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contains items from German language version

MS # B-147

Title : A Gp H (10 Nov 44 - 10 Mar 45)  
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 Position : Ia, A Gp H  
 Date of MS : 5 April 1946  
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Summary

A Group H

(10 Nov 44 - 10 Mar 1945)

Army Group H was organized 10 November 1944 to control the troops in Holland to the north of Army Group B. It comprised Fifteenth Army, First FS Army, and the Netherlands District Command (WB NdL.). The troops assigned to Army Group H were for the most part battle-weary, having been extensively engaged in France, Belgium, and southern Holland.

After First FS Army withdrew to the Maas Line (25 Nov 44), the activity on the front quieted down. Heavy floods on the right flank precluded enemy attacks there. Consequently, Army Group H lost approximately 10 to 12 divisions and most of its artillery which were transferred to more active fronts in preparation of the Ardennes Offensive. The withdrawal of these units made a serious defense of the Army Group H front impossible; complete reliance had to be placed upon floods and bad weather to thwart any Allied plans.

Army Group H was not scheduled to take part in the Ardennes Offensive, Army Group H did have a pursuit mission in case of a large-scale Allied withdrawal, but this mission was never realized.

The front remained quiet, and it was not until the last week in January 1945 that Army Group recognized an impending attack against First FS Army. In spite of a recognition by Army Group H and OB West that First FS Army could not defend its front, OB West was able to furnish very few reserves. On 8 February 1945 the anticipated attack became a reality when Twentyfirst Army Group attacked in the Forst Reichswald area after an intense artillery preparation and air bombardment. Army Group H still figured on the possibility of the main attack being at Venlo. Until

the main effort was recognized in the Cleve area, reserves were not shifted to Cleve, then, all available troops and reserves were shifted to the First FS Army front and the other fronts completely neglected. By these measures, a breakthrough to Wesel was prevented in spite of the slow but steady progress of the British.

On 23 February 1945 the American forces attacked Army Group B, and soon achieved a deep penetration. This was of great interest to Army Group H because of the fear of First FS Army losing its lines of communication. A slow withdrawal began with the hope of slowing down the American forces and later retreating behind the Rhine. An order from Hitler arrived which forbade any retreat to the east bank of the Rhine. The situation was very grave, since the right flank of First FS Army had been completely defeated and no preparations had been made for a defense of the east bank of the Rhine. In view of the situation Army Group H undertook on its own responsibility the transfer of artillery and supply units across the Rhine.

Since the Ruhr was undoubtedly the target of the Allies, and an effort to encircle this area was anticipated, it became necessary to protect the regions north and south of the Ruhr.

After repeated requests, OKW finally gave permission to evacuate the Wesel bridgehead (6 March 1945).

By this time the troops were in very poor condition. The continuous combat plus enormous losses decreased their efficiency. Morale, however, was fairly high and this was especially true in the Fallschirm divisions. Materiel losses and lack of equipment hampered Army Group H to a very great extent. At one time Army Group H had 50,000 men for whom there were no weapons.

In estimating the enemy capabilities, the author feels that the British soldier had a higher fighting value than the American. The leadership of the Americans, however, was more difficult to deal with than that of the British.

Allied air supremacy made it necessary for all movements to take place at night, and necessitated careful planning in order to avoid heavy losses of men and equipment.



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German Panzer units were hindered by a shortage of tanks and the lack of spare parts.

The construction of obstacles, roadblocks, minefields as well as other defensive preparations were carried out actively. However, the lack of fuel and ammunition, the shortage of signal equipment and materiel in general and the absence of Air Force protection contributed greatly to the Allied victories. In the author's opinion, the British could have crossed the Rhine in the Emmerich-Rees area in the beginning of March 1945, instead of eliminating the Wesel bridgehead first. The east bank of the Rhine was not fortified and the forces available for its defense were negligible. By crossing the Rhine with a task force consisting of a number of armored and infantry divisions, which were available, the British could have formed a bridgehead with only slight losses and would have knocked out the Rhine defense position before its establishment. The Wesel bridgehead could have been sealed off from the rear and a rapid penetration into central Germany would have been possible. The author is convinced that this operation would have resulted in a decisive success for the Allies.

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Preface

Army Group H

(10 Nov 44 - 10 Mar 1945)

MS # B-147 was written by Oberst Geyer under rather difficult working conditions in the British PW Camp at Bruges, Belgium. No reference material other than maps was available, and the author stated that mistakes in dates and troop units are therefore inevitable. Oberst Geyer wishes to show by his manuscript that, against overwhelming power in all fields, the German soldier did his duty until the very end. The battles in which Army Group H fought against the Twentyfirst Army Group are mentioned solely to give continuity to the report. The main emphasis is on combat with the American armies.

MS # B-148 was written after Oberst Geyer had been transferred to DEFE 20, Allendorf, Germany in response to a number of questions. The answers should clarify certain points in MS # B-147. The author used a Twelfth Army Group situation map for reference.

Generaloberst Kurt Student is the author of MS # B-717 which was written at the British PW hospital in Rotenburg near Hannover. The author has been suffering from an ailment which confined him to his bed. He was not able to write, and even reading was difficult for him. The first three sections of MS # B-717 are not connected with Army Group H and are therefore produced under separate cover. The fourth section contains valuable information on Army Group H and has therefore been added to Oberst Geyer's manuscript by way of a number of footnotes.

Generaloberst Student was the commander of Army Group H from its activation until 31 January 1945, when he handed over his command to Generaloberst Blaskowitz and returned to Berlin.



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Army Group H

(10 Nov 44 - 10 Mar 1945)

I. Initial situation:

1. Army Group H was organized as a subordinate command of OB West on 10 Nov 44, by an OKW order, to relieve Army Group B, which was involved in hard fighting east of Aachen, from the necessity of controlling the troops in its northern sector.\* To form the staffs and troops directly subordinate,

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\*Pt of 7 Pts of MS # B-717, Generaloberst Student:

As I heard later, Army Group H was organized above all with regard to the Ardennes Offensive. The staff of Army Group B and in particular its key figure, Generalfield-marshal Model, were to concentrate all their attention on the preparations for the offensive and were to be relieved, as much as possible, of all other command functions. For the time being, the activation of Army Group H was to be kept secret. The official activation was to take place only after 10 Nov 1944. Actually, however, I assumed already by the end of Oct 1944, the command responsibility over the extended front, under direct control of OB West.

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the staffs and army troops of the provisional "Narwa" and "Serbien" armies were assigned to the new army group, as they were no longer needed on the Eastern Front. They arrived within about two weeks of the formation of Army Group H. For a list of the more important officers of Army Group H, see App. 1. Subordinate to Army Group H were Fifteenth Army, First FS Army, and the Wehrmachtsbefehlshaber Niederlande (WB Ndl --Netherlands District Commander). By an OKW order, Twentyfifth Army was to be formed by drafts upon the staffs of Fifteenth Army and WB Ndl. Twentyfifth Army assumed command about 25 Nov 1944, thereby relieving Fifteenth Army. General (Flieger) Christiansen became the Commander in addition to his duties as WB Ndl. He was relieved about 15 Jan 1945 by General der Infanterie Blumentritt as Commander of Twentyfifth Army, but retained his post of WB Niederlande.

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2. On 10 Nov 1944, the sector of Army Group H extended from the German-Dutch boundary west of Borkum to Roermond (inclusive). Adjoining units on the flanks were Fuehrungsstab Nordkueste (North Coast Operations Staff) under command of the Oberbefehlshaber des Ersatzheeres (Commander of the Replacement and Training Army) on the right and Fifth Panzer Army (later Fifteenth Army) under Army Group B on the left (See App. 5.)

The front line extended along the islands of the Dutch north coast - Hoek van Holland -- western edge of Goedereede -- western and southern edges of Schouwen -- southern edge of Goedereede -- course of the Hollandisch Diep -- course of the southern arm of the Maas River as far as Ochten (southwest of Arnhem) -- Zetten -- Elst (exclusive) -- Hoevezand -- Haalderen -- Erlekom -- Groesbeek -- Middelaar -- about 15 km west of the Maas River to the junction with Army Group B. Approximate boundary between Fifteenth (Twentyfifth) and First FS Armies after about 15 Nov 1944 was along the line Nijmegen -- course of the Rhine -- Dutch-German border. The boundary between Army Group H and Army Group B was the line Roermond (Army Group H) -- Muenchen-Gladbach (Army Group B) -- Kettwig, on the Ruhr (Army Group B). The Army Group rear boundary was the Dutch-German border from Borkum to Winterswijk -- Wesel -- course of the Rhine. The Reichskommissar of occupied Holland as well as the Gauleiters (District Leaders) retained full command authority, independent of Army Group, of the territory extending beyond a 20 km strip behind the front. This situation caused undesirable friction.

3. The mission of Army Group was total defense, utilizing all possible means for this purpose. Army Group H had permission, however, to withdraw its troops, located west of the Maas, to the eastern bank when overwhelming pressure of the enemy should require it. This withdrawal had to be coordinated with the movements of Army



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Group B. Bridgeheads were to be held, particularly at Venlo and Roermond. Moreover, Army Group was at all times to hold forces ready for transfer to other fronts. The armies received orders accordingly. The WB Ndl. was to secure the territory under his command against hostile airborne landings. Also, he was to carry out a large-scale plan for the utilization of available manpower and weapons in order to strengthen the front, since fresh troops and supplies from the Zone of Interior could not be counted on for the time being.

4. Upon its activation on 10 Nov 1944, Army Group H was assigned troops which had to be considered, nearly without exception, as severely battered or at least extremely exhausted due to the battles in Belgium and southern Holland. Elements of the Fallschirm division were exceptions, since they were in better condition both in men and materiel.\* In their case, however, great anxiety was caused by the

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\*Pt 5 of 7 Pts of MS # B-717, Generaloberst Student:

Throughout the duration of my command of Army Group H, I remained simultaneously commander of the German Fallschirm forces. The 2, 3, 5, and 6 FS Divisions had been more or less destroyed during the invasion in the West. Of these divisions, the 3 and 6 FS Divisions were reorganized within Army Group H area (on the eastern border of Holland, in the Hengelo - Coevorden area). The 2 and 5 FS Divisions were in the Oldenburg area. Following their reorganization, my intention was to employ all these newly activated divisions in one of the many quiet sectors of the Army Group H front in the river area in order to give - under ideal circumstances - the new troops additional opportunity for preparatory combat training in reconnaissance and combat patrol operations. The 3 FS Division, under Generalmajor Wadehn, later under Generallt. Schimpf, and 5 FS Division, under Generalmajor Heilmann, were transferred to Army Group B and took part in the Ardennes Offensive as the foremost attack divisions. The 2 FS Division, under Generallt. Lackner and 6 FS Division, under Generallt. Plocker, remained with Army Group H and were first committed in the Arnhem area. The 6 FS Division was later employed at Capellsche-Veer, south of Gorinchem.

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makeshift training of the officers and non-commissioned officers. They were mostly without any knowledge of ground combat because they originated from the other components of the German Air Force (Luftwaffe).

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5. The construction of positions in the Army Group H sector had progressed as follows:

a. Holland: The Dutch coast was protected by field fortifications and - at certain points - by fortresses, and was sufficiently armed. The numerous rear positions in Holland, extending from north to south were intended as delaying obstacles or else were still under construction. In addition, their direction no longer suited the existing conditions, because at present an attack from south to north had to be anticipated rather than a landing on the coast. It was attempted to take this fact into account by the construction of connecting switch positions, which was started immediately.

b. The banks of the Maas and Waal rivers were not fortified, but here, as in other parts of Holland, inundations were expected to strengthen the defense.

c. In German territory, south of the Rhine, the Maas position was comparatively well-fortified.

d. The West Wall consisted only of one line of pillboxes of the lightest type of construction which extended to the Cleve area. The pillboxes had to be connected by field fortifications; their rearmament progressed slowly in the latter half of November 1944.

e. To the rear of the West Wall, the Niers - Roer position, which followed the course of these rivers, was still under construction. On 10 Nov 1944, this position was not yet ready for defense.

f. The construction of the Rhine bridgeheads had also only just begun. With the exception of the Ems and Westphalen positions - both north of Wesel - and disregarding obstacles, local and Flak defense positions, no other defenses east of the Rhine were being constructed.

6. Army Group had the right only to inspect and authorize construction projects in the rear areas. It could also make requests regarding the location of the center of gravity of the fortified defense system. The responsibility for survey and armament

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was with the Commander, Fortress Area West, and his subordinate commands such as Niederrhein Senior Command (at Bentheim), Festungs Pionier (Fortress Engineer) commanders, Festungs Pionier regimental and battalion staffs, etc. The construction as well as the supply of labor was the responsibility of the Reichskommissar of occupied Holland or the local Gauleiters. (For positions in the rear area of First FS Army, see App. 6.)

