CHAPTER SEVEN

ROER TO THE RHINE

The Rhine has always been a symbol of German pride and a significant boundary throughout history. The Romans set up garrison towns along the west bank of the river in order to protect their empire from the German tribes.[1] Basel, Strasbourg, Mainz, Koblenz, Bonn, and Cologne began as Roman outposts. Although the Romans had forts east of the Rhine, the commanders never wintered there, but always returned to the garrisons on the west bank at the end of summer campaigns against the German tribesmen. In 9 A.D., P. Quintilius Varus, the commander of the Roman army in Germany lost three Roman legions to Arminius the Cheruscan chieftain. The attack happened as Varus was returning to his winter quarters north of Cologne. This episode sent Augustus Caesar into deep mourning and changed his frontier policy. Augustus had previously planned to make the Elbe the boundary of the Roman Empire in the north but after the defeat of Varus he abandoned all thought of a frontier beyond the Rhine. The defense of the Rhine was reinforced and reorganized and the eight remaining legions were

garrisoned in permanent camps. One of the Roman legions was established at Neuss. Napoleon also placed the boundary of his French frontier along the Rhine River.

As the Allies approached the German homeland the mystique of the Rhine remained and in the hearts of most military men the Rhine was a very tempting goal. Although the Allied planners had decided to attempt to cross the Rhine at only two preplanned points, most of the American corps and division commanders seemed to have had a secret resolve to try a crossing in their own sectors if the opportunity presented itself.

One of the two designated crossing points was in the north between Emmerich and Wesel, and the other was to the south between Mainz and Karlsruhre.(Fig. 73) The northern objective was in General Montgomery's zone of action and the southern site (and of secondary importance to the planners) was in General Patton's sector.

Before the winter interruption of the German Ardennes counteroffensive, the Allied strategy had been aimed at the Ruhr industrial pocket and the major effort was to have been launched in the north by Montgomery's 21st Army Group.

After the US First and Third Armies had erased the last of the German bulge, General Bradley's 12th Army Group lost some of its divisions to General Simpson's Ninth Army which was to be part of Montgomery's push to the Rhine in the north. The 83d was one of the divisions that was

assigned to the Ninth Army. In Montgomery's original plan, the twelve American divisions of the Ninth Army would not take part in the initial Rhine action. It was to be an all-British campaign. After some complaints by American commanders that the plan wasted valuable resources, Montgomery changed his orders to include the American divisions at a point south of his major effort. The Americans would cross at the town of Wesel.

Generals Bradley, Hodges, and Patton situated along the southern boundary, did not wish to be left out of the drive to the Rhine. They had momentum after rolling back the bulge and wanted to participate in the renewed offensive toward Germany. Bradley's forces remained in the Eifel area, which was the difficult terrain alongside and similar to the Ardennes. General Eisenhower agreed to allow this "broad front strategy", provided Bradley's 12th Army Group could make a swift penetration of the Siegfried Line, the Rhine River, and then turn north to engulf the Ruhr. Otherwise, the emphasis and troops would revert to Montgomery.[2]

Interestingly, the Germans expected the Allied return to the pre-bulge strategy and therefore shifted the V Panzer Army north in order to be opposite Simpson's Ninth Army. In addition, the German VI Panzer Army was sent to the Eastern Front. So there was the same old assumption in reverse, the Germans did not think the Americans would

launch an offensive through the Eifel.

Although there appeared to be great opportunity, the troops were weary after the bulge and the terrain and weather conditions were terrible. There was very little progress. By 1 February they had struggled only right up to the Siegfried Line, therefore, Bradley had to shift seven divisions to the Ninth Army. This did not prevent Bradley and Patton from continuing to thrust toward the Rhine. Patton interpreted his orders broadly and churned toward the river with tenacity. In fact, on 7 March it was along this southern portion of the Allied lines that members of the First Army captured a bridge intact at Remagen. The bridgehead was not exploited and plans continued to focus on Montgomery's crossing in the north. The territory on the eastern side of the Remagen bridge was tough and unfavorable as an approach to the target areas east of the Rhine River. The high command decided that the Remagen bridgehead was most useful to draw off German troops from the scheduled crossings.[3]

General Simpson's Ninth Army was to cross the Roer on 9 February, but the Germans blew up the dams near Monshau causing the river to be impassable until 23 February. On that day the Ninth Army crossed the Roer and established a bridgehead on the east bank in Operation Grenade. At the same time Collins' VII Corps, part of Hodges' First Army, had a very difficult crossing of the rampaging Roer farther

south. Their mission was to protect the southern flank of the Ninth Army.

From 6 February until 28 February, the 329th Regiment was moved to Holland, but stayed in reserve. By late February the 83d Division was assigned to Major General Raymond S. McLain's XIX Corps for the Allied offensive into Germany. The corps was to drive from the Roer River to the Rhine. The 83d was to advance to the town of Neuss on the west bank of the Rhine, capture it, and secure the three Rhine River bridges connecting Neuss with Dusseldorf on the east bank of the river. By 2 March, Neuss was secured. Unfortunately, the bridges were blown one after another before the Americans could take them. Although an Allied crossing of the Rhine River was not accomplished until six days later further south at Remagen, the 83d Division were the first American troops to reach the Rhine. This is Sharpe's story about the 2d Battalion's advance to the Rhine River.

* * *

We spent most of February in training on the canals and rivers of Holland and with a few soldiers enjoying occasional passes to Liege, Belgium.

On 3 February our 774th Tank Battalion was replaced by the 736th Tank Battalion. On 5 February we were ordered to

remove our shoulder patches and cover our vehicle identifications in preparation for a move. On 6 February we moved from Tohogue, Belgium to the vicinity of Maastricht, Holland. Our mission was to be part of the Ninth Army reserve, with more concentrated river crossing practice in anticipation of shortly crossing the Roer and Rhine Rivers.

The rivers and canals in Holland were swollen and we could expect the same on the Roer and Rhine. Most of our new replacements had only a smattering of information about river crossings and no real experience, so we practiced river crossings day and night. (Fig. 74) Trying to master the art of moving units during darkness to the river bank, launching the flat bottom assault boats, getting the squad into the boat, paddling to the far side, all with stealth, was no easy task.

Two men, usually engineers, paddled back to the starting bank and picked up the second wave, third wave, etc. until the men were all across. Once the assault units of infantry had reached the far bank, they assembled at designated areas, and then attempted to establish a perimeter defense on the far shore. This is technically referred to as a bridgehead. The object is to move the perimeter as far inland as possible, in keeping with the basic plan of attack. Ideally, the bridgehead is deep enough to keep the enemy artillery from firing on the river

crossing activities. As aids to make the exercise as realistic as possible, we used blanks, demolitions, and smoke in our training.

The morale of our officers and men was stimulated not only by the concentrated training but also by our proximity to the city of Liege where they could enjoy the USO shows as well as local color. Each company was permitted to send ten percent of their assigned strength on pass into town at any one time. The privilege was mostly well handled but occasionally individuals would enjoy themselves too much. Such was the case one evening when among the pass contingent were two company commanders from the 2d Battalion, 329th, both captains of infantry. As the story goes they thoroughly enjoyed themselves to the extent they felt obliged to establish their prowess as the toughest of the tough. They had respectable credentials. One was a judo belt holder and the other a real cowboy from out west in the US. They managed to offend the rear echelon soldiers and a fight ensued. They were apprehended by the MPs and taken to the station. At that point the two decided they were not going to be locked up and set about to lick the entire twelve member military police station force. Thence they were released to return to their units. The next day I received a call from an apparently embarrassed MP officer who simply requested that the two mad captains not be permitted to come on pass to Liege.

The XIX Corps commander, General Raymond McLain issued an attack plan that would commit four divisions across the Roer River and hopefully across the Rhine River if we were fortunate enough to capture a bridge intact. (Fig. 75)

The corps attack plan designated the 29th and the 30th Infantry Divisions to force a crossing over the Roer. For the initial crossing the 330th Regimental Combat Team of the 83d Division was attached to the 29th Division. The initial objectives of the two assault divisions were far enough past the river to permit the engineers to build their pontoon bridges over the Roer River in the vicinity of Julich. (Fig. 76) The bridges were to be capable of carrying our medium tanks. The two other divisions, the 2d Armored Division and the 83d Infantry Division, were to cross as soon as possible behind the two lead divisions, pass through the lead divisions and continue the attack toward the Rhine River. The 29th Division was to move toward Monchen-Gladbach, the 2d Armored Divsion was to go northeast toward Krefeld, and the 83d Division northeast to Neuss and Dusseldorf.

On 23 February the attack was initiated with a trememdous artillery barrage preparation that lasted over a half hour. There were approximately twenty-one battalions of all calibers with at least twelve guns per battalion, or about 252 guns. They pounded every known and suspected enemy position, and every key road junction in the rear

area with the plan to blanket the area so thoroughly with gun fire to cause the Germans to freeze in place while our assault units were crossing the river. When the guns firing on the far river bank in support of the attacking units lifted so the infantry could assault the far bank these guns would shift inland to targets of opportunity.

The attack went well, the crossing was tough but successful. On 24 February the 330th Infantry crossed and attacked through the front lines and secured the two towns of Mersch and Pattern. The next day they secured Muntz and Hasselweiler. Twenty-five February saw the fall of Gevelsdorf.

