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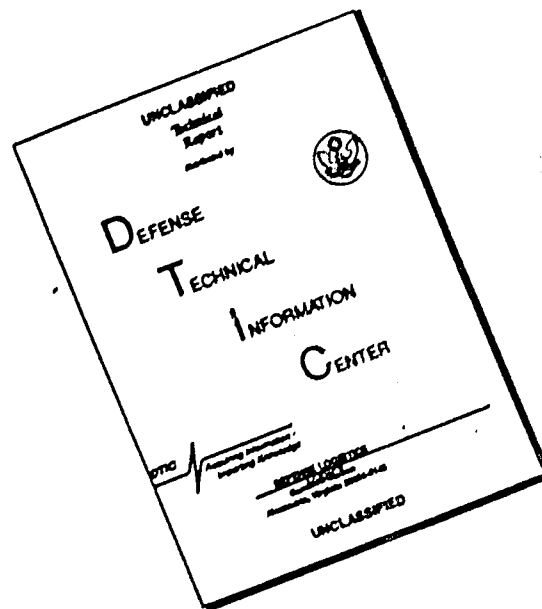
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BATTLE OF THE VOSGES MOUNTAINS

DEFENSE, WINTER

44th U.S. Infantry Division  
2d Free French Armored Division  
17th SS Panzergrenadier Division

1-10 January, 1945

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Tactical analysis of a battle between 44th U.S. Infantry Division (reinforced) and elements of 2d Free French Armored Division, defending against 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division during the German offensive in the Vosges Mountains, January, 1945; This battle has frequently been cited as an example of a defender concentrating forces to contain a penetration of a critical sector. (excellent)			

# ABSTRACT

COMMON REFERENCE: BATTLE OF THE VOSGES MOUNTAINS, 1-10 January, 1945.

TYPE OPERATION: Defense, Winter

OPPOSING FORCES: US/ALLIES: 44th Infantry Division (+), XV Corps,  
7th U.S. Army  
Combat Command L, 2d Free French Armored  
Division, XV Corps

ENEMY: 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division  
19th Infantry Division (elements)  
36th Volksgrenadier Division (elements)  
XIII SS Corps

SYNOPSIS: During the first ten days of January, 1945, a final German offensive struck XV Corps of the Seventh U.S. Army in the Vosges Mountains, south of Third Army in Lorraine. The 44th Infantry Division was defending east of Sarreguemines, and was initially forced back on its right (71st Infantry Regiment sector). Initial counterattacks in battalion strength failed, and the corps commander committed CCL, 2d Free French Armored Division, to restore the front. CCL retook the town of Gros-Rederching, but then apparently fired on 44th Division troops by mistake, and was unable to prevent German infantry from infiltrating back into the town. Thereafter, the 44th Division commander "castled" his forces, relieving and thinning out forces on his left and center to concentrate two reinforced regiments on his right flank. These regiments made limited counterattacks on 6 January and later, spoiling renewed German attacks.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: This battle has never been the subject of a detailed published analysis. It is best covered in the "Seventh Army History" and the "After Action Report - XV Corps - January 1945" produced by those two headquarters, respectively.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The 44th Infantry Division participated in the allied defensive operation against the German "Watch On The Rhine" offensive during the period 23 Oct 45 to 20 Jan 45. The 44th Infantry Division area of action for the period 1 to 10 Jan 45 was in the Low Vosges Mountains between the major towns of Bitche on the southeast and Sarreguemines on the northwest. The towns of Bliesbruck, Rimling, Gross Rederching and Rohrbach were within the divisions area of operations. (See Map 1, Section IV).

The 44th Infantry Division's organic maneuver units were the 71st, 114th, and 324th Infantry Regiments. The 253rd and 255th Infantry Regiments were attached during the period of this battle (Appendix 1). The 100th Infantry Division defended to the southeast from the right flank of the 44th Infantry Division, and the 103rd Infantry Division defended to the northeast from the 44th Infantry Division left flank (Map 1). Additional combat units within the XV Corps area were the 106th Cav Group, 12th Armored Division, CCA 14th Armored Division, 36th Infantry Division and the 253rd and 255th Infantry Regiments of the 63rd Infantry Division. (7 - Section I.1)

Opposing the 44th Infantry Division was a German Army Group. The 17th Panzer Grenadier Division comprised the main attack force, supported by the 19th and 36th Volksgrenadier Divisions operating to the west on the right flank of the 17th Panzer Division. Southeast of the 44th Infantry Division position was a second German Army Group of three divisions.

The action of the 44th Infantry Division has never been the subject of a comprehensive written work. The most authoritative work available at this time is the XV Corps After Action Report for the period Jan 45 and official history of the 44th Infantry Division. Both of these works contribute a chronological sequence of events for the actions of the division. However, neither work analyzed the total nature of the tactical and strategic implications of the conflict, and both contain conflicting, incomplete and inaccurate details.

## II. STRATEGIC SETTING

### A. CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT.

Allied forces landed in Sicily in Jul 43, the Italian mainland in Sep 43, Normandy on 6 Jun 44, and Southern France on 15 Aug 44. Allied air superiority was largely responsible for the success of the "Operation Overlord" beachhead and subsequent breakout. Outnumbered thirty to one, the Luftwaffe was unable to obtain any air superiority which was critical to the defense of the French coast. Unable to move up their panzer reserves, the Germans gave way at Saint Lô on 18 Jul 44, allowing the First U.S. Army to break out of the Normandy peninsula and sweep across France.

As the allies moved through France and swept into the lowland countries, Hitler prepared to make a last final assault to prevent the enemy from entering Germany. Mustering all the forces at his command including many which were untrained, ill-equipped and manned by old and very young men, he planned a swift breakthrough to capture the port of Antwerp, splitting the allies. Operation "Watch on the Rhine" was initiated 16 Dec 44 by an attack of 38 German divisions along a 50 mile front in the Ardennes forest region of France. Several First Army positions were overrun and the allies were pushed almost to the Meuse River. The 101st Airborne Division was cut off and surrounded at Bastogne until relieved by Third Army units attacking the German lines from the south. It is in the "Battle of the Bulge" that the 44th Infantry Division was committed to combat.

The 44th Infantry Division Battle of the Vosges Mountains (1-10 Jan 45) was one of many divisional battles along the Allied Front at the time

of the "Battle of the Bulge". This battle contributed to the defeat of the German attempt to regain the Saverne Gap by making a coordinated double attack against the 44th and 100th Infantry Divisions to the southeast of Bitche. After displacing the Allied forces, the two groups were to link up and drive east, west, or south, depending on the situation. In combination with the actions of the other Allied units involved in the defensive operation in the Ardennes, the final German attempt to undertake offensive action against the allied drive on Germany was thwarted.

#### B. COMPARISON OF THE PRINCIPAL ANTAGONISTS

The Treaty of Versailles which marked the end of World War I was obviously an unpopular memory for the German public in the hard years of German rebuilding following 1918. The new republican German government was blamed for the unpopular treaty, and in the period of rebuilding and high unemployment that inevitably existed from 1919 to 1928 many Germans were attracted to the Communist and National Socialist Parties. The depression of 1929 added to the economic problems of Germany and produced a political situation ripe for a dictatorship and nationalism. Following the collapse of the League of Nations disarmament talks in 1932, Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and began to rebuild the nation's military power well beyond the armistice agreements of World War I which had limited Germany to a standing army of not more than 100,000. Although some members of the European community were alarmed by the German military buildup, Great Britain fell under the influence of politicians who favored unilateral disarmament and agreed to scrap the

limitations of the Versailles Treaty so that Germany could build a navy and air force. Germany and Japan signed an anti-comintern pact in 1935, and were joined in that pact by Italy in 1936.

Hitler moved forces into Austria in 1938, taking advantage of (1) the German and Austrian desire for reunification, (2) the German public sentiment that Sudeten Germans had been mistreated by the Czechs, and (3) a pro-German feeling in the West that Germany was partially justified in this move. Germany occupied Czechoslovakia. In August 1939 Germany and Russia signed a secret pact dividing Poland, and on 1 Sep 39 the German army began it's drive across Poland, signaling the beginning of World War II. Bound to Poland by a guarantee of assistance, Britain declared war on Germany, reluctantly followed by France.

The Axis powers had not, and never did, develop formal joint strategic plans to win World War II. German aims were to expand East and South, regaining territory settled by ethnic Germans and building a buffer against their adversary, Russia. Germany then intended to envelop the Lowland Countries and France in order to provide a base for air assault of Britain. Hitler intended to obtain the alliance of Britain, whom he considered a valuable cornerstone of world order and trade, and then turn his attention to his most mistrusted foe, Russia. The defeat of Russia and capture of the Caucasus oil fields would pave the way for the "new Order" which Hitler intended to ultimately establish throughout Europe.

The April 1940 German occupation of ports and lines of communication in Norway was followed by the May Blitzkrieg of the Manstein plan through the Ardennes. Surprised and out of position, the French army was defeated and the British forces which were not casualties or captured

escaped through the beaches at Dunkirk. In the months following Dunkirk, British defenses were seriously impaired due to the massive equipment losses resulting from the evacuation. Hitler was unprepared to take advantage of this opportunity to make a sea and land invasion. Instead he ordered the aerial bombardment which was to become known as the Battle of Britain, hoping to force Britain to a settlement.

At the same time, German forces were being defeated by the British in North Africa and were heavily engaged in the Balkans. With the Western front in a stalemate, Hitler turned his attention to the invasion of Russia. Like the armies who had invaded Russia before them, the Germans were unable to contend with the harshness of the Russian climate, the length of supply lines and the determination of the Russian people to defend the "motherland".

Japan culminated years of aggressive actions in Manchuria and China by attacking the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 7 Dec 41. The United States entered the war on 11 Dec 41, agreeing with Great Britain to take care of the European problem first while following a policy of defense in the Pacific. As a reluctant entrant into the war, the United States had not built a large military prior to 1941. However, mobilization resulted in a force of that eventually numbered 7.5 million men and women in uniform.

A significant amount of information is not available to assist in a comparison of the two opposing forces in the Gross Rederching area of the Ardennes in January 1945. We do know that the 44th Infantry Division was authorized 14,086 personnel. The three organic infantry regiments, three attached infantry battalions, and other attached forces (See Appendix 1) indicate that the division was considerably stronger than the authorized

strength, but documentation for the period 1-10 Jan 45 is not available. The division was equipped with over 3,000 mechanically propelled vehicles, enabling it to move in one lift with minimal assistance from Corps assets. The opposing German Panzer Grenadier Divisions were authorized 12,500 personnel, but were understrength and partially composed of Germany's last manpower available for combat. Although many of the personnel were well trained and battle hardened, the aforementioned filler personnel were ill-trained, inexperienced and pressed into service against their will in some cases. The German division's mobility was restricted by equipment consisting of about 600 motor vehicles and tractors and 1,450 horse drawn vehicles which required armored or mechanized support in order to effectively move the division in close battle conditions. Both sides used armored self-propelled field artillery and were equipped with bolt action and automatic small arms, crew served automatic weapons and mortars. The Allies enjoyed almost total air superiority since the pinpoint bombing of German rear areas, supply lines and military targets and the numerical and technical superiority of allied airpower had reduced the Luftwaffe to a small and almost nonoperational force by this stage of the war. (I) - pp 623-625).

