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SHARPE'S BATTALION IN WORLD WAR II

by

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INTRODUCTION AND PREPARATION FOR MILITARY SERVICE

Introduction

Shortly before the end of World War II, Granville Attaway Sharpe was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel. At the age of twenty-four he was the youngest infantry officer to hold that rank in the United States Army European Theater of Operations.(Fig. 1) Sharpe's exceptional military career began in September, 1941, when he reported for active duty at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, as a second lieutenant of Infantry, having completed the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) course at Davidson College, North Carolina.

A North Carolinian from Burlington, while at Davidson Sharpe played quarterback on the football team, was captain of the golf team, and was a member of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity. He was selected for Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges.[1] Although he had a major in biology his career goal was to play professional

golf. When he reported for army duty immediatley after graduation it changed his plans and he made his career in the army instead of in sports.

After training infantry recruits at Camp Wheeler for eight months, he was transferred to the 329th Infantry Regiment, 83d Infantry Division, which was being reactivated for duty in Europe. He arrived in the training area at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, to assume command of Company G of the 2d Battalion, 329th Infantry. The battalion was nearly wiped out in the hedgerows of Normandy snortly after D-Day and Sharpe, who then held the rank of captain, was wounded twice during his first weeks of combat. On 5 August, 1944, after returning to his unit from a field hospital, Sharpe was instructed to take command of the 2d Battalion after two previous commanders had been wounded and another one killed. He remained battalion commander, a lieutenant colonel's job, for the remainder of the war.(Fig. 2)

This paper is a selective study of Granville Sharpe's World War II experiences as a member, then commander, of a United States battalion fighting in Europe. It covers events occuring between 27 June, 1944, and 28 April, 1945.

The primary resource was a series of oral interviews with Granville Sharpe. In addition to the interviews, his collection of photographs, personnel lists, maps, and other items preserved from the war years were made available to

me. I have also received letters and tapes from other soldiers who served in the 2d Battalion, which corroborate Sharpe's account of the 2d Battalion's war activities.

The paper was written to supplement an otherwise incomplete record of the 2d Battalion's war experiences and to document a combat officer's remembrances, both of which are valuable contributions to the history of World War II.

In the US Army chain of command, the battalion commander is the highest ranking officer normally accompanying infantrymen into the forward lines. Although there are always exceptions to this, most regimental, division, and corps commanders direct army advances from command posts situated behind the front lines. A good example of this axiom was the military action in which Sharpe's battalion was involved from 9 until 20 December, 1944. When General Omar Bradley of the 12th Army Group decided that General Courtney Hodges' First Army should pierce the Siegfried Line and capture the west bank of the Roer River from the Germans, Hodges assigned the sector south of Aachen to General J. Lawton Collins, who commanded VII Corps. Under his command were the 4th, 9th, and 83d Divisions. Collins assigned the objective to General Robert Macon, commander of the 83d Division. Macon deployed his three regiments, the 329th, 330th, and 331st, along the Siegfried Line south of Aachen. He assigned Colonel Edwin Crabill, regimental commander of the 329th

Regiment, the mission of breaking out of the Huertgen Forest and capturing the town of Gurzenich. As part of the 329th Infantry, Captain Sharpe's 2d Battalion was ordered to operate on the left side of the regimental sector, moving toward and capturing the towns of Hof Hardt and Gurzenich. So it was the battalion commander with four of his companies who actually accomplished the stategic plans formulated by the corps commander.

Although military histories give an overall picture of troop movements during World War II, no one has recorded the specific details of the role played by the 2d Battalion, 329th Infantry. Because of the abundence of combat information, for purposes of simplification, historians usually concentrate on the major campaigns. Small infantry units were often only fleetingly mentioned. The extent of detail in military reports and journals recorded during the war depended on how close the writer was to the battle. This characteristic was reflected in the various histories from the battalion level up to the overall European Theater of War analysis. Even in the down-to-earth recollections of a battalion history, such as those reported in Combat Digest[2], one rarely finds a specific account of the way in which small unit conflicts were conducted. Sharpe's recollections about the 2d Battalion and its operations provide more complete information about the campaigns in which the battalion

participated than that furnished by the existing histories. Instead of merely recording the fact that an assault was made and successfully accomplished, Sharpe's descriptions give us details of the sequence of events. From his memories, we understand exactly how an assault proceeded. There is certainly historical merit in contributing to the military record of the war by producing a more complete chronicle of events.

Sharpe's recollections not only supplement the official records but provide a portrait of an excellent combat officer. He had both natural leadership qualities and a creative bent which distinguished his tactics. His leadership qualities included a concern for the safety and morale of his men, and his tactical creativity was particularly noticeable in the arena of war. Therefore, his statements are worth preserving as the experiences of a very young American soldier who was abruptly confronted with the huge responsibilities of leadership during wartime and who met the challenge.

The text will be predominantly composed of Sharpe's narrative, which is so well organized and clear that it frequently needs no additional explanation. It will be supplemented where necessary with background material to make the story more complete. When editorial comments are intruded into the text they will be separated from Sharpe's remembrances by spaces and asterisks.

Preparation For Service

Sharpe's narrative begins: Early summer 1941, I was graduated from Davidson College, and the same day I reported for active duty at the ROTC camp at Clemson College, South Carolina. This camp was to add practical application to the four years of academic military training at Davidson. The training consisted first of physical toughening, then mastery of infantry weapons. After four years of football the physical toughening was bearable, until we started ropeclimbing and twenty-five mile hikes with full gear and equipment.(Fig. 3) When summer was over I was awarded my second lieutenant's bars in the US Army Reserve.

After a short leave to say goodbye to home and family I reported to my first active duty assignment, the 8th Training Battalion at Camp Wheeler, Georgia. My assignment was platoon leader of an infantry basic training company. The curriculum consisted of eight weeks of basic, plus five weeks of advanced infantry training.

The routine day was up before dawn, reveille in the dark, breakfast, training until 1700 hours, clean-up, supper, clean weapons, get ready for tomorrow. The routine days stayed the same, that is, until Pearl Harbor, 7 December, 1941. After that everyone was briefed on local security; we were to be suspicious of anyone who acted as a

loner, be alert for saboteurs. Each company took turns guarding the camp water tower. Since I was the most junior of second lieutenants, I was assigned the job of sleeping in the hall on a cot under the stairs of our BOQ [bachelor officer quarters], to be near the phone should any emergency occur. No one seemed to mind that I was having to spend every night there. Fortunately for me a new lieutenant, junior to me, arrived after a couple of weeks and I was able to move back into my own room.

Each officer had the primary duty of training his platoon. We were also assigned additional duties. One of mine was monitoring the supply sergeant's activities. Therefore, I became well acquainted with the company carpenter. He had been a cabinetmaker in civilian life and agreed to build a nice chest of drawers for me for a small sum. However, good lumber was not available, the only source was the packing boxes in which our equipment came. The chest had two large drawers and two small top drawers. I kept it for years, moving it halfway around the world from place to place.

I became increasingly fascinated with people and motivation. I noted how everyone respected Colonel Harry Renagal, my battalion commander, for his knowledge on military subjects. He had been a second lieutenant in World War I and he was eligible to retire but stayed on active duty because his skills were needed. Like an old

shoe, he used the soft approach in his leadership style. Everyone respected him because he was so knowledgeable, yet he accepted only superior performance.

The challenges of military service were exciting. One of my first special assignments was to teach a class on the light machine gun. I researched it well and 'picked the brain' of one of my sergeants, Training Sergeant Cash, who had been in a machine gun unit for twenty years. He was giving part of the instruction when a training inspector came by to monitor the class. The instructor gave me a good grade for the instruction but a bad report for not giving the lesson personally. My argument was that the soldiers were getting better instruction than I could have given them--argument unaccepted.

My second assignment was to prepare and teach a twelve hour course on chemical warfare to include the gas chamber and use of the gas mask. As I studied the basic materials I became increasingly interested in the subject. I took a few days' leave and went to Davidson, North Carolina to interview Doctor James Withers, who had treated gas casualties during World War I and was coincidentally my future father-in-law. With the results of my research, I taught the course to all the officers in the regiment. Although I was very nervous in front of older and senior officers, the colonel was favorably impressed, giving me a commendation and recommending me for promotion to first

lieutenant.

