward assembly areas near the river.

As we were moving to the forward assembly area in our truck convoy, a road guide must have left his post at the appointed road junction because the column missed the turn into the assembly area and instead we were traveling east in plain view of the Siegfried Line. We were moving along the top of a ridge which we should have been behind. We had over twenty 2½ ton trucks plus lots of other weapons carriers up on the ridgeline. Fortunately, our column was divided into march units of about twenty to forty vehicles in a group. So we sent a jeep back to the road junction to turn the rear of the column correctly behind the big ridge. That left about thirty-five vehicles, many pulling trailers, exposed across the front line area. Due to the narrow road and especially the trailers it was not feasible to turn the column around. The only practical thing to do was go down the road about half a mile, turn off to the right and loop back behind the ridge. We speeded up the column, followed across the ridge, made the loop and got

the entire column behind the ridge into our assembly area without receiving a single round of enemy artillery. It had been very suspenseful. The Germans must not have been very alert because we had presented them with a prime target for their artillery. It could have been a real tragedy.

The 1st Battalion was on our right, the 3d Battalion on our left, and both had arrived before us. The regimental zone was a wide front with about ten small villages across the center with two larger towns, Echternach on the left flank and Wasservillig on the right flank. The two large towns were on our side of the river but down at the river line. Both were nice, but Echternach was a famous tourist attraction. The 1st and 3d Battalions were ordered to drive the enemy from these two towns and then turn them over to our 2d Battalion as part of its defense mission, which they did.

Our battalion headquarters was set up in a little town called Herborn and we stationed troops in Ausweiler and Dickweiler. (Fig. 43) The concept of defense was that each of our companies would be kept in general readiness in the villages. We sent out patrols every day and night. In daytime we would occupy strategic observation posts usually manned by the S-2 [intelligence officer] or his staff and by the mortar and artillery observers. As time went by these OPs were able to furnish much information on enemy

activity and build-up. At night the line companies occupied listening posts near all avenues of approach into our positions. The night patrols always kept in touch with the listening posts to add support to these precarious positions. We maintained elaborate telephone and radio networks.

As we mopped up the near side of the river there was usually a firefight or two every day but nothing very extensive. The enemy was not very active.

We were on the high ground overlooking the Sauer River and as you looked up the banks on the far side of the river you could see the Siegfried Line which was the concrete and steel fortifications that were part of Hitler's West Wall. The battalion history stated that our time in Luxembourg was "largely a battle of nerves"⁴ and that was an accurate description of our operations. The Germans across the river were apprehensive about our entering their homeland and we were on the watch for the methods they would use in order to prevent us. The ground was lightly held and we were vulnerable to anything of any consequence in the way of an attack. So every day we were both trying to feel the other one out to see where the strengths and weaknesses were. Our men were on constant alert. In the first three days we took prisoners from each of the five enemy patrols that we encountered. We gained some valuable information from the prisoners. The

civilians were also helpful in passing us information as they got it. They had some communication with others across the river; people obviously slipping in and out at night. Most of the civilians in Luxembourg were glad of our presence and to be rid of the Germans, but we could not always be certain of who was friend and who was foe.

One day on three successive volleys, the German artillery hit our battalion CP, the artillery CP, and one of the gun battery positions of our artillery. Their accuracy was so good that we were immediately suspicious that somebody was giving them information. The next day as we searched around we found a house that had some women and children living in it and up in the attic there was a radio short wave receiver and transmitter. The indications were that this was probably where the Germans had gotten their information. We turned those people over to the CIC to investigate them and never heard anymore about them, nor did we receive any more direct hits.

On 3 October the Germans laid mines around the town of Wasserbillig and ordered the civilians to evacuate the city. They were obviously afraid that the city was going to be the entrance for some penetration across the river by the Americans. They also blew up the ferry bridge across the Sauer River. Their action helped us because we had already given Wasserbillig up as a bad place to defend. It was just not defensible sitting right down at the bottom of

a cliff even though it was on our side of the river. We decided not to occupy Wasserbillig with a stationary outpost, because had we manned it in such a remote location the enemy would have easily been able to capture our men since they had easier access to it than we did. So the concept of defense of the Wasserbillig area was to occupy an outpost at the head of the big draw that led up the hill from Wasserbillig. At first, the Germans used this avenue as an access into our battalion area. But finally we decided to ambush their access route by using 57mm antitank guns firing shells loaded with cannister shot. One day our S-2 intercepted a radio conversation which mentioned certain key terrain features which we recognized. Our ambush was alerted, they waited until the German patrol had advanced well up into the draw, and then fired several rounds of the antitank guns and lots of mortars. The few Germans that were able to withdraw radioed back to their headquarters and requested permission to return, giving their location as the rock quarry. While they were waiting for an answer we fired artillery into the quarry. The German patrol leader screamed to his headquarters that they had to leave because the Americans were listening to his radio.

Our operations were limited mostly to combat patrols, every day and every night. We concluded after collecting much patrol data on enemy sightings and patrol contacts,

that throughout the battalion area we needed six daylight patrols and six night patrols plus miscellaneous listening posts in frequently trafficked areas. Therefore, the three companies each had a requirement to send out two daylight and two night patrols. Each company manned listening posts as required. The companies in conjunction with the S-2 staff worked out time schedules to avoid repetitive patterns of movement.

