

30th INFANTRY DIVISION
117th Infantry Regiment
"L" Company, 3d Battalion

BREACHING THE SIEGFRIED LINE

(Interviews with Lt. James J. Erb, Company Executive, "L" Company, Lt. Charles A. Hardman, platoon leader of 1st platoon; Lt. Joseph Elinski, platoon leader of 3d platoon. Interview and terrain walk in Ubach with Sgt Fay and Pfc. Ira Reeder, machine gun section of weapons platoon, "L" Company, 23 October 1944. ... Capt. Hechler).

"L" Company saw its first action in the Siegfried Line breakthrough on 3 October, when the company attacked abreast and to the left of K Company into the town of Ubach. "When we moved through Ubach, the Jerries had bolted everything up, and because many houses were barred it was hard at first to take cover from the artillery," says Lt. Hardman.

The most bitter action fought by L Company in Ubach took place on ^{3 and} 4 October when 15 men from the machine gun section of the weapons platoon were cut off all day during repeated German counterattacks, and successfully held their position. At 1900 on 3 October, the machine gun section of the weapons platoon took up positions in a house on the south side of the northernmost of two main roads running east through Ubach, near the eastern edge of the town. To the north across the road there was an open field bounded by a hedgerow, along which the 3d platoon of L Company had dug in. To the south, there was an orchard and beyond the orchard the business district of Ubach. K Company was disposed to the south.

At 2300, a German patrol penetrated Ubach; the 3d platoon outposts let them through and counted them (seven), but did not fire. The patrol opened up with a burp gun and wounded two men standing in the doorway of the house where the machine gun section was located. The patrol soon withdrew, and the remainder of the night was quiet until about 0400 on 4 October, when S/Sgt. Tolliver Curry stuck his head out the door and observed a Mark IV tank parked in front of the house. The tank was firing

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its cannon and machine guns down into Ubach toward the west. While it was parked there, so close that its aerial actually was sticking into ~~the~~ a second-story window, ^{five} German infantrymen started to run into the house and Pfc. Ira Reeder killed two and wounded one of the first three with rapid pistol shots; the other two got away. Pvt. Kramjack tried to fire a bazooka out of the second-floor window at the tank, was handicapped by faulty ammunition, and then fired a rifle grenade which merely bounced off the turret. The tank withdrew out to the eastern side of Ubach, however. The cut-off section held out although isolated, and repulsed

another. Meanwhile a second tank appeared on the south side of the house and started to ^{rake} ~~the~~ house with machine gun fire. Bullets splattered liberally through the house, particularly on the first floor, but most of the personnel was on the second floor. While the tank was firing, some of the machine gun section were getting their share of the enemy. Pvt. Antone Montaya took a good toll with his BAR of enemy running across the open ground north of the house. T/Sgt. George E. Morris killed two ~~soldiers~~ with his carbine. Another machine gun in the hall window was also effective.

The house became a much hotter spot just as ~~light~~ day was breaking, when the tank which had retreated from the north side of the house returned and ~~the~~ machine-gunned the entire house. Across the street, the 3d platoon was pushed back by the tank, and when elements of K Company withdrew or were captured on the south, the house became isolated.

The next house to the west was occupied by Germans, who added to the ~~the~~ share of enemy fire which was coming in. The situation became more taut between 0830 and 0900, when seven enemy Mark IVs tried to cut around the north side of Ubach and encircle L Company. Lt. Robert C. Burke, forward observer for Battery C of the 118th Field Artillery Battalion, displayed

great heroism in pro. ing through enemy territory until he finally located a suitable OP from which he could direct artillery fire on the armored attack. The artillery was effective, one round hitting square on the turret of one of the tanks. In addition, the 2d Armored Division rolled into the open ground north of Ubach and several hundred yards from the position where the machine gun section was cut off; the work of the 2d Armored in coming into position, plus the artillery fire, caused the German tanks to withdraw.

The cut-off section held out although isolated, and repulsed another attack launched from the east of Ubach at 1000. Despite the heavy fire which came through the house from all sides, the only casualties suffered by the machine gun section were the two men whom the patrol had caught standing in the doorway the night before. At 1500, the cut-off section was able to break through and make its way back to the L Company CP in the center of Ubach.

On 5 October, when there was such a hold-up in Ubach, the enemy had all the road exits from town well blocked with direct-fire weapons which soon knocked out five tanks of the 743d and at least one M10 from the 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion. Nobody seemed able to bypass these direct fire weapons on 5 October. The 2d Armored Division was largely concentrated to the north side of Ubach, but many of their vehicles were jammed up in town. Lt. Erb said there was a "fierce tank battle going on on the north edge of town."

On 6 October, a coordinated attack was launched toward zu Ubach, and the 2d Armored Division by "fighting up a storm and firing into the German barracks" was able to release considerable pressure on L Company. The attack toward zu Ubach was launched at 1645 with L Company on the left of the Ubach - Alsdorf road and I Company on the right. The leading platoons of I and L ran

forward at top speed and surprised and surrounded many Germans by flanking their positions. A map captured in zu Ubach indicated that the enemy expected the main attack to come in from ~~the~~ ^{east,} north ~~of the~~ ^{road} ~~Ubach Alsdorf~~, hence had arranged positions along the road facing the wrong direction and they were very vulnerable to a flank attack. ^(That is, attack was from NW instead of NE.)

The 2d Armored Division did most of the work around the German barracks, and the tanks of the 743d were also very helpful. The platoon working with L Company was commanded by Lt. Jenkins, who recently received a battlefield commission and was also company commander of B Company of the 743d at the time. The collaboration was very close; four tanks worked cross-country while the fifth went down the road. In zu Ubach, L Company took "about 50 prisoners" right in town, and captured a battalion CP, including maps, working telephone system and operators in zu Ubach.

The next morning, 7 October, L Company ^{on the left,} and I on the right raced toward Alsdorf, with Lt. Gail Daugherty's 2d platoon in the lead. (This was the occasion when Lt. Daugherty had a bet with Lt. Tempe of I Co. as to which would reach Alsdorf first). There was some ^{enemy} artillery falling, particularly around the railroad track which cuts across the main road just northwest of Alsdorf, but most of the artillery seemed to be falling to the north over in the 2d Armored Division sector. A scattering of small-arms fire was met at the ^{edge} of Alsdorf, but ~~it was~~ it was insufficient to hold up the advance materially. In fact the advance was so rapid, that some German soldiers were caught sleeping in cellars in isolated houses along the road on the way down.

When the 3d battalion hit the outskirts of Alsdorf, 15 P-47's came over and did a beautiful job of bombing and strafing a retreating German column around the slagpile on the western edge of Alsdorf.