

120  
D R A F T

UNIT CITATION

On the 8th October 1944, the 120th Infantry was committed to action in the final phases of the Siegfried Line breakthrough and the closing of the Aachen "Gap." At this time, the 30th and 1st Divisions were encircling Aachen, and the Germans were putting up a death-struggle to keep the Allies from her own ground and to hold at all cost the garrison of the city of Aachen, which was not only a good base for further Allied operations into the country but was also a symbol of German history and invincibility, of incalculable morale significance.

Approximately five miles north of Aachen, near the village of Ottenfeld, the 1st Battalion, 120th Infantry, was committed on 8 October 1944. Its objective was high ground 3000 yards south near a tiny community called Birk. From the town southeast of the buildup area there, troops could dominate the terrain around them almost to Alsdorf to the north, to Broichweiden to the east, to Wurselen on Aachen's outskirts to the south, and to Bardenberg to the west. In all, the Birk area commanded the terrain for close to four square miles, and as such, was a vital link in the chain being forged around the beleaguered German city. That the enemy was determined not to lose it was apparent from the first.

Because the Division was flanking the Siegfried Line from the north, the enemy defense was not built upon the elaborate pillbox system in the country. Instead, the Germans had planned defensive fires to take maximum advantage of the fertile slopes and wide fields characteristics of the area. They had had much time during the Allied pause for supply at the German border to organize and arrange most effective camouflage and utilization of terrain features. The area around Bardenberg was the key to the north entrance into Aachen and, as such, was defended tenaciously and in large numbers.

At 0825, the 1st Battalion attacked from Ottenfeld southwest toward Reifeld. Attached were a platoon of light tanks and a platoon of medium tanks from the 743rd Tank Battalion, and a platoon of 57mm guns from Antitank Company. Company "A" led a column of companies, with Company "B" in rear. The troops met their first real obstacle on the high fields south of Reifeld. Here, artillery was

received in heavy battery concentrations, 88mm antiaircraft guns were fired in rapid single shots like artillery. From deployed positions, the Germans were able to bring accurate and voluminous machine gun and small arms fire against Company "A". Tanks were called upon, but when they reached the high ground where our riflemen were, a 75mm antitank gun blasted one, setting it aflame. A second tank withdrew but was hit in the process and had its hatch cover torn off. Infantrymen climbed on the burning tank and saved the personnel within. Suffering approximately 15 casualties during the day, Company "A" fought the entire afternoon and into the late evening. When it reached the knoll-top, fire was directed against it from the Bardenberg-Birk area which had perfect observation.

In the afternoon, with Company "A" still held up near Reifeld, Company "C" was committed to take the town of Duffesheide south of Ottenfeld, and Company "B" moved forward to clear an area between Duffesheide and Reifeld. From the Reifeld knoll, machine guns of Company "B" neutralized German antitank guns in Duffesheide, so that Company "C"'s advance was rapid.

By 2200, Company "A" had taken the Reifeld knoll, and the 1st Battalion lines extended from it east to the eastern outskirts of Duffesheide. Company "A" had taken a pillbox, but when an enemy gun fired on it, men inside suffered concussion effect, and bits of concrete shattered and ricocheted against the walls.

At 0700 the next day (9 October 1944), the drive was continued with Companies "B" on the left, and "C" on the right. In the morning fog, advance was made against artillery and small arms, though in the town of Esel, the enemy was caught off guard, and 50 prisoners were taken with little trouble. The companies drove across the open beet patches and plowed fields from Esel south to Birk. At 1100, they reached a railroad embankment which the enemy covered accurately with flanking machine gun and well-placed mortar fire. From positions on high ground around Birk, the Germans could bring immediate fire on anyone attempting to cross the embankment. Here, the 1st Battalion line held.

Driven from the 2nd Battalion lines on the left (east), an enemy force of infantry supported by about ten tanks coming from the east around Euchen swerved at 1500 into the 1st Battalion lines, in an attempt to cut through the slender

spearhead driving south. Company "C" bore the brunt of the attack; calling for strong artillery and cannon fires, the riflemen kept the enemy infantry at bay, until, with seven tanks immobilized, the remnants of the force retreated at 1845 toward Euchen.

During this period, the Battalion Commander was evacuated for battle fatigue, and the executive, newly returned from the hospital, took over the Battalion.

In the later afternoon, it was decided that, rather than strike frontally to Birk due south, the Battalion would flank the objective from the sector of the adjacent unit. With Company "A" leading, followed by Company "B", and Company "C" holding at the railroad tracks, the Battalion started at 1600 along the road from Duffesheide southwest to Bardenberg, already in friendly hands. Turning east at a corner on the outskirts, Company "A" headed for the builtup area of Birk only 1000 yards away. Almost onto the objective, antitank guns from the road ahead opened fire upon them. At the same time, five enemy half tracks mounting 20mm guns and carrying 50 motorized infantry previously observed advancing from the southeast toward Bardenberg turned north into the last platoon of Company "A" on the edge of Bardenberg and cut through it, causing approximately 20 casualties and cutting the company in two. The infantrymen narrowly escaped being crushed but brought bazooka fire upon the half tracks to drive them away. They pushed through to the northwest and succeeded in driving a small wedge between the 1st Battalion and the unit on its right (west).

