

The Waffen-SS
in Allied Hands
Volume Two

The Waffen-SS in Allied Hands Volume Two:

*Personal Accounts
from Hitler's Elite Soldiers*

By

Terry Goldsworthy

Cambridge
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Bundesarchiv and the Imperial War Museum.

Cover photo – An SS-Panzergranadier advances during the Ardennes
Offensive, 1944. (German military photo, captured by U.S. military
photo no. HD-SN-99-02729; NARA file no. 111-SC-197561).

For Mandy, Hayley and Liam.

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PREFACE

The Waffen-SS gained a reputation for ferocity and steadfastness in combat during conflict in World War II. In adversity they were some of the most resilient soldiers that fought for Germany in World War II. Ideologically and politically aligned with Hitler, they were well regarded by friend and feared by foe. For over 70 years many of the manuscripts contained in this book, and sourced from the United States National Archives, have not been scrutinised by modern researchers.

This book, and volume one, provide a unique opportunity to publish these records to provide an insight into the Waffen-SS. The Waffen-SS was a military organisation that is steeped in military myth, but there was also a darker side to this fighting force. These records are exceedingly valuable as they are one of the few contemporaneous primary sources of information available in relation to the Waffen-SS.

To this end the interrogations of the high-ranking Waffen-SS officers provides context and understanding to the actions undertaken by this fighting force in World War II.

It is anticipated that the accounts of the Waffen-SS generals will provide important information for those with an interest in this era of history and conflict.

VOLUME TWO INTRODUCTION

This is the second and concluding volume, examining the manuscripts provided by Waffen-SS Generals after World War II. The first volume examined the command structure of the SS and Waffen-SS. The role of Himmler's influence over the Waffen-SS was discussed. The training regime of the Waffen-SS was also explored. The first volume examined the actions of the Waffen-SS on the Eastern Front, as well as the Normandy and Falaise Pocket campaigns.

The second volume continues to survey the actions of the Waffen-SS on the Western Front. These include the Western Front in general, the Ardennes campaign and Operation Nordwind.

It must be remembered that initially the United States Historical Division was interested in information from the Waffen-SS as it pertained to their interests, primarily the Western Front. It was only later that information began to be gathered in relation to other theatres of war such as the Eastern Front.

This volume also provides insight into the question of the proposed Alpine Redoubt, as this possible insurgent activity by the SS was of great concern to the Western Allies upon the defeat of the Nazi Reich.

Publishing these records provides an insight into the Waffen-SS. The Waffen-SS was, a military organisation that is steeped in the military folk lore of being a force capable of incredible military feats; but it was also capable of incredible evil. These records are exceedingly valuable as they are one of the few contemporaneous primary sources of information available in relation to the Waffen-SS.

This book and the first volume are an analysis of the Waffen-SS to some degree. The Waffen-SS are commonly regarded as the elite of Germany's armed forces during World War II. They gained much of this reputation while fighting on the Eastern Front in Russia during Germany's war against the Soviet Union in World War II. They were also called to the fore in an attempt to hurl back the Western Allies invasion forces in Normandy. Finally, they were used in the last great offensive on the Western Front in the Ardennes, and they contributed to the final defence of Berlin. They were viewed as Hitler's most reliable soldiers and sometimes described as his "fire brigade"; to be sent where the need was greatest and the fighting the most desperate.

This book provides a clear and succinct picture of the Waffen-SS by publishing the manuscripts of senior Waffen-SS officers and by providing scholarly comment on the issues raised. The manuscripts were prepared by generals of the Waffen-SS, including the only two officers promoted to the most senior rank of *SS-Oberstgruppenführer* in the Waffen-SS. The publication of these manuscripts provides an insight into the Waffen-SS from a historical and military perspective.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WESTERN FRONT

This chapter will deal with some non-specific manuscripts on various aspects of the Western Front. In contrast to other chapters that have dealt with specific campaigns on the Western Front, this chapter includes a range of manuscripts that deal with actions after the Normandy and Falaise conflicts, and also up to the end of the war.



US troops move through the Siegfried Line (Westwall) into Germany, 1945. (NARA archives Identifier: 535984, Local Identifier: 208-YE-193).