On 27 February the 330th Infantry returned to division control in place along a line running east-west through Gevelsdorf and Titz. The 329th Infantry was moved to an assembly area south of Titz and committed the 2d Battalion to the right of the 330th Regiment with the mission to attack up Highway 1 toward Neuss. The 3/331 was on the right of the main road with the mission of screening the 83d Division right flank along the Erft Canal. Twenty-eight February found everyone feeling their way cautiously forward. We had a heavy skirmish at Titz against a German outpost; then it was rapid going for a few short hamlets. The 3/331 seized Grevenbroich and headed for Kapellen. The 329th took Belburduck and Hammerden.

On 1 March as the attack moved toward Loveling, enemy

76mm and 88mm anti-aircraft guns were firing flat trajectory at our columns on the main road. After we lost two vehicles, the decision was made to avoid the main road junction on Highway 1 between Hammerden and Kapellen. We moved to the right using the railroad track as cover to hide behind. This brought us into Holzheim which the 331st had already reached. We sent patrols toward Loveling and met heavy resistance. At this point we received support of a light tank company. After a meeting with my company commanders and the tanker, we devised a plan to fire a smoke screen in the direction of Neuss to blind the 88mm anti-aircraft gun crews, then follow with artillery and mortars to fix the enemy in place. The tank commander had about eighteen tanks, he put some in firing position and fired at the second stories of the town, while the remainder of the tanks made a flanking envelopment of the left side of town. The two rifle companies moved quickly across the open plain with marching fire. As they reached about 100 yards from the buildings, the tank fire lifted and the infantry assaulted the village, capturing a goodly number of prisoners. This attack opened the way for the 2/330 to take Grefrath to the left of Loveling. It also opened the way for the 329th to attack Neuss with the 1st Battalion on the left and the 3d Battalion on the right. The 2d Battalion remained in Loveling in regimental reserve.

The commander of the 329th Regiment decided on a night attack to capture Neuss. The primary reason was the large concentration of German 88mm and 76mm anti-aircraft guns to our front. These guns were part of the extensive German anti-aircraft defenses protecting the weapons factories of the Ruhr.

* * *

Here is Colonel Crabill's statement about night attacks: "Night attacks are much less costly than day attacks if the soldiers are sufficiently battle-hardened to stand a night operation. The defenders know they are being attacked but they can't see the attackers and can be overrun before they can put up much resistance. Only veteran troops are normally used, recruits are so frightened that they are ineffective. In Normandy everybody was so scared that we buttoned up at night and shot anything that moved."[3]

* * *

Our battle map showed four bridges over the Rhine in the Neuss/Dusseldorf area. (Fig. 77) Starting from right to left, (south to north), there was a bridge for Highway 1 leading from Neuss over to Dusseldorf, next a railroad

bridge 1.2 kilometers to the north, the third bridge at Oberkassel was 7.5 kilometers north of the railroad bridge, and the fourth bridge which shows on our battle map in the vicinity of Golzheim does not exist on the Dusseldorf blow-up map, dated 1940. The road net exists on each side of the river but no bridge is shown. It is interesting to note that all of our available military after-action reports mention only three bridges, and do not mention the Golzheim bridge.

The night attack at dark on 1 March was moving nicely. Shortly after midnight our battalion was alerted to be ready, once the near end of the railroad bridge was secured, to rush across the bridge, seize and defend the far bridge approaches, and try to keep the Germans from destroying the bridge.

The enemy withdrew from the outer defensive perimeter on the west side of Neuss, but the town of Neuss continued to hold out. In particular, the enemy showed a strong determination to defend the west end of the railroad bridge. It was not until 0430 hours on 2 March that the town was reported clear. However, none of the three bridges could be captured although a battalion was attacking each bridge.

The day of 2 March was a busy day for all. The 3/331 on our far right was trying to seize the Highway 1 bridge east of Neuss. On our far left the 3/330 plus 1/331 were

trying to seize the Oberkassel highway bridge, while in front of us the 3d Battalion of the 329th had the mission of seizing the railroad bridge east of Neuss. After a difficult attack against the approach to the railroad bridge, the 3d Battalion finally caused 200 Germans to surrender, and at the same time there was a loud explosion and a big chunk was blown from the center of the bridge.[4]

Shortly after dark I attended a meeting at the regimental forward CP in Neuss. It was a regimental meeting but it was attended by General Macon, General Ferenbaugh, Lieutenant Colonel Dodge the division engineer, and some other members of the division staff.

It was announced that all three bridges had been blown, so the rush across the railroad bridge to seize the other bank was off. Instead the plan was for our 2/329 to make a crossing in assault boats of the Rhine River that night as soon as possible. At first I felt intimidated since the general seemed to be enthusiastic. Then as the facts were set forth I became alarmed. When I asked about the river, the answer was wide with a fast current. Then I asked how many boats were available, the answer only twelve. Would we have motors on the boats? No, paddles only, they wanted a crossing by stealth. Then I posed the big question to Lieutenant Colonel Dodge; if we paddle across, then two men per boat paddle the twelve boats back across the river to pick up the second wave, then repeat

this through five waves, would the boats have drifted so far down the river that they would be out of the area which we had under our control? The answer was yes!

At this point I turned to Colonel Crabill and the generals and explained that I was a soldier who believed it correct to obey any order from my CO, therefore, if he said cross the river and attack the enemy on the the other side, I would go. However, I would only take volunteers, not my 2d Battalion, since they were too valuable, and deserved much better than a suicide mission. There was quiet, no one challenged what I had said. They closed the meeting, directing all commanders to return to their units, and told me they would consider it more fully and I would be advised.

When I arrived back at my CP about midnight, I called my staff together and told them about the details of the meeting, then I suggested they be ready for a new commander come morning, because I felt I would be relieved of my command. Next morning came and went and the subject was never discussed with any of the staff, or commanders, then til now.

On 3 March the fighting in Neuss was terminated. We remained in Neuss for about two weeks but no further attempt was made to cross the Rhine. Then on 18 March we moved back into Holland and practised river crossings again, this time on the Maas River.

* * *

Apparently the Allied planners were firm in their decision that the initial crossing of the Rhine should take place only at two prescribed areas along the Allied line, and that the primary site would be in the north. It is interesting that one of the mejor objectives of the Allied forces after crossing the Rhine was to proceed to the Ruhr industrial center. And the city of Dusseldorf was the most important city within the Ruhr. If they had attacked at that point the Americans would have been attacking directly into their objective. Nevertheless, when the 83d Division was just across the Rhine from that target city on 2 March, no special equipment was available to them for making a crossing. On the other hand, General Montgomery's northern crossing was supplied with seventy-two boats equipped with motors and naval crews. He had also been provided with thirty-eight foot boats called "Seamules" which were harbor tugs powered with two engines. When the motorized craft were used the storm boats sped across 1,000 feet of river in 30 seconds.[5]

General Simpson's Ninth Army was also issued river assault equipment but none of those craft were available to the 83d because they were being accumulatd as a part of Montgomery's main assault effort scheduled for 24 March farther north on the river.

When Montgomery executed his huge assault across the Rhine he employed not only the boats mentioned above, but he also employed paratroopers, gliders, heavy artillery bombardment, and aerial bombing. In the south, Patton's Third Army was scheduled to cross some time after Montgomery's attempt. However, Patton speeded up the preparations in his sector, hurriedly assembled his boats and engineers and accomplished a crossing near Mainz on 23 March unassisted by paratroopers or bombers; one day before Montgomery's crossing.

When Montgomery decided that the twelve American divisions of the Ninth Army would be participating in the crossing at the lower end of his sector, they were allocated some assault boats. Each battalion of the assault divisions were alloted fifty-four power driven boats. Had only a portion of the boats alloted to Simpson's Army been available to the 83d, they might have obtained a bridgehead across the Rhine, in the important Ruhr area, as early as 2 March. To conclude this chapter, I am adding Sharpe's retrospective comments and conclusions about the Rhine River crossing episode.

* * *

As I have reexamined my wartime memories, especially the Rhine River incident, I have collected some interesting

facts.

Standing in the town of Neuss looking east toward the Rhine River the water flows north. The river flows normally from four to six miles per hour. The engineer assault boat is flat bottomed and designed to carry a squad of soldiers (ten to twelve men) and can be paddled at a speed of approximately 2.5 miles per hour. The distance across the Rhine in the vicinity of the southern highway bridge is approximately 378 meters. The division engineer said there were twelve boats available, no outboard motors would be used since the crossing was to be by stealth.

In applying all these factors and using the drift formula I have satisfied myself that the prospsed assault crossing of the Rhine that night in Germany was simply not feasible.

Twelve boats crossing at a time is called a wave. An assault boat river crossing of an infantry battalion of 600 men would roughly take five waves to get the essential fighting men over the river. It would take many more trips to carry over the supplies, ammunition, and reinforcements.

