

NARRATIVE HISTORY
of the
399TH INFANTRY REGIMENT
in COMBAT

- FRANCE
- 1-28 FEBRUARY
- 1945

MAP REFERENCE

BITCHE
EASTERN FRANCE
1:50,000
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February 1, marking our fourth month of combat, began much as January had left off with aggressive patrolling and general holding action. Two patrols were dispatched by "A" Co at 1830 hours. The first, a combat patrol of eight men, investigated the wooded area at the Q 749518 grid where they overheard four or five of the enemy talking. A rifle flare, fired by the enemy in a draw at grid Q 741519, revealed four Krauts on a ridge SW of Sussels Farm, 25 yards away from our patrol. A sharp fire fight ensued during which our men killed all four of the enemy without any casualties to ourselves.

The second "A" Co patrol was made up of four men with the mission of reconnoitering enemy lines. Passing through "C" Co's positions, the patrol saw a Jerry patrol of four men headed toward our lines but made no contact.

Exchange of sniper fire continued in our 2nd Bn sector while we harassed the enemy with 50 cal machine-gun, mortar and artillery fire. No activity was reported from our 3rd Bn which remained in reserve continuing its program of training reinforcements and test-firing weapons.

Two prisoners were captured by our 2nd Bn and one prisoner was captured by our 1st Bn.

Enemy artillery action was exceptionally light throughout February 2nd. At 1930 hours, a strong enemy combat patrol hit our "C" Co's left flank in coordination with machine-gun fire from the first house on the western edge of Reysersviller. The raid was beaten off, however, after an exchange of small arms fire.

"F" Co continued its sniper duel, killing one Kraut. Our 3rd Bn

remained in reserve, training reinforcements and improving its defensive positions.

Daylight hours of February 3rd were spent in further improvement of our positions. But with darkness, all three battalions engaged in aggressive patrol actions featured by coordinated raids in platoon strength by "A" and "I" Cos.

The "A" Co patrol, comprising 28 men, moved out at 2300 hours. Passing through "C" Co, the patrol struck due east through a draw east of le Shimberg where they turned north, advancing along the ridge line. The patrol had covered only 200 yards in this now direction, however, when contact was made with six Krauts entrenched in three foxholes south of a road junction at grid Q 749498.

The Germans put up a fierce fight, hurling hand grenades and holding their positions until all six of the enemy were killed. The patrol then continued their advance to the road junction where three enemy machine-guns opened fire at them. After directing small arms counter fire against the enemy machine-guns and plotting the enemy positions, the patrol withdrew, having served their purpose of creating a diversion from the "I" Co raid on Freudenberg Farm to the north. Four of our men received minor wounds as a result of this engagement.

The "I" Co raiders, in platoon strength, left our lines at 2300 hours in coordination with "A" Co. Passing through our 1st Bn, they advanced on Freudenberg Farm from north, south and west, carrying out the plan of hitting this enemy strongpoint from three directions at once. In the pitch blackness the raiders inched forward toward the outlying farm buildings. Everything depended upon their entering these buildings and overpowering

the enemy housed in them before they could give the alarm. In fumbling for the entrances to the buildings in the almost complete darkness, however, the eight men who had approached from the west made some noise.

The Krauts, alerted, immediately fired flares which caught the raiders in the open and along the sides of the buildings. The group on the north side, realizing their comrades' predicament, rushed into the farm at once, blasting away with automatic weapons. But with the enemy alerted, severe machine-gun fire from two pillboxes south of the farm, Freudenberg OP and Freudenberg Fort was leveled at our men. Despite this enemy fire, the "I" Co platoon entered the houses and engaged the enemy. But in attempting to advance on the pillboxes, mines believed electrically controlled from the interior of the pillboxes were exploded and our men were forced to withdraw after having inflicted estimated casualties of ten killed and five wounded upon the enemy. We suffered losses of two killed, seven wounded and one missing.

The period covered by February 4th was devoted to training and repairing positions damaged by melting snow. Enemy activity was unusually [?] negligible. One Kraut, guarding a pillbox at Freudenberg Farm, was killed by one of our "B" Co snipers. We continued harassing the enemy holding Freudenberg Farm and forts to the south with 50 cal machine-gun, AT and mortar fire.

