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Lt General

Koenigstein, 8 September 1950

Index for MS # B 098.

Report on combat operations of 353d Infantry

Division west and east of the Rhine, south

of COLOGNE. Period: 27 March - 22 March 1945.

(Gustav Hoehne)

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Order of battle

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MS# B-098

Camp Allendorf

Oberst Kurt HUMMEL

3 August 1946

REPORT OF THE FIGHTING ENGAGED IN BY THE 353. INFANTRY
DIVISION WEST AND EAST OF THE RHINE AND SOUTH OF COLOGNE.

FROM 2 TO 22 MARCH, 1945

From 2 to 22 March, 1945.

A. The situation at the beginning.

Withdrawn from the Fuehrer Reserve of Heeresgruppe 'B' and placed in command of the remaining portions of the 353. Infantry Division at the beginning of March, 1945, I took over in due course on 2 March the Divisional combat group which had been sent in at that time between Liblar and Weilerswist on the left wing of the 5. Panzer Army, in a defense role - (58. Pnz Kps under General Krueger) ... (see Sketch '1'). The previous commander of the Division, now relieved, was Colonel Koppewallner.

Organization and state of the Division.

The Division did not have a single coherent infantry regiment at its disposal; they had all been broken up and decimated in the preceding battles. Two regimental and four battalion staffs were still in existence and these were allotted - according to the tasks they were to perform and the situation in general - 'alarm units' varying in strength from sixty to eighty men - made up heterogeneously from supply troops, stragglers from other units, etc. This meant that on any given day no more than some ten to twelve such units were fit for employment and at the disposal of the Division in the form of infantry striking power. However, led as they were by officers, even so these units were completely lacking in experience as infantrymen and had had very little training indeed as independent fighting groups. And, as they also contained elements from the German Home Guard, it can be imagined that their value as fighters was decidedly low!

The artillery still had three light battalions and one heavy battery, but possessed only limited supplies of ammunition. The signal and communications battalion had very few trained elements left. Radio equipment was in short supply, most of it having been lost in the previous fighting. Telephone lines were furnished for the most part from the local network. There was no longer any sapper and engineering battalion available. Only one company of armored infantry was left - with some ten 7,5 cm antitank guns. There were no assault guns on hand.

B. The fighting which started on 2 March, 1945 - (see Sketch '1').

On 2 March the Division was busy dealing with enemy thrusts from Lochenich against Libler and slightly weaker pushes emanating from the Friesheim bushland, aimed at Weilerwist through Bliesheim.

On the day following, heavy enemy attacks against Libler started, which we were able to hold during the day by using portions of the 12. V.G.D. On 4 March, with the continuation of the American attacks, a breach was made in the front. Contact with our neighbor on the right, the 12 Div, was lost. It was only by hurriedly throwing together alarm units made up of stragglers collected here and there that we were able to seal off the breach at the ironworks east of Libler. Simultaneously, strong attacks by the enemy began on the left wing of the Division in the vicinity of Weilerwist, which we had to give up. The division now saw itself compelled to attempt to build up a new defense front among the buildings of the iron foundry south of Eckdorf, and with the very weakest of forces. Again the

front was so thinly occupied that a breakthrough was more than possible. Counterattacks aimed at regaining Weilerwist and Libler, ordered by higher authority, had no success at all, seeing that, shortly after they were started, the inexperienced members of the alarm units just started running round in circles as soon as they came within the orbit of the enemy's fire. The situation grew still more threatening on 5 March on the left flank of the 353 Div, (see Sketch '1') - for the Americans, who had been able to withdraw reinforcements from the sector of the 15. Army thanks to the weakness of the resistance they had met with there, started to attack through Merten and Trippelsdorf against the latter town and against Walberberg.

And, since the 15. Army had diverted the division on its left wing to the Southeast, this meant that there was now a yawning gap between it and the left flank of the Division. And so the enemy was enabled to take Sechten.

In the sector Southwest of Bruehl, too, the enemy had pushed forward with his tanks along the highroad to Cologne close up to the east edge of Bruehl, on the 5 March. The very few assault guns at the disposal of the Division, about six in all, dropped out of consideration here.

