

WALDENBERG

The armored column roared south on Ohringen, and my 2nd Battalion mounted up and moved out promptly in support of the armored units. By nightfall elements of the armored division were in Ohringen and the 2nd Battalion, 255th Infantry, moved into the villages in the vicinity and mopped them up and provided local security for the tanks.

As soon as the armored elements had cleared the bridge at Weissbach I began crossing the remainder of the 255th Infantry. The following morning I received orders to send a task force to clear out the enemy from the high ground in the loop of the Kocher River southeast of the Hardihauser Wald and on the south bank of the Kocher across from the 253rd Infantry. For this purpose I constituted a task force of two companies, reinforced with two light tanks under command of then Captain LaMarr. After some delay in getting started the task force moved through the high ground in the river loop and down the river to a point opposite the 253rd Infantry but encountered little, if any, resistance because the enemy was at that time withdrawing hastily to avoid entrapment by the armored column which had then reached Ohringen to their rear.

As I stood on the high ground south of the Kocher I looked south and there some ten miles distant I observed the heavily wooded hill mass running out to a point crowned by the town and the castle of Waldenberg. As I looked at that forbidding height the thought occurred to me that it would be our luck to draw that dominating terrain as our next objective. That is exactly what occurred. The regiment moved out on its mission.

The town and castle of Waldenberg and the wooded heights towering 515 meters loomed up more and more formidable as we approached it. The regiment closed into villages on the plain during the evening and reconnaissance and planning went forward for the attack on the wooded height. Obviously the enemy would have observation that should permit him to observe our every move as we approached and deployed to attack the high ground. That observation I did not intend to permit him to use. How to prevent his utilizing it was the problem. Of course, I could move the regiment forward and attack under cover of darkness that night and that would deny him full use of his opportunity for observation, but on the other hand, such a night attack would not provide time for coordination with the 253rd on the right and would not insure adequate time for the supporting artillery to move forward into position and register their fires. Artillery preparation therefore would not be exploited to the fullest and registration of their fires in front of our advancing units would be difficult in such a hasty night attack. But an attack after daybreak the following morning would permit the enemy to use his splendid observation to the fullest unless it could be adequately blinded.

Of course, a heavy smoke screen in front of observation

points would blind his observation but it was apparent that excellent observation was available from almost any point along the high ground. Supporting artillery simply would not be capable of laying a smoke screen all along the high ground in our zone of advance and, at best, it could be expected only to provide adequate smoke screens to blind for a considerable period of time the salient observation points. I decided therefore that certain observation points stood out as those most likely to be used by the enemy and I determined to move forward at daybreak the following morning with our artillery providing smoke screens on the salient points for observation along the enemy front. If the points of probable observation were properly selected and smoked at the right time, this would permit the assaulting units to move forward without serious interference from the hostile artillery. It would afford the advantage of permitting adequate observation for our own supporting artillery fires.

While the regiment (less 3rd Battalion) moved out for this attack, the 3rd Battalion was moving to the southeast to effect another crossing of the Kocher River in the vicinity of Enslingen, and began mopping up the villages north and east of Schwabisch Hall. By way of parenthesis it should be explained that while the crossing of the Kocher River at Weissbach was from north to south and the crossing here described at Enslingen was from west to east, this is accounted for by the fact that the river swings to the south in a great loop several miles east of Weissbach, and before reaching Schwabisch Hall runs almost directly north.

This maneuver to send the 3rd Battalion across the river created a dangerous tactical situation. The move would place the 3rd Battalion on the far side of the river and thus it would be most difficult to reinforce them in case of emergency or to utilize any part of that battalion readily to reinforce any part of the remainder of the regimental front. In other words, the regiment would be advancing south astride an obstacle which tended to isolate the forces on either side of it. But as a calculated risk it was decided to send the 3rd Battalion on the separate mission. The regiment had a wide zone of action and I wished to keep all possible pressure on the Germans and also be in position to assault Schwabisch Hall from both sides of the river, or either side, when we should reach it. This risk was taken in order to keep up all possible pressure on the withdrawing German elements on our front, and to protect the right flank of the 254th Infantry then on our right.