Though badly shaken, Companies "A" and "B" regrouped and by 2000, had withdrawn to the Esel area. During the two days, seven officers and 48 men had been casualties.

Though there was no other unit to relieve the battered Battalion, it was at the same time essential to take the objective at once to protect the left flank of the 2nd Battalion and speed the encirclement of Aachen.

Unable to seize the objective from the front or the flank, plans were made to take Birk in an early morning attack. An artillery pounding on Birk lasted all night until 0430. Then the batteries remained silent; the enemy relaxed.

At 0530, Companies "B" and "C", in eight columns from four platoons, started

from a Line of Departure along the Duffesheide-Bardenberg road and advanced to envelop the objective from the north, northwest and west. The four right columns hit enemy positions on the outskirts of Bardenberg near the crossroads where the Company "A" platoon had been hit the night before; the four left columns advanced rapidly and silently against a sleepy, groggy enemy; 50 prisoners were taken, and only one, an accidental, shot fired. After the right columns cleaned out the enemy on the northeast outskirts of Bardenberg, they moved onto the objective and with Company "A", were organized into an all-around defense, since the enemy was still on three sides: Bardenberg, Wurselen and Euchen.

The high ground southeast of Birk could not be held physically since it was bald and under easy observation. Consequently, Companies "A", "B" and "C" prepared defenses encircling the small community on a reverse slope.

No sooner was the Battalion in position than the enemy counterattacked to try to gain back some of the strategic ground lost.

From 0745 till noon, German armor made small strikes at the Battalion. At 1100, the enemy struck furiously at the tip of the spearhead, the south end of the newly seized objective. Tanks came in draws where from the reverse slope defenses they could not be observed and were at one time as close as 50 yards from Company "A"'s position. With a captured German wheel-mounted "bazooka" gun which some of the infantrymen had carried with them, they fired at some of the tanks. At 200 yards, they knocked one out and forced another, 50 yards away in defilade, to withdraw. The artillery and cannon fires were instrumental in driving the enemy off, as were the tank destroyer and machine gun crews who stuck perseveringly by their positions.

By 1340, four enemy tanks had been disabled. By night, nine were lying immobilized close to the 1st Battalion lines. The casualty toll for the Battalion was estimated at more than 30 killed or wounded.

The Battalion established its command post in a farmhouse in Birk, of necessity close to the front lines. At this time, the Battalion held strategic ground, at a point from which the enemy could have driven the adjacent units into retreat. To the west, a regiment was driving southeast to an objective in Wurselen. Without Birk secured, it is doubtful that Wurselen could ever have been taken from

the north. The enemy fought to hold Wurselen as strongly as possible and contact with that Regiment presented another problem to the Battalion. It had to be maintained, however, to coordinate a strong defense line. During the period after the seizure of Birk, this coordination was maintained with difficulty; units underwent temporary isolation.

The 11 October saw the Battalion shelled persistently. A jeep was knocked out beside the Battalion command post. Artillery and mortar fire caused more than eight casualties. Tanks were heard and observed in draws close to the defenses, and prisoners, of which 19 were taken during the day, said there were 50 in the area. There were small tank and tank-infantry thrusts, later discovered to have been reconnaissances in force. The small attacks were repulsed, and at least 14 tanks were reported disabled. Small patrols were active in our lines, but were driven off. Enemy planes at evening dropped personnel and high explosive bombs.

During the night, tanks were heard continuously, circulating around Euchen and a group of pillboxes southeast of Birk. Sporadic shelling lasted through the hours of darkness.

At 0655, the shelling became heavy, and it was later learned the enemy was striking the 2nd Battalion to the left (northeast). The shelling lasted until 0730, when it became apparent that the enemy was launching a strong counterattack against the 1st Battalion from the Wurselen pillboxes and from Euchen. With no feelers, the full weight of the attack -- a force of 16 tanks, with a probable two Battalions of infantry -- advanced well deployed across the open fields toward Birk. The draws made it possible for the tanks to come close without being seen. Still, subjected to a hail of fire that could have been easily considered neutralizing, the 1st Battalion and the attached units stuck by their positions. Not one man moved to retreat, though three tanks came within 100 yards of Company "C" defenses and two tanks with infantry moved up a draw within 200 yards of Company "A"'s lines.

In Company "A"'s area opposite the pillboxes, two 57mm gun crews saw the main tank formation, led by Tiger and Mark V tanks. One gun opened fire when the tanks came within 500 yards; it fired three rounds and disabled two tanks, one a

Tiger; return fire hit the 57mm squarely and killed the gunner and the No. 2 man. Another 57mm antitank gun suffered a direct hit, but its crew stuck to the position. A section of machine guns from Company "D" saw some of the tanks unbuttoned and fired till the enemy was forced to close his hatch. When a tank destroyer gun knocked one of the tanks out, the machine gunners destroyed the crew trying to escape. Another tank blasted both machine gun positions, scoring a direct hit to destroy the guns and cause six casualties, one killed. Two tank destroyer guns were spotted and knocked out by enemy direct fire.

