

ARMOR IN THE HURTGEN FOREST

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THE ARMORED SCHOOL

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PREFACE

The purpose of this study is (1) to assemble all available data on the use of armor in the HURTTGEN FOREST between 14 September and 15 December 1944, (2) to evaluate the contribution of armor to the First United States Army offensive in this area, and (3) to interpret our findings in the light of past and present doctrine of armored employment.

In approaching this study all sources available were explored. The principal sources include unit histories, after action reports, combat interviews, and personal interviews. Not all of these sources were accessible for each unit considered and as a result there is a certain lack of balance in the chapters making up the report. For example, while an abundance of material was available on the 5th Armored Division and the 707th Tank Battalion, combat interviews with personnel of the 709th Tank Battalion could not be obtained. Certain data regarding the other units listed in the report were also unobtainable. However, within these limits the committee has attempted to do justice to each armored unit involved.

In view of the purpose of the report the infantry picture will seem somewhat slighted. This was done knowingly, not through any desire to overlook the gallant actions of the many infantry units involved, but because time and space did not permit a full account of these actions.

The few conflicting reports of action have been checked and evaluated to arrive at what is believed to be the most prob-

able conclusions. The interpretations and conclusions reflect the opinion of the committee; however, the committee wishes to acknowledge its indebtedness to the following officers who made themselves available for interview and on several occasions lent their time in order to review and comment upon the early drafts of the actions of their units: Lt. Col. W. A. Hamberg, 10th Tank Battalion, 5th Armored Division; Lt. Col. Wallace J. Nichols, 745th Tank Battalion; Lt. William K. Sanders, 745th Tank Battalion; Lt. Col. Robert S. Garner, 707th Tank Battalion; Major Lewis C. Taynton, 70th Tank Battalion; Captain James D. McLanachan, 70th Tank Battalion.

The committee further wishes to thank the Research and Evaluation Division and other departments of The Armored School whose personnel have been helpful in the reproduction of maps and photographs, the procurement of source materials, and other tasks necessary to the preparation of this report.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Of the campaigns and battles which led to "Victory in Europe," one of the most bitter and bloody was the battle of the HURTGEN FOREST. Although this battle was predominantly an infantry action, a separate tank battalion supported each infantry division and the 5th Armored Division played a decisive role. The objective of this study is to examine the manner in which armored units were employed and to evaluate their contribution to the Allied effort in the HURTGEN FOREST. Before bringing these units under close scrutiny it is first desirable to discuss the background of the operation.

The HURTGEN FOREST covers an area of approximately fifty square miles of GERMANY near the BELGIAN border and within the triangle formed by the cities of AACHEN (K840430), DUREN (F120460), and MONSCHAU (K940185). "Tall, closely packed fir trees rise seventy-five to one hundred feet above the damp, rugged floor of the forest allowing little sunlight to filter through even on the brightest days."¹ The forest is dotted with hills and cut by deep draws which are effective natural obstacles. The weather which the Americans encountered during the battle was unusually severe -- rain turned the ground into a sea of mud; mist hindered visibility; and snow and bitter cold followed. "Not in years had European weather been so unfavorable for grand scale military operations."²

Why was it necessary for the Allies to fight over this formidable terrain?

The battle for the HURTGEN was primarily a battle for the ROER dams. The ROER RIVER was controlled by a series of head-water dams in the hills east of EUPEN K798272 and in AACHEN the Americans had captured very complete engineering studies showing just what could be done with them.³

In the event that the Allied forces north of the HURTGEN FOREST area succeeded in crossing the ROER it would be a simple matter for the Germans, choosing their time, to produce a flood which could effectively cut off these forces.

During the planning stages of the Allied offensive to be launched in the direction of the COLOGNE PLAIN, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, wrote to General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, United States Army:

He (the enemy) is assisted in that area...by the flooded condition of the ROER RIVER and the capability he has of producing a sudden rush of water by blowing the dams near SCHMIDT FO63298. Bradley has about come to the conclusion that we must take that area by a very difficult attack from the west and southwest.⁴

And again, in writing after the war, General Eisenhower stated:

We first attempted destruction of the dams by air. The bombing against them was accurate and direct hits were secured; however, the concrete structures were so massive that damage was negligible and there was no recourse except to take them by ground attack.⁵

General Marshall in his Second Biennial Report states: "The seizure of the ROER RIVER dams in the vicinity of SCHMIDT was a necessary prelude to clearing the enemy from the west bank of the RHINE and a full scale drive into the heart of GERMANY."⁶

Two major penetrations of the SIEGFRIED LINE had been made

in the vicinity of AACHEN and U.S. troops in large numbers were east of AACHEN. By the end of September 1944, although AACHEN itself was still under assault, troops of the First U.S. Army, spearheaded by the 9th Infantry Division, pushed east and south-east of that city and occupied a salient within six miles of the ROER dams. This did not mean that no more fortifications were to be met for another band of defense lines ran through the HURTGEN and MONSCHAU FORESTS, taking full advantage of the terrain. This band was as much as nine to twelve miles deep and included many heavily fortified villages which served as key strongpoints.

In spite of the terrain, the fortifications, and the threat of bad winter weather, General Omar Bradley, Twelfth Army Group Commander, felt (and SHAEF agreed) that both the HURTGEN FOREST area and the ROER RIVER dams must be secured. This mission fell to the First United States Army.

On 21 October Twelfth Army Group ordered a general attack to the east which directed First Army to reach the RHINE in the vicinity of BONN (F547375) and COLOGNE (F450600), and to seize a bridgehead. First Army at this time had assigned to it a front of approximately sixty miles and had under its command three corps: VII Corps on the north, V Corps in the center, and VIII Corps in the south. The majority of the HURTGEN FOREST fighting occurred in the zones of V and VII Corps, then commanded by Major General Leonard T. Gerow and Major General J. Lawton Collins, respectively.

As a preliminary to its attack First Army had to replace the 9th Infantry Division in the line. This division had suffered

numerous casualties after six weeks of fighting in the HURTGEN and ROTGEN FORESTS and was badly in need of a period in which to refit and recuperate. Its relief was effected on 28 October by the 28th Infantry Division and with this change the First Army order of battle was as shown in Figure 1.

Facing the First Army at this time from north to south were the LXXXI, LXXIV, LXVI, and LXXX German Corps (Appendix III). This alignment included all of the Seventh German Army with the exception of its northernmost corps, 12 SS Panzer. Elements of this corps, however, were used later in the HURTGEN FOREST campaign. In addition to holding sectors, all of these German units were attempting to refit and reorganize following the withdrawal across FRANCE.

The First Army attack order provided for V Corps to secure the area VOSSENACK (FO38327)-SCHMIDT-STRAUCH (FO11262), which dominated the ROER RIVER crossings and provided access to the ROER RIVER dams. Seizure of this area was to be followed by a co-ordinated attack by VII Corps through the northern HURTGEN FOREST defenses to reach the RHINE in the vicinity of COLOGNE. The preliminary (V Corps) phase proved to be harder than had been expected and VII Corps was committed while V Corps still fought for its objective.

The Germans were now fighting on their own soil and close to their sources of supply; their reconstituted Seventh and First Armies were in sufficient strength, and were handled, Allied officers felt, more skillfully than they had been in NORMANDY....The Germans appeared to have strong local reserves available as they had not in NORMANDY, and they used them expertly and economically, thrusting in short, sharp counter-attacks against dangerous Allied penetrations, then promptly withdrawing.⁷

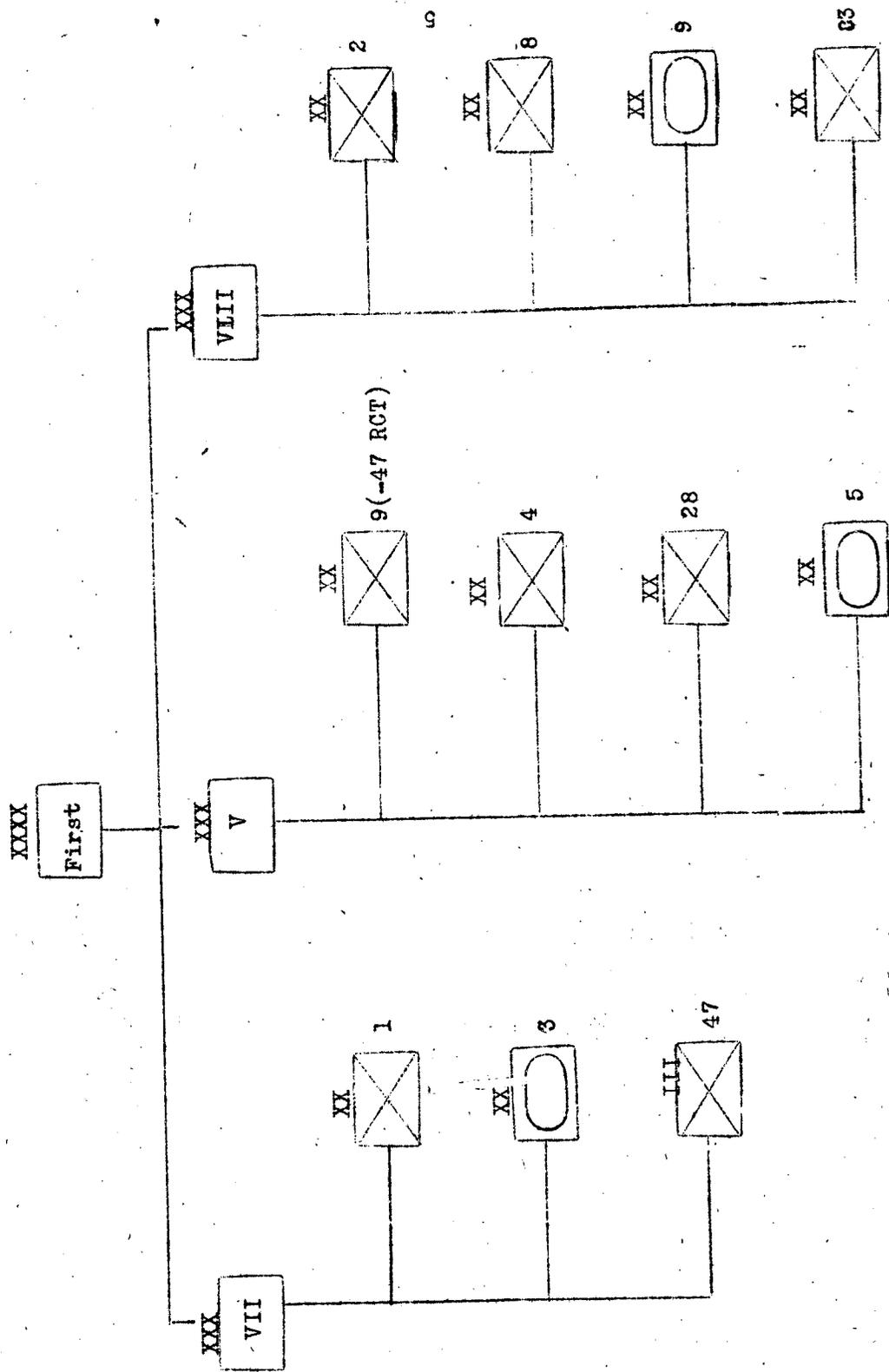


Figure 1. Order of Battle, First United States Army 28 October 1944

Because the hilly terrain and the dense forest limited observation, supporting artillery was unable to render continuous or effective assistance to the advance and the American soldier was forced to fight without the close support to which he was accustomed. Except for a few days bad weather prevented planes from giving close support to the attacking troops. Finally, the weather and the terrain combined to reduce the effectiveness of armor.

Beginning the New Offensive

On 2 November the 28th Infantry Division attacked in its zone to secure the V Corps objective, the VOSSENACK-SCHMIDT-STRACUH triangle. Simultaneously in the VII Corps zone the 1st Infantry Division made a strong demonstration employing mortars, artillery, and large patrols, but did not change its front line positions. The 28th took VOSSENACK with relative ease and reached SCHMIDT with elements of one battalion on 3 November but was unable to hold it in the face of severe counter-attacks which began the next day. By 8 November troops of the 28th had been driven back almost to their original line of departure. Greatly reduced in combat effectiveness the division held VOSSENACK in spite of murderous artillery fire and frequent counter-attacks until it was relieved on 20 November by the 8th Infantry Division.

After the collapse of the 28th Division attack, First Army again re-organized its troops, bolstered by the addition of the 99th and 104th Infantry Divisions. In the VII Corps area the 1st Infantry Division zone was narrowed when the 104th took over a portion of the front east of AACHEN on 8-9 November. VII Corps

was further strengthened by the assignment of the 4th Infantry Division which was placed on the southern flank of the corps zone. The 99th Division was made available to V Corps and went into corps reserve (Figure 2).

With the new alignment in effect, First Army ordered a continuation of its attack. VII Corps was to make the main effort with its 1st Infantry Division passing through the 47th RCT, 9th Division, in the direction of LANGERWEHE (FO30475) to seize crossings of the ROER RIVER north of DUREN. The 1st Division was to be assisted where possible by the 3rd Armored Division on its left (north) flank. The initial objective for the 1st Division was designated as the town of GRESSENICH (K987425) and the HAMICH (FO02437)-NOTHBERG (K936487) RIDGE. The 4th Infantry Division on the right (south) flank was to seize crossings of the ROER in the vicinity of DUREN or south of DUREN and to assist in the later advance of the 1st Division to COLOGNE.

The VII Corps, attacking at 161245 November after air and artillery preparation, began a hard, slow, stubborn fight with yard by yard advances marked by great numbers of casualties in the 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions. The terrain was as much an enemy as the German, who had thoroughly organized it defensively, who held every inch of ground until the last minute, and who followed each loss with an immediate counter-attack. However, slowly but surely gains were made and by 1 December VII Corps held a line which ran through INDEN (FO28522), LAMERSDORF (FO27509), LANGERWEHE, and just west of GEY (FO72399) in the 4th Division zone.

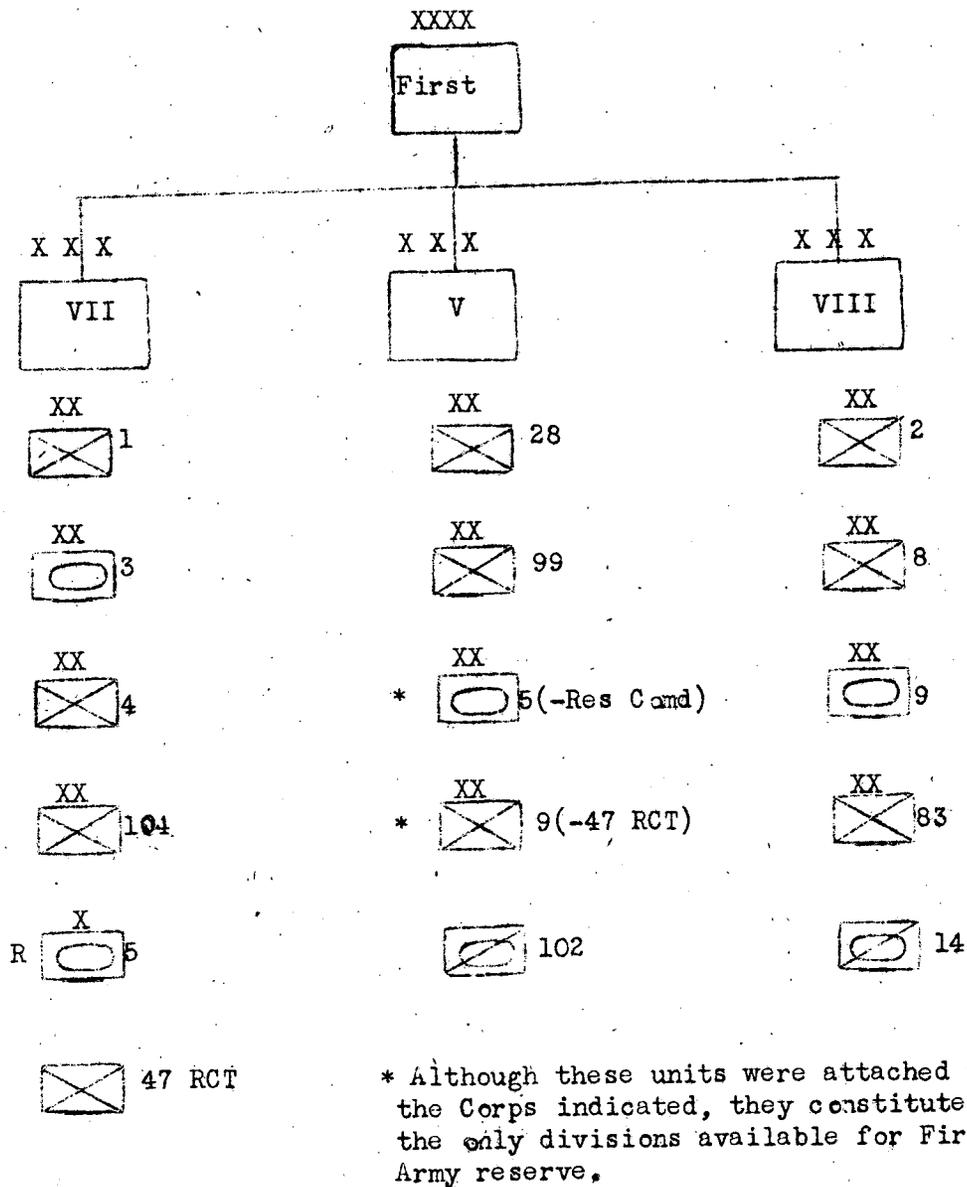


Figure 2. Order of Battle, First United States Army, 10 November 1944.

The optimistic objectives of First Army had not been reached and the 1st and 4th Divisions were relieved in place by the 9th Infantry Division from V Corps and the 83rd Division, which had moved north from VIII Corps.

Meanwhile, in the V Corps area the 8th Division had relieved the 28th and after hard fighting occupied the town of HURTGEN (FO41356) on 28 November. The capture of the V Corps objective, the high ground KLEINHAU (053370)-BRANDENBERG (FO64343)-BERGSTEIN (FO76377), was completed on 5 December by the Reserve Command, 5th Armored Division, which had been attached to the 8th Division for this mission. By 15 December the entire First Army front was on or near the banks of the ROER but did not threaten the strategic dams.

This marked the end of offensive operations in the area for First Army until one month later. On the next day the Germans launched their ARDENNES counter-offensive, which placed the Allied troops on the defensive. The ROER dams were not secured until February 1945.

The price paid in lives and equipment for the First Army offensive in the HURTGEN FOREST has never been accurately reckoned; however, battle casualty totals compiled by First Army for the three divisions most heavily engaged were 12,707 for 99 days of fighting.⁸

The First Army offensive gained fifty square miles of ground including the HURTGEN FOREST and the approaches to the ROER dams. The Nazis suffered great casualties, both as a result of

the hand to hand fighting and because of the Allied air and artillery, which was superior to that of the Germans in spite of the terrain and weather. Although plans for the ARDENNES counter-offensive were not then known to the Allies, there is no doubt that the determined attack of the First Army interfered greatly with the German plans for re-organization of units in preparation for this large scale assault. The enemy was forced to use units which had been earmarked for the ARDENNES; some of these were decimated and others badly mauled.

This is the story of the HURTTGEN FOREST in brief. It will serve as a background to the following chapters in which the role played by armored units will be examined. What was the contribution of armor to the HURTTGEN FOREST campaign? Were tanks employed in accordance with their contemporary doctrine? Present doctrine? Should more or less armor have been employed? The answers to these and other questions will form the basis for evaluation of the proper employment of armor under extreme conditions of terrain and weather.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

¹Report of Operations, First United States Army, 1 August 1944 to 22 February 1945, pp. 165-168.

²The War Reports of General George C. Marshall, General Marshall's Third Report, New York, Lippincott, 1946, p. 195.

³Walter Millis, The Last Phase, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1946, pp. 71-74.

⁴op. cit., General Marshall's Third Report, p. 195.

⁵General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday and Co., 1948), p. 329.

⁶General George C. Marshall, Biennial Report of the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, July 1, 1943, to June 30, 1945, to the Secretary of War (Washington, Infantry Journal Press, 1946), p. 80.

⁷Millis, op. cit., pp. 71-74.

⁸op. cit., First United States Army, p. 167.

CHAPTER II

THE 746TH TANK BATTALION IN SUPPORT OF THE 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The first American unit involved in the HURTGEN FOREST fighting was the 9th Infantry Division. Early in the morning of 14 September 1944, elements of the division, supported by the 746th Tank Battalion under Lt. Col. Clarence G. Hupfer, started across the Belgian-German border at ROTGEN (K915285) and MONSCHAU with the mission of penetrating the defenses of the German WEST WALL and seizing the road centers in the vicinity of DUREN. Within three days the 47th Infantry completely penetrated the WEST WALL at SCHEVENHUTTE (FO06422), while the 39th Regiment was through the first line of defenses at LAMMERSDORF (K968267) and the 60th Regiment was through the first line near HOFEN (K950165). Well organized German resistance halted the division with the capture of these objectives; thus ended the long march through FRANCE and BELGIUM; the tough fighting for limited objectives, characteristic of combat in the HURTGEN FOREST, began.

Probing attacks all along the division's front failed to achieve substantial gains despite heavy losses; the forces were spread too thinly for effective action against the organized German positions. So, on 4 October, the 4th Cavalry Group relieved the 39th and 60th Regiments in the LAMMERSDORF and MONSCHAU areas, and the two regiments assembled northwest of GERMETER (FO26334) for an attack on that town and on the road south and west of there. This attack was successful, but its continuation toward VOSSENACK

was halted by a German counter-attack from the north, which threatened to isolate the 39th Infantry on 12 October. Thereafter the seriously depleted forces of the 9th Division held their gains until the 39th and 60th Regiments were relieved on 28 October by the 28th Infantry Division. This relief was made possible by the regrouping of the First US Army forces following the fall of AACHEN on 21 October. It marked the opening of a new phase of operations -- the co-ordinated First Army attack to seize the ROER RIVER dams and crossings of the ROER RIVER.

The 746th Tank Battalion was first attached to the 9th Infantry Division 12 June after entering combat six days earlier with the 4th Infantry Division in amphibious landings in NORMANDY. Most of the battalion's practical tank-infantry training was in preparation for these landings. Previously trained in doctrine that called for use of tanks in mass, the tankers soon learned that infantry support meant fighting in small teams with the infantry. Seldom were they used in greater mass than a platoon.

The 9th Division attached the three medium tank companies to the three regimental combat teams:

Company A to the 47th Infantry Regiment;

Company B to the 60th Infantry Regiment;

Company C to the 39th Infantry Regiment.

The medium tank companies were further broken down to give each infantry battalion one tank platoon. Most often this platoon was allotted to the assault company of the battalion. The company headquarters normally operated near the infantry regiment command post.

Company D, the light tank company, was attached to the 9th Reconnaissance Troop and had one platoon constantly at the Division CP on guard duty. The other two platoons were used at various times (1) in division reserve; (2) to re-inforce road blocks established by engineer combat battalions attached to the division; and (3) to protect the flanks of the infantry regiments.

The assault guns of the battalion were organized into three two-gun sections to co-operate with the cannon companies of the infantry regiments. This re-organization, which took place late in September, was an improvement over the prior employment, which had seen the assault guns used as tanks. The tables of organization and equipment called for an Assault Gun Platoon of three guns in Headquarters Company and one assault gun in each medium tank company.

The Mortar Platoon of Headquarters Company was used throughout the period to re-inforce the road blocks set up by the attached engineers.

The Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company and Service Company operated generally in the vicinity of the Division headquarters.

The following brief description summarizes the actions of the 9th Infantry Division in the battle of the HURTGEN FOREST without specifically mentioning the supporting tanks of the 746th Tank Battalion, which were organized for combat as indicated above. The method of tank employment will be discussed in detail following the narrative of events.

The 47th RCT Captures and Holds SCHEVENHUTTE

To accomplish the mission of breaching the WEST WALL defenses and capturing road centers near DUREN, the 9th Division commander ordered the 47th Infantry Regiment to proceed northeast from ROTGEN along the edge of the HURTGEN FOREST. The regimental commander used his 3rd Battalion to protect the right flank by proceeding through the forest mass, while the bulk of his command followed the edge of the forest (Appendix VI, Map 1). German resistance to the advance was sporadic and disorganized, as indicated by the following combat interview:

The third battalion executive officer, Major W. W. Tanner, stated that, from the time they had left ROTGEN until reaching SCHEVENHUTTE, they did not receive a single round of artillery or mortar fire, due in a large measure to the fact that the enemy did not know exactly where they were. Further evidence of this was the fact that every night some part of the enemy forces would blunder into the battalion area, completely unaware of the presence of our troops.¹

The most serious threat during this three-day advance was a meeting engagement at 150400 September, when a battalion of German infantry marched into the bivouac area of the 3rd Battalion just southeast of ZWEIFALL (K956367). The situation was cleared up within five hours, and the third battalion continued to a position east of VICHT (K962394) for the night. On 16 September the 3rd Battalion proceeded to SCHEVENHUTTE in approach march formation and prepared a co-ordinated attack on GRESSENICH for the next day. This attack was called off when the Germans counter-attacked from the northwest, north, and east. The Germans continued almost daily counter-attacks through 22 September when their final effort

made by two companies was repulsed. They continued to harrass SCHEVENHUTTE with artillery and mortar fire for many weeks.

While the 3rd Battalion proceeded on the right, the 1st and 2d Battalions advanced through ZWEIFALL and VICHT to MAUSBACH (K971409) and KREWINKEL (K981410). Here again, opposition was sporadic until the final positions were reached on 16 September. The 2d Battalion cleared MAUSBACH and KREWINKEL on that date but was withdrawn south out of KREWINKEL on the following day. The 1st Battalion occupied MAUSBACH on 16 September and was moved to a position in the edge of the forest south of GRESSENICH to attack the town in conjunction with the 3rd Battalion on the following day -- the attack which was called off.

In these positions, troops of the 47th withstood counter-attacks and artillery and mortar fire for many weeks. They were not relieved when other elements of the 9th Division retired from the HURTGEN FOREST on 28 October, but stayed in position under the command of other divisions.

The 39th RCT Near LAMMERSDORF

The 1st Battalion led the 39th Infantry through ROTGEN and LAMMERSDORF on 14 September with the intention of clearing the main road through GERMETER and HURTGEN to DUREN. However, when opposition just north of LAMMERSDORF proved persistent, the bulk of the battalion moved across country to FINKENBUR (K949301) and then doubled back down the road to clean it up north of LAMMERSDORF. The 2d Battalion, which had followed the 3d Battalion, 47th Infan-

try, east from ROTGEN, turned south to establish a road block 1,000 yards southwest of JAGERHAUS (K984310). Leaving Company G to man the road block, the rest of the battalion attacked southwest in conjunction with the 1st Battalion to clear the area north of LAMMERSDORF. These operations were completed by 17 September and meanwhile the 3d Battalion had taken over the mission of proceeding from LAMMERSDORF to ROLLESBROICH (K995267) and thence northeast to DUREN.

The 3d Battalion managed to reach the eastern edge of LAMMERSDORF before determined opposition developed on 14 September. The following morning each of the three rifle companies was ordered to probe for weak spots in the enemy defenses -- Company I on the road which by-passed ROLLESBROICH to the west; Company K through ROLLESBROICH and then northeast; and Company L south through PAUSTENBACH (K972255) and then northeast through ROLLESBROICH. Only Company L made progress, getting through PAUSTENBACH and conducting an ineffectual attack on HILL 554 (K976254). The hill was to consume the efforts of the battalion for the next two weeks since it was stoutly defended and commanded the terrain over which the battalion was ordered to pass. After two days of little progress, the battalion planned a co-ordinated attack on HILL 554 for 18 September with Companies I and K attacking from the north and Company L from the west. This was unsuccessful and it was not until 29 September, when Company K and the battalion's tank platoon swept around to attack from the east and southeast, that the hill was finally taken.

On 18 September, meanwhile, the 2d Battalion opened an attack to seize the high ground north and west of ROLLESBROICH. Two companies attacked east out of LAMMERSDORF and after five bitter days of fighting managed to get the westernmost end of the ridge. Company G, which had been manning the road block near JAGERHAUS, captured that little community on 23 September and four days later moved south to attack the east end of the ridge. Companies F and G then co-operated to clear the ridge on 28 September but were so reduced in strength that they were pushed off two days later.

The 1st Battalion had gone to a position southwest of ZWEIFALL on 18 September to probe southeast toward GERMETER. After reaching the road junction just west of HURTGEN on the WETSSER WEH CREEK, however, they were recalled to MAUSBACH on 22 September to help repel a counter-attack against the 47th Infantry. On 26 September the 1st was committed near JAGERHAUS on the left of the 2d Battalion but moved only a short distance before being sent back to an assembly area west of LAMMERSDORF. On 4 October, all troops of the 39th Regiment were relieved in position by elements of the 4th Cavalry Group and moved to an assembly area southeast of ZWEIFALL for an attack on GERMETER and VOSSENACK in conjunction with the 60th Regiment.

The 60th RCT Near MONSCHAU

On the right flank of the 9th Division the 60th Infantry moved southeast out of EUFEN to MONSCHAU on 14 September. Task Force Buchanan, with the 1st Battalion of the 60th as a nucleus, moved south out of EUFEN, turned right through SOURBRODT (K870097)

and CAMP ELSENBORN (K902085), and then proceeded north to MONSCHAU. The two forces tied in on 17 September and then attempted to clean up the high ground to the southeast, including HOFEN and ALZEN (K958151). They continued on this mission until relieved by troops of the 4th Cavalry Group, after which they moved north for the attack on GERMETER.

The Attack on GERMETER and VOSSENACK

The final effort of the 9th Division in the HURTTGEN FOREST was the co-ordinated attack of the 39th and 60th Regiments on GERMETER and the road to the southwest of that town. The plan was to have the 39th take GERMETER and continue to VOSSENACK while the 60th concentrated on seizing the road and high ground southwest of GERMETER. The attack opened 6 October after being delayed a day by bad weather. The 39th used the 3d Battalion on the left and 1st Battalion on the right, with the 2d Battalion following the 3d and protecting the north flank of the regiment. The 60th used the 1st Battalion on the left and the 2d Battalion on the right with its third Battalion following the 2d.

After four days of stubborn opposition, the Americans succeeded in cutting the road both north and south of GERMETER on 9 October. The 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, was astride the road at WITTSCHIEDT (F028340) north of town, while the 1st Battalion, 60th Regiment, held RICHELKAUL (F019324) just south of town. The 1st Battalion, 39th, cleared GERMETER the next day. (Map 1, Appendix V). VOSSENACK was the next objective for the 39th Infantry, so the

3d Battalion moved to the edge of the woods north of VOSSENACK by early morning of 11 October, but the 1st Battalion had little success moving out of GERMETER toward the west end of VOSSENACK on the same day. A co-ordinated attack by the two battalions planned for the next day was halted by a German counter-attack from the north which penetrated the 2d Battalion positions. The 3d Battalion was called back to clear up this attack by KG WECELEIN, a force approximately a battalion in strength. Thereafter, the 39th was ordered to hold its position in GERMETER and vicinity until relieved on 28 October.

The 60th continued tough fighting until it captured its objectives along the road southwest of GERMETER. On 11 October, the 1st Battalion proceeded southwest of RICHELSKAUL to capture another road junction about a mile down the road. The 2d Battalion fought until 16 October to capture its final objective and clear the road from ROTGEN east through GERMETER.

Five weeks of unrelieved fighting had taken their toll of these two regiments, and with the fall of AACHEN First Army found it possible to relieve them with troops of the 28th Division. The bare description above does not fully describe the difficulties which beset the infantrymen of the 9th Division in their HURTGEN FOREST battle. But the main interest of this study is to determine what support armored units gave these infantrymen.

Employment of Tanks

Advance to Contact was generally made with tanks leading and infantry mounted thereon. However; no set formation was used

throughout the division. The 1st Platoon, Company C, 746th Tank Battalion, led the 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry, on 14 September from ROTGEN towards LAMMERSDORF. A platoon of infantry rode the tanks until they were fired upon by an anti-tank gun just outside of LAMMERSDORF. Thereafter the infantry flanked the tanks on either side of the road.

The 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, moving through ROTGEN toward the north on the same day, mounted Company B on five tanks and four tank destroyers. The 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, crowded two companies on the same number of vehicles while moving through the KONZENER WALD south of ROTGEN.

Organization for Combat has already been indicated in that each infantry battalion normally had a platoon of five tanks. Usually, the terrain dictated that the tanks be used by section rather than by platoon. Rarely were they used singly except for special purposes such as pillbox reduction.

Captain James R. Shields, who commanded Company C, 746th Tank Battalion, stated that although only one tank could fire at a time in attacking through woods, a second tank always followed to give the first protection. In practically all situations infantry accompanied tanks and Capt. Shields emphasized that in the woods flank protection by the infantry was more essential than elsewhere because of the extremely limited observation.

The First Well-Organized Defenses met by the 9th Division were dragon's teeth covered by numerous pillboxes and other enemy emplacements. Capt. Shields indicates that the 1st Platoon of his

company, accompanied by dismounted infantry of the 3d Battalion, 39th Regiment, attacked in column through the dragon's teeth on the main road southeast of LAMMERSDORF on 17 September. A crater in the road at the dragon's teeth gap proved no obstacle; the tanks proceeded right through it. However, 100 yards beyond the crater the lead tank was knocked out by long range anti-tank fire from the east. When the third tank was also disabled the remaining tanks retired and the attack bogged down. On 18 September the tanks tried to pass through a gap in the dragon's teeth farther to the south. The engineers had blown this gap, but the Germans mined it persistently despite the efforts of both infantry and engineers to keep it clear. The right suspension system was blown off the first tank to enter the gap, and blocked the gap for the rest of the day.

Three tanks got through this gap on 19 September, but in attacking HILL 554, the first was hit by bazooka fire and another by anti-tank fire. The third returned to LAMMERSDOFF. Captain Shields mentioned that although infantry were in the vicinity, they were not alongside the tanks.

Reconstituted to a three-tank strength, the platoon again passed through the dragon's teeth on 20 September to aid the infantry to reach the top of HILL 554. Lt.-Col. R. H. Stumpf, the 3d Battalion commander, noted that despite the loss of one tank to anti-tank fire the other two continued to shoot up the enemy in the trenches.

Pillbox Reduction was the next problem faced by the

infantrymen and attached tankers. Each tank company found its own solution, although tank-infantry co-operation was almost invariably the rule. Normally, only one tank was included in the assaulting team.

Company A, with the 47th Infantry, fired armor-piercing ammunition on the doors of the pillboxes and caused the enemy to surrender hastily. In one instance, infantrymen fired small arms on the apertures while the tank approached within 20 yards of the door. Three rounds from the tank gun caused fifteen Germans to surrender. In a second instance, the tank fire was effective at 600 yards. The occupants surrendered after four rounds hit the door.

Company B, with the 60th Infantry, used its tanks in conjunction with the infantry to fire on apertures. Then infantry and engineers flanked the pillbox and blew in the door with high explosive charges. Troops of the 2d Battalion met pillbox resistance in clearing the road from MONSCHAU to HOFEN. Two tanks first assisted by driving enemy from surrounding houses into the pillboxes and then by helping to kill fifty enemy re-inforcements and driving off 100 others. Under cover of tank and infantry fire, infantrymen poured gasoline on the pillboxes and tankers fired on them to ignite the pillboxes; twenty occupants surrendered.

Company C, with the 39th Infantry, found that the most successful pillbox attacks were those employing smoke and fire and maneuver. The smoke was employed in two ways: (1) to screen movement and (2) for casualty effect. The tactics used by the 39th

Regiment are described in the following combat interview:

In reducing the pillbox at (968287), Company E, 39th Infantry, used a TD and a tank to fire at the openings, a squad of infantry, a half squad of engineers using poling charges, a squad of flame throwers and white phosphorous smoke. The TD closed the embrasures by firing from a distance of about 400 yards, and the infantry followed behind the vehicle protecting it from enemy infantry. 60-mm. mortars were used to run the enemy from his emplacements into the pillbox, while the tank moved up to a range of 200 yards and then finally 50 yards. The direct firing and the pole charge seemed to be ineffective. Finally, one of the infantry saw a crack in the door of the pillbox, and in there he threw a white phosphorous grenade. The enemy came piling out.²

Using much the same tactics, Company F reported taking nine pillboxes in one hour and ten minutes on 17 September. Because of the terrain, tanks could not always support the attacks, and the infantry experienced more difficulty in capturing the pillboxes. The unsupported infantry attacks lacked shock effect. Rarely did tanks venture forth without infantry support, but in the final attack on HILL 554 on 29 September, the 1st Platoon, Company A, 746th Tank Battalion, outdistanced its supporting infantry and reduced the resistance in five or six pillboxes.

