

**Operations in the Hürtgenwald  
Battles in the Dark Forest, Oct-Nov 1944**

*Selected Chapter for Staff Ride Use*

**Russ Rodgers  
Command Historian, USAREUR**

## Foreword

The following is a chapter from my book *The Rise and Decline of Mobility Doctrine in the U.S. Army, 1920-1944*, published by the Mellen Press in 2010. This chapter deals specifically with an area of interest for a particular staff ride, in this case being examples of operations in the Hürtgenwald. Included with the chapter on this operation is a the original introduction to the book to provide the reader the context of the perspective taken when examining the course of the action, while most of the appendices with a map of the area in question, along with tables that analyze specifics of operations within the broader ETO. These are retained as a possible reference for the student. The overall bibliography and index have been left out, the former since most items referenced in footnotes have an initial complete entry, while the index no longer has any pagination meaning to the text. I wish to apologize in advance to students if any of these alterations cause difficulty with the text or sources.

## Introduction

*“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”*

Proverbs 23:7

This work is not about tanks or mechanized warfare, though both are discussed extensively within its pages. Rather, it is about examining the development of mechanized warfare through a different lens, that of contrasting the concepts of mobility versus positional warfare, or to use earlier terms, area versus linear methods of combat. It is about how combat leaders think about warfare and how this thinking impacts the way they prepare for and fight a war. A combat leader is either an Apostle of Mobility or a Prophet of Position, though there are situations when some will exhibit both characteristics depending on the circumstances, with the latter being the most predominant in armies around the globe.<sup>1</sup> And just like religious leaders of all stripes, both advocate their position with a zealotry that can outshine the most vehement preacher. However, the Prophets of Position predominate in military circles, and just like prophets and inquisitors of old they forcefully demand compliance to their orthodoxy, thus overwhelming the Apostles of Mobility who are reticent and more interested in training close disciples. Each seeks to perpetuate their own kind, and since the

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Brigadier Richard Simpkin for developing these terms, though he probably did not coin them. See *Red Armour: an Examination of the Soviet Mobile Force Concept* (Oxford: Brassey's Defense Publishers, 1984), pp 20-22. For example, the phrase “Apostles of Mobility” had already been used by Field Marshal Lord Michael Carver in *The Apostles of Mobility: The Theory and Practice of Armoured Warfare* in 1979.

Prophets are the vast majority of military leaders, these are what military institutions tend to create.

While this work concentrates on mechanized warfare leading up to operations in the European Theater during World War II, it should be stressed that the principles highlighted are applicable to all areas of warfare, and perhaps even to life in general. This analysis centers on developments of mobility warfare and its thought process, particularly at the operational level as defined in the second chapter and in the U.S. Army in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. At times this is contrasted with developments in Germany, the nation considered to be the purveyor of the blitzkrieg phenomenon. The key focus is on the two distinctly contrasting operational positions, that of mobility and position. However, selected tactical engagements are discussed and analyzed that underscore the operational viewpoints of these two philosophies, and how the thinking of senior combat leaders filtered down to the lower tactical levels.

It is important to at once clearly define some terms and concepts regarding these two positions. It would be very easy for the casual observer to confuse mobility with maneuver. These are not the same. All military leaders maneuver troops in the field.<sup>2</sup> However, only a select few conduct operations through a mobility perspective. Mobility and Position are actually *weltanschauung*, or worldviews and not merely overt ways to fight in combat. They are ways of thinking as well as doing, a mindset that actuates how a commander trains, organizes, and deploys his forces on the field of battle. As such, the Apostles of Mobility focus on time as the most critical factor in warfare, while Prophets of Position concentrate on space. The former work to create an asymmetric situation that places an enemy at a distinct disadvantage, while the latter succumbs to

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<sup>2</sup> Of course this depends on how one defines maneuver. In this context, maneuver is simply the movement of troops. For a different perspective on this issue see Robert Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver: Maneuver-Warfare Theory and AirLand Battle* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1994), pp 18-20.

symmetric battlefield encounters, accepting this as the norm in military operations.<sup>3</sup>

The worldview to which one ascribes determines their approach to the most violent endeavor of mankind—combat on the battlefield. Each aspect, from planning, recruitment, training, organization, and logistics are impacted by one of these two worldviews. It determines how subordinate leaders are prepared for combat, establishes doctrine for the use of new technologies such as aircraft and motor vehicles, and even directly determines the design of weapons systems such as tanks and artillery. It shapes the command and control process and develops how information is used. While one may attempt to straddle the two worldviews, hoping to be the bridge to bring peace between diametrically opposed ideals, those who do will almost invariably slip into the world of the positional view. Moreover, a mobility thinker can take on the role of a positional thinker when need be, and even backslide into it, but it is very difficult for a positional thinker to attain the mobility ideal. Mobility thinkers are educated into their thought process, while positional thinkers are the product of inertia, the norm of life itself tending to reinforce regimentation. While there are instances of positional thinkers who move on to the mobility worldview, they must first struggle against the array of obstacles that hamper such a transformation. It is far easier for mobility thinkers to momentarily accept the mantle of the positional view than for the latter to overcome the torpor that keeps them in place.

The particular worldview that is held by combat leaders also determines a view towards victory and casualties sustained, with the positional thinker usually willing to accept an enormous butcher's bill in an attempt to achieve a final triumph. Moreover, when this individual refuses to accept the costs, he invariably loses sight of the end game itself, gaining victory over a foe.

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<sup>3</sup> During this analysis I have avoided such terms as *Auftragstaktik* and *Befehlstaktik* as inappropriate for the operational level. Both are tactical terms that reflect the limited nature of mobility as understood by much of the German Army prior to World War II.

A worldview acts like a sieve, sifting the vast array of information that bombards the senses. The worldview one holds determines what information is retained, organized, and acted upon. It also determines what information is discarded or simply filed away as something merely good to know. The information that is placed to the forefront of thought then leads to the decision making process, a procedure also enhanced or hampered by whatever worldview is maintained as the data is sorted and organized. From the decision making process emerges the final output, the actions that determine life and death, victory or defeat.

The worldview of mobility is not about avoiding combat. Instead, it is about making the most of one's assets to achieve the maximum benefit for the least cost. The objective of an Apostle of Mobility is to win decisively and quickly with the least loss in blood and treasure, using any and all means available to do so. Any average commander who reasonably understands their profession can line up troops, coordinate firepower, pound the enemy mercilessly, and then launch a frontal assault that costs tens of thousands of lives in an effort to achieve their objective. While field commanders may find themselves thrust in such a situation, the Apostle of Mobility strives to think far enough ahead to avoid such set piece actions that can lead to costly assaults. All assets, even those only theoretically possible at the time, are accessed or planned for to achieve the goal of a decisive victory quickly and with a low cost in lives.

It is also not about maneuver over attrition, or maneuver in contrast to firepower.<sup>4</sup> An Apostle of Mobility will use maneuver to create attrition of an enemy force, and thus the two are complementary and not in conflict. This is even more prevalent at the operational level where the most decisive combat action can occur. In addition, firepower can be more effectively used by an Apostle of Mobility who has already worked to force an enemy from positions

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<sup>4</sup> While Leonhard's definition of maneuver is close to the notion of mobility as described here, he places maneuver in distinct contrast to attrition. This assumes that attrition is only the effect of direct combat and not about the overall impact of entropy in warfare.

that would be largely impervious to massed firepower. While these actions can be done at all levels, they are most effective at the operational level of war, the level where a true decision occurs on the battlefield.

Nor is the issue about tanks versus infantry. Much of the argument related to maneuver warfare theory has pitted these two complementary field forces against each other, and in some ways this is caused by the fallacy of contrasting maneuver theory with the use of infantry. This conflict caused much strife between the principle combat arms, which can include the traditional cavalry. Instead of developing a complimentary combined arms approach with a mobility worldview, many became victims to squabbling over parochial interests to protect their particular prerogatives. As a consequence, the principle of mobility, most importantly operational mobility, was shunted aside or even completely subsumed in the storm of conflict between the various military branches.

There are very few mobility thinkers in history, and these typically stand out as some of the most brilliant field commanders in combat. However, a large number of mobility thinkers never gain the luminance of historical grandeur, mostly because they either are at the wrong place and time, or become victimized by their less capable colleagues who see in their abilities the stifling of their own advancement. While one may be tempted to see the machinations of a dark conspiracy in action, in reality the selection of who advances in military circles is in large measure determined by who people know and whether or not their philosophy is similar to the one making the promotions. Human nature has a tremendous influence, even a decisive one, on who leads men into battle at a critical moment. It is indeed a rarity in history when the most capable are at the head of troops at the crucial time. Sadly, countless millions have died because of such folly, though of course this could depend on one's perspective. Understandably, many in Western civilization are quite happy that less capable generals took over the combat forces of Nazi Germany during the height of World War II. Nevertheless, understanding the differences between the two worldviews

and how they function in the realm of battle could be the difference in how many lives are expended during combat.

Thus, this book is in large measure a work of philosophy. It focuses on how men think about combat, and how their worldviews clash, not just on the battlefield but even among friends and colleagues. It is about how such worldviews lead to brilliant victories, bewildering defeats, and muddled stalemates. It is about lofty ideals and the rancor of envy between rivals vying for the top leadership positions in a military hierarchy that gets increasingly narrow at the pinnacle. And at last, it is how the tank and mechanization accentuated the differences between these Apostles of Mobility and Prophets of Position. For while these two worldviews have existed since time immemorial, it was the advent of the automobile and the technologies that grew from it, such as the tank and other vehicles, that dramatically highlighted these conflicting modes of thought about warfare.

Even though this work concentrates on the American Army's actions in the European Theater of Operations, it is not intended to be a blow by blow commentary of events. Selected actions are reviewed and analyzed to highlight the contrast in the two worldviews, rather than making an effort at inclusivity. For example, one of the major set-piece operations of the war, being the German Ardennes counteroffensive known as the Battle of the Bulge, is not discussed. As this campaign is reviewed in countless works and since the operations were largely from a positional perspective, it was not deemed necessary to illustrate the contrasts in the mobility and positional worldviews. Furthermore, this work is not an effort to comprehensively compare the worldviews of leading personalities in every major nation involved in World War II. While German and British thought are discussed in some measure, no attempt was made to extensively contrast the American experience with that in other nations like France or the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For an understanding of Soviet doctrinal ideas of the pre-World War II period, see V.K. Triandafilov, *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies*, trans. William A. Burhans

A few comments are in order about the organization of the text. I have followed the technique of the U.S. Army “Green Book” historical series on World War II when it comes to italicizing units of the German and Italian forces. I have also chosen to largely retain the German titles of rank rather than translating them. While the appendix includes a table comparing the German rank structure to its U.S. Army equivalent in World War II, such a comparison is not quite accurate. Unfortunately, there is no other method more accurate to compare these.<sup>6</sup>

I also must gratefully acknowledge a host of selfless people who made this work possible. Charles E. White contributed invaluable comments and thought provoking ideas to help sharpen the concepts presented. Our ongoing conversations on the nature of American command before and during World War II have been stimulating and revelatory. Mark Readon, Dennis Showalter, and Bob Doughty provided some excellent comments and suggestions to improve the manuscript, while Karl-Heinz Frieser offered to review the work within his busy schedule. I must also thank some important individuals who helped provide access to many of the documents and materials. Bill Hansen and Lorraine Mitchell at the Armor School Library offered their time and expertise in tracking down after action reports and other interesting monographs about the development of the armored force. Ericka Loze-Hudson and her staff at the Infantry School Library assisted with access to many of their lesser known collections of documents and papers. Rich Baker and Tom Buffenbarger assisted

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(London: Routledge, 1994), and *Field Service Regulations Soviet Army 1936 PU-36*, trans. Charles Borman, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army War College, 1983), the latter being probably penned by Tukhachevsky. Richard Simpkin provides his take on their thought in *Red Army*, Part 3, *The Deep Battle*, pp 139-154, and *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on Twenty-First Century Warfare*, (London: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1985), pp 37-46. In addition, readers can examine some of Tukhachevsky’s thought in Richard Simpkin, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii*, (London: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1987). While many have waxed eloquent of the importance of Triandafillov and Tukhachevsky regarding mobile operations, I am beginning to form a conclusion that their understanding of mobility vs. positional thinking was very limited, and that both followed the latter more than the former. As such, their influence regarding mobility is possibly exaggerated, though Tukhachevsky appears to be more developed in this regard. At best one could say that Soviet thinkers were attempting to employ mobility with mostly infantry forces, but with growing mechanization such thinking was passé.

<sup>6</sup> See Table 11 in the Appendices.

immeasurably with researching collections of American and German reports and papers at the Military History Institute at the Army War College. Rodney Foytik from this same institution also helped me track down some interesting photographs. I also must thank the staff of the York County, Pa., Historical Society for assisting in accessing their collection of the Jacob Devers papers.

Charles Lemons and his staff at the Patton Museum at Fort Knox, Ky., helped in so many ways that it is difficult to recount. Not only did they help me find some invaluable reports on tank versus tank engagements, they also allowed me unfettered access to their entire collection of armored vehicles, their extensive library of manuals and manuscripts, as well as complete use of their vast photographic collection. Regarding research on Bradford G. Chynoweth, I must thank Laura Mosher of the West Point Library for access to research materials compiled by other scholars regarding armor development in which Chynoweth was involved. She also helped me track down Gen. Chynoweth's son, Edward, who graciously offered wonderful insights regarding his father and the Army of the 1920s and '30s, as well as a reasonably good collection of photographs that have never before been seen or published. Unfortunately, Mr. Chynoweth passed away just prior to publication and sadly did not get a chance to see the final product of his assistance. But while all of these people and institutions assisted in making this work possible, any errors and omissions are my own.

## Chapter 9

### Battering at the Forest

#### *The Triumph of the Prophets of Position*

*“I have engaged in the long campaigns in Russia as well as other fronts... and I believe the fighting west of the Roer, and especially in the Hürtgen, was the heaviest I have ever witnessed.”*<sup>7</sup>

Generalmajor Rudolf Freiherr von Gersdorff, Chief of Staff *Seventh Army*

*“Some of the infantry by this time were so shaken up and unnerved, that the mere sound of a German tank starting its motor, caused a few of them to leave their foxholes and run to the rear. One infantry Sgt, about 1330, came running towards my position. I stopped him and asked him why he was running. He mouthed the answer. ‘A German tank.’”*<sup>8</sup>

First Lieutenant Raymond Fleig, 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon Leader of A Company, 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, describing conditions near Schmidt on 5 November, 1944

While the stalled Allied offensive at the German border in September 1944 was a disappointment, the frustration that followed was maddening for American forces attempting to press on to the Rhine River. American troops encountered a rugged piece of terrain called the Hürtgenwald as the U.S. First Army pressed forward into the *Westwall*. Actually a man-made obstacle, the forest covered an area south of Aachen and east to the Roer River, then south towards the Schnee Eifel. It was here that the human resources of four American divisions would be expended in a vain attempt to press on to the Roer River in preparation for the final drive to the Rhine. The operations of the U.S. V Corps,

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<sup>7</sup> Generalmajor Rudolf Freiherr von Gersdorff, “The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, Nov.-Early Dec. 1944” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS A-891), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> “Co. A, 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion Combat Interview 76.” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute). 1Lt. Raymond Fleig, 5 Nov. 1944.

under the command of Maj. Gen. Gerow during early November 1944 would highlight the serious nature of the conflict in operational doctrine between the two worldviews of position and mobility. In particular it would demonstrate the depth of this schism in doctrine regarding the employment of mechanized forces and armor and help to accentuate the failure to plan for the mobile breakout from Normandy that could have made the fighting in the Hürtgenwald moot. The operations in the forest also demonstrate how American commanders late in the war not only jettisoned any notion of operational mobility, but were even beginning to allow their positional worldview to infiltrate downward to the tactical level, for it was at the tactical level where Prophets of Position felt most comfortable. In contrast, German forces in the campaign, though having jettisoned operational mobility, used tactical mobility to keep American forces off balance and to inflict serious losses on their enemy. The analysis of the tactical operations that follows will amply illustrate this dissimilarity.

The American assault into the Hürtgenwald has puzzled both contemporary military observers and later historians alike. This confusion has been partly the result of a lack of understanding regarding the nature of U.S. Army operational doctrine, fueled by the explanations proffered by the leading participants after the war to cover up what some have considered a bungled operation. As American troops pushed forward to the German frontier, the First Army planners became obsessed with the dark forest to the south of Aachen. To Maj. Gen. Lawton Collins, commander of the VII Corps near Aachen, the Hürtgenwald represented an assembly point for German forces preparing to counterattack into the exposed right flank of the First Army. Collins, who just narrowly missed serving in the battles in the Meuse-Argonne during World War I, saw a parallel between that earlier battle and the possibilities represented by the Hürtgenwald.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Lightning Joe*, p. 323. *Siegfried Line*, p. 323. For some reason, Charles MacDonald indicated that Collins served in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign, apparently referencing a post-World War II

Apparently Hodges and Gerow agreed. In early September, a conference was held at Hodges's headquarters to establish an attack plan through the *Westwall* and to clear the forest south of Aachen.<sup>10</sup> Concurrently, American intelligence began to pick up an increase in German strength within the fortifications, though the nondescript names of the units involved gave little indication what capability they actually had.<sup>11</sup> As the autumn wore on elements of more experienced formations began to arrive, such as a battle group from the *1<sup>st</sup> SS Leibstandarte*, along with the *2<sup>nd</sup> SS Das Reich Panzer Divisions*.<sup>12</sup> While German patrolling had been rare during September, by early October there was a significant upturn in activity. Collin's VII Corps employed the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in a secondary attack into the forest during mid-October, an attack that managed to net more than one casualty per yard of ground gained.<sup>13</sup> With the end of this offensive, the VII Corps handed off the area to Gerow's V Corps, which laid out its attack plan to advance from Monschau to Gemund and Schleiden, an objective that was oriented south of the critical Roer River dams.<sup>14</sup>

This last point is crucial in light of postwar claims by some such as Bradley that the Roer Dams were a significant objective of the October and November offensives in the Hürtgenwald.<sup>15</sup> The offensive scheme of maneuver of the V Corps simply does not support his claim that the dams were a key objective, or that the commanders of the American forces in the area were even

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interview with him on this matter. However, in his autobiography Collins unequivocally states that he missed combat in World War I.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald Astor, *The Bloody Forest* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 2000), p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> "V Corps Intelligence Summary, Oct.-Nov. 1944" (D-47 Film 1464. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> "V Corps Intelligence Summary," p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> *Siegfried Line*, p. 340. It has been implied by some that the casualties were spread out through the entire month of October, and thus the losses in this offensive operation were less than claimed in the official U.S. Army history. However, an examination of the division's after action report demonstrates that it spent most of October in static positions with few losses, spending only 11 days in intense operations involving the assault which caused almost all of the losses. See "After Action Reports, 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, October, 1944." D-285 Film 3002. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, G2/G3 Situation Map, 10 Oct. 1944; see Appendix A.

