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The Establishment and Build-up

of the **REMAGEN BRIDGEHEAD**

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INTRODUCTION: Seizure of the Ludendorf Bridge.

At 071256 March 1945, a task force of the United States 9th Armored Division broke out of the woods onto the bluffs overlooking the RHINE RIVER at REMAGEN (F645200)*, and saw the LUDENDORF BRIDGE standing intact over the RHINE. Lieutenant Colonel Leonard E. Engeman, the task force commander, had under his command one platoon of the 14th Reconnaissance Squadron, the 14th Tank Battalion (Companies B and C), the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, and one platoon of Company B, 9th Armored Engineer Battalion.¹ Beyond the river lay the heartland of Germany, and presumably the organized defenses of the RHINE. Lieutenant Colonel Engeman's original orders were to capture REMAGEN (F645200) and KRIPP (F670180). However, in a meeting between the Commanding Generals, 9th Armored Division and Combat Command B of that division, it had been decided that if the LUDENDORF BRIDGE at REMAGEN were passable, Combat Command B would "grab it." This information had been sent to Lieutenant Colonel Engeman.²

About 062300 March the III Corps commander, Major General Milliken, had remarked to Major General Leonard over the phone, "You see that black line on the map. If you can seize that your name will go down in history." His words to that effect. This referred to the bridge.

The plan of assault as formulated by the column commander and as subsequently executed was an attack on REMAGEN (F6420) by one company of dismounted infantry and one platoon of tanks followed by the remainder of the force in route column and supported by assault guns and mortars from the vicinity of (F633204).³ This plan obviated the necessity of moving any vehicles within the column prior to the time of attack. The plan further provided that the assault tank platoon should move out 30 minutes after the infantry, with the two forces joining at the east edge of town and executing a coordinated attack for the capture of the bridge.³ As enemy troops and vehicles were still moving east across the bridge at the time (1256), the column commander requested time fire on the bridge with

*For all map references in this study see Maps, appendix V.

¹Statement of Lt Col Engeman, CO, 14th Tank Battalion.

²After Action Report, CCB, 9th Armored Division, March 1945, page 8.

³After Action Report, 14th Tank Battalion, March 1945, page 12.

the dual purpose of inflicting casualties and of preventing destruction of the structure. This request was refused due to the difficulty of coordinating the infantry and artillery during the assault on the town.¹

Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, moved out at 1350 following the trail which runs from (F629204) to (F635204). At 1420, the 90-mm platoon of Company A, 14th Tank Battalion, left the woods at (F632204) and started down the steep, twisting, tree-lined road that enters REMAGEN at (F639201).² The tank platoon arrived at the edge of town before the infantry and, meeting no resistance, continued on into the town. The infantry, upon arriving at the edge of town, was able to see the tanks already moving toward the bridge, so it followed along the main road running southwest through the center of REMAGEN.¹ The town appeared deserted—the only resistance encountered was a small amount of small-arms fire from within the town² and sporadic fire from 20-mm flak guns which enfiladed the cross streets from positions along the east bank of the river.³ The tank platoon reached the west end of the bridge at 1500, followed shortly by the company of infantry. By 1512, the tanks were in position at the western end of the bridge and were covering the bridge with fire. At the same time, a charge went off on the causeway near the west end of the bridge, followed shortly by another charge two thirds of the way across. The first charge blew a large hole in the dirt causeway which ran from the road up to the bridge; the second damaged a main member of the bridge and blew a 30-foot hole in the bridge structure. A hole in the bridge floor which the Germans were repairing made the bridge temporarily impassable for vehicles.⁴ The assault guns and mortars began firing white phosphorus on the town of ERPEL

(F647205) at this time (1515) in an attempt to build up a smoke screen over the bridge. A strong, upstream wind prevented complete success, but partial concealment of the assaulting force was accomplished.⁵ The use of burning white phosphorus demoralized the defenders and drove them to cover. The remainder of Company A, 14th Tank Battalion, arrived at the bridge and went into firing position downstream from the bridge. The 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, less Company A, dismounted in the town and prepared to assault the bridge.¹

At 1520, a captured German soldier reported that the bridge was to be blown at 1600 that day. This information, which appears to have been widely known, was substantiated by several citizens of REMAGEN (F6420).

