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The Capture of Ubach (30th Inf. Div)  
(Break Out Area for 2nd. Armored Div.)

North of Aachen 3-6 Oct. 1944

(Seigfried Line Offensive)

Type of Operation Described: Battalion in the Attack

Lt. Col. S. T. McDowell, Infantry

The capture of Ubach (30th Infantry Division) North of Aachen, 3-6 Oct 44 (Siegfried Line offensive), by Lt Col S. T. McDowell. Command & Staff College. 1946-47.

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The Capture of Ubach, (30th Inf. Div)  
(Break Out Area for 2nd Armored Div.)

North of Aachen 3-6 Oct. 1944,  
(Seigfried Line Offensive.)

(Personal Experience of a Battalion Commander)

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## Introduction

The purpose of this monograph is to cover the operations of the 3rd. Bn. 117th Inf. from its penetration of the Seigfried Line to the capture of Ubach---from Oct3-6 1944

In order to provide a common understanding and a sufficient orientation for the discussion, a short resume of events leading up to the capture of Ubach are hereby submitted.

During Sept. 1944 the Allies broke out at St. Lo and advanced across France--the 30th Div. was turned North at Paris and crossed into Belgium and Holland turning East just North of Aachen.

The Germans were apparently drawing back or being driven back into the Seigfried Line where they certainly would make a stand.

In the pursuit the 30th had walked the last 80-100 miles on foot arriving at Scherpenseel Germany where they had to wait for their supplies to catch up.

On arriving at Scherpenseel that portion of the Seigfried Line to our front was examined by patrols and found to be very lightly held. But when we attacked, after a two weeks delay it was found to be a different story. From our patrols we learned that daily they (Krauts) were bringing in more and more men to man the defenses and a determined effort would be made there.

## Geographical Features

The terrain over which the 3rd. Bn. 117th Inf. was to pass was well adapted for defense.

Beyond the main defense of the Wurm River and Seigfried the attack was into Ubach--Ubach was under observation from high ground and slag piles to the north and high ground to the south.

The sector is full of roads

The rolling land N. and S. of Ubach is cultivated--beets and grain.

Ubach guards the approaches to the main highway S to Aachen

The mission of the 3rd Bn. 117th. Inf. on Oct. 3 1944 was to pass through 1st. Bn. which was in the Seigfried Line and continue 2000 yds. to the S.E., capture Ubach and then 1000 yds. to the East and capture Zu Ubach. This was changed later after much negotiation As there was to be no one on my left or right, I did not cherish the idea of ending my army career in Zu Ubach.

The object in taking Ubach was to afford a break out position for the 2nd. Armored Div., and as it later turned out the 2nd. Armored Div. really did have to break out--I wasn't able to take all the commanding ground to the north and south of Ubach.

When definate orders were formulated at Regt. Hqts., a sand table was constructed which depicted the area and routes to the Seigfried Line and routes to Ubach.

It did not extend to Ubach so we made a map study of Ubach, and I decided to attack with L and K Companies abreast. Each to have a section of Heavy MG's attached.

We were to pick up Co. C. 743 Tk. Bn. as we passed through the line and were to be supported by 118th F. A. Bn. in D/S. I used the tanks mostly in K. Co. zone.

At 1100 o'clock on the 2nd. of Oct. the 1st. Bn jumped into the Seigfried Line and before many hours the 1st. Bn. CO., Lt. Col. Franklin called the Regt. Co, and said that he needed help. The Regt. CO. immediately called me by radio and told me to be prepared to go into the line anytime after 2 hrs.

When I received this message I went down in the line and contacted Lt. Col. Franklin to see what the trouble really amounted to.

I found out that the trouble was coming from the right flank. The Regt. on our right 119th. had not dented the line and some Germans were firing into the flank of the 1st. Bn.

I made my report to Regt. Co. and he decided that one company would be sufficient to protect the flank of 1st. Bn. Regt. CO attached I Co. and one MG section from M Co. to 1st. B n. The MG section was wiped out except for 2 men and I Co. spent a rather tough day and night in the scrap before being picked up by me on our way through the next day.

