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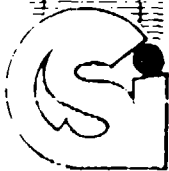
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HUERTGEN FOREST

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Huertgen Forest
Offensive, Deliberate Attack, Forest
4th Infantry Division
16 November 1944

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Fort Leavenworth

May 1984

ABSTRACT

COMMON REFERENCE: Huertgen Forest (4th Infantry Division)

TYPE OPERATION: Offensive, Deliberate Attack, Forest

OPPOSING FORCES: US: 1st (US) Army
VII Corps V Corps
1st Inf Div 28th Inf Div
4th Inf Div 8th Inf Div
104th Inf Div CCR 5th AD

German: 5th SS Panzer Army
7th Army
LXXXI Corps
3 Panzer Grenadier Div
12th Volks Grenadier Div
47th Volks Grenadier Div
275th Div
116th Panzer Div

SYNOPSIS:

The VII (US) Corps, 1st Army attacked 16 November 1944 with 1st Inf Div, 4th Inf Div, 104th Inf Div, and CCR 5th AD to clear Huertgen Forest and the path of 1st Army to the Roer River. After heavy fighting, primarily by the 4th Infantry Division, VII Corps' attack ground to a halt. V Corps was committed on 21 November 1944. Attacking with 8th Inf Div, and CCR 5th AD, the V Corps managed to capture Huertgen after stiff fighting on 28 November 1944.

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SEE ALSO APPENDIX B.

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Section I

Introduction to the Battle of Huertgen Forest

Huertgen Forest (4th Infantry Division)

On 11 September 1944, the 4th Infantry Division, faced with chronic bad weather, a crippled ground transport system (which was still recovering from the mad dash from Normandy), drastically curtailed air support, a hostile terrain, dense forest, and a tenacious stubborn enemy, set about accomplishing its given mission, "... clearing the Huertgen Forest between Schewenhuetten and Huertgen and continue to the Roer River south of Duren" (McDonald, 1963, p. 431).

The Siegfried Line Campaign, of which the Huertgen became a slug match once all units became committed, was reminiscent of battles fought in WW I. Small unit leadership became the norm as division commanders had little opportunity to influence the battle in any decisive manner. Sixteen days after the start of the November offensive (the date the first unit of the 4th Infantry Division fought in the Huertgen Forest), the 22nd Infantry Regiment was all the way through the forest, but had suffered such casualties that neither the 22nd nor the 4th was able to continue its mission. The division lost 432 dead, 255 missing, 4,153 battle casualties and 2,000 other injuries.

Beginning 3 December, a regiment of the 83rd Division began relief of the 22nd Regiment. During the next eight

days, the entire 4th Division was moved from the Huertgen Forest and was re-established in Luxembourg---just in time for the counteroffensive in the Ardennes.

The units of the 4th Division involved in the battle for the Huertgen Forest were the 8th Infantry Regiment, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 12th Infantry Regiment, and the 5th Armored Division's Combat Command R (attached from V Corps). These units were pitted against units of the German LXXIV Corps: 275th Infantry Division, relieved by the 344th Infantry Division on 21 November 1944, which, in turn, was relieved by the 353rd Infantry Division on 27 November 1944; the 116th Panzer Division; and Corps reserve.

Key US officers involved in the battle were General Omar Bradley, Twelfth Army Group Command; General Courtney Hodges, First Army Command; General J. Lawton Collins, VII Corps Command; and Major General Barton, 4th Infantry Division Command.

Section II

The Strategic Setting

Huertgen Forest (4th Infantry Division)

The conclusion of World War I left Germany with reduced national territory, a damaged economy, huge national debts, and a personal sense of national shame and anger fostered by the restriction on German nationalism and development created by the Versailles Treaty. Severe economic problems, although affecting all of Europe, were seen by Germans as unfairly affecting them, and as caused by conditions imposed at the end of WW I.

The German nation, feeling oppressed by the victors of WW I, deprived of any meaningful influence in their own future or that of Europe in general, was a perfect setting for the National Socialist Party. The Nazis promised an end to economic deprivation, but more importantly, a way to throw off the oppression imposed by other nations, and to regain national pride and world power. Few recognized (admitted) the darker side of National Socialist Party goals and methods.

The chronically perceived national need for greater living space (Lebensraum), coupled with an unspoken need to reassert German purpose and place, formed a basic motivation for national military expansionism. Whether these needs were real, only perceived, or were politically manufactured to gain public support and justification for less acceptable objectives was not the issue. The fact is

that during the period 1939-1945 the German national policy (war aim) was military expansionism to achieve Lieberstraum, throw off the oppressive restrictions from WW I defeat, rid the nation of unwanted/subversive elements, and prove German superiority and might to the world. The resulting international tragedy was World War II.

During the war, Germany headed a coalition of warring nations referred to as the Axis Powers. Besides Germany, the other major active members were Italy and Japan. Standing against the Axis was an eventual world wide coalition often referred to as the Allies. By the time of the Huertgen Forest Battle, the major Allied nations were the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France. A multitude of other nations actively joined the Allied cause. Among them were Canada, Australia, what are now referred to as the Western European nations, China, and numerous other nations.

Axis war aims, in broad terms, generally paralleled those of the senior partner, Germany. The Italian Fascist government of Mussolini was bound to the Axis more by political and philosophical agreement, rather than any realistic national aim for expansionism and greatness. Japan, on the other hand, as an island state, shared German

national goals to control trading markets and to secure sources of raw materials and oil. The Japanese internal conflict between factions for militaristic expansion versus peaceful development was won by the militarists. Thus, the two strongest Axis powers, Germany and Japan, sought the tool of military expansionism to achieve world power status, access to secure raw materials, and expanded national boundaries with a view to empire building.

The Allied nations sought a return to the status quo. For individual and joint, economic, political, philosophical, business, and religious reasons, Allied war aims were simply to stop Axis expansionism, return geographic and political conditions to the status quo, and secure a lasting peace. Due to the Axis all-or-nothing war policies, the resultant Allied approach was for total defeat of the Axis Powers. American insistence insured that nothing less than unconditional surrender by each Axis Power would be acceptable for a successful conclusion to World War II.

The principal events leading up to the battle of the Huertgen Forest began in September 1944 when the Allies, after landing at Normandy and fighting their way across France, began to close on the German western border. The First US Army, of which the 4th Division was a part, ran

into the fortified belt and coal mining area around the city of Aachen, which lies in, and obstructs, this historically famous gateway into Germany. There, the Americans became entangled and bogged down, while wider opportunities slipped away. When they reached the German frontier the eighty mile stretch between the Aachen area and the Metz area was covered by a mere eight enemy battalions, strung out across the hilly and wooded country of the Ardennes. By mid-September, the Germans had thickened their defense all along the front. The next month was spent by the First US Army in grinding down the defenses of Aachen. Clearing these pockets proved a painfully slow process, which was not completed until early in November.

Meanwhile the German build-up along the front covering the Rhine was progressing faster than that of the Allies, despite Germany's inferiority in material resources. In mid-November (the period of the battle herein reported) a general offensive was launched by all six Allied armies on the Western Front.

The breaching of the western German border by the allies in force was the beginning of the end for Germany and a repeat of World War I. While Germany's performance in WW I differed from that of WW II in mobility and mechanization,

battles in both wars were fought over the same terrain, within Europe, with the same eventual results. German defeat in both wars resulted from the superiority in the number of personnel and equipment/resources of the Allies arrayed against Germany, as well as overly optimistic German war goals, and unsound national leadership in the later stages of the wars.

Section III

The Tactical Situation

Huertgen Forest (4th Infantry Division)

Area of Operation.

Climate and Weather.

The period prior to the actual battle was characterized by rain, snow, and cloudy weather. The original target date for the attack was 10 November 1944, but bad weather precluded the attack that day. The bad weather lasted until November 16 when the decision was made to attack regardless of the weather (VII Corps Historical Report).

Historically, the weather during this period had been bad, and studies showed that the chance for good meteorological conditions was slim. However, during November 1944, rain "...far in excess of normal had fallen. Streams were approaching flood level. Roads were rapidly deteriorating." (McDonald, 1963, p. 126)

November 16, 1944, began overcast and cloudy, but cleared later so that by 1100 hours a ceiling of broken clouds from 1000 to 1500 feet existed over the target area. The weather improved steadily, until the afternoon, when it again became cloudy and overcast. But the clearing weather during the morning had allowed the Air Force to bomb the target area prior to the attack. The next day again was cloudy with mist and drizzle which made aerial bombing

impractical. The lack of air interdiction allowed the enemy to react more effectively against the ground attack (VII Corps Historical Report).

The remainder of November saw sporadic periods of good weather, but the majority of the time the weather was cloudy, rainy, and overcast. For example, on November 18 and 19, good weather allowed aerial bombardment. But for the period 20 to 25 November, little air activity was possible because of the weather.

The heavy rain also had an adverse effect on personnel and their equipment. The ground in the area was a virtual quagmire and even when the weather was good for a day, it was not long enough to dry the ground. This sea of mud hindered the advance of troops and also slowed the movement of supplies forward (VII Corps Historical Report). Foxholes usually contained several inches of water, which affected the morale of the troops. The mud also affected tactical operations because armored vehicles would become bogged down and could not advance or provide support for infantry. On November 18, armor supporting the 12th Infantry Regiment attack became bogged down, and the infantry had to attack without armor support (VII Corps Historical Report). This situation happened frequently during the battle.

As stated previously, the heavy rains also caused streams to flood, which added to the problems of mobility. It also increased the engineer workload because additional bridges had to be constructed. Likewise, roads steadily and quickly deteriorated because of the weather. This created even more problems, because with cross-country movement virtually non-existent, more vehicles were forced to travel the roads. Consequently, the roads deteriorated even faster.

Terrain.

The terrain that the 4th Division fought in during this time frame was some of the worst encountered by US forces during the war. For all practical purposes the battleground was the Huertgen Forest. The Huertgen Forest was approximately 20 miles long and 10 miles deep, and contained trees up to 100 feet high. It contained some woodland trails, and also deep gorges and swampy meadows (TIME, p. 29). The Germans had spent a tremendous amount of time building strongpoints and defensive belts. Minefields were covered by machine guns, and concertina wire, sometimes three rolls thick, was used extensively in front of defended positions. The dense woods and dug-in German positions hindered any US advance.

The drainage in the area was generally south to north, with the principle rivers being the Roer, Erft and farther east the Rhine. While some of the smaller streams were not considered major military obstacles, all of the major streams in the area were subject to flooding. This was the situation confronting the 4th Division in November 1944 (4th Division Special Operations Report).

The terrain definitely favored the defender, and, for this reason, the Germans were able to make better tactical use of the terrain. Observation and fire favored the Germans because they held the terrain. Aerial observation was difficult because of the weather and tree cover. Observation was limited for both direct and indirect fire in the Huertgen Forest, but farther east closer to the Roer River it improved because of the cultivated and flat land.

The Huertgen Forest was the most obvious concealment available for both armies. As stated previously, it also provided cover from aerial observation and bombardment. In addition, the lengthening nights provided longer periods of darkness. The Germans used the darkness to mass troops in assembly areas close to the front lines and then attacked very quickly in the morning (4th Division Special Operations

Report).

In addition to the tremendous number of wooded areas, the Germans also had pillboxes and dug-in positions to protect them from US fire. Enemy soldiers were barricaded inside buildings and used small towns for cover. The cover and concealment used by the Germans limited the effectiveness of US indirect fire, as well as aerial bombardment when it was available.

As far as obstacles, the Huertgen Forest was again the primary obstacle. The dense undergrowth and large trees made armor movement almost impossible, except along well established roads. The marshy ground also hindered any mechanized cross country movement. Other natural obstacles were the deep gorges in the forest, and the Roer and Erft Rivers. Farther east, the Rhine River was a major obstacle.

The Germans had multiplied the effectiveness of the natural obstacles many times over by effective use of wire, booby traps, and mine fields. The wire was well protected by small arms and machine gun fire making it difficult for advancing troops to breach the wire.

In addition, the Germans had prepared dams along the

Roer River with demolitions, and if they were destroyed the entire Roer Valley would have been flooded making any advance through the area impossible.

While it was not intended to be, the Huertgen Forest actually became key terrain. The Germans knew that once the US forces broke through the forest they would have little opposition in reaching the Roer and eventually the Rhine. Within the forest itself, several hills could be considered key terrain (See Map A-1).

One key hill was the one north of the town of Hamich. The Germans occupied the hill which afforded them observation of all US movements except in the heavy woods in the eastern section of the 1st Division. By being able to observe US movements, German artillery was very accurate in hitting advancing US troops. Additionally, the Germans could direct very effective interdicting fires in the Schevenhutte area where the road system was very canalized (VII Corps Historical Report).

Other key terrain was the high ground in the Wenau Forest which was to be seized by the 8th Infantry Regiment, and the high ground west of the towns of Kleinhau/Grosshau. These areas were considered key because of the observation

value afforded to whoever controlled them.

The dams along the Roer River could also be considered key because if they were destroyed the entire Roer Valley would be flooded.

