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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 1ST BATTALION
424TH INFANTRY (106TH INFANTRY DIVISION) AT
WINTERSPELT, GERMANY 12 DECEMBER 18 DECEMBER
1944 (ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY COMPANY
DEFENDING IN RUGGED TERRAIN

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INTRODUCTION

The Allied armies conducted a fast moving offensive after their "breakout" at Normandy. Allied infantry and tanks moved rapidly across France toward the German "Hinterland". The plan of advance was weeks ahead of schedule. (1)

The Allied Armies reached the German frontier by September 1944. On 12 September 1944, the United States First Army had the Germans fighting on their soil for the first time since the days of Napoleon. (2) The Allied offensive ended at the German West Wall. ^(camp) This happened because supply could not keep up with the ~~pace of the advance.~~ (3)

As a direct result of the need for ^{additional} new supplies and reinforcements, the Allied High Command planned to hold the newly gained positions at the West Wall. A plan was set up to establish supply priorities and the rebuilding of all units before continuing the advance. (4)

The Allied Army was ordered to resume the attack along the entire front 25 September 1944. The General plan was: (1) to destroy the enemy forces West of the Rhine River; and (2) to neutralize all German industry in the Roer Valley. (5) At this time the Ardennes Forest was a natural defensive barrier with a few good roads. Intelligence reports indicated that the sector was used by the Germans for rest and refitting their troops after long periods of combat. There was a great need of troops in the Roer Valley for the attack on the Roer Valley and seizure of the Roer River Dams. Since there was a great need for men in the Roer Section both General Eisenhower and General Bradley decided to hold thin in the Ardennes Sector, and to concentrate troops for an attack on the Roer River Dams. (6)

(1) A-2 p. 54; (2) A-8 p. 45; (3) A-8 p. 45; (4) A-1 p. 308;
(5) A-8, p. 54 & p. 71; (6) A-8, p. 338.

THE GERMAN PLAN

✓ The German attack plan was conceived by Hitler while suffering in a hospital from the aftermath of a bomb explosion. This famed German attack was later known as the "Battle of the Bulge". (7) It was Colonel General Jodl who pointed out to Hitler that four Allied Divisions were defending the Ardennes, an 80 mile sector. (8) On 8 Oct, while the attack on Aachen by the Allied forces was in progress, the German High Command was planning for the destruction of one half of the Allied Troops. (9) A lesson which all Allied Commanders had forgotten was that the difficult can be accomplished, for instance, (attack through rugged terrain in the Winter). The Germans attacked through the Ardennes Forest in 1940, 1914, and 1870 and were successful in each attempt. (10)

The plan of attack was as follows: (See Map B)

The Seventh Army: To swing to the south and become a blocking force to prevent reenforcement in the North by General Patton's Third Army; also, to make a diversionary attack toward Bastogne.

The Sixth Panzer Army to be employed in the North, to reach the Meuse River by the second day and capture Namur and Antwerp.

The Fifth Panzer Army to be employed in the Center to capture Brussels. (11)

The 66th Corps of the Fifth Panzer Army: To break through the Schnee Eifel toward St. Vith. (See Map A)

Approximately seventeen German divisions moved into the VIII corps sector without being detected by Allied intelligence officers, although the front line troops heard these movements. (12)

"Wacht Am Rhein", the German secret code for the attack, surprised everyone. The Germans carefully concealed their plans and troop movements. (13)

(7) A-2 p. 1 (8) A-2, p. 10 (9) A-2, p.10 (10) A-3, p.1
(11) A-2 p. 13 (12) A-2 p. 42 (13) A-2, p.92

THE GENERAL SITUATION

In December 1944 the First United States Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Courtney N. Hodges, occupied a sector along the Belgium German frontier. (14) The Southern boundary of the Third Army was at a junction of the Moselle and Seine Rivers. (15) The Ninth Army was located along the Roer River and North of the First United States Army. (16) (See Map A)

The First Army consisted of the VII, V, and VIII Corps. (17) In the extreme North of the First Army Zone was the VII Corps. South of the VII Corps was the V Corps whose mission was, at that time, to capture the Roer River Dams. (18) South of the V Corps existed some 80 miles held by three divisions and a cavalry group of the VIII Corps. This was the Ardennes, known as the "Quiet Sector". The VIII Corps was commanded by Major General Troy Middleton, who held such a sector once before in Italy. (19)

The VIII Corps sector included all the area from Losheim, Germany, the northern boundary to a point where the Our River crossed the Franco-German Border near Luxembourg. (20) This sector was occupied by the 14th Cavalry group, 2d Infantry Division, 28th Infantry Division, and the 4th Infantry Division. (21)

A light task force of the 14th Cavalry Group defended the headwaters of the Our River at the Losheim Gap above the Schnee Eifel Ridge. On 10 Dec 1944, the newly arrived 106th Infantry Division was assigned to the sector of the veteran 2d Infantry Division. (22) The 106th Infantry Division had just come over from the states to relieve the veteran 2d Infantry Division, which held a line located south of the 14th Cavalry Group from the Losheim Gap to Kesfield. The 28th Infantry Division held a line generally

- (14) A-1, p. 348 (15) A-2, p. 70 (16) A-2, p. 70 (17) A-8, p. 97
(18) A-6, p. 31 (19) A-8, p. 98 (20) A-6, p. 31 (21) A-7, p. 98
(22) A-8, p. 78

along the OUR RIVER and joined the 4th Infantry Division whose sector extended to the Third Army boundary. (23) (See Map A)

TWENTY SEVEN MILE SECTOR

The 106th Infantry Division relieved the 2d Infantry Division in the Ardennes Sector, so that the latter division could be used in the impending attack on the Roer River Dams. (24) This sector extended south from the Losheim Gap and slightly east of the Schnee Eifel Ridge. From there, it continued toward Hontheim then west below Bleialf. There was an open area southwest between Habscheid and Kesfield on the Belgium Luxembourg border. (25) (See Map C) For ten weeks there had been light patrol activity in this sector which was being used by both sides to rest divisions and refit them. It was also used for instruction of new divisions. The 106th Infantry Division was placed in this sector by Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges, so that it could gain experience and receive a baptism of fire for its first action. (26) The plan of attack of the First Army for 19 Dec 44 was to attack to the Rhine and capture Cologne, Duren and Coblenz. The 106th Infantry was to capture Coblenz. (27)

The terrain of the entire Ardennes sector was hilly and covered with forests. The Schnee Eifel Ridge, approximately 12 miles east of St. Vith and northeast of Luxembourg, was a wooded, snow covered ridge. The Our River, east of the Schnee Eifel, ran along the Belgium-German border. (28)

The division command post was located at St. Vith, a vital road center. It was through St. Vith that the Nazi Panzers rolled into Sedan in 1940 and 1914. (29)

The 422d Infantry Regiment relieved the 9th Infantry Regiment of the 2d Division on the Schnee Eifel sector on 10 December 1944.