On Oct. 3rd at 1100 AM we jumped off for Ubach--the only route to the Seigfried Line was over a 1300 yd. wide beet field. The enemy had perfect observation and the artillery and mortar fire were so heavy that it was hard to make the new replacements keep moving. Casualties were heavy but we made good progress until we reached the Seigfried Line. There 2 L Co. Officers got in a German bunker and refused to come out. The Art. fire was so heavy that they went to pieces. I later found out about them and had to go back and escort them up.

When we started through the line we were receiving fire from both flanks. L Co. on the left got pinned down by small arms fire from Palenburg and only part of it reached Ubach with K Co. on the right.

K Co. was having no picnic--the woods to the right were full of Germans. The ground was too soft to use tanks and the 119th. Inf. in whose sector the woods were seemed to be unable to do anything in their sector to relieve the pressure on our right flank/. We tried to use tanks in spite of the Terrain but they were soon bogged down.

I Co. was protecting the flank against a possible penetration,



but I called the Regt CO over the radio and he instructed me to pick up I Co. as I passed through. I did so, and instructed the company commander to follow K Co. prepared to complete the all around defence of Ubach when it was taken.

Like unto a sick man with pneumonia, complications began to set in as soon as we cleared the Seigfried Line. Artillery fire became so heavy that L Co. bogged down under it and the combined small arms fire that was coming from Palenburg.

At just about the same time K CO. on the right came under the fire of 2 pillboxes S of Palenburg and W of Ubach.

I called the tank CO on the "300" and he came up and took several shots at them with his 75. This caused them to close up and he kept them buttoned up until an AT officer got close enough to blow them open with some souped up ammo.

All the time the artillery shelling was getting heavier and heavier and somewhere in the town of Ubach we could hear direct fire *and*

After the pillboxes were neutralized K CO. started to advance again and when I found that L CO. wasn't progressing I decided to take Ubach with K CO. and what was left of I CO.

The tanks of C CO. 743rd TK. B n. which had practically all been bogged down began to join the B n. and started putting direct fire on the closest buildings in Ubach. This seemed only to draw more artillery fire, but it also raised the morale of the Infantry so we considered it at least an even swap.

There was a large slag pile to the north of Ubach which commanded the observation for miles around.

I therefore wanted to clear it as soon as possible and put my OP in the large church tower in the center of town. However the Germans began shooting at the church steeple very soon after we entered Ubach. They continued to do same for 2 days. I therefore did not use the steeple.

When we started to enter Ubach the Art. became much heavier and we called for the Art. to smoke the slag pile but it didn't seem to help so we ceased to smoke it.

The Germans had boarded up practically all the doors of the houses and from the inside made it as uncomfortable as possible. We used the tanks of the 743rd. B n to blow them open and then the Inf would clean out what was left.

At this time I realized that I didn't have enough troops to complete the job before dark, so I went back, found the CO. of L Co. and brought up L CO. and passed them through the left platoon of K CO.

It developed into a house to house fight and continued all night long. Control was extremely difficult--the lines were never more than one house apart and in several cases we occupied the lower floor of a house and the Krauts the upper until they were disposed of by Tenn. checkers.

By 1900 L CO. was generally along the northern part of Ubach- Part of a MG section was in position but had not cleaned out all the houses to the East. To the north was an open field bounded by hedge-rows along which the 3rd platoon CO. L had dug in. To the south was an orchard and beyond the orchard the business district of Ubach.

K CO. was tied in with L CO. at the main road junction in the SEastern part of Ubach. And I CO. was to the west and SW and NW blocking in the principal direction of Palenburg.

Although we were told Palenburg had been cleared before we jumped off it still had enemy infantry in it and they were constantly trying to probe into Ubach.

At approximately 2300 a seven man patrol entered the 3rd platoon area of CO L. We had found out by many experienced with the Germans that it was best to let the patrol in--check it and then capture it// Only 2 weeks before we had used this method successfully in capturing a 52 man patrol (platoon).

