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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 66TH ARMORED REGIMENT  
(2ND ARMORED DIVISION) IN THE PUSH FROM THE  
ROER TO THE RHINE, 28 FEBRUARY - 4 MARCH 1945  
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Regimental Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: ARMORED REGIMENT AS PART  
OF A LARGER FORCE IN A RIVER CROSSING FOLLOWED BY A  
BREAKTHROUGH AND EXPLOITATION

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 66TH ARMORED REGIMENT  
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 66th Armored Regiment of the 2nd Armored Division in the push from the Roer to the Rhine from the 28th of February to the 4th of March, 1945. Since the action of this unit in the operation was only a small part of a general coordinated action along the entire Western Front, a brief study of the "big picture" is necessary.

The strategic plan of the Allies for crossing the Rhine and advancing into the heart of Germany at this time, contemplated the main effort in the north by the 21st Army Group under General Montgomery to seize crossings north of the Ruhr. (1) The Supreme Commander concentrated his mass in this main effort. All other operations were designed to assist the main effort, with maximum economy in men and ammunition; until the 21st Army Group had closed to the Rhine, after which all other units were to close along the entire Allied Western Front. (2)

The 21st Army Group consisted of the First Canadian Army to the north, and the new Ninth US Army under Lieutenant General WH Simpson. In the massing of strength to the north the Supreme Commander had shifted the north boundary of the 12th Army Group farther to the north, so that the Ninth Army front now extended along the west bank of the Roer River from just south of Julich to Roermond. (See Map A) The shift of Third Army units to the north which the Supreme Commander had made to meet the German Ardennes Counter-offensive facilitated this concentration of mass to the north, a situation which greatly favored a powerful attack in this sector. (3)

(1) A-2, p. 8; (2) A-2, p. 87; (3) A-3, p. 11.

This grouping can be compared with that of November, 1944, in which slow progress was made in a more evenly-distributed attack along the entire front.

#### PREPARATIONS AND PLANS FOR THE ATTACK

General Simpson was faced with many problems in his plans for the crossing of the Roer River and the push to the Rhine. There were no crossing points anywhere along the river in his zone which could be considered favorable at any time, and when the unseasonable thaw came in February the river was greatly swollen. Banks and approaches were muddy, and numerous ditches and channels paralleled the stream. To make matters worse, the enemy was still in possession of the Roer dams in the First Army zone to the south, which he could use to flood the Roer valley in the Ninth Army zone at any time, either to prevent a crossing before it was attempted, or to isolate the first units after they had crossed. (4)

About 3 February the First US Army was given the mission of capturing the dams prior to the Ninth Army's attack. This was done, but the most important dam was destroyed by the Germans just before its capture. The Roer at once became a stream 2000 yards wide in some places, with a current of six or seven miles an hour. The target date of 10 February for the Ninth Army's attack was indefinitely postponed. (5)

In view of the difficulties facing him, General Simpson made requisitions to stock 100 percent replacements in many items, particularly Engineer material. He took steps to reduce road failure in his supply areas during the critical attack period by having supplies stocked as close to the river as possible during the waiting period, and at the same time managed to conceal this build-up from the enemy. Also, during the waiting

(4) A-1, p. 24; (5) A-2, p. 89.

period, infantry divisions were rotated to the rear to participate in river crossing exercises on terrain similar to the Roer River. Other safety precautions taken were evacuation or close surveillance of civilians, concealment of identity of new units, and restriction of troops to assembly areas. (6) Life belts, life guards, and rescue boats were planned for the crossing action, a step which paid big dividends at the critical time. (7)

In planning his grand-tactics, General Simpson considered the following conditions of enemy and terrain. The enemy appeared to be holding the river line lightly, but it was known he had considerable reserves behind this line, consisting of the 8th Parachute Division, 176th Infantry Division, 183rd and 363rd Volksgrenadier Divisions, 59th Infantry Division, and the 9th and 11th Panzer Divisions. (8) East of the river were prepared defenses, the first through Erkelenz, south into Linnich, thence east to the Erft River, this latter part being along a long plateau, the key terrain feature of the Army zone. (See Map A) Behind this lay another defense line covering the approaches to Munchen-Gladbach, facing generally west and southwest, consisting of trenches, mines, and numerous heavily-defended villages. Most prominent objective in the Army zone was the heavily-fortified city of Munchen-Gladbach. (9) The terrain east of the river was rolling, partly-wooded country, fine for armored operation in any but the wettest weather. (10)

The attack of the First Canadian Army in the north, which was launched on 3 February, drew some enemy strength from the Ninth Army zone, and it had been learned that more than half the armor on the German Western Front had been shifted to the east after the failure of the Ardennes Counter-offensive was evident. It was also known that the fighting quality and aggressive spirit of the troops facing the Ninth Army was not high. (11)

(6) A-1, p. 20-21; (7) A-1, p. 25; (8) A-6, p. 165; (9) A-1, p. 22; (10) Personal knowledge; (11) A-2, p. 89.