The key factor in the feasibility test for such a crossing is the amount of drift the boats will incur as they cross over, then return back to the shore and pick up the subsequent waves of soldiers. (Refer to the formula and sketch in Figure 78.)[6] The first artificiality is the fact that you can offset drift by the effectiveness of paddling

but the amount with the average unskilled paddler is negligible. In theory we would need 5.6 miles of river bank accessible on our side of the river in order to theoretically conduct the operation. It must follow that we needed to control the enemy along the entire length from the Erft Canal running north to include the Oberkassel Bridge, which was not feasible since we had less than a mile and a half under our control. Further, to be effective an attack must be concentrated in one area, in fire support, and in mobility.

In retrospect conclusions seem clear. First, the Allied command headquarters and supporting troops were not ready to capitalize on our rapid arrival at the Rhine River, this is indeed regretable. Second, under the circumstances, my decision not to attempt to cross with the 2/329 was the correct decision for me to have recommended to my CO. Third, the command decision not to attempt the crossing with an infeasible plan was commendable. And fourth, had the necessary engineer support equipment including powered boats been rushed forward along with a thorough crossing plan which had already been proven practical, history could have certainly been rewritten.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RACE TO THE ELBE

The 83d Division finally crossed the Rhine at Wesel on 30 March. Then paired with the 2d Armored Division, it began what was termed the race to the Elbe River. And it indeed had many elements of a race. The infantry division literally competed with the mechanized division to cover an amazing amount of German-held territory in a short time. It covered 280 miles in thirteen days.(Fig. 79) The men of the 83d swept through the provinces of Westphalia, Hannover, and Sachsen, as well as the states of Lippe, Braunschweig, and Anhalt.[1] They went through the Teutoburger Forest just as the Roman legions had done in ancient warfare over the same terrain. They marched over the hills of Hesse and the Harz Mountains, and across the Lippe, the Wesser, the Leine, the Saale and the Elbe Rivers. The infantry division used anything with wheels to transport its troops. Every jeep that could function with a trailer pulled a farm cart. Fire trucks, school buses, and cement mixers were employed. Company scouts rode two to a motorbike at the head of a column. Thirty-four men

could ride on the hull of a tank and fifteen on a jeep and trailer. (Fig. 80) It did not look very military, but it moved along quickly and often out-distanced the tanks of the top notch armored division.[2]

On 12 April, the 329th reached the town of Barby on the west bank of the Elbe River. Since the bridge had been blown, the engineers constructed a bridge on rafts and the 2d Battalion crossed and established the only American bridgehead east of the Elbe. Although the highway to Berlin was open and it was only fifty miles away, the high command instructed the American troops to stop their advance. The 329th remained in the bridgehead until 4 May, when the Russians arrived to take over. The 83d Division had overrun seventy-two towns and captured 12,845 POWs in its race to the Elbe.[3]

* * *

On 28 March the 329th Infantry was ordered back into Germany, west of the Rhine to an assembly area in the vicinity of Horstar-Schelsan. On 24 March, as part of a larger force the XVI Corps forced a crossing of the Rhine River in the vicinity of Wesel, Germany, established a bridgehead, and constructed a floating pontoon bridge across the river. On 29 March the 2d Armored Division followed by the 83d Infantry Division crossed the river and

then the XIX Corps passed through the XVI Corps.

At dark on the 25th of March near Wesel, the 2d Battalion of the 329th crossed the Rhine River on a floating pontoon bridge constructed by the American engineers. They constructed the bridge sections from the near bank and then pushed them out over the river, adding the new portions one after another from the shore end. As a security measure, the move was conducted under strict blackout conditions. The objective was to keep the enemy night reconnaisance planes from seeing us moving across the river and thereby knowing we were reinforcing the new allied bridgehead over the Rhine. We had practiced crossing floating bridges before on canals and small rivers, but never such a long one stretching across this wide Rhine River. The trick to driving an army vehicle over a floating bridge is for the driver to maintain a steady rate of advance. This fact was drummed into our drivers over and over again, no quick stopping or starting. Whatever they do, they are to do it gracefully and gently. Quick starts and stops can conceivably break the metal treadway pieces that connect pontoon to pontoon.

Everything was going smoothly when I heard a loud yell at the entrance to the bridge. The engineer control officer was yelling to some of my soldiers to remove a small German sedan from the line-up getting ready to cross the bridge. The problem was quickly solved by a group of

soldiers simply picking the little car off the road and setting it on the siding. The conclusion was that the auto was built too low to the ground and it would have hung up on the center portion of the bridge metal treads. This was one of those times when an innovative soldier solved his transportation requirement without realizing he was about to create an emergency.

Our 2d Battalion moved safely across the Rhine that night of 30 March and motored to an assembly area in the vicinity of Dulmen, south of the railroad tracks.

Initially, the tactical plan was to mop up any enemy who had been bypassed by the spearheading armor. As soon as the advancing armor seized enough terrain for two divisions to operate, the 83d was to get its own sector. The 2d Armored would be on the left so as to bypass the mountain terrain while the 83d would be pitted against the hill country. The terrain ahead of us was characterized as "cross compartments." That means one ridge after another intersected perpendicular to our axis of advance, and in our case the valleys were cut by rivers or large streams at least five times. Included in these hill masses was the famous Teutoburger Wald of classical history and the Harz Mountains.

The next day, 31 March, the battalion conducted extensive motorized patrolling to search out enemy pockets of resistance. E Company was directed to screen the

regimental right flank along the Lippe River. They met heavy resistance from Germans occupying the town of Herzfeld about twelve kilometers southeast of Beckum. The enemy had good observation from across the river and therefore was able to fire accurate artillery upon E Company. However, once in the town, the soldiers received relative protection from the buildings. Due to E Company's maneuvering and good fire support the enemy was routed and some fled back across the river. Their artillery continued to pound away at E Company positions until our friendly artillery managed to neutralize the German artillery by counterbattery.

On 1 April, the 329th moved from the vicinity of Oulman to a new assembly area near Beckum.(Fig. 81) The 2d Battalion occupied a defensive line along the Lippe River with the 3/330 on our left in the vicinity of Lippstadt, and a battalion of the 331st on our right at Hamm. Our mission was to seize and secure all bridges and keep the Germans south of the river. In case of enemy crossings we were to be prepared to counterattack immediately.

The day of 2 April was spent improving our defenses along the river, and searching for any enemy that might have infiltrated from south of the river. The only incident was another small skirmish in the vicinity of Herzfeld.

On 3 April the 95th Division relieved elements of the

83d. The division CP moved to Delbruck. The 1st Battalion of the 329th moved to the east and relieved elements of the 8th Armored Division and continued the attack to seize Neuhaus. The 2d Battalion of the 329th was relieved from the river line by the 330th Infantry and moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of Haustenbeck. The 3d Battalion of the 329th moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of Senelager.

On 4 April the battalion received a platoon of tanks from the 736 Tank Battalion, a welcome attachment that gave us a platoon of tanks and a platoon of self-propelled tank destroyers.(Fig. 82) Our battalion was ordered to attack and seize the town of Horn about sixteen kilometers to the northeast. The terrain favored the defenders since the crooked main road (Highway 1), ran over a portion of the Teutoburger Wald ridge for seven kilometers before Horn. It was heavily wooded, a perfect set-up for an ambush. The road was narrow with no room for vehicles to maneuver. I decided to send a small force as a motorized patrol very cautiously up the defile to engage the enemy and keep them occupied while F Company went toward Horn along a very poor secondary road through the woods. The plan worked, the patrol ran into a road block, made a big display of firepower while F Comapny came into town as a surprise. It was difficult because the entrance we used was up a huge cliff which was protected by two 20mm antitank guns. The

town was occupied by a German lieutenant colonel, and a company of stubborn paratroopers so the job wasn't an easy one.

For the first time we experienced civilians firing rifles as part of the defenses. And the paratroopers were firing panzerfausts (antitank weapons) as anti-personnel weapons. (Fig. 83) Panzerfausts were not usually effective for that purpose. It was necessary to fire the weapon against a solid surface to get it to explode. When it does, it gives off a violent explosion, with much concussion, but not much lethal fragmentation. It's terribly frightening but otherwise not very effective.

The road block was overcome and E Comapny and our platoon of tanks came into town and attempted to hold it but not before the paratroopers had counterattacked three times before giving up. In the round up of POWs we captured a German general who was very chagrined.

The 5th of April was really the beginning of the eastward thrust later nicknamed the Rag Tag Circus. It started with a passage of lines. Our 329th Regiment had been given an armored reconnaisance battalion to which I was ordered to attach one company of infantry (G Company) to furnish infantry support when the armor couldn't get through a road block. The unit was labeled Task Force Biddle. They passed through our battalion outposts east of Horn and in two hours had captured 2,000 stunned PWs while

seizing and clearing more than five towns and villages, including Bad Meinberg, Valhausen, Billerbeck, Belle, and Wobbel.

The 3/329 cleared Steinheim, and then passed the 1/329 through to attack eastward. The 3/329 reverted to regimental reserve. The 2/329 had been ordered to follow the armored task force and to screen the towns behind the leading units, mopping up any enemy stragglers.

The first determined resistance we encountered was a road block on the outskirts of Schieder. The enemy was well dug-in and was supported by antitank guns and tanks. The tanks of Task Force Biddle which had pulled over the hill leading into town and were deployed on both sides of the road, came under small arms fire. The infantry (G Company) had dismounted from the tanks but had no good covered positions to go to. The tanks moved back behind the small ridge. The infantry was left exposed on the forward slope of the ridge and was beginning to incur casualties.

