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DEFENSIVE ACTION IN INHABITED LOCALITIES

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PREFACE

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During my service with the United States Army in Berlin, Germany, I had frequent occasion to participate in theoretical exercises and actual operational planning involving the defense of an inhabited locality. A fairly wide range of assignments at infantry platoon, company, battalion, regimental, and Allied Command level afforded me an opportunity to evaluate a variety of approaches to the problems of defending built-up areas. While this service did not qualify me as an expert, it did reveal to me a lack of specific doctrine for guiding commanders, especially above platoon level. At the same time, it suggested that a regrettable rigidity exists in the defensive concepts of many American officers. Humbly, but earnestly, I hope to suggest here some partial remedies for these weaknesses.

Throughout this paper, terms such as village, town, populated place, inhabited locality, and the like, are used interchangeablely. All are intended to fall within the official definition of a built-up area: "any group of buildings designed for habitation or commercial purposes...." (19:52) The general ideas presented are thought to apply regardless of the size of the locality.

The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author -- not necessarily that of The Infantry School or the Department of the Army.

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INTRODUCTION

World War II contained hundreds of examples of the defense of inhabited localities, ranging in size from tiny villages to great cities. While these defenses did not always succeed, they did almost always require the attacker to accept severe losses. The German and Russian armies, in particular, made considerable use of populated places as defensive bastions. American experience, on the other hand, contains few instances of determined defensive action in towns during World War II or the Korean War.

Our lack of extensive experience is paralleled by a lack of training in this type of fighting. (See Annex A) Thus we are prone to acknowledge in theory the tremendous defensive strength of built-up areas, but fail to utilize this advantage when we must defend. (19:53) Field manuals list the unique considerations in city fighting, yet do not modify our doctrine sufficiently to conform to these conditions. (19:53; 20:153) While classifying combat in cities as a special operation, we apparently feel that this specialty requires little, if any, variance from normal operational techniques. The experience of World War II suggests that such is not the case.

This monograph, therefore, concerns itself with three areas in which modification or increased emphasis is required. These areas are: the general choice of defensive terrain, the utilization of the advantages of built-up areas, and the conduct of the defense in towns. Our purpose is to investigate existing doctrine, to amend and amplify it as suggested by the study of historical examples, and finally to convince the infantryman that these are things he needs to know and act upon. For infantry has the predominant role in city fighting. (34:100) The tenacity and skill of infantrymen and their leaders decide the issue.

Much is left out of this paper. We have avoided mention, for instance, of individual town-fighting techniques or preparation of a house for defense. On these matters, a wealth of sound literature exists. No attempt has been made to solve high-level problems, such as linear versus circular versus zone defensive organization in major cities. We have confined our thinking, insofar as possible, to general problems affecting any level of infantry organization. Historical instances are confined to battalion-size operations.

Our investigation is limited geographically, also. Only actions in Europe are studied. A cursory look at operations in the Pacific Theater suggests, however, that the conclusions drawn are applicable there, when physical characteristics of the towns approach European standards. (27:28)

DISCUSSION

The first concern of a commander assigned a defensive mission is to select the general area in which he will establish his defense. He seeks to reinforce his combat capability by defending terrain which has inherent strength and tactical importance. Built-up areas are frequently terrain of this sort. Towns straddle roads which the enemy needs; they serve as obstacles to his fast, free movement; they canalize and disorganize his forces; they furnish cover and concealment; they are important prizes psychologically and politically. This listing could be extended with other advantages equally as evident. But although they are evident, they are frequently forgotten. Too often the American commander, operating within a narrow field of tactical prejudices based on his experience and training, fails to use built-up areas to his advantage.

What we wish to suggest is that there are even instances when the defensive strength of a town, setting aside other geographical, political, or strategic considerations, may of itself warrant a defense of that locality. The British felt this way as they hastened to prepare for a German invasion of the British Isles. They condluded that a determined defense of every country village would disorganize, divide, and eventually slow to a halt any German blitzkrieg that sought to roll over England. They reasoned that "the awe-inspiring tank loses all its magic in the street and becomes just a lumbering iron contraption awaiting final preparation for a salvage dump." (50:7) This general view seems to have been confirmed on the battlefields of Russia, where a strategic advantage was won by Russian defense of every inhabited place. (37:76; 41:54)

We are not implying that populated areas should be defended in all cases. But we do emphasize the defensive strength of towns and their advantages to a weak defender, in the hope that commanders will not by habit

adopt field positions when a village could be held more easily.

The second area of consideration concerns the full utilization of the advantages of the built-up area. Specifically, this implies basing the organization of the defense on the use of houses. It does not mean defending only from houses. But houses must be prepared as bases for operations, as command and administrative locations, as shelters against fire, and ultimately for use as strongpoints. Initial positions may well be beyond the edge of town, but plans and physical preparation must be made for protracted defense inside the city itself. (14:93) Present American doctrine, that houses and basements may be used for administrative installations in village defense, does not go far enough. (17:354)

When the defender uses the buildings, he gains several advantages. He gets protection from enemy fire and shelter from the elements. With a small force in the concealment of a town, he deceives the attacker concerning his strength; the enemy must clear each house because it might be occupied. Solid buildings can be turned into pillboxes, and if shelling causes rubble, it improves strength and camouflage and reduces the fire hazard at the strongpoint. The houses serve as antipersonnel and antitank obstacles, the value of which is increased by rubble, mines, and the like piled between them. Use of the structures lends the three-dimensional quality to city fighting, and this can be turned to the defender's advantage in many ways. Colonel General Chuikov, commander of the Soviet Sixty-second Army that held Stalingrad, sums it up succinctly: "The defense of cities is based on the defense of houses and other structures." (7:88)

We have seen the value of establishing a defense in town and determined that that defense should be organized so as to use the available structures or what remains of them. Our third topic for consideration is the conduct of the defense. The key here, as emphasized in the doctrines of foreign armies, is the counterattack.