After the battles of Normandy the German *Wehrmacht* had been dealt a severe blow. Out of some 50 divisions that had been in battle, only 10

could be considered suitable for combat (Cooper, 1978). On the 15th of August 1944 the Allies had landed in southern France and vast tracks of France were recaptured with little resistance from the Germans (Bishop, 2005b). However, by September 1944 stiffening German resistance and Allied logistical problems conspired to allow the German forces time to regroup and reconstitute themselves.

The first manuscript in this chapter deals with the Siegfried Line or Westwall, a supposed defence line designed to stop the Allies entering Germany. In reality, after the bloody invasion battles the Westwall was of little value. According to Field Marshal Von Rundstedt the Westwall was “no longer in a defensible state because of the ... removal of weapons, ammunition, wire and mines to the fortifications on the Atlantic coast” (Cooper, 1978, p. 514).

ETHINT-27 – Siegfried Line. By *SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Kraemer*

4 pp; 2 Nov 1945.

The Siegfried Line (12-16 September 1944).

Title: The Siegfried Line (12-16 September 1944)

Source: Genmaj (W-SS) Kraemer, Fritz

Position: C of S, I SS Pz Corps

Date: 29 November 1945

Place: Unknown (probably St Germain, France)

Interviewer: Capt Frank C. Mahin

Circumstances: This interview was facilitated by the presence of Dr Percy Schramm, Historian, Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab (Armed Forces Operation Staff, OKW), who not only served as translator, but added significantly from his knowledge of this operation.

Foreword

This interview is one of a series conducted by the Historical Section, ETOUSA, and its successors. Unfortunately, only a typed record in English is available for editing. It is not known whether a record in German was made at the time of the interview nor, if one was made, can the accuracy of the translation be determined. Therefore, no absolute guarantee can be given as to the authenticity and completeness of this version of the interview. Only obvious errors in spelling, punctuation and grammatical construction have been corrected. All parenthetical statements, except those of the editor, which are identified as such, are as they appear in the available record.

Robert W Fye
1st Lt FA
Historical Editor
March 29 1948

Q Is this map (our enemy situation map) correct?

A Not quite. Actually, 1 SS Pz Div and 12 SS Pz Div were only kampffgruppens, both under control of the 2 SS Pz Div staff. The 2 Pz Div was almost intact. This designation (172 Tng Div) is misleading. In this case, there existed only a staff for the special purpose of supervising the civilian labour working to recondition the Siegfried Line. These civilians had been operating under political leaders, who were titled "Defence Commissioners", but who, of course, lacked technical and tactical knowledge. The 172 Staff was present to coordinate and advise the civilian workers. Therefore, that symbol is misleading, because it denotes the presence of troops when none were there.

2

Q When did you feel the Siegfried Line in your zone could be held?

A Seven or eight days after we arrived. By that time, some artillery had been moved up and we felt the Line could withstand your attacks. Of course, you realise that to us the Westwall was largely a bluff. It was outmoded, unarmed (Ed: Actually, the Westwall was at least partially armed with automatic weapons and artillery.) and poorly maintained; however, we recognised that it had three advantages. It gave us a physical installation to which we could tie in our defence and stabilise the front; it lent some protection from your artillery and mortars; and, perhaps most important, it placed a psychological burden on your troops. In my zone, we felt we could contain you prior to the attack on Wallendorf (14 Sep 1944).

3

Q Did the demonstration of 5 Armd Div (US) near Wallendorf on 12 and 13 September 1944 (attack on 14 September 1944) cause you to shift any troops from the north to meet this threat?

A No, we did not consider it necessary to place more than our small reserve there. I knew you were concentrating near the Schnee-Eifel, and I felt there was sufficient strength near Wallendorf. On the ring of hills around Wallendorf I had placed enough artillery to take care of an attack in this area.

4

Q What was the reaction to our attack at Wallendorf?