Before we could get the trap set for the patrol they ran into some GI who was probably where he should not have been and the fight was on. We got only wounded prisoners and dead ones so no information was gained from them.

I decided at approximately 0100 Oct 4th that the town could not be completely taken during the night and therefore started tying in my defenses for the counterattack that always come when something was taken from the Germans.

I checked first to see that all the companies were tied in properly. Second, I worked out a series of road blocks using tanks of 743rd. with the CO. of that Company. (Things were not going too easy for the tanks, we lost 5 of 13 that were assigned to us before we got out of Ubach.)

At approximately 0400 Oct 4th the first German counterattack came in the Northern part of town in the sector of the 3rd platoon L Co. They drove into the street with tanks and infantry. The platoon Hqs. was in the house where a representative of the MG section had set up his sound powered phone.

The tanks drove down and were firing machine guns into the houses. Five enemy infantrymen started into the house, two were killed, one wounded and the other two got away.

The tanks were using the same method as used by us---fire MG(s into the houses running the occupants into the cellar and then shooting an HE shell into the cellar through the cellar window.

The men in the house went to the second floor as soon as the tank started shooting. All the bazooka men were wounded by this time and the men who tried to use them were very inefficient. They fired rifle grenades at the tank and it withdrew.

At daylight the enemy came again, this time with a force of 6 tanks and approximately 75 men from the barracks SE of Ubach.

They succeeded in driving into Ubach for a short distance causing K Co. to fall back several houses.

The Eastern most part of L Co. became cut off and set up in and around the house occupied by 3rd platoon Hqts.

The house just west of them was taken by the Germans and all day long the fight went on from adjacent houses. Late in the day of Oct. 4th. they cleaned out the last of the Germans in the house and our lines were restored.

The strength of the rifle companies was considerably below 100 by now so we had to spread thin to do the job that should have been done by a regt.

During the day of Oct. 4th. the 2nd. Armored Div. started coming into Ubach but were unable to break out until the 5th.

All day the 4th. we were subjected to heavy artillery and mortar fire.

And although it was not the hottest spot in the war everyone who took part in this operation (several different Inf. Div. and 2nd. Armored Div) verified the fact that the shelling was the heaviest they had encountered.

At 1500 Oct 4th. the enemy launched a counterattack with eight Mark IV or V tanks and a company of infantry. They came in from the south and cut off one platoon of K Co. only 2 men got away at this time.

The company attacked immediately with what was left of 2 platoons of I company and some assistance from the 743rd TK Bn. and some of the vehicles of the 2nd. Armored Division that were close by.

The first house that was recaptured yielded 7 of our men from the basement. In the second house the second floor was still held by our men although they had finished second best at Tenn. Checkers. By dark the line had been restored and all but 2 of the men accounted for--we recaptured them the next day in the next town.

During the late afternoon L Co. was relieved by the 2nd. Bn and by concentrated effort of the entire Bn. the remainder of the town was cleared.

All the exits to the E NE and SE were well covered by German AT weapons or tanks. This can best be verified by some of the members of the 2nd Armored Division that took part in the affair.

On Oct 6th we lead out to the S and the 2nd Armd Div. to the NE.

**CONCLUSION:**

In making a detailed study of this operation it will be noted that the 3rd Bn. was assigned a difficult task in that both flanks were open all the way to the objective.

The points which may be justly criticized are:

- I. Failure of CO L Co. and Ex. under heavy art. fire
- II. Failure of Div. G-2 to provide adequate info about strength of enemy.
- III. Commitment of Bn on a man size mission after one of its companies had been chewed up in heavy fighting.

**LESSONS:**

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

- I. A lodgement area should be large enough to accomplish future operations.
- II. Heavy artillery fire will take its toll of officers from battle exhaustion unless they are closely supervised.
- III. A lodgement area should be on commanding ground.
- IV. A break out area for a Division should be larger than that occupied by one Bn.

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