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REDUCTION OF THE FORTIFIED CITY
OF METZ, FRANCE, BY THE XX CORPS
9-22 NOVEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Corps Assistant G-2)

Type of operation described: A COORDINATED
CORPS ATTACK TO ENVELOPE AND REDUCE A FORTIFIED CITY

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REDUCTION OF THE FORTIFIED CITY OF METZ, FRANCE
BY THE XX CORPS, 9-22 NOVEMBER 1944
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph describes the envelopment and reduction of the fortified city of Metz, France by the XX U. S. Corps, 9-22 November 1944, with emphasis on the intelligence or G-2 operations and results.

For the purpose of orienting the reader, a brief review of events leading up to this operation is required.

The cross-channel invasion of France, launched 6 June 1944 over the beaches of Normandy, had been successful. The Cherbourg Peninsula had been cleared and, after many bitter engagements, United States forces had broken out of the hedgerow country at St. Lo. The rapid advance eastward across France by early September had carried General George S. Patton's Third U. S. Army to a line generally along the Moselle River in the French province of Lorraine, less than 25 miles from the German border.

In southern France the American Seventh Army had landed successfully, and on 11 September had made contact with Third Army north of Dijon. In the north the American First Army and British Second Army had made parallel drives across northern France, reached the Belgian border, and in early September had captured Namur and the highly strategic port of Antwerp. (1) By November, First U. S. Army had cleared Aachen and was meeting increasing resistance in the Siegfried Line. Sixth Army Group in the south, composed of the American Seventh and French First Armies, was making slow progress in the Vosges Mountains. (2) (See Map A)

(1) A-1, p. 89; (2) A-1, p. 138.

THIRD ARMY SITUATION

Third U. S. Army was composed of XII, XV, and XX Corps whose advance across France had been characterized by rapid armor thrusts. ^{the} Enemy defense had been generally disorganized with determined stands made at critical communication centers and river lines. For such missions the enemy used whatever units he could disengage, withdraw, and reorganize in defensive positions.

These actions carried the XV Corps across the Moselle River and approximately 20 miles east of Charmes in the southern portion of the Army sector by 25 September. XII Corps, holding the central portion of Army sector, had also crossed the Moselle and was advancing toward Chateau-Salins. (3) (See Map A) XX Corps held the northern portion of Third Army sector.

The supply problem had become acute. On 25 September 1944 Third Army issued Letter of Instruction Number 4, which stated in part: "The acute supply situation confronting us has caused the Supreme Commander to direct that, until further orders, the Third Army with its supporting troops.....will assume the defensive. It is evident that the successful accomplishment of this mission will require particular concentration upon two points: **FIRST**, this change in attitude on our part must be completely concealed from the enemy who, should he learn of it, would certainly move troops from our front to oppose other Allied Armies. **SECOND**, we must be in possession of a suitable line of departure so that we can move rapidly when the Supreme Commander directs us to resume the offensive. In order to carry out the first of these requirements, we will not dig in, wire, or mine,

(3) A-1, p. 143.

but will utilize a thin outpost zone backed at suitable places by powerful mobile reserves."(4) Thus the Army Commander in his instructions made provision for security and availability of powerful counterattacking forces.

XX CORPS SITUATION

It was under conditions brought about by the requirements stated above that the XX Corps planned for the envelopment and reduction of the fortified city of Metz.

Initial detailed information concerning the Metz defenses had been obtained in early September by the 5th Infantry Division and the 7th Armored Division in their attack along the high ground west of Metz approaching Fort Jeanne D'Arc. Determined resistance had been encountered. In addition, reconnaissance elements of the Third Cavalry Group had reached Hauconcourt on the Mozelle eight miles north of Metz, set up OP's overlooking the river, and had determined that the enemy was organizing in great haste to defend Metz and the Mozelle River line. Another platoon of cavalry had penetrated through retreating columns of Germans on 1 September, reached Thionville, and seized and held the main highway bridge there for several hours before the startled Germans recovered and drove them off. (5)

All efforts during September and October to reduce the fortifications west of the Moselle were unsuccessful. In October the 5th Infantry Division had made a determined effort to take Fort Driant by assault. This attack was halted 10 October after intense fighting in darkened underground passages had proven too costly. The 5th Infantry Division and 7th Armored Division had also established a bridgehead east of the Moselle and south of

(4) A-1, p. 416; (5) A-2, p. 2.

