

THE BRITISH AT LAST GET FEELING OF OPTIMISM FOR OLD HICKORY SOLDIERS GET FEELING OF OPTIMISM FOR FIRST TIME AFTER SUCCESS IN GREAT RHINE CROSSING

GERMANS USE BEST IN TRY TO ENDEAVOR TO PUSH

By JOHN MACCORMAC
By Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES

WITH THE UNITED STATES NINTH ARMY, March 27—The story of the British Army bridgehead—which on Saturday was a tale of the first amphibious crossing of the Rhine and on Sunday of the imminence of a breakthrough into open country—has become since yesterday the chronicle of a desperate gamble by Field Marshal Gen. Bert Kesselring to prevent that breakthrough by throwing against it the famous 116th Panzer Division, the crack armored unit of the German Army.

Deciding, apparently, that of the simultaneous threats to his flanks in Western Front—presented by the First Army to the north and the Ninth Army's bridgehead to the south—the latter was the most crucial, Kesselring hurried down from the Netherlands one of the few first-class units that the Wehrmacht still possesses.

How much of it and its armor he managed to make their way through the seal set upon the bridgehead area by the Allied Air Forces is not known, but it is generally assumed that they have already been identified, and are using tanks to support the counter-attacks that it has been making since yesterday against the bridgehead. In the classic German manner when on the defensive.

Bridgehead Deepened
Despite all the counter-attacks the bridgehead has been deepened to a distance of fourteen miles from the Rhine on a ten-mile front. But the resistance was becoming steadily tougher today and may be still tougher tomorrow. The topography affords the 116th an opportunity to defend the ridge running south from a town somewhat east of an important town of Dorsten, on the northern edge of the Thirtieth Division's front.

Why Marshal Kesselring should have ordered the Army's two-division attack was more dangerous than the British Second Army offensive north of it was the subject of discussion among Ninth Army staff officers. But his decision has cleared the ring for the third and perhaps last round of the battle that the Thirtieth Division and the 116th Panzer Division have been fighting since they first met when the Thirtieth closed the breach between last October.

"When we encircled Aachen," reminisced Maj. Ezekiel I. Glazier of Palm Beach, Fla., a staff officer of the Thirtieth, "it was the first time that we were thrown in against us. When we jumped off from the Siegfried Line for the Roer River, it was the third time they are tangling with us and, you can take my word for it, if they stick it out it will be their last. My prediction was bold the history at the Thirtieth, which to the United States Army as 'Old Hickory' did not seem to justify it. In World War I it played a proud part in every major Allied offensive and received more than half the British decorations awarded to American troops and twelve of the seventy-eight Congressional Medals of Honor in this war. It was his mettle at St. Lo, where it spearheaded the breakthrough, in the Avranches elbow, where it repulsed a massive armor tank attack near Mortain, in the smashing of the Siegfried Lines last autumn and in the Belgian Bulge, where it was the main Rundstedt offensive.

Fighting German panzers seems to be the Thirtieth's favorite occupation. Near Stavelot in the Belgian bulge it trapped a German armored force and destroyed ninety-two of its tanks. In the Ardennes it was it all but ruined the First SS Panzer (Adolf Hitler) Division.

Yesterday and today it proceeded methodically with the destruction of the 116th. Elements of the 116th were first detected in the bridgehead sector on Sunday night by a forward detachment of the Thirtieth's 120th Regiment. Their presence on the Thirtieth's sector could be interpreted as a tribute, but it

On the Rhine, March 24 — (AP) — For the first time the always pessimistic American foot soldier feels tonight that this is the beginning of the last struggle which will bring the war to a quick end.

Everything the Allies have, including some weapons still on the secret list, has been thrown into the scale to crush the most powerful German fighting force left in the west, and amazing progress is being made by a combination of British and American skill and guts.

Despite the enormity of the stake, German resistance at first was spotty and prisoners were taken in abnormal numbers in the opening hours of the attack.

I followed the Doughboys and Tommies from their secret approach to the front, over moonlit roads and watched the attack develop from a front line regimental command post finally across the Elbe. I then crossed in a cup spotter plane to watch thousands of paratroops and glider troops drop into Germany.