(23) A-8, p. 98 (24) A-5, p. 78 (25) A-8, p. 88 (26) A-2, p. 77
(27) A-8, p. 88 (28) A-9, p. 49 (29) A-10, p. 3

On December 1944, the 423rd Infantry Regiment relieved the 28th Infantry Regiment in the sector, from Honthelm to Winterscheid, Germany. The 424th relieved the 23rd Infantry Regiment in the sector south of the 423rd Infantry Regiment from Winterscheid to Kesfield. (See Map D) There, the 424th Infantry Regiment joined the 112th Infantry Regiment of the 28th Infantry Division. (30)

The 106th Division moved by trucks from Le Havre to the front line positions. The 300 mile trip was made in trucks, some of which were open during downpour of rain, sleet, and snow. This caused everyone to get tired and wet. The overnight bivouac area, near Phillipville, Belgium, was deep in snow and mud. The move itself was disheartening to the men. Their morale was low, although it went up after they arrived at the front line positions. (31) *Map D*

REGIMENTAL POSITIONS

Cannon Company of the 424th Infantry Regiment, reenforced by a platoon from Anti-Tank Company and a platoon from Company C of the 508th Tank Destroyer Battalion, held the north flank of the 424th Infantry Regimental sector with only visual contact.[?] A two lane black top road went through this sector to St. Vith through Winterspelt, a little town about one mile east of Cannon Company. Cannon Company had a large road block on this highway. South of Cannon Company, between the Third Battalion, there was a gap of approximately one and a half miles. This gap was covered by mine fields. To maintain contact, patrols were also sent through the gap by the Company Commander of Cannon Company and the Third Battalion Commander. The Second Battalion held a sector south of the Third Battalion. (32)

The First Battalion of the 424th Infantry Regiment was placed in Division Reserve. Company A occupied the southern half of

(30) A-8, p. 98 (31) A-9, p. 49 (32) Statement of Lt. Col. Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn., 424th Infantry Regt.

Lommersweiler, and Company B occupied the northern half of the town. Lommersweiler was a small town, populated with Nazi sympathizers, and located on banks of the Our River. (33) Company C was located at Elcherath. First Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company were located in Steinbruck with D Company. Steinbruck was a small town approximately 300 yards west of the Our River, and 100 yards north of the road from Winterspelt to St. Vith. (34)

POSITION OF COMPANY A

At 1000 hours, 12 December 1940, Lommersweiler, Belgium, marked the end of the trip from Le Havre, France for Company A. Everyone ^{was} became wet and tired from the ride in 2½ ton trucks because of the downpour of sleet and snow. An attempt was made to dry out all clothing and equipment.

Although the Division was at full strength and ready for combat in January 1944, about 6,000 men and 600 officers were shipped out to join the 83rd Division in order to bring it to full strength before going overseas. (35) Three of the six officers in Company A were assigned from Anti-Aircraft units. These officers were the Executive Officer and the First and Second Platoon leaders. The three officers did not have any previous infantry training.

In July and August of 1944, most of the officers were on special duty with other organizations and did not know the men. One half of the men in Company A were assigned from inactivated Military Police Units, Service Commands, ASTP, and Air Cadet Students.

The men received infantry training, utilizing every opportunity

(33) Personal knowledge of author 18 Dec 44 (34) Statement of Lt. Col. Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn., 424th Inf. Regt. (35) A-9, p.48.

when time was available, as their training was inadequate. One half of the men in Company A did not know their jobs. This was the general situation of Company A when they arrived in Lommersweiler. (36)

THE ATTACK

On the evening of 15 December 1944, there were more enemy artillery concentrations falling around Lommersweiler than usual. At 0500 hours, 16 December 1944, the artillery concentrations fell in the town of Lommersweiler and around A Company's mess hall. (37) There were also heavy concentrations of enemy artillery fire falling around Battalion Headquarters and D Company in Steinbruck, but there were no casualties. The road from Steinbruck to St. Vith, the main supply route for the 424th Infantry, was shelled with interdiction fire. (38) This was the first close enemy fire received by the men of Company A.

The First Battalion, 424th Infantry Regiment, in Division Reserve, did not have an artillery liaison officer until 15 December 1944. Upon his arrival, he proceeded to work on concentrations which were prepared by the artillery liaison officer supporting the 23rd Infantry Regiment, which was relieved by the 424th Infantry Regiment. The Artillery Liaison officer did not have his concentrations planned on 16 December 1944. In addition, there were no forward observers with the rifle companies. (39)

The Battalion Commander of the First Battalion, 424th Infantry Regiment, had checked the three counterattack plans used by the 23rd Infantry Regiment, and took his company commanders on a reconnaissance over the terrain on 15 December 1944. (40)

(36) Personal knowledge of author (37) Personal knowledge of author (38) Personal knowledge of author (39) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn 424th Inf Regt (40) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn, 424th Inf Regt.

At daybreak, 16 December 1944, the Battalion Commander of the First Battalion was called by the regimental commander.

*What happened
at the time
of the attack* / Upon arriving at the regimental headquarters, he was ordered by the regimental commander to commit C Company reinforced, to restore the position of Cannon Company, and at the same time, to move the rest of the battalion to Winterspelt. At this time, the situation in Cannon Company sector was not known since the communications between regiments were out. (41)

At 0830 hours, arrangements were made for ammunition and transportation for the battalion by the battalion commander with the Motor Officer of the First Battalion. C Company with one section of the 81mm mortar platoon and one section of the heavy machine gun platoon of D Company were sent immediately by trucks to Winterspelt. They detrucked in Winterspelt and went by foot with two platoons abreast toward the Cannon Company position. (42)

Company A and Company B were alerted to be ready to move by motor to Winterspelt. The supply sergeant of Company A brought the ammunition to the platoons, and it was issued to the men. Each man in the rifle platoons received about four clips of .30 cal, M1 rifle ammunition.

There were about seven anti-tank rifle grenades, but someone at the ammunition supply point had taken the crimped cartridges out of the boxes. There were also a few hand grenades per platoon. (43)

It was a beautiful morning, almost like a day in the Spring. Overcoats were rather heavy and bulky, so the Company Commander of Company A ordered them left behind. The 2½ ton trucks arrived

- (41) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn 424th Inf Regt
- (42) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn 424th Inf Regt
- (43) Personal knowledge of author.

and the men got on. Company A was now ready to move. At 0915 hours Company A moved out, followed by Company B, and the remainder of Company D. The convoy arrived in Steinbruck, and the Battalion Commander led the column from Steinbruck across the Our River into Germany towards Winterspelt. (44)

The convoy moved in open column along an exposed route to Winterspelt, this being the only route into the town from the west. As the column arrived near the edge of the town, the last platoon from C Company was seen moving from the town to the Cannon Company position, which was about one mile east of Winterspelt. (45) As the convoy proceeded to go into the town of Winterspelt, it was caught by heavy artillery concentrations, thus causing the first casualty of Company A in action. (46)

The rest of the troops detrucked at the outskirts of Winterspelt, and deployed in front of a high hill southwest of the town.