Metz during September. The proposed armored exploitation of this bridgehead to the east was halted when the 7th Armored Division was ordered north to First U.S. Army, and the 5th Infantry Division established a defensive line on high ground overlooking the Seille River. Activity in this bridgehead was characterized by numerous counterattacks, strong patrol action, and fierce enemy resistance to 5th Infantry Division efforts. In spite of the necessity for going on the defensive, the bridgehead and activity within it gained two distinct advantages:

- (a) The armored striking power of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division had been used up in counterattacks; and
- (b) 5th Infantry Division positions outflanked several of the major Metz fortresses and offered good jump-off points toward the city from the south. (6)

The Corps sector extended from Luxembourg in the north to Pont-A-Mousson in the south, a front of 45 miles from flank to flank. (See Map C) Prior to redeployment for the attack, the 3d Cavalry Group patrolled the Moselle River line from Luxembourg to a point south of Thionville. The 90th Infantry Division held the sector from this point around the enemy salient west of the Moselle and to the 5th Infantry Division bridgehead on the south. The 5th Infantry Division held the bridgehead south of Metz to the Corps south boundary.

SIGNIFICANCE OF METZ

Metz, one of the oldest cities of Central Europe, had long been considered of strategic importance. Located at the confluence of the Moselle and Seille Rivers, the city has natural pro-

(6) A-2, p. 6.

tection formed by the abrupt slopes on the west side of the Moselle and the dominant hills to the east. The entire area is characterized by steep heavily wooded hills.

In Celtic times Metz was occupied and fortified by the Romans to defend Gaul from conquering Germanic tribes. In 451 A.D. the Huns devastated the city and occupied it for 60 years. Down through the ages one power after another, recognizing that Metz and its surrounding terrain constituted a gateway between Lorraine and Germany, struggled for its control. In 1870 France was invaded by three German armies, one of which marched on Metz but was defeated some four miles before reaching its objective. The success of the other two armies, however, led to the capitulation of the city.

Germany ruled until the Armistice of World War I, when Metz was again restored to France. When France capitulated in 1940 Metz once more came under German control, which continued until the 22 November 1944 ^{liberation} liberation by XX Corps and its return to the French shortly thereafter. (7)

The region of Metz and the Moselle valley was well-developed industrially. Many of the towns were dependent completely upon mines and steel mills which, under German control, had contributed heavily to the Nazi war effort.

Some 25 miles eastward lay the German border and the highly industrialized region of the Saar and its principal city Saarbrücken. The Siegfried Line fortifications on the east of the Saar River were very closely constructed, making this portion of the line one of the most powerful defense areas of the entire West Wall.

(7) A-2, p. 6.

Further beyond lay the Rhine and the Army objective, the Frankfurt-Darmstadt area, within the heart of Nazi Germany. To strike at this objective demanded first that Metz be taken.

NETWORK OF FORTIFICATIONS

A. The Metz Forts

Each of the fighting forces surging back and forth across the Lorrainian city left permanent imprints in the form of fortifications. It was upon the dominant ridges and hills formed by the Moselle and its tributary, the Seille, that these forts were built.

The Metz fortifications are made up of two belts of forts, an inner belt for close-in defense, and an outer ring. The inner defense belt of 15 forts was completed in 1866 under Napoleon III, and was modernized in varying degrees by the Germans. Some were linked by supporting bunkers, pillboxes, armored observation posts, heavily reinforced casemates, minefields, and connecting trench systems. In some, fixed artillery pieces as large as 210 mm. and self-propelled guns were installed. Extensive field fortifications were constructed for the purpose of making these forts of the "inner belt" primarily infantry strong points.

The belt of 28 outer forts was located roughly six miles from the city which it surrounded. These forts, built by the Germans between 1871 and 1912, were constructed primarily as fortified artillery positions as distinguished from the inner belt of infantry strongpoints. The deep moats surrounding each fort or fortified group were covered by interlocking automatic weapons fire. German infantry security for these highly fortified artillery positions was deployed at a considerable distance for all-around defense, and thereby effectively prevented complete surprise. Underground passages linked certain of the

fortifications. Artillery pieces were fired mostly from rounded steel turrets protruding slightly from the surface of the ground. The major portions of the forts were actually underground.

Against these implacements it was found that only aerial bombs of 1000 pounds or more could cause material damage. Relatively ineffective were high velocity direct fire weapons and counter-battery artillery fire including that of the eight-inch gun.

This outer belt of forts was broken down into fortified groups, each with a main center fort and two or three smaller ones. These groups housed from 2000 to 3000 men each. Communications between all forts was excellent, and was either direct or through a central switch in Metz.

