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TITLE: THAT RAID ON HAMMELBURG

SCOPE A discussion in the use of the small armored raiding force of the future, illustrated by Task Force Baum, 4th Armored Division, in its attack to free the Prisoner of War Camp at Hammelburg, Germany, on 26-28 March 1945.

The article describes the Prisoner of War Camp and its inmates, the route and actions of the Task Force, and the events which transpired after the liberation of the camp.

A brief dissertation follows, on the means which might be employed to make more successful a similar operation in the future.

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THAT RAID ON HAMMELBURG

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The Armored School

Fort Knox, Kentucky

May 1948

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Introduction to
THAT RAID ON HAMMELBURG

Would the Allied Forces have been able to maintain a beachhead on the Normandy Peninsula in June 1944 if the Germans had possessed the atom bombs which were dropped on Japan only a year later? In wars of the future, will the advent of these bombs, bacteriological warfare, and other methods of mass destruction allow the assembling of large bodies of troops in training areas, ports of embarkation, convoys, and frontlines? As more thought is being put into this problem by the military minds of the United States, the answer is definitely: "No." In a recent statement to the press, quoted in the 13 December 1947 issue of the Army-Navy Journal, General Devers remarked that the armies of the future would be composed of self-sustaining organizations, that more emphasis would be placed on the initiative of the individual, and that small units would be forced to operate independently, separated long distances from other friendly troops, to make them a less attractive military target. Armor, because of its mobility, fire power, shock, speed, and self-sufficiency, is ideally suited for just such independent missions. The planners and leaders of these forces will, of course, be armored officers.

Since practically all of our knowledge stems from the utilization of the experiences of the past, this paper will examine one combat example of the last war which contains all of the aspects deemed necessary in the independent type of maneuver foreseen in the future. This particular example concerns a small armored force ordered deep into enemy territory with the mission of liberating a prisoner of war camp containing a large number of American officers. What better mission to assign certain small, self-sustaining units of the future than the liberation of a group of potential marauders deep within the enemy rear?

The escape of but one prisoner of war in the United States during the last conflict was cause enough to alert entire state police forces on country-wide man hunts. The liberation of several hundred prisoners inside the enemy lines would multiply many-fold the confusion and fear caused by the escape of one man. Not only would production facilities be impaired by the presence and marauding of these individuals, but the enemy might be required to use reserve troops, which are needed elsewhere, for this rounding up mission.

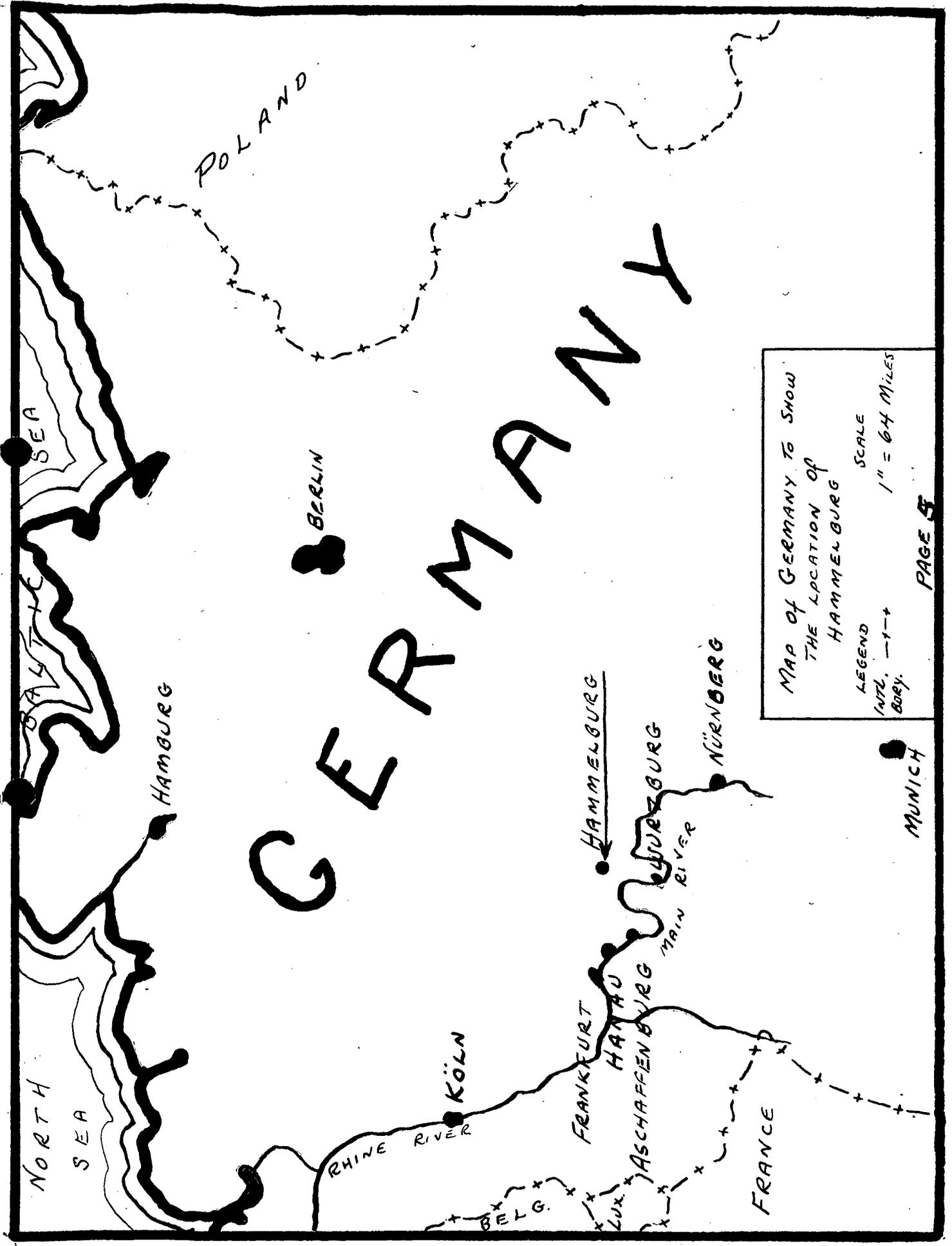
THAT RAID ON HAMMELBURG

A P80 dropping a napalm bomb on The Armored School at Fort Knox, Kentucky, could not have caused more astonishment than the JU88 which dive-bombed and strafed the peaceful German countryside, just over the green hill from the Prisoner of War Oflag XIIIIB at Hammelburg, Germany on 27 March 1945. Little did those of us who were inmates of the Oflag realize that we were witnessing an event which would soon precipitate us into a drama, fringing the backwash of the European conflict, to become known as the "Raid on Hammelburg." This raid, its results, and conclusions derived therefrom are the subject of this article.