Obstacles, both natural and man-made, continually limited the effective employment of tanks in the HURTGEN FOREST area. Usually, the enemy supplemented the natural obstacles with every means at his disposal -- the effect of the dragon's teeth has already been discussed.

During the advance to contact, several unprotected road blocks held up the advancing tanks. These were usually time-consuming nuisances. On 14 September, Company C tanks with the 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, were held up about an hour at a railroad

crossing by an iron gate protected only by mines. Later in the day they met a more common type of road block -- trees felled across the road. These trees did not happen to be mined or covered by fire as was usually the case. The tankers solved their problem by looping cables around the trees and pulling them out. A tank dozer was used to fill in craters in the road.

Engineers were not always readily available to remove mines at these road blocks. Captain Ralph G. Edgar, commanding Company A, 39th Infantry, cited two instances. The first was on 14 September when moving through LAMMERSDORF where the tanks were held up most of the day awaiting removal of mines at a crossroads. Again on 9 October, tanks supporting his company in the attack on GERMETER were held up from 0830 until 1400 before the engineers arrived to clear mines.

German defenders blocked and mined the fire lanes through the rough, heavily wooded forest. Capt. Shields stated that sometimes it was possible to take paths through the woods, but usually tanks found it best to avoid the fire lanes and go directly through the woods.

Tank obstacles had a very definite effect on the efficiency of the tank-infantry team. Neither element of this team operated as efficiently alone as when the two fought together. In some instances the whole attack was held up when obstacles stopped the tanks. In other instances, as when the 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry, was attacking in the area southwest of GERMETER on 9 October, the tanks progressed just far enough to break the enemy resistance

and allow the infantry to go forward 1,000 yards. However, on one occasion the 1st Battalion, 60th Regiment, advanced from GERMETER to a road junction 1,000 yards to the southwest without armored support. They accomplished the mission quickly on 10 October by following rolling barrages of the 4.2-inch and 81-mm. mortars. The armored support was held up by a mined road block and arrived at the road junction two hours after the infantry had secured it.

Tank-Infantry Attacks were seldom deliberately planned and even when they were planned they were not always successful. On 11 October, tanks of the 1st Platoon, Company C, led Company A, 39th Infantry, in the attack from GERMETER to VCSSENACK at 0830. The platoon had four tanks which proceeded in column along the road with the infantry following in column of platoons. After advancing 500 or 600 yards, the lead tank was destroyed by anti-tank fire. The other tanks retired as did the infantry. An artillery concentration was brought down on the enemy anti-tank guns. At 1100 the three remaining tanks again led the infantry into the attack down the road. Just before reaching the knocked-out tank, the second of the three was disabled by anti-tank gun fire. The lead tank, trapped on the road between two disabled tanks, was hit while maneuvering to withdraw. One tank remained and upon its withdrawal the attack on VOSSENACK came to an end.

The combined arms attacks of armor and infantry were generally more successful than this, however. While clearing the road from FINKENBUR to LAMMERSDORF on 15 September, Company A, 39th Infantry, without tank support, was held up trying to secure

an important road junction. The arrival of two tanks to support the infantry caused the enemy to withdraw without further fighting. Two days later Company I of the 39th, attacking east from LAMMERS-DORF with tank support, reported that the enemy broke and ran -- the same enemy which had held up the infantry attack the previous day. Northwest of GERMETER on 9 October the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, used two companies of infantry and two medium tanks to clean out a strong enemy patrol which had succeeded in disabling a light tank on the north flank of the regiment's position. The following day the 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry, captured GERMETER with tank support. Capt. Edgar attributed the lightness of the resistance to the presence of the tanks. Capture of GERMETER enabled the tanks to proceed northeast on the road and assist the 3d Battalion in recapturing WITTSCHIEDT which the unsupported infantry had lost on the previous day.

An outstanding example of successful tank-infantry attack took place on 9 October when the 1st Battalion, 60th Infantry, took the road junction at RICHELKAUL with its tank platoon giving good support. A 10-minute artillery preparation preceded the attack at 0800. Then tanks and infantry worked their way to the edge of the woods 200 yards east of the road junction. The tanks broke out of the woods abreast of the infantry, which was in line of skirmishers on both sides and to the rear. Both tanks and infantry fired every weapon. A German lieutenant raised up out of the bushes, fired his bazooka, which penetrated the turret of the lead tank and slightly wounded the tank commander. The tank returned the

the fire with a 75-mm. shell which cut the German officer in half. This so demoralized the rest of the defenders that they broke and ran from their well dug-in positions, and the tank-infantry team killed fifty and captured twenty-five of the enemy. Prisoners stated that after the officer was killed they were afraid to use the other twelve bazookas in the company.

Capt. Shields considered the psychological effect of the tanks on the enemy as the prime consideration in using armor in difficult terrain. He stated:

Within woods, the chances of hitting the enemy are relatively slight. But the shock and psychological effect is great. The enemy would generally give up when the tanks got to a position where they could fire at close range, even though they [the enemy] could not be hit.

Tanks captured by the Enemy were sometimes turned against our troops. For example, the Germans put two of the tanks disabled near VOSSENACK in position to fire on our troops in GERMETER, although they did not actually keep them manned. To prevent their use by the Germans, an infantry patrol protected a tank crewman who set off incendiary grenades in the tanks to destroy them.

Tank Road Blocks were occasionally established for short periods in a moving situation. The 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, used tanks with infantry support as road blocks southwest of JAGERHAUS in the early stages of the HURTTGEN FOREST battle and north of GERMETER on 9 October. The 3d Battalion used them similarly in LAMMERSDORF on 14 September. These were all one-day stands. The 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry, used its tanks with

infantry in a stable road block position for almost a week between 19 and 25 September at the south edge of MONSCHAU. In SCHEVENHUTTE, the 3d Platoon, Company A, 746th Tank Battalion, covered all routes of approach from positions within the town. For the first few days no foot troops were in position to give close support to the tanks.

Defensive Employment of Tanks was usually accomplished by using tank platoons as a mobile reserve for the infantry battalions to which they were attached. During the first week in SCHEVENHUTTE the tanks were used as road blocks, but by the time the enemy made its final attempt to recapture the town on 22 September the tanks and tank destroyers were used as a mobile striking force. They moved up and down the main street firing machine guns and 76-mm. shells at any enemy who presented himself as a target.

Defense Against Airborne Attack was the mission given to the 2d Platoon, Company A, 746th Tank Battalion on 19 October. The platoon was used on the high ground in the vicinity of FLEUTH (K973404) with the mission of guarding against possible glider landings.

Weather added to the difficulties faced by the tankers during October. Only seven days during the month were listed as "fair to good." Most of the rest were either cold and rainy or cold and cloudy. Fog frequently held up attacks planned for early morning -- for instance, the attack on GERLETER on 10 October was scheduled for 0830 but was held up until 1400 because tanks supporting the 39th Infantry could not advance because of the fog.

Withdrawal of Tanks from the perimeter of the infantry defenses at night was a source of friction between tank and infantry commanders in the 60th Regiment. Lt. Col. Hupfer, commanding the 746th, pointed out that the inability to pull tanks back had two principal defects: (1) green replacements had to be placed in tanks by taking them to the vehicles at the front without orientation to crew or vehicles; and (2) proper maintenance and service of vehicles could not be accomplished. This latter defect was possibly the more serious problem. The tanks of Company B were continuously on the line from 1 to 24 October. Lt. Col. Hupfer indicated that many tanks became inoperative because auxiliary motors to charge the batteries could not be operated -- the resultant noise brought down mortar concentrations which caused many casualties among the infantrymen near the tanks. Frequently the infantry units regrouped behind the protection of the tanks, but the tanks were never given the opportunity to drop back to perform necessary maintenance. The solution finally reached by agreement on 24 October was that the tanks would normally drop back to a position near the infantry battalion command posts where they could get proper care and still be on call of the battalion commander in an emergency. This policy was pursued by the other two regiments.

Communications between the tanks and the infantry were improved during the period by three methods: (1) SCR-300 radios were installed in seven tanks per company for tank-infantry communications; (2) telephones linked with the tank interphone systems were installed on the rear of all medium tanks to facilitate ground to

tank communication; (3) SCR 509-510 radios were established at the infantry battalion command post for an additional channel of communication.

Enemy Tactics were best described as tenacious. The enemy defended his positions effectively by making the most of fortifications well suited to the terrain. He employed mines with abandon and used concentrations of heavy mortars and artillery. He prepared field fortifications outside his pillboxes and fought from these until driven inside.

Anti-tank weapons used were: (1) the panzerfaust, a hand-carried anti-tank weapon for close-in fighting; (2) the self-propelled gun which was used to support his counter-attacks; and (3) an anti-tank rocket launcher mounted on wheels with a very low silhouette. Anti-tank guns were not plentiful because of the limited fields of fire and the enemy elected not to use his tanks in this terrain during this period.

Morale activities for personnel of the 746th Tank Battalion during September and October were very limited, but some of the men were sent on pass to VERVIERS, BELGIUM. Laundry was accomplished fairly regularly through quartermaster facilities.

Casualty figures are available only for the month of October. Disregarding those "injured in action" (who were hurt when a truck overturned) the personnel losses indicate that about three men were lost each time a tank was permanently disabled. (Figure 3).

PERSONNEL CASUALTIES

<u>Type of Casualty</u>	<u>Officer</u>	<u>EM</u>	<u>Total</u>
Killed in Action	1	3	4
Died of Wounds	1	0	1
Missing in Action	1	0	1
Seriously Wounded in Action	3	19	22
Lightly Wounded in Action	1	10	11
Lightly Injured in Action	0	6	6
TOTALS	7	38	45

TANK CASUALTIES

<u>Tank Type</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Breakdown of Losses</u>	
Medium Tank M 4	10	AT Gun Fire	3
Medium Tank M4A3E2	1	AT Rockets	5
Light Tank M5A1	1	Mines	3
TOTAL	12	Artillery	1

Figure 3. Personnel and Tank Casualties, 746th Tank Battalion
October, 1944.

Summary

The material aid of the 746th Tank Battalion to the advance of the 9th Infantry Division in the HURTTGEN FOREST was limited principally by the terrain; but the use of tanks in spite of physical difficulties benefitted the division because of the psychological effect of tanks -- they encouraged our own infantry and terrified the enemy. In almost every instance where tank support was possible, the infantry was enabled to advance more readily. Tank support might have been better if infantry commanders had realized the importance of the employment of tank-infantry-engineer teams to help keep the tanks moving. Engineers with the infantry division had little training with tank units, and this fact, coupled with the rugged terrain of the HURTTGEN FOREST, meant that the infantry often failed to get the tank support to which it was entitled.

The 9th Division's efforts to penetrate the HURTTGEN FOREST ended with the relief of the 39th and 60th Regiments by elements of the 28th Infantry Division on 28 October. All of the action of the 9th was preliminary to the First U.S. Army's deliberate plan to clear the forest on its way to the ROER RIVER dams and ROER RIVER crossings. On the front originally approached by the 9th Division in September, the army was to employ two corps -- the V and VII -- before the ROER RIVER was to be crossed in February.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER II

¹Penetration of the SIEGFRIED LINE by the 47th Infantry Regiment, Combat Interview 56, prepared by First Lieutenant Harry D. Condron, 2nd Information and Historical Service, Headquarters, First U.S. Army, p. 6.

²9th Infantry Division, 39th Infantry Regiment, 2d Battalion, 15 September to 26 October 1944, Combat Interview 56, prepared by Second Lieutenant F. L. Hadsel, 2nd Information and Historical Service, Headquarters, First U.S. Army.

³9th Infantry Division, "C" Company, 746th Tank Battalion, SIEGFRIED LINE, 15 September to 16 October 1944, Combat Interview 56, prepared by First Lieutenant Fred L. Hadsel, 2d Information and Historical Service, VII Corps Team, p. 6.

CHAPTER III

THE 707TH TANK BATTALION IN SUPPORT OF THE 28TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The 28th Infantry Division, supported by the 707th Tank Battalion, relieved the depleted 9th Infantry Division in the vicinity of GERMETER on 28 October and prepared to continue the assault to the ROER RIVER DAMS. Previous to the fall of AACHEN on 21 October, the bulk of General Hodges' First Army forces were engaged in the reduction of that city. After that date he was able to regroup his divisions for the attack to seize crossings of the ROER RIVER. VII Corps was to make the main effort to cross the ROER near DUREN, while as a necessary preliminary to this crossing, V Corps was to seize the dams in the vicinity of SCHMIDT.

The objective assigned to the 28th Division by V Corps was the area VOSSENACK-STRAUCH-SCHMIDT. SCHMIDT was an important communications center located astride an east-west road which First Army wanted for an MSR and in addition was on a ridge overlooking the SCHWAMMANAUDEL (FO58273), one of the vital ROER dams. East of the division and in the center of its sector lay the town of VOSSENACK atop an east-west ridge surrounded by woods. To the north lay the HURTGEN-BRANDENBERG-BERGSTEIN ridge which dominated the VOSSENACK ridge as did the ridge on which lay the towns of SCHMIDT and KOMERSCHIEDT (FO57309). (See Appendix I.)

The division plan of attack provided for the 109th Regiment to be committed on the north flank in the direction of the town of HURTGEN; the 110th Regiment on the south toward SIMONSKALL (FO23306), and the 112th Regiment in the center to take in turn, the towns of VOSSENACK, KOMMERSCHIEDT, and SCHMIDT. The 707th Tank Battalion commanded by Lt Col Richard Ripple was to support the attack. This battalion had joined the 28th on 6 October and up to the time of the HURTGEN operation had seen very little combat. In this operation the 707th fought mostly in support of the center regiment.

In front of the division on both north and south were dense forests cut by deep draws and hiding numerous defenses such as pillboxes, anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, and other types of man-made obstacles. In the center was the open ridge on which lay the town of VOSSENACK. Southeast of VOSSENACK and separating it from SCHMIDT was the KALL RIVER running through a steep wooded gorge. This river was crossed only by a small woods trail which connected VOSSENACK and KOMMERSCHIEDT and which was to become the MSR for the forces south of the KALL.

Before the attack the division G-2 estimated that to the immediate front the enemy had approximately 3350 men, to the north 1940, and to the south 1850, all fighting as infantry, under control of the 89th Infantry Division. Re-



PLATE III TANK DESTROYERS NEGOTIATE A NARROW TURN ON A HURTGEN FOREST ROAD

erves capable of rapid intervention were estimated at 2000 not committed and 3000 from less active fronts.

The attack, which was scheduled to jump off on 31 October, was delayed daily because of bad weather and was finally made on 2 November. Adverse weather continued, but it was decided the attack could no longer be delayed.

Action at VOSSENACK

As previously mentioned, the town of VOSSENACK lay astride a road which ran along the top of an open ridge. The town was about a city block wide and two thousand yards in length. Near the center of VOSSENACK the church formed a prominent landmark and overlooked the deep draws from the surrounding woods which reached up to the outskirts of the town on the north, east, and south.

At 020900 November, after an hour's artillery preparation, the 2nd battalion, 112th Regiment, jumped off from the vicinity of GERMIER in the attack on VOSSENACK. Moving down the ridge Company G was on the left, Company F on the right, with Company E following in reserve. In support of this attack was Company C, 707th Tank Battalion. The 1st platoon under Second Lieutenant William S. Quarrie plus two tanks from the second platoon, attacked with Company G. The three remaining tanks of the second platoon with First Lieutenant James J. Leming in command, attacked with Company F. Second

Lieutenant Joseph Novak's 3rd platoon with Company E was to assist in mopping up the objective or to come to the aid of the other tank platoons if required. The attack progressed satisfactorily and the infantry was on the objective shortly after 1000.

The tanks, however, had trouble from the start. The first platoon sergeant's tank had a track blown off while moving through a gap in an American laid protective minefield. Next Lt. Quarrie's tank became mired in the soft ground. Captain George S. West, commanding the tank company, saw the difficulty, came forward, and placed the Lieutenant in his tank, and the platoon moved on. The last tank of the second platoon went too far south and was knocked out by bazooka fire. The platoon commander, Lt Lening, who was having trouble with his tank gun, radioed the third platoon for assistance. One section came forward and was sent toward the east end of ~~the town.~~ After getting his gun in action, Lening moved forward only to have his tank immobilized by a German mine.

Meanwhile, Capt. West left his own tank to Lt. Quarrie and commandeered a third platoon tank which struck a mine in VOSENACK shortly afterward and was put out of action. He then mounted a battalion headquarters tank which was in the town performing forward observation for the battalion assault gun platoon. The difficulties of command under the conditions which faced Capt. West can be appreciated. His platoons were

in support of three different infantry companies; he could only act as an expeditor and to do this he required both transportation and communication.

A tank retriever which came into the town to evacuate Lt. Loring's tank was hit and immobilized by German artillery. Thus by 1300 five tanks and one retriever were out of action which reduced the effective strength of the company by roughly one-third. Most of these tanks were recoverable, but they were of no immediate value to the infantry which they were supporting. At 1600 the company returned to an area within 400 yards of GERMETER and spent the night in that location, remaining on call from the infantry.

About 0500 the next day, the tank company moved forward, occupied supporting positions on the north and east edges of VOSSENACK, and remained in these positions encountering no enemy activity until heavy artillery began to land about 1200. All tanks except three were ordered back into GERMETER. The three remaining were those of the 1st and 2nd platoon leaders and the battalion headquarters tank ordered to stay in the town for communication purposes. The command tank of the first platoon was still immobilized but could be used in this capacity. About 1230 hostile artillery fire hit the battalion headquarters tank, knocking it out, and at 1530 the only operative tank in VOSSENACK was ordered back.

No further tank action occurred until the following morning when the 2nd platoon was used in fire support role for one of the battalions of the 110th Regiment to the south. The mission was completed by 0705 and the platoon returned to company control. At 1030, on the request of the infantry commander in VOSSENACK, the four tanks of the first platoon went forward to neutralize small arms and machine gun fire coming from the woods north of town. The tanks moved in and fired HE at ranges of 150-200 yards, neutralized the enemy fire, and returned to GERMETER at 1100. Again at the request of the infantry, one section of the 2nd tank platoon plus the company commander in his tank went back into VOSSENACK, where the 2nd battalion, 112th Regiment, was still holding at considerable cost. The eastern end of the town and the eastern slope of the ridge where the infantry had dug-in was subjected to continuous battering artillery which took its toll of casualties and undermined the morale of the defenders. The western end of the town was relatively quiet except for troops passing through enroute to KOMERSCHIEDT. Medical and other vehicles continued to use the route through VOSSENACK to the south. (See Map 2, Appendix V.)

While the three tanks were engaged in counteracting small arms fire at the direction of the infantry, Capt. West's tank backed into a crater and broke a drive shaft. He ordered the other tanks back and stayed with his own until he was

towed back by company maintenance about midnight.

At 1815 Lt. Quarrie with three tanks of the first platoon moved to the position occupied by Company F. He spotted tracer fire coming from a draw east of the town and radioed the position to the battalion assault guns, which fired into this draw until the divisional artillery took over the mission. A PW later stated that this fire broke up a counter-attack which was forming in the draw, indicating the advantage of having an assault gun platoon organic to the tank battalion. Lt. Quarrie remained with Company F all night while the balance of the tanks were in GERMETER.

Capt. West, moved at 0700, 5 November, with Lt. Lening's three tanks, to positions from which they could fire into the woods north of VOSSINACK on mortar and enemy small arms locations. Here one tank received a direct HE hit which killed the driver and destroyed the 75-mm gun. The other tanks returned to GERMETER about 1000. At 1400 Lt. Lening went forward with his platoon in order to repel a reported counter-attack. Capt. West, accompanied this platoon which moved up to support Company G. Lt. Quarrie's platoon continued to support Company F. The entire eastern end of the ridge came under intense heavy artillery fire, and by 1500 both platoons were receiving heavy fire and withdrew to GERMETER apparently without orders. Capt. West, in his tank, remained in turret defilade behind Com-

pany G. At 1730 Lt. Quarrie again reported to Company F with an extra tank borrowed from the 2nd platoon. He remained with them all night, returning to GERMETER early the next morning.

After Lt. Quarrie reported back, Lt. Col. Ripple received orders to get all available armor into VOSSENACK to stop an enemy counter-attack; Companies B and C, 707th Tank Battalion, were committed. Company B initially sent its 1st platoon, under First Lieutenant Carl A. Anderson, into town. This platoon was soon followed by Capt. George S. Granger, the company commander, and the 3rd platoon commanded by Second Lieutenant Danforth Sherman. Company C, with its eight tanks, came last. The situation was described by the tankers as one of complete confusion. Many of the infantry were running to the rear out of the town. None of the tankers knew where the front lines were, or where the counter-attacking enemy was located. The first platoon of Company C occupied a position northeast of VOSSENACK and fired to the north until about 0900 when it pulled back to GERMETER. Meanwhile, in Company B, Lt. Anderson evacuated the crew of a damaged Company C tank by placing one man from the crew in each of his tanks and returning with his entire platoon to the LD. Although he asked for and received permission from Capt. Granger to make this evacuation, there seems to be no sound reason for taking all of these tanks out of action at a time when presumably

they were badly needed. He soon returned to VOSSENACK, however, and relieved the 2nd platoon, Company C, by 0930. When the Company B tankers first entered VOSSENACK they knew nothing about the ground and less about the situation. As a result they fired first into buildings occupied by the friendly infantry and caused some casualties. They also fired perilously close to the third platoon of Company C and some tank destroyers which were in the town. During all of this time Capt. Granger was trying to locate the infantry battalion commander to get an intelligent picture of what was happening.

Whether or not there was a German counter-attack is uncertain from the available accounts. Lt. Novak's Company C, 3rd platoon is credited with stopping some German infantry approaching the town from the east and southeast. The one fact that can definitely be reconstructed is that the American infantry defenders, having been subjected to unceasing artillery and mortar fire for five days, had reached the limit of their endurance. When the first shouts of counter-attack went up, panic spread like wildfire and the men left their holes and ran to the rear. When Capt. Granger located the infantry battalion CP he found that the battalion commander, though present, was a combat fatigue casualty and that a captain on his staff was in actual command.

In the initial action of Company B in VOSSENACK it is of interest to note that requests and orders to Company B came

Capt. West of Company C rather than from the tank or infantry battalion commander. Capt. West was in town at the time Company B was committed, but the accounts indicate that even he did not know the infantry situation. Capt. West was killed about 0900 by an enemy shell which landed in the turret of his tank. Capt. Granger took command of the tanks of both companies and kept his 1st and 3rd platoons in the vicinity of VOSSENACK the remainder of the day. Artillery fire knocked out three tanks and the only direct action against the enemy was the destruction of a small infantry counter-attack. At 0900, Lt. Quarrie of Company C, came forward and relieved the tanks of Company B for the night.

This day's action at VOSSENACK is a graphic illustration of the dangers attending such vague orders as those sending tanks into the town. The communication and coordination necessary between the tanks and infantry had completely broken down. When Capt. West was killed the remaining tanks were under the command of Capt. Granger who was not familiar with the terrain and who was also occupied in trying to establish contact with the local infantry defenders.

By this time the foot troops in VOSSENACK consisted largely of engineers of the 1171th Engineer Combat Group (two battalions) supporting the 28th Division. During the night, Brig. Gen. George A. Davis, assistant division commander, visited the town and ordered the engineers to retake the eastern end which had been abandoned by the infantry and re-

occupied by Germans in undetermined strength.

About 0300 on the following day, Lt. Quarrie's tank was disabled by a direct hit on the turret while another tank of his platoon was hit in the engine compartment. Lt. Quarrie was not injured, however, and at 0500 he was called to the engineer CP for his recommendations as to the employment of tanks in the engineer counter-attack to take place that morning. He explained that he was to be relieved by Lt. Johnson of Company B, but recommended that tanks not be used on the left (north) flank of the town because of its vulnerability from the high ground at HURTGEN and BRANDENBERG. (See Appendix I.) At 0730 Lt. Johnson, accompanied by Lt. Anderson and Capt. Granger arrived. Lt. Anderson led Quarrie's platoon back to GERMETER, and Quarrie followed with Capt. Granger after orienting Johnson on the engineer plan.

At this time the engineers held a north-south line through VOSSENACK at about the center of the town. Lt. Johnson's platoon was to move up the right (south) flank of the town immediately after the artillery barrage which heralded the engineer attack. One company of engineers was to attack from house to house up the main road of the town with Lt. Johnson's tank firing two rounds into each house before the assault. This plan succeeded and the engineers were able to retake the entire town.

Despite direct and indirect artillery and bombing and

strafing from friendly planes, casualties to the tanks were largely from other causes. One was immobilized by a mine, another became bogged in a shell hole, while a third became inoperative because of a broken gas line.

An incident occurred here which emphasizes the necessity for dependable communications. A garbled radio message caused the engineers to withdraw from the eastern end of the town under the impression that they were ordered to hold north-south line through the church. They did this without notifying the tanks and then called down artillery and mortar fire on the eastern end of the town. This fire fell around Lt. Johnson and his tanks until he succeeded in getting it moved farther east. The vacant part of the town was again occupied by friendly troops and the tank platoon remained in position until relieved by

Lt. Anderson and his platoon at 1800. This platoon immediately received direct artillery fire from its right front and Lt. Anderson ordered his tanks to move back, intending only that they back out of the line of fire. At this point his radio failed and because of the loss of contact, the rest of his platoon returned all the way to GERMETER. He started back after his platoon, but enroute he met Lt. Col. Henbest, commanding the 2nd battalion, 109th Regiment, which had been ordered to relieve the Engineers of the defense of VOSSENACK. The colonel told him that he and Capt. Granger had decided to keep the tanks in GERMETER since they could move up easily when desired, and

their presence only drew unwelcome artillery fire.

About 0500, on the morning of 8 November, Lt. Col. Henbest called for tanks, and at 0600 Lt. Anderson, with four tanks, moved into VOSSENACK and occupied positions at the western end of the town. His platoon moved in and around the town for the rest of the day except between 1200 and 1400 when he returned for resupply. He was relieved at 1200 by Lt. Novak of Company C, who remained in the town after Anderson's platoon returned. Anderson's main action during the day consisted of firing his tanks and adjusting artillery fire on moving targets and gun flashes. He also called and received an air strike on some enemy tanks which had been sighted. After dark both platoons returned to GERMETER; Lt Novak came back on foot ahead of his platoon suffering from severe shoulder and leg wounds.

8 November marked the last of the action for Company C in VOSSENACK. During the fighting here it had tried to keep one platoon in town with the infantry at all times. This effort was not usually in response to definite requests for armor for specific missions, but was rather an attempt to give continuous armored support.

At 0630 on 9 November, the 2nd platoon of Company B, numbering three tanks, moved into VOSSENACK. By now it was snowing and visibility was nil. At 0900 one of the sergeant tank commanders asked permission of Lt Johnson to return to GERMETER. His gunner was almost hysterical from battle exhaus-

tion and needed a rest. Permission was granted, and two tanks were left in the town. Later in the morning an officer (unidentified) from the artillery, walked over and asked the tanks to leave town. They did so, apparently without questioning the authority of the order. This concluded active participation of Company B, 707th, in VOSSENACK, although it remained on alert status in GERMETER during 9 and 10 November.

The action of the 707th Tank Battalion at VOSSENACK is a perfect example of the unnecessary loss of lives and material occasioned by (1) lack of mutual understanding between the armor and infantry arms; (2) lack of efficient communication between these two arms or a failure to use such means; (3) lack of exchange of tactical information between the arms on the lower levels.

It was vital to the 28th Infantry Division to hold VOSSENACK since the division MSR to SCHMIDT passed through this town. If the tanks had been used as a mobile reserve and given complete, clear and concise orders when committed, the losses both to the armor and the infantry would have been less.

The role of the engineers in this action should not be overlooked. Their mine reconnaissance and mine clearing activities did little to prevent the loss of tanks from mine damage. At a minimum, routes of counter-attack should have been cleared early in the action in order for the infantry to receive maximum benefit from the armor in the mobile reserve capacity.

Action at KOMMERSCHEIDT and SCHMIDT

Concurrently with the action at VOSSACK, troops of the 112th Regiment became involved in fighting at KOMMERSCHEIDT, and SCHMIDT. These two towns are accessible from VOSSACK only by a tortuous, twisted trail which passes through the forest and dips into the valley of the KALL RIVER (Figure 4). This trail was a distinct obstacle for tanks, tank destroyers, and supply and medical vehicles. It was narrow, unpaved, barely the width of a tank, and was characterized by sharp angled turns and rock abutments which hindered the passage of vehicles. These conditions were aggravated by the frequent rainfall occurring in early November.

SCHMIDT, it will be remembered, was the objective of the 112th Regiment and of the 28th Division in the attack which began on 2 November. Its importance was its control of a good road net and the fact that it dominated the SCHWAMMANAUER DAM on the ROER RIVER. Since VOSSACK had been taken with comparative ease on the first day, it was decided to pass the 1st and 3rd battalions through the 2nd in VOSSACK to attack KOMMERSCHEIDT and SCHMIDT respectively. This was a slight change in the original plan which contemplated the attack through RICHELKAUL. However, after an abortive attempt in this direction on 2 November, the plan was changed as indicated. The new plan was successful and by nightfall the 3rd battalion was in SCHMIDT, having taken it virtually unopposed, while the 1st battalion was in and around KOMMERSCHEIDT also occupied with very little trouble. However, the attackers who had been so successful soon became the defenders of their

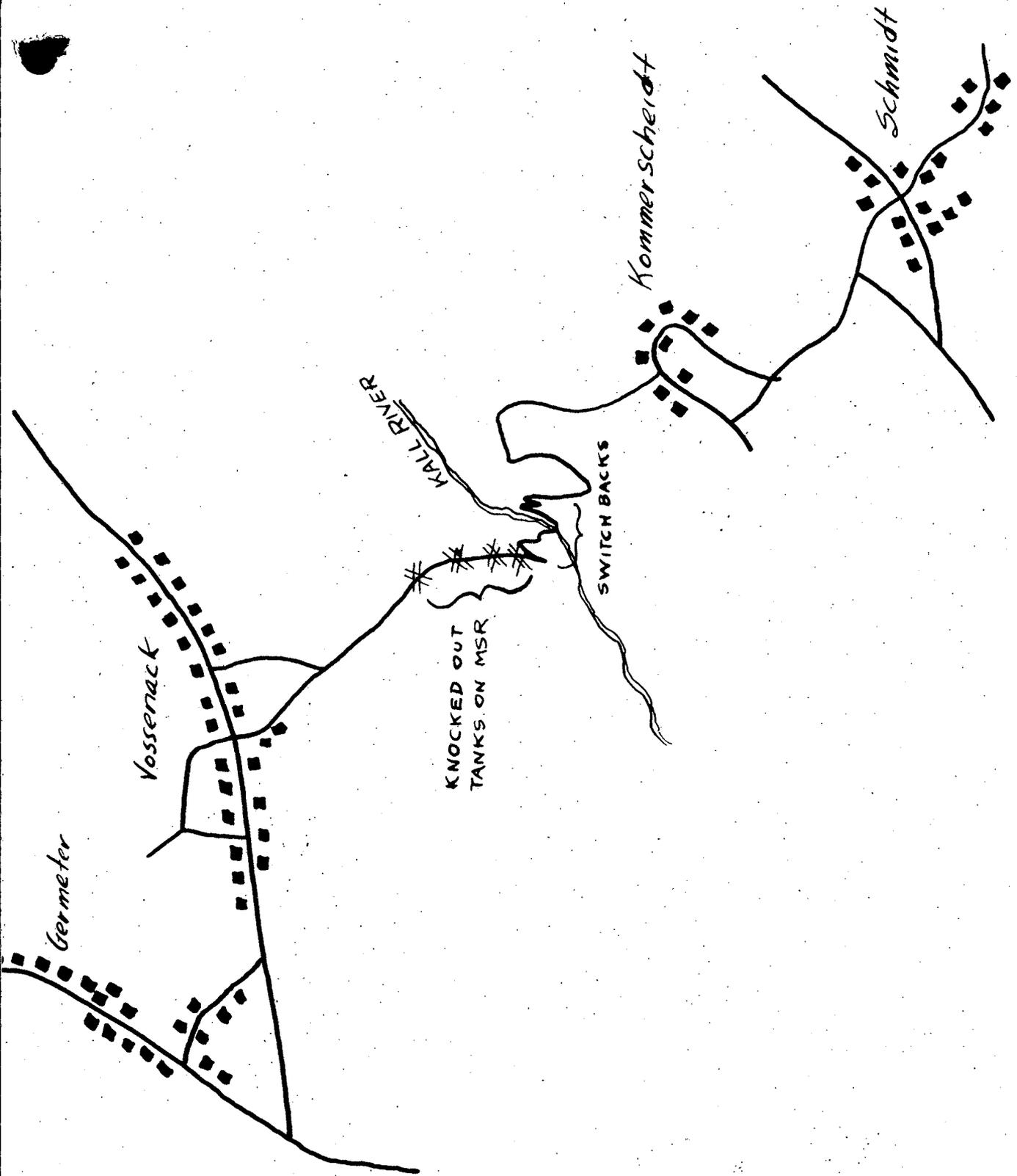


Figure 4. MSR between VOSSENACK and KOMMERESCHEIDT showing knocked out tanks.

respective towns without American armor forward to support them. Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, was the unit which was committed to the support of these troops and was reinforced by Company C, 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion (equipped with M 10's). The difficulties which beset the tanks and TDs are brought out in the following account.

2 November found Company A, 707th Tank Battalion, located in GERMETER in a reserve role. Its mission was (1) to support by fire the attack of Company C with the infantry on VOSSENACK, (2) to guard against a possible counter-attack from HURTGÉN and the north east, and (3) to be prepared to support the 1st and 3rd battalions, 112th Regiment, in their attack on SCHMIDT.

After an inactive day, Capt. Bruce M. Hostrup, the company commander, was called to the regimental CP at 1800. He was told that his company was to support the attack of the 3rd battalion which had the mission of securing KOMMERSCHIEDT and of driving on to seize, consolidate, and establish road blocks in SCHMIDT. Next he met Lt. Col. Flood, C. O. of the 3rd battalion, to discuss plans for the attack.

The tanks were to be employed as follows: 2nd and 3rd tank platoons support L and K companies respectively as they attacked KOMMERSCHIEDT abreast, starting from the church at VOSSENACK; the 1st tank platoon follow at about four hundred yards. The tanks with the leading companies were initially to lead the infantry and assist in cleaning out any Germans who might occupy the nose of the ridge. Next, they planned to fire into the woods

while the infantry moved forward, and finally, pull back to high ground from which they could fire directly into KOMMERSCHIEDT until the infantry reached the hill immediately north of that town. Although the assaulting infantry companies intended to lay wire as they advanced, the 'cease fire' to the tanks was to depend on visual means only.

The attack jumped off at 0700 3 November and went almost as planned. Platoon leader, Lt. John J. Clark lost his tank to a German mine. The rest of the tanks pulled back to the high ground, commenced firing into KOMMERSCHIEDT as outlined, and lifted their fire when they were able to see the infantry moving in good formation up the high ground on the other side of the KALL RIVER. The tanks then took advantage of what defilade was available and waited for word from the engineers that the trail between VOSSENACK and KOMMERSCHIEDT was passable.

About 1700 word came from Lt. Col. Ripple that the engineers had reported the road clear. Capt. Hostrup in one of his tanks reconnoitered the road and found that it was still impassable for tanks. After reporting this to Col. Ripple, who relayed it to division headquarters, the captain was subsequently ordered to remain in place until morning. He was told that engineers would work on the road to KOMMERSCHIEDT all night. The tanks remained in this position the rest of the night during which time artillery and mortar fire hit several but caused no material damage. Three tanks were inoperative

by this time, however, from other causes. Lt. Clark's had hit a mine, a second had thrown a track, and a third had bellied up on a sharp rocky ridge. The fire received during the night prevented retrievers from coming to their aid.