<sup>15</sup> *A Soldier's Story*, p. 442; *Siegfried Line*, p. 342.

aware of their presence. The operational history of the V Corps only indicates that the attack on Schmidt was to gain “the high ground northwest and southeast, thus securing the VII Corps right flank and cutting off possibility of movement of reserves from the V Corps front to strengthen the forces opposing VII Corps.”<sup>16</sup> The shifting of the V Corps boundary northward buttresses this point. With the shift in boundary, the V Corps’ 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was to attack through the Hürtgenwald and capture the crossroad at Schmidt. Once captured, the division was to attack southwest and assist the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division’s Combat Command A attacking northeast from Monschau. They would then clear up any German resistance to the west of the Roer.<sup>17</sup>

In this light it can be seen that the V Corps’ primary mission was simply one of support, that is, to screen the right flank of General Collin’s VII Corps as it made the primary attack through the Stolberg Corridor northeast toward Düren. Even the German command understood that the primary attack was the one aimed at Cologne, though some would later state that there were those concerned about the security of the dams.<sup>18</sup> This evidence strongly suggests that the Roer Dams never figured in the American attack plan, nor were they slated for occupation by V Corps troops.

What about the contention that the Germans could actually have launched an offensive through the forest? While theoretically possible it appears highly unlikely according to both contemporary intelligence information and postwar analysis. The V Corps intelligence section knew all too well how weak the German units were in the area. Not only were their dispositions accurately known through a captured operations map, they also had good knowledge of German reserves in the area.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the terrain was prohibitive to mechanized

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<sup>16</sup> “Operations of the V Corps in the ETO, Nov. 1944” (Box D-47 Film 1465. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), p. 282.

<sup>17</sup> “5<sup>th</sup> AD CCA AAR,” 2 Nov. 1944; “Operational History of V Corps,” LOI 30 Oct. 1944, p. 286; see Appendix B.

<sup>18</sup> “OKW War Diary B-034,” pp 252-253; General Erich Straube, “LXXIV Corps from Sept. to Dec. 1944” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS C-016), p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> “V Corps Intelligence Summary,” pp 58, 60.

operations with rivers and gorges that typically cut through heavily wooded valleys from the southwest to the northeast, thereby providing a natural defensive zone that could protect First Army's right flank. Any efforts by German forces to launch a major attack in that direction could be delayed long enough to allow reserves to respond, and German commanders on the spot were well aware of this.<sup>20</sup>

So the question demands to be answered: why were American commanders so determined to clear the Hürtgenwald? Answering this question will also help explain why American armor was deployed as it was, especially in the second assault on Schmidt. Hints as to the actual objective can be seen in the V Corps' original plan of operations south of the Roer dams and the actual attack plan for November. It appears that the objective was as simple as securing the right flank of the First Army on the Roer River, using the lakes created by those very dams neglected in planning to act as a screen and free up scarce infantry resources for use elsewhere. That is the dams were not the objective; the man-made lakes were. This is evident by the very nature of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's attack on Schmidt. The assault was so minor that Bradley's aide Maj. Chet Hansen called it simply "a limited objective attack designed to straighten the line in the sector they occupied."<sup>21</sup> Major Sylvan, Hodge's aide, did not even bother to mention the Roer dams in his diary.<sup>22</sup> General Eisenhower makes his first reference to the "Schmidt dam" in a letter of 2 December, while he mentions them as an afterthought in his postwar memoirs.<sup>23</sup> The postwar claims notwithstanding, it is obvious that the dams were hardly even considered in the

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<sup>20</sup> Generalmajor Rudolf Freiherr von Gersdorff, "Questions for Consideration by the Siegfried Line sub-section" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS A-892), p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> "Hansen Diaries," Nov. 14, 1944. Maj. Hansen made note that the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division "has not been showing up too well," indicating a general level of dissatisfaction with its performance in a limited operation.

<sup>22</sup> *The Bloody Forest*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> "Eisenhower to Montgomery, Dec. 2, 1944." *Papers of DDE*, Vol. 4, p. 2146; *Crusade in Europe*, p. 329.

plans for the assault on Schmidt. To simply straighten the lines along the lakes created by the dams appears to have been the only true objective.

The positional philosophy of the commanders involved would dictate how their assets were used down to the lowest levels and the combat action in the Hürtgenwald would show that their worldview was now beginning to dominate at the tactical level. The rationale for the offensive to straighten the line and anchor the right flank of the First Army on the Roer dam lakes would impact the plan down to battalion level, and this with adverse results. Instead of burning out several divisions plunging into the dark forest, an armored assault from the north and south could have pinched out the area, thereby forcing the Germans to abandon these positions with hardly a fight.<sup>24</sup> Instead, the American commanders chose to follow their inclination for straightened lines and planned a gradual advance toward the Roer through some of the most difficult terrain yet encountered.

Planning for the attack in early November left the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's commander, Maj. Gen. Norman Cota, in an unenviable position. Cota had received his command largely because of his excellent performance as assistant division commander of the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Normandy. He had taken over the division on 14 August after the untimely combat death of Brig. Gen. James Wharton. Wharton had been assigned to lead the division after Maj. Gen. Lloyd Brown had been relieved due to the perceived poor performance of the unit, and had commanded for only a single day.<sup>25</sup> Since that day Cota had led the division that had been the Pennsylvania National Guard, and now with his new assignment to the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, received the mission to capture a town that elements of the more experienced 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had been unable to seize. What made Cota's mission so difficult was that he had little to no input into the scheme of maneuver. General Gerow planned the assault down to the

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<sup>24</sup> *Siegfried Line*, p. 431 fn48.

<sup>25</sup> *Breakout and Pursuit*, p. 511.

regiment and this left Cota with little initiative on how to execute the attack. Gerow's meddling was so extensive that it left Cota with only the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to actually drive for the primary objective.<sup>26</sup> This penchant for micromanagement appeared to be a persistent problem within the elements of the First Army,<sup>27</sup> and as has been pointed out earlier such techniques of operational planning are a clear sign of positional thinking.

With his hands tied, Cota now had to contend with the major problems facing any commander leading an attack, these being the weather, the terrain, and the enemy. Much has been made about the first two in numerous books and studies, but there are some misconceptions on some key issues. The Hürtgenwald was not quite the dark and totally impenetrable forest of lore and legend as often maintained by many historians and even some participants. The forest was typical of most western European woodlands: large stands of coniferous trees which precluded the growth of ground vegetation and even limited the extent of lower branches, while there were other sections in early growth that slowed most ground movement.<sup>28</sup> An analysis of numerous photographs of the forest's interior demonstrates visibility up to fifty or 100 meters between the trees in most areas, and this is confirmed by actual on-site evaluation. There was almost no ground vegetation in many areas, and what debris there was typically came from broken branches caused by previous shelling or those felled by the Germans. Movement through the forest could be well nigh impossible or quite rapid, depending on the stand of trees encountered and their condition. In fact, most excess ground

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<sup>26</sup> *Siegfried Line*, p. 343.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see Patton's comments referenced earlier to Collins that he was going "too far in telling his divisions where to put their battalions. I told him this, but he does not agree." *The Patton Papers, Vol. 2*, p. 478. In addition, the G-3 for V Corps, Brig. Gen. John Hill noted that "when you did a situation report for the Third Army you showed the positions of regiments. When you did one for the First Army, you had to show platoons." Quoted in *Siegfried Line*, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Generalleutnant Hans Schmidt, "275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 15 Sept.-1 Oct. 1944" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS B-373), p. 15. It is of interest to note that this is a characterization by and large of such forests in and around Germany. For example, the lack of ground vegetation in a major forest along the Weser River was even noted by the Roman historian Tacitus, c 25 A.D. See Tacitus, *Annals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005 reprint), Book II, xvi.

vegetation was located along the trails and firebreaks, the very areas where the Americans tried to launch their attacks and where the Germans concentrated to defend.

The forest was indeed dark, but this was largely due to the dank weather and short days prevalent at those latitudes during that time of year. The sun typically sets by 1600 hrs, or 4 pm Greenwich Mean Time, or by 6 pm according to double daylight standard time. Units would stand to in the morning before sunrise and slog to evening chow in the growing dark. Coupled with the rain and lack of preparedness for such conditions, an understandable decline in morale resulted in any units deployed in the sector. In addition, the rain would cause serious problems with many of the roads. Those roads lacking a firm bed quickly turned to mud and became problems for both the Americans and Germans.<sup>29</sup>

Another difficulty was the approach route to Schmidt. The V Corps attack plan apparently did not seriously take the Kall gorge into account, as this gorge cut diagonally between two of the division's objectives, Vossenack and Schmidt. Its slopes were steep and heavily wooded, and the only trail leading into the gorge toward Schmidt was just partially visible on aerial photographs. This latter fact should have been a portent of difficulties to come for any tanks employed in the attack.<sup>30</sup> The trail sliced its way down at an angle, and the slope typically ranged around 10°, though the upper stretch of the trail came close to 20°. Considering the climbing capability of the typical tank and tank destroyer, being around 27° and the soggy ground, this could only mean tough going for any armor in support.

Another aspect of terrain that is often cited is the dominating position of the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge to the northeast of Vossenack. However, the height advantage of this position was negligible, as the center of Vossenack was close to forty meters higher, while the eastern edge of the Vossenack height was around twenty meters higher. Instead the real problem was the deployment of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 15a.

<sup>30</sup> *Siegfried Line*, p. 345.

American troops on the Vossenack heights, not the so-called “dominating terrain” to the northeast. During the entire battle, the 28<sup>th</sup> Division’s troops were consistently placed on forward slope positions exposed to observation and thus vulnerable to both direct and indirect fires.

But one other terrain aspect that may have been neglected was the nature of routes into the Schmidt area. While American forces would have to advance and supply themselves via a muddy cart trail down a steep gorge, German forces would have three rapid access routes on firm roads into Schmidt, with two additional routes against the northern flank via Hürtgen and the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge.<sup>31</sup> While it was planned to isolate the battle area using tactical air support, the poor weather and difficult nature of such an operation made this support dicey. Cota believed that without tactical air his lone assault would be a magnet for every German unit in reserve within 170 miles of the front.<sup>32</sup>

Within the planning for the attack the armor support was considered critical for success. The 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Richard Ripple, along with the 893<sup>rd</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Samuel Mays, joined by additional combat engineer assets were to support the attack of the 28<sup>th</sup> Division. Most of these would be committed to aiding the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment’s attack on Schmidt. An area where Cota appears to have had flexibility involved the employment of these assets, and yet these were spread thin among the various units in a piecemeal fashion. The 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion’s Company D (light) was helping to screen the division’s extended right flank, while Company B was assigned a fire support role as artillery. This left only the thirty-two tanks of A and C companies to support the initial attack. Regarding the 893<sup>rd</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion, Company A was detached to support a cavalry group to the north, leaving only twenty-three guns to support the action.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, A-891,” p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> *Siegfried Line*, pp 345-346. By this point the battle for Aachen to the north was over, the city having surrendered on 21 October.

<sup>33</sup> “After Action Reports, 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion” (8707 TB 101. U.S. Army Armor School Library, Fort Knox, KY), 1 Nov. 1944; Charles B. MacDonald and Sidney T. Mathews, *Three Battles:*

Nevertheless, the attack of the 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment could still call on fifty-five armored vehicles for support, a considerable force in most circumstances.

The initial plan of the attack was to have the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to advance on the town of Hürtgen and screen the left flank against German counterattacks from the northeast. The 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was to advance to the southeast to cover the right flank of the main attack. The 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Carl Peterson, was to advance with tank support on Vossenack. Once this objective was secure they were to advance southeast and take Schmidt. Peterson was to receive direct tank and combat engineer support as well as priority of artillery and air support. The attack was also to be preceded by a sharp artillery barrage. The tanks were to lead across the open ground near Vossenack, while the engineers were assigned the job of clearing mines and preparing the Kall gorge trail for transit by the armored vehicles. Moreover, they were also assigned the task of securing the trail against German infiltration.<sup>34</sup> Since the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had previously been assigned to a quiet sector it was at full strength at the beginning of the offensive, fielding almost 14,000 officers and enlisted men.<sup>35</sup>

The German forces disposed to defend the area around Schmidt were in poor condition, representing a collection of various shattered units, fortress troops, and replacement battalions. Two formations formed the principle defense in the Schmidt sector, being the 275<sup>th</sup> and 89<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Divisions*. The 275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*, initially based in southern Brittany, had seen action in Normandy, with one of its regiments forming *Kampfgruppe Heintz* that attempted to block the American advance from Omaha Beach.<sup>36</sup> During the campaign, the division was broken up, being partially reassembled on the *Westwall* near

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*Arnaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt*. United States Army in World War II, the European Theater of Operations (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1999), p. 314.

<sup>34</sup> *Siegfried Line*, p. 347.

<sup>35</sup> "After Action Reports, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Nov. 1944" (Box D-285. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA).

<sup>36</sup> *Normandy 1944*, p. 257.

Geilenkirchen by summer's end. The division operated there until exhausted when it was reassigned to the quiet Hürtgenwald sector in late September. At that time it had only two regiments, the 983<sup>rd</sup> commanded by Oberst Schmitz and the 984<sup>th</sup> under Oberst Heintz. The division's total infantry strength was about 800 men, and only four light field howitzers provided artillery support. To make matters worse, the division had no antitank guns.<sup>37</sup> Unhampered by American forces the commander of the 275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*, Generalleutnant Hans Schmidt, employed his troops feverishly to prepare their positions before having to absorb the assault of the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during mid-October.

The 89<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*, commanded by Generalmajor Walter Bruns occupied a sector south of Schmidt but would become embroiled in the action purely by accidental timing. This division had seen only marginal action in the Normandy area, having trained in Norway during the spring of 1944. The division deployed to France in June and by August was in action attached to the *I SS Panzer Corps*.<sup>38</sup> The division lost approximately 4,000 men during the retreat from France and by the fall it was positioned in the southern part of the Hürtgenwald, having participated in the action that stopped the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's attack in October. Organized with two regiments of three battalions each, its strength was around 250 to 300 men in each regiment.<sup>39</sup> At the moment of the American assault this division was pulling out of its positions, actually moving northeast astride the 28<sup>th</sup> Division's path of advance through Schmidt on its way to a badly needed rest.

As for reserves there was little in the area. The closest unit of importance was the 116<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division*, commanded by Generalmajor Siegfried von Waldenburg attempting to refit in the Düren area in preparation for its role in the

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<sup>37</sup> "275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, B-373," pp 10, 11; Generalleutnant Hans Schmidt, "Fighting in the Rhineland, 275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS B-810), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> *Normandy 1944*, p. 237.

<sup>39</sup> *Units Opposing the US 28<sup>th</sup> Division in the Hürtgen Forest* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS C-089), p. 10.

upcoming Ardennes offensive. The division had been badly battered in the defensive battles around Aachen, and was so seriously short of tanks that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Regiment sent about fifty men to the replacement battalion for retraining as infantry.<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of November the division had about thirty tanks, a mix of Pzkw IVs and Panthers, while it also had attached several sections of Jagdpanthers of the 519<sup>th</sup> Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion under the command of Major Hoppe.<sup>41</sup> The division absorbed the remnants of the 108<sup>th</sup> Panzer Brigade and received a rapid influx of replacements and new material. By 2 November, the artillery regiment had twelve self propelled guns and was carrying a combat load of 8,000 rounds of ammunition, while the 60<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Regiment was able to mobilize all of its companies.<sup>42</sup> The only other units in the vicinity of any consequence were the 341<sup>st</sup> Assault Gun Brigade and the 217<sup>th</sup> Assault Gun Battalion, the latter with about twenty Brumbären.<sup>43</sup> While the former unit's designation sounded impressive it could only field approximately six StuG III assault guns, and the overall condition of these vehicles was poor.<sup>44</sup>

American intelligence prior to the assault was adequate, although their patrolling had been lackluster. While the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division after action reports made numerous references to patrols deployed, the German commanders in the area largely agreed that American patrolling had been virtually non-existent.<sup>45</sup> This of course begs the question of what these patrols actually did, but

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<sup>40</sup> *From Normandy to the Ruhr*, p. 234.

<sup>41</sup> Generalmajor Siegfried von Waldenburg, "Report on 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, 1-9 Nov. 1944" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS A-905); "Units Opposing the US 28<sup>th</sup> Division, C-089," pp 6, 7, 14; *From Normandy to Ruhr*, p. 231. A section typically had two vehicles, meaning the 519<sup>th</sup> probably deployed no more than six Jagdpanthers.

<sup>42</sup> *From Normandy to Ruhr*, p. 235.

<sup>43</sup> "Units Opposing the US 28<sup>th</sup> Division, C-089," p. 14. Gen. Bruns, the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Div. commander, indicated that the 217<sup>th</sup> was equipped with Bumblebees (Ger- Hummelen, self propelled 150mm artillery pieces). This is clearly an error of memory or translation, since this unit was equipped with Grizzly Bears (Ger-Brumbären, with 150mm direct support guns). See *Encyclopedia of German Tanks of World War Two*, p. 101.

<sup>44</sup> "275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, B-810," p. 3; "The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, A-891," p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> "275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, B-810," pp 10, 22, 40; "275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, B-373," p. 18; "LXXIV Corps, C-016," p. 5.

at best it appears that they rarely penetrated into the German defensive zone, thus explaining why many of the reports filed indicated “negative activity” and failed to mention the taking of prisoners. Nevertheless, the American commanders had a good impression of what faced them. The V Corps intelligence section indicated that they had good knowledge of German tactical reserves prior to the assault, and they were familiar with the composition of the 275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to the inactivity of the American forces, German commanders were compelled to initiate long-range reconnaissance patrols, particularly as they were prevented from receiving any intelligence via aircraft. The LXXIV Corps, commanded by General Erich Straube launched scouting patrols that ranged as far as nine or ten miles behind American lines, going so far as to disabling vehicles and taking prisoners. While German patrols spent days roaming the American rear areas, Straube recalled that “we had the impression that the enemy did nothing but keep our own defensive line in the central and southern sector under observation.”<sup>47</sup>

While the Germans maintained brisk patrolling, they were unable to develop a defense in depth. Starved for combat troops and lacking equipment, German divisions had their hands full just maintaining a semblance of a front line. Russian volunteers, or *Hiwis*, were pressed into service to prepare positions while front line units developed selective strong points, unable to actually create a contiguous defensive front.<sup>48</sup> Yet, American forces failed to notice the permeability of the German front and were thus surprised by the exceedingly rapid advance of the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment into Schmidt once the attack began.

The morning of 2 November was cold and misty as the American artillery launched its brief one-hour preparatory bombardment, firing over 11,000 rounds

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<sup>46</sup> “V Corps Intelligence Summary,” p. 60.

<sup>47</sup> “LXXIV Corps, C-016,” p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> “275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, B-810,” pp 7, 24; “LXXIV Corps, C-016,” p. 6; “Units Opposing the US 28<sup>th</sup> Division, C-089,” pp 9-10.

into the German lines.<sup>49</sup> At 0900, the lead elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment moved out, the tanks in the lead and heading across the open ground toward Vossenack. Companies G and F moved out line abreast, led by ten tanks from Company C, 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, under the command of Capt. George West. The remaining tanks of the company formed a small reserve, but were not to assist Company E in the mopping up of the town. By 1030 the leading elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had begun to move through Vossenack, having surprised the German defenders and capturing over 300 prisoners.<sup>50</sup> However, failure to echelon tanks in depth meant that Company E, following up the attack to mop up, encountered German machine gun nests that had remained under cover during the initial advance. At the insistence of Company E, Capt. West's lead tanks had to retrace their tracks toward the line of departure to help clear up these enemy positions. As a harbinger of the slow bleeding to come, Company C lost two tanks to mines during this short advance while a third tank got lost in a wooded draw south of the town and was burned out by German Panzerfausts.

