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ARMOR IN THE ATTACK
(Personal experience of an Armored Infantry Battalion Staff Officer)

Types of action described:

- (1) Sixth Armored Division in an exploitation
- (2) Armored Infantry Battalion crossing the
Our River

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ARMOR IN THE ATTACK
SIXTH ARMORED DIVISION IN AN EXPLOITATION (1-12 Aug. 1944)
FORTY-FOURTH ARMORED INFANTRY BATTALION CROSSING THE OUR
RIVER (6-8 Feb. 1945)
(PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF AN ARMORED INFANTRY BATTALION STAFF OFFICER)

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

Armored Divisions are organized and equipped to perform missions requiring great mobility and fire power. This organization includes all the elements necessary to constitute highly mobile, flexible teams of combined arms possessing great fire power and armor protection. The Armored Division organization further provides organic means for maintenance and resupply. Tactically and administratively, the Armored Division is self-contained and with proper planning, is capable of independent operation for considerable periods of time. It can readily be appreciated that a force so organized and equipped is designed primarily as for the attack. Combat experience has proven that armor is ideally suited for this role.

The purpose of this monograph is to present two types of attack, greatly different in nature, as conducted by the 6th Armored Division during the period 28 July, 1944, to 8 February, 1945 with a view toward demonstrating the effectiveness and flexibility of Armored Combined teams; stress principles which attained success in both attacks and to provide any student or instructor of Armored operations an example of each of the two types of attacks discussed, together

with a summary of the principles employed and the lessons learned.

The two attacks referred to above may be classified as (1) an Exploitation and (2) a river crossing. The former describes the action of the 6th Armored Division in its race through the Brittany Peninsula to BREST during the period 1-12 August, the latter describes the action of the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion (Reinf), of the 6th Armored Division, in conducting a crossing of the Our River at a point where it served as an integral part of the SIEGFRIED LINE defenses on the German-Luxembourg border, during the period 6-8 February, 1945.

The first campaign of the 6th Armored Division is an example of pure exploitation in which the power of an Armored Division was given free rein in carrying out the role for which it was designed.

Although the Exploitation phase of the attack normally follows other types of attacks during which some mighty hard slugging has created a situation allowing for the breakthrough which develops into an exploitation, this monograph will undertake the treatment of the exploitation initially. This selection is made primarily due to the fact that this type of mission was among the first missions assigned the 6th Armored Division and was by far the most important mission given the Division to that date. Due to the rapid deterioration of the Wehrmacht during the period 1-12 August, 1944, very little notice was given the isolated exploits of this Division. The attention of the world was focused on MORTAIN, FALAIS GAP and

the dash to PARIS during this period. It is believed that this action of a single Armored Division on an exploitation mission well deserves the scrutiny of any student of military history.

SECTION II

THE EXPLOITATION*

ORIENTATION

For the purpose of orientation it will be necessary for the reader to consider the situation confronting the First U.A. Army from 25 to 31 July, 1944.

On 25 July, 1944, the First U.S. Army had succeeded in clearing the COTENTIN Peninsula to the North despite heavy resistance which was met in the drive South at the base of the peninsula and the close hedgerow terrain which canalized the operation of the First U.S. Army into an Infantry effort with little use for armor. At this time a breakthrough became imminent in the COUTANCES-ST. LO area. The 6th Armored Division, a reserve element of the VIII Corps, First Army, was alerted for movement on order from its assembly area in the LES MEMIL area to exploit the success. (1)

On 27 July, the Division was ordered to pass through the 79th Division at LESSAY-COUTANCES highway, and seize the Corps objective Northwest of COUTANCES. (2)

This mission was accomplished on 28 July against scattered resistance. The Division moved 26 miles on its first day in combat.

The success of the breakthrough at ST. LO, and COUTANCES caused

*See map A(1,2) A-1, p. 1-2;

VIII Corps to order the advance to continue South with two Armored Divisions abreast. In general, the Corps plan was to employ the 6th Armored Division on the West followed by the 79th Division to capture GRANVILLE. (3)

Upon continuing the advance on 29 July, the lead element of the Division was held up along the Sienne River near PONT DE LA ROCHE. The enemy had destroyed all bridges in the area, and were holding the high ground South of the river. The afternoon was spent in cleaning up enemy resistance North of the river and preparing for the attack. At 2030, a coordinated attack was launched by dismounted Infantry elements of the Division. At 2145 the bridgehead was secured. During the night the Division Engineers constructed a ford across the river. By early morning the 6th Armored Division was again rolling toward its objective. (4)

River Crossing
Est bridge head

The advance on 30 July was against scattered light enemy resistance except at BREHAL where enemy artillery and mortar fire were encountered. An estimated Infantry Battalion supported by a battery of four self-propelled 88 mm guns plus some smaller caliber anti-tank guns occupied the town and vicinity. The town was taken at 1325. During the afternoon, tenacious enemy rear guard actions were overcome South of BREHAL. By nightfall the Division was in position North-east of GRANVILLE prepared to attack the city. (5)

At 0600, on 31 July orders were received from VIII Corps directing the Division to continue its advance to the South to

(3) A-1, p. 4 (4) A-1 p. 4 (5) A-1, p. 6

LE PONT GILBERT.

Time was not available for a full development of the enemy situation in the vicinity of GRANVILLE. Suspecting the city to be lightly defended, if at all, one platoon of light tanks, with the Division G-3, dashed into town at noon on 31 July and accepted the surrender of the town and its German garrison without encountering resistance. (6)

By 2100, the Division was in position astride the AVRANCHES-GRANVILLE road with forward elements at LE PONT GILBERT at which time orders were received to relieve the 4th Armored Division and the 13th Infantry Regiment at AVRANCHES and PONT AU BAULT to the South. (7)

No indication was given that an immediate advance beyond this point was contemplated, therefore the Reserve Command was ordered to effect the relief of the troops at the bridge at PONT AU BAULT. The movement to accomplish this mission was commenced during the night of 31 July-1 August. The enemy air was very active and repeatedly strafed the armored column and unsuccessfully attempted to bomb the bridges. This air activity, coupled with the fact that the single road leading through AVARANCHES and PONT AU BAULT was almost impassable due to columns of wrecked and burning German vehicles, presented the worst bottleneck encountered by the Division during the war. (8)

At midnight 31 July-1 August, Third Army became operational

(6) A-1 p. 7 (7) A-1 p. 6 (8) A-1 p. 7-8, A-8 p. 78

and took over VIII Corps. At 0400, 1 August 1944, during which time Reserve Command was threading its way through AVARANCHES enroute to accomplish its relief mission, orders were received from Third Army through VIII Corps which completely changed the mission of the 6th Armored Division. These orders were a classic in simplicity, the essence of which may well be expressed in these words, "Capture BREST, time is important." The plan called for the 6th Armored Division to proceed West through the center of the peninsula in two or more columns and capture BREST with all possible speed. The 4th Armored Division was directed to attack after the 6th, and cut off the Brittany Peninsula by seizing REMMES and VANNES. The 79th Infantry Division was designated to follow closely behind the 6th Armored Division. A later change, placed the 83rd Division in support of the 6th Armored Division. Neither of these units ever caught up with the Division and finally on 4 August the Division Commander was informed he would receive no Infantry support. (9)

The change in mission at this particular time caught the Division in the middle of a stride. The Division policy was to use the Reserve Command Headquarters primarily to control all combat troops temporarily held in Division reserve and secondarily to carry out defensive missions which did not require the complete command organization provided by a Combat Command Headquarters. For this reason, Reserve Command was assigned to relieve the 4th Armored Division bridgehead.

