

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Action of the Third Battallion 1st Ind.  
(July 11, 1944)

HDB:dr

HEADQUARTERS 120TH INFANTRY, APO 30, US Army, 28 July 1944

TO: Commanding General, 30th Infantry Division, APO 30, US Army.

Approved.



HAMMOND D. BIRKS  
Colonel - 120th Infantry  
Commanding

10 Incl:

- 1 - Sketch of le Rocher area
- 2 - Certificate of Captain James W. Smith
- 3 - Certificate of 1st Lt. Charles E. Pritchard
- 4 - Certificate of Lt. Dr. R. Kuchenrither
- 5 - Affidavit by T/Sgt. Harry Peters
- 6 - Affidavit by Pfc. Joseph Aloysuis King
- 7 - Additional affidavit by Pfc. Joseph Aloysuis King
- 8 - Affidavit by Pvt. George Talarico
- 9 - Affidavit by S/Sgt. Hagens
- 10 - Affidavit by Sgt. Cecil Blankenship

Resume of Action of the Third Battalion in breaking up the counter attack by Tanks of the Panzer Lehr Division of the German Army on the morning of July 11, 1944 near Le Rocher, France.

The following resume was compiled from all available sources to complete the story of the breaking of the German Counter Attack by the Officers and Men of the Third Battalion, 120th Infantry, 30th Division during the early morning hours of July 11th, 1944 near Le Rocher, France.

The evening of July the 10th the Third Battalion, 120th Infantry had been given the mission of taking, and organizing a defense to hold, the high ground around Le Rocher. The Battalion had been in Regimental Reserve all that day. They moved up, in two elements, one on foot and one on the Battalion Organic Transportation. The foot elements were making a steady advance meeting in some places stiff enemy resistance as they moved forward before nightfall. The Battalion by passed the 1st Battalion in their advance. The 1st Battalion being slowed down temporarily by determined enemy action and artillery fire. The 3rd Battalion reached the point designated, by the Regimental Commander and immediately set up their defensive position and the men began digging in. The 3rd Bn out in front with both flanks exposed, Col. McCollum, C.O. of 3rd Battalion, set up road blocks on the most likely enemy approaches. Friendly tanks and tank Destroyers were advanced out beyond Le Rocher in the direction of Hill 90 and were maneuvering about in that area. This information was passed along to the men on the road block in that direction with the added precaution to make sure of the identification of the tanks before firing upon them. The time then was about midnight. The night was extremely dark. Heavy enemy

Artillery and Mortar fire was falling in the area of the Battalion C.P. and had been falling intermittantly since their arrival in the area with increasing intensity. Routine work of the Battalion Staff was in progress. Fire plans with the Artillery Liaison Officer were being perfected. It was about this time, between 2400 and 0100, that the Officers from the Cannon and Anti-Tank companies arrived at the C.P. for instructions upon the disposition of their weapons in the Battalions plan of defense. These Officers were 2nd Lt. James L. Ashmore of Cannon Co. and 2nd Lt. Leroy H. Steelman of the Anti-Tank company. They arrived at the C.P. in a jeep driven by Pfc. Clayton G. Moore, Pfc. Henry A. Snotherly the machine gunner and Pvt. Paul R. Kannan the radio operator.

At about 0130 a phone call was received from company "K" at the Battalion C.P. telling them that an enemy Armored vehicle or Flame Thrower had been discovered on the road by their area and was firing upon them and a tank from the 3rd Arm. Division. The Battalion Commander gave them orders to knock the vehicle out of action and destroy the enemy. Simultaneously with this information from "K" company a runner reported to the C.P. with word from the Sgt. at the road block on the road leading to Hill 90, that enemy tanks and armored vehicle were moving up the road in the direction of the Battalion C.P. That the men at the road block had at first thought them to be our own tanks, and that each tank and vehicle was being followed by about twenty men on foot. Also that two armored vehicles and one tank had passed the road block going in the direction of the C.P. All companies were then notified of this situation and alerted. Arrangements were made to knock out the tanks by bazookas and rifle grenades with machine guns against the enemy personee.

The action that followed happened in such rapid succession of events it is extremely difficult to get them down in order of occurrence. The two armored vehicles had passed the Battalion C.P. and gone on down the road in the direction of company "K". One of these vehicles opened fire on the tank and company C.P. upon being discovered. Company "K" men knocked out this vehicle, killing one of the enemy and it was believed wounding several. The second armored vehicle had advanced ahead of the "K" company area and stopped in a draw at the foot of the hill by a house. This was the vehicle which fired upon the Jeep carrying Lt. Ashmopre, Lt. Steelman, Pfc. Snoterly, Pfc. Moore, and Pvt. Kannan. They killed Pfc. Moore and Pvt. Kannan and wounded Lt. Steelman and Pfc. Snoterly. This vehicle also was the one which later fired upon the Jeep carrying Lt. Schlemmer, Pvt. Cross and Sgt. Riley of company D, and Sgt. Blankenship of the third Battalion Headquarters company.

