

### **- Bridgehead on the Mulde -**

Sensitive on the subject of bridges, German engineers left a wrecked span across the Mulde where Task Force Welborn halted on April 15. Infantry of his force, however, crossed and secured a bridgehead. Meanwhile, Lovelady's veterans cleared the towns of Thurland and Kleinleipzig (which later were the scenes of bitter fighting after German forces had infiltrated through the spearheading armor). Colonel Hogan cleared all of the north-east and Richardson secured the small town of Frenz and proceeded toward the larger place of Bernburg. He met fanatic resistance in Unterpeissen.

All along the division front resistance stiffened perceptibly. Towns which had been bypassed and thought clear, suddenly disgorged a complement of German troops who harried supply operations in rear areas. Infantry from Colonel Boles task force was used to clear Meilendorf and Kornetz, Quellendorf and Reupzig. These places were defended by fanatics wielding Panzerfausts and small arms for the most part. Colonel Orr's forces occupied several small towns, and the 83rd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion sent patrols which took Rendin, Thalheim and Sandersdorf. The recon troopers discovered that the larger towns of Wolfen and Bitterfeld, near the Mulde River, were more strongly fortified.

At this time the "Spearhead" Division was holding down a struggling 40 mile front with many uncleared, yet bypassed towns in the rear areas. The terrain, however, was favorable. It was flat farm country dotted by numerous small towns, all connected by excellent road systems. To the south of Dessau was a large patch of woods through which Task Force Welborn had advanced on the autobahn. To the division's north was the Elbe, and to the east, the Mulde. On this front the armor was facing the greater part of three divisions, each averaging 4,000 of Germany's last, well trained reserves, plus a scattering of other miscellaneous units. It was a condition which, even at this stage of the war, demanded prompt action and close attention. Fortunately, the division had sufficient mobility to strike the enemy before he could become fixed in any one position.

The Mulde bridge operation, meanwhile, continued to confront Task Force Welborn on April 16. Short of infantry to begin with, he found German artillery extremely heavy and accurate on the bridging site. After having considerable engineer equipment destroyed by enemy fire, Welborn was ordered, by Army, to discontinue spanning operations and to withdraw his infantry from the east bank. This he did on April 17.

While Colonel Welborn was sweating out his bridgehead on the Mulde, Task Force Lovelady cleared enemy resistance from Raguhn, west of the stream which divided

the town, while Richardson entered Bernburg. The significance of these moves was that the Harz mountain pocket had been effectively sealed and the capture of the more than 80,000 troops in that pocket made inevitable. It was the second such pocket that the 3rd Armored Division had helped to close in a month of combat, the first being the Ruhr - named the Rose Pocket, in memory of Major General Maurice Rose, where 374,000 prisoners of war were captured.

### **- Mop Up Before Dessau -**

Task Force Hogan continued to clear Kothen, while one battle group went to Klepzig, there to encounter a road block, artillery, mortar fire, small arms and bazooka defenses. The German defenders were making good use of their big, clumsy, but often deadly panzerfausts. However, Klepzig was cleared and later, Merzein, too.

On the following day, Task Force Boles took Libbesdorf and Kochstedt, west of Dessau, encountering a mine field in the course of operations. Colonel Orr's men swept the woods south of Dessau.

During the early morning hours of April 17, Task Force Lovelady's CP in Thurland was overrun by 150 enemy infantrymen in a well planned and coordinated infantry-commando attack. The town was not retaken until late in the afternoon when men of the 83rd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion slugged their way back in.

Meanwhile, Hogan's elements had entered the town of Aken, on the Elbe, and Orr's battle group maintained pressure on a road junction near the town of Torten, south of Dessau.

Task Force Richardson, ordered to attack toward Bobbau-Steinfurth, promptly nicknamed "Bobby-sox" by the tankers, was counter-attacked from the direction of the town. Richardson parried the blow with artillery and fighter bombers, accounting for eight enemy tanks in so doing. By the end of the day his forces had reached Bobbau-Steinfurth.

