

By the end of November 1944, the situation for the German forces in Alsace was quickly deteriorating. In the north, the US XV Corps had broken through the Saverne gap and reached Strasbourg, opening a gap between the 1. Armee and the 19. Armee, while in the south, French forces had reached the Rhine and the last defences in and around Belfort were about to collapse (see *After the Battle* No. 122).

Judging that the Allied armies would probably attempt to encircle and destroy the 19. Armee by means of concurrent drives south from Strasbourg and north from Mulhouse, the commander of Heeresgruppe G, General der Panzertruppen Hermann Balck, and the commander of 19. Armee, General der Infanterie Friedrich Wiese, agreed that their southern flank had to be pulled back to the east and north immediately. General Balck gave this evaluation to the Ob. West, Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt, on the morning of November 24. That afternoon clearer information on the situation in the Saverne area arrived at the Ob. West HQ located in Coblenz as well as news of the failure of a counter-attack by the Panzer-Lehr-Division. As a result, von Rundstedt appealed to the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW – Armed Forces High Command) that without immediate reinforcements — at least two panzer divisions and one infantry division and both fully up to strength — it would be impossible to hold the situation in northern Alsace and close the gap between 1. Armee and 19. Armee. However, all available reserves were currently being husbanded for the scheduled Ardennes counter-offensive and OKW had no spare units available. Without reinforcements, and to avoid destruction, von Rundstedt and Balck concluded that the 19. Armee had no choice but to abandon the whole of Alsace and withdraw quickly across the Rhine.



Following General Eisenhower's decision to halt the US 6th Army Group and use it 'to bail out the northern army groups', General Jacob L. Devers turned his attention to the US Seventh Army attack northward, and on December 2 he instructed the VI Corps to move north and position itself on the army's right wing. As far as the French 1ère Armée was concerned, it was to renew its offensive as soon as possible and finish the job of clearing the Colmar pocket. To this end, some American forces were transferred to Général de Lattre's command. The 3rd Infantry Division replaced the exhausted 36th Division on December 15 and the 28th Infantry Division followed from mid-January. The US XXI Corps was then transferred to the 1ère Armée to take over these two divisions plus the American 75th Division from the beginning of February. This picture was taken at Riedwihr in January when General Devers, in company with Général Henri de Vernejoul, the commander of the French 5ème Division Blindée (left), met with officers of the US 3rd Division. (ECPAD)

# THE COLMAR POCKET

As far as Hitler was concerned this was totally out of the question. Not only could he not face the idea of giving up the re-annexed Alsace to the French; he was now being asked to consider cancelling his planned master stroke in the Ardennes in favour of a major counter-attack in Alsace and Lorraine. No, the 19. Armee was to continue the fight and those parts of Alsace still under German control were to be held at all costs.

Nevertheless the situation on the northern and southern flanks of 19. Armee continued to deteriorate and by the afternoon of the 26th von Rundstedt finally persuaded OKW to approve a new defensive line, one that was more or less the same as had been originally proposed by Balck. That night Hitler finally gave his assent and von Rundstedt issued the necessary orders in the early hours of the 27th.

The Hitler-approved directive of November 27 was committing the 19. Armee to the defence of a vast bridgehead west of the Rhine, a bridgehead that soon became known in the Allied camp as the Colmar Pocket. Initially, the salient had a base along the Rhine for 65 kilometres between Erstein and Mulhouse, and its centre extended more than 40 kilometres westward from the river into the Vosges mountains. OKW and Ob. West estimated that with some replacements and at least some anti-tank artillery and assault guns, the 19. Armee could hold the salient for about three weeks, a time span dictated by the date set for the launching of the Ardennes offensive. To this end, during the first days of December, Wiese strove to

bolster the depleted combat units of his eight infantry divisions with a variety of military personnel scraped together from all branches and services.

On December 10, Hitler's determination to hold the salient was re-affirmed when he appointed Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler to take command of Heeresgruppe Oberrhein, a new headquarters that had been set up to control the 19. Armee in Alsace and the motley collection of formations assembled over on the eastern bank of the Rhine. Heeresgruppe Oberrhein was treated as a separate theatre command and Himmler reported not to von Rundstedt's Ob. West but directly to OKW and to Hitler himself. However questionable his military abilities, Himmler was able to accelerate the infusion of replacements into both the Colmar area and the east bank defences by having the immediate German interior scoured more thoroughly for supplies, equipment and manpower. In addition, the direct presence of the chief of the police undoubtedly ensured that no unauthorised withdrawals occurred and local commanders were 'inspired' to defend each village or water crossing with determination. On December 15, Himmler replaced Wiese with General der Infanterie Siegfried Rasp as commander of the 19. Armee. One week later, on the 22nd, Generaloberst Johannes Blaskowitz replaced General Balck to command Heeresgruppe G.

Following the decision by the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, on November 24 to turn the main thrust of the US 6th Army Group

By Jean Paul Pallud

northwards on the west bank of the Rhine (see *After the Battle* No. 122) — much to the disappointment of Lieutenant General Jacob L. Devers and his staff — by December 5 they had switched the US Seventh Army north as ordered by SHAEF. When Devers and Général Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, the commander of the French 1ère Armée, were surprised by the efforts of the German 19. Armee to continue to hold in the Colmar pocket instead of simply pulling back across the Rhine, Devers wanted the 1ère Armée to renew its offensive against the pocket as soon as possible and finish the job of clearing southern Alsace. To achieve this, he decided to transfer operational control of the US 36th Infantry Division and the French 2ème Division Blindée from the Seventh Army to the 1ère Armée, effective December 5.

To clear the German enclave, de Lattre planned a two-pronged offensive with the French 1er Corps d'Armée attacking north through Cernay on December 13 and the French IIème Corps d'Armée with the 36th Infantry Division and the 2ème Division Blindée attached pushing south from the Sélestat area on the 15th. However, it was questionable whether the 1ère Armée was strong enough to carry out such an endeavour. The November battle had exhausted French manpower and materiel resources, a situation from which they had difficulty in recovering because of their weak logistical



Left: In the meantime the centre and right wing of the IIème Corps d'Armée were still fighting over some of the highest and most rugged hill masses of the Vosges. This picture of elements of the 3ème Régiment de Spahis Algériens, the reconnaissance unit of the 3ème Division d'Infanterie Algérienne, was taken some time after the capture of the Bonhomme Pass



in mid-December. Due west of Colmar, this pass brought one of the major roads across the High Vosges. (ECPAD) Right: We finally traced the spot where this picture had been taken at the Calvaire Pass at an altitude of 1144 metres, right on top of the summit of the Vosges, some five kilometres south of the Bonhomme Pass.

and personnel support systems. Efforts to turn FFI elements into regular units continued to have serious drawbacks and the recruiting and training of new personnel, especially officers and technicians, could not be accomplished overnight.

Also the strength of the 1ère Armée was still undermined by the demands of Opera-

tion 'Independence', the attempt to open the Gironde estuary which was the approach to Bordeaux, the major port in south-western France. Initially, it was planned to have the French 1ère Division Blindée departing for the Gironde operation on November 11 and the 1ère Division de Marche d'Infanterie (DMI) following on the 27th but, after a

