

NINTH U.S. ARMY.

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NINTH U. S. ARMY

CRITIQUE

During October onwar the Ninth Army was the northernmost American Army, adjacent to the Second British Army, also in HOLLAND, and from 16 November the Ninth drove to the ROER River, approximately six miles distant from its 22 October front lines, and where it was situated late 15 December, planning a crossing of the ROER. The Ninth's major expression of its opinion of the enemy capabilities consisted in (1) the belief in the strength of the enemy's ROER fortification, (2) the recognition of the ROER dams flooding threat, (3) and the recognition of the presence and power of the Sixth Panzer Army as a strategic reserve west of the RHINE. There was no expression of opinion that NUSA expected or considered the enemy capable of the Counteroffensive.

NUSA arrived in France during late August, became operational on 6 September, and its major action during September was the conquest of BREEST, with containing actions against the ports of LORIENT and ST. NAZAIRE. (1) The Army became the northernmost U.S. Army in the Twelfth Army Group when its command post was established on 22 October in BALSRICT, Holland; the activity of the month consisting of planning for action west of the RHINE, and supply and movement to the assigned zone. (Ibid.) Containing operations continued until 16 November, when NUSA launched an aggressive drive to the ROER River, about six miles distant, in conjunction with the adjacent (south) First U.S. Army's drive to cross the ROER. (Ibid) Despite stiff resistance, both the XIII and XIX Corps were situated on the west bank of the ROER at the end of November. (Ibid)

Until 16 December, the Ninth Army eliminated remaining enemy forces in its sector west of the ROER, and prepared to cross the ROER. (I,D) Resistance was stubborn, counterattacks were mounted although "the enemy had withdrawn his high grade troops," and the enemy was alert, with evidences of "grim determination to defend between the ROER and RHINE."

During the first two weeks of December the Ninth Army planned the ROER assault. (I,D) Three considerations were noted by the G-2 After/Action Report for December as being of "considerable importance." (II,A) First, NUSA regarded the enemy field fortifications east of the ROER to be extensive, and a successful crossing required detailed planning and means to breach the Second, the

Critique:

enemy capability of releasing the ROER dams south of DUREN to flood the Roer valley was considered such a serious threat, that the bridgehead operation had been postponed by "higher authority," until their destruction by aerial bombardment or capture by the First U.S. Army. The third factor was the respect held for the reserve Sixth Sixth Panzer Army. MUSA's attitude towards this force was expressed thus: As to this third consideration, "the 6th Panzer Army, the enemy had been about to contain the Ninth and First Armies without committing any of the four Panzer Divisions constituting this force. This enemy had given him a very powerful mobile striking force with which to counter any break thru of his Roer River defenses. The presence of such strong forces west of the Rhine and the strength of the Roer River works made it clear that the enemy intended to make a determined stand west of the Rhine along the Roer."

This opinion of the Sixth Panzer Army as a strategic reserve constituted the Ninth Army's expression of its appraisal of the major enemy capabilities and intentions. "Large-scale counterattack potentialities, intentions, or capabilities were not discussed among the daily G-2 Periodics. MUSA's records did not indicate that the command had stated its views about the enemy in G-2 Estimates of the Enemy Situation. Air reconnaissance did not suggest enemy buildup operations and offensive intentions, possibly because poor weather had forced reduced flights. (II) No interpretative commentary was offered on the point "several changes in enemy dispositions occurred during the week of 9-16 December," namely the shifting to the south of the 2 SS Panzer and 3 Panzer Grenadier Divisions, and movement of the 246th Infantry Division into the Ninth's zone. (Ibid.)

Enemy operations on the 16th did not seriously affect the Ninth, according to the December G-2 After/Action Report:

"On the 16th of December, the enemy launched a powerful offensive on the front of the First Army. A considerable portion of the available German reserves was used in this drive.

"Having thrown the bulk of his forces into this attempted break-through, the enemy was fairly quiet on the Ninth Army front, engaging principally in harassing artillery and mortar fire and fairly consistent air activity throughout the period. ..."