The main avenues of approach for the three regiments of the 4th Division roughly followed the three east-west roads leading out of the Huertgen Forest. The 8th Regiment was to move along the road from Schevenhutte to Hafhaul, the 22nd Regiment was to move east along the road to Grosshau, and the 12th Regiment was to move northeast towards the town of Huertgen.

Combat Effectiveness of Opposing Forces.

Strength and Composition.

The 4th Infantry Division was to penetrate three and a half miles of Huertgen Forest, and then push another three and a half miles to the Roer River. The organization and attachments of the 4th Division are shown below.

4th Infantry Division

- 8th Inf Regiment
- 12th Inf Regiment
- 22nd Inf Regiment
- 4th Division Artillery
 - 20th FA Bn
 - 29th FA Bn
 - 42th FA Bn
 - 44th FA Bn
 - 4th QM Co
 - 4th Med Bn
 - 4th Signal Co
 - 4th Recon Troop
 - 704th Ord L Maint Co
- 4th Engineering Combat Co
 - 4th MP Platoon
 - 70th Tank Bn
 - 377th ADA (AW) Bn
 - 801st Tank Destroyer Bn
 - 1120th Engr Group
 - 294th Engr Combat Bn
- 4th Engr Combat Bn (Crossing of Roer)
 - Co C, 87th Chemical Bn
 - 294th Cavalry Squadron
 - Co C, 709th Tank Bn
 - Co C, 294th Engr Bn

Field Artillery

- 196th FA Bn
- 951st FA Bn
- 188th FA Group
- 1720th FA Bn
- 981st FA Bn
- B Btry, 285th FA Observation Bn

A superficial glance at the enemy opposite the 4th Division would not have inspired awe. The same nondescript 275th Division, which earlier had opposed the 9th and 28th Divisions, and which by this time had absorbed remnants of thirty-seven different units, held the line all the way from Schevenhutte to the forested plateau near Germeten. The controlling Corps, General Straube's LXXIV Corps was

virtually without reserves. Except for the combat command sent north to strengthen the reserve of LXXXI Corps, the depleted 116th Panzer Division still was on hand; but higher headquarters was becoming increasingly insistent that this division be released for refitting before the Ardennes counteroffensive. As events developed, the Panzer Division was to be withdrawn on 21 November, along with most of the headquarters troops that had helped defeat the 28th Division's attack on Schmidt. The adjoining 89th Division, fatigued and markedly understrength after the Schmidt fight, could provide little help to the 275th Division.

A closer analysis of the German situation revealed that the 275th Division had demonstrated twice already within the Huertgen Forest that well organized units composed of first class troops were not essential to a steadfast defense.

What is more, the 275th Division had a strength in men and guns which was considerably more impressive than could have been deduced from the conglomeration of subordinate units involved. Two of the division's organic regiments were basically intact. Though the third was down to about 250 men and was held in reserve, a composite regiment created from various attached units had taken its place in the line. The division had some 6,500 men, 106 tubes of artillery, 21

assault guns, and 23 anti-tank guns of 75 mm or above. Cited below is the composition and organization of the 275th Division (4th Division Special Operations Report).

275th German Infantry Division

983th Regiment
984th Regiment
985th Regiment
275th Artillery Regiment
275th FUS Bn
18th Fortress Bn
20th Fortress Bn
1031st Security Bn
276th Field Replacement Bn
275th Engineer Bn
275th AT Co

Also discovered fighting against the 4th Division were remnants of the following units:

1st German Division

1057th Regiment
1058th Regiment
91st Field Replacement Bn

99th German Division

1055th Regiment
1056th Regiment

3530th German Division

931st Regiment
941st Regiment
942nd Regiment
943rd Regiment
353rd FUS Bn

Reserves and Other Forces Capable of Intervening.

Immediately available behind troops occupying the front line positions was an estimated tactical reserve of 6,500 troops composed of uncommitted forces of the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division, 12th Infantry Division and miscellaneous units. There was another 31,000 troops available west of the Rhine River, part or all of which were capable of being thrown against a penetration towards the east by our own troops. This latter number was composed of the 9th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division (unlocated since their withdrawal from the British front) elements of the 2nd, 5th, and 7th Para Divisions reforming in Cologne, an unidentified division reported in Cologne and miscellaneous smaller units. Also available were the 1st SS, 2nd SS, 10th SS and 130th Panzer Divisions, reforming in the vicinity of Arnaberg-Paderburn. Approximately 100 miles northeast of Cologne was a Panzer army, and a number of newly formed or refitted divisions from the eastern and southern fronts. Still more remote and of lesser probability of appearing were two divisions from Denmark, eleven divisions from Norway, and eight divisions from Finland (G2 Journal, 4th Division Special Operations Report).

Technology.

The basic shoulder fired weapon in the US Army during the Huertgen Forest battle was the .30 caliber M1 (Garand) rifle, a semi-automatic piece much admired by its users. Though the Germans possessed a few similar models, their basic individual piece was a 7.92 mm (Mauser) bolt action rifle not greatly different from the US M1903. Two favorite weapons of the American soldier were the .30 caliber Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) and the .30 caliber Browning machine gun in both light (air-cooled) and heavy (water-cooled) models. The most effective close range German anti-tank weapon was a one-shot, shaped-charged piece called a Panzer Faust. On the American side, a 2.36 inch rocket launcher, the Bazooka was the most effective. The most widely used artillery pieces of both combatants were light and medium howitzers. German and American models were roughly comparable in caliber and performance. German artillery doctrine and organization for the control and delivery of fire differed marginally from the Americans, in that the German organic divisional artillery was less equipped for communication. The excellent American facilities of communications down to battery level and the effective operation of the American fire direction centers on many occasions permitted more accurate fire and greater

concentration in a shorter time. To offset superior knowledge of the terrain that the Germans enjoyed, the Americans had the advantage of aerial photographs, and they could use their artillery spotter planes while the Germans could not. The simple little monoplane that the Americans used for artillery observation appeared, in relation to contemporary fighter development, a throw-back to the aircraft of WW I. It was the L-4 Grasshopper (in some cases, L-5), variously called a Piper Cub, cub, liaison or observation plane.

In the matter of tanks, the Americans possessed no such advantage. The US tank, the M4 Sherman, a 33-ton medium tank, was relatively obsolete. Although a few Shermans equipped with a high-velocity 76 mm gun in place of the usual short-barreled 75 mm were to become available during the Huertgen Forest campaign, most medium tanks still mounted the 75 mm gun. They plainly were outgunned not only by the enemy's heaviest tank, the 63 ton Mark VI (Tiger), but also by the 50 ton Mark V (Panther). The only advantages left to the Sherman were superiority in numbers, easier maintenance, and greater flexibility and rapidity of fire as a result of a gyro-stabilizer and power traverse.

Some equalization in the matter of tank and antitank

gunnery was to be provided in November when a considerable number of US self-propelled tank destroyer battalions were to receive new vehicles. In place of the M10 Destroyer with its 3-inch gun, the units were to receive M36 vehicles mounting a high velocity 90mm gun (4th Division Special Operations Report).

Other than tanks, the German weapons would most impressed the American soldier in the campaign were the Burp Gun, the Nebelwerfer, and the 88 mm mortar. The Nebelwerfer was a newer weapon and one which had seen some service in Normandy but which came into general use only at the start of the Siegfried Line Campaign. It was a multiple-barrel, 150 mm mortar, mounted on wheels and fired electrically.

A disturbing aspect of the overall situation was the marked increase of unfavorable flying weather, which severely limited the effectiveness of tactical air support. The IX Tactical Air Command, for example, was able to fly only two-thirds as many missions in October as in September, and the prospects for the winter months were discouraging. Weather had a particularly damaging effect as long as the crippled ground transport situation prevented the airmen from moving their bases closer to the front lines. Not only was fight time wasted, but often the weather at the bases

differed radically from that over the target area, forcing the pilots to return home prematurely. A particular weakness of US tactical air was a lack of night fighters. For a long time German troop movements after nightfall were virtually unopposed, and the Luftwaffe was free to operate with impunity.

In an effort to make the best of unfavorable weather, the Air Force turned more and more to special techniques of "blind bombing". The most widely used was the Mobile Early Warning (MEW) or SCR-584 radar system, whereby forward director posts equipped with radio and radar, vectored the planes to the target area over the overcast, talked them into the proper approach, and took them down through the overcast directly over the target. At this point either the pilot himself made final adjustment for the attack or the forward director post specified the moment of bomb release. MEW also was used successfully in night control of aircraft. Despite the weather, the number of fighter-bomber missions, which dropped in October, was to rise again in November and December (VII Corps Historical Report).

The total fighter-bomber force numbered some 750 planes. In addition, 800 American and British fighters were to fly escort for the heavy bombers (4th Division Special

Operations Report).

Logistics and Administration.

Weather and the German resurgence were two reasons why Allied gains were limited during the period prior to Huertgen and to a great extent during the 4th Division's drive to the Roer. But the real felon was the crippled logistical structure which still had a long way to go before recovering from the excesses of the pursuit. No matter how optimistic the planners or how enthusiastic the executors, the logistical situation never failed to rear its ugly head.

Though the bulk of American supplies still came in at only two points, Cherbourg and the Normandy Beaches, the crux of the problem continued to lie less in shortage of ports than in limitations of transport. How to get supplies from the ports to the front, which in the case of the First Army at Aachen was more than 500 road miles away, was the real problem. The answer had two facets: improve the transportation system or get new ports closer to the front lines.

Behind the lines lay one of the biggest problems of all: how to get a supply route across Raven's Hedge Ridge.

Though engineers had gone to work quickly on a firebreak leading to Five Points, the task had proven more difficult than imagined. Constant dripping from sodden trees had so permeated the ground that passage of even a few vehicles quickly turned the firebreak into a sea of mud (4th Division Special Operations Report). The enemy in some instances had stacked one mine upon another like pancakes and often had fitted them with anti-lifting devices so that the engineers had to explode them in place and then fill the craters. Aside from the difficulty of getting supplies forward, the road problem also prevented getting tanks, tank destroyers, or antitank guns to the front.

For all the diligence of the truckers, airmen, and railway repairmen, no quick solution to the transport problem was likely, and did not occur. During this period, US forces could not be supported at desired scales. Tactical operations had to be tailored to the limited means available. So tight was the supply situation that General Bradley saw no alternative but to continue the unpopular system of tonnage allocations (VII Corps Historical Report).

Though the economy and industrial facilities of the liberated countries were in poor shape, they made important contributions to alleviating the logistical crisis. Local

procurement became an expedient method of filling supply request and provided the 4th Division particular assistance in relieving shortages in spare parts for tanks and other vehicles. During November alone, First Army ordnance officers negotiated for a total of fifty-nine different items (cylinder head gaskets, batteries, split rings, and the like). No matter what the value of those expedients, the very necessity of turning to them was indicative of the fact that the logistical structures might be frail for a long time.

Maintenance was a major problem. With the pause in the pursuit, commanders could assess the damage done to their equipment and vehicles during the lightning like dashes when maintenance had been a hit or miss proposition. As winter deepened, so did the mud to compound the maintenance problem.

To get supplies forward and casualties rearward, men slugged at least a mile under constant threat from shells that burst unannounced in the treetops and from by-passed enemy troops who might materialize at any moment from the depths of the woods.

The subject of replacements was a matter upon which the

4th Division by this time could speak with some authority. During the month of November, the division received as replacements 170 officers and 4,754 enlisted men. Most commanders agreed that the caliber of replacements was good. Integrating these new men into organizations riddled by losses among squad and platoon leaders was a trying proposition. So unusual was it to get a packet of replacements into the line without incurring losses that companies noted with pride when they accomplished it. So short was the front-line stay of some men that when evacuated to aid stations, they did not know what platoon, company, or even battalion, and sometimes regiment in which they were assigned. Others might find themselves starting their first attack as riflemen and reaching the objective as acting squad leaders. Most of the newcomers were reclassified cooks, clerks, drivers, and others pulled from rear echelon units, both in the US and in theater (4th Division Special Operations Report).

Objectives and Courses of Action.

The 4th Infantry Division, located on a line between Schevenhuetten and Huertgen, on 16 November, 1944, was to push northeast through the Huertgen Forest to reach the Roer River at Duren. More specifically, it was assigned the

mission to seize the main HUERTGEN-DUREN ROAD which would facilitate the capture of the Roer Dams and the crossing of the Roer River in the vicinity of Duren and to assist the advance of the 1st Infantry Division. Additionally, it was to protect the right flank of the Corps and be prepared on order to continue the attack in the southern sector to seize the city of Cologne (4th Division Special Operations Report).

