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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A,  
27TH ARMORED INFANTRY BATTALION, (9TH ARMORED DIVISION)  
IN THE SEIZURE OF THE REMAGEN BRIDGEHEAD, 7-8 MARCH 1945  
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: AN ARMORED INFANTRY RIFLE COMPANY  
ATTACKING TO SEIZE AND ESTABLISH A BRIDGEHEAD

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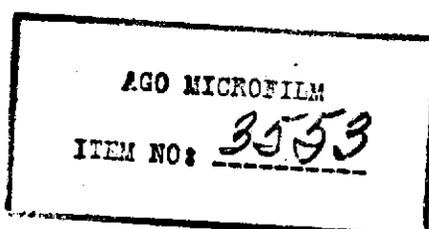


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INDEX.....	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	2
ORIENTATION.....	3
Introduction.....	3
The General Situation.....	4
Dispositions and Plans of Task Force Engeman.....	7
The Company Situation.....	9
The Company Plan.....	11
Final Preparations for the Advance.....	12
NARRATION.....	13
The Advance to Remagen.....	13
The Attack on Remagen.....	16
The Rhine Crossing.....	17
The Expansion of the Bridgehead.....	22
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.....	24
LESSONS.....	27
MAP A Operations to Reach the Rhine	
MAP B First Army Situation 6 Mar 45	
MAP C III Corps Plan 7 Mar 45	
MAP D Remagen Area	

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, 9th Armored Division, in the seizure of the LUDENDORF BRIDGE at REMAGEN, 7-8 March 1945.

After the Allied Armies had shaken off the effects of the German High Command's "Sunday-punch", and had once again resumed the offensive, the Allied Chiefs designed their operations toward the "destruction of the enemy forces west of the RHINE".

The purpose was two-fold: primarily to prevent these forces from escaping to the east bank of the RHINE, where they could be deployed, behind that great natural barrier, more effectively to protect the heart of Germany; secondly, when this was accomplished we would have the prerogative of concentrating at selected avenues across the RHINE, with a minimum of forces elsewhere along the front. (1)

The plan to achieve this end consisted of three phases. In Phase I the Canadian First Army and the U.S. Ninth Army were to advance to the RHINE in the north, while the U.S. First Army secured the Ninth Army's flank by driving toward COLOGNE. The remainder of the forces containing the enemy in their zones by aggressive defensive measures. (See Map A)

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(1) A-1, p. 8

In Phase II, a forced crossing of the RHINE in the north was to be effected. To secure the bridgehead, the remaining enemy north of the MOSELLE were to be eliminated by the First Army from the northwest, and the Third Army from the southwest. Meanwhile the forces in the south were to capture the SAAR BASIN and drive to the RHINE in that sector.

The final Phase was the consolidation and expansion of the bridgehead, while our forces in the south were to reach the RHINE, thus putting the entire west bank of the river in Allied hands. (2) (See Map A)

On 8 February, Phase I commenced in the north. Despite a combination of early thaw, with its resultant floods, and stubborn enemy resistance, the Canadian First Army reached the RHINE opposite ~~EMMERICH~~ on 14 February. (3) (See Map A)

The role the U.S. Ninth and First Armies were to play in this Phase was repeatedly postponed due to poor weather, and floods in the ROER VALLEY, caused when the enemy opened the locks of the SCHWAMMENAUEL DAM before abandoning it. However by 23 February the flood had subsided, and the First and Ninth Armies launched their attack across the ROER RIVER. Bridgeheads were secured and exploited rapidly, with the Ninth Army driving toward MUNCHEN-GLADBACH, and the First Army advancing toward COLOGNE. By 1 March, the Ninth Army had reached the RHINE at NEUSS, (4) and on 4 March had linked up with the Canadian First Army at GELDERN. (5) (See Map A)

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

The First Army's drive toward COLOGNE was a combination of Phase I and II. In the northern sector of the First Army's front, the VII Corps rapid advance had secured the flank of the Ninth Army, while the III and V Corps, in the center and southern sectors, respectively, were attacking southeast toward REMAGEN and the AHR RIVER against a disorganized enemy. (6) (See Map B)

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- (2) A-1, p. 87
  - (3) A-1, p. 88
  - (4) A-1, p. 89
  - (5) A-1, p. 90
  - (6) A-2, p. 17

VII Corps and the Ninth Army had crushed the right wing of the German Fifteenth Army, and as a result, III and V Corps were encountering stray units and Volksturm forces, whose spasmodic resistance barely slowed their advance. (7)

The morale of the German forces now opposing the First Army was low, bordering on indifference by the non-commissioned officers and men. Even the higher ranking officers appeared to be accepting defeat as the inevitable. (8)

This state of morale was no doubt influenced by the fact, that along the entire Allied front all bridges crossing the RHINE had been destroyed, with the exception of a railroad bridge at REMAGEN in the First Army sector. (9)

On 6 March, VII Corps had entered COLOGNE and held positions along the west bank of the RHINE, north to the Ninth Army boundary.

V Corps line extended through KIRSPENICH, southwest through ESCHWEILER and KALL, then west of the URFT RIVER to the DAHLEM WOODS.

