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MONOGRAPH

"38th R.C.T. - BATTLE OF THE BULGE"

Major GEORGE D. CALLAWAY, INF.

Battle of the Bulge, by Maj G. D.
Callaway, Inf. Command and General Staff
College. 1946-47.

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COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE

FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS

School of Combined Arms

Regular Course

1946 - 1947

Operations of the 38th Combat Team (2nd Inf Div)
on the Belgian-German Frontier 16-20 Dec 1944
(Battle of the Bulge)

Type of Operation: Regiment in
Attack, Withdrawal, and Defense.

Major George D. Callaway, Infantry

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V Corps History

Second Infantry Division History

I chose this subject because I think it is the most outstanding action that my regiment participated in in World War II. I think it will illustrate again some of the capabilities of infantry units; that the principles we have been studying do apply at all levels; that sometimes what appears to be violations of accepted doctrine will work with a little luck and determined execution.

Now, briefly, the background of this picture. The 38th Infantry (2nd Inf Div) landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy on D plus 1, fought through Normandy with V Corps, and as part of VIII Corps helped reduce BREST to a pile of rubble--then moved by rail and motor across France to relieve the 4th Inf Div in the Siegfried line in the SCHNEE EIFFEL region east of ST VITH in early October.

The normal supporting units were the 38th FA Battalion; Co. C, 2nd Engr Bn; Co. C, 2nd Med Bn; Co. C, 618th TD Bn; Co. C, 741 Tk Bn. The nature of this support was such that there was never any question of whether they were attached or supporting. There was always the closest cooperation--no argument as to whether or not a unit should be attached.

After a two month period in a defensive position in the Siegfried line (The division covered a twenty seven mile front,) in which the time was spent improving the position and living conditions, patrolling, and being patrolled against, the Div was relieved by the brand new 106th Div and amid great secrecy was sent north to vicinity EISENBORN, BELGIUM, to launch an attack to the northeast through the 97th Div to secure the dams on the ROER River at the junction of the ROER and URFT Rivers. (See Map A for objectives. Reference - V Corps History.) Due to the uncertainty of the situation and the close terrain the Div attacked in column of regiments, the 38th being second in column. The leading regiment attacked on 13 Dec and all day and night sought to penetrate a fortified position around the custom house at WEHLERSCHIED (Objective 2) on the BELGIAN-GERMAN frontier--a road junction that was later called "Heartbreak Junction", because we had to give it up after a bitter struggle to get it. This was the first belt of the Siegfried line and consisted of pillboxes protected by wire, mines and obstacles.

Attacking on the north of the Div was the 78th Div to seize the high ground west of the Dams. On the south one regiment of the 99th Div was to secure the OLEF draw west and north of HELLENTHAL.

The terrain over which this operation takes place is along the Belgian-German border on the western edge of and in the MONSCHAU FOREST--about 30 miles south and slightly east of AACHEN and about 20 miles northeast of ST VITH. It is on the northern edge of that rugged, almost mountainous area through which the Germans launched their ARDENNES counteroffensive. In this area, although it is all of fairly high altitude, the slopes are not steep and the terrain is of a rolling nature. The extremes in elevation differ less than 100 meters.

The principal terrain features are the open high ground around EISENBORN and ROCHERATH-KRINKELT, the MONSCHAU FOREST, the open high ground east of the Monschau Forest in the vicinity of DREIBORN; the lakes formed by dams on the URFT and ROER Rivers; and the OLEF River which bounds the DREIBORN-HARPERSCHIED area on the S and E. The road net is limited to one good road through BUTGENBACH, BULLENGEN, KRINKELT, ROCHERATH, up through the MONSCHAU FOREST to HARPERSCHIED and DREIBORN.

The MONSCHAU FOREST consists mainly of closely planted pine trees 20 to 30 feet in height. As with most of the forest land in Europe it had been well kept and was free of underbrush. Although it provided excellent cover and concealment, it did so for both sides. These trees also provided excellent obstacles when felled every few feet across the roads for stretches of hundreds of yards.

