

Chapter Four

FROM THE MAAS TO THE WEST WALL

I. Assumption of Command in Aachen Sector

96. During 8 Sep 44 the units attached to 353 Inf Div (Kfgr Riedel and units formed from stragglers) were assembled and organized at Maastricht. The command post of Division was at Amby, two km northeast of Maastricht. (See App 1.) It was planned to employ Division in the defense of Maastricht during the next few days, but nothing came of these plans, since LXXXI Inf Corps withdrew Division on the morning of 9 Sep 44 for a new mission. Division had to transfer all its non-organic units to 275 Inf Div and then be employed in preparing the defense of the West Wall, in the Aachen sector. Thus the non-organic units were left in Maastricht, while Division itself moved to Wuerselen, four km northeast of Aachen. Since the day was sunny and clear, enemy fighter-bombers were out in force. We had to stop and seek cover so often that the movement took all day. In the evening of 9 Sep 44, a Corps order directed that the staffs of Gren Rgt 941 (Obst Schmitz) and Gren Rgt 984 (Obst Heinz) be subordinated to 275 Inf Division. Thus, these two headquarters returned to the Maastricht area.

97. The LXXXI Inf Corps had ordered Division to prepare for the defense of the West Wall in the sector from Orsbach (excl)

to the forest south of Aachen (inclusive). (See App 2.) Division took over command of this sector on the morning of 10 Sep 44. The Festungsdienststellen (fortress staffs), which otherwise could have taken charge of the permanent fortifications of the West Wall, had such inadequate personnel that cooperation with them was a hindrance rather than an advantage. Furthermore, they had no weapons, equipment, or materiel--not even enough maps. In the years when the German front was on the Atlantic and the Channel, they had become mere administrative staffs, so that no support could be expected of them.

98. The first reconnaissance of the West Wall gave the following picture: Permanent installations such as bunkers and anti-tank obstacles were undamaged. Undergrowth, which had sprung up during the years when the West Wall was not occupied, had reduced visibility and fields of fire throughout the whole fortified area. The installations themselves were not armed; the weapons emplaced in them in 1939 and 1940 had been removed to the Atlantic Wall, where they remained. Furnishings for the interiors--lights, seats, and beds--were almost entirely missing. Some of the bunkers were occupied by bombed-out families, who left unwillingly, for they had no place to go. Before the front, there were neither wire obstacles nor mine fields. Since we expected that it would take the enemy several days yet to reach the West Wall, we could have done much to increase the defense potential of the West Wall; but as mentioned above, everything was lacking.

99. At Aachen there was a Kommandantur (garrison headquarters) under Obst von Osterroth. It had formerly been under the Wehrkreis VI (Commander, Gen Inf Mattenklott; Headquarters, Muenster, Westphalia; Command Post, Julich), but was now controlled by the Feldheer (field or operational forces). The Division Commander ordered the Kommandantur to be reorganized into a Kampfkommandantur (combat headquarters) under Obst von Osterroth and separate Ortskommandantur (post headquarters). By this measure von Osterroth was relieved of all administrative jobs and could concern himself with the tactical command of the sector.

100. In the West Wall units of the Ersatzheer (Replacement Training Army) were employed; elements of 176 Ers Ausb (Replacement Training) Div were north of Aachen and elements of 526 Ers Ausb Div (Genlt Schmidt) were in and south of Aachen. The Commander of 526 Ers Ausb Div was a Genlt Schmidt, who should not be confused with the Gen Schmidt who commanded 275 Inf Division. The elements of 176 Ers Ausb Div north of Aachen were sent to the southwest, to Maastricht. (See App 1.)

The Aachen sector was removed from the two replacement training divisions and assigned to 353 Inf Div, which thereby took over command of the following units:

A festungsmaschinengewehr (fortress machine gun) battalion, recently activated in Wehrkreis X, Hamburg, and immediately transferred to this area. It was committed on the Division right wing; the battalion command post was at Laurensberg.