(9) A-1 p. 8; A-3, p. 4-5

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

In considering the assignment handed the 6th Armored Division, one can appreciate the magnitude of this task by pausing momentarily to examine the geographical characteristics of the Brittany Peninsula. The area, while not so marshy as the Normandy Peninsula, nevertheless is a hedgerow country particularly in the West where hedges which often reach a height of six feet, present very effective barriers. In general the area can be described as close country, providing limited observation and very little opportunity for the employment of an Armored Division in such manner as to utilize its maximum power. The inland waterways are torrent like, and most rivers are unfordable due to steep banks and rapid current.

THE MARCH TO BREST

Initially the only route over which the Division could move was the one through AVARANCHES, at that time occupied by Reserve Command. This road did not permit the passage of a Combat Command until Reserve Command cleared the town. Despite the inadequacy of facilities for offensive operations within the Reserve Command Headquarters, history reveals that there were times when the Reserve Command undertook offensive action. This was one of those times. (10)

Speed was the essential factor, as specified by the Corps order. Two routes were perscribed as general guides for the Division, however, the directive stated that major centers of resistance were

(10) A-1 p. 8

to be avoided. Thus the 6th Armored Division found itself with the mission of racing over 200 miles through an isolated area of approximately 11 thousand square miles to capture a fortress city. (11)

Quickly appreciating the time factor involved, the Reserve Command was ordered to attack through the bridgehead held by the 4th Armored Division at PONT AN BAULT and secure a bridgehead at PONTORSON, thereby enabling the remainder of the Division to clear the bottleneck and develop on a broad front. (12)

The Reserve Command moved out and met sharp resistance at BREE, a small village approximately ten miles short of its objective, PONTORSON. The leading combat team of the Reserve Command composed of an Infantry Company and a Tank Company supported by a battery of self-propelled Field Artillery were advancing at maximum speed in order to seize its objective and allow the Division elements to clear the bottleneck at PONT AU BAULT. Upon encountering resistance at BREE, which consisted initially of only small arms and bazooka fire, the tanks and Armored Infantry opened fire with bow guns, vehicular machine guns and individual arms. This action smothered the enemy to the extent that the leading tank and Infantry Companies tore through the enemy defenses.

After passage of the leading tanks and Infantry the enemy, having recovered somewhat from the violence of the attack, opened up with a terrific amount of direct anti-tank and small arms fire from well camouflaged positions. This fire was received by the

(11) A-1 p. 9 (12) A-1 p. 9

battery of Artillery supporting the leading combat team. Three of its guns were destroyed before the column could deploy. The advance guard, less its artillery battery, dashed the remaining 10 miles to PONTORSON where it ran a gauntlet of small arms fire through the city to seize and secure the bridge over the LE COUESNON river at 11:00. The main body, upon realizing that the rear of the advanced guard had been struck, quickly deployed. The medium tank Battalion and the Headquarters Company of the Armored Infantry Battalion quickly took firing positions and placed fire upon the enemy. Two Armored Infantry Companies dismounted and pushed forward on both sides of the road. The Cub Liaison plane located 3 batteries of horse drawn artillery which were destroyed. The Armored Infantry Companies, supported by tank and artillery fire, succeeded in eliminating the hostile forces at 1230 with the loss to the enemy of an unknown number killed; 90 prisoners taken, and 3 batteries of horse-drawn artillery and one 88 mm gun destroyed. It is believed that the audacious action by the leading combat team, who succeeded in reaching its objective, thereby denying the enemy the opportunity fighting a delaying action on successive positions, contributed materially to the speed with which this opposition was eliminated. Upon reaching PONTORSON the main body cleared the town of snipers and closed into the bridgehead at 1715 where it halted for the night. (13)

In the meantime, the remainder of the Division moved from its assembly area North of AVARANCHES and slowly made its way through

(13) A-1, p. 10

the bottleneck. Combat Command "A" swung wide to the South and made an uncontested crossing of the LE COUESNON River at ANTRAIN SUR COUESNON South of the Reserve Command bridgehead. Combat Command "B" cleared AVARANCHES in the evening and closed in bivouac East of PONTORSON under cover of Reserve Command. (14)

On the second day of August, the advance on BREST began in earnest. The Division now was clear of the bottleneck and had two routes upon which to advance. Further, it was clear of roads cluttered with friendly troops and equipment. It no longer was to be restricted by road priorities or inadequate assembly areas. Completely unfettered the Division was now poised to launch itself through Brittany with all its tremendous strength. (15)

Orders were issued to continue the advance at daylight. It was planned that the two combat commands should march abreast, with the Reconnaissance Battalion covering the front and with Combat Command "B" on the right (North) flank. For the purpose of clarity, the routes taken by Combat Command "A" and Combat Command "B" will be referred to as routes A and B respectively. The Reserve Command, consisting of combat elements similiar to those of the combat Commands, was to follow whichever route proved most feasible. Division Trains composed of the organic service elements of the Division plus three Quartermaster Truck Companies and an Engineer Treadway Bridge Company, and adequately supported by Combat elements of the Division for protection, was charged with its normal mission of supplying the Division with the fuel and ammunition that it was to need so vitally. (16)

(14) A-1, p. 10 (15) personal knowledge, author. (16) A-1, p. 9

According to plan, the advance on BREST began at dawn with two combat commands abreast. (The Reconnaissance Battalion, due to difficulty in negotiating the bottleneck at AVARANCHES, was unable at first, to gain its position properly to cover the Division front. Later, the squadron led or protected the flanks of both combat command columns.) As Combat Command "B" approached DINAN, it became apparent that the city would be heavily defended. This fact was further substantiated by a document taken from a prisoner which revealed a rather formidable plan for the defense of that city. Realizing that to capture the city, a major effort would be required, the Division Commander sent the G-3 with instructions to Combat Command "B" to by-pass the city to the South. By the time the G-3 arrived at Combat Command, it was already engaged. It was not until the afternoon, after the enemy outpost lines had been driven in, that the engagement could be broken off. Covering its movement by a rear guard and masking its intentions by artillery fire, Combat Command "B" reorganized and marched East and then South-west to BECHEREL where it closed in bivouac at 2200 hours. In the meantime, Combat Command "A" advanced by the Southern route against little resistance. Consequently both Reserve Command and Division Headquarters switched from the Northern route to the Southern route. Combat Command "A" closed in bivouac between MEDREAL and QUEDILLAC. Reserve Command closed in bivouac for the night, between BECHEREL and TINTENIAC with Division Headquarters located in ST. DOMINEAUQ. (17)

(17) A-1 p. 11,12

In view of the fatigue of the troops, who had been operating practically day and night since 27 July, the Division Commander ordered that the advance on 3 August would not start until noon. Accordingly the Division resumed its advance at this time. The leading troops of Combat Command "A" failed to make a proper turn at GAEL. The command proceeded on the wrong route to MAURON where it ran into organized resistance. Due to difficulty in by-passing this town the commander decided to defeat the enemy force and pass through the town in order to regain his proper route. This was accomplished by a coordinated attack after which the command moved to the vicinity of GAEL where it went into bivouac. (18)

In the meantime Combat Command "B", marched approximately 20 miles on the Northern route. Minor resistance was encountered in vicinity of BROOMS where the advance guard ran into an enemy force apparently attempting to escape to the South. Combat Command "B" halted and went into an assembly area at 1900, on order of the Division Commander, about 8 miles East of LOUDEAC. (19)

Due to the more favorable situation on the Northern route, Reserve Command switched to Route "B" following Combat Command "B". (20)

While watching the attack by Combat Command "A" on MAURON at 1600, the Division Commander received orders from Corps to halt all movement West and divert sufficient force North to capture DINAN (by-passed by Combat Command "B" on the previous day.) As the majority of the Division was already well past DINAN, this meant a

(18) A-1, p. 13-14 (19) A-1, p. 14 (20) A-1, p. 13

backward movement of considerable distance. (21)

The Division Commander immediately formulated a plan to carry out the orders of the Corps Commander which would require the minimum movement of troops. The Commander of Combat Command "A" was directed to leave his tanks and Infantry in place and, with his own artillery, pick up the Reserve Command troops which were between him and DINAN and move on DINAN from the South-west. (22)

