

14

# THE BATTLE OF HATTEN RITTERSHOFFEN

14



14<sup>TH</sup> ARMORED DIVISION  
12-20 JANUARY 1945

JUN 21 1965

# 14th Armd Div at HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN



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A RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared at  
**THE ARMORED SCHOOL**  
Fort Knox Kentucky  
1949 - 1950

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THE ARMORED DIVISION IN THE DEFENSE  
(14th ARMORED DIVISION IN THE BATTLE OF HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN  
12-20 JANUARY 1945)

A RESEARCH REPORT PREPARED

BY

COMMITTEE 1, ARMORED OFFICERS ADVANCED COURSE

THE ARMORED SCHOOL

1949 - 1950

LIEUTENANT COLONEL BENJAMINE M. BROTHERS, CAV

MAJOR RAYMOND W. ALLEN, JR., FA

MAJOR ALLEN T. SMITH, INF

MAJOR WILFORD L. WILLEY, INF

MAJOR HARRY A. GREER, CAV

MAJOR ALBERT H. HISLOP, CAV

CAPTAIN OREN C. WINGFIELD, INF

CAPTAIN HOWARD F. WEHRLE, III, CAV

CAPTAIN JAMES H. SPANN, CAV

1st LIEUTENANT ROBERT G. HARNEY, CAV

FORT KNOX, KENTUCKY

MAY 1950

## FOREWORD

Fortunately or unfortunately war is unpredictable. Units often find themselves miscast in the fulfillment of their major roles.

In this historical example we find an Armored Division indoctrinated and trained for the offensive, forced by circumstances of war, to adopt temporarily the defensive.

Let us examine briefly the circumstances leading up to the Battle of RITTERSHOFFEN-HATTEN. Disappointed in their offensive thrust at the BATTLE of the BULGE the German High Command, in this case, Adolph Hitler, decided that German prestige could only be restored by retaking STRASBOURG and the area between the HART MOUNTAINS and the RHINE. This plan seemed entirely feasible as the American Seventh Army had been depleted of major reserves to strengthen the BATTLE of the BULGE and was well over-extended. Accordingly, at midnight 31 December 1944 a new offensive was launched on the U. S. Seventh Army front. This opened the three weeks German offensive between the VOSGES and the RHINE, which included the BATTLE of RITTERSHOFFEN-HATTEN and which finally ended with the U. S. VI CORPS shortening its front by a withdrawal to the MODER RIVER line.

It is seldom possible to get a true picture of any battle, as individuals and view points differ and after action reports have a way of getting misplaced in the process of demobilization.

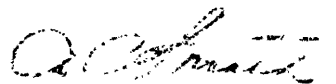
It is difficult to see why the German High Command ventured so many troops in an offensive that could, at best, stave off final

defeat for only a short while. Prisoners and captured documents indicated that the German Nineteenth Army Commander received orders shortly after the offensive started to send all units, not actually committed to action, to the Eastern front. His natural reluctance to do this at this late stage of the war may have forced him to commit all of his units in this final drive rather than send them to uncertain fate in Russian Prisoner of War Camps.

From the American point of view the success of the German offensive and the blocking of the SAVERNE PASS through the VOSGES would have left the Seventh Army in an unenviable plight, and the recapture of ALSACE might have bolstered German morale to a point where the war might have lasted several months longer than it did.

My own memory of main events of the Battle has blurred, but my immense respect for the courage and fortitude of the individual American soldier has sharpened with time.

For the infantry elements it was cold, desperate, close-in fighting where the enemy held the living room while you occupied the kitchen; for the Tanker it was constant attack and counter-attack of every major German thrust, under the constant sniping of accurate German antitank fire; for the artillerymen it was 24 hour, day in day out, service of the piece, and the anxiety to make each round count; and for all it was a long, gruelling struggle against a determined and numerically superior enemy, with the elements impartially against both.



A. C. SMITH  
Maj Gen, USA

## PREFACE

"The Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN" is a student research study of an armored division in the defense, prepared as a phase of instruction at The Armored School. The period of operations considered has been limited to nine days. Although elements of the 14th Armored Division played an important part in VI Corps operations prior to 11 January 1945 and during the withdrawal to the MODER RIVER, no attempt is made to discuss these operations in detail. The 79th Infantry Division and other VI Corps units played a decisive part in the battle, but the committee confined their study generally to the activities of the armored units.

This study is based on unit reports, records, and orders and on personal and letter interviews. Some unit records for the period concerned are inadequate; and despite all care used in research and assembly of the materials, it is recognized that the information is not complete in all details and may involve minor errors of fact. Information on oral orders, conferences, and command discussions was very limited; therefore, a discussion of factors involved in major command decisions ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> omitted. The interviews with senior commanders were conducted by correspondence, and these officers had few maps or notes to refresh their memories. Therefore in acknowledging our indebtedness to these officers it is not desired to place on them the responsibility for any factual errors or for the conclusions drawn. Special appreciation is expressed to Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz, whose detailed report on the artillery phases of the action provided our most prolific source of information aside from official records.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The 14th Armored Division and its actions at HATTEN-RITTERS-HOFFEN in ALSACE, FRANCE, during January 1945 was probably one of the most controversial operations of World War II. General Jacob L. Devers, Commanding General, 6th Army Group, stated that it was "one of the greatest defensive battles of the war," yet in another official document, part of the action of elements of the Division was called "an abortive attempt."<sup>1</sup>

Such conflicting views can only mean separate viewpoints were held by those making such statements, and it is possible one statement or the other was made without a true and complete knowledge of the facts. It is the purpose of this research to gather, insofar as possible, those facts and assemble them in usable form.

It is not the intent of this study to bring out the deficiencies or the merits of this action to justify any viewpoint now held by those who are familiar with the action. Rather, it is to determine the lessons learned and the principles illustrated, and to record the action for future students of armored warfare.

Before an accurate portrayal of these events can begin, it is important that certain strategic considerations be understood, that some of the tactical considerations which brought the 14th Armored Division to the HATTEN-RITTERS-HOFFEN area be explained, and that the situation which confronted the Division be shown.

## The 14th Armored Division

The 14th Armored Division was activated at CAMP CHAFFEE, ARKANSAS, on 28 August 1942. (Appendix I shows the organization of the Division; Appendix II lists the commanders and general staff officers during the HATTEN-REITERSHOPFEN engagement.) It underwent the standard mobilization training prescribed for an armored division and landed at MARSEILLES, FRANCE, on 26 October 1944. The Division was commanded by Major General (then Brigadier General) Albert C. Smith from 10 July 1944 until deactivation.<sup>2</sup>

The first combat action by elements of the Division was the occupation of a defensive position in the MARITIME ALPS, east of NICE, FRANCE, by two armored infantry battalions under the Reserve Command on 15 November 1944. The remainder of the 14th Armored Division moved north into ALSACE where between 21 November and 4 December it attacked southeast from SAVERNE toward the RHINE as a part of the VI Corps, Seventh Army. (Map 1) The Division mission was to block the roads leading eastward out of the VOSGES MOUNTAINS to trap the retreating German Nineteenth Army. This action was very successful.

On 4 December 1944, the entire Division reassembled in the vicinity of SAVERNE where it regrouped and resupplied.<sup>3</sup>

The VI Corps ordered the Division into action again on 12 December. With comparatively little difficulty, the armor advanced to the German border in two columns. By the 16th VI Corps had brought four divisions up to the SIEGFRIED LINE. The VI Corps succeeded in penetrating the outworks of this line, and had the

attack continued it might have pushed north into GERMANY.<sup>4</sup> During the last two weeks in December, the 14th Armored Division operated against the outposts of the SIEGFRIED LINE; but when the Germans launched their ARDENNES counteroffensive, it reverted to corps reserve. Elements of the Division spent Christmas in the town of HATTEN; and by the end of the month the Division, less Reserve Command, was in corps reserve about six miles north of SAVERNE. Reserve Command held a sector in the VOSGES MOUNTAINS on the left flank of VI Corps.<sup>5</sup>

#### Strategic Considerations

On 20 December 1944, the Supreme Allied Commander issued an operational directive prescribing measures to meet the German counteroffensive in the ARDENNES.<sup>6</sup> Under this plan General Devers' 6th Army Group was to abandon offensive operations, relieve the Third Army westward to SAARLAUTERN, and defend in its sector against any major hostile penetration. Subject to securing essential lines of communication, 6th Army Group was to be further prepared to yield ground rather than endanger the integrity of its fortres.<sup>7</sup> Consequently the Seventh Army offensive was halted even though its XV Corps was completing the reduction of the strongly defended forts of the MAGINOT LINE in the vicinity of BITCHE, and its VI Corps had already crossed the LAUTER RIVER and seized many pillboxes in the SIEGFRIED LINE.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, during the last ten days of December 1944, Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch regrouped his Seventh Army and deployed in depth to strengthen his defensive position. As Third

Army shifted its main effort north to the ARDENNES, XV Corps extended to the northwest and occupied the sector from BITCHE to SAARLAUTERN.<sup>9</sup> The Seventh Army front then comprised three geographical areas: the open rolling SARRE VALLEY; the rough wooded VOSGES MOUNTAINS; and the northern ALSACE PLAIN between the mountains and the RHINE.<sup>10</sup> The principal lateral line of communication was through the SAVERNE GAP.

The Seventh Army prepared an alternate main line of resistance along the old MAGINOT LINE, and a final defensive position along the eastern slope of the VOSGES. At the end of the year the 84-mile front from east of SAARLAUTERN to the RHINE was held by four divisions of Major General Wade H. Haislip's XV Corps on the left and by three divisions of Major General Edward H. Brooks' VI Corps on the right.<sup>11</sup> On New Year's Eve, General Patch personally warned his Corps Commanders that an enemy attack was to be expected during the early hours of the next day.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, German Field Marshal Karl Gerd Von Rundstedt, believing that the ARDENNES counteroffensive had weakened the Allied Forces from LUXEMBOURG to the RHINE, directed General Johannes Blaskowitz, commander of Army Group G, to exploit the situation with a double-pronged attack up the SARRE VALLEY. The primary objective of the operation was the SAVERNE GAP. On 1 January 1945, Blaskowitz controlled the LXXXIX Corps and the First Army of three corps -- a total of fifteen divisions, eight of which were concentrated in the BITCHE-~~SARRE~~ <sup>SARRE</sup> GUEMINES area. However, since most of the enemy divisions were below strength (averaging but four

or five battalions per division), the High Command's hopes of decisive results in ALSACE-LORRAINE were not well founded.<sup>13</sup>

#### Seventh Army Operations, 1-10 January 1945

As if to confirm General Patch's warning, the enemy launched his offensive in LORRAINE when two divisions struck between the SARRE RIVER and KOHRBACH early on New Year's Day. After driving a salient about ten miles deep into the XV Corps positions, Allied counterattacks, together with the appearance of powerful armored reserves in the area, caused the Germans to curtail the SARRE offensive on 3 January 1945.<sup>14</sup>

A more serious threat to the Seventh Army developed in the BITCHE area where five German divisions also launched an attack on New Year's Day. Striking southwest against the right flank of the XV Corps and southeast against the left flank of the VI Corps, the assault reached WINGEN by 4 January. It was contained by a stubborn defense which included the Reserve Command of the 14th Armored Division, and by the early arrival of reinforcements. By 7 January it was apparent that the force of the attack had spent itself, even though heavy fighting in the BITCHE salient continued until 20 January.<sup>15</sup>

During the night of 2-3 January 1945, General Brooks executed the first step of his planned withdrawal to the Maginot forts. During the next four days, the enemy slowly followed up this withdrawal.<sup>16</sup> At this time French political pressure caused the Supreme Commander to alter his original plan which was to maintain the integrity of the Seventh Army by withdrawing from

STRASBOURG and northern ALSACE to a final defensive position along the eastern edge of the VOSGES.<sup>17</sup> General Devers, now charged with holding STRASBOURG, had to revise his defensive plans. The boundary between the Seventh and French First Armies was shifted north, and the French took over STRASBOURG. General Brooks then readjusted his forces to conform to the new army boundary and began to prepare a final defensive position behind the MODER RIVER.<sup>18</sup>

Early on the 5th the Germans forced a crossing of the RHINE in the JAMSHEIM area. VI Corps counterattacks failed to stop them, and by evening they held a bridgehead five miles wide and two miles deep. During the next few days additional counterattacks were launched with all forces available in that area, but the bridgehead could not be reduced. On 7 January 1945 the German Nineteenth Army launched a limited objective attack from the COLMAR POCKET toward STRASBOURG. This attack gained some ten miles but was finally contained by the French First Army.<sup>19</sup>

On the 7th of January the enemy also struck a heavy blow in the vicinity of HATTEN with the strength of about two divisions.<sup>20</sup> The attack was initially successful; but its forward momentum was temporarily checked by a provisional force, designated Task Force Wahl, consisting of elements of the 79th Division and Combat Command A of the 14th Armored Division.<sup>21</sup>

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#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER 1

<sup>1</sup> The Seventh United States Army - Report of Operations - France and Germany - 1944-1945, Vol II, p 603.

<sup>2</sup>History of the 14th Armored Division; passim.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, Ch V.

<sup>4</sup>Op cit, Seventh United States Army - Report of Operations, p 477.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p 496 ff.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p 494,

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p 499.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p 483 ff.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p 560,

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p 563,

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p 560,

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p 561.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p 561 ff.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p 564 ff.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p 570 ff.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p 582,

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p 581.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p 582.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p 583.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p 601.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, p 603.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

#### The VI Corps Situation on 11 January (Map 2)

By 11 January the Seventh Army had succeeded in containing the southward drive of the German forces along the western slope of the VOSGES MOUNTAINS. However, the difficult terrain enabled the enemy to stubbornly defend this BITCHE salient which still presented a real threat to the VI Corps troops in the eastern half of the army sector. Consequently, General Brooks was forced to employ the entire 45th Division and other corps troops to hold his left flank in the VOSGES. The rest of the corps front, extending over 30 miles from the VOSGES to GAMBESHEIM on the RHINE, was in more open terrain. It was in this section of northern ALSACE that the Germans concentrated their principal effort for the rest of the month.<sup>1</sup>

The combat veterans of the 79th Division were spread across the entire Alsatian front, bolstering the thin lines of the inexperienced infantry regiments of the 42d Division. The 12th and 14th Armored Divisions, less elements already engaged, provided the mobile reserve of the corps. Although one combat command of the 12th Armored Division had been committed around BISCHWILLER, enemy pressure from the GAMBESHEIM bridgehead increased and threatened the VI Corps right flank. Eventually the entire 12th Armored Division was committed in an attempt to hold this sector. On the northeast face of the corps front, the strong German panzer



forces around HATTEN were attempting to exploit their penetration of the American main line of resistance which extended generally along the old French MAGINOT LINE between the VOSGES MOUNTAINS and the FOREST OF HAGUENAU. Here Task Force Wahl was heavily engaged.<sup>2</sup>

Map 2 shows the general situation on 11 January. By that time the greatest threat to the Seventh Army's front existed on the Alsatian front of the VI Corps. Here a German exploitation from their RHINE bridgehead or a major breakthrough of the positions around HATTEN threatened to destroy the integrity of all Allied forces east of the VOSGES MOUNTAINS. For the next ten days, these two areas, separated by the FOREST OF HAGUENAU, remained the principal concern of 6th Army Group.

During the 11th, the situation became more critical in the HATTEN sector. German infantry and tanks, supported by heavy artillery fire, infiltrated into RITTERSHOFFEN, while intense close-in fighting developed in HATTEN. An attempt by Combat Command A, 14th Armored Division, to clear RITTERSHOFFEN and HATTEN was stopped 400 yards west of RITTERSHOFFEN. By evening one infantry battalion of the 79th Division was isolated in RITTERSHOFFEN while another infantry battalion remained surrounded in HATTEN. Elements of the 21st Panzer and 25th Panzer Grenadier Divisions were identified in the area.<sup>3</sup>

The situation became so critical that the corps commander decided to commit part of his dwindling reserve to restore the positions at HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN. On 11 January the 14th

Armored Division was ordered to move without delay to the vicinity of WOERTH. The same order confirmed the relief of elements of the Reserve Command from attachment to the 45th Division and their reversion to control of the 14th Armored Division.<sup>4</sup> The division command post advanced from BOUXWELLER to MORSEBROWN during the afternoon. By 2130 hours Combat Command B and Reserve Command had moved up into assembly areas as shown on Map 2.

During the night new orders outlined the mission of the 14th Armored Division. VI Corps Operations Instructions Number 10, 112100 January, directed that;

(a) 14th Armored Division pass through 79th Division positions and attack to capture the line STUNDWILLER-BOHL-FOREST OF HATTEN.

(b) 79th Division to follow up the armored attack and reoccupy restored MAGNOT LINE positions.

This order launched the 14th Armored Division in the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN. General Smith later described the impending operation as "...about as prolonged and vicious an engagement between armored units as we can cite in the military history of our Army."<sup>5</sup>

#### The Attack Order (Map 3)

Shortly after midnight, 12 January, the Division issued the following attack order;

Hq 14 A D  
APO 446 US Army  
120030 Jan 45

O I No. 9

Map: France, 1/50,000

1. Div attacks RITTERSHOFFEN-HATTEN; Combat Commands abreast, daylight 12 Jan 1945 to restore VI Corps MLR.
2. Troops: No change in composition.
3. Assembly Areas:
  - CCA - Present area (remains under control 79th Div until lines passed by CCB, at which time reverts to control of the 14th Armored Div,)
  - CCB - Vicinity HOHWILLER.
  - Res Com - Vicinity HOELSCHLOCH.
4. a. LD - Infantry line of contact.  
b. Axis of attack - overlay.
5. a. CCA attacks at daylight, seize RITTERSHOFFEN; protect right flank of Div; screen passage CCB; after passage of CCB prepare to regroup and assist CCB in attacking HATTEN.  
b. CCB close in assembly area by 0800, 12 Jan 45; cross LD on Div order; attack in column of battalions, leading battalion to seize HATTEN and screen passage of following battalions; second battalion cut roads E of HATTEN and restore MLR; remain on the MLR until relieved by infantry of 79th Div; upon relief by infantry, regroup prepared to continue attack to E or return to assembly area.  
c. Div Res assemble vicinity HOELSCHLOCH by 0800 12 Jan 45, prepared to reinforce CCB. . . .  
d. Arty. Div Arty comdr arrange general support CCA and CCB; 499th AFA Bn direct support CCB.
6. Radio nets open 0730 12 Jan 1945.
7. Adv. Message Center - SURBOURG,

SMITH  
Brig General  
Commanding

OFFICIAL;

s/ Lambert  
LAMBERT  
G-3

Distribution: X

Despite the optimistic tone of this order, serious problems faced the combat units of the Division. They had to move up to their assembly areas at night, in severe winter weather, over treacherous ice-covered roads. The enemy situation to the front was vague, except that strong hostile forces were in HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN. Little or no time would be available for reconnaissance. In this fluid situation, coordination between units already engaged and those moving forward would be difficult. Furthermore, some elements of the Division had been engaged in heavy fighting since 1 January.

