

N-2253.9

UNCLASSIFIED

2253.9

An attempt to seize the Adolph Hitler bridge, Rhine River, Uerdingen, Germany by 3d Bn, 67th Armored Regiment, 2d Division, 3 Mar 45, by Lt Col W. M. Hawkins, Cav. Command and Staff College. 1946 - 1947.

This Document

IS A HOLDING OF THE

ARCHIVES SECTION

LIBRARY SERVICES

FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS

DOCUMENT NO. N-2253.9 COPY NO. 1

CGSC Form 160
13 Mar 51

Army—CGSC—P2-1798—7 Mar 52—5M

N-2253.9

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE
FORT LEAVENWORTH
KANSAS

SCHOOL OF COMBINED ARMS

REGULAR COURSE

1946 - 1947

AN ATTEMPT TO SEIZE THE ADOLPH HITLER BRIDGE, RHINE RIVER

UERDINGEN, GERMANY

BY 3D BATTALION, 67TH ARMORED REGIMENT, 2D ARMORED DIVISION

3 MARCH 1945

LT. COL. WILSON M. HAWKINS, CAVALRY

RETURN TO
~~PERMIT SECTION~~
LIBRARY C&SC

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bibliography	- - - - -	P age	1
Introduction	- - - - -	"	2
Geographical Features	- - - - -	"	3
Events of 2 March 1945	- - - - -	"	3
Account of the Battle, 3 March 1945	- -	"	7
Lessons Learned	- - - - -	"	10

UNCLASSIFIED

BIBLIOGRAPHY

After Action Reports, 2d Armored Division, March 1945

History, 2d Armored Division

History, 67th Armored Regiment

INTRODUCTION

This is an account of the attempt of the 3d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, 2d Armored Division (reinforced) to seize the Adolph Hitler Bridge over the RHINE RIVER at UERDINGEN, GERMANY intact on 3 March 1945. The attempt was unsuccessful for the Germans destroyed the bridge shortly after our troops seized the western approaches and abutment and were forming to cross it.

The background of events prior to 3 March were as follows:

The 2d Armored Division as part of XIX Corps and NINTH Army had reached the ROER RIVER north of JULICH on 3 December 1944. A crossing was considered imprudent while the SCHMIDT DAMS remained in enemy hands. During the next three months, attempts were made by FIRST Army to seize the dams, to destroy them by bombing, and the ARDENNES Campaign was fought. The campaign to close to the RHINE finally got under way late in February 1945.

The strategy of the campaign was to close to the RHINE RIVER all along the front to set the stage for forcing crossings and reduction of the RUHR DISTRICT and finally of GERMANY itself. NINTH Army was making the main effort along its right flank on the line JULICH - NEUSS.

The 2d Armored Division attacked out of the bridgehead made by the 29th and 30th Infantry Divisions at JULICH on 26 February 1945. CCA and CCB were attacking abreast with CCR following CCA on the left to prevent escape of Germans attempting to get out of the pocket. The attack progressed day and night stopping only to bridge the NORD CANAL in CCB's zone.

For routes and progress made refer to Map A.

During this entire attack enemy air was more active than usual. Good flying weather prevailed generally. He employed jet propelled aircraft against us for the first time.

Enemy resistance at first was stubborn but as the attack gained

momentum the enemy began to surrender in groups. He lacked reserves and supplies. Considerable artillery fire was received as well as anti-tank fire from the anti-aircraft guns which defended the RUHR in great numbers and from tanks. During the period only one real counterattack was received. The enemy attacked in groups from the West in attempts to escape.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The country over which the attack took place is the flat RHINE plain. All the land except in the villages and cities is devoted to farming. There are no scattered farm buildings as farmers live in the numerous small communities near their land. These villages afforded good cover and concealment for anti-tank weapons and accompanying infantry.

The area is adjacent to and southwest of the RUHR DISTRICT and contained the important centers and manufacturing cities of MUNCHEN-GLADBACH, NEUSS, KREFELD and UERDINGEN.