In the meantime the following is an account of what was taking place on the hill at the C.P. When Battalion was informed that there were enemy tanks coming up the road the men were still digging in and there had been considerable noise heard from the direction of Hill 90, which was believed to be friendly tanks. One German tank had eased up by short advances to within a few yards of the Battalion C.P. Another was not far behind it and a third was further down the road near the road block. There was an armored car behind the last tank. The men in and around the tank could be heard conversing in German. One man, believed to be a German Officer, was trying to send a Radio message. He was standing in the turret of the tank. Sounds were heard as if they were loading an Ammunition Belt into a machine gun. At this point there

were the following Officers and Men around the C.P.; Capt. Chris McCullough, Col. McCollum, Capt. Shaeffer, Capt. Smith, Maj. Adams, Sgt. Peters, Pvt. Talarico, Lt. Pritchard, Lt. Ashmore, Lt. Steelman, Pfc. Moore, Pfc. Snottherly, Pvt. Kannan and Sgt. Blankenship. Co. "L" had a Bazooka team in the hedge row across the road opposite to where the 1st tank stopped. Those men were S/Sgt. Hagen, Pvt. Barrett, Pvt. Sewade and Pfc. Brito. Company "D" had a 50 Cal. machine gun and a Bazooka team on the cross road at the C.P. just a few yards ahead of where the tank stopped. On the 50 Cal. was Pvt. Max Hamilton and Pfc. Wisnewiski. The Bazooka was manned by Pfc. Stiles and Pfc. King. "I" company had a group of men along beside the road in their area. The names of these men were not given. "D" company had two bazooka teams in the hedge row by the road in their area. Pvt. Talarico of 3rd Bn Headquarters was manning a bazooka alone. Lt. Pritchard was manning his 30 cal. machine gun which was mounted on his jeep just inside the Bn C.P. area.

When Lt. Pritchard heard the Officer in the turret of the tank giving orders and trying to send the radio message he opened up with his machine gun on the turret of the tank. This precipitated all ensuing action and acted as a signal for the other men to go to work on the 1st tank. Pvt. Talarico fired at it, first from the front, then through the hedge row on the side. The "L" company bazooka team opened up on it. Capt. McCullough and Capt. Shaeffer were tossing hand grenades in the turret and at the Germans in the road. The Germans began screaming for mercy and squealing like stuck pigs. The tank burst into flame. It made an effort to back up but did not move very far. The Germans, in behind the tank, ran down to the next one to warn them

but our men were upon them with bazookas, hand grenades, pistols, rifle grenades, and machine guns. Capt. McCullough ran out of ammunition for his automatic pistol. He climbed upon the tank and threw it in the turret. Capt. Schaeffer climbed upon the tank and was tossing hand grenades in the turret and at the men in the rear of it. Capt. McCullough, finding himself without a weapon, grabbed a light machine gun from some one and, throwing the belt of ammunition over his shoulder, went after the third tank and the armored car. The third tank managed to get away by backing around a house but not without great damage as parts of it were found in the road the next day. The armored car was completely burned up. It was stuck in the mud and caught there by our men. The total number of Germans killed in this action cannot accurately be estimated but there were many - and many more wounded. Several were taken Prisoner, one of them an Officer.

While this action was going on Lt. Ashmore and Lt. Steelman with their men started back for their guns and were ambushed by the armored vehicle below the "K" company area. This was the action in which Lt. Steelman and Pfc. Snotherly were wounded. Pvt. Kannan and Pfc. Moore were killed. Lt. Steelman, Lt. Ashmore, Pfc. Snotherly were taken prisoner. There were three more prisoners taken by these men in the attack of the other armored vehicle upon the "K" company C.P. Two of these men were identified as a Sgt. from the 3rd Armored Div. and Pfc. Joseph A. King of 3rd Bn Hdqs. Co. The third was an Officer from the 3rd Armored Div. The estimated number of Germans at this spot by the house was around fifty. It was at this point that Lt. Steelman being wounded asked one of the German Officers for Medical Aid as he had been shot