Friendly tanks went into action at once; though originally on the right flank, when they saw the main strike was aimed at the left, they moved to the area of greatest danger; in spite of the fact that they were at a disadvantage because of smaller guns, fired steadily at the Mark VI's and V's. In one case, even though a round had jammed in his gun, a tank commander stayed in an exposed position close by the infantry so that the riflemen would not think they were being deserted. A regimental antitank gun de-tracked a Tiger tank; one of our own tanks then put a projectile through its turret.

The artillery observation post was on a forward slope on the commanding hill, 100 yards from the nearest cover: a haystack subject to heavy shelling. The artillery observer was wounded during the first moments of the counterattack, and his radio operator killed; another sent to replace him was also wounded, and his operator also killed, even before they reached the observation post. The Battalion liaison officer finally reached it, and the artillery took a very active role in separating the infantry from the armor, in disabling some of the lead tanks, and in turning back the enemy advance. The German armor tried to keep the 1st Battalion infantry neutralized by maintaining a steady flow of machine gun fire at a height of two feet above the ground. But the riflemen, machine gunners and mortar men stuck by their posts to fire on the few enemy infantry who reached the line.

By 1030, the attack had been repulsed decisively and the enemy had been turned back, leaving eight tanks disabled in front of the 1st Battalion lines.

Two antitank, two tank destroyer, and two machine guns had been destroyed, a half track had been lost, and in the initial hour and a half of counterattack,

48 men were casualties. Of these, six were killed, and five wounded were officers; two were company commanders.

It was later learned that the enemy force was the 506th Panzer Grenadier Battalion, followed by the Panzer Grenadier Battalion of the 108th Panzer Brigade. These units consisted of a company of 14 Mark VI tanks and two companies of mixed Mark IV and V tanks, along with two Battalions of infantry.

The Germans did not try to take Birk again. The Aachen gap was closed within the following ten days. Had Birk been lost, the German relief of Aachen could have been effected, and the seizure of the city by the Allies long delayed.

During the capture and defense of Birk from 8 - 12 October 1944, the 1st Battalion with attached units moved 4000 yards to take vital ground commanding the north approach to Aachen; it had held its ground in face of four major counterattacks. It suffered 145 casualties, at least 20 killed, lost four anti-tank weapons, a half track, two tanks, a jeep, a  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ton truck, two machine guns.

But it destroyed 38 enemy tanks and took 125 PWs. Most important, it took a vital objective and held it against all odds.

B. P. PURDUE  
Colonel - 120th Infantry  
Commanding

- 4 Incls: (Suggested)  
1 - Two sketches  
2 - S-3 report of 12 October 1944  
3 - After Action Report

2nd Bn.

Period: Oct 10, 11, 12, 13 - 1944.

Location:

Oct. 10 - north of Nordstern, Germany.

Objective: high ground n.w. of Euchen, Germany.

Authority NND735011  
By RH NARA Date 07-26-08



HEADQUARTERS  
2ND BATTALION 120TH INFANTRY  
APO 30 US ARMY

17 October 1944.

UNIT: 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry, 30th Division.  
DATE: 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th of October 1944.  
WEATHER: Rainy, Chilly.  
CASUALTIES: Friendly - 5 Officers, 75 Enlisted Men.  
Enemy - Severe.  
LOCATION OF ACTION: Grid Squares: 50 to 55, 86 to 90 on Sheet  
5102, Hergozenrath Map of Germany, Scale  
1/25,000.  
LOCATION OF ENEMY: See Narrative.

NARRATIVE:

On 10th of October 1944, this battalion acting under regimental order moved out in the attack. At 0600 hours the battalion left the line of departure just north of Nordstern, Germany. The attack was made in a column of companies; Companys "E", "F" and "G" in that order. The battalion's objective was the high ground north west of Euchen, Germany. At 0900 hours the first contact with the enemy was made. This point of contact was approximately 2000 yards south of Nordstern, Germany. The enemy held excellent defensive positions. They were dug in on commanding ground supported by heavy machine gun fire and artillery. Two well positioned pill boxes were also in this vicinity. The battalion regardless of these enemy fires overran the enemy positions. Sixty prisoners were taken by the battalion in this single engagement. (Enemy location: 87.5 52.8) Quickly reorganizing, the battalion pushed on to the east. The terrain encountered in this area by the battalion greatly favored the enemy. The area consisted of heavily wooded sections and steep banks. The enemy took advantage of these terrain features, being well dug in and placed on all forward slopes. (Location of enemy: 88.0 52.5) Enemy artillery fire increased in intensity. Battalion was deployed with "E" and "F" the leading companys with Company "G" in reserve. Again disregarding heavy enemy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire the battalion overcame the resistance and moved forward. Another fifty prisoners were added to the battalion's bag of captives in this second encounter. Once more the unit quickly reorganized and the attack now swung to the south. Contact was again made with the enemy at approximately 1630 hours. (Location of enemy: 88.3-52.2) This particular section of the ground was heavily wooded. The enemy was again well dug in and emplaced on the forward slope of a ridge. Their positions afforded them excellent fields of fire from this commanding ground. Heavy concentrations of enemy artillery fire began falling upon our troops.