A It came as a great shock to the High Command, because there were no reserves readily available. The attack was astride not only a corps boundary (I SS Pz and LXXX Inf Corps), but also an army boundary (Seventh Army and Fifth Pz Army). As always in war, the junction of these different units was not very strong. You were successful at first, but when you slowed down in the "saucer" our artillery had some "good shooting". At this time, 19 Volks Gren Div came into the area and 106 Pz Brig became available. A Kampfgruppe from Pz Lehr Div in LXXX Inf Corps was dispatched towards the bridgehead. All these troops and two battalions of infantry from 2 SS Pz Div counterattacked your forces and pushed them back across the river. I saw 106 Pz Brig afterward and do not believe it lost more than about 10 tanks.

5

Q If we had committed, initially, the entire Armoured Division, plus one regiment of infantry, instead of one combat command, do you believe we could

have gone as far as, say, Pruem and Poonsfeld (Ed: probably Pronsfeld)?

A No, not as long as the weather stayed bad. If, however, you had had even one more division to advance on Eitburg I believe you could have made it to the Rhine. There was nothing to stop you.

6

Q What form did you expect our attack in the north to take?

A I expected a pincers like this (Interviewer's Note: With his fingers, Kraemer indicated a pinch-off of the Schnee-Eifel, precisely the reciprocal manoeuvre of their attack on the Ridge on 16-17 December 1944). Your pincers movement - Schnee-Eifel and Wallendorf - was too wide to be successful.

7

Q Were the troops in the Schnee-Eifel reinforced when our intentions were disclosed?

A No, not other than by the normal reinforcement that was being effected all along the line as troops were brought up from Germany. We used a pattern of deployment that was originated in the other war (Ed: World War I?), when we alternated Prussian and Austrian troops in adjacent sectors; the Russians were the "ribs of the corset". This time we interspersed SS and panzer troops between the miscellaneous troops that arrived from Germany.

8

Q After we had made a breach on the Schnee-Eifel, we attempted to move east off the Ridge. The leading battalion was ambushed and suffered heavily. Do you remember which units prang this trap?

A It was a regiment from 2 SS Pz Div. It had, in addition, two 210 mm mortars, and the following day one tank arrived. This tank knocked out six or eight American tanks.

9

Q Further south near Hasenfeld, a Kampfgruppe from 2 SS Pz Div launched a night attack on 15 September 1944, which put one of our battalions in substantial difficulty. We had reports of flame-throwers mounted on half-tracks. Was this done?

A Yes, the attack was made by approximately five companies with two flame-throwing half-trucks. These were improvisations. We found that your troops were not as well trained in night operations as in daylight fighting. We also found, even back in Normandy, that we could count on a three-hour lull about noontime. Both your ground and air forces were habitually quiet during this time, and we used the period to bring up supplies, move troops, etcetera.

10

Q Shifting now up to the Monschau area, on 13 December 1944, we made an attack aimed at the Roer and Urft River dams. One thrust was north of Monschau, at Lammersdorf, the other south of Monschau, above Rocherath. Did these attacks alter your plans or dispositions for your imminent offensive?

A No.

11

Q Who ordered the commitment of 106 Pz Brig and 19 Volks Gren Div?

A A Gp B put both units at the disposition of LXXX Inf Corps, to our

south. That Corps gave the specific orders for the attack.

END

The following manuscript deals in the main with events after the Ardennes offensive, and is written by *SS-Obergruppenführer* Bach-Zelewski. It also includes details of a now famous conference where Hitler berated his generals for the failure of the Ardennes offensive. The 14th SS Army Corps was formed in November 1944 in the Rhine area. In January 1945 it was in the Stasbourg area on the Western Front (Bender & Taylor, 1971).



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-S73507
Foto: Unger, 1944

SS-Obergruppenführer Erich von der Bach-Zelewski, 1944. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-S73507/CC-by-SA 3.0).

Born in Pomerania on the 1st of March 1899, Bach-Zelewski served in the German Army during World War I and joined the Nazi Party in 1930 (Yerger, 1997). In 1941 he was promoted to *SS-Obergruppenführer* in the Waffen-SS (Yerger, 1997). Bach-Zelewski was placed in command of anti-partisan operations on the Eastern Front from 1942-1944 and was Himmler's special deputy for anti-partisan warfare (Miller et al., 2006; Williams, 2015).

