

29th Infantry Division
After-Action-Report
December 1944

THE BATTLE FOR JULICH - PHASE X (CONT'D) 1-9 DECEMBER

The great drive for Germany proper was on. Allied armies from North to South were making the big push to the Rhine. The Ninth Army in the northern sector of the line was confronted with the ROER River, a major water barrier. The 29th Division as part of XIX Corps and the Ninth Army had attacked on 16 November and had succeeded in reaching the River bank in just eleven days. The Division had seen some stiff fighting in taking WITTMERICH (K9259), STRESCORF (K9356), ALDENHUSEN (K9856), BUCHHEIM (F0157) and KESLAR (F0350). The only remaining enemy forces on the east bank of the ROER were concentrated on the left of the Division sector in the zone of the 116th Infantry. It was necessary to dislodge this force from their excellent positions in order to reach the sites chosen by the Division for its crossing. Patrols were extremely active during this period along the river bank. Remaining bridges were of extreme interest to the Division for they afforded escape routes for the enemy still on the east bank as well as possible crossing sites for the 29th Division.

The Division was disposed with the 116th Infantry Regiment on the left and the 175th Infantry on the right. The 115th was in Division Reserve in the rear with the 1st Bn occupying SIEBERDORF (K9356) and the remainder of the Regiment in the town of HARKESLAR (K9657). The 116th on the left was holding the line with the 1st and part of the 2nd Bn. The 1st Bn plus 4 and 6 Companies of the 2nd Bn occupied KESLAR (F0059), while the remainder of the 2nd Bn was located in BUCHHEIM (K990535). The 175th Infantry Regiment in the right portion of the Division zone was disposed with two Bns, less two Cos, in line. The 1st Bn, less Co B, occupied the town of SCUDHEIM (F0157), while the 3rd Bn, less Co K, was securing KIRCHDORF (F0256). The Regiment, while operating in this zone patrolled aggressively along the line of the ROER River. The 2nd Bn of the Regiment plus Cos B and K were engaged in rehabilitation training in FRIEDENHEIM (K9655).

The Luftwaffe put in a small scale subsistence during this period. In the first day of December eighteen Focke-Wulf 10s operated over the Division zone.

The planes generally came over singly or in pairs and strafed and bombed in the rear areas.

One platoon of the 226th Searchlight supported our operations during this phase by indirect illumination of the battle zone. This platoon employed six searchlights in the Division area with good effect. Primarily the purpose of the lights was to provide indirect light on enemy positions by shining the beam on low clouds. (See photo section) It took many trials to perfect this, but the results achieved were quite satisfactory.

One of the obstacles confronting the 116th Infantry was the BATTALIA (7024594) of JULIAN (70059), the nesting place for the BATTALIA (7024594), which was strongly defended. This BATTALIA (7024594) is a bowl shaped stadium. Just north of the BATTALIA (7024594) there is a swimming pool which was also strongly defended by the enemy. Some 1100 yards north of the BATTALIA (7024594) is the BATTALIA (7018600). This consisted of the main house and several small out-lying buildings. Both the BATTALIA (7024594) and BATTALIA (7018600), border the SOLO River and are dominated by the high ground on the east bank. In addition it was necessary for an attacking force to cross approximately 800 yards of open terrain in order to reach either. Later all three points were to be stubbornly defended by the enemy, and the efforts of two regiments were necessary to clear them out. A complex system of tunnels in this area aided materially in the defense of these points and the enemy had taken excellent advantage of the long fields of fire covering every approach to these places. The swimming pool was defended with machine guns in each corner and in addition a self-propelled gun was employed to lay fire on any attacker. The high ground on the east bank of the river was of major importance to both sides, for the enemy from CPs located anywhere in this area was able to bring observed fire on any force moving across the flat, open terrain between BATTALIA (70059) and the SOLO River.

The 116th Infantry repulsed the attack for the riverline on 1 June by with the 1st Bn leading the effort. The enemy laid down heavy artillery concentrations on this attack from positions across the river, though his small-arms fire was only sporadic.