First, of course, we must lay the background for the scene. Where is Hammelburg? What is an Oflag? Why did this sudden appearance of violence in the midst of history's greatest conflict cause so much astonishment and consternation? And who were the people affected?

Hammelburg is, or was before it was struck by a merciless bombing attack, a fairly large town situated about one hundred miles due East of Frankfurt am Main. The baroque facade of the centuries-old buildings on its main street might have been described by the pre-war American tourist as "picturesque." A double track railroad, which ran from that "Graveyard of Bl7s", the ball-bearing production center of Schweinfurt, towards Aschaffenberg in the West, had a large marshalling yard and station not far from the center of town. Towards the North stretched a gently rolling rise patterned with cultivated fields. In this section of Germany the farmer cultivated his fields during the day and returned to his house in a nearby village for the night. Many such farmers lived on the outskirts of Hammelburg. To the South of the town

GERMANY



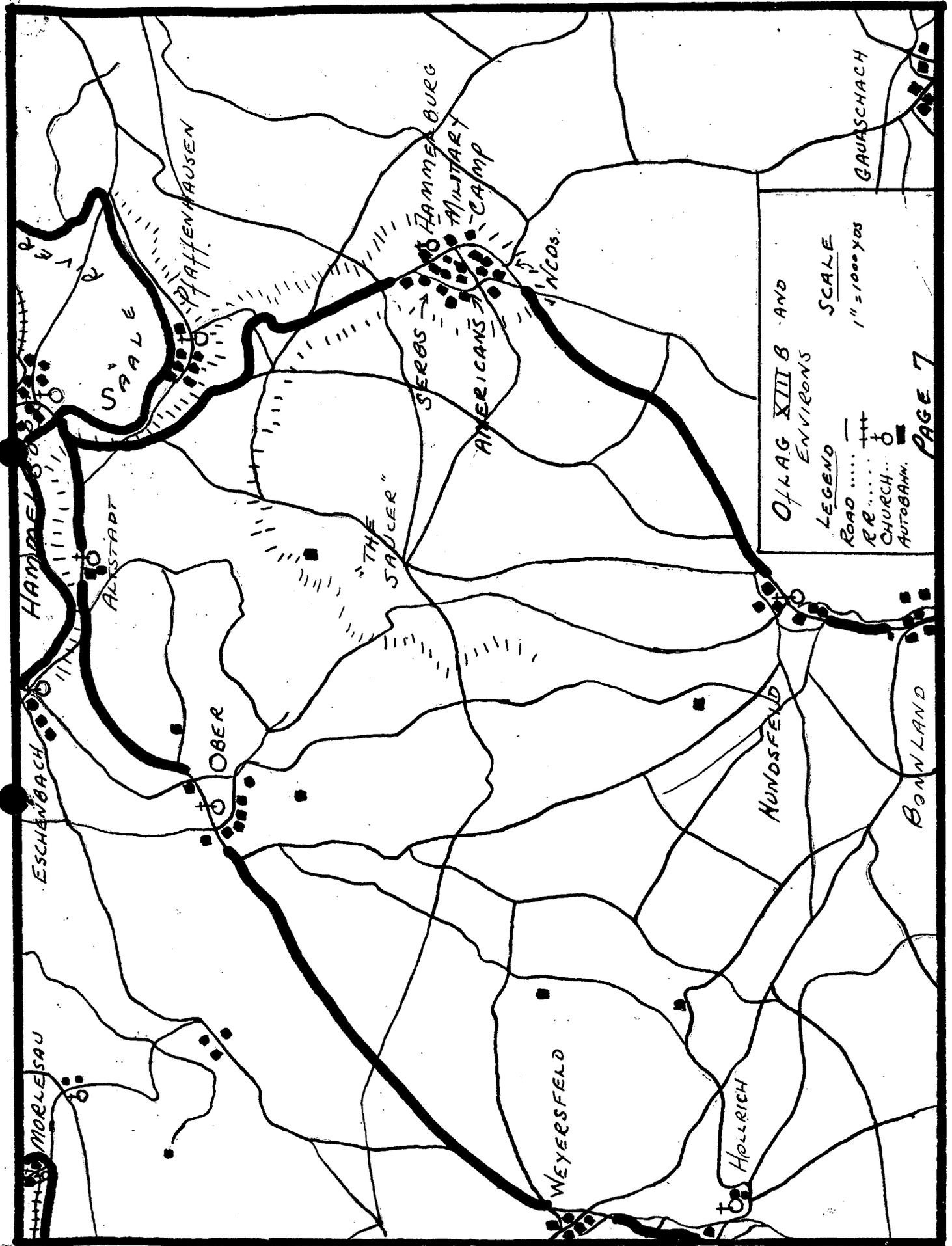
MAP OF GERMANY TO SHOW
THE LOCATION OF
HAMMELBURG

LEGEND
INTL. —x—x—
BODY.

SCALE
1" = 64 MILES

wound a narrow river and a three to four hundred foot high bluff. Atop this craggy, tree-lined bluff and slightly further to the South was a hill with a large shallow bowl stretching towards the West. Along the Eastern edge of this bowl and across the face of this small hill was located the German garrison of Hammelburg. It was a Regular German Army post, built of stone blocks and cement before World War I, complete with barracks, officers' quarters, chapel, water tower -- all not much different from one of the permanent Army posts in the United States.

