

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING DIVISION
GENERAL INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT
THE ARMORED SCHOOL
Fort Knox, Kentucky

Advanced Officers Class

12 May 1948

MONOGRAPH

TITLE: "Planning a Limited Objective Attack"

SCOPE: The report depicts through the medium of an historical example the procedure followed by one armored infantry battalion in preparing for and planning a limited objective attack which was to be made as part of a combat command assault. The third person style is followed in an effort to make the presentation as objective as possible.

In the Appendix the ARTILLERY ANNEX to the Division Operations Instructions is presented as an example of the completeness and thoroughness with which artillery support is prepared.

Locale: Germany, on the banks of the Roer River, about 9 miles across the Dutch-German border in the area east of Maastricht and north of Aachen.

Unit: 38th Armored Infantry Battalion, 7th Armored Division - attached to Combat Command "B" for the subject action.

Personalities:

CG, CC-B/7th Armd Div: Brig. Gen. Bruce C. Clarke
(now Ass't Comdt, TAS)
CO, 38th Armd Inf Bn: Lt. Col. W.H. G. Fuller
(now CO, School Trps, TAS)
S-3, 38th Armd Inf Bn: Maj. Donald P. Boyer, Jr.
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PLANNING A LIMITED OBJECTIVE ATTACK

By

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Monograph

for

Advanced Course
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PLANNING A LIMITED OBJECTIVE ATTACK

"Quick and successful engagement depends on the preliminary planning of the commander and on the execution of his plans by his troops."

— FM 7-20, par. 25a.

There in one brief sentence is a combat truth which should be known and understood by all soldiers. But what comprises the mechanics of planning a military operation? That is the problem which faces any commander, particularly a newly appointed battalion commander. As an example of how this problem may be solved, an actual combat situation will be depicted showing the procedure by which one armored infantry battalion, as part of a combat command, planned a limited objective attack.

SITUATION

It was the first week of December 1944, and for 15 agonizing days the American Ninth Army had been forcing its way slowly through the Siegfried Line with the mission of reaching the Roer River and establishing bridgeheads at Linnich and Julich.¹ To the south XIX Corps had pushed its way to Julich and was in the process of reducing this Nazi stronghold, while in the north XIII Corps was closing in on the town of Linnich.

¹ German towns, about 9 miles across the Dutch--German border, east of Maastricht and north of Aachen.

One major problem still confronted XIII Corps: how to reach Linnich and stay there — for to the west, within easy mortar and artillery range, was a cluster of six villages organized into an extensive fortified belt. From these strongpoints heavy and accurate fire could be placed upon the long axis of any advance into Linnich. To protect the 102d Division which had the mission of establishing the bridgehead, XIII Corps directed the 84th Division on the left flank to destroy the five villages lying farthest to the west: Lindern, Leiffarth, Wurm, Mullendorf, and Beeck. By 2 December, these towns had been neutralized, permitting the 102d Division to smash forward and capture Linnich.

Slowly the stage was being set for the crossing of the Roer, but before any bridgehead could be established the sixth village, Brachelen, would have to be captured and occupied. From their positions in and around this little town approximately 3500 yards northwest of Linnich, the Germans were able to dominate by fire all crossing sites and could prevent any bridging attempts.

On 5 December, Combat Command "B", 7th Armored Division, was assigned the mission of reducing Brachelen by attacking through the positions then held by the 102d and 84th Infantry Divisions with a battalion of tanks and two battalions of armored infantry. It is the plan which the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion evolved as its part of the combat command mission which will be studied as an example of planning a limited objective attack at the battalion level.²

² Other battalions were the 31st Tank Battalion and the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion.

FIRST ORDERS

"6 Dec. (1035) Battalion Commander returns from CC-R and announces to Company Commanders that 38th AIB is to be attached to CC-B for an attack on BRACHELEN. The attack is to take place after the dam at DUREN is blown. The general plan is for the 23d AIB and the 31st Tk Bn to attack BRACHELEN from the north of GEREONSWEILER between the ridge and the railroad; the 38th AIB will proceed to the area northwest of LINNICH, pass through the 102d Division and attack BRACHELEN from the southeast. Company Commanders are to make reconnaissance and report back to the CP for a meeting at 1500."

- Journal, 38th AIB, Dec. 1944.

In that brief journal entry is recorded the first warning order for the impending operation. It had been received by the battalion commander at Headquarters, Combat Command "R", during the regular early morning unit commanders' meeting.³ Immediately afterwards and before reporting to the new combat command, the battalion commander alerted his staff and the company commanders for the new mission and directed preliminary reconnaissance. Contact with Combat Command "B", however, was established as soon as the warning was received by dispatching a liaison officer who reported to the combat command S-3.

After issuing his instructions to the staff and the company commanders, the battalion commander of the 38th Armored Infantry, accompanied by the S-3, reported to the Commanding

³ The 38th Armored Infantry Battalion was then in an assembly area near Setterich, Germany, and was attached to Combat Command "R", constituting with the 17th Tank Battalion the immediate counterattack force for XIII Corps. The release of the 38th Armored Infantry from this mission and its attachment to Combat Command "B" did not become effective until 070600 December 1944.

General of Combat Command "B". At that time certain additional information which was necessary for the formulation of the battalion's tentative plan was requested. Included among the questions were:

- a. What tank and TD support would be available to the 38th?
- b. Which artillery battalion would be in direct support of the 38th?
- c. Would the battalion attack be mounted or dismounted?
- d. When would the combat command order be issued?
- e. What would be "D-Day" and "H-Hour"?

Of course only tentative answers could be given to these questions, for the combat command operational order still was in the process of preparation. For planning purposes the battalion commander was informed that the 38th Armored Infantry would receive tank support by fire from the flank of the main effort, which would be made by the tank battalion and the other armored infantry battalion; that the attack of the 38th would constitute a secondary attack and would be made dismounted; that the combat command order would be issued the following morning; and that the attack would be a daylight assault, probably to be launched the morning of 10 December (four days away).

No questions were required as to what adjacent troops should be coordinated with, for it was known that the 23d Armored Infantry and 31st Tank Battalions would be in the assault. From previous reconnaissance and contacts with the troops on the line it was known that the combat command would be attacking through that part of the line manned on the right by the

406th Infantry Regiment (102d Division) and on the left by the 334th Infantry Regiment (84th Division).

PREPARATIONS WITHIN THE BATTALION

While the battalion commander and the S-3 were at the combat command headquarters, various other members of the staff were performing their customary pre-attack duties under the supervision of the battalion executive officer. As this battalion had been in action for almost five months, many of these duties had become almost automatic and only the progress of the plans for executing their various functions had to be reported by the officers concerned.

