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OUR RIVER CROSSING

Combat Studies Institute
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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TITLE PAGE

OUR RIVER CROSSING

OFFENSIVE, DELIBERATE ASSAULT, RIVER CROSSING

US 6TH ARMORED DIVISION
VS
GERMAN 167TH VOLKSGRENADIER DIVISION

FEBRUARY 1945

PREPARED BY: STAFF GROUP B, SECTION 16
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MAY 1984

ABSTRACT

COMMON REFERENCE: OUR RIVER CROSSING

TYPE OPERATIONS: Offensive, Deliberate Assault, River Crossing

OPPOSING FORCES: U.S. 6th Armored Division

GERMAN 167th Volksgrenadier Division

SYNOPSIS: Action around the Our River bridgehead in February 1945 by the 6th Armored Division was an effort to divert Germans from an attack by the U.S. XII Corps. Nevertheless, this action provided a basis for penetrating the West Wall. As a follow up to the Allied march across France, the pace slowed as units neared Germany. The lessons of the Combined Arms team in securing and exploiting a heavily defended bridgehead are clearly demonstrated.

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BATTLE

PART A

SYNOPSIS OF THE BATTLE

This is an analysis of the deliberate river crossing conducted by an armored division in the European theater of operations during World War II. The crossing of the OUR River by the United States 6th Armored Division during the period 5-8 February 1945 provides the student of military history and combat operations with a classic case of an opposed deliberate river crossing operation. This battle clearly demonstrates the lessons to be learned in employing a Combined Arms team in securing and exploiting a heavily defended bridgehead.

At the conclusion of the ARDENNES Campaign the Allies had defeated a strong German counteroffensive by 26 January 1945. Allied forces were arrayed against the Germans along a north-south line west of the OUR River along the German border. These Allied forces were poised to resume the offensive into the German heartland. This offensive was designed to be the final overwhelming strike which would cause the complete collapse and surrender of Nazi Germany.

The 6th U.S. Armored Division, belonging to III Corps, Third U.S. Army, 12th Army Group, was deployed on a 12 mile front along a high ridge between the CLERF and OUR Rivers from LIELER to UBER

EISENBACH on 27 January 1945. This ridge was nicknamed "skyline drive". The Division conducted aggressive patrolling between its positions and the OUR River to prevent enemy infiltration and prepared plans to cross the river and continue the attack to the northeast. The Corps mission at this time was to continue the attack to clear enemy from the west bank of the OUR, to maintain an aggressive defense, and to prepare to attack to the east on Army order. (3:204)

On 4 February 1945, Corps extended the 6th Armored Division sector one mile to the north in order to realign units because of the shift of VIII Corps northward in preparation for its assault across the OUR and against the SIEGFRIED LINE or WEST WALL. The VIII Corps offensive was to be Third Army's main effort. On 5 February, 6th Armored Division received orders from III Corps to plan for and conduct a reconnaissance in force across the OUR River during the night of 6-7 February. The Division was to establish a bridgehead on the east bank of the OUR River and maintain the bridgehead in order to facilitate future operations to the east.

It appeared that the SIEGFREID LINE was inadequately manned on the Corps front. Corps further believed that the bulk of enemy strategic reserves east of the OUR had been withdrawn. (4:36) Four crossing sites over the OUR had been chosen by reconnaissance parties. Division chose Reserve Command to

establish the bridgehead because it was most familiar with the terrain.

Reserve Command planned to make the crossing with two infantry battalions and establish a bridgehead on the high ground north of DAHNEN. Due to a thaw, the OUR River was swollen to several times its normal width and was flowing at the rate of 15 miles per hour. A relatively minor stream had become a major obstacle.

In a well planned and executed operation blessed with a certain amount of luck, crossings at two sites were successfully accomplished by reinforced rifle companies. These crossings were accomplished above and below the KALBORN-DAHNNEN road. In spite of the rising river, which increased in width by fifteen feet during the ensuing 24 hours, three foot bridges, two pontoon bridges, and a suspension bridge were established. (4:36) Despite the fact that the suspension bridge was destroyed by enemy mortar fire shortly after its erection, a bridgehead two miles wide and one mile deep was firmly established by 8 February.

This specific operation deserves study because it shows how a major and difficult obstacle can be successfully negotiated. The 6th Armored Division accomplished its mission of an opposed night river crossing. Elements contributing to this outcome were

detailed planning, the prudent task organization using the proper mix of combat arms, combat support and combat service support assets, and effective operation security. There are many lessons for today's soldier to learn about river crossing operations by Combined Arms teams through the study of this battle. This is the significance of this operation and the purpose for which this paper is written.

PART B

SOURCE MATERIALS

General knowledge concerning operations in the European theater were obtained principally from the following sources: THE LAST OFFENSIVE by Charles B. MacDonald, EISENHOWER'S LIEUTENANTS by Russell F. Weigley, HISTORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR by B. H. Liddell Hart, and THE WEST POINT ATLAS OF AMERICAN WARS edited by BG Vincent J. Esposito. These are all academic works by noted historians. They present background material useful in putting the OUR River crossing into its proper perspective. Based on the academic credentials of these authors the works are believed to be objective and unbiased, although all of these individuals are from nations which contributed to the Allied forces. The best bibliographies are to be found in THE LAST OFFENSIVE and EISENHOWER'S LIEUTENANTS. THE SECOND WORLD WAR, by Basil Collier

provided additional general information, exceptionally good in gaining insight into the thought process used in strategy development. This work contains an overview of the major battles and campaigns. It is historically accurate and well documented.

The AFTER ACTION REPORT, THIRD U.S. ARMY: 1 August 1944 - 9 May 1945 gives the combat history of Patton's organization, of which the 6th Armored was part. It is a primary source in determining how the operations of the 6th Armored Division contributed to the overall mission accomplishments of its parent Corps, and the Third U.S. Army. These records are the combat accounts, reports, and orders of the American officers directly involved in combat operations. It is divided into two volumes, Volume I entitled The Operation and Volume II entitled Staff Section Reports.

Specific information pertaining to details of actions of the 6th Armored Division was found in COMBAT RECORD OF THE SIXTH ARMORED DIVISION - E.T.O. edited by Major Clyde J. Burk, Assistant G-3, and COMBAT HISTORY OF THE SUPER SIXTH, compiled by the staff of the 6th Armored Division. These are primary sources based upon official records, reports, and the personal recollections and experiences of the senior leadership and staff of the 6th Armored Division. These works were published soon after the cessation of hostilities in Europe. The primary motivation in the publication of these books appears to be a desire to record for posterity the contributions made by the 6th

Armored Division and , as such, can be considered to be biased in their approaches. Even considering this fact, these works are valuable sources of first-hand data concerning the 6th Armored Division.

A student research report entitled ARMOR IN River CROSSING was done in March of 1950 by The Armored School at Fort Knox, Kentucky. This report contains 32 pages of analysis of the deliberate river crossing of the 6th Armored Division and provides some conclusions and recommendations on this operation. It is interesting to note that one of the sources listed in the Bibliography for this report is a letter from the Commander of the 6th Armored Division during the operation, Major General Grow.

Information pertaining to Volksgrenadier divisions, their origin, intended purpose, equipment and personnel was found in MG Hellmuth Reinhardt's study entitled THE VOLKSGRENADIER DIVISION AND THE VOLKSTURM and the supplementary studies written on 22 September and 7 November 1950. The most detailed report pertaining to the combat history of the 167th Volksgrenadier Division which opposed the 6th Armored Division on the OUR river was found in a 16 page translated report entitled REPORT ON THE PARTICIPATION OF THE 167TH VG DIV, THE 59TH DIV, AND THE CORPS GROUP "HOECKER" IN THE ARDENNES CAMPAIGN. It provided the best insight into the actual mission, disposition, morale of the 167th

VGD.

The WEEKLY INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY for the week ending 11 February 1945, published by Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, gave strategic intelligence and a general rating of the 167th VGD.

