

Through the Frozen Mountains: The 45th Infantry Division in the Vosges Campaign,
20 September 1944- 23 January 1945

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THESIS APPROVAL

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The thesis is dedicated to my loving wife Kari Bishop, for without her love and support, this thesis and the completion of my Masters program would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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NAME: Darrell C. Bishop**THESIS TITLE:** Through the Frozen Mountains: The 45th Infantry Division in the Vosges Campaign, 20 September 1944- 23 January 1945**DIRECTOR OF THESIS:** Stan Adamiak**PAGES:** 111

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to examine the Vosges Mountain Campaign of World War II to better the fighting in southern France between the *Wehrmacht* and the Allies in particular the 45th Infantry Division. Keith Bonn, in *When the Odds were Even*, was the only historian to write an in-depth review of the campaign. He concluded that the Germans were fighting to hold the mountains and that the American push through the Vosges proved the superiority of the American army. He overlooked that the Germans were fighting a delaying defense and that the odds were far from even. The study draws upon military documents from the 45th Infantry Division, units linked to the Division and documents from Army Group G. It also uses the *Truppenführung* (German Army Manual) for information on the German delaying defense of World War II. It also draws upon various secondary sources for the historiography and background for the study. Chapter one covers the historiography of the debate over the Broad Front versus the Narrow Front along with the historiography of the southern prong of the Broad Front. Chapter two introduces the two sides fighting in the Vosges, the tactic of a delaying

defense and the history of the mountains. Chapter three covers the German delaying defense from the Moselle River to the foothills of the Low Vosges. Chapter four covers OPERATION NORDWIND, the German counterattack of January 1945, designed to push the Allies back into the mountains. The thesis promotes an understanding that Army Group G fought a delaying defense in the Vosges Mountains. It had four lines of resistance in the area, first at the Moselle River, then the high Vosges foothills, inside the mountains and then in the foothills of the low Vosges. In the *Truppenführung*, the Germans outlined the tactics for a delaying defense. They used pillboxes, dugouts, dummy fortifications, barbed wire, roadblocks, mines, and booby-traps. They refused to maintain contact with the Americans unless in a fortified town. They continued to fall back to new defensive lines. When the Allies threatened to cross the Rhine River, the Germans counterattacked in OPERATION NORDWIND. Army Group G received terrible reinforcements from all over Nazi occupied territory. Army Group G lacked the necessary supplies to fight the campaign and it suffered from poor communication between the units. The 45th Infantry Division had a far better logistical situation than the Germans had in the battle for the Vosges. The odds in the Vosges were against the *Wehrmacht* and their only hope was to fight a delaying defense in order to slow the Allied advance to the Rhine River.

Chapter 1: Historiography: The Southern Prong of the Board Front

In the European Theater of World War II, the struggle to liberate southern France is overshadowed by the fighting in the north. The Allies tasked the US Seventh Army with taking back southern France from the German Army Group G. After the Americans landed unopposed in OPERATION DRAGOON (15 August 1944), the *Wehrmacht* retreated to the Moselle River. The two sides fought across the Vosges Mountains into the Alsace Plains in the middle of winter. The Allies overcame the mountains along with the defenses of the Maginot and Siegfried lines. The Americans became the first army to successfully cross the Vosges while battling an enemy. Many historians argue that the *Wehrmacht* in 1944 was in decline and retreated towards Germany. Historian Keith Bonn claims that the *Wehrmacht* was the same fighting force from 1939, and that Army Group G fought to hold the battle for the Vosges; however, he overlooks the condition and logistical situation of Army Group G during the Vosges Campaign. He thought that this campaign could prove American superiority in the war. He also maintains that the infantry did all of the work during the campaign, while tanks and aircrafts had no effect on the battle.¹

The fighting in the Vosges Mountains has long been overlooked by historians. Directly after the war, several units produced histories of their operations during World War II. The 157th, 179th, and 180th Infantry Regiments created yearbook style books for each of its soldiers to take home with them. Leo Bishop, the 45th Infantry Division's intelligence officer wrote a history of the division after it returned to the states. In the 1950s, the US Seventh Army created a

¹Kieth E. Bonn, *When the Odds were Even: The Vosges Mountains Campaign, October 1944- January 1945* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 6-7, 44, 47, 62-4, 73-4 and 86-7.

history of its actions during the war. Most of the unit produced histories grazed over the fighting in the Vosges. The Seventh Army went into some detail about the campaign, but focused only on the American side.

Between 1970 and 1990, historians wrote about the campaign in reference to the 45th Division's trek through Europe with little to no new information, but between 1990 and 2010, scholars started to focus more on the fighting in the Vosges Mountains. In 1993, Jeffery Clarke wrote *Rivera to the Rhine*, in which he took an in depth look at the campaign, but focused mostly on the Allies. In the same year, Keith Bonn created his own in depth review of the battle for the mountains. He became the first historian to give some insight into the *Wehrmacht's* situation and the tactics of both sides. Vosges Mountain Campaign has a limited historiography, but fits inside the historiography of the Broad Front versus Narrow Front.

Army Group G fought a delaying defense against the US Seventh Army in the Vosges Mountains from the Moselle River to the Rhine River. The army group received poor reinforcements, few supplies and had less equipment than the 45th Infantry Division. The Americans' push through the mountains was inevitable and the Germans could only hope to slow the allied advance. The author of this study uses military documents from the 45th Infantry Division and units linked to the Division. He reviewed the *Truppenführung* (German Army Manuel) for information on the German delaying defense of World War II. He also uses military documents from Army Group G along with firsthand accounts of the fighting in the Vosges Mountains. The author reviewed the operational documents from the 36th Infantry Division. He looked at operational reports for each month, G-1 reports (personal), G-2 reports (intelligence), G-3 reports (operations), and G-4 reports (supply). The research endorses the theory that the *Wehrmacht* in the Vosges Mountains fought a delaying defense. It did not have the necessary

manpower, supplies or other means to keep the Americans from crossing the mountains.

Further studies of the Vosges Mountain campaign require more in depth research of the fighting men from both sides. It requires more research into German military documents and it should focus on the other divisions of the US Seventh Army.

The thesis promotes an understanding that Army Group G fought a delaying defense in the Vosges Mountains. It had four lines of resistance in the area, first at the Moselle River, then the high Vosges foothills, inside the mountains and then in the foothills of the low Vosges. In the *Truppenführung*, the Germans outlined the tactics for a delaying defense. The Germans used pillboxes, dugouts, dummy fortifications, barbed wire, roadblocks, mines, and booby-traps. They refused to maintain contact with the Americans unless in a fortified town. They continued to fall back to new defensive lines. When the Allies threatened to cross the Rhine River, the Germans counterattacked in OPERATION NORDWIND with the hope of pushing the Americans back into the mountains. All of these are parts of the delaying defense as outlined in the *Truppenführung*.

Army Group G received terrible reinforcements from all over Nazi occupied territory. Foreign reinforcements came from Poland, Italy, Belarus, Czech Republic and Ukraine. Most of these troops thought they would be fighting the Russians and they surrendered upon contact with the Americans. In September and October, most reinforcements came from air force ground crews and from the navy. They also came from the marines and coastal defense forces. Army Group G had to create units to defend its lines from stragglers of the retreat from southern France. In November and December, most replacements came from the *Volkssturm*, which were mostly elderly men, young men, convalescents and others that had been previously deemed unfit for military duty.

Army Group G lacked the necessary supplies to fight the campaign and it suffered from poor communication between the units. Most German soldiers did not receive hot meals unless they happened to be defending a city. They lacked winter clothing and fresh water as many troops in the later period were captured while searching for something to drink. They received adequate ammunition supplies, but it reached the front at irregular intervals due to the lack of transportation. They received faulty ammunitions in the later period as many artillery shells in December were duds. The units of Army Group G had poor communication with each other. Most units could not identify the other units in its sector. Many went weeks without contact with headquarters or other units in the rear. German troops also became casualties while retreating, after they wandered into mine fields laid by other German units.

The 45th Infantry Division had a far better logistical situation than the Germans had in the battle for the Vosges. It received plenty of reinforcements and enough supplies to keep the advance moving forward. It also provided rest camps for its soldiers, which the Germans lacked during the campaign. Tanks and airplanes had a large role in the fight for the mountains. The infantry, on both sides, used armor for direct fire support. The Americans used tanks to overcome pillboxes and other fortifications. Both sides used aircraft to attack artillery positions in the rear. There were few good flying days during the period, but aircraft had a sustainable role in the campaign.

The thesis proves that Army Group G could not stop the Allied advance through the Vosges. It did not receive the much needed reinforcements or the necessary supplies to prevent the Seventh Army from making it to the Rhine River. The 45th Infantry Division recognized that the Germans were fighting a delaying defense. The thesis also highlights the problems that the *Wehrmacht* faced in 1944. It shows that tanks and aircraft had a larger role in the fighting than

Bonn admitted in his book. It verifies that the campaign cannot be used to substantiate the claim of the American army's superiority in the war, because the odds were anything but even.

From October 1944 to January 1945, the 45th Infantry Division was part of the US Seventh Army's struggle to push the German Army Group G out of the Vosges Mountains. (See Map 1) In the west, the Americans and British advanced in Eisenhower's Broad Front, in which the Vosges Mountain Campaign was part of the southern prong. Several factors slowed the 45th's advance through the region; however, the primary factor was the Germans implemented a delaying defense to slow the American advance towards the Rhine River. In the east, the Russians moved in two prongs towards Berlin, the largest moving directly on the city through Poland and the other advancing through the Balkans. The *Wehrmacht* lost ground on both fronts attempted to slow down the Allies.

The debate over the Broad Front versus Single Thrust started with the generals involved in the debate. The scholars that followed can be broken down into these categories, Cold War, Logistics, Narrow Front, Political, and Coalition historians. Only a very few of the historians disputed each other directly. All of these scholars focused on the fighting in the north and the top four generals. The Cold War historians argued that the Broad Front led to the loss of Eastern Europe and the tensions between the two new superpowers. The Logistical historians contended that the Broad Front was the only possible strategy given the supply situation in 1944. The Narrow Front historians evolved their argument over time, with the common link that Montgomery's personality kept the Single Thrust from becoming a reality. The Political historians maintained that each strategy developed in reflection of the political situation in each nation at the time. The Coalition historians developed their arguments from a combination of the Political and the Narrow Front historians. Few histories covered the southern prong with the

Map 1



Source: <http://footstepsofthe409.blogspot.com/2012/01/ch-5-steige-and-lubine-nov-20-27-1944.html>

² The Vosges Mountains are represented by the blue triangles.

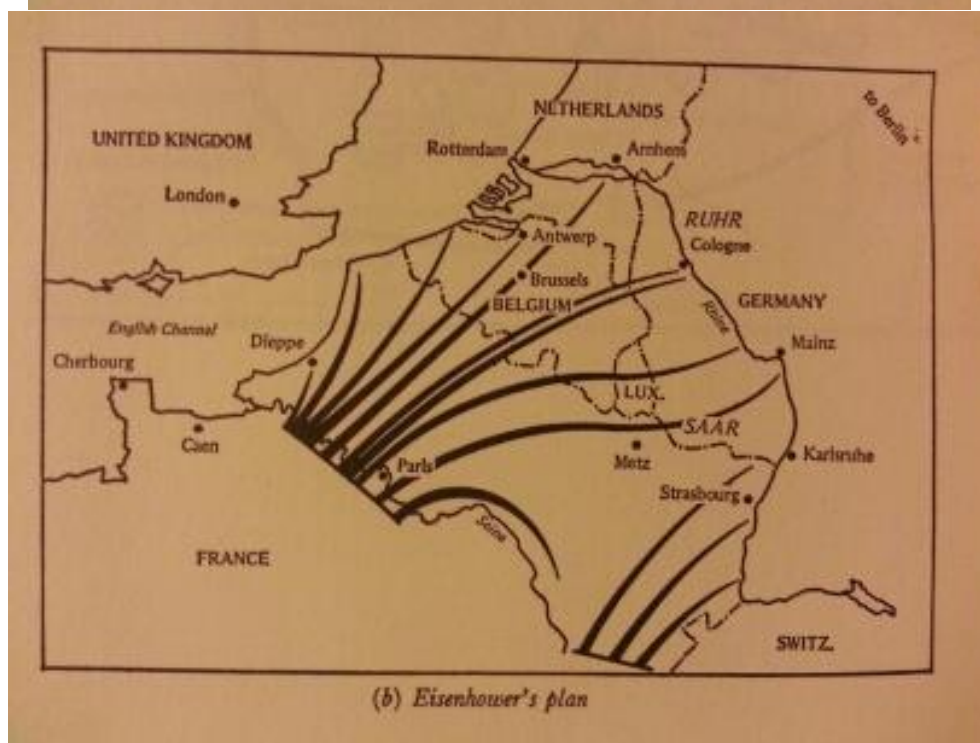
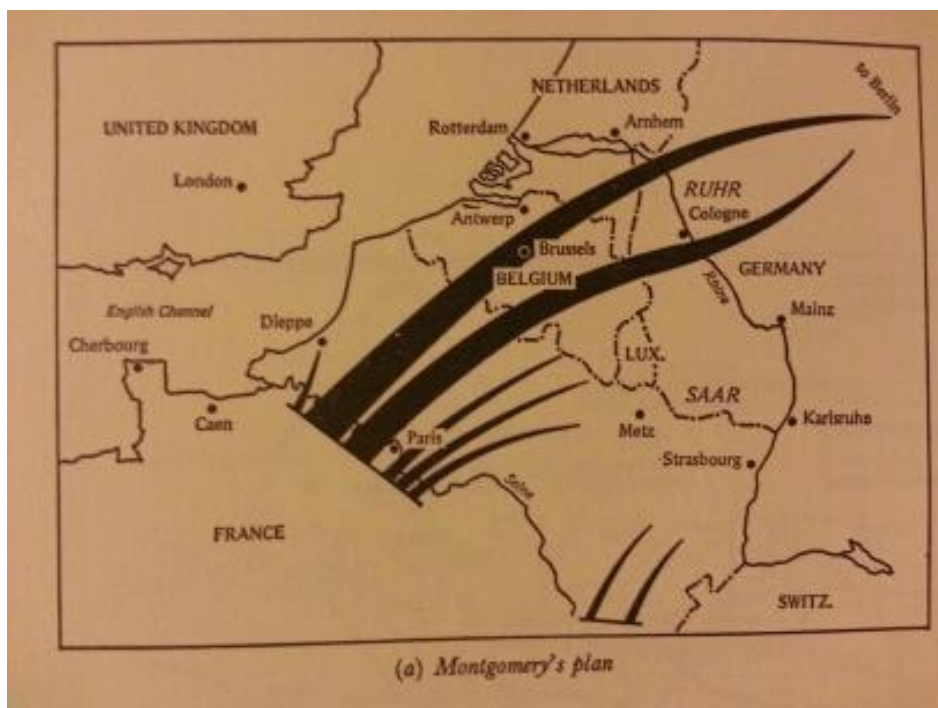
exception of the histories of the 45th Infantry Division or historians writing about the other units of the Seventh Army involved in the campaign.

Soon after the war, the three main generals in the debate over the strategies published their war memoirs, in an attempt to justify their decisions during the war.³ The Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. “Ike” Eisenhower made the decision for the Allies to advance on Germany in two prongs from the north and south, which was the Broad Front Strategy. Commanders under Eisenhower, primarily Field Marshal Bernard “Monty” Montgomery, advocated the Single Thrust or Narrow Front Strategy. It called for a forty-division thrust towards Berlin. (See Map 2) In the years following the war, historians pondered over which strategy was better for the realities of the fighting in Europe. Those that support the Narrow Front think that the war could have ended in 1944 with a drive towards the capital of the Nazi empire. The historians that support the Broad Front argue that it was the only strategy logistically possible and Eisenhower could not allow an American or British general to win the war due to the politics of coalition warfare. Since the end of the Second World War, historians have debated whether General Eisenhower or Field Marshal Montgomery’s plan would have brought an end to the fighting in Europe faster.

In January 1944, the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) had made plans for a dual invasion of France with one in the north and the other in the south to

³ The generals are Omar Bradley, Bernard Montgomery and Dwight Eisenhower.

Map 2



Source: Alun Chalfont, *Montgomery of Alamein* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), 344.

open the second front.⁴ Eisenhower gave the plan his full support, while the British tried to persuade him against the landings in the south.⁵ The first landing was on 6 June 1944 in Normandy in Operation OVERLORD. On 15 August 1944, the Allies invaded southern France in Operation DRAGOON.⁶ By the end of August, the Allies in the north were nearing the Seine River. In the south, the American Seventh Army had quickly advanced on the retreating Germans and was nearing the Vosges Mountains. Many Americans and British thought the war could be over by Christmas of 1944.⁷ Soon after the Normandy landings, the generals debated what strategy could bring the quickest defeat to Germany. Montgomery argued that the *Wehrmacht* had collapsed and if he had forty divisions under his command that he could take Berlin before the end of 1944.⁸ During the advance the three major American generals in the theater would switch to a defensive role to keep the enemy busy.⁹ General Sir Alan Brooke (Chief of the Imperial General Staff) and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, each wanted to knock Germany out of the war as fast as possible and supported Montgomery.¹⁰

The three major military commanders in the debate over the strategies defended their positions. Eisenhower in *Crusade in Europe* (1948) discussed Montgomery, Bradley and Patton,

⁴ Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 1989), 108-9.

⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, INC., 1948), 220-4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 250-1. The operation had originally been planned to happen on the same day as the Normandy landings, but had to be delayed due to the lack of landing crafts.

⁷ Bernard Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1958), 240 and 244-5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 244-6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 241-6 and Eisenhower, 305-10. General George Patton and General Omar Bradley favored a single thrust into Germany, but under their leadership.

¹⁰ Weigley, Russell F. *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944- 1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 576- 8.

who all wanted to lead a Single Thrust on Berlin, while the others went on the defensive.¹¹ He contended that this was impossible because the logistical situation in Europe prevented such a plan.¹² Montgomery published his memoirs in 1958 and contended that political pressure stopped Eisenhower from supporting his plan, because the American public and politicians in Washington could not accept American divisions command by a British Field Marshal.¹³ Montgomery thought the war needed to end by Christmas in order to help British morale at home, which he feared was nearing its limits.¹⁴ Bradley in *A Soldier's Story* (1951), argued that he had never supported a Single Thrust, because it would have never worked.¹⁵ Each general worked to protect their own wartime prestige.

Directly after the war, historians who were part of the war started to debate the two strategies basing their decision on the Allied logistics of 1944. Alan Moorehead started the logistical argument in *Montgomery* (1946), in which he reviewed Montgomery's role as a field marshal.¹⁶ He contended that the Single Thrust strategy would have failed because the Allies lacked deep-water ports to supply the armies.¹⁷ Francis De Guingand in *Operation Victory* (1946) gave his view on the operations in Europe. He argued that a severe lack of supplies could

¹¹ Eisenhower, 305-10. Eisenhower maintained that the Allies needed to keep the German defenses spread out to keep them from building their forces for a counter attack. He would have the Allied Armies advance in a long line toward the Rhine River. His policy was to remain strong nowhere and to grind down the Germans before entering Germany.

¹² Ibid., 306.

¹³ Montgomery, 241-2.

¹⁴ Ibid., 241-4. He maintained that the narrow front would have worked if the supplies for OPERATION DRAGOON were sent to his army. Montgomery claimed that he had gained the support of General Bradley for his plan.

¹⁵ Omar Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), 434-5. He was adamant that he had always supported Eisenhower's plan from the day he introduced it.

¹⁶ Alan Moorehead, *Montgomery* (New York: Coward- McCann, Inc., 1946), 204-5. In the chapter entitled "*Great Argument*," he discusses the fighting between Montgomery and Eisenhower over strategy. Moorehead was a war correspondent with the British.

¹⁷ Ibid., 204- 7. He contends that without the needed supplies, the thrust would possibly have been cut off; however, it was the best chance for ending the war before 1945. He claimed that had the war ended in 1944, it would have saved thousands of lives and saved Europe from the ensuing famine after the war

not support a single thrust toward Berlin and all Montgomery would have accomplished was a bridgehead on the Rhine River by the end of 1944.¹⁸ These two historians started the debate over logistics and future scholars built on their framework.

From 1951 to 2013, several historians used logistics in analyzing which of the two strategies could have ended with war fastest. Ronald Ruppenthal in August 1951 wrote an article for the *Military Review* in which he reviewed the logistical necessities of both strategies and contended that both plans were impossible without the Allies seizing the German held river port at Antwerp.¹⁹ J.R.M Butler in a series of books reviewed the Western Allies' war strategy in the book, *Grand Strategy* (1956), and studied both theaters of operation. In volume six of the series he discussed logistics of the Broad Front Strategy and argued that it was the only plan that could have worked with the Allies' supply situation.²⁰ Journalist Rick Atkinson wrote a three-volume history of World War II, the *Liberation Trilogy* in the third volume, *The Guns at Last Light*

¹⁸ Francis De Guingand, *Operation Victory* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 410-4. De Guingand was a staff officer in the Royal Army serving under Montgomery. The most likely outcome De Guingand maintained was, the British thrust would have been cut off and encircled. Therefore, he was in favor of the Broad Front Strategy since it was the best for the situation in Europe during 1944.

¹⁹ Ronald G. Ruppenthal, "Logistic Limitations on Tactical Decisions," *Military Review* XXXI No. 5 (August 1951): 7-9. The arguments he made in the article, became the basis for chapter 18 in the book *Command Decisions*, which is part of the US Army's official histories of World War II. Ruppenthal was an American military historian with Operations Research Office studying World War II. Ruppenthal argues that even though Montgomery had taken the port, the single thrust was impossible because the length of the supply lines to Berlin were beyond the limits of the Allies, and would have been vulnerable to attack from the Germans, and they could have captured the entire forty divisions.

²⁰ J.R.M Butler etd. *Grand Strategy Volume 6* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1956) 34-6. The book is part of the British Army official history of the war. Butler was a well-respected, traveling British military history professor and lecturer in the United Kingdom. He argued that Eisenhower's plan was to grind down the German Army before entering Germany, so that the defenses would be sufficiently weakened. He claimed that while the Broad Front worked, it also left the Allied armies extremely vulnerable to an all-out attack. The supply lines were stretched thin and if the Germans attacked full force in all sectors the Allies would have to retreat towards the English Channel.

(2013) in which he reviews the western front of Europe in 1944-45, and argued that the Single Thrust was logistically impossible.²¹

Montgomery had his supporters that looked to other factors that affected the war in Europe, such as the field marshal's personality. Chester Wilmot in *The Struggle for Europe* (1956) in which he focused on the Western Allies fight against the Nazis in Europe, and argued that the Single Thrust was the best strategy for ending the war and the greatest counter for the way that the Germany Army fought the war.²² B. Liddell-Hart wrote, *History of the Second World War* (1971) which was his comprehensive study of the war in both theaters, and he argued that the Allies should have gone with the Narrow Front, because it offered the quickest hope of victory.²³ Russell Weigley in *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* (1981) criticized the claims made by Liddell-Hart. He discussed the roles that Eisenhower's top generals played in the liberation of Europe and argued that Eisenhower's Broad Front Strategy was better, because that German Army had not yet collapsed.²⁴ Nigel Hamilton the famous Montgomery biographer contended that Eisenhower had preferred the Single Thrust in *Monty* (1981), and argued that Eisenhower

²¹ Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945 Volume III* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 227-9. The advance could not be supported all the way to Berlin. The drive would have been enveloped and destroyed

²² Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe* (London: The Reprint Society, 1956), 458- 62. Wilmot was an Australian war correspondent that spent World War II with the British Army. He argued that Eisenhower did not understand the tactical situation in Europe because he was not a ground commander. Wilmot maintained that Montgomery was a strategic genius and unappreciated by the Americans.