Elements of III Corps were about three miles from the RHINE in the north, disposed on a line through BRUHL and ROSEBURG, extending southeast through MORENHOVEN and STADT MECKENHEIM, thence southwest through MERZBACH. (10) (See Map B)

The Ninth Army in the north was mopping up the west bank of the RHINE opposite DUSSELDORF, while in the south the Third Army was spearheading toward COBLENZ and ANDERNACK. (11) (See Map B)

The First Army planned to close to the RHINE on 7 March, with VII and III Corps, while V Corps continued its advance toward the AHR RIVER. (12)

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(7) A-2, p. 15

(8) A-2, p. 11

(9) Personal Knowledge

(10) A-2, p. 18

(11) A-2, p. 24

(12) A-2, p. 12

In view of the fact that the only remaining bridge span on the RHINE was in the III Corps zone at REMAGEN, this Corps was instructed to make every effort to seize the bridge intact. (13) (See Map B)

III Corps planned to attack on the morning of 7 March with its four divisions generally abreast. The 1st Infantry Division was to seize BONN, with the 14th Cavalry Group protecting the left flank; the 9th Infantry Division to attack southeast and seize BAD GODESBURG and LANNESDORF; while the 9th Armored Division also attacked southeast "to seize REMAGEN, and crossings over the AHR RIVER in the vicinity of SINZIG, HEIMERSHEIM and BAD NEUENAHN". On the right flank, the 78th Infantry Division was directed to "seize crossings over the AHR RIVER at AHRWEILER and west of AHRWEILER, and to contain and protect the Corps right flank". All divisions were to clear the enemy from the west bank of the RHINE in their zones. (14) (See Map C)

In addition the III Corps instructed the 9th Armored Division to attack aggressively to seize REMAGEN, in view of the fact that the bridge might be reached before the enemy could destroy it. Corps also directed all artillery, that only "Pozit, or time fuses would be used when firing on the bridge". (15)

The terrain in the III Corps zone was primarily a rolling plain, dropping off into deep valleys along the RHINE and AHR RIVERS. In the central portion of the Corps zone, the KOTTEN FOREST extended northeast from STADT MECKENHEIM to the outskirts of BONN and BAD GODESBURG, offering a covered approach to these important objectives. (16) The road net was good throughout the zone, facilitating the rapid advance of armored and mechanized units, and their well-extended supply lines. Throughout the

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(13) A-2, p.18

(14) A-9, 6 Mar 45

(15) A-9, 6 Mar 45

(16) Personal Knowledge

zone the terrain favored the attacker, offering few natural defense lines, and limited observation for the defender.

The 9th Armored Division, with the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 310th Infantry, 78th Division attached, held a line from STADT MECKENHEIM southeast to VETTELHOVEN and BOLINGEN, with elements of its 89th Reconnaissance Squadron in the vicinity of HOLZEM.

Combat Command A, located in VETTELHOVEN and BOLINGEN, was to attack on 7 March to the southeast and seize crossings over the AHR at BAD NEUENAHR and HEIMERSHEIM. (17)

At the same time Combat Command B, from positions in the vicinity of STADT MECKENHEIM, was given the mission to attack southeast to REMAGEN and SINZIG. The 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, and one Company of the 656 TD Battalion were to protect the north flank of the division during the attack.

Brigadier General William M. Hoge, then commanding CCB, planned to advance in two columns. The northern column, designated Task Force Engeman, to advance along the axis, STADT MECKENHEIM-BIRRESDORF, to capture REMAGEN, and seize the bridge, if it had not already been destroyed; while the southern column attacked toward BODENDORF and SINZIG to seize crossings over the AHR south of REMAGEN. (18)

#### DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF TASK FORCE ENGEMAN (19)

Task Force Engeman, commanded by Lt. Col. Leonard E. Engeman, Commanding Officer of the 14th Tank Battalion, was formed in STADT MECKENHEIM during the night 6-7 March. (20)

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(17) A-9, 6 March 45

(18) Personal Knowledge

(19) Note: This is a case where the Battalion was not the next higher headquarters of the Company. In the task force formation the 27th Armd. Inf. Bn. (-) was only an element of the main body, while Company A, was advance guard for the entire main body. Thus the Company was immediately responsible to the Task Force Commander.

(20) Personal Knowledge

It comprised: the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, the 14th Tank Battalion (less Companies B and C), one platoon of the 89th Reconnaissance Squadron and one platoon of Company B, 9th Armored Engineer Battalion. (21)

The Task Force planned to move, mounted, in approach march column formation, on 7 March from STADT MECKENHEIM to REMAGEN, along the route indicated on Map C, crossing the IP at the junction of the ADENDORF-GELSDORF roads on the southern edge of STADT MECKENHEIM, at 0730 hours. The mission was to clear the city of REMAGEN, seize the approaches to the LUDENDORF BRIDGE and be prepared to effect a crossing or to proceed south to KRIPP on order.

Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, with one platoon of Company A, 14th Tank Battalion attached, was designated Advance Guard, while the remainder of the Task Force marched in the order:

14th Tank Battalion (-)

27th Armored Infantry Battalion (-)

First Platoon, Company B, 9th Armored Engineer Battalion

Company B, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion

Company A (-), 14th Tank Battalion

Company C (-), 27th Armored Infantry Battalion

Company D, 14th Tank Battalion

First Platoon, Company C, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion

The 89th Reconnaissance Platoon was to protect the flanks and reconnoiter to the front.

