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DATE May 1, 1948

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: Ten Days of Armored Exploitation.

SCOPE: This monograph describes the tactics and techniques utilized by the 6th Armored Division in a successful exploitation operation in April 1945 during the Campaign in Central Germany. The outstanding lessons from this operation are enunciated for the guidance of future armored soldiers.

41-9

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## INTRODUCTION

A look at the past is often the best way to obtain guidance for the future. Especially is this true in the field of military knowledge. The soldier without experience in armor will find this article to be helpful in that it contains successful solutions to numerous tactical problems that will be met again in any future war; the soldier with armored experience will find that which he already knows to be confirmed.

Armor, successfully employed in exploitation, exemplifies the application of most of the principles of war known to the armies of today. Because of this the exploitation operations of the 6th Armored Division in Central Germany have been chosen as the means of imparting some of the lessons learned by the author while serving in that unit as the operations officer of the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion.

The period covered begins on the 29th day of March 1945 and ends on the 15th of April of the same year. During this time the 6th Armored Division was a part of the Third United States Army. This Army, commanded by General G. S. Patton, Jr., had crossed the Rhine River in the vicinity of Oppenheim on 22 March 1945 and had driven immediately to the Main River with the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions leading the attack.<sup>1</sup>

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1. General G. S. Patton, Jr., WAR AS I KNEW IT, p. 273.



Crossings of the Main River were then forced east and west of the city of Frankfurt. It was the intention of the army commander to drive due north from here with his armor toward the cities of Giessen and Kassel.<sup>1</sup> After these crossings had been made the Third Army received instructions to move as rapidly as possible to the north to the line of the Werra and Weser Rivers, and after attaining that line to move east on the Elbe River.<sup>2</sup>

On March 31, 1945 General Patton had further delineated this mission to the XXth Corps of his Army. The XXth Corps was to be on the left (north) of the Third Army in its drive to the Elbe and was given permission to by-pass Kassel with the 6th Armored Division in order to accelerate the movement to the east.<sup>3</sup> This was interpreted to mean that the 6th Armored would not by-pass that city unless it was apparent that it was stoutly defended.

The evening of 31 March 1945 found the 6th Armored Division disposed in such a way as to be able to move either to the north or to the east. Combat Command A had a bridge across the Eder River in the vicinity of Wabern, and Combat Command B was preparing to bridge the Fulda River at Malsfeld (See Sketch 1). A railroad bridge in our hands at this latter town was not suitable to carry the division loads, which made the building of a new bridge necessary.

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1. General G. S. Patton, Jr., WAR AS I KNEW IT. p. 275.
  2. Ibid. p. 279.
  3. Ibid. pp. 279-80.

These dispositions put the 6th Armored in a position to attack and capture Kassel with CCA and then move toward the Elbe River, or in the event of strong resistance on the outskirts of this city, to funnel over the bridge that was being constructed at Malsfeld, leaving Kassel to be cleared by units that were following in the wake of the flying armored columns.<sup>1</sup>

In the event it was necessary to pursue the latter course of action, Major General Robert W. Grow, who commanded the 6th Armored, planned to have the division advance in multiple columns after crossing the Fulda, with the mission of capturing the cities of Erfurt and Weimar. CCA was to be on the left (north) flank and CCB on the right (south) flank. The 86th Cavalry Squadron, Mechanized, was to protect the division's flank on the north and to maintain contact with the south unit of the First United States Army. Reserve Command was to follow the leading combat commands, protect the division trains, and mop up any by-passed resistance in the zone.<sup>2</sup>

The division was organized in an orthodox manner for its exploitation mission. The six major commands were as follows: Combat Command A, Combat Command B, Reserve Command (CCR) Division Artillery, Division Trains and the 86th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized.<sup>3</sup> In addition to regular attachments such as tank destroyers and anti-aircraft

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1. Clyde J. Burke, Combat Record of the Sixth Armored Division. p. 251.
  2. After Action Report, 6th Armored Division. p.1.
  3. Ibid. pp. 1-2.

artillery, General Grow had received a regimental combat team from the 65th Infantry Division and a field artillery group from XXth Corps. (For a detailed breakdown of the division order of battle, see Annex I.)

CCA and CCB contained the bulk of the regular armored units of the division. CCA had two tank battalions and one armored infantry battalion and CCB contained two armored infantry battalions and one tank battalion. Division Artillery controlled all artillery units and was supporting all three of the combat commands. Division Trains controlled all of the service elements of the division. The 86th Cavalry, which usually operated on a flank was reinforced with tank destroyers and engineers to make it more capable of independent action. Reserve Command controlled all units that were in division reserve and on numerous occasions it conducted offensive operations like the other two combat commands.

The commanders of CCA and CCB broke their attachments down again to organize one combat team around the armored infantry battalion and one around the tank battalion. A typical armored infantry combat team consisted of the battalion less one rifle company; a tank company; an engineer platoon; a tank destroyer platoon, and a field artillery

battalion in direct support. Similarly a tank battalion combat team was composed of the same units except that the tank battalion was less one tank company and it had attached an armored infantry company.

The reader should keep in mind that the organization just described was not stable but was changed as needed to fit the tactical situation during the coming days of battle. When these changes occur they are noted in the text.

#### GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE AREA OF OPERATIONS

The area of operations of the 6th Armored Division during the period covered herein is largely encompassed by the provinces of Saxony and Thuringia, Germany.

The terrain of both states is similar, ranging from fertile farming plains to approximately 4000 foot mountain peaks. The Thuringian Forests further complicate the picture in the province of that name.<sup>1</sup>

The major water obstacles in this zone are the Weser, Weisse-Elster, Saale, Werra, Fulda, Zwick-Mulde, Zachopau and Elbe Rivers.<sup>2</sup> All of these streams flow generally perpendicular to the direction of advance of the 6th Armored and, with the exception of the Elbe, each of them presented that unit with a major tactical problem.