After studying the available information, General Simpson made plans which consisted of two alternatives - one to be used in case heavy resistance was encountered in the crossing and the push toward the Roer, the other to be used if opportunity for breakthrough and exploitation presented itself. (12) Since the first alternative was not used, it is not covered in this monograph.

General Simpson decided to use his three corps abreast, XIX on the south, XIII in the center, XVI on the north. In each corps zone the main effort was to be along the corps southern boundary for a relatively short distance, and then was to turn north and northwest, hitting the enemy defenses in flank and rear. (See Map A) The corps operations were to resemble somewhat the way a child thrusts his fingers down the side of a peanut jar and then curls them inward to pull out as many peanuts as he can. In addition to hitting the enemy flank and rear, these tactics were also designed to carry out General Eisenhower's expressed desire to trap and destroy every German in the Ninth Army's path. (13)

The heaviest strength in the Ninth Army attack was in its XIX Corps on the south, consisting of the 29th, 30th and 83rd Infantry Divisions, and the 2nd Armored Division. The 95th Division was in Army Reserve near Maastricht. The 29th and 30th Divisions were to cross the Roer after a 45-minute artillery preparation, 30th on the right south of Julich, 29th at Julich. They were to push east until a firm bridgehead had been established, then northeast to capture the plateau mentioned before as the key terrain feature of the Army zone. After the engineers had constructed a bridge suitable for armor the 2nd Armored Division was to cross, pass through the infantry, swing almost due north, by-pass Munchen-Gladbach, and strike for the Rhine at Verdingen. (See Map A) As they passed through they were to be followed by the 83rd Infantry Division, partly motorized, which was to hit

(12) A-1, p. 24; (13) A-4, p. 20.

Munchen-Gladbach from the east and south, and Neuss from the northwest. (14)

The stage was set for an action which was such a fine example of smooth teamwork among all arms in a coordinated attack against an obstacle, followed by a breakthrough and exploitation by armor, that it resembled a rehearsed demonstration.

With all his plans complete, the next big problem for General Simpson was when to launch the attack. He wished to attack at the earliest practicable date, sacrificing facility of crossing to gain surprise at a time when the Germans believed a crossing to be impossible. On 21 February his Army Engineer advised that a crossing would be possible on 23 February, so General Simpson set 230330 February as H-hour, after a 45-minute artillery preparation. No air strike was planned, to better the chances for surprise. (15)

#### THE INFANTRY CROSSING

The preparation was fired by 20 battalions of field artillery, (16) reinforced by infantry cannon, mortars, AA guns, and TDs. The infantry crossing met little resistance at first, but our engineers suffered heavily in equipment due to enemy mortar and artillery fire, and the power of the swollen stream. One bridge was rebuilt nine times. (17) In spite of this condition two divisions were put across the first day in the XIX Corps zone, and by the end of the day the bridgehead was well established.

#### 66TH ARMORED REGIMENT SITUATION

The morning of 23 February found the 66th Armored Regiment, commanded by Colonel William Stokes, along with the rest of the 2nd Armored Division, in an assembly area south of the Dutch town of Gulpen about 32 miles west of Julich, (See Map A) where it had secretly moved under cover of darkness (14) A-1, p. 22; (15) A-1, p. 24; (16) A-5, p. 48; (17) A-5, p. 47.



about ten days before. (18) The vehicles still bore no organizational markings - these had been painted out prior to the secret move into the Ninth Army area. The familiar code names by which the divisional units were known had been replaced by strange new ones. During the entire time men had been restricted to the area of their units. The "Hell-on-wheels" patch had been ordered removed from all clothing and equipment, and the only safe subjects for discussion were home and women. (18).

