

THE SIEGE OF BASTOGNE

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FOREWORD

The Siege of Bastogne was written from interviews with nearly all the commanders and staff officers who participated in the defense of Bastogne. It does not attempt to tell the whole story of Bastogne or even of the siege itself, but it presents an intimate picture of command in an action that received world attention. The Siege of Bastogne is essentially the account of how a single strong defensive force was built from separate commands of armor, airborne infantry, and tank destroyers—a force convinced that it could not be beaten.

The interviews were conducted at Bastogne from 31 December 1944 to 25 January 1945 by Colonel S L A Marshall, Captain John G Westover, and Lieutenant A Joseph Webber. Full and hearty cooperation was given the historians by all officers and men although Bastogne was still under heavy enemy attack.

Plans for the coverage of the siege were set up by Captain Westover, who was first on

the ground. He began work on the operations of the armor, and made arrangements for Colonel Marshall to cover the infantry and Lieutenant Webber the tank destroyers. Later Colonel Marshall assigned Lieutenant Webber the gathering of information on air-supply.

Interviews were conducted with individual officers and also with whole groups whenever possible. The historians had the opportunity of checking official records then completed with the staff and command involved, on the spot. They also reviewed problems of the defense with commanders at the original scenes of their action. Additional information was obtained from official records, especially for Chapter I, which is based on a report by the VIII US Corps. Captain L B Clark and Sergeant Eva C Spencer furnished supplementary interview material. The paintings were done at Bastogne by Technical Sergeant Olin Dows. Private First Class Joseph Nardello combined the duties of driver and cook with the profession of expert consultant. The final narrative was written by Colonel Marshall.

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(Captions for illustrations and
Situation maps follow the footnotes)

Map No 1

Illustration No 1

I. THE SITUATION⁽¹⁾

The siege of Bastogne is one chapter in the history of the battle of the Ardennes. On 16 December 1944, the Germans launched their greatest offensive of the war in the west. Achieving considerable success in the first attacks, they obtained a breakthrough, penetrated 65 miles into Allied territory, halted the Allied offensive then going on, and threatened the entire front in the west. The failure of the enemy drive was due in part to American resistance at St. Vith and Bastogne.

The background of Bastogne dates from the fall of 1944. At that time three American armies, forming the 12th US Army Group, were in position on the central portion of the western front. The First and Third US Armies were located along the Siegfried Line while the Ninth US Army was facing the Roer River in Germany. All three armies were pushing for the Rhine over difficult terrain, across swollen rivers,

and against determined enemy resistance. Except in the Aachen sector, where an advance was made to the Roer, the line did not move during October and November. The Third Army fought near Metz, while the First and Ninth Armies made the advance farther north, near Aachen. Between these two major efforts an extensive line of defense was maintained by the First Army; of this line the southern and major part was maintained by the VIII US Corps.

VIII Corps, which was under the command of Maj Gen Troy H Middleton, had its headquarters in Bastogne, Belgium, and extended from Losheim, Germany, to a point where the Moselle River crosses the Franco-German border. Generally parallel to the German frontier along eastern Belgium and Luxembourg, it comprised a front of 88 miles. This section of the country, the Ardennes, has rugged hills, characterized by high plateaux, deeply incised valleys and a restricted road net. The mission which First Army gave VIII Corps was to defend this line in place. New divisions were brought into this part of the front for battle indoctrination,

and battle-worn divisions were sent to the Corps for re-equipment and rest. As divisions were rotated into the sector, they took over existing wire nets and other facilities.

At the beginning of the German attack in December, the VIII Corps front was held by two battle-weary divisions, a green infantry division, part of a green armored division, and a cavalry group. The battle-tested divisions were the 4th Inf Div, which in November had fought a costly action through the Hurtgen Forest below Duren, Germany, and the 28th Inf Div, which had sustained heavy casualties in the First Army drive to the Roer. The 106th Inf Div, newly arrived on the continent, entered the Corps line four days before the offensive began. The 14th Cav Gp, consisting of the 18th and 32d Cav Sqs, held the north flank of VIII Corps, and the 9th Armd Div, minus CCB which was with V Corps, had the majority of its units attached to the divisions.

The enemy facing VIII Corps was estimated at four divisions. From north to south these were the 18th, 26th, 352d and 212th. Early in

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December the 28th Div ^{took} ~~captured~~ prisoners and reaffirmed the presence of the 26th and 352d Divs, but the rumors of one or more panzer units in rear of the German infantry divisions was not confirmed. From 12 December on the American outposts along the VIII Corps front heard sounds indicative of a great volume of vehicular motion behind the enemy lines.

On the morning of 16 December, the VIII Corps front, which had been quiet since the latter part of September, suddenly flared up. For more than a month the enemy had been concentrating some 25 divisions without disclosing it. At 0500 heavy artillery concentrations struck along the entire VIII Corps front and were soon followed by tank and infantry attacks. The strongest attacks were in the north near the V and VIII Corps boundary.

The infantry-tank attack on the north flank of the Corps began at 0800, and in three hours the enemy had penetrated the 14th Cav Gp position four kilometers. Group reserves were committed and the 106th Div put out flank protection to the north. Through the right of the 106th

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Div the enemy advanced two kilometers rapidly but when as reserves were brought up his progress was slowed. The ^{German} gains threatened to isolate two regiments of the 106th Division. Captured documents showed that on this day the enemy hoped to take St. Vith. This he did not do.

Against the 28th Div the enemy used two panzer divisions, three infantry divisions and one parachute division in an infantry-tank attack on the "Ridge Road" just west of the Our River. In operation, two enemy divisions assaulted each regiment. In the center and right of the Division the enemy made advances up to seven kilometers and crossed the north-south highway at several points. In the southern part of the VIII Corps the 9th Armd and the 4th Inf Div were also attacked by the enemy. These attacks were diversionary in nature to prevent the shifting of troops to the north.

At the start of the German offensive VIII Corps reserves consisted of an armored combat command and four battalions of combat engineers. The engineers were assembled during the first morning, and as the seriousness of the enemy

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thrust became apparent, additional troops were made available. In the north on the seventeenth, CCB of the 9th Armd Div was released from V Corps and the 7th Armd Div was ordered to close in an assembly area near St. Vith. In the south the 10th Armd Div was moved toward an assembly area near Luxembourg. Orders were also issued to move the 101st and 82d Abn Divs to the threatened area.

From captured documents and from the direction of early thrusts it became evident to Corps that the objective of the attacks was Liege and possibly Namur. The number of divisions identified indicated that the enemy needed a system of roads greater than those in the area under immediate threat. To prevent the enemy from securing the road nets a Corps defensive plan of two parts was selected. The first phase was to cause a maximum delay by defending in place along the original line of the Corps. The Corps realized that both the extensive front and small reserves might not allow this phase to last very long. The second phase of the defense was to deny the vital road nets to the enemy

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by building strong defenses in front of St. Vith, Houffalize, Bastogne, and Luxembourg as rapidly as possible. Prompt assistance from the First and Third Armies would build up the defense of St. Vith and Luxembourg; the attachment of two airborne divisions would make the defense of Bastogne and Houffalize possible. Unfortunately, no troops were ever made available to defend Houffalize.

On the second day of the offensive the enemy increased his pressure along the entire front, especially in the north. The V Corps right flank was forced back and in the VIII Corps, infantry and armor had by 0900 cut off two regiments of the 106th Division. To stem the advance on St. Vith the 168th Engr C Bn fought a delaying action north and east of that town, CCB, 9th Armd Div, was put into the line and the 7th Armd Div was committed piecemeal as it arrived in the evening.

In the 28th Div sector the Germans began their attacks early and made large gains. The left flank was forced to withdraw to the west *

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bank of the Our River and the right was pushed back an additional two to six kilometers. But it was in the center of the division, where one salient of 13 and another of 10 kilometers existed, that the enemy made his largest gains. Everywhere the ^{American} withdrawal had been seven to ten kilometers. At some points the enemy was within 18 kilometers of Bastogne.

On the southern flank of the VIII Corps the 4th Inf Div defended against strong attacks, but the enemy did not make the effort here that he did farther north. The 10th Armd Div reached the Luxembourg area in time to ~~definitely~~ assure its defense.