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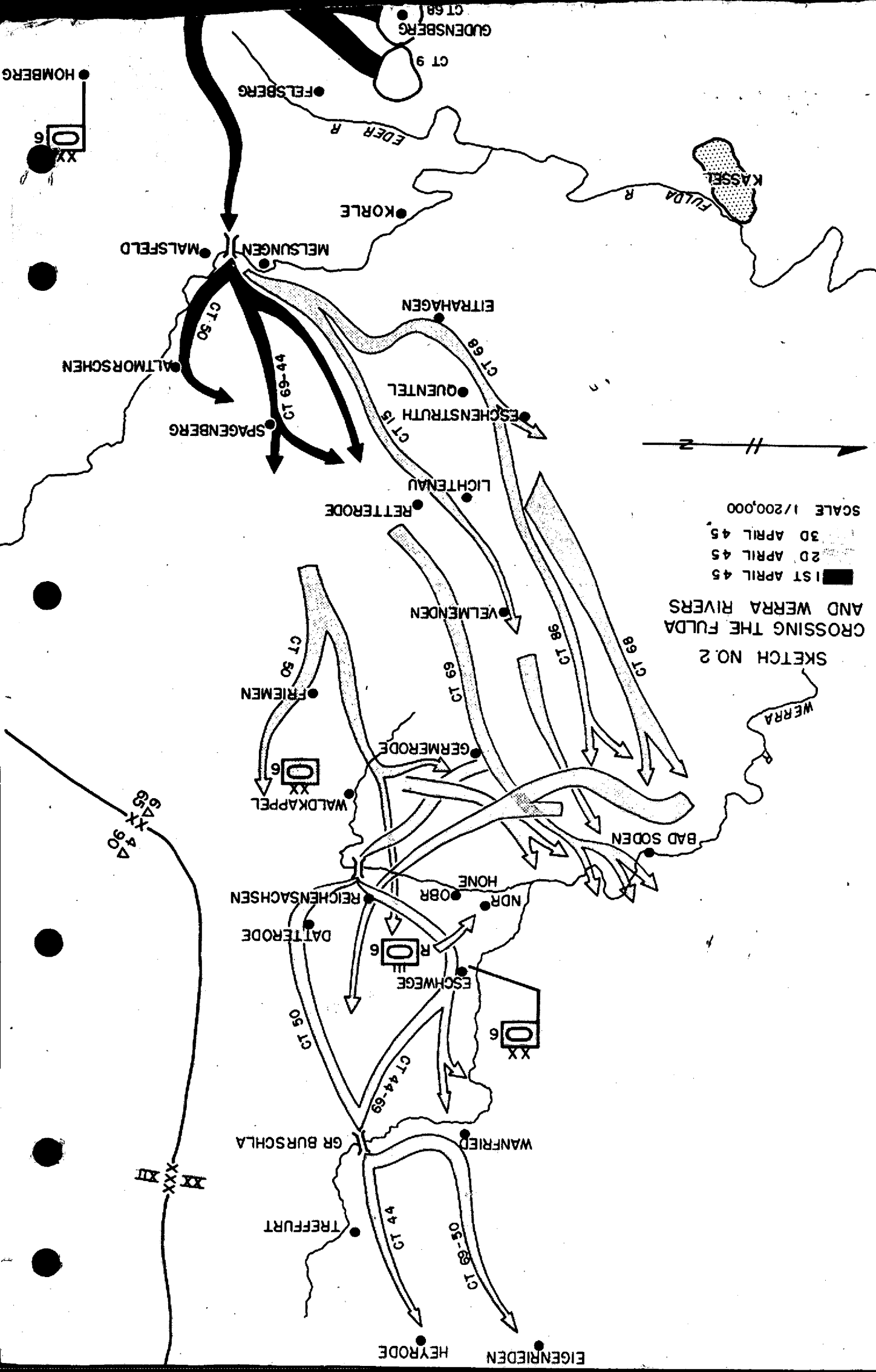
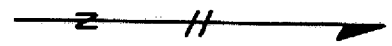
1. Encyclopedia Britannica, 1946 edition, Vol. 20, pp. 33-37. Article: "Saxony"; Vol. 22, pp. 171-72. Article: "Thuringia."

2. Ibid.



SKETCH NO. 2  
CROSSING THE FULDA  
AND WERRA RIVERS

SCALE 1/200,000  
 1ST APRIL 45  
 20 APRIL 45  
 30 APRIL 45



The two principal mountain ranges are the Rhon Mountains in the western portion of Thuringia, and the Erzgebirge Mountains, located in the eastern part of Thuringia and in the western zones of Saxony.<sup>1</sup>

Principal cities of the two provinces are Muhlhausen, Altenburg, Lagensalza, Zeitz, Gera, Erfurt, Leipzig, Jena, Weimar, Dresden, and Chemnitz.<sup>2</sup>

In summation of the above data, it may be said that this is not ideal terrain for the successful operation of an armored division. However, when it is viewed with the knowledge that it was not defended by a cohesive, determined body of enemy troops, it becomes apparent that the potential of this ground was largely lost to our late German enemy.

#### EXPLOITATION TOWARD THE ELBE

##### First Day - 1 April 1945 (Sketch 2)

After an all-night fight by CGA, it was apparent that the city of Kassel could not be taken quickly by this command. In accordance with the orders of the XXth Corps Commander, this mission was turned over to the 80th Infantry Division and the attention of all elements of the 6th Armored was turned to the east.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Encyclopedia Britannica, 1946 edition, Vol. 20, pp. 33-37. Article: "Saxony"; Vol. 22, pp. 171-72. Article: "Thuringia."
  2. Ibid.
  3. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 233.

The bridge over the Fulda River at Malsfeld was completed by the engineers at 0940, and CCB immediately crossed and began the advance. The 86th Cavalry utilized the intact railroad bridge over this river to effect a crossing between Melsungen and Malsfeld, and were thus in a position to begin their mission of protecting the north flank. As CCB cleared the bridge, reserve command came up and assumed responsibility for its protection. CCA was ordered to move on the Malsfeld bridge as soon as relieved in its position near Kassel.<sup>1</sup>

CCB advanced with its three combat teams, the 50th, 44th and 69th, approximately six miles. In the restricted area of the bridgehead, the enemy was able to effectively slow the rate of advance with bazooka fire from strongpoints and roadblocks in or near the numerous villages.<sup>2</sup> This represented the total mileage covered by the 6th Armored on the initial day of exploitation. However, the bridgehead was secure and, late in the day, CCB had opened up its route of advance by using an air-strike delivered by P47 fighters that were flying column cover for the division.<sup>3</sup>

Second Day - 2 April 1945 (Sketch 2)

CCA began crossing the bridge at Malsfeld before dawn and had cleared at 0930.<sup>4</sup> Now the main offensive power of the Super Sixth

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 233.
2. Ibid. p. 254.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

was east of the Fulda, and General Grow was able to advance with two combat commands abreast and in multiple columns. With a total of six combat teams striking him, the enemy evidently felt that it was time to retreat to the next river line, and made haste to do so.

CCA advanced rapidly and was opposed by infantrymen, anti-tank fire, bazookamen and self-propelled artillery.<sup>1</sup> This enemy was loosely organized and had no real will to fight.

With CCA on the left (north) flank and CCB on the right, the Super Sixth ground ahead and at 1930 CCB seized a bridge over the Wehre River at Reichenza-hsen.<sup>2</sup>

Reserve command followed CCA over the bridge at Malsfeld and moved behind CCB on the right (south) rear flank.<sup>3</sup> The 86th Cavalry continued to advance and screen the division's left (north) flank.<sup>4</sup>

The division advanced more than twenty-two miles on this day, despite heavily wooded and mountainous terrain. Enemy air harassed forward elements throughout the period but were very ineffective.<sup>5</sup> The major impediment to a really rapid advance, however, was the lack of bridges over the Werra River. Once more General Grow found, at the end of the day, that he had but one bridge on which to advance in the division zone.

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 255.

