

Michelin



Opa Working Title

Thorsten Herbes

Foreword

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the Second World War. When I was old enough to realize that he had been a participant, I began to beg my grandfather to tell me stories about the war, often to the dismay of the rest of the family, who'd grown tired of hearing them. I was mesmerized by his descriptions of Russia and awestruck when he showed me his surviving pieces of equipment. Never before had history felt so real, so touchable. I remember playing with his bayonet and searching every drawer in his house, hoping to find another hidden treasure.

As I got older, I began to look at history from a larger perspective, learning about the cause of war, the strategy and the equipment. I built a small library of books and devoured them at every opportunity. I visited every military museum I could find and often dragged many an unwilling participant along with me. Although my fascination with the technology and tactics of war never faded, an additional question began to form in my head – how did the experience of war affect a human being? What did the veterans experience on a personal level and how did it influence my grandfather?

When I left Germany in 1992 to move to the United States, I lost the ability to visit Opa and Oma as often as I'd been used to and our conversations and meetings became more infrequent and precious. The more time passed, the more I realized that we were losing members of the World War II generation daily and with them the personal connection to their past. I took every opportunity I could to preserve Opa's history, taping conversations and taking notes. During a trip to Germany in the fall of 2008, sitting at his kitchen table, listening to his stories, I realized that the end of Opa's military experience occurred during the Battle of the Bulge in Luxembourg, no more than 2 hours' drive away from his home – but that he'd never been back after the war. The following day, my wife and I drove to Luxembourg to explore some of the sites Opa had mentioned and to take some pictures for him. We found villages like Bastendorf and Diekirch, where my wife convinced me to stop at the military museum. At first I didn't want to make her spend a day of our honeymoon looking at tanks, but she was insistent. The museum was amazing and brought back that feeling I had as a kid, when history was real and touchable. I wondered if any of the thousands of artifacts belonged to Opa and was almost expecting to see his picture hanging on the wall at every turn. It was at the museum where we met Roland Gaul and the idea for this project began to take shape in my head. Roland Gaul then gave us directions to Mertzig and asked to stay in touch. We returned home at the end of the day, exhausted – but with a memory card full of images. Almost immediately, Opa started recognizing places and memories returned to him. "I remember it as if it were yesterday," he'd say, almost incredulous. I could almost sense a curiosity in him, a desire to reconnect – but accompanied by fear.

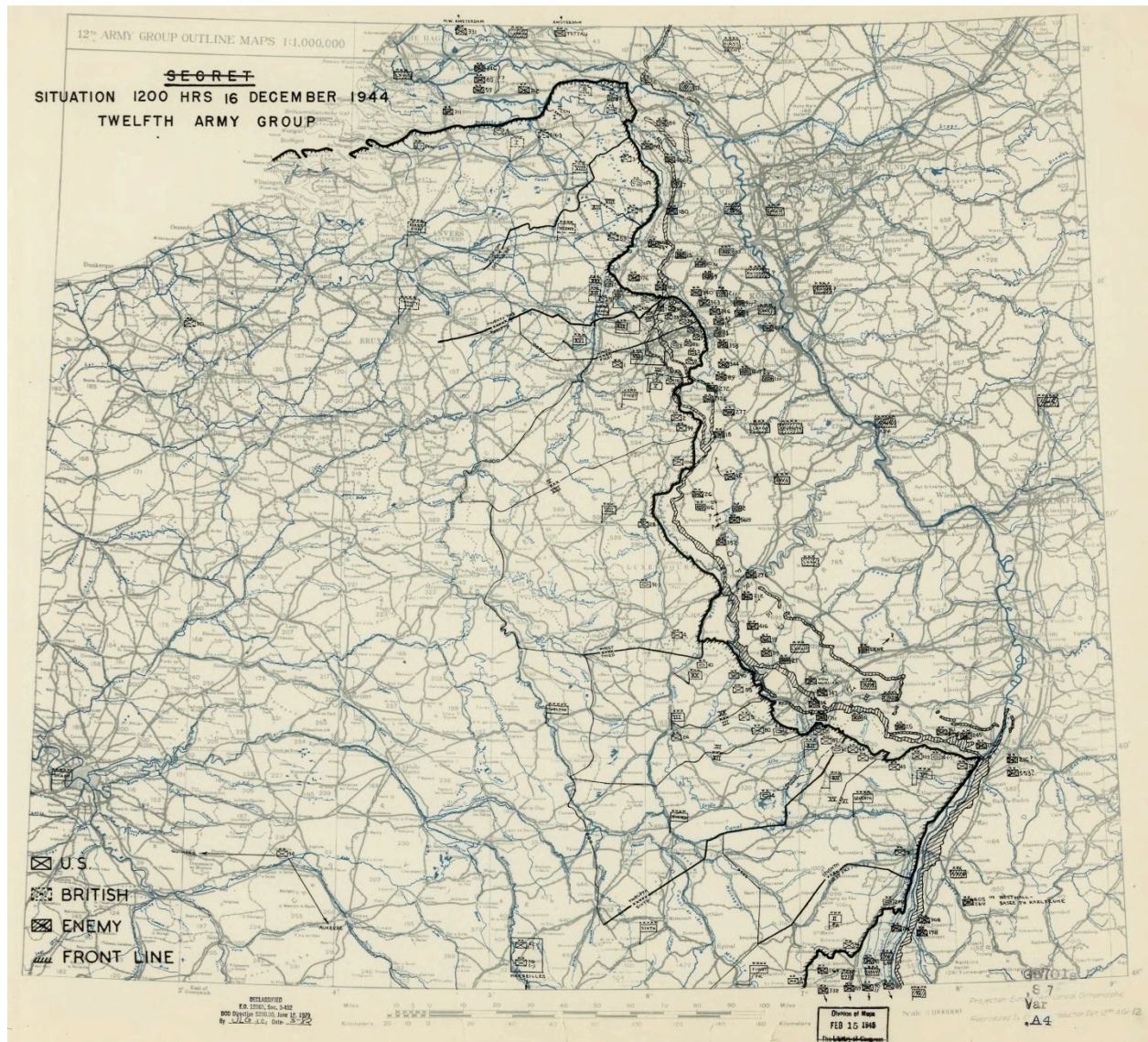
After returning home to Chicago, I continued to research Opa's story, resulting in the following document. Although initially just a hobby research project, it grew into something larger than I could have ever imagined or intended, involving many kind people and culminating with Opa's visit to Mertzig on December 22nd of 2008 - the first time he'd faced his war in over 64 years. He was reluctant to go, seemingly plagued by demons from the past. He returned, hours later, much more at peace than I'd ever seen. This is his story.

Thorsten Herbes, January 2009

Ardennes Offensive, December 1944, 352nd Volksgrenadier Division

Situation, Western Front, December 1944:

By December of 1944, after five long years of war, the Allied Forces had landed in Normandy, successfully broken out, advanced across France and approached the Western borders of Germany.



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Hitler's Reich was being squeezed on two fronts and the Allies were preparing for their final assault into Germany. In a desperate attempt to drive the Allies back, Hitler devised a last-ditch effort to drive back the Allies, code-named *Operation Herbstnebel* (Autumn Mist). Under strict secrecy and radio silence,

¹ <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/maps/wwii/essay1a.html>

the Germans assembled two Panzer and two Infantry Armies as part of Army Group B in order to drive a wedge between the British-Canadian forces in the North and US forces in the South while capturing the important supply port of Antwerp, Belgium, after crossing the Meuse River. ² Recapturing the port (which had only been opened by the Allies on 28 November) would deal a decisive blow to the Allied supply lines and ability to wage offensive operations against Germany.



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² Collins, Atlas of the Second World War, Page 160

³ Arnold, p 27

Much of the history of what was to become “The Battle of the Bulge” concerns itself with the Northern flank of the German attack and Joachim Peiper’s attack on Bastogne, courageously defended by the 101st Airborne. The aim of this document is to explore the Southern flank of the German attack in the context of the personal experiences of Erich Michely, a member of the 8th Company, 2nd Battalion, 915th Regiment, 352nd *Volksgrenadier* Division – grandfather of the author.

The Southern Flank

Nestled between Belgium to the North and West, France to the South and Germany to the East, lays the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Founded in 963, it occupies an area slightly smaller than Rhode Island⁴ and had a population of approximately 293,000 in 1945.⁵ Luxembourg’s terrain consists of heavily wooded rolling hills with farm land and villages. By December 1944, Luxembourg had been liberated by the Allies after suffering from German occupation since 1940. Although the war continued to the east, life in the country was slowly returning to normal. No one suspected that the *Wehrmacht* would last much longer and the end of the war seemed imminent. By winter of 1944, Luxembourg had become a rest area for weary frontline GI’s as well as a quiet area in which to acclimate newly arrived replacements to the front. The war had become mostly static, with the Siegfried Line on Germany’s western border as the front. To the north, Field Marshal Montgomery’s troops were preparing for their eventual drive into Germany’s industrial heartland while, to the south, General Patton’s Third Army was also attempting to cross the Rhine into Germany.

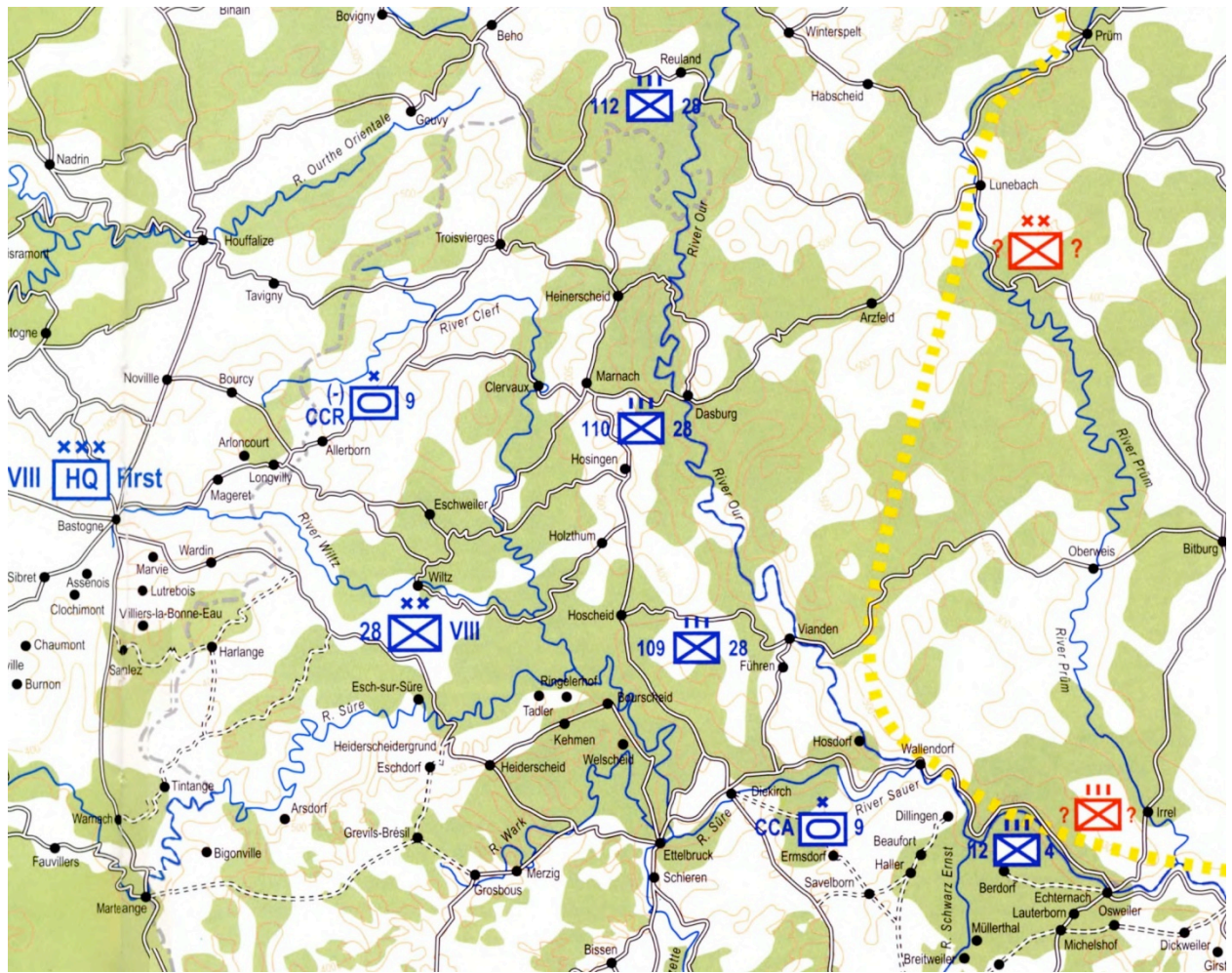


⁴ CIA Fact Book

⁵ www.luxembourg.co/uk

The Americans

Headquartered in Bastogne, the US VIII Corps was responsible for the section of the line extending from southern Belgium to the southern end of Luxembourg. This sector was generally seen as a quiet front, used to recuperate units exhausted from the Huertgen Forest campaign earlier⁶. When *Wehrmacht* troops crossed the *Our* on 16 December, VIII Corps consisted of the 9th Armored Division, 11th Armored Division, 17th Airborne Division, 28th Infantry Division and the 87th Infantry Division, along with several AAA and Engineer units. Opposing the German's 352nd VGD was the 28th Infantry Division, stretched along a 27 mile line from St. Vith in the north to Vianden in the south, with the 112th Regiment on the left (northern) flank, the 110th in the center and the 109th Regiment on the southern flank.



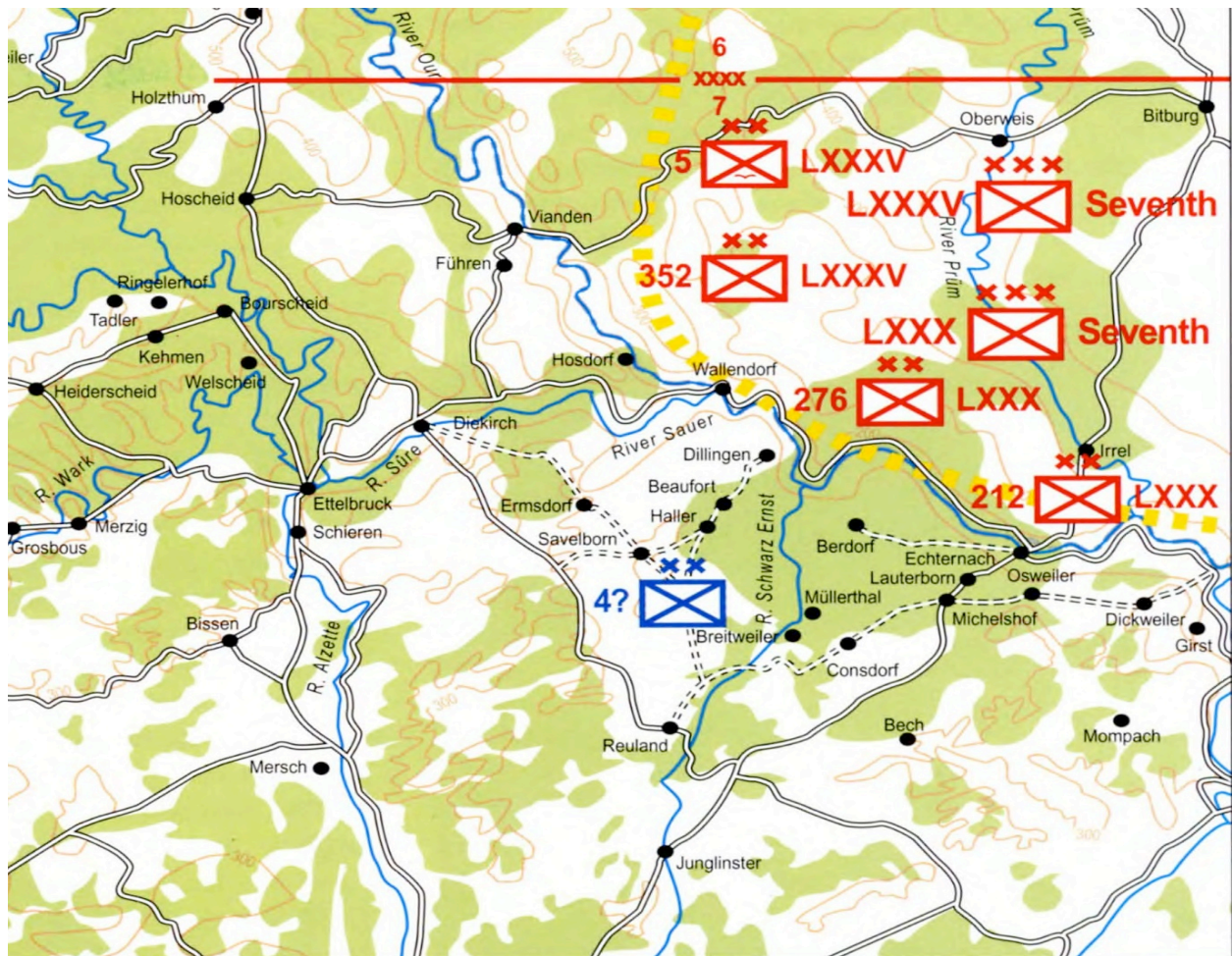
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⁶ Fossum, page 5

⁷ Quarrie, Volume 13, Page 11

The Germans

Under the command of Field Marshall Model, German Army Group B was comprised of the 15th Army, 5th and 6th Panzer Armies as well as the 7th Army. Tasked with conducting the attack, Army Group B covered a front from northern Belgium to southern Luxembourg, with 7th Army, under the command of General Erich Brandenberger responsible for the southern thrust into Luxembourg and toward the river *Meuse*.⁸ Its main objective was not only to reach the *Meuse* but also protect the operation's southern flank while tying up Allied reserve forces in Luxembourg. Although 7th Army contained several units (4 total divisions – 3 *Volksgranadier* and 1 *Fallschirmjäger*), the focus of this document will remain with the 352nd VGD, of which Michely's 915th Regiment was a part.



⁸ Collins, page 161

⁹ Quarrie, Volume 12, Page 9

History of the 352nd Volksgrenadier Division

The 352nd Volksgrenadier Division was formed on 21 September 1944 in Flensburg, Germany out of remnants of the 352nd Infantry Division, which was almost completely annihilated in July of 1944 during defensive operations in Normandy, France. Units of the 352nd Infantry Division were augmented by the 581st Volksgrenadier Division, which was being formed as part of the 32nd wave.¹⁰ The division consisted of navy and air force troops, veterans of the 352nd as well as veteran NCO's from the Eastern front (such as Michely). Most of the NCO cadre was made up from remnants of the 389th Division, which was destroyed on the Eastern Front at Cherkassy (where Michely was wounded). The 389th also participated in the battle for Stalingrad during the winter of 1942-1943 (of which Michely was also a part). By the time it was declared fit for combat, the 352nd Volksgrenadier Division consisted of approximately 13,000 men, reflecting 98% of specified strength.¹¹

According to *Generalmajor* Erich Otto Schmidt, Commander of the 352nd VGD: "I took over the division in October 1944. We continued to train until 15 November when we were moved to Bitburg, in the Eifel region, where we continued to train and supplement our equipment. Near the end of November, the division took over a section of the *Westwall* between Vianden and Echternach. 48 hours prior to the attack on 16 December, the division was led to its jumping off points between Roth and Wallendorf."¹² *Generalmajor* Schmidt continues: "The division was formed and equipped according to standard specifications for Volksgrenadier divisions, with *Ersatz* troops drawn from navy and air force ranks."¹³ Prior to the attack, Schmidt rated his troops:¹⁴

Enlisted Personnel: Age 23 -30, not enough training, no land or combat experience, not seen action. Full strength.

Non-commissioned Officers: Mostly navy troops, most lack front experience. 75% strength.

Officers: Varied front experience. Full strength.

Infantry: Good fighting spirit in Regiments 914 and 915. Lacks training and front experience.

Equipment: Mostly complete. Missing 35% of radios for fire direction, 30% of assault guns, 25% assault rifles.

In general terms, the 352nd VGD was well equipped for 1944 but lacked in experience. The 352nd was made up of three infantry regiments (914th, 915th and 916th), an artillery regiment, one cavalry battalion, one anti-tank battalion as well as anti-aircraft, engineer and signal battalions. At full strength, the division made up about 13,000 troops.¹⁵ Unteroffizier Erich Michely, veteran of two tours of duty on the

¹⁰ <http://spearhead1944.com/gerpg/ger352.htm>

¹¹ Gaul, Volume I, Page 22

¹² Schmidt, page 2

¹³ Infantry Regiments 914 and 915 were formed from navy troops, while 916 was drawn from air force personnel. See Appendix for detailed listing.

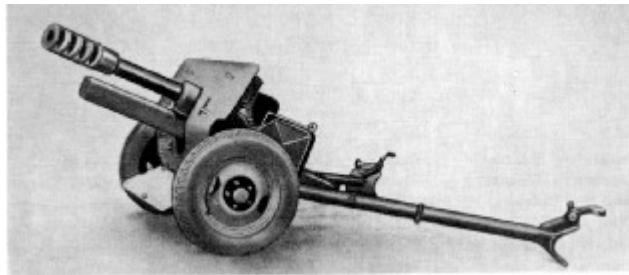
¹⁴ Schmidt, page 4

¹⁵ See Appendix II for detail

Eastern Front, was assigned to 8th (Heavy) Company, 2nd Battalion, 915th *Volksgranadier* Regiment, as a light infantry gun crew leader.

The 915th Regimental History up to 16 December 1944

After being wounded near Cherkassy, Russia, in March of 1944, Michely was transferred to a hospital in Lebach, Germany, near his home. After months of recovery and a brief period of leave, Michely received orders to report to the 915th *Volksgranadier* Regiment near the town of Flensburg in northern Germany. It was during exercises in Flensburg that Michely was trained on using the 75mm infantry gun he would later lead during the Ardennes Offensive. The 75 mm guns were of a brand new variety, likely the 7.5 cm *leichtes Infanterie Geschütz 42*. These guns were not mechanized, but drawn by horses and were meant to be used as both light artillery as well as anti-tank weapons.



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Each gun had a team of 4 horses and a crew of 7. “The names of the men on my crew were Otto, Kirnbauer, Abendrot and Kraft. I don’t recall the rest of them.” As a gun crew leader, Unteroffizier Michely was responsible for directing the gun’s fire and the welfare of his men and horses. “After recovering from the gut shot wound at Cherkassy, I was able to convince the doctors that I was no longer suited for service as an infantry soldier, as I had been in Russia. Personally, I simply didn’t think I’d survive another turn as an infantry man.” He was given special training and binoculars to locate targets and estimate range. Leading an artillery gun was an entirely new trade for Michely, who had been a machine gunner in an infantry unit during his time in Russia. For the first time he was also issued with the *Wehrmacht’s* new assault rifle, the MP44.



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¹⁶ Lexikon Der Wehrmacht

“Our regiment was spread out over several villages near Flensburg and we had little interaction with the other companies. I only knew the men in my crew as well as the other gun crew leaders, with whom I shared briefings.¹⁸ When we finished training in November, we assembled on some sort of parade ground and were loaded on trains and began to head east. I wasn’t excited about the prospect of heading back to Russia and didn’t think I would make it home alive from a third tour”, recalled Michely. “We had made it to Poland but, sometime during the night, we must have changed direction. I was sleeping and didn’t notice the change until one of the men screamed ‘Mannheim, we’re in Mannheim!’ I asked him if he’d lost his marbles before we’d even reached the front, but he insisted that we were indeed in western Germany since he was from the area. Much to my surprise, he turned out to be correct.” The train continued to the southwest, at one point even coming close to Michely’s home town. “I asked the chief if I could go and visit my family for a few hours. He laughed and said ‘Michel¹⁹, if I let you go, you’ll never come back.’”²⁰ The train continued its journey to the West, along a route taking the men through the ancient city of Trier to Bitburg until finally disembarking at Densborn, a mere 35 kilometers from the *Our* river.

By 26 November, the 352nd VGD had arrived in its assigned sector and began to occupy a portion of the *Westwall* near the Bauler – Echternach security zone, with division headquarters in Bettingen.²¹ Michely’s company, after de-training at Densborn, continued on foot toward its assigned sector, near the town of Seimerich, resting in the small village of Feilsdorf for several days. The time in the ready area was spent with continued training as well as preparing positions for what appeared to be a defensive winter position along the *Our*. Michely’s men were unaware of any looming offensive. “We began working on a fortified position for ourselves along with the help of some Russian prisoners of war, who were marched in to assist us daily. Special care was taken to ‘winter-proof’ our dugout as much as possible, since we figured we’d be spending our time here defending the *Our* over the next few months.” Michely also recalls assisting a local farmer with his late-fall apple harvest. “We used our wagons to help him load and move the apples, most of which were on the ground by now. In return for our assistance, we worked out a deal with the farmer where he was going to give us a share of the apple *Schnapps* he was going to distill, so we could fortify ourselves for the winter too.”²²

Although the average soldier in Michely’s unit appeared to have little clue as to their mission, signs were beginning to point to something big. “There were several occurrences, prior to the Division being informed of the planned offensive, which pointed to an impending large-scale combat action – but it was unclear who would be conducting the attack”, recalls Schmidt. “It was seemingly a miracle to all

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sturmgewehr_44.jpg

¹⁸ Author’s note: There were 4 *Je. I.G. 42* 75 mm infantry guns in the company. Each gun was led by a non-commissioned officer (*Unteroffiziere* Grau, Lemke, Mizera and Michely).

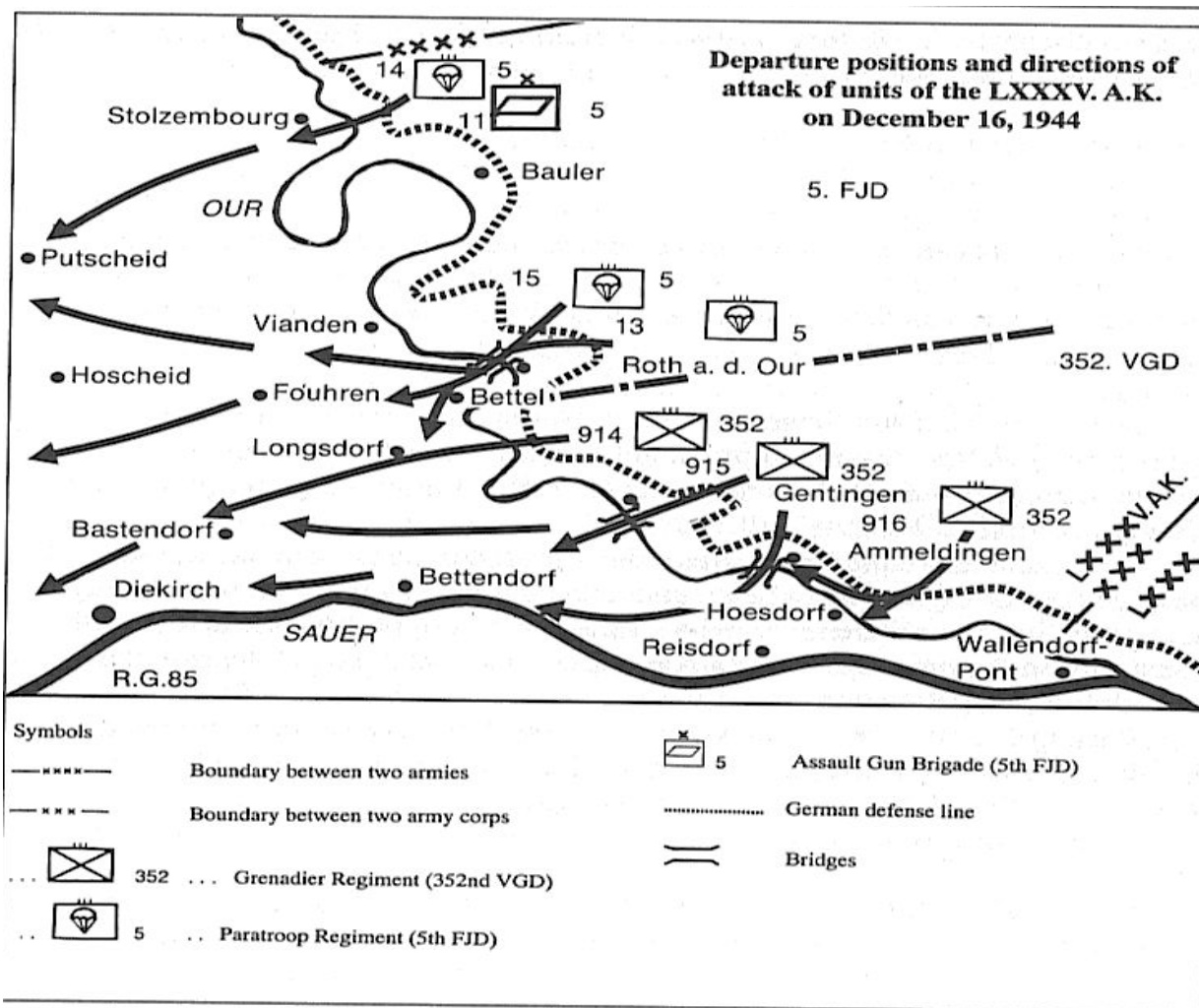
¹⁹ Erich Michely’s nickname

²⁰ Although Michely had thought about deserting, he knew that his family would be punished for his actions – a common practice near war’s end. He did, however, promise his father to attempt to go into captivity as soon as it was safely possible.

