

DIRECT SUPPORT :-:

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Here is the direct support artillery role in what was characterized by XIX Corps Headquarters as the "perfect infantry attack." It was so described in an Associated Press story dated 26 Nov 44, which gave an excellent news (non-technical) account of the operation.

This is not an attempt to set forth a standard operating procedure. No two operations are alike except that men die and you advance by fire and movement. This is an account of how a direct support battalion functioned in an attack on strong field fortifications in Germany.

Our mission was direct support of the 117th Infantry. Their mission was to capture in succession objectives E, K, G, H, M, and N (Overlay Sketch No. 1). It was expected that E would be taken the first day, K and G and then H the second, and M and N on the third day.

Three thousand years ago a Chinese said that tactics, like water, must conform themselves to the ground over which they flow. That is true today with a vengeance—ask anyone who fought in the hedgerows. The terrain over which this attack would be made was like a billiard table with a few blocks scattered upon it. The only concealment was in or near towns—amid the blocks. The important terrain features were, from north to south: the railway embankment north of Mariadorf, the two slag piles at Mariadorf (the near or northwest one 80 meters high, the far one 50), Mariadorf itself, the railway embankment south of Mariadorf, and the woods and ravine southeast of Kellersberg.

The front in this sector had been static for some time. This meant that the Boche had laid many mines—but also that we had a fair idea as to where his installations were. Within the limits of fluctuating ammunition allowances we had sniped at him quite a bit. Every time we'd shoot in a good target we would replot and then transfer it to an overlay marked "Known Enemy Installations." Sometimes, of course, he would move to alternate locations, but most of the time he wouldn't; reason: no suitable alternate locations.

We observed several characteristics. German mortars were invariably near German OPs, linked by wire communication. Long lines could not be maintained in the face of our artillery. Direct fire guns will stick to certain areas, those that meet the requirements of concealment and field of fire. We actually shot out two direct fire guns in the same location three days apart. Wherever there are Boche there are MG 42s.

Our infantry had attached to it the mortars of a tank battalion, and also one tank company. We had the 70th FA Bn (105-mm how) in direct support (virtually attached). Also we had a semi-battalion formed by grouping the 117th Inf Cannon Co with the 406th Inf Cannon Co (the latter having been loaned to us at the last minute). That is a total of thirty-six 105s which were at the immediate call of our FDC. In addition, a company of 4.2" mortars was to work in our sector, available through DivArty, and there was a great amount of reinforcing artillery at hand.

For many a day our doughboys had gazed across the flat beer fields between Alsdorf and Mariadorf and shuddered. There was no cover. The wooded ravine to the south had been explored with unhappy results. Their plan was to take off at

a dead run, go around both sides of the near slag pile, and get on the first objective (E, or Mariadorf town) before the Boche could slam the door with artillery and mortar defensive fires. There was to be no alerting artillery preparation. During the attack the flanks of the penetration area were to be smothered with HE, and the area of penetration was to receive ten minutes' fire while the assault companies made their 700-yard dash. The 2nd and 3d Bns would make the attack.

After consulting Ln-2 and Ln-3 we decided to send one FO with the assault companies of each battalion. A third FO from the 70th FA Bn would go with a support company of the 2nd Bn. All present static OPs would be manned to cover the attack. The FO who accompanied the 3d Bn was to find an OP that next day could cover the advance of the 1st Bn through the housing project.

The artillery fire plan was gotten up in the following manner. After consulting the infantry and our overlay of known locations we requested certain fires from Division Artillery. We told them where, how long, and what type (neutralizing or harassing). They, after a parley with Corps, told us what we'd get. With the Division plan in our pocket we went back to the infantry and planned the fires with their mortars and our thirty-six 105s. One unique feature was the plan to place one battery's time fire concentration on each of the two slag piles. These concentrations were to be lifted on call from static OPs when the infantry got too close for safety. As Ln-2 was not satisfied with the fire along and in back of the railroad embankment north of Mariadorf, we put our third battery in that area firing different time fire concentrations at maximum rate. This last paid dividends.¹

The composite fire plan was as shown in the table below (see Overlay Sketch No. 1).

