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Historical report on the Rhineland Campaign.

18 February to 21 March 1945.

(Alfred Zerbel)

Withdrawal

Withdrawal in the face of threatening double envelopment 18

Losses of materiel during withdrawal due to lack of fuel 18

American

Lack of exploitation of successful American attack 34

Attack with use of artificial smoke 20

Excellent effect of American artillery 35

Successful American tank attack 28/30

Attack

Halting an attack with last reserves 13

Failure to exploit a successful attack 34

Attack against penetrated enemy 23/24

Attack across river with use of artificial smoke 20

Fuel

Influence of lack of fuel on combat operations 32

Losses of materiel due to lack of fuel 18

Breakthrough

Successful breakthrough 15,28/30

Preventing a breakthrough with last reserves 13

River

Defense of a river line 18/19

Air attacks

Effective attacks by fighter-bombers 34

Morale

Deterioration of morale among exhausted troops 17,20

Signal communications

Use of post office net in homeland 31

Smoke

Use of smoke in attack across river sector 20

Tanks

Successful tank attack 28/30

Tank methods in intersected terrain 25

Defense

Defense of a river line 18/19

Disadvantages of rigid defense 8,11

Weather

Delay in expected attack due to bad weather 9

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Graf von [illegible]

Genlt

former Comm Gen of the XIII AK

FW Camp 300

June 1946

Historical Report

on

the Rhineland Campaign

18 Feb 45 - 21 Mar 45

Translated by A. Rosenwald

Note: This report has been prepared exclusively from memory, without documents for references or reliable maps. Errors are, therefore, possible even at places, which have not been marked with "?", denoting uncertainty on the part of the author.

H I S T O R I C A L R E P O R T

on

the Rheinland Campaign, 18 Feb 45 - 21 Mar 45

The Initial Situation

On 17 Mar 44, I left the Eastern front, proceeding to Hirschberg in order to participate there in a course of instruction for commanding generals. Ever since mid-July 1940, I had been continuously employed as commander, in the East. For the last two years, I was in charge of a division. The evening I spent in the company of Generaloberst Reinhardt, CG of the A Gp Center, as his personal guest in Ortelsburg. For one year he had been my superior, at first as CG of the Third Pz Army, then of the A Gp. From Vitebsk up to Augustov and to the Narev, we were joined in reminescences of combats and of battles experienced together.

This evening, we were of good cheer: The Ardennes offensive had begun and had not remained without its successes.

The company at the round table (CG, Chief, Ia IIA and I) discussed in a lively way this military operation. Since the breakdown of the A Gp in summer, and in view of the fact that the invasion had been successful, we no longer believed in the ultimate victory of German arms, of course! But in any case this offensive ought to have in view a kind of decisive objective. Still, even the

OB had not succeeded in obtaining any definite information from the higher commands on this subject. A name is mentioned: "Antwerp". But can we manage it still now? Doubts are expressed, as to whether the preparations have been sufficient; as to the possibility of standing up to such a mighty push, repelling the counterattacks, which are sure to follow..... We know, that these were our last reserves--which were committed there. Will we succeed in improving the situation to such an extent, as to enable us to attain a bearable settlement, at least in the West? Yet, if this blow fails, what then? There was no answer to this question.

During the course of instruction we received, we were questioned by the Chief of the Army Personnel Office about our possible desires in regard to our future employment. "The East, if possible, the sector of A Gp Center," I said, considering that for 4½ years this had been my military homeland. The greater was my surprise when in the middle of February, while on the Fuehrers Reserve in Potsdam, I received a direction by phone, to proceed to the West and to assume command of the XIII AK. In compliance with the order, I left by the next express train for Giessen (Zollar) and thence, at midnight, continued it by car; and at last reached the Staff of the Seventh Army at Eisenschmid, east of Kyllburg, north of Trier. The operational staff had had a disastrous day: at an advanced command post they had been hit by a bomb. The Ia was killed, the Chief of Staff wounded in several places, and there were other casualties and loss of equipment. Up to this time, the OB - Gen Inf Felber, had been the commanding general of the XIII AK, the command

of which I now had to assume. He gave me the introductory information. On the morning following, I was in the Corps command post at Waweren.

"Rhineland" Campaign

18 Feb - 21 Mar 45

I. History of Preceding Events

A. The Ge XIII AK - Chief of the Gen St Obst Üchtritz - at the time of my taking over command, was leading on the sector Pruem (excl) - 4 km south of Waxweiler.

Subordinated units: (from right to left)

323 Volks Gren Div, Genmaj Tolsdorf

x Volks Gren Div, deputy Genmaj Kaschner

x Inf Div, Genlt Hücker

326 Volks Gren Div Obst of Gen St Bodenstein

further subordinated:

Arty Comdr Genmaj Frhr von Buddenbrok

Army artillery, Pi and Construction troops in limited numbers.

Superior commands:

Hq of the Seventh Army Gen Inf Felber

Chief of the Gen St Obst, later Genmaj von Gersdorff

OB WEST, Genfldm von Rundstedt

B. Corps command post: Wawern

Command Post Div Tolsdorf: Wood north of Hohenecken

Command Post Div Kaschner: Near Dingdorf

Command Post Div Hoecker: Dackscheid

Command Post Div Bodenstein: North of Flutscheid

Reserves

a. Corps reserve,-one infantry regiment of one of the four divisions in the course of revitalization.

b. Divisional reserves: about one battalion for each division.

c. In addition: field replacement battalions of the infantry divisions, which except for their cadre, did not have any other trained personnel.

Quartering area of the Corps reserves in the region of Wetteldorf--Heuland; of the divisional reserves in the vicinity of divisional command posts, the field replacement battalion in the rear area.

Estimated strengths:

Corps reserve - 400 men.

Divisional reserves-- each battalion - 150 - 200 men

Field replacement battalions--between 300 - 500 men.

Rear positions:

Sehnen position (Nims position)

Kyll position

Both of these positions were still under construction and conserved almost nothing more than the form of a simple trench. No prepared command posts.....

