

Pratt  
28 March

Staff Department  
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1949-1950

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 289TH INFANTRY  
(75TH DIVISION) IN THE REDUCTION OF  
THE RHUR POCKET, VICINITY OF ICKERN,  
GERMANY, 31 MARCH - 5 APRIL 1945.  
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Regimental Staff Officer)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY REGIMENT  
ATTACKING AN INDUSTRIAL AREA

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operation of the 289th Infantry, 75th Division, in the reduction of the RUHR POCKET, 31 March - 5 April 1944.

It will be necessary for purposes of background to briefly discuss the major events which led up to the encirclement and reduction of the RUHR, an operation described by modern historians as the largest double envelopment in history.

On 6 June 1944 the Allied Armies invaded the Continent of EUROPE on the Northern Coast of FRANCE, and later landings were made in Southern FRANCE. Following the break-out at ST. LO, the Allied time-table for the conquering of GERMANY was set back by the salient created in December by the enemy in his attempt to drive to LIEGE and ANTWERP. This offensive was stopped, the Germans were rolled back and by 23 March 1945 the line was generally that of the RHINE RIVER. The American Ninth and First, and the British Second Armies elements were posed to strike at the RUHR VALLEY. (See Map A)

The RUHR from the very beginning had been a principal consideration of Allied planning inasmuch as the major plan for the invasion of the European Continent, Operations Overlord, called for an envelopment of the RUHR in the final phase. The RUHR VALLEY is the most highly concentrated industrial area in

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EUROPE. Battered though it was by heavy bombing during the war, it still contained the heart and sinew of the Reich's industry. Rich and extensive coal and iron ore deposits in this area furnished the life blood for armament, steel, synthetic oil plants and chemical factories. Here within 6,000 square miles was the body and soul of the German materiel war effort. (1)

Moreover, within the RUHR VALLEY were nearly one-third of a million German soldiers - Field Marshal Model's Army Group B with the greater part of the Fifth Panzer and Fifteenth Armies as well as elements of the First Parachute Army. These forces included a total of seven corps and the major elements of nineteen divisions, augmented by some one hundred thousand anti-aircraft personnel. (2)

#### TERRAIN STUDY

The area in question is bounded by the RHINE RIVER on the west, thence east from WESEL, through HAMM, to LIPPSTADT and on the south from the vicinity of REMAGEN, east through SIEGEN, to FRENKENBERG, thence north through BRILLON to LIPPSTADT. (See Map A) North of the RUHR RIVER was the densely-populated, heavily built up industrial section containing the great cities of ESSEN, DORTMUND, DUSSELDORF, DUISBURG, while to the south of the RUHR RIVER lay the rugged mountain terrain. Also in the north was an interlaced system of canals spread over terrain generally open and rolling. The south contained areas marked with definite hills and valleys and dotted by small streams. This latter area would have made excellent terrain for deliberate defensive works and historians agree that, had the Germans

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(1) A-1  
(2) A-1; A-3

elected to place permanent defensive installations in this zone, our progress would have been slow and costly.

#### THE GENERAL SITUATION

In accordance with the general plan of SHAEF, there was to be (1) a main envelopment from the north by the 21st Army Group, (2) a secondary effort by the 12th Army Group, which was to expand its bridgehead toward KASSEL and at the same time be prepared to reinforce the main attack, and (3) the establishment of a firm bridgehead across the RHINE by the 6th Army Group. (See Map A) (3)

On the 23d of March 1945, the British Second Army and the U. S. Ninth Army began a planned operation to drive deep into the heart of GERMANY, and destroy the remnants of its armies. (4)

Aided by the XVIII Airborne Corps, the 21st Army Group crossed the RHINE near WESEL and by the 28th, had established a bridgehead sixteen miles deep, north of the RUHR. In the same period (23-28 March) the First Army drove east sixty-five miles from its REMAGEN bridgehead, while the Third Army raced more than one hundred miles northeastward from its OPPENHEIM bridgehead. (See Map A) (5)

The 21st Army Group's crossing of the RHINE was the largest river crossing in history. During the previous month Allied air forces had dropped 31,000 tons of bombs as their part in the preparation for the assault. To prevent the enemy from learning just where the crossings would take place, a smoke screen nearly seventy miles long was maintained. Montgomery had available

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(3) A-8, p. 45  
(4) A-4, p. 104  
(5) A-8, p. 45

for the operation the Canadian First Army, British Second Army, and the American Ninth Army and in addition he had been given the XVIII Airborne Corps from General Brereton's First Allied Airborne Army, which comprised the British 6th and American 13th and 17th Airborne Divisions. Owing to insufficient air lift, the 13th Airborne Division was later withdrawn from the operation. (6)