2. Ibid.

3. After Action Report, Reserve Command, 6th Armored Division. p. 1.

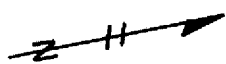
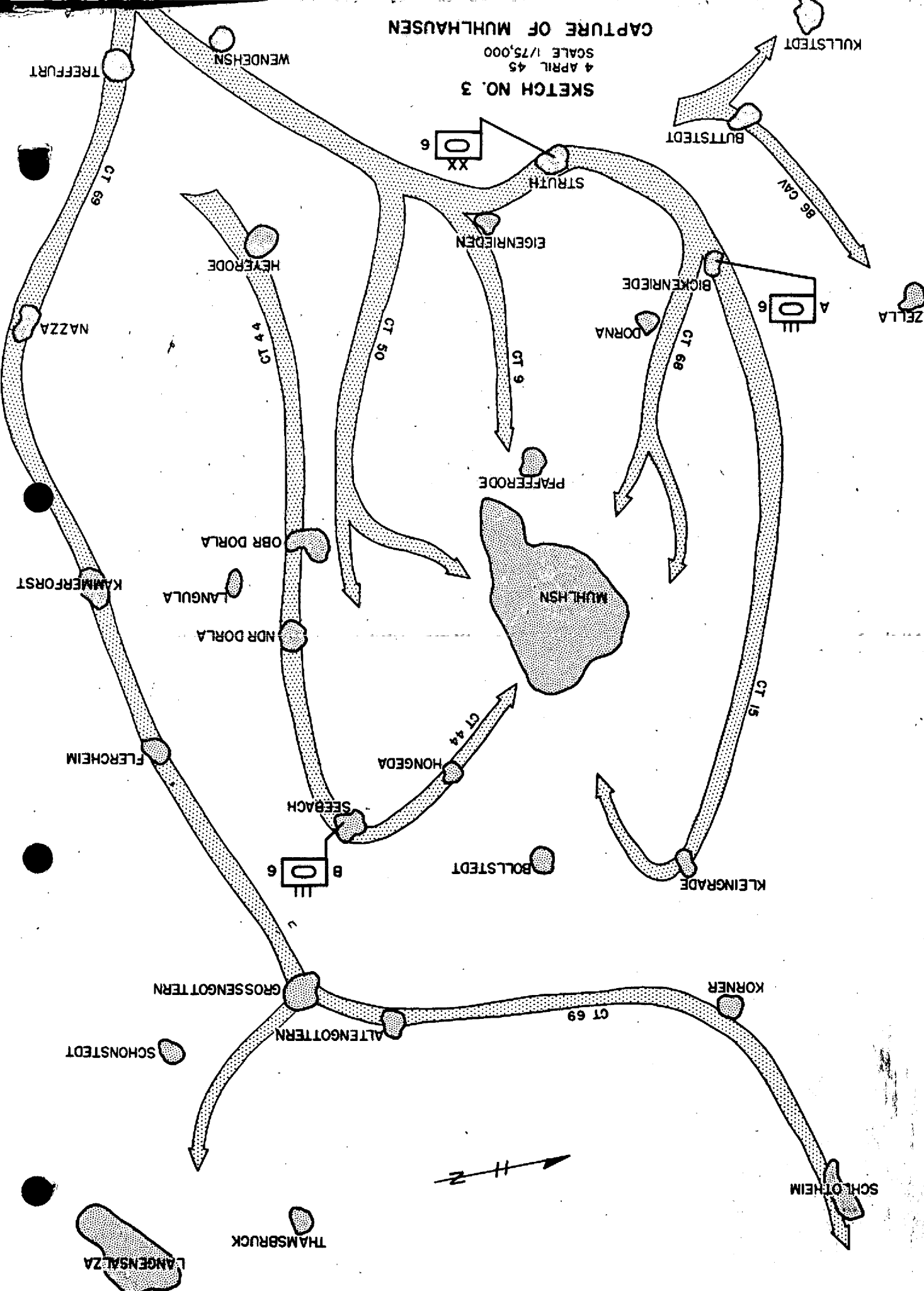
4. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 256.

5. Ibid. p. 255.

CAPTURE OF MUHLHAUSEN

4 APRIL 45  
SCALE 1/75,000

SKETCH NO. 3



LANGENSALZA

THAMBRUCK

SCHLOTHEIM

KORNER

KLEINGRADE

BOLSTEDT

SEEBACH

HONGEDA

FLERCHEIM

NDR DORLA

LANGULA

OBR DORLA

MUHLHSEN

PFAFFERODE

DORNA

BICKENRIEDE

EIGENRIEDEN

HEYERODE

STRUTH

BUTTSTEDT

KULLSTEDT

ZELLA

TREFFURT

WENDEHSN

Third Day - 3 April 1945 (Sketch 3)

CCB moved out of its bridgehead at Reichensachsen and raced for the Werra river at early dawn. Elements of CCA followed immediately, turned to the left, and were again to meet disappointment at the next river line. Late in the afternoon, the electrifying report came in that Combat Team 50 of CCB had secured a bridge over the Werra at Gross Burschla, near the southern border of the division zone.<sup>1</sup>

Again the commanding general was faced with the problem of but one bridge in the entire division zone. However, if he had not pressed the enemy incessantly at the approaches to every crossing in the zone, the division might well have been without any bridges. The desperate Wehrmacht was unable to cope with all the thrusts at so many vital points, at approximately the same time. The old problem of just when to blow a bridge has been the nemesis of many a defender.

CCR continued to guard the bridges over the main supply route of the division and, also, protected elements of division trains at Eschwege.<sup>2</sup>

The 86th Cavalry conducted reconnaissance north along the Werra River to Ellershausen.<sup>3</sup>

Fourth Day - 4 April 1945 (Sketch 3)

On this day, the boundaries between the First, Third and Seventh

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1. After Action Report, 50th Armored Infantry Battalion. p. 1.
2. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 257.
3. Ibid.