²¹ Gaul, Volume I, page 52

²² Michely’s fondness for apples and *Schnapps* continues to this day

those involved that the Americans did not discover the offensive.²³ Schmidt himself was informed of the attack in early December. The division was now tasked with several preparatory actions for the offensive, including the transport and delivery of all ammunition and bridge building materials inside the 5 kilometer restricted area within its assigned sector. This task was to be conducted at night and by means of horses.²⁴ Additionally, pathways were marked for troop movements, artillery positions prepared and supplies were deposited and camouflaged, intended for the first wave of attack. The troops themselves weren't told of their mission until 6 hours before the attack was to begin.²⁵ The 915th regiment was to cross the river *Our* near Gentingen, the 916th near Ammeldingen and the 914th was to be in reserve.



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²³ Schmidt, Project 22, page 6

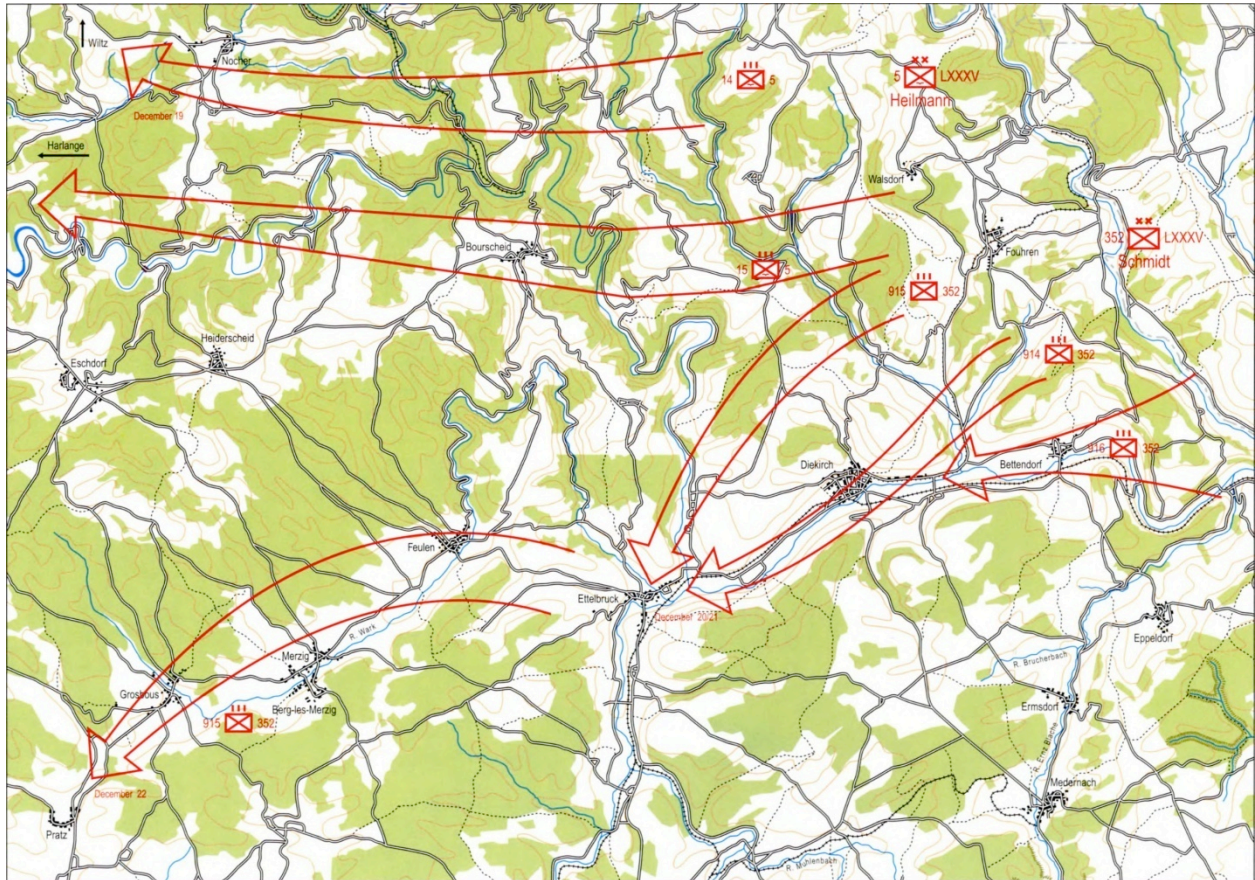
²⁴ Schmidt, Project 22, page 7

²⁵ Schmidt, Project 22, page 7

²⁶ Gaul, Volume I, page 53

The Battle Begins

16 December, 1944



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At 0530 HRS, German artillery opened up along the entire 352nd sector, catching the Americans by complete surprise. Roland Gaul describes the initial barrage in his book: “The actual ‘firestorm’ was to begin at 5:30 AM from all weapons on the whole attack front (Monschau to Echternach) and consist of three waves of 10 minutes each; only after that should the specific firing missions be carried out.”²⁸ *Generalmajor* Schmidt reports: “352nd VGD was ordered to cross the river *Our* on 16 December at 0530 HRS between Roth and Wallendorf and move to take the (river *Sauer*, author) crossings at Eitelbruck and Diekirch as quickly as possible...The attacking troops were instructed to bypass enemy strong points and advance to the *Sauer* quickly.”²⁹

On the opposite bank of the *Our*, American GI’s were dazed by the opening barrage but quickly began to organize a defense. Captain Embert Fossum, in charge of L Company, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th US Division, was positioned directly across the river from the 916th VGR. Years later, Fossum recalled:

²⁷ Quarrie, Volume 12, page 19

²⁸ Gaul, Volume I, page 50

²⁹ Schmidt, Project 22, page 8

“Company L, 109th Infantry, was the southernmost unit of the 28th Division when the German attack hit. Although the front was too wide to be adequately defended – approximately two miles – the ground it occupied was admirably adaptable for a defensive situation...During the [German’s] initial artillery preparation, which aroused the company at 0600 HRS on the 16th, the house where L company’s command post was located received a direct hit from both conventional artillery and *Nebelwerfer* rockets, which set it afire.”³⁰ At dawn, the first waves of German infantry began assaulting L Company’s foxholes on the western shore of the river, but were unsuccessful in dislodging the Americans.

Following its orders to bypass enemy strong points, advance units of the 915th crossed the *Our* by means of rafts, rubber boats, floats and footbridges.³¹ The troops moved quickly and by nightfall had reached a wooded area near Bastendorf. Historian Bruce Quarrie describes the 915th’s move: “Screened by the mist which aided all of Seventh Armees assault companies, the leading two battalions fortuitously struck at the junction between the US 109th Regiment’s 2nd Battalion, whose Company E was in Fuhren, and the 3rd Battalion’s Company I deployed in front of Bettendorf. There was a 2,000-yard gap in between the American positions which the *Volksgradiers* exploited, advancing unopposed through Longsdorf and Tandel.”³² The town of Bastendorf, as well as Longsdorf and Tandel remained in enemy hands.³³ When asked about his role during the first few hours of the offensive, Michely struggles to remember specifics, but it is unlikely that his company was part of the first wave across the *Our*. At Gentingen, the 352nd Engineer Battalion was working feverishly on completing a makeshift bridge across the river, capable of transporting the division’s heavy weapons, artillery and supplies.

17 December

By the next morning, the 915th still remained strung out, with its advance elements near Bastendorf and its heavy weapons, including Michely’s company, still awaiting the completion of the makeshift bridge across the *Our*. The regiment also suffered its first setback, losing its regimental commander, *Oberstleutnant* Johannes Drawe to a wound near Tandel. According to his personal diary, Drawe recalls: “Sunday, 12/16/1944: 0430 HRS: went on duty. 0530: Began to fire. 0900; Personally crossed over and went on to Longsdorf. In Longsdorf 1300, command post set up. During the day directed following units; artillery commander and VB had no radio contact with firing batteries until 1800...Sunday, 12/17/1944: No supplies, no reports; 916 also in town. Constant medium-caliber harassing fire. Reconnaissance fails. 0730 commenced to move command post to Tandel. 0830: fighting in Tandel. Around 0900 wounded.”³⁴ The regiment now also faced stiffening resistance and was unable to clear Bastendorf, portions of Tandel and Longsdorf until later in the day, when it was taken by the division’s reserve regiment, the 914th.³⁵ By evening, engineers finally completed the bridge at Gentingen and heavy weapons and vehicles were allowed to cross. Although he does not recall, it is likely that Michely’s unit was among those to use the bridge at this time.

³⁰ Fossum, page 10

³¹ Gaul, Volume I, 55

³² Quarrie, page 34

³³ Schmidt, Project 22, page 9

³⁴ Gaul, Volume I, page 77

³⁵ Schmidt, Project 22, page 10

Meanwhile, units of the 109th Infantry continued to resist the attack, but were beginning to feel the effect of their losses. "...with an abundance of artillery support, L Company managed to beat back every attack [but] all of this was not done without considerable loss, both killed and wounded. And on the 17th all available manpower, including the company's kitchen personnel, was brought up and put in the line."³⁶ Reinforced in this manner, Company L continued to hold its position along the heights overlooking the *Our*, determined to slow the progress of the 916th and direct artillery fire on the river crossings.

Elsewhere, the remainder of the 109th Regiment was engaged in firefights all along its sector, stalling the attack but sustaining heavy losses.

18 December

As the advance troops of the 915th continued to wait near Bastendorf, Michely and his men made steady progress toward them. "We often moved cross-country, following the infantry and providing fire support where needed. I think we were also afraid to stay on the roads for too long, for fear of American [P-38] Lightnings." Hindered by the rough terrain, the men were often forced to assist the horses in moving the guns. Many of the details of 8/915 route and events along the way have long left Michely's memory, but several anecdotal stories remain. "The infantry at the front of the column needed artillery support and we had to get our guns up the hill to help them. The hill was so steep that we had to turn the guns around, with their barrels facing forward, hook all the horses to one gun at a time and push it up the slope ourselves. Eventually, we managed to get all four of them up the hill." Michely continues: "I believe it was near Tandel where we came across two US tanks, unaware of our presence. We were looking down at them from an elevated position and our guns knocked both of them out. I don't recall if any of the crew managed to get out."³⁷ Given the horse-drawn means of transportation, Michely's company always seemed to lag behind the advance infantry troops and thus avoided much of the combat they faced. "We maybe fired a dozen rounds or so throughout the entire Ardennes campaign."

Entering the third day, the German attack was beginning to gain ground and force the American 109th to fall back. 1st and 3rd Battalion (Companies A and K) linked up and organized along the high ground south of Longsdorf, where K Company continued to face heavy attacks, resulting in the loss of an entire platoon to captivity. Company A, supported by one platoon of armor, attempted to fight its way into Führen to relieve Company E, 2nd Battalion, only to find the town empty and void of friendly troops and the command post burned to the ground.³⁸

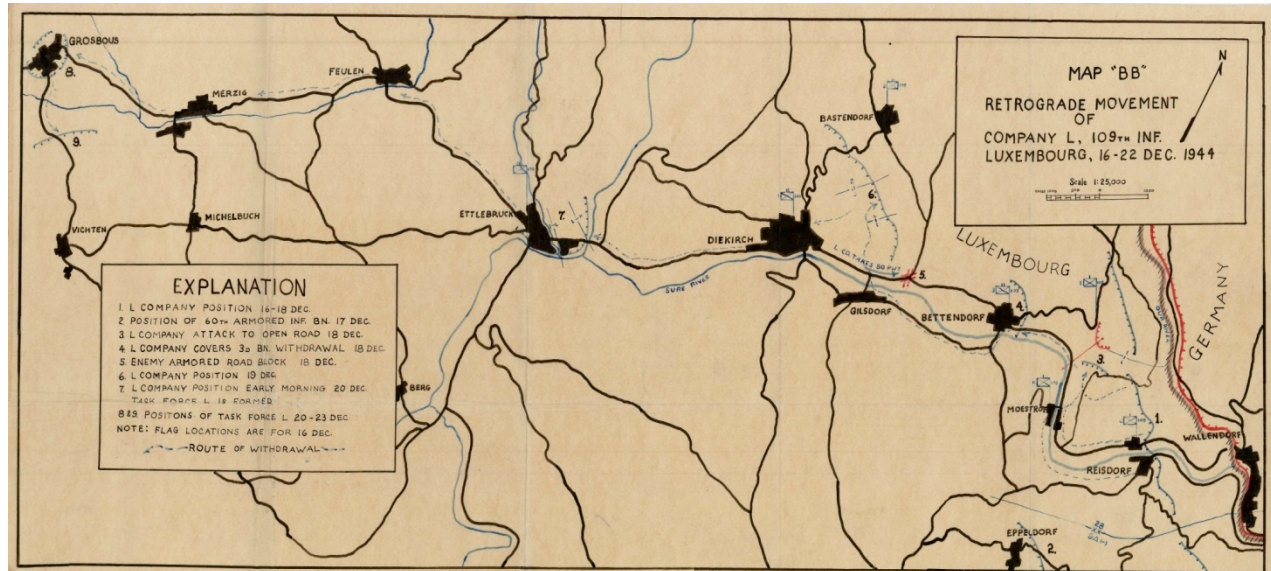
Company L was facing similar setbacks. "Shortly after noon on the third day, 18 December, the company was ordered, via [radio] to fall back to Bettendorf, the location of 3rd Battalion headquarters. This was accomplished with considerable difficulty and some casualties, as a limited penetration in I

³⁶ Fossum, page 11

³⁷ The author has been unable to confirm the loss of two tanks near Tandel throughout his research, but believes the story to be true.

³⁸ 109th Infantry Regiment December 1944 AAR, page 5

Company's sector to the north enabled the enemy to cover the road back with automatic weapons fire."³⁹ The company now took up defensive positions around Bettendorf, allowing the rest of the battalion to slip to the rear under cover of darkness to join the rest of the regiment in a newly selected defensive position on the high ground north and east of Diekirch.⁴⁰



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19 December

Throughout the night, L Company fell back to Diekirch as well, following the remainder of the battalion along the same route, one platoon at a time. The last group to leave Bettendorf assisted members of Company A, 103rd Engineer Combat Battalion to blow both bridges over the Sauer after crossing.⁴²

Meanwhile, after three days of continued movement, German units finally managed to link up with the 915th near Bastendorf. "The division regained the ability to operate as a whole after linking with the 915th Regiment," according to *Generalmajor* Schmidt.⁴³ It is likely that Michely's unit had now joined the rest of his battalion in Bastendorf., where he had his first close call of the offensive. "I remember being in front of the church in Bastendorf. The church had a large wooden entrance door, flanked by two walls on either side. As a front-soldier, one develops a certain sense, perhaps instinct, and often acts without thinking. By this time, I was able to tell if incoming artillery fire was going to be close or land at a safe distance. I heard the round come in and instinctively jumped into the entrance of the church, even though the protection of the flanking walls was closer. The round detonated behind the wall,

³⁹ Fossum, page 11

⁴⁰ Fossum, page 11

⁴¹ Map courtesy of Captain Embert Fossum,

www.infantry.army.mil/monographs/content/maps/StudentMaps/FossumEmbert%20A/Map%20BB.jpg

⁴² Fossum, page 12

⁴³ Schmidt, Project 22, page 11

where it would have surely killed me, had I been there. To this day, I don't know why I chose the door for cover instead."⁴⁴

Having finally regained its combat-effectiveness, the 915th quickly joined in the attack on the vital town of Diekirch, 2 miles south of Bastendorf. Company L, 109th Infantry Regiment, along with 1st and 2nd Battalion, had by now formed a defensive perimeter around the town, determined to stop the German advance. "The new position near Diekirch was held through the next day, 19 December, but was subjected to repeated attacks of both infantry and tanks. In a limited counter attack, directed toward the German road block which had cut the main road back [from Bettendorf], L Company's first platoon captured 81 prisoners. In spite of these successes, by nightfall it was apparent that the regiment's new mission of covering the flank of CCA, 9th Armored Division, could not be accomplished from this position, and another withdrawal to the south bank of the river [Sauer] at Ettelbruck was ordered." This movement began after dark at a cost of 30 casualties from German artillery fire. When the company finally crossed the river, the bridge was blown and the night was spent digging in along the river bank through the town.⁴⁵

When Michely's company entered Diekirch, many of the men, poorly equipped for cold weather and hungry from lack of supplies, helped themselves to whatever they could find in the abandoned US positions. "The Americans threw more food away than we were issued," recalls Michely. "We ate like kings from the rations we found in their supply depots and fighting positions." Michely always appeared to be on the lookout for food, something perhaps learned from the misery of the Russian front. "I could smell freshly baked bread as we entered some of the houses and knew that it was unlikely that anyone would bake bread without also having some meat nearby. Being a farm boy myself, I decided to take a look around, along with my buddy, *Obergefreiter* Abendrot." Contemporary Luxembourg homes often had a large chimney, which would form the centerpiece of the kitchen. Not only was it used for cooking and heating, but also for storage and slow smoking of cured meats, such as ham and sausages. "I decided to climb up into the chimney and found it to be 'loaded' with meat. The younger, or 'green' meat would typically be lower while the finished product would be higher up. As I climbed up higher, I must have knocked an entire green ham off its hook, because I heard a loud thump, followed by a scream. When I looked down, I saw Abendrot holding his head, where the ham had obviously made its impact. Nonetheless, despite the near loss of a comrade due to a falling piece meat, we managed to 'liberate' an entire ham and some sausages, along with a crate of eggs."

While Michely's abilities as a scrounger kept his men well fed, they also exposed the polar opposites of an old-salt front soldier and a newly commissioned officer. *Leutnant* Clement was assigned to Michely's infantry gun platoon as a forward observer and was fresh out of officer's school. On several occasions, he and Michely had minor disagreements, typically resulting from Michely's perceived lax sense of discipline. Despite being an instinctively proficient combat soldier, Michely never excelled at barracks-style discipline. After 'liberating' the ham and eggs, Michely's gun and carriage looked more like a

⁴⁴ It was this story which sparked the entire research project for the author. After hearing it for the first time in September 2008, the author decided to drive to Bastendorf to take pictures of the church and find out if any shell damage remained. As it turned out, a new church was built in 1948, replacing the old one.

⁴⁵ Fossum, page 13

butcher shop than a combat weapon, with sausages hanging from the gun barrel. “Clement noticed our assortment of meats and chewed us out, asking how we expected to fight a war in such conditions. He ordered us to throw away the food and to make sure we were combat-ready.” Being the old-salt, Michely instructed one of his men to trail behind as he and the rest of the soldiers unloaded their bounty into the ditch. Thanks to his plan, the trailing soldier managed to gather much of the loot after the lieutenant had left. “Later that night, we fried up some eggs and ham to eat. The delicious smell must have attracted the lieutenant, because he came by and asked what we were doing – and then asked us if he could have some of our meal.”

The quest for a full stomach continues throughout Michely’s anecdotes. On another occasion, his men pulled into a small patch of woods to rest. Hungry and tired, Abendrot immediately began to fry up some of his eggs, while Michely and the rest of the men dug foxholes for themselves, in case of enemy artillery fire. “All of a sudden, incoming rounds started falling around us and I made a leap toward my foxhole – only to find it already occupied by Abendrot, who was also holding his pan of eggs. I had no choice but to climb in on top of him!” According to Michely, both men, and more importantly, their eggs, survived the barrage.

Unbeknownst to the Germans, 19 December also marked the day on which the expected US counterattack began to take shape. Commanded by General Patton, US Third Army, consisting of two Army Corps (III and XII) had managed to change its direction of movement from due east to due north and was beginning to reach its forward assembly areas near Luxembourg city, less than 20 miles away. The movement was the result of a meeting of General Eisenhower’s senior leadership in Verdun on the morning of the 18th.⁴⁶ On a collision course with the 352nd VGD was the US 80th Division, commanded by General McBride. At dawn on the 19th, the 80th Infantry Division had started for Luxembourg City. Company L, 319th Infantry Regiment mounted 2 ½ ton trucks near Hoelling, France at 1400 HRS and marched approximately three miles to a regimental convoy staging area, where serials are formed for the motor march to Luxembourg. Departure for the “Grand Duchy” commences at 2000 HRS with the entire regiment moving out en masse.⁴⁷ Similar movements are simultaneously occurring across the remainder of the division’s regiments. T/5 John Balas, member of L Company’s HQ recalls the ride: “We were told that there was some kind of breakthrough up north, issued a blanket a piece and loaded on trucks. This turned out to be ‘The Bulge’. We started from a rainy somewhat autumn [sic] day to a blinding snowstorm at the end of the trip. As we mounted up we were told not to get off the trucks, period; if we had to go to the bathroom, it was to be off the tailgate of the truck. No stopping for anything. That was the most miserable ride I ever had.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Quarrie, Volume 13, page 16

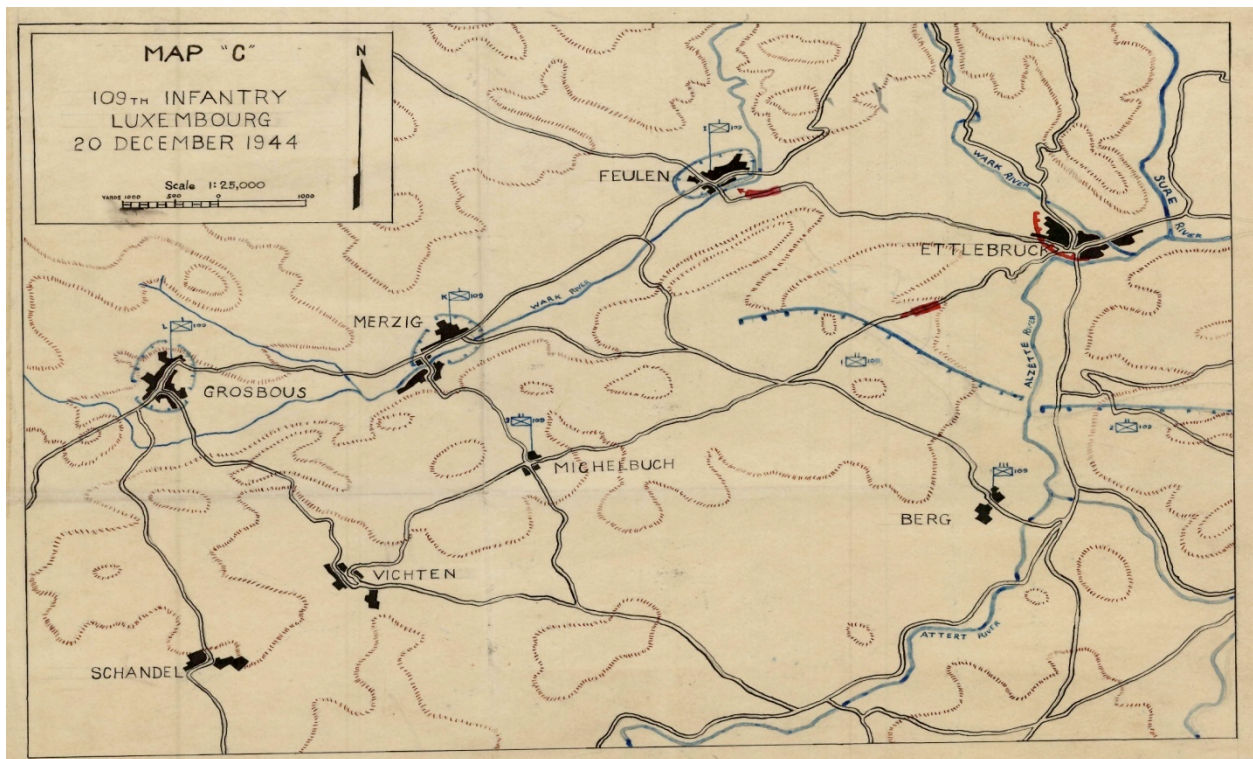
⁴⁷ Krehbiel, page 111

⁴⁸ Krehbiel, page 111

20 December

Unaware of the American reinforcements, the mission of the 352nd VGD was now to take possession of the river crossings at Ettelbruck, having already captured Diekirch. Upon taking possession of Diekirch, the left flank of the German attacking units discovered its bridge only to be damaged, not destroyed, allowing both infantry and heavy weapons to cross. It was decided to take advantage of this situation and use the 916th to cross the river *Sauer* in an effort to attack the strongly defended town of Ettelbruck from behind.⁴⁹

By now, realizing the dangerous nature of its unprotected left flank, the 28th US Division commander ordered the 109th Regiment to roll back with the 9th Armored. After pivoting to the south, the 109th had formed a line, generally facing north, at right angles to its original position, on the high ground south of Ettelbruck.⁵⁰ 3rd Battalion's task is to cover the left flank of this line and is broken into three units, which were to be positioned at major road junctions to the west of this line. I Company is reinforced and moved to the village of Feulen. K Company, also reinforced, moves to Mertzig. Battalion headquarters is set up at Michelbuch. L Company is reinforced⁵¹, renamed "Task Force L" and ordered to move 7 miles southwest and occupy the town of Grosbous.⁵²



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⁴⁹ Schmidt, page 11

⁵⁰ Fossum, page 8

⁵¹ See Appendix III

⁵² Fossum, page 13

⁵³ Fossum

Bypassing Ettelbruck, advance units of the 915th began probing attacks on I Company's positions near Feulen almost immediately, while the remainder of the regiment, along with Michely's unit surrounded the town of Ettelbruck. Michely's own position at this time is unclear but is likely on the high ground to the north of the town, as his platoon's mission was to provide artillery support to the units attacking Ettelbruck.