The morning of 4 August found Combat Command "A" reorganized and advancing on DINAN from the Southwest. It reached the vicinity of BROOMS at noon where it was halted on Division order. This halt was due to orders received from the Army Commander who arrived at the Division C.P. shortly before noon. He directed that the advance on BREST be resumed at once. Simultaneously, Corps orders were received cancelling the attack on DINAN. The remainder of the afternoon was required to reestablish the commands in their original formation. (23)

The change in orders which prevented the Westward movement of the Division from late afternoon 3 August until the afternoon of 4 August caused a delay of at least 24 hours in the arrival of the Division at BREST. In an effort to regain lost time, all elements of the Division marched all night 4-5 August, halting only to refuel. The weather was clear and the moon was full and bright. Very little resistance was encountered. Each Combat Command was delayed a short time by a blown bridge on its route. (24)

During the first days of the Brittany Campaign, the FFI (French

(21) A-1, p. 13 (22) A-1, p. 13 (23) A-1, p. 14 (24) A-1, p. 15
A-3, p. 7

Forces of the Interior) had kept discreetly under cover. As the Division continued its rapid advance the FFI gradually caught the spirit of the offensive and began to render more and more assistance. During the night of 4-5 August they appeared in the streets with arms. They served as guides for the columns through each of the towns. In some instances they even harrassed and hurried the departure of small German garrisons in the interior towns. They furnished much valuable information concerning the enemy. The Division Trains Commander also was served by these forces who, when equipped with captured weapons, held key road junctions and routes open for the Division train columns against small enemy forces. (25)

On 5 August, reliable information was recieved from the FFI indicating that the town of CARHAIX was held by a German force of 2,000 paratroopers. The Division Commander therefore ordered both columns to by-pass this city; Combat Command "B" to the East and North; Combat Command "A" to the South and West. (26)

Combat Command "A", having stopped for maintenance early in the morning, resumed its march at 0800 and turned North at GOURIN and continued South and West to HUELGOAT via LANDELEAU and PLOUVE. The Reconnaissance troops leading the Combat Command "B" column passed through the town after a brief skirmish. Upon turning West, it encountered an enemy position including a battery of artillery. Subsequent to the movement of the Reconnaissance troop through HUELGOAT and prior to the arrival of the Combat Command "B" Advance

(25) A-1, p. 15 (26) A-1, p. 15

Guard a considerable German Force moved into HUELGOAT from the woods to the Northeast. Infantry, artillery, and tanks of the Advance Guard were employed to clear the town. The command passed through the town and halted for the night at KERBERAU. (27)

Reserve Command, unknown to Combat Command "A", resumed its advance from the vicinity of GOUAREC with Division Headquarters positioned in its column. In an effort to join the rear of Combat Command "A" column, it marched North of CARHAIX toward HUELGOAT via POUILLAOUEN. At POUILLAOUEN the advance guard contacted and rapidly overcame a small enemy force after which the column continued its advance on HUELGOAT. The route from POUILLAOUEN to HUELGOAT is a derile. As the column approached HUELGOAT WOODS, small arms and mortar fire were recieved from an enemy force estimated at 200. The road was heavily mined. Fire placed upon the enemy position destroyed a large ammunition dump. Infantry elements of the advanced Guard were deployed and efforts were being made to reduce the mined area for employment of the tank elements when orders were recieved through the G-3 to establish a perimeter pending an attack by Combat Command "A" then coming up from the South. Reserve Command pulled back to high ground in the vicinity of POUILLAOUEN where it established a perimeter and remained for the night. (28)

Combat Command "B" by-passed CARHAIX to the East and North and marched to LE CLOITRE. Enroute the command destroyed a small enemy force East of LE CLOITRE with a loss of several small vehicles.

(27) A-1, p. 16 (28) A-1, p. 16-17

The enemy lost several machine guns, 15 killed and 5 captured. Resistance was again met at LE CLOITRE. Since the enemy force could not be reduced prior to darkness the Command was ordered to assemble near LE CLOITRE for the night. (29)

It was apparent on 6 August that MORLAIX was quite strongly held. Intelligence also indicated that enemy forces would also be uncountered in strength at LANDIVISIAU. Therefore, in order to avoid these two strong points, both columns were directed to swing North between these cities and approach BREST from the North. In taking this route the column would encounter no serious river crossings and would probably approach BREST against its weakest defense. (30) Both Combat Commands moved out early 6 August. Combat Command "A", although on the inside of this movement, followed a devious route over very poor roads which caused extremely slow progress on both the 6th and 7th of August. Combat Command "B", on the outside flank, made rapid progress on much better roads. Delays were encountered by Combat Command "B", South of MARLAIX in the morning and at LESNEVEN in the evening. Reserve Command, which had the previous day swung in behind Combat Command "A" column at HUELGOAT, once again was re-routed to follow the faster moving Combat Command "B". (31)

The city of BREST was known to be heavily fortified and garrisoned by a large number of troops. The action on the 7th of August was to determine whether or not BREST could be captured by the Division. The plan called for all 3 columns to strike swiftly and

(29) A-1 p. 16 (30) A-1 p. 17

simultaneously from an unexpected direction in an attempt to achieve complete surprise. This plan contemplated an approach in three columns, Combat Command "B" on the right (West), approaching from BOURG-BLANC; Reserve Command breaking off from the Combat Command "B" columns and approaching the center from PLOUVIEN through GOUESNOU and Combat Command "A" approaching from the Northeast through ST. THONAN and GUIPAVAS. (32)

During this day the Division efforts to arrive in its attack position were hampered by bad roads, unfavorable terrain, and several sharp encounters with the enemy. As a result of these unfortunate conditions, the columns could not arrive at the same time. Combat Command "B", which encountered the strongest of the BREST defenses, arrived first. Reserve Command came up in the center late in the evening and Combat Command "A", due to resistance and very bad road conditions, halted some distance North of its assigned position. (33) It was therefore impossible for the three columns of the Division to strike BREST on 7 August as had been contemplated.

At this time the first pinch for gasoline was felt. The task of supplying the Division had become tremendous. Organic transportation within the Division, reinforced by three additional Quartermaster truck companies and supported by tanks, Armored Infantry, Tank Destroyers and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, were required to make round trips up to four hundred miles through enemy infested territory in order to resupply the Division. Division Train installations were subject to sporadic attacks. Personnel from the Division

(32) A-1, p. 18 (33) A-1, p. 19

Band and the Engineer Treadway Bridge Company were required to guard supply dumps and repulse these attacks. The Division Trains received considerable attention from the enemy aircraft. Fortunately these attacks had been foreseen and two batteries of anti-aircraft artillery had been attached to the Trains. This AAA protected resupply convoys enroute to army dumps and provided protection for the Division Trains while marching and in bivouac. The Division had moved so far ahead of Corps and army units that evacuation of wounded and prisoners became impossible. Wounded were carried forward in ambulances.