²³ B.H. Liddell-Hart, *History of the Second World War* (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1971), 561-3. Liddell-Hart is a well-respected British military historian. Eisenhower's plan was only good for the planning table and not the realities of war.

²⁴ Weigley, 576-8. Weigley was a distinguished American Military Historian at Temple University. He maintained that the historians that make the case for the Single Thrust such as Liddell-Hart misjudged the actual strength of the Germans in the fall of 1944. The book is a biography of Montgomery. Chalfont does spend most of the book on the Second World War. Chalfont wants to portray the story of Montgomery the man, and not the military commander.

had never wanted to attack on a Broad Front. The problem was that he could not decide between Montgomery, Bradley or Patton to lead the advance, so he settled on the Broad Front Strategy.²⁵

In the last half of the twentieth century, historians used the politics of coalition warfare to debate the two strategies. Stephen Ambrose began the politics debate in *The Supreme Commander* (1970) he argued that the Allied generals had their own nation's political bosses to appease, and Eisenhower had the task of making the politicians of both countries happy. The Broad Front Strategy was the only plan that could satisfy political leaders of both nations.²⁶ Charles Whiting picked up where Ambrose left off in *The Field Marshal's Revenge* (2004) he argues that the special relationship between America and England was strained during the war. He maintained that the two generals were pawns in their nation's game during the war, and the two strategies became a matter of national pride.²⁷

The debate over Eisenhower and Montgomery pleasing their political bosses transformed into the issue of running an effective coalition war. Carlo D'Este in *Decision in Normandy* (1983) argued that Eisenhower's plan made the most logistical sense, and it was based on the

²⁵ Nigel Hamilton, *The Battles of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery* (New York: Random House, 1981), 414- 15, 563, 565. *Monty* is the condensed version of the three-volume set of Montgomery's war years. Hamilton quickly goes over field marshal's life before the war and then the bulk of the book is about his decisions during the war.

²⁶ Stephen Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1970), 412-24. Ambrose is an American military historian, admirer of General Eisenhower and wrote many other books about the general. The book is about Dwight Eisenhower's role as a general and then supreme commander in the Second World War. He explored the general's relationships with the other commanders and political leaders from both Western Allied nations.

²⁷ Charles Whiting, *The Field Marshal's Revenge: The Breakdown of a Special Relationship* (Emeryville, CA: Spellmount, 2004.), 137-45. If the Eisenhower had allowed the Single Thrust Strategy to go ahead, then the best chance it had of being effect was in 1944. After that there was no chance for success. Whiting in a British historian and fiction writer, contended that the strain was mirrored in the relationship between Montgomery and Eisenhower. He argued that Montgomery advocated his strategy for national pride, because he would be in charge not Eisenhower and the American generals would be regulated to a holding position while the British took Berlin.

politics of coalition warfare. He contended that politics created the Broad Front because all Allied armies in the west had to enter Germany at the same time.²⁸

The southern prong of the Broad Front Strategy along with the campaigns involved has been widely ignored by historians. Those who acknowledged the fighting in southern France mostly blamed the advance for taking valuable resources from the fighting in the north. OPERATION DRAGOON, the landing in the southern France, started the second prong of the Broad Front. Despite protests from the British, Eisenhower insisted on the operation. The southern prong of the strategy was attended to keep the Germans from attacking the allies in the north from southern France.²⁹ The allied forces involved in southern France were the US Seventh Army and the First French Army under General Alexander Patch. In reality, Patch had three corps available to him, which were the US VI Corps and the French I and II Corps.³⁰ The most important campaign of the southern sector was the Vosges Mountain Campaign. The Vosges was the final buffer between the Allied forces and the Rhine River. All the histories that reviewed the southern prong mention but a few analyze the Vosges Campaign.

After the war, the armies and regiments of the US Army wrote the history of their actions during World War II. The Seventh Army produced *Report of Operations: The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany 1944- 1945* in 1946 and reproduced it in 1988.³¹ They used after action reports from every unit of the Seventh Army to create the narrative. It gives a day-

²⁸ Carlo D'Este, *Decision in Normandy* (New York: E.P. Dutton, INC., 1983), 309, 464, 466, and 468- 70. D'Este is a retired Army officer and a military historian with his degree from the University of Richmond. He discussed the planning for the Normandy invasion and the strategy taken after the war, particularly the role that Montgomery had during this time. He maintained that Eisenhower could not allow an American or British commander to take Berlin without upsetting the other side.

²⁹ Atkinson, 192-4.

³⁰ Ibid., 188-90.

³¹ It was originally printed in a three volume set and the reprint is in two volumes.

by-day account of the corps and divisions that made up the army. For the planning and battles, the accounts go down to the battalion and regimental level; however, for major engagements it reviews company operations. It only gives details of what happened and no analysis of the events. Directly after the war, the three infantry regiments (157th, 179th, and 180th) of the 45th Infantry Division produced their operational histories for members of the regiment. The 180th Infantry Regiment produced its history while still in Munich, Germany in 1945. It reviews the engagements and movements of the regiment during the war. There are two chapters about the 180th in southern France.³² The 157th Infantry Regiment produced its history in 1946 while in the United States. The 179th Infantry Regiment created its history while in the United States in 1946. Both histories include three chapters on its operations in France. All three reviews the engagements and movements of the regiments, and were produced from the units' after action reports. In 1946, Leo Bishop wrote *The Fighting Forty Fifth: The Combat Report of an Infantry Division*.³³ Bishop was a Lieutenant Colonel and Intelligence Officer for the division during World War II. He gave a day-by-day account of the regiments in the division. He wrote it in a report style from the G-2 and after action reports from the 45th Infantry Division. He has a chapter on the operations in southern France and one on the Vosges campaign. In the four histories, they reviewed the events of the French campaign without analyzing them.

Interest in the southern prong faded away until the 1970s and 80s. John Turner and Robert Jackson wrote *Destination Berchtesgaden* in 1975. Turner and Jackson are both British military historians. The book concerning the Seventh Army's operations during the war from Sicily to Germany, and covers the major engagements that involved Seventh Army, but offers

³² A problem with using the book is that it lacks page numbers.

³³ Leo V. Bishop, *The Fighting Forty Fifth: The Combat Report of an Infantry Division* (Baton Rouge: Army and Navy Publishing Company, 1946).

nothing new from the unit histories, nor any analyses of the operations. They review southern France and the Vosges campaign with few details.³⁴ In 1984, Kenny Franks wrote *Citizen Soldiers* a history of the Oklahoma National Guard. Franks is an Oklahoma historian that has wrote on several topics in Oklahoma history.³⁵ *Citizen Soldiers* is a detailed history of the Oklahoma National Guard from the formation of the territorial militia to the Cold War. Most of the book is spent on the 45th Infantry Division during World War II. He only writes about the major battles that the National Guard was involved in. These three academics offered nothing new from the writings of the unit histories.

The official US Army histories of the fighting in southern France and the Vosges came out nearly 50 years after the war ended. Jeffrey Clarke in 1993 wrote *Riviera to the Rhine*, which was the first official history to cover the operations of the second prong. In 1990, Clarke became the Chief Historian of the Center of Military History. He reviewed the operations of the US armies from OPERATION DRAGOON to the crossing of the Rhine River. He argued that the Seventh Army was able to move quickly through the south, because German defenses were weak in the area. The German positions were indefensible and they were retreating towards the Rhine.³⁶ He contended that the American advance slowed only after they entered the Vosges. The advance was slowed only by lack of airfields, weather and terrain but, the most important was logistical problems.³⁷ The Germans were able to hold off the Allies, because their supply lines were shortened and they were receiving well-trained reinforcements.³⁸ In 2012, Clarke revisited the southern prong in *Southern France* published by the Center for Military History. He did not offer

³⁴ John Turner and Robert Jackson, *Destination Berchtesgaden* (New York: Scribner, 1975).

³⁵ Kenny Franks, *Citizen Soldiers: Oklahoma's National Guard* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984).

³⁶Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 186-7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 196- 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

anything new to the campaign. He argued that, “the Southern France Campaign showed what experienced, well-led Allied troops could do against their German foes.”³⁹ He contended that there has been very little written on efforts of the allies in the south and it “deserves more study and attention than it has yet received.”⁴⁰

In the last part of the 1990s, two academics wrote about the southern flank of the Broad Front. Flint Whitlock wrote *The Rock of Anzio* in 1998 in which he reviewed the operations of the 45th Infantry Division from Sicily to Munich. Whitlock is a Vietnam veteran and amateur historian. He discusses the major engagements that the division was involved in down to the company level. He details of actions of the division but offers no analyses. Charles Whiting wrote *America's Forgotten Army* in 1999 and reviewed the operations of the Seventh Army during World War II. Whiting is a British military historian who has written on several military topics. In the book, he discusses the operations of the Seventh Army during the war. The book is very similar to *Destination Berchtesgaden*. The only difference is that he argues the Americans decided to advance through the Vosges at the urging of the French military.⁴¹ The two academics offered very little new information to the southern flank of the Broad Front.

In 2013, two academics produced books on the subject. Alex Kershaw wrote *The Liberator* in which he followed Colonel Felix Sparks, 500 day odyssey with the 45th Infantry Division's 157th Infantry Regiment during the war. His book is a popular history and is more entertainment than a research resource due to the poorly cited sources.⁴² He hints that his book contains new evidence of the division's actions during the war, but all the information is located

³⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁴¹ Charles Whiting, *America's Forgotten Army* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 83-9.

⁴² The 45th Infantry Division spent 500 days in combat in the European theater. Kershaw is a professional writer and he has written several books on various World War II topics.

in other secondary sources. He offers nothing new to the debate of southern France or the Vosges. Rick Atkinson in *Guns at Last Light* wrote about both the north and southern flank of the Broad Front strategy. He also added new information on the Vosges campaign. He argued that the southern prong was needed because a two “punch” approach had won every campaign for Montgomery.⁴³ “Two-fisted punching had in fact won through for Montgomery at Alamein, Mareth, and Normandy.”⁴⁴ He contends that the Germans did not want to fight in the Vosges, as their main defensive position was outside the mountains near the city of Colmar west of the Rhine River. The German plan for fighting the Americans was to slow their advance to the river. He maintains that the VI Corps did not want to fight in the Vosges either. General Lucian Truscott was disappointed when he was ordered into the mountains as he had hoped to by-pass them and link up with Patton’s army.⁴⁵ Since the end of the Second World War, there has only been one in-depth study of the battle for the Vosges.

Keith Bonn did the first and only study of the Vosges Mountain Campaign, inspired by US Army Colonel Karl Detzer work, *The Mightiest Army* (1945). His work was an overview of America’s involvement in the Second World War and argued that the U.S. Army was the best military force to ever take the battlefield in the history of warfare.⁴⁶ In *When the Odds were Even* (1994), Bonn attempted to prove that the US Army was better than the *Wehrmacht*. He analyzed the Vosges Campaign from October 1944 to January 1945, because he thought that the odds were even in supplies, air coverage, and terrain. Bonn argued that the American soldiers had superior training and reinforcements. He maintained that the Vosges Mountains were an

⁴³ Atkinson, 217.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 217-9.

⁴⁶ Karl Detzer, *The Mightiest Army* (Pleasantville, NY: The Reader’s Digest Association, INC., 1945), 1-4. He contended that the army was unstoppable and could have defeated any of the armies involved in the war. The work is ultra-patriotic and racist, as he compares the Japanese to apes.

impenetrable fortress and since the Americans were able to fight their way through the mountains, they were the better army.⁴⁷

Bonn wrote to refute the work of Retired US Army Colonel Trevor Dupuy and Martin Van Creveld, because he thought they favored the German Army in their works. Dupuy wrote *Numbers, Predictions and War* (1979) in which he created a formula to analyze past and future military engagements. He used morale, supplies, equipment, manpower and other factors to determine the combat effectiveness of each side and should have won the battle.⁴⁸ He concluded that the *Wehrmacht* was the most effective army in the Second World War.⁴⁹ Van Creveld continued the work of Dupuy in *Fighting Power* (1982), he reviewed the performance of the German and US Armies in the Second World War. Van Creveld analyzed, developed, and adapted their fighting style based on economic and technological factors. He also looked at training, manpower and logistics. He made the argument that the Germans had developed the superior fighting power, based on the number of military victories that they achieved while outnumbered and fighting with old equipment.⁵⁰

The official histories of the campaign ignore the intent of the Germans and only discuss the amazing victory of the Americans fighting their way through a well-fortified position, rather than that the Germans were fighting a delaying defense to slow the American advance to the Rhine River. This thesis will add to the work started by Bonn. He made several assumptions in his book that were wrong and need corrected. Bonn failed to realize that the Germans were

⁴⁷ Bonn, *xxi- xxviii*. Bonn was a U.S. Army Ranger and graduate of West Point. He wrote the book because he was upset that what he thought was an anti-American tone in World War II scholarship.

⁴⁸ Dupuy reviewed various battles in the east and west.

⁴⁹ Trevor N. Dupuy, *Numbers, Predictions and War: Using History to Evaluate Combat Factors and Predict the Outcome of Battles* (New York: The Bobbs- Merrill Company, Inc., 1979), 1-12. Dupuy was a retired U.S. Army Colonel from West Point, and a noted military historian.

⁵⁰ Martin Van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German & US Army, 1939- 1945* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 163-73.

performing a delaying defense and not fighting to hold on to the Vosges Mountains. He was too focused on trying to prove that the American Army's superiority to the Germans, that he overlooked key facts to get to his conclusion. This thesis will correct the problems made in *When the Odds were Even*, while taking a new look at the Vosges Mountain Campaign.

Chapter 2: The Vosges Mountains, Germans and 45th Infantry Division in 1944

When the Odds were Even is a flawed, but important introduction research of the Vosges Campaign, since Bonn's thesis is disproved with a study of the campaign. He failed to realize that the Germans were fighting a delaying defense in the mountains, because it had the ideal terrain for the tactic. He set out to prove that the American Army of 1944 was better than the German Army at any time during the Second World War.

¹ The truth is by the fall of 1944 their fighting with the Allies had weakened them to the point that they were on the defensive. The German Army slowly retreated towards Germany on all three fronts (Italy, France and in the east). In the summer of the same year, the Russian offensive destroyed twenty- five German divisions, and the *Wehrmacht* anticipated 1.6 million casualties by October.² In his work, he inflates the quality and strength of the enemy facing the US VI Corps. This study seeks to correct the problems with the first extensive study of the Vosges Mountain Campaign from the 45th Infantry Division's records.

In August 1944, the US Seventh Army commanded by General Alexander Patch, landed in southern France in OPERATION DRAGOON.³ After which they raced over 400 miles in one month chasing after the retreating German Army Group G.⁴ The 45th Division, is one of three divisions that made up the VI Corps. By October 1944, the Allies faced the Vosges Mountains, one of the last obstacles between them and the Rhine River.⁵ General Lucian Truscott commander of the VI Corps, protested the order to move his corps through the mountains,

¹ Bonn, *xxi- xxviii*.

² Atkinson, 131.

³ In August 1944, the Seventh Army only consisted of the VI Corps.

⁴ Atkinson, 217-8.

⁵ The mountains were arguably the roughest terrain of Eisenhower's broad front.

because of the rough terrain and easily defensible location.⁶ Instead of making a stand to hold the mountains at all cost, the Germans chose a different tactic, a delaying defense to slow the American advance to the Rhine River. This is part of the German Doctrine in the *Truppenführung* (*German Army Manual for Unit Command in World War II*) that outlines where and how to perform a delaying defense. The reports from the 45th Infantry Divisions demonstrate that the Nineteenth Army fought a delaying defense in the mountains. The combination of the manual and reports indicate that the Germans only sought to slow the Americans and not keep possession of the mountains. The US Seventh Army was the first military forces to successfully make it through the Vosges, but its advance was inevitable. The Germans had used a delaying defense in the East, in the hopes of slowing the Soviet juggernaut. By the time of the Vosges Campaign, the German Army was in poor shape and got worse with each passing month. Before a study of the campaign can be started, one must understand the terrain of the Vosges, doctrine of a delaying defense, strength of the combatants, and strategy of the German Army in 1944.

The Vosges are a rugged mountain range in eastern France's Alsace region, along the German border, and have been a defensive citadel since Julius Caesar marched on Gaul.⁷ They are known as the Hardt Mountains to the Germans and have been the historical disputed border between France and Germany.⁸ The Vosges is bordered by Alsace on the western edge and the Rhine River on the east. Only 15 miles separate the two landmarks. The mountains run parallel to the Rhine on the Alsatian Plain for roughly 90 miles, and are 25 miles wide at their widest

⁶ Atkinson, 217-8. Truscott wrote several letters to Patch protesting the order, because he believed that the army was going to by-pass the Vosges or would have taken them sooner before the Germans had a chance to build up their defenses.

⁷ The Vosges lay between 47° 30' north latitude and 49° 15'.

⁸ Emmanuel De Martonne, *Geographical Regions of France* (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1954), 59.

point.⁹ The Vosges rise from the Rhine Valley, starting near Belfort, to heights of over 4500 feet. The mountains are broken up into two distinct sections, the Low and the High Vosges, by the Saverne Gap.¹⁰ They are also known as the Sandstone and Granite Vosges, respectively.¹¹

The High Vosges rise to heights of over 4600 feet and are tilted to the east. The tallest of the peaks is Mount Grand Ballon at 4663 feet.¹² (See Map 3) They are made of harder rock than the Low, such as gneiss, but mainly granite. The High is less steep than the Low; most of its slopes are gradual with long stretches of the flat ridge lines that allow for easy mobility on foot. The ridge lines above 2000 feet also extend into high mountain pastures and small plateaus. The High Vosges is densely forested, roughly 60% covered in forests. These forests are made up mainly of tall pine trees with little underbrush and several footpaths, making it easy for soldiers to infiltrate the area while being protected from aerial bombardment; however, "Orientation by compass is vital throughout the Vosges, where paths winding through wooded areas cause even people who know the sector to lose their way."¹³ The High Vosges also have several valleys where many of the major roads run through the area. The bottoms of the valleys are usually marshes that at first glance seem to be sturdy, but will not support the weight of vehicles, confining truck and tank traffic to the road network running through the valleys. The High Vosges support a larger network of roads than the Low, but most of them could only be used as single lane roads for military traffic.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid., 48-50.

¹⁰ Ibid., 49.

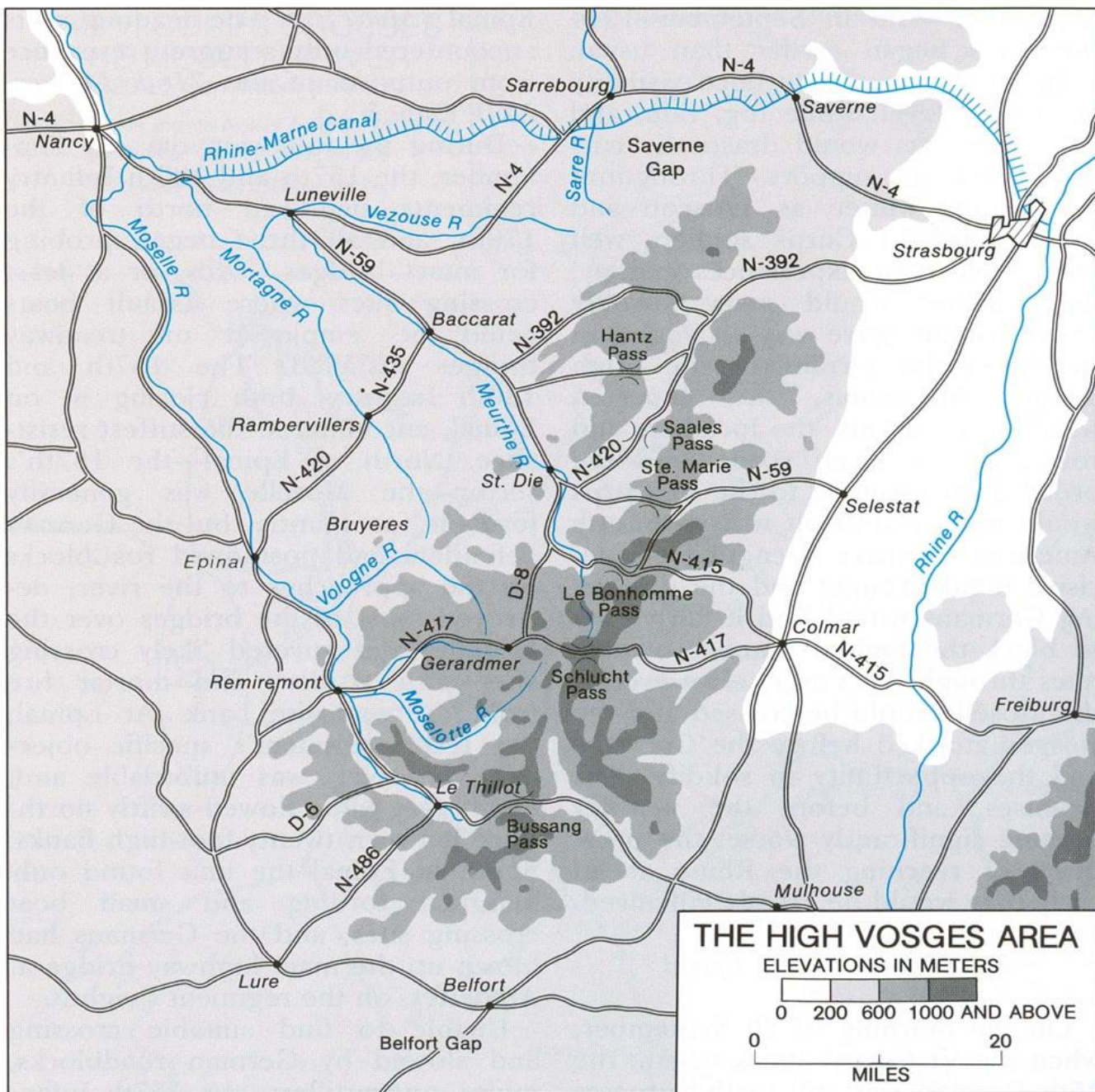
¹¹ Ibid., 52.

¹² Ibid., 50.

¹³ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-2, "G-2 Terrain Study of High Vosges Mountain Area with Details of Sector Raon L'Etape October 1944," 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 10, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Map 3



Source: Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 241.

The largest obstacle, besides the mountains in the High, is the Meurthe River, which averages 50 to 100 feet across and three to six feet deep.¹⁵ The division found area around the river suitable for the construction of military bridges as most of the bridges in the Vosges could not to be trusted due to their shoddy craftsmanship.¹⁶ Even though the High Vosges sits at a higher elevation than the Low, it still supports a large population, because it is more hospitable.¹⁷

The Low Vosges rise to heights of only 1500 feet and drop off sharply. Like the High Vosges, they too are tilted towards the east. They are made up of sedimentary rocks such as limestone and sandstone.¹⁸ The sandstone belt that makes up the Low wraps around the western edge of the High.¹⁹ Even though they are smaller than the High Vosges, the ridges of the Low are extremely steep and make crossing nearly impossible. The slopes are between 15 and 30 degrees, making mechanized movement impossible outside the few roads that run through the area. Also, fewer roads and passes are found here than in the High, making navigation more difficult. The area's high ground commands the roadways, making it easy for the enemy to attack. Trucks and tanks could not leave the road for the risk of becoming bogged down. The Low has fewer trees than the High, and more open fields that allow defenders a greater field of fire. In the High Vosges trees grow everywhere, from the ridges to the valleys, and in the Low, the trees grow only on the summits. The small valley floors are made up of meadows and are mainly used as pastures for livestock.²⁰

¹⁵ Martonne, 41-3 and 103.

