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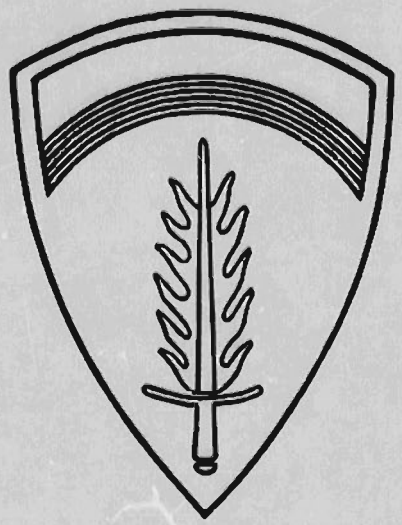

ENGLISH COPY

6TH SS MOUNTAIN DIVISION

(1 - 19 MAR 1945)

HISTORICAL DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY EUROPE
FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES BRANCH

13 pages

MS # B-693

6th SS MOUNTAIN DIVISION

(1 - 19 Mar 1945)

by

Generalleutnant a.D. Karl Brenner

HISTORICAL DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE

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6TH SS MOUNTAIN DIVISION

(1 - 19 Mar 1945)

In February 1945 the 6th SS Mountain Division had been employed in the lower Vosges Mountains. Since then its losses in men and materiel had been replaced. While morale had suffered as a result of the replacements, I was still able to report to my higher headquarters that the division stood ready for either attack or defense. Strength in men and equipment were at the level authorized for a normal mountain division and, in addition, we had been assigned an assault gun battery.

In the period 28 Feb - 2 Mar 1945 the division was withdrawn from its positions southeast of Bitche. Moving only at night because of the danger of air attacks, the division moved northward by train and truck. Concentrating in the area Hermeskeil - Rheinsfelden - Bierfeld, 40 kilometers northwest of Neunkirchen, the division was

subordinated to LXXXII Corps (Commander: General der Infanterie Hahm; chief of staff: Lt. Colonel Graf Ingelheim; operations officer: Major Vogel).

Heavy casualties were inflicted by enemy fighter-bombers during the course of the rail and motor movement.

The original order had directed LXXXII Corps Headquarters to commit the 6th SS Mountain Division in an attack on the Ruwer River sector to recapture Trier, which had been lost at the end of February. It was hoped to move the MLR forward to the road Trier--Nieder Zerf. However, after strong objections by corps and army as to the possibility of carrying out the order with only one division, the plan was changed to attack only as far as the road Trier--Nieder Zerf between Pellingen and Hill 507, thereby cutting off Trier from the south. This order might have been possible to carry out if the division were strong and received adequate artillery support. It seemed unlikely, however, that the road could be held against enemy counterattacks. My opinion, shared by corps, army, and army group, was not held by the High Command.

On 6 March, the division command post was located at Holzerath, 12 kilometers southeast of Trier (map 1). Both our mountain infantry regiments moved into the forest east

of Hinzenburg, the 11th under Colonel Reithel on the right, the 12th under Colonel Schreiber on the left. Each regiment was reinforced by one company from the engineer battalion. The reconnaissance battalion comprised the division reserve. The division artillery was coordinated with available remnants of the artillery of the 256th Volks Grenadier Division and strong elements of the 2d Mountain Division's artillery as well as about twenty 88-mm anti-aircraft guns from corps headquarters. Sufficient ammunition was available.

The American positions west of the Ruwer River were weakly manned. Apparently they had not yet recognized the division's advance. In any case there was no increase in artillery fire or air activity to indicate that we had been observed.

On 7 March, at 0200, without artillery support, both regiments began crossing the Ruwer River on emergency bridges northwest and southwest of Hinzenburg. Bypassing the village the two forward battalions pushed ahead to the road Trier--Nieder Zerf. Without encountering particular resistance the following battalions occupied Ollmuth, Niedersehr, Obersehr, Lampaden, and Schoemerich. The

mountain artillery and antitank battalions and the assault gun company rolled forward over an emergency bridge built by the division engineers near the Hinzenburg mill.