Since patrolling was our major task the company commanders gave it their primary attention. Included was concurrent training in the proper conduct of patrols, weapons training, heavy doses of map reading and radio operations, and first aid so that the soldiers could help patch up their wounded buddies. The size of the patrols usually were one or two squads depending on whether we were expecting a fight or not. A squad was composed of a squad leader (usually a sergeant), a BAR team of three men, five or more riflemen, and a second in command (corporal or buck sergeant). If two squads made up a larger combat patrol the platoon leader or platoon sergeant would usually go along as patrol commander. We tried never to send a new sergeant out as a patrol leader until he had been out at least twice before under an experienced leader. It's one thing to know how to patrol and lead at patrol, but it's always better if the individual is familiar with the ground they will cover.

Although some individuals are better than others at patrolling, it is a dangerous assignment and a good leader sees to it that everyone takes his turn as members of patrols. Fundamentally the casualty rate for patrolling goes down or up depending on how well trained and disciplined the patrol members are.

Since we have opened the subject of casualties, I immediately think of medical men or 'medics' as they are frequently called. Each infantry battalion is supported by a medical aid platoon. It includes a captain (surgeon) commander, a lieutenant (assistant commander), an aid station team, a litter bearer section, and 'aid men' section. The numbers of personnel assigned to each are allocated so that each rifle platoon of the infantry company has an aid man who is normally attached to the company for operations. It takes some doing, but with the numbers of patrols per day we always tried to send an aid man with every combat patrol. If it was a big patrol we tried to send two aid men plus a litter team, and if feasible sent a litter jeep along if the terrain permitted. As we learned in Normandy, nothing breaks the fighting spirit of a unit so much as the presence of wounded comrades calling out for help. That was one of the reasons for taking two squads for our combat patrol anytime we were expecting a firefight. The extra men add the extra shock action and firepower to the fight plus provide an extra

cushion in case the aid men need help.

As a rule the aid men were super. They not only knew their job but they were frequently called upon to do brave things and they most often rose to the occasion. In our Battalion we recommended a large number of aid men and litter bearers for decorations. One litter jeep driver supporting G Company was recommended for and received two silver stars.(Fig.44)

While in Luxembourg I didn't realize how valuable the heavy patrolling routines would prove to be in the Huertgen Forest battles later on. This close association of men with their leaders under the stress of those daily patrolling experiences developed a high level of confidence in the small units of squads and platoons. It was also useful for the men in getting to know their weapons and the capabilities of the guy next to them on the patrol. The expertness of the small unit activities tremendously increased their abilities when time came to fight other battles.

F Company had established themselves with a platoon in the town of Echternach.(Fig. 45) So we used this as a strong point for the left flank of our defense. Since it was a tourist town a number of people from the higher headquarters were coming up to our lines and wanting to go down and look into the town. After the first few groups of visitors we brought the tour to a halt because the Germans

could observe the main road which went down into town from our position; the American soldiers called it the "bowling alley". If the Germans saw us coming there was just enough time for them to get artillery fire on us before we got down into town. Most of the time the first vehicle in line would make it into town but the second one would occasionally get hit.

When our regimental commander, Colonel Crabill, was making a command visit into town to see how the troops were doing the jeep with his bodyguards in it was right behind him. We advised them that the idea of taking two jeeps at a time was ill-conceived, but they went ahead and the second jeep just barely cleared the edge of town before the shells began to hit. It was a very close call. The regimental commander put out instructions afterward that nobody else would test the situation, he had already tested it and everyone was to go into Echternach with only one vehicle at a time.

One of the little towns, I've forgotten whether it was Ausweiler or Dickweiler, had a chicken farm in it with white Leghorns. When we evacuated the town, the mayor told the American company that they were welcome to any of the chickens because there wasn't any way that the townspeople were going to be able to take care of them. So E Company ate fried chicken, and grilled chicken, and baked chicken and all kinds of chicken. As you neared the town if the

wind was blowing there would be white feathers going all over the place. E Company also had a commercial laundry in the town and they ran it from time to time to take care of all of the dirty clothes from their company and the neighboring companies.

From our position we could see the white vapor trails from the V bombs that were aimed into England. It was always oppressive to see those things take off and wonder what was going to happen on the other end.

As an aspect of the nervy type of warfare we were conducting in Luxembourg, we were given orders to execute a mock attack across the Moselle River down on the right of our position. We were to do a demonstration by fire, not by any troop movement. So we fired artillery and H Company's mortars and machine guns. We moved them all down on the forward slope of the hill and got them into good positions and we fired them across the river. H Company fired thirty-two belts of machine gun ammunition, and a thousand rounds of 81 mortar all in about twenty-five minutes. The Combat Digest mentioned, "Characteristically, Axis Sally on the night radio reported the action as an unsuccessful attempt at crossing the river. We laughed when she boasted that the America battalion attacking in the northeast of Luxembourg was driven back across the Moselle by a strong advance guard of our troops."⁵

As we observed the Siegfried Line and the things

behind the Siegfried from our OPs, we detected a definite increase in the concentration of troops and troop movements. Trains were unloading equipment and people in the area behind the Siegfried Line. As we know now that was the preliminary to the big counteroffensive that would later come on the 16th of December.

During our time in Luxembourg, we would take one company at a time to the old French Maginot Line south of Luxembourg and train on the pillboxes and the fortified locations there. The soldiers learned to work their way through the mine fields, through the barbed wire, and place the satchel charges on the pillboxes. The soldiers learned how to smoke them, and how to get in and get out, and reviewed many of the same things we had used back in the St. Malo area. So as we gave each company a course on the finer points and had them actually do the work with their own hands it resulted in an increase in their knowledge and capabilities. At the time we thought we would be using these techniques on the Siegfried Line right in front of us but as it turned out we never did.

We moved out of Echternach during the evening and night of 10 December. We had been assigned to move north and relieve the 4th Infantry Division in the Huertgen Forest.