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OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION 14TH INFANTRY,
(71ST DIVISION) IN A RIVER CROSSING NEAR RE-
GENSBURG, GERMANY 26-27 APRIL 1945.
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a company commander)

Type of operation described: RIVER CROSSING

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INTRODUCTION

My monograph covers a small unit action of the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment in a river crossing on the Danube River on the 25th, 26th, and 27th of April, 1945, during the Central German Campaign.

To bring the reader abreast with the situation it will be necessary to give him the picture of the general situation at this time.

Germany was a defeated country; her replacement system had broken down, communications had been disrupted and supplies were becoming meager for the troops that were still left in the field. It was expected that makeshift units such as converted Luftwaffe and Volkstrum troops would be used in defense of what was left of Germany. (1)

The main actions of the Central German Campaign had taken place in a period of seven days in which the XX Corps drove 150 miles into the "Heartland" of Germany to capture 47,000 prisoners and to destroy or capture great quantities of enemy vehicles, supplies, and guns. (2)

By the 15th of April, 1945, the situation had developed into a complete rout for the German forces. Only scattered and weak resistance was being given to the power laden thrusts of the Third Army, spearheaded by the XXth "Ghost Corps." (3)

(1) A-1, p. 1; (2) A-1, p. 24; (3) A-1, p. 1.

On the 15th of April, 1945, Twelfth Army Group directed Third U. S. Army to attack Southeast, advancing along the route, Regensburg-Linz and to contact forces of the U. S. S. R. who, at this time, had reduced Vienna and were attacking to the northwest from this city. (4)

no map
The operation given to the XXth Corps would require it to side slip to the right of the Twelfth Corps. The Twelfth Corps would change its direction to the southeast but would remain in position. This action would place the III Corps and the XX Corps on line with each other, with the III Corps on the right. (5)

General Walton H. Walker, Commander of the XXth Corps decided then to place the 80th Division in reserve, and to attack initially with the 65th and 71st Divisions on line. The 13th Armored Division had moved south from North Central Germany, a distance of 250 miles, to join the Corps and was not in a good vehicular state of maintenance and repair. (6)

no map
The 3d Cavalry Group, in order to give the 13th Armored Division time to perform badly needed maintenance, was used in a screening role, reconnoitering to the southeast in the corps' zone, to seize and hold any bridges remaining over the Danube River. However, the Cavalry would develop enemy resistance that appeared to be organized and the Infantry advancing to its rear would dispose of the enemy. The 3d Cavalry Group was augmented with Engineers, Tank Destroyers, and a Ranger Battalion, thus giving it a great deal of striking power. This was essential, due to its being assigned the role of an Armored Division. (7)

(4) A-2, p. 1; (5) A-2, p. 1; (6) A-2, p. 1; (7) A-2, p. 4.

This unit, consisting of the 3d Cavalry Group plus was passed through the 71st and 65th Divisions on the 22d of April, moving in several different columns. However, due to the inclement weather, the movement at first was slightly slowed. By noon of the same day the unit had cleared the Infantry Division's lines and against scattered opposition, had moved towards the Danube River. (8)

The 71st and 65th Infantry Division followed the Cavalry screen on toward the southeast, encountering only minor resistance. The 71st Division left one Combat team in the vicinity of Amberg where considerable "sniper" resistance was encountered, and it was found to be necessary for troops to maintain law and order. (9)

This Combat team was composed of the 14th Infantry Regiment, Company C of the 635th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Company B of the 761st Tank Battalion, Company A of the 81st Chemical Mortars Battalion, 608th Light Field Artillery Battalion, Company B of the 271st Engineer Battalion, one platoon of light tanks from the 761st Tank Battalion and one Medical Company from the 371st Medical Battalion. (10)

The mission given the 14th Combat team was soon completed and the organizations comprising it had the opportunity to rest their personnel, check equipment, and to prepare to push on. (11)

Early the morning of the 24th of April, orders were received to move to Regenstauf, a distance of 45 kilometers southeast of Amberg, and to seize crossings over the Regen

(8) A-2, p. 4; (9) Personal knowledge; (10) A-3, p. 79;
(11) Personal knowledge.

River. (12)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Many References

The 14th Combat team moved by motor from Amberg, leading elements crossing the I.P. at 0800 hours. (13) The order of march for the Infantry elements were: I and R platoon plus a platoon of light tanks acting as the leading elements of the advanced guard, G Company mounted on a company of medium tanks in support, and F, E, and H Companies mounted on two and one half ton trucks in reserve. The rest of the regiment followed in the order, 3d, 1st Battalions, and separate Companies. (14)

The 14th Combat team moved rapidly to the southeast through Burglengenfeld where a bridgehead had been seized by the third squadron of the 3d Cavalry Group and was being held by the 2d Battalion of the 66th Infantry. (15) This movement continued on toward Regenstauf with only minor resistance which was easily overcome by elements of the advance guard. (16)

The rapid advance of the combat team ground to a sudden halt in the outskirts of North Regenstauf where the point of the advance guard was trapped by a German ambush. (17) The Company Commander of G Company immediately dismounted his personnel from the tanks deployed on both sides of the road and advanced into the outskirts of the town where he was able to relieve the German pressure that had trapped the point of the advanced guard. (18)

Colonel Carl E. Lundquist, Commander of the Combat team

(12) A-2, p. 5; (13) Personal knowledge; (14) Personal knowledge; (15) A-2, p. 4 and 5; (16) Personal knowledge; (17) (18) Personal knowledge.

was with the "point" at the time of its ambush. His personal example of heroism displayed during this action was an inspiration to the entire unit. When ambushed, Col. Lundquist's driver was wounded, thus immobilizing his jeep. Lundquist rushed to another vehicle where the 50 caliber machine gunner had been killed, took over the weapon and covered the withdrawal of the I and R platoon. (19)

Company G, under command of Capt. William B. Pierce, after relieving the I and R platoon, proceeded to destroy all enemy resistance on the northeast bank of the Regen River. It was found that the center span of the bridge was only partially destroyed, so several attempts were made by G Company to take it by frontal assault, using tank, small arms and mortar fire for support. After two Lieutenants were wounded (Lts. Bernstein and C. D. Leaphart), and heavy casualties were sustained in their platoons it was decided to make a coordinated attack using engineer assault boats. (20)

The 2d Battalion of the 14th Infantry, heading the advanced guard of the Regimental Combat team, was designated as the unit to make the crossing. (21)

Lt. Col. Phillip Brant, Commander of the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, called his Company Commanders together and issued the following operations instructions. "'Easy' Company on the right, 'Fox' Company on the left, will cross Regen River simultaneously, 500 yards above the present bridge sight at 1230 hours. Upon crossing the river 'Easy'

(19) Statement of Lt. Nathaniel Freeman, I and R Platoon Leader; (20) Statements of Capt. W. B. Pierce and Col. C. E. Lundquist; (21) Statement of Col. C. E. Lundquist, R.C.T. Commander.