In addition to the heavy artillery and roving 105 self-propelled guns used in these forts, numerous 88 mm. AT guns were emplaced. (8)(See Map B)

B. The Thionville Forts

Thionville, on the Moselle 16 miles north of Metz, was protected by three fortified groups. Fort Guentrange to the northwest was captured by the 90th Infantry Division in September. Its eight 100.mm. French guns were later put to good use by Corps artillery. The other two fortified groups, Koenigsmacher and D'Illange, on dominant terrain east of the Moselle and north and south of Thionville respectively, were similar in construction to the outer belt of Metz forts. Each had a battery of four 100 mm. French guns. (9)(See Map C)

C. The Maginot Line

Scattered along a rugged ridge from Koenigsmacher to the

(8) A-2, p. 8,9; (9) A-2, p. 9.

vicinity of Boulay the 19 fortified groups of the Maginot Line represented a formidable obstacle in the path of XX Corps. Revolving gun turrets on these forts traversed 360 degrees. Exposed sides of casemates were protected by machine gun fire which interlocked with that of adjoining casemates. The first in this series of fortifications, the Metrich Group, was located approximately 1000 yards north of Fort Koenigsmacher and exchanged interlocking fire with that fort. (10)(See Map C)

PLAN OF ATTACK

Third U. S. Army was ordered to resume the offensive on D-Day at H-Hour to seize the Darmstadt-Frankfurt area of Germany. XII Corps was ordered to attack on the right (s) flank of XX Corps to seize that part of the Army objective within its zone, and to assist XX Corps to isolate and destroy the Metz garrison. III Corps Headquarters, newly arrived in the combat zone, was ordered to concentrate in the vicinity of Etain. Its staff officers were to work with appropriate staff sections of XX Corps Headquarters for indoctrination purposes. XIX Tactical Air Command was to support XX Corps. XX Corps was to attack on D-Day to encircle and destroy the garrison of the Metz fortified area, to seize a bridgehead over the Saar River in the vicinity of Saarburg, and to reconnoiter in force to seize crossings over the Saar River intact. (11)

XX Corps Field Order 12, dated 3 Nov 44, gave the Corps plan. The 5th Infantry Division was to attack from its bridgehead south of Metz, by-pass the outer belt of fortresses, and seize the high ground southeast of Boulay.

(10) A-2, p. 9; (11) A-2, p. 62.

The 90th Infantry Division was to make an assault crossing over the Moselle at Malling and Cattenom under cover of darkness, execute a flanking attack along the trace of the Maginot Line and join up with the 5th Infantry Division behind Metz in the Boulay vicinity. By attacking down the Maginot Line it was hoped that assault troops could reduce these forts one by one without being subjected to their supporting cross-fires. Reduction of Fort Koenigsmacher was to get priority.

The 10th Armored Division, newly arrived, was to be passed through the 90th Division bridgehead and attack southeast to Boulay on the outside of the 90th Division attack. One combat command was to strike swiftly toward the Saar River in the vicinity of Merzig and seize bridges intact to be held at all cost.

The 95th Infantry Division, also newly arrived, was to vigorously contain the enemy fortified salient west of Metz and rapidly follow up any enemy withdrawal, and, on Corps order, attack and seize the city of Metz. The Division was also to stage a demonstration in force at Uckange, to consist of a river crossing, continuing for a minimum of 15 hours.

The 83d Infantry Division, attached only for this operation, was to continue to protect Luxembourg and contain enemy in north of zone, and, on Corps order, pass through the 90th Division bridgehead over the Saar River in the Saarburg vicinity.

The 3d Cavalry Group was to screen the Moselle River line from Thionville to the north boundary for the purpose of covering readjustment of troops. The Cavalry was to follow the 10th Armored Division across the river, guard the Corps north flank and maintain contact between the 10th Armored and 83d Infantry Divisions.

Infantry Divisions were to thoroughly mop up areas through which they passed. (12)(See Map C)

ENEMY FORCES

An estimated 30,000 troops held Metz and the Moselle River line in the Corps zone. In the north to Koenigsmacher the 416th Infantry Division defended. The river line from Koenigsmacher to the north edge of the enemy salient west of the Moselle was held by the 19th Grenadier Division, while the 462d Volksgrenadier Division commanded the fortified enemy salient west of the Moselle. This latter Division had under its control Metz Officer Candidate School personnel and the 1419 Fortress Battalion. The 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division defended on the south of Metz. The 45th and 53d Machine Gun Battalions were interspersed in the southern defense areas. (See Map C)

On 1 November the LXXXII Infantry Corps replaced the XIII SS Corps in the Metz command. Generalleutnant Kittel, an expert in fortress defense, was brought from the Russian front to assume command of the 462d VG Division. His orders were to defend at all costs. (13)