21 December

Continuing its attacks on Ettelbruck, the 352nd VDG was finally able to capture the town, but found the bridge over the *Sauer* destroyed. According to *Generalmajor* Schmidt, the bridge was quickly repaired and the division's infantry regiments are brought across and order to move out to their next objectives the following morning. The orders were as follows: 915th to move on Bettborn along the Feulen – Mertzig axis, 914th to move to Usseldingen along Michelbuch – Vichten axis and 916th to move due south.⁵⁴

At around 1000 HRS, 1st Battalion, while fighting off several probing German attacks, managed to capture a German officer who carried an operational map outlining the mission of the 352nd and providing the Americans with valuable intelligence.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, I Company continued to defend Feulen but was forced to withdraw, opening the road to Mertzig. The company retreated to the south-west, occupying the wooded heights running parallel to the road, tying in with 1st Battalion on the right and 3rd Battalion's K Company on the left. Taking advantage of the open road, elements of the 915th, consisting of infantry and armor, pressed on against Mertzig and forced K Company to retreat to the south, astride the road to Michelbuch.⁵⁶ At 2100 HRS, a scouting patrol from the 915th advanced as far as the outskirts of Grosbous, 2 miles west of Mertzig, where it was met by Task Force L and repulsed, resulting in 31 dead.⁵⁷ By nightfall, the 915th was now firmly in control of Mertzig, but unable to take Grosbous. Its heavy weapons and trains remained behind, ready to join them the following morning.⁵⁸

Continuing its move to the north, the US 80th Division now began to arrive in the area. Lieutenant Colonel Elliot Heston, commanding officer of the 3rd Battalion, 319th Infantry reported: "On the morning of the 21st, the battalion received orders to move to Brouch, about 16 kilometers northwest of the city of Luxembourg. The high ground in the vicinity of Brouch and Buschdorf was occupied, with the battalion defending to the north. During the night of the 21st orders were received to attack to the north at dawn the next morning until contact was made with the enemy, which was expected to be in the vicinity of Mertzig."⁵⁹ The 319th would pass through the lines of Colonel Rudder's 109th Regiment

⁵⁴ Schmidt, Project 22, page 11

⁵⁵ 109th Infantry Regiment, AAR, page 7

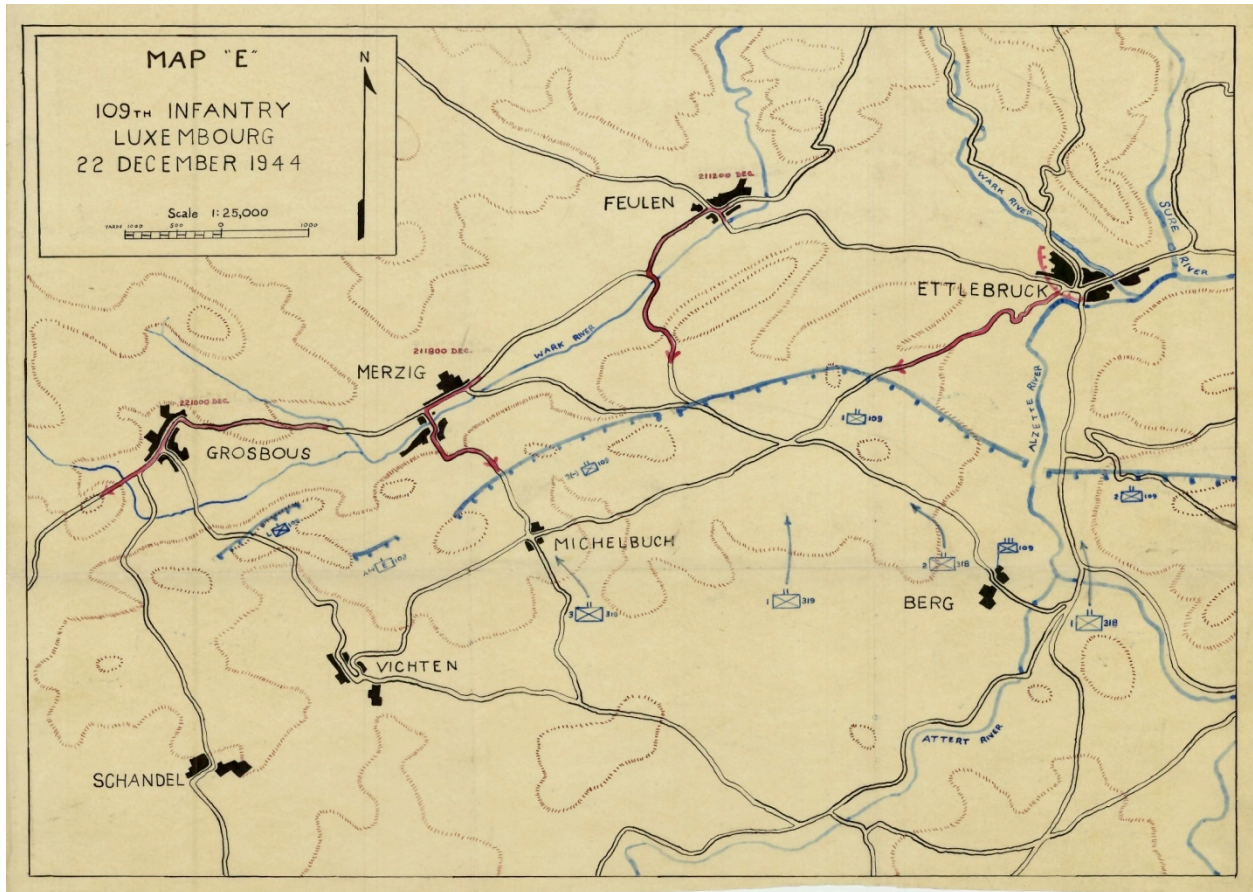
⁵⁶ Fossum, page 26

⁵⁷ Fossum, page 26

⁵⁸ See Appendix IV

⁵⁹ 319th AAR, pp. 1-2

and relieve the tired troops. CT 319 moved by shuttle to its designated areas and cleared them at 1715 HRS, after which they posted local security and made preparations for the advance.⁶⁰



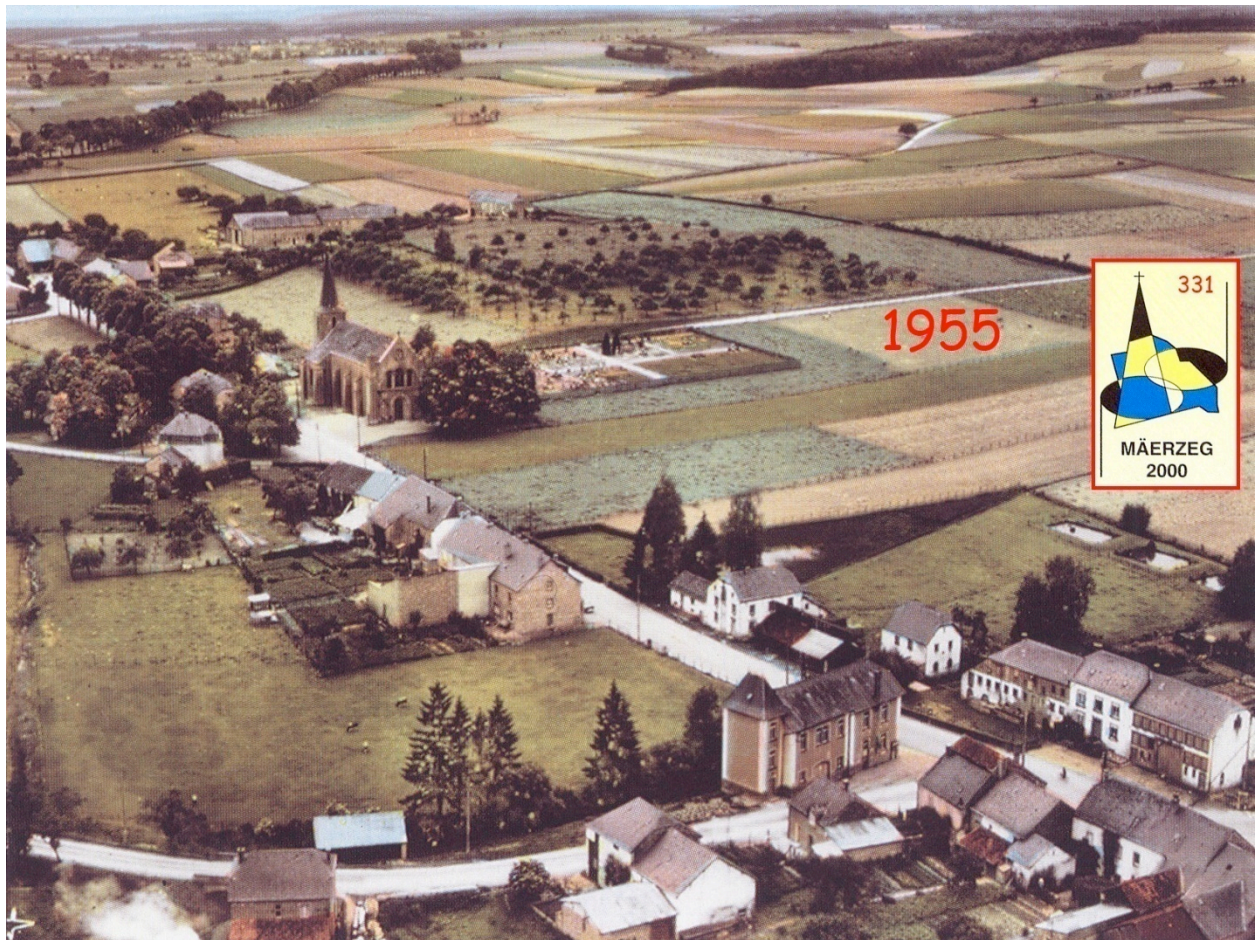
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The pieces were now in place for the American counterattack on the exposed left flank of the 915th Volksgrenadier Regiment.

⁶⁰ Murrell, page 43

⁶¹ Fossum

Mertzig, 22 December 1944



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The village of Mertzig stretches along its *Rue Principale*, in a slight south-westerly direction 2 miles west of Niederfeulen and 1.5 miles east of Grosbous, 15 miles north of Luxembourg City. The road runs along a valley, bordered by fields to the north and wooded hills and the River *Wark* to the south, set several hundred yards away. Several buildings, located in the very center of Mertzig in 1944, intersected by roads leading to the north (*Rue de Merscheid*) and south (*Rue de Michelbuch*) remain there today, with little change⁶³. By the evening of 21 December 1944, 1st and 3rd battalion of 915 VGR had pushed through Feulen, taken Mertzig after a brief fight with K Company, 3/109 and established a HKL⁶⁴, facing south and west. Scouting elements advanced as far as Grosbous but came under fire from Task Force L around 2100 HRS. Halting for the night, 915 VGR was now preparing to continue its offensive operations, with 1st and 3rd battalions moving toward Grosbous and 2nd battalion preparing to head

⁶² Image courtesy of Fernand Pletschette. *Rue de Michelbuch* runs along the bottom of the image, while *Rue Principale* stretches from bottom-right to top-left. The first three building along the right side of *Rue Prinicpale* are *Maison Weis*, the machine house and the saw mill. *Hotel Schammel* is on the left side of *Rue Principale*, first house on bottom-right corner.

⁶³ See Appendix V for map

⁶⁴ *Hauptkampflinie*, Main Line of Resistance

south, in the direction of Michelbuch. 8th Company, 2/915 was trailing behind, along with the regimental trains, in the general vicinity of Feulen.

After only a few hours of sleep, the company was told to water and feed the horse and move out, heading west in the dark. Moving quietly, soldiers walking and horses pulling the guns, the men advanced along the Feulen-Mertzig road, unaware of the Americans, who were dug in along the tree line to the south. By daybreak, and with Mertzig in sight, mortars and artillery began to fall, as I Company, 3/109 became aware of the Germans. "We came under fire as we entered Mertzig, but managed to reach the village without any casualties".⁶⁵ Being an experienced front soldier, Michely knew that the threat of artillery would diminish as soon as his men would reach cover and were out of sight of the forward artillery observer who had spotted them.

To the men, Mertzig looked as though it had been deserted in a hurry, both by the civilian population as well as the Americans. Not having been resupplied in days and feeling relatively safe, the platoon left its guns and horses in the street (in front of *Hotel Schammel*) and began to explore the surrounding buildings. Entering the hotel on the south side of the street, the men found the dining room empty but the beer taps full, and immediately began serving themselves. It was now mid-morning and snow started to fall. Little did Michely know that 22 December 1944 was to be his last day in combat.



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⁶⁵ Michely

⁶⁶ Image courtesy of Fernand Pletschette. Image shows Hotel *Schammel* in 2008. Point of view is looking east, along the main road. Michely's guns were parked facing the viewer, along the front of the building, just prior to the attack.

Earlier that morning, advance liaison officers of the US 80th Division made contact with their counterparts from the 28th and immediately coordinated moving the 317th, 318th and 319th Infantry Regiments through the lines and attack to the north, along the Luxembourg – Ettelbruck highway axis. Supported by units from the 702nd Tank Battalion and the 610th Tank Destroyer battalion, 3rd Battalion of the 319th Infantry Regiment was given the order to move north from Vichten into the direction of Michelbuch and attack Mertzig from the south. Moving cautiously, 3/319 had made steady progress and was now arriving at the heights, overlooking the village.

While his men were celebrating in the hotel bar, Michely explored the remainder of the building, liberating copious amounts of beer and wine. It is unclear why Michely did not take part in the feast but during many conversations with the author, he expressed having developed a sixth sense while on the Eastern Front⁶⁷ – a sense which had saved his life on several occasions. “On one end of the building was a bowling alley, with clear views to the south. To my horror, I saw American troops descending from the ridgeline only a few hundred yards away. Our guns were still harnessed to the horses and no defensive positions or security had been established. The men were completely unaware until artillery began to fall into the street moments later.” Michely had just seen the beginning of the attack by 3/319, with companies K and L abreast and M (Weapons) in reserve.

“As we rushed into the street, we discovered that several of our horses had already been killed or wounded by artillery and others, cut loose and frightened, we running off into the direction of the attack, trailing behind them the wagons containing our ammunition supplies. For a moment I thought about using my weapon to shoot the horses and keep them from ‘surrendering’, but I didn’t.” The men now attempted to make the guns ready to fire, despite the completely exposed positions in the road. “I was running from gun to gun when a tank appeared next to the dairy building, only a few hundred yards away. *Gefreiter* Erich Otto’s gun and crew were completely exposed in the intersection of *Rue Principale* and *Rue de Merscheid* but were determined to knock out the tank.” The next events happened in a matter of seconds. “I could see the turret of the tank turning into the direction of the exposed gun and screamed at Otto and his men to take cover as I dove into the front door of a house. I don’t know if it was the tank or a direct hit by artillery⁶⁸, but when I looked at the gun, I saw the flash of an explosion with pieces of the gun and its crew flying through the air.” The gun and its crew, *Gefreiter* Otto and *Obergefreiter* Kirnbauer, were gone in an instant.

⁶⁷ Author’s note: Michely was also quite displeased at having his meal ‘interrupted’ by the attack.

⁶⁸ Author’s note: Michely later recalled a second tank, moving west-to-east along *Rue Principale*. It is plausible that *Gefr.* Otto’s gun and crew were killed by a round from this second tank.



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The attack on Mertzig was conducted by the 3rd battalion of the US 319th Infantry Regiment and documented in its official regimental history.

“The mission of CT 319 was to continue the attack to the north. The 1st and 3rd battalions jumped off into the attack at 0600. At 0735 leading elements of the 3rd battalion had reached their first objective meeting little resistance. At 0800 the 1st battalion had also met no resistance. At the same hour (0800) the 3rd battalion had placed elements in Vichten where the 109th Infantry of the US 28th Division was stationed. At 0910 the 3rd battalion entered Michelbuch and gained contact with the enemy. At 1000 the 1st battalion reported no contact with the enemy. The 3rd battalion cleared Michelbuch and prepared to move on Mertzig with companies L and K (on the right) abreast at 1010. At 1040 one platoon of Company C, 702nd Tank Battalion entered Mertzig and at 1100 companies K and L reached the high ground in the vicinity meeting no resistance. At 1145 1st battalion advanced and met small enemy patrols. At 1205 the 3rd battalion was in Mertzig receiving considerable enemy small arms fire and light artillery.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Image courtesy of Fernand Pletschette. Image shows *Rue Principale* in 1944, looking east. *Maison Weis* is on the left, the dairy building on the right. *Obergefreiter* Otto and *Gefreiter* Kirnbauer died in the intersection immediately past the second building on the right.

⁷⁰ Murrell, page 45

Sgt. Hanright, a platoon sergeant in K Company, 319th, recalls the attack on the village. “We moved out from our positions overlooking the Mertzig from the south at around 1100 HRS. Our company was on the right flank of the attack and quickly covered the open ground between the tree line and the houses on the edge of the main road. We reached a house (which I later found out to be the mayor’s house) with a fenced-in yard and three or four concrete steps leading up to the front door (*Maison Rausch*). Upon entering the house, we found a set of stairs to the basement and I was about to throw in a grenade when I heard a sound which made me stop. I eventually took 22 or 23 German prisoners who had been hiding in the basement⁷¹.” Upon clearing the house, Sgt. Hanright’s platoon turned east and continued clearing houses along *Rue Principale*, using a captured German officer to encourage more troops to surrender.

Company L experienced similar events. T/5 Balas recalls: “About 0300 (22 December, author) we were abruptly awakened by the Sarge and had a hot breakfast. Then, we marched through the snow to the front lines. This was roughly a 20 mile hike with full equipment...After hours of walking, we came to the last elements of the rear guard (109th Infantry Regiment, author) on a ridge dug in among some trees...Down below in the valley we could see a cluster of buildings with a road leading away...After a friendly barrage of mortars and artillery, we attacked, surprising the Krauts...”⁷²

Private Krehbiel, a newly arrived replacement from 2nd Platoon continues: “By early afternoon we arrived on some high ground overlooking a village in a valley, but as I remember, the slope into the town wasn’t really steep. As we jumped off, I recall our platoon leader, Lieutenant Nauss, double timed us over some open ground to the right of the Company into the cover of some trees⁷³. However, the Krauts began firing on us and we sustained a casualty or two on the open ground before we managed to secure a foothold in the first buildings.”⁷⁴

As the Americans continued to attack, the situation in the street became increasingly dangerous and untenable for Unteroffizier Michely and his men. Having lost their horses, at least one gun and most of their ammunition (except for the 4 or 5 ready-rounds kept with each gun), the men decided what to do next. “We abandoned all but one of the remaining guns and pushed it up a street to the right of a large farm house (the farmhouse was *Maison Weis* and the street was likely *Rue de Merscheid*, author). By the time we reached the top of the hill, a few hundred yards to the north, we realized that the gun had a flat tire and its sighting mechanism had been damaged.”⁷⁵ It is unclear whether the men managed to push the gun along the road or along a small path behind several farm houses directly to the east of the road. Given the buildings’ location, both routes offered much needed cover from the enemy fire, which by now also included direct fire from heavy .50 caliber machine guns. “We reached a small, free-standing house at the top of the hill (25 *Rue de Merscheid*⁷⁶) and decided to return fire with our

⁷¹ Hanright

⁷² Krehbiel, page 113

⁷³ Author’s note: Based on research, the open ground may have been the meadow immediately west and south of the dairy building, with trees running parallel to *Rue de Michelbuch*.

⁷⁴ Krehbiel, page 114

⁷⁵ Michely

⁷⁶ See Appendix

remaining gun, as we now had a direct line of sight over the top of the houses along the main road and into the tree line from which the Americans were advancing. Since the gun sight was destroyed, we bore-sighted the gun and took aim at some of the truck-mounted heavy machine guns. In order to better direct our fire, I positioned myself under the barrel of the gun, lying prone and using my binoculars to spot the enemy. Our first shot unleashed a hornet's nest. Never in my life had I experienced such intense machine gun fire, not even in Stalingrad!" Michely continues: "Rounds were impacting all around me, but, luckily, they must have been poor shots, since most of them appeared to be aimed high. Nonetheless, I was trapped under the gun, unable to move and marveling at the sheer amount of fire power and ammunition they must have had available to them – they had more ammunition per machine gun than we had for our entire regiment!" Using his experience, Michely waited until the enemy machine gun crew had to change ammunition belts or barrels. "As soon as there was a lull in the fire, we took the opportunity to fall back. There was a door to the basement of the house, with two metal flaps parallel to the ground. We opened the door and found ourselves in a small, perhaps 10' by 10' basement room with a vaulted ceiling. There were 7 or 8 of us in the room."⁷⁷ The men in the basement were members of the platoon, but not of Michely's gun crew. "I can't say for certain how long we were in the basement, but we could hear the machine gun rounds hitting the walls of the house. We decided to make our way toward the center of the village."

Shortly after leaving the basement, the group encountered *Leutnant* Clement, the platoon's VB or forward observer, along with his runner. Clement was young and had only recently graduated from officer school. "He was 19 or 20 years old and had little or no experience in combat, other than what he had learned in school. After fighting in Russia, house-to-house combat was something I was quite familiar with."⁷⁸ Michely continues: "I realized the situation was hopeless and told *Leutnant* Clement that my war was over and that I intended to surrender to the Americans at the earliest and safest opportunity. I suggested that he and the rest of the men should do the same." *Leutnant* Clement disagreed and ordered that the men attempt a breakout to the northeast in order to join the rest of the battalion. Michely did not think that a breakout attempt was feasible. "Where are we going to go? They'll shoot us like rabbits!" Upon hearing Michely's refusal, Clement warned him that he would report him to the company commander and court-martial him for desertion.⁷⁹ "Before you can do that, you have to survive first," countered Michely. "Against our advice, *Leutnant* Clement and his runner then decided to head out, attempting to cross the open meadow east of *Rue de Merscheid*. After only about 35 yards, I witnessed Clement get hit and tumble over, dead. His runner was shot through the collar of his greatcoat while another bullet merely grazed him in the neck – but was otherwise unharmed."⁸⁰

⁷⁷ On 22 December 2008, Michely returned to Mertzig and was able to locate the basement room which had once saved his life. The ceiling had changed, but the metal flap doors covering the entrance were still there and he recognized it immediately.

⁷⁸ Michely

⁷⁹ Author's note: An avid opponent to war then and now, Michely always maintained the righteousness of his decision to surrender and does not see his decision as desertion. To him, the insanity of continuing an already lost war was not worth his own death. The decision to surrender was made by each individual member of the platoon and of their own free will.

⁸⁰ *Leutnant* Clement is still officially listed as "missing". Michely also told the author about being upset that he had been forced to give Clement his "good" compass earlier, which was now also lost.

Leutnant Clement's death now made *Unteroffizier* Michely the highest-ranking remaining soldier in the platoon.

The decision was now made to move toward the Americans in an effort to surrender⁸¹. Michely advised his troops not to shoot, under any circumstances. Making their way down along *Rue de Merscheid*, the men found a gate in the wall separating them from the park-like area behind *Maison Weis* and were soon within the cover of the row of buildings along the *Rue Principale*, in complete defilade from the fire coming from the tree line along the ridge across the *Wark*. In 1944, the terrain was open, with several trees, small ponds and a small brook, the *Turelbach*. Facing south, the men were behind three buildings, with the *Maison Weis* on the left, the saw mill on the right and the machine house in the center. The machine house was adjacent to the brook and contained the components needed to drive the saw mill.⁸² The men entered the machine house and made their way into the basement. "There were long concrete corridors and all kinds of machinery, which must have been connected to the saw mill", Michely recalls. "We could see logs outside, by looking through windows on the south side of the basement. Crawling over the logs were 'Amis', advancing toward us. I could clearly see their legs and short rifles (carbines, author)."



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⁸¹ Author's note: There appeared to be a lull in the fighting, or at least the amount of incoming fire had decreased substantially.

⁸² Author's note: Neither the machine house nor the saw mill exist today. The machine house was torn down in the 1970's and in its place (and the former saw mill) is now the *Centre Turelbach*, a community center. *Maison Weis* still remains and is Mertzig's village hall today.

⁸³ Image courtesy of Fernand Pletschette. The house in the center is the machine house. The background also clearly shows the high ground and tree line from which the 319th attacked.

What happened next is unclear and has likely suffered in detail by the passage of 64 years. During one conversation with the author, Michely recalls: "There were perhaps 8 or 10⁸⁴ of us in the basement. I knew the men were from my platoon, but none of them were part of my gun's crew. We could see the Americans advancing cautiously over the logs. I don't think they saw us yet. I told them (my men, author) not to shoot under any circumstances. Someone fired a shot at the Americans, dropping one GI. I couldn't tell who had fired due to the dim light in the room and no one took responsibility for the shot during my ensuing tirade." The remaining Americans took cover and possibly returned fire. Somehow, according to Michely, "we heard them call for a flame thrower and decided that we needed to surrender immediately."⁸⁵ Michely told the men that now was the time to surrender and that he wasn't going to force anyone to hold out. Each man was free to decide. Two of the men climbed up the stairs with their hands in the air – only to be fired upon immediately. Unharmed, the men jumped back into the basement and screamed "Michel, they don't want to take us prisoner!" Michely angrily screamed back at the men. "What do you expect after the asshole shot at them?" Michely now realized that the responsibility for the men was his, since he was the highest-ranking soldier. Frightened, he saw no other option but to lead the men up the stairs. "We would have died in that basement for sure. I took my MP43 and my binoculars and threw them over a wall behind which I heard the sounds of running water⁸⁶. I assumed it was the small stream we saw on our way and wanted to make sure that the Americans wouldn't get my weapon and glasses. Raising my hands over my head, I climbed up a steep set of steps leading to the outside.⁸⁷ At the top of the steps was a US soldier, pointing his rifle at me. I remember tripping while climbing up the stairs with my hands over my head and falling forward. Instinctively, I reached out and grabbed the ankles of the soldier to stop my fall. They must have thought I was trying to pull him into the basement, for I immediately received a blow to the back of my head by an unseen soldier's rifle butt. He hit me so hard that I saw stars."

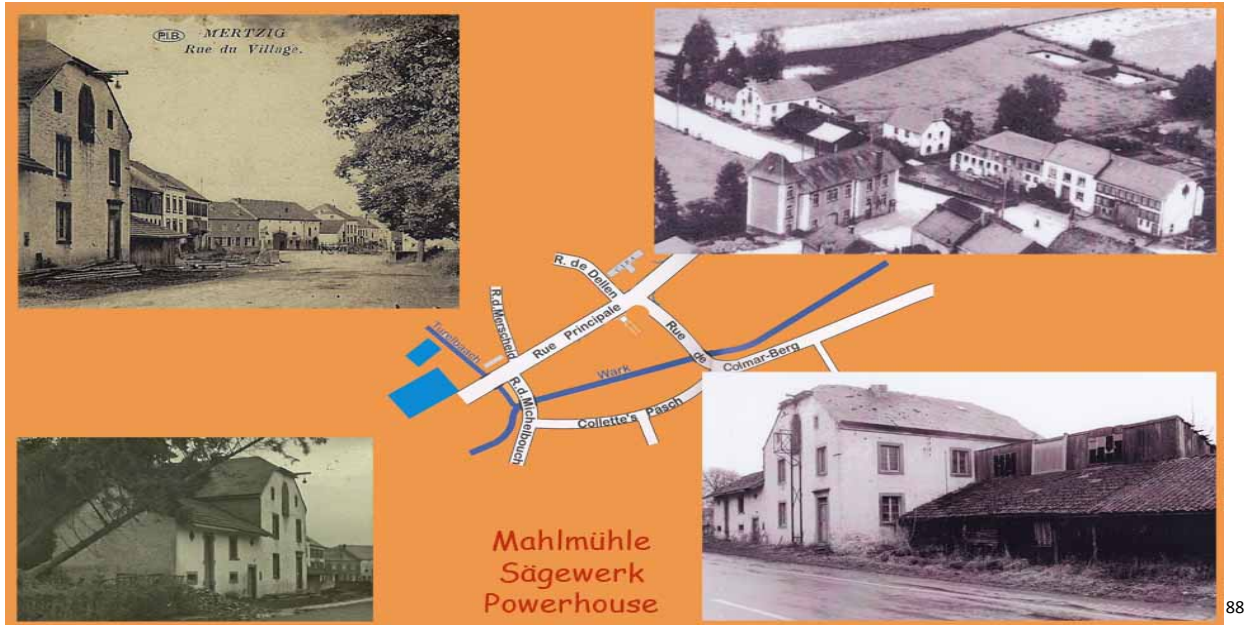
Despite the fall, Michely and his men managed to climb out of the basement and surrendered. "I remember seeing tanks and a lot of troops. We were searched and lined up against a wall. I had told the men to remove any articles of US clothing they might have on them, as many of them had taken advantage of the warm winter clothing we found in abandoned US supply depots. One of the men must not have heeded the warning as, all of a sudden, a shot rang out and he was killed." It is unclear whether this was due to him wearing a GI's coat or an act of revenge. "I thought they were going to kill us all", Michely remembers, "but then an officer appeared, gesturing wildly. I couldn't understand what he was saying, but no more prisoners were killed after that."

⁸⁴ Michely's recollection. He does not know whether *Leutnant* Clement's runner was with them or not.

⁸⁵ Author's note: One of Michely's men was Polish and claimed to have heard the American troops request a flame thrower. Whether he spoke English or whether there were Polish-speaking GI's remains unclear.

⁸⁶ The machine house contained a paddle wheel, driven by the *Turelback*, which was re-routed through the basement for this purpose.

⁸⁷ Authors' note: According to research, these steps were on the northwest corner of the building.



