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LUCHT, Walter

General der Artillerie

LXVI INF. CORPS

Continuation of "The Ardennes-Offensive"

Concerning: LXIV Inf. Corps, Continuation of "The Ardennes-Offensive".

3 Jan 45: On the morning of this day, lively fighter bomber activity was taking place. As I had supposed on 2 Jan, a superior strong enemy attack by many tanks was launched under violent artillery fire over the whole front of the Corps. The fighting was concentrated at Hierlot, Malempre and northwest of Odeigne. The divisions were pressed back, in spite of intensive resistance without, however, losing their inner cohension. In the evening, they were in about the line: woods northwest of Hierlot - north of Xhout-si-Ploux - northwest of Malempre-edge of the wood north of Obeigne - Freyneux - north of Dochamps. The situation in the wood north of Malempre was obscure. The enemy suffered considerable losses, as we did likewise,

4 Jan 45: The enemy continued the attack. After tenacious resistance and fluctuating and costly fighting, the front was pressed back to about the line: La Chapelle-Jevigne-Malempre-area of Odeigne and the wood southwest of it. Particularly hard fighting took place on the right wing, where Hierlot - which was defended desperately - nevertheless succumbed finally to the superior enemy. There, the enemy made a number of prisoners. The conditions between the left wing of the 12 'Volksgrenadierdivision' and the right wing of the 560 Volks Gren Div were not clear. Apparently there existed a gap there. The commanding General foresaw the danger of an enemy penetration to the main road and therefore committed the Armored Reconnaissance Battalion of the 2 SS-Pz Division which had been put at his disposal, between the two divisions as a protection of the boundary.

At first, the battalion remained subordinated directly to the corps headquarters. contin

5 Jan 45: The Armored Reconnaissance Battalion of the 2 SS-Pz Division then was subordinated to the 12 Volks Gren Div and additionally, one GHQ engineer battalion was brought up to the latter. At 9.00 hrs, the enemy continued the attack with strong armored forces exerting his main effort particularly upon the 12 Volks Gren Div. The Corps really reackoned with a strong enemy assault on the road to Houffalize, where the armored Reconnaissance Battalion was located by itself. Fortunately for it, the enemy did not avail himself of this weak point. In my opinion, he might have achieved a great success there by breaking through to Houffalize. Thus, he only kept up his pressure, which, however, was very strong, against the front. After tenacious defensive combat, the divisions, fought their way back to about the line: northern edge of La Vaux - north of Lierneux - wood clearing south of Malempre - Odeigne - and the wood southwest of it. On the right wing of the 12 Volks Gren Div - at the 62 Volks Gren Div - a gap arose between Odrimont and La Chapelle. The 12 Volks Gren Div committed the GHQ-Engineer Battalion there, on the hill northeast of La Vaux. Moreover, one battalion of the 326 Volks Gren Div was placed at the disposal of the Division and committed by it for the defense of Lierneux. The situation of the right wing of the 560 Volks Gren Div was obscure, but the Armored Reconnaissance Battalion 2 SS held its position at the main road. During his front trips, the commanding General once more directed the divisional commanders to take particular care of maintaining contact within their divisions and to the neighboring divisions.

6 Jan 45: The enemy attacked again at 8.00 hrs. His main effort became discernible at Lierneux and Fraiture, where many enemy tanks and heavy artillery fire were employed. The situation of the 560 Volks Gren Div was impossible to survey in the wooded terrain, where it was located approximately northwest of the main road from Regne to Samree. In the sector of the 12 Volks Gren Div. La Vaux and Lierneux were lost in the course of the day after very tenacious fighting. North of Fraiture we were able to hold the 'Gehe'-stream.

Enemy thrusts attempting to by pass the Armored Reconnaissance Battalion 2 SS were repelled. In the evening the Battalion withdrew to either side of the road fork south of Croix - St. Jacques.

On the left of the 560 Volks Gren Div the contact was lost in the wooded area. For this reason one rifle company with 20 mm guns on self-propelled mounts and several assault guns were sent to the wooded plot southeast of Odeigne. We suffered high losses. The Corps Hq Staff transferred its command post to Honyelez north of Bovigny. The Staff of the 12 Volks Gren Div moved to Petit Langlir.

7 Jan 45: In order to raise the fighting strength of the infantry, replacement training battalions arrived and were brought up to the divisions. Unfortunately the level of training of these replacements was very low. Their training, therefore, was still to be furthered whenever the enemy situation would allow it.