Adequate supply always is a "must" item for the operations of any military unit, and with an armored unit it is vital to the successful accomplishment of any mission. As the battalion, with the exception of one company, had not been committed within the past two weeks, the S-4 was not confronted with any extraordinary problems. He was required to check with each company to see if any essential items of supply were needed, and to assure that all vehicles were ready for action, completely refueled, and carrying the prescribed loads of ammunition and rations.⁴ Also he was responsible for seeing that the cargo vehicles of the Supply and Transportation Platoon of Service Company were fully loaded so as to constitute the battalion's

⁴ All rifle company half-tracks were required to carry a five-days supply of grenades, machine gun, and rifle ammunition, as well as sufficient "K" rations to last five days.

mobile reserve.⁵ This mobile reserve for ammunition consisted of approximately one-half a refill for mortars, antitank, and assault guns, plus about one-quarter a refill for small arms ammunition.⁶ The gasoline and lubricant reserve was sufficient to move the battalion approximately 50 miles on an average gravel-type road.

5 The Supply and Transportation Platoon was organized with four ammunition 2-1/2 ton trucks, each with a one-ton trailer, and three fuel and lubricant 2-1/2 ton trucks, each with a one-ton trailer. (This same organization is found in the Headquarters and Service Company of the armored infantry battalion of the new armored division.)

6 The basic ammunition load (or "refill") was the quantity of ammunition prescribed by the Army for all individual and crew served weapons except that carried in the cargo space of those general purpose vehicles allotted specifically for ammunition resupply.

While operating under Ninth Army, the following ammunition data controlled the resupply of the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion:

Type of Ammunition	Army Prescribed Basic Load (per individual or crew weapon) (rds)	Bn Prescribed Vehicle Load (per individual & crew weapons) (rds)	Bn Mobile Reserve (organic vehicles) (total rds)
.30 cal carbine	80	400	7,400
.30 cal rifle	80	400	84,000
.30 cal BAR	220	1,100	3,000
.30 cal MG	4,000	24,000	120,000
.45 cal SMG	300	600	6,000
.50 cal MG	2,000	8,000	15,900
57mm AT gun	40	40	54
60mm mortar	75	75	324
81mm mortar	75	66/22 (x)	504
75mm assault gun	125	46/78 (y)	180
105mm assault gun	100	66/34 (y)	60 (z)

In addition to the organic ammunition supply trucks, Service Company had acquired two three-ton German Opel trucks which carried approximately an additional one-half refill of 81mm mortar and assault gun ammunition.

Note: (x) Extra 22 rounds per mortar in platoon leader's track.
 (y) Extra 78 rounds, 75mm ammunition, and 34 rounds, 105mm, per assault gun carried in trailers towed by each gun.
 (z) Computed at 30 rounds per type of gun with which the battalion was equipped.

One of the first directives given the S-2 by the battalion commander had been to obtain sufficient 1/25,000 scale maps of the impending operational area to equip every squad leader, and sufficient aerial photos to equip every platoon leader. As soon as a check had been made of the maps already available in the battalion headquarters, the S-2 departed for Headquarters, Combat Command "B", to contact the S-2 there and obtain the necessary maps and photos. At the same time he obtained the latest information on the enemy order of battle and dispositions within the Linnich--Brachelen--Randerath area, after which he contacted the G-2 section of the 102d Division and the regimental S-2 of the 406th Infantry.

Although the battalion was assembled in Setterich, about 8000 yards to the rear of the contemplated line of departure, Service Company was in Ubach with the field trains of Combat Command "R". This disposition placed the battalion's service and maintenance elements too far to the rear, and it was necessary to locate a forward service park which could support the attack. This reconnaissance was directed by the executive officer, and was made by the battalion maintenance officer who accompanied the adjutant when he moved out to locate a forward CP for the battalion near Gereonsweiler.

At the same time the battalion surgeon departed on a reconnaissance so as to plan his recommendations for the medical support of the attack. Not only was he concerned with a covered or concealed location for the aid station, but also

in determining the best means for evacuating casualties from the battlefield.

As soon as the communications officer learned of the proposed attachment to Combat Command "B", he established telephone communication with the combat command headquarters by arranging for a relay through the switchboard of the 31st Tank Battalion, which was in an assembly area between the combat command and the 38th Armored Infantry.⁷ All radios were on "radio silence", but arrangements were made to change the SCR-506 (CW net) and the SCR-508 (FM net) in the S-3 half-track to the command channel of Combat Command "B", and the SCR-506 (CW net) in the S-4 half-track and the SCR-506 in the Service Company three-quarter ton command truck to the Combat Command "B" administrative channel. Meanwhile, pending the change in attachment from one combat command to the other, the 38th remained linked to Combat Command "R" by direct telephone.

Within the battalion all radios remained shut down with the companies being linked to battalion headquarters by wire. Nevertheless, the communications officer was charged with checking to see that all company radios were operative and that fresh batteries were installed in the SCR-536's, SCR-300's, and SCR-509's.⁸ In addition he had been directed

⁷ The 31st Tank Battalion was near Puffendorf between the 38th Armored Infantry at Setterich and Combat Command "B" just outside Floverich. Later the 38th was shifted back to Ubach, while the other units of Combat Command "B" assembled in the housing development between Ubach and Baesweiler.

⁸ The SCR-509's were made transportable by mounting the battery unit on one packboard and the radio unit on another, with an 8 foot flexible cable linking the two units.

by the S-3 to have the communications sergeants prepare the SCR-508's in the company command half-tracks for operation on the following channels:

- (1) 38th AIB command net.
- (2) CC-B command net.
- (3) 31st Tk Bn command net.
- (4) 23d AIB command net.
- (5) Artillery request net.
(available crystals for each of the three divisional artillery battalions, pending final designation of the direct support battalion)
- (6) Battalion heavy weapons fire support net.
(same as Hq Co command net)
- (7) "A" Co command net.
- (8) "B" Co command net.
- (9) "C" Co command net.
- (10) (Spare)
(used for CC-R command net)

In the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion the commander of Headquarters Company functioned as did the Heavy Weapons Company commander of an infantry battalion in a rifle regiment; he was responsible for the preparation and execution of the battalion heavy weapons fire support plan. To accomplish this mission he had the normal weapons platoons of an armored infantry battalion as it was organized during World War II — an assault gun platoon, an 81mm mortar platoon, and a machine gun platoon.⁹

⁹ The Assault Gun Platoon was authorized three Assault Guns, M8, mounting the 75mm howitzer, but at the time of the planning for the Brachelen operation was in the process of being reequipped with the Assault Gun, M4, mounting a 105mm howitzer. During December 1944, it was equipped with three M8's and one M4.

