

THE OPENING HOURS OF THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

At about 1500 hours on 17 December, 1944, as C. O., Reconnaissance Company, 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion, attached to the 2nd Infantry Division, First Army, I noticed a motorized column moving from east to west thru the town of Bullingen, Belgium. Our command post was located at the south edge of Krinkelt, some two miles from the column which appeared to contain U. S. Army and German vehicles.

I sent a platoon led by S/Sgt. Edward Patterson toward Bullingen to determine the make up of the column, report the information by radio and to return to Krinkelt. Sgt. Patterson (his battle field commission had not yet been effected) led his platoon to Bullingen, and, from the basement of the Ruaw Hotel, reported the column to be German (12th Panzer Division). Communications with the platoon terminated during the early morning hours of December 18th. I learned from Patterson after the war that he and his one section were lined up outside the hotel and were about to be shot by German troops, when a German major stopped the proceedings. They did shoot our medic named Goldberg. Patterson's other section escaped during the night and returned to Krinkelt.

In the early evening hours of December 17th, several German tanks moved in to the south edge of Krinkelt, halted at the church which appeared to be a key artery some 100 yards from our command post, a typical two story rural dwelling. The Panthers proceeded to shoot up our exposed reconnaissance vehicles and knock out communications. Although several of our men jumped into our M20s and attempted to fire their 50 calibre machine guns at the Panthers, I ordered them out of the vehicles just before the 75s destroyed the vehicles. (Sgt. Tony J. Diagiacomia)

So went the night, the bright German very pistol light, the quiet winter coldness, the uncertainty, the Germans strolling the streets from house to house. The company was divided, half in a small dwelling mentioned and half in a similar dwelling just across the narrow street. We saw no other American soldiers and I was informed by our Bn. C. O., Lt. Col. Ephriam F. Graham, Jr., that we were very much alone in Krinkelt. Col. Graham ordered that we not expose ourselves during the night but to await the morning. No one slept. I spent most of the night on the 2nd floor of the command post with Cpl. Monroe S. Block as my runner. Several German soldiers entered the house across the street where half of our company was located but our troops remained concealed and the Germans shortly came back into the street. Sometime during the night, a Panther tank shot the corner off the room in which I was standing. I was hit in the mouth with a piece of brick or stone but no one was otherwise injured. At about 500 hours, the Germans noisily prepared and ate their breakfast, seemingly confident that no American GIs were anywhere near. Then they climbed into their Panthers and moved back east.

At the first morning light on December 18th, I ordered all nearby houses searched for the enemy and we started preparing breakfast. All company officers were eating breakfast of pancakes together in the living room of the C. P. we had spent the night in. Suddenly, I heard a rumbling

and looked thru the lace curtains of the living room window and saw at least six Panther tanks moving to and past the church from the east. All bedlam broke out and I remember yelling, "Here they come - let's get them". Everyone was in motion as trained, including the cooks, grabbing bazookas and ammunition, grenades, rifles etc. I grabbed a bazooka and shouted to a cook to grab ammunition to load for me as I scrambled out the back door. Just outside the door sat a rumbling Panther not more than ten feet from the door. It was so close that I was apprehensive that firing the bazooka this close might injure our troops so I moved some twenty feet away and at an angle facing the side of the Panther. Our first shot from the bazooka glanced off the area between the tracks, the most vulnerable area. From a slightly different angle, the second projectile glanced off the Panther. The Panther then spun completely around and came rumbling directly for the cook and myself. We were near a rectangular building and we sprinted for its protection. On it came, firing. We sprinted around the opposite end and stopped. The tank also stopped, poked its long barrel into the side of the building and fired. We heard the motors again rev up and seek us out. We completely circled the building with the Panther in hot pursuit again, when I spied a stone wall across a small road where we could find shelter. I yelled for the cook to follow me behind the wall and we could hear that the tank had other problems because we could hear bazooka shells exploding and the Panther was knocked out. I looked from behind the wall and saw one of our jeeps which the Panther had run over in its chase. The jeep was not more than one foot high now.

Then I heard other firing and explosions and sought our company executive officer, Lt. Robert Parker. I found him hunting more bazooka ammunition, blood streaming down his face and neck. He raced back into the loft of a barn and continued firing his bazooka. Shortly, the noise and excitement stopped and we began to take stock of the situation. We had knocked out six German Panthers and their crews and learned later that this action had saved two infantry battalions and a regimental headquarters. Lt. Parker received the Distinguished Service Cross for his gallantry in this action.

I located Lt. Col. Graham at the Bn. CP at Wirtzfeld and he ordered the company be brought back to Wirtzfeld as soon as possible. He had had a long night and had given our company up for lost.

Harold L. Hoffer,

Battle Casualties in Krinkelt-Rocherath, Reconnaissance Company, 644th T.D. Bn.

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|----------------------|-----|----------|--------------------|-----|----------|
| Pfc. Norman Drummond | WIA | 12-17-44 | Pvt. Wm. Colley | WIA | 12-20-44 |
| Pfc Clifford Waldron | WIA | 12-17-44 | Pvt. John Lucero | WIA | 12-20-44 |
| T/5 Wamon Mason | WIA | 12-18-44 | Pvt. Alex Kosiw | WIA | 12-23-44 |
| Lt. Robert Parker | WIA | 12-18-44 | Pfc Peter Catalano | WIA | 12-24-44 |

Reconnaissance Company Men Captured in Bullingen 12-18-44

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|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Lt. Ed Patterson | Pvt. Silvio Garofalo |
| Sgt. Tom Smith | Pvt. John Brown |
| T/5 Charles Kaezyk | Pvt. Leslie Duffus |
| Pfc. Wayne Jones | Pvt. Arthur Greenberg |

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