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Report date: 4 June 1945

Title: Historical report on 507th Combat Team during Operation "Varsity"

Author: Headquarters, United States Army 507th Parachute Infantry

Abstract: The report is on the 507th Combat Team during Operation Varsity, a joint American and British Airborne operation on 24 March 1945, and through 9 May 1945

Number of pages: 16 p.

Notes: From the MCoE HQ Donovan Research Library, Fort Benning, GA. Documents collection. Call #: D809.12_507th_A4_9May1945

Classification: Unclassified; Approved for public release

D 809.12 Historical rpt, 507th
.507th.A 4 CT, VARSITY
(5/9/45)

HEADQUARTERS 507TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY
APO 452 U.S. ARMY

3 June 1945.

SUBJECT: Letter of Transmittal.

TO : Commanding General, 17th Airborne Division,
APO 452, U.S. Army.

1. Forwarded herewith are the following documents requested in Circular No. 32, Paragraph II, Headquarters 15th U.S. Army, dated 28 April 1945:

- ✓ a. Report on Strength, Casualties, Awards and Decorations, and Key Personnel.
- ✓ b. Historical Report of 507th Combat Team from 1 May 1945 to 9 May 1945, inclusive-
- o c. S-3 Periodic Reports Nos. 35 to 43, inclusive.
- o d. S-2 Periodic Reports from 1 May to 9 May, inclusive.
- o e. Extracts from S-3 Journal from 1 May to 9 May inclusive.

EDSON D. RAFF,
Colonel, 507th Parachute Infantry,
Commanding.

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HEADQUARTERS 507TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY
APO 452 U.S. ARMY

4 June 1945.

LIST OF KEY PERSONNEL

Colonel Edson D. Raff,	0-019261	Regt'1 CO
Lt. Col. William A. Kuhn,	0-357704	Regt'1 Executive Off.
Captain Horace J. Cofer,	0-128860	Regt'1 S-1
Major George S. Stevens III,	0-448774	Regt'1 S-2
Major Morgan A. Brakonecke,	0-359483	Regt'1 S-3
Major Lawrence W. Robert,	0-317112	Regt'1 S-4
Major George K. Vollmar,	0-372814	Regt'1 Surgeon
Lt. Col. Paul F. Smith,	0-444090	1st Bn CO
Lt. Col. Charles J. Timmes,	0-264300	2nd Bn CO
Major Roy E. Creek,	0-388556	3rd Bn CO

STRENGTH OF 507TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY
REGIMENT FROM 1 May to 9 May 1945.

1 May 1945 - 2052 EM, & Officers
9 May 1945 - 2497 EM & Officers

CASUALTIES OF 507TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY
REGIMENT FROM 1 May to 9 May 1945.

Battle Casualties - None
Non-battle Casualties - 19 EM & Officers

AWARDS AND DECORATIONS OF THE 507TH
PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT FROM 1 May
to 9 May 1945

Silver Star

Major Morgan A. Brakonecke
S/Sgt. Joe J. Gonzales
Pfc. Joseph S. Brennan
Pfc. Williford E. Varner

Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster to Bronze Star

Lt. Col. William A. Kuhn
Tec. 5 John Snurkowski

Bronze Star

Lt. Col. William A. Kuhn
Major Morgan A. Brakonecke
Major Lawrence W. Robert III
Major George K. Vollman
Captain George J. Roper (posthumously)
Lst Lt. Stanley L.R. Ardziejewski
T/Sgt. Matias C. Ransom
Tec 4 Gilbert Fiscina

HISTORICAL REPORT OF 507TH COMBAT
TEAM FROM 1 MAY 1945 to 9 MAY 1945

The first of May found the 507th Combat Team in the environs of Essen. Colonel Edson D. Raff was Commanding Officer of the Essen Sector and the personnel of the Regiment was acting under him in various capacities necessary for the administration of military government to Displaced Persons, Prisoners of War, and German civilians.

