

a tiny village about 4 kilometers east of Del (Map A), at 0800 hours and continued to roll down the highway at a speed of 15 to 20 miles an hour. At this time the Command Officer, 1st Cavalry Group, was riding in a jeep up with the leading elements of the point. The point moved over a long stretch of straight highway, rounded a curve in the road that was flanked on both sides by trees and the usual hedgerows, and then came head-on into a heavily defended road-block (19). Immediately the enemy opened fire on the column with machine guns, mortars, A T guns, and dismounted foot troops that were scattered on either side of the road for a distance of several hundred yards along side the column. Those men not killed in the first burst of fire jumped from their vehicles into the ditches where they were pinned down by the heavy machine gun, mortar and rifle fire that seemed to cover the entire stretch of road. Some men had left their weapons in their vehicles and were unable to fight back at the enemy, however, those with weapons did return the enemy fire wherever possible. The heavy fire that raked the column and the hedgerows along side the road made it almost impossible to get the vehicles off the road (Map B). The result was chaos and control was difficult to regain (20).

The only thing to do was to extricate the Tank Destroyer and cavalry troops that were still alive and make every effort to remove the dead as soon as possible. Two platoons of Tank Destroyers maneuvered into firing positions along the crest of the ridge where the column was halted and opened fire on known and suspected enemy gun emplacements with HE and smoke. Cavalry, Engineers, and Tank Destroyers were organized into battalion combat teams and started mopping up enemy foot troops on either side of the column.

(19) A-5, P. 4; A-7, P. 7, and A-10; (20) A-5, P. 7;

By 0800 hours several of the anti-aircraft and machine guns had been destroyed and our troops had advanced under the cover of smoke to close in positions. Soon thereafter the enemy started withdrawing into the wooded area to his rear. Immediately Task Force "A" started reorganizing and checking its losses. At the point, only three men remained who were not casualties. The Commanding Officer, 15th Cavalry Group could not be found although his driver was found dead and his vehicle burned near the road-block (21). Losses in personnel were heavy and eleven vehicles within the task force were damaged to such an extent they could no longer be used (22). A special party was arranged by task force headquarters to evacuate the dead and wounded to the rear.

By 0900 hours the dead and wounded had been recovered and reorganization accomplished. At this time orders came from task force headquarters that the column would not continue on the present route but would by-pass to the south using an alternate route (23). This decision was based upon reports from the civilians in Bagner-Pican that the German forces ahead was estimated to be two Infantry Battalions reinforced with armor (24). The exact strength and composition of the enemy force was never determined.

Later, this same day, it was learned from higher headquarters that the 6th Armored Division had received a change of orders and had turned south at Pontorson (Map A). Had this most vital information reached task force headquarters in time it might have saved the loss of lives and equipment and prevented the loss of much needed time.

Here, less than 12 hours after our initial jump-off, we were faced with a sizeable supply problem. We needed the men and vehicle replacements badly for now the task force was separated from friendly forces and the line of supply was

(21) A-5, A-4, and A-10; A-7, P. 8; (22) A-10, (23) A-7, A-5,

~~switching rapidly and to the rear, and to travel.~~

The task force commander decided that resupply of the losses suffered should be effected as soon as possible. He also issued orders to the effect that all supply vehicles going to the rear would be in convoy and under control of task force headquarters. The S-4, 6th Tank Destroyer Group was designated as the officer to be in charge of all supply convoys (25).

The first task force supply train was organized during the night of 3 - 4 August. The territory to the rear was known to be infested with enemy which had been by-passed in the rapid advance the previous day. This necessitated that the convoy be carefully defended with special vehicles and armament scattered throughout the column. To do this, one jeep with a .50 caliber machine gun mounted was used as a point, next was an M8 Armored car, then the 2-1/2 ton Cargo trucks with a .50 caliber machine gun, ring mounted, on each vehicle, a half-track with one .50 caliber and two .30 caliber machine guns located near the middle of the column, and an M8 Armored Car in the rear. At daybreak the column departed from the bivouac in the vicinity of Miniac, a small town approximately 20 kilometers south of St Malo (26).

Enemy activity consisted of only an occasional sniper and the convoy reached Avranches ahead of the anticipated time. The protective vehicles were dropped in a rendezvous point to await the return of the supply vehicles. The remainder of the convoy continued to VIII Corps Headquarters after obtaining releases for the items to be drawn. The trucks were regrouped and dispatched in accordance to depots upon which releases were effective, ~~in accordance to~~ (25) A-7, P. 10; (26) A-10;

the unit having requested the supplies. This was done to conserve time and distance traveled. Replacement vehicles and 76 MM ammunition had to be picked up at Omaha Beach (27).