II. Situation from 10 Nov 44 - 8 Feb 1945:

7. On the day Army Group H assumed command (10 Nov 44), 70th Infantry Division, fighting to hold Walcheren, lost the last strongpoints in its sector.\*

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\*Pt 2 of 7 Pts of MS # B-717, Generaloberst Student:

My immediate attention was devoted to the Island of Walcheren which controlled the entrance to Antwerp. I discovered that a division composed of men with chronic ailments (Ed: 70th Infantry Division) had been entrusted with this vital, perhaps most important sector of my front. Thus, the excellent and up-to-date coastal batteries on the island were protected by inferior troops. I decided to send 6 FS Regiment to Walcheren as immediate reinforcement. The Commanding Admiral, Holland, was instructed to hurriedly assemble the necessary river crossing equipment. However, it was already too late. The British attack on Walcheren occurred already the day after I assumed command.

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Therefore, the entrance to the port of Antwerp as well as the harbor itself was now open to the enemy. Combat in this sector ceased herewith - as Army Group had expected - especially since the steadily falling rain had by then caused heavy floods which were only too welcome.\* Heavy fighting continued on the left flank in conjunction

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\*Pt 3 of 7 Pts of MS # B-717, Generaloberst Student:

Engaged in heavy fighting, Fifteenth Army was withdrawing behind the river area. For this reason, I moved my first command post to Hilversum for a short time in order



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to take advantage of the well established signal communications net of the WB Ndl. who was located in that city. After Fifteenth Army had withdrawn behind the river area and Walcheren had been lost, I intended to abandon the Zeeland islands of Schouwen and Overflakkee in order to effect an economy of forces. However, an order from the Fuehrer strictly prohibited any withdrawal. A few days later, the Fifteenth Army staff was transferred to Army Group B and took over the Roer sector. Almost all corps staffs and divisions of Fifteenth Army were gradually withdrawn from my Army Group. Actually, this amounted to a transfer of the entire Fifteenth Army. The transfer of Fifteenth Army was to be concealed from the enemy as long as possible. To camouflage the fact, therefore, the new army headquarters (General der Flieger Christiansen) retained the designation "Fifteenth Army" as long as this was practicable and was only designated Twentyfifth Army after the purpose of deceiving the enemy had been achieved.

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with the battle raging east of Aachen.\* In coordination with the right wing of Army

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\*Pt 4 of 7 Pts of MS # B-717, Generaloberst Student:

The fighting which took place in November 1944 on the left flank of Army Group H was not "connected with the battle raging east of Aachen," but was an action by itself. Twentyfirst Army Group undoubtedly planned already at that time a major offensive with Nijmegen as point of departure. The large German bridgehead Venlo-Roermond constituted an immediate danger to the flank of such an offensive. Hence, Twentyfirst Army Group wanted to eliminate the bridgehead and thereby cover its own flank. The fighting began in the middle of November 1944 and did not come as a surprise. When the pressure became too strong, Army Group withdrew its forces to the east bank of the Maas according to plan.

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Group B, First FS Army had withdrawn to the Maas Line, completing the movement of about 25 November 1944. The situation then quieted down here as well.

8. Beginning in the middle of November 1944, the best units were constantly being transferred with the defensive battles of Army Groups B and G, and in preparation of the Ardennes Offensive of which nothing was known to Army Group until it started.\* and \*\*

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\*Pt 6 of 7 Pts of MS # B-717, Generaloberst Student:

By the end of November 1944, the various transfers to other front, even down to the level of OT (Organization Todt) units, had reached alarming dimensions in the Army Group H sector. The widely extended front between Den Helder and Roermond was now being

held by only eight divisions with weak artillery, few anti-tank guns, and very few tanks. No reserves at all were available. In contrast, these forces were confronted by the entire British might: its gigantic masses of tanks and other motor vehicles, its far superior artillery and ample supply of ammunition and, above all, the excellent morale of the British troops who, since El Alamein had been marching irresistibly toward ultimate victory.

The boundaries between the British and the Americans coincided approximately with the boundaries between the German Army Group H and B. At the time, I expected the British to resume their large-scale attacks any day. The enemy was pressed for time since he had to attempt to penetrate into Germany as quickly as possible. Such large-scale attacks would have been feasible without any difficulties. There had been so little rain, and therefore no inundations, during the second half of November 1944 that the enemy would have undoubtedly been able to surmount any adverse atmospheric conditions by using his widely varied technical facilities. The command of Army Group H spent some uneasy weeks because of the weakness of the German front and the threatening large-scale attacks by the enemy. A further weakening of Army Group took place immediately before the Ardennes Offensive. The initial successes gained during the Offensive, which surprised also Army Group H, brought considerable relief for some time after.

I was the only person in Army Group H who received advance information on the impending Offensive a few days beforehand, and was simultaneously instructed to transfer to Army Group B one Fallschirm battalion for a parachute jump. A trained and experienced battalion of parachutists was, of course, no longer available. The request was urgent, so I had to withdraw a large number of capable officers and enlisted men from different front sectors, which meant a further weakening of the front.

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\*\*\*Pt 1 of 3 Pts of MS # B-148, Oberst iG. Geyer:

Q: On 25 November 1944, the staff of Fifteenth Army was transferred to Army Group B. What mission was then assigned to Fifteenth Army? Was it responsible for the northern flank of the Ardennes?

A: Fifteenth Army, on being assigned to Army Group B, assumed the camouflaged designation "Fifth Panzer Army." Fifteenth Army took over the Fifth Panzer Army sector as the latter was being used in the Ardennes Offensive. Twentyfifth Army retained the designation "Fifteenth Army" for camouflage purposes up to the beginning of the Ardennes Offensive. The mission of Fifteenth Army (Fifth Panzer Army) was to defend its sector by all available means and to prevent an enemy breakthrough in the direction of Cologne. In the event of success in the Ardennes, the Army was to thrust via Maastricht into the area north of Liege and to destroy, in conjunction with the main attack group, the enemy elements enveloped between the main group and Army. Protection of the northern flank of the Ardennes was the mission of Sixth Panzer Army.

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For this reason Army Group H lost, during the course of the next six weeks, approximately 10 to 12 divisions, two corps staffs (LXXXVII and LXVII), almost its entire mobile Heeres (Army) artillery, and its anti-tank weapons. On the whole, Army Group retained only its Festungs (Fortress) artillery and anti-tank units which were



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none-mobile and equipped with captured guns. The combat capability was inferior. Since only a small issue of ammunition was at their disposal, this continual transfer of units could be achieved only by extending the frontage of units committed on the front in Holland. As a result, by the end of January 1945, only naval replacements and Ost (East) battalions of foreign volunteers occupied the coastal front and the Maas front as far as the area south of Dordrecht. Only the islands of Goedereede and Schouwen and the Fortress Hoek van Holland were occupied by combat troops. A total of five fully capable infantry battalions, which were reinforced by the addition of naval replacements and strong naval artillery and Flak units, were stationed on the islands.

9. Army Group believed it could assume the responsibility for this weakening, even though it made a serious defense of the Dutch territory impossible. It was assumed that, because of the floods caused by the bad weather and because of the general political and military situation, an attack to conquer Holland was not probable, at least not in the near future. After the beginning of the Ardennes Offensive, this conception of the situation was all the more firmly retained. Army Group H did not take part in this Offensive.

10. Under consideration by Army Group H was a plan to recapture the bend in the Maas east of Nijmegen in the event of a withdrawal of enemy forces. This plan never went beyond the preparatory stage, since the necessary forces (two infantry divisions and one Panzer division) were not available. Another plan, to launch an attack through Willemstad towards Antwerp with a task force consisting at first of three, later of one reinforced division, was also discarded, since by the end of December 1944 the regrettable, but undeniable, fact was realized that the offensive in the Ardennes had bogged down.\* The Antwerp attack was to have been launched as soon as the Ardennes



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\*Pt 7 of 7 Pts of MS # B-717, Generaloberst Student:

I was instructed to prepare for the end of December 1944 an offensive operation for my Army Group also. I submitted the following suggestions: To launch an attack toward Antwerp and recapture this port. For this purpose the river crossing was to take place in the Biesbosch-Keizersveer-Drongelen sector, not at Willemstad. Simultaneously, one Fallschirm battalion was to be committed for a parachute jump in order to eliminate the artillery emplacements the enemy had established in the woods and on the downs north of Tilburg. For this purpose, Army Group H would make available the 6th Fallschirm Division and one regiment of an army division. One Panzer division and two motorized divisions were required as additional forces. These suggestions were approved. Immediately after the beginning of the Ardennes Offensive, the Army Group units which were to participate in this operation, as well as the necessary river crossing equipment, were made available. But the transfer of additional divisions, which had been requested, was postponed repeatedly. In the end, the operation was abandoned altogether. Later, during my internment in England, I had the opportunity of discussing this plan with the G-2 of the First Canadian Army. He confirmed that at the intended crossing points only one Canadian armored division and units of the Polish Armored Division were covering a front sector extending over more than 100 kilometers. As a result of the Ardennes Offensive, all other units had been withdrawn.

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assault groups had crossed the Maas and reached the open terrain west of Liege. Army Group H was to pursue the enemy if a withdrawal on a broad front were recognized. OB West had promised additional forces for this event; however, increased reconnaissance missions, carried out in force along the entire front of Army Group H, brought no evidence of enemy withdrawals.

11. From the middle of January 1945, after the failure of the Ardennes Offensive and the beginning of the Russian large-scale offensive in Poland and East Prussia, the Germans had to expect that the general attack of the Western Allies would soon begin against the Western Front. Army Group H would also be attacked, although for the moment the front remained quiet. Army Group had no reason to change its belief that the attack would not be directed to the north in order to seize Holland. The possession of this country was, in the opinion of Army Group, no longer of decisive importance to the Allies at this late date. Such an attack, if launched by the Twentyfirst Army Group alone, would cause an undesirable splitting of forces for the enemy. On the other hand,

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Holland would fall into Allied hands in any case if they made a concentrated attack across the German border and the Rhine and thrust towards the Elbe River between Magdeburg and Hamburg.

12. Because of the interim events - suspicious movements in the British sector, preparation of river crossing equipment, and increased enemy air activity during the latter half of January 1945 - Army Group H expected an attack by the Twentyfirst Army Group with the main effort on both sides of Venlo, with the object of reaching the Rhine at Wesel. This attack would probably be preceded by a preliminary attack by the First Canadian Army to capture Forst Reichswald, west of Cleve. In addition, it was assumed that the Twentyfirst Army Group would attack before the Americans in order to force the German command to transfer forces from the American front. The main effort of the American attack was expected between Juelich and Dueren, with the Rhine between Duesseldorf and Cologne as the objective. Consequently, this attack would not have any effect on the left flank of Army Group H in the beginning.

13. It was hoped that Army Group B, which was numerically much stronger than Army Group H, would be able to cope with this attack. Army Group H was unable to protect its left flank by any means other than the intended commitment of two Panzer-jaeger (anti-tank) battalions of Elmpter Wald. However, the anticipated attack became a certainty when, in the last week of January 1945, American forces relieved the British troops in the sector south of Roermond and the commitment of special units was recognized in the region of Roermond and north thereof. The situation of the First FS Army, which would be principally threatened, was therefore considered extremely grave. The width of the division sectors was between 12 and 30 kilometers. Although personnel were at full strength and their morale was good, and although needs of materiel had been satisfied to a certain extent, there was, however, an acute shortage of mobile anti-tank weapons. By the end of January 1945, First FS Army possessed only one Sturmgeschuetz (assault-gun, SP) battalion with 20 guns on a front of 120 kilometers. The tactical

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reserves of Army consisted of only four battalions. Supplies were also low; two issues of ammunition and one-half an issue of gasoline were available.

14. Army Group H had no reserves except the following: 34th SS Division (Netherlands), which had neither artillery nor heavy weapons - the value and dependability of this division were doubtful - and two Polizei (police) regiments, which were subordinated to the Senior SS and Police Commander of Holland and whose main function was to safeguard Dutch territory against revolts by the population. In view of the situation, Army Group, since the middle of January 1945, had pointed out to OB West again and again that with such weak forces it would be quite unable to withstand an attack on the First FS Army front. Reinforcements of anti-tank units and Panzer reserve divisions were needed immediately. OB West shared this opinion concerning the dangerous situation of Army Group H and realized the urgency of this request, but could hardly comply since the other army groups and armies were engaged in heavy fighting involving heavy casualties and the best divisions were being transferred to the East.