At this time it is necessary to examine briefly the organization of a heavy armored division of the 2nd Armored Division type. There were two tank regiments of one three-company battalion of light tanks and two three-company battalions of mediums each. There was one infantry regiment of three battalions of three rifle companies and a heavy weapons company each. This made the ratio of tank companies to rifle companies 2 to 1, in contrast with the present 1 to 1 ratio. Artillery was normal - 3 battalions of 105mm Howitzers, and an AAA Battalion.

The 66th Armored Regiment was part of CCA, which consisted of

66th AR (minus Co. F (M) and Co. I (M))  
1st Bn, 41st Arm'd Inf Regiment  
Co A, 702 TD Battalion  
Co A, 17th Arm'd Eng Battalion  
78th FA Bn (Arm'd) D/S with Battery B, 195 AAA (AW) Bn attached

#### REGIMENTAL PREPARATIONS FOR ACTION

The move of the armored vehicles into their assembly areas had not torn up the roads to an alarming extent, but the exits from the areas to the roads looked bad, and the commander began to worry about whether or not a quick exit could be made when the orders came. This problem was solved by having all tankers take shovels and re-surface all exits with sand and gravel dumped on the site by engineer dump trucks. The problem of quick exits and (18) Personal knowledge.

an ample road net apparently was disturbing higher echelon planners also, because early in the morning of 24 February the regiment received orders to move that night to another assembly area in Aachen, Germany, about 12 miles closer to Julich. (See Map A) The regimental commander immediately issued orders for the tank crews to remove camouflage nets which had been garnished for a snow background, regarnish them in a dark color scheme, and replace them on the tanks. Newly cut logs about 8 feet long and 8 inches thick which had been gathered by the tank crews while in the area, were securely fastened on the front slope plates. These were to be used if needed to free the tank if it became mired, or to corduroy a soft piece of ground which had to be crossed. Quartering parties were sent by infiltration to the Aachen assembly area, route reconnaissance parties were sent out, and an administrative-type march was planned. (19)

When I returned to my billet at noon my good-natured Dutch host came to me and requested me to leave the key under the door mat when I left that night. I was quite surprised, and asked him what made him think we were leaving that night. He smiled, and said, "But Colonel, all morning I have seen tankers putting new camouflage and new logs on the tanks, and much activity. That means something's going to happen, of course. And I know the habits of tanks - they move only at night." My curiosity aroused, I asked him if he knew what outfit we belonged to. He said, "I know I'm not supposed to know, but its the 2nd Tank Division. A soldier left his patch on one shirt he gave to a friend of my wife to be washed."

In spite of the security leak, the division made its move without incident, and went into another assembly area in the streets of Aachen. Officers from regiment and from each battalion were observing the crossing operation, and making constant route and assembly area reconnaissance while the regiment waited for the decision of the Corps Commander that the time had come to throw in his armor. (20)

(19) Personal knowledge; (20) Personal knowledge.

### MOVEMENT TO FORWARD ASSEMBLY AREA

The movement orders came on 26 February. The regiment, under command of CCA, was ordered to move on 27 February to a forward assembly area south of Jackerath, prepared to attack northeast at 0730, 28 February to cut the communications between Munchen-Gladbach and Neuss on the Rhine. (See Map A) A motorized regimental combat team of the 83rd Infantry Division was attached to the 2nd Armored Division for this operation. The move was made in the "task force" formation which was to be used in the forward assembly area and in the attack forthcoming.

These "task forces" were made up as follows: (21)

#### TASK FORCE A

3rd Bn, 66th AR (minus Co I)  
Co A, 66th AR (Lt Tanks)  
1st Bn, 41st Armd Inf Regiment  
(minus Co B and C)  
Ren Co, 66th AR  
1st Platoon, Co A, 702 TD Bn

#### TASK FORCE B

2nd Bn, 66th AR (minus Co E and F)  
Co B, 66th AR (Lt Tanks)  
Co B, 41st Armd Inf Regiment  
2nd Platoon, Co A, 702 TD Bn

#### RESERVE OF CCA

1st Bn, 66th AR (minus Co A and B)  
(Lt Tanks)  
Co E, 66th AR  
Co C, 41st Armd Inf Regiment  
Co A, 17th Armd Eng Battalion  
Co A, 702 TD Bn (minus 2 Platoons)

As is shown above, when heavier infantry strength is needed the regimental reconnaissance company is added to one of the task forces, and for the coming attack this was done with TF A, which was to be the left (west) force in the attack, and which was expected to meet most of the opposition from enemy forces attempting to escape the trap and cross the Rhine. The use of the Reconnaissance Company is of course undesirable, but this veteran division had long felt the unbalance of tanks and infantry, and it was felt that this step was absolutely necessary.