Bach-Zelewski suffered from some psychological illness as a result of the effects of having to carry out orders associated with the extermination policies carried out in the east (Miller et al., 2006; Williams, 2015). He was responsible for the brutal suppression of the Warsaw uprising in 1944 (Miller et al., 2006).

He led various SS Corps until the end of the war. Bach-Zelewski gave evidence at the Nuremberg trials in regards to SS activities on the Eastern Front (Miller et al., 2006; Williams, 2015). He received a 10-year sentence; this sentence was later suspended, however, he was arrested on other charges relating to offences prior to the war. Bach-Zelewski died in prison while serving a life sentence (Miller et al., 2006; Williams, 2015).

B-252 – XIV SS Corps (Nov 1944-Jan 1945).

By *SS-Obergruppenführer* Erich von der Bach-Zelewski

12 pp, 5 illus; 1946. Includes a report of Hitler's conference of 28 December 1944.

Von Dem Bach-Zelewski, 7 December 1946

General der Waffen-SS

Commanding General of the XIV SS Corps

The XIV SS Corps in November – December 1944

Index for MS # 252

XIV SS Corps, November to December 1944

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Attack across river, formation and expansion of a bridgehead

Attack, reasons and preparations

Artillery

Artillery of a newly activated SS Corps

Reconnaissance

Good results by reconnaissance across river

Activation

Activation of an SS Corps

Bridges

Bridge demolition

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Attack across river to form a bridgehead

Evacuation of a bridgehead

River

Attack across river

Importance of dead river branches for bridgehead

Establishing river line defence

Supply

Troop supplies in excess of authorisation

Defence

Establishing and defending a defence front

A. The XIV SS Corps in November – December 1944.

On November while I was on leave I was ordered to report to Heinrich Himmler, in his special train in the Black Forest, in order to take over a new corps which was about to be activated. On 10 November I presented myself in the special train, which was at Triberg in a railway tunnel. Himmler had been appointed commander in chief of the Army Group Upper Rhine, which was about to be constituted.

Himmler explained to me, with the help of a situation map, the catastrophic situation of our collapsed front in Alsace-Lorraine.

I was ordered to build up, as the XIV SS Corps, a new defensive front in the German Westwall, on the eastern bank of the Rhine.

The right corps limit ran past and included Graben-Bruchsal. I was to establish contact with the army of General der Panzertruppen Balck. On account of the retreating movement of the front which was still continuing, the point of main effort in building up the new defensive front, on my right wing, was in the bridgehead of Karlsruhe – Maximiliansau – Maxau, situated north of the Westwall, and in the development of Karlsruhe as a strongpoint under a Generalleutenant, whose name I cannot remember, as commanding officer.

As left corps limit the Leopold Canal, inclusive, was decided on. My left neighbour, linking up with the Swiss frontier, was the XVIII SS Corps, to be newly organized by Waffen-SS Generalmajor Reinefarth.

The small bridgeheads of Drusenheim, Gerstheim and Rhinau, to the west of the Rhine, which were still held by isolated units of company strength reinforced by “Volkssturm” – See Sketch 1 – were to be abandoned even on small pressure by the enemy; the larger bridgehead in the harbour area of Strassbourg manned by one replacement training battalion of the army from Stuttgart was to be held. Adolf Hitler had reserved for himself the right to authorize blowing up of the large bridges Strassbourg – Kehl.

In the new corps at first only, the following troops were on hand: four replacement training battalions of the Army in the area Kehl – Oberkirch, under the command of Generalleutenant Seeger; Recruiting Area Headquarters Stuttgart; a fortress construction engineer battalion, and an anti-aircraft artillery battalion in the Maximiliansau – Maxau bridgehead. I was to build up the rest of the front by committing the local “Volkssturm” and collect all the split up parts of the army and its rear formations which were streaming back over the Rhine. At the end of November the remnants of the 9th Volks Grenadier Division, destroyed by the Americans at Zabern, were also transferred to the area of Baden-Baden for

reconstitution, and were subordinated to the XIV SS Corps. By the energetic combing out of all villages for (cut-off) units, and individual stragglers, the reorganization of battalions and regiments with a strength of about 12,000 men was gradually achieved.

