

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1947 - 1948

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 331ST INFANTRY,
(83RD INFANTRY DIVISION) AT GEY, GERMANY,
10 DECEMBER-15 DECEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Regimental S-3)

Type of operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK

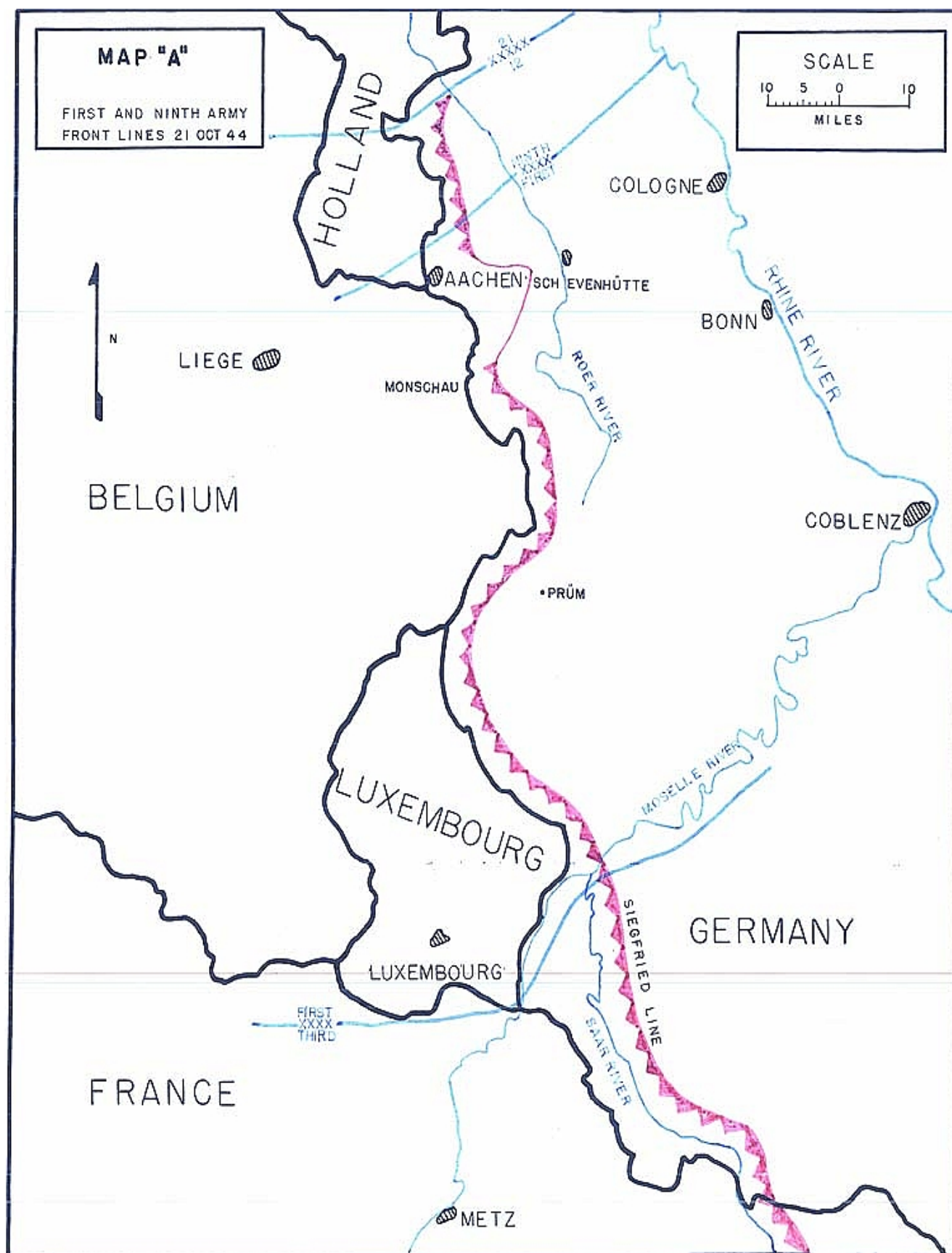
Major John F. Staples, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

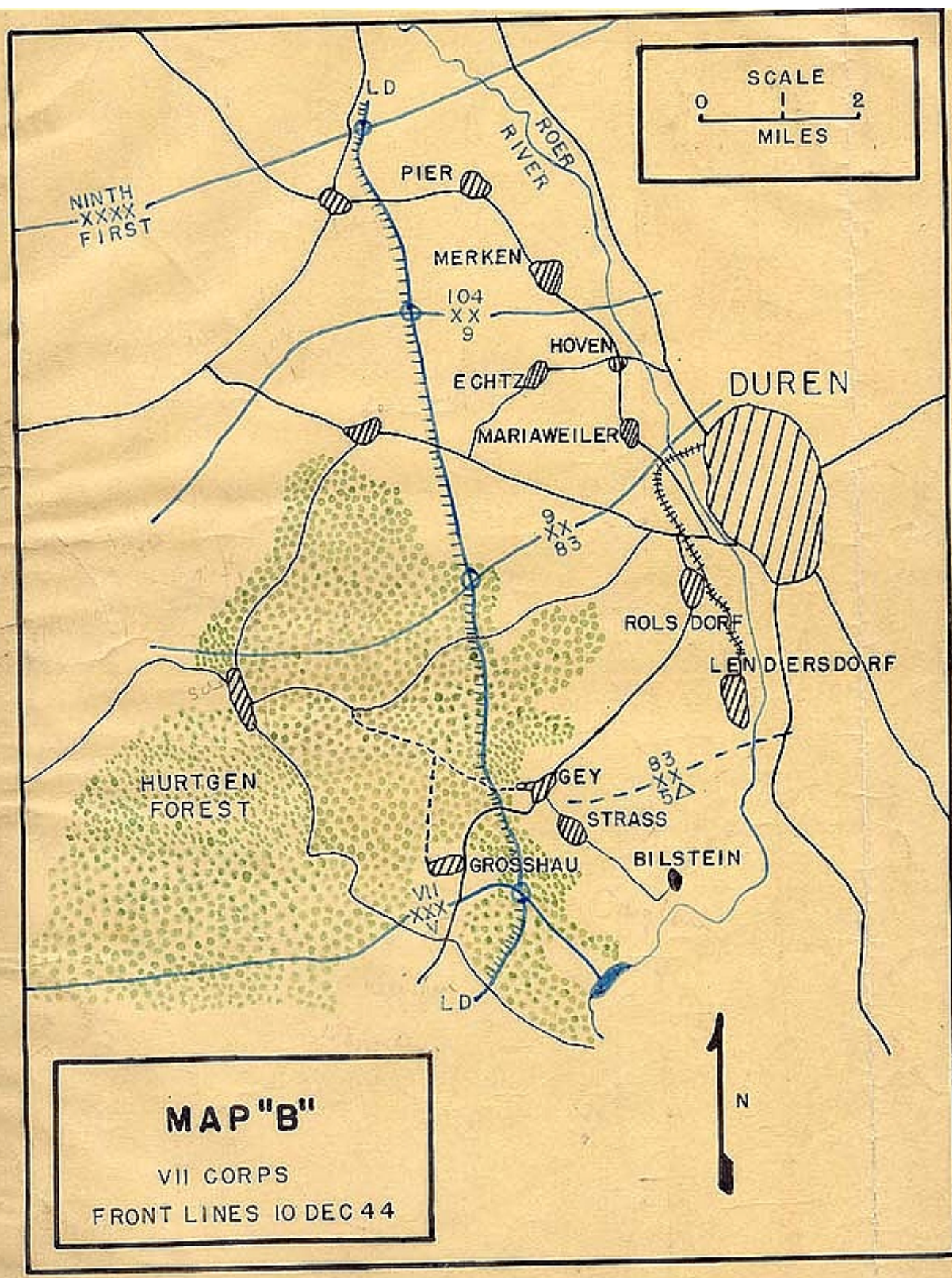
MAP "A"