The weak elements of the 256th Volks Grenadier Division that were stationed in the attack sector were subordinated to the division. These troops conducted reconnaissance and, together with forces of the 2d Mountain Division, covered our position on the north and south. During the morning the forward battalion of the 11th Infantry (on the right) reached its attack objective, 1 kilometer south of Pellingen. The lead battalion of the 12th Infantry lost its way, at dawn it encountered strong resistance, and by the afternoon it was stuck, 1 kilometer east of Hill 507.

In the late afternoon the enemy launched strong, tank-supported counterattacks. These were repelled but both sides suffered heavy casualties. During the night the battalion was encircled, though radio contact with the division command post remained unbroken.

During the night of 7 - 8 March all elements of the division were ordered to withdraw to the far bank of the river, since it became necessary to disengage from the action. The left regiment was able to retire without

difficulty, while the right regiment had to fight its way through enemy lines, leaving behind the seriously wounded and some of its heavy weapons.

The division was ordered to reassemble north of Hermeskeil and to be ready for further commitment.

Casualties for the action totaled about 500 dead and wounded and about 150 missing. Six assault guns and five antitank guns were destroyed by enemy fire.

At the same time the division captured 356 prisoners, including 6 officers, and destroyed eight enemy tanks and captured two.

On 9 March the division received orders to proceed to the Simmern area, where it was to concentrate and be placed at the disposal of Seventh Army. (While the division was en route, I reported, 12 March, to my new superior officer, General Hoehne, commander of LXXXIX Corps, whose chief of staff was Colonel Reschke.)

The LXXXIX Corps was to build up a new front west of the Moselle River, in order that the remnants of the battered German divisions could escape eastward across the river. The corps' right boundary was at the mouth of the Moselle, the left boundary at Briedern.

Until now the only forces available for this operation had been the remnants of the 276th Infantry Division and the badly depleated 159th Infantry Division. Now, the 6th SS Mountain Division was to reinforce these troops by taking over the right part of the corps sector. The division command post was established at Boppard (map 2). The transfer of the division progressed very slowly, because of the serious shortage of fuel and trucks.

En route, 10 March, the 12th Infantry was ordered by Seventh Army to turn off to the west for commitment west of Trarbach. With this order, the regiment was permanently detached from the division's command. I learned later that on 14 March the regiment was assigned to LXXXII Corps as army reserve and was employed northeast of Greimerath. In the course of the American breakthrough it was encircled, but on 19 March it broke through the enemy lines north of Landstuhl.

Owing to the shortage of fuel, the 2d and 3d Artillery Battalions were forced to halt en route. According to later information reaching my headquarters, after placing themselves at the disposal of the local commander, they were destroyed in defensive fighting.

On 12 March, the reconnaissance battalion was the first element of the division to reach the new area. It was immediately employed by corps headquarters at the boundary between the 276th and 159th Infantry Divisions (between Alken and Bodenbach). At that point the enemy was attempting to attack across the river. The battalion conducted a successful defense during 12 - 13 March.

On 15 March the 11th Infantry, two light mountain artillery battalions, the assault gun battery, and parts of the antitank artillery battalion, reached the area about 10 kilometers south of Boppard. The enemy had meanwhile succeeded in ferrying across the Moselle River. Near Niederfell, between Bodenbach and Burgen, and south of Burgen the American forces had already established small bridgeheads.

The forward elements of the above forces were immediately thrown into a counterattack. Near Pfaffenheck--Udenhausen they succeeded in checking the movement of enemy advance points, but an attempt to throw the Americans back over the Moselle River failed for lack of sufficient strength. The division was particularly short of heavy weapons and artillery ammunition.

The night of 15 - 16 March was relatively quiet, though scouts reported that new enemy forces were steadily moving across the Moselle. A fresh enemy attempt to reach Boppard had to be expected. During the night our forces were reinforced by other march groups that had arrived in the meantime. In the early morning a force comprising two battalions of the 11th Infantry, commanded by Colonel Reithel, was committed between Pfaffenheck and Udenhausen. A second force, commanded by the division artillery commander, Colonel Goebel, was committed between Udenhausen and Buchholz. The remnants of the reconnaissance battalion, separated, into small groups, fought along the line between these villages. No contact existed between the right and left side.