At daylight Company A again tried the trail to KOMMERSCH-EIDT. Lt. Raymond E. Fleig leading the first platoon started to move through the draw, but as he reached the entrance his tank hit a mine and threw a track. This was 24 hours after the engineers had reported the road clear of mines. Lt. Fleig reported to Capt. Hostrup who told him to get his tank clear of the road -- the company had to go through. Lt. Fleig then began a battle with the terrain which resulted in a number of disabled tanks and denied tank support to the infantry in KOMMERSCH-EIDT and SCHMIDT. In attempting to move his second tank around the first it slipped off the left side of the road and became mired in the soft ground. At this point his platoon sergeant using the command ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~commander~~ winched the remaining three tanks of the platoon past the command tank and removed the stuck tank.

As soon as the lead tank was clear Lt. Fleig took it toward the river, being forced at intervals to back and turn the tank in order to negotiate the turns in the trail (Figure 4.) At the three switchbacks he was forced to direct the tank on foot. After crossing the stone bridge at the KALL he led his tank on foot nearly to the top of the hill north of KOMMERSCH-EIDT. He made a brief visual reconnaissance of his route, mounted his

tank, and rode into town, arriving about 0730. There he reported to the CO of the 1st battalion, 112th Regiment, stating that he expected the rest of his company up by noon. The colonel told him that a German counterattack had driven part of the 3rd battalion out of SCHMIDT and asked him to take a position from which he could support a further withdrawal. Lt. Fleig was joined about 0930 by his platoon sergeant with two tanks. All three tanks were placed in partial defilade covering SCHMIDT.

The Germans apparently no longer considered the defense at SCHMIDT effective and at 1100 counterattacked KOMMERSCHIEDT with infantry and tanks. Lt. Fleig destroyed two Mark IVs and the other two tanks accounted for a third. Fleig then moved to his left where the defenders were giving way and engaged and knocked out a Mark V, after which he returned to the other American tanks and continued to fight with them until the attack was finally repelled at 1300. The tanks spent the remainder of the afternoon firing ~~at the pillboxes~~ west of SCHMIDT which the enemy was trying to reoccupy. Lt. Fleig had been instructed not to fire into SCHMIDT as part of M Company, 112th Regiment, was still there. About 1500 these troops pulled out and Lt. Fleig was ordered by the regimental CO to remain where he was. The colonel promised him infantry ground support adding that he expected another counterattack and stated that he felt if the tanks moved out of position, even for resupply, the infantry on the position would leave also. The expected night attack did not materialize, but artillery and mortar fire rained on the area.

During the time that Lt. Fleig was engaged in KOMMERSCHEIDT Capt. Hostrup was desperately trying to reach the town with the remainder of Company A. He had walked down the trail to assist the last of Lt. Fleig's platoon in crossing the KALL. The last tank of the platoon threw a track and became mired at the bottom of the draw. About this time Lt. Clark in his platoon sergeant's tank led his platoon forward. Not knowing the method which had been used to winch the 1st platoon around the dead tank at the trail entrance, Lt. Clark lost his tank off the road to the left when it tried to pass. Lt. Clark and the sergeant dismounted to survey the situation when artillery fire killed the sergeant and wounded Lt. Clark. The next two tanks using the two immobilized tanks as buffers went straight through on the road. Upon reaching the first bad curve the tank in the lead slipped off the road to the left and threw a track. The next tank, about 150 yards behind, also slipped off the left of the road throwing both tracks. Thus there were three tanks blocking the MSR to KOMMERSCHEIDT with little chance of getting maintenance vehicles near them.

Capt. Hostrup, later joined by personnel from his company maintenance section, worked on the vehicles and on the MSR. The center tank of the three was of most concern to the workers, its tracks were replaced time after time only to have it roll a few yards and lose its tracks again. The tankers in the draw also assisted the engineers in trying to dig bypasses out of the high right bank of the road to re-open it for traffic.

These banks were largely stone, however, and even blasting failed to produce satisfactory results. During the day and night the work of the tankers and the engineers was continually interrupted by interdictory mortar and artillery fire and once the workers were delayed by the stream of infantry pouring back from SCHMIDT. Capt. Hostrup kept Col. Ripple abreast of the situation and received the promise of additional engineers. By mid-night the tank battalion S-4 was on the road waiting to take a supply train through to KOMMERSCHIEDT. Finally, acting on orders from tank battalion headquarters and with daylight approaching, Capt. Hostrup and his men rolled the blocking tanks into the draw, permitting the supply trains to go through.

At 0430 Capt. Hostrup walked back up the road to his 3rd platoon position and stayed there until 0600 at which time he returned to the MSR. He learned that the engineers had been able to get bulldozers in and that the road was passable. Returning to the 3rd platoon, he attached to the platoon the remaining two tanks of the 2nd platoon and followed this group toward the road entrance. Lt. Payne, commanding the third platoon, halted to allow nine destroyers from the 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion to move through ahead of him. Little difficulty was experienced with the road, and Lt. Payne had his platoon on the hill north of KOMMERSCHIEDT by 0900. Capt. Hostrup's tank developed engine trouble south of the KALL and he radioed Lt. Fleig to take command of all tanks in the area pending his arrival.

Lt. Fleig with his three tanks helped the infantry beat off a small tank-infantry counter-attack, which faltered after a German Mark VI had received seven direct hits from the American tanks. About 0900 the Germans counterattacked again, this time without tanks. The tank destroyers arrived in town during the second attack which was also beaten off. Lt. Payne's platoon then joined the defenders and the enemy counter-attacked regularly at about four-hour intervals during the day; none of the attacks were successful. At dark the tank destroyers went to the rear to resupply, but the tanks again were ordered to remain in the town. Capt. Hostrup's tank, again operative, was at the regimental CP where the regimental CO wanted it for communication purposes. The division commander's orders to the regiment that night were to hold KOMMERSCHIEDT at all costs.

At about 0330 a German counterattack cut the lightly defended MSR and the enemy roamed it practically at will. Part of the tank battalion S-4 section was cut off in KOMMERSCHIEDT. The infantry regimental CP moved south into the town and joined the 1st battalion CP. At 0900 the Company A tanks protecting the south and southeast flanks of the town spotted another counterattack which was effectively broken up by artillery, tanks, and TDs. The tanks remained on a forward slope all day with the dug-in infantry but were forced to move continually in the face of direct fire and artillery from the excellent German positions near SCHMIDT, HARSCHIEDT, (FO70306) and BERGSTEIN, consuming more of their now precious gasoline. When

night fell the tanks pulled in near the buildings of the town. Two of Lt. Fleig's tanks were sent to the rear, having received direct hits which jammed their turrets.

Meanwhile, an unusual event was taking place. The tank battalion commander was appointed commander of a task force to be known as Task Force Ripple consisting of: (1) The 3rd battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment (already weakened by fighting in the south of the division sector), (2) Company A, 707th Tank Battalion (already in KOMMERSCHIEDT), (3) Company D (light tanks) of the 707th, and (4) Company C, 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion (also in KOMMERSCHIEDT but weakened by 3 or 4 destroyers), plus one platoon of Company B, 893rd. Company D 707th was on a screening mission to the south and actually never joined the task force, nor did the extra platoon of tank destroyers.

At 0245 on the morning of November the battered infantry battalion of Task Force Ripple crossed its line of departure (GERMETER ROAD-HURTGEN). Its mission was to pass through the embattled defenders of KOMMERSCHIEDT, pick up the remainder of the task force, and recapture SCHMIDT.

At daylight the weather, already cold, was made more disagreeable by rain. The 3rd battalion 110th Regiment, under Lt. Col. Ripple, TF commander, arrived at the woodline north of KOMMERSCHIEDT in time to witness a German counterattack on the town following a 30 minute artillery preparation. The size of the enemy force was estimated as from one to two battalions supported by tanks. Estimates of the number of hostile tanks

vary from 6 to 30 (probably 12-15), but the observers in many cases were bordering on hysteria. The American infantry dug in about the town had had fire poured into their foxholes from dominating positions for several days. The enemy tanks were engaged by American tanks, TDs and infantry bazookas. Three TDs and two of the defending tanks were knocked out. One sergeant tank commander, whose tank was shot out from under him, took over the crew of a TD which had lost its commander and fought until that too was knocked out. The defending armor began a withdrawal to the north, losing two more tanks with thrown tracks. The infantry, battered and depleted by being under constant fire for five days, was also leaving. Finally one tank and two TDs remained and supported Company C of the 112th Regiment, holding the woodline north of KOMMERSCHIEDT, where the infantry battalion of TF Ripple was also located. The one remaining tank was Lt. Fleig's. After dark Lt. Payne took a patrol forward and carried back ammunition from his own immobilized tank to be used by Lt. Fleig. The defenders of the woodline were required to beat off another counterattack during the night.

This ragged force held the woodline during the following morning even though many of the troops had gone to the rear during the night. There was little activity on this day but the recapture of SCHMIDT was out of the question. About 1700 the force was ordered to withdraw north of the KALL and to destroy the remaining tanks and TDs. This terminated the

action of Company A of the 707th as a fighting force in the HURTGEN FOREST. The remaining men of the company were led back to GERMETER by Capt. Hostrup, Lt. Fleig and other officers. Company A had lost 15 of its 16 tanks and 32 men were missing

The key to the failure of the forces at KOMMERSCHIEDT and SCHMIDT was the failure of adequate and timely armored support. Because of the terrain and road net the armored support depended in turn on engineer support. We have seen that the bulk of the engineer group attached to the 28th Infantry Division was engaged in fighting in VOSSENACK. Even those who were assigned to make the MSR passable for tanks were required to provide their own security which reduced the number of men available to work on the road. The lesson learned here is that if armor is to support the infantry operation it must be made certain prior to the operation the armor can move to the vital area when needed.

The loss of SCHMIDT was a bitter blow to the Allied cause, and it was not recaptured until early 1945.

Logistical Considerations

In spite of the inadequate road net resupply of the 707th Tank Battalion became serious only in regard to Company A in KOMMERSCHIEDT. Companies B and C withdrew their platoons regularly from VOSSENACK and were able to effect resupply with relative ease.

During the action at KOMMERSCHIEDT the battalion supply trains reached Company A twice: once on the night of 4-5 November

and again on the following night. The trains consisted largely of 'weasels' which had been borrowed from the infantry, and even these versatile vehicles had difficulties with the MSR since they were pulling trailers. The trailers had to be unhitched and man-handled around the difficult turns of the MSR. Two way traffic was out of the question even though this road was the only route of medical evacuation for the troops south of the KALL. On both nights the troops of the tank battalion in KOMMERSCHIEDT received gasoline, ammunition, rations, water, and mail. On the second night part of the supply section including the S-4 and Headquarters Company commander who had accompanied him were cut off when the Germans moved onto the MSR. They subsequently took part in the withdrawal described in the account of Company A.

It is interesting to note from a logistics as well as tactical point of view that Company B fired sustained indirect fire missions for a period of four days under the direction of the 28th Division Artillery. They were able to keep up their fire at a time when artillery ammunition to the division was rationed.

Evacuation of vehicles presented an unusual problem in that all of them had to be moved or repaired under fire. Under normal conditions the fighting has moved on when the maintenance crews conduct battlefield evacuation, but in the HURTTGEN maintenance vehicles were vulnerable to the same enemy action that took toll of the tanks. The situation which developed on the

MSR between VOSSENACK and KOMMERSCHEIDT demanded the presence of maintenance vehicles, but the condition of the road as well as hostile artillery made it almost impossible for these vehicles to be used.

No mention is made in the combat interviews of the battalion medical detachment; therefore, it is assumed that evacuation of the wounded was through infantry installations. There is an occasional reference to tanks evacuating their own wounded, and Lt. Col. Ripple admits that in the withdrawal from KOMMERSCHEIDT many wounded were left behind because there was no way to get them out. Some were evacuated on improvised litters carried by soldiers who stripped themselves of their combat equipment to perform this task. Company A listed 32 men missing in this withdrawal and the infantry battalion listed about 150.

The experience in KOMMERSCHEIDT is a grim commentary on the importance of clearing, maintaining, and strongly securing a main route of supply and evacuation. Although the ground distance to division rear installations was relatively short, the defenders at SCHMIDT and KOMMERSCHEIDT were, in effect, divorced logistically from the division. The terrain in a large measure was responsible for this, although the action of the enemy certainly played its part. Thus another bitter lesson was learned on the battleground of the HURTGEN FOREST.

Conclusions

The 707th Tank Battalion permanently lost 31 medium tanks in the HURTGEN FOREST; 15 from Company A, 7 from Company

B, and 9 from Company C. Most of these were due to mines or enemy shell fire. On the night of 8-9 November the battalion reached its lowest ebb with only nine effective medium tanks remaining. Company D, the light tank company, was not committed.

In view of the vehicular losses the personnel casualties among the tankers seem rather light. The missing men of Company A doubtless included some dead and wounded, however, aside from these only three men were known to be definitely killed, and one officer and six men wounded. Exact figures for company B are not available but after action reports indicate that they were rather light. Company C had two killed (including the commanding officer), one man missing in action, and one officer and eleven men wounded.

From the standpoint of combat effectiveness the above figures of tank casualties are important as is the fact that during the action many tanks were immobilized by thrown tracks or soft ground. Since under the prevailing conditions there was no way of rapidly returning these tanks to action, they were just as ineffective as if they had been completely demolished. At no time during the action at VOSSACK, at KOMMERSCHIEDT, and particularly at SCHMIDT did the infantry have the tank support to which it was entitled.

The 707th Tank Battalion was employed entirely in support of infantry, either offensively or defensively, but never in a separate armored action. Neither the battalion nor its companies were at any time employed in mass against a given

objective. Admittedly, this was precluded by the terrain to a large degree rather than by tactical decision.

In the light of present doctrine and with the advantage of hind-sight, 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 material value to the infantry, except possibly for morale considerations.

Again with the advantage of hindsight it appears that early efforts to clear the road between VOSSENACK and KOMMERSCHEIDT of mines, to improve it with engineer work, and to hold it strongly would have paid immeasurable dividends to the 28th Infantry Division.

It is apparent that the job of the tank battalion commander attached to an infantry division is especially difficult. Although he can recommend the employment of his tanks, his recommendations frequently may be rejected. He usually finds his companies and platoons widely separated and can no longer effectively command his units. He must content himself with keeping contact with them and with higher headquarters, trying to see that his companies are supported logistically, and trying always to be in the position where he is needed most. In many instances he is reduced to acting as a relay station between his units and the supported infantry or as a mere dispatcher.

In the European war many separate tank battalions made a distinction between whether they were attached to infantry units or in direct support, feeling that the latter allowed them more independence. Whatever justification may exist for this feeling, the only practical effect at company level is to weaken coordination. The new organization which finds the tank company organic to the regiment and the tank battalion organic to the infantry division should eliminate this problem.

The conclusions drawn are based on fighting in an area characterized by thick woods, deep ravines, and poor roads and complicated by rain, mist, and snow. Although the tank fighting in VOSSENACK was not in the forest, the presence of the surrounding woods determined the nature of the action. The forest limited visibility and maneuver, provided cover for the enemy AT weapons, and found the tanks in exposed positions to their great disadvantage. In the action at KOMMERSCHEIDT affected by the difficulties in clearing the MSR, woods and terrain decidedly influenced the outcome.

To say that tanks should not have been employed at all in the operations of the 28th Division would be an improper conclusion for time and again their work was effective against the enemy and assisted the supported infantry. Rather, it is to be concluded: (1) Tanks should not occupy defensive positions in clear view from dominating terrain. (2) Adequate routes for movement, supply, and evacuation must be provided for tanks. (3) The inclusion of tanks in the infantry division and regiment

is mandatory for effective command and communication. (4) Armor support was of material value to the 28th Infantry Division.

The 28th Infantry Division succeeded in getting elements south of the KALL RIVER to KOMMERSCHIEDT and SCHMIDT in its attempt to seize the ROER RIVER DAMS. Because the 707th Tank Battalion could not get sufficient armored support forward over the inadequate route from VOSSENACK TO KOMERSCHIEDT, the forces south of the KALL RIVER could not hold their gains, and were driven back across the river. On 14 November, the 8th Infantry Division in VIII Corps' zone to the south began a mutual exchange of zones with the 28th Division, which was completed on 19 November. (For action of 8th Infantry Division see Chapter VI). Meanwhile, however, the VII Corps opened its major offensive to break out of the northern edge of the HURTGEN FOREST and seize crossings of the ROER in the vicinity of DUREN.



PLATE II PUSSENACH, GERMANY, LOOKING EAST TOWARD THE ROEH

CHAPTER IV

THE 745TH TANK BATTALION IN SUPPORT OF THE 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION

Despite the failure of both the 9th Infantry Division and the 28th Infantry Division to seize the ROER RIVER DAMS, First Army directed that VII Corps continue its plans for the major offensive to seize crossings of the ROER RIVER in the vicinity of DUREN. The 1st Infantry Division, supported by the 745th Tank Battalion, was directed to make the main effort in the corps zone by breaking out of the northern corner of the HURTTGEN FOREST and seizing crossings north of DUREN.

At the beginning of the month of November 1944, the 745th Tank Battalion was disposed in positions around the southern edge of AACHEN repairing the damage incurred in the violent fighting for the capture of that city, and hoping for a period of quiet after months of action with the 1st Infantry Division. On 8 November came the cheerless news that the 1st Division was to relieve immediately, the 9th Infantry Division on the western edge of the HURTTGEN FOREST, and, as usual, the 745th was to support it. By 10 November the 1st Division had closed in assembly areas stretching from VICHT to MAUSBACH, and as in past months, elements of the 745th were teamed up with old friends in the 1st Division. The battalion headquarters, companies A and D, were with the 16th Infantry Regiment. Company B accompanied the 18th Regiment and Company C the 26th Regiment. In the 16th, each battalion had a light tank platoon and a medium tank platoon, and through-

out the 18th and 26th Regiments each battalion had one medium tank platoon only. In addition, the 1st Division had attached to it, the 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion, which was disposed throughout the division in generally the same manner as the tank battalion.¹ To further augment the division, the 47th RCT of the 9th Infantry Division remained in its sector when the 9th was relieved and continued to fight under 1st Division command.²

Since the days of NORMANDY the 745th Tank Battalion had been constantly attached to the 1st Infantry Division. Its veterans had seen almost every type of fighting that men and machines were called upon to face in Europe: hedgerow fighting, pursuit across open country, attacks upon fortified positions, and the tedious mopping up operations of city fighting. Sometimes their armored punch seemed to be the spark that kept the 1st Division rolling, and at other times it seemed that the tanks served only to draw fire upon their protecting infantrymen, block their roads, and rip up their telephone lines. The brief period 16 November to 7 December 1944, saw examples of all the above types of fighting compressed into the narrow space of a few miles of village spotted forest on the western edge of GERMANY.

Combat Operations

With knowledge gained from unhappy experience in previous assaults in the HURTTGEN FOREST, the First United States Army laid careful plans for a new assault that would sweep to the ROER RIVER. Artillery was massed in support from every unit under

First Army control; plans were laid for a formidable bombing along the whole front by more than 2500 bombers from United States and British air forces, and ground forces were carefully briefed until all was in readiness. D-Day was set for 16 November, and for six cold, miserable days the tankers and infantrymen sat and waited. It finally came, wet, cold, and overcast, but at 1100 the weather cleared and the bombing began.³ It was one of the largest pre-attack bombardments yet employed in front of an army, and the part of it which fell in the 1st Division zone seemed enough to churn the forest and hills into rubble. The towns of HAMICH and GRESSENICH were saturated, and the woods on all sides were splintered and smoking when H-hour came at 1245. (For the actions covered in the following pages of this chapter, see Map 3, Appendix V.)

As the smoke of the bombing cleared away, the 16th Regiment moved out of SCHVENHUTTE toward HAMICH with its attached tanks following. Due to terrain obstacles and the limited fields of fire the tanks of Company A, 745th, struggled forward with their assigned infantry battalions without firing.⁴ At the same time the 47th RCT jumped off from the woods south of GRESSENICH with that town as their objective. With them were the attached tanks of Company A, 746th Tank Battalion, which accompanied the leading elements of the infantry in this more suitable terrain. The third element of the attack was the 26th Infantry Regiment which attacked northeast through the woods from SCHVENHUTTE with the mission of seizing the high ridge about one thousand yards

away. Company C 745th Tank Battalion was unable to be of much assistance to them in this steep, wooded terrain, but did accompany them, breaking their own trails as they advanced. The rest of the 1st Division remained in positions east of VICHT awaiting developments. Each of the assaulting regiments' tank destroyer companies from the 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion remained in its attack position.⁵

High above the towns of GRESSENICH and HAMICH, commanding observation into these objectives and all the approaches to them, was enemy-held HILL 232 (K996446) which allowed the Germans to rake the whole valley with accurate artillery fire. In addition, in spite of the massive bombing, in the towns of GRESSENICH and HAMICH the enemy soldiers came out of the cellars and foxholes and quickly manned the defenses and the attacking troops were met with heavy fire as soon as they approached their objectives. Company A, 746th, attacking HAMICH, lost two of its tanks under the heavy artillery and direct fire which came in on them as soon as the attack jumped off. One of these tanks was the platoon leader's, and of its crew he was the only man left unwounded.⁶ Under this shelling the infantry attack slowed and finally stopped after reaching the near edge of the town. In GRESSENICH, almost the same thing happened to the 47th Infantry, and the 26th Regiment with its supporting tank company made only a short advance toward its objective.

The following day, 17 November, the Air Force again bombed in front of the First Army with tremendous formations, and the 1st Division concentrated seventeen battalions of artillery on HILL 232 (K996446) before the attack was resumed. This time Company A 745th accompanied the leading elements of the 16th Regiment on the right side of the SCHVENHUTTE-HAMICH Road, while a platoon from the 634th TD Battalion advanced along the road. Inside HAMICH the TDs and the accompanying infantry took one side of the street while the Company A tanks and their infantry took the other. The attack reached the center of town before it was halted by a determined enemy counterattack launched from the northeast end of the town. In this first counterattack one tank knocked out an enemy self-propelled gun at the end of the town's main street, but a German Mark V moved from behind a house not sixty yards away and shot through the frontal armor of the Company A tank before it could fire again. The infantry worked up close enough to hit the Mark V and it withdrew, apparently undamaged. After darkness fell the Germans counterattacked again with five tanks and about two hundred infantrymen, firing flares and supported by heavy artillery concentrations. The artillery set fire to one of the Company A tanks and one TD, and their flames lit the whole area.⁷ The 16th Regiment ordered its men under cover and called in time fire from its own supporting artillery, but this only slowed up the fighting, and made the



PLATE VI AT RANGES UNDER 100 YARDS OUR 76 MM GUNS WOULD PENETRATE THE FRONTAL ARMOR OF THE GERMAN MARK V, BUT AT LONGER RANGES THE ROUNDS MERELY GLANCED OFF.

tank action of both forces more important. One of the Mark Vs groping its way in the darkness only dimly lit by the blazing American tanks, drove within eight yards of a Company A tank without seeing it. The gunner soundlessly swung his turret and fired at the Mark V at this point blank range destroying it.⁸ Four separate counterattacks were launched within HAMICH during the night, and in the mixed up fighting the German and American losses were about equal. One of the Panther tanks fell in a bomb crater during the darkness, giving the Air Force credit for another kill although by this time the pilots were safely in their bunks in England. The bazooka teams of the 16th Regiment also managed to destroy one tank, while Company A lost two more M-4s to enemy bazooka teams and one of the TDs was set on fire either by mortar fire or hand grenades.⁹ Despite the stubborn resistance at every house, and the numerous counterattacks, at daylight the next, 18 November, the 16th Infantry Regiment held most of HAMICH and was preparing to move to the northeast and finish clearing the town.

In GRESSENICH the 47th RCT and its supporting tanks from the 746th Tank Battalion were engaged in a similar action, but with less success. At daylight on the 18th they held only half the town while enemy artillery fire directed from HILL 232 poured in on them.

Company C, 745th, with the 26th Regiment continued to have more difficulty with the terrain than with the enemy and

was unable to give much support. The infantrymen advanced through the woods leaving what roads and trails there were for the use of the tanks, but the enemy had expected just that and the roads were well defended. A roadblock and wire, covered by mortar and machine gun fire stopped the advance of the tanks on 17 November and there was no way to by-pass in the narrow, wooded valley and the tanks could only wait until the 26th infantrymen advanced beyond it.

The first two days of the First Army assault showed that despite the hopes and plans, there would be no easy advances to the ROER, but instead, a continuation of the slow, costly struggle. In the 1st Division zone the advance continued, but even the attacking units had so little room for maneuver that it is understandable that a whole regiment and a portion of the 745th Tank Battalion were not employed in the first days.

On 18 November the Company A tanks which had not entered the town opened fire from the woods southeast of HAMICH, using fuze delay 75 mm HE on the houses in the enemy held part of the town. After fifteen minutes of this firing the white flags began to appear and soon the rest of HAMICH was in the hands of the 16th Regiment. Then, as soon as plans could be made and disseminated, the attack on HILL 232 jumped off from the edge of town. In the words of Lt. William K. Sanders, an officer of the 745th:

....It was the sweetest example of infantry-tank cooperation that I have ever seen. A medium tank platoon of the 745th, a light tank platoon of the same battalion, and a destroyer platoon from the 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion moved out from HAMICH, carrying as many infantrymen from the second battalion of the 16th Infantry as possible on their decks. They advanced up the gradual slopes of HILL 232, firing at the ridge line and likely German positions and observation posts as they moved. There was low underbrush on this part of the hill, but not enough to interfere with tank movement. About halfway up the hill the infantry dismounted and pushed ahead on foot while the tanks continued their fire at the dug in German positions and the ridge line in general. An enemy self-propelled gun in the vicinity of (016446) kept the tanks under fire most of the time and an enemy tank in the same vicinity knocked out one of the Company A tanks. However, the infantry advanced to the crest of the hill without a loss.

At this instant the German artillery opened up on the American tanks, firing high explosives and some large caliber jellied gasoline shells. These shells made intense fires wherever they struck, and to avoid tank losses and to

back down the hill about two hundred yards to positions out of German observation but where they could still give direct fire support to the infantry on the ridge line.

On top of the hill the 2nd battalion infantrymen were separated from the Germans by a low embankment about twenty feet wide behind which the Germans were dug in. Here both sides tossed hand grenades at each other, but the tankers could see every German who showed himself to toss a grenade and often fired their 75's at single Germans, scoring direct hits a few yards in front of their own infantry.¹⁰

About this time, late afternoon of 18 November, a heavy concentration from our own 3rd Armored Division Artillery fell astride the lines on top of the hill. Fortunately, it caused no casualties among our own men, but the damage to their morale can be easily imagined.¹¹ At the same time the Germans launched a strong counter-attack with about two battalions of infantry

supported by tanks. The German tanks remained in place about eight hundred yards to the east and fired direct support for the counterattacking infantry who were partially successful and managed to drive the 2nd battalion from the top of the hill and halfway down the western slope. The hilltop changed hands several times during the next two days, but the tanks played no great part in the fighting.

After a lull in the fighting on 19 November, the 1st Division assault began anew on 20 November. The 16th Infantry attacked the high ground east of HAMICH with six tanks of Company A carrying troops and leading the advance. They crossed the open ground on the outskirts of the town, firing ~~their guns at the houses and the bridge~~ their guns until they reached cover where the infantry dismounted and pushed ahead on foot. A few hundred yards farther east a German tank attempted to change position in order to fire on the American tanks; a P-47 pilot caught the movement from above and set it burning with rockets.

In several cases we were unable to destroy the enemy tanks firing at us from long range but were able to cause them to move. When they showed themselves by movement, our Air Corps P-47s got them with rockets. Whenever the weather was good there were P-47s in the air over us, but much of the work they did was out of our observation, and we learned of it only when we overran tanks and SP guns that they had knocked out.¹²

While the 16th Regiment fought east from HAMICH, the 18th, supported by Company B, 745th, moved in to attack WENAU

(FO15445); in the woods to the east the 26th regiment attacked SCHLOSS LAUFENBERG (FO29445), with its Company C tanks still hampered by limited fields of fire and narrow muddy trails. One element of this last group moving down the road which branched west toward the objective of the 18th, WENAU, lost two tanks to the Panzerfaust fire of unseen Germans. Still further west the 47th RCT, 9th Division, continued the struggle to clear GRESSEMICH.

Between 20 and 27 November the 16th Infantry and its accompanying tanks advanced painfully through the woods and the muddy fields until its advance was stopped by the fire from German troops of the 3rd Parachute Division holed up in GUT MERBERICH (FO20475). An interesting aspect of this battle

when a battalion of German Infantry held out in ROSSLERSHOF CASTLE (FO15473) and it was planned to use tanks to shoot or smash down the gates through the castle walls. The Germans could not fire effectively from the castle walls except with machine guns and small arms, so six tanks of Company A attacked across the muddy, brush covered fields with accompanying infantry, but the tanks bogged down almost immediately. In spite of the hostile fire the platoon leader, Lt J. W. Sullivan, jumped from his tank and aided in placing logs, towing one tank with another, and guiding drivers until the tanks finally reached the castle where in traditional cavalry style they stormed through the gates with the remaining infantry firing in all directions and

forcing the defenders to surrender.¹³

In front of the 18th regiment and its B Company tanks SCHOENTHAL (FO23459) fell, but a strong German counter-attack from LANGERWEHE recaptured the high ground to the north, HILL 203, (FO22468) and defended it strongly. Further to the east a depleted regiment of the German 47th Volksgrenadier Division held out against the attack of the 26th regiment and its C Company tanks until the night of 24 November, when it finally withdrew, suffering few losses, and at long last the enemy was driven out of GRESSENICH by the 47th RCT which went on to take SCHLOSS FRENZENBERG (FO18490) by 27 November.

The Germans apparently attached considerable importance to HILL 203 in the zone of the 18th infantry regiment, but it had to be taken before an attack could be launched against LANGERWEHE so on 27 November the 18th attacked. The enemy had sited anti-tank guns and machine guns in the heavy stone-walled houses that covered the southern approaches to the hill, and they took their toll of the advancing tanks shooting three of them as they moved with the infantry on the narrow road.¹⁴

When the defenders saw the attack launched on HILL 203 they summoned a counter-attack by troops of the 2nd German Parachute Division from LANGERWEHE, but it moved in behind the hill just as the full fury of the 18th's supporting artillery fire fell and was almost destroyed. The defenses of the hill broke, and

close behind the retreating Germans the infantrymen of the 18th and their tanks rolled into LANGERWEHE. Farther to the east on the same day, 27 November, the 26th regiment attacked a town, JUNGERSDORF (FO40467) which finally allowed the supporting tanks of Company C to give them worthwhile support. At last their fields of fire for the tanks, and their direct fire added to the heavy artillery preparation helped the 26th to drive the 3rd battalion, 3rd German Parachute Division from the town. However not all of Company C fared so well -- almost at the same time that the attack on JUNGERSDORF was succeeding, the platoon with the 2nd battalion of the 26th, approaching MERODE (FO48452) was having what the battalion executive, Major Howell H. Heard, called "the sorriest experience of the war". MERODE was approachable by any type of vehicle from the German side but by only one narrow, soggy trail from the American side. Nevertheless it had to be taken, for it controlled the main road net in that sector of the forest. When the attack was launched, the C Company platoon was to advance down the narrow forest trail and the infantry battalion was to attack through the woods. In advancing down the muddy, tree-lined trail the third tank in the platoon column overturned, completely blocking the trail, cutting off the two tanks behind it. Thus the tank attack consisted of two tanks. When they reached the town one of them received a mortar round on its rear deck which set fire

Planning the Attack (1-16 Nov)

Dispositions of the 4th Division at this time are shown in Map 3, Appendix V. The plan of attack called for the 8th Regiment to be committed on the left, the 22nd Regiment to take the center, and the 12th Regiment the right flank. The 8th was given the mission of assisting the advance of the 1st Infantry Division on the north and of keeping contact with that division; the 12th had orders to attack north and northeast and envelop HURTGEN and then close in on the 22nd Regiment and continue the attack to the northeast; the 22nd occupied a three-mile gap between the south boundary of the 8th Regiment and the front line of the 12th. Because of the rugged terrain and the strength of the enemy defenses it was impossible for one regiment to attack on this broad front, so the 22nd was to penetrate on a narrow front in the center of its sector, seize GROSSHAU, then turn northeast to GEY. As planned this would result in the 8th and 22nd Regiments converging on the ROER near DUREN while the 12th covered the right rear.

The German front line crossed the division north boundary 1000 yards east of SCHEVENHUTTE and ran due south to the salient occupied by the 12th Regiment north of GERMETER. The Germans had been fortifying their position for two months and had built a rigid line of barbed wire and extensive minefields across the entire front. Obstacles, bunkers,

and entrenchments had been built up in the south to a depth of one mile and in the north portion to a depth of two miles.

Initially facing the 8th and 22nd Regiments were about eight German battalions of the 275th Infantry Division reinforced. A number of reserves were available to the enemy, and the bulk of two other divisions and elements of still others were encountered during the course of the battle. Nearly all of these were of poor to mediocre quality.

During the planning phase the American front line in the sector of the 4th Division was held on the north by elements of the 47th RCT of the 9th Infantry Division and on the south by the 298th Engineer Combat Battalion. There was no action along the front except for harassing artillery fire. Field Order #53, 4th Infantry Division, dated 7 November, announced that the division would pass through these units on the line and attack with the 1st Infantry Division on its left to secure crossings of the ROER at DUREN and south thereof.

Everything was in readiness by 10 November but the attack was dependent on favorable flying weather. Every effort was made to preserve the secrecy of the impending attack; therefore, lines of departure for the regiments were 1000 yards west of the enemy lines. Six long days were spent in waiting for the weather to clear before the attack started.

Despite this long wait there was no air action on the enemy defenses in front of the division as occurred in front of the 1st Division. It was felt that an air attack in such dense woods as faced the 4th would be impracticable.

Initial Penetration by the 8th Regiment (15-19 November)

On Wednesday 15 November, final plans for the attack were completed by the 70th Tank Battalion which had been ordered to make the following attachments: Company A and two platoons of Company D were attached to the 8th Regiment; Company C and one platoon of Company D were attached to the 22nd Regiment; and Company B was attached to the 12th Regiment and the assault gun platoon was attached to the 29th Field Artillery Battalion.²

D-Day was 16 November 1944. The weather was clear and cold. At 0115 a coded message received at the tank battalion CP indicated that H-hour would be 1245. The 1st platoon of Company D moved out to join the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Infantry Regiment. This regiment was attacking in column of battalions, 2nd battalion leading without artillery preparation. The point selected for penetration of the enemy MLR was just south of the east-west road which formed the south boundary of the 1st Division. The avenues of approach were fire breaks which were filled with concertina wire eight to ten feet high and heavily booby-trapped. In front of the wire the ground was sprinkled with Schu mines and

covered by machine gun and mortar fire.

The attack started with infantry leading, and the tanks of the first platoon followed as support but were canalized to the fire break. When the infantry was held up by the concertina wire the tank platoon moved up and fired on the enemy covering positions. One of the tanks threw a track, and in trying to make repairs the crew suffered three casualties from hostile mortar fire. Other crewmen of the tank platoon attempted to evacuate these men and were wounded themselves by the murderous fire. The infantry was forced to dig-in and the tanks withdrew to resupply. Thus, the first platoon of Company D had the first of many casualties to be suffered by the 70th Tank Battalion in the HURTGEN FOREST.

During the morning other tank platoons moved out in support of their respective infantry battalions. During this first day of battle the assault gun platoon fired as a battery 471 rounds of 105-mm; the targets being designated by FOs of the 29th Field Artillery Battalion. The 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, which had been attached to the division on 9 November, was relatively inactive. Because of the poor roads and heavy woods the destroyers were unable to get close enough to the front lines to give any support.

On the second day the 1st platoon Company A, 70th Tank Battalion, moved out at 0830 to support the advance of the 2nd

Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, in continuation of its attack. The infantry was still held up by triple concertina wire covered by heavy fire in addition to anti-personnel mines and booby traps. The medium tanks of this platoon made little better progress than had the light tanks of Company D on the previous day; they were stopped cold by heavy enemy fire. However, the TDs of the 803rd were able to render some support to the infantry.

