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COMBAT OPERATIONS (ATTACK, DEFENSE, WITHDRAWAL) OF COMBAT
TEAM 9, COMBAT COMMAND "A", (6TH ARMORED DIVISION)
IN FIGHTING NEAR WARDIN, BELGIUM, 3-5 JANUARY 1945
(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion S-3)

Type of operation described: OPERATIONS OF AN ARMORED
INFANTRY BATTALION IN SNOW AND EXTREME COLD

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Combat Team 9, Combat Command A (CCA), 6th Armored Division, during the battle of Bastogne, 3-5 January 1945.

Since early August 1944, the 6th Armored Division had been spearheading the advance of the Third Army through France. By 6 December 1944, the Division had reached a position just west of Saarguemines, Germany. Here it went on the defensive until 24 December 1944 while awaiting orders to push on into Germany and the Siegfried Line. (1) (See Map A)

Meanwhile, further to the north in the First Army sector, the German counteroffensive commencing on 16 December 1944 gained great initial success. A penetration of about sixty-five miles was made into the Allied lines, and the entire front in the west was threatened. American units, consisting of the 101st Airborne Infantry Division, Combat Command B of the 10th Armored Division, the 705th Tank Battalion, and others were surrounded and besieged in Bastogne. (2)

On 20 December 1944, Lt. General George S. Patton, commanding the Third Army, was ordered to lift the siege of Bastogne. Accordingly, the entire Third Army shifted its front to the north, and it attacked the southern shoulder of the German salient, beginning on 22 December 1944. Immediate advances were reported, and at 1845 hours, 26 December 1944, Combat Command Reserve of the 4th Armored Division broke through to relieve the Bastogne garrison. (3)

Meanwhile, on 24 December 1944, the 6th Armored Division had been suddenly ordered to Metz, to prepare to join in the Ardennes fighting on 26
(1) A-1, p. 1; (2) A-4, p. 1; (3) A-2, p. 205.

December, the 6th moved to Luxembourg, where initially it held a defensive sector on the south flank of Ettlebruck (See Map B) as a part of XII Corps, commanded by Major General Eddy. (4)

On 29 December, the 6th Armored was transferred from XII to III Corps, commanded by Major General Millikin, and ordered to Bastogne, where it attacked on 31 December, making the first offensive thrust into the enemy salient. (5) The 6th continued to do well, to quote General Patton, on the 1st, 2d and 3d of January 1945.

The 6th advanced a total of two miles on 3 January, (6) (See Map B) nearing the town of Wardin.

THE TERRAIN AND WEATHER

Three and one half miles to the east of Bastogne lay the town of Wardin. (See Map ^D) This hamlet of approximately two dozen masonry houses, for a two week period, was the center of fighting for CT 9. It was situated in the midst of a valley formed by two undulating hills running generally southwest. A small stream called Marvie creek, flowed slowly down the valley southward through Wardin west to the town of Marvie. Thick growths of evergreen trees were spotted across the landscape. These trees formed islands of resistance, where concealment was excellent and where troops could move freely without being seen. The rest of the ground was open country divided into fields by small wire fences. These made excellent obstacles for defensive combat. (7)

At the time of the action, snow covered the entire landscape and lay about knee deep in the fields. The temperature was near zero. Occasional mists and snow flurries rolled in to reduce observation. (8) Trench foot and frost bite were causing many casualties.

(4) A-1, p. 142; (5) A-1, p. 147; (6) A-2, p. 211-212; (7) A-4, p. 34, p. 132; (8) A-1, p. 196.

The frozen condition of the ground made maneuver by tanks possible in any part of the area. Tanks moved across the fields and into the woods with the infantry. The frozen ice and snow covering the ground allowed tanks to drive right over anti-tank mines which had been planted both by the Germans and the Americans. The detonators of the mines were frozen solid. (9)

In contrast to the open country, the roads were caked with ice. Slick roads frequently ^{caused} piled up vehicles ^{to get} off the grades and into the ditches. (10)

THE ENEMY SITUATION

On 12 December 1944, just prior to the jumpoff for the Ardennes counter-offensive, the XLVII Panzer Corps Commander, Lt. General von Luttwitz, stated that Bastogne, in the hands of the Americans, was "an abscess on our (the German) lines of communication." (11)

Luttwitz had intended first to go directly into Bastogne if possible. Failing in this, he had planned to envelop Bastogne on both sides and attack from the west with two armored divisions. The 26th Volksgrenadier Division would then move in and clear up Bastogne.

As planned, the Germans had launched their attack on 16 December and had achieved great initial success. But the eight day defense of the 101st Airborne Division (United States) and others, had caused not only XLVII Panzer Corps but also the Fifth Panzer Army to commit many more divisions than originally planned. The Allied breakthrough on 26 December by the 4th Armored Division cost the Germans the initiative. The remainder of the fighting in Bastogne resulted in the gradual sapping of the strength of the German divisions. Gradually, the Germans were shoved to the rear.

On the 3d of January 1945, Warden, directly east of Bastogne, was lost and retaken by the Germans from elements of the 6th Armored Division (United States). At this time, four German divisions directly opposed the 6th (9) Personal Experience; (10) Personal Experience; (11) A-4, p. 177.

Armored, as follows:

130th Panzer Lehr Division (Lt. General Beyerlein)
5th Paratroop Division (Major General Hellmann)
340th Volksgrenadier Division (Commander unidentified)
26th Volksgrenadier Division (Major General Kokott)

(12)

General Manteuffel, Commander of the German Fifth Panzer Army, was very concerned over the German difficulties at Bastogne. While visiting Major General Kokott, he said, "Bastogne must be taken at all costs." (13)

*may for enemy
Panzer units*

The German troops, however, were in miserable shape. American artillery and air power had dealt them crushing blows. Cold, hunger, and lack of proper shelter were causing non-commissioned officers to use bayonets on the men to keep them fighting. Since supply of all types was short, the Germans were instructed that the situation would be improved as soon as Bastogne, which was rumored to contain large supply dumps, fell to the Germans. (14)

SITUATION, 6TH ARMORED DIVISION

3 JANUARY, 1945

Major General Robert W. Grow, 6th Armored Division Commander, in a personal letter gave the situation of the Division during the first four days of January. Major General Grow's remarks follow:

"On 1 January our mission was to drive northeast on a relatively narrow front (See Map B) which was entirely north of Wardin. Therefore, our first attacks on 31 December and 1 January were made in that direction, although CCA on the right had Wardin in its zone. Either late on 1 January or early on 2 January the Corps Commander broadened our zone to include Bras. In my talks with him I said that this would give us a very wide zone for an Armored Division operating without reinforcements, and that I was skeptical about it because I would have to commit every unit in the Division and could keep no reserve. However, he was anxious for us to assist the advance of the

(12) A-4, p. 175, A-1, p. 154; (13) A-4, p. 197; (14) A-4.

26th Div. 2. 2. 1944
On map B-

26th Division which was attacking toward Bras from the south, and the 35th Division which was between us and the 26th and was badly played out in the woods fighting that had taken place. We did attack on 2 and 3 January in accordance with this plan. It resulted in several salients being thrust into the enemy lines, and resulted in a very irregular and long front, which I calculated to be more than 10 miles on the 3rd." (15)

Tell me?