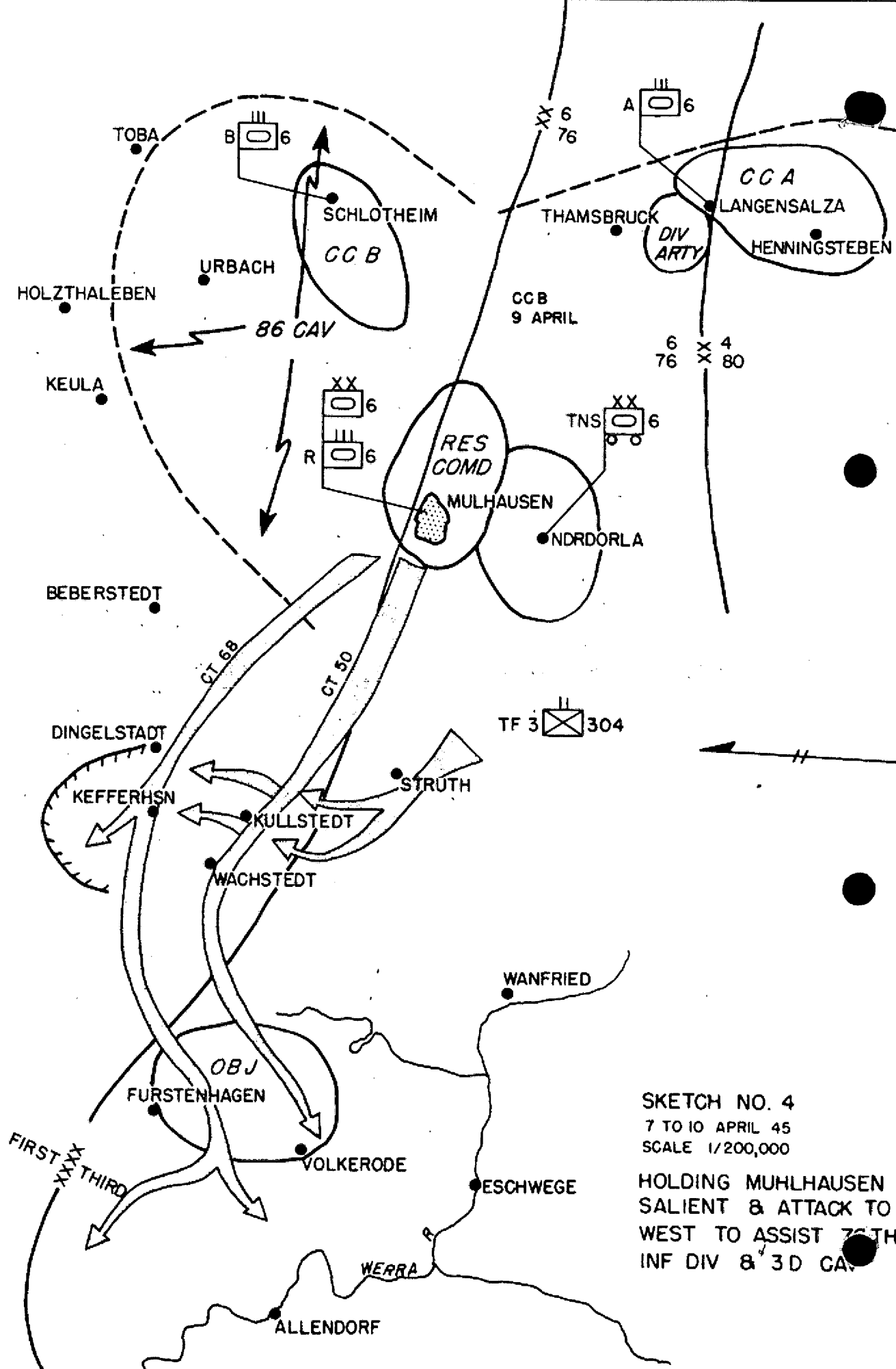
United States Armies were readjusted. General Patton was also given orders to halt his army's rapid advance on the line Weiningen, Gotha, Suhl, Lagensalza and Muhlhausen; and, thereafter, to confine its advance to no more than a few miles a day until such time as the First and Ninth Armies could close up to his front. The bulk of these two armies were engaged, at this time, in cleaning out the Ruhr pocket, so it is not to be inferred that they had been outdistanced due to any neglect on their part.<sup>1</sup>

With the necessity for speed and distance removed from his drive to the east, General Grow decided to capture the valuable communications center of Muhlhausen with a wide double envelopment using both CCA and CCB.

Each of the combat commands utilized three combat teams in encircling the city. The execution of the plan was as follows: CCB on the south advanced its leading unit, Combat Team 50, toward the city from the southwest, and blocked all exits in that direction; Combat Team 44 moved against the city from the south and southeast with the same mission; Combat Team 69 moved to the east of the German center and blocked all roads leading from the city in that direction. CCA crossed the bridge at Gross Burschla early in the day and deployed in a similar manner on the north, with Combat Team 9 moving into the town

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1. Patton, Op. Cit. p. 234.



SKETCH NO. 4  
 7 TO 10 APRIL 45  
 SCALE 1/200,000  
 HOLDING MUHLHAUSEN  
 SALIENT & ATTACK TO  
 WEST TO ASSIST 76TH  
 INF DIV & 3D CAV



from the west<sup>s</sup>; Combat Team 68 from the north; and Combat Team 15 from the northeast. By 1900 the flank elements of both combat commands were in contact, and the armored ring was slowly squeezed on the now completely encircled city. With the coming of darkness, all units were ordered to halt, post strong security to both the front and rear, and be prepared to resume the attack on the following morning.<sup>1</sup>

Reserve Command protected the division rear and trains in the vicinity of Struth, which is west of Muhlhausen.<sup>2</sup>

The 86th Cavalry crossed the Werra and again took up its assigned position on the North.<sup>3</sup>

At 1200, all elements of the 261st Infantry Regiment, 65th Infantry Division were relieved from attachment to the 6th Armored.<sup>4</sup> This did not greatly effect the situation because the Super Sixth was no longer plunging into Germany at so great a speed, therefore, the necessity for protection of rear areas were not so vital. This job had been assumed by units that were now closing rapidly on the 6th Armored.

#### Fifth Day - 5 April 1945 (Sketch 3)

During the night, the defenders of Muhlhausen had realized their predicament and were no longer disposed to follow the orders of Adolph Hitler to defend their city to the last man.

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 258.
2. After Action Report, Reserve Command, 6th Armored Division. pp.1-2.
3. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 259.
4. After Action Report, 6th Armored Division. p. 4.

At daylight, all 6th Armored units made a coordinated attack, without artillery, and by 0905 the city was secured. Resistance was very light and numerous high-ranking Nazis entered our prisoner of war enclosure.<sup>1</sup>

The 86th Cavalry continued to screen the division's north flank, and Reserve Command was reconstituted and given the mission of guarding all installations and supplies captured in Muhlhausen. To do this, the command was given the 68th Tank Battalion, the 50th Armored Infantry Battalion and Company C, 25th Armored Engineer Battalion.<sup>2</sup>

Upon being relieved in Muhlhausen by Reserve Command, CCA and CCB took up mobile defensive positions to the east and south of the city.<sup>3</sup>

These positions were occupied by the division because the XXth Corps had ordered that no further advance to the east be made until contact was established with the First Army Troops, which were now closing on the division's north flank.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Mobile Defense - (Sketch 4)

During the five day period 6-10 April 1945, the division continued to maintain a mobile defense in and around Muhlhausen, while awaiting the clearing of the XXth Corps Zone by infantry troops and, also, the arrival of the First Army.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 259.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. pp. 260-66.

Reserve Command and Division Artillery Command were active during the entire period, assisting both the 65th and 76th Infantry Divisions in clearing up pockets of enemy resistance to the division's rear. Reserve Command also repelled a counterattack by the Germans from the north. Many German prisoners were taken and a great amount of enemy war materiel was destroyed during the course of these actions.<sup>1</sup>

The 86th Cavalry continued to screen to the north, and on 9 April contact was made with the 3d Cavalry Group and the 69th Infantry Division, both First Army units, at Uder.<sup>2</sup>

All other elements of the division continued to maintain a mobile defense on approximately a forty mile front, until relieved by units from the 76th and 80th Infantry Divisions in their respective sectors.<sup>3</sup>

While engaged on this mission of defense, all units instituted an intensive maintenance program on vehicles and equipment in preparation for further action to the east.<sup>4</sup>

On April 10th, the division received orders from the XXth Corps directing it to pass through the lines of the 76th Infantry Division on the morning of 11 April. The mission was to advance in the zone assigned and to secure a bridgehead over the Elbe River, unless met sooner by the Russian Army.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. pp. 260-66.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. p. 266.