In order to evaluate properly the initial decision to establish a bridgehead over the RHINE and the subsequent decisions of higher commanders to exploit the operation, it is necessary to understand the plan of operation at the time. The mission of the 9th Armored Division was to go east to the RHINE and then cut south and establish bridgeheads over the AHR RIVER preparatory to continuing south for a linkup with the Third Army. Combat Command B, 9th Armored Division, was on the north and east flank of the division, charged with accomplishing the division mission within the zone of the combat command. The task force commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Engeman was, of course, one of the striking forces of the combat command. No specific orders had been issued to anyone to seize a RHINE bridge and attack to the east. The decision to cross the bridge and to build up the bridgehead required a command decision at each echelon—a decision which was not as obvious as it appears at first glance.

¹Statement of Lt Col Engeman, CO, 14th Tank Battalion.

²After Action Report, 14th Tank Battalion, March 1945, page 12.

³Statement of Maj Cecil E. Roberts, S-3, 14th Tank Battalion.

⁴Statement of Lt John Grimball, 1st Platoon, Company A, 14th Tank Battalion.

⁵After Action Report, 14th Tank Battalion, March 1945, page 13.

It is probable that very few places along the whole stretch of the RHINE were less suited for a large-scale river crossing. From a tactical standpoint, the REMAGEN BRIDGE was on the north shoulder of a shallow salient into the enemy side of the river. The ground on the east bank rose precipitously from the river and continued rising through rough wooded hills for 5000 meters inland. The primary road net consisted of a river road and two mountain roads, any of which could be easily blocked. From a supply and reinforcement viewpoint, the bridge site was near the southern, army boundary. Only one primary road ran into REMAGEN from the west, and that road did not run along the normal axis of supply. Furthermore, there had been no build-up of supplies at the crossing site in anticipation of a crossing at that point. As previously stated, therefore, the decision was not so obvious as it first appears. The possibility of putting a force across the river only to have the bridge fall and the force annihilated approached the probable. A negative decision which would have ignored the possibility of seizing the bridge while insisting the accomplishment of the assigned mission would have been easy. Probably the most important observation noted on the whole operation was that each element of command did something positive, thereby demonstrating not only a high degree of initiative but also the flexibility of mind in commanders toward which all armies strive but which they too rarely attain.

At 1550, Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, reached the east bank of the river, closely followed by Companies B and C.^{1,2} The crossings were made under sporadic fire from 20-mm flak guns and uncoordinated small-arms fire from both sides of the river.² The guns of Company A, 14th Tank

Battalion, drove the German defenders from the bridge road surface and from the stone piers of the bridge. In addition, the tanks engaged the flak guns on the east bank which were opposing the crossing.³ On gaining the far shore, Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, turned downstream and began sweeping ERPEL (F647207). Company B scaled the cliffs immediately north of the bridge and seized HILL 191 (F645208) while Company C attacked toward ORSBERG (F652216).⁴ Troops from Company B, 9th Armored Engineer Battalion, moved onto the bridge with the assault infantry. These engineers, moving rapidly across the bridge, cut every wire in sight and threw the explosives into the river.⁴ No effective repairs of the bridge could be accomplished until dark, however, due to extremely accurate and heavy fire from the snipers stationed on both banks of the river.⁵

As the leading elements reached the far shore, CCB received an order by radio that missions to the east were to be abandoned: "Proceed south along the west bank of the RHINE." At 1615 the Commanding General, Combat Command B, received an order issued to his liaison officer by the division G-3 at 071050 March, ordering Combat Command B to "seize or, if necessary, construct at least one bridge over the AHR RIVER in the Combat Command B zone and continue to advance approximately five kilometers south of the AHR; halt there and wait for further orders." Upon receiving this order, General Hoge decided to continue exploitation of the bridgehead until he could confer with the Commanding General, 9th Armored Division. By 071650 March, the division and Combat Command B commanders had conferred at BIRRESDORF (F580217), and the division

¹After Action Report, 14th Tank Battalion, March 1945, page 13.

²After Action Report, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, March 1945, page 6.

³Statement of Lt John Grimboll, 1st Platoon, Company A, 14th Tank Battalion.

⁴After Action Report, CCB, 9th Armored Division, March 1945, page 9.