It was decided that the Advance Guard would halt at the outskirts of REMAGEN, and notify the Task Force Commander of its position. There, final plans would be made to continue the attack according to the situation. (22)

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(21) A-10, p.1

(22) Personal Knowledge

In his estimate, Lt. Col. Engeman felt that, due to the location of the city and the nature of the terrain, taking REMAGEN dictated a coordinated attack strong in Infantry. (23)

#### THE COMPANY SITUATION

On the night 6-7 March, Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion had outposted the northeast sector of STADT MECKENHEIM while the remainder of the company settled down for the first full night of sleep since crossing the ROER RIVER on 28 February. Despite six days and nights of continuous offensive action, the company was at approximately ninety percent strength, and in a high state of morale as a result of its successful drive.

At 070630 March after receiving the Task Force order, Lt. Karl Timmermann, the Company Commander, assembled his platoon leaders and acquainted them with the Task Force plan. He then directed the group in a map reconnaissance to evolve tentative plans for employment of the unit on the march. It was necessary to approach the problem in this manner due to the character of the enemy.

In this sector the Germans had been employing isolated rear guard actions. These small delaying forces, composed of stray elements of various units and Volksturm, deployed at strong points which were miles apart from each other, would resist tenaciously until over-run or captured. Consequently, after each isolated action contact with the enemy would be lost.

STADT MECKENHEIM, located eleven miles northwest of REMAGEN and south of the KOTTEN FOREST had four main roads leading out of the town in the direction of the RHINE RIVER. However, neither of these led to REMAGEN.

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(23) Statement by Lt. Karl Timmermann

The only logical route to the objective was a secondary road winding through several scattered villages for about eight miles, and through a thickly wooded area for three miles to the heights overlooking the city. The villages along the route were small and approximately one mile apart. The entire zone was criss-crossed with numerous small trails connecting the villages and parallel roads. (See Map C)

This secondary road, which was selected as the route of march, passed over fairly level terrain, rising and falling in gentle slopes to the vicinity of LIEMERSDORF, where it dipped rather sharply into the valley between LIEMERSDORF and BIRRESDORF. At BIRRESDORF the road turned southeast along a ridge line extending through the wooded area to the outskirts of REMAGEN, where it wound down a steep bluff and entered the city from the southwest. (24) (See Map C)

The city of REMAGEN was located on the west bank of the RHINE RIVER, where the river formed a shallow salient into the east bank. The terrain along the west bank to KRIPP, about a mile to the south, was flat with little vegetation. Directly opposite REMAGEN, on the north shoulder of the salient was the small village of ERPEL.

The LUDENDORF BRIDGE crossed the RHINE from the southern edge of REMAGEN to the southern edge of ERPEL, leading to a tunnel through ERPELER LEY about thirty yards from the river bank. ERPELER LEY was a steep wooded bluff which rose abruptly from the east bank of the river, at about a sixty degree angle, to a height of approximately two hundred meters, rising more gradual through wooded hills for three to four miles inland. (See Map D)

The road net on the east bank of the river, consisted of a river road and two mountain roads, any of which could be easily blocked. (25)

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(24) Personal Knowledge

(25) Personal Knowledge

It is fairly evident that, from a tactical standpoint, the bridge site was poorly situated for a large scale river crossing. Looking at it from the supply and reinforcement angle, it was even worse, since the bridge was located near the southern boundary of the First Army, and the only primary road into REMAGEN from the west did not run along the normal axis of supply. (26)

The weather on 7 March was cloudy and cold, with fair visibility despite the low-hanging clouds and intermittent showers. Although it had rained considerably the previous day, the trafficability of the soil in the area was good.

#### THE COMPANY PLAN

Company A planned to form in its present area, and move in column along the prescribed route with the 2nd Platoon, plus two tanks, as the Advance Party; and Company A (-), and the 1st Platoon (-) of Company A, 14th Tank Battalion, as the Support. The 1st Platoon of the rifle company was to protect the right flank, the 3rd Platoon to protect the left flank, and the Anti-Tank Platoon to protect the rear. This protection was to be accomplished by observation, without leaving the column unless attacked.

To further orient the reader, I would like to point out that an armored infantry company, at the time of this action, was made up of three rifle platoons and one anti-tank platoon. The rifle platoons consisted of three rifle squads, a machine gun squad with two light machine guns, and a mortar squad with one 60 mm mortar. The anti-tank platoon consisted of three squads, each with a towed 57 mm gun. Every squad in the company was mounted in a half-track vehicle. Two half-tracks in each platoon had .50 caliber machine guns on a ring mount, while the remainder of the tracks were equipped with heavy machine guns.(27)

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(26) A-10, p. 3

(27) Personal Knowledge

Due to the fact that the level terrain offered good fields of fire for enemy anti-tank guns, in many places along the route, the Company Commander prescribed that the tanks in the Advance Party would march at the rear of the rifle platoon.

