

## 16: ODHEIM

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On 10 and 11 April the 1st Battalion, far below strength, was ordered to attack and secure a line along the north bank of the Kocher River. With Company A continuing its mission of protecting the battalion's flank, Company B started out to the left of Hill 210.9 sweeping across the German positions along the road, and continued on into the open terrain toward the Kocher River. Company C again moved out toward Willenbach Farms and Odheim without too much difficulty until it had gotten about halfway to its objective. Then from the high ground on the south bank of the Kocher came the 88mm fire catching the men out in the open. At the same time heavy small-arms fire came from the woods to the right. Company A advancing on the flank, engaged the enemy in the woods. Company C also closed in, having the alternative of remaining in the open under direct 88mm fire or seeking the shelter and concealment of the patch of woods held by the enemy. Moving in towards the small-arms fire, Company C ran into an area heavily sown with electric mines, but eventually forced the enemy to flee and gained the comparative safety of the woods.

Company B coming within sight of the Kocher River found itself the target of direct artillery and rocket fire and from Hill 230.1 came curtains of automatic fire. The Company pushed on to take the hill after supporting tank fire neutralized the small arms. With Company B overlooking the Kocher and Company C coming within fire of the river's defenses, all that remained for the successful completion of the mission was the crossing of the river and the neutralizing of the artillery fire from the hills behind.

The entire battalion together with tanks and TDs punched away at the Kocher River defenses, but the continued heavy artillery fire from the hills rising above the river thwarted a breakthrough. The Air Corps was called on to silence the self-propelled enemy weapons and with pinpoint accuracy sent gun positions



*Kocher River at Odheim*

flying skyward. Behind a rolling barrage of artillery the infantrymen crashed through to complete with the 2d Battalion the rolling up of the German flank along the Neckar River. With that the drive of the 398th Combat Team continued unchecked deep into Southern Germany. The enemy was thoroughly crushed. After the 3d Battalion had held the all-important bridgehead on the Neckar River and then went on to crack the enemy defenses, other units of the Division went on to press home the attack and wipe out the fanatic Germans. At the same time the 1st and 2d Battalions were crashing through Odheim and Jagstfeld to roll up the entire enemy flank, permitting a non-stop drive into Southern Germany. On 13 April, with the 10th Armored Division spearheading the drive, the 398th Combat Team struck south in pursuit of what remained of the protectors of the last vestiges of Naziism.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The 1st and 2d Battalions, and the 398th Combat Team, were recommended by the Regimental commander for the Distinguished Unit Citation. These recommendations, included in the Appendix, give a detailed account of the actions of these units in the Neckar and Heilbronn operations.

The following account of the 1st Battalion's fight for Odheim was written by Capt. Samuel J. Light, Adjutant:

