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TITLE: "Through the Vosges to Strasbourg"

SCOPE: An account of the advance of the XV U. S.

Corps from the vicinity of Luneville, France through the Vosges Mountains to the Rhine River at Strasbourg, with particular attention to the maneuvers of the 2nd French Armored Division.

41-43

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## THROUGH THE VOSGES TO STRASBOURG

During September and October 1944 the German High Command continued to reinforce its defenses in the West in an effort to prevent an entry by the Allies into Germany proper and to preserve freedom of action along the entire length of the Rhine River. Though the main concentrations of the German Army were further to the north it was sensitive to any Allied activities in the vicinity of the upper Rhine valley.

At the end of October the Seventh U. S. Army line extended from the Rhine-Marne Canal at a point east of Luneville, France to the southern foothills of the Vosges Mountains. This Army was ordered by the Sixth Army Group to advance against the enemy west of the Rhine, who still held the important area of Alsace, and be prepared to strike blows deep into Germany.

The Third U. S. Army on the left (north) of the Seventh Army was directing its efforts against the fortress of Metz, France which had to be overcome before any general advance to the east could be made by that Army. The offensive of the Seventh Army was directed toward Strasbourg; thus, as that army advanced it would uncover its left flank and must provide for its security. The First French Army was on the right

(south) of the Seventh Army with direction of movement paralleling that of the Seventh Army.

Between the Seventh Army and Alsace were the Vosges Mountains. These mountains, paralleling the Rhine River and from fifteen to twenty miles west of that river, provided a tremendous natural obstacle. The northern tip of that range of mountains begins at a point in Germany north of the Siegfried Line and extends to a point near the Swiss border at Belfort, France. The Saverne Pass divides the High Vosges in the south from the Low Vosges, or Hardt Mountains, in the north. The High Vosges reach elevations of over 4,000 feet. The Low Vosges, though having somewhat less elevation, are more heavily forested with steeper valleys and present a more difficult military obstacle than the High Vosges. The declivity between the High and Low Vosges is called the Saverne Pass. The town of Saverne is at the eastern exit of this pass.

In a directive dated 5 November the Seventh Army listed its missions. Summarized, this directive stated; attack on D-Day, destroy the enemy in the army zone west of the Rhine, capture Strasbourg (the capital of Alsace) and maintain contact with the right

flank of the Twelfth Army Group. The VI Corps, in the right half of the army zone, was to continue its present operations to straighten its front along the Meurthe River northwest and south of St. Die, and to attack not later than D-Day plus two on the axis St. Die-Strasbourg. The XV Corps, on the left, was to maintain close contact with the enemy, attack on D-Day, capture and secure Sarrebourg, then force the Saverne Gap and be prepared to exploit east of the Vosges.

At the beginning of November the XV Corps was composed of the 2nd French Armored Division, the 44th Infantry Division and the 79th Infantry Division supported by corps troops including the 106th Cavalry Group. During the first two weeks in November the XV Corps prepared for its ordered attack to the northeast and east. The general plan for the XV Corps was to advance northeast with the 44th Infantry Division<sup>1</sup> on the left and the 79th Infantry Division on the right with the 2nd French Armored Division ready to dash through any breakthrough accomplished by the infantry.

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1. This was the first combat action of the 44th Infantry Division.

Sarrebourg was to be taken for an assault to Saverne. The 44th Infantry Division was to attack Sarrebourg from the west and north and the 79th Division was to attack the fortified city from the south and southeast. Combat Command "D" of the 2nd French Armored Division was to advance northward on the left flank of the 44th Division and go on to Weyer, north of Sarrebourg, which would provide protection for the left flank of the corps, would accomplish a tactical encirclement and would permit armored units to drive southwest to Sarrebourg, southeast to Pharlsbourg or east through the Vosges by a minor route north of the Saverne Gap. Combat Command "L" of the 2nd French Armored Division was to advance on the right of the 79th Division and the remainder of the 2nd French Armored Division (two combat commands, "V" and "R") was to remain in reserve for employment where enemy resistance was found weakest. As it was believed that freedom of maneuver by the 2nd French Armored Division would permit it to reach the eastern exits of the Saverne Pass more quickly, no routes or limits of advance were prescribed by the corps commander. The 106th Cavalry Group was to screen the left flank of the corps and maintain contact with the XII Corps of the Third Army, Twelfth

Army Group.

The area between Luneville, France and the Rhine River, approximately sixty air-line miles, consists of distinct regions. Between Luneville and the Sarre River there is a region of forests and many small lakes. From Sarrebourg to the vicinity of Pharlsbourg there is an open plateau extending to the western edge of the Saverne Gap. The Vosges Mountains constitute the next region. The western side of the Vosges is shaped, more or less, in tiers but a very steep slope on the eastern side drops to the Alsatian Plain. East of the Vosges the flat plain of Alsace, with its good road net, extends east to the Rhine River.