The corps command post was established at Baden-Baden, and advance corps command posts prepared at Leibersdung, Memprechtshofen and Kehl.

The corps headquarters staff consisted mainly of the personnel of the former operational staff of the Chief of the anti-partisan formations. Police Colonel Goltz because Chief of General Staff.

Between the end of November and the beginning of December 1944, the troops of the XIV SS Corps were organized as follows:

Right sector:

Improvised divisional staff, division commander Colonel of the Army von Witzleben, bearer of the Knights Cross, command post at Malsch, advance command post at Huegelsheim.

Regimental staff of the Positional Regiment No. 1 under a Lieutenant Colonel of the Army at Welsch. Two "Volkssturm" battalions at Graben and Leopoldshafen, which achieved a certain military coherence through having a skeleton of noncommissioned officers and enlisted men from permanent Westwall personnel. The fortress construction engineer battalion in the Maximiliansau – Maxau bridgehead was placed under Regiment No. 1 as 3rd battalion, also the Maxau anti-aircraft artillery battalion. The combat commander of Karlsruhe was subordinated directly to the XIV SS Corps.

Positional Regiment No. 2, regimental command post in the barracks of Rastatt, regimental commander a Major of the Army. Subordinated to it was one replacement training battalion of the Army and a battalion composed of the supernumerary supply train members of the 9th Volksgrenadier Division. As 3rd battalion the permanent "Volkssturm" with its post at Elchesheim. The only heavy armament was an improvised battery with captured Russian guns, and a 2 cm anti-aircraft battery dependent on cooperation with the Regiment No.2.

Left Sector:

Division Generalleutnant Seeger – previously staff of the training division at Stuttgart, divisional command post at Oberkirch.

The right regiment as Regiment No. 3 the SS Police Regiment No.2 with two battalions, reinforced by one battalion of Customs Frontier Guard as 3rd battalion. The regimental command post was at Memprechtshofen. One company was sent forward to Drusenheim to man the bridgehead battalion. Police Regiment No. 2 had a heavy armament company of its own, and in addition I placed an improvised antitank company under it. An artillery battalion with captured Russian guns was being constituted and trained in the regimental sector.

Positional Regiment No. 4 was in the Kehl sector, consisting of four replacement training battalions of the Recruiting Area Headquarters Stuttgart, regimental commander a particularly experienced Major of the Army, regimental command post at Kehl. One battalion respectively at Kehl, Altenheim, Auenheim and as bridgehead unit in the harbour of Strassbourg. Four antitank guns in position on the bridges of Strassbourg, the bridges prepared for blasting and

guarded by an engineer unit.

Positional Regiment No. 5 consisting of the Police School of Ettlingen and of two "Volkssturm" battalions, the regimental commander was the commandant of the Police School, a lieutenant colonel of the police. The regimental command post was at Lahr, two bridgeheads in company strength at Gerstheim and Rhinau respectively.

In the area of Oberkirch – Kehl one improvised artillery battalion and two heavy railway guns in position subordinated directly to Division Seeger.

The combat commander of Offenburg, a Brigadier General of the Army, was subordinated directly to the XIV SS Corps.

Enemy pressure against the bridgehead of Strassbourg by continuous artillery fire and attacks by French infantry supported by tanks was very strong from the beginning. Our casualties, in the terrain which offered no cover and was overlooked by the enemy, were so considerable that the danger arose that a stronger attack by the enemy would allow the bridges to be captured intact.

On my urgent request to be allowed either to widen the bridgehead by way of attack or to evacuate it, I was finally authorized to evacuate and blast the bridges.

The blasting of the bridges was accomplished without hindrance, the withdrawal of our infantry only in part as the enemy pressed forward energetically after the blasting detonations. Half of our infantry were able to cross in assault boats, the other half was taken prisoner.

In the course of further expansion by the enemy from Strassbourg to the north and south, the small bridgeheads at Drusenheim, Gerstheim and Rhinau were also given up on weak pressure from the enemy, and the bridges were blasted as had been ordered.

