

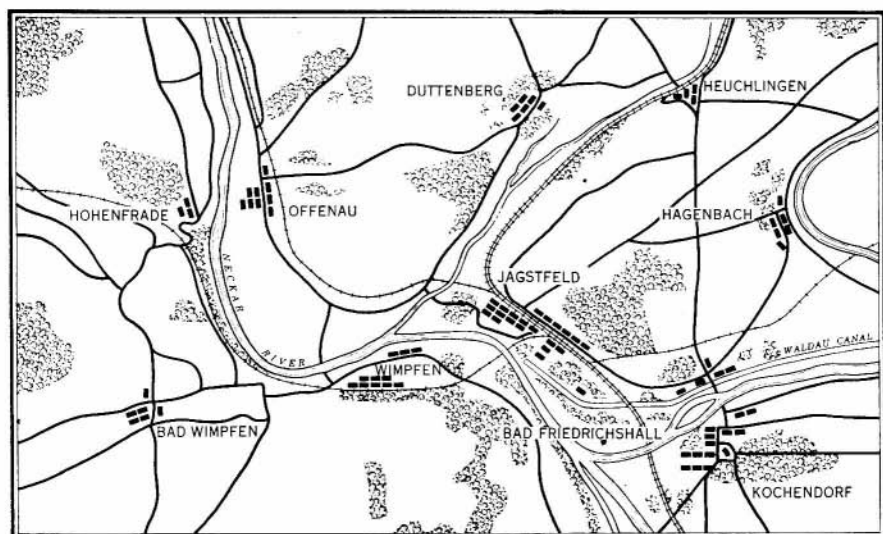
## 15: CROSSING THE JAGST

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While the 3d Battalion was holding a precarious position on the east bank of the Neckar River in the vicinity of Heilbronn, the 1st and 2d Battalion were roaring out of Bad Wimpfen with the mission of crossing farther upstream, then coming down to hit the defenders of Heilbronn from the flank and rear to relieve the pressure on the beleaguered battalion. But it was not only at Heilbronn the Germans fortified and protected. Their line of defense extended north to Odheim and Jagstfeld. The enemy realized the importance of the defense of his flank positions and fought with equal determination to prevent them from being rolled up.

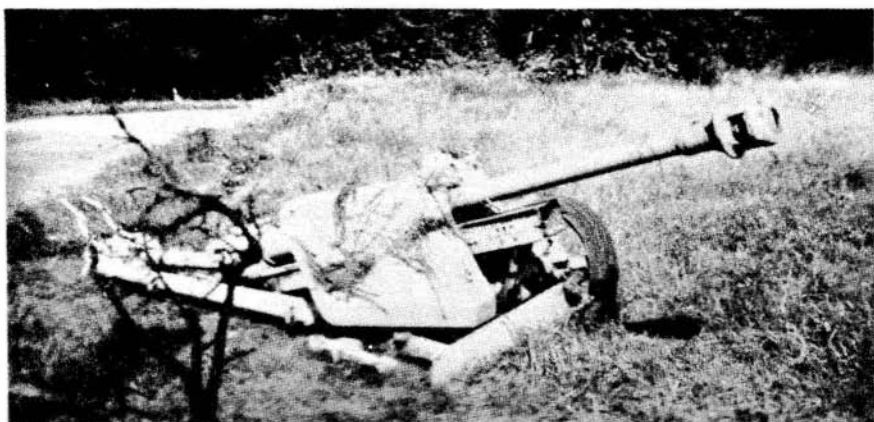
On the morning of 4 April the 2d Battalion together with attached units of tanks, tank destroyers, engineers and medics crossed the Neckar River with the twofold mission of relieving friendly troops at Heilbronn and of smashing the enemy's flank.

Company F crossed in the vicinity of Offenau, after a combat patrol reported no enemy on the opposite bank, after a thorough investigation. A perimeter of defense was hastily set up as the engineers constructed a bridge to expedite the urgent mission. Movement continued on to Duttenberg uninterrupted, overlooking the approaches to Heilbronn and the Jagst River, the next natural obstacle. Behind the Jagst River lay flat open terrain guarded by commanding hill positions to the left and wooded areas to the right. This open expanse sharply rose to and beyond the Kocher River into hills studded with batteries of artillery and rocket platforms. These were the weapons drawn in long convoys from Central Germany after the Allies had split the country to protect the last vestiges of Naziism in southern Germany. Beyond the Jagst River in this sector approximately two battalions of fanatic SS troops and equally infamous *Hitler-Jugend* were solidly entrenched behind a cunningly devised series of machine-gun and other automatic-weapon emplacements.



*Vicinity of Jagstfeld*

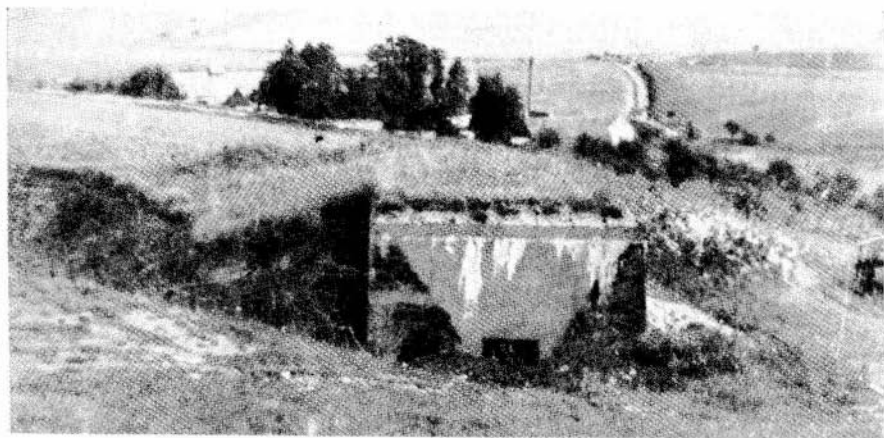
Reaching the Jagst River, assault groups from each company started across, while the remainder of the battalion watched and waited behind their weapons in concealed positions. Halfway across, the enemy revealed himself and his intentions with an ear-splitting roar of automatic-weapons fire. Simultaneously, mortar shells dropped along the opposite bank and in the water with deadly accuracy. The raking fire made a landing impossible and forced the boats to return to their starting point. Company H watching intently the progress of the crossing behind their heavier weapons immediately opened up on spotted enemy positions to cover the withdrawal of the assault boats. Under this continued fire the riflemen again pushed off and gained the opposite bank. With not the slightest ripple in the open terrain behind which to seek cover the men fought and wormed their way forward to a railroad embankment 150 yards ahead. Here the battalion regrouped. Casualties were heavy, compelling the Ammunition and Pioneer and Antitank Platoons to be brought to fill the gaps left by the fallen riflemen. Despite initial reverses and while under heavy mortar fire, the 2d Battalion pushed off in the attack on Heilbronn. Behind a rolling barrage of support-



*Abandoned*

ing artillery Company E drove towards Heuchlingen, Company F moved out towards the city of Jagstfeld and Company G drove directly to the front and center towards Waldau on the Kocher River. All three companies met fanatical resistance. The enemy, further incensed by the steady progress of the infantrymen despite the intense fire, increased his artillery and automatic fire to temporarily halt the advance.