Our soldiers came from all over the United States. They were skilled, unskilled, and professionals. In one platoon we had some men who could neither read nor write, and one who had been a professor of psychology at the University of Vermont. He was a prince of a fellow, spending much of his extra time writing letters home for the others.

I was in D Company at that time and most of our men had come from the hills of Tennessee and lowlands of Louisiana. Most had owned squirrel rifles at home and consequently were in love with their 1903 Army bolt-action rifles. We had a hard time keeping the rifles in the racks at night because they wanted to sleep with them. Our second problem with this group was their reluctance to wear boots. They would sneak and cut little slits in their boots to let air in or take pressure off a special toe.

But the big joy came when we took them to the rifle range for marksmanship training. They loved it, and D Company completed the training with the highest scores ever recorded at Camp Wheeler as of that date. We had the highest percentage of qualifications and expert marksmen. Although D Company scored unusually well in marksmanship training, the average soldier was also competent in handling firearms for weapons training. I can recall no problems in wartime related to familiarity or capability to

handle firearms. Any problems related to firearms were psychological, usually causing the soldier to 'freeze'.

The 8th Training Battalion at Camp Wheeler sent a number of junior officers to Ft. Benning, Georgia to attend a three month course in advanced infantry training to prepare us for wartime command positions. The course was outstanding. The instructors were the best available and the demonstration personnel superb. Classes were enhanced by knowledge recently gained in the North African campaign.

While there, a carful of us from North Carolina would leave at 1000 hours on Saturday immediatley after the morning inspection and drive for ten hours to Davidson. We would arrive about dark and then would leave for the return trip on Sunday about 1500 hours arriving back at Benning after midnight. My objective was to court Miss Alice Withers of Davidson. After a few trips the pace was too rough for us so we changed to every other week, then once a month.

On 27 July I was promoted to first lieutenant. This meant a welcome addition to my pocketbook. My take home pay was $128 per month out of which I had to pay a car payment of $37.50 and a $12 payment on my new long military beaver overcoat. I was married in August and transferred in December 1942 from Camp Wheeler to Camp Atterbury, Indiana and assigned to the 83d Infantry Division, which had been reactivated from the old World War I 83d Infantry

Division. (Fig. 4)

The basic cadre of officers and NCOs [non-commissioned officers] came mainly from the 2d Cavalry Division at Ft. Riley, Kansas. A cadre is the term referring to the skeleton of key officers and men around which a full strength military unit can be organized. The complement of officers came from the infantry training centers such as Ft. McCellan, Alabama, and Camp Wheeler, Georgia. The 329th Infantry received its filler personnel directly from the reception centers, bringing the regiment up to an authorized strength of about 3,400 officers and enlisted men. By the time I arrived to take command of G Company, 329th, the regiment had already filled and started its thirteen week basic infantry training.

My wife and I arrived at Camp Atterbury, Indiana in December, 1942. There was no on-post housing for families but we found a nice room with kitchen privileges in the home of an elderly widower, who owned a quaint old farmhouse about forty-five minutes from camp. This was the first of many residences we turned into homes during my military career. This one, with its old wallpaper of large red flowers, was more of a challenge than most.

During December, January, and February the weather outside was miserable with snow and rain. The general rule was to train out in the elements. Even when it rained we still stayed outside unless the subject had to be taught in

a classroom. The higher command wanted to make it rough enough on all of us so that we learned how to fight in miserable conditions with minimum damage to our weapons, equipment, and morale.

Toward the end of February the regiment finished its thirteen weeks of individual training. After a short vacation, we started the next phase called unit training, during which we practiced and perfected platoon and company tactical techniques and participated in a few battalion exercises in preparation for the Tennessee Maneuvers yet to come. On 1 May we celebrated my promotion to captain. The regimental commander pinned the 'railroad tracks' on my shoulders and I felt like I had finally arrived.

Our unit training lasted a full ten weeks taking most of April, May, and June. It included a lot of marches, especially speed marches, such as five miles in an hour. This improved our tactical mobility, which proved very useful in our company and battalion exercises. And later, in combat, when the time came to commit the reserve unit in a flanking attack around the end of an enemy position, we made it a habit to move the troops on the double, that is, running. This technique always caught the enemy by surprise since it happened so rapidly.

The final exercises of our advanced unit training was a week long problem during which we were graded on performance in the advance guard, attack, reserve, and

defense maneuvers. During the last few days rain fell continually, making deep mud. We made it with a 'Haba Haba Haba', the chant G Company developed to spark some good morale when the going got tough. Inclement weather training required a high degree of discipline for the soldier to be able to successfully care for himself and his weapon and still be effective as a fighting unit. During the Ardennes offensive of World War II, new replacements in the regiment often developed trench foot, which the veterans avoided by their habit of keeping a dry pair of socks under their shirts for emergencies. We tried to get everyone to change socks twice a day especially if their feet became wet. The disciplined soldiers rarely developed frostbite or trench foot. While all newly joined soldiers were strongly urged to take care of their feet and hands it seemed they couldn't believe it would happen to them.

In retrospect, our basic, advanced individual, and unit training proved to be outstanding preparation for war, with one exception. We had no training to fight in an environment resembling the hedgerows of Normandy. By the time our regiment had learned this, the hard way, more than 3,000 soldiers had been taken out of action by injury or death. This amounted to nearly a complete turnover of personnel in our regiment. Even the veteran regiments who had fought in North Africa had the same problem as we did in overcoming the Germans in the hedgerow country.

On 5 July, 1943 the 329th Infantry Regiment, as part of the 83d Division, moved from Camp Atterbury to the vicinity of Lebanon, Tennessee. Our regiment took up a defensive position east of the town in preparation for the Tennessee Maneuvers. We worked with or against some other fine military units such as the 8th Infantry Division, the 10th Armored Division, the 101st Airborne Division, and the 16th Cavalry. There were eight phases, or problems during the maneuvers. The weather was terribly hot, especially since we were given only one canteen of water per day. On 8 August a cub plane flew over our area and announced the maneuvers were over. They had ended five days early because the 329th Infantry had out-maneuvered its foes on three of the problems. Our soldiers enthusiastically fired into the air all their remaining blank rifle ammunition.

The regiment was given ten days rest but it was marred by rain almost every day. The kitchen areas in the valley were flooded giving the kitchen crews a real challenge, but we never missed a meal. One of my soldiers in G Company Headquarters was a true woodsman and ingenious with his hands. During those ten days we bivouacked in the forest near Springfield, Tennessee, he built a lounge chair out of wood saplings for me and placed it outside my tent next to one of our campfires. It was a real luxury and greatly enjoyed by many of us. He also always managed to have all kinds of little whatnots for himself which were

valuable aids to our primitive living. He always had a dry area for his bed at night since he collected leaves, pine needles, and so forth for his comfort.

The G Company first sergeant was Dwight Hinman. He loved to gamble, but he would never gamble with men from his own company, only NCOs from other companies of the battalion. One Saturday night during the ten day rest period they gambled most of the night. On Sunday morning I made my rounds of the company area to see if all was okay. When I came to Sergeant Hinman's tent, he was in his sleeping bag, head covered but money of all denominations was strewn all around his bed and tent. I collected it and returned it to him later in the morning. Also, I insisted he wire most of the money to his wife, back home, which he did.

When the Tennessee Maneuvers were over the 83d Division was ordered to Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky.[3] Almost everyone was given a short furlough (or leave) before or after reaching Camp Breckinridge. Those who had to wait for their furlough marched the 100 miles to Camp Breckinridge in five days, stopping each day to get some welcome sleep and frequently a walk into a local town. The regiment furnished each company with a truck and two NCOs with MP [military police] armbands and instructions to get the soldiers back in camp by midnight. The system worked well.

In his book, The Ragtag Circus, Colonel Crabill discussed the fact that 'at Brockinridge the regiment had a dose of The Soldier's Revenge--AWOL.'[4] Those who did not return from furlough on time were declared AWOL (absent without leave). When these individuals finally reported for duty or were brought in by the MPs, they were usually placed in the stockade. While the troops were living in nice barracks, an AWOL stayed in a big rectangular barbed wire enclosure, ate from his mess kit and slept in a pup tent with only a poncho and blankets. No cot, no mattress, no lights, no comic books. Toilets were pit latrines and water came from a few spigots in the enclosure. The prisoners went out for training with their companies during the day and back to the stockade for the night. It was a high price to pay for being AWOL. Consequently, there were few repeaters.