The order of march of the Support would be, Company Headquarters, Tank Platoon (-), 1st Platoon, 3rd Platoon, and Anti-Tank Platoon.

Radios were silenced and visual contact was to be maintained from rear to front.

Since the Task Force Commander had emphasized his desire to reach REMAGEN in the minimum of time, it was decided that the Advance Party when fired upon, would continue to move by vehicle farther forward than it normally would, and attempt to over-run the enemy, dismounting only when forced to do so. In the event the Advance Party became bogged down, it was to take up positions to form a base of fire, while the Support would endeavor to flank the enemy.

Upon reaching the outskirts of REMAGEN the Advance Party would assume positions securing the front, and notify the Company Commander by messenger.

Casualties received enroute would be placed along the side of the road and distinctly marked before the column moved on. (28)

#### FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE ADVANCE

Prior to moving out the company was served a hot breakfast, issued one-third K ration, and had its ammunition supply replenished. Vehicles, weapons, and equipment were checked while the men were given a thorough orientation. Arrangements were made at this time to resupply ammunition during the halt at the outskirts of REMAGEN.

I would like to point out here that only the platoon leaders of the 2nd Platoon and the Anti-Tank Platoon were officers; the 1st and 3rd Platoons were led by their platoon sergeants. In spite of the fact that the Anti-Tank platoon is, more or less, a defensive element, no readjustment of command was made at this time.

After the preliminaries were effected, the company formed in the northeast sector of STADT MECKENHEIM and started to roll toward the IP.

#### NARRATION

##### THE ADVANCE TO REMAGEN (See Map C)

At 0800 hours on the morning of 7 March 1945, the lead vehicle of the 2nd Platoon, Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, crossed the IP and headed toward GELSDORF. The column passed through GELSDORF without incident, and turned east to ECKENDORF. No resistance was encountered in ECKENDORF, however upon approaching FRITZDORF, about a mile to the east, a road block could be seen at the entrance to the village. Advancing on the village, the lead vehicle of the Advance Party sprayed the roadblock and adjacent houses with .50 caliber machine gun fire, while the second and third vehicles reconnoitered the left and right front by fire. At about 100 yards from the roadblock the Advance Party was fired upon, by small arms and an automatic weapon, from an orchard south of FRITZDORF.

The 2nd Platoon dismounted and while two squads outflanked the position, assisted by fire of the vehicular weapons, the remainder of the platoon, with the mortar squad acting as riflemen, cleared the town and removed the hastily constructed roadblock.

During this action, which delayed the column approximately thirty minutes, the platoon accounted for several enemy dead, and about ten prisoners, without suffering any casualties itself.

The column then proceeded southeast for one mile to OVERICH. On the outskirts of the town, the Advance Party came under small arms fire, with the lead half-track nearly being hit by a Panzerfaust located in the town. The platoon dismounted, and assisted by the tanks, cleared OVERICH, overcoming the resistance with little difficulty. Several prisoners were taken, and again the platoon suffered no casualties. (29)

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(29) Personal Knowledge

After hastily reorganizing the column, the Advance Party moved then in the direction of NIEDERICH, a half mile to the northeast. On the far edge of the town of NIEDERICH a group of enemy were seen beating a hasty retreat. After a few bursts from the vehicular weapons, they dropped their arms and headed toward the column indicating surrender. As one squad from the Advance Party dismounted to assemble the group, and dispatch them to the rear, one of the enemy, an officer, suddenly uncovered a pistol and fired what proved to be his last shot in defense of the Fatherland. The balance of the enemy were then headed to the rear and the column moved on.

The task force passed through LEIMERSDORF, a half mile to the southeast, and through BIRRESDORF, three-quarters of a mile further to the northeast, without running into anything other than white flags, and waving civilians. Many of these civilians were red-faced from the exertion of the rapid change from uniform to civilian clothes.

After leaving BIRRESDORF, the column turned sharply to the right and headed southeast toward REMAGEN. When the road entered the woods the Advance Party doubled its interval, and proceeded with more caution. At approximately one-half mile from REMAGEN, two jeeps from the 89th Reconnaissance Squadron, which had been operating ahead of the column, were fired upon and pinned down by enemy small arms fire from the woods on the right of the road.

The platoon leader led two rifle squads through the woods on the right, in a line of skirmishers, followed by the machine gun squad. He sent the third rifle squad and the mortar squad, again as riflemen, to clear the woods on the left of the road. After a short exchange of fire, the enemy ceased firing and apparently withdrew. (30)

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(30) Personal Knowledge

The two squads on the right of the road moved forward a few hundred yards, and broke out of the woods into a clearing in the center of which was a small farmhouse. One squad proceeded to clear the house which yielded three prisoners. The platoon leader moved a few yards beyond the house and found himself on the edge of a cliff overlooking REMAGEN. (See Map D)

From this vantage point he could see the entire city, and the RHINE above and below the LUDENDORF BRIDGE. The startling fact was that the bridge was intact!

The bridge was jammed with enemy military traffic, both foot and vehicular. In view of this, the platoon leader instructed his runner to inform the Company Commander, and to request that artillery "time fire" be placed on the bridge.

