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Commitment of the 361 Volks Gren-  
adier Division in Lorraine and the  
Northern Vosges, from 25 October  
to 31 December 1944.

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Translated by: D. Thompson.



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Preliminary note:

The following work was written from memory in April - May 1947, at the request of the Historical Division. The narration is based entirely on personal experience. Official, German reference documents were not available. There may therefore be some small inaccuracies with regard to dates and localities.



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I. The initial organization of the Division from 6.9.-18.10.44

On 31.8.1944 I was assigned with the command and reorganization of the 361 Volks Grenadier Division.

The old 361 Div, which had been surrounded in a pocket near Tarnopol in July 44, had only been able to save small remnants (mostly service troops) when it broke out. So its reorganization had become necessary. It enjoyed a good reputation as a well-tried division of the eastern army.

The competent headquarters for the reorganization of the Division was Wehrkreiskommando VI (Muenster in Westphalia), and the area assigned was the troop training grounds at Wahn, near Cologne. When I arrived in Wahn on 6 September I found two young general staff officers there, with a few special-missions staff officers, as well as a small organizational staff which, as liaison between the Wehrkreis HQ and the division, was to arrange for the provision of personnel and material requirements.

The division was to be ready for commitment at the beginning of October, after a four-week period of organization. A completely impossible demand: for even if everything went without a hitch, with the necessary personnel and materiel arriving in good time, it was impossible, even with the most efficient training staff, the hardest work and best organization, that the elements of such a unit be given <sup>either</sup> the necessary, firm, organizational structure, or sufficient training, or that the required coordination be achieved between the different types of weapon within the divisional framework. One could, however, foresee that a regular arrival of



supplies could not be relied on because of the crippling of war production and the increasing difficulties of transportation. Being responsible for the division's behavior in action, I therefore strove from the beginning on the one hand to urge on the organization and training as fast as possible with every means of planning and improvisation, and on the other hand, just as consistently, to postpone as long as possible the announcement that we were prepared for action.

Personnel for the division, principally from the Westphalian and Rhine/land resources of Wehrkreis VI HQ, arrived astonishingly quickly. Within the first ten days the numbers reached about 70% of the required strength. The level of training was low: basic training unfinished, some of the men were naval replacements or came from disbanded air force units and had little enthusiasm for commitment in the army. On the other hand the allocation of qualified personnel of special categories (observation post and fire control personnel for heavy weapons and artillery, administrative personnel etc.) was satisfactory. As was to be expected, there were very few enlisted men suited to become officer candidates, especially for the infantry. They had to be given preliminary instruction first, in special courses.

The combination of men from Westphalia and the Rhineland proved favorable: the tough, persevering character of the Westphalian and the light temperament and verve of the Rhinelanders were a good mixture.

Horses and vehicles could also soon be taken over from



elements which were no longer fit for action, belonging to the parts of the army in the west which had come streaming back in retreat.

A very useful acquisition was the supply section - almost intact - and a part of the service troops of the old 361 Inf Div, which were brought up and incorporated in the new division. They could be supplemented, in addition, by part of the service troops belonging to a division which had been destroyed in France during the retreat.

The sore point was the equipment with materiel. After fourteen days of the period of organization had passed, nothing had arrived beyond small arms. This precious time was lost for the training of the troops in the use of special weapons.

The first heavy weapons and guns only began to roll up on 20 September, and finally also motor vehicles and equipment (such as optical, signal equipment and the like). In many cases, however, essential accessories were still lacking, such as laying mechanism and panoramic sights for the guns, necessary vehicle accessories, means of signal communication and the like. Much improvisation was required in order to start weapons training, and also practice in cooperation with these weapons, in spite of the above-mentioned difficulties. Improvisation was, in fact, the order of the day for the division, and I purposely prepared officers and men for this in all spheres, from the beginning.

Now the already dragging delivery of materiel for the division was further obstructed, to an unexpected degree:

1. When, on 17 September, the British made their airborne



landing at Linnem in Holland, the division had to have an infantry formation of regimental strength (equipped only with small arms) ready to march within 24 hours, and place it at the disposal of Wehrkreis VI HQ.

2. One day later, 900 technical personnel had to be dispatched towards the east, for transfer to a division already equipped with materiel; with this the division lost the personnel which was of most value in building up the units, and which it had scraped together with great pains. My protest to the Commander in Chief of the replacement army produced no results.

3. On 22 September orders were received for the transfer of the division to Holland, to the area of Zwolle, where it was to continue its organization. Ten precious days at least were lost in moving and reinstalling the division in its new shelter area, and because the transports bringing up equipment had to be rerouted; considerable delays were caused by the Dutch railway-workers strike which had just broken out.

As I had the impression that the appropriate home authorities could no longer cope with the procurement and bringing up of men and materiel, in the crippling and more and more unpredictable circumstances which prevailed, I started - under pressure of necessity - to find my own expedients. Above all I wished to avoid the fate of having to lead an improvised "emergency mass" into action, which would break up on its first contact with the enemy. By sending out details to replacement troop units and ordnance offices, I succeeded in speeding up the arrival of personnel and materiel and thus procuring the larger part of our activation re-



quirements by the middle of October.

As was to be expected, at the beginning of October inquiries were made by the Replacement and Training Army as to the state of organization of the division for commitment, and more speed was urged. I was able to ward off these inquiries successfully and thus gain another few weeks for training.

In the training as well, improvisation was necessary from the start. In addition to training on a small scale, and regardless of the state of the units with respect to personnel and equipment, an early start was made with unit training at battalion and regimental level, and also combined arms exercises. By these means officers and men were put in a position, on the one hand, to master circumstances requiring improvisation, such as often occur in combat, on the other hand to practise command and commitment, and the cooperation of all weapons, to consolidate the structure of the troop formations and finally to gain the confidence required for commitment in action. These conditions <sup>gradually</sup> became easier as the troops improved. Precisely those exercises with improvised means proved later, in action, to have been worthwhile. For troops who have learned to help themselves with make-shifts experience a sense of relief when they can then go into action at full strength and with adequate weapons and equipment.

The most necessary thing appeared to me to be the tactical instruction of officers from regimental down to company commanders. In spite of all combat experience the line officer lacked thorough



tactical instruction. Without this, and with too short experience at the front, he was placed in positions of command and promoted, instead of being allowed to grow into these. The result was that his tactical ability no longer corresponded to the missions of leadership assigned to him and therefore, in many cases, unnecessarily high losses and failures occurred owing to inexperienced and partly careless leadership. For this reason I set the greatest store, from the beginning, by the tactical training of the officer, first of all adapted to the tactical scope of his appointment. By means of combat practice, terrain discussions, map maneuvers and signal communication command-post exercises, uniform tactical conceptions were produced, and practice was given in estimating situations, taking decisions, giving commands and also, especially, the combined action of weapons and the organization of fire support, as well as the cooperation of the different staffs. As a result, when the division later went into action the entire command set-up functioned properly even in the most difficult situations, right down to battalion level.

Finally the time came for the new unit to prove itself at the front, still rather earlier than suited the division, before the intended training program could be finished. The transfer of the division to Lorraine for commitment with the 1 Army began on 18 October. The <sup>initial</sup> organization in order of battle was complete. The only unit lacking was the assault-gun company which was organized on the troop training grounds at Grosvenborn, unaffected by the division, and was brought up to <sup>it in</sup> the operational area. Only one company of the engineer Battalion was ready, because according



to orders the battalion was only due to be brought up to full strength shortly before activation of the division was complete. The battalion was dispatched at the end of the transport movement, but its training had to be completed in the operational area. The 951 Inf Rgt was behindhand with its training because, owing to the previously mentioned surrender of one regiment to Wehrkreis VI, it had only been brought up to strength in personnel and materiel very late. The divisional command hoped still to find the time and the possibility of completing its training in action.

For the order of battle of the division see Appendix 1.

The essential differences from a division organized in the old way were as follows:

1. A saving of about 2000 personnel was achieved by the omission of the supply sections for companies, batteries etc. and creation of supply platoons for battalions. The assistant drivers for horse-drawn and motor vehicles were also eliminated. The light artillery battalions were constituted with two batteries of six guns each instead of three batteries of four guns, in order to save one battery detail and one ammunition section per battalion. The personnel of the divisional service troops was also cut down. This was an emergency measure which was to prove very disadvantageous in action.

2. The first battalion of the artillery regiment was equipped with Pak 40 (anti-tank guns). This meant on the one hand a weakening of the artillery from the point of view of caliber and trajectory; on the other hand this battalion constituted a



reinforcement of armor-piercing weapons. In this case the fact that the battalion was horse-drawn was bound to prove particularly disadvantageous because it meant that it had not the mobility required of an anti-tank weapon. Thus it could only be used behind the infantry zone, for the protection of the artillery. The heavy field howitzer battalion was not motorized, but also horse-drawn. Its guns were transported in two loads, which was also a considerable disadvantage for its mobility and readiness for action. Especially important was the effect of organizing the light artillery battalions with two batteries of six guns each. These batteries were awkward from the point of view of emplacement and firing; they were less mobile and presented, in their firing positions, obvious targets for the enemy air forces. For this reason they were re-organized in battalions with three batteries of four guns each, soon after the division's initial commitment.

3. The anti-tank battalion only had one Pak company with nine guns at its disposal; on the other hand the incorporation of an assault gun company with 12 guns was new and advantageous.

All these and other disadvantages arose from the shortages in the spheres of materiel and personnel. They were improvisations and defects, to which one had to adapt one's leadership, but which decreased the fighting power of a Volks Gren Div by at least 25% in comparison to a division of the old type.



II..First commitment of the division in the periodfrom 25.10.-7.11.44

(sketch 1)

The division was unloaded between 20. and 25 October in the area of Saarburg - Hemmingen and immediately committed for the relief of the 11 Panzer Div. The first commitment took place under the command of the 11 Pz Div. Until the relief was accomplished all the elements of the V.G.Div engaged were subordinated to 11 Pz Div Hq.

When I arrived on 21. October I found my advance party with the tactical group of the 11 Pz Div in Alteviller (5 km south-east of Dieuze). The 953 Gren Rgt, which was at the head of <sup>the</sup> Transport movement, was committed on the right wing with one artillery battalion, in the night of 21/22 October. The next infantry regiment (Gren Rgt 952) was committed two days later. The artillery and anti-tank battalions took over the data of their predecessors and were then employed accordingly. While the 11 Pz Div's position to the north of the Rhine-Marne Canal was taken over without my intervention, the previous front line to the south of the canal was, at my suggestion, only manned by combat outposts, and the main line of defense withdrawn to more favorable terrain behind the Rau (?) de Remiremont.

The relief took place without interference from the enemy; he remained completely passive to the north of the Rhine-Marne Canal. Only to the south of it, on the left wing, was the 11 Pz Div engaged at that time in combats of local importance, with the enemy who was trying to force the 11 Div troops to leave the Forêt de



Parroy (Forest of Parroy). The enemy attack was successfully held in fluctuating combats around the woods south-west of Xousse. Thus the relief of the division was for the most part accomplished by 25 October. The V.G.Div took over command of the sector on the same day. For details of its commitment see Sketch 1.

Points of main effort in the defense lay on the extreme right wing at Moyenvic and in the area between Bezange la P<sup>te</sup> and the Rhine-Marne Canal. In estimating the possible direction of enemy thrusts in a large-scale attack, the following had to be reckoned with:

1. By attacking over the Seille and thrusting forward through Chateau-Salins in the general direction of Moorhinen, the enemy would try in the first place to capture the commanding heights north of Moyenvic, to cover his flank;
2. by a thrust into the basin of Dieuze he would break off two corner-stones of our defense by taking not only the heights north of Moyenvic, but also those to the north-east of Xures, in order to use them as spring-board for a further advance towards the north, or in an eastward direction. Should they be held, then a penetration in the center could be eliminated by a counter-attack;
3. in the sector of our left neighbor (553 Inf Div) the danger was already apparent of an enemy attack over the Blamont - Avricourt line, thrusting towards Saarburg, whereby he would be driving into the rear of our division and would unhinge the Vosges position (Donon - Gondrexange - Bispin<sup>g</sup>) which was in the process of construction. This attack would <sup>also</sup> directly implicate the division's left wing, located south of the canal.