According to the Department of Army training requirements. the regiment was ready for combat in September 1943. For the next six months we refined our technical proficiency. We requalified everyone with his basic weapons; rifle, carbine, pistol, or submachine gun. Individuals who handled crew-served weapons such as the BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), the machine guns, light machine guns, mortars, and artillery all repeated their proficiency tests. All men could march 25 miles in 24 hours. Squads were tested on their proficiency to read and interpret maps

and photographs, to use the compass and field glasses. All leaders practiced adjusting mortar or artillery fires. We were very fortunate to have a division commander, General Macon, who had recently returned from the fighting in North Africa. He revolutionized our mortar training by introducing a technique called the 'alidade' method for alignment and the 'ladder method' of initiating fire on a new target rapidly. These techniques originated out of that North African conflict.

We were getting better all the time but the troops were getting bored. It was no small problem because we began having more AWOLs. When the recalcitrant soldiers were caught and brought back, they were court-martialled and usually fined and given three months hard labor with confinement in the regimental stockade. Others with more serious offenses were locked up in the post stockade.

During February, 1944 we received enlisted replacements from the 63d Infantry Division in Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. They arrived in time to complete POM (Preparation for Overseas Movement). This included a check of each man's records to see that he had received all required training plus his medical shots. The War Department issued a final directive stating that the 83d Infantry Division was ready for shipment overseas and eventual combat. The 83d personnel met all of their requirements but we were short some of our BARs, light

machine guns, mortars, and heavy machine guns. The division was ordered overseas anyway; we would be issued our crew-served weapons once we got to England. The final outcome of this weapons shortage was monumental. I understand that the 83d Division was originally scheduled to be part of the D-Day invasion force, but our shortage of weapons caused us to be struck from this list and moved to the D plus 10 group.

Our companies formed up in the battalion area at Camp Breckinridge, received last minute instructions, and marched to the railroad siding on post. As company commander I was required to send my first sergeant and a couple of armed guards to the post stockade to pick up four of our soldiers who were still under confinement. As we were loading onto the train, First Sergeant Dwight Hinman joined the company. I heard alot of noise, some helmets hitting the concrete, so I moved quickly to the end of my company column, only to find everyone back in formation and Sergeant Hinman standing at the rear with his prisoners. He assured me all was okay and I asked no questions. I concluded he had found it necessary to reestablish his authority over the prisoners. We boarded the train with the rest of the regiment, we were on our way to war.

The train trip ended at Camp Shanks, New York, which the Army called the New York Port of Embarkation. We detrained on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River,

crossed over on the ferry, and headed for our ship. There was a long flight of stairs which we negotiated with much discomfort. We were dressed in our winter clothing: long underwear, wool olive drab shirt and trousers, field jacket, wool knit cap and gloves, our long wool overcoat, and steel helmet. Everyone carried a gas mask on the right shoulder. The enlisted men slung their packs and weapons across their backs. The back breaker was that each soldier also carried a duffle bag weighing 50 to 60 pounds in which he carried his total belongings. The officers carried a musette pack (diddy bag) on our backs, pistol on our belt, and a valopac fitted with two changes of clothes.

At the top of the stairs we were greeted by an Army band along with the Red Cross doughnut and coffee units. Few of us found it possible to partake because our hands were busy wiping our sweat and nursing our equipment. An overgrown GI 'barker' bellowed out our last names and we countered with our first name and middle initial. Up the gangplank we struggled, mostly too tired to fret, and finally made our way to our assigned sleeping quarters. A few quarters had cots stacked five high but most had hammocks or straw mattresses. Major John Speedie, 3d Battalion, was acting troop commander and he and his staff did a good job organizing our billets. They put a chalk code on each man's helmet showing the deck and hold to which he was assigned.

Our ship was a British transport named HMS Samaria. She carried about 5,000 troops. It was but one ship of many which we were told constituted the largest convoy ever to cross the Atlantic.

For many of us this was the first time we had been on a large ship and certainly the first time to cross the Atlantic. We sailed from New York harbor on 6 April, 1944. For the first few days the weather was warm and the sea calm. Every morning we answered the lifeboat drill siren, donned our 'Mae West' life preservers and fell in on deck for lifeboat drill. On Sunday, about 3,000 of us attended Easter service on the open deck.

After a few days the skies darkened and the seas splashed over the decks and many succumbed to seasickness. I will never forget what Leon Hall, one of G Company's vehicle drivers, said after several days of severe seasickness. He said, 'I dearly love my wife, but if she ever wants to see me again she will have to come to England because I can't go through this again.' Those who could eat, complained about the British rations, which were mostly stew and pudding. What's more they only served us two meals per day.

After twelve days land was sighted. Our ship docked at Liverpool, England. Down the gangplank we wrestled our excess baggage once again. At the end of the dock we boarded an English train which took us slowly through the

darkness to Wrexham, Wales. The next morning we woke up in tent city--tents as far as we could see. The area was laid out in company streets with 16 feet paramble tents down each side. The box latrines were at the end of the street and the mess halls were in temporary buildings. The British made out well in some respects. Admittedly, they had carried much of the burden of the war up until that time but they had us paying for all the little services they were performing. As an example, they rented the mess hall building and all the pots, pans, and kitchen equipment to us. Some things we didn't want but they insisted it all came as a package deal, take it and be responsible for it.

The countryside was beautiful in April, the houses quaint, the roads narrow and winding, and the weather damp and cold. A few days of shakedown put us back in shape and some of the men enjoyed the British pubs with their dark beer, and fish and chips. The British currency required some education, but not without a few cases where we were 'taken.'

Our top brass wasted no time getting us back on a training program. For several weeks we marched through swamps and climbed the hills of northern Wales. The heather grass was deep and full of brambles. The nights were cold and we frequently shivered under our two woolen blankets, with our backs flat on the damp ground.

During one of our firing exercises up in the

mountains, one of our machine guns shot a sheep and killed it. It took several administrative 'Reply by Indorsement' forms for me to get this case closed. No excuse was satisfactory.

Once our training was completed, we moved back into our tent camp and visited familiar grounds surrounding Wrexham. On 6 June, 1944 it was announced that our fellow Americans had stormed the beaches of Normandy. We didn't need to be reminded how glad we were that we had been replaced on the D-Day troop list because of our weapons shortages. During the next few days we did get our weapons and what a mess we had getting them cleaned. As was customary, new weapons were dipped in a preservative grease called Cosmoline to keep them from rusting while in storage and shipment. It takes kerosene or gasoline and lots and lots of elbow grease to get them cleaned. When we finished we took them to a local firing range to test fire and zero the weapons.

One morning we received word that the officers' footlockers were ready for pick-up next to the mess hall. The officers helped each other carry the heavy footlockers to our tents. It was like Christmas, opening them to see if everything made the trip okay. The only things I took out for immediate use were some cheap razor blades, but they were better than none. Good Gillette blades had

become scarce. I didn't see my footlocker again until it was delivered to me in the States after the war. On 18 June we boarded trucks once again with field packs and moved to the port areas of Plymouth and Falmouth. It was a long and tiresome trip overnight. Here we exchanged our British currency for French invasion currency. Also every man was issued two clips of live ammunition for their weapons.

On 19 June most of the regiment boarded the British liner Cheshire, other units drew Liberty Ships. As we pulled out of port during the night everyone was anxious but well composed. I believe most of us were really ready to get our job done. But going up on deck next morning we noticed the convoy was not heading toward France but back toward England. We had run into a bad sea storm and turned back. The unloading of troops and equipment over the beaches of Normandy would have to be delayed.

CHAPTER TWO

NORMANDY

The 329th Infantry Regiment boarded ships on Monday, 19 June, to join the Allied invasion forces in France. A storm and high seas delayed their unloading on the French coast, therefore, it was 23 June when the regiment landed on Omaha Beach. The troops crossed the beach, carefully sticking to the sectors defined by white tape designating paths which the engineers had cleared of mines. The inland assembly point was Colombieres. Upon arrival, the men dug foxholes for their first night in a combat zone.(Fig. 5) German planes bombed the beach that night.

