

ARMORED DIVISION IN EXPLOITATION

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The principles of exploitation were employed with great success in many operations in World War II. Particular was this true in the use of armor. It is to be noted that armored warfare from its inception has failed or succeeded according to the degree that this principle has been followed. Exploitation as employed in the military sense is the taking of full advantage of success in battle and the following up of initial gains. The principle of exploitation is that, once the breakthrough has been made, to continue the penetration, building up the flanks until the zone of advance has been segmented into small islands of resistance which are then destroyed. Success in exploitation requires that the exploiting force be capable of: operating at sustained speed, attacking with force and violence, being self-sustaining. The armored division because it can meet all of the foregoing requirements is ideally suited for exploitation.

It is well to compare the operations of armor in World War I and World War II, to learn how certain tactical principles have been formulated and accepted. The first use of mass armor by the British on November 20, 1917 in the World War I battle of Cambrai, was the forerunner to a significant step in the formulation of new methods of warfare. Three hundred and eighty tanks rolled forward on a six-mile front with six divisions of ground troops joining in the attack. The surprised German troops yielded and the Hindenburg trenches were quickly breached. Five miles of advance gained for the British terrain which had taken months of combat to capture on the Somme in Flanders.¹ Because the tanks were used piecemeal and because no preparations were made by the British for continued exploitation, the Cambrai battle was not as successful as it could have been. Military leaders, not knowing effective methods of tank infantry tactics, failed to employ exploitation and thus confusion resulted. The confusion spoken of is natural in World War I tank operations. When tanks did appear the attacks petered out soon after starting, and any small successes came to naught because of the lack of cooperation between the arms.

Again in August 1918, the British used tanks in a great and successful attack. Thirteen divisions, more than two thousand guns and four hundred and fifty-six tanks were concentrated in the area near Cambrai. Tanks made a successful penetration six to eight miles and infantry was rushed in to consolidate the gains made.²

1 Ladislav Fergo, The Axis Grand Strategy, p. 224
2 Ibid. p. 225

Germany, using the lessons of Cambrai and the testing grounds of the Spanish Civil War, realized that armor was a new force to be reckoned with and was quick to follow the success of its 1929 experiments. By mid-1937, three German armored divisions were poised for action in the west. This was the beginning of an armored force that was increased from twelve divisions at the start of the western offensive to more than twenty divisions in the campaign against Russia.³

In the advance against the Low Countries and France, Germany used the principles of exploitation to great advantages. The breakthrough along the MEUSE in May 1940, leading as it did to one of the greatest campaigns of annihilation, was an outstanding example of successful exploitation. The armored columns were followed closely by infantry rifle divisions and if resistance was met by the armor the infantry quickly moved up to overcome any opposition. If the enemy lines were strongly defended, infantry-artillery teams were used. The panzer units then rushed through the gaps, exploiting the success.

Many times during World War II armored exploitation was used with considerable success. One of the classic examples of this type of exploitation was the break-out from the Remagen bridgehead on the east bank of the RHINE RIVER, to the east and north to PADERBORN by the 3d Armored Division. (see map 1)

Units of the First Army had secured a bridgehead on the east bank of the RHINE RIVER and were building up forces in the area in preparation for the attack to the east. The 3d Armored Division was ordered to attack on March 25, 1945 through the line held by the 1st Infantry Division on the north and the 104th Infantry Division on the south.

3. Ibid. p. 229

The 3d Armored Division had been organized into combat commands as follows:⁴

COMBAT COMMAND A
 Brigadier General D.O. Hickey
 Commanding
 32d Armd Regt (-3d Bn)
 1st Bn, 36th Armd Inf Regt
 1st Bn, 414th Inf Regt
 67th Armd FA Bn
 83d Armd FA Bn
 A Co, 703d TD Bn
 A Co, 45th Armd Med Bn
 A Co, Maint Bn 3d Armd Div
 A Co, 23d Armd Engr Bn

COMBAT COMMAND B
 Brigadier General T. Buodinet
 Commanding
 33d Armd Regt (-3d Bn)
 2d Bn, 36th Armd Inf Regt
 2d Bn, 414th Inf Regt
 391st Armd FA Bn
 B Co, 703d TD Bn
 B Co, 23d Armd Engr Bn
 B Co, 45th Armd Med Bn
 B Co, Maint Bn 3d Armd Div