The front line described by General Grow (See Map C) extended from the VIII Corps boundary on the railroad track to the north, southeast along the woods east of Mageret, then to the woods west of Benonchamps, south along the ridge west of Werdin to the Bastogne-Wiltz highway, west along the highway to Marvie, then south to the 35th Division boundary. This irregular line contained several salients, the worst one being to the south flank along the Wiltz highway. This line was held by three infantry battalions, three tank battalions, and one reconnaissance company. (16)

TASK ORGANIZATION, COMBAT TEAM 9

On 31 December 1944, the task organization of Combat Team 9 was set up as follows:

9th Armored Infantry Battalion (-Co. C) Major Frank K. Britton
Commanding
Co. A, 15th Tank Battalion
1st Platoon, Company C, 25th Armored Engineer Battalion
1 Platoon of Company B, 603d Tank Destroyer Battalion
2 Sections, Battery A, 777th AAA Battalion
128th Field Artillery Battalion (Direct Support)

From this group, attachments were further broken down to the two Armored infantry companies, each one receiving one platoon of tanks, one section of tank destroyers, and one section of antiaircraft guns. The tank company received the platoon of engineers to form a third team within the unit.

All forward units of the 6th Armored Division consisted of tank infantry teams similar in task organization to Combat Team 9. Some were tank strong (15) A-5; (16) A-1, p. 156.

(a tank battalion reinforced), others were infantry strong (an infantry battalion reinforced). These combat teams were commanded by the officers having the majority of troops in the team. (17)

STATUS OF PERSONNEL, SUPPLIES, AND EQUIPMENT

The condition of the troops on the whole was good. The tank crews were well trained, and a majority of the men were veterans. However, the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion had received about one hundred and fifty replacements just before Christmas. These men had been service troops, mainly cooks and bakers, with only a smattering of infantry training. Such men were to prove a handicap in the action which followed. (18)

The status of supplies and equipment at the time was excellent. All vehicles were loaded with four days rations, and all weapons were amply supplied with ammunition. There was no noticeable shortage of tanks or weapons. Snow suits had been ordered for the troops, but they had not arrived. (19)

ACTION OF COMBAT TEAM 9 ON 3 JANUARY 1945

Combat Team 9 had attacked on 1 and 2 January generally east toward Wardin. (See Map D) The attacks made progress and by dusk on 2 January, front line elements of CT 9 were generally disposed as indicated below:

A Company, 15th Tank Battalion (less detachments) in the northeast edge of the woods about one half mile west of Marvie Creek and southwest of Wardin.

A Company, 9th Armored Infantry Battalion was located about three hundred yards south of Company A, 15th Tank Battalion, in the woods southwest of Wardin.

B Company, 9th Armored Infantry Battalion, was located in the woods
(17) (18) (19) Personal Experience.

several hundred yards ahead of the rest of CT 9 in a position three hundred yards north of Marvie creek.

On the night of 2 January 1943, at about 2000 hours, Major Frank K. Britton, commanding CT 9 gave his verbal order for the continuation of the attack on 3 January to his assembling subordinate commanders at the Command Post. (See Map D) The order, in general, was as follows:

The line of departure for all units would be the present front line.

A Company, 9th Armored Infantry Battalion, would attack due east at 0830 hours 3 January; cross the Marvie creek and seize that portion of the high ground south of Wardin in its zone. It then would prepare defensive positions to hold the ground gained. Contact would be made with CT 15 on the north flank.

B Company, 9th Armored Infantry Battalion, would move out to clear the woods now held completely by Germans. It would then reassemble in its present position, and prepare to continue the attack on order.

A Company, 15th Tank Battalion (less detachments) would attack at 0830 hours to seize the northern slope of the high ground south of Wardin. Upon reaching the objective, defensive positions would be set up on the high ground. The 128th Field Artillery Battalion would fire on targets of opportunity as the attack progressed. (20)

The next morning at 0830 hours, A Company, 9th Armored Infantry Battalion moved out. It reached the forward edge of the woods, then crossed the stream and started toward the objective as skirmishers with two platoons abreast. On its way to the hill it received both small arms and artillery fire, which seriously wounded Captain Schomish, the Company Commander, in the leg. Captain Schomish had to be evacuated and the Company Executive Officer led the company up the hill to the objective.

On 2 January, Captain Rice, the B Company Commander, had been hospitalized with a cold. Therefore, on 3 January, B Company, with an inexperienced

(20) Personal Experience.

Knowledge

Lieutenant acting as commanding officer, had been ordered to clear the woods of Germans, and then reassemble on its present position to await further orders. The Battalion S-3 was ordered by the Battalion Commander to go along with B Company and to supervise it in the attack.

*Enemy not seen
Tanks omitted*

The Battalion S-3 arrived at the B Company position shortly after 0830 3 January. He found that the company had not sent anyone to clear the woods. In fact, the Lieutenant in charge, when questioned, showed no desire to lead the company in the attack. So the Battalion S-3 decided that he must take over and lead the company himself. He called the platoon leaders together and ordered the first two platoons and the tank platoon to move out as skirmishers through the woods, using marching fire to clear woods of the enemy. The Third Platoon was to remain in reserve in its present position.

The two platoons and the tank platoon moved out immediately, with the S-3 accompanying them. This unit cleared the woods, killing one German and capturing five prisoners. Upon completion of the task, it returned to its former position and reorganized.

Shortly after 0900 hours, a message arrived from the Battalion Executive Officer (Captain Redinger) ordering that an attacking force be formed. This force was to consist of one platoon of infantry and one platoon of tanks, under command of the infantry platoon leader. This force would move to the Wiltz road, turn left, and attack east to envelop the enemy troops on the south flank of the Battalion Objective. (21) (See Map E)

The attacking force, thus organized, moved to the road and advanced east as directed. Infantry soldiers in this force were pinned down east of Marvie creek by intense enemy small arms fire. This fire came from the high ground to the front and from the wooded hill mass to the south. The tank platoon immediately blasted at the enemy position with all guns, and it moved forward to the open ground between the hill and the Wiltz road. Here all tanks continued firing on the wooded hill mass on the south flank. (22)

(21) Personal Experience; (22) Personal Experience, A-1, p. 155.

While this fire fight was going on to the east, a messenger arrived ordering the Battalion S-3 to bring up the remainder of B Company along the same route used by the infantry tank platoon team. B Company would then attack through the pinned down infantry platoon and capture the southern portion of the Battalion Objective. (23)

The Battalion S-3 took over the company again and ordered the company to move out as directed. The march to the road was made with a platoon column formation, the Second Platoon leading. The Second Platoon Leader deployed his first squad in squad column.

In this formation the company moved east down the Wiltz road and through the First Platoon to the Objective. Supporting tank fire struck the enemy positions with such ferocity that our troops were able to move across the open field standing up. The enemy did not fire a single round in return. The appearance of the company, in fact, was enough to convince the Germans, dug in on the hill, that for them the war was over. Forty enemy soldiers jumped out of their foxholes with their hands up. They were taken prisoners and were immediately evacuated to the rear. (24)

B Company, without further ado, moved up on the hill and secured the right half of the Battalion Objective. The S-3 visited both platoons and had them dig in as quickly as possible. The men responded promptly, building lines of single foxholes along the wooded crest.

On the left of the Battalion sector, Company A, 15th Tank Battalion, was ordered to envelop the enemy north flank. With this attack completed, the Battalion Objective fell to Combat Team 9. A platoon of tanks was then withdrawn to make contact with CT 15 on the north flank, and to cover the left of CT 9. At this point, and without notifying the S-3 who was placing B Company's troops in a defensive position, the Battalion Executive Officer (Captain Redinger) took the First Platoon of B Company, which had just been passed through in the attack, away from the south flank and placed it in (23)(24) Personal Experience.

position around the platoon of tanks on the north flank.