Between Luneville and the Rhine the German Army had two defensive lines--the Pre-Vosges and the Vosges. The Pre-Vosges line followed, approximately, the outer foothills on the western side of the Vosges Mountains. On the thirty-first of October the 2nd French Armored Division penetrated the Pre-Vosges line in the right portion of the XV Corps zone by the capture of Baccarat and Montigny; the Pre-Vosges line in that area was then swung by the enemy to the east from Blamont, along the Vesouze River to Cirey and south toward Raon l'Etape. This line was covered in the northern portion of the

XV Corps zone by the lake region and in the southern zone by a succession of villages which had been transformed into strongholds protected by antitank obstacles. The Pre-Vosges line had been constructed by both German troops and Alsatian conscripted labor and was complete with antitank ditches, barbed wire entanglements and personnel trenches. The Vosges, or main line of defense, extended generally along the military crest on the western side of the Vosges Mountains. This line extended south from the Siegfried Line and consisted of strategically located strongpoints. Old fortifications were utilized, such as the old fortresses at Petite Pierre and Pharlsbourg, fortified by Vauban in the seventeenth century. Anti-tank ditches across the avenues of approach, antitank and machine gun positions and many fire and communications trenches were prepared. This line was not fully occupied as troops retreating from the Pre-Vosges line were to complete its manning. The German force charged with the defense of the Vosges Mountains was considered expendable and was to trade space for as much time and Allied resources as possible.

On the eighth of November the XV Corps in an operation order directed its troops to maintain active

and close contact with the enemy and stated that the corps would attack on D-Day to capture and secure Sarrebourg, force the Saverne Gap and be prepared to exploit east of the Vosges Mountains. Troops had been moved by the VI Corps to take over from the 2nd French Armored Division the town of Baccarat (which was in that corps' zone) and the bridges there over the Meurthe River which had been captured intact. These troops also were to protect crossings over the Meurthe River, to establish and maintain contact with the XV Corps and to protect the left flank of the VI Corps.

On the eighth of November in the zone of the XV Corps the 44th Division was on the left, the 2nd French Armored Division on the right, the 79th Division in rest area in the vicinity of Luneville<sup>1</sup> and the 106th Cavalry Group was protecting the left flank of the corps. On the eleventh and twelfth of November the 79th Division moved from its rest area to assembly areas in the right half of the XV Corps zone to prepare for the attack.

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1. The 79th Infantry Division had only four days out of the line after one hundred and twenty-eight days of continuous combat.

On the morning of the thirteenth of November, D-Day, the corps attack was launched. It had snowed during the night. All streams in the corps zone of action were in flood. The bad weather during November had necessitated extensive road and bridge maintenance. "The mud was bottomless."<sup>1</sup> Close air support had been impossible for weeks due to inclement weather.

The 44th and 79th Divisions attacked as planned. The 79th Division attacked through elements of the 2nd French Armored Division, which supported the attack of the infantry to the limit of its weapons. More than 25,000 rounds of corps artillery were fired between 121800 and 130700, November in preparation, interdiction and counterbattery fire. An armed reconnaissance by sixteen XII Tactical Air Command fighter bombers was flown over the corps zone of attack, but, because of adverse weather conditions, they could neither see nor attack enemy ground targets.

By the sixteenth of November the advance of the 44th and 79th Divisions had produced two narrow salients pointing northeast and east with a large gap between the two divisions and between the XV and VI

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1. XV Corps Reports After Enemy Action for Nov. 1944

Corps. In order to broaden the penetration elements of the 2nd French Armored Division were directed to cover the right and left flanks of the 79th Division. Combat Command "V" of the 2nd French Armored Division was moved to the area Merviller-Montigny-Bronville to protect the rear of the 79th Division, reconnoiter in the direction of Badonviller and Parux and be prepared to move to the northeast on corps order. On the seventeenth of November elements of Combat Command "V", 2nd French Armored Division, following a rapid surprise attack and a brief but bitter fight, took Badonviller in the VI Corps zone. From this breakthrough of the Pre-Vosges Line reconnaissance elements of the 2nd French Armored Division moved on via Bremenil toward Cirey, which was captured with the bridge over the Vesouze River intact on the eighteenth of November. Reconnaissance elements of Combat Command "R", 2nd French Armored Division, had fought into the western edge of Parux by dark. Elements of Combat Command "L" cleared Domevre during the morning and continued reconnaissance in the direction of Blamont to assist the 79th Division in taking that strongpoint.

In approaching the Vesouze River the 79th Division

encountered the most serious opposition that it had experienced since the clearing of the Forret de Parroy.<sup>1</sup> The enemy had taken full advantage of the high ground north of the Vesouze River and was well disposed in

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1. The Forret de Parroy is a densely wooded forest approximately six and one-half miles long and five miles wide containing deep underbrush hard to walk in and hard to see through. The conditions approached those of jungle fighting. The forest was defended by elements of the Fifteenth Panzer Grenadier Division with orders not to withdraw. These troops were well dug-in with overhead cover and employed barbed wire and other obstructions. The forest was very heavily mined. The mines were both antitank and antipersonnel and were found in trees and bushes as well as on and in the ground. Over one month was required to take the Forret de Parroy by a combat seasoned infantry division. The bold use by the Germans, and later by American units, of tanks as self-propelled artillery pieces has been called the outstanding feature of tactics during the operation. Hitler, as a lance corporal, had fought in the Forret de Parroy in World War I and took a personal interest in its defense during World War II.

dug-in positions on his Pre-Vosges line. Effective artillery fire directed from numerous German artillery observation points fell upon any movement toward the river. However, the 79th Division by the nineteenth of November had succeeded in taking Blamont and establishing a bridgehead over the Vesouze River, and had driven on to take Hatigny.