### III. THE TACTICAL SITUATION

[NOTE: References 6, 9, 10, and 13 were the principle sources used to develop this segment of the battle analysis. Since the following narrative, in large part, is a paraphrase of these references, no attempt has been made to individually reference each instance.]

#### A. The Area of Operations

##### 1. Climate and Weather

a. During operations conducted by the 44th Division throughout early 1945 in the Vosges Mountains, the weather was cold with temperatures plunging as low as one degree below zero. The typically cold winter weather was compounded by clear nighttime skies, which eliminated any hope of warmer temperatures through the insulating effects of the cloudy skies which usually prevail in Central Europe during the winter months. Continuing low temperatures and snow covered ground were the rule during January and early February. Despite the fact that there was little or no fog, visibility was hampered by blowing snow and snow that was disturbed by vehicular movement. The following weather and visibility data was extracted from the daily logs of the 44th Infantry Division:

Date	Weather	Visibility
1 Jan	Cold, Clear	Good
2 Jan	Fair, Freezing	Good
3 Jan	Cold, Overcast	Poor



4 Jan	Cold, Overcast, Fog	Poor to Fair
5 Jan	Freezing, Light snow	Fair to Good
6 Jan	Cold, Overcast, Snow	Poor
7 Jan	Cold, Overcast, Snow	Poor
8 Jan	Cold, Overcast, Snow	Poor
9 Jan	Cold, Overcast, Snow	Poor
10 Jan	Cold, Overcast, Snow	Fair to Good

b. Cold temperatures and snowy, frozen ground created as many problems as they solved. The frozen ground aided cross-country movement, but impeded the emplacement of barriers and the preparation of individual fighting positions. In many cases the ground was so hard that pickets could not even be driven and explosives were used to break the ground for the development of barriers and positions. While the hardness of the frozen ground eliminated problems with muddy fields and roads, in some instances, the depth of the snow caused additional movement difficulties. The clear nighttime skies and good lunar and stellar illumination throughout much of the month provided excellent visibility out to 300-400 yards. Despite cold temperatures, one may deduce that soldiers had difficulties staying dry since the trench foot incidence for the early part of January was unusually high.

c. As mentioned in the paragraphs above, the terrain was frozen. Rivers, though icy, were still flowing and created the same type of barrier that is typical of the well-controlled and regulated European water systems. Roads, though well-established, were snow-packed and were cleared only through extensive engineer efforts.

d. Little is known about the effects of the weather on equipment and supplies. However, one can assume that the 44th Division experienced many of the same logistics problems that were occurring throughout the rest of the theater of operations. Typical shortages of ammunition and fuel were no doubt exacerbated by poor road conditions and the relatively low priority of operations in the XV Corps sector.

e. Tactical operations received both the blessing and curse of the weather as indicated previously. Reports from battalion size combat teams throughout the month of January indicate that nighttime visibility was so good that soldiers in defensive positions still maintained a significant advantage over those attacking--a somewhat unusual situation, since darkness usually affords the attacker some degree of concealment. Despite generally good visibility, poor visibility often occurred at dusk. On one occasion French elements near Gros Rederching, thinking that American units which had been moving through the sector were advancing German units, fired on them because they were unable to recognize them as friendly elements. The sum effect of this particular incident was that American units were unable to relieve the French as intended, leaving portions of the division sector inadequately defended. Even though this problem was primarily one of communication, the weather played a significant role by neutralizing visual coordination efforts between forces.

## 2. Terrain

1. The most favorable routes from Lorraine to the strategic Frankfurt, Mainz, Darmstadt triangle are through that part of the Palatinate called Pfalzer Bergland, which includes the Landstuhl depression to the south and the Nahe valley in the north. This area was

of significant economic importance to the enemy. The Saarland was one of the most highly industrialized sections of Germany. Its growth was based largely on extensive coal fields and iron ore deposits. Coal mining and steel works were the main occupations. The main coal fields were near Saarbruecken and roughly oval in shape (approximately 25 miles long and 12 miles wide). Their loss would deprive Germany of 10 percent of its iron and steel capacity and a total production of 7,000,000 tons annually.

b. The "Bergland" is a moderately rolling hill country largely open or in cultivation. The terrain grows more difficult from south to north. It is essentially a drainage saddle lying between higher and more rugged barriers to the north and south and forming a gap connecting Lorraine with the Rhine valley.

c. Saarlautern and Zweibrucken, lying north and south, form the two portals to the Bergland. There is an obstacle formed around Saarbruecken by the coal fields and thick forests.

d. The Pfalzer Bergland may be considered moderately difficult country from the point of view of military action. However, it is relatively the best available passage through the natural barrier of rugged terrain from Aachen to Belfort. The terrain favored the enemy. The Seventh Army's sector was divided by a natural obstacle, the Lower Vosges Mountains, that formed a barrier ten miles wide between its troops to the east and west. There were only a few roads running east and west. Control of these roads was important to maintain command and control and move logistics.

e. The Germans used the natural obstacles of the Lower Vosges Mountains on their northward withdrawal. On the east side of the

44th Infantry Division sector, the wooded hills slope toward the Saar Valley. Along the steep roads and trails of the Vosges, the Germans prepared roadblocks and mines. On the plains west of the mountains, the Germans prepared roadblocks with mines at key intersections and bridges. North of Bitche, the forests thin out into open country and the hills become lower and spread out. Here the famed Siegfried Line, or West Wall, became an obstacle to American forces.

f. The Germans prepared three phases of defense to defend this area; first, there were roadblocks and tank trenches between the line of contact and the West Wall; second, along the West Wall itself, were communication trenches, firing positions, and additional obstacles; third, a secondary line of defense was added behind the West Wall where field fortifications were installed. Strong points were located at Saarbruecken and on the plains north of Heguenau. These barriers guarded strategic approaches to the Palatinate.

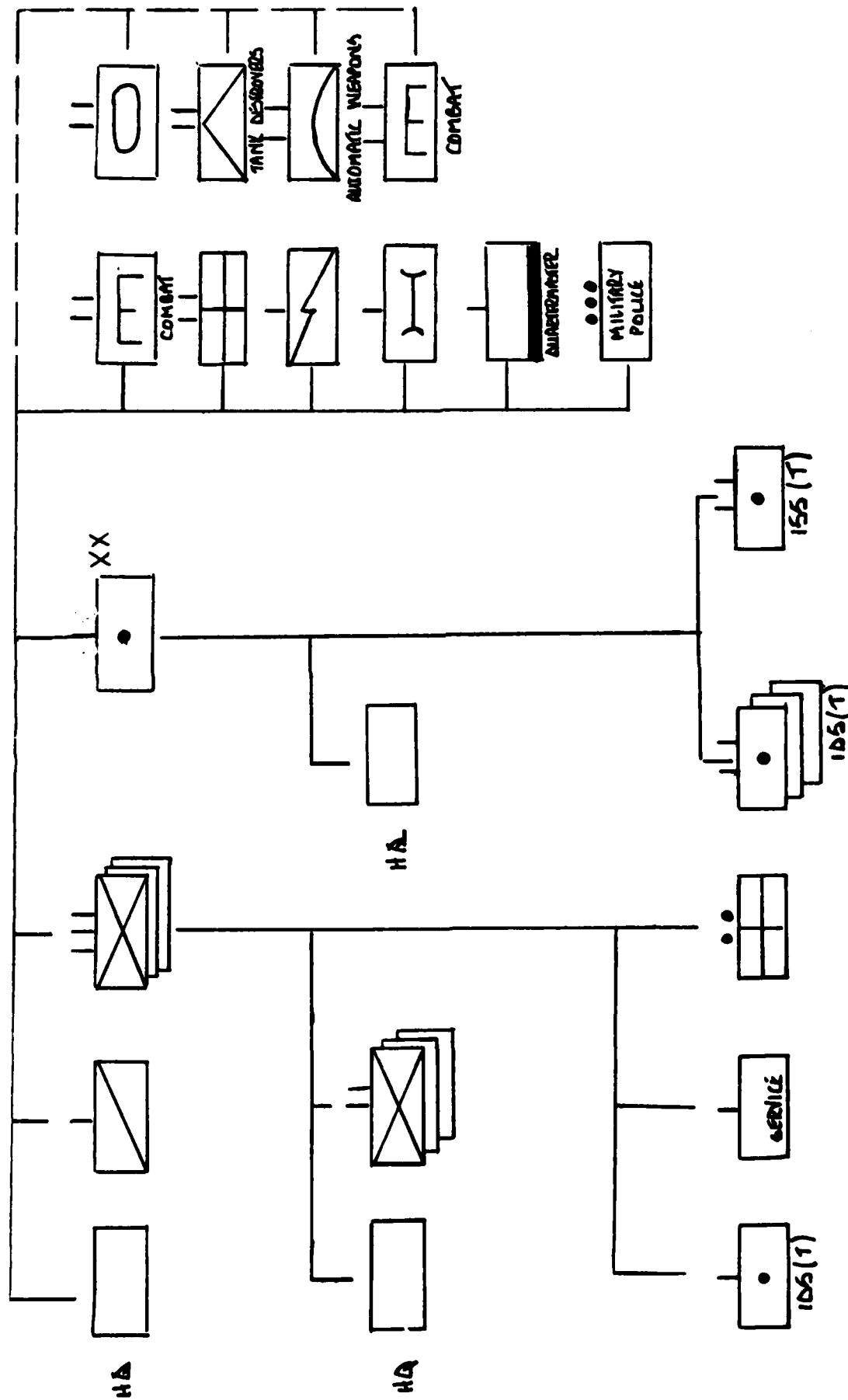
g. The major terrain features in the 44th Division's sector of the Saar-Palatinate were the Lower Vosges or Hardt Mountains and the Saarbruecken-Kaiserslautern-Worms corridor. Possession of key intersections in the Hardt Mountains controls both east-west and north-south movements along the limited road net. The Hardt Mountains, with elevations up to 2,300 feet, command the Saarbruecken-Worms corridor. The Germans considered the Saar the key to the most important transverse axis of the upper Rhine Basin. The significant terrain within the 44th Division's sector was the Blies River. The 44th Infantry Division used this natural obstacle on which to base their defense. If the division had to withdraw to positions to the south and could not cover the river with observation and fire, the Germans could bring troops

into the battle unopposed.

h. As will be discussed in greater detail in paragraph C, the objective of the German offensive was to regain the Saverne Gap. The Germans planned two attacks. The first avenue of approach was an attack from east of the Blies River to the south, to breach the Maginot Line at Rohrbach, and continue the attack south toward Phalsborg. The second avenue of approach was an attack east of Bitche, to link up with the first avenue of approach at Rohrbach, and continue the attack south to the Saverne Gap. Along Avenue of Approach 1, there are bottlenecks near Zweibrucken. Branches of the Blies River flowing east and west are not in themselves serious obstacles to military crossings; but the steep sidewall of some of the valleys impede movements into the 44th Division's area. Avenue of Approach 2, east of Zweibrucken, reaches nearly to Pirmasens across a deeply dissected plateau known as the Westrich. This area presents a pattern of flat blocks of open or cultivated plateau with deep valleys that limit broad maneuver. Avenue of Approach 1 was the best attack route for the Germans. This avenue allowed the Germans to attack using high ground to their advantage. The Blies River not only protected the flank of the attacking force, but also restricted maneuver. The terrain along Avenue of Approach 2 allowed for some dispersion by the attacker where the terrain along Avenue of Approach 1 channeled the attacking forces and restricted them to the narrow trails and roads in the mountains initially until they linked-up and continued their attack south toward their final objective. The selected avenues of approach were the best available and afforded the opportunity to use natural obstacles for cover and concealment as well as terrain suitable for observation and fire.