The French sentries and single American tanks guarding the west bank of the Rhine were being very sure of victory and therefore rather careless, rendered possible the maintenance of our stationary patrols on the western bank of the Rhine during the whole period in the wooded and marshy terrain between the enemy sentries. Distant reconnaissance patrols were sent forward every night far into the enemy's rear. Some of them stayed out for several days and advanced as far as Hagenau. Therefore, our picture of the enemy's situation, including American tank movements, was complete, which fact was to be of inestimable service to me during our own attack in January 1945. On the other hand, the information available to the Commander-in-Chief Upper Rhine Army Group was miserable and my patrol activity was really its only source. The reason for this was that during the precipitate withdrawal of the German troops from Alsace, the German High Command omitted leaving behind any experienced net of agents. Subsequent improvisations could not be successful as the psychological effect of the German reverse did not leave the Alsatian population prepared to cooperate in favour of the Germans.

Enemy patrol activity east of the Rhine could not be ascertained. From this, and from the fact that there were no evidence anywhere of enemy work for the construction of ferries or bridges, it was clearly to be concluded that the enemy had no intention of attacking in my sector.

Therefore, the guarding of our bank of the river could safely be left more and

more to the “Volkssturm”. The military units on the other hand, could be carefully trained and equipped.

B.

When the German offensive in the Ardennes had come to a standstill, Adolf Hitler called a meeting for 28 December 1944 at the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief West of the Army, with commanders and commanding generals intended to lead a new attack.

Field Marshal von Rundstedt announced the assembled generals to Adolf Hitler, whereupon the latter began to speak. He at once confessed frankly that the offensive in the Ardennes had failed. Hitler attributed this failure of the German offensive not to enemy air supremacy, but above all to German mistakes. In very sharp and plain words he exposed the alleged German mistakes. Hitler saw the principle reason of our coming to a standstill in the over-motorization of the German formations. This over-motorization had crowded everything together on the few roads an advance in developed formation and hopelessly obstructed the roads. Only because of this could the enemy Air Force have such a decisive effect. In practice what had happened was that the infantry division which simply went on marching beside the roads when these were obstructed advanced more quickly than the fully mechanized formations.

From the failure of the offensive, Hitler drew the following operational decision:

The conditions necessary to continue the Western offensive on a large scale existed no more, especially as the Russian offensive might begin at any moment. But it would be a great mistake to change over now to rigid defence and thereby give full liberty of action to the Western Powers. In this case the Western enemy would concentrate his main forces against the Ruhr District. In order to divert and split up these enemy forces, but also because a German defensive would hold down the same amount of our forces as attack, if not more, the attacks were to be continued, although with limited objectives.

For the first days of January, Hitler ordered, as the first such limited attack, that the Blaskowitz Army should start attacking from the area of Weissenburg in a west-south-westerly direction towards Woerth. A few days after the beginning of the attack the XIV SS Corps should form a bridgehead north of Strassbourg in order to draw the enemy reserves and by that to facilitate the advance of the Blaskowitz Army. Under favourable circumstances the bridgehead of the XIV SS Corps should aim at establishing contact with the Blaskowitz Army west of the forest of Haenau.

After the issue of these orders by Hitler, Field Marshal von Rundstedt thanked him for his hard but just criticism and promised in the name of all generals present to take Hitler's instructions to heart and to do his utmost in the coming battles.

Two days before, the XIV SS Corps received orders to attack and form the bridgehead on 5 January 1945. Choice of the terrain of attack and the time left to me. Only the following were given to me in addition by the Army Group: an assault-gun battalion, an antitank battalion, and material for the construction of one heavy and two light ferries. I had to organize the other attack groups from my improvised formations, including the 9th Volks Grenadier Division, which had only

been reconstituted up to 40%.

Considering the strained overall situation, however, the equipment of my unit with weapons, ammunition, motor vehicles and also with motor fuel could still be designated as being satisfactory. This had been achieved less by regular supply on the part of the Army Group than by meticulously picking up of all irregular reserves in the form of isolated troops and supply formations from the collapsed Alsace-Lorraine front, who had quartered independently in my sector.