Company will attack the town from the left flank and clear it of all enemy resistance. 'Fox' Company will cross the river and attack high ground to the rear of the town and cut the Regenstauf-Regensburg road. 'George' Company will attack the town with fire from present positions. 'How' Company mortars will support the attack of 'Easy' and 'Fox' Companies from present positions. First platoon heavy machine guns will be attached to 'Easy' Company and 2d Platoon to 'Fox' Company. 81mm mortar forward observers will accompany both 'Fox' and 'Easy' Companies. Anti-tank platoon will select positions to fire on any possible observation post locations or automatic weapon emplacements thus rendering support to the attack. The Engineer Company will furnish eight boats to 'Fox' Company, ten to 'Easy' Company. Engineer Company Commander and Rifle Company Commander will coordinate in selection of launching sites and boat assembly areas. 608th Field Artillery, Cannon Company and Chemical Mortar Platoon will support the attack, priority of fires to 'Easy' Company. Smoke and 'H.E.' will be placed on high ground to the rear of the town, commencing H-10 and lasting until H hour. Preparation will then shift to town and continue until H plus 5. Smoke White phosphorus will be used. Chemical and artillery forward observers will be with 'Fox' and 'Easy' Companies." (22)

"Companies will lay wire starting on the south bank of the river. Battalion C.P. will be located in North Regenstauf, Battalion O.P. 200 yards to the rear of 'Easy' Com-

(22) Personal knowledge.

pany. Radio operation will be normal, however, time of attack or place will not be mentioned at any time in code or clear." (23)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

It is necessary at this time to give the reader a brief orientation as to the terrain located in this area. The Regen River valley to the northwest is extremely flat farming country which has little cover and concealment available while to the southeast of the river we find high bluffs that are heavily wooded. These bluffs rise immediately to a height of two hundred feet from the southeast bank of the river. The river flows at a speed of four or five miles per hour in this area and is not fordable. The Regen River empties into the Danube fifteen kilometers below Regenstauf. Regensburg is located at this river junction. The Regen River is typical of the water systems in Europe in that it is a controlled stream with levies that hold it within check the year round. In this area its width is approximately 40 meters. (24)

Upon completion of the operations instructions the Company Commanders and special unit Commanders made their reconnaissances. "Easy" Company was able to find sufficient cover for an assembly area in the north edge of North Regenstauf. This area afforded the company some cover in the basements of houses located near the river bank. Trucks carrying engineer assault boats were free from small arms fire but were subject to observation from the high ground behind Regenstauf. Harrassing indirect fires were placed in this

(23) Statement of Lt. Col. Phillip Brant; (24) Personal knowledge.

area at intervals by the enemy. Fortunately, casualties were light in "Easy" Company, having only two men ^{were} wounded.

(25)

"Fox" Company Commander was less fortunate in finding a suitable assembly area for the crossing. The only area available was a group of farm buildings located adjacent to the proposed launching site that had been selected. This location was at Wornhof and the launching site was on the river bank just to the east. To reach the assembly area it was necessary for the company to move across 700 yards of open country with no cover or concealment available. The Company Commander, realizing the situation, moved his personnel across this area by squads and as rapidly as the men could travel. This seemed to be the opportunity that the Germans had been waiting for. From the high ground behind Regensauf a shower of 88 artillery fire and 81mm mortar fire dropped on "Fox" Company, knocking out 13 men. At the same time the engineer boat platoon was hit causing twenty casualties and destroying several assault boats. However, "Fox" Company was able to push off at H hour and accomplish its mission by 1530 hours. Only minor enemy resistance was encountered by "Fox" Company after crossing the river. Twenty Germans were captured, three killed, and several wounded. (26)

"Easy" Company was more fortunate in its portion of the operation. Three men were wounded by small arms fire while crossing the river. The enemy lost two killed and approximately fifteen captured. The enemy prisoners were found to be

(25) Statement of Capt. Harry Goldman; (26) Personal knowledge.

Wehrmacht troops who were under the command of an SS non-commissioned officer. This Commander had been wounded and had committed suicide rather than to surrender. His mission had been to delay the American forces until the artillery and infantry units could complete their withdrawal toward Regensburg. (27)

"George" Company placed fire on Regenstauf until it was masked by the advancing elements of "Easy" Company. "George" Company followed "Easy" into Regenstauf by crossing on the partially destroyed bridge. (28)

After the prisoners had been questioned by the S-2 interrogation team it was learned that we had been held up by a battery of 88mm guns, a platoon of mortars, and approximately 150 Wehrmacht troops officered by SS troops. (29) We also learned that the enemy had a limited supply of artillery and mortar ammunition. (30) This was fortunate for the combat team because if the 88mm battery had had sufficient ammunition it could have held off the entire combat team for a much longer period of time and inflicted much heavier casualties. (31)

The damaged bridge span was repaired by 2315 hours and the rest of the combat team moved into Regenstauf. (32) Local security was taken over by the 3d Battalion of the 14th Infantry and the unit bivouaced for the night. (33)

Early on the morning of the 25th April, 1945 the mission of crossing the Danube River and assisting the 65th Division in the capture of Regensburg was received by 71st Division

(27) Statement of Capt. Harry Goldman; (28) Statement of Capt. W. B. Pierce; (29) (30) Personal knowledge; (31) Personal knowledge; (32) A-2, p. 5; (33) Personal knowledge.

