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183d VOLKS GRENADIER DIVISION

(Sep 1944 - 25 Jan 1945)

By

Generalleutnant a.D. Wolfgang Lange

HISTORICAL DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE
FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES BRANCH

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FOREWORD

by General a.D. Erich Bradenberger

This is the first study of the 183d Volks Grenadier Division. It starts at the end of the first Battle of Aachen, when the division first arrived in the Geilenkirchen area at the right wing of Seventh Army. The division then occupied the unprotected sector of the West Wall, and there absorbed the 275th and 49th Infantry Divisions. (See study on the Seventh Army, Somme - West Wall, MS # B-730.) The 183d Volks Grenadier Division was involved only in the beginning of the second Battle of Aachen at the extreme tip of its left wing at Uebach--Palenberg. The enemy spearhead breakthrough proceeded southeast; Aachen was encircled and lost, and the second Battle of Aachen was concluded. In the third battle the division faced one of the main thrusts of the enemy attack, and was engaged in the first line, center and left wing. The 176th Infantry Division was on its right and the 9th Panzer Division on its left.

From the penetration of 16 November to about 5 December the 183d Volks Grenadier Division did not have an independent mission. The fighting for hills and villages was carried out by the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division,

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which were in the front line at all times. During this period the units of the 183d were almost always subordinate to one of the other divisions.

After 5 December, and after some units had been detached from the division for reorganization, the 183d Volks Grenadier Division again appeared as an independent unit. In spite of the insufficient reorganization, the division had to be reemployed as an independent unit since the 9th Panzer, 15th Panzer Grenadier, 10th SS Panzer and 340th Volks Grenadier Divisions had been designated for the Ardennes Offensive and were withdrawn.

The line drawn in the map in the appendix for November is not quite correct; Gereonsweiler had already been lost. The southern line in December should be deleted, and the northern line from Lindern should be placed further to the north because on 29 November the American major attack south of the Wurm River recommenced. On that day the US Ninth Army had already entered Lindern and reached the important hilly area at the Lindern--Linnich road. The LVII Panzer Corps, directly subordinate to the Fifteenth Army, took Lindern by counterattack, but could not hold it. Lindern was never recaptured after 1 December.

After 17 December the 183d Volks Grenadier Division came under Korps Gruppe Felber and remained under it until the corps left for the Battle of the Bulge during the second half of December. It was then again placed under the XII SS Corps. The right wing of the division wasn't engaged until the British XII Corps launched its attack between the Meuse and the Roer Rivers, 15 January. The right

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wing of the division was practically untouched until that time not particularly because of its strength, but rather the fact that on 16 November the British, for some unexplicable reason, did not launch an expected parallel attack. On 15 January the entire front was beginning to stagger under the American attacks on the division's other sectors. The major attack of the allied forces, which began 23 February, found the division revitalized. For a short time it was effective, but this period has not been covered in this report.

In places the study does not elaborate clearly on the role of the 183d Volks Grenadier Division in the third Battle of Aachen. The study, however, furnishes additional facts on the fighting in the division sector which are useful as war history. It also contains remarks on general experiences. The sequence of events of the division on a larger scale may be obtained from the studies of the LXXXI Corps, the XII SS Corps and the Fifteenth Army.

The study has been written as fully as the author could remember. It would have been a bit clearer perhaps, if the many experiences dispersed throughout the study had been incorporated in a special chapter.

183d VOLKS GRENADIER DIVISION
(September 1944 - 25 January 1945)

I. ACTIVATION

The 183d Volks Grenadier Division was activated during the first half of September 1944. It was composed of remnants of headquarters and other staffs of the former Corps Detachment C. The activation at the Doellersheim troop training ground in Lower Austria was completed within 14 days. Although everyone detached by the Army High Command and assigned to the division felt that an extension of the activation period was needed, it was not possible to obtain it. Not only would an extension have made it possible to complete the activation of the personnel and materiel normally and unhurriedly, but would have contributed greatly to the improvement of training and the development of comradeship.