Supply service:

Supply, on the whole, was very meager in quantity, dependent on how the transport difficulties were solved in the home country, and owing to the sinking production quantities of our industry, both

resulting from the effects of air raids. In particular, there was a lack of munitions for artillery and heavy infantry weapons, of fuel, radio equipment, field wire, tracer and signal ammunition. Food supplies for men were, in general, still sufficient, oats and grain very scarce, hay and straw, almost altogether lacking,-were partly requisitioned locally. The moderate quantities of supplies, which were assigned, could be distributed to the troops.

Neighboring formations.

The designation of the right corps has slipped my memory (Gen Meyer?). The left corps: Gen Kav Graf v Rothkirch;- command post, Dalberg near Kyllburg.

C. Mission:

To hold the present positions, under all circumstances.

D. Strength and Fighting Power

All of the divisions had taken part in the Ardennes offensive and were more or less worn out, especially as a result of the battles in the vicinity of Bastogne. The infantry was rather battle-weary, having had no rest for over two months. Losses amounted to from 50 to 60%; in addition to this, a lack of heavy weapons, notably of machine and antitank guns, was felt. The artillery was short of a number of guns, (being otherwise capable of combat) because of the dwindling number of horses available and their condition, as well as owing to the lack of towing vehicles; its mobility was seriously diminished. The Corps' signal battalion were minus about 25% of their authorized equipment.

The revitalization was constantly under way, but made little headway because of the impossibility of granting a rest to the troops. The training standard of replacements arriving from the homeland was low, making prolonged training at the Replacement Training Battalion, for many weeks, absolutely necessary.

The frame of mind of the troops generally, was that of weary and worn out men. They were trying to do their duty by defending their homeland, but they lacked the necessary vigor. The heart of the resistance were the battalion and regimental commanders, whose resignation to circumstances and constant personal readiness to do their duty, again and again inspired the troops. Here, every loss meant a specially heavy handicap.

Evaluation:--fit for defense,-conditionally.

B. Estimate of the situation

The enemy was attacking in the North toward the Rhine, on the left neighboring sector, in the Moselle valley, as well as near Bitburg. At the time, the Corps' sector itself was not seriously engaged. It formed a salient facing toward the West, and its position was bound to grow so much the more serious, the more ground the enemy would win on the neighboring sectors.

The following possibilities of a hostile attack on our sector had to be taken into consideration:.....

1. An attack against the Corps boundary line, from Pruem toward southeast, with the objective of enforcing a collapse of the frontal salient from the North, and likewise of endangering simultaneously the Kyll position, so as, subsequently, to establish

contact with the US forces pushing forward along the Mosel valley.

2. Attack on Waxweiler with the object of widening the penetration near Bitburg and so enforcing the fall of the remaining portions on the Pruem.

3. Launching both attacks simultaneously, in order to enclose the XIII AK in a pincers movement and to put it to rout, west of the Mosel.

With his evident superiority, the enemy was able to choose any one of these three possibilities. While, on the right wing, the enemy was busy with incessant adjustment fire, on the left he made repeated thrusts with strong reconnaissance patrols, supported also by tanks. When the preparations should be concluded and as soon as the weather permitted, we had to reckon with a start of the attack,- whether in one or in several places,- could not be foreseen. The Army, in the first instance, reckoned with an attack near Pruem.

The tactically correct countermeasure, would not have been to stand idly waiting, but to withdraw the salient to the Kyll position. Considering the reduced fighting power of the troops, we could not expect to hold the line against a major attack with its excellent flanking possibilities. Only the circumstance that every additional day was a benefit for the improvement of the Kyll position, biased us in favor of holding it.

Otherwise, all such considerations were practically useless, as on account of a Fuehrer direction, the OKH obstinately demanded the holding of the present positions. There was a written

order, issued by Hitler, that every commander, who even ventured to hint at the idea of a withdrawal, was to be relieved immediately of his post and tried before a military court-martial. There could be no doubt as to the consequences. It was characteristic of the circumstances for the Highest Command, that this order,-which had been issued in 1944, was still enforced in an aggravated manner, notwithstanding the devastating consequences it had brought in its train in June/July 1944, at A Gp Center in the East.

II. Battles.

A. Plans and orders. . . .

Are not on hand.

B. The Report.

During the first days, the combat engagements of the infantry were limited to local scouting raids on either side. The enemy artillery delivered fire on our positions and communications area, field emplacements, supply service,-and movements. At night, the Corps HQ Wawern was also kept under persistent harassing fire, but the main concentration of the latter was felt on the road at Lasel. From morning till night, the enemy air forces patrolled all roads and exits from villages, so that traffic could be maintained only by single vehicles and even so, only with caution. Our own artillery had similar fire missions, but it was paralyzed by the enemy mastery of the air and b, a lack of ammunition. In the event of a large-scale enemy attack, it was essential to hold the batteries capable of action and supplied with ammunition,(at

least to a certain extent). A period of bad weather cut down further the combat engagements and gave us a respite.

During the day, I was travelling out to become acquainted with the troops and the terrain. Around the 25 Feb 45, via a message of the Chief of the Gen St, I was requested to return immediately to the command post. Here, an order had arrived from A Gp which ran somewhat as follows: "Commanding General and Chief of Staff of the XIII AK change over immediately, with troops,-with . . .AK (left neighboring Corps Rothirch)."

At the same time, Genfldm Model sent me word that he hoped I would have more luck. I left immediately for the Corps command post at Schloss Malberg, just west of Kyllburg, where I arrived at 1500 hours. In the evening, the exchange of the Chiefs, was also carried out. Neither Graf Rothirch nor I was pleased with this limited exchange of personnel. We had requested the exchange of the whole Corps staffs, including the artillery commander and corps signal battalion, so as to be able to work with an experienced commanding organ. After some wavering, our request was accepted a few days later, but because of general developments west of the Rhine, the exchange of the signal battalion was no longer carried out fully.