After the winter rains and floods the ground was extremely soft and waterlogged. Cross-country movement was undertaken when necessary but resulted in mired tanks in numerous cases unless preceded by reconnaissance.

EVENTS OF 2 MARCH 1945

On 2 March, the 3d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment was part of CCR which was following CCA on the left flank. The night of 1 - 2 March was passed in withstanding a tank and infantry counterattack at SCHIEFBAHN by elements of 130th Panzer Lehr Division which were attempting to escape from MUNCHEN-GLADBACH. From SCHIEFBAHN the Battalion moved to WILlich closing about 1130 on 2 March. It proceeded according to orders and attacked the large factory and road center on the southwestern outskirts of KREFELD at 1500. After 10 minutes the attack was called off. Were it not for the communications facilities which exist in tank units this would have been a very difficult task.

At 1545 the Battalion was attached to CCA and received orders to

assemble in the southern outskirts of FISCHELN. It had to fight to get to its assembly area and lost one medium tank and destroyed one German self-propelled gun and a few infantrymen. Shortly after assembling at FISCHELN the Battalion was again ordered to assemble in BOSINGHOVEN which it did closing about 1900.

The Battalion Commander reported to CCA Headquarters about 1600. The Division Commander verbally reassigned the Battalion at this time to CCB.

At this time the 3d Battalion consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company containing an Assault Gun Platoon of 3 105mm Howitzers on the M4 (Sherman) tank, a Mortar Platoon of 3 81mm mortars mounted in half-tracks and a Reconnaissance Platoon, two medium tank companies and one light tank company. The medium tank companies were still armed with the M4 tank mounting the 75mm gun except for 4 tanks in each company mounting 76mm guns. The 76mm tanks had only 8 rounds each of HVAP ammunition which provided our only means of making a creditable showing in a stand-off tank fight. We were, then, a 64 round Battalion! The light tanks were all M5's mounting the 37mm gun. This was two months before the end of the war in Europe.

At CCB orders were received for the attack verbally, the details being worked out jointly by the CCB Commander and the Battalion Commander. The route was chosen from excellent maps and aerial photos.

The intelligence contribution to the attack is interesting. The CCB S-2 estimated the enemy situation and capabilities as follows: "You should have no trouble, there is nothing out there".

The attack was set for 0100 3 March, that being the earliest time that it was believed the different elements of the force could join in BOSINGHOVEN.

The plan was simple: Attack straight north on the secondary road out of BOSINGHOVEN to the Autobahn, turn east on the Autobahn, cross the bridge and take up defensive positions on the east bank of the RHINE in the vicinity of MUNDELHEIM. The attack was to be in the nature of a dash.

Attachments to 3d Battalion, 67 Armored Regiment were as follows:

Company H, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment

Company K, 379th Infantry Regiment, 95th Infantry Division

3d Platoon, Company C, 17th Armored Engineer Battalion

3d Platoon, Company B, 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion

3d Platoon, Company C, 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion

Special Demolition Squad, 17th Armored Engineer Battalion

Platoon Flamethrower Tanks

The Tank Battalion and Company H, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment had habitually worked together but the other attachments were new.

The Commanders of some of the above units were not available for receipt of the Battalion order. This was not considered so bad as to require a delay in the attack for it was anticipated that if we were able to make the quick dash, all units would follow in trace, and if not, only the advance guard would be engaged.

The Battalion order consisted of the general plan as outlined by CCB, an order of march since we were to start out on the road, and general instructions to the effect that only armored fighting vehicles would be taken and that all vehicles would keep well to the right of the road. The first was to shorten the column as much as possible and to reduce the possibility of a knocked-out vehicle causing a road block. The second was to prevent any vehicle causing a road block in the event of destruction or failure.