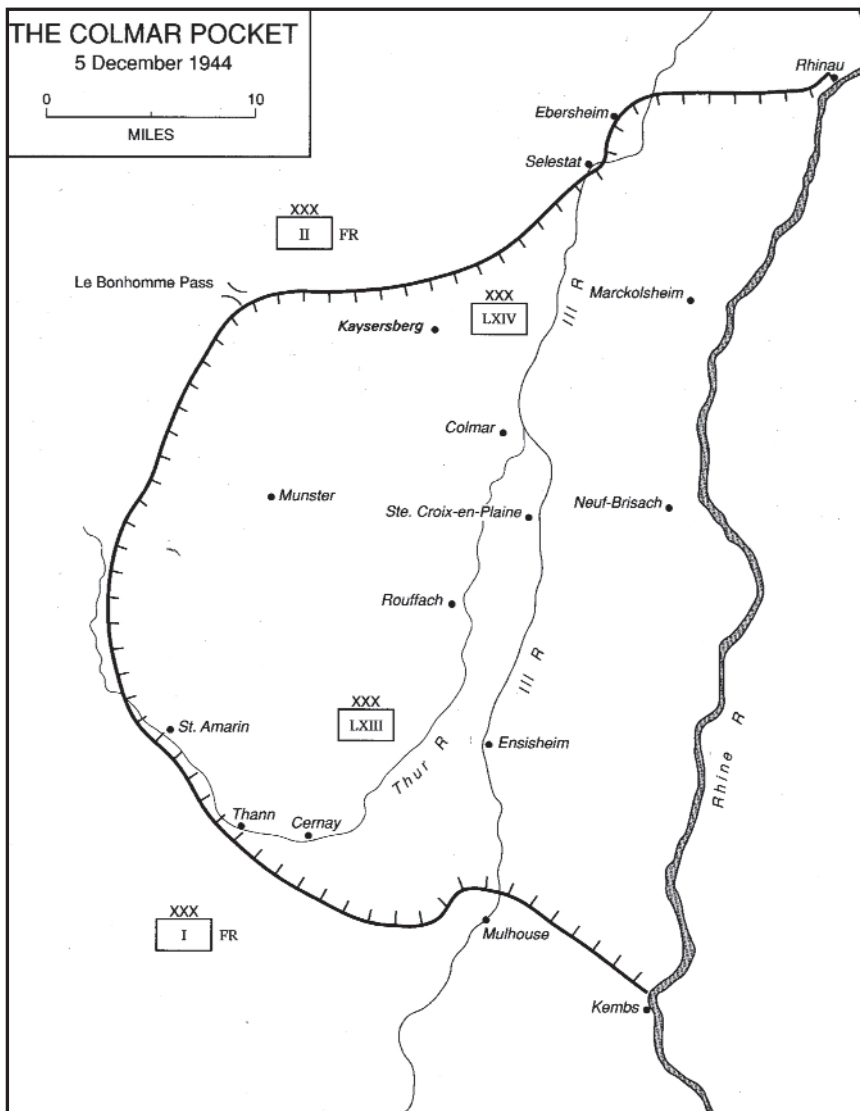
series of postponements, the 1ère DMI only started to move out on December 9. The 1ère Division Blindée was due to follow when, two days after the German attack in the Ardennes, SHAEF ordered another postponement. By then the main body of the 1ère DMI had reached western France and, though the division was quickly turned around, it arrived too late to play a part in the renewed offensive against Colmar.

By then the 36th Division and the 2ème Division Blindée — which had been assigned to reinforce the 1ère Armée — had both turned southwards. The 36th Division started to clean out the Kaisersberg valley but after ten days of heavy fighting it was so exhausted that its commander, Major General John E. Dahlquist, requested its immediate relief. With Devers' approval, the Seventh Army replaced it with the US 3rd Infantry Division on December 15.

In the meantime, with the armour of the 2ème Division Blindée having difficulty in moving in the water-soaked plains, its commander, Général Leclerc (Philippe de Hauteclocque), protested that his mission of clearing the area between the Rhine and Ill rivers was more appropriate for an infantry division. When Leclerc went to Paris to plead his case with Général de Gaulle, Devers considered either disbanding the unit or getting SHAEF to move it somewhere off his patch. In the end he finally told Leclerc that the 2ème Division Blindée had no choice but to accomplish the mission.

On December 15, shortly after the arrival of the 3rd Division, de Lattre renewed his offensive against the pocket, using the Ier Corps d'Armée to attack towards Cernay and the IIème Corps d'Armée striking through the Kaisersberg-Sélestat area. The cold, wet and overcast weather slowed down operations and made it impossible for vehicles to move off the roads, which nullified de Lattre's numerical superiority in armour. That first day, neither corps was able to make more than a few dents in the now strengthened German defences.

News of the German offensive in the north spread rapidly through the 6th Army Group during the evening of December 16. At first, many commanders reasoned that the German initiative in the Ardennes would weaken their forces in the south, thereby offering the Seventh Army an unique opportunity to break through the Westwall. However such optimistic thinking did not last long and the strength of the German offensive soon became clear. Late on the 18th, SHAEF ordered the US Third Army to despatch the 80th Infantry and 4th Armored





*Left:* On December 16 the 36th Division (with the 30th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Division attached) took Kaysersberg, ten kilometres north-west of Colmar. The Germans counter-attacked on the 17th and house-to-house fighting raged in the village throughout the morning. To try to break the German effort, the 11ème Corps d'Armée then sent one battle group of the 5ème Division Blindée to clear Kientzheim, the village east

of Kaysersberg, from where the Germans had set out. Capitaine Davout d'Auerstadt led his squadron into Kientzheim that afternoon where he waited for American infantry to join them to help clear the village. This picture of *Fornoue*, a Sherman M4A4 of the 1er Régiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique was taken on Place Schwendi in the centre of the village. (USNA) *Right:* Peace and quiet has now returned to Kientzheim.



For several days, the Germans mounted repeated counter-attacks in an attempt to blunt the salient, which threatened Colmar. Consequently the two villages of Mittelwihr and Bennwihr, three kilometres east of Kaysersberg, were taken, lost and retaken several times and it was not until December 25 that Bennwihr was finally secured by the 15th Infantry Regiment. By then the 3rd Division had completely taken over the sector and the 36th Division had been withdrawn. *Above:* This picture of dead Germans lying at the side of the road was taken two days later by a US Signal Corps photographer, Tech/5 B. J. McCroby. These grenadiers had belonged to the Begleit-Bataillon Reichsführer-SS (note the SS collar patch), one of the motley formations rushed to Alsace to bolster the 1. Armee. (USNA) *Right:* It was the details appearing on the road sign that led us to the correct location — at the southern entrance of Beblenheim, just north of Mittelwihr.





**The weak logistical machine of the 1ère Armée proved unable to sustain it in battle for any length of time and the rugged terrain made support even more difficult. One of the best**

**methods of transporting supplies were pack mules like these belonging to the 1ère DMI as the beasts could negotiate the mountainous roads without undue trouble. (ECPAD)**

Divisions northward for the Ardennes. At the same time, Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, the 12th Army Group commander, instructed Lieutenant General George S. Patton, the Third Army commander, to halt all preparations for his own offensive then scheduled for the following day and to prepare to send more of his divisions northward.

The next day, December 19, General Eisenhower held a major command conference at Verdun attended by Devers, Bradley and Patton at which he called for counter-attacks against the northern and southern shoulders of the German penetration in the Ardennes. Third Army was put in charge of the southern counter-strike (which would change its direction of advance from east to north), while Devers' 6th Army Group was to halt all offensive operations and take over responsibility for most of the sector vacated by the Third Army. Priority in supplies, equipment and manpower would go to the forces fighting in the Ardennes.

Consequently, Devers ordered the offensives against the Westwall and the Colmar pocket to end immediately. The Seventh Army was to occupy the extended front, spreading out to the west and north-west, and adopting a defensive posture, and the new boundary between the 12th and 6th Army Groups was to be moved over 40 kilometres west of the old November 26 line. As for the 1ère Armée, although it was to break off the action against Colmar, Devers directed de Lattre to be prepared to resume the offensive no later than January 5 by which time he expected the emergency in the north to be over.

As recounted by the official US Army historians Jeffrey J. Clarke and Robert Ross



**Thanks to a road-sign reading 'Triembach' that appears in another shot from the same series, Jean Paul was able to determine where this picture was taken. It turned out to be in the hamlet of Hohwarth, on the D203 between Villé and Kogenheim, about ten kilometres north-west of Sélestat.**

Smith in *Riviera to the Rhine*, 'privately General Devers was hardly pleased with the new orders. Recalling Eisenhower's decision on November 24 halting the Seventh Army's Rhine crossing in the Rastatt area, he felt that his command was once again being called on to bail out the northern army groups "just as we are about to crack the Siegfried Line by infiltration. . . which would

permit us to turn both east and west, threatening Karlsruhe to the east and loosening up the entire Siegfried Line in front of the Third Army to the west". Although recognising the necessity of turning the Third Army north against the German Ardennes offensive, Devers believed it a 'tragedy' that the Allied high command had 'not seen fit to reinforce success on this flank.'