Headquarters from XXth Corps. (34) Actually this operation was but a continuation of our attack on Regenstauf. The approaches were cleared for the 14th Infantry to move on up to the Danube River which was just 15 kilometers away from Regenstauf. However, this movement to the Danube would require the screening of the area in our zone all the way to the river. (35)

The Combat team was broken up at this point and the 14th Infantry Regiment was assigned the mission of screening the woods between Regenstauf and Regensburg. The right boundary of the regiment was the Regen River and the left was an irregular line extending from just north of Regenstauf to the west edge of Sulzbach on the Danube. The 5th Infantry regiment was on our left and the 66th Infantry on our right. (36)

Units not shown on map

The 2d Battalion of the 14th Infantry was given the opportunity to rest on the night of the 24th and 25th. Lt. Col. Phillip Brant called the Company and Special Unit Commanders together that night at 2330 hours where instructions were given for the next day's operations. These instructions designated areas of responsibility for the screening operations on the next day, the line of departure and the time of departure. (37)

The units of the 2d Battalion moved out at approximately 0500 hours on the 25th of April. Just as the Companies were forming to move to the I.P., two German planes strafed the town. This caused a slight delay and the Battalion was a

(34) A-3, p. 80; (35) Personal knowledge; (36) Personal knowledge; (37) Personal knowledge.

not on

River. At this time "George" Company and "Fox" Companies were on the line. Heavy firing was heard in the "George" Company area and a message was received by the "Fox" Company Commander to hold up his Companies' forward movement. This was done immediately and at nearly the same time a report came in by SCR 530 radio from the platoon leader of the platoon flanking on "George" Company that enemy opposition consisting of approximately a squad of personnel supporting a machine gun had caught the leading elements of "George" Company crossing an open field. Several men had been hit. "Fox" Company Commander went forward to join the platoon leader of the flank platoon bounding on "George" Company. Here it was learned that the enemy opposition was actually as reported. Permission was asked of Battalion to flank enemy position. "George" Company was notified of "Fox" Company's intended movement. One squad plus a light machine gun flanked deep behind the enemy position only to find they had just fallen back. (41) This same type of opposition was encountered later in the afternoon with approximately the same results. The duty of "scout" in the rifle squads was rotated frequently in all operations to improve and equalize the personal chances. It is believed that the present Infantry School doctrine of equal training as "scouts" for all personnel in the squad proved its desirability in operations of this type. (42)

The 2d Battalion pushed on into Tegernheim on the Danube River just before dusk. Minor opposition in the form of

(41) (42) Personal knowledge.

few minutes late in moving out. No casualties were received in the 2d Battalion from this raid. However, one jeep and trailer ^{was} were shot up so badly that they were turned over to Regimental S-4 and replacement vehicles were requested. (38) It was necessary for "How" Company to rearrange loads in one of the machine gun platoons to take care of this motor casualty. (39)

Screening operations were an "SOP" operation in the Battalion. Two rifle companies on the line and the third rifle company in reserve. The frontage covered was so great that it was necessary to attach machine gun platoons. The mortar platoon was usually kept under Battalion control but sometimes was attached to one of the companies. Due to the fact that under most circumstances these screening operations took place in wooded areas, tanks were usually kept under Battalion control and would move at the head of the organic transportation of the Battalion. They would follow along the best trail or road in the Battalion area by bounds. If opposition was met that required their use the Battalion Commander would send them on up to this point where they would come under control of the Company Commander in whose area they were needed. (40)

The morning of the 25th of April found the 2d Battalion following this procedure throughout its operations. No opposition was encountered during the morning but progress was slow due to the heavily wooded nature of the area. The Battalion was about half way between Regenstauf and the Danube

(38) Personal knowledge; (39) Statement Capt. Brewer, H. Co. Commander; (40) Personal knowledge.

"sniper" fire was encountered in the outskirts of the town. This opposition was easily overcome without casualties to us. One German soldier was killed and several captured in the City Hall. The civilian population was quite docile and a thorough search was made in the town to determine presence of soldiers or hidden weapons. (43)

Each company was assigned its security zone in the town and the Battalion settled down for the night. The 2d Battalion used a system of a Battalion all around defense when it was not able to tie in with the other Battalions of the Regiment on a continuous front. Each company would keep two platoons on line with skeleton crews manning automatic weapons. The balance of the units would sleep. These platoons would be rotated at three hour intervals during the night so as to give all an opportunity to rest. (44)

The Danube valley is a wide flat plain that extends across Bavaria, Austria and thence to the Balkans. The valley is bounded on the north by a steep cliff that rapidly drops to the Danube River. To the south extends a flat plain that is very sparsely wooded. The Danube River is deep and swift in this area and is nearly 150 yards wide. The river is also a controlled stream similar to the Regen River except that it is much larger.

Up to this point I have attempted to give the reader a view of the preliminary operations connected with the actual crossing of the Danube River. The general nature of the proceedings in which the Battalion had been involved

(43) (44) Personal knowledge.

in leading up to the actual operation of crossing the river and familiarity with the operating procedures of the Battalion have been covered. (45)

At this time the 2d Battalion of the 14th Infantry did not know that this night of the 25th-26th of April would be the time of crossing the Danube River. At 1930 hours a message was sent to the companies of the Battalion informing them that the river crossing would not occur until the next day or night. With this in mind the companies prepared a hot meal and bedded down for the night. (46)

The Company Commander of "Fox" Company requested permission of Battalion to operate a patrol in the portion of the Battalion's area that bordered the river. This permission was granted and the patrol was sent out. They had the missions of finding an assembly area for a possible crossing in the Battalion area and to determine the suitability of roads leading into it for two and one-half ton engineer trucks. This reconnaissance party became familiar with the area of the river front that was the responsibility of the 2d Battalion to secure. This patrol went out at 1945 hours and returned at 2130 hours. The patrol had just returned to the Company Command Post and the report of their activities received by Battalion Headquarters when a warning order was issued by the Regimental Commander to the effect that the 2d Battalion and the 3d Battalion of the 14th Infantry were to cross the Danube at 0400 hours the next morning. The 2d Battalion would cross at Tegernheim and

(45) (46) Personal knowledge.

move down the river to Barbing, seize this town and anchor the right flank of the bridgehead on the river just northwest of this town. The 3d Battalion would cross simultaneously and seize Sarching extending to the right and tying in with the 2d Battalion just to the east of Barbing. The 1st Battalion would prepare to move from its present position near Reimhausen to assembly areas at ~~Elchingen~~ Tegernheim or Donaustauf in preparation to cross the river and capture the air field after initial bridgehead was established by 2d and 3d Battalions. (47)

The companies of the 2d Battalion were issued an alert in the form of a warning order to make preparations within their own commands for a crossing of the Danube at 0400 hours. The Company Commanders were directed to report to Battalion Headquarters at 2300 hours. (48)

Due to the late arrival of the Battalion at Tegernheim it had been impossible for the Battalion Commander or Staff to make a daylight reconnaissance. For such an operation as this it is not only desired but is a necessity. It was decided to assign general crossing areas to the two companies that were to cross in the initial wave and allow the Company Commanders to select the exact locations for launching sites and assembly areas. (49)

On the evening of the 25th of April a replacement engineer officer was assigned to the platoon that was supporting the 2d Battalion. He, of course, had little time to familiarize himself with his command. This platoon had

(47) (48) (49) Personal knowledge.