The order of march was as follows:

Advance Guard: C O Co H 67th Armd Regt Commanding

Company H, 67th Armd Regt

Attached: 1st Plat Co K 379th Inf (riding on the tanks)

Special Demolition Squad, 17th Armd Engr Bn

Plat Flamethrower Tanks

3d Plat Co C 17th Armd Engr Bn

Main Body: (follow Advance Guard without interval)

Co C 67th Armd Regt (light tanks)

Co K 379th Inf(- 1st Plat) (riding tanks C and I Companies)

Co I 67th Armd Regt

Co H 41st Armd Inf Regt

Assault Gun Plat 3d Bn 67th Armd Regt

Mortar Plat 3d Bn 67th Armd Regt

3d Plat Co B 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion

Rear Guard: (follow Main Body without interval)

3d Plat Co C 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion

The order of march was dictated by the following considerations:

1) That Company K, 379th Infantry had no organic transportation while Company H, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment had its own half-tracks. Thus one platoon of Company K was attached to the Advance Guard tank company in order to put accompanying infantry with the tanks and because these infantrymen had no other transportation.

2) The Special Demolition Squad was put well forward in order to be on the bridge early where it would drop off and remove the demolitions from the bridge.

3) The Platoon Flamethrower Tanks was placed in the Advance Guard in order to be forward if close fighting developed.

4) The light tank company was placed at the head of the Main Body because this constituted the reconnaissance agency for the force.

5) The Assault Gun and Mortar Platoons were placed at the rear since there was ample artillery support. These platoons had not seen the ground in daylight and were not capable of fulfilling their primary mission of providing a base of fire until daylight. They were placed toward the rear for the ride only.

6) The two Tank Destroyer Platoons were included in the force to beef up the anti-tank defense on the eastern bank. These platoons were armed with the self-propelled 90mm gun.

Artillery forward observers were with each tank and infantry company. There were five battalions of artillery in direct support of the attack and several more including Corps heavy artillery capable of firing into the area and available on call.

The 0100 jump-off time was postponed one hour when it became evident that the infantry would not close in BOSINGHOVEN before 0100 and it was desired that all troops be completely joined up and briefed.

The platoon of flamethrower tanks never did arrive and the CCB Commander cancelled their attachment. As events of the 3d March turned out, these weapons could have been employed to good advantage.

ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE, 3 MARCH 1945

The attack got off at 0200 with the Advance Guard moving forward at full speed but not for long. As the column approached the first small road crossing, the point came under heavy direct anti-tank and indirect artillery fire. The leading tank was hit and set afire and by its light the next tank in column was hit quickly.

As the Advance Guard had no indication of the location of the enemy, it held up and called for artillery fire on the area to its front and flanks.

The Advance Guard then made several unsuccessful attempts to bypass the burning tanks by moving cross-country but were stopped each time by very accurate fire which cost tanks for each effort made.

The CCB Commander gave orders to hold up the tank attack. He called up the 3d Battalion 379th Infantry from a reserve position and ordered it to make a dawn attack supported by Company I, 67th Armored Regiment to secure the underpass west of KREFELD-LINN.

This attack was successful and the underpass was secured about 0900.

Company I, 67th Armored Regiment replaced Company H in the Advance Guard and the Task Force passed through 3d Battalion 379th Infantry and proceeded on its original mission.

As the Advance Guard moved onto the Autobahn, it came under heavy small arms and bazooka fire from the buildings near the Autobahn. The infantry left the tanks and started clearing the houses. This effort was supported by all the artillery within range plus the fire from the tank main guns and machine guns. Company I expended its complete basic load of ammunition in attempting to reduce the resistance.

The buildings were reinforced concrete apartment houses. The artillery fire was not too effective but had the result of driving the enemy into the basements. Our most effective procedure was to use artillery to drive them into the basements and then have the tanks

fire a round of armor piercing ammunition to create a hole in the wall and to follow it immediately with a round of white phosphorus through the same hole. In spite of this the progress was slow.

Shortly after 1200 the Advance Guard was well on the Autobahn and sent a tank forward toward the bridge. As this tank nosed over the first railroad overpass, this overpass being slightly arched, it was struck by anti-tank fire which broke to left sprocket and caused the tank roll back down the grade and out of the line of fire.