Points of main effort in the infantry and anti-tank defense system, which coincided, therefore had to be formed near Moyenvic, as well as between Bezange la Petite and the Rhine-Marne Canal. The artillery had to be grouped in such a way that the bulk of its guns could be effective before both of these points, firing from the same emplacements, and in addition reach as far south as possible to direct flanking fire before our left neighbor's sector; it was therefore committed with one group in the Marsal - Donnelay area, and a second group around Ommerey - Bourdonnay.

A view over the terrain confirmed what could already be seen from the map, namely, that the course of the main line of defense at that time was extremely unfavorable from the terrain point of view, and could hardly be held in face of a strong enemy attack. It was not a line which had been chosen as <sup>a</sup> suitable defensive position, after due consideration of its advantages and disadvantages, but the typical end-phase of an attack which had come to a stand-still, - as I had repeatedly been able to observe at the beginning, while armored formations were being relieved. No front-line obstacles offered protection against enemy tanks, artillery support for the line was difficult and to the rear of the front lay the marshy ground round the Kohlenfloesser trench between Moyenvic and Bourdonnay, over which there were only two crossing-points from the rear. The infantry was more or less isolated, - being without adequate support it was bound to be overrun by a strong enemy attack. I therefore made the suggestion that the line be moved back as soon as possible behind S eille and the Kohlenfloesser trench between Moyenvic and Bourdonnay, and - turning south by the pond west of



Bourdonnay - be led back to meet the existing front-line south of the canal at La Garde. The suggestion was approved, on the following conditions:

1. a bridgehead was to be held on the southern bank of the Seille at Moyenvic,
2. the commanding heights around the forest (one kilometer north-east of Xures), which - for the enemy - offered a far reaching view into the terrain to the north and north-east, were to be occupied,
3. when the new position had been improved and the Kohlenfloesser trench flooded to form an obstacle, it should only be occupied as main battle position shortly before an impending enemy attack.

As there were no signs indicating an immediately impending attack against our divisional sector, we took our time. On pressure from me, the order was finally given to move back into the new position on the night of 8/9 November, leaving security detachments in the old line.

The new, main battle position, as originally proposed, would have saved considerable forces because from the right wing up to Bourdonnay it extended behind an obstacle - if only one of limited value - , and thus allowed of the front line being less strongly occupied in order to enable at least local reserves for assault to be formed. This was all the more important as the division only had one battalion at its disposal as tactical reserve. The required "bridgeheads" at Moyenvic and Ommerey therefore not only meant the use of forces which could not be replaced; these forces



were also unnecessarily exposed to the danger of being overrun by the enemy. The new line, however, (Sketch 1) had essential advantages in any case:

1. In attacking the new line, as well as in following up an attack, the enemy would be forced into terrain unfavorable to him. He could be effectively opposed from dominating positions, especially those on the heights on either side of Juvelice. In addition, from Moyenvic to Ley, he would be met by an obstacle which, when flooded, could not be overcome without difficulty, even by tanks.

2. Artillery support was now assured along the whole front by a chain of outstanding observation posts.

3. The division's weak anti-tank forces could be concentrated for defense at the two crucial points, Moyenvic and the Ley - Ommeray-Donnelay area.

4. Finally, the previous construction and improvement of the position promised to reinforce the fighting power of the troops to a degree which should not be underestimated.

Further construction and preparations for the new commitment were immediately begun, after a unified plan had been drawn up. By flooding the Kohlenfloesser trench (opening the sluices of the lakes so that the <sup>out-</sup>flow of water was controlled over a longer period of time; construction of several dams) we succeeded, within seven days, in creating a wide area of marshy ground along the stream from Moyenvic to north of Ley. This measure was supported by heavy rainfall occurring at the time. The valley of the S. eille between Dieuze and Moyenvic was also partly turned into marshy ground.



The construction of the position - on the principle of a series of strongpoints - was reinforced by wire entanglements and, as far as the available, limited means allowed, with a few minefields. Observation posts, new gun emplacements and alternate positions were also prepared for the artillery and heavy weapons. The construction of an artillery defensive position, extending from the heights north of Hulzey - Gelucourt - Mailieres to Rechicourt, was planned. Thus everything was done in order to move the troops back as soon as possible into a position which was to a certain extent prepared, even if not quite finished.

At this time I was particularly anxious to complete the training of the troops in action, in order to increase their striking power. In the infantry this was accomplished in the first place by reconnaissance and combat patrol activity, which achieved some successes and thus encouraged the self-confidence of the troops. Then roads leading right into the enemy positions were reconnoitred; prisoners were brought in, who had been overtaken at night behind the front line, and whose statements added to our knowledge of the enemy command. Finally combat patrol missions at company level were executed. Thus a surprise attack was made on the enemy strongpoint at Juvrecourt during the night (this must have been on 4 November), and 30 prisoners taken for four casualties on our side. A similar operation was carried out in the forest of Moncourt, though with less success. These small successes were mostly achieved at the cost of few losses on our side. A distant reconnaissance patrol, penetrating through the forest of Parroy to the Luneville - Einville road, observed movements of enemy tanks and artillery in a northward



direction. An officer reconnaissance patrol from Moyenvic towards Arracourt, which was to ascertain the strength of a fairly large concentration of artillery which had been observed by artillery reconnaissance, did not return.

The training of the heavy weapons and artillery in observation, target reconnaissance and rapid, efficient fire control, was systematically extended in the tasks required by the current combats. By attacks on recognized enemy targets, supporting combat patrol operations, and as reprisal fire in response to sudden concentrations of fire from the enemy, the artillery gained practice in prolonged, and in sudden, short, concentrations of fire. Frequent changes of position, and reinstallation, were inevitably necessary because of the enemy's vigilant artillery reconnaissance and activity.

Commitment in action also provided plenty of problems and opportunities for the other branches, such as anti-tank units, engineers and signal troops, successfully to continue their training. Staff activity was practised in the same way.

These first 14 days in the commitment of the green troops were thus of benefit to the whole division, in training and in improving the structure of the formations. It proved possible to make up for much which had had to be neglected during the inadequate period of initial organization. The troops became accustomed to battle conditions.

The division suffered a serious loss in fighting power by the removal of an infantry regiment (951 Gren.Rgt) an artillery battalion and the assault gun company.



On orders from above, these units had to be dispatched for commitment with our heavily engaged, left neighbor, on about 3 or 4 November. The artillery battalion was first reorganized by taking over the fifth and sixth guns from the light batteries; so that after that the light battalions only had batteries of four guns. At this time one battalion of the 951 Gren Rgt was in reserve, the other in action south of the canal on the left wing. For its relief, the division had to commit its last reserves, the Fusillier Co (rifle). The division then had no tactical reserves left at all, - an extraordinary situation on the eve of heavy battles. Giving up the assault gun company was also a serious loss. This weakening of the division's fighting power was to have a very disadvantageous effect during the coming battles.



III. Combats during the American, large-scale attack  
from 8.-19.11.44

(Sketch 2)

Concerning the enemy it was known that the American 26 Div had been located opposite our divisional front, north of the Rhine-Marne Canal, since the middle of November. Its passive behavior, showing mainly infantry characteristics, and also the statements of prisoners gave the impression that this division was as yet inexperienced in combat. In the area west of Chateau-Salins, facing our right neighbor's front, were the American 36 Inf Div and 4 Armd Division. South of the canal, our own left wing was faced by a reconnaissance battalion which occupied the eastern edge of the Parroy forest only incompletely, leaving gaps, and also remained passive, apart from a few reconnaissance operations. This was in contrast to the strong enemy activity opposite our left neighbor, which had already seemed to indicate since the beginning of November that serious combat might break out any day. From the beginning of November onwards, the artillery reconnaissance units employed by the LXXXIX Corps HQ (which had relieved the LVIII Pz Corps HQ on 3 November) also reported that a striking reinforcement of the enemy's artillery, on our divisional sector as well, indicated that an attack on quite a large scale was imminent. As, however, there was no change in the aspect of the enemy infantry, these artillery reports were unfortunately not taken very seriously. The division counted at least on being able to retire in good time into its main battle position. Everything was prepared for this, so that on the morning of 9 November the new position could be occupied, and only



combat outposts remain in the old line.

As already mentioned, it was the intention of higher headquarters that the main battle position only be occupied shortly before the start of the enemy attack, and one could presume that this headquarters, with its ample sources of information, was better able to foresee the coming of an enemy attack than was possible at divisional level.

It was therefore an unwelcome surprise for the division when, on 8 November, beginning at 06.00 hours, the enemy laid down a two-hours drumfire on the front line, from the right wing as far as, and including, Moncourt. The enemy attack was launched along the whole army front.

All wire communications forward were interrupted - no radio communication either with Moyenvic - uncertainty as to the situation at the front ! Towards 09.00 hours came the first report from the artillery, stating that enemy tanks were rolling towards Bazange la Petite from the direction of Rechicourt; situation at Montois still obscure. A little later came the report that the enemy had entered Moyenvic. Lively activity by enemy fighter bombers, especially against artillery positions. There was thus no further doubt that the enemy's large-scale attack also extended along our divisional front as far as the Rhine-Marne Canal.

Around noon 953 Gren Rgt reported that reconnaissance, and the statements of stragglers, confirmed that the enemy had entered Moyenvic shortly after the drumfire, destroyed the I Battalion there, had obviously captured the Seille bridge intact, and had already gained a hold on the southern slopes of hill 300. The regiment's last



reserves were committed on hill 300 in company strength, with the mission of throwing the enemy back over the Seille.

The enemy attack was successfully resisted on both sides of Xanrey; however, a group of 20 tanks succeeded in penetrating through the front line, which was still being held, as far as the Moyenvic - Lezey road. These tanks withdrew again during the course of the day, after being attacked by artillery.

In Bezeange la Petite and Montois the 952 Gren Rgt, using tanks, bitterly fought for every house against a superior enemy. Driven back to the last houses and cellars, the garrisons of these two localities succeeded in holding until darkness fell, in spite of heavy casualties. It was unfortunately impossible, in that position, to give them the necessary, effective artillery support.

The end of the day was a failure for the division - it could obviously not have been otherwise in such a position. Even though the position was still more or less held and therefore the intended withdrawal during the following night was still possible, the enemy had, all the same, achieved a decisive success on the division's right wing. Striking westward after the capture of Moyenvic, he had succeeded in advancing on hill 300, and to Salival. There, a company which was thrown in against him did, by clinging to the top of the hill, succeed in preventing his obtaining a view into the lower Seille valley and the Dieuze basin. It was not in a position, however, to prevent the enemy from enveloping the hill on the northern side and outflanking it, unless the northern wing could be supported by the commitment of new forces, and the lost contact with the neigh-



boring forces on the right re-established. The division did not have the forces required for this. Losses were very high: one battalion was completely destroyed in Moyenvic, two further battalions had suffered considerable casualties in maintaining their positions. It was therefore impossible to release any forces from that part of the front which was not under attack during the following days, for commitment on the right wing, which was most seriously threatened.

On the first day of combat one could thus clearly foresee the danger of a strong thrust along the Petite Seille aiming at splitting the front at this boundary between two adjacent units. In the south, too, the enemy had begun an attack in the direction of Blamont, which aimed north-eastward, towards Saarburg. However, the 553 Inf Div appeared to be holding this attack, for the moment. But since this division's powers of resistance could no longer be considered very great, it seemed to be only a matter of time before there, too, the southern wing would be enveloped - which would mean that the division was enveloped on two sides.

There was no change in the order to move the front/<sup>line</sup> back behind the Kohlenfloesser trench on the night of 8/9 November.

By the morning of 9 November the withdrawal and regrouping in the new position had been executed unhindered by the enemy, and 952 Gren Rgt's sector had been extended to include Juvalice. To the west of this, 953 Gren Rgt had committed its II Battalion as far as the Seille. The situation on Hill 300 was unchanged. During the whole day, both sides grimly disputed/<sup>complete</sup> possession of the hill. First of all, in the early hours of the morning, our company made a counter-thrust, - having been reinforced by fifty men during the night. In-



spite of support from the entire divisional artillery, this counter-thrust failed due to the enemy's tough resistance and to the out-flanking movement from the north. Repeated enemy attacks, however, were also unsuccessful. An enemy penetration was eliminated in close combat; the hill was held.

In a night operation by assault engineers, with the mission of destroying the Seille bridge which had fallen into enemy hands intact, the bridge was reached, but could not be blown up owing to the vigilance of the enemy.

