edited by Mad Dog

MS # B-594

Riedel, Paul Generalmajor

former Hoeherer Artillerie Kommandeur 319

Fighting in the Ardennes

16 Dec 44 to 25 Jan 45

Seventh Army Artillery

Translater: H. Heitman

Fighting in the Ardennes

16 Dec 44 to 25 Jan 45

Seventh Army Artillery

Supplementary to report by Gen Pz Brandenberger and Gen Maj Frhr von Gersdorf, Chief of Staff, Seventh Army, during the period under review.

Part II Preparatory Fire

Part III Forming Focal Points of Artillery Fire

Fighting During the First Two Days of Attack.

Part II

Artillery fire preparatory to the commencement of attack on 16 Dec 44

Army Group had demanded uniformly for the entire attack front:

1. Artillery protection for the attack troops from the moment of their departure from their positions, i.e. from 0500 hours. This meant that artillery fire was to be brought down suddenly at that time.

2. Most intense fire concentrations to be directed at the breakthrough immediately prior to the breakthrough, which was to take place at 0530 hours.

3. Immediately preceding (2), fire concentrations directed at Headquarters Cp's and billet areas of reserves, so far as these had been made out or were suspected; incidental to this action: destruction of means of communication.

4. Later, harassing fire on main approach roads in the rear of enemy frontline.

5. From the outset to paralyze enemy artillery.

On the basis of these demands and the strength and composition of the artillery, Army Senior Artillery Officer (Harko) issued an order in detail for the drawing up of the firing charts. Following points in that order deserve mention:

a. Details were minutely determined for the preparatory fire in respect of sequence, duration, guns and ammunition to be employed.

b. Artillery fire was to be opened suddenly and in a burst at LXXXV Corps, at 0500, the moment our infantry commenced crossing the foremost line, on the whole without preceding adjustment fire, and directed at

the objectives reconnoitered; these were points from which effective action was to be expected against the attacking troops once these approached the breakthrough points.

At LXXX Inf Corps our infantry would have to cross the foremost line far sooner owing to their having to cover a greater distance to reach the points where a breakthrough was to be effected at 0530 hours.

At this point also, the rigid firing plan was only to come into effect at 0500 at the very earliest, but as late as possible in order to mask the extent of the German southward attack. In the event of counter-measures being taken, artillery was to be ready to bring down fire immediately it might be called for after 0500 hours.

c. The fire concentrations on the billeting areas etc. prior to the breakthrough were so far as possible to be fired battalion-wise, at least where lighter calibers were concerned. The choice of targets was left to the respective artillery commanders. All anti-aircraft artillery within the corps area was to be included in the action. Duration was to be according to the amounts of ammunition fixed, with firing at the highest rate of fire usual in fire concentrations of the nature involved.

d. For the fire concentrations on the breakthrough points, of which there were two to each division, all guns of the artillery, all mortars and anti-aircraft guns (48) and all heavy infantry weapons were to be employed. The duration of fire concentrations was to be six minutes, to be fired within a time period of ten minutes and at highest rate of fire. The pauses were intended to mislead the enemy. So far as can be recollected, the number of rounds allotted to each breakthrough point was 8 to 10,000,

excluding the rounds fired by the heavy infantry weapons. The mortars were to be employed in such manner that their last salves would reach their targets at the moment the fire concentrations ceased, at which moment the penetrations were to take place.

e. Once the breakthrough had been effected, the breakthrough areas were to be shielded by fire in part by rigid fire chart and in part directed by observers. Later shielding of the breakthrough areas was provided for by means of directed fire of Div Artillery or perhaps by mortars.

f. For the harassing fire on the approach roads, one heavy twelve cm cannon battery to each sector commander had been emplaced in the Enzen and Kaschenbach areas in such positions that they could bring down flanking fire on the Diekirch to Ettelbrueck to Niederfeulen road and on the road leading to Echternach from the south. Fire to be opened as the situation demanded and on the order of the respective artillery commanders.

g. The poor complement of artillery precluded any possibility of detailing special groups for the purpose of fighting down enemy artillery. The concentrated groups of the corps had to fulfill this mission as well. This was particularly disadvantageous with regard to the strong artillery pocket southeast of Echternach. LXXX Inf Corps' concentration group had perforce to place the majority of its guns in positions too far south for the fulfillment of its concentration firing mission and in spite of that had to carry on the artillery duel, firing at the longest range it could possibly reach. The disadvantage of having to forego short and secure lines of communication and a line of fire favorable to placing fire immediately

ahead of the infantry, had necessarily to be accepted.

The ammunition situation made it necessary to restrict action against the enemy artillery to holding them down, which end was to be achieved by concentrations fired generally by a number of batteries alternating with harassing fire by single guns. The harassing fire was to be maintained during the concentrations. All firing positions that had been made out as permanently occupied during the previous few days were regarded as targets. Plans further provided for the possibility of directing fire also at other batteries that might be observed by the observation battalion to be firing during the attack. At LXXXV Inf Corps fire directed at the enemy artillery was to be opened at 0500, at which time it was to commence along the entire front of the A G; at LXXX Inf Corps fire was to be opened when called for in accordance with the measures set forth under (b) The maximum duration of rigid fire by chart provided for was forty minutes. Later, and immediately the first objectives were reached, namely the penetration areas, directed fire was to take the place of the fire by chart.

Execution of the preparatory fire. Penetration.

At LXXXV Inf Corps the preparatory fire was delivered according to schedule broadly speaking, so far as the infantry objectives was concerned. Under protection of the preparatory artillery fire the infantry had worked their way up close to the penetration points.