¹⁶ G-2 Terrain Study.

¹⁷ Martonne, 53.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50-2.

¹⁹ E. Estyn Evans, *France: An Introductory Geography* (New York: Frederick A Praeger, 1966), 117.

²⁰ Martonne, 50-3.

The Vosges have historically been a bastion for defenders. The Celts used the mountains as protection from the Romans.²¹ The Germans settled the east side of the Vosges and the Celts lived on the opposite side. The Alsatians used the mountains as protection from the Huns.²² Throughout the centuries, no army attempted to cross the Vosges.²³ From the tenth through the eighteenth century, numerous leaders built fortresses in the passes of the Vosges to control the easy movement from east to west.²⁴ From 1870 to 1943, the Vosges were a barrier used to keep modern armies out. During the Franco-Prussian War, the French placed soldiers in the mountains to defend France. After the German victory in 1871, they took over Alsace and Lorraine, which became the Reichsland.²⁵ During World War I, the German army in 1914 attempted to march through the Saverne Gap to attack Epinal and take it from the French. They stopped at the Meurthe River and the fighting became static like the rest of the fighting on the western front.²⁶ In 1940, the Germans followed the 1870 war plan and bypassed the Vosges, only moving into the mountains after they had taken control of France. The US Seventh Army in 1944, became the only army after World War I that attempted to march through the Vosges.

The Germans hampered, but did not stop the Americans trek through the mountains due to a delaying defense. *Truppenführung* outlines the tactic in detail. This is the same tactic they used on the eastern and western (in the north) front. The German Army slowly retreated towards its homeland sapping enemy strength until their chance to strike a major blow to the enemy in

²¹ Ruth Putman, *Alsace and Lorraine, From Caesar to Kaiser 58 B.C. - 1871 A.D.* (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1915), 15-6. The oldest of which is known as Heathen Wall which was built in the early 20's BC, however this is just the best estimate that archeologist can provide.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, 30-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 39-45.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁶ Bonn, 6-7.

the hopes of regaining the terrain later.²⁷ They did this on the Eastern front and counterattacked at Kursk. In the north on the Western front, they fought a delaying defense until they stuck the Allies at the Battle of the Bulge. The Wehrmacht did the same thing in the Vosges Mountains. They fought a delaying defense until they struck back at the Americans during OPERATION NORDWIND attempting to push the Americans back into the mountains.

According to *Truppenführung* a delaying defense is used when the Germans are faced with a superior enemy force. The purpose is to sap the enemy strength while buying time to gain the advantage and go on the offensive once more. The strategy only works when the enemy force follows the defenders into a pre-prepared location, such as the Vosges Mountains. The main action takes place on a line of resistance by the infantry with several fallback positions. The terrain should be used to full advantage in determining the location of the line and the fallback positions. The best defensible area is mountains and wooded areas. Locations that force a narrow column of approach is preferred, such as the road system in the Vosges. The lines should also force the enemy to deploy early, thereby sapping time and resources. The commander decides the force used by his soldiers and the time for when they can retreat to the fallback positions. Subordinate commanders have the power to order a withdrawal before time if they are unable to defend their position. The defenders can put up a strong defense or can stay out of close contact with the enemy depending on the ability to defend that location. The lines are further strengthened by the use of obstacles in front of them. The obstacles slow down the enemy and allow the defenders the chance to counter attack. Obstacles can come in all types, with the exception of field fortifications, and dummy field fortifications are extremely valuable. The most

²⁷ Albert Seaton, *The Fall of Fortress Europe 1943- 1945* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishing, INC., 1981), 49- 50.

common obstacles used in the Vosges were barbed wire, road blocks, mines and dummy field fortifications. The German commander needs to break up the area into different sectors of the defense. In each sector, the commander should have pre-prepared lines of resistance.²⁸

The *Truppenführung* details how the German Army should conduct the delaying defense. Every unit is given a different mission and objective during the defense. The infantry are the backbone of the strategy. Their job is to harass and delay the enemy at every chance while keeping their distance. They engage the enemy in front of the line of resistance and fall back when the enemy offers a stiff defense. Infantry with heavy weapons are placed in fortified positions in front of the line.²⁹ “In covered terrain, light machine guns and riflemen can delay the enemy’s approach and deceive him as to the type of the defense and the location of the line of resistance.”³⁰ They are also placed in front of the line to probe and harass the enemy, especially as they try to get past obstacles. The infantry is to make every attempt to hold to keep the enemy away from the line, so that they can retreat at night in the cover of darkness.³¹ “If the line of resistance is evacuated during the day the infantry heavy weapons and the artillery must deploy in depth.”³² If the enemy attempts to penetrate the line of infantry, they should be allowed to do so. The affected section should retreat with its flanks attacking the rapidly advancing enemy in the attempt to envelop them.³³

Artillery is important in assisting the infantry. It should be used to harass the movement of the enemy infantry. Forward observers for the artillery are mixed in with the infantry to help

²⁸ Bruce Condell and David T. Zabecki, etd., *On the German Art of War: German Army Manual for Unit Command in World War II* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2009), 132-4.

²⁹ Ibid., 134.

³⁰ Ibid., 134.

³¹ Ibid., 135.

³² Ibid., 135

³³ Ibid., 135

coordinate the two elements.³⁴ The commander of each battery has the power of “execution and control of the interdiction and harassing missions.”³⁵ If adequate ammunition is available “every attempt must be made to deceive the enemy through aggressive artillery fire from widely dispersed positions.”³⁶ Artillery and heavy weapon infantry are to maintain the line of resistance. They are to retreat to the next line before the infantry and provide covering fire for them. The sector commander has to give the order to retreat as soon as possible.³⁷ “As the withdrawing units approach the new line of resistance, some of the artillery and infantry heavy weapons must be in position there already. Rifle companies are employed to the full effectiveness of their defensive capabilities as security elements in the line of resistance.”³⁸

Other unit types are held in the rear until the commander needs them. Armored vehicles are used to protect the retreating units by attacking the enemy. They also counter attack when the enemy penetrates the line.³⁹ Engineers are deployed ahead of time to prepare lines of resistance and field fortifications. They also set up obstacles, construct roadblocks and lay landmines between the lines.⁴⁰ Anti-tank units are used to protect open terrain and avenues of approach from enemy vehicles. When needed they are moved in front of the line to slow the enemy and are protected by the infantry. Smoke and chemical agents are extremely valuable in delaying the enemy. Smoke is used to deceive the enemy and provide cover for unit movement.⁴¹ “Terrain

³⁴ Ibid., 134.

³⁵ Ibid., 134.

³⁶ Ibid., 134.

³⁷ Ibid., 135-6.

³⁸ Ibid., 135-6.

³⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 136.

⁴¹ Ibid., 136.

contamination with chemical agents can restrict the enemy's follow-up."⁴² These units work in conjunction with the infantry and artillery to slow the enemy advance.

The American army had a similar tactic to the delaying defense, "delaying action" is the American version. The 1944 *FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations: Operation* outlines the tactic.⁴³ The field manual gives less instructions on the tactic than the *Truppenführung*. The purpose of the action is "to gain time while avoiding decisive action."⁴⁴ It is designed to buy time until they are prepared to battle, while the Germans use the time to sap the enemy's strength. The Americans want to fight on the high ground with open terrain in front of them for "good observation and good fields of fire at long range."⁴⁵ They prefer to fight the enemy at long range where the infantry does not have to come into close contact with their adversary.⁴⁶ In the delaying defense the Germans are willing to give up land, but for the Americans, "no more ground than necessary is given up."⁴⁷ The US Army also makes full use of fortified outposts with heavy machine guns deployed in front of the main lines of defense.⁴⁸ Both tactics serve the same purpose, to delay the enemy for an offensive strike; however, the Americans attempt to hold as much ground as possible. By 1944, the Germans used the delaying defense on the western and eastern fronts.

By 1943, the *Wehrmacht* had lost the offensive capabilities that it once had in 1939. The Allies had started gaining ground against the Axis powers in Europe. The Soviets, by the

⁴² *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴³ The 1944 *FM 100-5 Operations* was published on 15 June 1944, which was four months before the Vosges Campaign and the latest edition.

⁴⁴ *FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations: Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944), 208.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 208 and 210.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

summer of 1943, had taken back half of the Ukraine and Belarus. The Germans attempted to defend the east wall against the Russians. In OPERATION CITADEL, they sought to resume the offensive in Ukraine with a massive counterattack that failed.⁴⁹ The western Allies defeated the Germans in Italy and Sicily. The Axis powers Forced on the defensive in Italy the Axis powers had lost much of the country to the Allies. The Germans in France prepared for the Anglo-American invasion in the west.⁵⁰ In the east, Hitler refused to give the initiative to the Russian Army.⁵¹ (See Map 4)

After the defeat, the Germans continued to fight a delaying defense in the east, because they lacked the offensive capabilities. The Germans prepared defensive lines from the Balkans to the Baltic Sea in preparations for the Russian counterattack; however, the Soviets turned their attention to the Finns. For the rest of 1943, the Russians fought to liberate Leningrad.⁵² In January 1944, the Red Army began a new offensive against the Germans.⁵³ They attempted to hold the Soviets back at their preplanned defensive lines and slow their advance on Germany. They intended to go on the offensive again after forcing the western Allies out of the war. Their plan helped to slow the Red Army, but they could never retake the initiative.⁵⁴ They used the same strategy in Italy and eventually in France; however, they could only focus on one front at a time.

⁴⁹ Charles Messenger, *The Second World War in Europe* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 157- 61.

⁵⁰ Seaton, *The Fall of Fortress Europe*, 49.

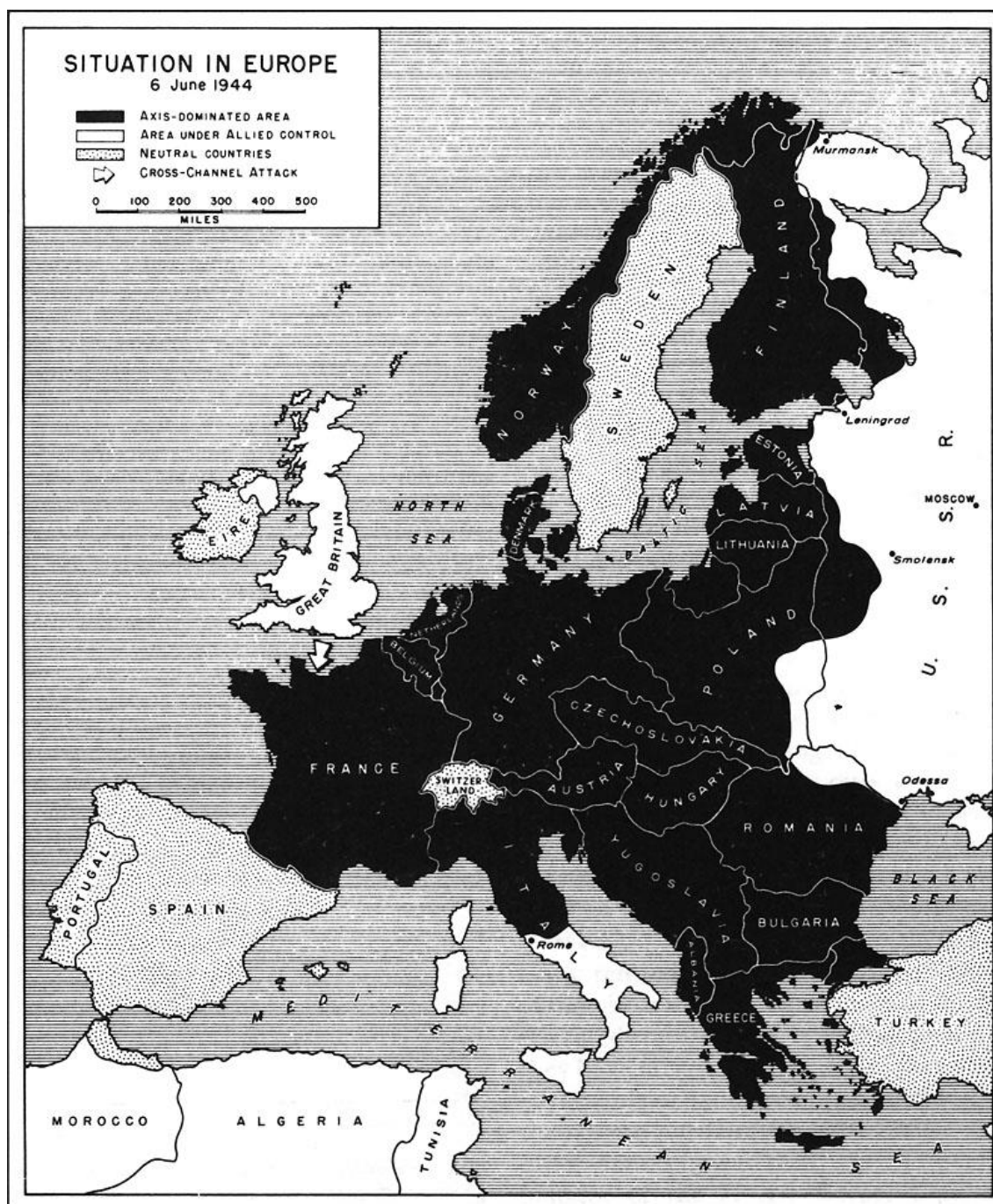
⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 162-3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 165-70.

Map 4



Source: Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 268.

In 1943, the Germans assisted the Italians in defense of the Italian peninsula. The British and Americans invaded Italy on 3 September 1943, in OPERATION AVALANCHE. The Axis powers went on the defensive and counterattacked the Allies several times until the winter of 1943. Both combatants took up defensive lines and could not go on the offensive until the next year.⁵⁵ On 22 January 1944, the Allies performed OPERATION SHINGLE, an amphibious landing near the city of Anzio in order to break the stalemate. The landing placed them to the rear of the Axis defensive line. The Germans held their defensive lines until May 1944, and they began to retreat towards Rome.⁵⁶ On 5 June 1944, the *Wehrmacht* retreated from the city and into northern Italy. The Americans entered the city on that same day.⁵⁷ After June 1944, the Germans lacked offensive capabilities on the Italian front. They setup a series of defensive lines throughout northern Italy and into the Alps. Italy gave the 45th Division, its first experience with the delaying defense.⁵⁸

In 1943, the Germans in France prepared for the inevitable invasion by the western Allies. They could not stop the preparations for the invasion, but only build up their coastal defenses. On 6 June 1944, the Anglo-Americans came ashore in OPERATION OVERLORD and started pushing into mainland France.⁵⁹ By July, “The *Wehrmacht* was in headlong retreat from France, and the immediate tasks were to reconstitute German forces in the west and hold back the Allied forces while defenses in depth were strengthened along the Westwall.”⁶⁰ The Germans retreated from Belgium into Holland. Hitler setup a series of defensive lines stretching from Holland through Germany down to Switzerland. On all three fronts, the Germans had taken up

⁵⁵ Ibid., 151.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 180-3.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 185 and 194.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 179 and 194-5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 177-8 and 180-8.

⁶⁰ James R. Arnold, Stephen Badsey, Ken Ford and Steven J. Zaloga, *Into the Reich: Battles on Germany's Western Frontier 1944- 1945* (Osceola, WI: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 11.

defensive positions waiting for their chance to make an offensive strike. (See Map 5) “Hitler’s strategy called for holding firm on all fronts until offensive preparations were complete. He believed that the British and Americans would be forced to halt after outrunning their supplies.”⁶¹ They thought that striking the western Allies would put them out of war and then they would only have to deal with the Russians.⁶² The delaying defense strategy that the Germans took in the Vosges Mountains happened to be the same strategy they took in northern France, Italy, and in the east.

In southern France, the Germans lacked the men to defend the territory and their compatriots had retreated in northern France. On 18 August 1944, three days after the American invasion in OPERATION DRAGOON, Army Group G received orders to retreat from the area. The orders required all German soldiers and personnel attached to the *Wehrmacht* to move immediately towards Dijon with defensive withdrawal lines setup at major cities (Avignon, Grenoble, and Lyon) along the way.⁶³ The divisions in Marseilles and Toulon had to protect U-boat construction until pressured by the enemy and then they could start their retreat. LXII Reserve Infantry Corps and 148 Reserve Infantry Division had to break from the Nineteenth Army and move to the Italian border to protect the passes into Italy.⁶⁴ The Nineteenth Army fought a delaying defense against the Americans to give the rest of the formations time to make their retreat towards Dijon.⁶⁵ They fought during the day and withdrew to their new

⁶¹ *Into the Reich*, 186-7.

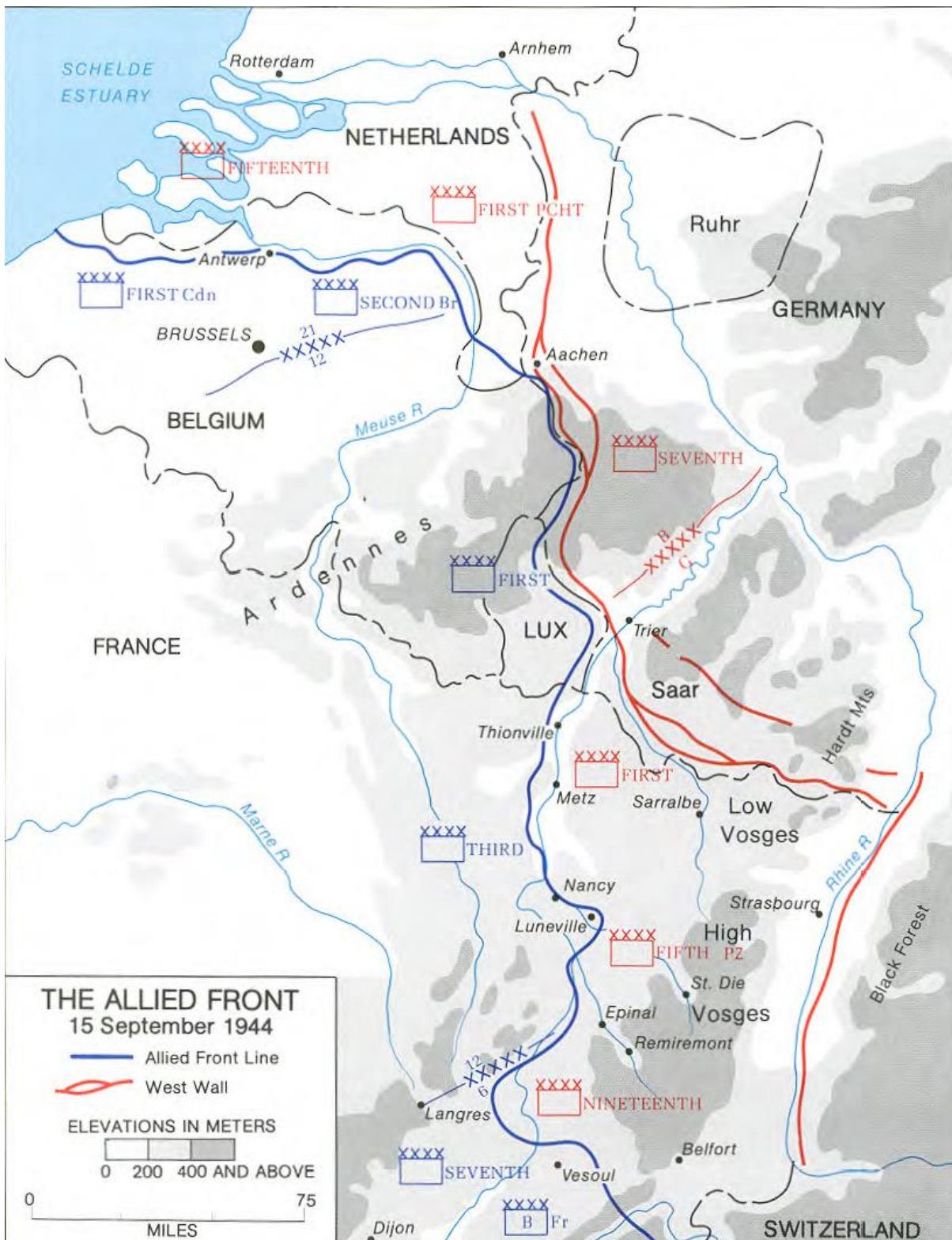
⁶² 187.

⁶³ Heinz von Gyldenfeldt, Europe Foreign Military Studies Branch, “Army Group G (May- Sep 44),” German Army Group G Reports, Box 1, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 38.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

Map 5



Source: Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 227.

defensive lines at night.⁶⁶ (See Map 6) They made it to Lyon on 3 September 1944, and most of the German forces in southern France had arrived in Dijon.⁶⁷ The Army Group G then retreated across the Moselle River while the Nineteenth Army set up a defense line near the city of Epinal. By 21 September 1944, all German forces had crossed the river ahead of the Americans.⁶⁸ The bulk of Army Group G retreated into the Vosges Mountains with the Nineteenth Army as the rear guard. The Germans fought a delaying defense through the Vosges and west of the Rhine River with the plan of keeping the Seventh Army occupied until the spring of 1945.

The 45th Infantry Division spent 511 days in combat during World War II. The division was a National Guard unit formed on 19 October 1920. It was made up of troops from Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Oklahoma.⁶⁹ During the war, it joined the VI Corps of the Seventh Army. In May 1943, they departed for Oran in North Africa to await deployment into the European theater.⁷⁰ The division first saw combat during OPERATION HUSKY on 10 June 1943, the Allied invasion of Sicily.⁷¹ Afterwards, it became a lead elements in the invasion of Italy. After the Allies became bogged down in Italy, the “Thunderbirds” were pulled off the front lines to make another amphibious landing into Italy.⁷² It had a pivotal role in the battle for Anzio. After it helped to defeat the Germans at Anzio, it fought its way towards Rome.⁷³ Before it reached the city, the division pulled back for training in preparation of OPERATION DRAGOON.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁸ Whitlock, 324-5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1-4.

⁷⁰ Gonzales, Michael E., *A Brief History of the 45th Infantry Division in the Second World War* (Oklahoma City, OK: 45th Infantry Division Museum, 1995), 6.

⁷¹ Ibid., 6-7.

⁷² Ibid., 7.

⁷³ Ibid., 8-9.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 9- 10. OPERATION DRAGOON was originally called OPERATION ANVIL, and it was supposed to happen at the same time as OPERATION OVERLORD. It was delayed because of the lack of landing crafts for the assault.

MAP 6



Source: Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 73.