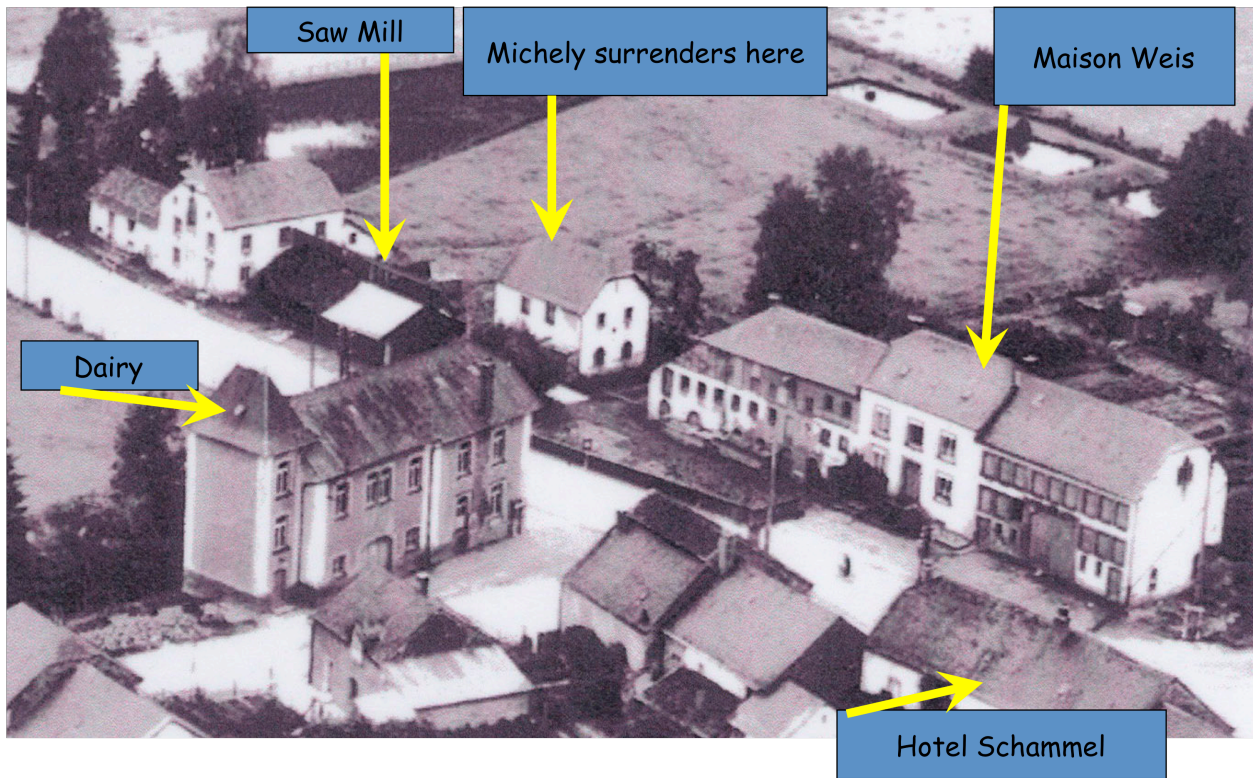
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After the lineup, the remaining men were assembled and transported to Mersch. Michely was elated at being alive and remembers meeting another “old salt” non-commissioned officer from his unit along the way. “We had both been through combat in Russia and were happy to have survived this one”. After being processed in Mersch, the POW’s were loaded into railway cars and transported into captivity. After several months in camps near Normandy, France, Erich Michely would return home to his family on November 13th, 1945 – his 22nd birthday.



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⁸⁸ Image courtesy Fernand Pletschette



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By nightfall on 22 December, the Germans held the north end of the town, with the Americans firmly dug in on the south.

While all of this took place, two additional elements of the 915th met unexpected attacks as well. By 1000 HRS, as the snowfall began to lessen, outposts from Task Force L, who by now had moved to positions on the high ground overlooking the road from Mertzig to Grosbous, observed a large column of enemy infantry and vehicles on the move toward Grosbous.⁹¹ The column stretched for almost a mile and a half and consisted of several artillery pieces, vehicles, infantry and two light tanks, apparently completely unaware of Task Force L's presence a mere 1,300 yards away.⁹² The entire column was destroyed with direct and indirect fire from Task Force L and the 108th Field Artillery Battalion. The result of the 20 minute ambush was the complete destruction of the 915th's spearhead, at the cost of one wounded soldier for Task Force L.⁹³

Just as the advance units were being destroyed, the tail end of the 915th also met its end – at the hands of 1st Battalion, 319th Infantry Regiment. The heavy weapons and supply trains were moving along the

⁸⁹ Image courtesy of Fernand Pletschette. German POW's (likely from the 915th regiment) await transport into captivity in Mertzig.

⁹⁰ Image courtesy of Fernand Pletschette

⁹¹ Fossum, page 31

⁹² Fossum, page 32

⁹³ Fossum, page 33

road from Feulen to Mertzig in almost parade-ground-like formation when 1/319 began its attack north across the road. The result was complete destruction. Corporal Clement Good remembers driving along the road later that night: "As driver for the division artillery's HQ battery commander, I often had to drive along the roads at night to deliver messages or look for breaks in our telephone lines. After the combat at Mertzig, I was driving down the road without any headlights for fear of being detected. The Dodge Command Car kept going over what appeared to be large bumps in the road. It wasn't until daylight that I realized I had been driving over the carcasses of German horses."⁹⁴

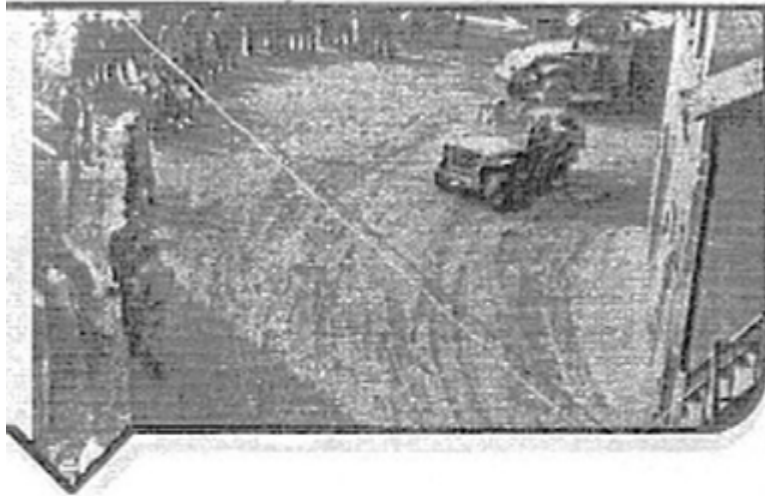
By the end of the day of 23 December, Mertzig had been completely cleared of any German resistance and the German advance had ground to a halt just west of Grosbous. Cut off from reinforcements, the remaining troops of the 915th were ordered to abandon their heavy equipment and break out, making their way back to Ettelbruck. Over the course of the next month, the Regiment continued to take part in defensive operations in the Ettelbruck bridgehead, eventually falling back to its original positions across the *Our* on 21 January, 1945. Hitler's final offensive in the west had been stopped, at a cost of 8,000 men to the 352nd VGD alone.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Interview with the author

⁹⁵ Fossum, page 36. By 24 December, 352nd's strength was estimated at 5,000 men.

The War Ends

By March of 1945, Germany was defeated and only weeks away from unconditionally surrendering to the Allies. Ironically, the same unit who took Michely prisoner, would eventually capture and briefly occupy his home town as well, entering Michelbach, Germany on 17 March 1945.⁹⁶



Rolling through Michelback, Germany
17 March 45

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Erich Michely still resides in Michelbach today, along with his wife of 61 years, Loni. Upon his return from captivity, he started a family which eventually grew to 4 children, 5 grandchildren (with a 6th on the way) and one great-grandchild. He spent his life as a construction worker and forester and enjoys his garden and apple orchard. On 22 December 2008, 64 years to the date, he revisited Mertzig, Luxembourg, where he was received with open arms and retraced his steps of his last day as a soldier.

⁹⁶ Krehbiel, page 189

⁹⁷ Krehbiel, page 315



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Acknowledgements

This document is the result of months of research and could not have been made possible without the generous help of the following people, many of whom were sucked into the vortex along with the author:

Marcel and Manfred Michely, sons of Erich Michely, both of whom spent countless hours researching and countless dollars on long-distance phone conversations with the author. Fernand Pletschette, Erny Kohn and the remaining members of the Mertzig Historical Society. Fernand answered the author's e-mail out of the blue and was instrumental in pulling in local information, finding images, composing presentations and coordinating Michely's visit to Mertzig in 2008. Claude Staudt, honorable mayor of Mertzig, who welcomed Michely with open arms and open doors. Roland Gaul, curator of the Luxembourg National Military Museum, for his knowledge and willingness to help. Mr. Gaul's books are a one-of-a-kind resource and his work is extraordinary. Robert Hanright, Robert Murrell, Bill Krehbiel and Clement Good for assisting the author in obtaining American eye witness accounts.

⁹⁸ Image courtesy Fernand Pletschette. Left to right: Claude Staudt (mayor of Mertzig), Fernand Pletschette, Marcel Michely, Erich Michely, Manfred Michely, Jos Clees, Roland Gaul. Picture taken 22 December 2008, on the steps of *Maison Weis*.

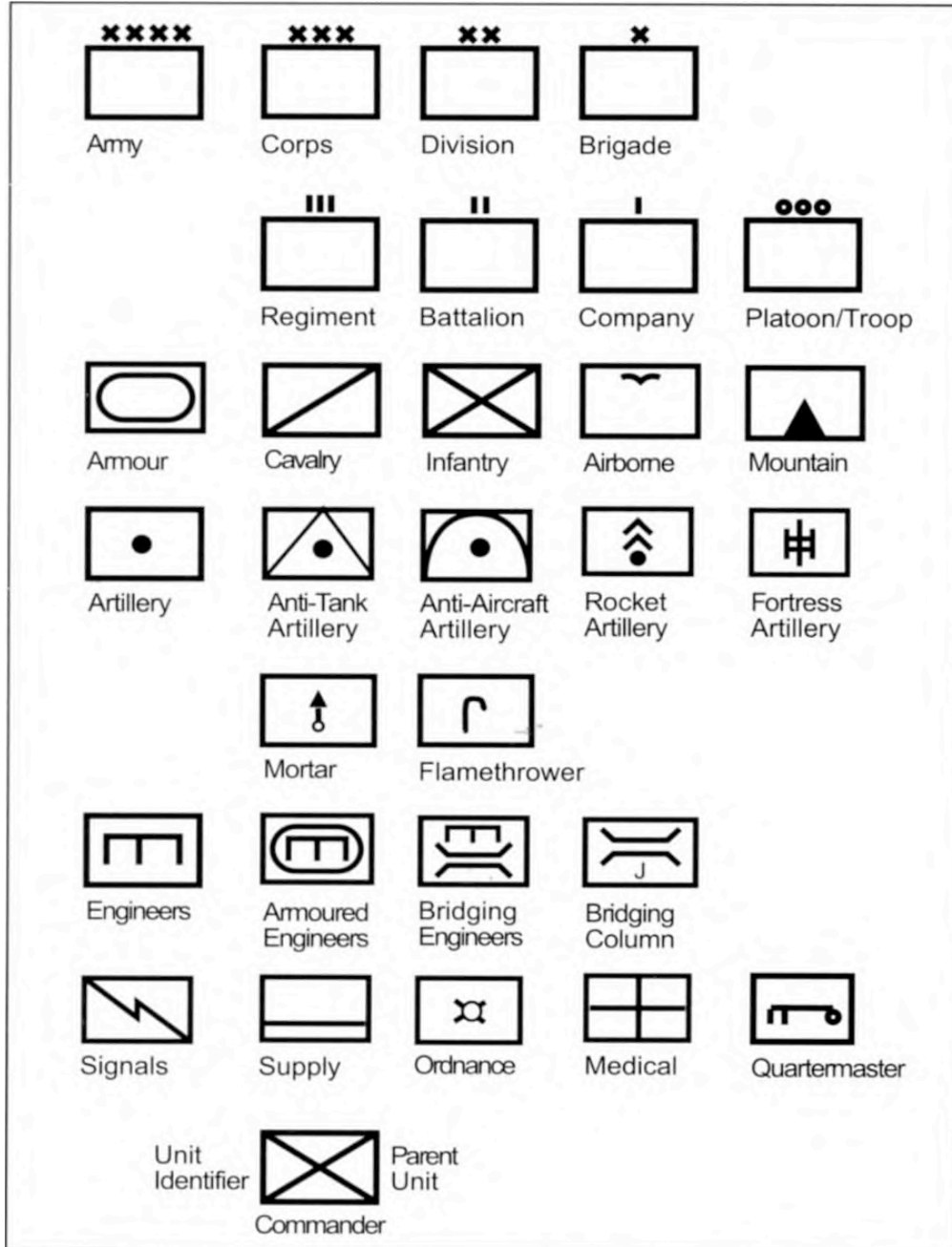
Kyla Herbes for being a trooper and encouraging the author's obsession.

Finally, and most importantly, Erich Michely, the inspiration for this project and to whom it is dedicated.. It is through your experiences that we can hope to remember the past and learn from it. Opa, thank you for always indulging me with your stories. Thank you for your example and courage.

APPENDIX:

Appendix I:

Military Symbols:



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Appendix II:

UNIT	Ofcs	NCOs	Pvt	Rt or Clng	Privs	Sub-MGs	LMGs	Hv MGs	81-mm Mort	120-mm Mort	Howitzers	Flam Tr	75-mm Inf How	82-mm Mort	105-mm How	150-mm How	150-mm How	AT Veh	Trucks	Inf Veh	Trs	Bks	Reqs	Reqs	Reqs	
Div Hq	34	87	100	121	92	12	5																			
Piv Co	3	23	169	89	25	84	8																			
Sig Bn	14	57	234	266	31	5	11											2								
Inf Regt (Tot)	46	267	1,596	1,118	269	597	79	16	12	8	72															
Inf Regt	46	267	1,541	991	269	597	79	16	12	8	72															
Inf Regt	46	267	1,541	991	269	597	79	16	12	8	72															
Arty Regt	75	405	1,364	1,405	201	132	45																			
AT Bn	17	119	324	326	140	26	30																			
Engr Bn	15	66	361	316	115	11	18	4	4																	
Sup Regt	46	161	848	951	121	3	15																			
Total	342	1,724	6,006	6,504	1,536	2,064	509	54	42	24	216	12	9	9	14	38	18	24	12	426	119	1,142	346	3,602	1,522	

1. A Flt Regt Bn with a C Sq may be added to any Volk Gren. Div.
2. May be replaced by a Fla Bn.
3. Including 49 officials.

Figure 35.—Volk Grenadier Division, total strength 10,372.

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MARCH 1945

RESTRICTED

TM-E 30-451

UNIT	Ofcs	NCOs	Pvt	Rt or Clng	Privs	Sub-MGs	LMGs	Hv MGs	81-mm Mort	120-mm Mort	Howitzers	Flam Tr	75-mm Inf How	82-mm Mort	105-mm How	150-mm How	AT Veh	Trucks	Inf Veh	Trs	Bks	Reqs	Reqs	Reqs		
Regtl Hq	6	1	12	4	3	14																				
Regtl Hq Co	5	25	157	133	22	32	10																			
Inf Bn	15	95	532	309	80	253	30	8	6																	
Inf Bn	15	95	532	309	80	253	30	8	6																	
Inf How Co ^a	3	32	162	145	21	31	5			8																
Bazooka Co ^a	2	19	146	91	63	14	4				72															
Total	46 ^b	267	1,541	991	269	597	79	16	12	8	72	12	9	10	219	84	430									

^a Referred to by the traditional designation: "12th" Co.
^b Referred to by the traditional designation: "14th" Co.
Including four officials.

Figure 41.—Infantry Regiment, Volk Grenadier Division, total strength 1,854.

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1 MARCH 1945

RESTRICTED

TM-E 30-451

UNIT	Ofcs	NCOs	Privs	Rs or Cms	Pistols	Sub-MGs	LMGs	Hv MGs	81-mm Mort	75-mm Inf Hows	Mtrcl	H-Dr Vehicles	Tlrs	Hs	Bols
Co Hq	1	8	15	14	3	7					1	2	2	5	4
1st (MG) Plat	1	6	22	11	9	9		4				2	1	3	
2d (MG) Plat		7	22	11	9	9		4				2	1	3	
3d (Inf How) Plat	1	7	44	38	5	9	1			4		7		15	1
4th (Medium Mort) Plat		7	53	34	21	5			6			15	12	19	
Total	3	35	156	108	47	39	1	8	6	4	1	28	16	45	5

Figure 48.—Heavy weapons Company, Volks Grenadier Division, total strength 194.

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German Rank	US Equivalent
<i>Offiziere</i>	<i>Officers</i>
Generalfeldmarschall	General of the Army
Generaloberst	General
General	Lieutenant General
Generalleutnant	Major General
Generalmajor	Brigadier General
Oberst	Colonel
Oberstleutnant	Lieutenant Colonel
Major	Major
Hauptmann	Captain
Oberleutnant	1st Lieutenant
Leutnant	2nd Lieutenant
<i>Unteroffiziere</i>	<i>Non-Commissioned Officers</i>
Stabsfeldwebel	Sergeant Major
Oberfeldwebel	Master Sergeant
Feldwebel	Technical Sergeant
Unterfeldwebel	Staff Sergeant
Unteroffizier	Sergeant Major
<i>Soldaten</i>	<i>Enlisted Men</i>
Obergefreiter	Corporal
Gefreiter	NONE
Oberschuetze	Private 1st Class
Schuetze	Private

¹⁰² Handbook on German Military Forces, 119

German Order of Battle (352 VGD)¹⁰³:

1. Division Command (HQ)
 - a. Command Staff & Field Police
 - b. Feldpost Number 29750
2. Grenadier Regiment 914
 - a. Regimental Staff and HQ Company
 - b. 13th & 14th Panzerjager Companies
 - c. 1st Battalion with Companies 1-4
 - d. 2nd Battalion with Companies 5-8
 - e. Feldpost Number 16053
3. Grenadier Regiment 915¹⁰⁴
 - a. Feldpost Number: 40107
 - b. Regimental Staff and HQ Company
 - i. Regiment Commander: Oberstleutnant Johannes Drawe, wounded at Tandel 12/17/1944
 - ii. Regimental Adjutant: Oberleutnant der Reserve Wilhelm Ifang
 - iii. 1st Ordnance Officer: Leutnant Rudolf Kalberlah
 - iv. 2nd Ordnance Officer: (rank unknown) Georg Kunze, wounded at Longsdorf, 12/18/1944
 - v. Officer z.b.V.: Oberleutnant Sepp Herrmann
 - c. Staff Company
 - i. CO: Leutnant Eduard Seidl, wounded at Kippenhof (Diekirch) 12/24/1944
 - ii. Communications Platoon: Leutnant Karl Dirks, wounded at Oberfeulen 12/22/1944
 - iii. Pionier Platoon: Leutnant Reinhard Bennemann, wounded at Tandel 12/17/1944
 - d. 13th Company (Infantry Gun)
 - i. CO: Leutnant Friese, missing at Mertzig, 12/22/1944
 - ii. Platoon Leader: Leutnant Heinrich Brande, missing at Mertzig, 12/22/1944
 - iii. Platoon Leader: Leutnant Otto Luhr, missing at Mertzig, 12/22/1944
 - e. 14th Company (Panzerjager)
 - i. CO: Leutnant Otto Griese, wounded at Longsdorf, 12/16/1944
 - ii. Platoon Leader: Leutnant Franz Michaelis, missing at Mertzig, 12/22/1944
 - f. Staff, 1st Battalion
 - i. Battalion CO: Hauptmann Heinrich Konig
 - ii. Adjutant: Gerhard Ihl, wounded 12/21/1944, location unknown
 - iii. Ordnance Officer: Karl Heinz Jantschak

¹⁰³ Gaul, Volume I, Pages 22-23

¹⁰⁴ Gaul, Volume I, Pages 28-30

- g. 1st Company
 - i. CO: Leutnant Alwin Feldhans, KIA 12/21/1944 at Ettelbruck
 - ii. Platoon Leader: Leutnant Horst Dietrich, missing 12/22/1944
- h. 2nd Company
 - i. CO: Leutnant Rudolf Rothfelder, KIA at "Friedhaff" Diekirch, 12/17/1944
 - ii. Platoon Leader: Leutnant Wolfgang Kluth
- i. 3rd Company
 - i. CO: Oberleutnant Albrecht Schubert
 - ii. Platoon Leader: Leutnant Reinhold Tietje
- j. 4th Company
 - i. CO: Oberleutnant Otto Muhlert, wounded at Pratz, 12/22/1944
 - ii. Platoon Leader: Leutnant Ludwig Vorst
 - iii. Platoon leader: Leutnant Georg Witt, missing at Mertzig, 12/22/1944
- k. Staff, 2nd Battalion:
 - i. Battalion CO: Hauptmann Herbert Kruger
 - ii. Adjutant: Wilhelm Leimbach, wounded at Tandel 12/16/1944
 - iii. 1st Ordnance Officer: Leutnant Paul Flocke
- l. 5th Company
 - i. CO: Oberleutnant Arthur Schulz, took sick 12/31/1944
 - ii. Platoon Leader: Leutnant Bruno Brassel, wounded at Mertzig, 12/22/1944
- m. 6th Company
 - i. CO: Leutnant Heinz Jagers, wounded 12/31/1944, location unknown
 - ii. Platoon Leader: Leutnant Heinz Ruckert, KIA at Longsdorf, 12/17/1944
- n. 7th Company
 - i. CO: Hauptmann Walter Langendorf, missing, date/location unknown
 - ii. Platoon Leader: Max Stalke
- o. **8th Company (Schwere)**
 - i. **CO: Oberleutnant Gunter Rolf**
 - ii. **Platoon Leader: Leutnant Werner Perlsberg**
 - iii. **Platoon Leader: Joseph Clement, missing at Mertzig, 12/22/1944**

Platoon List:

<p> <i>Abt. Clever</i> ++ <i>Abt. Lange</i> <i>Gen. Richter</i> ○ <i>Winkel</i> <i>• Otto, Erich</i> ++ <i>Raath</i> +v <i>Abt. Richter</i> +v <i>Gen. Richter</i> +v <i>• von</i> +v <i>Gen. Dymon</i> Flagn <i>Gen. Ranges</i> v <i>Gen. Gielzker</i> <i>• Gölitz</i> v <i>Abt. Alendroo</i> ○ <i>• Rombauer</i> ++ <i>• Otto, Werner</i> v <i>Gen. Gramberg</i> v <i>Gen. Almond</i> ○ <i>Abt. Allmann</i> <i>• Alwiller St.</i> +v <i>• Rothe</i> +v <i>Gen. Schnepel</i> +v <i>• Androlit</i> +v <i>Gen. Jannid</i> +v <i>Abt. Schwaigenbäumer</i> ++ <i>Gen. Jannet</i> ++ </p>	<p> <i>Abt. Clamer</i> +v <i>Gen. Flemer</i> +v <i>Gen. Binkhämmer</i> +v <i>• Reents</i> <i>Gen. Ambricht</i> Fl +v <i>Abt. Gärtig</i> +v <i>Abt. Reiter</i> Fl +v <i>• Reich</i> Fl +v <i>• Kämpf</i> Fl <i>Abt. Schmidt</i> Fl <i>Gen. Lyrowik</i> Fl <i>Abt. Reiches Waffengehilf</i> <i>Schoor</i> +v <i>Rifmann</i> +v <i>Offz. Fran</i> +v <i>• Heberer</i> <i>• Mithueli</i> +v <i>• Horbach</i> <i>• Halgenberg</i> +v <i>• Horn</i> <i>• Damer</i> ○ <i>• Kemke</i> +v <i>• Wigger</i> +v </p>
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Appendix III:

American Order of Battle:

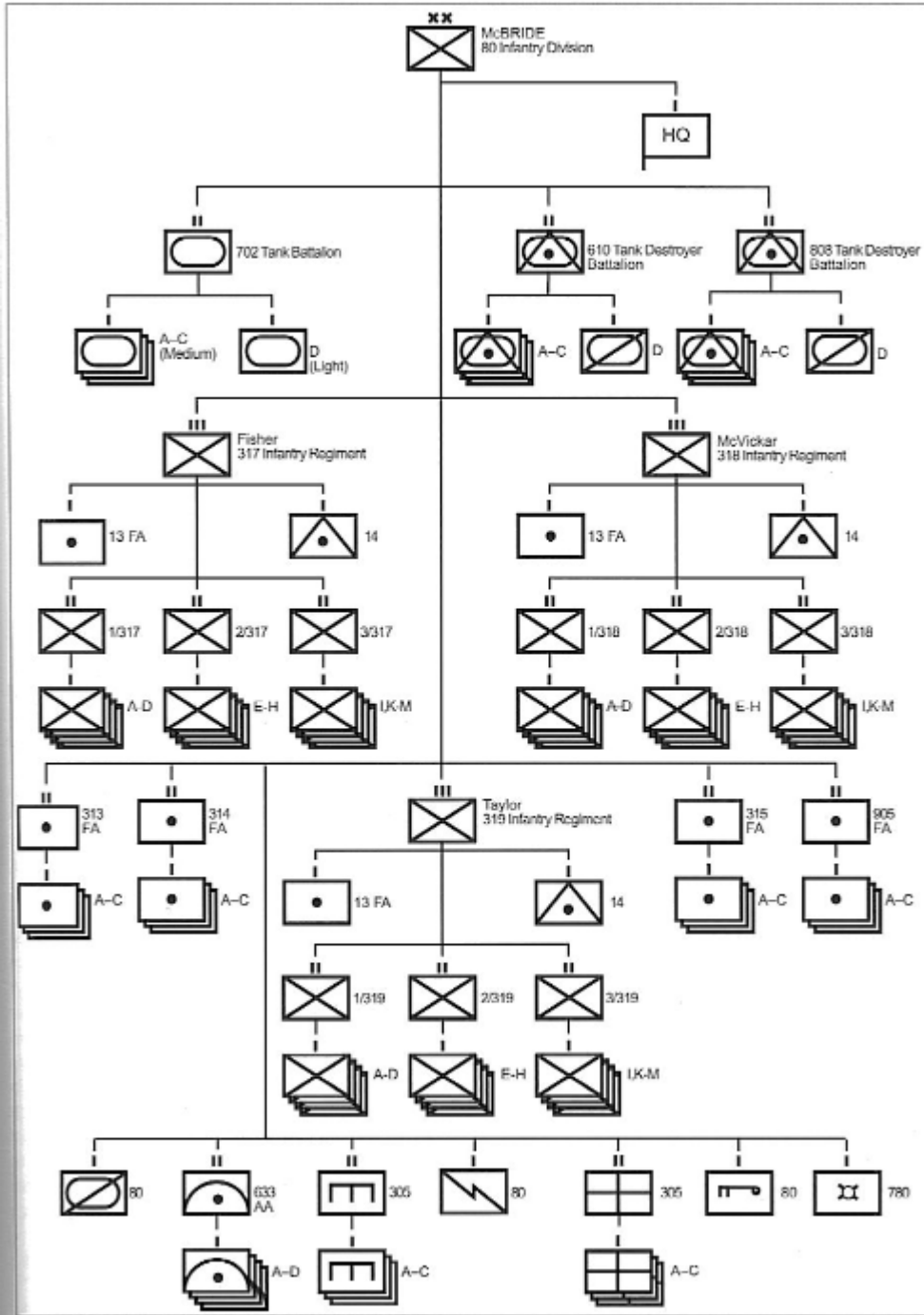
1. 28th Infantry Division¹⁰⁶
 - a. Division HQ & Infantry
 - i. **109th Regiment**
 1. **Became "Task Force L"¹⁰⁷, CO Captain Embert Fossum**
 - a. **Company L, 109th**
 - b. **1 Heavy Machine Gun Platoon, Company M/109th**
 - c. **1 Section, 81 mm Mortar Platoon, Company M/109th**
 - d. **1 Section, AT Platoon, 3rd Battalion HQ Company/109th (2 x 57mm AT Guns)**
 - e. **1 Platoon, Company C, 707th Medium Tank Battalion (2 x M4 Sherman)**
 - f. **1 Platoon, Company A, 630th TD Battalion (2 x 76mm towed AT Guns)**
 - g. **1 Squad, Company A, 103rd Engineer Battalion**
 - h. **1 Radio Team, HQ Company, 109th (1 x SCR 284 mounted on Jeep)**
 - i. **1 Forward Observer Team, 108th Field Artillery Battalion (155mm Howitzer)**
 - ii. 110th Regiment
 - iii. 112th Regiment
 - b. Artillery
 - i. 107th Field Artillery Battalion
 - ii. 108th Field Artillery Battalion
 - iii. 109 field Artillery Battalion
 - iv. 229th Field Artillery Battalion
 - c. Support Units
 - i. 28th Reconnaissance Troop
 - ii. 28th Quartermaster Company
 - iii. 28th MP Platoon
 - iv. 28th Signal Company
 - v. 103rd Engineer Battalion
 - vi. 103rd Medical Battalion
 - vii. 728th Ordnance Company
 - viii. 447th AAA Battalion
 - ix. 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion
 - x. 707th Tank Battalion

¹⁰⁶ Gaul, Volume II, Page 13

¹⁰⁷ Embert Fossum, "Operations of Task Force L near Grosbous, Luxembourg, December 20 – 23, 1944", Page 4

