

Russell Martin pegged hand grenades into the enlarged embrasure as the rest of the assault detachment charged from the crater. The charge carried both the pillbox and a series of field fortifications nearby where a nest of Germans had been lying low during the fracas. By the time the rest of Company A arrived, nothing remained but to organize defensive positions in the vicinity of the pillbox.

Only a few steps behind Colonel Frankland's 1st Battalion, the 117th Infantry commander, Colonel Johnson, sent a company of the 2d Battalion to clear enemy outposts from west of the river in the village of Marienberg. This done in less than two hours, despite delaying action by German riflemen and machine gunners, Colonel Johnson directed the company to cross the Wurm into the northern part of Palenberg while the remainder of the battalion crossed behind Colonel Frankland's battalion in order to approach Palenberg from the south.

Two pillboxes provided the crux of the opposition in Palenberg, but persistent small unit maneuver and daring use of bazookas and pole charges after the manner of Colonel Frankland's battalion eventually carried the strongpoints. By about 1600 the men had eliminated small arms fire from a permanent bridge site between Marienberg and Palenberg while others continued a house-to-house fight to eject the enemy from the rest of Palenberg. This fight often lapsed into hand grenade duels. One rifleman, Pvt. Harold G. Kiner, spotted an enemy grenade that landed between him and two fellow riflemen, threw himself upon it, and saved his companions at the cost of his own life. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Neither tanks nor tank destroyers be-

came available to the 117th Infantry during the day, not because the culverts designed for bridging the stream failed to work but because the banks of the Wurm were such a quagmire that the tank dozer which was to shave down the banks mired deep in the mud. Tanks brought up to pull out the tank dozer also bogged down. The tankers finally gave up to await construction of a treadway bridge.

Having worked under steady enemy shelling, the engineers at 1830 completed the treadway, but when the tanks crossed, the soil on the east bank proved too soft for maneuver. A short while later, when other engineers completed another treadway between Marienberg and Palenberg, the tanks found firmer footing. Yet now they were too late to assist in the first day's fighting.

Almost from the start, the 30th Division's other assault regiment, the 119th Infantry (Colonel Sutherland), had met with difficulties in the West Wall attack. Attempting to reach the Wurm south of Rimburg, to the right of the 117th Infantry's crossing area, the 119th's leading battalion came under German shellfire soon after crossing the line of departure. The two assault companies nevertheless reached the river and under light machine gun fire from the railroad embankment slapped their duckboard footbridges into place. One company then managed to build up along the railroad, but fire from three pillboxes located west of the railroad near the Rimburg Castle stymied the other. The Germans had expertly camouflaged one of the pillboxes as a house. All through the afternoon this company fought until at last a combination of small arms and bazooka fire reduced these three positions. Meanwhile, men of the other company found it impossible to

ABANDONED CROSSING *at the Wurm River.*

raise their heads above the railroad embankment. From positions hidden in the Rimburg woods, blistering fire frustrated every attempt to cross the embankment. Commitment of the battalion's reserve company served merely to pin more men along the railroad. Artillery and mortar fire against the enemy positions also had little effect. Limits on observation imposed by trees and bushes denied accurate adjustment, and as soon as supporting shellfire lifted to permit an assault, the Germans would rush from their pillboxes and renew their fire from field fortifications.

The 119th Infantry's plan of attack had leaned heavily upon the early availability of tanks to neutralize just such positions as these in the western edge of the woods. But the culvert that engineers had prepared for bridging the Wurm in this regiment's crossing area fell to pieces as the tankers towed it over rough ground to the river. Although the engineers rushed completion of a treadway bridge that enabled the tanks to cross in mid-afternoon, deep black mud halted every attempt to get the tanks up to the infantry positions.

In an attempt to open up the situation,

Colonel Sutherland early committed a second battalion of infantry on the left of the first. Delayed at the river because men responsible for bringing the duck-board footbridges had abandoned them en route, this battalion eventually crossed on bridges improvised from fence posts and doors. Once beyond the Wurm, the men came under intense fire from the Rimburg Castle. At last they drove the Germans from positions along the wall and moat of the castle and by nightfall had built up on three sides of this strong outpost position. Protected by medieval masonry, the Germans inside held out.

In late afternoon Colonel Sutherland committed his remaining battalion on his southern flank, but with no greater success. Once on the east bank, the men could advance no farther than the railroad. Like the others before them, they discovered it worth a man's life to poke his head above the level of the embankment.