(34)

A study of the situation was made during the night of 7-8 August and it was determined that a coordinated attack, employing the entire power of the Division would be necessary to take BREST and that this attack would have to be made quickly or even more force would be required. Plans for a coordinated attack were drawn up. Since a certain amount of reconnaissance, reorganization, occupation of attack and supporting artillery positions would be necessary on 8th August, the attack was ordered for daylight the following morning. (35)

In the meantime, early on the morning of 8th August, the Division G-2 and an interpreter entered BREST in a quarter-ton truck under a white flag to present the German Commander with a demand for the surrender of BREST. Unfortunately, the Command of BREST had passed, on the previous day, to the Commanding General of a German

(34) A-1, p. 19,21 (35) A-1. p. 20

Paratroop Division who, with his Division, had managed to reach the city from the South just in time to substantially reinforce the defense. The German General was polite, but refused to consider surrender. (36)

During the 8th of August the tired troops prepared for the assault scheduled for the following morning. The troops of Reserve Command, who had fought only two engagements during the march, were assigned to Combat Command "B" and the units previously assigned to Combat Command "B" reverted to Division Reserve. All Artillery Battalions were gathered under centralized control and prepared to support the attack. (37)

The Division plan of attack called for Combat Command "A" to attack Southwest through GUIPAS, Combat Command "B" was to attack in the same direction and on the right of Combat Command "A", Reserve Command would follow Combat Command "A". (38)

During the day units were shifted according to plan and artillery was moved into supporting position. This movement resulted in drawing considerable counter-preparation fires from the German Artillery. Many vehicular and personnel casualties were sustained, particularly in the Armored Infantry Unit with Combat Command "A". (39)

During the early morning hours three trucks containing troops of the 226th German Infantry Division were captured while attempting to reach BREST via a route which ran through the bivouac area of the Reserve Command. Other elements, upon attempting to use this same

(36) A-1 p. 20, A-3 p. 3 (37) A-1, p. 21, A-3 p. 7-8 (38) A-3, p. 8
(39) A-1 p. 20

route, were fired upon and withdrew with the loss of one vehicle. It was later revealed that the 226th German Division was moving toward BREST from MORLAIX via PLOUVIEN. Elements of this Division also struck the Division Trains early in the evening. Protective units with the Trains beat off this attack. As evening approached, small arms and artillery in increasing amounts were coming in from the rear (North). (40)

In the early evening the situation confronting the Division was as follows: Combat Command "B", newly organized with troops formerly in Reserve Command, was in position to attack; Combat Command "A", which had suffered severe casualties from enemy artillery, was not in position and probably would be unable to get into its attack position prior to daylight; the Division Reconnaissance Squadron was covering the Division rear, and a serious threat was building up in the North. The absence of the artillery observation aircraft, all of which had been lost, made it extremely difficult to determine the significance of this pressure. The situation was cleared however when, just prior to midnight, the Commander of the 226th German Infantry Division was captured. The entire 226th Infantry Division, previously by-passed at MORLAIX, was attempting to fight its way into BREST. (41)

The Commanding General, appreciating the seriousness of this threat against the Division rear, accordingly cancelled the order to attack BREST and directed the Combat Commands in their

(40) A-1, p. 20; A-3, p. 8 (41) A-1, p. 20, 21

positions and the Reserve Command, which had not yet moved from the West flank, to reverse their directions. They were ordered to leave a covering force to face BREST, move to the North at daylight, attack and destroy the enemy Division, and assemble in the area generally around and West of PLOUVIEN. Throughout the night the enemy made its presence felt. Small arms fire burst from hedgerows in all directions around the Division. Activity was particularly heavy around the Division C.P. and P.W. enclosure because of the efforts of the Germans to liberate their captured Lieutenant General. (42)

During the ensuing battle on 9 August, the German 226th Infantry Division was completely destroyed in what was described by the Commanding General of the 6th Armored Division as a massacre. Combat Command "B", moving North through BESQUELEN, struck the main body consisting of the major portions of three German Infantry Regiments. Reserve Command and Combat Command "A" completed the debacle by striking the enemy flanks at BOURG-BLANC and PLOUVIEN respectively. In the meantime, the Division elements facing BREST and covering the Divisions attack to the North were being hard pressed by German forces from BREST, who apparently were seeking to facilitate the movement of the 226th Infantry Division into the city.

During this action, units of the Division Artillery had the unique experience of employing a portion of their batteries in support of the attack to the North and simultaneously supporting the action of the screening force to the South with other batteries.

(42) A-1, p. 21; A-3, p. 8

The Division Band which was guarding a gas dump at LESQUERN was attacked by 150 paratroopers who were beaten off but not before 5000 gallons of gasoline were burned. The score was evened shortly afterward when this enemy force was caught on the road by a flight of P-51's and were strafed and bombed to destruction. The action of the Division on this day resulted in the complete destruction of the 226th Infantry Division and the capture of its Commanding General along with the majority of his staff. (43)

In an assembly area West of PLOUVIEN, on 10 August, the main body of the Division was out of enemy observed artillery range and had an opportunity, for the first time since 27 July, for a days' rest and reservice. In the meantime, the 1st Battalion of the 28th RCT was attached to and joined the Division at PLABENNEC. It was given a reconnaissance mission to secure in force the line GOUESNAU-GUIPAVAS in order to cover the Artillery positions from which they could reach the center of BREST. These orders were later amended to charge Combat Command "A" with the mission of securing a strong jump-off position in the vicinity of GUIPAVAS. Troops already committed were assigned to Combat Command "A". The purpose of the operation was to secure a line of departure against what appeared to be the weakest defenses at BREST and from which an attack could be supported all the way to the center of the city without a displacement of Artillery. (44)

(43) A-1 p. 24; A-3, p. 8 (44) A-1 p. 24,25

At this time G-2 estimated that the outer defenses of BREST, consisting of prepared positions including many concrete pillboxes, AT guns, mine fields and dual purpose Anti-aircraft weapons, was manned by a force of three thousand reportedly reinforced by at least one regiment of the 2nd Paratroop Division along with naval and marine units as well as flak units of unknown strength. The scheme of defense was well coordinated with all mine fields covered by registered Artillery fire. Bridges and certain buildings had been prepared for demolition. (45)

Delays incident to reorganization and redistribution of troops precluded a well coordinated attack by Combat Command "A" until 12 August. On 11 August Troops A and E 86th Reconnaissance Battalion pushed South against stiff resistance and repeated counterattacks and by nightfall held OP's Southwest of GUIPAVAS. The 1st Battalion 28th Infantry Regiment, after hard fighting, secured a line just North of the GOUESNAU-GUIPAVAS highway. (46)

The Combat Command "A" attack, astride the GUIPAVAS-BREST road, on 12 August had limited success. It gained good observation points which protected Artillery positions to the rear. Three days earlier the Division Commander had called upon VIII Corps for reinforcements of both Artillery and Infantry in order to insure a successful attack on BREST. At 1900 on 12 August orders were received from VIII Corps to leave one Combat Command to contain BREST and move the remainder of the Division to the LORIENT area and relieve the 4th

(45) A-1 p. 25 (46) A-1 p. 27

Armored Division. The VIII Corps began a movement to the BREST area with three Infantry Divisions and Corps troops to undertake an assault on the fortress city which was estimated at this time to contain 20,000 enemy troops. (47)

Thus the campaign for BREST, as pertaining to the 6th Armored Division as a whole, had come to a close. The Division had succeeded in plunging a distance of over 200 miles through the heart of the Brittany Peninsula against desperate enemy resistance encountered from all directions and at all hours of the day and night, to bottle-up all remaining resistance inside the fortress city of BREST.

As a sequel to this narrative, it is interesting to note that VIII Corps arrived in position to attack BREST on 18 August and at that time assumed command of Combat Command "A", 6th Armored Division. BREST fell five weeks later after the combined efforts of three Infantry Divisions, other Corps troops and supporting air action had been brought to bear upon its stubborn defenders. The fall of BREST resulted in the capture of forty thousand prisoners and the death of an untold number killed during the bloody siege of this fortress city.

(47) A-1, p. 28

SUMMARY

The spectacular drive of the Sixth Armored Division through the Brittany Peninsula did not develop any new principles but simply served to prove the soundness of Armored Force tactics. It was accomplished with outstanding courage and unprecedented speed.

The Sixth Armored Division was given a mission of great responsibility. The strategic importance of the Brittany Peninsula and its port cities is quite apparent. BREST, the second largest port in France was thought to be needed as a base to support the allied drive into Germany. BREST further provided the enemy one of its principal bases for submarine activity from which trans-Atlantic shipping could be constantly menaced.