## B. Comparison of Opposing Forces

1. The 44th Infantry Division, activated during the early days of World War II, was fortunate to have benefited from the vigorous debate over the organization, equipment, and doctrine to be common to a type US Infantry Division. LTG Lesley McNair, building on the concepts laid down by BG Fox Conner twenty years earlier, believed that an infantry division must concentrate a maximum of combat power into offensive units, reduce overhead and staffs, and must have restrict, as much as possible, the amount of motor transport to facilitate strategic deployment. Based upon these organizational principles, the 44th Infantry Division was organized around three Infantry Regiments (the 71st, 114th, and 324th) and trained for over two years in Louisiana, Washington, and Kansas before being shipped overseas. During this extended training period and from the reports from units already in battle, it became obvious, however, that the attempts to remove and pool units required only for special situations at Corps were causing problems. Regardless of the situation, an infantry division needed tank, antitank, antiaircraft, heavier artillery (105mm and 155mm), and nondivisional engineer support to succeed in heavy combat, and by the time the 44th Infantry Division arrived in France in September, 1944, all these had been added to the division. (See Figure 1.) Although organized and trained under the watchful eye of MG Muir, the 44th Infantry Division was led to Europe under the direction of MG Spragins. After being issued their heavy equipment in the Normandy Staging Area, they traveled by train on the 10th of October to join the other elements of LTG Haislip's XV Corps in eastern France. Entering combat on the 23rd of October, the division



secured the leftmost flank of the US Seventh Army in a defensive position. The division's first real test came a month later. The Panzer Lehr Division, outflanked and trapped by Patton's Third Army to the north, had fled to the south, and, on the 25th of November, attacked violently at Sarrebourg. Heavily engaged, the 44th Division was on the verge of being overwhelmed when the 4th Armored Division, attacking from the north (and out of their division, corps, and army boundaries), destroyed this renowned German division for the second time since the Normandy landings. While unplanned, unpredicted, and fortunate as the 4th Armored's attack had been, the 44th had, nevertheless, met head-on and blunted the violent assault of the Panzer Lehr Division. The 44th would benefit from this valuable experience a month later. The 44th Infantry Division held a thin defensive line through December as attention was focused on the battle in the Ardennes to the north. When MG Spragins was medically evacuated late that month, MG W. F. Dean succeeded him as the division commander. MG Dean, who later became famous as a division commander and prisoner of war during the Korean War, was thoroughly qualified and more than capable of providing superb leadership for the division as were the regimental commanders. As December passed, the 44th was above ninety percent strength in personnel and equipment, well-supplied, well-rested, and combat tested. On 31 December, 1944, the Seventh Army occupied an 84 mile front from the Rhine River to a point a few miles west of Saarbruecken and a flank along the Rhine north and south of Strasbourg. VI Corps held positions on the right from the Rhine River to Bitche, with the 79th and 45th Infantry Divisions in the line and the 14th Armored Division (less one combat command) in reserve. On the VI Corps left flank, holding a front of



about ten miles in the Vosges, was Task Force Hudelston. On the left flank of Task Force Hudelston, XV Corps maintained a line west to within a few miles of Saarbrueken, employing (right to left) the 100th, 44th, and the 103d Infantry Divisions, with the 106th Cavalry Group on the left flank. XV Corps reserve consisted of the 12th Armored Division, Combat Command L (CCL) of the 2d French Armored Division, Combat Command A (CCA) of the 14th Armored Division, the 36th Infantry Division, and the 253d and 255th Infantry Regiments (63d Infantry Division). The remainder of the French 2d Armored Division was enroute to the army area and it, along with the 36th Infantry and 12th Armored Divisions, was earmarked as a SHAEF reserve units. The Army's Rhine flank was the responsibility of Task Force Herren and Task Force Linden, both comprised of infantry elements of the 70th and 42d Divisions, respectively, whose supporting troops had not yet arrived in the army area. The Third (US) Army was to the left of the Seventh Army, and the French First Army was on the right. The Seventh Army was operating as a part of the Sixth Army Group.

2. No definitive explanation of unit strength is available for the 44th Infantry Division except from the daily reports which were subsequently consolidated by the division historian. A review of these daily summaries indicates that unit strength was at least as good in the 44th Division as in the rest of the **XV** Corps at the beginning of the defense of the Vosges Mountain region. However, by the second or third day of the operation, the division was apparently short of personnel and the replacement system was not working very well. Units relieved from the front lines were usually relieved to other missions and subsequently placed in other sectors. This would lead one to believe that units losses were not so great as to cause units to become combat ineffective

on a large scale. In some units, however, company strength was fifty to sixty men by the end of the month of January. In infantry companies where unit strength usually approximated two hundred soldiers, these strengths were certainly significantly low. On several occasions any semblance of unit effectiveness was only maintained by assigning administrative personnel to line positions.

3. Major subordinate units of the 44th Infantry Division included the 71st Infantry Regiment, the 114th Infantry Regiment, and the 324th Infantry Regiment, all assigned units. The 255th Infantry Regiment was attached to the division from XV Corps. However, it could only be employed with the permission of the corps commander. Other attachments included the 253d Infantry Regiment, the 693d Field Artillery Battalion, the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, the 749th Tank Battalion, and the 895th AAA Battalion. The New Year found the 44th Infantry Division deployed in a defensive position extending from Hill 392 (Q6458), to Hill 373 (Q6255), to a woodline in the vicinity of Q611590, to Bliesbrucken (Q5957), along the Blies River to Sarreguimines, and finally along the Sarre River to Wolferling (Q4957). The division's total frontage was approximately 20,000 meters long. The division was disposed with three regiments abreast. The 71st Infantry occupied the right flank from the division boundary to Bliesbrucken to Hill 275 (Q5559), and the 114th Infantry occupied the left flank from Hill 275 to the division boundary. The 253d Infantry was deployed in secondary defensive positions extending west from Wittring and could be committed to the action only by the authority of the Commanding General, XV Corps. The 100th Infantry Division, to the right of the 44th, also had three regiments in the line: the 397th, 398th, and 399th, left to right, with

the attached 255th Infantry Regiment engaged in preparing defensive positions to the rear of the 71st Infantry and east from Wittling in the Maginot Line. The 103d Infantry Division to the left of the 44th was similarly employed. Armor elements of the corps reserve were performing a counter-reconnaissance screen to the rear of the forward deployed units.

4. It is difficult to present a great amount of reliable information about the opposing German force because there is not much more information available than the identification of these units. Suffice it to say that the opposing German force was comprised of elements from the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division, the 36th Volksgrenadier Division, and the 19th Infantry Division and that elements of the 17th were most frequently encountered by the 44th. It is indeed significant that the 17th bore the brunt of the action, because it had been almost inextricably involved in the war from the Normandy beaches back to their present positions. The 17th was part of the Waffen-SS and, as such, was held at the disposal of Hitler for any purpose whatever. However, by the summer of 1944, the SS divisions were normally placed under the OKH, a segment of the German high command (Western Command) and assigned to army groups as needed. Nevertheless they remained prestigious units and were given independent tasks wherever possible. In July, 1944 the 17th SS was under the control of the Seventh Army, Panzer Group West (changed in August to the Fifth Panzer Army), LXXXVI Corps, in the Normandy area. At that time they were a tough, well-trained unit with strong and experienced leadership. The 17th SS fought a stubborn defense during early July, but by the end of the month had been reduced to regimental strength and absorbed by the 2d SS Panzer Division. In

late August, the 17th was restored to nearly full strength by two newly arrived panzer-grenadier regiments, composed mostly of school personnel with no unit training. During most of September and November 1944, the 17th fought against elements of the US Third Army in the Metz area as part of the Lorraine action. Casualties were high, but replacements were still available. In fact, at one point in early November, the 17th was overstrength (15,843), but had received so many replacements that it was considered fit only for defense. Like many other panzer-grenadier divisions, they did not have the mobile and armored equipment to distinguish them from an ordinary Volksgrenadier division. In early November, the division had only four Mark IV tanks and six assault guns. The artillery regiment, however, was at full strength in personnel and equipment. The 17th was in almost continuous action from June through November, 1944, and was about worn out by the end of November. Numerous changes in command at all echelons and the constant flow of untrained troops had robbed the division of its elite character. The 17th's artillery, however, still retained a high reputation. By 4 December the division had a strength of 4,000, of which only 1,700 were classed as infantry effectives. Their strength increased during the latter part of December, and by the end of the month the 17th was considered rested, refitted, and at almost full strength. However, it is also worth noting that at this stage of the war the German Army was feeling the full impact of new, young, and comparatively untrained soldiers and that in the desperation of the moment German strategy and tactics were somewhat different from those used by more cohesive forces at the beginning of the war.

5. By 1945 the allied bombing of German factories and

industrial centers along the Ruhr and the Rhine had substantially reduced Germany's ability to support the war effort. Therefore, the issue was not so much one of technology as one of availability. The 44th, as a classic American infantry division, enjoyed motorized support superior to the German opponent. However, in the somewhat static defensive environment of the Vosges defense, that may not have played as large a role as it did in the Patton-style movement across Central Europe. It is interesting to note that, despite an assumed US superiority in mobility, elements of the 17th were able to move throughout the depth of the 44th's sector and, through penetration operations, create difficulties on the Division's flanks and in its rear areas before elements of the 44th could totally respond. One factor which appears to have severely limited the 44th's ability to react to these German advances was the lack of communication and signal equipment, particularly with respect to combined operations with French forces. As noted above, the lack of communications systems not only hampered Allied efforts to engage German forces, but also compounded difficulties when Allied units were forced to react in a manner other than that previously planned. However, none of the tactics nor doctrine employed by either of the belligerents was probably very representative of that used previously throughout the war. The Germans, in a last ditch effort to develop a salient in the American line, may have poured an unusually large proportion of their resources into this particular battle. Nevertheless, the Americans enjoyed technological as well as a numerical superiority in artillery and other indirect fire weapons. This factor gave the Allied forces a great advantage. Despite his parochial view of the war, even Patton heartily acknowledged that the artillery won the war for the Allies. At this

stage of the war, if no special efforts had been made to significantly upgrade the 17th Division's supply and equipment status, they probably suffered from critical repair parts and equipment shortages as much as any other German unit (particularly in the area of weapons systems). As one looks back on the situation with 20/20 hindsight, it appears that both the Germans and the Allies were roughly equivalent in the development of technological concepts, even though the Germans may have enjoyed a slight advantage. However, the Americans were ultimately superior because they were able to maintain a secure industrial base and had greater access to raw materials which enabled them to apply their technological advances.