My work of building up was very much facilitated in this case by the endeavours, which had become more and more pronounced during the whole war, of all formations to hoard their own "black" material and even personnel reserves, as they could rely less and less on the legal means of supply; in the end it was only success that counted and after a success nobody asked how the unit had been able to reorganize itself again so quickly for action. The formations concerned seldom ventured to complain of a confiscation as they were convinced themselves of the illegality of their "black" stocks.

As an assembly area, the XIV SS Corps decided on the region between Freistett and Lichtenau. The bridgehead was to be in the area of Drusenheim, Offendorf and Gamsheim. I had chosen this region because the bank of the Rhine on this side was wooded and thus, by providing camouflage for the assembly position and above all for the construction of ferries, offered the possibility of surprise even in face of the strong enemy air reconnaissance; the western bank of the Rhine was especially favourable for the first critical days in the creation of the bridgehead, because here the wooded area was, in addition, traversed by a number of creeks to the Rhine. This seemed to me the removal of any danger of the bridgehead being destroyed by the enemy tank attack which was to be expected immediately, before a sufficient number of armour-piercing weapons had crossed. The two ferries were my most vulnerable spots in face of the enemy air superiority. Therefore, in the first few days, only the hours of darkness and in the early morning mist it would be suitable to operate the ferries.

For reasons of security I had the rumour spread among the population by alleged quartering of officers that the "Volkssturm" would soon be relieved by GHQ troops in the line of concrete fortifications. The ferry construction took place only at night, while the assembly areas were not occupied until the last night. The corps command post was transferred forward to Memprechtshofen and the command post of the 9th Volks Grenadier Division to Scherzheim, see Sketch II.

A special combat team was formed under the command of Captain of Armoured Troops von Luettichau, and an infantry battalion and an antitank battalion were subordinated to him in addition to his assault-gun battalion. This combat team particularly was to bear the main weight of all attacks. The assembled two improvised infantry regiments were to be committed, according to their fighting qualities, only for the defence of the bridgehead. The attack took place in the earliest morning twilight. The infantry battalion von Luettichau and an infantry regiment crossed over in assault boats. After firing a few shots the enemy sentries retired immediately into the nearest villages and alerted the single American tanks standing there. These at once started counterattacking in small groups, but the soon stuck fast among the mass of water-filled ditches. As we succeeded before it

became real light, in ferrying across an 8.0 cm anti-aircraft artillery battalion and an antitank company, the small bridgehead, see Sketch III, was secured for the first 24 hours.

Simultaneously with this main attack, a combat team composed only of an improvised infantry regiment and “Volkssturm” without heavy weapons under Colonel von Witzleben had, in order to create a diversion, started an attack in assault boats from the area of Huegelsheim against Fort Louis and Neuhausel. I had given Colonel von Witzleben a free hand to evacuate the enemy bank again immediately in case the enemy should counterattack. Surprisingly enough, the troops in Beinheim, Neuhausel, Fort Louis and Stattmaten, consisting only of French infantry, evacuated these places after a short engagement, giving the impression that these villages in the outpost area of the Maginot Line had been occupied only by French rebels.

I ordered Colonel von Witzleben to prepare the occupied localities for defence, to resist weaker attacks and to send reconnaissance patrols forwards towards the Maginot Line. In the main bridgehead the combat team of von Luettichau succeeded within the first five days in occupying the villages of Herrlisheim, Ottendorf and Gamsheim against strong enemy resistance and thereby decisively enlarged the bridgehead.

In the next few days the villages did change hands again many times, as our infantry's morale could not stand up to the American tank attacks. Our infantry losses were considerable, especially in prisoners, but von Luettichau's combat team always succeeded in recapturing the villages again.

The combat team took several hundred prisoners and was able to report in the first few days the disabling of 22 enemy tanks; altogether, during the first three weeks, the disabling of 48 enemy tanks.