Contd - Narrative of 2d Bn.

The leading elements of the battalion at this time ran into heavy small arms fire supported by a machine gun and anti-tank fire. So intense was the enemy fire and so well were their positions located that the battalion was pinned to the ground.

The battalion dug in for the night and was continuously hammered by enemy artillery, in support of the automatic and small arms fire, that harassed our troops throughout the entire night.

At 0700 hours the next morning, the 11th of October, the battalion resumed the attack. Taking full advantage of a protective fog, the leading echelons advanced in the face of the enemy fire and routed the enemy from their positions. Fifty more prisoners of war were added to the battalion's record. Without losing any momentum in their drive, the battalion moved up to Schleibacherhof, Germany. During this move, the enemy hurled all the available fires at his disposal in this sector at our troops. These fires consisted of intense artillery, mortar, machine gun, anti-tank and small arms fires. The battalion's foremost point of advance was a railroad at coordinates 89.0-51.4. Readjustment of positions was accomplished under this heavy fire. "G" Company relieved "F" Company. "F" Company going into battalion reserve.

Because of this advance a salient was created by the battalion, causing both the battalion flanks to be vulnerable to attack. Due to the existence of this salient, an orderly reorganization and straightening out of the battalion's front line was immediately necessary. This reorganization and straightening of the lines was accomplished under extreme hazardous conditions. The enemy artillery fire increased in intensity and several counterattacks were repulsed.

At 1900 hours the enemy counterattacked, with fifteen tanks supported by infantry on the right flank. The battalion's lines held, the attack being hurled back with severe losses to the enemy infantry, and five enemy tanks being knocked out.

At 0600 hours the 12th of October, a second severe counter-attack by enemy armor and supporting infantry took place. The enemy had approximately twenty tanks in this attack. Once again our lines held with heavy losses to the enemy infantry and seven enemy tanks knocked out of action.

Throughout all these engagements, the enemy maintained heavy artillery fire, and supported their counterattacks with mortar and automatic fire.

Throughout these several days every man in the 2nd Battalion stuck to his assigned post, performed his job in a superb manner. It was this demonstration of superior performance of duty, that enabled the battalion to hold its positions successfully, when the situation for the battalion was critical.

Contd - Narrativ 2d 1.

Because of the heroic and courageous action of the 2d Battalion throughout these several days, and enemy breakthrough that might have proven disastrous was averted. The strategic and tactical importance of the accomplishment of the 2nd Battalion in these several engagements is recognized by its higher headquarters as invaluable.

Morale of the entire battalion during these trying days was extremely high. Every man sensing the importance of the battalion's mission did his utmost to enable his unit to function as a well coordinated team.

Besides knocking out many of the enemy armored vehicles and tanks, the battalion succeeded in capturing intact, six anti-tank guns. The battalion's vehicle loss amounted to three quarter-ton vehicles.

OCTOBER 1-21

3rd Bn. 120th

From 1 Oct <sup>over</sup> 44 to 4 Oct 44 the 3rd Bn 120th Infantry was in Division

Reserve and although all plans were completed and the two attacking regiments were to be the 117th and the 119th Infantries, the Battalion had conscientiously trained in all aspects of pill-box fighting and all necessary aspects of fighting that was anticipated to be encountered in breaching the Siegfried Line. The Division's mission was to penetrate the Line in its sector, generally the area between Rimbürg and Marienburg. From there it was anticipated that the Division roll up the flank of the Line from the north and effect the joining of forces in the encirclement of Aachen. This <sup>is</sup> a final objective, was to completely weaken the defenses both natural and man-made and also as a blow to take the once most heavily fortified city of Germany.

On the 5 Oct 44 the <sup>3d</sup> third Battalion was attached to the 119th Infantry at 1300. A gap between their two assault Battalions had developed and it was the Battalion's mission to cross the Worm river and clean out the pocket left and establish contact between the two Battalions. At 1333 the Battalion started moving and crossed the Worm under heavy Artillery. The crossing site had been spotted by that time and heavy concentrations were falling there periodically. The Battalion crossed the river and advanced through the woods to the east. I Company was sent out and contacted the battalion on our right and K and L Companies <sup>ABREAST</sup> proceeded toward their final objective. The Battalion encountered a pill box in the woods which was naturally camouflaged and this obstacle was easily removed by small arms fire, causing <sup>it</sup> them to button up and when we got men close the small garrison surrendered. There were about ten men and an officer in the pill box. By 1800 we had established the <sup>H Co</sup> on the left and <sup>I Co</sup> on the right contact, and were on our Objective and digging in for the night. We had encountered two more pill-boxes that were effectively reduced with the aid of our tanks and our infantry assault teams. We found that the enemy was organizing the area around the pill-boxes rather than remaining inside them.

(1)

By Authority: [Signature] 100011  
Date: 07.26.44  
B. H. NARA Date

After Lt. Col Paul W. McCollum, the Battalion Commander, had checked the Companies positions he started to return to his CP. On the return route he was killed by artillery fire. This is mentioned because his death seriously affected the morale and efficiency of the Battalion for a short while.

