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Lt General

Koenigstein, 8 September 1950

Index for MS # B 100.

Rhineland Campaign. Sub paragraph:

VOSGES, ELSASS. Period: 20 November 1944

to 14 February 1945.

(Gustav Hoehne)

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M S # B-100

Bleckwenn, Gen. Maj.
former commander of the
703. Volks Gren. Div.

P O W - camp 11,
20 APR 1944.

C A M P A I G N " R H I N E L A N D "

Lower sector : " V O S G E S , A L S A C E , "

Time : 20 NOV 44 - 14 FEB 45.

Concerning : Campaign" Rhineland", lower sector : Vosges, Alsace", time; 20 NOV - 14 FEB 45.

Enclosures: - 7 sketches-

1, a) area of command- 708. Volks- Gren, Div.

In this was incorporated in the middle of DEC 1944, the 716. Inf. Div. Approximately in the middle of JAN 1945 I took over the command of the remnants of the 189. Inf. Div. after its commander Oberst Zorn was killed in the area South of Colmar.

All divisions were in normal organization according to the tables of organization for Volks or infantry divisions.

To work together with : Panzer Brigade "Feldherrnhalle", commander Oberst Baecke, and one heavy Panzer- Jaeger- Battalion, number unknown, commander Maj. Noack.

Higher Headquarters and Superior Officers:

1. General Kommando IXIV. A. K. Commanding General of the Infantry Thumm; successor, Gen. Lt. Grimmois chief of staff: Oberst Lt. i. G Bahr; successor, Oberst i. G. Koehler.

2. a. Nineteenth Army. Commander in chief : Gen. of the Inf. Wiese , successor,: Gen of the Inf. Rasp. chief of staff: Gen. Maj. Botsch; successor, Oberst i. G. Brandstaedter.

b). Position of the division, C. D., Boundaries e. t. c. see enclosed sketches 1-7.

c). Mission holding of the position.

d) Strength, Striking power etc, of the troops.

On the 20 NOV 44, after the previous commander of the division (708) dismissed because of his failures , I took over the command of the division. It was originally a security division and as such employed on the Atlantic coast, where it was severely battered in the invasion, and was later organized in a troop training camp in the home country into a Volks Grenadier Division. In my opinion, the time available for training was not used to the full advantage, also the equipment, with weapons , material , etc. was not supplied fast enough. The entire artillery of the division for instance, arrived only towards the end of the training, so that no training of combined units could take place. The signal equipment of the signal battalion and the signal units for the troops was only loaded at the time of departure from the trainingsground for the troops for the employment on the front , so that the staff was not thoroughly acquainted with the apparatus. The units of the division arriving individually , were committed straight from the railhead - without regard for their coordination in order to withdraw the 21. Pz . Div. (commander Gen. Maj. Feuchtinger). As it was employed just in the center of gravity, the 708. Volks Gren. Div. was at the first place not suitable to fulfill the task. The relief had taken place in haste and was hardly finished when the great attack of the Americans started with the penetration through Zaberner- Senke and the following capture of Strassbourg. This blow hit the right wing of the 708. Div., next to the left wing of the right neighbour (LXXXIX. A.K. Gen. der Inf. Freiherr von Gilsa) split it and thrust important parts aside (one grenadier regiment , the pionier battalion, the Replacement Training battalion, the Anti-Tank detachment with all assault guns , one light and

heavy artillery battalion) over to the division joining to the right (553. Volks Gren. Div. , commander Gen. Maj. Bruhn) and separating these units definitely from our own division. I took over the command of the division at the moment in which it was attacked in the front and had the right wing and flank open and uncovered (see sketch 1.). The units of the divisions were disorganized , the troops employed coming straight from transport and combat actions. This and the preceding training, which was inefficient, and also the earlier set backs and last failures weakened the striking power . By reorganizing the remaining units and collecting local reserves , a comparatively strong reserve of the division and through many personal energetic measures I succeeded in organizing the division again, to reinforce its striking power in a comparatively short time and to strengthen the confidence and morale of the troops. Besides a few unessential local penetrations , the enemy had no decisive success in the sector of the division . Only at the end, when we no longer had a division but only remnants left from constant heavy losses , without striking power, did the repeated attacks of the superior allied forces , with their penetration and break through, get so they could not be prevented in these sectors of immense width.

e) Estimate of the situation:

It was impossible to hold the position in the long run, considering the superior enemy strength in men, material , tanks , artillery, ammunition and airplanes as compared to our own weak units , insufficient-equipped , without any assistance of the Luftwaffe, nearly without any mobile reserves, and also, on the other hand the complete tying down of our own supplies by the enemy airforce coupled with a serious shortage of ammunition.

Further destruction and greater losses of our own units could have been prevented and a considerably longer holding of the Alsace made possible if the suggestion , made in ti-me by the troop-commanders, had been accepted by the higher command after the American break through of the "Zaberner Senke " to occupy the Vosges summit position . Through that had been attained:

1) occupation of a favorable and strong position as far as terrain was concerned.

2) limitation of enemy tank units to few roads which were easily blocked, in which case enemy tank units would hardly be able to attack.

3) doom enemy air force to inactivity through low clouds in the Vosges end of NOV.

4) saving of strong forces through occupation of this position. These forces would have had to be withdrawn as reserves. Reserves make it possible to relieve the employed detachments and to offer them support . With them it would be possible at this time to relieve Strassbourg by one push from the South or the Southeast.