Nevertheless, it was under these adverse conditions that, for the first time in its operational history, the 14th Armored Division was to be employed as a unit. The Official History of the 14th Armored Division rather dramatically summarizes the situation on the night of 11-12 January with the comment, "The great power of the Division was gathering itself for the savage battle to come."<sup>6</sup>

Before examining the attack plan in detail, it is necessary to consider the units involved in the battle and the terrain.

#### Troops

The task organization of the 14th Armored Division remained essentially the same throughout the operation.

Combat Command A<sup>7</sup> (Colonel Charles H. Karlstad)  
48th Tank Battalion (Major John C. Cavin)  
68th Armored Infantry Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Edwards)  
Company C, 125th Armored Engineer Battalion  
Troop C, 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron  
Detachment, 154th Signal Company

Combat Command B<sup>8</sup> (Colonel Francis J. Gillespie)  
25th Tank Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel Ernest C. Watson)  
62d Armored Infantry Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel James H.  
Meyer, Major Arthur J. Richards)  
Company B, 125th Armored Engineer Battalion  
Troop A, 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron  
Detachment, 154th Signal Company

Reserve Command<sup>8</sup> (Colonel Daniel H. Hudelson)  
47th Tank Battalion less Company B (Lieutenant Colonel  
James F. Lann)  
19th Armored Infantry Battalion (Major Forest T. Green)  
125th Armored Engineer Battalion less Companies B and C  
(Lieutenant Colonel John R. Morrison)  
94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron less Troops A and C  
(Lieutenant Colonel Thomas G. McCollum)

Division Artillery<sup>9</sup> (Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz)  
499th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (Lieutenant Colonel  
Robert L. Vance)  
500th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (Major Joseph J.  
Martha)

Company B, 47th Tank Battalion, was attached to the 79th Division in the GAMBESHEIM area and did not rejoin its parent unit until later in the action.<sup>10</sup> The 501st Armored Field Artillery Battalion, the third organic artillery battalion of the division, was attached to the 45th Division in the VOSGES MOUNTAINS and did not participate in any of the action around HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN. The 398th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion (SP)(AW), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Albert A. Moren, was attached to the Division throughout the operation and provided antiaircraft protection to the command post, division artillery, and combat command trains.<sup>11</sup>

Elements of the 79th Division were also engaged in the area throughout the battle. During the first day of the 14th Armored Division's operations, the 3d Battalion of the 315th Infantry Regiment in RITTERSHOFFEN remained under control of the 79th Division.

In HATTEN the 2d Battalion of the 315th Infantry, reinforced by remnants of a tank destroyer platoon and of infantry from the 42d Division which had survived the initial German assaults, remained under control of the 79th Division throughout the battle. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Earl F. Holton, was in charge of all operations in HATTEN. These two infantry battalions were supported by elements of the 79th Division Artillery, the 310th and 311th Field Artillery Battalions and Battery B, 312th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm How).<sup>12</sup>

Although the 14th Armored Division was to be committed as a unit, the intermingling of troops of different divisions in the confined HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN battlefield created a complex command situation. This was particularly true with the artillery. For example, all fire in front of the 315th Infantry positions in the towns had to be cleared through the 79th Division Artillery, while all fire in advance of elements of the 14th Armored Division in the same area had to be cleared through their own division artillery. Colonel Kurtz, Commander, 14th Armored Division Artillery, modestly expressed the problem when he said, "This situation called for the utmost cooperation and the closest type of coordination in preparing fire plans."<sup>13</sup>

VI Corps Artillery furnished additional combat support to the 14th Armored Division. Units participating in the battle included:

6th Field Artillery Group

36th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm Gun)

194th Field Artillery Battalion (8-inch How) (less Battery A)

634th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm How)

Two platoons, 698th Field Artillery Battalion (240-mm How)

17th Field Artillery Group

Battery A, 977th Field Artillery Battalion (155-mm Gun)

Further investigation shows that not all of the organic elements of the 14th Armored Division were up to their normal combat effectiveness on the eve of the battle. The 48th Tank Battalion of Combat Command A, as already mentioned, had been engaged in heavy fighting in HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN. Company C, for example, lost four medium tanks during one German attack on the 11th.<sup>15</sup> The 68th Armored Infantry Battalion was committed during the afternoon, and that night Colonel Karlstad's troops were disposed west of RITTERSHOFFEN as shown on Map 3.

As for Combat Command B, the 25th Tank Battalion was up to strength. However, the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion was still recovering from its crippling losses of early January when, operating with Task Force Hudelson, it had been badly battered by the German attack southeast of BITCHE.<sup>16</sup> During the early hours of the 12th, the troops moved up to their assembly areas around HOHWILLER, but it was not until late in the morning that all elements of the combat command had closed in the new position.<sup>17</sup>

The Reserve Command had the greatest trouble assembling its forces because the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion, over 20 miles to the west, was not released by the 45th Division until early morning of the 12th. Therefore, while Colonel Hudelson was assembling his available units in the vicinity of HOELSCHLOCH, it would be several hours until all the armored infantry could arrive.<sup>18</sup>

As for the artillery, the 500th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was supporting Combat Command A, but the 499th had been moved

into a position near SOULTZ on the night of the 11th.<sup>19</sup> With the commitment of the Division during the night, some reorganization was necessary. It was not until the 12th that Division Artillery resumed control of the 499th and 500th Battalions and completed installation of its wire communications.<sup>20</sup>

#### Terrain

The most critical terrain features in the VI Corps sector between the VOSGES MOUNTAINS and the FOREST OF HAGUENAU are the communications center of SOULTZ and the high ground about 1,000 yards to the southeast around HONWILLER. These areas dominate all avenues of enemy approach from the northeast to the rear of the corps. However, the battle was not fought on these critical points. Instead, the entire operation was centered in the restricted area of the villages of HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN. The battlefield lay in a rough triangle, bounded on the northeast by the SELTZBACH RIVER, on the south by the FOREST OF HAGUENAU, and on the west by a north-south line through the western edge of RITTERSHOFFEN. The western side of this triangle is only two and one-half miles long; its east-west base is about the same length. The two villages are less than 1,000 yards apart. (Map 4)

The outstanding characteristic of the area is its lack of cover and concealment. The entire area from the forest to the river is open farm land, except for the two villages, a small stream, and a railroad. The towns are on a low ridge which extends from west to east, but the Germans -- from positions northeast of the SELTZBACH -- had good observation throughout the area, as did the



Americans from northwest of RITTERSHOFFEN. The stream which runs eastward from RITTERSHOFFEN to HATTEN and then southeast to the forest played an important part in the battle because it afforded a concealed route for movement of enemy troops and supplies into RITTERSHOFFEN. The Germans used this avenue of approach as their main supply route. The roads and buildings are located as shown on the map.<sup>21</sup>

The weather during the period 12-20 January was typical of Alsatian winter, marked alternately with snow and below-freezing temperatures, high winds, and fog. Operations were frequently hampered by almost complete lack of visibility. The movement of armored vehicles on the roads was difficult because of the ice and snow, but cross-country trafficability was good since the ground was frozen.<sup>22</sup>

Another important feature of the area was the fortifications of the MAGINOT LINE which the French had constructed just to the east, north, and northeast of HATTEN. These large concrete works provided protection for numerous underground galleries. Smaller fortifications, machine gun and antitank gun emplacements, were located southeast of HATTEN. The Germans occupied these fortifications and used them as shelters for personnel and materiel and as antitank gun emplacements. The larger structures even withstood fire from American 8-inch and 240-mm howitzers.<sup>23</sup>

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NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup> Seventh United States Army - Report of Operations - France and Germany - 1944-1945, Vol II, p 576.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p 607.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p 603.

<sup>4</sup> Operations Instructions No. 9, VI Corps, 11 Jan 1945.

<sup>5</sup> Major General Albert C. Smith, Personal Letter, 8 Nov 1949.

<sup>6</sup> History of the 14th Armored Division, Ch IX.

<sup>7</sup> Report from Major Lyster to G-3, 14th Armored Division G-3 Journal, 11 Jan 1945.

<sup>8</sup> Operations Instructions No. 8, 14th Armored Division, 11 Jan 1945.

<sup>9</sup> Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz, "Field Artillery in the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSCHOFFEN," Headquarters, 14th Armored Division Artillery, 15 Feb 1945.

<sup>10</sup> Op cit, Seventh United States Army Report of Operations, p 596.

<sup>11</sup> Kurtz, Op cit, p 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; passim.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid; passim.

<sup>15</sup> "Combat Command A History - European Operations, 1 October 1944 to VE Day," p 6.

<sup>16</sup> History of the 14th Armored Division, Ch VIII.

<sup>17</sup> Situation Report No. 41, 14th Armored Division, 12 Jan 1945.

<sup>18</sup> Major General Daniel H. Hudelson, Personal Letter, 20 Jan 1950..

<sup>19</sup> Kurtz, Op cit, p 9.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p 1.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid, p 2.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p 3.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ATTACK OF 12 JANUARY

Although the Allied troops in ALSACE were on the strategic defensive during January 1945, the mission assigned the 14th Armored Division was offensive in nature. It will be recalled that on the night of 11-12 January VI Corps directed the Division to attack through the positions of the 79th Division, and recapture the line STUNDWILLER - BUHL - HATTEN FOREST. Even though the weather, terrain, and the opposing forces were to impose severe restrictions on the Division, the mission was a typical one for armor in a defensive situation -- counterattack against a limited objective.

The next three chapters of this study will discuss, as far as available historical documents permit, the operations of the 14th Armored Division during the period 12-20 January. These operations developed as a continuous series of small, but bitterly contested, unit actions centered in the towns of HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN. Although the Division never succeeded in gaining the objective assigned, it did accomplish an important defensive task because a major German offensive was stalled in its tracks during the period.

#### The Plan

The blue arrows on Map 4 show the axes of attack of the combat commands as directed by Division. Combat Command A was to attack at daylight, seize RITTERSHOFFEN, and screen the attack of Combat Command B on its left. After the passage of CCB, CCA was to

be prepared to assist CCB in the capture of HATTEN. Combat Command B would attack on Division order, in column of battalions, and seize HATTEN with the leading battalion to screen the advance of the following battalion. The second battalion would cut the roads east of HATTEN and restore the main line of resistance, the fortifications of the MAGINOT LINE between HATTEN and the SELTZBACH RIVER. The Reserve Command would assemble about six and a half miles west of RITTERSHOFFEN prepared to reinforce CCB.<sup>2,3</sup>

The plans of the battalions of Combat Command A were worked out in further detail. (Map 5): The 48th Tank Battalion less Company A, with Company B 68th Armored Infantry Battalion attached, would attack on the right (south) of RITTERSHOFFEN. Company B, 68th Armored Infantry Battalion, was to lead this attack by driving into the south edge of the town. It would be followed and supported by Company C of the 48th. Company B, 48th Tank Battalion, would move out at 0800 and take up positions southeast of the town to cut the HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN road by fire. The other tank company, Company D, was to protect the right rear of the attacking elements. Thus, one armored infantry company, followed by a company of tanks, was to make the main effort of the battalion into RITTERSHOFFEN from the south.<sup>4</sup>

On the left of Combat Command A the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion less Company B, and with Company A, 48th Tank Battalion attached, would attack along the main road entering the town from the west. The main effort would be made by Company C with the tanks attached. This company was organized into four teams of about two

infantry squads and two tanks each and with at least four light machine guns and a rocket launcher per team. These teams were to clear the houses in RITTERSHOFFEN as the attack progressed. Initially Company A of the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion would form a base of fire from positions on the left of Company C. Later Company A would follow Company C into the town and outpost it after Company C reached the east edge. The mortars, machine guns, and assault guns of Headquarters Company would be in general support of the battalion; the Antitank Platoon would protect the flanks of the battalion; and one platoon of engineers, the battalion reserve, would follow the attack by 300 yards.<sup>5</sup>

The plan of Combat Command B was issued in its field order dated 112400. The attack position was located in HOHWILLER; the combat command would be in this position and ready to attack by 0800 hours on the 12th. The attack would be launched in a column of battalions with the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion followed at 1,000 yards by the 25th Tank Battalion. The frontage of the attack would extend 1,000 yards south from the SELTZBACH RIVER. Corps artillery would support the attack by placing fire on STUNDWILLER, BUHL, known enemy emplacements, roads leading east of HATTEN, and the west edge of the HATTEN FOREST. The 499th Armored Field Artillery Battalion would be in direct support of the combat command with forward observers with each tank company. Company B, 125th Engineer Battalion, was alerted to lay mines and prepare demolitions against any enemy crossing to the south bank of the SELTZBACH. Combat trains were to remain at HOHWILLER; radio silence would be maintained

until the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion crossed the line of departure; the combat command advanced command post would follow the leading battalion.<sup>6</sup>

The two battalions of the 315th Infantry Regiment were both isolated in HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN, contact having been lost with the 3d Battalion during the night. (Map 4)<sup>7</sup> The situation on the flanks was vague. Elements of the 42d Division were supposedly covering sections of the FOREST OF HAGUENAU to the south, and OCA had Troop C of the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron patrolling the north edge of the forest.<sup>8</sup> On the 14th's left flank elements of the 79th Division held OBERROEDERN, but no continuous line of contact existed in this area; and elements of the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron patrolled to the northwest along the SELTZBACH RIVER.

The enemy situation was also vague although elements of the 21st Panzer and 25th Panzer Grenadier Divisions had been identified.<sup>9</sup> The Germans in HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN had been reinforced with infantry and tanks and had placed antitank guns and tanks in concealed positions around the buildings. The enemy apparently had strong artillery units around BUHL and STUNDWILLER and good observation over the entire battlefield.<sup>10</sup>

#### Operations, 12 January (Map 5)

The Division launched its attack as planned. Combat Command A attacked at 0750 with the advance of the 48th Tank Battalion preceded by a 15 minute artillery preparation. By 0800 hours Company B reached a position from which it could place fire on the

southeast edge of RITTERSHOFFEN. It remained in this position until 1700 although it did attempt to move a section up closer to the objective and lost one tank in the attempt. The infantry company moved out as scheduled but was stopped short of the south edge of RITTERSHOFFEN. It launched an assault at 0840 but met heavy small arms fire and was repulsed. No further progress was made by the infantry, although the tanks of Company C supported them from close range all day. At 1650 hours Company D, which had remained on the south flank since the initial attack, moved directly east and opened fire on the south edge of HATTEN. At 1700 hours Company B joined this tank attack and also moved east to bring its fire on HATTEN. However, 20 minutes later both companies began to withdraw, and by 1920 they were back in NIEDERBETSCHDORF where resupply was completed during the night.<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime the other battalion of CCA had also experienced difficulty. The 68th Armored Infantry Battalion launched its attack at 0800. Company C gained a few houses, and Company A moved in behind the assault teams. Unfortunately, what few buildings were captured proved untenable since the Germans set fire to them as they withdrew.<sup>12</sup> By noon the 68th had advanced about 400 yards into the town; established contact with the 3d Battalion, 315th Infantry; and set up its advanced command post in the town. By 1900 the western half of the town had been cleared after heavy house-to-house fighting. Throughout the day intense sniper, machine gun, tank, and artillery fire was encountered, particularly in the north central section of the town and from a



strong point around the church in the eastern section of the town. That night the attached tank company withdrew to NIEDERBETSCHDORF for resupply. As a result of the days fighting, CCA had cleared about a quarter of RITTERSHOFFEN and had established firm contact with the 3d Battalion of the 315th Infantry. The 500th Armored Field Artillery Battalion had supported the combat command throughout the day. At 1130 hours the combat command reverted to control of the 14th Armored Division as planned.<sup>13</sup>

In the meantime, Combat Command B launched its attack across the open ground north of RITTERSHOFFEN at 1130. The 62d Armored Infantry Battalion, less Company C, and with Company C, 25th Tank Battalion, attached, led the attack with two dismounted infantry companies abreast, supported by the tank company. The line of departure was the RITTERSHOFFEN-LEITERSWILLER road. By 1300 hours the attack had pushed eastward about 1,000 yards; but there the infantry was forced to stop and try to dig into the frozen ground under intense artillery, mortar, and small arms fire.<sup>14</sup> As Company C's tanks crossed the line of departure they came under accurate antitank fire from the north edge of RITTERSHOFFEN. Within a few minutes they lost two tanks. By 1530 the remaining tanks were forced to withdraw to defensive positions west of the line of departure.<sup>15</sup> Although part of the armored infantry battalion was scarcely more than 300 yards north of HATTEN, it could move no further. Eventually, these troops also withdrew behind the line of departure where the companies began to dig in.<sup>16</sup>

The 25th Tank Battalion approached the line of departure 20 minutes behind the 62d Battalion, with companies in column in the order B, A, B (62d Armored Infantry Battalion), and D.<sup>17</sup> The battalion attempted to pass through the infantry, but came under heavy antitank fire from the north edge of RITTERSHOFFEN before they reached the line of departure.<sup>18</sup> The olive drab tanks were excellent targets against the open snow-covered terrain between the SELTZBACH and RITTERSHOFFEN; artillery, antitank, mortar, and small arms fire from dug-in enemy positions took from CCB a mounting toll.<sup>19</sup>

By evening the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion was dug in along the RITTERSHOFFEN-LEITERSWILLER road, and the 25th Tank Battalion had withdrawn to HOHWILLER for resupply. During the attack Lieutenant Colonel Meyer was wounded, and Major Richards succeeded to command of the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion.