As the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion cleared Vossenack, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Albert Flood and supported by Capt. Bruce Hostrup's tanks of Company A, 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, prepared to pass through Vossenack to continue the attack toward Schmidt the following day. As it was, the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had advanced barely two miles before consolidating its position. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion pushed forward over the crest of Vossenack ridge to the northeast of the town and began to dig in on the forward slope around mid-afternoon, clearly open to observation from the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge.<sup>51</sup>

When 3 November arrived, the plan was for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion to shield the left flank to allow the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion to press on for Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. By 0715, the American troops began to receive artillery and mortar fire even as

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<sup>49</sup> *Three Battles*, p. 259.

<sup>50</sup> "AAR 707<sup>th</sup> Tk Bn," 2 Nov. 44.

the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion with Hostrup's tanks crossed the line of departure near Germeter. By 0930, they had reached the southeast edge of the Vossenack ridge, poised to plunge down the steep valley along the Kall trail. The infantry proceeded while the tanks fired support fire into Kommerscheidt. By 1100 hours, Capt. Hostrup could see the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion infantry on the other side of the gorge moving "in good formation" and closing in on Kommerscheidt, the minimal time expenditure indicative that they were making good progress against little resistance.<sup>52</sup> Opposition was light as the American infantry began to clear the town and they pressed on for the main objective, the town of Schmidt, which was clearly visible in the distance. By 2300 hours, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was in possession of the town and vital crossroads, having surprised the Germans there to the extent that some were captured inebriated.<sup>53</sup> In the meantime, Company A's tanks pulled back into a defilade position awaiting the engineers to indicate that the Kall trail was passable for tracked vehicles. It was at this point that the bottom seemed to fall out of the entire operation.

Engineers from the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion were attached with the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry to support the attack. Their primary mission was to clear and maintain a supply route from Vossenack to Schmidt, meaning they would have to prepare the Kall trail for operations. Due to the exposed nature of the Vossenack ridge the engineers were told not to take any vehicles larger than jeeps and most of the men hand-carried the tools necessary to improve the trail. Two engineer officers, Captains Edwin Lutz and Joseph Miller, reconnoitered on foot the Kall trail and bridge site in the gorge. Returning to Vossenack in the gathering dark around 1600 hours, the two reported that the trail was difficult but passable.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "After Action Reports, 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Nov. 1944" (Box D-285 Film 3007. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), 2 Nov.; *Three Battles*, p. 262.

<sup>52</sup> "Co. A, 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion Combat Interview 76." Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute. Hostrup 3 Nov. Hereafter referred to as "CI 76."

<sup>53</sup> "AAR 112<sup>th</sup> Rgt, 2 Nov.,"; *Three Battles*, p. 280.

<sup>54</sup> *Three Battles*, pp 286-288.

Col. Ripple then informed Capt. Hostrup that the trail was negotiable, but Hostrup was skeptical.

“Having seen this road earlier in the day, I doubted it was passable. So, I took one of my tanks and started down this road into the draw.... The tank was having great difficulty remaining on the road which was very slippery. The left shoulder of the road, sloping towards the draw, kept giving away. The road was about nine feet wide. So was the tank..... The tank slipped and nearly went off the left bank down into the draw.”<sup>55</sup>

Hostrup stopped his tank and backed it up to the high ground where he reported the trail’s condition to Col. Ripple, who then sent word to the engineers that it was not ready. Hostrup received orders to stand fast and prepare to move on to Kommerscheidt at first light after the engineers had spent the night working on the trail. Meanwhile, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion consolidated their position in Schmidt, with Col. Flood setting up his command post along the road leading to Kommerscheidt. No effort was made to support them with additional troops or equipment and there is no indication that a single staff officer or headquarters liaison from the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry or 28<sup>th</sup> Division ever checked on the battalion’s progress or situation.<sup>56</sup>

Before dawn of 4 November, Hostrup’s company prepared to move down the Kall trail, having approached it from the reverse slope of the Vossenack Ridge so as to avoid being observed. The 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, led by 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Raymond Fleig took the lead, and once it reached the entrance of the draw Fleig’s tank struck a mine. It was assumed that the mine was missed by the engineers, but it is also very possible that a German patrol had laid the mine during the night, as this would be their irksome routine during the coming days.<sup>57</sup> Fleig’s disabled tank partially blocked the trail, and after vain attempts to pass with a second tank Fleig’s platoon sergeant, S. Sgt. Anthony Spooner devised a way to winch the tanks around the disabled vehicle, an incredible feat considering the steep terrain

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<sup>55</sup> “CI 76,” Hostrup 3 Nov.

<sup>56</sup> *Three Battles*, p. 291.

<sup>57</sup> “CI 76,” Hostrup, 5 Nov.; “AAR 707<sup>th</sup> Tk Bn,” 5 Nov.

of the gorge. Once Spooner's tank was cleared Fleig took command of it and began to work his way down the narrow trail, leaving Spooner to get the rest of the platoon through. After crossing the stone bridge in the valley Fleig led his tank on foot up the zigzagging trail, where he found the situation "fairly quiet" at the edge of the woods. By 0730, with the first glimmer of dawn on its way, he began to approach Kommerscheidt, a single tank to support the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion in Schmidt.<sup>58</sup>

But the Germans were anything but quiet. Unknown to Col. Flood, the *1055<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Regiment*, commanded by Oberst Hesse of the *89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, had been relieved from its positions south of Schmidt and had passed through the town several hours prior. By 1600 of 3 November, the regiment was informed that Schmidt had been taken by advancing Americans and that they were to assemble and turn around to attack the town from the northeast. Furthermore, they received word that the "big brothers," tanks of the *116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division*, were on their way.<sup>59</sup> That this regiment went undetected was largely due to the fact that Flood either did not order patrols, or subordinate commanders tacitly overruled or ignored him. Had the battalion done some routine patrolling they would have discovered the enemy assembling to the northeast and been prepared for what came next.

But this was just the beginning of bad news for the American advance. By sheer coincidence, Feldmarschall Walther Model, commander of *Army Group B*, was conducting a map exercise with senior officers at Schloss Schlenderhan, located near Bergheim on the Erft River west of Cologne. Among those in attendance were the commander of the *Seventh Army* General Erich Brandenburger, his chief of staff Generalmajor Rudolf-Christoph von Gersdorff, and the commander of the *116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division* Waldenburg, along with other key officers. Feldmarschall Model decided to use this attack as the subject of the map exercise while concurrently giving direct orders to Waldenburg. Unlike

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<sup>58</sup> "CI 76," Fleig 5 Nov.

General Cota's detailed instructions from General Gerow, Model's instructions were simple and brief—move to the Schmidt area and restore the situation. A *kampfgruppe* commanded by Oberst Johannes Bayer, comprising all of the tanks of the division, was ordered to Schmidt for the counterattack, while the reconnaissance battalion was to move down the Kall gorge behind the American advance.<sup>60</sup> Even as Lt. Fleig's tank slowly clattered toward Kommerscheidt German tanks and infantry were approaching Schmidt from the northeast. The German attack would hit the American positions just after 0800 hours.

By the early light of 4 November, the reconnaissance battalion of the *116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division* had reached a point just north of Brandenburg, poised to push down the Kall gorge and seize the bridge between Vossenack and Kommerscheidt.<sup>61</sup> The rest of the division struggled to assemble just to the north of Schmidt and by dawn the *156<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Regiment* was prepared to attack toward Vossenack. Meanwhile, elements of the *89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* moved in to make the first assault on Schmidt. After a brief onslaught of artillery German infantry began to close in on the town. By 0900, they received support from the first tanks of the *116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division* to arrive, being eight Pzkw IVs under the command of Oberleutnant Werner Adam, as well as four assault guns, possibly Jagdpanthers from the *519<sup>th</sup> Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion*.<sup>62</sup> Adam's tanks rolled forward, keeping a modest distance but directing near point-blank fire into the positions occupied by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's infantry. Following closely behind were the infantry of *Battalion Wolf*, part of the *1055<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment* of the *89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's resistance rapidly crumbled and all command and control was lost as the men, deserting their wounded, streamed from the town toward Kommerscheidt.<sup>63</sup> Hauptmann Wolf personally led a section of men into the town to secure it even as Adam's tanks circled around to

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<sup>59</sup> "AAR 28<sup>th</sup> ID," captured report for the German *89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*.

<sup>60</sup> "Units Opposing the US 28<sup>th</sup> Division, C-089," pp 18-20.

<sup>61</sup> *From Normandy to Ruhr*, p. 214.

<sup>62</sup> *From Normandy to Ruhr*, p. 242; "V Corps Intelligence Summary," p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> *Three Battles*, p. 301.

the north in pursuit.<sup>64</sup> It was into this chaos that Lt. Fleig found himself driving as he entered Kommerscheidt.

Fleig reported to Maj. Theodore Hazlett, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in Kommerscheidt who directed him to position his solitary Sherman to cover the withdrawal of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion from Schmidt. Fleig moved to the southwest of the town, taking up a hull defilade position on the reverse slope. Around 1000 hours, S. Sgt. Spooner with two tanks joined him, and these three comprised the core of the antitank defense against the German attack that materialized an hour later against Kommerscheidt. When the German assault came, the same method of attack was used with the tanks and assault guns holding back from the town as they lobbed high explosive rounds into the American positions. At the same moment, the men of the 1055<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Regiment* began to cautiously close in, with some even attacking from the southwest close to the position occupied by Fleig's tanks.<sup>65</sup>

Fleig's primary concern was the enemy tanks. "10 enemy tanks were reported in Schmidt, but Spooner and I saw only five. We engaged these. My tank knocked out two Mark IVs. Spooner and the other tank crew knocked out a third Mark IV."<sup>66</sup> Oberleutnant Adam had divided his tanks into two teams, one to advance and the other to over watch. The leading element, three tanks under Adam's personal control, closed in on the town and was thus screened from Fleig's view. The other five tanks were on the edge of Schmidt providing the covering fire, and it was these that Fleig's tanks engaged. One of these tanks was commanded by Leutnant Schaller which took several hits and began to burn,

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<sup>64</sup> *From Normandy to Ruhr*, p. 243; "AAR 28<sup>th</sup> ID," captured report of 89<sup>th</sup> *Infantry*.

<sup>65</sup> "AAR 28<sup>th</sup> ID," captured report of 89<sup>th</sup> *Infantry*. It is interesting to note that this report indicates the German infantry was very active in the attack. However, reports by tank leaders in the 116<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division* assert that the infantry failed to advance. This issue can possibly be explained in that the German infantry was nervous about operating close to the tanks, since a number of the infantry had been recently run over by them. See *From Normandy to Ruhr*, p. 243.

<sup>66</sup> "CI 76," Fleig 4 Nov.

killing part of the crew and severely wounding the German officer. The two other tanks were hit when they attempted to change to more favorable positions.<sup>67</sup>

Oberleutnant Adam now shifted the direction of his attack, leading his two other tanks around to the north of Kommerscheidt. Several Jagdpanthers from the *519th Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion* apparently supported his move, and this combined assault now sent panic into the American positions. Fleig's tankers noticed the infantry pulling out from the north of the town, and Fleig, realizing something critical was happening there, maneuvered his tanks along the reverse slope to the northwest of the town. "Looking through an orchard on the eastern outskirts of the town, I spotted a Mark V (Panther) going into position."<sup>68</sup> Fleig's identification was only partially in error, as this was more likely a Jagdpanther supporting Oberleutnant Adam's attack. All of the authorities on the German side agree that none of the Panthers from the *116th Panzer Division* were employed in this initial attack, while the commander of the *89th Infantry Division* asserted that the Jagdpanthers employed were mistaken for Panthers and Tigers by the Americans.<sup>69</sup>

Fleig engaged the Jagdpanther in the left flank at a range of about 500 yards with two high explosive rounds. But when he called for his loader to throw an armored piercing round into the breach he discovered that he had none available in the turret racks. At this point the official U.S. Army history along with many popular historians, make a curious reference to Fleig retrieving his armored piercing ammunition from a sponson rack outside of the turret.<sup>70</sup> These histories unwittingly cast Fleig in an unfavorable light, making him appear incompetent and unaware that his gunner was shooting high explosive rounds and

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<sup>67</sup> *From Normandy to Ruhr*, p. 243.

<sup>68</sup> "CI 76," Fleig 4 Nov.

<sup>69</sup> "Units Opposing the US 28<sup>th</sup> Division, C-089," p. 14; *The Bloody Forest*, p. 118. Astor notes that after the war Fleig indicated this vehicle was actually a Pzkw IV. However, the available evidence strongly suggests he was engaging a camouflaged Jagdpanther, and thus was easily mistaken at the time for a Panther.

<sup>70</sup> *Three Battles*, p. 308; *The Bloody Forest*, p. 118; *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, p. 367.

leaving the armor defeating ammunition in some mythical rack outside of the tank. Instead, this incident reveals an interesting aspect of American tank gunnery at this point in the war. It was not uncommon for American tank crews to fire a combination of rounds at German tanks, alternating between armored piercing and high explosive, and even including a few white phosphorus rounds. While FM 17-12 (1943) specified that high explosive was to be used on armored targets over 2,000 yards away, it was not uncommon for crews to mix the rounds in any fashion they seemed necessary at the moment.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, Fleig would know what ammunition his gunner was using as common crew practice demanded a fire command sequence where the type of ammunition was announced. Thinking he was engaging a heavier Panther, Fleig apparently had decided to engage first with the explosive rounds to suppress the enemy crew, which is exactly what it did since the Germans bailed out of their vehicle. When Fleig called for an armored piercing round he learned that there were none in the turret racks, instead being stowed in the interior hull sponson racks located over the tracks. To access these rounds he had to rotate his turret so the loader could retrieve the ammunition through the turret basket screen. The process took several minutes, and while doing this the German crew remounted their vehicle and fired a round that missed Fleig's tank. Having at last retrieved the rounds he needed from the sponson rack, Fleig resumed the engagement, the first round slicing off the enemy vehicle's barrel and three others tearing open its left side and setting it ablaze.

While the exact location of Fleig's armored piercing ammunition is a minor point of historical detail, the fact that it was in the sponson rack raises an important question: why was it there in the first place, and not some of it still in the turret racks? Understandably, some of these rounds may have been expended in the first engagement with the Pzkw IVs, but M-4A1s-A3s with 75mm guns

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<sup>71</sup> *FM 17-12 Armored Force Manual, Tank Gunnery* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 18; Maj. Gen. I.D. White, *A Report on United States vs. German Armor*

carried twenty rounds in the turret, with an additional thirty directly under the turret floor.<sup>72</sup> It would appear that the primary reason why the turret racks were out of this ammunition so quickly was because experience of other tank units supporting infantry in France had already taught them that it was actually quite rare to encounter large numbers of German tanks.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, most of the ammunition carried in the turret would be high explosive, since most of the targets encountered were typically those referred to as “soft” targets. In the initial engagement his crew had expended the few armored piercing rounds available in the turret, and in the heat of the battle the crew had failed to notice there were none left. This failure to rearrange the ammunition during a lull in the fighting almost proved fatal for Fleig and his crew, but reflects the habitual mindset of crews when they prepared their tanks for combat, being that they were focused on supporting infantry against relatively soft or static targets, rather than in fighting enemy tanks.

With the enemy vehicle now burning, Fleig turned his attention to his other two tanks, at that moment busy exchanging shots with Oberleutnant Adam’s Pzkw IVs on the edge of Kommerscheidt. It would appear that one of these Shermans hit the Pzkw IV of Feldwebel Dolezal, which set the tank on fire.<sup>74</sup> Oberleutnant Adam began to withdraw his remaining tanks and the assault on Kommerscheidt slowly dissipated before Fleig could enter this part of the action.

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*and Equipment.* Prepared for General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force, 1945, pp 34, 44, 46.

<sup>72</sup> *Sherman*, pp 147, 155. A few of the 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion’s Shermans were M-4A3s with 76mm guns, and Fleig may have been operating this type. These carried less ammunition in the turret. See *The Bloody Forest*, pp 98-99.

<sup>73</sup> *Survey of Allied Tank Casualties in World War II*, p. 6. This report states that about 50% of tank casualties were by direct fire guns. However, a closer examination of numerous after action reports indicates that only about 25% of American tank losses were from enemy tanks, the other direct fire causes being anti-tank guns. This sampling included some of the most aggressive and heavily engaged tank units in the European Theater, including among others the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 67<sup>th</sup> Armored Regiments, and the 37<sup>th</sup> and 747<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalions.

<sup>74</sup> *From Normandy to Ruhr*, p. 244. Guderian believes that this tank may have been the one knocked out by Lt. Fleig, when he had to retrieve AP ammunition from the sponson rack. However, Company A claimed four Pz IVs and one Pz V destroyed, while Adam’s command lost only four Pz IVs. The latter was almost certainly a Jagdpanther.

That night, Fleig intended to withdraw his tanks for fuel, ammunition and maintenance, but Col. Peterson ordered him to remain near the infantry for close support. “He told us he expected an enemy counterattack that night with tanks using headlights to dazzle, blind and rattle our infantry. He was also very concerned that the infantry would pull out, with or without orders, if we withdrew even our small tank force.”<sup>75</sup> Fleig was attempting to use his tanks as prescribed by the tactics developed for armor and employed in training. These tactics specifically stated that “as the tank is primarily an offensive weapon it should not be placed in position and used as a pill box.”<sup>76</sup> The company level field manual also points out that “the tank’s offensive power must be used in defense for counterattacks. They are not used as stationary pill boxes except as a last resort.”<sup>77</sup> Instead of using accepted armored tactics, the infantry leadership in the area demanded that Fleig use his tanks as pill boxes, hoping somehow that the presence of the armor would instill in their men what leadership and prior training had failed to do. As it turned out no German attack materialized during the night, but the tank crews did have to endure a night of artillery and mortar fire and were unable to resupply. This condition also plagued the few tank destroyers in the area, as they would receive orders several times, once with threats of court martial, for their vehicles to stay close to the infantry in their positions.<sup>78</sup>

During the night of 4 November, Hostrup struggled to push the rest of his tanks down the Kall trail to support the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Kommerscheidt. Between thrown and broken tracks, interspersed with German artillery fire, Hostrup’s men managed to move five more tanks up to Kommerscheidt, joining the three under Fleig and six M-10 tank destroyers from Company C, 893<sup>rd</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion that had recently arrived. Thus, by the morning of 5

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<sup>75</sup> “CI 76,” Fleig 4 Nov. Emphasis in text.

<sup>76</sup> *FM 17-33 Armored Force Field Manual, The Armored Battalion Light and Medium* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), Sec. VII, p. 40.

<sup>77</sup> *FM 17-32 Armored Force Field Manual, The Tank Company* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), Sec. VII, p. 38.

<sup>78</sup> *Three Battles*, pp 330, 356.