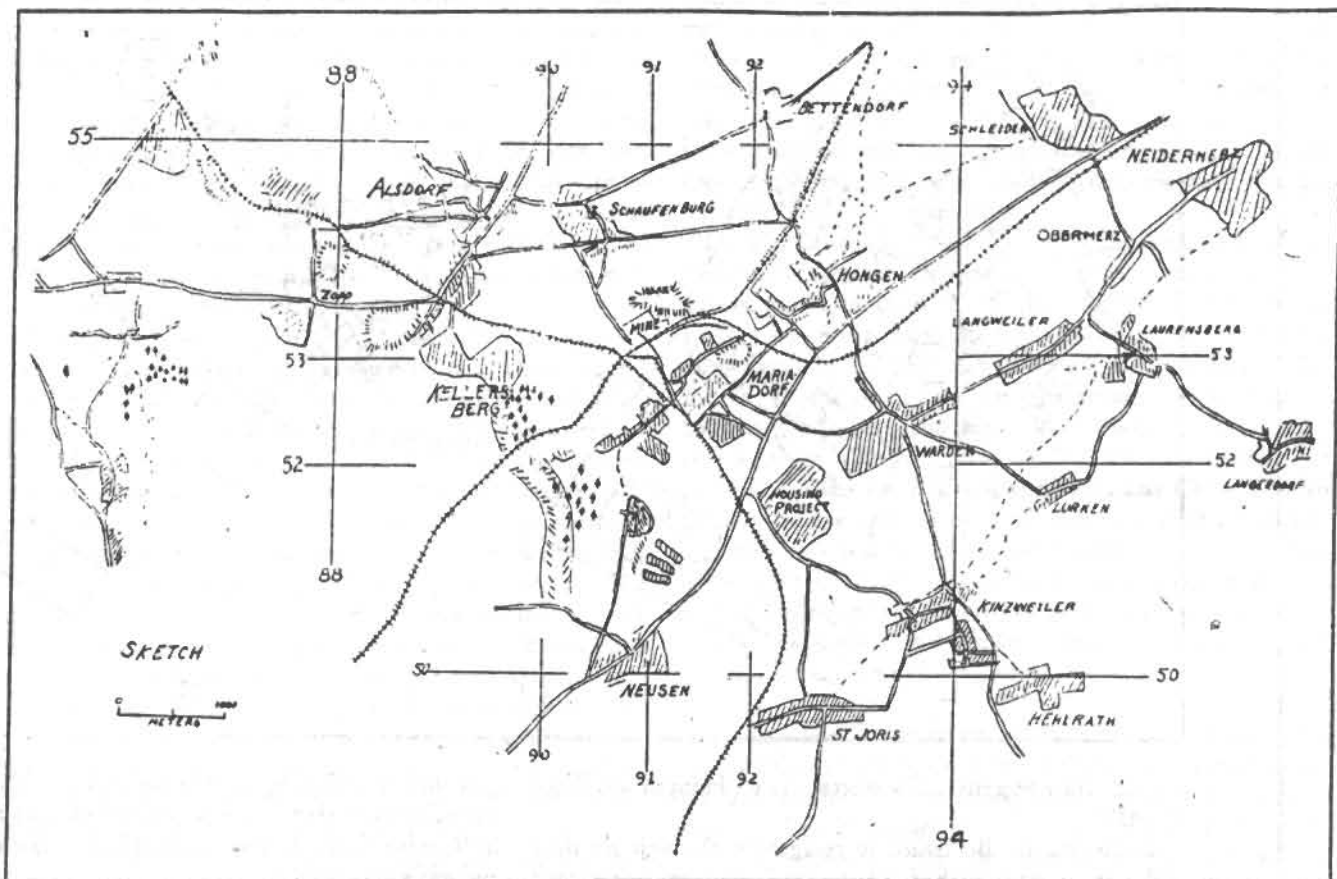
Time	Unit Firing	Area or Conc	Method of Fire
H 'til lift	118th FA "A" & "C"	Conc 1 & 2	1 btry v/min ti fire
H to H+10	General support	Area 1	Neut fire
H to H+30	General support	Areas 2 & 3	Neut fire
H to H+60	1 plat 4.2" mtrs	Area 16	250 rds
H to H+15	Btry B, 118th FA	Area 17	220 rds ti fire
H to H+30	117th Inf & atchd mtrs	Areas 11, 12, & 14	Neut fire
H to H+30	4.2" mortars	Area 15	Neut fire
H to H+2	117th & 406th Can Cos	Area 12	4 vol max rate
H+2 to H+15	117th Can Co	Area 15	Neut 1-v/min
H+2 to H+15	406th Can Co	Areas 15 & 10	Neut 1-v/min
H+15 to H+30	406th & 117th Can Cos	Areas 13 & 9	Harr plat v/min
H+15 to H+60	70th FA Bn ²	Area 18	Neut (total 192 rds)
H to H+60	General support	Areas 4, 5, 6, 7, & 8	Harr fire

Initially every tube was tied up with prearranged fires. We expected, however, that our own "A" and "C" batteries would be free by H+10. Previous experience indicated that very few targets are picked up in the first few minutes of an attack.