Lt. Col Howard W. Greer, then Major, assumed the command of the Battalion and spent the entire night planning attack for the next day. Throughout the night heavy concentrations of artillery fell in the vicinity of the crossing. Early the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> of October <sup>44</sup> our position was counter<sup>ly</sup> attacked by a force of approximately 100 enemy infantry. However the attack was repulsed and the 3rd Battalion pushed over the open fields west of Herbach and close to Merkstein Hofstadt.

On the 7th of October, with the 1st Bn<sup>ly</sup> 119th Infantry on its right, and the 3rd Bn<sup>ly</sup> 120th Infantry jumped off for the ground between Herzogenrath and Alsdorf. L Company cleaned out Herbach and I Company Merkstein Plitschard. This was the first chance that the Battalion had to do any town fighting in Germany. We established our policy early by burning <sup>six</sup> houses from which we received resistance. The Battalion was in ~~ZM~~ Merksain before noon, where it was held up briefly by heavy enemy small arms fire from one of the slag piles in the area. By 1315 the Battalion had reached Merkstein itself, and after an air strike on the territory between Merkstein and Herzogenrath, drove across the open ground east of Herzogenrath into the settlements of Noppenberg and Bierstrass. The objective was taken by mid afternoon. Later <sup>the</sup> I<sup>st</sup> Company cleaned out the woods further south and to the east of Herzogenrath, and we organized our defenses in this position.

For the three days since the jump off the Battalion advanced 6000 yards against heavy artillery, automatic and small arms fire. The <sup>3d</sup> ~~third~~ Battalion fought over all types of terrain, including woods, five towns and open ground. The Battalion's casualties were light with the astonishing number of 406 prisoners captured. It is worth noting that we captured a Lt. <sup>Lieutenant Colonel</sup> ~~Colonel~~ and his complete staff and 300 of his men. On the last day we fought 3000 yards

with an exposed left flank.

On the 8th of Oct <sup>44</sup> 3rd Battalion was relieved from its attachment to the 119th Infantry and <sup>as returned to the</sup> ~~attached to the~~ <sup>120th</sup> Infantry; <sup>it was to be committed in support of the 117th Infantry</sup> which was fighting on the Division left (east) flank, in the vicinity of Alsdorf and Kol-Kellersberg. In the afternoon the <sup>3rd</sup> ~~third~~ Battalion, less I Company, <sup>which</sup> who had been left to defend the woods east of Herzogenrath, was ordered to move to Kol-Kellersberg. We moved out with L Company leading, followed by K. Our mission was to aid in securing the 117th's regimental objective, high open ground 400 yards east of the town.

Through Zopp and around the slag pile south of Alsdorf the battalion moved on to the high ground where the residential district lay. <sup>It</sup> We had received information that the town had been cleared earlier that day by the 117th Infantry. Half way through the town <sup>the</sup> our lead company, with the Regimental Commander of the 120th, the 3rd Battalion Commander and the Battalion <sup>3</sup>, was cut off from the rear elements and cost the Battalion 20 men and <sup>two</sup> ~~A~~ light tanks. The Command group and the two platoons organized an all around defense and early the next morning managed to reestablish contact. The following two days we regrouped and tied in our defenses between the 117th Infantry and the 2nd Battalion of the 120th Infantry. In the process of tying in with the 2nd Bn. 120th, Lt. <sup>one</sup> Bickley and ~~A~~ platoon of K Company did an outstanding job of making contact. Report from higher headquarters was that he was to proceed to a railroad junction in the vicinity of Euchen and contact elements of the 2nd Battalion. The information that the 2nd <sup>Battalion</sup> Bn. had been pulled back did not reach Lt. Bickley, and consequently he walked his platoon into a heavy fire <sup>and</sup> fight, but effectively withdrew them in good order with only ~~A~~ casualty.

On October 11, the 3rd Bn, 120th, reverted to Division reserve in the vicinity of Noppenberg. The same day the Battalion received orders to be prepared to retake the town of Bardenberg, a town which the 119th Infantry had previously captured and which had been retaken by a large counter-attacking force. Two Battalions of the 119th had been cut off south of the town

which was reoccupied and filled with enemy. At this time K Company was pulled from the Battalion and held in reserve of the 120th Infantry. Battalion less K Company moved west through Herzogenrath and attacked Bardenberg from the north at 0900 following a terrific artillery preparation. The Battalion by superior planning of Lt Col Howard W Greer, was broken down and assigned sectors within the town. With a company of tanks the battalion moved into the town and the resulting fight turned into house to house combat. In the center of the town the troops encountered tanks and were momentarily stopped. Lt Col Greer, Battalion Commander, personally at the head of his troops destroyed two enemy tanks and catching the spirit of their commander, the Battalion rapidly pushed ahead and cleared the town. <sup>Lt Col Greer was awarded DSC for this act.</sup> Just before dark the fighting became sharpest, but by late evening the entire town was retaken and cleared of enemy and contact reestablished with the Battalions of the 119th. Our casualties were moderate and we accounted for 100 prisoners, <sup>four</sup> 4 tanks, 12 half-tracks and killed 30 enemy. The 119th relieved us and we withdrew to positions north of the town, supporting their defense in depth. ~~On the 11~~

On the 12th of October the Battalion, less K Company, was again attached to the 119th Infantry with the mission of attacking south east of Bardenberg toward the west section of Wurselen. Against heavy artillery and persistent small arms fire, by late afternoon the <sup>3d</sup> third Battalion, with I Company and L Company abreast, I on the right, had reached the main highway to Alsdorf. In this position the Battalion consolidated and established contact with the 1st Bn 120th Infantry on the left and with the 119th Infantry on the right. On the 13th of October 44 the 3rd Battalion was relieved from attachment of the 119th Infantry and became attached to the 116th Infantry, 29th Division. From the 13th to the 15th of October we remained in position on the Alsdorf highway, bounding North Wurselen.