November, there were fourteen armored vehicles available to support the defense of the town. Concurrently, the 28<sup>th</sup> Division headquarters was apparently still unaware of the true condition of the troops in Kommerscheidt, and buoyed by the reinforcement of armor in the town issued new orders to attack and retake Schmidt starting at 1100 hours.<sup>79</sup>

While the American armor sat idly poised to repulse another attack, the 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division was working feverishly to cut off the penetration at Kommerscheidt. To accomplish this feat, Waldenburg had issued orders that a trail be cut through the woods from Hürtgen toward Vossenack. However, the effort proved futile as the terrain was too rugged and water logged, causing the heavier German tanks to bog down, though the lighter assault guns could still handle the conditions.<sup>80</sup> Another effort, this more successful as it followed a trail, was being launched down the Kall gorge by the division's reconnaissance battalion supported by several Panther tanks. By the night of 5 November they would seize the bridge and nearby Mestrenger Mill, thereby blocking the supply route between Kommerscheidt and Vossenack.<sup>81</sup>

When the morning of 5 November arrived, Fleig's tanks, still acting as outposts for the infantry, had a brief duel with an infantry attack supported by five tanks. During this engagement, they immobilized one vehicle they labeled a Mark VI but was probably another Jagdpanther. This brief and unsuccessful attack was followed early in the afternoon by the rumor of a major German tank attack. "Tank fear" swept through the ranks of the infantry, and only the quick action of small unit leaders prevented a general rout. Fleig personally intervened, grabbing one stunned sergeant in an effort to reason with him.

"I held him there talking to him to steady him. [I] asked him if he hadn't learned in training that a tank cannot depress its guns to hit a man on the ground when it has come within 35 yards, if he hadn't learned that a tank can run over a foxhole without injury to the occupant.... He replied

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<sup>79</sup> "AAR 112<sup>th</sup> Reg.," 5 Nov.

<sup>80</sup> Generalmajors Rudolf von Gersdorff and Siegfried von Waldenburg, "116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division in the Hürtgen Forest" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, Ethint 56), p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> *From Normandy to Ruhr*, p. 246.

‘yessir... but I can’t stand it anymore.’ This Sgt was not in isolated case. The infantry were in a very exposed position. They were dug in on the forward slope.”<sup>82</sup>

To restore the situation Col. Peterson ordered Fleig to engage the German tanks in Schmidt. Fleig, coordinating with a platoon leader of the tank destroyers, agreed to draw the German fire while the M-10s would move into position on the flank to destroy the German armor, believing these to be Tiger tanks. Fleig’s three tanks pulled up on the slope north of Kommerscheidt and indeed drew both direct and indirect fire from the Germans. He looked over to his right to watch the M-10s move up to fire, but despite the continued gestures and obvious orders of their platoon leader, the tank destroyers refused to budge. This left Fleig’s tanks alone in an exposed position, and he was forced to back down in a shallow defilade with two of his tanks damaged by the enemy fire. They claimed just one enemy tank destroyed for their trouble.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the tank and artillery fire, no German attack materialized on 5 November. However, the situation had become too much for some men to handle, including some of the infantry officers. Among the combat exhaustion casualties was Col. Flood, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion’s commander whose formation had been routed from Schmidt. Complicating matters, communications to the rear had broken down. Telephone lines were out, and the only communication was by radio and messenger. One of those messengers from the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry sent word back to Maj. Gen. Cota that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions were disorganized and the men in bad condition, yet nevertheless Peterson would try to retake Schmidt if possible. By this time, Peterson was now with the weight of his formation, having set up his forward command post in the woods west of Kommerscheidt. Yet, the personal impact of his presence seemed almost nonexistent and his command continued to disintegrate. Casualty reports of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division reveal an interesting picture of the condition of the unit’s various regiments.

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<sup>82</sup> “CI 76,” Fleig 5 Nov.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

While all of the troops were exposed to the enemy and the elements, the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry had an abnormally high level of non-battle losses, being well over that of the other two regiments combined.<sup>84</sup> The stress of being under direct enemy pressure, especially that of enemy armor was taking its toll on the infantry.

Cota appeared unmoved by, or unaware of, these conditions. He ordered the creation of Task Force Ripple on 5 November, composed of one battalion of the 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the tanks and tank destroyers already in Vossenack and Kommerscheidt. Their mission was to launch another attack on Schmidt, and they set out during the night to try and cross the Kall gorge. Instead, Col. Ripple found that the Germans had blocked the trail, having decided that merely harassing the American supply line intermittently was insufficient. Ripple lost several vehicles trying to move down the trail, and his efforts to get help from the engineers tasked with guarding the bridge in the gorge were met with the unimaginative excuse that they were ordered to guard the bridge and not clear the trail of the enemy. There was no command authority present to sift through the conflicting orders and agendas, and TF Ripple fell back on its own meager resources in a renewed effort to force the trail. Two tank destroyers were lost in close combat, and Ripple realized that they could not get tanks or tank destroyers to Kommerscheidt, making the planned attack on Schmidt impossible.<sup>85</sup> He was able to get some of the infantry through, as well as himself, and during the next day he conferred with Peterson as to the state of affairs in the town. Ripple could not even have imagined at that moment that in just a few hours he would find himself in complete command of what was left of the ramshackle American forces in Kommerscheidt.

What Ripple had discovered was that the main supply route to Kommerscheidt was now cut by elements of the reconnaissance battalion of the *116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division*. A team carrying desperately needed supplies for the 707<sup>th</sup>'s tanks managed to slip through during the night but were unable to return

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<sup>84</sup> "AAR 28<sup>th</sup> ID Strength Reports," Nov. 1944.

to Vossenack. Prior to this, the Germans had repeatedly disrupted the Kall trail, throwing sporadic patrols through the area and lacing it occasionally with mines and felled trees. Unlike the American troops, the Germans in the area showed a tremendous acumen in patrolling and infiltration techniques even though they were just as unfamiliar with the sector as the Americans.<sup>86</sup> But, in an effort to finally pinch off the penetration near Schmidt the Germans had decided the best way was to physically block the trail. Incredibly, the supply route was at best but lightly guarded, with no serious effort being taken by the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry or supporting elements to ensure its security. Even more incredibly, the headquarters of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had no idea the trail was now blocked, and still harbored the illusion that the route was clear.<sup>87</sup>

By the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>, the situation in Kommerscheidt continued to deteriorate. During the night Gen. Bruns, commanding the 89<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*, issued orders to destroy the American forces cut off at Kommerscheidt. Assigned to this task were the tanks of *Kampfgruppe Bayer* along with elements of the 1055<sup>th</sup> *Grenadier Regiment*. *Kampfgruppe Bayer* was comprised of the 1<sup>st</sup> *Battalion*, 24<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Regiment* equipped with Panthers, the remaining Jagdpanthers of the 519<sup>th</sup> *Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion*, and the assault guns of the 341<sup>st</sup> *Brigade*, supported by a company of infantry. They were to attack from the south. Meanwhile, the 1055<sup>th</sup> *Grenadier Regiment* was to attack from the east with the last four Pzkw IVs from the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Battalion*, 16<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Regiment*.<sup>88</sup>

Just prior to the German attack, the American command structure in Kommerscheidt became even more confused when Col. Peterson received an order by radio to report to division headquarters. Suspecting his pending relief,

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<sup>85</sup> “CI 76,” Ripple 5 Nov.

<sup>86</sup> “AAR 28<sup>th</sup> ID,” captured report of 89<sup>th</sup> *Infantry*. The German author of the report lamented how they now had to operate in the unfamiliar terrain, and how they wished they were back in their old positions where “everyone is familiar with every inch of the ground.”

<sup>87</sup> *Three Battles*, p. 338.

<sup>88</sup> “AAR 28<sup>th</sup> ID,” captured report of 89<sup>th</sup> *Infantry*; *From Normandy to Ruhr*, pp 256-257. The 1<sup>st</sup> *Bn 24<sup>th</sup> Panzer Regiment* had once been part of the 24<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division*. After being battered in

he departed for Vossenack in a jeep with a driver and one guard. This left Col. Ripple in command at Kommerscheidt, who quickly learned that the infantry in the area “were in an absolute daze” unable to move from their current area to take more defensible positions on the left flank. Moreover, they “were under observed fire from an angle of more than 180 degrees. It was impossible for either the vehicles or personnel to find cover from this artillery fire. As a result, we suffered heavy casualties in occupying this position.” Colonel Ripple received orders to hold his position “at all costs” during the afternoon, even as Gen. Cota tried once more to organize a task force in an effort to retake Schmidt.<sup>89</sup>

This new attempt would never materialize, as the German attack struck at dawn. Lieutenant Richard Payne, 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon leader in Company A, counted about ten tanks, but intelligence estimated the attack involved closer to thirty.<sup>90</sup> Payne’s tank had a damaged elevation mechanism which naturally made it difficult for him to engage the enemy vehicles. After working with several tank destroyers to drive off one tank, he saw the American infantry falling back on the left, apparently under a direct tank attack. As Payne circled around the north of Kommerscheidt, he spotted what he thought was a Tiger tank moving through the eastern edge of town. Instead, this was probably a Panther from *KG Bayer*. Payne ordered one of his other tanks, commanded by Sgt. Lipe, to take the enemy vehicle under fire, disabling the vehicle with a single shot of AP.<sup>91</sup>

Payne, now in an exposed position and under artillery fire, backed down into the defilade north of the town and radioed for his two other tanks to do likewise. Lipe apparently did not hear the message, or was simply too busy with the action. Even as Payne backed down into defilade, Lipe’s tank spotted another German tank crawling slowly through the center of the town. He fired at a range of less than 400 meters, knocking the tank out. But in turn his tank was hit by

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Russia, the division reformed in France in 1943, and this battalion was used to build the *116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division*.

<sup>89</sup> “CI 76,” Ripple 7 Nov.

<sup>90</sup> “CI 76,” Payne 7 Nov.; “V Corps Intelligence Summary,” p. 62.

<sup>91</sup> “CI 76,” Payne 7 Nov.

another enemy tank in over watch. Undeterred, Lipe abandoned his damaged vehicle and commandeered a tank destroyer whose commander had been killed, to continue engaging the enemy tanks. This vehicle was knocked out as well, followed quickly by Payne's third tank. By mid-afternoon, Kommerscheidt was in German hands and the remnants of Ripple's command were now cornered in the woods on the reverse slope northwest of the town. The group had lost two tanks and three tank destroyers, while two more tanks including one of Payne's, threw tracks on the soggy slope. At the end of the day only two tank destroyers and one tank, that of Lt. Fleig's, remained in action.

The 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division now faced the inevitable, and while the 8<sup>th</sup> was relatively quiet for the men on the edge of Kommerscheidt, Ripple's overall situation was critical. Early in the afternoon he radioed the division headquarters requesting armor support, food, water, and ammunition. But, by 1600 hours the new commander of the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Col. Gustin Nelson managed to slip through the German noose around Kommerscheidt to inform Ripple that the division had instead ordered their withdrawal.<sup>92</sup> That night the crews quietly disabled their last three armored vehicles and began to wind their way through the woods into the Kall gorge. Hostrup and Fleig led a group of fifty men through the woods, crossing the Kall a few hundred yards north of the bridge as they suspected the Germans still held it. Just after midnight on 9 November this group reached Germeter, the first to make it back.<sup>93</sup> The ordeal of the 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, and its associated sister units, had come to an end.

In the second attack on Schmidt, the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was close to destroyed, losing 2,093 officers and men. Of this total, 167 were killed, 719 wounded, and 431 missing. Also, an additional 544 were listed as non-battle casualties. Supporting units were hit equally hard, especially the armor units.

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<sup>92</sup> "AAR 112<sup>th</sup> Reg.," 8 Nov.

<sup>93</sup> "CI 76," Fleig 9 Nov.

The 893<sup>rd</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion lost sixteen M-10s,<sup>94</sup> while the 707<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion took a pounding, losing thirty-six of its fifty tanks. Twenty-four were total write-offs while twelve were evacuated for higher level repair. Company A took the most losses, losing fifteen of its sixteen tanks as write-offs with several captured by the Germans.<sup>95</sup>

This isolated action at Schmidt in early November 1944 demonstrated serious mistakes by the American command regarding both the use of tanks with infantry, and even the fundamental principles of operational command and control. As late as November 1944, divisions with significant combat experience were using the same methods of combat as advocated by Prophets of Position. Leaders at the tactical level were emulating the worldview of their senior commanders, such as Gerow, Hodges, and Bradley. In the case of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, its assault revolved around the concept of positional warfare, and the deployment of the supporting tanks reinforced this mindset. Specific items stand out that highlight this.

During the initial attack on Schmidt there was little forward leadership by higher echelons of command. If the postwar apologists are correct that this indeed was a major assault to seize the Roer dams, then the performance of the higher leadership, from division to army, was abysmal. On 8 November, Lt. Gen. Hodges met up with Cota, at that time conferencing with Eisenhower, Bradley, and Gerow. Once the other officers left,

General Hodges drew General Cota aside for a short sharp conference on the lack of progress made by the 28<sup>th</sup> Division. General's chief complaint seemed to be that division headquarters had no precise knowledge of the location of their units and were doing nothing to obtain it.... General Hodges, needless to say, is extremely disappointed over the 28<sup>th</sup> Division's showing....<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Three Battles*, p. 415.

<sup>95</sup> "AAR 707<sup>th</sup> Tk Bn," Medium Tank Status Tabulation, 2 to 12 Nov.

<sup>96</sup> "Sylvan Diary," 8 Nov. 1944.

Faced with the threat of pending relief Cota was caught in a vice, having had his division's deployment micromanaged by Gerow and with the conduct of operations largely out of his hands. However, with this in mind Cota could have moved himself personally forward to the main point of attack, but instead chose not to. While his men spotted Cota during the early stages of the attack, he was seen in the 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry's sector not in the more critical area of the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry.<sup>97</sup> This is not an effort to denigrate Maj. Gen. Cota's personal courage, for that was beyond question and had already achieved near legendary status. Instead, this situation in many ways demonstrates the very supporting nature of the entire attack and that nobody in the leadership really expected the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry to penetrate as deeply and quickly as they did. In this sector, neither regimental nor divisional officers were to be found, nor their liaisons.<sup>98</sup> Instead, commanding officers attempted to control their troops from the rear, relying on telephone lines and messengers. When elements of the 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry were cut off and the lines lost, command and control deteriorated rapidly. Contrary to the American forces, German forces saw forward leadership from battalion and regimental commanders. As a consequence their units, though exhausted and dispirited like the Americans, performed more efficiently. It was not until the attack had stalled and the Germans began to build pressure against American forces that any significant American leadership arrived on the scene.

Compounding the lack of forward leadership were attempts to press units into forbidding terrain and poorly deploying them, especially the tracked armored elements. *Field Manual 101-5, the Staff and Combat Orders*, has an entire section devoted to terrain appreciation, with many of the aspects apparently neglected or ignored during the planning for the attack by the V Corps. Aspects of cover and concealment, fields of fire, and the need for secure communications, particularly across rugged terrain, are covered in the manual, but seem to have

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<sup>97</sup> *The Bloody Forest*, p. 113.

<sup>98</sup> *Siegfried Line*, p. 360.

been minimized in the attack plan.<sup>99</sup> As a consequence, the plan called on the infantry and supporting tanks to take up defensive positions on forward slopes, especially at Vossenack, exposing them to both direct and indirect fires. While the operations around Vossenack were not the primary focus of this study, they underscore this problem, especially for the tanks. American tank and infantry positions, while at the same elevation or higher than the Brandenburg-Bergstein ridge, were in full view allowing German tanks and tank destroyers to slowly pick off individual tanks and hammer the infantry positions, while German artillery observers called in a sustained and accurate hail of artillery on the area. Thus, it was not the dominating terrain across the Kall gorge that was the problem, but instead the poor deployment of the troops in the Vossenack area.

The same stultified mindset was evident at Schmidt. When the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry occupied the town, the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Flood, spread his troops throughout the village, even though he was aware that he did not have the physical means to defend it in entirety. As a result, the infantry were too scattered to provide effective resistance when attacked the next morning. Making matters worse was that Col. Flood positioned his command post behind the village, on the road toward Kommerscheidt. He would have done far better to have hedge hogged at a key point in the town, setting up several key strong points protected by the few mines he received, and then launching out aggressive patrols during the night to probe and harass German units in the area. He would have been alerted to the coming German attack, and by placing his command post in the middle of his position could have personally influenced the coming battle. Instead, the plan demanded that he was to occupy the entire town and he was determined to do it according to the plan, while placing his command post to the rear just as he had been taught by a doctrine influenced by the positional mindset.

This operational and tactical approach to battle was also evident in the deployment of the tanks and tank destroyers. The commanders of these two

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<sup>99</sup> *FM 101-5 Staff Officers' Field Manual, the Staff and Combat Orders* (Washington: United

battalions, Lt. Cols. Ripple and Mays, tried to prevent the improper deployment of their assets, but were pressured by infantry officers to commit their armor contrary to doctrine. For example, independent tank battalions organized to support infantry divisions, of which the 707<sup>th</sup> was one, were supposed to be “committed to combat in large numbers” and “only in exceptional circumstances will GHQ tanks be allotted to lower echelons, and then only for specific missions.” Moreover, the “tank units must not be tied to the movement of foot troops, otherwise their mobility is sacrificed and vulnerability to hostile antitank weapons increase.” Finally, when operating in the defense, “tank units are used offensively to support a counterattack. They are not used as stationary machine gun or antitank gun emplacements.”<sup>100</sup>

To their credit, the junior armor and tank destroyer officers attempted to avoid these pitfalls. Instead, infantry officers demanded of them, even with threats, that they should leave their vehicles in exposed positions so as to provide a morale boost to the infantry. When officers like 1Lt. Fleig were able to break free of the senior infantry officers nearby they maneuvered their tanks effectively, inflicting serious losses on attacking German armor. But when they were forced to take stationary positions, they inevitably fell prey to enemy direct fire from tanks and tank destroyers that would carefully maneuver for a good firing position, while the American tanks waited patiently for their own destruction.

In a postwar analysis of this operation, a group of American officers writing a report for the Armored School’s Advanced Course made the following concluding observations.

In light of present doctrine and with the advantage of hind-sight (sic), it appears that the tanks in support of the Vossenack defense could have been better employed as a counterattacking force and used only when it was necessary to repel a German attack. As they were actually used, they merely drew fire which they could not accurately return and were of no

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States Government Printing Office, 1940), Appendix II.

<sup>100</sup> *FM 17-10 Armored Force Field Manual, Tactics and Technique* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), pp 341-342, 345, 359.

material value to the infantry, except possibly for morale considerations.<sup>101</sup>

The only problem with this assessment was that it was not hindsight. These issues were part of established armor doctrine several years before the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's attack on Schmidt. Instead, the doctrine of mobility was ignored or slighted by officers who had no use for it, who instead preferred to rely on massed artillery and aerial bombardments, neat lines of advance, leadership from secure rear areas, and overwhelming material superiority. As one German assessment noted, "Allied higher commanders rely on methodical planning down to the last detail and on material superiority. Even the small-unit commanders are imbued with this philosophy; they are not in the habit of exploiting independently any favorable turn that the fighting takes."<sup>102</sup> That is, most American commanders relied on the philosophy of position, and if this meant expending the armor assets of an entire tank battalion on a minor objective so as to straighten the line, then so be it.

Unfortunately, this action at Schmidt did not seem to penetrate the fog of command at the higher levels of the American army, and subsequent events would demonstrate that these commanders in the area had learned little from previous experience. Even though Eisenhower had stated after Cobra that strategic bombers would never again be used to support a ground attack, he relented as Bradley, undeterred by the fate of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, prepared to expend even more men and material in the Hürtgenwald and the Stolberg Corridor. As part of the massive attack to reach the Roer River, this offensive, which was part of the action of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division at Puffendorf described earlier, was to push Hodges's First Army in line to the river.