We drew up a plan of defensive fires for each of the objectives in advance. We planned the use of FOs from the jump-off to the final objective. The liaison officers came in, got the defensive fires, and were briefed on the plans for supporting fire on D-day and for employment of FOs. With Ln-1 we drew up a tentative fire plan for the attack on the housing

¹Our S-2 later found in this area 12 abandoned MGs that had not fired a round.

²70th FA Bn was used by DivArty from H to H+15.



project (Objective G).

The morning before the attack there were air strikes on Mariadorf and Hongen. We marked the targets with red smoke, our observers correcting any errors in marking. H-hour was near mid-day, immediately after the air strike.

We had shot in Concentrations 1 and 2. The batteries had given the data to each section to avoid delay. H-hour came, the tumult began, and we waited. At H+6½ "B" Btry reported rounds complete, each of six concentrations fired twice, btry 3 rounds. At H+10 Ln-2 called for Concentration No. 1 to lift. Ln-1 reported that the assault companies were moving around the slag pile into the mine, walking upright. About H+15 Ln-1 fired at a machine gun in a house on the near edge of Area No. 2. Ln-2 called for Concentration No. 2 to lift. Ln-1 reported no Boche artillery or mortars as yet. A Cannon Co FO on "B" Co OP began firing on some 25 Germans with machine guns short of the north edge of Area 14 (Overlay Sketch No. 1). Two batteries with time fire were put on this target, firing about 60 rounds. When the area was mopped up three walking wounded were gotten out; the rest would never walk.

By dark all of Objective E except the far slag pile had been taken. The fog of war began to settle.

The 70th FA Bn lost contact with their FO accompanying the 2nd Bn. Our FO with the 3d reported his location, then checked out of the net to conserve batteries. When we attempted to decode his message giving his location, we couldn't. Ln-2 moved up to Mariadorf. The Boche began to shell the road between the mine (by the rear slag pile) and the town with 150s.

Ln-1 called up about dark. The FO who was to accompany 1st Bn to Objective G (housing project) was with him.

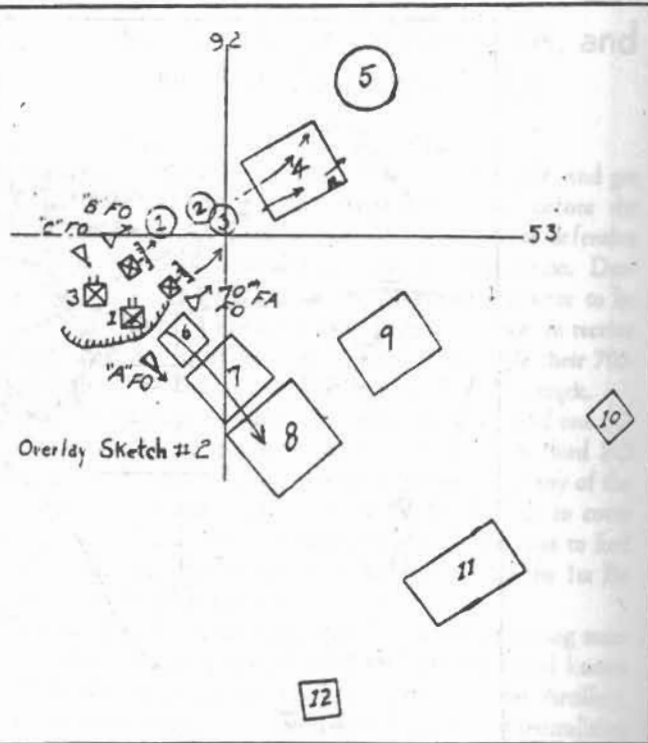
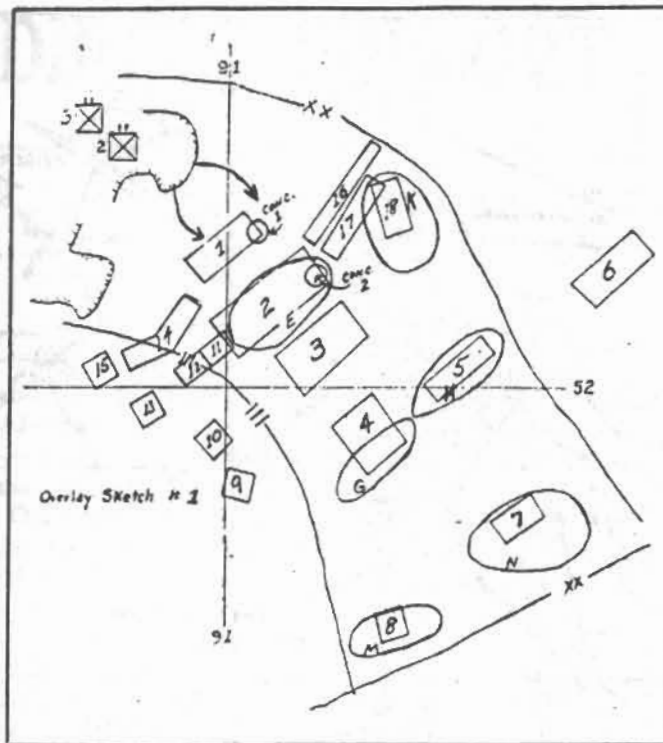
He wanted to know what the FO with the 3d Bn could see that would help him. We couldn't tell him. He still planned to use the previously-prepared supporting fires (Overlay Sketch No. 2).