Fifty-one percent of the division's personnel were Austrians, the majority from the Lower Danube and Vienna. Many of the enlisted personnel had been deferred for years. A large percentage of the men were from Alsace Lorraine, East Upper Silesia, Western Prussia and the Warta district. During the short period allotted, the training, which on the whole was insufficient, could be little improved

and then only within the smallest units. It was impossible, for example, to have exercises with combined-arms units. There was a lack of specialists. However, armament and equipment was usually good and complete even though supplies were small compared with the new authorized strength of Volks Grenadier divisions. The assault gun company did not join the operations area of the division until September.

Because of these circumstances the division lacked inner stability at the beginning of operations. Although these conditions were improved in the course of time, heavy losses of infantry and engineers could only be made up by incompetent replacements, mostly Luftwaffe personnel. Numerically the infantry strength varied greatly and never again reached the initial authorized strength. In the course of time the armaments weakened because few new automatic and medium guns were supplied.

11. FIRST ASSIGNMENT AT THE WEST WALL

In mid-September the division was transported without incident to the Western front. As the various units arrived they took up positions on both sides of Geilenkirchen. Although the activation had not been perfected and enemy air operations were very strong at the time, disrupting communication lines, the transfer ran practically according to plan. The unloading of troops in the Juelich--Dueren area was not greatly disturbed.

After 18 or 19 September, during local fighting west of

Geilenkirchen, units of the 275th Division, withdrawing under General-leutnant Hans Schmidt, were added to the 183d at Geilenkirchen. Elements of the 49th Infantry Division under General Machholz were added at the West Wall south of the town. With these additions the 183d was able to close a gap on the northwest front extending as far as the Birgden area, and thereby halted the American advance on the Reich.

Since the withdrawing divisions were exhausted and our situation and that of the enemy was rather uncertain, the 183d was obliged to carry out many thorough reconnaissance actions. The division was also kept busy establishing communications with the withdrawing troops. Eventually the 183d stood well-organized in a thinly manned front from Birgden through Hattereth--western edge of Geilenkirchen--Wurm River sector (West Wall) to Uebach. The front extended 26½ km, with the point of main effort near Geilenkirchen. (Appendix A.)

The 183d was subordinate to the LXXXI Corps under Generalleutnant Schack and, until 23 October, to the Seventh Army. General Schack was succeeded after a few days by General der Infanterie Koechling. The corps command post was at Niederziw, 8 km north of Dueren. The unit on the left was the 49th Division and later the 246th Volks Grenadier Division which later absorbed the 49th. The right adjacent unit was the 176th Division under Colonel, later Generalmajor Landau. The command post of the 183d Division was first at Floverich, west of Puffendorf, and after 23 September at Beeck.

Additional units were later placed under the 183d Division. A fortress machine gun battalion, which was employed at the West Wall south of Geilenkirchen, was absorbed by the infantry, but its combat value was low. The Juelich and Dueren Army NCO Schools were employed at and north of Geilenkirchen. Although the subordination of these units improved the combat value of the division for a short time, the use at the front of such first-rate units as one body must be condemned. Their organization, armament and equipment were not quite sufficient for employment at the front. They were in some respects lacking, and abundant in others. It is most obvious that such an employment of personnel was highly uneconomical. It meant wasting first-rate personnel without receiving adequate profit. By distributing immediately the two NCO schools over the entire division, its combat value would have been improved considerably and maintained at high level. The employment of the schools as separate units resulted in high losses and when both were finally distributed to the entire army group, no unit profited perceptibly.

During the fighting in October, the second half of November and even later, the composition and area of responsibility of the division were changed several times. Although the details of these changes are no longer available, a general picture may be obtained in the following description of activities during that period. The construction and improvement of a defense front on both sides of Geilenkirchen during the second half of September was slow because

the area was sparsely occupied. New installations had to be built in the wooded area north of Geilenkirchen and at the western edge of the town. In the southern part and in the area between the permanent installations it was necessary to prepare the West Wall and improve it with field fortifications, at the same time that the activation was being completed. A fusilier battalion was formed from the bicycle company, and the new assault gun company became part of the antitank battalion.

The tactical mission of the division was defense, and above all, to hold the West Wall. This period was characterized by intensive reconnaissance activity on both sides and a successful stand against several local enemy attacks, mostly near Geilenkirchen.