When engineers at midnight completed a second treadway bridge at a permanent bridge site between Rimburg and the castle, the attached tanks at last had firm footing, but the arrival of the tanks had come too late to assist the 119th Infantry in getting beyond the railroad into the pillbox belt. The day's fighting had netted the regiment a shallow bridgehead a mile long and 300 yards deep, embracing only the flatland between the river and the railroad.

Anticipating immediate German reaction to the West Wall attack, General Hobbs and his regimental commanders waited apprehensively as night came for the first counterblow to fall. The bridgehead of the 119th Infantry was tenuous at best, and that regiment's inability to advance beyond the railroad had left the

117th Infantry with an exposed right flank. For those reasons, General Hobbs told his artillery commander to hammer through the night at likely enemy assembly areas and routes leading into the restricted bridgehead.

Unknown to General Hobbs, active German reaction to the West Wall assault had been delayed because the blow had achieved complete surprise. Deceived by diversionary attacks made during the day northwest of Geilenkirchen by the 29th Division and to the south at Kerkrade by the 30th Division's 120th Infantry, the commanders of the 49th and 183d Divisions had been unable to believe for several hours that this attack on the narrow Marienberg-Rimburg front was "it."²³ Even when they finally accepted this fact, General Macholz of the 49th Division had virtually nothing to throw against the bridgehead and General Lange of the 183d Division had only one battalion as an infantry reserve. This battalion General Lange ordered to counterattack soon after dark in company with an assault gun battalion. The counterattack could not be launched during the day because the Germans dared not move assault guns in this open terrain under the rapacious eyes of American planes and artillery.²⁴

As night came, interdictory fires laid down by 30th Division and XIX Corps artillery were far more effective than any American commander could have dared to hope. "Murderous" artillery fires, the Germans said, delayed the counterattack

²³ MS # B-792 (Macholz).

²⁴ 183d VG Div AAR; Evng and Daily Sitreps, 183d VG Div to LXXXI Corps, 2 Oct 44, in LXXXI Corps KTB, Tagesmeldungen; Tel Convs, LXXXI Corps to 183d VG Div, 1430, 1800, and 2120, 2 Oct 44, in LXXXI Corps KTB, Kampferlauf.

by three hours.²⁵ Not until midnight did the Germans strike and then only with a smattering of the original infantry force and but two assault guns. The mobile guns American bazooka men and rifle grenadiers on the northeastern fringe of the bridgehead turned back quickly, but not until after a brisk fire fight did the German infantry retire, leaving behind seven dead. The 117th Infantry lost three men, including Private Sirokin, one of those who had performed so courageously that afternoon in the taking of the pillboxes. So discouraged by this feeble show was the German corps commander, General Koechling, that he ordered the 183d Division's General Lange to confine his operations to "sealing off" the penetration until stronger forces could be assembled for more effective countermeasures.²⁶

Though the 30th Division had made no phenomenal advances during the first day of the West Wall attack, this was no cause for discouragement. The 119th Infantry had failed to move far enough even to clear the Rimburg crossing area of direct small arms fire; yet the 117th Infantry farther north had breached the forward line of pillboxes, had seized Palenberg and the high ground immediately south of it, and was ready to resume the advance along a main highway through Uebach. The leading battalion of the 117th Infantry had incurred 146 casualties, including 12 killed, and the only other battalion to see major action had lost 70, including 12 killed. Engineers had thrown sturdy bridges across the Wurm at both Marienberg and Rimburg.

Prospects for the next day were bright, even in the sector of the 119th Infantry where plans progressed during the night for outflanking the stubborn Germans in the Rimburg woods.

The diversionary attack northwest of Geilenkirchen which had fooled the German division commanders for several hours had been launched on the left flank of the 30th Division by two battalions of the 29th Division. The purpose was to tie down enemy forces and prevent their use against the main attack. From the first resistance was stanch. Even on subsequent days when the 29th Division enlarged operations to include elements of two regiments, the Germans held firm. This was not to say that the attack did not worry the Germans. General von Obstfelder, whose corps of the *First Parachute Army* was adjacent to this sector and who was at the moment embroiled in a fight with the 7th U.S. Armored Division in the Peel Marshes, anxiously inquired on 3 October whether General Koechling's *LXXXI Corps* was going to take any countermeasures against the 29th Division's attack. In view of the situation at Marienberg and Rimburg, General Koechling had to respond in the negative.²⁷ The Germans nevertheless reacted sensitively to the 29th Division's attacks, and in one instance virtually annihilated a company of American infantry in a village named Schierwaldenrath. A later raid on the village brought revenge, but as operations developed in the 30th Division sector, the 29th Division limited offensive action to reinforced

²⁵ 183d VG Div AAR; Mng Sitrep, *LXXXI Corps to Seventh Army*, 0555, 3 Oct 44, in *LXXXI Corps KTB, Tagesmeldungen*.