When queried on this operation, Colonel Gillespie recalled some features of this attack:

It was snowing heavily at the time of our attack. We moved directly from the road, from march formation, to the line of departure, and attacked on time. The attack itself was not successful, but it undoubtedly relieved the pressure from the troops in RITTERSHOFFEN and HATTEN. At times, because of the snow, we could not see more than a hundred yards in advance. The ground was frozen and there was no opportunity to take cover of any sort, which considerably worried the troops. There was no evidence at the time to show that the holding attack had been launched; and as far as I could find out, the holding attack, if at all organized, had not gained ground. We stopped by holding and organizing the high ground generally northwest of RITTERSHOFFEN and took up a very active defense with much patrolling. It appeared to me at the time that the ground held by CCB was the ground desired by the enemy, who were trying to get the town of SOULTZ to the northwest, which has always been a strong traditional town to the Germans. It was also a good communication center.<sup>20</sup>

14th Armored Division, and its gains could only be marked in yards. Nevertheless, its timely arrival at the threatened sector of the corps front had strengthened the American's hold on a critical area. The battle, however, was just beginning.

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NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

<sup>1</sup> Operations Instructions No. 10, VI Corps, 112100 January 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz, "Field Artillery in the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN," Headquarters, 14th Armored Division Artillery, 15 Feb 1945, Map.

<sup>3</sup> Operations Instruction No. 9, 14th Armored Division, 120030 January 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Monthly Report, 48th Tank Battalion, January 1945, par 5.

<sup>5</sup> Attack Order No. 2, 68th Armored Infantry Battalion, 120700 January 1945.

<sup>6</sup> Field Order No. 8, Combat Command B, 14th Armored Division, 112400 January 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Op cit, Monthly Report, p 6.

<sup>8</sup> S-3 Report No. 11, Combat Command A, 14th Armored Division, 120100 January 1945.

<sup>9</sup> Kurtz, Op cit, p 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p 6.

<sup>11</sup> Op cit, Monthly Report, p 6.

<sup>12</sup> Unit History, "68th Armored Infantry Battalion, From Port of Embarkation to V-E Day," p 12..

<sup>13</sup> G-3 Report No. 12, 14th Armored Division 130100 January 1945.

<sup>14</sup> S-3 Report No. 41, CCB, 14th Armored Division, from 120001 January to 122400 January 1945.

<sup>15</sup>Captain Andrew W. Winiarczyk, Commanding Officer, Company C, 25th Tank Battalion, Personal Interview, 2 March 1950.

<sup>16</sup>Op cit, G-3 Report No. 12

<sup>17</sup>Lieutenant Ralph Cardinal, "History of the 25th Tank Battalion." p 10.

<sup>18</sup>Major William E. Shedd, III, S-3, 25th Tank Battalion, Personal Interview, 2 March 1950.

<sup>19</sup>Cardinal, Op cit, p 10.

<sup>20</sup>Colonel Francis J. Gillespie, Personal Letter, 27 January 1950, p 24.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ATTACK OF 13 JANUARY

#### Plans and Preparations

Fortunately, the enemy did not react to the attack of the 12th with any violent counterattacks during the night. As the Division caught its breath after the first day's battle, General Smith issued new instructions for resuming the attack the next morning.

Operations Instructions No. 10, published 122000 January, established the missions of the three combat commands of the Division:

1. Combat Command A was to continue the attack at daylight to clear RITTERSHOFFEN. After clearing RITTERSHOFFEN, Colonel Karlstad would assist the Reserve Command in clearing HATTEN and restoring the main line of resistance.

2. Combat Command B was to attack RITTERSHOFFEN and HATTEN by fire only from their present positions along the RITTERSHOFFEN-LEITERSWILLER road. The fires of all available tanks and assault guns would be coordinated with Reserve Command and Combat Command A. Colonel Gillespie was also to protect the Division's north flank and prepare either to regroup, to reinforce CCA, to attack HATTEN, or to march to an assembly area.

3. The Reserve Command was to make the main effort on the 13th. Colonel Hudelson would assemble his forces in the vicinity of NIEDERBETSCHDORF prior to daylight and then attack around the south flank of the Division at daylight to seize HATTEN; rescue the

remnants of the 2d Battalion, 315th Infantry, still isolated in the town; and restore the main line of resistance. This force would also be responsible for the protection of the right (south) flank of the Division.

4. Troops A, 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, was released from attachment to CCB and attached to Reserve Command. The remainder of the 94th Cavalry took over the protection of the Division's left flank along the SELTZBACH RIVER from LEITERSWILLER to SOULTZ.

5. The fire plan for the attack included the support of VI Corps artillery. Some 8-inch howitzers would be used in the close support of the troops in HATTEN; a 30-minute preparation would be fired by medium and heavy artillery on known enemy positions west of the RHINE; and interdiction fires were scheduled along the enemy's main supply route which extended northeast from BUHL.

Thus, the general plan for the attack on the 13th was similar to that of the first day. Combat Command A would continue to make the frontal attack in RITTERSHOFFEN while the main effort would again be launched against HATTEN. This time, however, Reserve Command would attack from the south instead of CCB attacking from the north as had been attempted on the 12th. The defensive mission of Combat Command B was dictated by higher headquarters. General Smith said:

With reference to the somewhat passive role played by CCB after their first major setback and the rather unorthodox mission "To attack by fire only"....I had received oral orders,

later confirmed in writing from VI Corps to keep one combat command available for immediate use as corps reserve, in case of an emergency on another front. Under this restriction this was the only use that I felt justified in making of this combat command. In fact, I strained a little at my orders in putting them in a defensive position to assist the remainder of the division.<sup>1</sup>

The Reserve Command experienced the most difficulty during the night ~~because~~ <sup>since</sup> the other two combat commands were already in position to resume the attack. Colonel Hudelson commented on his problems:

CCR received the division attack order (oral) at 2100 hours on 12 January 1945. CCR was closing in an area about 25 kilometers from HATTEN at this hour. The 19th AIB had been released from a front line position near MOUTERHOUS (in the VOSGES MOUNTAINS) early that morning. Two battalions had been fighting constantly since early January 1945. The hour of attack was given as 0800 hours 13 January. This meant that CCR must march an additional 25 kilometers at night, over icy roads, and attack without making a reconnaissance. All troops were battle weary. No replacements had been received since the last major engagement.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these difficulties, Reserve Command assembled in NIEDER-BETSCHDORF by 0700 hours on the morning of the 13th and completed preparations to launch its attack on schedule.<sup>3</sup>

#### Operations, 13 January (Map 6)

The attack was launched at 0800 hours. In RITTERSHOFFEN, the 3d Battalion, 315th Infantry, was attached to Combat Command A. This battalion, with the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion on the left and the 48th Tank Battalion on the right, was engaged in close-in fighting throughout the day. Covered by a smoke screen on the southeastern edge of the town, the 48th Tank Battalion attacked with two companies. They advanced slowly but steadily

until about 1000 hours, when a tank was knocked out as it approached the German strongpoint around the church. Fighting slackened until about 1800 that evening when house-to-house fighting broke out again. By 1930, most of the battalion had established defensive positions for the night in the southern part of the town.<sup>4</sup> During the day, one company of tanks moved south of the town and reached a point midway between HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN. Here they were able to bring fire on the road between the two towns. The fourth tank company occupied a flank firing position in the southwest corner of RITTERSHOFFEN during the day.<sup>5</sup>

The 3d Battalion, 315th Infantry, also attacked to extend its foothold in the town but made little progress against stubborn enemy resistance.<sup>6</sup> The 68th Armored Infantry Battalion continued its attack of the preceding day with two companies, working in tank-infantry teams, driving to the northeast. The assault guns and 81-mm mortars provided close support to the attack but could not neutralize heavy enemy small arms and mortar fire from the northeast. Enemy artillery fire was intense all day, and soon most of the ungutted buildings were on fire. At dusk, two small German counterattacks were contained, but by dark the 68th was back in the same positions it had held the night before. Company C, 125th Armored Engineer Battalion, remained in combat command reserve at KUHLENDORF throughout the day.<sup>7</sup>

Next, consider the operations of the Reserve Command in HATTEN. The battalions moved up from their attack positions and at 0800 launched their attack across the line of departure, the



road running south from RITTERSHOFFEN.<sup>8</sup> They were in line formation, with the 47th Tank Battalion on the right and the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion on the left astride the railroad.<sup>9</sup> Company A of the 19th was north of the railroad, Company B was to the south, and Company C was in reserve. The tanks of the 47th moved on a parallel axis about 200 yards south of the railroad. The axis of attack extended eastward along the railroad to a point south of HATTEN and then north into the eastern part of the town,

Almost as soon as the troops began to move eastward, they came under withering fire from RITTERSHOFFEN, the south edge of HATTEN, and the German-held bunkers southeast of HATTEN. A smoke screen was laid on the south edge of HATTEN, and by 0845 the infantry had advanced within 300 yards of the HATTEN railroad station.<sup>10</sup> The battalion then attacked north against the town but made little progress. By 1000 hours heavy artillery fire had forced these troops to withdraw south of the railroad. The attack to the north was resumed at about 1100, supported by tanks.<sup>11</sup> By noon, contact was established with some of the troops who had been isolated in the southern portion of HATTEN; and about 100 men, mostly from the 42d Division, were evacuated during furious fighting. However, at 1400 hours a heavy German counterattack forced Reserve Command to withdraw to the woods south of HATTEN.<sup>12</sup>

At 1500 hours, the Division Commander issued an oral order to Reserve Command to attack without delay, drive the enemy from HATTEN, and secure the forts of the MAGINOT LINE north of HATTEN. Colonel Hudelson describes this attack:

Due to the extremely heavy small arms, mortar, tank, anti-tank, and artillery fire falling in the area of CCR, I decided to delay the attack until dusk. The Light Tank Company of the 94th Reconnaissance Squadron (12 tanks) and two companies of the 47th Tank Battalion (23 tanks) were assembled in the woods 800 yards south of HATTEN. The remaining combat troops of the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion were loaded on these 35 tanks under the command of the battalion commander of the 19th AIB (Major Forest Green) at 1700 hours 13 January 1945. These tanks, loaded with the infantry, dashed into HATTEN at top speed. The infantry dismounted and was engaged in a bitter house-to-house fight within a matter of minutes. All but one platoon of medium tanks were ordered out of HATTEN after discharging the armored infantry that they were carrying. No tanks were lost during this trip. Three men were injured by small arms fire during the ride into HATTEN. By 2400 hours, our attack lost its momentum. About three-fourths of the town was then in our hands. 73 casualties were incurred by the armored infantry during the house-to-house fighting prior to 2400 hours. Three of the five tanks that had been left in HATTEN were knocked out and were replaced immediately. 126 Germans were captured. 91 dead Germans were found in that portion of HATTEN held by CCR at 2400 hours on 13 January 1945.<sup>13</sup>

In this manner all three companies of the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion and two platoons of tanks established firm contact with the 2d Battalion of the 315th Infantry in HATTEN during the evening. It was one of the most successful engagements of the entire operation.<sup>14</sup>

While CCA was fighting in RITTERSHOFFEN and the Reserve Command in HATTEN, CCB had been supporting the operations from positions north of RITTERSHOFFEN.<sup>15</sup> In an attempt to assist the progress of the other attacks during the morning, Company C, 25th Tank Battalion, tried twice to reach HATTEN from the north. The tanks moved out as indicated on the map, but in each attack a tank was lost and the company retired. In the afternoon Division ordered Company C to make another attempt to cut the roads running northeast from HATTEN and contact Reserve Command to the south. This attack, launched with two platoons in line and one in support, penetrated to

a point about 1,000 yards north of HATTEN; but a third tank was lost and again the company was forced to withdraw by heavy anti-tank fire from RITTERSHOFFEN, HATTEN, BUHL, and STUNDWILLER.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of the fighting up until the night of 13 January, the 2d Battalion, 315th Infantry, had been relieved and the foothold on HATTEN expanded somewhat by Reserve Command. However, the positions of CCA in RITTERSHOFFEN and CCB on the left flank were practically unchanged despite the day's bitter battles.<sup>17</sup>

Visibility had been bad during the morning, limited to 100 to 200 yards. However, it improved during the day, and the air force attempted to drop supplies to the hungry infantrymen holding out in HATTEN. An air observer spotted German reinforcements moving toward HATTEN on the BUHL-HATTEN road, but attempts to destroy the bridge over the SELTZBACH with artillery fire were unsuccessful. Late in the afternoon the 499th Armored Field Artillery Battalion marked the town of BUHL with red smoke to guide dive bombers on a strafing attack on the town.<sup>18</sup>

However, the fighting of the 13th was not yet over. At 2115 hours the Germans launched a strong night counterattack against the newly won positions of the Reserve Command in HATTEN. This powerful attack was supported by tanks, flamethrowers, and artillery fire. The enemy forced the Americans out of most of HATTEN that they had gained earlier in the evening. All available artillery fire was brought in to strengthen the defenders, and by midnight the attack was contained.<sup>19</sup>

About half an hour after the HATTEN counterattack began

the Germans launched another strong attack in RITTERSHOFFEN. This attack, also supported by tanks and flamethrowers, came from the direction of HATTEN. The counterattack was contained within an hour by massed American artillery fire; but elements of the 48th Tank Battalion south of the HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN road were forced to withdraw, and the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion fell back to the west. By midnight, however, CCA and the 3d Battalion still held their foothold in RITTERSHOFFEN, and the German attack was repulsed.<sup>20</sup>

During the day, the artillery in support of the 14th Armored Division had one of its busiest periods of the entire campaign. It expended 6,142 rounds of ammunition, including 5,298 light, 700 medium, and 142 heavy shells.<sup>21</sup>

The net gains in HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN as a result of the fighting on 12 and 13 January were negligible; but a major enemy counterattack had been stopped, and the American positions in the two towns were stronger than before. Furthermore, contact with the isolated infantry battalion in HATTEN was again established.<sup>22</sup> The operations for these first two days have been related in considerable detail to describe the pattern and nature of the fighting. For the next week, the battle was to continue with unabated fury in HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN, but these operations were a general repetition of the same type of fighting that occurred on the 12th and 13th. These subsequent operations will be discussed briefly in the next chapter,

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 4

- <sup>1</sup>Major General Albert C. Smith, Personal Letter, 27 Mar 1950.
- <sup>2</sup>Major General Daniel H. Hudelson, Personal Letter, 20 Jan 1950.
- <sup>3</sup>S-3 Report No. 1, Reserve Command, 13 Jan 1945.
- <sup>4</sup>"Combat Command A History European Operations, 1 October 1944 to VE Day," p 6.
- <sup>5</sup>Headquarters 48th Tank Battalion Report, 13 Jan 1945, p 6.
- <sup>6</sup>Op cit, Combat Command A History, p 6.
- <sup>7</sup>S-3 Report, 68th Armored Infantry Battalion, 13 Jan 1945.
- <sup>8</sup>S-3 Report No. 1, Reserve Command, 13 Jan 1945.
- <sup>9</sup>Hudelson, Op cit.
- <sup>10</sup>Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz, "Field Artillery in the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN," Headquarters, 14th Armored Division Artillery, 15 Feb 1945, p 7.
- <sup>11</sup>S-3 Report No. 1, Reserve Command, 13 Jan 1945.
- <sup>12</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, p 14.
- <sup>13</sup>Hudelson, Op cit.
- <sup>14</sup>G-3 Report No. 13, Headquarters 14th Armored Division, 14 Jan 1945.
- <sup>15</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, p 14.
- <sup>16</sup>Captain Andrew W. Winiarczyk, Commanding Officer, Company C, 25th Tank Battalion, Personal Interview, 2 March 1950.
- <sup>17</sup>Situation Report No. 47, Headquarters 14th Armored Division, 132130 Jan 1945.
- <sup>18</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, p 12 ff.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid, p 12.
- <sup>20</sup>Op cit, Combat Command A History, p 6.
- <sup>21</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, Annex, Type of Fires.
- <sup>22</sup>Situation Report No. 47, Headquarters 14th Armored Division, 132130 Jan 1945.

## CHAPTER 5

### OPERATIONS 14-20 JANUARY

General Smith issued his third and last written operational instructions for the conduct of the battle at 2000 hours on the 13th. This directive outlined the general missions of the major elements of the Division (Map 7).

Combat Command A was to organize all-around defensive positions to be occupied during hours of darkness. It would then continue the attack to clear RITTERSHOFFEN at daylight and prepare to repel any enemy counterattacks. As soon as RITTERSHOFFEN was cleared, CCA would assist the Reserve Command in clearing HATTEN and restoring the VI Corps main line of resistance. The fire plan against HATTEN would be coordinated with Reserve Command. CCA would also continue to block the HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN road to prevent the escape of enemy forces to the east and would maintain contact with CCB on the left and Reserve Command on the right.

Combat Command B was to organize a defensive line which extended south from LEITERSWILLER for 1,300 yards along the road to RITTERSHOFFEN. This line would be organized and occupied during darkness by infantry strongly reinforced by tanks. CCB would also be prepared to repel counterattacks from the northeast or southeast, to protect the north flank of the Division, to assist CCA in clearing RITTERSHOFFEN, or to counterattack HATTEN by fire coordinated with Reserve Command. Neither the 25th Tank Battalion

nor the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion would be committed without approval of the Division Commander except to repel an attack on CCB's own position.<sup>1</sup> Such limited commitment of the command was dictated by the corps commander's desire to keep one combat command available for immediate use as corps reserve.<sup>2</sup>

Reserve Command was to organize defensive areas in HATTEN during the night, renew its attack to clear the town at daylight, and restore the VI Corps main line of resistance. It would also protect the right (south) flank of the Division, place defensive mine fields on roads southeast and south of HATTEN, and prepare to meet counterattacks from the east or southeast.<sup>3</sup>

These instructions established the general pattern of operations for the next week: Combat Command A fought in RITTERSHOFFEN, Reserve Command fought in HATTEN, and Combat Command B maintained a defensive position northwest of RITTERSHOFFEN while supporting the other two combat commands with tank and assault gun fire. After the last major elements of the Division were committed on the 13th, subsequent operations were not marked by any coordinated Division attacks. Instead, they were characterized by extremely bitter house-to-house fighting in the two towns in which both Americans and Germans employed attacks and counterattacks up to battalion strength to maintain their positions. Therefore, the battle from 14 - 20 January was certainly not a typical armored action and did not exemplify the normally accepted ideas of the proper use of an armored division.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand this period does afford an example of how circumstances may

sometimes force armored units to fight a prolonged defensive battle.