6. The question of technology and its availability naturally brings up the topic of logistical and administrative support. Unfortunately, only a few specific statements were made in any of the available documents about the logistical status of the 44th Infantry Division. One can deduce from statements about the war in general that, for the most part, logistics were not a problem in this action. Apparently, barrier materials and engineer support was adequate up to the limitations imposed by the weather and climate. However, one can also assume that the artillery ammunition shortages and selective petroleum allocations prevalent throughout the rest of the field army must have been extended to the XV Corps and the 44th Division. In fact, considering the relatively low priority given to this sector of the Allied front line, one may presume that these shortages may have been more severe in the 44th than in other areas. Obviously, if there were shortages, they were overcome by careful allocation and conservation of resources or perhaps by limiting the actions taken by subordinate units.

In one instance on 4 January, over 600 rounds of 105mm artillery ammunition were fired in a four hour period, with 300 of the rounds fired in the first hour alone. That nothing in detail is mentioned of these types of problems is quite amazing since they caused hardships on the soldiers and limited combat operations; and since ammunition and petroleum shortages caused great difficulties throughout the theater. Food was apparently plentiful throughout the operation. Though local shortages existed from time to time, these were due more to distribution rather than widespread availability or supply problems. A rather humorous if not ingenious application of frontline food preparation was invented in the 324th Infantry Regiment. One of the mess sergeants decided to bring his "kitchen" to the front lines and served hot meals from a kitchen foxhole to infantryman as they ran by. As a serving was prepared, the mess sergeant would lift it up above ground level and the next soldier "in line" would dash from his fighting position, grab the meal and return to his own foxhole to eat it. Amazingly enough, this method was used for several days without incurring even one casualty. (One of several conclusions can be drawn from this: the Germans were extremely poor shots, the Americans were extremely fleet of foot, or there weren't many of the enemy interested in shooting hungry Americans.) One significant shortage that heavily impacted on command and control was the unavailability of radio batteries. Shortages of batteries occurred early in the battle and continued throughout.

7. Like so many of the other aspects of the Vosges Mountain defense, not much is specifically mentioned about the condition of the equipment or maintenance systems. Administrative systems were admittedly bad, particularly in the areas of replacement requisitioning and

training. These deficiencies probably impacted directly on operations in the Vosges during the early part of 1945 as indicated by the 44th's unit history, which states that it was late in the month of January before the Division and its subordinate regiments could implement a new system to properly handle replacements. The major deficiency regarding personnel replacement was the manner in which they were integrated into the unit at the regiment, battalion, and company levels. New soldiers were immediately sent to their assignment without appropriate training or orientation, and were expected to fill the position of their predecessors. One can imagine the difficulties that this must have created, since the Division subsequently mandated the development of regimental level training centers in order to adequately train and orient new arrivals. This problem was compounded by the fact that replacements were scarce and insufficient to replace battlefield casualties. A second aspect of the personnel shortage situation in the 44th Division may have directly contributed to its faltering administrative systems. Since replacements were in short supply, administrative personnel were used to replace critically needed combat arms soldiers. Not only did this cause a general deterioration in the combat effectiveness of the unit, as previously discussed, but it also debilitated the Division's ability to operate its administrative systems. (Perhaps this is one of the reasons why there is such a dearth of information and such a poor compilation of data about the 44th Infantry Division as a whole.)

8. While command and control may have been good as a rule, there are some indications that C2 systems were not adequate to meet the changing situation and direct all participants in the battle. For example (as briefly mentioned earlier), on 3 January 1945, French units,



which were operating with the XV Corps in the 44th Infantry Division's sector, became confused and fired on elements of the 71st Regiment as they were maneuvering through the area. Thinking that the US forces were advancing elements of the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division, the French engaged the US elements for several hours before the confusion was resolved. This incident alone seems to point out that units relied heavily on prior planning and visual battlefield coordination and that there were no command and control systems capable of keeping up with the pace of the battle even in this somewhat static defensive operation. A second situation that seems to further substantiate this conclusion is that division and even regimental headquarters were unaware of front line movement, actions and general situations for several hours at a time. The overall problem was not due to lack of planning, but strictly the inability of the commanders to adequately direct the battle, once it had begun and once changes were required, through existing communications systems.

9. The 44th Infantry Division, after a quiet Christmas period received indications that the Germans were moving large numbers of troops into their sector. As early as 26 December 1944, subordinate commanders were well aware of the enemy's movement and were beginning to fortify their positions. Down to the battalion level it was apparent that a successful breach of the American lines through the passes in the Vosges Range could ultimately split the Seventh (US) Army and cause great difficulties for the Allies. More specifically, the 44th was aware that at least two German divisions, with elements of two others, had moved from the north and were assembling to the northeast of the 71st's and 324th's regimental sectors. Local security was increased and units

placed in a state of increased alert. Air operations were quite helpful in determining the day-to-day movements of the German units and reported large numbers of tanks and infantry moving throughout the region. The validity of these reports became apparent within just a few days as the Germans began probing patrols all along the 44th's front. Despite increased awareness and security, several incidents occurred during the early stages of the battle that causes one to wonder about the general state of alertness and operational security on the part of the regimental and battalion-sized elements of the 44th Division. On one occasion a battalion commander's meeting was called to a sudden halt by the appearance of three Panzer tanks and approximately 70 infantry in the village that housed that battalion's headquarters company. Not until the tanks began firing at almost point blank range did anyone in the battalion headquarters realize their presence. On another occasion two German agents, masquerading as an American officer and sergeant entered a regimental headquarters, asked several questions, and agreed to take a lightly wounded soldier to the aid station as they purportedly continued their mission of coordination with the local population. These incidents, coupled with the more typical instances where soldiers were individually and collectively stranded on the front lines as other units pulled back, seem to support the premise that combat intelligence and operational security had some rather serious gaps.

10. Other deficiencies become evident as one reviews the application of training and doctrine by both antagonists. US forces usually employed their units with at least one fourth of their combat power held in reserve. Since the 44th was a five regiment division during the Vosges Mountains Defense, it typically held two of the five

regiments in reserve or reinforcing positions and countered German penetrations with counter attacks and artillery fire. The well-developed skill of experienced combat soldiers cannot be doubted. However, the assignment of administrative/support personnel into infantry fighting positions must certainly have degraded overall unit effectiveness, since many of them had previously seen action only in front of a typewriter. The combination of these personnel with new, untrained replacements and a general shortage of soldiers must have considerably debilitated the 44th's fighting ability. The decision to use administrative personnel to fight as infantry was a decision created by necessity. It could very well have been the type of decision that contributed to many of S.L.A. Marshall's conclusions regarding the ability and the effectiveness of the average soldier during the Second World War. If the Americans were predictable in their actions and application of doctrine, the Germans were methodically routine in theirs. Penetration was the principal element in the German's strategy, and was applied in a series of combined arms operations aimed at suspected weak points across the 44th Infantry Division front. Despite comments made in division-level after actions reports that German artillery fire was less than devastating, regimental histories seem to contradict these statements, indicating that enemy artillery fire was highly effective and at times awesome. It is difficult to determine which of these situations is factual. The division report may tend to downplay the event because the writer was probably comfortably seated ten to fifteen miles to the rear when he related the incidents. On the other hand, the regimental account may have overstated the situation, since the account was designed for publication in a yearbook-type chronicle intended for general consumption.

by all members of the regiment. Nevertheless, there is general concurrence that the Germans continued to use combined arms operations throughout this battle. Predictably, during early operations in the 44th's sector, the Germans began with extensive probing patrols and activity throughout the depth of the sector.

11. Morale in both units appeared to be high at the beginning of the battle. It is logical that, if this penetration through the Vosges was key to the establishment of a German salient, the German soldiers would most likely have been encouraged to do well and fight hard. In one account of the fighting on the second or third day of the battle, the Germans were cited as launching a vigorous attack "screaming vilifications" as they came. Another reference states that the German soldiers were either drunk or drugged--a statement that has not been substantiated and one that is somewhat without precedent (better for the 44th that they not admit such a mediocre showing against an inebriated foe). Despite the fact that the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division had seen consistent action throughout the war, there are good indications that they had recently been rested and refitted for this offensive. One statement included in a regimental history stated that the Germans had been outfitted in white winter overgarments, which may be indicative of the extent to which the German Army had gone to insure maximum advantage to their forces. However, if morale and esprit were high at the the outset of the battle, the enormous casualties incurred by the Germans throughout the battle had a significant impact. In several instances where German soldiers had a distinct advantage, they chose to surrender rather than prolong the fight. On the other hand, US morale seemed to be high and, despite some rather severe hardships and limited replacements,

remained so throughout the battle.

12. Morale may have been stimulated by good leadership on both sides. The regimental histories of both the 324th and the 71st Infantry Regiments indicate that leaders at all levels made every effort to remain involved in spite of several limitations posed by the communications systems. Casualties and fatalities on both sides included officers and in several recorded instances noncommissioned officers led by example and were decorated for their heroism.

#### C. Military Objectives

1. German documents subsequently captured reveal that the German High Command West apparently had concluded from the Allied withdrawal of bridgeheads in the Sarre area that forces on this front south from the Ardennes to the Rhine had been weakened. On 21 December, German Army Group D was directed to exploit this situation specifically through local attacks and preparations for a surprise attack to regain the Saverne Gap. Signal operations instructions issued on 25 December designated the new operation by the code word Nordwind.

2. The objective for the operation was to gain the Saverne Gap in the Phalsbourg-Saverne sector in order to annihilate Seventh Army forces in northern Alsace and to secure a juncture with the German Nineteenth Army. For this purpose two attack groups were to be readied. The first group was to attack from east of the Blies River toward the south in order to breach the Maginot Line at Rohrbach and there to make a junction with the right flank of the second group for a thrust against Phalsbourg. The second group was to attack from east of Bitche toward the south in several spearheads and then to link up with the first group, after which, depending on the situation, both were to attack either west

or south toward the Phalsbourg-Saverne line.

3. On 26 December, German High Command West informed Army Group G of the Fuehrer's request that the efforts of the right attack group be undertaken in such a way that, with cover for its left flank against Saverne, it would quickly reach the highway leading to the Phalsbourg-Saverne axis. Therefore it was necessary to move the right flank of the XIII SS Army Corps westward to Bliesbruck on the Blies River. From there the attack of Group I could be launched south of Rohrbach. The 25th Panzer Grenadier Division and the 21st Panzer Division were designated as reserves. They were to be so situated in the northern area that after the breakthrough they could be shoved rapidly south past Group I, then, theoretically, at Rohrbach.