This suggestion was strongly refused by the higher command every time. Not one inch of ground was to be given up, . The result was that the troops were in a completly insufficient position, and were greatly decimated by continous losses . Strassbourg could not be taken again, and the bridgehead had to be narrowed down and finally given up.

II . a.) Plans and Instructions.

As far as I was informed (every troop commander was only informed of that which concerned his command, or at most the next superior command) the forst mission was to hold the western edge of the Vosges , ignoring the American breakthrough to Strassbourg. The intention was to push to the South with the First Army, out of the sector Metz , to close the gap by attacking,and so to destroy enemy forces which had penetrated . Later, after the loss of the Vosges and after the attack on the sector of Metz had not led to success , it was necessary to hold the narrowed "bridgehead Alsace" no matter what the circumstances. It was also intended to relieve Strassbourg this time by attacking from the North, out of the bridgehead we had regained in Hagenau, and at the same time from the area Erstein from the south. The attack from the North was to be made by S.S. units and from the South by the 198. , the 269, inf. div. and the Panzerbrigade "Feldherrnhalle" . This attack could have been a great success . Forced by the development of the position on the eastfront the high command withdrew , shortly before the beginning of the attack, the S.S. Pz, Div. "Frundsberg " the 269. Inf. Div. and the Pz. Brig. "Feldherrnhalle" which were transported to Silesia. With that the relief of Strassburg became impossible , the holding of the bridgehead Alsace only a question of time.

The given orders were kept within the limits of the aims mentioned above. For the 708. Volks. Gren. Div. they were limited entirely to the defence of the position occupied at the time.

b.) development of the position see enclosed sketches 1-7 . I cannot give a detailed description with accurate statements without working directly with the forst general staff officers of my division Maj. I. G. Kuhlenkamp (708) Maj. I. G. Marahrens (716), Maj. I. G. Haack (189) and without the use of war diarys of the division concerned.

M. S. B 100

III. criticism.

A. The allied air attacks were mainly limited to fighter bomber attacks which paralysed the traffic on roads and railwars completly and attacked the radio stations , headquarters , artillery gun positions etc. The complete absence of out own air defence made them very effective , we had only a few flak batteries, and had partly to suffer heavy losses.

The enemy tank forces were tied to roads and crossings over the numerous rivers, canals, rivulets and other water courses. They attained no decisive success against the division on account of the so called rocketlauncher (Panzerschreck), made efficient through special intensive training of our troops for the close combat against tanks, and through the successful practice of close combat with the weapon. Besides this equipment of the division was equiped with antitank guns , and had the support of our assault guns and flak, employed against ground targets so we could always keep the enemy tanks in check.

Our losses of panzer and assault guns were, compared with the disabled enemy tanks reported , comparativly small, so that our crews bravely and with the feeling of at least equality started their mission . Only around area of the Colmar canal, through alleged employment of heavy antitank guns (caliber 9.3 cm.) on the American side in the sector Holzweiler (in the Northeast of Colmar), were serious losses of our own assault guns experienced , and then we started to be very careful about thier further employment. The cross-country -mobility of the American tanks was noteworthy as was the outstanding skill of the American tank drivers. According to the judgement of our own tank experts, there was no danger for Hochkoenigsbourg because , it was said, enemy tanks could not reach it. The day after making this expert statement American tanks reached Hochkoenigsbourg; it had only been a walk-over for them!

The enemy infantry was far superior to our own in number but not in quality. To keep a certain activity in the frame work of defence and on the other hand to observe and ascertain the enemy units, which were standing opposite . I ordered raids from the day I assumed command of the division. These raids were always very successful and did not bring many losses if adequately and carefully outlined and prepared . The American infantry was surprisingly lacking in watchfulness espedially at night, had very poor security, it being inattentive. All this was in favor of our own operations. For instance,as both bridges on the north edge of Schlettstadt fell intact into the hands of the enemy one of our assault units, consisting of thirty to thirty-five men, defeated the enemy bridge security detachment, blasted the bridges and captured from of the surrounding houses 3 American officers and 118 men without a fight.

The services of the American engineers were outstanding. Completly destroyed bridges did not delay the enemy, because of this skill and the use of specially quick bridge - equipment.

The allied artillery was superior in numbers, but not too strong; its shooting accurate and good and the ammunition supply apparently unlimited. Its cooperation with the air force was outstanding. As soon as an American artillery reconnaissance plane was up, our own artillery was forced into absolute silence. If only one single battery gave fire to support the infantry, which was struggling hard, it was covered with a curtain of artillery fire by the Americans, so that one had to expect at least 50% loss-

Weather and terrain were only partly favorable for our own actions, namely: cloudy weather hindered the American air-force ; the terrain, because of the conditions-off from the road entirely or partly prevented the development of enemy tank units.

C. (sic.) The detachments under my command had given their best and done their utmost. It was not the failure of out own troops, which in the end led to the success of the enemy. The troops were, day after day , week after week, month after month in continuous employment without any possibility of rest or recreation. The men had to fight for days with uniforms completly wet through and even frozen hard to their bodies, t his in positions which were not build up, without secure shelter, in a very damp terrain, exposed without protection to the inclemancy of the rainy autumn and winter weather. The width of our own sector and our very limited combat strength did not permit the withdrawal of single units, it was only possible to send a few soldiers at a time to the rear, to get them dry and warm and this only if there was no objection caused by the tactical situation.