The Division was now ordered to form a new defense front during the night along the line from Bruehl - the heights south of Berzdorf - the northern edge of Wesseling. This was done, although it was occupied only by very weak forces, inexperienced in infantry fighting. Any attempt at a penetration into Bruehl on the part of the Americans was to be rendered ineffectual by counterpushes on our side. During the daytime, the divisional staff had already withdrawn to the group of farm buildings 1 km south

of Rondorf. An advanced combat post still stayed in Berzdorf.

On the following day - the 6 March - the Americans continued their attacks along the highroad, against Bruehl, and from Wesseling onward strengthened the force of their push in the direction of Godorf. When we tried to throw them back by counterattacks on their penetrating into Bruehl they smashed our attempts with their tanks. We suffered more casualties, and as a result we were unable even to hold this line on the 7. The main line of defense had already been brought back to between Meschenich and Godorf on the night of the 6 March and occupied with weak forces. The staff of the Division moved on the forenoon of the 7 to Weiss, where those of the 58. Panzer Korps and the 12. V.G.D. were already located.

As the bridgehead south of Cologne formed by the 12. V.G.D. and 353. Div - although still being held - had now narrowed down considerably, all artillery limbers, ammunition trucks, and supply wagons which could be dispensed with were sent back from Weiss and Suerth across the Rhine, the movement starting on the 6. An order from the Fuehrer had prohibited any retreat on the part of the artillery and armored infantry to the eastern bank of the river, despite the fact that the defense in the bridgehead - which by this time had grown very narrow - particularly after the loss of Cologne - would have been far more effective from there and could have been much more efficiently supported. Most of the batteries were already involved in close fighting from the 6 March onward or else were getting ready for same, for their guns were located immediately behind the infantry front - weakly occupied.

So, in the face of this senseless and incomprehensible order, single batteries had been taken back, otherwise it would have been impossible to maintain the defense on the eastern bank of the Rhine any longer.

The Corps staff and both the Divisional staffs were to remain in the narrow bridgehead - and meet their death there !

On 7 March the enemy started to attack once more -- beginning from Godorf . . . Meschenich had to be yielded. On the afternoon of the same day, the remaining remnants of the 353. Div were still holding the line '53' - one and a half kilometers north of Godorf - halfway between the latter village and Suerth. Adjoining to the North the remaining portions of the 12. V.G.D. were still fighting valiently. The batteries had been dispersed.

On the early morning of the 8, when the main body of the non-fighting units had been brought across the river together with the greater part of the stragglers from other units - no longer engaged in the fighting - the enemy now started to attack from the southeast edge of Cologne against Weiss and Suerth. A heavy curtain of artillery fire swept the river and both banks. And with the start of the enemy attacks on Weiss and Suerth, and with the collapse of the resistance at last inside of the bridgehead - the Commanding General resolved to move back over the river along with the two staffs. Meanwhile, a new defense front had been erected by the Division on the east bank of the Rhine along the line of Langel - the mouth of the Sieg at Mondorf. This new front was manned with members of the German

Volksturm, stragglers, and supply troops. The Divisional staff itself moved to Spich - (see Sketch '2'). The new line of demarcation between the Division and that of the 12. V.G.D. and the division on the left wing can be seen from a perusal of sketch. It was now to be feared that the Americans would concentrate their forces and throw them across the Rhine within the next few days. It would have been quite possible for them to send over infantry forces in the sector of the Division during the night of the 8 and to build up a bridgehead on the eastern bank, as at this time the Rhine front in the divisional sector was occupied with not nearly sufficient forces. It is true that blocking units, and engineering troops which had assisted in getting the members of the Division across the river, were now sent in here as security but with their meager strength and hopelessly inadequate equipment, they were in no position to form a coherent defense front. At this stage, the artillery had very little ammunition left; we had no telephone lines, owing to shortage of wire.

However, as no further attacks by the Americans took place in the days immediately following in the sector manned by the Division and things remained quiet for some time, we were able to re-assemble and re-form the units and at the same time bring up new reinforcements and withdraw the members of the Volksturm and integrate them into the companies, as well as fetching new material such as anti-aircraft cannon and machine-guns from the dump located near the exercise ground at Wahn, and in this way equip the Division anew.