III. MAJOR BATTLES

1. The American Attack at Uebach-Palenberg. The 183d Division made feverish defense preparations, expecting that any time after September the enemy would continue the attacks. Because of the terrain and the especially lively reconnaissance and combat activity of the enemy at Geilenkirchen, the division anticipated the main point of effort to be there. The division was surprised when the Americans attacked at Uebach-Palenberg on 2 October. Although the terrain was somewhat unfavorable for the attacker because the Wurm River had to be crossed, and in spite of the permanent fortifications of the West Wall, the thin defense front was pushed back rather easily. The attacker was lucky in that the

spearhead of the attack hit the boundary of the 183d Volks Grenadier Division and the 10. Volks Grenadier or 49th Division. From some of our advanced observation posts one could see, and almost count, the overwhelming number of attacking tanks and the forces that followed them. By evening about 80 American tanks had crossed the Wurm. Uebach-Palenberg had been lost.

An order was issued to re-establish the MLR at the Warm River by a counterattack during the night of 2 October. This counterattack was led by the commander of the 183d Division, even though the main thrust was in the south originating from the sectors of the two adjacent divisions. Most of the troops of the adjacent divisions took part in the attack. Apart from the infantry units of these divisions, the concentric counterattack was carried out mainly by an infantry regiment under Captain Schreder, and the assault gun company of the 183d in the main thrust from the south, and the engineer battalion of the division, used because there were no other troops, from the north. In order to have the best communication lines, the division commander, with a small staff, moved to the command post of the Schreder regiment in the gallery of the Baesweiller mine. Nonetheless it was extremely difficult to get prompt cooperation from all units engaged in the attack. As a result the beginning of the attack several times was delayed for some hours. The cooperation of the assault gun company of the 183d with the infantry regiment from another division, under Captain

Schreder, during a night attack, was particularly difficult, especially as this company had joined the division only a few days previously equipped with new kinds of equipment. However, in spite of all these difficulties the counterattack was carried out early in the morning of 3 October. The eventual success was merely a narrowing and sealing-off of the penetration. When viewed objectively, more could not have been expected under the circumstances, especially with the proportion of strength. The engineer battalion suffered especially heavy losses and did not recover from the blow.

During the days following the Americans were able to widen locally their penetration, but could not turn it into a breakthrough. It was widened mainly in the south toward Aachen in the sector of the left adjacent division. By temporarily placing an infantry regiment (404th?) under a major of the 246th Volks Grenadier Division and employing it at Immendorf the new front in the southern sector of the 183d was consolidated (see appendix).

On 17 October the 183d Volks Grenadier Division became subordinate to the XII SS Corps under Obergruppenfuehrer von Gottberg. When von Gottberg became ill, General der Infanterie Blumentritt assumed command. After 23 October the division was assigned to the Fifth Panzer Army. On 4 October the division command post was moved from Beeck to Ruhrich.

2. The American Attack at Immendorf. October and the first half of November passed with mainly reconnaissance patrols. The northern sector was improved up to and including Geilenkirchen while

in the southern sector new installations were built. It was noteworthy that the division front at that time cut the West Wall at Geilenkirchen in such a manner that the fortifications were hardly of any use for the defense. Only in the Wurm River sector near Geilenkirchen and between Geilenkirchen and Immendorf were there permanent installations in the depth of the main defense area to support the defense.

An unusual move by the enemy was the formation and maintenance for weeks of a nest of 30-50 tanks in the open terrain south of Immendorf, close behind the front line. This behavior can be explained only by assuming the American infantry urgently needed such support. For us, however, this concentration was a great worry. On the one hand our infantry felt completely helpless against such a superior and permanent menace. On the other hand it was hopeless to try to combat these tanks with our means. Attacks with antitank guns were soon given up because the danger of losses was greater than the prospects of success. Raids of the division artillery could perhaps harass the tanks, which had been dug deeply into the ground, one tank might even be accidentally hit, but the expenditure of ammunition was not justified by the results that could be expected. Eventually two howitzers were to be transferred to the division. One arrived, but I can't remember whether it had any effect.

There was also the weather and the mud, especially in the

Immendorf area, which proved the most hostile enemies of our infantry lying in the front line without cover.