There was at most one warm meal in 24 hours distributed, and this only at night time. In the case of a withdrawal during the night, which happened comparativly often, the distribution of this one warm meal became particularly difficult or very questionable.

On the American side however units at full strength with men who were very fit and well equiped appeared at each attack. The enemy had also unlimited quantities of material, ammunition, fuel, and large numbers of vehicles etc. at his disposal, while our troops only in case of really important combat received the most necessary supply, insofar as the American air activity permitted. There was no replacement of men, so that our own units shrank slowly but surely through the great losses caused by enemy fighting operations and diseases.

The American air-force was up in the air even if it was only fairly good flying weather -from daybreak to the beginning of darkness attacking the positions of the infantry, artillery, radio centers, commands,

supplies etc. while our own airforce was not seen at all.

In spite of all these facts, which were very depressing for our men, the troops fought bravely and faithfully, always ready to sacrifice themselves, acting superhumanly more than once. If they had not done so, these small units, which were visibly shrinking, would not have been able to resist the superior strength of the Allies for such a long time. I had no deserters in my division.

The German high command and even more the Highest command stuck to their orders to "hold on at all costs" and "not to surrender even one foot of ground", in spite of the continuous reports on the conditions of the troops and the impossibility of making such demands from the troops, in spite of the reports on their combat strength and the informed enemy units, in spite of continuous demands for supplies and finally the suggestions made again and again to adapt oneself to the only possibility as mentioned on page 4 (to retreat on large scale to build up positions which were to be held).

signed: BLECKWENN.

There were many other things besides this incomprehensible and irresponsible attitude of the German Highest command, but never was it in the failures of the German soldier, that were the reasons for the failure of the campaign.

MS B-100
Sketch 1.
Space of time: 13 Nov - 22 Nov 1944.

Gen. Maj. Blaekwenn
former commander of the
708. Volks Gren. Div.
scale - 1: 250 000.

553. Volks

Gren. Div.

716. Inf. Division.

B

MS B 100
Sketch 2.
Space of time: 24 Nov - 26 Nov 44.

Gen Maj. Blackwenn
former commander of the
708. Volks Gren. Div.
scale - 1: 250,000

716 Inf. Division

MS B 100
Sketch 3.
Space of time: 28 NOV - 30 NOV 1944.

Gen Maj. Bleckwenn
former commander of the
708. Volks Gren. Div.
Scale: 1: 250.000

716 Inf. Division.

MS B - 100
Sketch 4.
Space of time: 2 DEC - end of JAN 1945.

Gen Maj. Bleckwenn
former commander of the
408. Volks Gren. Div.
Scale 1: 250,000

198. Inf. Division.

389. Inf. Division.

MS B 100
Sketch. 5.
Space of time: end of JAN/ beginning FEB 1945.

Gen. Maj. Bleckwenn
former commander of the
708 Volks Gren. Div.
Scale - 1: 250.000

108 Inf. Division.

MS B 100
Sketch 6.
Space of time: 1. week of Feb. 1945.

Gen. Maj. Bleckwenn
former commander of the
708 Volks Gren. Div.
Scale - 1: 250.000

"5. Geb. Jaeg. Division."

MS B 100
Sketch 7:
Space of time: 10 FEB - 18 FEB 1945.

Gen. Maj. Bleckwenn
former commander of the
708 Volks Gren. Div.
Scale 1: 250.000