Although the 4th Division's immediate objective was the Huertgen-Duren Road, the stubborn and determined German army turned the forest itself into a formidable objective. Initially, the mission of the division was logical and consistent with the tactical and strategic objective of the Corps and Army. However, the 4th Division was to learn what the 9th and 28th Divisions had discovered "in October at such a terrible cost: Huertgen Forest was a chamber of horrors, combining the most difficult elements of warfare, weather and terrain. Here, in a belt of rolling woodland 20 miles long and 10 miles deep, pillboxes of the West Wall nestled in the gloom among fir trees up to 100 feet tall. The forest was broken--but hardly relieved--by woodland trails, deep gorges carved by icy streams and high, swampy meadows with names like Deadman's Moor " (Time, p. 29). Unfortunately, the experiences of the two divisions in the

forest failed to teach the Army and Corps commanders a valuable lesson--a third division was to be decimated in the deadly forest. Not really having a choice, the 4th Division's course of action was limited by its mission, the terrain they had been assigned, and the lack of enough troops to effectively conduct the necessary operations.

In comparison, the Germans had eight battalions of the 275th Infantry Division, the primary force facing the 4th Division, supported by the 116th Panzer Division who were committed to stopping the 4th Division's penetration within the dense and restrictive forest. However, the German commanders had several courses of action available. As stated, they could continue to conduct a strong defense and when their present positions were penetrated, they would launch a battalion-size counterattack. Additionally, they believed they could fall back and conduct a delaying action to allow time to prepare defensive positions around the Roer River, Gurzenich and Duren. Also, after about 48 hours they felt they would have the capability to counterattack, using units of the 116th Panzer Division. Certainly the Germans had the capability to perform these courses of action; however, the latter two courses of action must have been too risky, considering the type troops available and the strength of the US forces (G2 Journal, 4th Division Special

Operations Report). Nevertheless, the Germans were certainly in a precarious situation because they had recently lost the battle to hold Aachen, and it was essential to the Germans' strategic and tactical goals to hold the Roer River dams, and also, to gain time to allow for the preparation of the winter offensive.

The feasibility of the 4th Division's breaking through the Huertgen Forest must certainly be questioned. The division sector was large and ill suited for a breakthrough operation. It was totally in the forested area, and as mentioned earlier, the trees and undergrowth were dense and visibility was less than ten yards. However, the 4th Division was a strong unit with a lot of combat experience and good morale, and it had previously conducted several diverse missions and had performed admirably. The division had aggressive leaders, and the personnel strength and equipment status was relatively the same as other units in VII Corps and 1st Army. They had the capability for successfully completing their assigned mission---if the operation had been conducted outside the unforgiving Huertgen Forest.

In contrast, the Germans had demonstrated twice that within the Huertgen Forest a hodgepodge force could do the

work of a more elite unit. The Germans had the necessary resources coupled with the forest, and with the possibility of unleashing the Roer River, they felt comfortable with their capacity to stop the American forces.

Mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, and time were all a consideration of the commanders and staff of the 4th Division. However, based upon their mission and the area of operation assigned by Corps and Army, they had little choice in the courses of action. "In spite of the terrain, the fortifications, and the threat of bad weather, General Omar Bradley, Twelfth Army Group Commander, felt (and SHAEF agreed) that both the Huertgen Forest area and the Roer River dams must be secured" (Armor in the Huertgen Forest, p.3). Though General Bradley's view was not a popular one, it was reflected in the mission passed down through the chain of command. Accordingly, it was believed by the majority of the commanders that "the Germans could assemble in the forest undercover and conduct a counterattack on the American flank" (Time, p.28). Therefore, the 4th Division's mission was fairly cut and dry. Based upon their unit's location, there was only one way to get to their immediate objective, Huertgen-Duren Road, and that was through the woods.

The terrain the soldiers had to consider and "fight for" had been surveyed, reconnoitered, photographed, and analyzed many times prior to the arrival of the 4th Division. Nevertheless, nothing could reshape the terrain or remove the trees the division had to conquer.

The combination of the terrain and weather was the more prominent factor common to all the units involved in the Huertgen Forest fighting. The terrain restricted maneuver, reduced mobility, limited observation, hindered supply of attacking units, and decidedly favored the determined German defenders. The weather was closely allied to the terrain conditions: rain transformed the already formidable terrain into a morass; fog reduced visibility in some instances to only a few yards; snow and cold adversely affected equipment, concealed mines and booby traps, and added frostbite and trenchfoot to the other discomforts suffered by troops in the forest (Armor in the Huertgen Forest, p.194).

The enemy and the troops available were two factors that were not as abstract as the mission and terrain; as a result, their consideration and evaluation by the unit was relatively easy. As mentioned earlier, the 4th Division knew its enemy well and had the men, equipment and the capability for a fast and thorough defeat of the enemy. "General Eisenhower had told all commanders in the 4th Division--"This is the big push of the war to break the Germans' back. It is entirely conceivable that the war will

be over by Christmas" (Armor in the Huertgen Forest, p.37). Unfortunately, the Germans with their ally the Huertgen Forest were again not prepared to relinquish control of their strategic area.

The combat power of the German forces was certainly a consideration of the 4th Division prior to attacking through the Huertgen Forest. However, some of the information and intelligence indicators received by the division may have been misinterpreted causing the Americans to underestimate the strength and fighting capability of their opposing forces. For example, the G2 had been receiving numerous reports from civilians and from the interrogation of deserters that the morale of the 275th Division was very low. They indicated the unit was made up of young inexperienced soldiers and the physically handicapped, and the leaders were poor, having to use threats to motivate the soldiers. Additionally, reports were received that indicated the US bombing and artillery fire had had a significant impact on the resupply of rations to the German forces (G2 Journals, 4th Division Special Operations Report). Many other similar intelligence reports helped construct a faulty estimate of the Germans' combat power. Based upon these estimates, the 4th Division believed the 9th and 28th Divisions had attrited the Germans' force. Once the Corps

attacked, the Germans would continue to fall back, and the fighting would be relatively easy, similar to the division's push through France and Belgium. In comparison, the Germans knew the strength of the US forces but felt they had defeated the 9th and 28th Divisions in the Huertgen Forest and believed that with their fortifications within the forest, they could stop and defeat any force attacking through the deadly woods.

Section IV

Description of the Action

Huertgen Forest (4th Infantry Division)

Disposition of Forces.Location of Tactically Deployed Forces.

The 4th Division was positioned in the southern sector of the VII Corps area between Schevenhuetten and north of Huertgen with the 8th Division of V Corps to its right in the south and the 1st Division to its left in the north. All three regiments of the 4th Division were positioned in the zone with the 8th Infantry Regiment in the north, the 12th Infantry Regiment in the south, and the 22nd Infantry Regiment in the center. Sector widths for the supporting attacks were narrowest with the 8th Infantry Regiment responsible for 2 kilometers and the 12th Infantry Regiment only covering approximately a 500 meter frontage. This left the 22nd Infantry Regiment attempting to operate across a 2.5 kilometer frontage in the center. Also, to deter from the 4th Division's capability was the fact that the majority of the 8th Infantry Regiment's attention had to be shifted north where it was responsible for the inter-division boundary of the 1st and 4th IDs. See Map A-1 for the locations of the 4th Division units.

Opposing the 4th Division in the battle of Huertgen Forest were units from the German 275th Infantry Division. The 275th Infantry Division, which earlier had opposed the US 9th Division and the 28th ID, now had absorbed remnants

of thirty-seven units (McDonald, 1963, p. 431). The 275th Division was responsible for a wider defensive sector than the US 4th Division and covered a line from Schevenhuetten to the forested plateau near Germeter (McDonald, 1963, p. 431). The 275th Division had been in its basic location in the Huertgen Forest for nearly three weeks, and therefore had developed extensive fortified positions and were dug in (Fourth Infantry Division G-3 Journal file, p. 1). All factors considered, the elements of the 275th Division were well prepared to defend and delay the numerically superior American forces. The units of the 275th Division were well understrength and in need of rearming and refitting. However, all preparations made by the German units resulted in a detailed defense in depth and one that took maximum advantage of the dense forest. The zone of responsibility of the 275th Division is depicted in Map A-2.

A closer analysis of the German situation revealed that the 275th Division had demonstrated twice earlier that within the Huertgen Forest, large, well organized units composed of first class troops were not essential to a steadfast defense. Having quickly sown the limited network of firebreaks, trails, and roads with mines, a few poorly coordinated squads in well prepared field fortifications might be able to hold off a company or a battalion at heavy

cost to the attackers (McDonald, 1963, p. 432).

Recent, Current and Proposed Unit Movements.

In October 1944, the 4th Division was assigned to V Corps, First US Army, which was moving across Belgium, Luxemborg, and ultimately into the heartland of Germany. To increase the offensive capability of VII Corps, which had the responsibility for the main attack in the Huertgen Forest area, the 4th Division was attached to VII Corps. As the 4th Division was moving from the V Corps sector to an assembly area behind the VII Corps lines the night of 6 November 1944, word reached the 12th Regiment to drop out. The 12th Regiment was to relieve the 109th Infantry Regiment astride the wooden plateau between the Weissen Wei Creek and the Germeter-Huertgen Highway in support of the 28th Infantry Division (McDonald, 1963, p. 429). The 8th and 22nd Regiments continued their movement into the designated assembly areas. The 12th Infantry Regiment suffered numerous casualties in their engagements with the Germans which meant that the 12th's contribution in the main offensive in the Huertgen Forest would be limited since the 12th had lost almost 1000 men to enemy fire, combat exhaustion, trench foot, or respiratory ailments. To counter the loss in the capability of the 12th Regiment, the 5th Armored Division

CCR was attached on 10 November 1944. (McDonald, 1963, p. 429).

Because a primary part of the 4th Division's mission was to assist the advance of the 1st Division, General Barton had to direct one of his regiments to hug the division's north boundary close alongside the 1st Infantry Division's 26th Infantry Regiment. This assignment fell to the 8th Regiment. From a point just south of Schevenhuetten, the 8th Infantry was to attack northeast two miles through the Huertgen Forest to high ground above Gut Schwarzenbroich. This would put the regiment about two-thirds of the way through the forest in position to continue northeast toward Duren (McDonald, 1963, p. 430).

To cover the remaining three forested miles between the 8th Infantry Regiment's southern boundary and the positions of the 12th Regiment, General Barton had only the 22nd Regiment. He gave them initial objectives on the far side of the forest, the villages of Kleinhau and Grosshau. From these villages the 22nd Regiment was to turn northeastward toward Gey for eventual convergence with the 8th Regiment on the approaches to Duren (McDonald, 1963, p. 430).

As the offensive action advanced through the Huertgen

Forest, the 12th Regiment would protect the right flank of the division and ultimately revert to 4th Division reserve.

Regarding the German forces of the 275th Division, they had been in the Huertgen Forest for the previous two months and had been in conflict with other American forces during the previous period (and had constructed elaborate defensive positions). The German forces were able to hold the established defensive line and severely restrict movement of the 4th Division units.

Opposing Units' Combat Power.

As previously mentioned, the 4th Division entered the action with only two of its three regiments. The lost unit was the 12th Regiment which incurred more than 1600 casualties including both battle and non-battle injuries while engaged in combat during the period 6-15 November (McDonald, 1963, p. 429). Thus, approximately one-third of the division was unavailable for combat during the initial period of the battle. The 12th Regiment was not battle ready until 19 November. Therefore, the 4th Division had to rely on the 8th and 22nd Regiments as well as other attached forces such as tank battalions, tank destroyer battalions, engineer combat battalions, and several field artillery

battalions to engage the German defensive forces.

The German 275th Division had a strength in men and guns which was considerably more impressive than could have been deduced from the conglomerate of subordinate units involved with the US 4th ID. Two of the divisions organic regiments were basically intact. Though the third regiment was down to about 250 men and was held in reserve, a composite regiment created from various attached units had taken its place in the line. The division had some 6500 men, 106 artillery tubes, 21 assault guns and 23 antitank guns (75mm or higher) (McDonald, 1963, p. 432).

.. Confronting the 4th Division's 8th and 22nd Regiment's were approximately eight German Battalions. Considerable reserves were available to the enemy, as the bulk of two other divisions and elements of still others were encountered during the course of the battle. Nearly all, however, were mediocre to poor quality units.

Missions of Units Involved in the Initial Clash.

The 4th Division which had been transferred to VII Corps from V Corps for the major winter offensive had the responsibility for pushing through the Huertgen Forest to the road net in the vicinity of the villages of Huertgen, Kleinhau, Grosshau, and Gey, then to continue northeast to the Roer River at Duren to capture the Roer Dams. This facet of the operation was critical to the First Army's drive into the heart of Germany. There was still a serious problem confronting this operation as planned: the Roer River Dams. So long as the Germans controlled them, they could flood the Roer Valley at will. Before a major offensive could be undertaken, it was imperative to capture the dams.

The primary mission of the 275th Division was to delay and defend the terrain surrounding the Huertgen Forest. They were able to hold off and stall the American offensive and not allow American forces into the heartland of Germany. Unknown to these German forces, they were providing time and space for the German high command to organize and complete detailed internal planning for a winter counteroffensive through the Ardennes.

Details of the Battle.Opening Moves.

The offensive involving the 4th Division had been planned and ready for launching for more than one week. To accommodate the prevailing poor weather, D-Day was flexible anywhere from 11 through 16 November. The planners wanted good weather in order to execute a massive air and ground fire support preparation. In fact, the air strike planned, Operation Queen, was going to be the very largest of the war in support of ground troops (McDonald, 1963, p. 129).