Slowly but steadily the 2d Battalion men advanced to a distance of feet from enemy positions. Singling out objectives they rose from the ground hurling grenades and firing into the stubborn enemy. This type of vicious close-up fighting was indicative of the day's operations. Under no conditions would the enemy withdraw or surrender. By late afternoon Company E seized Heuchlingen after one platoon had been completely cut off and gallantly fought its way back to the main body. Company G in an attempt to thrust through the center of the German defenses became pinned down in an unmerciful cross-fire for six hours. Friendly tanks attempted to relieve the pinned-down troops but direct 88mm fire from the heights above the Kocher River knocked one out and the continued intensity of the fire drove the remaining few away. During the night, with its fighting strength whittled down to less than half, the company effected a withdrawal. Meanwhile Company F succeeded in smashing to the



*Valley guardian on the Siegfried*

outskirts of Jagstfeld and after a severe close-up fire fight took several of the outlying houses. During the night the Germans attacked all positions of the battalion time and again but were repulsed with heavy losses.

The next morning the 2d Battalion regrouped its battered forces to storm the city of Jagstfeld into which the SS and *Hitler-Jugend* gathered for a final stand. For the next five days the battalion fought against a fiercely resisting enemy who turned every street corner and house into an independent fortress. The infantry and tanks moved upon one position at a time blasting roadblocks and barbed-wire entanglements. Bazookas, rifle grenades and point-blank tank fire tore gaping holes in buildings through which groups of riflemen poured to come into hand-to-hand combat with SS. Exhausting their ammunition, the 2d Battalion men courageously continued the fight, swinging rifle butts to subdue the enemy. But winning a position did not mean the end of a fight. Hundreds fled into the hills and every night returned in force in an effort to regain their positions within the city but each time they were turned leaving the streets littered with their dead.

By 10 April the city of Jagstfeld was entirely cleared of the enemy, but the surrounding hills in which were concealed bat-

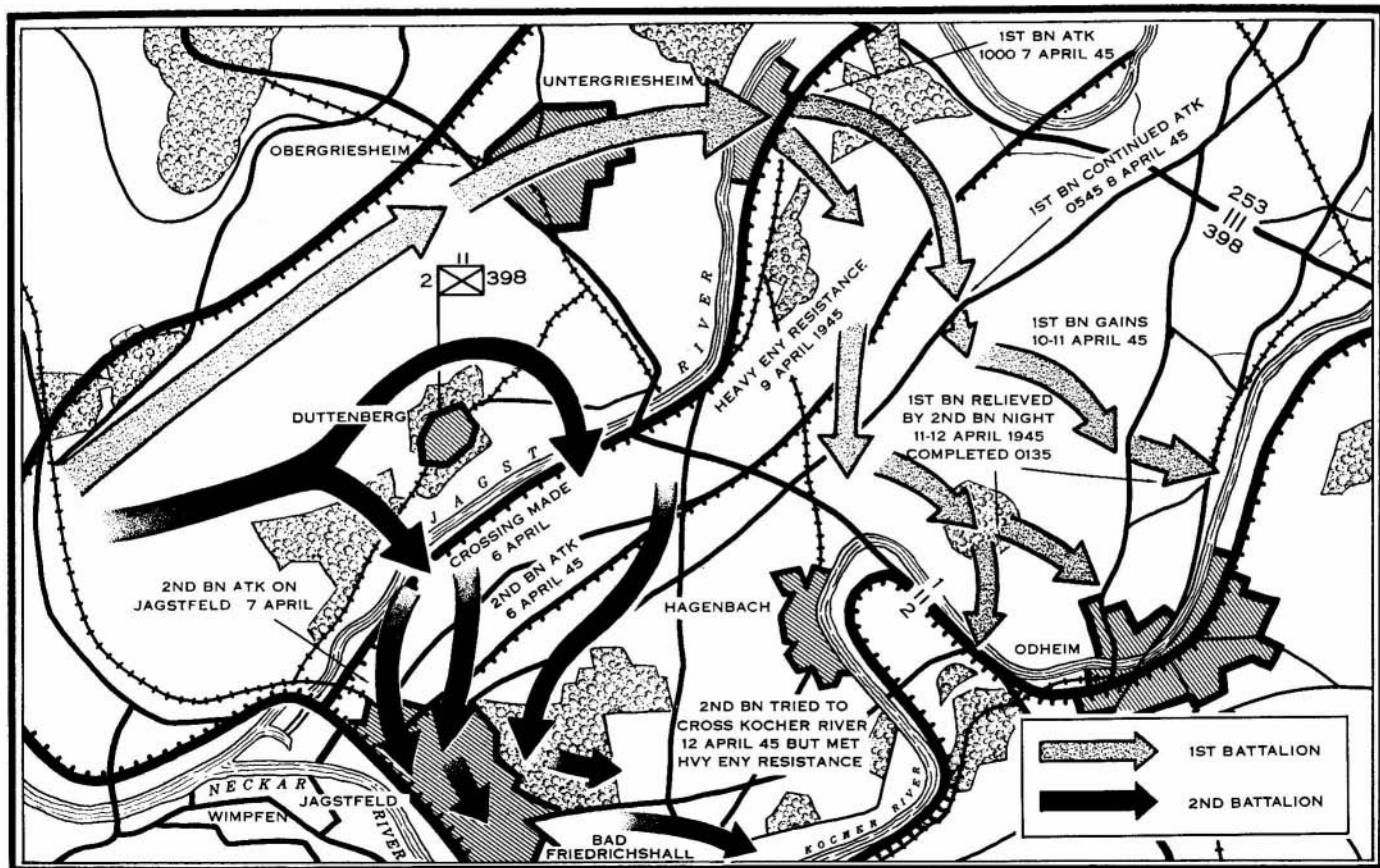
teries of 88s and rocket platforms continued to shell the battalion's positions without letup. On 11 April the men, dog-tired but anxious to finish clearing their sector of the enemy, pushed toward the Kocher River. Again they met with automatic fire coming from defenses before the river but the defenders, now conscious of the fighting superiority of the attackers, turned and fled before the thin line of steadily approaching 2d Battalion doughs. Supporting artillery turned heavy fire on the enemy emplacements in the hills and behind that the infantrymen crossed the Kocher River and stormed up the sides of the hills, capturing or killing entire gun crews.