By the middle of March the Division was organized as follows:

Divisional Staff.

Signal Battalion - (1 radio and 1 telephone company.)

2 Infantry regiments each of 2 battalions.

1 Infantrygun company to each regiment (with 6 light 7,5 guns).

The heavy 15 cm guns had been given over to the Artillery.

1 anti-aircraft machine-gun company of 12 2cm guns.

1 sapper and engineering battalion of 2 companies - formed anew.

1 armored infantry battalion of 2 companies with 7,5 and 8,8 cm guns - (antitank).

1 artillery regiment with 3 light and one heavy battalion.

Battalion allotted to the Division, of 3 batteries of 4 guns.

Although a new texture had been given to the Division in these days of quiet its fighting value, owing to the heterogeneous nature of the troops composing it and their serious lack of fighting experience, was but slight. It can be stated that it was in no sense suitable for attack.

In the sector of the Division the enemy attempted to send patrols and assault detachments across the Rhine in the night-time at Rheidt and lower Kassel but did not manage to set foot on the other side. Single infantrymen were taken prisoner.

Enemy harassing artillery fire was directed by day at different times against crossroads and villages in the sector of the Division. As of 4 March, the strongpoints at Siegburg and Friedrich Wilhelm Haute were still subordinated to the Division. The officer leading the fighting there was

named by the Heeresgruppe according to need. These strongpoints were manned by about 300 men of the Volksturm. They were armed and equipped by the Division.

The Sieg sector was built up and strengthened by the Division from the mouth of the river Sieg up to Bulsdorf, assisted by civilian labor.

There was no contact with the enemy in the sector of the Division up to 22 March, 1945.

/s/ H u m m e l

Colonel.

The 5. Panzer Army.

58. Panzer Corps.

Sketch '1'

The battles of the 353. Infantry Division
west of the Rhine. (2 to 8 March, 1945).

12. V. G. D.
Early on 8 March

12. V. G. D.

353. Div.

12. V. G. D.

353. Inf. Div.

Left neighboring division.

As per map of Cologne - 1:100000

Number of left neighboring
division no longer known.

15. Army

353. Infantry Division.

Divisional command post.

Regimental command post.

Demarcation line, - of division.

" of Army - left flank of division.

Artillery positions no longer known.

Sketch 121.

5. Panzer Army.

LVIII. Pnz. Kps.

Defense line of 353. Inf. Div.
on the Rhine. Time - 9-22 Mar.

12. V. G. D.

353 Division.

LXXIV. Army Corps.

Scale as before.

353. Infantry Division.

Divisional command post.

Regimental command post.

Divisional perimeter.

Corps perimeter - adjoining left division.

Artillery position of one light battalion.

Two battalions in the area Libur - Uckendorf.

One battalion west of Spich.

Position of heavy battalion (15 cm).

Correct Names of Towns

Rhine	Rondorf
Koeln	Godorf
Liblar	Meschenich
Weilerswist	Weiss
Lechenich	Suerth
Friesheim	Langel
Fliesheim	Sieg (river)
Eckdorf	Agger (river)
Merten	Mondorf
Trippelsdorf	Spich
Walberberg	Wahn
Sechtem	Rheidt
Bruehl	nieder Kassel
Barzdorf	Siegburg
Wesseling	Friedrich Wilhelm Huette
	Buisdorf