At this time the Battalion Commander was called by the Regimental Commander and was instructed to report to Regimental Headquarters. While the Battalion Commander was waiting at Regimental Headquarters, a report arrived from the Third Battalion that their counterattack was successful, they had captured about 115 prisoners and the German Battalion Commander. The first enemy message was picked up by the Third Battalion in this attack. (47) It was a message to all German troops by General Von Runstedt "We gamble everything now--we cannot fail". (48)

There were also several pyro technique signals that were found on the prisoners, which were immediately reported to higher headquarters and disseminated to the troops. (49)

(44) Personal knowledge of author (45) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn, 424th Inf Regt (46) Personal knowledge of author (47) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn 424th Inf Regt (48) A-8, p.105 (49) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn, 424th Inf Regt.

The Division Reconnaissance Troops were surrounded at Winterscheid, and one company of the First Battalion, 424th Infantry Regiment, was ordered by the Regimental Commander to relieve them. However, the order was canceled by the assistant division commander, who was present at the regimental command post. He made it clear that the First Battalion was the Division Reserve and was to be used only on order of the Commanding General of the 106th Infantry Division. (50)

The Commanding Officer of the 424th Infantry Regiment then instructed that a hasty defense be set up north of Winterspelt on the exposed flank of the regiment.

At this time, the situation seemed to be in favor of the defending force, because Cannon Company was assumed to be holding, although C Company found out later that this assumption was false. The Second and Third Battalions beat off three counterattacks with tremendous artillery support of the 591st Artillery Battalion. Part of the 106th Division Reconnaissance Troops were maintaining contact with the 423rd and the 424th Infantry Regiments. This was an area approximately 2½ miles long and the Division Reconnaissance Troops were receiving attacks from all directions. (51)

THE DEFENSE OF WINTERSPELT, GERMANY

The Battalion Commander, upon return to Winterspelt, called his remaining company commanders together and ordered Company A to hold East of Winterspelt along a high hill, and Company B to dig in north of the town and to join Company A on their northern flank. (52)

The plan of Company Commander of A Company decided to defend with two platoons ^{was} abreast, with the second on the right and third in support. (53)

- (50) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn 424th Inf Rgt.
- (51) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn 424th Inf Rgt.
- (52) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn 424th Inf Rgt.
- (53) Personal knowledge of author.

The first platoon sector was approximately 200 yards east of Winterspelt and north of the two lane road going into Winterspelt. In this sector was a high bald knob that ran along an unimproved road to Winterscheid for about six-hundred yards. It was along this road that the elements of the Division Reconnaissance Company were to maintain contact, but they never arrived. The platoon positions extended along this bald knob for about 500 yards. (See Map E) (54)

In the second platoon sector, the unimproved road from Winterscheid extended SouthEast of Winterspelt, for about 200 yards. South of this hill was a heavy wooded area. The town itself was about evenly divided by the two lane road with about the same number of houses and smelly manure piles on each side. South of the road in the center of the town was a church with a tall steeple in which a machine gun was later mounted. (55)

The third platoon sector of Company A was astride the road about one hundred yards east of the church. (56)

The Company Commander of Company A decided to use both of the light machine guns of the weapons platoon on the right flank of the second platoon. This was done to protect the exposed right flank of the company from a threat that might undetected come from the woods. The extreme left flank was also exposed. One 60mm mortar squad was attached to each platoon. The 60mm mortar ammunitions was divided equally, each squad receiving 10 ? rounds. (57)

The company commander of A Company, unable to find the First Platoon Leader, ordered the third platoon leader to take the previous position intended for the first platoon. The first platoon was later placed in support.

- (54) Personal knowledge of author
- (55) Personal knowledge of author
- (56) Personal knowledge of author
- (57) Personal knowledge of author

The Battalion Command Post was located in the basement of a house located in the center of Winterspelt.

The Command Post of Company D was also located in the center of town. Enemy artillery, causing several casualties, continued to fall on the Company A position all afternoon at 10 and 15 minute intervals. At 1500 hours, 16 December 1944 the platoon leader of the Third Platoon, which was northeast of Winterspelt, saw a large group of Germans, concentrating in a patch of woods about 1000 yards northeast of the Third Platoon positions. The platoon leader immediately brought his one 60mm mortar on these positions, and members of the Third Platoon saw the Germans withdraw from the woods.

At 1530 hours, the Battalion Commander was caught in a heavy artillery barrage in the Third Platoon area as he was inspecting the defensive positions of Company A.

A section of heavy machine guns from D Company was attached to Company A, about 1600 hours. A Company's Commander placed one squad approximately 30 yards north of the road in the Third Platoon area near a house. The other squad was placed in the Second Platoon area about 10 yards south of the crossroads in an old abandoned machine gun position near a building. (58) The foxholes in the area filled quickly with water, but the men stayed in them because of the heavy artillery concentrations falling on their positions. The Second Platoon leader was wounded at 1600 hours therefore the company commander placed the platoon sergeant of the platoon in command.

There was a change in the weather and it began to get extremely cold. The men, unprepared for the cold, began to get chilled. Everybody wished for their overcoats which they had left behind in Lommersweiler.

(58) Personal knowledge of author.

One K ration was issued to each man at this time, this being the first food that the men had eaten since breakfast. The Company Commander came to the platoon positions just before dark at 1800 hours and informed the platoon leaders that the company would stay in this defensive position until further notice from higher headquarters. At this time the platoon leader requested more 60mm mortar ammunition and crimped cartridges for the anti-tank grenades, that were missing from the box, when issued. This ammunition was never received. (59) At 2000 hours when the third platoon leader went out to see how effective his squad positions were for night defense, considerable noise, including movements of armor was heard in front of his position. As the platoon leader ^{moved} advanced in the center of the platoon sector, which was occupied by the Second squad, small arms fire opened up from a ridge at the rear of the third platoon position. The platoon leader thinking that the firing was from B Company, who occupied this ridge throughout the day, went to the Company Command Post in the Third Platoon area, to inform the company commander of this incident. He also wanted artillery to fire, ^{received} toward of the position occupied by Company A, where the noise and armor was heard. The company commander wasn't at the company command post and he left no information as to where he might be located. The platoon leader called the battalion command post and requested that B Company cease firing into positions of Company A. (60) The battalion commander answered the telephone and told the platoon leader that it wasn't fire from Company B as this company was not in that position. He further stated that the fire came from enemy patrols that infiltrated around both flanks of the battalions position.