On the third day, the 1st platoon of Company A was still in support of the same infantry battalion and fired 76-mm HE into the tangle of wire holding up the infantry and then pushed on across it with the infantry following in the tank tracks. Considerable progress was made. An unexpectedly appeared when a P-47 passing overhead joined in the battle. The tanks had their panels on display and the plane seeing the situation strafed the enemy lines. This caused some demoralization among the enemy and enabled the tanks and infantry to advance several hundred yards to breach the defensive MLR. A penetration of almost 1000 yards had been made on the third day of the battle; however, the advance could not be pressed further until the penetration had been broadened. With this in mind, the 8th Regiment decided to hold up and reorganize its positions. Two battalions were placed in the line with one held back in reserve.

The next several days the 70th Tank Battalion spent



PLATE IX IT WAS NECESSARY FOR THE 4TH INFANTRY DIVISION TO CONSTRUCT A COMPLETE ROAD NET



PLATE VIII AFTER 1 DECEMBER 1944, THERE WAS LITTLE MORE THAN PATROL ACTIVITY
ON THE 1ST DIVISION FRONT



PLATE VII AFTER A FEW TANKS PASSED DOWN THE NARROW FOREST ROADS THEY BECAME
NEARLY IMPASSABLE QUAGMIRE

to the bedding rolls and the tarpaulin there. The crew decided to go back into the woods to put out the fire and when they withdrew, the other tank pulled out also, and when the infantrymen reached the town they had no tank support.¹⁵

At this instant the 2nd Battalion, 3rd German Parachute Division counter-attached and cut off the two infantry companies in MERODE. With their MSR blocked, no tank support, and no hope of reinforcement, they were forced to surrender the following day. There was some feeling that the tankers had failed them in turning back without orders, but considering the strength of the German counter-attack, this probably made little difference.

The stubborn resistance of the enemy had cost the 1st Division heavily, but it cost the defenders even more. First Army reports that by the end of November the 1st Division and its supporting troops had destroyed the fighting effectiveness of, the 104th German Regiment, the 47th Volksgrenadier Division, and the German 12th Infantry Division. It is not claimed that these were full strength, first line divisions, but they had been determined, effective fighting forces.¹⁶

On 1 December the 1st Division line paralleled the ROER RIVER, running from LANGERWEHE through JUNGERSDORF to MERODE, with no major terrain obstacles in front of them. The Germans held out in MERODE, successfully blocking the roads

to the northeast. Supporting the defenders of MERODE was the artillery of the 3rd Parachute Division and the 47th Volksgrenadier Division, altogether a formidable array when combined with the terrain obstacles on the 1st Division side which limited the attack to foot troops, supported only by what could be hand-carried through the woods. In the face of these obstacles the 26th regiment made no further attempt to take the town and the 1st Division shifted its attack to the north.

In front of the 16th regiment and its tanks from Company A the enemy had withdrawn from GUT MERBERICH when LANGERWEHE fell, and had retreated into LUCHEM (FO37490). In preparation for the attack on this town the 16th lined up all of its tanks both light and medium, and its TD company, A, 634th. The attack jumped off without artillery preparation, and the tanks reached the edge of town almost before the Germans knew what was happening. When they did, the inevitable counter-attack came from ECHTZ, (FO70484), but the 1st Division artillery, poised waiting, destroyed it before it had crossed the open ground between ECHTZ and LUCHEM.

With the loss of LUCHEM, German activity in the 1st Division zone almost ceased, and both the forces did little more than patrol their fronts from then until 7 December when the 1st Division was relieved by the 9th Division and withdrew to a rest area in BELGIUM, taking with it the 745th Tank Battalion and the 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Conclusions

The 745th Tank Battalion had behind it months of intimate association with the men of the 1st Infantry Division. The same platoons had accompanied the same infantry battalions day after day across Europe, and their state of training could hardly have been better. At the opening of the battle in the HURTGEN FOREST they stood at one hundred percent strength in men and equipment. True there was a sprinkling of green replacements here and there in the tank crews, but not enough to affect the status of the battalion. Altogether there could hardly have been a better unit selected for a test of tanks in support of infantry in the difficult terrain of the HURTGEN FOREST.

The assistance given by the 745th Tank Battalion to the operations of the 1st Division was not great when measured in terms of strong points taken or enemy destroyed, but when considered in the light of the nullifying effect that they had upon enemy tanks, and the encouragement that their presence gave the division foot soldier their value was far out of proportion to the destruction they wrought.

It is plain that the tanks were used whenever there was the slightest chance that they could be of any value, to the extent that at times they were a definite hindrance. The noise they made and the blocking of the trail at MERODE certainly contributed to the failure of the assault on that town, but else-

PERSONNEL LOSSES

Killed in Action.....	3
Wounded in Action.....	79

TANK LOSSES

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Total</u>
Mines.....	2
Direct Fire Weapons (AT guns, tanks, panzerfausts, bazookas).....	5
Artillery or Mortars.....	8
Terrain (Mud or obstacles).....	13*
Mechanical Failure.....	0-10**

* All but two recovered.

** Varied from day to day; average number four tanks.

Figure .5. Losses of 745th Tank Battalion during the period of fighting in the HURTTGEN FOREST 16 November- 6 December 1944. 17

where in terrain equally as difficult their assistance ranged from slight to considerable. In the words of Lt Col Wallace J. Nichols, the 745th Tank Battalion commander, "In spite of the hilly terrain, woods, limited road net, and mud, the tanks were employed successfully."

The use of tanks in small units preceded by infantry or closely surrounded by them was unquestionably the only practical way in which they could have been employed. Their mobility and armor protection meant nothing on the forest trails, but their machine guns and the fire of their cannon as assault guns were encouragement to the infantry that sometimes carried the attack through. It is true that during the battle the 745th could count more tanks out of action due to terrain difficulties than due to enemy action. The remaining ones proved that regardless of how difficult the terrain may seem, and how little advantage may be taken of the tank's basic merits, we must have them there first and in greater numbers than the enemy.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

¹After Action Report #290, 745th Tank Battalion, November, 1944, p. 150.

²I. H. Peterman, Hurtgen Forest as I Saw It in Danger Forward, Albert Love Enterprises, 1947. p. 176.

³Ibid, p. 177.

⁴Lt. Col. Wallace J. Nichols, Commanding Officer, 745th Tank Battalion.

⁵After Action Report 464, 634th Tank Destroyer Battalion, November, 1944. p. 23.

⁶Lt Col Wallace J. Nichols.

⁷Combat Interview #5, 23 May, 1945, Maj. Kenneth Hechler, 2nd Information and Historical Section. p. 1.

⁸Ibid, p. 2.

⁹Ibid, p.2.

¹⁰Lt. William K. Sanders, ptn. ldr., Co. A, 745th Tank Bn.

¹¹Op. Cit., Combat Interview #5.

¹²Lt William K. Sanders.

¹³Op. Cit., Combat Interview #5.

¹⁴Lt Col Wallace J. Nichols.

¹⁵Ibid. (Conflicting statement is Combat Interview #5 which states that tanks turned back at woods edge without reaching town.)

¹⁶Op. Cit., Danger Forward, p. 181.

¹⁷After Action Reports 273 and 290, 745th Tank Bn., November and December, 1944.

CHAPTER V
THE 70TH TANK BATTALION IN SUPPORT
OF THE 4TH INFANTRY DIVISION

Supporting the major effort of the 1st Infantry Division, in the VII Corps zone was the 4th Infantry Division, which fought through the HURTGEN FOREST to protect the south flank of the Corps and to seize crossings of the ROER at DUREN and south thereof. The presence of the 4th Division and its attached 70th Tank Battalion was a well-guarded secret since they were to fight through a portion of the forest where no American troops had attempted an offensive since the 47th Regiment reached SCHEVENHUTTE two months previously.

The immediate objective assigned the division by VII Corps was to seize the main HURTGEN-DUREN ROAD, which would facilitate the capture of the ROER dams and a crossing of the ROER RIVER. Early in November General Eisenhower had told all commanders in the 4th Division, "This is the big push of the war to break the German's back. It is entirely conceivable that the war will be over by Christmas if this attack is successful."¹

On 16 November 1944 the 70th Tank Battalion, attached to the 4th Infantry Division, pushed off into what was to prove its most gruelling battle in Europe. To under-

stand what kind of unit the 70th was, it is necessary to see what experience it had prior to HURTTGEN.

The 70th Tank Battalion had fought in Africa as a light tank battalion. In November 1943 it was transferred to England, redesignated as a medium tank battalion, and attached to the 4th Division for amphibious training. From England the battalion went to Normandy on D-Day, across France, and finally to the HURTTGEN FOREST still accompanying the 4th Division. The unit entered the HURTTGEN FOREST a tough, battle-seasoned outfit with high morale and good esprit de corps.

The experience of the 4th Division in the HURTTGEN FOREST Operation was characterized by severe fighting and extreme weather conditions. The troops of the 4th found that all routes, fire breaks and trains were heavily mined and covered by automatic weapons fire. Added to the casualties suffered in combat were large numbers of troops made helpless by trench foot. Companies, which were brought up to strength by replacements would be found two days later with less than 50% strength remaining. Objectives were sometimes taken by companies consisting of 20, 25 or 45 men. In addition to combat in the forest it was necessary for the division to construct and maintain a road net within its zone, hampered by mud and unceasing artillery fire.

in slugging at the enemy. Small advances were made daily in most of the sectors assigned the infantry regiments, but it was tough going all the way. The tanks and TDs continued to give the infantry all possible support commensurate with the poor road net and small number of passable trails.

Supply and resupply was a gigantic task. During one period the only means of getting gasoline and ammunition to Company C was by the use of a weasel. An interesting and effective way of getting fresh water to the tank companies was the use of three large 250 gallon water tanks captured from the Nazis. They were mounted on one $2\frac{1}{2}$ ton truck which made a daily run to each company with the ration truck. The company kitchens were kept forward with the companies during the entire operation.³ Personnel casualties were evacuated through the infantry battalions with which the tanks were working at the time.

Attack of GROSSHAU by the 22nd Infantry

On D-Day the 22nd Infantry Regiment in the center had been assigned the task of capturing GROSSHAU. (FO52581) After many days of hard slow fighting, on 23 November the regiment reached the edge of the woods facing the town and here consolidated their positions. On 24 November replacements were received bringing the regiment up to strength, and it was decided to attack the town of GROSSHAU on the following day.

The regimental commander desired surprise in his attack and, therefore, ordered the 3rd Battalion of the Regiment to envelope from the north without artillery preparation. The 1st battalion was to cover the left rear west of GROSSHAU, while the 2nd was to make a secondary attack to the edge of the woods southwest of the town.

Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, was to support the 3rd Battalion in its attack. This company had been working with the 22nd since 16 November. On Saturday morning, 25 November, Captain Lewis Taynton in command of Company C, moved his tanks into positions to support the attack. The Germans greeted their movement into the attack position with heavy concentrations of artillery and mortar fire which caused many casualties among the infantry. At 1000 the 2nd tank platoon had to find a new attack position to the northwest since the infantry company which had been with them was reduced to four men. At 1115 the 13 remaining tanks and the 3rd platoon of Company C, 803rd TD Battalion jumped off in the attack on GROSSHAU. This was scheduled to be a coordinated attack, but because of the terrific volume of artillery fire very few of the infantry were able to clear the edge of the woods. The tank company commander reported seeing only six men and one infantry officer⁴. The terrain between the woods and the town was open, rolling ground and almost immediately the tanks and TDs (employed as tanks) were fired upon by well placed anti-tank guns. Six of

the tanks and two destroyers were knocked out by direct hits. The remaining destroyers and tanks withdrew to the edge of the forest, but there the rearward movement was stopped by fallen trees which artillery and anti-tank guns had knocked down. Trees fell across the top, in front, and sometimes in rear of the tanks. In the opinion of the company commander every tank was eventually hit either by direct or indirect fire of some kind. All the armor was forced to stay in the edge of the woods until nightfall when the trees were cleared away. One more tank was lost during the night by a hit from a large caliber artillery shell.

Meanwhile Company C of the 709th tank battalion (which had arrived from V Corps the day before) supported the limited objective attack of the 2nd Battalion southwest of GROSSHAU. The battalion secured its objective late in the afternoon.

Since there was no longer any chance of a surprise attack on GROSSHAU, the village was shelled. The regiment decided to wait until the 12th Regiment and the 5th Armored Division (V Corps) came abreast. The regimental commander ordered tanks and destroyers to withdraw and assemble further back because as long as the tanks remained in the front lines they drew artillery, mortar, and anti-tank fire.

The day following the ill-fated attack on GROSSHAU, a task force was formed from Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, Company C, 709th Tank Battalion, and Company C, 803rd TD Battalion.

This force was attached to the 70th under the nominal command of the battalion executive officer, and it was sent to support the 2nd battalion of the 22nd Regiment facing GROSSHAU in the woods southwest of the town. During the day the group was moved into position to support the infantry. The tanks and TDs fired on enemy positions in the town of GROSSHAU and KLEINHAU; they were subjected to enemy artillery fire all day but held their positions.

For the next two days the task force poured fire on enemy positions in and around the town, from the sector of the 2nd battalion, which extended from the east-west road leading into GROSSHAU south about 1000 yards. One German self-propelled AT gun was knocked out when one of the sharp-eyed tank commanders of the 70th noticed movement in the woods south of town. The area between the woods and the town was heavily mined with AT and AP mines, but because of the artillery and small arms fire covering these mines it was impossible for engineers to move forward to clear them. The dominating ridge in this locality ran through KLEINHAU and east of GROSSHAU toward GEY. The possession of this high ground enabled the enemy to cover GROSSHAU and its western approaches, and to keep the 22nd Regiment under devastating direct fire.

While waiting for V Corps troops to come abreast, the regimental commander of the 22nd decided on a plan to by-pass GROSSHAU to the north in the direction of GEY. This move together

with the advance of V Corps through KLEINHAU would encircle GROSSHAU. On Wednesday, 29 November, the plan was put in operation. The 2nd Battalion continued to hold west and southwest of GROSSHAU while the 1st and 3rd advanced northeast toward GEY. Just before noon the division commander disapproved the plan and ordered that GROSSHAU be taken that day. The only battalion in position to make an immediate attack on the town was the 2nd.

The hastily formed plan called for the infantry to advance followed by the tanks and destroyers of the task force. At 1500 the attack was launched, but almost immediately the infantry was pinned down by heavy concentrations of enemy fire. The tanks and tank destroyers then attempted to push out ahead of the infantry. The 1st platoon of Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, which was leading attempted to breach the minefield. Two of the tanks struck mines and were knocked out. The remaining three tanks pushed out following closely the tracks of the first two and successfully broke through the mines. The company commander was following closely in his command tank and the four tanks arrived in the town almost at the same time as three TDs. The infantry of the 2nd battalion followed rapidly and eliminated the snipers in the cellars of the town.

During the attack destroyers of Company C, 803rd TD Battalion, neutralized two pill boxes and two machine gun nests

by direct fire. They killed about 50 of the enemy and took 45 prisoners who were passed over to the infantry on arrival. The third platoon of this company gave direct fire support to the attack by firing HE, AP, and caliber .50 from their original positions.

By 1900 GROSSHAU was completely in American hands, and the armor began to withdraw for refueling and resupply. This was accomplished by sending a few back at a time. As the last tank cleared the mine field on its way back the enemy detonated a large portion of the field by remote control, but no one was hurt. The 2nd Battalion set up its CP for the night in the only building in GROSSHAU even partially standing, using the basement which had been converted into a bomb shelter by the Germans. The tanks and TDs returned to the town as they were refueled and went into a defensive position outposting the town for the night.

After the fall of GROSSHAU the next objective of the 22nd Regiment was the wooded area between GROSSHAU and GEY. The armored task force formed by the three C Companies supported the infantry in the attack to the northeast and succeeded in either taking or controlling all of the open ground north and east of the town. (For action of 5th Armored Division in this area, see Chapter VII.)

The German Counter-attack

On Saturday, 2 December, just before dawn, the 1st battalion, 963rd German Infantry Regiment infiltrated through the front lines between the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 22nd Regiment. Their objective, as later ascertained by G-2, was to recapture GROSSHAU. Initially their tactics were successful and they penetrated the front lines to a depth of about 500 yards. The armored task force was called forward immediately to assist in the American counter-attack. As the tanks and destroyers advanced, they encountered the enemy but did not realize it until bazooka teams began to attack them. Confusion reigned for several minutes while one tank was knocked out and burned and another damaged by bazooka fire. Another tank was set afire, and except for one man the crew bailed out. The remaining crewman put out the fire and drove back to GROSSHAU, loaded another crew, and started back toward the fight. Meanwhile the infantry organized and together with the tanks systematically set out to destroy the enemy. By 1400 hours all the attackers had been destroyed or captured. The front was reestablished and the armor moved back to a position southwest of GROSSHAU where they were resupplied.

During this action several infantrymen including two company commanders were captured by the Germans and were taken to a farmhouse approximately 500 yards in front of the American lines. While the lines were being reorganized, a

platoon of infantry moved out to the farmhouse, captured the German guards, and released the Americans without a fight.

Throughout the remainder of the day, the front lines of the 4th Division took a pounding from artillery and mortar fire. One small enemy counter-attack in the sector of the 12th Regiment was turned back; the entire front held and remained alerted for possible enemy action during the night.

On the next day the armored task force moved to an assembly area on the high ground northeast of GROSSHAU where it could act as a mobile reserve to repel any hostile action in the regimental sector. No counter-attack occurred but the tanks were subjected to sporadic artillery fire all day. The task force held its position until 1900 when the 22nd Regiment was relieved in place by the 330th Infantry Regiment of the 83rd Infantry Division. Crews from the 744th Tank Battalion (attached to the 83rd Division) took over three tanks of Company C, 70th, in position on an exchange basis. These tanks were considered to be better adapted to woods fighting, having reinforced armor and mounting short barreled 75-mm guns. These were M4A3E2 medium tanks and with their shorter barrels 360 degree traverse could be obtained without the guns striking trees.

After drawing back from the front, Company C, 709th Tank Battalion, and Company C, 803rd TD Battalion, were re-

lieved from attachment and reverted to their own battalion control.

On Tuesday, 5 December, Company C of the 70th was ordered to move to MONDORF, LUXEMBOURG, and Company C, 803rd also moved to MONDORF on this date. The other companies of the tank and TD battalion were still attached to their respective regiments which had established defensive positions all along the division front. Artillery fire was the only action to be found along the front of the 4th Division. The entire division was relieved by 12 December by the 83rd Infantry Division, and moved to LUXEMBOURG.

Summary

During the period from 16 November to 12 December 1944, the 70th Tank Battalion fought in twenty-four active engagements. They were on or within a few hundred yards of the front at all times. Throughout the fighting, tanks were canalized to trails and fire-breaks which were heavily mined and covered by fire. Many times wire and anti-personnel mines held up the infantry, and the tanks provided the only means of neutralizing these obstacles. They tore up the wire by firing into it or moved ahead of the infantry neutralizing AP mines and enabling the infantry to follow.

The capture of GROSSLAU had proved a most difficult and costly engagement for the tanks. In the initial attack

six tanks of Company C of the 70th were destroyed and two destroyers from the 803rd were lost. The TDs were employed as tanks during this action. In the later attack, which was successful, the destroyers and tanks were formed into a task force. At this time only six tanks and seven TDs remained of the two companies which had entered the HURTGEN at 100% strength, and in the attack two more were lost.

On 2 December the enemy hurled a counter-attack against the line northeast of GROSSHAU. The tanks which were in assembly 300 yards from the front sped forward to intercept the attackers. Before the tanks were aware that they were not among friendly infantry, one tank was destroyed and another damaged by bazooka fire. The next thirty minutes were a wild melee in which crewmen shot many of the enemy with carbines and pistols and drove them away from the tanks. Eventually the counter-attack was halted and the tanks assisted the friendly infantry in the complete destruction of the attacking force.

The battalion commander of the 803rd, Lt Col Charles W. Goodwin had this to say about the employment of TDs in the HURTGEN.

"The policy of attaching destroyers to infantry commanders has again proven very unsatisfactory. Lower infantry commanders have no knowledge of the proper use of tank destroyers. In one action during this period our destroyers were ordered to charge a town abreast with tanks, resulting in two destroyers being destroyed. This, in my opinion, was drastic misuse of valuable men and equipment. Sacrifice is a

poor substitute for leadership. It is my recommendation that tank destroyers be left under control of the trained and experienced tank destroyer officers. The job in the past and in the future is better done under these conditions."

The 70th Tank Battalion losses in equipment were high and included 24 tanks lost as a result of enemy action. Of these, twelve which did not burn were later retrieved and either repaired or cannibalized for parts.

Personnel casualties included one officer killed and eleven wounded while 11 enlisted men were killed and 67 wounded. During this period there were 46 non-battle casualties from various causes.

The action of the 70th in the HURTGEN FOREST has indicated that it is a terrific expense from the standpoint of material for tanks to fight in wooded areas. This is due to the restricted maneuver space available and the vulnerability to concealed anti-tank weapons. However, many times the tanks offered the only means of enabling the infantry to advance. From a morale standpoint it is desirable to have a limited number of tanks supporting infantry as they advance through wooded areas. The psychological effect on ground troops as well as material assistance given makes up for all the handicaps tanks suffer in woods. If at all possible, and if a few trails and open spaces are available for movement of tanks, they should in the future be utilized in platoon size units in attacks through woods.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

- 1 Personal interview with Major Michael C. Varhol, Fort Knox, Kentucky.
- 2 After Action Report, 70th Tank Battalion, November 1944.
- 3 Personal interview with Captain John M. Bushey, Fort Knox, Kentucky.
- 4 Personal interview with Major Lewis C. Taynton, Fort Knox, Kentucky.



PLATE XIII 8TH INFANTRY DIVISION COMMAND POST IN THE HURTGEN FOREST



PLATE V AN EXAMPLE OF A GOOD ROAD IN THE HURTGEN FOREST

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PLATE XI IN THIS RUGGED TERRAIN EVACUATION OF CASUALTIES HAD TO BE DONE BY HAND



PLATE IV COMBAT PATROL OF THE 28TH DIVISION NEAR VOSSEWACK

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PLATE X TROOPS OF THE 8TH INFANTRY REGIMENT NEAR SCHEVENHUTTE, GERMANY

1962

Chapter VI

THE 709TH TANK BATTALION IN SUPPORT OF THE 8TH INFANTRY DIVISIONS

"The failure of the 28th Infantry Division to take SCHMIDT made it necessary for the First Army and V Corps to secure another road which would serve as a supply route in the push to the ROER RIVER,"¹ and to effect the seizure of the vital dams that influenced all operations to the north. "An alternate route was found in the road through HURTGEN to KLEINHAU. Not only were there several approaches to the road but possession of the positions around HURTGEN on the KLEINHAU-BERGSTEIN RIDGE would give the American forces observation while denying it to the enemy."²

On 14 November 1944 the battered 28 Infantry Division was relieved from the HURTGEN front and began a mutual interchange of positions with the 8th Infantry Division which was located in the relatively quiet VIII Corps sector to the south, and on 19 November the 709th Tank Battalion, which had been attached to the 8th Infantry Division throughout the European campaign, relieved in place the 707th Tank Battalion, the armored support of the 28th Infantry Division.

Oral orders from the commanding general of V Corps were received by the 8th Infantry Division early on the evening of 19 November necessitating a hurried move of the 121st Infantry Regiment which was still in LUXEMBOURG. A letter of instructions

followed which directed the attachment of CCR, 5th Armored Division, to the 8th Infantry Division for an attack to seize the HURTGEN-KLEINHAU-BERGSTEIN RIDGE on 21 November (see Chapter VII).

"In order to carry out the corps directive it was planned to divide the action into two phases. During Phase I the 121st Infantry Regiment, reinforced, was to pass through the 12th Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, and commencing at 210900 November was to seize as its first objective the northern and eastern edges of the forest south and west of HURTGEN."³ This would provide a line of departure for CCR, 5th Armored Division, to initiate Phase II by its advance under cover of darkness from the west to seize HURTGEN and KLEINHAU and the ridge on which these towns were located. The 121st Regiment was then to relieve CCR, occupy HURTGEN, KLEINHAU, HILL 401 (FO58377), and defend the ridge from counterattacks from the northeast and southeast while CCR continued the attack to BERGSTEIN. The account of Phase II can be found in Chapter VII.

The 121st Regiment had attached the 12th Engineer Bn., to clear the road to HURTGEN which was heavily mined and obstructed by fallen trees. No serious threat from German armor was expected during the attack through the forest but there was a strong possibility of counterattacks when the edge of the forest was reached. To counter this possibility Company A, 644th TD Battalion, was attached to the regiment.

The other regiments were to have little part in the attack on HURTGEN. The 28th Regiment was to remain in position in VOSSENACK and the 13th was to occupy defensive positions just north of the KALL RIVER.

The portion of the forest through which the attack on the town of HURTGEN had to pass lay generally along and west of the HURTGEN-GERMETER ROAD. The Germans had correctly evaluated the defensive capabilities of the heavily wooded, boggy, irregular terrain which was cut by numerous gullies and steep cliffs. They had prepared elaborate positions of wire entanglements, minefields, log bunkers, pillboxes and prepared fires, "Maps of the forest used by the Germans had each section marked; when the observers in the log bunkers heard a noise in any section they called for fire on that point."⁴ The mud, rain, and sleet of early winter added to the formidable nature of the obstacles opposing the American forces.

The German troops opposing the attack of the 8th Infantry Division were not of the best quality. Their forces consisted of many provisional units which were formed of exceptionally old or young men many of whom had never been in combat and stragglers from units that had been disorganized in FRANCE. Some of the enemy units identified were, Combat Team WEINEN consisting of about 400 men, elements of the 89th Division and other non-divisional units. The morale of the defenders was generally low and for that reason certain of the

SS troops were stationed west of the ROER to discourage any notion of surrender. A scarcity of officers was indicated with all platoons and most companies being commanded by non-commissioned officers. In several cases 2nd Lts commanded battalions. The poor quality of the defenders, however, was more than offset by the elaborateness of the defense. All approaches to the clearing in which the town of HURTTGEN was located passed through dense woods with the two roads approaching from the west having sharp bends which provided ideal sites for strongpoints. The Germans took full advantage of these positions as outposts.

The frustrating obstacles of mud, mines, and limited mobility in the tangled masses of trees forced the 709th Tank Battalion to be employed largely by platoons throughout the HURTTGEN operation. Even in this strength the available ground for maneuver was so limited that tank operations frequently came to a standstill when a single tank immobilized by mines or mud blocked the path of the canalized column. The tanks played a minor role in the initial attack toward HURTTGEN, and except during the attack on the town itself never rose above a supporting role during the entire operation.

Assault to HURTTGEN (12-28 November 1944)

The 121st Infantry Regiment attacked with three battalions abreast at 210900 November toward the forest clearing southwest of HURTTGEN. The attack was launched through the

positions of the 12th Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, located generally north and west of WITTSCHIEDT, but bogged down almost immediately because of the heavy concentrations of mortar fire and the dense anti-personnel mine fields encountered. Company I, on the right flank of the regiment, was the only company to reach its objective, the edge of the forest southwest of the town of HURTGEN.

On the following morning the regiment resumed its attack with the 1st battalion in the center making the main effort. The 3rd battalion on the right strengthened its positions on the edge of the forest but made little forward progress in spite of the repeated attacks and the support of the Corps artillery. The 2nd battalion meanwhile advanced about 200 yards and reached the edge of a fire lane short of the objective. The lack of success was due principally to mortar fire, dense woods, mine fields, and heavy artillery fire. By evening it was apparent that much greater progress must be made on the next day if a line of departure for CCR of the 5th Armored Division was to be secured.

On 23 December the regiment again attacked with three battalions abreast without appreciable gains. The 2nd platoon of Company D, 709th was attached to the 1st battalion 121st Regiment, and the 3rd platoon Company D was attached to the 3rd battalion. It was first planned to use the tanks of the 2nd platoon in the firebreaks ahead of its infantry battalion, but four of the five tanks bogged down before reaching their

but four of the five tanks bogged down before reaching their positions. It was then planned to use the 3rd platoon of Company D in front of the 3rd battalion against a strong point which had been holding up both battalions. The tanks bogged down en route to the 3rd battalion, and when they finally arrived at 1645 the lead tank became mired again and blocked the advance of the others. At 1700 the enemy counter attacked along the entire regimental front but was repulsed after a 30 minute engagement. By nightfall the line of departure for the attack of CCR of the 5th Armored Division which was to initiate Phase II still had not been secured and the attack of CCR scheduled for the 24th was delayed.

On 24 November the remainder of the 709th (less Company C) was attached to the 121st Regiment for employment on the following day and was held ready to follow CCR in its attack on HURTTGEN. Company C of the 709th was attached to the 2nd battalion 22nd infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division. The 121st Regiment continued its attack with the 1st Battalion, made no gain; the 2nd Battalion on the left gained 500 yards to face HURTTGEN from the west, and the 3rd Battalion on the right advanced about 200 yards east of the Germeter HURTTGEN Road. The 3rd platoon of Company D, 709th still attached to the 3rd battalion was given the mission of wiping out a machine gun that was holding up the infantry. At 0900 the 3rd battalion began a coordinated attack on both sides of the road with the attached light tanks in support.

The lead tank was disabled by a mine although the road had been cleared the night before. Either the Germans had mined it again or the engineers had failed to clear all the mines. The platoon leader dismounted to check for mines and stepped on an anti-personnel mine which blew off his legs. A German self-propelled 88mm gun further disabled the tank with three direct hits, killing one member of the crew and wounding another. The other four tanks turned back since they could not pass the first tank, which, together with a large crater beside it, blocked the road. At 2150 a tank recovery vehicle from Company A, 709th, went forward to pull the tank off the road. Some 200 yards short of its goal it hit a mine which knocked off a track. Men of the 12th Engineer Battalion went up during the night and blew up the tank in order to clear the road, but discovered two other, large craters blocking the road beyond.

Meanwhile, to the northwest, the 2nd platoon of Company D with the 2nd battalion of the 121st Regiment had the mission of supporting the infantry in an advance to the forest edge. Mines and obstacles halted the advance and the tank attack was called off.

The situation as seen at the close of 24 November by Division Headquarters was as follows: the advance of the 4th Division on the north seemed to insure that an attack by the 121st Regiment against the HURTGEN-GROSSHAU (F052381) RIDGE could be supported from that flank; progress had been slow in the 121st regimental zone; combined attacks by light tanks,

tank destroyers, and the bulk of the 3rd battalion made slight progress on the south flank.

In general, the situation in the 121st Regimental zone was still not conducive for an attack by CCR, 5th Armored Division, on 25 November. However, the arrival of German reinforcements in the HURTGEN area and the expected arrival of more reinforcements indicated the necessity of an attack by CCR without delay. The 8th Infantry Division plan contemplated that the 121st Regiment, reinforced by the 709th Tank Battalion (-) and Company A of the 644th TD Battalion, follow CCR and mop up and occupy HURTGEN, KLEINHAU, and HILL 401 with one reinforced battalion on each. The 22nd and 12th Regiments of the 4th Division were to support the attack from positions west of HURTGEN and KLEINHAU, while Company C of the 709th was to be made available to CCR at KLEINHAU.

At 250730A November the 121st Regiment renewed its attack toward the edge of the forest. The 2nd battalion on the left made the only appreciable gain, about 700 yards. The 2nd platoon of Company D, 709th, attached to this battalion had been instrumental in its advance to the edge of the forest.

"To get to the edge of the forest, Co E, 121st Regiment, pulled out first. It had a detachment of engineers from the 12th Engineer Battalion and the 2nd platoon from company D, 709th Tank Battalion. Company G went to the left of the minefield and then across country to a hairpin turn in the road to the east. They took out a machine gun which was in a set of road blocks along the road near this turn. When a team was organized it went down the road. The infantry led, then the engineers, and finally the tanks. The infantry protected the engineers while they removed some 100 anti-tank mines and 4 road blocks. Tanks helped

knock out bunkers. Approximately 38 prisoners were taken. There was wonderful team work between the infantry, engineers, and tanks. None of the tanks were destroyed." 5

"E Company was walking around the tanks and about 4 men were riding the tanks. We met 'jerries' in log bunkers * * * Each bunker had at least one automatic weapon and small arms. The tanks exchanged a few shots with 'jerries' in log bunkers and easily persuaded them to give up." 6

The push of the 2nd Battalion improved the regiment's position which was now on or around the west side of HURTGEN. Meanwhile CCR had launched an attack at 0730 and again at 1630 through the 3rd Battalion of the 121st up the GERMETER-HURTGEN ROAD but made no advances. (See Chapter VII) The plan for the taking of HURTGEN by CCR of the 5th Armored was abandoned and the mission fell to the infantrymen of the 121st Regiment. Operations for 26 November came as somewhat of a 'breather' with only limited objective attacks being made to straighten out the regimental front line by eliminating small pockets of resistance. Reducing this resistance, the 121st consolidated along the edge of the forest on the southwest, west and northwest sides of the HURTGEN clearing. Co. F advanced to within 300 yards of HURTGEN but withdrew in the face of heavy fire. A coordinated attack on HURTGEN by the regiment with its attachments was planned in conjunction with the 1st Battalion, 13th Regiment, on the north. The employment of the tank battalion was not contemplated until the fall of HURTGEN in order that the restricted road net would not be blocked for tank destroyers and necessary light vehicles of the regiment.

On the following day the 1st battalion, 13th Regiment, made an advance of approximately 1500 yards to the east on the north side of HURTGEN and cut the HURTGEN-KLEINHAU road. The 1st battalion of the 121st Regiment advanced toward HURTGEN but made little gain because of reduced strength and the heavy fire encountered. The 2nd battalion also attacked toward the town but was stopped cold by small arms fire from the outlying houses and by mortar fire. The 1st and 2nd platoons of Company A were in support of the 2nd battalion, but were of no major assistance. The 3rd battalion on the south continued to attack east through the forest. On the night of 27 November patrols from the 2nd battalion and from the 1st battalion of the 13th Regiment erroneously reported HURTGEN unoccupied; the town was nearly encircled by the Americans.

Next morning the 2nd battalion of the 121st attempted to enter HURTGEN from the southwest but was surprised to meet resistance. The 1st battalion attacked from the woods to the south of HURTGEN but was stopped by machine gun fire coming from the town. The regimental attack bogged down but by noon was reorganized into a combined infantry-armor assault which advanced into HURTGEN despite heavy artillery and mortar fire. The 1st platoon Company A, 709th, led the attack, followed by infantrymen from Company E and a squad of the 12th Engineers with minesweepers mounted the tanks of the leading wave. Companies F and G advanced on foot. As the combined arms team

approached the town one tank was hit by artillery fire which wounded all of the infantrymen aboard. Small arms fire was received and the troops of F and G companies dropped behind. When the tanks reached the outlying buildings of the town the infantry and engineers dismounted and took shelter on both sides of the street. No mines were encountered in the town so the engineers fought as infantry. The foot troops advanced house by house on both sides of the street while the tanks moved ahead firing into each building with their 75's after which the infantry cleared it top to bottom. Ninety-five percent of the prisoners were taken from reinforced concrete cellars. "The Germans were terrified by the tank fire more than anything else." ⁷ As the lead tank neared the church in the center of HURTGEN it was hit by a bazooka and set on fire. A few minutes later a tank destroyer was knocked out by a bazooka in the same vicinity, however, by 1730 the town was secured after all houses had been cleared. Officers of the 709th Tank Battalion felt that the infantry should have advanced at least three houses ahead of the tanks in the town fighting to prevent tank losses from enemy bazooka fire.

Company C, 13th Regiment advanced into HURTGEN from the 1st Battalion positions on the northeast of the town, where, during the day, it had repulsed several counter-attacks. The remainder of the 1st Battalion seized HILL 401, south of KLEINHAU. The 1st Battalion of the 121st Regiment joined the 2nd Battalion in mopping up. CCR, 5th Armored Division was

alerted and ordered to jump off at daylight 29 November to capture KLEINHAU and the high ground to the northeast.