received heavy casualties the afternoon of the 24th of April not only to personnel but to equipment. This officer was directed to assist the two company commanders in the selection of launching sites and assembly areas. In addition it was necessary for him to check his own boat equipment in preparation for crossing of the Danube. (50)

The Company Commanders reported to Battalion Headquarters at 2300 hours and the tentative plan of operation was given by the Battalion Commander. This plan in general was that "Easy" and "George" Companies would cross the river together in one wave at 0400 hours, "Easy" on the left and "George" Company on the right. They would push up the far bank of the river to the right until they reached the vicinity of Barbing where the units would dig in and prepare hasty defense positions extending from the first road junction east of Barbing through Barbing and there tie in on the south bank of the river just east of Kreuzhof. The limiting point between Companies was to be the main street that ran north through Barbing. "Fox" Company would cross as soon as the boats returned from the first wave. They would follow "Easy" Company at about 400 yards and cover the open left flank of the Battalion. In addition "Fox" Company would send out a patrol and maintain contact with the 3d Battalion on the left. Upon arrival of the leading elements of the Battalion on the limit of the bridgehead "Fox" Company would prepare a defense in depth to the rear of "Easy" Company paying special attention to the left flank (50) Personal knowledge.

of the Battalion. "How" Company would attach one platoon of machine guns to "Easy" Company and one to "George" Company. The 81mm mortars would go into position on the north bank of the river and support the Battalion until range became too great to give adequate support. They would then displace to the south bank of the river and select adequate positions to give support to the attack. Anti-tank platoon and attached tank destroyers would take up positions on the north side of the river and would not be displaced forward until the bridge was placed in operation by the engineers. Artillery preparations would not be fired, because secrecy was desired in the initial phase of the operation. 4.2 mortars and field artillery forward observers would accompany the two leading companies. Ammunition and pioneer platoon would maintain carrying parties between the ammunition points of two leading companies and Battalion ammunition supply point. The Battalion Command Post would remain on the north side of the river until Barbing was captured, at this time it would move to the road junction 324. Battalion observation post would move about 200 yards to the rear of "George" Company. Aid station would remain in the vicinity of the crossing area on the north side of the river. It would not displace forward until ^a bridge was in operation. (51)

The Battalion Commander and the S-3 checked assembly areas and launching sites that had been selected by the Company Commanders and approved them. The routes of approach

(51) Personal knowledge.

for the engineer boat trucks were adequate for a night operation but had very little cover. One hundred yards from the river bank there was an old levee that did give some cover from small arms fire and since the operation was taking place under the concealment of darkness the risk was taken. (52)

The Company Commanders were dismissed to return to their organizations to make final preparations for the crossings. However, all were informed to give their enlisted personnel as much rest as possible that night, because it was expected that the morning would bring a hard time for all concerned. (53)

The Battalion was informed by Regimental Headquarters at approximately 0200 hours that they would receive only about half of the assault boats that had been expected. This had been brought about by the transfer of some of the 14th Infantry Regiment's engineer support to the 5th Infantry Regiment. (54)

This change entailed the subsequent altering of the Battalion's plan of operation. The Battalion S-3, Lt. E. E. Smith, contacted the Company Commanders and Staff, notifying them to report to Headquarters immediately. The change in plans was actually very minor. "Fox" Company being the smallest rifle company in the Battalion was assigned to cross as a unit in the first wave while the "Easy" and "George" Companies would follow them in that order. "How" Company would attach one platoon of machine guns to "Fox"

(52) Personal knowledge; (53) Personal knowledge; (54) Statement Lt. Col. B. S. Halter, Regt. Executive Officer.

Company instead of to "George" Company. "George" Company would become reserve Company for the Battalion and after crossing the river behind "Easy" Company would take over the mission of protecting the Battalion's left flank which would be open until "Love" Company of the 3d Battalion tied in on the left side of the bridgehead. "Fox" Company was directed to move out to the launching site in sufficient time to launch the assault boats at 0400 hours and the other rifle companies were to follow at ten minute intervals in the order of their subsequent crossing. (55)

The "Fox" Company Commander made a hasty check of the crossing site with the engineer platoon leader and exact launching positions were selected for the assault boats. The engineer platoon leader informed the "Fox" Company Commander that sufficient engineers were not available to handle the unloading of the assault boats or to row them back from the south side of the Danube after the crossing had been made. This caused some consternation, because "Fox" Company's strength was low and personnel could not be spared to return the assault boats after the crossing had been made. The Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Phillip Brant was contacted and assistance was requested. Col. Brant ordered "George" Company to furnish ten men to the engineers to help them with the handling of the assault boats. (56)

The night of the 25th-26th was overcast and it was difficult to make a satisfactory reconnaissance. The site selected for the launching of the assault boats was a small

(55) (56) Personal knowledge.

lagoon that, according to the map, emptied into the Danube about 400 yards to the southeast. This proved incorrect later, because a small neck of land cut it off from the river proper. However, at this time neither the rifle company commander nor the engineer officer were aware of this fact. This error in reconnaissance later delayed the crossing of "Fox" Company and caused the Battalion to move the launching site down the river approximately two hundred yards. (57)

The first unit to cross the river moved out of Tegernheim for the launching site at 0330 hours. They arrived at this location at about 0340 hours. Immediate contact was made with the engineers who had moved their two trucks within 150 yards of the launching site. The 65th Division on the right flank of the 71st was shelling the area to the west of Regensburg at this time so the movement of the engineers' trucks was made under the cover of the noise from the artillery fire. The engineers with the assistance of the "George" Company personnel unloaded the boats and "Fox" Company moved them down to the launching sites, loaded and prepared to push off for the river proper.

The assault boats pushed out from the north bank at 0400 hours and started up the lagoon for the river. The Company moved in a column of platoons with the attached machine guns bringing up the rear. (58)

The first platoon after moving 400 yards found that they had run into an embankment and that the lagoon did not empty into the river as had been first thought. Lt. Barstow, (57) (58) personal knowledge.

the first platoon leader, signaled the Company Commander to move on up to where the first platoon had run aground. Upon arriving at this position the Commander of "Fox" Company directed the first platoon to portage their assault boats across the embankment and to hold up their movement to the south side of the river until the other platoons could move out with them. This movement was made with as much stealth as the circumstances ~~could permit~~. The platoons reached the south side of the river with no further mishap and the movement had still not been discovered by the Germans. The shelling by the 65th Infantry Division was still continuing and this probably masked what noise had been made in the portage and crossing. (59)