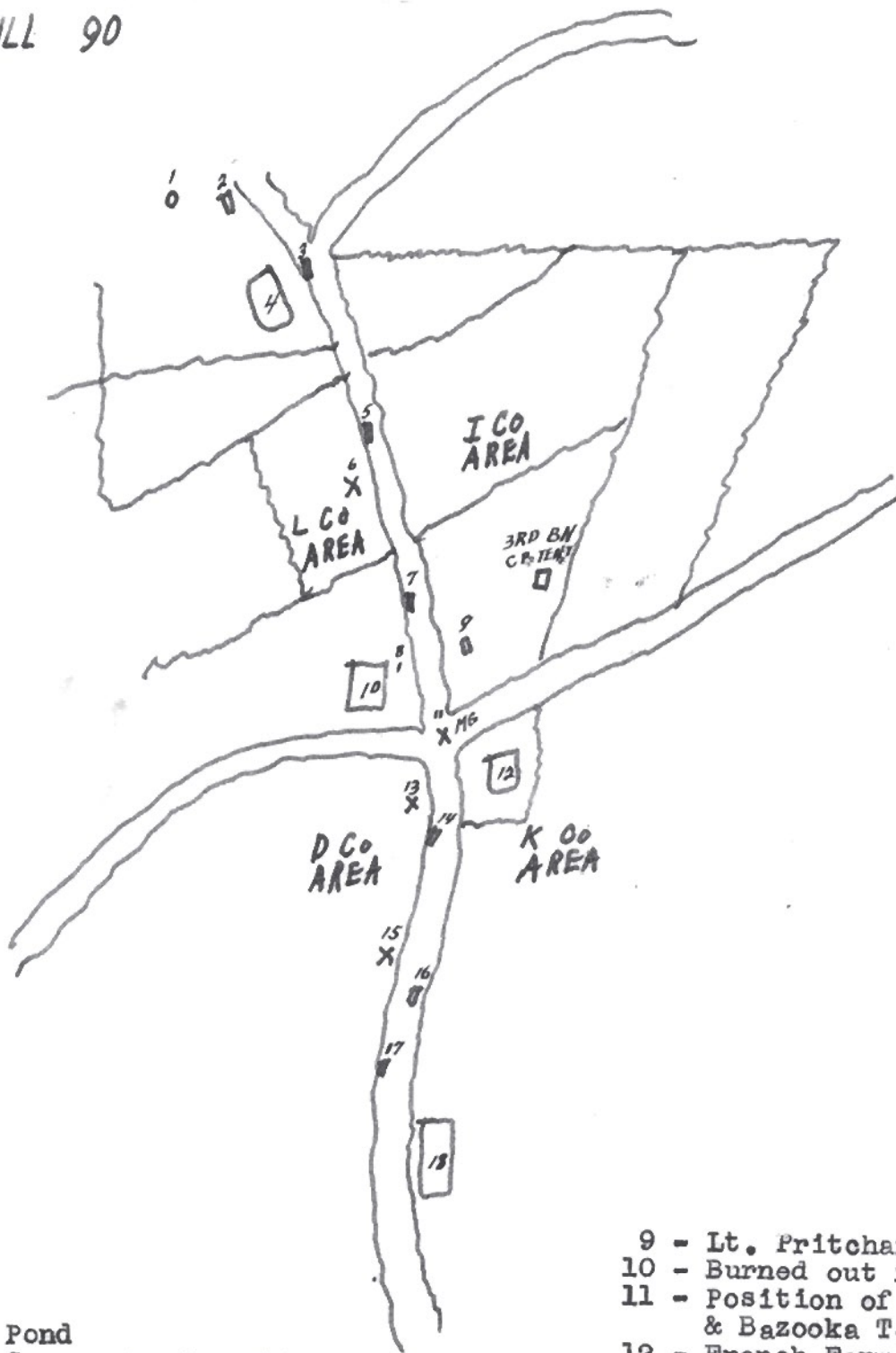
through the leg by the machine guns from the Armored vehicle. The German Officer spoke in German to one of his aid men. The aid man came over and kicked the Lt. in the leg and pushed him into the embankment. The ammunition having run low at the Battalion Lt. Schlemmer and his party were sent for more. As they approached the armored vehicle, thinking it one of our own, the Germans opened up with machine guns and killed the Lt. and Pvt. Cross, wounding Sgt. Riley. Sgt. Riley was left in the ditch. Sgt. Blankenship rolled off the jeep and into a puddle of water in the ditch and remained unnoticed by the Germans. The Germans searched their prisoners and lined them up against a wall or embankment. Later they lined up their prisoners behind the armored car and, with the exception of the driver and machine gunners in the car, fell in behind them and moved off up the road in the direction of the Bn C.P. The car stopped within a few yards of the cross roads where the 50 cal. M.G. and Bazooka team was located and near the other D company bazooka team in the hedge row. The Germans were reported to have shot a flare. Others say it was a flame thrower. <sup>It was established the next day that this was definitely a flame thrower.</sup> The Bazooka's and the 50 cal. M.G. opened up on the vehicle. Lt. Ashmore was wounded and Lt. Steelman killed. Snotherly, King and Blankenship made their escape and it is supposed the Officer and Sgt. from the armored division. The Germans scattered. Some were killed, many were wounded and several captured. The armored vehicle was put out of action and burned.