HURTGEN to the Corps Objective (29 Nov-5 Dec)

With the fall of HURTGEN a foothold on the HURTGEN-KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ridge was seized which gave CCR, 5th Armored, room to maneuver. Accordingly, CCR attacked at daylight and captured KLEINHAU and HILL 401 to the northeast. Here it was relieved by the 1st Battalion, 13th Regiment, in order that it could regroup and push south to BRANDENBERG. The 1st and 2nd Battalions, 121st Regiment, consolidated positions in the vicinity of HURTGEN while the 3rd Battalion continued its attack east through the forest and gained 1000 yards south of the town. Elements of the 28th Regiment in VOSSENACK to the south pushed eastward and occupied HILL 50 (FO49343). The 709th Tank Battalion was still attached to the 121st Regiment but remained in regimental reserve helping to consolidate and to organize defensive positions around HURTGEN.

On the next day new orders were given to the 709th Tank Battalion. The assault gun platoon was attached to the 56th Field Artillery Battalion. Company A was attached to a task force with the mission of assisting in clearing remaining enemy resistance west of the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ROAD. Company D plus one platoon of Company B was attached to the garrison under Lt.-Col. Streiter which was being organized with two rifle companies and a platoon of TD's for the defense of KLEINHAU. En route to KLEINHAU a light tank from Company D turned over

killing an officer and an enlisted man. Company B (less one platoon) was ordered to outpost and defend HURTGEN, and lost one tank during the day when it ran over a mine.

The drive for the dams gained headway again once the bottleneck of HURTGEN was removed. The picture on the 8th Infantry Division front for this day includes the building up of defenses along the line HURTGEN-KLEINHAU to ward off any attack from the northeast; the push of elements of the 121st Regiment just south of HURTGEN toward the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ridge; and the breakout of the VOSSENACK 'thumb' by the 28th Regiment in the direction of the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ROAD. All the while CCR, 5th Armored Division, was pushing down this road in the direction of BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN. Though bloody fighting continued the stalemate was crumbling.

Company A, 709th Tank Battalion, continued to operate on 1 December in the reduction of enemy resistance west of the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ROAD. The 1st platoon was ordered to attack with the 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment against the enemy to the southeast of HURTGEN. The 2nd Platoon also joined the attack with the mission of giving supporting fire. The attack was successful and the 2nd Battalion crossed the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ROAD by evening. The 3rd Battalion launched its attack in the same area. Just before the attack jumped off 4 American tanks appeared on the scene. Major Hogan, the Battalion Commander, talked with the tank platoon leader who informed him that his mission was to support the 2nd

Battalion. Major Hogan requested that they support him instead. Shortly afterwards when the 3rd Battalion was held up by pillboxes the tank platoon commander requested and received permission to assist them. An infantry sergeant was placed in the lead tank and coordinated the tank fire with that of the infantry on the strongpoints which were holding up the attack. The Germans placed fire on the tanks but failed to destroy them. After assisting the infantry to gain 70-100 yards in the entire days fighting the tanks returned to HURTGEN for the night.

To the northeast the 3rd Platoon of Company A attacked with the 1st Battalion of the 13th Regiment. The attack started at KLEINHAU and the platoon progressed some 1500 yards to the south, losing but one tank which struck a mine. The attack south of HURTGEN continued on 2 December against the remaining enemy pockets west of the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ROAD with the 2nd Platoon of Company A in support. Lt. Bush and Sgt. Harper of the Infantry were placed in one of the tanks with an SCR 300 radio and coordinated tank fires with those of the infantry. One pillbox was knocked out by a tank firing at it from pointblank range with its 75-mm. cannon. An advance of 150 yards against stiff resistance was made and 55 prisoners were taken. Sergeant Carlton R. Brown, Operations Sergeant of the 3rd Battalion, 121st Regiment, stated in a combat interview regarding this action, "Tanks were not of much value except that psychologically they scared the enemy and encouraged us."⁷



PLATE XII THE 121ST INFANTRY REGIMENT ADVANCES ALONG THE GERMETER-HURTGEN ROAD



PLATE XIV TROOPS OF THE 13TH INFANTRY REGIMENT ADVANCE THROUGH THE FOREST



PLATE XV THE TOWN OF HURTGEN, GERMANY AFTER IT'S CAPTURE BY THE 8TH INFANTRY DIVISION



PLATE XVII SCREENS WERE ERECTED TO CONCEAL THE GERMETER-HURTGEN ROAD FROM ENEMY OBSERVATION



PLATE XVIII TANKS ASSEMBLED IN THE OUTSKIRTS OF HURTGEN FOR THE ATTACK ON KLEI NHAU

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The 2nd Battalion, 121st, to the east of the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ROAD reported that an American tank fired on them killing two men and wounding two others before it could be stopped. They also reported that later one of the tanks in the same group ran over a pile of 20 mines which destroyed the tank, killed the crew, and injured some of the nearby infantrymen. (After Action Reports of the 709th Tank Battalion do not mention this incident.)

The 1st and 2nd Platoons of Company A attacked with the 3rd Battalion cleared out the pocket west of the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ROAD and crossed into the woods on the east by evening of 3 December. The 1st Battalion, 3rd Regiment pressed its attack east of the road supported by the 3rd Platoon, Company A, 709th, gaining 300 yards before they consolidated their gains for the night. On this date CCR seized BRANDENBERG.

While the 121st Regiment was clearing out the resistance on both the east and west sides of the road, the 28th Regiment to the south had been pushing east and southeast from VOSSENACK attempting to straighten out the line from VOSSENACK to BRANDENBERG. On this date the 2nd Platoon, Company B 709th moved to VOSSENACK to support one of the attacks of that regiment. Mud and woods interfered with the coordination of tanks and infantry and the tank platoon withdrew to GERMETER.

The 1st and 2nd Platoons of Company A of the tank battalion on 4 December assisted the 121st Regiment in a final attack to secure its objectives on the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ridge.

Lt. Bush of the 3rd Battalion was again placed in one of the lead tanks as the attack moved forward. Mortar fire was encountered, but it bounced off the tanks without damaging them. The infantry complained of the reluctance of the tanks to leave the firelanes and enter the woods. When they did so, however, the tanks knocked out two machine gun nests before bogging down. The 3rd Battalion was on the Corps objective (the KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG ridge) by nightfall.

Meanwhile the 1st Platoon of Company B supported the 2nd Battalion 28th Regiment in an attack to the southeast of VOSENACK. The attack jumped off after a heavy artillery preparation but met no success and lost all of the tanks of the platoon, presumably to enemy tank fire. The remnants of the tank crews returned to GERMETER.

On 5 December Company C returned to the control of the 709th after seeing considerable fighting with the 4th Infantry Division. A description of its action is included in the chapter on armored support of the 4th Division. (See Chap. V)

The phase of the action that ended on 5 December saw the 121st Regiment in possession of the high ground which included HURTGEN, KLEINHAU, and BRANDENBERG with control of supply routes necessary to continue the attack southeast to the vital dams on the ROER. The 28th Regiment had pushed elements east as far as BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN. The action of the 709th Tank Battalion in the area near HURTGEN was concluded and the weight of armored support was shifted to the 28th Regiment.

Conclusions

Supply was no great problem to the company commanders of the 709th Tank Battalion. The Battalion S-4 brought the supplies to the company area each night. Light tanks were used at times to carry supplies forward and also to evacuate the wounded. In the operation the tank companies kept on hand 2 days reserve rations, one and a half days oil and gas, and one day of fire in ammunition.

During the battle of HURTTGEN FOREST the 709th Tank Battalion discovered that some infantry officers were not acquainted with the capabilities and limitations of armor. On one occasion the infantry requested that tanks attack at night over unreconnoitered terrain. In the town fighting in HURTTGEN the tankers felt that had the infantry preceded the tanks by 3 or 4 houses the infantry would have been well supported and tanks would not have been lost to enemy bazookas.

The abundance of German artillery made it expeditious for the noise of movement of armor to be covered by artillery fire in front of the area. German artillery fire also hampered the movement of infantry commanders while directing the attack. One infantry battalion commander found that by using a light tank as a mobile command post he could more effectively control his companies in the attack.

The winter conditions adversely affected the normal operation of equipment. Tank turrets had to be worked constantly to prevent them from freezing in the cold weather. Tank

tracks would freeze to the ground and break if the tanks were not moved frequently. A great deal of difficulty was experienced with sights and peri-scopes freezing over. Frost on the drivers vision slot was particularly troublesome as it blinded the driver when buttoned up and made him entirely dependent for directions on the tank commander.

Prior to the HURTGEN action 19 AN/VRC-3 (tank SCR 300) radios were installed in tanks of the 709th. They were used successfully in operation with the infantry. Radios frequently went out during the operation but quick repair by skilled communications personnel minimized the problem.

summary

The action of the 8th Infantry Division in the HURTGEN operation centered largely around the 121st Regiment which attempted to secure for the CCR, 5th Armored Division, a line of departure for an attack on the HURTGEN-KLEINHAU area and then to the south. Light tanks of the 709th Tank Battalion were employed without success along the firebreaks in front of the infantry battalions and up the GERMETER-HURTGEN ROAD. The failure of armor at this time can be attributed largely to the fact that mud mired the tanks and mines disabled them.

Because of the slow progress of the 121st Regiment CCR tried to attack through them on 25 November without success. It was apparent that armor could not be employed in mass until the clearing which surrounded HURTGEN could be reached. It is

interesting to note that on 25 November when CCR could not break through, a tank-infantry-engineer team employed farther west where advances had previously been halted was able to reach the edge of the forest. The theory of combined arms seems sound when the members of the team play their respective roles; the infantry protects the engineers while they clear a path for the tanks. It is to be emphasized that mere grouping of the several arms does not in itself provide a team; teamwork and close coordination are essential. It is further noted that, after this success, the attack bogged down for about three days until at noon on 28 November another team, consisting of elements of Company A, 709th, 2nd battalion 121st Regiment, and part of the 12th Engineer Battalion, was formed and immediately moved in and captured HURTGEN. The effective results of the work of this team indicate that it would be advantageous for combined arms teams to have the opportunity of working and training together prior to actual combat.

The fall of HURTGEN permitted CCR to pass through the infantry, seize KLEINHAU and continue its attack to the south. Also with the fall of HURTGEN the 28th Regiment in VOSSENACK began moving east in conjunction with the 121st. During the move of the 121st to the Corps objective tanks were used in platoon and section size units in support of the battalions in the forest.

As the Corps objective was approached the main effort of the 8th Division began to shift to the zone of the 28th Regiment and the tanks were gradually shifted to that area.

The role of the 709th Tank Battalion in the HURTTEN FOREST battle is not one to be used as an illustration of armored principles of mass action, maneuverability, and violent attack. Rather, its main contribution was close support of infantry by individual tanks in slow, plodding advances that were measured in yards rather than miles. It is felt that the main lesson to be learned is the necessity for complete understanding, for coordination and cooperation between platoon size tank and infantry units which operate or expect to operate together.

The actions of the 709th Tank Battalion are very similar to those of the other separate tank battalions which were attached to infantry divisions in the Battle of the HURTTEN FOREST. All five of the battalions normally fought individual tank platoons in support of infantry battalions. In one or two instances tanks were massed in company formations -- never larger. But always, the tanks of these battalions supported the infantry to which they were attached, and their actions were ordinarily dictated by infantry commanders. An examination of the actions of the 5th Armored Division -- the only large armored unit which fought in the HURTTEN FOREST -- may disclose whether its problems differed essentially from those of the tank battalions which have been discussed thus far.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER VI

- 1
Summary of Action, The Battle for Hurtgen Forest V
Corps Interviewers.
- 2
Ibid.
- 3
After Action Report, 8th Infantry Division, 20 November 1944.
- 4
Combat Interview, Major Luther Millen, S-3, 121st Inf Regt.
- 5
Combat Interview, Lt Colonel Henry B Kunzig, CO, 2nd Bn,
121st Inf Regt.
- 6
Combat Interview, S/Sgt Anthony Rizzo, 2nd Plat, Co G, 121st
Inf Regt.
- 7
Combat Interview, Sgt Clifford L. Adams, 3rd Plat, Co E,
121st Inf Regt.

CHAPTER VII

THE 5TH ARMORED DIVISION AND THE HURTGEN BATTLE

The 5th Armored Division was a participant in the Battle of the HURTGEN FOREST from the first week in October until it was withdrawn from positions near the ROER RIVER on 22 December as a result of the German ARDENNES Offensive. During this period the division was employed in missions which included (1) holding a defensive sector, (2) having combat commands attached simultaneously to V and VII Corps as reserves, (3) attacking key positions within the forest, and (4) attempting to exploit eastward when infantry elements reached the eastern edge of the more thickly wooded area. The action of the 5th Armored is important to this study not only because it was the only armored division employed in the HURTGEN FOREST mass but primarily because the division secured the V Corps objective in the zone of the 8th Infantry Division.

To better understand the action of this division in the HURTGEN let us briefly review its history prior to October 1944. In February 1944 the "Victory Division" arrived in England where "married" formations were adopted for last minute training and the final preparations for combat. These formations were to be used with only minor variations throughout the EUROPEAN campaign. Finally on 23 July 1944 the men of the division embarked for FRANCE and the job for which they had been preparing nearly three years.

On the continent the 5th was attached to XV Corps and spearheaded the corps' advance in the Third Army dash across FRANCE as it pursued the German Seventh Army--the army it was to oppose in the HURTTGEN FOREST. Teamed with the 28th Infantry Division and fighting under V Corps, the division captured the city of LUXEMBOURG and pushed to the German border where on 11 September 1944 it became the first division to fight inside the Third Reich.

The Fifth as a Mobile Reserve (1 Oct to 19 Nov)

In the first week of October the 5th Armored Division was relieved in LUXEMBOURG by the 8th Infantry Division and moved north to the vicinity of MONSCHAU, just south and west of the critical HURTTGEN FOREST area.

During the following month the division did not operate as a unit against the enemy, although elements of the 5th were engaged. Control of divisional components were even more decentralized than in the previous month: elements were employed in both the V and VII Corps simultaneously; combat commands, individual battalions, and companies were attached to infantry units. In the first week of November the division headquarters and Combat Command B remained at MODERSCHIED (905990) as the V Corps mobile reserve; CCB had an additional defensive mission in a sector near KALTERHERBERG (925146). At this time Combat Command A assembled at NEUDORF (850312) in order (1) to repel any enemy counterattack through the 28th Infantry Division which was making the corps

main effort or (2) to attack through the 28th on Corps order when it secured the high ground in the vicinity of SCHMIDT and STRAUCH. As discussed in Chapter III the 28th attack was unsuccessful and CCA was not committed. On 8 November CCB in the defensive sector was placed under army control; division headquarters joined CCA at NEUDORF and became V Corps reserve with restrictions, however, placed by Army on its commitment. In the meantime the reserve command had been attached to VII Corps for employment with the 4th Infantry Division also attacking through the HURTGEN FOREST. On 17 November CCB rejoined the division having been relieved of its defensive responsibilities by the 99th Infantry Division. The division less CCR remained in V Corps reserve and engaged in minor security missions and in performing routine training and maintenance until 29 November. On 19 November CCR was relieved from the VII Corps and on the same day was attached to the 8th Infantry Division which had relieved the 28th.

HURTGEN-KELINHAU-BERGSTEIN Plan (19--23 Nov)

CCR was attached to the 8th Division, but it should be emphasized that V Corps assigned it the specific mission of seizing the dominating open ground surrounding HURTGEN, KELINHAU, BRANDENBERG, and BERGSTEIN. This attack was to be carried out in three phases: first, the edge of the woods one mile south of HURTGEN would be secured by the 8th Infantry Division attacking from the southwest and the 4th Infantry Division attacking from the west (See Map 3, Appendix V)

second, the armor using this edge of the woods as a line of departure would attack to take HURTGEN and KLEINHAU where they would be relieved by an infantry battalion of the 8th; third, CCR would swing southeast to seize BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN as elements of the 8th threatened these towns by pushing through the woods to the west. With this high ground in possession of V Corps troops, the ROER and the ROER DAMS could be taken thereby completing the first part of V Corps' mission, to protect the south flank of the attacking VII Corps. V Corps would then be in a position to secure a crossing over the ROER RIVER and to continue its advance to the east.

Since the dominating ground was controlled by the enemy and since there was no point which offered good observation, physical reconnaissance by unit commanders was limited. This was partially offset, however, by four factors: (1) There was an OP from which part of the BERGSTEIN ridge could be viewed; (2) many reconnaissance flights in liaison aircraft were conducted; (3) there was sufficient time to make a thorough map study; and (4) information of the enemy was available largely as a result of patrolling to BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN by the 2d Ranger Battalion. The area was defended by elements of the German 275th and 89th Infantry Divisions reinforced initially by the 116th Panzer Division as a mobile reserve; however, this latter division was being withdrawn at the time CCR was committed. The elements of the two infantry

divisions included the 253d and the 600th Engineer Battalions, the 275th Fusilier Battalion, the 31st Machine Gun Battalion, the 2d Battalion, 1055th Regiment, and the 1st and 2d Battalions, 60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, all of which were supported by the divisional artillery of the two divisions engaged. This actually shows eleven battalions defending the area, but intelligence at the time correctly estimated that all battalions were down to at least one-third strength. This meant that opposing OCR there was the equivalent of one regiment with good fire support from the 31st Machine Gun Battalion, artillery, and mortars (at least two light and one medium artillery battalions and a minimum of twelve mortar batteries, 81mm. and 120mm.). The enemy in the area, however, was well organized and was controlled by two Kriegsgruppen--KG Trier and KG Wegelein. Of still more importance was the fact that the relatively stable situation over a period of weeks had been used to advantage by the two engineer battalions to lay large numbers of mines. AT and AP mines were interspersed throughout although Schu mines were predominant in the woods and Holz mines were predominant along the roads and on the shoulders.

The open terrain around the objectives was limited and surrounded on all sides by woods and wooded draws that facilitated tank stalking by the enemy at night and gave concealment to his AT guns by day. In addition, the ground

had been cultivated in the previous growing season, and this plowed ground softened by heavy rains made tank movement difficult except on the narrow, third-rate roads. An exception to this was the GERMETER-KLEINHAU main road, but movement here soon became awkward due to the stresses of tank battle. The key terrain features of the area were a hill northeast of KLEINHAU, a hill northeast of HURTGEN, a hill just east of BERGSTEIN, and a ridge connecting these last two. This gave the enemy observation over the entire area. Further, a wooded draw between VOSSENACK and HURTGEN, another between VOSSENACK and BRANDENBERG, and heavy woods east of KLEINHAU and north of BRANDENBERG were good obstacles easily defended by a minimum of troops.

At this time the reserve command and attached elements were located at WALHORN (F810321), BELGIUM, where formations and groupings were made as shown in Figure 6. Immediately upon attachment to the 8th Infantry Division the 95th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was directed to reinforce the fires of the 56th Field Artillery Battalion (8th Division Artillery), but it was to revert to CCR control upon its commitment.

The HURTGEN Operation (23 to 25 Nov)

The original plan was to move Reserve Command less its trains from WALHORN to an assembly area at ROTGEN on 23 November and to launch an attack against HURTGEN the following morning. As discussed in Chapters V and VI the infantry part

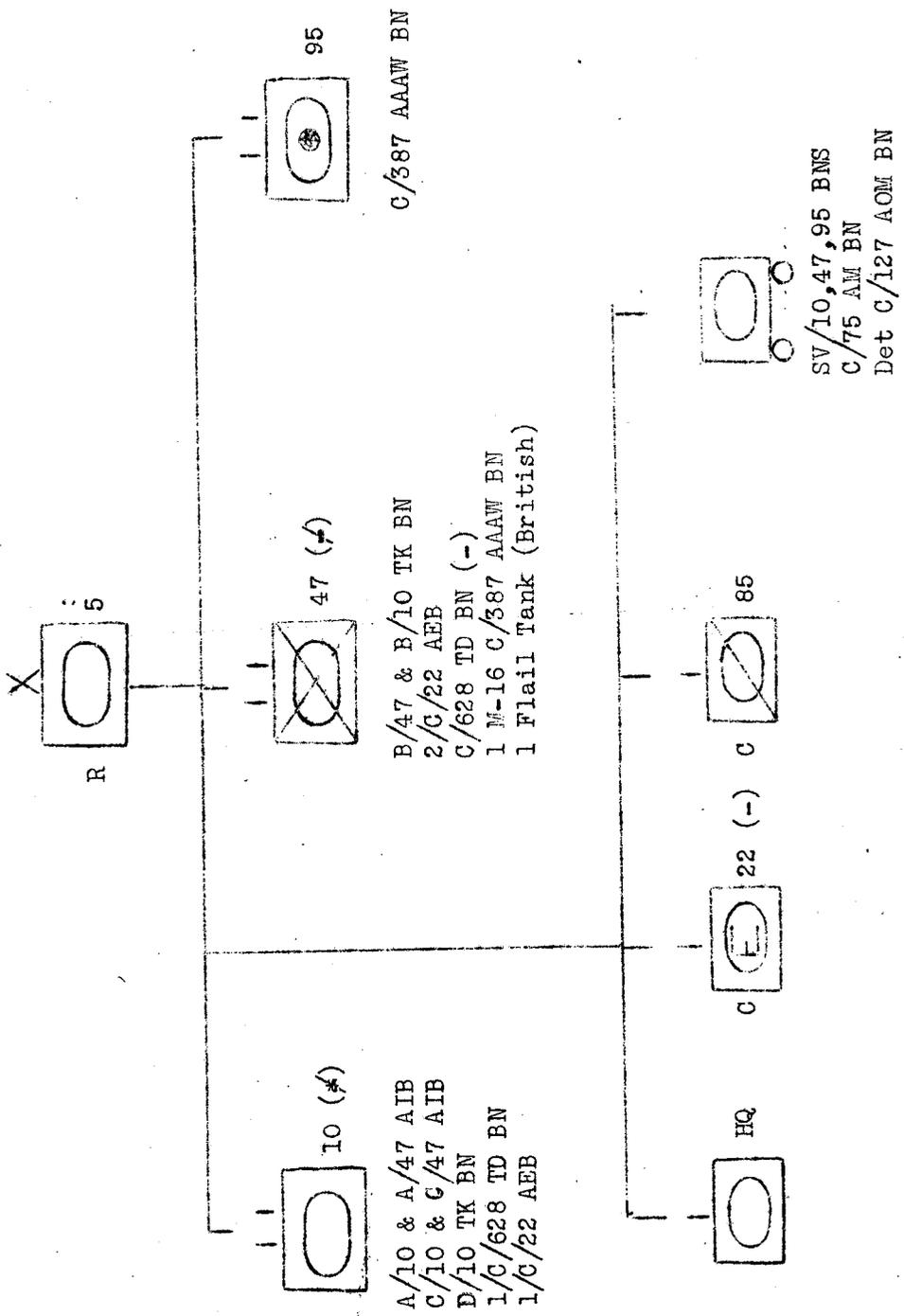


Figure 6. Task Organization of CCR

of the corps plan called for (1) the 121st Infantry Regiment, 8th Division to secure a line of departure along the edge of the woods just south of HURTGEN; (2) the 28th and 13th Regiments of the same Division to hold the woods from HURTGEN south to include VOSSENACK; and (3) the 4th Infantry Division to continue mopping up the woods northeast of HURTGEN and to push its attack on GROSSHAU. In addition all available artillery would lay a preparation to include smoke on the town of HURTGEN just prior to jump-off. The 47th Armored Infantry Battalion moving to an attack position in the night was to attack HURTGEN at 0730 and hold until relieved by elements of the 13th Infantry Regiment; the 10th Tank Battalion following the 47th across the LD was to seize the high ground southeast of HURTGEN to protect the command's right flank and continue the attack to KLEINHAU on reserve command order; engineers and reconnaissance elements were directed to mark the routes to the attack position and to support the attack once launched. The attack, however, was delayed twenty-four hours as neither the 4th nor the 8th Infantry Divisions made the progress initially contemplated.

On the evening of the 24th, the 8th Infantry Division reported that it had secured the line of departure and was removing mines and bridging a crater in the road north of GERMETER (Chapter VI) Captain Frank M. Pool, commanding Company B, 10th Tank Battalion, was sent to a forward battalion CP to get the latest reports on infantry progress,

particularly that which applied to the condition of the GER-METER-HURTGEN road over which his company would attack. He learned there that, contrary to reports, the infantry had not physically reached the edge of the woods designated as the LD; but he was informed that this would be accomplished prior to jump-off time as two infantry companies were to attack forward to that line at 0500. Later, at the 121st Infantry CP, Capt. Pool met the 8th Infantry Division Engineer and was reassured that (1) the road to the line of departure would definitely be cleared of mines, and (2) the crater would be bridged or a path would be cleared around it. ¹ At 0725 this was confirmed by a radio message from the 8th Infantry Division.

At 242100 November the infantry of the 47th proceeded in half-tracks to a point from which they were to move to the LD dismounted. The tanks started later and were to meet the infantry on the LD prepared to attack at 250730 November. Major Hogan commanding the 3rd Battalion 121st Infantry Regiment gave the armored infantry locations of his troops and minefields and furnished guides to lead them forward through the minefield. It had rained all night and continued to rain all morning. About fifty yards from the meeting point the first platoon of the armored infantry walked into a minefield and the mine explosions alerted the Germans, who began pouring in intense and accurate artillery and mortar fire. Three minutes later and right on schedule the artillery began its preparation and laid the smoke screen on the southern outskirts of HURTGEN.

At the same time the lead tank of the tank column which was about three hundred yards south of the LD reached the crater in the road at 026437. Although the crater was neither bridged nor by-passed, it looked as if it would hold a tank so the lead medium tried to cross and immediately bogged down. Artillery and mortar fire was coming in, and as the tank hit the crater the column began receiving small arms fire from the right and left. An AT gun located southwest of HURTGEN opened fire on the tank; however, each round missed and passed in the same place. Evidently, the gun had been laid to fire directly down the road and was not being re-aimed at the tank, which was laying on its side on the left edge of the road. By combining manipulations of the elevating and traversing handwheels, the tank gunner was able to destroy this AT gun.³ Several other tanks in the column were hit by artillery and, although not disabled, lost crew members. Americans and Germans in the woods were so intermeshed that the enemy small arms fire could not be neutralized without endangering the friendly troops. The infantry commander stated that he could not withdraw his men because of the mines.⁴

A bridge truck of the 12th Engineer Combat Battalion, 8th Infantry Division, was standing by, so it was decided to span the crater. However, there was an additional delay as the engineers did not have sufficient roadway to complete the span and had to go to the rear to obtain some, during which

time the infantry suffered very heavy casualties. Even when material was available, the engineers were very reluctant to erect the treadway under the heavy fire until the spirit of the crane driver, who volunteered and moved forward, spurred the others on. The crater was finally spanned after considerable difficulty. With the first tank immobilized the next tank in the column crossed the span at 1030 and the attack was resumed--only to stop fifty feet from the crater when this tank hit a mine, again the road was blocked. Before the crew could get out this tank received a direct hit from another AT gun. Since the artillery smoke screen had dissipated by this time, two tanks were edged into a firing position just off the road and placed HE and smoke on the south border of HURTGEM while a third tank moved forward to tow the disabled tank from the road. The third tank was hit by a bazooka round as it reached the knocked-out tank. The road was now completely blocked for the tanks; therefore, a request for more infantry was made. In the meantime additional smoke was requested, but the supply had been exhausted. At this time an air attack was made on HURTGEM and KLEINHAU and the air claimed one enemy tank, but this gave only temporary relief from the constant rain of fire.

CCR began regrouping at once to give the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion its own A, B, and C companies in addition to Company B, 10th Tank Battalion, already attached. The

attack was resumed at 1630 when Company C was committed to the left of Company B of the infantry. At first progress was good, but then the company encountered a minefield in which it lost seven men in ten minutes. Company C then swung right to move up the highway, but was pinned down by six machine guns and an AT gun in the south edge of HURTGEN. During all of this time the mortar and artillery fire had been falling without let-up. Company B of the infantry had eighty men left out of two hundred twenty-five and Company C suffered fifty casualties in twenty minutes. An attempt was made to evacuate the disabled tanks but was unsuccessful due primarily to the artillery fire. The element of surprise had been lost, the infantry continued to suffer heavy losses without making any headway, and the 10th Tank Battalion was never able to get clear of the woods to make its thrust; therefore, Colonel C.H. Anderson, the Reserve Command commander, directed that the troops withdraw to ROTGEN under cover of darkness to reorganize. After considerable difficulty with vehicles becoming stuck during the withdrawal, the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion closed in its assembly area at ROTGEN just prior to daybreak on 26 November.

Thus, after a day's fighting and at a cost of one hundred fifty actual casualties and three tanks, the command succeeded in reaching its line of departure for the attack on HURTGEN. The action can be summarized by saying that enemy mines and

and soggy ground made movement of tanks almost impossible, while artillery and mortar fire and numerous anti-personnel mines made dismounted advance very costly.

Following this unsuccessful attack it was decided that HURTTGEN could not be taken from this direction and would have to be captured by infantry forces from the west and northwest. Even when elements of the 121st Infantry Regiment were entering the northwestern outskirts of HURTTGEN (the town fell to them on 28 November as brought out in Chapter VI) it was still impossible for other forces to debouch from the woods along the road from the southwest.

All during the period that the 121st was reducing the German defenses at HURTTGEN, the 10th Tank Battalion was parked along the armored division's MSR, which was a one-way, narrow, circuitous route from ROTGEN through the forest on secondary roads to ROTT (K922326) and ZWEIFALL. "Our parking on this road must have interfered seriously with supply, but there was no place to clear and besides we were expecting to attack at any moment -- for about three days!"⁵

KLEINHAU Operation (28 to 30 Nov)

When on 28 November the 121st Infantry Regiment took HURTTGEN, CCR was directed to continue the attack to KLEINHAU and on to BERGSTEIN as originally planned. The enemy defending KLEINHAU consisted of three infantry companies of seventy men each, three self-propelled guns, and several gun

sections from the 31st Machine Gun Battalion(towed 75 mm.)

The friendly order of battle remained the same except that one platoon of Company C, 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the attached flail tank were transferred from the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion to the 10th Tank Battalion while the multiple AAA M16 reverted to its parent battery.

The general plan called for the 121st Infantry Regiment to clear north to the road junction at 052366 ⁶ and for the 4th Infantry Division to push its attack on GROSSHAU. The 10th Tank Battalion established liaison with elements of the 22nd Infantry Regiment and Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, both of the 4th Infantry Division, which were just west and north of KLEINHAU. These elements were not to fire on KLEINHAU unless fired on by high velocity weapons. The tank-infantry teams of the 10th were to move through GERMETER with the head of the column to reach the draw north of HURTGEN at first light on 29 November, attack through KLEINHAU to seize HILL 401 northeast of the town, and hold until relieved by the 1st battalion, 13th Infantry Regiment, which was to follow the armored elements. The 95th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, in direct support, would concentrate its fires north of KLEINHAU to prevent retreat but would be prepared to shift to targets called for by forward elements, while the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion would stand by in reserve southeast of GERMETER.

Between 25 and 28 November, two self-propelled 155mm. guns were emplaced on a hill about 5,000 yards west of KLEINHAU and proceeded to destroy the town by direct fire starting at the south end and working north up the main street. In addition, artillery fires had been placed on KLEINHAU all the previous week by the 8th Division and supporting artillery, but as a variation it was decided not to shell the town the night before the attack. However, preparatory fires from sixteen to eighteen battalions were fired immediately preceding the jump-off. Although there was a trench around the town in the path of the attack which reconnaissance had reported occupied, it was only lightly manned at the time of the attack; it was felt that this was because the Germans remained in town during the artillery lull the night before and were caught there in the morning by the intense preparation.⁷ This perhaps facilitated the entrance to the town but at the same time left more Germans to be rooted from the cellars; whether it is more beneficial to defeat the enemy infantry in the relative open outside of town or to have to combat them house to house in town is certainly debatable. The reason the 10th preferred the second method is that the tankers did not want to assault the fixed, dug-in positions; they all had developed a high respect for the panzerfaust.⁸

Returning to the assault, the 10th Tank Battalion task force under the command of Lt Col W.A. Hamberg began moving forward in the early morning hours of 29 November, but again

there was trouble reaching the line of departure. The head of the column with the "married" C companies leading finally passed through HURTGEN at 0756 after having trouble by-passing the same crater that caused trouble in the HURTGEN action and still further difficulties with mines on the road. At 0860 the attack began as forward elements opened direct fire from positions just south of KLEINHAU. The infantry had been dismounted early to breach a minefield that had been reported south of the town. The dismounted infantry was hit heavily by artillery and mortar fire and became pinned down, but they did determine that there was no specific minefield, although the shoulders of the road were littered with AT and AP mines. From this time on it was extremely difficult to keep the dismounted infantry up with the tanks.

This early dismounting of the infantry and the resulting casualties was considered by Lt. Col. Hamberg to be one of the biggest mistakes he made during the war,⁹ although it certainly seems justified in view of the information then on hand. The original report of the minefield was received from the infantry and it was verified several times by prisoners of war. In addition, the report was "clinched" the day before the attack when, after a light snow, a regular pattern of partially melted rings could be seen just where the mines were supposedly located; these rings were later found to have been caused by cow dung! The incident is of value to show how a series of small circumstances can lead to a wrong tactical

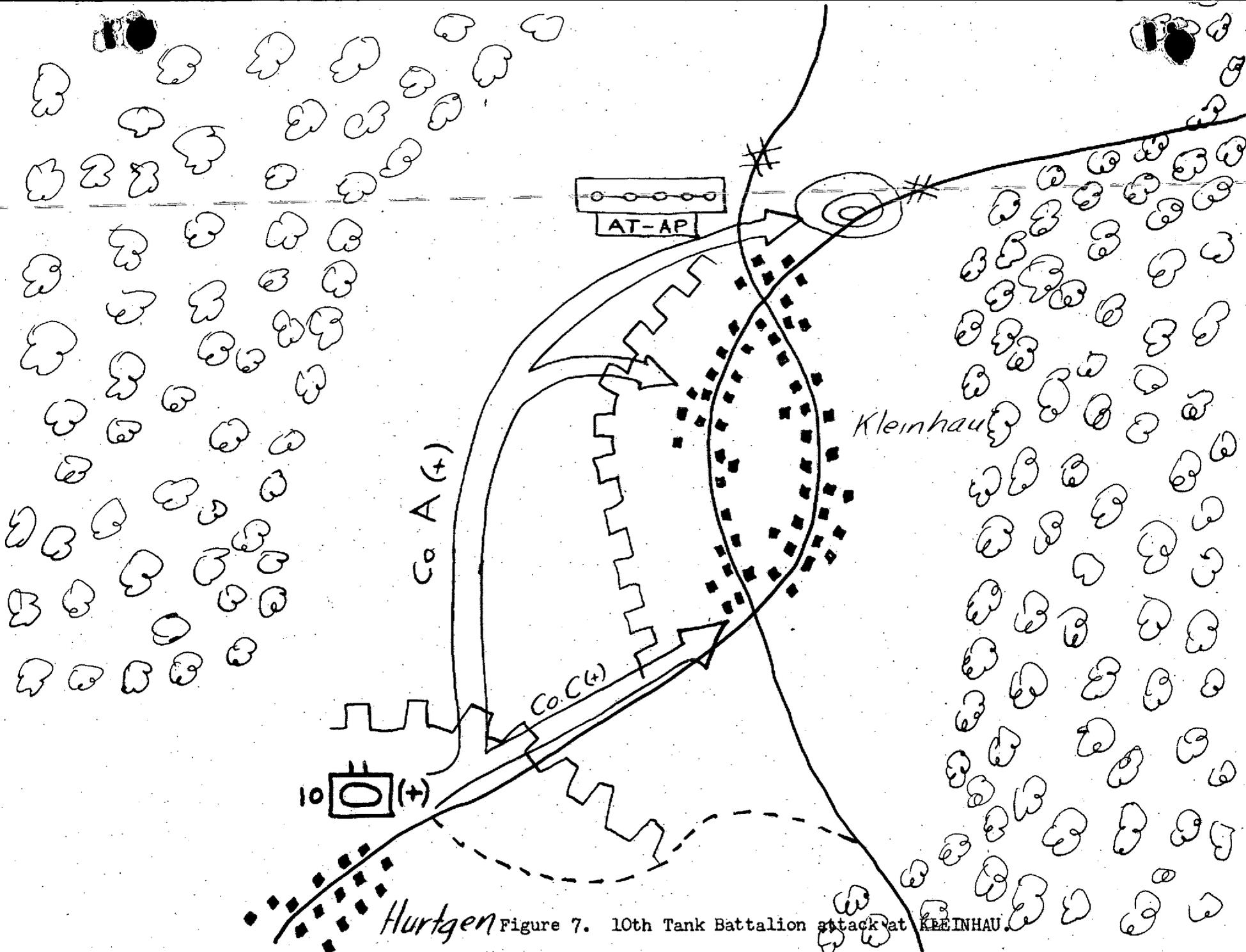


Figure 7. 10th Tank Battalion attack at KLEINHAUS.

decision even by an experienced leader. It was decided that from this time on the armored infantry would not be dismounted in a tank-infantry attack until forced to do so; this rule was followed at both BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN in spite of the mines, and the attacks progressed much more rapidly and were less costly to the infantry.¹⁰

The artillery preparation lifted at 0858. The second tank platoon of Company C moved into the town from the south; the first platoon attempted to flank the town from the west but began bogging down as soon as it left the road; the third platoon acted as a base of fire from the jump-off point at the crossroads on the southern edge of the town. At 0908 the second platoon reported that it had entered the town but that its infantry had fallen behind due to accurate artillery time fire.