Our present doctrine again falls short of providing adequate guidance.

It states that defense of a built-up area is comparable to any other defense, and the handling of counterattacks is routine. (19:59,72) The squads of front-line platoons are employed abreast. (16:147) The reserve platoon of a front-line company is envisioned as blocking by fire, since it "rarely" ejects the enemy by counterattack. (16:142; 19:74) Apparently we visualize a deliberate, strongly supported action by the reserve of a battalion or higher unit.

Contrasting with our view of routine counterattacks are the official positions of Russia, England, and Germany. The Red Army General Staff prescribes a strong mobile reserve which can be employed piecemeal or as a single force in the counterattack, and Chuikov emphasizes the effectiveness of rapid blows by small groups. (3:167; 8:58) "A mobile reserve must be maintained at all levels down to platoon", say the British. (46:150) German doctrine concurs, specifying that a reserve be held out for counterattack at platoon and higher level. (35:8) The history of street-fighting in Europe is replete with demonstrations of the soundness of these provisions for rapid counterattacks by small groups.

If directives and historical verification are not convincing enough, we can apply logic as a further test. First, rapid counterattacks seem necessary, since the attacker's aim is to seize and expand a foothold in the town. The defender must act quickly to eject any penetration before it can be reinforced. In view of communication problems inherent in towns, reserves of higher units probably would be unable to assemble and launch the counterblow with the speed and effectiveness of smaller local reserves. In the second place, such counterattacks are easy to make. The enemy will stop to reorganize in a house after its capture. His forces will concentrate in the seized building prior to continuing the attack. Then the strength of the counterattack force can be based on the size of the building, not the number of enemy troops in it. The building is a very desirable objective for such an attack, assaulting distance is short, and prepared routes through

other buildings shorten movement time and exposure to fire. German practice suggests that even when counterattacks are not employed, infiltrators can reenter houses which have been lost, but not sufficiently consolidated by the attacker. In one instance in Italy, German defenders reentered such houses as many as four times before being completely driven out. (26:3) So foreign tactics and logic seem to agree that, in town defense, counterattacks take on added significance and that reserves must be maintained at the lowest level to effect these attacks.

Having developed some tentative ideas in our three areas of consideration, we shall now analyze them in the light of combat experience. We wish to know whether the results of actual battle confirm the conclusions suggested by our discussion thus far.

THE DEFENSE OF SCHMIDT, GERMANY
BY THE 3d BATTALION, 112th INFANTRY REGIMENT
3-4 NOVEMBER 1944 (30:252-303)
(MAP A)

On 2 November 1944, the 28th Infantry Division attacked to seize Schmidt, Germany, a small crossroads town situated on high ground overlooking an important dam on the Roer River, a few miles west of the Siegfried Line. The 112th Infantry made the main attack for the division, and at 1430 the following day, the first elements of its 3d Battalion entered the town. Early darkness and a battalion order to shift to the defense halted mop-up operations before the town had been completely cleared. Sniper and machine gun fire still came from a group of buildings at the extreme southeast of town along the Hasenfeld Road.

The 3d Battalion organized a perimeter defense around the town. Company L, with a section of heavy machine guns attached, established its 3d Platoon astride the Hasenfeld Road to the southeast, and its 1st Platoon on the Harscheidt Road running northeast. The 2d Platoon was between them, facing east. To the south, Company K, with another section of attached machine guns, put its rifle platoons abreast to cover the Strauch Road and the open area between the Strauch and Hasenfeld Roads. The reserve company, Company

I, dug in on the north of town with two rifle platoons (the 1st Platoon was on guard duty at division headquarters) and a light machine gun section, one platoon, the 2d, extending Company L's left flank to the left rear, and the 3d extending Company K's right flank to the right rear. "Because of the all-around nature of the Schmidt defense, Company I was a reserve company in name only, and none of the three rifle companies had been able to hold out a support (reserve) platoon." (30:291)

Company M's 81-mm mortars were emplaced near a house on the Kommerscheidt Road. Nearby, facing northeast to assist the 2d Platoon of Company I, was the remaining heavy machine gun platoon. The battalion command post was located 300 yards from Schmidt in a pillbox along the Kommerscheidt Road.

For antitank defense, the battalion used 60 antitank mines that had been brought forward by weasel[1], placing the mines on the hard-surfaced roads leading in from Harscheidt, Hasenfeld, and Strauch. No camouflage was attempted, but rocket launchers and small arms covered the mines. Tanks and tank destroyers were prevented from assisting in the defense by the lack of a suitable road for moving forward from friendly positions on the northwest.

Thus, the 3d Battalion set its defenses. Its entry into Schmidt had been fairly easy; despite light shelling and some fire from snipers and the machine guns in uncleared houses in the southeast edge of town, the night was quiet. The mortarmen of Company M slept in a small building near their positions, some prisoners were put under guard in a cellar, but the combat positions were dug in around the edges of the town.

The German command, fearing the loss of the Roer dams, reacted violently to the American advance into their lines. A dawn counterattack on 4 November was ordered to negate the 112th Infantry's success at Schmidt. Just before sunrise the attack began. Enemy artillery fire from at least three directions moved back and forth through the town for more than 30 minutes. Shortly

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1. A full-tracked cargo-carrying vehicle, M29.

after 0730, Company I's 2d Platoon observed some 60 German infantrymen in the woods about 1,000 yards northeast of town. Artillery fire was requested, but somehow never was received. 10 or 15 enemy who moved into Zubendchen were dispersed with fire from the 81-mm mortars and from heavy machine guns with Company L's left flank. Company I's 2d Platoon repulsed another light attack from the northeast.