The 83d Division, commanded by Major General Robert C. Macon, was given the mission of relieving the 101st Airborne Division in Carentan, under the command of Major General Maxwell D. Taylor.(Fig. 6) The 101st was one of the battle-weary units which had parachuted behind the beaches the night before D-Day to knock out German defenses in order to give the landings at the beaches a better chance of success.(Fig.7) On 26 through 28 June, the 83d moved into Carentan at night to relieve the airborne

troops. The 83d became a part of the VII Corps commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins.(Fig.8) The Corps was made up of the 4th, 9th, and 83d Infantry Divisions. In order to be able to spread out and maneuver into the heart of France, or toward the important Breton ports, the American forces needed to get away from the Contentin peninsula of Normandy. The task of General Collins' VII Corps was to attack toward the south by way of the narrow corridor of the Carentan-Periers Isthmus toward the Periers-St. Lo highway where they would then be able to deploy to other parts of the French interior. The drive began on 4 July, and what followed was the frustrating story of the hedgerows of Normandy. After the first day of tremendous casualties in the marshes, rain, and the intimidating landscape of the hedgerows, the division had only advanced one thousand yards, and the 2d Battalion of the 329th Regiment had not moved forward at all.

Walter McGee, from H Company, gave a good description of the hedgerows: "The ground in Normandy was flat, we were not far from the sea, and the farmers had been there for generations, so the fields were small, some less than 50 yards square. The French [farmers] had dug drainage ditches around all four sides of each field and had thrown the spoil up on a spoil bank. The same had been done to the fields left and right, front and back, so that you had drainage ditches with spoil banks in between. These spoil

banks had been built up over the years and could be 6-8 feet thick at the base and four feet high. (Fig. 9) They were not tended, so they were overgrown with weeds and brambles. Frequently there were trees which acted as a windbreak for the field. So what this did,in essence, was to limit your visibility to one field, or 50 yards. From your position to the edge of the next field was clear because it was a meadow or a plowed field, but then there was this hedgerow to the left and right of you and you couldn't see beyond it. It was a mess. It really limited what you could see."[1]

Sharpe is convinced that the initial high casualty rate of the regiment was not because the 83d Division was poorly trained or that the men were overcome by their first experience in combat, but because the soldiers and more particularly the leaders were ill-prepared for fighting in hedgerow terrain. With all of their extensive training, the distinctive techniques of hedgerow combat were not included. He states that his men were in good shape, capable, and courageous, but that neither they, nor their leaders, were knowledgeable about hedgerow warfare.

One can see from the map of Carentan that it was a swampy area. The Germans were familiar with the terrain and were already established in favorable positions. To give themselves an added advantage, they destroyed the

dikes that the French used to keep their fields dry, thereby flooding large portions of an already difficult terrain.

In his report of the 2d Battalion's first battle in Normandy, Captain Frank C. Carmichael, commander of H Company, said that the 2d Battalion was given the order to attack an island in the middle of a swamp. The German troops holding the position were members of the 6th SS Paratroopers. Carmichael explained that the Americans had first to crawl across the swamp in mud and water, and then try to climb over the hedgerow at the end. The Germans had deepened the moat directly in front of the hedgerow, so that in order to negotiate the higher ground the American soldiers had to lift their companions up to get over the top of the moat. Of course, the Germans were dug in, and dry, on the far side of the hedgerow and simply picked off the Americans as they arrived at the edge of the high ground.[2]

During the time in Normandy, Sharpe was wounded twice, first on 4 July and the second time was on 14 July, after which he was evacuated to an army field hospital.

Of his experiences in the Normandy hedgerows, Sharpe remembered:

* * *

We stayed on the ships for several days. Finally, the convoy headed back toward France. We passed ship after ship coming back from the beaches, there were hospital ships with their big red crosses, and empty supply ships going back for another load of supplies. Our first sight of the beach area was dreadful. Our landing site was Omaha Beach, the larger of the two US invasion beaches. It was about 7,000 yards from end to end. Omaha Beach was under V Corps control and had landed the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions,and the 5th and 2d Ranger Battalions. The D-Day objectives for the above units are shown in Figure 10. The actual terrain seized on D-Day is shown in Figure 11. There seemed to be over fifty ships with barrage balloons floating above them. These balloons were attached to the ships with metal cables. They were used to keep the German planes from dive bombing our ships. There were wrecked ships laying on their sides, and wrecked vehicles and shell holes on the beach. During the earlier storm, a breakwater was needed so boats could unload men and cargo. The authorities had scuttled perfectly good ships to establish the breakwater enclosure and it worked.

During the afternoon of 23 June we came ashore. Some came down cargo nets into LSTs and thence to shore. Others of us came down walkways into DUKs which unloaded us on makeshift docks.

Most of us thanked God for a safe trip to France.

After a roll call check-in we formed up G Company and marched off in a column of twos. As we marched over the first few sand dunes we saw hundreds of white crosses marking the fresh graves of those who died during the initial landing.

We marched down some dirt and some hardtop roads through the villages of Formigny, Trevieres, and Bricqueville to an assembly area at Colombieres, a total of about nine miles.(Fig. 12) Local security was posted, everyone dug a slit trench, put up their pup tents, ate a C ration for supper, and got ready for the night. We spent almost four days here before we were given a mission.

It finally came, we received orders to mrve about twelve miles to the west through the towns of Isigny and Carentan and to relieve elements of the 101st Airborne Division. The 101st had parachuted into the area northwest of Carentan on the morning of D-Day, 6 June.

It was late afternoon 27 June that the 2d Battalion, 329th (2/329) left Colombieres. E and F Companies had front line assignments and we of G Company were to be in battalion reserve. Thc distance on the map showed about 24 kilometers or 15 miles to our objective. Since infantry usually march about 2.5 miles per hour, we were expecting a trip of about 6 hours. Leaving about 1700 hours we should be in position about 2300.

To clear up the miles/kilometers relationship, our

battle maps for France and Germany were keyed to kilometers. A kilometer is .6 of a mile. So 24 kilometers divided by 1.6 equals 15 miles, or the reverse, 15 miles times 1.6 equals 24 kilometers.

The first leg of our march put us in the little village of Isigny about 6 miles away. Then it was another 7 miles to Carentan and finally 2 miles to our reserve position.

The march was routine until we approached the bridge over the canal as we entered Carentan.(Fig. 13) The MPs had a guardpost about 200 yards from the bridge. It was sandbagged sides and roof. MPs were there to alert all who came near the bridge to the fact that the Germans shelled the bridge area intermittently day and night harrassing our troop traffic. The idea was, if you were close to the bridge, be ready to halt and dive in the ditches, or else double time across the bridge and dive in the ditches on the other side.

As we walked down the cobblestone streets of Carentan it was already dark. The streets were lined on both sides by stone walls about 7 feet tall. It came time for our hourly 10 minute rest halt. The column halted, and just as everyone was leaning against the walls and relaxing, a field artillery battery of 155mm 'Long Toms' guns on the other side of the wall fired a volley (where each gun in the unit fired one round). It was a frightening

experience. We all looked for some place to hide until we realized it was friendly artillery. The rest of our march was uneventful except for our realization that we were getting close to the enemy. Our destination was an apple orchard where we would take over from the airborne troops. I remember how happy some of our men were to find slit trenches and foxholes already dug. I also remember how elated the airborne soldiers were as they marched away down the road to the rear that night. We commented at the time how very lightly the airborne were equipped with their light machine guns and towed 37mm antitank guns, pea-shooters we called them.

Our unit, G Company, was initially in battalion reserve, which meant we were not on the front line, but we were about 300 yards back, defending a little rise in the terrain in behind E and F Companies. At night we were responsible for sending out patrols to maintain contact with neighboring units on the battalion's right and left.

The next day, 28 June, many of my soldiers wrote letters home. We officers had an additional duty of censoring all outgoing mail to be sure no military information, comforting to the enemy was included in their letters. Most of the men followed the rules so it was not a big chore for us.