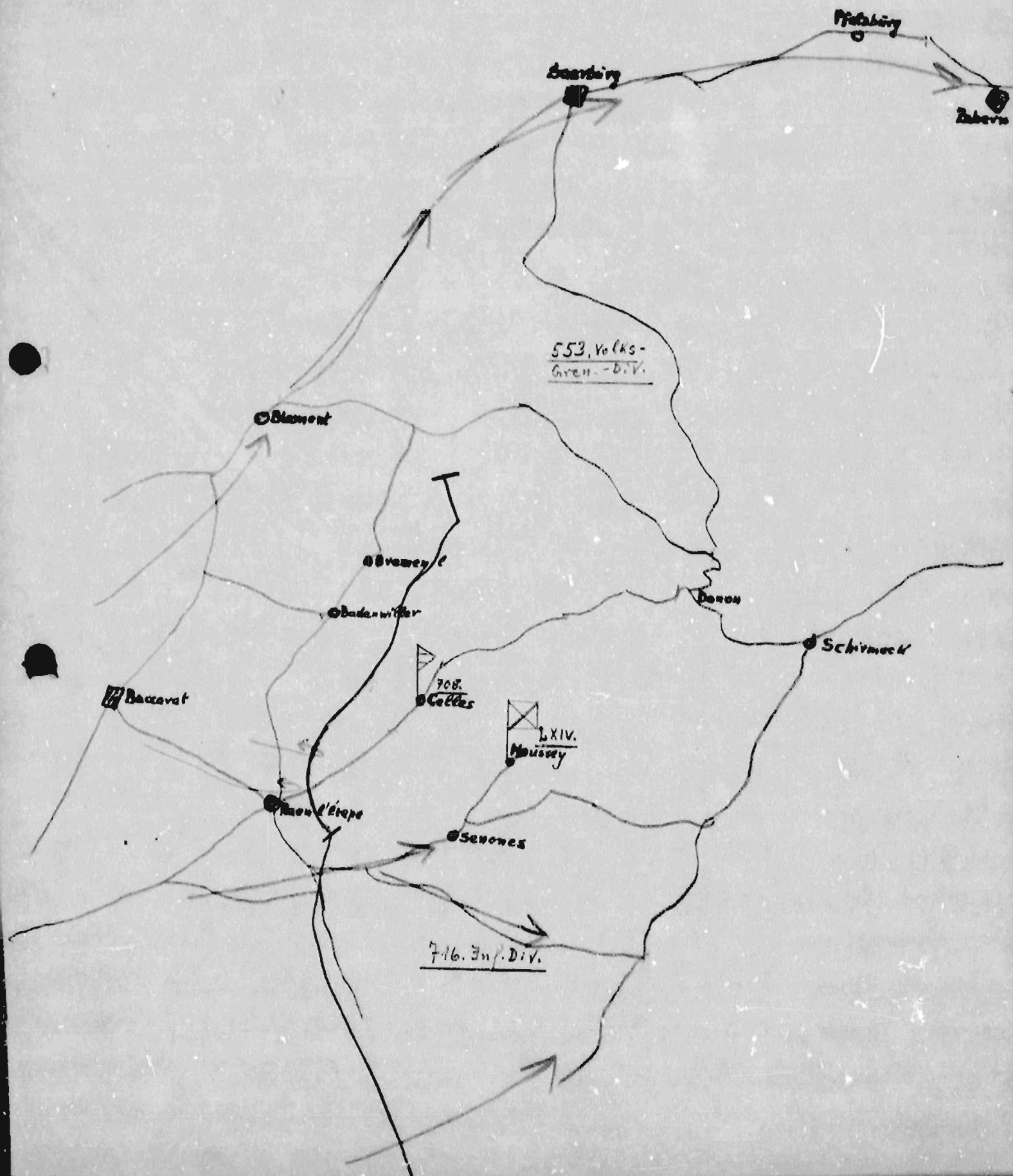
Skizze 1. B-100

Zeitraum: 18.-22.11.1944.

MS # B-100

Generalmajor Bleckwenn,
chem. Kommandeur der
708. Volks-Grenadier-Division.

Maßstab 1:250 000.