The 9th Armored Division, First Army, was to advance on the left (north) flank of the 6th Armored, and the 86th Cavalry was already in contact with this unit on the previously mentioned halt time. The 4th Armored Division, XIIth Corps, Third Army, was to operate on the right (south) flank.<sup>1</sup>

The stage was thus set for the final drive of the war; all resistance to the rear of the 6th Armored had been cleaned out, resupply and rehabilitation of equipment had been accomplished; also, the left (north) flank had been secured by units of the First Army.

The division organization for exploitation was similar to that of 1 April, except that now the 50th Armored Infantry Battalion and the 68th Tank Battalion were both in CCR. This assignment was made because supporting infantry was no longer attached to the division, although the 76th Infantry Division was to follow and mop up in the zone of advance. (Sketch 4)

The plan of attack called for an advance in four columns in the zone assigned, with CCA on the right (south) flank and CCB on the left. CCR was to have one combat team follow the southernmost CT of CCA's two columns and one CT on the outside (north) route of CCB. Division Headquarters and Division Trains were to march on the inside routes of

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1. Patton, Op. Cit. p. 297.

either or both leading combat commands, and CCR had the mission of securing their flanks.<sup>1</sup>

The 86th Cavalry Squadron was again to furnish flank protection on the north.<sup>2</sup>

6th Day - 11 April 1945 (Sketch 4)

At 0700, the division passed through the lines of the cooperating infantry as planned, and smashed the thin crust of enemy resistance that had built up during the enforced delay of the past five days.<sup>3</sup>

This time the powerful, mobile might of the armor was not to be denied and, by nightfall, the division had advanced sixty miles, securing three bridges over the Saale River. The broken, demoralized remnants of the Wehrmacht offered but slight resistance to the four racing columns.<sup>4</sup>

During the day, CCA liberated 3000 allied prisoners of war at Bad Sulza and overran the infamous concentration camp at Buchenwald, north of Weimar. There were more than 21,000 political prisoners in this torture camp. Late in the day, the north column of CCA succeeded in seizing a bridge intact over the Saale River at Camburg, north of the city of Jena.<sup>5</sup>

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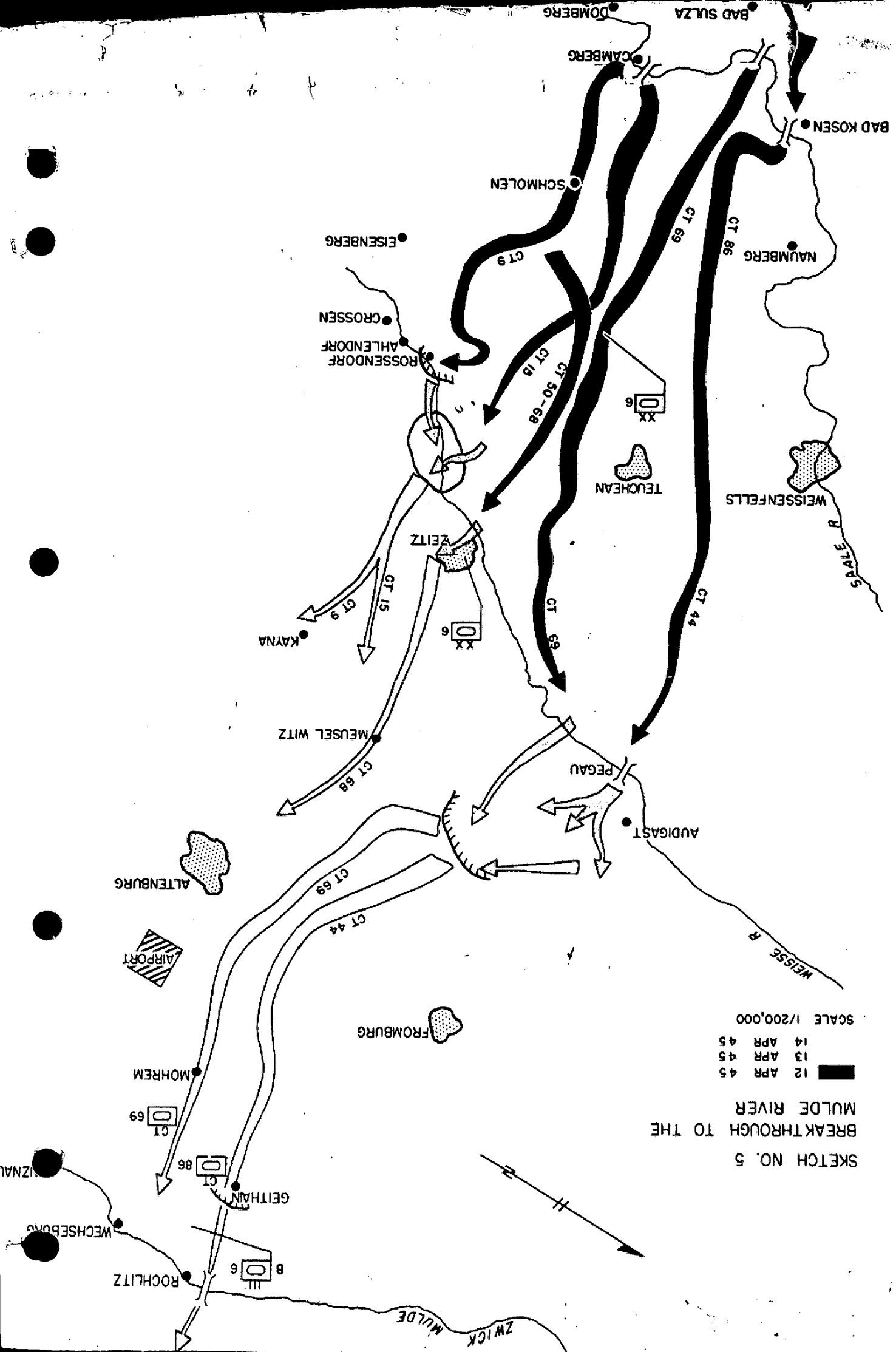
1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 267.