This action left B Company in a precarious position. Its forward position on the crest left the company with its south flank in the air and with no reserves to give depth to its position. The tanks were lined up along the Wiltz road facing south toward the enemy position, which was no more than one hundred yards away. (25)

The situation was somewhat improved when an armored infantry company from CT 44 organized a defensive position extending west from the above mentioned tanks along the Wiltz road. This unit faced the enemy to the south; it dug in along the bank of the Wiltz road. The rest of CT 44 extended west along the Wiltz road and then south to Marvie, where it contacted CT 86. CT 86, in turn, maintained contact with the 35th Infantry Division, which was dug in about two miles to the southwest. (26)

At about 1500 hours, troops from A Company observed German troops of about company strength, led by two Tiger Royal tanks, moving south along the front of the Battalion position. They moved in a column of twos as if unaware that the high ground was in American hands. Forward observers from both A and B Companies called for artillery fire on the German column. In about ten seconds the earth shook as about two hundred shells exploded together on the enemy. Needless to say, the enemy column dispersed, and the tanks withdrew toward Wardin. Such an artillery show raised the morale of the front line troops of CT 9.

The Lieutenant of Company B who had been unable to lead the attack was straightened out by the S-3. After receiving a short, sharp lecture on leadership, he took over as Company Commander and proceeded with the task of consolidating the defense.

At about 1800 hours, after checking the front, the Battalion S-3 returned to Battalion Headquarters. (27)

(25) Personal Experience; (26) A-1, p. 156; (27) Personal Experience.

ACTION, 4-5 JANUARY, 1945

The morning of 4 January started off very quietly, with the troops of CT 9 consolidating their positions. No enemy action was reported during the morning.

About 1100 hours, the S-3 was ordered by the CT 9 Commander to go over to CT 15 and find out how C Company, 9th Armored Infantry Battalion, now a part of CT 15, had made out in the 3 January attack. The S-3 secured a jeep and drove over to the woods occupied by CT 15. The S-3 returned about 1500 hours and reported back to the CT 9 Commander.

During the S-3's four-hour absence from the CT 9 area, much enemy activity had been seen to the front. It was easy to see that an attack was imminent. Enemy troops in white snow suits were seen moving around. CT 9 troops dug in deeper and waited for the fight.

CT 44 was the first unit to be hit. *position not as map E* At about 1600 hours, enemy soldiers assaulted its position east of the road junction south of Wardin. The attack centered around a building used for the headquarters of Company B, 44th Armored Infantry Battalion. The building was cut off and all personnel in it were killed or captured. A counterattack by tanks was launched after concentrations of light and medium artillery were fired on the enemy. The German attack was dispersed, but four of our tanks were destroyed in the battle.

The CT 9 Command Post was the scene of great activity. At about 1600 hours, an order from CGA was received which stated as follows:

"The south sector of the Combat Command line is to be withdrawn to the shorter position occupied on 1 January by CT 44 (See Map E), approximately 1000 yards north of the present position. This withdrawal and reorganization is to be completed immediately after dark." (28)

The Commander of CT 9 called over the S-3 and explained the situation to him. He then ordered the S-3 to execute the withdrawal of CT 9 to a

(28) A-1, p. 157.

position along the edge of the woods west of Mervie creek. The tanks would be assembled in the rear of the infantry so that they would be available for a counterattack. He cautioned the S-3 that this was a tough job and that he should be very careful.

At about 1630 hours, the S-3 left the Command Post and went to the front line positions. Just in the rear of A Company position, he saw a ghastly sight which showed the results of several days exposure to zero weather and deep snow. A soldier sat huddled at the bottom of the hill, apparently asleep. On a second look, the S-3 realized that he had frozen to death. These were the conditions under which the men fought at Bastogne. Thus, it was apparent that we were fighting two enemies - the Germans and the bitter cold. (29)

The situation seemed critical. The five tanks covering the right flank had been knocked out and set ablaze by German bazooka fire. The troops all along the line were engaged in a terrific small arms fire fight with the Germans. Burp guns sputtered away up and down the front line. Judged from the sound, the Germans had achieved fire superiority. An attack could be expected momentarily. (30)

The S-3 visited the front line positions of both A and B Companies. No officers could be located, and none of the men questioned knew where the officers were. Apparently all the company officers of both companies had become casualties. The men were busily engaged in the fire fight, so the S-3 left for the CT 9 north flank position.

Upon arrival, the S-3 found out that the Platoon Leader of the First Platoon, Company B, 9th Armored Infantry Battalion, had been placed in command of the tanks-infantry team guarding the north flank of CT 9. This combat group was the least engaged of any at the time. The S-3 ordered this group to withdraw to the woods and organize a support position on the right flank to cover the withdrawal of the remainder of CT 9. (31)

(29)(30)(31) Personal Experience.

The S-3 returned to the A Company Command Post, and moved through the A Company area looking for officers. In desperation the S-3 finally found a Sergeant who was commanding a platoon. In the absence of officers, the S-3 placed the Sergeant in temporary command of the A Company troops. The Sergeant was ordered to withdraw the company by platoons, starting with the left platoon. The withdrawal was to begin at dark. The Sergeant stated that he understood.

The S-3 then went to the B Company defensive position. The company was in the midst of a terrific fire fight with the enemy. Fire was being delivered from every available weapon at close range. It was evident that this company was in for a rough scrap.

Seeing the situation, the S-3 decided that nobody in B Company could be notified of the withdrawal at this time. Otherwise, the men might break and run. They were scared, but they were holding their own. It was best to leave them where they were until darkness fell.

Meanwhile, the tank platoon and infantry platoon on the left flank began to thin out and to move to their position in the woods. This move proceeded in an orderly manner. The S-3 joined this group. He moved the infantry platoon over to the southern edge of the woods behind B Company. Here he gave them instructions to prepare a defensive position to cover the withdrawal. The Platoon Leader, a First Lieutenant, ~~agreed~~ put the men to digging foxholes on the position. (See Map E) (32)

The tanks remained in an assembly point in the same woods about two hundred yards north of the infantry platoon position.

Just before 1700 hours, the S-3 met the S-2, who had been up at the front all day and who was returning to CT 9 Command Post. The S-3 told the S-2 that the left flank group which he now saw had been withdrawn earlier than the rest of CT 9 to act as a base for the remainder of the Combat Team to fall back on. The S-3 requested that this information be given to the
(32) Personal Experience.

Commander. The S-2 assented and left for the Command Post.

Unfortunately, the men in the A Company position saw the tanks and men move into the woods in the rear of them. This was enough to convince them that the withdrawal had begun. They immediately started working to the rear, heading for the tank position. They were in no apparent hurry; they just slowly eased to the rear.

The S-3 rushed over to the troops coming back from A Company. He got them moving and under the cover of the woods where the tanks were located. He located the ranking Sergeant of the group that had fallen back and placed him in command of all A Company men in the woods. The Sergeant then was ordered to prepare a perimeter defense around the tanks, beginning at once. (33)

Then the most amazing thing happened. What appeared to be a platoon of men moved out from the woods to the right flank, just a little beyond the B Company front line. They came on the dead run, moving single file, resembling football players as they prance into the stadium for a game.

To his absolute horror, the S-3 saw this and concluded that B Company also was heading to the rear but at a much more rapid pace than A Company. These troops had no helmets on - scarves were wrapped around their heads. In the mist and fast gathering darkness, identity of these men was impossible. They entered the woods at a point which would lead them directly on to the infantry platoon just placed as a right flank support by the S-3, thirty minutes earlier. This should turn out all right, thought the S-3 - at least the Lieutenant in charge will be able to calm them down and organize them.

The S-3 then took two tanks of the platoon in A Company assembly area, and with them he started to place them in a central position to the rear, where they could serve as a counterattack force. With these tanks he climbed the hill that passed directly in rear of the infantry platoon guarding the right flank. Desiring to check the troops here, the S-3 moved toward the infantry position. As he approached, soldiers were seen roaming around the defensive position - they certainly were not busy digging their foxholes!