"Fox" Company pushed beyond the south bank of the river for a distance of about two hundred yards where they stopped and reorganized for the movement toward Barbing. Barbing was to the southwest of the river. The Company Commander formed his unit into a formation of two platoons on the line with the 3d platoon in reserve following the 2d platoon at a distance of 150 yards, thus covering his open left flank. ~~The Company light machine guns were attached to the 2d platoon~~ while the 60mm mortars were kept under company control to follow the two leading platoons at a distance of 250 yards. The "How" Company guns were attached one section to the first platoon and one to the 3d platoon. The Company Command Post was to follow the two leading platoons at a distance of 300 yards and keep in contact with the observa-

(59) Personal knowledge.

tion post by means of radio. The observation post was to move between the 1st and 2d platoons. Radio silence was lifted upon reaching the south bank of the river and contact was made with Battalion Headquarters. (60)

"Easy" Company moved across the river behind "Fox" Company with little delay, making contact with the Command Post group of that company soon after gaining the south bank of the river. The Company immediately formed into an echelon to the left formation sending out contact patrols to "Love" Company who had crossed to the east of them and to "Fox" Company on the right. Contact was made in a very short time and the advance was started. Soon scouts from both "Easy" and "Fox" Companies made contact with the enemy who were in hastily prepared positions. These positions were rapidly overrun and the advance continued. Very little firing had taken place in the 2d Battalion area due to the fact that the enemy were apparently sleeping in their holes and had been taken completely by surprise. These positions were thought to have been an outpost line. Two enemy had been killed in the "Fox" Company area and ten taken prisoner; "Easy" Company had taken fourteen prisoners. No casualties had been received by either Company. (61)

As soon as the boats returned from transporting "Easy" Company, "George" Company loaded up and pushed off. Upon reaching the south side they immediately moved into an assembly area, reorganized, and sent out contact patrols toward "Easy" Company. Having the mission of covering the

(60) Personal knowledge; (61) Statement Capt. Harry Goldman.

left flank of the Battalion this Company notified "Easy" Company that they were now in position to take over that responsibility and would make contact with the 3d Battalion on the left. (62)

The advance section of the communication platoon of Headquarters Company followed "George" Company across the river and wire communications were immediately started forward to both "Fox" and "Easy" Companies. A forward Command Post was set up in the landing area.

"Fox" Company after meeting light opposition about 400 yards from their landing area continued its advance toward its portion of the Battalion objective. Control was difficult due to the darkness and also to a heavy river fog which had settled in the river bottom. The combination of these two factors made the advance very slow. Contact was lost with the field artillery forward observer's party soon after the first engagement. It was later learned that in the darkness they had lost contact with the rifle company observation post group and had wandered over into the "Easy" Company area. Lt. Pearson, the forward observer, and his crew were picked up by the Command Post group of "Easy" Company and were then able to make contact with "Fox" Company by radio. However, this did not occur until after 0500 hours. The fact that it was necessary for the forward observation party to hand carry their SCR610 radio made it difficult for them to keep up with even a slowly advancing rifle company. In the past SCR536 radios had been borrowed

(62) Statement Capt. W. B. Pierce.

by the field artillery personnel from the Infantry Battalion so that they could operate a fire control net with the SCR610 which would be kept on a vehicle and moved as close to the supported Infantry units as possible. The damp undergrowth of the river bottom had so interfered with SCR536 communications that this former method had had to be dispensed with. (63)

Radio communication with the SCR536 continued to be difficult throughout the early morning until the sun had had an opportunity to dry the undergrowth. However, the battalion SCR300 nets gave very good service through the entire operation. Wire communications with the two leading companies was gained by 0500 hours and maintained through the rest of the action except for several short periods of time. (64)

The movement in the "Easy" Company zone of advance progressed more rapidly due to the facts that they were operating on somewhat higher ground where the river fog did not hamper control and where the area was free of underbrush.

The scouts of "Easy" Company again made contact with the enemy at 0530 hours. This position seemed to be based on two machine guns and a ground mounted 20 mm. AA gun. The forward movement of the two leading platoons was stopped. Capt. Harry Goldman moved into a position from which he was able to observe the location of the enemy entrenchments and by use of his 60 mm. mortars and attached machine guns was able to place fire on their positions thus giving his two

(63) (64) Personal knowledge.

forward platoons the opportunity to work in close and assault the guns. "Easy" Company knocked out these positions capturing forty enemy and killing three. Their own losses amounted to four men wounded. By this time dawn had broken and visibility in the area was very good. Capt. Goldman reorganized and pushed his Company on into the eastern outskirts of Barbing where heavy sniper and automatic weapon fire were met. (65)

"Fox" Company had continued its move toward the west with little opposition. Several Germans were picked up out of prepared positions but they had shown little or no desire to fight. By 0530 hours dawn had broken and the company was within 150 yards of Barbing and the "Red Ball Highway". The ground fog was lifting and observation had improved to the extent that hastily prepared positions were seen to the immediate front. Nearly simultaneously enemy machine gun and 20 mm. fire opened up from these positions. Enemy troops were seen running to and from some of the positions. The machine gun fire hit several of our scouts and personnel in the leading platoons. Machine gun fire supported by rifle and B.A.R. fire from the leading platoons was placed on the positions. Under cover of the fire from these weapons the forward movement was continued. The assault fire of the advancing troops succeeded in pinning the Germans in their positions and forcing them to lift their fire to the extent that we were able to close with them. Lt. Felix Gossam of the 2d platoon with carbine fire and

(65) Statement Capt. Harry Goldman.

hand grenades was able to successfully knock out the 20 mm. gun. His platoon worked into the German positions on its flanks, assaulting them with small arms fire and hand grenades driving the enemy in their sector out of their holes, forcing those to surrender who would and killing the ones who wouldn't. The 1st platoon reached the enemy positions to the right simultaneously and engaged them in a serious hand to hand fight. This fight lasted for about five minutes before the Germans decided that it was time to surrender. Simultaneously with the action of these two platoons the 3d platoon was ordered to move into the town and work down the main street to where "Fox" Company was to tie in with "Easy" Company. They immediately ran into stiff opposition and had difficulty gaining the first several houses at the edge of town. (66)

The enemy resistance along the "Red Ball Road" had ceased but still the 1st and 2d platoons were harrassed with long range 20 mm. fire from the airport to the southeast of Barbing. Also at this time the company started receiving 88 and 40 mm. fire from the same position. (67)

The 1st and 3d platoons were ordered to start improving the captured positions and to prepare for a counter attack from the direction of the air field. Reports from the platoon leaders showed that we had had five men killed and ten wounded. A Company aid station was set up in the basement of a house on the outskirts of Barbing and the wounded were moved into this location. It was impossible to evacu-