4. As early as 22 December, it was proposed to support the operations of Army Group G by employing special forces which had been brought together under Army Group Oberrhein east of the Rhine. The commander of Third Army Group was instructed to support Operation Nordwind by shock troop tactics and to assist in the establishment of bridgeheads north and south of Strasbourg. By 26 December it was decided that the attack over the upper Rhine was not to begin until 48 hours after the initial assault. At the same time a diversionary attack to the north on the Third Army front was called off. On the next day more detailed plans were made that the Oberrhein command was to be committed only when the armored spearheads of the assault forces driving south from Bitche had arrived at the eastern exits of the Vosges in the Ingwiller-Saverne area. After having established its bridgehead across the Rhine north of Strasbourg, the Oberrhein Army Group was to aid in the destruction of Seventh Army troops, isolated in Alsace, by attempting a

junction with Groups I and II, which would be turning east from the Vosges Mountains to the Haguenau-Brumath area. The Fuehrer ordered the initial attack for Operation Nordwind to start at 2300 hours on 31 December 1944

5. The build-up of German forces to execute Operation Nordwind did not go unnoticed by the American intelligence apparatus. On 29 December the Seventh Army G-2 estimated that the Germans would launch a series of limited objective attacks for the purpose of keeping Seventh Army under sufficient pressure to prevent it from sending troops north against the Ardennes salient, or, as the next probability, that they would attack south from the Bitche-Sarreguemines area with five to eight divisions to seize the Saverne and Ingwiller passes, to fan out to destroy the Seventh Army in the Rhine Valley, and to recapture Alsace. Such a drive, it had been foreseen, might well be coordinated with a drive northward from the Colmar bridgehead and with the establishment of a Rhine bridgehead in the Gamsheim area. This intelligence build-up was responsible for the intensification of defensive preparations throughout the Army area. On New Year's Eve, General Patch, Commanding General, Seventh Army, visited the XV Corps Command Post at Fenetrange and there warned both the XV and VI Corps Commanding Generals that an enemy attack was to be expected during the early hours of New Year's Day. Official holiday celebrations were cancelled as U.S. forces prepared for the attack.

#### IV. BATTLE ACTION - DESCRIPTION

[NOTE: REFERENCES 7, 8 and 10 (see appendix 2) were the predominant sources of information for this section and were used extensively to formulate the accounts contained herein. Most of the narrative below is a paraphrase or a direct quote from the subject references and no attempt has been made to individually reference each such occurrence.]

01 JANUARY 1945 (SEE MAP 1)

The German Army struck in the closing hours of the old year with fanatical force. The 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division spearheaded one attack group, its initial objective the town of Rohrbach in the eastern Sarre Valley. It was supported by two other divisions: the 19th Infantry Division on its left and the 36th Volksgrenadier Division on its right. The 559th, 361st, and 256th Volksgrenadier Divisions comprised a second attack group and struck southward from the Bitche area in the Low Vosges Mountains. The second attack group gained little success throughout the battle in the next few days, their attack being stemmed by the 100th Infantry Division and the elements of the VI Corps to the south of XV Corps. The first group, on the other hand, attacked into the center of XV Corps against the 44th Infantry Division and achieved significant success before being halted. The 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division attack was supported by artillery, mortar, and tanks. The attacking troops shouted vilifications as they closed with the U.S. forces.

This fanatical attack was initially felt by the 2d Battalion 71st



Infantry at about 2345 hours, when five companies of enemy infantry attempted to force them off of Hill 392 in the right of the division zone. As the attack grew stronger in the early hours of the morning, the battalion was forced to withdraw. The 1st Battalion 71st Infantry also came under attack at about the same time as the enemy penetrated the Main Line of Resistance (MLR) in the vicinity of Bliesbrucken. The 114th and 324th Infantry Regiments were also under attack but were successful in holding the MLR in their zones. All U.S. units repulsed the enemy attacks with combined infantry small arms, mortar, and artillery fires. The after action reports give great credit to the artillery fires for the success of the defense.

It was evident early that the main enemy effort was being placed against the 71st Infantry Regiment. At 0055 hours the Regimental Commander ordered his reserve battalion (3-71 Infantry) to move to the south of the Bliesbruckener Wald (Q6054) for the purpose of launching a counterattack to restore the 2d Battalion's MLR. This battalion came under fire from the Bliesbruckener Wald prior to reaching their assembly area, as the enemy had already penetrated this wooded area. The 3d Battalion was then ordered to attack and clear the Bliesbruckener Wald. In the meantime, the 2d Battalion, assisted by tanks from Company A, 794th Tank Battalion (attached to the regiment), counterattacked and restored the MLR in their zone by 0600 hours. The attacks against the 71st Infantry positions continued throughout the daylight hours, supported by tanks and assault guns. The 2d Battalion was repeatedly thrown out of its positions but succeeded in regaining them each time. The 3d Battalion made slow progress in clearing the Bliesbruckener Wald.

The division's situation was deemed critical, and at 0815 hours the

1st Battalion 324th Infantry (- Company C), the reserve battalion of that regiment, was attached to the 71st Infantry Regiment for the purpose of establishing a position in the left portion of the Regimental Reserve Line. Requests were made, and permission from the Commanding General, Seventh Army was granted to use one battalion of the 253d Infantry Regiment for a similar purpose. Orders were issued to the 3d Battalion for movement and attachment to the 71st Infantry Regiment at 1215 hours. This battalion was to establish a position to the right of the Regimental Reserve Line. At 1430 it became apparent that the 3d Battalion 71st Infantry would not be able to clear the Bliesbruckener Wald without assistance, and permission was granted to use the 1st Battalion 324th Infantry for this task. The combined efforts of the two battalions were successful, and at 1930 hours the 1st Battalion 324th Infantry was released to its parent regiment's control. The attacks against the 71st, 114th, and 324th Infantry Regiments continued throughout the night of 01-02 January.

Elsewhere in the XV Corps sector, the 100th Infantry Division had come under attack shortly after midnight. The division used the attached 255th Infantry Regiment (with permission of the Commanding General, Seventh Army) to bolster its defense and was successful in holding off the enemy attack. XV Corps also placed one Regimental Combat Team of the 36th Infantry Division to the right of the 100th Division to cover a flank left exposed by the withdrawal of Task Force Hudelston, which had been surprised by the enemy attack. The 106th Cavalry Group was attacked by a strong force supported by artillery and mortar fire and was forced to withdraw approximately 2 kilometers.

Throughout the day the XII Tactical Air Force flew 204 sorties in

support of XV Corps, all in support of the three units in contact (44th and 100th Infantry Divisions and the 106th Cavalry Group). Corps and division artillery units placed observed concentrations on enemy formations, positions and command posts. Corps units were used primarily for counter-battery, harassing and neutralization missions.



02 JANUARY 1945 (SEE MAP 2)

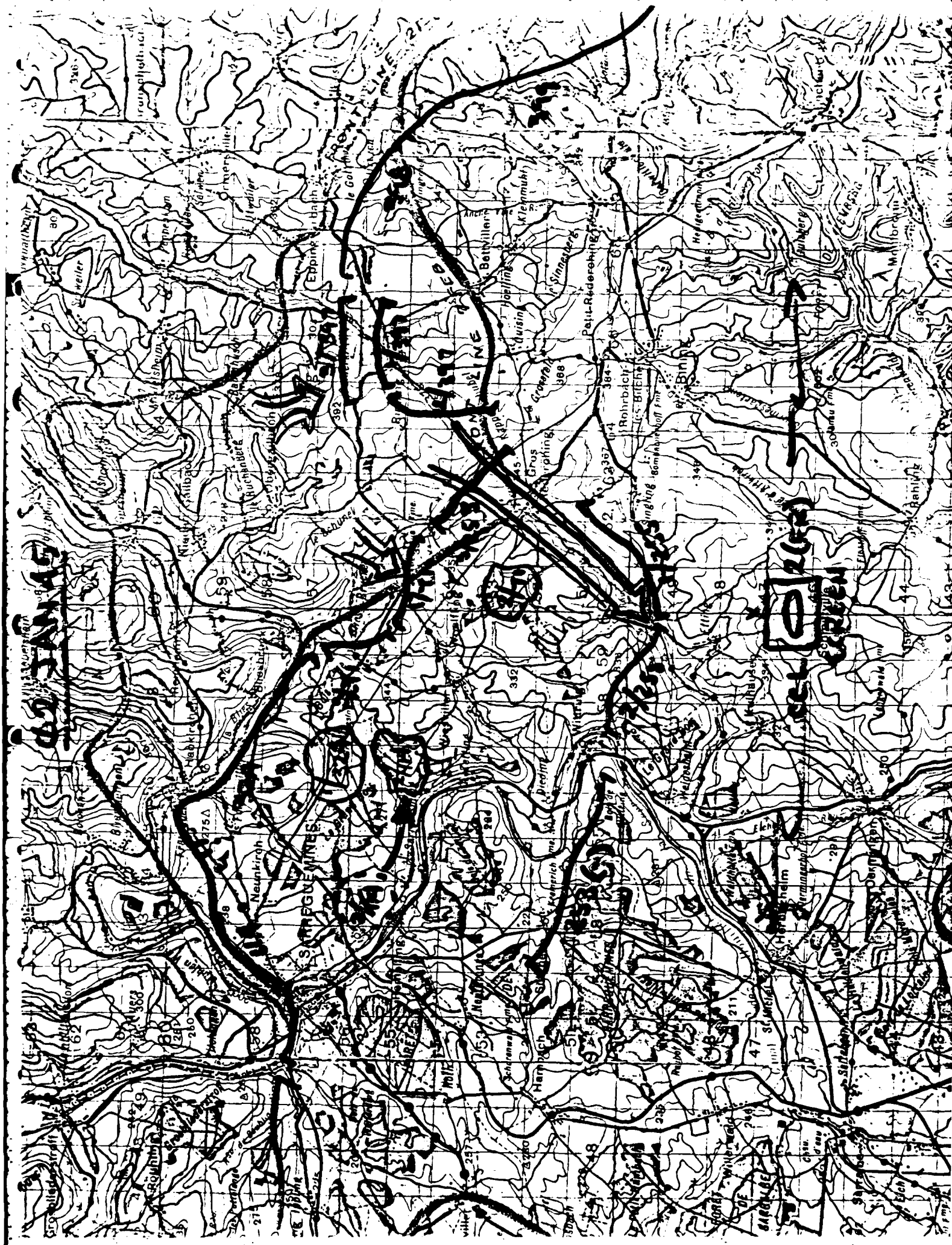
At 0135 hours the 2d Battalion 71st Infantry received an attack from its rear and right flank, forcing the battalion to withdraw. At this time the regimental commander deemed his position untenable and reported to division that he was withdrawing to his Regimental Reserve Line. This withdrawal was conducted in an orderly manner during the hours of darkness. The 2d Battalion covered the withdrawal of the 1st Battalion which occupied positions held by the 3d Battalion. The 1st and 2d Battalion then covered the 3d Battalion as they slipped to the left of the 1st Battalion, dislodging small pockets of enemy as they adjusted the lines. The 2d Battalion then withdrew into positions as the Regimental Reserve. This adjustment was completed by 0530 hours and resulted in a defensive line with the 3d Battalion 253d Infantry on the right, the 1st Battalion in the center, the 3d Battalion on the left, and the 2d Battalion in reserve.