#### Combat Command A in RITTERSHOFEN

On Sunday, 14 January 1945, Combat Command A and the 3d Battalion of the 315th Infantry continued to clear RITTERSHOFEN. On the left the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion attacked, employing tank-infantry teams supported by assault guns and mortars. In the ensuing house-to-house fighting, it met stubborn enemy resistance consisting of machine gun, artillery, and mortar fire. A small patch of woods on the northwest edge of the town was cleared of Germans who had infiltrated during the night. On the right the 48th Tank Battalion was assigned a defensive, overwatching, and security mission to protect the right flank of the 3d Battalion and was also instructed to establish contact with Reserve Command. The 48th supported the 3d Battalion with tank fire and cut the road from HATTEN to RITTERSHOFEN by fire. Five medium tanks were attached to the 3d Battalion to assist in their close-in fighting in the town. In the center the 3d Battalion made negligible progress toward the church which the enemy had developed into a formidable strong point protected by heavy mortar and artillery fire. In the afternoon a 155-mm self-propelled gun from corps artillery was sent up into the town to support the attack.<sup>5</sup> Three rounds were fired at very short range against the church, but hostile antitank guns forced the gun to withdraw before it inflicted any material damage on the strong point.<sup>6</sup> At 1400 hours the Germans



launched a determined counterattack with infantry supported by tanks. Friendly artillery fire was called for; with its help the counterattack was repulsed by 1530 hours, and two enemy tanks destroyed. Fighting reverted to the use of demolitions, flame throwers, and rocket launchers in an effort to win a house at a time. CCA organized defensive positions for the night after the hard day's fighting which won only slight gains.<sup>7</sup>

On Monday CCA assumed a more defensive attitude in an effort to recuperate from the past four days of heavy fighting. Colonel Karlstad's instructions for the day prescribed:

...Our battalions will seize anything in RITTERSHOFFEN that can be taken without undue loss of personnel. Attack by fire. There will be full watchfulness for enemy attacks, and buildings and grounds now held will be maintained. The impression of the usual attack will be given without excessive fire. Organizations will be kept in hand, in full strength to meet probable enemy attacks.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to daylight all units laid mine fields west of the town, and during the morning the battalions attacked by fire and probing patrols. General Smith ordered the attack resumed to the northeast and east at 1400 but few gains were registered. The 155-mm gun was again used against the church strong point which the enemy still held tenaciously.<sup>9</sup>

The attacks to clear RITTERSHOFFEN continued on Tuesday, without decision, the Germans still defending their church stronghold and the northern section of the town.<sup>10</sup> They were reinforced by elements of the 104th Volks Grenadier Regiment of the 47th Volks Grenadier Division.<sup>11</sup>

On Wednesday, the 17th, the remaining battalion of the 315th Infantry, the 1st Battalion, joined CCA in another major attempt to clear the town. The 1st Battalion, on the left of CCA, was to attack to the east to seize the commanding ground around the north edge of the town; the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion was to launch a house-to-house attack to clear its zone; and the 3d Battalion, 315th Infantry, on the right was also to clear its portion of the town.<sup>12</sup> The attack began at 0730 when Company B, 315th Infantry, gained a small lodgement in the northern edge of the town. However, furious enemy resistance soon isolated this company which lost contact with the rest of its battalion. At 1405 hours Company A, 315th Infantry, supported by a company of tanks, launched an attack to regain contact with Company B.<sup>13</sup> This attack failed. Two survivors of Company B were found later in the day, but the rest of the company had disappeared. The 68th Armored Infantry Battalion and 3d Battalion, 315th Infantry, made limited gains; but by evening all elements of CCA were establishing night positions to hold their ground.<sup>14</sup>

Thursday all units held fast, and the enemy was less active. Patrols made limited gains in the vicinity of the church.

On the 19th, Friday, probing patrols reached limited objectives before being driven back to their battalion positions. The next day the 14th Armored Division and 79th Division prepared to withdraw to a new defensive position behind the MODER RIVER.<sup>15</sup>

The After Action Report of Combat Command A for January 1945 includes the cost of the battle of RITTERSKOFFEN. Casualties

for the battle included 41 killed, 202 wounded, and 29 missing; the 48th Tank Battalion suffered 84 of these casualties while the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion lost 160 officers and men. Combat Command A also lost thirteen medium and six light tanks. On the other side, the German losses were estimated at 1,510 killed or wounded.

#### Reserve Command in HATTEN

While CCA and the enemy were battling to a standstill in RITTERSHOFFEN, Reserve Command and the 2d Battalion, 315th Infantry, were defending their exposed positions in HATTEN. Here the Germans made repeated attempts to drive the Americans out of the key town. The 19th Armored Infantry Battalion and the 2d Battalion, 315th Infantry, supported by two platoons of tanks and a reconnaissance troop, bore the brunt of the fighting in the town while the 47th Tank Battalion supported these operations by fire and minor diversionary attacks. The engineer company prepared hasty mine fields and assisted with demolitions.<sup>16</sup>

Sunday the 14th, both battalions launched a coordinated attack from the southwestern portion of the town.<sup>17</sup> Considerable progress was made during the day, but at 2200 hours that night the enemy made a strong counterattack that succeeded in wiping out most of the gains.<sup>18</sup> The Germans used infantry, bazookas, flame-throwing tanks, and artillery; the fighting was at very close quarters with heavy defensive fires placed on enemy troops just across the street from friendly forces.<sup>19</sup> This counterattack was

launched by two battalions of the 20th Parachute Regiment of the 7th Parachute Division, a unit not previously identified on the VI Corps front.<sup>20</sup> After about three hours of bitter fighting, the counterattack was contained.

Early Monday morning, the enemy struck again. From 0500 to 0630 hours Reserve Command successfully resisted five counterattacks of medium intensity. The Americans reorganized during the rest of the morning and prepared to resume the attack at 1500 hours. Their plans were disrupted, however, by another enemy attack of battalion strength at 1450 hours. Exceedingly bitter house-to-house fighting developed; but Reserve Command's counterattack, which lasted until 2100 hours, regained some ground.<sup>21</sup>

Tuesday, Reserve Command continued to attack in house-to-house fighting against the fanatical German paratroopers. As in RITTERSHOFFEN, the church in the eastern edge of HATTEN became a center of activity. By 1500 the enemy had stopped the advance, and an hour and a half later Reserve Command fell back to their original lines and prepared defensive positions for the night.<sup>22</sup>

Early on the 17th observers reported heavy vehicle traffic on the roads northeast of HATTEN which continued despite friendly harrassing artillery fires. The day's activities began at 0500 hours with two simultaneous German attacks in company strength from the east and from the southeast, the latter supported by six tanks. These attacks were repulsed by 0800, but two hours later a third attack forced the Americans to give up four houses. After a counterattack at 1230 regained these buildings defensive positions

were maintained the rest of the day. The 47th Tank Battalion, reinforced by the return of Company B from the RHINE bridgehead, launched a diversionary attack to the south and east of HATTEN to relieve pressure on the town. Enemy antitank fire prevented the tanks from cutting the roads leading east from HATTEN.<sup>23</sup>

Thursday the positions of the opposing forces remained unchanged, and ground fighting slackened somewhat in intensity although the artillery was active because of improved visibility.<sup>24</sup>

On Friday the Germans launched a three-pronged attack from the north, northeast, and east, employing infantry supported by mortar, artillery, and tank fire. This assault, and another which developed about noon, were finally contained by 1400 with the help of effective defensive artillery fires.<sup>25</sup> These proved to be the last major German attacks in the HATTEN-REITERSHOFFEN area.

The morning hours of Saturday were marked by considerable enemy vehicle and foot traffic on the roads out of HATTEN, and in the afternoon the enemy laid a smoke screen to conceal their movements. January 20th was the first time for 12 days that the enemy failed to mount a sizeable attack in HATTEN.<sup>26</sup> That afternoon Reserve Command was ordered to withdraw from that bitterly defended Alsatian ruin -- there was hardly enough left to be called a town. A Seventh Army historian placed Reserve Command's casualties in HATTEN at 362 officers and men, including 26 killed. German losses were estimated at 678 killed and 1,000 wounded.<sup>27</sup>

### General Activities

While the other two combat commands were involved in continuous close fighting in the two towns, Combat Command B held its defensive positions behind the RITTERSHOFFEN-LEITERS-WILLER road with the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion and the 25th Tank Battalion. These units supported operations in both towns by fire and conducted limited armored reconnaissance in the area.<sup>28</sup> On the 19th, the 25th Tank Battalion was placed in corps reserve and moved back to the south to meet another hostile threat in a different area.<sup>29</sup>

The artillery of the 14th Armored and 79th Infantry Divisions, as well as the VI Corps, played an important part in the battles of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN. The first four days of operations were marked with the greatest expenditure of ammunition, the heaviest firing being on the 15th when 6,247 rounds were expended.<sup>30</sup> That night, however, the artillery was advised that the ammunition situation was critical and that drastic reductions must be made in ammunition expenditures.<sup>31</sup> For the next five days, the daily ammunition expenditures dropped about 50 per cent.<sup>32</sup>

Poor visibility hampered air operations throughout the campaign; but when possible, the XII Tactical Air Command joined the battle. At dark on the 14th BUHL was observed in flames as a result of a bombing attack that afternoon.<sup>33</sup> The next day the first German jet-propelled aircraft seen in the area bombed a battery of the 499th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.<sup>34</sup>

Map 8 shows the locations of certain of the more formidable German defenses which were developed in the vicinity of HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN during the operation.<sup>35</sup> During the battle elements of four German divisions were identified in the area. Appendix III lists these enemy divisions, together with the location and date their units were identified.<sup>36</sup>

The operations had been costly to both Americans and Germans. The 14th Armored Division estimated their total casualties for the period 13-20 January to be 1,115 officers and men. Map 9 shows the tracked vehicles lost by both sides. Approximately 47 American and 61 German vehicles were destroyed,<sup>37</sup> Appendix IV includes a statistical summary of personnel and vehicular casualties, and fuel and ammunition expenditures for the 14th Armored Division during the battle. Appendix V indicates the effect of tank losses on the overall tank strengths of the combat commands.

As for the general situation in the VI Corps sector, the crisis was not yet passed (Map 2). On 19 January combat efficiency reports for the divisions that had been in the corps area at the beginning of the campaign listed the 14th Armored and 45th and 79th Infantry Divisions as "satisfactory," while the 12th Armored and 42d Infantry Divisions were rated as "unsatisfactory." In view of the status of these latter two divisions, and the fact that it appeared that the enemy was shifting troops south from HATTEN and was gathering his forces for a renewed attack across the RHINE, the Seventh Army Commander informed the 6th Army Group Commander of his inability to hold his existing front. General Devers then authorized

the execution of the preplanned withdrawal, and in turn General Patch authorized the withdrawal of the VI Corps at the corps commander's discretion.<sup>38</sup> General Brooks then directed that the withdrawal to the MODER RIVER line be completed by 0730 hours 21 January.<sup>39</sup>

Operations Instructions No. 13, issued at 1500 hours 20 January by General Smith, prescribed the details of the withdrawal for the 14th Armored Division. (Operations Instructions No. 12, 192030 January, only prescribed minor changes in the organization of the division.) The 68th Armored Infantry Battalion was transferred to CCB, and the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion was assigned to CCA. Combat Command A, with this battalion and the 48th Tank Battalion, was attached to the 79th Infantry Division to cover the withdrawal of all troops from the HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN area.<sup>40</sup> The Division, less CCA, began to withdraw at 1800 hours on the 20th; and late the next morning successfully completed the march to an assembly area south of the MODER RIVER where it reverted to corps reserve. CCA and the 25th Tank Battalion rejoined the Division in the afternoon.<sup>41</sup> Thus ended the most vicious battle of the 14th Armored Division's operational history in World War II.

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#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER 5

<sup>1</sup> Operations Instructions No. 11, 14th Armored Division, 132000 January 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Major General Albert C. Smith, Personal Letter, 27 March 1950.



- <sup>3</sup>Operations Instructions No. 11, Op cit.
- <sup>4</sup>Major General Daniel H. Hudelson, Personal Letter, 20 January 1950.
- <sup>5</sup>"Combat Command A, History European Operations, 1 October 1944 to VE Day," p 7.
- <sup>6</sup>Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz, "Field Artillery in the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN," Headquarters, 14th Armored Division Artillery, 15 February 1945, p 16.
- <sup>7</sup>S-3 Report No. 14, Combat Command A, 14 January 1945.
- <sup>8</sup>Operations Instructions No. 21, Combat Command A, 14th Armored Division, 142130 January 1945.
- <sup>9</sup>S-3 Report No. 15, Combat Command A, 15 January 1945.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid, p 7.
- <sup>11</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, p 2.
- <sup>12</sup>Operations Instructions No. 24, Combat Command A, 14th Armored Division, 161900 January 1945.
- <sup>13</sup>Op cit, Combat Command A, p 7.
- <sup>14</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, p 21.
- <sup>15</sup>Op cit, Combat Command A, p 7.
- <sup>16</sup>S-3 Report No. 4, Reserve Command, 14th Armored Division, 16 January 1945.
- <sup>17</sup>S-3 Report No. 2, Reserve Command, 14th Armored Division, 14 January 1945.
- <sup>18</sup>S-3 Report No. 3, Reserve Command, 14th Armored Division, 15 January 1945.
- <sup>19</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, p 15.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid, p 2.
- <sup>21</sup>S-3 Report No. 3, Reserve Command, 14th Armored Division, 15 January 1945.
- <sup>22</sup>S-3 Report No. 4, Reserve Command, 14th Armored Division, 16 January 1945.

<sup>23</sup>S-3 Report No. 5, Reserve Command, 14th Armored Division,  
16 January 1945.

<sup>24</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, p 23.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid, p 25.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, p 27.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid, p 39.

<sup>28</sup>G-3 Report No. 17, VI Corps, 17 January 1945.

<sup>29</sup>VI Corps Report, January 1945, p 41.

<sup>30</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, Annex, Type of Fires.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, p 17 f.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid, Annex, Type of Fires.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid, p 16.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid, p 18.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, Map.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid, p 1 f.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid, Map.

<sup>38</sup>Seventh United States Army - Report of Operations - France  
and Germany, 1944-1945, Vol II, p 614 f.

<sup>39</sup>VI Corps Report, January 1945, p 43.

<sup>40</sup>Operations Instructions No. 13, 14th Armored Division,  
201500 January.

<sup>41</sup>G-3 Report No. 22, VI Corps, 21 January 1945.

## CHAPTER 6

### LOGISTICS

The advanced location of the 14th Armored Division in the battle line, the weather, and the theater-wide shortage of artillery ammunition and replacement personnel added to the magnitude of the logistical problem. That the Division was not critically hampered by the shortage of artillery ammunition reflects credit on the personnel of division trains and division artillery. This chapter consolidates available statistical data grouped according to Division Trains, Personnel, Supply, Battle Losses, and Technical Support for the Division.

#### Division Trains (Map 10)

The 14th Armored Division Trains, Colonel Dale V. Swanson commanding, consisted of the 84th Armored Medical Battalion, the 136th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion, and the 154th Armored Signal Company (less normal attachments to Division units). All major units of the trains having moved west of the SAVERNE GAP on order of VI Corps 2-3 January, Trains Headquarters was established in PHALSBOURG on 8 January with the mission of "standardizing the division rear."<sup>1</sup> Colonel Swanson was further charged with control of the supply installations at SAVERNE and PHALSBOURG. (This was a forerunner of the Division Supply Control Point, now a part of current--1950--armored doctrine, although it then involved centralization of the installations themselves as well as their control.)<sup>2</sup>

By 11 January two companies of the medical battalion had been attached to combat commands, and the third was assigned as Division holding station. An ordnance company was placed in support of each combat command. Coincident with orders for the 14th Armored Division to restore the main line of resistance at HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN, the Division command post was moved to MORSBRONN, with the advanced command post at SURBOURG. Advanced supply elements were moved to MERTZWILLER. The main supply route then followed the line, BOUXWILLER-PRAFFENOFFEN-MERTZWILLER-SURBOURG.<sup>3</sup>

#### Personnel

Replacements for all losses suffered in the initial attack on the SIEGFRIED LINE and in the brunt of the VOSGES operation had not been received. Non-battle casualties from frozen feet (particularly among the tank and other vehicle crews) had been sizeable. Replacements could not be expected prior to the attack, and it was not known when they would be available subsequent to the attack.<sup>4</sup> Battle casualties during the operation were considered normal. (See Appendix IV, Statistical Summary.) The problem of obtaining infantry and armored replacement personnel, especially combat junior officers, was a critical one.<sup>5</sup>

#### Supply

Gasoline. During the period covered by this report, the 14th Armored Division had no difficulty in maintaining an adequate supply of gasoline and oil in all units. Indeed fuel consumption

was considerably lower than might be expected for an armored division. There was no change in the regular supply schedule during the operation. The Division gasoline supply point was located near SAVERNE and remained there during the period. The average length of supply runs for combat command gasoline supply trucks was 35 miles. The icy roads greatly increased the difficulty of blackout driving required in the forward areas.