PREPARATION AND DEPLOYMENT

It was decided that the 90th Infantry Division would assemble in the Foret de Cattenom in preparation for the attack. This forest area west of the Division crossing site afforded good concealment for staging, although between the forest and the river no cover existed, and the enemy had complete observation from high ground east of the river. Fort Koenigsmacher and the head of the ridge containing the Maginot fortifications commanded the entire 90th Division crossing area, and provided the enemy

(12) A-2, p. 62; (13) A-2, p. 14.

with excellent observation. The tactical effect of terrain in this general area favored the defender. (14)

Both the 95th Infantry Division and 10th Armored Division had recently arrived in the theater. Neither had experienced battle. For battle indoctrination the 95th was put into the 5th Infantry Division bridgehead, while the latter withdrew and conducted intensive training in assault of fortified positions. The 10th Armored was assigned the southern portion of the enemy salient west of Metz. At this time the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions of XII Corps were in the vicinity south of Pont-A-Mousson. Major General Walton H. Walker, commanding XX Corps, decided that by placing the 10th Armored Division in this same general area, the enemy would conclude that an armored drive was to be made southeast of Metz. (15) This deceptive move was proven sound in the forthcoming attack.

Corps Artillery had for the attack 17-2/3 battalions of artillery plus one battalion of 14 captured weapons of mixed type plus eight 100 mm. guns of Fort Guentrange. Security for regrouping these units was essential. Prior to regrouping, the bulk of Corps Artillery was in position in the 5th and 95th Infantry Division zones. Most of that within the 5th Division zone was to remain, while the major portion of the movement for regrouping was out of the 95th Division zone and into position for supporting the 90th Division crossing.

For maximum security, movements were restricted to darkness. Strict control over civilian traffic was established. Artillery not scheduled to move increased its rate of fire to maintain the same volume to which the enemy was accustomed. Some radios and

(14) A-2, p.12; (15) Personal Knowledge; A-2, p. 14.

Air OP's were left in old position areas for maintaining the usual amount of radio traffic and air patrol. Reconnaissance of new position areas was limited to certain key personnel. Vehicle markings and shoulder patches were changed to correspond with those of the 3d Cavalry Group which had been operating in that area for several weeks. Registrations from new positions were restricted to one gun per battalion the afternoon prior to the attack and were covered with simultaneous fire from units remaining in old positions. (16)

To conceal movement of Corps Artillery units out of the 95th Division zone, higher headquarters provided the 23d Special Troops (EFOUSA) to maintain existing artillery conditions in this area. The method was to employ dummy rubber guns, simulate gun flashes, and establish deceptive radio operations. These troops moved in and occupied positions simultaneously with the departure of Corps Artillery. Flashes were set off simultaneously with the firing of artillery units which had remained. All evidence of the genuine artillery picture to include positions, camouflage, traffic, and communications was maintained. (17) Interrogation of prisoners revealed later that these movements had been made without detection by the enemy. The deceptive efforts had been successful. (18)

Two enemy pockets west of the Moselle and north of his fortified salient still existed and had to be taken before the river crossing could be attempted. Maizieres-Les-Metz was strategically located astride the main highway leading into Metz from the north. The enemy had clung tenaciously to this town during October when numerous limited objective attacks were launched. To assault Metz we had to first control Maizieres.

(16) Personal Knowledge; A-3, p. 26; (17) Personal Knowledge; A-3, p. 26; (18) Personal Knowledge.

An all-out attack by 90th Division elements with air and artillery support drove out the enemy on 30 October after savage house-to-house fighting. (19) Near the Corps north boundary an estimated three enemy companies held the town of Berg on the Moselle and the high slopes to the northwest. This area was cleared on 5 November by elements of 3d Cavalry Group. (20)

The Moselle was now cleared on the west bank except for the fortified enemy salient west of Metz. The 5th Infantry Division held a sizeable bridgehead south of the city and could cut the main escape routes east of the city, or assault directly from the south.

The 90th Infantry Division assembled in the Cattenom Forest by dawn 8 November ready to pass through 3d Cavalry Group and cross the Moselle. ^{the} 10th Armored Division had been relieved and was in its initial assembly area near Mars-La-Tour ready to move north and exploit the 90th Division crossing on Corps order. ^{the} 83d Infantry Division in the north, attached for this operation only and assigned Saarburg crossings of the Saar River as its objective, continued to patrol Luxembourg and maintain contact with First Army units on its north. Everything was in readiness for the attack.