COMBAT COMMAND RESERVE
 Colonel Robert Howze
 Commanding
 36th Armd Inf Regt (-1st, 2d Bn)
 3d Bn, 32d Armd Regt
 3d Bn, 33d Armd Regt
 3d Bn, 414th Inf Regt
 C Co, 703d TD Bn
 C Co, 23d Armd Engr Bn
 C Co, 45th Armd Med Bn
 C Co, Maint Bn 3d Armd Div

DIVISION CONTROL
 83d Armd Recn Bn
 703d TD Bn (-A, B, C, Cos)
 414th Inf Regt (-1st, 2d, 3d, Bn)
 486th AAA (AW) SP Bn (-A, B, C, D, Cos atchd to Arty Bns)

The combat commands were organized into three teams, each team consisting of tanks, armored infantry, infantry, armored engineers. There was, in addition, general armored artillery support.

It is well to consider the opposition which faced the 3d Armored Division in this operation, and thus gain a more complete understanding of the situation.

The Fifteenth German Army, with headquarters at ALTENKIRCHEN, was charged with the defense of the sector between the SEIG and LAHN RIVERS. Eight German divisions, in various stages of depletion were in the VLL Corps zone where the 3d Armored Division was to make the breakout. Six German divisions defended in the actual break-through zone although effective fighting strength probably made them the equivalent of two full strength divisions.

Report, 3d Armored Division, March 1945
 4 After Action Report

To the north the 363d Volksgrenadier Division reinforced by the 62d Volksgrenadier Division faced the U.S. 1st Infantry Division. In the center the 3d Parachute Division was supposedly being relieved by the 3d Panzer Grenadier Division. The relief was never made because of subsequent developments. To the south remnants of the 9th Panzer Division faced the U.S. 104th Infantry Division. Still farther south and overlapping into the VII Corps zone was the 340th Volksgrenadier Engineer Regiment and many service elements. As to reserves, the only unit known to be immediately available was the 15th Panzer Regiment of the 11th Panzer Division which was just north of the city of ALTENKIRCHEN. This regiment was equipped with Mark V and a few Mark VI tanks. From the south it was believed that units of battle group size were capable of intervention. The 5th Panzer Army to the north had the 116th Panzer and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions and possibly battle groups from the 130th Panzer Lehr Division. These were a threat not considered serious in view of the powerful American Ninth Army attack developing from the WESER bridgehead.

Higher headquarters, realizing that the German Wehrmacht was in a state of disorganization, set the stage for an armored exploitation through the enemy's shell of defense. The 3d Armored Division was assigned by VII Corps the mission of making the breakthrough and the exploitation of any successes which might be gained.

The 3d Armored Division had as its initial objective the road center of ALTENKIRCHEN, then east to successive objectives including crossings over the DILL RIVER between DILLENBERG and HERBORN. (see map 2)

The attack format was initially was to be combat commands abreast with Combat Command A on the right and Combat Command B on the left.

Each combat command was organized into two task force columns. Combat Command R, prepared for intervention in either zone, followed the two center routes. The 83d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion followed the left Task Force on the north, protecting the Division's left flank.

Leading elements of the assault forces passed the line of departure March 25, at 0400. Contact was made with the enemy infantry immediately on passing through the infantry lines. Because the enemy was well dug in and had strong support from anti-tank guns, artillery and mortars, fighting was fierce. The terrain was thickly wooded and enemy road blocks and mines slowed the advance.

By darkness advances had been made for some twelve miles despite slow and hard fighting. It is well to note that the principle of advancing in columns and on the roads until forced to deploy by enemy resistance or obstacles was followed throughout this operation. The attack continued throughout the night and a bridgehead was secured across the MEHR RIVER by teams of Combat Command A.

On March 26, the attack continued, Combat Commands breaking through the enemy defenses and making rapid advance toward ALTENKIRCHEN. Combat Command B on the north flank was meeting stubborn resistance. Combat Command R was committed between Combat Command A and Combat Command B to clear ALTENKIRCHEN. The teams from Combat Command R advanced easily against outflanked and withdrawing German forces. Combat Command R was then placed in Division Reserve just west of ALTENKIRCHEN. Combat Command A was held up on the right by destroyed bridges southeast of ALTENKIRCHEN. The Task Force Commander involved decided to fight on and bridge the WIED RIVER. Here was a demonstration of a quality necessary to a good leader. Basing his decision on experience and past learning he made a prompt decision which is a vital characteristic of good leadership.

