

HEADQUARTERS 80TH INFANTRY DIVISION
APO #80, U.S. Army

G-2 AFTER ACTION REPORT

1 January - 31 January 1945

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I - INTRODUCTION

The period under consideration could well be entitled "The German Rear Guard Action" as it was during the month of January that the enemy's ARDENTES Offensive collapsed against the onslaught of the Allies' counter-offensive. In an effort to salvage the remnants of the battered armies from complete annihilation, several German Infantry Divisions were left at the "hinges" of the salient to forestall any offensive Allied action either from the North or from the South to close the escape route to the SIEGFRIED LINE. This was accomplished by staging almost continual small-scale, limited objective counter-attacks to prevent the Allies from launching a full-scale offensive in the areas adjacent to the SIEGFRIED LINE.

The launching of the great Russian offensive in the East on 14 January made even more desperate the German position in the West. Too great a force had been committed in the West for him to counter the rapidly advancing Russian drives to the German border. As a result, the Germans were obliged to transfer at once a great portion of his broken forces for commitment on the Eastern Front. This sudden swing to the East lent even more importance to the rear guard action in the West. The Germans were playing for time which was their only salvation. Delay of the Allies was all important. The 80th Infantry Division's Sector was included in this delaying rear-guard action of the Germans.

II - SURE RIVER FRONT

(1 - 22 January 1945)

With the dawn of the new year, the 80th Infantry Division held a North-South line on the left (West) flank of the XII Corps. Confronting our positions from North to South were elements of three German Volksgrenadier Division: 9th, 276th and 352d. With the route of the German's offensive in

the ARDENNES, the German attitude changed to one of aggressive defense and delay, in an effort to withdraw his battered remnants into the SIEGFRIED LINE.

Enemy activity in the zone of the 80th Division from 1-5 January, consisted mainly of aggressive patrolling and moderate artillery, nebelwerfer and mortar fire throughout the sector.

On 6 January, the 80th Division launched a limited objective attack across the SURE River and seized GOESDORF and DAHL. This attack took the Germans completely by surprise and caught them during the relief of elements of the 9th VG Division by elements of the 276th VG Division. Enemy resistance against our attacking forces steadily increased during the day, however, with heavy artillery and nebelwerfer concentrations slowing our advancing troops.

During the ensuing 3 days, the enemy staged numerous counter-attacks on our SURE River bridgehead in efforts to recapture the commanding ground of this area. These attacks were accompanied by heavy artillery, nebelwerfer and mortar concentrations. All enemy thrusts were repulsed. Prisoners captured brought new identifications of the Fusilier Battalion of Der Fuehrer Brigade, elements of the 519th GHQ Heavy Anti-Tank Battalion and of the 406th Volks Artillery Corps.

10 January found the German attitude definitely defensive with a noticeable decrease in enemy patrolling and artillery fire. Once again the Germans had failed in their mission to hold "at all costs" the ground North of the SURE River.

11 January the enemy was driven further to the East by a reinforced Infantry platoon in the vicinity of BOCKHOLZ. 82 prisoners of war were captured during this operation. Reidentifications of the 79th VG Division were obtained, confirming previous reports that two of the three regiments of that Division held positions confronting our bridgehead, with the third regiment, 208th BG Regiment, in positions in the Southern portion of the 80th Division zone.

12-17 January, the enemy maintained his defensive attitude. Our patrolling revealed extensive digging in by the enemy opposite our positions in the SURE River bridgehead. Heavy enemy artillery harassing concentrations continued in this sector. South of the SURE River activity on the part of the enemy was negative.

During the period 18-19 January, our forces attacking NOCHER and MASSELER met strong resistance from dug-in positions. Very heavy enemy artillery and nebelwerfer fire fell in the Northeastern portion of the 80th Division zone. Both objectives were seized and consolidated.

The enemy was completely cleared from 80th Division's zone South of the SURE River on 20-21 January. Enemy artillery fire remained moderate. A general withdrawal towards the SIEGFRIED LINE was now apparent along the entire front. In rear areas, large concentrations of vehicular and horse-drawn movement to the East was observed.

III - WILTZ - HOSINGEN FRONT

(23 - 28 January 1945)

23 January found the 80th Division on a front extending from WILTZ on the North to BOURSCHEID on the South. The direction of our attacking forces had now switched to the East. Fierce resistance was encountered along the CLERF River line where the enemy maintained defensive positions on the commanding ground East of the river; however, enemy strong points were also encountered to the West of the river. Our advance made rapid progress East from WILTZ up to the CLERF River in the vicinity of WILMERSVILTZ, where enemy dug-in infantry and tanks on high ground along the East bank of the CLERF halted our advance. Further to the South, the towns of MERKOLS and KAUTENBACH and the woods South of the WILTZ River, were cleared of enemy. Enemy minefields and demolitions were encountered throughout the 80th Division zone.

On the CLERF River, indentifications from all three regiments of the 276th VG Division were made, on a front extending from the vicinity of DRAUFELT to KAUTENBACH. To the North of the 276th VG Division, remnants of the battered 5th Para Division, in the form of combat team SEILER, were encountered and to the South of the 276th were elements of the 79th VG Division and the 130th Panzer Lehr Division of BASTOGNE fame.