SECTION II

THE STRATEGIC SETTING

PART A

GENERAL BACKGROUND

World War II can be considered to have become an irreversible event with the German occupation of the Rhineland in 1936. (7:701) Under the Nazi regime, the German government was looking to reestablish the Fatherland as a self-sufficient nation on the European continent. Moreover, there was also a desire to return Germany to its former position of power in the world of nations. This could only be accomplished by expanding geographically so that Germany could increase the markets available for its manufactured goods and become agriculturally self-sufficient. It was not the intent of Germany at this point in time to engage in a major war. (7:704) The Western European nations, Britain and France, could see some degree of moral justification in this move into the Rhineland and allowed it to pass without opposition. This, as the world would see all too clearly in hindsight, was only to be the first step of Germany's expansionist policy in search of "Lebensraum".

Seizure of the Rhineland was followed in 1938 by the annexation of Austria and the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia. Again these moves were unopposed by the West. In March 1939, Hitler occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakia. This was to be the last bloodless conquest.

Following the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the British government allied itself with Poland and Rumania in the event of hostile German moves toward these nations. This was a rash alliance as Poland and Rumania were too distant for Britain to realistically be able to assist them militarily. Only Russia was located in a position to provide assistance. Although the British made half-hearted attempts to secure assurances from Russia for intervention on behalf of Poland, Hitler was able to persuade Stalin to sign a nonaggression pact on 23 August 1939 which ruled out any Russian support. (5:Section 2)

On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Two days later, Britain declared war on Germany in fulfillment of its guarantees to Poland. France reluctantly followed Britain's lead within hours. Poland was completely overrun within one month.

The next six months were quiet. In 1940, Germany occupied neutral Norway forestalling Britain's plans for gaining control of the area. On 10 May, Germany struck against the Low Countries and France. The British and French military forces on the European continent were routed. Total disaster was only averted by the narrow escape of British forces at Dunkerque.

At this time Britain was the only remaining active opponent of Nazi Germany. Britain's military capability was marginal at

best, with the exception of her navy. Nazi Germany now turned its attention to the East where it felt that the massed Russian armies were a potent threat to Germany's rear. On June 22, 1941 German forces attacked into Russia. The offensive bogged down before reaching its objective - Moscow. Winter 1941-42 in Russia was a severe drain on Nazi Germany's war machine.

The United States entered the war in December 1941 as a result of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The United States declared war on Japan and on Germany, both of whom were members of the Axis Powers. Upon entry into the war, the U.S. pursued a Germany first policy. Our national strategic objective was to mount an offensive on the European continent which would culminate with the total defeat of German military forces on their own homeland. This invasion was not to occur until June 6, 1944.

PART B

ALLIED CAMPAIGNS IN EUROPE

In a series of campaigns conducted between the June 6, 1944 landings and late January 1945, the Allies reconquered France and the Low Countries. These campaigns were the Normandy Campaign, 6 June to 18 July; the Brittany Campaign, 18 July to 17 September; the Seille River Campaign, 17 September to 7 November; the Saar River Campaign, 8 November to 24 December; and the Ardennes

Campaign, 25 December to 26 January 1945. At the conclusion of these operations, the Allies found themselves facing the West Wall on the border of Germany.(4:25-34)

The Allied advance during the summer and fall of 1944 across the European continent had been extremely successful. The German army had suffered heavy losses in both men and material. The German counteroffensive in the Ardennes in December and January used up the last available large body of trained reserves leaving the West Wall thinly defended. (8:60)

Following defeat of the German counteroffensive, there was great debate at Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces Europe (SHAFE) concerning Allied strategy for the next campaign. The Allies had insufficient forces to mount simultaneous offensives north and south of the Ardennes against the West Wall. Furthermore, there was debate raging between Montgomery, the senior British ground commander in SHAFE, who advocated advance into Germany along a narrow front, and the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces, Eisenhower, who favored attack along a broad front.

Eisenhower eventually was forced to adopt a variation of the narrow front strategy due to the shortage of forces. The main effort was to be made by Montgomery's Twenty-First Army Group north of the Ardennes. The Ninth U.S. Army was to be made available to Montgomery from the Twelfth Army Group under

Bradley. Bradley's mission was to protect the southern flank of Montgomery's forces during their advance. Bradley was not happy with this decision.

PART C

THE EIFEL CAMPAIGN

Bradley, with the backing of Patton, proposed that the Twelfth Army Group conduct a limited offensive against the WEST WALL into the EIFEL area. This had the advantages of avoiding an Allied pause in offensive operations and denying the Germans time to regroup, thus capitalizing on German expectations of an Allied offensive in the north, and assisting the northern offensive by posing a serious threat south of the Ardennes by the Twelfth Army Group. Additionally, this limited offensive would outflank and bypass the critical ROER River Dams which controlled the flow of the ROER River. (8:56-57)

The Supreme Commander consented to the limited offensive proposed by Bradley with the qualification that it was not a substitute for the Twenty-First Army Group's major offensive. Conduct of offensive actions along the entire line of contact was more in line with Eisenhower's personal inclinations. He saw seizing intermediate objectives along the RHINE River as a necessary part of the general buildup before a major offensive could be conducted further into the German homeland. Eisenhower

also decided to allow Bradley to retain control of the Ninth Army and its Divisions during the initial stages of his campaign. (8:57)

The EIFEL is a heavily forested area forty-five miles deep and seventy-five miles long. It is generally situated between the cities of AACHEN in the north and TRIER in the south. Rivers in the area can generally be categorized as minor streams. Included in this category are the OUR, PREUM, AHR, and the ROER Rivers. These rivers were obstacles to east-west movement because of their steep banks and deep twisting cuts. Key cities in the EIFEL are BITBURG and PREUM. Also contained in the northern portion of the EIFEL is an area of dense forest known as the HURTIGEN Forest.

Bradley's plan was to avoid the HURTIGEN forest and advance along a narrow ten to twelve mile front. His intelligence was that the fortified zone of the West Wall was shallow and thinly defended. The first phase of the campaign was to be a frontal attack by the First U.S. Army to penetrate the West Wall from MONSCHAU to LUETZKAMPEN. Main effort within First Army was to be the XVIII Airborne Corps attacking astride the LOSHEIM GAP. Third U.S. Army had the mission of protecting the southern flank of First Army. (8:58)

The limited offensive by the Twelfth Army Group began on 27

January 1945 in extremely adverse weather conditions. Moves against the West Wall proper did not begin until the fifth day of the campaign - 1 February 1945. The Wall was reached one day later. Due to the terrible weather; first extreme cold followed by a heavy snowfall and then a rapid unseasonable thaw, the OUR River had become a significant obstacle. On 1 February, Bradley was ordered by the Supreme Allied Commander to cancel the offensive into the EIFEL and shift 5 Divisions to the Ninth U.S. Army which would then be shifted to the Twenty-First Army Group. This order was the result of pressure from Montgomery and Eisenhower's conviction that the best route of advance was in the north against the industrial area of the RUHR. The Twelfth Army Group was to go on the defensive except in the sector of the First U.S. Army which was given the mission of seizing the ROER River dams and protecting the right flank of the Ninth Army.

Discussions between Eisenhower and Bradley resulted in an informal modification of the terms of the 1 February order. Bradley was to be allowed to continue the EIFEL offensive until 10 February with the objective of gaining a line from PREUM to GEMEUND. Third Army under Patton was to conduct "probing attacks" throughout its sector to prevent the enemy from shifting resources to reinforce his defenses against the main effort in the north. It was well understood by Bradley that headquarters Third Army called these "probing attacks" the "defensive-offensive", and that to Patton the term was merely a

euphemism for a major attack. (8:68)

Third Army orders of 3 February 1945 specified the following missions:

1. Continue the attack to seize PREUM.
2. Drive northeast to seize BITBURG.
3. Be prepared to continue the attack to the Rhine.