The new sector of the Corps ran from south of [illegible]weiler up to Meckel.

The following units were committed from right to left:-

99 Volks Gren Div (Obst Hummel), command post Seffern, later St Thomas.

9 Volks Gren Div (Genmaj Koehn-:-, Maj of Gen St. Zander), command post St. Cindorf

2 Pz Div (Obst v Lauchert, Maj of Gen St. Mueller), command post Condorf

352 Volks Gren Div (Genmaj Schmidt, Maj of Gen St Schneider, command post Auw.

The situation was as follows:---;.....

The enemy had attacked with superior forces on both sides of Bitburg, had broken through the Pruem position and considerably compressed our line toward the East. The heap of ruins which was Bitburg was in his hands. Our own troops were holding a MLL on the heights west of the Kyll. A loose contact existed to south of Waxweiler, on the left, there probably was a gap. The losses suffered were considerable, notably a large number of batteries had also been overrun and put out of action, by tanks. The Corps had no more reserves left. The enemy attacks continued. The throwing back of our line across the Kyll, could be considered as the first objective of the enemy. Whether the enemy would then swing to the North, in order to cut off the salient between Waxweiler and Pruem, or whether he would try immediately to push forward to Witlich and the Mosel, remained to be seen. In any case, the situation was dangerous, not alone for the Corps, but for the entire northern wing of the Seventh Army as well!

Conversely,-here also, a timely withdrawal to the Kyll would have been appropriate, an operation which was the obligation of AOK 7 to arrange for both of the Corps. It has already been

mentioned that, because of the "Hitler order", such an arrangement was not possible.

The condition and fighting quality of the troops had deteriorated considerably. It was my impression that the 9 Volks Gren Div and the 2 Pz Div had retained the greater part of their fighting power, while the 9 Volks Gren Div and the 352 Volks Gren Div had been knocked above very much.

The occupation of the MLR was extremely weak, with considerable gaps, and scarcely exceeded the measure of mere security. The echeloning in depth was not sufficient. All this was occasioned by lack of forces. The 9 Volks Gren Div and the 2 Pz Div had disposal over a reserve force consisting of a weak battalion, the other two divisions,-only of detachments of Pi troops. The 2 Pz Div was in possession of about 12 panzers of varying types. Three or four of them were in the repair shop, but could not be brought forth because of lack of fuel.

The crew of the missing panzers were lying in rest far to the rear, hoping to receive new vehicles. I ordered their immediate organizing into a combat detachment under the leadership of their own officers. The mode of employment of this force I reserved to myself. Other men, who had become superfluous in the rear--about 150 soldiers, the greater part of whom had combat experience and had had a rest,-could be made available. But they could not be expected to be ready for commitment for another couple of days. This order was contrary to directives in force, but in view of the strained nature of the prevailing situation and the

improbability of receiving new tanks I considered it justified.

The Corps command post was transferred to Cransdorf.

On 28 Feb 45 (?), we received the order to occupy the Kyll position, a measure rendered necessary by the fall of Waxweiler and the throwing back of the right neighboring corps, as well as a result of an enemy penetration on the sector of the 99 Volks Gren Div, south of Seffern, to the North. Until further notice, the Corps Rothkirch was to hold the Wims position. By this, about a rectangular turn to the West of our right wing, facing toward the South, was occasioned. Against this oblique defense line, the enemy was attacking along the road Bitburg--Nettersheim--Seffern--Schoenecken with strong artillery and panzer support. At the same time he thrust to the East to Kyllburg--Malberg. If he succeeded in breaking through to the North, the Corps Rothkirch would be caught from the rear and rolled up. It was therefore essential to slow down the breakthrough, until Rotkirch would also be able to get to the Kyll position. Of decisive import were the hills south of Malberweich. As a reinforcement, a group of six panzers from the 2 Pz Div, was assigned and subordinated to the 99 Volks Gren Division. Further, the Army informed us, that the 246 Volks Gren Div (Genmaj Kuehn, Maj of Gen St Hiltrop) was being brought up to relieve the 99 Volks Gren Division. One grenadier regiment and one artillery battalion would arrive in the course of the night and would be available for reinforcement at the endangered spot. After relief, the 99 Volks Gren Div was to be moved to the left wing. It would probably be transferred to another corps.

New command posts:

XIII AK	Ekenschmid (formerly AOK 7)
99 Volks Gren Div	St Thomas
9 Volks Gren Div	Oberkail
2 Pz Div	Cransdorf (formerly XIII AK)
352 Volks Gren Div	Nerforst, later Niersbach
246 Volks Gren Div	Usch

On the day following, heavy battles ensued on the sector of the 99 Volks Gren Division. Finally, the enemy succeeded in taking the important heights near Valbergweich. Of the 246 Volks Gren Regt the regimental staff and one battalion had only arrived. A further movement of reinforcements, in the daytime, was prevented by enduring aerial attacks. Our own defense, notably the artillery and the six tanks, were constantly paralyzed or even silenced by bombs and fire from aircraft weapons. Our infantry had suffered heavy casualties. At nightfall, two of the six tanks were able to return, the remaining ones being either burnt out or rendered incapable of moving. But the engagement had been worthwhile: the enemy was no longer pushing forward. During the night, with the assistance of the newly arrived portions of the 246 Volks Gren Div we succeeded in establishing a barely sufficient contact with the Corps "Rothkirch."

In the meantime, developments in the South had likewise been unfavorable. Elements of the enemy were said to be already at Schweich on the Mosel. This would mean, that he had already broken through the Kyll position on the sector of our left neighboring

corps. At the time, we had no connection with it. Officer reconnaissance patrols, which were sent out again and again, did not bring clear results. Neither did the Army know anything definite. About this time, the Seventh Army was transferred from A Gp 'Model' to A Gp 'Hausser'.