There were some sixty odd prisoners taken in this action by the 3rd Bn. There were many wounded who got away and the total of the enemy killed cannot accurately be estimated. There were many of them. This Gallant action by the Officers and Men of the 3rd Battalion epitomises the spirit and determination of combat warfare and unconquerable faith in their own zeal to meet the enemy and destroy him. Our losses both in men and material were light considering the seriousness of the

situation and the determined effort of the Germans to break through our lines.



# HILL 90



- 1 - Pond
- 2 - German Armd. Vehicle
- 3 - German Tank
- 4 - Burned out Fr. Farm House
- 5 - German Tank
- 6 - "L" Co. Bazooka Team
- 7 - German Tank
- 8 - Location of "D" Co. Mortars

- 9 - Lt. Pritchards jeep with M.G.
- 10 - Burned out farm building
- 11 - Position of 50 cal. M.G. & Bazooka Team of "D" Co.
- 12 - French Farm Building
- 13 - "D" Co. Bazooka Team.
- 14 - German Flame Thrower or Armd. vehicle.
- 15 - "D" Co. Bazooka Team
- 16 - 3rd Armd. Div. Tank
- 17 - German Armd. vehicle
- 18 - French Farm House in Draw.

C E R T I F I C A T E

The First Battalion was the assault echelon of the Regiment that day. The 3rd Battalion was in reserve on the following overlay: 45.9271.60. The battalion stayed in this position until around 1600. At that time the regimental commander ordered that we move to the vicinity of 46.1570.90, stating that one regimental staff officer would be there with orders. Upon arriving at this point, the battalion received orders that we would continue down the road from the cross roads in the direction of Southwest. The enemy resistance of the 1st Battalion had been broken at that time. The Battalion continued the advance to the cross roads of Le Rocher, preparing security measures for the battalion on order from Custer 5. Disposition of the battalion after reconnaissance had been made and security measures as per sketch attached. That time was approximately at 2245.

Regular CP routine duties prevailed within our area until darkness. Security for the CP was under the supervision of Lieutenant Charles E. Pritchard. Captain Boss, Field Artillery Liaison Officer and I were in the CP at that time working on defensive fires. At that time a messenger entered the tent to inform me that I had a phone call. I went to the switch board to receive the phone call. The message was that enemy tanks were approaching within the vicinity of our CP. This message was from Company K. I relayed the message to the Battalion Commander. I then 'phoned the Commanding Officer of Company K and told him to place bazooka teams on the flanks of the tank and knock them out. In the distance we heard another rumble of a tank and voices. The language spoken was German. We then knew we were receiving an attack at night. Our bazooka teams and defense within the CP and battalion area was alerted for a stand-to. Approximately 25 yards from the road junction at LaRocher the tank and enemy group stopped. We could hear the voices very plainly and it sounded like an officer's voice giving an order. We could also hear the click of placing ammunition into an automatic weapon. Lieutenant Pritchard was standing on his jeep which had a 30 caliber light machine gun mounted on it. He was manning the gun. He opened his fire upon the tank, left flank, and upon the forms as could be seen against the sky. He fired approximately a full belt of ammunition, 250 rounds, and 2 bursts. After the two bursts I could hear moaning, hollering. The tank automatically started to smolder and backed down the road in the direction of south, the direction from which it came. Each company was then alerted by runner to insure the protection within each company area and road blocks of the battalion of a mechanized attack. The Infantry bazooka teams within each company area, and men armed with Anti-Tank rifle grenades worked in perfect harmony and brought about the success of stopping the mechanized threat to our front and flanks.

/s/ James W. Smith  
/t/ JAMES W. SMITH  
Capt., Hq. Co., 3rd Bn.

THIS IS A CERTIFIED TRUE COPY.

*Harry L. Jackson*  
HARRY L. JACKSON, Capt., Infantry.