2. Ibid. p. 268.

3. Ibid. p. 267.

4. Ibid.

5. After Action Report, 6th Armored Division. p. 8.



SKETCH NO. 5  
 BREAKTHROUGH TO THE  
 MULDE RIVER

12 APR 45  
 13 APR 45  
 14 APR 45  
 15 APR 45

SCALE 1/200,000

BAD SULZA  
 CAMBERG  
 SCHMOLLEN  
 EISENBERG  
 NAUMBERG  
 WEISSENFELLS  
 SAALE R  
 TEUCHEAN  
 PEGAU  
 AUDIGAST  
 MEUSEL WITZ  
 KAYNA  
 ZEITZ  
 AHLENDORF  
 ROSSENDORF  
 CROSSEN  
 ALTENBURG  
 FROMBURG  
 MOHREM  
 GEITHAIN  
 ROCHLITZ  
 WECHSEBUNG  
 ZITZ  
 ZWICK MULDE  
 WEISSE R

CT 9  
 CT 15  
 CT 50-68  
 CT 69  
 CT 44  
 CT 86  
 CT 88

XX 6  
 XX 8

CGB captured two bridges over this same river, one at Kleinheringen and one at Kosen.<sup>1</sup>

CCR protected the division trains and the 86th Cavalry continued to screen the north flank.<sup>2</sup>

7th Day - 12 April 1945 (Sketch 5)

Dawn again found the 6th Armored driving relentlessly to the east against gradually stiffening resistance. An advance of twenty eight miles to the Weisse-Elster River was made, and two bridges captured in the face of active and determined resistance. The division was now being opposed by organized forces manning formidable 88mm anti-aircraft guns, which had been emplaced to protect the many vital installations in this area. All of these anti-aircraft guns were capable of horizontal fire and they were so located that they were mutually supporting. The Germans capitalized on this and used the anti-aircraft weapons quite effectively as anti-tank guns.<sup>3</sup>

The two columns of CCA advanced in the zone approximately abreast, until they reached the Weisse-Elster River. CT 15 was stopped by the previously mentioned AA guns at Casekirchen. While part of the unit was engaged with these guns, another element by-passed to the south of this strongpoint and pressed on to the river.<sup>4</sup> CT 9 succeeded in

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1. After Action Report, 6th Armored Division. p. 8.

2. Ibid.

3. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 269.

4. Ibid.

reaching the river without being stopped, but met misfortune at Rossendorf. Here, the armored infantrymen advanced with speed and daring in the face of German small arms fire, but, after the leading company had crossed the coveted bridge, which did not appear to be prepared for demolition, it was blown sky-high by a concealed time-bomb. The chagrined infantrymen maintained the force on the far bank and immediately instituted reconnaissance for other crossings to the south.<sup>1</sup>

CCB advanced rapidly in its zone, by-passing the strongly held city of Zeitz. Notwithstanding this move, the command still found itself slowed up by defenders manning the AA guns, that were on the north of Zeitz. By steady fighting, CCB forced its way to the Weisse-Elster, but too late to secure a bridge. Every bridge in the CC zone had been destroyed. In order to maintain the momentum of the attack, the Combat Command moved to the north, into the zone of the Vth Corps. This resulted in the seizure of an intact bridge at Pegau.<sup>2</sup> At this time, the 6th Armored was ahead of the 9th Armored Division which was operating in the Vth Corps zone, so that this movement by CCB was possible, without interfering with the latter division.<sup>3</sup>

XXth Corps directed that elements of the division, which were now

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 269.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. p. 271.



in the zone of the First Army, would operate under the command of Vth Corps, until such time as they could again return to their own zone. Thus, command was temporarily switched to facilitate control.<sup>1</sup>

CCR secured the bridges that had been seized over the Saale River the day before by the 6th Armored, until all elements had crossed; then moved toward the by-passed resistance center of Zeitz, to clear the division main supply route. Resistance was stiff and at the end of the day CCR had not yet reached the city.<sup>2</sup>

The 86th Cavalry had also found it necessary to cross into the zone of the Vth Corps and at 1630 they established contact with CCR of the 9th Armored Division. The squadron then crossed the Weisse-Elster at Pegau behind the last elements of CCB.<sup>3</sup>

8th Day - 13 April 1945 (Sketch 5)

During this day, the division established and expanded three bridgeheads over the Weisse-Elster. A fourth bridgehead at Pegau was released to Vth Corps by CCB and this command then continued to the east. CCB had completed crossing the bridge before any of the Vth Corps units had closed on it and had been given permission to continue its advance without interruption. By evening CCB had reached Lucka, where it halted and prepared to continue its advance the

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 271.

2. Ibid. p. 270.

3. Ibid.

following morning.<sup>1</sup>

CCR, in the middle of the division zone was heavily engaged at Zeitz, where it was attempting to establish a bridgehead. The 304th Infantry Regiment, 76th Infantry Division, moved up to assist CCR in its task and attempts were made to complete a Bailey type bridge, but intense artillery and mortar fire on the site made this impossible during daylight.<sup>2</sup>

CCA, on the south, was effectively delayed during the entire day because of blown bridges over the Weisse-Elster River in its zone. Late in the day, CT 9 had succeeded in establishing a combination bridge and ford at Rossendorf. This was made possible by opening some dams on the river in that vicinity, and by utilizing logs and a section of treadway bridge. These materials were laid directly on the bed of the river, and the banks cut down so that heavy vehicles could negotiate the crossing. By 1800, the combat team was entirely across the river and it then drove east with renewed vigor.<sup>3</sup>

The other fighting team of CCA, Combat Team 15, forced a crossing at Schkauditz in the face of heavy opposition, and at 2100 all elements of this unit, except the direct support field artillery battalion, had crossed and were in a position to resume their advance.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 271.

2. Ibid. p. 272.

3. Ibid. p. 271.

4. Ibid.

The 86th Cavalry advanced to the east in the Vth Corps zone and screened the left (north) flank of CCB.<sup>1</sup>

9th Day - 14 April 1945 (Sketch 5)

By penetrating and flanking action, the 6th Armored had broken the Weisse-Elster River defense line and it now continued its exploitation, advancing approximately twenty eight miles to the Zwick-Mulde River at Rochlitz. The division had destroyed more than 150 German guns of 88mm caliber or larger, during the last two days in this general area.<sup>2</sup>

CCA met stubborn resistance throughout its zone, after crossing the Weisse-Elster. CT 9 and 15 destroyed or overran more than thirty five enemy artillery pieces. Progress was not spectacular but it was steady all during the day. The mobility of the armored columns was utilized to flank and by-pass resistance whenever this was possible. Leading elements of the command were at Ober Kossa at dark.<sup>3</sup>