The dams on the URFT and ROER were critical in that they permitted the enemy to flood the ROER at will to hinder our offensive in the North. (Ninth Army and VII Corps were just short of the ROER R. to the North and the Germans were withdrawing E of the river. The lakes built up by the dams held enough water to flood the lowlands across their entire front.)

The key terrain features with which we are particularly concerned in this discussion are the MONSCHAU FOREST, the road from ROCHERATH to DREIBORN, the road junction in the forest, and the towns of ROCHERATH and KRINKELT. These two villages are actually only one. It sits on the end of a ridge which runs to the northeast along the main road. The houses are

all of stone with thick walls and are huddled closely together with just room enough for the streets to pass through. It is identical to thousands of European villages. It is dominated by the tall church tower in the center of town.

The weather had been around freezing and snow was on the ground, averaging about six inches at the start of the operation. A partial thaw had rendered cross country movement for vehicles and tanks very difficult.

I should like to emphasize that this weather was extremely bad for offensive operations in that the snow was just on the verge of melting and was very wet. When a soldier crawled or fell he would soon be soaked, and being near freezing, that was extremely unpleasant. Wounded went rapidly into shock and the ones who were not wounded became fatigued much quicker than normal.

The weather at this time and the terrain in this general area have been very completely described by Col. Osmond in his conference on the Ardennes Counteroffensive. As you recall the weather prevented our aerial reconnaissance and close air support and allowed the Germans to achieve surprise in the offensive operation.

By the 10th of December the 30th Infantry had followed the 9th through the gap in the initial minefields and barbed wire (Obj. 2) and by ten o'clock was attacking on the south of the 9th astride the road to DREIBORN with the Second Battalion on the right and the First Battalion on the left (North). The Third Battalion was in reserve west of the road junction. Due to the restricted road net and the impossibility to move vehicles cross country through the forest, only essential vehicles were being moved forward. These consisted of about 15 per Bn and a few for Regtl Hq and Medics. To further relieve the congestion in the area, Antitank Co which was equipped with 57 mm towed guns was left in position along the road north of Rocherath, not to be moved forward till we had cleared the forest. Cannon Co had been required to furnish 24 men to Co C, 2nd Med Bn as additional litter bearers, since there was such a great deal of hand carry of patients necessary. They also furnished 33 men to the 30th FA Bn as wiremen since it was most difficult to maintain communications through the forest and vehicles could not be used to lay wire. The remainder of the company was attached to Div Arty, to remain in vicinity KALTERHERBERG until they could be moved through the forest

and placed in position in supporting distance. The Cannon Co was equipped with the M3 towed Inf Hows.

At this time Regtl Hq was in the process of establishing a CP just off the main road in the forest. (see map) Most of the company was being used to lay wire and dig in the CP. In addition to the normal T/O the company had a provisional MP platoon composed of a lieutenant, a Sergeant, and about 21 men. They were being used to control traffic, guard prisoners and local security, augmented by a portion of the I&R platoon.

The Medical Det was operating normally with a section with each Bn and one with Regtl Hq.

The Service Co was set up in the north edge of ROCHERATH with Co. C, 2nd Med.

The 38th FA Bn was under Div Art, control and were in position north of the road in the edge of the forest. Part of Co C, 2nd Engr Bn was supporting the regiment, the rest being used with the remainder of the Bn on road maintenance and were constructing a road between WIRTZFELD and EISENBORN.

Co A, 741 Tk Bn, had supported the advance of the 9th Inf and was attached to the 38th to continue the attack.

Resistance was still stubborn although the first line of pillboxes had been penetrated. At this time, on the morning of the 16th, reports were received of heavy Art, fire on the Div MSR back as far as Div Hq, which should have indicated something. As a matter of fact, the 99th and 106th Divs were beginning to take a beating. However, there were no further orders from higher headquarters, so the attack continued.

The objective of the Regiment was the hill mass 3000 yards to the east at the junction of the roads from Dreiborn and Harperscheid (Objective 3). The Ninth Infantry was swinging to the north to take the town of ROHREN. (Objective 1)

Opposing our advance were elements of the German 277th Volksgrenadier Division and 326 Infantry Division.