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<sup>101</sup> Lt. Col. Carey A. Clark and others, "Armor in the Hurtgen Forest" (Ft. Knox, KY: Committee 7, The Armor School Officers Advanced Course, 1948-49), p. 64.

<sup>102</sup> Intelligence Bulletin, "Allied Combat Efficiency, as the Germans see it" (War Department Military Intelligence Division, Vol. III, No. 9, May 1945).

The renewed American attack began on 16 November, primarily by the VII Corps under Maj. Gen. Collins, and was heralded by a massive aerial bombardment by strategic bombers called Operation Queen. The bombers actually dropped their load several miles behind the front lines in order to avoid the terrible fratricide incident that preceded Cobra the previous July in Normandy. While theoretically correct, if targets of German command and communications had been identified and hit, the effects of this bombardment were actually quite negligible. American commanders, even into the postwar age, exaggerated the effect of this attack and were therefore surprised by the extent of the German resistance.<sup>103</sup> The *47<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division* was hit by the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, ironically reinforced by the 47<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team of the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. To the left of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division was Combat Command B of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division, pushing into the Stolberg Corridor. It would be the 47<sup>th</sup> RCT that would bear the brunt of the assault on the *47<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division* in the forest. On the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division's right was the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, assigned the unenviable task of fighting its way through the thick of the Hürtgenwald against the surprisingly resilient *275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* that had just recently given the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division such headaches near Schmidt. To their right was the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from the V Corps, assigned the job of seizing the village giving the infamous forest its name. Lastly, making a final appearance in the forest in a cameo role was the already badly handled 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, launching flank supporting attacks on the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's right flank.

The *47<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division*, destined to absorb most of this assault, was formed from the remnants of the smashed *47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* that was demolished in the Mons Pocket in August 1944. Initially designated the *577<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division* from the 32<sup>nd</sup> Mobilization Wave, it was reassigned its old divisional number on September 17 and ordered to assemble near Düren.

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<sup>103</sup> A *Soldier's Story*, pp 440-441; "Sylvan Diary," 16 Nov. 1944; also see *The Bloody Forest*, p. 190.

There is a considerable degree of confusion regarding the nature of the Volksgrenadier Divisions, in particular their capabilities and equipment. Conventional wisdom consigns these units as the barrel scrapings of German military manpower.<sup>104</sup> While this may be partly true, these divisions were not merely a desperate measure to piece together military formations for a last-ditch stand against impending invasion of the Fatherland. The primary focus of the Volksgrenadier divisions was to maximize firepower while keeping manpower resources at a bare minimum.<sup>105</sup> Most of the infantry were to be armed with the new Sturmgewehr44 assault rifles, while antitank defense was emphasized in training.<sup>106</sup> What oftentimes hampered the effectiveness of these units was the way they were hastily deployed and improperly prepared, often with little divisional-level training. The 47<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division suffered from these very handicaps.

Generalleutnant Max Bork was assigned command of this division during its formation and was appalled at what he saw. Its composition varied, from Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine transfers to youths recently conscripted. Only about 33% of the men had some fighting experience from the eastern front. One asset was that senior commanders as well as half the junior officers had previous combat experience. Yet, the remaining had been combed out from rear-service formations. One of the major deficiencies in the division was a lack of cohesion in the units, since they had not been formed from any one particular local district as was the habit with previous German combat formations.<sup>107</sup> Such cohesion could have been developed over time had the division been able to train more.

Lack of experience and cohesion were just the first problems. One of the major problems was a serious shortage of heavy weapons, with Bork noting that

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<sup>104</sup> One example of this can be found in *Hitler's Dying Ground*, p. 122.

<sup>105</sup> Generalmajor Hellmuth Reinhardt, "The Volksgrenadier Division and the Volksturm" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS P-065b, 1950), p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 3, 10.

<sup>107</sup> 47<sup>th</sup> VGD, B-602, pp 1-2.

the division's "weakness was from the outset in artillery and antitank defense."<sup>108</sup> For example, self-propelled anti-tank weapons normally assigned to the Volksgrenadier units were not even slated for the 47<sup>th</sup> by its table of organization.<sup>109</sup> Because of these shortages, much of the weapons training had to be conducted in theory. Making this situation worse was the division's train-up assignment, as the unit was first sent in October to scattered locations in quiet Denmark. Without proper communications and no training facilities the division was unable to train in large formations. Nevertheless, Bork still managed to get his division involved in some training exercises up to the regimental level by November, and by the beginning of the month the assigned artillery at last arrived. According to Bork, had the division had another two weeks to train, many of the deficiencies present could have been corrected and the 47<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadier Division* would have been fully ready for commitment to combat. Instead, he was ordered to commit his unit as part of the *LXXXI Corps* into the northern edge of the Hürtgenwald on 9 November. In all, they had but six weeks of training.<sup>110</sup>

The division detrained near the front line with few losses, despite Allied air activity. Its job was to relieve elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Parachute Division*, and squeeze next to the 12<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadier Division*.<sup>111</sup> This was confusedly done in the dark over unfamiliar wooded terrain. Worse still, since the division had trained in the flat open fields of Denmark they had received no preparation in woodland fighting.<sup>112</sup> The men settling into their positions were therefore lonely and disconcerted, lost within the dank confines of the northern part of the Hürtgenwald. "The arranging of units in the position was rendered difficult by this thickly wooded terrain and the continuous harassing fire and signal

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp 2-3.

<sup>111</sup> General Friedrich Köchling, "81<sup>st</sup> Armeekorps Actions in Aachen Sector (Sept-Nov 1944)" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS A-996, 1946), p. 12.

<sup>112</sup> "47<sup>th</sup> VGD," B-602, p. 4.

communications were unreliable from the start. In the midst of these difficulties came the enemy attack....”<sup>113</sup>

But the 47<sup>th</sup> *Volks grenadier Division* was not alone. Its condition was reasonably good compared to other units in the *Seventh Army*. For example, units in the *LXXIV Corps* just south were woefully under strength, with typical infantry battalions numbering no more than 250 to 300 men, a serious shortage in signal equipment, and no motor transport which made resupply efforts herculean. In these conditions, the commander of the corps considered his units to be only capable of defense “in a dire emergency.”<sup>114</sup> An advantage enjoyed by the *LXXXI Corps* was the presence of some tank units in reserve, especially in the form of the 9<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division*. The *LXXIV Corps* did not have these assets nearby, and it was only by chance that the 116<sup>th</sup> *Panzer Division* was close enough to intervene, as it was refitting for the coming Ardennes Offensive. The key unit for the corps in its defensive line was the longsuffering 275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*, already severely depleted from its earlier exertions against the 9<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Divisions*’ attacks toward Schmidt.

What is of particular interest is the nature of reconnaissance carried out by both sides prior to this offensive. As noted prior, German commanders would report later that American patrols were woefully lacking while German patrols routinely penetrated American lines, sometimes by up to ten miles, in search of information on their enemy’s intentions.<sup>115</sup> This was a situation similar to that experienced in the 28<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*’s sector in its prior assault on Schmidt, and American combat reports seem to bear this out. For example, while preparing for the 16 November assault the 47<sup>th</sup> *RCT* launched numerous patrols. Yet, the regiment’s accounts are replete with entries that the patrols came back with a negative report, and hardly a single entry for this time period indicates anything

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> General Karl Püchler, “LXXIV Corps (2-27 Oct 44) & (16 Dec 44-23 Mar 45)” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS B-118, nd), p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> “275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*,” B-373, p. 18; “47<sup>th</sup> *VGD*,” B-602, p. 11; “275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*,” B-810, p. 40; “LXXIV Corps,” C-016, p. 5.

such as prisoners returned or the nature of enemy activity. Apparently, these American patrols were routinely tracing areas directly in front of their positions, more as a precaution against possible attack than as preparation for their own assault. As a result they rarely, if ever, penetrated the immediate edge of the German outposts, let alone found anything on their main line of resistance. Therefore when the attack was launched, American small unit combat leaders directly in the action had little idea what was actually in front of them. As shall be seen, this was not a problem isolated with the 47<sup>th</sup> RCT during this offensive.

This does not mean that American intelligence was totally insufficient or blind. On the contrary, higher echelon commands had a reasonably accurate picture of what they were facing, both in quality and quantity. For example, an intelligence summary of 9 November listed the actual German units facing the VII Corps in its zone of advance, with an approximate total strength of only 6,800 men. The only unit missing from the summary was the incoming 47<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadier Division*, which was at that very moment moving in between the 12<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadier* and 275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Divisions*.<sup>116</sup> They were aware that the Germans were creating strong points and that these positions were often on reverse slopes.<sup>117</sup> In addition, “aggressive patrolling” had been routinely ordered,<sup>118</sup> but the evidence already cited suggests that this was not being done at the lowest unit level. Compounding this latter problem is the lack of any evidence that higher echelon commands sensed that patrols were not following the intent of their directives, and these appear complacent and self-satisfied with what information they presently had.

With the bombing complete, the 47<sup>th</sup> RCT, supported by tanks jumped off on their attack towards Gressenich and Schevenhütte at 1250 hours. Within fifteen minutes leading troops and tanks were penetrating into the southern edge

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<sup>116</sup> “VII Field Orders, Nov, 1944” (D-3. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), Intelligence summary FO #10, Nov. 9, 1944.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., FO #65 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Nov. 10, 1944.

<sup>118</sup> “VII Field Orders,” FO #10.

of Gressenich, while tanks from Combat Command B began entering the north side an hour later. German mortar and artillery fire was focused on the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Divisions to the north, initially ignoring the 47<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team's advance. This was coupled with early indications that resistance was weak, which gave the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division troops a false impression of what was to come.<sup>119</sup> This would quickly change as German mortar fire shifted and added its weight to the battle, even as the supporting tanks encountered land mines that crippled some and blocked the advance of the rest. Despite these difficulties, by about 1600 hours the sense of some officers in the 47<sup>th</sup> RCT was that "things were going along pretty well," though they had some trouble with house-to-house fighting in Gressenich. By late afternoon K Company had cut the road leading northeast out of Gressenich, and the supporting tank battalion actually prepared to bed down for the night.<sup>120</sup> Other units followed suit, and true to form American units ceased their attacks to wait for first light on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Some POWs captured were from the 103<sup>rd</sup> Grenadier Regiment of the 47<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division, and this appears to be the first indication of this new German division's presence in the combat zone.<sup>121</sup>

General Bork and his 47<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division were constrained by the weak strength of their infantry to forego a defense in depth and across the entire front. "Men and means were lacking for the construction of a continuous position, so that a system of strongpoint defense—which is unfavorable in forests—had to be adopted."<sup>122</sup> These strong points were focused on roads, crossroads, and firebreaks, and the coming battles centered on these locations. They were often well organized in their own limited areas. A typical example was the German position at the crossroad of the trail leading east from

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<sup>119</sup> "47<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team S-2/S-3 Journal, Nov 1944" (D-3. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), Nov. 16.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> "47<sup>th</sup> VGD," B-602, p. 5.

Schevenhütte to Hof Hardt, and Gürzenich and the Renn Weg.<sup>123</sup> Two German bunkers covered access, and several additional bunkers behind provided flank and rear protection, a combination very commonly used in the forest. However, beyond this, there was no further extent to these positions and they were easy to outflank... if American troops took the initiative to probe deeper into the forest and away from the trails.

Bork had not done this without cause. Previous Allied operations had taught the Germans something about American and British attacks. They had learned that they typically concentrated their assaults on well-defined terrain features, especially roads, trails, and crossroads. German intelligence reports during the actions in Normandy mirrored battle experiences already learned in Italy that Allied forces failed to exploit successful attacks, and even more importantly, were extremely reluctant to use infiltration tactics in heavy country in order to isolate enemy strong points and turn their flank.<sup>124</sup> Bork understood that the American attack would focus on key points and deployed his meager assets accordingly. He was not disappointed.

By 18 November, the 47<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadier Division* had lost several key towns but had also inflicted serious losses on the Americans, with Bork recalling that they knocked out 49 tanks, most of these from CCB of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division.<sup>125</sup> The canalizing nature of the Stolberg Corridor and the American penchant for attacking obvious objectives, allowed the 47<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadier Division* to maximize their very limited supply of landmines. Nevertheless by 21 November, the 47<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadier Division* was severely depleted, with one unit, the 115<sup>th</sup> *Regiment*, reduced to a meager 230 officers and men deployed in two strong points on the southern edge of the Stolberg Corridor. The division's

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<sup>123</sup> Today the trail is a paved road as is the Renn Weg, although a barrier blocks vehicle traffic on the latter.

<sup>124</sup> *Overlord*, pp 146-147.

<sup>125</sup> "47<sup>th</sup> VGD," B-602, p. 5; "After Action Reports, 3rd Armored Division, November, 1944" (803 AD 401. U.S. Army Armor School Library, Fort Knox, KY), November 1944. The 3<sup>rd</sup> AD report only states that heavy tank losses resulted due to terrain constraints and mines. Only one German tank was engaged in this operation, and this was knocked out.

situation was extremely precarious, with its commander believing that a quick enemy attack westward would have collapsed his entire position. However this attack never materialized, with Bork attributing this failure to the insufficient American reconnaissance that never identified his division's weaknesses.<sup>126</sup> At last, during the night of 27 November, the 47<sup>th</sup> *Volks grenadier Division* was relieved from the line, its positions taken over by elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Parachute Division*. It had suffered heavily but had managed to contain the American assault over two weeks of hard fighting.

The assault on the 275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division* bore similar marks to that against its neighbor to the north. General Schmidt had received a temporary leave in late October, returning to the division the day prior to the American attack. He found the situation basically the same, although the 275<sup>th</sup>'s preparations had made good progress. The engineers had laid considerable mines and rear positions had been organized so as to provide some depth to the combat area. At the time, the division could field 6,500 men, of which 4,500 were combat effectives.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the division could employ a reasonable artillery complement of 25 tubes, and was also able to call on the support of higher formations, adding an additional 81 guns. They also had improved their antitank defense as they now had 21 assault guns and 23 antitank guns. Nevertheless, the 275<sup>th</sup> was far too weak to cover their six miles of woodlands. And while the men were in good spirits, Schmidt could tell they were at the end of their physical and moral strength.<sup>128</sup> He also knew that he could not rely on receiving any reserves, as the *LXXIV Corps* had committed everything to the forward defense. Without local tactical reserves available, senior German commanders would be compelled by one crisis after another to commit elements refitting for the upcoming Ardennes counteroffensive.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> "47<sup>th</sup> VGD," B-602, p. 11.

<sup>127</sup> "275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, B-810," pp 24-25.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>129</sup> "LXXIV Corps," C-016, p. 14.

Like the situation regarding the 47<sup>th</sup> *Volksgranadier Division*, the American intelligence picture of the 275<sup>th</sup> *Division* was reasonably accurate, and this was demonstrated in a propaganda leaflet dropped over the German lines. This leaflet accurately cited the 35 different non-divisional units attached to the division, while poking fun at the hodge-podge nature of its organization. A slogan on the leaflet called on the German troops to surrender, since “it is senseless to continue fighting under these circumstances.”<sup>130</sup> Yet, at the same time there were severe limits to their knowledge of German dispositions. While aware of the ad hoc nature of the 275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division* as well as its equipment and manpower shortages, they knew little of their true dispositions.<sup>131</sup> This implies that the 4<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*’s patrol efforts were as lackluster as those of the 47<sup>th</sup> *RCT* to the north.

The plans for the assault by First Army units followed the same pattern of previous efforts: pushing down roads and firebreaks, and focusing on crossroads to maintain closer control of units. Lieutenant General Hodges left a briefing at the 4<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*’s headquarters with the “impression that they were going about the attack in the wrong way – running down roads as far as they could instead of advancing through the woods tightly buttoned up yard by yard.”<sup>132</sup> Historian and combat veteran Charles MacDonald pointed out that “despite the hundreds of American dead who had fallen victim to the forest, the Americans had not altered their methods of attack.”<sup>133</sup> Hodges’s solution, apparently suggested to Maj. Gen. Raymond Barton, the divisional commander, but not insisted upon, was to advance through the woods in straight line, shoulder to shoulder. This was a curious course for the First Army commander, especially in light of his tendency to micromanage subordinates. Perhaps he himself was tactically deficient to suggest other options, especially when one considers his

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<sup>130</sup> “275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division*,” B-810, p. 26.

<sup>131</sup> *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, p. 432.

<sup>132</sup> “Sylvan Diary,” 17 Nov. 1944.

<sup>133</sup> *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, p. 431.

remark just quoted. This is underscored by Hodges's comments early in the campaign when he noted that too many units "tried to flank and skirt and never meet the enemy straight on..., believing it safer, sounder, and in the end, quicker, to keep smashing ahead, without any tricky, uncertain business of possibly exposing yourself to being cut off."<sup>134</sup> Even more curious is that Collins did not find any problems with Barton's scheme of attack, and would steadfastly maintain that with just a little more effort American forces could penetrate the brittle crust of German resistance.<sup>135</sup> In one aspect, he was correct because the German units defending the sector were suffering heavy losses they could ill-afford. Perhaps Hodges was partially right as well; merely smashing ahead would eventually carry the day, though at a dreadful cost.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's attack initially remained true to this pattern. As the men jumped off the tendency was to follow or skirt along roads and firebreaks, and the actions of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment were typical. A Company deployed in platoon columns on the first day of the advance, paralleling the advance of B Company up a firebreak.<sup>136</sup> B Company got into the thick of the fight on the 17<sup>th</sup>, when they engaged a strongpoint "close to crossed firebreaks at [grid reference] (009379). The enemy had sown mines thickly along the firebreak, and defended the firebreak with a pair of machine (sic) guns on each side."<sup>137</sup> C Company got involved in an attack on 18 November, following the right flank of A Company as they advanced "with the east-west firebreak being the axis of advance and company boundary." When the company received artillery fire it was focused on a crossroads the company was maneuvering towards, forcing them to skirt the road.<sup>138</sup> On the following day they again

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<sup>134</sup> "Sylvan Diary," 30 July 1944. Sylvan's original manuscript mislabels the date as "30 August."

<sup>135</sup> *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, p. 475.

<sup>136</sup> "After Action Reports, A Co., 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Combat Interviews," Nov 16-Dec 3, 1944 (D-471 Film 2340. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), Nov. 16.

<sup>137</sup> "After Action Reports, B Co., 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Combat Interviews," Nov 16-Dec 3, 1944" (D-471 Film 2340. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), Nov. 17.

<sup>138</sup> "After Action Reports, C Co., 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Combat Interviews, Nov 16-Dec 3, 1944" (D-471 Film 2340. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), Nov. 18.

advanced down a road, once more receiving a serious dose of German mortar and artillery fire.<sup>139</sup> F Company joined the attack on the 17<sup>th</sup>, with an “advance to the edge of the north-south road and then turned to follow the west side of this road before crossing. The Germans threw a terrific barrage of arty...”<sup>140</sup> On the 20<sup>th</sup>, both E and G Companies joined F in an attack to “secure the north-south road to the east.... When G had almost reached the road, it was caught in a crossfire from two enemy tanks firing both high explosive rounds and machine guns. G Co. received a very large number of casualties.”<sup>141</sup> Before being entangled in this debacle G Company had assisted another attack down a firebreak on the first day of the assault.