#### BATTLE FOR ODHEIM

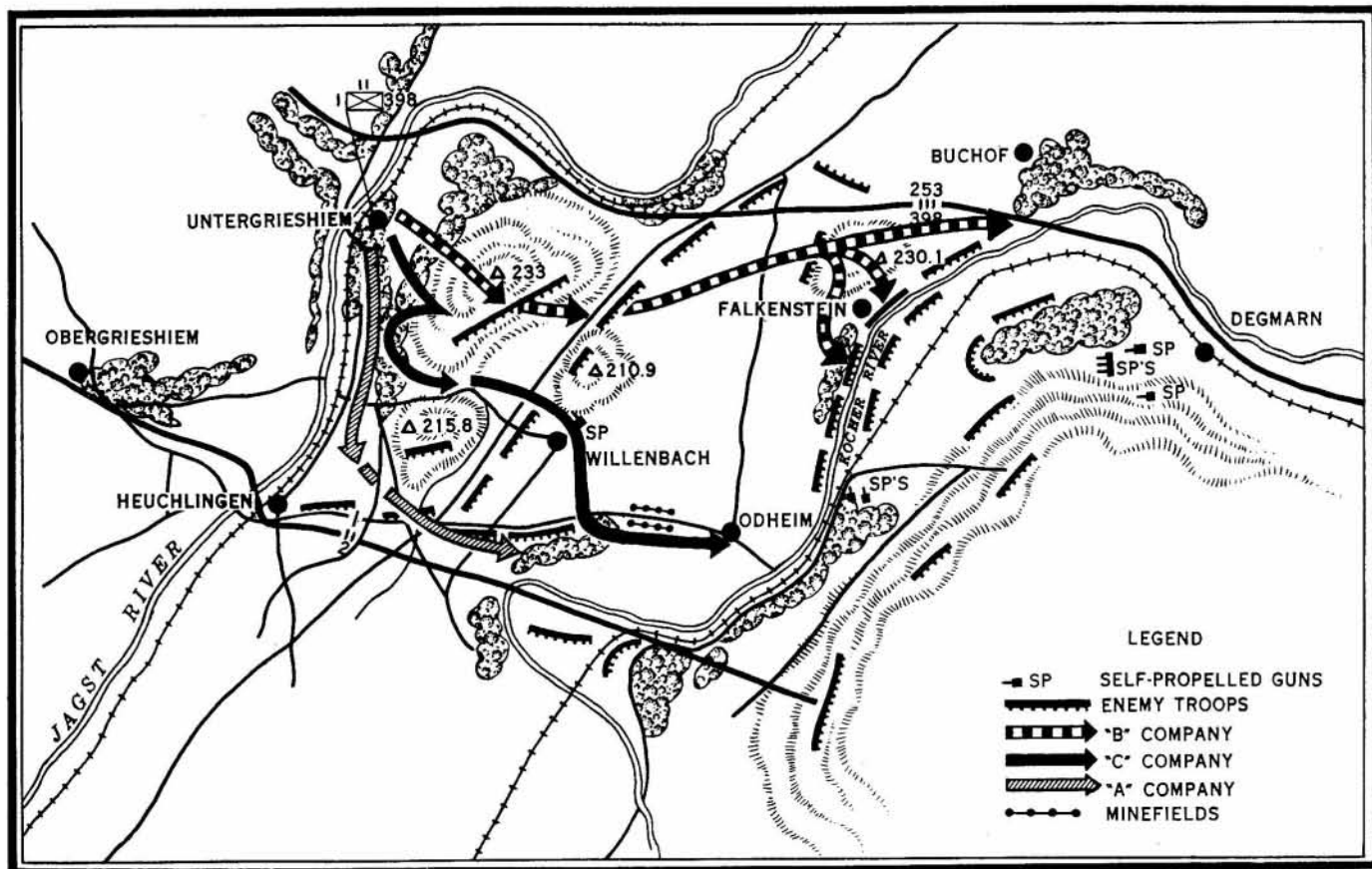
*This is not the story of a history-making attack; it was but one of thousands of attacks which have been successfully made by the gallant men of the Infantry. In every attack of this kind we see the same high type of courage, determination, and initiative exhibited—the qualities that make our Army unbeatable and the fighting team that it is.*

*In this compilation we have attempted to give not only the significance of the objective taken and the enemy routed, but to give also the story of the men who fought in this action. These men, advancing in the face of murderous fire, stumbling over the bodies of their own dead and wounded—men tired of war, of death, and of suffering—these are the men whose deeds we attempt to record on paper. The men who came from every section of America to fight and die for the ideals they so firmly believed in—to these men this story is dedicated.*

At 1700 on 3 April 1945, the 1st Battalion, 398th Infantry, 100th Division, closed into Bad Wimpfen, Germany. This hard-hitting, fighting unit had come a long way since landing at Marseille, France, on 21 October 1944. With six months of battle experience under their belts the men and officers of this battalion were a cocky bunch, meeting every assignment cheerfully and confident of a job well done after each operation. With the attachment of one platoon of engineers, one platoon of TDs, a platoon of light and a platoon of medium tanks, the 1st Battalion was a task force within itself.

Bad Wimpfen, Germany, is located on the western bank of the Neckar River. From Bad Wimpfen the Neckar turns and flows south by Untergriesheim and Heilbronn. Directly across the Neckar from Bad Wimpfen the Jagst River flows in from the northeast. The high ground southeast of the Jagst running from northeast to southwest (see map) formed the defensive positions the Germans were manning to protect Heilbronn from the north and northwest.

During the evening of 3 April the 1st Battalion relieved the 3d Battalion, 255th Infantry, in the vicinity of Bad Wimpfen and maintained protecting positions from the south and east and was prepared to advance east on order. At 0045 7 April Operation Instructions No. 33 came down from the Regiment ordering the battalion to move without delay to assembly area in Obergriesheim on foot, attack within zone at



The Battle for Odheim

0800. At 0500 the battalion moved north out of Bad Wimpfen on foot, in order: B, C, A, D, and Headquarters, and crossed the Neckar on a footbridge, previously constructed by the engineers. The bridge was located approximately a mile north of Bad Wimpfen. The vehicles moved over a circuitous route north and crossed the Neckar at (9984).