H to H+5	Area 6	Bn concentration
H+5 to H+15	Area 7	Rolling barrage
H+5 to H+15	Area 8	Med arty neutralization
H to H+60	Areas 9, 10, 11, 12	Harassing fires

For Ln-2 it was agreed to put some "heavy stuff" (TOT with several medium bns) on Hongen and to fire Concentrations 2 & 3 (Overlay Sketch No. 2) at H-hour.

One company was to go around the east side of the slag pile, another west of it. The 70th FA Bn FO had never made contact with his company, the one that was to go to the east. Our "B" FO was with the company that was to go to the west of the slag pile. H-hour was 0700 hours.

The 1st Bn got through the rest of Mariadorf but stopped at the main highway short of the objective to reorganize. The company of the 2nd Bn that went east of the slag pile faded into the blue as far as we were concerned. The company west of the slag pile got pinned down by machine guns in houses at Concentration No. 1 and an AT gun at Concentration No. 2 (Overlay Sketch No. 2). At about 0805 hours our "B" FO began adjusting on these houses—which were slightly less than 200 yards from our advance troops. At 1130 the 4.2" mortars began anew to neutralize the Hongen area. At 1155 we fired a preparation on the houses at Concentration No. 1 and lifted to Concentration No. 2; this had been planned and coordinated by our FO and the company CO. The company east of the slag pile would not give us clearance on Concentration No. 3 but asked for fire 200 yards north of that point (and got it). This gave us an inkling of where that company was. The 2nd Bn's attack proceeded slowly because they had to pause to take quite a few prisoners, but by about 1500 they



were on their objective. The mortar fire on Hongen was lifted at 1435.

While the 1st Bn halted to reorganize, the unit on their right was counterattacked. They waited until that was cleared up. At 1400 we put all 36 of our 105s on Area 4. The infantry moved in behind the fire. By 1530 they were on objective G.

About 1530, as our FO with the 2nd Bn got into an OP in Hongen, he saw about 100 Boche retreating north from that town. The location he sent in plotted out in the open, so we started to put only one battalion on the target. We were a little skeptical about so many Boche thus exposing themselves. The FO's radio operator clarified the situation by saying, "The whole damn German Army's out there." We put ourselves and the 70th FA Bn on the target until it disintegrated and melted from view. Later that night we fired on some enemy infantry near the railroad underpass west of Hongen, perhaps remnants of this group.

The 406th Inf Cannon Co reverted to their own regiment's control. This left thirty 105s at our immediate call. During the attack this day we got a wire-head up as far as Ln-1, on the far side of Mariadorf. We also put in a wire to Ln-2 but could not keep it in because of enemy artillery and friendly tanks.

The 1st Bn planned to attack Warden (Objective H) from the east and the southeast, one company attacking from Mariadorf and one from Objective G (the housing project southwest of Mariadorf). The "A" Btry FO with the 1st Bn had observation on Warden and had registered us on a house on the rear side of town. Also the FO from the 70th FA Bn in Hongen had observation on Warden. The fire plan had been tentatively drawn up prior to D-day:

H to H+10	Warden	Neutralize (118th & 70th FA plus Can Co)
H to H+60	Langweiler, Lurken Kinzweiler, St. Joris	Neutralize—general support

At 0730 the attack jumped off. The tanks failed, however, to accompany the infantry and maintain neutralization. The attack was repulsed with losses. "A" FO shot out a machine

gun that he picked up during the attack. The 70th FA Bn FO in Hongen shot at two self-propelled guns that he spotted in Warden. Since the town seemed full of Boche we requested and got a TOT on it.