German Army Group G defended of Southern France during the operation. The 45th Infantry Division pursued Army Group G across Southern France and through the Vosges Mountains.⁷⁵ The Thunderbirds crossed the Rhine River on 26 March 1945 entering the Germany heartland.⁷⁶ On 29 April 1945, the “Thunderbirds” liberated the Dachau concentration camp.⁷⁷ The division continued fighting Army Group G across Germany to the city Munich, where the war ended for both units.⁷⁸

During the war, the US Army infantry divisions formed a “Triangular” organization and consisted of nearly 15,000 troops. Each division had three infantry regiments of three battalions each.⁷⁹ It had four artillery battalions to support the infantry.⁸⁰ It also had support units consisting of a headquarters company, reconnaissance troop, military police platoon, signal company, ordnance company, engineer battalion, medical battalion and quartermaster company.⁸¹ The army attached tank and tank destroyer units to the division.⁸²

On 8 May 1944, the *Wehrmacht* created Army Group G for the protection of southern France in anticipation of an allied invasion of France.⁸³ The First Army, Nineteenth Army and

⁷⁵ Ibid., 12-3.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁹ The 45th Division had the 157th, 179th and 180th Infantry regiments. Each regiment had roughly 3,300 men.

⁸⁰ The 45th Division had the 158th, 160th, 171st, and 189th artillery battalions under its command. These battalions were armed with 105mm howitzer and one battalion of 150 mm howitzer. All four battalions combined had roughly 2,230 men.

⁸¹ The 45th Division had the 45th Headquarter Company, 45th Reconnaissance Troop, 45th Signal Company, 700th Ordnance Company, 120th Engineer Battalion, 120th Medical Battalion and the 45th Quartermaster Company under its command. All the units had a combined strength of roughly 2,123.

⁸² Shelby Staton, *Order of Battle: US Army World War II* (Novato CA: Presidio Press 1984), 8-12, 17-9 and 31.

⁸³ Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, 1965), 293.

LXXV Corps combined to make up the army group.⁸⁴ Veterans of the Eastern front made up the divisions of Army Group G; however, they had nearly been destroyed in their fighting with the Russians. In order to bring the divisions back to fighting level, reservist, rear echelon, *Luftwaffe* ground crew members, stragglers, marines, and militiamen filled the ranks of the divisions.⁸⁵ Most of the soldiers of army group had their first combat experience as infantrymen, in southern France, against the US Seventh Army.

General Johannes Blaskowitz commanded Army Group G from 8 May to 21 September 1944. The German high command blamed Blaskowitz for the botched retreat from southern France and they dismissed him of his command. The Seventh Army forced the Nineteenth Army to retreat sooner than they planned by outflanking, and this left some units behind the Americans.⁸⁶ In September, General Hermann Black took command until 24 December 1944, and General Blaskowitz was placed back in charge.⁸⁷ Both generals were veterans of World War I and career soldiers. Blaskowitz commanded soldiers in the 1939 invasion of Poland until he protested the abuses committed by SS soldiers. As a result, he lost his combat command and was forced into the military government of occupied France until taking control of Army Group G.⁸⁸ General Black commanded soldiers in Poland, France, Greece and the Eastern front before taking over the army group.⁸⁹ Both generals were skilled officers and committed to the *Wehrmacht*.

⁸⁴ Pogue, 228. Cole, *The Ardennes*, 293. Army Group G in the beginning was under the command of Army Group D.

⁸⁵ Terry Nick, *The German Order of Battle 1939- 1945, Volume VI* (Washington, DC: The Military Press, 2001), 58, 132, and 134.

⁸⁶ Whitlock, 320-3.

⁸⁷ Pogue, 229.

⁸⁸ Richard Giziowski, *The Enigma of General Blaskowitz* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1997), 220-2 and 261-5.

⁸⁹ F.W. von Mellenthin, *German Generals of World War II: As I Saw Them* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 189-220.

The German Army, in 1944, lost the strength that it had at the beginning of the war. They also no longer had sufficient manpower to garrison their European conquests.⁹⁰ The Germans did several things in order to make up the losses of their soldiers on the eastern front. The Germans reduced the size of their divisions and left decimated units as combat divisions. When the *Wehrmacht* invaded the Soviet Union, it had 153 divisions made up of 3.2 million soldiers. In November 1943, they had 195 divisions in the east made up of 2.85 million soldiers. They did this by removing four regiments from each infantry division.⁹¹ They also left weakened units in combat. One such example from Army Group G is the German 48th Infantry Division that was withdrawn from the line in December 1944. “Its [*sic*] reported strength at that time was 850 infantry and 47 artillerymen.”⁹²

The *Wehrmacht* also created the *Volksgrenadier* divisions to replace the infantry division. These divisions were used to fill in holes on the western and eastern fronts. They were “fairly low grade units.”⁹³ “These divisions were formed at a stage of the war when both manpower and material was becoming scarce and it is unlikely that many were formed at full strength; nonetheless some 50 in all were formed or rebuilt from other formations before the war ended.”⁹⁴ The division had three infantry regiments with two battalions per regiment. The regiments had more automatic weapons to make up for the lack of men.⁹⁵ It had four battalions of artillery, but the number of guns was reduced by 30 percent from the number of guns allowed at the start of

⁹⁰ Albert Seaton, *The Russo-German War, 1941-45* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 394

⁹¹ W.J.K. Davies, *German Army Handbook* (New York: Arco Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), 42. They removed two rifle regiments and two artillery regiments.

⁹² Terry, *German Army Order of Battle*, 132.

⁹³ Davies, 46.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48. *Volksgrenadier* division translates into “the people’s rifle” division.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46-8.

the war.⁹⁶ The infantry is also supported by a headquarters company, antitank battalion, signal battalion and a fusilier company (reconnaissance company). The fusilier company had 200 men with bicycles that replaced the previous 625 men with motorized equipment. Horse-drawn transports replaced the motorized transports for moving supplies. The Germans also replaced heavy antitank weapons with *panzerfausts*.⁹⁷ Remnants of destroyed line units and rear echelon troops made up the divisions. These men had little to no training before placement into combat.⁹⁸ The *Volksgrenadier* were weak combat units, but they did boost the number of men on the frontlines. The alterations did not help to change the problems the army faced in 1944.

When Black took over the army group, he had a personal meeting with Adolf Hitler. Hitler told him that his command would not receive reinforcements, because of a planned offensive in France. He would lead the Americans into the “muddy ground and fog” and stiffen the defense.⁹⁹ He needed to hold Alsace until after the November defensive and then reinforcements would be sent to the army.¹⁰⁰ Army Group G from September to October 1944 received no reinforcements because all strategic reserves moved north for the Ardennes offensive. In November, the *Wehrmacht* sent *Volksstrum*, the “last-ditch home guard” that came from the young and old as replacements to the army group. The *Volksstrum* came from the people last recruited for the war effort.¹⁰¹ In November, they had to “transfer the 3rd and 15th motorised [*sic*] divisions” to the new offensive that help to weaken their combat strength.¹⁰² The

⁹⁶ Ibid., 46-8. One battalion was armed with 150mm howitzer, two with 105mm howitzer and one with horse drawn 75mm howitzer.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 46-8. The biggest group that they turned into combat soldiers was *Luftwaffe* ground support personnel. *Panzerfausts* are shoulder fired anti-tank weapons.

⁹⁸ Bonn, 44.

⁹⁹ Von Mellenthin, 217.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 217.

¹⁰¹ Historical Division Headquarters United States Army, Europe Foreign Military Studies Branch, “Army Group C [*Sic*] (Nov 44- 22 Jan 45),” German Army Group G Reports, Box 1, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1-3 and Davies,16.

¹⁰² Europe Foreign Military Studies Branch, “Army Group C [*Sic*]”, 1.

transfer of troops and the lack of proper reinforcements weakened the army group until December 1944.

In 1944, the Americans had a better system of replacement in place than the Germans. They shortened the training time for infantrymen and stripped enlisted men from divisions awaiting deployment. They had to make the change to the replacement system, because of the demand for new troops after the invasion of France.¹⁰³ The 45th Infantry Division received 6815 enlisted reinforcements by January 1945; however, these men received unsatisfactory training.¹⁰⁴

The 45th Infantry Division's G-1 responded to a letter sent to the headquarters by the War Department Observers Board in which they complained about the quality of the reinforcements.¹⁰⁵ They wrote only about the new riflemen in the unit. They do not know the "tactical employment of infantry weapons."¹⁰⁶ They needed more time on the rifle range and could not fire the bazooka. The new soldiers only trained to use one weapon and lacked familiarization with the machine gun. They needed more training in night operations and selecting targets.¹⁰⁷ In order to overcome the problems, the division commanders started giving the replacements a 48-hour training session before sending them to the front. The new men joined a platoon with "a battle-tested aggressive staff sgt. was assigned as platoon leader."¹⁰⁸ The platoons trained with their leader for two days and carried supplies to the front lines. This

¹⁰³ Stanton, 4.

¹⁰⁴ 45th Infantry Division Office of G-1, "G-1 Section German Campaign January 1945," 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 13, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Annex No. 12.

¹⁰⁵ They wrote the letter about the quality of replacements on 28 December 1944 and the memo of how they fixed the problems on 2 January 1945.

¹⁰⁶ 45th Infantry Division Office of G-1, "G-1 Section German Campaign December 1944," 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Annex No. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Annex No. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Annex No. 2.

allowed them to get use to “shellfire” without being in combat.¹⁰⁹ The division tried the procedure over an extended period and “proved to be the best method in the utilization of replacements.”¹¹⁰ The 179th Infantry Regiment started the training procedure in October 1944 and after success, all regiments of the division used it.¹¹¹ The replacements had weaknesses, but the 45th Infantry Division found a way to overcome the problems.

By mid-1944, the German situation had pushed them from an offensive strategy to the defense strategy to protect three different fronts. The *Wehrmacht* had declined because of poorly trained units and piecemealed divisions. They turned soldiers into riflemen who lacked formal infantry training. The German Army could not meet the demands of fighting on several fronts at one time. Bonn admitted that, “by late 1944, the German army in the west was suited neither by organization nor by personnel and training for the execution of its mission to hold back the Allies from the gates of Germany.”¹¹² At the same time, the American situation had improved as they gained ground in France. They also received adequate replacements that could easily be trained by their infantry division to be adequate in combat.

Bonn argued that, the Germans had fought to hold the Vosges using the area as a natural fortress, like many armies before them had done. The Germans instead fought a delaying defense in the hopes of a successful counterattack in December 1944. The Americans received decently trained reinforcements while fighting in the mountains, while Army Group G received poor replacements until late December before OPERATION NORDWIND. The Germans lacked critical supplies such as medicine, ammunition of all types, winter clothing, heating fuel, and weapons

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Annex No. 2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Annex No. 2.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Annex No. 2.

¹¹² Bonn, 47.

throughout the four month period. It is impossible to judge the two militaries from the fighting in the Vosges Mountains. The American Army faced a German Army in decline in 1944. The *Wehrmacht* did not fight to hold the mountains, but it tried to gain time. It used obstacles of all types to sap as much men and material from the Americans as possible before their offensive. The Germans had the ideal place to use a delaying defense in the easily defendable Vosges Mountains.

Chapter 3: Moselle River Defense to the Colmar Pocket: 20 September to 31 December 1944

In early 1944, the Germans thought very little of the capabilities of the US infantry, but found its artillery terrifying and accurate. “Americans do not follow their successes up. The Russians over-ran and sealed us in our pillboxes, then returned and wiped them out later. Americans must be afraid of losing men; they always stop when they come to an obstacle and do not press on until it has been destroyed. But their artillery is terrifying.”¹ This underestimation helped the Seventh Army in its trek through the Vosges Mountains. The *Wehrmacht* was over confident in its delaying defense and obstacles to halt the American advance in southern France.

In late September, Army Group G started the delaying defense at the Moselle River, a shift from the mass retreat from southern France. It continued the strategy through the end of December. In September, the Germans hastily put together a defensive action that grew increasingly stiffer as the Allies got closer to the Rhine River. The *Wehrmacht* used roadblocks, booby-traps, mines, and machine gun positions on hills as part of its delaying defense. During the four month period, the Americans did not have a perfect logistical situation, but the Germans suffered from a lack of vital supplies despite the close proximity to Germany. The 45th Division received adequate reinforcements, while Army Group G received mostly stragglers with poor morale. Weather was a problem for both sides; as a majority of their soldiers lived exposed to the harsh Vosges’ winters. Armor and aircraft assisted both sides as they attempted to achieve their objectives.

By 10 September 1944, the Germans had retreated from the Mediterranean coast to hastily prepare a defense line along the Moselle River. Army Group G set up the defense line

¹ Warren P. Munsell, *The Story of a Regiment: A History of the 179th Regimental Combat Team* (San Angelo, TX: Newsfoto, 1946), 83.

miles from the Vosges Mountains to buy time to prepare their positions in the lower ranges.² (See Map 7) It hoped to rebuild its strength in the mountains and counterattack the US Army's southern flank.³ The Seventh Army expected the *Wehrmacht* "to take advantage of the terrain along four major phase lines."⁴ Germans setup the first line at the Moselle River, followed by the foothills of the High Vosges and the approaches through the mountains. The third line was at the foothills of the Low Vosges around the Alsace Plains and lastly the Rhine River.⁵ "As the Rhine was the last natural barrier before Germany, the enemy was expected to make maximum use of the defense in depth afforded by the Vosges Mountains."⁶ As it prepared the defensive lines, the *Wehrmacht* became concerned by the rapid advance of the US Third Army led by General George Patton and ordered Army Group G to attack before further withdrawal.⁷ Between 4 to 8 September, it removed full strength units from the Moselle River defensive line. The attack started the following day, Patton's army defeated the German attack within the week and forced them back on the defensive at the river.⁸

On 12 September, "the 45th was ordered to capture Epinal and cross the Moselle, proceed in a northeasterly direction to take Rambervillers and Baccarat, and be prepared to seize the Saverne Gap."⁹ Epinal is the vital communication center and transportation hub leading into the Vosges Mountains.¹⁰ General Black ordered the German Nineteenth Army to hold the city until

² Whitlock, 324.

³ Pogue, 246. The southern flank was considered the US Third Army and the Germans thought the US Seventh Army was of little concern to their defensive lines.

⁴ US Army, *The Seventh United States Army: In France and Germany 1944- 1945* Volume II (Nashville, TN: The Battery Press, INC., 1988), 287.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

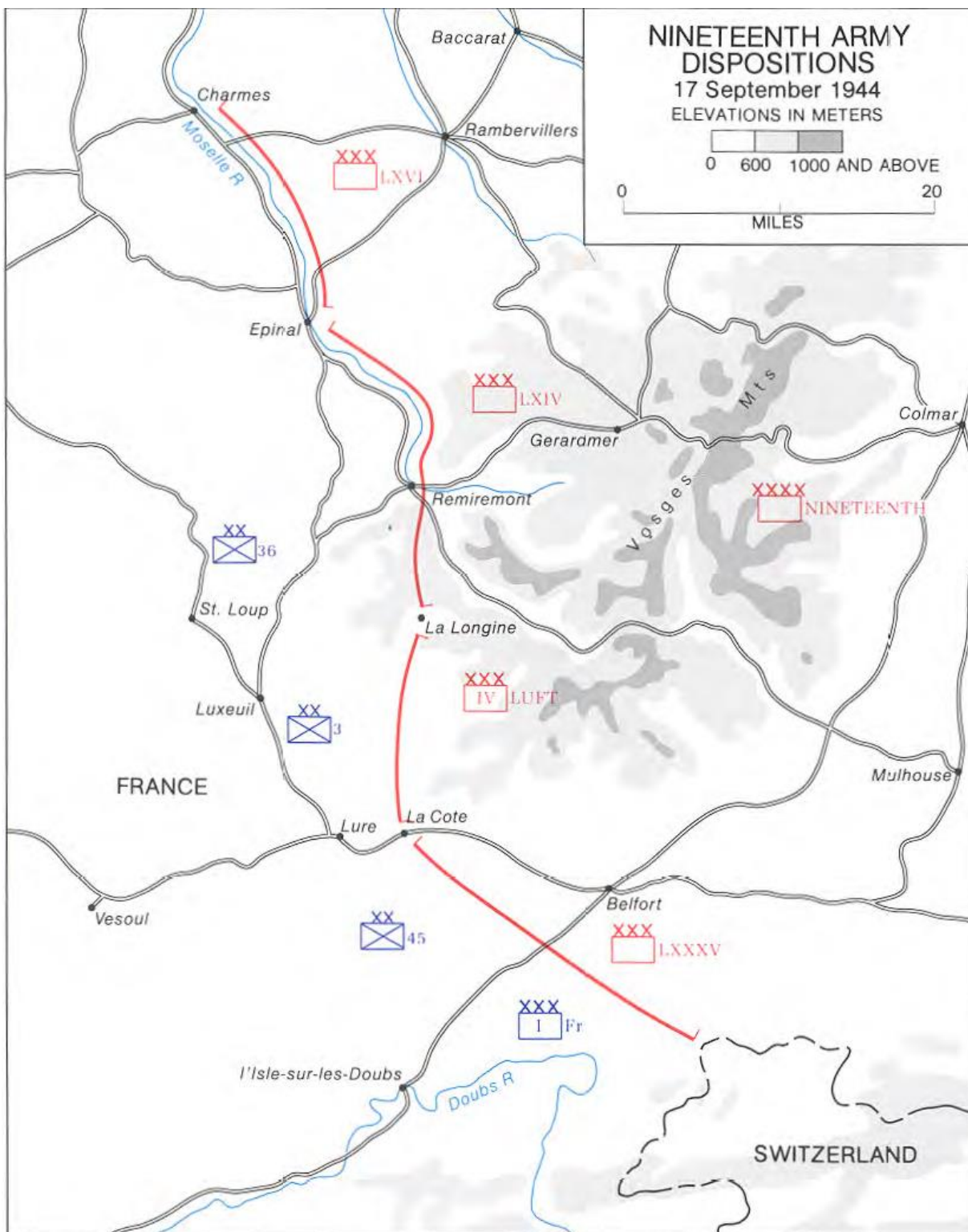
⁷ H.M. Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign* (Washington, DC: Historical Division Department of the Army, 1950), 50-1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 190-3.

⁹ Whitlock, 324.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 324.

Map 7



Source: Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 236.

23 September and then fall back to other defensive positions.¹¹ The Moselle River is 80 feet wide with vertical embankments of 20 feet.¹² The Germans had prepared the river defense by demolishing all of the bridges over it. They also heavily mined the approaches to the city, set up roadblocks and dug machinegun emplacements on the east bank.¹³ The 45th Division attempted several crossings between 20 to 21 September, but heavy machinegun fire forced them back every time. The next day, the division launched a three-pronged attack to take the city.¹⁴ On the same day under the cover of a heavy rain a battalion gained a foothold on the east bank south of the town.¹⁵ The Germans guarding the river fell back to new defensive positions closer to Epinal.¹⁶ Inside the city, the Americans fought bitterly for every inch of ground against snipers, booby-traps, mortar and concentrated artillery fire.¹⁷ Two days later, the Americans liberated the city finding booby-traps and mines left behind by the Germans. On the same day, the 45th captured the cities of Girmont and Mossaux without a fight as the Germans retreated on contact with the enemy.¹⁸ Once securing the river, the 120th Engineer Battalion built temporary bridges to allow motorized vehicles, artillery and supplies to cross the river.¹⁹ After crossing the Moselle, the division entered the foothills of the Vosges Mountains. (See Map 8)

¹¹ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-2, "G-2 Periodic Report, September 1944," 23 September 1944, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹² Guy Nelson, *Thunderbird: A History of the 45th Infantry Division* (Oklahoma City, OK: 45th Infantry Division Association, 1970), 79.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 79. The roadblocks were made from fallen trees, disabled vehicles and ammo carts.

¹⁴ "G-2 Periodic Report, September 1944," 20- 21 September 1944. They attacked north and south of the city crossing the river. The center prong attacked the city.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 September 1944.

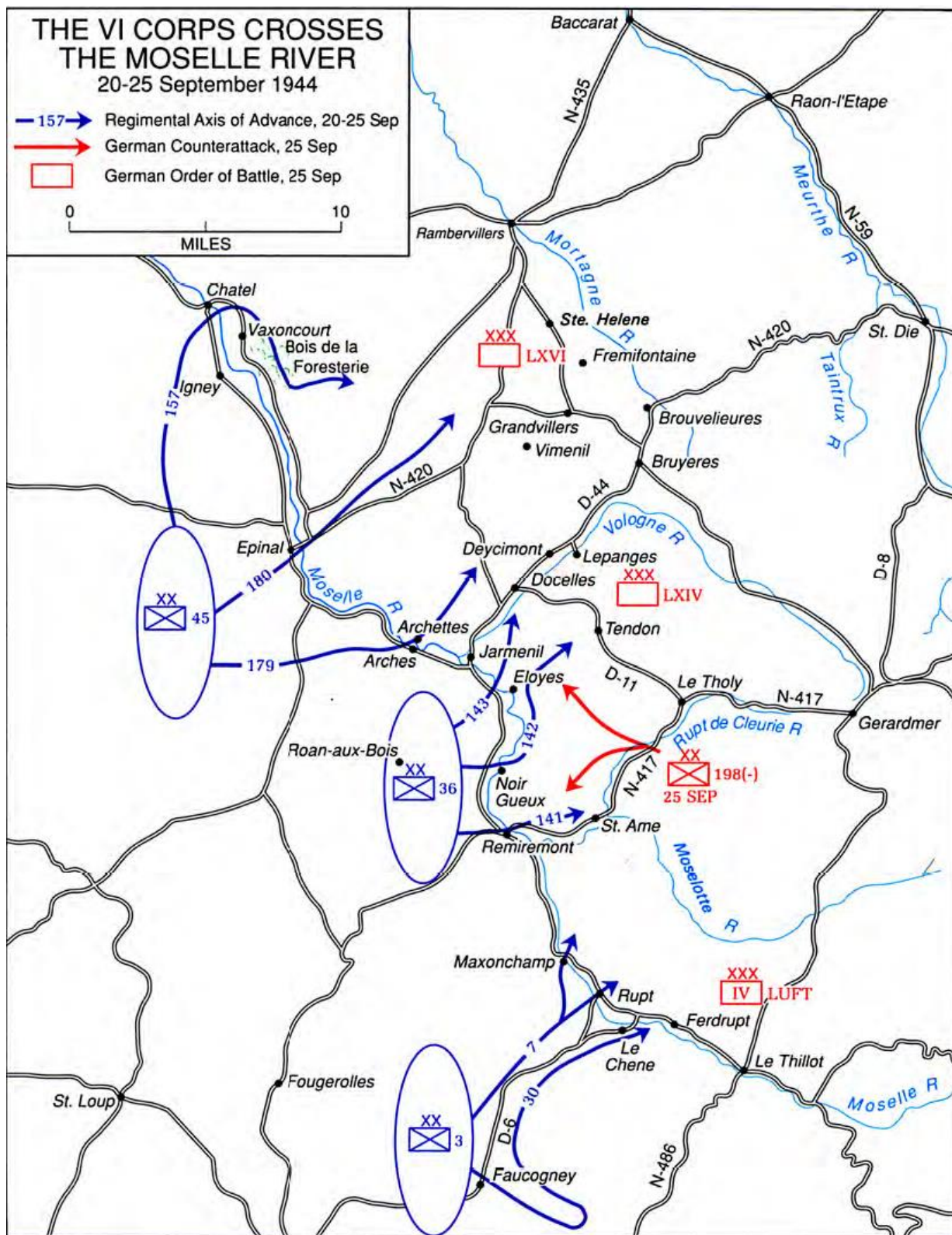
¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 September 1944.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23- 24 September 1944.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26 September 1944.

¹⁹ Nelson, 79.

Map 8



Source: Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 243.