At 0715 the battalion closed in Obergriesheim. The order of attack: Companies B and C to cross the Jagst River at Untergriesheim and attack southeast to Odheim. At 1200 Companies B and C jumped off southeast from Untergriesheim, Company C passing through positions held by Company E, 255th Infantry, which was dug in on the northern slope of Hill 233, and Company B advancing down the draw to the east of Hill 233. On crossing over the crest of Hill 233 at approximately 1215 Company C drew intense rifle and machine-gun fire, as well as artillery and mortar fire. Immediately noticing that the majority of enemy small-arms fire was coming from Hill 215.8 to the right front, Lieutenant Hyslip of the 375th FA Battalion, artillery forward observer attached to Company C, at once called for an artillery barrage on this area. Company B meanwhile was receiving intense small-arms fire from their direct front, and from Hills 233 and 237. A platoon of medium tanks from Company B, 781st Tank Battalion, and a platoon of TDs from the 824th TD Battalion, then moved forward to fire on enemy positions on Hill 233. At 1550 Companies B and C again started forward, but again met strong enemy resistance and heavy artillery fire from the hills surrounding Odheim. An air mission was called for, and a short time later our fighters strafed enemy positions near Willenbach Farms, in the draw between Hills 215.8 and 210.9 and in the woods five hundred yards south of Willenbach Farms. The mission was very successful, but due to the proximity of our forces and those of the enemy, no immediate help to the assault companies could be given. Company C then sent the 1st and 2d Platoons, to attack up the draw between Hills 233 and 215.8, while the 3d Platoon, mortar section, and heavy machine-gun platoon remained on the west slope of Hill 233 to support the attack by fire. At 1900 the assault platoons moved forward, and advanced several hundred yards, where they were temporarily halted by intense small-arms fire. Artillery fire was then again laid in on the enemy, and five light tanks of Company D, 781st Tank Battalion, under Lieutenant McIntyre went forward to support the attack. A combined tank and infantry attack then pushed forward several hundred yards, killing a large number of Germans in fierce, close-in fighting.

Pfc. Mike Colalillo, a rifleman of Company C, jumped up on one tank and, under concentrated enemy fire, manned a light machine-gun located in the turret. During an approximate ten minutes that Private First Class Colalillo was on the tank he definitely knocked out three enemy machine-gun nests, and killed or wounded an estimated twenty-five Germans, without suffering any injury himself. For his heroic action Private First Class Colalillo was awarded the Medal of Honor. S/Sgt. Loma Hash, a squad leader of Company C, alone charged several machine-gun nests located on the west slope of Hill 210.9, but was mortally wounded by a burst of machine-gun fire.

The two platoons had advanced to within seventy-five yards of Wiltenbach Farms, where the German mortar positions and battalion CP were located, when the tanks ran out of ammunition and were forced to withdraw, leaving the riflemen in open country with absolutely no protection. It was here that the gallant action of Lt. Frank Reinhart 4th Platoon leader of Company C, and several other men saved the greater part of the company. Lieutenant Reinhart, with utter disregard for his personal safety, exposed himself to all enemy fire in order to direct fire of his mortar and machine-gun sections, which helped keep the enemy pinned down while the rest of the company withdrew. Lieutenant Reinhart was killed in this action. Lt. Noel Felix, S/Sgt. Herman Black, and S/Sgt. Charles Earle (were all listed MIA when) in order to protect the men under their command, remained behind and put heavy fire on the enemy to cover the withdrawal. As a result of the gallant actions of these men, the majority of Company C's two rifle platoons and machine-gun section was able to form a line on Hill 215.8, where they dug in for the night and reorganized. A company, which had been in reserve up until this time, was called upon to move into position on the right flank of Company C, where it was expected the Germans might attempt a counterattack. By 2100 all the companies had dug in, forming a line roughly north and south from Hill 215.8 to Hill 233, then around the slope of Hill 233 and running east. A gap in the line between Company B's left flank and the 63d Divisions' right flank was being plugged by a platoon of engineers from the 63d and the 1st Battalion's antitank platoon, with A&P Platoon prepared to enter the line at a moment's notice.