As to its fighting strength, the 246 Volks Gren Div was in better condition than the other divisions. Finally, in order to get a corps reserve fit for use, it was committed in such a way as to enable the relief to be accomplished of the weak 9 Volks Gren Division. This reserve was necessary, the more so, as the appearance of strong enemy armored forces on the corps boundary line caused us to anticipate a concentrated enemy attack to the East, either against Mitloch or against Cochem.

Even if the terrain of the Kyll sector, on account of the steep rocky slopes there and the timber-forest, was at many points secure against tanks, it was nevertheless, at other spots secured less favorably; in any case, the thinly scattered occupational troops were not powerful enough to prevent a crossing "by the power of arms," in case the enemy should want to force it. In addition, the sector was rather difficult to survey, a fact which was very detrimental to artillery activities. The 9 Volks Gren Div was moved to the area north of Manderscheid, with the mission of preparing a defensive line facing to the Northwest and the North. The divisional command post, as far as I can remember, was at Trittscheid.

When, - a day or two later I paid a visit to the Div, the

shortening it and establishing contact with the bridgehead Cochem (Div Wilky), it was withdrawn to the line Lubzerath -Cillenfeld--Lettendorf. The Div A was located on the right wing, with command post near Bad Bertrich.

The 246 Volks Gren Div had forced its way through toward the southeast, underwent reorganizations for a short while, and was then moved to the left, adjoining the 2 Pz Div, along the approximate line Gindorf--Dudeldorf. The adjoining 352 Volks Gren Div lost the plateau of Spircher and was pressed back up to the edge of the wood west of Herford. Contrary what was the case with the 2 Pz Div and the 246 Volks Gren Div, which were still fighting well even in a desperate situation, the worn out 352 Volks Gren Div gave the impression that it either no longer could nor--to a certain extent--even wanted to go on fighting any longer. There was no doubt that a large number of soldiers allowed themselves to be overrun and had then surrendered.

Corps command post just east of Wittlich.

Estimate of the situation:

The enemy had broken through on the sector of our right neighboring Corps. His objective was the Mosel, either near Cochen, or near Koblenz, probably at both of these places. On the left neighboring Corps sector, in the Mosel valley, the enemy was gaining ground slowly but steadily. For days, the contact with the Corps had been unreliable or else broken. The XIII AK, deployed in a large arc over a widely extended frontline-was in danger of being enveloped on the wings and encircled, if it were not withdrawn to the Mosel in time. The reasons preventing a withdrawal in one stretch were the

divisional command post was suddenly taken under tank artillery fire, which notably accel rated the departure of numerous, wretched supply trains. It was a matt r of six tanks only, but now it became as clear as daylight, that the enemy had broken through the Rothkirch Corps sector. Reports soon followed, from a study of which a push of at least one combat command toward Daun--Ulmen became evident. No forces of the enemy had turned to the South, he presumably aimed directly at Mosel (Cochem). The 9 Volks Gren Div was deployed to defensive positions on a line, running over Steinberg--Schalkenmehren--Buckhausen--Bittendorf, and was ordered to harass the advancing enemy by constant local thrusts into his right flank. Because of their limited strength, the distribution of the divisional forces on the range of hills was possible only in the form of strongpoints. The divisional command post went off to Ober Scheidweiler.

On the Corps command post news awaited me that the enemy had broken through near Kyllburg as well. Armored forces were said to be near Seinsfeld and Steinborn, and contact with the 246 Volks Gren Div was reported to be interrupted. The Corps ordered the 2 Pz Div to bend backward its sector to west of Oberkail--Cindorf,--if this had not already been carried out. Whether and to what extent it would be possible to commit the 246 Volks Gren Div, cut off at that time,--between the 9 Volks Gren Div and the 2 Pz Div,-could yet not be foreseen.

The Army informed us, that the bridgehead at Cochem would be reinforced by the (215?) Div of Conmaj Milky (Ia,-Maj of Gen St Pickart), which was on the way up; that an antiaircraft combat force would go into battle position west of Blechel, and that the corps would

receive a further division for the purpose of lengthening its right wing (Number of the Div and the name of its commanders have slipped my memory, it remained with our corps up to the Mosel and, for simplicity's sake, is called here Div X.) By way of reinforcement, the Staff of the Artillery Regiment and two battalions of the Projector Regt 44 (?), Oberst Keller, were subordinated to the 9 Volks Gren Division.

Disquieting news arrived, however, from the southern wing, too;-no contact, instead there were enemy movements near Roth. In order to secure this wing, two weak pi companies were subordinated to the 352 Volks Gren Div and moved over to it on trucks. They had the mission of laying down mines on the roads and forest firebrakes near Rothaus and Dierscheid. I knew the terrain from experience and feared a surprise attack in this forest area, all the more, as no infantry forces were available. Corps command post was transferred to Karl.

At night, it became known that the Commanding General of the right Corps, Graf Rothkirch, had been taken prisoner.

It became ever more and more evident, that the enemy spearhead was not making for Cochem, but toward Koblen. This direction, pointing somewhat more to the North, was not recognized at first, because of the enemy's use of a new road, not yet marked on our maps, the course and the branch-lines of which, ran in a forest area and were therefore concealed from ground view. Thus, my thin right wing so far remained intact. With the view of

following:

1. The worn-out condition of the troops did not allow such a movement, the formations were crumbling away.

2. It was essential, to try, by every possible means, at first to transfer the maximum quantity of war material to the eastern bank, especially the ordnance depots, workshops, ration supply depots, hospitals, supply service trains, wire lines, and so forth.

3. The few Mosel bridges allowed of but a slow, planned flow of traffic. The Mosel ferries could not be counted upon for the crossing of complete formations.

Thus, only a withdrawal via an intermediate position could be considered. As such a position, pressed by the enemy, so to speak, the following line was occupied: Lutzerath--Ober Scheidweiler-Kupperath--Bergweiler--Dreis--Schlem--?

Corps command post--St. Neil, then Zell, on the Mosel.