On the first day of the month the bodies of thirty-five Russian slave workers were exhumed and reburied by a labor party composed of the leading civilians still remaining in the city. A large crowd of foreign workers and German civilians witnessed this ceremony. At 2400 hours on the 2nd of May the Duisburg Bridge became the Port of Entry for this area. From this time on no civilian was allowed to cross the Rhine or any other bridge in the Division area, and the people crossing at the Port of Entry were required to have a military pass as well as a medical certificate. On the 3rd the 3rd Battalion moved its CP to its present location in order to be more centrally located in relationship to the DP camps they were maintaining. At this time work started on the separation of DP's into camps by nationality. This also had the effect of reducing the number of camps in the sector and also simplified administration details.

On the 5th of May repatriation of French and Belgian DP's began. Twenty truck loads were sent off this day. At this time the Corps' MP's took over the regulation of traffic over all bridges in the area. Commencing the 6th of May, a survey was started to uncover any allied PW's in the area. Hospitals, jails, etc., were carefully searched. Also, from this day on no Russians were to be tried for any offense.

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By the 7th the evacuation of Western European peoples was progressing satisfactorily. The problem arising relative to this activity was that many of these people had remained living with German civilians, prompted by the comparative privacy and comfort afforded in individual houses as opposed to living in DP camps. As a result, those living in private homes had not registered and were not prepared for evacuation. As word of repatriation spread, more and more DP's were turning themselves in daily. This complicated movement plans and swelled our population of DP's. Efforts were redoubled to corral these people and send them home.

An investigation by the S-2 Section revealed the fate of three American aviators who parachuted into Essen. These men were taken into custody by German soldiers who allowed them to be horribly beaten by enraged civilians and finally, when they were more dead than alive, thrown off a bridge and drowned in the river below.

A continuous screening was begun to find Russian Prisoners of War who might have been lost amongst the DP's. They were segregated and placed in Camp No. 20 under Russian officers. Preparation was started to plant gardens in the various DP camps as soon as seed could be obtained. On the 9th of May seven Russian DP's were apprehended raiding a farm south of Rodberg and they claimed they came from Velbert.

1-19 Apr 45

HISTORICAL REPORT ON 507TH COMBAT TEAM DURING OPERATION "VARSITY"

During the day of April 1st very little action took place. This period was spent in acting as a security force, holding Haltern for the XIX Corps which had its Headquarters in this town. During the day the only diversion from ordinary house-keeping routine was desultory arty and s/a fire coming from the small enemy strongpoint which had developed across the river south of town where the enemy had been forced into a small pocket between us and the forces coming up from the south and west, which the 3rd Bn holding off with little difficulty. We received word from Commodore 5 that every effort was being made (by 17th A/B Div) to get us relieved and reattached to the Div, which at this time was preparing to enter Munster with the 6th Guards Armored Brigade.

At 0200 April 2nd we set out watches ahead one hour to conform with British Double Summer Time which went into effect then. At 1030 we were formally relieved from the XIX Corps and the Bns were alerted to move to the 17th Div zone of action. By 1420 the 2nd Bn was in position outside of Munster (South) and the Regimental CP was at Mecklenbeek, a suburb to the south of Munster. At 1700 the order was given for all Bns to occupy their zones in Munster. The Regimental CP was now moved into Munster, our area being in the southern and eastern parts of the city. At this point organized resistance had ceased but the town had not been cleared. There were still strong points throughout the area and tank battles and small arms skirmishes were prevalent. Prisoners continued to be taken and the enemy seemed to be fighting a delaying action on the eastern outskirts of the city. As an example of the incidents taking place, the 3rd Bn took 10 prisoners from an armored car which was running down a highway into town.

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During the early hours of the morning of the 3rd of April, reconnaissances were being made of the bridges across the Dortmund Canal to the east of the city. A few were found intact but most were blown and in the process of the investigations more enemy points of resistance were encountered, reduced and more prisoners and materiel captured. By 1250 Div had asked for and received a report that the airfield in the 3rd Bn area was not in a usable condition. At 1415 the Regimental CP had moved further into Munster (98737). Prisoners continued to be taken; at 1650 an "F" Co patrol reported 72 prisoners at 967763; "E" Co 215 prisoners reported at 1840. At 2000 the 3rd Bn found a flak This unit surrendered and the prisoners taken

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included 1 major, 2 lieutenants, 1 warrant officer and 94 enlisted men. This patrol destroyed six 88's, an AA mg, 3 boxes of grenades and approx 100 rifles. The 2nd Bn reported that one squad captured a map factory.