The division expected the American attack to continue from the area south of Immendorf directed at Gereonsweiler and Linnich. We therefore kept our reserves, generally an infantry battalion and the assault gun company, at Gereonsweiler. The corps expected an attack against the 176th Division toward Hausberg. Such an attack would also hit the right wing of the 183d Volks Grenadier Division. The corps ordered the division reserves to be moved to the west bank of the Wurm River. There were no clues as to when the American attack would begin.

It was a clear day on 16 November when the commander of the 183d Volks Grenadier Division inspected the forward positions between Geilenkirchen and Immendorf in the early morning, at noon, when the major attack on Immendorf began, he was 1 or 1.5 kms west of the town, yet, in spite of constant observation in all directions he had not noticed anything indicative of an attack. He saw only a repeated air raid on Immendorf, a common occurrence.

Without long artillery preparation, the attack begun at noon, with strong tank support in the Immendorf area, turned out to be the main point of the attack. Immendorf, Floverich and Loverich were lost. The right wing of the left adjacent division was also hit. Although the depth of the main defensive area was only thinly occupied, the enemy advance between Immendorf and Apweiler was

stopped long enough for the fusilier battalion and assault gun company of the division reserve to be moved up from the Nirm--Wurm area. It was a very risky operation for the assault gun company to move in broad daylight through the open terrain, however, the movement was completed without much interference.

In the afternoon of 16 November and on 17 November the division reserves, subordinate to the regiment commander at Apweiler, prevented the attacking Americans from breaking through at Apweiler toward Gereonsweiler and Linnich. The assault gun company suffered rather light losses on 16 November in disabling 14 American tanks. The fusilier battalion, however, suffered heavy losses during the repeated American attacks and our own counterattacks. The men in pillboxes between Immendorf and Geilenkirchen held their positions bravely and thus prevented a wider penetration. Apweiler, the center of our defense, remained firmly in our hands. Just south of Gereonsweiler 10 to 15 "King Tiger" tanks were concealed in special shelters and were not used during the fighting. This measure ordered by the high command was certainly justified, even though it was a great disappointment to the troops. During the fighting of 16 and 17 November three infantry battalions and the antitank company of the division suffered great losses. A penetration was made with the loss of Immendorf, Floverich and Overich. The Americans also suffered great losses of personnel and materiel, partly because of their rather awkward actions.

A breakthrough, which had certainly been the aim of the American command, was prevented in these first days of major fighting by the troops of the division unassisted. A counterattack however, with only the division forces, to reestablish the former MLR, was out of the question.

It was therefore decided to employ the 9th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division for this purpose. They launched their counterattack from the Prummern and Gereonsweiler areas on 18 November. The 183d Volks Grenadier Division relinquished control of this sector to these divisions, but was not authorized to remove its troops. Even those whose combat value had sunk to a minimum during the preceding fighting were required to remain. After much dissension, which decreased morale considerably, the last unit of the division--the remnants of the hobbled fusilier battalion--was pulled out of the front some days later. Once again the disadvantage of mixing units or postponing their reorganization was evident. Any unit is at its worst when fighting as part of another unit; a unit tends to abuse another unit subordinate to it. The counterattack of the 9th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division failed, and in the days following these divisions hardly managed to hold their positions.

The antitank battles of the 183d Volks Grenadier Division at Uebach-Palenberg and Immendorf provided many lessons in combating tanks with special infantry weapons. In summer 1944 in the east

tanks were often countered successfully with improvised means such as hand grenades, concentrated charges, frag. : glass smoke grenades, and gasoline bottles. These successes were due partly to the tremendous experience and high caliber of the individual German fighter, and partly to the bold and often stupid use of tanks by the Russians. On the western front, however, after September 1944, as far as I observed, little success was achieved with such combat methods. The use of rocket launchers and portable rocket launchers was also ineffective. Besides the decreasing caliber of the German troops, these failures were due to the systematic and cautious employment of tanks by the Americans.