On 18 December, the third day of the offensive, the enemy increased the momentum of his drive in the center of VIII Corps. The Corps north flank was bolstered by the arrival of the 7th Armd Div but remained extremely critical because of the deep penetrations in the V Corps sector. But the weight against the 28th Div was so overwhelming that its thin defenses disintegrated and the enemy achieved a breakthrough.

The right flank, which had pulled back across the Our River the previous night, was unable to stabilize its lines. In the withdrawal a wide gap was created through which the enemy pushed a great deal of armor. In the center enemy thrusts between strongpoints encircled companies and destroyed or captured them one by one. To division the picture was obscure throughout the day because of lost communications, but the appearance of many enemy columns behind the regimental sectors and the tragic tales of stragglers indicated a complete disintegration of regimental defenses. The 28th Div CP was itself attacked when the enemy approached Wiltz. The 44th Engr C Bn, the 447th AAA Bn, and miscellaneous headquarters personnel from the division were used to defend the town. Communications remained with only one regiment.

Directly behind the 28th Div on the St. Vith-Bastogne road were roadblocks established by CCR, 8th Armd Division. One block, known as Task Force Rose, was attacked in the morning and overrun by the enemy by 1400. A roadblock on the Wiltz-Bastogne road, known as Task Force

Illustration No 2

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Hayze, came under heavy enemy attack by 1815.

The Germans overran this roadblock during the night of the 18-19 December and came within three kilometers of Bastogne. The defense of Bastogne now became the task of airborne infantry and armor which had been ordered into the sector.

Illustration No 3

II. THE CONCENTRATION

On 17 and 18 December, three battle-tested organizations by different routes and under separate authority began their moves toward the town in the Belgian Ardennes with whose names their own fame was to be thereafter inseparably linked. Orders were received by the Third Army from 12th Army Group on the sixteenth directing the 10th Armd Div to be temporarily attached to VIII Corps, First Army, to counter a serious attempt at a breakthrough on the part of the enemy.(1) At 1320 on 17 December, in compliance with the order, CCB, 10th Armd Div, took its first step toward Bastogne when it moved from a rest area at Remeling, France, to the vicinity of Merl, Luxembourg.(2) That evening at 2030 the 101st Abn Div, which was then re-outfitting in a training area at Camp Mourmelon (near Reims, France), received telephone orders from Headquarters XVIII Abn Corps that it was to go to Bastogne.(3) On the following night, 18 December at 1800, the 705th TD Bn, then in position at

Illustration No 4

Kohlscheid, Germany, was ordered by the Ninth Army to march to Bastogne and report to VIII Corps. (4)

Bastogne, then the Headquarters of VIII Corps, was an important place for rendezvous. The town is a nodal point in the highway system of the eastern Ardennes--a countryside forbidding to the movement of mechanized forces except when the roads are under control. By holding at Bastogne the VIII Corps could unhinge the communications of the Germans who were striking south and west toward the line of the River Meuse. (5)

CCB closed in the vicinity of Merl at 2155. On the following morning it was ordered to move independently of the 10th Armd Div to join VIII Corps and took the road through Arlon to Bastogne. On the way Col William L Roberts, the commander, received a request from Maj Gen Norman D Cota, commanding the 28th Inf Div, to support his force at Wiltz by putting CCB into position south and southeast of the town. But this Roberts could not do and comply with his

Illustration No 5

Corps orders, so he took his column on into Bastogne and reported to Maj Gen Middleton at 1600.(6)

At Camp Mourmelon, 101st Div was short many of its soldiers who were on leave in Paris. The Division Commander was in the United States. The Assistant Division Commander was giving a lecture in England on the airborne operation in Holland. The Artillery Commander, Brig Gen Anthony C McAuliffe, got the Division staff together at 2100 on 17 December and outlined the prospect in these words, "All I know of the situation is that there has been a breakthrough and we have got to get up there." He directed the Division to move out in combat teams without waiting for the men on pass.(7)

An advance party was then set up to precede the Division to Bastogne. In the party was a representative from each major unit and a company of engineers who were to be used as guides to lead the combat teams into their Bastogne assembly areas.(8) Just as the advance party was pulling away from Camp Mourmelon at noon of

Illustration No 6

the eighteenth, the Acting Chief of Staff of the Division, Lt Col Ned D Moore, ran out of the CP and told the party that XVIII Corps was to handle the operation and that they should go to a rendezvous with XVIII Corps at the crossroads in Werbomont, 30 miles north of their original destination. This they did.(9) It was an error that might have been fatal though in the end it cost nothing. On reaching Werbomont the night of 18 December they were told that the operation was being handled by VIII Corps and that they were even then due in Bastogne. In this way the advance party failed in its mission and did not reach the objective until 0300 on the morning of 19 December.(10)

Ten minutes after the advance party had left Mourmelon, McAuliffe started for Werbomont taking with him his G-3, Lt Col H W O Kinnard, and his aide, 1st Lt Frederic D Starrett.(11) They drove as rapidly as they could, passing many elements of the 82d Abn Div along the route. At Neufchateau, Gen McAuliffe was informed by VIII Corps that the Division was attached to VIII Corps at Bastogne. Officer

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guides were left in the town to see that the column received the new route. On reaching Bastogne at 1600, McAuliffe's party went directly to the CP of VIII Corps, which was located in the former German barracks at the western edge of town, and reported to Gen Middleton.(12) At that same moment Col Roberts, who had arrived ahead of his column, presented himself to Middleton and reported that CCB was on the road and would soon be in Bastogne.(13) Middleton asked Roberts, "How many teams can you make up?" Roberts replied, "Three." The general then said, "You will move without delay in three teams to these positions and counter enemy threats. One team will go to the southeast of Wardin, one team to the vicinity of Longvilly and one team to the vicinity of Noville. Move with the utmost speed. Hold these positions at all costs."(14)

Roberts accepted the order without demur though at that moment he believed that the distribution of his force over so great an area would make it ineffective. But he made the mental reservation that the Corps Commander must

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know the situation much better than himself.(15)
Middleton's decision was the initial tactical
step which lead finally to the saving of Bastogne.
(16) CCB continued on its way moving north and
east to carry out its orders.(17)

While McAuliffe and his party were on the
road, at Mourmelon the Division was working with
the problems of the move. The few hours before
the Division began its march were utilized in
preparation for departure and in partly provid-
ing those combat supplies which had been lost
in Holland. Such things as mortars, rifle
ammunition, entrenching tools, Arctic overshoes,
blankets and gas masks were far below T/BA.(18)
In the great emergency, Transportation Corps
and Oise Base Section acted with utmost dispatch
and rallied truck groups from Rouen and Paris.
Many of the truckers had already been long on
the road when they were ordered to Mourmelon.
They were intercepted, unloaded on the spot, and
directed to their new destination. The first
trucks arrived at 0900. The last of the 380
trucks needed for the movement of 11,000 men
arrived at the camp at 1720.(19) At 2000, eleven

hours after the arrival of the first vehicles, the last man was outloaded. As far as Bouillon, Belgium, the column ran with lights blazing. It was a calculated risk taken by 101st for the sake of speed. The night was clear and the stars shone brightly. Had the Luftwaffe come on then, the story of Bastogne might have taken a different turn.(20)

In Bastogne, Middleton sketched the situation to McAuliffe and Kinnard very roughly, telling them, "There has been a major penetration..." and "...certain of my units, especially the 106th and 28th Divisions, are broken." In the absence of the advance party Kinnard tried to function as an entire Division staff during the conference. But after discussing matters with both the G-2 and G-3 sections at Corps, he had only the vaguest picture of what was happening and felt altogether uncertain about both the friendly and enemy situations.(21) He gathered that some armored elements--the 9th Armd Div and 10th Armd Div were mentioned--were out in front of Bastogne, but he could not pin point where their roadblocks were located. Because of their own

Illustration No 7

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uncertainty, both he and McAuliffe became acutely concerned over plans for the night bivouac. Further than that, they worried that the column might be hit while it was still on the road or that it might even be caught by the German air while far back.(22)