From the line of departure to the vicinity of Leintrey the 44th Division had made slow progress against strong resistance. However, on the seventeenth of November, after breaking through the enemy line of resistance east of Leintrey against heavy action, the 44th advanced to and took Avricourt. From Avricourt the division moved on to crack through the German Pre-Vosges Line on the nineteenth of November at strongly defended St. Georges and quickly moved on to take Neufmoulins.

By evening of the nineteenth of November a breakthrough of the German defense lines seemed certain. The continuous determined attack of the XV Corps had pushed deep into the Pre-Vosges line (see chart). The enemy had suffered heavily in personnel and material. Evidence of deterioration in the coordinated character of his defense and evidence of confusion and demoraliza-

tion were appearing.

On the eleventh of November the Corps Commander, Major General Wade H. Haislip (now Lieutenant General), had set forth a plan in an operations instructions specifying that the 2nd French Armored Division be prepared to pass through either or both of the infantry divisions to exploit the successes of either or both of those divisions to the limit of its capabilities and to secure the eastern exits of the Saverne Pass. Now seemed the time to order the execution of this plan, and the corps commander so directed.

The 79th Division was relieved of its mission of assisting the 44th Division in the capture of Sarrebourg but was directed to continue its attack to the northeast and to be prepared to exploit any success of the 2nd French Armored Division in the right portion of the corps zone. A quartermaster truck company was made available at Blamont to increase the mobility of the 79th Division. This division was also directed to be prepared to relieve the 2nd French Armored Division on a bridgehead east of the Vosges Mountains, to secure the Saverne Pass and to protect the right flank of the corps. Two rifle companies of the 79th Division were attached to the 2nd French Armored Division on the twentieth of

November to assist the advance of the armored division by blocking the western exits of the Vosges and to guard the large number of prisoners of war which were impeding the rapid advance of the division.

The 44th Division was ordered to continue the attack to the limits of its capabilities, to capture Sarrebourg and to exploit the successes of Combat Command "D", 2nd French Armored Division, in the left portion of the corps zone. In addition, the 44th Division was to be prepared to relieve the 79th Division in the north portion of the corps zone, east of the Saverne Gap, or to advance east or northeast from the Saverne Gap on corps order, protecting the corps' left (north) flank. Through additional transportation furnished by the corps the entire division was to move forward by motor transport. The division had the 45th Reconnaissance Troop which had been attached by the corps on the nineteenth of November to be employed for protection of the left flank.

Now that the breakthrough had been accomplished the plan for the armor strike was ordered executed.

The 2nd French Armored Division at 191345 November was ordered to execute the plan specified by the operations instructions issued by the corps commander on the

eleventh of November; ie: pass through the infantry divisions to seize and secure the eastern exits of the Saverne Gap. The eastern exits were to be secured until the 79th Division could arrive to take them over. The armored division was to be prepared to then continue its advance to Hagenau or to move northwest to the vicinity of Weyer to cover the left flank of the corps. Careful planning had been carried out. On the twelfth of November (D-Day minus one) the division had issued a preliminary field order which cited routes to be followed, methods of employment and missions to be accomplished. Through a study of aerial photographs, maps and of information supplied by persons familiar with the Vosges area in the XV Corps zone of action the Commanding General, Second French Armored Division (Major General Philippe Francois Le Clerc)<sup>1</sup>, decided to employ his troops in the following manner:

1. The provisions of his field order of the twelfth of November would become effective when the enemy's principle line of resistance had been breached and only delaying elements would be encountered, and when a sufficient area of terrain was secured to permit

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1. See Annex No. 1.

the division to deploy and utilize its full strength and mobility.

2. The minor, less frequented routes through the Vosges, north and south of the Saverne Gap, would be used and urban centers would be avoided.

3. Small armored teams would be pushed toward the Saverne Gap as the first echelon as soon as the infantry divisions had achieved a breakthrough. The first echelon would probe for the enemy point of weakest resistance, at which point the largest mass of armor would be directed.

4. Close liaison would be maintained with the infantry divisions so that no time would be lost in taking advantage of their breakthrough.

5. Four tactical groups, or combat commands, would be utilized--Combat Commands "D", "L", "V" and "R".<sup>1</sup> Combat Command "D" would operate on the left of the 44th Infantry Division and Combat Command "L" on the right of the 79th Division. The other two combat

*THE ORGANIZATION OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> FRENCH ARMORED DIVISION  
FOLLOWED, GENERALLY, THAT OF THE "HEAVY" AMERICAN  
ARMORED DIVISIONS.*

commands would be held in reserve to be employed on either or both flanks as the tactical situation might indicate. Combat Commands "D" and "L", reinforced by engineers, tank destroyers and reconnaissance troops were to carry their own fuel and were placed on a three hour alert.

6. No prearranged routes would be binding nor was a limit of advance prescribed.

In accomplishing its mission of protection of the right flank of the corps, and in securing maneuver space for its contemplated future operations, the 2nd French Armored Division had taken Badonviller (in VI Corps zone, but ahead of that corps' troops), had driven northeast along the eastern foothills of the Vosges and across the Vesouze River at Cirey, keeping abreast of the 79th Division.