FIRST AND NINTH ARMY
FRONT LINES 21 OCT 44

SCALE

10 5 0 10
MILES

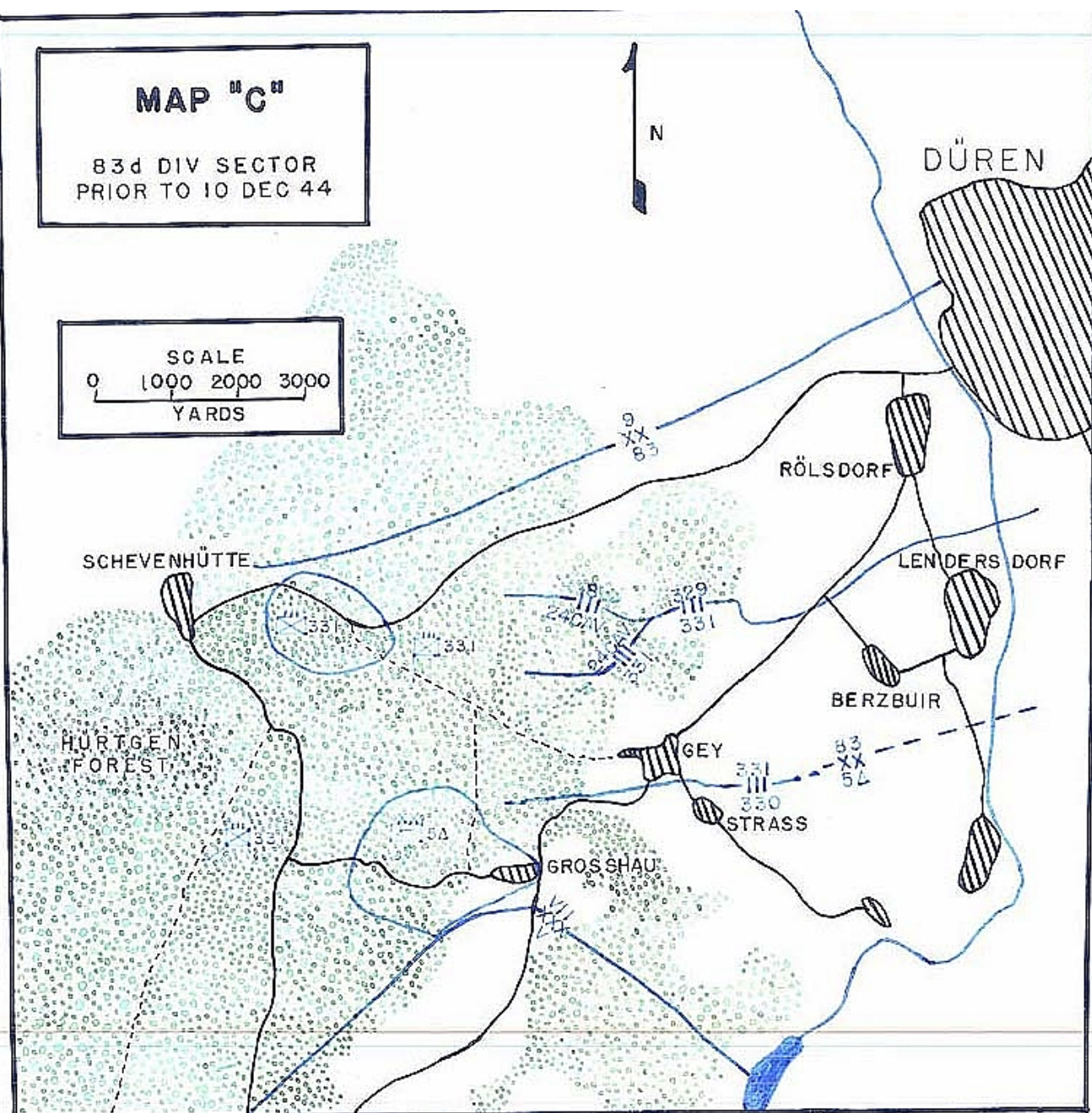




MAP "C"