The next four days were spent with frequent patrolling of the vacant areas between our units, particularly looking

for German patrols or snipers who harassed us from time to time. We often jumped when we heard artillery firing, even if it was our own friendly units. Each day we became a little more accustomed to the noises of the battlefield.

On 3 July we received orders to be prepared to participate in a coordinated attack across the entire VII Corps front. The 83d Infantry Division was to attack with the 330th on the left, the 331st on the right, and one battalion of the 329th (the 2d) on the division right flank. The attack was scheduled for daybreak on 4 July. Our battalion was to attack across a very swampy area about 400 yards wide and to assault with E and F Companies leading. We were to attack the German positions and drive them back from their prepared defenses. G Company was to be prepared to rush across and reinforce E and F Companies as soon as they gained a foothold on the far side of the swamp. During the night of 3 July G Company moved up close behind the front lines so as to be ready for our mission.(Fig. 13)

At 0400 hours on 4 July the supporting mortar and artillery units started firing the preparation fires. I can remember how we likened it to a 4th of July fireworks demonstration. At 0445 the US forces launched their attacks across the VII Corps front. E and F Companies moved out a few minutes earlier so as to be at least halfway across the swampy area before the friendly fires

were to be lifted. Shortly after our supporting fires were lifted, the leading elements of E and F Companies came under withering German machine gun and mortar fires. Heavy casualties were incurred across the whole front. Some of the units were immediately pinned down, unable to move. Others raced across the remaining distance and took refuge behind the hedgerows rimming the swampy area. The Germans had E and F Companies trapped between the hedgerows and the swamp. They were smothered with barrages of hand grenades, and both companies suffered heavy casualties. Our supporting heavy machine guns from H Company had been blown from their initial firing positions by enemy tank fire. Our artillery and 81mm mortars were now of no real help because the German lines were so close to our troops that we couldn't fire on the enemy front line positions without hitting our own troops.

Backing up to 0445 hours on the morning of 4 July, there was a relative quiet for a few moments after we lifted our initial artillery preparation fires and shifted to other suspected enemy targets further from the shore line. This relative quiet was broken by three bursts of German automatic machine pistol fire. Bullets hit all around where several of us were standing. No one was hit but I felt something jerk my combat jacket. I looked down to find two bullet holes in my jacket at stomach level, one in and one out, and it never touched me.

Although we in G Company were in reserve and had no targets to shoot at we still received what seemed like a lot of enemy artillery shells. Occasionaliy we would also get a round of direct tank fire that was probably intended as harassing fires to keep our troops from moving around to reinforce E and F Companies. I spent most of my time moving from squad to squad encouraging my men to be alert and ready for whatever developed. Then I would pay a visit to the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Claude Bowen, at his observation post (OP). One new problem had surfaced--the Germans were jamming some of the battalion radio frequencies. It was like a dipsy doodle high and low tone, back and forth. We couldn't use some radios at all. As the reserve company commander it was my duty to be ready to commit my company into the battle should the battalion CO (commanding officer) feel it necessary to do so. Therefore, from time to time I went back to the battalion OP to see how the battle was going with the front line companies.

On one of my trips back through G Company I found that we had received some casualties. It was my first experience of having some of my own soldiers wounded. There is no way to express the feeling. My greatest urge was to get a medic to patch them up and get them back to the battalion aid station. In addition to their need for medical care, it was important to get them out of the

company area as quickly as possible so their buddies wouldn't start getting even more scared.

A few minutes later I was visiting one of my squads in front of a lone farmhouse, the only building in our area. As I dashed around the left near corner I realized that my position was too exposed and decided to turn back. I wheeled around and ducked behind the corner just as an enemy artillery shell burst against the side of the building. My left leg had not completely cleared the corner so a piece of shell fragment went into my left thigh. It's distressing to see a fellow soldier wounded, but even worse when the soldier is you. The battalion aid station was close by so I went by for a quick patch over my wound, then back to my company.

By 1000 hours it was clear that the American attack had failed. Colonel Bowen sent me a message to get ready to attack in order to relieve pressure on E and F Companies. We made ready, but the attack was not ordered. Finally at about 1130 the division commander authorized the regimental commander to withdraw whatever he could of E and F Companies and further directed that G Company not be committed across the swamp.

At about 1200 hours some of the E, F, and H Company men started arriving back on our side of the swamp. Captain Frank Carmichael, commander of H Company, remembers that his heavy machine gun squads had left their guns in

the swamp but had removed the bolts so the enemy could not use the guns against us.[3] The machine gunners had buried the bolts in the mud. At 1600 a German medic put up a white flag and suggested we might want to clear the battlefield of our wounded. Colonel Bowen sent all of our medics out and the German medics helped with the American wounded as well. Once the medics had done all they could they took down the white flags and the front reverted to firing at everything that moved. It was a fourth of July which most of us would never forget.

During the early evening everyone was alerted to be on the lookout for returning stragglers, and to expect German patrols to try and infiltrate our positions. Instructions were clear, don't shoot until you see the swastika on the enemy's belt buckle. Sure enough, shortly after dark G Company killed a three man German patrol as it was crossing a wire fence into our position. According to later G-2 reports the 2d Battalion had made their attack against much superior forces, but the men of the battalion knew this 30 minutes after they jumped off.

At 2200 hours G Company was ordered to move to a blocking position to protect a road junction in the rear of the 330th Regiment. The division commanding general anticipated a German counterattack to try to regain this important road junction. The three rifle platoons moved to their assigned areas, positioned their light machine guns

and BARs and started digging slit trenches and foxholes. An American medium tank arrived at the crossroad to help in our defense and went into a good firing position near the corner. Standard operating procedure was for me to check the platoon positions and coordinate local security for the night watches. After the holes were dug the next requirement was for all not on guard to get some sleep. Most of the company had been awake since 0300 the night before.

Just before dawn on 5 July the Germans fired flares and the whole sky was illuminated. They opened up with artillery, mortars, machine guns, and tanks. It sounded like the enemy was everywhere. Those or us in the G Company CP (command post) area dived for their holes. Since I didn't have a hole yet, I dived in the hole closest to me. Unfortunately, I fell on one of my soldiers. He screamed and became almost hysterical thinking I was a German. It took some tall talking to convince him he was okay.

The enemy had launched a strong counterattack. They got a lucky hit on the tank at the crossroad and it caught on fire. But G Company gave a good account of themselves, fought off the counterattack and the enemy withdrew.

During the day of 5 July we were moved back with our battalion into regimental reserve. So far, G Company had lost 20 of its 187 men, either killed, wounded, or missing.

E and F Companies both reported they each had only 70 men left. Battalion Headquarters Company had lost 11 men and H Company had lost a large part of one heavy machine gun platoon. Stragglers were still continuing to report in.

It was mid-afternoon when G Company started receiving heavy enemy artillery fire in their assembly area. The Germans were traversing and searching up and down both sides of the hedgerows, seemingly trying to neutralize our 81 mortar gun position. Our mortars must have been doing damage to the enemy else they would not have been so eager to suppress the 81 mortars. By early evening we had already had a number of men killed and wounded even though they were in their holes. The enemy shells were aimed along the hedgerows and many were exploding in the trees overhead and raining down hundreds of shell fragments right into our foxholes and slit trenches. The cry of 'medic' was occuring too often. The frustration of being shot at and not being able to fight back is devastating to soldiers. I raced back and forth through the company area helping with the wounded and trying to comfort my men.

In desperation I ran several hundred yards to regimental headquarters and asked for help. I asked to move G Company to a different location but it was denied. The officer in charge explained that they knew what was happening and that our artillery was getting ready to finally fire counter-battery fires to suppress the enemy's

incoming fires. On my way back to the company, I could hear our artillery starting to fire back; I felt better, and the rest of the night of 6 July was bearable.

Early on 7 July G Company was ordered to retake a three-way road junction behind our 3d Battalion. The Germans had infiltrated the American lines and re-occupied their old defenses, thereby interrupting the 3d Battalion's line of supply. The reason G Company kept getting these special tasks was because we were part of the 2d Battalion which was designated the reserve unit for the 329th Infantry Regiment; plus the fact that E and F Companies were not yet fully operational due to their horrible experience of 4 July in the swamp.