On the afternoon of the 16th the Regiment had advanced about 1000 yards east of the road junction. The situation was beginning to become a bit confused, with reports of an enemy attack in the vicinity of MONSCHAU and heavy fighting to the south and reports of paratroopers to the rear. In view of all this the regiment consolidated its position to the front and moved the third battalion upon the west flank of the Ninth Infantry.

On the morning of the 17th the situation was getting bad---worse than we realized. Much of the information we were getting was very vague, but evidently the situation was critical. The enemy was reported to have broken through with tanks and infantry as far as BULLINGEN and our liaison air strip was captured. The Div CP at WIRTZFELD was attacked by tanks and Inf and all the available personnel were used in its defense. A battalion of the 23rd Inf with tanks and TD's moved in to protect the Div CP. The remainder of the 23rd had been attached to the 99th Div.

Around noon on the 17th the corps commander ordered the Division to establish a line north of ROCHERATH--KRINKELT--WIRTZFELD to the lake east of BUTGENBACH. (V corps History)

The 3rd Bn of the 38th from its reserve position was ordered to move back to Krinkelt and take up a defensive position to protect the withdrawal of the remainder of the Division. At this time the regiment was about six miles northeast of KRINKELT. The 3rd Bn moved into this position with little difficulty.

The remainder of the regt was to remain in position at "Heartbreak Corner" and protect the withdrawal of the 9th Infantry.

The order of withdrawal was 1st Bn to follow the 9th Inf and 2nd Bn with Co A, 741 Tk Bn follow the 1st. The 1st Bn started moving about 1530, closely following the 1st Bn 9th Inf.

Antitank Co was placed in position on the most likely approaches into Rocherath and Krinkelt.

The Division Artillery had withdrawn to positions in vicinity of ELSENBORN and the leading Bns of the 9th Inf cleared through Krinkelt and went into position south of Wirtzfeld.

About 1700 there was a heavy concentration of Arty and Tank fire on ROCHERATH and the road leading to the north. Service Co was blocking an

approach from the east (see map) and was having a bad time. The 1st Bn, 9th Inf, then on the road, was attached to the 38th Inf and put into position northeast of Rocherath to enable the 1st and 2nd Bns to complete their withdrawal. This was in December, remember, and it began to get dark about this time. The 3rd Bn was engaging an enemy attack from the South and the remnants of Service Co were heavily engaged. Stragglers from other units were finding their way through our lines ahead of the German thrusts. At this time the Germans attack seemed to be a series of thrusts with armor at various points along our lines. Certainly at this time a strong coordinated German attack could have gone through. The Service Co commander endeavored to assemble as many of the stragglers as he could to bolster his own defense. He had little luck however. The CP of the 741 Tk Bn was in ROCHERATH. Upon request they sent several of their command tanks to help Service Co. I think all the tanks were knocked out.

The 1st Bn, 38th Inf, was caught in a heavy concentration of Arty fire just after dark and as they were approaching Rocherath. The Bn suffered many casualties and one company was badly disorganized. By 1900 Co A, Co B and part of Co D had been put into their assigned positions. Co C and one MG Platoon occupied its position about 2000. There was no firm contact established between companies however until daylight. At about 2000 five enemy tanks with some infantry broke through the lines and reached the Bn CP but were repulsed by Hq Co and a platoon of B Co and the mortar platoon of D Co.

At about 2100 hours the 2nd Bn arrived at Rocherath in the order of F, E and G Companies and went into position with F Co tying in with the flank of the 1st Bn, 9th Inf and with G Co in Regtl Reserve and protecting the Regtl CP in ROCHERATH. E Co was ordered to take over the position held by Service Co.

All these positions, excluding the 3rd Bn and Antitank Co had been occupied at night with little daylight reconnaissance, and under artillery fire. Lateral contact between units did not exist in many cases. The enemy made repeated thrusts at our lines and small groups infiltrated through. An estimated group of 5 tanks and an estimated 100 infantry broke through and assembled at the church in Rocherath. At daylight they were attacked by G Co supported by tanks of the 741 Tk Bn and TD's of Co C, 644 TD Bn which had

been attached to the regiment. The En tanks were knocked and most of the infantry killed or captured. Three of the tanks were knocked out within 100 yards of the Regimental CP.