83d DIV SECTOR
PRIOR TO 10 DEC 44

SCALE
0 1000 2000 3000
YARDS



ATTACK ON GEY
10-15 DEC 44

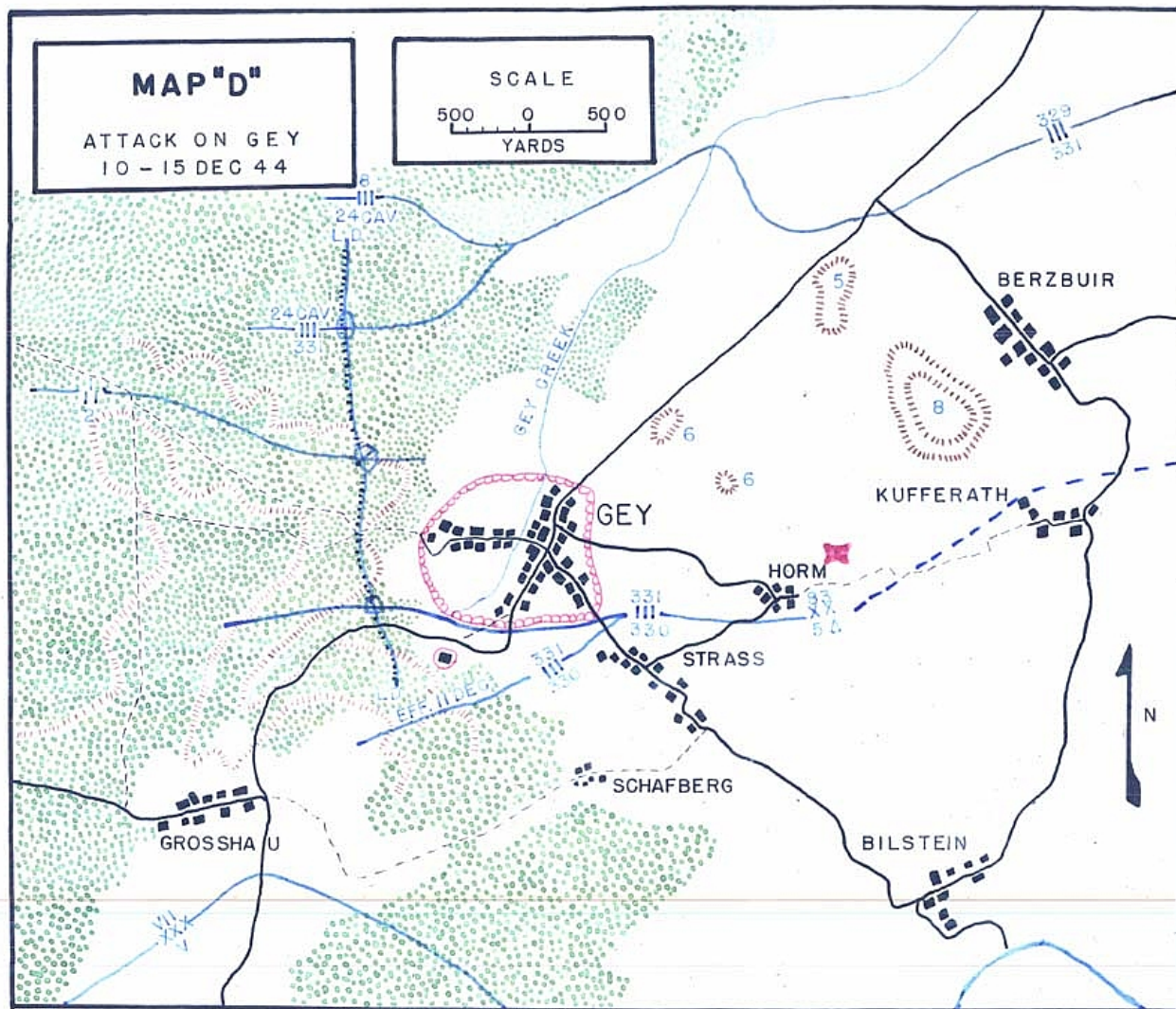


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index.....	1
Bibliography.....	2
Introduction.....	3
The General Situation.....	6
The Division Plan of Attack.....	8
The Regimental Situation.....	9
The Regimental Plan of Attack.....	14
Analysis and Criticism.....	25
Lessons.....	28
Map A - First and Ninth Army Front Lines 21 October 1944	
Map B - VII Corps Front Lines 10 December 1944	
Map C - 83rd Division Sector Prior to 10 December 1944	
Map D - Attack on Gey 10-15 December 1944	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 First Army Report of Operations, Part I (6 June 1944 - 31 December 1944)
- A-2 The Invasion of Western Europe, Department of Military Art and Engineering, United States Military Academy
- A-3 Report by the Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force, (6 June 1944 - 8 May 1945)
- A-4 Combat Operations Data, First Army, Europe, (1944 -1945)
- A-5 Thunderbolt Across Europe, (History of the 83rd Infantry Division)
- A-6 Draft copy of "Record of Events of the 331st Infantry," covering the period 26 June 1944 - 28 February 1945 made by 2d Lt. Marcel Newman (then M Sgt and Regimental Sgt Major) In the personal possession of the writer.

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 331ST INFANTRY,
(83RD INFANTRY DIVISION) AT GEY, GERMANY,
10 DECEMBER-15 DECEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Regimental S-3)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 331st Infantry, 83rd Infantry Division in the battle of Gey, Germany 10 December-15 December 1944.

The Allied Armies, after making rapid advances during August and September, had been forced to halt by lack of supplies. By 21 October sufficient supplies had been moved forward to permit the planning of further attacks. With the fall of Aachen, Germany on this date, preparations were begun for the Allied winter offensive. (1) (2)

The general plan called for an advance to the Rhine River toward the Ruhr and Saar industrial areas. (3) (4)

The main objectives of the offensive were:

1. To maintain the maximum pressure against the enemy forces defending the Ruhr and the Saar areas in an effort to force the employment of the German general reserve east of the Rhine. (5)
2. To destroy the general reserve. (6)
3. To clear western Germany of the enemy to the banks of the Rhine. (7)

If successful in attaining these objectives the Allies would then be in position to launch a final offensive into the heart of Germany for the destruction of the remaining enemy forces. (8)

At this time the front lines of the First and Ninth Armies

(1)A-3,p.66; (2)A-1,p.67; (3)A-2,p.65,66; (4)A-3,p.72;
(5,6,7,8)A-2,p.64.

were generally along the Luxembourg, Belgian, Dutch and German borders. There were minor penetrations into Germany west of Prum and at Monschau. The deepest penetration into Germany proper, which had breached the Siegfried Line, had been made by the First Army in the vicinity of Aachen. This penetration included Schevenhutte, approximately ten (10) miles from the Belgian-German border. (See Map A)

On 21 October Twelfth Army Group issued an order for an attack in which First Army was to seize the east bank of the Rhine River in the vicinity of Cologne and Bonn, and attempt to seize a bridgehead over the Rhine. In the event the bridgehead was not seized First Army was to clear the enemy from an area bounded by Cologne, on the north, and the Moselle River on the south. (9)

The Ninth Army was to attack in its zone and protect the left flank of the First Army. (10)

The Third Army was to continue its attack in the Metz area. (11)

Immediately upon receipt of the Twelfth Army Group order, First Army issued a letter of instructions in which it directed that VII Corps would attack in the direction Duren-Cologne to the Rhine. V Corps, upon the breaching of the main defenses by VII Corps and upon Army Order, was to attack toward Bonn. The VIII Corps was to conduct a vigorous defense and be prepared to attack on order. (12)

The 5th of November or later was tentatively set as the date for the attack, depending upon the availability of ammunition and weather suitable for air operations. To support the attack, Operation "Q", the largest, close-support, air attack ever used, was planned. Operation "Q" was supposed to

(9,10,11,12)A-1,p.67

provide the necessary blow to permit a "breakthrough" of the German defenses. (13) (14)

The 16th of November was later designated as the day on which the attack would be launched regardless of the weather, the attack having been delayed previously by adverse weather conditions. The 16th dawned cloudy, but cleared sufficiently by 1100 hours to permit the air attack to begin. The VII Corps jumped off at 1245, and initially, met comparatively light resistance; but by mid-afternoon the enemy was recovering from the air and artillery assault and the attack was pushed against increasing resistance. The advance was resumed against a determined enemy fighting from fortified buildings in the towns and cities of the comparatively open terrain north of Aachen and Duren. South of Duren the enemy was defending from well-dug-in log emplacements in the heavily wooded and rugged terrain of the Hurtgen Forest. The positions facing the First Army were protected by extensive anti-tank and anti-personnel mine fields and supported by heavy artillery and mortar fire. (15) (16) (17)