I arrived at a road junction about two kilometers this side of Schieder. I could see there were problems. The road was jammed with task force vehicles. People were running to and fro. It was obvious from the firing that the battle was heated, and when three casualties arrived on a litter jeep it was more obvious that things were serious. And especially when I ran to the litter jeep and found the

wounded were my men. They included Captain Hugh Bates, the G Company commander, and two platoon sergeants. They were all wounded but didn't appear critical.

Standing next to his armored halftrack was the task force commander; the assistant division commander, General Claude Ferenbaugh; and others. The situation had stalemated, casualties were mounting and no action was being taken. I asked the general if I could take command of the situation, that I wanted to commit my E Company down the wooded ridge to the right of the road to flank the town from the right. He gave his approval, E Company was all ready to go and moved into the woods smartly.

Just when they entered the near edge of the woods, an armored vehicle further down the road toward town opened up with a 50 calibre machine gun firing at something in the woodline along the ridge on the right of the road. I had visions of these trigger happy tankers opening up on my E Company, so I jumped into the nearest jeep and roared down the road half on the road and half on the shoulder, screaming at the top of my lungs for the tankers to cease firing. Finally, I stopped the firing, got back in the jeep, returned to the road junction and as I got out of the jeep I saw to my embarrassment the general's star on the front plate. I had commandeered the general's jeep.

For 6 April pursuit was the order of the day. The regimental commander, Colonel Edwin Crabill, was not happy

with the performance of the armored task force claiming they had lost one full day by indecisiveness. Anyway, he told division that he was returning the armored task force back to division control.[4]

For that day's tactical plan the 2/329 was to clear and secure the mountain pass east of Schieder, to pass the 3/329 through and the 3d Battalion was to be responsible to secure the division left flank. The 2d Battalion seized the pass including the town of Harzberg, passed the 3d Battalion through, then proceeded to attack eastward toward Bodenwerder. E Company led the attack and captured the town of Ottenstein on their way to Bodenwerder. During that morning after the 3/329 had passed through the 2d Battalion the 3d Battalion moved rapidly and when they found no bridge operational in their zone, moved left into the 2d Armored Division sector, borrowed their neighbor's bridge at Grohnde, crossed over the Weser River, and captured the town of Halle from the rear.

The plan of attack for 7 April was G Company on the left to take several towns and then seize Hehlen. F Company on the right was to take any villages, but definitely get Bodenwerder. E Company, initially in reserve, was to follow F Company to Bodenwerder. G Company accomplished their objective and seized Hehlen. However, at about 1830 hours when our units had not yet reached Bodenwerder we heard a large explosion, which turned out to

be the blowing of the bridge at Bodenwerder. As we approached the town at dusk enemy snipers harrassed our units but F and E Companies combed the town and captured 81 POWs.

Since we now had no bridge available in our zone, I requested permission to use the 2d Armored bridge at Grohnde also. Permission was granted so we made the move north and over the bridge that night, arriving at Duingen after midnight. POWs for the day were 200.

On 8 April we received a reconnaisance platoon from the TD battalion attached to the division. It was very good and very helpful. Each of our three rifle companies had taken two jeeps, mounted light machine guns on them and called them their in-house reconnaisance section. These units had been invaluable and now with the addition of the TD recon platoon we more than doubled our reconnaisance capabilities. In effect it meant we could reconnoiter practically every little trail instead of simply bypassing and gambling that there were no enemy hiding down them.

We left Duingen and cleared several small villages. The terrain was up and down with lots of woods. After about ten kilometers we cleared Brunkensen. Earlier the battalions had been alerted to expect a strong defense by the Germans at Alfeld. Division reported a large force of SS troops were occupying the town. As we approached the town we were especially cautious and expecting a determined

enemy stand. We had reached a small ridge overlooking the bridge which led into town. The bridge was intact. I was apprehensive about exposing our troops in the open area leading to the bridge and also more open ground before we could reach the first buildings for cover. I contacted Major George White, battalion CO of 3/329 on our left, hoping to get some support from them in possibly a joint attack. What I found out was that when they heard the report of expected SS in Alfeld, they decided to cross the river downstream during the night so they wouldn't get involved with the SS troops. The 3d Battalion had bypassed us all. With no help I ordered the attack. We smoked the town entrance, rushed the bridge and into the town. There was only small enemy resistance and no SS whatever! Anyway, I never let George White forget how chicken I felt they had been leaving us alone to handle the SS. After clearing Alfeld, we continued east for about ten more kilometers and captured Harbarhsen and stopped for the night at Adenstedt. We had the battalion CP and one company in Adenstedt, a company plus in Harbarhsen and the rest of the battalion in the little town of Westfeld.

For the day we had not only advanced about thirty kilometers and taken 146 POWs, but had captured several big underground factories in and around Alfeld. Included were a synthetic oil refinery and an armament works.

Our battalion was in regimental reserve for the day of

9 April. It was a much needed break, since our vehicles, personnel, and weapons required maintance. One big factor which became apparent as the war dragged on was that while the soldiers got tired from lack of good sleep, the leaders suffered from the tremendous stress of a continuous barrage of command decisions required to fight the daily battles. Each decision incorporated the estimate of the situation. That is, where is the enemy and in what strength, what are his capabilities at this time or one hour from now? Is he now hiding up the trail to the right or left waiting for us to move past then counterattack our rear? Should I drop off a unit here to hold this ridge while the rest of the battalion goes by? Then there are decisions as to the supporting fires plans. Do we fire on the town before we attack or try for stealth and surprise? The heaviest stress comes when you may have misjudged one or more factors and things don't go well. The tendency is to get too cautious, and that is disaster for a fast moving situation. For once you have the enemy on the run, the best tactic is to stay in hot pursuit. By close pursuit they won't have time to get set on the next ridge line or next road block defense where they hope to be able to delay the attacker for some time. More importantly you don't want the enemy to have time to organize for a counterattack. This big paragraph was meant to say, the leaders need a break from the stress decisions even when

they have adequate sleep and food.

On 10 April we moved all day without major enemy resistance. In one case we overtook a withdrawing German column, it surrendered, we took their weapons, and gave them a white flag escort to the POW enclosure in the rear. We had commandeered several more Germans vehicles, one of which was a fire truck, with which we were able to transport lots of soldiers and thereby assist our advance.

* * *

The 329th Infantry was moving so rapidly across the German countryside that it needed a way for its communications to keep pace with the rate of advance without giving information to the enemy. Colonel Crabill mentioned a method devised by Granville Sharpe: "Although appearances were against it the regiment was by no means an uncontrolled mob. Major Sharpe had initiated the idea of numbering important places along the zone of action and furnishing each Company Commander with a map overlay showing the numbers. This allowed commanders to talk in the clear over the radio, since saying, 'We have taken number thirty-six and are moving on number twenty-four' would mean nothing to anyone who didn't have the code. Primarily its greatest use was to keep area monitors off our necks. We were supposed to encode and decode such

messages, which were so slow that they would be worthless when received. The regimental forward CP adopted this method from Major Sharpe and soon had our whole section of Germany on numbered map overlays."[5]

Figure 84 is a copy of one of the map overlays that Sharpe used in Germany. It is a map of the town of Zerbst and the surrounding area, with the letters and numbers indicated for communication purposes. It is interesting that the map itself was printed only a few days before the US forces attacked the town. The map makers were photographing, drawing, and printing the guides just ahead of the advancing American troops.

* * *

In the late afternoon we arrived at Goslar, the biggest German city since crossing the Rhine. We had outrun the Germans, they were not ready. The only enemy ready were the local Hitler Jugend. They made a noble stand but gave up quickly as they were no match for our veteran soldiers. When I noticed a large house which would make a good command post location for the battalion, I walked into the front foyer with my bodyguard and heard the lady of the house on the phone telling her friend the Americans had arrived. When she saw us she screamed, but readily accepted the fact that we would use her house for a CP. My

bodyguard told her in German to go next door we wouldn't hurt anything and would be gone in two days.

But just when we were thinking of getting settled for the night, we received orders to seize the town of Harlingerode which was on the eastern outskirts of Goslar. A late afternoon attack was executed fast and furiously, but successfully. Just as we entered the town there was a tremendous explosion. The Germans had blown up their own ammunition dump. The battalion settled for the night in three separate areas of the two towns. I was really concerned about our close-in protection for the night since we were close to the Harz Mountains and we hadn't had enough daylight to set up a good outpost and security system. I was also worried about telephone communication with the companies.

As a matter of experience we had developed a SOP which called for a decision by 1500 to 1600 hours to stop fighting and button up for the night. To "button up" meant alot of detailed decisions had to be made and executed quickly. To list a few: establish security outposts and develop supporting fire plans, get word back to the kitchens as to where to bring the chow and resupply vehicles, locate contact points where adjacent patrols can contact each other during the night. For these things to be done correctly you need at least a couple of hours of daylight.

One of my worries was put to rest when the battalion communications officer, Lieutenant Marvin Hughes, came in and gave me a slip of paper with a list of telephone numbers on it. All I had to do was dial the correct number and there was telephone contact with one of the companies. Lieutenant Hughes had gone to the local telephone exchange, put his guards on duty, disconnected all local lines, and tied all of our units together right at the exchange switchboard. Normally it would take several hours to lay the necessary wire lines to establish telephone communications within the battalion.