15. For this reason, Army Group H was given only few reinforcements, and even these were arriving after 1 February 1945. They were the following:

- a. Four Panzerjaeger and Sturmgeschuetz battalions;
- b. One Panzerabwehr (anti-tank) battalion (partly mobile);
- c. One Volks artillery corps;
- d. Several Heeres (army) artillery and Festungs (Fortress) artillery battalions;
- e. One Volkswerfer (rocket projector) corps;
- f. One Sturmmoerser (heavy assault mortar) battery;
- g. The 7th FS Division (to be assembled in the Geldern area);
- h. The 361st Infantry Division (only personnel without equipment who were transferred to the Netherlands for reorganization). By 8 February 1945, not all of the forces enumerated above had been brought up. The armament of the rear positions was speeded up. On 2 February 1945, XLVII Panzer Corps (15th Panzer Grenadier Division



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and 116th Panzer Division) was ordered to assemble on the boundary of Army Group H and Army Group B in the area Kempen - Muenchen-Gladbach, and was designated as OB West reserve.

16. The assembly of these units, which had first of all to be withdrawn from the fighting in the Eifel area, and which possessed a total combat strength of about 40 tanks and four battalions, took place exceedingly slowly. The main difficulty was the scarcity of motor fuel, which also delayed the movements of other reinforcements on the approach march. On 7 February 1945, these forces were about 75 percent assembled. Since these preparations for the impending combat were considered insufficient, Army Group H ordered Twentyfifth Army to prepare for the withdrawal of the 6th FS Division as a reserve.

17. A special staff was put in charge of the inspection of both the defensive preparations against airborne landings and the construction of obstacles in the rear areas. Despite all these preparations, Army Group H looked to the near future with great anxiety. It was clear that the impending decisive battle would entail very heavy fighting without hope of outside assistance, without sufficient strategic and tactical reserves, and without sufficient support from the Luftwaffe against a superior, well-trained enemy. Deep penetrations and extremely critical situations, therefore, had to be expected.

18. In spite of the situation, Army Group was resolved to the last man to defend every inch of soil and to render as difficult as possible the enemy attempt to thrust towards the Ruhr area, which was Germany's last armored force. A conference on 3 February 1945, addressed by the Commander-in-Chief West (Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt) in a suburb of Krefeld confirmed the gravity of the situation, not only for OB West, but for the whole of Germany. (For details of these officers attending the conference, see App. 2.) The situation on the front of OB West was considered to be as follows: An attack by the Western Powers, starting in the Army Group H area,

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seemed to be imminent and would extend from there to the south. The primary objective was presumed to be the Rhine and it was believed the enemy would by-pass the West Wall and roll up these positions from the rear.

19. The situation of OB West was therefore considered critical. Its mission was to hold out to the end in order to give OKW the necessary time for carrying out the countermeasures which had been initiated and to preserve Germany's last industrial areas, the Ruhr and the Saar. Reinforcement from the East could not be counted on, and OB West had no strategic reserves worth mentioning. Furthermore, units of Army Group H were over-extended because of the lack of sufficient forces. Army Groups B and G as well as Nineteenth Army had been hit hard in previous battles and had reached the limit of their strength. The supply situation was equally unsatisfactory. Only one-third of the required ammunition and no reserves of fuel were available. In spite of this situation, combat operations had to be carried on by using every possible means. The measures undertaken by Army Groups H and B were approved.

III. Combat against Twentyfirst Army Group from 8 February 1945 to the Beginning of the American Attack against Army Group B.

(For the order of battle of Army Group H on 8 February 1945, see App. 3; for the situation of Army Group H, see App. 7.)

20. On 8 February 1945, the British - First Canadian Army (?) - began to attack the Forst Reichswald area, west of Cleve, as expected. The attack was preceded by the heaviest barrage hitherto experienced and by heavy attacks of strong formations of four-engined bombers on the area immediately behind the MLR. It is unnecessary to give a detailed description of the combat against Twentyfirst Army Group. Only fundamental principles guiding the Army Group H operations as a whole during the first weeks of the fighting will be described in this report.

21. It was important for Army Group H to assist the heavily engaged First FS Army by continually placing additional units at the disposal of Army, since it was rapidly

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using up its forces during the defensive battle. After the beginning of the battles for Forst Reichswald, Army Group had also to consider the possibility of a **British** attack via Venlo until the time it was clearly established that the bulk of the British forces were in the Cleve area. At first, the bringing up of reserves was also influenced by this consideration.

22. Finally, Army Group H was greatly concerned with securing its left flank by using mobile forces in the event of an American breakthrough at the junction with Army Group B. Only XLVII Panzer Corps with its two subordinate divisions, which had been released by OB West without delay, was available, the Corps, after being assigned to Army Group H, was moved via Geldern to the vicinity of Xanten and west thereof. On 9 February 1945, the Corps was subordinated to the First FS Army for an attack to recapture Cleve and the surrounding heights. After initial success, however, the attack completely bogged down; thus the corps was committed and no longer available for independent missions.\* Reinforcement of First FS Army with forces from Army Group

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\*Pt 2 of 3 Pts of MS # B-148, Oberst iG. Geyer:

**Q:** Describe in detail the combat in the area of Krefeld and the Wesel bridgehead from 23 February 1945 to 10 March 1945. In the opinion of Army Group H, was the combat in the Cleve area decisively influenced by XLVII Panzer Corps? Did Army Group H believe that the right flank of Army Group B was broken through so quickly because XLVII Panzer Corps and Panzer Lehr Division were withdrawn?

**A:** Details of the combat in the area of Krefeld cannot be given because of the lack of data and the absence of responsible officers of LXIII Infantry Corps.

The battle for Cleve was decisively influenced by XLVII Panzer Corps. The bulk of all available Panzer forces was assembled by this corps. Corps was the only unit which could carry out counterattacks, clear up critical situations, and restore the general situation. However, due to the weakness of its Panzer and infantry units, its strength was not sufficient to seal off the deep British penetration, despite its early commitment. If Corps had not been made available to Army Group H, Twentyfirst Army Group probably would have broken through between 10 and 12 February 1945.

The transfer to Army Group H of XLVII Panzer Corps with one Panzer division, one Panzer Grenadier division, and later Panzer Lehr Division undoubtedly constituted a decisive contribution to the quick breakthrough of the American offensive in the direction of Cologne. OB West and Army Group B, at the beginning of the American offensive,



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hand only the 11th Panzer Division and 338th Infantry Division available as strategic reserves. The 11th Panzer Division however, was only just being brought up because of lack of fuel, while the battle-weary 338th Infantry Division was arriving by rail. The two divisions, moreover, could not be committed under a unified command because of the way the situation developed. Although the other three first-class divisions no longer possessed their full fighting power, their transfer had very unfavorable consequences. A simultaneous well coordinated counterattack of these forces might not have stopped, but would have delayed considerably the American offensive. Of course, in that case, critical situations would have developed even sooner in the Army Group H sector. Because of the stress of circumstances, the dangerous weakening of the forces behind the right flank of Army Group B, the consequences of which were apparent to OB West, had to be sustained despite the threatening American offensive.

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could only be achieved by stripping the Twentyfifth Army front of all active combat units in a far-reaching and drastic manner. The value of the Twentyfifth Army front had therefore been lowered to that of an observation line, particularly since heavy machine guns and all other heavier weapons could not be replaced.

23. Naval replacements, Ost (East) battalions, one police regiment, and the 34th SS Division (Netherlands), committed as infantry, were barely sufficient to fill the gaps on the Maas - Waal front. The large gaps on the coastal front caused by these measures, and the fact that only two police battalions (recruits) remained for securing the entire Holland area, had to be sustained.

24. By using trucks furnished by the Army Group Nachschubfuehrer (supply officer) - these trucks of course could not be used for supply purposes in the meantime - the following troops were gradually transferred to First FS Army by the end of February 1945:

- a. The 6th FS Division;
- b. The 2nd FS Division;
- c. One reinforced regiment of infantry from the 346th Infantry Division (two infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, one engineer company, and one Panzer-jaeger company).

To support the artillery defense in the vicinity of Cleve, Twentyfifth Army also formed an artillery group in the area west of Emmerich. It must be remarked

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that all these measures were possible only because the Commanding Admiral, Holland, as well as the Senior Commander of the SS and Police in Holland, fully cooperated with the requests of the Army Group. They put their last troop units at the disposal of Army Group H to relieve troop units of the Army.

25. For the conduct of the defense, First FS Army was ordered to utilize the forces arriving from the above sources so as to gradually relieve as many XLVII Panzer Corps troops as possible in order to build up mobile reserves. However, even with these measures, the step-by-step progress of the British could not be prevented; they reached first the line Alt - Calcar-Coch, and later advanced in the direction of Xanten - Weeze. This advance cost the British terrific casualties. But it was possible to thwart the attempted breakthrough to Wesel, a contingency which would have brought dire consequences.

26. Not until 21 February 1945 could OB West comply with the request of Army Group to send an additional Panzer division - Panzer Lehr Division - to be used for one single commitment. Withdrawing this valuable division from the right wing of Army Group B, at present threatened by an American attack which became more and more obvious, seemed extremely risky. In addition, Army Group was forced on about 20 February 1945 to permit First FS Army to withdraw the 8th FS Division (eight battalions) from the salient at Roermond because no additional infantry forces, with the exception of those already mentioned, were available to Twentyfifth Army. To replace the 8th FS Division, First FS Army could obtain only the 406th Division staff (zbV), two training regimental staffs, and six training battalions (no heavy weapons or signal equipment). These troops were withdrawn from a rear area of Army Group B by order of OB West in spite of strong protest. They arrived very slowly; only three battalions were in the front line when the American attack began, although the entire 8th FS Division had been withdrawn already.

For control of its left flank, First FS Army was assigned the staff of LXIII Corps (Generallt. Abraham).

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IV. Combat on the Left Flank of First Fallschirm (Parachute) Army.

(For the order of battle of the First FS Army at the beginning of the American attack, see App. 4.)

27. When, on 23 February 1945, American forces launched a decisive attack against Army Group B, the right flank of First FS Army was still engaged in defensive combat against the unabated attacks of the Second British Army. In the center and on the left flank there was little activity. There was inactivity also on the Rhine, temporary evacuation of Rhine villages and farm buildings, however, obviously pointed to the fact that this period of quiet would not last. No signs pointing toward any change in the situation could be detected on the First FS Army front which had not been attacked. The center of gravity of First FS Army's defense was, therefore, on the right flank. Here, along the general line Vynen - Marienbaum - Udem - Weese, Bergen, the main body of its forces was fighting a fierce battle in which the British were suffering heavy losses. Up until now, First FS Army troops had been able to thwart all attempts at an enemy breakthrough by repeated counterattacks, and had yielded ground only step by step. (For the disposition of First FS Army, see App 8.)

28. The following reserves were available:

- a. Panzer Lehr Division in the vicinity of Sonsbeck (Army Group H reserve);
- b. Remnants of 2nd FS Division (less two regiments) which would arrive no earlier than 26 February 1945;
- c. One regiment of the 406th Division (zbV) - less heavy weapons and signal equipment - arriving in the area Duellen - Viersen;
- d. One partially mobile Panzerjaeger battalion (88mm) located in the Elmpfer Wald.

29. Although the first news of the defensive battle against the American attack was not unfavorable, it was clear to Army Group H from examining the reports currently arriving from OB West on 24 and 25 February 1945 that the enemy had attained his objective



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by breaking through the Army Group B front. As a direct result of this breakthrough, the enemy would soon penetrate behind the deep flank of Army Group H. This meant, of course, that most of the Rhine crossings available to the Army Group would also be in danger. Furthermore, First FS Army might be cut off from its rear communications.

30. On 24 February 1945 (?), OB West withdrew Panzer Lehr Division from Army Group in order to assemble this division together with the 338th Infantry Division, which was on the approach march in the vicinity of Rheindahlen. These divisions were to counterattack the enemy breakthrough. Those elements of the 338th Infantry Division, which had already arrived, were transported by Army Group H trucks and moved to the Erkelenz area. First FS Army was ordered by Army Group H to use the training regiments of the 406th Division (zbV), which had just arrived, to build a security line from the southern outskirts of the Elmpter Wald - Krueckten - Burgwaldniel. Also, the Army was to make available some anti-tank forces by carrying out a regrouping of Festungs (Fortress) anti-tank units. In addition, the setting up of obstacles and road blocks, prepared for this area, and the placing of explosive charges under the Rhine bridges, were ordered.

31. On 25 February 1945 (?) First FS Army, despite its most forceful protests since naturally it was exceedingly worried about its right wing, was likewise ordered to divert the rear elements of the 2nd FS Division which were on the approach, to the area south of Krefeld and to relieve the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division from the northern front. The latter, as soon as it had been withdrawn and reassembled in the vicinity of Sonsbeck, was to be dispatched to the area north of Krefeld.

These measures, which were the maximum of what Army Group H could undertake, constituted the basis for slowing down the further advance of the American forces in the direction of the Rhine River crossings east of Krefeld and for building up a defensive front, however, weak it might have been. Army Group H meant to guarantee the later withdrawal of the bulk of First FS Army behind the Rhine, which, according

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to the opinion of Army Group, was inevitable. It had to risk that the pace at which the right wing of First SS Army was yielding, might be accelerated as a result. However, Army Group believed that, in spite of the weakening of the right flank, the favorable nature of terrain in this area and the slow and methodical tactics of the British would prevent a future breakthrough.