In early afternoon of the nineteenth of November Combat Command "L" moved out to the northeast from the vicinity of Cirey in two columns--Task Force Massul on

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1. The 2nd French Armored Division exploited to the maximum its inherent characteristic of flexibility of organization. The compositions of combat commands were changed often and quickly (continued on page 17)

the right and Task Force Minjonnet on the left. At the end of the day Task Force Massu was stopped at an antitank obstacle north of Lafrinbolle. This obstacle was made of heavy logs cemented to form a very strong obstruction which was covered by enemy fire and located in a narrow passage. The rainsoaked ground prevented cross country movement. Task Force Minjonnet was stopped at the end of the day at Niderhoff. The following day, in a pouring rain, Combat Command "L" resumed the attack, supported initially by the entire division artillery and a portion of corps artillery. The antitank obstacle at Lafrinbolle was overcome by the armored infantry after a severe battle and the armor rolled forward. The bridge over the Sarre Blanche River was secured intact against strong resistance. With the taking of Saint Quirin in the early afternoon of the twentieth, enemy resistance collapsed and Task Force Massu continued on via Walscheid and

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1. (continued from page 16) to take full advantage of opportunities for victories. These "task forces" were reinforced battalions named for their commanders; for example, "Task Force Massu" commanded by Lt. Colonel Massu, et cetera.

Hazelbourg to reach Dabo at 1830 hours. Task Force Minjonnet, meanwhile, had taken Niderhoff against strong resistance and had proceeded to seize the bridge of the Sarre Rouge River intact. At Voyer particularly severe artillery and determined resistance were encountered before the town was taken at dusk.

Combat Commands "V" and "R" had been held in reserve for employment along the most promising axis. In the late afternoon of the twentieth of November Combat Command "V" was committed along the southern route, following Task Force Massu of Combat Command "L". In a downpour of rain, with all vehicle lights blazing, Combat Command "V" began to roll into the Vosges. Combat Command "R" protected the corps' right flank.

In the left portion of the corps zone Combat Command "D", subdivided into Task Forces Quilichini and Rouvillois in an assembly area in the vicinity of St. Georges, moved out on the twentieth of November to capture Lorquin and advance to the north. Xouaxange was reached without resistance by Task Force Quilichini. Task Force Rouvillois, moving north from St. Georges, crossed the Rhine-Marne Canal at Hemming and continued north. Sarrebourg was bypassed on the west

and the combat command continued on to Haute Clocher, where it assisted elements of the 44th Division in overcoming the resistance at that town. Task Force Quilichini turned toward the east at Sarraltroff, after having crossed the Sarre River on bridges constructed by elements of the task force. Task Force Rouvillois crossed the Sarre River at Oberstinzel and entered Rauwiller that evening.

On the twenty-first of November Task Force Massu of Combat Command "L" advanced east from Dabo where it met strong enemy resistance and abatis obstructions on its way to the Wolsberg Pass. The narrow, winding, slippery mountain road provided further hazards and added to the worries of the task force. At 1300 hours, after passing through the Wolsberg Pass on the east side of the Vosges, Task Force Massu debouched from the Vosges onto the Alsatian Plain. It turned north and reached Reinhardsmunster, where it spent the night. Combat Command "V", following Task Force Massu, moved out of the Wolsberg Pass and proceeded to the northeast to Birkenwald to protect the right flank and to protect the bridgehead which had been established on the Alsace Plain. Task Force Minjonnet moved from Voyer to capture Biberkirch after a violent fight. Late in the

morning Task Force Minjonnet reached Trois Fontaines and established contact with elements of Combat Command "V" which were following the route of Task Force Massu. Guntzviller was occupied by strong reconnaissance elements of Task Force Minjonnet at the end of the day. The 1st Battalion, 313th Infantry, 79th Division was attached to Combat Command "V" on the twenty-first of November to establish road blocks from the Sarre Blanche to Walscheid.

On the left flank of the corps, Task Force Quilichini of Combat Command "D" moved from Sarraltroff toward Pharlsbourg. Hilbesheim, Lixheim and Herange were quickly cleared. Strong resistance and antitank ditches at Mittlebroun stopped the task force until dark, when it was able to bypass the resistance. Strong reconnaissance was pushed toward Pharlsbourg where a large and very well defended antitank ditch was encountered on the western edge of the town which halted the advance of the task force. On this twenty-first of November Task Force Rouvillois was given the axis Rauwiller-Eschbourg. The task force commander, however, considered the axis Rauwiller-Petite Pierre further to the north a better route and requested permission to use that axis. Permission was granted and the task

force encountered and surprised the German 361st Volks Grenadier Division which was moving to the east to take up new positions at the Petite Pierre Pass. Hundreds of Germans were killed or taken prisoner and their material captured or destroyed. The advance was continued from Petite Pierre to the east through the Vosges. From Petite Pierre, Task Force Rouvillois moved in two columns, one to debouche from the Vosges upon the Alsace Plain to take Bouxwiller and the other to move southeast to Neuwiller.