(33) Personal Experience.

The S-3 grabbed the first soldier and asked him what was going on. The soldier answered in German and threw his gun on the S-3, saying in English, "Surrender."

Here was an American officer reprimanding a German soldier for doing his duty for the Fatherland!

The S-3 snapped his rifle to his hip and tried to fire - too slow on the draw! The German soldier fired; the S-3 fell to the ground, wounded in the leg. The German, a young boy no more than sixteen years of age, stood over the S-3, considering whether or not to finish him off with another bullet. Finally he decided not; he took the S-3's rifle and left the S-3 lying in the snow.

Suddenly the German Platoon Leader spotted the two tanks which had followed the S-3 up the hill. He ordered his men down, and called for the bazooka man, "Panzerfaust! Panzerfaust! Panzeren!"

The German bazooka man fired at the lead tank. The round struck the side of the tank dead center just above the track. The tank track fell off; the tank stopped but the crew escaped uninjured. The other tank opened fire on the Germans with its machine guns, while it slowly backed away down to the A Company defensive position. (34)

The Germans then moved about one hundred yards deeper into the woods, where they came upon the B Company half track (command vehicle) and another half track filled with "C" and "K" rations. They forgot about the fight; they started eating. (Later statements showed that they had not eaten in three days). However, from this position the Germans could observe all movements of the Americans, and they could prevent reinforcement of the Combat Team from the road.

Judging from this action, apparently the German unit was a combat patrol, sent in to seize this terrain feature and to contain the Americans on the Bettelion forward positions until a coordinated attack could be launched. (34) Personal Experience.

Also, they desired to capture as many prisoners as possible. (35)

Several hours later, after dark, two American soldiers from the B Company positions wandered into the woods shouting "Yank! Yank!" at the top of their voices. The S-3 attracted the attention of these men, who were lost in the dark and cold. Seeing that the S-3 was seriously wounded, they bandaged his leg wound, picked him up and tried to work around the German position by circling left. They moved a scant fifty yards before the Germans surrounded the group. The two soldiers dropped the S-3 and threw up their hands.

The S-3 talked to the Germans, telling them that it was ridiculous for only these five Germans to attempt to take the three American soldiers back to their lines where there was no food. Instead, they should, themselves, surrender to the S-3, who guaranteed them safety and good conduct back to an American PW Cage, where they would be well-fed as Prisoners of War. The Germans listened attentively as they munched away on the stolen "K" rations taken from the B Company half track. Finally they shook their heads, indicating that the Americans would be taken back to the German lines.

For the S-3 the war was over. He was helped to the German positions, walking between two men. At the German Command Post, and awaiting interview, was the American Lieutenant and his platoon that the S-3 had placed in position to support the right flank. The Lieutenant appeared in good health, and it was evident that he and his platoon had surrendered without firing a shot. He walked over to the S-3 to explain but no explanation was necessary.

Fortunately for Combat Team 9, no more attacks were launched that night. The German counterattack, coming as it did upon the heels of the withdrawal, had upset the apple cart. No officers were with the men to assist in re-organization. Lost men wandered around all night and on into the next day hunting their companies. Several hours later, officers from CT 9 Headquarters and also CCA got through to the front line troops. By dawn the withdrawal

(35) Personal Experience.

had been completed and a strong defensive position organized. The remainder of 5 January 1945 was spent in consolidating the positions.

At this point American Air power hit with a fury that put the Germans back on their heels. The XIX Tactical Air Command, working with Third Army, opened up with everything that could fly. P-51's pounded enemy troop concentrations, ammunition dumps, and defended enemy towns. German soldiers were so distracted that they were held in defensive positions only by the greatest efforts of their officers and non-commissioned officers. The S-3, now lying in a German aid station, saw the station fill up with German wounded after a nearby P-51 raid. The German Sergeant in the aid station angrily asked the S-3 if any of the prisoners were flyers. The S-3 replied that it was none of his business. (36)

Thus ended the period 3-5 January 1945 for Combat Team 9. This period had given the team an acid test under the worst circumstances of weather and terrain, as well as enemy action. It is well to note that General Patton wrote in his diary of January 4 in Bastogne, "We can still lose the war!" (37) To quote from a letter by Colonel John L. Hines, CCA Commander, "As it appeared later this was a determined attack whose object was to break across the southern base of the Bastogne salient and again isolate it. The strength at the time was estimated as a reinforced regiment, with ten tiger tanks and ten self-propelled guns. The armor was counted from the Warden hill before the smoke was too thick. However, since this was one of the last major attempts to break out of the Bulge, the strength may have been greater." (38) To further quote Colonel Hines, "Incidentally, when I drove down the Eres road in February, after the snow had melted, and troops were removing the dead from this battlefield, the stench was appalling as were the numbers of German bodies in this area. At the time of the fighting, and right after, the heavy snow had buried the bodies and frozen the wounded." (39)

(36) Personal experience; (37) A-2, p. 213; (38) A-11; (39) A-11.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In the words of Major General Grow, the Commander of 6th Armored Division, "the 9th Infantry, as well as the 44th, together with the supporting tanks, performed most brilliantly, under the circumstances of surprise, fast gathering darkness and the bitter cold and deep snow. Besides (the S-3) and the others that were captured, a great many men were separated and literally lost. Many of these found their way back to our lines during the next two days. The night of the 4th it looked like a disaster to us, but before daylight the line was firm, the enemy counterattack had been completely repulsed and our losses were much less than feared -----, Only the brilliant and dogged resistance of small units and individuals saved the situation." (40)

The first problem noticed in the preceding operation was the poor leadership shown by the Lieutenant in charge of B Company. If officers had been plentiful in the company, this officer could have been evacuated. But there were only three officers with B Company and many times in the battle Platoon Leaders (Lieutenants) were called on to serve as a part of a platoon tank infantry team with a specific mission. Therefore, this Lieutenant was left in temporary command of the company.

The action of the Battalion Executive Officer in taking a platoon from B Company without notifying the S-3 who was consolidating the company upon the objective, violated the principle of chain of command. This action left the flank of the company in the air. It is believed that the platoon of infantry should have been taken from A Company in the center to form the north flank protection.

The unusual success achieved by the B Company tank-infantry team was inspiring. In fact, the surrender of forty Germans showed how effective this combination was. Such a victory raised the morale of the men.

(40) A-5.

The location of the five tanks in the open was a mistake. Careful selection of positions in the woods along the Wiltz road would have guaranteed the tanks concealment and still left them in a position to accomplish their mission.

The defensive position organized on the objective lacked depth. Even with CT 44 on its right, the position of CT 9 was over-extended. This was apparent to General Grow, who ordered a withdrawal the next day. (41)

Withdrawal operations should be carefully planned and executed. Besides the S-3, other staff officers should have gone up to assist in the withdrawal. Then when no officers were located in the companies, staff officers could have taken over as company commanders and successfully executed the withdrawal. This had to be done subsequently, when it was much more difficult.

The German attack in the midst of CT 9's withdrawal could have been disastrous to the Division. Fortunately, the Germans stopped when they came across the two half tracks filled with "C" and "K" rations. ^(only a patrol) They stopped attacking and started eating. Hungry men will not fight very well, no matter what side they are on.

Failures made by the S-3 in the withdrawal action were, (a) notifying the A Company Sergeant, too soon, of the withdrawal, (b) not sending a contact patrol over to check on unidentified troops in the area, and (c) bawling out a German soldier who was only doing his duty.

LESSONS

1. Officers and enlisted men of all ranks must be thoroughly trained in leadership so that they can function under the most adverse circumstances.
2. Communications, once lost, must be regained as quickly as possible by the combined efforts of superior and subordinates.

(41) A-1, p. 157.