The fighter bomber attacks, also with bombs, increased on this day, though they had only slight effect. The enemy continued his attack with strong artillery, smoke and tanks. In the sector of the 12

Volks Gren Div, the enemy exerted his main effort at Grand-Sart and Fraiture. Although these localities were very tenaciously defended and several counter-attacks carried out successfully, yet in the end t ey were vanquished by the far superior enemy.

On the right of the 12 Volks Gren Div, in the sector of the 62 Volks Gren Div, violent fighting raged for Goronne. But the contact was maintained. Some improvished contact existed also between the 12 Volks Gren Div and the right wing of the 560 Volks Gren Div and the right wing of the 560 Volks Gren Div north of Chabrehez. In the evening, the 12 Volks Gren Div had reached approximately the line: Joubival - Herbronval - Fraiture. The enemy losses were not light; ours were considerable. Several assault guns were lost too.

8 Jan 45: In consequence of the continuous battles, the fighting strength of the infantry decreased in an alarming way, which imposes a maximum of physical and mental strain on troops and command in their efforts to keep up at least to some extent the continuity of the front. Troops and Command therefore deserve highest praise for having prevented an enemy breakthrough in spite of all that.

As the occupation at the main road to Houffalize was spread out wide apart, so that, for the most part, no connexion existed between the two divisional wings, the commanding General insisted upon having reinforcements brought up to the threatened area. Thereupon, the subordination of one motorized infantry regiment of the 2 SS Pz Division took place, which was inserted in the gap at the road. Only a very weak connexion existed also to the right of the 62 Volks Gren Division, and finally even a gap,

into which the 326 Volks Gren Division was inserted, with its left wing near Joubieval. This division was subordinated to the Corps asjacent to the right (XIII Inf. Corps). Moreover, a reconnaissance battalion of the 9 SS-Pz Division was brought up to the 12 Volks Gren Division, to Ottre so as to increase its fighting strength. After very hard fighting, Joubieval and Ottre were lost in the evening. From the region of Joubieval the enemy thrust forward in an easterly direction upon Provedroux. The front roughly ran as follows: south of Joubieval - Ottre - east edge of Bihain - Petite Tailles (there was the Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 2 SS) - Les Tailles and towards the Southwest. The 2 Armored Division of the enemy had made its appearance, that was why from now on, tanks of the enemy became visible in great numbers.

9 Jan 45: On this day, the enemy pressure as not so strong, so that in general, the line hitherto existing could be held. The weather was getting colder and there were snowfalls.

10 Jan 45: At the front of the 12 Volks Gren Div and in the sector of the division adjacent to the right, violent fighting blazed up. North of Langlier the enemy was repelled at the 12 Volks Gren Division, but Bihain and Petites Tailles were lost after wavering fighting.

In the sector of the 560 Volks Gren Div the situation remained unchanged.

11 Jan 45: In order to support the front, the 2 SS Pz Division was then inserted between the 12 and the 560 Volks Gren Div.

The enemy renewed his attack with heaviest artillery fire and an augmented commitment of tanks. Apparently an additional armored Division of the enemy had appeared, which, subsequently, was identified as

the 3 American Division. In the sector of the right neighbor, the enemy achieved a penetration by assault as far as to the outskirts of the wood south of Provedroux. The enemy attacks against the right wing and the center of the Corps sector were repelled under slight losses of terrain. The situation in the wooded sector of the division adjacent to the left was obscure; we only knew that the enemy had had but a small measure of success there. At about 20.^{00} hrs, a heavy attack with artillery preparation took place, the focal point of which was at Langlier. The enmy took that locality after hard fighting. There, the foremost line was at the road fork sharp south of Langlier. The general front line ran roughly as follows: along the road from Bovigny to the road fork south of Langlier - the road from Langlier to Pisserotte and from there through the wood in a southwesterly direction. Our losses were considerable at Langlier; we lost also several panzers and assault guns. Because of its heavy losses, the 12 Volks Gren Div was compelled to commit the not-fully-trained men of the replacemtn training battalions, which then suffered heavy losses, particularly by being taken prisoner. The 'corps Hq' transferred its command post to Wattermal.

12 Jan 45: During the night of 11/12 Jan 45, the enemy launched a large-scale night thrust. He succeeded in achieving an enveloping advance towards the road fork north of Langlier. The infantry forces in themselves were already far too weak for an infantry combat in woods, but it was all the more difficult to keep up contact in the dark, and particularly so as part of the replacements committed there had not yet been fully trained. On account of that, the enemy succeeded in penetrating into the depth of the forest. In the morning he had reached the southern exits of the large

forest north of Baclain and Lomre. There, he was stopped again, so that his breakthrough was prevented. There was a definite possibility that the enemy would break through, at least as far as to the road from Sterpigny to Cherain.