A heavier assault hit the right flank of Company L on the Hasenfeld Road. Supporting this attack was a machine gun at the base of one of the uncleared buildings in the southeastern edge of Schmidt. An American squad leader with several of his men crawled forward, attacked, and succeeded in silencing the gun. Germans, however, began infiltrating Company K's positions on the south. By now, attacks were coming from all sides of Schmidt except the north.

At 0850, American artillery finally began firing, engaging a tank concentration east of town. From that direction came an attack by five tanks and a battalion of infantry along the Hasenfeld Road. On the Harscheidt Road, a similar force moved from the northeast. Rocket launcher fire seemed ineffective against the tanks. Spotting the feeble rows of mines, the German armor skirted them and rolled in "among the buildings of the town and the foxholes of the defenders." (30:300)

The attack by a battalion against Company K in the south spilled over and hit the 3d Platoon, Company I. The company commander ordered his two platoons to withdraw from their open foxholes to the protection of the buildings. But Company K's defenses had already cracked. Americans were fleeing to the woods and fields in the north, west, and southwest, and the soldiers of Company I joined them. Company L had broken when tanks entered its line. In a few cases, leaders attempted orderly unit withdrawals, but hostile fire and confusion wrecked these attempts. A brief effort by the headquarters groups of Companies K and L to form a line in the center of Schmidt also failed. All semblance of order was gone; each little mob struggled back to friendly lines on its own, as best it could.

At about 1000, the battalion commander issued a token order to withdraw and closed his command post. The defense of Schmidt had failed.

The failure at Schmidt could be attributed to many causes: lack of artillery and air support; an incomplete knowledge of the situation at higher headquarters; the non-availability of tanks or antitank guns due to road conditions; lack of sufficient intelligence; and the like. More fundamental, however, is the commander's failure to appreciate the peculiar advantages and peculiar requirements of defending in built-up areas.

In the first place, he had neglected to clear the town completely upon entry. Whatever the difficulties of clearing at night, as would have been necessary, they seem slight when compared with the enemy's advantage of possessing good firing positions less than 50 yards from the American foxholes. (30:298)

The second error lay in not utilizing the buildings themselves to strengthen the defense. The foxholes ringing the town might have been sufficient protection against light infantry attacks. But additional supplementary positions should have been prepared in advance within the buildings in any case, and especially in view of the known weakness of the antitank defense. Withdrawing to these prepared buildings, the defenders could have dealt on more even terms with the German armor. Then, too, the few precious mines could have been spread between the houses to reduce further the momementum of the tank thrust. As they were employed, the mines had no value.

In addition to obstructing the tanks, the buildings would have concealed the Americans and protected them from the heavy German fire. But it was too late when, for instance, the Company I Commander realized this and ordered his men to the houses. Apparently, the only effective American use of buildings during the action was for administrative purposes. The Germans, on the other hand, used them to maintain their hold on part of the town, harass our defensive preparations, and support their attack.

Lack of a plan to employ the inherent strength of the built-up area is

only part of a larger deficiency, failing to plan adequately for the over-all conduct of the defense. Had the commander visualized his reactions to possible enemy attack, he could have issued instructions to guide the defenders in their times of difficulty. Once battle was joined, the loss of communication and control inherent in built-up areas precluded remedying this failure. So the 3d Battalion soldiers, when driven from their foxholes, fled without plan or hope, many even going toward the enemy.

And had the battle been visualized in advance, the battalion commander might have realized the compelling necessity for establishing some reserve force. As we saw, all rifle elements were committed on the perimeter. Somehow, there should have been some men in reserve, "men to hit back with, men to restore the situation if it gets critical, men to reinforce the threatened parts." (49:11) Even a small reserve could have done effective work if the defense had been based in the buildings. As an example, consider the movement of the Company L squad leader against the German machine gun position in the buildings. It was one of the few bright spots in the battle (and, incidentally, the only aggressive activity). Similar small actions by small reserves throughout the battalion might materially have changed the outcome of the defense of Schmidt.

With these lessons in mind, we compare the actions of another American infantry battalion defending a small town.

THE DEFENSE OF LE BOURG SAINT LEONARD, FRANCE
BY THE 1st BATTALION, 359th INFANTRY REGIMENT
15-17 AUGUST 1944 (22:1-28)
(MAP B)

The Allied Armies in France were seeking, in August 1944, to encircle and destroy the German Seventh Army by closing the Falaise-Argentan Gap. As part of this operation, the 359th Infantry Regiment (90th Infantry Division) was to relieve elements of the 5th Armored Division, with the mission of blocking German escape to the east. (22:5) The 1st Battalion of the 359th was to hold that portion of the road net including Le Bourg St. Leonard on the west and Exmes on the east. Other friendly forces lay to the southwest, south, and east. The 1st Battalion's relief of the 5th Armored Division elements, who had had no contact with the Germans in this

area, was effected on the morning of 15 August.