3. Armored units must have infantry attachments if they are required to organize a defensive position as infantry.
4. Withdrawal or relief operations must be carefully planned. It is at such a time that a unit is most vulnerable to enemy attack.
- pw. 5. Attacks may fail because of cold and hungry men. This is especially true of the German attack on 4 January.
- pw. 6. All unexplained troops in an area must be checked immediately by contact patrols, particularly when visibility is poor.
7. Exposed flanks must be safeguarded.
8. Defensive positions must be organized in depth.
9. Concealed and covered positions should be selected for tanks in the defense.
10. Fighting in extreme cold, to be successful, requires thorough training. *Conducting*

HEADQUARTERS FORT DEVENS, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL
FORT DEVENS, MASSACHUSETTS

19 November 1948.

Major James McCrorey,
119 Infantry Drive,
Columbus, Georgia.

My dear McCrorey,

It is very gratifying to me to learn that you have chosen one of the most desperately fought engagements of the Division for your monograph. I well remember the general situation and a few of the details, but I am afraid I cannot add anything from personal knowledge that is not contained in the "Combat Record" which we published in book form in Germany. You said you had a copy of the 6th Armored Division History. If this history is the one published in Yedkinville, N.C., it does not contain as much detail as the official edition published by the Division. The library at Fort Benning was furnished a copy of the "Combat Record", and I presume this is the one you have. The sketches at the end of each chapter are quite accurate, and the tactical organization of the several units is listed in the text with complete accuracy. If you haven't got the right book, let me know at once and I will loan you one.

I can give you one or two pieces of background information from the Division point of view. On 1 January our mission was to drive northeast on a relatively narrow front which was entirely north of Werdin. Therefore, our first attacks on 31 December and 1 January were made in that direction, although CCA on the right had Werdin in its zone. Either late on 1 January or early on 2 January the Corps Commander broadened our zone to include Bras. In my talks with him I said that this would give us a very wide zone for an Armored Division operating without reinforcements, and that I was skeptical about it because I would have to commit every unit in the Division and could keep no reserve. However, he was anxious for us to assist the advance of the 26th Division which was attacking toward Bras from the south, and the 35th Division which was between us and the 26th, and was pretty badly played-out in the heavy woods fighting that had taken place. We did attack on the 2d and 3d of January in accordance with this plan. It resulted in several salients being thrust into the enemy lines, and resulted a very irregular and long front, which I calculated to be more than 10 miles on the 3rd. With no reserves and a refusal by Corps to give us additional Infantry to hold this long line, I decided we would have to shorten it in order to make it possible for any of our units to get any relief from the bitter cold. So, a partial withdrawal and straightening of the line was ordered for 4 January. We hoped that we could make the withdrawal without attracting too much attention, and I am quite sure that Colonel Hines planned the movement of your Battalion, to start after 16 hours. By pure chance the enemy mounted a strong counterattack

at the same hour. This was not the result of enemy observation of our movements, because these had not yet become apparent. It was just hard luck that he should have planned his attack at the same hour that we planned our withdrawal. The result you know only too well. The 9th Infantry, as well as the 44th, together with their supporting tanks, performed most brilliantly, under the circumstances of surprise, fast-gathering darkness, and the bitter cold and deep snow. Beside you and the others who were captured, a great many men were separated and literally lost. Many of these found their way back to our lines during the next two days. The night of the 4th it looked like a disaster to us, but before daylight the line was firm, the enemy counterattack had been completely repulsed and our losses were much less than feared.

In many ways, this was the most disastrous action that occurred to the Division during the war. Although it involved only two and a fraction Battalions, and the final results were not serious, it frightened me when I thought what might have happened had the Germans strongly supported and followed-up the initial success. Never again during the war did we get caught by surprise during a withdrawal or relief operation, and I can assure you I never want to get caught that way again. Only the brilliant and dogged resistance of small units and individuals saved the situation.

For your information, the 9th Infantry Battalion performed splendidly throughout the balance of the war, among the highlights were its attack through the Siegfried Line pillboxes; the capture of the bridge over the Main River at Frankfurt (which could be called the capture of Frankfurt without exaggeration, since two days later the complete Division by-passed the city, and all the 5th Division had to do was a little mopping up; and the relief of the concentration camp of Buchenwald (the 9th C.T. was the right flank column of six columns that swept across the Thuringen Plan, and Buchenwald was just off its route to the right, and a part of the Combat Team was detached by the Commander of the 9th Infantry to open the doors of freedom to the starved inmates. The Division passed miles beyond on this day, and I didn't know until after Midnight that one of the most famous concentration camps had been in our path that day). The last action of the Battalion was to secure three bridges over the Zuckepau River at Mittwida, northeast of Chemnitz, which was 10 miles beyond our "stop line", and the farthest east in Germany reached by any American unit during the war.

My congratulations to you for picking out a worthy and important action by a splendid unit for your monograph, and my best wishes for your success in your future career.

Sincerely,

/s/ R.W. Grow

/t/ R.W. GROW,
Major General, USA.

TRUE COPY:

James McCrorey,
Major, Infantry

4438 Reservoir Road, N.W.,
Washington 7, D.C.,
January 13, 1949.

Dear McCrorey:

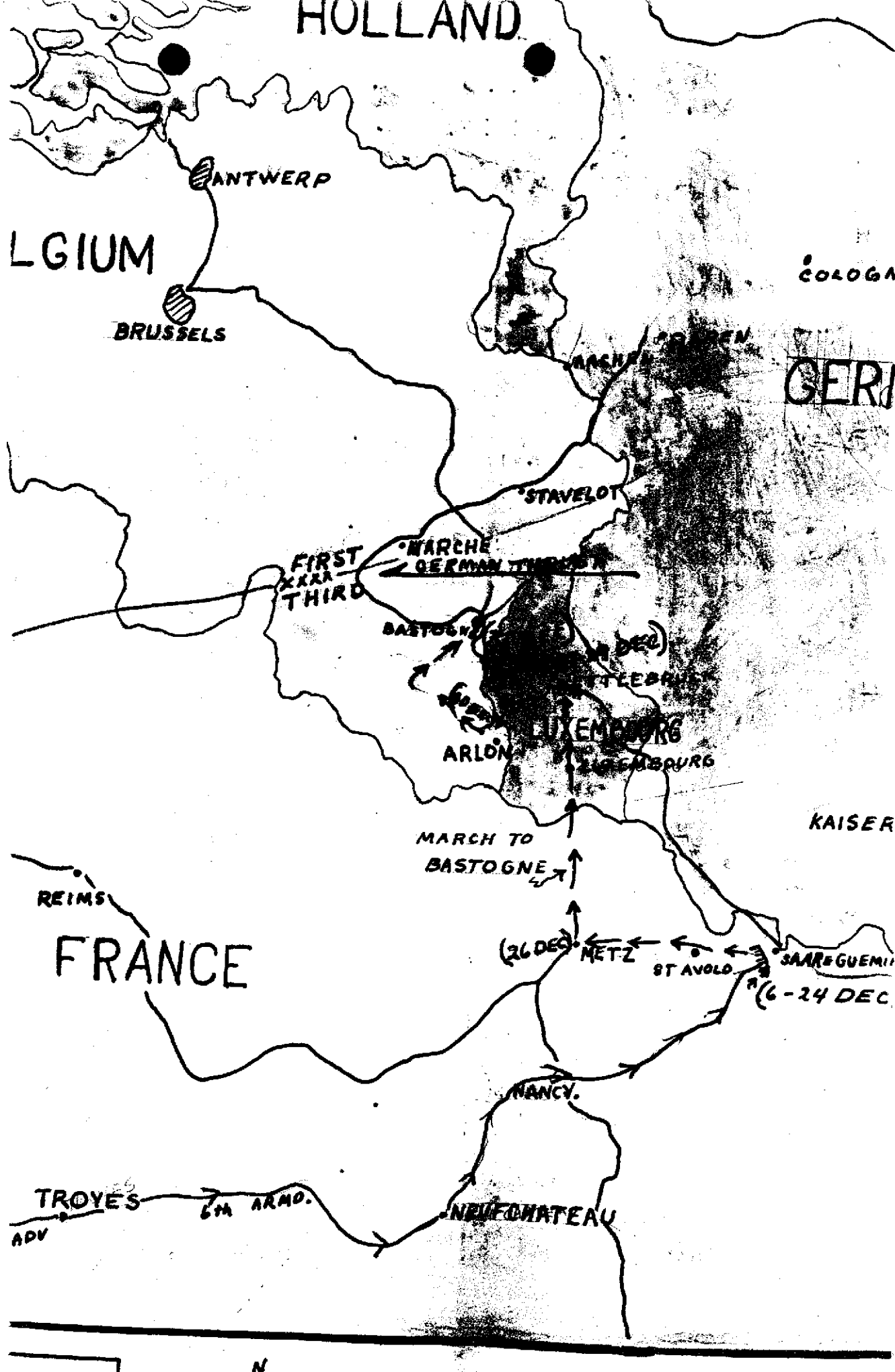
I am in receipt of your letter and will be glad to be of what assistance I can in giving you information. In the first place, however, I do not know where copies of orders issued during the desired time may be found. The originals and official copies are probably at the Adjutant General's depot at St. Louis, Missouri and may be very difficult to obtain. The 9's old sergeant major, Jerome K. Engleberg, told me the other day that he had copies of some of that bettelion's records. His address is 3716 Yuma Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