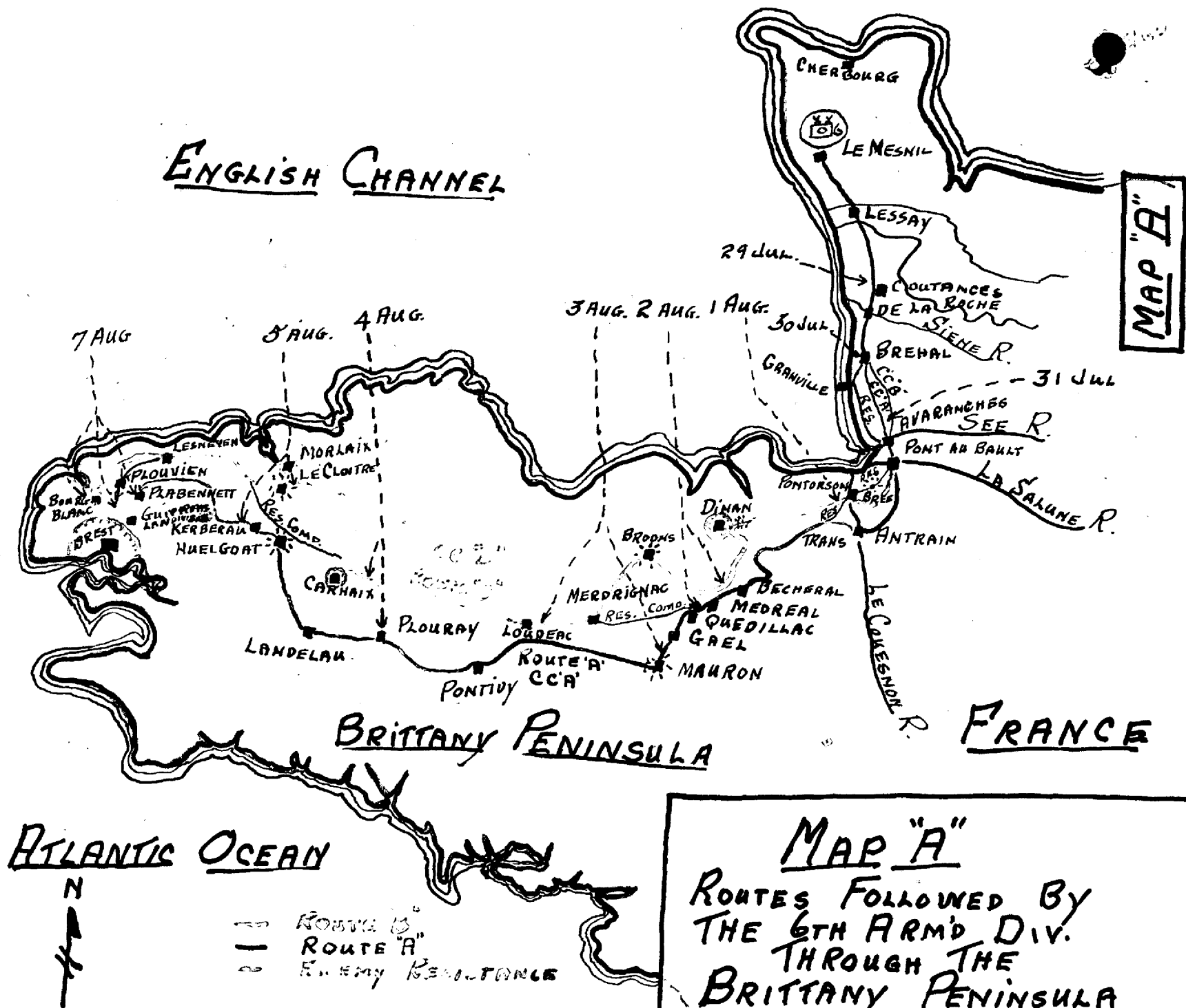
The design of this operation allowed the Division maximum latitude. Speed was to be the guiding tactical principal. Major resistance was to be by-passed. With this in mind, the Division's first aim was to cover the distance of over 200 miles to BREST with maximum speed and to arrive in condition to fight effectively.

Tactics: The Division plunged through an Infantry "bridgehead", plowed through enemy delaying forces and broke clear into the enemy rear where it raced through and thoroughly disorganized the enemy supply and communication facilities. The audacity and speed of this action completely disorganized a defensive minded enemy. The enemy's resistance consisted primarily of delaying actions in order to allow his forces an opportunity to withdraw into coastal cities which

afforded him great defensive advantages. Throughout this operation, wherever met, the enemy fought well and stubbornly. His chief disadvantages lay in two facts: (1) he was frequently caught by surprise and (2) the Division did not choose to fight him on his selected battlegrounds but by-passed all centers of resistance. Unquestionably the Division by-passed far greater strength than it attacked. On numerous occasions enemy forces were surprised while marching on the road and destroyed. It was apparent that he was unaware of the Divisions presence until struck.

Supply: The supply system of the Armored Division may well be compared to the blood stream of the body. Without food, ammunition, fuel and maintenance, an Armored Division will shortly cease to function. It is therefore obvious that a sustained operation of this nature required a smoothly organized logistical support system, characterized by tireless continuous effort and vitalized by aggressive service and supply personnel who vigorously planned and executed every detail required to support such an armored onslaught. Aside from servicing and supplying the Division, trains personnel were frequently required to defend themselves and their installations against enemy attacks from both ground and air. The fact that the Division was never without food, fuel or ammunition and that its powerful machines continued to operate, pays tribute to the gallant personnel of the Sixth Armored Division Trains.

ENGLISH CHANNEL



MAP "A"

ATLANTIC OCEAN



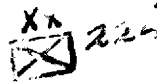
- - - ROUTE B
- ROUTE A
- ~ ENEMY RESISTANCE

MAP "A"
ROUTES FOLLOWED BY
THE 6TH ARMD DIV.
THROUGH THE
BRITTANY PENINSULA

ADVANCE OF
GERMAN 226TH
INF. DIV.
NIGHT OF
8 AUG '44

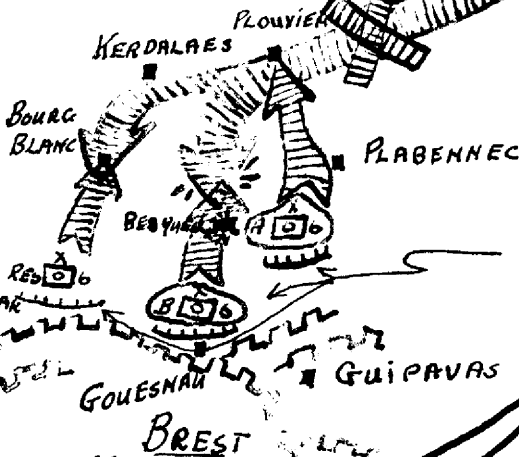
FIGHTER BOMBER
STRIKE 9 AUG '44

LESNEVEN



ALL 3 COMMANDS
LEAVE COVERING
FORCE FACING BREST,
REVERSE THEIR
DIRECTION, ATTACK
AND DESTROY
GERMAN 226TH
INF. DIV. 9 AUG '44

POSITIONS OCCUPIED
BY 6TH AD 8 AUG '44



BRITANNY PENINSULA

MAP "B"

THE BATTLE
AT BREST

8-9 AUG
1944

0 5 10
MILES
APPROX. SCALE

11

SECTION III

THE OUR RIVER CROSSING. *

ORIENTATION

February 1945 found the Sixth Armored Division poised to strike the enemy on his own soil. The Division was drawn up along the Our River in the Northern portion of LUXEMBOURG where the Our River marks the LUXEMBOURG-GERMAN boundry.