Several times during the course of 16 March the enemy tried to resume the advance to Boppard. In hard and bitter fighting, the troops of the division succeeded in holding the line between Pfaffenheck and Buchholz. The village of Pfaffenheck changed sides several times during the day.

Late in the afternoon the corps command post, which had moved to Boppard a few hours before, received an order from army to disengage and withdraw to the east bank of the Rhine River.

On 17 March, in agreement with corps headquarters, I continued to hold our present line, employing both forces, in order to prevent the enemy from reaching Boppard. I intended to withdraw during the night with the vehicles, horses, medical installations, and rear services. I had boats at my disposal near Boppard and Brey. The night of 16 - 17 March passed quietly, though Boppard remained under heavy artillery fire, which fell with particular force on the ferrying site and on the road between Boppard and Brey. Still, despite great difficulties, the troops were able to carry out the crossing. The ferries could continue operating during the day owing to the thick fog that lay over the whole river.

The enemy continued to attack throughout 17 March near Pfaffenheck and Udenhausen, though their force had somewhat diminished. Other enemy forces, supported by armor, pushed forward from the south as well as along the Rhine River road toward Boppard. Their advance was checked, however, by the antitank obstacles that had been erected the previous night.

During the night of 17 - 18 March both forces of the division completely disengaged from the enemy and withdrew to Boppard and Brey, where they crossed the Rhine River under the protection of the thick fog.

MAP 1

Situation 8 March 1945

Central Europa 1: 100 000
Sheet U.1
Neunkirchen

Trier

Moselle R.

256th Volks Gren Div

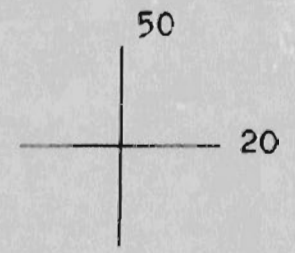
256th Volks Gren Div

Saar R.

6th SS Mountain Div "North"
Holzera-Th

Pellingen

Hinzenburg



LXXXII.Corps

2d Mountain Div

Nieder-Zerf

2d Mountain Div

416th Inf Div

gez. Brenner

MAP 2

Situation 12 - 17 March 1945

Central Europa 1: 100 000
Sheet S.2. Koblenz
T.2. Wiesbaden

Rhine R.

XIII.Corps

10

90

Moselle R.

276th Inf Div

17/18 March 45

Brey

Alken

276th Inf Div

Commanding Gen v. Reithel

6th SS Mountain Div "North"