(4:32-36)

At this time, Third Army was ordered to release two divisions to the Ninth Army. Patton changed his mission from that of flank protection of the First Army to clearance of the EIFEL and seizure of the cities of PREUM and BITBURG. The mission of VIII Corps, Third U.S. Army was to breach the West Wall along an eleven mile front on 6 February. III Corps, Third U.S. Army was given the mission of seizing VIANDEN in order to prevent the Germans from shifting forces north and south. Sixth Armored Division (U.S.) was assigned to III Corps at this time and was part of the force given the mission of eliminating the VIANDEN Bulge. In addition, the 6th Armored Division also had the mission of establishing a bridgehead over the OUR River on 6 February 1945 as a diversion for the XII Corps attack, also part of the Third Army offensive.

PART D

HISTORY OF THE 6TH ARMORED DIVISION (U.S.)

The 6th Armored Division was activated at Fort Knox, Kentucky on 15 February 1942. The first division commander was Major General William H. H. Morris, Jr. It was organized originally along the lines of the "heavy-type" armored division concept which evolved in 1941, patterned after the pre-1940 German panzer divisions. The 6th Armored Division began its growth by using as a nucleus 2,601 officers and enlisted men as cadre, chosen from the already existing 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions.

The "heavy-type" organization was formalized with a TOE on 1 March 1942 which consisted of 14,620 officers and enlisted men, 252 medium tanks and 158 light tanks. The tanks were organized into two regiments with each regiment consisting of one light and two medium tank battalions and totaled approximately 4,848 men. The infantry portion of the division consisted of a three-battalion regiment with 2,389 personnel. The "armored artillery" had three battalions, with a total strength of 2,127. The division staff, engineers, a headquarters company, and service troops completed the structure of the division. The notion that tank companies should outnumber the infantry companies by a ratio of two to one was founded in the perception that the German panzer success had proven the utility of the tank. (12:17)

The American version of the German panzer divisions was improved through the addition of facets designed to give more mobility and increased flexibility. The American armored division mounted all their "armored infantry" in half-tracked APCs and all fifty-four pieces of artillery were self-propelled 105mm howitzers. To provide more flexibility, the division headquarters was provided the assets for two "combat command" subheadquarters which gave the division the capability to create flexible task forces, as needed. Each combat command was commanded by a brigadier general.

The 6th Armored Division was moved soon after its activation to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas. There, the cadre received and trained the "recruits" that arrived in trainloads. Basic training and advanced individual training was given by the division. In August 1942, the Division conducted maneuvers in Louisiana. This period provided excellent training in conducting night operations and traversing difficult terrain under adverse (rainy) weather conditions.

The division returned to Camp Chaffee in late September and was almost immediately redeployed to the Mojave Desert on 10 October for desert training. After five months of full-scale maneuvers, the 6th Armored Division moved to Camp Cooke, California. During the ten months at Camp Cooke, the division

practiced "street fighting", close infiltration courses under live fire, hand-to-hand combat, swimming tests at Santa Barbara, extensive reconnaissance training, further rifle practice and qualifications, and field exercises. In June 1943, Major General Robert W. Grow assumed command of the Division. MG Grow retained this command throughout the participation of the 6th in WWII. (4:6-7)

In September 1943, the 6th Armored Division went through a reorganization and became structured as one of the "light-type" armored divisions. The impetus behind this change was given by the head of the Army Ground Forces, General McNair. McNair was convinced that the design of the German panzer divisions during the Russian campaign of 1941 reflected doctrinal change due to combat experience. In fact, a reduction in the number of tanks in the panzer divisions reflected the inability of tank production to keep up with losses. Mobility, not combat power, became the new focal point for the design of American armored divisions. (12:18)

Under this organization, the Division had an equal number of tank, infantry and artillery battalions of three each. Total personnel strength was reduced to 10,937. Each of the tank battalions had 729 officers and men, each of the armored infantry battalions had 1,001, and each of the artillery battalions 534 personnel. Each tank battalion now had three companies of medium

tanks plus one company of light tanks for reconnaissance purposes. A tank company consisted of seventeen tanks - five in each of three platoons and two at company headquarters. The light concept had 263 tanks compared to 390 under the heavy concept. (12:18)

In January 1944, the 6th Armored Division was alerted for shipment to the European Theater of Operations. By the 25 of February 1944, the Division debarked in Glasgow, Scotland and moved to England where it was to remain for four months until the invasion of Normandy. On 18 July 1944, two years and five months after its activation, the leading elements of the 6th Armored Division landed at UTAH BEACH on the NORMANDY PENINSULA.

During the Brittany Campaign from 18 July to 17 September 1944, the 6th Armored Division drove a distance of 230 miles through the center of BRITTANY PENINSULA in the Allied advance. The 6th Armored Division killed approximately 4,000 enemy troops, captured 6,270 troops, and captured 1,000 guns, combat and other vehicles that were either knocked out or abandoned in the 20 mile-wide sector. (4:21) During the Seille River Campaign (17 September - 7 November), the Saar River Campaign (8 November - 24 December) and the Ardennes Campaign (25 December - 26 January 1945), the 6th Armored Division remained in continuous combat with the exception of a four day period as Third Army Reserve. By 27 January, the entire Third U.S. Army had been stabilized

along the ridge nicknamed "Skyline Drive" facing the SIEGFRIED LINE fortifications. It was during this period, called the Dasburg-Prum River Campaign (27 January - 8 March 1945), that the crossing of the OUR River occurred.

PART E

VOLKSGRENADIER DIVISIONS

The volksgrenadier divisions (VGD) were regular formations of the German Army. The first of these divisions appeared in the summer of 1944. Their purpose was to give the German Reich additional military forces to counter the Allied offensive. The fundamental building block for the VGD was a cadre of combat-experienced officers and non-commissioned officers taken from German divisional combat units that had been dissolved. In fact, these remnants of particularly battle-tried divisions were used as "shadow divisions" on to which the volksgrenadier division structure was overlaid. To this cadre base were added fresh, young, enlisted soldiers. (9:8-10)

Administratively, the VGDs were aligned under the Himmler's Reichsfuehrer SS. This, supposedly, was to insure their absolute loyalty under Hitler's rule to reduce the chance of there being another assassination attempt on the Fuehrer's life. The goal of the VGD was to have an elite unit which possessed maximum firepower with minimum personnel and equipment. The equipment was supposed to have been the newest and best equipment that

Germany had, to date, produced. Antitank defense was to be one of its major strengths. The VGDA were thus designed to provide an adequate level of defense to stop the Allied advance on a broad front. The training time required to prepare this division for combat was estimated to have been a minimum of three months. Because of the pressure to deploy forces, this training period was not achieved in many divisions. Additionally, due to widespread equipment shortages, the volksgrenadier divisions had equipment deficiencies that prevented them from reaching their full design potential.

The organization of the VGD, in terms of a Table of Organization and Equipment, was never finalized prior to the end of the war. A typical VGD consisted of the normal staff of an infantry division, three grenadier regiments, and combat support and service support organizations. The total personnel strength was approximately 10,072. The division contained 54 heavy machineguns, 369 light machineguns, and 2,064 submachineguns. (9-32)

Each grenadier regiment had one infantry gun company with one heavy and three light platoons, one motorized antitank company with three platoons of three 7.5 cm motorized antitank guns each, two grenadier battalions with three rifle companies and one heavy weapons company, and the normal regimental staff, including a signal communications platoon, an engineer platoon, and a bicycle

platoon. The VGD had one artillery regiment with three light (10.5 cm & 7.5 cm) and one heavy (15 cm) battalion. As a reconnaissance element, one fusilier company equipped with bicycles and augmented by a heavy weapons platoon was used in the VGD. The VGD contained antitank units which varied widely from VGD to VGD because of equipment availability. One possible structure consisted of a battalion staff with communications section, one company of heavy antitank guns (twelve 7.5 cm or 7.62 cm guns), one assault gun company (10 guns) and one antiaircraft company with nine 3.7 cm or twelve 2 cm antiaircraft machine guns. The VGD was rounded out with one engineer battalion, one signal battalion, a field replacement battalion with total strength of about 700 men, and supply troops similar to those found in a normal infantry division. (9:10-12)

The 167. Volksgrenadier Division was the primary organization which opposed the 6th Armored Division during the OUR River crossing. On the 29th of January 1945, the 167th occupied positions in the SEIGFREID LINE east of the OUR River. At that time, it was commanded by Major General Hoecker who later became the Corps commander.

v

The West Wall was generally in a state of shambles. Some of the minefields that had been laid in 1939 were covered by snow or wire entanglements and some had deteriorated and would not detonate. New mines were generally not obtainable. Most of the

pillboxes had been destroyed by Allied bombing and artillery fire. Shortages of equipment including clothing and food were major factors which detracted from the combat effectiveness of the German soldier.