²⁶ *Ibid.* See also American accounts in records of the 117th Infantry.

²⁷ Tel Conv, *LXXXVI Corps to LXXXI Corps*, 1920, 3 Oct 44, in *LXXXI Corps KTB, Kampfverlauf*.



RIMBURG CASTLE, showing moat in the foreground.

patrols. The Germans were content to let it go at that.²⁸

In the meantime, along the railroad east of Rimbürg, the 119th Infantry discovered early on the second day (3 October) of the West Wall attack that the passing of night had done little to lessen opposition in the Rimbürg woods. The only progress at first was against the Rimbürg Castle, and that because many of the

Germans who had made the castle such a fortress the afternoon before had sneaked out during the night.

No hope remaining for carrying the Rimbürg woods in a frontal assault, the 119th Infantry commander, Colonel Sutherland, put into motion plans he had made during the night. He dispatched a task force under command of his executive officer, Lt. Col. Daniel W. Quinn, to cross the 117th Infantry's bridges at Marienberg, hit the Rimbürg woods from the north, and cut off the German positions by moving behind the woods. Composed of two companies of infantry

²⁸ See 29th Div AAR, Oct 44, and Joseph H. Ewing, *29 Let's Go! A History of the 29th Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948). This is among the better unit histories.

(both from the 2d Battalion) and a company each of tanks and self-propelled tank destroyers, Task Force Quinn quickly made its weight felt. A few rounds from the tank guns against the northern tip of the woods brought about a hundred Germans scurrying from two pillboxes and surrounding entrenchments to surrender. Relieving pressure on the 1st Battalion, 119th Infantry, the task force continued to work south. The only real difficulty came from intense enemy fire from the vicinity of the regimental objective, the crossroads atop the eastern slopes of the Wurm valley near Herbach.

This fire proved a harbinger of what was to greet the 1st Battalion when in late afternoon the men emerged from the Rimburg woods. Having cleared about a dozen pillboxes, the 119th Infantry had at last broken through the first band of fortifications, but Task Force Quinn's envelopment had not been deep enough to precipitate any substantial advance. Once again the Germans brought the regiment to an abrupt halt after a gain of only a few hundred yards. Casualties from this kind of close, confined fighting were becoming increasingly heavy: one rifle company, for example, had lost half of one platoon and all of another except the platoon sergeant. By the end of the second day of fighting, the depth of the 119th Infantry's bridgehead was still no more than a thousand yards.

For his part in renewing the attack on 3 October, the 117th Infantry's Colonel Johnson committed his reserve battalion (the 3d) to drive on Uebach, about a mile east of the Wurm, and then to cut the Geilenkirchen-Aachen highway and occupy high ground east of the highway between Uebach and Beggendorf. Almost immediately, tedious house-to-house

fighting developed. The Germans seemed determined to make of Uebach a point of decision. Round after round of mortar and artillery fire they poured into the little town. Some of the American infantry called it the heaviest German shelling since the battles at Mortain in Normandy. The commander of the regiment's supporting 118th Field Artillery Battalion hazarded a guess that the Germans had finally found a copy of the American field artillery manual telling how to mass their fires. The first few concentrations took a particularly heavy toll because the doors and windows of all houses except those actually defended were locked and barred. That made cover in the houses at first hard to get at.

Commitment of CCB

Into the maelstrom that Uebach had become rolled the tanks and half-tracks of the 2d Armored Division's Combat Command B. During the morning of 3 October, General Corlett had ordered the armor to start crossing the Marienberg bridges at noon. The 30th Division was to give priority to the armor's passage in order that the combat command might expand the bridgehead to the north and northeast and free the infantry for the push southward to link with the VII Corps. The rest of the 2d Armored Division was to follow CCB as soon as enough space for deployment could be gained.²⁰

Committing a combat command with its wealth of vehicles in a confined bridgehead where an infantry regiment still was struggling to gain enough room for its own operations was a risky business.

²⁰ XIX Corps Ltr of Instrs 40, 3 Oct, XIX Corps Ltr of Instrs file, Oct 44.