(66) (67) Personal knowledge.

ate them under the fire that was being received and the Battalion aid station was still on the north side of the river. (68)

The 3d platoon contacted the Company Commander and asked for assistance. One squad from the 2d platoon and a light machine gun squad were immediately dispatched to their assistance. However, this assistance did not prove sufficient and the balance of the 2d platoon was sent to help in the cleaning out of the town. (69)

In the meantime the "Easy" Company personnel had succeeded in taking their portion of the town and the two companies tied in together at the main intersection in Barbing. The casualties in "Easy" Company amounted to three men killed and seven wounded. (70)

The enemy up to this time had lost 250 men captured, 40 killed, and the number wounded amounted to 40 or 50. Included in the group eliminated was the Command Post group of the airport defense who had been unable to escape from town due to our rapid and sudden attack. The Commanding Officer, a German SS colonel, was killed along with several of his staff when they made a final stand in their Command Post. (71)

It was just previous to the folding of resistance in the town that we were able to get artillery fire on the air port from which we had been receiving a great deal of fire. Our forward observers in both "Easy" and "Fox" Companies were able to get the massed fire of Division artil-

(68) (69) Personal knowledge; (70) Statement Capt. Harry Goldman; (71) Personal knowledge.

lery placed on the German positions. This fire soon silenced the Germans and emissaries under a white flag came forward to the "Fox" Company lines to ask for permission to surrender. The surrender was accepted by the "Fox" Company Commander and two hundred German air force personnel marched in from the airport and were taken into custody. (72)

We were still receiving some scattered fire from the town of Kreuzhof which was located to our right front just on the bank of the Danube. Artillery, 4.2 Chemical mortar fire and direct fire from the tank destroyers and anti-tank guns soon had this small group of buildings burning. A patrol from "Fox" Company moved into this group of buildings against no opposition and set up a defensive position securing the right flank of the bridgehead on the Danube River. (73)

By 1000 hours the bridgehead was completely secure and operations were well under way on the engineer bridge that was being built in the 14th Infantry area. Even though progress had advanced to this phase in the operation the wounded men had not been evacuated from the Company aid stations of the front line Companies. The fact that an advanced echelon of the Battalion aid station had not been sent across the river greatly handicapped the evacuation of the wounded. (74)

The Battalion Command Post and aid station moved into Barbing at 1200 hours. The wounded American and German soldiers were evacuated to the rear at this time. So ends

(72) (73) (74) Personal knowledge.

the phase in which the 2d Battalion was involved in this operation. (75)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

As I look back on this operation it is quite apparent to me that the higher command in the American forces was quite aware of the fact that German resistance had fallen to pieces and it was just a matter of occupation of territory until Germany was completely subjugated.

With this in mind it becomes quite apparent to a reader why many principles of war were disregarded by Commanding Officers. In the rapid crossing of the Regen River by the 14th Infantry many obvious errors were made. It was deemed more essential to maintain rapid movement toward the Danube and by doing so violate such principles as adequate assembly areas for the crossing, movement of troops without cover or concealment under artillery fire, and many others. But still we must remember that if the disorganized enemy had been given the opportunity to reorganize the cost in life would have no doubt been greater than it actually was. So the relentlessness on the part of the higher commanders in driving the troops continually forward did pay off in lives saved in the long run.

However, in such operations adequate maps should be furnished front line units. The error in the 1/100,000 map which was used in crossing the Danube might have proven to be much more serious than it was if enemy units had been more alert. Also, time must be given so adequate daylight

(75) Personal knowledge.

reconnaissance can be made by front line commanders. At this time maps can be checked for accuracy by comparison with the ground.

In the movement of the combat team behind the 3d Cavalry group reinforced toward the southeast we see the results of excellent cooperation between two separate branches working as a team to achieve a joint goal. The reinforcement of the Cavalry group gave it excellent striking power.

Operations following the pattern of those that have been related in this monograph require that an organization have good communications. This requires that personnel must not only be trained to the utmost in the operation of the different means of communication, but must be thoroughly acquainted with the capabilities of these means. This is not limited to operating personnel of the communication platoons but must include all commanders. The idea that a unit is only as efficient as its communications has certainly proven itself to be undeniable. However, it is felt that the field artillery should equip its forward observers with a more mobile set that can be easily carried in attack.

The desirability of uniform training of all rifle platoon personnel in the duties of security elements is now a requirement of the Infantry. This should improve morale in units and equalize the opportunities of personnel in this hazardous duty. The losses received by the security elements of the front line companies were heavy considering the type of opposition being met at this time. This could be either caused by the excellent delaying tactics used by

the German soldiers or from the lack of good training on the part of the American soldiers. It is of my opinion that it was due to a combination of both of the above reasons.

The use of artillery in a rapid moving situation such as the movement of the combat team from Amberg to Regenstauf is of a minor nature. However, the preparations fired in the assault across the Regen River were of great assistance to the infantry units. In addition the use of smoke on the high ground south of Regenstauf was of great assistance in blinding enemy observation. Perhaps the massing of the division artillery fired on the air field at Regensburg would better show the great value of the ability of a division to mass its fires and the results that can be gained. In turn we can point to the fire of the German 88mm. battery and from our experience with it at Regenstauf we see that if proper dispersion had not been used in "Fox" Company, casualties might have been heavier than those actually sustained.

In the operation instruction given before crossing the Danube a sound plan of evacuation and medical support was not set forth. A commander must plan for any eventuality and instigate measures to insure evacuation of wounded personnel immediately.

New commanders of all grades must be given the opportunity to orient themselves with their command. The manner in which the new officer commanding the supporting engineer platoon was pushed into combat was not an exceptional case.

These instances when forced by circumstances should be kept to a minimum.

LESSONS

The lessons that have been emphasized in this operation are mostly those that have been taught to us in the military schools of our country--long before we entered combat. However, many were re-emphasized during those days of combat.

1. Night reconnaissance for river crossing sites are not adequate. The "Fox" Company patrol and the "Fox" Company Commander were unable to select proper sites.

2. Maps can not be trusted at all times. Actual reconnaissance of the area must be made. This was shown in the error made in selecting the lagoon as a launching site.

3. The element of surprise often times may outweigh the other principles of war. This is exemplified by the immediate crossing of the Danube on the night of the 25th-26th of April.

4. Relentlessness in the pursuit certainly characterizes a successful operation of this nature. This is quite typical of the actions of the 3d Army throughout the central German campaign.

5. Cavalry units reinforced with additional fire power and mobile infantry are excellent troops for a pursuit operation. This is typified in the use of the 3d Cavalry Group reinforced in this operation.