32. An order which arrived shortly afterward from OB West brought the news that the enemy had pushed into Moenchen-Gladbach, and requested 15th Panzer Grenadier Division to be transferred to Army Group B in order to stop any further enemy advance toward Duesseldorf.

33. Meanwhile, contact was made for the first time with American forces in the Army Group H area near Burgwaldniel. However, the poorly equipped elements of training battalions committed in that sector were able to drive off the relatively weak enemy. Several enemy tanks were knocked out in this action. Since a restoration of the situation in the Army Group B sector could not be counted on, however, Army Group H, on its own authority, granted permission which was later approved, later by OB West, for a withdrawal of the front line from the salient at Roermond, which had not yet been attacked, to the line Venlo - Kaldenkirchen - Burgwaldniel. The withdrawal of all weapons and equipment and the demolition of all combat installations in the West Wall were made obligatory. The enemy followed up the withdrawal only hesitantly the first day. The second day, however, the weakly held security line, completely lacking in signal equipment for the transmission of orders and reports, was pushed back to the line Venlo - Kaldenkirchen - Dueren - Viersen in the face of increasing enemy pressure from the southwest. Kaldenkirchen and sections of Venlo were lost.

34. As a result of the rapid development in the fighting in the Army Group B sector, contact with this Army Group was lost. Because of this situation and because of the lack of signal equipment on the left wing of Army Group H, reports on the situation of Fifteenth Army were completely inadequate and in most cases arrived too late

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at First FS Army and Army Group headquarters. Army Group installed forward message centers in the LXIII Infantry Corps area, but this measure did not improve the situation. The only means of obtaining information was by officer scouts, who took hours for their reconnaissance trips. The information obtained concerned the local situation only and could not serve as enlightenment on the measures planned by the intermediate and higher commands of Army Group B. The telephone communication to OB West was in most instances also disturbed, and connections usually had to be made via Berlin.

35. Because of the enemy pressure on its left wing - it was supposed for the time being that the main effort of the Americans would be against the Rhine somewhere between Duesseldorf and Cologne - First FS Army was unable to hold its ground despite the fact that the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, whose transfer had been delayed, could no longer be sent to Army Group B and was subordinated again to Army Group H and First FS Army respectively. The left flank of First FS Army was therefore moved back first to the line Uerdingen - Krefeld - Kempen - Wachtendonk. Later, when the Americans forced their way into Krefeld, where the city's Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth) battalion had been fighting a heroic but hopeless battle, the Army withdrew to the general line Rheinhausen - Rumeln - Kapellen - Aldekerk - Nieukerk - Geldern. At the same time, bridgeheads were built at Uerdingen and Rheinhausen.

36. Intermediate commands attempted with little success to organize fighting units from the numerous shattered elements of Panzer Lehr and 338th Infantry Divisions, which had been driven from the Army Group E area into the First FS Army sector. Energetic measures were taken to prevent a disorderly flight of rear elements across the Rhine bridges. In this manner, some degree of order was preserved, although no real stabilization of the situation was brought about.

37. A sharp order from the Fuehrer strictly prohibited any withdrawal of troops across the Rhine, which affected the withdrawal of supply units and trains.



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V. The Wesel Bridgehead.

38. The right flank of Army Group B was shattered. It was easy to estimate when the Americans would take undisputed possession of the entire bank of the Rhine between Duesseldorf and Cologne. The pressure against the left flank of First FS Army was not very great, but because of its limited combat strength, which had been reinforced only by extensively weakening the northern front, the pressure was too great for the existing position to be maintained. It was realized that the front line of First FS Army would be pushed farther back, but this would necessarily result in a contraction of the front and therewith in an increase in the total power of resistance. There were no reserves of any description either to First FS Army or Twentyfifth Army. By a direct order of the Fuehrer, a defense of the Rhine had not been prepared except the incomplete construction of small local bridgeheads for the protection of the river crossings. This meant that with the exception of the Ems and the Westphalen positions - both far to the north in the rear of quiet sectors - there were no prepared positions at all.

39. The construction of the Rhine position began at this time, by order of the Fuehrer, under pressure of the existing situation. With the exception of mostly fixed installations of Flak, there was no artillery on the east bank of the Rhine. There were no infantry troops between Emmerich and Uerdingen except one Gendarmerie (rural police) battalion and seven Volkssturm battalions, the latter equipped with Panzerfaeusten (bazookas) and a few rifles. The Ausbildung (Training) Division Karst, subordinate to Wehrkreis VI (Gen. d. Inf. Mattenklott), was stationed in the Borken - Dorsten - Haltern area as protection against enemy airborne landings. The division was non-mobile.

40. Army Group H had therefore to consider very seriously how it would be able to secure the defense of the east bank of the Rhine at least in those sectors of the river bank opposite which the enemy had already arrived. Since the Fuehrer was determined not to give up one inch of soil voluntarily, an early order to withdraw from the west

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bank of the Rhine could not be expected. Only an early withdrawal would have made a somewhat limited occupation of the east bank of the Rhine feasible. On the basis of such considerations, the defense of the bank of the Rhine as far as Emmerich (inclusive) was to be the responsibility of Twentyfifth Army. The Army was ordered to commit the 346th Infantry Division, which had until then been protecting the Hoek van Holland, Schouwen and Goedereede.

41. Furthermore, First FS Army was authorized to employ the previously withdrawn staff of LXXXVI Infantry Corps to organize a Rhine defense. The command post of the latter, however, was to be on the west side of the Rhine. OB West sent a general of the artillery zbV (Genlt. Meyer-Buerdorf) to Army Group H to command the artillery defense. This officer was ordered to make all the artillery preparations for a defensive stand. At his disposal, during the first days of March 1945, were a Volks Artillery Corps from Army Group G, elements of the 184th Artillery Regiment, and one artillery battalion of the 245th Infantry Division (Genlt. Sander), which was arriving without its infantry in the vicinity of Borken for the purpose of reorganization.

42. Army Group H ordered on its own responsibility the gradual transfer of the non-mobile Festungs (Fortress) artillery behind the Rhine as well as the gradual withdrawal of supply troops (which was against orders of the Fuehrer). The division supply troops had been sent to assembly areas directly on the east bank of the Rhine, where they were formed into alarm units to secure the river bank. Insofar as possible, they were to make all preparations for the reorganization of their respective divisions after their withdrawal. There were enough soldiers available for this purpose, but no weapons.

43. First FS Army at this time had about 50,000 men at its disposal for whom no weapons could be obtained. All the supply troops had already been deprived of their weapons in support of the front line units. Further reserves of personnel were available in almost unlimited numbers due to the fact that on 1 March 1945 all the western

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Wehrkreise (Army Districts) and Gaue (Districts) without any exception had been subordinated to the respective Army Groups, which could now call upon the Volksturm and even men in the "deferred" category whenever weapons and equipment could be procured for them.

44. It was estimated that an enemy attack across the Rhine would bypass the Ruhr, in anticipation of deployment difficulties in this area, and would be ventured on both sides of it. It was therefore considered important to build the main defensive positions north and south of the Ruhr. Instructions to that effect were given to First FS Army. All the bridges and the 12 ferry crossings as well as the control of traffic across the river were made the responsibility of the General der Pioniere (General of the Engineers).

45. While the first preparations for the defense of the Rhine were being made, the fighting continued. Due to the great superiority of the enemy the front line had to be gradually withdrawn. In the southern part of the sector one Rhine bridge after another was lost, each one being blown up in due course without difficulty.

46. When elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division had crossed the Rhine by the bridge at Uerdingen, Army Group kept them on the east bank of its own responsibility; they were assembled in the area north of Isselburg and immediately reorganized as Army Group reserve. Elements of the Panzer Lehr Division and the 338th Infantry Division - likewise pushed back across the river at Uerdingen - were transferred to Army Group B. A training division, Division Hamburg, intended for replacing personnel of Army Group H divisions, was ordered to the area northeast of Duisburg. No definite time could be fixed for its arrival. It can be stated that, in spite of this gradual transfer of forces from the fighting on the west side of the Rhine, a cohesive decisive front along the general line Xanten - Sonsbeck - Issum - Rheinberg - Orsoy had been successfully established during the first days of March 1945. By this time, a fanatical resistance



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was being put up against the combined Anglo-American forces, during which several violent counterattacks robbed the enemy of advantages already gained and which resulted in the capture of many prisoners. One single counterattack in platoon strength at Rheinberg brought in 230 prisoners. (For the situation during the early days of March 1945, see App 9.)

47. The struggle became increasingly desperate as a result of the ever-growing air activity by the enemy, which at times eliminated simultaneously both of the Rhine bridges at Wesel and no less 10 of the 12 ferry crossings. In spite of all, it was repeatedly possible to bring up the necessary minimum of supplies.

48. Despite these small, partial successes which served only to slow up the progress of the enemy, Army Group H no doubt that the contraction of the salient on the west bank of the Rhine, and therewith the annihilation of the troops committed there, together with the loss of irreplaceable materiel, was now only a matter of days. According to the opinion of Army Group H, retention of the bridgehead could be justified only if a jump-off area for a counterattack with the objective of restoring the situation on the Army Group B front was to be maintained. However, there was no prospect of such a counterattack inasmuch as the enemy had already succeeded (Ed: on 7 March 1945) in establishing a bridgehead at Remagen. The retention of a bridgehead on the west bank of the Rhine could now only represent a dangerous trap to the troops holding it. Moreover, it prevented the construction of a cohesive defense front along the Rhine. Actually, its retention rendered a good turn to the enemy. Army Group H repeatedly expressed this opinion to OB West and OKW but did not succeed in changing their views. The only concession obtained was permission to transfer to the east bank of the Rhine all supply troops and trains not needed for combat, as well as all staffs which could be spared.

49. Thereby, the following staffs and units were relieved and employed on the east bank of the river - enumerated in the approximate order of crossing:

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- a. Staff of the LXXXVI Infantry Corps;
- b. The remaining elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, elements of Panzer Lehr Division, and 338th Infantry Division;
- c. Staff and remnants of the 84th Infantry Division;
- d. Staff and elements of the 2nd FS Division;
- e. Staff of the LXIII Infantry Corps;
- f. Staff of the 406th Division (zbV);
- g. Staff of the XLVII Panzer Corps (about 6 March 1945);
- h. Staffs and remnants of the 180th and 190th Infantry Divisions;
- i. Various Flak and Festungs artillery units were transferred concurrently.

50. In the bridgehead, after about 6 March 1945, there remained:

- a. Forward command post of First FS Army;
- b. Staff of Second FS Army;
- c. The 6th, 7th, and 8th FS Divisions;
- d. The 116th Panzer Division;
- e. Kampfgruppe (combat group) of the 346th Infantry Division;
- f. Remnants of some Panzerjaeger and Flak units.

The front of the bridgehead on about 6 March 1945 followed the line Xanten (exclusive) - Veen - Boeninghardt Forst - Millingen - Ossenbergl. An American reconnaissance thrust across the Rhine at Hochheim, carried out in company strength, was repelled with heavy enemy casualties.

51. Under the impression of the disastrous development of the situation in the Army Group B sector, and based on a report submitted by the Ia (Operation) of OKW who had visited the bridgehead at Wesel and had adopted the views of Army Group H, OKW finally gave permission on 6 March 1945 for the evacuation of the bridgehead by 10 March 1945. The movement, despite all efforts of Twentyfirst Army Group to hinder it, was carried out in three stages according to plan and in good order. All heavy weapons and

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all supplies, which could be carried along, were withdrawn. During the night of 10 March 1945, without interference from the enemy, the last Rhine bridge was blasted. The west bank of the Rhine in the area of Army Group H was evacuated.\*

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\*Pt 3 of 3 Pts of MS # B-148, Oberst iG Geyer:

Q: What do you know of the details of the struggle in the Wesel bridgehead? What possibilities had the Anglo-American command at that time?

W

A: I cannot give any further details of the battle in the Wesel bridgehead. From the Twelfth Army Group situation map of 4 March 1945, the situation of the Anglo-Americans attacking in the Army Group H sector had the following aspect: The American offensive, after breaking through in the Army Group B sector, was approaching Cologne and had reached the Rhine north of this city on a broad front extending to Duisburg (see MS # B-148: App 1). After the loss of Krefeld, First FS Army facing Twentyfirst Army Group still put up a stubborn resistance along the general line north of Krefeld - Geldern - west and northwest of Xanten. The attack gained ground slowly. Northwest of Xanten, the west bank of the Rhine was firmly held by the British. This sector was quiet.