2. 80th Infantry Division¹⁰⁸
 - a. **Division Artillery**
 - i. **Division Artillery HQ**
 1. **Battery Commander, Captain Beecher, Corporal Clement Good, Driver**
 - ii. 313th Field Artillery
 - iii. 314th Field Artillery
 - iv. 315th Field Artillery
 - v. 905th Field Artillery
 - b. Infantry
 - i. 317th Regiment
 - ii. 318th Regiment
 - iii. **319th Regiment**
 1. 2nd Battalion, CO: Lieutenant Colonel Bandy
 2. **3rd Battalion, CO: Lieutenant Colonel Elliot Cheston**
 - a. **Company I**
 - b. **Company K**
 - i. **Platoon Sergeant: Robert A. Hanright**
 - c. **Company L**
 - d. **Company M (Weapons)**
 - c. Support Units
 - i. **1 Platoon, Company C, 702nd Tank Battalion**
 1. **Equipped with M4 Sherman**
 - ii. **1 Platoon, Company A, 610th TD Battalion**
 1. **Equipped with M36**

¹⁰⁸ Murrell



U.S. Third Army - XII Corps - 80th Infantry Division

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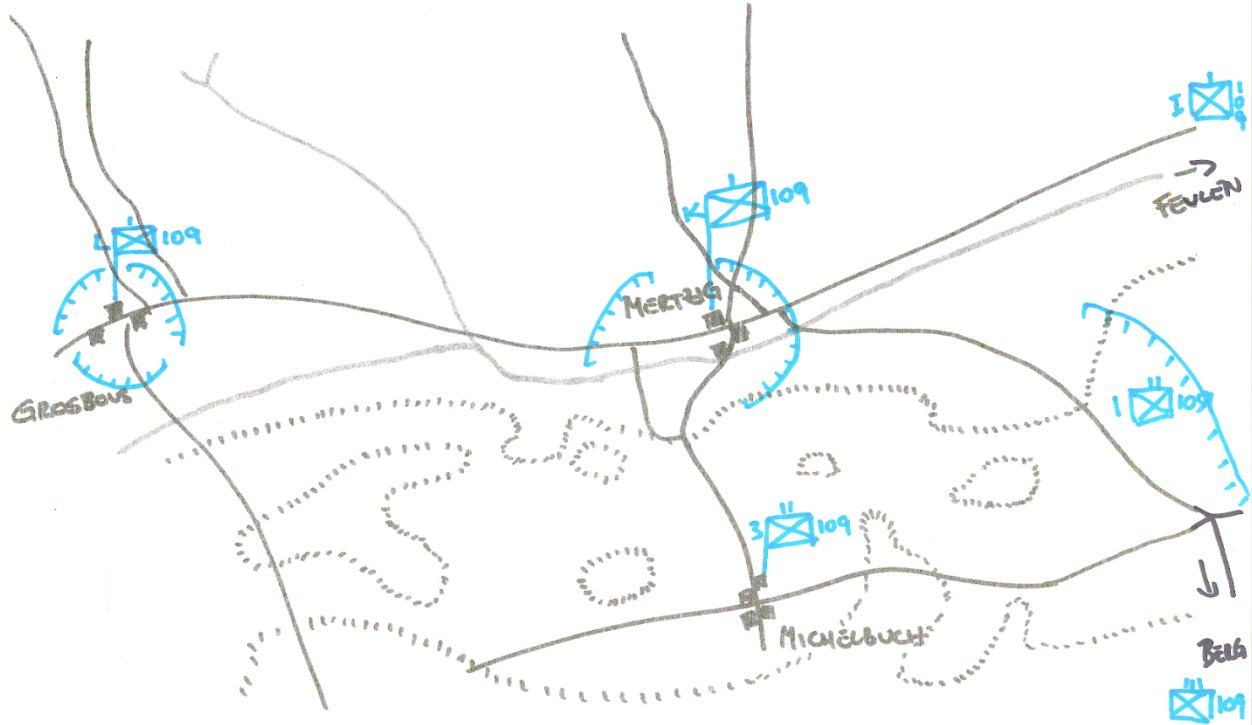
109

Appendix IV:

Positions of 3rd Battalion, 109th Infantry around Mertzig:

12/20/1944

US POSITIONS, 109TH REGIMENT

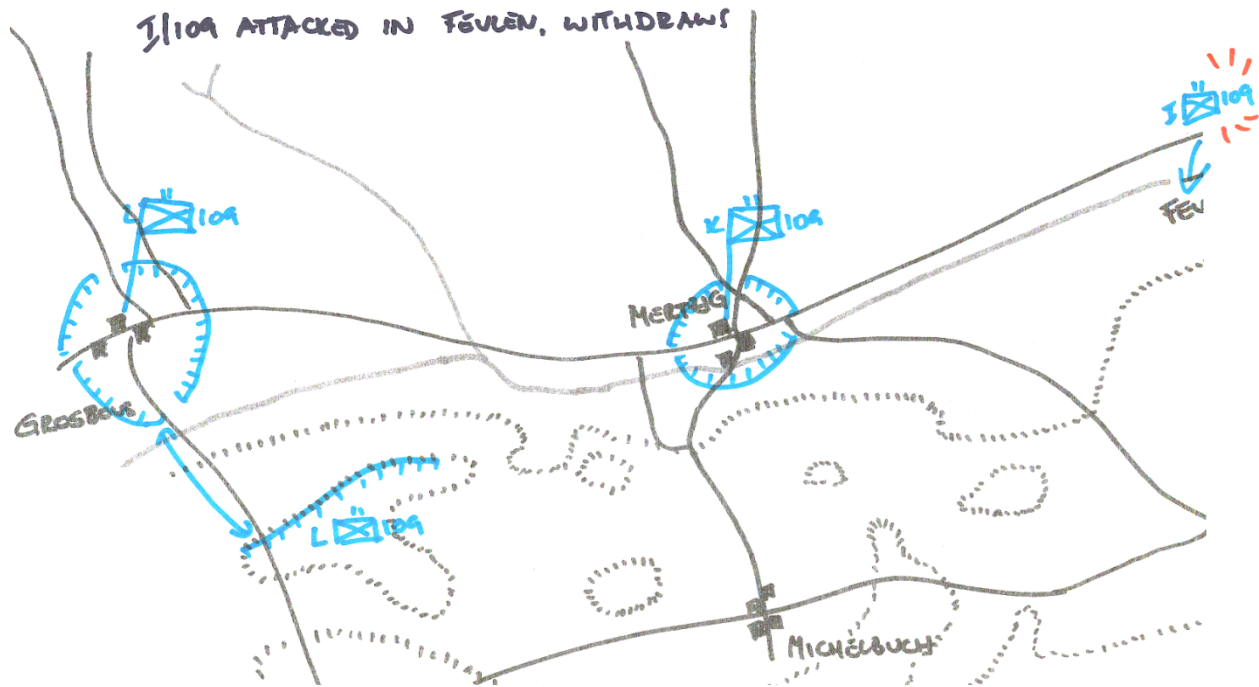


12/21/1944

AFTERNOON

L/109 PREPARES POSITION ON RIDGE
BUT RETURNS TO GROSBOUS.

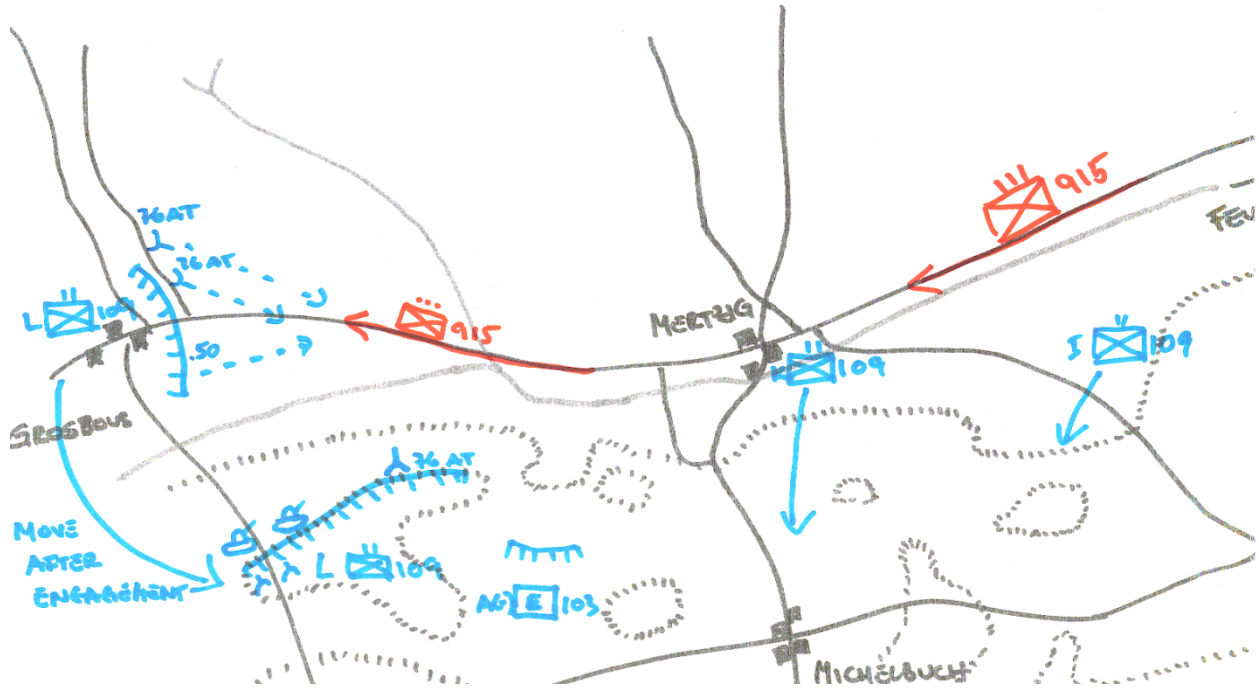
J/109 ATTACKED IN FEULEN, WITHDRAWS



12/21/1944

2100 HRS

L/109 OP HEARS 915 COMBAT PATROL; ENGAGES
MOVE TO ALTERNATE POSITIONS AFTER



12/22/1944

EARLY MORNING POSITIONS & AMBUSH @ 1000 HRS

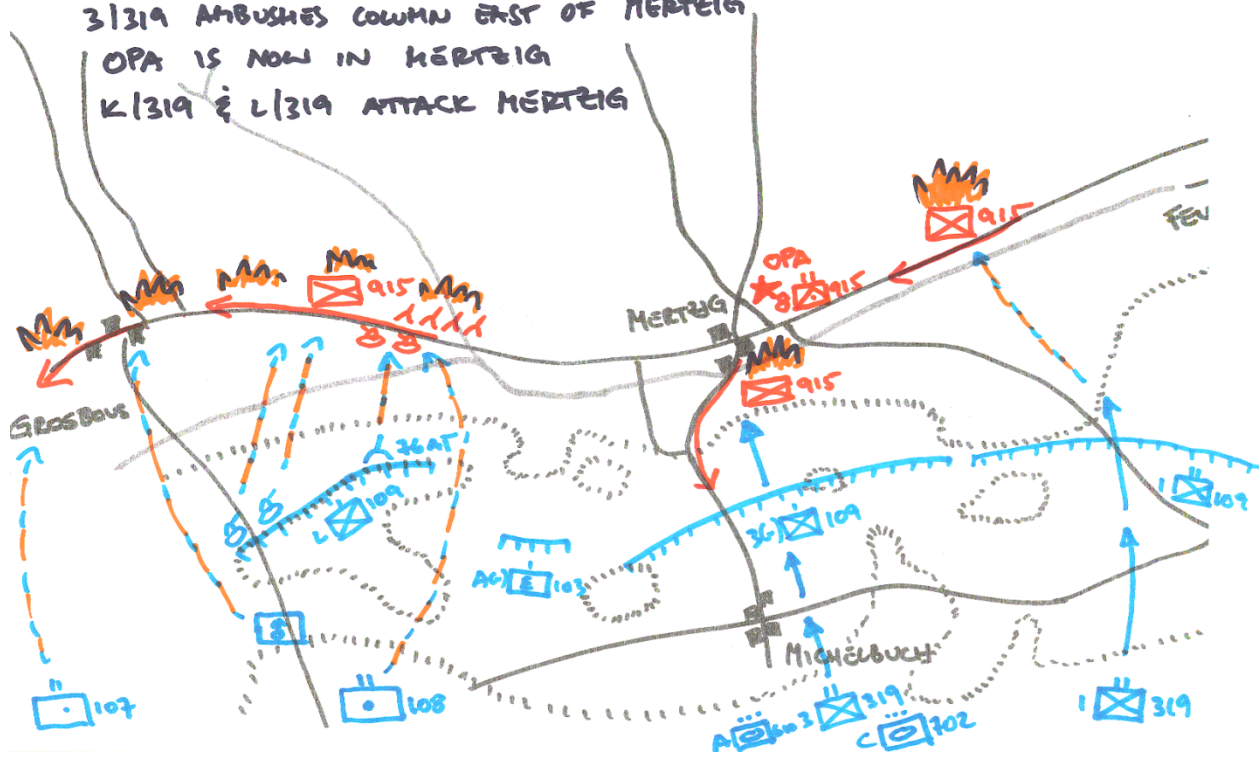
SNOW FALLS HEAVILY FOR 2 HRS, STOPS @ 1000 HRS

L/109 AMBUSHES COLUMN WEST OF MERTZIG

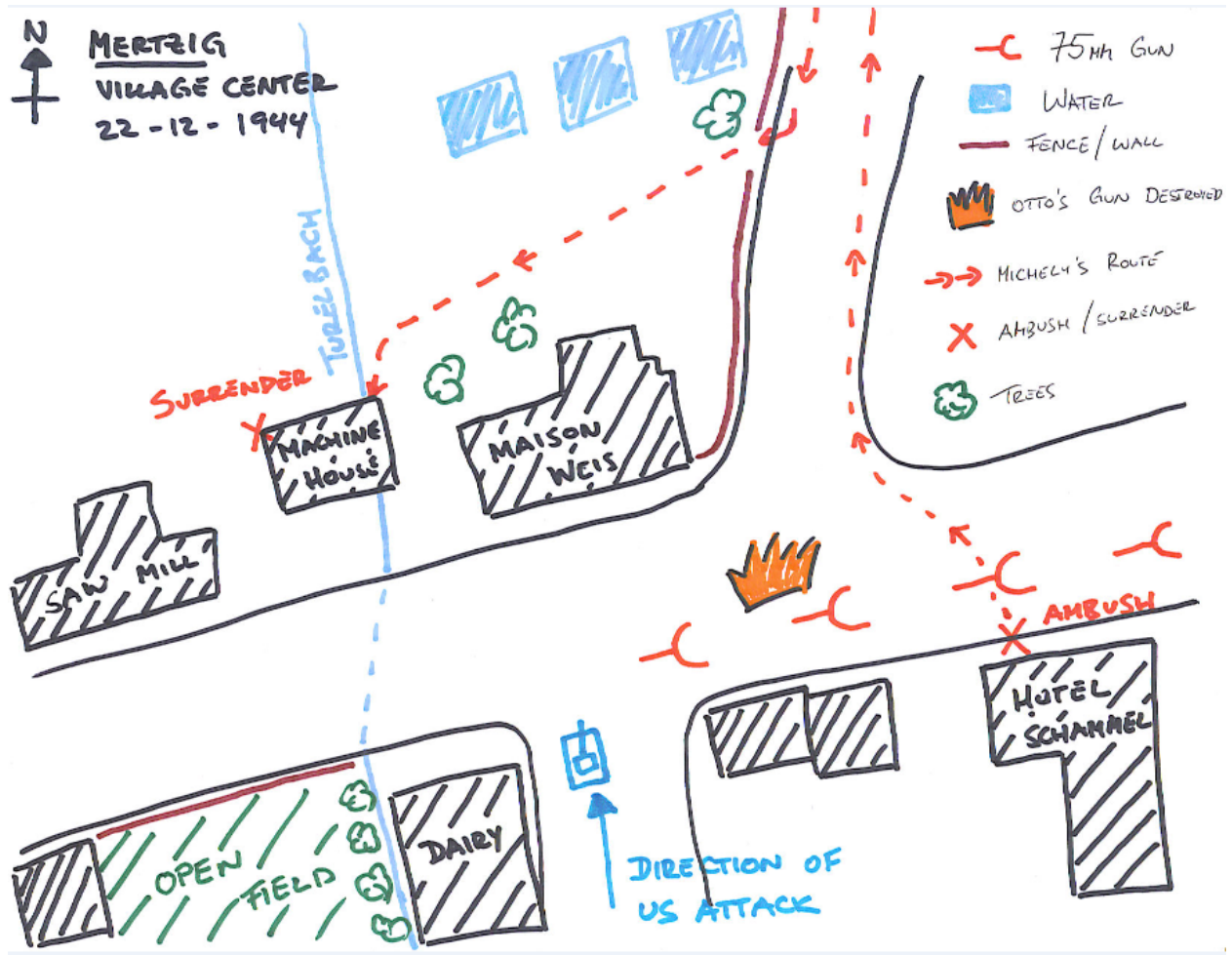
3/319 AMBUSHES COLUMN EAST OF MERTZIG

OPA IS NOW IN MERTZIG

K/319 & L/319 ATTACK MERTZIG



Appendix V:



Appendix VII:

After Action Reports by *Generalmajor* Schmidt, CO, 352nd VGD

Erich Otto Schmidt
Generalmajor a. D.

P-0329

27. 2. 1950

Manque page 13

351 VGD

P R O J E C T A B B .

(A R D E N N E N - O F F E N S I V E)

MS

P - 0329

v. Greiffenberg
Gen. d. Inf. a. D.

Vorbemerkung.

Anbei übersende ich einen Bericht des Kommandeurs der 352. VOB.,
Generalmajor Erich Otto Schmidt ueber den Einsatz seiner Division bei der
Ardennen-Offensive.

Der Bericht schildert den Kampfeinsatz der Division, welche an der
Suedflanke der 7. Armee stehend, zunaechst mit einer Angriffsaufgabe, dann
aber mit der Abwehr an einer immer brennender werdenden Front beauftragt
war. Da keine naecheren Unterlagen mehr vorhanden und auch von den Mitkamp-
fern nicht zu erreichen waren, hat der Verfasser seine Ausfuehrungen nur
in grossen Zuegen machen koennen. Immerhin werden sich aber Teile des
Berichtes im Gesamtrahmen der Darstellung des Kampfes der 7. Armee gut
verarbeiten lassen.

Die Arbeit wurde durch den ehemaligen Oberbefehlshaber der 7. Armee,
Gen. d. Pz. Tr. Brandenberger, ueberprueft.

Dies ist der letzte Bericht von dem Gesamtthema "Die Ardennen-Schlacht".
Das Thema ist damit abgeschlossen.

Anlagen: 1 Bericht und
3 Anlagen: 1 Stellenbesetzung
1 Bericht des Kommandeurs
des Pi. Btl. 352.
1 Bericht des Kommandeurs
des Mrs. Btl. 352.


(v. Greiffenberg)

Bericht ueber die Aufstellung und den Einsatz der 332. V. G. D.
in der Ardennenoffensive.

Zeittafel.

1. 10. 44 - 10. 11. 44	Anfstellung der 332. V. G. D.
11. 11. 44 - 15. 12. 44	Einsatz im Westwall und Vorbereitung der Offensive.
16. 12. 44 - 21. 1. 45	Die Offensive: a. der Angriff ueber die Our und Sauer vom 16. 12. - 22. 12. 44. b. die Abwehr an der Sauer vom 23. 12. - 17. 1. 45. c. der Rueckzug in den Westwall vom 18. 1. - 21. 1. 45.

Aufstellung der 332. V. G. D.

Im Oktober 1944 uebernahm ich im Raume Flensburg - Gluecksburg - Schleswig die Reste der 352. Div. als aufzustellende 332. Volks-Grenadier-Division (V. G. D.). Div. Stabsquartier: Satrup. Die 352. Div. war in den Invasionskaempfen voellig zerschlagen worden und lag eigentlich nur noch mit ihren Nachschubeinheiten, Nachrichten-Abteilung und dem Div. Stab in dem genannten Raume. Die Div. sollte nach der K. St. N. aufgestellt werden mit Einschränkungen, die die Not der Zeit gebot.

Personell: Die Division erhielt als Ersatz Marine- und Fliegerpersonal. Junge, krasftige Soldaten mit keiner Kampferfahrung im Erdkampf.

Die Lage im Offiziersersatz war die gleiche.

Es wurden aufgestellt:

Inf. Rgt. 914 aus ehem. Marineangehoerigen,

Inf. Rgt. 915 " " "

Inf. Rgt. 916 aus ehem. Fliegerpersonal, + Mannn

Artl. Rgt. , Pl. Batl. ebenfalls aus Marineangehoerigen und Fliegerpersonal.

Materiell: Die Div. wurde, wie folgt, ausgeruestet:

Infanterie.

Ein Regiment bestand aus 3 Batl. mit:

Rgt. Stab, Nachr. Zug, Pl. Zug, Radfahrzeug.

13. Komp. zu 2 Zuegen mit 12 cm Granatwerfern,

1 Zug mit 2 s. I. G.

14. Komp. zu 3 Zuegen mit Panzerschreck (54 Rohre).

Die Batl. setzten sich zusammen aus:

Stab, Nachr. Staffel, Versorgungszug und 3 Schuetzenkompanien.

Die Schuetzenkompanie gliederte sich in:

Komp. Trupp, 6 Scharfschuetzen, 1 s. M. G. Gruppe und die Meldler.

3 Schuetzenzuege. Der Schuetzenzug zu 3 Gruppen mit je 1 l. M. G. 42.

Schuetzen des 1. Zuges hatten Sturmgewehre 44, waehrend die Schuetzen des

2. und 3. Zuges Karabiner trugen. + G 43

Geplante Gesamtausstattung des Rgt. :

- 270 Sturmgewehre,
- 87 l. M. G. ,
- 30 s. M. G. ,
- 81 Gewehrgranatgeraete,
- 18 12 cm Granatwerfer,
- 12 l. I. G. ,
- 2 s. I. G. ,
- 54 Panzerschreckrohre.

Artillerie:

Das Artl. Rgt. bestand aus 3 Abteilungen. 2 Abteilungen mit l. F. H. und 1 Abteilung s. F. H. (davon 1 Battr. mit 10,5 Flakgeschuetzen).

Pi. Batl. zu 2 Komp. auf Fahrrad und dem mot. und bespannten Tross.

Nachrichtenabteilung ausgeruestet nach K. St. N.

Sturmgeschuetzkompanie zu 6 Hetzern. 3 x 6 Hetzen (TOTAL)

Das Grad. Rgt. 914 war als geplante Vorausabteilung mit Zivilfahrraedern ausgeruestet worden, um beweglich zu sein.

Die Zeit im Aufstellungsraum wurde mit Aufstellung und Ausbildung der Truppe gemuetzt. In dieser Zeit zeigte sich bereits der Mangel der zu schnellen Aufstellung und zu kurzen Ausbildungszeiten. Die Infanterie beherrschte ihre Waffen und das Gelaende nur unvollkommen. Fuehrungsmassig waren fast alle Fuehrer unsicher. Ausnutzung von Feuer und Bewegung, die Grundidee im Grosskampf, war den meisten Soldaten noch ein Geheimnis.

Die Artillerie beherrschte ihre Schiessverfahren nicht, geschweige

dann die Kommandosprache fuer die Feuerleitung im Heere. Schiesskorrekturen nach Beobachtung auszuwerten und in die Tat umzusetzen, wurden nur schwer erlernt. Alles war noch eingestellt auf das Schiessen auf hoher See. Die eine Batterie z. B., ausgestattet mit 10,5 Flakgeschuetzen, stand grundsatzlich falsch. Entweder konnte sie artl. Aufgaben loesen, dann fiel die Panzerbekampfung weg, oder sie stand auf Panzerabwehr und konnte dann nicht in den Artilleriekampf eingreifen. Dieses Mehrzweckgeschuetz war fuer vollausgebildete Artilleristen gedacht und war bei einer Neuaufstellung vollkommen fehl am Platze.

Angesetzte Planspiele, Geländeaebungen usw. behoben zwar die grosssten Mangel in der Ausbildung von Fuehrer und Mann, konnten aber nicht darueber hinwegtauschen, dass Fuehrer und Truppe trotz besten Willens den Anforderungen eines modernen Grossekampfes nicht gewachsen waren. Die Stimmung selbst in der Truppe war gut.

Einsatz im Westwall und Vorbereitung zur Offensive.

Am 10. 11. 44 wurde die 552. V. G. D. in den Raum des LXXX. Korps um Bitburg verlegt. Hier betrieb sie weiter Ausbildung und uebernahm gegen das 26. 11. 44 den Sicherheitsabschnitt: Bauler (einschl.) - Echternach (ausschl.) im Westwall. Div. Stabsquartier: Bettingen.

Der Einsatz im Westwall bis zum Angriffsbeginn am 16. 12. 44 wurde von der Truppe weiter zur Ausbildung benutzt. Leider konnten fuer die Ausbildung nur schwache Teile herangezogen werden, da die Masse der Truppe in der Besetzung der Bunkerlinie aufging. Das Artl. Rgt. war dagegen in der Lage, die fehlende Uebung in der Feuerleitung aus den bezogenen

Stellungen heraus nachzuholen. Ausserdem hatte die Div. den Befehl erhalten, zur Schaffung von Fuehrer- und Mannschaftsersatz ein Feldersatzbtl. und eine Div. Kampfschule aufzustellen. Diese Einheiten wurden mit Soldaten aelterer Jahrgaenge und Volksdeutschen aufgestellt. Waehrend des Grosseampfes mussten diese Einheiten leider oft als Feuerwehr eingesetzt werden.

Bevor die Div. von der geplanten Offensive erfuhr, deuteten folgende Ereignisse auf den bevorstehenden Grosseampf hin. Klar war nur nicht, wer der Angreifende war. Allen Beteiligten erscheint es jetzt noch als ein Wunder, dass der Amerikaner nichts von der Offensive erfuhr. Seine Spionage und Luftaufklaerung mussten hier voll versagt haben.

1. Durch die starke Belagung der Inselcoerfer im November und Dezember 44 veranlasst, sprach die Bevoelkerung offen von einem bevorstehenden Grosseampf.

AOK 7

2. Ende November erschien der Obstltz. i. G. L a s s e n auf dem Div. Gefechtsstand und suchte unter fadenscheiniger Begrueudung Auskunft ueber das Gelaende an der Our, Beob. Moeglichkeiten, Strassenzustand usw. im Div. Abschnitt zu erhalten.

3. Eigenartige Anfragen hoeherer militaerischer Dienststellen bei der 352. V. G. D. bestaerkten diese in ihrer Vermutung.

So viel ich noch in Erinnerung habe, wurde ich persoenlich Anfang Dezember 44 von der geplanten Offensive unterrichtet. Einige Planspiele beim LXXXV. Korps (Gen. d. Inf. K n i e s s) und bei der 7. Armee Anfang Dezember fuehrten mich und den Ia (Major i. G. S c h n e i d e r) in die Gedankengaenge der hoeheren Fuehrung fuer die geplante Offensive

ein. Am 12. 12. 44 setzte uns Adolf Hitler nochmals die schwerwiegenden Gruende fuer diese Offensive auseinander.

Die Vorbereitungen der Div. fuer die Offensive waren vielseitig:

a. Die 352. V. G. D. hatte den Auftrag, mit ihren Pferdestaffeln nachts ab der 5 km Sperrlinie die gesamte Anlagerung der Munition, Behelfsbrueckengerastes usw. fuer die Angriffsdivisionen im derzeitigen Verteidigungsabschnitt durchzufuehren. Eine Arbeit, die an Fahrer und Pferd hoechste Anforderungen stellte.

b. Markierungen der Wege fuer die einrueckenden fremden Einheiten und fuer die Verschiebung der eigenen Truppe in die Ausgangsstellung an der Our.

c. Vermessen von Stellungen fuer die gesamte Artillerie in dem derzeitigen Verteidigungsabschnitt, festlegen der Schiessgrundlagen, Aufstellen der Beobachtungsergebnisse.

d. Getarntes Bereitstellen von Uebersetzmitteln fuer die erste Angriffswelle.

e. Einrichten von Gefechtsstaenden und Nachrichtenverbindungen fuer die Offensive.

f. Maendliche z. T. schriftliche Einweisung aller Fuehrer fremder Einheiten, die aus dem jetzigen Sicherheitsabschnitt der 352. V. G. D. heraus angreifen sollten.