*Left:* On January 7, the LXIV. Armeekorps launched Operation 'Sonnenwende' to re-take a triangular area between the Ill and Rhine rivers near Erstein south of Strasbourg. No genuine photographs appear to have been taken during this operation although Jean Paul has identified this sequence lifted from film footage shot for the German *Wochenchau*



newsreel that was shown to cinema audiences in late January 1945. In this still we see grenadiers of the 198. Infanterie-Division on January 7 as they move into Obenheim, one of the villages recaptured during this German counter-attack. *Right:* Rue Voegele in Obenheim, eight kilometres south-east of Erstein, looking northwards.

By the end of December, when the momentum of Heeresgruppe B's attack in the Ardennes had begun to peter out, the German command realised that the Allies had greatly weakened their southern army group to counter the attack in the Ardennes. As a result, the Germans believed that a new

offensive in the south could exploit this weakness or, at least, bring some relief to their hard-pressed forces in the north. Accordingly, plans were made and it was finally agreed that the 1. Armee was to launch two attacks on New Year's Eve, one down the Sarre valley and the other through

the Vosges. As for Heeresgruppe Oberrhein, it was to launch supporting attacks north and south of Strasbourg.

Heeresgruppe Oberrhein began on January 5 by attacking across the Rhine at Gamsheim north of Strasbourg. Two days later, the 19. Armee initiated another assault south of



With no indication as to the location, and the date questionable, the identification of clips from news film is not easy. However Jean Paul always likes a challenge and comments that 'when I saw this short sequence showing German troops proudly posing with a captured French car I reasoned that it

might have been taken in an area just recaptured from French forces. This narrowed down the search as there were not that many and I circled the area south of Strasbourg where a dozen villages had been recaptured during the "Sonnenwende" operation'.



*Left: 'I started to work from north to south, visiting each village in turn, and was lucky to find the location in the third village I looked at — Obenheim. The decisive clue was this house on the corner of*



*the street in the shot showing a Bergepanther towing a Jagdpanther of schwere Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654.' Right: 'The Rue de Colmar in Obenheim today, looking eastwards.'*

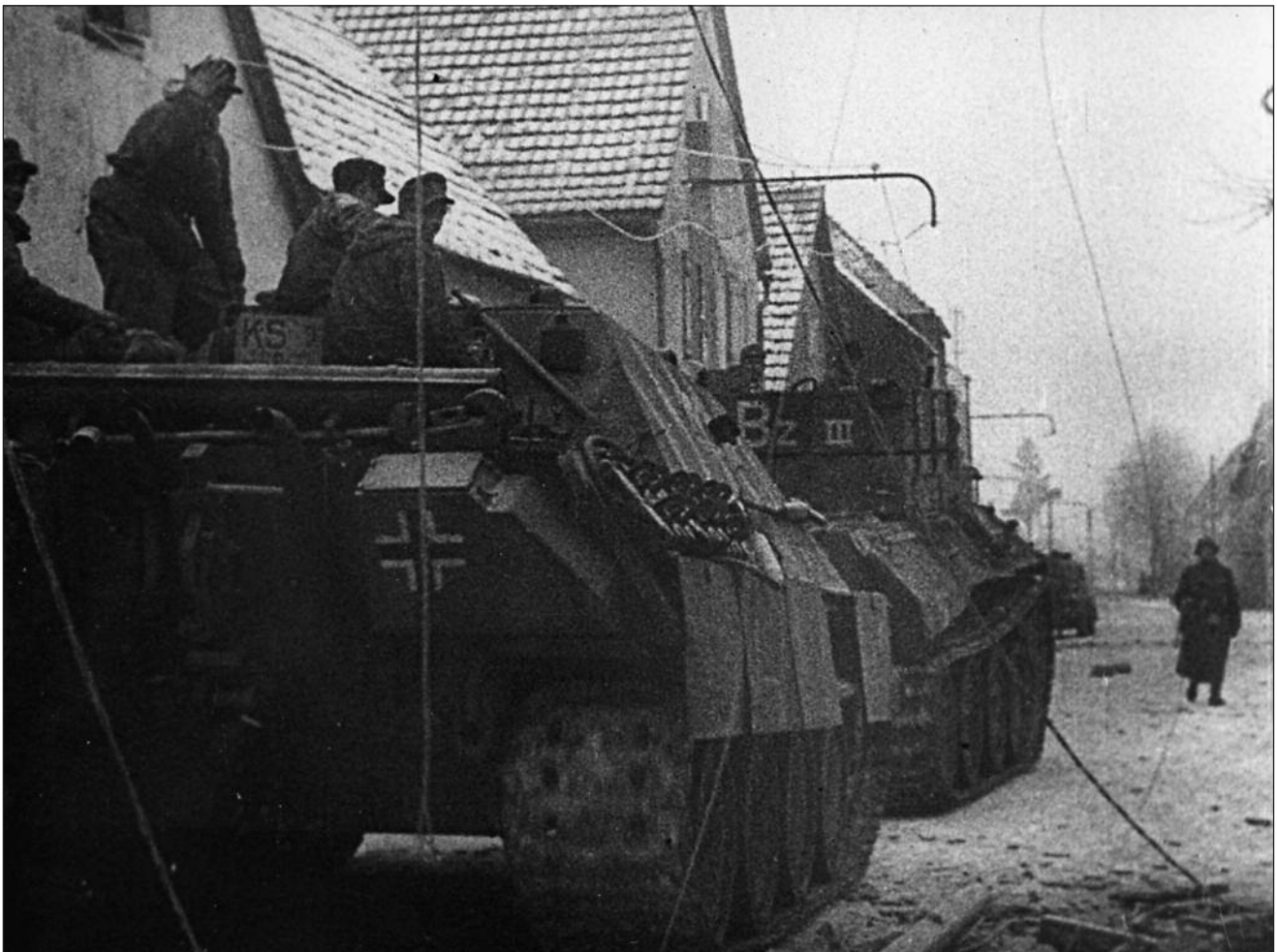
the city near Rhinau, on the northern edge of the Colmar pocket. The initial objectives of this operation, which was code-named 'Sonnenwende' (Winter Solstice), were limited and consisted of a triangular zone between the Ill and Rhine rivers from Sélestat to Erstein. Then, in a second phase, the advance was to reach Molsheim, another 15 kilometres northward, until eventually Strasbourg was invested.

Charged with the initial assault, the LXIV. Armeekorps commander, General der Infanterie Hellmuth Thumm, had concentrated his

attack on the west side of the Rhone-Rhine Canal believing that the French forces between the canal and the Rhine would simply fall back if Erstein could be taken quickly enough. This proved the case when, on January 7, one regiment of the 198. Infanterie-Division drove north with tanks and assault guns of Panzerbrigade 106 in support, and reached Erstein during the first day. It then swung back to the south-west along the Ill river to trap French units engaging the rest of the 198. Infanterie-Division. Most of the surrounded French troops managed to escape

across the Ill that night and the Germans then secured the west bank of the Rhine as far as Erstein.

Operation 'Sonnenwende' formally ended there on January 13 for the continuation of the attack northwards was cancelled when the 245. Infanterie-Division that was to launch the second part of the operation was ordered to the Eastern Front. Its scheduled replacement, the 2. Gebirgs-Division, was late in arriving so, consequently, the LXIV. Armeekorps was left with an even larger perimeter to defend with fewer units.



*'These film frames are of great interest for a genuine picture of a Bergepanther towing a Jagdpanther — and on the actual battlefield — is very rare. In the shot at the top of the page we can*

*see the special equipment welded on the front armour plate of the Bergepanther and the German cross, and in the other shot (above) the 'Bz III' tactical number on the rear'.*



Following the German attacks in northern Alsace, the 6th Army Group retained the 2ème Division Blindée — arguably its best armoured force — in reserve. On January 15, now confident that Seventh Army could handle the situation in northern Alsace, General Devers decided to commit more forces against the Colmar pocket itself and so ordered the French armour to move south. *Above:* Light tanks in Rosheim, 25 kilometres south-west of Strasbourg. (ECPAD) *Right:* Place de la République today.