Let the officers and men of the 2d Battalion describe the fighting at the Neckar, the Jagst, Waldau, and the Kocher.

#### FIRST PHASE: NECKAR RIVER CROSSING

On the morning of 5 April 1945 the 2d Battalion of the 398th Infantry moved into Hoenstadt, Germany, by motor and relieved elements of the 63d Division with the understanding that a bridgehead across the Neckar River was to be established as soon as practicable, so as to effect a drive to the high ground to the east of Heilbronn. Having been told previously by the Regimental commander that it might be possible to make the crossing over a bridge that the 3d Battalion was attempting to construct near Heilbronn, the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Harvey Weisel, with his S-3, Capt. Elba Bowen, and his four company commanders, went to the vicinity of Heilbronn on a reconnaissance. Upon arriving there it was found that much opposition was being met at the crossing site and it seemed advisable to attempt a crossing at another place. That afternoon Captain Bowen and Lieutenant Pollitt, Heavy-Weapons Company commander, made a reconnaissance of the river in the vicinity of Offenau and found a likely site for a footbridge. This was reported to the battalion commander and he then ordered Company F to outpost the area and to send a patrol that night into Offenau to determine whether or not it was occupied by the enemy.

Upon receiving these orders Lieutenant Adams directed his 2d Platoon, led by Lieutenant Stalikas, to occupy a house overlooking the river and the town of Offenau, and from there to send a patrol into Offenau. By 2130 Lieutenant Stalikas had the proposed crossing site outposted and a reconnaissance patrol organized. The patrol was lucky in finding a small boat near the water's edge and with makeshift



*The Battle for Jagstfeld and Odheim*



paddles and grim determination finally reached the opposite shore. Even though the crossing was difficult the patrol laid wire which they hoped would prove useful the following day. Upon reaching the muddy bank of the river Sergeant Curbo, who was in charge of the patrol, ordered the small boat to be hidden in the brush and led his small group of men into the dark streets of Offenau. Finding no activity of any kind in the town, members of the patrol roused some civilians hoping to gain some information regarding the enemy. All the knowledge that they could get from the natives was that during the previous night a ten-man SS patrol had gone all through their town and reconnoitered the river bank. After searching several houses and feeling confident that the town was not occupied Sergeant Curbo and his patrol returned to their well concealed boat and made a return trip, reporting to their platoon CP at 2400 hours.

With the report from Captain Bowen that a footbridge could readily be constructed across the river near Offenau and also the information brought by Sergeant Curbo that the town seemed to be free of enemy, the battalion commander ordered that one platoon of Company F cross the Neckar at this point in the morning in engineer assault boats and secure the far shore and the town so that the engineers could construct a footbridge to be used by the remainder of the battalion later in the day.

The following morning at 1010 hours Lt. John Visser, Executive Officer of Company H, was fired upon near the proposed crossing site as he was making a reconnaissance for a covered route to the river's edge. The fire was from a machine gun that was at some great distance and not well aimed, but it served as a warning to Lieutenant Stalikas of Company F who was just then bringing his platoon down the embankment to make the initial crossing. Moving quickly and with great skill this platoon of thirty men soon had three assault boats in the water and were headed for the far bank. As they were about halfway across the river, which at this point was some 120 yards wide, enemy long-range harassing fire fell, but was unsuccessful in hitting any of the boats.

As soon as the boats reached the shore each squad ran quickly to previously selected positions from which they were to start the search of the town. One squad remained near the edge of town to protect the flanks and the other two squads moved from house to house up the two main streets on the east side of town. When that section of the town had been searched Lieutenant Stalikas, using the wire laid the night before, called Lieutenant Adams informing him all seemed clear. Lieutenant Adams immediately sent another platoon across in boats and together the two platoons searched the town, finding only two German

soldiers who had been left behind. A defense for the protection of the battalion's crossing was established and the men of the 2d Platoon of Company B, 325th Engineers, under Lieutenant Pinnell began construction of a footbridge.

By 1500 hours the bridge was completed and the remainder of Company F crossed the river followed by Company E plus a platoon of heavy machine guns from Company H. Company F consolidated and prepared to spend the night outposting Offenau. Captain Garahan, Company E commander, was ordered to send one platoon northeast to Obergriesheim to make contact with the 63d Division and to take the remainder of the company to Duttenburg where they would meet the tanks attached to them. Both groups proceeded to their objective without mishap and found that the Germans had recently pulled out of the vicinity. In the open ground just outside both towns were found small pillboxes which had recently been occupied and hastily abandoned. The platoon in Obergriesheim set up a defense of the town and awaited further orders while the remainder of the company outposted the town of Duttenburg with the idea of protecting the area where the battalion was to cross the Jagst River which flowed swiftly toward the Neckar far below the heights on which Duttenburg was perched. A platoon of heavy machine guns from Company H was in support of Company E and went into positions where the whole valley below them could effectively be covered by fire.

In the meantime Company G, under Captain Einsman, was accompanying the tanks attached to the battalion which crossed the river some miles upstream. After crossing the river and arriving at the woods northeast of Offenau, Company G dismounted from the tanks and searched the woods where they found pillboxes that apparently had been left in haste. American Red Cross boxes were strewn around the emplacements and a small amount of ammunition was found. Before leaving the woods a patrol was sent out to contact the 63d Division and tell them of the battalion's movements. Company G arrived in Offenau about 2300 hours and prepared to spend the night.

The Neckar River had been crossed with little difficulty but it was the two tributaries, the Jagst and Kocher, that presented the 2d Battalion's greatest problem. As they wound their way to the Neckar a veritable peninsula was formed which must be cleared before the drive southeast could really begin. For the most part this neck of land which lay between the Jagst and Kocher rivers was high and afforded a formidable defense line for the determined enemy. With two rifle companies in and around Offenau, one at Duttenburg, and vicinity, and elements of the heavy-weapons company supporting the various rifle companies



the battalion was prepared to make its second river crossing, which would put it in a position to attack this peninsula which was known to be the line that the Germans were most likely to defend.

### SECOND PHASE: JAGST RIVER CROSSING

At 2400 hours Lieutenant Colonel Weisel called the company commanders to his CP at Offenau and issued the order for the next phase of the battalion's attempt to break through the defense of these river lines. The battalion was to cross the Jagst River at 0500 hours in engineer assault boats in the vicinity of Duttenberg and from there the companies would carry them to the crossing site which the company commanders would select in the meantime. Company E was to be on the left, Company G in the middle and Company F on the right. Upon crossing the river Company E was to proceed to Heuchlingen where the tanks would be met and continue on toward Haganbach and secure the high ground. Company F was to drive into Jagstfeld, clear out the town and continue on to Waldau, and contact Company G. Company G was to pass over the high ground directly ahead and drive hard toward the town of Waldau where they would secure the bridge across the Kocher River which was still intact according to a report from the Air Corps. The 81mm mortar platoon of Company H was to go into position in Duttenberg where it could support the river crossing and also be prepared to give supporting fire to the companies as they advanced toward their objectives.