About this time information was received that the 4th Infantry Division was not attacking GROSSHAU as planned but would commence its attack at 1100. Since the tanks were drawing heavy direct fire from GROSSHAU, permission was received to place artillery concentrations there which considerably reduced this fire.

By 1101 the 10th Tank Battalion had two tank platoons in town but the infantry was still about ten minutes behind. A Mark IV tank in the town near the outskirts was destroyed at very close range after it first disabled one CCR tank. In

addition, several AT guns were found unmanned in KLEINHAU proper; it was not determined whether they had been abandoned or whether the crews had been knocked out by the artillery. At 1012 the armored infantry arrived and began clearing the buildings, and by 1058 the "married" A companies moved up and sent one platoon of infantry into town to assist in the mopping up while the remainder of the tanks and infantry fought west of KLEINHAU to flank the town and to strike it from the north and west (Figure 7). This maneuver was likewise extremely difficult for the infantry as the force was subjected to devastating artillery and mortar fire. While this was occurring, the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion task force moved forward from ROTGEN to its reserve position west of GERMETER.

A message was received at 1100 that the 3rd and 9th Panzer Regiments were moving south toward GROSSHAU in a counter-attack. All units were alerted and mines and tank destroyers were rushed forward, but nothing came of the attack except that Company C reported hearing sounds of enemy tanks moving into GROSSHAU at 1118.

By 1245 the attack was progressing well although movement of the dismounted infantry was still costly because of the continuing high trajectory fire. At this time Company A was on the north edge of town while Company C was working through the town from the south with the infantry who were flushing Germans from the cellars, primarily by the use of white phosphorous and fragmentation grenades. About 1327 the weather

cleared and friendly aircraft appeared overhead, which brought about a noticeable decrease in enemy artillery thereby enabling the infantry to proceed more effectively with its house to house clearing. In general, the enemy had evacuated the town before the tanks arrived; however, this did not preclude bitter house to house fighting in some sections.

The town was securely in American hands by 1730. Company A, 10th Tank Battalion, established road blocks just forward of the high ground northeast of KLEINHAU¹² and secured the north half of the town, while the other half was secured by Company C, 10th Tank Battalion. The two platoons of attached tank destroyers moved into the town but the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion remained west of GERMETER. During the night of 29-30 November, elements of the 13th Infantry Regiment assumed responsibility for the defense of KLEINHAU although they occupied the town only and did not occupy the road blocks or any positions on the hill northeast of town. The infantry stated that they did not have sufficient strength to go out that far. The road blocks were maintained by the 10th Tank Battalion until 300800 November when they were withdrawn by request of the infantry since they "drew fire."

The OOR plan had called for the 10th battalion to assemble in ROTGEN upon completion of its mission, but V Corps now directed that the elements assemble and remain in the open field just west of KLEINHAU. On the 30th the Germans brought up eight self-propelled guns to the edge of the woods just east

of GROSSHAU and placed direct fire on this assembly area. Air was requested but refused because the enemy was in the 4th Infantry Division zone; however artillery fire from the 95th Armored Field Artillery Battalion caused the guns to withdraw with a probable loss of three. The 10th Tank Battalion had one tank disabled by a mine when it moved to engage these guns and lost one half-track which burned after being hit by a high explosive round.

That evening Lt. Col. Hamberg moved his battalion about seven or eight hundred yards west into the woods and as a result received much less artillery fire, which had been continuous since he assembled in the open field as ordered. This move was made without orders, but it was later approved. Even though the woods were rather thick, the standing was good enough to permit maintenance after the area was cleared of "Bouncing Bettys."

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The action of the Germans in the HURTGEN-KLEINHAU area was characterized by stubbornness rather than by aggressiveness. At no time was there any indication of a general withdrawal. The enemy refused, except by direct pressure, to give ground which he held by full use of natural and man-made obstacles with very heavy artillery and mortar support; yet contrary to his usual custom, he did not counterattack. This may be partially explained by the fact that a field order of the 31st Machine Gun Battalion was found which showed its mission to be "to hold KLEINHAU at all costs." In addition, the direction of the

attack on KLEINHAU was somewhat of a surprise according to PW reports, as the Germans expected the attack to come from the north. This is substantiated by the minefield and trench system between KLEINHAU and GROSSHAU (Figure 7).

In the battle for KLEINHAU, CCR captured fifty-five prisoners and lost sixty men, one tank destroyer, thirteen half-tracks (some were later recovered), and eight tanks (two to AT fire and six to mines).

BRANDENBERG Operation (30 Nov to 4 Dec)

Following the seizure of KLEINHAU, plans were completed for the attack on BRANDENBERG. Elements of the 8th Infantry Division were to approach BRANDENBERG through the woods from VOSENACK and to secure a line of departure north of the town for the armored attack from KLEINHAU. However, the infantry had considerable difficulty advancing through the woods so that CCR was directed to launch its attack on 2 December rather than wait any longer (Figure 8).

The assignment of troops within the command remained the same as at KLEINHAU except for minor changes in supporting troops. On the enemy side, BRANDENBERG was defended by elements of the 1055th and 1056th Regiments, the 2d and 3d Companies of the 189th Engineer Battalion (used primarily as infantry), the 189th Anti-Tank Battalion (towed 75-mm. guns only two of which were actually in BRANDENBURG), the 2d Company, 983d Regiment, and one battalion of dual purpose anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns. These enemy units were receiving direct support from the

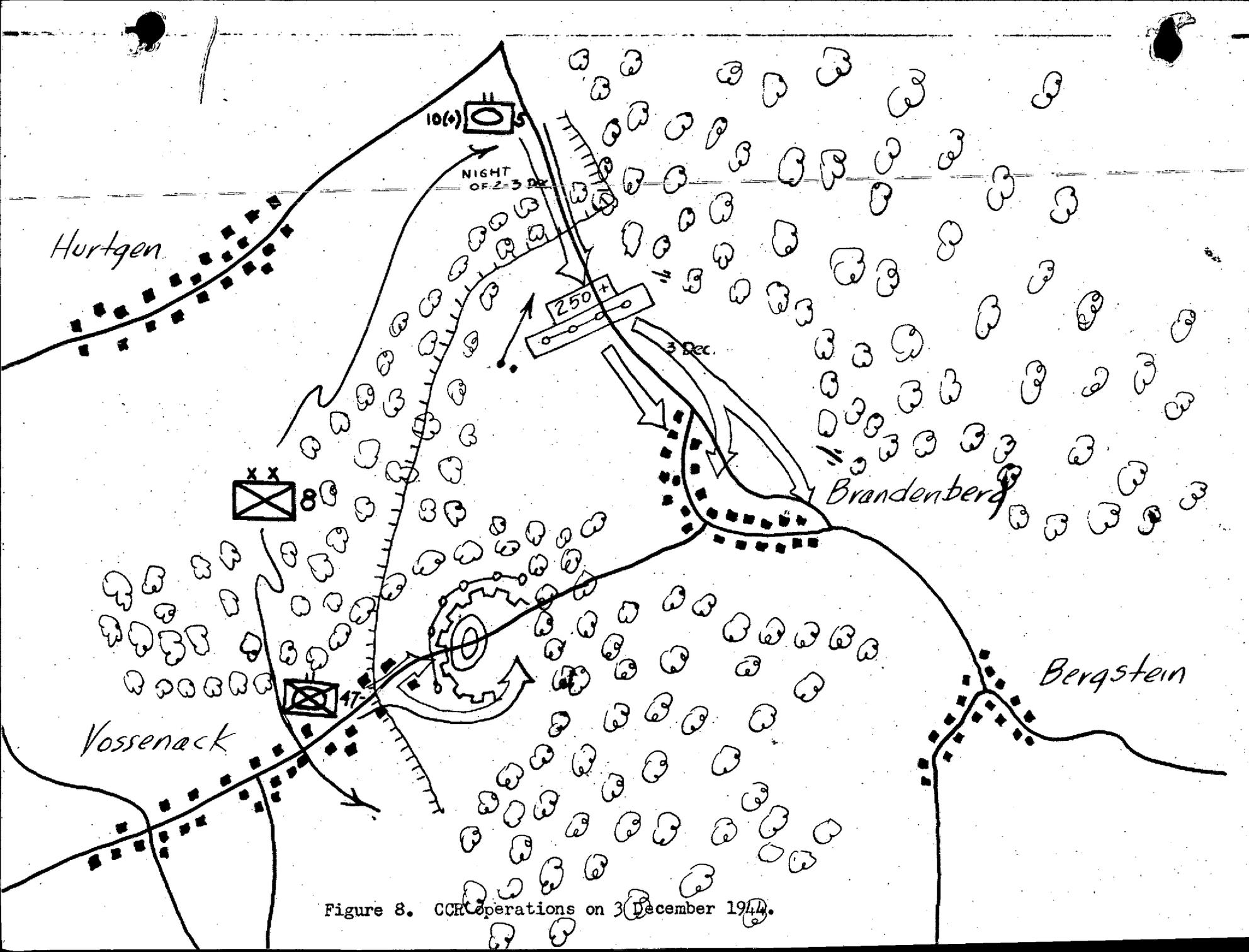


Figure 8. CCR Operations on 3 December 1944.

189th Artillery Regiment and from at least two batteries of 120-mm. mortars.

BRANDENBERG is situated on a narrow ridge which runs southeast from KLEINHAU to BERGSTEIN. The ridge had open, rolling, cultivated fields on the crest and was heavily wooded on the slopes. A paved road running along the crest was in extremely poor repair and was pockmarked by numerous artillery craters. The approaches to both BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN are dominated by HILL 402 (F087338) six hundred meters east of BERGSTEIN and one other just east of the ROER RIVER and northwest of NIDEGGEN (F115332) and they could be observed from the KOMMERSCHIEDT -SCHMIDT area (Appendix I).

The reserve command plan was to attack southeast along the ridge with the 10th Tank Battalion passing through the infantry front lines (Figure 8) at 020730 December to seize BRANDENBERG and to be prepared to continue the attack to seize and hold BERGSTEIN. The 47th Armored Infantry Battalion was to take a position astride the road southwest of GERMETER prepared to move through HURTGEM and KLEINHAU to attack or to assist in the defense of BRANDENBERG or BERGSTEIN within thirty minutes. Direct artillery support would be furnished by the 95th Armored Field Artillery Battalion reinforced by the 56th Field Artillery Battalion and a 155-mm. Howitzer battalion. Air support would be available if the weather permitted. Company D, 10th Tank Battalion was to cover both flanks of the attack.

The attack did not commence at 0730 since the 10th Tank Battalion said "it was too dark to shoot," but elements did move forward to the line of departure. When the attack finally jumped off, very little progress was made during the morning as the road was well covered by camouflaged SP guns in KOMMERSCHIEDT, BRANDENBERG, and other positions. One of these guns was later located within friendly lines. When the tanks attempted to deploy they found they were confined to the road because the shoulders were deep mud and the fields were mined. This minefield was covered by automatic weapons and panzerfausts from the draws and by small arms and machine gun fire from the woods to the east, in addition to the self-propelled guns referred to above.

Two flights of aircraft reported at 0835 and 0942 respectively to the forward air controller who was riding in the executive officer's tank. These were employed in bombing and strafing targets in BRANDENBERG, BERGSTEIN, and the surrounding woods; but their effectiveness was limited by the very poor visibility, and at 1020 the weather eliminated further air support.

The only apparent approach to BRANDENBERG was straight down the road. Fighting occurred on both flanks since the infantry had not secured the east side of the road nor had they eliminated a pocket on the west just southeast of HURTGEN. A tank of the first platoon of Company A hit a mine on the right side of the road and came under direct fire from KOMMERSCHIEDT (75 or 88 mm.); when the platoon leader got out to direct the withdrawal of the tanks, he and several men who had fallen to

the ground to avoid artillery bursts were run over when the tanks moved abruptly. In the meantime, two more tanks hit mines on the west side of the road. Accurate artillery and direct HE fire continued to pour onto the ridge.

By 1245 the situation had become static. Company A had lost four tanks to mines or direct fire and had had a large number of radio antennae shot off; also, it appeared necessary to remove the mines before any further advance could be made. Permission was received from the 8th Infantry Division to consolidate present gains in order to remove the mines under cover of darkness and to resume the attack on 3 December. Company D, 10th Tank Battalion, supported by infantry, took over the front positions while Companies A and C returned west of KLEINHAU to reorganize for the attack the following day.

The line was held by Company D, 10th Tank Battalion, during the night while Company C, 22d Armored Engineer Battalion, cleared a path through the minefield west of the road by removing two hundred fifty Holz mines. The minefield itself was situated on the friendly slope of a rise that dominated BRANDENBERG. The original plan was to clear five lanes to permit the tanks to advance in line across the crest, but only one sector was cleared; however, the Germans for some reason did not make full use of this tactical advantage when the attack was made.

A few prisoners were taken during the night as patrols were sent forward into the surrounding woods. These patrols



PLATE XIX ASSAULT GUNS OF THE 47TH ARMORED INFANTRY BATTALION SUPPORT THE ATTACK

reported that enemy in large numbers as well as panzerfaust teams were active throughout the night. One of these patrols led by Lt. Wiersma, commanding officer of Company C, 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, got through the minefield and ran upon eight Germans in dug-in positions; these eight followed the patrol back to our lines to surrender. Apparently some of the Germans liked this type of fighting no more than did the Americans!

Heavy artillery fire was placed on BRANDENBERG all night with a ten minute preparation in the morning just before the attack. This was followed by bombing and strafing as the tanks moved forward at 030800 December to the minefield which was the designated line of departure. This time the "married" C companies were in the lead, followed by the A companies which were to establish a base of fire at the top of the crest. Moving to the line of departure the tank of Lt. T.A. Maguire, commander of Company C, was disabled by a mine before he could get into position; he changed to another tank and continued to lead the column down the road even though they received terrific artillery fire from all directions -- KOMMERSCHIEDT, NIDEGGEN east of the ROER, and from OBERMAUBACH (FO88361) due east, as well as direct fire from positions near BRANDENBERG. An enemy smoke screen slowed progress somewhat initially, but by 0912 with the air still attacking, the C companies were ready to enter the town. The base of fire companies were receiving some artillery

fire, but mostly small arms fire from a draw west of the road which had not yet been eliminated by the infantry.

Another flight of aircraft controlled by the forward air controller riding in the Company C column began attacking at 0958. As the air strafed and bombed BRANDENBERG, the tank column pushed down the road with the first platoon going straight into town and the third platoon swinging left to hit the southeast edge of the town. When guns from BERGSTEIN opened up on the third platoon, "one of the sergeants got burned up about it and went down to BERGSTEIN where he destroyed the AT gun that had fired at him and knocked the sight off another."¹⁴ A second tank moved down to BERGSTEIN, but this premature movement of tanks in BERGSTEIN caused the 28th Infantry Regiment to call for corps artillery fire on the town. This fire was cleared by Lt. Col. Hamberg because at the time he had not been informed of the two tanks advancing to BERGSTEIN; when he heard they were his tanks, he had them withdrawn immediately.¹⁵ No casualties were suffered in this particular encounter; and although the tanks were withdrawn, it was learned the road to BERGSTEIN was not mined.

Lt. Col. Hamberg felt and had recommended during the planning the night before that the battalion could and should have pushed right into BERGSTEIN,¹⁶ The biggest bone of contention, however, seemed to be the fear of higher headquarters that the second town could not be held and that the

counterattack thus incurred might not only cause the loss of BERGSTEIN but of BRANDENBERG as well, primarily because of the heavy woods around the town and the non-availability of infantry to assist in the defense of the towns and the exposed flanks.

The remainder of the tanks and infantry continued cleaning up BRANDENBERG and established security. One of these tanks which had been set out as an outpost on the main road at the south edge of town was hit by a panzerfaust; the concussion blew off an open hatch, killed the tank commander, blew open a closed hatch, and blew two crewmen out of the tank. By 1115 the seizure of BRANDENBERG was complete and two hundred seventy-six prisoners were taken. (Some of these were taken by the 121st and were turned over to the 10th).

However, elements of the 8th Infantry Division had not taken their planned objectives, so CCR was directed to assist the 28th and 121st Infantry Regiments. Company D, 10th Tank Battalion, supported the 121st in seizing a small hill northwest of BRANDENBERG from which one hundred forty prisoners were taken, and the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion was attached to the 28th Infantry Regiment at 031200 December to assist in its zone.

At 1430 the 10th Tank Battalion was attacked by enemy planes, and two planes were shot down with no damage to the battalion. These planes, however, gave BERGSTEIN "one hell of

a working over and the Germans captured there by us the next day were still plenty bitter about it." ¹⁷ The units were now disposed to prepare for the attack on BERGSTEIN and to defend BRANDENBERG; tank destroyers and infantry were in the town while tanks and infantry were in positions near the road junction south of town. The tanks of Company D were used to patrol the MSR, the road from KLEINHAU to BRANDENBERG. Enemy artillery and mortar shells continued to fall on the troops in BRANDENBERG, while our own artillery interdicted the road to BERGSTEIN throughout the night. Two platoons of Troop C, 85th Reconnaissance Squadron, were sent to BRANDENBERG to act as infantry. Elements of these platoons formed two night patrols to enter BERGSTEIN from the north and west, respectively. These patrols reported the town occupied and verified the absence of mines in the approaches.

In the meantime, the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion (supposedly the CCR Reserve) was given a mission by the 8th Division of clearing a large rubble pile and fire trench at the east edge of VOSSENACK. This mission was assigned to the second platoons of the "married" B companies, who launched the attack at 031430 December. A second team of 'married' platoons would follow the attack and push southeast through the objective to contact infantry elements at the woods line while mortars from Headquarters Company smoked the KOMMERSCHIEDT ridge. The rubble pile was crescent-shaped and surrounded by an elaborate system of mines and fox holes in addition to the already existing

fire trench and draw nearby (Figure B).

Just as the attack jumped off, the area was strafed and bombed by a group of twenty to thirty ME-109's (the same planes that attacked BERGSTEIN). One ship was reportedly knocked down by fire of the infantry or tank units. As the attack again got under way, orders were received to send tanks immediately to repel a hostile counter-attack northeast of VOSSENACK, but this turned out to be only about twenty-five Germans who advanced a short way out of the woods and then retired. By 1530 the attack had progressed to within approximately seventy-five yards of the objective when the lead tank hit a mine and was knocked out. Although the infantry attempted to continue the advance, it was driven off by small arms and artillery fire. The infantry then withdrew and tried to attack the objective from the north supported by direct tank fire, but they again were driven off by automatic, artillery, and mortar fire. Each time the infantry approached, the enemy in the southern fire trenches fired a green flare which brought down heavy artillery and mortar barrages from the KOMMERSCHEIDT area. During the same period the tank-infantry team tried to move around to the south and east to reach the woodline, but hit minefields which stopped the tanks and high velocity fire that prevented the infantry from clearing the field or from moving through it. A third unsuccessful attempt was made to seize the rubble pile after which the 28th Infantry Regiment directed the forces to withdraw, reorganize, and make an attack that night. At 040239

December the forces, which had been reinforced by the "scorpion"¹⁸ tank, jumped off. The "scorpion" worked excellently at first but hit a nest of five mines which blew off the chains; the tank, still moving, hit another mine and lost a track. Nevertheless, by 1200 the pile was cleared of enemy after two more tanks were lost -- one to artillery fire and the other to a mine. Lt. Goldman, commanding the force, was commended by the CO of the 22th Infantry Regiment as this position had been a thorn in their side for more than a week.

The 47th was then directed to attack southeast from VOSSENACK, reinforced by Company C, 28th Infantry Regiment. The plan was to divide the eight remaining tanks of Company B, 10th Tank Battalion, into two groups, one to mount the remaining men of Company B, 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, and the other to mount Company C, 28th Infantry; however, the attack had to be postponed since the men of the latter unit could not be rallied and reorganized in time.¹⁹

This latter plan was abandoned as the 47th reverted to Reserve Command control at 041600 December, and was directed to reorganize in GERMETER prepared to attack BERGSTEIN in conjunction with the 10th Tank Battalion.

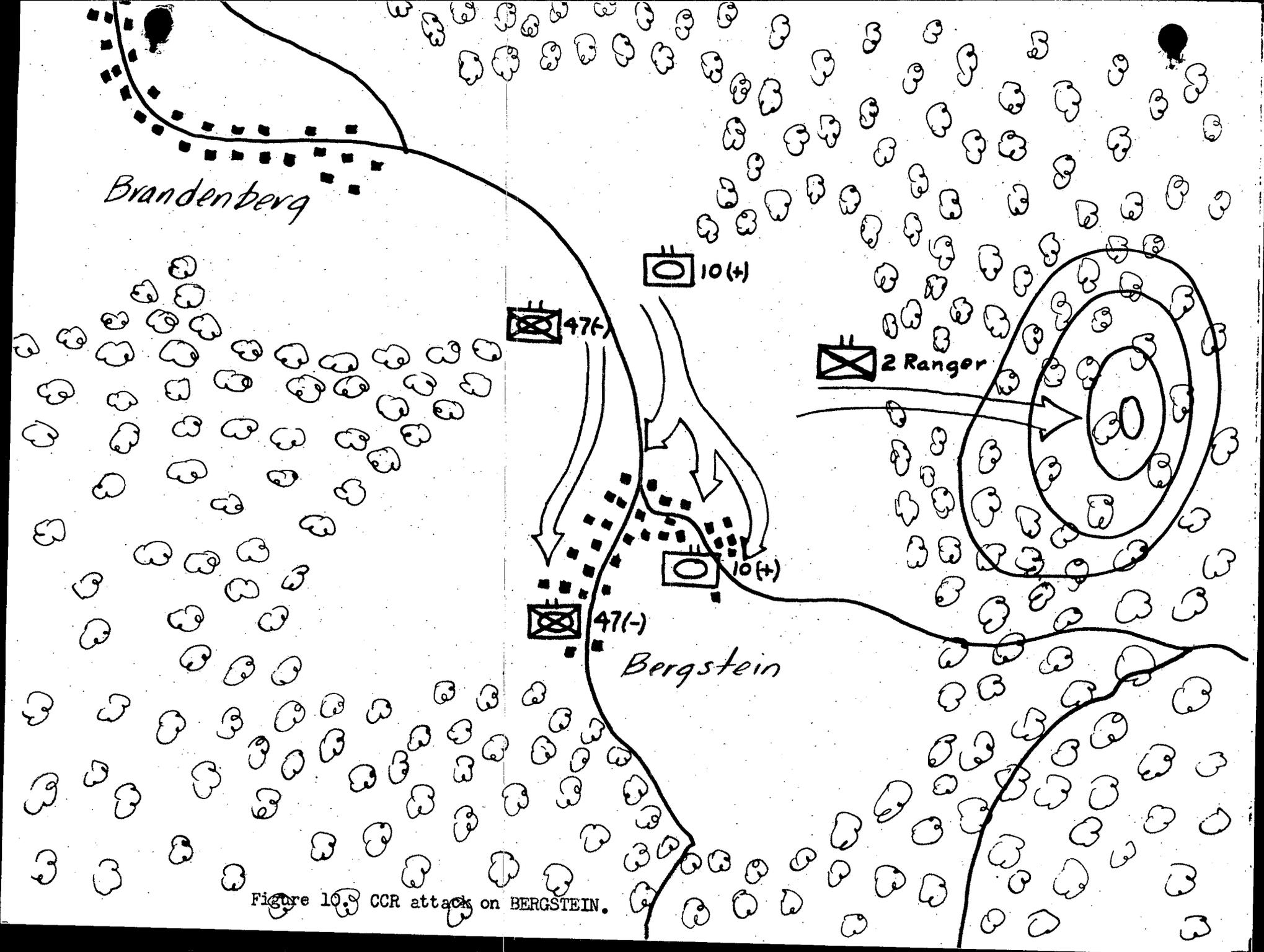
BERGSTEIN Operation (4 to 8 Dec)

On 4 December CCR was directed to prepare to attack BERGSTEIN. Colonel Anderson strongly requested (1) air support, (2) the use of both his battalions, and (3) that the attack not be launched until the infantry had successfully cleared the flanks.

The first request depended on the weather; the second was granted; and in regard to the third, it was agreed that the infantry should clear the enemy from the draw southeast of HURTGEN and should occupy the woods south of BRANDENBERG before the attack would be launched. Reserve Command formed its task forces as shown in Figure 9.

The Germans defending BERGSTEIN consisted of the 2d Battalion, 980th Regiment, (approximately four hundred men) the remaining elements of the 189th Anti-Tank Battalion, five self-propelled guns, all supported by the same artillery that backed up the defenses of BRANDENBERG.

Later the same day, CCR was directed to be prepared to attack on order of the 8th Infantry Division after 050800 December. The 10th Tank Battalion was to seize and hold north and northeast BERGSTEIN and HILL 402 "if the situation permitted," and to utilize the light tank company to secure the MSR and to maintain contact with elements of the 121st Infantry Regiment of the northeast flank. The 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, with eleven tanks and sixty-four fighting men, was to move on order to an assembly area south of KLEINHAU and attack on order behind and west of the 10th Tank Battalion to seize and hold the southwest and south portions of BERGSTEIN. This battalion was to prepare AT defenses on all roads entering from the south and west and to contact the 28th Infantry Regiment on the west. Weather permitting, air support would be made available. The 95th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was to furnish direct



Brandenberg

10(+)

47(-)

2 Ranger

10(+)

47(-)

Bergstein

Figure 10. CCR attack on BERGSTEIN.

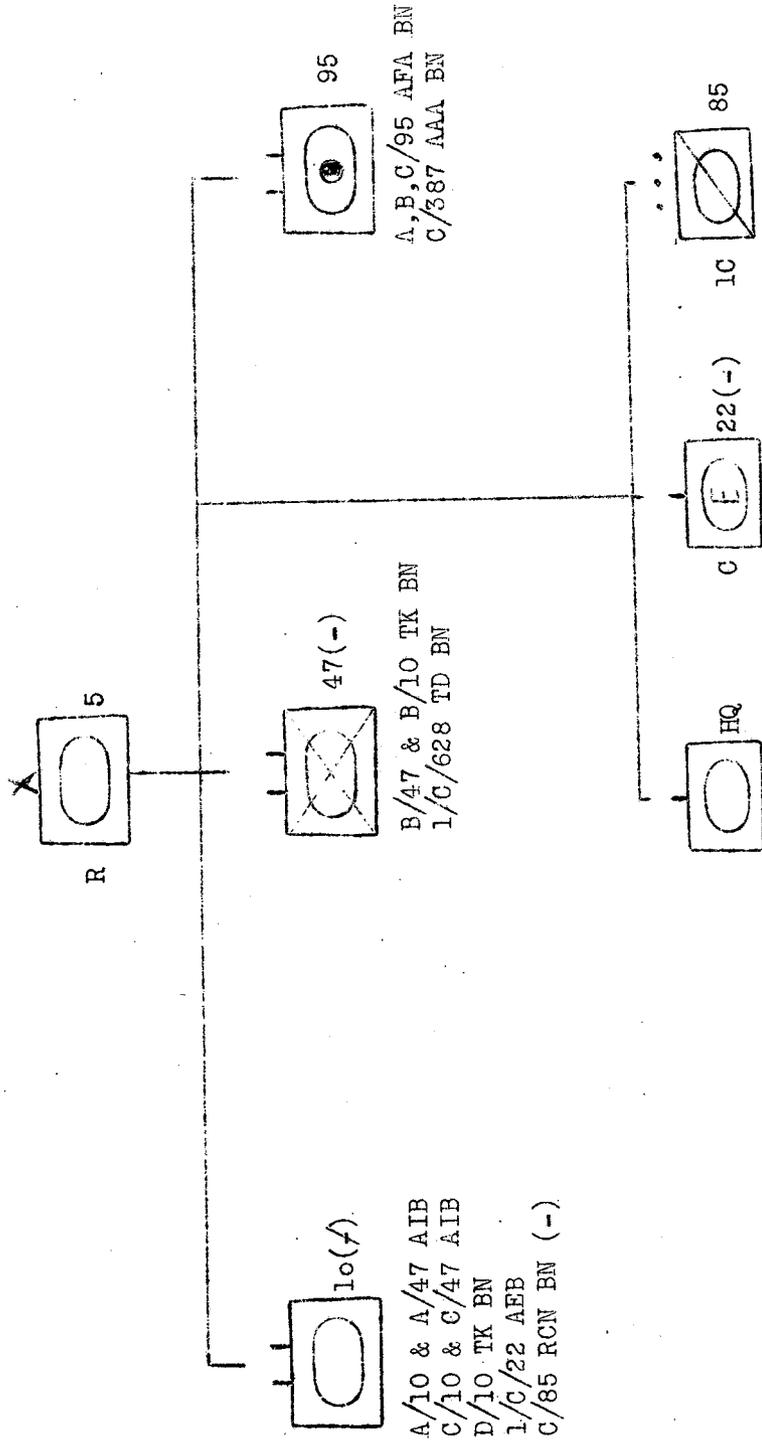


Figure 9. Task Organization of CCR

artillery support.

The attack was postponed until 051400 December because of bad weather. However, when the weather cleared, the air flights arrived for the attack and gave excellent support. The flights were controlled by a forward air controller who rode in the executive officer's tank. Air-ground coordination between the armor and the planes worked perfectly, although some confusion was caused by an air controller with the 8th Infantry Division who directed the planes to bomb BERGSTEIN after the tanks had entered the town; this was countermanded in time by the tank air controller, who was with the battalion commander on a small rise where he could see the entire operation. Between attack missions the planes remained overhead thus reducing considerably the volume of enemy artillery fire.

The assault guns of the 10th Tank Battalion, prior to the jump-off, were to take up defiladed positions just north of BERGSTEIN to cover the northeast portion of the town. The "married" C Companies swinging west behind the assault guns would attack the eastern portion of the town. A Companies "married", which now had but seven tanks, would follow C and move directly into town. The married B Companies under the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion were to swing west of A and hit the town from the southwest (Figure 10)

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The plan was a good one and worked almost perfectly; the one delaying factor was that the assault gun platoon failed

to turn off east as soon as they should have and ran into an unreported minefield. The rear assault gun was knocked out by a mine and blocked the withdrawal of the others, the platoon leader was killed by artillery when he dismounted to direct the withdrawal. The two remaining assault guns fired from this position although in a minefield and under heavy artillery fire. Company C moved east of the assault guns as soon as the first AG stopped. In doing so, one tank was hit by an 88-mm. shell and burned. All this ground was under observation from a ridge at NIDEGGEN across the river, and the operation was constantly subjected to heavy artillery fire. The commander of Company C reported he was in the town at 1444 and by 1500 had begun to mop up. At the same time A companies were moving in and the 47th task force was entering the western portion of BERGSTEIN. All this action took place under unremitting artillery fire; however, this time the armored infantry was mounted in half-tracks following the tanks (after the lesson learned at KLEINHAU). "Infantry dismounted couldn't have lived through that inferno of fire, but as it was we had only one casualty going into town." ²² Then the infantry of the 47th task force dismounted and deployed to the west in a skirmish line at the tip of the town.

By 1720 the mission of taking BERGSTEIN was reported accomplished, but the town was bigger than had been thought and an urgent call for more infantry was made. Two reconnaissance platoons were set out as outposts, and the two engineer platoons

which had been kept in reserve were brought forward to act as infantry. In addition, Company D came up to assist in the defense.

Forward observers with all three tank-infantry teams were casualties and trained observers were requested from the 8th Infantry Division. Radios had to be removed from disabled tanks to furnish them with the communications necessary.

Since the 121st Infantry Regiment failed to secure its objective during the attack, it was planned to cover the north flank with artillery fire. Nor was the gap on the west cleared by the infantry, so CCR was reinforced by one infantry company and one TD company to assist in defending that flank.

In this attack CCR lost four assault guns, six tanks, and one M-10 tank destroyer. In fact, all units were seriously understrength in men and vehicles as shown in Figure 11. Some of the vehicles listed in Figure 11 were tanks that had been disabled in the battles for HURTGEN and KLEINHAU and had been evacuated, repaired, and returned.

Intermittent artillery and mortar fire throughout the night further demolished BERGSTEIN. Also, considerable noise came from the enemy area all night which seemed to indicate the Germans were preparing an attack. Finally at 0640 an artillery preparation began and lasted about fifteen minutes. This consisted mostly of high-velocity fire from three sides -- SCHMIDT, KOMMERSHEIDT, NIDEGGEN, and the woods to the south and west. Actually it came from four sides as part of the friendly artillery was falling on CCR's southwestern troops." 24

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>EM</u>	<u>Vehicles</u>
10th Tank Battalion			
Co A	3	23	5 Tanks
Co B	3	43	8 Tanks
Co C	2	42	8 Tanks
47th Armored Inf- antry Battalion			
Co A	3	35	
Co B	3	80	9 Half-tracks
Co C	1	37	
Company C, 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion	3	48	
Company C. 22nd Armored Engineer Battalion	Approximately two platoons.		

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Figure 11. Strength of CCR after taking BERGSTEIN.

At 060710 December the first of three counterattacks was launched into the sector of the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion from the woods to the southeast. This attack was made by about five hundred men of the 1st Battalion, 980th Regiment (P7's later stated they had moved from the SCHMIDT area during the night of 3-4 December), supported by about ten Panther tanks and assault guns. The attacking forces were brought under fire by the 10th Tank Battalion with everything it had; but the battalion now had less than one 76-mm. per company and the rest, which were 75-mm., "just bounced off the enemy tanks." The troops in the 47th sector also fired all available weapons. Division and corps artillery was called and "began landing in about thirty minutes which was as soon as could be expected." This time interval was specifically stated by Lt. Goldman; however, Lt.-Col. Hamberg, who commanded the 10th Tank Battalion in BERGSTEIN, had this to say when confronted with that statement:

"That sure is a surprise to me! We had an elaborate artillery plan with numbered concentrations and anyone could call them down. The concentration overlay had been issued to leaders down to and including tank commanders. The Corps Artillery Officer told me later that we fired more than 40,000 rounds of artillery in the few days we were in BERGSTEIN. This (statement of Lt. Goldman) is grossly unfair to our artillery, since a look at our strengths and the sector involved should prove that artillery actually bore the defense."

In view of artillery support and coordination in previous attacks, it seems likely that Lt.-Col. Hamberg's picture is closer to the actual facts.

At this time it was still dark, and American forces were



PLATE XX MORTARS' FIRE ON THE ENEMY COUNTER ATTACK OF BERGSTEIN

207017

having considerable difficulty finding targets although the Germans did not seem to be having the same trouble. The German tanks had moved to the flank and were firing point-blank range, while the infantry came through in groups -- "they would have made good targets if we could have seen them!" There were two TD's near the edge of the town, but one received a direct hit before it could do any good. The other waited for a German tank to come up within seventy-five yards and knocked it out; the enemy must have picked up its gun flash, as it was hit a few seconds later. As dawn came, the Company B command tank (the only 76-mm, with the 47th's forces) moved to the south edge of town. Daylight disclosed a Mark V moving in an open field; the 76-mm. destroyed it with one shot and quickly traversed left to get a second Panther in two rounds. In the course of about an hour this tank knocked out five enemy tanks and an SP gun. "We were in the open between two houses of rubble and don't know why they failed to destroy us" as German tanks were in good defilade firing positions and the shells burst all around the tank."