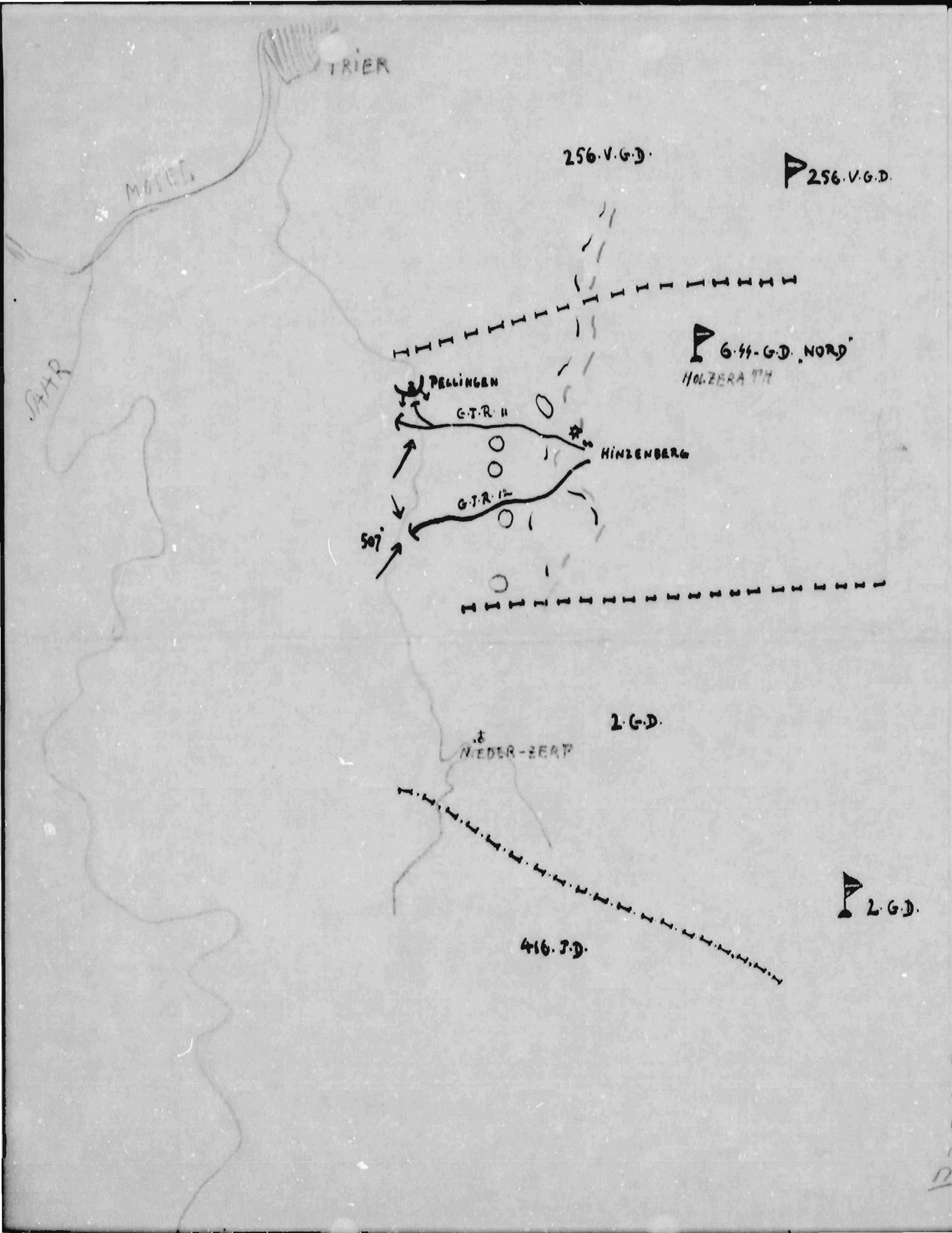
LXXXIX Corps

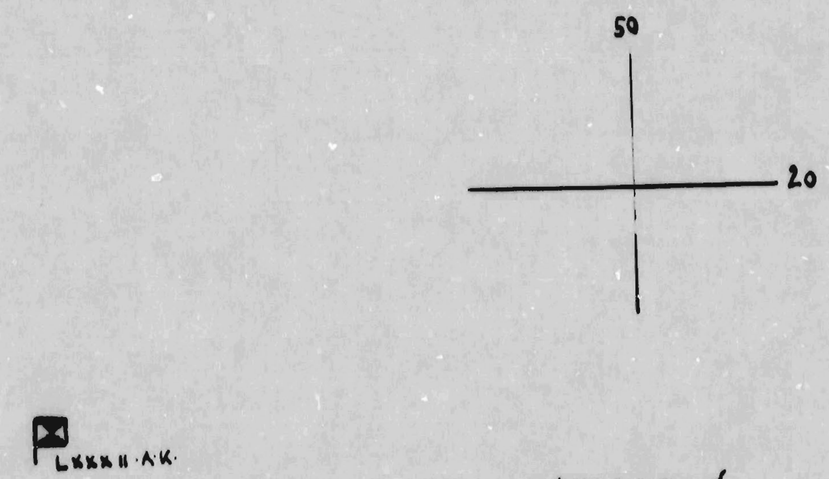
Commanding Gen v. Goebel

159th Inf Div

LXXXIX Corps
15 March 45

gez. Brenner





ANLAGE 1

CENTRAL EUROPE 1:100.000

SHEET U.1.