Upon receiving the battalion commander's order the company commanders returned to their respective companies and proceeded to make a reconnaissance for possible crossing sites. Before leaving for the reconnaissance each company commander gave orders that their executive officers would call in the platoons from various outposts, assemble the company, and meet guides at designated points in the vicinity of Duttenberg, to be guided to the river's edge.

By 0500 hours the company commanders had selected sites for their crossing and had posted guides for their companies. The guides pointed out the engineer boats which were unloaded in Duttenberg, and each company carried to the river bank the boats that they were to use in crossing. Each platoon leader was assigned the needed number of boats and by 0530 hours the first wave was loaded in boats and on its way across the swift-flowing river. The first wave of each company reached the far shore at approximately the same time. They quickly unloaded and ran across the two hundred yards of flat open terrain toward the railroad that borders the woods and high ground to their front. Just

after the first elements reached the far shore at approximately the same time. They quickly unloaded and ran across the two hundred yards of flat open terrain toward the railroad that borders the woods and high ground to their front. Just after the first elements reached the railroad embankment and before the majority of the men had cleared the open ground enemy machine guns and small arms opened up from the high ground to the front and from the railroad bed on the right. Most of the men immediately hit the ground when the firing started but were soon ordered to move up to the embankment where the enemy could not have direct fire on them, for lying in the open field they presented perfect targets for the machine guns which were firing from the heights above. As soon as the firing started the men left on the Duttenberg side of the river began firing on the high ground from which the enemy fire was coming. Captain Garahan of Company E had started across in the second wave and was pinned down by the fierce fire on the river's edge just after he stepped out of his boat. Since Company E and Company G had selected crossing sites near each other, it was possible for Captain Einsman of Company G who had not crossed yet to build up one continuous firing line. Two sections of Company H's HMGs were placed in strategic positions and the riflemen of both Company E and Company G flanked these automatic weapons. It was the quick action of the machine gunners in getting their guns into position and firing that enabled the men pinned down in the open ground to advance safely to the steep embankment. No sooner had Company H's machine guns opened fire than the enemy automatic weapons were directed on their positions, knocking out one heavy machine gun and wounding two gunners. Enemy riflemen could be seen running from hole to hole to gain for themselves more protection and better firing positions.

Down the river a short distance Company F was receiving fire from the high ground to their front and also from their right flank. Realizing that the enemy was at a distinct advantage holding the high wooded ground directly to the front of the crossing site and also well concealed positions in the town of Jagstfeld, Captain Einsman directed Sergeant Austin, the artillery forward observer, to call for a concentration on the sector of the town from which the fire was coming. Company H's mortars had already begun a barrage on the woods directly in front of the crossing sites. From their OP in Duttenberg the mortar men could see Germans running in groups of four and five to well dug-in positions along the wooded embankment. Because of their commanding position high above the river valley the mortar observers could see all the action clearly and consequently could engage groups of

enemy in the woods with little difficulty. Several direct hits on groups of enemy personnel were observed. Observation into the town of Jagstfeld was not good, but it is believed that the artillery fired with good effect on the enemy positions for the fire was silenced.

During the mortar and artillery barrages Sergeant Compton of Company G, disregarding the small-arms fire that was still coming his way, ran up and down the bank of the river getting the boats lined up for crossing. When the enemy started firing many of the boats were washed downstream and away from the crossing site. Sergeant Compton displayed unusual bravery and heroism as he went beyond the call of duty in effecting a reorganization of the boats and getting men lined up to go over in the next wave. In the meantime Captain Einsman went upstream in hope of finding another place, perhaps more secluded, where the rest of the troops could cross. Upon reconnoitering the dam which was across the river he found that the water flowing over it could be reduced by raising the headgates, and a few minutes after the gates were raised the water level had dropped. Plans were made to take the Company H heavy machine guns across in boats above the dam and the remainder of the men of Company E and Company G would infiltrate across the river on the dam itself. Because at least one automatic weapon was still being fired on the men as they exposed themselves the Company H weapons were left in place until the last minute, so that they could cover the men as they ran across the open field after crossing the river. As the men who had been pinned down on the water's edge and the men who were crossing on the dam ran across the open field toward the railroad embankment, Company H's mortars and machine guns fired all along the wooded area to keep the enemy down and permit a safe crossing. After most of the riflemen had crossed the heavy machine guns were loaded in the boats and taken across above the dam. As the mortar barrage continued the machine gunners made their way to the safety of the railroad embankment even though snipers were still active.

### THIRD PHASE: THE DRIVE FOR WALDAU

#### *Company F*

It was 1030 hours by the time all of Company E and G personnel reached the railroad embankment and reorganization could take place. Company F upon getting all their men across the river still found it impossible to cross the wide open ground in front of their crossing site because of the fierce fire coming from their right flank. Realizing he

could not get his entire company up to the railroad, Lieutenant Adams directed his men who made it in the first wave to join the remainder of the company on the river bank where he reorganized and prepared to push farther down the river and into Jagstfeld. The reorganization showed that one soldier had been killed and four wounded in the long day's tedious and dangerous fighting. At 1600 hours Lieutenant Adams started his company down the river bank hugging the shore in defilade from observation of the enemy on the high ground to their left and from their positions in the town. Upon coming to a relatively narrow strip of open ground between the river and the railroad track Lieutenant Adams directed that his company dash, a squad at a time, across the open ground to the railroad and take cover in the buildings which were on the edge of town. The dash was made without mishap and upon searching the buildings they were to occupy three prisoners were taken. After the reconnaissance Lieutenant Adams ordered his platoons to occupy a series of houses overlooking the town and prepare to defend that sector for the night.

At 0330 hours the following morning (7 April) an eighteen-man German patrol came into the area occupied by Company F. They were fired upon as they ran up the street in front of a Company H machine gun. Upon receiving fire from the heavy machine gun the patrol took up positions in nearby houses and returned the fire with rifles and automatic guns knocking out one of our machine guns with five direct hits. Lieutenant Lustica, in charge of the section, ordered his other gun to spray the house from which the enemy fire was coming and finally with the help of riflemen firing from other angles the patrol was forced to withdraw. Through the dark of night the enemy could be seen running away carrying at least one wounded comrade. One dead German was found in the street the next morning.

At 0600 hours that morning a radio message from battalion ordered Company F to proceed into Jagstfeld, clean out the town, go to the blown bridge site between Jagstfeld and Wimpfen and secure this point so engineers could put in a Bailey bridge. In accordance with these orders Lieutenant Adams sent his 3d Platoon under the command of Lieutenant Cantor into town to clear the street on their left.