Whereas, in the case of 276 Div of LXXX Inf Corps, the attacking troops met opposition on approaching the penetration points, thus calling for the opening of our artillery fire, the approach was not noticed in the sector of 212 Div, so that at this point artillery fire started with the

fire concentrations.

Along the front of both infantry corps enemy artillery remained completely or almost completely inactive at the outset. Apparently they had not been concentrated quickly to ward off the German attack and in particular the strong artillery group southeast of Echternach did not act as effectively as had been expected. It was only in the late afternoon that the American artillery gradually and hesitantly became more active. The rigid fire by firing chart, for the purpose of holding down the enemy artillery, therefore soon ceased, particularly in consideration of the ammunition situation, and was replaced by directed fire. Following the fire concentrations on the breakthrough points the infantry had succeeded in reaching all the immediate objectives envisaged; only at 276 Div the penetrations did not succeed before afternoon after further preparatory fire had been delivered by the artillery.

Part III

A. Forming focal points of artillery fire.

When the German attack began on 16 Dec, main effort of seventh Army rested with LXXXV Inf Corps.

On the other hand, in allocating artillery forces to LXXX Inf Corp two factors had to be taken into consideration: First, the presence of the very strong enemy artillery group southeast of Echternach and secondly, the extension of the Corps (2 divisions and one battalion) beyond the intended left wing of the attack to Mosel gateway.

Therefore, in view of the meager artillery reinforcements brought forward, (see Part I - MS # B-467 - Chapter III) it became necessary to refrain from forming artillery concentrations on the army level and to divide the artillery reinforcements equally between the corps.

The corps also had to refrain from allotting artillery reinforcements to the divisions. The problem of forming focal points of artillery fire within the sectors of both subordinate divisions could only be solved by means of a concentrated corps artillery group with fire directed by Corps Art Commander and simultaneously having the mission of fighting down the enemy artillery.

Corresponding to the equal number of penetration points, each Inf Corps was assigned one mortar brigade. The mortar brigades were to be employed as compact units under their respective commanders, but at the same closest collaboration between the commanders of the brigades and the respective artillery commanders as well as of the mortar regiments with the division artillery regiments and the lower level infantry units

was to be ensured.

For the purpose of forming focal points of artillery fire after the operation had begun the Army had available:

a. Two Bns VAK (Volks Art Corps), at LXXXV Inf Corps; three Bns of this VAK had to be left with 5 FS Jaeg Div to replace the immobile and inadequately trained 5 FS Art Regiment.

b. VAK B with five BNs at LXXX Inf Corps. Note to (a) and (b): The equipment of the two VAK's was uniform; as follows:

First Bn: antitank guns Mod 43, suitable for special missions. Of little value for general artillery work on account of too small caliber.

Second Bn: 10 cm cannons. Even though two issues of ammunition were on hand, the supply of 10 cm cannon ammunition had long been known as a bottleneck.

Third Bn: Light Field Howitzers Mod 42.

Fourth Bn: Light Field Howitzers (Russian, 122 mm). Two issues of ammunition on hand. Further supplies could hardly be expected.

Fifth Bn: Heavy Field Howitzers (152 cm, Russian) Two issues of ammunition on hand, further supplies could hardly be expected. Hence, from the outset the evaluation of the firing power of a VAK, particularly when taken over a long period, showed a picture that could by no means be described as meriting the designation: "Artillery Corps".

c. Two batteries heavy 120 mm Cannon, scarcely 1/3 mobile.

d. The 8 and 18 Mortar Brigades compare Part I - MS # B-467 - Appendix II) each with two issues of ammunition (20 salvos).

Owing to the situation with regard to prime movers and motor trucks, only

one regiment of two Bns in each brigade could be rendered adequately mobile before losses were incurred. So far as the ammunition was concerned, the available amount was considered adequate for a protracted operation.

With the beginning of the operation the two Bns of VAK A were assigned to LXXXV Inf Corps for localized main effort action and one heavy cannon battery each to LXXXV and LXXX Inf Corps for the same purpose. Once the Sauer had been crossed, VAK B was to be held at the disposal of Army. The intention was to assign it to LXXXV Inf Corps if possible. Compare Part IV for further focal points of artillery fire formed during the ensuing battles.

B. Fighting during the first two days of Attack.

No changes took place in the organization or positions of the artillery during the first two days of attack, apart from some batteries on the extreme north wing being brought closer to the Our river.

However, considerable difficulties arose in maintaining communication between the observers following in the immediate wake of the infantry and the firing positions. The supply of telephone wire was too small whereas communication by means of the protable radio sets suffered serious interruptions owing to the nature of the terrain and the inadequate practical experience of the operators, the high losses amongst whom could only be made up for with replacements who had had even less practice. The interruptions often became aggravated until there was a complete stoppage of communication, especially at night. For this reason it became necessary in most cases to maintain one telephone and one radio line of communication with each Bn and its observation outposts once the e had crossed the Our and the Sauer, each line being supplemented with one or more relay stations.

This led to difficulties in transmitting firing orders and to inadequate flexibility in the support to the infantry, and these difficulties, especially where directed fire was concerned, constituted one cause for the slow progress made by the attack in the center and on the left wing.

The construction of military bridges also suffered as it proved impossible for the few observation posts we had with the forward infantry to locate

the American observation posts who were directing fire on the bridge construction sites and in many cases could be made out by our infantry, and to drive them from the terrain that was so favorable to them. Our own ammunition supply situation made it impossible for us to hold down for long the enemy batteries firing on the bridge sites.

S/ RIEDEL