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von W i e t e r s h e i m

Generalleutnant

MS # B-417

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Allendorf, 7 Febr 47

(Mueller, A l f r e d J o h a n n e s)

The 11 P A N Z E R - D I V I S I O N in the Rhineland

Part III

(from 20 Dec 44 to 10 Feb 45)

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1.) Short previous history and state of the division.

The departure of the division out of the sector south of Saarbruecken was very much delayed for want of fuel. After reaching the new assembly area of the division around Bitburg, the commander drove at once to the headquarters of the 5. Pz. Army. It was planned to have the division follow the 5. Pz. Army, which was in the Ardennes offensive. On returning from the 5. Pz. Army, the commander learned that this plan had been given up and the division was first of all to be reconditioned where it was. At the same time the division became OKW reserve. At the end of December one regiment had to ^{be} sent out temporarily, for three or four days, as contact detachment behind the left wing of the 7. Army in the West-Wall, just north of Trier. Otherwise, the time in the area of Bitburg was used to replenish the division with men and equipment, and to train it. On account of destroyed railways and lack of fuel it was not until the middle of January that the division was completely assembled in its reconditioning area, especially with its armored elements. The process of rapid reconditioning was also seriously delayed by reason of the difficult traffic situation. Part of the troop replacements marched on foot

from the Rhine. By the middle of January the division was up to strength in enlisted personnel as well as with most of its weapons, and had 50 V tanks, 30 IV tanks and 25 tank-destroyers ready for action.

At the beginning of January the commander was ordered to the command post of the Heeresgruppe G (Army Group G), in the region of Saarbruecken. (sketch 1). There he was given some orientation on different plans, demanded by the High Command, to hold down enemy forces during the German Ardennes offensive, or respectively, to achieve success against weak enemy resistance. One of these plans provided for the recapture of Strassburg. In connection with this, an attack was to be carried out from the region of Bitch, towards Saarburg, to regain the terrain lying between Strassburg and Saarburg by a pincer attack. Finally after this attack had succeeded, Metz was to be recaptured from the region of the Saar-Moselle-triangle, and this assault would be combined with the first operation. All these operations were, however, already declared impossible by the Army Group on account of lack of forces, and were indeed never carried out. Even the attack on Saarburg from the region of Bitch, which was planned for the 11. Panzer-Division within the framework of the XXXIX. Panzer-A.K., which was going to be brought up, was never carried out.

From 12 Jan to 17 Jan. On 12 Jan 45 the division received the order to assemble as soon as possible in the South, in the area of Rheinsfeld - Kell (Hunsrueck-Hoehenstrasse) (Hunsrueck-mountain-road) as army reserve of the 1. Army. The mission of the division was to

prepare to go into action, out of the assembly area:

- 1.) as contact reserve between 1 and 7 Army near Trier,
- 2.) within the framework of the 1 Army near Saarlautern,
- 3.) likewise within the framework of the 1 Army in the Saar-Moselle-triangle.

The assembly of the division was delayed by snow-storms and deep snow-drifts on the roads.

Division command post: Schillingen.

From there contact was made with the LXXXII. A.K., which also commanded the sector of the Orscholzriegel (Orscholz switch position) within the Saar-Moselle-triangle.

Original position.

Since about 10 Jan the enemy had been attacking in the Orscholzriegel. After the first attacks had been repelled, various penetrations had succeeded. They had only partly been eliminated by counterattacks. The units engaged there belonging to the LXXXII. Corps - originally the 416. Inf. Division, to which all the available units of the corps had been added, had serious losses. The corps was of opinion that they would not be able to hold out any longer against further, persistent strong enemy pressure. On the 14 and 15 Jan parts of the Orscholzriegel were already lost. The enemy's penetration was enlarged in the following days. By request of the corps, on the 16 Jan, one regiment of the division with some tanks was, first of all, placed in a rear position within the Saar-Moselle-triangle behind the weakened 416. Division. In the evening of the 17 Jan the division was directed, to cross the Saar as speedily as possible with all its

troops, in order already on the 18 Jan to recapture the line of fortifications of the Orscholzriegel by an assault-raid on beyond the Orscholzriegel to the hills of Perl on the Moselle, thus relieving not only our own troops there, but also those involved in the Ardennes offensive.