The 6th Armored Division had, at this time, the benefit of over 6 months continuous combat experience. During this period the 6th Armored Division had greatly assisted the 1st U.S. Army in breaking out of the CONTENTIN Peninsula, had made a spectacular dash of approximately 300 miles to bottle up the fortress city of BREST; had played a major role in rooting the enemy out of its strongly prepared positions in the fortified towns of the Seille River Valley; had a leading part in the vicious slugging which characterized the Saar Campaign and had slugged it out victoriously with the Germans best during the "Battle of the Bulge" from BASTOGNE to the German Frontier where we now find it ready to launch itself into the enemy's homeland.

For the purpose of orientation, let us pause briefly to consider the situation as it was faced by the 6th Armored Division at this time.

The German Forces having realized that their Ardennes offensive was lost had attempted to extricate their SS and Panzer forces. In so doing, they sacrificed their less favored Infantry and withdrew from BELGIUM and LUXEMBOURG leaving the field strewn with battle debris, consisting principally of dead Infantry and destroyed vehicles.

*See map "C"

The enemy had been driven back into his highly-touted West Wall, the SEIGFRIED LINE, from which he had launched his ARDENNES offensive six weeks previously. Although he was revealing definite signs of strain and his defenses were believed inadequately manned, his skillfully prepared positions were situated in mountainous terrain, ideally suited for defense and the Our River to his front afforded a natural protection. Flowing at the minimum rate of 15 MPH and with the depth of 15 feet, the Our, which was at flood stage, presented a very formidable obstacle to any type of movement. The approaches to the Our were steep and the terrain throughout the area was very rough, permitting vehicular movements only on primary and secondary roads. (48)

The 6th Armored Division at this time, operating under III Corps, was disposed on a 12 mile front along the Our River due East of CLERVEAUX from 1 mile North of LIELER on the North to UBER EISENACH on the South. The 17th Airborne Division was on the right (South) flank and the 11th Armored Division (VIII Corps) was on the left (North) flank.

On 5 February orders were received from III Corps to conduct preliminary reconnaissance and establish a bridgehead across the Our River. It was believed by III Corps that the bulk of the enemy strategic reserves and considerable local forces had been drawn to the North as a result of an attack by VIII Corps. It was believed that the SIEGFRIED LINE was inadequately manned on III Corps front. (49)

(48) A-1, p. 197, 200 (49) A-1, p. 206

Due to the type of operation called for, coupled with the character of the terrain in this area, the task of making an assault crossing of the Our River and establishment of the Division bridge-head fell naturally to the Armored Infantry Battalions supported by Engineers and Artillery. The plan called for the employment of the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion on the left and Co. "C" 9th Armored Infantry Battalion on the right, with each team being supported by one Engineer combat company. The Division Artillery provided one Battalion of Artillery for direct support of each of the assaulting teams and held one for General Support. (50)

During this operation the two assaulting forces encountered generally the same type of difficulties. The Our River was at flood stage. Due to the proximity of the enemy ensconced in its SIEGFRIED LINE fortifications directly overlooking the Our, the plan called for a night attack in an effort to cross the river by stealth during the hours of darkness. The nature of the terrain and the extreme climatic conditions (below freezing temperature) further contributed to the difficulties already heaped upon the assaulting forces.

The nature of this operation required the Infantry-Engineer team to play the major role. For the purpose of attaining a full appreciation of the difficulties encountered and the techniques employed during this action, let us closely follow the manner in which the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion accomplished its mission.

(50) A-11

THE RIVER CROSSING

On 5 February the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion received orders to make an assault crossing of the Our River during the night of 6-7 February, establish a bridgehead to permit the construction of a Bailey Bridge and to push a reconnaissance in force into the SIEGFRIED LINE in the direction of DAHNEN. The time of attack was set for 1900 hours 6 February 1945. The order indicated two possible crossing sites approximately one and one-half miles North of the blown bridge over the Our on the DAHNEN-KALBORN road. This blown bridge site was selected as the point at which the Bailey Bridge would be constructed. (51)

During the night 5-6 February, patrols consisting of reconnaissance and Engineer personnel selected tentative crossing sites, route of approach, and the site at which boats were to be unloaded from Engineer trucks. Due to the flood stage of the Our, it was determined that only one of the two crossing sites indicated within the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion zone would be suitable. It was further determined that because of the treacherous terrain and the desirability of stealth, boats could be moved by truck no closer than the junction of the DAHNEN-KALBORN road and the trail which approached the crossing site. This fact indicated the necessity for the movement of boats by Infantry over the steep mountain trail for a distance of over one and one-half miles. Plans for the operation were made accordingly. (52)

(51) A-11, A-12 (52) A-1, p. 206

During the day of 6 February, all reconnaissance possible was made by the Infantry, Engineer and Artillery officers who were to participate in the attack. This reconnaissance consisted primarily of a study of the terrain from forward observation posts, maps and aerial photographs. Since all movement anywhere within the vicinity of the river could be observed by the enemy, a daylight reconnaissance, even of the approaches to the crossing site, was not possible.

Immediately after dark on the 6 February, the supporting Engineers moved the assault boats by truck to the previously selected site. The 44th Armored Infantry Battalion crossed the line of departure at 1900 hours. Upon arriving at the boat site, it was found that the Engineers had encountered an unexpected difficulty and had been unable to unload the boats. The boats to be used for this operation had been obtained from Corps. Upon removal of the covering tarpaulin it was found that, in addition to being heavier than requested, the boats had been nested top-side up and that the top boat was three-fourths full of water, the upper three or four inches of which was solid ice. Because of the additional weight of water and ice, the top boat could not be lifted, regardless of the number of men around it. Despite the fact that stealth was desirable in this forward position, the urgency of the situation demanded results. Orders were issued to break out the pioneer tools, smash the ice and bail out the water. This was done without enemy reaction. However,

since the water bailed out of the boats immediately froze upon striking the ground forming a sheet of ice all around the truck, considerable commotion resulted in the darkness as the result of insecure footing of personnel unloading the boats.

After a desperate struggle all boats were finally unloaded and the Infantry-Engineer teams started their one and one-half mile trek carrying their heavy burdens to the launching site. Upon leaving the boat site, the column slowly wended its way down toward the river. Below them raged a torrential flow, swollen by recent rains and melting snows. Despite the adversities of a singularly dark night, a bad start in getting the boats unloaded, and a treacherously steep and icy one and one-half mile approach to the river carrying assault boats which weighed 500 pounds, the 44th reached the selected crossing site at 0200, 7 February. To the amazement of all, the enemy still seemed to be unaware of the 44th's activity. Needless to say, a great deal of noise was unavoidable in making an approach under these conditions. (53)

The Engineer and Reconnaissance personnel who had visited the site on the previous night, served as guides during the approach. Because of the extreme darkness all information concerning the river was obtained from these individuals. Absolutely nothing could be seen. Although standing at the river's edge, which was reported as being only 30 yards wide, neither the river nor the far side could be seen. The plan called for Co. "A" of the 44th Armored Infantry

(53) A-11, A-12

Battalion to make the initial crossing therefore, this company was leading the column. The first wave of assault boats were placed in the water as they arrived. Since visibility was non-existent and the audible rush of water indicated that the river was swollen out of all proportion to its normal size, the decision was made to cross initially with one boat towing a line. It was planned that this line would be secured to the opposite bank and serve to guide the remainder of the boats and further to assist the Engineer oarsmen in returning the boats to the near shore after discharge of the Infantry on the far bank.

The first boat was loaded with its crew consisting of a rifle squad and 2 Engineers. Upon being launched and after moving only about its own length, this boat was seized by the current and returned to the near shore, slightly downstream, in no uncertain manner. Further attempts were made by this crew with no better results despite desperate efforts of the oarsmen to overcome the stubborn current.

It was realized by this time that the current was practically head on, due to the bend in the river about 100 yards North of the launching site. In an effort to get a line across the river the Infantry crew of the first boat was replaced by a crew of carefully selected Engineers who had been thoroughly trained in the handling of boats and who, as the result, were expert oarsmen. Much to the chagrin of all concerned, this crew obtained no better results.