While on the subject of communication, to be effective it must be of good quality and timely. The ideal is eyeball to eyeball. If you can't have that the next best is telephone person to person. And if this is not available then radio voice to voice or radio telegraph key to key is a last resort.

Once you speak in the clear on the radio, you run the risk of giving away your secrets. Once you decide to encode your message, you prolong the timeliness of your communications.

The established means of handling communications within an infantry battalion in combat is through the functioning of the battalion communications platoon. The platoon is composed of one officer, the battalion communications officer; one staff sergeant; and thirty-six

other ranks. The platoon is functionally broken down into a wire section of one sergeant and eleven men, the radio section of one sergeant and eleven men, and the message center section of one sergeant and eleven men.

The message center section operated the message service function which provided motorized messenger service to the regiment and to the companies of the battalion. It also handled the coding and decoding of classified messages.

The radio section provided radio communications to the companies and to the regiment both tactical and administrative.

The wire section laid telephone lines, installed switchboards and established telephone service within the battalion command post, to the battalion trains area, forward to the battalion OP (location of battalion CO), and to each front line company CP.

Lieutenant Hughes devised several other modifications of wire and telephone communications to cope with the fast moving battle situations which we were experiencing. He also devised other procedures for adapting the radio section and message center section to their unusual roles.

There were three secrets which made the rat race or ragtag circus possible. The first was the use of civilian telephone lines which generally followed our axis of advance along main roads. The second secret was the

augmentation of our organic transportation with captured German vehicles. And the third was a complete modification of our battalion radio networks and equipment.

Since we have just covered the routine wire team procedures, I will now mention their adaptation to the fast moving warfare. The communications officer took one of his message center jeeps, installed a wire reel and redesignated it as a wire jeep. Around it he organized another wire team. This gave him an extra team. The concept of using civilian lines already up on poles meant he did not need to lay the long lines, but only short distances through the small towns. The technique started at our assembly area CP. The wire team clipped onto the long lines both at our end and at regiment. This way they only had to lay lines into the assembly area off the main roads. When the battle action commenced, one civilian line was chosen going in our direction of advance. A twisted pair telephone line was laid from our CP switchboard and clipped onto the civilian overhead lines. The wire team maintained a phone on the line all the time. When we came to a town the wire team went up the pole, cut the two wires going into the town, clipped on a new twisted pair line and laid this new line through the town to the far side, then back up a pole, cut the line and tapped onto the lines going to the next town.(Fig. 85) The purpose of the newly laid line through the town was to cut out all the civilian

switching centrals. Figure 86 shows newly laid lines being lifted up by poles onto anything that would keep them off the ground. Local signs were very helpful.

For a standard set piece attack two wire crews left the battalon CP area and laid a trunk line to each of the front line company command posts. This wire was double stand, twisted together. It was the responsibility of the battalion wire teams to keep these lines in operation. As the attack went forward the battalion teams laid another line which they identified as the battalion commander's observation line. The artillery battalion liaison officer's wire team also laid a line from the direct support artillery battalion fire direction center to the vicinity of the infantry battalion commander's OP. This group of forward telephone wires became the real nerve center for combat operations.

These wires were vulnerable to enemy artillery and mortar shell explosions and friendly tanks or other track laying vehicles. The irony was that these lines got cut wherever the action was. Where the enemy was shelling was where the wire crews had to go to repair the break. No wonder we had so many casualties from these wire crews and decorations as well.

The utility of telephones and numbers of wires opened many possibilities. The American units mostly used what we called a twisted pair, that is two wires twisted together.

You could put a field telephone on each end and two people could talk. You could tap into these lines and let others become parties on the line. Using various rings one can notify who is being called. A more practical modification permitted the use of what was called a "ground return." That was the German system, a single wire and the ground became the other wire, or the return. The Americans added another set of phones by using a short wire at each end tied to a metal stake driven into the ground. This permitted two phones at each end or four people could talk privately on just two wires or one twisted pair. A further modification allowed sixteen people to talk, eight at each end. All that was needed was two twisted pair lines and sixteen telephones using what was called four "phantom circuits" and four ground returns.[6](Figs. 87 & 88)

Our wire teams became very proficient and speedy in tapping onto civilian high lines. One system for speed in repairing a break in the line was to adopt the leapfrogging technique.(Fig. 89) Team #1 would locate the break, make the two splices to fix the break in the line, leaving the new wire on the ground rather than take the time to try and re-string the high wires. Team #2 leapfrogged forward ready for the next town or next break in the line. These teams got their instructions from calling forward or backward on the good lines.

Now to discuss in some detail the third secret of how

we were able to move so rapidly on the rat race to the Elbe River. The standard infantry organization TO&E (table of organization and equipment) allocated hand held SCK 536 radios as primary communications within the rifle company from company commander to platoon leader. Its range was pitifully short of daily needs plus it was very vulnerable to enemy radio jammers, and lastly it was an AM frequency set and therefore would not net with the SCR 300 FM radio sets which were the primary radios within the battalion.

The reason we had the two incompatible sets within the same infantry unit is not clear. I have been led to understand that it was a wartime state of the art decision. The 536 had been developed, we needed a small radio, so the decision was to go into production with it even tough it was an AM set. Hindsight says we should have held out for a small FM set for use within the infantry company even if it was back-packed rather than hand held.

The TO&E allocated nine SCR 300 radios to the infantry battalion. When the war was over my inventory of SCR 300s showed we had a total of thirty-five, which meant we had collected by hook or by crook twenty-six more than I was authorized. However this difference made us operational, whereas earlier we had been operationally limited.

There was another problem with the SCR 300 radios. When we became motorized they could not broadcast over a sufficiently long distance to be effective. I simply could

not maintain contact with my companies when we became widely deployed. This fact was recognized early and I corrected it partly with the appropriation of four SCR 610 FM radios. One day I noticed a visiting liaison officer from regiment had a radio that was not being used. He said the range was not long enough for the distances he had to operate away from regiment. I talked the regimental communications officer into lending them to my battalion. One was mounted in my command jeep and the others in the command vehicles of my company commanders. They had a six to ten mile range which was excellent when motorized. We had these radios in place when we made the Rhine to the Elbe dash in which we almost beat the 2d Armored Division in our race for the Elbe River.

Another modification was the addition of two SCR 284 AM voice and key sets. This gave us over fifty mile key capability and about fifteen to twenty miles on voice. We had one of these in my command jeep and another mounted in one of our message center jeeps. These were used any time we were operating at extreme ranges, as an example when one company was away from the battalion on either detached service or ahead of the battalion on reconnaisance.

The last modification was devised by Lieutenant Hughes and helped our operational capabilities considerably. He converted a captured German van/bus into a communications center. Figure 90 shows a sketch of how he used it to

improve our operation when we needed to be very mobile. The van was set up with a radio section, a message center section, and a radio repair area. It took the place of a message center jeep and two radio jeeps. They monitored four radio nets, the 284 administrative net, the 284 command net, the 610 command net, and the SCR 300 command net. Two message center jeeps followed the van when a message needed to get to the battalion executive officer or the assistant S-3. The message was handed out the van window and the jeep messenger was on his way.

* * *

In correspondence about his memories of service in the 2d Battalion, Marvin Hughes, the former communications officer of the 2/329 related a story of a battle during the fast moving push across German territory to the Elbe River. "All communication set ups are important but the most elaborate I remember was while making a frontal attack on a town using four tanks and four tank destroyers abreast in support. We put a radio operator with radio on the back of one tank and one on the back of a tank destroyer. We had a field telephone in the tank and TD with a wire going out through an opening to the telephone held by the radio operator. Now the command post had communications with the

tanks and TD via radio via telephone. At the same time we had ground to air communications with four support planes via CP radio in contact with air control ground radio at another location that relayed communications to the planes. We had radio contact with line troops, CPs, companies to right and to the left, and regimental headquarters. I don't know how it all worked but anyhow we won the objective. The Colonel set it all up."[7]

* * *

On 11 April we moved out before dawn. Our advances more than matched the previous day's fifty kilometers. One refreshing experience, we liberated a camp of about 1,000 British POWs, along with a few Americans. The Germans had marched them several hundred miles to keep them from falling into Soviet hands. Some of the heartier ones jumped on our vehicles and decided to continue the war with us. To my knowledge, none stayed with us very long. We captured six small hospitals of wounded German soldiers. That night we stayed in a little village on the eastern outskirts of Halberstadt.

For the day we had secured a large number of small villages, included were Stapelburg, and Veckenstedt, and had assisted the 3/329 in taking Halberstadt. It went like

this: The 3d Battalion zone of action was just north of Halberstadt. The roads leading into town from the west were heavily roadblocked with log and stone barracades. However, Major George White, CO of the 3d Battalion, noted that the three main roads on the north side of town were not blocked, so they flanked the town with an attack from the north while our battalion attacked frontally and the enemy gave up quickly. I sent Lieutenant McGhee to find a way through town which he did.

After the main road into town was opened we proceeded to clear the city and thence to take the next two villages of Harsleben and Wegeleben where we settled for the night. We had covered approximately fifty-five kilometers for the day and collected 412 POWs.