During the night the division learned that its sector had been extended up to the Petite Seille, and that it was its mission to occupy Hainpont in order to re-establish contact <sup>there</sup> with the 559 Volks Gren Division.. For this purpose, since other forces were unavailable, there was nothing else to be done but to commit the engineer battalion although it was not suited for an infantry combat mission. In spite of lively activity by enemy fighter-bombers which very much hampered daylight movements, the battalion was successfully concentrated by the evening in the forest north of Haraucourt. Hainpont was to be occupied during the night. However, the commander, who was apparently not equal to his infantry mission, delayed the assembly of his troops so long that the operation could only be executed in the early morning of 10 November.

Meanwhile two weak battalions from the 553 Inf Div (strength 150 - 200 men each, battle-weary) had been transferred to our division late in the afternoon of 9 November. They were committed as extension of the right wing and subordinated to 953 Gren Rgt. In the night of 9/10 November, one battalion, linking up with the ele-



ments on hill 300, occupied the line: eastern slope of hill 300 - road from Haraucourt to Hampont, as far as the point where the road emerged from the forest. The division's intention of extending this wing further west could not be executed, because when the battalion attempted to penetrate the forest north of hill 300, it suddenly encountered the enemy there. The second battalion was held in readiness in the forest to the rear of the right wing. As a last reserve it was intended for the following missions:

a. Commitment in a counter-attack in the Haraucourt area and to the north, in the event of the enemy pressing forward in the direction of Dieuze or through the Forêt de Brille;

b. Counter-attack northward against the enemy, who was advancing through Hampont towards Wisser;

c. Extension of the right wing along the northern edge of the Forêt de Brille.

Based on the events of the day, the division made the following estimate of the situation: There were no indications that the enemy would make an offensive advance against the front south of the Seille, and the battle for hill 300 appeared to be only of local importance, since the enemy had evidently not committed any reinforcements there and was content with the protection of his eastern flank. There could be no doubt, however, that he was bringing up fresh forces to the area of penetration, and in fact, as could be seen from the occupation of the forest south of Hampont, to the tactically weak spot. One could therefore definitely count on the enemy's continuing his advance northwards - the operationally most effective direction - on 10 November. The operation which the



division had begun against Hampont to counter this could therefore, even if successful, only be of importance as a delaying action. These forces were too weak to achieve a lasting success. For this the commitment of a whole regimental formation would have been required. However, what could be accomplished with one regiment on 10 November could probably only be mastered by a whole division on the following day.

When, on 10 November in the early morning, the engineer battalion approached Hampont, it was struck simultaneously on the front by tanks from Hampont and in the flank by an infantry attack out of the forest to the south. The battalion was at once destroyed. No one returned apart from a few stragglers. The CO and all officers were missing. Hampont was already in enemy hands. On the right wing, the newly committed battalion in the forest was faced by the enemy a short distance away. During the course of the day, the enemy thrust forward from Hampont towards Obrek - thus completing already the splitting and outflanking of the division.

As an enemy thrust eastward towards Wuisse was also threatening, the division determined to do its utmost to counter the threat to its northern flank, and throw in the anti-tank company - which still consisted of five guns - at Chateau-Voud. It was clear that this company could not go into action before the morning of 11 November. The success of its race against the more mobile enemy was doubtful.

When, during the afternoon, a 2 cm Fortress Fla-MG Battalion (of only limited mobility) was assigned to the division, this was committed for the extension of the right wing. This also could only



become effective during the night of 10 November. This battalion could not be employed in open terrain owing to the height of its weapons. It was therefore used to occupy the edge of the forest in support of the right wing, up to south of Chateau Voué, so that it could cover the ground along the stream to the west of this locality and provide some covering fire for the anti-tank troops dispatched in that direction.

The division had given due consideration to the question arising as to whether the reinforcements received during the last two days could, with greater effect, be sent forward - foregoing the support of the stationary wing - to points in the known direction of the enemy's thrusts. These formations, which were in part utterly battle-weary, and in part, owing to their state of organization and training, only fit for action in a limited way, were not sufficiently proof against crises to be thrown in, in isolated positions, against a superior enemy fighting only with the support of tanks. As the commitment of the engineer battalion had shown, they would be overwhelmed in the first encounter. The divisional command considered that it would be more advantageous to incorporate them in a more firmly-knit structure and, by extending the wing, <sup>gain time by</sup> compelling the enemy to strike further north.

On the rest of the divisional front the enemy remained completely inactive again that day. He <sup>had</sup> even ceased his efforts to gain complete control of hill 300. This confirmed the view that he was here only concerned with the protection of his eastern flank. Before the center of the front, he only probed the line with reconnaissance patrols. Our artillery attacked tanks and armored scout



cars, which were advancing to Ley and Lezey, with visible success. In the south, the 553 Inf Div continued to hold against strong artillery fire and attacks in battalion strength.

The westward salient of the front on either side of Marsal now meant a waste of forces inconsistent with the situation; its withdrawal to con/<sup>serve</sup> forces was necessary. With the approval of Corps Hd the withdrawal onto the shorter line: Juvelice - heights west of St Medard, was ordered for the night of 10/11 November. This made it possible, by extending the front of 952 Gren Rgt as far as the Seille, to pull out the II Battalion of 953 Rgt in order to return it to its regiment in the rear of the northern wing. The divisional command post was transferred to Germange.

11 November. The enemy again only tentatively probed the new line occupied by the right wing during the night. He attacked, however, in the woods north of Heraucourt and achieved a penetration. This was then wiped out in a counter-attack, with the use of the 553 Inf Div battalion which was still available as reserve. In the wooded terrain, which made observation difficult, we again suffered considerable losses.

When the anti-tank company arrived near Chateau Voué, in the early hours of the morning, it was attacked by tanks coming from the direction of Obrek. Two guns were lost, but the remaining ones succeeded in holding up the further advance on Wuisse, for the moment. The possibility of establishing communications with our right neighbor, concerning whose position at the time, incidentally, nothing definite could be discovered, was finally shattered by this eastward thrust of the enemy.



The II Battalion of 953 Rgt, which had been pulled out during the night in the regrouping process, could not be assembled in Blandre Eglise until early in the morning. Its transfer to the rear of the right wing, impossible by day, was therefore postponed until the following night. In the course of the day the division's assault gun company was returned. Coming out of action in our southern neighbor's sector, it brought back only four guns, and these were only partially fit for use due to having been damaged on the march. With the II Battalion of 953 Rgt, whose strength was now only around 200, and this assault gun company, the division was planning to bar the enemy's advance, on 12 November, on the northern flank either side of Wuisse. For this purpose the two units were led forward on the following night into the woods south of Wuisse, in order to occupy Wuisse - if necessary by an attack - in the early morning. In order to avoid being forestalled by the enemy during the night, an emergency unit of about 60 men was scraped together and thrown forward to occupy Wuisse, and the Pak located west of it was brought up. This operation was successfully carried out during the night.

Once again the question arose - as so often in those days - whether the division would be able to master the situation with these measures. That the division should always be lagging behind the enemy's moves was an inevitable consequence of the fact that forces were lacking at all points, and no more reserves available. To ward off a crisis at one point, forces had first to be released from another point not under enemy attack at the time. Another cause of delay was the absolute enemy air superiority which made practically every



daylight movement of formations in open terrain impossible. During the battle in which the division sought to resist the enemy's out-flanking movement, no reserves had, up to that time, reached the area in which they were to be committed in time to be fully prepared for defense before the arrival of the enemy. In short: owing to the enemy's superiority in all spheres it was an unequal battle for space and time. It is, of course, usually the attacker who dictates the course of action; but a successful defense is only possible if the absolutely necessary operational and tactical reserves are on hand. Where these means are lacking, there is only one correct decision: Delaying action !

On 12 November two events brought the division's northern wing into a very serious position:

1. The troops carrying out the operation against Wuisse, who had started off early in the morning, ran into heavy fire from tanks on the opposing heights, before reaching the locality. The troops, forced to the ground, remained in the area of the stream. The assault guns could not leave the cover afforded by the edge of the forest, to go to their support. The enemy penetrated into Wuisse and wiped out the troops occupying the locality.

2. At the same time the enemy succeeded in making a breakthrough in the forest. He pushed forward as far as (the ?) Beranche Ferme. A counter-attack against the enemy flank here, undertaken during the afternoon with every available man under the command of the regimental CO, was a failure. In the northern part of the forest the enemy thrust further east, fell on the assault gun company in a surprise move, and captured the guns; he was then in the rear of



the divisional formations located outside Wisse.

The way to the east thus lay open to the enemy; but he did not exploit his opportunity, so giving the division another chance to throw forward units to bar his passage.

The decision to withdraw the right wing again was self-evident. The order was given to fall back onto the new main line of defense, running from 1 km west of <sup>the</sup> Dieuze - Morange road, through the hills 2.5 km west of Genestroff to Mulzey - Blanche Eglise - Donnelay - pond 1.5 km east of Donnelay - pond west of Bourdonnay - Lagarde, on the night of 12/13 November.

The II Battalion of 953 Rgt, again very much diminished, which was located outside Wisse, and part of the assault gun crews who had been able to blow up their guns before the enemy captured them, were successfully pulled out of the enemy's pincer movement after dark, and committed once more. The greater part of the Fla MG weapons was also lost that day; the Fla MG Battalion was from then on only fit for employment as an infantry combat unit. The troops had suffered considerable casualties in these days of combat in the forest, so that, especially in the sector of the 953 Gren Rgt, it was only possible to maintain a security line more in the nature of a succession of fortified points.

On the rest of the divisional front the enemy still, as before, remained passive and only sent forward reconnaissance patrols. Our reconnaissance patrols reported that Haraucourt and Marsal were not occupied by the enemy.

In our right neighbor's sector the enemy had penetrated deeply, as far as the Brechain - Conthil line, thus approaching Hœrochingen



and the important railroad junction of Benestroff. In the south, on 11 November, he had extended his attack along the entire front of the 553 Inf Div and on 12 November, against lessening resistance, had broken through on either side of Leintrey. This was an omen of operational developments to come - unless forces were available to prevent them, or a comprehensive decision taken !

On 13 November the division also succeeded in preventing an enemy advance through the Forêt de Bride and the valley from Wuisse towards the east, compelling the enemy forces to reach further north, past Lidrequin. A covering party located on the road north of Arlangeferme had no contact with the enemy.

A Luftwaffe engineer battalion was placed under the command of the division, and the latter was assigned the mission of barring the enemy's path to the east, towards Benestroff and Guebling, by using this "blocking unit" in a line echeloned as far forward as possible, - around Zarbeling - Lidrezing and in the forest south of that locality (Forêt de Koecking). The battalion was about to blow up the railroad installations at Benestroff, when it was assigned this mission. Its commitment could naturally only have a limited delaying effect. The battalion never entered Zarbeling and Lidrequin because it was forestalled by the enemy. It did succeed, however, on 13 November and in the night of 13/14, in obstructing a few small roads in the Forêt de Koecking with abatis.

The 14 November was a foggy day. The enemy - who was more active than on the preceding day - succeeded in penetrating at several points in the Forêt de Bride under cover of the fog. The forest front was split up into several combat teams. The II Battalion of



953 Rgt, encircled, only succeeded with some of its elements in breaking out of the pocket during the following night. The security detachments of the Luftwaffe engineer battalion, who were defending the obstacles they had put up in the Forêt de Koecking, were also attacked by the enemy on the morning of the 14 November and pressed back. This meant the collapse of our defense in the forest. The way to the east was now finally thrown open to the enemy.

This development of the situation, which was not surprising, now made <sup>it</sup> necessary to abandon the forest terrain and withdraw the front behind the Bourgalstroff - Dieuze sector, in the night before 15 November. At the same time, south of Dieuze, the following shorter line was ordered: edge of forest east of Blanche Eglise - Gueblanche - pond east of Donnelay. Strong covering parties were left before the front at Guenestroff and Kerprich in order to delay the expected enemy advance along the road to Dieuze.

This was the end of the division's combats and anxieties concerning its northern wing and the outflanking of it; combats which had cost the division heavy sacrifices in men and material. In its new position the division once again had contact in the north with a strong neighbor. Through the successful intervention of the 11 Pz Div against the enemy's attempts, during the following days, to split the new, continuous front near Guebling and Bedesstroff, the enemy attack could be brought to a standstill for the time being.