Early on 25 January, elements of the 80th Division attacked LOH Hill, to the North of PINTSCHE. Our attack took the enemy by surprise and the defenders of the hill were surrounded early in the morning. In the battle for PINTSCHE, our progress was not so rapid. Strong resistance was encountered here but by late afternoon the enemy had been cleared from the town. Very heavy enemy mortar fire and moderate artillery concentrations were received during the progress of our attack.

Prisoners of war captured during the WILTZ area operation stated that the mission of the 276th VG Division was to delay the Allied forces in order to gain sufficient time to complete the withdrawal of German units behind the SIEGFRIED LINE.

Our attack to the East continued to meet moderate enemy resistance as we advanced to positions on the high ground generally West of the road running North and South through HOSINGEN. During the five day period of the WILTZ - HOSINGEN operation, a total of 422 prisoners of war were captured by the 317th Infantry Regiment.

IV - THE SIEGFRIED LINE

(28 - 31 January 1945)

Upon completion of the WILTZ - HOSINGEN mission, the 80th Division moved South to the familiar terrain of the SAUER - OUR River, between BETTEL on the North and BOLIENDORF on the South. (It will be recalled that in the early stages of the German offensive the 80th Division went into positions in this vicinity). Here the highly touted and formidable SIEGFRIED LINE glared at us from its rugged lofts of concrete and steel. Reputedly impregnable in the eyes of the Germans, we considered all the ramifications of its biography and how best the enemy could defend his border from behind this "wall of death".

We considered the following EEIs of primary importance: (a) who was in the Wall now; (b) what weapons would be used against us; (c) what strategy and maneuver could we anticipate; (d) to what extent had obstacles and demolitions been employed; (e) to what degree would the OUR and SAUER Rivers hamper our attack and where were the most suitable crossing sites.

The study was undertaken at once but, as of this writing, the results are incomplete. From our own observations, it is believed that the line is held as thinly as possible with a view toward economy of personnel and materiel and dependence upon pillboxes and obstacles to prohibit its penetration by our forces, in order to release as many troops as possible to the Eastern Front.

At the end of January, identifications of elements of two Volksgrenadier divisions had been made: 352d and 212th VG Divisions - the former holding positions in the Northern part of the 80th Division Sector and the latter in the Southern portion.

Prisoners of war captured in this sector tell of the present plight of the Germans on this front: (a) morale is low; (b) food is bad; (c) clothing is of poor quality; (d) weapons are of insufficient quantity; (e) personnel in not of high caliber. To a certain degree, this unfavorable German situation may be attributed to the great need for troops, equipment and supplies on the Eastern Front.

During the last four days of January, enemy activity reached a new quiet for the 80th Division. The enemy situation remained generally inactive throughout the division zone. Only light and sporadic artillery and mortar fire was received, together with patrolling activity to a minor degree.

V - SPECIAL SECTIONS

IPW Teams Nos 75 & 76

O/C IPW Team 75 - Captain Paul Loeser
O/C IPW Team 76 - Lt Theodore E. Gutman

1836 Prisoners were captured during the month of January. Overall, the morale of PWs encountered was in keeping with the retreating movements of the enemy and the increased difficulties in supplying his troops West of the German border. 79th VG Division showed the poorest morale as well as discipline, and many of their troops surrendered willingly to the advancing infantry of the 80th Division. In the 5th Para Division, 2 distinct types of men could be noted:

(1) The component which had been active in the breakthrough and can be considered paratrooper personnel. They were arrogant, self confident and still believed in German victory.

(2) Recent replacements, included many high-ranking NCOs from ground crews, and even pilots from Air Corps organizations. These men had arrived at the front without training or weapons. Rifles had been thrust into their hands, and they had been told to commence fighting in the general direction of the enemy. Needless to say, their morale was poor. They leaned their rifles against the nearest tree and reported for rations and quarters at the 80th Division PWE.

Highlights of Interrogations: An increasing number of PWs were noted during this month who not only held a German victory impossible, but also considered it undesirable. Though this latter number is small, its very presence seems indicative of a rising opposition to the regime in Germany.

General Comment: Questions regarding the Volkssturm were generally belittled by PWs, who held that though momentary tactical advantage may be gained through employment of these troops, the German Government would not dare to issue arms to the public at large in fear of uprisings.

Order of Battle Team #34

O/C Team - 1st Lt Armand V. Paolino

Shortly after the start of the present Russian offensive, an estimate of this offensive was prepared and distributed. This estimate contained the German as well as the Russian Order of Battle of the armies engaged and the effect this operation would have on the Western Front.

Captured maps and other documents were scrutinized and passed on to higher headquarters. The translations of documents and propaganda leaflets were prepared. Special resumes of the activities of the German divisions opposing us were given distribution. The sketch of the front line situation was a daily task.

MII Team #444-G

O/C Team - ;st Lt Erich Denzer

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MII Team #444-G

O/C Team - Lt Erich Denzer

The primary mission of this team during January consisted of securing all possilbe enemy information pertaining to that portion of the SIEGFRIED LINE facing the 80th Infantry Division. As a secondary mission, the team was charged with procuring detailed information on roads and rivers, the condition of river beds, fords and bridges.