The RHINE was crossed practically unopposed in Ninth Army's area. The XVI Corps had been selected to spearhead the Army's assault across the river between ORSOY and RHINEBERG with a mission of establishing a large bridgehead east of the RHINE and north of the RUHR industrial area in a meticulously planned offensive involving the entire 21st Army Group. Over 120,000 troops and great quantities of engineer equipment were employed in this inland amphibious operation. (See Map A) (7)

The assault opened with an artillery preparation in which 54 field artillery battalions participated. While the 75th Division defended the XVI Corps' sector on the RHINE's west bank, the 30th Infantry Division crossed the river at four sites and the 79th Infantry Division made the assault at two sites. Moving eastward between the LIPPE RIVER and the RHINE-HERNE CANAL the Corps committed the 8th Armored Division, and the 35th and 75th Infantry Divisions against elements of a German Parachute Division, two Volksgrenadier divisions and a panzer division opposing it. (See Map C) (8)

#### ENCIRCLEMENT OF THE RUHR VALLEY

Owing to the spectacular successes of the 12th Army Group,

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(6) A-9, p. 35

(7) A-6

(8) A-7, p. 198-200



the Allied overall plan was altered and thereafter, the main attack to encircle the RUHR was made by the 12th Army Group.

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On 29 March in the First Army Sector, General Collins sent the VII Corps' 3d Armored Division north from MARBURG and in two days it advanced to within three miles of PADERBORN. The division's exposed left flank was protected initially by only a cavalry group and an armored task force, but infantry units were rushed forward to establish barrier positions facing the RUHR. Meanwhile, in the north in the Ninth Army area a real breakthrough was achieved by the XIX Corps, which enabled its 2d Armored Division to race thirty-five miles to LIPPSTADT, where on 1 April elements of the 2d and 3d Armored Divisions made contact. PADERBORN was simultaneously captured, and the encirclement of the RUHR was complete. (See Map B) (10)

#### PLAN FOR REDUCTION OF THE RUHR

The overall plan for the reduction of the RUHR was a combined operation of the American First and Ninth Armies. On 2 April representatives of the two armies met at First Army Headquarters to plan and coordinate the joint attack on the huge pocket. The boundaries between armies was set as the RUHR RIVER as far east as NUTTLAR and then north to RUTHEN and east to PADERBORN. This gave the Ninth Army the densely-populated, heavily built-up industrial section north of the river, and to First Army the rugged terrain to the south. (See Map B)

Ninth Army's plan of attack was simple. The operation called for a converging attack by two Corps aimed at the heart

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(9) A-8, p. 45

(10) A-9, p. 42-43

of the RUHR. XVI Corps was to attack south to the RUHR RIVER from its current positions north of the RHEIN-HERNE CANAL. XIX Corps forces, striking from the HAMM and LIPPSTAD areas, were to drive southwest to the Army south boundary. At the same time, First Army forces would be driving north and northwest to effect a junction with Ninth Army all along the RUHR RIVER. (11)

#### SITUATION 75TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The 75th Infantry Division had been given the mission of screening the XVI Corps front along the west bank of the RHINE RIVER from WESEL in the north to DUISBURG in the south during the preparations for the crossings. In this mission it had been highly successful in that no enemy patrols had ever returned from crossing (as borne out by subsequent captured enemy intelligence reports), while, on the other hand, our patrols had made nightly crossings, obtained valuable intelligence reports on enemy positions and activities. Division artillery had supported the operation by firing over 27,000 rounds and had placed smoke on the enemy through the use of an attached Provisional Smoke Generator Company. (12)

Having completed the screening assignment on the XVI Corps sector, the 75th Division was ordered to join other Corps units across the RHINE RIVER north of the RUHR industrial area.

By 29 March the 75th Division had completed its movement to the east bank of the RHINE and was assembled in the vicinity of HIESFELD, GERMANY, except for elements still guarding the bridges and for the 290th Infantry which had been attached to the 8th Armored Division on 27 March. Meanwhile, the 30th In-

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(11) A-2, p. 270

(12) A-5, p. 29

fantry Division and the 8th Armored Division had been advancing slowly east of the RHINE, in the area between the LIPPE RIVER on the north and the RHEIN-HERNE CANAL on the south, with the 30th Infantry Division on the north. The 75th Reconnaissance Troop reconnoitered routes to the forward assembly area in the vicinity of IM LUE, where the Division completed concentration by 1200 on 30<sup>th</sup> March. (See Map C) (13)

The Corps attack order - Field Order Number 14, issued at 1700 projected a continuation of the Corps attack on the axis already begun: toward and across the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL where it ran parallel to the RHINE RIVER, approximately twenty-eight miles away and a few miles east of the line RECKLINGHAUSEN-HALTERN. (See Map C) (14)

#### ENEMY ORDER OF BATTLE

The enemy order of battle as disclosed in the Intelligence Annex to Field Order No. 14, indicated that the principal opposition in the division zone would be the 116th Panzer Division, composed of the 16th Panzer Grenadier Regiment in the center and the 116th Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion in the south, in addition to reported elements of the 130th Division and of nine other miscellaneous units. (15)