The 167. VGD had only two regiments with two infantry battalions each. The artillery regiment, due to both the lack of good roads and the availability of prime movers, had only three battalions with two batteries each (two light and one heavy). According to MG Hoecker, the soldiers of the 167. VGD fought tenaciously despite these conditions because of the importance of this line of defense. (6:14-19) It is within this strategic setting that the battle across the OUR River was fought. (6:14-19)

SECTION III

THE TACTICAL SITUATION AND FIGHT

PART A

THE MAJOR PHASES OF THE BATTLE

As a part of the United States III Army Corps, the 6th Armored Division had knifed its way steadily east from Bastogne. By the 25th of January, the division had gained its objective on the high ridge between the CLERF and the OUR Rivers. The next operation would be the crossing of the OUR River and the establishing of a bridgehead from which the division could assault the SIEGFRIED Line. The OUR River crossing was accomplished in three phases - the planning and preparation, the crossing, and the consolidation of the bridgehead.

SUBSECTION 1

THE PLANNING AND PREPARATION PHASE

The division received orders from Corps to conduct a reconnaissance in force across the OUR River on the night of 6-7 February. The division commander prepared the following concept of operation.

First Objective: Seizure and securing of two bridge sites on the east bank of the OUR River by two reinforced infantry battalions under the Reserve Command.

Intermediate Objective: Establishing a bridgehead on the east bank of the OUR River by the Reserve Command from which the remainder of the division could assault the SIEGFRIED Line.

Final Objective: Penetration of the SIEGFRIED Line.

Tactical Plan: A night crossing by infantry using assault boats and the rapid expansion of the bridgeheads covering each bridge site to form a consolidated division bridgehead. The entire division reinforced

to achieve the final objective with CCB passing through the Reserve Command and leading the effort to penetrate the SIEGFRIED Line. (2:34)

A detailed study of air photographs and information gathered by patrols was conducted. Then, considering that the division Reserve Command had been holding the division front and was thoroughly familiar with the terrain, the commander formulated his plan and issued the following order.

The Reserve Command would cross the OUR River beginning the night 6-7 February with two infantry battalions and establish a bridgehead on the high ground north of DAHNEN. A vigorous reconnaissance would be conducted along the west bank of the OUR River to determine suitable crossing sites for the assault troop; three sites would be selected. The operation would be initiated during the early hours of darkness with emphasis on stealth and secrecy. No artillery preparations would be fired. CCB would be prepared to assume command of the troops in the bridgehead east of the OUR River on division order and CCA would be prepared to assume command of all troops on the west bank of the river on order. (2:34)

The Reserve Command Commander utilizing infantry and mixed infantry and engineer patrols, extended the reconnaissance throughout the zone. The primary mission of these patrols was to locate routes of approach, attack positions and suitable crossing sites.

Reconnaissance in the area was hampered by close hostile surveillance of the area. Movement by friendly forces in forward areas during daylight received prompt attention from hostile mortar and artillery fire. It was soon evident that reconnaissance would be limited to the hours of darkness.

During the night of 5 February 1945 three crossing sites were selected, two in the north numbered one and two and another in the south numbered three. Routes of approach and attack positions were

determined and located on the ground.

The assault plan indicated the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion, commencing at H-hour would cross the OUR River at crossing site one (P855686) and crossing site two (P853683), seize and secure the high ground at LANGFUKR (P870673).

The 9th Armored Infantry Battalion, commencing at H-hour would cross the OUR River with one reinforced company in the vicinity of (P851651) and advance generally east and seize the town of DAHNEN (P863650).

The 50th Armored Infantry Battalion initially constituted the reserve that was alerted to move within two hours across the OUR River to occupy the ground seized by the assault battalions.

Due to adverse weather and terrain conditions, which rendered approaches impossible to wheeled vehicles, the assault boats were located at the junction of the DAHNEN-KALBORN road. This necessitated the hand carrying of assault boats over one and a half miles of steep, icy mountain trails to selected attack positions.

The Engineer Plan stipulated that the 25th Armored Engineer Battalion supported by the 1123d Engineer Construction Group would provide engineer support for the crossing operation.

Company A 25th Armored Engineer Battalion would support the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion by providing and operating assault boats, and the construction of foot bridges at the battalion's crossing site.

Company C, 25th Armored Engineer Battalion, would support the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion by providing and operating assault boats, and constructing foot bridges at the battalion's crossing site.

The 25th Armored Engineer Battalion less companies A and C reinforced by the supporting corps engineer unit would prepare and maintain avenues of approach, construct a Bailey bridge at the old bridge site on the DAHNEN-KALBORN road, and provide any additional support required by the assault battalions.

The allocation of crossing means provided assault boats (the exact number cannot be determined) for the assault elements, foot bridges not to exceed two per assault battalion for the supporting foot elements,

and a Bailey bridge for the crossing of vehicles.

A carefully prepared fire support plan indicated the 69th Tank Battalion would provide direct fire support to the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion and be prepared to cross the OUR River on order.

68th Tank Battalion would provide direct fire support to the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion and be prepared to cross one medium tank company over the OUR River on orders. The tank company would be attached to the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion upon reaching the east bank.

86th Cavalry Recon Squadron Mechanized would support the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion by fire from positions on the west bank of the OUR River.

Battery A, 777th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, (-) would be prepared to move one platoon on order to the vicinity of the bridge site and provide protection for the construction of the bridge.