A new, deep penetration at Domèvre was reported by the southern adjacent unit.

#### 18 - 19 November.

On the morning of 18 November the division stood with the very



battle-weary elements of the right wing between Bourgalstroff and Dieuze (inclusive), behind a sector not unfavorable for defense. In Bourgalstroff contact was made with elements of the 11 Pz Div. Both command and troops were greatly relieved to know that they were once more part of a more or less coherent structure. South of Dieuze 952 Gren Rgt, with its two intact battalions, occupied a wide front, while there had been no change on the extreme left wing, south of the Rhine-Marne Canal, with the Fusilier company.

The enemy also continued not to attack the front south of Dieuze, but only tentatively followed it and probed it with reconnaissance patrols. The expected attack along the road through Kerprich toward Dieuze did not materialize; the enemy only pushed forward here, too, with reconnaissance patrols against the covering parties at Kerprich and Guénestroff. On the other hand, in our right neighbor's sector, the battle flared up already on 15 November. The American 4 Arm Div, with which we were sufficiently acquainted from the preceding combats, succeeded in erecting a bridgehead at Guébling and penetrating via Bourgalstroff as far as Bedesstroff. In a counter-attack, elements of the 11 Pz Div succeeded in recapturing Bedesstroff and Bourgalstroff and throwing the enemy back to Guébling. Guébling itself remained in enemy hands. Further attempts by the enemy to repeat this thrust in the following days, and also to gain ground north of there, were successfully resisted. Standing only on the fringe of these events, the division was able to allow its elements a well-deserved rest, reorganize them - as far as their commitment permitted - and gradually improve



their position. The enemy artillery and air force were very active, and, becoming more and more so every day, compelled our artillery to make frequent changes of position.

A second Festungs Fla battalion, assigned to the division on 16 November, was committed in the depth of the position. It had suffered considerable losses through artillery fire and fighter-bomber activity already while moving into position, because of conduct unsuitable to conditions in the field.

The situation in our southern neighbor's sector was becoming increasingly threatening: From 16 to 17 November, the 553 Inf Div had to withdraw onto the Avricourt - Cirey line. Our left wing was pulled back behind the Rhine-Marne Canal, and had to be extended to Moussey. On 17 November Blamont was lost and on the following night the 553 Div stood on either side of Rechicourt; the night after that, it was already on the Gondrexange - Ibigny<sup>line</sup>. The stretch of canal from Moussey to Gondrexange was unoccupied. The enemy had only forced back the covering parties left behind by the 553 Inf Div in a bridgehead at Moussey, over the canal, but had not so far crossed the canal himself. As the canal was only six meters wide, it presented no obstacle, incidentally. It formed the boundary line between our division and the unit adjacent on the left, and belonged to the latter's sphere of responsibility with respect to demolition tasks at the bridge crossings, and their preparation. On 19 November the canal, together with the above responsibilities, was transferred to 361 Volks Gren Div, - only a few hours before decisive action was to occur at precisely that spot. The long expected crisis on the southern wing had arrived. With the enemy attack proceeding in the same direction, the crisis was bound to take effect on the flank and rear of the division.



IV. Combats during the American large-scale attack  
from 20 to 30 Nov 44.

(Sketch 3)

On the afternoon of 19 November the division was informed of the decision, dictated by the situation on the northern wing of the 19 Army, to pull back the left wing of the 1 Army behind the Saar - Coal - Canal. The division was to retire onto the line: Loudrefing - Bieping - Saar Coal-Canal. As the wooded nature of the terrain made it very difficult to obtain a clear view in the new sector, the divisional command decided to organize its defense in two sectors: as northern combat team, 953 Gren Rgt with a light artillery battalion, from Loudrefing to the Etang du Stock (exclusive)(étang - pond); as southern combat team, 952 Gren Rgt with two light artillery battalions and an anti-tank company, from Etang du Stock (inclusive) to Heming (inclusive). On the southern wing contact was somehow to be established with the 553 Inf Div, concerning whose position nothing definite could be discovered. When darkness had fallen and the withdrawal movement was already under way, elements of the combat teams being dispatched along their lines of retirement, I or my Chief of Staff was ordered to report to Corps Hq, -receiving the order towards 21.00. I went myself. Orientation concerning the tense situation on the northern wing of 19 Army. Having penetrated the front at several points, the enemy, in a rapid advance, was approaching the Saar east of Gondrexange. As the Vosges positions were broken through, the flank and rear of 361 Volks Gren Div were in extreme danger. One could count on a further enemy advance in the direction of Pfulzburg - Zabern. By order of the army, my division was to



hand over a regimental combat team with 2 - 3 battalions and an artillery battalion, to the 19 Army. This meant extensively uncovering our front, and the transfer was to be carried out that same night. The army took over responsibility for my widely extended front, which could then only consist of weak security detachments. The regimental combat team was to be dispatched at once to Saarburg, from where the regimental CO was to make contact with the CO of the 553 Inf Division.

I fully understood that this measure was necessary. As this development, however, could already be foreseen clearly days before, I could not understand - even then, not only later when the disaster had happened - that :

1. no steps had been taken to prepare a reserve force. Certainly, neither the army nor the Heeresgruppe had anything at all on hand, but a High Command with foresight could have, at that time, committed the Armored Training Division (Pz-Lehr-Div) with some probability of success. As it was, the decision to commit this division was taken on 25 November, when it was too late.

2. - and this was a very grave error in the circumstances - the boundary line between the two armies was not simply displaced further south, and my regiment used to extend my left wing over the Rhine-Marne Canal towards the south.

By doing this one could perhaps at least have prevented the break-through towards Saarburg on 20 November, and gained time for additional measures. As it was, however, this regiment was cast into the already untenable situation on the 553 Inf Div<sup>sector</sup>, where it could not go into effective action, because its commitment was delayed.



As my point of main effort had to be on the southern wing, along the Rhine-Marne Canal on either side of Heming, and it was necessary for the battalion dispatched there to be committed in good time, I decided to execute the order I had received by combining the northern battalion and regimental staff of 952 Rgt with one battalion of 951 Rgt, to form the combat team to be handed over. The latter battalion was in the process of organization from the remnants of Inf Rgt 951, which had returned in the meanwhile from commitment elsewhere, and whose existence was <sup>as yet</sup> unsuspected by higher headquarters. Only in this way could I arrange to have a whole battalion at my disposition for Heming. The newly composed regiment, with the artillery battalion, was diverted from the line of retirement towards Saarburg, where it arrived at day-break, and there left my sphere of command.

For new organization see sketch 3.

The Fusilier company was committed in place of the I Battalion of 952 Rgt, which had been pulled out. The two battalions of 553 Inf Div, with a strength of 80 - 100 men each, were pulled out from 953 Gren Rgt's combat team, and put at the disposal of the division.

The front was thus occupied as follows - over a width of 30 km:

Right: 953 Inf Rgt with 2 battalions (120 men), Fla MG Bn (100 men) and regimental unit.

Left: II Battalion of 952 Rgt with subordinate fusilier company, together still 300 men strong.

That was the entire force occupying the main defense line !

There was no contact with the 553 Inf Div during the night, so that it was left to the ingenuity of the CO of 952 Gren Rgt



to discover the whereabouts of the divisional CP.

On the morning of 20 November, towards 0800 hours, the II Battalion of 952 Rgt reported that the enemy was attacking at Heming and had already entered the locality. With a premonition of misfortune, I went over there, and met the battalion CO towards 0900 hours in the neighborhood of his CP in Barchheim. He informed me that the enemy attacked at day-break under cover of a strong barrage and smoke-screen, entered the locality in a surprise thrust, and was already on the Heming - Saarburg road, with tanks. The CO was then engaged in building up a new front, with the last remnants of his battalion, along the edges of the forest north of Heming. The locality was under heavy artillery fire. The anti-tank company had been delayed and had not arrived in time for effective commitment along the stretch of canal; it was now in the process of taking up positions on the edge of the forest. The only thing which I could still offer him for the support of his front was the Fla Company. The two battalions of the 553 Div could not be ready for use before noon, in St Jean de Bassel. He would have to hold the position at any cost until the arrival of reinforcements made it possible for him to bar the Heming - Saarburg road at least by an outflanking movement. In the circumstances, a counter-attack to recapture Heming could no longer come into question.

Further events on the southern wing occurred as follows:

Towards 10.00 hours the enemy penetrated into the forest north of Barchheim and threw the battalion back up to <sup>the level of</sup> Kerprich aux Bois. The major part of the Pak was lost. The battalion commander was killed. The CO of the I Battalion of 561 A-pty Rgt - standing



now with his battalion in the very front line - succeeded in bringing the enemy tanks to a temporary standstill. In his battery positions, he began to establish a new front. The enemy's movements indicated that he was striking eastward in the direction of Haut-Cloche.

Towards noon a distorted radio message from 952 Gren Rgt was received, from which could be gathered that one battalion of the regiment was in action in Saarburg, the other battalion committed on the heights north of the town. Out of this situation it might be possible to produce a continuous defensive flank, if the missing center portion could be supplied.

As, at the same time, the two weak battalions of the 553 Div had arrived in St Jean de Bassel and been combined into one battalion, this was now dispatched via Gosselming and Dolving, with the mission of capturing hill 321 (1 km north-west of Saarburg) in an attack, and closing the gap between the elements on either side of Kerprich aux Bois and the I battalion of 952 Rgt north of Saarburg. To reach its objective the battalion had 10 km to go, and at least three hours must pass before it could produce effective results. The enemy's activity was such that there was little hope of the plan succeeding. - But it had to be tried ! The battalion/<sup>1008</sup>therefore also instructed to attack, if it encountered the enemy sooner, and at least reach the road between Haut-Cloche and Saarburg. The artillery received instructions to support this attack - in so far as it was still in a position to do so.

As could only be expected, the battalion already encountered the enemy towards 14.00 hours, as he pressed northwards, east of



Haut-Cloche. The battalion could not move forward and remained on a level with Haut-Cloche. Communications with the I Battalion of 952 Rgt could not be re-established. In order to save the artillery, the elements on either side of Kerprich aux Bois were now also pulled back to Langatte, and on either side of it. The road to S-aarburg was now in enemy hands. For its protection, he was thrusting north. He had ceased his attack on Kerprich aux Bois, but was now striking out eastward of Haut-Cloche and driving further north.

The Fus Co had been pulled out of the canal front and transferred to Dolwing, in order to block the narrow passage between the forest and the Saar. When it arrived there, towards 15.00 hours, the enemy was already "before the gates" with his tanks. Towards 16.00 enemy tanks thrust in to Gosselming, beyond which, fortunately, a medium howitzer battery was installed; this battery was able to prevent the enemy, at close range, from emerging towards the north. The divisional staff and elements of the signal battalion began to organize the defense of the locality of St Jean de Basseel.

From other reports coming in during the course of the day, the picture could be completed:

Towards 17.00 hours enemy tanks unexpectedly broke into Oberstinzel, where parts of the divisional staff, including the motor transport section, were located. The staff personnel was able to escape after nightfall - having lain in hiding up till then in sheds and lofts.

Reconnaissance patrols sent out eastwards reported an enemy



armored group, carrying infantry, advancing on the road from Oberstinzel to Rauviller, towards 17.00 hours. Stragglers from the staff of I Battalion of 952 Rgt reported that their battalion had been attacked on the heights north of Saarburg, around noon, by strong enemy armored forces and infantry. They had suffered heavy losses and were finally dispersed in the forest. The battalion CO had been killed. Fighting was taking place in Saarburg at the time.

The two artillery battalions had changed position during the afternoon, in the area around Gosselming. Three guns had been put out of action by tank fire. Several enemy tanks had been put out of action or damaged while attacking Gosselming. The battalion of the 553 Inf Div, which had been run down by the enemy east of Haut-Cloche, had finally retired to the forest north of the locality, and the Fus Co from Dolving to the forest on the west.

After their radio message at noon, no further radio communication with 952 Gren Rgt could be achieved; there was also absolutely no information concerning 553 Inf Div. The right wing (953 Gren Rgt) reported no enemy contact. There was no report from the supply troops, who were located in the area Lixheim - Hangviller - Rauviller.