The hill mass before the regiment (less 3rd Battalion) presented a most formidable obstacle and I had every reason to believe that the enemy would defend it with all available resources. Identifications and captured documents indicated that elements of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division held the high ground in the vicinity of Waldenberg and that the 553rd Volks Grenadier Division, plus other units, held the open ground from the hill mass eastward toward the Kocher, with boundary between divisions running just east of Waldenberg.

Our regimental right boundary ran less than a mile west of the

town and castle of Waldenberg and thus the regimental zone of action did not permit a wide envelopment to the right. I decided that the approach to the hill mass on the extreme right of the regimental zone of action presented a somewhat more favorable tactical approach in that it afforded opportunity to utilize the more broken terrain on the hill slope on the extreme right of the regimental zone and then too, the slope there was somewhat more gradual. Therefore I decided to attack with the 1st and 2nd Battalion abreast, in order from right to left, and initially with battalions in column of companies. The 2nd Battalion would attack up the draw toward Waldenberg, capture the town and assist the 1st Battalion. The 1st Battalion, on the extreme right of the regimental zone, would drive hard to establish itself on the high ground and push on into the wooded area beyond and thus isolate the town and castle of Waldenberg.

Attached units included Company B and 3rd Platoon of Company D, 753rd Tank Battalion and Company B, 822nd Tank Destroyer Battalion. By this time these units were looked on as practically an organic part of the regiment.

Colonel Edwards of the 253rd Infantry suggested that one of his battalions follow in column behind Forbes' 1st Battalion until our 1st Battalion should establish a foothold on the high ground, and then swing out to the right to protect the right flank of our 1st Battalion and press the attack on our right flank. I readily agreed to this because I was confident that our 1st Battalion would press forward rapidly to the high ground and open the way for the following battalion to move forward by echelon to the right and thus provide badly needed flank protection in the heavily wooded terrain atop the hill mass in the most expeditious manner.

As daylight began flooding the plain on 15 April, 1945 both the 1st and 2nd Battalion had moved forward to the last effective mask before the foot of the wooded slopes, and at that time supporting artillery began firing smoke on selected points of probable enemy observation. The enemy was prepared to offer stubborn resistance to our advance up the slopes but his artillery was ineffective and, obviously, his artillery fires were not being adjusted on our advancing troops. Unfortunately considerable artillery fire landed in the 1st Battalion zone which troops along the front insisted was from a direction indicating it was being fired by friendly artillery. Lieutenant Colonel Britt began to burn the radio waves to get that fire stopped and within a few minutes it ceased. I knew the fire did not come from our own supporting artillery but I never learned positively the source.

The 2nd Battalion breasted heavy fire and stubborn resistance until it had reached the foot of the wall about the town of Waldenberg and then continued pressure to push beyond the town on the west side. The 1st Battalion, with Company A under Captain Robert S. Young, in advance came under heavy small arms fire as it reached the slope. Captain Young, the heroic commander, halted his company in defilade at the foot of the slope

and went forward with his messenger to the line of scouts to reconnoiter the slope. After some time he returned to the scouts and informed them that he had located three machine-gun nests at various points along the slope in his company zone of action. He asked the scouts whether they wished to volunteer to assist him in mopping up the machine-gun nests. All of the scouts and the messenger volunteered to go with him. Then, moving the scouts into position to cover his approach, he and his messenger moved forward to assault the first of the machine-guns. As the two approached the gun position, Captain Young instructed the messenger to take up a secondary covering position while he, Captain Young, worked his way forward to assault the position. Making use of all available cover, he had worked his way almost to grenade distance when the Germans saw him and opened fire. Although he suffered a wound in this attempt, he succeeded in grenading the position and killing or capturing the crew.