Alles schwierige Aufgaben fuer eine frisch zusammengestellte Div. , zumal dabei die Tarnung gegen den Feind und der eigenen Truppe gegenueber gewahrt bleiben musste. Die Angriffstruppe wurde erst 6 Stunden vor Angriffsbeginn ueber die bevorstehende Offensive unterrichtet.

sprechungen im Dezember 44 vorgetragen werden. Leider bewahrheitete sich diese Berechnung und sollte der Div. noch schwere Stunden bringen. Am 16. 12. 44 traten planmaessig 5.30 die zwei Angriffsgruppen, ihre Spitzen mit Artl. Feuervorbereitung 10 Min. vorher, an und setzten ohne grosse feindliche Einwirkung ueber die Our.

Die rechte Angriffsgruppe (I. R. 915) erreichte im zuegigen Angriff am 16. 12. 44 abends das Waldgebiet bei Bastendorf. Der Rgt. Kdr. fiel durch Verwundung aus. ^{Obstlt. Droné (Tourel)} Hier musste sie liegen bleiben, da sich der feindliche Widerstand erheblich verstaerkt hatte und schwere Waffen fehlten; Bastendorf, Longsdorf und Tandel blieben noch in Feindeshand.

Die linke Angriffsgruppe (I. R. 916) griff das fuer feindliche B-Stellen hervorragend geeignete Hoehengelaende dicht suedlich Hosdorf an. Hierbei ueberschritt das vordere Batl. eine amerikanische, gut versteckte Bunkerstellung und erhielt aus ihr Feuer in den Ruecken. ^{Parks (I Co 109th Rgt.)} Dieses war den ungeschulten Fliegern neu, sie verloren die Nerven und stellten den Angriff ein. Die amerikanische Besatzung verteidigte sich ausserdem hervorragend. ^(in der Luft) Der junge Rgt. Kdr. zeigte sich auch nicht der Lage gewachsen, musste erst von Seiten der Division zu folgerichtigen Handeln gezwungen werden. Am Abend des 16. 12. 44 war durch Erkundung festgestellt worden, dass frontal dieser Hoehenzug nicht zu nehmen sei. In der Nacht vom 16./17. wurde das Rgt. 914 zur Sauberung der feindlichen Widerstandsnester in Longsdorf nachgezogen. Das Rgt. 914 konnte nicht eher nachgezogen werden, da die Uebersetzstellen von den Angriffsregimentern benoetigt wurden. (Zu wenig Uebersetzmittel!). Das Felders. Batl. und die Div. Kampfschule wurden zur Sicherung in die Ausgangsstellung des Angriffs

eingesetzt.

Am 17. 12. gelang es dem Rgt. 914, Longsdorf von Feinde zu säubern. I. R. 916 gliederte sich zum Angriff neu, nachdem es in Angriff gegen genannten Hoehenzug nur unbedeutenden Boden gewonnen hatte, und beabsichtigte am 18. 12. umfassend von Norden her ihr Angriffsziel zu nehmen. Die Verbindung zum Rgt. 915 konnte wegen Fehlens schwerer Waffen und feindlichen Widerstandes noch nicht hergestellt werden. Unangenehm war es vor allem, dass einzelne feindliche Panzer Bastendorf und Fahren sperrten. Eingesetzte Panzervernichtungstrapps kehrten unverrichteter Sache wieder zurueck. Kostbare Zeit ging damit verloren. Am Abend des 17. 12. wurde endlich die Behelfsbruecke fertig, schwere Waffen konnten nachgezogen werden, obwohl die Bruecke noch unter geleitetem Feindfeuer lag und schlechteste An- und Abfahrtswege hatte.

Am 18. 12. nahm I. R. 916 endlich die beherrschenden Hoehen suedlich Hosdorf und schaltete damit den gezielten Beschuss der Brueckenstellen aus. I. R. 914 war es wegen der neu erscheinenden ^{3 Sherman} Feindpanzer immer noch nicht gelungen, die Verbindung zu I. R. 915 herzustellen. Gegen Mittag konnten zur Entlastung die 6 Hetzer durch die Div. nachgezogen werden. Dem Rgt. 914 gelang es nun in Verbindung mit der ^{13 Rgt 5FSD} 5. F. S. J. Div. Fahren zu nehmen. Bei diesen Kaempfen hat es sich wieder gezeigt, dass eine kampfunerfahrene Truppe stark flankenempfindlich ist und sich ratlos feindl. Panzern gegenueber verhaelt.

Am 19. 12. konnte die Verbindung mit I. R. 915 hergestellt werden. Damit war die einheitliche Kampffuehrung in der Div. wieder hergestellt, zumal auch nun die gesamte Div. Artillerie unter die straffe Fuehrung

ihres Art. Kdr. kam. ^(Friedhof - Huelden) Aber auch der feindliche Widerstand verstaerkte sich und es folgten verlustreiche, oertliche Kaempfe im Raume noerdlich Diekirch. Hierbei wurde auch der Div. Kdr. verwundet. Er behielt die Fuehrung der Div. bis zum 25. 12. und wurde dann durch den Gen. Maj. **B a t z i n g** ersetzt.

Am 30. 12. kam es darauf an, sich in den Besitz der Saueruebergaenge bei Diekirch und Ettelbrueck zu setzen. Durch Bilden eines Artl. Schwerpunktes durch die Armee sollte die Div. bei ihrem weiteren Angriff unterstuetzt werden. Die linke Angriffsgruppe nahm Diekirch und stellte fest, dass die dortige Bruecke nur mangelhaft gesprengt war und ein Uebergehen von Infanterie mit schweren Waffen ermoeglichte. Man entschloss sich die Div. , auf dem Suedufer mit dem Rgt. 916 vorzugehen, um das stark verteidigte Ettelbrueck von hinten zu nehmen. ^(Ingeldorf)

Am 31. 12. wird Ettelbrueck von der Div. genommen. Die zerstoeerte Bruecke wird mit zugefuehrttem Kriegsbrueckengerast in kuerzester Zeit wieder hergestellt. Die Aufklaerung meldet nichts Besonderes. Am 22. 12. tritt die Div. den Vormarsch auf den Allertabschnitt an und zwar mit:

I. R. 915 ueber Feulen-Merzig auf Bettborn,

I. R. 914 ueber Michelbuch-Vichten auf Usseldingen,

I. R. 916 ueber Schieren nach Sueden. ^(ins Wolmer-Berg)

In Gegend Merzig trifft die rechte Kolonne, die in Marschgliederung vormarschierte (I. R. 915), mit starken amerik. Panzerverbaenden zusammen ^{180th Div} und wird eingeschlossen. Auch die Rgt. 914 und 916 werden in Panzerkaempfe verwickelt und muessen auf den Brueckenkopf Ettelbrueck zurueckgehen. Damit ist der Vormarsch der 552. V. G. D. gestoppt, ohne dass sie ihr

Angriffsziel erreichen konnte. Die Div. haette sicher den befohlenen Allertabschnitt erreicht, wenn die Verzoegerung des Brueckenschlages und das damit verzoeagerte Nachfuehren der Hetzer und schweren Waffen nicht gewesen waere. Ob diese neu aufgestellte Div. sich haette am Allertabschnitt gegen starke feindliche Panzerkraefte behaupten koennen, kann nicht mit Sicherheit gesagt werden. Persoenlich wurde jedoch spaeter vom Div. Kdr. in Ettelbrueck festgestellt, dass sich die Soldaten auch ohne panzerbrechenden Waffen, nachdem sie den ersten Schreck ueberwunden hatten, gegen Panzer behaupteten.

b. Die Abwehr an der Sauer.

Am 23. 12. wurde dem eingeschlossenen Rgt. 915 befohlen, sich auf Ettelbrueck unter Zuruecklassung der schweren Waffen durchzuschlagen. Die Reste dieses Rgt. trafen am 23. 12. im Raume Ettelbrueck ein. Die Rgt. 914 und 916 hatten indessen die Sauer von Erpeldingen bis Diekirch besetzt und Ettelbrueck (hier I. R. 916) zum Brueckenkopf ausgebaut. Das herangefuehrte Ers. Batl. sicherte von Gilsdorf bis Reisdorf. Alle Versuche des Gegners, den Brueckenkopf einzudruecken, wurden abgeschlagen.

Am 24. 12. dauern die Kaempfe an der Sauer an. Am Abend des 24. 12. trifft eine Alarzmeldung vom Ers. Batl. ein, die besagt, dass der Gegner bei Mostroff ueber die Sauer gesetzt sei. Kritische Lage, da die Div. ueber keine Reserven mehr verfuegt und mit einem feindlichen Stoss in die Tiefe rechnen muss. Gott sei Dank stellt sich aber diese Meldung als falsch heraus. Dem Amerikaner war es nur gelungen, den Brueckenkopf Ettelbrueck einzudruecken und die deutsche Besatzung aus Mostroff zu werfen.

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Ab 25. 12. - 17. 1. 45 wird drückend die amerikanische Luftüberlegenheit bemerkbar. Kein Fahrzeug darf sich am Tage auf der Strasse sehen lassen, der Nachschubverkehr am Tage ist unterbrochen, damit wird Artl. Munition und Sprit knapp. Erscheinungen, die man die Kampfhandlungen bis zum Ende (5. 5. 45) begleiteten. Allgemein gesagt, herrschte im Abschnitt der Div., von örtlichen Gefechten abgesehen, Ruhe. Die Div. gliederte sich neu, liess durch ihre Pioniere Übergangstellen versetzen und Sperren und Hindernisse im Hintergelände anlegen. Durch die letzten Gefechte bedingt, hatte die Div. so starke Ausfälle an Menschen und Material, dass sie von jetzt ab nur noch als Kampfgruppe gewertet werden darf.

c. Ruckzug in den Westwall.

Am 18. 1. griff der Amerikaner ueberraschend beiderseits Diekirch die Div. an. Starker Nebel ^(Künstlicher Nebel) begünstigte sein Unternehmen, denn der Verteidigung war jede Sicht genommen. Die Artillerie, in der Munitionsausstattung beschränkt, musste unbeobachtet ihr Sperrfeuer abgeben. Eingebrochenen Gegner zu bekämpfen, war aus angegebenen Gründen nicht möglich. Gleichfalls sahen die Widerstandsnester nichts und wurden umgangen. ^(Zugelschuss cf. Stöckel) Der Amerikaner kam somit verhältnismässig schnell ueber den Sauerabschnitt. ^(cf. Heinnich) Hierbei verlor ausserdem noch die Div. die Masse ihrer Pioniere, die aus ^(Sauer) Kraftemangel in die Verbände der Grenadier-Rgt. zur Abwehr eingegliedert worden waren. Am 19. und 20. 1. wird die Div. weiter zurueckgeworfen. Munitions- und Betriebsstoffmangel begünstigten den Gegner. Brandenburg wird verloren und die Div. steht am 21. 1. wieder am Ourabschnitt.

Die Verteidigung an der Sauer ab 25. 12. und den Ruckzug in den West-

wahl habe ich persönlich nicht miterlebt, sondern mir diese Tage schildern lassen. Ich selbst uebernahm erst am 18. 2. 45 wieder die Div. in der Hühnerfarm bei Bitburg etwa 5 km suedwestlich davon.

gez. S c h m i d t .

Stellenbesetzung.

Div. Kdr.	Gen. Major Schmidt, ab 25. 1. 45 Gen. Major Batzing,
Ia	Major i. G. Schneider,
Ib	Major i. G. Ulrrich,
Div. Adj.	Major Block,
Kdr. 914	Obstltn. <u>v. Luecken</u> ,
" 915	Obstltn. <u>Drase</u> ,
" 916	Major v. Criegern, (+)
" Artl. Rgt.	Oberst Sandmann,
Pi. Batl.	Major Marquardt,
Nachr. Abtlg.	Major Usadel,
San. Abtlg.	Oberstarzt Voigt,
Feld. Ers. Batl.	Major Dula,

Anlage 1

Bericht des Majors M a r g u a r d t (Kdr. Pz. Batl. 352) ueber
die Aufstellung und den Einsatz des Pionier-Bataillons der 352.
Volksgrenadier-Division.

I. Aufstellung:

Ort: Raum Flensburg.

Stamm-Bataillon: Restteile des Pionier-Batl. der 352. Inf. Div.

Fast nur noch Tross. Ehemalige Offiziere des Pz. Batl. 352: 1 Ob. Lt.

Offz. Ersatz: Komp. Chefs mit wenig oder keiner Fronterfahrung.

Zugfuhrer: jung (letzter Offz.-Lehrgang), begeistert.

Mannschaftersatz: Bis auf wenige alte Pioniere vom Ers. Batl. (Div. Kampfschule)

Alles junge Leute, die zur Marine eingezogen worden waren.

Waffe und Gerast: Die Bewaffnung genuegte den Anforderungen des Pz.

Batl. Die Ausstattung mit Gerast, vor allen Dingen die Ausstattung mit Gerast fuer den 1. Einsatz, war unzureichend.

Gliederung: Das Pz. Batl. gliederte sich in den Stab, 2 Komp. auf Fahrrad, dem mot. und bespannten Tross. Der mot. Tross besass nur 6 Lkw., was voellig unzureichend war.

II. Einsatz im Westwall und Angriff ueber den Westwall:

Nach einer viel zu kurzen Ausbildungszeit im Raum Flensburg wurde die Div. an den Westwall verlegt. Hier Einsatz im Rahmen des Gren. Rgt. zum Verstaerken der Sperren.

Anlage 1

Erkundung der Uebergaenge ueber die Our und die Sauer.

Angriff ueber die Our. Hierbei war dem Batl. eine Kompanie der Pl.-Brigade Hammer unterstellt. Brueckenbau wurde durch reissende Stroezung und das fehlende Kriegsbrueckengerat sehr erschwert. Weiterer Einsatz beim Uebergang ueber die Sauer bei Ettelbrueck.

Abwehrkaempfe in Ettelbrueck. Inf. Einsatz. Abwehrkaempfe an der Sauer. Nach Erstarren der Front im Raume Burscheid - Ettelbrueck - Diekirch wurde das Batl. zum Bau von Sperrern eingesetzt. Es wurden vor allen Dingen beiderseits Diekirch bis Ettelbrueck an den unuebersichtlichen Stellen Minensperren angelegt.

Rueckzug auf den Westwall.

Bei Beginn des Angriffs der Amerikaner ueber die Sauer zwischen Ettelbrueck und Gilsdorf am 18. 1. 45 war das Batl. mit beiden Kp. in und um Diskirch eingesetzt. (Sauer)

Da wegen der geringen Kraefte keine Reserven ausgeschieden werden konnten, wurden die Pioniere beim ersten Ansturm, den sie im Verbands eines Grenadier-Regiments ueberstehen mussten, fast voellig aufgerieben. Das Batl. fuehrte von da an seine Einsaetze nur noch mit Kampftruppe durch.

Schwere Kaempfe im Raume Brandenburg. Von da Absetzen nach Norden, wobei jeder, auch der kleinste Uebergang, durch Sprengen zerstoeert wurde, (Gilsdorf) (?) um das Vordringen der Amerikaner zu verzoegern.

Schmidt, GenMaj.

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352. VGD

(Die folgenden Darstellungen habe ich aus dem Gedächtnis wiedergegeben, da mir sämtliche Unterlagen, Gefechtsberichte, Kriegstagebücher usw. abhanden gekommen sind. Ich kann mich deshalb fuer die angegebenen Stärken, Daten und geschilderten Geschehnisse nicht voll verbuergen. Da ich am 19.12.44 verwundet wurde, begruenden sich die Darstellungen bis 25.12. auf Berichte meiner Offiziere meines Stabes.)

Im Text genannte Anlagen fehlen!

ARDENNE(16.12.44 - 25.1.45)I. Vorgeschichte:

Die 352. Infanterie-Division wurde waehrend der Invasionskaempfe stark angeschlagen und deshalb zur Neuaufstellung in den Raum Flensburg - Schleswig verlegt. Im Oktober uebernahm ich diese Division als 352.V.G.D. Der Division blieb der Oktober zur vorgenannten Arbeit und etwa um den 15.11.44 wurde die Div. nach der Eifel in den Raum um Bitburg verlegt. Hier blieb ihr noch einige Zeit zur Ausbildung und zur Ergaenzung ihrer noch fehlenden Ausruestung. Ende November uebernahm die Div. im Westwall den Abschnitt Vianden - Echternach (ausschl.). 48 Stunden vor Angriffsbeginn am 16.12. wurde sie in ihre Bereitstellungsraeume zwischen Roth und Wallendorf gefuehrt.

A. Die Division bestand aus:

Inf.Rgt. 914	Kdr.	Oberstlt.	von Criegern (gefallen)
" "	915	" "	Drave (16.12. verwundet)
" "	916	" "	v. Luecken
Artl."	352	Oberst	Sandmann
Pf.Batl. 352	"	Major	Marquardt

Uebersgeordnete Dienststelle LXXXV. Korps.

B. Genaue Lage der Gefechtsstaende und der Verbaende siehe

Anlage 1 - 3.

C. Auftrag: Durchbruch suedl. Vianden durch die feindl. H.K.L. und Fortfuehrung des Angriffes ueber Ettelbrueck and den Attert-Abschnitt. (Bettborn - Bissen). Hier Einsatz im Flankenschutz fuer die Angriffe-

Armee im Verband des LXXXV. Korps.

D. Die Division wurde aufgestellt und ausgeruestet nach K.St.H.

fuer V.G.D. Ersatz stellte Marine und Luftwaffe.

Mannschaften: Alter 23 - 30 Jahre; zu kurz ausgebildet, keine Land- und Kampferfahrung, noch nicht im Einsatz gewesen. Volle Sollstaerke. (✓ 13000)

Unteroffiziere: Stammtruppenteil Marine, meist keine Fronterfahrung. 75 % der Sollstaerke.

Offiziere: Unterschiedlich in Fronterfahrung und Ausbildungsstand. Staerkemaessig voll.

Infanterie: Guter Kampfgeist im Bgt. 915 und 914 (Angehoerige nur Marine), zu kurze Ausbildungszeit und keine Fronterfahrung.

Artillerie: Zu kurze Ausbildungszeit, nicht sicher in der Feuerleitung und Beobachtung. *f. Dranse*

Sturm-Geschuetze: Zu kurze Ausbildung, taktisch und technisch nicht sicher. Zum Teil Mannschaften noch nicht im Einsatz gewesen.

(Hetzer)

Nachr.Abt.: Entsprach den Anforderungen.

Pi.Batl.2 Entsprach den Anforderungen.

Ausruestung: Im allgemeinen fast voll. Es fehlten:
 35 % der Funkgeraete zur Feuerleitung
 30 % - etwa - am Soll zustehende Sturmgeschuetze.
 25 % - etwa - Sturmgewehre.

E. Beurteilung der Lage: Vor der Front feindl. Feldstellung mit schwacher Besetzung. Angriff musste gelingen, wenn rechtzeitig ueber Our und Sauer schwere Waffen und Artl. nachgeschoben werden konnten und wenn rechtzeitig feindl. Artl. Beobachtung auf Hoehe nordwestl. Wallendorf ausgeschaltet wurde. Mit feindl. Gegenangriffen in staerkerem Ausmass musste ab 3. Angriffstag aus Richtung Westen und Raum Luxemburg gerechnet werden.

II. Kampfe (s. Anlage 1-3)

A. Die Division hatte den Auftrag, am 16.12.44 um 5.30 Uhr ueberraschend ueber die Our suedl. Bettel zu gehen, den Saueruebergang bei Ettelbrueck zu erzwingen und sich nach Erreichen von Bettborn und Bissen am Attert-Abschnitt in die Flankenschutzstellung im Verband des LXXXIV. Korps einzugliedern.

Hierzu wurde befohlen:

1. Angriff in vorderer Linie Rgt. 915 und 916.
Div. Res. - Rgt. 914.
2. Angriffsziel fuer 1. Tag: Hoehe westl. der Our, dann Durchstoss bis an die Sauer bei Ettelbrueck.
3. Artl., zusammengefasst im Korpsverband, sollte erstes Uebersetzen durch Feuer auf die erkannten feindl. Stellungen unterstuetzen.
4. Pi. Batl. hatte Auftrag, eine Behelfsbruecke suedl. Bettel (Gantingen) zu bauen.

B. Zeitabschnitt vom 16. - 18.12.44 (Anlage 1):

Erstes Uebersetzen ueber die Our verlief ueberraschend fuer den Gegner und planmaessig. Inf. Rgt. 915 stiess, feindl. Widerstandsnester umgehend, bis westl. Bastendorf durch. Hier blieb es bis zum 19.12. liegen, da schwere Waffen fehlten und Munition knapp wurde.

I.R. 916 blieb im Angriff am Nordosthang der Hoehe nordwestl. Walendorf vor feindl. Widerstandsnestern liegen. Erst am 18.12. gegen 10.00 Uhr vorm. gelang es dem Rgt., nach Zufuehrung schwerer Waffen, diese Hoehe zu nehmen.

I.R. 914 wurde am 17.12. in den ersten Morgenstunden nachgezogen mit Auftrag, bis zum Rgt. 915 durchzustossen. Dies gelang bis zum (Lunzendorf) 18.12. nicht, da schwere Waffen fehlten und das Rgt. unter starker Flankenbedrohung litt. Nach Zufuehrung von schweren Waffen konnte am 18.12. Fouhren besetzt werden, das bereits von Teilen der 5. Fallschirm-Division im Sturm genommen worden war. (Rgt 13, / GR 914)

Behelfsbruecke suedl. Bettel (Gentingen) wurde am Abend des 17.12. fertiggestellt.

Zeitabschnitt 19. - 22.12.:

I.R. 914 stellte am 19.12. abends Verbindung mit I.R. 915 her, nachdem Bastendorf gefallen war. Artl. wurde zur Weiterfuehrung des Angriffes ueber die Our nach Raum Bastendorf nachgezogen. Die Div. nahm am 21.12. Ettelbrueck. Diese Verzoegerung trat durch feindl. Brueckensprengungen ein.

Fuer den 22.12. wurde der Angriff mit Ziel Attert-Abschnitt (Bettborn - Bissen) fortgesetzt. Feindl. Gegenangriff in Staerke etwa einer amerikanischen Division mit Panzerunterstuetzung zwang zur Aufgabe dieser Absicht.

I.R. 916 und 914 wurden auf Brueckenkopfstellung Ettelbrueck zurueckgenommen. I.R.915, weit vorgestaffelt und eingeschlossen, erhielt den Auftrag, sich durchzuschlagen. Es meldete sich etwa am 26.12. unter Verlust seiner schweren Waffen bei der Div. zurueck.

Zeitabschnitt 23. und 24.12.:

Am 23.12. lag Brueckenkopfbesatzung im Abwehrkampf. Ers.Batl.352 bezog Befehlsgemaess gegen Abend den Sicherheitsabschnitt Diekirch -

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Wallendorf, da linker Nachbar nicht vorwaerts gekommen war. Am 24.12. wurde Brueckenkopfbesatzung auf Sauer zurueckgenommen, um damit eine staerkere Abwehrfront zu erreichen.

B. Zur Frage 1. nein

2. I.R. 914 (Div.Reserve) musste bereits in der Nacht vom 16./17.12. eingesetzt werden (siehe Skizze).
3. linker Nachbar (276.I.D.) kam nicht vorwaerts. Fuer eigene Div. bestand dadurch Flankenbedrohung, die sich mit Fortschreiten des Angriffs stetig verstaerkte.
4. Infanterie hatte Auftrag feindl. Stuetzpunkte zu umgehen, um Raum nach vorwaerts zu gewinnen.
5. Normale Nachrichtenausstattung.
6. Gut bis zum 24.12., dann Stoerung durch feindl. Luftwaffe.
7. Keine
8. Nichts Besonderes zu berichten.

III. Beurteilung:

A. Das Gelaende fuer den Angriff war tief eingeschnitten und damit unuebersichtlich. Die Our und Sauer fuehrten reissendes Hochwasser, was den Brueckenschlag verzogerte. Diese Nachteile wirkten sich, wie schon beschrieben, hoechst nachteilig fuer den Angriff, der schnell vorwaerts getragen werden musste, aus.

B. Kritische Momente: 16. und 17.12.44 - An diesen Tagen musste die Infanterie ohne schwere Waffen und mit weit abstehender Artillerie kaempfen. Nachschub von Munition und Material wurde durch verzogerten Brueckenschlag stark behindert.

Am 22.12. feindl. Gegenstoss gegen die im Vormarsch begriffenen Divisionen. Staerke etwa 1 amerik. Division verstaerkt durch 60 - 70 Panzer.

20. bis 25.12. - Ungeschuetzte tiefe Flanken von etwa 20 km, gegen die mit feindl. Angriff zu rechnen war. Hierfuer standen der Division keine Reserven zur Verfuegung.

C. Mir nicht moeglich zu beantworten.

gez. SCHNIDT

Generalmajor

Appendix VIII:

Major Embert Fossum's Report, Advanced Infantry Officer's Course, 1948 – 1949

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF "TASK FORCE I", 109TH INFANTRY
(28TH INFANTRY DIVISION) NEAR GROSBOUS, LUXEMBOURG
20 - 23 DECEMBER 1944

(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Task Force Commander)

Type of operation described:

REINFORCED RIFLE COMPANY AS SECURITY
FOR THE EXPOSED FLANK OF A DEFENSIVE POSITION

Major Embert A. Fossum, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO 2

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THE OPERATIONS OF "TASK FORCE L", 109TH INFANTRY
(28TH INFANTRY DIVISION) NEAR GROSBOS, LUXEMBOURG
20 - 23 DECEMBER 1944

(ARDENNES-ALSACE CAMPAIGN)

(Personal Experience of a Task Force Commander)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of "Task Force L", 109th Infantry, 28th Infantry Division, in the vicinity of Grosbos, Luxembourg, 20-23 December, 1944, fighting against the German Ardennes Offensive.

"Task Force L", in reality a heavily reinforced rifle company, consisted of the following:

Company L, 109th Infantry;

1 Heavy Machine Gun Platoon, Company M, 109th Infantry;

1 Section, 81mm Mortar Platoon, Company M, 109th Infantry;

1 Section, Anti-Tank Platoon, 3d Battalion Headquarters Company, 109th Infantry (2 57mm Anti-Tank Guns);

1 Platoon, Company C, 707th Medium Tank Battalion (2 M-4 "Sherman" Medium Tanks);

1 Platoon, Company A, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion (2 76mm Towed Anti-Tank Guns);

1 Squad, Company A, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion;

1 Radio Team, Headquarters Company, 109th Infantry (1 SCR 284 mounted on $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton vehicle);

1 Forward Observer Team, 108th Field Artillery Battalion (155 Howitzer).

All of these units were sadly depleted in strength, after having battled against overwhelming odds for four days and nights. As shown before, the tank platoon consisted of only two tanks, and the tank destroyer platoon had only two guns; Company L, the basic unit, consisted of approximately 100 men. (1)

In order to explain why this small "task force" was formed and how it was employed, it will be necessary to first describe the general situation along the Western European front and what had happened along that front, particularly in the 28th Infantry Division sector of the VIII Corps, First United States Army, during the preceding four days.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

After the victorious dash across France and Belgium during the late summer and early fall of 1944, the Allied Armies had pushed up generally against the West Wall defenses of the German border from The Netherlands to Switzerland. Fighting elements had pushed on to the limits of logistical support, and there was a pause along the entire Western front. (2) Early in December the Third United States Army was preparing for a thrust into the Saar basin. (3) Farther north, the First and Ninth United States Armies were massing for an attack which was planned to carry them across the Roer river, over the Cologne plain, and into the heart of the Nazi Reich. As part of this preparation, the Divis-

(1) Personal Knowledge; (2) A-1, pp. 56-60; (3) A-1, pp. 71, 72.

ions of the V Corps, First Army, were being torn to shreds as they battered their way yard by yard through the "green hell" of Hurtgen forest toward the Roer dams, the capture of which was necessary before the main attack could be launched. (4)

Between the Third Army and the positions selected for the northern attack lay the 80-mile quiet front of the VIII Corps, extending through the mountainous Ardennes region of Belgium and Luxembourg. In order to concentrate as large a force as possible for the big attack, the high command had decided to risk holding this line with an extremely thin force. (See Map A) (5)

For three months activity along this front had been negligible. Minor patrol activities were carried on by both sides, and there was a regular exchange of carefully rationed artillery fire. Training and rehabilitation were emphasized for the defending troops. (6)

On 16 December 1944, this long VIII Corps front was held, from north to south, by the 106th Infantry Division, the 28th Infantry Division, Combat Command A of the 9th Armored Division, and the 4th Infantry Division. Two of these units, the 106th Infantry Division and CCA, 9th Armored Division, were new to the combat zone and had been moved to this quiet sector for purposes of battle indoctrination. The other two, 28th Infantry Division and 4th Infantry Division, had been badly mauled in the bitter battle of Hurtgen forest, and had been sent there for rest and reorgani-

(4) A-1, pp. 69-71; (5) A-1, p. 78; A-2, pp. 142, 143;
(6) A-1, pp. 77-82.

zation. (7) The 28th Division had lost 248 officers and 5,452 enlisted men as battle casualties during three weeks of this fierce fighting in November. (8) Men of the organization had jokingly changed their battle cry from "Roll On, 28th!" to "Roll Over, 28th, and Make Room for Replacements!" (9)

Then, before daylight on the morning of 16 December, the entire VIII Corps front erupted. (See Map A) The Nazi Wehrmacht had massed three Armies, consisting of twenty divisions with a heavy preponderance of armor, and slashed through the thin American line, heading for Brussels, the Meuse, Antwerp, and the North Sea. (10) The German Sixth Panzer Army shoved aside the 99th Infantry Division, southernmost unit of V Corps, and crashed through the defenses of the 106th Division. The Fifth Panzer Army smashed through the Southern regiment of the 106th Division and split the 28th Division, penetrating its sector in several places for a depth of several miles. And the Seventh German Army was hurled against the Southern regiment of the 28th Division, the 9th Armored Division's CCA, and the Northern portion of the 4th Infantry Division. (11)

The greatest counter-offensive drive ever thrown against American troops had been successfully launched by the Germans, and for three days fresh Nazi divisions were shoved into the breached line to exploit the initial success. (12)

(7) A-1, p. 77; A-2, p. 143; (8) A-4, ch. III (pages not numbered) (9) Personal Knowledge; (10) A-3, p. 195; (11) A-1, pp. 106-115; (12) A-1, pp. 136-149.