Estimate of the situation.(sketch 2)

The terrain in the Orscholzriegel was unfavorable for the commitment of an armored division on account of being very broken up, and interspersed with woods. This was especially evident in the weather conditions prevailing at that time. Many roads, small bridges and paths, as well as ditches were covered entirely by snow-drifts. Any commitment of an armored division there would have necessitated thorough reconnaissance. The Orscholzriegel position, a switch position in the Saar-Moselle-triangle between the Moselle and the Saar, had its right wing on the Moselle, at the Luxemburg boundary. The entire position was only of value as long as the right wing extended next to a neutral Luxemburg. That had also certainly been presupposed when the switch position was constructed. In bringing up and supplying the division the fact had to be considered that there was altogether only one single bridge crossing the Saar for tanks, and consequently the supply situation of motorized units inside the Saar-Moselle-triangle could become critical because of the enemy's air superiority and our weak air defense.

The enemy occupying Luxemburg could direct flanking fire from the dominating hills west of the Moselle, with artillery and to a certain degree with heavy weapons, on to the fortifications themselves,

as well as into their rear terrain. The enemy was superior in artillery and could further increase that superiority by the employment of numerous air observers.

Our own forces.

The 416. Division, employed till then in the entire Orscholzriegel, and the units which had been brought up to it by the corps, ^{from time to time} were seriously battered, confused with one another and hardly fit for further resistance. The attack of an armored division would therefore have required, all the more, the most exact reconnaissance and careful preparation. It would have, in any case, to be executed far enough from the Luxemburg border to avoid the possibility of the division being caught in the flank. while moving into the assembly area as well as during the attack itself.

On account of these considerations the division proposed to attack - if at all - only after thorough reconnaissance and preparation.

18 Jan. Counter to its own proposals, the division was entrusted, already on the morning of 18 Jan, with the command of the entire Moselle front facing Luxemburg, and of the Orscholzriegel itself up to and including Butzdorf. The units of the 416. Division there were subordinated to it. In spite of all protests the attack was ordered for the morning of the 18 Jan. The bulk of the division, however, did not arrive in time, as was only to be expected, because of the difficult road conditions. A large part of the tank regiment remained on the east bank of the Saar from the very beginning, for

want of fuel. Thus the division was deprived from the first of its proper striking power. In spite of these difficulties the division made a surprise attack on Butzdorf and Tettingen with those units already in the Saar-Moselle-triangle, on the morning of 18 January, in order, first to recapture the Orscholzriegel there and to pierce a gap for the following tanks. Butzdorf was taken by infantry, and the forces pushed their way into Tettingen. The tanks, committed through the gap thus created, ran into a German antitank ditch covered with snow and had considerable losses on account of the stoppage thus caused. The local units employed there until then had not been able to give the tanks exact information about the course of the ditch, presumably owing to the fact that these units were very jumbled up and some had been thrown into the fighting only very recently. Thus the basic elements of any raid - suddenness and surprise- were lost. A raid was now no longer possible at that point. The proposal made by the division only, - if at all - to start a new attack after regrouping, and from another point even further from the possible flanking fire coming from Luxemburg, that is to say to attack from the area of Oberleuken - Orscholz was rejected. The main reason given was that that was not the sector of the division! Instead of that the division was ordered by the corps to keep strictly within its assigned limits, like infantry, and pursue the attack within its own sector. Remonstrances, that an attack along the Moselle in the flanking fire of the enemy in Luxemburg could not succeed, were not listened to. The attack of the 111 regiment on 19 January continued, as ordered, against Nennig, Wies and Thorn, broke down with heavy

losses. Its renewal, ordered for the 20 January, was also essentially unsuccessful and resulted only in the capture of the castle of Thorn and Wies, with heavy losses of our own. Finally various separate operations were ordered by the corps, according to the map on a scale of 1 : 10 000, in the divisional sector. The division was - above all without its tanks - unable to develop its entire power at any point. Finally, on 21 January one of the ^{raids} succeeded, and resulted in the capture of the North part of Nennig, although with serious losses. The infantry's fighting power was consumed more and more, our tanks had no fuel and stood around inactive, on both sides of the Saar, away from the division. The command post of the division, transferred at the beginning of the attack to Perdenbach, was there shelled out of its position, losing some special-missions staff officers, and was moved to Portz. An advance command post remained, as hitherto, at Beuren.

From 22 Jan to 26 Jan. Counterattacks by the enemy at Nennig resulted in the loss again ^{of} nearly the whole locality; only a few odd houses in the Northern part were held. The Americans grew stronger from day to day; not only new tank destroyers appeared, but it seemed, too, to be certain that elements, at least, of a new armored division were brought up. The enemy went on attacking against the whole sector of the Orscholm ^{Weg}. Butzdorf, Berg and Wies were lost in stiff, changing combat after having changed hands several times.

27 Jan. On 27 January the enemy attacked Sinz, with strong armored support. After fierce fighting he succeeded in infiltrating into the southern part of the locality. The next day, the castle of Thorn,

which had been turned into a very effective strongpoint. (28 January).