Nevertheless one of the antitank weapons, the rocket launcher, merits further development. It can be used in wooded areas and cover positions in villages and other terrain. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that in using this weapon the individual loses the feeling of complete helplessness against a tank. The range of the launcher should be increased and thereby lessen the emotional strain on the soldier. The drawback of the portable launcher is, that it is difficult to handle and easily damaged. A horse-drawn or tractor-drawn gun is also unfit for combating tanks. Firstly, in modern combat, even a well camouflaged gun cannot hold its position against the fire of several mobile tanks. Secondly, it is impossible to change positions during enemy fire because of the difficulties involved. The entire antitank company of the 183d Volks Grenadier Division was destroyed in a short time without

attaining any noticeable achievements. Only the low-built, self-propelled mount promises success. During the foregoing battle, the "Hetzer" type assault gun proved excellent because it was mobile and needed only to be moved from under cover for a few minutes to be fired.

3. The Loss of Geilenkirchen and the German Counterattack.

During the second half of November Geilenkirchen was encircled by the enemy and lost. The division realized early that this town could not be held and requested that it be surrendered. Authorization wasn't given until the encirclement was complete and the technical means of communication were gone. Patrols that were to deliver the order either could not find their way or did not find our troops. As a result an entire battalion was lost, yet nothing essential had been gained.

Here again a counterattack was ordered by higher headquarters, perhaps solely out of habit. An infantry regiment of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division was brought into the Tripsrath area and assigned to the division in order to retake Geilenkirchen from this area with an attack to the south. Although the direction of attack and the terrain were favorable, the attack had little prospects of success from the outset because the German forces operating here were too weak. They were halted in the Niederheide area after some initial success, however, the higher command was satisfied. Except for some minor changes the course of the MLR by the end of November

can be seen in the appendix.

During this fighting the 183d Volks Grenadier Division became temporarily part of the LVII Panzer Corps under General Heinrich von Luetwitz. For a short time the command post of the division was at Porselen and the division commander and a small staff in a pillbox at Randeveth, an advance command post. In the infantry only the 351st Grenadier Regiment commanded by reserve Colonel Schudo on the right wing was practically untouched. Five infantry battalions were completely exhausted or had nothing but cadre. Consequently division headquarters was temporarily withdrawn from the front to reorganize the five infantry battalions and the engineer battalion for the defense of the Roer River. During this time the division command post was at Doveren.

That part of the division which was still fit for combat, particularly the 351st Grenadier and the artillery regiment, was made subordinate to the 15th Panzer Grenadier and 9th Panzer Divisions. However, the division commander was still responsible for these troops.

It is proper to add some remarks here on counterattacks based on the experience of the foregoing fighting. In German, principles of battle command, great emphasis is rightly placed on the importance of counterattacks as a means of regaining a lost MLR; they are an essential part of defense. A counterattack was usually launched or ordered by the responsible officers whenever the enemy

had penetrated into the main defensive area. However, a counter-attack must be based on the prospects of success. Success depends on the enemy's manner of fighting and the forces available to the defenders. Against a bold enemy that lacks systematic methods of fighting, the chances of success by counterattacks are generally greater than against the Americans, for example, whose procedure of attack is almost overcautious. If in addition the forces available are insufficient for a successful counter-attack, it is better to assume a new MLR, even if it is less favorable than the previous line. This is not to deny the inviolable principles of defense, but the loss of the MLR must be accepted when a counterattack has no chance of success. Experience has shown that the loss of troops in counterattacks that fail is extremely great.

The failures on 3 October at Uebach-Palenberg and at Geilenkirchen were typical examples. The unsuccessful counterattack at Immendorf on 18 November was another example, but this attack was different in that it was carried out by two divisions supported by about 70 tanks. In the examples of Uebach and Geilenkirchen there arises the question as to whether the higher command actually misjudged the situation or whether it knew from the outset that such counterattacks were doomed to failure. Perhaps the higher command only intended to narrow the penetrations or seal them off, while actually ordering the former MLR re-established. If this is true, the orders were both tactically wrong and immoral. Such orders are likely to weaken

confidence in the higher command.

4. Participation in the Battle of the Bulge. The reorganization of the exhausted infantry had to be greatly speeded because the division soon took over the front sector northwest of the Wurm River, including the river valley. Since the MLR had been moved back it had to be built anew. There was also much done to organize the depth of the main defensive area. The defense was strengthened considerably by the assignment to the division of the volks artillery. The troops had little rest because of patrol activity by both sides, especially in the Wurm Valley. A larger operation on the left wing along with the left adjacent unit brought some initial success that later had to be given up. From 10 December to the end of the month the division was under the Korpsgruppe Felber because of plans for the division to take part in the Battle of the Bulge. According to plans about four divisions were to advance southward between the Meuse and the Wurm Rivers and thereby regain the Aachen area. The left wing of this group, which I believe included the 9th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and elements of the 183d Volks Grenadier Division, was to attack on a wide sector. It was at first assumed that the enemy front would be very weak because troops had been taken out for the main front in the Ardennes Forest. The division determined its plan of operations according to the orders from higher command, but did not inform the troops of these orders.