6. The SCR536 when used within its capabilities is an excellent radio set. However, it is imperative that limiting factors in its usage be known to all.

7. The SCR610 is an excellent radio, however its weight is a handicap to the forward observers. An auxiliary means of communication such as a SCR536 net between the SCR-610 and forward observer is essential.

8. All riflemen should receive equal training as scouts and this job should be rotated frequently.

9. We have learned a great deal from the tactics of the German soldiers in delaying action. Their ability to select good positions for such operations and then successfully withdraw after forcing us to fully deploy is certainly outstanding.

10. Where the opportunity presents itself replacement officers or men should be given the opportunity to orient themselves before assigning them to front line units.

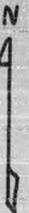
11. When moving a unit through artillery fire it must be remembered that dispersion of personnel and rapidity of movement are essential.

12. Use your artillery to the utmost. It will often times force a tired and defeated enemy to surrender thus taking an objective by fire.

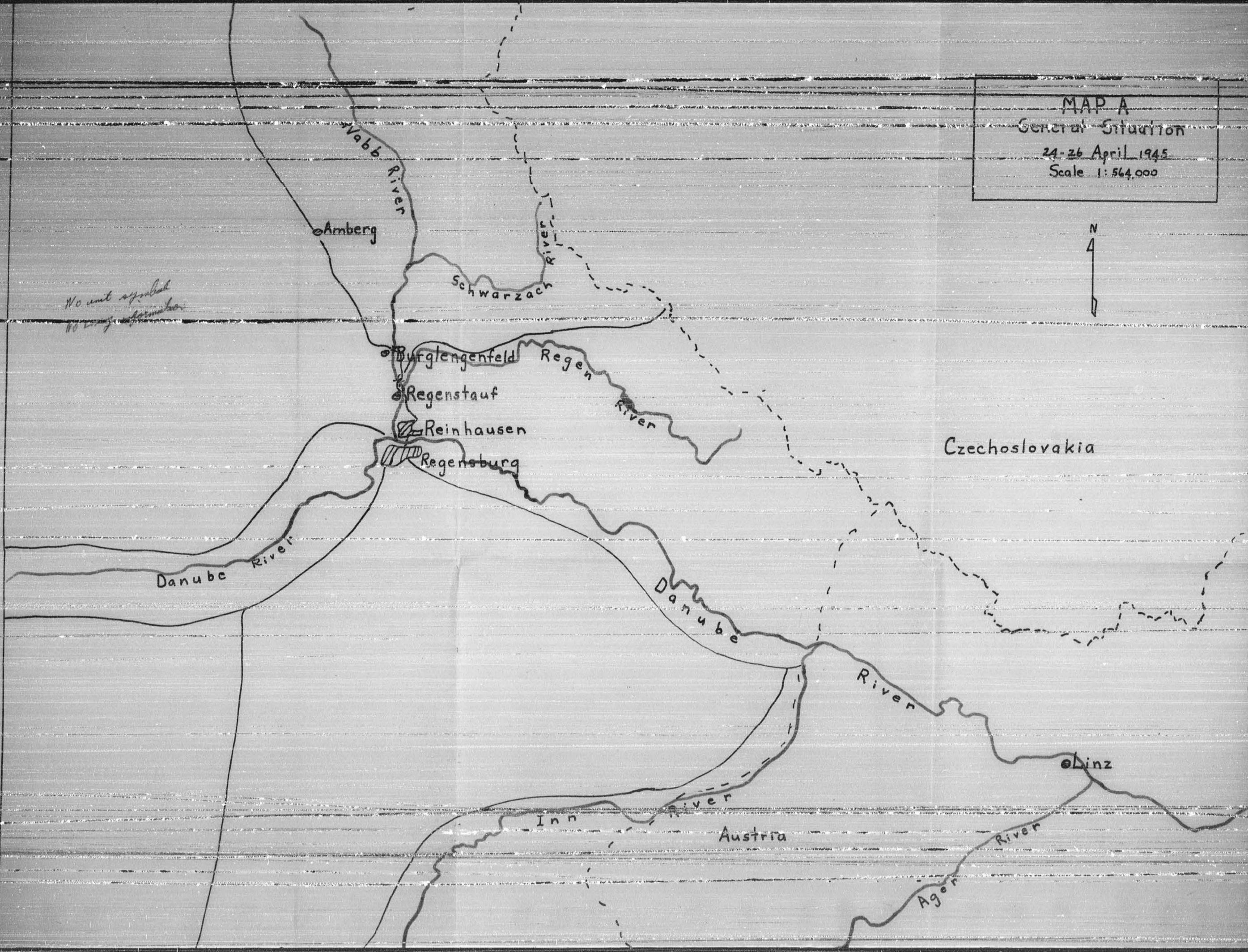
13. The Battalion aid station must be kept well forward in an attack to give rapid and efficient services to the attacking units.