The most impressive sight of all, as always, was that of long lines of silent infantry walking across the fields and along the roads. The sight always brings a tightness to one's throat.

Among the hundreds of factors contributing to the success of the vast, intricate attack was the bravery of British commandos who lay within a mile of Wesel while 300 RAF Lancasters destroyed the town in a dropped bomb and precision bombing, then rushed into the flaming rubble and crushed the garrison of tough German paratroops.

Too there was the bravery of American transport pilots who flew their cumbersome ships through a wall of flames and dropped their airborne troops. Some returned in flames. Some did not return.

Yesterday afternoon a curtain of smoke blanketed the town as the British and American and British bombs. The rest came from chemicals set off to screen Allied troop dispositions.

Men and machines lay silent inevitably spoiled the prospects for an early exploitation of the Ninth Army's bridgehead.

Had the Thirtieth with supporting armor been able to make a breakthrough on Sunday, a dash for Dorsten might have achieved then and there.

Road to Dorsten Was Blocked
But, as it happened, the road to Dorsten had been blocked by three huge craters, which delayed the dash until Sunday afternoon. When it arrived, the 116th had entered the bridgehead sector.

Since then the 116th has been content to dig in and always does. It planted mines along the roads. When its artillery fired it fired in salvos instead of spaced intervals according to the usual methodical German fashion. It defended Gahlen, most important town on the road to Dorsten since the bridgehead was fighting from street to street and from house to house.

It counter-attacked the Thirtieth's 117th Regiment in battalion strength with no air support. It gave nothing away. It demonstrated how far more formidable a force it is than the 160th Volksgrenadier Division, which, after the Rhine was first crossed, constituted the only defense group in this sector.

until dusk. But with the darkening the Allied front stirred to life.

In the forests there came a rumble of tanks and trucks, and on the roads long convoys sprang forth with every conceivable piece of equipment, including thousands of tons of landing material and huge bridging craft on giant trailers.

It seemed impossible that this vast assortment could be unangled and moved to the right place at the right time. But most of it got there.

Near the river diked a barrage from mortars kicked up dust and steel whistled about the German regimental command post (the 30th Division's 117th Infantry) in a ruined house.

In the cellar the commanding officer (Walter M. Johnson) "Minkie," a short man with a 45 slug in his hip—was just getting his communications in order. It all had to be done by telephone for this division had been moved to the front secretly and could not use the wireless for fear of advancing to the presence to the Germans.

"The worst thing about this period," Col. Johnson complained, "is that you have to sit and wait. There's nothing you can do, just sit and wait. You can't stop all this stuff from going on, nor can you help it any until the battle is over."

At the colonel's side was Lt. John F. McGee of Charleston, S. C. At 22 he is one of the youngest regimental operations officers in the "scraps" and used to be a platoon leader and is thankful for his present job, declaring "it's safer" just as a mortar shell takes the top of a house near the front.

Other operations officers find the jump-off especially fitting as it is the exact hour he was born 32 years ago. He is Capt. Arne Nielsen, Oakland, Calif.

BARRAGE STARTS

Shortly after dark is a thunder to the north from the big guns. The British have begun their preliminary barrage, which is to go on for four hours.

The jump-off was staggered, with the British northward, launching it at 8 p. m. the southern flank at 9 p. m. and then the Ninth Army's 30th Division to the south at 2 a. m.

From the time those guns opened up the front was a continuous roar, reaching such a crescendo at times that plaster fell from the ceiling. The discussion of the guns pulled at your clothes.

Just north of the 30th, British commandos slipped across the river in the darkness and along a ditch through the river defenses. Then they hid out a scant 1500 yards from the key German strong point in Wesel.

At 10:30 p. m. there was a heavy mortar barrage on more than 300 Lancasters, with blockbusters labored overhead with railway schedule precision. It was their job to find the town in the dark and flatten it without hitting the commandos.

An artillery observer with the men directed artillery fire on the town in which they were hidden, until the Germans were out of sight, the men made off on the double-quick for the river.

Four Thunderbolt pilots, informed of a getaway attempt, swung low over the fleeing men, straffing all Germans in their path. They were flying at treetop height, and just as the men reached the river one Thunderbolt leader struck the top of a house and was killed.