The reserves at the disposal of Twentyfirst Army Group on that day were: 15th, 51st, and 52nd Infantry Divisions (British), 75th Infantry Division (US), Guards Armored Division (British), and an unknown number of armored brigades. The enemy situation, as visualized by the Anglo-Americans, indicated that the bulk of the forces at the disposal of First FS Army were committed in the Wesel bridgehead. Besides the ferries, Army only disposed of the two Rhine bridges at Wesel. Regarding the occupation of the east bank of the Rhine between Arnhem, where the 2nd FS Division was assumed to be committed, and Duisburg, there is no data on the map. However, the author assumes that Twentyfirst Army Group, informed as to the disposition of First FS Army, knew that on the German side only extremely weak security forces, if any, could have been employed. As for German strategic reserves, only the 361st Infantry Division in the Utrecht area could be assumed as being available. The following estimate of German intentions seemed feasible: Judging by German tactics hitherto observed, it could be assumed that the bridgehead, defended so stubbornly up to now, would not be given up voluntarily. Its elimination was bound to involve heavy losses. Due to stubborn resistance, holding the bridgehead as a jump-off area for a later counterattack to restore the situation in the Army Group B sector was useless because of the German weakness, because of the condition of First FS Army, and because further rapid Allied attacks in the direction of the Moselle could be expected. These attacks would force the Germans to commit either there or on the expanding Rhine front south of Cologne every reinforcement due to arrive.

The Anglo-American command decided to clean out the west bank of the Rhine first before crossing the river in the Army Group H area. This enabled the Germans to build up their Rhine defense with the forces of First FS Army which had finally been withdrawn behind the river. The enemy crossing carried out by every means, including airborne operations in force, resulted in bitter combat and heavy casualties. A surprise crossing of the Rhine at that time would have made the later attack superfluous. If it had succeeded, the immediate consequences would have been:



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- a. Formation of a strategic bridgehead with slight losses.
- b. The German Rhine defense in that sector would have been knocked out before preparations for resistance had been made.
- c. The Wesel bridgehead would have been sealed off from the east, if sufficient forces had been used. This would have presented the opportunity of annihilating the First FS Army on the west bank of the Rhine.
- d. The promises of a rapid push into central Germany with slight losses would have existed.

The sector where the First Canadian Army had already reached the Rhine was suitable for river crossing, particularly in the Emmerich - Rees area, where a crossing was forced later. In the Ninth US Army sector, a drive into the Ruhr area would have been impracticable because of the deployment difficulties which would have been encountered in this area. Besides the above-mentioned reserves, the following forces could easily have been used for this attack: 43rd Infantry Division (British), 2nd Infantry Division (Canadian), 4th Armored Division (Canadian), 11th Armored Division (British). Altogether, there were therefore six infantry divisions (one of them after relief by the 75th Infantry Division (US)), three armored divisions, and four to six armored brigades were available. Considering the quiet situation in Holland, the Polish Armored Division could also have been withdrawn and used as a reserve. The mission of the assault group would have been along the following lines: forcing a Rhine crossing in the Emmerich - Rees area by a coup de main; establishing a bridgehead on the general line south of Rees - along the Oude and Issel - high ground north of Emmerich; expanding the bridgehead by attacks to the southeast, east and north; and a simultaneous thrust of a strong armored group (at least two armored divisions) toward Wesel to seal off the German bridgehead from the east. The forces remaining on the west bank of the Rhine and facing First FS Army should have been subordinated to Second British Army for the purpose of carrying out the following mission: continuation of the attacks against First FS Army in order to prevent German forces from being withdrawn. If the Germans should attempt to disengage, an immediate thrust in the direction of Wesel should have followed. From the beginning of the attack the air force would have had the mission of eliminating the Wesel bridges and the ferries to render impossible a rapid withdrawal of First FS Army units. The actual situation of Army Group H showed that east of the Rhine the following forces were available:

- a. Seven Volksturm battalions and one Gendarmerie (police) battalion between Emmerich and Duisburg;
- b. One non-mobile training division in the Bocholt - Borken - Haltern area;
- c. Battered elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division assembling north of Isselburg;
- d. One artillery group, consisting of two battalions, in position in the area north of Emmerich;
- e. Four battalions of the 346th Infantry Division which were taking over the mouth of the Issel - Emmerich sector.

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The 361st Infantry Division only of personnel without weapons and therefore could not be committed. The 245th Infantry Division, which was arriving, consisted only of trains without any infantry.

The actual strength situation shown by this enumeration of the German forces east of the Rhine is therefore no more favorable than the German situation visualized by the Anglo-Americans. This proves, without further comments, that the suggested attack would have been a decisive success and probably would have met with resistance of some strength only in Wesel from the Flak units committed at that point.

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## VI. Evaluations.

52. The divisions of Army Group H were distinctive in type, organization, and equipment. It may be remarked that not one division resembled another. Furthermore, apart from the original differences of their described T/O, improvised emergency measures had brought further considerable changes. For example, the Panzerabwehr (anti-tank) units hardly ever corresponded, either in strength or in organization, to the T/O. The same was true of the artillery. All divisions were considerably short of vehicles and of signal equipment, which was irreplaceable once it had been lost. It should be mentioned that not one of the training units even had telephone equipment. These, as well as other battalions committed in the front lines through necessity, possessed no heavier weapons than light machine guns. Personnel could always be brought up to strength quickly during lulls in the fighting. The manpower shortage had more or less been overcome by autumn 1944. Personnel reserves of the higher commands were particularly plentiful after 25 February 1945, but they could not be fully exploited as no weapons were available.

53. The soldiers were poorly trained due to the long duration of the war; there was also a severe shortage of well-trained non-commissioned and junior officers. Also, the quality of battalion and regimental commanders as well as that of junior general staff officers deteriorated due to the length of the war. The consequences were manifold: friction among officers which could have been avoided, deficient technique in the transmission of orders and messages, lack of initiative, and slow execution of

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orders. Scarcity of complete, well-organized units often forces the commitment of units which were neither adapted nor ever intended for combat. (For commitment of training battalions, see above. Commitment of three battalions at Cleve - one of men with stomach trouble, one of partly deaf men, and the third, the Muenster Wach (guard) battalion, of men with minor ailments.)

54. The fortress artillery and anti-tank units were formed because necessity demanded it. They were hurriedly assembled and improvised units, and every single one was non-mobile. For example, for each fortress artillery battalion there were, as a rule, only one prime mover and a few trucks available. Weapons consisted mostly of captured materiel for which the ammunition supply was difficult. These troop units were intended as security forces in rear positions, from which they were to be withdrawn when the fighting troops moved in. This intention was never realized, however, owing to the fluid situation and too confused withdrawals. Their equipment was therefore lost in many cases through no fault of their own since it could not be taken along. Since each fortress anti-tank gun company had a front of seven to ten kilometers, company commanders were unable to control their units effectively; platoons of these units usually came under command of the combat units.

55. All front line units had one feature in common: they had all been submitted to an uninterrupted series of unsuccessful battles since June 1944, and had been decimated more than once and hastily reconstituted. Their morale was good in spite of this. It was clear to all soldiers that this was a fight for the life or death of Germany. They behaved accordingly even if the civilian population in some instances urged them to give up the fight. The effect of the enemy artillery and air force was taken in quite good spirit by the fighting units, although they felt their own helplessness.

56. The "makeshift units" which had been committed on the front because necessity demanded it (alarm units, training battalions, limited service battalions, etc.) were of much lower fighting quality. For one thing, they did not come up to the psychic



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demands of modern large-scale fighting made by the use of artillery, aircraft, and tanks. On the other hand, they were not fitted for the individual nature of modern combat where men are required to come to grips with the enemy alone or in small groups. The feeling of originally not being correctly organized or equipped for battle contributed to this attitude.

57. Of particularly high combat value were the Fallschirm (Parachute) divisions, consisting of volunteers whose nerves were still unaffected and who had belonged to other components of the Luftwaffe. Of equally high value were all the Panzer units as well as the bulk of the Flak units. The defect of the parachute divisions - the lack of experiences in ground fighting by its commanders and sub-commanders - was largely overcome during the lull in the fighting between the middle of November 1944 and the beginning of February 1945 by mutual and far-reaching exchanges of officers between army and parachute units.

58. The Volkssturm was a disappointment. The ties which bound its men to the homeland did not prove effective in increasing their will to fight in the West. On the contrary, it was a disadvantage, as they were obsessed with the idea that their property at home - so far still intact - might be destroyed if the fighting still continued. As contrasted with the East, the fate of their families in the case of continuing enemy successes did not worry them over much. The Volkssturm, however, performed its duty wherever energetic leaders with military training were in charge. The "Volksaufgebot" (Ed: A compulsory mobilization of the people supposedly on a voluntary basis. Under the leadership of Party officials, these people were digging ditches and constructing fortifications.) worked willingly. But, during enemy air attacks or within range of enemy artillery fire, it was impossible to keep these people at their work. However, there was never any large-scale panic. The troops remained under the firm control of their leaders. Stragglers were picked up by a system of straggler nets spread by the Wehrmachtordnungstruppen (traffic regulation units)

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operating at road blocks, particularly along the Rhine. The stragglers were sorted into groups according to their parent unit and returned to their divisions. Courts-martials had been set up as a precaution but were needed only in exceptional cases.

59. Regarding the hardships which the German troops had to endure, it is significant that the British were able to withdraw their units approximately every four or five days, whereas, on the German side, up to the conclusion of the struggle, the only infantry unit which obtained any rest was the completely shattered 84th Infantry Division which was once withdrawn for two days. This is mentioned to permit a fair judgment of the conduct and performance of the German troops. Also, the reorganization of Panzer units in most cases took only hours, at the most, one day.

60. All combat units were convinced that they were superior to the enemy in fighting qualities and eagerness. The enemy successes were attributed mainly to the destructive effect of the Allied air forces, which could not be eliminated or even mitigated. It was considered a fact - and it coincided in general with events - that, whenever the Allied air forces were not in evidence, the enemy made no progress and German counteraction was successful.

61. The British soldier was considered to have a higher fighting value than the American soldier, particularly in defensive fighting; the American soldier was considered to have some sort of fear of close combat. As far as leadership is concerned, it was more difficult to deal with the Americans than the British. The methodical leadership of the British, which was constantly bent on security, enabled the German troops and command to get out of critical situations more easily and to devise counter-measures. A rapid exploitation of successes often would have reduced the large British losses. American tactics, particularly the use of the armored force, envisioned speedy exploitation of initial successes, disregarding by-passed German elements. These tactics were similar to German attack methods.

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62. Confusion in the rear, uncertainty concerning the actual situation on the front, etc, were frequently caused by only weak enemy elements which had rushed forward. The German command endeavored to counteract the effect of these tactics by setting up command posts far forward, by operating straggler collection points manned by Wehrmacht-ordnungstruppen and by enforcing obstruction measures. These measures were only expedients; sufficiently strong mobile reserves, the essential component in conducting defensive fighting, were lacking.

63. The absolute enemy air superiority presented the German command with the following difficulties:

a. The execution of all movements, both in the combat zone and in the rear, including the movement of supplies, was possible only at night. Movements were delayed correspondingly. When the weather was favorable for flying, troop movements above company strength could not be carried out safely by daylight - even far to the rear - unless units were deployed over a wide area.

b. Counterattacks could be carried out only at night or, at the latest, at dawn. Since the necessary preparations could only be made during the night, counterattacks usually started too late and bogged down with full daylight.

c. All movements, including those by rail or truck, had to be carefully prepared.

d. Detours around all potential bombing objectives such as cities and bridges had to be reconnoitered and determined.

e. Sufficient river crossing equipment had to be on hand at river crossings, even in the rear areas, and preparations for rapidly moving it had to be made.

f. Flak units had to be committed at points of main effort, which meant continuous transformation of static Flak units into mobile ones. Less important fixed installations had to be left without protection.



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g. All staffs and troop units had to be billeted away from inhabited localities. Alternate command posts for headquarters staffs always had to be selected and prepared in advance. Consequently, scarce signal communication equipment had to be installed in advance.

h. All supply depots had to be widely dispersed.

64. The enforcement of the above-mentioned measures had the result that the enemy air attacks admittedly caused considerable disturbances, particularly among the civilian population, but that they could not stop troop movements by night. The closely-knit road and railroad network favored these movements. Only in one case did the railroad movement of a division have to be switched to another railroad line 30 kilometers away because the original line was completely blocked after an air attack. The railroads were almost always functioning up to about 10 kilometers behind the front line.

65. Army Group was always exactly and rapidly informed about the composition and intentions of the enemy. In addition to combat, long-range and close air reconnaissance, prisoner of war statements, and recognition of enemy troop insignia - espionage conveyed little - information was obtained by the following means:

a. The poor radio discipline apparent in enemy radio message transmission, particularly of the American units;

b. The quiet unequivocal increase in enemy air reconnaissance and bombardment missions during the last two weeks before the beginning of an attack from which conclusions could be drawn as to the starting time and size of the expected attack.

The boundaries between British and American units were always promptly recognized for the same reasons. The interception of enemy radio transmissions also brought valuable results. British and American prisoners showed little willingness to give information. The camouflage of the British and American units, which were being assembled before the beginning of the last two attacks was excellent. The smoke screens put up to hide the Allied movements only drew attention. They were no obstacle to the German air reconnaissance.