After securing their position on the east bank of the Moselle, the Americans made their advance towards Rambervillers. On 26 September, General Black issued an order for his troops to slow the advance towards the Vosges and to hinder the enemy before they could reach the main line of resistance (MLR). He encouraged an aggressive defense in well protected terrain and no units were allowed to retreat until given special orders.²⁰ From 26 to 29 September, the 45th found that the Germans lacked a MLR between Epinal and Rambervillers. Instead they relied on mobile troops with machine guns and mortars to slow the American progress. They also used roadblocks made of fallen trees, with anti-tank mines in front and anti-personal mines, along with booby-traps in the branches. The Thunderbirds found that the roadblocks could easily be removed using a D-7 bull dozer after the removal of the anti-tank mines.²¹ The Germans also used snipers at roadblocks with officers being their preferred target.²² In addition, they heavily mined the roads leading to Rambervillers.²³ It took the 45th Division four days to travel the 15 miles to reach the outer defenses of the city. On 30 September, the Americans met organized enemy resistance 300 yards south of their objective. The Nineteenth Army deployed manned roadblocks, unmanned roadblocks with mine booby-traps, barbed wire and mine fields. Mortar and artillery protected the well dug in infantry attempting to hold the Rambervillers.²⁴

The Germans became more aggressive and had better prepared defenses in October than they had in the previous month. The two armies fought each other in densely wooded, hilly

²⁰“G-2 Periodic Report, September 1944,” 27 September 1944.

²¹“Ibid.,” 20-23 September 1944, and Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division, “Lessons Learned in Combat in France 15 August- 15 October 1944,” 8, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The process was safer than removing it by hand; however, it was time consuming and helped to slow the American advance at times to a crawl.

²²“Lessons Learned in Combat in France,” 8.

²³“G-2 Periodic Report, September 1944,” 26-29 September 1944.

²⁴“Ibid.,” 30 September 1944.

terrain. The *Wehrmacht* used hundreds of roadblocks with booby-traps and thousands of mines against the Americans.²⁵ “Enemy artillery, mortar & automatic fire as well as enemy resistance increased as our troops pushed forward, and strong counterattacks by a strengthened enemy became daily occurrences.”²⁶ The Germans set up their MLR along hills and ridges with foxholes covered by dirt and logs.²⁷ In the cities, they turned the buildings and houses into pillboxes.²⁸ The Nineteenth Army took advantage of the previous month to prepare its defensive positions.

As a result, during October, the Seventh Army’s advance slowed and daily progress became measured in yards instead of miles. General Black ordered his men to hold the Americans in the foothills of the Vosges until defensive positions are constructed in the mountains.²⁹ Static warfare of attack and counterattack defined the strategy for the month. Rain turned the unpaved mountain roads into mud bogs that slowed both sides.³⁰ The 45th Division, in October, cleared the Germans from the area around Rambervillers to the Meurthe River.³¹ The Nineteenth Army turned the cities of Rambervillers, Grandvillers and Jeanmenil into fortresses. The Germans built roadblocks, mined the streets and barricaded the buildings. It took the 45th three days to take Rambervillers and Grandvillers. (See Map 9) The Thunderbirds had to fight house to house and use close tank support in order to take the two towns.³² The division setup

²⁵ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division, “45th Infantry Division Operations, France, Oct 1- 31, 1944,” 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-2, “G-2 Periodic Report, October 1944,” 19 October 1944, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-3, “G-3 Report, October 1944,” 22 October 1944, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The VI Corps’ G-2 received this information from captured documents.

³⁰ Whitlock, 327.

³¹ The Germans built their winter defensive lines on the Meurthe River.

³² “G-3 Report, October 1944,” 1- 2 October 1944.

defensive positions outside of the cities. The *Wehrmacht* took command of the hills around the cities with machinegun emplacements. The two sides spent most of the month exchanging artillery barrages on the others' forward elements.

The 45th division had placed Jeanmenil under siege after meeting heavy fire from the Germans inside the city.³³ On 25 October, the 157th Regiment attempted to enter the town. The infantry needed the armor to dislodge the enemy from the fortified buildings. The regiment had to fall back out of the town as the spotters in the church steeple called in accurate artillery on the advancing Americans.³⁴ Three days later the regiment fired incendiary shells from mortars into the city and most of it caught fire. The fire and artillery leveled most of the buildings, which forced the defenders to retreat down the main road.³⁵ American fighter-bombers and artillery harassed the enemy as they pulled out of the city for their new MLR.³⁶ Jeanmenil was the last German strong point before the Mortagne River. The division met token resistance in crossing the river and found Army Group G had strong defensive positions on the high ground on the east bank of the river.³⁷ In November 1944, the *Wehrmacht* had an estimated 13,700 soldiers defending the Vosges Mountains.³⁸ Most of them guarded the roads, passes, and trails through the mountains, but were in a state of disarray as they attempted to retreat to their defenses along the Meurthe River. The Americans' sought to capture the city of Strasbourg and then cross the Rhine. The 45th Division started the month in a line southeast of Baccarat, northwest of St. Die and west of the Meurthe River.³⁹ The Thunderbirds received orders to take the town of

³³ Ibid., 3 October 1944.

³⁴ Ibid., 25- 28 October 1944.

³⁵ *The Seventh United States Army*, 369.

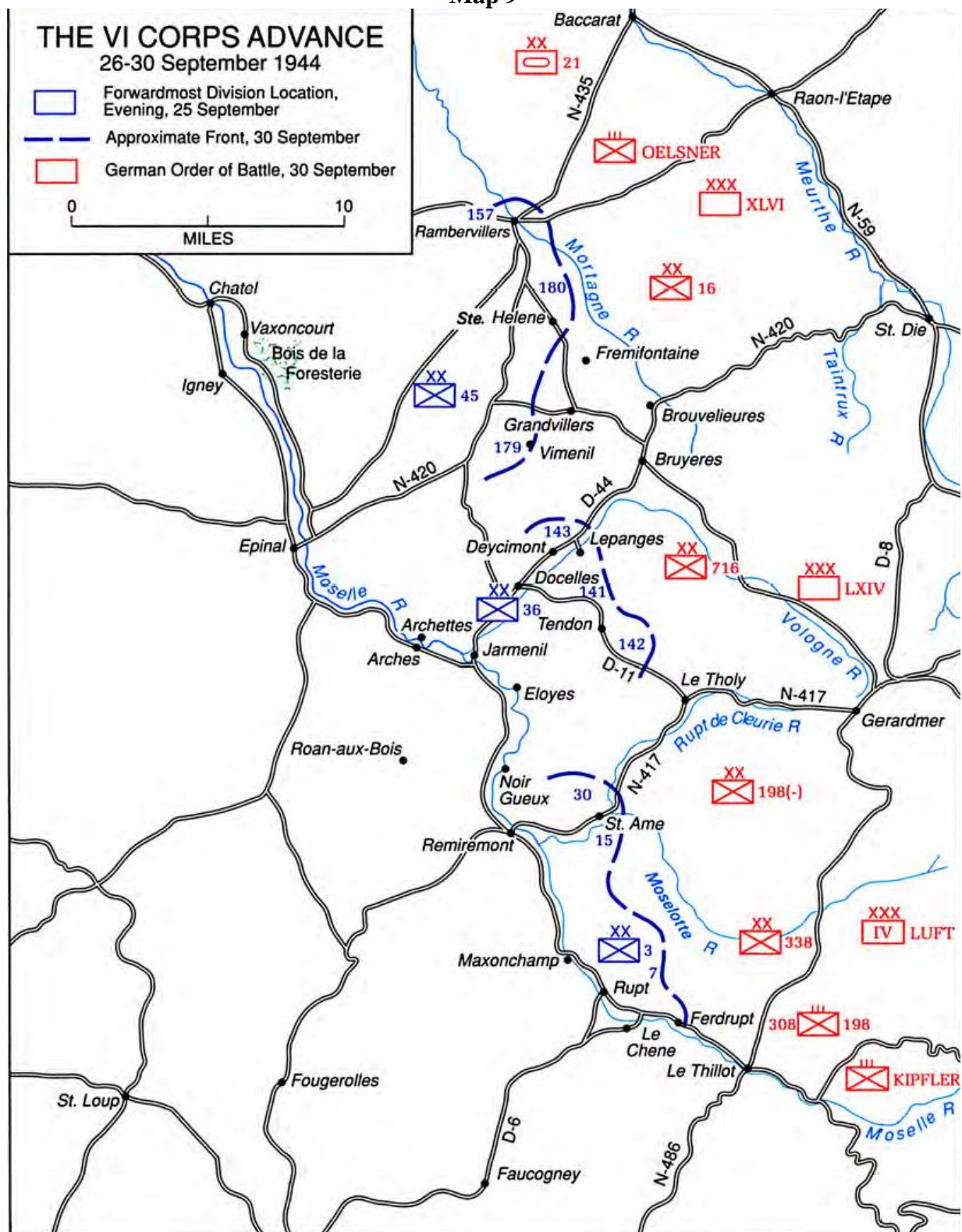
³⁶ "G-3 Report, October 1944," 28 October 1944.

³⁷ Ibid., 23- 24 and 30 October 1944.

³⁸ *The Seventh United States Army*, 395.

³⁹ Whitlock, 329.

Map 9



Source: Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 258.

Raon L'Etape and then cross the river.⁴⁰ (See Map 10) The Seventh Army attached the 399th Infantry Regiment of the 100th Division to the 45th Division.⁴¹ The Nineteenth Army's mission for the month was to hold its defensive line on the Meurthe to the last man.⁴²

The division found scattered pockets of resistance between the Mortagne and Meurthe Rivers. The Germans left behind booby-traps, roadblocks, and mines as they retreated to the Meurthe MLR, to slow the American advance. They reinforced positions on hills and towns on the west side of the river. The Germans "stubbornly defending key terrain features and persistently offering strong resistance at well placed road blocks, scattered pockets of Eny [*sic*] presented stiffer opposition in the Div [*sic*] of advance."⁴³ Army Group G reinforced the cities of Pajaille and Thiaville with a new *Volksgrenadier* regiment. It took two days of house to house fighting to dislodge the Germans from Pajaille.⁴⁴ The 45th made it to the outskirts of Thiaville and found well defended roadblocks on the roads leading into the city. For the next three days, the regiment attempted to take the city and it continued to receive strong resistance from inside the city.⁴⁵ It used tanks and artillery against the defenders, but they could not force them out. The regiment received heavy artillery fire from the opposite side of the Meurthe River that continually stopped its advance in the city. The Germans used the steeple in the church to call in

⁴⁰ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division, "45th Infantry Division Operations, France, Nov 1- 30, 1944," 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁴¹ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-3, "G-3 Report, November 1944," 1 November 1944, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

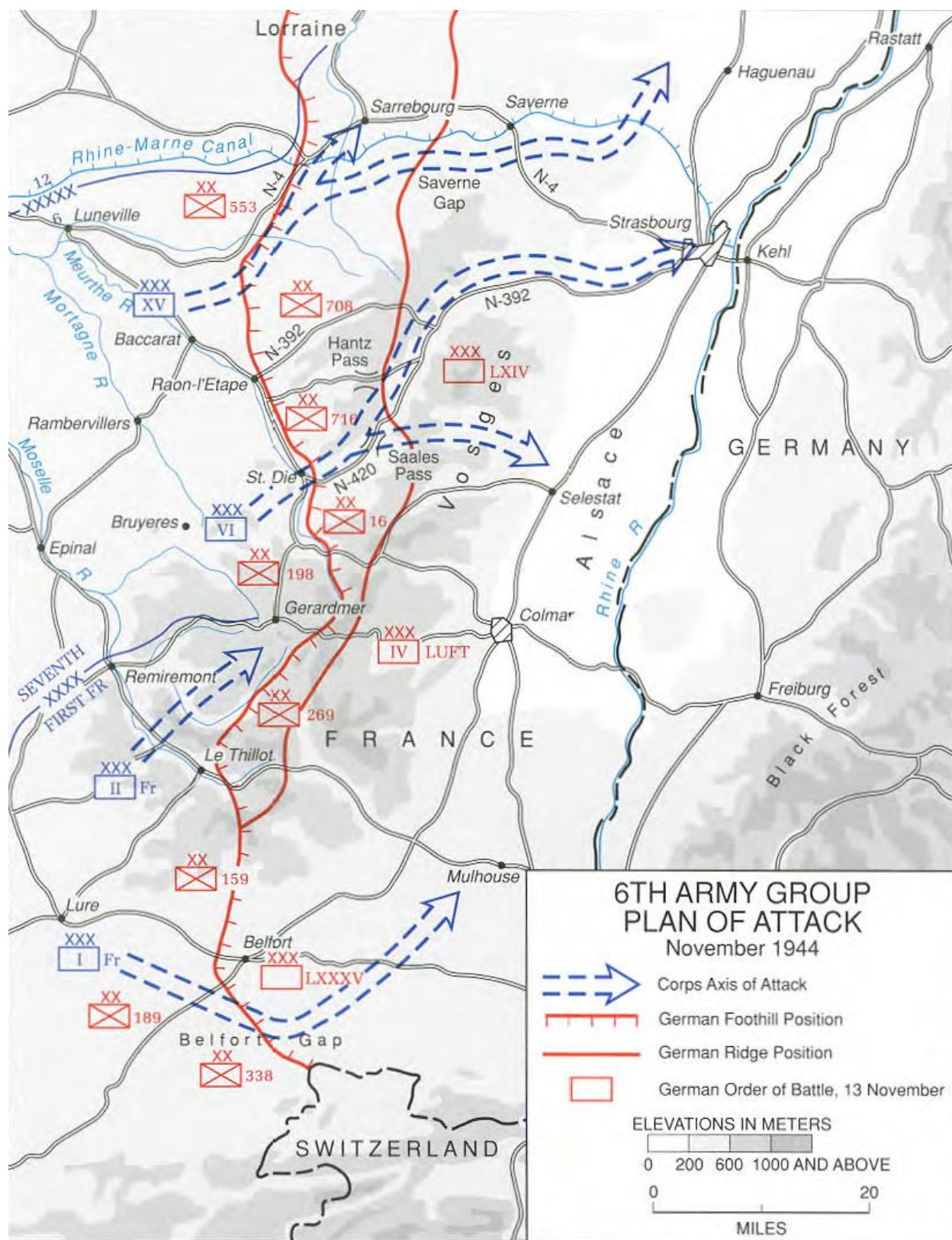
⁴² Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-2, "G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944," 1- 8 November 1944, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1944.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6- 8 November 1944 and "G-3 Report, November 1944," 2- 5 November 1944.

⁴⁵ "G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944," 4 November 1944.

Map 10



Source: Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 335.

precision fire on the Americans.⁴⁶ On 8 November, artillery of the 45th Division destroyed the church steeple, before the 180th Regiment pulled off the line.⁴⁷ On 9 November, the 45th Infantry Division turned over combat operations in its sector to the 100th Infantry Division and moved to a rest area in the rear of the Seventh Army sector.⁴⁸

On 10 November, General Black issued a new order to the German soldiers holding the Vosges. He ordered, “all able-bodied men between the ages of sixteen and sixty were to be evacuated to the east bank of the Rhine for use as forced labor. Women, children, and men infirm or over sixty were to be herded into relatively safe areas: and each village, town, and city was to be completely destroyed as the German troops left.”⁴⁹ He used SS units for the scorched earth policy; however, they lacked explosives and had to rely on fire.⁵⁰ From 10 thru 22 November, the Thunderbirds remained in a rest area to train and receive fresh reinforcements.⁵¹ During that time the Seventh Army crossed the Meurthe River and took the Saverne Gap.⁵² By 14 November, the French and American forces attempted to take the Belfort Gap, but the German defenders held out for eleven days.⁵³

On 23 November, the 45th Division now attached to the XV Corps took up position northeast of Baccarat and far north of its previous position in the line; however, only the 179th Regiment moved to the front near the Romanswiller.⁵⁴ The division received orders “to

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5- 7 November 1944.

⁴⁷ “G-3 Report, November 1944,” 8 November 1944.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9 November 1944.

⁴⁹ Clarke, 339.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 339-40.

⁵¹ “G-3 Report, November 1944,” 10- 22 November 1944.

⁵² Clarke, 405

⁵³ Clarke, 428-30 The Allies now were halfway through the Vosges Mountains. They had also separated the German Nineteenth and First Army.

⁵⁴ “G-3 Report, November 1944,” 23 November 1944. Refer to Map 9.

strengthen protection of the Saverne Gap bridgehead.”⁵⁵ In order to complete the task, the Thunderbirds needed to capture and secure more of the Vosges’ passes.⁵⁶ The regiment faced a “conglomeration of miscellaneous units into those undermanned posns [*sic*], but resistance in that area was broken, although reports indicated that Mutzig would be strongly defended.”⁵⁷ The Germans used fallen trees and booby traps to slow the regiment’s advance towards the city. The division moved unopposed into the Mutzig. It faced mines, booby trapped roadblocks, blown bridges and machinegun emplacements on hilltops.⁵⁸ Army Group G relied on small arms, booby traps and roadblocks to protect most towns. The division had to fight house to house in order to liberate the cities.⁵⁹ On 26 November, the Seventh Army received orders from SHAEF to not cross the Rhine River, but to destroy the Colmar Pocket before crossing river.⁶⁰ At the end of November, the Thunderbirds found the fortified cities of Uhrwiller and Zinswiller. As the 45th entered the Uhrwiller, it immediately came under fire from German infantry and tanks. The Americans brought up their own tanks to meet the threat inside the town and secured it by 30 November.⁶¹ At Zinswiller the Germans counterattacked at night while the division prepared outside of the city. They attacked in full force with armor and forced the 157th Regiment to retreat and take up defensive positions in the hills surrounding the city.⁶²

⁵⁵ *The Seventh United States Army*, 458.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 458.

⁵⁷ “G-3 Report, November 1944,” 26 November 1944.

⁵⁸ “G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944,” 26- 28 November 1944.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 25- 30 November 1944.

⁶⁰ Clarke, 442. Colmar is a city between the Rhine River and the Vosges Mountains. Army Group G built defense positions with most of its manpower located inside the Colmar Pocket.

⁶¹ “G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944,” 30 November 1944 and “G-3 Report, November 1944,” 29- 30 November 1944. The 45th Division also came under fire from German artillery for the first time since returning to the frontlines.

⁶² “G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944,” 29- 30 November 1944.

The 45th Division started December on the edge of the high Vosges Mountains and the Alsace Plain. (See Map 11) It occupied the high ground west of Zinswiller in the wood line of the mountains.⁶³ The division received orders to take Ingwiller, Kindwiller, and the railroad line between Niederbronn and Mertzwiller.⁶⁴ The Germans had 9,000 men in the sector to defend the passes, but only 5,500 could be considered fit for combat.⁶⁵ The *Wehrmacht* during the month attempted to hold the American advance into Germany by using the Maginot Line and Siegfried Line. The Germans fought furiously as the Seventh Army's advance neared to the Rhineland.⁶⁶

In the early part of the month, the division found roadblocks, booby-traps, and mines left behind by Army Group G.⁶⁷ The *Wehrmacht* fortified the cities of Zinswiller, Mietesheim and Oberbronn with roadblocks, mines and barbed wire. It also had tanks, 20mm flak guns, 88mm guns, and machineguns inside the cities.⁶⁸ At Zinswiller, the defenders had blown up all of the bridges and it took the 45th two days to build a bridge due to heavy artillery and mortar fire from the city.⁶⁹ It took ten days with heavy house to house fighting, with the assistance, of armor for the Americans to liberate the two towns.⁷⁰ Two days later the division made first contact with the defenders of the Maginot Line.⁷¹

⁶³ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division, "45th Infantry Division Operations, France, Dec 1- 31, 1944," 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁶⁴ *The Seventh United States Army*, 465. During December, the Thunderbirds set positioned between the Nineteenth and First German Armies.

⁶⁵ Clarke, 467.

⁶⁶ Whitlock, 332.

⁶⁷ Most of the roadblocks were made from fallen trees with mines placed in the center.

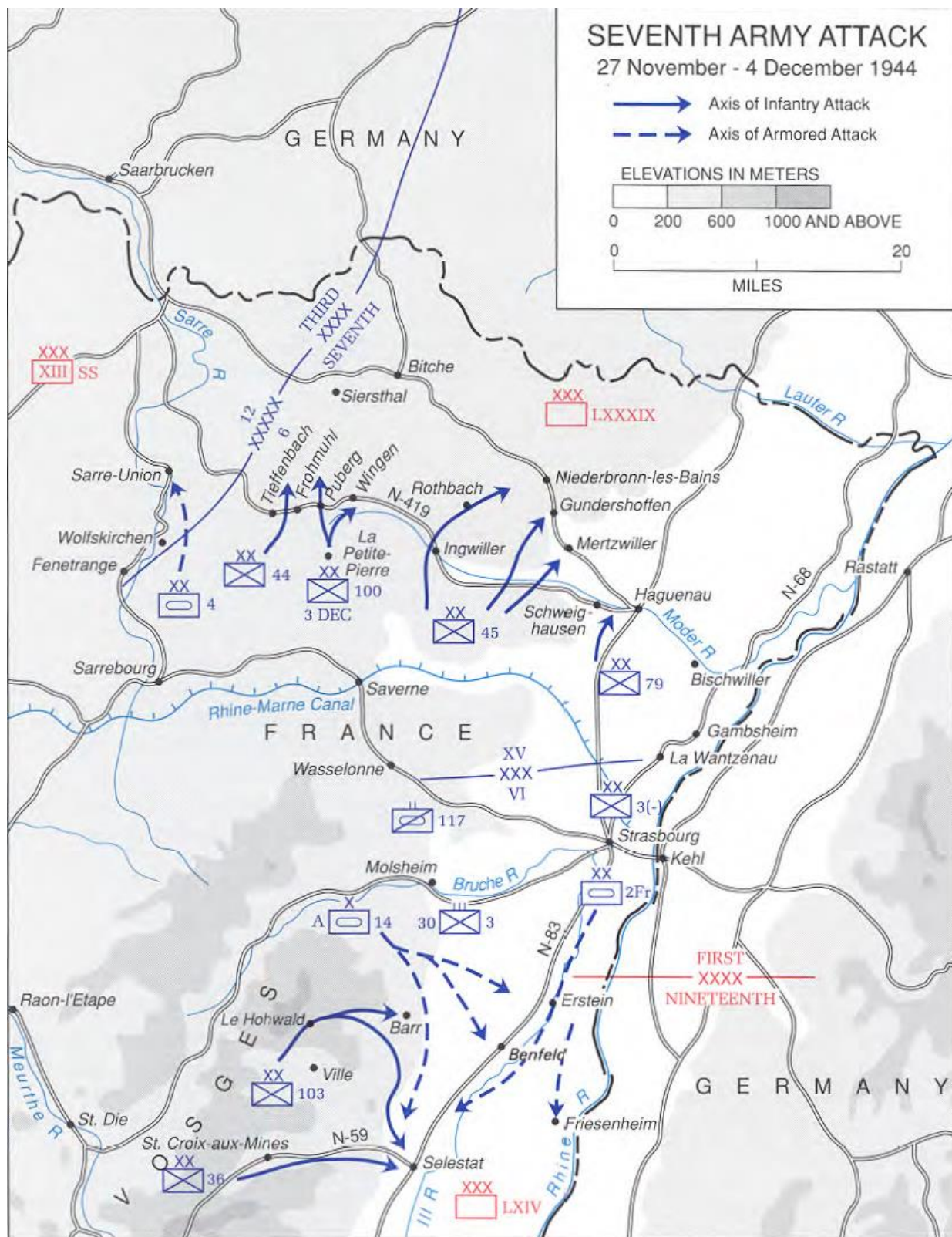
⁶⁸ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-3, "G-3 Report, December 1944," 1- 10 December 1944, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 2- 3 December 1944.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1- 10 December 1944.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 12 December 1944.