The Mortar Platoon was equipped with three 81mm mortars mounted in Mortar Carriers, M21, and the Machine Gun Platoon had four caliber .30 water-cooled heavy machine guns.

In addition the Reconnaissance Platoon had been trained to function as an additional mortar platoon when not engaged upon other duties and was equipped with three 81mm mortars. After the preliminary staff meeting, the Headquarters Company commander departed on a reconnaissance to locate the probable firing positions for the weapons platoons, and also to learn if he could receive any additional fires from the Heavy Weapons Companies of the 406th Infantry Regiment through which the 38th Armored Infantry would be attacking.

After obtaining all possible information from the combat command, the battalion commander and the S-3 set out on their personal reconnaissance. The first stop was Linnich where XIII Corps Artillery had complete observation of the Brachelen area from an OP established in the tower of the former local hospital. Here the S-3 made a quick sketch of the proposed attack area, and then he and the battalion commander visited the regimental and battalion CP's of the troops occupying the line of departure.

By this time the hour of 1500 was approaching, and all officers started the return trip to battalion headquarters where they had been directed to reassemble for a briefing. Back at the CP each officer quickly gave a report on his reconnaissance activities, after which the executive officer was able to report that all companies were fully equipped with fuel, ammunition, and reserve rations. The enemy information as learned by the S-2 was rather limited: Brachelen was reported

to be held by a depleted battalion of German infantry supported by five or six tanks and self-propelled guns. The German infantry were believed to be from either the 183d or 340th Volksgrenadier Divisions, with the tanks being supplied by the 10th SS Panzer Division. Troops from all three divisions had been identified during the fighting for the Linnich—Lindern—Leiffarth—Beeck area.

The terrain over which the attack was to be launched was a featureless, rolling plain, gently dropping toward the Roer River. The fields which made up the plain had been devoted to the cultivation of beets, but by December only the bare stalks were left, offering little cover in the oozy mud which had been churned up by almost a month of continuous rain. Throughout the area was a continuous series of obstacles comprising trenches, minefields, and wire, all covered by interlocking bands of machine gun fire. There was no cover and the attacking troops would be exposed to observation from Brachelen itself and from the high ground east of the Roer which rose as much as 1000 yards in less than a mile and a half. To the left of the attack zone was a railroad embankment running from Lindern to Brachelen with an elevation of as much as 20 feet in many places. This embankment would afford excellent cover for German tanks and infantry who would be able to place flanking enfilade fire upon the assault units.

Through the right portion of the attack zone — that part assigned to the 38th Armored Infantry — ran an antitank

ditch varying from 8 to 10 feet in width and 4 to 6 feet in depth. It was this ditch which had dictated the employment of the tanks in the left portion of the attack zone, where about 400 yards south of the railroad the antitank ditch apparently stopped. The distance from the front line positions held by the 102d and 84th Divisions to the town of Brachelen was about 1500 to 1800 yards, yet officers from both units claimed that it was impossible to move from their foxholes during the daylight hours. The Germans reacted to any movement with accurate mortar, machine gun, and self-propelled gun fire and did not hesitate to sweep the area if even one man moved.¹⁰

While all this information was being exchanged, the S-2 distributed the 1/25,000 scale maps with sufficient copies to equip every squad leader, and promised aerial photos of the attack area by the next afternoon. Then the battalion commander announced his tentative attack plan, which, in brief, included an assault with two companies abreast — "B" on the left, "A" on the right, and "C" in reserve. In order to obtain surprise and reduce the exposure to enemy observation and fire, the two attack companies would advance under cover of darkness the night before the attack and occupy foxholes on the front line, where they would be prepared to jump off at "H-Hour" the

¹⁰

The S-3 of the 38th Armored Infantry could vouch personally for this German sensitiveness to any movement in the area east of the Gereonsweiler—Lindern road. Several days earlier he had been observing Brachelen from the forward slope of a ridge about 1000 yards behind the front line and had been forced to take refuge in a water-logged-shell crater when the Germans quickly pumped three rounds of SP fire at him.

next morning. Number One priority would be given to the coordination of supporting tank, artillery, and mortar fires, with particular attention to smoke for masking the railroad embankment and the high ground east of the Roer.

There in the brief space of four and a half hours an armored infantry battalion had started planning for a limited objective attack to be made as part of a combat command assault. In that short period of time the following planning steps had been accomplished:

- a. Preliminary reconnaissance of the attack area.
(by battalion commander, staff, and company commanders)
- b. Preliminary liaison and coordination with higher headquarters and adjacent units.
(with combat command and other assault units; also with regiments and battalions manning the front line, through whom the attack would be launched)
- c. Tentative planning of supporting fires.
(mortars and assault guns; need for artillery and smoke)
- d. Issuance of maps and preliminary briefing on terrain and enemy situation.
- e. Formulation of tentative plan of attack and issuance of warning order.
- f. Coordination of resupply and evacuation measures.
(ammunition, fuel, rations; medical, prisoner of war, and materiel evacuation)

THE COMBAT COMMAND ORDER

At 0900 the next morning, 7 December, all unit commanders with their S-3's or executive officers assembled at Headquarters, Combat Command "B" to receive the Commanding General's attack order. It was delivered orally, and the following notes were taken by the S-3 of the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion:

"Operational Plan for Taking of Brachelen.

"Maps: GERMANY, 1/25,000, Sheets 4903, 5003.

"1. MISSION: To attack and take BRACHELEN, and hold it until relieved by the 84th Division on Corps order.

"2. TROOPS:

CC-B, Hq/Hq Co
31st Tk Bn
23d AIB
38th AIB
C/814th TD Bn (SP)
B/33d Armd Engrs
D/203d AAA Bn (SP)
B/87th Cav Rcn Sq

SUPPORTING TROOPS:

XIII Corps Arty
7th Armd Div Arty
84th Inf Div Arty
102d Inf Div Arty
B/92d Cml Mortar Bn
Tactical Air

"3. PLAN OF ATTACK:

a. Time: 'D-Day' is day DUREN dam is blown. Attack to be made on Division order on 'D/1' or later; 'H-Hour' 0945.

b. Scheme of maneuver: Attack to be made by 31st, 23d, 1st/B/33d, 38th.

31st, 23d, and 1st/B/33d to make the main attack with two tank companies leading, then two infantry companies mounted, followed by one tank company on the left and one infantry company on the right. 1st/B/33d to follow right rear infantry company.

38th to move to attack positions between LINNICH and LINDERN under cover of darkness the night before the attack day, and attack dismounted concurrently with the main attack force, toward OELDREISCH (960678) and toward the southeastern end of BRACHELEN. C/38th in Combat Command reserve north of GEREONSWEILER.