(59) Personal knowledge of author.

(60) Personal knowledge of author.

At this time the battalion surgeon reported at the battalion command post, that approximately 167 casualties had been evacuated. From some of the men of C Company who escaped came a report that the company was annihilated including all of its officers.

Another enemy patrol estimated to be about 100 men, raised "hell" in the command post of Company D. The executive officer of Company D was wounded and the company commander was captured but later escaped. (61)

subject
subject
The company commander of C Company directed the counter-attack while on his knees seriously wounded. (62)

The Third Platoon leader of Company A left the Company Command Post at 2300 hours and walked down the road in his sector to see if any of his men had seen the enemy patrol that came down the road through the company's positions. About 15 yards north of the road he saw a man from the first squad of the Third Platoon with a bazooka and his assistant. The latter told the platoon leader that they had seen a group of men coming down the road, but with all the confusion going on, they thought the group of men were a part of Company C. The platoon leader informed the men that the group of men who had gone through was an enemy patrol. He further instructed the men to fire first at anything that moved, and ask questions later.

About 2400 hours the Third Platoon leader entered the second platoon area to contact the platoon commander. He found about 20 men near a barn approximately 50 yards south of the crossroads occupied by the two platoons of Company A. The platoon sergeant was now missing from the Second Platoon, so the Third Platoon leader designated a sergeant-in-charge until the

- (61) Statement of Lt. Col. Lamar A. Welch, CO 1st Bn. 424th Inf. Regt.
(62) Statement of Lt. Col. Lamar A. Welch, CO 1st Bn. 424th Inf. Regt.

Second Platoon Sergeant returned and sent the men back to their former positions. It was learned the following morning that the company commander, executive officer, and the Platoon sergeant of Company A were captured in the Second Platoon area at about 2300 hours. (63)

After designating the sergeant-in-charge and deploying the men into positions, the platoon leader went back to his area to find that the enemy had completely infiltrated to the rear of his position by killing the riflemen and his assistant with a bazooka at the crossroads. The enemy also brought a tank with a battalion of troops down the road into Winterspelt from the East, and they ended up at the Battalion Command Post.

Nothing was heard from the First Platoon, the support of Company A, because the enemy penetrated along the unimproved road between the third platoon and the support platoon of Company A.

Small arms fire continued throughout the night with house to house fighting went on in the town and in the Third Platoon sector. At daylight the company area of Company A was overrun and contact was lost between all platoons and the battalion command post. Close in fighting continued all day with most of the company either becoming casualties or being captured. (64) One officer and 30 men were able to get through the enemy positions on the morning, 17 December 1944 and rejoin the remainder of the battalion.

During the night a company from the 81st Combat Engineer Battalion moved into position southwest of Winterspelt along the high ridge that ran from the northwest of town. The remainder of the First Battalion went into positions north of the Engineer Company. B Company held the northern sector about 300 yards from the two lane highway. One officer of Company A and 30 stragglers were south of Headquarters Company and joined with the Engineer Company. (See Map F) The Battalion occupied these positions the following day.

(63) Personal knowledge of author.
(64) Personal knowledge of author.

The enemy placed approximately one battalion of troops into position, south west of Winterspelt and the two lane road going to St. Vith, to occupy the remainder of the First Battalion in combat. This made it possible for the enemy to advance his main body to St. Vith along the two lane highway. (65) (See Map F)

(65) Statement of Lt Col Lamar A. Welch, CO, 1st Bn 424th Inf Regt

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

In making a study of this operation, it is my opinion that the companies of the First Battalion, 424th Infantry Regiment would have been placed in better use if reports received from Cannon Company had been complete and provided an adequate picture of the existing situation. The belief that Cannon Company was holding was purely an assumption, not a report, and should not have been treated as a fact until more accurate information of the enemy situation could have been obtained.

The defense at Winterspelt would have held a little longer if the officers and men of the First Battalion, 424th Infantry had known the general situation.

Intelligence in general was optimistic and did not provide a clear picture of the existing locations and dispositions of units.

The high bald knob, that the Third Platoon of Company A occupied afforded no cover or concealment, although it was the best position at the time. The Second Platoon sector had a little cover and concealment although it was widely scattered. The First Platoon, in support, was astride the two lane highway and could not see the sector occupied by the two front line platoons.

Companies A and B could have defended much longer at Winterspelt if the artillery liaison officer could have joined the First Battalion, 13 December 1944 and had his artillery concentrations prepared. Artillery ammunition was limited but a few supporting concentrations would have helped the defense considerably.

An example of what the Second and Third Battalions did with artillery support acknowledged this fact. The artillery forward observers should have been assigned to the First Battalion, although the unit was in Division Reserve.

The Company Commander of Company A could have sent transportation to Lommersweiler early in the evening to pick up coats and blankets for the men to have made them a little more comfortable.

The officers and troops were green in combat and were scared because this was their first action. Veteran troops could not have held the position at Winterspelt when the large number of enemy troops hit the position.

Additional infantry training would have helped the troops in this heavy attack if there had been more time available for training the Division prior to commitment.

not covered
If the entire First Battalion had been committed to restore the position of Cannon Company, the mission might have been accomplished in spite of the fact that the plan of operation was based on erroneous assumption.

To sum up the results of the defense of Winterspelt, (1) Company A, 424th Infantry, while it failed to defend Winterspelt successfully, did succeed in delaying the Germans a short while because they did not reach their objective, the Meuse River, according to their schedule. The First Battalion, 424th Infantry did stop many attacks north of St. Vith a few days later. Company A was later built up to 60 men and became part of the First Battalion again.

The attack on Winterspelt gave the enemy a good two lane black top road across the Our River to St. Vith. This road was used by a Panzer division later.

Company A lost 5 officers: 3 captured; 1 wounded; and one was killed. Out of approximately 187 men, only about 30 men joined the remainder of the battalion. The rest were killed, wounded, or became prisoners of war.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operations are:

1. Troops defending a position must have a perimeter defense or have their flanks secure. The position of Company A was a good example, the flanks could not be secured at night when there was limited visibility.
2. When reporting to higher headquarters, reports should be accurate and provide up-to-the-minute information on the situation.
3. Information of the enemy should be obtained so that the commander could formulate his plans and decisions.
4. Intelligence should be properly evaluated, interpreted and disseminated to the front line soldier.
5. Troops that have learned to work together and know each other should not be transferred out of a combat unit to be replacements in unfilled divisions or units.
6. When men are assigned from units such as ASTP, Military Police Battalions and Service Commands, they should be given thorough infantry training similar to new troops.
7. Men should be considered above anything else and should be made comfortable to the extent that time and conditions permit.
8. Units should not be thrown in to stop a counter-attack. The object of a counter-attack is to restore a units defensive position.
9. Boxes of ammunition, such as anti-tank grenades, should contain the crimped cartridge attached to the grenade.
10. The loss of leaders is expected in combat. If other officers are available they should immediately take over.