To the dismay of the 4th Division ground troops the final morning available for D-Day dawned cloudy, overcast and gloomy. Regardless of the preparations planned and the few sorties that were able to be used, the attack would begin on 16 November. However, slight breaks in the cloud cover did occur and a partial amount of the massive fire support plan was accomplished. The effects were intermittent but certainly the morale of the infantry soldiers was enhanced by the sights and sounds of the effort. Thus when the 4th Division crossed the Line of Departure (LD) at 1425 hours, they knew that the defending German units had already been pounded by the Air Force assets.

Across the 3.5 mile front the divisional units were operating in primarily the dense Huertgen Forest (McDonald, 1963, p. 442). This is in contrast to the division's position until early November when it was only holding a front of 2 miles in the Bochholz Forest (First U.S. Army After Action Report, p. 142). After their initial coverage of several hundred yards, they would encounter some small patches of open ground, but these respites were infrequent. After traversing the entire forest area, they would also encounter some urban areas, but reaching these villages was the task ahead. This portion of the narrative, however, will only encompass the engagements of 16 through 20 November 1944, and during this sequence both units being analyzed were both fighting in the heavy forest mentioned earlier.

Attacking Forces and the LD.

On the allied side, all three regiments of the division were involved with the 8th in the north, the 12th in the south, and providing the main attack in the center of the division sector, the 22nd. Unfortunately, the 12th in the south had been assigned a previous mission which had resulted in staggering casualties and other than being in place, it would not mount an effective attack in support of the 22nd for several days. Mutual support between the

regiments was quite difficult since the division sector involved the thick, uncleared forest. The sector was too wide for a full strength division, and the area was practically road-less, with the most mobility provided by footpaths, tiny cart-roads and firebreaks in the forest.

Sector widths for the supporting attacks were narrowest for the 8th Regiment (responsible for 2 kilometers) and the 12th Regiment (responsible for only 500 meters). This left the 22nd Regiment attempting to operate across 2.5 kilometers in the center. More will be mentioned about the over-extended Regimental widths in later paragraphs.

Though light and medium tanks were available, all the regimental commanders initially attempted direct ground assaults across the LD. Normally, column formations were used to attempt the forming of a penetration. With the near absence of usable east-west roads the units attempted to traverse their sectors on the previously mentioned paths and firebreaks. There were two problems with this tactic. First, the direction was not always that desired by the regiment, and second, this action was most predictable and therefore, extensively covered by the defenders. The heavy use of mines, booby-traps, mortar and artillery fires, slowed the movement on these small paths through the forest.

Action of the Defending Forces.

The lack of meaningful preparation fires in the 4th Division area may or may not have aided the attempt at achieving surprise. Regardless, the defending unit, the 275th Infantry Division, had been in their basic location for nearly three weeks and therefore quite dug-in (4th Infantry Division G3 Journal File, p. 1). Understandably, their preparations had been thorough and obstacles, the key to integrated defense within the forest, were precisely located and established.

Obstacles, in the form of triple layer concertina, tangle-foot barbed wire, anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines, roadblocks, fallen trees and cratered roads were all well covered with registered mortar and artillery fire. In addition to this covering indirect fire, machine-guns were paired and tripled from firmly entrenched bunkers to cover key avenues of approach, all of which made the advances slow and painful. The German experience in withstanding the superior Allied air and ground fires had educated them to build underground fortifications and these were numerous in the 275th Division's area.

All the preparations amounted to a detailed defense in depth and one that took maximum advantage of the forest. This combined with the American feeling that they were limited only to ground infantry supported by some high angle fire played directly into the power of the defense and thus the offense initially proved to be woefully inadequate. Limited counter-attacks by the defenders occurred anytime a salient appeared in the defensive line.

Supporting Forces Needed.

General Courtney Hodges, the First Army Commander and overall commander directing this mid-November offensive, stressed the use of massive preparatory fire. All along the Army front, the various Corps and Divisions received all that the limiting weather would allow, with the exception of the 4th Division. For reasons of maintaining 'surprise', the commander, MG Barton, decided to launch his attack without preparatory fires. The only deviation from this plan was some tactical fighter/bomber sorties made well to the enemy's rear, quite forward of the 4th Division units (McDonald, 1963, p. 143). Retrospectively, an offensive of this magnitude was probably not a strategic surprise and it is open to speculation whether the withholding of Eighth Air Force assets and field artillery preparation along a 3.5

nile zone enhanced the element of surprise for the 4th Division.

Supporting fires were far less plentiful for the Germans, and moreover, far less necessary. As noted above, the established defensive positions combined with the dense forest were effective in themselves. After action reports for the 4th Division frequently mentioned the encountering of mortar, artillery (to include 88mm) and very infrequent enemy air attacks (4th Infantry Division, G-2 Journal File, p. 1). What the defender could have used were reserves had they been available. Unfortunately for the Germans the entire strength of units were placed forward, and any troops left in the rear were solely for the support and service support of front line elements. It was not until after the initial period of the battle that the controlling German Corps was able to shift boundaries in order to furnish two weak divisions to bolster the line plus some segments of these units serving as the reserve.

Control of Support Fires.

During the D-Day period prior to H-Hour, the 4th Division idea was to maintain surprise and therefore, not employ anything but very deep air strikes in the division area. Conversely, the German defenders had habitually been expending a low-level of artillery fires, just to keep assault preparations off balance. Most of the effect fell on the 298th Combat Engineer Battalion which was the front-line unit for the 4th Division until the passage of lines as H-Hour approached (4th Infantry Division, G-3 Journal File, P. 1).

After the attack began, the American units quickly realized that supporting fires were essentially limited to high angle systems. Other means were attempted to include low angle artillery and close air support. Neither proved to be of much use during the combat in the thick, jungle-like growth of the Huertgen Forest.

On the opposing side the advantages of defense were readily evident, and hinged upon the integrated use of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, well fired mortars, and the occasional use of artillery. From the patrol information of the previous weeks, most of the indirect means had been

well registered and ground observers were even left near the American units in order to adjust fire as necessary. Even if German air units had been present, they would have been no more effective than the United States Air Force elements were for the 4th Division.

One element that did not appear to be used was smoke. There were potential uses on each side but records do not reflect that smoke was employed. Regarding this issue, more will be said later relating to the tactical doctrine of the time.

Critical Areas of Initial Contact.

From the very start, no momentum could be achieved by the attacking units. They were physically limited by the terrain, forcibly restrained by the intense efforts of the defenders and mentally handicapped by a lack of intelligence. Furthermore, this was the third US division to begin such an attack within this very region. The previous efforts by the 9th and 28th Divisions were well publicized and their lack of success and discouraging losses were known to soldiers of the 4th Division (McDonald, 1963, p. 140).

Such inability to gain any offensive thrust from the outset forced a relook by the 4th Division command at the attack objectives. In addition, the means of achieving the objectives were also suspect but did not get changed as the situation appeared to dictate. In fact, for the first several days, the division fought its way only a short distance, but into exhaustion.

Conversely, the German defenders were tested but initially satisfied with the slow progress that American units were able to claim. Nearly all the physical variables favored the defenders to include the weather, terrain, visibility and position. What the commander of the 275th Division reacted to was the intermittent US gains, and he was generally successful in repulsing these advances with quick ground attacks. Many requests were sent up the chain-of-command to the 74th German Corps for reinforcements, but during this period no additional troops were to be had. For some time, the German High Command had been busily at work developing the offensive thrust planned for late 1944 (McDonald, 1963, P. 431).

Command and Control Procedures.

Headquarters for the 4th Division was well forward with the command post being located in the small village of Zweifall (VII Corps After Action Report, p. 26). Such proximity to the front line, approximately 3.5 kilometers, was theoretically close enough to the action to keep the key decision makers involved and informed. Also, with the reduced size of the division depth, land-line communications (both telephone and telegraph) were frequently and effectively used. In many intra-divisional messages, it was stressed that only secure land-line teletype was to be used. Breakdown in the front to rear communications was evident once the assault battalions and companies began moving forward and therefore control by the regimental headquarters was reduced. No significant operational difficulties arose as a result of this and therefore command and control procedures appeared to be adequate.

For both sides, communications was sufficient to direct supporting fires, including the movement of tactical fighter/bombers for the US forces. Each side was able to incorporate the artillery and mortars available by use of both wire and radio means. When these systems did fail, usually due to indirect fire from the opposing force, unit

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commanders up to regimental level were typically on the scene to assist in timely decision making.

Tactics and Doctrine.

The German division primarily opposing the 4th Division was doing all within its capability to defend in a sector where it was heavily outnumbered. The tactics employed were well coordinated with the existing terrain and the combined effect was to slow the initial advances of the American units well below the expected level. In terms of what the 275th Division was doing doctrinally, it appears they executed to the extent possible the principles of the time. Had additional assets been available, they could have been used to strengthen the defense via reserves.

From the US standpoint, the prevailing tactical doctrine was outlined in FM 100-5, Field Services Regulation - Operations, dated 22 May 1941. In the manual, only three pages were dedicated to offensive operations in the woods, but clearly some very prominent points were evident:

- Seek to avoid isolated wooded areas.
- Seek to capture by envelopment.
- If nothing else is available, then attack frontally.
- Use supporting fires and attack salients initially.
- In dense woods use small columns.
- Use extreme caution if moving by roads or trails.
- Outflank enemy strongpoints.
- Numerical superiority is of little use in heavy woods.

After reviewing the offensive maneuvers utilized not only by the 4th Division but also the two US divisions which had preceded it unsuccessfully, it becomes fairly clear why so much difficulty was encountered. The doctrine was pointed in its direction, but the planners for the 4th Division failed to heed what was clearly in print. Specifically, the following attack actions were conducted in contravention to stated doctrine:

- Envelopment on a large or small scale was not earnestly attempted.

- Avoidance of heavily wooded areas was not seriously considered.

- Use of small columns moving off obvious avenues of approach was not required.

- The massive fire support available was not utilized until several days into the assault.

The results were predictably depressing. Not only from the fact that the doctrine stated otherwise but also lessons to be learned from the two previous divisions would have shown the futility of the attempted tactics. What was merely proven again was the techniques to build casualties and gain virtually nothing while rendering a unit unfit for further action. Doctrine is not dogma, nor is it to be summarily ignored or excused without a valid attempt to make it work.

The Effectiveness of Leadership

The lack of adherence to US doctrine in the employment of the 4th Division was indicative of the less than ideal leadership that was evident. At the small unit level, there were notable exceptions in the daring and initiative demonstrated by junior officers and NCOs. Regrettably, this quality did not extend to the top, and in the very word of General Hodges, First Army Commander, "They are going about this in the wrong way: they are running down roads, rather

then advancing through the woods, tightly buttoned up" (McDonald, 1963, p. 431). Though his observations were quite accurate, his inability to exercise his prerogative to check those faulty plans was also inexcusable.

Some of the more decisive decisions were undoubtedly made at regimental level and below. These decisions eventually gained some success for the US division. An example was the tactical change developed by Col McKee of the 8th Regiment when he concluded that only a break-out could be precipitated by the use of tanks (McDonald, 1963, p. 431). This new twist, one which was actually an employment of existing doctrine, occurred on 18 November and resulted in substantial gains by his unit.

During this initial contact of mid-November, the opposing German forces were operating with few leaders and thus relied heavily upon the individual capabilities of their soldiers. There was considerable operational reaction at the highest levels where the primary German commanders were General Brandenberger of the German Seventh Army and General Straube at the 74th German Corps. Directly below him was General Hans Schmidt of the 275th Infantry Division. There had been considerable preparation in anticipation of the US offensive. Once the attack had begun, this leadership

was essentially bound to reacting to those US attempts and stem the tide all along the Allied front.

Soldier Reaction.

Under some of the most horrendous fighting conditions imaginable, the fighters on each side showed amazing resilience. The training on the US side had been insufficient to adequately prepare the soldiers for what they were to experience in the dense forest. Nor had the division been properly indoctrinated to the conditions they were going to encounter. In spite of these handicaps, the individual soldiers suffered through cold, wet weather, soggy, mud-drenched ground, and the demoralizing enemy tactics of mines, mortars, and machine guns.

The fighting was reduced to small unit operations and this very decentralized action stressed the need for low level combat leadership. Much pressure was placed on the soldiers as the mounting casualties not only diminished the fighting line but also took away a great quantity of officer leadership. An example would be the 22nd Regiment in which all three battalion commanders were casualties of the first days action (McDonald, 1963, p. 435).

Compounding the miseries of the hostile actions, both sides had to contend with the elements which constantly harassed the soldiers. Casualties attributable to battle equalled by those derived by respiratory ailments, shock and "trench-foot". Regardless, the units on both sides were consistently obedient to orders and during the contact, records of units breaking from the battlefield could not be found. This could not be said for other divisions which had already attempted to penetrate the Huertgen Forest. There had been incidents of unit defection, but with the 4th Division the amount of troop desertion and alibi was limited to individual failures. This physiological reaction ranged from private up through the officer ranks.