During these two days artillery was the heaviest that has been encountered by this Battalion throughout its entire combat. Not a man left his fox-hole and we suffered from 15 to 20 casualties a day. The enemy with excellent

observation on our entire sector methodically destroyed building after building.

On the 15th of October the 3rd Battalion received orders to attack Wurselen, and with two companies on line we jumped off. Enemy artillery reaction was heavy, but the Battalion gained ~~the~~<sup>a</sup> little ground beyond the Alsdorf Highway. Wurselen was defended fanatically by excellent troops and on either side of the town were pill-box groups which the enemy knew could be flanked only through the town. During this attack 12 men were killed, of which two were officers. From the 16th to the 20th of October the Battalion maintained its defensive positions along the highway. Throughout the ~~five~~<sup>four</sup> day period enemy artillery and mortars were consistently heavy. The Battalion was subjected to two counter attacks which were stopped by artillery and mortar fire. In the ~~5~~<sup>same</sup> day period, on the defense, 12 men were killed and 42 wounded. At 0745 on the 21 of October, in coordination with the 116th Infantry on its right, the Battalion staged an attack on Wurselen, which was intended to divert enemy reserves from the main effort further south, an effort which was to close the gap between the 30th and 1st Divisions and thus encircle the city of Aachen. ~~The Battalion's K~~ Company, which was in Regimental reserve, at the same time also attacked the town of Euchen in another sector, 3000 yards north. Their mission was likewise diversionary.

The advance during the attack was initially rapid and both companies got into Wurselen about 500 yards beyond the Alsdorf Highway. The unit on our right, which was to attack at the same time, failed to keep up with our rapid advance and a counter-attacking force of infantry and an estimated company of Tiger tanks hit our right flank and cut I Company in half. Not having reserves, Capt Charles R Shaw, I Company commander, when he found that he would get no help, called down artillery on his own troops in order to allow them to withdraw. In the resulting bitter fighting our men engaged in hand-to-hand and bayonet. Disengaging themselves from the enemy, they withdrew in good order and again took up positions on the Alsdorf Highway.



In order to strengthen our defensive position, <sup>(Separate)</sup> B Company of the 99th Infantry Battalion ~~was~~ attached to the 3rd Battalion, 120th, to support ~~them~~ <sup>it</sup>.

In a feat of reorganization, accomplished under direct tank fire and heavy artillery, all three companies were tightly consolidated by nightfall. The cost of the attack was heavy. The <sup>3d</sup> Battalion lost approximately 60 men, including killed, wounded and missing. However, the feint attack had been a success. In the evening announcement was made of the link up of the 30th and 1st Divisions, and the encirclement of Aachen was complete. Later, on the 16th of November, in the main drive for the Roer River, ~~xxx~~ a Regiment and a Battalion had to be employed to take the same ground. The month of October saw the 3rd Battalion of 120th Infantry do its heaviest fighting, and during the entire operation the Battalion suffered 581 casualties, of which 24 were killed.

Captain Edward M. Hill,  
3rd Bn. 5-3

per Lt. Col. Ward.

1st Bn 120th Inf.

Attached to 1st Bn 12 Oct. 44:

1st + 3rd platoon, Co. "B", 823 TD. [4 guns].

1st platoon, Co. "A". [4 guns].

Co. "B", 743 Tank Bn.

1st platoon, AT Co., 120th Inf.

a platoon of Co. "C", 105 Engr.

In direct support:

230 F. A.

Cannon Co., 120th Inf.

Location of 1st Bn. 12 Oct. 44:

Part played by AT platoon, 1st Bn.:

On the morning of Oct. 12, 1944, this platoon had 2 57mm. AT guns in defensive positions in the front lines on the forward slope of a bald hill. Early in the morning, these two gun crews saw enemy tanks approaching their positions from a great distance. They were coming from the east and it was very difficult to see them because of the sun. The AT crews held their fire until the lead tank, a Mark V, was within 500 yards. Then one gun opened fire on the lead tank, making a direct hit, knocking it out. The second shot was a miss aimed at the next tank. The third shot was a hit on a Mark VI tank, which was silhouetted on the sky-

line. Immediately after this third shot, this gun received a direct hit from an enemy tank, which put the gun out of action.

The second AT gun was knocked out of action before it could fire. Two members of the crew were killed.