These examples demonstrate the core of the American problem. Attacks followed a one-dimensional and predictable pattern,<sup>142</sup> allowing the Germans to concentrate at selected points to maximize their defense. During the first day of the assault the 275<sup>th</sup> *Infantry Division* lost contact with the 47<sup>th</sup> *Volksgranadier Division*, and this was maintained only sporadically by small patrols for several days. This gap was never discovered by American reconnaissance. To make things more difficult, the troops employed by the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division acted as if they were inexperienced and green to the field. General Schmidt noted that the American troops used in this assault were not as good as those used before as they tended to get lost, stumbled into flanking fire, and failed to use preparatory fires to full effect.<sup>143</sup> There was an exception along the front of his division and this was found in a unit with extensive previous experience in the forest. One battalion sized element of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, having learned bitter lessons

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov 19.

<sup>140</sup> “After Action Reports, F Co., 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Combat Interviews, Nov 16-Dec 3, 1944” (D-471 Film 2340. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), Nov. 17.

<sup>141</sup> “After Action Reports, G Co., 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Combat Interviews, Nov 16-Dec 3, 1944” (D-471 Film 2340. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), Nov. 20.

<sup>142</sup> The term “one dimensional” has been used here to denote frontal assaults, though the colloquialism is usually “two dimensional.” In the context used here, a two dimensional attack would add a flank attack, or use of airborne troops, to break an enemy position.

<sup>143</sup> “275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division,” B-810, p. 28.

from previous fighting in the area, managed to filter through the German positions and achieve a deep penetration. Instead of being supported they were essentially abandoned and then isolated by the Germans, finally being compelled to withdraw.<sup>144</sup>

By the end of first day, the *275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* had expended its reserves, and was now facing the serious possibility that their right flank had been compromised with American forces moving east to envelop them. As Schmidt soon discovered to his relief, the *4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* failed to identify this gap, and therefore failed to exploit a prime opportunity.<sup>145</sup> That night, the *LXXIV Corps* began to move various elements into the *275<sup>th</sup> Division's* sector, one of those being a small *kampfgruppe* of the *116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division* once again on loan from being refitted for the upcoming Ardennes offensive. Despite these efforts to shore up the front the German line still had large gaps that once more the *4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* failed to locate or exploit, even when they launched an aggressive assault on the 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>146</sup>

The *275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* absorbed the weight of the *4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* attacks up until 21 November. At this point, it became necessary to pull out elements of the weakening German division and insert a fresh unit. The division selected was the *344<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division*, formally the *91<sup>st</sup> Luftlande Division* that was badly mauled in the Normandy campaign. This division moved into its positions on the night of 20 November, and by the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> the transfer was complete. The *344<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division* received most of the remaining infantry elements of the *275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, while the latter's rear echelon services withdrew to refit. Although they absorbed the infantry of their predecessor, the *344<sup>th</sup>* was still spread perilously thin, and like its predecessors was unable to properly man positions and maintain adequate

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., pp 28-29.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

observation of its sector.<sup>147</sup> It was into this dispersed formation that the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's assault commanders, Col. Richard McKee of the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and Col. Charles Lanham of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, at last decided to use more fluid tactics to bounce the Germans from the forest. On 22 November, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's assault teams moved out, with part of the elements as a demonstration to draw attention while another part moved quickly and quietly through the darkest parts of the forest.<sup>148</sup> German forces were initially caught off-guard, and elements of the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry advanced one thousand yards through and behind the main German line. When the German forces did react, they were compelled to vacate their prepared positions and launch costly counterattacks in a vain effort to restore the situation. In the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry's sector, one battalion moved so quietly through the heavy forest that they advanced 1,200 yards with almost no opposition.<sup>149</sup> For the *344<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division*, the renewed advance was disastrous and it became imperative for the German command to pull this division out and replace it with the *353<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division*, as they erroneously blamed the new division for the failure. But this change provided little relief. Rather than being the failure of German dispositions, it was the change to a form of mobility tactics by the American units, though only on a limited scale, that spelled the beginning of the end of German resistance in this sector of the Hürtgenwald. Although heavy fighting lasted another week, by that time the leading elements of the VII Corps were pushing out of the forest and into the Roer Plain. With success at last, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, having suffered over 4,000 combat casualties and another 2,000 non-battle losses, was pulled out for a badly needed rest. They were sent south into quiet Luxembourg to soon find

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<sup>147</sup> "91<sup>st</sup> LL Division (344<sup>th</sup> VGD) in the Rhineland" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS B-171, nd.), p. 4.

<sup>148</sup> "AAR, A Co., 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry," Nov. 22.

<sup>149</sup> "After Action Reports, 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Nov 16-Dec 3, 1944" (D-471 Film 2339. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), Nov. 22.

themselves on the fringe edge of the largest German attack in the west since the invasion of France in 1940.<sup>150</sup>

While largely an infantry action supported by armor, the fighting in the Hürtgenwald highlights the problems with the positional philosophy and how the American commanders by late in the war were largely abandoning operational and even tactical mobility. Armored units were often used to support the infantry almost all across the line, instead of being used for a concentrated deep exploitation after a breach was achieved at a selected point. On the other hand, German performance in the forest and the Stolberg Corridor was exemplary. Deficient in clothing, lacking decent food, and throttled by shortages in all other categories, the German soldier and his small unit leaders maintained the front against an enemy mostly using static tactics. They did this by utilizing highly mobile tactics, especially infiltration, to keep the Americans off balance and nervous, while at the same time conducting long range reconnaissance into the enemy lines to discern their intentions, strength, and deployment. While at the strategic and operational level, the German command for various reasons had abandoned mobile warfare doctrine, where the front remained relatively fluid the tactical level leaders continued to apply these principles. These tactics were repeatedly used during operations in the Hürtgenwald. Even in late November, when the tide was turning and the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division's CCR began to be employed for the final breakout, German groups, at times in force, would infiltrate through American positions during the night to harass and disrupt American assembly areas and outposts. At times these movements actually compelled American troops to abandon positions and fall back to the rear.<sup>151</sup> Curiously enough the after action reports of the CCR, while mentioning the habit

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<sup>150</sup> It must be noted that these losses were mostly made good by replacements, albeit lacking combat experience and tactical integration. When the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was engaged in the Ardennes it was close to the foxhole strength it had at the start of action in the Hürtgenwald. For example, see "Strength / Loss Reports, 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Nov 16-Dec 3, 1944" (D-434 Film 2290. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA).

<sup>151</sup> *Paths of Armor*, p. 163.

of German troops to use the woods to stalk American tanks caught in the open, held to the notion that “the German defense was exceedingly stubborn, but it was not aggressive.”<sup>152</sup> The German commanders on the spot would beg to differ.

It must be noted that this German preference for infiltration tactics was not new in the Hürtgenwald and that they were standard fare for many of their units. During the fight for the hedgerows during the Normandy campaign, American troops found that German units would infiltrate snipers into their rear areas,<sup>153</sup> while other units such as the *17<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Grenadier Division “Gotz von Berlichingen”* used infiltration tactics effectively in their counterattack on the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division’s bridgehead over the Moselle River in early September.<sup>154</sup> These tactics would be noted later by U.S. Army personnel when describing the nature of the German Army just before the end of the war.<sup>155</sup> Not only were these infiltration tactics effective in dislocating an enemy’s defensive position, they also facilitated in the capture of enemy personnel, thus providing valuable information, particularly since they could not receive much information through other sources like aircraft. While American patrol reports in the Hürtgenwald often showed little or no result for their efforts, German units in the forest and adjoining areas were bringing in a reasonably healthy share of prisoners, with one source indicating as many as 200 daily.<sup>156</sup> In an area where aerial reconnaissance was limited captured personnel could provide a good source of intelligence on the enemy at a given moment. In particular, such information was of the kind that could be exploited tactically in a timely fashion.

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<sup>152</sup> “5<sup>th</sup> AD AAR , CCR,” November, 1944.

<sup>153</sup> *After D-Day*, p. 51.

<sup>154</sup> Antonio Munoz, *Iron Fist: A Combat History of the 17.SS Panzergrenadier Division ‘Gotz von Berlichingen’* (Axis Europa Books, 1999), p. 17.

<sup>155</sup> *Handbook on German Military Forces*, p. 254.

<sup>156</sup> “OKW War Diary, B-034,” p. 255. The diary implies that this figure includes the Hürtgenwald as well as areas to the north of the Stolberg Corridor, and covers the period of the offensive and not the entire month of November. Moreover, much of this take would have come from regular operations and not just patrols. However, the information in the after action reports of American units and German sources indicate that German patrolling was far more aggressive and useful in bringing in actionable intelligence.

German military performance made tactical and leadership problems in the United States Army stand out in stark relief. The problem for the Americans was not so much the individual soldier as it was the training and development of his leaders. Poor reconnaissance in an army is a result of poor leadership and lack of foresight, or even just plain laziness. German positions in the Hürtgenwald were so thinly manned that it would have been possible from the outset for American units to infiltrate the positions and force them to fall back from strong points along the roads and firebreaks. Yet time and again, German commanders noted that American ground reconnaissance was so lethargic as to fail to find these gaps for exploitation, and thus save the lives of fellow soldiers by bouncing German positions through maneuver. General Schmidt's comments regarding this problem are telling:

It often seemed as if prior to an attack the enemy would not in the least care to procure a more or less correct picture of our forces and positions, but he simply attacked completely indifferent to the fact whether at this point the enemy was strong or weak.<sup>157</sup>

These remarks are even more compelling when one considers the comments by Bill Boice in his *History of the 22d U.S. Infantry in World War II*, that since "reconnaissance patrols were never able to extend more than a few hundred yards in front of the lines, troop leaders rarely knew the exact disposition of hostile firepower until they actually exposed themselves."<sup>158</sup> Since German patrols could at times extend up to ten miles behind American lines, the question demands to be answered why American patrols were not able to extend at least marginally farther than they actually did. In combat situations this is not the function of the individual soldier but rather his leadership at all levels. Aggressive patrolling can be ordered from a higher command, but it requires follow-up by that command to ensure that leaders at the lowest levels are

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<sup>157</sup> "275<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division," B-810, p. 40.

<sup>158</sup> William Boice, *History of the 22d U.S. Infantry in World War II* (Washington DC: Infantry Press, 1959); quoted in *The Bloody Forest*, pp 203-204.

complying. This effort to ensure compliance was woefully lacking in the Hürtgenwald. As noted previously, the S2 and S3 Journal of the 47<sup>th</sup> RCT had numerous references to patrol activity in which nothing was reported, while German units were much more aggressive in their activity. It is a strange twist of irony that while the philosophy of position employs micromanagement of subordinate units, those combat leaders with the penchant for this worldview were the most lackadaisical regarding the follow up on such critical tactical operations as patrolling.

George Wilson, who served as a small-unit leader with the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during its operations in the Hürtgenwald, noted that patrols were first and foremost supposed to go where higher authority dictated. Therefore, if a higher command level did not authorize, encourage, or supervise deep patrolling, then it simply failed to happen. Another aspect of patrolling that he noted was that it was actually quite easy to “goof off on patrol, because you were out there all by yourself and no one could check on you.”<sup>159</sup> While Wilson explains that he did not fall victim to this, many front line troop leaders, already frustrated by the stalled offensive in France and that they were forced to operate in the dank forest, would find the temptation irresistible to avoid taking undue risks during a patrol, especially if the risk meant penetrating German lines. Couple this with a prevailing mindset among the men that the war was nearly over and that no soldier wanted to get killed or seriously maimed in what would be the final phase of operations, then one can understand why American patrolling would tend to lose aggressiveness. German troops on the other hand, working under effective small unit leadership and with their backs to the proverbial wall, would use aggressive and deep reconnaissance of the enemy in order to give them the added edge that could provide some relief from the Allied assaults. The facts are compelling in reinforcing the notion that boldness and courage are traits that can

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<sup>159</sup> George Wilson, *If You Survive* (New York: Ivy Books, 1987), p. 104.

be instilled and trained into men, and those responsible for such are the unit leaders at all levels.

This problem of leadership not only was seen in poor patrolling and reconnaissance, but also demonstrated itself at the higher levels by a complete lack of understanding of the operational situation regarding German conduct of operations. As noted earlier, one of the primary reasons given for American involvement in the Hürtgenwald in the first place was that the Germans might use it to stage a major offensive against the flank of the northern half of the Allied advance pushing on to the Rhine.<sup>160</sup> Some Allied commanders would share this fear but others questioned this line of reasoning. Major General Lunsford Oliver, commanding the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, wondered why the forest could not have been essentially surrounded by attacks on the north and south sides.<sup>161</sup> Commenting after the war on this operation, Maj. Gen. Ernest Harmon, then commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division to the north of the forest remarked,

that other strategists, who better understood the value and fighting quality of tanks, could have organized the capture of those [Roer] dams—and at far more modest cost in human life. Maps of the area show clearly that it is good tank country. Heavy armored columns advancing on either side of the forest could have performed a double envelopment of the dams that would have made the infantry action unnecessary.<sup>162</sup>

Incredibly, it never seemed to dawn on senior American commanders like Collins, Hodges, or Bradley that if it was so difficult to move tanks and other mobile forces through the Hürtgenwald from the west, why would it be easy for the Germans to do so from the east? Making matters worse was that field grade officers generally followed the lead of their superiors. If corps commanders would make set-piece frontal assaults on a broad scale, why not do so at the regimental or battalion level? It was only after heavy losses that Colonels McKee

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<sup>160</sup> *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, p. 414.

<sup>161</sup> *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, p. 431, fn8.

<sup>162</sup> Ernest Harmon, *Combat Commander* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 225.

and Lanham of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division actually attempted tactics that emphasized mobility over brute force, and even then only on a limited local scale. After initial success, they would revert back to the original and failed formulae. Ironically, for McKee this change in tactics came after he had accused one of his battalion commanders of being “yellow” when that unit received heavy casualties from artillery while conducting a frontal assault during the early portion of the offensive.<sup>163</sup> Otherwise, the operations at regimental level and below bore a striking resemblance to those conducted by their superiors at division and corps.

Finally, it has been said by many that the heavy American losses in the Hürtgenwald were matched by equally heavy losses for the Germans, forcing them to commit some units being refitted for the upcoming Ardennes offensive. Therefore, the American assaults in the forest helped to drain off German reserves and thus blunt the coming German attack in December. This is a belief that is even held by some German officers.<sup>164</sup> However, could have these reserves been engaged and beaten in a more mobile operation at a far lower cost in American lives? What if American mobile forces had been used to go around the Hürtgenwald, plunging quickly and massively into the flat Roer Plain on their way to the Rhine? Is it not only conceivable but even logical that more German reserves would have been committed, thus possibly even preempting the entire Ardennes offensive altogether? Rather than looking at an alternative and seeking solutions for the future, it appears bitterly apparent that many make the statement that the actions in the forest bled off German strength as a macabre way to justify the bloodletting of American units that occurred. It is difficult for many on either side to admit that the combat in the forest was a waste, or even improperly

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<sup>163</sup> *The Bloody Forest*, 214; “After Action Reports, 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Nov 16-Dec 3, 1944” (D-429 Film 2281. U.S. Army Infantry School Library, Fort Benning, GA), Nov. 17.

<sup>164</sup> Oberst Günther Reichhelm, “Army Group B (Oct 1944-Apr 1945),” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Military History Institute, MS B-701, 1947), pp 17-18.

conducted, in light of the heavy losses incurred as no one wishes to impugn the memory of the dead.

The actions in the Hürtgenwald demonstrated how the Germans maintained the tactical edge on American units. By maintaining a relatively fluid front and surmising what their enemy would do they could quickly concentrate troops at key points of defense, while using fast maneuvering infantry to infiltrate American positions to harass, confuse, and obfuscate the American attacks. It can be argued that American leadership actually aided the Germans by stumbling directly into the German plan of defense, and then stubbornly clinging to conventional and one-dimensional concepts until they had burned out the infantry resources of four divisions. And lastly it can be argued that the slugfest in the forest, rather than weakening the German offensive in the Ardennes, actually helped pave the way for it, primarily by not outmaneuvering German reserves and forcing them to fight on American terms in a more mobile action at the operational level. In these ways American leadership demonstrated itself to be woefully deficient when compared to their German counterparts.



# **APPENDICES**

## **Tables and Maps**



**Table 1: Position and Mobility Concepts Developed in the 1920s-30s, Related to Tanks and Mechanization**

<b>Position</b>	Concepts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As an infantry support system</li> <li>2. Close support</li> <li>3. Infantry pace</li> <li>4. Mobile pillbox</li> <li>5. Infantry mobility as “battlefield taxi” idea</li> <li>6. Tanks in secondary role</li> <li>7. A tactical system; gradual results</li> <li>8. Maximum control from higher command</li> </ol>
	Tendencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Heavy tanks mixed with infantry</li> <li>2. Slow vehicles; cumbersome; well-armed and armored</li> <li>3. Emphasis on HE ammunition to suppress dug-in positions</li> <li>4. Emphasis on breakthrough of infantry</li> </ol>
	Consequences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Minimal combat commitment</li> <li>2. Minimal risk to combat forces in case of failure</li> <li>3. Minimal gain</li> </ol>
<b>Mobility</b> <i>Ver. 1</i> <b>Cavalry</b>	Concepts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Used as a cavalry system</li> <li>2. Screening</li> <li>3. Exploitation after infantry breakthrough</li> <li>4. Pursuit to allow infantry to maintain advance</li> <li>5. A tactical system; localized results</li> <li>6. Moderate control from higher command</li> </ol>
	Tendencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Light to medium tanks used alone</li> <li>2. Fast, rapid movement; light armor and armament</li> <li>3. Small AP gun system</li> </ol>
	Consequences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Minimal commitment</li> <li>2. Minimal risk, as elements kept close to main army</li> <li>3. Minimal gain</li> </ol>
<b>Mobility</b> <i>Ver. 2</i> <b>Operational</b>	Concepts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Used as part of integrated combined arms force</li> <li>2. “Married units;” supported by mechanized artillery / infantry</li> <li>3. Pace varies to operation, but typically high tempo</li> <li>4. For deep exploitation as self-supporting force</li> <li>5. An operational system; to achieve decisive results</li> <li>6. Delegated control / lower level initiative</li> </ol>
	Tendencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mixed ammunition loads for varies targets</li> <li>2. Fight infantry, support services, and other tanks</li> <li>3. Heavier armament to handle all types of situations</li> <li>4. Breakthrough / deep exploitation as needed</li> </ol>
	Consequences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fairly high level of commitment</li> <li>2. Greater risk for failure</li> <li>3. Greater potential for decisive success</li> </ol>

**Table 2: Personal Supervision and Visits by  
Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley to Army Commanders  
1 August 1944 to 8 May 1945**

<i>Commander and Army</i>	<i>Visit Initiated by Bradley</i>	<i>Bradley Received Visit</i>	<i>Total Visits</i>
Hodges- First Army	22	6	28
Patton- Third Army	10	4	14
Simpson- Ninth Army	9	3	12
Devers- 6 <sup>th</sup> Army Group	2	2	4
Patch- Seventh Army	1	1	2
De Lattre- Fr. First Army	1	0	1
Montgomery- 21 <sup>st</sup> AG	9	2	11

Total visits to 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group northern sector: 31 + 9 = 40 (both First and Ninth Armies)  
Total visits to 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group southern sector: 10 + 4 = 14 (Third Army only)

**Notes:**

First and Ninth Army were very closely deployed and coordinated during most of the campaign (unless Ninth Army was deployed with 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group). Visits to 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group, Seventh Army, French First Army, and 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group included for comparative purposes. These were not supervisory but for coordination purposes only.