While the light remained, they took a quick swing out over the area west of town and McAuliffe pointed out to Kinnard where he wanted the Division placed. It was a snap decision, yet it importantly influenced the campaign because it placed the Division in a sheltered forward assembly area until it was ready to strike. In the emergency Kinnard grabbed an MP private from Corps and sent him to the crossroads at Sprimont to meet the Division as it came on. He and McAuliffe then went to the junction of the Arlon and Neufchateau roads in Bastogne to make another attempt to find the advance party. Kinnard had with him nine 1:100,000 and six 1:50,000 maps of the area. This was all that the Corps staff could give him to fight the operation. When he returned from the reconnaissance, Kinnard searched at

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Corps for more maps but found that the Map Section was already moving out. From Corps he obtained an administrative order telling the location of ammunition dumps, water points, evacuation hospitals and other installations.(23)

At this time two officers from 502d Regt, who were supposed to have accompanied the advance party but had fortunately missed it, showed up at Corps Headquarters. They joined Kinnard and Starrett and drove west to Mande-St-Etienne. Here they met a jeepload of 327th Regt officers who had also missed the advance party. Kinnard now had enough personnel to set up the assembly area. An officer guide was posted on the Mande-St-Etienne road to direct the incoming column and Starrett went to work setting up a division CP in a nearby farm house. The remaining officers reconnoitered their regimental areas and made their plans for the night dispositions. The hour was a little after 1800 and there was not yet any sound of combat in the vicinity. A heavy maintenance company from 28th Div was already in Mande-St-Etienne. The commander told Kinnard this was his area and

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he would not leave. Kinnard had to return to Bastogne to get an order from the Corp Commander to clear the area. Around Gen Middleton in the Corps CP there were now only six or eight officers.(24)

Maj Gen Matthew B Ridgway, the Commander of XVIII Abn Corps, came to VIII Corps Headquarters about 2030. Ridgway and Middleton were each under the impression that his Corps was responsible for 101st. They called First Army Headquarters and were told that the Division would operate under VIII Corps. McAuliffe decided to stay at Corps to get his mission for the next day. During the conference of the corps commanders, Brig Gen Gerald J Higgins, Assistant Division Commander of the 101st, who had been called from England by McAuliffe, arrived.(25)

Higgins and Kinnard went out to the Division assembly area. Lt Starrett had found that the local school house was a better CP than the dwelling which Kinnard had designated and on his own initiative had made the change. He already had telephone lines strung to Corps and to 501st Regiment. An officer from the 506th Regt

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who had missed the advance party reported at the CP and was given his sector. Things were now beginning to look a little more snug.(26)

That night in Bastogne was quiet, largely because the 28th Inf Div was holding on commanding ground around Wiltz and fighting the enemy off for a few vital hours. Many stragglers were falling back through the town and the roads were jammed to the south and west. No attempt was made to hold any of these men at the time. Corps was busy with its evacuation and CCB and 101st were engrossed in their own problems. Col Roberts, who had set up his CP in Hotel Lebrun at 1800, found that it was difficult even to persuade the organizations who were about to withdraw to give up their motor parks so that he could get his own vehicles off the streets.(27)

The third major part of the Bastogne garrison, the 705th TD Bn, under command of Lt Col Clifford D Templeton, got its marching orders at 1800 on 18 December. It left Kohlscheid, Germany, at 2240, but could not proceed by the shortest route--Liege, Houffalize, Bastogne--

because the enemy was already around Houffalize. The column therefore proceeded via Laroche where it went into a defensive position along the heights six miles south of the town at 0915 on 19 December. Templeton looked Laroche over and was thoroughly alarmed at what he found. American units were sprawled along the road. They were making little or no effort to adjust themselves to the situation or to set up a local defense. So in midmorning Templeton sent two platoons with four TDs to set up a roadblock to the north of the town. Leaving the battalion at Laroche, he then went on to Neufchateau, where VIII Corps was newly established. Middleton told him to get on into Bastogne and attach himself to the 101st Division. An officer was sent back to Laroche to bring the battalion on but to leave the roadblock force in place.(28)

Templeton and his command section, after reporting to McAuliffe, started northwest to meet the oncoming column. At Bertogne the section was ambushed by a German party armed with two machine guns, one self-propelled gun and several small antiaircraft guns. The opening

fire wounded three men, destroyed a jeep and forced the abandonment of the armored command vehicle. Templeton's men withdrew along the road about one-half mile with all their weapons engaging the enemy. This action took place about 1500 and was over in twenty minutes.(29)

Templeton radioed to his battalion to expect the roadblock at Bertogne. He then told them, however, that the roadblock could be overwhelmed and the battalion was to "come any way possible to Bastogne but get there." He did not know that the Bertogne road was impassable as the bridge above the town was out. In the late afternoon the command section returned to Bastogne to establish its CP. Templeton then radioed the commander of the supply train to "find a haven in the west and hook up with some big friends." He felt quite certain that his train would get through safely because the one M18 accompanying it was capable of dealing with any roving enemy tank or infantry group along the way. The 705th TD Bn reached Bastogne at 2030, by the route Laroche-Champlon-Ortheuville-Bastogne.(30)

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With the arrival of the 705th TD Bn, all the organizations present in Bastogne during the seige were gathered. The 101st and CCB had begun the fight that morning and the TDs were now ready to link their power with that of the armor and the infantry. Men of every unit had morale of the highest quality and with their weapons each was capable of stiffening the other. It was a matter of finding the way through courage, resource, and good will.

III. TEAM CHERRY

On the evening of 18 December, Roberts ordered Team Cherry to move out along the road leading east and go into position near Longvilly. It thereby became the first of the Bastogne reinforcements to move out and engage the enemy. The force under command of Lt Col Henry T Cherry (CO 3d Tk Bn, 10 Armd Div) included the 3d Bn, Co C of the 20th Armd Inf Bn, the 3d Plat of Co C of the 55th Engr Bn and 2d Plat of Trp B of the 90th Cavalry Squadron.(1)

They went on into the darkness, knowing only this of their situation, that some parts of CCR of the 9th Armd Div were supposed to be in the vicinity of Longvilly and that the enemy was reported advancing toward that town from the east. The march was uneventful. 1st Lt Edward P. Hyde (CO, Co A, 3d Tk Bn), commanding the advance guard, came to a halt just short of Longvilly at 1920. The town is on low ground and its streets seemed to be already jammed with the vehicles of CCR. Leaving the main body, Cherry

went forward to the CP of CCR to learn their intentions. But they had no plan and did not know whether they would stay or get out. So Cherry returned to his force, which was then refueling on the road, and told Hyduke to make a reconnaissance and occupy ground west of the town before dawn came. The main body was to remain 1000 yards west of the town until there was a change in CCR's situation. At 2300 Cherry returned to headquarters in Bastogne to tell Roberts how things were going. As he went through Mageret he noticed that CCR's trains were headed for the rear. Roberts told him that he was to cover CCR's main body if it withdrew, but in any case he was to hold at Longvilly. The road was already plagued with stragglers, most of them moving in trucks and half-tracks back toward Bastogne. They knew nothing except they had last seen the enemy about six miles east along the main road. When asked what the Germans had, they repeated: "Tanks, tanks, tanks," and then moved on to the rear.

CCR was set up with roadblocks to the north and east of Longvilly, with one battalion of

infantry and another of tanks supporting the blocks, and two batteries of artillery helping to cover them from a position next the town. But there was no close-in defense around the houses. Looking these dispositions over, Hyduke decided there was danger that the enemy might come in from the south. So he sent his platoon of cavalry in that direction with instructions to withdraw quickly if the pressure became heavy. Seven light tanks were placed forward with four medium tanks covering to the right. Infantry were outposted north of the position. One of the field artillery batteries from CCR tied in with Hyduke's party and shortly thereafter opened fire to the eastward, though Hyduke never learned at what they were firing.

At 2340, CCR started its withdrawal from Longvilly, though it was not until two hours later, while Cherry was returning to his team, that he got word by radio from Hyduke that Team Cherry was now holding alone. The next few minutes brought more distressing news to the commander. In Neffe he met a wounded enlisted man who said that his vehicle had been shot up

near Mageret. Then a sergeant told him that a strong German patrol had entered Mageret just before midnight. This meant that the Germans were across the road between Cherry and his Team. Cherry radioed Capt William F Ryerson (CO of Co C, 20th Armd Inf Bn, 10 Armd Div), who had been left in command at Longvilly, to get a patrol to Mageret and reopen the road. Two squads of infantry were sent in a halftrack on this mission. They dismounted before reaching the village and approached stealthily. Within a few minutes they had located three enemy tanks and an infantry force, which they guessed to be about one company, in positions around the crossroads at Mageret. They had come in along the one side of the town which was not being covered by an enemy tank, and while they waited there they heard another armored vehicle coming up behind them. For a few seconds they were in a cold sweat, thinking they were about to be trapped by a fourth tank. Instead, it proved to be an American TD. The infantrymen and the TD crew discussed their chances and decided they weren't strong enough to attack Mageret. So they returned to Ryerson. By then

Ryerson had heard from Roberts that he was to commandeer any American men or equipment which he could use. So he drafted the TD into his outfit.