Main force under Lt. Col. Erlenbusch to move in following order from bivouac areas through PUFFENDORF and GEREONSWEILER to assembly areas previously designated in time to attack at 'H-Hour':

B/31st
A/23d
Comd Gp/31st
A/31st
B/23d
Comd Gp/23d
C/31st
C/23d
1st/B/33d

Details of movement through forward elements of 84th Division to be worked out direct with 84th. 102d Division to be informed of details of plans.

- c. B/87 - to post guides and control traffic for main force and for 38th. When last column clears, assemble north of GEREONSWEILER and await orders.
- d. B/33(-) - maintain route through GEREONSWEILER during passage of CC-B. Follow main force to reserve north of GEREONSWEILER and await orders.
- e. C/814 - move to previously reconnoitered positions vicinity of LINDERN to help cover northern flank of main attack force. Coordinate with TD unit of 84th Division in LINDERN.
- f. Main attack force to attack in formation southeast of railroad and parallel to it into western outskirts of BRACHELEN, then to clear town south of the railroad. Next phase is to clear out town north of railroad, and organize to hold the town until relieved.

Main force to have one tank company cover left flank of the attack; tanks of right tank company cover targets in front of 38th's attack, prepared to move to aid of 38th on order.

Tanks to be withdrawn from BRACHELEN on Combat Command order. Lt. Col. Erlenbusch to command all forces in BRACHELEN until other instructions are received from Combat Command.

- g. B/92 - Shell BRACHELEN with HE prior to 'D-1'. At 0630, day of attack, set town on fire with WP. At 0930 same date screen western edge of town with WP, also left flank of of main attack northeast of railroad. Smoke on western edge of town to be stopped on Combat Command order just before attack reaches town.

h. Artillery support desired: Corps Artillery to cover RANDEKATH—HORST—HILFARTH and general vicinity starting at 0800 attack day and continue until attack enters town. All available artillery to 'Stonk' BRACHELEN at 0915 day of attack. Then smoke BAAL, RURICH, KORRENZIG, GIMBACH from 0930 until attack enters town, then maintain counter-battery fire. Artillery to cover part of town north of railroad until attack is ready to move into that part of BRACHELEN; fire to be lifted on Combat Command request.

7th Armored Division Artillery to furnish FO's to 31st, 23d, and 38th for direct support during attack, and be prepared to support defense of town after it is taken.

i. Tactical air support desired: Fighter-bomber cover over attack area on attack date from 0930 until town is taken.

"4. ADMINISTRATIVE:

a. Current SOI plus lettered square key for reporting locations.

b. Forward Command Group, CC-B, to follow main attack force to position in the vicinity of GEREONSWEILER.

c. 'B' Trains remain present location."¹¹

After announcing his order the Commanding General directed all unit commanders to reassemble at the combat command CP at 1900 that evening, at which time they were to present orally their battalion attack plans. At the same time the liaison officer from Division Artillery would present the artillery plan for furnishing the support requested by the combat command.

¹¹ There are certain corrections in terminology from the order as dictated:

(1) Par. 2b - "assembly areas" was used to mean forward assembly areas, which now are designated as attack positions.

(2) Par. 4c - the term "'B' Trains" as used in World War II has been replaced by Field Trains, as opposed to Combat Trains (formerly "'A' Trains").

When the commanders were released the battalion commander and S-3 of the 38th Armored Infantry returned to their CP, where the complete combat command order was given to the assembled staff and company commanders for their information. During this briefing an artillery liaison officer from the 440th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (organic to the 7th Armored Division) reported and announced that his battalion would be in direct support of the 38th during the Brachelen operation.

The previous afternoon the S-3 had made arrangements with the 406th Infantry Regiment for certain members of the battalion to enter the front lines at night, spend the next day there studying the terrain, and be relieved the following night. This plan was announced to the assembled company commanders, and they were directed to have two platoon leaders from each company together with all platoon sergeants and three squad leaders report to the Headquarters Company CP at 1500, prepared to spend the next thirty hours in the front lines. These men would be taken to the CP of the 406th Infantry, where guides from the front line battalions would lead them into position after dark. The following night they would be relieved and replaced in the line by the other two platoon leaders and six squad leaders from each company.

As an additional means of gaining information, arrangements also had been made for two members of the Reconnaissance Platoon to participate in a patrol being sent out by the 3d Battalion of the 406th Infantry the night of 7-8 December. The S-2 of the 38th was directed to select

and brief the men who would participate in this patrol and then transport them to the rendezvous point. When the patrol members returned early the next morning, they were able to furnish specific information on the organization of the German defensive positions.¹²

12

In addition to the observations made by the patrol, one prisoner was captured and the following interrogation report was submitted:

"Unit Identified: 2d Co, 696th Regt, 340th VG Div.

Strength: 100 men, 3 platoons with 3 squads each.

Weapons: Riflemen armed with German, Polish, and Czech rifles.

Locations: Co CP in house at 96076770.

1st Plat in position in trenches extending from 95386680 to 95256700.

The LMG's are 25 to 30 yards apart from each other, with the first one at 95366681. They are covered with camouflage cloth.

2d Plat is in position west of the 1st Plat.

Personalities: CO, 2d Co is Oberleutnant HAHN.

Remarks:

- a. Trenches - PW states that trenches in 2d Co sector are not as deep as they should be and do not connect with the different squad positions.
- b. Engineer Activity - The men were told that German engineers would be working in front of their positions last night, but PW does not know what kind of work they performed.
- c. Food Rations - Every night at about 1800 two men from each squad go back to Co CP and draw rations. They return between 1900 and 1930 at which time the men eat supper.
- d. Ammunition - Every man gets 30 rounds per day."

SUPPORTING FIRES

After briefing his staff and company commanders, the commander of the 38th Armored Infantry, accompanied by the S-3 and the artillery liaison officer, drove to the Corps Artillery OP in Linnich where they started planning the fires which would be needed to support the infantry assault. In addition to pointing out the areas where the smoke was desired, all known and likely locations for enemy OP's, automatic weapons, and close support infantry cannon were given a concentration number and marked for inclusion in the preparatory fire plan. The next step was to select those areas in the attack zone where the armored infantry might expect trouble and to identify these locations by concentration numbers, which could be fired on call. Especially was this done for the town of Brachelen itself where provisions were made for sealing off the streets by barrage lines drawn through the town perpendicular to the line of attack and separated from each succeeding barrage line by not more than two streets. Each barrage could then be lifted by the infantry when they had completed their mop-up of the area which was sealed off, and they were prepared to move to the next street with its group of houses.

As these fires were planned and marked, agreement was reached, subject to final approval by Division Artillery, on the means for lifting the artillery fires and on the type of emergency signals to be used. Not only were fires planned

for the attack phase but also for the defensive phase which would follow the securing of the objective. Counterattacks would be inevitable for the Germans were expected to react most violently to their ejection from the "capstone" of their control of the Roer River in the Linnich area.