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66. The Panzer and Anti-tank units.

a. The fundamental weakness of the German Panzer arm was due directly to the wide discrepancy between the number of tanks actually available for commitment and the number called for in the T/E. The authorized basic allowance of the two Panzer divisions, five Sturmgeschuetz (assault gun) or Panzerjaeger (anti-tank) battalions, and three Sturmgeschuetz companies assigned to First FS Army on 8 February 1945 called for about 430 tanks. With actually only about 140 tanks of its own, it faced the Second British Army, which was equipped with, at a conservative estimate, from 1,000 to 1,500 serviceable tanks. By the end of the fighting, Army Group had approximately 25 tanks ready for action. Actually the total number knocked out completely was insignificant but the lack of particaly all spare parts delayed every repair.

b. The limited number of German Panzer vehicles, dispersed over a wide front, necessitated their concentration, regardless of leaving large frontal areas unprotected. In addition, it imposed a consolidation of Panzer units. On the other hand, losses in infantry strength, which occurred rapidly in the course of the fighting, necessitated the commitment of small Panzer detachments for delaying action. The almost exclusive use of British armor to cover the advance of infantry and the small size of the armored forces employed therewith favored the German defense. The same applied to the American attacks against the southern flank of First FS Army; on only one occasion was a rather strong assembly of American tanks recognized. This occurred south of Krefeld, but for unknown reasons did not lead to anything.

c. The German tanks, particularly the "Panther," were considered better than those of the enemy. It was said that they were better built, more maneuverable, and that their weapons had a greater penetrating power.

d. The German anti-tank guns (75mm and 88mm) as well as the anti-aircraft guns were effective, excellent defense weapons. Their disadvantage was their high silhouette and their limited mobility due to their weight. Large losses in equipment was the consequence. The commitment of anti-tank formations in depth was desired, but could not always be achieved due to the lack of forces.

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e. The German troops had great confidence in the "Panzerfaust" (bazooka), a close-in combat weapon. It was handy, could be used without any special training, and was successfully used in house-to-house fighting. During the first days of March 1945, reports indicated that the enemy tanks were beginning to stay beyond the 30 meter range of this weapon.

67. The Artillery.

a. The concentrated enemy artillery fire, with its tremendous expenditure of ammunition, always had a devastating effect. In particular, communication lines as far back as division were badly cut up in this way. Losses in weapons, however, were small. During the battles described here, the effect of enemy artillery was seldom felt as far back as the echeloned German artillery positions. A destructive effect was achieved on 8 February 1945, at the beginning of the British offensive, on elements of the entrenched troops of the 84th Infantry Division, on elements of its reserves in Forst Reichswald, and on parts of the artillery and anti-tank units. Increased enemy adjustment fire gave advance notice of an intended attack.

b. The German artillery fire activity suffered from enemy fighter-bomber attacks when weather conditions were favorable for flying. Shortage of ammunition frequently enforced restrictions, even when firing on observed targets.

68. The Engineers.

a. Action at the Front: No comment.

b. From the middle of November 1944 already, special attention was being given to the ferry service operating across the Rhine. Ferries, barges, and small assault boats had been brought from Holland, the number of landing stages had been increased and their construction improved. Also, the industrial tunnel under the Rhine near Duisburg was being prepared for use. The funneling of the entire cross river traffic through one point during the critical days at the beginning of March 1945 proved successful owing to the strictly regulated direction of traffic and signal communications. All railroad bridges were adapted for truck and pedestrian traffic.



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c. Specific plans had been elaborated for the demolition of each bridge and special powers for use in case of imminent danger were given to the responsible tactical and technical bridge commanders. Orders for the mining and fuze setting of Rhine bridges - the former took 12-24 hours, the latter two hours - were given by Army Group. Authority for the systematic demolition of the Rhine bridges was given to First FS Army. All demolitions were carried out successfully and according to plan. In one case, an additional blasting was required under direct enemy observation and within firing range.

d. All flooding which was carried out was planned and prepared in advance as an important combat measure. The flooding was put into effect when the situation required it. The setting of the required charge took a considerable amount of time.

e. The entire rear area of Army Group H was divided into anti-airborne security commands, which were also in charge of both the preparation and the construction of road blocks against enemy armored surprise thrusts, insofar as this work had not already been completed by fortress construction units. The responsible organizations for these measures were:

1. The Volkssturm;
2. Static Fortress Engineer units;
3. Rear elements of combat units, supply units, etc.

The construction work necessary had to be continued by other units whenever troop units moved out of their billeting area. This was the weakness of the organization about which nothing could be done, since regular obstacle construction units were not available. The entire system was already thrown into disorder as a consequence of the regrouping which had become necessary during the course of the battles which started on 8 February 1945. In addition, the fortress engineer units were enroute to the eastern bank of the Rhine at the beginning of the American attack against the left flank of First FS Army. In deference to the wishes of the civilian population, the Volkssturm had often failed to execute orders to install road blocks; in fact, in

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some cases road blocks were again removed by them. For this reason, the carefully prepared blocking system did not have its full effect where no combat troops were present. Blocking missions should be executed only by blocking commands exclusively charged with these duties and having no other functions to fulfill. Orders for the enforcement of blocking measures should be given only by local military authorities (corps and armies) for accurately outlined sectors. In no case should orders be given by civilian authorities (Kreisleiter, Landraete). Blockings which are ordered prematurely prevent troop movements and tardy and inaccurate orders decrease their value.

f. The rear positions in the sector of Army Group H were not used except for a short time. In addition to fortress anti-tank units, security troops were constituted from the forces mentioned in paragraph (1) - (3). The same shortcomings were therefore experienced with reference to security troops in the above paragraph. Anti-tank ditches had only a delaying value; they rendered tanks more vulnerable to antitank fire. The task of constructing them required too much time and manpower, and they were ineffective unless completed. Very successful were the minefields, even the small size and dummy installations; the scattered employment of mines was preferred.

#### 69. Signal Communications.

a. Due to the density of the German and Dutch underground cable net, the effect of enemy air attacks on local signal communications was slight with the exception of the tactical wire net. Mon-directional radio (decimeter circuits) afforded excellent stand-by service. The constant bombing of Muenster, the signal communications junction, had unfavorable effects on long-distance communications; however, the submarine cable Holland-Wilhelmshaven was a substitute.

b. The lack of signal equipment among the subordinate commands increased the difficulties of issuing orders and receiving messages.

c. Advance message centers of Army Group, with direct radio communication to the rear, were run by general or senior staff officers and proved to be a success.

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They were located near the command posts of those corps and divisions which were centers at the time, and were therefore able to give direct and timely situation reports.

d. Enemy radio equipment was handier and lighter than the German.

70. The Luftwaffe (Air Force).

a. Flak equipment was just barely sufficient for the centers of gravity after complete withdrawal from less important sectors. Flak effect against fighter-bomber and tactical aircraft was good; against four-engine bombers, however, Flak was ineffective on account of their great altitude of flight. Shortage of ammunition reduced their effectiveness considerably after the end of February 1945. Their commitment in ground fighting, in which the Flak weapons were of great value, resulted in many successes, but the losses in equipment were high. Fully mobile units were mostly committed on the battlefield; their mission was combined defense against air and ground attacks. Less mobile units were placed farther to the rear for the defense of roads and fixed installations. The Luftwaffe Flak units in the Army Group H sector were under command of the 18th Flak Division until the end of February 1945; their original mission was restricted to the support of Army Group. They were subordinate to Air Force West. At the end of February 1945, they were combined under VI Flak Corps, which in turn was directly subordinated to Army Group H. No disadvantages arose from the original arrangements since the cooperation between Army Group H and the Flak units was always close and friendly. Army Flak units were placed under the tactical command of Luftwaffe Flak headquarters.

b. The activity of the air squadrons was restricted to night flying missions. Occasional fighter sorties were possible only in overcast weather. According to intercepted radio messages, considerable successes were achieved on several occasions in spite of the weak forces employed. The main reasons for German aerial inactivity were numerical weakness - there were never more than 40 aircraft available for one mission and lack of fuel.



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71. The Supply Services.

The supply situation was characterized by shortages in all fields, particularly in artillery ammunition, fuel, and weapons.

a. By strictly centralized direction of supplies, the Quartermaster of Army Group was able to procure complementary supplies whenever necessary. He also succeeded in providing fuel for troop transfer as well as for movements and commitment of Panzer divisions.

b. Army Group held on an average from one to one-and-one-half issues of ammunition and from one-half to one issue of fuel.

c. The total capacity of means of transportation available was insufficient for all requirements, since troop transfers from Holland to the First FS Army area required extensive use of transportation.

d. Tank and truck repairs suffered from lack of spare parts. The tire situation was very serious.

e. The delivery of newly manufactured tanks was slow; this situation improved slightly after 1 March 1945.

VII. Conclusions:

72. The combat report is an attempt to describe from memory the course of the fighting which led to the loss of the west bank of the Rhine from the point of view of Army Group H, and to disclose the resulting decisions and measures. The evaluations attempt to furnish indications which are important for the proper understanding of the German situation.

73. It can be clearly seen that the German Command was not surprised by the development of events. It is not possible to judge, without knowledge of British documentary evidence, whether the German Command was deceived with regard to an attack via Venlo or whether the initial, greater successes, obtained in the Cleve area, induced the British command abandon its first intentions. The fact that this attack was never

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launched was not a disadvantage, as far as the employment of reserve troops is concerned, since Army Group preparations took all possibilities into consideration. Acting according to the principle that "He who tries to protect everything, protect nothing," Army Group committed all available forces to the strengthening of the position near Cleve without consideration of the danger which might still be threatening from the direction of Venlo. The only delay occurred when the commitment of one infantry regiment of the 7th FS Division - at that moment the only reserve - was delayed for one day in spite of requests from First FS Army. It was clear that the recapture of the former MLR could not be achieved after the first deep penetrations into the Cleve area and this was not expected by OKW since the ratio of a strength was so uneven. In a comparison of ground forces, 90 Anglo-Canadian divisions opposed 58 German divisions - after all possible reinforcements had been brought up - and at least 1,500 British tanks opposed 140 German tanks, including Sturmgeschuetze (assault guns). It was therefore only a question of delaying a further enemy advance in the direction of Wesel as long as possible in case it could not be stopped. This mission was carried out by the valiant units of First FS Army better than expected. It is doubtful whether the British forces alone would have sufficed to reach the objective had not the American attack necessitated a withdrawal of forces from the northern front of the First FS Army.

74. In the third stage of the battle, after the front of Army Group B collapsed, it became important to build up an additional defensive position in the southern Army Group H sector. By slowing down the further advance of Anglo-American forces, the main body of combat and supply troops would be able to cross the Rhine in good order. Even this mission was carried out despite all the difficulties encountered. The numerous broadcasts and newspaper articles, which in enemy countries featured during this period the bravery of the German foe, prove that the enemy acknowledged the difficulties of the river crossing.

75. The retrospective observer, judging the British and American forces, wonders why they did not immediately attempt a daring thrust across the Rhine wherever they

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had reached it before new defense positions had been built up on the east bank. The numerical weakness of Army Group and its disposition must have been known to them. With only slight losses, a bold attack launched in this manner would have smashed any Rhine defense before its establishment and opened a wide gap for a further penetration into central Germany at this early moment. Furthermore, it would have meant the almost certain destruction of the main body of the First FS Army units still on the western bank. The commitment of airborne units, which took place later and resulted in heavy casualties, would have been superfluous. Army Group H considered this possibility without any means of preventing it. Its failure to materialize enabled Army Group H to organize the Rhine defense and to grant the shattered units of First FS Army the necessary respite for their recovery and reorganization.