As the enemy resistance in this main bridgehead was obviously stiffening, reconnaissance by the northern combat team of von Witzleben showed that there the American forces were only just beginning in the occupation of the Maginot Line and the relief of the French forces. I proposed in higher headquarters that we should take the fortifications of the Maginot Line west of Fort Louis by bringing up a strong combat formation and thus gain the Maxau – Maximiliansau Lauterbourg-Seltz-Drusenheim road as a supply on the western bank, to relieve the inadequacy of the ferrying operations.

My proposal was accepted and the 10th Parachute Division was added to the XIV SS Corps. The newly activated 10th Parachute Division, under the command of Generalmajor Schulz, was inspired with an offensive spirit which was seldom still to be found in the year of 1944. Its aggressive spirit was ample compensation for its lack of combat experience. With hard fighting the villages of Roppenheim, Roeschwoog, Auenheim and Dalhunden were taken, and the Maginot Line was thus pierced. These successes induced the Higher Command to put the SS armoured division Frundsberg, under the command of *SS-Brigadeführer* Harmel into the bridgehead of Herrlisheim – Gamsheim by the road now cleared from Lauterbourg via Seltz, then on the Rhine dam east of Drusenheim. See Sketches IV and V.

While the SS Panzer Division prepared for the attack against Bischwiller,

Kurtzenhausen und Weyersheim, the 10th Parachute Division took Fortsfeld, Kauffenheim, Leutenheim and Soufflenheim in a speeding advance, took several hundred American prisoners, among them a battalion staff and an American colonel, and finally, in combined action with the 9th Volks Grenadier Division, captured the strong point Drusenheim, stubbornly defended by American tanks, in house-to-house fighting at night. This was the situation when I was ordered to the east with my corps headquarters staff to take over the X SS Corps in Pomerania.

General der Panzertruppen Decker took over my formation on the Upper Rhine. I was finally relieved by him on 25 January 1945.

Signed: von dem Bach-Zelewski

END



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-J28180/Schurer/CC-by-SA 3.0
Foto: Schurer | 27. Oktober 1944

A German soldier armed with a Panzerschreck (antitank gun) at Metz during the Lorraine Campaign, October 1944. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-J28180/Schurer/CC-by-SA 3.0).

The 13th SS Army Corps was initially rebuilt from a *Wehrmacht* corps in August 1944 (Bender & Taylor, 1971). It was transferred to the Western Front in late 1944 and contained the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division *Gotz Von Berlichingen* and other *Wehrmacht* units (Bender & Taylor, 1971). Its commanders included *SS-Obergruppenführer* Hermann Priess and *SS-Gruppenführer* Max Simon (Bender & Taylor, 1971; Yerger, 1999).

ETHINT-33 – XIII SS Infantry Corps in the Lorraine Campaign. By *SS-Gruppenführer* Max Simon

12 pp; 17 Aug 1945.
 XIII SS Inf Corps in the Lorraine Campaign
 EUCOM: HD: OHGB Copy 1
 Department of the Army
 Historical Division
 Special Staff, United States Army
 Washington 25. DC
 12 July 1949
 Note to: ETHINT 33
 By: Kenneth W Hechler
 Major, Infantry (Res)

No record in German was made at the time of this particular oral interview, in as much as an interpreter was used to translate the remarks of General Simon as he made them.

The questions came from individuals in the ETO Historical Section who were working on the Lorraine operations of the Third US Army – particularly Gordon Harrison. A large-scale American map was used to assist General Simon, but it would have been better if we had had a smaller scale of the area. So far as the French and German versions of the spelling of towns is concerned, I used the spelling which we had on the map, and in some cases took down phonetically the names of the towns as General Simon pronounced them.

Simon reminded me of a big, talkative, genial grocer. He had little hesitancy about talking on any subject, and was never at a loss for an oral answer. I had somewhat of a feeling that he was trying a little too hard to be helpful. For this reason I would use this oral interview with some care, checking the observations carefully with our own documents and the available German documents and testimony of other commanders in the area.

ETHINT 33 – ()
 Title: XIII SS Inf Corps In The Lorraine Campaign
 Source: Genlt (W-SS) Simon, Max
 Position: Cmdr, XIII SS Inf Corps
 Date: 17 August 1945
 Place: Heidelberg, Germany
 Interviewer: Maj Kenneth W. Hechler