Almost immediately after this incident, a $\frac{1}{4}$ ton truck came up the column from the rear, passed this knocked-out tank and proceeded toward the bridge. It was hit and demolished before going 200 yards. The bodies were identified as the driver and a Captain of Ordnance assigned to a Corps unit. No explanation of their action is possible. The incident illustrates a lesson which was disregarded too often in this war - do not get beyond the front line unless it is known what is being done and in case of doubt, ask.

About this time a report was received from a section of light tanks which had been sent to reconnoiter to the RHINE through KREFELD-LINN. This tank section reached the river and reported the route clear.

It might be wondered why this course was not followed much earlier rather than continue the slow fight at the Autobahn. The reason was that it was not believed that vehicles could get onto the Autobahn at any point east of the point where we were trying. The Autobahn in this area is on a high embankment approaching the height of over a three story building as it approaches the river.

As a result of this reconnaissance and purely in hopes of finding some way of getting onto the bridge, the Task Force turned east through KREFELD-LINN with Company H, 67th Armored Regiment and Company H, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment acting as Advance Guard.

The former Advance Guard disengaged itself and withdrew into KREFELD-LINN where it guarded the rear and received a replenishment of its basic load of ammunition.

The tanks and infantry had no difficulty in reaching KREFELD-RHEINHAFEN but a sharp fight occurred when the bridge embankment was approached. The enemy on our side (south side) of the embankment

was disposed of quickly but stubborn resistance was offered by the enemy from the other side (north side) of the embankment. There was no way to support the infantry with the direct fire tank weapons and the two forces being only the width of the road and embankment apart were too close for the use of artillery. Our success in finally driving the enemy off the roadway was due to the fact that he expended his supply of hand grenades first. Prisoners were identified as elements of the 23d Parachute Regiment which had arrived from Holland the previous day. Thus, the west approach and abutment of the bridge was seized about 1900. The enemy still was present and active in the buildings immediately north of the bridge and we were receiving fire from the east bank of the river.

Dismounted reconnaissance was sent out immediately on the bridge itself and the Special Demolition Squad started searching for demolitions.

This reconnaissance reported the bridge impassible for vehicles as a section of the floor was destroyed probably by bombing. It was reported that infantry could cross on the main members which were still intact.

The CCB Commander ordered the force to attack with infantry to cross the river and secure the eastern approaches. If this could be done, it was possible to get vehicles across by spanning the gap in the floor with treadway bridging.

The following picture taken on 4 March will give an idea of the bridge itself, its approaches, the size of explosion necessary for demolition and the complete destruction which was obtained.



The enemy destroyed the bridge as a force consisting of two infantry companies and the engineers was being formed to make the crossing.

The Task Force had fought hard against stubborn and fanatical resistance on a mission which all hands were keen to accomplish. With success almost within its grasp the enemy had destroyed these high hopes.