Force Cohesion/Disintegration

Withstanding the volume of stress producing factors encountered in the Huertgen forest was no simple task. However, in tribute to the individual stamina and unit morale demonstrated within the 4th Division, most units performed well and fought to physical exhaustion without losing their cohesion. This achievement was noteworthy in light of the tactics being employed, the terrain to cover, and the demoralizing effect of the enemy actions.

Reports by the Division reflect a quantity of deserters; these figures do not appear to be excessively large (VII Corps After Action Report, p. 93). In contrast the number of prisoners of war collected by the American forces was significant with the total for the first four days of the initial battle amounting to 461 (7th Corps After Action Report, pp. 33-52).

The German division primarily responsible for the defense was the 275th Infantry Division, as previously mentioned. Unfortunately for them, this actually represented a composite unit, conglomerating personnel from some 37 various other German elements (McDonald, 1963). The potential to fight as an incohesive unit was high, but the manner in which the 275th was fielded lent itself to the use of small, independently operating squads and sections. In this manner, the need to function as fully cooperative companies and battalions was averted. Thus, with these small teams established to cover likely avenues of approach, they were able to maintain their individual integrity and provide a very stiff amount of resistance to the attackers.

The Effects of the Initial Contact

As noted in Map 1, Appendix A, German positions on 16 November were forced back to a new line by 20 November. The amount of western movement varied from as little as 1000 meters to the maximum shift of 2600 meters, but the line was still intact. Neither of these figures represented a significant loss of terrain considering that this was the result of four days of close engagement. But the condition of these German units was critical by 20 November and had the 4th Division not paused on 19 November to recuperate, the offensive push could have developed the penetration they were looking for (McDonald, 1963, p. 433).

From the American viewpoint the attack had been unsuccessful and none of the initial objectives of the division were reached by 20 November. The urban areas of Grosshau and Gey were still in German hands and only the north-south road formerly held by the Germans had been seized. Even this did not help alleviate the need for easier east-west movement by the US units. The supporting attacks in the north and south had had little success, while the primary effort in the center by the 22nd Regiment had covered the most ground and had produced a salient in German lines.

Certainly, no dramatic penetration or significant break-out from the confines of the Huertgen Forest had been attained. The enemy elements were still stubbornly resisting and gave no indication that they were about to collapse. Thus the initial period was at best a stalemate and at worst a defeat for the 4th Division. In regard to subsequent action, the division had more of the same ahead and the slugfest in the forest was to continue.

Why had this been the outcome for the initial 96 hour period? In summary, it could be said the terrain heavily favored the defender, and this, combined with unfavorable weather thwarted the superior US combat firepower. Additionally, the less than efficient US tactics contributed to this initial poor performance.

Casualty Rates

As noted earlier, the division entered the action with only two of its three Regiments. The 12th Infantry Regiment had been detailed to assist another division and was engaged from 6 through 15 November. As a result, it suffered more than 1600 casualties, including battle and non-battle injuries (McDonald, 1963, p. 429).

The remainder of the 4th Division fared little better when looking at the losses for the first four days. Some of the alarming figures include: infantry companies losses through-out were in the vicinity of 70%; one of six company officers was left available to fight; of the two engaged Regiments there were 1500 casualties - plus 750 more from illness and exhaustion (VII Corps After Action Report, p. 157). Although replacements had begun what was to become a daily push to the front, this effort was never enough to equal the number lost in action. Beyond that, the mathematical shortfall did not account for the fact that the new troops were green and could in no way immediately match the expertise and experience of the men they were replacing.

This reduced capacity of the division was realized at First Army headquarters and on 19 November the boundaries between V and VII Corps were shifted north to effectively reduce the front facing the 4th Division. This reduced area of responsibility acknowledged the battered condition of the unit and the fact that its objectives needed to be drawn in.

Both sides were making adjustments during the pause in the attack, and the bloodied and exhausted 275th Division was pulled off-line and replaced by the 344th Division (McDonald, 1963, p. 439). There were actually two reasons for this: one, the unit had been beaten down to a point of combat ineffectiveness; and two, the unit had to be rebuilt for subsequent employment in the German counteroffensive to begin in December.

Thus, the casualties on both sides were exorbitantly high and they made each unit far less effective for follow-on action. In fact, the German defenders had to be withdrawn and replaced with an entirely new division. For the 4th Division, it had endured greatly and would require a considerable period of recuperation to regain its former strength.

The Battle in Terms of the Principles of War.

These principles will be discussed in terms of the 4th Division's action:

MASS: to the extent possible, considering this was a supporting attack and that the frontage assigned was excessive for an infantry division, this unit was within its

means to mass. This could not be considered a serious deficiency but one that did diminish the power and speed of the attack through the forest.

MANEUVER: nothing imaginative was used and as observed even by the First Army commander: "they are going about it all wrong..." Such an indictment foretold of the near disaster that was going to confront the 4th Division. As previously stated, the prescribed doctrine of the day was not employed. Certainly, the initial moves of the 4th Division did not place the enemy in a position of disadvantage as the proper use of this principle implies.

OBJECTIVE: as a unit executing a supporting attack within the overall First Army plan, the potential existed to function without a clear-cut objective. Also, with one regiment already out of action, the division had far less combat power than normal. Nonetheless, the principle of establishing a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable goal was met. As it turned out that attainment was to require more effort than originally thought.

OFFENSIVE: Here the miscalculations, poor weather and inhibiting terrain worked against the 4th Division and prevented it from effectively exploiting the initiative. There were some gains, but they were small and very slow in progressing.

ECONOMY OF FORCE: This principle does not appear to have materially affected the 4th Division.

UNITY OF COMMAND: Within the unit being assessed, the 4th Division, there was unity of command. This is not to say that commanders made what were the best decisions, but at least cooperation was apparent and the effort of the division was well focused.

SECURITY: This principle does not appear to have materially affected the 4th Division.

SURPRISE: Here a major principle was taken into consideration, but the ability to achieve surprise was extremely questionable under the circumstances. This dilemma has been previously explained; decisions were made to achieve surprise. However, after noting the dismal showing throughout the initial four days, no extraordinary success was made that could have been a product of the surprise of

the attack. Thus, the lack of mass, in the form of fire support, was incorrect for the situation.

SIMPLICITY: This principle does not appear to have materially affected the 4th Division.

The Major Phases of the Battle.

Despite the tremendous losses of personnel, with little ground to show for it, the mission of the 4th Division remained the same as it had been at the start of the battle one week earlier. The unit was ordered to proceed to the northeast to capture the key roads and villages of Grosshau and Gey and proceed to the Roer River at Dueren (McDonald, 1963, p. 408).

The chronology of events will show that the battle still had two phases before the exhausted division would be relieved of their mission. The 4th Division remained guardedly optimistic on 19 November, and General Barton felt the division could seize the town of Gey and clear the forest in one phase. The frustrations the 4th Division experienced during 16-20 November, the effects of weather and terrain, and the well fortified and determined enemy would become evident again during the following weeks.

The two remaining phases were the capture of Grosshau, and the attack on Gey. Although these objectives were only 1.5 miles apart, the 4th Division would be forced to again stop in place, consolidate resources, and catch its collective breath before it could continue.

Chronology of Events.

Field Order #64 was issued at 201200A NOV 1944. It called for the 4th Division to attack to the northeast on 21 November. Specifically, it tasked the 8th Regiment to relieve the 12th Regiment, seize objectives at the eastern edge of the forest, and prepare to continue the attack towards Duren. At this time, the 8th Regiment consisted of 3 infantry battalions, D (-) and A Companies of the 70th Tank Battalion, A(-)/803rd Tank Destroyer (TD) Battalion, a medical platoon, and an engineer platoon from the division's organic Engineer Battalion.

The 12th Regiment, when relieved by the 8th Regiment, was to secure lateral roads for resupply, and clear the zone of action of by-passed or infiltrating units. They were to prepare for employment between the 8th Regiment and 22nd Regiment; or to attack to the northeast. The 12th Regiment, in addition to its 3 infantry battalions, had B/70 Tank Battalion, B(-)/803rd TD Battalion, a platoon of engineers, a medical platoon, and a platoon from C/87th Chemical Battalion.

The 22nd Regiment's mission was to continue the attack to seize Grosshau and Gey, and prepare to continue towards

Duren. This was the division's main attack, and the regiment had its own 3 infantry battalions plus C(+)/70th Tank Battalion, C/803rd TD Battalion, a medical platoon, a platoon of engineers, and C(-) /87th Chemical Battalion.

The 24th Cavalry Squadron (-) was to secure the road nets in the zone of the 8th and 22nd Regiments, and cover the gap between the two units (as much as possible, within assets). The 4th Engineer Battalion (-) was to concentrate on mobility of supply routes in the zone of the 22nd Regiment (4th Division Special Operation Report).

The Germans welcomed the lull in fighting as much as the Americans. As mentioned, the 275th Division was nearing combat ineffectiveness. After frantically searching for a replacement unit, the decision was made to stretch the defensive lines dangerously close to the corps in the south, and release the 344th Division to replace the 275th (McDonald, 1963, P. 437).

21 November 1944.

The planned coordinated divisional attack on 21 November never materialized. Instead, the division continued to consolidate positions in sector. The supply routes to the 22nd Regiment were not opened in time (1135 hours); and the regiment was experiencing severe problems with casualty evacuations as their wounded had to be carried a mile to the rear to reach motorized transportation.

The 8th 's 3rd Battalion moved at 0830 hours to mop up the southern portion of the regimental sector. It encountered only minor obstacles and closed with the northern flank of the 22nd Regiment at 1630 hours.

Casualties were high, as the enemy constantly bombarded front line units with high caliber artillery and mortar fires. The weather was overcast, with heavy rains that prevented any air support missions. Division Artillery fired 276 missions (7302 rounds), with 84 counterbattery, 88 interdiction, and 44 close support missions. The 803rd TD Battalion fired 830 indirect rounds (3", HE) and 14 direct fire rounds. There were no enemy planes in the area.

22 November 1944.

The 8th Regiment's attack was delayed, as ammo had to be brought forward by hand. The 1st Battalion attacked at 0830 hours with the 2nd Battalion supporting with fire. The regiment reached the edge of objective Jagerhaus in the early afternoon. At 1120 hours, the 3rd Battalion moved out along the axis of the 1st Battalion. They made contact with German defenses at 1300 hours and encircled them. The engineers attempts to open supply routes in the area were hampered by the tree-top artillery fires. The 12th Regiment moved to an assembly area in the center of the division sector by 1215 hours.

The 22nd Regiment's attack started with a series of feints by the 1st Battalion to draw the enemy's attention away from the 3rd Battalion's planned axis. The 3rd Battalion's attack towards Grosshau still encountered heavy artillery and small arms fire, and several key personnel at battalion staff and company level were casualties. By 1333 hours the battalion had moved only several hundred yards, but now had the road to Grosshau under direct fire. The unit then started to receive direct artillery fire from the town. The 2nd Battalion attacked at 0950 hours and met stubborn resistance (dug in self-propelled guns). It also moved only

200-300 yards.

The weather was again rainy and overcast, cancelling all US and German air support. The artillery fired 217 missions (7173 rounds) with 83 interdiction missions. In addition, the 803rd TD Battalion fired 630 rounds of indirect fire.

23 November 1944.

The 8th Regiment's 2nd Battalion attacked at 0840 hours and captured a large number of enemy personnel and equipment. Their progress was held back by the slow advance of the 3rd Battalion, due to their late start (resupply problems) and heavy small arms and artillery fires. The 1st Battalion was pinned down in their positions all day.

The 12th Regiment attacked to the east of the 8th Regiment at 1015 hours. They were to cross the road between Jagerhaus and Grosshau, and provide fire support for the 8th Regiment. A series of enemy mine fields delayed most of the battalions all day, with only two companies reaching the high ground on the other side of the road.

The 22nd Regiment remained in their locations all day,

as heavy enemy fires (from Grossheide) continued. Small task forces of infantry, tanks, and engineers were used to clear pockets of resistance in zone. Several small enemy counterattacks were quickly repulsed.

The weather was intermittent rain and overcast skies, allowing no air missions. The artillery fired 269 missions with 54 close support, 47 counterbattery, and 125 interdiction missions (8543 rounds). The 303rd TD Battalion fired 1400 rounds of interdiction support as well.

24 November 1944.

The 4th Division continued the attack, with the 12th Regiment on the right and the 8th Regiment on the left. The 22nd Regiment was again unable to move due to heavy artillery fires.

The 8th Regiment, with two battalions abreast, attacked to the northeast at 0830 hours and immediately encountered strong resistance from small arms and machine guns. The regiment had spent the entire day moving forward one tree at a time, but managed to capture almost 100 enemy personnel in the process.

The 12th Regiment attacked to the east at 0900 hours, with the 3rd Battalion passing through the 1st Battalion then attacking on line with the 2nd Battalion. Both battalions moved rapidly against weak resistance, and by 1400 hours had linked up with the 121st Regiment (8th Division) on the 4th Division's right flank.

Once again, bad weather cancelled all flights. The artillery fired 170 missions (31 close support, 20 counterbattery, and 76 interdiction) and used 8542 rounds. The 803rd TD Battalion fired 560 rounds, all indirect.

