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ARDENNES, 16 December 1944 to 12 January 1945.

(Gustav Hoehne)

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MS # B-030

Kniess

Gen of Inf and Commanding General

of the LXXXV Army Corps

Allendorf

21 May 46

THE ARDENNES

(16 Dec 44 - 12 Jan 45)

Translated by Christensen

Concerns: Report according to directives received.

THE ARDENNES

(16 Dec 44 - 12 Jan 45)

I. History of the Preceding Events

A. Since the beginning of Dec 44, the LXXXV Corps Headquarters--coming from Belfort to be subordinated to the Seventh Army--was stationed at Wittlich. The Seventh Army was commanded by Gen Brandenberger, General of the Armored Forces. Only the Commanding General and the Chief-of-Staff were informed by the Army Commander of the new mission, "Attack by the 'Heeresgruppe B'--under Field Marshal Model--from the positions occupied up to now, across the Maas in the direction of Antwerp. The Seventh Army will cover the left flank." The staff sections, the commanders, etc., got their instructions much later; the troops did not get theirs until the night before the attack. For additional secrecy, the approach march of the assault division took place in several night marches, the moving into position of the artillery, infantry howitzers and horsedrawn smoke-shell mortars occurred two or three nights before the attack, and finally, the infantry occupied its positions of readiness during the night of the attack itself. The concentration of the troops for action took place without difficulty and according to plan; the heavy bridge-building equipment, however, which had to be stacked in the

neighborhood of the bridge sites, did not arrive in time, nor in full measure.

D. The LXXXV Headquarters took over the right sector, previously occupied by the 80 Army Corps (up to now organized for defensive warfare under Lt Gen Bayer of the Infantry). The LXXXV Headquarters was stationed on the right wing of the Seventh Army. To the right the 45 Pz Army Corps (under Gen H. Freiherr v Luettwitz of the Armored Forces) adjoined, to the left by the 80 Army Corps.

The following forces were available for the attack: to the right:--the 5 Parachute Div (under Brig Gen Heilmann) stationed on a line from Stolzenburg to Roth; to the left,--the 352 Volks Gren Div (under Brig Gen Schmitt) as far as Hallendorf (excl). The artillery of the Corps had been reinforced with one artillery corps (five battalions) and one projector regiment and, further, one engineer battalion had been assigned.

Command posts:

Seventh Army	Dockendorf
LXXXV Hq	Burg
5 Prcht Div	a pillbox northeast of Vianden
352 Volks Gren Div	Huettingen

C. Mission: "In immediate conjunction with the left wing of the 45 Pz Army Corps the Corps has to break through the enemy positions on the Our River and advance, if possible, as far as Gedinne--Libramont--Marche--Houffalize and, further, it was to

prevent all influence by enemy forces on the left flank of the 1st Army advancing on the Meuse River."

D. Both divisions were brought up to full strength and were well equipped, but they had only had a short training. They had received no formation training.

E. Estimate of the situation: The American divisions holding positions on both sides of Vianden were, I suppose, sent to the hitherto quiet Our front for a freshening up after their engagement in the sector of Aachen. They were regarded as battle-weary. Both by means of reconnaissance and observation with field glasses we could ascertain that the front line itself and the front zone were thinly occupied. Artillery, infantry, howitzers, and mortars were scarcely employed. No reserves worth mentioning were known to exist and were hardly to be presumed. These circumstances held out hope of success; and the foggy weather which prevented all activity of the air force of the enemy and finally,--the factor of surprise, increased our hope.

At the earliest, reserves available or brought up by the enemy could be expected to intervene on the third or fourth day of the attack. If possible, these attacks were to be repelled on the line Vaux les Rosieres--Martelangen--Bissen as stated in the instructions received, and thus the left flank of the 1st Army advancing to the Meuse River would be covered.

II. Engagements.

During the night of 16 Dec the infantry stationed in

the foremost line advanced to the Our River--unnoticed by the enemy. At 0530, after a sudden concentration of the fire of all weapons on targets in the foremost line and the zone of resistance, on villages and shelters recognized as being occupied by the enemy, the infantry made a sortie across the Our River, using floats and makeshift material, while the terrain occupied by the enemy was kept under searchlight. The 5 Parachute Div gained ground speedily, whereas in the sector of the Volks Gren Div heavy fighting developed round Fuhren and southeast thereof. During the engagements, which lasted until Christmas,--the Parachute Division advanced through the elevated terrain in the vicinity of Hoscheid, crossed the line Kautenbach--Wassler, and reached, with its foremost units; Hampre--Hollange--Tintange-- Martelangen--Domleide. Here it met strong forces of the enemy. After the corps reserve (one infantry regiment) had been thrown in, the Volks Gren Div succeeded in reaching the Sauer River and in making Ettelbruck on 21 Dec. The bringing up of the heavy weapons, artillery and assault guns,--was delayed, as the building of the emergency bridges had not yet been finished and because of the bad condition of the roads. On 19 and 20 Dec the command post of the Corps was located at Fuhren; from 21 - 28 Dec at Lipperscheid.