It took much longer than General Devers had anticipated to counter the German Ardennes offensive and it was January 11 before he and de Lattre were able to meet at Vittel to discuss a renewal of operations to clear the Colmar pocket. Both were eager to launch the attack before rainfall and warmer temperatures began to melt the accumulated snowfall which would make the going extremely difficult. For the moment though, Devers felt that the 1ère Armée was too weak to carry the operation alone so he planned to obtain additional units from the SHAEF reserve.



A thick layer of snow had fallen during the night and down the main street this Sherman of the 501ème Régiment de Chars de Combat had not yet been cleared. (ECPAD)



Another nicely restored part of Rosheim with the gate by the Hohenbourg school barring the street — now Rue du Général de Gaulle.

Two days later, General Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's Chief-of-Staff, visited the 6th Army Group at which point Devers made his request for two divisions, an infantry division to reinforce the 3rd Division at Colmar and an armoured division to replace the 2ème Division Blindée which he intended to return south. Smith convinced Eisenhower that the request was justified and on the following day, January 14, he signalled Devers that the US 10th Armored and 28th Infantry Divisions were to be allocated to 6th Army Group. He warned him however that the 28th Division was still licking its wounds suffered in the Ardennes and was capable of only limited offensive action.

Meanwhile, the 6th Army Group planners had drawn up an operational plan for a simultaneous attack on both sides of the pocket, aiming towards the major surviving Rhine bridge near Neuf-Brisach. The 1er Corps d'Armée was to lead off in the south with a drive from Mulhouse directly to the bridge area, with a secondary attack in the Vosges north of Thann in order to tie down German forces in that area. After the German reserves had hopefully moved to the south, the US XXI Corps would then launch two infantry divisions and the 2ème Division Blindée in the direction of Neuf-Brisach, assisted perhaps by an airborne assault. Meanwhile, the 11ème Corps d'Armée would seize Colmar itself. The planners estimated that the operation dubbed 'Cheerful' would take about one week and, after studying weather and flood records, they recommended that it begin in early February, certainly before the 20th.

SHAEF replied that there were no airborne forces available which did not upset Devers as he saw their employment as an unnecessary complication. However, it was the timing which disturbed him for he was worried about rising temperatures and he insisted that the operation begin earlier, even without the XXI Corps and the 2ème Division Blindée. Instead the 11ème Corps d'Armée was to make the main effort against Neuf-Brisach. The concept to employ a secondary attack in the south to draw off German reserves was retained and so the plans were finalised as follows.

On the southern flank of the pocket, the 1er Corps d'Armée was to start the attack on January 20. The corps' main effort was to be on the left between Thann and Cernay, and over the Thur river toward Ensisheim, with the 4ème Division Marocaine de Montagne (DMM) and the 2ème Division d'Infanterie Marocaine (DIM) and some tanks of the 1ère Division Blindée in support. At the same time the 9ème Division d'Infanterie Coloniale (DIC) was to push into the suburbs and woods north of Mulhouse. Once



This series of pictures showing tanks of the 2ème Division Blindée was taken about January 20-25 when the division was assembling in the Molsheim area, west of Strasbourg, after Devers' decision to commit it against the northern flank of the German pocket in Alsace. (ECPAD)



Much of the architectural heritage in the picturesque town of Rosheim is timeless. This gate at the eastern entrance in the fortifications dates from the 14th Century.



Left: On January 25, the 2ème Division Blindée was ordered to cross the Ill river and clear the Herbsheim-Witternheim area, 30 kilometres south of Strasbourg, in support of the 1ère Division de Marche d'Infanterie that had encountered strong resistance here.



Here engineers complete the construction of a pontoon bridge across the Ill at Kogenheim, probably on the 26th. (ECPAD) Right: A lucky fall of snow enabled Jean Paul to take a 'seasonal' comparison.





In the south, the 1er Corps d'Armée jumped off as scheduled on January 20 with the 4ème Division Marocaine de Montagne and the 2ème Division d'Infanterie Marocaine undertaking the main effort between Cernay and Mulhouse and the 9ème Division d'Infanterie Coloniale making another thrust north of Mulhouse. The objective was to clear a triangular shape of territory between Cernay, Ensisheim and Mulhouse and seize bridges



over the Ill river at Ensisheim. Adverse weather and terrain and stubborn resistance quickly broke the tempo of the advance and it was not before the 30th that the 9ème DIC finally took Wittenheim, five kilometres north of Mulhouse. This shot of men from the 6ème Régiment d'Infanterie Coloniale in the centre of Wittenheim was taken on January 31 when the 9ème DIC completed the clearing of the town. (ECPAD)

these forces had cleared this territory between Cernay, Ensisheim and Mulhouse, and had secured bridges over the Ill river at Ensisheim, the main body of the 1ère Division Blindée would pass through and drive for Neuf-Brisach.

To the north, the IIème Corps d'Armée was to attack on the 22nd, two days after the beginning of the operations in the south. The 3rd Infantry Division in the centre, reinforced by one combat command of the 5ème Division Blindée, was to undertake the main effort, pushing south-east from the area between Sélestat and Kaysersberg. On its left, the 1ère Division de Marche d'Infanterie (DMI), with some of the 2ème Division Blindée armour attached, would push east, covering the northern flank of the attack.

Once the 3rd Division had secured bridgeheads over the Colmar Canal, about halfway to the Rhine, the rest of the 5ème Division Blindée was then to be committed to seize the objective area.

Numerous streams, rivers and canals lay in the paths of advance of both corps so large amounts of bridging equipment were required. The 1ère Armée had even replaced many of the existing Bailey bridges in their area with timber structures to create extra reserves of bridging materiel, and the 6th Army Group managed to obtain a bridge company from the Third Army to provide support for the 3rd Division.

In Alsace, the 19. Armee controlled two corps headquarters situated inside the Colmar pocket comprising eight infantry divi-

sions and one armoured brigade. The right (northern) wing of the pocket was held by General Thumm's LXIV. Armeekorps, with the 189. and 198. Infanterie-Divisions and the 16. and 708. Volksgrenadier-Divisions. In the north, Operation 'Sonnenwende' had left the 198. Infanterie-Division holding the Erstein salient and the 708. Volksgrenadier-Division along a north-south line on the Ill river from Sélestat south to Colmar. The 189. Infanterie-Division took over in Colmar itself and the 16. Volksgrenadier-Division outposted the mountainous western section of the pocket. In the south, Generalleutnant Erich Abraham's LXIII. Armeekorps had the 338., 159. and 716. Infanterie-Divisions. The weak 338. Infanterie-Division was in the mountains north-west of Thann, the 159. Infan-



Ensisheim, the 9ème DIC intermediate objective, was still a disappointing five kilometres away. This M10 pictured in Wittenheim belonged to the 9ème Régiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique,

the tank destroyer regiment of the 1ère Division Blindée, of which Combat Command 1 had been attached to the 9ème DIC to try to bolster its difficult advance. (ECPAD)



On the left, the 2ème DIM also tried hard to turn the German defences of the Cernay sector and cut them from the rear but, aided by heavy snowfalls and overcast skies that limited Allied air support, the 159. Infanterie-Division held on stubbornly. Four kilometres east of Cernay, the sector of Wittelsheim

was hotly contested from January 22 and it was not before February 3 that the town was finally secured. This Sherman M4A2 of the 5ème Régiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique was part of the 1ère Division Blindée's Combat Command 2 that was attached to the 2ème DIM. (ECPAD)

terie-Division centred on Cernay and the 716. Infanterie-Division opposite Mulhouse.

The army reserve comprised just the 269. Infanterie-Division and Panzerbrigade 106, but the former was in the process of deploying to the Eastern Front and its replacement, the 2. Gebirgs-Division, had yet to arrive.

All of these divisions were understrength and undertrained (their units had been fleshed out with hastily trained replacements and recruits). They were also under-equipped, having only about 30 to 40 per cent of their anti-tank weapons and little ammunition for their more numerous artillery pieces. Armour was even scarcer, totalling perhaps 65 operational tanks and assault guns with Panzerbrigade 106 (in army reserve), Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 280 and Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654.