25 November 1944.

The division was now in position to attack to the east with three regiments abreast. Severe rains had made road movements impossible; and the tanks and tank destroyers could not keep pace with the infantry. Heavy fires continued from Grossheu. It was now becoming obvious that Grossheu was considered key terrain and a key psychological objective for both sides. The 8th and 12th Regiments reached their daily objectives "easily" against light, disorganized resistance, as the Germans concentrated their efforts in the town.

The 22nd Regiment's plan was to have the 3rd Battalion envelop Grosshau from the north, while the 2nd Battalion circled to the southwest to be able to place direct fires on both Grosshau and Kleinbau (8th Division objective). The attack was to start at 0730 hours, with no artillery prep in order to achieve surprise.

The 3rd Battalion attacked at 0745 hours and encountered immediate resistance; nevertheless, it reached its objective by 0845 hours with over fifty enemy POWs. The attack by the 2nd Battalion was delayed until 0820 hours as supporting armor tried to reach the unit. Despite strong resistance, the 2nd Battalion reached its objective by 1030 hours. At 1145 hours, the 3rd Battalion attacked across an open field toward Grosshau. The attack was immediately halted by direct fires that knocked out four tanks and two tank destroyers. Further attempts also failed, and the battalion dug in at 1500 after suffering heavy casualties. The 22nd Regiment alone had 266 battle casualties that day, and the whole division lost 479 battle casualties.

The weather was still cold (40 degrees), but the rain stopped for several periods. The fighting was too close to allow air support (a constant problem for the 4th Division), but no enemy aircraft were spotted either. The artillery

fired 270 missions (30 close support, 44 counterbattery, and 86 interdiction), using 6936 rounds. The TD battalion fired 548 rounds (indirect).

26 November 1944.

Due to the heavy personnel losses the previous day, the 4th Division generally maintained its position. Orders were passed to the 12th Regiment to clear the high ground between Grosshau and Kleinhau, in order to assist the 8th Division and CCR, 5th Armored Division in their attack on Kleinhau. The 3rd Battalion, 12th Regiment attacked up steep slopes and through swollen streams without armor support. During the attack, one company ran out of ammunition 100 yards short of the objective and had to pass through the following company to complete the mission. The objective was secured at 1600 hours.

The 22nd Regiment consolidated its position and poured 81mm mortar and artillery fires into Grosshau. Company C attacked to the east to clear the woods west of Grosshau, but was repelled by an enemy counterattack. The 22nd did get a small patrol into the outskirts of the town where it remained to provide intelligence.

For the first time all month the rain stopped; but the close proximity to the enemy prevented close air support. No enemy aircraft were spotted. The artillery fired 190 missions, mostly close support and interdiction (5695 rounds). The 803rd TD Battalion fired 560 rounds, all indirect.

27 November 1944.

The resistance around Grosshau intensified even more with the arrival of the 942nd Regiment, 353rd Division. The 4th Division expanded the zone of the 8th to free the 2nd Battalion of the 12th Regiment so it could move to an assembly area in the center of the division sector. The 22nd Regiment retook the ground west of Grosshau, lost the previous day. Other attempts at inserting patrols into the town were driven back by enemy small arms and artillery fires.

The reports were vague, but it appears the 4th Division might have finally received air support in the form of fighter/bomber missions against the rear elements of the 942nd Regiment. The weather was clear once again, with good visibility. The artillery fired 161 missions (105 of them were interdiction missions), expending 5637 rounds. The TD

Battalion fired 200 rounds of direct fire and 520 rounds of indirect fire into Grosshau. No enemy aircraft were spotted.

28 November 1944.

The 4th Division attacked with elements of the 12th Regiment to clear the area between the 8th and the 22nd Regiments. The enemy continued heavy fire from Grosshau and the high ground east of the town. The division's attack on the town was delayed a day to make it coordinated with the 8th Division attack on Kleinhau. The 12th and 22nd Regiments launched battalion-sized and smaller attacks to clear out larger zones. They encountered heavy mortar and artillery fire every time they moved.

Despite another clear day, no close air support was available. The enemy still did not fly over the division's zone. The artillery fired 197 missions (33 close support, 46 counterbattery, and 83 interdiction), expending 5319 rounds. There is no record of TD missions, but it can be assumed that they continued to provide indirect fire support as well.

29 November 1944.

The 8th Regiment moved its 1st and 2nd Battalions through the 3rd Battalion at 1116 hours to attack to the east. They immediately encountered heavy resistance, and once had to back up for artillery close supporting fires. Only slight gains were made all day. The 24th Cav moved into the rear of the 8th Regiment's sector to assist in preventing counterattacks.

The 12th Regiment started patrols towards the town of Gey to prepare for the next phase of the assault, while the 22nd Regiment prepared to enter Grosshau. The initial plan for the 22nd called for the 3rd Battalion to attack to the northeast of the town to seize the high ground. The 1st Battalion was to follow the 3rd Battalion to protect its flanks. The 2nd Battalion was to prepare for a frontal assault on the town.

The 3rd Battalion moved out at 1200 hours, against heavy resistance. Resupply and evacuation were extremely difficult due to the enemy direct fire on the trails. The 3rd Battalion reached its objective by 1830 hours, and had cleared the enemy off the high ground by 2050 hours.

The 2nd Battalion attacked at 1250 hours with two infantry companies plus tanks and TDs, against heavy enemy fires and counterattacks. By 1615 hours, they had only gained 75 yards past the first house in the town. At dusk, they were ordered to continue the attack (one of the few night fights in the 4th Division sector the entire battle); and had secured most of the town by 1945 hours. They continued to take prisoners out of cellars during the entire next day.

The capture of Grosshau had cost the division 368 casualties that day, and made the 22nd Regiment virtually combat ineffective. The rains returned, but air support would not have been possible in the house to house fighting anyway. The artillery fired 251 missions: 36 prep, 16 close support, and 128 interdiction (7092 rounds). The TD battalion was a great aid, firing 151 direct and 520 indirect rounds.

The division Field Order #65 on 291700A NOV 44, ordered an attack on 30 November to seize the LD (as of COB 29 Nov) and prepare to continue to attack the town of Gey. The 8th Regiment was to conduct "aggressive recons" to the east and southeast, and be prepared to resume the attack. They were given C/87th Chemical Battalion.

The 12th Regiment was to secure the LD and continue, on order, to capture Gey, assisted by the 22nd Regiment on the left and the CCA, 5th AD on the right. They were given D(-)/70th Tank Battalion and D/87th Chemical Battalion (replacing 1/C/87th Chemical).

The 22nd Regiment was given a newly attached unit, the 46th Armored Battalion, to help seize the LD. It was then to continue to the northeast to assist the 12th Regiment. The 22nd Regiment received C/709th Tank Battalion, but lost C(-)/87th Chemical.

The 24th Cav was to continue to secure road nets in the division's zone. The 4th Engineers were to enhance supply routes for the 12th and 22nd. (4th Division Field Order #65).

30 November 1944.

The 8th Regiment was to start the new division attack at 0800 hours. They had difficulty coordinating armor support, and did not start off until 0845-0900 hours. They immediately came under small arms and machinegun fire, and small enemy counterattacks. They gained only one-half mile

throughout the day.

The 12th Regiment attacked at 0845 hours against no immediate resistance, with the objective of securing an area west of Gey to be used as a LD for the mass attack into that town. They encountered several minefields covered by artillery fires, but advanced to positions just short of their objective and overlooking Gey.

The 22nd Regiment had an artillery prep fired, then attacked at 1130 hours. The prep was relatively ineffective against the dug in forces. By 1500 hours, the 3rd Battalion was still 300 yards short of its objective. The 2nd Battalion encountered stiff resistance east of Grosshau, and only moved 300 yards in two and one half hours. The 46th Armored Battalion spent the day retaking the LD, after severe fire from hill 401 (supposedly secured by CCA, 5th AD the previous day). The new battalion was at half strength by the end of the day.

Occasional rain fell throughout the day, but the previous dry weather allowed armor and supply vehicles to move more easily over the trails and roads in the area. The Air Force was able to provide some close air support to the 12th Regiment and fighter/bomber support to the division.

The recent attachment of the 951st Artillery Battalion became evident, as 293 missions were fired (29 close support, 15 prep, 52 counterbattery, and 127 interdiction), expending 8642 rounds. The 803rd TD Battalion consumed 65 rounds in direct fire and 520 rounds in indirect fire. No enemy aircraft were sighted.

1 December 1944.

Throughout the VII Corps area, the enemy suffered its greatest setbacks in the area of Gey. Unfortunately, it would require yet another bloody day for the 4th Division, as US casualties exceeded 400 killed or wounded.

The 8th Regiment, on the left (north) of the Division, attacked at 0815 hours towards Haf Hardt, with two battalions abreast. The enemy was well dug in, and both the woods and trails were heavily mined. The small arms fire was the worst encountered by the regiment thus far in the battle. The regiment attempted to envelop the enemy from the north, but the mines prevented armor support. By 1445, most of the mine fields had been cleared. An enemy counterattack had been launched at 1100 hours but was driven off.

The 12th Regiment attacked at 0800 hours to follow

gains made by the previous day. They encountered a series of enemy strongpoints and heavy artillery fires. At 1115 hours, an enemy platoon infiltrated 1st Battalion positions and attacked the battalion command post, cutting off communications. By 1330 the platoon had been eliminated. By 1500 hours, the regiment had reached the high ground overlooking Gey and was bringing up supporting troops.

The 22nd Regiment attacked at 0835 hours. The 3rd Battalion reached its objective by 1000 hours. The 2nd Battalion and 46th Armored Battalion met stiff resistance. By 1100 hours the 46th was ordered back to Hill 401 due to its personnel losses from the two days and the inability to get replacements. The 1st Battalion was committed, and the regiment flanked enemy positions from the northwest. By the end of the day the regiment reached positions from which they could support by fire the attack on either Gey or Strass, but at a heavy toll of casualties.

The fighting was again too close for air support by either side. The artillery fired 317 missions (35 close support, 101 counterbattery, and 125 interdiction), consuming 12,459 rounds. The 803rd TD Battalion fired 630 rounds (indirect). One FW-190 German bomber dropped six fragmentary bombs in the division area, but no casualties

were reported.

2 December 1944.

The 8th Regiment attacked with three battalions at 0830 hours to seize the road center at Haf Hardt. Extremely heavy resistance caused slow progress. By 1300 hours the regiment had penetrated the enemy defensive belt.

The 12th Regiment was attacked by a 40 man team of the 1057 Regiment, 91st Division, but quickly halted the advance. At 1000 hours, the regiment was ordered to attack to make contact with the badly mauled 22nd Regiment, which was accomplished by 1315 hours. By 1700 hours, the regiment was consolidating its position.

At 0645 hours the 22nd Regiment was counterattacked by elements of the 353rd Division, unsupported by armor or an artillery prep. The attack reached 600 yards to the 1st Battalion command post, where all available (60) personnel finally drove them back. By 1010 hours the attack was over, but elements of both the 1st Battalion and the 3rd Battalion had been overrun.

The 4th Division was supported by one squadron of

fighter-bombers, and six enemy tanks were bombed. The artillery fired 243 missions (57 close support, 21 counterbattery, and 122 interdiction), expending 7256 rounds. The 830th TD Battalion fired 723 rounds of HE (indirect).

The grave situation in the 22nd Regiment as well as the rest of the 4th Division had been made known to VII Corps and First Army for several days. By order of First Army, the 83rd Division was to move into the 4th Division's sector to start relief of the 4th Division on 2 December. General Barton issued orders on 202600A December 1944 for the 8th Regiment to continue the attack while the 12th and 22nd Regiments assumed defensive positions. The 22nd was to be relieved first, followed by the 12th, then by the 8th Regiments. The 4th Division was to move to assembly areas in the rear of the corps sector (4th Division Frag Order, 021600 hours A Dec 1944).

3 December 1944.

The 330th Regiment relieved the 22nd Regiment in zone by midmorning. The enemy forces tried several counterattacks: one by two platoons of infantry from the 8th Parachute Regiment, and another by elements of the 2nd Battalion, 981st Regiment, 272nd Division (a new arrival on the front, from the south). All attacks were made without supporting armor, and no ground was lost.

The 3rd of December was the largest enemy air strength in two months, as several squadrons of German bombers and fighters were in the VII Corps area. ADA forces reported over 20 confirmed kills and many other probable kills. The 4th Division Artillery fired 168 missions (32 close support, 18 counterbattery, and 56 interdiction), using 3404 rounds. TD missions were not reported, but indirect missions were likely.

4-13 December 1944.

On 4 December, the 12th and 8th Regiments mopped up the woods between the regiments, then left the 24th Cav to secure the roads. The enemy appeared to be regrouping after the counterattacks of 2 Dec.

On 5 December, the enemy again counterattacked with two companies of the 981st Regiment proceeded by artillery and mortar fires. The attack was unsuccessful, and the enemy was eliminated. Enemy offensive actions stalled, following defeat of this latest attack.