The enemy continued to attack throughout the day but gained little ground. The 3d Battalion 253d Infantry was attacked by tanks and infantry at 1005 hours. Although the right of their line initially withdrew, counterattacks regained the original positions by 1145 hours. The 3d Battalion 71st Infantry was also attacked but held the line of resistance. At 0945 the 1st Battalion 324th Infantry (minus Company C) was attached to the 71st Infantry and the 2d Battalion 114th Infantry attached to the 324th Infantry. At 1620 hours the 2d Battalion 114th Infantry was attached to the 71st Infantry and the 1st Battalion 324th Infantry reverted to parent regiment control. The 114th Infantry continued to defend its sector and reconnoitered a new MLR. The 324th

Infantry conducted a counterattack to restore the original (1 January) MLR in its sector.

During the afternoon of 2 January, enemy pressure relaxed somewhat and the possibility of a withdrawal to the north was considered. The lull proved to be only temporary, however, as the attack was resumed after nightfall from the Bliesbruckener Wald. The 1st Battalion 71st Infantry and the 3d Battalion 253d Infantry were the object of these attacks. The attack against the 3d Battalion 253d Infantry was strong in tanks and infantry and succeeded in penetrating the lines to the towns of Gros Rederching and Achen. At Achen, the enemy force was halted by elements of the 255th Infantry Regiment occupying Maginot Line positions. This was to be the greatest penetration of U.S. lines by the attacking enemy.

Other units in the XV Corps held their defensive positions with the exception of a slight withdrawal on the right flank of the 100th Infantry Division. The 2d French Armored Division arrived in the corps zone and was assigned the mission of CCA, 14th Armored Division (conducting a counter-reconnaissance screen and preparing to counterattack). CCL took over the screen to the rear of the 44th Division in the region: Bining - Achen - Wittring.



The enemy continued to attack into the penetration of the 71st Infantry Regiment and succeeded in dislodging the 3d Battalion 253d Infantry and forcing them to withdraw approximately 2 kilometers. This enemy attack was a coordinated tank and infantry effort and by early morning it was apparent that the enemy had reached both Gros Rederching and Achen in some strength. The 3d Battalion 253d Infantry reorganized into defensive positions northwest of Gros Rederching (Q6053). The 2d Battalion 114th Infantry, attached to the 71st Infantry, conducted a counterattack to restore the line of resistance in the early daylight hours. In spite of heavy artillery and small arms fire they were able to seize positions in the vicinity of Bellevue Farm (Q6155). At 1015 hours the 2d Battalion 71st Infantry, in reserve, was ordered to prepare to counterattack.

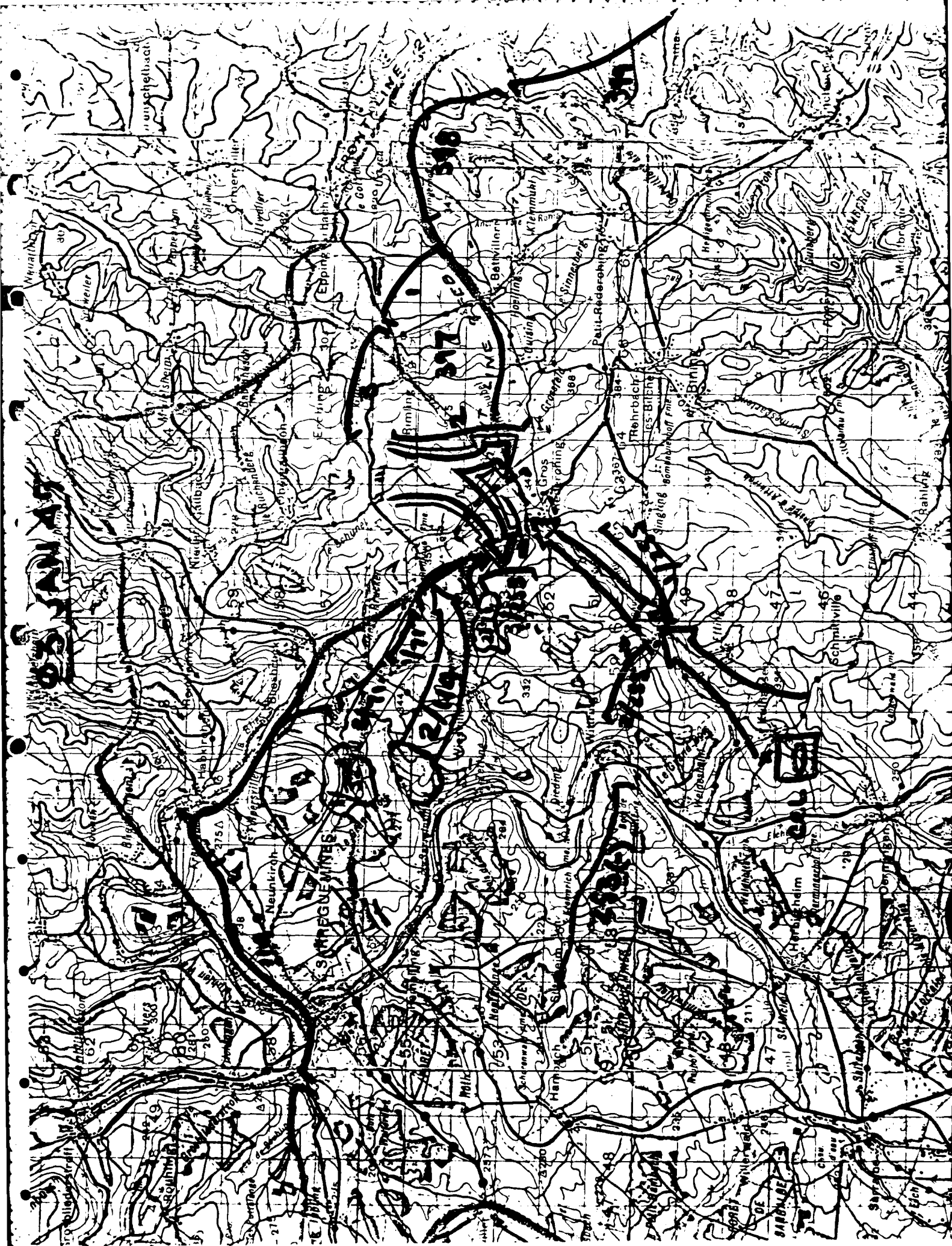
In the meantime, the enemy penetration to the town of Achen had been stopped by the 1st and 2d Battalions 255th Infantry which were attached to the 100th Infantry Division and deployed in defensive positions in the Maginot Line at Achen. At 1030 hours CCL of the 2d French Armored Division supported by infantry elements from the 255th Infantry, attacked north from Kalhausen to eliminate the enemy penetration. The attack was successful in clearing the enemy from Achen by the next day. At 1230 hours, one Task Force of CCL continued the attack northward to clear the enemy from Gros Rederching. This task force entered the town at 1630 hours, meeting medium resistance.

In the afternoon 2d Battalion 71st Infantry was diverted from its planned counterattack to restore the lines of the 3d Battalion 253d



Infantry. Instead the battalion was directed to attack to the south and relieve the task force of CCL 2d French Armored Division holding Gros Rederching. As elements of CCL pushed to the north of Gros Rederching in the gathering dusk, they encountered the 2d Battalion which was moving to relieve them. Because of the poor visibility, identity of the approaching infantry troops was not established and the French tanks opened fire on them, whereupon the 2d Battalion withdrew to the north.

Elsewhere in the XV Corps sector the only other enemy attack was made against the 397th Infantry Regiment to the right of the 44th Division. This attack was marginally successful, but the regiment managed to regain their losses and hold the original line. XV Corps deployed the 36th Infantry Division into the zone of the 100th Infantry Division to prepare for attack and the 103d Infantry Division was directed to effect relief of the 106th Cavalry Group in the left of the Corps sector. Other armored units continued their counter-reconnaissance screen missions.



04 JANUARY 1945 (SEE MAP 4)

The enemy made one last attempt to gain and hold the town of Gros Rederching on this date. German soldiers manning American tanks attacked the task force of CCL 2d French Armored Division located in the town and succeeded in pushing them back to positions along the ridgeline at Singling. These enemy established a roadblock near Q6252 which repulsed the 2d Battalion 71st Infantry in their attempt to relieve the town in the early morning hours (0030). There is a question as to whether the tanks that fired on this battalion the previous night were in fact French or German troops. In any case, at 0447 the 2d Battalion was ordered to move toward Achen. Clearing small pockets of enemy resistance as it moved, the battalion cleared the woods at Q5951 by 1710 hours when it reverted to regimental reserve and moved to an assembly area at Q5650. The 3d Battalion 253d Infantry established a roadblock, attacked and seize positions west of Gros Rederching and began patrolling into the town. The 2d Battalion 114th Infantry extended its lines as shown on MAP 4.

The 71st Infantry Regiment, supported by two battalions from other regiments, had been fighting the onslaught since midnight of 31 December-1 January, a period of 3 days. In order to provide some relief to this beleaguered regiment, the 44th Division obtained permission to employ the 253d Infantry Regiment (-) in the zone of the 114th Infantry Regiment to free this regiment for a counterattack and subsequent relief of the 71st Infantry. The 114th sector had been quiet since the initial attack early on 1 January and they were relatively rested, with the exception of the 2d Battalion, which had been attached to the 71st

Infantry. This relief was effected by 1905 hours without incident, and control of the sector passed to the 253d Infantry at 2200 hours. The 114th Infantry (-) moved to an assembly area south of Sarreguemines and prepared to move to the sector of the 71st Infantry the next day.

The appearance of the strong armor forces of CCL 2d French Armored Division in the attack on Achen and Gros Rederching the previous day apparently convinced the German High Command that further efforts to execute Operation Nordwind were fruitless. The entire XV Corps front, except for the one attack at Gros Rederching, was quiet. U.S. units patrolled, in an attempt to maintain contact with the withdrawing enemy forces, with little success.



05 JANUARY 1945 (SEE MAP 5)

Following Operational Instructions #20 issued 041900Jan45, the 114th Infantry moved from its assembly area south of Sarreguemines with the 3d Battalion closing in an assembly area in the vicinity of Wiesviller at 1015 hours. The 1st Battalion moved by motor through Dieding(05551) to Achen to Gros Rederching late that evening(2200). The Regiment assumed attachment of the 71st Infantry(-) and the 3d Battalion 253d Infantry at 1200. The rest of the day was spent in reconnaissance for the attack planned for 0800 on 6 Jan. At 2000 the order for the attack was issued to all units under the control of the 114th Infantry.