Other vantage points were utilized in the planning of the fires, after which all three officers drove to the Fire Direction Center of the 440th Armored Field Artillery. There final details of the artillery support plan were arranged by command liaison between the two battalion commanders, after which the close support artillery fire plan was completed and forwarded to Division Artillery for coordination and inclusion in the general plan of artillery support.

While at the artillery battalion, the armored infantry commander obtained permission to use a "Cub" airplane so as to observe the attack zone and the objective from the air by flying over the American lines. Arrangements also were made for the battalion S-2 to make a similar flight later in the afternoon.

At the same time that the liaison officer was aiding the armored infantry battalion commander in the preparation of the artillery support plan, the battalion Headquarters Company commander was drawing up the final plan for the heavy weapons support of the attack.¹³ This included locating the firing

¹³ The armored infantry battalion of the new armored division will be less able to support its front line companies than was the battalion in World War II. Included in the Headquarters and Service Company of the new armored infantry

positions for the two mortar platoons, the machine gun platoon, and for the assault gun platoon, together with arrangements for communication between the weapons platoons and the battalion OP which he established in Linnich. From this OP the Headquarters Company commander would be linked with the firing platoons by both wire and radio, as well as with the supporting weapons platoons of the adjacent infantry battalions. This fire support from the adjacent units had been arranged by the S-3 and the Headquarters Company commander with the 406th Infantry, and enabled the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion to have the following heavy weapons in direct support of the assault companies:

27 mortars, 81mm	(18 - 406th Infantry Regiment (6 - 38th Armored Infantry (3 - 48th Armored Infantry
6 assault guns, 75mm	(3 each - 38th & 48th AIB's
2 assault guns, 105mm	(1 each - 38th & 48th AIB's
8 heavy machine guns	(4 each - 38th & 48th AIB's

During the next two days all weapons platoons were "zeroed-in" on all known targets and were registered on various suspected enemy localities by firing single guns on harrassing missions. This data was plotted on the fire control map of

battalion is only one weapons platoon — a mortar platoon with three 81mm mortars. There is a fourth 81mm mortar ~~in the support squad of the reconnaissance platoon.~~

In the opinion of the author an assault gun platoon with three 105mm howitzers, on a tank chassis, should be retained within the armored infantry battalion. In addition it is believed that the mortar platoon should be organized as a four mortar platoon, similar to the ones in the battalion heavy weapons companies of the infantry regiment.

the Headquarters Company commander and on the range cards for each gun and platoon.

At 1900 hours that same evening (7 December) all unit commanders reassembled at Headquarters, Combat Command "B" where they presented their battalion attack plans. Last minute details were worked out under supervision of the combat command staff, after which the Commanding General gave his approval. Then the S-3 of Division Artillery presented the general plan for artillery supporting fires which included an extensive series of prepared fires, preplanned on call missions, and arrangements for firing defensive concentrations and counter-preparations on call.¹⁴

14

See Appendix "A" for the complete artillery plan as contained in the ARTILLERY ANNEX which was issued several days later.

In immediate support of Combat Command "B" were two armored field artillery battalions in direct support, and a general support group of two additional armored field artillery battalions. In general support for the Division were a 155mm howitzer battalion, a tank battalion with 29-75mm guns, a battery of 155mm self-propelled guns, a 4.2-inch chemical mortar company, and a TD company equipped with 12-90mm self-propelled guns. Reinforcing artillery included two 155mm howitzer battalions and an 8-inch howitzer battalion.

In brief, the prepared fires included:

<u>Time</u>	<u>Units to Fire</u>	<u>Mission</u>
H-180	Chemical Mortar Co.	Fire Brachelen with WP.
H-105	XIII & XIX Corps Artillery	Counter-battery on all known enemy artillery.
H-30	7 Bns. Artillery)	(TOT, fuze delay, on targets selected by unit commanders while planning close support fires with artillery liaison officers.
H-25	3 Bns. Artillery)	
H-20	3 Bns. Artillery)	
H-15	1 Bn. Artillery)	
H-10	3 Bns. Artillery)	
H-5	4 Bns. Artillery & Chemical Mortar Co.	Smoke — to be continued for 4-1/2 hours; to be stopped on CC-B orders.

BATTALION ATTACK ORDER

Upon returning to the CP of the 38th Armored Infantry after the briefing at Combat Command "B" on the evening of 7 December, the battalion commander issued his attack order at 2030 hours. It was given orally to the assembled staff and company commanders, and substantially the order included:

"1. a. Elements of the 340th VG Division, identified as the 696th VG Regiment, hold BRACHELEN and are manning the German defensive works in our zone. At least 6 tanks and 4 or 5 SP guns have been observed in BRACHELEN, and are believed to be from the 10th SS Panzer Division.

b. CC-B will attack on 'D/1' ('D-Day' being the day the ROER dams are blown by the RAF) to take BRACHELEN and hold it until relieved by the 84th Division. Attack is now planned for 10 December with 'H-Hour' set for 0945.

(1) 31st Tank Battalion and 23d Armored Infantry will attack mounted from LINDERN to seize central portion of BRACHELEN.

(2) 440th AFA will be Direct Support for the 38th; 434th AFA, Direct Support for the 31st and 23d; in General Support will be the 83d and 489th AFA....

(3) Air support includes attacks with delayed action bombs by medium bombers on HIMMERICH, HILFARTH, BAAL, and the woods northwest of BRACHELEN prior to 'H-Hour' on attack day. At 'H-Hour' BRACHELEN will be hit by a fighter bomber group (36 planes).

Armed reconnaissance will be flown on the right flank with particular attention to KORRENZIG, RURICH, and BAAL. Column cover will be flown by 4 fighter bombers, available every 30 minutes starting at 'H-Hour', with particular attention to the railroad and the BRACHELEN--HILFARTH road.

(4) A/31 will furnish tank support by fire from the left flank of the 38th during the assault, and will furnish one platoon for tank support of BAKER and ABLE Companies during organization of the defense.

"2. This battalion (with Mortar, Machine Gun, and Assault Gun Platoons, 48th Armored Infantry, plus Mortar Platoons, 1st, 2d, and 3d Battalions, 406th Infantry in direct support) will attack dismounted at 'H-Hour' and seize southern part of BRACHELEN and OELDREISCH, then take up defensive positions prepared to repel counterattacks.

Formation: BAKER Company on the left.
ABLE Company on the right.
CHARLEY Company in Combat
Command reserve.

Line of Departure: Present front lines.

Assembly Areas: To be selected by S-3 with company commanders, vicinity of GEREONSWEILER.