The enemy, using civilian labor, had prepared strongly fortified positions in rear of the Siegfried line which were still blocking the Allied advance. (18) (19)

The failure of Operation "Q" to deliver the necessary blow to permit a breakthrough of the German defenses and a rapid advance to the Rhine can be laid to two reasons:

1. Failure of the planes to bomb close enough to our front line troops to weaken the defenses enough to permit a breakthrough.
2. Failure of the ground units to push rapidly

(13)A-1,p.67; (14)A-1,p.73; (15,16)A-1,p.74; (17)A-1,p.76;
(18)A-1,p.84; (19)A-3,p.80.

ahead and take advantage of the psychological effect of the bombing. (20)

These failures can both be attributed to excessive safety allowances used as a result of the bombing experience at Saint Lo. (21)

While the application of Operation "Q", as planned, was highly successful its failure to achieve a breakthrough of the German defenses resulted in a slow, hard, and costly fight to reach the Roer River.

By the end of November the enemy situation had definitely improved in the First Army Zone. Infantry divisions (reformed after being disorganized and disrupted by the rapid advance through France) fortress battalions, and Volks Grenadier Divisions had been used in the defense of this area. These inferior units had been highly successful in derending strongly fortified positions against heavy attack. (22)

The front line units which had suffered most from the determined Allied offensive received replacements of personnel from other branches and of men released from industry. (23)

Intelligence reports, during the latter part of November, indicated that several Panzer Divisions were moving from east of the Rhine to Aachen-Cologne sector; and by 30 November the front line units of the Seventh German Army, which was opposing the First Army, consisted of ten (10) Infantry Divisions and one (1) Parachute Division, while the reserve consisted of four (4) SS Panzer Divisions and three (3) Panzer Divisions. (24)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Prior to the end of November it was evident that fresh

(20,21)A-4,p.15; (22,23,24)A-1,p.84.

divisions would have to be attached to VII Corps to give further impetus to the attack.

On 28 November a First Army Letter of Instructions which was effective at 1200 29 November, provided, in part, for:

1. Attachment of 5th Armored Division (less CCR)² from V Corps to VII Corps.
2. 83rd Division to relieve the 4th Division and the 4th Division to take over the 83rd Division sector in Luxembourg. (25)

The change in dispositions was accomplished as follows: On 1 December the 331st Infantry relieved the 330th Infantry, which moved to VII Corps Zone on 2 December, relieved the 22nd Infantry by 1900 3 December, and was attached to the 4th Division.

The 331st Infantry was relieved by the 22nd Infantry on 5 December, moved to VII Corps Zone on 6 December and completed the relief of the 12th Infantry by 1600 on 7 December.

Responsibility for the respective zones passed at 1600 on 7 December; the 8th Infantry being attached to the 83rd Division and the 329th Infantry to the 4th Division.

The 329th Infantry was relieved by the 12th Infantry on 9 December; moved north on 10 December and relieved the 8th Infantry on 11 December. (26)

On 8 December VII Corps issued an order directing that an attack be made on 10 December to seize the west bank of the Roer River in its zone and preparations made to cross the Roer and continue on Army order. (See Map B) (27)

(25)A-1,p.83; (26,27)A-1,p.88.

The 104th Division was to seize high ground in the vicinity of Pier and Merken. (See Map B) (28)

The 9th Division, assisted by a combat command of the 3rd Armored Division was to relieve the 1st Division and seize the high ground in the area Echtz-Hoven-Mariaweiler. (See Map B) (29)

The 5th Armored Division after capture of Gey by the 83rd Division, was to attack on the right of the 83rd and seize the west bank of the Roer from south of Lendersdorf to Bilstein. (See Map B) (30)

The 83rd Division, with 774th Tank Battalion, 629th T.D. Battalion, and the 24th Cavalry Squadron attached, was to seize Gey and Strass initially and continue to its objective along the railroad which ran through Rolsdorf and Lendersdorf. (See Map B) (31) (32)

THE DIVISION PLAN OF ATTACK

The 83rd Division planned to attack with two (2) regiments abreast initially. (See Map C)

The 330th Infantry was to attack on 10 December to seize Strass and then revert to division reserve after being passed through by the 5th Armored Division. (See Map C) (33)

The 331st Infantry was to attack on 10 December to seize Gey, Lendersdorf, and the west bank of the Roer in its zone. (See Map C) (34)

The 329th Infantry, upon relief of the 8th Infantry, was to attack on 12 December and seize the west bank of the Roer in its zone. (See Map C) (35)

Upon seizure of Gey the 5th Armored Division, from assembly area in vicinity of Grosshau, was to have priority of use of the

(28,29,30,31)A-1,p.88; (32,33,34,35)Personal knowledge.

road leading from Grosshau to Gey to permit it to attack to the southeast. (See Map C) (36)

The 24th Cavalry Squadron, with 83rd Reconnaissance Troop attached, was to occupy and defend a portion of the front between the 329th and 331st and would be pinched out by the attack of these two regiments. (See Map C) (37) (38)

THE REGIMENTAL SITUATION

The 331st Infantry departed from its sector in Luxembourg on 6 December for its move to the 12th Infantry sector about four (4) miles southwest of Duren in the Hurtgen Forest. Arriving about 1600, it had closed in an assembly area about half-way between Schevenhutte and Gey, Germany by 1900 hours. (See Map C) (39) (40)

During the night the final details for the relief of the 12th Infantry were completed. As the three battalions were of approximately the same strength and efficiency it was decided that the relief would be made on a corresponding unit-for-unit basis; namely: 1st Battalion relieve 1st Battalion, 2nd Battalion relieve 2nd Battalion, etc. It was to be made during daylight hours as it was felt that the concealment provided by the thick woods was sufficient for the necessary secrecy. A relief at night would have been extremely difficult and dangerous because of the lack of visibility, and numerous mine fields. (41) (42)

The relief was initiated at 0800 on 7 December and was made by relieving one squad per company at a time, in order to reduce the probability of casualties from harrassing artillery fire which was constantly falling in the area.

(36,38,40,42)Personal knowledge; (37)A-5,p.60; (39)A-6,6Dec44; (41)Personal statement of Lt.Col. Robert H.York, then Regimental Commander of 331st Infantry.