Soon after this platoon left the company CP, Staff Sergeant Stankus, mortar observer for Company H, spied from his attic OP a German vehicle loaded with Germans coming down the road toward his position. He immediately called the information to Lieutenant Adams, who ran to the window and fired on the vehicle which was pulling an antitank gun. About the time that he fired, one of his light machine

guns fired from its position in a nearby railroad tower. The Germans taken entirely by surprise quickly rounded a corner stopped the vehicle and dived into the ditch beside the road. Sergeant Stankus fired from his attic window and the machine gun continued to fire, killing seven of the occupants of the vehicle. When members of Company F went out later to destroy the gun and vehicle with bazooka fire they found one live German hidden under the vehicle. He was taken prisoner and the demolition continued. Sergeant Stankus and two wire men later crawled out to the dead Germans and cut off three P38 pistols, even though snipers fired at them from the woods to their front.

After the excitement with the German vehicle subsided Lieutenant Adams got word that his 3d Platoon was well into the town, so he ordered Lieutenant Ward and the 1st Platoon to proceed into town on another street. They had not gone far before they met strong opposition from enemy located in houses and in a small concrete pillbox which was covering an open field. Lieutenant Ward ordered the pillbox fired upon with bazookas and after three rounds were fired twelve SS troopers came out with their hands up. Lieutenant Ward then made contact with Lieutenant Cantor's platoon and with the section of heavy machine guns in support they proceeded toward the blown bridge site. Just after they started forward they were fired upon again from houses on the left. Lieutenant Lustica's heavy machine guns fired five belts in the fire fight that ensued and many casualties were accounted for. One of the tanks attached to Company F was then called forward to fire directly upon the house from which the heavy fire was coming. It took just one well aimed round to silence the opposition at that point and the two platoons proceeded on to the bridge site at the edge of town.

About this time a radio message from battalion said that Company G had been held up and could not drive straight to Waldau as planned, but would come to the north of Jagstfeld and make contact with Company F. In the meantime Company F was to continue clearing the east side of town. As Company F moved toward the factory district in the eastern sector stiff opposition was met and the fighting was from building to building. Company H had a squad leader killed and Company F had several wounded, as the men battled their way with great difficulty from factory to factory. When the troops finally reached a large pickle factory which afforded beautiful fields of fire and excellent observation of the large railroad yards from which the main organized resistance was coming it was decided to consolidate for the night and hold the ground taken. Many enemy were killed that evening as they ran from houses on the left which were targets for Company G. Their

only retreat from Company G's fire was across an open field which was covered perfectly by Company H's five heavy machine guns. In Lieutenant Lustica's words, "The boys had a field day picking off those Germans as they ran across that open field." That night a small enemy patrol came into the factory area and was captured by riflemen standing guard.

At 0700 hours 8 April the 2d Platoon of Company F with two tanks in support led the company's push farther into the factory section of Jagstfeld. Two large factories were cleared of snipers and thoroughly searched before they proceeded towards the railroad yards. Upon approaching the yards enemy opposition was great and Company F was fired upon by mortars, machine guns and small arms. In return Company F fired their 60mm mortars and clip after clip of .30-caliber with the Mls. Company H's heavy machine guns fired several belts at snipers and automatic-weapons crews stationed in the buildings surrounding the yards. A final protective line was set up so as to fire down the railroad tracks, thus cutting off the enemy's route of retreat from the buildings. As they ran across the tracks withdrawing from their positions the machine guns killed them in their tracks. By 1700 hours that evening Company F was able to move a platoon into the main building of the railroad yards and set up an outpost for the night. That night was a harrowing experience for Lieutenant Stalikas' platoon and the section of machine gunners from Company H, for the enemy attempted during the night to drive them out of the buildings by firing armor-piercing ammunition through the wall and bazookas at the windows where the heavies were mounted. Staff Sergeant Dahlberg, section sergeant from the heavies, told of the enemy fire coming down the corridor and how his men had to crawl on their hands and knees to get from room to room. One soldier was wounded as he lay asleep on the floor when an AP round came through the wall. As this terrific battle was waged several belts of .30-caliber were poured into the houses occupied by the enemy. The riflemen with antitank grenades finally set fire to the closest enemy building and the attempt to knock out the outpost was repulsed.

On 9 April Company F's fight for the city of Jagstfeld continued with Company H's mortars dropping round after round on the buildings designated by Lieutenant Adams as giving them trouble. At one point during the firing Lieutenant Lonsberg of Company F called Lieutenant Mavrinac, who was supervising the firing of the mortars, and asked if they had fired about five minutes before that. Lieutenant Mavrinac, a bit worried at first for fear they had had a short round,



told him the mortars had been firing and wanted to know if anything was wrong. Lieutenant Lonsberg replied, "No, they are dropping right where we want them. The shrapnel is flying across the tracks and all over our house but keep throwing them in." The Air Corps was called upon to strafe the town and the woods lying to the north from which fierce fire was coming. The strafing was effective to the extent of killing several enemy and causing others to withdraw via the canal. That night a terrific explosion was heard which proved to be a charge set to demolish the bridge at Waldau. The enemy apparently had withdrawn from Jagstfeld, but all day on 10 April they continued to drop mortar shells into the railyard area. For the first time in four nights Company F slept without being hit by a counterattack or a combat patrol. The fight for the town had been a terrific one and the enemy suffered many casualties.

On the morning of 11 April Company F was able to push out of Jagstfeld and on toward their original objective, the town of Waldau. With two tanks and two TDs and the section of heavies from Company H, Company F moved without resistance to the northern end of Waldau where their 1st Platoon met a German strongpoint which was soon overrun by the TDs. One German was killed and two were captured. A Company F patrol that followed along the canal to give flank protection ran into a Schu-mine field in which one soldier lost a leg. Upon arriving at Waldau at 1200 hours a heavily booby-trapped roadblock was encountered but it was soon cleared by Lieutenant Kelly and his A&P Platoon. The town was entered and searched and a defense was established. Two patrols were sent out to reconnoiter for a possible river crossing site. Both patrols were sniped at, but one group was successful in finding a footbridge across the canal and a likely place to ford the river if the enemy could be cleared of the area. This information was reported via radio to battalion, and Company F was ordered to remain in Waldau for the night and await further orders.