Two infanterie ersatz (infantry replacement) battalions were committed in the forest southwest and south of Aachen.

A few flak units, which were used for antitank defense or as artillery.

101. All these units were unready for combat by reason of their organization, equipment and state of training. They had some battle-experienced officers and NCO's, but also many who had never seen anything of combat. The enlisted men included convalescents and insufficiently trained replacements of all age classes. They had few weapons. Heavy weapons were almost entirely lacking in the infanterie ersatz battalions. However, the position had to be made defensible with these forces, as far as was possible with the scanty materiel and equipment. The fortress communications net also had to be put in operation. Division expected to get a few real combat men when the fighting should begin.

II. Role of Police and Party in the Defense

102. Police and Party agencies, all of which had instructions not to subordinate themselves to the Wehrmacht, worked side by side with the purely military organizations in preparation for the struggle to come. Thus, in the municipal forest of Aachen, I encountered a police unit (probably from Koeln or Duesseldorf) building there--about 800 meters behind the West Wall--a defensive position, independent, without adjacent supporting positions, and

forming no organic part of the general defensive front. Another day I met at Stockheim (four km southeast of Dueren) an Oberleutnant who told me that he was the commander of a regiment formed by the Reichsjugendfuehrung (German Youth Headquarters) and given the mission of protecting the civilian workers in rear positions from air attacks.

103. So scattered and wasted were the preparations for defense within the homeland! The ultimate cause of this great failure was that the highest positions in all services were occupied by dilettantes and ignoramuses. These services were, moreover, organized vertically, so that horizontal cohesion was lacking. This was true, for instance, in the case of the Wehrkreis Commanders. There were, of course, Reichsverteidigungskommissars (German defense commissioners), the Gauleiters, but most of them had never been soldiers. If one of them had actually been a soldier, he could not have risen higher than Hitler did--that is to say, to acting corporal. But now they all, like him, wanted to play the General!

III. Preparation and Reorganization

104. A few days later--I think it was on 13 Sep 44--116 Pz Div (Genlt Graf Schwerin) took command of the sector and of all units of the Ersatzheer employed there. The 353 Inf Div was transferred to Vicht, to prepare the Ober Forstbach--Roetgen sector for the defense. (See App 3.) Here ersatz battalions of 526 Ers Ausb Div were employed under the command of an ersatz infantry regimental

staff (probably 453), under the command of Obst Feind.

A landesschuetzen ausbildungs (local defense training) battalion from Frankfurt-am-Main and another landesschuetzen unit were brought up to Division for commitment in the second line of the West Wall. When the Division Commander inspected this battalion, he found that a great number of the approximately 800 men were completely unfit for combat, and only partly fit for labor assignments. Twelve of the men were over sixty. The Division Commander ordered thorough medical inspections and sent the least suitable personnel--over 100 in all--back to Frankfurt-am-Main.

105. Next morning, probably 14 Sep 44, the 9 Pz Div (Genmaj Gerhard Paul Wilhelm Müller; command post, Breinig) took over the forward line of the West Wall, while the staff of 353 Inf Div was transferred to Schevenhuetten. The mission of preparing the defense of the second line of the West Wall was not changed.

106. Division had in the meantime made plans for a reorganization, which was approved by Seventh Army, in Lyons-la-Forêt. After the staffs of Gren Rgt 941 and Gren Rgt 984 had been taken over by 275 Inf Div on 9 Sep 44, no combat troops remained to 353 Inf Division. Only the trains were still available from the infantry, fusiliers, and engineers. From AR 353 only a regimental staff and two battalion staffs (all three suitable for combat), trains, and a few artillerymen and one howitzer were available. The Division Commander therefore ordered on 14 Sep 44 the organization of the staff of Gren Rgt 942 (Maj Woelke) and a battalion staff (Hptm Siepmann). At this time a

few remnants of Fues Btl 353 (Lt von Baer) arrived and became the cadre of a fusilier company. Thus was built up a framework which could absorb the replacements in prospect.