After reviewing all the results of the day, the divisional command evaluated the situation as follows:

Whereas the enemy had not followed up before the northern wing, the division's southern wing - weakened by having to give up a reinforced regiment - had been struck in the flank unexpectedly and destroyed by superior infantry and armored forces.



The weak reinforcements thrown into combat could no longer save the situation. They were simply drawn into the whirl of events.

The reinforced regiment which had been dispatched to Saarburg, to our left neighbor, arrived too late, or did not succeed in making contact with the division there, to be effectively committed in the circumstances. Left to himself, the regimental CO had to take up the combat in Saarburg and on the heights north of the town, against unexpectedly appearing, superior tank and infantry forces, although he had no anti-tank weapons. The regiment was split up, destroyed and overrun. Attempts by the division to make contact with it had failed, and there was now a breach of eight kilometers from Saarburg to Gosselming. The area to the east stood open to the enemy for free operational action. The way through the Vosges into the Rhine plain was open, the splitting of the two armies final. The enemy was already advancing with motorized and armored forces from Saarburg via Saaraltroff, Oberstinzel and Rauviller in the direction of the Vosges pass to Pfalzburg, and thus reaching the division's rear communications.

The enemy's advance northwards to the west of the Saar was simply for the purpose of covering his flank. There was therefore no doubt that he would also cover his route of advance through Rauviller by attacking to the north. The important thing was to prevent these enemy forces from advancing further north.

Decision, which was approved by Corps HQ: New defense line along railroad south of Mittersheim - Berthelming - hills 322 and 332 (either side of Hellering) - hill 319 (north-east of Rauviller) - Schalbach.



How far the division was capable of holding this line, depended on what forces were still available. For the moment the elements of the left wing were still in the area south of Gosselming; their condition could not yet be reviewed. Corps HQ held out some hope of a few, small reinforcements, which the army wished to make available. Finally, the occupation of the proposed line depended on the behavior of the enemy. It could only be occupied where he had not yet penetrated. Of course, no attacks could be made for the purpose.

The combat strength of the left wing finally revealed itself as more favorable than was to be expected in the circumstances. Compared with the combat strength of the day before, there were still:

- in II Bn of 952 Rgt, after a loss of 50%, 150 men,
- in the 553 Inf Div battalions, after loss of 20%, 130 men,
- in the Fus Co, after loss of 15%, 100 men.

In addition, a unit of about 100 men was organized from gun crews who had become available. During the night, two police companies of the army arrived, whose combat value could not be highly rated.

These forces were committed to occupy the new, main defense line. They were very weak to put up an effective defense. The line could only be extended as far as the forest north-east of Rauvil.

In his eastward thrust the enemy had fortunately kept to the road. Points of main effort had to be formed where further enemy thrusts northward were most likely, which was, above all,



on the roads leading north from Hellering and Rauviller. The divisional CP was transferred to Diedendorf on the morning of 21 November.

Two staff officers were dispatched during the night, with the special mission of making contact with the supply troops. They never returned from this mission. The division therefore did not know the fate of the supply troops. To anticipate: as reported next day by the Chief Supply Officer, these troops, first of all going over automatically to local defense, could not hold up the enemy advance via Rauviller towards Hangviller. However, as G-4 was able to save the most important materiel before the enemy arrived, nearly all elements were pulled out of the danger zone, towards the north, during the night and with only a few casualties. The elements committed in the area of Lixheim had no contact with the enemy at all up to that time.

On the morning of 21 November, by superhuman efforts, the new front was established. For details see sketch . As the morning passed without the enemy attacking, the troops were able to install themselves more or less firmly in their positions. When, during the afternoon, enemy infantry put out weak feelers by Hellering and Rauviller, they could be repelled. On the other hand a report came in that enemy tanks were feeling their way forward to Drulingen. With what could this gap be blocked ?

In the night of 20/21 November the Corps Hq was transferred, in order to construct a new front along the edge of the Vosges. With what forces this was to be done was unknown to the division. The latter itself was placed under direct command of the army.



Direct communication with Corps Hq was cut from then on.

Combat outposts left in St Jean de Bassel had no contact with the enemy. On the right wing the enemy felt his way up to the front line with tanks, west of Mittersheim, without letting himself become engaged in combat. This was an indication, however, that something was being prepared there for the following days, since he attached importance to the road going east through Mittersheim.

Loose contact <sup>been</sup> had/taken up with the 11 Pz Div by the forest north of Loudrefing.

Thus, by his inactivity on 21 November, the enemy had allowed the division time to collect itself and reorganize. Its main anxiety, how to regain some firm support for the left wing, was very much relieved by an order received in the evening. This order required the withdrawal of the divisional front onto the line Ins-viller - Mittersheim - Fenetrangle - Baerendorf - Hirschland - to south of Drulingen. There it would be reinforced by the army assault battalion, the army escort company and a "Magen" battalion (composed of men with stomach ailments). The division was to co-operate with a Volks Arty Corps, which had for the moment two battalions, containing partly long-range guns which could be used to harass the enemy units on the march.

The divisional command decided to establish the course of the new front line in such a way that, by Mittersheim, a small bridge-head would be held, supported by the Grand Etang de Mittersheim; Finstingen and the heights north-west and north-east of Baerendorf would be incorporated in the line, which would continue past Hirsch-



land (inclusive), along the sector south of Weyer, to the forest south of Drulingen. While the 953 Gren Rgt combat team was now assembled on the west wing and around Mittersheim to concentrate its efforts there, the Magen Bn, which was subordinated to it, was committed in the stretch of forest between Mittersheim and Finstingen. Adjacent, under the command of the CO of the artillery regiment (the division had no other regimental staff at its disposal): the artillery unit between the forest and the Saar, the 553 Inf Div battalion up to Baerendorf (exclusive), the II Bn of 952 Rgt Baerendorf - Hirschland, adjoining this the police (two companies) and from Weyer to south of Drulingen the army assault battalion was to form the left wing, extending across the big road leading from Pfalzburg to Drulingen. As the division's only reserves, the Fus Co and the army escort company were transferred to Eschviller and Wolfskirchen respectively.

On the morning of 22 November, the front was established as ordered up to the western edge of Weyer. The army assault battalion, which had not arrived till late at night, could not have taken up its position yet. When I went to see the battalion commander that morning in Berg, he had just dispatched his companies to their sectors a few hours before. It was too soon for a report of their successful occupation to have come through. It was learned later that the company on the left encountered enemy armored reconnaissance cars in Drulingen, and did not occupy the locality. This caused a deviation of the left wing from Weyer to the edge of the forest north of Drulingen. In spite of orders from the division to attack Drulingen, which could only



be weakly held by the enemy at the time, the assault battalion did not manage to execute this mission, through lack of initiative. On the next day, it was already too late.

In the course of 22 November the enemy attacked by Mittersheim, with tanks. Making use of a smoke-screen and strong artillery fire, he forced a crossing over the canal, thrust into the locality and forced our garrison back to the edge of the forest. We had no anti-tank weapons there; he could not be held up by 2 cm MG. In the course of the afternoon he advanced on the road eastward, with his tanks, and arrived outside Finstingen. There he was successfully held by our anti-tank guns, which put several of his tanks out of action. Finstingen was held.

East of the Saar, the enemy first of all thrust towards Hirschland with a strong armored group, coming from Rauviller. Effectively opposed by concentrated artillery fire and by two of our tanks which, well concealed, opened fire from the Freywald (forest north of Hirschland), this group turned off to the east on the road to Weyer. In Weyer, overrunning the right wing of the army assault battalion, the group did not remain longer but departed towards the east. During the night of 21/22 November the division was supplied by the 11 Pz Div with one armored platoon, having only four tanks. This platoon, occupying an absolutely outstanding key-position on the high block north of Hirschland, from there saved the situation on several occasions during the following days. In addition the anti-tank defenses were further reinforced by:

1. 4 assault guns, which had been repaired by the <sup>division's</sup> assault gun company. These were held ready in Wolfskirchen, together with the



army escort company, as local supports for assault;

2. 5 anti-tank guns, which were brought up to the anti-tank company from a fortress anti-tank company. These were committed at Finstingen and north of Baerendorf;

3. the army assault battalion had brought along three anti-tank guns for its own protection.

Thus on its left wing (east of the Bois de Fenetrangle) the division again had at its disposal an anti-tank defense force of 16 pieces: 8 anti-tank guns, 4 tanks and 4 assault guns.

In the afternoon the enemy entered Baerendorf. No attack developed, as it was successfully held in check by our artillery. With that, the day ended.

The enemy had succeeded in capturing Mittersheim; he was outside Finstingen and in Baerendorf with tanks and infantry. As was to be expected, these three localities were to remain the crucial points in the engagements of the next few days. On the extreme left wing the day passed without notable events, but there were as yet no signs of a coming link-up with the Vosges front, which was said to be being prepared. The small gap in the front at Weyer, caused by the tanks rolling through, was repaired by the assault battalion. Only the police (west of Weyer), who were unused to combat, overcome with panic before the tanks, <sup>had</sup> fled from their position and had to be brought back into line again.

On 23 November the enemy, advancing along the Saar Coal-Canal from Mittersheim with tanks, succeeded in penetrating into the foremost position, but was successfully held up at Pont Neuf. Also, the commander of 953 Gren Rgt was compelled by events occurring in



the sector of the 11 Pz Div to pull back his right wing to the Munster - Rothof Ferme - Pont Neuf road. The Fla Battalion committed on either side of the canal did not appear to be equal to the situation, which fact had already been evident at Mittersheim. No wonder, since it lacked combat experience as infantry.

Towards noon the enemy entered Finstingen, having enveloped it on the northern side, and took full possession of the locality. The garrison, putting up a courageous resistance, succeeded in preventing the enemy from advancing further north on either side of the hill to the north of the locality.

On the other side of the Saar, the battalion of the 553 Inf Div, now threatened in flank and rear, began to waver. Its retirement was brought to a standstill, and a line reformed hard north of hill 316 - Postroff. At Baerendorf the enemy also attacked with infantry and tanks and achieved a break-through. However, there he was stopped by accurate artillery fire and the intervention of our tanks. During the afternoon the enemy unexpectedly broke into Weyer. A counter-attack by the assault battalion was unsuccessful. The police retired into the forest, thus leaving a wide breach in the front, which was fortunately not exploited by the enemy.

The day again showed that the enemy was anxious to gain ground as far north as possible in the general direction of Saar-Union. Owing to already partially accomplished facts, and in order to shorten the front, the division was compelled to establish a new line during the night, as follows: Munster - Fenetrangle road (as far as the lake north-west of Fenetrangle) - southern exit of Nieder-



stinzel - southern tip of the Bois d'Isch - Postroff - Eschviller - center of the forest south-east of Eyviller - edge of the forest north of Drulingen.

Unfortunately the tank platoon placed at the division's disposition by the 11 Pz Div, and which had been so outstandingly effective, was removed again.

On the evening of 23 November, the commander of an army engineer battalion appeared at divisional headquarters, having been assigned the mission of laying mine-fields between Drulingen and Tiefenbach. We agreed that he should first of all hastily lay mine-fields against tanks and infantry in as great a depth as possible following the course of the roads from Drulingen to Saar-Union and Petersbach - Assweiler - Rexingen. These mine-fields should remain occupied and be finally closed off in the event of enemy attacks. In this way at least something could be done to delay an enemy advance in the sector of this exposed wing. In the Moder sector, east of Tiefenbach, other engineer forces were to be assigned, to prevent an enemy advance in the Vosges by erecting obstacles there. Our own engineer battalion was continuously occupied with laying mines and placing abatis in the main defense line.

On 24 November, on the extreme right wing in the neighborhood of Rothof Ferme and in the forest north of the Saar Coal-Canal, combats developed in the nature of assault patrol engagements, in which the enemy committed tanks even in the forest. The line was held in spite of a few penetrations. In Niederstinzel the enemy broke in, but was thrown out again by a counter-attack. At about the same time, towards noon, the enemy pushed into Eschviller and Eyviller, with tanks. Eschviller was retaken in a counter-attack



by the Fus Company with the support of the assault guns, but Eyviller remained in enemy hands. The tanks had withdrawn from the locality again.