Task Force Hogan took all of Aken on the 18th, and one of his battle groups contacted the XIX Corps in Poszig, near Bernburg. The 83rd, with Lt. Colonel Miller's battle group attached, attacked toward Wolfen and Greppin. Miller's tankers took Rodgen and Thalheim against mortar and artillery fire, and the 83rd pushed through two towns to Renden. Here, the enemy counter-attacked with three tanks and about 50 infantrymen. The attack was thrown back and the town was taken. In Bobbau-Steinfurth, meanwhile, Richardson was experiencing another counter-attack. He also held firm and, on the 19th, mopped up the area.

Colonel Miller's forces entered Wolfen on the 19th, and Task Force Hogan sent a group to clean up the area between Wolfen and Bobbau-Steinfurth. The next day Wolfen and Greppin were firmly in "Spearhead" hands. The preliminaries were over. Commanders pored over maps and studied the blue phase lines and the routes into Dessau.

### **- Dessau and The Elbe -**

To 3rd Armored Division Texans, April 21 was proper for the entry into Dessau: it was San Jacinto day! Task Force Welborn attacked from the south, and Boles spearheaded through Alten to enter the city. Hogan took Kleinkuhnau and Grosskuhnau, encountering road blocks, small arms, mortar and artillery fire. Richardson, another Texas tanker, drove into Jessnitz.

Resistance stiffened in Dessau on the 22nd of April, with shellfire and small arms the principal opposition, but on the following day all of the town was cleared. Sgt. Bill Wascom, of the 391st Armored Field Artillery Battalion, who had fired his outfit's first shell in Normandy, sent battalion's 170,100th 105mm projectile whistling into German lines. The campaign was over.

### **- Campaign Kaput -**

Weary tankers, red eyed and grimy, tooled their big Shermans and Pershings back over the roads of conquest. The division, as usual, had been the cleaving edge of Major General J. Lawton Collins' crack VII Corps. As usual, the "Spearhead" came out of battle with high honors - and vacancies. Lt. Colonel Prentice E. Yeomans, of the 83rd, had been killed in action at Zschepkau. Lt. Colonel Matthew Kane had been wounded. Since crossing the Rhine there had not been a single division general staff section which had not lost an officer. Some of the latter were lucky enough to return safely after being retaken by friendly troops. Among them were Lt. Colonel Wesley A. Sweat, G-3, and Lt. Colonel Jack A. Boulger, G-1.

By April 25, the 3rd Armored Division was out of the line and out of contact with the enemy: it was one of the few in more than ten months of almost continuous battle. The 23,879 prisoners taken in the drive to Dessau, plus a number captured in rear areas, boosted division totals over the 75,000 mark - more than five times "Spearhead" strength! To the division's credit was another long drive, 145 miles from Paderborn to the Elbe. Here, to observe strategic coordination with advancing Russian armies, the American drive halted. At long last, Germany was breaking up. There could be no mistake: the war in Europe was very close to an end. Thirteen days later the end was officially announced. To the weathered veterans of battle, the news was almost anti-climax.

South of the Harz mountains in the Sangerhausen area, men of the 3rd Armored Division rested in comfortable billets, learned that reveille is still practiced in the American army, and tried to forget about K-rations and foxholes.

These men who had come up the long, dusty roads from Omaha Beach and St. Jean de Daye, through France and Belgium and Germany, through the flaming towns and the best defenses of a fanatic enemy, felt the comfortable relief of a hard job, well done. Now they might relax for the moment. They did. And they wondered, too - they wondered where the trail led from these quiet towns in occupied Germany ..

There was always the far east. So long as the United States remained at war there would be need of tanks in the American scheme of battle. 3rd Armored Division soldiers knew that no fighting force in the world could claim supremacy over the "Spearhead". In view of that fact, whether the 3rd would again be called upon to lead the first Americans in total, irresistible combat, was a matter for God, and General Marshall to decide.

**THE END**