Responsibility for the area passed at 1600, with no indication that the enemy had any knowledge that a new unit had been placed in the line. Shortly after the relief was completed, however, propaganda pamphlets were fired on the positions by enemy artillery. They read as follows: "You have been given a damnable Christmas present by being transferred to the famous Aachen sector, where fighting is heavier than anywhere else. The forest is cold, slippery, and dangerous. Death awaits behind every tree. Fighting in woods is hellish." If the enemy knew a relief was being conducted he had missed a wonderful opportunity to cause heavy casualties to both units. (43) (44)

The major units of the regiment were disposed as follows:

The 2nd Battalion, on the right, had its right flank about 100 yards north of the Grosshau-Gey road and near the eastern edge of the woods. Its front lines extended generally along the eastern edge of the woods for a distance of approximately 800 yards. (See Map D)

The 1st Battalion was on the left. Its front lines curved back deeper in the woods and extended about 1300 yards where it joined the sector of the 24th Cavalry Squadron. (See Map D)

The 3rd Battalion was assembled in regimental reserve approximately 1500 yards to the rear in the center of the regimental sector.

The Regimental C.P. was initially established in the old 12th Infantry C.P. about 3000 yards south of Schevenhutte. On 9 December it was moved to a position half-way between Schevenhutte and Gey on the Schevenhutte-Gey road. The Regimental Trains were set up in Schevenhutte. (See Map C) (45)(46)

(43) Personal statement of Lt.Col. Robert H. York, then Regimental Commander of the 331st Infantry; (44,46) Personal knowledge; (45) A-6, 7 Dec 44.

Orientation by personnel of the 12th Infantry revealed that the fighting in the area had been extremely difficult. The ground was rugged and the woods were dense except along fire breaks and in a few isolated spots. Trees and branches cut down by artillery fire had fallen to the ground and become matted, making movement extremely difficult in some areas and impossible in others. The enemy had exhibited fanatical resistance in defending from well concealed, log emplacements. This determined defense coupled with extensive use of mines and casualties caused by tree bursts from heavy, artillery fire had made every yard gained very costly. (47)

For at least a month prior to the arrival of the regiment in this area, cold weather with rain and snow had prevailed. The ground was soaked to such an extent that all but the lightest vehicles were road bound. This was particularly true of tanks in the densely wooded area where movement off the roads was impossible. There were only two roads in the area capable of handling the heavier regimental vehicles and tanks. One, the main supply route for the regiment, ran for approximately 1.5 miles out of Schevenhutte on the Schevenhutte-Duren road and then branched off onto a trail leading into Gey. The other road ran north from Grosshau and intersected the main supply route about 1.25 miles west of Gey. Both of these roads had originally been capable of handling jeeps only, but had been improved by engineers of the 4th Division. Throughout the coming operation these roads remained muddy and slippery despite strenuous effort on the part of our own engineers. Their poor condition restricted the movement of tanks to the extent that the capture of Gey was delayed at least two days. (See Map C) (48) (49)

(47, 48) Personal statement of Lt. Col. Robert H. York, then Regimental Commander of the 331st Infantry; (49) Personal knowledge.

The cold wet weather was to introduce further difficulties in the form of "Trench Foot" and frozen feet. To combat this one pair of clean socks were sent forward daily with the rations. Orders were issued for officers to inspect the men's feet daily and to have the men massage their feet and change socks daily. Any men with symptoms of "Trench Foot" or frozen feet were sent to the Battalion Surgeon who determined whether or not they would be evacuated. Pyramidal tents, equipped with stoves and cots, were set up in each battalion area and the men with minor cases placed in them for treatment. The early treatment, rest, and three hot meals a day which the men received under this plan returned them to their units within two or three days. (50)

The terrain in the regimental zone was for the most part rolling. The three key terrain features in the area were as follows:

1. The hill west of Gey in the edge of the forest had a fairly steep, even slope down to within the edge of town where the slope became more gentle and continued on to Gey Creek. This hill provided excellent observation of the terrain to the east.

2. The town of Gey controlled all of the roads in the area, including the road to Duren, which was the only one capable of supporting any volume of traffic.

3. A ridge, running northwest and southeast about 2200 yards northeast of Gey, dominated the ground from the river to Gey and gave the enemy excellent observation of the entire area including the eastern edge of the woods. (51)

The 22nd Infantry had reported that Gey was strongly
(50,51) Personal knowledge.

fortified. With the knowledge that the attack would be resumed in a few days, active patrolling was started immediately to obtain all available information regarding enemy positions. As any movement in the forward edge of the woods brought immediate response from the enemy in the form of artillery and mortar fire, daylight patrols in this area were out of the question. Consequently, night patrols were sent out to definitely locate enemy positions in the vicinity of Gey. These patrols reported strong enemy outposts about 300 yards from the edge of the woods extending in a semi-circle through the western end of the town. None of the patrols had been able to penetrate the enemy positions. (52) (53) (54) /

An officer-led combat patrol of approximately platoon strength, with an SCR 300 radio for communication and artillery support, was sent out to probe the woods north of Gey. The mission of this patrol was to attempt to get through the woods to a point east of Gey Creek about 800 yards north of the town for the purpose of finding a route through the woods over which tanks and infantry could move for an attack on Gey from the north. After attempting to penetrate a strongly organized enemy position in several places the patrol returned, having suffered fairly heavy casualties from "Shu" mines and enemy fire. (55)

After a study of the information available from patrols and intelligence reports plus a consideration of how costly woods fighting had been for the 4th Division, it was decided to attack initially with only one battalion plus a platoon of tanks. Considering the difficulty encountered in moving tanks on the existing roads it was felt that more than one

(52,55)Personal statement of Lt.Col.Robert H.York,then
Regimental Commander of the 331st Infantry; (53)A-6,9Dec44;
(54)Personal knowledge.

platoon could not be employed effectively in the early stages of the attack. It was believed that a quick thrust, following heavy preparatory fires, would overrun the enemy positions and enable the assaulting units to gain the houses. The employment of more than one battalion on this battalion-size objective would over-saturate the position with troops and increase the number of casualties without gaining a corresponding increase in fire power. A tentative plan to attack through the woods north of Gey with another battalion was abandoned in order to avoid attacking a known, strong enemy position. (56)

To overcome anticipated failures in wire communication, which is always difficult to maintain in rough terrain and under heavy artillery fire, three command radio nets were put in operation. Using SCR 584's for one net, SCR 610's for the second, and SCR 300's for the third a communication system was established which never failed to provide at least two effective channels of communication. This plan was so effective that it was adopted as part of the regiment's standing operating procedure. (57)

For the attack the regiment had the following attachments:

Company B 774th Medium Tank Battalion

Company C 629th Tank Destroyer Battalion (SP)

1st Platoon Company C 308th Engineer (C) Battalion (58)

THE REGIMENTAL PLAN OF ATTACK

The Regiment's plan of attack was for the 2nd Battalion, with a platoon of tanks and the Anti-Tank Mine Platoon attached, to attack Gey from the edge of the woods west of the town. The attack was to jump off at 0600 on 10 December, about one hour

(56) Personal statement of Lt. Col. Robert H. York, then Regimental Commander of the 331st Infantry; (57) Personal knowledge; (58) A-6, 7 Dec and 9 Dec.