Meanwhile some of the six or seven scouts who had volunteered had been wounded in maintaining supporting fires. Captain Young then moved the remaining scouts to a suitable position where they could place fire on the second position, and with his messenger assisting, succeeded in working into grenade position for assault on the second machine-gun nest. He again succeeded in killing or capturing all of the crew, and the German riflemen in local covering positions. Again some of the scouts were hit, and only two remained. With these two scouts affording supporting and diversionary fires, Captain Young and the messenger repeated the tactics that had been successful on the preceding positions. By this time the small group had worked their way to a position near the crest of the high ground. The remaining scouts were hit as Captain Young and the messenger worked into position for the final assault. Although their supporting fires had ceased, the two continued to a point where the messenger could observe the captain as he worked his way under the wire for the final assault. This time, however, the Germans opened fire as he attempted to work under their final protective wires. Captain Young returned to the messenger and moved him to a position from which he could observe another approach along a small depression in the ground. Then Captain Young again worked forward along the new route to assault the position. This time he was successful in getting through the wire and to a position from which he could reach the machine-gun nest with his grenade. Just as he threw the grenade, a nearby German rifleman fired and the bullet struck Captain Young through the head. The captain was killed instantly but his grenade landed true and the last of the three machine-gun emplacements along that slope in his company zone of action was wiped out. The messenger, the sole survivor of the volunteers for the mission and whose name I regret I do not recall, returned to the company with a report of what had occurred, and also reported that he had killed the German rifleman who had killed the captain.

Casualty reports were secret information during the war and therefore were not mentioned in the regimental radio net. Knowing something of the affection and esteem which the men of A Company held for their company commander, I realized that Captain Young had been killed when I received a message from the commander of the 1st Battalion informing me not to expect many prisoners from Company A that day.

The exploit of Captain Young and his volunteers had opened the way to the top of the hill and the battalion advanced promptly to the high ground. There Captain Packard's Company B moved up abreast of Company A. At the top of the ridge the enemy artillery and mortar fire fell heavily and effectively on the assault companies of the battalion. Also at this point the forward companies could observe ahead of them a flat and open field some four or five hundred yards in width and, beyond that along the edge of the heavy woods, the Germans were waiting in strength with prepared defensive fires to cover the open ground to their front.

Company A broke from the woods along the crest of the hill and charged straight across that open level ground for the German positions on the far side. They were met by a storm of fire from the prepared positions but the company never slackened or wavered. Their blood was up, and the men who got through that rain of metal swept into the woods and cut down the Germans in position there. The company swung to the right and rolled up the German front line. Then, swinging back into its zone of action, it struck deep into the woods where it over-ran an artillery battery and killed the gunners. This valiant action on the part of Company A not only avenged the death of the company commander but it effectively opened the way for flanking action and encirclement of the town of Waldenberg.

Captain Young had earned the Nation's second highest award for heroic action back at the Siegfried Line. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for knocking out three machine-gun nests in the attack on the Siegfried Line in March. For his heroic action at Waldenberg I had the honor of recommending the award of the Medal of Honor to him.

Something of an insight into the character of that modest but brave and loyal officer may be gained by a couple of incidents which occurred only a few days before his death. Captain Young's Company A was being held in regimental reserve as the regiment approached the Jagst River. Lieutenant Colonel Smoak mentioned to me that Captain Young had just asked him to intercede with me to have his company returned to front line duty. Colonel Smoak said that Captain Young had remarked that he was willing to fight anybody, any time and place but he just did not like to have Company A held back in regimental reserve where it was not participating in active attack.

Then a day or so later, when the heavy counter-attack struck the 2nd Battalion then in the vital bridgehead just across the Kocher River at Weissbach, I sent for Captain Young and acquainted him with the situation. I informed him that he would move his

company forward at once and be prepared to cross the river by fording at Weissbach and drive back any penetration of the bridgehead that might be effected by the Germans. I made it plain to him that the limited space in the bridgehead would not permit maneuver, but that he would be required to meet the thrust head-on in a knock-down, drag-out fight and push the Germans back to restore the position. "All right sir," he said, "You just tell me what you want done and old Company A will do it". War brings out the best in men but, unfortunately, it takes away the best of men.

It is difficult to fully understand the plan of an operation from a mere reading of the operations instructions without the aid of the overlays issued with the instructions and having available the accompanying maps. Since it is not possible to include all overlays and maps with this publication, I am nevertheless, quoting the operating instruction for their face value. (Page 112-a)

The 2nd Battalion advanced up the slope directly on the town of Waldenberg. Company G forced its way to the foot of the castle wall, but the wall, rather than German arms, proved a temporarily impassable obstacle. Endeavoring to find a breach in the wall the company deployed in a half circle about the foot of the castle wall crowning the northeastern promontory. The battalion encountered very heavy defensive fires from the castle, from the positions along the crest of the hill and among the houses extending toward the west.