Early efforts in launching the first boat had determined that the river was too deep to wade. It was considered impractical to attempt to swim the river since even an expert could not hope to succeed against water so violent.

At this point the Battalion Commander had a number of miserable moments when he realized that his Battalion had overcome more than its share of difficulties in reaching the river only to find that men could neither wade nor swim across and that even the best of oarsmen in boats were helpless in its powerful current. Considering that the objective lay on the far side of the Our, and that at the first light of dawn his position, figuratively under the enemy's nose and literally under the muzzles of his SEIGFRIED LINE weapons, would be extremely hazardous, he decided to dispense with stealth and try his last resort in an effort to cross prior to daylight. This last resort was brought forward in the form of two Engineer outboard, 35 H.P. motors.

The first motor was attached to a boat, an Infantry-Engineer crew loaded and a line attached. The motor was started and the boat moved off. Almost immediately a wave washed over the motor and it conked-out. Immediately the boat was swept back by the current against the near shore. The drowned motor was quickly removed and replaced by the second motor. This motor was started and the boat shot away roaring at top-speed. Upon reaching approximately mid-stream, with the motor still going strong, this boat was literally

picked up by the mighty on-rush of water and turned upside down. The crew was thrown from the boat and found themselves engaged in a life or death struggle with the mercilessly cold and violent waters of the Our. These men were handicapped, in addition to struggling for their lives fully clothed and against a raging torrent, by the fact that they could not see even so far as to determine in which direction they should attempt to swim.

Four of the men from the crew of the capsized boat succeeded in struggling ashore on the near side. At 0400 it was found that the first man of the Forty-Fourth Armored Infantry Battalion had set foot on German soil while on a combat mission. Ironically enough, this individual was unarmed, for he was a member of the crew of the capsized boat who had managed to reach shore and found himself in Germany. This individual made his way back upriver, from where he had been carried by the current, to a point directly opposite the launching site. (55)

It is not hard to imagine the thoughts which must have run through the mind of this soldier. He was in Germany alone and unarmed. No one was in a better position than he to appreciate the effort being made to span the gulf which lay between him and the comparative safety of being with his comrades some 30 yards away, across the river. This situation, coupled with the fact that he was completely soaked in freezing temperature, is not thought to have contributed greatly to his morale.

Although it was not immediately recognized, the problem of crossing the Our was practically solved at this point. The ingenuity attributed to the American soldier is well deserved and in this case provided the key to the door through which the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion entered Germany. It was not long before an alert sergeant at the launching site conceived the idea of attaching a piece of engineer tape to a rifle grenade and, without pulling the pin, fire it across the river to be seized by the soldier on the German side of the river. This to be followed by the process of towing heavier lines across until a cable could be put in place and fastened at both ends.

This scheme was accomplished at the first light of dawn. The Engineer Company quickly arranged an affair called a "flying ferry", which consisted of pulleys that ran along the cable to which ropes were attached and in turn secured to each end of a boat. By shortening the forward rope, the boat was carried across stream by pressure of the current at an amazing speed.

It was found that due to the swiftness of the current, the round trip for this boat took less than five minutes. Thus, the same current that plagued the efforts of this gallant force during the night, was now harnessed and its powerful force was so directed that it greatly contributed to the ease with which the Our was now crossed.

At 0715, the first boatload of Infantry landed on the far shore. This process was quickly repeated and shortly thereafter "A" Company was entirely across. As soon as squads were landed they were moved into position so as to secure the crossing site.

During the entire period thus far, the activity of the 44th had drawn no enemy reaction. Even the coming of daylight brought no indication that the enemy was aware of the crossing. This is possibly explained by the fact that the roar of the river partially covered the noise made during the crossing and that after daylight it was found that the crossing site was in defilade from the Main Line of Resistance of the SIEGFRIED LINE. It is quite apparent that the enemy maintained no observation posts, listening posts, nor operated patrols along the river at this point. As was later determined, the Germans were reluctant to operate forward of their Main Line of Resistance due to numerous anti-personnel mines known to be in the area and the exact location of which, due to a frequent change of troops manning the SIEGFRIED LINE, was known to none.

It was considered that while the "flying ferry" system of crossing the river was satisfactory for the movement of assault squads, it would be inadequate to support the combat operation of an entire Battalion. Since the enemy appeared to be unaware of the crossing, it was decided that, prior to moving additional troops over the river, two foot bridges would be constructed at the crossing site; one to be a suspension type bridge, the other a floating type. During the

day and the following night the Engineers battled the elements in an attempt to construct these bridges. In one instance when a floating type foot bridge was nearing completion, the torrential flow of water rose upward to destroy the efforts of these tired men. Replacement equipment was immediately obtained and renewed effort proved successful during the night of 7-8 February.

Having two foot bridges behind them, the 44th swung into its attack to seize the Bailey Bridge site on the morn of 8 February.

While "A" Company was protecting the engineer work at the crossing site, the remainder of the Battalion was waiting under cover in KALBORN for the Engineers to complete the spanning of the Our. As soon as the bridges were completed, troops were on the way. The veil of darkness had not lifted, as more and more men raced across the river and into position.

One platoon of Company "C" was assigned the mission of going directly down the river, reduce the pillbox immediately overlooking the site selected for the construction of the Bailey Bridge and secure a small bridgehead at this point. The remainder of the Battalion was given the mission of conducting a vigorous reconnaissance in force against the SEIGFRIED LINE proper in its sector. Company "A" was to be on the right and was directed to tie in with the platoon of "C" Company at the Bailey Bridge site. This platoon was attached to "A" Company in position. Company "C" was assigned the center of the zone with "B" Company operating

on the left of the bridgehead area.

At first light, the attack jumped off. The platoon from "C" Company proceeded down the river where it caught the enemy defense at the bridge site completely by surprise and outside their pill-box. The platoon immediately opened fire killing four, wounding several, and dispersing the remainder of the crew of approximately eighteen.

The remainder of the Battalion launched its attack, encountering small arms fire, mortar fire and heavily booby-trapped area.

Discovering the footbridges across the Our, the enemy quickly placed fire upon them. The suspension bridge was short-lived. A mortar round squarely hit one of its two suspending cables which snapped and rendered the bridge unserviceable. The floating bridge although damaged, was immediately repaired and gave continuous service throughout the operation. The suspension bridge was likewise repaired in a matter of a few hours and was never hit again.

Despite this belated enemy resistance the 44th had the advantage of surprise and by 1030 on 8 February, when ordered to consolidate its positions, found that it controlled a piece of German real estate approximately one and one-half miles deep and two miles in width.* This bridgehead permitted the construction of a Bailey Bridge over which the 6th Armored Division moved to reduce the SIEGFRIED LINE along its front and to resume its favorite combat past-time of crushing German Forces, wherever met, who were so unfortunate as to still possess the will to resist.

*See map "C"

SUMMARY

The crossing of the Our River by the Forty-Fourth Armored Infantry Battalion is not unique in that it evolved any new tactical principles. The fact that this operation succeeded conclusively demonstrates the accomplishments that may be achieved by men who refuse to recognize an apparent impossibility. Their mission was to establish a bridgehead across a raging torrent directly under the guns of the enemys' most powerful defensive installation, the SIEGFRIED LINE. The necessity of executing this hazardous operation over treacherous terrain during freezing weather further added difficulties to be overcome by the attackers.