(21) Personal knowledge.

## THE ATTACK

The division attack order directed CCA on the left, CCB on the right along the left (west) bank of the Erft River, CCR in reserve. All Combat Commands to drive between Munchen-Gladbach and Neuss, to kill or capture as many as possible of the enemy attempting to retreat across the Rhine, and to make every effort to seize intact a bridge across the Rhine. (22) Line of Departure was the present front line of the 29th and 30th Infantry Divisions, the line Borschemich-Garzweiler. (See Map B) Time of attack 0730, 28 February. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

The attack jumped off at 280730 February. The entry of the 2nd Armored Division into battle is well described by a "Time" correspondent: (23)

"From the air in a Piper Cub the tank drive was a thing of sheerest military beauty. First came a long row of throbbing tanks moving like heavy dark beetles across the green cabbage fields of Germany in a wide swath - many tanks in a single row abreast. Then a suitable distance behind came another row of tanks even broader, out of which groups would wheel from their brown mud tracks in green fields to encircle and smash fire at some stubborn strongpoint. Behind this came miles of trucks full of troops, maneuvering perfectly to mop up by-passed tough spots. Then came the field artillery to pound hard knots into submission. And always overhead swung and looped the Thunderbolts keeping the tanks under absolute safety umbrellas and from time to time diving to knock out trouble spots.

This was one of the War's grandest single pictures of united and perfectly functioning military machines in a supreme moment of pure fighting motion."

The advance met little resistance at first, moving for about two miles in one steady advance; an attack across beautiful tank country, tanks in the lead, firing their machine guns on the move most of the time, stopping (22) A-7, p. 139 (to refresh memory); (23) A-2, p. 179.

occasionally to take more careful aim with their 76mm guns and the few 90mm guns on hand at some suspicious-looking target. In the vicinity of Juchen the advance was halted temporarily by the natural barrier of a railroad embankment, defended by anti-tank guns, tanks, and dug-in infantry. (See Map B) While the task forces were regrouping for a coordinated attack, the air tank, which was in constant touch with elements of the XXIX Tactical Air Corps on air alert, called for air strikes on the troublesome area, and within 10 minutes the planes located the area, picked out a few targets, and went to work on them, using machine guns, bombs, and rockets. (24) This was the first time the division had seen rockets used from planes. (25) After the ground attack was resumed the planes continued to attack targets as they exposed themselves, and the resistance was quickly overcome. The attack continued to the north of Juchen where the task forces again paused to reorganize.

Here the regimental commander decided upon a maneuver with light tanks which was considered by some of us working with him as quite bold - at least it was a definite departure from previous techniques of the division in the use of light tanks. Early experience with the light tank M-5, armed with a 37mm gun, proved them of little use as a fighting vehicle against an aggressive enemy. Late in 1944 they were fitted with racks to carry five litters per tank for evacuating wounded from exposed areas. This use of the tanks proved very successful. But after the Battle of the Bulge the regiment received fifteen new M-24 light tanks with 75mm guns. On this afternoon of 28 February they were grouped into one task force and given the mission of advancing from Juchen to cut the Reydt-Grevenbroich road, a distance of about two miles, (See Map B) moving "as fast as possible, without stopping, spraying everything that looked suspicious with machine gun and 75mm HE fire." Covering fires of medium tanks and assault

(24) Statement of Commanding Officer, Task Force B; (25) Statements of Regimental officers.

guns were planned, and the race for the objective began. The charge was so fast and so audacious that although there were apparently a few shots fired at the tanks none were stopped, and the mission was accomplished without loss of man or machine. (26)

During the afternoon of this day the regimental CP was in Juchen, and a rather bitter lesson in "curiosity killed the cat" was learned. The division received its first attack of jet planes, and several command post personnel gathered outside the CP building to watch the weaving tactics of these bullet planes as they eluded all the AA fire being directed at them. While they were watching an unexploded 40mm HE shell from one of our guns landed in the middle of the street corner by the CP, killing two, and sending several key personnel to the rear for treatment, including the mess officer. (27)

By the end of this 1st day the regiment had advanced eight miles, and the last defenses of the Neuss corridor had been overwhelmed. Only once or twice during the day had there been any semblance of an armored counter-attack, and even then in small numbers. (28) The breakthrough had been accomplished, and exploitation was about to begin.