On the plus side was the fact that the 19. Armee had good roads to its rear, good wire communications and ample rations and stocks of mines and small-arms ammunition. The weather and terrain also favoured the defence, as did the Alsatian network of small towns, each of which could be turned into a fortress.

Key to the 19. Armee defensive efforts in Alsace was the availability of bridges and ferries over the Rhine. Two bridges remained — at Breisach and Neuenburg; two very strong structures which had proved impossible to destroy by air attacks. In addition the 19. Armee maintained numerous ferry sites along the river capable of handling 8-, 16- and 40-ton loads with even a few of 70-ton capacity. Near Breisach alone were four 10-ton, six 16-ton and one 70-ton ferry sites, two cable ferries and one fuel pipeline.



The picture was taken in the Cité Graffenwald by the side of the D19 two kilometres south of Wittelsheim. When Jean Paul first pinpointed the location in the spring of 2002 the tree which appears off to the right in the 1945 photo was still there but by the time he returned to match up the shot the following winter, it had been felled.

As scheduled, the 1er Corps d'Armée attack jumped off in the south on January 20 but the weather forecast proved wrong and the operation began in the middle of a driving snowstorm. Hitting at the boundary between the 159. and 716. Infanterie-Divi-

sions, the French achieved tactical surprise and drove forward several kilometres on the first day but the Germans reacted quickly. A series of small counter-attacks were launched with armoured support by elements of Panzerbrigade 106 throughout the



**Left:** On the evening of February 3, the gap left open between the 1er Corps d'Armée near Ensisheim and the XXI Corps near Sainte-Croix-en-Plaine was down to 15 kilometres. The Germans then speeded up their withdrawal from the Vosges and abandoned Cernay during that night. As the 4ème Division de



**Montagne Marocaine** entered the town the following morning, the stunned inhabitants emerged from their cellars to discover the street littered with tree branches cut off by shrapnel intermingled with the bodies of dead German soldiers. (ECPAD) **Right:** Cernay, Rue Poincaré today.

21st which managed to retain hold of Cernay and contain the French gains above Mulhouse.

When Général Emile Béthouart, the 1er Corps d'Armée commander, shifted his main effort to the right where the 9ème Division d'Infanterie Coloniale had done better, he soon found out that the German resistance was solid right across the front. The French attacks were channelled by roads, forests, streams and small towns through a series of heavily-defended strong points organised in

depth. Bypassed defenders successfully pulled back in order, aided by the heavy snowfall and overcast skies that limited Allied air support and vehicle mobility.

At the end of January, after 11 days of fighting, the French were still six kilometres short of Ensisheim, their intermediate objective. By then, Béthouart reported that his infantry was exhausted, his stocks of artillery ammunition almost depleted, and two of his armoured division's three tank battalions reduced to between 16 and 18 operable

armoured vehicles apiece. Combat Command 1 (CC1) alone had lost 36 tanks during the offensive to German mines.

The 1er Corps d'Armée attack in the south had at least succeeded in its first goal, that of drawing the German armoured reserves southward, for Heeresgruppe Oberrhein had quickly approved the commitment of those parts of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654 that were yet in reserve and also ordered Panzerbrigade 106 and the arriving elements of the 2. Gebirgs-Division to the threatened area.



**As the 6ème Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains** cleared Cernay and rounded up prisoners, the rest of the 4ème DMM pressed northwards. Brushing aside scattered German forces trying to withdraw from the Vosges, the leading French

**troops reached Rouffach** in the evening. The surprised Germans reacted quickly; consequently the small French force had to withdraw for the night into the southern outskirts of the town. (ECPAD)



**Left:** In the north, the IIème Corps d'Armée attacked late on January 22 when the 7th and 30th Infantry Regiments crossed the Fecht river at Guémar and swept southwards during the night. On the following day, as the leading elements of the 30th Infantry took the Maison Rouge bridge across the Ill, on the right the 7th Infantry cleared the village of Ostheim.



**A French photographer, H. Malin, took this picture some days later when the 254th Infantry Regiment (attached to the US 3rd Division) passed through Ostheim on their way eastwards to the Jepsheim sector. (ECPAD) Right:** Only one of the original houses, the one on the left, remains on the present-day Rue de Strasbourg.

In the north, the IIème Corps d'Armée attack began on January 22 as planned and initially achieved some success. Major General John E. O'Daniel, the 3rd Division commander, had planned his attack with a successive series of assaults by his four infantry regiments (the 7th, 15th and 30th and the attached 254th). Each was to push east for a few kilometres and then drive south for another 10 to 15 kilometres; the next attacking regiment would pass through the rear lines of the first and then attack east for a few kilometres before turning south as the first had done. In this way O'Daniel hoped to side-step the entire division south-east to the Colmar Canal and beyond, opening a path for a final drive on Neuf-Brisach by the 5ème Division Blindée. The manoeuvre might also deceive the Germans into believing that the Americans were trying to outflank Colmar when their real objective was the Neuf-Brisach bridge and ferry sites.

General Thumm, the LXIV. Armeekorps commander, had noted the Allied build-up between Colmar and Sélestat and had directed the 708. Volksgrenadier-Division to

maintain only a thin defensive screen west of the Ill river, keeping enough forces to the rear for strong local counter-attacks. To add some strength, he had attached Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 280 with some tanks and assault guns to the division.

At first, all on the Allied side went according to plan. The 7th Infantry Regiment crossed the Fecht river at Guémar (which was already in Allied hands) late on January 22 and proceeded south. Following them, the 30th Infantry crossed the river during the night of January 22/23 and started to enter the Colmar forest through deep snow. The unit's initial objective was the Maison Rouge bridge, a wooden span over the Ill opposite the south-eastern corner of the forest and Colonel Lionel C. McGarr, the regimental commander, split his force into two attacking forces. The 3rd Battalion was to head south-east directly for the bridge while the 1st Battalion struck out eastwards to cross the Ill about a mile or so above the bridge and move down to the crossing site from the north. The 1st Battalion managed to cross the Ill in rubber boats during the night unop-

posed and sweep down the east bank of the river, surprising a small detachment of Germans at the bridge. When day dawned on January 23, the 30th Infantry was in possession of the Ill bridge as well as the crossroads to the east and the farm complex of Maison Rouge in between.

The bridgehead was consolidated in the early morning hours of the 24th whereupon patrols were pushed out to the east, south-east and south. With the Germans apparently failing to react, McGarr decided to continue the advance to Riedwihr and Holtzwihr, the intermediate regimental objectives. He directed the 1st Battalion to move through the woods toward Riedwihr; the 3rd Battalion to pass behind the 1st and advance on Holtzwihr, some distance farther south; and the 2nd to follow the 1st into the Riedwihr woods as a reserve.

Just before midday, the leading elements of the 1st Battalion reported hearing enemy armour around Riedwihr and later, from the eastern edge of the woods, they reported seeing a few German armoured vehicles proceeding through the town. McGarr became



**Left:** Combat Command 6 of the French 5ème Division Blindée also passed through Ostheim on their way to Jepsheim. (ECPAD) **Above:** The Protestant church in the town had been so badly damaged that it had to be rebuilt on a new site on the bank of the Fecht river. This is actually the far end of the Rue de Strasbourg which runs to the left at this junction.



**This picture captioned 'in the Riedwihr area' slots perfectly into our story at this point because it shows one of the treadway bridges established over the Ill river although it does not say**

**that this is the actual Maison Rouge bridge. Taken on February 1, this shot features men of the US 75th Division moving in for the final push to Colmar. (USNA)**

increasingly nervous about his lack of armoured support east of the river so he pushed for engineer assistance with reinforcing the bridge at Maison Rouge which had been taken intact but was not strong enough to support tanks. One Sherman of the attached tank company was run up and down the west ramp, causing the structure to shake and sway so violently that it ended any ideas the tankers might have had of charging across. It was decided to strengthen the centre spans and reinforce the surface with treadway bridging but when the sections finally arrived around 3 p.m., there were too few to cover the whole length of the bridge and approach ramps.