Attack Positions: To be occupied by moving dismounted to front lines under cover of darkness night before attack.

Boundaries and Objectives: As shown on S-3 map.

- "3. a. ABLE Company will seize, clear, and organize Objectives 'A' and 'C', contact BAKER Company on the left in BRACHELEN; be prepared to attack and clear Objective 'D' on battalion order after organization of Objectives 'A' and 'C'.
- b. BAKER Company will seize, clear, and organize Objective 'B', contact A/31 (reinforced by B/23) on left in BRACHELEN.
- c. CHARLEY Company will remain with their vehicles in assembly area as Combat Command reserve.
- d. Headquarters Company will support attack from firing positions in vicinity of LINNICH and GEREONSWEILER.
- x. Upon organization of BRACHELEN for defense, all elements this battalion will pass to control of 31st Tank Battalion.

"4. Administrative details later.

- "5. a. Radio silence until 'H-Hour'.
Special pyrotechnic signals:
(1) Emergency lifting of artillery - red star cluster.
(2) Emergency lifting of heavy weapons fires - green star cluster.
- b. Battalion CP will be established at 93856301 by midnight night before attack.
I will be at the battalion OP in LINNICH with S-3 and Headquarters Company Commander day of attack."

With the battalion attack order issued,¹⁵ all that remained to be accomplished were various last minute details and the completion of company rehearsals. As a final aid to the detailed planning by each company, the S-2 completed next day a sandtable showing the towns of Brachelen, Linnich, Lindern, and the area west of these towns. The afternoon of 8 December, the company commanders used this sandtable while presenting to the assembled battalion staff their plans for accomplishing the various company missions. After this briefing the sandtable was made available to each company for a minimum of 8 hours per company, so that it could be used in presenting the battalion and company attack plans and orders to the men of each company.

Of particular note was the arrangement with Division Artillery through the combat command for the use of a common radio channel by all artillery observation planes. In this way spot information on front line activities could be relayed instantly to the ground, both prior to and during the attack. Within the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion an extra SCR-528 was made available to the S-2/S-3 Section at the CP for monitoring this common observation channel.

¹⁵ The battalion attack order as presented in this report is substantially the same as the original order. No original notes on this order were available to the author, and he was forced to reconstruct it from memory after which it was verified by checking with different officers of the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion.

ATTACK DELAYED

"9 Dec. (1650) Dam not broken; no attack 10 December; prepare for attack on 11 December.

"10 Dec. (1600) No operations; dam not broken..."

— Journal, 38th AIB, Dec. 1944.

Those cryptic journal entries spell out the first of several delays in "D-Day" which eventually were to prevent the 7th Armored Division and its Combat Command "B" from launching the attack on Brachelen.

The Roer River was proving to be the stumbling block not only in the assault on Brachelen but also for the entire Ninth Army offensive. It was neither a deep nor a broad stream, and its normal capacity in the Linnich area was restricted to a width of no more than fifty to eighty feet and a depth which did not exceed five to ten feet. The Roer, however, was capable of becoming a roaring torrent — more than thirty feet deep and several thousand feet wide — if the Germans were to open the floodgates on one or more of the several dams which they controlled at the headwaters of the river. These dams were about 15 miles upstream in the Schwamaneul—Schmidt area and were the major objective of First Army. For more than a month First Army had been hacking its way laboriously and at great cost through the Huertgen Forest towards the dams, but because of the weather, the tenacity of the German defenders, and the difficult terrain, was still far from capturing the dams.

It was essential that the threat of flooding the Roer be removed before any American troops advanced east of the river or they would be in danger of being isolated and destroyed

on the far shore. When the Brachelen operation was conceived, Twelfth Army Group was preparing to blow the dams with "blockbuster" bombs to be dropped by the R.A.F. Taking advantage of the flood of water which was certain to follow the destruction of the dams, XIII Corps planned to attack Brachelen the morning after the dams were blown. The river in the Linnich—Brachelen area would then be in flood stage, and the Germans would be unable to reinforce their garrisons on the west bank for several days. By then it would be too late, and the Americans of Ninth Army would be in complete control of Brachelen.

On 9 December, the first bombs were dropped but no appreciable damage was caused the dams and no flooding resulted. Accordingly the attack was postponed for twenty-four hours, but again the bombers were unable to breach the dams sufficiently to cause the desired flooding. The night of 10 December, the assault on Brachelen was postponed until it could be launched in conjunction with a coordinated attack by British XXX Corps to reduce Heinsberg and eliminate the entire German bridgehead west of the Roer. This new operation was to be known as "OPERATION DAGGER" and was to be a joint effort by British XXX Corps and the American XIII Corps. The initial orders for "DAGGER" were issued on 12 December, with the expectation that the attack would be launched one day after the dams were blown. The new target date for the bombing by the R.A.F. was set for 15 December, but bad weather set in and the bombers were unable to accomplish their mission.

Before the weather had cleared, the ~~Somber~~ morning of 16 December 1944 arrived and the Germans had unleashed their full-scale offensive against the Allies in the Ardennes area. With this attack by von Rundstedt and his Fifth and Sixth SS Panzer Armies, all thoughts of taking Brachelen had to be put aside. The 7th Armored Division was shifted south some 90-odd miles to the vicinity of St. Vith, Belgium, where it helped First Army contain the Panzer divisions which were racing for the Meuse and Liege.

When "The Bulge" had been eliminated a month later Ninth Army was again able to turn its thoughts towards the establishment of a bridgehead over the Roer near Linnich. This time the 102d Infantry Division was charged with the reduction of Brachelen, and on 26 January 1945 captured the town into which so much detailed planning had gone. The attack plan was similar to the one developed by Combat Command "B" and was made by two infantry battalions and a battalion of tanks.

SUMMARY

Through the medium of an historical example, the details of planning a limited objective attack at the battalion level have been depicted. The first warning order was received at 1035 hours, 6 December; at 2030 hours the next day -- just 34 hours later -- the final complete battalion attack order had been issued. While the elapsed time was greater than that

which will be available in most combat situations, each and every step in the planning procedure followed by the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion must be considered when preparing for an attack. These steps include:

- a. Reconnaissance -- to obtain information on the following items:
 - (1) Battalion objective, line of departure, and zone of action.
 - (2) Enemy dispositions, including location of strong points held or likely to be held.
 - (3) Obstacles, location, type, and extent - both natural and artificial.
 - (4) Areas under enemy observation and subject to enemy direct fire.
 - (5) Favorable avenues of approach to the enemy position.
 - (6) Suitable company objectives.
 - (7) Location of friendly units through which the battalion will attack, and determination of any means by which they may assist the attack.
 - (8) Location of areas for:
 - (a) Reserve company.
 - (b) Supply and maintenance facilities.
 - (c) Battalion aid station.
 - (d) Battalion OP and CP.
 - (e) Firing positions for heavy weapons platoons.
 - (9) Location of avenues of likely enemy counterattacks (infantry, tanks, or both).
- b. Liaison -- from battalion to the next higher command, and with adjacent major units.
- c. Formulation of Tentative Plan -- to include scheme of maneuver and plan for supporting fires, as well as details of supply, maintenance and evacuation, together with a reliable communications system.
- d. Scheme of Maneuver -- with company objectives, axis of attack, zones of action for assault companies, formation of battalion, composition and employment of reserve.