Ammunition. Ammunition resupply was normal and adequate, with the exceptions of artillery and mortar ammunition. These items were controlled. Division Artillery, Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz commanding, was notified on 15 January that every effort would be made to hold expenditures below 30 rounds per gun per day for 105-mm howitzers, and 180 rounds per battalion per day for 155-mm howitzers.<sup>6</sup> On the following night VI Corps warned that if all ammunition was fired that night, the Division would receive no more on the 17th.<sup>7</sup> As for mortar ammunition, G-4 notified the advanced command post on the night of 15 January that no more 81-mm mortar ammunition was available; further, it probably would not be available for two weeks.<sup>8</sup> On the 18th instructions were issued directing all abandoned 8-cm (German) ammunition to be picked up and reported immediately to the Division ammunition officer. At the same time, a description and appropriate firing table covering the use of this ammunition in American 81-mm mortars was distributed.<sup>9</sup> Resupply from the ammunition supply point at SAVERNE was not adequate to replace expenditures. In order to alleviate this shortage, twenty 2½-ton trucks were sent to

MARSEILLES and returned loaded with artillery ammunition dug out of the surf at the landing sites of the invasion of Southern France.<sup>10</sup> This effort succeeded in briefly relieving the shortage, but these items of ammunition remained controlled.

Rations. At the start of the HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN operation there was no change in the Class I supply schedule of daily issue. This favorable situation was maintained throughout the period.<sup>11</sup> Some difficulty was encountered in feeding the men in the forward areas, especially in HATTEN, due to the open, fire-swept terrain.<sup>12</sup> The Germans were, of necessity, reduced to much the same situation, although they had some cover in the approach to the two towns from the rear. Frequent snow flurries covered the myriad tank tracks throughout the area. Each morning, however, new tracks were visible, indicating the routes taken by supply vehicles of both sides in resupplying the two towns under the cover of darkness.<sup>13</sup>

Class II and IV. The resupply of Class II and IV items was adequate, with the exception of armored vehicles and field telephone wire. Division artillery was especially handicapped by this shortage of wire.<sup>14</sup> The greatest difficulty in the resupply of available items was in getting them to the forward units. In this connection, it was necessary, on one occasion, to shoot medical supplies to troops in HATTEN by medium artillery.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the above expedient, six planes were used to drop containers of supplies to units in HATTEN on 13 January.<sup>16</sup> The use of armored vehicles in ground resupply became habitual since

general purpose vehicles were vulnerable to small arms fire. Camouflage materials were available in limited quantities for men and vehicles.

#### Battle Losses

Battle losses of equipment during the period are considered generally normal. (See Appendix IV, Statistical Summary.) After 16 January, however, so many tanks were lost by the 47th Tank Battalion that it was forced to assume a defensive attitude with supporting artillery and mortar fire.<sup>17</sup> (See Appendix V, Medium Tanks Operationally Fit Each Day.) While icy roads slowed movement, ordnance repair shops were overloaded with disabled tanks but succeeded in making repairs on short notice.<sup>18</sup> Recovery of most disabled vehicles was exceedingly difficult because of the complete lack of cover. Resupply of destroyed combat vehicles was extremely slow because of the requirements of units to the north as a result of the Battle of the Bulge.

#### Technical Support

Engineer. While the command post of the 125th Armored Engineer Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel John R. Morrison commanding, was established at GRIESBACH on 11 January, the engineer companies occupied forward positions in support of the combat commands and reserve command. These forward positions were as follows:

Company A at SCHWABWILLER in support of Reserve Command.  
Company B at HOHWILLER in support of Combat Command B.  
Company C at KUHLENDORF in support of Combat Command A.

Elements of all companies were used as infantry throughout the period because of the limited engineer missions assigned, and because of the shortage of infantry.<sup>19</sup> Engineer missions were limited to little more than mine-laying and maintenance of roads in the division sector. On 13 January, a hasty mine field was laid across the division front,<sup>20</sup> while on the night of 14-15 January, an additional hasty field was laid forward of the positions of the 62d Armored Infantry Battalion.<sup>21</sup> During the withdrawal of the division from the HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN area, Company C, 125th Armored Engineer Battalion, was attached to Combat Command A acting as covering force. During this operation, the company blew bridges, cratered roads, laid mines, and set booby traps in the SURBOURG area in support of the delaying action planned by the covering force. A shortage of 100 concertinas was the only serious shortage of engineer material experienced by the battalion during the HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN operation.

Medical. The 84th Armored Medical Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Louis H. Schinfeld commanding, established the battalion command post at PHALSBOURG in the division trains area. Companies B and C were attached to the combat commands, while Company A operated the division holding station in a schoolhouse at LIXHEIM. This holding station operated at or near full capacity (40 to 50 patients) during the period that the 14th Armored Division was actively engaged at HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN. Ambulances of Company A were attached to Companies B and C for the evacuation of casualties to the holding station at LIXHEIM. Casualties were



evacuated and medical supplies brought in to troops in HATTEN by halftracks conveyed by tanks since the ambulances were being destroyed by fire in the forward areas. Evacuation of casualties to army medical facilities was without difficulty except for that caused by the icy roads. This evacuation was accomplished by a platoon of the 582d Ambulance Company.<sup>22</sup>

Ordnance. The shop and offices of division ordnance (136th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel George M. Megica commanding) occupied a northeastern suburb of SAVERNE through the entire month of January. The Division G-4 described some of the activities of this battalion:

They took on many jobs that base shops wouldn't handle. They...transferred turrets and welded in cannibalized turret rings -- exchanged gun tubes -- even laminated sheets of ordinary hard steel up to armor thickness to fill holes in... tanks that were hit but not destroyed.<sup>23</sup>

Each of the three lettered ordnance companies was at least partially located in more forward positions, furnishing maintenance support as follows:<sup>24</sup>

Company A at MERTZWILLER:

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Combat Command A  
48th Tank Battalion  
68th Armored Infantry Battalion  
Troop C, 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron  
154th Armored Signal Company (-)  
Headquarters Company Division Trains  
Headquarters Rear Echelon  
84th Armored Medical Battalion  
Company C, 125th Armored Engineer Battalion

Company B at SAVERNE (vehicle collecting point at SURBOURG)  
Headquarters and Headquarters Company Reserve Command  
19th Armored Infantry Battalion  
47th Tank Battalion

Company C at SAVERNE (automotive platoon at NEUBOURG)  
Headquarters and Headquarters Company Combat Command B  
25th Tank Battalion  
62d Armored Infantry Battalion  
Troop A, 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron  
Detachment, 154th Armored Signal Company

Headquarters and Headquarters Company 14th Armored  
Division (Forward Echelon)  
94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (-)  
125th Armored Engineer Battalion (-)  
Military Police Platoon  
14th Armored Division Band

Headquarters and Headquarters Battery 14th Armored  
Division Artillery  
499th Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
500th Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
501st Armored Field Artillery Battalion

Quartermaster. The organization of armored divisions during the period of World War II did not include a quartermaster battalion. The usual quartermaster transportation services were furnished by attached quartermaster truck-companies and by division trains units organic to the armored division. During this operation, however, no attached truck companies supported the 14th Armored Division, nor were they made available until the following month upon insistence of the Division Commander. The only additional transportation available at this time consisted of about twenty trucks informally secured here and there on a catch-as-catch-can basis.<sup>25</sup>

Signal. The 154th Armored Signal Company, commanded by Captain Alfred D. Stackhouse under Lieutenant Colonel W. M. Duckwitz, Division Signal Officer, was augmented by the 177th Signal Repair Detachment. Company teams preceded the movement of the Division command post to MORSEBRONN on 11 January to establish communications and lighting facilities. This was standard operating

procedure in the 14th Armored Division,<sup>26</sup> On 12 January an advanced message center was established at SURBOURG to service the advanced command post there, while a switchboard was installed by one of the operating teams. These forward installations required the services of two trouble-shooting wire teams in order to maintain the Division lines of communication. Despite the damage caused by constant German bombings, artillery, and mortar fire (the chief operator was killed by a bomb burst which destroyed the Combat Command A switchboard on 16 January), communications were maintained throughout the period. Further, communications to battalions were maintained at all times, though trouble shooters worked under artillery fire as a rule rather than an exception.<sup>27</sup> Throughout this period the importance of wire as a supplemental means of communication in the armored division was readily apparent.

In accordance with the general practice of centralization of maintenance functions, a radio maintenance technical team was attached to the ordnance company supporting each combat command. The attached 177th Signal Repair Detachment and two teams from the radio maintenance section of the organic 154th Armored Signal Company were used for this purpose. In addition to the signal maintenance mentioned above, each combat command was furnished a mobile team to effect on-the-spot repairs of signal equipment. These front line repair teams were mounted in halftracks and operated well forward with the combat units. The efficiency of this system of signal repair was excellent. During January, reflecting for the most part the vehicular and equipment casualties

at HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN, the teams serving with the ordnance companies accomplished the following: 31 tanks checked and processed (including interphone systems); 131 radio sets checked; 168 radio sets repaired; 7 remote control installations effected; and 6 M209 converters repaired.<sup>28</sup>

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NOTES FOR CHAPTER 6

<sup>1</sup>History, 14th Armored Division Trains, 1-31 January 1945.

<sup>2</sup>Lieutenant Colonel George P. Seneff, G-4 14th Armored Division, Personal Letter, 4 January 1950.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Joe C. Lambert, "Armored Rescue," The Armored Cavalry Journal, Vol LVIII, No. 1 (Jan 1949), p 40.

<sup>5</sup>Report of Operations, Seventh Army, 1944-45, Ch XXI.

<sup>6</sup>Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz, Commanding Officer 14th Armored Division Artillery, Personal Letter, 9 December 1949.

<sup>7</sup>G-3 Journal 14th Armored Division, 162310 January 1945.

<sup>8</sup>G-3 Journal 14th Armored Division, 152215 January 1945.

<sup>9</sup>Administrative Instructions No. 3, 14th Armored Division, 18 January 1945.

<sup>10</sup>Op cit, Kurtz letter.

<sup>11</sup>Lambert, Op cit, p 40.

<sup>12</sup>Op cit, Seneff letter.

<sup>13</sup>Colonel Edwin M. Van Bibber, Commanding Officer 314th Infantry 79th Infantry Division, Personal Letter, 28 November 1949.

<sup>14</sup>Op cit, Kurtz letter.

<sup>15</sup>Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz, "Field Artillery in the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN," Headquarters, 14th Armored Division Artillery, 15 Feb 1945, p 7.

- <sup>16</sup>Summary of Air Activity, Headquarters VI Corps, 18 Jan 1945.
- <sup>17</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, p 28.
- <sup>18</sup>Op. cit., Kurtz letter.
- <sup>19</sup>Engineer Sitrep, 125th Armored Engineer Battalion, 16-17 January 1945.
- <sup>20</sup>Unit History, 125th Armored Engineer Battalion, Jan 1945.
- <sup>21</sup>History Combat Command B, 14th Armored Division, Jan 1945.
- <sup>22</sup>Unit Historical Report, Company A, 84th Armored Medical Battalion, 31 Jan 1945.
- <sup>23</sup>Lieutenant Colonel George P. Seneff, G-4 14th Armored Division, Comments on Draft, undated 1950.
- <sup>24</sup>After Action Report, 136th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion, 1-31 Jan 1945, p 1, 2.
- <sup>25</sup>Op cit, Seneff comments.
- <sup>26</sup>After Action Report, 154th Armored Signal Company, 1-31 January 1945.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid; passim.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid; passim.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

One phase of the final, frantic effort of the German Army to expel the Allied Expeditionary Forces from EUROPE and to save itself from total defeat was arrested at HATTEN-RITTER-SHOFFEN. There can be no doubt that the action was a strategic success. It permitted preparations for the coming invasion of GERMANY to continue without further interruption. Furthermore it had marked political significance in contributing to the retention of the recently liberated city of STRASBOURG under Allied control. No little credit is due the 14th Armored Division which persevered through that dismal January fortnight to help foil the Wehrmacht's last blow in the West.

Tactically however, the operation was not so successful; the Division learned much both through bitter disappointments and brilliant accomplishments. Such lessons as were learned have no doubt contributed materially to reemphasis of fundamentals and establishment of present doctrine of armored employment. It should be remembered that the object of this study is to determine these lessons rather than to ascertain individual responsibility for any success or failure encountered by the Division. Delineation of such responsibility would in any case be impossible since many factors, such as oral orders, contributing to decisions and subsequent action were not preserved.

## Tactical Lessons

It will be recalled that the assigned mission of the Division was "attack to capture the line STUNDWILLER-BUHL-BOREST OF HATTEN." This mission was in turn passed on to Combat Command B which made the main effort on 12 January. For reasons then decided sufficient, CCB, after making an initial effort, elected to take up what was termed an "active defense" rather than continue the first day's attack, a prime violation of the principle of the objective. Many factors however contributed to this decision. Insufficient time was given the Division Commander and subordinate commanders to prepare for this action. Fundamentals of armored employment dictate that deliberate planning is essential to the desired violent execution.<sup>1</sup> In this instance VI Corps issued the 14th Armored Division its instructions less than 12 hours before the action began. Division in turn issued its own instructions in the middle of the night for an attack only a few hours after daybreak. This circumstance could not have allowed any subordinate commander adequate time to prepare for the tremendous operation that lay ahead. It is, then, desirable that plans be prepared and orders issued far enough in advance to allow all subordinate commanders time to prepare carefully and in detail for the execution of these orders.

Plans must be simple and orders must be clear.<sup>2</sup> A directive that leaves the recipient in doubt as to what is desired or required is often worse than no order. A particularly unfortunate example is found in the instructions prescribed for 14 January by Combat

Command A: "...battalions will seize anything...that can be taken without undue loss of personnel. Attack by fire...the impression of the usual attack will be given without excessive fire..." Such orders can lead only to confusion or indifference on the part of subordinate commanders and prohibit efficient coordinated action with other units.

However, the principal cause of the Division's predicament was its inability to adhere to a principle that is now regarded as basic: the tremendous shock effect of an armored division must be employed in massed armored assaults, properly executed.<sup>3</sup> Dispersion of forces results in weakened action. At HATTEN and RITTER-SHOFFEN piecemeal attacks were the rule rather than the exception, not only by the American forces but also by the Germans. Nowhere in this action does there appear a really coordinated effort by the entire Division. If there is one lesson that reverberates through and through this entire operation, it is the ghastliness of piecemeal commitment.<sup>4</sup> It is truly futile effort. Even in the main attack of 12 January, CCA was committed three and one-half hours before CCB, less than a mile to the north. Each combat command had two companies of armored infantry supported by a company of tanks in the assault echelon; the Division employed less than one-half of its total available combat strength in the forward echelon in this initial attack.

In a single area such as this where several different units were charged with the same overall mission, it is imperative that area control be centralized. Every effort must be made to obtain



unified command to forestall piecemeal efforts by separate units and to facilitate detailed planning for efficient utilization of all available combat strength.<sup>5</sup> The establishment and maintenance of adequate communication facilities and liaison contacts is also essential to control for no commander can direct his units unless exchange of information and issuance of orders can be accomplished with ease. A contributing factor to cessation of the CCB attack on 12 January was lack of detailed information as to location and action of the adjacent combat command.<sup>6</sup>

Only by offensive action does a unit preserve freedom of action and retain the initiative.<sup>7</sup> The instant an attack is allowed to stall or stop, enemy counter action is immediately favored. Cessation of attack simply because terrain desired by the enemy is controlled by friendly forces is not in the spirit of violent and decisive action. Alternate plans should be prepared and continuously revised as necessary to ensure that should an initial thrust falter, an alternate plan may be promptly adopted. Only the Reserve Command, for example, varied the routine of unsuccessful daylight probing actions by interspersing night attacks. The limited successes of German night attacks, from the standpoint of morale if nothing else, point to this type of operation as a possible opportunity for successful action that was consistently ignored by the Division as a whole. Flexibility of tactics must accompany armor's characteristic of flexibility of control, communications, and movement to maintain the initiative.

HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN shows practical application of camouflage measures on both German and American equipment. Necessity of altering camouflage to conform to background, however, was forcibly impressed on American tank elements which whitewashed their vehicles only to see snow succeeded by melting rain. Their white vehicles were then even more starkly outlined against the dark background than they had been against the snow before painting.<sup>8</sup>

The effective employment of artillery fires may be hailed as an outstanding factor contributing to the defensive success of this action. More than once it was artillery fire which blunted the vicious German attacks, both day and night. Certainly without artillery HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN could sooner or later have fallen entirely to the enemy. However, close artillery support was greatly restricted by the extreme proximity of American and German forces in the two towns. Repeated refusal of associated infantry elements to clear as "safe to fire" close concentrations called for by others of the defenders,<sup>9</sup> even as a last resort, perhaps indicates a training deficiency resulting from lack of confidence in artillery.

This engagement demonstrated that fighting in towns does not permit effective utilization of the full capabilities of armor.<sup>10</sup> In such cases infantry troops must contribute the maximum effort. At HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN the primary role was a dismounted one; such infantry as was available required augmentation by engineers and all other troops at hand.<sup>11</sup> That this reinforcement was effective testifies to the soundness of requiring basic infantry

training for all troops regardless of branch.

To summarize the combat lessons learned at HATTEN-RITTER-SHOFFEN is to enumerate many facts contributing to American armored doctrine evolving from World War II. Some of these lessons are:

1. Units must be given time to plan an operation, and these plans must all be directed toward the primary mission or objective.

2. Plans must be simple but in sufficient detail to insure maximum coordination with adjacent units, and orders must be clear.

3. To gain maximum effect from an armored division's great shock action, armor must be employed in mass. Piecemeal attacks must be avoided.

4. Command must be centralized in a restricted area, and close and continuous liaison must always be maintained between all units.

5. Armor must maintain the initiative to be successful. Its inherent flexibility must be employed to keep this initiative.

6. Camouflage must constantly be adopted to the terrain.

7. Artillery is a third partner in the tank-infantry team, particularly in the defense; and all elements must have confidence in its support.

8. Armor should avoid fighting in towns or cities, for when it does, success depends primarily on armored infantry alone.