#### THE REGIMENTAL SITUATION

The 289th Infantry had moved by foot and mortar from MOERS, GERMANY, to a rear assembly area in the vicinity of VORDE, GERMANY, closing at 1945 on the 29th of March. The regimental command post was established at VORDE for the night. At 0400 on

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- (13) A-5, p. 29  
(14) A-5, p. 30  
(15) A-5, p. 30

the 30th, the regiment initiated its move by organic and attached motors from VORDE to a forward assembly area in the vicinity of KIRCHELLEN and the regiment closed in its forward assembly area at 0810. Reconnaissance was initiated immediately of areas of departure for an attack the following day, and at 2130 the order for the attack was issued. Brigadier General St. Clair Mickle, assistant Division Commander, assumed temporary command of the 289th Infantry during the temporary hospitalization of Colonel Douglas B. Smith, the regimental commander. (See Map C)

For the operation, the 289th attachments were: 701st Tank Battalion (less Companies A and D) and Company A, 772d TD Battalion. In support were Company A, 375th Medical Battalion, Company A, 275th Engineer Battalion, 897th FA Battalion and Battery C, 440th AAA Battalion. (16)

The regiment at this time was in excellent shape. Strength of the units was higher than it had been since prior to its commitment in the ARDENNES salient. Morale was exceptionally good due to the excellent opportunity afforded the regiment for rest and recuperation during the static period it had remained on the west bank of the RHINE RIVER, and also due to the high standards maintained by the Division Commander, Major General Ray E. Porter. He didn't believe that a soldier had to be cold, hungry, dirty and unshaven to be a good combat soldier and devoted a good bit of his time to seeing that they lived otherwise. He maintained that both officers and enlisted men would live as comfortable as the situation would permit, and this refreshing viewpoint did not take long to become a daily

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(16) A-10

axiom with all concerned after General Porter took command during the ARDENNES CAMPAIGN. In addition to the fine state of morale, all units were fully supplied in equipment and ammunition. (17)

#### NARRATION

##### PRIOR TO THE ATTACK

The division objective was a line running south from the LIPPE-SEITEN CANAL past the town of DREVE, and just short of the DIE HAARD FOREST. The XIX Corps was north of the LIPPE-SEITEN CANAL; the 8th Armored Division was on the division's right. The formation for the attack was the 289th Infantry on the right, and the 291st on the left. The 290th Infantry (less 1st Battalion still with the 8th Armored Division) was in division reserve. The 289th Infantry would attack from a line of departure of the north-south road running through POLSUM, with two battalions abreast and seize the town of MARL, approximately two and a half miles to the northeast. At 0500 on 31 March, the command post of the 289th Infantry opened at ULKFORTE. (18)

##### THE INITIAL ATTACK

At 0600 the attack jumped off with two battalions abreast, 1st Battalion attacked on the right with Companies A and C on line with Company B in reserve; 3d Battalion had L and K on line with Company I in reserve. The attack progressed rapidly against light enemy resistance. Throughout the zone indications were that the enemy was withdrawing and would continue to do so

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(17) Personal knowledge  
(18) A-10

until he had reached a point where he could reorganize and have a position strong enough to defend. By 0755 15 PWs had been taken, and teams of infantry and tanks from I and K Companies were at the outskirts of MARL, the regimental objective. L Company was temporarily stopped by a mine field but soon had it cleared and started to move again. Company K, meanwhile, was pushing into the town. At 0855 General Mickle contacted the Division G-3 and informed him that the BURGOMEISTER had just said that there were 6,000 civilians in the church and that he had declared it an open city to American troops. By 1200 the city was completely cleared by the 1st and 3d Battalions, who were reorganizing to renew the attack on the Division objective of HULS. (See Map C) (19)

Despite direct high velocity fire on its right flank from the area of the 8th Armored Division, the attack was pushed forward and the first objective was taken by 1445. A few hours later the 3d Battalion began to receive heavy fire. Every time the battalion tried to cross the crest of the hill in their zone, they received heavy artillery and mortar fire from the southeast, with Company K held up due to heavy small arms and mortar and artillery fire. At 1730 the enemy counterattacked in the 3d Battalion sector, however this attack was light and was quickly repulsed. By 1800 the regiment had gained the division objective in its zone and reorganized to continue the attack at 0600 on 1 April. At this time the regiment's right flank was exposed, but by 2130 the 75th Reconnaissance Troop had established contact between Company K on the right flank, and the 8th Armored Division's left flank, element, Combat Com-

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(19) A-11

mand R. The regimental command post opened at 0530 on 1 April in HULS. (See Map C) (20)