So far most of the attacks had been heavily supported by armor. Identifications included elements of the 1st SS Pz Div, 12 SS Pz Div, 277 Div and 10th Div and 3rd Pz Grenadier Div. Apparently the enemy was trying to roll back this shoulder of his penetration.

During the 10th of Dec. continued attacks were made by the enemy at various points of our perimeter. We had lost contact with the unit to our north. We kept patrolling to establish contact, but our patrols could locate nothing but the enemy. One attack forced E Co back about 200 yards. The battalion commander counter attacked with F Co from their position to the north and successfully repulsed the enemy.

The 1st Bn of the 9th Inf had taken a severe beating on our left flank and now numbered only less than 200 men. They were relieved from attachment and withdrawn through KRINKELT to rejoin their regiment. G Co was placed on our north flank, defending to the north and northwest.

L Co was withdrawn from position and attached to the 2nd Bn to bolster a weak spot in their line on the right of E Co. A provisional company of stragglers commanded by our "M" Co Commander occupied the original position of L Co.

Some of the enemy attacks succeeded in penetrating our lines, but the gaps were quickly closed and the enemy destroyed within our position. On one such occasion a Panther tank with some infantry got through; the infantry were all killed and the turret on the tank jammed. The tank raced down the main street of Krinkelt, clipped off a few telephone poles and ran down the Regt S-4's jeep which was standing outside the 3rd Bn CP, (The S-4 and driver bailed out in time) and travelled about 100 yards further before it was completely knocked out by one of our TD's.

It was reported that an officer in the 1st Bn herded some cattle out of a barn into the path of an enemy tank on a narrow road, temporarily halting the tank so that a bazooka team could knock it out. (You can take that or leave it.)

The regimental CP moved from ROCKERATH to KRINKELT in anticipation of a shortening of our lines to form a tight perimeter around KRINKELT if we

were forced to do it.

The 395th Inf (99th Div which was attached to 2nd Div) on our north was consolidating its position northwest of ROCHERATH. The 26th Inf (1st Div) had been put in position around BUTGENBACH. The 9th Inf was holding in the vicinity of WIRTZFELD. Elements of the 23rd Inf were organizing a second line of defense on the EISENBORN ridge.

Our MSR had been through Butgenbach and BULLINGEN, but now BULLINGEN was in the hands of the enemy. I have mentioned before that the engineers were working on a road from WIRTZFELD to BERG. It had been completed but was barely trafficable due to the mud. This was our only means of ingress and egress to the area and for that reason logistic support was difficult. In addition, the road was constantly under arty fire.

Service company, along with all the unit field trains was moved to CAMP EISENBORN. The service company ammunition vehicles had been parked behind houses in the north edge of Wirtzfeld and had been disabled by arty fire. Fortunately the 36th FA Bn with Div Arty was back in the vicinity of Elsenborn where they had better supply routes, yet were still able to cover our entire front with artillery fire.

The regimental S-4 established a Class V Supply point across the street from the 3rd Bn CP. Casualties were evacuated by litter and jeep to a collecting station in Krinkelt and the surgeon utilized his ambulances or any truck available to evacuate them to Camp Elsenborn. There was no opportunity to evacuate the dead, although a large number of bodies were collected in the vicinity of the aid station.

I have said very little about the supporting arms. The artillery had given us uninterrupted support and was very effective in stopping the enemy thrusts. The 36th FA Bn fired over 5000 rounds on Dec. 18. The tanks and TD's were scattered throughout the town. The 741 Tk Bn had its CP in Rocherath and had elements of at least two tank companies. The Bn Commander of the 644th TD Bn was also in Rocherath and Co C plus possibly a few more TD's were helping defend the town. I don't know if there is anywhere a complete list of the units and elements of units that were defending this corner and unofficially at least, were under command of the C. O. 38th Infantry. A group composed of remnants of one of the regiments of the 99th Div which had been cut off and infiltrated back through our lines had been collected and hastily organized and put into the 3rd Bn sector to take the place of

L Co which had been attached to the 2nd Bn.