THE 28TH DIVISION SITUATION

(MAP B)

Almost from the time of the first blow struck by the Germans, the situation along the 28th Division's portion of the line was described by higher headquarters as "fluid". (13) All three regiments had been on the line, with the division covering a 27-mile front, and all three had been hit hard. (14)

The 112th Infantry, on the north, had been cut off from contact with the rest of the division by the drive of the 47th Panzer Corps, and on the second day of the battle, in the absence of orders from division headquarters, had been pulled north to St. Vith by Major General Troy H. Middleton, VIII Corps Commander. (15) This regiment fought the remainder of the Ardennes battle as an attachment, successively, of the 106th Infantry Division, 7th Armored Division, 75th Infantry Division and XVIII Airborne Corps. (16) When operational control of the 28th Division, along with VIII Corps, passed to Third Army on 201330 December, this regiment remained in First Army. (17)

The 110th Infantry, in the center of the division line, was hardest hit. The main effort of the 47th Panzer Corps literally smashed this thinly spread out regiment to bits. Companies, platoons, and squads were isolated and wiped out, captured, or pushed back. (18) The major portion of the 109th Field Artillery Battalion, in direct support of the 110th Infantry, finally on 19 December struggled into Bastogne, where it was attached to the 907th Glider Field Ar-

(13) A-1, p. 173; A-7, pp. 108, 111; (14) A-1, p. 175;
(15) A-1, p. 114; (16) A-1, p. 154; A-4, ch. IV; (17) A-3, p. 173;
A-7, p. 113; (18) A-1, p. 113; A-4, ch. IV.

tillery Battalion of the beleaguered 101st Airborne Division. (19) Also at Bastogne was "Task Force Snafu", made up of miscellaneous personnel of the 28th Division and other organizations, under the command of Captain Charles Brown of the 110th Infantry. (20) Others fought along side of clerks, general service engineers, and the division band in an unsuccessful attempt to defend Wiltz, the town where the division headquarters was located. (21) Finally on 20 December the remnants of the regiment, consisting of 454 enlisted men and 42 officers, was collected under division control and formed a defense line south of Bastogne. (22)

not shown
The 109th Infantry, on the south, stood up better under the initial assault. Company E was cut off at Longsdorf and minor penetrations were made in Company F and Company I sectors. The 60th Armored Infantry Battalion of CCA, 9th Armored Division, on the regiment's right, withdrew to Eppeldorf, about three miles from its original front. The 28th Division Commander ordered the 109th to roll back with the 9th Armored, so as not to expose its flank. With its own left flank hanging open and exposed by the penetrations in the 110th Infantry front, the 109th, on 18 December, began to pivot to the south, and on the 20th had formed a line, facing generally north, at right angles to its original position, on the high ground south of Ettlebruck. (23) This line was extended on the right by CCA of the 9th Armored Division, CCA of the 10th Armored Division, and elements of the 4th Infantry Division, forming the southern

(19) A-5, p. 73; (20) A-5, pp. 69, 70; (21) A-1, p. 176; A-2, p. 156; A-4, ch. IV; (22) A-1, p. 185; A-4, ch. IV; (23) A-4, ch. IV; A-6.

"hinge" of the American line against the penetration. (24)

The 107th Field Artillery Battalion (105-Howitzer); the 108th Field Artillery Battalion (155-Howitzer); Company A, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion; Company A, 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed); and Company C, 707th Medium Tank Battalion all swung to the south with the 109th Infantry, forming RCT 109. On 20 December contact with division headquarters had been lost and RCT 109 was attached to CCA, 9th Armored Division, which in turn was attached to 10th Armored Division. (25)

Thus, by 20 December, contact between units of the 28th Division had become severed and it could not be employed as a unit. (See Map B) RCT 112 was fighting on the north flank of the "bulge" as part of the First Army. A portion of the 109th Field Artillery and individuals from other division units were at Bastogne but out of direct contact with division headquarters. The remnants of the 110th Infantry, divisional special troops, and division headquarters were at Sibret, Belgium, forming part of the VIII Corps line (now part of Third Army) at the western limits of the penetration. And RCT 109 was on the south flank with XII Corps, Third Army. (26)

The following statement of Lieutenant Colonel George Dyer, Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff, XII Corps, is indicative of the confusion which prevailed all around the perimeter of the "bulge" which had been driven into the American lines: "So confused was the situation, and so rapidly did units move in and out that some were never

(24) A-1, pp. 184; 185; A-3, p. 173; (25) A-1, p. 104; A-4, ch. IV; A-6; A-7, p. 114; (26) A-4, ch. IV.

pinned down long enough to be reflected on XII Corps paper; a good example of this is the 109th regiment of the 28th Infantry Division, the rest of which had been scattered off to the North and West, which appears on no XII Corps station list, though it was briefly part of the Corps." (27)

THE SITUATION OF COMPANY L, 109TH INFANTRY

(map 35)

For a clear picture of the condition and effectiveness of "Task Force L", it is necessary to explain in more detail the operations of Company L, the basic unit of the "task force", during this four-day period of fighting and confusion, 16-19 December 1944. (See Map BB)

Company L, 109th Infantry, was the southernmost unit of the 28th Division when the German attack hit. Although the company's front was far too wide to be adequately defended -- approximately two miles -- the ground it occupied was admirably adaptable for a defensive situation. Located at a major river junction, the company straddled the Sure river at Reisdorf and faced the Germans across the Our river. On the north, L Company was tied in with I Company and on the south with the 60th Armored Infantry Battalion, 9th Armored Division. The positions of the riflemen were on high ground, which on a large portion of the long company front dropped almost precipitously down to the west bank of the Our. (28)

During the Nazi's initial artillery preparation, which aroused the company at 0600 on the 16th, the house where L Company's Command Post was located received direct hits from

(27) A-8, p. 288; (28) Personal Knowledge.

both conventional artillery and Nebelwerfer rockets, which set it afire. And starting with dawn, and continuing for two days at intervals of from four to six hours, L Company's foxholes were charged by waves of drunken or "hopped up" German "Supermen", wildly firing Schmeiser machine pistols and shouting unintelligible battle cries containing references to "Twenty-eighth" and "Cognac". (29)

Armor could not operate on this particular portion of the front because of the two rivers and the rugged terrain. And with an abundance of artillery support, L Company managed to beat back every attack. Company requests for fire were delivered by M Company's 81-mm mortars, regimental Cannon Company, two battalions of 28th Division Artillery, and a battalion of field artillery from the Ninth Armored Division. (30)

All of this was not done without considerable loss, both killed and wounded. And on the 17th all available manpower, including the company's kitchen personnel, was brought up and put in the line. (31)

Shortly after noon on the third day, 18 December, the company was ordered, via SCR 300, to fall back to Bettendorf, the location of 3d Battalion headquarters. This was accomplished with considerable difficulty and some casualties, as a limited penetration in I Company's sector to the north enabled the enemy to cover the road back with automatic weapons fire. (See Map BB) After engaging in a limited fire fight, the company managed to reach the Bettendorf position about the time darkness fell, but to do so it had been nec-

(29) Personal Knowledge; (30) The writer cannot identify this Armored F.A. Bn; however, "Cobblestone" was its telephone code name; (31) A-6; Personal Knowledge.

essary to abandon a quantity of ammunition, emergency rations, and the personal effects of practically all members of the company. One 60-mm mortar was also lost. It was reported by one member of the mortar crew that he had abandoned the weapon after it had been hit by small arms fire, ruining the elevating mechanism, but the company commander was never assured whether this actually happened or whether the mortar was abandoned in the near panic which accompanied the daylight withdrawal. (32)

At Bettendorf a defensive position was taken by Company L while the remainder of the battalion slipped to the rear under cover of darkness to join the rest of the regiment in a newly selected defensive position on the high ground north and east of Diekirch. (See Map BB) (33) This was an extremely difficult move, since enemy tanks had come down from the north and cut the main road from Bettendorf to Diekirch, which paralleled the Sure river on the north. (34) With considerable trepidation and no prior reconnaissance, the battalion succeeded in crossing the river at Bettendorf and moved down an unimproved road south of the river to another bridge at Gilsdorf, west of the German road block. There it recrossed to join the remainder of the regiment. After the rest of the battalion had started back, L Company moved back, one platoon at a time, over the same route, but not until after about ten casualties had been sustained from intense artillery, rocket, and mortar fire. The last group from the company to leave Bettendorf assisted members of

(32) Personal Knowledge; (33) (34) A-6; Personal Knowledge.

Company A, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion, to blow both bridges after crossing. (35)

The new position near Diekirch was held through the next day, 19 December, but was subjected to repeated attacks of both infantry and tanks. In a limited counter attack, directed toward the German road block which had cut the main route back, L Company's first platoon captured 81 prisoners. In spite of these successes, by nightfall it was apparent that the regiment's new mission of covering the flank of CCA, 9th Armored Division, could not be accomplished from this position, and another withdrawal to the south bank of the river at Ettlebruck was ordered. (See Map BB) (36)

Again Company L was given the task of covering the movement, which began immediately after dark. (37) The route of withdrawal was covered by enemy artillery fire, and more than 30 casualties were suffered as the regiment pulled south. (38) When L Company had crossed the river, the bridge at Ettlebruck was blown, and the remainder of the night was spent by the company digging in along the river bank through the town. (39)

"TASK FORCE L" IS FORMED

However, by daylight plans had been changed, "Task Force L" had been formed, and a new move was in progress.

A new solid line was being formed on the south flank of the German area of penetration by XII Corps. This new

(35) Personal Knowledge; (36) A-4, ch. IV; A-6; (37) Personal Knowledge; (38) A-6; (39) Personal Knowledge.

line extended east and west from the vicinity of Echter-
nach to the high ground about two miles south of Ettlebruck. *map C*
(40) RCI 109 was to form the western portion of the line.
Its 2d Battalion, which had suffered greatest in the previ-
ous four days fighting, was tied in with 9th Armored units
left of Ermsdorf. The 1st Battalion dug in on the high
ground just south of Ettlebruck. 3d Battalion was to cover
the left flank of this line, and in order to accomplish this
was broken down into three units which were to be posted at
major road junctions to the west of the main line. (See
Map C) (41)

I Company, reinforced, moved into Feulen. K Company,
reinforced, moved into Merzig. 3d Battalion headquarters
was set up at Michelbuch. And "Task Force L" was to move
seven miles southwest and occupy the town of Grosbous. (42)

Orders given the little "task force" were in substance
as follows: Move out at 0500 (about an hour and a half be-
fore daylight) and go to Grosbous. If the enemy is in the
town, drive him out and occupy it. If the enemy is not there,
set up a perimeter defense and hold at all costs. The Ger-
man 5th Parachute Division and 352 Volksgrenadier Division
are known to be operating to our immediate north and west and
may move against the town from any direction. Communicate
directly with regiment, by-passing battalion channels. Good-
bye and good luck. (43)

The men and officers of this little group, after four
days and nights of constant contact with the enemy, were so

(40) A-1, p. 184; (41) (42) A-4, ch. IV; A-6; (43) Personal
Knowledge.

worn with loss of sleep and fatigue that the ominous sound of the orders did not arouse undue concern or interest. They were almost too tired, cold and hungry to care.

Incessant attack by the enemy and the digging of three successive positions during the withdrawal had fatigued them almost beyond endurance. (44)

Blankets, rolls, and overcoats had, for the most part, been lost or abandoned, and the December weather seemed to grow more bitterly cold each hour. (45)

There had hardly been time to eat, even if food had been available. When they had left their original position at Reisdorf shortly after noon on the 18th, each man had carried one-third of a K-ration with him in his pocket. Another one-third of a K-ration had been issued as they left Diekirch on the night of the 18th. And while in Ettlebruck, during the early morning hours of 20 December, many members of the company had shared in a quantity of canned poultry and fruit juices left there by the 102d Evacuation hospital, which had made an extremely hurried evacuation. (46)

The men of the attached units had suffered about the same experiences. For instance, Lieutenant Quarry, who commanded the tank platoon from Company C, 707th Tank Battalion, had two tanks hit and burned while he was riding in them during the previous four days. The second time, after escaping from the burning vehicle, he had been forced to swim the Sure river under a hail of enemy small-arms fire. (47)

So it was a pretty badly beaten unit that headed for Grosbous. Morale was certainly at a low ebb.

(44) (45) (46) (47) Personal Knowledge.

As the column moved out of Ettlebruck, some enemy had apparently succeeded in crossing the river, and a few shots were exchanged with one German in the churchyard in the center of town. (48)

I Company and K Company had already taken up their positions in Feulen and Merzig, respectively, when "Task Force L" moved through, but except for the one lone German at the Ettlebruck church, no enemy had been contacted by any elements of the battalion. When daylight came, however, one unforeseen difficulty was encountered. The road became jammed with refugees, on foot, in trucks, on bicycles, pushing carts, and leading ox-carts, seriously impeding the progress of the vehicular elements of the column, which were following by bounds behind the dismounted rifle elements. (49)

ORGANIZATION OF A PERIMETER DEFENSE AT GROUSBOUS

Except for the difficulty of pushing through the swarm of Luxembourg farmers, fleeing with all their livestock and possessions, Grosbous was entered and occupied without incident. But immediately upon arrival in the town, the "task force" was confronted with four obvious problems, which the commander felt should be dealt with according to the following priority: first, organization of the defensive position; second, providing some rest for the men, now near the point of exhaustion; third, providing some adequate feeding plan; and fourth, exercising some manner of control over the civilians.

(48) (49) Personal Knowledge.

To cope with problem number one, the task force commander and the platoon leaders immediately made a reconnaissance to determine how the perimeter defense was to be set up. (See Map D)

They found that Grosbous was a typical European village, with buildings of solid masonry construction extending for about 1000 yards along the highway and along side-streets for 200 to 300 yards on either side. The main highway, over which the "task force" had entered the town, was a hard-surfaced road coming in from the east and curving through the town, going out in a southwesterly direction. From the cobblestone square in front of the village church, another hard-surfaced road led out of the town, almost due south. To the north and northwest, six unimproved roads and wagon trails led up into the wooded hills.

The village lay on the north side and near the end of a valley, about 1500 yards in width, which extended generally from west to east. To the north of the town high hills rose rather abruptly. These were heavily wooded on the crest, but the lower portions were cleared pasture lands and terraced cultivated fields. On the south side of the valley a low ridge, wooded along the crest, generally paralleled the main highway leading through the town. A small creek flowed easterly along the floor of the valley, and three others, one running through the town, emptied into this, flowing down from the hills in a southwesterly direction. However, all were small and were little or no obstacle to either foot troops or tracked vehicles. South of the town,

near the village cemetery, was a large orchard. Except for this, the floor of the valley consisted of cleared fields. All surfaced roads were lined on either side by rows of regularly spaced tall trees.

Although as stated in the orders to the "task force", large bodies of enemy were known to be operating to the north and west and could approach the town unimpeded from almost any direction, it appeared that the most likely approach was from the east, along the route over which the "task force" had just come. And this route was blocked at Feulen by Company I and at Merzig by Company K.

Time would not permit an extensive reconnaissance of the six unimproved roads leading over the high hills to the north and northwest, and although they obviously led to German-held territory, it did not appear likely that any large enemy force would attempt to use these poor and difficult routes when better ones were easily accessible. The paved roads to the south and southwest led in the direction of American-held areas but were undefended near Grosbous and were open to any enemy making a flanking movement from the west. But last contact with the enemy had been at Ettlebruck, so the road to that place was considered to be the most likely approach and it was decided that this route would be most heavily defended. (See Map D) (50)

A perimeter defensive position was laid out around the town, extending about 1200 yards in a north-south direction and about 750 yards from east to west. This extended, roughly, around the outermost buildings of the town

(50) Personal Knowledge.

and could not be contracted without greatly reducing visibility and fields of fire. Obviously, it could not be tightly defended by a half-strength rifle company. So it was organized into squad positions -- for squads consisting of five or six men -- as close-in support of the automatic weapons and anti-tank guns. For the most part it was possible to cover the wide gaps between squads and platoons with small-arms fire. But even spaced as thin as they were, no riflemen were left for an inner perimeter or reserve. (51)

The first platoon was deployed for about 750 yards around the eastern and northeastern portions of the town, covering the main road toward Merzig, Feulen, and Ettlebruck and one unimproved road to the north. L Company's .50 caliber machine gun was dug in with the center squad, firing directly up the main road. A section of heavy .30 caliber machine guns was placed with a rifle squad north of this main road, and the other section of heavy machine guns and a rifle squad were dug in south of the main road. The two 76-mm tank destroyer guns were placed on high ground, north of the town, protected by the northernmost squad and also covering the main avenue of approach. (52)

The third platoon was stretched for about 600 yards around the south and southwest portions of the perimeter. Each squad of this platoon was reinforced with a light .30 caliber machine gun. (53) The two surfaced roads, leading south and southwest out of the town, were each covered by one of these squads. The third squad was dug in between these roads in the large orchard. One of the 57-mm anti-tank

(51) (52) Personal Knowledge; (53) One extra light machine gun had been picked up from a knocked-out American tank several days earlier.

guns was emplaced to cover the road leading to the southwest. (54)

The second platoon, with no automatic weapons except Browning automatic rifles, was placed to the west and north of the town, covering about 500 yards across five of the unimproved roads which led up to the wooded hills. The remaining 57-mm anti-tank gun was placed on the left flank of this position, where it could fire up one of the unimproved roads and across three others. (55)

The two 81-mm mortars and the company's remaining two 60-mm mortars were set up near the cemetery in the southern part of the village, emplaced to cover the eastern and northeastern approaches. (56)

The two medium tanks were left in the center of the town to be utilized as a mobile reserve against attack from any direction. These, along with L Company's first sergeant, the regimental radio team, and the engineer squad, constituted the entire reserve of the "task force". (57)

Men were just not available to set up an adequate outpost system, and listening posts were held down to a bare minimum. Three two-man outposts were set up. One was near a large farm house about 500 yards down the main road in front of the third platoon, near a bridge where the road crossed a creek. And the third was put in at the edge of the woods about 400 yards forward of the second platoon's middle squad. (58)

As soon as the necessary foxholes and emplacements for the crew-served weapons could be dug, problem number two was (54) (55) (56) (57) (58) Personal Knowledge.

tackled and measures were taken to obtain some sleep and rest for the men. A system was set up whereby half of the men could occupy houses immediately adjacent to their assigned positions. This reduced the number actually in their holes to barely enough to man the crew-served weapons with an additional two, three, or four riflemen to each squad position. But unless some rest could be obtained it seemed obvious that they would be in no physical condition to put up any resistance. (59)

The third problem -- that of feeding -- virtually solved itself. In Ettlebruck the battalion S-4 had managed to obtain about 100 blankets for L Company, and these, along with a quantity of K-rations, were brought to Grosbous in company transportation with the "task force" and issued there. That relieved the immediate hunger problem, and very soon these rations were supplemented, to a large extent, by smoked hams and sausages which the men soon ferreted out of the chimney smoke closets of many of the abandoned Luxembourg homes. (60)

These rations and the much-needed rest which the men managed to obtain undisturbed by the enemy during the remainder of 20 December served to buoy the spirits of the "task force" considerably, and morale reached the highest peak in several days.

THE CIVILIAN PROBLEM

The final problem, that dealing with the civilians, was approached next. Some American Army service unit had been

(59) (60) Personal Knowledge.

billeted in the village previously, and had been withdrawn to the rear as soon as the extent of the German break-through became known. When these troops had left, many of the Luxembourg residents began to doubt the wisdom and safety of remaining friendly to Allied personnel, and doubtless there were some who had real sympathy for the Nazi cause. In any case, many of these civilians, either hostile or with wavering loyalty toward Americans, had prepared a welcome for the onrushing Germans. When "Task Force L" arrived in the town it was confronted with many Swastika flags and Nazi banners displayed in front of homes and places of business, and it seemed likely that the position was infested with unfriendly persons and potential spies, indistinguishable from those who were friendly and deserving of treatment as Allies. (61)

As the perimeter defense was being prepared around the town, many of the residents, with their livestock and other portable possessions, started to leave. The problem was to prevent spies and informers from going to the German forces with information concerning the strength, armament, and position of the "task force", and at the same time to enable the loyal Luxembourgers to escape from falling into the hands of the Germans again. Many would undoubtedly have, in such a case, suffered severe retaliation for having been friendly and cooperative with American forces since their liberation the previous September.

The "task force" commander, with an interpreter, went to the mayor and village priest and laid down this rule: those

(61) Personal Knowledge.

who wished to leave could do so, using only those routes to the southwest and south away from known German-held territory, and they were given a three-hour deadline to clear the town. No one would be permitted to pass outside of the perimeter after the deadline hour, and those who remained would have to take the risk of remaining in their homes and cellars if a battle developed. This word was quickly spread, and a large majority of the residents made a hurried exit. (62)

There was another more favorable aspect to the civilian situation. As L Company was leaving Diekirch on the night of the 19th the "task force" commander had witnessed the execution of several persons -- described as Nazi collaborators -- by members of the Luxembourg "police", who were former members of the underground and were now identified by an arm-band and armed with captured German weapons. Now Diekirch was in the hands of the Wehrmacht, and a group of 15 of these "police", several of whom were recognized as those who had shot the collaborators, arrived at Grosbous and offered their services. Their offer was accepted, and they were utilized as welcome replacements in the depleted rifle platoons of L Company. Throughout the remainder of this operation they stayed and fought as members of the "task force". (63)

CHANGES ON THE REGIMENTAL FRONT

Another serious problem soon arose. The SCR 284 proved incapable of maintaining continuous or adequate communication

(62) (63) Personal Knowledge.

with regimental headquarters, and shortly after dark a liaison officer from regiment arrived in a $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton vehicle over the road which led from the south. He informed the "task force" commander that after a more careful study of the situation, the regimental commander, Colonel James E. Rudder, felt that the flank security mission could best be accomplished from a defensive position on the low, wooded ridge to the southwest, paralleling the main road at a distance of from 1000 to 1300 yards. He also stated that a telephone line was then in the process of being strung from regimental headquarters to the company and should be in within a couple of hours. (64)

He said that the 1st Battalion had observed large numbers of enemy in Ettlebruck and had been directing a considerable volume of artillery fire on them. I Company, at Feulen, had been attacked by a strong combat patrol and had repulsed it. (See Map C) (65)

With this information, the "task force" moved across the valley and began to dig in along the edge of the woods near the crest of the ridge, stretched out on a front of about 1300 yards. (66)

After about three hours had been used in digging in these new positions, the regimental wire team arrived, and the "task force" leader immediately called his regimental commander and informed him of the situation. As a result of this conversation, it was decided that the original perimeter defense around the town should be reoccupied and

(64) Personal Knowledge; (65) A-6; (66) Personal Knowledge.

that the new position on the crest of the ridge should serve as an alternate position. As soon as the foxholes and gun emplacements were completed, the entire "task force" moved back into the perimeter positions around Grosbous, and the telephone line was extended to the command post which had been established there. (67)

21 December was a quiet day at Grosbous, but information of increased enemy activity in other portions of the regimental sector was received with regularity over the wire from the regimental command post. Once during the day, a regimental liaison officer again arrived at the "task force" position to get first-hand information of the situation there and to ^{advise} (apprize) the "task force" commander of what was happening elsewhere. (See Map E) (68)

At 0520 that morning, Company I had repulsed an attack made by a company of enemy infantry at Feulen. CCA, 9th Armored Division, reported increased pressure near Ermsdorf and the G-2 of that organization warned of a probable Nazi drive from the northwest. (69)

1st Battalion had fought off combat patrols and had captured a German officer who carried an operation map which showed that the 352 Volksgrenadier Division was to attack through Ettlebruck and then turn south to Arlon and Luxembourg City, utilizing the Feulen-Merzig-Grosbous road. ^{MAP A} ^{MAP E} (70)

By noon the pressure on I Company had increased to such a degree that Feulen could not be held by this small force, and it was pulled south and east to the high ground over-

(67) (68) Personal Knowledge; (69) A-6; (70) A-6; Personal Knowledge.

looking Merzig. (See Map E) (71)

The position of Company C, on the left flank of the 1st Battalion, was adjusted to tie in with I Company. Constant enemy activity, including motor movement, was reported from then on in front of these two companies. Enemy infantry, supported by tanks, pressed against K Company at Merzig, and shortly after dark that unit was pulled back astride the road to Michelbuch, extending the regimental line to the south. The road to Grosbous was now cleared for the enemy. (72)

DEFENSE OF THE VILLAGE

At about 2100 "Task Force L's" listening post on the road from Merzig reported enemy troops approaching. It was an extremely dark night and the number could not be estimated with any accuracy -- on the spot estimates ranging from 50 to 200. They were moving incautiously, massed on the road, and making considerable noise. The "task force" was immediately alerted and all men swiftly went to their assigned foxholes. (See Map D) (73)

Although it was too dark to see anything, soon movement could be readily heard 300 to 400 yards in front of the main line. The .50 caliber machine gun opened up first, spraying the road directly to its front. After the initial burst it was joined by fire from the two sections of heavy .30 caliber machine guns and all of the rifles and automatic rifles of the first platoon. (74)

(71) A-4, ch. IV; A-6; (72) (73) A-6; (74) Personal Knowledge.

Cries of pain and surprise proved that the fire was effective, and the enemy who were not hit immediately took to their heels. The men of the "task force" sat tight in their holes, no pursuit being attempted in the inky darkness. (75)

A report of the incident was immediately telephoned to regiment, and after about an hour with no further enemy activity, the "task force" was ordered to move up on the ridge to its alternate position. (76) It is to be remembered at this time that the mission of RCF 109 was not to guard the Feulen-Merzig-Grosbous road, but was to protect the exposed flank of the XII Corps line from envelopment from the west and northwest.