After the attack had been in progress for some time, a white flag appeared and two German soldiers came through the lines of Company G under cover of it. The two soldiers, a sergeant and a private, carried a message requesting a thirty minute truce in order that the Germans might have opportunity to evacuate civilians from the vicinity of the castle. Whether the white flag episode was for the purpose claimed or merely a ruse to afford time for the defenders to reinforce their positions we never learned. Since the two soldiers had been permitted to walk through our lines and see for themselves exactly what dispositions our men were in about the castle, it would have been criminally negligent to have permitted them to return to the castle. On the other hand, they were entitled to certain considerations under terms of international agreements and, therefore, I directed that they be escorted to the regimental command post where they could be detained until a suitable way could be devised to return them to their lines without harm to ourselves. This was accomplished some two or three days later when they were released forward of our lines and their white flag returned to them to afford them protection in passing back through their lines. The decision to return was a matter which was left entirely up to them, and they struggled with it for some time before reaching a decision. They were sure that Germany would soon be defeated but, on the other hand, they felt that their fellow countrymen would regard them as traitors if they did not return.

At the time the German soldiers were released at a point

Hq 255th Inf
FUSSELACH, Germany
150100Z Apr 45

OPNS INSTNS No 35

MAP: GERMANY 1:25,000

1. 63d Inf Div cont atk 150900Z Apr 45 to secure SULZBACH (85442) STEINBACH (87055) area.
2. New Bds eff immediately
3. 253d Inf (atchd Co A, 753d Tk Bn, Co A 822 TD Bn)
 - (a) Atks seizes sector of Obj "A" in Z
 - (b) Cont atk in Z to Div Obj.
4. 254th Inf (atchd Co C and 1st Plat Co D 753d Tk Bn, Co C (-1 Plt) 822 TD Bn.
 - (a) Atks in Z seizes Obj "D"
 - (b) Cont atk to Div Obj.
5. 255th Inf (atchd Co B and 3d Plat Co D 753d Tk Bn, Co C (-1 Plat) 822 TD Bn.
 - (a) Atks at 150900Z to seize sector of Obj "A" in Z.
 - (b) Assists 253d Inf in capture of Obj "A"
 - (c) Captures Obj "B" and "C"
 - (d) Cont atk in Z to Div Obj.
6. 1st Bn rel Co E prior to daylight 15 Apr 45, atk in Z, quickly overrun KESSELFELD (3871885), seize high ground (Obj "W"), assist 2d Bn in the capture of Obj "X" by flanking action fr the SW and cont atk in its Z to Div Obj. Maintain contact with Elms 253d Inf on R, protect their left flank and assist their adv by fire and mmt within our Regt Bn.
7. 2d Bn (- F Co) seize Obj "X" and cont adv in its Z to Div Obj. Maintain physical contact with Elms 1st Bn. F Co in Regt Res initially in vic GEUNBUHL (83770), prepared to move on Regt O.
8. 3d Bn seize quickly towns at Gk Pts 8, 10 and 12 and cont adv in Z to Div Obj., mopping up all resistance enroute. Maintain contact with Elms 2d Bn on R and Elms 254th Inf on L.
9. AT Co provide AT protection to Regt, paying particular attn to L flank and Z of 3d Bn.
10. 863d FA Bn (Cn Co atchd) apt atk with priority of fires to 1st Bn, smoke hostile obsn in Z of 1st and 2d Bns. Smoke to be lifted on call.
11. Atchmnt a:
 - (a) 1st Bn
 - (1) 1 Plat Co B 753d Tk Bn.
 - (b) 2d Bn
 - (1) 1 Plat Co B 753d Tk Bn
 - (2) 1 Plat Co C 822 TD Bn
 - (c) 3d Bn
 - (1) 1 Plat Co B 753d Tk Bn
 - (2) 1 Plat Co D 753d Tk Bn
 - (3) 1 Plat Co C 822d TD Bn
12. Engrs in General apt.