The Oflag, or Offizieren Lager (Officers' Camp), for officer prisoners was located in some stone barracks, surrounded by rusty looking barbed wire, on the Western slope of the hill. A Stalag (Stammlager, or Sleeping Place) for non-commissioned officers and slave-laborers was on the other side of the hill, in what American GIs would call "temporary barracks." The officers consisted of Serbs, who had surrendered five years before, and Americans, who, for the most part like myself, had been captured during the Ardennes offensive. The American section of the camp was started in January 1945. The Serbs had been offered freedom by the Germans if they would return to Yugoslavia and fight Mihailovich. All had refused despite the fact that they were prisoners separated from home for many years. One Serb had even spent four other endless years in this same camp as a prisoner during the First World War. Each nationality was in a separate compound, but the single wire fence was no division to some officers from both sides who made nightly visits to discuss philosophy, the progress of the war, and favorite menus with the other group. About the middle of March the camp received several hundred more American



OFLAG XIII B AND ENVIRONS

SCALE 1" = 1000 YDS

LEGEND

ROAD -

RR +

CHURCH ... †

AUTOBAM. ... ▬

ground arms officers who had been evacuated from their camp in Poland, when it was in danger of being overrun by the Russian Army.

Except for two daily roll calls, the Germans left the internal affairs of each compound pretty much alone. The arrival of the group from Poland brought a new Senior American Officer, Colonel Paul Goode, who, complete with staff, ran the American camp much the same way any large military organization is run. There were rigid inspections on Saturday, church services on Sunday, and instructional lectures scheduled during the week to fill up the time. Twice a day each room of forty men sent their representatives to the central kitchen where they picked up a huge pot of watery, generally foul-smelling, ill-tasting, inedible soup. This pot usually contained carrot, beet, or turnip flavored water, although frequently the diet was varied by the appearance of dehydrated turnips, dubbed "Yellow Peril", or weeviled greens, nicknamed "Green Hornet." Twice a week the single daily soup had meat and potatoes which had been hoarded the entire week to make two fair meals. Soup, plus a piece of black bread about the size of a match box, some oleomargarine and a spoonful of sugar, and parts of American Red Cross parcels, made up the rations. Most men shared the top of a double decker bunk with a buddy to increase the number of flimsy flannel blankets and insufficient warmth. Almost everyone stayed in bed all the time to conserve energy and keep warm. Clothing was scraped off only once during this period, and that was to take a tepid shower. Everyone had to crawl from bed some four or five times a night, stagger through blacked out rooms, and trudge to the latrine to relieve his kidneys. The winter dragged along. The men cursed the snow. They swore at

the cold. Nerves grew taut and tempers short. Food was stolen and each man eyed his neighbor. French lessons, German lessons, plans for improvement, interest in everything except food was forgotten as the men gazed in apathy at the ceilings of their rooms.

But Spring came early to Germany in 1945. The warm sun extracted less energy from our bodies than did the cold, barely heated barracks, and brought life to the unshaven men, the budding trees, and the voracious lice in the bedding. Air raids increased in frequency, and with each screaming siren warning, lice-picking parties scuttled to their quarters under penalty of being shot for loitering out of doors and "signalling to the planes." The sound of heavy cannonading from the West seemed to increase in intensity almost daily. Each barracks room had a map of one kind or another upon which the most artistically qualified inmate drew the "front." From underground rumors reported by the Serb enlisted men who worked in the Hammelburg railroad yards, and from German communiques received from a guard in exchange for Red Cross cigarettes, we realized that the Allied Armies were not too far distant. How close they were on 27 March we could not have guessed, until the German statement that we would not be moved from camp was changed, and we were ordered to move out -- lock, stock, and barrel -- by foot, the next day.

In the confusion of initial capture, many prisoners, with still full stomachs and a knowledge of the terrain and front lines, escaped almost without trying. When the stomach empties, there is no food to carry, the situation is obscure, the country is strange, and the cold winter has cut down the energy, however, that is a different matter.

We were leaving Hammelburg with its double strand barbed wire fences and its guards who twice fired into our midst and cold bloodedly killed two men. This was it, we thought. The weather was warming up, the column would be long, and the guards insufficient. Food could be stolen or bartered in exchange for hoarded Red Cross soap and cigarettes, and every step taken in the direction away from the front would be indelibly memorized until the time came to quietly slip away from the column and retrace our steps.

Such was the situation at Hammelburg on 27 March 1945 when the Catholic officers trudging to a pre-Easter Mass watched a brown German plane, for no apparent reason, drop a bomb on the seemingly peaceful, budding German countryside.

The immediate results were electrifying. The cloud of ugly, grey dust raised by the detonation of the bomb had not even begun to settle to the earth when an American P47 Thunderbolt screamed down from the blue skies and spit tracers upon the JU88. The German side-slipped and reached for the ground as the P47 overshot its mark. A second run by the American, and the German scuttling for home belched flame and smoke and crashed in a shower of sparks. A column of oily black smoke rose swiftly skyward to mark the pyre of the German crew, while the pilot of the Thunderbolt circled once to confirm his kill, and then headed towards the West from whence he had come.

Even as we stared at German guards racing on the double to reinforce the towers which overlooked the camp, a column of German vehicles, wagons, and men could be seen winding along the Western rim of our saucer, headed West. As they disappeared into the trees, we turned our thoughts and conversation to the plane, the guards, and the morrow's hike out of camp. But not for long,

because within minutes the column which had gone West was now streaming, for some unknown reason, in the other direction. Drivers lashed their teams to greater speed. Vehicles cut around one another. The soldiers had been joined by gear-laden civilians who scurried along with bulging blanket packs. This column raced towards Hammelburg, and at its van, we could discern the familiar rattle of machine guns interspersed with cannon firing.