At 0600 the 289th Infantry renewed the attack east and southeast from HULS toward the ZWEIG-DORTMUND-EMS CANAL, nearly nine miles away. The 1st Battalion continued its advance on the left, 2d Battalion, which had been in regimental reserve, passed through 3d Battalion on the right and attacked abreast of the 1st Battalion. The 3d Battalion had the mission of guarding bridges intact in the zone and of securing the regiment's right flank until the 8th Armored Division could come abreast. The 291st Infantry continued to fight on the regiment's left flank. (21)

The division had an objective paralleling the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL and about midway through the DIE HAARD FOREST, to the south of HALTERN. (22) (See Map C)

Initially resistance was light all along the line. It was later learned from PWs that the Germans had orders to continue delaying actions and to withdraw on first contact with the American forces. Enemy resistance, however, gradually stiffened and the units began to receive moderate to heavy small arms, self-propelled, mortar and machine gun fire. It was discovered by 0725 that all the bridges in the area (numbering twenty) had been blown. The 1st Battalion's progress was slowed by this condition when crossing the SICKINGMUHLE CREEK. Company A, commanded by Captain R. G. Belloir, reached the creek which was narrow in most parts, and found many snipers and men in dug-in positions on the other side. Tanks were not available, as they were occupied elsewhere in the battalion sector. Looking for

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(20) A-5, p. 31  
(21) A-10  
(22) A-5, p. 31

a crossing site the company found a place where men could walk across the creek. A base of fire was laid down and the company crossed only to find that the opposition had pulled out. It was clearly indicated that the enemy's purpose was to delay the advance as much as possible. Wherever possible, available civilians were compelled by the regimental commander to work on the reconstruction of bridges. Rifles were found in some of the houses nearby, and also German uniforms. It is impossible to estimate the number of soldiers who became civilians overnight. (23)

By 1200 the attacking battalions, hampered though they were by roadblocks and blown bridges, had nevertheless reached a point just east of LENKENBECK. (See Map C) (24)

To facilitate and ensure reaching the Corps objective on the Canal as soon as possible, a motorized task force was organized under the command of Lt. Col. Thomas A. Gearhart, battalion commander of the 2d Battalion. The composition of the Task Force was: one rifle company (reinforced), one company light tanks, one platoon TDs, one A & P Platoon (less one section), and a battalion medical section with three ambulances. Infantry elements of the task force were drawn from the 2d Battalion. The mission of this force was to attack along the main route to the Canal, OER, HENNEBREE, and MECKINHOVEN.

At this time the 290th Infantry passed through Combat Command R of the 8th Armored Division on the regiment's right and continued the attack. This regiment had been relieved as division reserve by the 116th Infantry of the 29th Division. This gave the division four regimental combat teams, a structure

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(23) Statement of Captain R. G. Belloir

(24) A-11



which it was to maintain throughout practically the entire operation. (25)

By 2045 Task Force Gearhart was formed. Plans were made for a small advance guard to precede it. It was known that the first 1500 yards were clear and all defiles had been fixed in this area. The 2d Battalion, less the task force elements, moved up to the 1st Battalion positions, and the 1st Battalion continued their attack throughout the night.

The main body of the Task Force moved through LENKENBECK at 0100. Despite rain and poor visibility, the drive maintained its momentum. By 0700 the entire task force was at its destination on the Canal. The 1st Battalion, which had continued its attack throughout the night, reached the Canal at 0800. By 1000, the remainder of the 2d Battalion had moved to the Canal and both battalions consolidated and organized defensive positions. (See Map D) (26)

Meanwhile throughout the day the 290th Infantry on the regiment's right flank had been unable to move up. A serious gap existed in the division line which created an exposed flank. Inviting a serious counterattack, the gap also left unprotected the left flank of the 35th Division and was the immediate concern of both division commanders. Earlier in the morning in a strongly expressed conversation with the G-3, the 75th Division Commander, Major General Ray E. Porter ordered him to send someone down to the 290th Infantry and inform its commander that they must cut out "dilly - dallying" and move the regiment up. Considering the slight resistance the enemy was putting up and in view of the fact that the 290th Infantry had three tank com-

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(25) A-5, p. 32  
(26) A-11

panies attached, the Division Commander saw no reason why this regiment was unable to keep abreast of the other assaulting regiments. (27)

*which one*  
In the bold advance to the Canal, it also developed that a considerable number of enemy had been by-passed. At 1000, the regimental quartering party which had entered the town of RAPEN to establish the CP were turned back. This group received SP and high velocity fire including 88s from the southern edge of the woods bordering the town, and it was also determined that Jerries were hidden in basements throughout the town. It then became necessary for the regiment to engage in mopping up operations. General Mickle formed two small task forces from the 3d Battalion in reserve, composed of infantrymen and tanks and initiated reconnaissances in force to eliminate enemy resistance.