The discovery that the enemy was across the Team's rear, quickly followed by Ryerson's report of the enemy strength which his patrol had found at Mageret, convinced Cherry and Roberts that ~~the realities of~~ the situation was such that Longvilly could not be held. Cherry ordered the advance guard under Hyduke to hold its ground at Longvilly while the main body tried to beat its way back through Mageret. These orders, which arrived at 0830, turned the advance guard into a rear guard. Cherry went back to his CP which was in a stoutly walled chateau 300 yards south of Neffe, and stayed there awaiting developments. The CP force, the rear guard and the main body were each engaged during the entire day in widely separated actions.(2)

Through these misadventures and decisions, Team Cherry had come to a pass where it could no longer confront the on-coming enemy and where most of its strivings would be directed toward

Illustration No 8

keeping itself in being and covering its own
flanks and rear. Whether the German advance
into Bastogne from the eastward could be checked
and thrown into recoil now depended on the forces
of 101st Division.

IV. THE FIRST MEETING

They played in luck from the beginning and their luck began weeks before the siege started. In the early part of November a young lieutenant colonel commanding a regiment on the Neder Rijn front in Holland took a busman's holiday and spent two days' leave in Bastogne. He was possessed of an eye for ground and a keenness for the study of it far beyond the powers of the average regimental commander and he spent his two days roaming over the ridges east of Bastogne and reflecting on their military significance.(1)

This was Julian Ewell, commanding the 501st Pzcht Infantry. It was luck that in giving the march order prior to leaving Mourmelon, McAuliffe had put 501st Regt at the head of the column.(2) It was luck again that Ewell got away well in advance of the column and was the first commander to arrive in the vicinity of the bivouac.(3) He ran into a wire-stringing detail, asked what they were doing, found that they were men from 101st

and then followed the wires into the Division CP. Then he got ready to guide his men in.(4)

All down the route over which he had come he had found the traffic blocking and stopping, and he didn't expect 501st to come up to him before 2300 because of this backwash.(5) But it beat that schedule by one-half hour and Ewell was closed in his area by 2400. McAuliffe knew at midnight that he had one regiment ready.(6)

Earlier in the night Ewell had talked to McAuliffe and Higgins. The one thing on which all of the commanders agreed was that no one could be certain of anything. Ewell said of himself that he was as much in the dark as any man present. But he presented to his commander that he should be given a definite assignment. It was a large request, the situation considered.

The index finger pointed out along the road running eastward--toward the ridges where Ewell had walked in November--although neither Middleton or McAuliffe ever knew that he had seen the ground.(7) The enemy was coming that way. At Corps the 9th Armd was thought to have a roadblock

somewhere around Longvilly and the 10th Armd had a block farther west toward Neffe. The 9th's block was thought to be surrounded; the 10th's block was supposed to be engaged but not yet surrounded.(8)

Middleton had described the situation at these blocks when McAuliffe reported to him and had said: "There is a battle now going on for Bastogne." (9) He spoke of the blocks out along the Longvilly road as "surrounded" and he described the position of three other blocks which CCB of 10th Armd was maintaining to the east, northeast and southeast of the city.(10) The Corps Commander had no specific plan for the employment of 101st Div, and at first McAuliffe could think of nothing.(11) At 2200 he suggested to Middleton that a combat team be sent east to develop the situation.(12) That idea appealed to McAuliffe simply as a "good old Leavenworth solution of the problem." (13) It was wholly consistent with Middleton's concern for the preservation of the other elements of his command.(14)

Middleton and McAuliffe sent for Ewell. He had been spending a part of his time unprofitably

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on the road intersections trying to get information from the Americans who were straggling in from the north and northeast. All talked vaguely and dispiritedly. Man after man said to him: "We have been wiped out," and then stumbled away through the dark. They did not know where they had been. They had no idea where they were going. Ewell and his officers tried several times to draw out these men, then gave them up as a bad job and paid no further attention.(15) Ewell reached his separate conclusion that any quest for information concerning the enemy, other than going out bodily after it, was useless. ~~He was ready when the call came.~~(16)

The exact mission given Ewell was to "seize the road junction at 676614 and hold it."(17) That would put him out the eastern road well beyond Longvilly. Middleton told him that CCR of the 9th Armd had a roadblock at that point which was supposed to be "isolated" and that the 110th Inf was supposedly still maintaining a CP at Allerborn.(18) From 501st's assembly area it was nine and one-half miles to the road junction. However, that distant point did not enter into McAuliffe's instructions to Ewell

or what he anticipated the regiment would be able to accomplish. McAuliffe was not sure where the enemy would crowd him first, but he thought it most likely that they would roll on him from the east. That had as much to do with his assignment of Ewell as did the involvement of the armored roadblocks. He simply pointed to the map and moved his finger along in the direction of Longvilly, he said: "Ewell, move out along this road at six o'clock, make contact, attack and clean up the situation."(19)

Ewell didn't ask a question. He said: "Yes, sir," saluted and went on his way.(20)

Recalling that scene some days afterward, McAuliffe was to remark: "There were many men and commanders in my operation who did outstanding things. But Ewell's was the greatest gamble of all. It was dark. He had no knowledge of the enemy. I could not tell him what he was likely to meet. But he has a fine eye for ground and no man has more courage. He was the right man for the spot I put him in."(21)

Of the few maps which Division had obtained

from Corps, twenty went with Ewell's combat team as it started to march.(22) It wasn't enough to go around. Lt Col Clarence F Nelson, commanding the 907th FA Bn, had only one map scaled 1:100,000 from which to provide his firing data. So as the movement got underway, he had sketches drawn up for the forward observers. On the sketches all control points and critical features --such as crossroads, bridges, woods and towns-- were marked and numbered. The observers knew the locations of the batteries. In this way the artillery operation was coordinated.(23)

The offensive mission was limited to the one combat team. McAuliffe had decided right at the beginning that a successful defense of Bastogne depended on the utmost harboring of his reserves at every stage of operation, and having sent Ewell forth, he proposed to sit on Bastogne with the rest of his Division until something new developed.(24)

That same idea--conservation of force--guided Ewell in his opening moves. In giving his battalion commanders the march order, he told Maj Raymond V Bottomly, Jr, who was leading

Illustration No 9

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out with the 1st Bn, that he was not to put out flank security until he reached Mageret; otherwise, the progress of the column would be much too slow. But in line with the governing principle he added the instruction to all commanders that if they met opposition, they were to "take it slow and easy." Being familiar with his men and their methods in past campaigns, he knew that they tended to throw themselves directly on the target. These methods had worked in Normandy and Holland. But from what he had seen of the Bastogne terrain in November, he had concluded that his main chance lay in "fire and maneuver" rather than in shock action. He felt that his whole operation should be guided by this principle. He said to them: "I don't want you to try to beat the enemy to death." (25)

The regiment took off at 0600, passing its CP exactly on the minute. (26) Battery B of the 81st AB AA Bn--seven 57mm guns--moved out behind 1st Battalion. (27) The Division Reconnaissance Troop, which had been attached to 501st, started through the town ahead of Bottomly's men. (28) The observers and the liaison party

from the artillery moved out with the lead infantry company. The artillery battalion remained in the bivouac area two miles west of Bastogne waiting for the infantry to find the enemy.(29)

Ewell went forward at 0700. The light was just beginning to break. Already, he felt vaguely familiar with the terrain and the first incident strengthened his confidence. At the first intersection past the town, he found 1st Bn proceeding down the wrong road--toward Marvie. He saw, without referring to the map, that they were misled, and he recalled them and got them pointed toward Longvilly. The Rcn Plat, having proceeded farthest along the wrong road, thus got behind the battalion column, and raced to catch up.(30)