Pressed by O'Daniel, who called him again at 3.55 p.m., McGarr was ordered to begin the attack on Riedwihr and Holtzwihr at 4.30 p.m. The 1st Battalion met heavy enemy fire as it approached Riedwihr and was barely able to reach the outskirts of town. The 3rd Battalion moved into Holtzwihr but was counter-attacked by strong tank/infantry teams. Both units requested immediate assistance to deal with the enemy armour.

Under pressure to bring at least some tanks across the bridge at once, the engineers choose to use the available treadway sections



**This is the bridge at Maison Rouge as it appears today, looking eastwards. Lieutenant John F. Harmon drove his Sherman up the western ramp — just as these cyclists are doing — but when the tank reached the centre span, the bridge collapsed and the tank fell into the river.**



**Left: Pushing south from Maison Rouge, the 15th Infantry took Riedwihr on January 26 but met strong resistance as they tried to**



**advance to the Colmar Canal. (ECPAD) Right: This is the southern entrance of Riedwihr joining the road from Wickerschwihr.**



Two battalions of the 30th Infantry then moved through the 15th Infantry and resumed the attack south of Riedwhir on January 27 with Combat Command 4 of the 5ème Division Blindée in support. Holtzwihr and Wickerschwir were captured and

the Colmar canal was reached. Later a French photographer, Fernand Charleuf, pictured a Jagdpanther from Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654 abandoned at Wickerschwir. This was a late-production model with the heavy bolted gun mantlet. (ECPAD)

to overlay the two unsteady ramps in the hope that the shorter centre spans would support the weight. After running three 57mm anti-tank guns and their movers and a large ten-ton truck across the bridge, at 5 p.m. Lieutenant John F. Harmon drove his Sherman up the reinforced ramp and onto the centre span. As soon as the tank had cleared the reinforcing treadway section and driven onto the centre section, the bridge gave way and the tank fell into the river. No more vehicles would cross the Ill river for many hours.

All three battalions east of the river then suddenly found themselves in the midst of a

general counter-attack by elements of the 708. Volksgrenadier-Division and Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 280. Around 6 p.m. one American tank officer who had crossed the Maison Rouge bridge on foot to reconnoitre the opposite side, reported streams of soldiers pouring back from the Riedwhir woods in complete disorder, abandoning weapons and attempting to climb over the damaged bridge. In the words of the official US Army historians Clarke and Smith: 'In the background he noted white tracers from German automatic weapons mingled with the red tracers of American arms — someone was still fighting — but most of the regiment

appeared to be taking refuge along the stream and riverbanks or braving the cold waters of the Ill to reach the opposite shore. There, frustrated tank and tank destroyer crews watched the debacle and shortly thereafter, as the sunlight began to fade, they spotted the squat German assault guns moving up two by two, each section covering the advance of the other. Anti-tank and artillery fire kept the counter-attacking force at bay for a while, but sometime after dark the bridgehead appeared to be in German hands, though no one could tell for sure.'

At 8.30 p.m. O'Daniel ordered Lieutenant Colonel Hallett D. Edson, the commander of



The two houses visible in the background of Fernand's photo gave Jean Paul the clue for pinpointing the particular field

between Wickerschwir and Holtzwihr where the Jagdpanther met its end.



In the meantime, a few kilometres to the north-east, the 254th Infantry and Combat Command 6 attacked Jepsheim where violent fighting continued throughout the 27th and the 28th. By the evening the village was at last firmly in Allied hands. (ECPAD)



Left: This 75mm anti-tank gun abandoned by the side of the road leading from Jepsheim to the canal south of the village was one of those which, together with the deadly 88mm guns of some



Nashorn tank destroyers of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 525, destroyed three Sherman tanks and three M10 tank destroyers of the French command during the fighting for the village. (ECPAD)



The Germans fought hard to retain Jepsheim and their losses were heavy and at least 800 prisoners were reported to have been taken by the Franco-American force. When Monsieur Malin (see page 41, top) took these pictures on January 29 the Germans were already preparing their counter-attack. (ECPAD)

the 15th Infantry, to secure the bridgehead, see to the repair of the structure, and resume the 3rd Division's attack as soon as possible. Edson alerted his 3rd Battalion and immediately sent two of its rifle companies, I and K, to cross the Ill some distance above the bridge. Descending on Maison Rouge from the north as the 30th Infantry's 1st Battalion had done 24 hours earlier, at 5 a.m. on the 24th the two companies scattered the small German holding force at the bridge and rescued a number of 30th Regiment infantrymen who had somehow survived the night on the east bank.

Clarke and Smith: 'Instructed to defend both the bridge area and the cross-roads, the battalion commander gave Company K the responsibility for the crossing site and sent Company I out to occupy the cross-roads. As dawn came, the Company I commander, finding the cross-roads completely exposed and without any cover, requested permission to pull the unit back to the tree line, but was instructed to hold in place: division engineers were just completing a new treadway bridge to the north and armoured support could be expected shortly. For the next several hours the men of Company I frantically chipped away at the frozen ground, digging up at best a few inches of dirt, ice and snow and wondering when the tanks would arrive. They finally came about three hours later, but from the wrong side.

'At 8 a.m. on the 24th, the Germans launched their second counter-attack against the bridgehead with 13 heavy assault guns and a company or more of infantry. As the enemy machines began pushing through the mile or so of fields between Company I and the Riedwihl woods, the American soldiers scrambled into their makeshift foxholes and watched and waited, lying flat on the frozen ground. Friendly artillery soon caused the attacking infantry, barely visible at first, to disperse and lag behind; but the assault guns, accompanied by a few tanks and lighter armoured vehicles, continued toward them at a steady pace. The company commander and his forward observer ticked off the German progress for many to hear — 800 yards away, then 600 and then 500. A few panicked and fled and others asked their officers; "Can we go?" The rest stayed, although, as one sergeant later recalled "we all practically had one foot out of the foxhole" and when the company commander finally made the decision to pull back "we didn't have to give the order very loud".

'That morning, shortly after 8 a.m., the company was overrun. Some soldiers were crushed under the German tank treads or machine-gunned where they lay; others managed to fall back into the Company K area closer to the river; still others were shot while trying to surrender.'



**Left:** Elements of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 136 with some Jagdpanthers of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654 in support mounted the attack on Jepsheim on the morning of the 29th and again in that afternoon. That same day, Malin took this



shot of American infantry resuming the advance from Jepsheim eastwards in the direction of Artzenheim. (ECPAD) **Right:** No snow and a much nicer weather when Jean Paul took this comparison in February 2003.



Although this is another Jagdpanther disabled near Jepsheim — one of the five lost in the sector during the last days of January — it is important to stress that the Germans did not possess strong armoured forces in Alsace. By mid-January, with

the 30 Jagdpanthers of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 654 and the armour available to Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 280 and Panzerbrigade 106, there were no more than 55 panzers of various types available. (ECPAD)



It was January 31 when Malin took this last shot. The snow had melted over the previous two days, turning the street into a sea of mud. (ECPAD)



A café has since replaced the station inn — named the Gasthaus zum Bahnhof in what is essentially a German-speaking region of France — which once occupied this corner of Jepsheim.





*Left:* At 7 a.m. on February 3 the US XXI Corps launched the final push into Colmar. The 109th Infantry led the advance, followed by a battle group of the 5ème Division Blindée. Here an M5 light



tank of the 1er Régiment de Cuirassiers rounds the corner as crowds line the street to cheer their liberators. (USNA) *Right:* This is Rue Kléber; Place Rapp lies just behind the photographer.



At 11.30 a.m. the leading tanks reached Place Rapp which lies in the centre of Colmar. Exhilarated tankers of the 5ème Division Blindée rejoice in the historic moment: Colmar, second

only in importance to Strasbourg in the province annexed by Germany, was back in French hands. The campaign in Alsace was about to reach its finale. (ECPAD)



*Left:* An M10 of the 11ème Régiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique, the tank destroyer regiment of the 5ème Division Blindée, stands guard in front of former German barracks. (USNA) *Above:* This is the main entrance to Quartier Bruat on Route de Strasbourg. The sports ground indicated by the German sign is still there bearing its original name: Stade des Francs.