By 050500 August all vehicles had reached the rendezvous point near Avranches although some of the personnel had had no sleep during the night. The departure was held up until 0545 hours allowing everyone time for breakfast (28).

The convoy rolled along smoothly and everything was uneventful until a spot about 7 kilometers from Dol was reached.

The lead jeep observed what appeared to be a road block to his front and immediately signaled the convoy to halt. At about the same instant an enemy machine gun opened fire. However, no damage was inflicted and the jeep reached cover safely. All vehicles were moved off the road under cover and observers sent forward to determine, if possible, the extent of defenses that confronted us.

Little could be obtained from observation, therefore, it was decided to organize two teams and feel out the enemy strength. Two .50 caliber machine guns were removed from the trucks and set up on ground mounts in a position that provided fields of fire to the enemy obstacle. While this was being done two teams were being organized using two M-18 Tank Destroyers, drawn as replacements, as our primary weapon with truck drivers and replacement personnel comprising the crew members and foot soldiers. The teams took up positions on either side of the road and started advancing cautiously forward while firing upon the target with the machine guns and the 76 MM guns, still endeavoring to determine the nature of his defense. During this time the enemy continued to return our fire with machine guns

and rifles but no A T guns were in evidence. Considerable machine gun and 76 mm fire had been placed upon his position when a white flag appeared. Fire was halted and immediately twelve Germans came forward and surrendered. They stated there were no other enemy troops in the vicinity and that they had hoped to be able to capture an American vehicle and rejoin their forces in the direction of Brest. After considerable discussion it was decided to take the prisoners along and turn them over to task force headquarters for interrogation. No casualties were suffered by our troops and after having lost one hour and forty minutes the convoy was once again on the road and everything going well. A good rate of speed was maintained and no further enemy encountered during the remainder of the trip. (29).

The task force had cleared the enemy from Miniac (30) where we left them the day before and was now held up just outside St Malo by bitter resistance from enemy forces occupying high ground behind and on both sides of the city. (31). Task Force "A" had received orders on 4 August to move north toward St Malo, feel out the enemy and if possible determine the extent of defense and enemy activity. Enemy defenses were determined to be strong and a great deal of activity in and around the city. Upon reporting these facts the Commanding General, VIII Corps, the task force commander was ordered to contain the enemy at St Malo until relieved by the 83d Infantry Division which would probably be during the night of 4 - 5 August (32).

General Earnest had decided that the task force, to have maximum effectiveness, should have one battalion of (29) A-10; (30) A-4, P. 10; (31) A-2, P. 38; (32) A-9;

motorized Infantry troops. This recommendation was made to higher headquarters and at the same time a request submitted for at least one battalion (33).

Task Force "A" was relieved from St Malo (Map A) on 5 August by the 83d Infantry Division. At this time the request for Infantry was granted and the 3rd Battalion, 330th Infantry, with sufficient trucks provided by VIII Corps to motorize the battalion, became a part of the task force, (34).

Units of Task Force "A" were now acquiring the feeling of all being members of a particular organization rather than a group of separate units associated with other strange units. A more or less unwritten SOP was now in effect, for example, the S-4, 6th Tank Destroyer Group would be in charge of all supply convoys operating to the rear. This was known by all units and the resultant cooperation was gratifying. Each unit had ~~to~~ come to know what vehicles and personnel it would provide for convoy security. An M8 Armored car would be provided by the 6th Tank Destroyer Group and one from the 15th Cavalry Group, a jeep, with a .50 caliber machine gun mounted, from the 159th Engineer Combat Battalion, a half-track from the 1st Tank Destroyer Brigade, runners from various units, and so on until a supply convoy equipped and capable of operating through enemy infested territory was a reality. Replacement vehicles, personnel, and equipment drawn while on resupply missions would be organized into fighting teams for the return trip, (35). Here it may well be said that a well balanced organization had been the outgrowth of what had been, only three days hence, a group of disorganized units

(33) A-9; (34) A-10; (35) A-10; (36) A-2

susceptible to surprise and ambush, as had been our experience, (36).