Wire communication was maintained effectively, but with difficulty, due to the artillery fire and the tanks and TD's.

Since our greatest threat was from enemy armor, all available means of tank defense were employed. The first line of defense was the artillery which to my surprise was very effective. It kept the tanks buttoned up, knocked off the infantry support, which enabled our bazooka teams to fire on the tanks when they came in range and in some cases 155 mm howitzers set the enemy tanks on fire. The next line was our bazooka teams spread all around our front lines. Our defensive position was based on the built up area of the town and the fences and hedgerows adjacent to the buildings. Our fighting was done from the basements and windows of the stone houses and in the fence row positions near the houses.

At this time the snow had almost completely melted and the ground was very muddy. This kept the enemy armor for the most part on the roads. Our bazooka teams operated generally from covered positions in and behind houses, allowing the tanks to come very close before opening fire. By noon the 18th there were a considerable number of destroyed tanks on the roads on the edge of town which provided excellent road blocks. On one road leading into the area occupied by C Co and part of AT Co one tank was knocked out on the road and as another attempted to go around it, it too was knocked out. From then on that road was blocked.

All our 57's were in position around critical road junctions. Although they weren't too effective, they did damage some enemy tanks. The incident I mentioned of the tank with its turret jammed running over the S-4's jeep had been caused by one of our 57 mm AT guns.

The final punch to our defense was the tank Co and TD Co which were scattered throughout the town. No enemy armor succeeded in going completely through. We lost a large number of our own tanks and TD's however, particularly on the evening of the 17th and morning of the 18th.

The situation remained the same throughout the 18th and morning of the 19th. On the 19th a provisional battalion was formed by the Division from the rear echelon personnel. It was commanded by the Division Special

Service Officer and composed of all the Personnel Sections and service personnel which could be taken from their duties. Their job was to organize and dig in a defensive position extending from the lake east of BUTGENBACH to a point about 2000 yds northwest of WIRTZFELD. The plan was for the 38th Infantry to withdraw to this line on the night of the 19th. The 9th Inf was then to withdraw from vicinity WIRTZFELD through the 38th and the 38th would complete the organization of this ground and hold it.

During the day all vehicles except those absolutely essential were withdrawn to CAMP ELSENBORN. The plan of withdrawal was for the battalions to peel off from East to West in order 2, 1, 3 and withdraw in column through WIRTZFELD up our makeshift MSR to our defensive position. The 1st Bn which was the most depleted was to continue through to a reserve position NE of BERG; the 2nd Bn would occupy the MLR from the road to the lake; and the 3rd Bn would occupy the MLR from the road north to tie in with the 99th Div's right flank.

Each Bn as it withdrew west was to cover its own withdrawal until the Bn was covered by the next Bn in the line. Bns were to use a few Tanks and TD's protected by infantry to provide their own rear guards. About a half dozen tanks protected by the Regtl I and R platoon with some Engrs to lay mines behind them as they withdrew were to protect the withdrawal of the last elements of the regiment.

This operation went off as planned after dark on the 19th. By about midnight all units were in their new positions. As the tail of the 1st Bn and the head of the 3rd passed through WIRTZFELD the column was caught by a heavy concentration of arty and nebelwerfer fire which caused a number of casualties and some confusion. Otherwise, the plan worked perfectly. I believe the enemy was aware of our movement as evidenced by the artillery fire on the road, but he made no determined effort to keep pressure on us until daylight on the 20th, by which time the 9th Inf had completed its withdrawal through our new position.

I think this withdrawal was unique in that it was more of a sideslipping rather than a withdrawal to the rear. We had been facing south and east around ROCHERATH and KRINKELT and we moved to the west and occupied a position facing Southeast. I believe that the field manual solution would have been for each front line Bn to leave a covering shell in position and pull back across country to assembly positions, then form up and move out. I think that under these special circumstances our plan worked better because

of the sideward movement instead of rearward and because our units were all so badly cut up and in some cases disorganized that I believe that a withdrawal cross country by small units to assembly positions would have resulted in utter confusion and great difficulty in rounding them all up again. Maybe we were just lucky, but the whole thing went off very smoothly.