The order to carry out the attack was not given. It was reported that all troops that had been transported to the front between the

Meuse and the Wurm Rivers during the last weeks, especially the 9th Panzer Division, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and the volks artillery, had been withdrawn. The rear area became alarmingly empty. The right adjacent 176th and the 183d Volks Grenadier Divisions knew that again they would have to be independent. The expected reports of success from the Battle of the Bulge did not come. However, there was also a relief from the pressure on our front. The Americans opposite the right division sector were relieved by British troops. Particularly lively reconnaissance and combat patrol activity restricted enemy movements.

During the crises and setbacks of the Battle of the Bulge the higher command ordered a move in which the 183d Volks Grenadier Division was involved indirectly, and over which the division commander had strong misgivings. According to this plan the 183d was to release certain units to assist other divisions. The division probably objected to this plan because the actual strength of its infantry had been reduced greatly by losses during the Battle of the Bulge. There were no new units to relieve these exhausted troops nor were there replacements from home. As a result infantry personnel had to be withdrawn from the quiet front north of Aachen and sent to the Ardennes front as though they were replacement transfer battalions. It was impossible to transfer entire units because the local reserves were too weak. The divisions were ordered to release only a certain number of officers, NCO's and enlisted men from each unit. Since in this way the best men were naturally not transferred,

a second order was issued requiring each infantry company to release its entire sixth squad.

Such a transfer naturally caused many difficulties. The gaps left in the front had to be filled. This was difficult because on this wide front there was already an extreme shortage of men. An even greater damage was inflicted on the morale of the troops, who had just begun to get accustomed to each other. Another factor was that mail deliveries from home, which had been interrupted often, were now held up for even longer periods.

The division commander was ordered to take charge of the organization of these replacement transfer battalions, which had to be readied within a few hours for departure by trucks. Almost all of these men were from the front line where they had been for months without relief. They were hurriedly fed and their torn or worn uniforms replaced with new ones.

Higher command tried to counter the bad morale of the troops with rather dubious measures that in the long run seriously damaged the intermediate command. This operation was called "neighborly help" or "comrades' support." It was announced that the men would be transferred to the Ardennes for only a short period and would later be able to make use of their new experiences in their former units. However, not one of the men released returned to his former division; many of them are still registered as "missing in action." In summary, the measure, of transferring the men, inflicted serious

damage, especially morale damages, and on the whole did not bring much relief.

In December 1944 and January 1945 the command post of the 183d Volks Grenadier Division was situated in the new village of Krickelberg near Ratheim.

During the Battle of the Bulge the 183d Volks Grenadier Division was assigned to major reconnaissance operations of deception and restriction of the enemy forces. The Tripsrath sector was chosen for this purpose. We were to capture the village and part of the woods west of it and include them again in the German MLR. Our troops faced the British 43d Division.

Our penetration into the woods was to be made on a narrow front as in an assault operation. By circling deep in the woods and constantly moving up units, we were to cut off the forward position of the enemy. The time and place of our artillery support had been accurately determined. Forward observers accompanied the infantry. All preparations had been worked out very carefully, often with double and triple security. Added to the written orders, oral briefings guaranteed that everything was understood and prepared correctly.

We launched the attack as a surprise. The division commander commanding the entire operation from an advance command post near Dremmen. Our infantry strength was approximately that of one battalion split up into various units.

The surprise element and the skillful planning gave us a very good

initial success. The encirclement was to a large extent accomplished and many prisoners were taken. An entire enemy battalion appeared to be hit directly. But after a few hours reports regarding manpower shortages began coming in from all sides, eventually the last of our infantry reserves were committed. The expected large number of British prisoners were not taken. And those captured could not be moved back to the rear area because of our lack of personnel. Thus, short of a full success, the operation came to a standstill because of manpower shortage.