We succeeded in occupying the Mosel positions without any considerable loss of heavy artillery equipment. The materiel could not be saved in full; notably--a large number of motor vehicles, which were still capable of repair, had to be left behind. There was no fuel--for hauling them away. Besides, the curved roads and often very steep grades limited considerably the possibilities for towing vehicles by trucks.

The Mosel position was improved only to a limited extent and, consisting as it did chiefly of single strongpoints, it lacked depth. Working in the stony vineyards was very difficult, the more so since suitable entrenching tools were not at hand. The numerous

loops of the Mosel brought about a considerable lengthening of the front line, to the detriment of the occupational troops. One's view was impeded both by the heights along the loops and by those on the opposite banks; this called for a large number of observation posts, for which both personnel and equipment were scarce chiefly for the artillery. On the other hand, some of the places offered excellent flanking possibilities for observation and machine gun fire. They lured us to undesirable concentrations. The chief advantage of the position consisted in the Mosel itself, serving as a tank carrier, which could not be overcome without a thorough preparation. So we could hope for some quiet days to come.

Boundaries of the Corps: On the right, Alt Brellay, northwest of Zell

On the left, Muehlheim, west of Bernkastel-Cues

Command Posts:

Div "X"	Blankenrath
9 Volks Gren Div	Altlay
2 Pz Div	Naversbeuren
246 Volks Gren Div	Irmelach

Corps Command Post:- Lautersweiler, south of Brichenbeuren

The 352 Volks Gren Div had been transferred to the left neighboring Corps. Prior to the beginning of the ensuing attacks, the Div "X" was withdrawn and allocated to another formation. Its sector was partly assigned to the Div Wilke (? 315 Volks Gren Div.),

which, however, was subordinate to the right neighboring corps. The command post of the Division was located in the vicinity of Kappel. It was still not yet complete. Portions of it had probably been misdirected or appropriated by some other instance. Its chief trouble was the protruding loop near Ellern--Bullay. Likewise, the chief anxiety of [redacted] Corps was the loop of the Mosel west of Traben--Trarbach.

During my daily visits to the front I often made use of portions of the Hundsrueckhohen road. It was always busy. During aerial attacks, the woods,-in many places approaching close to the road, offered the necessary cover from air surveillance. Open places were quickly passed. Thus, comparatively few losses were occasioned. More and more however we met individual soldiers or groups of different formations, mostly belonging to the divisions of the left neighboring corps, who, pretending to be stragglers, tried to go to the rear. Their behaviour, on the approach of officers, showed that they did not want to be seen, in order to elude questioning.

They were quite simply, shirkers, without identity documents. The corps organized the apprehension and assembly of these people, who, a list having been made of their names, were assigned to the divisions in groups of 50 men each. It was evident that the morale of these men was not very high, but we were in dire need of each pair of hands and of each rifle available. Moreover, at that time, all these men still carried their weapons with them. The Army was informed of this phenomenon and on its part caused

additional collecting points to be established in the farther rear area.

Increasing artillery fire indicated the progress of enemy preparations for an attack. On the Corps sector the fighting began as expected--at the big loop west of Traben--Trarbach, at first-near Erden and Zeltingen. Again and again, the Americans, availing themselves of artificial fog, which intensified still more the natural blanket, succeeded in gaining a footing on the eastern bank of the Mosel; again and again they were thrown back by the tenaciously defending 2/6 Volks Gren Div, which committed all its reserves available. Finally, however, our forces were used up to such an extent, that the only possibility remaining was that of sealing off the penetration along the line Trarbach--Graach. Similar engagements occurred on the sector of the 9 Volks Gren Div, south of Fuenderich, albeit on a narrower stretch. However, the situation grew precarious, when the enemy, on the sector of the Div "ilky; succeeded in throwing strong forces over the river, pushing forward up to the important road center Kastellaun. The Division was thereby split up into two parts. The lefthand regiment adjoining my sector, was immediately subordinated by me to the 9 Volks Gren Div in order to build up a flank defense.

By evening, the <u>situation</u> was as follows:

On our own sector, the enemy had established a bridgehead between Trarbach and Graach, which was sealed off, however. On the 9 Volks Gren Div sector, on the eastern bank of the river, there were but weak enemy forces, which the Division hoped to be capable of

handling. The right neighboring Corps was broken through, forces for sealing off the gap had to be withdrawn from another place and brought up, at first. The appearance of armored troops pointed to a concentration of the attacking forces here. Their immediate objective would be Simmern, later the line Bad Kreuznach--Kirn. A thrust into the flank and rear of the First Army could be presumed as being the intention of the enemy. This army (LXXXIX Gen Inf Koertsch, command post: Kaiserslautern) occupied a curved front line, extending far to the West, in many places even into the former west wall. The Highest Command had to decide the question of taking the Army out of this salient before it was too late. But, were they going to make the right decision this time, or would they continue to cling to the mad plan of letting oneself be killed? Again a whole army was at stake, as at Stalingrad. It was beyond any doubt, that the breakthrough to Kastellaun could no longer be repaired. Somehow, we could perhaps seal it off in the depth, but the Mosel position would still be squeezed in tight.

The Corps established a defensive front along the line Alterkuelz--Leideneck--Blankinrath. It was reinforced in driblets by the most motley of small detachments from different units, among others, from the 6 SS Div, antiaircraft battalions, single batteries, and so forth. In addition, the bringing up of the Division of Genmaj v d Luehlen (the number is no longer known to me) had been promised.

First of all, the General, an experienced veteran, together with his Ia, arrived. He reported, that his division was

due to arri ve but slowly and at great intervals as for the pur ose of revitalization, it was stationed far in the rear and spread over a very extensive area. As the presumable sector of commitment for his division, I indicated Sommern--Kirchberg, as it was evident that by the date of arrival of his troops, the line Alterwuets--Blankenrath would have been overtaken by events long since. For the corps it was essential to receive his forces, if ever possible, assembled in concentrated formations.

The Army promised to carry out the sealing off of the line Alterkuetz--Rhine, as far as it was possible.