In order to safeguard the regimental right boundary, it had become necessary for the 1st Battalion to extend its C Company line 1200 yards out of the regimental sector. However, by 1500, Major Dunlop, the regimental S-3, contacted the G-3 and informed him that this line had to be drawn in. The 1st Battalion was receiving heavy fire from the southwest. Elements of the 290th Infantry were arriving on line and were attacking the town in their zone. Shortly thereafter, this regiment reached the Canal. (28)

By 1800 the mopping up operation was completed and 3d Battalion after assisting in this operation, assembled in RAPEN in regimental reserve. Colonel Douglas B. Smith resumed command of the regiment. (29)

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(27) A-11  
(28) A-5; A-12  
(29) A-5

## CROSSING THE DORTMUND-EMS CANAL

Extensive reconnaissance for likely crossing sites was carried out by units on the canal throughout the afternoon. It was found that all bridges were out and that the enemy had dug in on the east side for a last desperate stand. Fire fights raged up and down the canal and the Germans in a show of strength rolled 88s up to the canal and fired directly across. The canal itself was the much vaunted German second line after the RHINE, and was a formidable barrier, averaging ten feet in depth and 100 feet in width. The worst feature of all discovered, during the reconnaissance, was the 20 foot reinforced concrete wall on the opposite bank. This was the first indication the regiment had that the wall existed. Prior intelligence reports had no mention of it and aerial photos of the area were not made or if they were made, had not reached the regimental level. It is believed that division and corps were also unaware of the barrier. Moreover, maps of the area used for the operation did not disclose its existence. (30)

At 2145 the Corps Commander stated to General Porter that if at all possible the division was to move across that night and if this could not be accomplished that it would be done the following night.

The night was spent engaged in fire fights across the canal and in reconnaissance. The strong resistance encountered along the front and the perpendicular wall barrier on the east side of the canal made the establishment of a bridgehead that night a highly hazardous plan, and the Division Commander issued instructions to prepare for a crossing the following night. At 2310 he directed the Engineer to ready enough material for the

(30) A-5; Personal knowledge

following night to permit the laying of three Bailey bridges.

(32)

The regimental I and R Platoon made an extensive reconnaissance of that particular area in the regimental zone of advance where the Autobahn crossed the Canal. It became increasingly apparent that this main artery of highway communication was intended by the Germans to remain in their hands in order to facilitate the retreat of their forces from ESSEN, DUSSELDORF, DUISBURG, and the rest of the concentrated area, with hopes of making a breakthrough in force out of the encirclement. The regimental commander reasoned that this junction of super highway and Canal, and the City of ICKERN, a short distance beyond to the east, to be a vital area and one which would be stubbornly defended. All indications at the time and subsequent developments supported this reasoning. (33)

At 2245 on 3 April, the 3d Battalion relieved the 2d Battalion on the line, the latter battalion reverting to regimental reserve at RAPEN. The relief was accomplished without incident and with a minimum of confusion. During the afternoon hours, detailed coordination was made by Company Commanders and the staff of the 3d Battalion, and a detailed reconnaissance was completed. A plan was agreed upon whereby an exchange of supplies and equipment would be made, and in particular crew-served weapons and communication equipment. It is believed that in this particular case, considering the closeness of the enemy lines, this relief could not have been so successful, and so apparently undetected by the enemy had this exchange of front line equipment not been made. (34)

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(32) A-11

(33) Personal knowledge

(34) Personal knowledge

The division continued its defense of the west bank of the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL and ZWEIG CANAL, preparatory to the assault crossing early on 4 April.

At 0930 the regimental commander contacted the division headquarters with reference to the engineer part of the plan to support the crossings. He gave his recommendations as to the bridge site, but was told that the engineers hadn't completed their reconnaissance. The Division Engineer said that it would be completed by noon. (35)

Meanwhile fire fights continued up and down the Canal and casualties were heavy. Evacuation of wounded was difficult due to the close observation the enemy had on movement within the units. (36)

At 1245 the 3d Battalion reported that they had been talking across the Canal to the enemy and an estimated fifty Germans agreed to surrender at 1400 and to come across the Canal. However, the surrender didn't take place. It was later learned that their officers prevented their surrender. Instead of surrender, an increased volume of fire was laid on the regimental positions. (37)

At 1820 the Division Engineer contacted the G-3 and asked if he was ordered to put in Bailey bridges. He further stated that you can't put bridges in from foxholes and that the roads stuck up like sore thumbs. He said that he was concentrating all his efforts on a quick ford in each regimental sector for tanks and TDs and improved causeways for ordinary traffic. (38)

Around 2045 Company M was fired upon by several machine guns on the west side of the Canal and it was feared that the

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- (35) A-11  
(36) Personal knowledge  
(37) A-5  
(38) A-11

enemy had infiltrated onto the Autobahn. Patrols were sent out but they were unsuccessful in locating the enemy. Other patrols were sent across the Canal itself on reconnaissance during the earlier part of the night. (39)

Despite the lack of bridging material at the selected sites, the assault was to be carried out after midnight. The attack by the entire Division from its present position preceded a coordinated drive in which the 35th and 79th Infantry Divisions and the 17th Airborne Division later participated. (40)