Source: War Diary of Omar Bradley, Bradley Papers, Series I Box 4

### Table 3: U.S. Army Planned Divisions vs. Actually Mobilized

Selected Periods of Divisions Deployed in the European Theater,  
with Other Theater Totals Included for Comparison Purposes

Type	Plan 1941	31Jul 1944	31Oct 1944	31Dec 1944	30Apr 1945	MTO	PTO	Total	% 1941
<b>Arm</b>	61	5	8	11	15	1	0	16 <sup>1</sup>	26% <sup>2</sup>
<b>Mech</b>	61	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
<b>Inf</b>	54	13	25	34	44	4	18	66 <sup>3</sup>	122%
<b>Abn</b>	7	2	2	3	4	0	1	5 <sup>4</sup>	71%
<b>Mtn</b>	10	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	10%
<b>Cav</b>	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	1 <sup>5</sup>	25%
<b>Total</b>	197	20	35	48	63	6	20 <sup>6</sup>	89	45%
<b>% Mech</b>	62%	25%	23%	23%	25%	17%	0%	18%	

Notes:

MTO = Mediterranean Theater of Operations by April 1945

PTO = Pacific Theater of Operations by August 1945

1. Four armored divisions were planned but never activated (15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>).

2. Only 13% if the loss of the mechanized divisions is included.

3. One infantry division not activated (39<sup>th</sup>); two saw little combat but deployed (93<sup>rd</sup>, 98<sup>th</sup>).

4. One airborne division sent to Europe but saw little combat (13<sup>th</sup>).

5. One cavalry division deactivated and never deployed to combat (2<sup>nd</sup>).

6. This does not include the six Marine divisions deployed to the PTO.

Sources: *An Unknown Future and a Doubtful Present*, p. 107; *World War II: A Statistical Survey*, pp 111-112; *World War II Order of Battle*.

**Table 4: Downtime of Select U.S. Units in days, 1944**

Unit	August	September	October
	31 Days	30 Days	31 Days
37th Tk Bn	9	12	16
	29%	40%	52%
32nd Ar Rgt	10	11	15
	32%	37%	48%
67th Ar Rgt	6	9	13
	19%	30%	42%

Based on After Action Reports for the 37<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Armored Regiment, and 67<sup>th</sup> Armored Regiment, Aug-Oct 1944. Number represents the full days the entire unit did not move during these months with percentages being the proportion of the month the unit was not engaged in action.

**Table 5: Comparative Tank Ground Pressures**

	<b>Senger</b>	<b>Jentz</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>	<b>Hunnicutt</b>
<b>Tank</b>	Ground Pressure (PSI)	Ground Pressure	Ground Pressure	Ground Pressure
Pzkw IV H/J	12.6	12.6	12.6	NA
Pzkw V G	12.5	10.7	12.5	NA
Pzkw VI E	14.7	10.5	11.3	NA
Tiger I				
Pzkw VI B	15.2	11.1	13.7	NA
Tiger II				
M-3A5 Grant	NA	17.1	13.6	13.1
M-4A1	NA	15.6	13.5	13.7
VVS				
M-4A3E8	NA	10.9	10.6	11
HVVS				
Sherman VC	NA	13.7	13.1	13.6
Firefly				

Sources:

F.M. Senger und Etterlin, *German Tanks of World War II*. A & W Visual Library, 1969.  
 Thomas Jentz, ed., *Panzer Truppen Vol. 2*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 1996.  
 Aberdeen Proving Ground, *Tank Data World War II*. Old Greenwich, CT: WE Inc., nd.  
 R.P. Hunnicutt, *Sherman: a History of the American Medium Tank*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1994.

**Table 6: Select U.S. Unit Tank Loss Summary  
1944-45  
By Total and Cause**

Unit	Total AFVs	By Cause						
		Tk fire	AT fire	Arty	Bzka	Mines	Crew	Unk
32nd Ar Rgt	55	3	41	0	8	3	0	0
67th Ar Rgt	97	45	24	0	0	1	0	27
14th Tk Bn	18	2	4	2	4	0	0	6
37th Tk Bn	69	17	28	2	2	4	0	16
70th Tk Bn	25	0	16	0	6	3	0	0
747th Tk Bn	67	15	16	4	14	13	4	1
607th TD Bn	16	1	3	2	4	4	0	2
702 <sup>nd</sup> TD Bn	33	8	2	5	0	1	1	16
<b>Totals</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>68</b>

Based on After Action Reports for the units in question during the entire scope of operations in the European Theater. Losses included self-propelled tank destroyers. Arty represents any indirect fire attack. Bzka represents any attack with a light infantry held antitank device, such as the Panzerschreck or Panzerfaust. Crew represents those tanks destroyed by their crew for any given reason, but typically to prevent capture by the enemy.

**Table 7: U.S. 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division Tank Losses  
July 1944-May 1945**

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Direct Fire</b>		<b>Artillery</b>		<b>Bazooka</b>		<b>Mines</b>	
	Des	Dis	Des	Dis	Des	Dis	Des	Dis
<b>15th Tk Bn</b>	34	14	5	22	21	6	2	25
<b>68th Tk Bn</b>	30	60	5	15	5	1	0	0
<b>69th Tk Bn</b>	28	16	2	0	13	12	4	10
<b>Totals</b>	92	90	12	37	39	19	6	35

Based on After Action Reports for the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division's three tank battalions during the campaign in the European Theater of Operations. This table and those following do not reflect vehicles both destroyed or disabled that were repaired and later put back into action, and therefore should not be used to highlight combat consumption.

## Table 8: Comparative Analysis of Engagements

U.S. 3rd and 4th Armored Divisions

European Theater, 1944-45

### M-4 Tanks on the Attack, All Situations

Unit	Eng	U.S.		German		Ave Rng	U.S. First Shot	Ave U.S. Tnks	Kill-Loss
		Used	Lost	Used	Lost				
<b>3AD</b>	26	225	71	43	16	756	1	8.7	1-4.4
			31.6%		37.2%		3.8%		
<b>4AD</b>	21	276	46	85	41	1157	6	13.1	1-1.1
			16.7%		48.2%		28.6%		

### M-4 vs. Tank or Tank/Antitank Mix

Unit	Eng	U.S.		German		Ave Rng	U.S. First Shot	Ave U.S. Tnks	Kill-Loss
		Used	Lost	Used	Lost				
<b>3AD</b>	10	115	25	21	8	585	1	12	1-3.1
			21.7%		38.1%		10.0%		
			% Withdraw — 4 Engagements; 80%						
<b>4AD</b>	16	207	26	83	40	1050	6	13	1.5-1
			16.7%		48.2%		28.6%		
			% Withdraw — 3 Engagements; 27.3%						

### Number of Engagements by Basic Type

3AD	Type Engagement	4AD
4	Vs. MK V	13
10	Vs. All Tnks / SPs Guns	16
14	Vs. Antitank	2

### **Table 8 Notes:**

The table compares tank engagements by the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Divisions and the results of those engagements.

**Eng** indicates the number of engagements for the analysis.

**Lost** indicate the number and percentage of tanks destroyed or disabled during these engagements.

**Ave Rng** indicates the estimated average range in which the engagements began.

**U.S. First Shot** indicates the number of engagements in which the U.S. force fired first.

**Ave U.S. Tnks** indicates the average number of U.S. tanks committed to a given engagement.

**Kill-Loss** indicates the kill to loss ratio for the total number of engagements.

**% Withdrew** is indicative of the percentage of times the U.S. force withdrew from the action.

**Number of Engagements by Basic Type** provides details of the types of vehicles or weapons engaged by a particular U.S. unit.

Source: *Data on World War II Tank Engagements Involving the U.S. Third and Fourth Armored Divisions.*

**Table 9: Select U.S. Units Kill-Loss Ratio, 1944-45**  
Sorted by most successful units

<b>Unit</b>	<b>AFV Kills</b>	<b>AFV Losses</b>	<b>Kill-Loss Ratio</b>
<b>607th TD Bn</b>	85	16	5.3 to 1
<b>702nd TD Bn</b>	107	33	3.2 to 1
<b>37th Tk Bn</b>	137	69	2 to 1
<b>67th Ar Rgt</b>	134	97	1.4 to 1
<b>14th Tk Bn</b>	20	18	1.1 to 1
<b>32nd Ar Rgt</b>	32	55	.58 to 1
<b>70th Tk Bn</b>	2	25	.08 to 1
<b>747th Tk Bn</b>	3	67	.04 to 1

Based on After Action Reports for the units in question during the entire scope of operations in the European Theater.

**Table 10: Select U.S. Unit Tank Kill Summary  
1944-45**

By Type When Known

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Total AFVs</b>	<b>Pz III</b>	<b>Pz IV</b>	<b>Pz V</b>	<b>Pz VI</b>	<b>Pz VIe</b>	<b>Pz VIb</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>Unk</b>
<b>32<sup>nd</sup> Ar Rgt</b>	32	0	7	8	0	4	1	7	5
<b>67<sup>th</sup> Ar Rgt</b>	134	17	39	49	7	0	2	20	0
<b>14<sup>th</sup> Tk Bn</b>	20	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	13
<b>37<sup>th</sup> Tk Bn</b>	137	0	2	16	6	0	0	26	87
<b>70<sup>th</sup> Tk Bn</b>	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>747<sup>th</sup> Tk Bn</b>	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0
<b>607<sup>th</sup> TD Bn</b>	85	1	14	9	0	0	0	21	40
<b>702<sup>nd</sup> TD Bn</b>	107	3	32	40	1	2	3	13	13
<b>Totals</b>	520	21	95	122	21	6	6	89	160

Based on After Action Reports for the units in question during the entire scope of operations in the European Theater. The **Unk** column includes other known vehicles considered too light as an AFV, such as the Pzkw II Luchs reconnaissance tank.

**Table 11: Comparative Ranks**

<b>German <i>Heers</i> Rank</b>	<b>German <i>Waffen SS</i> Rank</b>	<b>U.S. Army Equivalent</b>
Feldmarschall	No Equivalent	General of the Army
Generaloberst	SS-Obergruppenführer und Generaloberst der Waffen SS	General
General der Infanterie etc.	SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen SS	Lieutenant General
Generalleutnant	SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Waffen SS	Major General
Generalmajor	SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen SS	Brigadier General
Oberst	SS-Standartenführer / SS Oberführer	Colonel
Oberstleutnant	SS-Obersturmbannführer	Lieutenant Colonel
Major	SS-Sturmbannführer	Major
Hauptmann	SS-Hauptsturmführer	Captain
Oberleutnant	SS-Obersturmführer	First Lieutenant
Leutnant	SS-Untersturmführer	Lieutenant
Stabsfeldwebel	SS-Sturmscharführer	Master Sergeant
Oberfeldwebel	SS-Hauptscharführer	Technical Sergeant
Feldwebel	SS-Oberscharführer	Staff Sergeant
Unterfeldwebel	SS-Scharführer	Sergeant
Unteroffizier	SS-Unterführer	Corporal
Soldat	SS-Grenadier	Private

Source: *Handbook on German Military Forces*, pp 6-7; *Wenn alle Brüder Schweigen, Großer Bildband Über die Waffen-SS* (Osnabrück: Munin Verlag GmbH, 1975), pp 582-583.