To secure the critical road junctions in his area and prohibit their use by Germans coming from the north and west, the battalion commander sent Company A to Le Bourg St. Leonard and Company C to Exmes. Company B, in reserve, was to defend the road junction just east of Le Haras Du Pin[1]. To that company was attached the battalion antitank platoon. The battalion command post was located in Le Haras Du Pin, as was an attached engineer platoon. Other attachments to the battalion were a platoon of towed three-inch antitank guns from a tank destroyer battalion and a platoon of tanks. A section of these tanks and a section of the antitank guns each were further attached to Company A in Le Bourg St. Leonard and to Company C in Exmes. The battalion 81-mm mortars were similarly divided, three going to each of these forward companies. Company A's tanks and one antitank gun were positioned in St. Leonard; the other gun was located at the road junction east of town so it could fire west through the center of St. Leonard. Company A's 60-mm mortars were in an orchard just south of this same junction. The attached 81's were further forward, also southeast of town.

From Le Bourg St. Leonard observation was excellent along the roads to the west and north, but between these roads lay a densely wooded area, the Foret De Gouffern. The battalion commander accordingly directed that Company A maintain patrols in that area 24 hours a day.

The day and night passed without incident, but on the morning of 16 August, the first contact was made with the enemy: a Company B outpost destroyed a German armored car moving toward Exmes from the north. French citizens of Le Bourg St. Leonard began fleeing southeast in the early afternoon, reporting that the Germans were coming. Shortly thereafter, soldiers of Company A heard small-arms fire to the northwest in the Foret De Gouffern. A strong German force advancing in attack formation had clashed with Company A patrol. As soon as the firing started, defensive positions on the western and northern

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1. On maps, this town appears as le Pin au Haras. For convenience, we shall use Le Haras Du Pin, as it appears in the source document. (See map, FRANCE, 1:250,000, Sheet 3a & 8, CHERBOURG and CAEN).

sides of town were occupied.

Now heavy concentrations of German artillery fire began falling in the town and the volume of small-arms fire intensified. The Americans replied with fires on the hostile force. Tanks which appeared on the road from Argentan were taken under fire by the three-inch gun located in the middle of town. All electrical communication with the battalion headquarters had been broken, but the battalion commander soon arrived by vehicle to assess the situation. Having done so, he ordered his operations officer to return to the command post, inform regimental headquarters of existing conditions, and alert Company B for movement to St. Leonard on order.

German artillery fires shifted east and southeast into the American zone, and the Germans launched an apparently well-coordinated infantry-tank attack. A force was seen moving south across the Argentan road toward Company A's left flank. A short while later, this enveloping force struck the 81-mm mortar positions on the southern side of the town, but were held at bay by the small-arms fire of the mortarmen, assisted by the battalion command group.

In the meantime, the air bursts of the heavy German artillery fire had a devastating effect on Company A's right (north) platoon, "forcing them out of their uncovered foxholes and back into the buildings on the edge of town. The cover of the buildings neutralized this air burst effect and the first platoon stood fast." (22:12)

Communication with the rear was reestablished when a new wire line was laid along a back trail into St. Leonard from the southeast. This trail, incidentally, was under fire from the same force that was in contact with the mortar position. A radio vehicle, in communication with regimental headquarters, also entered town.

When communication was reestablished, Company B was ordered to move immediately to Le Bourg St. Leonard, entering town along the trail where the wire had been laid. The company commander was warned that he might have

to fight to get into town. The attached engineer platoon was ordered to the road junction just east of St.Leonard, where it was to fight as infantry and protect the antitank gun. Except for a few casualties from artillery fire en route, the engineers were able to go into position at the junction without difficulty. By 1515 Company A had stopped the German attack from the west and northwest. On both flanks, however, the situation was vague and threatening.

Company B arrived at the junction of the Le Haras Du Pin Road and the back trail about 1630. An additional platoon of tanks had arrived to assist the battalion and joined Company B for its entry into town. Thus reinforced, the company moved astride the back trail into St. Leonard. It was assigned the defense of the western and southern portions of town, and Company A was directed to shift to the right and defend the northern side. Another German attack along the front during the shift was repulsed.

The day's end found the situation in Le Bourg St. Leonard somewhat stabilized. The Germans had lost several tanks and many casualties, but they now held some houses in the western end of town and woods to the north, west, and south. The only routes into town still in American hands were the main road east to Exmes and the back trail to the Le Haras Du Pin Road, the Exmes Road being covered by the engineers and the three-inch gun.

The second day of fighting began with a dawn attack by the Germans against the southern flank and around the northern flank of the American position. Company B repulsed the attack on the south, but the Germans enjoyed some success against the weaker Company A in the north. The company stayed together under its one remaining officer, but gave up ground and a few buildings to the attacker. The Germans, identified as three battalions of an SS Panzer Division, now controlled the east-west road up to the center of town, and were able to restrict its use further east by fire. "American and German tanks stalked each other in the streets and alleys of the town." (22:15)

Enemy forces had also moved further eastward on both flanks. A group going around the right (north) flank approached the road junction where the engineers and antitank gun were located. Apparently surprised at the strength here, the Germans stopped after an exchange of small-arms fire. To the south, flanking attack forces occupied ground just short of the Le Haras Du Pin Road and including the back trail, which had served as the defender's main supply and evacuation route to St. Leonard. This route was reopened for resupply purposes by the battalion commander, who, riding on the lead tank and firing its caliber .50 machine gun, lead the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon and two tanks up the trail. These tanks had been taken from their previous attachment to Company C at Exmes.

The battle continued. German shells rained in; a general officer came forward to visit the 1st Battalion and inspect its lines. Company C was relieved at Exmes by another battalion and moved to Le Haras Du Pin. It was prepared to march on order from there to St. Leonard over the same route Company B had used.