On 7 December, the 83rd Division completed relief of the 4th Division at 1600 hours, less the 8th Regiment. Throughout this time, both sides were regrouping for another battle. On 10 December, VII Corps attacked, capturing Strass and entering Gey. The 8th Regiment had flank responsibility and provided fires for the attack. On 11 December, the 8th Regiment was relieved to rejoin the 4th Division.

During the entire battle, the 4th Division suffered over 5180 battle casualties (253 officers) and over 2,430 non-battle casualties (57 officers). Replacements were 170 officers and 4,734 enlisted men. There are conflicting reports on battle losses between regimental and division reports, especially non-battle losses. Some S-1 reports listed total non-battle losses in excess of 4,000 men. The figures quoted here were taken from the 4th Division Special Operations Report, G-1 Record.

The Use of Combat and Combat Service Support.

To a large extent, the use of combat support and combat service support assets has been discussed in the chronology of events. Specific points will be highlighted here. Although there were two phases to the battle from 20 November - 7 December 1944, the actions of either side did not significantly change between the phases and they will be discussed together.

Engineers.

The German obstacle plan continued throughout the Huertgen Forest. The Germans were able to use the early November lull in the fighting to prepare excellent covered and concealed defenses. The magnificence of these defenses can be seen in a description of the typical German pillbox found in that region:

The roof averaged 6'10" thick concrete. The front wall was 4 feet thick; the rear wall 7'5" thick. All walls and the roof were reinforced with one quarter inch steel rods. The best defense was anti-tank direct fire or explosive charges placed to blow out a steel door or blow a hole in the concrete. This was followed up by grenades and/or flamethrowers to kill the inhabitants (Letter, Documentation of the Siegfried Line, 11 Oct 1944).

These defensive positions held up well under heavy US artillery fires and could only be destroyed by direct hits from 8" concrete piercing rounds. Their low silhouette in the darkened forest made them difficult to see. Attacks on one position usually led to devastating fires from mutually supporting positions.

The Americans' dependence on its engineer assets was directed primarily at mobility support. There were no adequate hard surface roads in the entire division sector, except for the road between the towns of Grosshau and Gay, and the trails wandered in every direction. Due to the heavy rains, even the narrowest creek was often impassable by vehicles. The enemy artillery barrages kept the few usable paths covered with broken trees.

Each regiment had one platoon of engineers attached during the battle. These meager resources were used primarily to assist the mobility of the tanks and tank destroyers in the units and to overcome larger obstacles in the battle area, then to open a route from the regimental trains to the battalions. Unfortunately, the requirements of the first mission were so enormous that the second mission was rarely accomplished. Survivability was left to the individual soldier. Minefields were breeched and cleared

largely by the infantry.

The 4th Engineer Battalion (-) was tasked to open the supply routes between the division and regimental trains. This task often included the requirement for minor bridge construction. It must be pointed out that the Huerfeno Forest area is not only heavily wooded, but also far from flat. There were slopes exceeding forty percent grades in several areas, especially along the major creeks.

The Use of Artillery Support.

Artillery support was a key ingredient for both sides. The Americans had to depend on artillery (and, to a lesser extent, on tank destroyer battalions) to provide interdiction and counterbattery fires necessary to maintain the attack, since air support was usually not available. The dense forests prevented close air support even on days with good weather, and the Americans had yet to really trust close air support after several disastrous missions early in the war. US artillery and mortars were the only means of providing large caliber fire on the immediate enemy forces, since often the tanks and tank destroyers were unable to keep up with the infantry's advances.

The Germans were especially successful with artillery because their targets were often unprotected infantry. By this time the Germans had mastered artillery bursts at tree-top level, which sent metal and large pieces of trees down on the soldiers below. The German artillery had the advantage of good communication with the forward bunkers and could fire missions with great accuracy. The defense from high ground positions often allowed German spotters to adjust artillery on US vehicles and engineers in the rear of the battle. This directly attributed to the inability of to US to resupply its front line units in a timely manner, and thus slowed the battle significantly.

Very little supporting fires were used by either side. The weather had a great impact on the ability to use air support; the steady rains made the use of smoke or chemical fires ineffective as well. Although there was a chemical battalion in the 4th Division, the records do not show US use of smoke or chemicals in the forest. The only known use of smoke by the Germans was on 4 December to shield an unknown activity on a flank.

The Use of Deception.

Deception was used sparingly by both the Americans and the Germans. By this stage of the battle, the US forces realized that the Germans had constructed a solid defense in depth. On several occasions both forces purposely avoided the use of preparation artillery fires or armor support for infantry attacks in hopes that the principle of surprise would be more essential. The Americans had little success with this plan, as the infantry were usually quickly pinned down by small arms and machinegun fires. The Germans did achieve partial success with this tactic on 2 Dec.; but once the counterattack was blunted, the German infantry quickly became casualties.

On several instances, the US regimental commanders had one of their battalions conduct a feint in order to divert attention from the main attack. Had the German forces not put all their assets on line (small reserve) but rather tried to economize on the line and counterattack with a large reserve, the feint might have been more successful. Once the Germans determined where the main attack was, they quickly adjusted artillery.

Affects of Attrition on the Battle.

The effect of attrition of forces was of great consequence to both sides. To the Americans, it taught a valuable lesson: the ability to replace losses does not, by itself, maintain the effectiveness of a unit. The Americans were able to replace over 65% of their daily losses by the following day. These replacements were both praised and rebuked by their commanders. McDonald implies that they were not trained for the battle they were entering, which was true for the entire division. Often, a large number of replacements would become casualties as they reached their units and started to dig in (McDonald, 1963, P. 470). Yet one battalion commander liked the new replacements in the attack:

The old men are afraid of artillery, while the new men move forward despite it, sometimes fast enough to avoid it. This is in accordance with the training they are receiving in the States (LTC Linder letter to LTC Fife, 4th Division Special Operations Report).

What was even more significant than the sheer number of replacements was the high percentage of junior leaders (officers and especially NCOs) that were casualties. Fighting in the Huertgen Forest required close small unit cohesion, which often meant that the junior leader was on

his feet moving from man to man. Artillery tree bursts were especially dangerous to these leaders. The combination of over 50% replacements and the majority of new leaders made several units combat ineffective despite their fill of personnel.

The Germans experienced a different problem. As new divisions were thrown into the battle, only the staffs were replaced. The infantry soldier of the old division was just absorbed by the new unit. These composite units lacked effectiveness that requires prior training. The Germans' inability to provide individual replacements eventually also resulted in ineffective units, because of the want for just a few more "warm bodies".

Command and Control.

Command, control and communications, always a problem in close combat, was further complicated by the fighting in the Huertgen Forest. Much of the problem can be attributed to the large turn-over of personnel, both leaders as well as individual replacements. The failure of US forces to train more of the enlisted ranks in radio telephone procedures often meant that the officer had to also be the radio-telephone operator (4th Division Special Operations

Report). The same effective enemy artillery fire that was causing so many casualties frequently destroyed wire communication between units.

Fighting in the deep woods further aggravated the situation, as often elements were unable to determine their own locations. This reduced the unit's ability to call for support fires or even properly execute by fire and maneuver. FM 100-5 advised units to avoid trails or roads, but these were often the only source of direction. There are several instances of company and smaller sized units attacking in the wrong direction because of confusion over location.

The overall result was that despite efforts by the regimental and battalion commanders, the battle was often fought at the company (or lower) level without coordination. Battalions had to constantly stop and regroup; and large gaps existed between units even after attempts were made to narrow regimental sectors.

The German forces experienced their own command and control problems, especially when the replacement units arrived. As previously mentioned, these were component units with little training together. US indirect fires also contributed to many of the same communication problems

discussed above. The German forces did have the advantage of being in the defense, with many of their lines buried before the American's arrival (4th Division Special Operations Report).

Use of the Reserves.

A cohesive reserve force, capable of influencing the battle, was not available to either antagonist during most of the fighting. The wide sector initially given to the 4th Division required the positioning of all available forces to the front. As the sector was narrowed, the division's units were so depleted that a reserve was still not possible.

The regiments often attacked with two battalions abreast, the third to the rear. Often, this third battalion was only a skeleton of its former self, after being in heavy contact the previous day, and needed what little time was available to regroup and resupply itself. These "reserves" were usually committed early in the battle as the front line units bogged down under heavy fire. The rear battalion also had the mission of mopping up bypassed units, which were numerous. Even if the battalion was not committed to the front lines, it was often engaged in an equally destructive battle in the rear.

The US forces were fortunate that the Germans had their own reserve problems, and could not launch a large scale counterattack. The one battalion-sized attack the Germans were able to muster (2 December) nearly overran the 22nd Regiment.

Description of the Action.

The battle of Huertgen Forest had no clearly recognizable turning point. It was more a matter of short daily advances against a prepared defense. The German command's decision to replace the 275th and 374th Infantry Divisions were as much an indication of their reluctance to give up German soil, as the American's daily infusion of individual replacements. The enemy counterattacks were too small to ensure operational success.

The result was the battle became as much a psychological operation as a tactical operation. In the 4th Division's zone of action, one event stands out- the capture of Grosshau. Although the town was just one link between the larger populated areas of Gey and Heurtgen (now in the zone of the 8th Division), it was the most important military objective in the 4th Division zone, except for Gey. Psychologically, it was an identifiable piece of land - far different from the nondescript woods that made up most of the battle area. Its capture meant a significant success had been achieved in a battle where daily advances were measured in yards.

To the Germans the town also had both tactical and psychological importance, for the same reasons given to the

Americans. Grosshau became the central strongpoint in a defense characterized by strongpoints in depth. To the German soldiers, every day that Grosshau remained in their hands was another day the rest of Germany could prepare to counter the Allied attack.

The fall of Grosshau had a noticeable effect on both antagonists. The morale in the American units increased dramatically. For a day, the German defenses were very unorganized as so much effort had been placed on Grosshau's defense. German POW rates also increased for several days.

Although the significance of Grosshau was recognized by both sides, each commander was limited in his ability to influence its eventual capture. The Germans were more successful at this by introducing additional resources to help bolster the town's defense.

General Barton was impeded by a VII Corps mission to clear the entire zone of defenders, and the need to coordinate the attack on Grosshau with the 8th Division's attack on Kleinhau. Had Grosshau been captured earlier, the American forces in the town would have been susceptible to counterattacks from several sides. Only the creation of new divisional unit boundaries and the assignment of the capture

of the string of towns from Huertgen to Gey to one division could have made the operation progress more rapidly.

The Outcome.Clear Tactical Victory?

Review of the Battle of Huertgen Forest reflects that neither the 4th Division or the 275th Division achieved a tactical victory for their part in the battle.

In the Huertgen Forest, the 4th Division was virtually expended for the second time since it landed at Normandy some six months earlier. Seven thousand men were lost in the four weeks of this operation which meant a 100-200% turn-over in rifle companies and battalion staffs. The total gain purchased at such a price was less than ten square miles, falling far short of the planned objectives, even though enemy resistance was on the whole of low quality. Several factors contributed to this failure. Among them may be: insufficiency of troops for the mission, premature commitment of one of the 4th Divisions regiments, loss of junior leadership, training of replacements, and the severe deterioration of the attacking units as they rapidly became transformed into aggregations of new replacements.

Therefore, late on 1 December, General Barton spoke in

detail to the VII Corps Commander, General J. Lawton Collins, about the deplorable condition of the division. The 22nd Infantry Regiment in particular had been milked of all offensive ability. Although replacements were courageous, they did not know how to fight; most junior leadership had fallen and virtually no leaders remained to provide continuity to the new troops. General Collins promptly ordered General Barton to halt his attack. On 3 December, a regiment of the 83rd Division brought north from the VIII Corps sector in Luxembourg was to begin relief of the 22nd Regiment. In the course of the next eight days the entire 4th Division was to move from the Huertgen Forest to Luxembourg in time for the counteroffensive in the Ardennes.

From the American viewpoint the attack through the Huertgen Forest had been unsuccessful and none of the initial objectives assigned to the 4th Division had been achieved when it was withdrawn from combat. Certainly no significant penetration or breakout from the confines of the dense Huertgen Forest had been attained. Thus it can be concluded that the 4th Division achieved at best a stalemate and at worst a defeat.

The German 275th Division did not fair much better than the 4th Division as the intense fighting inflicted

numerous casualties on the division's units. The bloodied and exhausted 275th Division was pulled off line and replaced by the 344th Division three days into the battle. There were actually two reasons for this tactical maneuver: first, the 275th Division had been beaten down to a point of combat ineffectiveness and second, the unit needed to be refitted and rearmed for subsequent use in the planned German counteroffensive to begin in December.

Opposing Forces and Mission Accomplishment.

With reference to the American 4th Division, it failed to accomplish its assigned mission which was to defeat the German forces in its sector of the Huertgen Forest, control the road network and seize the villages of Huertgen, Kleinhau, Grosshau, and Gey, and then, finally, move to control the Roer River Dams in the vicinity of Duren.

The German 275th Division, though it did not stay in the battle for a long period of time, was successful at delaying and defeating the units of the 4th Division and relinquishing minimal terrain in the process.

Battle Fought According to Plans?