Map 11



Source: Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 450.

The 45th Division found Maginot Line stripped of its former glory; the Germans had removed all of the big guns and left only pill boxes that faced the Rhineland. The Germans had turned the bunkers of the line into munitions factories.⁷² The 157th Regiment fought past the line on 12 December. It quickly overcame the pill boxes and counterattacks with the aid of tanks.⁷³ The regiment moved up the railway towards the city of Bundenal. For the next five days, the division cleared roadblocks, mines, fallen trees and concrete obstructions, while facing localized German counterattacks.⁷⁴ On 15 December, the 180th Regiment became the first unit of the Seventh Army to step foot into Germany.⁷⁵ By mid-December, the division prepared to attack the Siegfried Line with the objective of the rail line near Niederschlettenbach.⁷⁶

The Germans had constructed an amazing defensive system along their western border. “The key to the Siegfried Line defenses was the bunker. Thousands of them- most of which were twenty-one feet wide, eighteen feet high, forty-two feet deep, with multiple levels, reinforced concrete walls, and ceilings up to nine feet thick- stretched north and south as far as the eye could see.”⁷⁷ Machine guns and 37mm anti-tank guns armed the bunkers. Smaller pill boxes, trenches, barbed wire and mine fields protected the bunkers.⁷⁸ The Germans used dirt and fake building exteriors to disguise the fortifications.⁷⁹ “Four years of inactivity and undisturbed

⁷² Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-2, “G-2 Intelligence Summary The Maginot Line,” 4, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁷³ “G-3 Report, December 1944,” 12 December 1944.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 6- 17 December 1944. It liberated the cities of Wingen and Lembach as it pushed through the line. It cleared the area around the cities of pill boxes, dugouts, and roadblocks with the help of armor.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 December 1944.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 17 December 1944.

⁷⁷ Whitlock, 333.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁷⁹ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-2, “G-2 Intelligence Summary The Siegfried Line, 13 December 1944,” 1, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

natural growth has greatly improved this concealment, and the forts are hard to locate.”⁸⁰ Bonn argued that artillery and planes had no effect on the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line.⁸¹ He contended that only infantry had any effect on the line, but the 45th Division found an easy way to take the bunkers that took more than just infantry. It laid heavy artillery fire on the area around the bunker, while the infantry crawled into position in the trenches surrounding the building.⁸² “While all this was taking place, some brave soul, loaded down with white phosphorus grenades, would attempt to crawl on top of the bunker and drop a grenade down the ventilation shaft.”⁸³ The platoon then moved on to another bunker.

The city of Niederschlettenbach lay inside the defenses of the Siegfried Line. Five pill boxes protected the outside of the city and a flood stream with all of the bridges blown leading into the town.⁸⁴ The Americans overcame the pill boxes and heavy fighting inside the city with armored support on 18 December. The Germans counterattacked three times in an attempt to push the 45th away from the rail line. The third attack supported by tanks pushed the Americans back across the stream.⁸⁵ The division dug into the hill tops, laid minefields and directed artillery fire on the *Wehrmacht* for the remainder of the month.⁸⁶ The Germans desperately attempted to slow the American advance across the Vosges despite their poor tactical and logistical situation.

The 45th Infantry Division faced a weakened and demoralized German Army in September 1944. Stragglers made up the *Wehrmacht* units defending Epinal and the Moselle River. Army Group G armed the men with carbines and light machine guns. They lacked heavy

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸¹ Bonn, 182.

⁸² Whitlock, 333.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 333-4.

⁸⁴ “G-3 Report, December 1944,” 16- 17 December 1944.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 December 1944.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 19- 31 December 1944.

support weapons around the river. The units defending the city had anti-tank guns and mortars. Soldiers complained of a lack of ammo, support weapons and had poor morale. Between 20 to 24 September, German artillery fired around 15 rounds daily. The Thunderbirds, in comparison, fired over 100 rounds daily.⁸⁷ On 25 September, the SS Police Regiment 19 became the main defensive unit in the sector with light machine guns, anti-tank guns and support weapons.⁸⁸ Army Group G faced reinforcement problems throughout September.

Most reinforcements came from straggler companies or filled with foreign soldiers from Eastern Europe.⁸⁹ These companies came untrained as infantry, poorly equipped, and had low morale. They lacked the will to fight, as most retreated on first contact with the Americans, and foreign soldiers surrendered in mass without fighting.⁹⁰ “Army Group G was instructed to use as replacements men from ground, air, and naval elements that were then withdrawing from southern and southwestern France.”⁹¹ These men also lacked unit cohesion which is necessary for effective fighting units. Many prisoners could not identify their unit or the mission assigned to them.⁹² Most of the German units in September fell into shambles and the situation did not improve the following month.

In October, German units continued to suffer from poor morale for various reasons including ineffective reinforcements, lack of supplies and bad communications. The

⁸⁷ “G-2 Periodic Report, September 1944,” 20- 24 September 1944.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 25- 30 September 1944. The exception was 28 September, when the Germans fired 150 rounds as the 45th Division approached Rambervillers’ defenses. The regiment had good morale during September. The Germans severely lacked artillery ammunition for the last five days of the month and fired just under 20 rounds daily. They took food from the local population or found food in abandoned homes.

⁸⁹ “G-2 Periodic Report, September 1944,” 25- 30 September 1944. Foreign soldiers came from Poland, White Russia or the Ukraine.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 25- 30 September 1944.

⁹¹ Pogue, 246. The coastal defense units were marines and soldiers manning coastal defense gun emplacements. Most came from the *Luftwaffe* ground crews and coastal defense units.

⁹² “G-2 Periodic Report, September 1944,” 25- 30 September 1944.

reinforcements came from stragglers that had assembled in Bruyers.⁹³ Stragglers had poor morale due to the lack of infantry training and being thrown on the front lines feeling exhausted after a 200 plus mile retreat through southern France.⁹⁴ The 19th Army received reinforcements from Germany for the first time since the withdrawal. Convalescents, NCO candidates, marines and *Volksdeutsche* made up the new soldiers coming into the sector.⁹⁵ Many of the convalescents had previously been listed as unfit for front line duty due to their wounds.⁹⁶ The marines came from the broken German navy and lacked any infantry training. Most only had three weeks of basic military training.⁹⁷

They suffered from a lack of supplies during October. At the start of the month, they had a good supply of rifle and machine gun ammunition and by mid- month they started to have a shortages of all ammunition types.⁹⁸ The Germans still lacked heavy weapons and tanks for counterattack support that commanders promised to the infantry.⁹⁹ They lacked winter clothes and blankets.¹⁰⁰ They also lacked food in adequate supply and most soldiers had to forage for

⁹³ "G-3 Report, October 1944," 1- 14 October 1944. The number of soldiers facing the division is an estimate from the 45th Division's G-2. The Nineteenth Army had 5140 men from various companies facing the 45th Division and only one regiment. The 19th SS Police Regiment had 900 men. Stragglers reinforced the regiment and by 14 October, they made up a tenth of the unit. The regiment had been on the front line for three weeks and had a manpower of 200 down from the original 1400. They also suffered from very poor morale.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1- 4 October 1944 and Cole, 242. He also argued that the German army lost territory in September and October due to the unauthorized retreats. General Black argued that his army group could not build up reserves of troops, because the soldiers kept retreating without permission.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14- 17 October 1944. *Volksdeutsche* units were made up of old and underage men that were originally passed over in the draft. Some of the prisoners captured by the 45th were over 40 years old.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 October 1944.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21- 24 October 1944. The Germans also sent several Poles to replace casualties on the front line. Two units in the sector had Polish soldiers that made up 60 percent of the unit.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1- 5 and 20- 31 October 1944. Throughout the month, they had a severe deficiency of artillery shells.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1- 31 October 1944. Prisoners complained that they had been promised tank support during attacks that never materialized. On 26 October, was the only day that German tanks came near the MLR to support the infantry.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 October 1944.

food.¹⁰¹ The Germans in Jeanmenil and a few other units on the MLR did not receive a hot meal during the month.¹⁰²

Poor communication between the German units led to deaths and low morale. Units guarding the MLR did not know the location of friendly minefields. As a result, several soldiers became casualties during routine operations.¹⁰³ Morale suffered when units did not have the necessary knowledge for their mission, other than, remain in their foxhole and hold the Americans. Many prisoners thought their orders were to remain in their defensive positions throughout the winter. General Black's orders never reached the German infantry on the MLR.¹⁰⁴ The Americans had a better tactical situation throughout September and October.

In November, Army Group G had 13,700 soldiers to delay in the Vosges until the spring of 1945.¹⁰⁵ "The enemy fought desperately in the foothills of Vosges and did succeed in gaining time to complete defense preparations on approaches to the fatherland."¹⁰⁶ The Germans used the tactic of frequently breaking contact with the Americans and forcing them to occupy the ground immediately.¹⁰⁷ Army Group G's tactics during November showed clear evidence of a delaying defense. The Germans did not have a MLR, but attempted to defend a few major villages and the nearby hilltops.¹⁰⁸ They left behind booby traps and mines in towns after retreating. They also used fallen trees along with roadblocks with and without booby traps to slow the American

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 20-22 October 1944

¹⁰² Ibid., 30- 31 October 1944

¹⁰³"G-3 Report, October 1944," 15 October 1944. Prisoners complained bitterly that minefield overlays were not reaching many front line units.

¹⁰⁴ "G-3 Report, October 1944," 14- 16 and 20- 22 October 1944

¹⁰⁵ *The Seventh United States Army*, 395. The *Wehrmacht* planned to hold the Americans in the foothills of the mountains while most of the soldiers improved defensive positions on the Meurthe River and near the passes inside the Vosges.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 395.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 391-2. The Germans had the advantage of holding the high ground and their close proximity to Germany.

¹⁰⁸ "G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944," 1- 30 November.

advance. They blew the bridges crossing the Meurthe River and other streams inside the foothills.¹⁰⁹ They laid thousands of mines and they used dynamite demolitions as improvised mines in the last week of the month.¹¹⁰ The 45th Division faced a severely degraded enemy with low morale, poor reinforcements and lack of supplies.

Low morale led many of the soldiers of Army Group G to desert their posts. Between 25 to 30 November, the 45th Division alone took 923 prisoners, and mostly deserters.¹¹¹ “Prisoners interrogated pointed to bad health, poor food, continuous commitment, lack of medical attention, propaganda pamphlets, difficult terrain, bad weather, and insufficient clothing as reasons for their low morale.”¹¹² The Germans also cut morale building factors such as, “mail, recreational facilities, good equipment and sufficient rest.”¹¹³ The soldiers of Army Group G lived exposed to the elements or in wooden dugouts without heating fuel.¹¹⁴ German High Command instituted *Ersatz* morale or fear morale. They brought up SS and police units behind the frontlines to shoot anyone trying to retreat without orders. Any German soldier that left that post without orders risked their comrades being shot and their families could lose food allotments.¹¹⁵ The *Ersatz* morale did not stop non German members of the *Wehrmacht* from deserting to the American lines. The Germans continued to receive poor reinforcements during the month.

The low quality of the *Volksgrenadier* and *Volksstrum* units in the Vosges surprised the Seventh Army. The reinforcements came from three groups, those that had been previously

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 1- 30 November. On 8 November, the *Wehrmacht* started using rockets against the Seventh Army to stop American attacks.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 28 November.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 25- 30 November.

¹¹² *The Seventh United States Army*, 396.

¹¹³ “G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944,” 4 November.

¹¹⁴ *The Seventh United States Army*, 390.

¹¹⁵ “G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944,” 4 November.

passed up for military service, foreign volunteers and stragglers from around Europe. In early November, the 45th Division fought the 951st *Volksgrenadier* Regiment along with various other units. Stragglers, new recruits, convalescents, and veterans from the east and Normandy made up the new regiments.¹¹⁶ The unit had “30% limited service, 50% youths (17-20 yrs) and 20% veterans.”¹¹⁷ It had four weeks of training, new clothes and rifles, but lacked everything else, such as heavy weapons. The 1417 *Festungs* Infantry Battalion guarded the east side of the Meurthe River. It contained “elderly men whose mission is to prepare and man defenses of a fairly stable type.”¹¹⁸ Other reinforcements came from the Holland and Eastern fronts. The *Wehrmacht* told them that they were being moved to inside Germany to get rest before taking up position to protect the Rhine River. Instead of getting much needed rest period, these men immediately took up positions in the Vosges sector after disembarking the train.¹¹⁹

The Germans lacked necessary war materials in November, despite the shorter supply and communication lines.¹²⁰ They had shortages in winter clothing, heating fuels, medical supplies and food.¹²¹ They lacked explosives and had to rely on fire in their attempt to scorch the earth as they retreated.¹²² At the start of the month, the Germans had 270 artillery pieces in the Vosges sector and from 27 to 29 November they had zero artillery pieces in the 45th’s sector.¹²³

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 6 November.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 6 November. The new recruits had four weeks of training in Holland and only had trained with their rifle.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 2 November. The foreign volunteers came from areas of Eastern Europe, mostly Poland and the Ukraine. These men wanted to fight the Russians and were most likely to surrender to the Americans.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 25- 30 November. Most of the men coming in from Holland had been in constant combat since the Normandy invasion. They blamed their very low morale on being in continually battle and the broken promise of a rest period.

¹²⁰ *The Seventh United States Army* , 396.

¹²¹ “G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944,” 1- 30 November.

¹²² Ibid., 1- 10 and 27- 30 November. They ran out of mines in late November and improvised mines out of the few explosives in their stockpiles. The biggest problem for the *Wehrmacht* in November was the lack of artillery shells, and in the later days, the loss of medium or heavy guns.

¹²³ *The Seventh United States Army*, 541 and “G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944,” 1- 30 November. During November several of artillery rounds fired by the Germans were duds.

Throughout the month, Army Group G relied on the few tanks it had to provide direct fire support against the advancing Americans.¹²⁴ The Germans had bullets in plentiful supply for machine guns and rifles; however, few rounds reached units in the front.¹²⁵

In December, Army Group G was in a state of disarray as its tactical and logistical situation became increasingly worse. The Germans had 9,000 soldiers northwest of the Colmar Pocket, but the *Wehrmacht* only considered 5,500 fit for combat.¹²⁶ All of the elite units had been pulled from the sector in preparation for the upcoming offensive in the Ardennes.¹²⁷ They still suffered from low morale, few supplies and poor reinforcements.

The German tactics during December showed clear evidence of a delaying defense in the final stages. They setup defensive positions in villages and on key terrain features in the high Vosges in order to slow the American advance. They setup MLRs at the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line. They continued to use pill boxes, fallen trees, barbed wire, mine fields, booby traps and roadblocks to slow the Seventh Army.¹²⁸ The 45th Division noted that the Germans used “local offensive thrust with the dual purpose of retaking lost pill boxes and keeping our attack off balanced.”¹²⁹ They also forced the Americans to advance through the narrow valleys, where tanks wreaked havoc on the Allied infantry.¹³⁰ Army Group G still had low morale that

¹²⁴ Ibid., 1- 30 November.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1- 30 November.

¹²⁶ Clarke, 467.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 467.

¹²⁸ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-2, “G-2 Periodic Report, December 1944,” 1- 31 December 1944, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Most counterattacks were accompanied by three to four tanks during the month. The Germans used localized counterattacks with tanks and anti- aircraft guns against the Allied offensive to gain time.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 20 December 1944.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2 December 1944.

led many soldiers to desert their posts.¹³¹ The Germans went long periods without rest or food. The German artillery often fired on their own lines, because of the disorganized MLRs.¹³² The 45th Division captured many soldiers that became lost and could not find their way back to the MLR.¹³³ Prisoners also complained that their poor morale came from the lack of heavy weapons or mail service.¹³⁴ A *Wehrmacht* soldier wrote in a letter captured by the Thunderbirds that: “There is an awful mess and terrible mixup here at the front; nobody knows what’s what. For 3 weeks now I have been kicked around from one sector to the other. It’s awful not to have any mail from you. The trouble is, the units exist only a few days until they are routed and dissolved once more; thus I have no regular Field Post Number, and naturally, the “Change of Address Forms” get lost too.”¹³⁵ Army Group G’s logistical situation also contributed to low morale in its soldiers.

The Germans received the worst reinforcements of the period. All of the units desperately needed of reinforcement as most of them had 50 percent troop strength.¹³⁶ They received mostly *Volksstrum* of elderly and others previously deemed unfit for service. Members of the *Volksstrum* in regular *Wehrmacht* uniforms guarded the Siegfried Line.¹³⁷ Prisoners called them the “Old Men” protecting the bunkers.¹³⁸ Their average age was 40 and the average age of the squad leaders was 53.¹³⁹ The Thunderbirds had intelligence on a typical reserve platoon of 46

¹³¹ “G-2 Periodic Report, December 1944,” 2 December 1944. When every the chance arose soldiers from Poland, Eastern Europe and Italy deserted in large numbers to the American lines during December. Poor communication also caused problems with the *Wehrmacht* in the Vosges.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 1- 31 December 1944.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 1- 31 December 1944. Other prisoner could not identify where the frontline was or the unit that they belonged to that day.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 December 1944.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4 December 1944.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 December 1944. They still got reinforcements from the Air Force and Eastern Europe.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1- 31 December 1944.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16 December 1944.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 25- 28 December.

men to the 192th *Volksgrenadier* protected the bunkers. They only had two light machine guns and twelve carbines for the entire formation.¹⁴⁰ “In this group are men with artificial limbs and one eye. One NCO PW has been discharged previously for rheumatic fever but was recalled into service recently.”¹⁴¹ Army Group G also cleared out all of the kitchen staff with the exception of one cook per unit. The *Wehrmacht* in late 1944 became increasingly frantic for new reinforcements.

Army Group G suffered the worst logistical situation since entering the Vosges. Its troops only received hot meals near villages, at times going without food for up to three days.¹⁴² Defenders in the Siegfried Line only had four days’ worth of emergency rations.¹⁴³ Soldiers did not have heating fuel to keep them warm and in the bunkers, only the command bunker had electricity.¹⁴⁴ They went without fresh water and many soldiers became prisoners while searching for water.¹⁴⁵ The Germans received ample small arms ammunition, but due to the lack of transports the deliveries came at irregular times.¹⁴⁶ The Germans also had a severe lack of guns during December. They used captured Russian artillery and Polish and French machine guns.¹⁴⁷ Some of the German units had one rifle for every ten men and “some of the men don’t have carbines or pistols and are armed with hand grenades only.”¹⁴⁸ The Siegfried Line bunkers had poorly maintained machine guns. The bunkers had MG 08 water cooled machine guns that

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 17 December.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 17 December.

¹⁴² Ibid., 2 and 19 December 1944.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 18 December 1944.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 5 and 18 December. They lacked entrenching tools to allow them to dig trenches.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 25- 31 December.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 4 and 19 December. The other problem with the ammunition was the getter frequency of duds.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 3 and 16 December.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 15 and 26 December 1944.

had been left there since the construction of the line. The guns leaked water faster than could be put back in.¹⁴⁹ The 45th Division, during the four months, had a far better logistical situation.

The 45th Infantry Division did not suffer from the same problems that the German 19th Army did during September. They had adequate numbers of reinforcements to replace casualties.¹⁵⁰ They received poorly trained replacements, yet the Thunderbirds found a way to quickly field train them and turn them into well trained infantrymen.¹⁵¹ The Americans had exceptionally high morale during the month. The soldiers had adequate supplies and this did help to keep their morale up. They had sufficient supplies of food, water, grease, oil and gasoline; however, the Americans did lack several vital supplies.¹⁵² They lacked rifle ammunition, which had to be flown in to the sector to keep the infantry armed.¹⁵³ The Thunderbirds also lacked some food items, such as daily fresh meat, bread and butter that they had been accustomed to in the previous months, but the troops had plenty of field rations.¹⁵⁴ The US Seventh Army worked hard on getting the supply problem fixed during the month.

Bonn argued in October, that the Seventh Army had a critical supply situation as logistical lines neared their breaking point.¹⁵⁵ The Seventh Army kept the VI and XV corps well supplied, enough to continue its advance.¹⁵⁶ The 45th Division's G-4 claimed they had a

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 18- 19 December.

¹⁵⁰ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-1, "G-1 Report, September 1944," 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. Also refer to chapter 2 for outline of the 45th's battlefield training.

¹⁵² Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-4, "Operations G-4 September 1944," 2- 6, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁵³ Ibid.,6. They had shortages in 105mm artillery rounds, and every gun had a 40 round a day limit.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 5. There was a shortage of fresh meat, bread and butter.

¹⁵⁵ Bonn, 86-7.

¹⁵⁶ Whitlock, 327. The French wanted more supplies and this led to squabbles between the two allies.

favorable supply situation during the month, but not as luxurious as the one in Italy.¹⁵⁷ The division had a good logistical situation, high morale and, reinforcements in adequate supply during October. They kept a sufficient level of manpower during the period to remain on the offensive.¹⁵⁸ The troops received fresh meat for nearly half the month, with fresh bread and butter served daily.¹⁵⁹ The 45th received enough gas, oil, and grease for the month to keep the advance moving forward.¹⁶⁰ They had enough rifle and machine gun ammunition, but suffered from severe shortage of artillery shells of all types.¹⁶¹ The division lacked winter clothing and properly sized boots during the period.¹⁶² The division's quartermaster kept the men's morale up by providing rest camps for the troops. The camps had hot showers, coffee, hot meals and rest facilities. It did not have regular clothing exchanges, due to the lack of uniforms.¹⁶³ Division commanders wanted soldiers rotated off the line and to the rest areas as often as possible.¹⁶⁴ The men also received daily rations of cigarettes, tobacco, candy and toilet articles that helped to keep them in good spirits.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-4, "Operations G-4 October 1944," 9, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁵⁸ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-1, "G-1 Report, October 1944," 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The division had a good logistical state with only a few shortages and problems. The static nature of the fighting in October allowed the division to rebuild its supply dumps.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3. The only problem that the division had with the gas supply was it came in 55 gallon drums and not 5 gallon cans.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5- 6. The lack of artillery and mortar ammunition led to the slowdown of their advance. They still fired 34, 166 rounds during the month and averaged 1,100 a day. During October, the division fired ten times more artillery rounds than the Germans.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 3- 4. The division was completely equipped with winter clothes by the end of the month. The new boots were designed to prevent trench foot caused by the harsh French winters, though they did not have arch support and the sizes were too large for most troops. The footwear prevented trench foot, but caused other major foot problems that hurt morale.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6. It provided laundry services for the GIs.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

During November and December, the 45th Division had a mostly adequate supply of reinforcements to keep the offensive moving forward. During the division's rest period in November, the three regiments received fresh reinforcements and gave it time to train the new GIs.¹⁶⁶ "The supply situation improved again during November, however shortages of ammunition still exist."¹⁶⁷ The Seventh Army continued in its attempt to move supply dumps closer to the front lines.¹⁶⁸ The Seventh Army during the month also had a shortage of 81mm mortar rounds.¹⁶⁹ "The over-all ammunition situation is therefore still critical..." but the division did not limit expenditures of ammo.¹⁷⁰ The division received fresh food and sufficient of water during the month.¹⁷¹ The 45th received enough gas, oils and grease for the month to keep the advance moving forward.¹⁷² It ran short on heating fuel, but firewood was obtained from local sources.¹⁷³ The division received new winter gear and soldiers became accustomed to their new boots during the month.¹⁷⁴ Each man received four wool blankets or one sleeping bag and two

¹⁶⁶ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-1, "G-1 Report, November 1944," 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. In November, the 179th Infantry Regiment went on the defensive, because it had suffered too many casualties and was no longer able to keep up the offensive. After this short period, the Thunderbirds maintained enough manpower to continue the assault on the Vosges during November and December.