In several minutes, the platoon leader was joined at his OP by the Task Force Commander, the Battalion Commander, and the Company Commander. After analyzing the situation, Lt. Col. Engeman decided, that despite the lucrative target it presented, no fire would be placed on the bridge for fear of damaging it, or losing what surprise that may yet exist. (31)

About five minutes later, at 1300 hours, the Company Commander issued the attack order to the platoon leaders near the same OP. (See Map D)

The 27th Armored Infantry Battalion was to attack REMAGEN, dismounted, from the northwest at 1310 hours, in the order A, B, and C Companies. Upon entering the city, A Company would proceed southeast to the bridge and secure the bridge approach. B Company would clear the southeastern portion and continue through the city to protect the right flank. C Company would clear the northwest part of REMAGEN, and protect the left flank. The assault gun platoon, and the 81mm mortar platoon of Headquarters Company would be in position in the vicinity of the farmhouse. The company (32)

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(31) Statement by Lt. Col. Engeman in presence of author

(32) Personal Knowledge

vehicles and the Task force (-), with the tanks leading, would proceed down the road into REMAGEN at 1340 hours.

Company A was to move down the mountain trail in column, with the 2nd Platoon leading, followed by the 1st and 3rd Platoons in that order. Once in the city they were to move abreast along three parallel streets, the 1st Platoon on the left, 2nd Platoon in the center, and 3rd Platoon on the right.

(See Map D)

THE ATTACK ON REMAGEN (See Map D)

Promptly at 1310 hours, the 2nd Platoon, Company A, crossed the line of departure, descended the steep mountain trail, and entered REMAGEN from the northwest. The platoons then fanned out, and moved along the designated streets in a column of files on either side of the street.

The Company advanced about 300 yards into the city, when it encountered heavy sniper fire from within the buildings. This forced the platoons to leave the streets, and move from building to building, clearing each as it went.

The 2nd Platoon after advancing about 100 yards further was stopped by the fire of an automatic weapon located in the vicinity of the square. Before the platoon could maneuver to flank the machine gun, two tanks from the 14th Tank Battalion approaching the square from the right flank, quickly knocked out the enemy position. The 2nd Platoon then joined the tanks and proceeded more rapidly to the objective; arriving at the bridge at about 1430 hours.

The 1st Platoon, moving along the river road, was held up temporarily by two machine guns in the vicinity of the ferry landing. These weapons were covering the withdrawal of two assault boats loaded with enemy. (33)

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(33) Personal Knowledge

The machine guns were knocked out by the platoon's 80mm mortar, while Sgt. DeLisio was credited with sinking one assault boat with his Rocket Launcher. The other craft was knocked out by machine gun fire.

The 3rd Platoon on the right encountered the bulk of the snipers, being forced to clear nearly every house in its sector. As a result their advance was slow.

By 1500 hours the entire company had reached the bridge, and had outposted the approaches thereto.

In clearing REMAGEN, Company A had taken an undetermined number of prisoners, most of which were Engineer and Service troops. Many of these prisoners were ferreted out of cellars and attics, with the eager assistance of overjoyed Russian prisoners of war.

Sgt. Chinchar, platoon leader of the 1st Platoon, who could speak Russian, informed the Company Commander that several of the Russians claimed the bridge was to be blown at 1600 hours. (34) This information was passed on to higher headquarters, and was later verified upon interrogation of a German prisoner at GCB Headquarters. (35)

#### THE RHINE CROSSING (See Map D)

The LUDENDORF BRIDGE was a railroad bridge about 400 yards long spanning the RHINE RIVER between REMAGEN and ERPEL. It had been converted to accommodate vehicular traffic by means of wooden planking over the ties. Along either side there was a fenced-in concrete cat-walk for pedestrians, and at both ends of the bridge there were two enormous concrete towers. These towers were four stories high, with a circular stairway in the center and two rooms on each floor. There were small windows in each room, affording all-around observation from each tower. (36)

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(34) Personal Knowledge

(35) A-6, p. 36

(36) Personal Knowledge

The bridge had been damaged, presumably, by long range artillery fire. In the center of the structure a hole had been blown in the planking, rendering it impassable for tanks or large vehicles.

The bridge had been prepared for demolition. Numerous wires and charges, attached to the girders and supports, could be seen with the naked eye. An anti-tank mine field had been prepared across the bridge approach, but the holes were empty and the mines were stacked along the side of the road.

At approximately 1515 hours Company A, with one squad, Company B, 9th Armored Engineer Battalion attached, was ordered to cross the LUDENDORF BRIDGE, clear the town of ERPEL and secure the bridge. The 14th Tank Battalion (-) would support by fire from the west bank. At this time both B and C Companies, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, were still engaged with the enemy in their zones.

Company A planned to move in column across the bridge, in the order, 1st Platoon, 2nd Platoon, and 3rd Platoon. One squad of the 1st Platoon was to clear the tunnel and take positions to protect the bridge from the east, while the remainder of the company cleared ERPEL. After clearing ERPEL the 3rd Platoon would take up positions on the outskirts of town, and protect the bridge from the northwest. The 2nd Platoon would scale ERPELER LEY and deny the enemy of observation and direct fire upon the bridge from that vantage point. The 1st Platoon would move east of the bridge and guard that approach.