Through this operation leaders of all elements were given the responsibility of making many decisions. This task of bridging the WIED RIVER was accomplished by sending the infantry forward to give the engineers protection while bridging operations were in progress. The balance of the fighting team then coiled up tight to give all around defense. Supporting artillery prepared to give direct fire support in case of attack. While bridging operations were in progress, loads of ammunition and fuel were being reconstituted in preparation for the operation the following day. Tanks and other vehicles were being refueled and ammunition supplies were being replenished. The initial phase of the operation had caused a severe drain on ammunition stocks, and continued operations were expected to necessitate heavy demands on fuel and to a limited extent on ammunition. Because of the fluidity of the opposition encountered, Division supply personnel realized that a break-through was in the making and that lengthened supply lines would cause problems in continuous replenishment. This supply planning resulted in no breakdown in subsequent operations, and demonstrated the absolute necessity for pre-planning in any operation of an exploitative nature. Ammunition was considered not to be of essential priority in this operation. Fuel, on the other hand, was of absolute importance for the uninterrupted advance of the Division and subsequent demands proved the pre-planning correct. Unless supply for the combat elements is constant and on the spot, the advancing units will bog down and endanger the accomplishment of the mission.

This day, March 26, had been marked by many bitter but short lived fights. The Air Corps gave sorely needed assistance and were able to destroy many vehicles in the northern part of the Division zone.

Not only the Air Corps but arms and services combined to make the over all operation successful. Cooperation between arms and services is essential to the success of any military operation.

Tanks, infantry, engineers, artillery, ordnance, quartermaster and others combined to aid each other to the limit of their capabilities and thus assist in the attainment of the military objective.

On March 27, strong enemy resistance was encountered only in the north sector of the Division zone, where the enemy was trying to build up his defenses. Combat Command A continued its attack and after seventy-two hours of continuous fighting secured crossings over the DILL RIVER.

Pausing only to refuel, Combat Command B and Combat R fought on through the night against anti-tank and small arms fire. They moved on to DILLENBURG and at this point secured crossings over the DILL RIVER. Combat Command B closed up on the flanks of Combat Command A. Combat Command B and Combat Command R continued the attack on the night March 27-28, against little resistance and seized MARBURG and RUNZHAUSEN. The 83d Reconnaissance Battalion passed through Combat Command R at DILLENBURG, attacking east and capturing BOTTENHORN and HOLYHAUSEN. A line was thus extended from MARBURG to DILLENBURG in preparation for the Division's drive to the north. (see map 3)

The continued fighting up to this point had followed the principle of penetration. Now with enemy dis-organization evident the 3d Armored Division was ready to launch forward to exploit the successes gained. Evidence showed that the enemy was in such a state of confusion due to loss of higher commanders and the disruption of communications that exploitation could be pursued relentlessly.

Orders were sent to all units of the Division and the stage was set for one of the greatest single-day advances in modern military history.

The 3d Armored Division was poised for the attack. Since resistance was weak and scattered and locations of the enemy were not known, the 83d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion was ordered to lead the attack. Instructions were given to by-pass all resistance, but to report locations of any strong opposition. The Division attacked with two combat commands abreast, Combat Command R on the left and Combat Command B on the right. Combat Command A in Division Reserve, followed the two center routes. Each attacking combat command, thus had two routes on which to advance.

Enemy was encountered in large numbers as the advance progressed, but were so disorganized that they offered no strong resistance. Many installations were overrun and enemy in large numbers were destroyed.

The armored columns on each route were forced to travel cross country, in many instances to by-pass poor roads and weak bridges. It was almost impossible to cross laterally from one Task Force to the other, for each route was separated by three to five miles. Liaison planes were used to cross from column to column.

Supply vehicles had to be escorted and even these were ambushed, several being lost through enemy action. Burning vehicles dotted the country side and long columns of prisoners were marched to the rear under the control of their officers and non-commissioned officers.