before daylight, following a heavy artillery preparation and supported by the Heavy Weapons Companies of the 1st and 3rd Battalions. The 3rd Battalion was to occupy positions of the 2nd Battalion and be prepared to pass through Gey after its seizure and take the ridge southwest of Berzbuir, ~~Berzhuir~~, and Lendersdorf. The 1st Battalion was to remain in position and block the enemy in the woods north of Gey. (59) (60)

The 2nd Battalion's plan of attack called for E and F Companies to make a direct frontal assault from the edge of the woods. E Company, on the right, to attack across the open terrain between the west and south legs of town and seize the south and southeast portions. F Company, with a platoon of tanks attached, was to seize the west and north parts of town. G Company, was to protect the right flank of the battalion from positions along Gey Creek near the right limiting point and be prepared to attack Gey from the southwest. (61)

The 2nd Battalion jumped off at 0600, but ran into difficulty immediately. F Company got a good start and secured the first buildings on the edge of town. E Company, however, was detected before it overran the enemy outpost and heavy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire caught them in the open area southwest of town. The company continued forward until it ran into a barbed wire entanglement which had not been reported by patrols. Unable to advance and suffering casualties from the heavy fire the men sideslipped to the left and became intermingled with F Company. With the intermingling, both companies became disorganized and the attack bogged down except for some of the leading elements of F Company which had pushed on ahead. (62) (63)

(59,61,62) Personal statement of Lt. Col. Robert H. York, then Regimental Commander of the 331st Infantry; (60) Personal knowledge; (63) Statement of Captain Macaluso, G Company Commander.

By 1100 hours the leading elements of F Company had advanced to a point about 100 yards west of Gay Creek against very determined resistance. The Company Commander, who was with this group, held up the attack because the group was considerably weakened by casualties and the remainder of the company was not following up the assault echelon. Enemy fire was increasing. Machine guns were firing on the attacking troops from positions at the northern and southern ends of town. Enemy artillery fire was pounding the western end of town and the edge of the woods with the heaviest artillery and mortar concentrations ever experienced by members of the regiment. (64) (65) (66)

In the meantime, the platoon of tanks had been trying to move up on the road leading into town from the west. The road was narrow and muddy, and after a great deal of difficulty the lead tank got to within 100 yards of the edge of town where it hit a mine. This happened in a narrow defile where it was impossible to get any other tanks around it. Efforts to get the tank out were started immediately, but because of the difficulty of working in the restricted area under enemy artillery fire the road was not cleared until after dark that night. (67) (68) (69)

It was not until 1100 that the Regimental Commander was informed of the true situation. The battalion had reported the progress of F Company hoping to be able to get F and K Companies reorganized and the attack moving. The Regimental Commander immediately went forward to contact the 2nd Battalion Commander. Investigation revealed that enemy observation and fire precluded the possibility of any effective

(64,67)Personal statement of Lt.Col.Robert H.York, then Regimental Commander of the 331st Infantry; (65)Statement of Captain Macaluso, G Company Commander; (66)Statement of Captain Walter G.Ashmore, 3rd Battalion S-3; (68)Statement of Captain James D.Shonak, Anti-Tank Company Commander; (69)Personal knowledge.

reorganization and resumption of the attack by E and F Companies. (70) (71)

Reports from the 2nd Battalion and from prisoners captured in Gey indicated that the buildings in the town had thick walls through which the enemy had blown holes for use as firing ports, and deep basements into which the enemy moved during our artillery fire. There were mines and booby traps in the yards around the houses and dug-in positions in the fields outside the town. Prisoners also reported that there was approximately a battalion in Gey and another one on the ridge about 2200 yards to the northeast, and that they had seen several anti-tank guns a short distance to the northeast of Gey. (72) (73) (74)

G Company with one platoon of tanks attached, was ordered to attack Gey along the Grosshau-Gey road. However, upon the receipt of information that Strass had been taken and a report of a large mine field on the Grosshau-Gey road, the plan was changed. One platoon of G Company plus one platoon of tanks was to move through Grosshau, Schafberg, and Strass for an attack on Gey from the southwest. Permission was obtained from the 330th Infantry for movement of this task force and it moved out on its mission. (75) (76)

Strass, however, had been erroneously reported as captured. Two companies of the 3rd Battalion, 330th Infantry, had gotten into the town but had not cleared it. The enemy had cut these units off and when the G Company task force attempted to enter the town it became engaged in a fight, knocked out two enemy tanks, and withdrew. This erroneous information had unnecessarily endangered the lives of the

(70,72) Personal statement of Lt. Col. Robert H. York, then Regimental Commander of the 331st Infantry; (71,74,76) Personal knowledge; (73,75) Statement of Captain Macaluso, G Company Commander.

men involved and disrupted another attack on Gey. (77) (78)

The 2nd Battalion was ordered to continue the attack the following day. F and E Companies with one platoon of tanks were to continue the attack in the west leg of Gey, and G Company with one platoon of tank destroyers was to attack along the Grosshau-Gey road. A squad of engineers was attached to G Company to remove the mine field reported by the 330th Infantry the previous day. This mine field was about 100 yards outside the edge of the woods and was well covered by all types of fire. Smoke was to be fired on the woods north of Gey, on the ridge northeast of Gey and on Horn to block enemy observation and to cover G Company's movement, and to permit removal of the mines. (79) (80) (81)

The 2nd Battalion jumped off as scheduled, but the smoke was ineffective and when G Company came out of the woods it immediately came under enemy fire, including anti-tank gun fire which was coming from the vicinity of Horn. Heavy small arms fire was coming from a house on the south side of the road about 200 yards from the edge of the woods. (See Map D) Attempts to move the tank destroyers into positions to fire on the house were unsuccessful and G Company was stopped. (82)

In the meantime, in the western leg of the town, the tanks were again in trouble. The lead tank, when in approximately the same position where the tank had hit the mine the previous day, threw a tread; again the road into Gey was blocked. This time the road was not to be cleared until 1800 the following day. (83) (84)

The enemy continued to pound the area with artillery fire, and E and F Companies without the tanks were making

(77)A-5,p.61; (78,82)Statement of Captain Macaluso,G Company Commander; (79)Statement of Lt.Col.Robert H.York, then Regimental Commander of the 331st Infantry; (80)A-6,11Dec44; (81)Personal knowledge; (83)Statement of Captain Walter G.Ashmore,3rd Battalion S-3; (84)Statement of Captain James D.Shonak, Anti-Tank Company Commander.