From the perspective of the American forces the battle was not fought nor were the results as successful as anticipated. The basic truth was that the fight for the Huertgen Forest was predicated on a purely negative reason of denying the Germans use of the forest as a base for thwarting an American drive to the Rhine. In the process of the fight, the 4th Division failed to capture the only really critical objectives which were the Roer River Dams.

However, the factor that severely impacted on the 4th Division offensive capability occurred before it became engaged in the Huertgen Forest Battle. When the 12th Regiment was shifted to the 28th Division during the period 9-15 November, the number of casualties incurred by the regiment impacted on its offensive capability when the 4th Division attacked on 16 November. This situation affected General Barton's capability to use and maneuver his subordinate regiments, thereby limiting the division's offensive punch.

From the viewpoint of the commander, 275th Division, his plan was to delay and repulse the American forces with his limited manpower assets which were of poor quality.

The 275th Division reacted to the intermittent American gains and it was generally successful in repulsing these advances with quick ground attacks. It can be deduced that the German units fought the battle as they originally planned with the intent of denying the 4th Division's movement and access to key terrain.

Personnel and Equipment Losses.

The Battle of Huertgen Forest was fought under some of the most adverse fighting conditions imaginable. Nevertheless, combatants on both sides demonstrated resilience and determination. The American forces not only had to contend with dense forested area against a dug-in enemy in well fortified positions, but also had to endure the extreme cold weather. During the battle, the 4th Division incurred a tremendous number of battle and non-battle casualties which ultimately culminated in their becoming combat ineffective. During the battle some 432 men were known dead and another 245 missing. The 4th Division had suffered a total of 4053 battle casualties while another estimated 2000 men had fallen to trench-foot, diseases, and combat exhaustion. The 4th Division also experienced an extensive loss of equipment due to enemy mines, artillery

and mortar shelling, and the restrictiveness of the dense forest.

Historical records do not reflect the battle casualties or losses of equipment of the 275th Division. It can be assumed that losses were extensive due to the nature of the battle and the fact that the division was withdrawn from combat after only 96 hours on the line.

Opposing Force Preparations for Future Operations.

Both the 4th Division and the 275th Division were withdrawn from the Battle of Huertgen Forest because of combat ineffectiveness. After being withdrawn, both units were refitted for future campaigns which ultimately resulted in their involvement in the German counteroffensive in the Ardennes.

Section V

Significance of the Action

Huertgen Forest (4th Infantry Division)

Immediate Significance.

The Battle of Huertgen Forest which pitted the 4th (US) Division against the 275th (GE) Division initially and later against the 399th (GE) Division, was certainly not a decisive battle. The action of both antagonists must be considered in the larger scope of US offensive action against the Siegfried Line. As the battle turned very early into a stalemate, this fight had very few immediate effects except the fact of fixing a division on each side.

On the US side, no strategic objectives could be achieved. The only important objective for the 4th Division was the Roer Dams, which were never reached by the division. These dams were probably less important as dams, but their capture and crossing the Roer was the key to the plain from Duren towards the Rhine.

On the German side, there was a certain strategic achievement. Although they suffered many casualties, the Siegfried Line resisted and was not penetrated, which gave the German High Command the opportunity to prepare the Ardennes Counteroffensive.

The only significant advantage for the winning side, in

the case of the Germans, would have been a successful counterattack which disintegrated the VII Corps and the First Army offensive. Lack of reserve forces prevented the Germans from counterattacking. On the other hand, there was no significant disadvantage for the US, notwithstanding the 7000 casualties. As reinforcements were available, this cannot be considered as significant for a nation practicing attrition warfare.

Long-Term Significance.

The outcome of the battle of Huertgen Forest by the 4th Division and the opposing German did not affect the long term objective: the defeat of Nazi Germany for the Allies. At that time Germany had no long term objectives except survival. The battle was a clear defeat for the American way of fighting war, based upon frontal attack supported by massive firepower. Although the doctrine of FM 100-5 was sound, very few commanders applied it and most of them preferred firepower to maneuver. Consequently, it was quite normal that the lack of firepower or inadequate firepower created the basis for defeat. But it was only a tactical defeat. Replacement of a division was only a question of time, as human and materiel resources were sufficiently available.

The battle certainly did not decide the outcome of the war. The Germans fought a good defensive battle, followed by excellent retrograde operations. The fact that the 4th Division attacked during several weeks makes this battle important in the way of how NOT to engage in a tactical action. In fact, every day that the village of Grosshau remained in German hands was another day of rest for the German Army at the Western Front and added time for the High Command to prepare for the counter to the allied attack.

Military Lessons Learned.

In fact the battle did not teach any new significant military lesson. There were a lot of old solid and sound military principles where were not respected by the 4th Division and so they paid a very high price of casualties.

There is no reason to believe that either of the antagonists learned from this action. The Germans fought a good battle, and they continued to do so for the remainder of the war. However, the same scenario of overwhelming manpower and materiel eventually were used by the Allies to determine the outcome of the war.

It must be clear to contemporary military students that although doctrine should not be dogma, it is better to follow the doctrine than to make costly and useless frontal attacks. Another important lesson is that on whatever level an action is planned, it is on the very low level of squad and platoon that the outcome of the battle will be decided and therefore good combat leadership by junior officers and NCOs is mandatory.

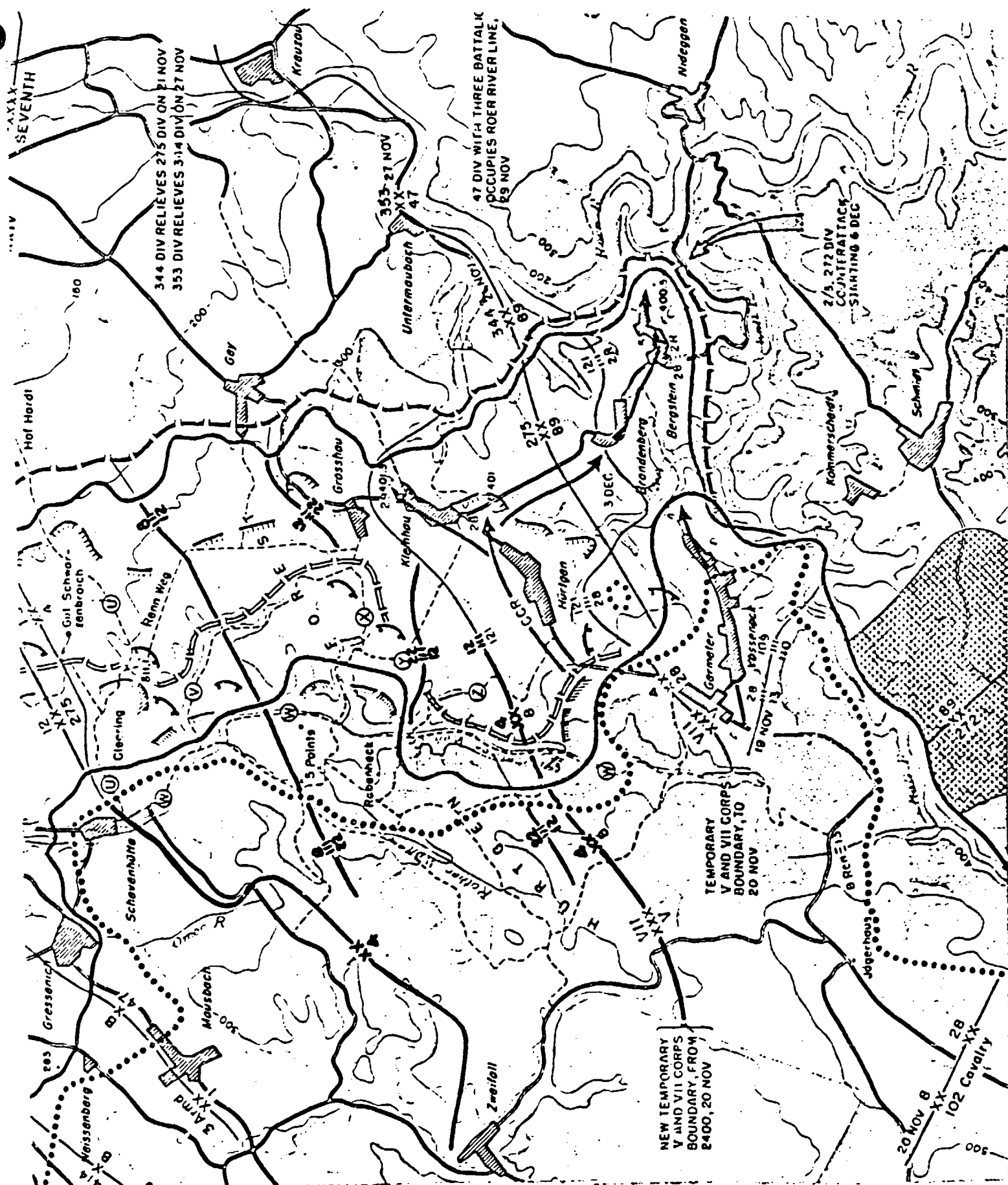
Another old lesson renewed is the synergistic effect of combat power (engineers, artillery, air, armor, infantry).

Last, the Americans relearned the difficulty of achieving tactical surprise when the overall maneuver and war style is very predictable and lacking imagination.

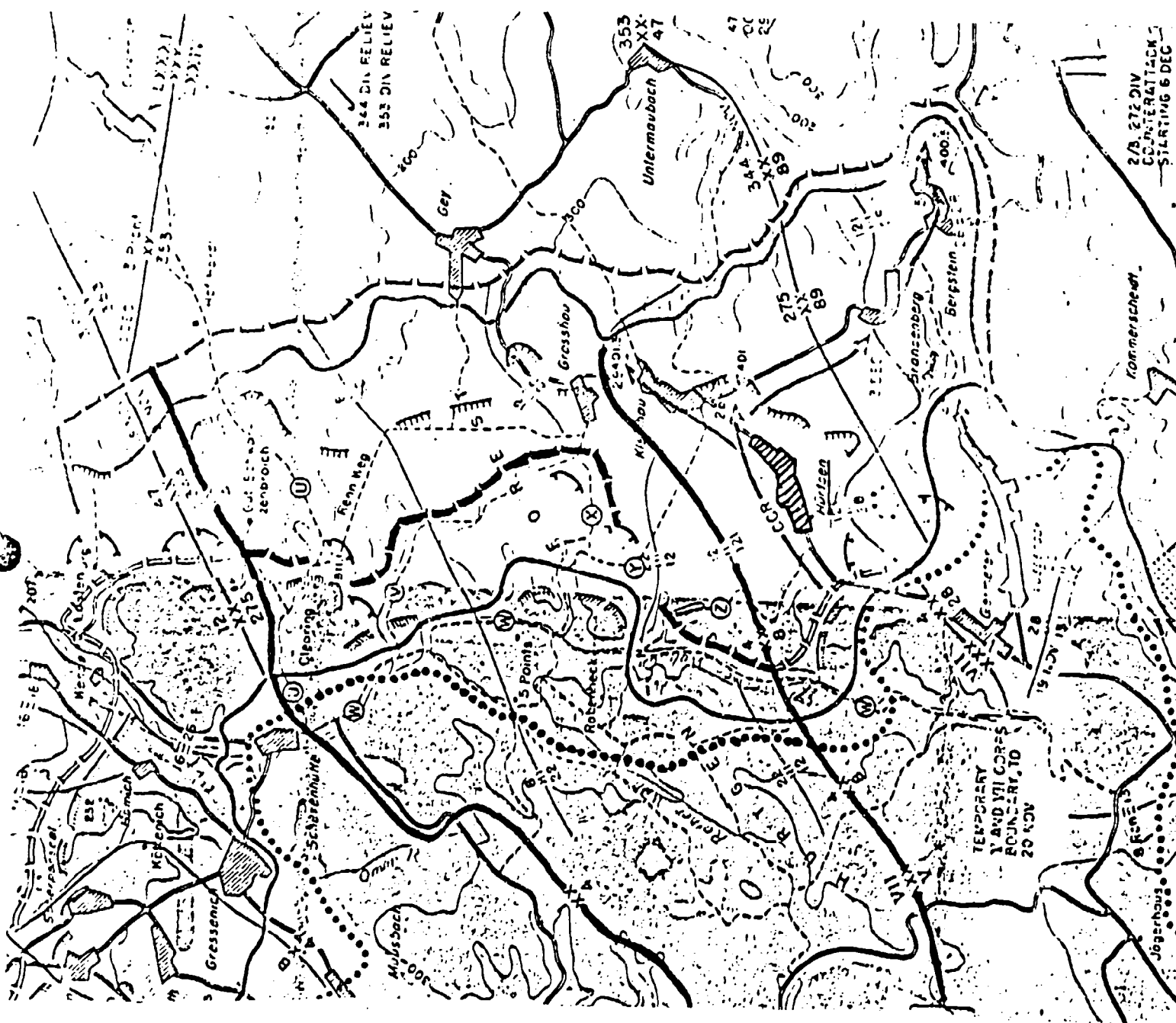
Appendix A

Maps

Huertgen Forest (4th Infantry Division)







Appendix B

References

Huertgen Forest (4th Infantry Division)

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