NINTH U. S. ARMY

DOCUMENTATION

I. After/Action Reports, Army.

A. September, 1944.

(Source: L-196(1))

NUSA assumed initial operational responsibility on 5 September, having arrived in the CHERBOURG Peninsula during late August. It captured the city of BREST, France on 18 September, and the month concluded with containing action against the ports of LORIENT and ST. NAZAIRE.

B. October.

(Source: L-216(1))

The command post was moved to MAASTRICHT, Holland, and the headquarters was established by 22 October. During the month NUSA was concerned with planning of operations against enemy positions west of the RHINE, and with supply and movement of units to the zone of action. There was some minor activity by and against the XIX Corps in particular, but no major enemy activity. NUSA became the northernmost US Army on the Twelfth Army Group's front.

C. November.

(Source: L-268(1))

At the beginning of the period NUSA occupied a 14 mile front roughly from the ROER River, north of which was the Second British Army, to approximately WUSELEN, the boundary with the First U.S. Army. Containing operations and patrols comprised the operations until 16 November, when a Army Group offensive was launched toward KULM. NUSA was to drive aggressive to the ROER River, about six miles distant, and the First Army was to drive across the ROER. Resistance was stiff, but the month's end found both the XIII and XII Corps on the west bank of the ROER River.

D. December.

(Source: L-344(2))

"Until 16 December the divisions of the Army were eliminating the remaining enemy formations in the sector west of the Roer River and resting, refitting and training for the next assault to cross the Roer toward the Rhine. ...

...

The enemy drive altered plans, and new ones had to be made with a delay. Every effort was devoted to preparation for warding off possible threats from the northeast against the flank of the American line, and to rendering assistance to the hard-hit First Army to the south.

...
 "The XIX TAC was hampered by poor weather but managed to fly some missions, cutting rail lines, attacking fortified sites and giving close support to ground troops whenever visibility permitted.

"In early December the staff was engaged in planning the crossing of the ROER River. Such plans had to take into account field fortifications on the eastern bank, the possibility of flooding through demolition of the dams on the upper reaches of the river and the disposition of the Sixth Panzer Army, 'a very powerful mobile striking force,' somewhere west of Cologne.

"Resistance remained stubborn up to the conclusion of the operation on the Roer, with counterattacks mounted from time to time, although the enemy had withdrawn his high grade troops. He was sensitive to patrols across the Roer. His posts were warned and he was alert. Our troops observed extensive digging and other evidences of a grim determination to defend the area between the Roer and the Rhine Rivers.

..."

II. G-2 After/Action Report. (Source: L-344(7))

A. 1-15 December.

"Situation at Beginning of Period.

"At the beginning of the month, Ninth Army was continuing its drive toward the Rhine River (Operation Q). Stubborn enemy resistance, heavy minefields, and bad weather had all contributed in slowing the advance. In spite of these difficulties, the Army had gradually moved forward. At the end of November our front lines, except in the extreme north portion lay generally along, or slightly to the West of the Roer River. At this point, forward movement became secondary to consolidation of the position, rectification of the front lines, and preparation for crossing the Roer River.

"The crossing of the river itself was estimated to be a simple operation in view of the small size of the obstacle. However, there were three factors of considerable importance to be considered before forcing the crossing. First, the extensive field fortifications constructed by the enemy on the East side of the river. Second, the known capability of the enemy to flood the Roer River valley by release of water impounded by 3 dams South of DUREM. Third, the location of the 6th Panzer Army West of Cologne in the zone of advance of Ninth and First Armies.

"The first of these considerations, the enemy defensive works, made it a prerequisite of a successful crossing to have all details carefully worked out and the necessary means available to breach the enemy's formidable positions. The second consideration,

the enemy's capability of flooding the valley was considered as serious a threat to the success of the crossing, that higher authority had directed a postponement of the bridgehead operation until the dense forest had been destroyed by aerial bombardment or captured by the First Army. As to the third consideration, the 6th Panzer Army, the enemy had been able to contain the Ninth and First Armies without committing any of the four Panzer Divisions constituting this force. This enemy had given him a very powerful mobile striking force with which to counter any break thru of his Roer River defenses. The presence of such strong forces West of the Rhine and the strength of the Roer River works made it clear that the enemy intended to make a determined stand west of the Rhine along the Roer.