The Company Commander issued the order and the company started to cross the bridge at 1520 hours. As the lead platoon approached, two charges were set-off near the center of the bridge, further damaging the planking and the supports. The Battalion Commander ordered the Company to halt until the extent of damage could be determined. (37)

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(37) Personal Knowledge

At 1530 hours the Company was again ordered to attack across the bridge. By this time the men were beginning to show signs of fatigue; and when the order was given, they arose wearily and started across. Once on the bridge weariness vanished, and the men sped across as fast as they could run, ignoring the machine gun fire from the opposite bank which was relegated to secondary importance. In the back of every man's mind was the grim picture of the dynamite charges tied to the girders and beneath the floor of the bridge. (38)

While Company A rushed across, Lt. Hugh Mott, Sgt. Dorland, and Sgt. Reynolds of Company B, 9th Armored Engineer Battalion, cut the wires below the bridge deck, preventing the Germans from touching off a 40 pound charge planted on the cross beams underneath. They then raced to the far side of the bridge, to cut the main cable.

Later it was learned that the Engineers located one 500-pound charge of TNT about two thirds of the way across the river. The cap had gone off but the charge failed to explode. Lt. Mott and his men also found several 350-pound charges which had not been detonated. (39)

All this was accomplished by Lt. Mott and his two sergeants, despite the hail of machine gun fire from the towers, and positions on the opposite bank of the river. They were duly awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for this action.

Upon reaching the east bank, Company A proceeded according to the plan. The 1st Platoon sent one squad into the tunnel, while the remainder of the platoon cleared the towers. The few enemy in the towers, who had been manning two machine guns, were quickly knocked out, and after a short fire fight, the tunnel yielded several prisoners. A second squad of the 1st Platoon moved down the river road about 500 yards southeast of the bridge, and took up defensive positions. (40) The remainder of the company turned

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(38) Personal Knowledge

(39) A-8, p.6

(40) Personal Knowledge

northwest to attack ERPEL, with the 3rd Platoon on the left, the 2nd Platoon on the right, and the 1st Platoon (-) in support, following the 3rd Platoon.

The Company Commander contacted the Tank Commander on his SCR 536, and had the fire on ERPEL lifted. No sooner had the tanks ceased firing, when the Company came under intense machine gun and rifle fire from within the town. The platoons were stopped momentarily, but after a heavy exchange of fire, they were able to reach the cover of the houses on the outskirts of the town. From here on progress was slow but steady. By 1600 hours, ERPEL was cleared of the enemy, with the Company taking more than fifty prisoners.

The 3rd Platoon then outposted the northwest edge of ERPEL, and the 1st Platoon (-) moved southwest of the bridge and extended the line already held by its one squad in that area. The 2nd Platoon proceeded up the steep slope of ERPELER LEY from the southwest.

The 2nd Platoon was about halfway from the top of the bluff when it was fired upon by an antiaircraft gun, which was initially presumed to be located on the west bank of the RHINE. The platoon found itself pinned against the side of the cliff with no way to take cover from the murderous flak. About half of the platoon were able to work their way to the right around the nose of the cliff and, out of line of fire. The remainder of the platoon slid or rolled down to the base of the cliff.

The 2nd Platoon suffered about fifteen casualties, from this shelling, including Sergeant Schultz the Platoon Sergeant. Five of these casualties were men who had fallen from the cliff in their haste to take cover. About an hour later, the antiaircraft gun was located east of the RHINE in the vicinity of HEISTER, about 1000 yards northeast of ERPEL, and was knocked out by the 81mm Mortar Platoon of Headquarters Company. (41)

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(41) Personal Knowledge

The platoon was reorganized and again climbed ERPELER LEY, this time from the southeast, reaching the top without further incident. They then moved about 300 yards inland and organized defensive positions.

Meanwhile German mortars from the vicinity of UNKEL and ORSBERG had been firing on the bridgehead area, and the 3rd Platoon had reported tanks moving about in the vicinity of UNKEL. Patrols from this platoon also reported a large number of enemy and vehicles in ORSBERG.

Since the company numbered only about 120 men on this bank of the river, and fearing the inevitable counterattack, the Company Commander ordered the Anti-Tank Platoon to cross the river, leaving two men behind with each gun. He instructed them to dismount as many of the company's .50 caliber machine guns as they could effectively man, and employ them on ground mounts covering the roads into the bridgehead.

The Anti-Tank Platoon crossed with four .50 caliber machine guns and four Rocket Launchers. The platoon divided into teams, each with Rocket Launchers and one machine gun was deployed with one team on each of two roads leading into ERPEL from the northwest; one team covering the ORSBERG road, and the fourth team covering the river road southeast of the bridge.

At this time, approximately 1630 hours, Company C and Company B crossed the bridge. Company C assumed positions astride the ORSBERG road about 400 yards southwest of ORSBERG. Company B moved to Hill 192 300 yards east of ERPELER LEY and dug-in, defending from the north and east. Both companies had closed-in by 1700 hours.

In the present disposition, the battalion was covering more than 3500 yards of frontage. The observation and fields of fire in two-thirds of this area being restricted by dense woods.