Appendices

353 INF DIV

(24 Jul - 14 Sep 44)

REPORT OF THE COMMANDER

MS # A-984

- App 1: 353 Inf Div: Assembly Area: 24 Jul 44
- App 2: 353 Inf Div: Order of Battle: 25 Jul 44
- App 3: 353 Inf Div: Situation: About Noon 25 Jul 44
- App 4: 353 Inf Div: Counterattack: Afternoon of 25 Jul 44
- App 5: 353 Inf Div: Situation: 0500 Hours 26 Jul 44
- App 6: 353 Inf Div: Developments: 26 Jul 44
- App 7: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Afternoon of 27 Jul 44
- App 8: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Morning of 28 Jul 44
- App 9: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Evening of 28 Jul 44
- App 10: 353 Inf Div: Breakout: Night of 28/29 Jul 44
- App 11: 353 Inf Div: Situation: 29 Jul 44
- App 12: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Afternoon of 30 Jul 44
- App 13: 353 Inf Div: Situation: 31 Jul 44
- App 14: 353 Inf Div: Situation: 1 Aug 44
- App 15: 353 Inf Div: Order of Battle: 5 Aug 44
- App 16: 353 Inf Div: Situation: 5 Aug 44

- App 17: 353 Inf Div: Situation: 6 Aug 44
- App 18: 353 Inf Div: Line of Departure: Night of 9/10 Aug 44
- App 19: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Evening of 10 Aug 44
- App 20: 353 Inf Div: Order of Battle: 11 Aug 44
- App 21: 353 Inf Div Units and Commanders: 11 Aug 44

MS # A-985

- App 1: 353 Inf Div: Commitment: 12 Aug 44
- App 2: 353 Inf Div: Commitment: 13-14 Aug 44
- App 3: 353 Inf Div: Situation: 15 Aug 44
- App 4: 353 Inf Div: Commitment: 16 Aug 44
- App 5: 353 Inf Div (Reinf): Commitment: 17 Aug 44
- App 6: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Morning of 18 Aug 44
- App 7: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Noon 18 Aug 44
- App 8: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Evening of 18 Aug 44
- App 9: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Evening of 19 Aug 44
- App 10: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Morning of 20 Aug 44
- App 11: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Afternoon of 20 Aug 44

MS # A-986

- App 1: 353 Inf Div: Billeting Areas: 21-24 Aug 44
- App 2: 353 Inf Div: Seine Crossing: 24 Aug 44

App 3: 353 Inf Div: Billeting Area: 25-27 Aug 44
App 4: 353 Inf Div: Situation: 29-30 Aug 44
App 5: 353 Inf Div: Situation: 31 Aug 44
App 6: 353 Inf Div: Positions: 1 Sep 44
App 7: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Morning 2 Sep 44
App 8: 353 Inf Div: Situation: About 2 Sep 44
App 9: 353 Inf Div: Commitment: 6 Sep 44
App 10: 353 Inf Div: Commitment: 7 Sep 44

MS # A-987

App 1: 353 Inf Div: Situation: Afternoon 8 Sep 44
App 2: 353 Inf Div: Disposition of Units: 10 Sep 44
App 3: 353 Inf Div: Disposition of Units: 13-14 Sep 44