The German infantry and tanks attacked again about noon, the main effort falling against Company A's position. "The fighting became a fierce room-to-room, man-to-man struggle. Bayonet and grenade duels by individuals in the Company A sector were the rule. A German tank with its turret hatch open came near a house that was occupied on the first floor by the Germans. The second floor, however, was still held by the Americans. A fragmentation grenade dropped down the turret of the tank caused a series of explosions and the destruction of the tank. A bazooka team knocked out four Mark VI German tanks with five shots. BAR's were waiting to cut down members of the crews who managed to escape the burning tanks. There were as many as 14 German tanks in St. Leonard at this time." (22:18)

Meanwhile, Company C had been ordered to the woods just east of the junction of the Le Haras Du Pin Road and the back trail to St. Leonard, use of which was again being denied by German fire. The battalion operations

officer was to meet Company C there with further orders from the battalion commander. As this staff officer awaited the company's arrival at the junction, he noticed two soldiers approaching from the direction of St. Leonard. These two men, from Company A, stated they had become separated from their unit and thought they were the only ones to escape alive. They were ordered to the edge of the woods to await Company C. Soon, however, other groups of three and four men each arrived with the same story. Eventually, they totaled about 20 men, including Company A's only officer, who reported that he didn't know how many of his men had managed to get out, nor whether some were still fighting in the town. The latest attack against Company A had engulfed both flanks and broken its lines in many places. The officer was instructed to reorganize the 20 men who had gathered here at the road junction and return to his section of town, if he could possibly do so.

Company C arrived at the road and trail junction, having received about 35 casualties in the move northwest from Le Haras Du Pin. The operations officer briefed the Company C commander on the battalion situation and relayed the battalion commander's orders: move to St. Leonard astride the back trail on a two-platoon front, clear that area once again, and move up behind Company B's right rear.

Having passed on these instructions, the operations officer returned to St. Leonard and reported to his commander there. Stating that he had had no communication with Company A since about noon, the battalion commander ordered the operations officer to go to that company, take command, counterattack to regain the positions originally held, and establish contact with Company B.

Since German fire still prohibited use of the east-west road in town, the operations officer, carrying two bandoleers of ammunition for his rifle, moved back east to the road junction where the three-inch gun stood, then north and west toward town. Firing could be heard to the north and in

Company A's sector of town. Upon reaching St. Leonard, the officer found five men defending the northeastern edge of town from Germans on the Chambois Road. The sergeant in charge said that, so far as he knew, he was the Company A commander and these five men comprised the company. Assuming command, the operations officer instructed the sergeant that they would attack to secure the two houses and orchards immediately to the west of their present position and astride the Chambois Road. After distributing the twelve clips of ammunition he had brought along, the officer maneuvered forward with two men, while the other three established a base of fire. This attack surprised a German machine gun crew, which was eliminated by bayoneting. When the machine gun was silenced, other Germans began a rather disorganized withdrawal, with the result that the German hold in this area was broken.

To add to this American force, the machine gun platoon leader of Company D appeared with his one remaining machine gun and a single belt of ammunition. He, too, had been isolated, but with this gun and a three-man crew had been able to hold his position. Other groups of two and three men began joining Company A from areas which had been behind German lines.

In the meantime, Company C had successfully entered St. Leonard and managed to get a platoon across the east-west road, where it could link with the reforming Company A. "In another limited objective attack, Company A and the platoon from Company C succeeding in regaining their initial position held at the beginning of the battle. The last hard-surface road out of the (Falaise-Argentan) trap was securely in American hands. The battalion commander received word that the 1st Battalion would be relieved that night by 2d Battalion, 359th Infantry. It was with pride that he handed over the town and the defensive positions that had originally been held." (22:21)

The 1st Battalion's retention of control of the roads leading through Le Bourg St. Leonard was a signal contribution to the closing of the Falaise-Argentan Gap and a decisive Allied victory. (2:24) Analysis of the action reveals some of the reasons for this success, as well as errors that had to be redeemed.

The battalion was required initially to occupy a wide front of some four kilometers. This distance combined with the assigned mission to suggest a defense of the built-up areas. It seems unlikely that field-type defense would have succeeded on this frontage against the strong enemy force.

The urgency of the German situation apparently required them to exert maximum pressure against the town of St. Leonard itself, since its possession meant control of the roads. As they were using most of their forces in the direct assault on the town, they could never quite complete an encirclement of it, which would have severely complicated the 1st Battalion's defensive problem. But even an encirclement, unless followed by a careful clearing of the town itself, would not have won a German success. Thus, this action convincingly demonstrates the tactical value of defending small towns or villages in circumstances where good movement routes are needed by the enemy.

How did the peculiar characteristics of built-up areas influence this action? First, Company A was lucky enough to be able to seek the protection of the houses against the air bursts of hostile artillery shells, before the enemy launched his first assault. Having done so, they were able to sustain this initial attack. Houses furnished cover from fire.[1]

Secondly, the houses of St. Leonard permitted small units or groups to survive close, heavy attack. Consider, for example, the number of people who reappeared from places behind enemy lines when Company A, under the operations officer, began counterattacking. Or, on a larger scale, the ability of Company B and a badly battered Company A to endure at least three strong attacks before further reinforcement.

The battle for St. Leonard illustrates the inherent advantage of a built-up area as an antitank obstacle. Imagine what the effect of some 14 attacking tanks would be on a similar force of defenders in open terrain. Yet here,

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1. Following the action, an officer of the battalion recognized the error of not utilizing the houses initially to strengthen the position. He attributed this failure to the fact that the battalion previously had used French villages for billeting only. Subsequent claims for damages to property had led to an effort to keep the troops out of French houses. (22:24)

deprived of observation, speed, maneuverability, and mutual support, tanks were engaged and destroyed by infantry weapons. (The grenade-in-the-turret incident also points up the three-dimensional quality of town combat.)