By now, events and rumors vied for first place. It was the Americans. No, it was the Russians. No, not that either, the Germans were revolting. The long line of vehicles, wagons, and people disappeared over the hill in their rush to Hammelburg and the safety of its buildings. The towers overwatching the camp were double-manned, and their machine guns were double-checked. Excited German officers rushed from one office to the other, trying to find out the situation upon which to base the plan for the accomplishment of their mission: to get the American officers to the Southern mountains. Finally, the Senior American Officer was informed by the German general in charge that it was the Americans, that the Germans could not get the prisoners on the road immediately, and the the General was leaving. In order to prevent bloodshed among the unarmed prisoners, the general was going to order his troops to put up token resistance, and then retire. And, incidentally, would the Senior American Officer look out for the general's family, over there in the quarters on the hill?

When the news of this talk permeated to the ears of the Americans in the compound, there was so much boisterous exuberance that they were ordered to their quarters until the situation cleared and there was no danger. White flags

appeared at most windows, and from some hidden source an American flag came to grace the top story of the administration-kitchen building, headquarters of the Senior American Officer.

To get some idea of the time which had elapsed since the first appearance of the German bomber and what was now transpiring, it is only necessary to recall that when the bomb was dropped from the JU88 the camp was on its way to Mass. Now the stacato bursts of machine gun fire were interrupted by the whining scream of a shell as it smashed outside of the chapel and forced the chaplain and his charges to drop to the floor for cover. Mass was over, and the officers scurrying for their rooms caught a glimpse of the American force poking its head over the hill which separated the camp from the town of Hammelburg.

This force was met with immediate machine gun fire from the guard towers and German troops quartered on the hill in back of the enclosure. Tracers burned up the streets between the barracks, and in a matter of minutes, the camp water tower was gushing frothy water, and a cloud of smoke was drifting upward from the Serb compound, where their wooden theater building flamed briskly. Rallying after their initial set-back, the American force poured fire from hull down positions, covering some tanks as they dashed down from the hill across the bodies of their dead infantry comrades, and tore through the wire fence into the closer Serb compound.

The Senior American Officer, relying upon the word of the German general in regard to token resistance and surrender of the camp to the Americans, dispatched his executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel John K. Waters, to contact

the tanks' commander. With an American flag flapping, a small party set out from the administration building, only to be fired upon by a German sniper. Colonel Waters was wounded, but the commander was contacted, and the small column of tanks made its way to the headquarters of the Senior American Officer.

By this time all firing had ceased, and milling prisoners surrounded and clung to the tanks like glue. While the two commanders conferred, each room dispatched a liaison officer to the American headquarters. The sun, which had been dropping fast, now fell behind the hill to the Southwest, and blackout shades were put up on all windows. Administrative details concerning the evening soup were completed, and the usual water filled the bowls. It was at this time that the liaison officers returned to all the rooms and told their fellow officers to prepare to move out, on foot, within fifteen minutes. The clock showed 1830.

But this information was not complete. The liaison officers also said that the task force consisted of only two hundred men, that it had fought its way through the German lines from Aschaffenberg, and that the road back was sixty miles long.

How dared this small band of intrepid Americans appear at the camp without warning, and liberate almost fifteen hundred American officers, and twice as many Serbs, scheduled to leave the next morning for the mountain fastnesses of South Germany, to what is now familiarly called "The Redoubt?" What was its purpose? Who commanded it? What was its composition? How had it fought its way through the front lines and sixty miles of Germany to deprive Hitler of what might have been valuable hostages?

Third Army Headquarters had directed the 4th Armored Division to send a small tank force to Hammelburg, Germany, to liberate some four hundred American officers held prisoner in a stockade close to the town. After consideration of the distance involved and probable enemy resistance, the 4th Armored Division requested that it be allowed to send a combat command. When this was not granted, it was decided to request permission to send a task force of tanks and armored infantry, with supporting weapons, from Combat Command B. Upon approval of this plan, Task Force Baum came into existence. Its life span was to run from 1700 hours 26 March 1945 for a period of less than forty-eight hours. Captain (later Major) Abraham J. Baum, S-2 of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion, commanded. It contained 293 officers and enlisted men and 53 vehicles, broken down as follows: six officers and 209 enlisted men in Company A, the Assault Gun Platoon, and a patrol from the Reconnaissance Platoon of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion, and four officers and 73 enlisted men in Company C, and a platoon of Company D, of the 37th Tank Battalion. The vehicles consisted of 27 half-tracks, 10 medium tanks, six light tanks, three 105mm assault guns, six one-quarter ton trucks, and one weasel. Major Alexander C. Stiller, General Patton's aide-de-camp from Third Army Headquarters, accompanied the force.

Its mission was simply stated: get to Hammelburg and liberate the four hundred Americans held prisoner there. Bring along enough vehicles to load them up and carry them back. The plan was almost that simple: have part of Combat Command B attack Schweinheim from their bridgehead across the Main River, get the task force through, and then have it go like hell. And it did.

TASK FORCE BAUM

11 Officers

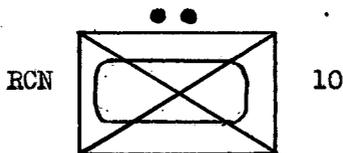
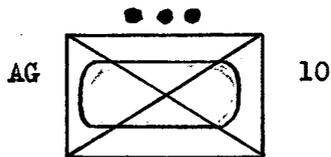
282 Enlisted Men

53 Vehicles

10th Armored Infantry Battalion

7 Officers

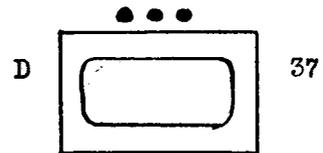
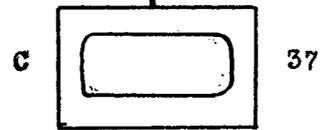
209 Enlisted Men