## KEY OFFICERS - ARMY GROUP H\*

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Previous Assignment</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
			Command Section	
Cmdr	STUDENT	Generaloberst	Cmdr, First FS Army	until 1 Feb 1945
	BLASKOWITZ	Generaloberst	Cmdr, Army Group H	1 Feb - 6 Apr 1945
	BUSCH	Genfldm	Cmdr, Opns Staff North Coast	after 6 Apr 1945
C of S	HOFMANN	Genlt	C of S, Fifteenth Army	Gen d. Inf. 20 Apr 1945
Ia	VORWERK	Obstlt iG	?	until 1 Feb 1945
	GEYER	Obstlt. iG	Ia F, Army Group H	after 1 Feb 1945 Obst iG, 20 Apr 45
Ic	von THROTHA	Obstlt iG	?	until 16 Mar 1945
	LUTHEROTH	Obstlt (Res)	Ic, Twentyfifth Army	after 16 Mar 1945
Id	BAUMGART	Maj iG	Id, Narwa Army (Prov)	
IaF	GEYER	Obstlt iG	Ia, 68th Inf Div	until 1 Feb 1945
	SCHILLER	Maj	Ia to Engr O, Army Group H	1 Feb - 1 Apr 1945
	THAMM	Obstlt iG	Ia, 84th Inf Div	1 Apr 1945
1st Sp Miss Staff O (O1)	LINDENBERG	Hptm (Res)	O1, Narwa Army (Prov)	

\*After 6 April 1945, OB Northwest

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Previous Assignment</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Personnel Section				
IIa	Friedrich	Oberst	IIa, Narwa Army (Prov)	
IIb	Friedrich	Hptm (Res)	IIb, Narwa Army (Prov)	
Arms and Services				
Engr O	Lehnert	Oberst	Engr O, Fifteenth Army	Acting
	Wagner-Hoen- Lobbese	Genmaj	Engr O, Army Group G	until 15 Apr 45
	Ritter von Heigl	Genmaj	Eastern Front	from 15 Apr 45
Sig O	Goering	Oberst	Sig C, Narwa Army (Prov)	until 15 Apr 45
	Muegge	Oberst	Sig O, Fifteenth Army	from 15 Apr 45
Staff O for Arty	Schlickum	Oberst	?	
Staff O for AT defense	Selzer	Obstlt	Staff O for AT defense, Narwa Army (Prov)	Oberst, 20 April 1945
Cmdr, Heeres Flak Trs	Langer	Obstlt	?	
O Qu Section				
O Qu	Colsmann	Obstlt (Res)	O Qu, Sixth Panzer Army	Oberst 20 April 1945
Qu 1	Schmalzried	Maj iG	Qu, Narwa Army (Prov)	

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<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Previous Assignment</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Qu 2	Berrer	Maj (Res)	?	
IVa	Wespe	Generalintendat	?	
IVb	Schmidt- bruegge	Generalarzt	IVb, Narwa Army (Prov)	
IVc	Bruder	General- veterinär	IVc, Fourth Army	
Transportation Officer*				
Trans O	Thummeley	Obstlt iG	?	until 6 Apr 45
	Barnstorff	Obstlt iG	RR Ln O, Army Group G	from 6 Apr 45
Liaison Officers				
Air Ln O	von Scholz	Obstlt iG	Air Ln O, Seventh Army	until 1 Feb 45
	Zickerich	Obstlt iG	Min of Air	from 1 Feb 45
Naval Ln O	Rieve	Vize Admiral		until 15 Dec 44
	Plath	Ko Admiral	Fortress Cmdr, Gdingen (Danzig)	from 15 Dec 44

\*Until 6 April 1945, Railroad Liaison Officer



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## OFFICERS ATTENDING OB WEST CONFERENCE IN KREFELD

(3 February 1945)

OB WEST	Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt	Commander-in-Chief
	Generalleutnant Westpahl	Chief of Staff
	Oberstleutnant von Berlichingen	Ia (Operations)
ARMY GROUP H	Generaloberst Blaskowitz	Commander, Army Group H
	Oberstleutnant iG Geyer	Ia (Operations)
	General FS Schlemm	Commander, First Fallschirm Army
ARMY GROUP B	Generalfeldmarschall Model	Commander, Army Group B
	General der Infanterie Krebs	Chief of Staff
	General der Infanterie von Zangen	Commander, Fifteenth Army
	Oberst iG von Kahlden	Chief of Staff, Fifteenth Army
	General der Panzertruppen von Manteuffel	Commander, Fifth Panzer Army

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Anlage 3Schematische Gliederung der Heeresgruppe "H"am 8. 2. 1945

H OB: Gen.Oberst Blaskowitz  
 Chef: Gen Ltnt. Hofmann

A. Unterstellte Verbände

25

OB: Gen.d.Inf. Blumentritt

Chef: Genmaj. Reichelt

LXXXVIII

Gen.Ltnt. Schwalbe

2. 3) 6.

Gen.Ltnt Lerchner Gen.Major  
 (ohne 1 Rgt!) Flocher

XXX

Gen.d.Kav. Kleffel

zbV 2

346

F H.v.  
Holland

Gen.M.LINDNER

K.d.K. 1)

(H.Kdo zbV TETTAU)

Gen.Ltnt. v. Tettau

KVA Sued F IJMUIDEN KVA NORD

(Div zbV33)

? ? Gen.M.DISTEL

1

OB: Gen.d. Fsch.Tr. Schlemm

Chef: Oberst i. G. d.Lw. Kusserow.

II.

LXXXVI.

Gen.d.Fsch.Tr. MEINDL

Gen.d.Inf. Straube.

4)  
8.

180.

190.

2)  
7.

84.

Gen.Maj.d.Lw. WADEHN

?

Gen.M. KLOSTER

Gen.Ltnt.d.Lw.

Gen.Maj.VIEBIG

KEMPER

ERDMANN

Armeereserve:

Fsch.Stu.Gesch.Abtlg 12

T 625 (?)<sup>5)</sup>  
8,8

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W. B. Ndlde.

OB: Gen.d.Fl. CHRISTIANSEN

Chef: Oberst i.G. von OERTZEN

Feldkdttr.

Feldkdttr.

Feldkdttr.

Abschn.Kdo. NORDFRIES-

?

AIMELD

GRONINGEN

LAND



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6)  
B. Reserven. (im Bereich des F.S.A.O.K. 1)

RESERVEN der H. Gr. "H"

- a. 1 Bgt. der 7. Fsch.Jg. Div. (erst mit Teilen eingetroffen)
- b. 245 559 655(?) 741
- c. 1 Volks ART. KORPS (401 oder 402)
- d. 1 Volks Werferkorps
- e. 1 Sturm Moerser Batterie.

RESERVEN des OB. WEST

XXXXVII

Gen.d.Pz. Tr. von LUETTWITZ

116.

15.

?

Gen.Ltnt. Rott

C. Der H. Gr. "H" angekündigt. Zeitpunkt des Eintreffens im Ndl. Raum noch unbekannt.

361.<sup>7)</sup>

G.M. PHILIPP

D. Auf Zusammenarbeit angewiesen:

Hoch. Kdo. NIEDERRHEIN 8)

Gen. d. Inf. von FOERSTER.

E. Luftwaffe (auf Zusammenarbeit angewiesen)

Lfl. Kdo. WEST 9)

10)  
18

Gen.Maj.d.Lw. DEUTSCH

11)  
VI.

Genltnt. d.Lw. SCHILFHARDT

F. MARINE

KOM.ADM. Ndl. 12)

Schiffsstamm Rgt 2

Schiffsstamm Rgt 1

Ausserdem noch schwimmende Verbaende.

G. Hoch. SS und Pol. FUEHRER NIEDERLANDE. (Auf Antrag in Notfaellen unterstellt.)

SS Hoch. SS u. Pol Fuehr. Ndl.

SS-O.GRU.-Fhr. RAUTER

14)  
SS 34. (Ndl.)

13)  
Pol Brig. Ndl.

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BEMERKUNGEN:

1. Gebildet aus Div. Stab zbV 604 KdK - Kommando d. Kuesten Verteidig.
2. Ohne 1 Rgt, mit 1 Rgt d. 2. Fsch.Jg. Div.
3. Ohne 1 Rgt., siehe Ziffer 2.
4. 8 Batl., keine eigene Artl., Aufstellung noch nicht abgeschlossen.
5. behelfsbeweglich
6. Versammlung war am 8. 2. durchweg noch nicht abgeschlossen, geringe Gefechtsstaerken, nur wenig einsatzbereite Kampfwagen
7. Nur Personaleinheit, ohne Waffen u. Geraete.
8. Stellungsbaustab.
9. Zusammenarbeit mit L.Fl.Kdo WEST unmittelbar nur ueber Einsatz fliegender Verbaende, ueber Flakeinsatz unmittelbar mit 18. Flak Div. bzw. ab 1. 3. mit VI. Flak-Korps.
10. 1. 3. aufgeloeset
11. 1. 3. aufgestellt und H. Gr. "H" unterstellt.
12. Im Landkampf u. Kuestenverteidigung eingesetzte mar. Truppenteile unterstanden taktisch AOK 25, WBND1 bzw. deren nachgeordneten Kdo. Staeben.



13. 2 Rgter, wenig schwere Waffen, 1 Rgt bestand aus Rekruten.

14. Früher SS Freiwillig. Brigade "NIEDERLANDE". 2 Rgter, keine vollwertige Pak, nur 1 Abtlg  
Artl.

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Anlage 4

Schematische Gliederung der im Bereich F.S.A.O.K.1 bei Beginn  
des amerikanischen Angriffs eingesetzten Kraefte.

1.

OB. Gen.d.Fschtr. Schlemm

Chef Oberst i.G.d.Lw. Kusserow

LXVII	LXXXVII.	II.	XXXXVII
Gen.Ltnt.ABRAHAM	Gen.d.Inf.STRAUBE	Gen.d.Fschtr.MEINDL	Gen.d.Pz.Tr.v.LUETTWITZ
zbV 406 <sup>2)</sup>	180.	190.	7.
		15.	8.
		6.	116.
		84.	Krtgn.
Gen.Lt.KUEHLWEIN	Gen.M.KLOSTER	Gen.Lt.ERD- MANN	Gen.Lt. Gen.Maj. Gen.M. Gen.Maj.
	KEMPER	ROTT	WADEHN PLOCHER VIEBIG.
			2 Regt. 2.Fsch.Jg.Div.

Armeereserve:

	<u>H.Gr. Reserve</u>	<u>OB WEST Reserve:</u>
3)		
2.	4)	5)
	Pz.L.Div.	228.(?)
Gen.Maj. LACHNER		

Erläuterungen:

1. Zerschlagen
2. Ein Regt. eingesetzt  
" " im Eintreffen  
keine schwere Waffen, Nachr.Mittel u. Artl.
3. Ohne 2 verst. Regt. Eintreffen erst ab 26. 2.
4. Ab 24. 2. OB WEST RESERVE
5. Erst 1 verst. Regt eingetroffen, Rest noch im Eisenbahn-Antransport. Nr. fraglich!



Sketch 1

MS # B-147

SKIZZE 1

Gliederung der Heeresgruppe "H"

am 10.11. 44.

BEMERKUNG:

Weitere Gefechtsstaende sowie Zahl  
u. Bezeichnung der Divisionen  
nicht mehr bekannt

K.V.A  
"Nord"

Kdo. z.V.  
Tettau

Hoeh.  
Kdo.  
Tettau

Kdo.d.  
Kuesten-Vert.

KVA  
"Sued"

W.B.N

R.Komm.

"H"

Hoeh.SS u.  
Pol.Fhr.Ndl.

Hoeh.  
Kdo.Ndr.  
Rhein

AOK 15 (25)

"H"  
(ab 27.II)

15

XXX.AK.

XXX

Kd.Adm.  
Ndl.

LXXVIII.AK.

LXXXVIII

1

LXXVI.AK

II.WS.K

FSAOK 1

"B"

LXXXVII.AK.

Pz. AOK 5

Heeresgr. B

West. Nordkueste

SKIZZE 2

Ungefährer Verlauf der

Stellungen im Bereich

F.S.A.O.K. 1.

Stand: November 1944

Erläuterungen:

- A Maasstellung
- B Westwall  
Feldstellung noch im Ausbau
- C Kellenriegel  
Feldmaessiger Ausbau
- D Niers-Rur-Stellung  
Im 1. Ausbau
- E Brueckenkopf Wesel
- F Erweiterter Br.-Kopf  
Duisburg - Duesseldorf  
Nur teilweise im Bau
- G Brueckenkopf Homberg
- H " " Duisburg
- J " " Uerdingen

Bemerkung:

Am 8.2. war Ausbau von B u. C im wesentlichen abgeschlossen,

D zu 50 - 70 % vollendet,

E, G, H, J fertig,

F unvollendet.

Erkundungen fuer den Ausbau eines erweiterten Brueckenkopfes Wesel liefen.

Heeresgr. "B"

MS # B-147 Sketch 3

SKIZZE 3

Lage bei Heeresgruppe "H" am 8. 2.45

Erlaeuterungen:

A Grenze rueckwaertiges Heeresgebiet

B Grenze zw. W.B."Niederlande"/AOK 25

C, C<sub>1</sub> Versammlungsraeume XXXXVII. Pz.korps,  
116. Pz.Div, 15 Pz. Gren.Div.

D Bereitstellungsraeume fuer 4 Pz.jg.  
bzw.Sturmgesch.Abt. u. 1 Pz jg.Abtlg.

noch in Versammlg. begriffen

W. B.  
"Niederlande"

WB "N"

KVA "Nord"

2 Pol.-  
Rgter

F

Kdo.d.  
Kuestenvert.

KVA "Sued"

25

AOK 25 Hoeh.SS u.  
Pol.fhr.  
"N" "H"

Kd.Adm.  
"N"

LXXXVIII.AK.

XXX.AK.

2.Fsch.D.

346.J.D.

6.Fsch.D.

84.J.D.

Br.St.zbV 20

7.Fsch.D.