11. Artillery concentrations should be well planned in advance. Forward observers should be assigned immediately to all rifle companies and become acquainted with the company commanders.

12. A unit in division reserve should be assured adequate maps, covering all areas of possible employment.

13. Valuable information can be gathered by studying previous operations of an enemy's action during a similar situation or on like terrain. In this connection reference is made to the previous German operation in the Ardennes sector.

14. The mission of artillery is not to hold a forward position but rather, to furnish support for the entire unit. The utilization of Cannon Company as infantry found it unable to cope with the heavy enemy attacks and prevented it from providing support to the other units of the regiment.

15. Officers assigned to infantry units with no prior infantry training should receive additional instruction in all infantry subjects prior to being committed in combat.

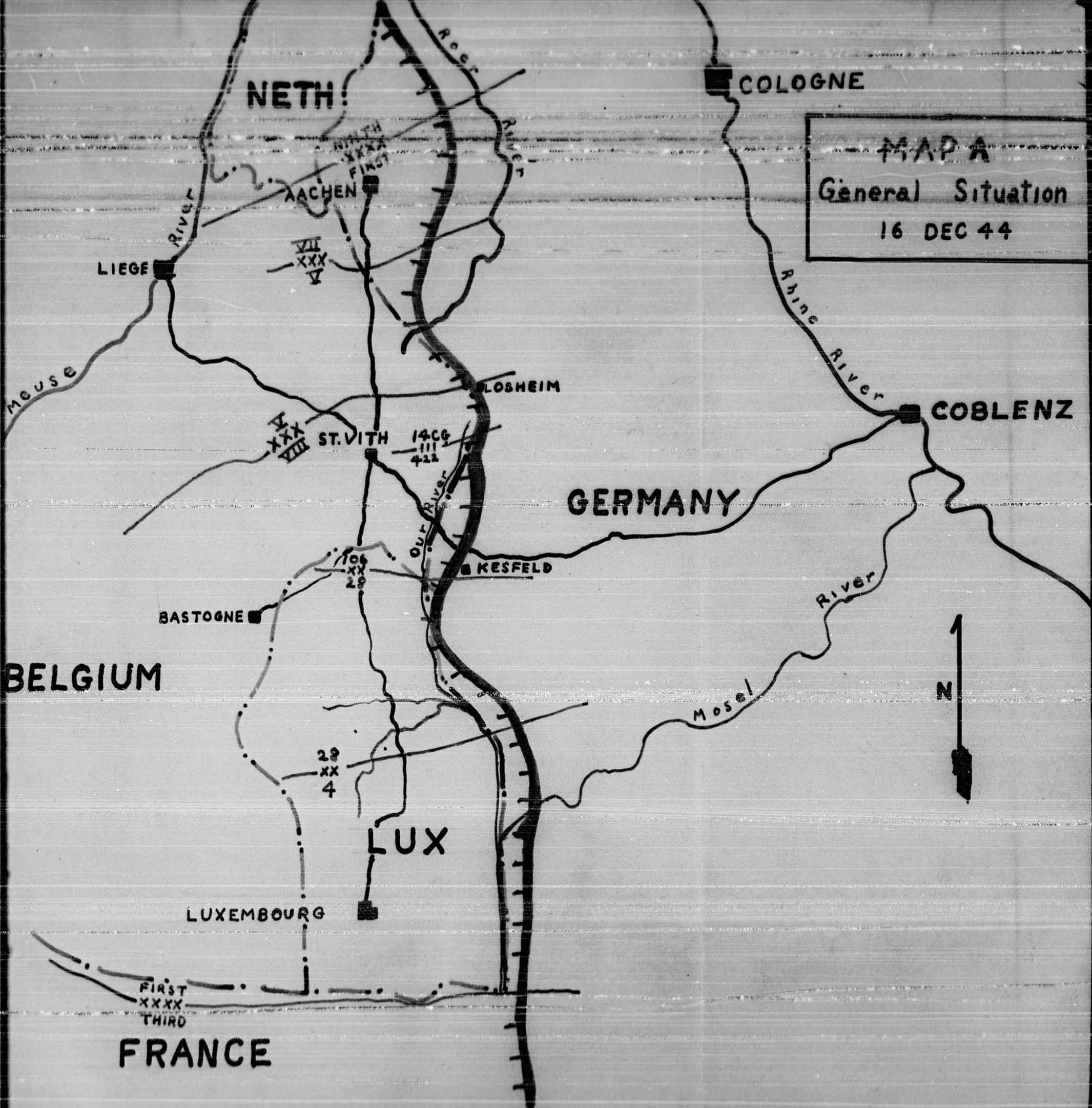
16. Restrictions on the utilization of radio communication should be removed when a unit finds itself in a situation where all available means are required to assure control.

17. A logical estimate of the situation must be made in order to reach a sound decision. Commanders of units and their subordinates must be provided the facts regardless of how adverse they may be, in order that an operation can be intelligently carried out.

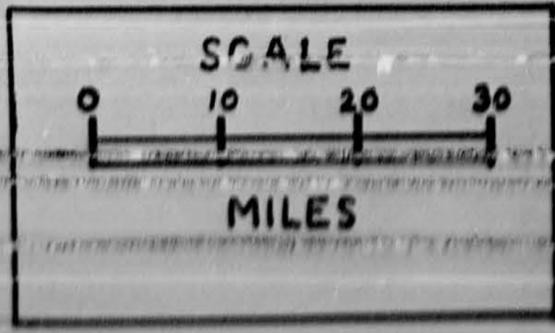
18. Report of combat incidents should immediately be reported to the next higher headquarters, in order that an estimate of consideration takes in all factors.

19. A unit scheduled for overseas employment should not be forced to give up large numbers of its trained personnel for use as overseas replacements just prior to its shipping date.

20. All infantry units should be thoroughly trained in detecting and disposing small groups of enemy infiltrating their position.