V Corps in the Corps History states that this stand on the north shoulder of the bulge prevented the widening of the penetration to permit the use of the 3 north routes planned to be used by the German Sixth Panzer Army.

A captured German officer when asked why their counter offensive was unsuccessful stated that their right flank ran up against a wall.

Six months later Maj. Gen HUEBNER stated the Rocherath battle "will be numbered among the greatest achievements of the European Campaign."

On Dec. 20, 1944, General COURTNEY H. HODGES, commanding First U. S. Army, sent a message to the division commander which said in part, "What the 2nd Infantry Division has done in the last four days will live forever in the history of the United States Army."

In three days of this operation, 17 - 19 Dec, the 38th Inf suffered 625 casualties, about 200 of which were missing, presumably captured by the enemy.

The enemy casualties were very large, many of them being killed after they penetrated our position. An estimated 78 tanks and/or self propelled guns were destroyed or disabled by the 38th Inf and the supporting artillery, tanks and TD's. A large number of these were knocked out by bazooka teams.

The entire operation was summed up in a letter of 5 Jan, 1945, by the division commander to the officers and men of the division -- part of which follows:

"In a span of twelve days the Division had undergone changes in tactical disposition ranging from a relief from a defensive area for a coordinated attack, execution of a bitter attack against and capture of a strongly fortified sector of the Siegfried line, daylight withdrawal to a defensive position across the front of a vigorous enemy attack, repelling of a strong armored and infantry thrust against the rear and flank of the Division, defense of an area against continuous day and

night fanatical attacks by determined enemy armor and infantry, preparation of a tenable defensive position, and finally a night withdrawal to occupy and defend that position."

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. The doctrine of detailed planning and preparation to include rehearsal in attacking a fortified area is certainly sound. We did not have the time and intelligence information in this instance and the attack was slow and costly.
2. As has been proven many times, we did not have the proper clothing and equipment to combat the weather and terrain. We were road bound with vehicles, and improper clothing cost us many casualties. Oversnow equipment and cargo vehicles of good floatation were necessary for good logistical support.
3. As anticipated, many additional litter bearers and communication personnel were needed in winter warfare in Europe.
4. A movement into a defensive position at night with little reconnaissance as we did at ROCHERATH is a costly process and might prove disastrous.
5. It takes a great deal of time to organize a defensive position in cold, wet weather. If time is not available to construct adequate individual emplacements, then the defense must be based on a built up area so that personnel can take advantage of the shelter of houses (provided they are of heavy stone). Men cannot survive a long period of time in open emplacements in that kind of weather and maintain their fighting efficiency.
6. The bazooka, which had been considered more or less ineffective prior to this time, proved itself to be a very satisfactory weapon against enemy armor, even when used by personnel who had little or no training with it.
7. Many reasons have been given for the overall failure of the German offensive. I think one thing can be learned from their side of the picture. They had made a penetration, but I think that here on the north flank they failed to take advantage of their initial advantage. As I have mentioned before, I believe that a strong coordinated attack by the Germans on the 17th or early 18th could have taken our position and rolled up the flank still further to the north. The longer they delayed the less chance they had and by the time we occupied the final defensive position on the night of the 19th nothing they had could have gotten through. Instead,

they "piecemealed" their effort and were unsuccessful.

8. The most important lesson to be learned from this operation is a concept of defense against armor. The first line of defense was the massed artillery of the division, which was very effective. The second line was the infantry with its organic AT weapons, in this case the rocket launchers. The addition of the present recoilless weapons would be even more effective. The third line was the tank and TD kept mobile to strike from covered positions in the rear of the MTR. The infantry regiment as now organized, supported by the division tank battalion, is admirably suited for such a defense.

MAP A

SCALE: 1" = 4 miles

ARMY/AIR

SHEET N° 6

7

Eupen

6°0'

8

7°W.