Besides demonstrating the advantages of defense in towns, the action in St. Leonard provides the key to successful conduct of such a defense -- aggressive counteraction. Unfortunately, the initial phases of the defense lacked this quality. Nothing appears in the report of the action that indicates counterattack planning or execution by Company A. The battalion reserve was initially too far away to conduct local counterattacks within the town, although of course, both Companies B and C later conducted counterattacks to enter St. Leonard. But within the built-up area itself, Germans gained a foothold in the western edge of town on the first day and were not ejected. Had counterattacks been pressed with the vigor of the battalion commander's clearance of the back trail, German attacks on the next day could have been more easily dealt with. When they did get going, counterattacks were decisive. The operations officer and his five men turned the tide in the Company A sector, where earlier in the day that company had virtually disintegrated. Joined by a platoon of Company C, the reforming Company A completed the ejection of the enemy. Counterattacks proved to be the decisive factor in the defense of Le Bourg St. Leonard by the 1st Battalion, 359th Infantry.

We turn our attention now to a third action in which an American infantry battalion defended a small town against a series of German attacks.

THE DEFENSE OF HOFEN[1], GERMANY
BY THE 3d BATTALION, 395th INFANTRY REGIMENT
10 NOVEMBER - 18 DECEMBER 1944 (13:1-24)
(MAP C)

On 10 November 1944, the 3d Battalion, 395th Infantry (99th Infantry Division), relieved elements of the 5th Armored Division in the vicinity of Hofen, Germany. The battalion was to hold the long, narrow ridge upon which

1. Correctly speaking, this action occurred in Höfen (Hoefen), Germany. For convenience, we shall use Hofen, as it appears in the source documents. (See map, GERMANY, 1:25,000, sheet 5403, MONSCHAU.)

the town was built, on a front of well over 4,000 yards. This ridge dominated important terrain in Allied areas to the west. Eastward about 2,000 yards were German positions.

To speed the relief, the battalion occupied the positions already prepared by the Armored Division elements. On the left (north) was Company I; Company K was in the center; and Company L on the right (southeast) flank. A section of heavy machine guns was attached to each flank company; a platoon of these weapons was attached to Company K in the middle of the line.

The need to readjust the positions and improve the battalion's defensive strength was obvious. The front was manned by a thin line of riflemen and automatic weapons. There were no reserves; communications were inadequate for the wide front; battalion mortars could not cover the whole sector without shifting mounts.

To correct these weaknesses, the battalion made good use of the time that was available between 14 November and 15 December. It established, in place of the linear position, a series of strong points, each consisting of an automatic weapon protected by riflemen. Alternate positions were prepared on the flanks and rear to facilitate withdrawal in those directions. Most of the positions of the main line of resistance lay outside of Hofen, due to the lack of depth of the town. On the left, however, several strongpoints were prepared in buildings on the edge of town. Machine guns were also placed in cellars of houses all along the front to support the forward positions. "Within the town itself, a large number of buildings were prepared for defense, and gun emplacements were constructed in the streets, but were not occupied. The general plan was that if the units on the front line were driven back, they could carry on the fight in town.

"The battalion commander withdrew one platoon of Company L from the line to form the nucleus of the battalion reserve. In the event of an emergency, all battalion and company administrative personnel were to be attached to this platoon, so actually the reserve numbered slightly over 100 men. Several

counterattack plans were worked out to seal off penetrations at what appeared to be the most dangerous points. The battalion reserve force, including the administrative detachments, rehearsed each of these plans several times." (6:42)

Additional radios and telephones were secured to improve communication. The battalion was ultimately linked by a network of 52 telephones, including one in each strongpoint.

The total number of 81-mm mortars was brought to ten, 60-mm mortar crews being used to man the extra, more effective weapons. A tank destroyer company, with twelve towed 3-inch guns, was also attached. "Most of the guns were placed inside houses or barns, with the corners ripped out to allow traverse. These positions were then reinforced with sandbags and camouflaged with natural debris." (6:43) An artillery battalion was in direct support of the Hofen defenders.

Barbed wire, antipersonnel and antitank mines were emplaced.

For more than a month after the 3d Battalion's arrival in Hofen, friendly and enemy action consisted of patrolling. But on 16 December at 0525, a twenty-minute shelling of the town began. German fire caused immense damage, igniting buildings, filling streets with rubble, badly damaging the battalion command post, and destroying the wire system.

At 0550, the Germans illuminated the area with indirect lights from searchlights. Ten minutes later, they appeared out of the haze. The main attack struck along the boundary of Companies I and K. Company L reported only patrol activity to its front. Opening fire almost simultaneously when the Germans were about 200 yards away, the 3d Battalion caused severe German casualties. Surprised and confused, the enemy failed in his assault. After some heavy fighting around Company K strongpoints, the Germans began withdrawing about 0655.

At 1235, a company-size enemy force attacked again in Company K's sector. Small-arms and artillery and mortar fire repelled this effort.

The following day was uneventful, except for repeated hostile air attacks which strafed and bombed Hofen. Despite heavy damage to material, only one casualty was reported.

On 18 December at 0345, another attack hit the battalion, the main effort falling against Company I. An enemy platoon surrounded an observation post in that company's area. The company contained the force, subsequently counterattacking and destroying it at daylight.

A thirty-minute preparation by artillery, mortars, and rockets preceded a strong onslaught at 0900. The German infantry was supported by 12 tanks and seven armored cars. American 3-inch antitank guns were able, however, to prevent this armored support from closing with the defenders. A penetration about 100 yards into Company K's area was stopped and driven out by artillery and mortar fire. The German armor withdrew with the fleeing infantry. Simultaneously, a small penetration of Company I's line was forced to retire.