## Logistical Lessons

It is well established that the success of any operation depends to a great degree upon the adequacy of the logistical support given to the combat troops.<sup>12</sup>

During the HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN operation the 14th Armored Division was supported by organic and attached service troops and by army installations in the area. While some items such as artillery and mortar ammunition were in short supply, the over-all availability of essential supplies and equipment was sufficient to maintain the operation. This was primarily possible because of the ingenuity and aggressiveness of commanders of service units of the Division.<sup>13</sup>

The establishment of a supply control point similar to the present day Division Supply Control Point facilitated efficient operation of the logistical elements of the Division.<sup>14</sup> In order to properly control supply operations, the Division Commander charged the Division Trains Commander with the responsibility for control of the consolidated supply installations. This centralization contributed materially to the smooth operation of resupply and evacuation required during the battle.

An examination of the logistical functions performed indicates that an armored division requires quartermaster units in order to properly conduct operations. Resupply of Class III and V supplies to using units within the 14th Armored Division was difficult because organic quartermaster transportation was inadequate. This deficiency of World War II armored divisions has been

corrected by the addition of a quartermaster battalion in current Tables of Organization and Equipment.<sup>15</sup>

During World War II it was a theater-wide experience for units to have temporary shortages of various items of Class III and V supply. The 14th Armored Division experienced a shortage of artillery and mortar ammunition during this operation that required strict rationing.<sup>16</sup> The support rendered by organic mortars and artillery clearly demonstrated that adequate fire support can be furnished to assault units even when hampered by a shortage of ammunition. This is possible when expenditures of items in short supply are adequately controlled and firing is confined to essential targets only.<sup>17</sup>

A study of the HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN operation reveals that the resupply to or evacuation from forward units, over fire-swept terrain affording little or no cover or concealment, is feasible under cover of darkness when armored vehicles are used instead of general purpose vehicles. The Reserve Command in HATTEN successfully used armored personnel carriers and tanks as supply and evacuation vehicles. Tanks convoyed these vehicles to and from the forward units. An alternate solution, to withdraw tanks at night for resupply, was used by Combat Command A during the early phases of the battle but as a result hard-won ground was lost and had to be regained the next day.

While radio is the generally accepted primary means of communication in the armored division, it is evident that wire communication is an important supplement.<sup>18</sup> During the HATTEN-

RITTERSHOFFEN engagement command posts, supply installations, and artillery positions remained fixed or moved short distances only. This situation led to the extensive use of wire which, in such a situation, is more reliable and faster than radio.

The salient lessons of logistical support as exemplified by this study may be summarized as follows:

1. Aggressive and ingenious leadership is as essential in service units as in the combat arms.
2. The use of a centralized supply control system within the armored division is highly desirable.
3. Adequate quartermaster support is a prime requirement for proper supply of combat units of an armored division.
4. The expenditure of items in short supply, especially artillery ammunition, must be rigidly controlled.
5. Exposed front line units may be successfully resupplied by using armored vehicles for supply transportation.
6. The supply of telephone wire should be maintained at required levels in all units to insure that the best means of communication is available in static situations.

#### Final Considerations

An examination of these lessons, particularly the tactical lessons, reveals little that is new in military doctrine. In fact they are a repetition of the basic principles of war -- the objective, simplicity, mass, unity of command, and the offensive.<sup>19</sup>

The commanders in the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN were well aware of these principles. Why, then, were some of them apparently violated?

One answer is that the fog of war sometimes so confuses the issue that adherence to all the principles of war is difficult or impossible. For example, higher headquarters, for good reason, may impose restrictions upon the employment of a unit; terrain might restrict operations; enemy action may disrupt timing or plans; supply deficiencies beyond the control of a unit may retard operations; or lack of combat experience may amplify the problems which arise in an already confused situation. All of these problems confronted the 14th Armored Division in this action.

Herein lies the final lesson. Circumstances may sometimes cause an armored division to be employed under conditions which make it difficult to follow the basic rules of armor. Nevertheless, these adverse conditions can and must be overcome.

The strategy of armor is to plan boldly and well and to execute with aggressiveness and violence -- deliberate planning and violent execution.<sup>20</sup> When holding the initiative in the offensive such strategy can be followed, and in the normal defensive situation prior planning often permits this strategy in the counterattack.<sup>21</sup> However, one must not forget that conditions which favor this strategy do not always exist. When the enemy holds the initiative armor must sometimes be committed without prior planning and even in initial piecemeal attacks. This fact was demonstrated not only during the German offensives in ALSACE in January 1945 but also in the ARDENNES in December 1944. The 14th Armored Division at HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN and the 12th Armored Division at GAMBESHEIM were used to plug holes in the Allied line,

and elements of these divisions were committed only at the last moment when the situation demanded employment of the final reserves.<sup>22</sup> The 10th Armored Division marched 50 miles to hold the south shoulder of the German penetration in LUXEMBOURG on 17 December. The same day the 7th Armored Division marched 26 miles to ST VITH to attempt to hold the north shoulder. The 4th Armored Division moved north 100 miles and immediately launched an attack toward BASTOGNE, and the 2d Armored Division marched south for 46 miles only to be confronted by an enemy panzer corps east of the MEUSE RIVER.<sup>23, 24</sup>

In all these actions deliberate planning was impossible, and the units had to be committed piecemeal as they reached the battlefield. Thus when the enemy holds the initiative circumstances may force the employment of an armored division under conditions incompatible with the accepted doctrine on the use of armor. This will be even more true in any future war than it was in World War II when the Germans assumed the strategic offensive only once after the Western Allies landed in NORMANDY.

Under such circumstances the successful unit is the one that can overcome these adverse conditions and ultimately employ its strength effectively. To do this special measures must be employed to take advantage of the inherent characteristics of armor employment: flexibility, mobility, and fire power.<sup>25</sup> However the ability to adopt these special measures depends upon the aggressiveness, ingenuity, determination, and experience of troops, staffs, and commanders.<sup>26</sup> Academic knowledge and training alone cannot



provide all the answers to these combat problems. Likewise a study in retrospect cannot appreciate all the factors which had to be considered on the ground during an action.

It is hoped that this survey of the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN has revealed some of the problems which can confront an armored division in a defensive situation. If it made the reader aware of these problems and if it will provoke thought on how to solve them, this study has been worthwhile.

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#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER 7

<sup>1</sup>Field Manual 17-100, Armored Division and Combat Command (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949), p 28.

<sup>2</sup>Field Manual 100-5, Field Service Regulations -- Operations (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949), p 21.

<sup>3</sup>Op cit, FM 17-100, p 26.

<sup>4</sup>Captain DeWitt C. Armstrong, III, S-2, Combat Command A, 14th Armored Division, Personal Letter, 11 January 1950.

<sup>5</sup>Op cit, FM 100-5, p 21.

<sup>6</sup>Colonel Francis J. Gillespie, Personal Letter, 27 January 1950.

<sup>7</sup>Op cit, FM 100-5, p 21.

<sup>8</sup>Lieutenant Ralph Cardinal, "History of the 25th Tank Battalion," p 10.

<sup>9</sup>Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz, "Field Artillery in the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN," Headquarters, 14th Armored Division Artillery, 15 February 1945, p 16 f.

<sup>10</sup>Op cit, FM 17-100, p 172.

<sup>11</sup>Major General Daniel H. Hudelson, Personal Letter, 20 January 1950.

- <sup>12</sup>Op cit, FM 100-5, p 6.
- <sup>13</sup>Field Manual 100-10, Field Service Regulations -- Administration (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949), p 153.
- <sup>14</sup>Special Text No. 17-50, Logistics, Armored Division (Fort Knox, Kentucky: The Armored School, 1949), p 82.
- <sup>15</sup>"Table of Organization and Equipment. 17N" (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948).
- <sup>16</sup>Kurtz, Op cit, p 17 f.
- <sup>17</sup>Op cit, FM 100-10, p 220.
- <sup>18</sup>Draft Field Manual 17-70, Signal Communication in the Armored Division (Fort Knox, Kentucky: The Armored School, 1949), p 25.
- <sup>19</sup>Op cit, FM 100-5, p 21 f.
- <sup>20</sup>Op cit, FM 17-100, p 28.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid, p 192.
- <sup>22</sup>The Seventh United States Army - Report of Operations - France and Germany - 1944-1945, Vol II, *passim*.
- <sup>23</sup>The War in Western Europe, Part 2 (West Point, N. Y.: Department of Military Art and Engineering, United States Military Academy, 1949), p 20 ff.
- <sup>24</sup>"Order of Battle of the United States Army - World War II - European Theater of Operations - Divisions," a report prepared by the Office of the Theater Historian, p 433 ff.
- <sup>25</sup>Op cit, FM 100-5, p 259.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid, p 17 ff.

APPENDIX II

PERSONALITIES  
(14th ARMORED DIVISION - JANUARY 1945)

<u>14th ARMORED DIVISION</u>	Brigadier General Albert C. Smith
Chief of Staff	Colonel James P. Hill
G-1	Lt Colonel Albert A. Stephens
G-2	Lt Colonel Harold E. Miller
G-3	Lt Colonel Joe C. Lambert
G-4	Lt Colonel George P. Seneff
CCA	Colonel Charles H. Karlstad
CCB	Colonel Francis J. Gillespie
Reserve Command	Colonel Daniel H. Hudelson
25th Tank Battalion	Lt Colonel Ernest C. Watson
47th Tank Battalion	Lt Colonel James F. Lann
48th Tank Battalion	Lt Colonel John C. Cavin
19th Armored Infantry Battalion	Major Forest T. Green
62d Armored Infantry Battalion	Lt Colonel James H. Meyer (WIA) Major William T. Higgins Major Arthur J. Richards
68th Armored Infantry Battalion	Lt Colonel Robert E. Edwards
94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (M)	Lt Colonel Thomas G. McCollom
125th Armored Engineer Battalion	Lt Colonel John R. Morrison
Division Artillery	Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz
499th Armored Field Artillery Battalion	Lt Colonel Robert E. Vance
506th Armored Field Artillery Battalion	Major Joseph J. Murtha
501st Armored Field Artillery Battalion	Lt Colonel Joseph H. Harrison
Division Trains	Colonel Dale V. Swanson
84th Armored Medical Battalion	Lt Colonel Louis H. Schinfeld
136th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion	Lt Colonel George M. Mogica
154th Armored Signal Company	Lt Colonel William M. Duckwitz

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF PERSONALITIES

### Major General Albert C. Smith

Albert Cowder Smith was born in VIRGINIA on 5 June 1894. His military service commenced with appointment as cadet, United States Military Academy, on 21 June 1913. Initially commissioned in the 3d Cavalry two weeks after the UNITED STATES entered World War I, he served with the American Expeditionary Forces in FRANCE from October 1917 until the Armistice and with the Army of Occupation in GERMANY for nearly a year afterward. It is interesting to note that prior to participation in the MEUSE-ARGONNE offensive he served with the general staff of VII Corps in the VOSGES sector. Upon return to the UNITED STATES he served with both the 13th and 14th Cavalry in various positions as well as several tours of duty as an instructor at the Military Academy. A graduate of the Cavalry Troop Officers Course (1927) and the Command and General Staff School (1940), he reported for service with the 7th Cavalry Brigade (mechanized) at FORT KNOX, KENTUCKY in the latter year. Successively appointed colonel AUS (11 December 1941) and brigadier general AUS (10 September 1942), he assumed command of the 14th Armored Division at CAMP CHAFFEE, ARKANSAS on 10 July 1944. He commanded this Division until it was inactivated in late 1945. Shortly after the HATTEN-RITTERSCHOFFEN action, General Smith was appointed major general AUS (19 March 1945). Decorations awarded General Smith for service during World War II include the Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, and Bronze Star Medal.

### Major General Daniel H. Hudelson

Daniel H. Hudelson was born in MISSOURI on 27 April 1902. He enlisted in the 160th Infantry, CALIFORNIA National Guard on 3 January 1925 and was initially commissioned as second lieutenant in that organization on 27 June 1925. His service with the 160th Infantry as first lieutenant (6 June 1927) and captain (28 April 1931) continued for fifteen years, during which time he graduated from the Infantry National Guard Company Officers Course (193-). In 1940 General Hudelson was assigned as assistant G-3 40th Infantry Division, CALIFORNIA National Guard. Appointed major (16 February 1940), he graduated from the National Guard Officers Course, Command and General Staff School. On 3 March 1941 he was inducted into federal service with the 40th Division as major AUS. Within eleven months appointed lieutenant colonel AUS (22 December 1941), he joined the 14th Armored Division in that grade in October 1942. He was subsequently appointed colonel AUS (27 August 1944) and commanded Reserve Command, 14th Armored Division throughout the engagement at HATTEN-RITTERSCHOFFEN. He was awarded the following decorations for combat service in World War II: Silver Star, Bronze Star Medal, and French Croix de Guerre with Palm and Order of Goums Marocains.

Brigadier General Charles H. Karlstad

Charles H. Karlstad was born in SOUTH DAKOTA on 26 January 1894. After graduation from SOUTH DAKOTA State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts in 1917 he accepted appointment as captain, Infantry Section, Officers Reserve Corps and entered active duty on 15 August 1917. After service as major, National Army, commencing 8 June 1918, he was appointed captain, Infantry, upon vacating the National Army appointment on 21 September 1920. Subsequent to this, he graduated from the Infantry Company Officers Course (1923), the Command and General Staff School (1933), and the Army War College (1934). Appointed lieutenant colonel (18 August 1940) and colonel AUS (24 December 1941), he commanded Combat Command A, 14th Armored Division during the period of this report. He was shortly afterwards appointed brigadier general, AUS (19 March 1945). His decorations include the Silver Star, Legion of Merit with bronze oak leaf cluster, and Bronze Star Medal.

Colonel Francis J. Gillespie

Francis James Gillespie was born in NEW YORK on 17 January 1898. Appointed cadet, United States Military Academy, 15 June 1916, he was commissioned second lieutenant of Infantry on 1 November 1918. After service with the Army of Occupation in GERMANY, he graduated from the Signal School and served briefly with the 16th Tank Battalion. Subsequently he served with the 12th Infantry, 23d Brigade (Philippine Scouts), and 3d Field Artillery Brigade in various positions. After graduation from the Infantry Advanced Course (1934) and the Infantry Tank Course (1935) he served over four years with the 66th Infantry (Light Tank). Colonel Gillespie graduated from the Command and General Staff School in 1942. Appointed colonel AUS (16 June 1942), he commanded Combat Command B, 14th Armored Division throughout its action at HATTEN-RITTERSCHOFFEN. Decorations awarded him include the Bronze Star and Purple Heart Medals.

Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz

Maurice Keyes Kurtz was born in ICWA on 25 April 1897 and was appointed to the United States Military Academy from that state on 14 June 1917. Commissioned second lieutenant, unassigned, he was assigned to the field artillery sixteen months later and graduated from the Field Artillery Basic Course in 1920. Later service included duty with the 5th, 11th, and 1st Field Artillery Regiments. He graduated from the Command and General Staff School (1937), Field Artillery Advanced Motors Course (1930), and in 1931 received the Master of Science Degree (Mechanical Engineering) from Purdue University. After service with the 6th Field Artillery, Colonel (then major) Kurtz became a member of the Mechanized Cavalry

Board. A graduate of the Army War College (1940), he was appointed lieutenant colonel AUS (15 September 1941) and colonel AUS (17 April 1943). He commanded the 14th Armored Division Artillery at HATTENRITTERSCHCFEN. Colonel Kurtz has been awarded the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, and Bronze Star Medal.

APPENDIX III

GERMAN ORDER OF BATTLE<sup>a</sup>

HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN, January 1945

25th Panzer Grenadier Division

- 1st Battalion, 35th Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
(HATTEN) (9 January)
- 1st Battalion, 119th Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
(HATTEN, later RITTERSHOFFEN) (9 January)
- 2d Battalion, 119th Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
(HATTEN) (9 January)

21st Panzer Division

- 2d Battalion, 125th Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
(RITTERSHOFFEN) (10 January)
- 1st Battalion, 192d Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
(RITTERSHOFFEN) (10 January)
- 220th Panzer Engineer Battalion  
(HATTEN) (11 January)
- 2d Battalion, 192d Panzer Grenadier Regiment  
(RITTERSHOFFEN) (13 January)

7th Parachute Division

- 1st Battalion, 20th Parachute Regiment  
(HATTEN) (14 January)
- 3d Battalion, 20th Parachute Regiment  
(HATTEN) (14 January)
- 2d Battalion, 20th Parachute Regiment  
(HATTEN) (15 January)

47th Volks Grenadier Division

- 104th Volks Grenadier Regiment  
(HATTEN and RITTERSHOFFEN) (16 January)
- 103d Volks Grenadier Regiment  
(RITTERSHOFFEN) (17 January)

General Support

- 5th Tank Battalion
- 22d Tank Regiment
- 21st Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion
- 125th Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion
- 25th Antitank Battalion
- 155th Panzer Artillery Regiment
- 1151st GHQ Artillery Battalion
- 1152d GHQ Artillery Battalion

<sup>a</sup>Colonel Maurice K. Kurtz, "Field Artillery in the Battle of HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN," Headquarters, 14th Armored Division Artillery, 15 February 1945, p 1 f.

APPENDIX IV

STATISTICAL SUMMARY<sup>a</sup>  
 14th Armored Division  
 13 Jan 1945 - 20 Jan 1945

CASUALTIES:

<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>	<u>Missing</u>
104	399	112

VEHICLES DESTROYED BY ENEMY ACTION:

Tanks . . . . .	39
Half Tracks . . . . .	5
Wheeled Vehicles . . . . .	30
Armored Cars . . . . .	1
105-mm Howitzers . . . . .	2
57-mm Guns . . . . .	6

GASOLINE EXPENDED: 193,300 gallons

AMMUNITION EXPENDED: (by and in support of the 14th Armored Division)

Carbine . . . . .	4,670
Cal 30 . . . . .	32,607
Cal 45 . . . . .	3,460
Cal 50 . . . . .	45,337
37-mm Gun . . . . .	1,325
57-mm Gun . . . . .	1,300
75-mm Gun . . . . .	723
76-mm Gun . . . . .	3,392
60-mm Mortar . . . . .	3,977
81-mm Mortar . . . . .	2,584
Light Artillery . . . . .	33,747
Medium Artillery . . . . .	4,776
Heavy Artillery . . . . .	730
Rockets . . . . .	1,496
Grenades . . . . .	3,542
Anti-Tank Mines . . . . .	7,500
Bombs . . . . .	120

<sup>a</sup> L. Colonel J. C. Lambert, "Armored Rescue," The Armored Cavalry Journal, Vol LVIII, No. 1 (Jan 1949), p 44.