Part played by 2nd section, 2nd platoon, Co. "D", Oct. 12, 1944:

In the morning of Oct. 12, 1944, this machine gun section observed five enemy tanks approaching their positions across open ground. Noticing that the hatches were open on the tanks, the section opened fire, forcing the tank crews to close the hatches, thereby limiting their vision materially.

When one of these tanks was knocked out by Tank Destroyer fire, the section switched their fire to it and caught the crew abandoning this tank. One enemy tank approached to within 300 yards of this section of guns before being knocked out. During the ensuing fight, both machine guns of this section were knocked out by direct fire from enemy tanks. One gun was buried in the crew's fox hole and the other gun was completely ruined. Both gun crews stayed in position in their fox holes even after their weapons had been put out of action.

Part played by 230 F. A. Liaison Officer and 2 observers with their crews, Oct. 12, 1944:

These men stayed in their front line positions during the counterattack launched by the enemy on the 1st Bn position. They should be given the lion's share of the credit

for stopping the determined counterattack. Even after both forward observers and their crews had (become casualties?) been knocked out, the Liaison Officer continued directing the artillery fire.

DRAFT  
UNIT CITATION

3. Specific Data:

- a. Exact date of action: 5 October through 21 October 1944.
- b. Location where action occurred: From Rimbürg, Holland to Wurselen,

Germany.

- c. (1) Character of terrain, of hostile observation and of enemy fire:

From rolling and open around Herbach and Merkstein to heavily builtup in Bardenberg and Wurselen. The enemy had excellent observation from hedgerows and pillboxes overlooking the open country and had organized a strong defense from houses and intersections in the towns. Predominant character of enemy fire was periodically extreme artillery <sup>and mortar</sup> concentrations, consistent barrages, <sup>at regular intervals,</sup> and heavy tank fire during the principal counterattack. Automatic fire was well organized. During the close combat near Wurselen, bayonets had to be used by both sides.

(2) Visibility, time of day, and atmospheric conditions: Visibility good except during rains from 15-21 October; period 5-21 October, weather clear and cool until 15 October; frequent rainy spells from then till 21 October.

(3) Location of enemy: In direct contact at all times, except for short periods during movements to new sectors from the 9-13 October.

(4) Morale: our forces, excellent; enemy, unknown.

(5) Casualties sustained: ~~unknown~~ 581

(6) Effect or result of action: The series of attacks which carried the Battalion through the Siegfried Line and into the town of Wurselen north of Aachen, helped directly in completing the encirclement of that key city; the first attack on the 21st October caused a diversion to the enemy and permitted elements of the 30th Division north of Aachen to contact members of the 1st Division driving from the south that night. The fact that the entire area was heavily defended, strongly counterattacked and continuously shelled is proof of its importance; the fact that many tanks were taken from the Aachen area to counterattack the feint drive which the enemy must have considered a major strike by the Battalion showed how effective the enemy deemed the Battalion's action. As a result, the Germans lost vital ground for the first time within their own country.

(7) Detailed Resume:

On 5 October 1944, the 3rd Battalion, 120th Infantry, was attached to the 119th Infantry Regiment and ordered to seize the ground between Rimburg and Herbach, thus filling the gap between the 1st and 2nd Battalions of that Regiment. After crossing the Wurm River, the Battalion seized the high ground and woods on its objective, had neutralized three pillboxes and established contact by patrol with adjacent units.

On the following day, the attack was continued, and though counterattacked by 100 enemy infantry early in the morning, the Battalion pushed over the open field west of Herbach and close to Merkstein Hofstadt.

On 7 October, with the 1st Battalion, 119th Infantry, on its right (west), the 3rd Battalion, 120th Infantry, struck for the ground between Herzogenrath and Alsdorf. It cleaned out Herbach and Merkstein Plitschard and swept into Zn Merkstein before noon, where it was held up briefly by heavy enemy small arms fire from one of the slag piles in the area. By 1515, the Battalion had reached Merkstein itself and, after an airstrike on the territory between that town and Herzogenrath, drove across the open ground east of Herzogenrath into the settlements of Noppenberg and Bierstrass. The objective was taken by mid-afternoon. Later, one company cleaned out the woods further south to the east of Herzogenrath and organized defenses there.

From the jumpoff three days before, the Battalion had fought 6000 yards against heavy artillery, automatic and small arms fire. It had fought in woods and through five towns and over open ground. (Though casualties had been only moderate, 406 prisoners were taken. One lieutenant had been killed. (On the last day, the Battalion fought 3000 yards with an exposed left flank.)

The Battalion Commander was killed by heavy artillery falling in the woods near Rimburg the night of the 5 October. Because it continued forward in a series of successful attacks and repelled a counterattack, without its accustomed leadership and particularly because that leadership had come to be trusted and depended upon, the individual and collective prowess of the Battalion was the more enhanced.

On 8 October, the 3rd Battalion was relieved of attachment to

the 119th and attached to the 117th Infantry, which was committed on the Division left (east) flank in the vicinity of Alsdorf and Kol-Kellersberg. In the afternoon, the 3rd Battalion, minus one company left to defend the woods near Herzogenrath, was ordered to move to Kol-Kellersberg, to aid in securing the Regimental objective, high, bald ground 400 yards east of that settlement. Through Zopp and around a slag pile south of Alsdorf, the Battalion moved onto the high ground where the residential district lay. Halfway through the town, an enemy penetration cut off the forward elements from the rear troops and cost the Battalion 20 men and two light tanks. In the face of a splitup, the men of the Battalion did not become disorganized but fought off the enemy and, the next morning, reestablished contact between the separated groups. The following two days saw the Battalion regroup and defend the south flank of the 117th Infantry, while that Regiment attacked and seized its objective.