Enemy counteractions, during which tanks reached as far as Tripsrath, became noticeable that afternoon. Our assault-gun company, which had been assembled near the front, could not come to position because the terrain was too exposed. Thus we had to abandon the attack and that night the troops had to be withdrawn to their jump-off positions. However, I believe that although we gained no terrain we accomplished our mission of deception and restriction of the enemy forces. The information received from prisoners satisfactorily complemented our reconnaissance.

5. Allied Attacks Between the Neuse and the Roer Rivers. An enemy attack, of which the Roer River was probably the first target, began at the right wing of the 176th Infantry Division in January. A penetration to the left was systematically widened. Consequently the 183d Volks Grenadier Division was eventually hit, beginning at the right wing. The hesitating advance by sections did not cause

the defenders serious crises. Strong point after strong point was breached, but the attacker did not make use of the frequent opportunities to achieve deeper penetrations or even a breakthrough. Our infantry forces, which were still extremely weak, were gradually consumed, as again and again we needed reserves to cover the right flank, and to close new gaps.

The German infantry units, which were mere remnants now, reached the east bank of the Rcer River by the end of January. They had given ground, sector by sector, but were now making preparations for defending themselves under somewhat more favorable conditions. In classical terms one would have called what they were doing a "river control line." The artillery, which whenever it had ammunition, always formed the skeleton of defense was still somewhat better off. The 183d Volks Grenadier Division was assigned the Orsbuh--Hilfarth sector. On 25 January the division command post was moved from Krickelberg to Golkreth.

Although the Roer River had become the German main line of resistance, higher headquarters ordered combat outposts left on the west bank. The 183d Volks Grenadier Division chose the dominating hill at Himmerich as an advance position. This situation was a typical example of interference with small units by higher headquarters. In this respect the German principles of command are based on an army that, (a) has been formed from the general obligation to serve in the armed forces, and (b) possesses a trained officers'

corps. These principles emphasize the free choice of alternative by the responsible person in executing tactical missions and assume that the qualities of leadership necessary for such responsibilities exist in the men concerned. Little was left during the last period of actual warfare of the noble principles of readiness to do one's duty and the development of the feeling of responsibility. Only part of the reason lay in the decrease in qualified officers' because of the quick build-up of the army and the heavy casualties of the war. In many cases it might have been better to have selected leaders according to their qualifications for battle command. The independence of the division commander, for example, was more and more limited, most of all in the field of tactics, where ultimately he became just the agent of a higher headquarters and was obliged to enforce and constantly control the detailed orders. The German Army thereby relinquished its forte--the initiative of its subordinate commanders.

As an example of the above, the advance position at Himmerich was occupied by 12 men. This strength was in full accordance with the usual proportion of security detachments of main forces. Corps insisted on the hill being occupied by "at least 100 men." The division commander objected, pointing out the strength of every unit. After long discussions corps agreed with the division commander and requested higher headquarters to authorize a strength of 12 men. The authorization was received three hours later. The request had gone at least as far as the army group. All that was left of the

German principles of command was diffidence, from top to bottom, and lack of responsibility and initiative.

The manner of handling the transportation of supplies during the battle exemplified the reluctance to accept responsibility of subordinate commanders. In the Eifel and Ardennes Forests there were few roads and many curves and grades and traffic was considerably handicapped by snow and ice and, particularly, by enemy aircraft. Thus the entire supply system was endangered. Army group decided to apply drastic measures to straighten things out. The measures taken were perfectly proper for a combat area but north of Aachen, the front was quiet. In the rear there was flat terrain with a very good system of roads. There were some weak divisions situated in wide sectors, without deep defensive areas or reserves, operating under such sharp fuel restrictions that they could hardly use any of their motor vehicles. In this entire area there was a frightening emptiness. But because the army operating in this area came under the same army group, it received the same traffic regulation orders intended for the Ardennes, and passed them on to subordinate units for their instruction and information. The orders required division adjutants to personally drive along the rear area roads during the night in order to regulate traffic and, if necessary, take vigorous and strict measures to relieve congestions and other obstacles and report results by a certain hour. The usual threats of punishment for neglect of duty were also issued. At nighttime, however, the roads were completely free of moving columns, with only here and there a lonely horse-drawn

vehicle. The adjutant consumed precious fuel night after night, but army and corps dared not disobey the orders, intended for the Ardennes front and not at all suitable to their area where entirely different conditions prevailed. Once again, the nonsensical interference by higher headquarters with subordinated units and the threats of punishment, resulted in a lack of responsibility and moral courage among the subordinate troops.