On 12 April we were on our way early with the Elbe bridge at Barby as our objective. It was about sixty-five kilometers due east. The 3/329 was on our left and the 331st Infantry was on our right. G Company was given the mission of spearheading the attack and gaining a foothold in the town of Barby. The TD Recon platoon was leading the advance. They had four jeeps and an M-8 Armored Scout vehicle.(Fig. 91) The road net was so poor I decided to send E Company to the north about three kilometers and let them use Highway 81 which was in the 3d Battalion zone of action. They traveled out of our zone for about sixteen kilometers before coming back into our zone but it helped

the battalion to get closer to Barby more quickly. It takes a long time to pass a battalion along a narrow road. Two routes cut the time in half, plus making the mass of the battalion closer to the front. The advance went nicely halting occasionally to flush out small units of German infantry left behind to delay our advance. As it turned out, traveling on the poor back road and trails was somewhat of an advantage because the enemy hadn't thought we would use the secondary roads. Therefore, there were fewer enemy delays.

On one occasion before we reached Barby the main column halted. As I drove forward bypassing the column of vehicles I noticed two H Company weapons carriers with trailers loaded with machine guns but no gun crew memebers in either vehicle, only the drivers. The gun crews were going first class in two nice civilian sedans they had liberated. I was highly provoked since these gun crews should have moved forward into firing positions the minute the column was halted due to enemy action. As it was, they were very much out of the action and had lost sight of their mission of "close and continuous fire support."

As we approached the town of Barby I had ordered extreme caution since we didn't know how the enemy was disposed. The situation developed as follows: About 1500 meters from town we halted G Company, they deployed their platoon of TDs, the troops dismounted in the open field and

everyone waited. When they received no fire, the troops started into town. We radioed the 3d Battalion on our left that we were approaching the town, so they wouldn't fire on us. They responded that they were already in the town. This led us to believe the enemy possibly wasn't going to make a determined stand. To G Company's immediate front about 200 yards was a railroad and road crossing and on the siding off to their left were several railroad boxcars.

The TD Reconnaisance platoon had used routine procedures of two vehicles going into firing positions to furnish fire support if necessary. They covered the leading two vehicles as they approached the town. If there was no enemy observed then the lead units would enter the town followed by the supporting section. In this situation the enemy had set up an ambush. There were German infantry in the railroad cars and in the fields on the left of the road leading into town. There were more enemy in the first few buildings on the outskirts of town. They all stayed out of sight until the reconnaisance platoon entered the town, then they opened fire with all weapons killing as I remember two men and wounding three others. Three of the recon vehicles managed to withdraw bringing their wounded.

The enemy in the railroad cars opened up on G Company, and G Company dived for the ditches such as they were. Real cover was very scarce. The firefight lasted over thirty minutes during which our mortars and artillery got

into action. F Company was brought forward and attempted to reinforce G Company but the terrain was too flat, no covered routes were available. Shortly before dark G Company managed to capture a couple of buildings on the edge of town.

During the heavy part of the firefight I noticed that some German civilians were on the catwalk around the dome high above the city hall, enjoying watching our predicament with the TD platoon and G Company. I was annoyed, my men were being shot up, but there stood the Germans watching the fighting. So I told the TD platoon commander to fire one round of his three inch high velocity antitank gun at the clock above the observers on the city hall balcony. I told him to put one round through the clock face at, say, about five o'clock. He fired one round and got a five o'clock bullseye on the clock face. Needless to say that flushed the group of sightseers from their observation platform.[8]

E Company had been in reserve on the left road coming into town so they were committed to the attack to come into town next to the 3d Battalion. By dusk, the enemy had been neutralized and the few that were left pulled back into town.

The town of Barby is located on the Elbe River. It was here that we planned to cross to drive deeper into Germany. (Fig. 92) To my recollection the events began on

13 April and happened as follows: The last enemy surrendered at 0945 hours and I went with some of my leaders to the railroad bridge site. It was apparent that the bridge was not usable for vehicles nor walking, but soldiers could climb across the side rails that were still in place. I consulted with the E Company commander to see if he was confident he could get E Company across and into the little town of Walterneinburg without supporting weapons. He was willing to try so I told him to go. Then I reported to Colonel Crabill, told him what E Company was doing and told him we were ready to cross on assault boats as soon as the division engineer, Lieutenant Colonel Dodge could get the boats to the river bank.(Fig. 93)

Bt 1300 hours E Company had shinnied their way across, had assembled, and had reached the town without a firefight. F and H Companies were crossing in assault boats. About 1330 hours I crossed with my battalion party made up of the battalion S-3, Captain Antonio J. Gaudio; the artillery liaison officer, Captain Hugh Borden and his wire and radio section; my wire and radio section; the liaison sergeant from the Heavy Weapons Company; and an officer from the reserve company (G Company).

While waiting for my command jeep and our two 57mm antitank weapons to be ferried across the river I sat with my back to a big tree looking back toward the ferry site. The next effort was for the engineer battalions to get the

ferrys assembled and operating and the bridge built so we could send over reinforcements for our bridgehead and defend it against enemy counterattacks that were sure to come. (Figs. 94 & 95) Leaning back against the tree I dozed off, only to be startlingly awakened by the sound of a plane diving and firing machine guns and dropping a big bomb near the ferry site. As I looked up the pilot was pulling out of his dive and heading straight for me. My system pumped in enough adrenalin to last for an extended period. No damage had been done at the crossing site because the pilot's aim had been faulty, but so had the aim of our anti-aircraft weapons protecting the site for they missed also.

The next incident was very timely. Our first two 57mm antitank guns arrived from the ferry site and were quickly put into firing positions covering the main road junction leading into Walterneinburg. And none too soom because shortly afterward the enemy launched their first of four counterattacks. The attack was of about platoon strength supported by several armored vehicles. The antitank guns opened fire on the first two vehicles, a tank and SP (self propelled) assault gun. Both vehicles were hit but the shots ricochetted off and did not penetrate the armored vehicles. However, the rounds must have shaken up the tankers because they turned quickly around and disappeared, taking the few other vehicles with them.

My command vehicles with radios arrived and I was now mobile so I could see what our positions looked like. The biggest improvement to our bridgehead battle positons was when the first two M-10 SP TDs arrived from the ferry site. They were quickly put into firing positions to defend the two main roads leading into Walterneinburg, one from the north and one from the east.

In the meantime the 1/329 had been arriving and had taken over the area from Walterneinburg extending to the right of the bridgehead.

The next counterattack was against F Company. It was just before dusk. They were to the left of Walterneinburg and back along the woodline. The Germans attacked with infantry, assault guns, and tanks. Our recently arrived TDs knocked out one tank and one assault gun while our H Company mortars and our 322 Field Artilley Battalion made quick work of the infantry. The enemy was turned back after a short fight.

From the way the enemy was working further to our left each time, it seemed imperative that we get more troops on our left, specifically the little cluster of buildings at a place on the map designated as Flotz. The 1st Battalion took over E Company's positions in Walterneinburg and E Company was moved to Flotz. They set up defenses as best they could in the dark and put out listening posts.

The night passed rapidly. There was constant

monitoring of the activities at the bridge site. G Company had come over late in the afternoon and moved into a blocking position in the woods halfway between the crossing site and Walterneinburg. Other regimental units were across, part of the 331st Infantry was across and on the right of the 1/329.

Word had passed down that the 2d Armored Division had lost their bridgehead over the Elbe River to our north near Magdeburg, the enemy had cut them off before they could get enough armored protection in place.

Before dawn, about 0600 hours, it happened, the fourth German counterattack, this time against E Company in their new position in Flotz. The E Company commander was calling with a most unusual request. The enemy had attacked with artillery first, then lots of infantry. They were all around his position. He was requesting artillery be placed over his whole position with "timed fire" fusing. Timed fire is when the artillery shells are fitted with proximity fuses which cause the shells to explode when reaching a set number of feet above the ground. By exploding in the air the hundreds of steel fragments come down like a cone. This type of fire is devastating to infantry in the open. The E Company commander had ordered all his company into the cellars of the buildings therefore they would be relatively safe from our proximity fused artillery.

This took some soul searching on my part and once I was convinced he had his men in the cellars I made the request and the artillery fired it. The suspense while we waited for a response back from E Company was like an eternity. But finally the company commander called back, it had worked, the enemy withdrew and there were many enemy casualties, and none from E Company.

During the night of 13-14 April the Ninth Army Engineers finished building a pontoon bridge over the Elbe at the old ferry site south of Barby. (Fig. 96) By dawn on the 14th they were beginning to cross the rest of our 329th regiment and to cross a combat command of the 2d Armored Division. A message came from XIX Corps CG telling all units to dig in and be ready to receive enemy counterattacks that were sure to come. Enemy movement was reported around Zerbst two kilometers to the east. However, enemy artillery was light and mainly directed at the bridge area.

At 0930 the 1/329 attacked and captured the little village of Nutha just east of Walterneinburg. Also at 0930 the 3/329 attacked and captured Gutergluck but not without heavy opposition from German mortars, infantry, and SP assault guns. The 2/329 was placed in regimental reserve, but occupied blocking positions reinforcing the bridgehead.