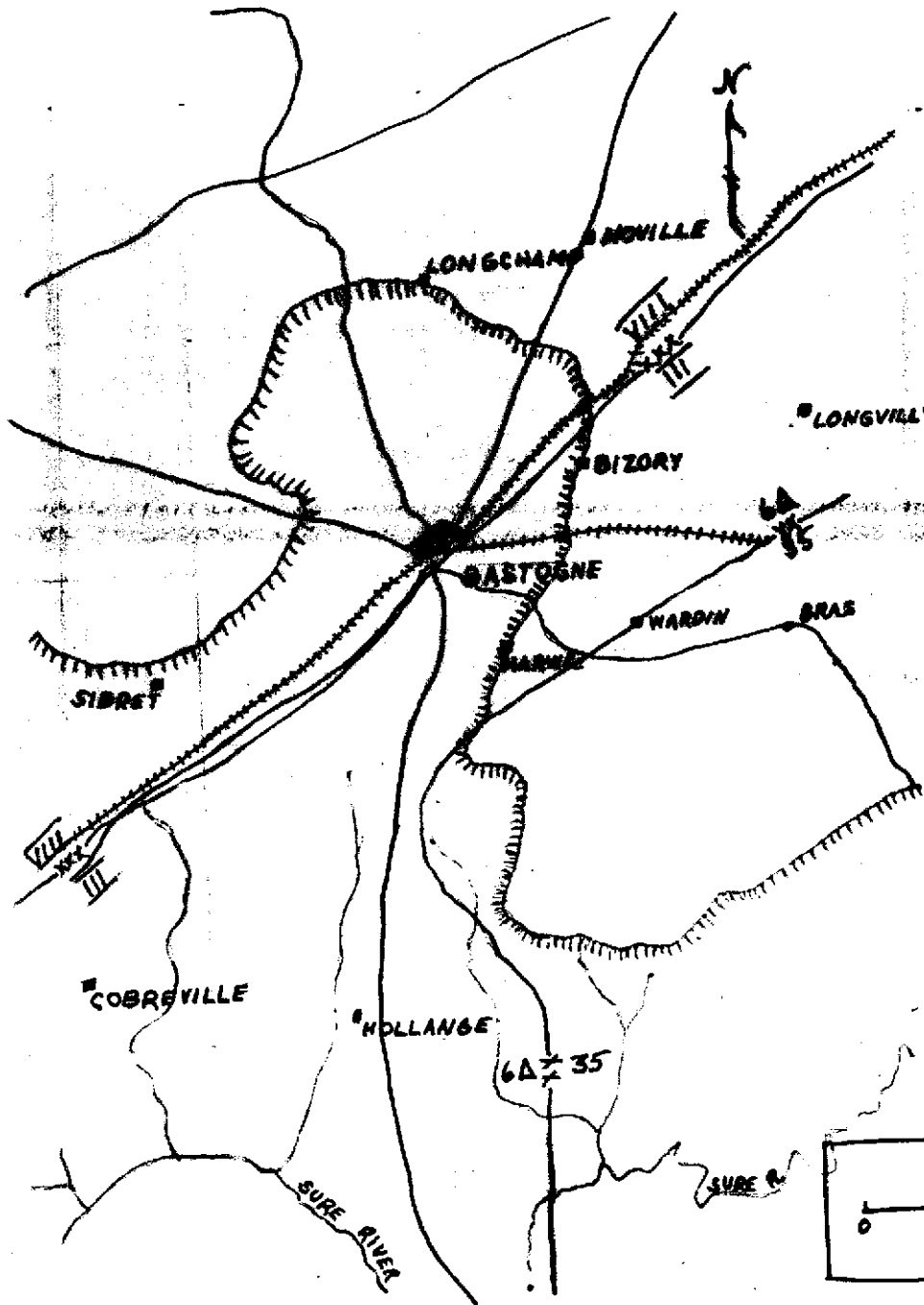
The account of the fighting as given in the History of the Sixth Armored Division is based on my reports to Division at the time and so is quite accurate. There is one place in it, however, where, in describing the attack by the Germans, it says, "they attacked from the woods (where you were captured) toward Warden", it should have said toward Marvie. This account probably underestimates the strength and ambitious intention of the enemy. In the book about the bulge called "Dark December", published last year, although it does not give much emphasis to our part, rather being devoted to the story of the First Army and the Germans, nevertheless, states that the Germans made a concentration of their best and selected troops into a reinforced division against us for an all out "Do or die" final effort to again isolate Bastogne. I wish you success with your thesis and belatedly congratulate you on your successful survival. My account of January 3,4,5, 1945, as well as I can remember it, follows.