Fsch.-  
AOK 1

LXXXVI AK.

1Rgt  
7.Fsch.D.

190.J.D.

II.F.S.K. XXXVII  
180.J.D.

8 Fsch.D.

15.Pz.Gren.Div.

116.Pz.D.

Heeresgr.  
"B"



MS # B-147

Sketch 4

SKIZZE 4

Einsatz des Fallsch. AOK 1 bei Beginn des  
amerikanischen Angriffs gegen Heeresgruppe B

Vordere Linie nur Anhalt!

Gefechtsstaende fraglich!

AOK 25

Art.gruppe  
AOK 25

KGr 386

Reste 84.JD vorgesch.Gef.std.

6.Fsch.Div

116. Pz. Div.

LXXXVII.AK.

8.Fsch.D.

XXXXVII

2.Fallsch.Div.  
(o.2 Rgter)  
vom 26.2.

7.Fsch.Div.

15.Pz Gren D.

II.Fsch.K.

Pz.L.Div.

190.J.D.

LXXXVI

LXXXVI.AK.

180.J.D.

LXVII

406.J.D. zbV

228. J.D.(?)

(3 BH.)

3 BH.

406 zbV

406. J.D.

25./26.2.

Heeresgr. "B"

MS # B-147

Lage Fsch.-AOK 1 in den ersten Maerztagen 1945

Art.gr.AOX 25

346.J.D.

Vers.Raum  
Tle.15.Pz.Gr.Div.

Staemme  
245. J.D.  
im Eintreffen

Ausbild.-

Div.

"Karst"

3.Volksturm-Btle.

Fsch. AOK 1

Kpfgr.  
346.J.D.

XXXVII Pz.K.

116. Pz.D.  
Reste 84. J.D.

1 Volkst.-Btl.

6.Fsch.D.

II.Fsch.K.

7.u.  
8.Fsch.D.

LXXXVI

190.J.D.

LXVII.A.K.

1 Volkst.Btl.

Tle.Heeresgr."B"

180.J.D. Tle.Ausb.Div.406

Tle. 15.Pz GrenD.

Tle.2.Fsch.D.

2 Volkst.-Btle.

Ausbild-  
Div.

"Hamburg"

(angekuendigt)

Heeresgr. "B"



# SKIZZE I

Gliederung der Weeresgruppe  
am 10.11.44.

BEMERKUNG:  
Weitere Gefechtsstände sowie Zahl  
u. Bezeichnung der Divisionen  
nicht mehr bekannt



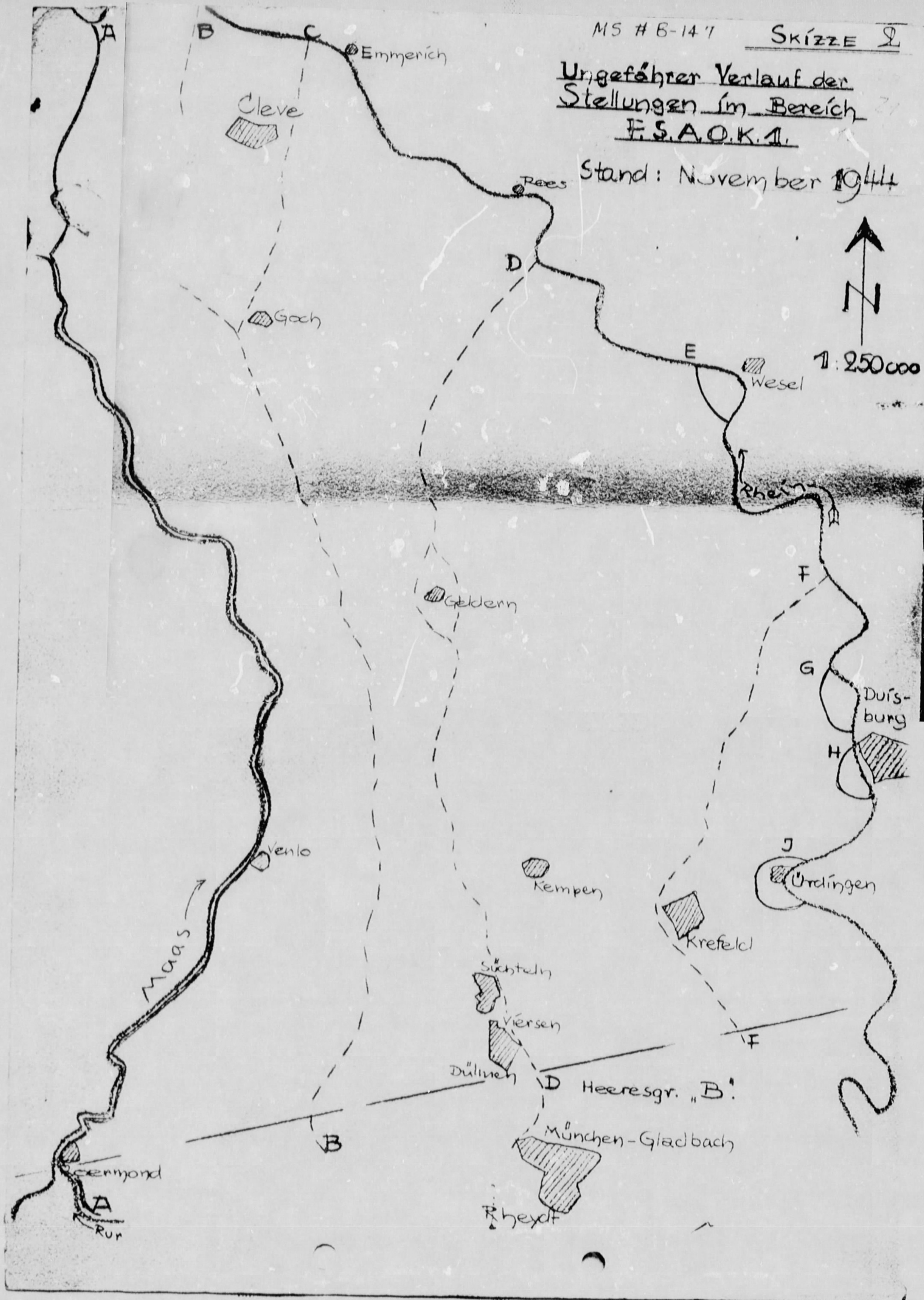


MS # B-147

SKIZZE 2

Ungefährer Verlauf der  
Stellungen im Bereich  
F.S.A.O.K. 1.

Stand: November 1944



## Erläuterungen:

- A Maasstellung  
 B Westwall  
 Feldstellungen noch im Ausbau  
 C Kellenniegel  
 Feldmäßiger Ausbau  
 D Niërs-Rur-Stellung  
 im 1. Ausbau  
 E Brückenkopf Wesel  
 F Erweiterter Br.-kopf  
 Düsseldorf-Düsseldorf  
 Nur teilweise im Bau  
 G Brückenkopf Homberg  
 H " " Düsseldorf  
 J " " Ürdingen

## Bemerkung:

Am 8.11.44 war Ausbau von  
 B u. C im wesentlichen abge-  
 schlossen,  
 D zu 50-70% vollendet,  
 E, G, H, J fertig,  
 F unvollendet.

Erkundungen für den Ausbau  
 eines erweiterten Brücken-  
 Kopfes Wesel liefen.

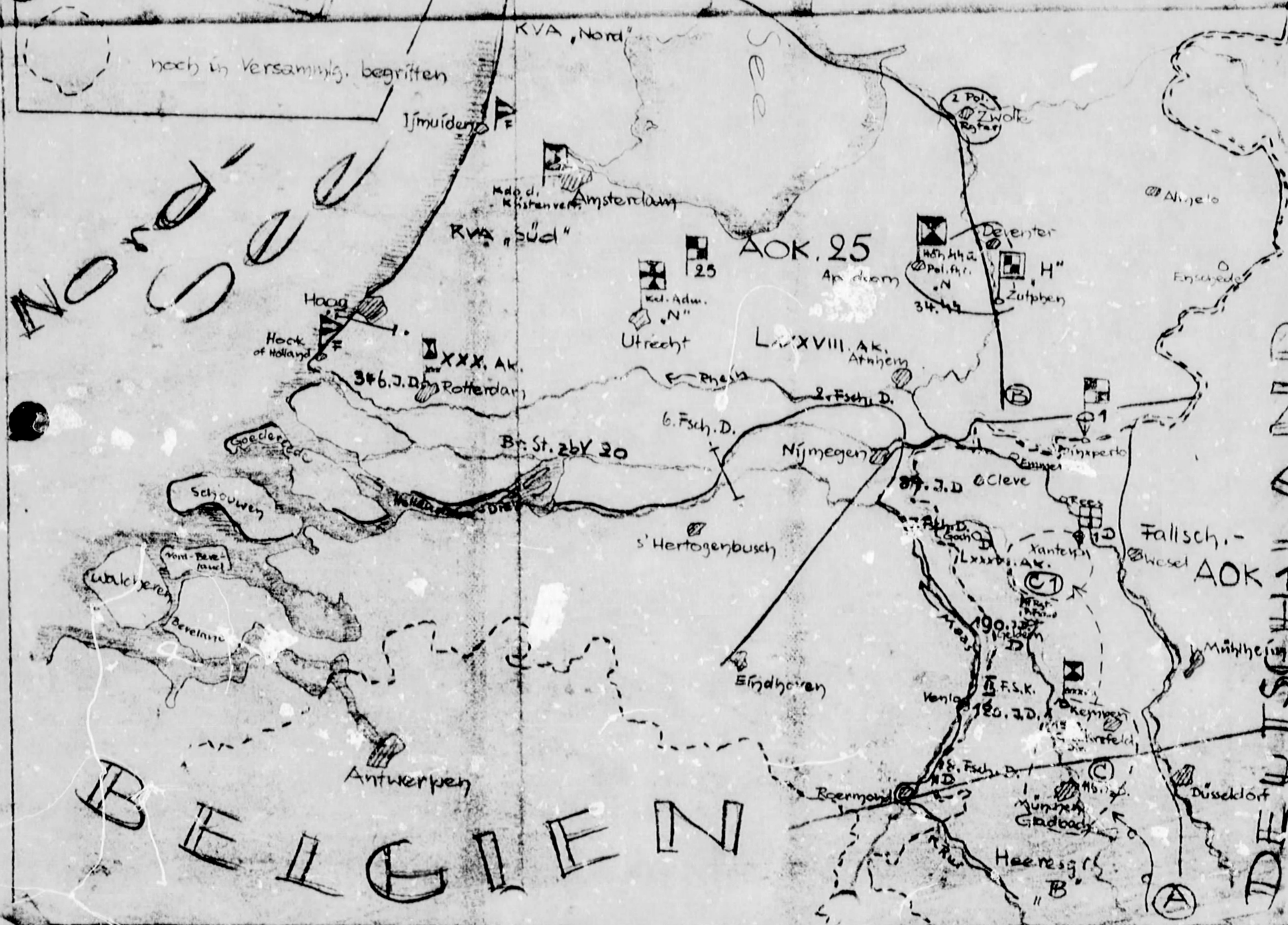


# SKIZZE 3

## Loge bei Heeresgruppe, H" am 8.2.45

### Erläuterungen:

- (A) Grenze rückwärtiges Heeresgebiet
- (B) Grenze zw. W.B. Niederlande / AOK 25
- (C, C1) Versammlungsräume xxvii B.korps, 116. Pz. Div., 15 Pz. Gren. Div.
- (D) Bereitstellungsräume für 4 Pz. Jg. bzgl. Stützpunkt, Abt. u. 1 Pz. Jg. Abtlg.



1:1000000

W.B. N. Emigen



MS # B-147

# SKIZZE 4

Einsatz des Fallsch. AOK 1 bei Beginn des amerikanischen Angriffs gegen Heeresgruppe B

Vordere Linie nur Anhalt!  
Gefechtsstände fraglich!





# Lage Fsch-AOK 1 in den ersten Märztagen 1945

# SKIZZE 5



1:250 000

Borken  
Ausbild.-  
Div.  
"Karst"



Aachenbeck  
Art. gr. AOK 25

Haarenberg

346. J.D.

Emmerich

Versaum  
Tle. 15. B. Gr. Div.

Bocholt

Stämme  
245. J.D.  
in B. Straß

BA: DYLE: BILG:

Cleve

Forst  
Reichs-  
wald

Goch

Udam

Fisch-AOK

Volksst.-Btl.

Wesel

Weeze

Rhein

Volksst.-Btl.

Dinslaken

190. J.D.

LXVII A.K.  
Rheinberg

HOLLAND

DEUTSCHLAND

Jsum

180. J.D.

Me. Heeresgr. B

Moers

Ausbild.-  
Div.  
"Oberhausen  
Hamburg"  
(angekündigt)

Duisburg

Ruhr

Krefeld

Heeresgr. "B"

Ratingen

Düsseldorf