(JUNE 1943)

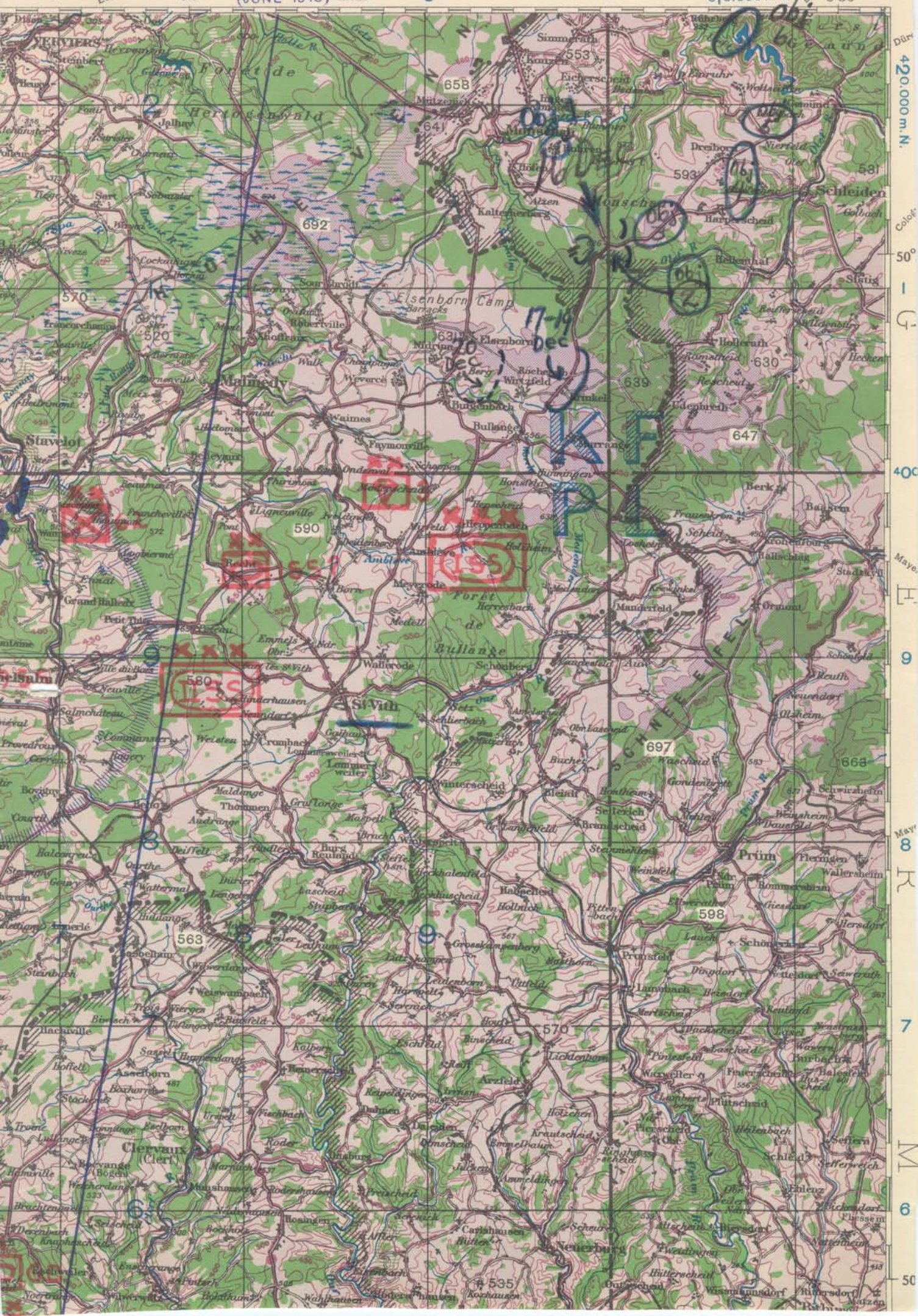
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50°

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6°30'