⁵Statement of Maj Cecil E. Roberts, S-3, 14th Tank Battalion.

commander directed Combat Command B to secure and expand the bridgehead;¹ Task Force Prince at SINZIG to be relieved by Combat Command A and Task Force Robinson on the north to be covered by one troop, 89th Reconnaissance Squadron; division responsible to the west end of the bridge.² This released for the bridgehead forces the following units:

Company C, 656th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Troop C, 89th Reconnaissance Squadron.
52d Armored Infantry Battalion.

1st Battalion, 310th Infantry.

1 platoon, Company B, 9th Armored Engineer Battalion.

Provisions were made to guide these units to their areas, and a time schedule of crossing was drawn up.³

The command post of the bridgehead force was set up in REMAGEN 200 yards west of the bridge at 1605. Combat Command B command post was established at BIRRES-DORF (F580217) at 1200.

At 1855, the bridgehead commander received orders from Combat Command B to secure the high ground around the bridgehead and to mine several roads leading into the bridgehead from the east. In addition, he was informed that the necessary troops required to perform this mission were on the way and that the division would protect the rear of the task force.⁴

A dismounted platoon from Company D, 14th Tank Battalion, swept the area between the railroad and the woods on the high ground west and south of REMAGEN. This job, which was completed at 2040, silenced the flak guns and drove out the snipers who had been

harassing the engineers working on the bridge.⁵

Late in the evening American Air intercepted a German order directing a heavy bombing attack on the bridge to be made at 080100 March. However, the bad weather prevented the German planes from getting off the ground.²

During the night, the two roads leading into REMAGEN from BIRRESDORF on the west and SINZIG (657164) on the south, as well as the streets of the town, became clogged with traffic; first by units of the combat command being hurriedly assembled, and later by reinforcements being rushed up by III Corps. The night was rainy and very dark, which necessitated great efforts from all concerned to keep traffic moving at all. The bridge repairs, completed by midnight, permitted one-way vehicular traffic. Company A of the 14th Tank Battalion, less its 90-mm platoon, crossed successfully; and Company C, 656th Tank Destroyer Battalion, followed. The leading tank destroyer slipped off the temporary runway on the bridge in the darkness and became wedged between two cross members of the structure, thereby halting all vehicular traffic for a period of three hours. By 080530 March, when the tank destroyer was finally towed off the bridge, the traffic jam was impeding movement as far back as BIRRESDORF (580217).⁵

During the next 24 hours, the following-designated units crossed the bridge:

080015 March

Company A, 14th Tank Battalion, less one platoon, crossed and set up a road block at (F642211) and one at (F656203).

¹After Action Report, 9th Armored Division, March 1945, pages 19, 20.

²Statement of Major General Leonard.

³After Action Report, 14th Tank Battalion, March 1945, page 14.

⁴After Action Report, 14th Tank Battalion, March 1945, page 13.

⁵After Action Report, CCB, 9th Armored Division, March 1945, page 10.

080200 March

52d Armored Infantry Battalion, dismounted, started across the bridge. The battalion established its command post at ERPEL (F647207) at 0630 and took over the north half of the perimeter from UNKEL (F634224) to (F652227).¹

080700 March

1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, crossed and occupied the high ground south of the bridge around OCKENFELS (F673200) in order to deny the enemy use of the locality for observation on the bridge.

080715 March

14th Tank Battalion, less Company A, crossed and went into mobile reserve.²

During the remainder of the day of 8 March, the 47th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division, crossed and took up defensive positions to the east and northeast of the 27th and 52d Armored Infantry Battalions. By this time, the bridgehead was about one mile deep and two miles wide.

Following the 47th Infantry, the 311th Infantry, 78th Division, crossed the river and went into an assembly area at (F647213).^{3, 4}

During the night of 8-9 March, traffic congestion in REMAGEN became so bad that only one battalion of the 60th Infantry was able to cross the river. One cause of the increased traffic difficulty was the almost continuous artillery fire falling on the bridge and bridgehead, and the air strikes in the area.^{5, 6}

The command of the bridgehead changed twice in 26 hours. At 080001 March, the Commanding General, Combat Command B, 9th Armored Division (General Hoge), assumed command of the forces east of the RHINE. During the night of 7-8 March, he moved to the east bank all command posts of units having troops across the river, so that a coordinated fight could continue even if the bridge were blown. At 080235 March, the Commanding General, 9th Infantry Division (General Craig) assumed command of the bridgehead forces and directed the operation until the breakout on 22 March.⁷

¹After Action Report, 52d Armored Infantry Battalion, page 3.