little, if any, progress. B Company took over A Company's position, and at 1445 A Company jumped off from the portion of town held by the 2nd Battalion with the mission of cutting the Grosshau-Gey road about 300 yards south of the main cross-road in the town. If successful, A Company was then to clear that portion of the town to the south. The enemy opened fire as soon as the company left the protection of the buildings, but the attack was pushed and some men reached the houses. Most of the men of the two assault platoons had been caught in the open and had been hit or had taken cover and failed to go forward. Attempts to reach the Company Commander, by radio, throughout the day and night were unsuccessful. It was later discovered that the Company Commander with one officer and about 20 men had initially captured two houses, but because of numerous casualties had consolidated into one. They remained there, repulsing numerous attacks, until the town was cleared on the 13th of December. This group of men, of which more than half had been wounded, played no major part in the capture of Gey, but certainly were a hinderance to the enemy in the defense of the town. (85) (86)

By dark the 2nd Battalion reported that it had reached the main road in town. (87)

During the day I Company relieved elements of the 330th Infantry south of the Grosshau-Gey road and the boundary was shifted accordingly. (See Map D) (88)

Immediately after dark, orders were issued for the 3rd Battalion to relieve the 2nd Battalion and continue the attack on 12 December. The relief was accomplished by K and L Companies; E and F Companies moved to the west end of town;

(85,88)A-6, 11Dec44; (86)Statement of Lt.Col.Henry Neilson, 1st Battalion Commander; (87)Personal knowledge.

G and I Companies remained in position. The 3rd Battalion reported that the 2nd Battalion had not reached the main road, but were at the west side of Gey Creek. (89) (90)

The 3rd Battalion plan was for L Company on the left of the road and K Company on the right to continue the attack toward the center of town. One platoon of tanks was to be used with these two companies if it could be moved into town. I Company with one platoon of tank destroyers and a "flail" tank, borrowed from the 5th Armored Division, was to attack along the Grosshau-Gey road. Its mission was to seize about one-third of the southern leg of the town, initially, and push on up the main road. (91) (92)

The 3rd Battalion jumped off at 0600 without an artillery preparation. Two platoons of I Company moved out, in column, on the Grosshau-Gey road, passed the mine field and the house which held up G Company, and continued on towards the objective undetected by the enemy. The "flail" tank, leading the platoon of tank destroyers, started to work on the mine field and had exploded several mines, when it was knocked out by a mine which the "flails" had missed. The two platoons of I Company continued their advance, and after completely surprising the enemy took I Company's objective after a short fight. (93)

Shortly after daylight the I Company Commander, with his command group, was just across the road from the house from which the enemy had fired on G Company. He sent two men to investigate it and as they approached they were fired on. The Company Commander sent word to T Sgt. Carl Hansen, who was Platoon Leader of the 3rd Platoon, to take a squad and capture the house. Sgt. Hansen, after getting the squad in

(89,91)Statement of Captain Walter G. Ashmore, 3rd Battalion S-3; (90)Personal knowledge; (92,93)Statement of Captain H. Dixon Smith, I Company Commander.

position, worked his way up to the house under the covering fire of the squad. Finding a door open he went into the house, killed three Germans, knocked one out with his fist, and captured 15 prisoners who were in the basement of the house. (See Map D) (94)

By this time the enemy was completely alerted and was pounding the area with artillery, mortar, and anti-tank fire. Engineers attempted to remove the mines under the enemy fire, but after having several men killed and wounded ceased their efforts. (95)

The enemy continued to pour his heavy concentrations of artillery fire on Gey with a noticeable increase in fire from high velocity guns. These high velocity guns were firing from the east and northeast of Gey with one gun located in the tip of the woods north of Gey. (96)

K and L Companies continued fighting throughout the day, making slow progress, against stiff resistance. K Company reached the main road on the south side of the road leading west into the forest. L Company reached the main road, turned north and was pushed back several houses by a counterattack.

L Company resumed the attack to the north and reached a point opposite the junction of the Horn road where they were stopped by tank fire from the north end of town. The tank blocking the road from the west was finally moved at 1800 and three tank destroyers were moved into town. This success was short-lived, however, as one was knocked out by artillery fire and one threw a tread. The third tank moved up to support K Company. (97) (98)

(94,95) Statement of Captain H. Dixon Smith, I Company Commander;
(96,98) Statement of Captain Walter G. Ashmore, 3rd Battalion S-3;
(97) A-6, 12 Dec.

Immediately after dark engineers were put to work removing mines from the Grosshau-Gey road up to the advance elements of I Company. Another mine field had been located on the road just inside the town. About 2200, the 1st Battalion Commander was called to the Regimental C.P. and directed to have one company attack north on the main road in Gey from I Company's position. The company was to have one platoon of tank destroyers and one platoon of tanks attached and was to attack not later than 0800 on 13 December. The Battalion Commander decided to use B Company, which was in the line, because the Company Commander had a great deal of experience and was very aggressive. (99) (100)

The decision to use B Company greatly increased the problem of having it ready to attack at the designated hour. Any movement at night was difficult and had it not been for the aggressiveness and drive of the B Company Commander the move probably would not have been accomplished as well as it was.

B Company was relieved by A Company plus some men from C Company. To save the strength of the men, trucks were sent to a point about one mile in rear of B Company's position and the company moved to the vicinity of Grosshau by motor shuttle. From here the company was to proceed on foot to the line of departure. During the night a heavy fog had settled on the area and so hampered the movement that at 0900 only two platoons of B Company were ready to move out. As the fog had not dispersed the Battalion Commander decided to have B Company attack without an artillery preparation. At this time the Battalion Commander ordered the B Company Commander to move out by 0945, whether the other platoon of B Company

(99) Statement of Lt. Col. Henry Neilson, 1st Battalion Commander;
(100) Personal knowledge.

and the tanks and tank destroyers had arrived or not. At 0915 the platoon of tank destroyers arrived and at 0945 B Company, minus one platoon, moved out. The third B Company platoon arrived about 1000, was quickly briefed, and sent ahead to join the company. The platoon of tanks arrived later and joined B Company after the attack started. (101)

B Company, under cover of the fog, surprised the enemy; and, by a vigorous, driving attack supported by fire from the tanks and tank destroyers, overran the town and announced it cleared by 1225. B Company captured 128 prisoners, had one tank knocked out, one man killed and several wounded. Prisoners captured in Gey stated that their casualties had been heavy and that approximately three companies had been sent in as reinforcements during the course of the battle. (102) (103) (104)

The 5th Armored Division was notified that the town had been captured and moved up to send its leading elements down the roads to Strass and Horm. The first tank attempting to move out the Strass road hit a mine about 200 yards from the main cross road. Further investigation revealed mine fields, at the edge of town, on each of the roads leading out of Gey. (105) (106)

When the success of B Company's attack was assured C Company was ordered to continue the attack to the northeast as soon as possible. The company was to attack on the right of the Duren-Gey road with the mission of securing Objective 8. (See Map D) The purpose of this attack was to maintain pressure on a retreating enemy and secure the high ground from which the enemy was directing artillery fire. C Company