The situation was critical. There was practically no information of the enemy, although it was safe to assume that he was rushing troops into the area in an effort to eliminate the bridgehead. In the face of this, the only allied force east of the RHINE was not in a position to be reinforced with Infantry or armor, for several hours. Only a portion of the Division's (42)

organic artillery were in a position to support the bridgehead, at this time. Also Corps artillery had been displacing south when the bridge was taken, and none of its units were within supporting distance.

The tanks and antitank guns of the Task Force were unable to cross the damaged bridge, thus the heaviest antitank weapon east of the river was the Rocket Launcher.

9th Armored Engineers were working frantically to repair the bridge, despite artillery and mortar shelling, and did not expect it to be trafficable until midnight.

On top of all this, the roads west of the RHINE were jammed with traffic, making it impossible for the kitchen vehicles to get through. As a result the men who had consumed their one-third K ration went hungry.

Fortunately, at this time the German Army was as unprepared to reduce the bridgehead, as the Allied Armies were to reinforce it.

Consequently, no major counterattack was forthcoming on 7 March, although the enemy did make several small scale attempts to penetrate the defenses--to no avail. These attacks were no stronger than reinforced platoons, and were easily repulsed. (43)

#### THE EXPANSION OF THE BRIDGEHEAD (See Map D)

At 2400 hours the night of 7-8 March the bridge repairs were completed, permitting passage of one-way vehicular traffic. Company A (-), of the 14th Tank Battalion, crossed at 0015 hours and set up road blocks at the approaches to the bridgehead along the river.

Company C, 656 TD Battalion followed the tank company, but unfortunately the leading TD slipped off the temporary runway, becoming wedged between two cross-members. Traffic was halted until 0530 hours, when the TD was finally dislodged and towed off the bridge. By this time the roads were jammed with traffic, in a continuous line from the bridge as far back as BIRRESDORF. (44)

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(43) Personal Knowledge

(44) A-10, p. 4

However, in the meantime, the 52nd Armored Infantry Battalion, 9th Armored Division, had crossed on foot, and attacked toward UNKEL, assuming responsibility for the northwestern half of the bridgehead. (45) During the night the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, 78th Division also crossed, and attacked south toward KASBACH.

In the morning of 8 March, elements of the 9th Infantry Division and of the 78th Infantry Division crossed the bridge, along with the balance of CCB, 9th Armored Division. (46)

At approximately 1500 hours on 8 March, the 1st Battalion 47th Infantry 9th Division relieved the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, and attacked toward ORSBERG.

The 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, after a long and eventful day-and-a-half passed into reserve in UNKEL. (47)

In summary--Company A, in a period of thirty-five hours, had led an armored task force some fifteen miles against scattered resistance, to the RHINE RIVER. It successfully attacked and cleared the city of REMAGEN; then seized the LUDENDORF BRIDGE, and established a bridgehead on the east bank of the RHINE. The Company held the bridgehead alone for three hours, and as part of the battalion, succeeded in holding the bridgehead for ten additional hours without armor, and with a minimum of artillery support, until Corps and Army could regroup their forces sufficiently to reinforce the position.

In accomplishing this mission, the Company necessitated a change of plans for the entire Allied Army. It had thoroughly surprised the enemy, catching him with his reserves so disposed, that he could not assemble a force large enough to reduce the bridgehead in its infancy.

In the words of General Eisenhower--"It was here on that day that occurred one of those rare and fleeting opportunities which occasionally present themselves in war, and which, if grasped, have incalculable effects in determining future success". (48)

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(46) A-10, p.24

(47) Personal Knowledge

(48) A-1, p. 91

## ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

### 1. SUPPLY

During the preparation phase an adequate plan was made for a resupply of ammunition. This plan was executed rapidly during the short halt prior to the attack on REMAGEN, and again immediately before crossing the bridge. As a result, when the company crossed the RHINE it had a full supply of ammunition. This foresight minimized the effect of the supply barrier, caused by the damaged bridge and the traffic-choked roads, which could have had an adverse effect upon the ability of the company to accomplish its mission.

### 2. FAILURE TO REORGANIZE COMMAND

It is my opinion that the Company Commander did not make proper use of the leadership and professional ability of his Anti-Tank Platoon Leader. The Officer involved, Lt. Gardner, was a superior officer and definitely capable of leading a rifle platoon, by reason of his training and inherent ability as a leader. It is not meant to imply that either of two sergeants, who commanded the rifle platoons, performed unsatisfactorily. However, knowing all the personalities in question, and in view of the fact that the anti-tank platoon was excess baggage due to the organization and mission of the Task Force, I firmly believe that the Officer's talents should have been used to further insure the success of the mission.

### 3. USE OF TANKS

In consideration of the fact that the success of this operation depended largely upon speed, the tanks were not utilized to the maximum. The Advance Party Commander was instructed to have the tanks follow the rifle platoon's five half-tracks, because of the good fields of fire for enemy antitank guns along the route of march. No long range antitank guns were encountered, however if there had been any, a tank is less vulnerable than a half-track and certainly better equipped to retaliate.