37th Tank Battalion

4 Officers

73 Enlisted Men

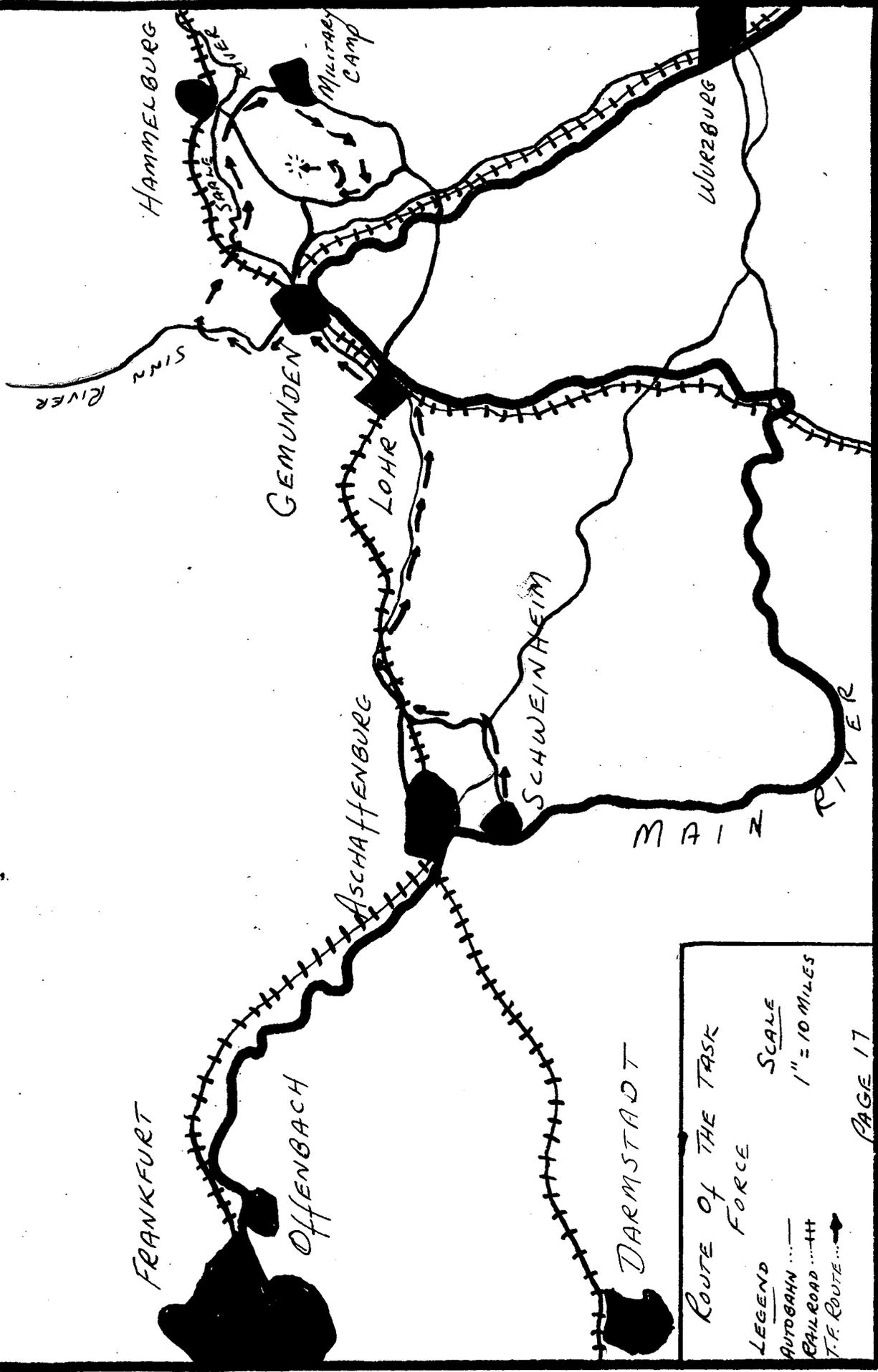


- 10 Medium Tanks
- 6 Light Tanks
- 3 105mm Assault Guns
- 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ ton Trucks
- 1 Weasel

At 2100 hours 26 March, Company B 37th Tank Battalion and Company B 10th Armored Infantry Battalion attacked Schweinheim, as the three Armored Field Artillery Battalions, the 22d, 66th, and 94th, of the 4th Armored Division poured their shells upon its German defenders. Resistance was stiff, as small arms tracers and sparks from bursting bazookas lighted the shelled rubble. But resistance was futile, too, because Task Force Baum slipped its 53 vehicles through by 2230, and the race was on. The supporting force dropped back into its bridgehead, with the loss of one tank, and soon the only link between the force and the American lines was a slim, tenuous radio channel.

As the force pushed through the night, its commander radioed his locations. From Schweinheim he stretched North to skirt still strongly defended Aschaffenberg. Then he sped East on the main road to Lohr, which is located on the East bank of the Main River where it curves in a giant "S" between Aschaffenberg and Wurzburg. At Lohr the first medium tank was lost to bazooka fire, despite the fact that the column had been fired upon by an almost continuous string of bazookas since it started. Continuing on its course through woods, down back roads, and along the valley of the Saale River, they raced towards Gemunden, and as the sun came up, it showed railroad trains ready to be picked up by the hungry tanks. Between Lohr and Gemunden, it is estimated that as many as twelve trains, consisting of twenty cars apiece, were destroyed.

By this time it was broad daylight, and the German territory was in total alarm. Road blocks were being thrown up, control points had been strengthened, and units were alerted, as the Germans feared that the Third Army was making its break-through. When Task Force Baum reached Gemunden, they wished they were



ROUTE OF THE TASK FORCE

LEGEND
 AUTOBAYN
 RAILROAD
 T.F. ROUTE
 SCALE
 1" = 10 MILES

the Third Army, because the Germans knocked out three medium tanks and blew the bridge over the Saale, even as the Americans battled upon it. A prisoner, of which the force took some 200, informed them that two German divisions were in the area.