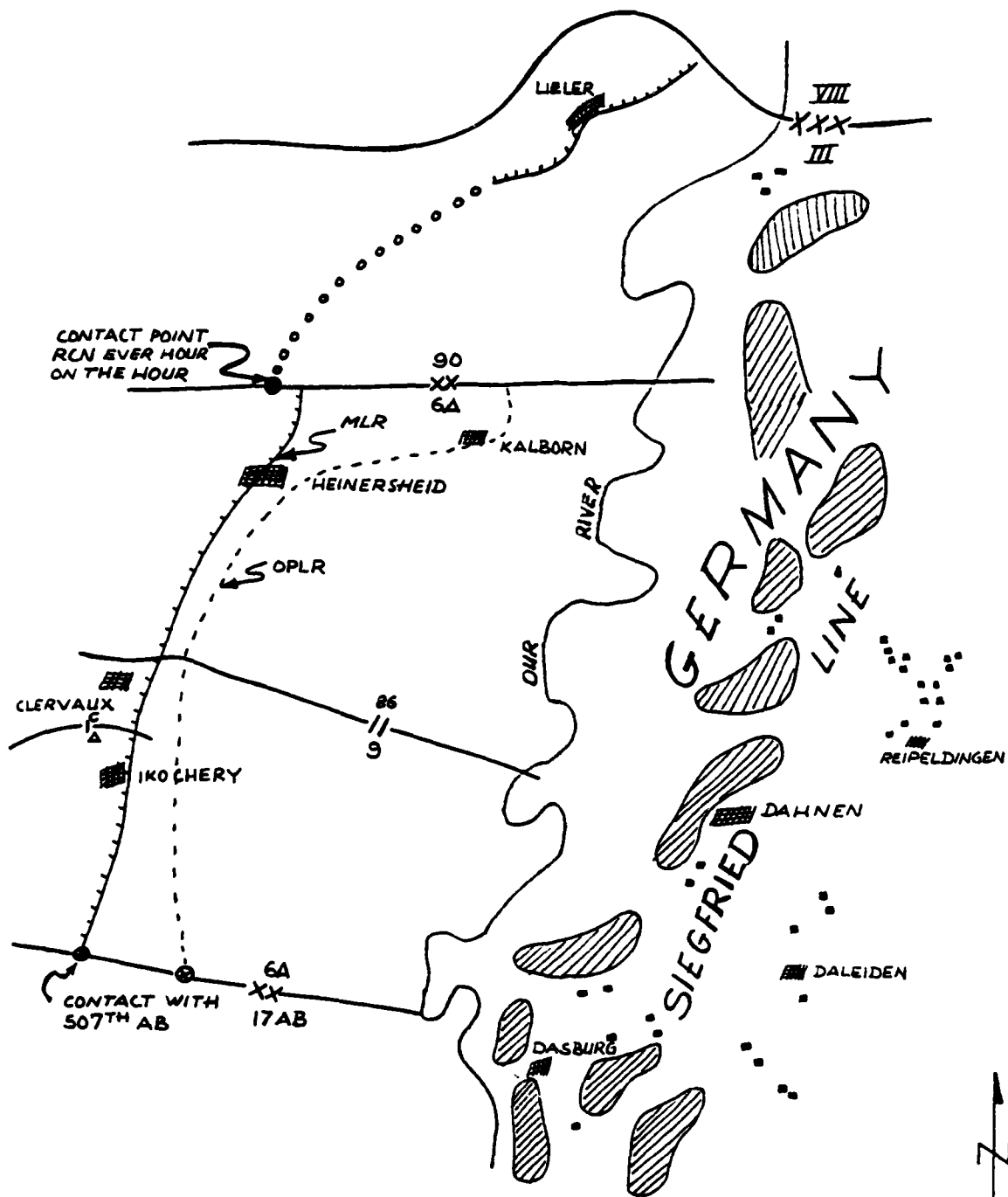
The 212th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (P803706) would be in direct support of the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion.

The 231st Armored Field Artillery Battalion would be in direct support of the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion.

The 128th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (P901678) was placed in general support of the crossing operations. (2:35-38)

With crossing sites established, engineer support adequately apportioned, and fire support planning completed, the planning phase ended and the 6th Division was prepared to begin the crossing. Although the artillery support was not to be used initially to achieve surprise, it had been planned, and, this was a classic combined Arms River Crossing Operation. The map on the next page shows the situation on 7 February.

OUR RIVER LINE



SCALE: 1 / 200.000

SUBSECTION 2

THE CROSSING PHASE

To fully realize the military significance of the OUR River Crossing, the reader must first understand the existing weather condition and terrain associated with this operation. The thaw that began on the first of February had caused the river to swell beyond its normal banks and increase the river's rate of flow to 10-15 miles per hour. The river was approximately 10 ft. high and the approaches on both sides were rough and steep. Temperature during the operation averaged slightly below freezing.

A night reconnaissance conducted on 5 February determined there were three suitable crossing sites. The northern two (P855686, P853683) sites numbered one and two respectively, were secured by the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion. The southern site (P851651) would be secured by the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion. Both units were under the control of the 6th Division's Reserve Command which had been given the mission to secure bridgeheads for the subsequent crossing of the Division Combat Command A (CCA) and Combat Command B (CCB). Upon crossing, CCA and CCB would attack into the SIEGFRIED Line. Two companies of the 25th Armored Engineer Battalion were to support the 44th and 9th battalions by providing and operating assault boats and constructing foot bridges at the battalion crossing sites. The remainder of the 25th Engineer Bn, augmented by the Corps engineer unit, would prepare and maintain avenues of approach to the crossing sites, construct a Bailey Bridge at the old bridge site on the DAHNEN-KALBORN road,

and provide any additional support required by the assault battalion.

The 69th and 68th Tank Battalion would provide direct fire support for the 9th and 44th Armored Infantry Battalions respectively for the actual crossing. One field artillery battalion was placed in direct support of each assault battalion. A third artillery battalion was placed in general support of the entire crossing operation. Battery A, 777 Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion (-) would be prepared to move one platoon, on order, to the vicinity of the bridging site and provide protection.

By 061630 Feb 45, the Reserve Command had established its new CP from which it would control the operation. All subordinate units of the Reserve Command were ready and poised for the river crossing which would commence at EENT.

Each crossing will be discussed separately.

A. Sites 1 and 2 by the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion:

Due to the heavy icing conditions, vehicular traffic was restricted to primary and secondary roads. Consequently, the heavy assault boats could only be trucked to a point approximately two miles from the river. To further complicate matters, some of the boats were found to be 3/4 filled with water of which the upper 3 to 4 inches were solid ice. The task of chopping the ice and emptying the water was hazardous and time consuming. The infantry-engineer teams carried the 500 pound boats over rough and difficult terrain finally arriving at the crossing site at 0200 hrs 7 Feb. At this time, the German defenders were completely unaware of any river crossing activities.

During one of several unsuccessful attempts to cross the swift river, a boat capsized but one soldier was able to swim to the far bank. A rifle grenade attached to a small line was fired across to the soldier who attached it to the far bank. Troop carrying boats were now able to breach the river by using the cable as a guide. The first boat load of infantry soldiers arrived on the far bank at 0715 hrs 7 Feb.

As daylight approached, it became evident why the enemy had not detected the crossing activities; the slopes on the far bank were so steep that the crossing site was in complete defilade. In addition, the German defense in this area was so thin that no patrols or observation posts were operating in a position to observe the activity in this area.

The ferry method was effective for quickly moving small groups across the river, but inadequate to support the entire battalion. Suspension and floating bridges were erected while the remainder of the 44th Bn returned to KALBORN to wait under cover until the bridging was completed.

The entire 44th Bn crossed prior to first light on the 8th of February. Elements of the battalion moved downstream to secure a bridgehead for additional bridging assets. Light resistance was met and the entire bridgehead area now spanned a mile and a half deep and two miles wide.

B. Site 3 by the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion:

The soldiers of the 9th Armored Infantry Bn experienced many of the same weather and terrain related problems as did the

44th Bn. Conversely, the 9th Bn received enemy mortar and small arms fire throughout their crossing operation. Assault boats successfully rowed across the surging river approximately one half hour before daylight. Crossing during daylight hours was halted after several boats were effectively engaged by enemy fire while attempting to cross. The battalion commander determined that units could only cross under the cover of darkness. The supporting engineer unit was given the mission to construct a bridge to hasten the movement of troops across the river which would again commence that night. In spite of aggressive efforts to complete the bridge that night, it was not completed until noon the following day. After receiving heavy mortar concentration during the crossing, the 9th Bn accomplished the crossing by 1500 hrs 8 Feb. By 1830 hrs that evening all three companies had completed a link-up and the bridgehead had been secured.

The Reserve Command ordered the 9th Bn to send a company north to affect the link-up with the bridgehead elements of the 44th. Contact was established between the two battalions and a continuous defensive line was tied in by 091830 Feb 45.

The crossing was conducted as it had been planned. As might be expected, the units encountered many different problems as they began to execute the plan at their respective crossing sites. In all cases, however, the unit leaders made the necessary adjustments to accomplish the mission successfully.

The 44th Armored Infantry Battalion, unopposed by enemy troops, had to fight unexpected problems with the engineer assault boats

and the river. However, the leaders took action to modify the plan when necessary. With an interesting blend of good luck and surprise, the 44th was able to cross with few casualties. Fortunately, the terrain had masked the 44th action from enemy observation. In addition, the 44th operated undetected because the Germans had placed no observation posts and operated no patrols in the area; thus, the 44th was able to achieve tactical surprise.

Although the river was less of a problem, the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion was not entirely lucky; they had to fight their way across the river. The action was delayed because the commander decided to cross at night to prevent enemy observation. Darkness and the morning fog provided concealment for the engineers to construct the bridges and the companies to cross the river.