# Maps

## Key to Map Symbols



**Allied Infantry Division**



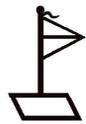
**Allied Armored Division**



**Allied Corps with Nationality**



**Allied Army with Nationality**



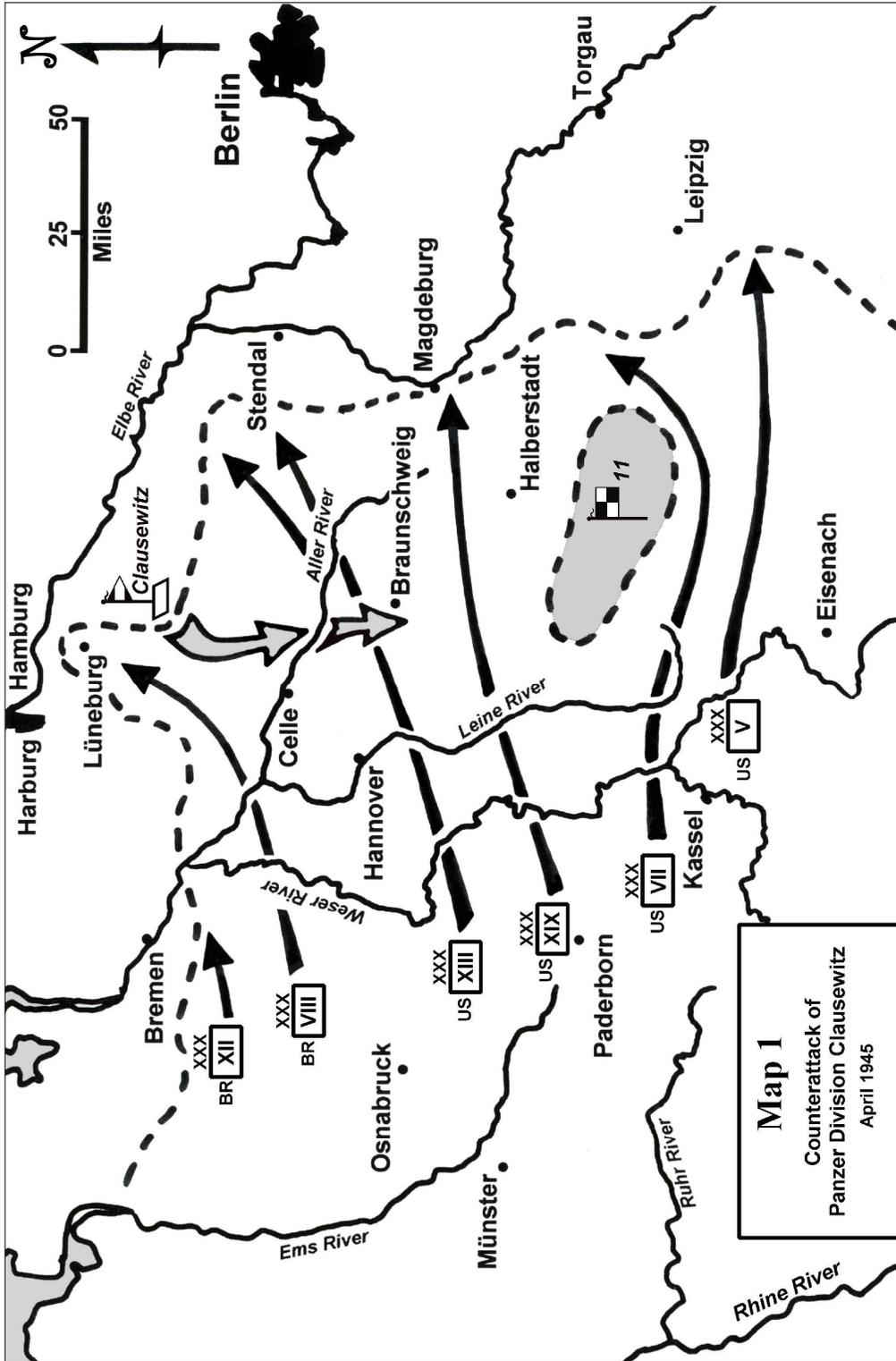
**German Panzer Brigade**

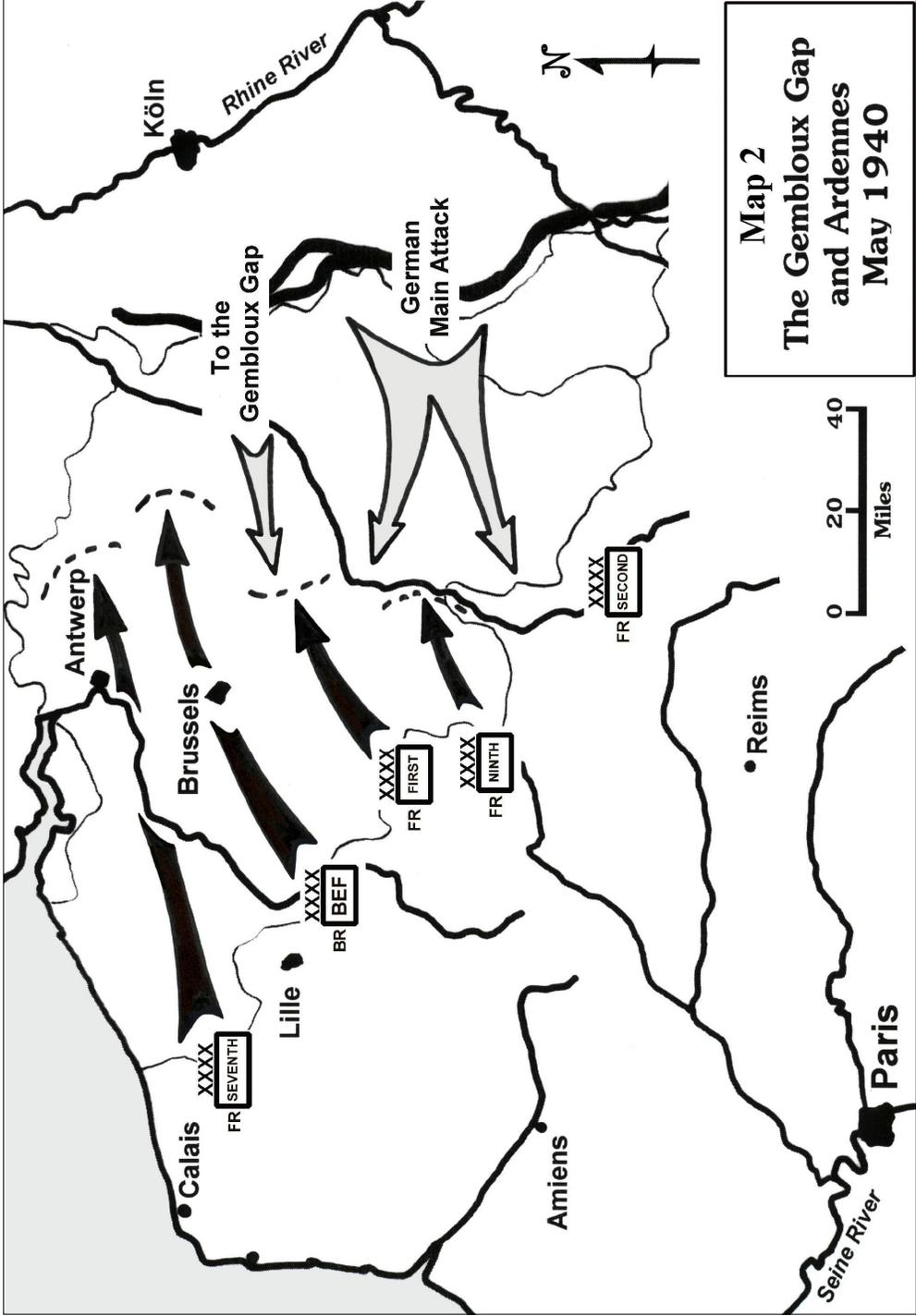


**German Panzer Division**

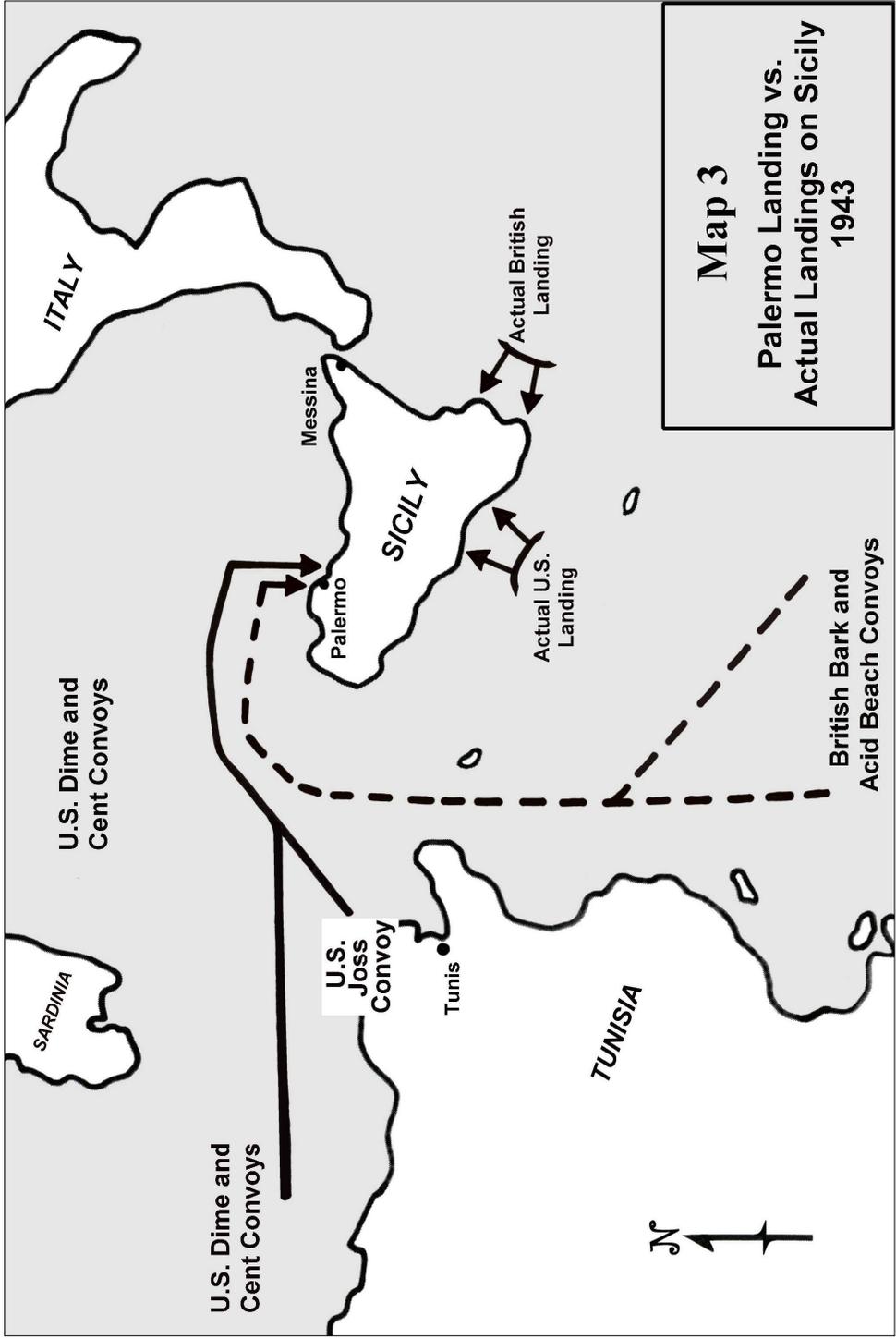


**German Army**

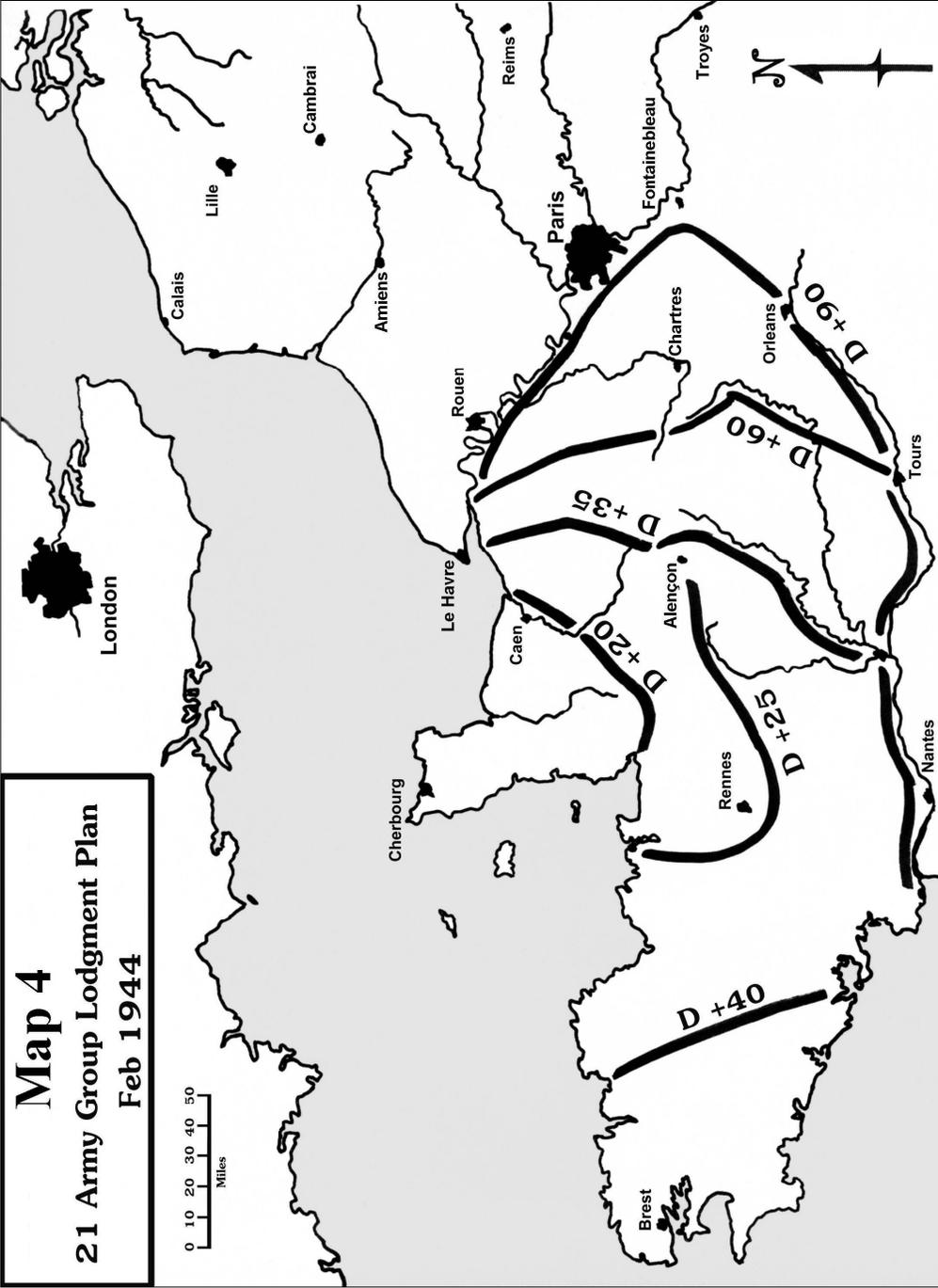




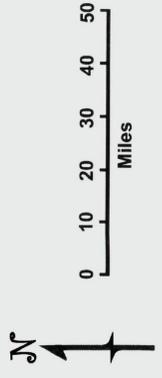
**Map 2**  
**The Gembloux Gap**  
**and Ardennes**  
**May 1940**



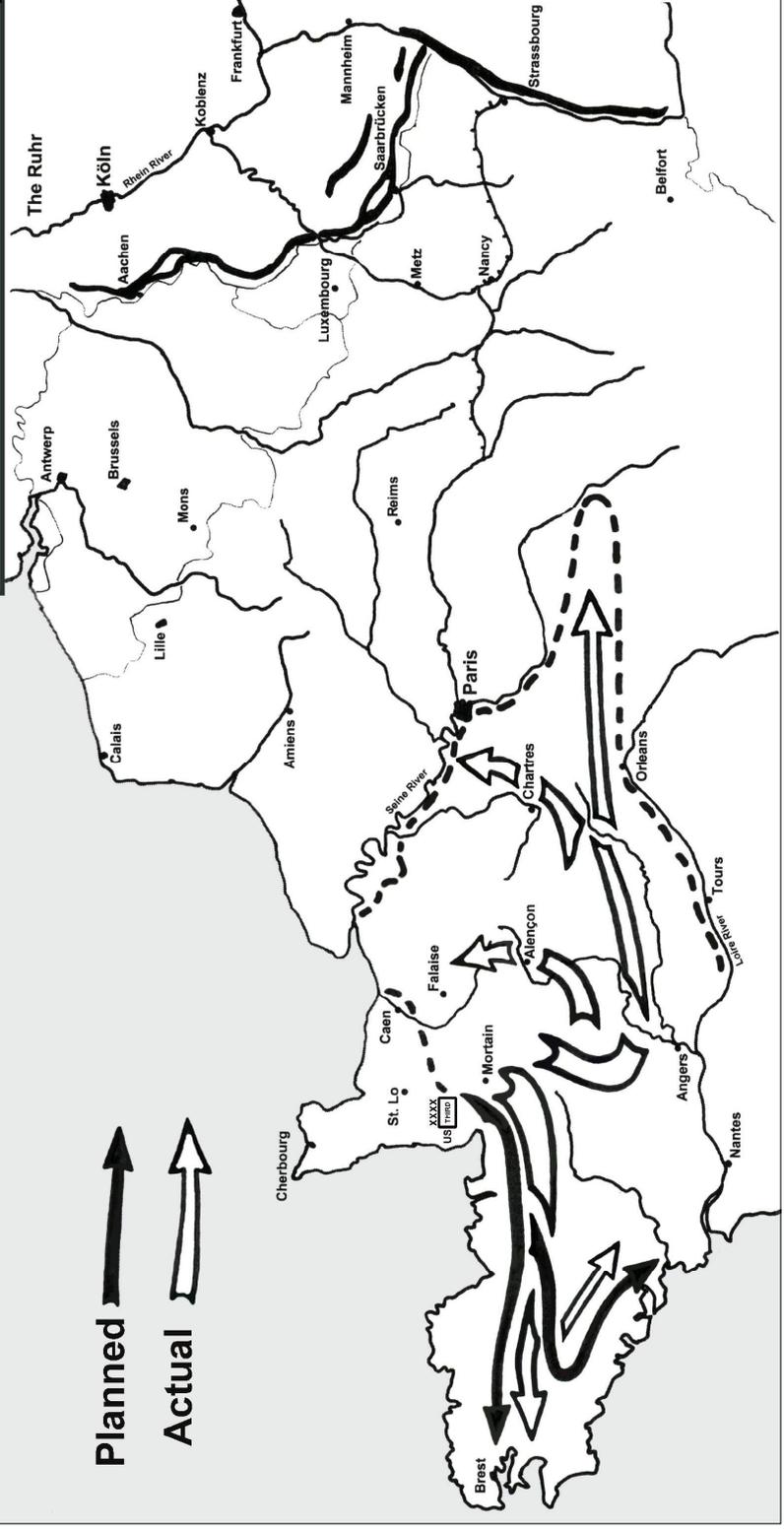
**Map 3**  
**Palermo Landings vs.**  
**Actual Landings on Sicily**  
**1943**

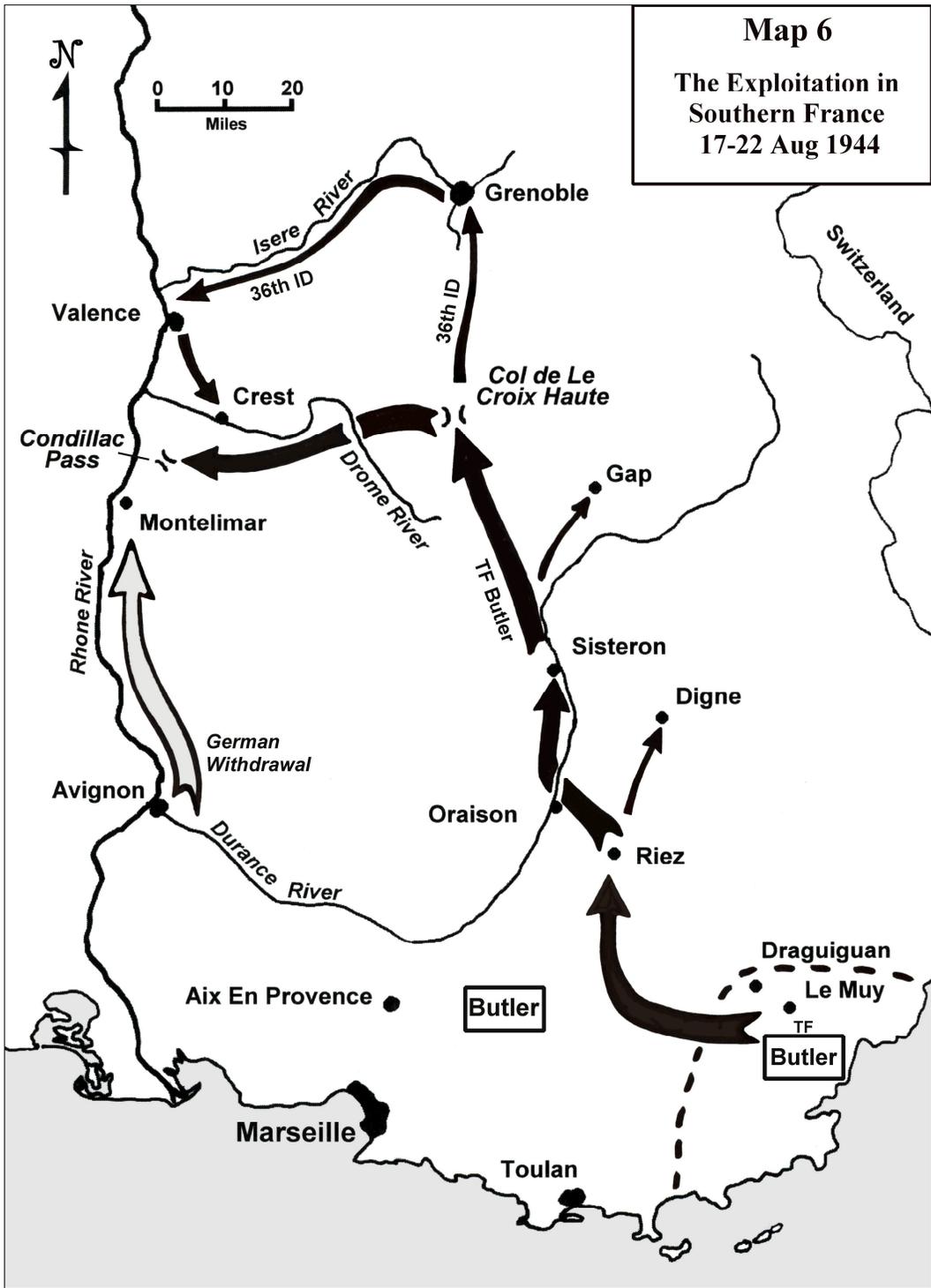


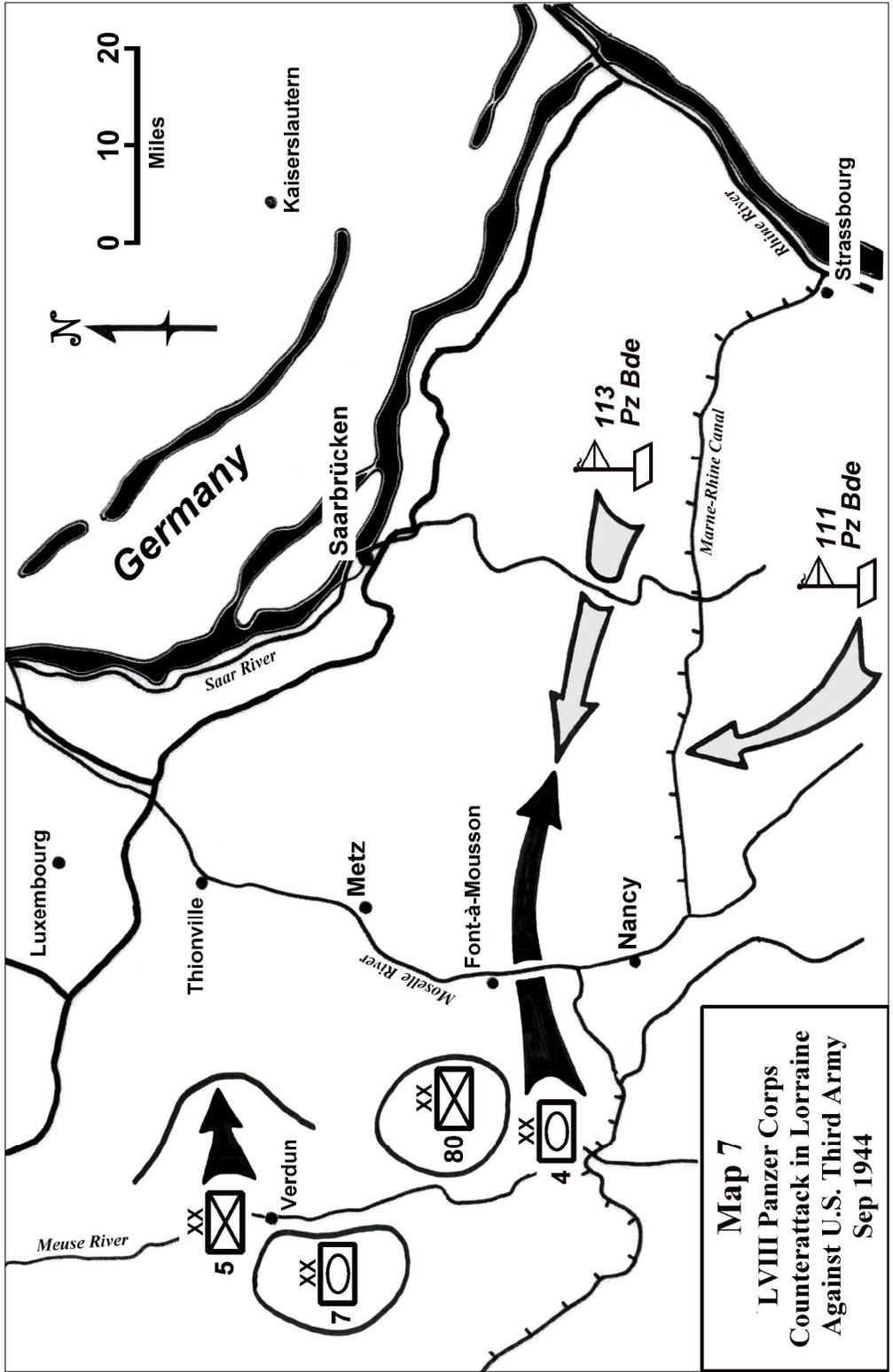
**Map 5**  
**The Planned and Actual Breakout**  
**by the U.S. Third Army, Aug 1944**



**Planned**   
**Actual** 







**Map 7**  
**LVIII Panzer Corps**  
**Counterattack in Lorraine**  
**Against U.S. Third Army**  
**Sep 1944**