THE ATTACK

The 95th Infantry Division diversionary attack in battalion strength crossed the Moselle in assault boats at Uckange 2100 hours, 8 November, and penetrated a short distance to the vicinity of Bertrange. Enemy reaction was as expected. A regiment of the 19th Infantry Division supported by armor was moved to commanding terrain in that area, and prepared to counterattack our

(19) Personal Knowledge; A-2, p. 13; (20) Personal knowledge; A-2, p. 15.

anticipated larger forces. Small groups were sent out to contain the demonstration unit. When a 95th Division task force went through this area a week later the enemy had moved this regiment in attempting to halt our 90th Infantry Division. (21)

At 0330 hours, 9 November, the 90th Infantry Division began its crossings at Cattenom and Malling. Recent steady rains had swollen the Moselle until enemy defenses in low areas along the east bank were inundated. In this respect the river initially aided the attack, but the water was rising rapidly, and the assault boat crossing became more and more difficult. Boats were swept as much as 1000 yards downstream by the swift current. 90th Infantrymen and Engineer units on the west side waiting to cross were shelled by artillery and mortars. The Moselle continued to rise. By noon it had swollen to 800 yards in width at the Cattenom crossing site. Bridging efforts were futile, but by darkness on D-Day the 90th Division had sent across eight Infantry battalions. Using only hand-carried weapons these troops in the first day overran seven towns, penetrated two miles with no armored support, and began an assault on Fort Koenigsmacher. Extensive enemy minefields, in addition to stubborn resistance with small arms, artillery, and mortar, were encountered. (22)

Read in context - not at all

The first strong enemy reaction came at 100030 ^{N.O.M. or} against the 90th Division in the vicinity of Kerling when a counter-attack was launched in company strength, supported by seven tanks. The enemy retook the town. (23) The keystone of the Maginot Fortifications, Fort Metrich, was enveloped and reduced

(21) A-2, p. 16; (22) A-2, p. 21; (23) A-5, p. XCIII

by marching fire. Resistance to the south at Fort Koenigsmacher was fearfully similar to that encountered in early October at Fort Driant. The defenders, one battalion strong, snugly manned positions, while 90th troops on top were subjected to intense artillery and mortar fire. Explosives were needed to complete the reduction. Enemy fire prevented supply by boat, so five artillery liaison planes dropped "C-2" compound to the infantry on top of the fort. (24)

The river continued rising as rain fell steadily. The Corps Commander decided to employ his armor more quickly than originally planned and to cross it at Thionville. This was to take advantage of higher river banks and smaller flooded areas. The 95th Infantry Division was ordered on 10 November to establish this bridgehead.

The eight infantry battalions of the 90th were still fighting with hand-carried weapons only. Tactical Air Reconnaissance reported an undetermined number of enemy tanks 10 miles east of Koenigsmacher 091400 A.

In the south the 5th Infantry Division met ^{Should be on May 2} sporadic resistance to its 9 November attack. Fort L'Aisne was found unoccupied. Prisoner interrogation revealed that elements of 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division were to be relieved in the fort by a Fortress Machine Gun Battalion which failed to arrive on schedule. The SS Troopers had pulled out without relief. The 5th Infantry Division immediately took over the area. The enemy was known to have planned a defense of the general line Fort L'Aisne to Sorbey. With the Fort L'Aisne sector suddenly breached, the Corps Commander decided to exploit the opportunity for an immediate thrust into Metz through what appeared to be the soft

underbelly of the fortified defense area. (25)(See Map B)

Support on D-Day, both artillery and air, was excellent. For secrecy, no artillery preparations were fired within the Corps zone before the jump-off. At H-Hour all probable targets, which had been located and confirmed by Corps Artillery S-2 Counterbattery Intelligence Section, were brought under fire. Numerous counterbattery missions were fired throughout D-Day with good results. (26)

The 8th Air Force lent a helping hand by delivering a saturation attack on all fortified towns east of the 5th Infantry Division bridgehead area. 1476 heavy bombers took part. 2305 tons of bombs were dropped on Metz alone. Principal targets besides Metz were Verny, Orny, Pommerieux, and Saarbrucken. The effect was good. Enemy communications were cut and enemy units were left, at least temporarily, as separate fighting forces. (27)

Up north the Malling bridge in the 90th Division zone was completed by early morning on the 11th. 90th ^{Div.} elements driving along the crest of the Maginot Line had made good progress, but its advance had exposed its flanks. The battalion assaulting Fort Koenigsmacher and using composition "C-2" dropped by Cub planes met fanatical resistance. Finally, after three days of blasting and restricting the enemy to more and more untenable areas within the massive fort, the remaining Germans, approximately 372, were encouraged to surrender by gasoline poured down ventilator shafts and ignited. (28)

At Thionville the 95th Division sent a battalion across against a surprised enemy who recovered quickly and swept the area with small arms, artillery, and mortar fire from Fort

(25) A-2, p.34; (26) A-3, p. 27; (27) A-4, p. 128; (28) A-2,p.56.