The situation remained static on February 5th while we devoted our time to training with emphasis on weapons orientation and marches. One night reconnaissance patrol of five men left the 2nd Bn with the mission of investigating enemy positions on Steinkopf. The patrol, dis-

covered the enemy dug-in in a zig-zag defense. An enemy sentry who ran when he saw our lead scout, was killed. The three shots our scout fired, however, alerted the enemy and the patrol was forced to withdraw when the Krauts opened up with a machine-gun and fired flares.

The Regiment continued to defend its positions during February 6th with activity confined to training and improvement of fortifications. Co "C", 325th Engineers, aided our Bn A & P platoon and Regimental AT mine platoon in resweeping roads for enemy mines following injury to one of our men from this cause. Thirteen newly planted enemy mines were uncovered and removed.

Our Cannon Co. fired 29 rounds against enemy machine-gun positions east of le Steinkopf and enemy mortar emplacements in the woods south of Reyersviller.

On February 7th, our 3rd Bn relieved our 2nd Bn on position during the early morning hours. Our 2nd Bn went into Regimental reserve with "B" Co assembled in Siersthal, "G" and "H" Cos in Lambach and "F" Co in Glassenberg.

Two enemy deserters from the 7th Co, 1127th VG Regt were captured by our 1st Bn during the morning. Two night patrols dispatched by our 1st Bn, made no contact but reported hearing movement and seeing a light identified as a match.

Enemy patrols were more active on February 8th. Two small Kraut scouting parties were dispersed by "A" and "I" Cos when the enemy approached our positions during darkness of February 7th-8th.

One of our own combat patrols dispatched from "A" Co with the mission of investigating enemy positions in the woods east of Legeret Farms, made no contact. Continuing to grid Q750508, the patrol reached within 30 yards of an enemy pillbox where they overheard four Krauts talking and sounds of other Germans within the fortification. After listening to the enemy for a while, the "A" Co patrol bi-passed the pillbox and continued to a road bend at grid Q751507 without making further contact.

Sniper duels between our "K" and "L" Cos and the enemy continued.

Defensive action prolonged the static situation on February 9th. A four-man enemy patrol which attempted to reconnoiter our lines with the object of discovering our MLR was apprehended by our "L" Co. A firefight ensued during which one Kraut was killed, and two wounded and taken prisoners. Morale was described by the PW's as very low. Enemy officers were said to be taking unusual precautions to prevent desertion.

A captured German 80mm mortar was changed to a flat trajectory weapon by Lt. Col. Elery M. Zehner, our 1st Bn CO, and used to good effect against enemy positions on Freudenberg Farm.

Co "A" relieved Co "B" on position with "B" Co going into Bn reserve.

Two bombs were dropped by unidentified planes over our "C" Co sector. One of our men was killed and four wounded in this attack.

Our Cannon Co fired seven missions (70 rounds) of harassing fire against enemy positions.

Further improvement of our defensive positions was maintained by our regiment. Extensive night patrolling by our 1st and 3rd Bns paid little

dividends. No enemy contact was made with the exception of a 3rd Bn patrol which heard whispering and saw a flashlight blink on the left side of a narrow cut at grid Q744486.

Exchange of sniper fire, particularly in our "K" Co sector, continued.

Artificial moonlight was used to excellent advantage during early morning darkness of February 11th. The "moonlight", supplied by the 1st Plat, Btry A, 353rd AAA Searchlight Bn, was utilized in coordination with a highly successful raid conducted by our "E" Co against enemy positions on le Steinkopf and Kraut fortifications facing our "L" Co.

The "moonlight" not only proved effective in guiding our "E" Co raiders to their objective, but enabled us to direct mortar and artillery concentrations against enemy OP's as well as lessening the dangers of enemy infiltration.

Our "E" Co raid, in platoon strength, attacked enemy positions on le Steinkopf at 0330 hours. Passing around our "I" Co's right flank, the patrol moved east to the "Fishing Grounds" at grid Q7415488 [?]. The "Fishing Grounds", so named because of the large number of PW's our men had taken from these enemy positions, proved deserted and the raiders turned north toward their objective. A few hundred yards from the enemy positions located in the thick woods covering le Steinkopf, Lt. Earl L. Cross halted his platoon and divided it into assault and support groups, deploying eight men in a hedgerow about 100 yards to the north and leaving an additional eight men where they were. Then, with ten men for his assault group, Lt. Cross moved forward rapidly with the aid of the art-

ificial "moonlight".