When the advance stopped that night, leading combat elements had covered about seventy-five miles of road distance and other elements had covered over ninety miles. This lightning advance to PADERBORN was the longest single day's advance of the entire war.

German intelligence had reported American tank columns at WUNNENBURG and at NEIDER-MARSBURG as of March 29, 2100, to the commander of the SS Panzer Reconnaissance Training Regiment stationed near PADERBORN. Two battalions located at PADERBORN were ordered to build up a defensive line from HOLTHEIM to HELMERN. Almost all of these two battalions occupied the line, but this did not constitute a threat to the Division as they were only in the eastern zone of the advance and were subsequently turned on their right flank.

This line was the first coordinated attempt to stop the 3d Armored Division drive toward PADERBORN. The defense finally evolved was controlled by three major units, namely the 507th GHQ Tiger Tank Battalion, the SS Armored Reconnaissance Replacement Training Regiment and the SS Tank Replacement Training Regiment. Stragglers from nearby airfields increased these units in size.

The 326th German Infantry Division is believed to have been scheduled to move from NORTHEIM to PADERBORN as well as many 88mm self-propelled guns from WARBURG, but neither appeared. The 512th Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion was known to be in the vicinity of DAHL, SCHWANY and HERBRAM. Equipped with twenty-five, 128mm guns mounted on Mark VI chassis, this battalion was a constant potential threat.

Continuing the attack on March 30, the two reconnaissance columns became engaged at WUNNENBERG and HUSEN and were passed through by teams from Combat Command B and Combat Command R. Operations were continued throughout the night. WEWER was reached by a team from Combat Command R.

A Task Force of Combat Command B was taken under fire by enemy tanks on the route about two miles north of KIRCHBOREN and the column was hit hard from both sides of the road.

It was here that the 3d Armored Division Commander, Major General Maurice Rose, was killed while trying to reach the Command Post of the Combat Command B Task Force.

This example of individual heroism demonstrates a requisite of the good leader - the necessity for him to actually lead his men by personal example. It is a well known fact that admiration, respect and confidence are engendered by the leader who is at the front of his unit. This aids too, in such things as control, the opportunity for making quick decisions by being in a position to see the total situation and the opportunity for the leader to make any change in plan of operation because of success or a temporary halting of his advance by the enemy.

At first light on March 31, Brigadier General Doyle O. Hickey, the Combat Command A Commander, was flown by artillery liaison plane to the Division Command Post to assume command of the Division. A regimental commander assumed command of Combat Command A.

A part of the enemy tank-infantry force that had cut Combat Command B column withdrew to the north and east during the night. However, the main force continued to resist stubbornly and to fight it out. One force of about two hundred infantry men supported by five Mark VI tanks counter-attacked at HAMBORN, but were beaten back. The area was cleared by nightfall to allow preparations for a coordinated attack on PADERBORN to get under way.

PADERBORN was lightly defended despite the fact that it controlled the entire remaining communication net connecting the German Ruhr forces with the rest of Germany. Only a few dug in tanks and several isolated groups offered resistance. Its defense crumbled rapidly before the three Task Forces making the assault. It fell April 1, at 1700.

On April 1, at 0330, VII Corps had ordered the 3d Armored Division to make contact with the 2d Armored Division at LIPPSTADT, some twenty miles to the west. At 1500 the Task Force sent to make the junction made physical contact with elements of the 2d Armored Division. The great Ruhr Pocket, which yielded 374,000 German prisoners of war was closed.

We have considered the most profitable use of armor in military warfare, that of exploitation and the following of initial gains and success in battle. We Have seen how, with disorganized and scattered resistance that was encountered in this operation, the situation lent itself to a continuous advance. The coordinated efforts of all elements of the division were directed toward the objective in a common effort. The outstanding soundness of the principles of exploitation were demonstrated by the success of this operation.

Enemy Material Losses and Personnel Losses 5

From the day the 3d Armored Division broke out of the RHINE bridgehead, March 25, to the meeting with the 2d Armored Division on April 1, the 3d Armored Division processed 20,000 prisoners.