D'Illange and old Fort Yutz, the latter in eastern Thionville commanding the crossing site.

The enemy decided on 12 November that it was time to commit his reserve forces to counterattack and destroy the American bridgeheads. At 0830 elements of the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division supported by tanks and SP Artillery struck the 90th Infantry Division in an effort to split the bridgehead along the Petite-Hettange-Kerling road. The enemy reached Petite-Hettange before being halted. The Moselle had receded some and two TD's succeeded in reaching and crossing the Malling bridge. Direct fire from these weapons in support of Infantry forced the enemy to withdraw. (29) ^{when} Fort Yutz fell, and our own artillery and the Fort Guentrange 100 mm. French guns were blanketing artillery casemates of Fort D'Illange. Throughout the night of 12-13 November bridging operations continued as troops and supplies were ferried across to the bridgehead.

The receding Moselle uncovered extensive minefields along the river banks. Large minefields also delayed elements of the 90th Division along the Maginot Line. (30)

At 131740 ~~A~~. November the first vehicle crossed the Cattenom bridge. The hard-pressed infantry could now expect proper support. The Koenigsmacher bridgehead was firmly established. The Metz defenses were breached in the north and south. The most formidable obstacle, the river, had been overcome and the 10th Armored Division was in assembly west of the Cattenom Forest, poised and ready to exploit infantry success on Corps order. (31)

On 11 November an order from 12th Army Group had transferred the 83d Infantry Division from 3d to 1st U.S. Army. The Saarburg crossing sites were then assigned as objectives to 3d (29) A-2, p. 24; (30) A-2, p.25; (31) A-2, p. 26.

Cavalry Group which was reinforced by engineers, tank destroyers, and one battalion of artillery, and designated Task Force Polk. (32)

By morning of the 14th all regiments of the 90th and its supporting light artillery and two TD battalions had cleared the Cattenom bridge. (33)

The bridge at Thionville was ready for armor. Elements of 10th Armored Division began rolling across on the 15th. Other elements prepared to cross at Malling and swing east of the Maginot Line outside the 90th Division attack.

The last strong enemy counterattack hit the 90th Division at Distroff at dawn ^{on} the 15th in regimental strength. After four hours the enemy withdrew. 90th Division resistance supported by tanks, TD's and artillery had been more than the enemy had bargained for. (34)

Elements of 10th Armored Division were in a final assembly area at Kerling prepared to attack toward Merzig on the 16th. Other elements were crossing at Malling. On the ridge of the Maginot Forts the 90th reached a hill overlooking Budling. (35)

In the south, when the Corps Commander decided ^{the} defense was possibly collapsing after Fort L'Aisne was found unoccupied, the attack north to the city was characterized by rapid movements, quick maneuvers, and sharp engagements with enemy delaying forces. Direct assault did not have to be employed against any of the forts. Most of them were found unoccupied. Enemy resistance was from mostly second-rate troops.

In this area, too, the weather proved a formidable obstacle. Continuous rain up to the 14th turned into sleet and snow on that date. Many casualties resulted from trench foot and a

(32) Personal knowledge; (33) A-2, p. 26; (34) A-2, p. 27;
(35) A-2, p. 27.

continuous effort of leadership was required to keep the attack going. The 5th Infantry Division was attacking three regiments in line on a 16-mile front. The terrain favored the defender. Large expanses of open ground offered no natural cover for the attacking forces. (36)

should be on map C
Fort Chesny (south) was found unoccupied and Fort Chesny (north) was taken by 15 November. On 17 November the towns of Grigy and Borny which commanded an escape route from Metz were taken. Fort Queleu was surrounded. The Sorbey Forts were captured. The Marne Group of forts, one of the largest in the Metz area, was estimated to be a probable rallying point for the disorganized enemy. This group was contained by two battalions, assaulted by a third, and surrendered without firing a shot, 18 November. (37) (See Map B)

During the breakthrough in the southern defenses the 90th Infantry Division had encountered withering 75 mm. fire from the Hackenberg forts of the Maginot Line. (See Map C) Eight-inch and 240 mm. howitzers adjusted by air OP's proved ineffective against the reinforced concrete casemates of the enemy artillery bunkers. SP 155 guns firing at a range of 2000 yards silenced these enemy guns. Early on 16 November the 10th Armored Division was turned loose in its attack towards Merzig and advanced some five miles down the main road ^{which led} before being temporarily stopped by elements of the 25 Panzer Grenadier Division. The 90th Division was now advancing rapidly down the high ridges, and had units well ahead of the armor. By the 17th, 10th Armored Division reconnaissance determined that the bulk of the enemy had withdrawn toward the Saar River, and throughout the day long columns