On the 4th of April at 0100 the 2nd Bn found the enemy manning ten 88's and twenty mgs with plenty of ammunition along a general line 960718-965720. The position was reduced. At 1115 the Bns were ordered to assemble their units in mobile reserve, to maintain outposts and combat patrols, and to be prepared to use their reserves wherever and whenever the situation warranted such action. At 963717 the following enemy materiel was found: eight 88s, three 20 mm AA guns, 6 double barreled mgs, two sound devices, one range finder device and about 100 rifles. The 88s and mgs were destroyed by demo. The airfield was reported to have two runways in condition at 1730 and two bridges east of town were usable and another nearly ready for use. East of the river in the 1st Bn area Russian nationals were rioting, killing several German women, and tearing down buildings.

The Regiment was alerted at 0125 the morning of the 5th to be ready to move out to a new area by 1000. At 0145 the order went out to the Bns to pull in their outposts beginning at 0600 and to begin assembling in preparation to move out by 1000. At this time no information was available as to where we were to go or as to the nature of our assignment; an officer was sent as an advanced representative to the new area and at 1240 a billeting party left with General Whitelaw. Shortly after this, information was received that upon our arrival in the Dinslaken area (our destination) we would be attached to the XVI Corps. The Regiment jumped off for the new area in the following march order: 3rd Bn 1625, 1st Bn 1650, 2nd Bn 1715, 464 Preht FA Bn 1805. The 3rd Bn arrived in the vic of Dinslaken at 2000, the 1st and 2nd Bns at 2130. The Regiment was to relieve the 315th Inf Regt and elms of the 314th Inf Regt which are units belonging to the 79th Div.

By 0200 on the 6th of April the 3rd Bn had completed relief of "F" Co of the 315th and the 3rd Bn of the 314th and at 0230 the 1st Bn had completed taking over the positions of the 315th. The 2nd Bn in reserve completed their move at 0330, occupying the former reserve area of the 315th in Bottrop. This period was to be used as far as possible to get the men and their equipment cleaned up. The CP was now in the Police Barracks in Bottrop.

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At this time the Regimental MLR ran along the north bank of the Rhine-Herne Canal from the west boundary of the 513th FIR at coordinates 410222 west to a bridge at 483239 which was the eastern boundary of the 35th Div. At 0388 on the 7th of April the 79th Div began its attack through the positions of the 35th Div to our immediate left. Our formation at this time was 3rd Bn on the right, 1st Bn on the left. At 0300, to coincide with the jumpoff of the 79th a demonstration was put on by our front line Bns to act as a feint for the 79th's attack. This action proved successful as it drew fire from the enemy and a great deal of activity occurred in the area to our immediate front. By 0915 the 79th had reached phase line Riley which meant that the bridgehead had been successfully established and it was possible to begin work on the bridges. A Bn COs' meeting was held at 1130 during which Colonel Raff presented the anticipated plan for the Regimental attack. The plan in general was that the 2nd Bn now in reserve would cross the canal in the 79th sector and attack west to the front of the present 1st Bn sector, thus widening the bridgehead and at the same time protecting the right flank of the 315th Inf (the unit on our immediate left). When the 1st Bn's front was covered on the south side of the canal it was to revert to regimental reserve. To further expedite this plan and to take advantage of the enemy's pre-occupation with the attacking division, Chariot 6 ordered the 3rd Bn to establish a small bridgehead in their zone and if possible to establish an OPLR on the south side of the canal. By 2155 the 3rd Bn reported that a bridgehead had been established with 11 prisoners taken. Occasional s/a and arty fire was experienced in the area around the bridgehead. The enemy appeared to be probing to find out our positions, strength and intentions. At 0400 the 3rd Bn combat patrol pushed across the bridgehead late on the night of the 7th, became involved in a serious fire fight against superior forces. Concern was felt for this patrol and a contact patrol was sent out to find it. At this juncture the bridgehead was maintained by two platoons and was being counterattacked and subjected to moderately heavy arty fire. Sporadic fighting was continued across the canal probably involving our combat patrol but no more specific information could be gathered. Captain Roper, Regtl S-2, who had accompanied the patrol was found dead and the body was brought back across the canal.