When it turned out that one of these divisions was a panzer division, Captain Baum headed his column North along the West bank of the Saale, determined to find a bridge and head East towards Hammelburg again. A bridge that was still intact was found at Grafendorf, and, after crossing, the force sped down the Saale valley to Weikersgruben, capturing a German general and staff and liberating 700 Russians on the way. About 1400 they hit German tanks at Ober, a mile and a half from Hammelburg. The contest ended in a draw with neither side losing any tanks, but as the Germans withdrew, the advancing Americans ran into more resistance when they fought approximately two companies of infantry. The sun was going down fast when the force caught its first glimpse of its destination, but not all of its men were to live to set foot in the camp. The German guards opened fire from their watch tower machine guns and it was only after a concerted attack that they were silenced. Then some of the tanks rumbled past their dead comrades and crashed through the wire fences, to be surrounded by a whirling, ecstatic mob.

Now the force had joined with the ones it had come to liberate.

But the forces which came together were not compatible, and this fact had much to do with the final outcome. Task Force Baum consisted of a hastily amalgamated group of individuals who, without previous rest, had been yanked from their battalions and were now at the destination toward which they had

fought for almost twenty-four hours. Their journey had not been without interruption, because only about half of the force had reached their goal, leaving the other half smoking, burning, or demolished along the route. The ones who had arrived were fatigued and confused, held together only by the presence of the others in the group and the nervousness which comes from impending action. Ammunition and gasoline supplies were low, and the long return route was still ahead. The prisoners, on the other hand, were thrown straight from the ennui and uselessness of prison life into a period of excitement. The smell of powder and the sight of freshly spilled blood contributed a great deal to their actions. Another factor contributing to the state of confusion was the lack of organization among the prisoners. Never organized into more than a central administrative headquarters with makeshift battalions and "rooms", the prisoners, as a large group of officers will do, questioned and grumbled, and adopted an attitude of: "Why don't we do it my way, which is better?"

It was this group which was ordered by the Senior American Officer to form outside of their barracks, as they had for the twice daily German formations, and prepare to leave the camp. The initial formation was orderly, and the men lined up with their packs, previously prepared for the German march which was supposed to have begun the next day. The task force vehicles, meanwhile, had already left the camp and were parked in column among the trees atop the hill which separated the camp from the town of Hammelburg. The prisoners filed out in column of fives, through the Serb enclosure and up the hill to the tanks. The Serbs had been ordered by their commander to remain in camp, but some of them sneaked along with their American friends.

By this time it was almost dark. The first part of the column broke ranks as it reached the tanks, and the prisoners threw themselves in and around the vehicles, until every cubic foot of the vehicles was filled, and every handhold was tightly clutched. K rations and cigarettes were greedily snatched from those men in the task force who offered them.

This weird scene was lit by a huge pile of burning straw which the Germans had for their horses, and under which ammunition had been stored, to now explode and add to the flickering shadows. After the vehicles were loaded to overflowing, the remainder of the prisoners continued marching towards the West. Heavy blanket rolls and tin can stoves thudded to the ground as their owners divested themselves of all excess weight in preparation for a long, grueling march.

But like the pile of straw which had caught fire so quickly and now as abruptly burned out, the column which had set out so bravely, now slowed and came to a halt. The liberated prisoners stood first upon one foot and then the other, as the minutes ticked by, until finally, one by one, they sat upon the ground. Each mind held the same question: "Why had the column stopped when it had just barely started?"

The ghost-like figures of some prisoners from the head of the column appeared in the darkness, repeating the same message every hundred yards. In gist, the message explained that the small column of vehicles could not convoy the long marching column, that the column would have to fight its way back, and that as many men as could be placed on the vehicles were already there. Therefore, the prisoners had to make one of several choices: they could march

back to camp, they could try to squeeze on one of the vehicles, or they could break up into small groups and attempt to make the long journey back to the lines on foot.

With the slowness of a python, the massive column of stunned prisoners writhed and disgorged its contents in every direction. The lack of food, weapons, maps, and compasses prompted most of the men to return to the place about which they knew: the stockade. Some few moved to join the vehicles in an effort to find a seat or a place to hang on the outside. Others wandered aimlessly, unable to make up their minds, or started the long trek for the West and freedom.

Not long after this announcement had been made, the column disappeared and the task force turned over its motors for the second half of its trip. The reconnaissance leader had found a trail which led down the hill, through the saucer to the West of the enclosure, and in the direction the commander planned to take. The newly liberated prisoners with the vehicles looked over their left shoulders at the barely discernible outline of the camp as the column ground on its way. In less than a mile, the trail became a quagmire, and ended at the bank of a bridge-less stream. After jockeying for some time, the vehicles unloaded their human cargo, and inched their way cross country up an incline, on the top of which was a good road leading in the direction they wanted to go. The panting, dismounted prisoners caught up with the vehicles and mounted on the run, as the column moved off with a rush. Several miles of dark, quiet German countryside passed by.