¹⁶⁷ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-4, "Operations G-4 November 1944," 6, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5. Supply officer caused the only major problem met by the G-4 during the month. The XV Corps had a different way in allocating ammunition than the VI Corps and this caused confuse with the ammunition officer of the division.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1-3. The division received fresh bread, extra coffee, milk and sugar every day of the month. It also obtained fresh meat and butter at regular intervals. It received ration accessory packs (containing cigarettes, tobacco, candy gum and toilet articles) every day during the period. The division's water needs were met throughout the month and it also procured new eight head shower units.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 3. and "45th Infantry Division Operations, France, Nov 1- 30, 1944," 1. During November, the division fired nearly double the artillery rounds than the Germans. Its artillery regiments fired 32,450 rounds during the month and averaged almost 1,100 a day. The division also decreased the number of artillery rounds fired in an attempt to stockpile shells for the upcoming December offensive. It had enough rifle and machine gun ammunition, but suffered from a lack of 81mm mortar rounds.

¹⁷⁴ "Operations G-4 November 1944," 4. The new boots was supposed to prevent trench foot. The troops adapted to the new boots and problems decreased with the exception of trench foot. The Thunderbirds issued new sleeping bags and wool blankets during the month.

wool blankets.¹⁷⁵ The division encountered several supply problems including transportation and winter clothing. The poor weather conditions and bad road network in the Vosges made it impossible for trucks to transport supplies to the front line soldiers. The quartermaster procured mules to transport the supplies.¹⁷⁶ The division's supply dumps also moved closer to the frontlines during the month. It now only took the quartermaster two days to get from the supply dumps and back to the frontlines.¹⁷⁷ The 45th division obtained vital supplies in good quantity that kept the offensive moving forward in December.

The division's quartermaster continued providing rest camps for its men during the period and the Seventh Army pulled the division off the line for two weeks in November that helped keep the men's morale up. "The Division minus Artillery Battalions was relieved for the first time since the landing in southern France for a much needed two weeks rest period in the Army rest area southwest of Epinal."¹⁷⁸ During November and December the quartermaster continued to provide rest camps with hot showers, laundry services and other treats that helped boost the men's morale.¹⁷⁹

Bonn claimed that armor could not operate in the mountainous terrain and forests, forcing the infantry to take the Vosges, but the Thunderbirds used tanks in close support of the foot

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 4 and Administrative Instruction No 13. The soldiers like the new bags as it is warmer than the other sleeping bags; however, soldiers cannot get in it with their boots on and it is too short for some of men.

¹⁷⁶ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-4, "Operations G-4 December 1944," 1- 4, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and 45th Infantry Division Operations, France, Dec 1- 31, 1944," 1. The 45th had a critical shortage of engineer and signal parts. The division still suffered from shortages of 81mm mortar and 75mm Howitzer rounds. Even with the shortages, the division fired 51,952 rounds of artillery and averaged 1, 675 rounds a day. The division had learned the best way to use the animals from its experience in Italy. The infantry also had a shortage of gloves, overshoes and wool garments. The artillery battalions received new parkas and sleeping bags for below zero temperatures; however, the division did not have enough for the infantry regiments.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 2. Fresh meat was issued 22 days during the month and fresh eggs on six days. It also issued fresh bread, extra coffee, sugar and cream every day during December. The divisions water needs were met during the month. It also procured gasoline, oil and grease in adequate supply.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷⁹ "Operations G-4 November 1944," 5 and "Operations G-4 December 1944," 3.

soldiers. They could operate in the woods with the .50 caliber machine gun removed because it could become snagged on low hanging branches and be destroyed.¹⁸⁰ They also kept the Germans deep in their foxhole and allowed the Americans to approach without being fired upon before attacking the foxholes.¹⁸¹ In October, the armor could leave the heavily mined roads and follow the infantry into the woods helping to force the Germans back towards the Rhine.¹⁸² They also used anti-tank guns as close infantry support weapons to knock out pill boxes and entrenched enemy positions. Anti-aircraft units provided fire support against fortified positions.¹⁸³ During the time period, the Americans had more than just infantrymen attempting to push the *Wehrmacht* out of the Vosges.

Both sides relied on armor during the four months. Several tank battles took place inside towns during December as the Germans brought up their tank reserves.¹⁸⁴ During both months, the Germans used tanks for direct fire support and for infantry support, when they could not call on artillery.¹⁸⁵ During the fight for the high Vosges, the Germans used armor to devastating effect against the Seventh Army soldiers as they tried to advance along the valley floor.¹⁸⁶ During the period, the Americans used tanks to help knockout pill boxes and for direct support of the infantry.¹⁸⁷ During the fight for the Siegfried Line, the 45th Division used armor to distract

¹⁸⁰ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division, "Lessons Learned in Combat, 15 August- 15 October, 45th Infantry Division, France 1944," 9, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 11.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 5. The Thunderbirds used friendly tanks that could no longer move as heavy guns and it only took two infantrymen to work the 75mm gun.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸⁴ "G-3 Report, December 1944," 1- 31 December 1944.

¹⁸⁵ "G-2 Periodic Report, November 1944," 1- 30 November 1944 and "G-2 Periodic Report, December 1944," 1- 31 December 1944.

¹⁸⁶ "G-2 Periodic Report, December 1944," 5 December 1944. The Americans had to bring up tanks of their own to counter the German armor.

¹⁸⁷ "G-3 Report, November 1944," 1- 30 November 1944 and "G-3 Report, December 1944," 1- 31 December 1944.

the bunkers, while the infantry moved into the trenches around the bunkers.¹⁸⁸ They also used armor to remove roadblocks and fallen trees from the road.¹⁸⁹ Both sides relied on tanks as important tool during the period.

Bonn argued in his book that, planes had no affect against the German Army in the Vosges due to poor weather during the push towards the Rhine River.¹⁹⁰ The 45th Division found aerial recon photos very valuable throughout the period. The photos helped the division locate roadblocks, enemy strong points and artillery positions.¹⁹¹ The division had two types of friendly aircraft that flew over their sector; the P-47 Thunderbolt (fighter bomber) and Piper L-4 Grasshopper (artillery liaison plane). Even though the planes could not fly every day during September and October, they had two major impacts on the infantryman.¹⁹² “The mere fact that fighter-bombers, or eve cub-planes, are flying over the front lines is an effective method of silencing enemy artillery and boosting morale of the infantry.”¹⁹³ These two airplanes effectively destroyed enemy artillery. The cub-plane directed the artillery to mark the enemy with smoke and the fighter-bomber devastated the position.¹⁹⁴ General Blaskowitz feared the American fighter-bomber, and argued it had the biggest impact on the outcome of the fighting of September.¹⁹⁵ They continued to have the same impact into October 1944. During the German retreat from Brouvellieures on 22 October, American planes used effective pin point bombing on the retreating soldiers. The bombing caused massive causalities and panic in the Germans.¹⁹⁶ At

¹⁸⁸ “G-3 Report, December 1944,” 15- 31 December 1944.

¹⁸⁹ “G-3 Report, November 1944,” 1- 30 November 1944 and “G-3 Report, December 1944,” 1- 31 December 1944.

¹⁹⁰ Bonn, 73-4.

¹⁹¹ “G-3 Report, October 1944,” 1- 15 October 1944.

¹⁹² “Lessons Learned in Combat,” 9.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ “Army Group G (May- Sep 44),” 38.

¹⁹⁶ “G-3 Report, October 1944,” 22 October 1944.

the same time, the Germans only had ME-109s over the 45th's sector for three days on reconnaissance missions. They also used the fighters to harass the cub-planes in an attempt to keep them away from their artillery positions.¹⁹⁷ During this period, American aircraft helped aid the Thunderbirds' advance, despite a few days of flying allowed by the weather.

Aircraft had less of a role for both sides during November and December, because of the weather. The Germans had two planes doing reconnaissance over the front on 3 November, the only day during the month allowed for high altitude reconnaissance.¹⁹⁸ The Seventh Army still relied on cub planes during both months to help direct artillery fire.¹⁹⁹ During December, there were 13 good flying days.²⁰⁰ Planes helped the Thunderbirds advance during the month with fire support from fight bombers and by reconnaissance from the cub planes.²⁰¹ From 1 to 25 December, the Germans used aircraft to scout the 45th Division's lines.²⁰² P-47s with American markings attacked the Thunderbirds on 26, 30 and 31 December. The planes dropped bombs and strafed the division's artillery. The artillerymen fired yellow smoke, but the aircraft still attacked.²⁰³ The Americans discovered that Germans piloted the P-47s after one was shot down by the 45th Division's anti-aircraft battalion.²⁰⁴ Aircraft still had a vital role during the period for both sides despite the poor weather conditions.

¹⁹⁷ Headquarters of 106th AAA AW BN, "Events for the Month of September 1944," 45th Division: World War II Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and Headquarters of 106th AAA AW BN, "Events for the Month of October 1944," 45th Division: World War II Records and Reports, Box 11, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁹⁸ Headquarters of 106th AAA AW BN, "Events for the Month of November 1944," 1, 45th Division: World War II Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁹⁹ "Events for the Month of November 1944," and Headquarters of 106th AAA AW BN, "Events for the Month of December 1944," 45th Division: World War II Records and Reports, Box 12, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

²⁰⁰ "G-3 Report, December 1944," 1- 31 December 1944.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 1- 31 December 1944.

²⁰² "Events for the Month of December 1944," 1- 4.

²⁰³ "Events for the Month of December 1944," 4- 5. Yellow smoke was used to show that the aircrafts were attacking friend units.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4- 5.

The weather for the four month period had little effect on the ground fighting; however, it did have a limited effect on air support. The 45th could count on having air cover during days that weather permitted flying. During the period of 20 to 30 September the overall weather was cool and mild. It rained for six out of the ten days, this meant the Americans lacked air support for the six days. Forty percent of the month saw perfect weather and the American planes wreaked havoc on the German lines.²⁰⁵ They stayed much the same during October, but started to turn colder later in the month.²⁰⁶ Only ten days were fit for flying, the rest of the month was raining and cloudy.²⁰⁷ During November, the weather was extremely cold and wet the entire month.²⁰⁸ Mud plagued both sides during the period, making it harder to get supplies to the front and slowing attackers.²⁰⁹ In December, it snowed and iced most days with temperatures near freezing every day.²¹⁰ The ice and frost slowed the American advance.²¹¹ “December in Alsace is a cloudy month with low ground fog and drizzling rain. On only five days of the month was the Tactical Air Force able to give close support to the Seventh Army drive.”²¹² The only reprieve from the weather came during the occupation of villages and bunkers for either side.²¹³

The German situation declined during September and October, while the American situation only improved. The Nineteenth Army supply line shortened as it got closer to Germany, but the priorities for supplies went elsewhere in the German war effort throughout Europe. It received limited ammunition and had to forage for most of their food. It also got enough

²⁰⁵ “G-3 Report, September 1944,” 20- 30 September 1944.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1- 31 October 1944.

²⁰⁷ *The Seventh United States Army*, 362.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 378. It rained iced or snowed every day of the month.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 378.

²¹⁰ Whitlock, 335.

²¹¹ *The Seventh United States Army*, 459.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 459.

²¹³ This reprieve gave little comfort from the weather that was only as comforting as the availability of heating fuel to the soldiers.

ammunition to continue the drive into the Vosges. During October, the division took two weeks to stockpile artillery shells. The *Wehrmacht* commanders promised armor support for counter attacks, but they never sent any to the frontlines until the end of October.

The German situation continued to decline in November and December as the American situation improved during the period. Army Group G's supply lines shortened as it got closer to Germany. Much of the goods came directly from the factory, but was of poor quality. The Germans still did not receive hot meals at times and water by the end of December. Both sides received plenty of ammunition, but in December the Army Group G ran short on small arms, machine guns and artillery. The Germans lacked anti-tank guns and assault weapons throughout the two months. Both sides used tanks and aircraft for reconnaissance or to assist in attacks. The German units continued to have low morale. The *Wehrmacht* received poorly trained men without formal infantry training. It received elderly and medical unfit soldiers to hold pill boxes on the MLR. It also received large numbers of foreign troops that deserted when the chance came to them. It used localized counterattacks to reestablish lost MLRs and gain time to establish new lines. The *Wehrmacht* held strong defensive positions in the Colmar Pocket and along the Siegfried Line as it prepared a massive counterattack for the New Year, meant to push the Americans back into the low Vosges.

It is clear that during the four month period that the Germans desperately attempted to delay the American advance to the Rhine River. They created several different MLRs along cities and hills that could be easily forfeited by the defenders. They used barbed wire, pill boxes, dugouts, dummy fortifications, mines, roadblocks, and booby-traps to slow the Allies. It would have been impossible for Army Group G to prevent the US Seventh Army from crossing the

Vosges Mountains because of its tactical and logistical situation during the period. The odds during this period of time were not even and were in the American favor.

Chapter 4: OPERATION NORDWIND: 1 to 23 January 1945

At 1740 hours on 20 January 1945, two bloody and battered men wandered into the hastily constructed headquarters of the third battalion 157th Infantry Regiment. These men were the only survivors of the third battalion who were able to make it out of the German encirclement that started on the night of 15 January. They told their superiors that the trapped companies made numerous attempts to break through the German lines, but they were the only ones able to get out. They also told them that the companies had suffered at least 75 percent casualties and that most men no longer had ammunition. The commanders of the 45th Division made the decision to move the regiment to the rear and leave the encircled GIs behind. On the morning of 21 January, the entire regiment moved to a rear area for reorganization and training.¹ This happened at Reipertswiller, France and there the Thunderbirds suffered their worst defeat of the entire war. The 157th Infantry Regiment lost six companies during the five days battle.²

In January 1945, the Germans counterattacked the Seventh Army in order to drive them back into the Vosges and prevent the Americans from crossing the Rhine River, the counterattack the last part of the delaying defense, known as OPERATION NORDWIND.³ The attack had limited success because the Germans had intelligence flaws, poor planning, logistics and poorly trained reinforcements. The *Wehrmacht* had several flaws in its intelligence gathering and planning for the operation. Weather and supplies caused problems for both sides in January. Bonn argued that there is no need to extend the study past 13 January, because Army Group G

¹157th Infantry Regiment, *History of the 157th Infantry Regiment* (Camp Bowie, TX: 157th Infantry Regiment, 1946), 129- 136.

²Felix L. Sparks, *Operations Near Reipertswiller, France: January 14-20, 1945* (Oklahoma City, OK: 45th Infantry Division Museum, 1988), 2. A company was roughly 100 men.

³Wolf T. Zoepf, *Seven Days in January with the 6th SS-Mountain Division in Operation NORDWIND* (Bedford, PA: The Aberjona Press, 2001), 64-65.

lacked any offensive capabilities after that time, but the Germans had great success after 13 January against the 45th Division.⁴

OPERATION NORDWIND got its name from the 6th SS Mountain Division or the NORD Division. The Germans originally planned for the operation to take place at the same time as the Battle of the Bulge (16 December 1944 to 25 January 1945), so that the American lines would be stretched thinner and cause chaos amongst the Allies. The *Wehrmacht* figured with the fight in the Ardennes, the lines of the Seventh Army would be stretched thin.⁵ It planned to use the NORD Division to reinforce Army Group G on the west side of the Rhine River.⁶

The 6th SS was enroute to Germany from Finland during the planning of the operation. It arrived on the west side of the Rhine around Christmas Day 1944. The group would then attack the Seventh Army with the hope of pushing the Americans back into the High Vosges and retake the Saverne Gap.⁷ The *Wehrmacht* planned for two *Panzer-Grenadier* divisions to strike the Americans on the left and right flank while keeping a third in reserve. The two divisions would encircle the American divisions and the rest of the German units would destroy the American units in the center.⁸ The plan though, was extremely flawed. The infantry would spearhead the attack and clear out sections of the road for the Panzer units to attack the American lines. After this, the tanks would lead the rest of the attacks and the infantry would take care of the American positions the tanks left behind. The operation started on 1 January 1945, because the NORD

⁴ Bonn, 232- 4. He discusses Operation NORDWIND in the last part of chapter four, entitled *The Battle for the Low Vosges*.

⁵ Steve J. Zaloga, *Operation NORDWIND 1945: Hitler's Last Offensive in the West* (New York: Osprey Publishing, LTD., 2010), 5-6.

⁶ Army Group G was the German Army that the US Seventh Army fought against throughout the Vosges campaign.

⁷ Zoepf, 64- 5.

⁸ Bonn, 197.

Division needed time to get in place for the attack. The original plan had the Germans bypassing the 45th Division and leaving them in the circle.⁹ (See Map 11) S.S. Chief Heinrich Himmler later added the objective of retaking the city of Strasbourg for the glory of the *Furher*.¹⁰ The operation had limited success and the *Wehrmacht* did not accomplish any of its objectives.

The 6th SS Mountain Division formed on 12 February 1941, and originally had two infantry regiments. It became a full division on 15 March 1944 with members from Germany and Norway.¹¹ It had special training in fighting in cold and mountainous terrain. In June 1941, it moved to Finland and received a new leader *SS-Brigadefuhrer* Karl-Maria Demelhuber. He was disturbed by what he found there.¹² He wrote, “Few commanders at the regimental and battalion level claimed even moderate experience with the ways of modern warfare. The antitank gunners had never fired their guns... the division was not ready for combat, despite the men’s high morale.”¹³ It fought for nearly three years in the Arctic Circle fighting the Russians outside Finland.¹⁴ It returned to Norway after the Finnish armistice with the Soviets, and then moved to Denmark in late 1944 to prepare for fight in the Vosges. German veterans of the Norway occupation replaced the Norwegian elements of the division had to remain in the country. The division became famous for its lightning maneuvers to strike the enemy, by infiltrating the enemy lines with small groups in order to strike the enemy from behind and in the front. Its soldiers used skis and snow shoes to outmaneuver their enemies. It used both tactics again with

⁹ Stephen M. Rusiecki, *In the Defense of the Riech: The Destruction of the 6th SS Mountain Division 'NORD'* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010). Refer to MAP 13.

¹⁰ Zaloga, 5-6.

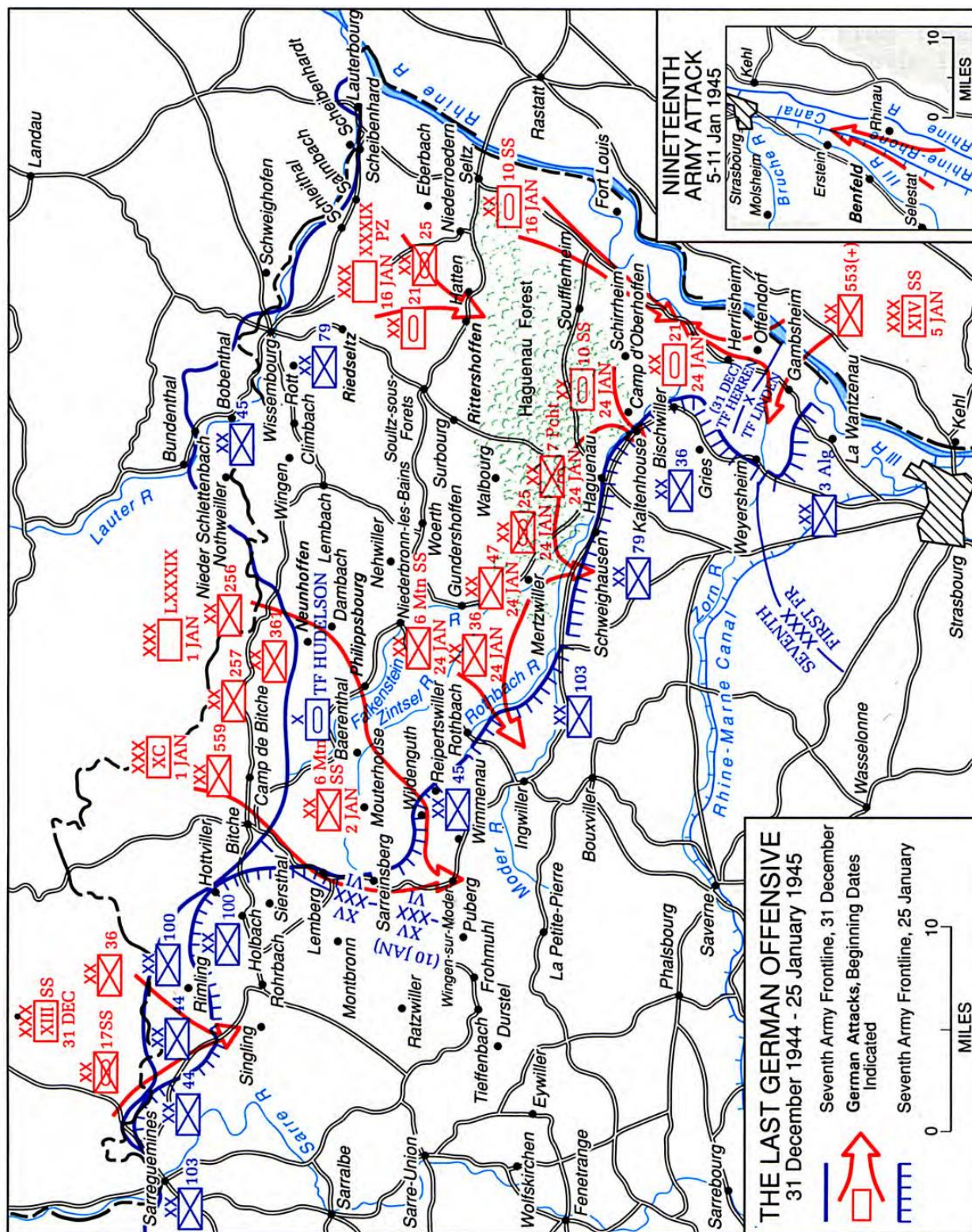
¹¹ Rusiecki, 1-3. They were a branch of the *Waffen-SS*.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-10. By 1944, it was one of the best units that the *Waffen-SS* could field.

Map 11



Source: Jeffery Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 506.

success against the Americans.¹⁵

The Americans knew of the operation seven days before it started. The Seventh Army knew about the planned counterattack on 24 December. It received a warning from the Sixth Army through an intelligence report that stated, “Excellent agent sources report enemy units building up in the BLACK FORREST area for offensive. Other indications for imminent enemy aggressive action exist. Imperative that all defensive precautions be immediately effective.”¹⁶ The Seventh Army had already started building defensive positions, but after it received the message, it intensified the defensive preparations.¹⁷ The XV Corps and VI Corps started “preparing counterattacks against possible enemy penetrations as well as consolidating lines of defense.”¹⁸ “On New Year’s Eve General Patch visited the XV Corps Command Post at Fenetrage and there warned both American Corps’ Commanding Generals that an enemy attack was to be expected during the early hours of New Year’s Day.”¹⁹

The weather during the month worked against both sides, and only the SS Mountain Divisions were prepared to fight in the conditions. The temperature during the month never rose above freezing. Most of the month temperatures remained at or below 25 degrees.²⁰ Both sides lived in dugouts or directly exposed to the weather conditions. Snow storms lingered for nearly half the days of January.²¹ These storms added to the previously fallen snow from the storms of

¹⁵ Sparks, 1-16, and 157th, 133-136.