5. Pz. Armee.

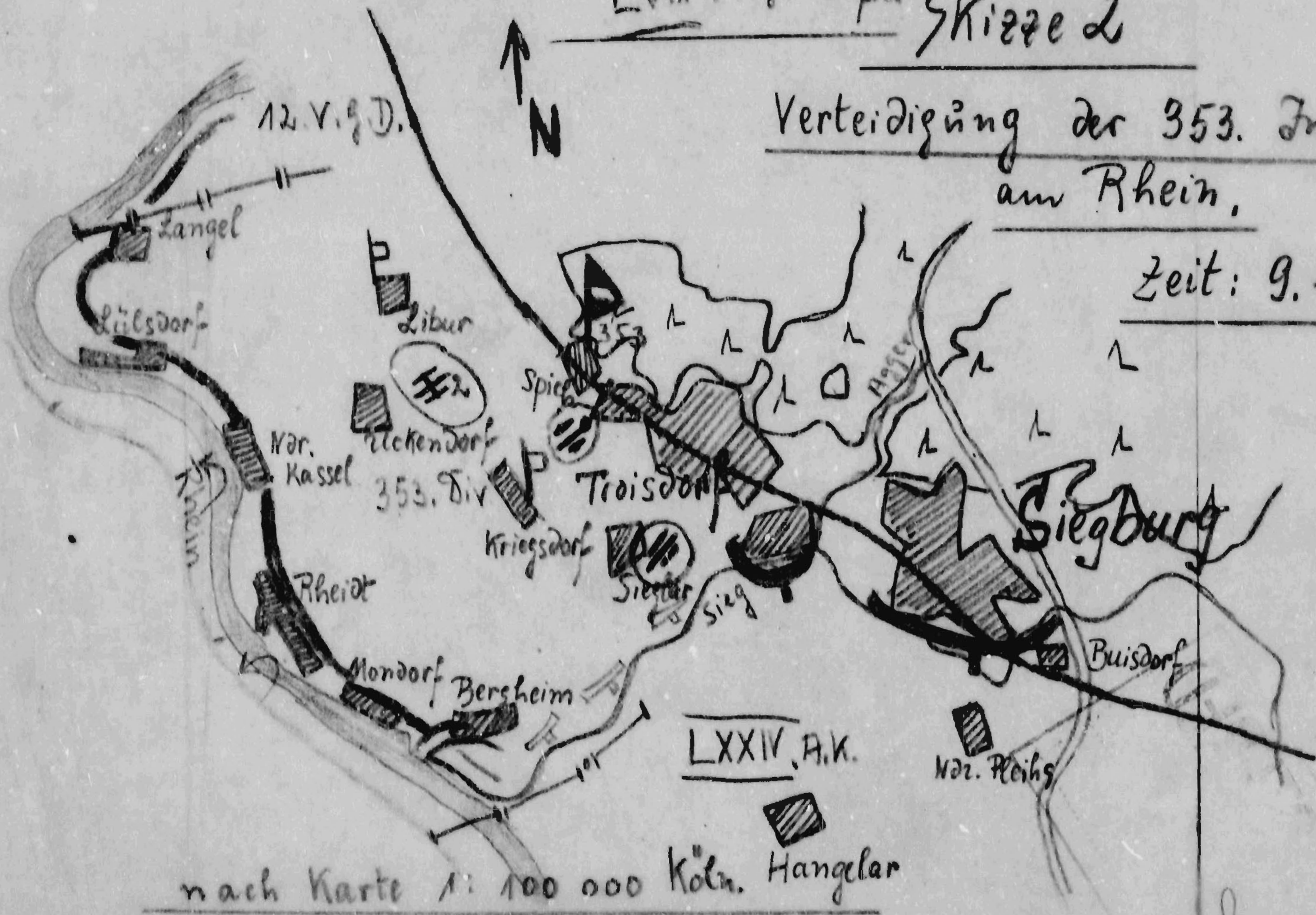
LVIII. Pz Korps Skizze 2

Verteidigung der 353. Inf. Div.
am Rhein.

Zeit: 9. - 22. 3. 45

353. Inf. Div.

12. V. 9 D.



nach Karte 1:100 000 Köln. Hangelar

Erläuterungen zur Skizze 2

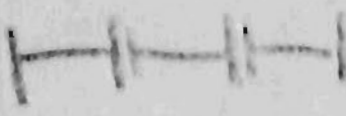
353. Inf. Div.



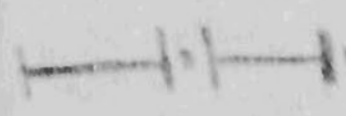
= Div. Gef. Stand



= Reg. Gef. Stand



Div. Abschnittsgrenze



Korps-Grenze, ngl. linke Div. Grenze



= Artillerie-Stellung mit leichter Vorbereitung
2 Abteilungen mit Raum feuert
- Waken Dorf, 1 Abteilung westl.
Speich.



= Stellung der schweren Abteilung (15 cm).

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