#### EXPLOITATION - CLOSING THE TRAP

The main problem of the second day, 1 March, was the crossing of the Nord Canal between Munchen-Gladbach and Neuss. (See Map B) Here for the first time armored infantry led the way in the attack of the task forces, and by 2230 that evening the engineers had put across sufficient bridging to permit the mediums to roll across, reinforce the infantry bridge-head, and prepare to lead out again the next morning. Units which had been in reserve relieved tired units in the assault Task Forces where practicable. (26) (27) (28) Personal knowledge.

While the 2nd Armored Division advanced north on this day the 83rd Division Regimental Combat Team peeled off from behind the two leading Combat Commands and attacked Neuss from the west and northwest, (See Map B) with the additional mission of furnishing east flank protection for the 2nd Armored Division. (29) On the west flank the 29th Division took Munchen-Gladbach in one day. This was the largest German city to fall to the Americans up to this time. The 29th Division was then pinched out, and assembled in the vicinity of the city. (30)

Again the 66th Armored Regiment had received no coordinated armored counter-attack, and it was apparent that, as in Normandy, enemy armor was being committed piecemeal as it arrived on the scene. (31)

By 2 March the operation reached the pursuit and mopping-up stage. (32) The objective from this time on was to capture as many as possible of the enemy attempting to withdraw across the Rhine, and to seize intact a bridge across the Rhine. There were four of these in the division zone, three in the Neuss-Duesseldorf area and one at Uerdingen. (See Map B) On the morning of 2 March CCB on the right reached the Rhine north of Neuss, while the 66th Armored Regiment continued to spearhead the advance of CCA to the north, medium tanks leading, moving almost to Oppum. (See Map B) The Regimental Combat Team of the 83rd Division cleared Neuss of the enemy, and reached the Rhine south of Neuss. A task force from this unit, with TDs and tanks attached, made a dramatic secret maneuver that almost succeeded in the capture of the bridge at Obercassel, a suburb of Duesseldorf. (33) (See Map B)

On this day, 2 March, a remarkable change in the Army plan of attack took place. With the 66th Armored Regiment already poised to slice between Krefeld and Uerdingen, and elements of the XIII Corps just reaching Krefeld from the west, the XIX Corps boundary was shifted to the north so as to

(29) A-6, p. 182; (30) A-6, p. 182; (31) Personal knowledge; (A-6, p. 183; (33) A-6, p. 183.

allow its northward momentum to continue, thus cutting off more German crossing sites and trapping more Germans west of the Rhine. (34) (See Map B) This change was a brilliant one, but it was responsible for some confusion and unfortunate incidents which will be discussed later.

The 66th Armored Regiment had some difficulty crossing the roads and railroads between Krefeld and Uerdingen. The enemy was desperate in his attempts to keep open all possible avenues of escape. But the hunting was good for the mediums that day, and they took terrific toll with their machine guns and tank guns on fleeing vehicles and foot troops. (35) By nightfall both task forces were astride the roads and railroads between Krefeld and Uerdingen. (See Map C)

On the morning of 3 March the infantry of Task Force B was called on again, this time for a night attack to clean out the enemy from a German military barracks area about one mile northeast of Bockum and be prepared to continue the attack on order. They moved out on foot at 0300, under the artificial moonlight being thrown out by Army searchlights somewhere in the rear, using the greatest stealth to gain surprise. It was practically a walk. The enemy offered little or no resistance, and some had to be awakened and informed they were prisoners. Most of them were tankers who were supposed to be fighting as infantry because their tanks were out of gas, and on being captured they claimed they thought they were "in the rear area". (36) The infantry continued on into the town of Hohenbadburg, (See Map C) and here they were greeted by a field artillery concentration from XIII Corps artillery, who apparently believed they were softening up a town in their zone for their own infantry. Before much damage had been done the situation was cleared up, the mediums passed through and roared on northeast.