For the purpose of unified control of the units, which were bound to arrive on the right wing, the staff of the Artillery Commander, Genmaj Frhr v Buddenbrock, was nominated supplemented by elements of the Corps' Signal Battalion. At a later date, it was to be relieved by the staff of Gen v der Wuehlen. This never occurred, however. Genmaj Frhr v Buddenbrock concentrated his valuable energy on organizing the defensive fire of the artillery and antiaircraft battalions. The infantry forces subordinated to him had the approximate strength of two battalions and actually represented nothing more than a local security for the batteries.

In the battles following, the enemy won considerable ground in a southeasterly direction. The right wing of the Corps was finally located near Kirchberg, minus any connections; further to the West, there was no heavy pre sure by the enemy. The Mosel position was still held by the 2 Pz Div and the 246 Volks Gren Div; the main body of the 9 Volks Gren Div had turned toward the North.

In such a situation, the Chief of Staff of A G., German Staedtke, called us up by phone informing us as follows (in general lines): "The enemy armored forces driving an attack through the Soonwald forest, have reached Sobernheim and Bad Kreuznach. They continue to receive reinforcements.

The XIII AK has to withdraw the 2 Pz Div and the 246 Volks Gren Div, and early in the morning, to employ them for an attack south of the Soonwald against Bad Kreuznach. It is essential to cut off the enemy forces already south of the forest and to prevent the enemy from bringing up new reinforcements. At the same time, an attack will be launched from Bad Kreuznach to the West. New MLR has to be established (?) in the line Mengerschoid--Idarwald. The remaining portions of the Division Wilky will be subordinated to the Corps. The Division has been ordered to seal off, west of Sobernheim toward the East. Later, the 246 Volks Gren Div will probably be assigned to another Corps. As recompense, the Corps will get the 352 Volks Gren Div back again."

The subordination of the Corps under command of the First Army, had been ordered just before (?)

Withdrawing of both of the most energetic divisions from the proper front line, worsened the situation of the Corps considerably. Moreover, they could not be employed in their full strength, as the mobile Pz Div would scarcely, and the 246 Volks Gren Div, which in addition, had to cover a long way on foot,-never could be moved into assembly position for the attack to take place by next morning.

Representations to this effect were of no avail. Both divisions received corresponding orders. It was pointed out that the Pz Div should not wait for the 246 Volks Gren Division. The assembly area for th 2 Pz Div was Langenthal--Durbach--Diemern lower Chaun and for the 246 Volks Gren Div, west of it.

At that time, as far as I can remember, the 2 Pz Div possessed but four tanks and three assault guns, about 200 pz grenadiers (armd inf) as well as one light and one heavy artillery battalion. The divisional commander and the artillery officer reconnoitered the terrain while it was still afternoon, fixed the march routes, and so forth. Obst v Lauchert hoped to start the attack at 0700 hours. However, a certain circumstance, unforeseen, caused a considerable delay. According to a "Fuehrer-order", every village- under supervision of the party authorities, had to build antitank barriers at all possible and impossible places. Their narrow passages remained open initially. So it had also been at the time of reconnoitering by Obst v Lauchert. For some reason, never ascertained, next morning, when the Division wanted to drive up, the barriers had been closed by the civilian population; probably they had obtained information about the breakthrough by tanks to Gobernheim and wanted to safeguard themselves against surprise.

As the attack got under way at 0900 hours, it had some success in the beginning, thanks to its surprise effect. The supply road to Gobernheim was crossed and the Winterburg--Rehbach area reached. There, the Division came up against strong defense, including antitank artillery and tanks, which pinned down the attack. In the

afternoon the setback came: the Division was attacked by forces of manifold superiority, from the North and the East, and thrown back up to Langenthal, where it then occupied a defensive line. Now, it had but one tank and one assault gun left.

The 246 Volks Gren Div had managed to come up to the Kirn area. The idea of sending it into action, was given up now. The divisional commander was ordered to the First Army, with the object of receiving new directives there.

At that very late date, the Corps was placed under the command of the First Army.

Corps command post: Griebelschied, northwest of Kirn

On the morning following, the enemy attacked along the whole width of the Corps front, concentrating his main power against the right wing. Preceding the attack, strong artillery preparatory fire reached far into the rear area. In a few minutes, all lines of communication were cut. From a height in the vicinity of the command post I watched the sector. The noise of battle indicated deep penetrations on the Group 'Buddenbrock' and the 9 Volks Gren Div's sector. The gradual approach of the bursts of fire from the enemy tank artillery could be easily followed. Ultimately, I was also able to recognize tank movements on the heights of Dickenrodt. The tanks did not even intend to use the roads through the valley, where they would meet many road barriers, but rolled right away over heights and slopes, whence they raked the underlying valleys with fire. The 246 Volks Gren Div having a rest near Kirn was immediately ordered to go into a covering position south of the Nahe. Moreover,

we had now to wait and see how things would develop. I relied on my "ticket system." For we leaders of the front troops were in the best of all positions to judge the strength of individual sectors and the defensive power of the troops, we had tacitly agreed to pass lightly over the "Fuehrer-order" threatening us with military court-martial, if we did not strictly obey orders. During my daily visits to the divisional commanders I regularly supplied them with a verbal "general ticket" regulating their behaviour, in case things should go wrong. In general, this ticket comprised nothing more than the new MLR, new command posts for divisions or advance message centers and Corps command post. Without these provisional agreements the Corps in all probability would have flown apart already, west of the Mosel. So we managed to build up at least a makeshift defense line along the Nahe. The fight had been a costly one for us. The combat team "Buddenbrock" was practically dispersed, its General was missing. A number of batteries, also, were overrun and had to be left behind. In my opinion, the 246 Volks Gren Div now ought to have been withdrawn and moved to the Lauterecken area. The Corps command post was put up in a little village near Kappeln north of Lauterecken.