Chariot 6 ordered the 2nd Bn across the canal in the 79th sector to move eastward and take up position on the left flank of the 2nd Bn. This Bn came into position at 2250. In the

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meantime sporadic activity had been flaring up about the 3rd Bn bridgehead. This consisted of counterattacks and arty fire. At no time was our position in this area seriously threatened. At 1900 Lt. O'Rourke flew over the area where the lost patrol had been sent and witnessed their capture by a vastly superior force of enemy. Later these men were retaken in the Ruhr Pocket and we learned that they had finally run out of ammo thus being forced to surrender, being completely surrounded and two miles deep into enemy held ground. On the 9th of April the 1st and 2nd Bns continued to attack west until a linkup was made with the 3rd Bn bridgehead which by now had been firmly established. The regimental zone was now expanded south to the Berne Canal. Upon completion of this task the 2nd Bn took over the entire area relieving the 1st in their zone and the 3rd Bn relieved the 3rd Bn of the 315th.

On the 10th at 1245 two jeep patrols, consisting of five men each, were alerted to go into the City of Essen and left at 1430. At 1700 they returned reporting no resistance met. At 1800 Chariot 6 issued the following order: "This Regiment will be relieved by elms of the 155 AT Bn and will proceed to Essen, seize, secure and defend the city. The 605 TD Bn will accompany the regiment. The 2nd Bn will occupy the northern portion of the city and will take the left road leading into town. The 1st Bn (less "C" Co) will take the central route and occupy the southern section of the city. "C" Co will proceed into town after dark with a company of tanks which are on their way to us and will join us there. The 3rd Bn will take the eastern road and hold the eastern sector of town. Bns will move out at 1900. Zones of responsibility: right flank 2nd Bn, center 1st Bn and left flank 3rd Bn. At 1900 the Bns left their positions as scheduled being relieved by Btrys A, C & D of the 155th AT Bn. At 2230 Co "B" of the 684th Tk Bn joined us as mentioned in the Field Order.

The occupation of the City of Essen was uneventful and by 0230 on the morning of the 11th we had instructions to move again at 0700. The Bns moved out on time and by noon the city of Mulheim had been taken and a bridgehead secured across the Ruhr River toward Duisburg. Patrols were sent back through the area just passed over to pick up or flush out any enemy bypassed in the morning. A platoon had moved forward from Mulheim toward Duisburg and was occupying the town of Speldox. In the evening at 2230 arty of large calibre began falling around bridgehead at Mulheim.

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Throughout the night of April 12th sporadic arty fell in Mulheim and environs. Much of this seemed to be interdiction fire falling around the bridgehead. There was also a peculiar type shell falling in the city proper, which could not be identified. It was of large calibre and seemed to detonate with a double report leading to the belief that the gun had a very slow muzzle velocity (the propelling charge and the impact audible simultaneously) or that the gun was concealed very close at hand and was firing direct fire into the area or that this was some kind of a new shell (our S-2 reported compressed air shells found in the area).

In the morning at 0800, Comdr 6 ordered the regiment into Duisburg in view of the fact that our prior reconnaissance had shown that this city was a plum ripe for the picking. However, a change of plans occurred and at 0915 the operation against Duisburg was called off. This cancellation came too late to catch two jeep patrols which had already left for the city and at 1030 they reported back, having gone to the outskirts of Duisburg without encountering any opposition and bringing back a German captain of the medical corps who claimed the city had been evacuated of troops and that the Burgermeister had left the day before. Chariot 6 ordered the arty not to fire into Duisburg and requested our neighboring units to do the same.

At 1150 an order was received from Comdr 6 the text of which follows: The 507th CF will take over a line on the Ruhr River from the junction of the Rhine-Herne Canal (337173) on the north to a point (145914) on the Ruhr River to the south and east of the area. Keep the bulk of the regiment in mobile reserve and be prepared to counterattack enemy penetration in the sector. You will have the 605 TD Bn attached (3 firing Cos). Your tanks will be released sometime today. No formal relief to be made with units in the sector we are taking over.