**A dead German soldier lies prostrate in the snow in front of a garage where the Americans have emplaced two anti-tank guns. (USNA)**

The battle for the bridgehead continued throughout the morning and into the early afternoon, neither side being able to secure the area. While direct fire from American tanks and tank destroyers from across the Ill river had forced the German assault guns back, the German infantrymen were unable to overcome the American defenders. Two American tanks and a tank destroyer finally crossed the new treadway bridge established some distance to the north and charged south only to be promptly disabled by German assault guns. Finally, about 2.30 p.m., the 1st Battalion of the 15th Infantry counter-attacked from the north with more armour in support and managed to relieve the men trapped at the bridge.

The 15th Infantry continued its advance southwards and entered Riedwihr on the night of January 25/26. For two days, the Germans launched repeated counter-attacks with no success. It was during one of these attempts on the 26th that 2nd Lieutenant Audie Murphy earned the Medal of Honor for turning back several attacks from the turret of a burning tank destroyer (see *After the Battle* No. 3). The Colmar Canal was crossed on the night of January 29/30 and the following day the 3rd Division's three regiments drove several kilometres south of the canal to secure the crossing sites. The advance then halted. The 3rd Division was exhausted, with some of its rifle companies down to 30 men.

General Devers then decided to commit the XXI Corps to control three American divisions, the 3rd, the 28th and the 75th Infantry Divisions, for a drive on Neuf-Brisach, with the US 12th Armored Division (still recovering from a catastrophic commit-



**Jean Paul found that the picture had been taken at the major road junction where the Route de Strasbourg (off the picture to the left) joins the Route de Sélestat on the right. The same petrol station was still in business when he took his comparison in the winter of 2003-4 although 'For Sale' notices were evident on the windows.**

ment at Herrlisheim) in reserve. De Lattre concurred and also agreed to assign the whole of the 5ème Division Blindée to the XXI Corps. The corps commander, Major General Frank W. Milburn, decided to con-

tinue using the 3rd Division to spearhead the attack with most of the 5ème Division Blindée to back up the tired American regiments. On the left wing, the IIème Corps d'Armée was to secure the northern flank.



The odd pockets of resistance in the city and the suburbs were progressively being cleared and at 4 p.m. the French battle group reported having taken 250 prisoners. Some 25 of them are seen here being marched up the Avenue de la République. (ECPAD)

As early as January 25, Heeresgruppe G had concluded that holding the Colmar pocket was no longer important to the German defensive effort in the West and recommended that either the entire pocket should be abandoned or, at least, the northern extension at Erstein be evacuated and the forces used to strengthen the northern shoulder.

On the night of January 28/29 Hitler finally agreed to the partial withdrawal in the north but still insisted that the pocket be defended as long as possible.

On January 29, Heeresgruppe Oberrhein was dissolved and SS-Oberstgruppenführer Paul Hausser took command of Heeresgruppe G, including all forces formerly

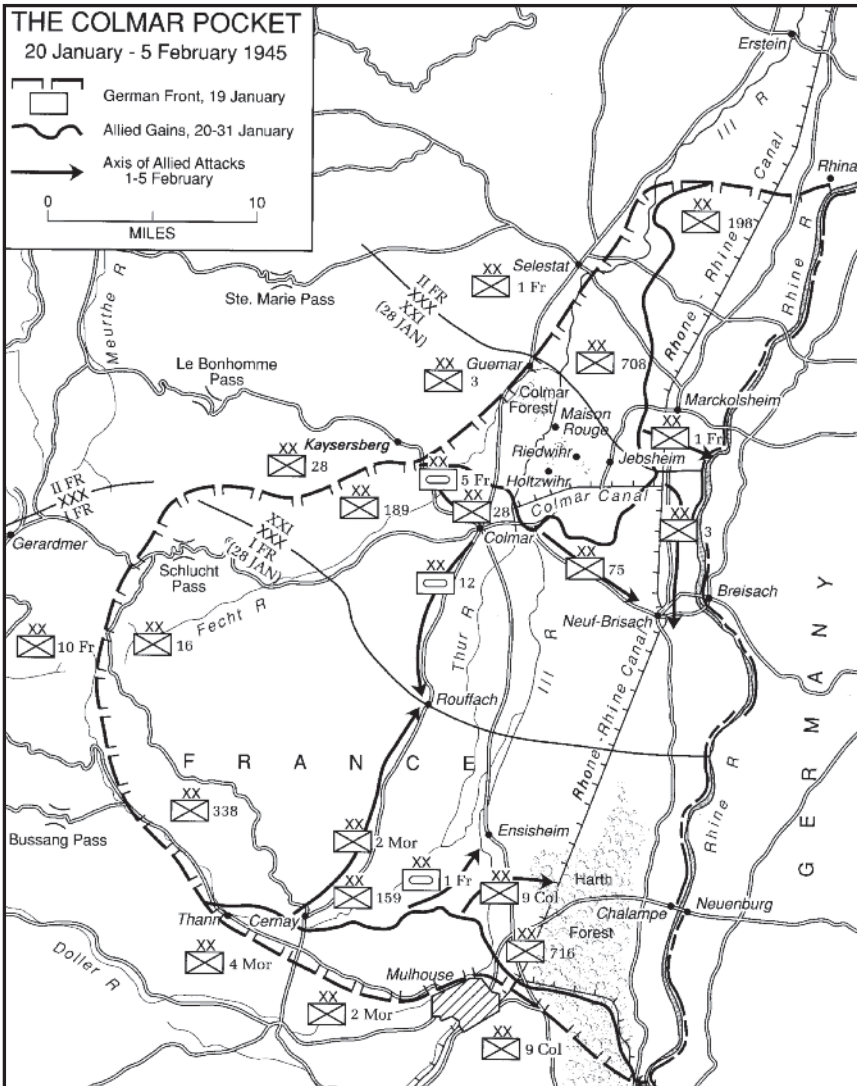
assigned to Heeresgruppe Oberrhein. Reichsführer-SS Himmler was reassigned to a command on the Eastern Front (Heeresgruppe Weichsel commanding three armies on the Vistula front) and Generaloberst Johannes Blaskowitz, who had commanded Heeresgruppe G from December 22, was made commander of Heeresgruppe H in Holland.



Another time . . . but the same place! A low-lying winter sun gives superb light for our comparison in February 2003.



The US 12th Armored Division took over the advance southwards and in the early hours of February 5, its Combat Command A entered Rouffach. Here an M5 light tank has pulled up on the Place de la République. (USNA)



German intelligence in Alsace was faulty and it was only on January 30, when the 3rd Division had crossed the Colmar Canal, that the German command began to perceive that the Allied drive was headed directly for the bridge at Neuf-Brisach. On the night of the 30th, Heeresgruppe G specified to General Rasp of 19. Armee that his main mission was to 'assure the survival' of the pocket for as long as possible. He was authorised to withdraw most of his forces from the Vosges front, leaving only reconnaissance detachments to hold the mountain passes. Rasp in turn ordered the immediate evacuation of all forces in the Vosges and concentrated them on the northern and southern shoulders of the bridgehead, while sending two major reinforcement he could to protect his two major bridge sites at Breisach and Neuenburg.

Inside the pocket, the situation was soon becoming confused with elements from the 16. Volksgrenadier-Division and the 189. and 338. Infanterie-Divisionen mixed with those of the other divisions as well as with units of the 2. Gebirgs-Division which had begun arriving in the pocket sometime after the 20th. On February 1, in spite of standing orders to the contrary, General Rasp began to move service troops and damaged equipment east of the Rhine. That evening Hitler's order to stand fast in the pocket arrived at Heeresgruppe G and was immediately passed on to Rasp by telephone. While these instructions remained unaltered to the end, from the 6th Rasp started to evacuate equipment over the Rhine by ferry or over the Neuenburg bridge while the bulk of the combat forces fell back on this same bridge.