As contact with the right neighbor loosened more and more, the 9 SS-Pz Division had been sent for and committed on the right of the 12 Volks Gren Div. In the course of the day, the enemy in pursuit pressed the 12 Volks Gren Div back as far as to the road from Baclain to Mont-le-Ban. On the left, the 2 SS-Division was fighting on the road to Houffalize and on either side of it.

In the sector of the 12 Volks Gren Div, particularly violent fighting blazed up around Lomre, which however, supported by several panzers and assault gun - the enemy was repelled successfully.

In spite of his high superiority in all branches of the service and in spite of his night attack, the enemy had not succeeded in obtaining a penetration.

13 Jan 45: The enemy penetrated into Mont-le-Ban and after, that, into Baclain, in the night of 12/13 Jan 45. The actions were fought with changing success on either side. The enemy did not succeed before 13 Jan in the evening in definitely occupying the localities. Panzers of the 9 SS-Pz Division too was pressed further back. Enemy tanks appeared at the forest west of Mont-le-Ban in the afternoon.

14 Jan 45: The Army ordered that I was immediatley to take over the sector farther to the West on either side of the road north of Houffalize, with 560 Volks Gren Div and 116 Pz Division. It was a cold bright day and

the enemy fighter bombers kept extremely busy. Since no contact existed with these divisions, the Commanding General set out himself in order to assume the battle command on the spot.

On account of the very brisk activity of fighter bombers, he made only slow headway, and since the road in the region south of Brisy was congested with traffic, he had to cover the route from there to Taverneux - where the two divisional Staffs were located - by marching on foot. Thus he arrived late in the evening at the respective command posts. There, the situation was as follows: On either side of the road Houffalize to the North - on a level with Dinez - one 'Kampfgruppe' ECKARTSTEIN of the 3 Panzer Grenadier Division was committed. West of it were weak elements of the 506 Volks Gren Div and farther to the Southwest the weak elements of the 116 Pz Division. The reconnaissance battalion of the Pz Lehr Division, which hitherto had been placed at our disposal, with six to eight panzers at Mont, was withdrawn in the night of 14/15 Jan 45, thus causing an additional weakening of the front. In my opinion this salient of the combat front was nonsensical and only likely to cause heavy losses.

15 Jan 45: Just in time, early in the morning, the Army's order arrived to withdraw the front to the Southeast and to leave security detachments at Taverneux and east of Houffalize. We succeeded in doing that in the course of 15 Jan 45 without having the enemy close on our heels. With that, this 'Kampfgruppe' had escaped the encirclement.

The Commanding General went by way of Houffalize at first to Cetturu east of Houffalize, in order to supervise there the withdrawal of the front and its continuity. Late in the afternoon he returned via

II SS-Pz Corps at Halt - so as to orient himself there on the situation - to his command post, since new orders had arrived there.

Signed: Walther L. LUCHT

Group West Neustadt, 9 March 48

To the Historical Division,

The annexed report on the LXVI Inf. Corps, written by General of Artillery LUCHT, covers the period from 3 to 15 Jan 45.

This report is a continuation of his general report (MS # B-333 and MS # B-477) which will be submitted from time to time by single paragraphs on account of technical reasons.

As a simple report of facts, it describes the withdrawal of the Corps on either side of the main road from Liege via Houffalize to Bastogne, which was effected under strong enemy pressure.

In spite of the reinforcements constantly brought up to the Corps - which however, were extraordinarily weak as to their fighting power - the enemy succeeded within a fortnight in gaining about 20 kilometers of terrain, and only the sanction - obtained at the very last moment - for withdrawal of this part of the front, which was still held for no particular purpose, prevented its entire loss.

It is interesting that here report is made on an American night attack for the first time; such were made very rarely by the American Army according to German experience, although for that very reason, night attacks would be sure to bring about good surprise effects and promise good success, since the German units were not trained in night fighting. The night attack mentioned in this report, was entirely successful too; the enemy, however, did not turn it to account.

Detailed reports on the events during this period are available by the participating divisions, and have been written by the 12 Infantry Division

(the 12 Volks Gren Div is not meant in this case), the 326 Infantry Division and the 560 Volks Gren Division, moreover by the neighboring divisions: the 62 Volks Gren Div and 116 Pz Division. The two SS-Pz divisions are missing here too.

The brief report furnishes an adequate historic documentation on the course of fighting of the LXVI Inf. Corps during the above mentioned period.

Signed: BRANDENBERGER

Appendix: 1 report

Translation only

Edited by Anne Hall