The column passed on down the road which follows the line of the creek toward Neffe. To their left the hills rose evenly from the edge of the right-of-way--fairly easy slopes up which an infantryman might run without undue exertion. Ahead, they could see very little. The road dipped and turned around the hill facings of the

Map No 2

little valley and the morning fog lay so thick that the visibility toward the south, where the land opens up beyond the line of the creek, was limited to 500 yards.(31)

First Battalion had been on the march for a little more than two hours, and the advance party was being passed through by the Rcn Plat, when the body was fired on by a machine gun stationed along the road and just short of Neffe. The first burst of fire did no damage but the battalion hit the dirt. They had need to, for they were looking straight down the groove toward the enemy position; for the last 700 yards the road runs straight and almost level into Neffe. To right of the road, the ground fell off sharply to the creek. To the left were the gently sloping hills. Bottomly deployed his men that way. Ewell told him to go ahead and develop his situation. Shells began whipping along the road and Bottomly sent word back to Ewell that he thought he was being opposed by two tanks and two platoons of infantry. Ewell took himself off, leaving Bottomly to direct his own fight. He had already tasted the shell fire

Illustration No 10

and he didn't want to tempt it, unnecessarily. Back beyond the road's first turning, about 1000 yards from Bottomly's skirmish line, there was a pocket in the hillside to left of the road where a stone house fitted snugly. Ewell set up his CP there.(32)

It soon became clear to him that 1st Bn would not be able to reduce the roadblock because of the German tanks; they were firing from a defilade close into the hillside where the road runs down to Neffe from Bizory. Bottomly couldn't bring the 57mms to bear because of the straightness of the Neffe-Bastogne road over the last half mile. About 1000, being convinced that 1st Bn was stopped, Ewell decided to bring the rest of the regiment out of Bastogne. But it was easier said than done. The VIII Corps was rushing the evacuation of its last units and their troops were streaming through town across the regiment's line of march. Second Battalion fought its way through this traffic during the next hour and Ewell ordered them on to an assembly area on the reverse of the gently sloping ridge north of Bottomly's position(575500). He

figured that he would put them out to the left closed up so that they could be deployed as the occasion arose.(33)

Lt Col Nelson, CO of the 907th G1 FA Bn, and Capt Gerald J McGlone, CO of Btry B, had gone forward to Ewell the minute the radio flashed word that 1st Bn had met fire at Neffe. McGlone got his battery into position 500 yards northeast of Bastogne on the left of the Longvilly road, and opened fire as soon as he was in position, which was only a few minutes after 1000. The atmosphere was still thick with fog and the battery was working under several other handicaps--its radios had never been tested and five of its guns had never been fired. But they spoke now from a distance of only 1000 yards behind Bottomly's skirmish line. Having weighed the risk that the enemy might flow on around Ewell's narrow front--and accepted it--Nelson decided that one battery was enough in that particular position. He put Btry A, under Capt Lowell B Bigelow, into the action from a position near the Battalion CP, 1000 yards west of Bastogne. Luck rode with him. The defilade

where he had placed Btry B on the spur of the moment was so well chosen that the guns were to work there for almost a month without receiving one round of counterbattery fire.(34)

This day, however, the batteries had no need to worry about anything coming in on them. The only heavy support for the German attack was from their tanks and it was all close-up fire directed against Ewell's line. The American artillery fire was turned mainly against the tanks and the small groups of German infantry: there were many such targets.(35)

Ewell sized up his situation. In 1st Bn, Cos B and C were in skirmish line, while Co A was collected in reserve. Bottomly had deployed most of his strength to the north of the highway but he had managed to find room for one platoon in the ground south of the creek and the rail line. The battalion had put two mortars into operation almost immediately and their fire was shaking down the houses around the enemy road-block in Neffe.(36)

But an attempt to get 1st Bn's left flank

forward had failed. From Neffe, the north road climbs gradually through a shallow draw to the small farming community of Bizory. The country hereabouts is absolutely barren grazing land except for the small but thick tree plantations and clusters of farm houses which appear as villages on the map. The dominant terrain features are the long and quite regular ridges which run generally in a north-south line. These hills are gently undulating and the hill-sides are quite smooth. From the tops of the commanding ridges one may see great distances on a clear day. The reverse slopes are smooth and are usually accessible from either end of the hill, making them highly useful to artillery and armor. The roads are close enough together that vehicles may move to the ridges from either direction. When the country is covered with snow, nothing obtrudes on the landscape except the small black patches of forest. The ridges fall away in gently sloping draws which provide clear fields of fire to the flank and enable an easy coverage of the main lines of communication.(37) The road from Neffe to Bizory rises gradually

Illustration No 11

for a distance, providing a perfect slot for fire from the low ground around Neffe. Bottomly had made one pass in this direction and shells from the tanks had fairly blistered the little valley.(38)

Ewell decided that as long as the enemy tanks were in Neffe, 1st Bn couldn't move in any direction. He ordered 2d Bn to seize Bizory.

That hamlet is in the same draw up which the tanks had shot at Bottomly's men, but the ground flattens out at Bizory so that the place can't be seen from Neffe. This detail, however, Ewell couldn't see from the rear, but he was curious to find out about it. The map told him that the ridge adjacent to Bizory was the high ground and would be of use to him. He wanted to see if the enemy force east of there was holding a continuous position and he sent 2d Bn forward to find out.(40)

His decision, so casually made, probably contributed as much to the salvation of Bastogne as anything that happened during the first few critical days. Ewell was still strongly of the opinion that he was being opposed by only a minor roadblock.(41) But when he determined to extend

and sweep forward, he made it a certainty that the oncoming Germans would suddenly collide with Americans who were attacking along a broad front. These were the things they least expected. Until that time they had been meeting small or disorganized units, which they quickly encircled and overcame.(42)

The shock discovery threw them off stride. They recoiled, hesitated and lost priceless, unreclaimable hours and opportunity because of their own confusion. In that action, a few platoons hardened the fate of armies. Ewell thought of none of these things as he ordered the 2d Bn to seize Bizory. He reflected on them later in his CP in the Bastogne Nunnery which the German artillery had made one of the best-ventilated buildings in Belgium.(43)

V. EAST OF BASTOGNE

The 3d Bn of the 501st Regt had become caught in the traffic snarl west of Bastogne and was at a standstill. Ewell checked on them at 1200 and found that they had moved scarcely at all. After trying to get out of town, the battalion had backtracked, only to find that the auxiliary routes were likewise clogged with outgoing troops.(1) Yet even the delay had its benefits. Some of the infantrymen lacked helmets, rifles and ammunition. They begged them from the armored troops of CCB who were in town, and in the interval the battalion became better equipped.(2) Ewell ordered Lt Col George M Griswold, commander of 3d Bn, to march the battalion to Mont, a little hamlet lying south of the Neffe road. It seemed like the best opportunity to get the battalion out of Bastogne. However, Ewell directed that one of Griswold's companies be sent down the Wiltz road to cover the battalion's right flank. Griswold

Illustration No 12

was told to send the company to the bend in the road lying directly east of the village of Marvie. Ewell planned to send the 3d Bn against Neffe from the southwest after it had reached Mont, but he issued no orders to the effect at the time. He followed his usual plan of giving his subordinate commanders only a limited objective.(3)

At 1203 the 2d Bn took Bizory without opposition except for unobserved fire from the tanks in Neffe. Still convinced that the Neffe roadblock was the only immediate threat to his front, Ewell ordered 2d Bn to advance and seize Mageret. By this move he figured he would box the tanks and could then proceed against them from either front or rear according to the advantages of the ground. But he specified that Maj Sammie N Homan, commander of 2d Bn, send one company to seize the patch of woods ~~(602602)~~ directly north of Mageret. This wood is a small plantation of very tall spruces. Ewell saw that the long ridge running across to the spruces dominated Mageret in the valley. It seemed to him that putting one company there

might cover the approach to Mageret.(4)

Homan started out by road from Bizory to Mageret, but his route march ended quickly. At the crest of Hill 510 he collided with German infantry in dug-in positions: they were the Rcn Plat of the 26 Volksgrenadier Division. Homan took the first jolt almost without loss; not so, the enemy. Their line was moving forward from the foxholes and coming over the hill when the battalion mortars and Nelson's artillery caught them with full blast. The paratroops saw a number of the enemy fall before the survivors ran back. Deploying the rest of the battalion, Homan sent Co F to the left to seize the coveted wood. When this extension was completed he reported to Ewell by radio that his hands were full and he was now engaged along his entire front. "For the time being," he said, "I cannot think of taking Mageret."(5)

Third Battalion reached Mont and found one of the engineer roadblocks outposting that point but the further assignment of the main body of the battalion was compromised by the nature of the ground between Mont and Neffe. The two

Map No 3

villages are little more than a mile apart and from Neffe one may look right down the little valley and see Mont clearly. The tanks of Panzer Lehr which were at Neffe(6) were shipping a few shells toward Griswold's infantry. It seemed possible that a small party might work its way toward Neffe but the ground was much too naked for the exposure of any large force. Griswold stopped where he was.