By evening, elements of this Bn had reached the river bank and were preparing to attack to the North. The 2nd Bn, meanwhile, closed up into the positions the 1st Bn vacated when it had moved out in the attack. This placed B and G Cos, 116th Infantry on the eastern outskirts of KOSLAR (FOO59) and the entire 1st Bn to the East and slightly to the South of the town holding down the West bank of the ROER River in that zone.

On 2 December Companies B and C, 116th Infantry attacked from the vicinity of the paper mill of KOSLAR (FOO59) in an easterly direction to take the swimming pool and the SPORTPLATZ (FO24594). Initially the attack progressed, but extensive anti-personnel mine fields in the vicinity of the swimming pool halted the attack. It was found throughout the attacks in this sector that entry into a mine field brought instantaneous enemy response. The flash of an exploding mine immediately brought heavy mortar and artillery fire to bear on the attacker. On the morning of 3 December, B and C Companies were pulled back to KOSLAR (FOO59) as the open ground afforded no adequate cover.

Companies E and F, of the 2nd Bn, 116th Infantry on 2 December attacked astride the KOSLAR (FOO59) - HASENFELD GUT (FO18608) road with E Company on the right. Heavy artillery and mortar fire succeeded in pinning these companies down shortly after the attack got under way. F Company, later, succeeded in advancing to within 300 yards of HASENFELD GUT (FO18608) before heavy small-arms and direct self-propelled fire caused them to come to a complete halt.

On 3 December G Company relieved E Company at the dike South of HASENFELD GUT (FO18608), but on the morning of 5 December, because neither company could make any headway G and E Companies were pulled back to KOSLAR (FOO59). Here the companies were combined and placed under one commander.

On 3 December Company L from the woods to the East of KOSLAR (FOO59) moved out to take the SPORTPLATZ (FO24594). Again this attack was stopped as the enemy laid down heavy mortar and artillery fire. Mine fields of which schuh mines were a major part again made the going difficult. On the night of 3 December Company I was sent out on the right flank of L Company but its advance was also halted by mine fields at the North edge of the woods

around the swimming pool. The enemy from the stadium end also from positions across the Road River delivered heavy machine gun fire on this company and pinned it down effectively. The open character of the terrain made it imperative that this company remain there during daylight hours and therefore the entire day of 4 December was spent dug-in in this area. The marshiness of the ground made fox holes or slit trenches untenable and many men preferred to take their chances above ground rather than stand in the water that came up to their waists.

4 December Companies B and C attempted an attack on HANWFIELD GUT (FO186008), but were unsuccessful; mine fields a main being the chief obstacle. Company K on this day, with the aid of an artillery smoke screen, attacked just north of the road at WALDACK GUT (FO03601). Once again heavy mine fields were encountered. Two tanks were employed to clear a path through these mines and in the process one was knocked out by artillery fire. Elements of K Company, however, reached the wall around HANWFIELD GUT (FO186008) early the morning of 5 December, but a hasty reconnaissance showed no means of entrance and the company withdrew just prior to daylight to positions just west of the mine field. The night 5-6 December all elements of the 116th Infantry were pulled back to KALDIA (FO0959) to reform and prepare for attacks on these objectives.

On 6 December the attack was renewed, this time with heavy artillery support. 8 inch howitzers fired on the STREIFLICH (FO24594) and HANWFIELD GUT (FO186008) and other enemy emplacements in that general area. Fighter bombers from the XIX TAC were also called into the fight and their planes dive-bombed and skip-bombed with excellent results. 1st and 2nd Dns were the attacking elements of the 116th Infantry and, as before, initially the attack went well. The 1st Bn later was stopped when it reached the edge of the STREIFLICH (FO24594) by heavy machine gun, mortar and artillery fire. This battalion was then withdrawn to positions at HANWFIELD GUT (FO22589).