NEUNKIRCHEN

LAGE AM 8.III.1945

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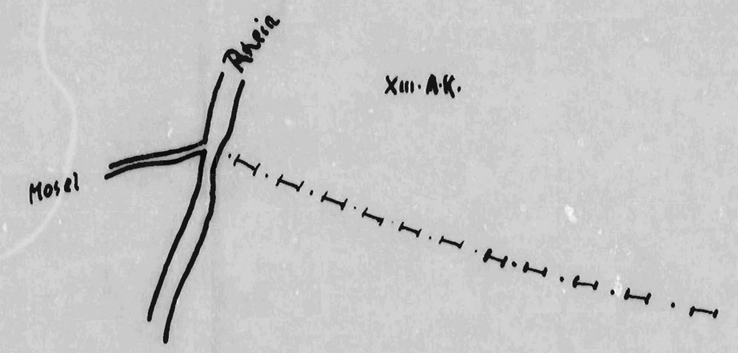
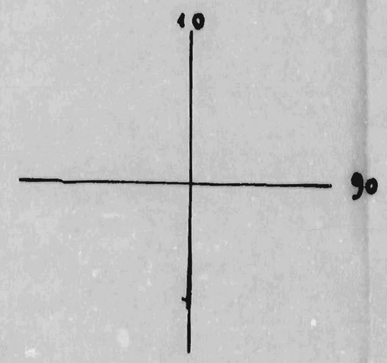
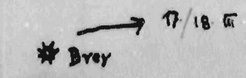
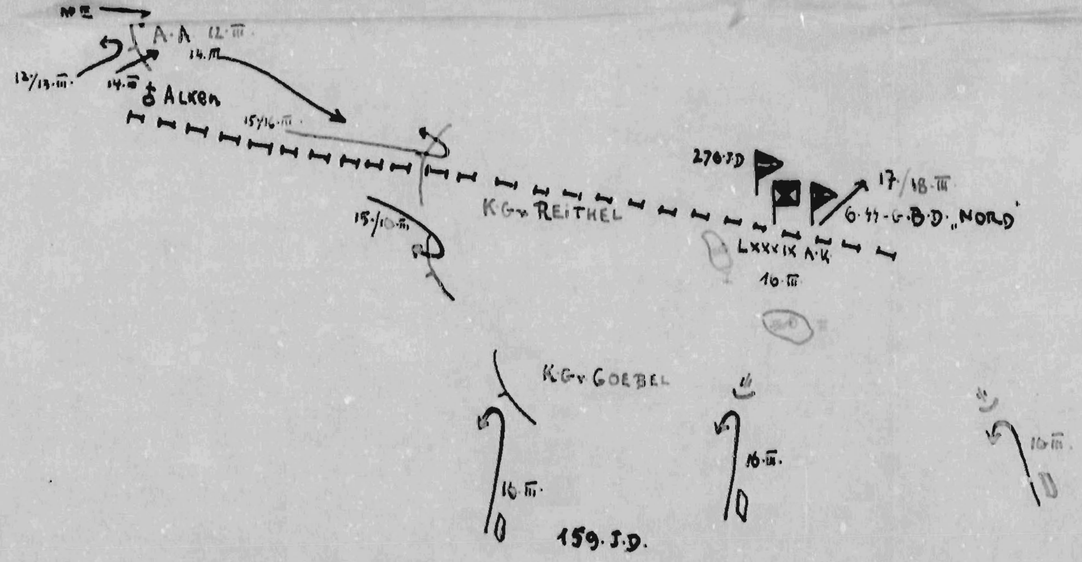
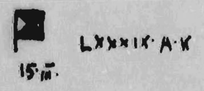




276. I.D.







ANLAGE 2

CENTRAL EUROPE 1:100.000

SHEET S.2. KOBLENZ
T.2. WIESBADEN

LAGE VOM 12.-17. III. 1945

(BRENNER)