MS # A - 987 : APP 1

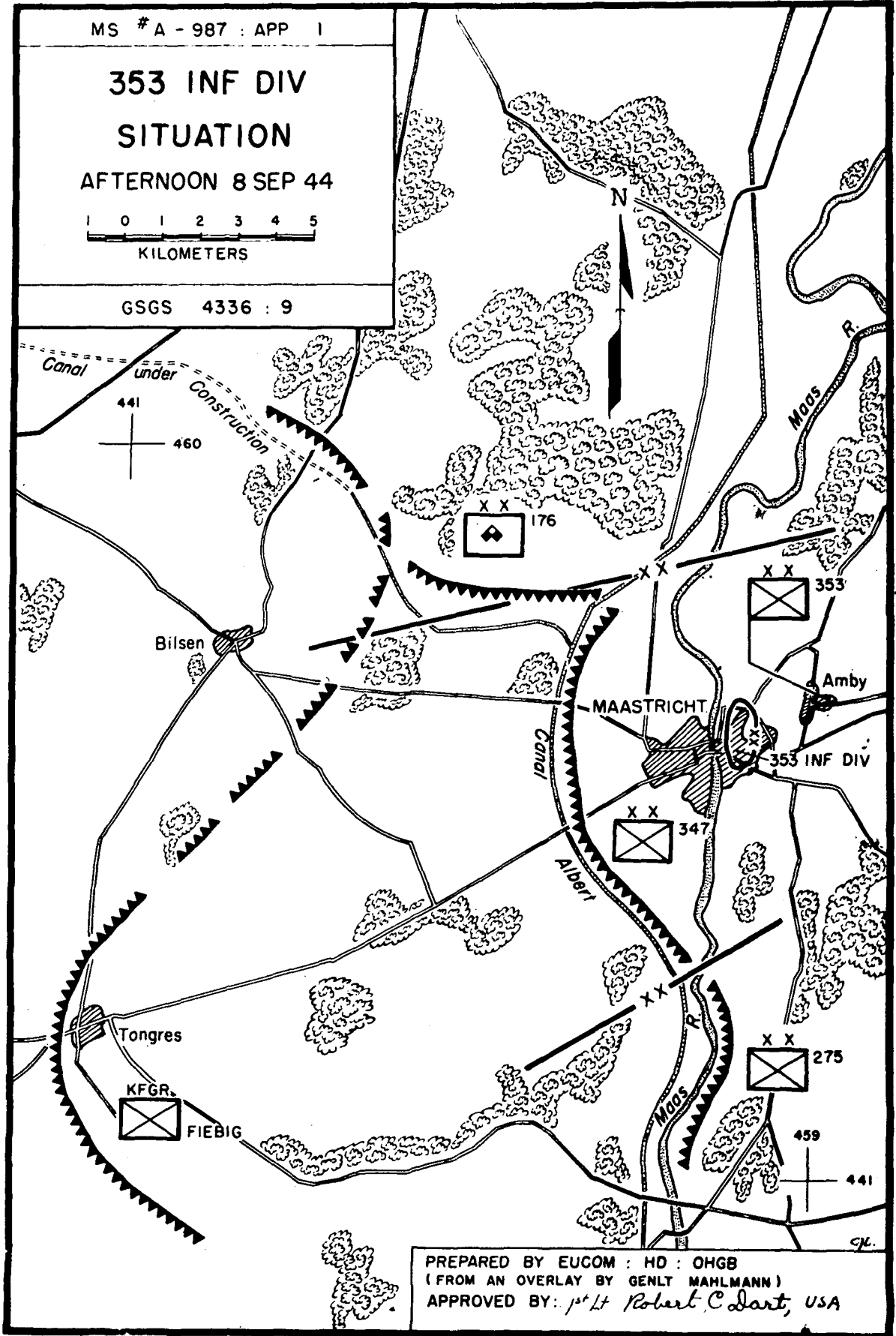
353 INF DIV

SITUATION

AFTERNOON 8 SEP 44

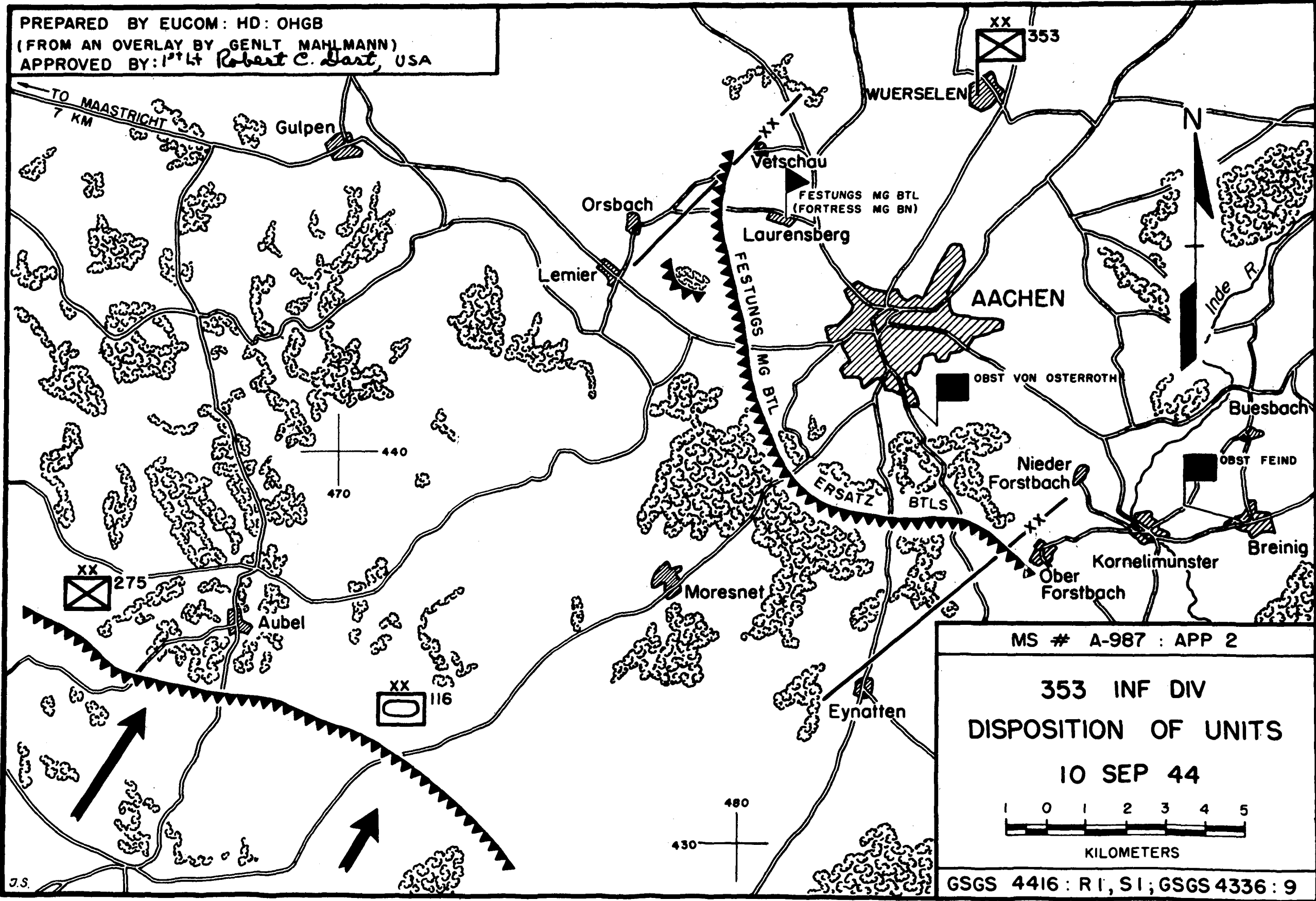


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