Attacking Company I's sector again about 1000, a battalion-size group managed to pierce the center of the defenders' line and establish themselves in four buildings on the edge of town. Some 100 German infantrymen were in these houses, firing from windows and doors. The stone construction minimized the effect of American indirect fires placed upon them. Ringing the area with heavy fire, the battalion commander ordered his reserve platoon to seal off the penetration. Two 57-mm antitank guns, protected by the reserve force, began firing armor-piercing ammunition into the occupied houses with terrifying effect. The reserve force then launched a counterattack, systematically reduced the houses, and secured the surrender of 25 badly shaken Germans. Three times that number lay torn and dead in the buildings. (13:20) That was the last German attack against the 3d Battalion, 395th Infantry, in Hofen.

The success of the American defense is founded upon many factors. One can not discount the influence of an abundance of material means - extra

mortars, the tank destroyer company, a whole battalion of supporting artillery, extra communications equipment. But probably just as significant in the overall victory - if not more so - was the battalion commander's careful analysis of the problems, his detailed planning, and his elaborate preparations in the long period of time before attack.

Despite the extended frontage, a reserve force was provided and trained for its possible employment. A participant in the action stated that "the withholding of a reserve, although small, actually snatched victory from defeat." (13:21) One recalls, by way of comparison, the failure to hold out or establish a reserve in the unsuccessful Schmidt operation.

Maximum use was made of the advantages of the town. Because the built-up area lacked depth, the main positions were generally forward of the edge of town. Where possible, however, the natural strength of buildings was exploited in placing weapons, alternate positions, and command and administrative installations. Plans were made to use the town for continuing the defense if the main positions were lost. Thus, this example demonstrates how a defense may be based upon the use of a built-up area, even though the main defenses are not within the town itself.

The role of the counterattack in the defense of built-up areas is again strikingly demonstrated. The final counterattack by the battalion reserve is worthy of peculiar attention, for it shows how the enemy attackers concentrated in the houses, how they were easy to locate and isolate, and how they could be attacked during a period of disorganization and easily defeated by taking a house at a time.

Having seen three instances of American units defending against German attack, let us turn briefly to an instance involving a German force on the defensive against a Russian attack.

THE DEFENSE OF KHRISTISHCHE, RUSSIA
BY THE 1st BATTALION, 196th INFANTRY REGIMENT (GERMAN ARMY)
24-27 JANUARY 1942 (38:24-32)
(MAP D)

By defending Khristishche against attacks from the north, northeast, and east, the 1st Battalion of the German 196th Infantry was to block any

further Russian advance south along the road to Slavyansk, an important town in the industrial Donets Basin. It was January 1942, a three-foot snow covered the ground and temperatures had dropped to -50 degrees Fahrenheit. "Snow positions had been established at the edges of Khristishche because it was impossible to dig in the frozen soil. The battalion's field of fire extended up to 2200 yards north and south. To the east lay a long ridge beyond which there was a large forest held by strong Russian forces." (38:24)

On the morning of 24 January, a platoon-size Russian reconnaissance patrol attempted to approach the town, but was virtually annihilated by German machine gun and sniper fire. Other patrols on the hill to the east were able to observe into Khristishche, but made no attempt to advance toward it. Throughout the day, mortar and artillery fires fell in the town, apparently adjusted by observers on the same hill.

As dusk came, the Germans doubled their sentries in the snow trenches. An east wind blew snow into the men's faces and made observation difficult. Sentries were relieved every 30 minutes, in view of the severe weather conditions.

At about 2115, sentries of Company C[1] noticed rapidly approaching figures near the boundary between their unit and Company B. The Germans tried to open fire, but weapons were frozen. Finally, one sentry fired his carbine to give the alarm. By this time assaulting Russian ski troops had been observed along the entire battalion front, firing and hurling grenades. The only German machine gun to function was one that had been kept indoors.

The surprise raid did not proceed as planned, however, because the Russian skiers could not jump the four-foot snow wall and because many of them carried their weapons slung on their backs and could not fire. The attack was repulsed, except for a small penetration into the extreme northern end of town. Here, 25 Russians occupied the first house, but were destroyed in

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1. Alphabetical company designations are used in the source report, apparently for the convenience of American readers. German companies were, in fact, designated by number. See p 53, TM-E 30-451, Handbook on German Military Forces (Washington, D. C.: War Department, 1943).

five minutes by hand grenades.

"Meanwhile, the German mortars and infantry howitzers laid down a barrage on the ridge northeast of town. Two Russian battalions, which had just gained the ridge, were caught in the barrage and turned back." (38:28) Russian losses were about 150 men. The Germans had 13 casualties, including three frostbite cases.

The next day, 25 January, was marked by three Russian patrol actions, one 60-man group coming from the northeast, and later two 30-man groups coming from the southeast. German fires stopped these patrols well before they neared the town.

In the night an officer-led combat patrol of 50 Russians approached Khristishche from the east. Some of the men, who could speak German, wore German uniforms. "The patrol was to occupy the first houses and then send a message to the rear, where a reinforced company was kept in readiness to follow up the patrol's attack and to occupy Khristishche." (38:29) At about 0130, five men from this group approached two German sentries near the eastern corner of town, claiming to be Germans. Approaching to within 20 feet, the masquerading Russians hurled hand grenades and wounded one sentry. The other fired his carbine, but was shot by the Russians, who immediately headed for the first house, followed by the rest of the combat patrol.