Counted enemy losses in material

Tanks - - - - -	35
SP Guns - - - - -	31
Arty Pieces - - - - -	48
RR Guns - - - - -	2
Heavy AA and AT Guns - - - - -	49
Heavy AA Guns - - - - -	146
Staff Cars & Sedans - - - - -	25
Trucks - - - - -	1263
Aircraft on the ground - - - - -	8
RR Trains - - - - -	6
Assult boats - - - - -	-15

During the same period, the 3d Armored Division lost 125 killed and 504 wounded. Material losses are shown in the following table:

Medium Tanks - - - - -	42
Light Tanks - - - - -	11
Half Tracks - - - - -	19
GMC 2½ ton Trucks - - - - -	15
¼ ton 4x4 - - - - -	11
Misc. Vehicles - - - - -	11

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It is well to consider the lessons and sound principles which were learned in this classic example of coordinated exploitation.

We have considered in the example cited the necessity for the exploiting force to: (a) Operate at sustained speed, (b) Attack with violence, (c) Be self-sustaining. These principles were well illustrated by the 3d Armored Division Paderborn Operation. All personnel of the armored division must be imbued with the principles that govern a war of movement. Commanders must be capable of making immediate decisions and taking bold action. Aggressive leadership must keep men and vehicles going to the limits of their endurance. All personnel must be indoctrinated with an intense determination to press the attack.

Specifically, emphasis must be made by leaders of armored units to stress the following: (1) TRAINING, although a basic concept, is tremendously important in the early organization of any military unit. Training must be considered not only from the standpoint of the officer and leaders of a organization, but it must extend down to and include the individual soldier. It is well understood that to function, a military unit must have the coordinated efforts of every individual in its make-up. This coordination can only be achieved by training toward the end of intergrated effort. Each man in the organization of the unit must be trained to do not only his particular job, but must have a knowledge and a through concept of the duties of the next higher commander. This applies from the standpoint of the basic soldier to the highest leader in the organization. It is important that this particular fact be made a goal of the leader who desires to have a well trained and efficient organization.

It has been demonstrated that in combat the lack of training of a individual has caused a failure in the accomplishment of a mission, when this same individual finds he has lost the guidance and discipline of his leader.