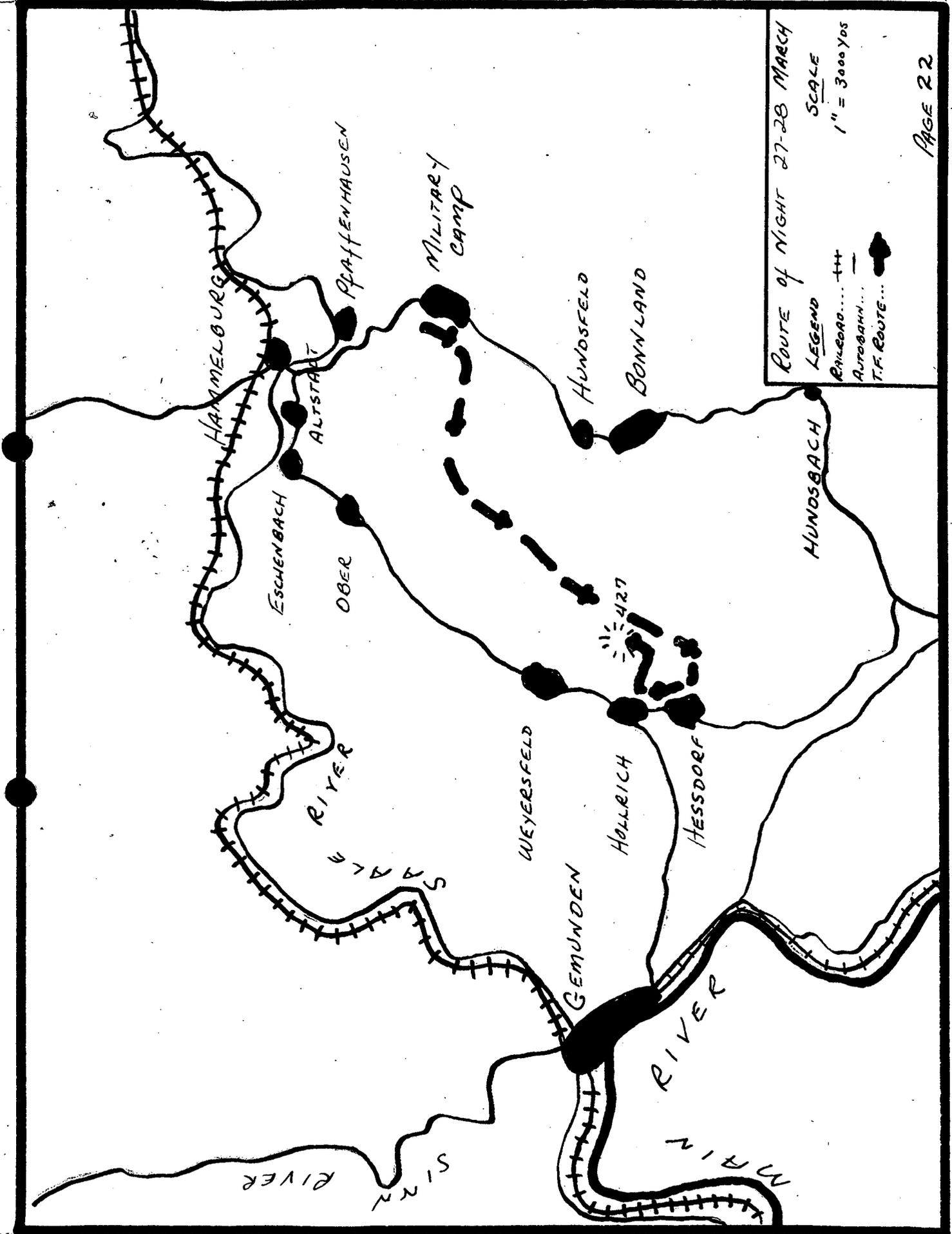
Abruptly, the road turned Southward. The commander desired to go West and North to meet up with an armored column which, according to previous information

would be headed in that direction from Aschaffenberg, and so he called the column to a halt. A study of the map revealed that there was a road, of sorts, which might be used to get down from the West side of the ridge upon which they were presently located, to a good road in the valley below. The good road led in the direction they desired to travel. The column creaked and slid down this road and was soon across Giess Creek and in the small town of Hessdorf. The burghers of Hessdorf hung white sheets from their windows, and looked fearfully upon the unshaven, haggard Americans, and the slave-laborers whom they had just liberated.

At Hessdorf, the column caught sight and sound of enemy troops, and turned Southwest looking for a route through the town. There was no route -- only a dead end street. With much swearing, backing, and tugging, the vehicles were brought around, and the force continued on its way, this time headed North.

The rear end of the column had just cleared Hessdorf when the enemy force, which had been seen not too long ago, emerged into a potent anti-tank road block. The second and third tanks of the column were hit and disabled, in a burning flash of powder, molten metal, and screams. The column skidded to a halt, and tracers skimmed through the skies like drunken fire flies. Men streamed from the halted vehicles and ran, bent double, up the ridge from which the column had come not more than a half hour before. The task force commander, estimating the force to be too large to cope with, ordered his vehicles to break contact and assemble on the ridge towards which so many of the dismounted ex-prisoners were headed.

This bloody little skirmish at Hellrich cost the force three medium tanks



ROUTE of NIGHT 27-28 MARCH

SCALE

1" = 3000 YDS

LEGEND

RAILROAD... -x-x-x-

AUTOBAHN... -x-x-x-

T.F. ROUTE... - - -

and the lives of an undisclosed number of men. Also important was the loss of gasoline, ammunition, precious time, surprise, and disclosed location. The column licked its wounds and headed back towards the Hammelburg camp, on the same route it had just traveled. Its destination was a hill, whose elevation was 427 feet, located about half the distance to camp along the road presently used.

Upon arrival at Hill 427, the Senior American Officer of the prisoners ordered all of his men to form a column and march with him back to camp. The wounded tankers and prisoners were placed inside a building located on the hill. The task force was going to regroup, drain the gasoline from the half-tracks to put in the remaining tanks, and make another attempt to reach the front lines.

The column of prisoners, minus a few officers who elected to remain with the task force, marched away in the lightening darkness, headed for Hammelburg. The force was regrouped, and resupplied. Fuel would carry them forty miles, and the gasless half-tracks which had furnished this gasoline from their own tanks were destroyed. What had begun as a force of 293 men and 53 vehicles, now consisted of three medium tanks, three light tanks, a few half-tracks to be used for bridging purposes over small stream, and about 110 men. Captain Baum brought his men together for an orientation period, and upon its conclusion mounted his vehicle, prepared to lead the force back. The tanks and remaining half-tracks were taking their positions in the column, when all hell broke loose.