Company I, which had drawn the assignment on the extreme right flank, was instructed to prowl the three large woods west and northwest of the village of Wardin. At 1330 Co I reported that it had checked the three woods and had found no enemy. Ewell then told Co I to advance to Wardin and make contact with a friendly armored roadblock which was supposed to be there. Ewell had not been told officially of the existence of this force but had heard of it quite casually from someone walking down the road.(7) The company went on to the contact which Ewell had ordered, but for all practical effect, the stranger who had mentioned that there were friends at hand might just as well have left his words unsaid.

This was Team O'Hara of CCB (10th Armd Div) which on the night of 18 December had taken up position on the high ground south of Wardin (605555) just short of the woods. The night had been quiet except for the stragglers coming through--mostly rear echelon people from 28th Div whose idea about the enemy situation was wildly confused. The morning opened with fog. About 1000 the trickle of stragglers failed altogether. This worried the force as they figured it must mean that the enemy was coming on. They put out a reconnaissance screen to the east which moved slowly along the road to Bras. At 1140 they engaged and destroyed a Volkswagen on the Wiltz-Bastogne highway. Just as they opened fire they saw the head of the enemy column break through the fog a few hundred yards away--two Mark IVs and a personnel carrier. The platoon had nothing with which to fight armor and so it cleared out rapidly, reporting its findings by radio. As a result of the message, unobserved fire was put on Bras by the 420th Armd FA Battalion. At about the same time Capt Edward A Carrigo, Team S-2, and 1st Lt John D Devereaux, commanding B of the 54th, were entering Wardin from the

southwest and finding it unhealthy. The town was wrapped in fog; they could scarcely see anything at 50-yard range but they prowled on through the town and just as they got beyond it a projectile of antitank size hit the front bumper of the jeep. Nothing was hurt, but the two officers increased their speed and reported that there were people moving into Warden who were quite unfriendly. (8)

By noon the visibility lengthened to 800 yards. 2d Lt Theodore R Hamer, observer for the 420th, moved forward to the top of a small hill (609555). There were five tanks of Team O'Hara on the crest when he got there. Before he had a chance to observe for fire, his own tank was hit twice from the left by a high velocity gun. Hamer and three other crew members were wounded. One man was incinerated inside the tank. A second medium tank was hit in the turret by a shell which killed the gunner. The driver backed the tank down the hill wildly, not stopping until the vehicle became bogged; the tank could not be salvaged and later had to be destroyed. The other tanks cleared away from the hill as

Map No 4

rapidly as they could. Direct fire artillery began to hit the force's main position from north across the valley. On the road ahead, the team had hastily set up a mine field. At 1300 a few Germans jumped from a Volkswagen and tried to remove the mines. From only 200 yards away to the west, five of the infantry halftracks and five medium tanks opened fire on the party. But they jumped in their car and made a clean getaway. Shortly after, an outpost at the south of the position saw another enemy group moving through woods northeast toward Wardin. One of the medium tanks moved up and put them under fire.(9)

These were the things which had happened prior to the time when Team O'Hara saw men coming toward them from the woods at their rear. They were in patrol formation and wore an unfamiliar green uniform, which looked tight around the legs. The tankers were just about to fire and then someone in the approaching party yelled. They were the point of Co I, 501st Infantry. Their green jump suits had almost been their undoing; the main body of the company was right

behind them in the woods. They were on their way to Wardin. It was good news to the tankers. The first infantry support had arrived and they could now withdraw their own patrol which had been reaching out toward the town. Some fateful minutes passed and nothing was done to unify the action. With the enemy crowding in on them, the forces acted like two ships passing in the night. The paratroopers went on. Two medium tanks were placed so as to cover the exits from Wardin. That was all.(10)

Lt Col James O'Hara, commanding 54th Armd Inf Bn, 10th Armd Div, had thought that the enemy would push west on the Wiltz-Bastogne highway. But he was wrong about it. They bypassed his group--except for a few who squeezed a little too far over to the west and got themselves killed for their pains--and went on to Wardin, moving along a deep gully where O'Hara's tanks couldn't bring their fire to bear. The tankers could see the German infantry infiltrating by twos and threes, moving northwest toward the town, until a hundred or more had passed. They asked that artillery be put on the gully

but the artillery was occupied with the defense of Noville. Then the enemy began to fret O'Hara's immediate front again: one group came close enough to fire at a tank with a rocket which fell five yards short. Halftracks sprayed the area with machine gun fire and the tanks pounded away with their 75mms. Thus preoccupied, Team O'Hara paid no mind to Wardin. They knew there was fighting going on but the situation was "obscure." (11)

At 1415, Ewell heard that Co I was being fired on in Wardin. The reports trickling in during the next few minutes indicated that the company was doing pretty well. Armor was now opposing them, but they had already knocked out two tanks and were pushing the enemy infantry from town. By 1600, Ewell was pretty content with his general situation. He had three battalions approximately abreast; he was in contact all along his front and there was a friendly roadblock--Team O'Hara--on his extreme right flank. But he felt that he had gone as far as he could with his offensive action and that such strength was now being committed

against him that he could no longer think about his specific mission. He therefore ordered the battalions to make plans to break contact at dark and draw back to defend a general line along the high ground to the west of Bizory-Neffe and in any approximate extension of this line to the southward of the creek. At Division Headquarters, McAuliffe and Kinnard looked over his plan and approved it.(12)

As he was walking back through Bastogne he met a sergeant from Co I who said to him, "Have you heard about Company I? We've been wiped out." Ewell got to his radio; he didn't believe the sergeant, but the story was nearer right than he thought. Company I had lost 45 men and 4 officers at Wardin and the survivors had scattered so badly that it was no longer possible to form even a platoon. The news was a shock. Upon hearing that Co I was becoming involved in Wardin, Ewell had ordered it to disengage and withdraw; however, before the company could comply, it had come under the full shock of an attack by seven tanks and one battalion from 901 Regiment of Panzer Lehr.

The survivors got out as best they could.(13)

The incident simply strengthened Ewell's conviction that he must abandon all offensive intention and tighten up his position. O'Hara had reached the same conclusion and for much the same reason. Four of the walking wounded who had gotten out of Warden had come into his lines and told him the news. He saw himself in an exposed position with no one on his right, an aggressive enemy on his left and pressure along his front, and he asked CCB for permission to withdraw.

By radio he received his reply, "Contact friends on your left, hold what you have." That showed that Headquarters still didn't understand the situation. So he sent his S-3, Capt George A Renaux, to Bastogne to explain what he couldn't put over the air, and then he took himself to the rear to reconnoiter a better position. At 1715 he was ordered to withdraw to the high ground north of Marvie--the same place he had already chosen as the best defensive line in the area. The Hq Co, heavy weapons and

Map No 5

engineers were first to start digging into the new slope; when they were in place, the rest of the force came along, except for four medium tanks and one platoon of infantry which covered the withdrawal. Throughout the whole move, the 420th put a heavy covering fire into the ground where the enemy had been seen during the day. But not a shot was fired in return.(14)

Because of the loss of Co I and the feeling that the enemy was building up on his right, Ewell asked Division to attach one battalion to his regiment for a right flank and reserve. He was given 1st Bn of 327th GII Inf under Lt Col Hartford F Salee. They were put in behind Ewell's 3d Bn which put them next to Team O'Hara.(15)

Between 1700 and 1800, 501st fell back to the new defensive line. Estimating his gains and losses, Ewell didn't give the regiment too much credit. He thought that Co I had probably killed some Germans at Wardin, but since the enemy still held the town, he couldn't be sure. His impression was that the execution done by

his own right and center had not been very good.