During the late afternoon the enemy once more attacked Eschviller with tanks, and Postroff at the same time. He penetrated into both localities. The army escort company, committed in Postroff with the aim of reversing the situation, also supported by the assault guns, did not succeed in retaking the locality. It remained on the northern edge. Two assault guns were put out of action by the enemy. The Fus Co, which had been overrun by the enemy in Eschviller, was able to seal off the breach with the elements which had escaped, on the slope to the north of the locality. Thus during the night a continuous line - although of course weakened by losses - was established just north of the two localities. The day had swallowed up the last small reserves of the division. The following day could only be awaited with the greatest anxiety, particularly as the penetration at Eyviller could not be eliminated.

In the afternoon however, like a "saviour in need", appeared the commander of the Armored Training Division. He was to begin a southward thrust into the rear part of the enemy flank, already on the following night (24/25 November). However, as his movements had been delayed owing to fuel shortage, his division's assembly could not be completed before the evening of 25 November; the attack had to be postponed until the night of 25/26 November. The elements of my division located east of the Saar were to be placed under his command. I came to an agreement with him that the elements basically forming a part of my division (II Bn/952 Rgt,



Fus Co, and elements of the Pak and assault gun companies) should be at my disposal once his attack was under way. Concerning the best way of carrying out this attack, my view was that it should be launched with its main weight over the line Baerendorf - Hirschland, heading for HELLERING - RAUVILLER; from there, according to the situation, the forces would thrust either through the forest south of RAUVILLER or east of it. We both agreed that the forces at his disposal were inadequate for the successful execution of his mission.

On 25 November, my division therefore had to take over the protection of the Armored Training Division while this was in the process of assembling, in the Wolfskirchen area and to the east. As the first elements had arrived the night before, I had some reinforcements in my rear on 25 November, which relieved my anxiety about the threatening enemy break-through at this point.

On 25 November the enemy did not attack in the sector of the left wing up to and including Postroff; but, just east of the Saar, he pressed back the 553 Inf Div battalion into the Bois de l'Isch.

West of the Saar he repeated his attack on Niederstinzeln and captured the locality. West of the Saar Coal-Canal, various penetrations in the forest and the situation of the 11 Pz Div in the neighborhood of Munster necessitated a withdrawal of the right wing. On orders from the division, it fell back during the night onto the line: Altviller - Chateau Bonne Fontaine - course of the road to Niederstinzeln - southern edge of the Bois de l'Isch. The divisional CP was transferred to an estate one kilometer south-east of Saar-Union. On the starlit night of 25/26 November the Armored Training Division launched its attack. The 361 Division was able -

as agreed - to pull out the units belonging to it, the same night, and bring them up as reserves into the forest west of Rimsdorf. The other elements located east of the Saar came under the command of the Armored Training Division.

By the following morning the Armored Training Division's attack had reached the line Helling - Rauviller, but there it came to a standstill. Two days later, after attempts to succeed further east by means of regrouping, the operation had to be given up.

The 361 Div was able, on the whole, to maintain the line it held west of the Saar on the evening of 25 November. Near Bonne Fontaine it could even report a successful combat patrol operation, carried out at night, in which 50 prisoners were taken.

During the night of 30 November to 1 December all elements of the division west of the Saar were withdrawn from commitment there, being relieved by the 25 Pz Gren Division. The division was transferred the same night to its new area of commitment in the lower Vosges.

The 361 Volks Gren Div may claim credit for having, during the period from 20 November until the intervention of the Armored Training Division, prevented an enemy break-through on either side of the Saar towards Saar-Union, although its forces were weak and very battle-weary. The division cannot be blamed for the break-through via Saarburg towards the Vosges passes on either side of Pfalzburg, on 20 November. Being weakened by the removal of a reinforced regiment, it was no longer in a position, with the means at its disposal, to hold up a so much superior enemy.

The reinforced 952 Gren Rgt, transferred from the division, and



the remnants of the 553 Inf Div fought their way back to Arviller after the hopeless battle for Saarburg on 20 November. From there they were compelled by a superior enemy to fall back on Pfalzburg, where, on 22 November, they were encircled. On orders from the headquarters of LXXXIX Army Corps, which was in a similar position in Zabern, the larger part of the troops, having destroyed their heavy weapons, succeeded during the following night in escaping out of the pocket and fighting their way out north, through the mountains, in separate groups.

The 11 Pz Div had succeeded, by local counter-attacks, in holding up the enemy when he started to advance north-east out of the Benestroff area on 20 November. The break-through of enemy armored formations was thus so long delayed, that they only reached the Saar, between Saaralben and Saar-Union, on 30 November.

V. Combats in the northern Vosges from 1.12 - 15.12.44.

## (Sketch 4)

After marches of 50 km and more the division arrived, on 1 December, in its Vosges sector: Frohmuehl (east of Tiefenbach) - Wingen - Wimmenau - edge of the mountains north-west of Ingwiller. Certain elements were sent on in advance by truck transport. They relieved a security force of engineers there in the morning, and established contact with the reconnaissance battalion of the Armored Training Division, which was committed east of the mountains for security and reconnaissance purposes. The majority of the units had arrived by noon, so that in the course of the day and the following night a defensive front could be established, consisting of a succession of organized tactical localities. In addition the units of the reinforced 952 Gren Rgt, which had been reformed meanwhile in the rear area and partly rearmed, could be committed so that the division's fighting power was reinforced by two weak battalions and the regimental units.

The division here again came under the command of its old HQ, LXXXIX Army Corps, which had escaped from its encirclement in Zabern and, after an adventurous journey, installed itself again in Bitsch. The infantry general, Hoehne, had become Commanding General in the meantime. The Corps HQ had under its command, apart from the 361 Volks Gren Div, the 256 Volks Gren Div which was just arriving in the area of Hagenauer Forst and to the east of it, and the 245 Inf Div, which was being committed gradually, one battalion after the other, between Hagenauer Forst and the edge of the mountains, linking up with our division. Adjacent on the right of 361 Div was the army



assault battalion, which was now subordinate to the 25 Pz Gren Div.

The 361 Volks Gren Div was disposed as follows, in the Moder sector:

on the right, 953 Gren Rgt (II Bn/953, Fla Bn) in the strong-points: Hinsburg, Puberg and Wingen;

on the left, 952 Gren Rgt (II Bn/952, I Bn/951) in the strong-points: Wimmenau and hill 300 (2 km north-west of Ingviller).

Contact between these strongpoints was maintained by security detachments. Security detachments were also sent forward on the roads and paths towards the south. One battalion (I Bn/952) was held in Lichtenberg as reserve for the division. In addition the division still had the Magen Bn at its disposal, but this was not to be committed for the moment. Of the artillery, each light battalion was directed to cooperate with one infantry regiment; the heavy battalion superimposed, to support them. The II Battalion of 361 Arty Rgt, which had lost its guns in the battle around Saarburg and east of there, was not yet ready for action. The anti-tank elements were committed in Wingen and on the Wimmenau - Reipertsweiler road. The divisional CP was moved to Houterhouse.

While there was as yet no contact with the enemy before the divisional front - up till then enemy forces were only reported on the mountain road through La Petite - Pierre, Eckartsviller towards the east - , he continued his attack west of the mountains, and east of them pushed forward onto the Moder sector and thrust right through it, before the 245 Inf Div had succeeded in establishing itself there on a continuous front.

At first the division carried on lively reconnaissance patrol activity up to the road La Petite Pierre - Eckartsviller - Sparsbach - Ingviller. Brisk movement of motorized forces was observed there and some prisoners brought in. The first impression was that the enemy did not intend for the moment to attack through the mountains against the divisional front. Finally however, the division did become implicated on both wings when its two neighbors were forced to retire. And in the end the enemy attack was also extended onto the division's right wing, in the mountain terrain.

On the division's left wing, the advance security detachment at the mill 1.5 km north-west of Ingviller was attacked, on 2 December, by tanks and driven back to the main line of defense. The enemy pressed forward as far as the entrance to the mountains north of there, and was repelled. The reconnaissance battalion belonging to the Armored Training Division had <sup>been</sup> moved away before the 245 Div could link up with us. This contact was never made, because the 245 Div never reached the Moder sector. Elements of its right wing were already attacked in the stretches of forest north-east of the locality, and in the following days were pressed back further and further east - thus every day exposing the left flank of our division to the enemy, in greater depth.

On 3 December the enemy advanced to the attack against the division's left wing. He succeeded in enveloping it on the north, and driving forward onto hill 300. With effective artillery support the hill was retaken in a counter-attack, but the enemy could not be completely forced out of the forest. He stood firm on its edge. In order to protect our flank the I Bn/952 Gren Rgt had to



be committed with elements along the edge of the mountains to a point immediately west of Rothbach.

On 4 December the enemy attempted to force an entry into the mountains north of Ingviller. He thrust with infantry through the forest, and with tanks along the road. The tanks were driven off by artillery and heavy infantry gun fire. Enemy infantry however, established itself on the railroad west of hill 300. An enemy attack on Wimmenau, undertaken during the afternoon with infantry and armored reconnaissance cars, was repelled; on this occasion two damaged armored reconnaissance cars were captured. Hill 300 was disputed in severe combat during the next few days; it was attacked again daily from east and west. The enemy wanted to secure this point out of our defense line, in order thus to control the entrance to the mountains. In <sup>this</sup> changing and bitter forest fighting, however, the hill was successfully held.

Owing to the fact that on 4 December the right wing of 245 Inf Div was forced back over the Rothbach river, the enemy penetrated into Rothbach with infantry and tanks during the following night. The Magen Battalion, which was committed there as further extension of the curved wing, arrived too late to prevent this.

On 5 December the enemy attacked there and advanced in the forest to the hill west of Rothbach. A counter-attack by elements of I Bn/952 Rgt deprived him of the hill again, but here too, he could not be thrown out of the forest, nor could Rothbach be recaptured.

On 6 December the enemy already established himself in Offviller, and by 10 December he was able to uncover the flank of the division on

past Zinswiler to Oberbronn. As the division had committed its last reserves to protect this flank on the edge of the mountains up to Offwiler, it could from now on only help itself by placing abatis and mine-fields. In addition to its own engineer battalion, an army engineer battalion was also committed for this purpose. In these combats on the flank, which, in the wooded terrain, again caused considerable losses, the enemy could not achieve any outstanding success. He remained on the edge of the forest, and from 7 December onwards gave up his attempts to penetrate further.

On the right wing the division also had an "uncertain" neighbor. At Frohmuehl, from the beginning, it had never succeeded in making proper contact with the army assault battalion. Already on 3 December the enemy drove a wedge between the assault battalion and the division's right wing, and thrust north between Weisslingerhof and Buchwald. On 4 December Weisslingerhof was lost and the assault battalion thrown back to the edge of the forest north of the locality.

Now, from 5 December onwards, the enemy attack overlapped onto the divisional sector as well. Enemy entered Puberg. A counter-attack to retrieve the situation failed. Artillery support in the wooded terrain was difficult. It could not - also in the following days - give the heavily engaged infantry the necessary assistance. As the enemy also entered the Buchwald (forest) from the west, the right wing had to be pulled back during the night, from Wingen on, to the railroad and the northern edge of the Buchwald.

After breaking through between Rosteig and Wingen on 6 December, the enemy thrust into Wingen from the west, in company strength.



While the main defense line on the southern outskirts held, house-to-house fighting developed in the locality. When darkness had fallen the enemy was successfully overwhelmed in a counter-attack, and 140 prisoners taken. To the east of Rosteig other enemy elements had taken a hold in the forest, and could not be driven out. The enemy also entered the forest south of Volksberg, after the assault battalion had been forced back still further. The regiment committed a small reserve force to seal off this penetration, on the road south of Volksberg.

On 7 December the enemy took Volksberg; with further forces he thrust north via Rosteig and Hochberg. The weak security detachments could not prevent his gaining the road north-west of Kohlhuette. There were not enough reserves to retrieve this situation. During the night, abandoning Wingen, the right wing had to be taken back to the line Soucht - Meisenthal - road to Wimmenau. Wimmenau was still held. Since the line was very weakly held and had many gaps, and timely artillery support could not be counted on due to the restricted visibility in the forest terrain, further, deep, enemy penetrations had to be expected.