From 30 January to 1 February the fighting somewhat abated. On 2 February the enemy succeeded in penetrating into the Campholz, northwest of Sinz. Repeated counterattacks, with great pains, prevented the enemy from breaking through. Our lack of sufficient tanks was felt as a great disadvantage, above all by the armored infantry which seriously weakened, was facing American tanks. Since there was not much fuel available, only a few, separate tanks could offer a certain support to the much reduced rifle units. Even these few tanks were so short of fuel that they could scarcely make a local change of position, which again affected their real fighting power. During the period of these engagements the division had to cover, as well, the whole Moselle front from the Orscholzriegel up to the mouth of the Sauer. The Moselle was, indeed, frozen over, but the ice was not so firm that it was possible to cross without any trouble. This did provide some security for our flank, but nevertheless considerable forces were required to guard the front, which extended over more than 20 km. Overcoming many difficulties, our patrols succeeded in crossing the pack-ice of the Moselle and reconnoitering far into Luxemburg. It was to be concluded from the weak cover of the enemy that he did not intend to cross the Moselle at this point. A few small enemy patrols, trying to cross the Moselle in their turn, were repelled. Stronger enemy concentrations could only be observed at Remich and just north of there, that is to say, in the localities where they could intervene against our flank in the fighting for the Orscholzriegel.

From 2 to 5 February. Local fighting continued at the Orscholzriegel with many casualties. It sometimes abated for one day, only to blaze up so much the stronger the next day. The artillery superiority of the enemy was felt as ever more oppressive. The combat strength of the whole III regiment decreased to just over 50 men, although, according to instructions from above, the drivers of motor-vehicles were already being used. The position could finally only be held by employing parts of the reconnaissance battalion, which had been covering the front on the Moselle, in the Orscholzriegel. Thus, during several weeks the infantry fighting power of the division was consumed there in fluctuating battles for single pillboxes, which were for the most part already ^{partly} destroyed. The troops and the individual soldiers here achieved exemplary results day and night, though lying in the open, in the wet snow. Frostbite was added to the heavy casualties. The division, held within narrow limits, a tank unit fighting according to the map on a scale of 1 : 10 000, without any possibility of using ^{its} particular characteristics, fought with the feeling that its combat was not essential to the over-all situation.

In this way the short-sighted corps command allowed a recon-ditionned armored division to bleed to death in a position which was impossible from the point of view of terrain and tactical features. During the whole war the division was never so restricted in its command and never had such serious and useless casualties. Finally the commander of the division reported sick, since his constant protests were never given a hearing, and sent an officer with the appropriate data to the Inspector of Tank Troops, in order to ask

him to persuade the higher headquarters to see that the division was assigned a mission appropriate to its branch of service. When the Army Group finally intervened and the division was pulled out, beginning on 5 February, its infantry elements were already completely worn out. On 10 February the relief of the division by the 256. V.G. Division was completed. Thus this battle for the Orscholzriegel is a perfect example of wrong assignment and employment of a mobile motorized division for a raid!

As mentioned in the estimate at the beginning the following experiences were confirmed:

1.) To undertake a raid, sufficient time must be given to an armored force, especially during the winter, for thorough reconnaissance of the terrain, of the habits and of the position of the enemy. (The accurate course of the antitank ditch covered with snow, in which the first tank-raid broke down, was first discovered from an American captured map!)

2.) The infantry of an armored division must not be allowed to bleed to death in unfavorable terrain without its tanks. If the initiative cannot be gained at one point, then it must be sought again at another place, without set boundaries - which are blinkers to a command such as that of an armored division, which operates like a cavalry command.

~~As~~ the preceding principles, learned by experiences, were not taken into consideration, a short time later, at a decisive spot, when the vigorous attack began against the Rhine, the higher command had at its disposal as a mobile force, instead of a reconditioned

armored division, only one which was seriously battered.

signed: Wend von Wietersheim

MS # B-417

12 -
sketch 1
1 : 100 000

11. Panzer-Division Rhineland, part III.

Koeln

Aix-la-Chapelle

Bonn

Koblenz

11.Pz.Div.
22 Dec to 13 Jan.

Trier

Luxemburg

11.Pz.Div.
from 14 Jan.