At 0545 on 8 April Companies A and B jumped off again, with Company C in reserve. Heavy artillery, mortar, and small-arms fire were received, and the light tanks and TDs moved out to join in the fire fight. After a fierce battle, characterized by small-arms duels at distances of fifty to a hundred yards, the assault companies returned to

their original positions. During this action Technician Fifth Grade Johnson, a rifleman of Company A, singlehandedly charged a machine-gun nest which had been putting heavy fire on our troops, wiping out all four members of its crew. T/Sgt. Frank Bujnowski, acting platoon leader of the 1st Platoon of Company A, was killed as he personally led a charge against several enemy dug-in positions, completely ignoring his own safety. The gallantry and inspiration of men like these resulted in inflicting a heavy toll on the enemy in this action, and contributed much to the eventual defeat of the German troops in this sector. After the companies had returned to their original positions T/Sgt. Paul Santora, platoon sergeant of the 2d Platoon of Company B, saw a man about two hundred yards to his front and within a hundred yards of the enemy lines struggling to crawl back to safety. Throwing off his pack and weapon, Sergeant Santora jumped from his hole and started to run toward the man. Despite intense rifle and machine-gun fire directed at him, Sergeant Santora reached the wounded man, who had twelve bullet wounds in his legs, and lifting him to his back, carried him back to our lines, still under intense fire. Pfc. Francis Crowley, a machine gunner of Company B, volunteered to lead a group of litter bearers five hundred yards in front of our lines to evacuate some casualties, making two trips under heavy fire.

For the rest of the day and all of 9 and 10 April there was little activity. Having forced the enemy to reveal his positions to meet the attack of our hard-driving infantry, we were now in a position to pound him with artillery—and pound him we did. Artillery, mortar, and cannon FOs were with the forward elements of each company and, aided by men who had attacked these positions only a few hours previous, directed the shelling with deadly effect. Heavy machine-guns from each of Company D's weapons platoons fired indirect fire missions, spraying enemy positions and forcing the German infantry to stay in place, while our heavy artillery pounded these positions incessantly. Lieutenant Colonel (then Major) McCrum's forward battalion OP was also close to the front lines, and from this position Lieutenant Colonel McCrum directed and coordinated the various units supporting the attacking riflemen. On the afternoon of 8 April Company A captured a total of 15 PWs. According to these prisoners, our battalion was opposed by approximately a regiment of SS troops. Also one medical officer claimed that he had some of our wounded in his aid station including one officer. If this information was correct several of the men listed as missing in action from Company C on 7 April might still be alive and prisoners.

On 9 April Company B sent out a patrol toward Buchof on the extreme left flank of the battalion sector, reporting no enemy in this area. Companies A and C each sent out reconnaissance patrols to their front, which were fired on by enemy dug in in this sector. On the night of 10 April Companies B and C reported tank and vehicle movement in the vicinity of Odheim. At 0330 on 11 April Company B picked up one PW, who claimed that his battalion had withdrawn. Acting immediately on this information, patrols were sent out early in the morning to attempt to make contact with the enemy. At 0845 the order came from Lieutenant Colonel Williams, the Regimental commander, to move forward, seize the Kocher River line, and secure any river crossings that could be found. All companies moved out soon afterward with our artillery supporting the advance with fire laid in on positions across the river. Moving rapidly forward, the companies quickly established a line on the north and west bank of the Kocher, and in the case of Company C were in position before the enemy was aware of what was happening. Once the Germans spotted our troops they opened up from positions in and around Odheim, using small arms, machine guns, 20mm artillery, and SP guns. Lieutenant Waldie, acting CO of Company B, spotted one SP gun and directed artillery fire on it, knocking the gun out of action, and removing a major threat to his company's advance. By 1515 all companies were in positions along the river bank and were digging in. An air mission over Odheim a few minutes later achieved excellent results. For the remainder of the day the companies held the river bank, and during the night were relieved by units of the 2d Battalion, 398th Infantry, and moved back to Bad Wimpfen, Germany.

During this five-day action the 1st Battalion had driven from strategic, well dug-in positions, a regiment of German SS troops, had helped to shatter the defense of the enemy guarding Heilbronn, and had inflicted exceptionally heavy casualties on both men and equipment in this sector. The 1st Battalion had completed the task assigned to it quickly and well. It had added one more victory to its long list of successful actions. And it had helped to hasten the end of all enemy resistance in the famed southern redoubt. The men of the 1st Battalion can look back on this record with justifiable pride—the pride of a good soldier in a good outfit, and in the best and most important branch of service—the infantry.



# FINAL OPERATION