While on 8 December enemy attacks on Meisenthal and - a little later - on Soucht were repelled, enemy forces unexpectedly appeared outside Montbronn - again coming from the west ! The regiment had, in anticipation, committed its last reserves (engineer and bicycle platoon) for the protection of the artillery located north of the locality. The enemy was prevented from breaking into the town. During the night, this combat team was reinforced by an emergency unit of 60 men, collected and formed by the division. In changing combats on 9 December, Montbronn was held against repeated attacks and enemy penetrations, until

the evening - with the effective support of the III Battalion of 351 Artillery Rgt. On the other hand the enemy succeeded during the afternoon in breaking through east of Meisenthal, on the road and in the forest. He arrived before Sarreinsberg, where the regimental staff and a few artillerymen were able to hold him up on the southern outskirts until the evening.

In these circumstances the deeply indented front could no longer be held. It would not have been possible to hold up an enemy breakthrough on the following day. Therefore a drastic decision had to be taken. The division requested its withdrawal onto the line: Lemberg - Mouterhouse - Baerenthal - Philippsburg - Niederbronn, and the shifting of its right sector boundary to just west of Lemberg, which request was approved by the corps. The withdrawal took place on the night from 9/10 December. The divisional CP was transferred to the Stuerzelbronn forester's house. In this way, at least the deeply exposed flanks on either side were eliminated for the moment, and the troops in the front line again had a clearly defined sector before them - even if it presented <sup>an</sup> unfavorable character between Lemberg and Fournau. There was no doubt that the enemy would continue to attack on either side of Lemberg, with the aim of pushing through, following the course of the road, to Bitsch. For this reason we had to concentrate our effort at that point.

The fighting power of the infantry had dwindled to such an extent in the bitter forest fighting of the last ten days, that the division was compelled to adopt the most extreme emergency measures in order to be able to carry on the combat. All formations not committed at the front were once again "combed out", to find every man



who could be made available. By this means it was possible to supply reinforcements in personnel, above all for 953 Gren Rgt, which had to continue bearing the brunt of the combat. The II Bn/953 Rgt could be brought up again to a strength of 200, and

the Fla battalion was also raised to the same combat strength by the use of personnel from the rear formations. The combat strength of the battalions of 952 Gren Rgt was still 120 - 150.

On 10 December in the morning the II Bn/953 Rgt installed itself in defensive positions on either side of Lemberg, and the Fla Battalion adjacent to it occupied the sector up to and including Mouterhouse. The 952 Gren Rgt took over the adjoining sector up to the exit from the mountains at Niederbronn. Lemberg was reinforced as a strong-point, especially by five anti-tank guns and four 2-cm MG. In addition, engineers mined the road from Goetzenbrück to Lemberg and the stretches of forest on either side of it, during the night, and a road bridge just south of the locality was blown up. Advance combat outposts were placed on either side of the road. To the east of Lemberg the division was in contact with the 25 Pz Gren Div. On 10 December there was no contact with the enemy along the whole divisional front. When I visited the CO of II Bn/953 Rgt in Lemberg towards 08.00 hours on 11 December, the locality was under fire from enemy artillery; in addition, enemy tanks were just feeling their way forward along the road. When these reached the blown bridge however, they stopped and turned away again when they were fired on by anti-tank guns. In the afternoon an enemy assault patrol

thrust into Mouterhouse, but was repelled at the cemetery. On the other hand enemy forces broke into the front line at point 345 east of Lemberg, before darkness fell, and pressed forward in the forest and the group of houses east of Lemberg. They could not be forced back from there at night.

On 12 December the enemy attacked Lemberg, and to the west of it. Whereas on the southern outskirts of Lemberg the attack was brought to a halt by accurate artillery fire, the enemy succeeded in penetrating at Enchenberg and east of it, into the sector of our right neighbor. To the east of Lemberg also, the enemy continued his attack, exploiting his break-through of the previous evening, and advanced as far as the railroad. In the afternoon, enemy tanks attacked Lemberg from the west; they succeeded in breaking into the locality. Since it was now enveloped on two sides, the town had to be given up. The enemy had also thrust forward east of point 345 as far as hill 406. Thus by the evening of 12 December the right wing was forced back onto the line from the hill north of Lemberg to the railroad north of point 406. The regiment succeeded in reestablishing a coherent security line <sup>there</sup> during the night.

On 13 December the enemy extended the area of his break-through towards the east, by capturing the hill west of point 233 and advancing near Mouterhouse to the southern edge of hill 345. A break-through on the railroad north of point 406 led to the loss of the ridge north of point 305. Our right neighbor had been forced back on Lambach, while the II Bn/952 Rgt still held on either side of the road just north of Lemberg.



Meanwhile our left neighbor had been pressed back into the district east of Windstein. The 952 Gren Rgt, which was harassed in front only by a few enemy assault patrols, which could be repelled by artillery, now again had a defensive flank which "eat up" its reserves. Another withdrawal of the front was necessary. The division also requested the shifting of its sector boundary east of Bitsch, as it did not consider itself in a position to undertake the defense of this locality. Both proposals were approved. On the morning of 14 December the new defense line was <sup>occupied</sup> as follows: railway guard's house 3 km south of Bitsch - hill 350 (1.5 km south-west of Eguelshardt) - Bannstein - Mambach - southern exit of Dambach - Windstein. The right wing just west of the railroad 1 km north-west of point 346.

On 14 and 15 December the enemy only attacked the right wing along the railroad and east of point 346; he made penetrations, but these were eliminated or sealed off. However, he drove our right neighbor back to the outskirts of Bitsch. North-west of Bitsch there was heavy fighting for <sup>works</sup> of the Maginot line. Our left neighbor's right wing was forced <sup>back</sup> further north, past Lembach. The enemy even succeeded, by 18 December, in driving this division back to the West Wall, and capturing certain bunkers west of Weissenburg.

In the night from 15 to 16 December the last withdrawal movement in this phase of the combats was executed, by order of the corps headquarters. The division took up positions in the following line: northern tip of pond 1.5 km south-east of Bitsch - hill 348 - Eguelshardt - northern edge of Hanau pond - hill 369 - southern extension of Neudoerfel - Obersteinbach - Niedersteinbach.

The divisional CP was transferred to the Ludwigswinkel forester's house.

After 15 December, the enemy's large-scale attack died down along the entire front - also on either side of the division -, obviously as a result of the Ardennes offensive. On the division's front, all became completely quiet. It was discovered by reconnaissance that only one enemy reconnaissance battalion was securing practically the whole front before the division. Only before the extreme right wing were there still elements of the American 100 Division. There - to the west of Eguelshardt - abandoned enemy field positions were even discovered, after 20 December.

The division's delaying action in the Vosges territory was chiefly determined by the enemy's outflanking movements, and threat to the division's flanks from the neighboring sectors on either side. Deep flanks consumed forces which - committed in the front line - would have rendered a stronger, and perhaps successful, resistance possible. Above all, since the forested nature of the terrain restricted the line of vision, which meant that artillery support for the most part failed to be effective, the troops sparsely occupying the front line - more in the nature of security detachments - could not resist stronger enemy attacks. A delaying action as fought by the division, lap by lap, was thus the sole solution, allowing the enemy to gain ground only gradually, to keep him from reaching the West Wall, for as long as possible. The division succeeded in the last phase in maintaining its position in a wide, forward arc still ten kilometers south of the West Wall.



In the following period the division prepared for its commitment in the West Wall. It also made use of the lull on the front to reconstitute its formations, particularly since some replacements and new weapons were arriving. When these measures were well under way, the division was assigned a new mission, concerning which a report has already been written.

sgd. PHILIPPI

Appendix 1 Order of Battle of 361 Volks Grenadier Division.

Printing Map Section  
Platoon

same same  
as 1 as 1

same as  
953

supply rgt.

Mtr	1&2 horse-	Admin	Vet	Medical	Ambulance	Mainte-
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Co	port columns				1 & 2	Artifi-
						cer Pla-
						toon.



MS # B-626

- b -

Sketch 1

Position of 361 VGD from 25.10 to 7.11.1944

559 VGD

(from 12.10.)  
26 DIV

I Bn/951 (Fus Co)

553 Inf Div

Explanations:

Main defense line from 25.10 onwards.

approved large-scale combat position from 9.11 onwards.

Scale 1 : 100 000

MS # E-626.

- e -

Sketch 4.

Position of 361 VGD from 1.12 to 31.12.44.

Scale 1 : 100 000

Explanations:

Position from 1.12. to 9.12:

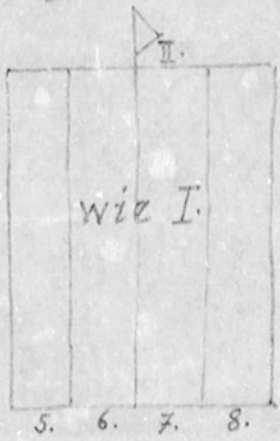
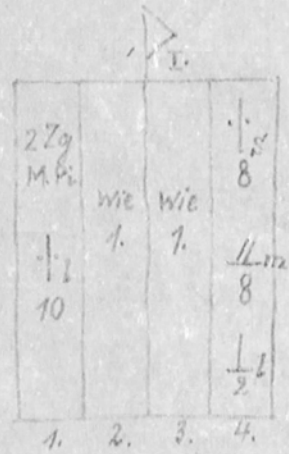
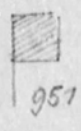
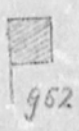
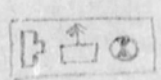
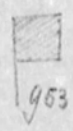
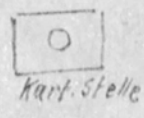
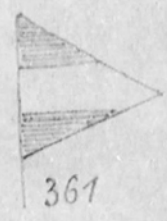
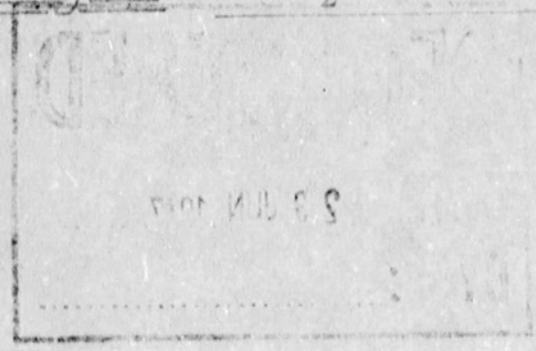
" " 10.12. "13.12:

" " 14.12. "15.12:

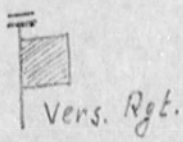
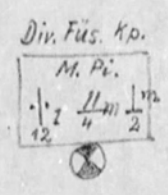
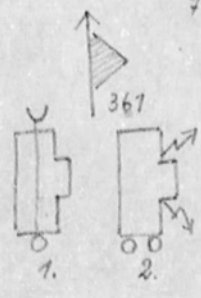
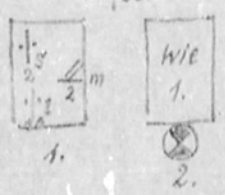
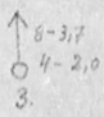
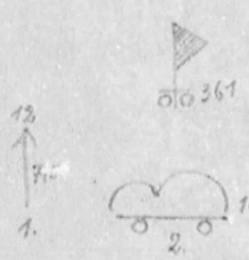
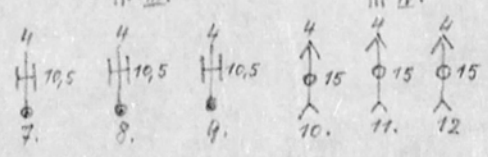
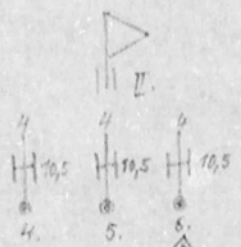
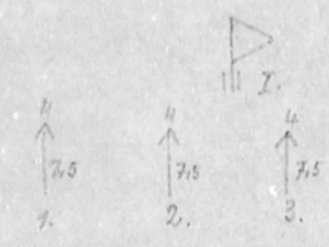
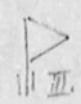
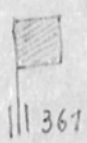
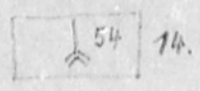
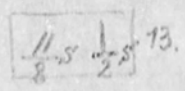
" " 16.12. "31.12:



# Anlage 1 Kriegs-Gliederung der 361. Volks-Grenadier-Division

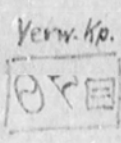
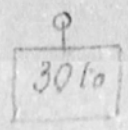
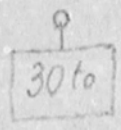
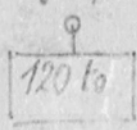


wie 953

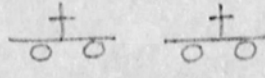


Kf. Kp.