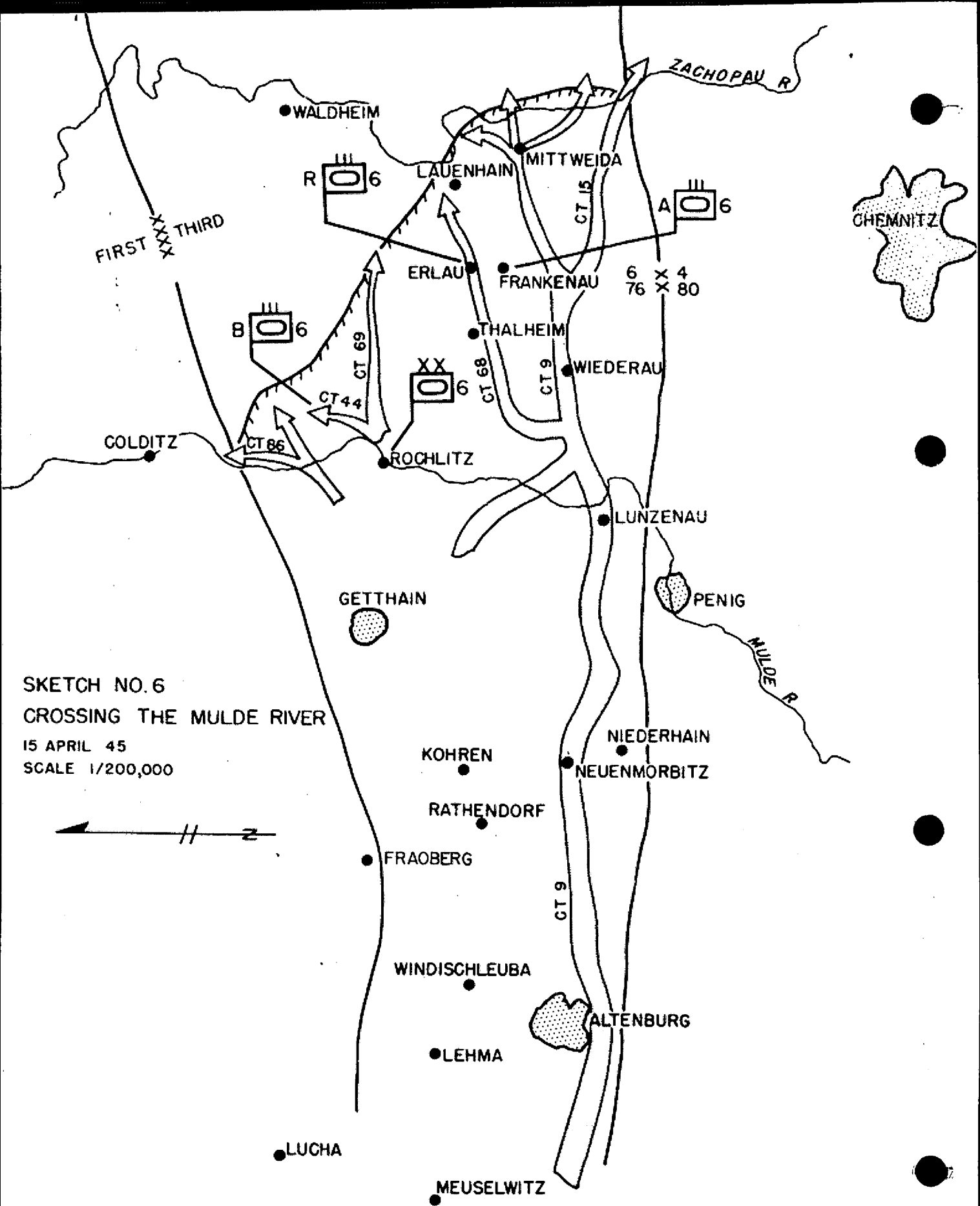
CCB was farther to the east than any of the other divisional units and they were determined to maintain their lead. The excursion of this unit into the zone of the Vth Corps had allowed them to assume this commanding lead. They returned to the 6th Armored zone at Lehma and again moved toward the Elbe with all possible speed. This unit found that most of the resistance was centered in the towns and where

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1. After Action Report, 86th Cavalry Squadron, P. 4.

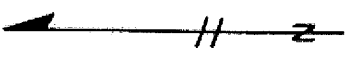
2. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 270.

3. Ibid. p. 273.



SKETCH NO. 6  
CROSSING THE MULDE RIVER

15 APRIL 45  
SCALE 1/200,000



feasible it also by-passed these trouble spots to maintain momentum. CCB ended its march for the day with the capture of a bridge over the Zwick-Mulde at Rochlitz.<sup>1</sup>

CCR, which had been engaged heavily in the reduction of the defenses of Zeitz, now turned responsibility for completing this task over to units of the 76th Infantry Division and moved on to the east over the ford at Rossendorf. At nightfall, the command had closed on Altenburg, another by-passed center of resistance, and was preparing for an attack on the city.<sup>2</sup>

The 86th Cavalry maintained contact with the 9th Armored Division on the north and continued to advance to the east.<sup>3</sup>

10th Day - 15 April 1945 (Sketch 6)

For the hard-fighting 6th Armored, this day was virtually the end of the war in Europe. The division had closed up on a limiting line that had been worked out with the Russians by higher headquarters, and its surging advance across Germany was ended. Nothing else had stopped it, only orders from the top could accomplish what the Germans had failed to do since Normandy. When the limiting line became known to the lower units the 6th Armored had established three bridgeheads over the Zwick-Mulde River, and had one combat team seize three additional

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 273.

2. Ibid. pp. 273-4.

3. Ibid. p. 274.

bridges over the Zachopau River, which was the next major water obstacle.<sup>1</sup> This unit was ordered to hold the town of Mittweida on the Zachopau, and, since this then represented the most advanced American Army element, most of the newspaper correspondents came here hoping to meet the Russian Army. As history records, the fates decreed otherwise, and so the story of an excellent combat division ended with a disappointment.

Dawn found CCA determined to overtake CCB during the day. Accordingly, a rapid advance was made by both combat teams and, shortly after noon, CT 9 seized a bridge over the Zwick-Mulde at Lunzenau. This unit caused consternation in the ranks of the German defenders of this town by turning on all tank sirens as it entered the outskirts.<sup>2</sup> Sirens were very closely associated with air attacks in the German mind and, for this reason, chaos was quickly achieved among the enemy by this simple device. CT 9 paused only to put out security for the bridge they had seized, and then sped for Mittweida and the Zachopau River. The leading elements of this team entered this town literally through the back door. A little used country lane led in to the town from the west, while the main road entered from the southwest. CT 9 used the little trail for its entrance and a German battalion was left to watch along the main entrance and wonder where the Americans were. (They later discovered

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 274.

2. Ibid.

this information, but not until they were hit from the rear.) CF 9 quickly secured the three bridges in or near Mittweida and outposted them to the east.<sup>1</sup> CF 15 closed on CF 9 and engaged the by-passed Germans on the southern edge of Mittweida. The German unit was scattered in this action and it played no further part in the war.<sup>2</sup>

On the north, CCB cleared Rocklitz of all enemy resistance and expanded its bridgehead over the Zwick-Mulde, until the limiting line was reached.<sup>3</sup>

CCR accepted the surrender of Altenburg and the command then moved rapidly to the east and assembled in the vicinity of Erlau.<sup>4</sup>

When the XXth Corps limiting line was reached, the 86th Cavalry Squadron was ordered to establish contact with units on both flanks of the 6th Armored. Contact was made with the 9th Armored Division at Lastau on the north and the 4th Armored Division was contacted on the south.<sup>5</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

This paper has dealt with the actions of one armored division of the United States Army during the closing, decisive days of the war in Europe.

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1. Burke, Op. Cit. p. 274.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Ibid. p. 275.