At daybreak of 6 August, Task Force "A" moved out on what might be termed the second lap of its journey, the dash to Brest. This time no reasonable caution was left unheeded. Units of the Cavalry preceded the column several miles to the front while others screened the flanks. A sizeable point or advanced guard, consisting of Cavalry and a platoon of Tank Destroyers moved well ahead of the column. Furthermore, contact had been made with the French and arrangements made for a civilian warning system to be in effect. Members of the French underground were to contact the lead Cavalry troops and also the task force headquarters, prior to reaching key objectives, with any information of importance pertaining to enemy defenses, approximate strength of enemy in that locality, defended areas, and extent of enemy troop movements. As will be verified, this civilian warning system proved to be and did save time, personnel, and equipment on several occasions, (36).

Rapid progress was made throughout the day with enemy activity limited to snipers and lightly defended road blocks.

(37). In most cases the enemy, although capable in numbers of delaying longer, seemed ready to take the easy way and surrender. The number of prisoners taken was so great that it was necessary to turn them over to the civilians to guard, giving the civilians the captured rifles and machine guns for weapons. The three railways and two highway bridges at St Briens were each defended by a detachment of troops, two machine guns and a few soldiers. The other two bridges, the one at St Briens and the one at St Briens, were each defended by a detachment of troops, two machine guns and a few soldiers.

(36) 1-10, (37) 1-1, 2, 31.

prior to arrival at St Brieuc along with the information that none of the bridges were equipped to be blown. The 6th Tank Destroyer Group, with the Infantry battalion attached, was given the mission of seizing the bridges and immediately the group commander formed two forces for the attack. These units closed in on the bridges from different directions and within two hours all five had been taken. The group losses consisted of one M-13 vehicle knocked out by A T fire, one M8 armored car damaged by A T mines, and six casualties, (38). Since all bridges were located within the same general area, only one platoon of Tank Destroyers and some Cavalry troops were left as security. Prisoners and captured weapons were turned over the Forces Francaises de l'Interieur who were to assist in securing the bridges and mop up pockets of enemy troops that had been by-passed during the day, (39).

A bivouac area for the night was selected about 8 kilometers west of Guinecamp (Map A). Immediately after closing into bivouac the S-4, 6th Tank Destroyer Group was called to task force headquarters and told that all units had been instructed to prepare to send back supply convoy early the next morning and that the group S-4 would again go as convoy commander.

Vehicles comprising the convoy assembled at 070500 August and the departure was made fifteen minutes later. The formation and protection was the same as that used for the previous trip, which was, a jeep in the lead with a .50 caliber machine gun mounted, one M8 armored car, supply vehicles with a .50 caliber, ring-mounted, machine gun on each truck, one half-track mounting two .30 caliber and one .50 caliber machine guns located about the center of the

(38) A-7, P. 11; (39) A-1, P. 23;

convoy and an M8 armored car in the rear.

The days journey was uneventful except for occasional enemy sniper activity and by 1200 hours the convoy had reached Del. Here, as previously done in branches the security was dropped in a rendezvous point and the supply vehicles continued.

The drawing of supplies was routine and by 081230 the last vehicle had returned to the rendezvous. Immediately the convoy was formed and once again the return trip was underway. All went well until approximately 1630 hours, at Plouegat, a town about 25 kilometers east of Morlaix, where a group of excited civilians halted the convoy and reported that Plouegat had been recaptured by the Germans, estimated to about an Infantry Company, who were now in the process of constructing road-blocks and fortifications but had no anti-tank weapons. They further stated there were no by-passes that would not involve considerable extra distance to travel and also necessitating some back-tracking. It was also learned that a group of the Forces Francaises de l'Interieur about fifty strong, approximately half of which possessed arms, had organized outside the town and would be glad to assist in driving the enemy out. This assistance was readily accepted and the French troops assembled at our location. Three teams were formed consisting of: team number 1, one M-18 Tank Destroyer and ten foot soldiers, team number 2, two M8 armored cars and ten foot soldiers, and team number 3, one M8 armored car, one half-track and 10 foot soldiers. Team number 2 and 3 moved to positions on either side of the town while team number 1, took position along the highway (Map C). When the teams were in readiness all weapons opened fire simultaneously upon what the French had designated as enemy armor columns. Only enemy armor fire was returned so hard that the enemy was forced to retreat. That the enemy had no anti-tank weapons was also confirmed.

in on the town slowly. After approximately twenty minutes a white flag appeared and the cease fire order was given. Two Germans appeared and continued down the road to our position. The spokesman, an officer, stated that his troops would be willing to surrender providing we would not turn them over to the French. We told him this could not be guaranteed since we were the advanced unit of a much larger force only a short distance behind and that the commanding officers would not accept a conditional surrender. Seemingly the officer believed our statement and sent his companion back to bring the other troops into the open, have them stack their weapons and march to another open area. Their weapons, as had done in previous cases, were given to the French forces and the one hundred and eight prisoners left in their custody. In this action there were three French and one American casualties. It was now 1915 hours and the task force was thought to be a considerable distance away. (40).