- e. Supporting Fires — made up of separate plans for artillery, battalion heavy weapons, tank, and air support.
- f. Issuance of Attack Order — must afford company commanders time to plan their own attack and brief their men.
- g. Rehearsals — if possible and time is available.

There in a concise tabulated form are the planning steps which must be accomplished by the staff of a battalion before an attack may be mounted. Omission of any of these basic factors could result in failure and needless waste of human life.

ANNEX "A" -- Artillery Plan for Brachelen Attack

: (Classification) : CP DIV ARTY, 7 ARMD DIV
: AUTH: CG 7 AD : vic GEILENKIRCHEN, GERMANY
: INIT: : 121700 December 1944
: DATE: 12 Dec 44 :

MAPS: GERMANY - 1/25,000

ARTY ANNEX NO. 9 TO ACCOMPANY OPERATIONS INSTRUCTIONS
7 ARMD DIV

OPERATION DAGGER

1. a. Enemy: Refer to current G-2 Reports, 7 AD.
- b. (1) XIII Corps atks H-Hr, D-Day, in conjunction with atk of 30 Corps (Br), seizes and clears MULLENDORF-WURM-BRACHELEN and continues atk to seize Corps obj (see o'lay).
- (2) CC-B, 7 AD, passes thru elms of 84 and 102 Divs H-Hr, D-Day, seizes and clears BRACHELEN.
- (3) Composition of CC-B:
 - CC-B Hq & Hq Co
 - Div Arty w/atchmts
 - 31 Tk Bn
 - 23 Armd Inf Bn
 - C Co 814 TD Bn
 - B Co 33 Armd Engr Bn
 - D Btry 203 AAA Bn
 - 38 Armd Inf Bn
 - B Trp 87 Cav Rcn Sq Mecz
- (4) Arty atchd to 7 AD Arty:
 - (a) 83 Armd FA Bn (105 SP)
 - (b) 2 FA Bn (155 How) (to revert to Corps control on Corps order when CC-B gains obj)
 - (c) B Btry, 557 FA Bn (155 Gun SP) (to revert to 84 Inf Div by Noon of second day)
- (5) 472 FA Gp, from present posns, reinforces fires of Div Arty until BRACHELEN is taken.
 - Composition:
 - (a) 254 FA Bn (155 How)
 - (b) 754 FA Bn (155 How)
 - (c) 264 FA Bn (8" How)
- (6) 75mm guns (total 29) of 40 Tk Bn reinforce fires of Div Arty.
- (7) 2 Plats A Co plus 1 Plat C Co, 814 TD Bn (12-90mm Guns), reinforce fires of Div Arty.
- (8) 7 AD Div Arty has joint use first day of atk of C Co, 92 Chem Mortar Bn w/84 Inf Div.

2. 7 AD Div Arty spts CC-B in the atk (see Fire Plan).
3. a. 434 Armd FA Bn:
 - (1) Mission - D/S CC-B's main ctm.
 - (2) Present posns.
 - (3) Ln to 31 Tk Bn.
 - (4) Tk FO's to 31 Tk Bn, RO's to 23 Armd Inf Bn.
- b. 440 Armd FA Bn:
 - (1) Mission - D/S 38 Armd Inf Bn.
 - (2) Present posns.
 - (3) Ln to 38 Armd Inf Bn.
 - (4) RO's to 38 Armd Inf Bn.
- c. 489 Armd FA Bn:
 - (1) Mission - G/S.
 - (2) Present posns.
 - (3) Ln to CC-B for Div Arty. Ln O to work thru Div Arty.
 - (4) Observation - FO w/31 Tk Bn, RO w/23 Armd Inf Bn, and RO w/38 Armd Inf Bn.
- d. 83 Armd FA Bn:
 - (1) Mission - D/S 489 Armd FA Bn in a G/S Gp.
 - (2) Present posns.
 - (3) Ln to 489 Armd FA Bn.
 - (4) Tk FO w/31 Tk Bn.
- e. 2 FA Bn:
 - (1) Mission - G/S.
 - (2) Present posns.
 - (3) Ln to Div Arty.
- f. B Btry, 557 FA Bn:
 - (1) Mission - G/S. Atk of concrete pillboxes by short range fire.
 - (2) Be prepared to fire to North or to East.
 - (3) Present posns.
- g. C Co, 92 Chem Mortar Bn:
 - (1) Mission - G/S.
 - (2) Positions NE of BEECK. Occupy night of D-1.
- h. 814 TD Bn (1 Co):
 - (1) Mission - G/S.
 - (2) Positions - occupy previously reconnoitered and surveyed posns vic BEGGENDORF on Div order.
- i. 40 Tk Bn (75mm Guns only):
 - (1) Mission - G/S.
 - (2) Positions - occupy previously reconnoitered and surveyed posns vic PUFFENDORF on Div order.
- x.
 - (1) All FA Bns will establish ground OP's.
 - (2) Zones of Fire - see o'lay.
 - (3) Firing Chart - 1/25,000 grid sheet, supplemented by 1/25,000 map.

- (4) All 105mm How Bns will register for percussion and time, prior to H-Hr on Div Arty Ck Pt No. 2 (Coordinates 95790-67710), limited to 1 gun per btry. 2 FA Bn will register for percussion only.
- (5) On D-Day there will be no arty firing between 0700 to 0710, and 0850 to 0900.
- (6) Immediate shellreps will be sent in to Div Arty S-2.
- (7) Observers will send in rpts twice an hr on changes in locations of leading elms and on int info. Negative rpts will be sent in if there is nothing else to rpt. All rpts will be forwarded to Div Arty S-2 at once.
- (8) FO's and Ln O's will join respective Hq by 0900 on-D-1.

4. a. Ammunition allocation for 7 AD Arty for period from D to D plus 3 (incl):

4.2 Mortars	-	1500 Rds, HE
		1500 Rds, WP (available D-Day only)
75mm Tk	-	7200 Rds, HE (normal charge only)
90mm	-	3300 Rds, HE
105mm	-	7200 Rds, HE (D-Day only)
		for period, 500 Rds WP, 250 Rds HC
155mm How	-	900 Rds, HE
		200 Rds, HC
155mm Gun	-	250 Rds, HE

In addition the following has been allotted to 102 Div Arty for use on smoke missions to support 7 AD:

105mm	-	750 Rds, HC
155mm	-	500 Rds, HC

- b. 90mm and 75mm ammunition is to be hauled fwd and dumped prior to 0800, D-1.