The engineers, with their bridging assets and imaginative crossing techniques, played a significant role in the crossing. Their actions facilitated the crossing and made possible resupply and support operations.

SUBSECTION 3

CONSOLIDATION OF THE BRIDGEHEAD

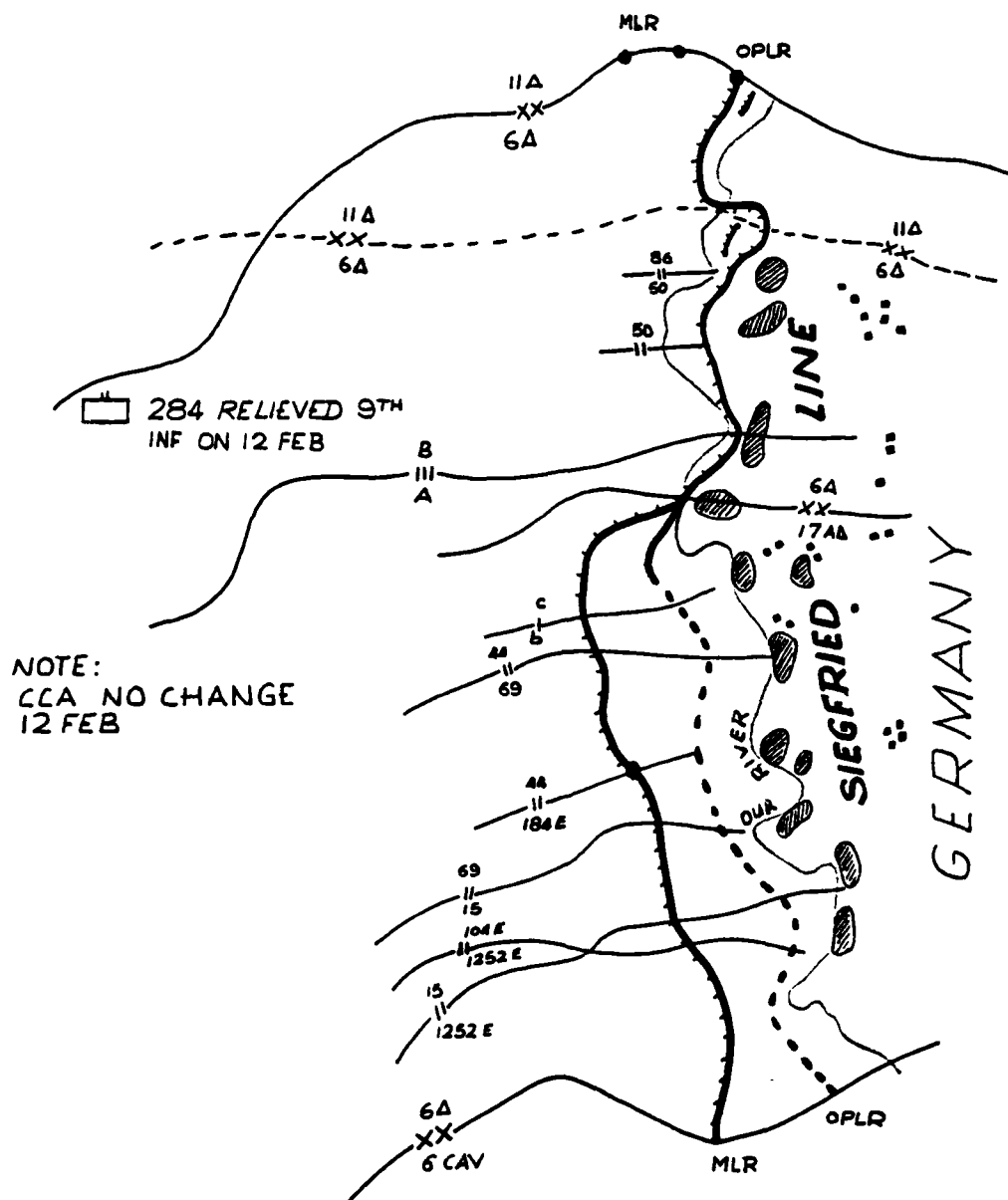
Initially, the bridgehead that was established at each crossing site was gradually expanded. Eventually all sites were linked together. The 44th quickly established their bridgehead and immediately began vigorous reconnaissance and combat operations to eliminate fortifications which could observe and fire on the intended Bailey Bridge site. By 1030 on 8 February, the 44th had

expanded its bridgehead to a mile and a half deep and two miles wide. The 9th was delayed by enemy fire. However, it was across by 1500 hours, repulsed a counterattack at 1740, and consolidated and established the bridgehead by 1830 on 8 February. With the build-up of troops across the river it was not possible to join the two bridgeheads, so Reserve Command ordered the battalion to send one company to the north to make and maintain contact with the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion. Contact was established and a continuous defensive line was tied in by 091830 February. (2:48)

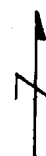
Thus, the three phases of the battle were complete. The plan had been a good one requiring only minor modification. The execution of the crossing, though hampered by the swollen river, was excellent. The 9th and 44th quickly established the bridgehead to facilitate the attack of the SIEGFRIED Line. The OUR River crossing is a classic demonstration of the value of engineers in a river crossing and of the ingenuity they can employ to overcome even the most treacherous obstacles.

The following map depicts units positions following the establishment of the bridgeheads east of the OUR River.

BRIDGEHEAD EAST OF OUR RIVER



——— AS OF 9 & 10 FEB
 ——— 112400 FEB
 - - - - - CHANGES IN AFFECT
 122400 FEB
 BDRY LINES OF NEW SECTORS
 NIGHT OF 13 & 14 FEB



SCALE: 1/100,000

PART B

THE KEY EVENTS

The OUR River crossing was lightly opposed action; thus, there were no turning points in the decisive action. The Germans were prevented from viewing the crossing by the inclement weather and the placement of their own troops. However, there were two key events which ensured success - the initial landing and the link-up of the bridgehead forces.

The initial landing in the 44th and 9th battalion areas was key because it established the initial foothold in enemy territory. Once the river had been crossed, particularly in the 44th's area, bridges and similar structures could be built to facilitate crossing by the remainder of the initial assault units.

Once the river had been breeched at the two crossing sites, consolidating the two bridgeheads was the final action that ensured success. The crossings in the 44th and 9th battalion areas were successful and individual bridgeheads were established. The bridgeheads were expanded and a continuous defensive line was formed; thus, the 6th Division had a base of operation on the German side of the OUR River.

Throughout the operation the leaders did an outstanding job of planning and adjusting as required. The plan was excellent; it integrated the required engineer support; it provided sufficient fire support; and it provided sufficient forces to each crossing site. As problems arose, the leaders modified the original plan and pressed on to success.

These key events were critical to the success of the river crossing. In addition, they provided a base to continue the attack against the SIEGFRIED Line. Thus, the key events had a significant impact on the war as well as the river crossing.

The following foldout page graphically depicts the key events from 5-9 Feb.

