

B
20

*Very Large
in the
...*

REPORT
ON
BREACHING
of the
SIEGFRIED LINE

Prepared by Engineer Section, XVIII Corps (Airborne)

. 28 January 1945

Some of the dirt had been dug away, and about a foot of each tooth was exposed. The exposed teeth were cut off by explosives. Apparently this particular spot had been used by the enemy to withdraw their equipment behind the line. The tanks penetrated at this point and succeeded in neutralizing each pillbox at point-blank range. It was later observed that the heaviest armament in these pillboxes consisted of light machine guns. The tanks met considerable opposition from AT guns that were located in open emplacements at a distance of approximately 400 to 600 yards in rear of the pillboxes. There were approximately 12 tanks lost in the initial phase, of which 9 were recovered. At the time of the breakthrough, no air cover was supplied this task force.

The engineers were equipped with flame throwers and pole charges for assaulting the pillboxes, but it was not found necessary to use this equipment as no fire was immediately delivered from the pillboxes and the tanks were able to effect their neutralization. Each pillbox was manned by 10 to 12 Germans. No anti-personnel mines were encountered in front of the line, where the initial breakthrough took place.

TACTICS USED IN ASSAULTING PILLBOXES.

Frontal attacks on pillboxes are avoided in an effort to evade the concentrated fires from the embrasures. The blind approaches to a pillbox can be quickly determined by thorough reconnaissance previous to the attack. In many instances, the occupants of a pillbox have surrendered readily upon finding that our forces have worked their way to the rear of the occupied pillbox. When stubborn resistance is met, available tanks, tank dozers, AT guns, bazookas and 155 self-propelled cannons are brought up to fire on the embrasures. The fire from these weapons usually induces the occupants to surrender. In some few instances, the doors to the pillboxes have been sealed and the pillbox covered with earth by the use of a tank dozer.

Company "K" of the 39th Infantry reduced a pillbox on the main road from LAMMERSDORF to ROLLESBREICH on 22 September. It was mostly recessed in a hollow in the ground, with steep banks, accessible by steps leading to the entrance. The ceiling was approximately six feet thick covered with five feet of earth. There were two doors in the front of the box with apertures through which machine guns were fired.

Upon the arrival of the company at the pillbox, some members of the assault team were able to get on top and around the blind sides of the box; from these positions bazookas were fired and pole charges were placed against the outer entrance door. These two methods failed to dislodge the occupants. Gasoline was poured under the door and ignited with a thermite grenade; this method was unsuccessful. The next morning further attempts to cause sur-

render were met by bursts of machine gun fire by the occupants. A tellermine and one beehive charge was placed on the ventilator on top of the pillbox blowing off the pipe. Twelve tellermine were then placed in the opening where the ventilator had been, followed by another charge of 24 tellermine. This failed to penetrate the box. A charge was then placed to blow away the earth in order to get to the concrete on the top side of the box. From 6 to 8 beehive charges were used in succession each calculated to blow through approximately 2½ feet of concrete. Finally, 3 beehives in the hollow created by the previous beehives were used. The total penetration of these charges amounted to 2½ feet. Between these attempts, bazookas and flame throwers were used against the apertures with no avail. Finally, a charge of approximately 300 pounds of TNT was placed in the hole on top of the pillbox, tamped and detonated. After the explosion, the occupants came out and surrendered. The occupants reported that some smoke entered through the firing apertures, but none through the vents or doors. Flame throwers had no effect and no gas entered under the door, but the occupants sensed the odor of burning phosphorous. The candle light dimmed and went out several times. The occupants left the pillbox not because they believed one of the entrances was already blocked and the other sufficiently blocked to make their fire ineffective, and it would enable charges to be eventually placed against the door. There were 30 men in this pillbox.

The bazooka has been found quite effective when fired against the embrasure. Although the damage to the pillboxes by artillery fire in many instances was negligible, the occupants were so shaken by such fire that they generally surrendered. Breathing inside the pillboxes was reported to be very difficult due to the powdering of concrete as a result of the heavy shelling.

THE USE OF ARTILLERY AGAINST PILLBOXES.

The 991st FA Bn (155 GSP) fired twelve direct fire missions on concrete pillboxes. All twelve missions were successful due either to destruction of the pillbox or the surrender of the occupants. In one of the missions where a T-105 concrete piercing fuse was used, examination of the box revealed the penetration of some of the shells. In another mission, success was achieved by using white phosphorous smoke with a delayed fuse. Occupants of the pillbox reported that their position was untenable. In another mission, an observation pillbox containing a steel turret was fired on; complete penetration could not be achieved on the 14" steel walls of the turret, however, the occupants surrendered when the intake of the ventilating system was destroyed.

The 195th FA Bn (8"H) fired precision adjustments on three pillboxes at ranges between 10,050 yards and 14,500 yards. The first mission expended 18 rounds with 1 direct hit; the second expended 10 rounds with 3 direct hits; and the third expended 18