NOTES FOR MAPS

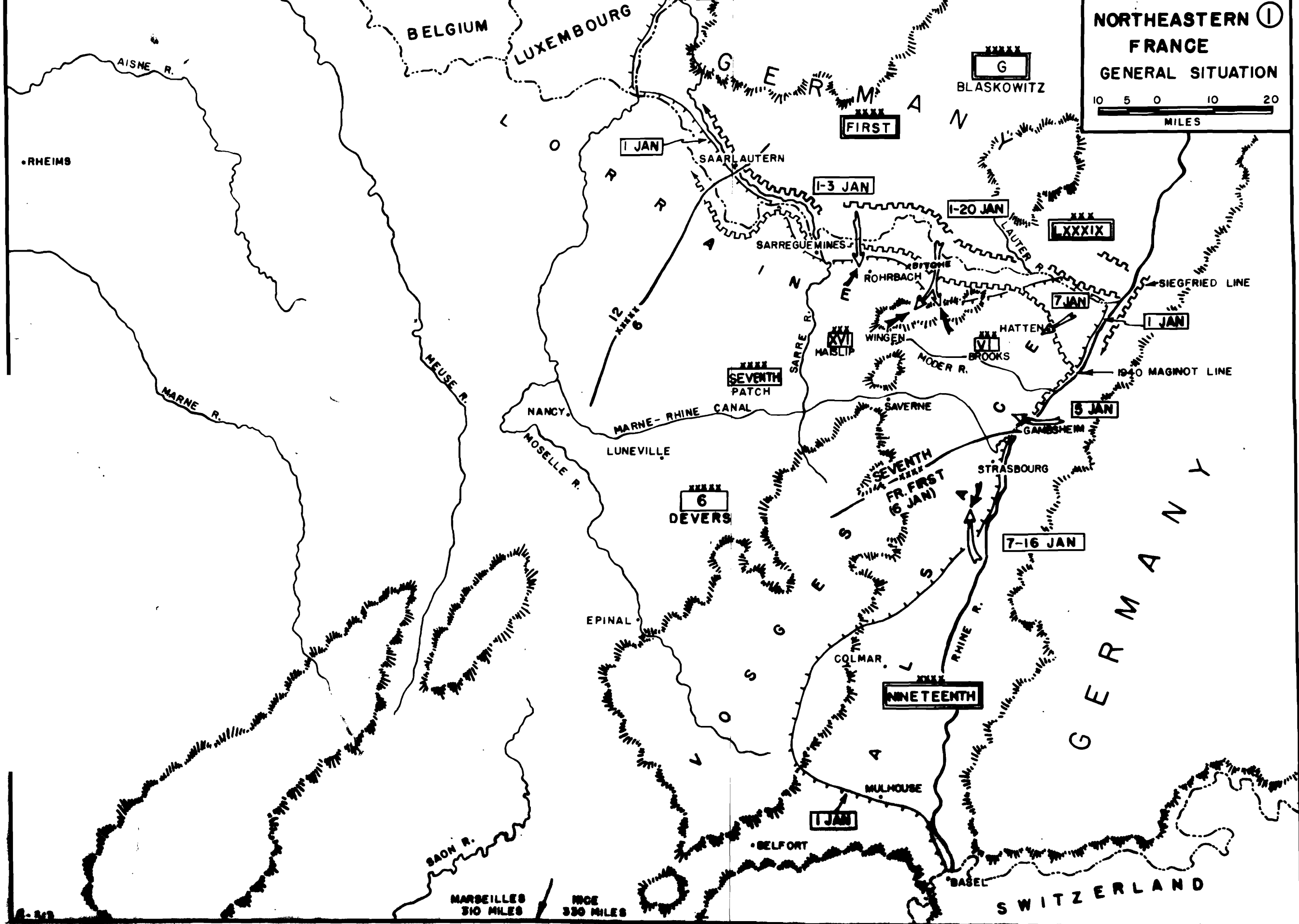
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BRUXELLES - FRANKFORT M 32 and M 31 sheets.

Maps 2 and 10: CENTRAL EUROPE 1:100,000 SAARBRUCKEN V.1.,  
STRASBOURG W.2., WISSEMBOURG V.2., and G.S.,G.S. 4249 15.G. sheets.

Map 3: EASTERN FRANCE 1:50,000 HAGUENAU XXXVIII - 14 and  
WISSEMBOURG XXXVIII - 13 sheets.

Maps 4 through 9: FRANCE 1:25,000 SELTZ 1-2 sheet

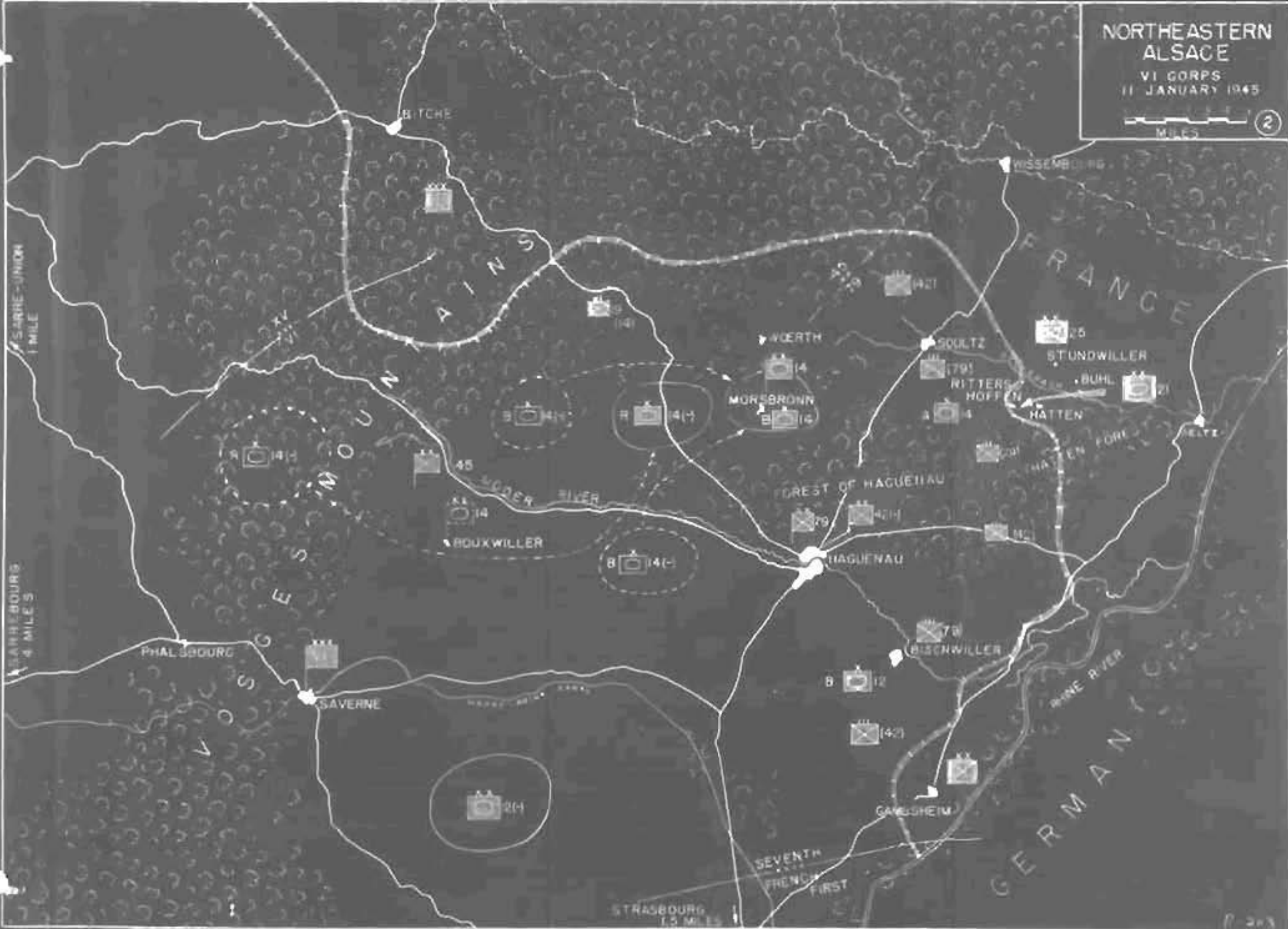
**NORTHEASTERN ①**  
**FRANCE**  
**GENERAL SITUATION**

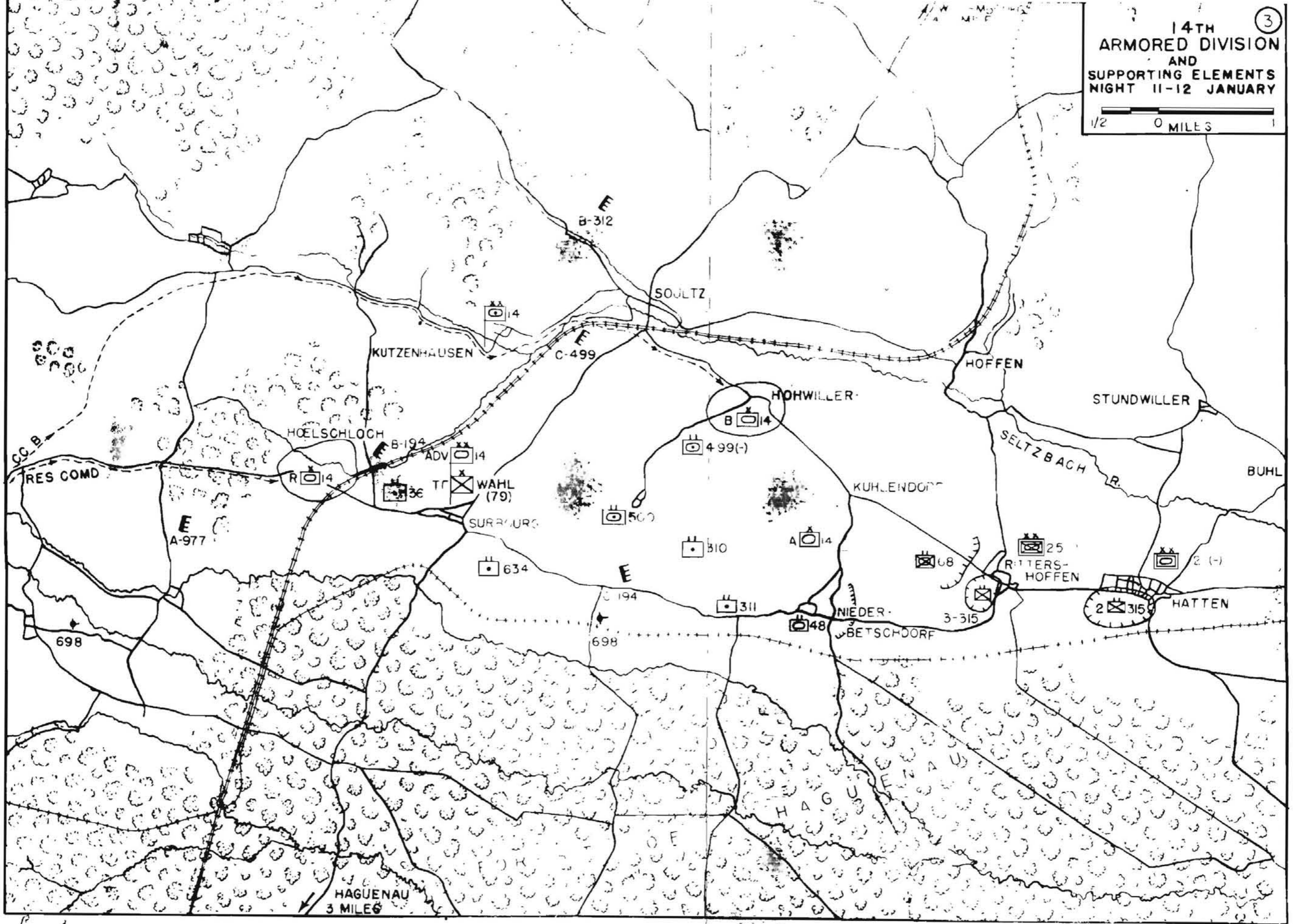


MARSEILLES 310 MILES  
 NICE 330 MILES

# NORTHEASTERN ALSACE

VI CORPS  
11 JANUARY 1945







STUNDWILLER

LEITERSWILLER

OBERROEDERN

XX 21 BUHL

SELTZBACH R

HATTEN FOREST

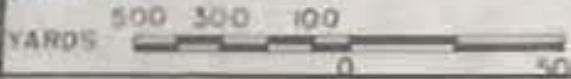
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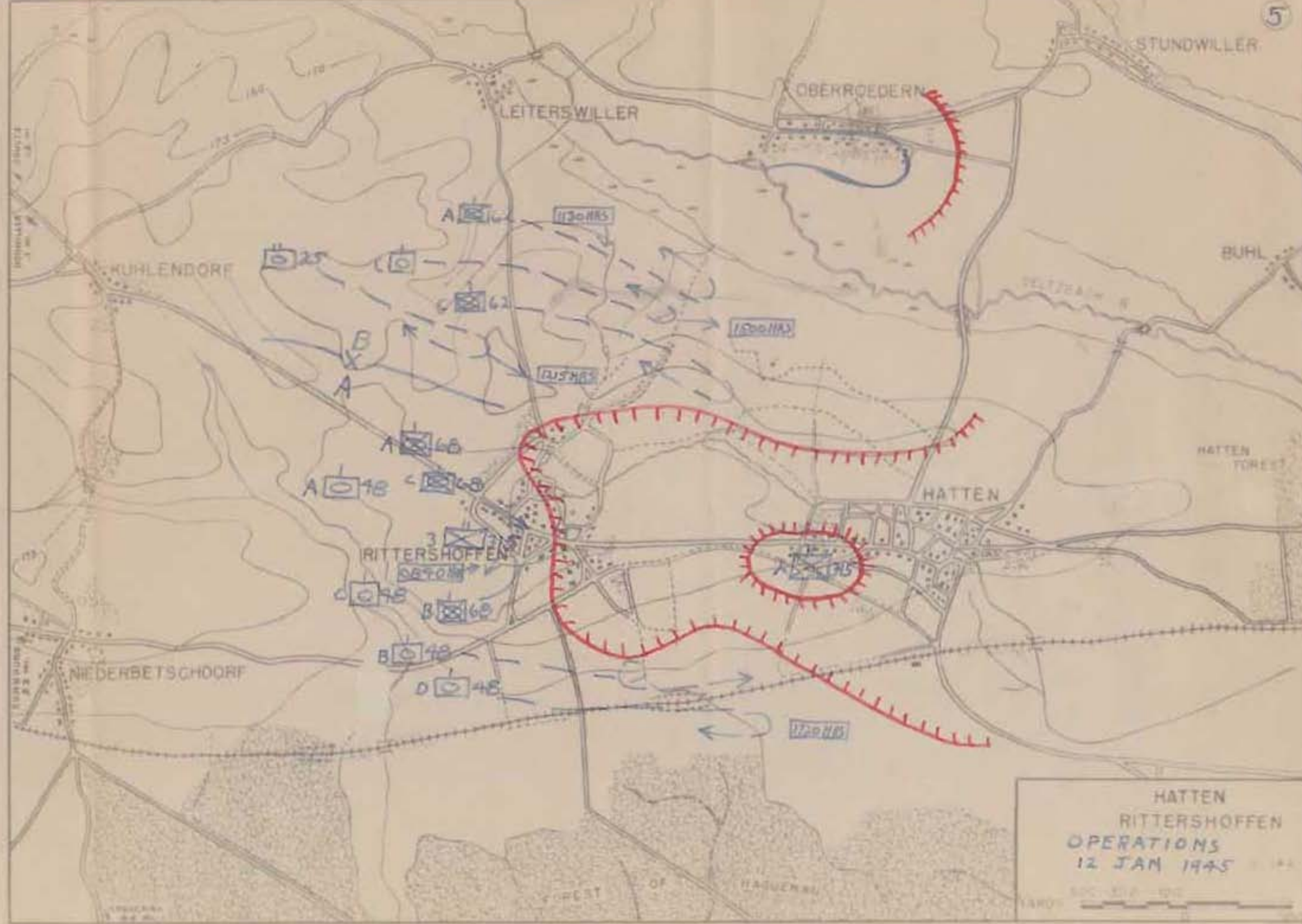
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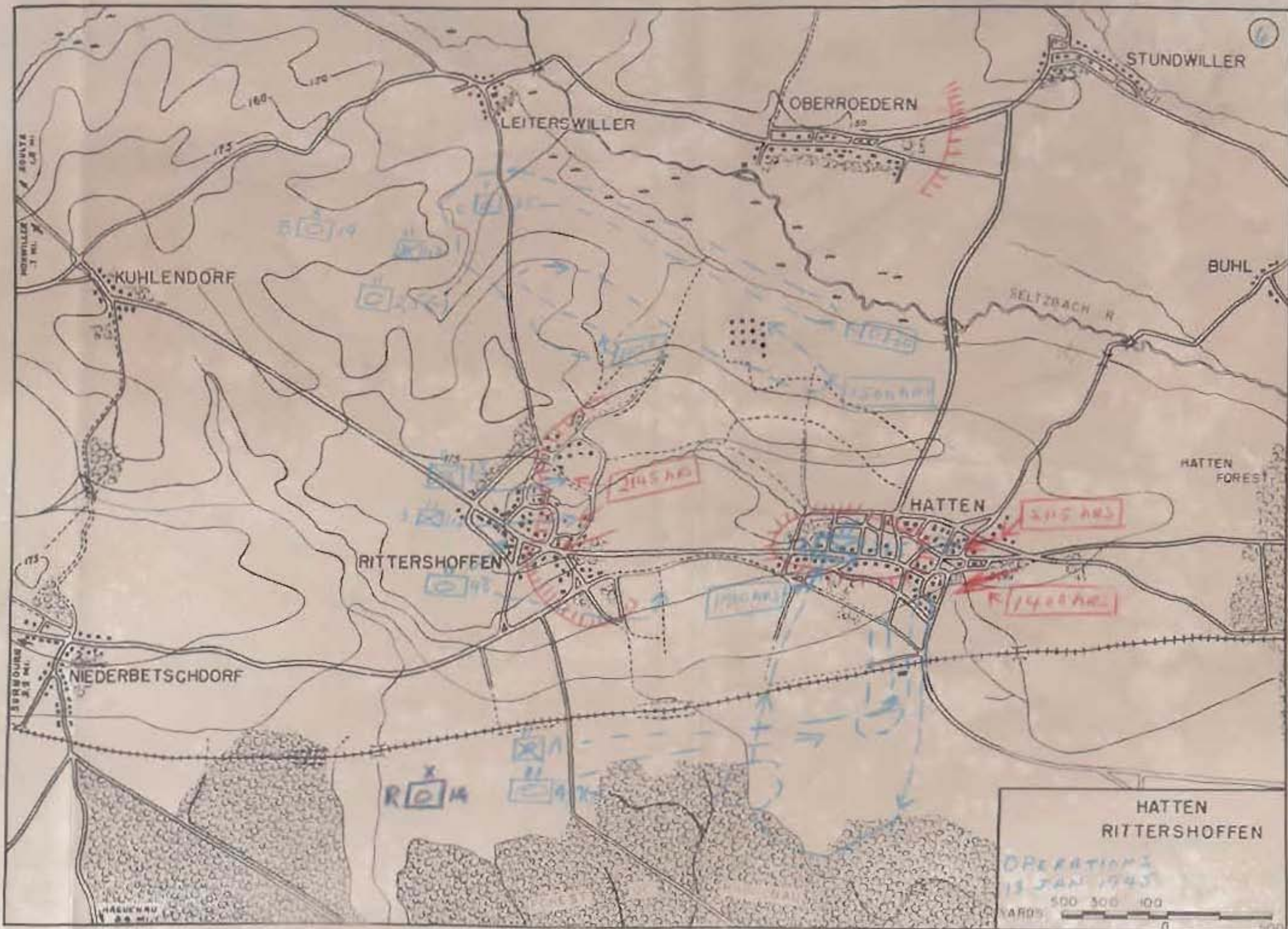
NEDERBETSCHDORF