BY WES GALLAGHER

Standing in the backyard I could see the attack. The first bombs hit the river minutes before the town flamed and jumped under the explosions. Overhead, almost in a funnel straight into the sky, burst hundreds of flak flashes. These flashes were mute testimony that every bomb was hitting in the target area for they flamed directly upon the town.

FLYING LOW

Plane after plane thundered by. Some were less than 1,000 feet up. When they finished the show appeared to be just red glow.

Twenty minutes later in the cellar command post came the first report from the commandos.

"Our only trouble is in taking care of the number of prisoners we are getting," it said.

Outside the command post the infantry marched by, followed by tanks, battalions and a number of heavy divisions of mortar or tank shell hit nearby, but no one paid any attention.

There is no excitement but a sense of quiet urgency always comes over command posts just before a big attack.

"I just hope we see the head in the water," said Operations Officer Maj. Julius W. Singleton of Morgantown, W. Va.

Boats of young officers came in and out of the command post with a thousand assignments, demonstrating the tremendous complications of the operation.

One of these is Lt. Henry L. Hatcherman, Providence, R. I. His job is to get three bullet-proof divers down the river dikes, to get a boat and land on the other side where they will go to work building landing ways for other equipment.

CRANES BREAK

Down on the river, cranes are trying to fit huge Navy boats over their trailers. The cranes break under the strain and the cumbersome vessels are manhandled off into the water.

Later, infantry waves carried over 1,000-pound assault boats down to the river on their backs so that the waves could be heard and land on the other side.

The river was covered with smoke and you could scarcely see your hand before your face. To make it worse, the planes across the river tracers were being fired in lanes.

In other places big flashlights were tied in bundles on the west bank and used to guide later arrivals.

Motorboat hobbyists, who were recruited from all over the Army, were transferred weeks ago to handle the storm craft with their outboard motors. One of these was Pfc. James L. Killingsworth of Longview, Texas.

"I was just to go on my trip," Killingsworth said as he trudged up the bank guarding some German prisoners

brought back by returning boats. "My motor conked out midway and I had to be wounded men on board, including the assistant operator. I still don't know how I got it started again and got to shore."

The Germans tried to mortar the boats as they crossed the river but casualties were surprisingly light for the magnitude of the operations. All up and down the river the scene at this beachhead was repeated.

Back at command posts, lines on the maps ranged deeper and deeper into Reich as battalion after battalion landed and pushed inland. In this sector they encountered few mines. Apparently the Germans had not had time to plant them.

NAZIS OUT EARLY

Many German soldiers gave up after only a brief struggle. More than 250 were lying face downward just behind the diked area. They already had been ferried back across the river. Many were young and sullen but the fight was all gone out of them.

The Navy boats, alligators and ducks had repeated trips across the river. But the storm boats which carried the first waves were left scattered in the opposite direction. Their job was achieved.

Many motor landing craft operators study of sound table relief maps saved their lives as they got lost in the smoke and did not know where they were on the river.

With the coming of daylight the Germans had been pushed back out of small arms range of the river in some sectors.

When this was accomplished the first of the heavy bridging equipment, thousands of tons of steel, was sent their way to the toping of the river with hundreds of pieces of gear.

They had the biggest short term engineering job of the war, the building of enough bridges across one of the largest rivers in Europe to move three full armies.

The task is comparable to building enough bridges across the Hudson to move the entire Bronx population and its household equipment in a few days.

The engineers have to work under fire for days in one of the most dangerous jobs of the engineer was seen in a truck going upstream with an arm in a sling. When asked what he could do, thus injured, he raised the other hand and said, "I still have another arm left."

"We are going to break our record," declared Lt. Col. Danneberg of Cambridgeport, Mass., who had a surveyor's pole in hand.

As the morning advanced there came a new crisis in the battle. It was the first time the front under a canopy of Allied planes. That was the task of dropping airborne troops.

SHALLOTTE PILOT

To watch it one of the best seats was in a cub plane piloted by Capt. Odell Williamson of Charlotte, N. C., 30th Division Artillery.

A slight wind had come up, blowing the smoke away from

the river and leaving the left bank of the Rhine in clear view. The cub had to fly high to keep out of the way of some 1,500 transport craft dropping airborne troops from 10 a. m. to 1 p. m.