~~The honors of the day belonged to the artillery.~~

(16) Ewell said, "Any actual killing of the enemy that day was due to the artillery." (16)

Capt Ryerson's force, having spent the day hoping that the infantry would get up to them, clung to three houses in the northwest edge of Mageret after dark. The enemy shot up flares and blazed away at Ryerson's vehicles with AT guns; three of them were destroyed. Their infantry then came on but was driven back by the fire of the 420th Battalion.

At 0030, CCB sent orders for Ryerson to withdraw before dawn, and to make contact with Ewell at Bizory. One line in the special instructions said, "The lead vehicle will inform outpost line of number of vehicles in his column to insure that no Germans follow column into our lines."

Ryerson got ready to move his wounded to a point beyond the crest of the first hill--the first step on the way out. (17)

Illustration No 13

VI. HOLDING THE CHATEAU

Col Cherry had been sitting on the hot seat. Having failed to get to his forward elements the night of 18 December, he went to his CP, which was set up in the chateau 300 yards south of Neffe. A signal company from VIII Corps which had hastily pulled out of this building had scribbled signs on the walls saying, "We'll be back--The Yanks." One of Cherry's men read it and snorted, "We'll be back--Hell! We're here to stay."(1)

At 0600 on 19 December--just as Ewell's men were passing the IP--Cherry's Rcn Plat of the 3d Tk Bn, which was outposting the road junction at Neffe, was hit by enemy tanks and infantry from the east. The platoon knocked out one tank with a bazooka but the enemy kept coming; and after taking some losses, the line broke back under a storm of rifle, machine gun and direct artillery fire. Most of the outpost fell back along the Bastogne road up which Bottomly's

men were coming, but three of them were able to get through to Cherry in the chateau; they carried the word that the enemy had come to Neffe with two tanks and two infantry platoons.(2)

At 1000, while Ewell was committing his 2d Bn, Cherry saw 4 more German tanks--one, a Tiger Royal--an armored car and 97 more infantrymen enter Neffe from the direction of Mageret. Right after that, they hit him, and they spent the rest of that day trying to crush him with their left while poking at Ewell with their right. The chateau was stoutly built and this somewhat compensated for Cherry's depleted numbers. He had to see it through with his headquarters personnel who moved from one side of the building to another as the attack shifted. The automatic weapons had been taken from the vehicles and placed in the windows and at other points where they could cover the chateau yard and walls. From three sides, the enemy infantry pressed in against the building; the west side of the chateau was raked with 20mm and machine gun fire. (3) But though some died within five yards of the walls, not one German got into the chateau.

There was only one sombre note in the defense. A depleted platoon of engineers which had arrived from the direction of Mont early in the morning was ordered to the south of the chateau at the height of the action. The enemy was moving through woods toward the high ground in that direction. The engineers started on their mission but kept on over the hill and Team Cherry never saw them again.(4)

Some time around midafternoon a platoon from Ewell's 3d Bn in Mont worked its way carefully forward, taking advantage of the cover by the forest patches and the rise and fall of the ground, and entered the chateau.(5) It turned out this way, that whereas the fire of the German tanks had kept Griswold from closing on Neffe, his infantry fire had compelled the Germans to release their tight hold on the chateau. Too, the enemy must have felt mounting concern for what was occurring on their right. The platoon had come as reinforcements --to help Cherry hold the fort. But by that time the roof was blazing over his head and his men were being smoked out by a fire lighted by

the enemy's HE shell.(6) He waited until the approach of dark and then he led all hands out of Neffe and back to the infantry lines at Mont. Before leaving, he sent CCB this message, "We're not driven out....we were burned out. We're not withdrawing....we are moving."(7)

VII. TEAM DESOBRY AT NOVILLE

The contemporary accounts which attempted to apportion the credit for the saving of Bastogne had much to say about the 101st Div and relatively little about anyone else. It was irony that a paratroop outfit which had done equally brilliant work in Normandy and Holland won world recognition for the first time and in so doing eclipsed the splendid help given by the other victors at Bastogne. It was the belief of the commanders at Bastogne that the 28th Div had absorbed much of the shock of the attack before the enemy reached their front on that first day and that the harrying of the German rear by the armored forces which had gone out the Longvilly road further lightened the burden to their men.(1) In those critical hours the armor out along the roads leading north and east was to the infantry in Bastogne like a football end throwing himself in the path of the interference so that the secondary defense can have a clean chance to get at the man with the ball.

Map No 6

One of the most desperately placed of these small armored forces was Team Desobry which assembled in the Noville area at 2300 on 18 December. The town of Noville is on relatively high ground. Yet it is commanded by two ridges from about 800 yards, one in the south-east and the other running from north to north-west. Because the team arrived in the darkness, full advantage of the natural defenses of the area could not be taken immediately. Maj William R Desobry (CO, 21st Armd Inf Bn, 10th Armd Div) set up a perimeter defense of the town under Capt Gordon Geiger of Headquarters Company. Three outposts, each consisting of a depleted platoon of infantry and a section of medium tanks, were sent forward. One went east on the Bourcy road, one went northeast on the Houffalize road and the third set up its roadblock at some crosstrails on the road to Vaux. This outpost line was about 800 yards from the main body. The engineers were instructed to install minefields in support of the roadblocks but found it impossible to comply with the order because of the flow of

American stragglers back over these same roads. They came on all through the night--men from scattered engineer units, from CCR of the 9th Armd Div and from the 28th Division. Roberts had told Desobry to draft into his organization any men he could use. Every vehicle which came down the road was halted and searched for infantry soldiers. At the end of the search Desobry had collected many individual riflemen but only one organized group--an officer and 14 men from CCR. This group filled the gap in Desobry's ranks and maintained itself courageously during the next few days, but it was Desobry's experience that the strays were little use to him and took to the cellars when the action became warm.

At 0430 the flow of stragglers abruptly ceased and Desobry's men grew tense, anticipating an enemy attack. At 0530 a group of halftracks could be heard and dimly seen approaching the block on the Bourcy road. In the darkness the outpost could not tell whether they were friend or enemy. The front sentry yelled "Halt!" four times. The first vehicle

pulled to a grinding halt within a few yards of him. Someone in the halftrack yelled something in German. From a bank on the right of the road, Desobry's men showered the halftrack with hand grenades. Several exploded as they landed in the vehicle. There was loud screaming as some of the Germans jumped or fell from the halftrack and lay in the road. The rest of the column quickly unloaded and deployed in the ditches along the road. There ensued a 20-minute close-up fight with grenades and automatic weapons and although the roadblock crew was greatly outnumbered, the bullet fire did them no hurt because of the protection of the embankment. S Sgt Leon D Gantt decided that too many potato mashers were coming into the position and ordered his men to withdraw about 100 yards. Thereon the Germans turned their halftrack around and ran for safety; they were apparently a reconnaissance element and had completed their mission. During the action the two tanks had done nothing although they were within 100 yards of the German column. Sgt Gantt went to 2d Lt Allen L Johnson and

asked him why. Johnson replied that he wasn't sure what to do. He then fired a couple of Parthian shots down the road but the enemy had already disappeared into the fog and darkness. At dawn the outpost fell back on Noville according to instructions.

Twenty minutes after the fighting had died on the Bourcy road three tanks approached the outpost on the Houffalize road. The sound of their motors seemed familiar to S Sgt Major I Jones who was out by himself 75 yards in front of the roadblock. He thought they were American. When the tanks were 75 yards away Jones yelled, "Halt!" and fired a quick burst with his BAR over the turret of the lead tank. It stopped 50 yards from him. He heard the occupants conversing in English. Then fire from the tank's .50 cal broke around Jones' foxhole in the sloping bank on the side of the road. He flattened quickly and the fire missed his back by inches. The men at the roadblock fired on the tanks. Suddenly a cry of, "Cease fire, they're friendly troops!" was heard. Jones was not certain whether the cry came from the force in

front or behind him. The small-arms fire ceased. But the two medium tanks which were supporting the roadblock, and were standing about 100 yards from this new armor, were less sanguine. The tank on the right side of the road fired his 75mm; the first round hit the bank 15 yards from Jones and almost blew him out of the hole. The foremost tank confronting Jones fired six quick rounds in reply. The first round knocked out the American tank on the right. The second round knocked out his companion. The succeeding rounds also scored direct hits. Yet none of the tankers were killed though several were hard hit. One man had his right leg blown off and his left badly mangled. Pvt John J Garry, an infantryman, moved over to the ditch to help the wounded tankers and was hit in the shoulder by a shell fragment.