The regimental commander planned to cross the Canal with his two assault battalions from their present positions, the 1st Battalion, under Lt. Col. Henry Fluck, on the north, and the 3d Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Joseph Stearns, on the south, with the 2d Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Thomas Gearhart, remaining in reserve. The 1st Battalion was to attack and capture the City of ICKERN, which was a vital point. The 3d Battalion was to cross the Canal and turn south. (41)

To assist in the crossing, the Fire Direction Center of the regimental Cannon Company from positions near ERKENSCHWICK controlled 15 105 mm guns firing a 1000 round, 30 minute concentration beginning at 0030. (42)

The attack began shortly after 0100 hours on 4 April, meeting heavy mortar, artillery, small arms and self-propelled fire. When it got under way the 3d Battalion was unable to effect a crossing at its planned site, due partly to very strong resistance around the Autobahn which crossed the Canal in their zone and partly because the engineers had failed in providing the

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(39) A-12

(40) A-7, p. 200

(41) Personal statement of Colonel D. B. Smith, 3 February 1950

(42) A-13

battalion with ladders and bridging material. (43)

The 1st Battalion, however, was able to cross. Sliding down the grass covered forward slope of the canal, the companies began to cross over a single plank bridge. At times the plank was completely submerged under water and the men could only leap in the darkness from board to board. Three ladders were used to climb up the perpendicular escarpment on the other side, and the climb was made with great difficulty. Particularly hazardous was it for those carrying heavy weapons. Nearing the top, Lt. Gulley of Company D suddenly took an unexpected and inadvertant 15 foot dive into the water of the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL. Captain Nielsen, D Company Commander, lost his carbine by the same downward excursion. (44)

By 0235 the 1st Battalion had two companies, A and C Company, across and had established a bridgehead of one thousand yards. (45)

In accomplishing this, the 1st Battalion had been able to pin the enemy down on the far bank and had been able to get three hastily constructed wooden ladders up the twenty foot reinforced concrete wall on the opposite side. When the regimental commander saw that he had a definite bridgehead in this sector, he immediately changed his entire plan of attack. He ordered the reserve battalion to immediately move up and cross after the 1st Battalion. The 1st Battalion was to continue their attack as planned and the 2d Battalion was to attack on the left of the 1st Battalion, and an attempt was to be made to deceive the enemy as to the direction of the main attack so that he would commit his reserves farther north and ignore the fact that

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(43) Personal statement of Colonel D. B. Smith, 3 February 1950  
(44) A-15  
(45) A-11

the regiment would attack south as well as due east. The 3d Battalion was given a similar emergency order and told to maintain one company along their zone, to cross the remainder of the battalion in the 1st Battalion crossing site, and immediately turn south and clear the east bank of the Canal completely.

(46)

By 0300 the entire 1st Battalion was across and by 0430, the 2d Battalion and I and L Companies of the 3d Battalion had made crossings. The remainder of the 3d Battalion were receiving heavy rifle, mortar, and machine gun fire from the vicinity of BREITE, and were encountering difficulty in crossing. By this time artillery was falling in the regimental CP area at RAPEN. (47)

By 0400 the 1st Battalion had taken 40 prisoners and an hour later the battalion was entering the northern outskirts of ICKERN. Later in the morning the battalion saw some bitter fighting and ammunition ran low. The canal had not been bridged as yet and all supplies came up by hand. The situation was somewhat relieved in this Battalion when the medics got a German command car in running order, draped a white sheet on it, so friendly troops would not fire on it, and used it to haul rations and ammunition from the bank of the canal on the return trip after taking back the wounded. (48)

The attack of the 3d Battalion had slowed and part of its left zone had been given to the 2d Battalion. By 1500 it had crossed the second barrier, the EMSCHER CANAL, which ran perpendicular to the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL, and put out of action 12 to 15 machine guns. It was past HAQING HORST by 1630. Company

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(46) Personal statement of Colonel D. B. Smith, 3 February 1950  
(47) A-11  
(48) A-14



K had a severe fight near the Autobahn and saved the battalion some casualties by turning south and cleaning out the Germans there. L Company moved down on the right of K and the two companies had a hard fight for HENRICHENBURG. A platoon of Company K, commanded by 2d Lt. D. L. Smith, going through an underpass saw another platoon coming in from the opposite direction. At first the men thought the other platoon was friendly, but soon saw that it was a German unit. About the same time each platoon yelled to the others to surrender. The enemy started shooting and part of Lt. Smith's platoon flanked the enemy by going around them to the south and putting them in a cross fire. Some of the Germans were killed, others were taken prisoner. (49)