If the tanks had been at the head of the column, with infantry mounted on the decks, it is my opinion that there would have been considerably less delay in reducing the small enemy groups encountered along the route. As it was organized, the Advance Party had to dismount and maneuver on foot to overcome the resistance. Whereas, tanks with infantry, could have over-run the positions more quickly. In clearing the town of OVERICH, the tanks were used, but there was a delay in getting them to the head of the column due to the narrowness of the road.

At REMAGEN, since the importance of capturing the bridge intact was apparent, speed was of the essence. Yet the infantry attacked from one direction, while the tanks attacked from another direction thirty minutes after the infantry had crossed the line of departure. As was pointed out, the tanks had no difficulty in moving through the city, in fact they joined the 2nd Platoon before it had been half-way through the city. The infantry was forced to spend much time in clearing REMAGEN, since they had to pass through the entire city before reaching the bridge. It is my opinion that a considerable amount of time could have been saved, if the tanks and the infantry had attacked jointly along the route which the tanks did take.

#### 4. THE ENEMY'S FAILURE TO BLOW THE BRIDGE

The failure of the German Army to destroy the only remaining bridge across the RHINE proved to be one of the greatest single factors toward hastening their defeat. The fact that Von-Rundstedt under-estimated the speed of the First Army advance, and permitted the bridge to remain intact until the last moment, because it was so unfavorably situated for a large scale river crossing, gave the Allies a foothold on the east bank which could not be denied due to the disposition of the German Army at that time.

U.S. Army Engineers have stated that the last minute attempt to destroy the bridge, failed as a result of faulty detonators and poor wiring. While

Field Marshal Kesselring, who relieved Von-Rundstedt due to his error in judgement, stated that the bridge commander was absent from the site on that day.

Regardless of the reasons for its failure to be destroyed at the last moment -- it is my opinion, that it should have been destroyed earlier in the campaign when the bulk of the German forces were withdrawn. There was no reason for leaving it intact as an avenue of escape, for there were no large forces operating in that sector. It proved to be a costly avenue of escape to provide for such small groups as there were in that area.

#### 5. THE ATTACK ACROSS THE RHINE WITH ONE COMPANY

At 1530 hours Company A attacked across the RHINE, and approximately one hour later Companies B and C crossed to reinforce the bridgehead.

When the battalion attacked REMAGEN, all three companies were committed, and as a result B and C Companies were in the act of mopping up the enemy on the outskirts of town, when the Task Force Commander decided to attack across the RHINE. Granted, the operation called for immediate execution and there was no time to wait for the rest of the battalion to become disengaged. Nevertheless, when the attack was launched on REMAGEN, it was clearly understood by all concerned that if the bridge was intact, the infantry would cross it. Therefore, I contend that in the face of this, the Battalion Commander should have withheld a reserve for this contingency.

As it turned out, Company A was able to establish the bridgehead and hold it until the remainder of the battalion crossed, however the importance of the bridgehead dictated more positive planning.

#### 6. DECISION TO EMPLOY THE ANTI-TANK PLATOON

In my estimation the Company Commander's decision and employment of the Anti-tank Platoon was commendable. Finding himself threatened by

counterattack, and in a position where he could not bring his organic anti-tank guns across the river, he made the maximum possible use of the men and weapons at his disposal. The teams of .50 caliber machine guns and rocket launchers were disposed to cover likely avenues of approach for tanks and vehicles. Though not as effective an anti-tank defense as one might wish, the teams were equipped to give a good account of themselves had an armored counterattack materialized.

#### 7. DELAY IN REINFORCING THE BRIDGEHEAD

On 7 March, after the attack toward the RHINE had jumped off, III Corps in anticipation of its forces reaching the river and then attacking south, had begun displacing its artillery to the south. Consequently, when the bridge was taken, Corps artillery was not in a position to reinforce the bridgehead by fire. Likewise all of the Divisions of the Corps were employed, which resulted in a piecemeal commitment of forces to reinforce the bridgehead. Approximately thirteen hours elapsed before the first reinforcing element crossed the bridge.

Needless to say, had the enemy been prepared, the infantry battalion with its lack of support and its extended front, would have had a most difficult time in holding the bridgehead.

It is difficult to understand why these conditions existed, for commanders at all levels knew of the existence of the bridge, and Corps had instructed the 9th Armored Division to capitalize if the bridge were taken intact. Yet, as it resulted, we were completely unprepared for immediate exploitation of the success.

#### LESSONS

1. Prior planning to effect resupply of ammunition at every opportunity in a fast-moving situation, minimizes the effect of unforeseen supply obstacles which may later arise.

2. During combat, trained subordinate leaders should be used where their talents can assist in accomplishing the mission, and not be wasted in unimportant roles.

3. Where speed is essential, especially against a disorganized enemy, tanks should be used aggressively to take maximum advantage of their shock action and armor protection.

4. Do not wait until the last moment to deny the enemy ~~an~~ an avenue of approach, nor disregard an approach when organizing a defense, no matter how unfavorable it may be for his use.

5. The importance of withholding a reserve, with which to further a success, cannot be emphasized enough.

6. In combat one of the qualities of a good commander is his ability to adjust his organization to cope with an unorthodox situation.

7. If there is a possibility of the enemy failing to do the obvious, which would influence our course of action, we must not over-estimate him and should be prepared to take advantage of his blunder.