5 FEB 45

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 2

6TH AR DIVISION AND RES COMMAND	X CORPS ORDER TO RECON IN FORCE ACROSS OUR																						
	X INITIAL PLANNING: BY DIVISION COMMANDER																						
	X DIV CDR AND RES CMD CDR PLAN AT																						
9TH ARMORED INFANTRY	X MIXED INFANTRY AND ENGINEER PA																						
44TH ARMORED INFANTRY																							
SUPPORTING UNITS																							

6 FEB 45

4 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

IGHT OF: 6-7 FEB

X NEW RES: CMD CP AT HEINERSHEID

RES: CMD BOXHORN CP

ROLS RECON FOR CROSSING SITES, RTS OF APR AND ATK PSNS

X (DURING NIGHT) 3 SITES SELECTED, RTS OF APR AND ATK PSNS LOCATED

X BN IN RA

X CO C IN: FWD RA

X EN DUMP ASLT: BOATS AT ATK

X BN IN RA

X SUP: UNITS IN PSN

4 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 2

1193

X BOATS: APPROX. AT CROSSING SITE

§ 38: NE: (GNI NEV) X

! X CO: A BEGINS CROSSING: ATTEMPT

IN CO A FIRST INF ACROES

11 FIRST : MAN : ACROSS : X (MID-MORNING) CO : A ACROSS

;(MID-MORNING) 44TH(-) WITHDRAWS TO; KALBORN

```
% CONST: OF 2 FOOT BRIDGES: BEGINS
```

ASLT BOATS IN PSN

ELIYAHU FEBBY ESTABLISHMENT

8 FEB 45

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

X CO A ACROSS X CTR ATK REPULSED

X CO B BEGINS CROSSING

X CO B ACROSS

X 9TH ACROSS

10 FOOT BRIDGE

X FOOT BRIDGE COMPLETE X BRIDGEHEAD SECURED

X (PRE-DRAIN) 44TH ACROSS AND IN RSN

X (POST-DRAIN) 44TH BEGINS ATK

X 44TH ACROSS

X BRIDGEHEAD 1.5 MI DEEP X 2 MI WIDE

9 FEB 45

4 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 2

X CONTACT BETWEEN

9TH AND 44TH

CONTINUOUS DEFENSIVE

LINE ESTABLISHED

X CONTACT EST WITH: 17TH DIVISION

X FERRY ESTABLISHED

PART C

THE OUTCOME OF THE BATTLE

A clear cut tactical victory was enjoyed by the 6th Armored Division in its successful crossing of the OUR RIVER. Obviously the 167th Volksgrenadier Division did not succeed in its mission of stopping the eastern advance of the Allies at the WEST WALL along the SIEGFRIED LINE and the OUR River.

The 6th Armored Division was victorious due to a combination of factors. Among those factors was personnel strength. Although the 6th Armored Division and the 167th Volksgrenadier Division both had sustained heavy losses in the Battle of the Ardennes, the 6th had enjoyed a steady stream of replacements from D-Day until its withdrawal from combat in June of 1945. The 167th Volksgrenadier Division, however, had received replacements in "dribblets" (6:5). It began its defense of the OUR River with only two regiments of two battalions each and with the divisional support battalion and the recon battalion as its tactical reserves, (6:17). In the Weekly Intelligence Summary of SHAEF dated 11 February 1945, the 167th VGD was one of 13 volksgrenadier divisions to be rated as a "C"; 13 others were rated "B"; only one was rated as an "A" (11:back cover).

Organization and tactics were not the main problem of the 167th VGD nor the primary reason for the success of the 6th AD. MG Hans Hoecker, Commanding General of the 167th VGD criticized

American tactics for being too slow, and for not exploiting battlefield successes. Instead the Americans seemed to be "feeling their way" in and around German defenses in order to reduce loss of life. Tactics used by the 167th VGD in its defense of the OUR River could have been better employed had it been at full strength. Thinly deployed as it was, it relied upon the steep eastern banks of the river as a natural obstacle and did not have sufficient observation posts to detect the first attempted river crossings at 1900 on the evening of 6 February 1945 and did not detect the 6th Division's crossing until at least a company of Combat Team 9 was on the eastern bank around 0650 on 7 February (4:144). Had the various crossing sites been detected early on, and either artillery or machine gun fire been brought to bear, the 6th AD would have paid a much dearer price for its efforts to breach the WEST WALL.

Quantity and quality of weapons and equipment played a role in the victory of the 6th AD. MG Hoecker states:

"it was well known that the Americans were numerically superior, with regard to equipment even manifoldly superior, that they had had fully equipped and well-fed forces and, it must be admitted, absolute superiority in the air." (6:6)

Had the 167th VGD been fielded with the "latest and most effective weapons" that Germany produced, as originally intended, (9:8) and had it been organized with its normal three grenadier regiments instead of only two, it would have easily presented dangerous opposition to the 6th AD. However, due to its tremendous

equipment shortages it was no match for the American tank division.

Training was another important factor in the successful crossing of the OUR RIVER. The 6th AD had been formed in March 1944 and was well trained prior to its involvement in the European Theater. The 167th VGD had been formed in October, November, and December of 1944 from portions of the 17th Luftwaffe Field Division (6:2). One third of it had fought in battles in all theaters of the war, one third had undergone a short infantry training period, and one third had been speedily trained (6:4). Due to delayed assignments of personnel, badly needed maneuver training, combined arms training, and specialized training were lacking. One might also conclude, after the fact, that training in defensive riverine operations was also needed.

Disparity in leadership was not a contributing factor in the success of the 6th Armored Division. At the division commander level, MG Grow and MG Hoecker were equal adversaries. Leadership at the junior officer and non commissioned officer levels on both sides was essentially the same.

According to MG Hoecker, unit cohesion and morale were not a factor in his loss to the Americans. He states that although his troops were outnumbered and without sufficient rest their morale

was "first class" (6:17). Unit cohesion in the 6th AD was high as evidenced by their ability to rebuild destroyed bridges and maintain their momentum in the crossing as well as the enlargement of the bridgehead.

6th Armored Division had the edge in battlefield experience since it had been in combat since June 1944, whereas the 167th VGD was only organized and fully staffed two months prior to its mission of the defense of the WEST WALL. Although it had seen a lot of action at BASTOGNE, it still could not match the 6th AD in combat experience. However, in the opinion of the German Infantrymen "the fighting qualities of the American Infantrymen were poor." (6:12)

Without a doubt the 6th AD had the edge in quantity and quality of logistical support. Not only were supplies in the crumbling Third Reich at a minimum, the system of distribution was equally in a shambles. In MG Hoecker's own words, the "bringing up of supplies did not go well." (6:9)

Terrain and weather were a factor in the 6th AD's success. As mentioned above, because of the steep banks on the far side of the river the Germans had neglected to post OPs at the three points of the crossing. The dense fog on 6 and 7 February provided badly needed concealment for the engineers of the 6th AD (4:44).

The extreme fog was also a good bit of luck for the 6th AD in that it coincided exactly with the first two days of the crossing. Another factor which was in the Allies' favor was that time was on their side. They could pick the time and place to press their next offensive which was best suited to their overall strategy, and rely upon their superior equipment and personnel system to overwhelm the weakened German Army and the dwindling German supply system.

At first glance it would appear obvious that the 167th VGD did not accomplish its mission to retain the WEST WALL position and prevent the enemy from breaking through and going to the Rhine. The 167th VGD was successful, however, in sporadically offering stiff resistance to the 6th AD's advance as it heeded Hitler's instructions of "not giving up any position without fighting." Within materiel and personnel constraints, the 167th held out on the West Wall as long as it could. As can best be determined, it did fight the battle according to its commander's plans and intents.

At this point in the war, German procedures for treating and evacuating casualties were extremely poor. Many soldiers died on the battlefield due to loss of blood. All transportation assets and lines of communications were poor both to and from the front lines. The policy of fighting to the end left many German soldiers abandoned in pillboxes and cut off from all resupply and

medical support.

No mention was made as to how the 167th VGD handled, evacuated, and interrogated prisoners.

Although loss figures for just the crossing of the OUR River from 7 to 10 February were unable to be found, during the DASBURG-PRUN River Campaign which lasted from 27 January to 8 March, of which the OUR crossing was a part, the 6th Armored Division sustained 114 killed and 544 wounded (4:50). Figures on the 167th Volksgrenadier Division were not recorded except for the comments of MG Hoecker that "during the engagements [on the OUR River] combat strength decreased to 1/5." (6:18)

Opposing forces prepared for future operations with great difficulty. MG Hoecker complained that his division was unable to receive needed rest between the Battle of Bastogne and the defense of the OUR. His division was required to occupy defensive positions along a portion of the SIEGFRIED LINE which was in a state of shambles. Many of the pillboxes had been destroyed and many minefields laid five years earlier were unmarked or non functional. From its inception, the 167th VGD simply held out from one operation to the next as best they could with no replacements and were given new missions with little or no warning to adequately prepare.