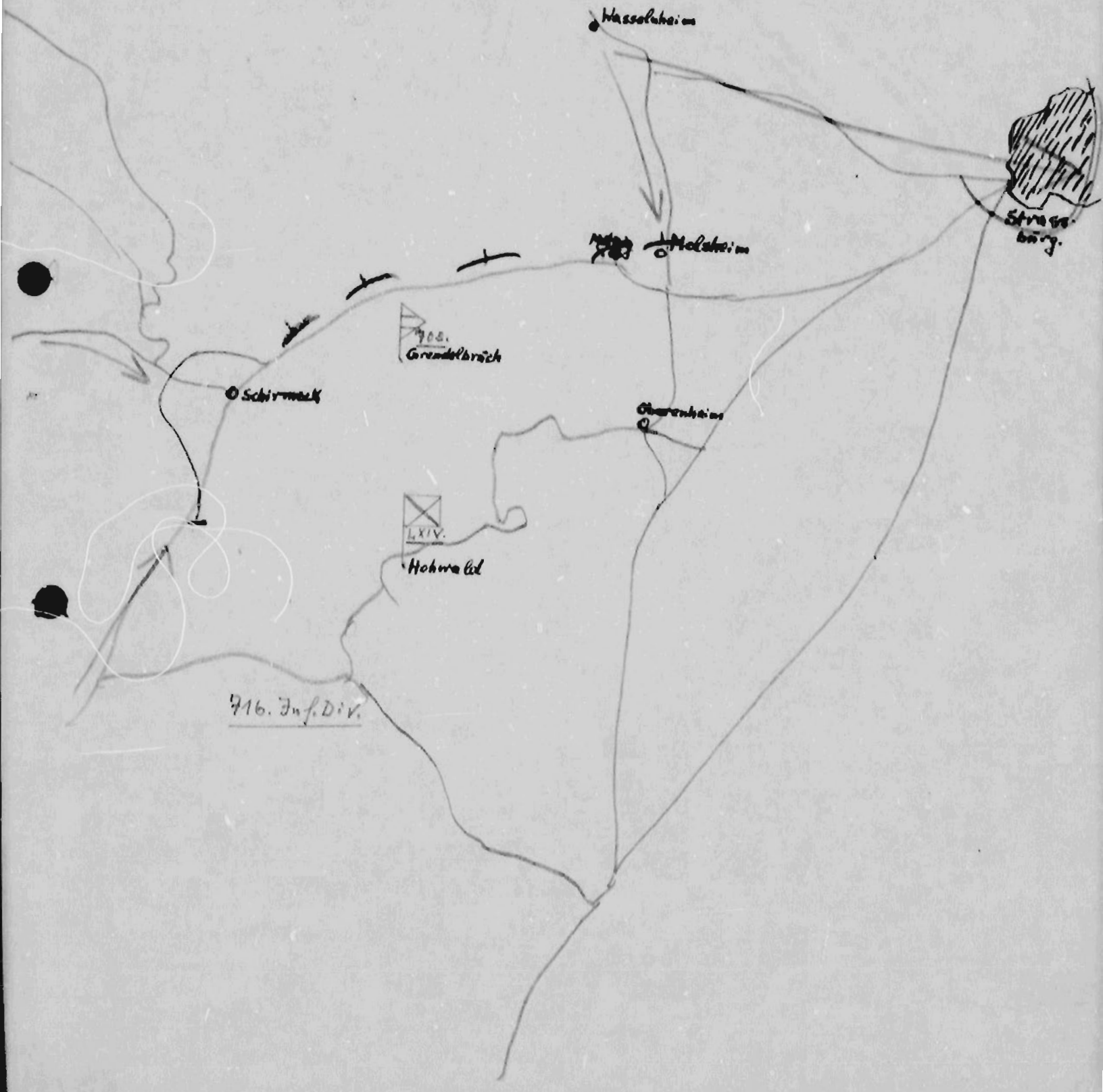
Skizze 2, B-100

Zeitraum: 24.-26.11.44.

MS # B-100

Generalmajor Bleckwenn
chem. Kommandeur der
708. Volks-Grenadier-Division.

Massstab = 1:250 000.



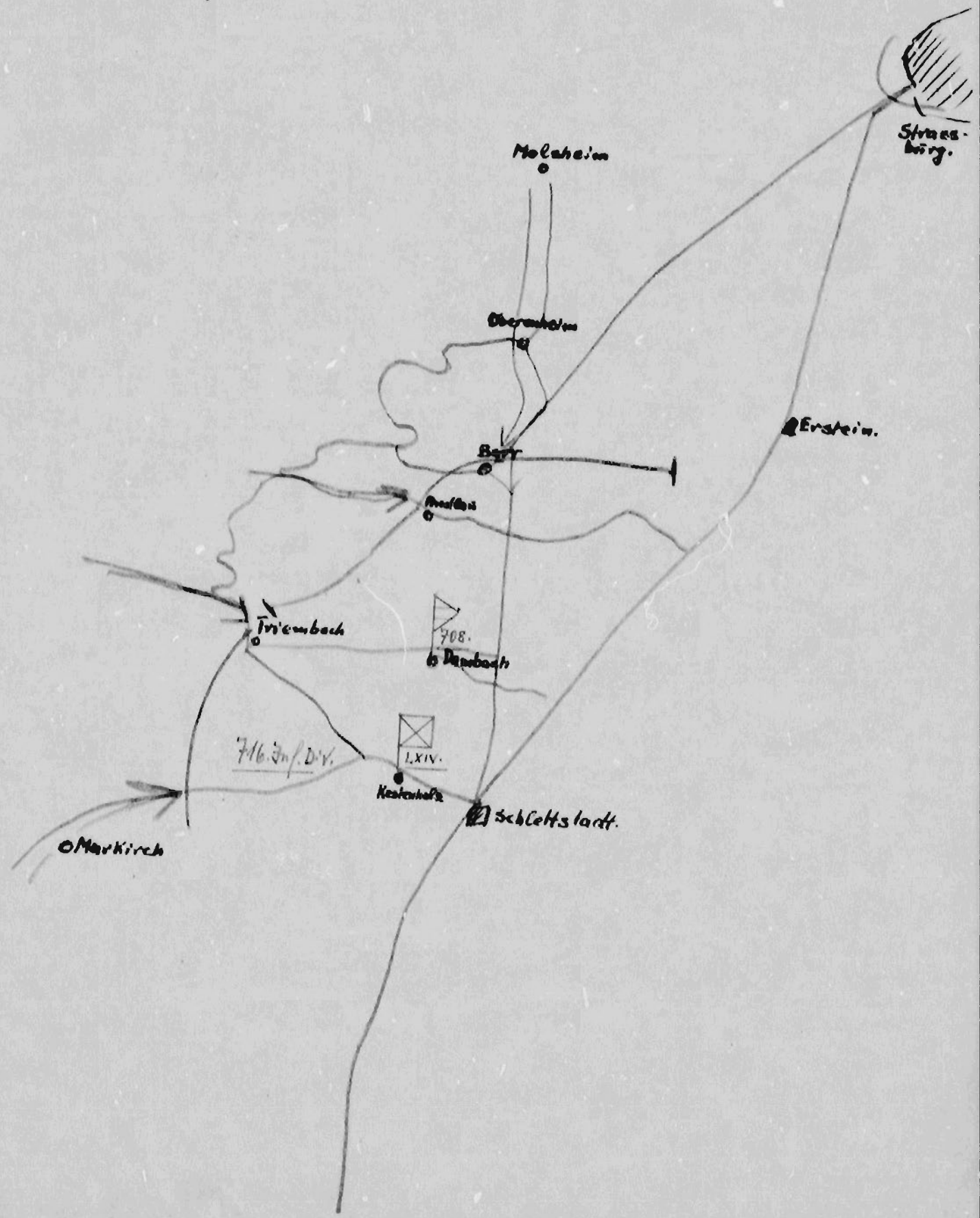
Skizze 3. B-100

Zeitraum: 28.-30.11.44.

MS # B-100

Generalmajor Bleckwenn
ehem. Kommandeur der
708. Volks-Grenadier-Division.

Massstab 1:250 000.