The 2nd Bn attacked south with the 81mm mortars of both the 2nd and 3rd Dns supporting and when darkness fell had reached positions 50 yards north of HANWFIELD GUT (FO186008). A and H Companies attempted to swing wide to

attack this position from the rear, but were halted by intensive small-arms and machine-gun fire. Company I of the 3rd Bn moved East between the 1st and 2nd Bns and succeeded in working its way to a dike that ran to the GUT from the South. No further movement was made because, as before, movement during daylight hours brought instantaneous response from the enemy.

On the early afternoon of 6 December following an air strike and with artillery and chemical mortars smoking the back of the ROKA, the 2nd Bn jumped off. Flam mortars of both the 2nd and 3rd Bns supported this advance by battery fire. The first 700 yards were covered swiftly but heavy mortar and artillery fire were met when this point was reached. 500 more yards were then made and B and C Companies moved North to attempt to swing around and come in behind their objective. The enemy succeeded in stopping this attack, by heavy small arms, machine gun and artillery fire from positions at the GUT, the swimming pool, and across the river.

On 7 December the 115th Infantry relieved the 116th Infantry in its entirety and proceeded to take charge of the 7000 yard front and to prepare to continue the attack to clear out enemy resistance west of the AOKA River in the Division zone.

The 1st and 2nd Bns, 116th Infantry, upon being relieved moved to an assembly area in SCHAUFRANSANG (4904542). The 3rd Bn closed into an assembly area at BERTENBOURF (4921553) at midnight, 7 December. The 115th Infantry on 8 December had attached Co A, 92nd Cal Bn, 1 platoon and one section of the assault guns of the 747th Tk Bn. At 0500 hrs on that morning the comparatively fresh troops of the 115th attacked to capture the redoubtable SPONTELLAN, (5024594), HANFIELD GUT (F018608) and the swimming pool. Surprise was the chief weapon used in this attack and the enemy was hit fast and hard. Co B attacked from NAUSAURHIA (F015533) and Co A moved out from KOSLAR (F0059). The objective was the SPONTELLAN (F024594) and enemy positions there were reduced with ease and rapidity. It was almost a walk-in.

The 3rd Bn was assigned the mission of taking HANFIELD GUT (F018608). The Bn employed Cos I and K to do the job with K moving on the position from the South. Enemy mortar fire in heavy concentrations stopped this attack and I Co was committed to advance on the objective from the west with the aid of

covering smoke. Moving skillfully to take advantage of the screening smoke the stringpost was recovered and successfully and quickly reloaded.

The 115th Infantry remained in defense of the Division zone and completed the clearing up of the small enemy residual force east of the river on 9 December with all Bns in the line. The next day the 1st Bn, less Co B, was relieved by the 3rd, plus Co B, and the former moved to SICHBUANG (K9856) for a relief rotation period. Co B, attached to the 3rd Bn, was held in the town of KOUK (K9859) as an SO reserve.

In the afternoon of 14 December the 1st Bn relieved the 3rd in its front line positions and in turn moved to SICHBUANG (K9856) to take up a relief rotation program.

During this period the units of the 175th and 115th Infantry regiments in reserve all vacated river crossings by foot bridges and by the use of assault boats. Boat teams were organized and searchlights were used as a further aid. Each outfit also practiced firing over an observation unit in front of the river. Each Bn in the Division also conducted a FIX which was run over the same general area that they had taken previously. The use of supporting elements was stressed so that in future operations maximum use could be made of all of them. The night of 15-16 December a JU 52 was shot down in the Division area and fifteen paratroopers were killed in the crash. (See Photo Section) Others were reported dropped to the South that same night.