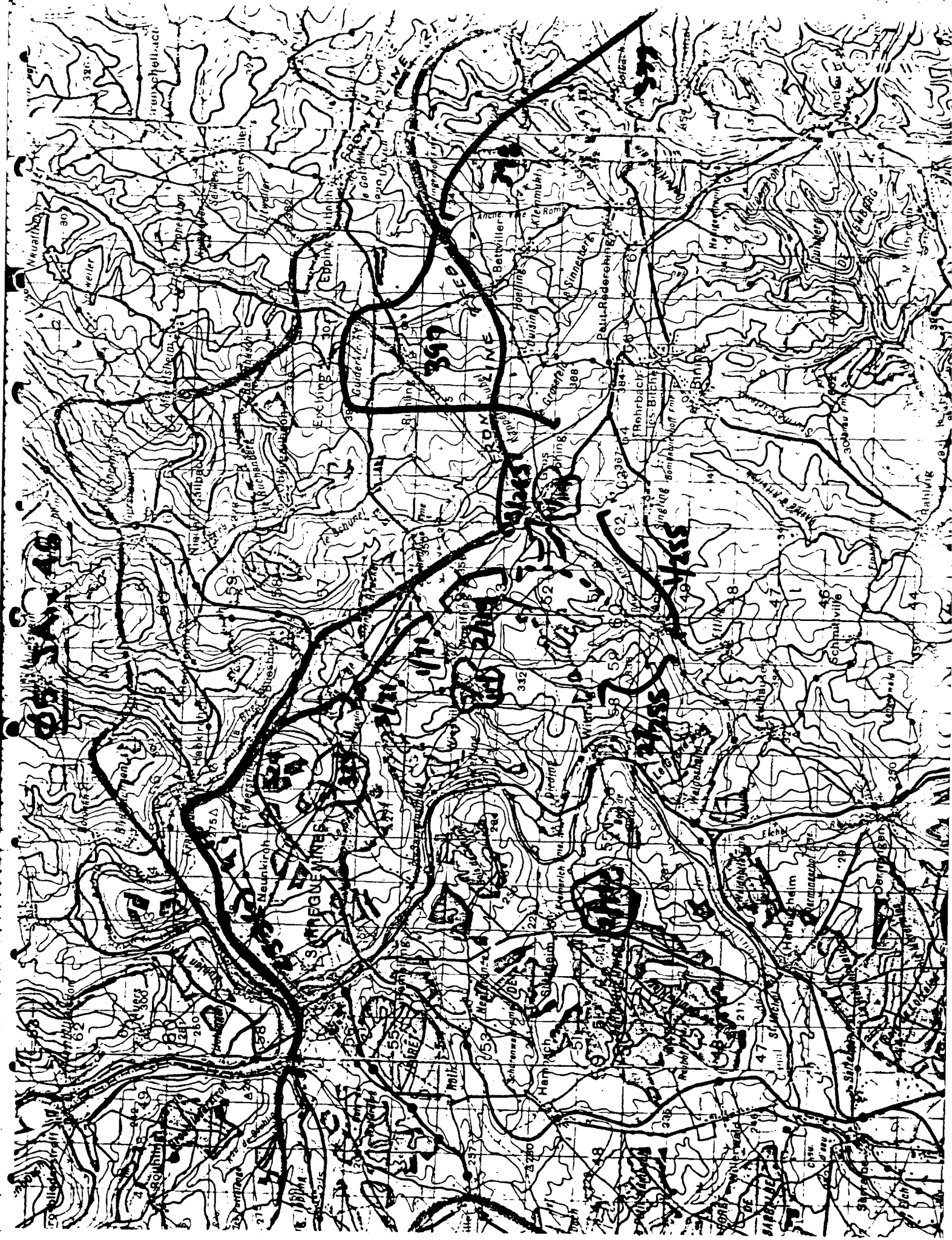
The 71st Infantry(-) prepared for the arrival of the 114th Infantry by moving the 2d Battalion from reserve positions to the vicinity of St. Michel. Defense of the sector was continued with the 1st and 3d Battalions in the left portion of the sector and the 3d Battalion 253d Infantry securing Gros Rederching and the high ground to the north of Gros Rederching.

The 324th Infantry was engaged in mopping up Frauenberg with the 3d Battalion, using combined tank/infantry teams to clear the town in about one hour. The troops worked gallantly against considerable enemy resistance and, through closely coordinated tank fires, the foot troops broke the enemy pocket and forced them to withdraw. Pursuit was attempted, but enemy mortar fire forced abandonment of this course of action. The remainder of the day was spent in sporadic action which included the rescue of three airmen who had parachuted to safety in front of our lines. Finally, close coordination was effected with the 3d

Battalion 114th Infantry in their plans for the attack on 6 January.

The 253d Infantry(-) spent the period organizing and improving their new positions and familiarizing themselves with the sectors and fire plan.

The remainder of XV Corps sector was relatively quiet except for a small arms fight in the sector of the 36th Infantry Division on the far left. Elements of the 2d French Armored Division were extended in a reconnaissance screen eastward from Le Grand Bois - Achen - Singling - to Bining.





The sky was overcast with a light snow falling into the cold morning. The 114th Infantry prepared to initiate its attack to regain the original Division MLR in the 71st Infantry sector. The attack began exactly on schedule at 0800 with three battalions on line (1st, 2d, and 3d from right to left) with the exception of some tanks that could not reach the line of departure from their assembly areas in time to be employed due to the icy and snowy roads. All three battalions immediately ran into strong enemy resistance, resulting in fighting characterized by determined defense and continual counterattacks by the enemy throughout the day.

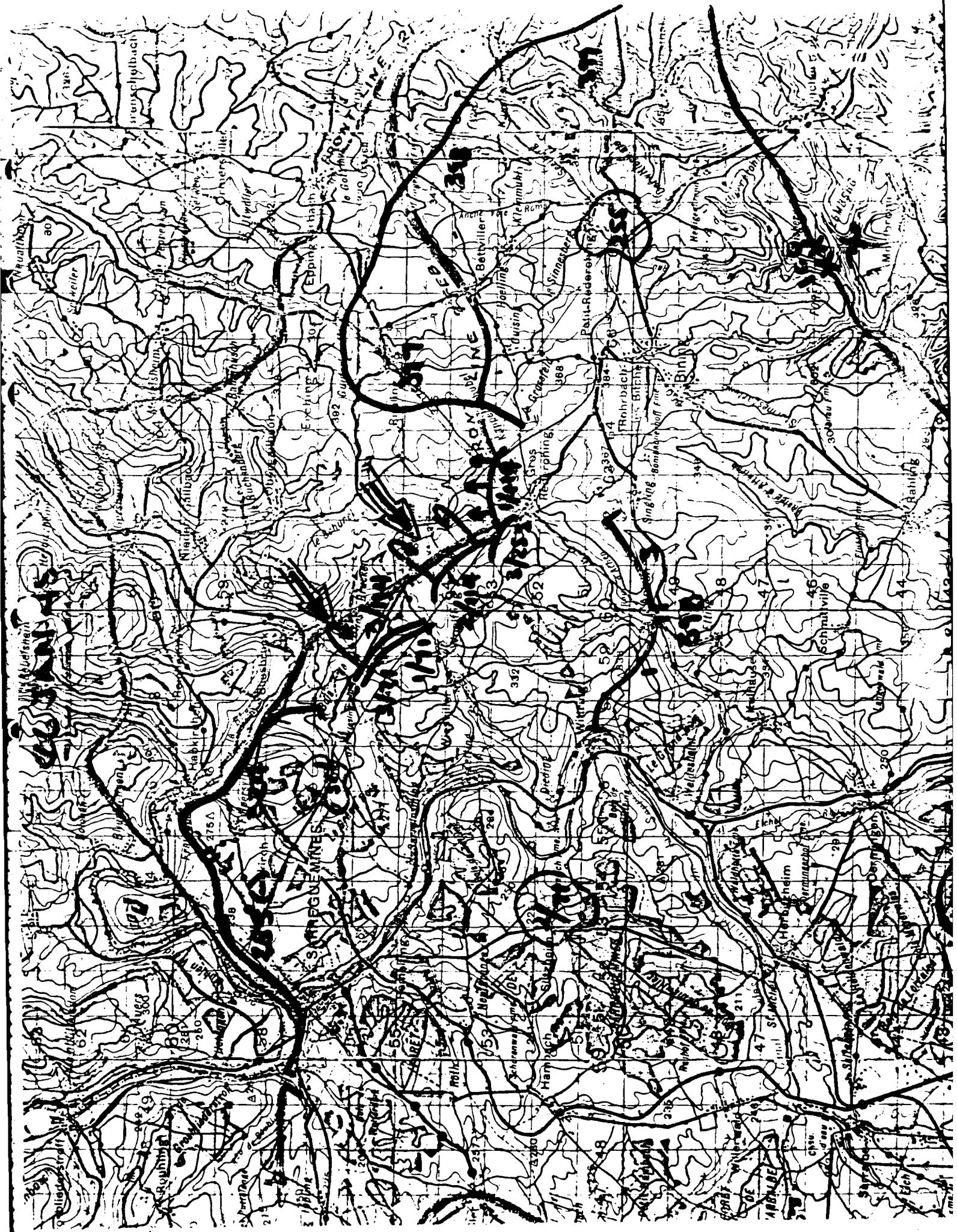
The 1st Battalion advanced to its initial objective in the vicinity of Gros Rederching against strong small arms resistance prior to noon, but was unable to advance further due to a threat by enemy tanks and infantry on its left flank. This threat was broken up during the latter part of the day by artillery fire. In its advance the 2d Battalion immediately encountered stiff resistance from small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar and artillery fire. Elements reached the edge of the woods near Q6155 and Brandelfingerhof Farm (Q6154) where heavy automatic weapon and artillery fire prevented further advance. During the afternoon a determined enemy counterattack, estimated at a battalion of infantry supported by several tanks, forced the battalion to withdraw to its original positions. The 3d Battalion passed through the 1st and 2d Battalions 71st Infantry and advanced against stiff enemy resistance to the vicinity of Q5956 by 1200. At 1300 the enemy counterattacked with an estimated reinforced company supported by numerous halftracks, and after

stiff fighting the leading elements of 3d Battalion were forced to withdraw to their line of departure. The battalion reorganized and attempted to advance several times, but stiff and determined enemy resistance prevented any appreciable forward movement. At the close of the day, the 3d Battalion was in the process of completing the relief of the 1st and 3d Battalions of the 71st Infantry.

The 1st and 3d Battalions 71st Infantry, attached to the 114th Infantry, remained in defensive positions throughout the day and fired in support of the attack of the 114th Infantry. At 1300 the bulk of the 3d Battalion 253d Infantry (also attached to the 114th Infantry) moved from the vicinity of Gros Rederching to a support position on the right of the 2d Battalion 114th Infantry.

The 324th Infantry, in the center of the division sector, continued to occupy and improve its defensive positions. During the day this battalion provided support and firepower to the 114th Infantry attack while receiving sporadic artillery fires. The 253d Infantry (-) saw little activity and also continued to improve its defensive positions.

Elsewhere in the XV Corps sector units continued to occupy, organize, and reinforce their sectors with little enemy activity other than some company strength raids and patrols conducted by the 103d Infantry Division.