MAP A
General Situation
16 DEC 44



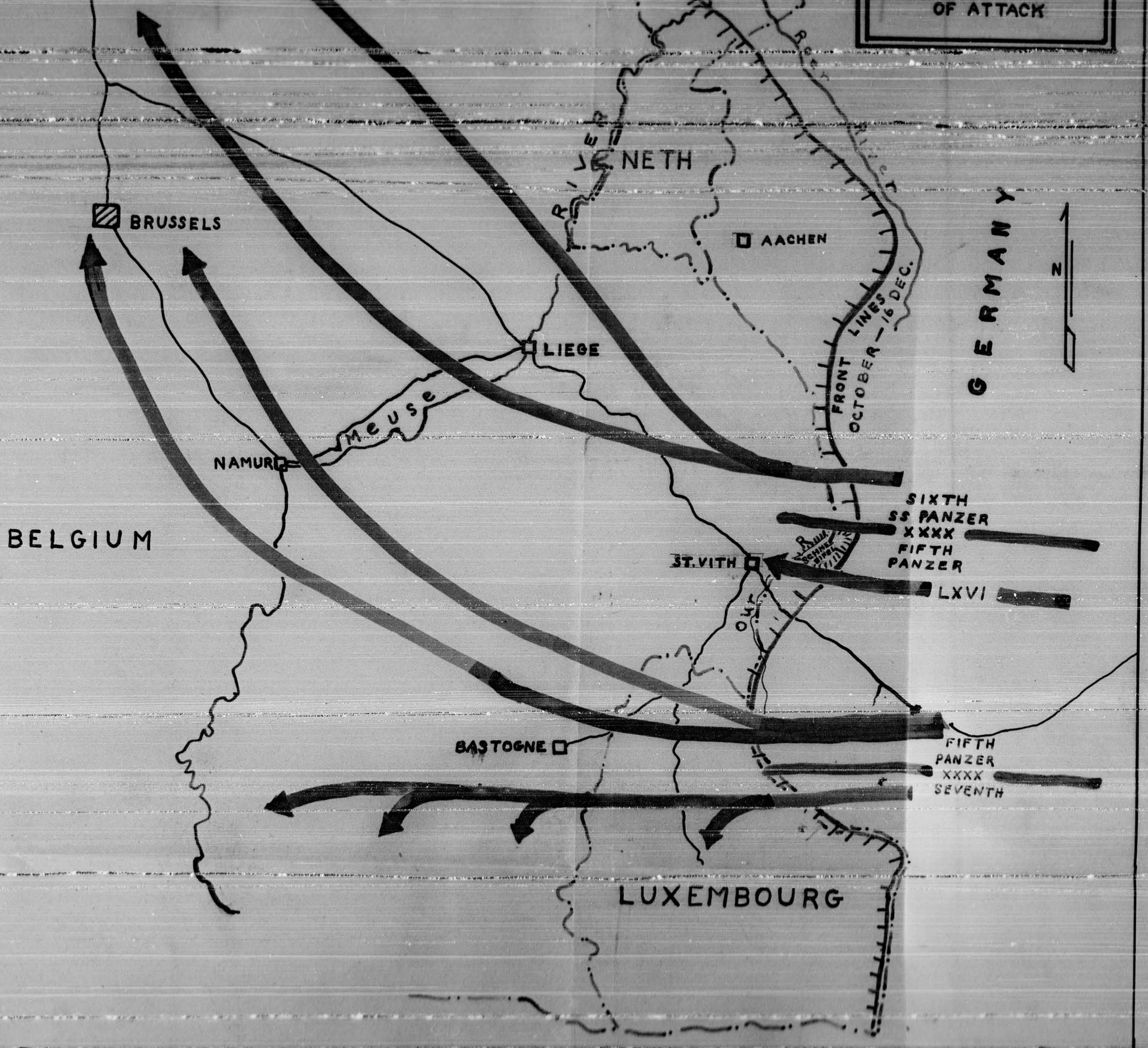
LEGEND

FRONT LINES

BOUNDARY

ROADS

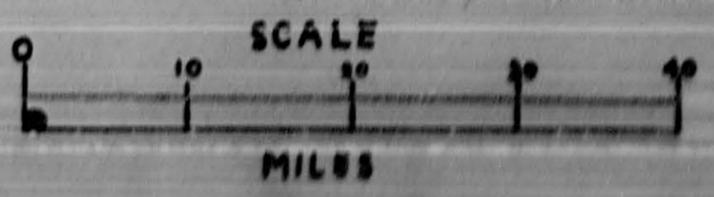
OF ATTACK



BELGIUM

GERMANY

LUXEMBOURG



LEGEND	
GERMAN PLAN OF ATTACK	
FRONT LINES OCT 16 DEC 44	
ROAD	
BOUNDARY	

XVII

ST. VITH

XX
106

14CG
III
422

422
III
423

OUR RIVER

SCHNEE EIFEL