### *Company E*

As was mentioned above, Company E completed their crossing of the wide stretch of open ground beyond the Jagst River by 1030 hours, and by 1100 hours had reorganized and moved out in a northeast direction along the railroad. The 1st Platoon of heavy machine guns from Company H was in support of Company E. After advancing about two hundred yards the 1st Platoon, led by Lieutenant Passero, was fired upon by automatic weapons from the high ground on the right. A

patrol was sent forward to try to knock out the enemy weapon, but it found upon advancing a short distance that there were a number of automatic weapons dug in on the hill in such a position that they could fire easily on anyone that approached the steep incline. Staff Sergeant Holt, the Company H 81mm observer with Company E, radioed his section to lay a barrage on the area which he designated by coordinates. Lieutenant Lacy, the mortar platoon leader, informed him that from their OP in Duttenberg they could see the enemy in groups of four and five scattered along the ridge and that he was just ready to fire on them. The mortars had already fired over three hundred rounds farther to the right of this area as the companies were crossing the river. Now that the enemy could be seen shifting their strength to the right so as to block Company E from reaching Heuchlingen, Company H began laying down intense concentrations in the corner of the woods just above the railroad. As one section laid down repeated barrages in the woods another section began to fire smoke so as to screen the path that Company E had to take along the railroad. Two hundred rounds of smoke were fired, thus protecting Company E and the section of heavy machine guns from Company H as they made their way into Heuchlingen.

Before starting behind the smoke screen for Heuchlingen, Captain Garahan ordered Lieutenant Pittman to take his platoon plus one section of heavy machine guns and skirt the woods on the company's right to give some protection to the flank and knock out anything that might be in the lower corner of the woods. The main body of the company moved on into Heuchlingen about 1540 hours under the protection of the beautiful smoke screen laid down by Company H, and upon arriving there found that the tanks which were supporting the company were already in the little settlement and had captured thirty-eight enemy who had been sniping from their excellent position high above the river. Eight members of the 2d Battalion's antitank platoon had come in on the tanks and helped round up the enemy scattered throughout the buildings. Captain Garahan ordered his platoon to organize a defense of the town and prepare to hold it until further orders. Lieutenant Matthew, in command of the Company H heavy machine guns, selected positions on the edge of the settlement and ordered the guns set up in readiness for a counterattack.

About 1930 hours word came from battalion that Lieutenant Pittman's platoon and the section of heavies supporting him had been cut off from the company, and that Company H's mortar platoon had rescued them by laying down a barrage thus permitting them to with-

draw back across the river to Duttenberg. Some of the enemy had worked down the hill toward the river, set up a strong defense line on the ground above Lieutenant Pittman and had fire covering the area he must cross to get to Heuchlingen. The mortar barrage plus many rounds of smoke enabled the platoon and the heavy machine guns to get back to Duttenberg safely. Knowing that Company G had run into heavy opposition on the high ground to the right of Heuchlingen and also knowing that many enemy were dug in on the high ground toward Hagenbach, Company E was ordered to consolidate and stay in Heuchlingen that night.

On the morning of 7 April the 2d Platoon of Company E again joined the company and about 0900 hours they moved out to clear the woods southwest of Heuchlingen, so that Company G who had arrived at Heuchlingen the night before could proceed on to Jagstfeld and join Company F in clearing out the town. Only snipers were encountered, so it was assumed that the strong force had withdrawn the members of their unit that were still alive.

During the day numerous enemy could be seen walking from hole to hole far to the east of Heuchlingen. Members of Company H spotted a German sneaking down a deep cut that led up to the barn in which they had their machine gun, and after a couple of shots were fired in his direction he dropped his rifle and came toward them with his hands up. Staff Sergeant Kraszewski, section sergeant from Company H, ordered the young SS trooper to call in his comrades which he did after some hesitancy. Two more came out of the dugout about three hundred yards down the road. Much artillery was fired on the high ground to the front with great effectiveness, for the enemy could be seen running toward Hagenbach between the bursts.

At 1800 hours Company E, less one platoon which was to hold Heuchlingen, was ordered to move to the north sector of Jagstfeld and set up a defense for the night. With Company G and Company F pushing into the town proper the battalion's left flank needed protection, and it was Company E's mission to relieve Company G's platoon and protect this flank. At 2200 hours Company E less the 3d Platoon proceeded through the woods and into Jagstfeld, where they consolidated for the night. One platoon of heavy machine guns from Company H was in support of Company E and these guns were mounted so that they could cover the woods on the north and also the open ground just west of the woods.

The following morning, 8 April, Company E was ordered to clear the woods northeast of Jagstfeld of the enemy that had been firing on

Company G and holding up their advance. At 0830 hours the 1st and 2d Platoons moved into the woods and before they had gone over three hundred yards they were fired upon by a flakwagon, and soon enemy rockets and mortars were falling on the riflemen as they were deployed through the woods. Before the entry into the woods, the two TDs fired and artillery shells came down on that sector of the woods, but apparently the enemy observers were well dug in and had no thought of withdrawing. Realizing the futility of trying to clear the woods with only two platoons and with the terrific mortar barrage protecting the area, Captain Garahan withdrew his company to the north side of town and called for more artillery to be thrown into the woods. He also asked the artillery to see if they could locate the flakwagon with their reconnaissance plane, but this attempt proved useless for the woods were offering excellent camouflage for the wagon. Soon after withdrawing his company Captain Garahan slipped on a stairway and injured his back and Lieutenant Keddie took command of the company.

At 1500 hours a second attempt was made to clear the woods when Lieutenant Pittman's platoon, with Lieutenant Passero's platoon following, started forward with platoons escheloned to the right. The 1st Platoon of Company H accompanied the riflemen into the woods. After the unit had advanced about six hundred yards it was decided to send a patrol to the right to contact Company G who was reported moving forward and also another patrol sent to reconnoiter the northeast sector of the woods. The patrol sent to contact Company G met elements of their left platoon and found that they were being held up and could not advance. The patrol which went forward into the corner of the woods was fired upon by two machine guns and small-arms fire. Members of the patrol returned individually to where their platoon had halted and found that one of their group was unaccounted for. Lieutenant Passero then sent another small patrol back hoping to locate Private Duncan who was missing. This search was unsuccessful for this patrol was fired upon by automatic weapons that sprayed the area. Private Clow, a member of the second patrol, was missing when others of the group finally worked their way back to the small ravine in which the platoon had halted. Mortar fire again began to come in on both platoons and Lieutenant Keddie via the radio got permission to withdraw to the houses on the north of Jagstfeld and set a defense for the night.

At 2000 hours that night Private Duncan came out of the woods, and told of how he had lain flat on the ground for three hours. The Germans had fired over his head and into the patrol that had been

sent out to locate him. He had been too close to the enemy to call to his comrades or to attempt to escape before the fire fight ended. Only by cautiously crawling through the underbrush had he been able to escape. He reported that he knew nothing of Private Clow and it was believed that he had either been captured or killed. However, the following morning about 0900 hours the Company H machine gunners spied him limping out of the woods and toward their positions. He was quickly gotten into the house and given first aid for shock and a serious arm wound. Even though weak and completely exhausted from the loss of blood and the long exposure he told of how he had managed to get a bandage on his arm, and then lay motionless for hours hoping that the Germans would withdraw. It was not until early morning that the voices near him ceased, and with great pain he made his way out of the woods and back to his company.