Meanwhile the problem of caring for prisoners was becoming more difficult. By 0950 there were 70 and this figure by 1120 had swollen to 200. Due to the lack of bridging over the canal, none had been evacuated. Regiment contacted division and asked about a ford or a bridge. The G-3 in conversation with the Engineer at 0920 found out that the ford had been started two hours earlier but no explanation was given as to why ladders hadn't been furnished in all the battalion areas, other than a statement that arrangements had been made earlier in the evening. This situation did not improve throughout the day. At 1100 it was learned that the engineers were to bulldoze the bank down but at 1310 Major Dunlop, S-3, was informed that it was impossible to build a ford and that now a bridge was to be started. (50)

The resulting ammunition and medical re-supply challenge

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(49) Personal Statement of Lt. D. L. Smith

(50) A-11

was met to a certain degree by Division artillery liaison planes. Led by Major Edward Wold, Division Artillery Air Officer, the planes landed on an unreconnoitered farm field west of WALTROP. Several round trips were made. On the return trips the more seriously wounded were evacuated. (51)

The 1st Battalion's job of mopping up in ICKERN proceeded slowly because of the large number of enemy troops. The City was invested by 1645. In taking ICKERN, the battalion had moved toward the town with the Autobahn as a right boundary. At the creek near the town's outskirts the battalion stopped and called for a 15 minute artillery barrage on ICKERN. Moving forward, the battalion seized all bridges over the Autobahn except one and shot at the Germans who blew it. The enemy were firing flat trajectory guns from the main road leading into the town from the northeast. Company C was given the mission of knocking these out while the rest of the battalion moved through ICKERN, keeping on the north side of the Autobahn. An underpass was taken in the southeastern sector and a factory was cleared, securing the Autobahn from the east. The remaining job of taking the town was one mainly of clearing houses.

In driving south and east the 2d Battalion had been temporarily halted by the obstacle of the EMSCHER CANAL, but it found a ford at 1645, crossed, and pressed the attack on ICKERN from the west. (52)

By the morning of 5 April, the regiment had firmly consolidated its positions, Company E had been placed in regimental reserve, and it and the regimental command post moved to ICKERN. At 0225 the Division Engineers, now commanded by an infantry

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(51) A-5, p. 35

(52) A-5

colonel, had a bull-dozer ford over the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL in the regimental sector. (53)

#### SUMMARY

To sum up, it can be said that the way had been cleared for elements of the 75th Division to drive south to the RUHR RIVER, isolating DORTMUND and splitting the RUHR POCKET. This was accomplished 13 April. The operation had been a success, and had been carried out against formidable obstacles. The gravelly plateau on which the regiment fought had numerous forests, limited fields of fire. It was interlaced with canals and contained numerous villages, towns, and industrial plants, all capable of conversion into strong points, and furnishing cover for snipers.

Enemy losses were heavy; prisoners taken during the period were well over five hundred, and dead and wounded exceeded this figure. Enemy losses in material, particularly flak-guns, anti-tank guns, tanks, self-propelled weapons, artillery, machine guns, mortars and vehicles were equally costly.

By contrast, the regiment's losses were light. During the period casualties of killed, wounded and missing were under two hundred. Battle losses of materiel were also light. (54)

Highlights of the operation were many. The surprisingly swift advance culminating in the capture of MARL on 31 March set the tempo for a slashing offensive, which the 289th Infantry launched in April. The spectacular drive of Task Force Gearhart to the ZWEIG-DORTMUND-EMS CANAL, the crossing of the Canal, the capture of ICKERN and later the final assault which

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(53) A-11  
(54) A-11

carried the regiment to the RUHR RIVER marked the high spots of a completely successful campaign.

### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

#### 1. FLEXIBILITY OF PLANS

An attack is seldom executed exactly as planned. In crossing the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL when the regimental commander saw that he had a bridgehead in the 1st Battalion sector and that the 3d Battalion was unable to cross, he immediately changed his entire plan of attack. He decided to cross all three battalions at this one point. In doing this, he realized that the Germans would perhaps think the main attack would be made where the Autobahn crossed the canal and at which point the bridge was obviously blown. In recognizing the bridgehead as a weak point in the enemy's line, and in deciding to push the entire regiment across over three wooden ladders with some men carrying heavy weapons, was a conclusion that few leaders would formulate. Yet the decision proved to be sound. It is important to remember that the entire regiment climbed these ladders at the same point and all units were across by daybreak. Obviously, any such operation would have been difficult and hazardous even in daylight hours, and it is hard to conceive anyone including this operation in prepared plans. The enemy, it is believed, was disrupted by the plan to throw everything across, leaving a skeleton force along the line - in this case one company of the 3d Battalion - and then changing the direction of attack after having crossed.

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## 2. SUPPORTING ARMS

The mission of the Division Engineer Battalion is to increase the combat efficiency of the division. To do this the battalion has 977 officers and men, is completely motorized, is armed with M-1 rifles, rocket launchers, and .30 cal. LMGs. It is capable of providing its own security against enemy attacks and is effective when employed as infantry if adequate fire support is provided.