HATCHER
Command

OFFICIAL:

BAKER
S-3

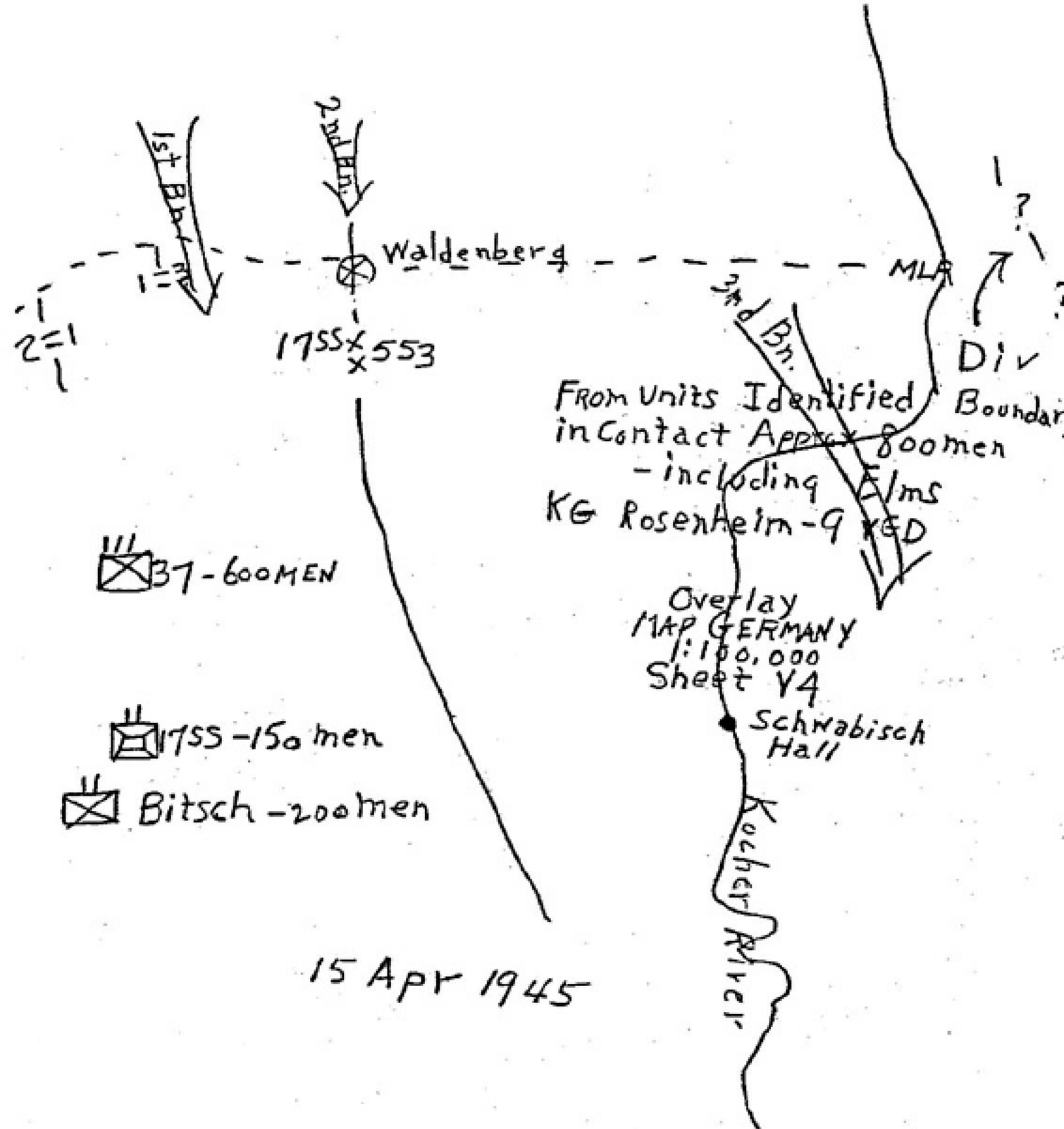
several miles distant from the point where they came through our lines each signed a statement to the effect that they had been fairly treated and were accorded proper consideration in accordance with international agreements pertaining to such matters. Lieutenant Norman E. Ruff, who had escorted them to the point of release, then handed them the white flag and notified them that they were free to make their way into their own lines.