As Captain Baum later said: "It was the first time that I ever saw the

Germans make a coordinated attack." ¹

Self-propelled guns barked from the South, two companies of infantry supported by a platoon of self-propelled guns advanced upon Hill 427 from the Southwest, and a platoon of Tiger tanks poured fire from the Northeast. The only remaining direction, Northwest, showed a column of tanks advancing on their position from the town of Weikersgruben. Hit by surprise as they were preparing to move out in column, the Americans had not the time to make more than hasty defensive measures. The German infantry was separated from its tanks by the accurate fire from tank guns and the .50 caliber anti-aircraft machine guns mounted on turrets. Hard hit as the Germans were, they pressed the attack, and within a half hour all the American vehicles were knocked out or disabled. The remaining personnel were told to break up into groups of four and make their way back on foot. As a few disappeared into the woods, the Germans advanced into the American position and killed or captured all of the force which remained.

As these newly captured prisoners were marched to the Hammelburg stockade, the Germans hunted with dogs, looking for the men who had escaped in the woods. Some of these were hunted down, and those liberated from Hammelburg who had weapons in their possession were shot. The ones who were not found lay in the woods, and listened to the crackling of the blazing tanks and half-tracks, the exploding of cannon shells, the shouting of the Germans, and the

¹Captain Kenneth A. Koyen, The Fourth Armored Division, chapt : "Task Force Baum" is the source for this quotation and much of the information contained herein.

barking of the dogs.

That was the finish of Task Force Baum. Of the 293 who started from Schweinheim, nine were killed and 16 were declared missing. Almost all of the remaining 236 were prisoners of war at one time or another. But Combat Command B of the 4th Armored Division was not to hear of this until two weeks later. In the meantime, the German press screamed in triumph that they had stopped and annihilated the advance force of the Third Army. The men in the division listened and wondered about the fate of their fellows for a short time only, because on the 29th of March they crossed the Main River at Hanau, bypassing still untaken Aschaffenberg, and began the mopping-up phase of the war as they slashed across Germany, to the North of Hammelburg.²

Task Force Baum was finished, but the Hammelburg stockade was not. When the Germans realized that they had to contend with only a small force, they re-entered the camp and took over again. Those prisoners who had returned to the compound the first night were rounded up in the morning and, on schedule, marched South to Nurnberg. Here, as they ate lunch near the railroad marshalling yard, they watched American bombers drop their loads on ammunition trains standing close by. Some of the bombs fell wide of their target, and landed on the column, killing and wounding approximately thirty prisoners and guards. The second group, those who returned to camp with the Senior American Officer, arrived too late for the march, and were placed on a train which took them to Nurnberg. From there they marched to a large prisoner of war area at

²After Action Reports, 4th Armored Division, period 25-30 March 1945.

Moosburg, near Munich. Another group, rounded up in the woods prior to 2 April, was put on a train, which after being strafed all day by American planes, finally arrived in Nurnberg during a night air raid. At Nurnberg they joined with the group which had marched from Hammelburg, and together they walked to Haag, on the Isar River, near Munich, where they were finally liberated by the 86th Infantry Division. The last group consisted of the Serbs, slave-laborers, and non-commissioned officers who were not considered valuable enough hostages to waste the few available guards, and the wounded, including Colonel Waters, the Camp executive officer, and Captain Baum, who was wounded as he tried to reach the front lines by foot. These men were liberated on 6 April by elements of the 16th Armored Division.

What had been accomplished by Task Force Baum?

They had fought their way through sixty miles of enemy territory. They had liberated the prisoners they were sent to free. They showed higher headquarters that behind the German front lines, armor could reach its happy hunting ground: the unprotected enemy rear. They disclosed the location of two German divisions and an important bombing target, Gemunden. They forced the Germans to employ reserves which they could ill afford to use. They made a feint which perhaps so disrupted the German plans, that it made it possible for the 4th Armored Division to advance very rapidly in the area to the North of Hammelburg. They loosed a force of 1500 potential marauders to raise havoc in the enemy rear. And lastly, they terrorized the German populace by their presence and the thought that if this force could strike into Germany, then other and larger groups could do the same thing. Perhaps the Germans who came

in contact with the smashing advance of Task Force Baum realized that their once proud armies were now only shells, and that further resistance was futile. In any event, it was possible for the 4th Armored Division to pass through the North against only scattered opposition, and the units which followed Task Force Baum to meet only a disorganized enemy.

Sitting back in the role of a "Monday Morning Quarterback", it is always easy to conjecture on what might have been. Examining the story of Task Force Baum should throw some light on changes which might have been made, to offer those officers who may find themselves planning and leading such units in the future.

In the first place, the force was too small to be the only raiding party across the lines. Its few vehicles and men could smash through, but they could not fight or hold off any determined attack. Second, the number of men held at Hammelburg was not in accordance with the intelligence report of only 400. Extra half-tracks had been brought to return these men, but the number of these vehicles was too small for 1500 men. Third, maps, compasses, food, and weapons were not included in the supplies brought along. Any one of these things would have greatly assisted anyone attempting to make his way back to the lines on foot. Fourth, the prisoners were not sufficiently indoctrinated into the seriousness of the situation, nor were they led in any but a loose manner. In their selfishness to get home unscathed, most gave thought only to themselves, offering little or no assistance, and hindering the men in the force who were attempting to accomplish their mission. Fifth, the officers and men in the task force were tired and not sure of final success. The officers made confused

decisions, and failed to make proper reconnaissance. The men were not informed, they lost cohesion in the mass of liberated prisoners, and they seemed to catch some of the latter's spirit of defeatism. Lastly, the force did not have air cover to reconnoiter possible routes, report the presence of the enemy, and relay messages to higher headquarters.

In the wars of the future, we have been told that the massing of huge forces makes them too profitable to the effects of mass destruction weapons. Emphasis will be placed on small, self-contained forces. Perhaps some of these forces, like Task Force Baum, will perform similar missions: feinting, forcing the enemy to utilize his reserves, disclosing the location of enemy troops, and loosing prisoners of war to prey upon the fears of the civil populace. Many such raiding parties deep in the enemy's territory, supported by air, raising havoc with his communications and supply, would bring a war to a faster conclusion.

If the individuals who will command tomorrow will remember the lessons taught in its forty-eight hours of existence, the 293 men of Task Force Baum will not have struggled in vain.

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