Though official government sources and from civilians, the team located many pillboxes and fortifications not shown on overprinted maps. It succeeded in gathering additional information as to construction, size, type of camouflage, armament and vulnerability of pillboxes and fortifications. Information regarding the road net, bridges and possible fords on the front of the Division was obtained. Evacuees were sources of important information of the enemy, his strength and dispositions, identifications, supplies and equipment throughout the divifion zone. Overlays, sketches and in some cases original plans were submitted to facilitate evaluation of the information given.

In one instance, a messenger for the Austrian Underground was interrogated and highly valuable information was immediately turned over to Supreme Headquarters - Allied Expeditionary Forces for disposition.

Public Relations Section

O/C Section - 1st Lt Bernard Didinsky

Routine duties for the month of January included the release of 69 human interest stories, 2944 releases on decorations, 471 on citations and 65 on promotions submitted to appropriate agencies. In addition, 3 tactical news stories and 3 radio programs were prepared.

PI Team #69

O/C Team - Capt Michael E. Derbin

During the first two weeks of January while the cloudy weather prohibited air photography, visits were made to the Regimental and Division Artillery S-2's to discuss their photographic problems. As a result of these discussions, special efforts have been made to satisfy their requirements. Following these visits, numerous requests were received from the regiments to aid them in the briefing of their patrols. The artillery's urgent call for new targets were answered by giving them an annotated set of photos. Mosaics were prepared for each infantry battalion which later proved to be very helpful to them. A road and bridge study of the Northern portion of Luxembourg was prepared and submitted to interested units on annotated photos.

During the Wiltz - Hosingen operation, a project was undertaken covering the Siegfried Line area between Dasburg and Dalfiden. From numerous sorties flown during the summer of 1944 and since the fall of snow, many defensive installations were found and pin-pointed on a 1/25,000 map. The results of this project were forwarded to XII Corps when the Division moved to another area.

A new project covering the Siegfried Line from Bettel to Boliendorf was then begun. The installations found were plotted on a 1/25,000 map. Within the same area, river and road studies were made.

Another Siegfried Line project of the area South of the 80th Division zone had been started in December 1944, but put aside due to change in orders. This project was now completed at the request of XII Corps as part of a comparative study on the interpretations of various PI teams.

Thirteen mosaics of the Siegfried Line in the zone of the 80th division were prepared and distributed to divisional units. Not only installations were indicated on these mosaics, but also a grid was superimposed to facilitate the location of the positions.

Inasmuch as a difference in tree growth had been observed between the ground and that indicated on maps, the entire division front was checked and an overlay prepared on the new clearings and tree lines.

At the end of the month the team was engaged in preparing town plans of all towns beyond the German border within the division zone.

CIC Detachment

O/C Det - Capt Thomas R. McMillen

During the month of January 1945, the 80th Division CIC Detachment maintained offices in 22 towns of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. In order to

forestall possible infiltration during the ARDENNES breakthrough, primary attention was given to the Counterintelligence Control Line. This was manned by Military Police, supplemented by civilian guards in 28 towns, with the result that no civilian or military personnel could pass through the Division sector without proper identification. Two suspected enemy agents were arrested during the period, along with a small number of political prisoners.

VI - COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

1. Psychological Warfare:

a. Prisoners of war report that the most effective time for a psychological warfare desertion broadcast to enemy troops is at dusk. This time of the day works to the advantage of the deserter as he can more easily free himself from his officers or non-commissioned officers who would shoot him in the back if they realized his intentions. At the same time, it is not so dark that the deserter's intentions can fail to be understood by friendly forces. More persuasive action may be used by laying on artillery concentration on the front line troops, then featuring the desertion broadcast, telling the prospective deserters that as soon as the broadcast has been completed, artillery will be fired to the rear of the front line troops, thus enabling them to desert while their officers and non-coms are pinned down by artillery fire.

b. Personalized propaganda leaflets, addressed directly to the units confronting the friendly troops, further stimulates their effectiveness.

c. It is felt that news broadcasts, quoting official communiqués of both the Allied and German High Command are most effective in telling of the great adversities experienced by the Germans, thus informing the enemy of his present dire position and imprinting on his mind the futility of his resistance.

2. The 80th Division daily G-2 Periodic Report is now including a sketch of the enemy front lines and the relative position of the battalions manning this line. This sketch depicts at a glance the strength and positions of forces opposing the division.

3. During a defensive stage prior to an attack it is believed that much can be learned from a plot (overlay) of enemy artillery, mortar and nebelwerfer fire landing in the division zone. From this plot the areas in friendly territory considered by the enemy to be critical, can be ascertained and often avoided.

4. The work of our German MII and French Liaison Teams has been coordinated and, to a certain degree, combined. The results of this combination have produced more complete coverage, while duplication of effort has been reduced to a minimum. Individual identity of the two sections has been maintained although the reports submitted to this headquarters by these sections are signed by both officers in command.

RICHARD R. FIEISHER
Lt. Colonel, G.S.C.
AC of S, G-2.