Estimate of the situation:

The enemy out ahead of the front of the Corps--according to the information from Ic and from prisoners of war--consisted of two, if not three armored divisions (14, 5, 12?) and several infantry divisions, already in action or in readiness. It could be taken as being his intention, with these decidedly superior forces, to undertake

a concentric attack against the XIII AK, and by defeating it, make his way freely into the rear of the First Army, with a view to hitting it a d structive blow. The Corps had no longer the fighting power, necessary for absorbing the force of this blow, at best it could only delay it for a short time, and would then be disintegrated, itself. It was illuminating to reflect that the Corps would have to be sacrificed, in the event of it being able to free the Army from envelopment. When and whether such orders were given by the Higher Command, is not known to me. No such directives or instructions came into the hands of the Corps leaders. In any case, it was the mission of the Corps, to ward off, and to delay in its present position, the destructive blow of the enemy, as long as it was possible.

As from the point of view of mere common sense, it was not possible to hold a line west of the Rhine, the Corps shifted all portions that could be spared, including its divisions, across the river. West of the Rhine, the divisions were assigned fixed assembly areas and one advance message center. The staff of the Corps also transferred portions of the telephone company, with the exception of one team for establishing connections with post offices and to build the necessary staff communication lines. Control was maintained exclusively by radio and special mission staff officers by motor cycle. These measures proved very effective later on.

Early on the morning following, I drove out to the Div Wilky (Daerweiler) and the 2 Pz Div (Rundsbach). Upon my return to the Corps just before noon--the attack expected had not yet begun--an Army order awaited me there to the effect that the Corps was to assume command of both of the right hand divisions of our left

neighboring Corps (Genlt Hahn?). These were the 352 Volks Gren Div (Genmaj Schmidt) and the Div of Genlt Densfuss, already referred to above. (The number of the latter has slipped my memory) I immediately left for their sector, taking with me a copy of the radio message and a motorcycle messenger. Naturally, there was no other sort of contact.

We lost a lot of time in trying to get forward, as the roads were very congested. The noise of battle increased more and more on the left wing. I met the Ia of the Div "Schmidt" in Sien; the situation at the forward positions was vague, the commander of the division was on the way there. On my way on to the Division "Densfuss," I was stopped on a hill near Ehlenbach by enemy tanks, which blocked the road. I turned to the East and, driving further, met in Kirchenbollenbach the advance guard of the divisional staff. They had telephone connection with the former command post and I was able to speak to Gen Densfuss, who was just about to depart. He reported to me the fact of the widespread scattering of his division, especially by attacks via Daunhelder, as well as his intention of building up a new MLR north and northeast of there. As to the losses, he could not tell me anything definite, but knew that the casualties were considerable.

In returning, I again called on Genmaj Schmidt, whose estimate of the situation was that it was serious. Late that night, I was back at my command post again. The day following, would probably bring a decision.

Of the Division "Sensfuss", the Corps never heard anything more again. The motorcycle messenger returned on the day following and reported that on that very night the divisional staff had been encircled and for the most part taken prisoner.

On the morning following, the large-scale attack commenced along the length of the entire Corps front. The enemy succeeded in making numerous deep penetrations and pressed the divisions considerably back. By 1100, because of a threat from armored forces, the command post had to be transferred to the Kreuzhof area east of Watfstein. Reports from the divisions arrived more and more rarely, the enemy tank artillery-charges became more and more numerous. When, about 1300 hours I tried to visit 246 Volks Gren Div in Teschenmoschel, some 15 tanks stood east of the village firing upon it. Over this tank spearhead, the usual fighter-bombers circled. When, after being detained by air attacks, I again arrived near Kreuzhof, we had to again make a detour on account of enemy tanks approaching from the North. At this juncture, the two rear radio cars were shot on fire, a third escaped by a miracle. We joined up again at Schweissweiler. After some time, the Ia of the 246 Volks Gren Div (Maj Hiltrop) also managed to get there. He reported that the Division had been overrun by tanks and split up into seperate groups. The batteries had been put out of action, either in firing position or during a change of position. He was ordered to assemble all available portions of the division, at Schweissweiler. In my opinion, the building up of a new defensive line was practically out of the question, we could only assemble the remnants of the division.

By 1700, enemy tanks arrived at Mockenhausen and Imsweiler on the road Kreuznach--Kaiserlautern. Judging by the noise of battle, the enemy was already pressing forward to Kirchheimbolanden. Thus, every hope of establishing a front line west of the Rhine, had vanished. There was no contact with the Army, probably it was changing its position. Even the special missions staff officers, sent out long ago, did not return.

At night, in order not to be overrun in Falkenstein, the Corps moved to Leistadt, north of Bad Dürkheim. The officers who had been sent out no longer encountered any leaders but had only met isolated troops, wounded, and single vehicles. The XIII AK was crushed.

At break of dawn, the Ia was sent to try and establish contact somehow with the Army and receive new directives. By noon, he returned with the order that the Corps had again been placed under command of the Seventh Army, with the object of building up a new defense east of the Rhine--in the Worms--Ludwigshafen area. We were to establish contact with the local commanders of the XII Military Area. The Army's command post had moved, at first, to the southern exit of Ludwigshafen, later to Lensheim. The operations party--three trucks--threatened by fighter-bombers, had crossed the Rhine on ferry boats near Maldsee and occupied rather dismally poor quarters in a village near Heidelberg. The campaign of the Corps, west of the Rhine, was at an end.

Special Notes to Part II "Battles."

Signal Communication

The Corps Signal Battalion scarcely had three-quarters of its nominal personnel and equipment. With regard to telephone connections,--the scarcity was made up by using the local postal network. This was regularly the case with connections to the Army, while for divisional connections this condition was aspired to, as far as possible. The Commander of the Signal Battalion was personally responsible for these connections. He usually saw to getting the permits necessary from the Reichspost authorities. In the case of a withdrawal, the Corps Signal Officer agreed with the Divisional Signal Officers on one post office for each, in which to establish all the divisional connections; in addition,- the Corps post office was known to the divisions. When changes occurred, which could not be foreseen,-by new developments for example,- the post office agreed upon remained linked up until a fresh connection was established. The system worked very well, the only drawback was naturally the lack of alternate circuits and bearer frequencies, in consequence of which lines were often heavily overloaded. As an advantage, was the fact that the bulk of the field cable on hand or assigned ("Ff" cable, no longer was supplied) could be held at the disposal of troops, who during engagements used up, and also lost, huge quantities of cable.