*Enemy Operations During the Period.

"Resistance on the front continued to be stubborn at all points of contact. ...

"During the second week of the period, the last enemy resistance West of the Roer and Inde Rivers in the XIX Corps zone ended after our troops, in bitter fighting, cleaned up the Sportplatz and Hasenfeld Cut. Save all of our patrols crossed the river. Enemy outposts and pillboxes were well manned and alert. The period closed quietly.

*Enemy Dispositions During the Period.

"There were no changes during the first part of the month, except that contact was lost with 10 SS Pz Div. ... Most of the fighting on the Ninth Army front was being done by 363 Inf Div. The enemy's nominal strength on our front continued to be 3 divisions, equivalent to roughly to 3-4 divisions (27,000 men) supported by 90 tanks.

"By the end of the period all Pz and Pz Gr Divs had been withdrawn from contact. Four Volksgren Divisions remained on the line. It was estimated that 2 Pz Divs, 2 Pz Gr Divs and 1 Inf Div were in immediate reserve, with the 6 Pz Army in strategic reserve."

*G-2 Air.

"Throughout the period bad weather of preceding weeks and the resultant poor conditions of many of the air strips hindered the activities of the G-2 Air Branch. Such conditions made it necessary to fly on a reduced scale for a large part of the period, and photography was reduced. In order to alleviate this condition, tactical reconnaissance aircraft were given photo missions in addition to their regular visual missions. In this way a portion of the photo reconnaissance was completed."

B. 16-31 December.

*Situation at Beginning of Period.

"During the week immediately preceding the period under review, enemy activity on the Ninth Army front had been confined to limited counter-attacks, patrolling, and harassing artillery fire. On 9 December the last enemy resistance west of the ROER and INDE

River in the XIX US Corps zone had been eliminated as SPITZBLATZE (FO25 504) and HASENFELD CUT (FO927) were cleared. Several of our patrols crossed the still flood-swollen ROER River, only to find a vigorous and alert enemy on the east bank.

"Several changes in enemy dispositions occurred during the week 9-16 December. The Second SS Panzer Division and Third Panzer Grenadier Divisions were shifted south out of the Ninth Army zone. The 46 Infantry Division was moved into the zone. On the 16 December, enemy strength on the Army front was a nominal 7 divisions, equivalent to 3-4 divisions (26,500 men), supported by approximately 95 tanks.

"Enemy Operations During the Period.

"On the 16th of December, the enemy launched a powerful offensive on the front of the First Army. A considerable portion of the available German reserves was used in this drive.

"Having thrown the bulk of his forces into this attempted break-through, the enemy was fairly quiet on the Ninth Army front, engaging principally in harassing artillery and mortar fire and fairly consistent air activity throughout the period. ..."

III. G-2 Periodics.

(Source: L-344(XA))

A. G-2 Periodic, #99. 120001A-122100A Dec.

"1. Enemy Situation at End of Period.

b. Defensive Organization.

Confirmation of the enemy's intention to utilize the ROER River dams as a defensive measure was noted from a PW captured by First U.S. Army. The PW, of 942nd Sgt, 353rd Inf Div, stated that his unit had a message the night of 11 Dec which said that upon the radio signal VRO, repeated four times, the Commandant of DUREN (F1246) would order the opening of the flood gates of the dam. The PW believed this could be accomplished by means of a single electric switch in DUREN."

Order of Battle Notes, attached to the Periodic.

"3 General:

a. Sixth SS Pz Army: A PW captured by 3 US Assault Div claims that the HQ of Sixth (SS) Pz Army is located at Castle SCHLEIBERHAY (F263611)."