The Russians threw grenades into the first house just as the squad of Germans who occupied it ran safely out the back door. Throwing hand grenades and firing from the hip, the German infantrymen tried to stop the enemy who closed in on three sides. The squad of defenders was pushed back to the second house, however, and Russians immediately occupied the first one. Setting up two machine guns, they opened fire on German soldiers from another company who were hastening forward.

The Russians tossed grenades and explosives through a window into the second house, trying to wipe out its squad of German occupants. The first attempts were unsuccessful, but finally the defending squad was forced to withdraw through a damaged rear wall when the house caught fire. By now,

however, a German company commander had arrived and taken charge of the situation. Using company headquarters personnel, reserve squads, and the squad that had initially occupied the first house, he launched a counterthrust. "Throwing hand grenades and firing their weapons on the run, the counterattacking Germans drove the Russians from Khristishche within a few minutes." (38:30)

Noticing the signal equipment left in the first house by the Russians, the German company commander correctly presumed that other Russian forces waited outside of town for a signal to advance. Accordingly, he called for artillery fires against suspected Russian jumpoff positions. The remainder of the night passed quietly.

On 26 January, Russian activity against the town consisted of five hours of artillery shelling and an unsuccessful attempt to infiltrate the German position by crawling through the snow. During the night (26-27 January), the Russian commander intensified his effort and launched a mass attack without artillery support.

Assembling three battalions for a total of 1,500 men, the attackers moved out at 0330 on the 27th. Two battalions formed the first assault wave, with a third battalion following 350 yards behind. The noise of their movement drowned out by howling winds, the Russians marched toward the German positions in close order. Their assault was met by a hail of deadly German fires. Only a few Russians broke into the defensive position; their comrades, dead and wounded, piled up in front of the German line.

German artillery fire completely dispersed the Russian reserve battalion, and after half an hour the impetus of the attack had spent itself. The Russians had suffered some 900 casualties, and Khristishche remained in the hands of the German garrison.

A brief analysis of this German defense reemphasizes the same major features we have noted in our previous examples. Well illustrated is a typical reason for defending towns, the wisdom of using the buildings to aid the defense, and the predominant role of the counterattack in this type

of warfare.

The Germans knew that "often the size of the town is not the principal determining factor in a ... tactical plan; instead, a town's geographic or economic importance may be (the) first consideration." (25:41) Khristishche lay astride a road which the Russians needed to reppen their way into the Donets Basin. Hence it was well chosen as a locality to be defended.

In the fierce winter weather, the town offered the warmth and shelter of its buildings to the German defenders. Their campaign in the east had taught them that "cleared roads and warm quarters are the two basic prerequisites for winter warfare." (37:77) Thus, they used the buildings for protection from the elements, as well as protection from hostile fire.

German counterattacks were strikingly effective. When 25 Russians seized a house during the first attack on the town, they were eliminated in five minutes. Time was not wasted in sealing off the penetration and organizing a deliberate counterattack. Quick local attacks with grenades eliminated the threat. Similarly, the prompt organization and initiation of a counterattack by the German company commander drove out the combat patrol which had captured two houses. This doubtless prevented the planned reinforcement of the penetration by a full company of Russians. The German counterattack force, it will be remembered, comprised headquarters personnel, reserve squads, and the squad that had just been ejected from its building by the Russians. This makeshift force succeeded against a 50-man patrol supported with machine guns. The German counterattacks were speedy, vigorous actions by small groups.

Taken together, the four combat actions appear to confirm our initial thoughts and demonstrate the need for some special emphasis and amplification of our doctrine for defense in built-up areas. For various reasons, each of these towns had tactical significance. Schmidt controlled roads and offered observation of key areas. Le Bourg St. Leonard and Khristishche similarly blocked hostile movement on roads. Hofen was situated on high

ground with broad fields of view. As we saw in all three successful defenses, the towns also had defensive strength which aided in holding off quite superior forces. Schmidt was as strong potentially, but it was improperly used. So it appears that these inhabited localities were well chosen as general areas of defense.

In the instances of successful defense, we see that sooner or later, the buildings were utilized by the defenders. They made use of the built-up areas for protection from fire and air attack, as in Hofen and St. Leonard. Khristishche gave the Germans protection from the severe weather. The value of a town as an obstacle was capitalized on in St. Leonard, where the tanks were slowed, separated, and subsequently destroyed by defenders in and around the buildings. At Schmidt, on the other hand, the tanks had already overrun the defenders before entering the narrow confines of the town. These and other examples, especially the entire action at Hofen, indicate that the organization for defense in a town involves the use of its structures.

In the conduct of the defense, aggressive counterattacks stand out as being decisive. The Germans at Khristishche were successful with rapid local attacks; six men turned the tide of enemy advance in a broken sector of St. Leonard; the well-rehearsed reserves at Hofen materially aided that defense. Even at Schmidt, the single counterthrust against a machine gun was successful. By the very nature of the area and the tactics employed in it, counterattacks in towns are necessary, easy to make, and apparently quite successful. Speed and aggressiveness in the blow are preferable to more weight at the expense of longer delay. Reserves should be held out for counterattacks at very low levels of organization.

We have completed our study in three areas related to the defense of towns. We stated initially that American experience and doctrine was limited, and that modification or application of our thinking appeared necessary as regards choosing defensive ground, organizing a town defense to full advantage,

and conducting that defense. The doctrine of enemies and friends, the force of logic, and the tests of battle have provided guidance in these three areas. American infantrymen must study this guidance and apply it.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) Inhabited localities have tactical importance and defensive strength, which make them especially suitable as areas for defense. (2) The organization of the defense in such a locality must be based on the full utilization of its buildings. (3) The conduct of the defense in a built-up area is characterized by vigorous counterattacks, especially by small groups.

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