My best wishes to you and do by all means send me a copy,

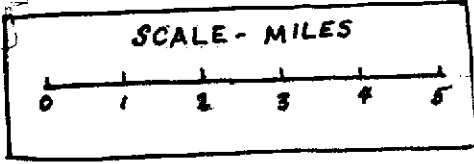
Sincerely,

/s/ John L. Eines, Jr.,





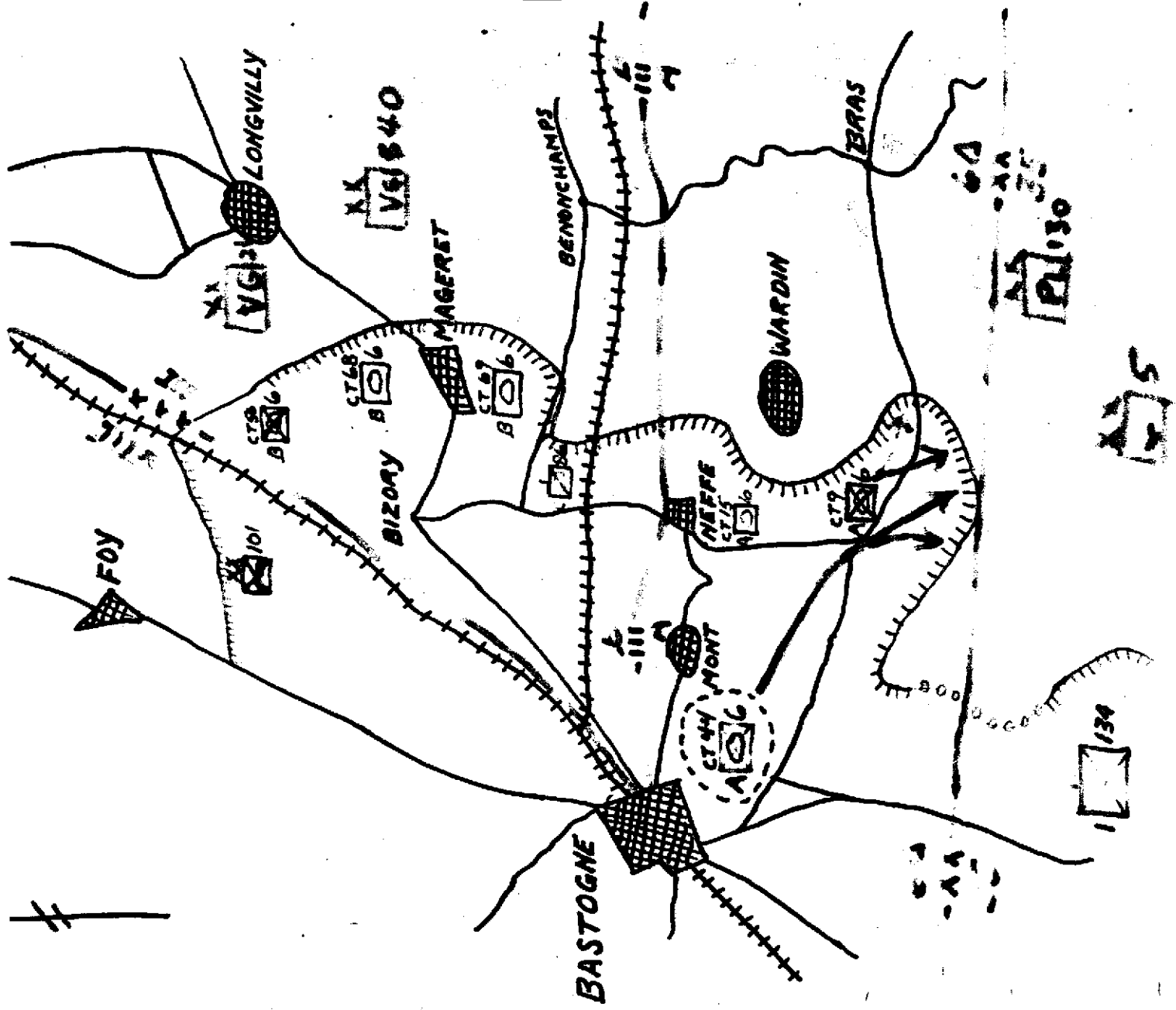
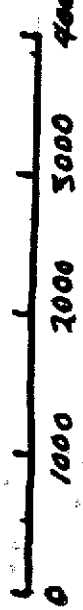
MAP B
 BASTOGNE AREA
 30 DEC. 1944