The enemy positions at the road junction included a single house on one corner plus the typical hedgerows separating the farmer's fields. There were a number of large trees around the junction. What we didn't know was that the Germans had established an intricate network of interlocking machine gun positions dug into the hedgerows. One good thing we discovered was that they didn't have any supporting mortars or artillery. That alone made the upcoming battle more manageable.

There was a hedgerow along the right side of the main road leading into the road junction, and a second hedgerow extended perpendicular along the road leading off to our right front.

My plan of attack was to have two platoons forward, one on the left of the main road, and one on the right. Each platoon was to go forward cautiously with a few scouts moving quickly from cover to cover, hoping to get the Germans to fire and disclose their positions early. The enemy was clever, they held their fire until our lead elements were very close. Then, they opened fire from three directions. It was like an angry beehive of machine guns and machine pistols (burp guns) firing. Fortunately, only a few men were close, and they immediately took cover but were pinned down and couldn't move.(Fig. 14) The two platoons quickly deployed so that every soldier could return fire on the German positions. In order to get a better vantage point to size up the turmoil, I took my radio operator and two messengers and moved over to the hedgerow on my right. The three men with me went over first and made it okay, but as I bounded over the five foot high mound of dirt and hedge, I was shot in my rear with a blast of machine gun fire. When I settled on the ground on the far side of the hedgerow, my seat was numb and I called for an aid man. Then I reached back with my right hand and felt my backside expecting to feel a hand full of blood, and--joy! there was none. On later examination of my tanker's bib trousers I discovered five purple spots. The burst had come from wooden bullets which the Germans used on maneuvers and for close-in defensive situations such as

this road junction defense. The Germans gained the surprise, fear, and shock action of machine guns firing and bullets ricochetting without shooting their own soldiers.

From my new vantage point I was able to direct the firing of the two platoons. We used rifle grenades and smoke grenades to confuse the enemy. The battalion had sent two 57mm antitank guns to support G Company, so we smoked the enemy position while the antitank guns went into firing position, then as the smoke cleared the guns fired on the German machine gun positions in the corners of the hedgerows and in the house. My support platoon was then committed to flank around to the left and capture the house. With everyone firing and the 3d platoon flanking, the enemy tried to withdraw. A few of the Germans made it but most were wounded or killed. But that's not all.

Just as the support platoon was assaulting and moving into the house a lone P-47 Air Force fighter bomber was overhead flipping his wings frantically trying to jettison a single bomb from under his wing. It finally came loose and fell down, down, down, directly onto the house, demolishing it.

Those of us who had seen the bomb falling dived into the ditch beside the road. The concussion picked me right off the ground and slammed me flat against the ground, knocking me almost out of breath. My immediate thought was sickening for I thought the 3d platoon had been wiped out

in the explosion of the bomb on the house. I called frantically to the platoon leader on my radio. He came in loud and clear. I asked him how many casualties he had; he victoriously said, not a one.

Here was a battle lesson. He and part of his platoon had seized the house, moved through it, out the back, and into a quick defensive position on the far side of the house--just as the army tactics book prescribes, so as to be ready for the enemy's counterattack, should it come. Had they lingered in the house, as they sometimes do, they would all have been killed.

The position was combed for any enemy who might be hiding out, then G Company was formed up and moved back to the battalion position, much wiser and not a little proud of their victory.

Having opened the subject of battle lessons, another comes to mind and bears airing. During one of our earlier days when we were moving into an assemble area, we had scouts out front checking the area before bringing the troops in. It was a big pasture with hedgerows all around except for a gate opening at each end of the rectantgular field. The basic rule is never to walk through a strange gateway but to go around. The principle is that the enemy on defense will know the exact range and will therefore have the advantage over you. Proper procedure is to avoid the opening, move to a covered position, and cross into the

field as inconspicuously as possible. This particular day, we heard a lone sniper shot. When we reached the gateway, there was our scout, a young red-headed soldier, dead from a shot directly in the center of his helmet. It always made me feel especially sick inside when I saw a careless death. (Fig. 15)

On 8 July, or possibly 7 July, G Company was attacking along the Carentan-Periers highway. Our mission was to strengthen the division's right flank by attacking alongside the 331st Regiment. The company was in a column of platoons since the enemy positions were not yet identified. The lead unit, the 3d platoon, had several scouts out front moving by bounds from cover to cover. We heard some enemy firing up front but the lead platoon kept moving ahead. Then suddenly it stopped. My company command group and I were at the head of the 2d platoon in the column. I moved up into the lead platoon as quickly as I could and found myself next to Private First Class Michael G. Cheripka. He had beem one of the platoon messengers since Atterbury; I knew him well. So I asked him what was the problem, why had they stopped? He said, 'I don't know,' so I told him to go tell the platoon leader to get moving. If we stopped there, the Germans would start firing their mortars and artillery. Cheripka said. 'Go yourself, I don't want to.'

So, crouching as low as I could, I made my way

forward until I reached the head of the column. I could see that two scouts had been hit. Once I had jumped over the hedge to help the wounded, others came to help me, and who do you think was closest? Cheripka was right by my side. We got the wounded back under cover of the hedgerow and the platoon leader put out more scouts and we started forward again. I was much the wiser, because I realized my men were near exhaustion and not really themselves.

We were coming into contact with the enemy outposts. Shortly we hit their first fully defended hedgerow. We deployed the two lead platoons, established a base of fire, drew enemy fire, smoked the enemy position, and fired our supporting fires to fix the enemy into their positions. Then with everyone firing, I committed the support platoon quickly onto the enemy position just as the smoke was lifting. It was a tactical victory for the company and for me because I was of the opinion that we were losing too many men with the broad frontal attacks we had been using. The battalion had us sending the men forward along a broad front without proper concentrated fire power ahead of them.

Since the fields were divided into compartments by the hedgerows, I felt the best way to attack and reduce the enemy positions was to attack one or no more than two compartments wide at a time, keeping a narrow front, concentrating the fire support, using lots of smoke to screen the advance, and using white phosphorus mortar and

artillery shells for shock effect. When it became necessary to lift supporting fires as the infantry neared the enemy position the riflemen could use a flood of rifle grenades to add additional shock action to the infantry assault as they closed with the enemy defensive position.

G Company had a good day. Casualties were light and everyone was encouraged, especially when we heard we were going into battalion reserve for a breather.

On 9 July, E and F Companies were back in action with the mission of attacking the town of Sainteny.(Fig. 16) G Company was finally really in reserve. The town was in shambles, having been bombed and shelled by nineteen battalions of field artillery. Resistance was light, but once the town was reached, the Germans withdrew to the next ridge and from there raked the town with devastating artillery and direct tank fire. The Germans also counterattacked from the south west and reoccupied part of the town. A second counterattack came in from the east and cut off our battalion aid station. Simultaneously, the battalion observation post was hit by enemy artillery and tank fire. Most of the observation post personnel were wounded.

The acting battalion commander, Major Edwin G. Holt, was seriously wounded; Captain Frank C. Carmichael, the H Company commander, was also wounded and received damage to his ears and could not hear anything. Captain Carmichael

applied first aid to Major Holt's ruptured upper arm, stopped the bleeding, and walked him to relative safety. Lieutenant Hugh Borden, the 322 Field Artillery Liaison Officer, and a couple of his liaison party were about the only individuals of the battalion observation group that were not wounded.

E and F Companies had lost their attack momentum but were tenaciously holding on to the left side of the town of Sainteny. Because of the casualties and confusion at the battalion forward CP, the 2d Battalion was not operational for a period of time, exact time unknown. Someone must have passed the word back to the battalion rear command post and the regimental command post. The reports must have been very complete because a multitude of actions were being taken. First, I received a radio message from somewhere for me to report to the observation post in Sainteny and take command of the 2d Battalion, 329th Infantry. I was with G Company on the north side of town. I had already gotten word about the aid station being cut off and so I dispatched a platoon of G Company to recapture it. The Germans quickly withdrew. I turned over command of G Company to Lieutenant John Devenny or Lieutenant William Ford, I don't remember which, and made my way with much trepidation into town and found what was left of the observation party. Almost simultaniously, the regimental assistant communications officer, a warrant officer,

arrived with all the necessary radios, wire, and telephone equipment and operating personnel to re-establish communications with the companies and regiment. It was one of the most professional rehabilitation jobs I had seen or have seen in two wars. The regimental headquarters had responded beautifully. Most helpful was Captain James C. Bagley, the assistant regimental S-3 [operations officer] who arrived on the scene and brought me up to date on the battle on our flanks.