(36) A-2, p. 34; (37) A-2, p. 35.

of enemy were hastened in their retreat along the ridge of the Maginot Forts by 76 mm. fire from our tanks. (38)

Task Force Polk had attacked north in the meantime toward its Saarburg objective but ran bluntly into heavily fortified switch positions of the Siegfried Line along the base of the Saar-Moselle triangle. The breaching of this line is the story of another campaign and did not occur until February 1945. For the remainder of the Metz campaign the cavalry patrolled and protected the now-exposed north flank of XX Corps across the base of the triangle from the Moselle to positions overlooking the Saar valley within Germany. (39)

While the 90th Infantry and 10th Armored Divisions closed in on the objectives northeast of Metz and the 5th Infantry Division made rapid progress in its attack from the south, the 95th Infantry Division, which had conducted the feint across the Moselle at Uckange and then established the Thionville bridgehead and was containing the enemy salient west of Metz, had taken Fort D'Illange and expanded both bridgeheads. Prisoner interrogations and front line reports indicated the enemy had been forced to shift the bulk of his forces in this area to meet the 90th Infantry and 10th Armored Divisions to the north. The Corps Commander decided to exploit this weakness and ordered the 95th Division to form a mobile striking force to advance south on the eastern side of the Moselle and attack the city of Metz. (40)

Task Force Bacon was the result. Composed of two infantry battalions, attached engineers, reconnaissance troops, tank destroyers, and one company of medium tanks, Task Force Bacon's march to Metz which started 16 November was highly successful.

(38) A-2, p. 28; (39) Personal knowledge; (40) Personal knowledge.

Pushing south from D'Illange, first it relieved the surrounded
battalion demonstration force. This cut-off unit had been supplied for several days by artillery liaison planes. Proceeding on, the task force used armor well forward, firing point blank at points of resistance. Fort St Julien, reported by reconnaissance troops as occupied in force, was overrun 18 November after a 155 SP gun had blasted down its main gate. Patrols reported the enemy was abandoning Fort Bellecroix within Metz proper. Task Force Bacon consolidated and made preparations to enter the city on the 19th. (41) (See Map B)

In the meantime the 95th Division was also attacking at points along the enemy salient west of the river. A night attack between Maizieres and the Moselle encountered dense minefields covered with intense small arms fire, and withdrew. ^(withdrew) On 14 November the high ground between Forts De Guise and Jeanne D'Arc were taken. A sharp counterattack cut off the two leading companies. Forts Jussy, North and South, were captured the same day and again our troops on objectives were cut off by counterattack. Efforts to effect a relief were repelled by all types of fire from adjacent fortifications. Until 17 November these cut-off units were supplied with food, ammunition and medical supplies by seven artillery liaison planes. (42)

After probing attacks at various points along the salient the 95th breached the enemy final protective line northeast of Seme-Court and reached the high ground directly west of Woippy. Taking advantage of this break in enemy defenses the 95th also struck south from Maizieres. (43)

On the 16th the town of Woippy was cleared. This place had

(41) A-2, p. 30; (42) A-2, p. 31; (43) A-2, p. 32.

The enemy blew the Merzig bridge, and the 10th Armored Division was halted on high ground overlooking the Saar valley. (48)

On 20 November contact was made in Metz between the 5th Infantry Division and the 95th Infantry Division. General Kittel, commander of the Metz garrison, led a die-hard last stand of a few hundred defenders on the islands formed by the Moselle and the canal. The city was reported clear at 221435A November 1944. (49)

The enemy holding Fort Queleu had surrendered. The by-passed Forts Jeanne D'Arc, Driant, Plappeville, St. Quentin, Verdun, and St Privat still held out with an estimated total strength of 2000. These forts were contained until one by one they surrendered as food and ammunition was exhausted. Finally, only Jeanne D'Arc remained. She, too, bowed out on 13 December. (50)

The reduction of Metz cleared the way for a continuation of the attack toward the Army objective, Frankfurt. Two routes of attack had been opened. One led east across the Saar River, through the Seigfried Line and across the Palatinate. The other lay through the switch positions of the Seigfried Line covering the base of the Saar-Moselle triangle, thence east across the Saar, through the main Seigfried Line positions and across the Palatinate, the Rhine, and on to Frankfurt.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The attack on Metz and surrounding areas was thoroughly planned and coordinated.