All during this time there were two 90-mm. TD's sitting in the road to the rear of the tank, but the turrets were facing the wrong way and the crews were in cellars and would not come out to fire as they said the enemy would pick up the gun flashes.

Friendly elements had initially withdrawn about seven houses for more secure positions, but by 0900 the attack was

repulsed and the position was restored with an estimated two hundred enemy killed, sixty captured, and six tanks and five anti-tank guns destroyed. A PW later reported that all but ten men in one company were casualties. At 1130 and 1420 further attacks were launched (the latter by the 189th Replacement Battalion); but these were quickly broken up, primarily by defensive artillery fires.

The importance the Germans placed on repelling this attack by CCR and the sincerity of their counterattacks is exemplified in the following statement by General-Major von Gersdorff, Chief of Staff of the Seventh German Army:

The attack of an American armored group in the direction of BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN in early December was of critical importance. This thrust threatened a deep penetration with a consequent extension of our thinly spread forces. Every effort was, therefore, made to repel this lunge by counterattacks. Having no other reserves available, Seventh Army, with the concurrence of Army Group, decided to commit the 272d VG Division assisted by assault gun units. It was an unwelcome decision for both Army and Army Group. The division was scheduled to participate in the ARDENNES offensive and it was recognized that heavy casualties in this engagement would seriously hamper its effectiveness. The projection, however, of the American attack on through BERGSTEIN to the ROER RIVER would jeopardize the execution of the ARDENNES operation....Repeated counterattacks against BRANDENBERG, BERGSTEIN, and HILL 402 enjoyed no success.³¹

Enemy continued firing constant artillery and mortar fires on BERGSTEIN and BRANDENBERG, and casualties of men and equipment rapidly mounted. By afternoon the 47th task force had a fighting strength of but thirty-four men, and the 10th Tank Battalion was comparatively as weak. "Couldn't afford to evacuate combat fatigue cases although some of

the men were out of their minds."³² In answer to the request for reinforcement for the town, word was received that the 2d Ranger Battalion would move into the town to reinforce the reserve command and to seize HILL 402 to the east which the "situation had not permitted" the armor to capture. The Machine Gun Platoon, 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, was dispatched forward from BRANDENBERG, but the platoon leader was wounded as they assembled and a half-track was hit and the platoon sergeant killed when they started down the road. By evening there were only ten or twelve men effective in this platoon. Then the third reconnaissance platoon (about forty men) from Troop C, 85th Reconnaissance Squadron, was dismounted and started to the south. The artillery gauntlet en route to BERGSTEIN eliminated all but fifteen; a German counterattack just after their arrival left only eight effective in the platoon. Next sixty men just out of the hospital were sent into BERGSTEIN as replacements, but these men were still in poor health and lacked essential individual equipment.³³ It was necessary to pick up weapons for them wherever they could be found on or near the dead, and although they had no blankets there were none available for issue in BERGSTEIN. Rain was pouring down as it had been almost constantly for several days; all the men were soaked and were already suffering from bad colds.

However, the weather suddenly began clearing at about 1500, and by 1600 friendly air appeared overhead. It attacked

the enemy to the south but received heavy anti-aircraft fire and requested artillery to counter this. This request was immediately acted upon. "So seldom were we ever in a position to help them,"³⁵ and it was later learned that this counter-battery actually broke up a counterattacking force which was assembling to the southeast.

About 062400 December, the 2d Ranger Battalion began to move into BERGSTEIN. Lt. R.S. Lewis, commanding Company B, 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, said:

About midnight a guy came down the road, then two others, each one five yards behind the other. They were three Ranger lieutenants. They asked for enemy positions and the road to take; said they were ready to go. We talked the situation over with the officers. They stepped out and said, "Let's go, men." We heard the tommy guns click and without a word the Rangers moved out. Our morale went up in a hurry.³⁶

In the early morning of 7 December the 2d Ranger Battalion seized its objective, the high ground immediately east of BERGSTEIN, and later the same day the 121st Infantry Regiment took its 5 December objective.

Although any action involving HILL 402 would be closely allied with BERGSTEIN, no official relationship was established between the 2d Ranger Battalion and elements of CCR in the town. In fact, the entire command relationship in this operation was unusual. CCR maintained its CP on a rise west of

KLEINHAU from which it had good radio communication to its battalions and to division. The 47th and 10th battalions were on an equal basis and co-ordination would normally come from CCR, but CCR was so far from the actual scene of operations that nearly all arrangements were made on a basis of mutual understanding between Lt. Col. Boyer, commanding the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, and Lt. Col. Hamberg although Colonel Anderson did come forward frequently to check on the situation. In fact, troops such as engineers, tank destroyers, and reconnaissance platoons were used in the 47th sector although actually attached to the 10th Tank Battalion. The relationship with the 2d Ranger Battalion was conducted on the same basis and cooperation was excellent. The ranger battalion commander said he would consider himself attached to the 10th Tank Battalion since he felt close coordination was necessary and since his organization was weak in radios and evacuation facilities; therefore, tanks were given to the rangers for communication and their casualties were evacuated through 10th Tank Battalion channels. With a maximum of cooperation and a minimum of confusion the Ranger battalion lined up along the eastern edge of BERGSTEIN, and at a given signal all men rose and dashed to the top of HILL 402, receiving only three or four casualties in the few seconds it took to be on the objective. However, they found the hill barren and rocky and the enemy artillery began to cause losses. A request was relayed through Lt. Col. Hamberg for permission

to defend forward of the hill, but the request was denied --the hill must be "occupied and held at all costs." When told this, the Ranger Battalion commander answered that he would seize the hill "every hour on the hour" but could not occupy it. This was apparently acceptable as no further message was received from the 8th Infantry Division.³⁷

On 7 December CCR continued to defend in BERGSTEIN. All during the day artillery continued to cause casualties. During the night of 7-8 December, CCR was relieved by elements of the 121st Infantry Regiment and of the 644th TD Battalion and was directed to move to WALHORN, BELGIUM, for reorganization. It was impossible to evacuate any of the disabled vehicles at this time, and the command was followed up the road to BRANDENBERG by artillery fire. Then CCR was relieved and it had seventy infantrymen left out of seven hundred fifty, eight out of fifty-eight tanks, and one tank destroyer out of a company. The losses in tanks were particularly high both because of enemy action and because of the difficulty of evacuation. Also, losses were disproportionately high among key personnel because the type of fighting placed special demands on leaders; in addition, many tank commanders were lost as a result of time fire. During the period of reorganization that followed, CCR remained attached to V Corps and had no mission other than being the reserve of that corps.

GROSSHAU to SCHAFBERG (29 Nov to 5 Dec)

As stated previously, the 5th Armored Division, less CCR, was attached to VII Corps on 29 November. While division troops and CCB remained near NEUDORF, BELGIUM, as VII Corps reserve, CCA was attached to the 4th Infantry Division since it was to be the lead combat command in any breakthrough. The 46th Armored Infantry Battalion of CCA was further attached to the 22d Regimental Combat Team then operating just west of GROSSHAU. The 46th was given the mission of attacking on the right flank of the 22d to secure the road from KLEINHAU northeast to SCHAFBERG (074383). The capture of SCHAFBERG, situated at the eastern edge of the forest, would provide a point of debouchment for CCA to attack the following day. The remainder of CCA, in the meantime, had moved to ZEIFALL to be prepared to follow the 46th, to break out of the woods, and to push the attack rapidly to the ROER RIVER about four thousand yards east. The line of departure for the armored infantry battalion was to be HILL 401 just northeast of KLEINHAU; the hill and the town were reported to be in friendly hands. (It will be remembered from the KLEINHAU account that the infantry following CCR occupied only the town and not the hill).

The lack of time for preparation was a serious handicap as CCA and attached troops had been expecting to be employed in the V Corps zone where they were fully abreast of the situation and terrain; but now they became attached to

an infantry division in another corps zone on one day, and the 46th Armored Infantry Battalion was used in an attack on the morning of the next. Information given to the 46th was that the 22d Regimental Combat Team was opposed by the 7th Company, 985th Infantry Regiment, and by three rifle companies and a heavy weapons company of the 353d Fusilier Battalion.

At this time CCA consisted of the troops indicated in Figure 12. For the attack, the 46th Armored Infantry Battalion was to use its organic companies dismounted with the 44th Field Artillery Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, in a direct support role. The formation was Company C on the left, Company A on the right, and Company B in a reserve echeloned to the right rear. The Machine Gun Platoon of Headquarters Company was attached to Company A, while the 81mm, mortars and assault guns were retained under battalion control in general support.

At 300930 November the battalion moved from its assembly area in an approach march formation; but as the leading companies emerged from the woods at 045375 they came under heavy and continuous artillery and mortar fire, and as they advanced they received small arms and automatic fire from HILL 401. Although the 22d RCT still insisted this must be friendly fire, the battalion commander directed an assault of HILL 401 by Charlie. The assault, although against "friendly" fire, was costly but successful and resulted in the capture of fifty

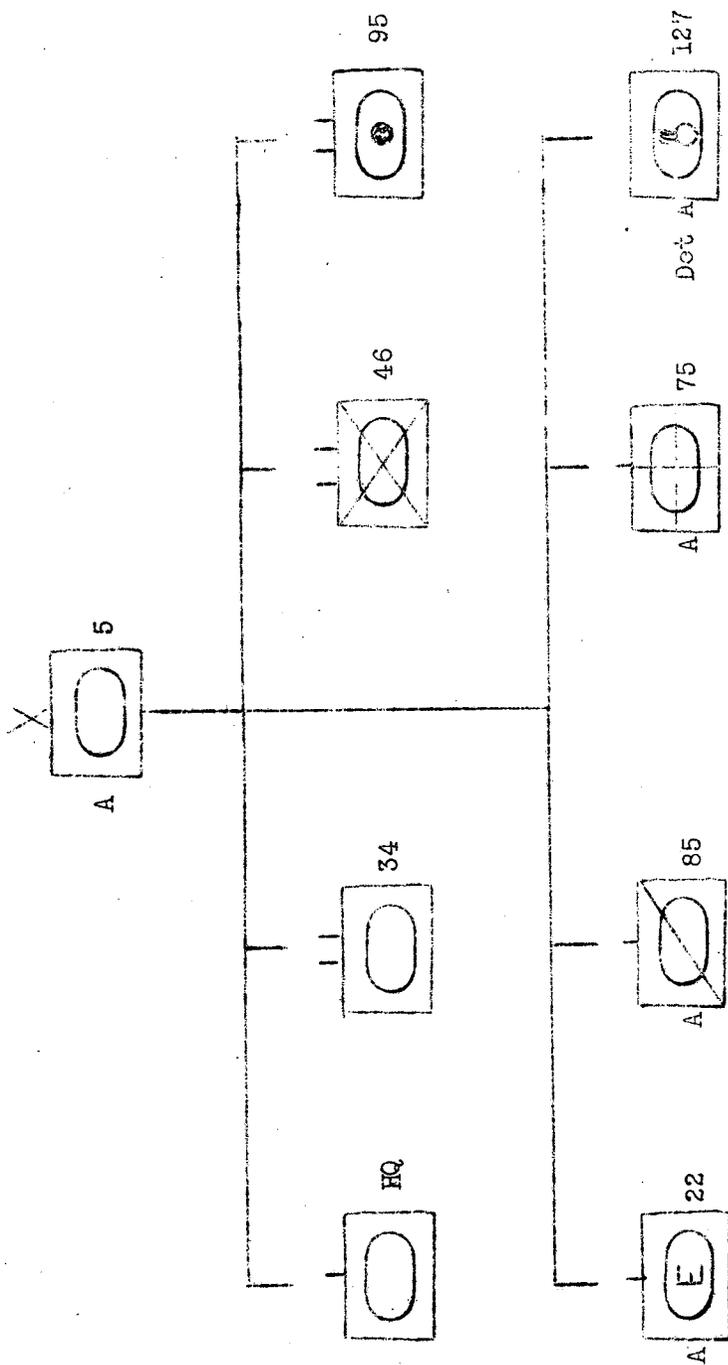


Figure 12. Task Organization of CCA

prisoners and six machine guns. The attack was continued and by nightfall the battalion had established a line approximately one thousand yards short of the objective. Here the battalion dug in for the night.

The devastating artillery fire created an acute supply and evacuation problem and as a result all supplies and evacuation of wounded was carried on during the hours of darkness.
38 Casualties for the operation so far were four officers and one hundred thirteen enlisted men.

This position was held throughout the night with considerable patrol action on both sides, and the battalion jumped off at 010900 December with the same formation to continue to SCHAFBERG. Although contact with the enemy was made immediately, the leading companies had made a costly advance of five hundred yards by 1100. Visibility was limited to a maximum of five yards due to the density of the trees.
39

However, the 22d RCT directed at this time that the battalion withdraw to position held the night before in order to establish contact with the 2d Battalion, 22d RCT, which was about six hundred yards back and eight hundred yards left. This withdrawal was successfully accomplished with difficulty because of the number of wounded who had to be carried back. While organizing this position a counterattack by a company of the 541st Regiment was dispersed, primarily by artillery fire.

That night the 46th reverted to CCA control and orders were issued that Company B, 34th Tank Battalion, would support

the battalion in its attack east the following morning (2 December), but by 021100 December the tanks still had not arrived at the battalion. Then the attack was postponed because of a German counterattack from GEY and because artillery, probably fired in conjunction with this attack, had reduced the battalion to below 30 per cent effectives so that it was withdrawn west of KLEINHAU. All of the effectives except a skeleton company acting as a covering force were used to carry the wounded, and during the withdrawal the one remaining battalion staff officer and the ranking company commander were put out of action. The withdrawal was completed on 022000 December. In the three days the battalion had suffered ten officers and two hundred twenty-seven enlisted casualties.

From 2 to 5 December elements of the combat command remained at this location and on 5 December assembled in ZWEIFALL to reorganize and remained there until 9 December.

Although the 46th Armored Infantry Battalion of CCA had advanced to within about five hundred yards of the eastern edge of the HURTTGEN FOREST on 1 December, it was directed to withdraw by the 22d Regimental Combat Team and CCA was not able to gain maneuver room to commit its forces at this time.

Push to the ROER (9 to 15 Dec)

During the period that CCR was attacking with the 8th Infantry Division, the Division Headquarters and CCB were assembled prepared to take advantage of any success by CCA in breaking out of the woods. On 10 December the Fifth was dis-

posed with its headquarters at ZWEIFALL, CCA at HAHN, (K915357) CCR at WALHORN reorganizing, and CCB assembled in KLEINHAW. The 83d Infantry Division had relieved the 4th Division and was attacking GEY and SCHAFBERG, the two exits from the HURTGEN FOREST. The Fifth was ordered to attack through 83d Division elements at 110730 December and planned to do so in two armored columns -- CCA on the north passing through GEY and CCB on the south through SCHAFBERG, with the 4th Cavalry Group screening the southern flank of the division. CCR was to act as the division reserve; however, it would emphasize reorganization and re-equipping and would be called upon only in an emergency.

Although CCB passed through the 83d at SCHAFBERG, it was stopped about two hundred yards to the southeast by enemy resistance; CCA was directed to halt for the night in the vicinity of GROSSHAU as the capture of GEY was not yet complete. CCB was having considerable trouble as the only supply line was under constant shelling and was impassable to wheeled or semi-track vehicles; light tanks were used to bring in supplies and to evacuate casualties. The continuance of the attack which had been planned for the 12th was postponed to the 13th and then to the 14th. Although CCA was still unable to move through GEY, no clear reason has been found for not attempting to continue the attack of the southern column. On the 14th the overall attack was resumed and CCA reached the outskirts of KUFFERATH (103399) after breaching an extensive minefield near HORM (086396). In the south CCB met very heavy enemy resistance

and initially could advance but one kilometer; however, on the 15th CCB split into two columns, one seizing LANGENBROICH (098388) and the other the woods to the south. CCA also split into two columns on this date and secured KUFFERATH and the hills southeast. The following day CCA remained in these locations while CCB consolidated at LANGENBROICH and pushed south to capture the town of BILSTEIN (102378).

At the time the 5th Armored Division was committed to attack through the 83d Infantry Division, the 4th Cavalry Group which was to cover the 5th's south flank already had a light tank battalion screening from the 83d's forward infantry elements southwest to KLEINHAU. The Group, which was attached to the division for this mission, was further attached to CCB on this southern flank. At this time the 4th Cavalry Group consisted of the troops shown in Figure 13. The majority of the troops including the light tank and TD battalions were employed dismounted. As mentioned above, the tank battalion was already in position south of the KLEINHAU-SCHAFFBERG road; the 85th Cavalry Squadron (minus Troops C and D) with Company C, 635th TD Battalion, attached was to follow CCB and push south to extend the screen of the light tank battalion. The organic squadrons were not used in either of these missions because the 4th was still screening a gap between the 9th Infantry Division and the 83d Division, while the 24th was committed between two regiments of the latter division. These two squadrons were not relieved until the 13th and 18th,

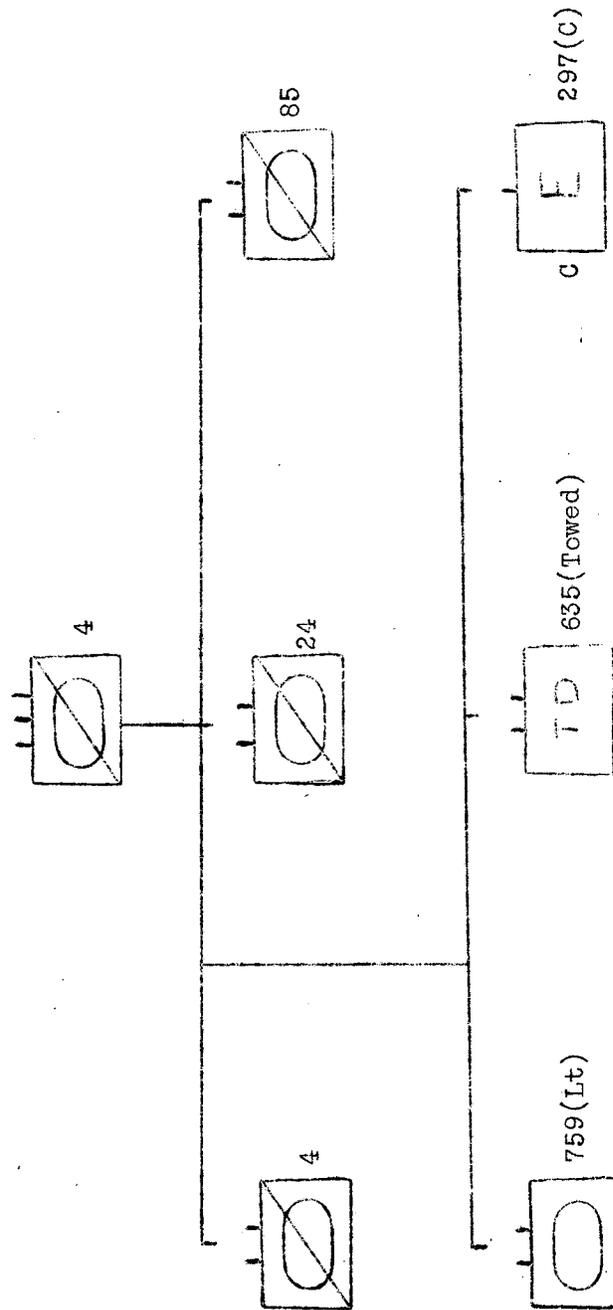


Figure 13. Task Organization of 4th Cavalry Group

respectively, when the 4th Squadron was directed to take over the mission of the 85th Squadron and assembled just north of GROSSHUI on 15 December. On 16 December two troops of the 4th Squadron extended the screen east to maintain contact with the forward elements of CCB.

The magnitude of the German attack in the ARDENNES on 16 December was not immediately recognized, and the 5th Armored was assigned additional missions to clear the west bank of the ROER. Finally, on 22 December, both the 5th Armored Division and the 4th Cavalry Group were directed to assemble in preparation for operations in the south. CCA was relieved by the 83d Infantry Division and CCB was relieved partly by elements of the 83d and partly by elements of the 121st Regiment of the 8th Infantry Division which also relieved the 4th Cavalry Group.

Logistics

Discussion of logistics will be broken down into the same three periods used for the discussion of tactical employment--(1) a mobile reserve period; (2) a period during which elements were used in the forest to assist the infantry in achieving its penetration; and (3) the armored attack to the banks of the ROER RIVER.

First Phase. In the first period, the division was not in contact except for one combat command which held a defensive sector on an inactive front. This period was very wisely used to resupply after the trek across France and to perform

maintenance and to prepare for future operations, particularly in obtaining the necessary items, such as "duck bills", over-shoes, and sleeping bags for the coming winter. The division assembly area in the vicinity of MONSCHAU was close to the army dumps so that no problem was involved in securing supplies; however, distribution was somewhat complicated by the splitting up of divisional organic units. Combat commands were periodically detached and moved to other corps areas; tank battalions and even companies (Company D, 10th Tank Battalion was attached to the 2d Ranger Battalion) were attached to infantry units. Nevertheless, as it turned out, none of these elements were actively engaged so that supply requirements remained at a minimum.

In preparation for future operations a system of conducting protected convoys was instituted. This entailed establishment and operation of a "Division Service Area" into which units would dispatch supply vehicles guarded by armed escort from the unit and from which the division could dispatch convoys to supply points with division protection. The reverse procedure operated in the forward flow of supplies.⁴⁰ This general system was utilized throughout the HURTTGEN action, although armed escorts were seldom necessary.

The division set up Class I and Class III dumps by employing transportation of the attached Quartermaster Truck companies and by using personnel from these companies to

supplement a detachment of service troops provided by V Corps. Scheduled convoys were operated between army and division dumps. During the months of October and November, the trucks of the two Quartermaster Truck companies averaged 739 miles per truck per month.

Second Phase. From the last week of November to 8 December, while elements of the division were assisting the infantry in penetrating the forest, resupply became a definite problem. The division headquarters and CCB were together; but CCA was attached to the 4th Infantry Division with one of its battalions operating under the control of the 22d Regiment Combat Team and, at the same time CCR was not only attached to the 8th Infantry Division but was in another corps zone. To increase further the burden, both CCR and the 46th Armored Infantry Battalion were suffering heavy losses in men and materiel. Losses in personal equipment, individual arms, and crew served weapons were extremely heavy; in addition, heavy replacements were required for tires, radios, and radiators shattered by artillery tree bursts in the forest action. An abnormal delay existed in the replacement of these and most major items because of the confusion caused by the detachment of organic components, the resultant time lag of reports, and the circuitous MSR's.

During this period individual units took steps to reduce the materiel losses and to obtain equipment that was slow in being replaced or that was not available at depots.

A truck was kept at the aid station and items of individual equipment, particularly arms and overshoes, were removed from the wounded and loaded into this truck. Because overshoes were a critical item and the incident rate of trench foot was rising, trucks were sent periodically to the rear to canvass hospitals for overshoes and other items of equipment. Although this was out of channels, the expedient kept the trench foot rate low.

Those units engaged found that all supplies had to be brought forward at night and then in half-tracks or, more often, in tanks and armored trailers. In the action of the 46th Battalion east of GROSSHAU, all supplies had to be hand-carried by teams of drivers, cooks, and maintenance personnel. The S-4 of the 46th found it necessary to direct most of his attention to distribution which required far more personal supervision to reload supplies, to organize carrying teams, and to command these groups in the operation.

Long evacuation routes to the Ordnance Battalion for vehicle evacuation were further complicated by the lack of hard standing and by poor roads. Because tank transporters could not negotiate the roads, disabled tanks were dragged to the rear by retrievers, tanks, and M-25 tractors.

Personnel casualties were evacuated in tanks or in armored trailers towed by tanks. In the action of the 46th Armored Infantry Battalion even this method was impractical. Administrative personnel and the supply carrying-teams hand-carried the wounded under cover of darkness sometimes as far

as two kilometers. Since evacuation was so difficult, aid stations were kept well forward, frequently right with the assault companies.

Final Phase. During the third period, supply was not quite so difficult as in the second period. Resupply and evacuation for frontline elements was accomplished for the most part by light tanks and armored trailers -- only full-track vehicles could negotiate the roads and high-angle fire continued to harrass the supply routes. In addition, supply installations were located on the west of the forest while units were attacking on the east edge with long, narrow, unimproved, winding routes between the two.

Few specific solutions can be found to the difficult supply situation in this type of operation; the only answer seems to be longer hours, initiative, endurance, and ingenuity on the part of service personnel.

Summary

First Phase. The employment of the 5th Armored Division and its elements in the reserve role conforms, in general, to present doctrine except that it is felt that combat commands will not normally be attached to infantry divisions. Arguments that attachment was necessary for logistical reasons are inconsistent since the combat commands were supplied by the armored division anyway. Additional missions given the armored division while it was in the reserve role, although not considered normal, were dictated by the circumstances and did not detract materially from the primary mission since the

majority of the division remained ready for immediate employment and since plans were made for quick release of elements otherwise utilized.

Second Phase. Colonel Anderson was particularly critical of the use of his Reserve command while attached to the 8th Infantry Division,⁴¹ but it is certainly doubtful that dismounted infantry could have seized the objectives without suffering even greater losses. There was evidence of a lack of co-operation between the armor and the infantry division based on (1) receiving erroneous reports from the infantry, and (2) the failure of the infantry to take its objectives in joint attacks. However, the latter may be justified since some of the infantry companies were down in strength to a dozen men (Chapter VI). As for the erroneous reports, commanders must learn that reports must be verified by personal reconnaissance whenever time permits. The officer establishing contact must not stop at division or regiment, but must go to the company or platoon that is physically on the ground.

A different picture of the operation is presented by Lt. Col. Hamberg, who commanded the 10th Tank Battalion, in the following statement:

I have never seen an operation in which more personal initiative and bravery was shown. The reason that individual initiative and courage showed up was due to the way the attack was conceived and planned. Ample time was given to study the job. There were excellent maps and photos. Each job was studied in complete detail. Houses and terrain features were identified. Squads

and tanks were assigned to particular missions. After the first operation, however, CCR's forces were depleted to the point that there were no reserves; all troops were committed. Artillery preparation was planned in the same detail as other actions⁴².

This commitment of CCR to assist the infantry in its penetration by limited objective attacks at decisive points where the infantry lacked the strength and drive to be successful is fully in accordance with present-day doctrine. It is felt that CCR's success where three infantry divisions (the 9th, 28th, and 8th) had bogged down vindicates its employment in spite of heavy losses. This is not intended to indicate that CCR accomplished what three divisions could not; the divisions had attacked singly and were low in strength and spirit by the time they had reached this point. In addition, the 8th Infantry Division captured HURTTGEN, which unhinged the defense of the area and served as a wedge into the German positions. Further, the greater percentage of CCR's losses were received in two actions, the unsuccessful attack on HURTTGEN on 25 November and the holding of BERGSTEN against repeated counterattacks between 5 and 8 December. The first was directly occasioned by erroneous information from the infantry and the failure of CCR to verify these reports on the ground. In the second instance, infantry elements, to conform with ground. In the second instance, infantry elements, to conform with doctrine, should have taken over the defense of the objective the first night. This was called for in the original plan, although the depleted strength and other commitments of the 8th Infantry Division may have precluded this. Nevertheless, the action did prove something. Tankers normally are very reluctant

to be placed on the defensive; although position defense is not the most profitable use of mobile forces, this action demonstrates that tanks can set up a strong defense with a small force of infantry when required to do so.

Thus, the use of armor in a limited objective attack to speed up the penetration when it is progressing slowly and at a high cost to the infantry is certainly within the scope of past and present tactics; in fact, the retention of all of the 5th Armored in a reserve role when it could hasten such a costly penetration could not have been justified. In such a commitment of armor there are two principles that should be applied: (1) that the objective assigned be within the capability of armor (i.e., ground sufficiently open to give maneuver room to the attacking armor even if surrounded by woods), and (2) that sufficient force be retained in reserve to take advantage of any success so gained.

Final Phase. In the last period, two armored columns attacked through the infantry on the far edge of the forest to push to the ROER before the Germans could reorganize their defense. The attack did not proceed rapidly because of numerous mines, but it was successful and was marked by close cooperation between the 5th Armored Division and the 83d Infantry Division.

General Conclusions. Two possible criticisms exist in the general picture. At various times elements of the 5th Armored Division were parcelled out to infantry units during the

first period. This does not refer to the attachment of CCR to the 8th Infantry Division, as this was tactically sound and necessary. That sufficient emergency existed in other CC attachments is not apparent now, but full consideration should always be given to the fact that combat and reserve commands, like the organic battalions, are not designed to operate detached from the armored division. While CCA was attached to the 4th Infantry Division from 29 November to 9 December, its armored infantry battalion was used in the line with the 22nd Regimental Combat Team; this was a completely dismounted action and was very costly in officers and other trained personnel; although the battalion was well ahead of other battalions of the 22nd RCT, it was ordered to retire to straighten the line, and its contribution to the overall situation did not justify the losses sustained. Armored infantry contains too many specialists in proportion to the number of riflemen to attack profitably with regular infantry. By the same token, the 4th Cavalry Group was given so many gaps to fill that it became necessary to commit an attached light tank battalion and a TD battalion dismounted; although reconnaissance battalions are trained to fight mounted or dismounted, tank units should be committed in dismounted action only as a last resort.

The technique and tactics within the division conformed to present day doctrine except in two matters: (1) the constant use of the reserve command as a fighting headquarters, and (2) a semi-permanent attachment of battalions in the reserve and combat commands. This latter idea was carried down to reinforced battalions, which with few exceptions, consisted of tank and armored

infantry companies "married" to each other. Both of these points are contrary to the teachings of the Armored School, but still have many proponents in the armored force. Those opposed to the school doctrine argue that a triangular organization is needed in combat and is actually provided by the third headquarters (which is organized the same as the others except for the grade of the commander) and, further, that units resting or being rehabilitated can operate with the trains or as division troops. Using three fighting commands enables a rotation of headquarters and leaves the headquarters commanding the reserve better able to be committed as a reserve.

In regard to the "married" formations CCR, for example, used a system of set formations which were included in SOP's and designated in orders by "A", "B", or "C". It was found that these formations covered just about every situation encountered, and if they did not, it was still possible to alter them as the circumstances demanded. They, of course, had the advantage of simplifying communications and command relationships and also built a pride in the various teams, but had the disadvantage that there was a tendency to use one of these formations out of habit rather than organize according to the terrain and the mission. One might say that there is a trend toward making the plan fit the task organizations rather than organizing the troops to fit the plan. In addition, this system led to a fixed formation within CCR whereby the armored infantry battalion consisted habitually of but one "married" team of tanks and infantry and a small

proportion of supporting troops, thereby wasting a battalion headquarters and giving the load repeatedly to the tank battalion.

Some consideration should be given to the employment of battalions and companies in CCR. The only criticism that can be made of this well-organized operation is in the plans for the utilization of the reserve, which considered its use only if the attacking battalion got in trouble rather than its use to exploit a success. The reserve was also kept well to the rear and was not moved forward as the attack progressed. For example, when the 10th Tank Battalion was attacking BRANDENBERG the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, the reserve, was still located west of GERMEYER and would have had to move over poor, congested roads through KLEINHAU. Had the reserve been well forward, at least to KLEINHAU, it could have pushed through to BERGSTEIN when Company A tanks entered that town on 5 December.

The tank battalion in its attacks on KLEINHAU, BRANDENBERG, and BERGSTEIN used to full advantage the capabilities of its various arms. In general, the tanks and infantry attacked a town jointly; tanks with some infantry protection cut off the roads in and out of the town while the infantry, assisted by some tanks, was utilized to clear the town. In the attack on KLEINHAU the infantry was dismounted too soon, as we have already noted, and this error was corrected in subsequent actions.

An important point to be considered is the need for armored vehicles to bring up front line supplies and to evacuate casualties. Because of the intense high trajectory fire, the 10th

Tank Battalion frequently used light tanks to accomplish these missions. The inclusion of the M-44 full-track personnel carrier in present tables of organization should solve this problem, however, since such situations will be the exception rather than the rule.

We can conclude that armor other than that in direct support of infantry can be successfully employed, not through heavy woods themselves but to seize decisive open areas within the forest when infantry elements have secured the woods-line. These attacks require particularly close teamwork between tanks, armored engineers, and armored infantry and especially close cooperation between the armored task force and other infantry units with which they are fighting. Such attacks require the maximum armor that the open spaces will hold as well as closely coordinated artillery preparations and counterbattery fire. The tanks must advance immediately behind supporting artillery fires and often under artillery time fire to get protection from enemy bazookas. These attacks require detailed planning, frequently down to squads and tank crews, which necessitates adequate time and accurate maps and air photos.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER VII

- 1
Combat Interview by V Corps on 29 December 1944 with Capt F. M. Pool, C. O. Company B, 10th Tank Battalion (CI 49-A)
- 2
Combat Interview by V Corps on 29 December 1944 with Lt. R. S. Lewis, 47th Armored Infantry Battalion (CI 49-A)
- 3
Interview by Cpat A. St John on 10 January 1949 with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg, C. O. 10th Tank Battalion

4
Op cit., Interview with Capt F. M. Pool (CI 49-A)

5
Op Cit., Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg by Capt St John

6
This part of the plan was specifically stated in the After Action Report of CCR of the 5th Armored Division although it seems rather improbable since this road junction is in the southern outskirts of KLEINHAU, and if the infantry could clear the road to this point they would have accomplished the first phase of the mission by thus securing a foothold in the builtup portion of the town. In addition, this was never accomplished by the infantry.

7
Combat Interview by V Corps on 28 December 1944 with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg, C. O. 10th Tank Battalion (CI 49-A)

8
Op Cit., Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg by Capt St John

9
Ibid

10
Op Cit., Combat Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg (CI 49-A)

11
This was probably the attack on GROSSHAU by tanks with the 4th Infantry Division.

12
Lt Col Hamberg stated that he did not occupy the hill as it was "flat as a billiard ball and besides the people at the road block could see over and around it." He added in an interview on 10 January by Capt St John that the tankers of A/10 Tank Bn. ran all over the hill with their tanks. This became an important point when the 46th Armored Infantry Battalion made its attack on GROSSHAU.

- 13
Op Cit.. Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg by Capt St John
- 14
Combat Interview by V Corps on 29 December 1944 with Major
W. M. Daniel, Ex O. 10th Tank Battalion (CI 49-A)
- 15
Op Cit.. Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg (CI 49-A)
- 16
Ibid
- 17
Op Cit.. Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg by Capt St John
- 18
After Action Report, 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, Dec 44
- 19
Ibid
- 20
Combat Interview by V Corps on 30 December 1944 with Lt
O. D. Goldman, Company B, 47th Armored Infantry Bn. (CI 49-A)
- 21
Op Cit.. Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg (CI 49-A)
- 22
Op Cit.. Interview with Lt O. D. Goldman (CI 49-A)
- 23
After Action Report CCR, 5th Armored Division, Dec 44
- 24
Combat Interview by V Corps on 30 December 1944 with Lt
R. Stutsman, Company B, 47th Armored Infantry Bn. (CI-49A)
- 25
Op Cit.. Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg (CI-49-A) This
statement was also made by Lt Goldman when interviewed by V Corps
on 30 December 1944.
- 26
Op Cit.. Interview with Lt O. D. Goldman (CI 49-A)
- 27
Op Cit.. Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg by Capt St John
- 28
Op Cit.. Interview with Lt O. D. Goldman (CI 49-A)

- 29
Op Cit., Interview with Lt R. S. Lewis (CI 49-A)
- 30
Ibid
- 31
Report on the Battle of the Hurtgen Forest by General-Major Frhr. v Gersdorff, C of S, Seventh German Army translated and prepared by USFET Historical Section.
- 32
Op Cit., Interview with Lt R. S. Lewis (CI 49-A)
- 33
Ibid
- 34
Ibid
- 35
Op Cit., Interview with Major W. M. Daniel (CI 49-A)
- 36
Op Cit., Interview with Lt R. S. Lewis (CI 49-A)
- 37
Op Cit., Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg by Capt St John
- 38
After Action Report, 46th Armored Infantry Bn. Nov 1944.
- 39
Ibid
- 40
After Action Report, 5th Armored Division, Oct 1944.
- 41
Combat Interview by V Corps on 27 December 1944 with Col G. H. Anderson, C. O. CCR, 5th Armored Division.
- 42
Op Cit., Combat Interview with Lt Col W. A. Hamberg (CI 49-A)

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

The combination of terrain and weather was the more prominent of the two major factors which were common to all of the armored units involved in the HURTGEN FOREST fighting. The terrain restricted maneuver, reduced mobility, limited observation, hindered supply of attacking units, and decidedly favored the determined German defenders. The weather was closely allied to the terrain conditions: rain transformed the already formidable terrain into a morass; fog reduced visibility in some instances to only a few yards; snow and cold adversely affected equipment, concealed mines and booby traps, and added frostbite and trenchfoot to the other discomforts suffered by troops in the forest.