Upon reaching Morlaix, the security detachment, left at the bridges, was contacted and their radio used to call task force headquarters. They gave their location as being 30 kilometers east of Brest and ordered that we bivouac in our present location for the night and continue the trip next morning. After a most appetizing supper, consisting of fresh eggs secured from the civilians, everyone settled down for a good night of sleep, for some the first since our departure at 070515 August.

At 090530 August the supply convoy departed from Morlaix in the routine formation and at 0915 hours made contact with the task force near Lesneven, thus ending a supply trip of more than four hundred miles of which almost half was

through territory infested with enemy troops.

Task force "A" advanced to the vicinity of Brest and by noon, 3 August, made contact with elements of the 6th Armored Division who had been on a similar mission, advancing down the southern route of the peninsula, (42).

Thus, on the seventh day, Task Force "A" succeeded in accomplishing its original mission in such a manner as to bring credit to each individual unit. True, the soldiers were weary and tired but not unjustifiably for few, if any, had eaten a hot meal or had a bath during this period. Rest and sleep had consisted of a short nap here, another there. Clean clothes had not been available, for ammunition, gasoline, and rations had replaced shirts and underwear on the baggage trucks. For some there had been no opportunity to undress, rest intervals had been too uncertain and short.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

After making a study of this operation it is my opinion that many of the mistakes made were due to the lack of combat experience where the situation is fluid and fast moving. Prior to this mission the combat experience of units comprising the task force had consisted of close hedgerow fighting and limited gains. There the tactics vary sharply with those used in an operation of this nature which, in many respects, hedges upon guerrilla warfare.

Some criticism may well be directed at higher headquarters for failure to notify the task force commander that a change of orders had been given the 6th Armored Division and that beyond Pontorson no friendly forces would precede the task force. I believe it is within reason to assume that a different formation would have

(42) A-1, 1-1, 1-2

been in effect had this been known. However, it is not believed that all criticism for this mishap should be laid to higher headquarters. The responsibility remains with the commanding officer of any unit to provide local security. Knowing that some enemy did remain in the area between Avranches and Pontorson would justify the placing of adequate security ahead and to the flanks.

I consider a speed of 35 miles to 40 miles an hour to be excessive in cases where enemy action might be present. This speed does not allow screening personnel adequate time to accomplish what is expected of them.

The omission of motorized Infantry from the task force at the beginning proved to be a mistake. The Armor, Cavalry, and Engineer combination is excellent for a fast moving mobile situation where resistance is light, however, this situation cannot always be expected when opposing the enemy. The addition of motorized Infantry provided a force capable of engaging any type enemy.

The crux of this operation was the difficulties encountered with supply and evacuation. The group and task force commanders had cognizance of these difficulties well in advance. Because they did realize and study the seriousness of this situation in advance the supply convoys consisted of the necessary armor and armament for self protection and at no time was any supplies lost enroute due to enemy action. Had the Germans succeeded in destroying any of these convoys, or prevented them from getting through to their destination, then the task force units might well have found themselves in a desperate situation. Because the commander realized and assumed the responsibility for

supply there was always protection provided whenever the supply vehicles moved independent of the task force.

A great deal of credit is due the Forces Francaises de l'Interieur and the French civilians for their loyalty and assistance, without which, the accomplishment of this mission might well have been much costlier in men, material, and time. This affords an excellent example of the advantages favoring the side operating in the territory of a friendly populace.

LESSONS

1. Supply is a command responsibility.
2. Protection for supply vehicles must not be neglected.
3. Supply personnel in combat must be aggressive.
4. Supply installations should be pushed as near the front line troops as safety permits.
5. Success in combat is dependent upon successful re-supply.
6. All troops should be taught supply discipline.
7. A road bound mechanized column, without adequate security is extremely vulnerable to ambush.
8. When enemy is near, a tactical march formation is necessary even when it is believed the route of advance is clear.
9. When advancing in a combat area the commanding officer should never ride with the leading point of his column except in cases of necessity.
10. Reconnaissances and continual planning are essential.
11. When time and speed are imperative alternate routes of march must be planned ahead.
12. Rapid dissemination of information to combat troops is imperative.
13. A friendly populace can greatly assist the supply effort.