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RITTERSHOFFEN

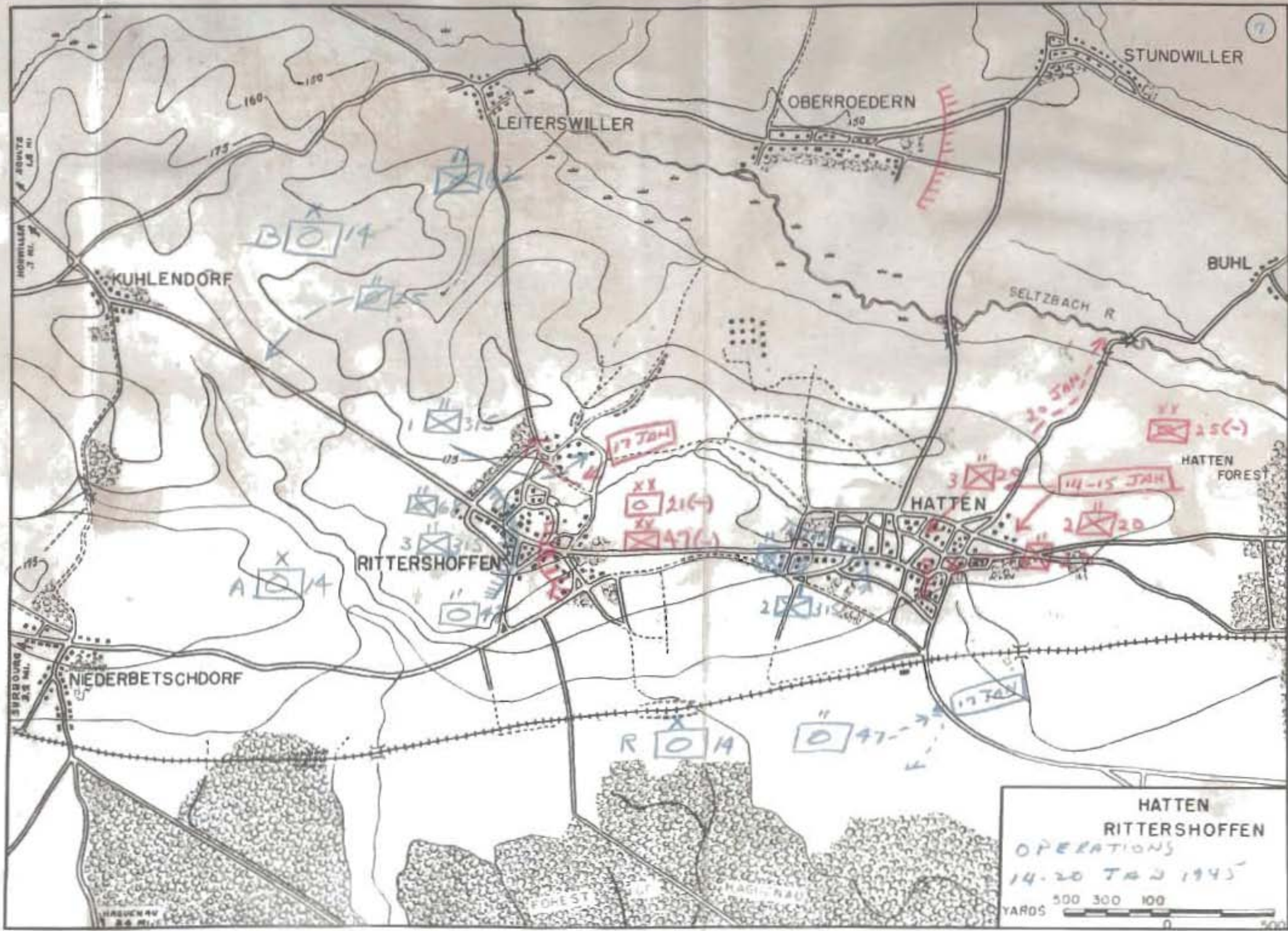
TEHRAN  
ATTACK PLAN, 12 JAN

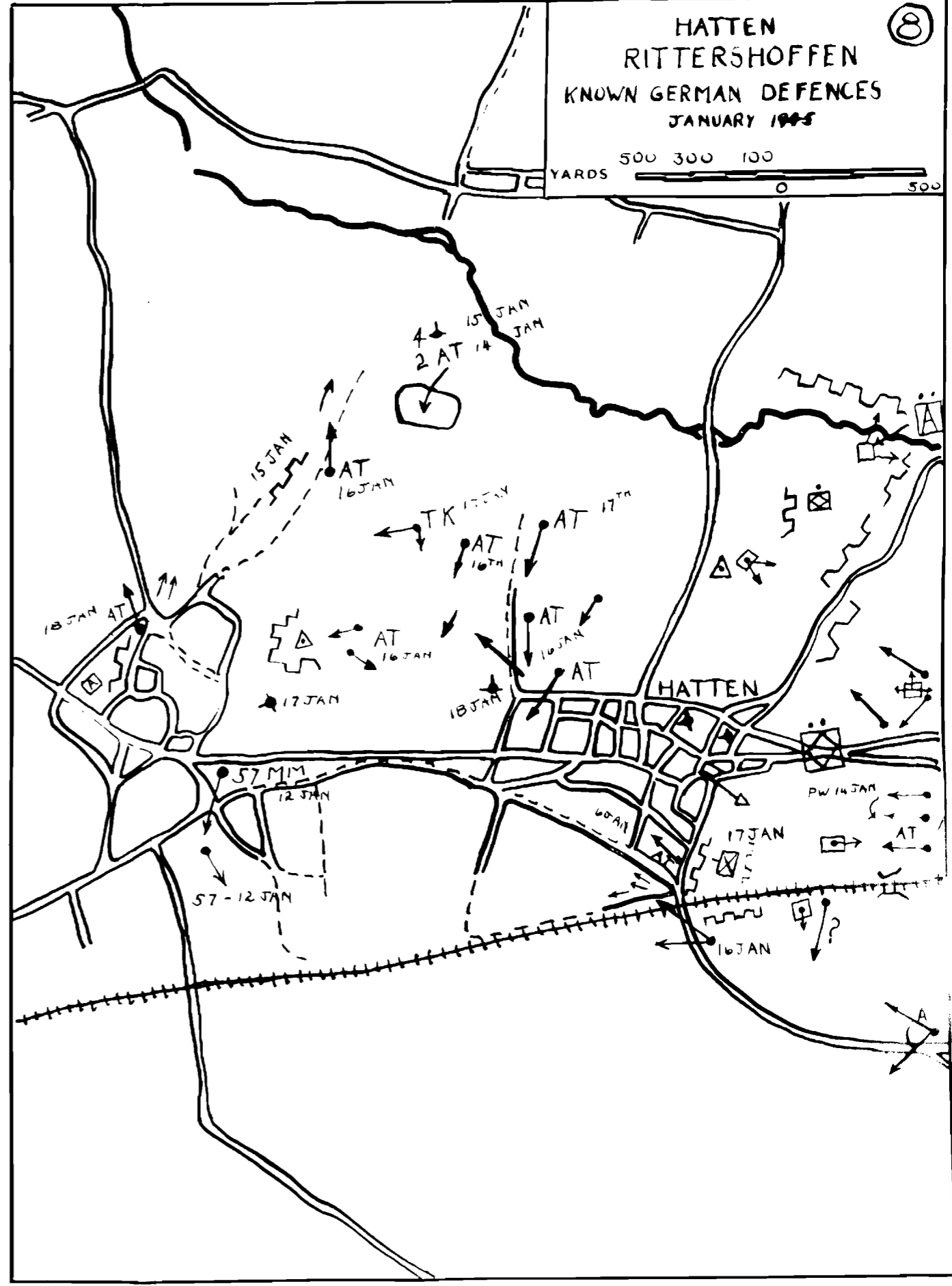
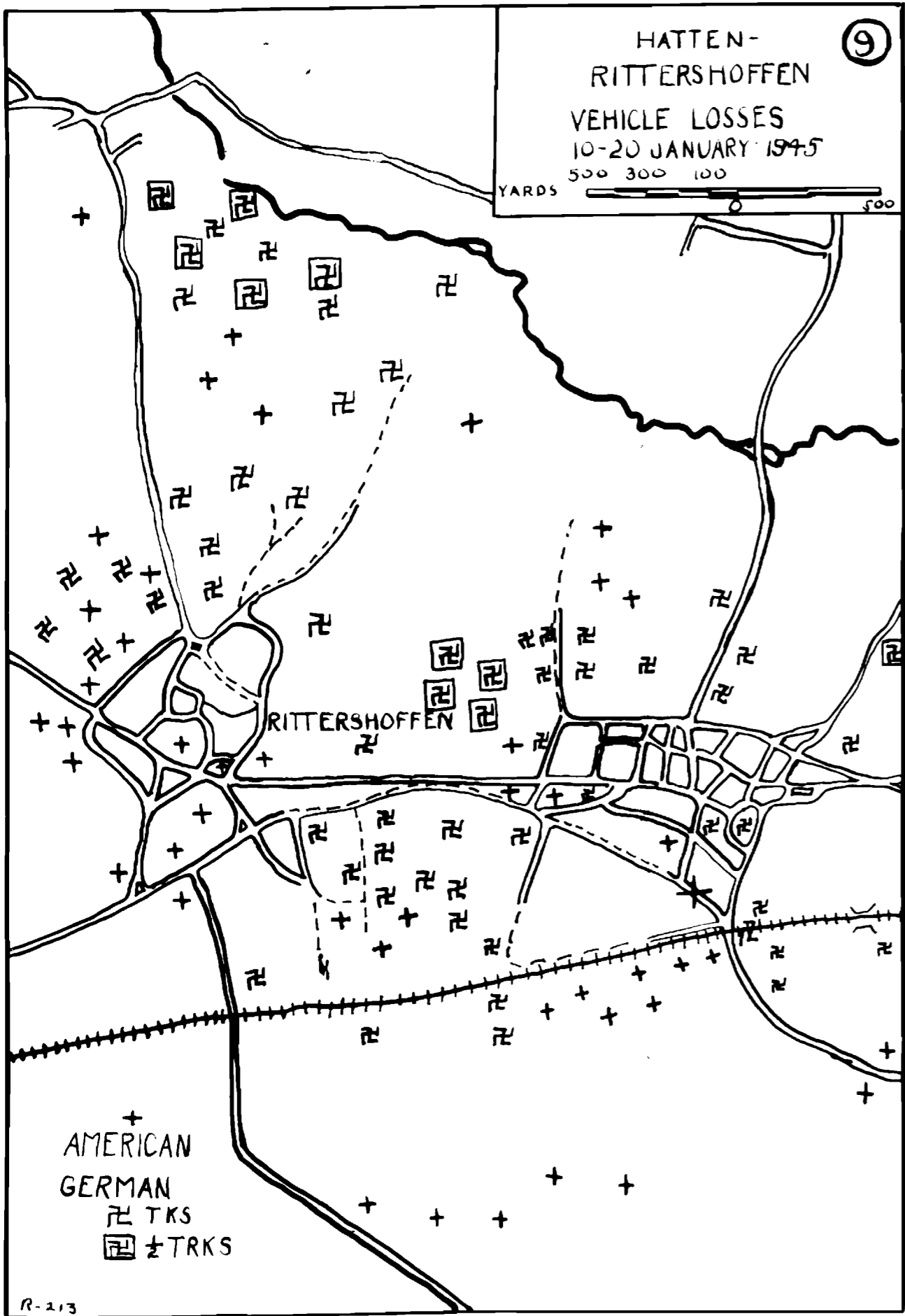






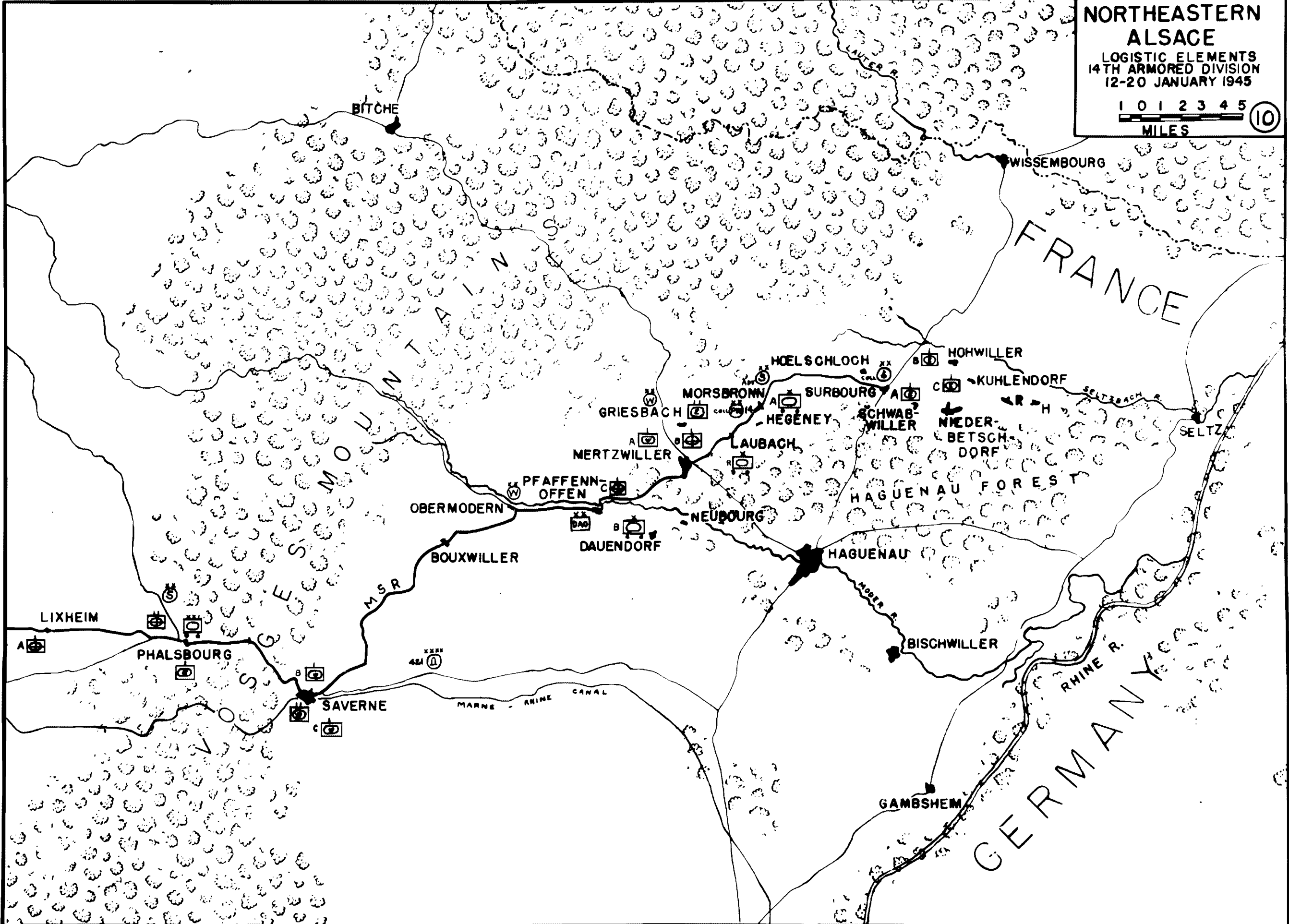






**NORTHEASTERN ALSACE**  
**LOGISTIC ELEMENTS**  
**14TH ARMORED DIVISION**  
**12-20 JANUARY 1945**

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