April 16-19 were all about the same--boring. Our rat race had been exhilarating, this waiting was just not to

anyone's liking. While one can always improve his defensive position, and should, it is a never-ending job. As an example, instructions came down from corps headquarters reminding all commanders to see that all defensive positions were dug in and properly camouflaged. Once done we were to dig and camouflage alternate positions. This was done in case the enemy located your primary position and knocked you out of it, then you would have an alternate position nearby from which you could still accomplish your primary mission. Included in these instructions were orders to begin laying antitank mines, anti-personnel mines, establish more outposts for daytime defense, and more listening posts especially for night surveillance. These must all be dug and camouflaged, plus equipped with telephones and radios.

These situations are a test of good leadership; how do you keep the soldier convinced that it's all worthwhile? Well, most often all it takes is a good, quick enemy counterattack with a couple of tanks firing flat trajectory direct fire into your position and it helps to have a couple of enemy planes strafing and bombing, while enemy mortars and artillery walk across your position.

These enemy actions are convincing, but it's really better if you don't have to experience these incoming packages of explosives firsthand. It's really better to learn from the experiences of others. Three examples were

readily available, the fact that the 2d Armored Division had lost its bridgehead near Madgeburg because they were not able to hold it. And on the 18th of April the Germans were counterattacking the new bridge site just four kilometers south of our bridge. The third example was the fact that the Germans had sent sabotage teams of swimmers with bombs to blow up our bridge.

We didn't have to be bored for long because on 21 April I received orders to assemble a small task force and be ready on one hour's notice to move out and make contact with the Soviet forces to our east. We no sooner received the instructions than we were overwhelmed with press personnel and photographers, each one with their own ax to grind. They had no appreciation for our problems, only the requirement to get a story for their editors. They didn't want the press conference pitch, they needed that special story told only to them. Therefore, they immediately button-holed my staff and commanders before we had a chance to make our plans. They out-numbered us three to one, so I had to put them under control long enough for us to formulate our plans for the link up with the Russians. The whole idea was exciting, but in reality it was not a choice infantry assignment. It was not a normal military maneuver or operation. We had to move behind enemy lines in order to make contact with our allies. We didn't have time to get involved in fighting the enemy, because our mission was

to find the Soviets and establish contact.

The next day, 22 April, the XIX Corps Headquarters advised us of a procedure to be used in case we needed to get a message to them in a hurry regarding the Soviet link-up. We were to call the operator, get on the line and say "clear the line call." This was supposed to automatically cause anyone who heard it to yield the line for the emergency message regarding the impending link-up.

When the war was over and I went back home I saw first hand the incredible resourcefulness of the American press. Once they got my name and hometown, they located my wife, and family, and my college. This developed a wealth of background copy, and produced some interesting hometown releases.(Fig. 97)

April 23-27 was more of the same, minor changes to the bridgehead defenses, and a number of attempts to get the city of Zerbst to surrender. The Burgermeister came out asked us to stop shelling the town because they couldn't keep up with the burials. He further stated that the military commander would like to surrender but he had been told by Hitler not to give up. He indicated that if we would attack they would not fire back. When this concept was proposed to me I objected on the grounds that you just don't attack without suppressing fires to keep the enemy in their holes or under cover while the attacking troops move close to the objective. To me it could be useless

slaughter if the enemy opened up while our soldiers were in the open. After much conversation and assurance that all would go well, I reluctantly agreed but only to use minimum troops deployed up forward. Once they got into town without firefight the main body of units would come into town and then we would mop up the POWs. At 1600 hours on 28 April we did it. All went as planned and the POWs totaled approximately 900 and not a shot was fired.

On 29 April we received word to start evacuating any western Europeans who did not want to be caught on the east side of the river. The next day we began allowing them to cross the bridge. They came in great numbers, all heading west.

On 30 April at 1330 hours word was received that an element of Troop C 125th Cavalry Squad, part of the 113d Cavalry Group had made contact with the Soviets at Apollensdorf. Arrangements were made to have General Macon meet with the Soviet general the next day. (Fig. 98) The best part of this information was that the Task Force Sharpe mission was called off, a blessing to all. The members of the press disappeared rapidly.

The next day, 1 May, the first detachment of Soviet troops came into Zerbst. They were very orderly and matter of fact. Their MP units were mostly women. They were smartly uniformed and immediately set up traffic directors at the key road junctions. The Soviets had looting teams

working each street, usually pulling small garden wagons house to house. They were looking for food, and any expensive items, but obviously doing a professional job of looting.

On 2 May a German captain came to one of our outposts and was escorting a German colonel; he was taken to the regimental CP and he asked that the US forces evacuate approximately 19,000 Allied POWs interned at his Camp Altengrabow about twenty-five miles (forty kilometers) north of Zerbst. We understood that he didn't have any more food to feed them plus the Germans didn't want to turn their prisoners over to the Soviets.

Division headquarters was contacted and they directed me to make the necessary arrangements and evacuate the POWs. It took several days and hundreds of trucks and ambulances before we evacuated the thousands of Allied POWs across the Truman Bridge toward home. Over 1200 were Americans. Although it took several days I will mention only the first two because of the unusual circumstances.

Early - 3 May the vehicle convoy which the division quartermaster had agreed to make available arrived at the designated assembly road junction at Zerbst. There were a large number of ambulances and a much larger group of 2½ ton cargo trucks, many of which carried food supplies. As I remember it there were close to sixty vehicles in all. We briefed the drivers, divided them into smaller groups

for control purposes, placed two battalion officers and NCOs in charge, and started on our way. There was a lead German vehicle with a white flag, then my jeep with radio and white flag. I had my bodyguard and the German captain in my vehicle and we were armed and he wasn't. As we came to various key road junctions it was a spooky feeling to be looking down the barrels of German machine guns in their defensive positions, however, there was not a single incident of violation of the local armistice. When we arrived at the camp the commandant had everything organized. We first loaded all the ambulances with the worst of the wounded, then the trucks with first the Americans, then the few British. Once it was obvious that all was under control I accepted the German commandant's invitation to coffee in his office. The trip back was without incident. It was thrilling to see the excitement of those POWs now being liberated. (Fig. 99)

The second day, 4 May, I turned the command of the convoy over to Major Harry Benion, my executive officer. They repeated the procedures of the day before and all went well until they were halfway back with the trucks and ambulances loaded with almost liberated POWs. A Soviet vehicle turned sideways across the road blocked our column of vehicles. Coming down the street was a woman Russian captain, bedecked heavily with medals, leading a file of infantry soldiers on each side of the street. They had

just entered the town. The Russian soldiers quickly started removing the watches and binoculars and compasses off of my battalion officers who had quickly assembled.

Things were very tense for a few minutes until some interpreters made it clear who the Americans were, then the Soviets returned their loot and the convoy was on its way.

Also on 4 May the Soviet troops arrived in Zerbst with their main units. Mine was the last of the 329th Infantry units to evacuate the bridgehead. My instructions were to turn over command of the bridgehead to a Soviet general who was to meet me at the town square at a precise time.

I arrived with my entourage including some of my staff, and a couple of interpreters. The idea was to make the transfer official. All over the square I saw Soviet soldiers inching their way closer and closer to where we were standing, obviously curious to know what was happening. Once the greetings were made, I started to make my speech, when the Soviet general stamped his foot, let out a loud bellow and at once there was a mass exodus of Soviet soldiers. In a minute's time the square was clear except for the general, his staff and the American personnel.

I explained to the Soviet general that my instructions were to turn over command of our bridgehead to him, at which point he in a pompous response said I was not giving it to him, he already had it. I didn't say what I thought

but only saluted smartly and withdrew to our waiting jeeps.

When he said that to me I was furious and I reflected on my impression of their units and that we could have wiped the floor with them. I saw it firsthand, the Soviet forces were strictly second class, many of their units were horse drawn. Our mobility and our communications were much superior to the Soviets, and by that time my men were very experienced. Yes, we would definitely have been able to turn them around that day on the eastern side of the Elbe.

* * *

This brings to an end Sharpe's World War II career. After having fought across France and Germany Sharpe's wartime participation came to an end on the banks of Elbe River.

EPILOGUE

After VE Day the 2/329 was moved to Plattling, about thirty miles north of Passau. The troops were used as a show of force or presence and were responsible for the military occupation of that portion of Germany. Many of Sharpe's officers and NCOs were assigned to temporary duty as military government officials. They performed as overseers of local governments which were run by German nationals.

During this period the division conducted a command review in honor of General George Patton followed by a banquet and cake cutting at the Officers Club in Passau. (Figs.100 & 101)

Lieutenant Colonel Sharpe was transferred to division headquarters and shortly thereafter was returned to the US to attend a five month course at the Command and General Staff College (C&GSC) located at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. This schooling was designed to provide the students advanced training in staff work at the higher levels of army command.

After completion of C&GSC General Claude Ferenbaugh, commanding general of Headquarters Military District of

Washington (MDW), recommended to Lieutenant Colonel Sharpe that he apply for Regular Army status and make the army a career. Five months after Sharpe separated from active duty as a reserve officer, he received a telegram from General Ferenbaugh stating, "Confidentially you have made Regular Army, I have three jobs, which one do you want?"[1] Sharpe selected a job in the G-3 section and was recalled to active duty in the Regular Army. This assignment to Washington, D.C. and the Pentagon was the first of three tours Sharpe had in the Pentagon during his military career.