In considering the above, and further considering the amount of bridging and heavy equipment found organic in this battalion, it is believed that the support given the infantry regiments by the engineers during the canal crossings fell miserably below their capabilities and below its usual level of performance.

Assault elements of the 289th Infantry occupied defensive positions on the west bank of the canal on 2 April. Yet it was not until early morning of 5 April, 24 hours after the assault crossings, that a bridge of any sort for vehicles was laid.

The problem of supply and evacuation appeared to be serious because of the inability to get vehicles across. All the wounded had to be hand-carried back across; re-supply of ammunition had to be hand carried. Fortunately this situation was corrected before it seriously impeded the progress of the attack. Aggressive leadership is equally demanded of supporting arms commanders as it is of the infantry commanders.

## 3. FAILURE OF ADJACENT UNITS TO ADVANCE

The failure of the 290th Infantry on the right flank to advance against their objectives resulted in an extended line for the right battalion of the 289th Infantry and permitted an

exposed flank. Also it created a serious gap between the division and the left flank of the 35th Division. Had the enemy realized this and provided he had the necessary reserve forces, a penetration could have been made. As it happened unnecessary casualties were inflicted on units on the flank and the enemy was afforded vantage points of observation whereby he could bring down and adjust fires on our movements. It further necessitated the employment of the division reconnaissance troop to maintain contact during a period when this unit could have been employed usefully in reconnaissance and security missions forward. It took aggressive leadership on the part of the Division Commander to keep this regiment moving abreast of its adjacent units.

#### 4. NIGHT RELIEF OF AN INFANTRY BATTALION

Early during the night of 2-3 April, the 3d Battalion effected a night relief of the 2d Battalion. This relief was completed after a detailed reconnaissance of the sector was made during daylight hours by the 3d Battalion Company Commanders and the Battalion Staff. At this time arrangements were completed to exchange supplies and equipment and this included the transfer of machine-guns and communication equipment, which were on front line positions. The relief was accomplished with a minimum of confusion and apparently unknown to the enemy. It is felt that considering the closeness of the enemy and friendly troops, in this case the exchange of front line equipment materially contributed to the success of the relief and consequently the maintenance of security.

#### 5. MOPPING-UP OPERATIONS

In the aggressive drive by Task Force Gearhart in its motor-

ized dash to the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL, and simultaneous all night attack by the 1st Battalion, it was inevitable that small groups of enemy would be by-passed, and particularly is this true in an attack through a built-up area. This in no way should restrict the advancing units. However, enemy resistance behind the front lines is to be expected and plans should include provisions for eliminating this resistance. In this particular operation the by-passed elements had not been expected nor were they uncovered until the quartering party entered RAPEN to establish the regimental command post. Once discovered the acting regimental commander, Brigadier General Mickle, took steps to have the resistance wiped out by sending out combat patrols from the reserve battalion to make reconnaissance in force.

#### 6. EXPLOITATION OF ENEMY WEARNESES

It became apparent after the initial attack that the enemy was offering only token resistance and further that he would not make a definite stand until he had withdrawn sufficiently to reorganize and to where he could establish an advantageous defensive position. Upon meeting slight opposition, the decision was made to motorize a task force and make a bold, aggressive thrust. This proved highly successful in that the force drove nearly nine miles to the Canal site with no determined opposition.

#### 7. INTELLIGENCE

Every means available must be utilized in securing and interpreting information of the enemy, his positions, and the terrain over which an attack is to advance. Maps used by the

regiment and division in the operation of crossing the DORTMUND-EMS CANAL failed to disclose the formidable, twenty foot perpendicular wall on the east bank of the Canal. This lack of information certainly delayed the crossing and in part contributed to the lack of planning in providing equipment to cross and scale the barrier. Had timely aerial reconnaissance of the area been flown, it is believed that aerial photos would have indicated that the wall was there.

### LESSONS

1. In order to achieve success with minimum losses in personnel and equipment, operational plans must include a maximum of flexibility.
2. Supporting arms to infantry in combat must, through aggressive leadership on the part of their commanders, fulfill their capabilities to the utmost in order to increase combat efficiency and ensure success.
3. Attacking units must energetically push forward in their zones to prevent a gap in the lines, whereby the enemy can counterattack on an exposed flank or subject the adjacent units to flanking fires.
4. The night relief of a battalion in contact can be accomplished with a minimum of confusion and with increased secrecy and security when front-line heavy weapons and communication equipment are exchanged.
5. In an aggressive drive by motorized elements through built-up areas, scattered resistance will be by-passed and provisions should be included in the operational planning to eliminate it.



6. When the enemy is offering only token resistance, and indications are that he is weak and will delay on successive positions until he can effect a strong defense, exploitation of this weakness can often be made through bold thrusts by motorized elements.

7. Intelligence, if it is to be of maximum use to assaulting units, must be complete and must be timely.