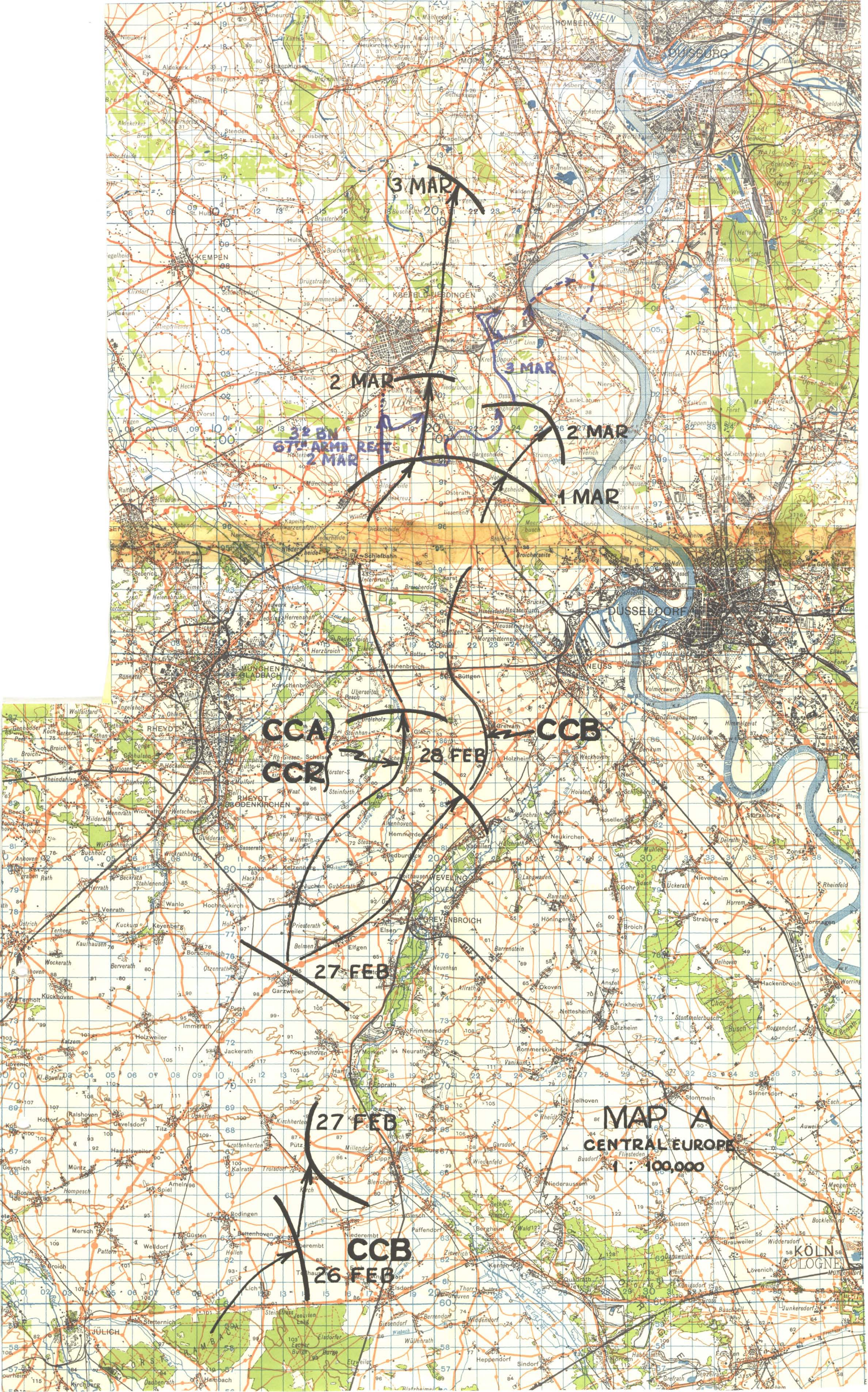
LESSONS LEARNED

The attack indicated again the desirability of permitting time for commanders to look over the ground in daylight. Had such been possible, more success might have resulted from the night attack by knowing our way around cross-country in attempting to by-pass the burning tanks on the road.

Lack of time also prevented thorough dissemination of orders and the organization of the hastily assembled units into a team. Although this actually had little effect on the outcome of the fight, it did create anxiety on the part of every commander and served to make every task more difficult.

The attack is a good illustration of what can happen to tanks at night.

The final lesson learned was that when the benefits to be gained are large enough, it is wise to make an attempt to secure them regardless of the hazards and difficulties involved. Had we been able to secure the bridge intact, the benefits resulting to the force as a whole are obvious. For this reason, the making of a quick attack at night with tanks without benefit of daylight reconnaissance and the employment of a hastily organized force were entirely justified.





KREFELD UERDINGEN

RAIL ROAD
OVER PASS UERDINGEN

ADVANCE GUARD
BECAME ENGAGED
WITH GERMAN
INFANTRY

UNDER PASS
SEIZED BY
32 BN 379 INF

MAP B

CENTRAL EUROPE

1 : 25000

PLANNED ROUTE

ACTUAL ROUTE

ADVANCE GUARD
STOPPED APPROXIMATELY
HERE IN FIRST ATTEMPT