During the early afternoon leading tanks of Task Force A were about to

(34) A-6, p. 186; (35) Personal knowledge; (36) Personal knowledge.



open fire on a group of tanks advancing from the west. (See Map C) Some alert gunner held up the fire, however, identifying the tanks as American. Contact was made and it was found that the tanks were from the US 5th Armored Division, part of the XIII Corps. A lieutenant in the outfit showed his map which indicated he was to advance almost due east to the Rhine. He was determined to carry out his mission in spite of the fact that he was outnumbered and outranked by 2nd Armored Division officers, with maps which showed the change in plan, but he was held in check until he was convinced by higher authority in his own outfit that his map was out-dated. (37)

On this day (3 March) the Army Reserve, the 95th Division, was committed to action to assume the role of infantry follow-up for the 2nd Armored Division, and only these two divisions were still active in the XIX Corps zone. All other units had been pinched out. (38) CCB and CCR were cleaning up around Uerdingen, and staged another attempt to capture a bridge intact that almost but not quite succeeded. (39)

4 March saw the final advance of the regiment and some of the sharpest fighting of the operation. The enemy managed to mass his anti-tank guns and emplaced tanks better than ever before. The task forces were forced to mix their tanks with infantry, some in half-tracks and some riding the tanks. The Reconnaissance Company with the west task force suffered comparatively heavily, losing two officers killed. (40)

One action which took place during the day would probably have resulted in heavy tank losses had it not been for a lucky accident - a mix-up in direction of attack which, according to all rules of tactics was a big "U", but which turned out to resemble a complicated, beautifully-timed football play, with a fine down-field block sending the runner on for a touchdown. Task Force B, on the right, was in an assembly position astride the Uerdingen-Rheinhausen road (See Map C) about 1700 yards southwest of Rheinhausen,

(37) Statement of Regimental S-3, who was at the spot; (38) A-6, p. 188; (39) A-6, p. 183; (40) Personal knowledge.

preparing to attack northeast, by-pass Rheinhausen to the north, and reach the Rhine, while Task Force A was assembled just south of Bergheim, preparing to attack Rheinhausen itself. Neither commander was aware of the other's intentions, the terrain hid each from the other's view, and neither knew that the small patch of woods west of Rheinhausen was bristling with concealed enemy anti-tank weapons of different calibers, guarding one of the few remaining bridges over the Rhine. (See Map C) Task Force B commander was about to give the command which would have sent his force advancing northeast, exposing his flank to the murderous fire from these guns when he noticed the tanks and half-tracks of Task Force A cutting across his front from the west. (See Map C) He waited until they had cleared his route of advance, and then moved out as planned. The German gunners, waiting impatiently to pour their fire into the flanks of Task Force B suddenly saw the tanks of Task Force A bearing down on them from due west, and a violent tank vs gun fight followed, while Task Force B continued on to the Rhine. The guns had lost the surprise factor they had counted on, and were finally overpowered, but Task Force A lost eight tanks, the largest loss for a similar sized force of the entire operation of the regiment. Luckily, personnel losses in these tanks were low. Just how the mix-up of direction occurred is not known - no one ever investigated the matter so far as is known, probably because the action was so successful. (41)

With the reaching of the Rhine the advance of the regiment had ended. The Task Forces pulled in their tails, blocked important roads, and rested.

On 5 March elements of the 95th Division took over the areas held by the 2nd Armored Division, and the tanks began a march to the rear for maintenance and training prior to crossing the Rhine. As General Simpson puts it, the division had just had a "Rehearsal for the Rhine", and the show itself was less difficult than the rehearsal. (42)

(41) Statement of Commanding Officers of Task Force A and Task Force B.  
(42) A-1, p. 27.

During the advance the 66th Armored Regiment encountered elements of the German 9th Panzer, (43) 11th Panzer, (44) 130th Panzer Lehr, (45) 183rd and 363rd Volksgrenadier Divisions, and 59th Infantry Division. (46)

In its drive from the Roer to the Rhine the 2nd Armored Division killed more Germans than in any other battle from Sicily through the Battle of the Bulge. (47)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing and criticizing this operation the first thing of note is the thoroughness of the Army Commander's plans and preparations for the attack. General Simpson had a hard-working staff who took advantage of the time available to insure a successful operation by taking detailed steps to be prepared for any eventuality.