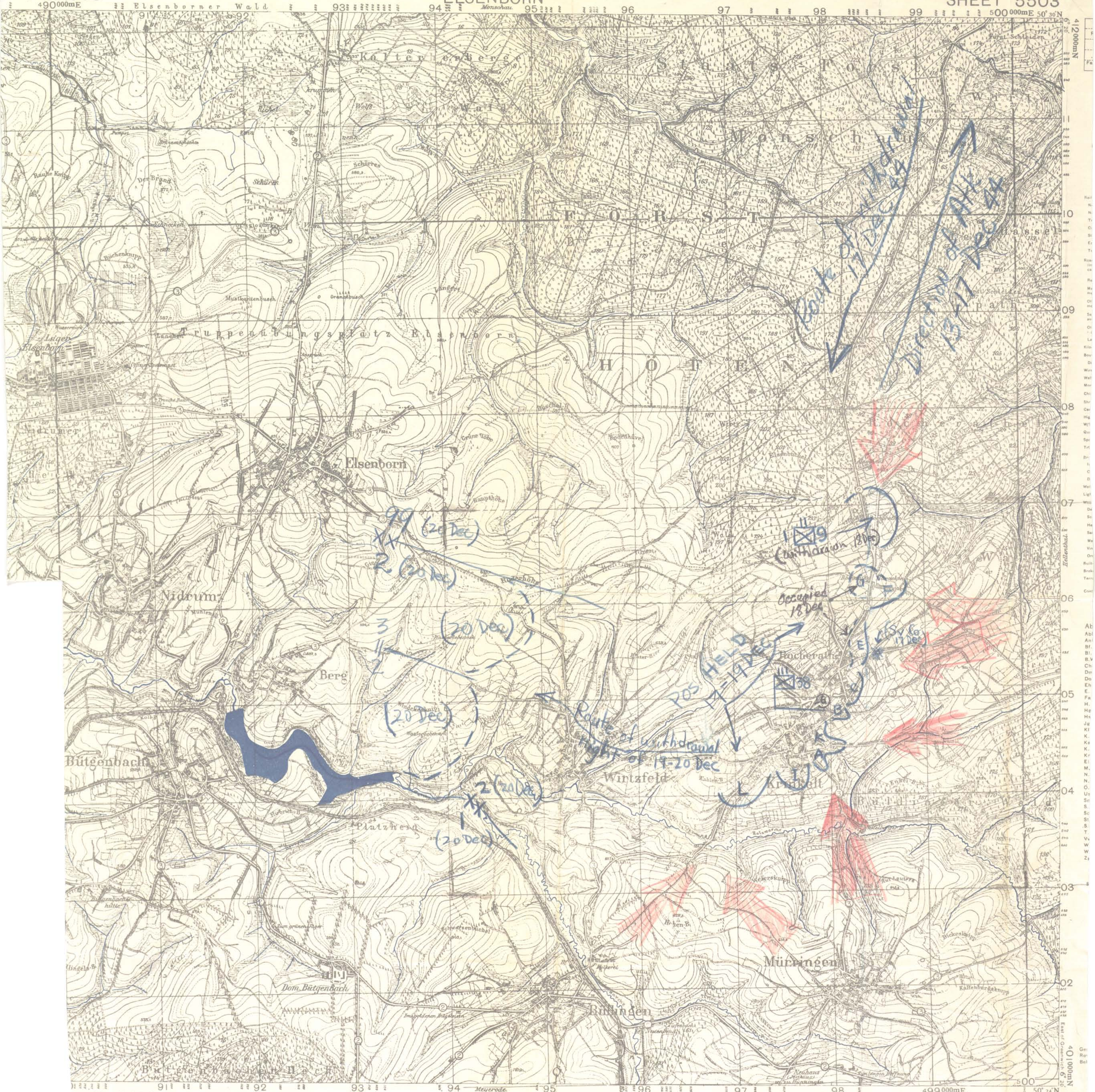


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ELSEN BORN

SECOND EDITION (AEF)

SHEET 5503



Staff, No. 4414.
 U.S. Army Topographic
 1 Aug. 1940 By 668 Engr Co. U.S. Army

NOTE: The Nord de Guerre grid on this sheet is based on the French Geographical System or graticule. The geographical values of the sheet corners and graticule tick marks on this sheet are based on the German Geographical system or graticule. To convert German Geographical values to French Geographical values, subtract 13" from German latitudes and add 3 15" to German longitudes.

Scale 1:25,000

Yards 1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 Yards
 Metres 1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 Metres

MAP "B"