The fact that armored units were fighting in support of infantry and under the operational control of infantry commanders was the second major factor. This means that the tactics of armor were modified to fit the infantry situations and were dictated by the infantry and that their objectives were infantry objectives. Furthermore, co-ordination was weak; control was ineffective; and armored units often lacked the necessary tactical information.

One of the most pressing problems in the HURTGEN FOREST -- a direct result of these two major factors -- was the vital need for close and aggressive engineer support for armored units: (1) terrain and weather conditions made excessive demands on the engineers; and (2) engineer units trained to support infantry did not appreciate the magnitude of their role in supporting armor. For

instance, lack of adequate engineer support precluded the use of the 707th Tank Battalion in the 28th Infantry Division's defense of SCHMIDT and was instrumental in the failure of the attack on HURTGEN by Reserve Command, 5th Armored Division. Aggressive and continuous preparation and maintenance of a route for armored vehicles would have done much toward avoiding the losses sustained in these two engagements.

Engineers must be included in every tank-infantry team. Their presence assures maximum availability of tank support to the infantry. But their absence delays or denies the infantry this support; for instance, a lack of engineers for mine removal prevented timely tank support for infantry of the 9th Division at both LAMMERSDORF and GERMETER. Russian army doctrine recommends the following small combined arms team for forest fighting:

It is advisable to attach about one squad of infantry and three or four sappers to each tank, and contact between them must not be broken. Aside from saws and axes, the sappers should be equipped with mine detectors and explosive materials for demolishing trees.¹

All of the difficulties encountered stem from the fact that the engineers with the infantry divisions had too little training in tank support. The tank battalions which had fought continuously from the NORMANDY beaches with the 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions had less trouble getting adequate engineer support than the tank battalions with other infantry divisions. Inclusion of tanks in the infantry division under the new tables of organization would result in better tank-infantry-engineer training and will do much to solve the problem of

engineer support.

Tactics

Attacking infantry must have tanks in close support regardless of difficulties presented by the terrain. The psychological advantages of using tanks in the HURTGEN FOREST -- the shock effect on enemy troops and the confidence which tanks gave our own infantry -- far outweighed the disadvantages of limited mobility and restricted fire power. This premise -- that some tanks must be in immediate support of infantry in every tactical situation -- underlies any discussion of the tactical use of armor in forest fighting. It does not follow that the principle of mass is violated just because the terrain often dictates that tanks must be used individually or by section to give effective support to the infantry; if tanks must be so employed, then the commander is using them in the largest mass possible. From this it follows that commanders at every echelon must be alert to use their tanks in greater mass if the accidents of terrain offer this opportunity. The infantry battalion commander having a platoon of tanks at his disposal must look for opportunities to use his tank platoon in massed formation; the regimental commander must be prepared to mass his tank company; the division commander should be ready to use his tank battalion (or an attached Corps tank battalion) to exploit a favorable situation; and the corps commander should seek an opportunity to employ his armored division to gain the decision.

Present doctrine for the use of armor in reducing a forest mass contemplates (1) that armor sweeps around the forest mass in a pincer movement to isolate the area and thus facilitate the advance of infantry through the woods; or (2) when the flanks are unassailable, that armored elements are massed in a mobile reserve to attack through infantry when the far edge of the woods has been secured as a line of departure. In addition, the basic premise that tanks must be in immediate support of infantry regardless of the difficulties presented by terrain necessitates a third concept: infantry clearing dense forests must employ small combined arms teams which include tanks, infantry and engineers.

The HURTTGEN FOREST operation was initially planned in accordance with the second method. However, it was found necessary to weaken this reserve by committing part of it to assist in the penetration. The utilization of the armored division in this role, prepared to attack through the infantry when sufficient penetration has been made to secure maneuver room, follows the normal principle of employing a mobile reserve. The reserve must be centrally located; the armor must maintain close liaison with infantry elements to be prepared for any contingency; and prior planning and detailed reconnaissance forward are necessary. Great stress must be placed on liaison and planning in forest fighting as any movement through infantry will require detailed coordination and preparation to avoid congesting the limited road net and the few open patches of ground. In the battle of the HURTTGEN FOREST, the means used to

solve this requirement for special coordinations was to attach to the infantry division concerned the combat command which was to lead the attack, with the reservation that this combat command would revert to its parent unit as soon as the attack had progressed sufficiently beyond the infantry. Such attachment of a combat command to an infantry division is not the best solution, since (1) it further augments the difficulties of coordination by necessitating a change of command at a critical moment, and (2) it complicates logistical and administrative support because the combat command is not an administrative headquarters. Further, infantry commanders will be tempted to use elements of this intended reserve in the line, reducing its capability to make a powerful driving attack when committed. With proper training and a proper attitude on the part of the infantry and armored commanders, the necessary coordination and cooperation can be accomplished without friction. Mutual understanding and mutual appreciation should be the keynote rather than technicalities as to command, whether units are attached, supporting, or cooperating.

During the mobile reserve phase it will frequently be expeditious to use components of the reserve in secondary missions such as the defense of an inactive sector or indirect fire roles. The former may become necessary as an economy measure in order to permit other forces to be concentrated to achieve the breakthrough; and the latter, as in the HURTIGEN FOREST campaign, will often be necessary because of a shortage of artillery ammunition. Missions such as these should be considered as expedients but may be assigned

when circumstances dictate, provided that (1) they do not detract materially from the primary mission, (2) a majority of the mobile reserve is retained ready for immediate employment, and (3) plans are made for a quick release of units so utilized.

A modification of the concept of employing armor after the infantry has secured the far edge of the woods is to commit armored elements from the mobile reserve to assist the infantry in penetrating the forest mass. Such attacks will normally be limited objective attacks directed at decisive points such as those made by CCR, 5th Armored Division to secure the HURTGEN-KLEINHAUBERGSTEIN area. This employment of part of the mobile reserve to hasten a penetration when it is progressing slowly and at a high cost to the infantry is sound. In this role, particularly if the objective or zone of action is completely within the boundaries of one of the attacking infantry divisions, the armor may well be attached to that division. There are two requisites to the employment of the armored command in this type of operation: (1) the area assigned for attack should be sufficiently open to allow maneuver room to the armor even if surrounded by woods, and (2) sufficient force must be retained to take advantage of any success so gained. Deliberate planning and violent execution are the key; there can be no hesitation once the attack is launched.

The concept of employment within the attacking force follows the same pattern as for any armored attack: close teamwork between tanks, armored engineers, and armored infantry is vital, and especially important is close co-operation between the armored

troops and the other infantry units in the area. The restrictions on maneuver necessitate detailed planning, often to include special missions down to squads and tank crews. Such planning requires good reconnaissance by all echelons, adequate time, and accurate maps and air photos. Likewise, closely co-ordinated artillery support becomes particularly important since the tanks must advance immediately behind supporting fires and often under artillery time fire to get protection against bazookas. Other principles are normal: infantry must attack with the tanks; engineer support must be well forward and immediately available. The engineers remove obstacles slowing the advance; the infantry protects the tanks and the engineers; the tanks protect both.

The role of tanks in immediate and direct support of infantry divisions during the HURTGEN FOREST fighting was the role of the medium tank company of the attached tank battalion. Co-operation between the tank battalions and the infantry divisions which they supported varied in proportion to the length of time they had worked together -- the longer their association, the smoother their combined action. To render continuous, immediate support to the infantry it was necessary for tanks to be prepared to fight in small combined arms teams with the infantry and engineers. Forest fighting necessitates decentralization of command, and some such organization as was used by the 9th Infantry Division for the reduction of pillboxes might be desirable whenever tanks are to be used.

It has already been stated that infantry commanders at all

levels must be ready to mass their tanks to take advantage of accidents of terrain. These accidents will usually be clearings within the forest mass where the mobility and fire power of the tanks can be better utilized. The attack at RICHELKAUL by tanks of the 746th Tank Battalion is a good example of this employment at tank platoon level. The use of a company of tanks and tank destroyers near GROSSHAU where the 70th Tank Battalion was supporting the 4th Infantry Division exemplifies this employment on the company level.

Infantry commanders usually gained a closer appreciation of tank capabilities and limitations the longer they worked with armor. The use of the tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion as armored pillboxes at VOSSENACK by the 28th Infantry Division was extremely wasteful and was without material advantage to the infantry -- in fact, it was frequently to their disadvantage because the tanks attracted artillery fire to the nearby infantry positions. The situation often dictates that tanks should be held in mobile reserve, prepared to move to any possible scene of action on short notice -- as they were employed by the 70th Tank Battalion at GROSSHAU.

The new tables of organization and equipment adopted since World War II will eliminate many of the difficulties encountered by armored commanders in the Battle of the HURTTEN FOREST. The inclusion of a tank company organic to the infantry regiment recognizes the principle that attacking infantry must have tanks in close support in every situation, and will elimi-

nate many difficulties of training and command. The organic tank battalion gives the infantry division commander a powerful weapon to assist in the penetration of enemy defenses and to use in the exploitation once the penetration has been effected. The corps commander can use a tank battalion from his armored group to further assist his infantry divisions before he is forced to commit a part of his armored division in mobile reserve in a limited objective attack.

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47th Armored Infantry Battalion

10th Tank Battalion

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I
TERRAIN STUDY

Ridge System. The ridge line runs through the forest from the southwest to the northeast. The main crest lies approximately 4000 yards west of the line MONSCHAU-SIMMERATH (K 995242); the highest point being 2150 feet just north of MUTZENICH (K 922193) at the southern edge of the forest. Over a distance of approximately 16 miles, to the northern edge of the forest in the vicinity of IERODE, the crest gradually falls to an elevation of 600 feet.

Moving north and northeast from MONSCHAU, the ridge splits into three fingers, the first starting at SIMMERATH at the head of the KAIL RIVER and running along the general line SIMMERATH-STRAUCH-SCHMIDT to the ROER in the vicinity of WIDDEGGEN. The second finger splits off to the east about 4000 yards southwest of GERMETER, near the WETSSEK WEH CREEK, the crest running along the line GERMETER-HURTGEN-KLEINHAU-GROSSHAU. The third finger runs due north from the head of the WETSSEK WEH CREEK and flattens out just south of GRESSENICH. There are two spurs branching off the center ridge which are of major importance. Both branch off to the east, one following the line GERMETER-VOSSENACK, and the other along the line KLEINHAU-BRANDENBERG-BERGSTEIN.

Drainage. All major streams in the HURTGEN FOREST area flow to the north with one exception, the WESER RIVER originating

about 7000 yards due west of SIMMERATH and on the west side of the main ridge flows generally west. Passing through the forest from the west, there are three streams that form definite barriers, not so much from their size, but because of the deep ravines formed by them. The first of these is the VICHT CREEK which runs along the west edge of the forest from the vicinity of ROTGEN north to VICHE, where it flows out of the forest on through STOLBERG (K 935342). This stream, and the many short tributaries flowing into it, form deep ravines which are heavily wooded. This is generally true of all streams in the area. The second stream, the WETSSER WEH CREEK, is about four miles further to the east across the first military crest, splitting the main ridge line into two distinct ridges. This stream begins about 4000 yards southwest of GERRETER and flows almost due north through SCHEVENHUTTE and WENAU, where it emerges from the forest and flows along the edge. Like the VICHT, this stream flows through a steep ravine with many short tributaries, which have cut deep into the hillsides on both banks. The course of the WETSSER WEH is about 3000 yards to the west of VOSSENACK and HURTGEN.

The third stream of importance is the KALL RIVER, which originates just southwest of SIMMERATH and flows generally northeast until it reaches a point due west of VOSSENACK, where it turns west and flows into the ROER just east of BERGSTEIN. Its current is very swift and it has a number of small tributaries, and like the other streams in the area it flows through

a deep ravine with banks which are almost perpendicular in places.

Routes of Communication. The road net throughout the forest is generally poor, especially the east-west roads. The better roads run generally north and south following the ridge lines, with third class roads and trails connecting these main roads. The valley roads - generally third class and trails - follow the major streams throughout their entire length, usually not more than a few feet from the banks of the streams. Away from the populated areas, through the forest, apparently no more trees were cut than absolutely necessary to get the roads through, and as a result the forest borders these roads closely on either side.

The only first class road in the area passes through the southwest section of the forest connecting MONSCHAU-ROTGEM-FREISENRATH (K 903345)-KORNELMUNSTER (K 904378) and leaving the forest at FREISENRATH. This is a hard-surfaced road, approximately 24 feet wide, relatively straight and suitable for all types of traffic. This road enters the forest at an altitude of approximately 800 feet and goes up the main ridge to an altitude of 1440 feet at the crest about 3000 yards west of LAMERSDORF, where a second class road, hard-surfaced and about 16 feet wide, branches off to LAMERSDORF. From LAMERSDORF this second class road follows the crest of the ridge to GERMETER-HURTEM-KLEINHAU-GROSSHAU-GEY and is one of the two major ridge roads in the area.

The second ridge road, also second class, passes through SIMMERATH-STRAUCH-SCHMIDT-HARSCHIEDT and crosses the ROER just west of NIDEGGEN. Between the two ridge roads mentioned and generally parallel, there is a secondary valley road, running along the north bank of the KALL RIVER until it reaches the ROER, where it crosses the KALL, and follows the ROER to connect with the south ridge road just before that road crosses the ROER.

The ridge roads are cross connected by several third class roads (12 feet wide and surfaced) and trails, with two second class roads serving this purpose. One of these is between LAMERSDORF and SIMMERATH, flanked by a third class road. The next link is from SIMMERATH-ROLLESBROICH to SILBERSCHIEDT, (FOO3287) winding down to and across the KALL to connect with the north ridge road. The next road east connects VOSSENACK and SCHMIDT, passing through KOMMERSCHIEDT. This is a third class road and in the vicinity of the KALL RIVER crossing it is very steep and exceedingly crooked, with several hairpin turns. The last cross link, a second class road, leaves the north ridge road on the southern edge of KLEINHAU, follows a spur ridge to BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN, then down the ridge to the KALL RIVER valley road, across the KALL to connect with the south ridge road just west of the ROER RIVER bridge. Between BRANDENBERG and BERGSTEIN a trail leads down to the KALL, crosses, and joins the south ridge road at HARSCHIEDT. This is a very steep trail with many hairpin turns and not suitable for vehicular traffic.

On the west edge of the forest there is a second class road connecting ROTGEN-ROTT-ZWEIFALL-MAUSBACH-GRESSENICH-SCHEVENHUTTE-VENAU. This is a valley road following the VICHT CREEK, hard-surfaced and about 16 feet wide. There are numerous trails leading east into the HURTGEN FOREST from this road; however, there are only three of any importance. Moving north from ROTGEN, the first of these, a third class road, approximately 12 feet wide and hard-surfaced, branches off at MULARESHUTTE (K929343) and runs southeast to connect with the north ridge road just north of LAMERSDORF. This road has branches from ROTT and ROTGEN and a third connecting with the north ridge road about 5000 yards north of the first connection. The next, a second class road, hard-surfaced and about 16 feet wide, branches off to the east at ZWEIFALL and connects with the north ridge road midway between LAMERSDORF and GERMETER. The third connecting road of importance is a second to third class road which enters the forest at SCHEVENHUTTE, runs generally south along the WETSSER WEH valley and connects with the north ridge road at the head of the WETSSER WEH CREEK, about 4000 yards southwest of GERMETER.

This last road serves as a trunk, with three or four roads leading off on each side. The more important of these side roads are the ones leading east to connect with the GERMETER-HUNGEN-GROSSHAU ridge road. Without exception these side roads are steep, crooked, and narrow.

Tactical Effects of the Area. The HURTGEN FOREST covers an area of approximately 50 square miles, within the triangle

formed by the three towns of AACHEM, DUREN, and MONSCHAU. It is thickly wooded with trees medium to tall and largely coniferous in nature. These trees are large enough in diameter to present a serious obstacle to armored vehicles. The floor of the forest is carpeted with pine needles and leaves which offer excellent opportunities for the installation of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, as well as booby traps of various kinds. The terrain is quite rugged with many steep hills and perpendicular ravines bordering many roads and trails as well as the streams in the area. These streams are quite swift, but for the most part are fordable and only represent obstacles because of the generally steep approaches. The roads are generally poor, steep, and winding, and will not support heavy vehicular traffic. Even the better ones will not support tank traffic except for a short time.

Attacking through the forest from west to east the terrain particularly favors the defender in all respects. An attacker would be obliged to move across corridors, up hill through heavy woods, and on poor roads. These conditions enable the defender to make the maximum use of mines, pillboxes, observation, and canalizes vehicular traffic. The attacker would have to advance through a solid mass of forest, for a distance of approximately 10,000 yards, before reaching the first cleared and populated area. This area lies along the ridge line GERMETER-HURTGEN-GROSSHAU and forms a formidable obstacle. The villages of GERMETER, VOSSENACK, HURTGEN, KLEINHAU, and GROSSHAU are one-street towns built along the ridge road, and are capable of

being strongly fortified with excellent observation and fields of fire. To reach the two upper ROER RIVER dams, two additional major obstacles must be crossed, the KALL RIVER, and the SIMMERATH-SCHMIDT ridge which separates the KALL and ROER RIVERS. The SIMMERATH-SCHMIDT ridge, the last obstacle before reaching the ROER, dominates all approaches, the altitude of SIMMERATH being 1770 feet and SCHMIDT 1500 feet. The villages of KOMBERSCHIEDT, SCHMIDT and HARSCHIEDT situated in a cleared area along the crest, form a formidable fortress. The elevation of the KALL RIVER between SCHMIDT and VOSSEMACK is approximately 850 feet.

Employment of armor in the area is practically impossible, due to the thick forest, deep ravines, and poor roads. In wet weather the ground in the few cleared areas becomes very soggy, and in general will not hold armor.

APPENDIX II

ORDER OF BATTLE

U. S. FORCES IN HURIGEN OPERATIONS

Of the Corps assigned to the First United States Army during operations in the HURIGEN FOREST the V and VII Corps bore the brunt of the fighting. The VIII Corps and at one time the XIX Corps were also part of the First Army, but were on the south and north flanks respectively of the HURIGEN area. The frequent changes of divisions between the Corps warrants the inclusion of separate line-ups indicating these changes for the entire period under consideration.

The relative positions of the Corps listed were from north to south: the XIX, VII, V, and VIII Corps. On 22-23 October 1944, XIX Corps passed from First Army control to the Ninth Army on the north, while VIII Corps on the south passed from Third to First Army; the First Army remained at three Corps strength.

27 September 1944

XIX Corps	VII Corps	V Corps
29th Inf Div	1st Inf Div	4th Inf Div
30th Inf Div	9th Inf Div	28th Inf Div
2nd Armored Div	34d Armored Div	5th Armored Div
7th Armored Div		

Except for the 29th Infantry Division and the 7th Armored Division which began to arrive in the First Army area on 26 September the order of battle indicated above was the same as that with which the Army had operated for most of the month of September.

11 October 1944

XIX Corps	VII Corps	V Corps
29th Inf Div	1st Inf Div	4th Inf Div
30th Inf Div	9th Inf Div	28th Inf Div
2nd Armored Div	3rd Armored Div	5th Armored Div

22 October 1944

VII Corps	V Corps	VIII Corps
1st Inf Div	4th Inf Div	2nd Inf Div
9th Inf Div	28th Inf Div	8th Inf Div
3rd Armored Div	5th Armored Div	83rd Inf Div
4th Cav Gp	102 Cav Gp	9th Armored Div

27 October 1944

VII Corps	V Corps	VIII Corps
1st Inf Div	4th Inf Div	2nd Inf Div
3rd Armored Div	9th Inf Div(-47 RCT)	8th Inf Div
47th RCT	28th Inf Div	83rd Inf Div
	5th Armored Div	9th Armored Div

10 November 1944

VII Corps	V Corps	VIII Corps
1st Inf Div	9th Inf Div(-47 RCT)	2nd Inf Div
4th Inf Div	*28th Inf Div	*8th Inf Div
104th Inf Div	99th Inf Div	83rd Inf Div
47th RCT (atchd 1st Div)	5th Armd Div (-CCR)	9 Armd Div
3rd Armd Div	102nd Cav Gp	14th Cav Gp
CCB 5th Armd Div		
4th Cav Gp.		

* These divisions traded Corps on 19-20 November.

15 December 1944

VII Corps	V Corps	VIII Corps
1st Inf Div(res)	2nd Inf Div	4th Inf Div
9th Inf Div	8th Inf Div	28th Inf Div
83rd Inf Div	78th Inf Div	106th Inf Div
104th Inf Div	99th Inf Div	9th Armd Div
3rd Armd Div(res)	CCR 5th Armd Div(res)	(-CCB)
5th Armd Div(-CCR res)	CCB 9th Armd Div(res)	
4th Cav Gp	102nd Cav Gp (res)	

x

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APPENDIX III

GERMAN ORDER OF BATTLE

The First US Army, in whose zone lay the HURTIGEN FOREST area, was opposed by the Seventh German Army. The German Army boundaries coincided with those of the First Army.

Although the rearguard action which the German Army had put up in FRANCE had been haphazard and costly in combat troops, most of the corps and division staffs had been kept intact. As the retreating Germans reached the West Wall these headquarters were used to command a hidden reserve which now made its appearance in the form of independent "fortress battalions". These battalions relieved battered elements of the division on the front while the latter were sent further to the rear in order to reform and refit. Later, many of these fortress battalions were permanently incorporated into the divisions under whose staffs they served. The divisions so formed were lacking in training and equipment and were about one-third T/O strength.

Of the four corps in the Seventh German Army only one, the LXXIV Corps with 526 Reserve Division and 347 Infantry Division subordinated, was defending the HURTIGEN FOREST sector in September and early October.

During October and November the German Seventh Army strove to reinforce its heavily engaged right flank and to

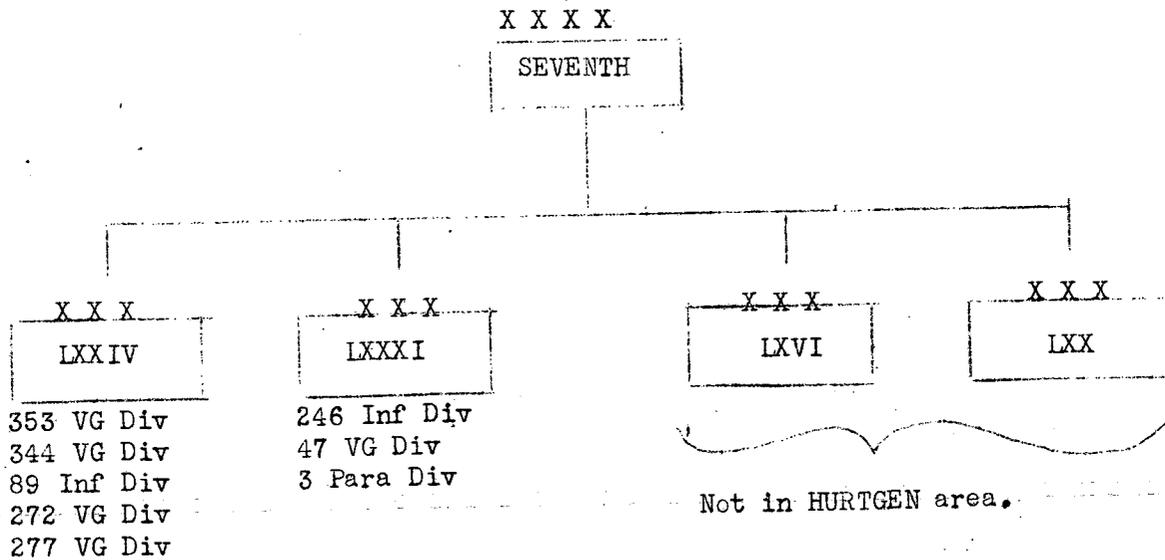
withdraw from the line those units earmarked for the ARDENNES Offensive. This shift to the north was affected by periodically requiring the 272nd and 277th Volksgrenadier Divisions (on the south) to leap-frog their right flank battalions during the night to occupy the positions of their neighbor on the north. For example, the right boundary of the 272nd VG Division initially was just north of MONSCHAU and ultimately was edged up to ZWEIFALL-SHAFER.

The job of withdrawing units for refitting prior to the ARDENNES Offensive was given a high priority by the German High Command and necessitated frequent changes in the Seventh Army's order of battle.

For the Seventh Army the HURTGEN area was always an open wound and was a very disturbing factor in the planning for the ARDENNES Offensive. Because of the continued fighting, Seventh Army was always forced to attempt to bring forward reserve troops for the battle in the HURTGEN. Those VG divisions that were in the area were forbidden to utilize because they had been earmarked for the ARDENNES. Panzer and SS units were already under control of the armies that were going to fight in the ARDENNES. Those divisions had to finish their reorganization and instructions behind the front or in inactive sectors, the only sectors we were permitted to commit them.

By mid-November the German order of battle had lined up as shown in Fig. 13. The LXXIV Corps was the corps primarily responsible for the HURTGEN AREA, and the Panzer and SS units constituted a counterattacking reserve.

On 10 December the Seventh Army was relieved by elements of the Fifteenth Army and the Fifth Panzer Army.



In Reserve to the west:

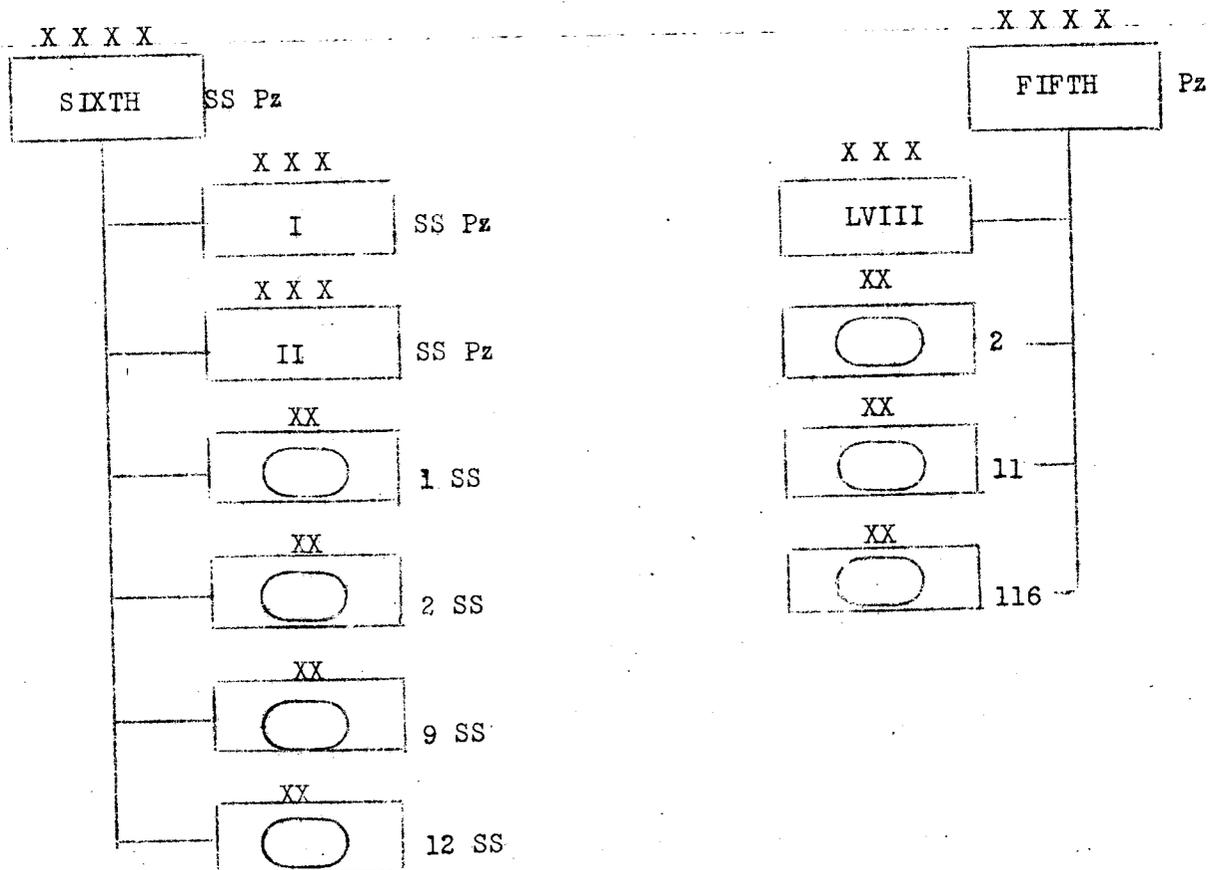


Figure 13. German Order of Battle (30 November 1944)

APPENDIX IV

MAP REFERENCES

Aachen	K840432	Hill 232	K997443
Alzen	K958151	Hill 401	F058377
Bergstein	F076337	Hill 402	F087338
Bilstein	F101378	Hill 554	K976254
Bonn	F547375	Hofen	K950165
Brandenberg	F064343	Horn	F085395
Camp Elsenborn	K902085	Hurtgen	F041356
Cologne	F450600	Inden	F028522
Duren	F120460	Jagerhaus	K984310
Echtz	F070484	Jungersdorf	F040467
Eupen	K798272	Kalterherberg	K926147
Finkenbur	K949301	Kleinhau	F053370
Fleuth	K973404	Kommerscheidt	F057309
Freisenrath	K903345	Krewinkel	K981410
Gerneter	F026334	Kufferath	F104399
Goy	F072399	Kornelmunster	K904378
Gressonich	K987425	Lanersdorf	F027509
Grosshau	F052381	Lammersdorf	K968267
Gut Morberich	F020475	Langenbroich	F095391
Hahn	K915357	Langerwehe	F030475
Hamich	F002437	Luchem	F037490
Harscheidt	F070306	Mausbach	K971409
Hill 50	F049343	Merode	F048452
Hill 203	F022468	Moderscheid	K905993

Monschau	K940185	Stolberg	K935432
Mulartshutte	K929343	Strauch	F011262
Mutzenich	K922193	Vicht	K962394
Neudorf	K849312	Vossenack	F038327
Nideggen	F115332	Walhorn	K806321
Nothberg	K986487	Wenau	F015445
Obernaubach	F088361	Wittscheid	F028340
Paustenbach	K972255	Zweifall	K956367
Richelskaul	F019324		
Rollesbroich	K995267		
Rosslershof	F015473		
Rotgen	K915285		
Rott	K922326		
Schafberg	F074383		
Schevenhutte	F006422		
Schloss Frenzenberg	F018490		
Schloss Laufenberg	F029445		
Schmidt	F063298		
Schonthal	F023459		
Schwammanauel Dam	F085273		
Silberscheidt	F003287		
Simmerath	K995242		
Simonskall	F023306		
Sourbrodt	K870097		

APPENDIX VI

ARTILLERY

Much has been said in the accounts of the HURTGEN FOREST fighting of the intensity and volume of the German artillery fire. Each infantry unit involved felt that it was more severe than any it had previously encountered; the effect of hostile artillery on tanks was unusually great. Certainly the enemy which had been beaten back through FRANCE stiffened his resistance before the ROER RIVER, and an impressive feature of this resistance was his artillery fire.

On the 1st of October the number of enemy artillery battalions in the AACHEN area was estimated to be 25; this total had increased to 34 by October 21st * * * Moreover, a definite improvement in the tactical employment of enemy artillery was observed * * * Massing of fires as well as the coordination of widely separated batteries were noted. Heavier caliber weapons were used and these included both field and railroad artillery. Some counter-battery fires were received and all indications showed that a more "artillery conscious" enemy was defending GERMANY. The ability of the enemy to switch the bulk of his fires from one critical area to another also became apparent. This was illustrated when an attack was made by V Corps in the general direction of SCHMIDT on 2 November and later on 16th November when the drive to the ROER RIVER by the VII Corps was resumed.¹

Artillery units of brigade and corps size were encountered about 1 December. By this time there were estimated to be a total of 68 battalions of German artillery along the First Army front. This total was part of the buildup for the ARDENNES.

It is significant that this sudden stubborn defense on the part of the enemy artillery units came at a time when the Americans were seriously short of important calibers of artillery ammunition.

However despite the shortage the Americans were pouring back twice as much artillery as the Germans were firing. Thus, although ammunition was rationed we may still speak of Allied artillery superiority. First Army's 43 artillery battalions and 13 Tank Destroyer Battalions in addition to the organic divisional artillery units were more than adequate to accomplish all missions. This is an imposing total of artillery units and the statements of many captured Germans pay respectful tribute to its effect. According to one captured German officer " * * * when our positions were smothered, without warning, by an American artillery concentration - then, not even birds or rabbits could escape." ² And as the First Army Artillery Section points out, "The frequent shortage of artillery ammunition stands alone as a limiting factor in the artillery support rendered during the operations * * *"³

During the period 15 October - 28 October which saw the fall of AACHEN the expenditure of artillery ammunition in the First Army fell sharply due to the limited amounts of such ammunition in the supply pipeline. Only the most lucrative targets were attacked. During the period 29 October-11 November the rationing of ammunition continued to be strict and the major effect of the artillery with the Army was used in repulsing repeated counter-attacks in the HURTGEN-VOSSENACK-SCHMIDT area. In the next phase from 12 November to 25 November First Army launched its coordinated offensive with VII Corps driving toward the ROER, later joined by V Corps. Increased allocations of artillery were received unexpectedly, and were badly needed in view of the dogged fighting which characterized the offensive.

	Average No. Guns in Action	Average Rounds Per Gun Per Day	Total Rounds For Period
<u>105 Howitzer</u>			
15-28 Oct	522	23	171,200
29 Oct-11 Nov	554	24	189,247
12-25 Nov	576	44	354,989
26 Nov-9 Dec	558	41	322,868
10-15 Dec	600	44	159,049
 <u>155 Howitzer</u>			
15-28 Oct	228	10	31,908
29 Oct-11 Nov	213	13	37,563
12-25 Nov	258	21	74,300
26 Nov-9 Dec	260	24	86,936
10-15 Dec	282	29	57,577
 <u>155 Gun</u>			
15-28 Oct	84	8	9,054
29 Oct-11 Nov	82	8	8,900
12-25 Nov	84	24	27,707
26 Nov-9 Dec	84	24	28,293
10-15 Dec	77	27	14,491

Figure 14. Average daily ammunition expenditure for 105 and 155 millimeter howitzers and the 155 millimeter gun. These were the weapons most affected by the artillery ammunition shortage during the fighting in the HURTGEN FOREST.

During this period expenditures were held to a minimum in the VIII Corps zone, reflecting the nature of the action along the Army front. Between 26 November and 9 December artillery in the V and VII Corps zones was active in supporting the continued offensive but regrouped toward the end of the period in order to prepare for a new attack on 10 December. This period, 10 December to 15 December brought increased allocations of artillery ammunition with a corresponding increase in the amount of fire laid down. For the five periods outlined corresponding expenditures for the 105 mm howitzer; 155 mm howitzer; and the 155 gun M1 are indicated in Figure 14. These are the calibers most affected by the ammunition shortage.

During this time one 105 mm howitzer battalion was reequipped temporarily with 18 75-mm howitzers to take advantage of the plentiful supply in that category. The artillery also improvised by using 36 German 105 mm gun-howitzers for which approximately 20,000 rounds were available, while captured ammunition was used by the 155 mm gun M-12 battalions. The use of the 4.5 inch rocket launchers by the 18th Field Artillery Battalion was an expedient forced by the shortage of ammunition, but this new weapon worked quite well when it was employed on area targets.

NOTES FOR APPENDIX VI

1
Report of Operations, First U. S. Army, 1 Aug 1944
22 February 1945

2
Ibid.

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