07 JANUARY 1945 (SEE MAP 7)

This day began cold and overcast and transitioned to snow with poor visibility in the late afternoon. The division continued to occupy and improve its defensive positions with the front lines making only minor adjustments. Contact with the enemy was maintained through active patrolling and infrequent opportunities for long range visibility. One ineffective minor attack was made in the sector of the 114th Infantry. Sporadic small arms, mortar, and artillery fire was received throughout the day.

The 114th Infantry, with the 1st and 3d Battalions 71st Infantry and the 3d Battalion 252d Infantry attached, completed relief of elements of the 71st Infantry by 0130 and maintained its positions throughout the day. At 0400 the 2d Battalion received a counterattack in the vicinity of Q6055 by an estimated company of infantry which was repulsed at 0520 by concentrated artillery and mortar fire. The 3d Battalion 71st Infantry reverted to regimental control at 1100.

The 324th Infantry continued to occupy, hold and improve its line. There was no enemy infantry contact and sporadic small arms and artillery fires were experienced throughout the day. Company B, 749th Tank Battalion, attached to the 324th Infantry, had no action.

The 253th Infantry, minus its 3d Battalion, continued its preparations of main defensive positions and reconnoitered for positions in the Regimental Reserve Line(RRL). There was no contact with the enemy during this period. Company A, 749th Tank Battalion, was not committed and had no contact with the enemy.

The 71st Infantry, less the 1st Battalion(still attached to the 114th Infantry), engaged in rehabilitation activities and reconnoitered for a new Main Line of Resistance(MLR). The 3d Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 114th Infantry at 1100 and moved to the vicinity of ST MICHEL(Q5246).

Throughout the day division and corps artillery units fired counterbattery missions, engaged targets of opportunity, and attacked suspected enemy assembly areas to the division front. Division engineer assets marked minefields, improved trafficability, and prepared and guarded obstacles throughout the day.



08 JANUARY 1945 (SEE MAP 7)

The weather was cold and overcast with periodic snowstorms preventing long and short range observation, especially in the late afternoon. Overall, this was another quiet day. Several units were relieved by others and front line units spent the day improving positions, rehabilitating their forces, and patrolling. All units received sporadic artillery fire and periodically directed fires against long-range targets of opportunity. The only direct enemy contact was a small enemy raid conducted in the 114th Infantry sector.

The 114th Infantry continued to improve its positions and conduct active patrolling. At 0330 an enemy raid by 10-20 men in the 2d Battalion sector with a group of 10-20 men was repelled by artillery and small arms fire. The 1st Battalion 71st Infantry, attached to the 114th Infantry, was relieved in position by the 2d Battalion 71st Infantry.

The 324th Infantry experienced some small arms fire in the vicinity of Bliesbrücken(Q5858), but had no direct contact with the enemy during the day. All battalions remained in their previous positions throughout the day.

The 253d Infantry (minus the 3d Battalion still attached to the 114th Infantry) improved its positions and continued normal outpost duties. The day was generally quiet.

The 71st Infantry occupied positions in the MAGINOT LINE and continued its program of training and rehabilitation. The 1st Battalion of the 71st Infantry was relieved from attachment to the 114th Infantry at 0945 by the 2d Battalion 71st Infantry in the vicinity of Wiesviller. The 1st Battalion then marched and motored to St. Michel, closing at 1205.

Division troops continued their specialized missions throughout the day. The 44th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop continued guarding bridges and patrolling. Division artillery performed generally harassment missions and supported the 100th Infantry division during the attack in their sector near Rimling. The 63d Engineer Battalion continued to improve mobility throughout the division sector.



The weather was cold with overcast skies, snow, and poor visibility. There were no major changes in unit dispositions with front line units continuing patrolling, harassing fires, and improvement of positions. A heavy snowstorm in the late afternoon of the 9th precluded observation of enemy activities. The enemy, although not taking any offensive action, did seem more active and fought several determined defensive engagements. Moderately heavy artillery and mortar fire was received across the front throughout the period.

The 1st and 2d Battalions of the 114th Infantry continued the defense of their sectors, improved their positions, and effected relief of the 3d Battalion 253d Infantry. On 9 January the 3d Battalion 114th Infantry attacked at 1400 after a 5 minute artillery preparation to seize the railroad track from Q5956 to Q6055. Because of heavy enemy fire, and the inability of the battalion to make a concentrated effort in one sector, it was forced to withdraw.

Units of the 324th Infantry occupied, held, and improved the positions of the previous period. Prior to daylight active patrolling resulted in a number of engagements with enemy soldiers. On 9 January elements of the 2d Battalion occupied a temporarily vacated enemy position near Q5956 and succeeded in capturing 14 prisoners and killing 3 enemy who attempted to reoccupy the position. The information furnished by the prisoners captured there, proved valuable in the planning of future operations against the enemy in the 2d Battalion sector.

On 9 January the 71st Infantry discontinued its program of rehabilitation and training and moved to new positions in preparation for

establishment of rear defensive areas along the new main line of resistance, vicinity Q4352 to Q4451. The 2d Battalion at Q5853 was attached to the 114th Infantry and employed on line in their sector.

The 253d Infantry, minus its 3d Battalion, continued to work on defensive positions until 10 January when it reverted to its' parent regiment's control and moved to a reserve position to the rear. Enemy activity was light in the regimental sector during this period.

Divisional troops continued support operations as in previous periods. Additionally, engineers prepared demolitions for and guarded four bridge sites, numerous craters, and several abatis to assist with countermobility operations during establishment of the new main line of resistance(MLR).

At 1800 hours, 9 Jan, Operations Instructions 96, XV U.S. Corps, announced the new plan for employment of Seventh Army. Division planners began to coordinate the minor boundary adjustments and changes to the task organization which were required by the plan. Issuance of this new Corp's order and a continuing lack of initiative by enemy forces signaled the end of Operation NORDWIND and, more importantly, the end of the last German offensive in the Seventh Army's sector.

09 JAN 45



#### V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION

The 44th Infantry Division Battle of the Vosges Mountains, 1-10 January 1945, was one of many significant actions which contributed to the defeat of the German offensive during the Battle of the Bulge. The inability of the German forces to penetrate the Allied lines in the 44th and 100th Infantry Division sectors, and the success of 3rd Army at Bastogne signaled a defeat for Hitler's last offensive effort to defeat the Allied forces which were about to overrun Germany. The Battle of the Vosges Mountains was a successful Allied defensive operation accomplished with available forces, thereby averting the diversion of additional combat power from the critical action underway at Bastogne. Although initially surprised by German use of mass concentration and use of combined arms, the Allies were able to regain all ground initially lost and then hold the line against further German offensives. Even though clearly the victors, the Allies did not subsequently assume the offensive due to lagging logistical support and the priority being given to the actions of 3rd Army to the North.

If the German Army had succeeded in the attempt to push the two pronged attack through Allied lines to the north and south of Bitche, the Allied effort to push through France into Germany would have been delayed. Given Allied air superiority and the logistical support and mobility difficulties of the German forces at that time, the German force would not have been able to drive a significant wedge into the Allied forces. However, victory in the Battle of the Vosges Mountains or any of the other similar actions along Germany's western front could have given

Hitler the time to perfect the technical breakthroughs he counted on to give Germany a tactical and strategic advantage. In retrospect the Battle of the Vosges Mountains provides a number of tactical lessons, some of which foretold the shape of future tactics of modern armies.

The 44th Infantry Division demonstrated the use of the offense as a part of the defense. For example, on 9 January the 324th Infantry Regiment conducted active patrolling (as was their custom) and obtained a great amount of intelligence regarding enemy dispositions and intentions. This intelligence was extremely useful in preempting enemy initiatives. As a principle, this use of active patrolling (offensive action) during conduct of the defense denies surprise and provides excellent intelligence collection. The 44th Infantry Division showed itself to be an excellent combat unit through its performance of unglamorous, yet basic, combat disciplines.

Use of reserves at all levels was appropriate and timely. The use of CCL (2nd French Armored Division) as a Corps counterattack force can be credited as the key to the successful U.S. defense. Reserves were maintained at all levels and used to reinforce or counterattack. At division level the ability to move the reserve units (mobility) is essential, and adequate use of this capability was demonstrated. This rapid displacement of reserve forces for employment at the critical place and time was the product of an effective command and control system.

The commitment to training exhibited by the 44th Infantry Division has become a part of Army doctrine, albeit a policy which must continually be relearned and reinforced. Specifically, on 8 and 9 January the 71st Infantry Regiment was pulled out of the line for rehabilitation and training. Although the soldiers were certainly in

need of rest and a break from battle, the chain of command properly recognized the value of continuous training even during combat operations. This training discipline became particularly useful when relatively untrained and inexperienced individual replacements had to be incorporated into the unit.

This battle again demonstrated the superior fire direction procedures developed by the U.S. Field Artillery during World War II. In particular, the U.S. artillery's ability to quickly and accurately mass fires across a broad front was credited with blunting and disorganizing numerous German attack formations. In addition, U.S. forward observers had, by this time, developed an intimate working relationship with their supported maneuver forces, and indirect artillery fires were thoroughly integrated in all defensive plans.

The winter weather of this time of year taught hard lessons which have been learned and relearned before and since. The snowy, icy conditions adversely affected conduct of the defense. The ground was frozen creating great difficulty in preparing individual and crew served weapons positions. Icy roads caused movements to fall behind plans, as in the delay of tactical vehicles in the counterattack of 6 January. Operational effectiveness of artillery and air missions were greatly degraded due to the light snow that fell during the battle. Artillery observers were frequently unable to observe midrange and distant targets, and there was no chance to employ close air support missions due to visibility even though the support was readily available. The weather caused many engineer assets to be diverted to the task of keeping roads and bridges open (mobility operation), and were therefore not always available to prepare critical defensive positions for countermobility and

survivability.

Throughout the course of the battle administrative personnel were used extensively as front line combat replacements, causing two major problems. First, the administrative capability of the unit was severely degraded, affecting everything from casualty reporting and replacement operations to historical records. Second, the administrative personnel were not trained or experienced in actual combat skills and were marginally effective when required to fill front line positions. Current Army programs to assure all soldiers are trained and current in soldierly skills are intended to rectify this problem. Emphasis on the importance of casualty reporting and replacement operations is incorporated into ARTEPs and FTX and CPX operations.

Distribution of subsistence was a major lesson learned for the 44th Infantry Division and the other units fighting in France. Except in isolated cases, rations were available in theater, but were inequitably distributed. Theater-wide shortages of Class III and certain types of Class V highlight the importance of managing limited materiel assets to provide prioritized distribution to the critical sector. The 44th Infantry Division benefited from the rapid delivery of the critical supplies which were available through the "Red Ball Express". These transportation management lessons were subsequently applied in Korea and Vietnam with considerable success.

APPENDIX 1

TROOP LIST - 44TH INFANTRY DIVISION

71st Infantry Regiment

114th Infantry Regiment

324th Infantry Regiment

253d Infantry Regiment (Attached)

494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (Attached)

693d Field Artillery Battalion (Attached)

749th Tank Battalion (Attached)

776th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Attached)

895th AAA AW Battalion (Mobile) (Attached)



## APPENDIX 2

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