Combat Command "R" continued to protect the right flank and rear of the division. Task Force Minjonnet of Combat Command "L" had overtaken Task Force Massu on the Alsatian Plain and had captured Schweinheim and Waldolisheim. As Task Force Massu entered Saverne, Task Force Minjonnet entered from the south but passed through the town and turned west toward Pharlsbourg where the German commander, determined to carry out his orders to hold that strongpoint, was successfully holding off Task Force Quilichini of Combat Command "D" west of the fortified city. A stiff fight at Quatre Vents opened the junctions. A number of German 88 mm antitank guns aimed toward the west to engage Task Force Quilichini were destroyed before being able to

open fire on the new attacker from the east. Resistance at Pharlsbourg continued until the twenty-third of November when the 314th Infantry Regiment, 79th Division arrived to assist the armor in overcoming the fortified position. While the attack of Saverne was in progress Combat Command "V" moved toward the northeast from Birkenwald in Alsace and took Allenviller, Reutenbourg and Marmoutier, which protected Combat Command "L" and further extended the Alsatian Plain bridgehead.

The envelopment of the Saverne Gap completely surprised the enemy. In Saverne the 2nd French Armored Division captured the Commanding General of the LVIII Panzer Corps and the majority of his staff. The commanding general was sent immediately to the XV Corps prisoner of war cage at Sarrebourg for interrogation. About the same time the 106th Cavalry Group had captured the chief of staff of the German corps while he and his German Army female driver were on a trip to inspect the German defenses west of the Vosges. He, too, was rushed to the XV Corps cage. As he was ushered into the interrogation center he saw his commanding general and greeted him with the ejaculation "My God, General, what are you doing here!"

While the 2nd French Armored Division was making its spectacular breach of the Vosges Mountains and envelopment of the Saverne Gap the other elements of the XV Corps were progressing steadily. By the twenty-second of November the 106th Cavalry Group had progressed northward to Postroff, Eschwiller, Bettwiller, Durstel and Lieffenbach. The 44th Division was disposed along the corps' left flank from St. Jean de Bassel, via Baerendorf, Siewiller, Eschbourg to Vilsberg. The 79th Division was disposed at Pharlsbourg, at the Rhine Marne Canal on the western edge of the Vosges and in the vicinity of Schneckenbusch. Elements of both the 79th and 44th Infantry Divisions had been attached to the 2nd French Armored Division during its envelopment of the Saverne Pass.

On the twenty-first of November a Seventh Army directive set forth the plan for the XV Corps, upon forcing the Saverne Gap, to capture Hagenau and Soufflenheim, to occupy the fortification at Mutzig, to attack Strasbourg, to protect the left flank of the Seventh Army and to reconnoiter along the Rhine River between Strasbourg and Munchhouse, taking advantage of any opportunity to cross the river. The VI Corps was to continue its attack, push through the Vosges passes

between Saverne and Belfort and capture Strasbourg assisted by the XV Corps.

Hagenau and Soufflenheim are north of Strasbourg and west of the Rhine River. Hagenau, outposting the Siegfried Line, was strongly fortified, but its capture would protect the Army's left flank. Soufflenheim was used by the German traffic moving east across the Rhine to the upper Alsatian Plain. Its capture would interrupt German lateral traffic across the Rhine north of Strasbourg. The village of Mutzig controls the eastern exit of the Strasbourg-St. Die highway from the Vosges Mountains, which was the main avenue of advance of the VI Corps. The VI Corps was making very slow progress through the Vosges whereas the XV Corps already had considerable armor and infantry east of the mountains. By closing off the Saales Pass at Mutzig the German forces opposing the VI Corps would be cut off from escape.

Strasbourg is not only the metropolis of Alsace but is also the communications keypoint of the Alsatian Plain. The east-west land routes of France through the Vosges passes, and of Germany through the Black Forest passes converge at Strasbourg. At this city the land routes meet the vitally important north-south water

route of the Rhine River. The Rhine-Marne Canal, which connects the Rhine River to the Marne River (and ultimately to the English Channel), has its eastern terminus at Strasbourg. The Rhine au Rhone Canal, connecting the Rhine River to the Mediterranean Sea via the Rhone River, begins in the north at Strasbourg. In addition to the importance of Strasbourg as a communications center, the city is the political capital of Alsace. The province of Alsace was a part of Germany for several centuries but was given to France in 1648 by the Treaty of Westphalia. In 1681 the French seized Strasbourg and retained it until the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 when Germany took all of Alsace from France. After World War I France regained Alsace but lost it again with the fall of France in 1940. The "liberation" of Strasbourg was thus mandatory to the prestige of France.

Due to the importance of Strasbourg and the necessity for its protection, and to the extreme flatness of the Alsatian Plain, the city was encircled by forts and man-made antitank ditches. The forts were located at strategic points on the main highways leading into Strasbourg or upon slight elevations immediately outside the city. There were sixteen of these forts.

Their fields of fire encompassed 360 degrees. The antitank ditch began at the Rhine River, north of Strasbourg, arched southwest and then southeast to include the major forts and terminate at the Rhine-Rhone Canal, south of Strasbourg, to form a continuous anti-tank ditch.

The Commanding General of the XV Corps on the twenty-second of November ordered the 2nd French Armored Division to close all of its combat elements south of the Zorn River east of Saverne and, on corps order, to attack Strasbourg and assist the VI Corps in its capture. In the event that the division arrived at Strasbourg before the VI Corps the 2nd French Armored Division was to capture the city. The division was also to protect the right flank of the XV Corps east of the Vosges.