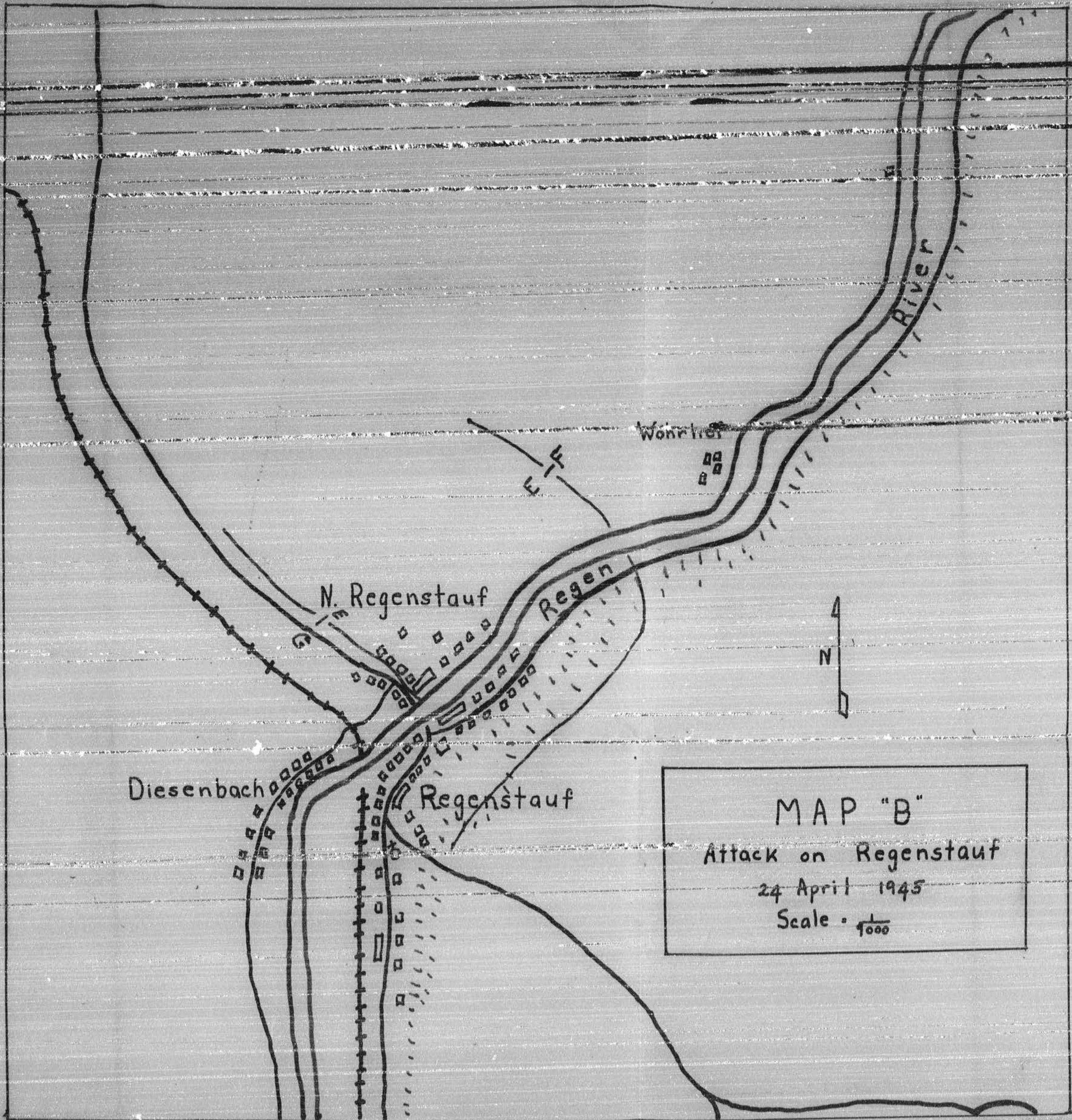
14. Evacuation is a major problem in a river crossing and provisions must be made for its rapid and efficient accomplishment.

MAP A
General Situation
24-26 April 1945
Scale 1:564,000

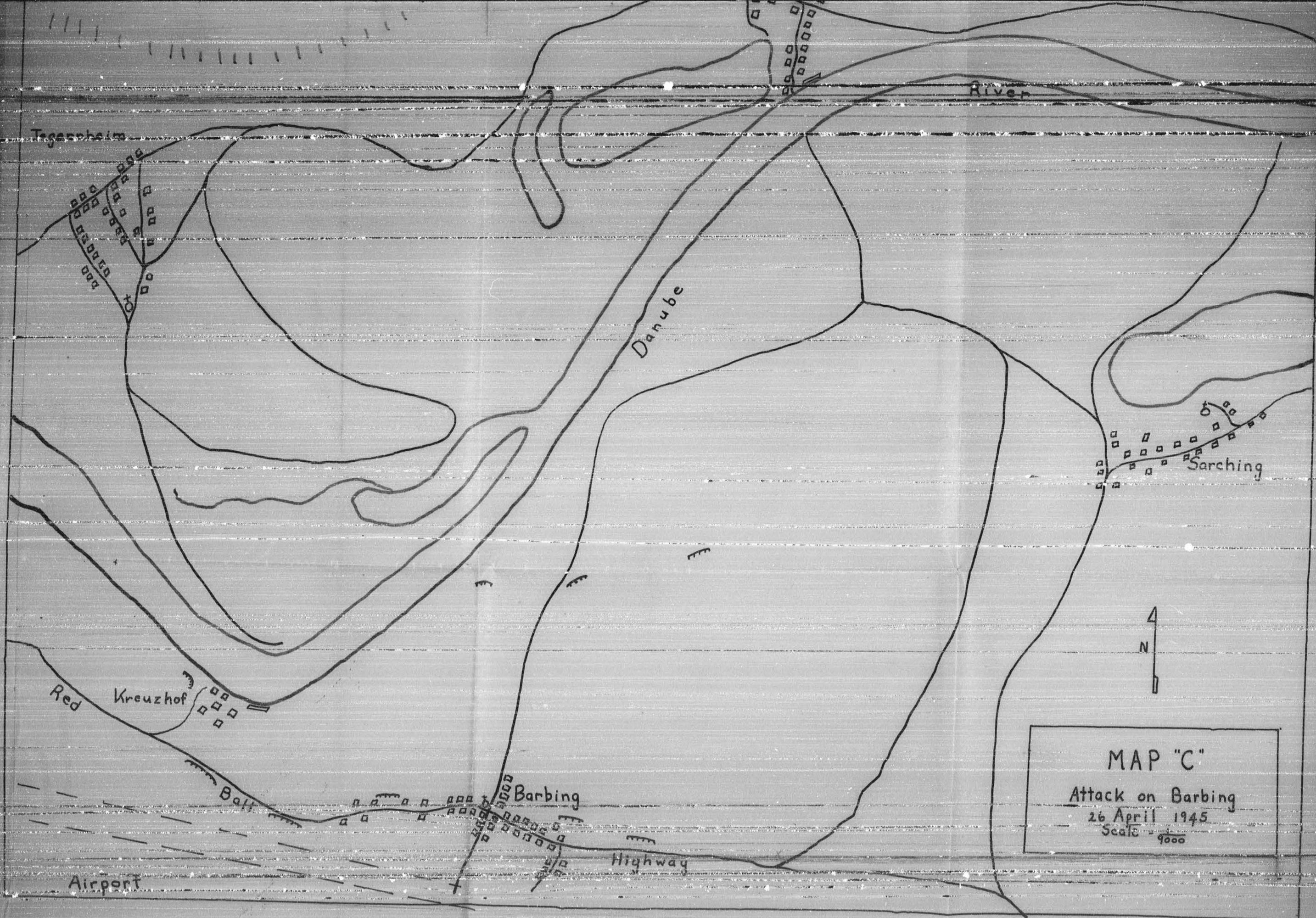


No unit symbol
No unit information





MAP "B"
Attack on Regenstauf
24 April 1945
Scale = $\frac{1}{1000}$



Tegernheim

River

Danube

Sarching

Kreuzhof

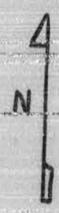
Red

Balt

Barbing

Highway

Airport



MAP "C"
Attack on Barbing
26 April 1945
Scale 9000