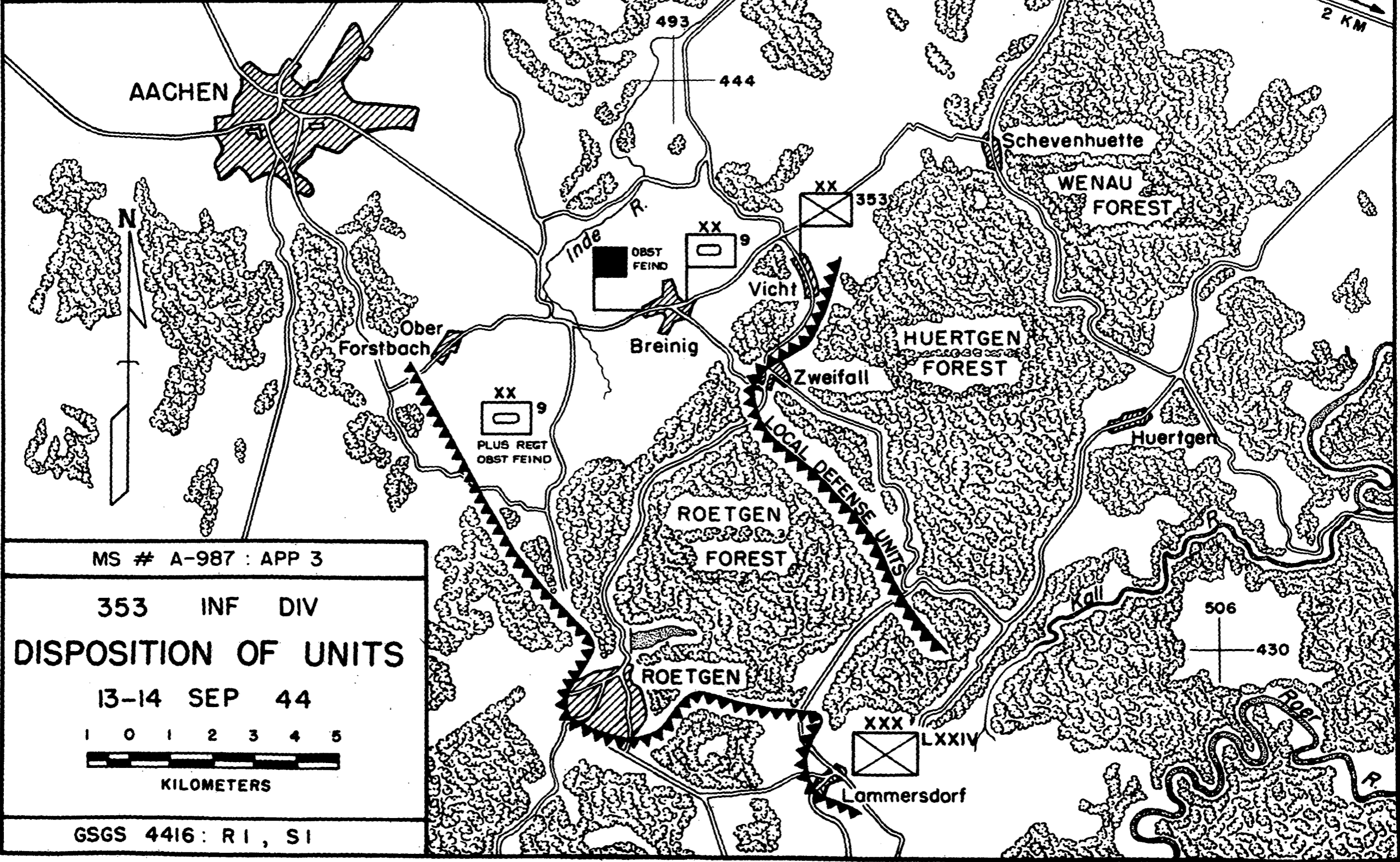


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(FROM AN OVERLAY BY GENLT MAHLMANN)
APPROVED BY: 1st Lt Robert C. Dart, USA

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MS # A-987 : APP 3
 353 INF DIV
DISPOSITION OF UNITS
 13-14 SEP 44
 1 0 1 2 3 4 5
 KILOMETERS
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