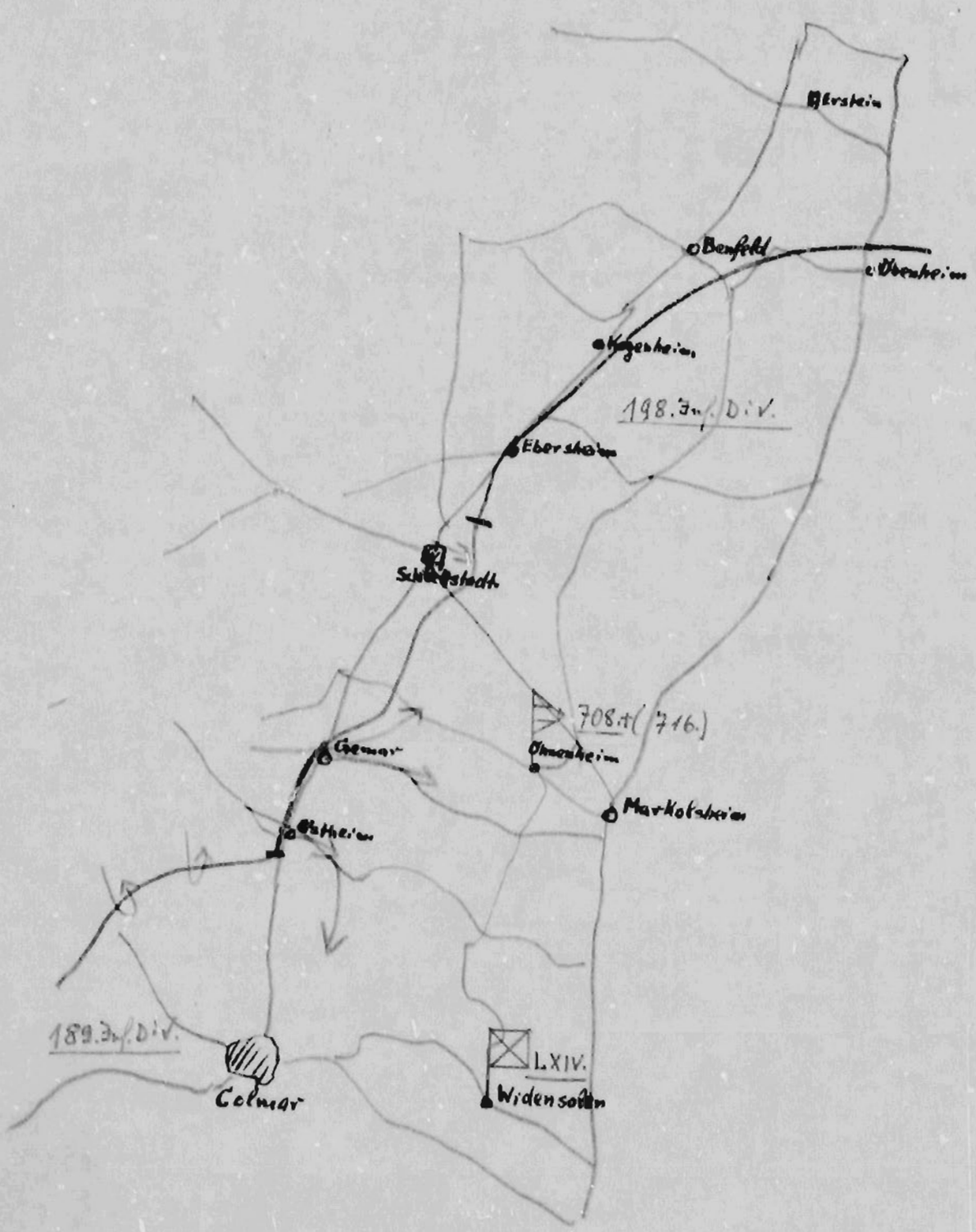
Skizze 4. B-100'

Zeitraum: 2.12.44 – Ende Januar 1945.

MS # B-100

Generalmajor Bleckwenn
ehem. Kommandeur der
708. Volks-Grenadier-Division.

Massstab 1:250 000.