The connections to the divisions by radio always

functioned well. The transmission of radio messages to the Army often presented serious difficulties because the Army, being swamped out, could not accept them. Even turning in with the "urgent" signal, did not always bring results, as there were too many radio messages all of which were "urgent."

Supply Service

In general the supply of rations for the men was adequate. Horses were supplied more and more with forage from rural communities, as hay and straw were not brought up; it was a hand to mouth existence. The influence of the scarcity of fuel was felt detrimentally, specially in the case of tanks and assault guns. Measures planned as to creation of power concentrations, implementing of flexible tactics, and so forth, were wrecked by the fuel situation.

Reinforcements

In the main, the reinforcements promised arrived much later than promised. As the reason for this in many cases was the enemy supremacy in the air which did not allow movements of troops to be made in the day time, further also the physical condition of men and horses, who simply could not accomplish forced marches.

As to the quality, the reinforcements never consisted of troops with full fighting power, at best they had been "revitalized"; the majority of them were poorly equipped; because their reorganization had not then been completed and always they were poorly supplied with ammunition. This situation became worse and worse. For example,

the 800 men, most of them stragglers, whom the Army sent to the Corps as reinforcements, east of the Mosel--hardly possessed a single rifle!

Support from the German Luftwaffe

There was none!

Briefings and so forth

The CO of the Army visited the Corps command post every three or four days. I met him only on rare occasions, because I myself was always on the travel. He discussed everything necessary with the Chief of Staff.

Field Marshal Model did not pay a visit to the Corps during the period I was in charge of it; CO of H Gr South (?) Genobst (SS) Hausser visited it on the Mosel, after having given notice, so that I was able to be present.

Except for giving information to one another, essential points were never discussed at these meetings.

III. Estimate

A. The enemy air attacks were of decisive importance as to materiel and morale, as well as tactically. Despite heroic exertions the troops were pleased at every rainy day, which excluded or reduced the air attacks. Specially disagreeable was the continuous enemy commitment of fighter-bombers, which in the day time pinned down every movement and often, even, neutralized the activity

of the artillery. The fighter-bombers attacked every single vehicle and did not stop until they had set it on fire. Even small groups of people on foot were fired at. During my drive to the front to assume the command, an agricultural laborer in the field west of Wetzlar was attacked, two women were killed and one man was wounded in the arm. The command post of the Division "Hoecker," Duckscheid (pruem position) was totally bombed out. East of Kyll, a horsedrawn medical company, in spite of its Red Cross flags, was almost completely shot up. I drove past this company both before and after the attack. The artillery of the 246 Volks Gren Div had considerable losses in horses through air attacks east of the Mosel.

Ground attacks, as far as I know, were never carried out without support from tanks. They were launched according to strict schedules and did not make the most of the successes gained. The infantry, in particular, was very susceptible to shot.

Apparently what was tried was to avoid all losses, very natural, considering the material superiority of the enemy and the possibilities arising therefrom.

The moral effect of artillery fire generally was in proportion to the expenditure of ammunition. With the sinking fighting power of the German infantryman, his stamina against artillery fire also deteriorated considerably. Sudden concentrations of fire were compact and well directed. Annihilating of our batteries by preparanged cones of artillery fire, did not come to my attention. Long-range fire at night, notably in the depth, was disagreeable, albeit the effects, apart from

a temporary harassing of traffic and disturbance to night rest, were not considerable.

The weather was mostly cool, but nice: there were but a few rainy days. The Germans would have preferred more rain and fog!

The terrain was very uneven throughout: the many heights and small woods limited one's view and called for a large number of observation posts, which the artillery, in particular, was no longer able to establish, both as to personnel and material. For tanks, the territory was not easily negotiable, owing to the frequency of steep slopes. On the other hand, numerous depressions, ravines, and other blind corners offered good assembly areas, and varied possibilities for making surprise attacks. The campaign showed, that against an army with modern equipment, even a river like the Mosel performs the only function of a tank obstacle, but cannot offer security against tanks.

The network of roads was unfavorable in layout, since the main roads in conformity with the mountain ranges and riverbeds ran almost without exception from north to south. The byroads, used for the supply service, etc., for the most part were narrow, curved and steep. As a result of this, horses and motor vehicles were subject to excessive use, the traffic was often jammed, notably at the numerous tank barriers.

b. Critical moments

Of the numerous critical moments, only the principal ones are mentioned:

1. Penetration on the 99 Volks Gren Div sector west

of Kyllburg. Thereby, the right wing was uncovered and the connection with neighboring Corps was cut.

2. The tank breakthrough near Kyll, whereby the Seventh Army was cut up and the Kyll position induced to collapse.

3. Capturing of the heights near Spicher. As a result of this, the left wing was broken up and contact severed for a considerable time.

4. Breakthrough across Mosel on the sector of the Div Wilky. The right wing and the rear were thereby threatened and the whole of the Mosel position became untenable.

5. Breakthrough by tanks into the sector of Sobernheim The Seventh Army was thereby split up.

6. Concentric attacks and breakthroughs on the Nahe, as a result of which the Corps was completely cut to pieces and almost annihilated.

C. Successes and Failures.

If there can be any talk about a success at all, then it is the circumstance, that with these worn-out and decimated troops we so often and fa so long a time succeeded in building up a defensive front and again and again were able to detain the enemy.

On account of the inferiority of the strength of our forces in all fields, the eventual failure of the Germans was inevitable from the very beginning.

sgd Graf v. Schlieben, Genlt

late Commanding General of the XIII A.K.