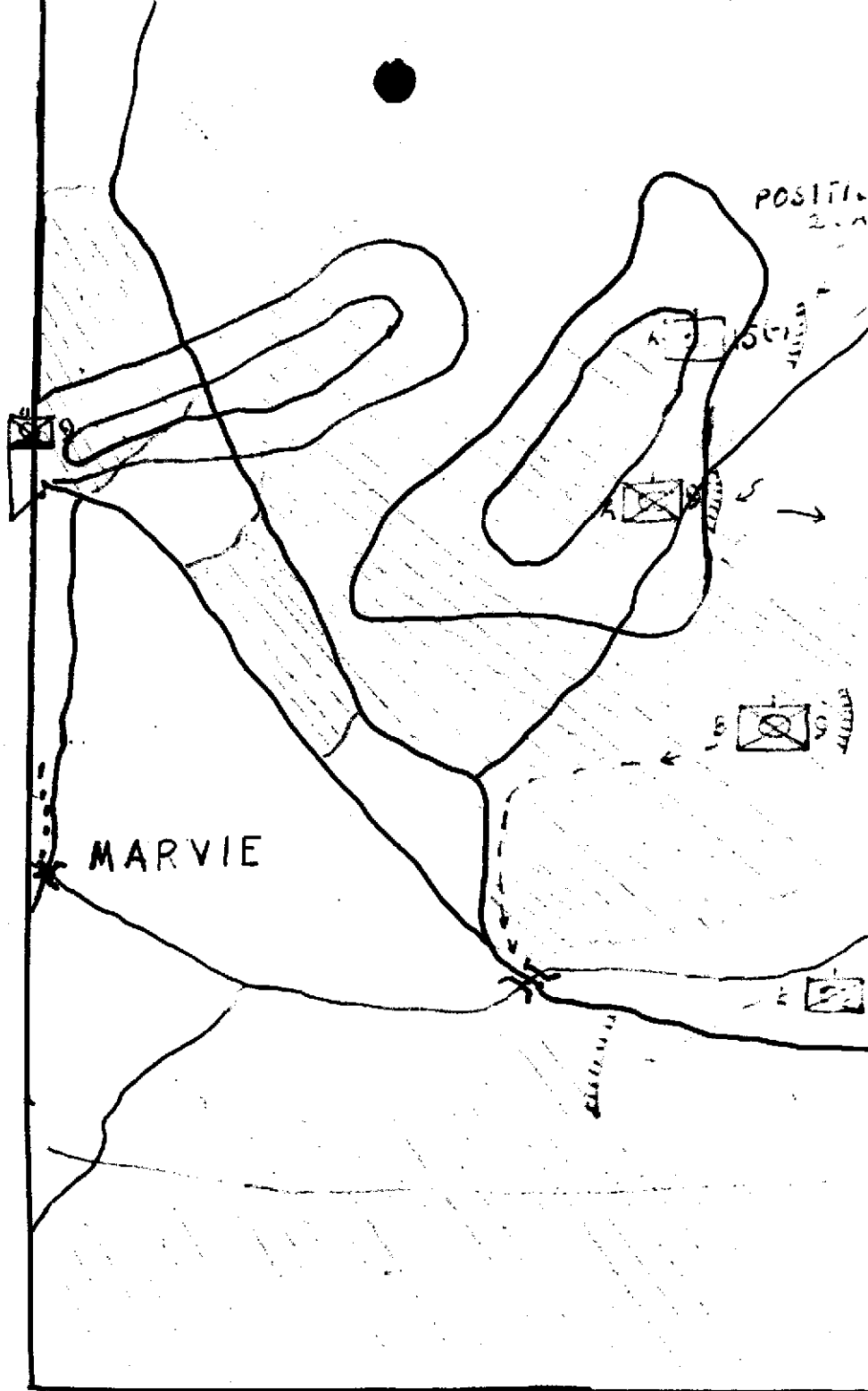


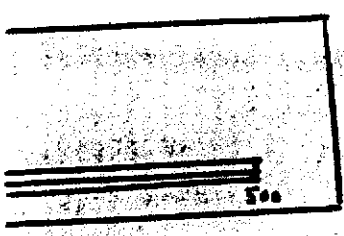
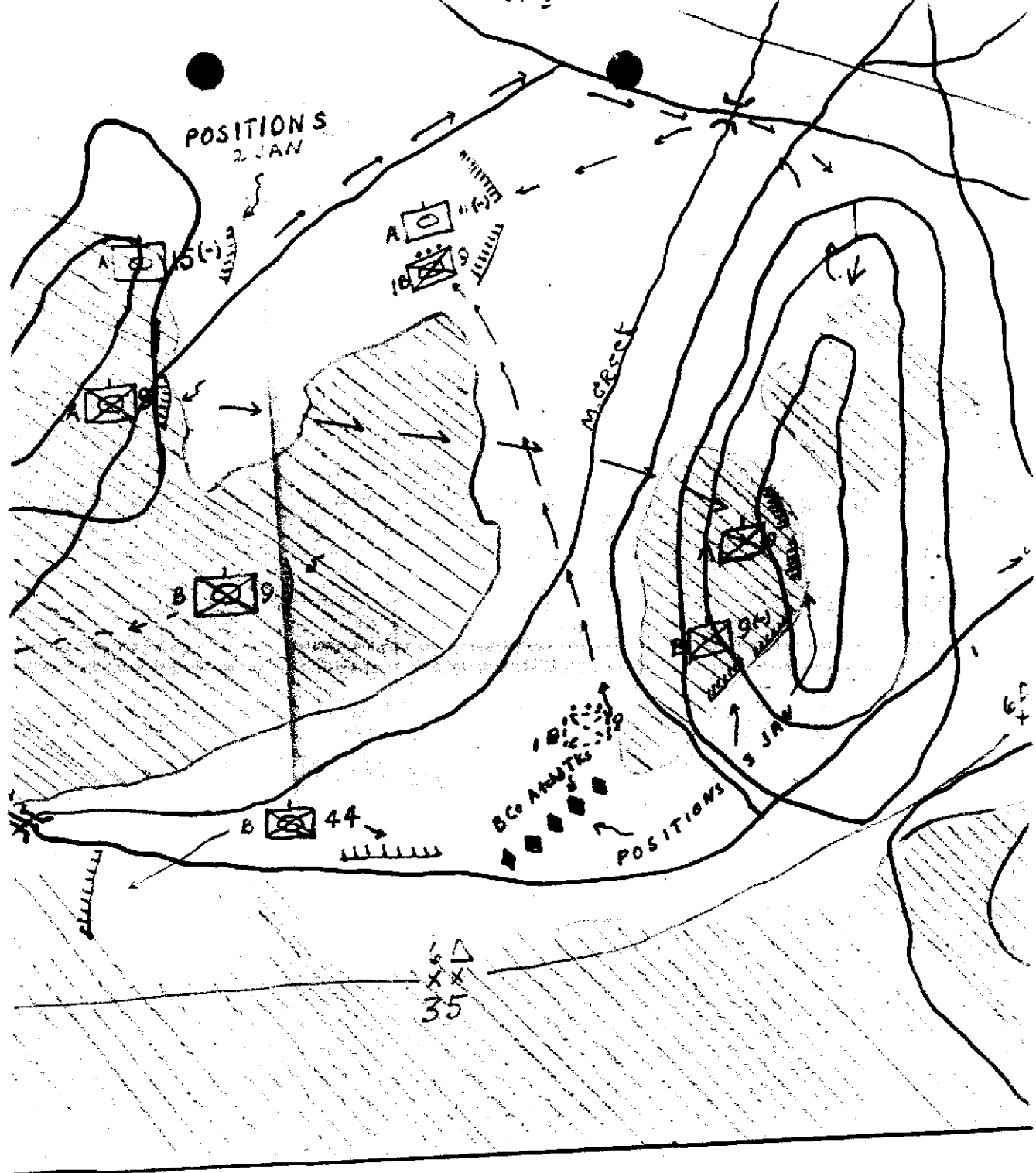
MAP C
 ACTION AT BASTOGNE
 2-3 JAN. 1945

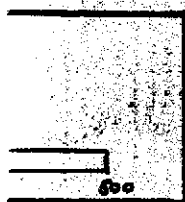
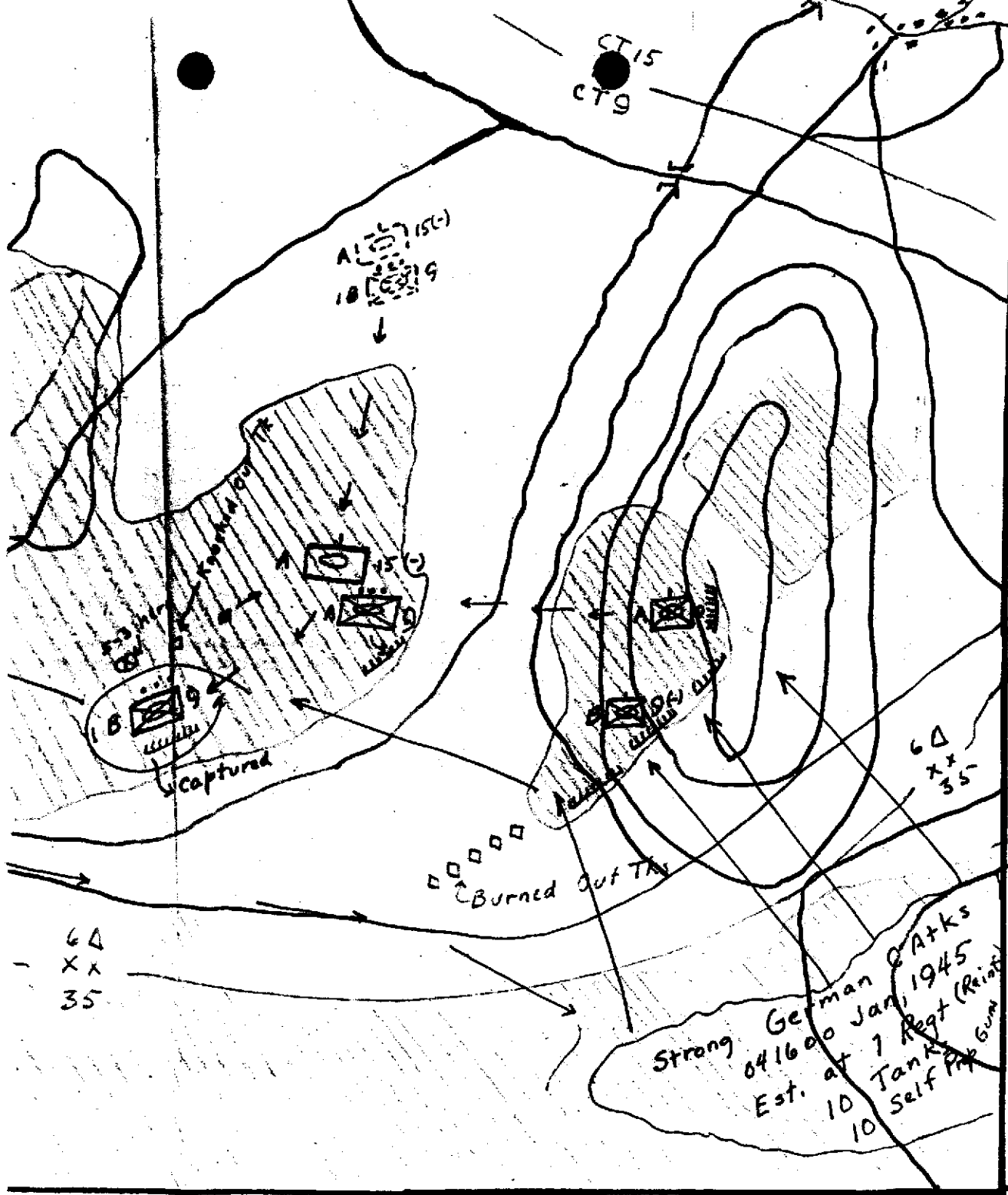
SCALE: 1/50,000

YARDS









MAP E
OPERATIONS OF CT9
NEAR WARDIN
4-5 JANUARY 1945