IV. CONSTRUCTION OF OBSTACLES AND POSITIONS IN THE REAR AREA

Much of the activity of the division consisted in building of obstacles and positions in the rear area and in the depth of the main defensive area. The construction of obstacles was accomplished mainly by division personnel, but the division worked only a little in the MLR and rear area positions. In both projects higher headquarters seemed to demand much more construction than was needed for the conduct of battle, a view that was later substantiated.

It was well established during peacetime that obstacles are useful only (1) when they cannot be easily by-passed and (2) when they are defended. It is foolish to build them for any other reason. This is particularly true considering that the Americans did not hurry their attack.

A particular example, that caused arguments between corps and division, was the cutting down and sawing up of the trees along the wonderful old avenues of the Rhine province in preparation for the planned demolition of the area should it have to be given up. There

never was justification for this measure. The ground on either side of the roads was flat and very soft. There were practically no road-side ditches. Moreover, as long as the roads were in the combat area they were of no importance. Besides, tracked vehicles could travel better alongside the roads. If ever the Americans had wanted to use the roads for heavy supply traffic, they would have had no difficulty clearing all obstacles off them with their enormous technical equipment.

It was the same in regard to the building of positions. They were being built everywhere. The construction of a certain position was hardly begun when it was altered, or a new design was given, or the position had to be changed, or some other alteration planned. There were day positions and night positions, summer and winter positions. Moreover, every village was turned into a fortress. Eventually the entire terrain was densely covered with ditches. Apparently no one stopped to consider which side would later fight in these positions. Unoccupied positions are of no use to defenders, and occasionally prove very useful to the enemy. Instead strong points of concentration should have been formed in this area. Thereby saving manpower and achieving more in the end. At the same time the command would have been able to clearly show where serious resistance was to be offered. The positions that were constructed, though built well and in time, required prompt and systematic occupation by combat elements, if necessary, by withdrawing early from the MLR. Moreover, every inch of ground had to be held. It

was a matter of chance as to whether in a continuous, rear area position serious resistance could be offered and the enemy halted. For the most part a position was broken at one or more points where there were no troops to defend it. Shortly thereafter the entire position was lost.

If less had been done in both erecting obstacles and building positions, more would have been achieved.

V. REORGANIZATION AND TRAINING

Generally, reorganization and training were possible only during a quite period and only in one infantry reserve battalion of the division. In other respects, the training, especially that of specialists and subordinate commanders, was systematically and very intensively carried on in the courses of the replacement training battalion, which was activated in the operations area.

The reorganization and training of exhausted infantry units was nothing more than orders. The arriving replacements, particularly NCO's, who were usually men released by the Luftwaffe, could not meet even the lowest standards of training. Eventually a company of NCO's was formed, because many of these men could not be used according to their rank even when they had passed courses at the replacement training battalion. The replenished infantry units, however, had no time to improve their training or the confidence of their men because they had to be employed as soon as possible. Thus in the end, the combat value of the infantry decreased constantly and quickly.

VI. CONCLUSION

Allied air raids in the combat area had no lasting effect on our materiel. Their moral effect was more serious because there was no German resistance in the air.

The Allied ground attacks were obviously aimed only at nearby targets which they reached with an extraordinary expenditure of ammunition and the use of many tanks. In spite of favorable conditions the attackers, never fully exploited their tactical successes and they kept expanding because the defenders, with their weak reserves, could do nothing about them. The Allies were successful because they employed tanks against which our defenses were completely insufficient. Our troops fear of tanks was revived by the use of the enemy tank dozers.

However, in spite of the width of its sector and the strong superiority of the enemy in materiel, the 183d Volks Grenadier Division, in four and a half months, retreated only 12 to 15 kilometers. On the map in the appendix is shown the tough defense battle this division fought. Considering all factors the defense was a remarkable tactical success and remains a great feat achieved by our troops.