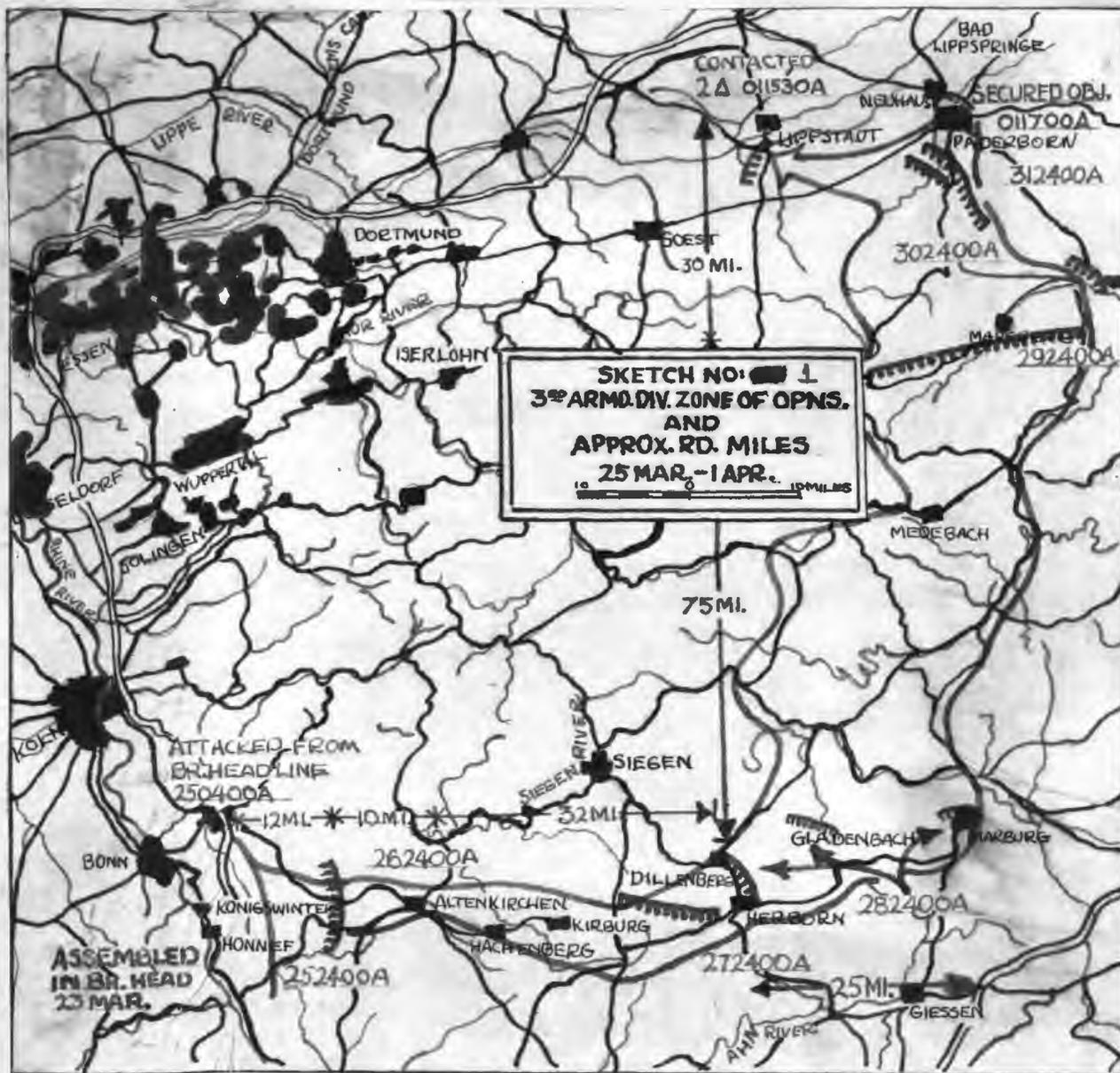
(2) LEADERSHIP, is a very common concept which must be stressed in the make-up of a military organization. No where, in any other endeavor does the leader demonstrate the qualities which can make the achievement of his mission a success or a failure than in the heat of battle. In the military operation just cited the change over of key leaders and subsequent functioning of each commander in his new command, proved with the training just mentioned and the qualities of leadership, the advancement to a position of higher responsibility will not prove foreign to the individual.

(3) SUPPLY, with its demand for continuous flow, is of great importance to any battle unit in the exploitation and to the fighting ability of the unit. The logistical problems involved in any exploitation as demonstrated in the problem considered are especially complex when the advance is rapid. This again involves itself into greater problems with a armored unit. Fuel is a tremendous problem and without an adequate supply of fuel the unit can become immobilized and the accomplishment of the mission impossible. In the problem of supply to the 3d Armored Division on its history making dash to Paderborn the distance involved to keep front line vehicles functioning was out of the ordinary. However, the proper functioning of supply personnel, and the planning for future operations, must be a part of the supply plan.

Important to an armored division is the supply of parts, as well as the supply of vehicles to replace those destroyed by enemy action, for without vehicles an armored division will become foot-troops and lose its rapidity of advance. On the other hand unless absolutely necessary disabled vehicles of an armored column in exploitation are never stopped for. Nothing should stop the advance. Once the breakthrough is made speed is the keynote in gaining of the objective.

CONCLUSIONS, The tactical principle of exploitation necessitates a fast moving, powerful shock force capable of independent action. The Armored Division is ideally suited for this type of action. Once the breakthrough has been made and the exploitation stage is set, nothing must interrupt the advance. Continuous movement is imperative. It is necessary to have: (1) Trained personnel to successfully pursue the exploitation principle. Each man must know his job thoroughly, and to the point where he reacts instinctively. (2) Leadership must be cultivated so that unquestioning, willing and loyal troops, though weary and fatigued react to the commands of their leaders. (3) Supply must be constant and unfailing so that nothing can impede the forward movement of vehicles and personnel.

It is important that the unit involved in an exploitation permit nothing to stop its advance. This can only be accomplished through attention to TRAINING, SUPPLY, and the constant application of LEADERSHIP.



SKETCH No 1



SKETCH NO 2.

COMBAT ROUTES FROM MARBURG TO PADERBORN

28 MAR TO 1 APR

ASSEMBLY AREA

SCALE IN KILOMETERS