Jones and the other men in the advanced positions were pinned to their foxholes by the grazing fire from the enemy guns. The American halftracks were in line behind the Shermans. The position of the ruined armor not only blocked the enemy from coming down the road

gave the halftracks partial cover so that they could turn their machine guns against the enemy column. A bazooka team tried to get forward but couldn't find an avenue by which they could bring the rockets to bear. Under these conditions of deadlock the two forces continued to slug it out toe-to-toe while the fog swirled around them and at last closed in so thick that they could scarcely see the muzzle flashes of the guns. At 0730 the platoon disengaged and withdrew to Noville, acting on the orders given by Desobry the night before. They had held to the last minute and so complied with the order, but they were about through in any case, as enemy infantry was now coming up around the flank. The roadblock on the Vaux road was not attacked. But while that party likewise was withdrawing at 0730 they heard the enemy coming down from the north.

During the night Capt Geiger had set up roadblocks on all roads entering Noville and had placed a thin screen of infantry in a circle just beyond the buildings. The position was particularly weak on the south and west--the

sides which the enemy seemed least likely to approach. One tank was posted on the road leading to Bastogne and two were put on the other main exits from the town. In addition, one 57mm gun and a 75mm assault gun were placed to cover each of the roads which had been outposted during the night. The survivors of the two opening skirmishes had just drawn back within this defensive circle when 88 fire from the northward ripped out of the fog which by this time completely enveloped the town. From Noville's main street the north-running road is straight for miles: the defenders figured that German tanks were sitting out on the road somewhere and firing right down the slot. The fire was very heavy for half an hour. It destroyed three halftracks and a jeep and blew the machine gun from an M8 car. But miraculously, no one was hurt. At 0830 two Tiger tanks nosed out of the fog and stopped within 20 yards of the machine gun positions covering the northern sector. The 57mm gun to right of the road was within 30 yards of the tanks. A medium tank with a 75mm gun was looking straight at them. The machine gunners alongside the road

picked up their bazookas. All fired at the same time and the two Tiger tanks became just so much wrecked metal; later, all hands claimed credit for the kill. A few Germans jumped out of the tanks and started to flee. Machine gunners and riflemen in the outposts cut loose on them. But they could not be sure whether the fire found the targets because the fog swallowed the running men within 30 yards. Some German infantry had come along behind the tanks and Desobry's men had caught only a glimpse of their figures. But they turned back the moment the skirmish opened. About 0930 the enemy began to press against the west sector with a series of small probing actions which lasted until 1030. The officer in charge of this ground, 2d Lt Eugene E Todd, was new to action and he felt that he was sustaining the weight of a major attack by the whole German Army. When he asked Capt Geiger for permission to withdraw, Geiger replied, "Hell, hold your ground and fight." He did.

The real thing started at 1030. The defenders had heard the rumblings of tanks and the pattering of smaller vehicles out in the

fog as if a tremendous build-up were going on. Quite suddenly the fog lifted like a curtain going up and revealing the stage. The countryside was filled with tanks. From the second story of his CP in the Noville schoolhouse, Capt Omar R Billett, (CO of Co B, 20th Armd Inf Bn, 10th Armd Div) saw at a glance more than thirty tanks. Others saw as many more from different points of vantage. In an extended skirmish line along the ridge short of Vaux were 14 tanks; Desobry's men looked at this scene and knew that they were standing in the road of an entire Panzer division. At that moment they might well have uttered the words of Roland, "Great are the hosts of these strange people," but instead they picked up their arms. The leading enemy formations were 1000 yards away. The distance made no difference even to the men working the .50 cal machine guns: they fired with what they had. When 800 yards out, the 14 tanks on the ridge halted and shelled the town. Other tanks were swinging around the right flank but on the left the enemy armor was already within 200 yards of the American position when the curtain went up.

The events of the next hour were shaped by the flashes of the heavy guns and the vagaries of the ever-shifting fog. The guns rolled in measure according to a visibility which came and went in the passage of only a few seconds. But it was never an infantryman's battle. Little knots of men on foot were upcoming behind the German tanks, and the 420th's batteries hammered at these forces; it is doubtful if the American artillery stopped a single tank. About the time that the enemy array became fully revealed, a platoon from the 609th TD Bn rolled into Noville, and added the gunpower of its four TDs to the guns already engaging. The sudden, sharp focus given the line of Mark IVs and Mark Vs on the ridge line made them like ducks in a shooting gallery. Nine were hit straightaway, three of them exploding in flames. One came charging down the highway and was turned into a flaming wreck 500 yards out. Two tanks which had been in the foreground, ahead of the ridge, also charged the town at a speed which wrought momentary confusion in Desobry's CP. At 30 yards range, a 105mm assault gun fired its first round, stopping one tank, but

not disabling its gun. The German fired but missed, then tried to withdraw; the assault gun finished him off with a quick round. The other

German had been stopped by one of Desobry's mediums at range 75 yards. Looking in the direction from which they had come, observers in the taller buildings of Noville could see four more tanks laying in a draw--almost concealed. The ground cover was good enough that the Noville guns couldn't get at them--until one tank made the mistake of pulling out onto the road. It was a shining mark, 300 yards away; a TD fired and the tank exploded in a blaze. The fog swirled back, screening the draw, and the other three tanks ran. To east of town, the run down the flank by the enemy armor ended with the destruction of three of the tanks. German infantry had appeared on that side in fairly large numbers but when the lifting of the fog exposed them, they turned and ran, and bullet fire from Noville thinned their ranks while they were running. In Noville, the defending infantry company had lost 13 wounded, 4 vehicles had been wrecked and one TD smashed--mainly from indirect artillery fire which had harassed

the town while the tanks came on.(2)

By 1130 the fight had died, though intermittent shelling continued to worry the garrison.(3)

In Bastogne, McAuliffe got the news at the crisis of the first attack and decided that Team

Desobry needed help.(4) At 1050 he ordered

1st Bn of 506th Regt, under Lt Col James L

LaPrade, to reinforce Noville, putting 2d and

3d Bns in division reserve just north of Bastogne

on the Noville road.(5) At the same time, he

detached 1st Bn from Rgt and put it under Div-

ision control.(6) LaPrade and his staff got up

to Desobry at 1130 and told him the battalion

was on the road.(7) It was not quite clear

to either of the local commanders whether there

had been an attachment of one force to the

other but they decided that for the time being

they would keep it a "mutual affair."(8)

LaPrade and his command had just one 1:100,000

map to serve them for the forthcoming operation.

(9)

The commanders agreed that the next order of business was to attack due north and seize the high ground which the enemy had tried to

use as a springboard during the morning. Infantry and armor would jump off together at 1400. However, LaPrade's battalion didn't arrive until 1330 and couldn't make ready that soon; the jumpoff was postponed until 1430, since meanwhile there was a small matter of supply to be finally adjusted.(10)

The 506th had left Mourmelon in such a hurry that many of the men did not have helmets and others were short of weapons and ammunition. LaPrade told Desobry about his embarrassment and the armored force's S-4, 2d Lt George C Rice, was sent packing to Foy to bring up ammunition. Enroute, he met the upcoming battalion and asked for their supply officer; but the latter was in Bastogne beating the woods for weapons and ammunition. So Rice asked the company officers what they needed most, and found that rocket launchers, mortars and all types of ammunition were the critical shortages. He then dashed on to Foy and loaded the jeep with cases of hand grenades and M1 ammunition. The jeep was turned around and the stuff was passed out to the paratroopers as they marched.

On his next shuttle, Rice got back to the moving battalion with a jeep and a truck overloaded with weapons and ammunition. The materiel was put alongside the road in five separate piles so that the men could pick up the things they needed as they went by. He made one more trip and caught the head of the column just before it reached the limits of Noville. A load of 81mm mortar ammunition came into town after the battalion got there.(11)

These details caused a slight delay in getting the battle under way again.