By now we had gotten a T-splice from Ln-1's wire to "A" FO. Over this wire we conducted a simultaneous adjustment of the 118th FA Bn, 70th FA Bn, and 117th Inf Cannon Co on initial points for a preparation for the next attempt to take Warden. Between sensings over the same wire the infantry issued several field orders (mainly, "Get those damn tanks up").

The attack was to be at 1150. We had been firing for three minutes when Ln-1 cut in on the line to announce that the attack was called off 'til 1300. This time a company of the 2nd Bn supported by tanks was to attack from Hongen toward Warden to assist the 1st Bn. "A" FO adjusted the 118th & 70th FA Bns and the Can Co of the 117th Inf around the NW, W, and SW sides of Warden, respectively.

We sent "C" FO up to Ln-1 to be put on a static OP in Warden, when taken.

This attack had the taste of perfection. DivArty neutralized the centers of Langweiler, Lurken, Kinzweiler, and St. Joris for 30 minutes. Our 105s covered Warden. The infantry and tanks came fast, the tank machine guns spraying the rear side of town. As the friendly troops approached our fire, "A" FO would move it by saying, "Move Cannon Co 200 yards deeper" or "Move 70th FA 200 yards northeast." As our troops entered Warden he fired both the 70th and 118th FA Bns on Boche beyond the town attempting to escape.

We were getting a little extended now. The 70th FA Bn set up a static OP in Hongen. We put one in Warden. Wire would go to the OP in Warden in the morning. We had wire with Ln-1 on the far side of Mariadorf and with Ln-3 on the rear side. With Ln-2 (who was in Hongen moving to Warden) we had only radio communication.

The LnO at regimental headquarters told us that the plan

for the next day was a simultaneous attack by the 2nd and 3d Bns on Kinzweiler and St. Joris, respectively (Objectives N and M, Overlay Sketch No. 1). Our OP in Warden could see Kinzweiler. The FO with the 1st Bn in Objective G, the housing project, was told to get observation on St. Joris. We planned to use the same type preparation that we had used on Warden, with the FOs adjusting the preparation and lifting it as the troops approached (this time using radio instead of wire.) In this case we requested a particular fire support plan from DivArty after consulting only Ln-3.

Ln-1 briefed the observers in Warden and in the housing project. They understood that they were to adjust on the NW sides of St. Joris and Kinzweiler at daylight and to lift the fire back into the towns on the approach of our troops. Ln-2 called by infantry wire at about 2300; the plan was explained to him. Ln-3 called to say that the observer who would go with his assault troops had reached his company. Everything seemed to be in hand. H-hour was set for 0800.

The infantry had learned well the value of speed. With their tanks, they moved out swiftly across the naked fields. At 0811 the FOs who were giving surveillance to the preparation requested the mediums to lift and the 105s to fire concentrations on the towns' forward edges. These were lifted to the rear of the towns at 0815. By 0830 both Kinzweiler and St. Joris were taken. Our total casualties could be counted on one hand. A surprised German battalion staff, with a nice piece of the battalion, had been captured.

Both we and the 70th FA Bn had selected positions near Kellersberg the previous day. Wire had been laid and survey executed. The objectives taken, we began to displace. We sent one battery first, with a section of FDC to initiate regis-

tration, using the "C" btry FO in Warden. When this was under way we left the assistant S-3 and a radio at the old CP (thus assuring communications with the 70th FA Bn and with observers), and moved the other two batteries. Quite a number of missions were fired through this arrangement. Before noon we were registered and firing from the new position; then the 70th FA Bn displaced.

During the assault from Warden to Kinzweiler two of our tanks had tracks blown by mines. The crews jumped out with tommy guns and went on with the infantry. Later when an attempt was made to get the tanks, an AT gun near Lurken caused trouble. "B" FO picked up the AT gun and quickly silenced it. He also did some good shooting at German armor SW of Langerdorf and may have broken up a potential counterattack. The FO from the 70th FA shot steadily and well. The Boche was confused and hurt. Our OP in Warden picked up some German infantry movement near a haystack. The first time he adjusted one battery; next time he saw them move, thirty 105s fired two volleys and movement ceased.

Our infantry were securely on their objectives. They had captured more than 700 Germans. Enemy dead and wounded marked our concentration numbers.

* * *

No new lesson is to be drawn from this narrative—only a reaffirmation of the old one of coordination. Tanks, infantry, and artillery form a strong combat team. A failure by any one of the three members jeopardizes the whole operation.

As an artilleryman the task is yours to strive, scheme, and shoot, to do all in your power to help the doughboy. The satisfaction of knowing he has implicit faith in you is more than ample reward.