¹⁶ *The Seventh United States Army*, 498.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 499.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 499.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 501.

²⁰ “G-3 Report January, 1945,” 1- 31 January, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 13, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1- 25 January. For 16 days in January in the sector that the 45th Infantry was in it snowed. It ranged from light snow to massive snow squalls.

November and December. The soldiers sometimes fought in waist deep snow drifts.²² During January, both sides had to deal with snow, ice, mud and extremely cold temperatures.²³ Other than the SS mountain divisions, none of the infantry units were equipped to fight in the snow in the mountainous terrain. The SS divisions brought equipment from its fighting near the Arctic Circle in Russia. They also trained to fight in these conditions and had years of combat experience in the same conditions; however, the majority of Army Group G's soldiers had very little training and lacked training to fight in the environment that presented during January.²⁴ The weather conditions for January favored the defender.

Weather affected how the soldiers on both sides operated during the month. The conditions had changed from December, as the days became colder with more ice and waist high snow drifts. Most of the days were cloudy or overcast. Dense fog made visibility poor for most of the days during the month.²⁵ Air cover for both sides became a luxury during the month due to the weather. Cub planes could not get in the air for most of the month. Infantrymen also had a difficult time in coping with the conditions. They were exposed to the elements night and day for the entire month. It was difficult for them to wage a successful attack in these conditions, because the weather for January, favored the defender. The weather conditions were an important factor in the battle especially mixed with the logistical problems had both sides.

Both sides had a difficult time maneuvering tanks in the weather conditions of January. The *Wehrmacht* placed a heavy emphasis on tanks for the success of the attack. Due to snow, ice

²² Ibid., 1- 25 January.

²³ Ibid., 1- 25 January.

²⁴ Zoepf, 8- 17.

²⁵ "G-3 Report January, 1945," 1- 25 January.

and mud, the armor had to stick to the roads of the Lower Vosges.²⁶ Armor also had a problem when trying to navigate the roads, because of the ice. In several incidents American tanks slid off the road or became stuck in the snowdrifts.²⁷ In the operation area only four roads ran north and south that could support armor.²⁸ The Seventh Army defended these roads against the *panzers*. The weather conditions and small road network limited the ability of both sides to use tanks during the month, but the Germans suffered a number of intelligence flaws as well.

Wolf Zoepf, a commander in the NORD Division during the operation, argued that the *Wehrmacht* suffered severe intelligence flaws when planning the battle and also had leadership problems. Army Group G had to use intelligence reports from 21 December 1944.²⁹ Their intelligence informed them that a surprise attack could work in the area around the Colmar Pocket, because of the battle in the Ardennes. It claimed that the Seventh Army's lines were stretched thin, because of the fighting in Northern France. What they did not know was that by 1 January 1945, new divisions had strengthened the American lines.³⁰ None of the regimental generals or those under them knew of any plans to attack before 1200 hours on the day of the attack. The *Wehrmacht* restricted units from performing any reconnaissance before the assault, because it might tip off the Americans. Army Group G gave the main divisions two hours to prepare their attack. German artillery lacked enough ammunition or was not in place to support the initial infantry assaults.³¹ Zoepf argued "the German high command had sacrificed the

²⁶ United States Army, *Armor Vs Mud and Mines: 4th Armd Div in the SARR-MOSELLE Area* (Fort Knox, KY: The Armored School, 1960), 85.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁸ Bonn, 198.

²⁹ Operation NORDWIND was supposed to take place on that day, but had to be postponed until January 1, 1945, and during the planning of the operation they still used the intelligence for the original order of battle.

³⁰ Zoepf, 62.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

benefits of solid intelligence and prudent preparation.”³² These factors led OPERATION NORDWIND’S failure.

The Germans encountered many problems with their personnel during the month of January. Most of the units in Army Group G lacked full combat strength, and they were extremely battle weary from constant fighting since September. The units that were at full combat strength were made up of *Volksstrum*. They had no combat experience and little training. The *Volksstrum* consisted of boys too young for conscription and men too old to serve in the military.³³ They trained for a few weeks with their rifle and *Panzerfaust*. They lacked formal infantry training. These men reinforced the *Volksgrenadier* divisions and thought their duties would be guarding bunkers.³⁴ The *Wehrmacht* also equipped their men with hastily produced heavy weapons that that lacked the effectiveness of the older weapons.³⁵ One example is “the Jagdpanzer 38 popularly called the Hetzer, which was a low-cost expedient in place of the older and more durable StuG III.”³⁶ The Americans could easily destroy this mobile assault gun with a grenade. NORD Division was well equipped, sufficiently trained, had combat experience and its combat efficiency was excellent.³⁷ Most German battle groups were not ready for the tasks they were given during the offensive.

The Seventh Army added the 70th to the 45th Division’s section to help bolster its defensive position. The soldiers of the division had sporadic training and lacked combat

³² Ibid., 67.

³³ Steven J Zaloga, *Operation NORDWIND 1945: Hitler’s Last Offensive in the West* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 30-36.

³⁴ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-2, “G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945,” 5 January 1945, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 13, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

³⁵ Zaloga, 34.

³⁶ Ibid., 34.

³⁷ Rusiecki, 24-5.

experience. Though better equipped than any German unit in the operation the 70th came to be known as the worst division in all of the Seventh Army's defense line.³⁸ The Allies needed infantry to protect their lines and placed the 70th in the line even though it lacked support units. It had only the three infantry regiments and the 45th supplied to assist it.³⁹ Members of the 45th jokingly called the other division the "the American *Volksstrum* Grenadiers" because of its lack of experience.⁴⁰ The 70th Division allowed for the largest penetration of the American MLR.

The Thunderbirds struggled to supply the 70th and its division during the month. "The supply situation was more critical in January than at any time in the Division's experience."⁴¹ It received hot meals, fresh bread, butter and meat every day. The 45th Division had a hard time supplying its soldiers along with the other units attached to the division. The Thunderbirds during the month had eighteen different regiments and battalions attached to their own.⁴² The 45th Division's supply staff had to assist the 70th Division, because it had never been in combat. The Thunderbirds had a severe lack of winter gear in January. It ran short during the month and they could no longer issue wool gloves, overshoes, socks, woolen trousers, overcoats rain coats, shoe pacs and jackets. They also ran out of cooking supplies and one-burner stoves.⁴³ "This situation was very serious due to the heavy snow and bitter cold."⁴⁴ The division had restrictions placed on all types of ammunition, because ammunition had to be sent to other units.⁴⁵ The Thunderbirds had shortages in oil, so it had to have used oil moved to a supply dump to be

³⁸Zaloga, 37-9.

³⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁴¹ Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-4, "Operations G-4 Section German Campaign January 1945," 5. 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 13, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁴² This was another problem caused by the extreme weather and snow storms during this period.

⁴³ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

recycled.⁴⁶ This shortage caused the 45th to lessen the use of mechanized equipment during the month. Much of the shortages during the month came from supplying the other division. Army Group G had a worse logistical situation than the 45th Division.

The *Wehrmacht* had a shortage of food and ammunition for all units. It planned to capture American fuel dumps to make up for the lack of gasoline reserves.⁴⁷ This never happened and all German tanks left the sector bound for the Eastern Front on 13 January 1945.⁴⁸ The Germans could not supply their soldiers with enough food. The initial assault troops received half a loaf bread with spread, and then told to get their next meal from the Americans.⁴⁹ As the month went on, the German soldiers complained bitterly of food rations not making it through to the front line soldiers.⁵⁰ Some soldiers on the front went for five day periods without eating after breaking away from their battalions. By 21 January most were extremely sleep deprived from almost nonstop combat on two fronts. The Germans in this pocket thought that their position hopeless and wanted to fall back.⁵¹ A soldier said of this period. "My memory of the next two days is blurred, probably the result of the continuing frost, hunger, lack of sleep and the nagging doubt all of us had about coming out of there alive."⁵² German POWs complained that their units lacked food and had low morale. Shortages in ammunition and winter gear also caused low

⁴⁶ Ibid., Administrative Instructions No.1.

⁴⁷ Charles Whiting, *The Other Battle of the Bulge: Operation NORDWIND* (Chelsea, MI: Scarborough House Publishers, 1990), 48.

⁴⁸ Bonn, 232-234.

⁴⁹ Whiting, *The Other Battle of the Bulge*, 52.

⁵⁰ Johann Voss, *Black Edelweiss: A Memoir of Combat and Conscience by a Soldier of the Waffen-SS* (Bedford, PA, The Aberjona Press 2002), 188. German front soldiers lacked food rations, while there was plenty of food in the rear positions.

⁵¹ Ibid., 188- 9.

⁵² Ibid., 189.

morale.⁵³ Their supply problems intensified later in the month and forced the *Wehrmacht* to take up defensive positions.

From 1 to 13 January, the 45th Division's newly attached units had their first experience of the combat with the *Wehrmacht*, and it ended with the Americans being forced from their positions. Germans plan of battle for the operation left the 45th and 70th out of the initial attacks until 4 January.⁵⁴ During this period, the NORD division attacked elements of the 70th while *Volksstrum* units attacked the Thunderbirds. From 1 to 2 January, the German infantry limited attacks to probes in the sector. On 2 January, the Americans learned from POWs that a large attack in the sector was coming soon, that they were building up their forces in the area.⁵⁵ The next day, the attack came on the western portion of the line with heavy artillery shelling on the entire defensive line. The Americans successfully fended off the attacks. The German attacks of 4 January pushed back elements of the 70th.⁵⁶ The next day the Americans counterattacked throughout the sector. That night the Germans counterattacked again and the frontlines became blurred.

On 7 January the Americans had met stiff resistance and could no longer maintain the attack. The 45th received orders to dig and form defensive lines once again. The next day a massive attack pushed back the western section of the line. For the next two days the Germans continued their attacks, but the Americans held their ground.⁵⁷ Then, on 12 January, the elements of the 70th could no longer take the pressure caused by the NORD's constant attacks and

⁵³ "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 1- 25 January.

⁵⁴ Zoepf, 64-5 and Headquarters Forty Fifth Infantry Division Office of G-2, "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 1- 4 January 1945, 45th Headquarters Staff Sections Records and Reports, Box 13, 45th Infantry Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁵⁵ "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 1-2 January.

⁵⁶ "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 1- 4 January and "G-3 Report January, 1945," 1- 4 January.

⁵⁷ "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 7- 11 January.

retreated in a panic. This caused the 45th to fall back to a new defensive position or risk being encircled. It could no longer hold the line while being attacked in the front and with the threat of attack from the sides.⁵⁸ Elements of the 70th Division retreated from the line in chaos. The bewildered soldiers ran in every direction in attempt to save themselves and get to the new lines.⁵⁹ The 157th Regiment filled the hole in the MLR after the 70th Division had to send the 313th Regiment to the rear.⁶⁰

From 14 to 21 January, the 157th Infantry took on the full brunt of the 6th SS with devastating results. On the morning of 14 January, the 157th and the 180th attacked the Germans from their new defensive position in an attempt to regain lost ground. The 157th Infantry fought two miles northwest of Reipertswiller and in this area, the heaviest fighting of the period took place.⁶¹ The initial attacks seemed extremely successful and pushed the Germans back. The SS men continued to fall back until evening. Then they counterattacked. A massive artillery barrage followed by an intense infantry attack stopped the 45th's advance.⁶² The 180th Regiment fell back to its original lines while the 157th dug new defensive lines to counter attack in the morning. The 45th thought that the 157th had a good defensive position on hilltops near the German lines.⁶³ In the night, the temperature fell way below zero and light snow obscured enemy movement. The NORD Division took the opportunity and infiltrated the American lines.⁶⁴ The next morning two companies of the 12th Mountain Regiment completely surrounded the

⁵⁸ "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 1- 5 January and "G-3 Report January, 1945," 5- 12 January.

⁵⁹ "G-3 Report January, 1945," 12- 13 January.

⁶⁰ "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 12- 13 January.

⁶¹ "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 14 January and "G-3 Report January, 1945," 14 January.

⁶² "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 14- 17 January and "G-3 Report January, 1945," 14- 17 January.

⁶³ "G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945," 14- 17 January and "G-3 Report January, 1945," 14- 17 January.

The 157th's attack was led by the 3rd battalion and a company from the 2nd battalion.

⁶⁴ Voss, 187-8.

companies C, G, I, K, L and M of the 157th Regiment.⁶⁵ The Germans had around 200 men encircling the 600 Thunderbirds. The *Wehrmacht* companies in the rear of the Americans dug in for defensive purposes to block the Americans from getting relief to the surround GIs.

Heavy artillery fire pounded the surrounded companies and the 12th Mountain infantry attacked from all sides. The 2nd battalion of the 179th Regiment attempted to breakthrough to the trapped men of the 157th Regiment. It furiously counter attacked the two companies of German infantry, and the Americans finally broke through on 16 January.⁶⁶ The 45th Division decided to send three tanks into the German lines. The tanks reached Company I with the supplies, but two tanks were destroyed with *Panzerfausts* as they returned to the American lines.⁶⁷ The tanks could not carry enough supplies to supply the companies for much longer. On 17 January, the Germans formed defensive lines around the encircled companies and repelled attacks by the Thunderbirds from both sides. The Germans continued the artillery barrage on the trapped companies.⁶⁸ The Americans continued to try and reach the besieged units without success.

From 17 to 20 January the 45th continued its attacks gaining nothing but “heavy casualties.”⁶⁹ On 20 January, the besieged companies made one last ditch effort to fight their way to the rear lines, and only two men were able to make their way out of the encirclement.⁷⁰ On the same day the Thunderbirds made plans to airdrop supplies to the surrounded companies, but a

⁶⁵ Sparks, 2, and Voss 188-90.

⁶⁶ “G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945,” 14- 17 January and “G-3 Report January, 1945,” 14- 17 January.

⁶⁷ Sparks, 8-9.

⁶⁸ “G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945,” 17 January and “G-3 Report January, 1945,” 17 January.

⁶⁹ Sparks, 14- 5.

⁷⁰ “G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945,” 17- 20 January and “G-3 Report January, 1945,” 17- 20 January.

heavy snow storm made it impossible. The division shifted the 157th and the 179th Regiments to the rear for reorganization. The six companies surrendered to the Germans.⁷¹

The 45th Division suffered its worst defeat of the war at the Battle of Reipertswiller, the Germans only victory during the operation. The *Wehrmacht* strategy for the battle was to surround the besieged Americans and use artillery to destroy their defense. The NORD Division fired thousands of rounds at the American hilltops making them resemble the lunar surface. The massive barrage, quickly followed by concentrated infantry attacks to overrun sectors. This tactic was tremendously successful.⁷² The trapped soldiers lacked medical supplies, ammunition, food and any source of water. The 45th estimated that 75 percent of the men were either already dead or captured. It reported that the reason it had not been able to communicate with the rest of the regiment was because the radio batteries had gone dead. The Thunderbirds warned that the men were about to break because the German artillery had zeroed in on them with horrifying results.⁷³ At the end of the battle, the average German soldier was starving and battle weary, but in high spirits. Their morale was high due to the in victory.⁷⁴ Members of 45th Division remembered the battle with horror. Colonel Felix Spark, the commander of the 3rd battalion of the 157th Infantry Regiment that attempted to rescue the “lost battalion.”⁷⁵ He later wrote that, “The most tortured memory is of the Battle of Reipertswiller. Seven company commanders, about thirty platoon leaders, and some six hundred other valiant soldiers of the regiment were either killed, wounded

⁷¹ Sparks, 15- 6.

⁷² Whiting, *The Other Battle of the Bulge*, 125-9.

⁷³ 157th, 134-5.

⁷⁴ Voss, 188-90.

⁷⁵ Colonel Sparks was not with the trapped men, because during the outset of the battle his jeep struck a mine and he was sent to the field hospital in the rear.

or captured during this tragic operation.”⁷⁶ The 45th Division pulled back to a new defense line on 21 January.

From 22 to 31 January, both sides reverted to fighting a defensive battle. The 180th and the 179th Regiment remained in the sector with the exception of the 2nd battalion of the 179th.⁷⁷ The 6th SS lacked the offensive capabilities to follow up on their victory at Reipertswiller. The German supply problems finally affected them and the hungry soldiers could not be pushed into attacking the enemy any more. The Thunderbirds lacked the manpower to attempt to regain the territory. With both sides unable to attack, they dug in for a defensive struggle with the occasional exchange of artillery and small arms fire.⁷⁸

The Seventh Army made the decision after the fighting in January to wage a defensive battle only in the preparation for a March offensive. This decision allowed them to regroup and regain the manpower lost after OPERATION NORDWIND. This permitted time for the winter weather to pass and for the divisions to stockpile supplies for the push into Germany.

Army Group G also had to take up defensive positions due to manpower and supply problems. The German counterattack did not obtain any of its objectives, but it did stop the Seventh Army's advance. Faulty intelligence, lack of reconnaissance, poorly trained reinforcements, and terrible logistical situation hurt the *Wehrmacht* in the operation. Weather had an important factor in the battle, because it aided the defender. It also affected the way that the soldiers fought and helped to hide the movements of men infiltrating the enemy lines. In the Battle of Reipertswiller, the more experienced 6th SS were able to overcome and destroy

⁷⁶ Sparks, 16-17.

⁷⁷ “G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945,” 22- 31 January and “G-3 Report January, 1945,” 22- 31 January.

⁷⁸ “G-2 Periodic Report, January 1945,” 22- 31 January and “G-3 Report January, 1945,” 22- 31 January.

elements of the 157th and 179th Infantry. Keith Bonn was wrong that the Germans could not continue the attack after 13 January, because they had their greatest victories of the operation after that date, but they could not capitalize on the victory.

By 25 January 1945, the Seventh Army had secured defensive positions on the foothills of the Lower Vosges and throughout the Alsace Plains. It had accomplished something that no other army had in history. It is clear that Army Group G was fighting a delaying defense during its retreat through the Vosges. It set up several MLRs from the Moselle River to the Colmar Pocket. It used roadblocks, barbed wire, fallen trees, minefields and pill boxes to slow the Allied advance. In January the Germans finally had strength to go back on the offensive against the Seventh Army. They attacked the Americans with the hopes of pushing them back into the mountains. They were unsuccessful, but the counterattack forced the Seventh Army to stop offensive operations until March 1945, which was the goal of the Germans delaying defense.

Conclusion

The *Truppenführung* outlines the tactics of, and when to use, the delaying defense. Army Group G used the delaying defense as outlined in *Truppenführung*. It used the defense when faced by a superior enemy force. It lacked the ability to maintain an offensive and delayed waiting for the opportunity to attack in OPERATION NORDWIND. The tactic only works if the enemy force follows to the pre-prepared locations, such as the Seventh Army did in the Vosges Mountains. The terrain should be used to full advantage in determining the location of the line and the fallback positions. The best, defensible areas are mountains and wooded areas, such as the terrain found in the High and Low Vosges. Locations that force a narrow column of approach is preferred, such as the road system in the Vosges. The *Wehrmacht* created four lines of resistance throughout the Vosges. The lines should force the enemy to deploy early, thereby sapping time and resource, which the Germans did during the first three months of the campaign. The *Truppenführung* also states that the defender can use counterattacks to gain back small sections of ground and gain more time. In November and December, Army Group G used several localized counterattacks to regain back lost ground. The defenders can put up a strong defense or can stay out of close contact with the enemy depending on the ability to defend that location.

The lines were further strengthened by the use of obstacles in front of them. The obstacles slow down the enemy and allow defenders the chance to counter attack. Obstacles can come in all types, with the exception of field fortifications; however, dummy field fortifications are extremely valuable. Army Group G used pillboxes, dugouts and dummy fortifications throughout the Vosges and Alsace Plain. It used miles of barbed wire, roadblocks (manned and unmanned), mines and booby-traps to slow the Allied advance. The Germans built fortification

on select hilltops with machine gun emplacements to help delay the Americans. During the defense Army Group G picked select towns to fortify and others it cleared out all of the townsfolk. In the cleared out villages the Germans left booby-traps, mines and roadblocks. All of the evidence from the campaign show clear evidence of a delaying defense.

Army Group G lacked the ability to go on the offensive between September and December 1944. It received abysmal reinforcements, inadequate supplies and all of its units suffered from poor communications. It desperately needed soldiers for its undermanned units. In the early period, it had to rely on stragglers, air force ground crews, marines, and coastal defenders. All of the groups lacked any formal infantry training. In later periods, the *Wehrmacht* sent non Germans, convalescents, elderly men and young boys from the *Volksstrum* to the Vosges. Many of the foreign troops surrendered in mass when they made contact with the Americans. These soldiers had signed up to fight the Russians in the east and not the western Allies. In December, Army Group G received exhausted soldiers from other fronts that had been told they were being moved to rest camps.

The units of Army Group G had poor communication with other units in the army group. Several soldiers became casualties after wandering into friendly minefields, because the units did not communicate with each other. Most front line troops did not have contact with the rear and could not identify their own lines. German artillery fired on their own lines for the same reason. During OPERATION NORDWIND, Army Group G gave two hour notice to the attacking units and could not do their reconnaissance of the Allies. The lack of communication between the units lead to low morale, confusion in orders and numerous deaths.

Army Group G's logistical situation during the period created another problem for the Germans. The soldiers went without hot meals unless they were stationed in a town. In some cases, soldiers went days without food or sleep while on the frontlines. The Germans lacked fresh water, and many soldiers in December became prisoners while trying to find something to drink. They had shortages in winter clothes, guns and basic tools such as entrenching tools. They received adequate supplies of ammunition, but arrived at the front at irregular intervals due to a lack of transportation. In the first four months, Army Group G had a shortage of artillery guns and for a time did not have any guns in the 45th Division's sector. During November and December, some German units had a deficiency in firearms. They had one rifle for every ten men and some of the soldiers were only issued hand grenades. They went without heavy assault weapons and anti-tank guns. In January, the new German units brought these weapons with them, but they had severe defects that made them vulnerable to infantry attacks. The 45th Division had a far superior logistical situation between September and December.

The Thunderbirds received enough reinforcements to keep the advance moving forward. The new soldiers came with some training deficiencies but after two weeks, the 45th turned them into adequate troops. It received plenty of ammunition during the period. At times, it did have shortages, but it did not stop the push forward. During the period, it did run short on artillery shells, but the problem did not slow the Thunderbirds. It had plenty of food and clothing with the only complaint being, that the logistical situation was not as luxurious as the one in Italy. The soldiers received hot coffee, fresh bread, butter, toilet items, candy and cigarettes every day during the five months. The troops got at least one hot meal a day, and at times they obtained fresh foods from local sources. The division ran rest camps in the rear with the troops rotated off

the front line every two weeks. The Thunderbirds did not have a perfect logistical situation, but it was better than the Germans.

Most historians have overlooked the Vosges Mountain campaign, which allowed Keith Bonn to claim that the Germans attempted to hold the mountains and make the assumption that the odds were even. He argued that tanks and aircraft did not have an impact on the fighting, and the infantry did everything. This is not true. Armor and airplanes had a role in the Vosges for both sides. Army Group G fought a delaying defense against the US Seventh Army in the Vosges Mountains from the Moselle River to the Rhine River. The army group received poor reinforcements, few supplies and had less equipment than the 45th Infantry Division. The Americans' trek through the mountains was inevitable and the Germans could only hope to slow the allied advance. The campaign needs and deserves more research; however, it is clear from the research that the odds during the fight for the Vosges were far from even and in the Allies' favor.

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