5. CP's:

Div Arty	-	8820-6375
434 FA	-	9130-6170
440 FA	-	9280-6115
489 FA	-	9065-6200
83 FA	-	927 -610
2 FA	-	875 -648
472 FA Gp	-	9136-6024
CC-B	-	885 -550 (on day of atk)

By order of Colonel MARTIN:

OFFICIAL:

/s/ Safer
SAFER
S-3

SCOTT
Ex

NOTES: Artillery Plan for Brachelen Attack

The Artillery Annex was accompanied by a detailed FIRE PLAN which included a table showing the following information:

- a. Time of Fire
- b. Concentration Number
- c. Type of Fire
- d. Units to Fire
- e. Size of Concentration
- f. Volume of Fire
- g. Remarks

Attached to the table were two overlays - Phase I (Attack Fires) and Phase II (Defensive and Interdiction Fires). Each overlay located the respective concentrations on the map as well as the smoke lines, while pertinent information was summed up on the margin, including: concentration number, firing unit to which each concentration was assigned, and coordinate locations for each concentration.

As an example of how the FIRE PLAN table was prepared, the entry for the "H-30 TOT" is given below:

Time	Conc No	Type of Fire	Unit	Size	Volume of Fire	Remarks
H-30 (TOT)	CHICAGO					
	6AB	Preparation	434 FA Bn	Bn	3 Volleys	Fuze Delay
	7AB	"	440 FA Bn	Bn	Do	Do
	6-8-10AB	"	264 FA Bn	Btry	Do	Fuze Delay (1 Btry on each conc)
	8AB	Preparation	754 FA Bn	Bn	3 Volleys	Fuze Delay
	9AB	"	2 FA Bn	Bn	Do	Do
	10AB	"	83 FA Bn	Bn	Do	Do
	11AB	"	489 FA Bn	Bn	Do	Do

ANNEX "B"

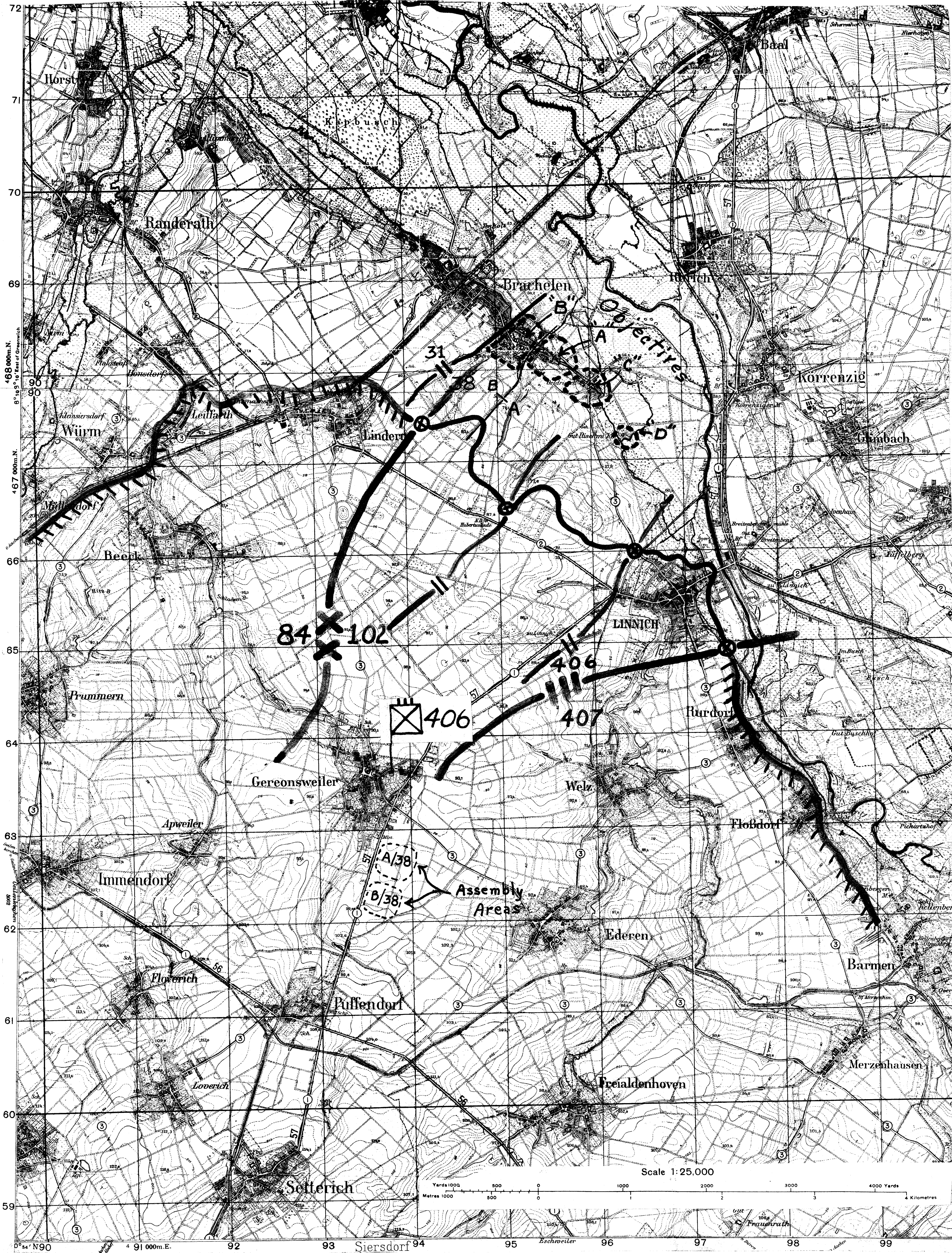
Brachelen Attack Map

Maps: GERMANY, 1/25,000 - sheets 4903 (ERKELENZ)
and 5003 (LINNICH).

NOTES: Front lines are shown as of 2400 hours,
7 December 1944.

Boundaries in black are those established in the combat command and battalion attack orders; those in blue apply to the units of the 84th and 102d Infantry Divisions which were manning the front lines.

Objectives as outlined in red are the various company objectives of the 38th Armored Infantry Battalion as designated in the battalion attack order.



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167 000m.N.
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0° 54' N90 91 000m.E. 92 93 Siersdorf 94 95 Eschweiler 96 97 98 99

Scale 1:25,000

Yards 1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 Yards
Metres 1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 Metres