After moving to Noppenberg in Division Reserve on 11 October, the 3rd Battalion was ordered to retake Bardenberg, a town which the 119th Infantry had previously seized and moved through; it had been counterattacked from the southeast and two battalions had been cut off south of the town, by that time reoccupied and filled with Germans. At the same time, one company was taken from the Battalion to be held in reserve of the 120th Infantry. With a company of tanks, the Battalion moved south from Bierstrass and ~~headed~~<sup>attached</sup> into the heart of town. In the center, the troops were ~~attacked~~<sup>hit</sup> by ~~tanks~~<sup>enemy tanks</sup> and momentarily delayed; then when they saw the Battalion Commander personally destroy two of the enemy tanks, they pushed ahead to the southeast outskirts. Just before dark, the fighting became sharpest, but by late evening, the entire town was retaken and contact with one of the Battalions which had been cut off was reestablished. In the drive, the Battalion took 100 prisoners, disabled four tanks and 12 halftracks, and killed 30 enemy. The Battalion then withdrew to positions north of the town.

The next day, again attached to the 119th Infantry, the Battalion attacked southeast from Bardenberg toward a western section of Wurselen on the left of positions already ~~used~~<sup>held</sup> by the 119th Infantry bounded on the east by a highway to Alsdorf. Against heavy artillery and persistent sniper fire, ~~high ground~~<sup>high</sup> ~~between Bardenberg and~~ the highway was reached in the late afternoon, and

contact established with the 1st Battalion, 120th Infantry, to the left.

From the 119th Infantry, the 3rd Battalion was relieved on 13 October and became attached to the 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division, which ~~attacked to take~~ <sup>took</sup> positions along the Alesdorf highway bounding north Wurselen. On 15 October, the 3rd Battalion pushed <sup>further Southeast</sup> into Wurselen; with two companies on line and hence, without normal reserve, during heavy rain and artillery fire which blasted two stories from an observation post and constantly shook the command post itself, the Battalion ~~remained~~ <sup>gained little ground beyond</sup> the Alesdorf highway. Wurselen was defended fanatically, for on either side of it were pillbox groups which the enemy knew could be flanked only through the town. During the attack, 12 men were killed or wounded, of which two were officers.

From 16 to 20 October, the Battalion maintained its defensive positions along the highway. Throughout the five day period, enemy artillery and mortars were consistent and unrelenting. The weather was wet and the Battalion zone was subject to two attempted counterattacks, stopped by artillery and mortar. In the brief period on the defense, 12 men were killed and 42 wounded.

At 0745 on 21 October, in coordination with a unit on its right (south), the Battalion staged a feint attack upon south Wurselen, which was intended to divert enemy forces from the main effort further south, an effort to close the gap between the 30th and 1st Divisions and encircle the city of Aachen. Striking at Euchen in another sector, 3000 yards north, the third rifle company of the Battalion also attacked east at the same time.

The advance during the attack was initially rapid, and both companies in Wurselen and the company near Euchen pushed over 300 yards with small casualties. Then from the right (south) flank, a strong force of an estimated company of Tiger tanks passed <sup>in front</sup> ~~before~~ a unit on the Battalion's right which had not advanced so far and struck the right (south) company. At the same time, <sup>strong mortar & machine</sup> ~~in Euchen~~ in Euchen appeared and fired into the advance of the company on the north, <sup>causing 15 casualties</sup> ~~causing 15 casualties~~

*gun fire, along with direct fire from Complaced tanks*

The right company in Wurselen was cut in half by a force of <sup>with 150 infantrymen</sup> tanks herded by four Tiger Royals, and it became necessary to send <sup>help in the form of</sup> ~~Company~~ Company "B", 99th Infantry Battalion (separate) to help extricate it. In a feat of reorganization, accomplished during heavy tank fire and combat so close that



bayonets were used, all three companies had withdrawn by nightfall to their former positions.

The feint attack had been a success: in the evening, announcement was made of the linkup of the 30th and 1st Divisions around Aachen. But for the 3rd Battalion, it had been costly, for it had lost more than 141 men killed, wounded and captured, including three officers wounded. Thirty-nine prisoners had been taken. Later, on 16 November, to take the same ground, a Regiment and a Battalion had to be employed.

Representing a sustained advance through the enemy's long prepared defenses and <sup>an</sup> heroic attack at the end of it, which succeeded <sup>in</sup> to draw <sup>ing</sup> the German armor away from the main ~~effort~~, <sup>American thrust</sup> the 16 days of continuous action and movement were a tribute to the unit's efficiency and untiring devotion to duty. During the entire operation, of the <sup>581</sup> ~~1000~~ casualties, 24 were killed.

B. P. PURDUE  
Colonel - 120th Infantry  
Commanding