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“A” Ambush Pg 1,2,3.docx-G-119kb
Arbeitsgruppe (workteam) Tasc Force Baum

This is the ambush

Interview by Hanns-Helmut Schnebel with captain retired Gehring about the combat in Hoellerich by the Infanterie Academy Doebritz.

The staff of the academy and the staff of the instructors No. 1 and 2 were transferred to the Truppenübungsplatz (training ground for troops) in Grafenwoehr and the instructions were resumed. But there was not much time to further the instructions for the Fahnenjunker (cadet officers). On March 26, 1945 the OKW (Supreme Headquarters of the Army) gave Alarm “Leuthen”. Therefore all instruction units, stationed in Wehrkreis (Defence circle) XIII, were attached to Division 413 z.b.V = Zur besonderen Verwendung (for special tasks) and were thrown to the Western front, which had already reached the river Main at Aschaffenburg. Also the Infantry Academy (Doebritz) received order to form a combat group together with Wehrkreisunterführerlehrgang (Academy for noncommissioned officers) and to move to Aschaffenburg. But the event changed.

On 26. March an armored assault detachment of the U.S. forces broke out of the bridge head of Aschaffenburg, with the target, to liberate U.S officers out of the POW camp OFLAG XIII B

This U.S. combat group, consisting of 306 men and 53 vehicles - there were 10 Sherman tanks, 3 Sturmgeschütze (self propelled heavy guns) and 6 smaller tanks, all from the 4. U.S.-tank-division under its commander captain Abraham Baum, reached the town Lohr in the early morning hours. Here they met their first resistance, but that was fast broken. Without any bigger delays, Task Force Braun reached Gmuenden, where the bridge over the Saale river had been blown up in time by German pioneer soldiers, so Hammelburg couldn't be reached directly, but they had to take a detour via Rieneck - Burgsinn - Graefendorf - Michelau - and Weikersgrueben. Information about the (American) breakthrough from Aschaffenburg could not reach the German units in the Wuerzburg - Schweinfurt district fast enough, because the Task Force had cut all the telegraph poles and the phone lines were interrupted. The report about the American breakthrough and the order, to send a counterattack group to Wuerzburg, arrived at the infantry academy at about 8:00 in the morning. The academy commander Generalmajor Heinrich Wittkopf ordered his Adjutant Hauptmann Franz Gehrig to start for Wuerzburg with 100 cadet officers, to clean up the situation there. The cadet officers were all older combat approved Unteroffiziere (non commissioned officers) But there were only rifles, MGs (machine guns) as well as some bazookas at hand. 4 busses, fueled by gas, produced from wood in a boiler on board of each vehicle, transported the cadet officers to Wuerzburg. Hauptmann (captain) Gehrig sat in the first vehicle, because there was no commander-vehicle at hand. This special transport was very uneasy for the drivers. They came from the Volkssturm (Peoples-storm, the last enrolment, these men were older than 65, they were inducted into the army for jobs behind the front like drivers or to build obstacles against attacking enemies but not for combat purposes) and Hauptmann Gehrig had a hard job to persuade them, to do the driving (against the enemy).

At about 14:00 (2:00 PM) the (German) group arrived at the ruined Wuerzburg, the town center had been bombed and devastated by an air attack on March 16. (1945). The Ortskommandant (local commander) had his quarters in the barracks on the Galgenberg, here Hauptmann Gehrig was instructed about the military situation.

It was known by air-reconnaissance, initiated by the 7.Arme, that the American Task Force Braun was in the district of Rieneck - Burgsinn. Hauptmann Gehrig got the order to do reconnaissance from Gmuenden to Burgsinn and to destroy the enemy. When he reached Burgsinn with his 100 men, no American Task Force Baum was there, because they already were on their way to Hammelburg. There was the opinion, that the Task Force Baum only was the head, and that the bulk would follow soon, out of this reason Hauptmann Gehrig also made reconnaissance to the West(to the rear).

Suddenly an pioneer officer arrived, who had the order from Wehrkommando XIII (defence command XIII) in Nuernberg, to blow up all bridges over the Sinn River. Hauptmann Gehrig convinced him, that these blow ups were completely senseless, because the tanks could drive through (the river). A little later a messenger on motorbike appeared and brought the order, to follow the Americans. Soon Hauptmann Gerig stopped the reconnaissance activity and took up the trail. In Graefendorf, Michelau and Weikersgrueben people reported, that the Americans had driven trough a bit more than two hours ago. But never the less there always was the danger to drive into the armored group and to become annihilated.

When Hauptmann Gehrig arrived at Hochstrasse (High street) in Seifritzburg at the Reichsstrasse 27 (state road 27) thunder of guns could be heard in the distance. The American Task Force Baum was entangled in a gunfight in front of Hammelburg. Or did the thunder of guns came from the Western part of the military training ground, where the POW-camp was? There was no way to find out precisely. Because Hauptmann Gehrig exactly knew the district, he decided to drive to Hoellerich, to get in contact with the commandants office of the training ground to learn, what should happen next.

In Hoellerich nothing was know about the whereabouts of the American group .Hauptmann Gehrig set up outposts and made quarters for the night, which were made in the barns of the local farmers. Finally at least, there was something to eat and to drink.

Hauptmann Gehrig just was about to get in contact with the commandants office, when a messenger arrived. He brought the order to block the roads, that lead from the military training ground to Reichsstrasse 27. There were no means to construct fortified tank blockades, except in the forest at the rim of the training ground, so no blockades were constructed there, but ambushes were installed, from where accurate shootings with bazookas were possible.

Till late at night all was quite, when suddenly, shortly after 2:00 AM, noises of oncoming tanks were heard. When Hauptmann Gehrig carefully went to the outpost at the entrance of Hoellerich, it was pitch dark. There was nothing to be seen, but the driving noises apparently came from heavy tanks, that rolled from the training ground to Reichsstrasse 27, in a distance of about 2000 meters. Then you could exactly hear, when

the first tank reached the (Reichs) Steet and turned into the direction to Hoellerich. In a great distance to the first tank, the second tank followed. When the first tank, coming from the direction of Hessdorf, reached the entrance of Hoellerich, a Fahnenjunker (cadet officer) fired his bazooka from a distance of 50 meters and made a hit. The explosion was low, but the tank crew was no longer able to fight, it stopped suddenly.

Two (Fahnenjunker) cadet officers with a hand grenades sneaked to the tank and entered. They dragged out the dead driver, then one (Fahnenjunker) cadet officer took the wheel and drove the tank into a fruit yard next to the village entrance, the other Fahnenjunker (cadet officer) took the earphones of the wireless set. "Can you hear me ? What has happened?" he could hear over the earphones. The Fahnenjunker (cadet officer) replied : "It's not important, don't be afraid. We are moving on." And so he misled his enemies and the second tank followed and also was shot (and disabled) at the entrance of Hoellerich.

Baum also lost a third tank at this attack, when he tried to break through to Hessdorf, as he writes in his book "Raid".

After this failed attack the Americans didn't try another break trough. When daylight, one could hear fighting noise from the training ground. A stray tank grenade hit the barn, in which Hauptmann Gehrig had his command post. A Fahnenjunker (cadet officer) was seriously wounded. Hauptmann Gehrig didn't take part with his Fahnenjunker (cadet officer) in the fighting, because he was not instructed about the situation and still fulfilled his order, to block Reichsstrasse 27.

Later came a messenger on motorbike and brought the order to participate at imprisonment of the fugitive POWs. On March 29. (1945) the detachment of the Infantry Academy left for Raetzbach.