(101,103)Statement of Lt.Col.Henry Neilson, 1st Battalion Commander; (102)A-6,13Dec; (104,106)Personal knowledge; (105) Statement of Captain Walter G. Ashmore, 3rd Battalion S-3.

was unable to launch the attack until 1545. The company had advanced about 400 yards when it was stopped by artillery and mortar fire; and heavy small arms fire from positions about 800 yards northeast of Gey. The company was ordered to withdraw into Gey. The attack had not been a complete failure as several high velocity guns firing from Objective 8, and one from the point of woods north of Gey, had been spotted. (107) (108)

During the night the mine fields on the roads leading to Duren, Horm, and Strass were removed and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions were consolidated in Gey for the attack on 14 December. The 1st Battalion was in the north part of town, the 2nd Battalion in the south and southeast parts, and the 3rd Battalion in the west part. The plan for the attack was as follows:

1st Battalion, with one platoon of tanks attached, was to attack at the same time as the 5th Armored Division, to seize Objective 6. (See Map D)

2nd Battalion, with a platoon of tanks attached, was to pass through the 1st Battalion upon its capture of Objective 6 and seize Horm and Objective 8. (See Map D)

3rd Battalion, in reserve, was to occupy Gey. (109) (110)

The 1st Battalion jumped off at 0700 following closely behind a rolling barrage, and by 0825 had captured its objective and two 150 m/m guns and two 88 m/m guns with unfired rounds in the chambers. During the attack the 1st Battalion had only two men killed. Shortly after the Battalion reached its objective the enemy began firing on it with high velocity guns from Objective 8, but two "time on target" barrages silenced the fire. (111) (112)

(107) A-6, 13 Dec; (108, 112) Statement of Lt. Col. Henry Neilson, 1st Battalion Commander; (109, 111) A-6, 14 Dec; (110) Personal knowledge.

The 2nd Battalion passed through the right flank of the 1st Battalion at 0930 and immediately came under fire from Horn and a large emplacement about 400 yards northeast of Horn. Horn, which was strongly defended by infantry with three (3) tanks in support, was captured by G Company with the aid of tanks of the 5th Armored Division. G Company continued its advance and captured the emplacement and 30 prisoners. The 2nd Battalion continued its advance and by dark had reached the foot of Objective 8. (See Map D) (113) (114)

At 0800 the following morning G Company attacked Objective 8 and after a short fight captured the hill. C Company, with one platoon of tanks attached, was directed to seize Objective 5. The company attacked at 1600 behind heavy artillery fire and by 1730 had captured its objective, 58 prisoners, and two 75 m/m anti-tank guns. C Company had five men killed and twelve wounded. (See Map D) (115) (116)

During the period of 10 December to 15 December 1944, there were 313 battle casualties evacuated through the Regimental Aid Station and an undetermined number through the 330th Infantry. There was a considerable number of non-battle casualties, also undetermined, caused by "Trench Foot" and frozen feet. Prisoners captured totaled 324.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation it is apparent that the Division erred, initially, in not designating the southern boundary of the 331st Infantry to include the Grosshau-Gey road. The Regiment also erred in not realizing

(113)A-6,14Dec; (114)Statement of Captain Macoluso, G Company Commander; (115)A-6,15Dec; (116)Statement of Lt.Col.Henry Neilson, 1st Battalion Commander.

immediately the importance of this road for an attack on Gey and requesting that the boundary be changed. Admittedly, boundaries are not walls through which no troops can pass, but, in my opinion, the initial placing of the boundary affected the original plan of attack.

By deciding not to attack in the woods north of Gey the Regimental Commander was refusing to attack where the enemy had proven it was easy to defend and where experience had shown that casualties to the attacker would be high.

The capture of Gey depended upon the successful movement of tanks into the town to give direct fire support to the infantry. The lack of adequate roads permitting their employment was the critical factor in the capture of the town. Without the tanks the direct efforts of six rifle companies were required over a period of three days to seize less than one half of the town. With tanks, one rifle company captured the remainder of the town in approximately two hours.

The use of only one battalion in the initial attack, and subsequent use of not more than three rifle companies in attack at any one time, was predicated on the assumption that over-saturation of a position with troops results in unnecessary casualties and may result in confusion with a consequent loss in fire power. This premise was proved by a sharp increase in casualties from artillery fire on 13 and 14 December when three battalions of the 331st Infantry and elements of the 5th Armored Division were consolidated in Gey for a continuation of the attack.

The use of artillery preparations prior to attack on Gey apparently had little effect in preventing the enemy,

who was protected by thick walls and deep cellars, from placing accurate small arms fire on the attacking troops. Attacks conducted in darkness or under conditions of low visibility without artillery preparations were successful in completely surprising the enemy.

The attacks by the 330th Infantry and the 331st Infantry, 10 and 11 December were the only ones conducted in the Division Zone on these days dates. These attacks, over a front of only 1800 yards out of a total 10,000 yards assigned to the Division, permitted the enemy to concentrate the entire weight of his artillery on the efforts of these two units.

The attack by C Company more than three hours after the fall of Gey was a case of sending "too little, too late."

Attacks by companies of the 1st Battalion, over open terrain, 14 and 15 December with the infantry following closely behind heavy artillery preparations, permitted these elements to reach the objectives before the enemy could retaliate.

Premature or erroneous reports made by the 2nd Battalion of the 331st Infantry and by the 330th Infantry were not critical factors in this operation. The report by the 330th Infantry did, however, unnecessarily endanger the lives of the men involved and disrupt an attack.

The selection of Gey and the high ground to the northeast, for defense, demonstrated the enemy's appreciation of the importance of key terrain to the defender. Realizing that any movement out of the forest would be "funneled" through Gey, he had prepared strong defensive positions in and around the town and made maximum use of mines to restrict the movement of both tanks and infantry. The high ground northeast of Gey provided excellent observation posts for the control of artillery fire and good fields of fire

for both small arms and anti-tank weapons.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

1. Main roads leading into towns should be included in the zone of action of the unit assigned the mission of capturing the town.

2. If possible, a unit on the offense should attack the weakest point in the enemy's defense and where the greater benefit can be derived from supporting fires.

3. Tanks are of vital importance for the support of infantry in town fighting.

4. Adequate routes to the battle position must be provided for the effective employment of tanks.

5. Over-saturation of a position with troops increases casualties.

6. Surprise is an important element of a successful attack.

7. An attack on a narrow front permits the enemy to concentrate all of his attention and fire power on a small sector.

8. Attacking infantry following closely behind heavy artillery preparations can capture strong positions with few casualties.

9. Attacks conducted to maintain pressure on a retreating enemy should be launched quickly and with sufficient power to be effective.

10. Erroneous reports of progress may unnecessarily endanger the lives of men and disrupt planned operations.

11. Individual soldiers should be trained to protect themselves against the effects of winter weather.

12. In situations where the maintenance of wire lines is difficult additional radio nets insure adequate communication.