The 44th Division was ordered to capture Hagenau and Soufflenheim, reconnoiter the Rhine between Gamsheim and Munchhouse and protect the left flank of the corps east of the Vosges.

The 79th Division was directed to advance rapidly in its zone, assist the 2nd French Armored Division in its attack on Strasbourg by action from the north or to assist the 44th Division in the capture of Hagenau

and Soufflenheim, and to reconnoiter the Rhine River between Strasbourg and Gamsheim.

The 45th Infantry Division was attached to the XV Corps on the twenty-third of November in the Seventh Army rest area west of Bains les Bains. One regimental combat team (the 179th RCT) was ordered to move immediately to Romanswiller. Upon arriving at Romanswiller the RCT was to be prepared to move south with the mission of capturing the Position de Mutzig, then to fan south and southwest to block the eastern exits of the mountain passes in that vicinity and prevent a German escape to the east. The 45th Division was to be prepared to move one RCT to the northern flank of the XV Corps, west of the Vosges, and one RCT to the east of the Vosges.

Combat Command "A" of the 14th Armored Division was attached to the XV Corps on the twenty-third of November. That combat command had previously been attached to the VI Corps with the mission of advancing southeast through the Valle du Blanc Rupt to an objective in the vicinity of Barembach. The XV Corps ordered Combat Command "A" to continue its mission. If stopped it was to follow the 2nd French Armored Division through the Vosges passes and turn south to

assist the 179th RCT of the 45th Infantry Division.

The XV Corps now found itself in an unusual situation. The corps zone was divided into two zones of action, one east and one west of the Vosges Mountains, with five fighting fronts: west of the Vosges there was a "fighting front" to the north and also to the south; east of the Vosges there were fighting fronts to the north, south and east.

During the night of the twenty-second--twenty-third of November the 2nd French Armored Division received its orders to attack Strasbourg. Combat Command "D" (Task Force Quilichini), relieved by elements of the 79th Division, moved from the Pharlsbourg area to Bouxwiller to protect the left flank of the division. Combat Command "V" was relieved of its covering mission of the right flank of the division by Task Force Remy, a force formed by the reconnaissance battalion, reinforced. Task Force Remy was to protect the right flank of the division and advance to the south to assist the corps in achieving the mission of cutting off German escape from the west.

To take Strasbourg, speed was essential to prevent giving the Germans time to regroup within the city; multiplicity of axis of attack was necessary as several

points in the defensive ring of the city had to be probed to find a point of entry<sup>1</sup>; and a rapid concerted attack of the city from all possible directions was deemed necessary to disperse the enemy resistance and permit capture of the Rhine bridges intact. Prisoners of war taken on the way to Strasbourg were to be disarmed and sent to the rear without escort. Resistance prior to reaching the Kehl bridge was to be bypassed, insofar as possible.

The Commanding General of the 2nd French Armored Division reformed Combat Command "L" to include Task Force Massu and Task Force Rouvillois. That combat command was to attack Strasbourg from the north and northwest. Combat Command "V" was to attack the city

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1. This follows the French armored tactics and teachings of leading with strong aggressive reconnaissance elements which attempt to find points of weakness which can be penetrated by the reconnaissance element or by the heavier elements of the armored division. When the reconnaissance forces develop the situation the location which appears to offer the best chances of success is struck by a "task force" (reinforced battalion) and combat command.

from the west and southwest. At 230715 November, in a downpour of rain, these two combat commands moved out. At 1030 hours the Alsatian Plain had been crossed by Combat Command "L" without resistance but Combat Command "V" and Task Force Massu of Combat Command "L" were then stopped before the antitank ditch--fortress belt of Strasbourg. Task Force Rouvillois took the route Detwiller-Hochfelden-Brumath-Strasbourg. At 1030 hours the command post of the 2nd French Armored Division received the message from Task Force Rouvillois "Tissue est dans Iode" (cloth is in iodine) which, interpreted, read "Task Force Rouvillois enters Strasbourg and drives on to the Kehl bridge". The commanding officer of Combat Command "L", learning that the Brumath-Strasbourg road was open, immediately sent Task Force Massu to enter Strasbourg by the northern route and to mop up behind Task Force Rouvillois. Task Force Rouvillois left the formal capture of the city to other elements of the division, which entered the city that day, and forced itself on through Strasbourg to the Kehl bridge. Although the Rhine River was reached and the Kehl bridge was intact, the permanent blockhouses and the fortifications at Kehl on the east bank of the Rhine withstood all attacks. The Rhine was not to be

crossed at Strasbourg for some time to come due to that, initial resistance at Kehl and due later to orders from a headquarters above corps.

Combat Command "V", meanwhile, was successful in forcing the antitank ditch near Wolfisheim. One of the task forces began mopping up the southwestern part of Strasbourg, one task force went to Neudorf to assist Task Force Rouvillois, and the third task force moved to the south, crossed the Bruche River, surprised an enemy column at Lingolsheim and mopped up the airfield<sup>1</sup>.