The "E" Co raiders quickly overran the first line of Kraut positions and pushed the retreating enemy north where they fell back to the support of prepared dugouts. The "E" Co. men had killed an estimated 12 of the enemy and wounded fifteen more before enemy machine guns and mortars forced the outnumbered raiders to withdraw under cover of Corps Artillery and the supporting fire of the two groups which had been left behind for this eventuality.

Reconnaissance patrols were also dispatched by our 1st Bn. An AT gun in our 1st Bn scored four direct hits on enemy emplacements. Three enemy were seen hastily evacuating these positions, leaving an undetermined number of wounded and killed behind.

Our 2nd Bn continued weapons training and practice firing.

Cold and rainy weather swept the hills bare of snow on February 12th. There was very little activity throughout the period save for the usual sniper exchanges. But with darkness, we embarked upon aggressive night patrolling.

Our 1st Bn dispatched three patrols. One patrol of 12 men from "B" Co, left Legeret Barracks at 0330 hours with the mission of raiding enemy positions on Sussels Farm, about one-half mile to the northeast, and return with prisoners if possible. The raiders moved through Maginot "dragon's teeth" tank obstacles to the Hottviller-Froudenberg road and then turned east at the junction with the road leading to Sussels Farm.

The patrol reached to within 70 yards of the Farm without difficulty but at this point they ran into an enemy outpost relief of five Krauts. In the ensuing fire-fight, one enemy was killed, two wounded and two

taken prisoner at no loss to ourselves. By this time it was 0530 hours and the patrol was forced to withdraw.

A second "B" Co patrol of 26 men left our lines at 0400 hours and raided an enemy pillbox at grid Q750508 on the forward slope of le Steinkopf hill. The patrol made use of a flamethrower and succeeded in "frying" one Kraut. An enemy machine-gun on the patrol's right flank was silenced by a white phosphorous grenade tossed by the platoon sergeant.

One additional patrol was dispatched by our 1st Bn and two others by our 3rd Bn but no enemy contact was made.

Artificial "moonlight." was again furnished by Btry "A", 353rd AAA Searchlight Bn in coordination with our patrolling activity.

There was no apparent change in enemy capabilities.

Our prisoner of war total climbed to 761 for 104 days of combat.

Sporadic sniper fire in our "K" Co sector was the only contact made with the enemy during daylight hours of February 13th. The regiment employed the period in making further improvements on our defensive positions, particularly at Legeret Barracks.

A night reconnaissance patrol from our 1st Bn observed three enemy and heard voices of others in the woods bordering the draw east of le Shimberg (Q749495).

A 3rd Bn patrol reconnoitered enemy emplacements at grid Q748479, but found the positions unoccupied.

Intermittent enemy mortar fire fell in our sector.

During darkness hours of February 13th, our 2nd Bn relieved our

1st Bn on position. Our 1st Bn then closed into Siersthal and Lambach as a regimental reserve.

Our 3rd Bn dynamited 20 holes near Signalberg Tower under cover of darkness. These positions were then occupied by "L" Co troops as an advance OP.

A 14-man patrol from "I" Co moved against enemy positions at grid Q741491 but unavoidable noise made by the raiders in passing over the rough terrain alerted the enemy. The Krauts opened up with a machine pistol and other small arms. We returned the fire and after a brief but spirited fight withdrew, reaching our lines at 2025 hours.

On February 15th, the forward OP established by our 3rd Bn the previous night, began to pay dividends. Co "L", in whose sector the new positions were, dispatched Sgt. Horace T. West to the OP as an observer. Before the day was over, West's pinpointing of enemy positions resulted in the slaying of seven Krauts by mortar fire while he killed an additional five of the enemy with a Springfield '03 sniper's rifle.

During the night, a platoon from Co "I", reinforced by a squad from Co "K", conducted a coordinated raid against enemy positions on the NE slope of le Steinkopf and high ground on Signalberg with the mission of capturing prisoners. The patrol, divided into four groups, approached the objective from different directions. Picking their way through enemy concertina wire, one group flushed two Krauts in a foxhole five yards beyond the wire barrier. With these two enemy taken prisoner, the patrol leader rapidly captured four additional prisoners by adopting the expedient tactic of forcing the POW's to lead the raiders to their comrades' positions.

The approach to these foxholes was accomplished without enemy suspicion by compelling the two prisoners first captured to give the password when challenged.