The reader should keep this fact in mind as he considers the tactics herein described; this was not an isolated armored division operating alone, but it was an integral part of a victorious American army during that army's final thrust into the heartland of our German enemy.

Here we have seen armor in its most successful role; that of exploitation in enemy rear areas. Superior fire power, shock action and mobility enabled this unit to achieve success against all types of resistance during these ten days.

The exploitation really began with the successful crossings over the Fulda and Werra Rivers, but was interrupted momentarily by the higher commanders to allow infantry units to mop up in the zone to the division's rear. During this enforced wait the division was employed in reducing a major enemy communications center, Muhlhausen, by means of a perfectly executed double envelopment.

During the succeeding four days we find the division engaged in another of its primary roles, that of mobile defense and counterattack.

We next find the armored units utilizing their speed, firepower and flexibility in a lightning advance through the infantry lines, to close on and capture bridgeheads over the important Saale River.



After the crossing of the Saale, the advance of the division was slowed perceptibly by enemy units, making determined stands with improvised anti-tank (88 millimeter flak guns) weapons. However, by quick decisions, initiative and resourcefulness, the advance was kept rolling. The decision to enter the assigned zone of another unit is one that any military commander hesitates to make, but it was done in this instance to advance CCB over the Weisse-Elster promptly. Had this decision not been made, it is quite possible that the entire division would have bogged down on this defended river line.

Again, the initiative and resourcefulness that led the soldiers of CCA to open the dams on this same river, allowing the water level to drop until it was feasible to construct a ford, exhibited to the highest degree the type of action that is needed to keep armor rolling.

A simple technique such as that displayed at Lunzenau, when the tank sirens were turned on, again illustrates the ingenuity that is demanded of armored soldiers in the exploitation.

When, during this division's final thrust of the war, units of CCA attacked the town of Mittweida from an unexpected direction and caught the enemy unprepared, these soldiers were exemplifying in action one of the oldest principles of war, that of surprise.

Logistical supply of forward units was assured at all times during this action. This was accomplished by the division commander by utilizing CCR and cooperating infantry units to clear up any by-passed centers of resistance. CCR and the cavalry were also used to provide security for elements of the division.

With these highlights we have reviewed the actions and techniques employed by an armored division in a successful exploitation, and it can be said in summary, that the 6th Armored Division performed excellently its exploitation mission deep in the enemy rear areas by disrupting lines of communication, isolating enemy units, and creating confusion and fear in the minds of the German people.

The lessons to be learned from this armored operation are not new, but it is felt that they should be enumerated for emphasis.

The objective must be kept in mind at all times. A soldier must allow nothing to divert him from his assigned mission.

Surprise is essential to the success of an armored maneuver deep in enemy-held territory. Surprise brings success speedily and armor must swiftly exploit any advantage thus obtained.

An armored unit in an exploitation mission must continually provide for all-around security, since it is vulnerable to attack from

any direction. However, the column formations normally used and the rapid advance of these columns against a less mobile enemy, provides automatic flank protection, and only when the column halts must additional security to the flanks be provided.

The principle of simplicity is especially applicable to the orders of an armored unit in exploitation. Rarely, if ever, are higher commanders able to supervise the execution of their orders, and because of this the orders should be of the mission type, allowing the armored soldier great latitude in the accomplishment of his mission.

Rapid and aggressive movement is essential to the accomplishment of a mission of exploitation. Unnecessary delays in reaching the objective are costly and should be avoided by any means available. A highly mobile armored column, operating against a less mobile enemy, is only playing into that enemy's hands, if it allows itself to be slowed down each time it meets a strong-point. In most cases enemy resistance evaporates when by-passed. It is imperative for armor to keep moving to be successful.

When an armored column is stopped short of the objective by enemy resistance, deployment must be automatic. Everyone must be prepared to work together as a team to reduce the obstacle without the necessity

of waiting for complicated orders and instructions.

The operation that has been described, and others like it, demonstrates that the proper application of the principles of the employment of armor will produce outstanding results. In the hands of a capable commander an armored division is a superior strategic and tactical member of our ground combat forces. Be prepared to use your armor decisively!

ANNEX I

The organization of the division for exploitation was as follows:<sup>1</sup>

Combat Command A

15th Tank Battalion

68th Tank Battalion, minus Company A

9th Armored Infantry Battalion

3d Battalion, 261st Infantry Regiment\*

Troop C, 86th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized

Company A, 50th Armored Infantry Battalion

Company B, 25th Armored Engineer Battalion

Platoon, Company C, 25th Armored Engineer Battalion

Company B, 603d Tank Destroyer Battalion\*

Battery A, 777th AAA Battalion, minus 1 Section\*

86th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized

86th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized, minus Troops B and C

Company A, 603d Tank Destroyer Battalion\*

Platoon, Company C, 25th Armored Engineer Battalion

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1. After Action Report, 6th Armored Division. pp. 1-2.

Combat Command B

69th Tank Battalion  
44th Armored Infantry Battalion  
50th Armored Infantry Battalion, minus Company A  
2d Battalion, 261st Infantry Regiment\*  
Company A, 68th Tank Battalion  
Troop B, 86th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized  
Company A, 25th Armored Engineer Battalion  
Platoon, Company C, 25th Armored Engineer Battalion  
Company C, 603d Tank Destroyer Battalion\*  
Reconnaissance Company, 603d Tank Destroyer Battalion\*  
Battery B, 777th AAA Battalion\*

Reserve Command

25th Armored Engineer Battalion, minus Companies A, B and C.  
603d Tank Destroyer Battalion, minus Companies A, B and C  
777th AAA Battalion, minus Batteries A, B and D  
261st Regimental Combat Team, 65th Infantry Division\*  
261st Infantry Regiment, minus 2nd and 3d Battalions and Cannon  
Company  
869th Field Artillery Battalion, Towed\*  
Cannon Company, 261st Infantry Regiment\*

Battery D, 546th AAA Battalion\*

Company A, 691st Tank Destroyer Battalion\*

Reconnaissance Troop, 65th Infantry Division\*

Company C, 81st Chemical Battalion\*

Platoon, Company C, 265th Combat Engineer Battalion\*

Company C, 365th Medical Battalion\*

#### Division Artillery

128th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. (Direct Support of CCB)

212th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. (Direct Support of CCA)

231st Armored Field Artillery Battalion. (Direct Support of CCB)

193d Field Artillery Group\*

274th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.\* (Direct Support of CCA)

689th Field Artillery Battalion.\* (Reinforcing)

176th Field Artillery Battalion.\* (Reinforcing)

Battery D, 777th AAA Battalion.\*

Section, Battery A, 777th AAA Battalion.\*

#### Division Trains

76th Armored Medical Battalion

3d Platoon, 16th Field Hospital\*

128th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion

642d Quartermaster Truck Company\*

3803d Quartermaster Truck Company\*

Battery C, 777th AAA Battalion, minus 2 sections\*

Division Forward Headquarters

2 Sections, Battery C, 777th AAA Battalion\*

\* Attached Non-Divisional Troops



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