HONTHEIM

423
III
424

WINTERSCHIED

WINTERSPELT

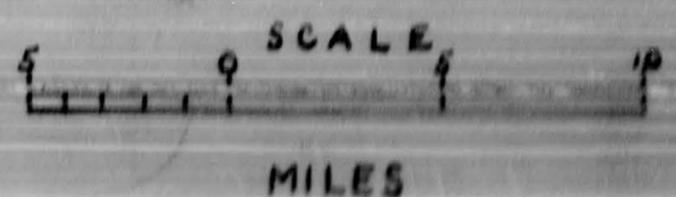
ARDENNES

106
XX
28

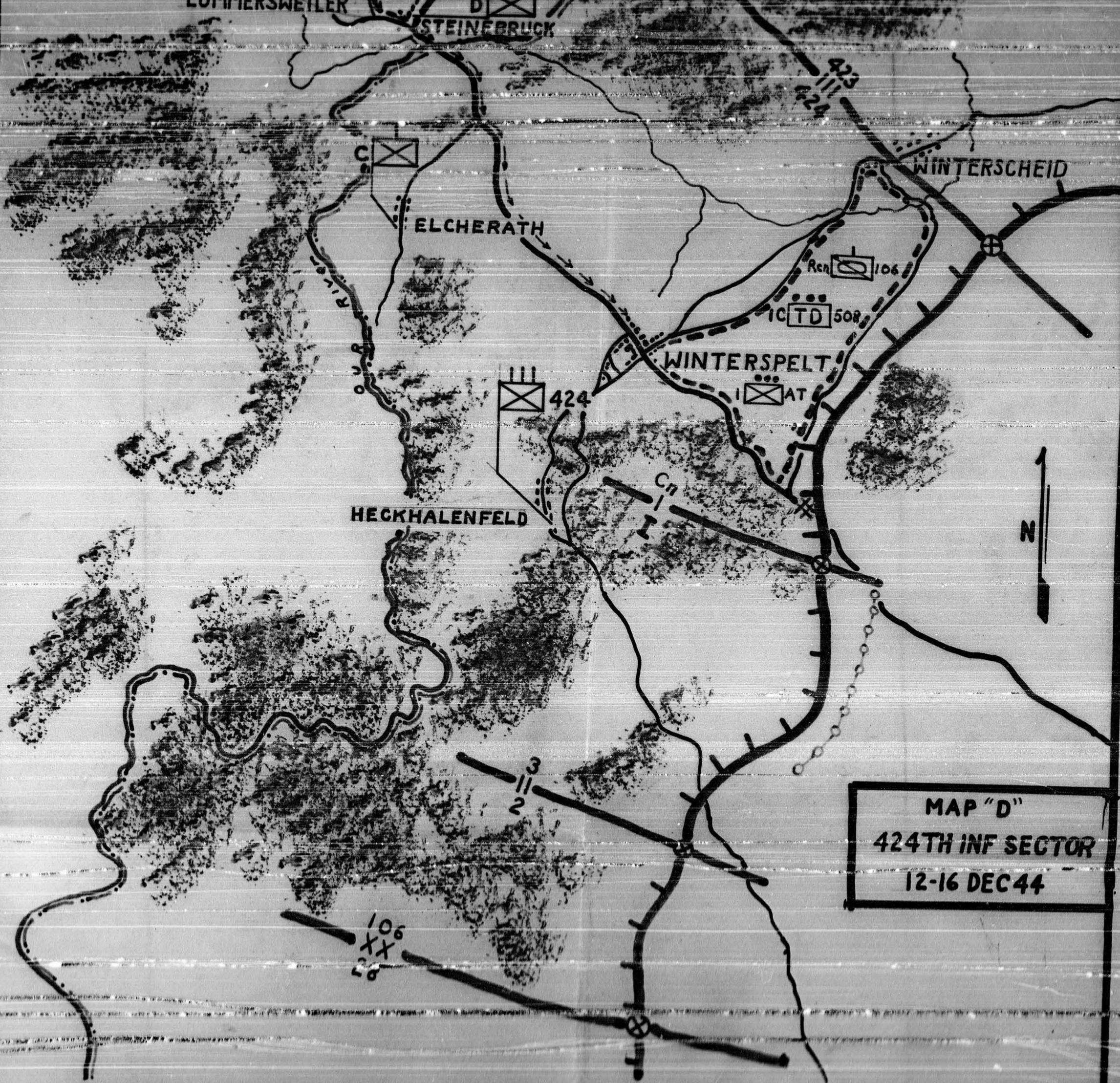
KESFELD



MAP C
THE 27 MILE SECTOR
106TH INF DIVISION
12 - 18 DEC 44



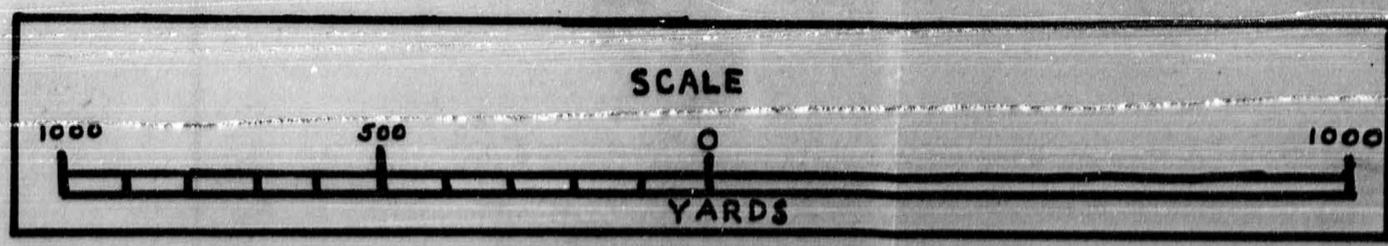
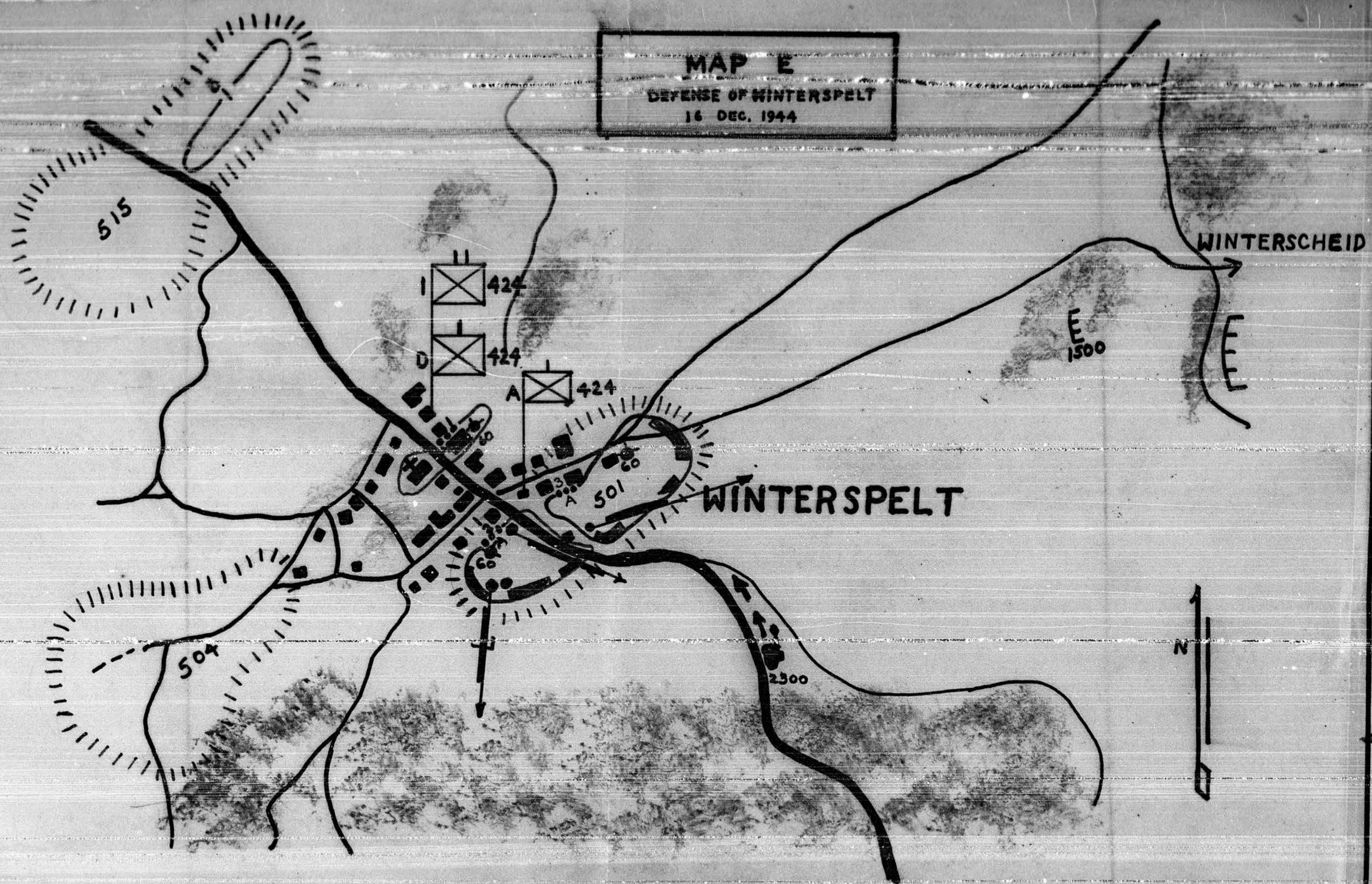
LEGEND	
FRONT LINES 16 DEC 44	
ROAD	