A second group, lying in ambush, overpowered two more Krauts in a foxhole. Of the two remaining groups, one was pinned down by machine-gun fire at grid Q742492 on a ridge-line approximately 200 yards south of the Reyersviller road, and the other made no contact. In all, eight prisoners were captured at a loss to ourselves of two killed and one wounded.

Our 1st Bn, in regimental reserve, coordinated reserve positions.

Our 2nd Bn made no contact throughout the period.

The eight prisoners captured by our 3rd Bn, increased our total to 769.

Enemy patrolling was far more active than usual during the night of February 15th and early morning hours of February 16th. Two patrols of 10-12 and 12-15 men each, hit our "G" Co's front line positions between 2020 and 2130 hours. The first raid was repulsed successfully by 60mm mortar fire. The second enemy patrol was smashed by concentrated white phosphorous, rifle and hand grenades. Enemy casualties could not be estimated but considerable moaning and groaning was heard from the draw from which the attack had originated. About one hour later, four enemy, believed to be aid-men were heard moving into the draw.

Two of our own patrols, dispatched by our 2nd Bn, made no contact but heard sounds of enemy activity such as talking and eating.

There was little activity in our 3rd Bn sector. The Bn took advantage of the lull to make further improvements on front line positions.

Our 1st Bn remained in reserve.

Continuing our defensive mission, CT-399 spent February 17th in improving positions and laying additional wire.

A patrol in platoon strength from Co "B" left our lines at 2000 hours to harass and destroy an enemy strongpoint located at Sussels Farm (Q749519). Moving slowly and cautiously, it required more than three hours for the patrol to reach their objective. About 100 yards from Sussels Farm, the patrol paused while four men walked toward the enemy positions. They had advanced to within 30 yards of the Jerry entrenchments before the enemy was alerted. The Krauts hurled grenades and opened fire with small arms and a machine-gun which soon was silenced by a well aimed white phosphorous grenade. At this point, however, overwhelming enemy fire forced our patrol to withdraw, the mission of harassing the enemy having been accomplished.

Enemy artillery fire was active with 24 rounds of 105mm falling in the vicinity of Enchenberg.

Our 1st Bn continued improving positions while in regimental reserve.

February 18th was spent in further development of our positions while we harassed the enemy with sniper and machine-gun fire. Enemy artillery was again active with particularly heavy shelling of Enchenberg.

Three night reconnaissance patrols were dispatched by our 1st and 2nd Bns to investigate enemy strongpoints. Information was gathered but no enemy contact was made.

Exchanges of harassing sniper and machine-gun fire throughout our sector continued on February 19th. Enemy fire from le Kirsheidt against our "F" Co positions was particularly heavy, while we harassed the Jerries entrenched on Freudenberg Farm.

Our 1st Bn made preparations for relief of our 3rd Bn during the night.

At 2100 hours of February 19th our 1st Bn relieved our 3rd Bn on position with "A", "B", "C" and "D" Cos replacing "L", "K", "I" and "M" Cos respectively.

Harassing fire against Freudenberg Farm and surrounding enemy positions was maintained throughout February 20th with the employment of Cannon, TD's, Artillery and Small Arms.

A three-man reconnaissance patrol dispatched by our 2nd Bn, reached Simserhoff Farm at grid Q744522 and heard enemy 80mm and 120mm mortar fire.

Seventy rounds of 120mm and 10-15 rounds of 80mm mortar fire fell in our 2nd Bn sector in the vicinity of Legeret Barracks.

There was no known change in enemy units in contact and no prisoners were taken during the period.

Continuing improvement of our positions on February 21st, 50 additional yards of concertina wire were laid by our 2nd Bn. Our 3rd Bn developed reserve positions, conducted training of reinforcements and instructed groups in range firing.

Night reconnaissance patrols were sent out by our 1st and 2nd Bns and the I & R Platoon. No contact was made, but listening posts reported sounds of enemy activity in Reyersviller and the immediate vicinity.

Exchanges of harassing fire continued.

Another 100 yards of concertina wire were laid by our 2nd Bn on February 22nd. No activity was reported with the exception of a continuation of sporadic harassing fire.

Patrols dispatched by our 1st and 2nd Bns established listening posts but again reported nothing more than sounds of minor enemy activity, particularly in and around Reyersviller.

No prisoners were captured and no change was reported in enemy disposition.

Two patrols were dispatched by our 1st Bn during the night of February 22nd and early morning of February 23rd. The first patrol, comprising eight men, made no contact with the enemy but discovered 15-20 unoccupied enemy dugouts along the northern slope of le Steinkopf south of the Reyersviller road.