Saarbruecken
Saarlautern

Pirmasens

Metz

Bitch

Orientation of Heeres- Saarburg
gruppe G concerning
operational aims at the
beginning of January 45

Strassburg

Possible places of commitment
of the 11.Pz.Div. from the
assembly area Southeast
of Trier

signed: personally checked by
W. Drews
Oberstleutnant

11. Panzer-Division Rhineland, part III

50 to

Kozz-karthaus

Oberemmel

assembly area of the
division (from 13 to 17 Jan)

Hermeskeil

5 to

L
u
x
e
m
b
u
r
g

Wincheringen

Saarburg

11. from 18 to 21 Jan 45

Perdenbach

Ports

Serrig

from 21 Jan

2 ton ferry

advanced command
post Beuren
from 18 Jan

West - Wall

Remich

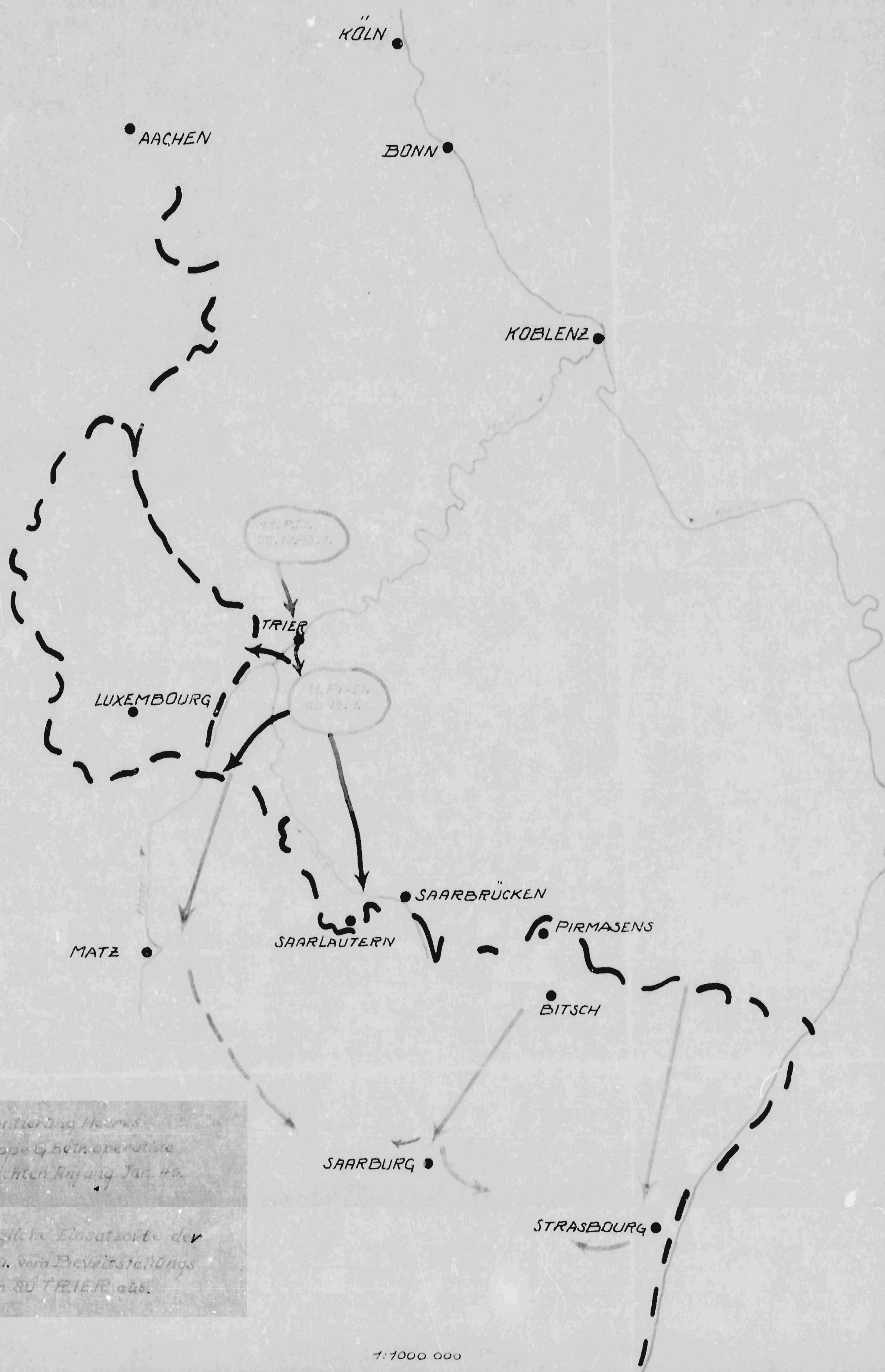
Sinz

Tabern
416. Inf. Div.O r s c h o l z - R i e g e l
Orscholz

Saarburg

personally checked by

signed: W. Drews
Oberstleutnant



Abgrenzung Heeresgruppe G betriebsoperativ
Absichten Anfang Jan. 45.

— Mögliche Einsatzorte der
11. P.D. vom Beveistellungs-
raum SU TRIER aus.