SECTION IV

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION

PART A

IMMEDIATE

The battle during the crossing of the OUR River by the 6th Armored Division was immediately decisive in that it succeeded in providing a basis for the penetration of the German West Wall defenses. The action by the 6th Armored Division, planned as a diversionary attack in support of XII U.S. Corps, was successful in contributing to the subsequent exploitation of the weakened enemy forces and pursuit into the German homeland.

The penetration of enemy defenses was enhanced by well executed action by the 6th Armored Division in the face of comparatively light and disorganized resistance (with the exception of effective fire placed against the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion); the weakened German defenses were the result of inadequately manned fortifications, coupled with a failure to take advantage of defendable terrain and adverse weather conditions to block American advances.

The immediate effect on the outcome of the war was that the significant breach of German defense provided for follow-on opportunities for exploitation and pursuit of demoralized and weakened enemy forces; in one sense, the West Wall fortifications are thought to have provided vulnerable targets for the American Army more so than they provided viable defenses for the German Army.

Significant tactical advantages for U.S. Forces were attained in addition to follow on exploitation; most notable was the formation of a continuous U.S. defensive line to allow for consolidation of forces in preparation for continued eastward advance. Of significant disadvantage to the Germans was the disruption of their ability to conduct a planned, strongly fought withdrawal to contain allied advances.

The most important immediate consequence of this action was the attainment of U.S. tactical objectives which would allow the later attainment of the strategic objective of pursuit/destruction of enemy forces. The breach of German defenses likewise signaled the end of an orderly German withdrawal and further exasperated hopes of defending the German heartland.

PART B

LONG-TERM

The long term effects of this battle can best be put in perspective through looking at the strategy of both sides. The Allied Forces had attempted to attack on a broad front into the German heartland and seize the industrial Ruhr and Saar areas. The main effort was to be north of the Ardennes. The northern area was selected for several reasons. First, the SIEGFRIED line south of the Ardennes was considered a formidable obstacle. Second, the German V-2 offensive could still be launched against England from land bases north of Antwerp. The port of Antwerp was needed to supply the up coming drive into Germany. Eisenhower agreed to a limited advance toward Arnhem to capture several key bridges and secure a position from which an attack could be launched. The Allied Airborne Army was to secure the bridges while the British 30th Corps attacked to effect the link-up followed by the British 2d Army. This offensive was stopped after only opening up a sixty mile salient to the south banks of the Lower Rhine. (13:435) This offensive action was followed by an attempt in the central sector led by Patton's Army. This offensive ground to a halt shortly after it had begun due to extremely wet conditions.

Hitler meanwhile was withdrawing forces from the

Eastern Front to beef up the Western Front in preparation for the huge offensive through the Ardennes. The German offensive was launched in December 1944 by seventeen divisions. The attack was made against a thinly manned American sector and succeeded in making an initial success, but failed to reach its objective of securing crossing sites over the Meuse River. By 8 January, Hitler realized he would not be able to accomplish his objective and permitted Model to withdraw some of his forces and pulled the Sixth SS Army out to return it to the Eastern Front where Germany was now having severe problems.

As soon as the crisis in the Ardennes was over, Eisenhower, in response to the General Staff, embarked on a modified strategy to cut the Rhine and close it throughout its length. He intended to advance from the Middle Rhine to Frankfurt and Kassel, to first destroy the enemy forces north of Duesseldorf, and to close the Rhine in that sector while remaining on the defensive south of the Moselle. He then was to destroy any enemy west of the Rhine in both north and south. Finally, he would concentrate thirty five divisions east of the Rhine and north of the Ruhr with a view to drawing enemy forces away from the north by capturing objectives in the south. Eisenhower proposed to deploy east of the Rhine on the axis Frankfurt-Kassel. (13:455)

The Battle of the OUR River Crossing, in light of

the movement of the Sixth SS Army back to the Eastern front and the strengthening of Allied Forces, was fought against an enemy which had spent a great deal of resources in the previous Ardennes Offensive. Even though the 6th Armored Division was only "at about 70% strength," (3:56) the division was able to cross the OUR River, breach the SEIGFRIED Line and continue to advance "against disorganized enemy even though there were pockets of stiff resistance" (3:35) until its relief by the 90th Division on 8 March 1945. The relief and reversion to SHAEF Reserve came after 221 consecutive days in combat which saw it move from Cherbourg almost to the Rhine. This last offensive in which the 6th Armored Division participated in this sector was the beginning of the drive into Germany and signaled her ultimate surrender.

PART C. MILITARY LESSONS LEARNED

The crossing of the OUR River provided many lessons for Allied Forces, many of which have been incorporated into river crossing doctrine through the years since this crossing took place.

Maintenance of the element of surprise continues to be of paramount importance. Extensive reconnaissance of the crossing area on both the near and far banks is essential. Unlikely crossing sites where entry and exit banks are

steeper than normally desired will probably be less protected by enemy forces than the more obvious crossing sites. Preplanned artillery fires to be used on-call, rather than preparatory fires which compromise surprise, should be planned. Although they did not plan for it, the 6th Armored Division benefitted from terrain masking during the Our River Crossing because a high bluff on the far bank prevented a large portion of the crossing area from being viewed by the defending forces.

Crossing forces must take advantage of natural concealment provided by darkness, dense fog and haze. The Our River crossing was particularly dependent upon concealment to protect against enemy direct fire and adjustment of indirect mortar fire on several of their crossing sites. Artificial concealment provided by smoke pots and smoke generators should be incorporated whenever possible. If artificial smoke had been incorporated during the Our River Crossing, several significant delays caused by units waiting for darkness to conceal their movements could have been avoided.

Extensive planning for pre-crossing operations was lacking during this crossing. Adequate engineer assets were not available to maintain the roads into the crossing area for wheeled vehicles or for the trucks carrying the assault boats. As a result, the assault boats could not be carried by trucks to cover and concealed positions near the river.

The assault boats provided by corps engineer units were almost all filled one-half to three-quarters full of water, the top three or four inches of which had frozen solid. A great deal of time was lost removing the ice and carrying the 500 pound boats almost two miles to the river.

Rapid expansion of each crossing site bridgehead was accomplished using small unit attacks against isolated pockets of enemy resistance. The quick link-up of the individual bridgeheads provided increased security and was perhaps the most critical element contributing to the success of this river crossing.

Combat elements crossing the river should retain their organic or supporting engineer assets to facilitate their own mobility operations on the far bank. External engineer resources should be obtained from the supporting headquarters to facilitate river crossings. The success of the Our River crossing by the 6th Armored Division could have been exploited more significantly if greater external engineer assets had been available from corps to free the organic divisional engineers to remain with their supported units in the subsequent attack.

Although the German defenders quickly realized they had failed to adequately plan for the defense of the Our River, it is very doubtful that much useful information regarding lessons learned was ever passed up the chain of command and subsequently disseminated to other German

Forces. The rapid withdrawal of German combat forces from the West Wall, coupled with the disintegration of the German High Command, probably prevented any detailed analysis of engagements along the Siegfried Line.

Perhaps the greatest lesson learned from the river crossings of World War II was that operational control of forces crossing a river must be vested in a centralized headquarters to insure coordination and support of crossing forces. Positive control must be executed over forces as they approach, cross and exit the crossing area. The development of our current river crossing doctrine provides for a Crossing Force Commander to plan and control a river crossing. Crossing Area Commanders of each assaulting echelon, such as a brigade for a division crossing, would assume operational control of units as they cross the release line into the crossing area. Crossing units, security forces, engineer support units, communications and control systems are all coordinated and controlled by the Crossing Area Commanders. As the crossing assault forces leave the crossing area and cross the far release line, operational control is transferred back to the unit commander. This doctrine permits the assaulting force commander to focus his attention on the ensuing battle and helps to improve the overall coordination between the river crossing operation and the tactical concept for the battle.

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