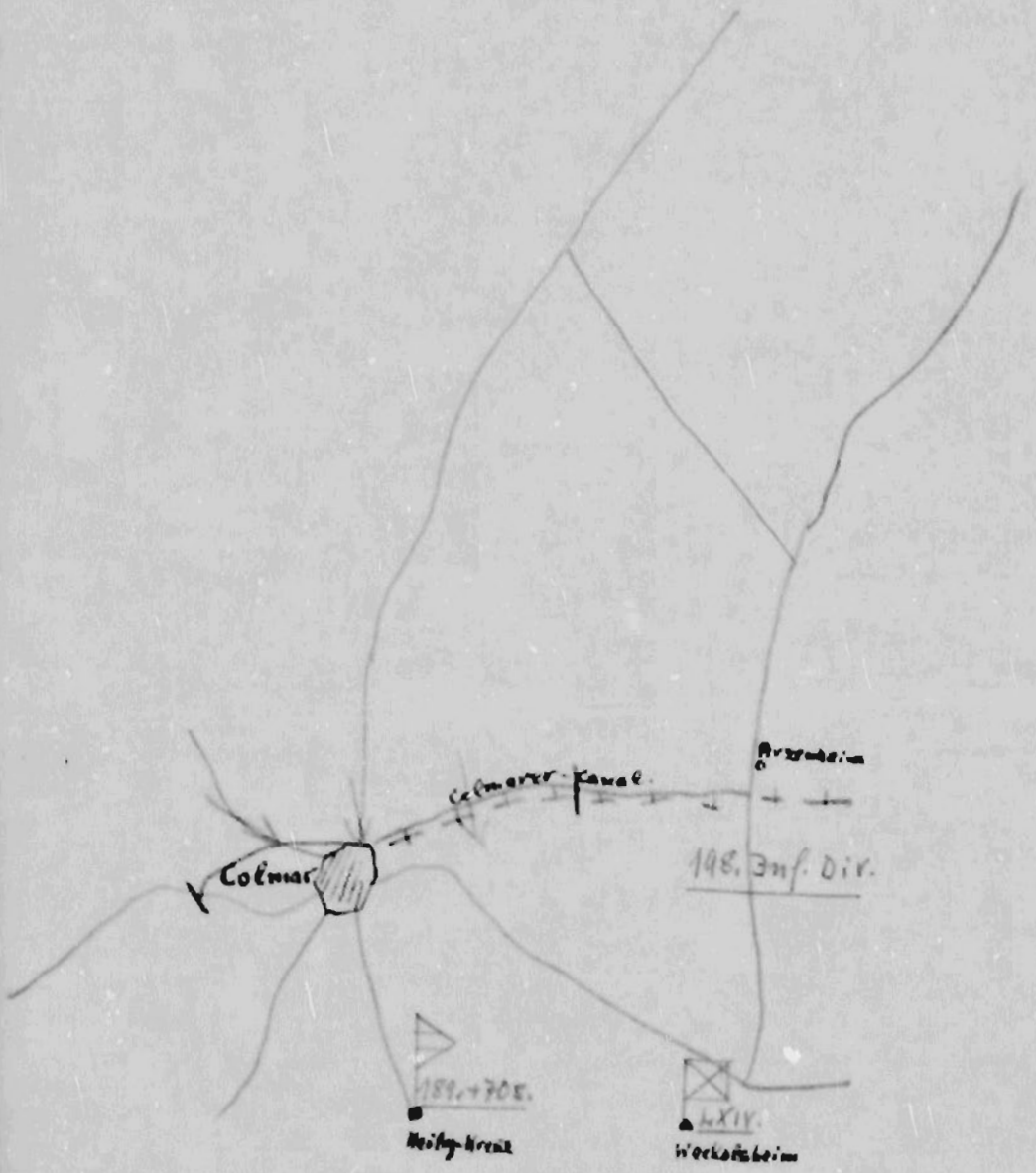
Skizze 5. i:B - 100

Zeitraum: Ende Januar/Anfang Februar 1945.

MS # B-100

Generalmajor Bleckwenn
ehem. Kommandeur der
198. Volks-Grenadier-Division.

Massstab = 1:350 000.