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At 1345 the City of Duisburg surrendered to Lt. Bennett and a patrol he was leading. The colonel in command of the city ordered all police to surrender to the 507th CT and to maintain law and order. A small outpost was left in Duisburg to aid the police in keeping order and the German colonel was brought back to Mulheim to the 507th CP. At 1610 Colonel Raff signed the formal acceptance of the surrender of the city of Duisburg by Colonel Kampe, the German commander. Colonel Kampe was then sent back to his city and his destiny. The CT was now occupying its zone as ordered and the 3rd Bn was in Bredeneay as regimental reserve. Fighting flared up in the area about Werden on the south side of the river. This remained a hot spot in the area for several days due mainly to the fact that Germans trapped in the Ruhr Pocket were being pressed from the south and thus were being compressed into an ever increasingly smaller area and this spot seemed to be a natural outlet for this pressure. At no time did this become a serious threat to our positions but remained a constant source of annoyance until the pocket was eliminated. The 1st Bn was ordered to occupy Duisburg.

On the 13th of April at 0310 the 194th Glider Regiment began to close in Mulheim. The bridge at Werden was taken and a small party maintained a bridgehead on the south approach. Activated no doubt by this how of aggressiveness about the bridge, mortar and arty fire fell continuously throughout the day. The Germans were undoubtedly worried that we were planning to widen our bridgehead at this point and attack through this area although we had no intention of doing so for our mission was to hold a large sector and to wait for the units working up from the south to clean up this zone. Tanks and SP guns were seen in this area and a report received from PWs taken in the neighborhood indicated that the personnel holding this area consisted of Volksturm kept in line by a handful of paratroopers and SS men. The finding of a mine shaft in the area running under the river indicated that the vigilance in the area must be redoubled. At 2355 the platoon holding the approach

on the south side of the river was counterattacked and surrounded. A platoon was sent across the bridge to reinforce the holding party and the attack was repulsed. Five or six casualties were sustained but could not be evacuated at this time due to the fire. This activity ran into the morning of the 14th.

At 0150 on the 14th Chariot 6 issued an order based on Division FO No. 5 to the 3rd Bn: "You will hold a line from 441078 (vic of Kettwig) to 592139 (vic of Dahlhauser) effective 0700. Contact the 79th Div at 592139 every even hour and the 194th Glider Inf every two hours on the even hour at 441086 (vic of Kettwig) beginning at 1200 on the 14th". To the 1st Bn: "You will be relieved commencing at 0700. Bn commanders will be at the CP at 0600. Our right boundary will be 441078 which means that the 3rd Bn will take over part of your sector." At 1630 the 1st Bn had completed its relief in zone. Heavy arty concentration began falling on the Werden bridgehead at various intervals and it seemed that fire was coming from SP guns which had been seen in the area and which appeared to have direct fire on the positions.

Division arty was given targets in the vicinity in an effort to neutralize these pieces. It was required that this be observed fire because the impact area was necessarily very close to our own positions. During the night of the 15th-16th arty of varying intensity continued to fall about the bridgehead.

Throughout the day of the 15th all activity was centered on the Werden bridgehead positions. Arty, mortar, and SP fire continued to fall all during the day culminating in a counter-attack at 2055 which was beaten off immediately. This attack was renewed under a heavy arty barrage at 2140. Chariot 6 requested and received fire from 155s available to Division in this area. By 2151 word was received that the enemy was attempting to close in on the holding force on the approach to the bridge. A heavy arty concentration accompanied this attack.

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By 2214 it became apparent that this counterattack had been quickly broken up with heavy enemy casualties. The situation indicated that the enemy troops involved in these sorties had little appetite for continuing the war but were forced into these attacks by the German paratroopers and the SS men who were left with them for this express purpose. All the regiment was alerted to be vigilant for another attempt in a new sector for which this might be a feint.