The second patrol, consisting of three men, moved out at 1930. They had reached the Lemberg-Bitche road at grid Q75354735 when they heard an enemy patrol following them. Our patrol turned back toward our lines and had passed a friendly outpost when the enemy, still following, fired a flare and opened up with an MP and small arms. The outpost answered this fire and drove the enemy off.

During the day, harassing fire was again concentrated on enemy positions at Freudenberg Farm. Enemy mortar, artillery and small arms fire was much heavier than during the previous period and was leveled primarily against our 2nd Bn sector.

Our 3rd Bn continued in reserve, making further improvements on defensive positions and conducting training of reinforcements.

From prisoners captured on February 24th, it was ascertained that the enemy 559th V.G.D. had been replaced by the 2nd Mountain Division made up of 90% Austrian troops. The 2nd Mountain Division had taken over positions vacated by the 559th V.G.D.

Enemy activity was almost nil and even the usual harassing mortar and machine-gun fire was noticeably absent.

A raiding patrol, dispatched by our Co "K", engaged in a 15-minute fire fight with the enemy on the western slope of hill 427 and inflicted five casualties upon the Krauts before retiring.

The regiment continued to improve positions.

Capture of one POW increased our regimental total to 771 for 116 days of combat.

Two patrols dispatched by our 1st Bn on February 25th made no contact with the enemy.

A three-man enemy patrol, attempting to infiltrate our 2nd Bn positions, was driven off by hand grenades.

Our 3rd Bn remained in regimental reserve.

Our artillery continued to harass enemy positions on Freudenberg Farm.

February 26th was almost totally devoid of action. Three ambush patrols, sent out by our 1st and 2nd Bns, made no contact.

We continued improvement of our front line and reserve positions, laying an additional 250 yards of double apron wire and beginning the excavation of an OP trench through open ground on the forward slope of le Steinkopf.

The usual harassing fire against enemy positions on Freudenberg Farm was maintained.

From three enemy deserters who walked into our 3rd Bn lines on February 27th, it was learned that the 2nd Mountain Division, which had re-

placed the enemy 559th V.G.D. several days previously, had in turn been relieved by the 6th SS Mountain Division during the night of February 24th.

Two patrols were dispatched by our 1st Bn and one patrol by our I & R platoon.

One 1st Bn patrol left our lines at 0015 hours. At grid Q73954880, they discovered a shu-mine field extending north and south parallel to the cut. The patrol picked their way through the mine field and continued to the northwest slope of hill 427 where they encountered enemy fire. One Kraut ran toward our patrol and was killed.

Another 1st Bn patrol, consisting of three men, left our lines at 1930 hours. After reconnoitering to the edge of the woods on the western side of the Lemberg-Bitche road at grid Q74954725 without seeing or hearing any evidence of the enemy, the patrol returned to our lines at 2306 hours.

The I & R patrol, consisting of three men, reconnoitered the North-South road at le Spitzerg and found 12 unoccupied, recently constructed dugouts. The patrol then continued through the woods northwest to the head of a draw leading to the Lemberg-Bitche road where one Jerry was seen running south across the ridge. At this point, an enemy flare was fired but the patrol, still undiscovered proceeded, proceeded along the edge of the woods on the northern side of the draw to grid Q74844808 where they established a listening post. Voices and sounds of chopping were heard and one round of sniper fire was received, but no other contact was made.

At 2158 hours our 3rd Bn relieved our 2nd Bn on position.

Sniper and harassing artillery fire continued along our entire regi-

mental front throughout the period.

Capture of three enemy deserters boosted our regimental total to 774 POW's for 119 days of combat.

During the night of February 27th and early morning of February 28th, we engaged in extensive patrolling. Three patrols were dispatched by our 1st Bn, three by our 3rd Bn, and one by our I & R platoon with the mission of capturing prisoners.

Hampered by the light of a full moon and dead-wood which cracked under their feet on the only avenue of approach, the patrols were unable to move close enough to carry out their missions. Sounds of enemy personnel and vehicular activity were heard, however. All three patrols from the 3rd Bn were fired upon before withdrawing.

Daylight hours were spent in continued improvement of positions. Range firing and training marches were conducted by our 2nd Bn while in reserve.

One additional enemy deserter was captured, increasing our POW total to 775 for 120 days of combat.