The drop was one of the most complicated feats of arms thus far in the war. It was being made in daylight in one of the heaviest flak belts in Europe by slow transport towing their sitting targets for ground gunners.

To meet this threat of the German antiaircraft defense, British gunners at 9 o'clock took up the job of clearing the air at all known German flak positions deeper in the battle zone. That assault continued for half an hour. Then it had to stop so that the drop area would not be covered with smoke and dust.

No Allied guns could fire in or over the area during the drop because of the danger of hitting Allied planes or troops.

Thus the drop, at the peak of the battle, came in a lull in the flak's roar.

Some flak positions may have been knocked out, but there were still two streams of C-47s with their "chutists and glider men" crossed the river to the north, made the drop and then swung out to the south.

PLANES ON FIRE

Some C-47s came in low above the C-47s came in low where the flak planes go" could see the flak gun craters into the crews were armor-plated. Smoke obscured the drop, but not the planes.

Some exploded in flight. Others fell at the river's edge. But at once were flames almost side by side as they fell to the Rhine.

"Look," shouted Williamson, pointing. "Look at those poor devils. You got to have it those C-47 pilots, just sitting there and taking it."

Williamson whipped his cub about and out in close to the two flying coffins. There was nothing but just a glow and watch helplessly. One plane had its motor on fire and the pilot was trading altitude for time. Williamson made an effort to make a crash landing in an open field.

The other was burning from the wings. Suddenly paratroops were seen just as they fell out. The pilot apparently stayed with his plane to give the crewmen a chance to bail out. Suddenly the plane dived toward the ground. But before it hit it exploded with a smoky, reddish glare.

The first pilot must have seen his companion go down, but he was advanced that ship. He skimmied a row of trees and crash-landed in the field.

For a moment it looked as if he was safe. But the crash apparently broke open the gas tanks. The entire ship was engulfed in a red glare. No one was seen to get out.

While this was going on a stream of transports plunged toward the Rhine like a relentless tide.

The big picture of war went on but some of the little actors were gone.

Flyer Dies To Old Hickory Tank Mixup Citation Given Aid 30th Men Backfires as Mark Vs Lose 120th Outfits

AT THE ELBE RIVER IN GER-

MANY, April 15 (AP)—An American Thunderbolt pilot gave his life helping to save sixty men of the 30th Infantry Division when a German attack smashed the American bridgehead across the Elbe yesterday.

An artillery observer with the men directed artillery fire on the town in which they were hidden, until the Germans were out of sight, the men made off on the double-quick for the river.

WITH 30th INF. DIV.—It was a

brisk break-out effort worked out for the 117th Regt.'s First Bn. when it took Oberemburg, a town of 300 houses. The battalion had moved into town and troops were eating breakfast by 7:30 A.M., according to Lt. Tom E. Stanley, of Marston, Conn., just prior to the jump-off for tanks and the supporting 743rd Tank Bn. It was dark

They heard tanks coming from their rear and men went out to watch them down. However, the tanks were Mark Vs. "Move over," one Jerry commando said, "an open, S.C. mouthed C. Co. dough. Then

STARS AND STRIPES

the Jerries quit talking and started shooting. "I could have reached out and touched one of the tanks," said Charles B. Foster, of Rushville, Ind., "when he swung that telephone pole (88 mm gun) toward me."

The German armor fighting to get out of trap, so surprised the Old Hickory men it ran through practically all of the battalion before the 823rd TdCo could apprehend it. They took out two of the tanks and half-tracks. While the 823rd got the tanks, a B Co. platoon, led by T/Sgt. Capt. Odell Williamson, S.C., shot 15 Jerry infantrymen.

CAMP BLANDING, Jan. 31,

(AP)—Four outfits of the 190th Infantry, part of the Thirtieth Division which trained at Blanding, have been cited for "outstanding performance of duty in army contact with the enemy," it was announced today.

Those cited were the Second Battalion, Company K, the First Platoon, Anti-tank Company, and the Second Platoon, Anti-tank Company.

"By their brave and heroic

stand," the citation read, "they prevented the enemy from splitting our forces. No mandy from those in Brittany."