During the very early morning hours of the 16th activity continued along the bank of the river, indicating that the enemy was restless and trying to find a way out of the trap in which he found himself. At 0400 the regimental OP saw and heard long machine gun bursts, flashes of arty and large numbers of tracer bullets streaking across the horizon. All this was taking place deep in the enemy held territory leading us to believe that the American forces coming from the southern part of the Ruhr pocket had made contact with the enemy to our front. Coincidental with this the 3rd Bn was receiving sporadic SP fire in the Werden Bridge area. As the day wore on, further evidence of fighting deep to our front presented itself. At 0945 the regimental OP reported that automatic fire and arty could be heard coming from about 3 or 4 miles to the southwest. Trouble kept brewing about the Werden Bridge and at 1408 shells thought to be 88s fell. These were coming in on a very low trajectory indicating that they were probably SP guns. At 1445 a heavy shelling fell in this vicinity. Col. Raff ordered a fix to be taken on the pieces doing the firing and Div fired counter battery.

Word came from "F" Co in the Werden environ that arty in the enemy positions to our front could be seen firing in the opposite direction away from our sector which seemed to confirm further our belief that the Americans from the south had made contact with the forces to our front. At 1900 we received the news that the Commanding General of the 53rd German Corps had surrendered with the 180th and 190th Inf Divisions and the 116th Panzer Division. Also included in this haul were the battle groups from the 9th Panzer Division, an estimated total of 50,000 men. G-2 reported an infantry regiment with thirty to forty tanks in Angermund to our southwest, which indicated still further that what was left in this section of the Pocket was being pushed in our general direction. Flurries of activity continued to flare up along the front to the south and east. At 2300 a concentration of enemy armor

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appeared on the east-west bank along the river. This was very effectively broken up by arty fire adjusted by our own infantry observers.

At 0636 on the morning of the 17th we were informed by G-2 that the 8th Div would be pushing up from the south. It was 0650 when the first American tanks were sighted by a patrol from "F" Co under Lt. Danes. Lt Danes moved out to contact this force and found them to be "Task Force Leonard" from 13th Infantry Regiment of the 8th Division, the Division that relieved this regiment when it was pulled out at La Haye de Puy in Normandy. The Task Force was composed of one reinforced infantry company and a company of tanks. Their combat team was at Velbert, 6000 yards south of Werden and it was thought that they should reach here in a few hours. By 0900 two bns and a tank company were in Werden. The troublesome bridgehead at Werden was quiet and the engineers had begun to clear the bridge itself. Lt. Snowden of "E" Company contacted the Bn Comdr of the 3rd Bn, 13th Inf Regt, who revealed that his bn was about to move east, his armor leading, and would pass along in front of our MLR. Accordingly he wished to have all our units alerted to this fact so that they would not fire on his column. From this time on we received reports throughout the day of various units pushing up from the south and at 2110 word came that the 3rd Armored had made contact with elements of our division. It was becoming obvious that the "Pocket" was being cut to shreds and would very soon cease to exist. At 2150 "D" Co received the formal surrender of Altendorf, destroyed eight 20 mm guns found there and took all German troops in town prisoner. American arty was still falling on the town. Division arty was contacted and reported that none of their Bns were firing and that they were contacting Corps arty to have this fire lifted. This was the end of our combat contact with the enemy.

From this point to the end of the period the regiment spent its time in Military Government duties. On the 19th Col. Raff took over the Essen Zone from General Whitelaw and the regiment furnished the personnel, under his direction, to administer the internal affairs of the largest section of the Ruhr industrial area. This area has a population of well over a million and the mighty Krupp Works have many of their plants here in Essen and environs, the Pittsburgh of Germany. In addition to the German population, there were found in the area approximately 25,000 foreign workers, slave labor, Russians, Poles, French, Belgian, Dutch,

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Czechs, Yugoslavs and a sprinkling of every nation in Europe, each with their problems. The zone was divided into subzones each manned by a battalion: Northern Essen Subzone, 1st Bn, Major Smith commanding; Southern Essen Subzone, 2nd Bn, Lt. Col. Timmes commanding; and Eastern Essen Subzone, 3rd Bn, Major Creek commanding; and Essen-Worden Subzone, 155th At Bn, Lt. Col. Packard commanding. Colonel Raff is Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Kuhn Deputy Commander and Major Brakonecke, Camp Administrator. Lt. Col. Downe (British) Military Government, and each battalion commander as shown above is a subzone commander. Under these come all the functions concerning the administration of the Essen Zone. The bulk of the effort is spent in administering Military Government to the German civilian population, watching their activities, suppressing any that are detrimental to the allied cause, feeding, caring for and evacuating the displaced persons found in the zone.

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