All of the nine principles of war were exemplified in this operation, but four were outstanding. These were Mass, Movement, Economy of Force, and Cooperation. The Army Commander employed Mass and Movement with great success. He drove in with all his strength, then changed direction to hit enemy positions in flank and rear. All units had strong reserves on hand at all times, and the impetus of the advance was maintained by rotating reserves. An alternate plan was prepared to seize the opportunity of a breakthrough and this was the one used in this case. Movement was also exemplified by the flanking maneuvers of corps, divisions, and smaller units. Economy of Force was best exemplified by the Supreme Commander's strategy of massing forces in the northern Army Group, while directing utmost economy of men and ammunition in the central and southern Armies. Cooperation was evidenced by the smooth teamwork of all arms throughout--infantry forcing a crossing with heavy artillery support and establishing a bridgehead, Engineers building bridges under almost impossible circumstances, armored

spearheads breaking through, followed by other fresh infantry divisions, partly motorized, to mop up and secure the flanks and rear of the operation, while planes on constant air alert assigned to certain zones, and in constant contact with ground units fighting in those zones, furnished rapid and effective support.

The Army Commander made every effort to conceal the identity of newly arrived units, but in the case of the 2nd Armored Division this effort was jeopardized by one soldier who gave a shirt with his unit patch to a talkative civilian.

Commanders at all echelons were aware of the importance of insuring that passable roads would be available when needed. The Army commander stocked supplies well forward before the attack, dispersing these stocks as much as possible to preserve secrecy. The Corps commander moved the 2nd Armored Division from an area of unfavorable roads to the streets of a city, a rather unorthodox assembly area, but one which insured good mobility in any direction. The regimental commander put his combat troops to work on the roads to prevent the tanks from being mired when they were needed.

The condition of the river and approaches at the time the Army commander selected for the crossing was far from favorable, but he crossed when he did to gain surprise and to save time.

The enemy plan of defense was to man the river line lightly, and hold mobile forces to the rear for counter-attack. These counter-attack forces didn't move fast enough, or in sufficient force when the critical time came. They were too few and too late.

The armor, once committed, advanced rapidly, not butting its head against unsuitable objectives. These were left for the mobile infantry which followed.

The armored infantry was used in a very successful night attack, advancing by stealth and entering the enemy position without causing an alarm.

The change in the Army plan took advantage of the momentum of the armored advance, but some confusion resulted because some small units did not learn of the change soon enough.

### LESSONS

1. The application of the principles of Mass, Movement, Economy of Force, and Cooperation greatly enhance the chances for success.
2. Careful, complete, detailed planning and preparations at all levels are vital to the success of a major river crossing operation. Alternate plans should be prepared on a high level to take advantage of chances for exploitation.
3. Road preservation and maintenance is highly important for both logistical and tactical success. Men of the combat units must sometimes be used to do engineer work on the roads, particularly in armored units.
4. Secrecy of a new unit in an army area is difficult to achieve, and its success depends upon the enforcement of secrecy discipline by all commanders, including squad leaders.
5. River crossings under unfavorable natural conditions are always costly in time and materials, but if well-planned may achieve success through the surprise gained.
6. In a defensive-offensive action employing light forces along an obstacle, backed up by mobile counter-attack forces, speed, timeliness, and strength of the counter-attack are essential. Our Field Service Regulations, Par. 12.65, state, "In defensive-offensive action - success depends on the commander's ability to launch the attack at the proper time and in a decisive direction."
7. Night attacks made by stealth and securing surprise can be highly successful. Our Field Service Regulations, Par. 12.76, state, "Night attacks

are made - to capitalize on the surprise inherent in night combat", and par. 12.78 goes on, "The attack itself may be made by stealth or by full use of all available fire power."

8. The use of fresh units will maintain the momentum of the advance. As stated in Field Service Regulations 9.106, "In offensive combat it may be necessary to relieve units in contact with the enemy - in order to continue the momentum of the attack."

9. Changes in plans by higher commanders must reach the lowest echelon, or confusion will result.

10. Maximum success is obtained by having armor by-pass strong points, and having mobile infantry follow-up, mopping up by-passed places, and protecting the flanks and rear of the advance. Our Field Service Regulations, Par. 2.11, say, "Once launched, the armored attack is pushed forward as rapidly as possible, by-passing resistance, to seize critical objectives in the enemy's rear areas," and Par. 9.104 adds, "Other mobile forces - exploit the advantages gained, and attack the enemy in rear and prevent his escape."

11. The air-ground team can function smoothly and rapidly when there are sufficient planes for air alerts, in direct contact with attacking units.

12. Get under cover when friendly AA fire is going on in the vicinity.