While the 5th Parachute Div had to resist strong attacks, the 352 Volks Gren Div had to continue the attack, on 22 Dec, to the southwest in order to reach the Atter sector and the terrain northwest thereof. Leaving weak security detachments behind on the Sauer River on a line--Ettelbruck--Wallendorf, the division moved

forward with its three regiments in three columns from Niederfeulen--Ettelbruck, through Crostans--Bissen. On the line Merzig--the wood northeast of Michelbach--Niederschieren they, surprisingly, met strong tank forces which in heavy fighting--especially in the wood east of Merzig--pushed the right regiment back to Ober- and Niederfeulen and the middle and left ones to Ettelbruck and behind the Sack River. On this line the division held its own against all attacks, whereas it was unable to prevent American forces from advancing on the line Niederfeulen--Merzig to the northwest, through the wood, on Heiderscheid and Eschdorf. The Fuehrer Grenadier Brigade, recently assigned to the Corps, and the 79 Volks Gren Div (under Brig Gen Lieber) were thrown in against these forces on 23 Dec (?). As a deputy for the commander, seriously wounded while carrying out reconnaissance, Major v Courbiere had the command of the Fuehrer Gren Brigade. The Fuehrer Gren Brigade was to attack from the line Heiderscheid--Kehmen, through the wood to its southeastern edge; the 79 Volks Gren Div, starting from a position of readiness on the line Asselburg--Welchen, was first of all to take possession of the sack sector on both sides of Niederfeulen, and then to turn to the Northwest into the wood. The attack was a failure. After costly fighting in the wood the Fuehrer Gren Brigade had to withdraw to its jump-off position. At Eschdorf and Heiderscheid it was again attacked, and after five days of fighting pushed across the Sauer River, and first at Nothum, then at Bruderscheid and then at Dahl it was able to delay further advances of the Americans.

In the wood northwest of Niederfeulen the 79 Volks Gren Div met with strong enemy forces. Fighting developed in the wood without any decisive result. The Division recaptured Niederfeulen, reached the Mack sector east thereof, and established contact with the 352 Volks Gren Div at Obermarken. On the day following, an American counterattack, launched with strong forces, pushed the Division back to the general line of Scheidel--Melschen--the stream sector southeast thereof.

On this line--later on with an extension to the northwest as far as Ringel incl.- the Division organized its resistance. At Obermarken it had contact with the 352 Div, which with its left wing had gone over to the defense at Reisdorf behind the Saar River after the unsuccessful attack southwest of Ettelbruck.

About 25 Dec the LIII Corps Headquarters (under Gen Count Rothkirch of the Cavalry) took over the troops sent in northwest of Ringel after they had been reinforced with 9 Division. The command post of the Corps was located at Enscheringen. Southeast of Ringel the LXXXV Corps Headquarters was located, having its command post at Stelzenburg.

On 10 Jan the staff of the LXXXV Corps Headquarters was withdrawn from the front line and started off to the First Army. The 79 Volks Gren Div was assigned to the LIII Corps Headquarters and the 352 Volks Gren Div to the LXXX Corps Headquarters. Until then both divisions kept possession of their positions.

III. Estimate

A. As of 19 Dec, the weather having improved, the American Air Force had complete command of the air. All traffic far into the rear area was interrupted by day owing to the lively activity of the fighter-bombers. Displacement of troops and the bringing up of supply was only possible at night-time. The artillery fire, directed by aircraft was always very well directed. The American infantry always got fine support.

B. The following were critical situations:

1. The surprisingly early clash of the 352 Volks Gren Div - moving forward in three columns from the line Niederfeulen--Ettelbruck to the southwest - with strong advanced enemy tank forces, already deployed and which, having encircled two battalions of the right regimental group,-pushed the Division back to and even behind its jump-off positions.

2. The attacks launched by the Fuehrer Gren Brigade and the 79 Volks Gren Div did not lead to the success expected; on the contrary, both attack groups had to be withdrawn, hard-pressed by the American forces: the Fuehrer Grenadier Brigade behind the Sauer River to the line Mothum--Bruderscheid--Dahl and the 79 Volks Gren Div to the line Ringel--Welschen--Obernarken.

C. Until the middle of January, when it had to give up the command, the 85 Army Corps kept its positions. The divisions - thinly spread out as they were - were not able to hold their own against attacks launched later on by forces strongly superior in men

and material. In the course of the preceding engagements they had been too much weakened, and reinforcements had not been brought up to them. The divisions - like the higher command - had no reserves worth mentioning available and the bringing up of supply was almost completely stopped because of the American command of the air.

/s/ Aniess