17-18 December the 115th Infantry was relieved by the 175th Infantry which moved its 1st and 2nd Bns into the line and placed the 2nd SO in reserve at SICHBUANG (K9856). The 3rd Division on the right of the 17th Division relieved it of the defense of its sector at 0150 hrs, 17 December. The 17th Division took over this responsibility while the 3rd Division moved South for assignment in the First Army sector against the German counteroffensive. The 17th Cav Recon Element had been heading the line for the 3rd Division and was attached to the Division at the same time that the 17th Division took over the 3rd Division's sector. The 70th CA Bn was also attached at this time. The 17th Cav Recon Element remained in defense of the right half of the Division sector, that sector formerly occupied by the 17th Division. On 19 December

the 1st Bn, 116th Infantry in Division reserve in LAUFELD (PO03543) moved to relieve elements of the 17th Cav Recon Bn, taking over the left half of the Squadron's zone, just after midnight on 20 December.

The 29th Division on 20 December relieved the 2nd Armored Division of the defense of its sector. This operation was made by the 116th Infantry, less the 1st Bn, which moved from CHAUFFOURIER (K904542) and LAUFELD (K921553) to the line. The 3rd Bn, with Co G attached, actually held the line while the 2nd Bn, less Co G moved into Regimental Reserve at FRIEDENHOVEN (P956600). The following day the 3rd Bn, 175th Infantry relieved the 1st Bn, 116th in the right half of the Division zone. The 1st Bn then moved to FRIEDENHOVEN (P956600) in Regimental Reserve. The 2nd Bn, 116th Infantry, less Co G, relieved the 1st Bn, 175th Infantry on the 21st also. This then was the situation. The 29th Division was occupying the sectors formerly held by the 30th Infantry and 2nd Armored Divisions. This sector bordered the ROER River and the Division was dispersed from left to right as follows: the 3rd Bn, 116th Infantry; 2nd Bn, 116th Infantry; 3rd Bn, 175th Infantry; 3rd Bn, 175th Infantry, and, finally the 17th Cav Recon Bn on the right. The 102nd Division was on the left of the 29th and the 104th on the right. At 2400 hrs the 29th Division passed from XII Corps to XIII Corps control.

The 83rd Carl Snacks Generator Co was attached to the Division on 20 December and placed in Division Reserve in LAUFELD (K915526). This unit was attached to assist in the projected crossing of the ROER and several demonstrations were held to show the generators vast possibilities. (See Photo Section)

PHASE II - DEFENSE OF THE ROER RIVER LINE - 10-31 DEC-44

When the enemy had been cleared out west of the ROER River in the Division sector and after the 30th and 2nd Armored Divisions had moved out to the South for employment in the First Army zone against the German thrust, the 29th Division continued on the defensive. There was no immediate possibility of offensive action with the wide front the Division was holding. The German offensive in the South made the possibility of an attack in the XIII Corps great-er in that by attacking somewhere in this area the enemy could hope to fashion the northern claw of a pincer that would set near Liège or even

ATTACK. The 29th Division, therefore, set about the task of setting up the best defense possible using the terrain and all available forces. Understrength of personnel of rifle companies limited the frontages units were capable of defending. Since the best defense is an active defense in depth the Division, not averse to taking a tip from the enemy, decided to set up a system based on the defense of small towns extending in lines across the Division area. (The original plan of action when engaged in taking this area called for the taking of high ground around the towns and then the towns themselves if necessary). The German defense system had employed these mutually-supporting towns to great advantage and the Division had found that in the majority of cases it was absolutely necessary to take these towns one by one instead of by-passing them.

Each town in the Division area was wired in. Emplacements were dug to cover all possible approaches. All tanks and tank-destroyers on line were dug-in and mutually supporting as far as possible. In addition communication trenches were dug from the emplacements defending the perimeter of the town into the town itself. This made it possible for the defenders as a last ditch resort to conduct house-to-house fighting.

Christmas day for the 29th Division was quiet as far as the war was concerned. The Christmas spirit took over for the day and Christmas trees were in abundance. All men of the Division enjoyed turkey dinner and the Commanding General visited each Bn in the Division and personally saw to it that every man had his pound-and-a-half. Services were held in all units throughout the Division and even the enemy in JULICH across the way rang the church bells of the town on Christmas Eve.

As the month of December concluded the great majority of the defenses had been completed and the 29th Division was firmly resolved and confident that the area would be well defended.