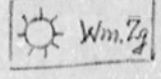
1. + 2. Fahrschw.



Kr. Kw. Zg 1+2

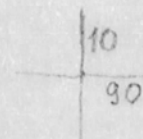


J. Kp.



ANLAGE 2.

LAGE AM 6.6.84°



352.  
Dir.

Brechy

Tbaon

Plumetot

Y. 6

Sequeville

Gairn

Cambo

9.1 R Div.

Blainville

Lobigny

Hevrouville

711. Div.

15. Armee

716 Div.

CAEN

Prof. Wagner

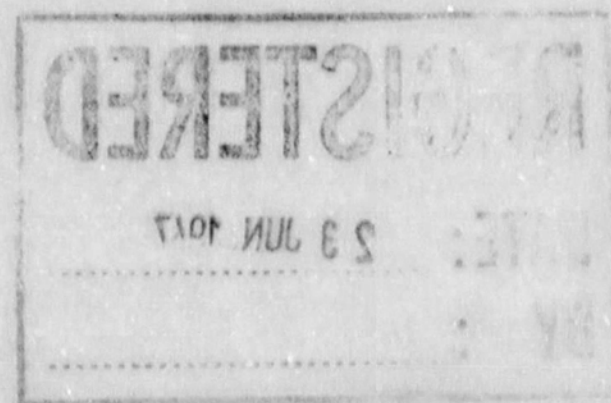
16  
Anno's. O.



Skizze 1

Lage der 361. V.G.D. vom 25. 10 bis 7. 11. 44.

559. V.G.D.



30

45

361.



LXXXIX.

953

952

II.

II.

26. Div.  
(ab 12. 10.)

II/951 (Füs. Kp)

30

10

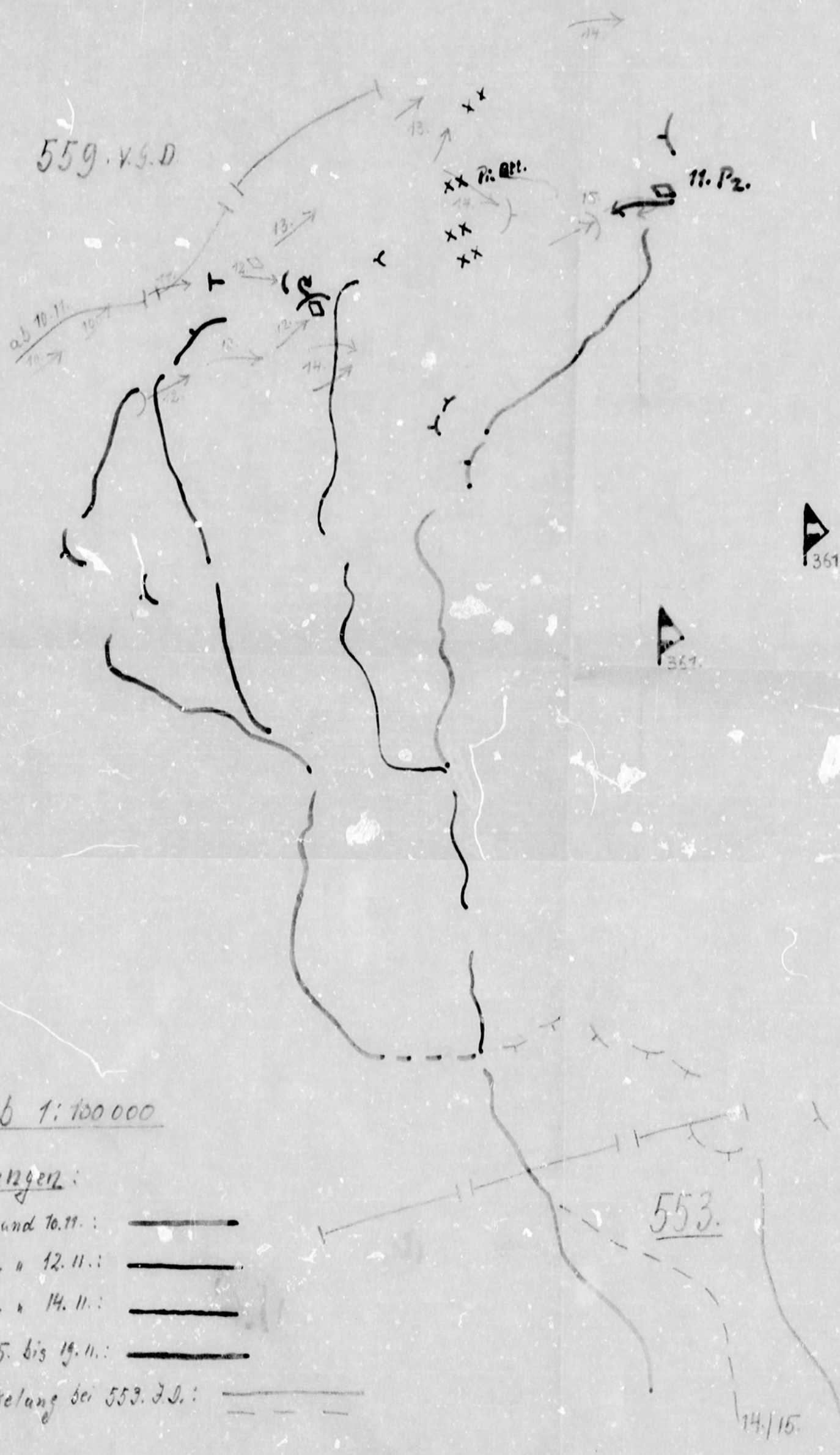
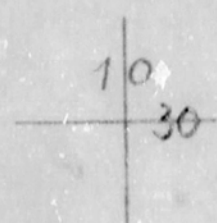
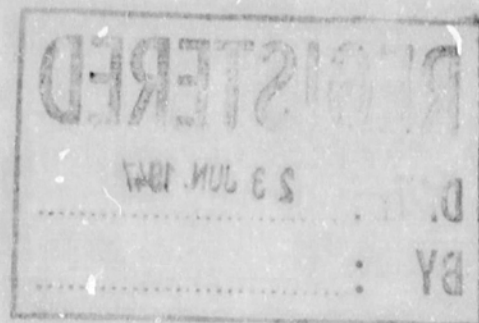
553. J.D.

Erläuterungen: ——— = HKL ab 25. 10.- - - = genehmigte Grosskampfstellung  
ab 9. 11.Massstab: 1:100 000

Mikipp.



Skizze 2. Lage bei 361.V.G.D. vom 8. bis 19. 11. 44

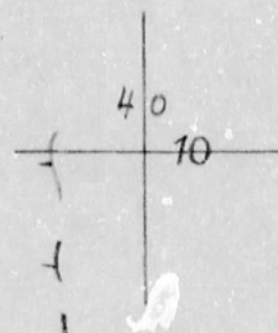


Massstab 1:100 000

Erläuterungen:

- Lage am 9. und 10. 11.: ———
- " " 11. " 12. 11.: ———
- " " 13. " 14. 11.: ———
- " vom 15. bis 19. 11.: ———

Lageentwicklung bei 553. J.D.: ———



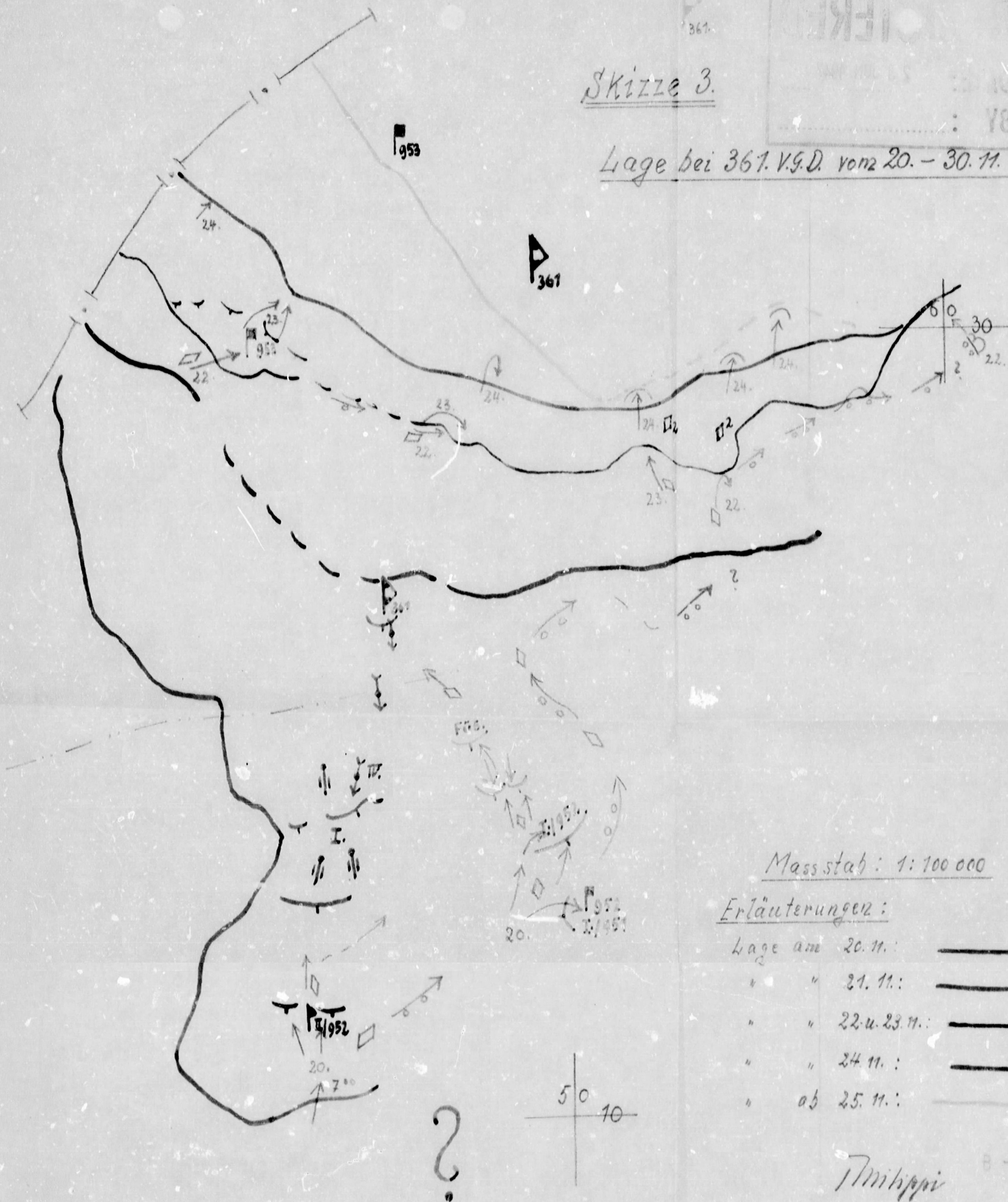
8-626

Mississippi



# Skizze 3.

Lage bei 361. V.G.D. vom 20. - 30. 11. 44



Massstab: 1:100 000

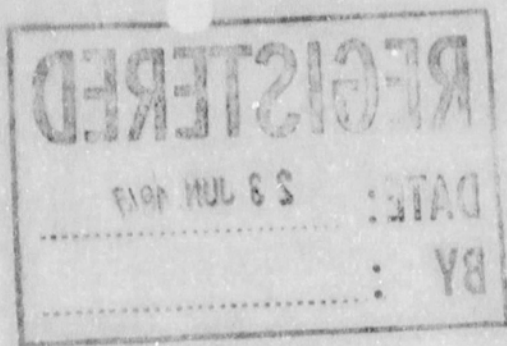
## Erläuterungen:

Lage am	20. 11.:	_____
"	" 21. 11.:	_____
"	" 22. u. 23. 11.:	_____
"	" 24. 11.:	_____
"	ab 25. 11.:	_____

Thippi

B - 6 2 6





626

Skizze 4.

Lage der 361. V.G.D. vom 1.12. bis 31.12.44.

361.

361



Massstab: 1:100000

Erläuterungen:

Lage vom 1.12. bis 9.12.:   
" " 10.12. " 13.12.:   
" " 14.12. " 15.12.:   
" " 16.12. " 31.12.:

Mihjui