²After Action Report, 14th Tank Battalion, March 1945, page 15.

³After Action Report, CCB, 9th Armored Division, March 1945, page 9.

⁴After Action Report, CCB, 9th Armored Division, March 1945, page 10.

⁵After Action Report, 9th Armored Division, March 1945, page 20.

⁶Statement of Lt John Grimball, Company A, 14th Tank Battalion: "... the first round of German artillery fired at the bridge came in on the morning of March 8 at about 1030 or 1100 o'clock. I remember this very clearly ..."

⁷After Action Report, CCB, 9th Armored Division, March 1945, pages 10, 11.

NARRATIVE: Build-up and Conduct of the Bridgehead

By the time the 9th Infantry Division assumed command of the bridgehead, it had become a major effort. The activities which then dominated the scene were threefold: (1) the close-in protection of the bridge and the building of additional crossings; (2) the enlarging of the bridgehead; and (3) the reinforcing of the troops east of the RHINE. In order to understand correctly these problems and their solution, it is necessary to hark back several days and study the progressive situation.

6 March 1945

In the 9th Infantry Division zone the 47th Infantry Regiment drove approximately three miles past HEIMERZHEIM (F4135), a gain of five miles. The 60th Infantry attacked through the 39th Infantry Regiment and also advanced approximately five miles to BUSCHHOVEN (F4631), which was captured.

Both Combat Command A and Combat Command B of the 9th Armored Division attacked to the southeast early in the morning and continued its attack through the day and night to advance nine or ten miles. Although Combat Command A was held up for a number of hours at the city of RHEINBACH (F4325), it captured that place during the late morning and by midnight had taken VETTELHOVEN (F5229) and BOLINGEN (F5319). Combat Command B captured MIEL (F4230) and MORENHOFEN (F4430), and by 1530 had entered STADT MECKENHEIM (F4925).

The 78th Infantry Division's 311th Infantry, which had crossed the corps southern boundary into the V Corps zone in order to perform reconnaissance and protect the corps south flank, was relieved early by elements of the V Corps and attacked to the east. The regiment advanced up to five miles to MERZBACH (F4322), QUECKENBERG (F4022), LOCH (F4022), and EICHEN (F4216).

As a result of the changes of corps boundaries that had been directed by First US Army during the night 5-6 March, the direction of

attack was changed to the southeast, with consequent changes in division boundaries and objectives. The 1st Infantry Division's southern boundary was moved south so that the city of BONN (F5437) fell within the division zone, and the division was directed to seize BONN and cut by fire the RHINE RIVER bridge at that place. The southern boundary of the 9th Infantry Division was also turned southeast so that the cities of BAD GODESBURG (F5932) and LANNESDORF (F6129) became its objectives, and the 9th Armored Division was directed to seize REMAGEN (F6420) and crossings over the AHR RIVER in the vicinity of SINZIG (F6016), HEIMERSHEIM (F6016), and BAD NEUEN-AHR (F5716). The 78th Infantry Division was directed to seize crossings over the AHR RIVER at AHRWEILER (F5416) and places to the west of AHRWEILER (F5416), and was instructed to continue to protect the III Corps right flank. All divisions were directed to clear the enemy from the west bank of the RHINE RIVER in their respective zones, and all artillery was directed that point or time fuses only would be used when firing on RHINE RIVER bridges.

During the night of 6-7 March, 9th Armored Division was directed to make its main effort toward the towns of REMAGEN and BAD NEUEN-AHR, and was informed that closing to the RHINE RIVER at MEHLEM (F6129) was of secondary importance.

By 1900, First US Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges, requested the Air Force not to bomb either BONN or BAD GODESBURG. It was also requested that all the RHINE RIVER bridges in III Corps zone be excluded from bombing, although no objection was made to attacking ferry sites, pontoon bridges, boats, or barges being used to ferry men and equipment across the RHINE RIVER.