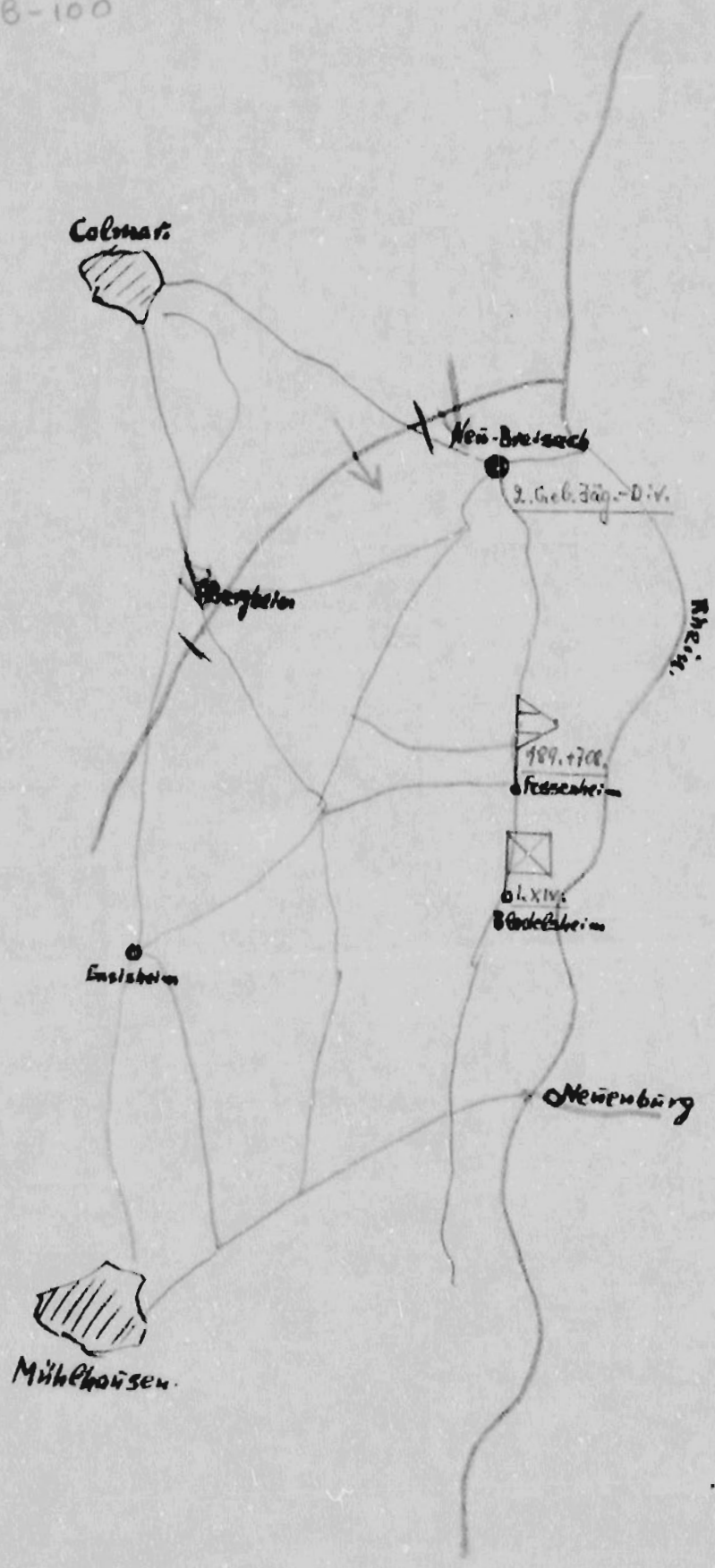
Skizze 6. MS # B-100

Zeitraum: 1. Woche Februar 1945.

MS # B-100

Generalmajor Bleckwenn,
ehem. Kommandeur der
708. Volks-Grenadier-Division.

Massstab 1:250 000.



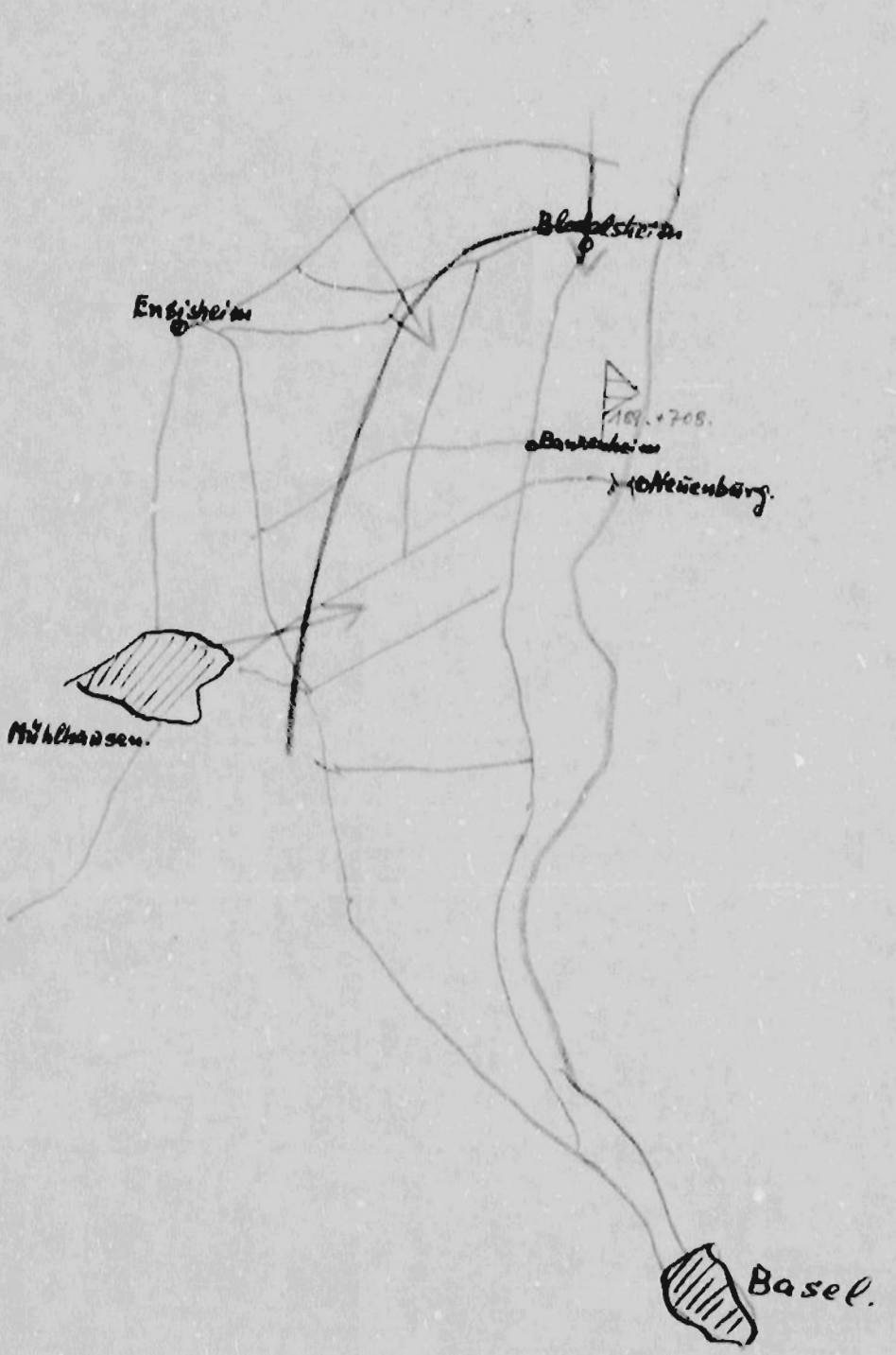
Skizze: 7. 8-100

Zeitraum: 10.-13.2.1945.

MS # B-100

Generalmajor Bleckwenn,

ehem. Kommandeur der

708. Volks-Grenadier-Division.

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