MAP "D"
424TH INF SECTOR
12-16 DEC 44



MAP E
DEFENSE OF WINTERSPELT
16 DEC. 1944

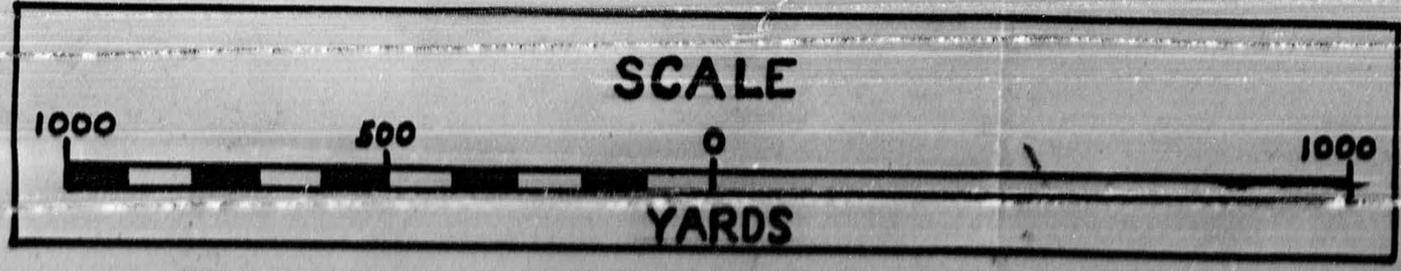
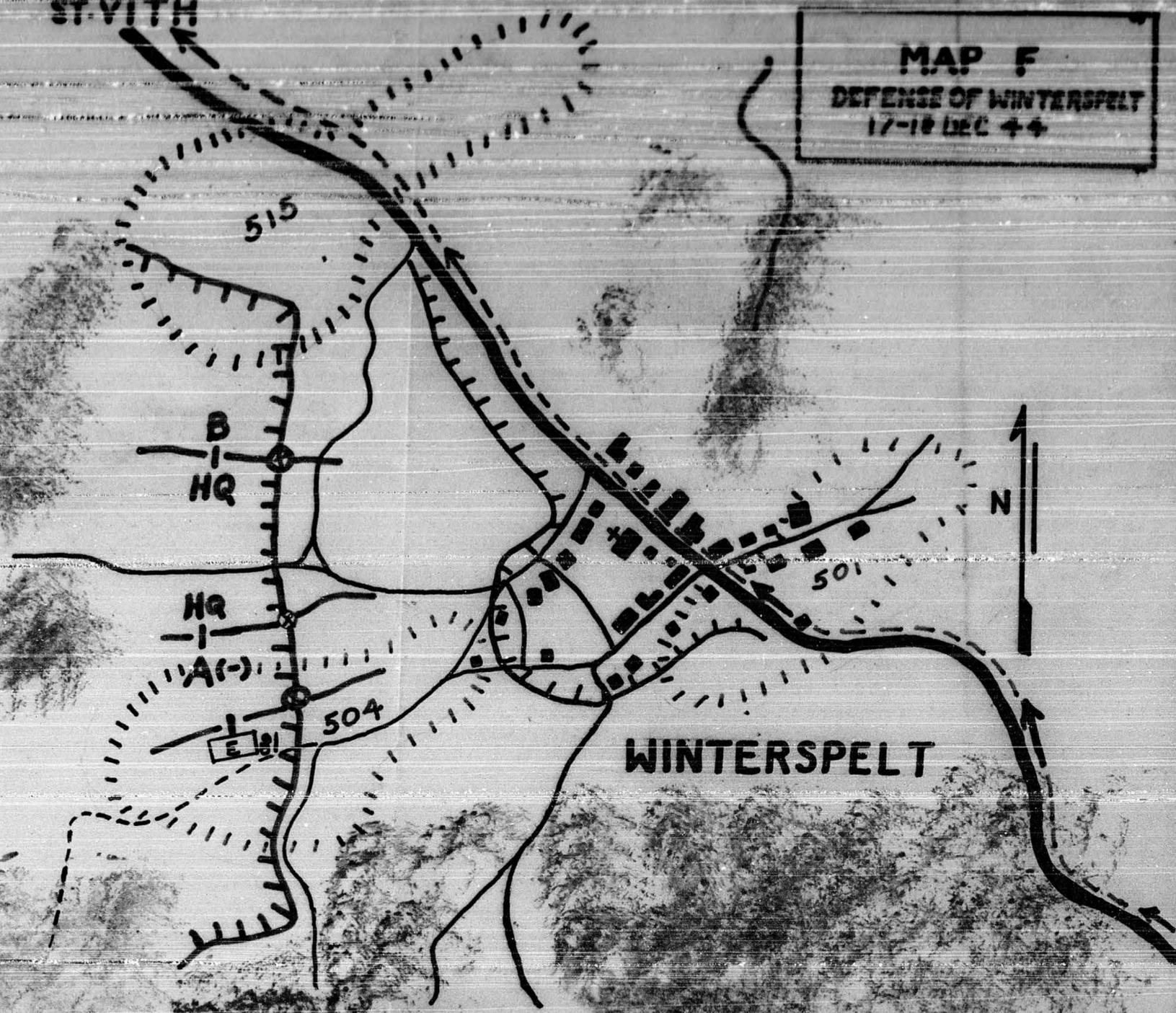


LEGEND

ENEMY TROOP	
CONCENTRATIONS	E
ENEMY ARMOR	●
ROAD, TWO LANE	—
RIDGES	

TO
ST. VITH

MAP F
DEFENSE OF WINTERSPELT
17-18 DEC 44



LEGEND

1ST BN DEFENSE	
ENEMY DEFENSE	
ROUTE OF ENEMY FORCES	
TWO LANE ROAD	
TRAIL	
STREAM	