Finally, it was concluded that we had to dislodge the Germans from the west end (on our right) of town. So I sent for G Company and committed them around our right flank on the edge of town.

While waiting for G Company to get into position, I witnessed a series of heroic actions by Lieutenant Merle Cailor, the 2d Battalion Transportation Officer. The enemy was shelling the town again. Lieutenant Cailor with disregard for his personal safety moved back and forth across the town square, getting into vehicles and moving them to safer places behind buildings. He was trying to protect 'his' vehicles. Division called on the 2d Battalion, 331st, to attack on the southeast (left) part of town and drive the Germans back. This was done at the same time as G Company attacked on the west side of town.

G Company was now moving rapidly against the enemy, and we had mortars and artillery firing ahead of them. All

at once we were startled to see other friendly troops from the 4th Division on our right. Their left flank battalion had committed their reserve company around their left as we had committed G Company around our right flank. Fortunately we didn't fire on each other, and by now the Germans were withdrawing, having been overwhelmed by the extra efforts of the 4th Division, our G Company, and the extra 2d Battalion of the 331st Infantry.

I was notified that a lieutenant colonel was coming up to take over the 2d Battalion, so I returned to my good old G Company and spent the night in what was left of the prayer room behind the church chapel.

Command and control had truly been given the acid test that day, 9 July. The 2d Battalion, 329th had experienced three commanders. G Company had lost two lieutenants during the day. The 331st Regiment had recently lost five company commanders and when Lieutenant Colonel Bob York took over the 331st he became their seventh commander since the division landed.

Our Catholic chaplain, Father Howard Swartz, was present in the aid station when it was captured. He was fluent in German and had been talking to a wounded German soldier hoping to get some military information. The soldier was feeling sorry for himself and had told the chaplain that he hadn't eaten for a day and the chaplain was feeling sorry for him until the German soldier got sick

and vomited up some recently eaten chicken. We recaptured the aid station and Captain Donald Overdyke, the battalion surgeon; the aid station personnel; as well as the chaplain; were all delighted to have the Germans out of there. They had all been threatened with submachine pistols stuck under their noses as well as pushed around a bit.

That night we had two G Companies in the town of Sainteny, G/329 and G/331. The next morning the first sergeants sounded off, 'Let's move out G Company,' and I think I got some of their men and they got some of mine simply because most replacements knew the company they were in but weren't sure of the regiment. The new soldiers didn't realize there were two regiments in the same town.

While eating breakfast the next morning in the small prayer room of the church, a soldier I did not know walked in and displayed the contents of a velvet drawstring bag. It was full of beautiful jewelry. He offered me some but I declined and told him to put it back where he found it since it had obviously been left with the local priest for safe keeping. I have often wondered if he put it back or not.

I received orders to have G Company attack southward from Sainteny. The enemy had withdrawn during the night and broken contact. It is always bad tactically to lose contact with the enemy. It is expensive in manpower and

time to have to find the enemy again. Had we been well organized and alert at either the battalion or regimental level it would not have happened. Keeping contact with the enemy would have been a good task for the I & R Platoon of the regiment.[Intelligence and Reconnaissance] But this didn't happen, therefore, G Company once again was ordered to move out, find the enemy, fix them in position by supporting fires, then annihilate them or drive them south.

The division commander, General Robert Macon, had been under heavy pressure by the VII Corps commander, General Lawton Collins, to take Sainteny by 5 July. Sainteny was finally cleared on 10 July. Part of the delay was that the 83d Division had repelled five German counterattacks. The reason for the urgency to take Sainteny was that the terrain begins to open up to its south. The 83d's new zone was shifted to the southeast so as to make room between the 83d and the 4th Infantry Divisions for the commitment of the 9th Division. General Collins had been waiting impatiently for five days to commit the 9th Division.

G Company moved south out of town, a hedgerow at a time, following a ridge line going cross country which meant we had no roads in our zone of operations going our way.(See Fig. 16) Our leading patrols located four German tanks about 200 yards to their front along a road running perpendicular to our direction of advance.(Fig.17a) The patrol was about 400 yards ahead of the company. We were

moving through the woods out of sight of the enemy tanks. At this same time our left flank lookouts spotted a two-man German patrol about 400 yards away working their way along a stream line 200 yards off to our left and parallel to our advance.(Fig. 17b) I ordered the lead platoon to keep moving through the woods, then called the battalion CO on the battalion SCR 300 radio net. I reported the sighting of four enemy tanks and asked that he attach two 57mm antitank guns to G Company and also send the A&P Platoon [Ammunition and Pioneer] to help cut brush and trees so we could get the guns over a small creek. (Fig. 17c) He gave me an affirmative reply. My soldiers along the left woodline opened fire with rifles and a BAR attempting to hit the two-man German patrol, which by this time was about 300 yards away. The enemy patrol continued to move relatively close along our left flank. They were especially proficient, moving rapidly. Up would come a head, then just as we would squeeze a round off the head would go down, only to come up again at a new location. I had borrowed a rifle and joined the group of about six riflemen firing at the two-man patrol. We continued to fire as they moved closer and closer, now about 200 yards from where we were at the edge of the woods. At this point they reversed their course and went back the way they had come. We fired for a short while longer but with no apparent results.

Consequently, they probably accomplished their objective of getting us to reveal our position even if they weren't able to tell our strength. However, they did us a favor, they gave us a perfect example of how effective a patrol can be if conducted correctly. They proved that our Scouting and Patrolling Field Manual was correct. It states that scouting and patrolling, if done correctly, is not a suicide mission and can be very effective. I never let my officers and men forget this perfect example the two German soldiers gave us of how to conduct proper patrolling.

The preparations for and sequence of the battle that followed are shown in Figure 17. The mission was to attack through the woods and seize the small east-west road about 1500 yards to the south. I had dispatched a small combat patrol to move carefully through the woods ahead of the company and try to get information concerning the road junction in the center of our zone. The patrol reached the edge of the woods and by radio reported having sighted the four tanks parked along the sunken road to their left front. Also, they reported negative enemy[3] in the woods, where they had been. We moved two platoons to the vicinity of the south edge of the woods, with instructions to stay out of sight. The artillery and 81mm mortar observers established an observation post behind a hedgerow near the corner of the woods.(Fig. 17a) We confirmed the tanks'

location to battalion, and proceeded to resolve the problem of how to get the antitank guns over the stream. It took about an hour for the A&P Platoon to cut small trees and brush and with a squad from G Company finally manhandled the two guns over the stream and up to the edge of the woods. It took some more work to prepare firing positions for the two guns.(Fig.17e)

As we looked at the tanks the left three were in defilade (Fig. 18) with only the tops of their turrets visible. The fourth tank (closest to the road junction) was in partial defilade but some of its hull was visible.

The plan was to fire two volleys of artillery fire to neutralize the enemy infantry, and have the 81mm mortars fire smoke to obscure the enemy's view of our activity as we moved the two antitank guns into firing positions. When the smoke cleared the antitank guns were to fire at the fourth enemy tank. This they did but the two rounds ricocheted off the tank. Before the gunners could reload, a fifth enemy tank, which was sitting back off the road junction and camouflaged, fired two rounds at our antitank guns.(Fig. 17g) The first round hit close to the gun on the right knocking the crew out of action and turning the gun sideways. The second round hit the hedgerow and blew the second gun crew away from their gun. I rushed to the aid of the second gun and helped the stunned crew to get back on their gun. They fired one round and missed. At

this point our mortars smoked the position to deny visibility to the tank on the corner. Our division heavy artillery (155mm) started firing at the tank on the corner. When all cleared, the four tanks to the left had moved out of position and withdrawn down the road. The fifth tank remained on the corner of the woods. Our antitank guns were neutralized, the G Company members shaken.