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1. It is reported that General Le Clerc on the night of the twenty-second--twenty-third of November stated to his division, "Tomorrow my command post will be in the office of the German Commanding General at Strasbourg". General Le Clerc's prophesy materialized--he arrived in Strasbourg on the twenty-third of November. He had just comfortably settled himself into the German Commanding General's chair in his palatial office in Strasbourg when a very large caliber German shell struck the building. General Le Clerc was thrown to the floor by the concussion. He arose, so it is reported, slowly and with dignity, brushed the dust from his uniform and stated in a jocular manner, (continued on page 32)

The twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of November were devoted by the 2nd French Armored Division to mopping up Strasbourg and the fortress garrisons, and to patrolling to the north, south and west.

On the twenty-fifth of November, 1944, after heavy artillery and direct tank fire had been placed upon the fort embrasures and walls, Fort Ney was surrendered and the commanding general of the garrison, who was also the Military Governor of Strasbourg, was taken prisoner.

While the 2nd French Armored Division was redeeming the honor of France by its brilliant actions, the other elements of the XV Corps were also performing admirably. The XV Corps had inflicted great damage on the German Army with its armor; now the German armor was causing some concern to the XV Corps. On the twenty-third of November increased pressure on the front of the 106th Cavalry Group between the Sarre River and Vosges Mountains gave evidence of an enemy buildup in that area. From a prisoner of war identification it was learned that the 130th Panzer Lehr

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1. (continued from page 31) "Gentlemen, I think it is time to move the command post".

Division was in that area. Late in the afternoon of the twenty-third of November that German division, perhaps the best and strongest German armored division then on the Western front, attacked. The 106th Cavalry Group performed splendidly in slowing this strong German armored attack almost to a standstill until the 44th Infantry Division could come to its assistance.

On the twenty-sixth of November the XV Corps was disposed as shown on chart. In thirteen days the corps, through brilliant planning and equally brilliant execution, had seized the Saverne Gap, liberated Strasbourg, reached the Rhine River ahead of all other Allied troops, seized approximately 1,000 square miles from the enemy and captured approximately 300 serviceable artillery pieces and 15,000 German soldiers and officers in addition to the destruction of considerable German material and the killing of many members of the German Army.

The XV Corps had been opposed by units of the 21st Panzer Division, 25th Panzer Grenadier Division, 130th Panzer Lehr Division, 245th Infantry Division, 256th Infantry Division, 361st Infantry Division, 553rd Infantry Division and the 708th Infantry Division.

In accomplishing these imposing feats the corps

had fought its way through man-made positions and the natural obstacles of the Vosges Mountains hampered by the worst weather in many years. In less than two weeks after beginning its attack the XV Corps had firmly established itself upon the Rhine River after having forced a mountain barrier never before breached in the annals of military history.

Annex No. 1

The following letter was written by Albert C. Kornblum (former Public Relations Officer, XV Corps) to "The Evening Star", Washington, D. C.--which newspaper published the letter on 13 December 1947 under the caption "Le Clerc--'France Will Miss Him'":

"To the Editor of the Star:

It was distressing to learn of the plane crash death near the Sahara of Gen. Jacques Le Clerc, inspector general of the French Army, recently interred in a hero's grave in Des Invalides.

In my mind's eye I can see him now, a slim, medium-sized man in his 40s, of even features, trim black moustache, and disarming blue eyes that fairly danced when he spoke. I saw him first in August, 1944, when his irrepressible 2nd French Armored Division was assigned to Lt. Gen. Wade H. Haislip's XV Corps of the 3d Army and subsequently of the 7th Army. Of the courageous Patton school of tactics, Le Clerc and Haislip abounded in mutual respect and between them won great victories throughout France.

The dramatic story of Le Clerc's unorthodox division has never been told fully and can be touched upon here only with brevity. Rolling from town to town in gaudily daubed armor, its recruiting system was a revelation in simplicity. A receptive youth was handed a beret, a rifle, an item of American clothing; his name was recorded, an experienced sergeant took him in tow and he was in! The division squandered our precious supplies and equipment, it practiced very little camouflage discipline, it violated many standard United States Army techniques. But how superbly it could fight! And it knew how to deal with the Germans.

Armored division commanders were sometimes inclined to be prima donnas in their propensity for employing only suitable terrain, but not so Le Clerc, who led his tanks in brilliant sweeps at every opportunity. His piercing of the Saverne Gap and breath-taking seizure of Strasbourg brought him to the Rhine before any other Allied commander. It was an astounding feat.

Better known was his spectacular entry, along with American forces, into rapturously welcoming Paris, where he accepted the surrender of the

German general, Dietrich von Choltitz. It was probably the proudest day in Le Clerc's life, but even then he was grateful to his friend Haislip who had won and held the ground from Versailles to strategic Mantes-Gassicourt on the Seine, thereby opening the door to Paris.

Neither martinet nor sophist, he wore his honors with modesty that won him the genuine affection of his troops.

After reconnaissance elements had pushed into colorful Alencon, Le Clerc followed on foot, armed only with his favorite cane. He told me later he wanted to 'feel' the city.