On his return from releasing the two Germans, Lieutenant Ruff reported that he had escorted them to a point well beyond our forward elements. At that point they heard the unmistakable sound of a burp-gun a short distance ahead. He then asked the soldiers if they recognized the sound of the gun. They informed him that it was one of the German automatic weapons. When they realized that they were about to be released to make their own way from there, each of them blanched and began to tremble. Still they insisted that their honor required that they return to their own troops. They signed the statement with shaking hands and departed.

Resuming the story of the battle near Waldenberg, artillery fires in support of the attack had been well directed but due to lack of sufficient supply and application of slow fuse, their fires had not succeeded in breaching the wall. A gate in the wall was observed at the western side of the castle but it was extremely well defended by positions just inside. Nevertheless several men, under command of a technical sergeant, threw smoke grenades into the gateway and dashed into the courtyard. They were met by such a hail of fire inside the castle grounds that they were compelled to take shelter in a subterranean chamber. The Germans promptly reinforced their fires about the gateway and effectively blocked temporarily further assault from that quarter. As hours passed and no word came from the men who had forced their way into the castle grounds, we reluctantly concluded that they were casualties.

Meanwhile a Sherman tank was brought up the steep and narrow road and it passed along the narrow ledge of roadway under the northern castle wall until it reached the gateway. There it attempted to lead an assault through the gate. Unfortunately, a German panzerfaust struck the tank just as it entered the gate putting it out of action and thus blocked the entrance. The 2nd Battalion Pioneer Platoon immediately set to work to construct a by-pass just back of the tank to afford room for another tank to swing out from the ledge-like road and permit it to hook onto and drag the disabled tank out of the gateway. This was a tedious and dangerous operation but it was successfully completed after several hours of work and numerous casualties.

Meanwhile I had reached the conclusion that Company G should be withdrawn from about the foot of the castle wall in order to permit heavy aerial bombs to be dropped onto the side of the castle and thus breach the walls. I was most reluctant to authorize this operation as long as I held out hope that the men who had entered the castle were still alive there. It is a most difficult decision to authorize the dropping of bombs or artillery fire on an area where your own men may still be holding out. On



the other hand, to withhold such supporting fires leaves the other men in the assaulting units exposed to enemy action that probably could be eliminated by the use of bombs or artillery. All arrangements for the bombing was made and the aircraft were awaiting the order to proceed on the mission. Had aircraft dropped heavy bombs effectively on the comparatively small target area, it is most likely that any men remaining in what was left of the castle at that time would have become casualties. Because of the possibility that our men still were holding out inside the castle, I postponed the decision until late in the afternoon. Fortunately, it was not necessary to give that order.

Late in the afternoon the sergeant in command of the small group inside of the castle decided to make a break for it. He threw three smoke grenades to form a screen in the direction of the gateway and then led his men in a dash back through the gate to his own lines, collecting a couple of bullet holes through his helmet on the way.

About this time a second Sherman tank had been brought forward and worked into position to pull the disabled tank out of the gateway. That job completed, the tank supported by men of the 2nd Battalion stormed into the castle grounds and through the village beyond. Shortly after nightfall we were firmly established along the heights beyond the ruins of the town of Waldenberg, with our lines extending to the southwest to the regimental boundary.

With the heights taken, the last German organized defensive position of sufficient strength to challenge the firepower of the entire regiment fell into our hands. We still were to encounter small defensive positions but the last battle on a regimental, or larger, scale was fought at Waldenberg. There we had defeated elements of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, which withdrew from that position to make its last stand in the defense of Nuernburg before the 3rd Infantry Division a few days later. Also elements of the 553rd Volks Grenadier Division and another infantry division were defeated or captured there.

When we passed beyond Waldenberg it was not realized that anything of value remained in the ruins of the castle there. Later I heard that slave laborers blasted open vaults in subterranean chambers under the castle and stole the former crown jewels of Wurtemberg. The jewels were later found hidden in a farm-house near Baden and restored to the rightful owner. I am unable to verify this story but I have heard it from persons who claimed to know the facts, and I have read a newspaper account of it.