Two actions followed. First, we asked the heavy artillery to keep trying to hit the tank with 155mm or 8 inch Howitzers.[4] Secondly, I took the third platoon and flanked the position from the left down by the creek line.(Fig. 17h) As we approached the left corner by the bridge the enemy infantry fired on us with rifles and machine guns.(Fig. 17f) One of the BAR men was wounded so I decided to take the weapon and lay down a base of fire while the platoon leader and one squad would assault the position. The assistant BAR man fed me the ammunition and I became gunner for the assault. Our men reached the German defensive holes, but the enemy had moved back and opened with heavy fire again. The platoon leader was hit and the squad panicked momentarily and came running back to my position. Once they got under cover behind the hedgerow they explained that the lieutenant had been wounded. I insisted that two of them go back and get the lieutenant. Again with a reloaded BAR and the rest of the platoon also firing at the enemy, two men went back and recovered their

lieutenant. Meanwhile the enemy withdrew along with the fifth tank on the corner.

The entire battle had taken about five hours and a number of wounded. The enemy had done a good job of delaying our advance. The battle highlighted several factors. Infantry against tanks without tank support are very vulnerable. Towed antitank guns are almost useless, and expensive in manpower. When units are terribly under strength they tend to neglect their special weapons and equipment such as bazookas and radios. Radios and other communications equipment tend to be overlooked until needed. Special types of ammunition are vital to the battle when needed.

During the battle when I was getting ready to make the flanking movement along the streamline, I sent for a bazooka team and was horrified to learn we had none in the company. That should never have happened, but it did because of the trememdous attrition, plus the fact that the bazooka was a special weapon, that is, it was not assigned to a specific person; all soldiers are trained to fire the bazooka. This was a flaw in our infantry organization.

At the end of the war the supply personnel told me that the 2d Battalion fired more smoke and white phosphorus shells than the other two battalions of the regiment combined. As it was borne out throughout the campaigns smoke properly utilized was a most valuable weapon.

A head count that afternoon revealed that G Company had only 40 men in forward fighting troops, one sergeant NCO (mortar squad leader), and one captain (company commander).

That night on 10 July in my company command post (German dugout bunker) at the corner of a hedgerow, I was bemoaning a terrible headache when I remembered I hadn't eaten breakfast, lunch, or supper. This was the first time I had stopped since dawn.

Just before midnight, we received twenty replacements. The first sergeant, Dwight H. Hinman, had brought them up from the kitchen area where they had been kept for a couple days to get a little taste of the war in small bits. I sent for Cheripka and asked him how many men they had in the 3d Platoon. He said there were nine. I told him to count off the first ten replacements of the twenty who were crouched against the hedgerow, they were assigned to the 3d Platoon, and that he was the new platoon sergeant. He appeared a little shocked, but rose to the challenge. I promoted him and he made a fine sergeant.

The 11th of July is fuzzy to me and the available records are not clear about G Company or the 2d Battalion, 329th. My guess is we were moved into battalion reserve, received and assimilated some more replacements, since I only had a skeleton company and I was its only officer.

On 12 July, the 2/329 was again attacking south of

Sainteny with G Company leading. We met stiff resistance from German artilley, machine guns and infantry. Twelve enemy tanks were reported to our front by air observers. The artillery took them under fire and they dispersed. The Infantry Tank Team defenders apparently withdrew and G Company continued for another hedgerow. By the end of the day we had made five hedgerows or about 1500 meters, which was a record day for advance in the hedgerows. During the doy's actions G Company had attacked seven different directions. The platoons had worked well supporting each other. We used the same principle as before. We located the enemy positions, pinned them down by direct and indirect fires, concentrated the fire of two rifle platoons and the weapons platoon's machine guns and mortars all on a narrow area, and flanked it with the other platoon when we could. When we couldn't flank them, we made the last assault with marching fire and rifle grenades for heavy shock action. It was slow but it worked with only a few casualties.

The following incident occured during one of the firefights on 12 July. Two platoons were in position behind a hedgerow firing just ahead at the German position. I noticed one soldier hiding behind the embankment and not firing. When I got his attention he was terribly frightened. I took his rifle, put it over the hedgerow, loaded a clip of ammo into the rifle, and insisted that he

hold the rifle. But he couldn't shoot. Then I took the rifle and started shooting. Apparently okay, he took the rifle and started firing. I congratulated him profusely, he smiled and one more potential battle fatique case was rescued.

The day wasn't over, we had made such a deep penetration that there were no friendly units on either flank. I pleaded with battalion headquarters and insisted that the gaps be filled before dark but with no success. Therefore, we made our night defense into a box formation defending all four directions. Finally, the battalion did send some help in the form of a backup unit. Fortunately, it worked the first night, but for the second night I put out the word to the adjacent units that they must close the gap the next day and anyone who attempted to leave the front at night would be shot.

On 13 July the 2d Battalion attacked with G and F Companies forward and E Company in reserve; the 331st Regiment was on G Company's left rear. The enemy had withdrawn back to a new defense line during the night. G and F Companies fought well making good progress. At one place they had a weird situation. They had worked their way up a hedgerow perpendicular to the axis of advance. (Fig. 19) The German infantry with a big tank was parading up and down the small road repeatedly shouting out 'Hande hoch!' suggesting that we put up our hands and

give up. After each shouting they would laugh as if hopped up. Their conduct was provoking to our GIs and they took more and more chances. They would stick their automatic weapons (BAR) over the dirt mounds and fire a couple bursts then duck back down. The tank would usually return the fire with his machine gun and occasionally with his big 76mm gun. At one point, one of our riflemen wounded the tank commander. Then someone fired a bazooka but it wasn't a good hit, however, it made the tank withdraw with his infantry.

G Company made a quick move forward and caught the enemy before they had time to get set up. With a quick flanking movement and using smoke and heavy mortars they forced the Germans to withdraw. By 1600 it was necessary to start 'buttoning up' for the night. The term covered notifying the platoons where they would dig in for the night, putting out the password and countersign, sending back word to the kitchen when and where to feed after dark, taking a head count, and telling the first sergeant the personnel status. It included telling the supply sergeant what was needed in the way of weapons, ammunition, and other supplies, putting replacement batteries in radios if necessary, starting to lay telephone wires to each platoon and outpost or listening post, installing temporary mine fields to block any tank avenues into our position, and installing trip wires across avenues of approach with booby

traps or trip flares. We also had artillery and mortar observers lay out areas for defensive fires and give them names or numbers so that the units could call for them in the dark should they detect an enemy attack or patrols. All crew-served weapons including heavy and light machine guns were placed in firing positions so as to be able to fire along predetermined lines in the dark. It is the leader's task to check all these defensive measures every night before he dares to settle in. Particulary important are limiting stakes for weapons that traverse back and forth, so that in the confusion of battle you don't shoot your own people or adjacent unit. A fundamental requirement is to coordinate always with your neighbors on either side, as well as front and back, and arrange for patrols to visit other units during the night. The leader sees that all units, outposts, and gun positions have the correct types of signal flares, and parachute flares to light the battlefield at night.

On that particular afternoon I had called for the platoon runners to have them get all necessary messages ready for the rear about food, ammo, etc. For the past hour the enemy had been firing a round or two of artillery about every ten minutes or so. The shells had been landing about 150 yards over our position. Then it happened, a round came over shorter than the others, exploding in the top of the trees overhead.

From information I received later from witnesses, this is what happened that day: Two of my company headquarters group were killed and several of us were wounded. My wounds were in my left thigh and right upper arm, artillery shell fragments. Several soldiers applied first aid to the wounded. The aid men strapped us on stretchers and transported us to the battalion aid station on litter jeeps. After checking me over and giving me a shot, the battalion surgeon went about patching up the others who were more seriously wounded. In good time they checked our bandages, gave us more shots, loaded us in an ambulance and transported us back to the clearing company [emergency hospital tent] close to the front, then back to a field hospital, still tents, but with full medical facilities. The field hospital was in the rear between Carentan and Cherbourg near one of the P-47 airfields. My wounds were sufficiently deep to require the vasoline gauze treatment. The gauze was stuffed into the wound holes and promoted healing from the inside of the hole and prevented the skin from healing over first. That is my best account of 13 July. I remained in the field hospital until 2 or 3 August.