At 0730 hours 9 April, Captain Bowen, battalion S-3, and Lieutenant Pollitt, Company H commander, came into Jagstfeld on reconnaissance to determine how best this defense line might be broken and the drive toward Waldau continued. After looking over the positions of the troops and talking with the company commanders regarding the strength of the enemy, Captain Bowen decided in order to make the battalion's line more secure as Company G and Company F battled for the town of Jagstfeld that Company E should draw one platoon back to the woods between Heuchlingen and Jagstfeld, thus making one continuous defense line between the two towns. The plan was to clear the town and then turn attention to the woods and the terrain beyond. This change in the lines was made and then at 0830 hours the next day, 10 April, upon order from battalion Company E proceeded toward Hagenbach which they were to occupy and from there dispatch patrols to reconnoiter for a possible crossing site over the Kocher River in case Company F was unsuccessful in getting one at Waldau. This move to Hagenbach was deemed advisable for a report from the Air Corps confirmed the belief that the explosion heard during the night had blown the bridge at Waldau. With the bridge blown there was cause to believe that the mortar and artillery fire plus the fire power displayed along their front had caused the enemy to withdraw across the Kocher. Then too the mortar fire that Company F had been getting seemed to come from the direction of Kochendorf.

As Company E approached Hagenbach with two tanks and two TDs the 3d Platoon led by Lieutenant Bird was leading. Upon reaching the outskirts of the town Staff Sergeant Cain took a patrol and started down the main street. No sooner had they reached the first

house than a machine gun opened up on them from a knoll to their left and near the river. The patrol soon outflanked the gun and after several shots were fired the crew surrendered. Two of them were badly wounded and the third was captured. The town was divided into sectors and each platoon proceeded to clear out its sector. Several enemy were killed in the search and sixteen were captured, including a lieutenant with a powerful radio set. Upon securing the town Lieutenant Keddie ordered it outposted and patrols were sent out to reconnoiter for possible crossing sites. The far banks of the river afforded no suitable crossing site, and both patrols were fired upon by snipers as they made their way along the banks of the river. Company E reported this to battalion, and received orders to hold that sector for the night and await further orders.

During the next day, 11 April, Company E improved positions dug in above the bank of the river outside of Hagenbach and sent a patrol to the right to contact Company F near Waldau. Contact was made and it was then known that the ground between Hagenbach and Waldau was clear of enemy. Knowing this and also that Company F had found a possible crossing site, the battalion ordered both Companies G and E and the sections of HMGs from Company H supporting them to proceed to Waldau and await instructions there. Lieutenant Visser of Company H brought trucks to the crossroads east of Heuchlingen and the 1st Platoon of Company H went on carriers to Waldau where they were supposed to set the machine guns into position so that they could support a river crossing. Company E arrived in Waldau at 2030 hours and Lieutenant Keddie reported to the battalion CP for orders.

### *Company G*

With Companies F and E now in Waldau ready for the final river crossing which would end this peninsular campaign, let us now turn back and follow Company G as they made their desperate fight over the high ground above the river and fought against bitter opposition in Jagstfeld.

At 11 hours, 6 April, Company G, commanded by Captain Einsman, moved across the railroad tracks and up over the high ground with the 1st Platoon leading supported by a section of HMGs from Company H. The leading elements had not gone far until they were fired upon. Returning the fire, Company G could see the enemy pulling back to what appeared to be better positions. By the time Company G had gone one thousand yards they hit the enemy's main line, estimated by Cap-



tain Einsman to be manned with at least eight machine guns and 150 men. A bloody fight ensued lasting for several hours and resulting in Company G having 4 killed, 3 captured and 27 wounded. In addition to these casualties there were three men from Company H's machine guns wounded. Ten enemy were captured and at least forty were killed. When reorganization was being attempted so as to hold what had been gained, the battalion radioed Company G that tanks were coming up from the left to aid in the fight and the preparations should be made to continue the attack. As the tanks approached the 2d Platoon of Company G was pushed forward to lead, but the enemy was too strong. One tank was knocked out by an SP gun and all the crew members were wounded. They were able to withdraw from their tank mainly because of the covering fire from the Company H's machine guns. Technical Sergeant Good who was in charge of the machine guns described the action on this high ground thus: "We were advancing against heavy artillery, small arms and absolutely fanatical opposition. Our entire unit demonstrated great courage and a determination to perform their assigned tasks as a fighting team." The remaining tanks withdrew because of the intense artillery and mortar concentrations being laid on the area.

Captain Einsman at this point realized the futility of further offense and ordered his platoons to withdraw to positions which would be more advantageous for a defense. The enemy seemed to sense what was occurring and now concentrated their fire against the 3d Platoon, led by Lieutenant Herold. They had been defending the right flank of the company. The fire on them was so intense that repeated messages to them to fight their way back failed to produce any results. A private who lay in a furrow of ploughed ground for several hours expressed their plight thus: "We seemed glued to the ground and nothing could move us." Realizing that something must be done if the platoon was to be saved, Captain Einsman and Sergeant Compton, his communications sergeant, stripped off their equipment and rushed out to the isolated unit to give them courage and inspire them to make a run for their lives. Sergeant Compton, former All-American football player, made three trips over this ploughed open ground, each time carrying wounded back. At one place he came into physical contact with an enemy soldier and beat him over the head with his helmet, since he had left his M1 in order to carry his fellow soldier.

At 1900 hours battalion radioed Company G to proceed to Heuchlingen and join Company E. At 2000 hours when he was left of the company arrived at Heuchlingen tired, hungry and completely exhausted

from the eight long hours of battling against the onslaught of the determined foe. K rations, which had been rowed across the river at a point just below the castle, were eaten and preparations were made to spend the night in the hay barns. It had been a long and costly day but because of the heavy casualties on the part of the enemy they were forced to withdraw, enabling the battalion to get a firm hold on the city of Jagstfeld the following day.

By 1100 hours the following day (7 April) Company G was in Jagstfeld after following Company E's platoon through the woods as it was cleared of snipers. Company G's mission was to clear all houses on the left of the railroad yard and drive hard toward Waldau and secure the bridge which air reconnaissance had proved was still intact. As the leading platoon started down the left side of the railroad it received tremendous small-arms fire from buildings ahead. The tanks were called forward at this point and they knocked out the guns and set the two buildings on fire.