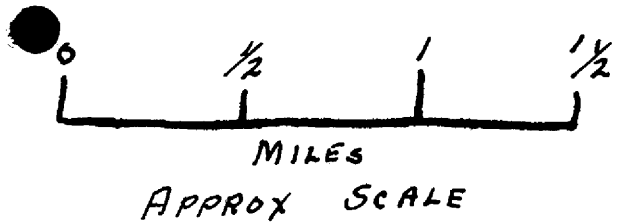
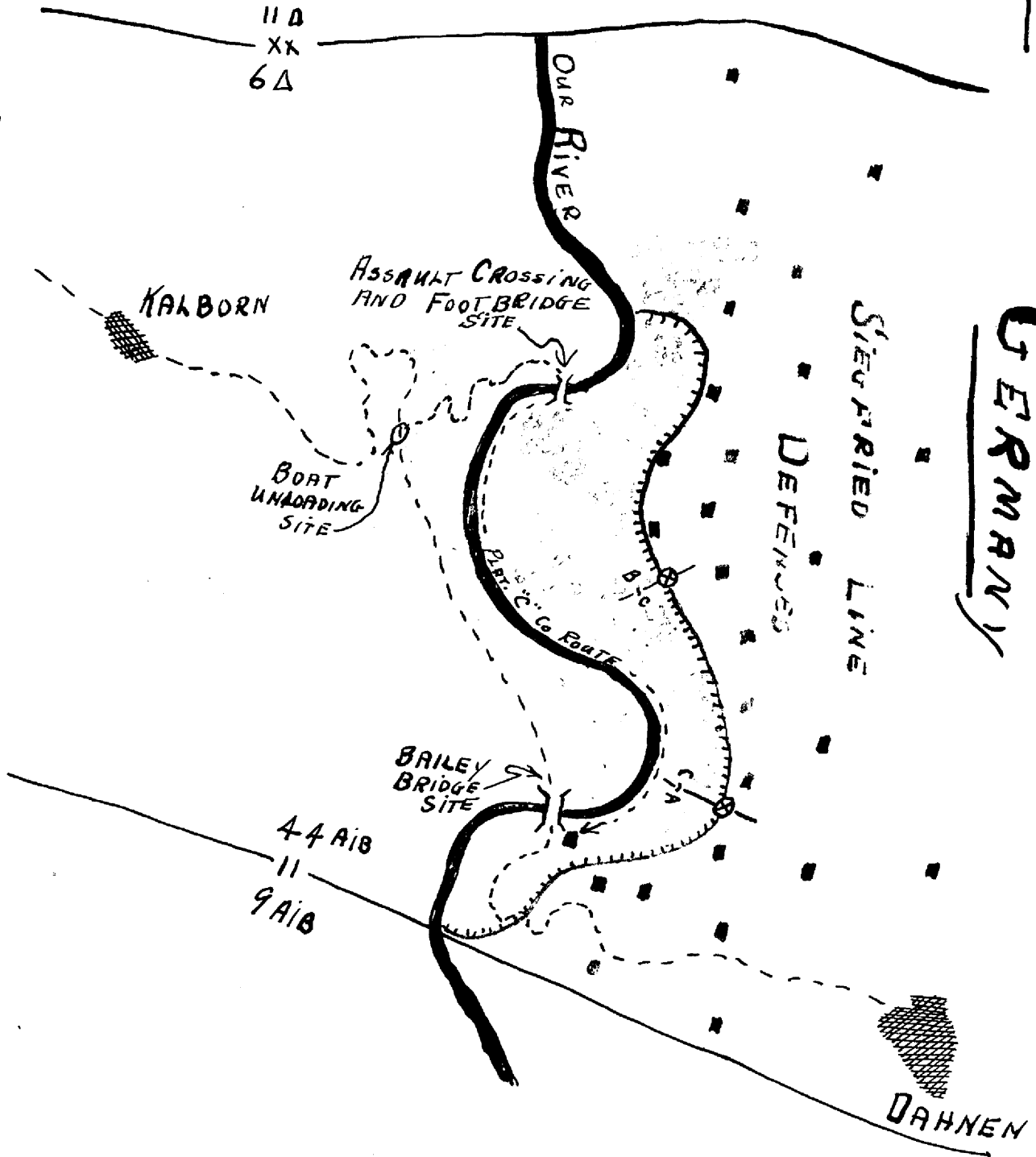
Although faced with practically all forms of adversity capable of design by man and nature, this gallant force through a great aggressive spirit, determination, courage and resourcefulness succeeded by herculian efforts in accomplishing its mission. The sheer audacity of this action, no doubt, contributed largely to the success achieved.

A civilian observer later remarked to General Patton when commenting upon a crossing of this same river several miles up stream "that he did not see how human beings could be brave enough to succeed in such an attack." (54) The accomplishment of this mission pays high tribute to the soldiers of the Forty-Fourth Armored Infantry Battalion and its supporting Engineers, Company "C", 25th Armored Engineer Battalion.

(54) A-8, p. 239

LUXEMBOURG

GERMANY



MAP "C"
 OUR RIVER
 BRIDGE HEAD OPN
 44TH AIB
 SECTOR

SECTION IV

LESSONS

Although not new, the lessons enumerated below may be drawn from the foregoing operations and are considered worthy of emphasis.

1. Objective: The objective must be kept in mind by all commanders. To divert forces to seize nonessential objectives may delay and jeopardize the accomplishment of the primary mission.
2. Surprise: Surprise is essential to the success of an Armored Division operating deep in enemy held territory. Speed of movement, frequent changes of direction and use of unfavorable terrain and secondary roads contribute greatly to gaining and maintaining surprise throughout an exploitation. Surprise is equally essential when attacking an enemy who occupies a strongly fortified position. Surprise may be attained by attacking over unfavorable terrain, by use of stealth, by taking advantage of darkness and by striking from an unexpected direction with unexpected force at an unexpected time.
3. Mass: The ability to advance often depends upon the speed and intensity with which fire of

a force are massed upon given points of enemy resistance.

4. Movement: Rapid and aggressive movement is essential to the success of the exploitation. Unnecessary delays before reaching the objective lessen the chance for success.
5. Simplicity: The principle of simplicity is especially applicable to orders given an Armored Commander when he is assigned a mission of exploitation. Since personal supervision by higher commanders is rarely possible, such orders should be of the mission type, allowing the Armored Commander maximum latitude in the accomplishment of his mission.
6. General:
 - a. A highly mobile Armored column operating against a less mobile enemy is merely playing into the enemy hands if it is greatly delayed each time it encounters an enemy strong point. Such strong points should be quickly reduced or by-passed.
 - b. When encountering enemy strong points requiring reduction, deployment must be automatic. All elements must be trained to work together as a team to reduce the obstacle without

requiring time consuming, complicated orders or instructions.

- c. It is absolutely necessary that service personnel of an Armored Division be thoroughly trained so as to enable them to defend themselves and their installations. Service elements are particularly vulnerable when the Armored Division is engaged in an exploitation.
- d. To advance through a defile without prior reconnaissance is suicidal.
- e. Great care should be taken to insure that all equipment to be used in an operation is serviceable and ready for immediate employment prior to its commitment. Much loss of time and confusion results when equipment must be made ready on the battlefield. This applies particularly to equipment which is to be used at night.
- f. Navigation- Accurate navigation is a necessity for an armored column. To lose the proper route invariably results in lose of time and frequently results in a loss of equipment and lives.

g. When roads are available, time and effort are saved by using them. March on roads until forced off by enemy fire. When this happens, get off the road, fix the enemy with fire, envelope and destroy him.

General Patton well summed this tactical rule in the following words, "Use roads to march on; fields to fight on." (56)

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING DIVISION
GENERAL INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT
THE ARMORED SCHOOL
FORT KNOX, KENTUCKY

ADVANCED OFFICERS CLASS # 1

APRIL 20, 1948

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: ARMOR IN THE ATTACK

SCOPE: This monograph presents two types of attacks: (1) an Armored Division in an exploitation and (2) an Armored Infantry Battalion in a river crossing, with a view toward demonstrating the effectiveness and flexibility of armored combined teams, stressing principles which attained success in both types of attack and enumerating some of the lessons which may be drawn from these operations.

Joe V. Langston
Major, Cavalry