

Pris

UNIT: TASK FORCE SMYTHE, 80th Inf Div

PERIOD: 6 - 8 May 1945

ACTION: Surrender of 6th German Army at GARSTAN, AUSTRIA, and account of last shot fired by American forces in World War II

SOURCE: Major E. C. Kerr, Asst G-3, 80th Inf Div

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW: KAUFBEUREN, GERMANY, 19 June 1945

INTERVIEWER: Capt James J. Cowen

MAPS: Scale 1/100,000 --

CLASSIFICATION CHANGED TO:

CANCELLED

AUTHORITY OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

INTERVIEW was conducted without unit records.
UNGRADING COMMITTEE 29 June 1945

TITLE

SHEET NO

GSGS NO

Wels

X-8

4416

Enns

X-9

4416

Bad-Ischl

Y-8

4416

Admont

Y-9

4416

On 6 May 1945 newly-formed TF Smythe, 80th Div, took off from the VOCHLABRUCK (4152) area in pursuit of 10,000 SS troops who were reported in a location between KIRCHDORF (7644) and LEIZEN (8906). The task force, headed by Brig Gen (then colonel) George W. Smythe, Asst Div Comdr, consisted of the 3d Bn, 317th Inf (later growing into CT 317), 702d Tk Bn (less two companies), 80th Div Rcn Tr, the 313th FA Bn and Rcn Co, 811th TD Bn.

The task force went into an assembly area in the vicinity of KIRCHDORF. The Germans were in position in the vicinity of KLAUS (8035), holding the area south of KLAUS. A formidable and well-defended pass lay between KLAUS and MICHELDORF (7840) and separated the two hostile forces.

At this time Gen Smythe sent Lt Col R. R. Fleisher, G-2, 80th Div, and Major E. C. Kerr, Asst G-3, 80th Div, to negotiate with the German commander. After passing through the German outposts, they were taken to GASTAN (9324), where discussions were held with Ernst

29

Eigruber, the gauleiter of OBERBRAUNAU. Eigruber, according to Kerr, is still among the missing Nazis and reportedly is the youngest gauleiter in Germany.

Eigruber wanted to surrender all his troops in his gau, but with the provision that no American troops would pass south of an east-west line running through PHYRN PASS (9110), just north of the ENNS River.

Kerr was under the impression that Eigruber was being strongly influenced by the commander of the SS troops in the area and really was stalling for time. He believed he presented this condition to the American negotiators for the following two reasons:

1. To give his troops time to stream south through the mountains in order to get away from the Americans and,
2. To get them into position to fight the Russians. In other words he wanted to effect a surrender with the Americans so SS troops could deal with the Russians alone.

They told him no, that the surrender would have to be effected on an unconditional basis, and gave him until 2300 6 May to accept. At 0200 7 May he returned to the house in GARSTAN in which the negotiations were being made and gave Fleisher and Kerr a negative answer, saying he couldn't accept the terms.

So at 0600 7 May, TF Smythe jumped off and caught the retreating Germans streaming southward in the area near GARSTAN, having first to surmount the blown railroad bridge and road crater at KLAUS.

Shortly thereafter, German Brig Gen Soeth, Wehrmacht officer, contacted the 80th Div and surrendered 20,000 troops in the immediate area to Maj Gen Horace L. McBride, CG, 80th Div. Although the unit surrendered was approximately Corps size, it was a disorganized force

representing many units that happened to have been in the sector at the time the 80th attacked. The surrender took place at GARSTAN.

That same night German Lt. Gen. BALCK, successor to Gen. MODELAS commander of the 6th German Army, according to KERR, came into the GARSTAN area, but the task force headquarters did not see him until the next day, 8 May. At the time, his entire 6th Army was fleeing West from the Russians. BALCK saw Gen. MCBRIDE personally and without hesitation surrendered his entire army to the 80th on an unconditional basis. An estimated 102,000 troops marched across the ENNS River and surrendered after the negotiations.

KERR said the division since has had no knowledge of the whereabouts of GAULEITER EIGRUBER or of the SS Colonel who would not allow him to come to terms.

It was on the morning of 7 May 1945 that the last shots of the war were believed fired in anger.

KERR stated that the reconnaissance troops of the task force were strafed by two Jerry fighter planes in the KLAUS area and that the reconnaissance troops returned the fire, probably knocking one down that was seen leaving the scene trailing smoke.