Sharpe's duties in the G-3 MDW included the coordination of any ceremonies involving troops in the Washington area. This meant honor guards, escorts, or detachments which honored national or foreign dignitaries. The job also involved formulating the secret plans for the funeral of General of the Army, John J. Pershing, down to the most minute detail. In addition, he worked on the protocol scheduling of the Army Band, funerals at Arlington Cemetery, and use of the ceremonial detachment to furnish guards for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Beginning in October, 1947 Sharpe served in the distinguished 1st Infantry Division, the "Big Red One". The division was stationed in West Germany. The 1st Division was a professionally superior military group. The uniqueness centered around its leadership. General Frank

Milburn the division CG, had commanded a corps in World War II; the regimental commanders had been brigadier generals and were dropped back to colonels; most of the battalion commanders had fought battalions in the war; and many of the company commanders had fought in the war. The majority of the senior NCOs were battle tested, and the junior offiers were sprinkled with a number of West Pointers eager for a chance to serve in the well known division. Sharpe was the battalion commander of the 2d Battalion of the 26th Infantry Regiment commanded by Colonel Samuel Williams.

Due to the Berlin blockade and airlift the 1st Division was always in a high state of alert. The 2/26 had the mission of leading the assault down the autobahn toward Berlin should the Soviets cut off the airlift. There was a ten mile corridor from West Germany into Berlin. When Sharpe asked for clarification, the answer came back that the only real corridor was the width of the autobahn.

After twenty-one months as an infantry battalion commander in the 26th Infantry, Sharpe was moved to division headquarters and for the next seventeen months was given a select assignment, G-3 of the division staff. He was responsible for operations, plans, and training of the entire division. With the division headquarters south of Munich at Bad Toltz in Bavaria, Sharpe spent almost as much time in the air as on the ground since he was required to inspect the training of the units at their home stations.

The division was spread from north of Frankfurt, east to the Grafenwohr training area, west to Baumholder, and south to Bad Toltz.

Lieutenant Colonel Sharpe was then transferred to Headquarters Seventh Army at Stuttgart and for eleven months, December 1950 to October 1951, he was a staff officer in the Plans Section. This work involved developing and monitoring the emergency plans for all the tactical units in Europe. Included were the plans for the evacuation of all the families and noncombatants in Europe.

After forty-nine months the personnel policies called for Sharpe to return to the US, so he and his family moved to Ft. Monroe, Virginia. He was assigned to the G-3 training section of CONARC (Continental Army Command). This headquarters supervised all the troops in the ZI (Zone of the Interior). CONARC was responsible to organize, equip, and train the stateside army units in preparation for their missions, either stateside or overseas. General Samuel T. Williams was the deputy G-3 and Sharpe had formerly served as a battalion commander in his 26th Infantry Regiment. The general had three colonels as his executive officers. When one of those positions became vacant General Williams sent for Lieutenant Colonel Sharpe and assigned him the job even though it was a colonel's vacancy. Sharpe was stationed at Ft. Monroe from November 1951 until October 1952.

Toward the end of 1952 General Williams was given command of the 25th Infantry Division in Korea and he requested that Sharpe be assigned to his command. Therefore Lieutenant Colonel Sharpe did combat service in Korea from November 1952 until December 1953. His first assignment was executive officer of the 35th Infantry Regiment. The policy was for outstanding army colonels who wished to be promoted to prove their ability to command at the higher level by directing a regiment for at least six months in combat. Sharpe was executive officer to three such regimental commanders, and all three were subsequently promoted to brigadier general. Afterward, Sharpe served temporarily as acting chief of staff of the division for two months. He was junior in rank to the entire staff, but General Williams told him, "You are now chief of staff of this division, this is your staff--now run it!"[2]

Near the close of the Korean War the Chinese launched a major offensive, striking astride the boundary between the US 2d Infantry Division and the II ROK Corps. The enemy drove a wedge with ten Chinese divisions for approximately twenty miles into Allied territory. Due to the stress of the battle the Korean II ROK Corps commander became incapacitated. General Maxwell Taylor, the Allied Commander, sent for General Williams to assume command of the II ROK Corps. General Williams sent a helicopter to the 35th to pick up Sharpe. After he reported to General

Williams, Sharpe's first mission was to take the helicopter and go find the front lines because they knew this would be General Taylor's first question when he arrived to assess the situation. And General Williams was prepared, because in a three hour period Sharpe had located both friendly and enemy units from the air. The enemy units were identified because they fired on the helicopter.

After Sharpe's service in Korea, he returned to the US to attend the 1954 class at the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia. The five month curriculum taught commanders and staff officers how they should conduct themselves when operating as members of joint commands. They learned to deal with commands made up of land, sea, and air units operating toward a combined objective. The student body was made up of field grade officers in the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Each branch of the service argued by the hours about how best to control tactical fighter aircraft in the close air support role. The Army felt the Air Force was neglecting the tactical fighter units in favor of the strategic units, therefore the Army wanted their own tactical units for close air support. The arguments gave rise to the development of helicopter gun ships, which are in use today.

Lieutenant Colonel Sharpe's second tour in Washington lasted for four years, three years of staff duty and the last year as a student at the National War College at Ft.

McNair. His job as a staff officer was spent in the personnel policy field. Sharpe appeared before Congress to justify the need for the draft. He wrote the regulations for the test of the unit rotation system. And he made an exhaustive study of the officers efficiency report system. The third year was spent as a member of the office of the Secretary of Defense. Sharpe was one of the army staff representatives for duty on the "Cordiner Committee", studying the revision of the military pay system. The fourth year of the Washington stay was as a student at the National War College, the highest level of joint military schooling. The students came from all branches of the military plus the State Department and the CIA. No school in the US could show a better list of renowned guest lecturers.

Back to Germany in July 1958, Sharpe was assigned to command the 34th Infantry Battle Group of the 24th Infantry Division in Augsburg. A battle group was an oversized battalion or more like a streamlined regiment. It was designed to give the unit more and varied weapons under its direct control, and was commanded by a colonel instead of a lieutenant colonel. Sharpe had been promoted to colonel in September 1955. (Fig. 102) He spent nineteen months in this assignment.

During February 1960 Sharpe was transferred to Heidelberg to become a staff officer and head of G-3

training. In this capacity he was back in the business of scheduling training exercises for major units. This required that he inspect tank, artillery, and air defense firing. Guided missles were just arriving in the European Theater. Sharpe headed a twelve man committee to revise and update a booklet entitled "Guidelines for the Commander" originally written by General Bruce Clarke.

In March 1960 there was an earthquake in Agadir, Morocco. Sharpe was selected to command a force, primarily engineer troops and heavy equipment, to fly down to Africa and assist in extricating those trapped in the rubble. The rescue effort was making progress but local authorities stopped the use of heavy equipment. They were afraid someone under the rubble might be killed by a bulldozer trying to uncover others. The US troops continued to work through the rubble with their hands.

In July 1960 the Congo acquired its independence from Belgium. The situation became dangerous because the people were rioting and the Congolese soldiers had left their units and become rebels. Sharpe was ordered to take helicopters and small fixed wing planes to the Congo and with the assistance of the Air Force to evacuate all Americans and any other whites who desired to leave. The mission was successful, flying over 280 sorties and evacuating several hundred missionaries and other noncombatants. The rebels shot holes in some of the planes

and seven airmen were severely beaten but no personnel or planes were lost.

In July 1962 Colonel Sharpe returned to ZI and was posted to Carlisle, Pennsylvania as a member of the faculty at the Army War College. He was also a member of the Institute of Advanced Studies. The institute was responsible for projecting army doctrine requirements twenty years in advance. Colonel Sharpe's stay at the War College was cut short by a special request by the Army Chief of Staff's Office that he be transferred to the Pentagon again.

His new Pentagon assignment was in the Office of the Chief of Staff and was similar to the one he had had earlier in Heidelberg at USAREUR Headquarters. It was monitoring the money programs to see that the shortages were spread as fairly as possible. The job involved the the allocation of millions of dollars.

After seventeen months he was transferred to WSEG (Weapons Systems Evaluation Group). WSEG was the in-house study group for the Secretary of Defense. The study group had 150 principles, fifty senior military from all the services and about 100 elite civilians with doctorates in many specialized fields. These civilians were on loan from the key universities and colleges across the country. Sharpe was one of twelve army analysts. The civilians and military personnel were assigned into mixed study groups to

tackle difficult tasks.

During this third tour in Washington, Sharpe completed and was awarded his Masters Degree in International Relations from George Washington University.

In August 1967 Colonel Sharpe's final army assignment was to Ft. Benning, Georgia.(Fig. 103) He commanded the Student Brigade of the Army Infantry School. The brigade handled the administration and training for all the Infantry, Airborne, and Ranger students at the school. Colonel Sharpe supervised approximately 15,000 military personnel and over 600 civilians.

Colonel Sharpe established the first NCO candidate course ever implemented at a US Army service school. Its main purpose was to provide highly qualified NCOs for replacement to the units in Vietnam.

In August 1968 Colonel Sharpe requested early retirement after twenty-seven years active duty and accepted a position with Martin Marietta in Orlando, Florida.