This shift of positions, though unimpeded by the enemy, was not without incident. In attempting to tow one of the 76-mm tank destroyer guns from its position above the town, the half-tracked prime mover slid on the steep, muddy ground, and the gun was wedged between two trees. It could not be extricated in the dark, so part of the breech mechanism was removed to prevent its being used by the Germans, and it was temporarily abandoned. (77)

ORGANIZATION OF DEFENSE LINE ON THE RIDGE

On the ridge, the "task force" occupied the previously prepared positions, spread across a front of about 1300 yards and generally paralleling the main road through Grosbous at a range of from 1000 to 1500 yards. (See Map F)

The ground on the ridge was extremely muddy and slippery, (75) (76) (77) Personal Knowledge.

and the tracked vehicles had considerable difficulty in moving to good firing positions. However, through the skillful efforts of the half-track driver, the remaining 76-mm tank destroyer gun was placed in a good position about 150 yards to the right (east) of the road. The two tanks remained on the hard-surfaced road in positions where they had exceptionally good fields of fire but were completely exposed. The two 57-mm anti-tank guns were placed to cover two unimproved roads, running along the top of the ridge, one to the east and one to the west. The attached squad of engineers served as close-in rifle support for these weapons. (78)

The rifle platoons were assigned sectors of about 300 yards each. The second platoon was placed on the left of the road, reinforced by the three light machine guns and the .50 caliber machine gun. The first platoon was on the immediate right of the road, providing close-in support for the tank destroyer gun and reinforced with a section of .30 caliber machine guns. The third platoon was on the right of the first, also reinforced with one section of heavy .30 caliber machine guns. (79)

The 81-mm mortars and the 60-mm mortars were in defiladed positions about 1800 yards range to the center of the town and less to most observed portions of the main highway. (80)

To give the "task force" some protection on its right flank, the commanding officer of RCT 109 had ordered Company A, 103d Engineer Combat Battalion (minus the squad with the "task force") to dig in a position in the draw between "Task Force L" and the main regimental line. (See Map E) This

(78) (79) (80) Personal Knowledge.

gap, however, was about one mile in width and could not possibly be covered by this small unit. And the position selected by these engineers to defend was so deep in the heavily wooded draw that the "task force" could not tie in with them. To do so would have meant the sacrifice of all good fields of fire and visibility by pulling the defense force back to a reverse slope position on the heavily wooded ridge. But the engineers remained there and did not take any part in the subsequent action. (81)

Continued activity was reported from other sections of the regimental front. That portion of the road from Merzig to Feulen, now in German hands, was interdicted by our artillery throughout the night. At 0300, 22 December, the enemy penetrated our lines between C Company and B Company, but A Company -- the regimental reserve -- was committed and the line was restored. By daylight the enemy had pushed down the road from Merzig toward Michelbuch, and all available men at 3d Battalion command post were thrown into the fight at that point. (See Map E) (82)

Co's not shown

During the night, liaison officers from the 318th and 319th Infantry Regiments, 80th Infantry Division, had contacted regiment and stated that their units, a part of III Corps, Third Army, were moving north and would attack through our lines sometime in the morning. Grosbous, however, lay just east of their division boundary, and "Task Force I" would probably be relieved, they said, by elements of the 26th Infantry Division which was moving up on the left of the 80th. (83)

(81) A-6; Personal Knowledge; (82) A-6; (83) A-4, ch. IV; A-6.

Meanwhile, "Task Force I" spent the remainder of the night improving its position and patrolling to determine the enemy's movements. Shortly after daylight a light tank was observed about 1800 yards to the northeast, moving down the road toward Grosbous. Closer observation, through field glasses, revealed that two men in O.D. uniforms were pedaling furiously down the road on bicycles, about 200 or 300 yards in front of the tank. These men were soon identified as a patrol which had been sent out from the 1st platoon during the night. The forward observer from the 108th Field Artillery Battalion (155-Howitzer), immediately called for a fire mission, and several rounds were fired at the tank. Although no direct hits were made, some near misses caused the tank to head back. It turned off on an unimproved road leading into the wooded hills on the north and was soon out of sight. The artillery firing served a very useful purpose, however, furnishing registration data for the fire direction center. (84)

The two members of the patrol, when they finally arrived at the "task force" position, reported that they had stopped at a farmhouse when they heard the tank approaching. They immediately seized the two bicycles, which were at the house and appeared to be the fastest available means of transportation, and headed back for the company.

They further reported that 31 dead German infantrymen were scattered over the road in front of the Grosbous position, where the fight in the dark had taken place the night before. Most of them, they said, appeared to have been stopped

(84) Personal Knowledge.

by the .50 caliber gun. (85)

By the time they had arrived, snow had begun to fall, and it was soon coming down so heavily that visibility was limited to a few yards. This continued with undiminished intensity for about two hours.

In the meantime, the "task force" commander was informed that the attack near 3d Battalion headquarters had been beaten off, and that the 318th and 319th Infantry Regiments had passed through all other elements of the regiment and were now attacking in an attempt to recapture Merzig and Feulen and Ettlebruck. (86) Although no contact had been made with anyone from the 26th Infantry Division, that organization was known to be moving forward somewhere nearby. It was not known, however, from which direction it would be coming. Orders to "Task Force L" were to watch for the 26th Division and to inform regiment when it was contacted. (87)

AMBUSH OF THE GERMAN COLUMN

About 1000 hours the snow began to lessen and a solid column of troops and vehicles could be seen on the road to Grosbous, extending through the town and off to the southwest for several hundred yards, strung out laterally across the front of the "task force" at about 1300 yards range. Visibility was not good enough to determine whether it was a friendly or enemy force. (See Map F) (88)

Patrols were immediately sent down toward the road to

(85) Personal Knowledge; (86) A-9; (87) (88) Personal Knowledge.

determine whether it was a friendly or enemy force. Regiment was called in an effort to learn the identity of this column. The regimental command was not at the command post, and the regimental executive officer ordered the "task force" commander not to fire on the column, for fear that it might be the 26th Division units which were past due in that area or one of the 80th Division units which had just arrived. Although it was pointed out that it was extremely unlikely that any friendly troops would be coming from that direction, it was also unlikely that an attacking enemy would be in closed column on the road with no apparent flank security, and the order held that no fire was to be delivered unless positive identification could be made. (89)

By this time the snow had almost completely stopped, and the patrols were back with positive news that the column was German. The regimental commander, who had just arrived back at his C.P. called then to say that no American units could be on that road and to fire away. (90)

All this time the enemy column continued to move slowly down the road, and the task force, perched on the ridge along their south flank, was undetected. (91)

The German column, which was stretched along the road for about a mile and a half, consisted mostly of foot troops. Near the tail of the column there were some vehicles, three or four light artillery pieces -- probably 75-mm howitzers --, and two light tanks. The infantry troops were closed up tight, with one column on each side of the road. The vehicles were in closed column. (92)

(89) (90) (91) (92) Personal Knowledge.

It was quickly decided that it would be most effective to bring the heaviest possible volume of fire down on the unsuspecting enemy at one time, and word was sent up and down the line for no one to fire a single round until the artillery opened up. Then they were told to pour it on. (93)

The 108th Field Artillery Battalion (155-Howitzer) was called to fire on that portion of the column east of Grosbous, and the 107th Field Artillery Battalion (105-Howitzer) was asked for a fire mission on the leading portions of the column, southwest of the town. The two tanks and the one 76-mm tank destroyer gun, all located near the center of the position, would fire at the best targets they could pick up along the entire line, concentrating on the vehicles. The mortars, both 81-mm and 60-mm, were to fire into the town to dislodge troops that were obscured from sight by the buildings. Although the range was too great for effective rifle fire, all machine guns, rifles, and automatic rifles were to be fired into that portion of the column nearest their front. (94)

The forward observer from the 108th Field Artillery contacted his unit by radio and was told that the entire battalion would fire the mission and keep it up as long as profitable targets were available. There was no observer team from the 107th Field Artillery Battalion present, but an L Company platoon leader was designated to fill this berth and arrangements were made to relay the fire mission and adjustment calls through regiment to this unit. This whole battalion would also fire the mission. (95)

(93) (94) (95) Personal Knowledge.

As soon as the first call of "on the way" was received from the artillery, a hand signal was given by the "task force" commander and everything opened up.

The German column almost seemed to disintegrate under the initial blast of fire. Some of the vehicles managed to turn around and head back, out of sight. Others were knocked out by the tanks and tank-destroyer fire. Still others were abandoned. Individuals and small groups of infantry were seen scurrying for cover toward buildings and up the steep slopes on the other side of town. Not one round of any kind was fired in return by the bewildered enemy. (96)

Particularly effective "pursuit by fire" was delivered against the small groups above the village by the 76-mm tank destroyer gun. Firing high explosive ammunition at a range of about 2000 yards, this weapon scored several direct hits on small knots of men, sharply silhouetted against the background of snow-covered fields between the town and woods. (97)

Every weapon in the task force was utilized except the two 57-mm anti-tank guns and the rifles of the engineer squad, covering the flanks and rear of the defensive position. (98)

For almost 20 minutes this devastating fire was continued, until no more targets were visible. Then the 1st platoon was pulled out of its position in the center of the line and was sent hurrying toward the town to drive out any Germans who had taken refuge there. Little resistance was met. Five enemy were killed by rifle and carbine fire just as the leading men of the platoon reached the first buildings of the town. Others were encountered near the church, in the center of the

(96) (97) (98) Personal Knowledge.

town, but they were fleeing as rapidly as possible and offered practically no opposition. One I Company man was wounded when a rifle grenade fired by a retreating German exploded against the stone wall of a building near him. That was the only casualty suffered by "Task Force I" during its entire period of operations, 20-23 December. (99)

Just as the first platoon was entering the village, the 3d Battalion commander arrived on the scene. After the town had been cleared, he ordered the first platoon moved back to its position on the ridge in preparation for and expected counter attack. The tank destroyer gun, abandoned the night before, was now dislodged and also brought up to the ridge. (100)

Flushed with their success, the men of the "task force" waited confidently in their foxholes, but no counter attack developed. Many of the German infantrymen had reached the cover of the woods north of the town, and some near the head and tail of the column had managed to get out of sight of the "task force". But those who survived the ambush did not re-organize and attack the position, although they undoubtedly greatly outnumbered the defenders. (101)

Although it was not known at this time, the explanation for this probably lies in the fact that the 80th Division was just launching its attack toward Merzig and Feulen, and the main body of Germans had its hands full. While "Task Force I" was enjoying its successful ambush of the column, elements of the 319th Infantry caught a similar group on the road between Merzig and Feulen -- probably another serial of the

(99) (100) (101) Personal Knowledge.

same formation -- and completely disorganized it with artillery and direct fire. (102)

No accurate estimate of the German casualties can be made. The mopping-up operation in the town was hastily executed, and the pursuit was not carried along the road to either the east or southwest. However, the enemy unit involved was identified as the 915th Regiment, 352 Volksgrenadier Division. G-2, Third Army, estimated that this division had an effective combat strength of 7000 on 21 December (103), and this estimate had dropped to 5000 by 24 December. (104) A portion of this considerable loss was undoubtedly sustained in this action. From the position on the ridge, numerous enemy dead could be seen strewn along the road. (105)

Since the remainder of his unit had been relieved by the 319th Infantry and had moved for rest and a hot meal to the town of Schandel, about five miles due south of Grosbous, the 3d Battalion commander remained with "Task Force L" the remainder of the day and throughout the night. (106)

No more German activity was encountered, and at 0515 on the 23rd leading elements of the 104th Infantry, 26th Infantry Division, arrived at the position. (107) They explained that they had not arrived there the previous day, along with the 80th Division units, because they had met considerable enemy resistance on the road southwest of Grosbous. Upon their arrival, "Task Force L" was disbanded. The attached units were released to their parent organiza-

(102) A-9; (103) A-10; G-2 Annex 28, p. CXXIII; (104) A-10; G-2 Annex 28, p. CXXV; (105); (106); (107) Personal Knowledge.

tions, and L Company moved to Vichten, about five miles to the southwest, where a hot meal was served and preparations were made for a new attack, to be launched in coordination with the 10th Armored Division the following morning. (108)

There was still to be more fighting around Grosbous, however. The 104th Infantry did not immediately occupy Grosbous when "Task Force L" left the ridge, and it was necessary for this regiment to fight to regain the town, capturing a few prisoners there the following night. It was two days after "Task Force L" had left the position before the pocket of resistance encountered by the 26th Division troops southwest of Grosbous was cleared. (109)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Upon close analysis it would appear that the errors of the German attacking force contributed in great measure to the success enjoyed by "Task Force L" at Grosbous and on the ridge overlooking the town.

✓ The first attacking force of Germans to move against the town, moving right down the road in a massed formation with no attempt to maintain secrecy and no normal security elements employed, was set up like pins in a bowling alley for the American machine guns. ✓ It is almost impossible to understand why the larger ^(second) force would move down the road in closed formation the following day, without any flank security, even under cover of the dense snowfall, since they must have known that there were defending forces nearby.

(108) Personal Knowledge; (109) A-10; G-2 Annex 28, p. CXXIII; A-11.

*3 letter
supporting
American
needed.*

The only reasonable explanation for these actions of the German troops is overconfidence. They were part of a victorious army which in a few days had torn gaping holes in the American lines. And on the same road American troops had withdrawn from both Feulen and Merzig soon after being attacked and had left passage through these towns open to the Nazis. They must have assumed that the same pattern of defense -- slight delay and then withdrawal -- would be followed at Grosbous.

This German unit, the 352 Volksgrenadier Division, was given a combat evaluation of "good fighting unit" by Third Army G-2 (110) and was further described as having been composed of young German Air Force and Naval personnel who, after three and a half months of training and reorganization, had become "good assault infantry troops". (111) But their actions against "Task Force L" and their estimates of the situation were completely erroneous.

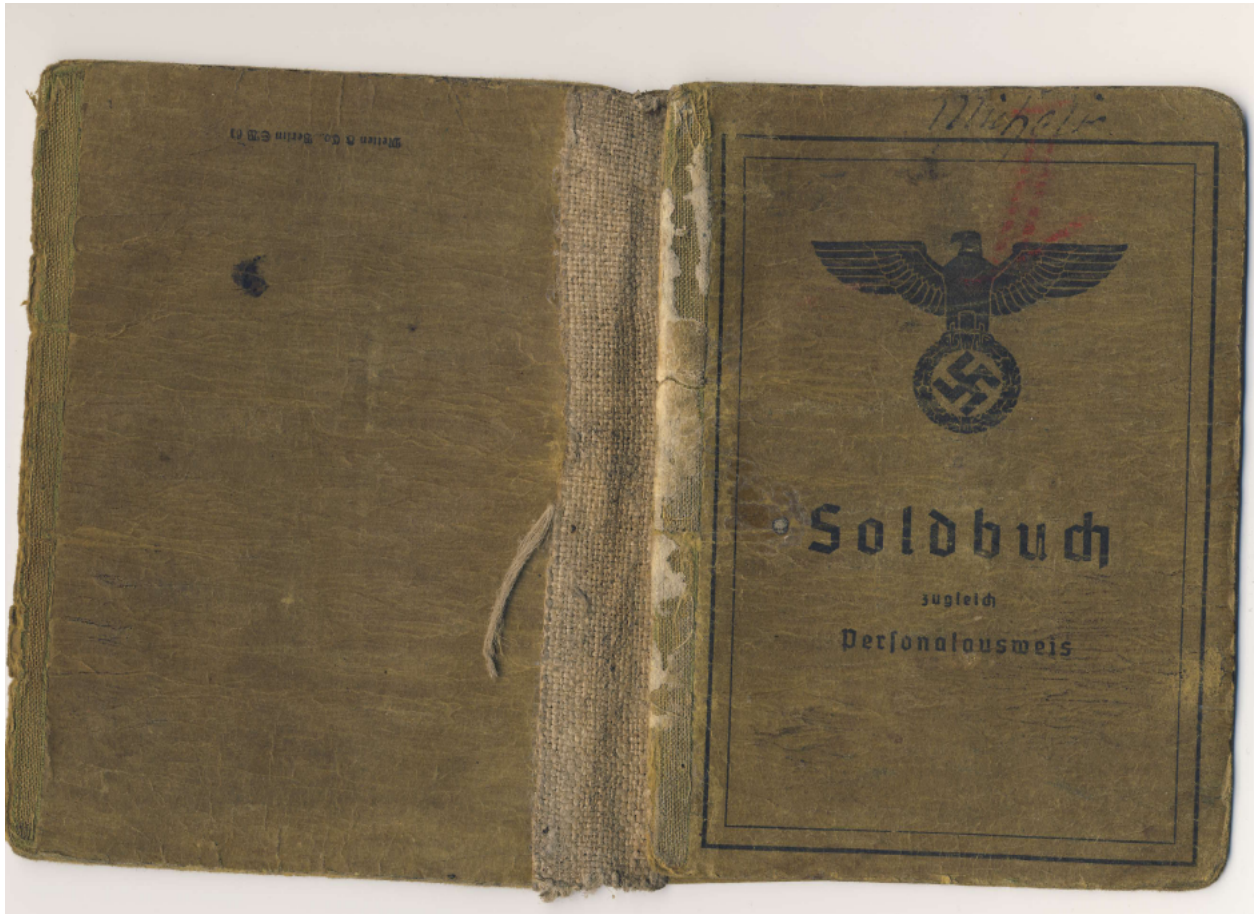
negative & indiff
The security measures taken by "Task Force L" were not particularly commendable either. After that unit had moved to its alternate position on the ridge it failed to keep adequate listening posts near the road and town. As a result, apparently a large force of Germans managed to slip past, under cover of darkness or the morning snowfall, and this enemy force caused considerable delay to the units of the 26th Infantry Division. Of course it is not known for certain that the enemy encountered by the 104th Infantry southwest of Grosbous went south by this route, but is a reasonable assumption that they did. Certainly they easily

*two, perhaps
certain
to back
of security
of the house
beamed
force which
has sprung
it 65205 to 450
the unit
apparently
felt that the
road had been
cleared by
the pursuing force.*

(110) A-10; G-2 Annex 29, Estimate No. 11, p. CXXXVIII;
(111) A-10; G-2 Annex 28, p. CXXV.

Appendix IX:

Michely's Personal Documents – PLEASE DO NOT COPY OR DISTRIBUTE!



Soldbuch (literal translation – Pay Book). Used throughout the German military to record a soldier's vital statistics, such as units, rank, equipment, blood type, etc.



Soldbuch
zugleich Personalausweis

Nr. 8018
1406 für
den Schützen
(Dienstgrad)

ab <u>1.7.1943</u> (Datum)	<u>Guldrichs</u> (Name Dienstgrad)
ab <u>7.8.1944</u>	<u>R. U. B.</u>
ab <u>1.10.1944</u>	<u>Unteroffizier</u>

Gef. N. 313 898660
Erich Michaely
(Vor- und Name)

Befestigung und Nummer der Erkennungsmarke 893 2. Inf. Fr.
Blutgruppe 0
Gasmaskengröße 2
Wehrnummer 10010000

Zahnstation:

Zahnersatz erhalten am:

+ Fehlende Zähne O Ersatzte Zähne

8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Unterschrift des Zahnarztes

Unterschrift des Tr.-Regies

Ausbesserungen am:

in der Zahnstation:

Ausbesserungen am:

in der Zahnstation:

Ausbesserungen am:

in der Zahnstation:

Bemerkungen:

3. B. trägt seit: eigenes Zahnersatzstück mit Zähnen im Liefer.

Fortsetzung zu Seite 4

Zum Feldheer abgeandt von: 1)

	Erfahrtuppenteil	Kompanie	Nr. der Truppenstammelle
a			
b			
c			

	Feldtruppenteil ²⁾	Kompanie	Nr. der Kriegsstammelle
a	<u>8./Gren. Rgt. 915</u>		<u>370/4</u>
b			
c			

	Jetzt zuändiger Erfahrtuppenteil ²⁾	Standort
	<u>8. u. 3. Btl. 396</u>	<u>Wolfsheim</u>

(Meldung dortselbst nach Rückkehr vom Feldheer oder Lazarett, zuändiger für Ersatz an Bekleidung und Ausrüstung)

Dem Erfahrtuppenteil einzutragen, von dem der Soldbuchinhaber zum Feldheer gefandt wird.

Dem Feldtruppenteil einzutragen und bei Uebersetzungen von einem zum anderen Truppenteil derozt abzuändern, daß die alten Angaben nur durchstrichen werden, leferlich bleiben.

Deutlich schreiben! Druckschrift erwünscht!

Write clearly and in printed letters!

Vorname—Surname <i>Michely</i>		Name—First name <i>Erich</i>	
Date of birth Geburtsdatum	<i>13. Nov. 1923</i>	Place of birth Geburtsort	<i>Michelbach</i>
Rank Dienstgrad	<i>Uffz.</i>	Unit Militärische Einteilung	<i>Infanterie</i>
Army No. Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke	<i>2. Inf. Ers. Btl. 174 823</i>	Last civilian residence Letzter ziviler Wohnort	<i>Michelbach</i>
Family's address Familienanschrift	<i>Peter Michely Michelbach 101 a 22 Kreis. Wadern. Bezirk Trier</i>		
Coming from (Camp No., Hospital No., etc.) Komme von (Lager Nr., Lazarett Nr., u.s.w.)			
Captured: In Gefangenschaft geraten: <i>unwounded* nicht verwundet* slightly wounded* leicht verwundet* severely wounded* schwer verwundet* ill* krank*</i>			
Am well * Am: <i>recovered* convalescent*</i> Befinde mich wohl * Bin: <i>geheilt* in Heilung*</i>			
16-36582-1			
Present address: Gegenwartige Anschrift:	P. O. W. No. Gefangenen Nr.	<i>SIG 828660</i>	Camp No. Lager Nr.
Locality Ort	<i>PWIB USA FR</i>	Date Datum	<i>17. Jan. 1945</i>
		Signature Unterschrift	<i>Michely. E.</i>

*=Cancel what does not apply!

=Nicht zutreffendes durchstreichen!

No further details permitted!

Weitere Angaben nicht erlaubt!

See explanation on reverse side!

Siehe Erklärung auf der Rückseite!

Copy of POW Notice, received by Michely's parents in 1945.

WARNING Warnung

Anyone who supplies, or puts his signature to, false particulars, or who falsifies entries or signatures will be subject to

THE MOST SEVERE PENALTIES

Wer falsche angaben macht, diese unterzeichnet oder Eintragungen oder Unterschriften fälscht oder verfälscht

WIRD SCHWER BESTRAFT

To be completed by the person to whom this form relates.

CERTIFICATION Erklärung

Auszufüllen durch die Person, auf die diese Karte sich bezieht.

I, (NAME OF UNDERSIGNED)
Ich, (Name des Unterzeichneten)

Erich Michely

hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the particulars given on the front of this form are true.

erkläre hiermit, nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen, dass die umseitigen Angaben wahr sind.

SIGNATURE,

Erich Michely

Unterschrift,

To be completed by the commander of the unit or formation rendering this form.

AUTHENTICATION Beglaubung

Auszufertigen durch den Offizier der den Truppenteil befehligt.

I certify that the particulars on the front of this form have been checked against all documents available to me. I further certify that, to the best of my knowledge and belief they are correct and that the above signature is that of the individual concerned.

Ich bestätige hiermit dass ich alle umseitigen Angaben mit den mir zur Verfügung stehenden Papieren verglichen habe. Ich bestätige ausserdem, dass diese Angaben richtig sind und die obgenannten Person die vorstehende Erklärung eigenhändig unterzeichnet hat.

SIGNATURE,

Cecil E. Chapman

CECIL E. Chapman, DPT. 222
Unterschrift,

DATE
Datum 20 OCT 1945

CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE

ALL ENTRIES WILL BE MADE IN BLOCK LATIN CAPITALS AND WILL BE MADE IN INK OR TYPE-SCRIPT.

Dieses Blatt muss in folgender Weise ausgefüllt werden:
1. In lateinischer Druckschrift und in grossen Buchstaben.
2. Mit Tinte oder mit Schreibmaschine.

PERSONAL PARTICULARS
Persönliche Beschreibung

SURNAME OF HOLDER MICHELY
Familiennamen des Inhabers
CHRISTIAN NAMES ERICH
Vornamen des Inhabers
CIVIL OCCUPATION PAINTER
Beruf oder Beschäftigung
HOME ADDRESS NR. 108a
Heimatanschrift
Ort MICHELBACH
Kreis WADERN
Regierungsbezirk/Land/
TRIER

DATE OF BIRTH 13 NOV. 1923
Geburtsdatum (DAY) MONTH/ YEAR
PLACE OF BIRTH MICHELBACH
Geburtsort
FAMILY STATUS—SINGLE Ledig
MARRIED Verheiratet
WIDOW(ER) Verwitwet
DIVORCED Geschieden
NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ARE MINORS NONE
Zahl der minderjährigen Kinder

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF THE PARTICULARS GIVEN ABOVE ARE TRUE.

Ich erkläre hiermit, nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen, dass die obigen Angaben wahr sind.

AND I UNDERSTOOD THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR PERSONNEL ON DISCHARGE (CONTROL FORM D.1).

und die Anweisungen für die Besatzung (Kontrollblatt D.1) gelesen und verstanden habe.

SIGNATURE OF HOLDER
Unterschrift des Inhabers

Erich Michely
ERICH MICHELY

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE
Ärztlicher Befund

DISTINGUISHING MARKS
Besondere Kennzeichen
DISABILITY, WITH DESCRIPTION
Dienstunfähigkeit, mit Beschreibung
MEDICAL CATEGORY
Tauglichkeitsgrad

SCAR LEFT ARM

ONE IT

I CERTIFY THAT TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF THE ABOVE PARTICULARS RELATING TO THE HOLDER ARE TRUE AND THAT HE IS NOT VERMINOUS OR SUFFERING FROM ANY INFECTIOUS OR CONTAGIOUS DISEASE.

Ich erkläre hiermit, nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen, dass die obigen Angaben wahr sind, dass der Inhaber ungezierrfrei ist und dass er keinerlei ansteckende oder übertragbar Krankheit hat.

SIGNATURE OF MEDICAL OFFICER
Unterschrift des Sanitätsoffiziers

Thomas M. Cole

NAME AND RANK OF MEDICAL OFFICER
IN BLOCK LATIN CAPITALS
Zuname/ Vorname/ Dienstgrad des Sanitätsoffiziers
(In lateinischer Druckschrift und in grossen Buchstaben)

THOMAS M. COLE CAPT. M.C.
P.T.O.
Bitte wenden

† DELETE THAT WHICH IS INAPPLICABLE
Nichtzutreffendes durchstreichen

PARTICULARS OF DISCHARGE
Entlassungsbescheid

THE PERSON TO WHOM THE ABOVE PARTICULARS REFER
Die Person auf die sich obige Angaben beziehen
WAS DISCHARGED ON (Date) - 2 NOV 1945
wurde am (Datum der Entlassung)

C.C.P.W.E.
#16



CERTIFIED BY PAUL HANLEY CAPT. C.M.P. EMBOSSED SEAL
Beglaubigt durch

NAME, RANK AND APPOINTMENT OF ALLIED DISCHARGING OFFICER IN BLOCK CAPITALS
Gerald B. Moskowitz
CAPT. C.M.P.
OFFICIAL
Einträgestempel

Autorisé à rentrer dans ses foyers

Le Chef de Poste
DEPOSE

ORGANIZATION, e.g. "R.A.D.", "N.S.F.K.", "Wehrmachtteil oder Gliederung der die Einheit angehört, z.B. „Heer“, „Kriegsmarine“, „Luftwaffe“, „Volkssturm“, „Waffen SS“, „R.A.D.“, „N.S.F.K.“, etc.

et Anmeldung auf dem Bürgermeisteramt
sämtliche militär. Ausrüstungs-
Gegenstände abzuliefern
Die Bürgermeisterämter übergeben die
Gegenstände dem zuständigen
Command Militaire.

Vu à la Cage d'Armée No 2

Le 8. NOV. 1945

Autorise a rentrer dans ses foyers
Le S. Lieutenant KRETZ

Commandant la Cage d'Armée No 2

LEFT C.C.P.W.E.

Arbeitsamt Wadem
Vermittlungsstelle
für männl. Arbeitskräfte
verschiedener Art
14. 11. 45



Certificate of discharge from POW status.

Appendix X:

Images



Oberstleutnant Drawe, CO, 915th VGR. Courtesy of Roland Gaul.



German NCO, similar in uniform and equipment to Michely. Courtesy of Roland Gaul.



Lieutenant Colonel Elliott B. Cheston, CO 3rd Battalion, 319th Infantry. Courtesy Bill Krehbiel



Members of 2nd Platoon, L Company, 319th. Courtesy of Bill Krehbiel



Bill Krehbiel, 1944. Courtesy of Bill Krehbiel.



Sergeant Bill Krehbiel, 1945. Courtesy of Bill Krehbiel



Sergeant Hanright, June 2008. Image courtesy of Fernand Pletschette.

Appendix XI:

Web Links

- PowerPoint [presentation](#) compiled by Fernand Pletschette
- US 80th Division Resources
 - o [After Action Reports](#)
 - o [Morning Reports](#)
 - o [Patton's Troubleshooters](#) by Terry Janes
- US 28th Division Resources
 - o [Bloody Bucket](#)
 - o [109th Infantry Regiment After Action Report](#)
- [Lexikon der Wehrmacht](#)

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Various oral interviews with Michely, Hanright and Good. Conducted by author, 2008 - 2009

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US War Department. Handbook on German Military Forces. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.

Various oral interviews with Michely, Hanright and Good. Conducted by author, 2008 - 2009

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