Artillery support was excellent and, on occasions, was instrumental and probably the decisive factor in halting counter-attacks and in reducing fortifications. From 9 through 22 November inclusive, artillery with XX Corps comprising an average of

(48) Personal knowledge; (49) A-2, p. 38; (50) Personal knowledge; A-2, p. 38.

- (b) Changing unit objectives to conform to changing enemy weaknesses.
- (c) Employing Corps supporting units in areas of greatest advantage.

Tactical surprise was achieved primarily because of the flooded condition of the Moselle and special measures taken to preserve secrecy in redeployment of troops prior to the attack. According to prisoner reports, the enemy believed that an assault river crossing was impossible under such severe flood conditions as existed. The 95th Infantry Division demonstration in force across the Moselle at Uckange was highly successful in that attention was temporarily attracted to that area and away from the 90th Infantry Division initial crossings. The use of special units to simulate artillery flashes and communications was well carried out and contributed greatly toward covering artillery displacement to new areas.

Shifting of divisions into and out of the line prior to the attack bewildered the enemy; especially effective in this respect was placing the newly-arrived 10th Armored Division in the vicinity of Pont-A-Mousson near two armored divisions of XII Corps thus leading the enemy to conclude an armored thrust of great strength was to be made in that area.

Our own knowledge of the enemy situation on the immediate front was good so long as contact was maintained and patrols were active and prisoners taken. Longer range intelligence kept a constant flow of information into the Corps G-2 section, useful only for planning purposes. Possibly the greatest shortcoming of this latter type was the failure to furnish more accurate and detailed information concerning the Metz defenses before

concentrated on pinpointing artillery targets. The other team worked chiefly with Corps Engineers. Both teams were supervised by G-2 Air. Photos were consistently one of the most reliable sources of information.

(d) Order of Battle (OB) Team.

One such team was available and worked within the Corps G-2 section. These experts on enemy units confirmed or denied the presence or absence of enemy units on the front. They formed a main cog in G-2 operations and were dependent almost exclusively upon PW reports for information. This team also specialized in examination of enemy documents.

(e) Psychological Warfare Team.

This team of one officer and two enlisted men, all linguists, was equipped with public address systems which were used on many occasions on front lines within hearing distance of the enemy to persuade him to throw down his arms and "come over for a hot meal". Several of the Metz forts which held out though surrounded were targets for this team. Their other weapon was information leaflets packed in shells and fired into enemy territory by artillery. Both weapons were generally effective in persuading small groups to surrender.

(f) Radio Intelligence (RI) Company.

This technical unit, furnished by higher headquarters, intercepted enemy radio traffic. It proved to be a highly reliable source of information.

(g) Ordnance Technical Intelligence (TIT) Team.

This small group worked under the Corps Ordnance Officer and was most helpful in identifying and evaluating new enemy ordnance equipment.

(h) Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Team.

This team made extensive use of resistance forces and contact agents behind enemy lines. They were quite active in the Metz area and produced a continuous flow of information from within enemy held territory. Their FFI agents failed in the important mission of securing the switches controlling demolitions over the Metz bridges.

(i) Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) Team.

The one Corps team functioned within the area between Corps and Army forward boundaries. Occasional items of positive intelligence were produced. (54)

LESSONS

This operation was a success. In its success certain tactical lessons are emphasized:

1. Rivers at flood stage may impede but cannot prevent assault crossings by infantry units.
2. Assault crossings of rivers at flood stage tend to achieve tactical surprise.
3. Demonstrations in force, conducted with timeliness, will divert enemy attention from the area of the main effort.
4. Shifting of units into and out of contact confuses the enemy as to our intent.
5. Presence of armored units will cause the enemy to bolster his defenses in that particular area, possibly at a sacrifice of defensive strength in another area.

(54) Personal knowledge.

6. In redeployment of troops prior to the attack, secrecy may be preserved by: careful control of civilian traffic; limiting reconnaissance of new areas to a minimum of key personnel; restricting troop movements to hours of darkness; operating dummy radio traffic to maintain the normal flow; maintaining normal patrol activity; changing vehicular markings and shoulder patches to conform to those of the old unit in the new area; and setting up dummy artillery pieces in normal position areas.

7. Aerial resupply by artillery liaison planes to surrounded infantry units can be effective.

8. Aggressive engineer bridging operations are vitally important to insure prompt and proper support of infantry assaulting across a river line.

9. To insure a proper evaluation of intelligence from all sources and an accurate estimate of the enemy situation, contact with the enemy must be maintained and information kept flowing constantly from front line units to battalion to regiment and on up the line.

10. Infantry troops in contact are the most reliable source of tactical information about the enemy.