Men of Company G plus a section of HMGs from Company H advanced cautiously from house to house as artillery fire was shelling the area. Fierce automatic fire was coming from the woods east of town and was responsible for three Company G casualties. One HMG and a platoon of riflemen were left on the north edge of town to defend the left flank as the remainder of the company pushed farther into the town toward the large railroad station. As the leading elements approached the station terrific automatic-weapon fire came from it and nearby buildings. One of these buildings was set on fire and many Germans were seen fleeing from it. Sergeant Good fired several belts into this area as the enemy attempted to withdraw. A reconnaissance the following morning showed over twenty Germans had been killed in this fight including the officer who had been the commander of the town of Jagstfeld. Due to darkness the company consolidated for the night.

On the morning of 8 April Company G's platoon on the left flank was relieved by Company E and the company attempted to push farther into the center of Jagstfeld. Because of the dogged determination of the enemy the leading elements were held up and the fighting again resumed a house-to-house basis. Company H machine gunners spotted a large group of Germans coming out of the woods on the left and fired several belts causing many casualties. All during the day and the following day fighting continued with no great amount of ground gained but many Germans were accounted for as they rushed from buildings being fired upon by the riflemen of Company G and the

HMGs and mortars of Company H. Staff Sergeant Hatley, Company H mortar observer, has been recommended for the Silver Star for his activity during these two days. Time and time again he directed fire on groups of enemy that he could see from his advantageous OP. There was a narrow corridor of clear ground over which the enemy had to cross when retreating from the scene of the battle and Sergeant Hatley repeatedly fired upon this area with great accuracy. So many were killed here that the action is still spoken of as "Hatley's Slaughter." Sergeant Tillett, who had a HMG near Sergeant Hatley's OP, said they cheered as they saw legs and arms of the enemy fly into the air numerous times.

On 10 April when the battalion's lines were extended after the bridge at Waldau had been blown and the enemy had withdrawn across the Kocher River, Company G relieved elements of the first battalion near the town of Odheim so that the regiments could have one battalion in reserve. Reconnaissance was made for a possible crossing site but without success. A patrol was sent to contact the 63d Division on the left and the company remained in this area until the following evening when they were ordered to proceed to Waldau. By 1800 hours the company was assembled in the town of Waldau, and Captain Einsman went to the battalion for further instructions.

#### FOURTH PHASE: KOCHER CROSSING

At 2000 hours Lieutenant Colonel Weisel gave to the assembled company commanders the order for crossing the Kocher River at 2200 hours. A successful crossing here meant that a Bailey bridge could be constructed and the battalion would be free to drive southeast. Company F, who had made the reconnaissance of the canal, railroad yards, and river, was to lead the battalion with Companies E and G following, accompanied by the heavy weapons of Company H. At 2200 hours Lieutenant Cantor led his platoon down to the crossing, and as soon as the leading elements reached the footbridge over the canal the enemy threw great amounts of fire from automatic weapons and even bazookas on the crossing site and along the embankment where the riflemen were cautiously feeling their way. There had been a downpour of rain about an hour before and the ground was slick and hard to traverse. Word was sent to Lieutenant Adams by messenger when the platoon was held up, and he ordered them to withdraw to the safety of a railway underpass so Company H's mortars could shell the area from which the fire seemed to be coming. A heavy concen-

tration was thrown across the canal and also into Kochendorf on the far side of the river. The fire could not be observed but was believed to be effective, for no fire was drawn by a patrol that was sent across about 0200 hours. The patrol returned to Company F about 0300 hours and by 0400 hours the companies were organized and ready to move out. The narrow footbridge was used to cross the canal and the river was waded at a spot which was only knee-deep. Company F crossed and entered the town of Kochendorf where they captured eighteen Germans. After clearing the town they established roadblocks and set up a defense of the river so as to give security to the engineers as they constructed a Bailey bridge. Company E followed, skirted the town and drove on toward Neckarsulm. Company G moved through Company F and occupied the high ground out of Kochendorf before starting on their drive to the southeast.

Thus the last three rivers and the ground between them which the enemy had used as its last organized defense line were crossed. The 2d Battalion with the aid of elements of the 10th Armored Division which was soon to join them could not push on to the southeast in pursuit of the enemy as they raced for their Southern Redoubt.

The 1st Battalion attacked farther north and on 7 April struck out from Untergriesheim in an encirclement movement toward Heilbronn with Odheim as its first objective. The approaches to Odheim were covered first by the Jagst River, over which the engineers hurriedly threw a bridge expediting the fanning out of the supporting tanks and tank destroyers. Behind the Jagst were many commanding hill positions, notably Hill 233 on the left and Hill 215.8 on the right. Farther to the rear and directly between the first two hills rose Hill 210.9, forming a perfect triangle and peering down into the draw between Hills 215.8 and 233. Beyond this natural defense lay Willenbach Farms—an open, flat expanse offering no means of protection from the intense fire that was to come from the woods to the right and left, and from the high ground behind the next obstacle—the Kocher River.

Companies B and C, without artillery preparation, spearheaded the battalion's drive. Company C started up the long incline of Hill 233 under intermittent enemy artillery fire and

had almost reached the crest of the hill when suddenly intense fire poured from caves at the top, driving the men to the ground. With the volume of fire increasing and supplemented by equally heavy fire from the adjacent hill, positions became untenable. Company C withdrew to the base of the hill under the covering fire of Company D's heavy machine guns, and moved around into the draw between the hills while Company B resumed the attack on Hill 233. With a platoon of Company D attached, Company B succeeded in occupying the hill. Company C, together with a platoon of tanks, battled its way through the draw. Fire raged down from Hill 215.8 and from a new source of positions along a road and directly to the front. Direct 88mm fire crashed into the area, scoring direct hits on two of the tanks. However, the company fought on to overwhelm the positions to the front and moved on out into the open expanse of Willenbach Farms, where the intensity of artillery and automatic fire forced a withdrawal back into the draw. The SS followed and again took up their lost positions along the edge of the road. In the meantime Company A was called from its reserve position and proceeded around to the right to protect Company C's flank as it extended out into Willenbach Farms. Slowly it went about the costly process of cleaning out and occupying Hill 215.8 and at the end of the day the two hills were in our hands. Company C dug in for the night in the draw. Casualties for the day were heavy. Tank and tank destroyer platoons took up positions atop the hills and fired round upon round into the entrenched enemy to the front during the night.

The next morning Companies B and C attacked but again met with a furious and unrelenting enemy fire. Company B advanced two hundred yards but C was held in the draw after an attempt on the positions to the front. Patrols missioned to feel out a weak spot in the enemy's defenses could not get as far as sticking their heads out of their foxholes without inviting fire from all directions to the front.

It was evident now that the Heilbronn defenses extended to this area and that the enemy realized the importance of this flank position and was determined to hold at all costs. Time artillery fire was called for to eliminate the enemy in their well dug positions. All day and the following night engulfed the stubborn enemy with concentrations of time fire. It did the trick. On the third day heavy patrolling activity was carried on, but despite the severe time fire some Germans were still around to combat the patrols.



*Two-gun man*