Born Count Philippe de Hautcloque and trained as a French officer in the best tradition of Marshal Foch, he adopted the name of Le Clerc to shield his wife and six children who remained in a region occupied by the enemy when he fled to Africa in 1942. There, he organized what became known as 'Le Division Le Clerc' whose exploits worried Rommel and gave heart to the underground resistance movement at home. To make overland contact with the British 8th Army, he led a Free French force from the Lake Chad region of French Equatorial

Africa on a 2,000-mile march to Tripoli.

Le Clerc loved France with a tireless ardor that needed no trumpets for inspiration. He hated Nazis and knew how to defeat them when knowing how was tremendously important. He was convinced that life without liberty was life without honor.

France will miss him."

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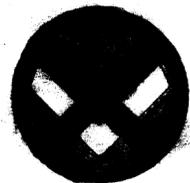
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GÉNÉRAL DE DIVISION  
PHILIPPE FRANÇOIS LECLERC  
COMMANDING



MAJ. GEN. IRA T. WYCHE  
COMMANDING



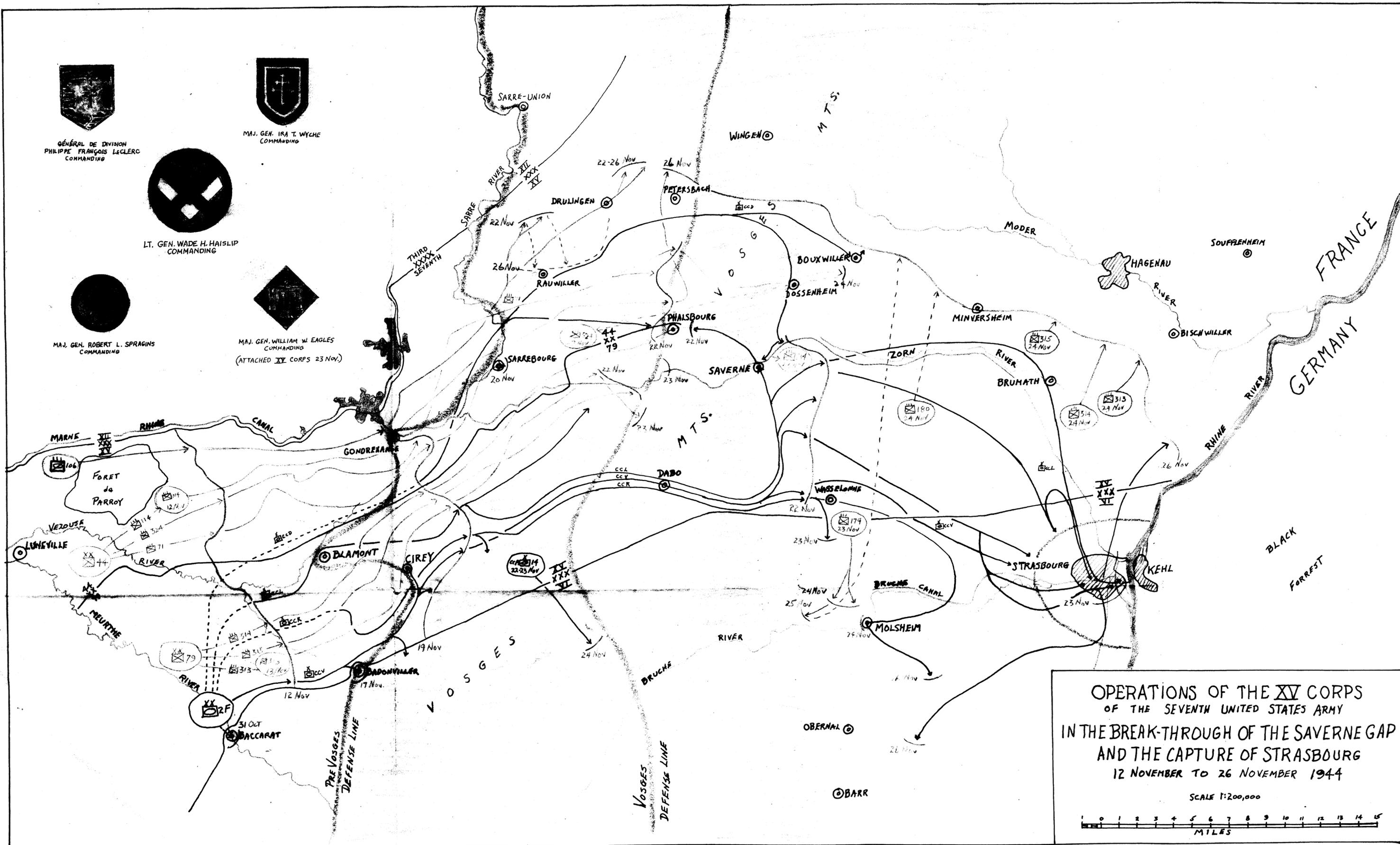
LT. GEN. WADE H. HAISLIP  
COMMANDING



MAJ. GEN. ROBERT L. SPRAGINS  
COMMANDING



MAJ. GEN. WILLIAM W. EAGLES  
COMMANDING  
(ATTACHED XV CORPS 23 NOV.)



OPERATIONS OF THE XV CORPS  
OF THE SEVENTH UNITED STATES ARMY  
IN THE BREAK-THROUGH OF THE SAVERNE GAP  
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12 NOVEMBER TO 26 NOVEMBER 1944

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