

Inden

IN THE early morning darkness of 28 November, 1944, the soldiers of 1st Battalion, 413th Infantry, advanced over flat, muddy ground toward the little city of Inden, just north of Lamersdorf, on the banks of the Inde River. Most of Inden lay west of the river. Three bridges crossed the river to a smaller section on the east side. The soldiers' mission was to capture Inden and establish a bridgehead across the Inde as a jumping-off place for 415th Infantry's attack on Lucherberg. It would be a march into hell.

The plan seemed reasonable enough. The battalion would march straight east in columns: C Company (commanded by Cpt. Ralph Gleason), followed by B Company, followed by A. When they reached the main north-south highway through the shallow Inde Valley, the column would turn south, B Company would pull abreast of C, and side by side, they would enter Inden from the north. A Company would follow B.

C Company reached Inden first and entered the city without opposition. The enemy woke up. Men of B Company, still on the outskirts, were pinned down with machine-gun and mortar fire. Unable to extricate themselves until dark, they suffered heavy casualties. Company A took a wrong turn and wound up just north of Inden, in Altdorf, with the 30th Infantry Division. The mistake was soon discovered, but enemy fire held the company in Altdorf until dark.

C Company struggled alone throughout that first day as the Germans fought to hold every inch of ground. Third Platoon reached the center of town, where it was attacked by enemy infantry and tanks, including up to five Tiger tanks. Second Platoon seized the northernmost bridge and occupied a group of nearby houses.

After dark, 3rd Battalion sent reinforcements. Most of I Company, intended to relieve B Company, wandered into Altdorf, where it was stuck until the following night. Only one platoon reached Inden. Company A arrived from Altdorf. One platoon joined Cpt. Gleason, who was in a factory west of the river with his first platoon, part of the second, and about twenty German prisoners.

That night, the Germans surrounded the factory, forced their way into the lower floor, and drove the defenders upstairs. Three times, the Germans pulled back under a flag of truce, demanding that the trapped group surrender. Two times, the Americans refused. The third time, with casualties climbing and the building falling in around their heads, they had no choice.

As related in *History of the 413th Infantry Regiment*, "Cpt. Gleason's radio messages had been growing weaker and could only be heard by the SCR 300 carried by Lt.

That night,
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factory...

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Pete Branton of I Company, which was also defective and could not answer back. A group of silent men listened to Cpt. Gleason's last message, unable to offer any assistance." Around midnight, tanks and infantry attacked other 2nd Platoon men holding the bridgehead east of the river, cutting them off from the rest of the company.

The next day, the depleted American forces fought to regain the ground they had lost during the night. The 750th Tank Battalion tried to come to their aid, but nothing could reach Inden in daylight. That afternoon, 30th Division, able to communicate with both the 104th Division and troops in Inden, relayed this message: "Situation in Inden obscure and mixed up. The platoon guarding the bridge seems to have disappeared, although it is not certain at this time as to just what happened to them. The main difficulty is that they have no route of supply; have not had food or water the past twenty-four hours."

Communications were so sporadic those first two days that little solid information was coming out of Inden. The *History* and *Timberwolf Tracks* lay out basic facts of the battle, but much of what happened on those days is known only to the men who lived them.

"It felt like the Germans had set a trap for us."

Joseph Allegretti, a sergeant in C Company, recalls the fighting in Inden as the most vicious he ever experienced: "I didn't include the following information in my story ["Nothing In Hell Can Stop the Timberwolves"] because I never saw it written elsewhere. I believe C Company got into Inden without a shot fired; at least we in the 2nd Platoon did. But when we were deep into the town, we were attacked from all sides. It felt like the Germans had set a trap for us. There was gunfire from most of the buildings. We scrambled back in the direction that we came from. We regrouped, and that was the beginning of what I call my worst nightmare." [Joe would like to hear from any 413 C men who were in Inden: jallegretti@nycap.rr.com.]

On the 30th, two companies of 750th Tank Battalion, plus light tanks carrying men from Company B, tried to reach Inden simultaneously from three directions. The tanks were either knocked out or withdrew, and once again, B was pinned down in open fields until nightfall. Company K sneaked into the town that night to join the remnants of Companies C, A, and I.

In the morning, tanks attempted to lead Company L into Inden. The tanks did not make it, but the infantrymen, suffering heavy casualties, reached the northern part of the city. Men from 3rd Battalion intelligence section managed to guide one tank at a time into town. Company G arrived following its fight in Lamersdorf, and what was left of Company B returned. Now all rifle companies from 1st and 3rd Battalions plus Company G from 2nd Battalion were in Inden, and the Timberwolves held the northern half of the city.

That day, Lt. Col. William Summers, 3rd Battalion commander, was placed in charge of all troops in Inden with orders to capture the city quickly, because his battalion was scheduled to jump off from Inden for Lucherberg the following day. Summers resisted all pressure to cross the river prematurely. He sent a runner with the following message: "As of 1600 situation...is essentially the same as yesterday.... Enemy to east firmly entrenched with infantry and tanks.... Crossing of river with enemy holding entire south part of town would be disastrous...."

Progress was slow on 2 December and casualties heavy, but by late afternoon, all organized resistance in the city west of the Inde had been overcome. Only isolated pockets remained. K and B Companies mopped them up after dark. That night, the Germans withdrew across the river, destroying the bridges behind them, and 3rd Battalion, 414th Infantry, relieved all troops east of the river. The stunned men of the 413th ate their K rations in silence, marveling that they had survived the worst fighting they had ever seen.

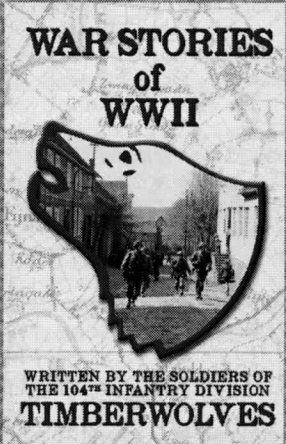
Charles B. MacDonald, in *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, citing the 104th Division Combat Interview file, writes, "In

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the five-day fight, two American battalions [413th 1st and 3rd] lost 319 men, 40 of them killed and 156 missing. Inden was nothing but rubble."

Lt. Col. Gerald Kelleher, commander of 415th 3rd Battalion, was a close friend of Terry Allen's from 1st Division in Africa and Sicily. Back on 30 November, as the battle raged in Inden, he received a call from the general. Parley "Pop" Allred, radio operator in the battalion command post, remembers the conversation going something like this [as told in *War Stories of WWII*, pages 224–225]:

"Hello, Terry. What do you want?"

"Well, Jerry, I want you to take the town of Lucherberg by morning."

"My hell, Terry! That place is heavily fortified, and there are enemy troops all over the place! I will try, but I want a heavy artillery barrage set down before we attack."

"Colonel, that will cost too much money and we can't afford it."

"I don't give a damn if it costs fifty thousand dollars and only saves one life, General! It's worth it!"

"Colonel, you do what I have told you to do."

"General, is that an order?"

"Yes."

"Okay, General, but you be down here tomorrow to accept my resignation. And don't tell me I can't, because you know very well I can. Good-bye!"

Tune in to the next issue to find out what happened next...

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