'The 75th Infantry Division had begun moving into the 1ère Armée area on January 27', wrote the official US Army historians, 'and by the evening of the 31st started to relieve O'Daniel's 3rd Division regiments south of the Colmar Canal for the final push. Again O'Daniel attacked east and then south, first slipping the 30th Infantry behind the others and moving it east to the Rhône-Rhine Canal for a drive south with units of the 5ème Division Blindée. Next, with the arrival of the 75th Division on the battlefield, he transferred both the 7th and 15th Infantry



**Left: German pockets of resistance still held out in many places and it was not until 8 a.m., after two hours of disorganised fighting, that Rouffach was finally cleared by CCA and elements of the 4ème Division de Montagne Marocaine that had**



**entered the town from the south. This lone prisoner surrendered to men of the 4ème Régiment de Spahis Marocains. (USNA) Right: This is Rue du Maréchal Joffre. Rue Poincaré lies behind the photographer.**

to the far side of the Rhône-Rhine Canal, turning them south as well. By February 3 elements of all three 3rd Division regiments were approaching Neuf-Brisach and the Germans began a last-ditch defence of the bridgehead with all available manpower. On the 5th, with the old fortress town nearly surrounded, the Germans started to evacuate the area and by noon of the following day, February 6, the entire sector was under Allied control.

Inside the pocket the German defences around the city of Colmar had already collapsed. While the 3rd Division attacked toward Neuf-Brisach, first the attached 254th Infantry and then the regiments of the 28th Division (Major General Norman D. Cota) steadily pushed against the northern approaches to Colmar in the Kaysersberg valley. By February 2 Cota's units had cleared the city's suburbs against diminishing resistance, allowing units of the 5ème Division Blindée to drive into the heart of Colmar nearly unopposed. Immediately de Latre agreed to commit the 12th Armored Division through the 28th Division for a drive south; two days later American armoured task forces, moving south along two parallel axes, met 1er Corps d'Armée elements at Rouffach during the early morning hours of February 5. By that date the bulk of Béthouart's southern forces had finally bypassed German emplacements around Ensisheim and, finding enemy defences crumbling elsewhere, raced to Rouffach from the south. The drives split the



**A battle group of the 1ère Division Blindée then reached Rouffach from the south but when its commander, Chef d'Escadron de Bertereche de Menditte (left), met Brigadier General Riley F. Ennis (right) commanding CCA of the 12th Armored Division, Ennis pointed out that Rouffach lay within the XXI Corps sector of action, not that of the 1er Corps d'Armée. He therefore asked that the French combat command be moved beyond the boundary. The French commander immediately concurred and issued orders to resume the advance east using another route more to the south which ran through Munwiller. (USNA)**



**Left: Meanwhile GIs of the 12th Armored Division grabbed the opportunity of the lull in the fighting to catch up with their mail. From the windows of their convent, nuns observe the**



**joyful demonstrations at the liberation of their town. Right: Time has stood still at the junction between the Rue Poincaré on the right and the Rue Ris (left).**



Pushing from the south, Combat Command 3 of the 1ère Division Blindée cleared the western bank of the River Ill as far as Sainte-Croix-en-Plaine which lies some eight kilometres

north-east of Rouffach and well to the north in the American sector. This picture of French troopers from CC3 was taken on February 3. (ECPAD)



Indicating that Colmar lies 17 kilometres away and Mulhouse 20 kilometres in the opposite direction, the road sign provided

an easy guide to the location of the photograph: Meyenheim. This is the Grande Rue in front of the new town hall.



Prisoners being marched off in Meyenheim. During the advance, French forces had liberated a series of villages along the river but

some, like Reguisheim, had to be bypassed. Their capture was achieved on the 5th. (ECPAD)



Left: Combat Command B of the 12th Armored Division was late in reaching its allocated sector along the west bank of the Ill river and it was not until the morning of February 6 that all of Combat Command 3 had fulfilled its promise to move back



behind the US XXI Corps boundary which had been established due east of Rouffach. (ECPAD) Right: After a long search, Jean Paul found that the picture of infantry dismounting from a tank had been taken on the Rue de la Gare in Meyenheim.



Left: However the tanks of the 1ère Division Blindée were held up from crossing the Ill until pontoon bridges had been constructed and it was February 7 before the first tanks of Combat Command 3 managed to get across. This is *Prague*, a Sherman



M4A4 of the 2ème Régiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique. Right: Jean Paul discovered that this particular bridge had been built at Meyenheim. Today its permanent replacement taking the D3bis over the river lies just behind the photographer.



In the meantime, in the north, the XXI Corps had crossed the Colmar Canal and pushed south-eastwards in the direction of Neuf-Brisach. The 75th Infantry Division had joined the operation from January 30 and the French 2ème Division Blindée from February 4, the latter taking over from the combat commands of the 5ème Division Blindée which then assembled at Colmar as 1ère Armée reserve. On February 5, while the 291st Infantry took Wolfgantzen, two kilometres north-west of Neuf-Brisach, the 289th Infantry secured Appenwihr, six kilometres to the west. A combat command of the 2ème Division Blindée then sped south through Hettenschlag to reach Dessenheim, five kilometres south of Neuf-Brisach. Late on February 5, the troops of the 15th Infantry reached the western ends of the road and rail bridges at Neuf-Brisach, both already blown up by the Germans. Above: This Wirbelwind, a Flak tank mounting a quadruple 2cm AA gun on a PzKpfw IV chassis, had been abandoned at Hettenschlag, its crew probably taken by surprise at the sudden appearance of French tanks on the afternoon of February 5. (USNA) Right: A timeless comparison, the church having been untouched for the past 60 years.



Left: Pressing on south-westwards, the 2ème Division Blindée took Balgau, 12 kilometres north of Chalampé, on the afternoon of the 7th. The sign at this elaborate road-block set



up at the western entrance of the town announced: 'Death to the destroyers of Europe'. (USNA) Right: Could this really be the same place 60 years on?





The Germans destroyed the last Rhine bridge — the one between Chalampé and Neuenburg — at 8 a.m. on February 9. The forces of the 1er Corps d'Armée fighting to clear the shrinking German bridgehead heard the explosion and realised what had happened. At 11.30 a.m. the leading troops of the 9ème



DIC reached the town just as the last Germans crossed the Rhine in small boats. *Left:* Another propaganda message, this one claiming that when 'Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt demolish, Hitler builds up!'. (ECPAD) *Right:* The same wall survives at Bantzenheim, two kilometres west of Chalampé.

Colmar pocket wide open. Between February 5 and 9, as the supporting American divisions redeployed northward, French forces finished cleaning out the pocket. In the north de Monsabert's forces (Général Aimé de Montsabert, the commander of IIème Corps d'Armée) swept the west side of the Rhine from Erstein to Marckolsheim, while in the west units of the new 10ème Division d'Infanterie and the 4ème Division de Montagne Marocaine policed up the interior of the pocket.

To the south, Béthouart directed his main effort against the last German bridgehead at Chalampé, using the 1ère Division Blindée and the 2ème Division d'Infanterie Marocaine and 9ème Division d'Infanterie Coloniale. Here German resistance remained

fierce for a few days, but the French managed to penetrate across the Ill river on February 5, secure Ensisheim on the 6th and reach the Rhône-Rhine Canal by the 7th. There they were joined by Leclerc's armour on the 8th; the next morning, elements of the 9ème DIC reached the Rhine at Chalampé, forcing the Germans to destroy the remaining bridge at 8 a.m. This final act marked the end of the Colmar pocket and the German presence in upper Alsace as well.'

Hitler's decision to hold the pocket as long as possible, mainly for political reasons and probably personal esteem, had resulted in high losses for the 19. Armee. Precise German casualty reports are sparse, but it is estimated that thousands of men had been killed or wounded in Alsace. Non-combat casual-

ties from the weather had also been high as the men had had to endure deep snow and freezing temperatures. One Heeresgruppe G report put the 19. Armee losses between January 20 and February 5 to 800 dead, 2,596 wounded and 3,129 missing. The late orders to evacuate had saved probably 10,000 troops of all types, no more, and at least a part of their artillery, anti-tank guns and vehicles, but over 17,000 men had been taken prisoner.

On the Allied side, the 6th Army Group staff estimated American casualties around 8,000 and French twice that number. About 500 Americans had been killed in action. The toll taken by the weather on the Allied forces was also very high, one third of the losses being from non-combat injuries.



The demolition of the last bridge across the Rhine was the final act in the battle for Alsace (also referred to in the history books as the Battle of the Colmar Pocket), and the 1ère Armée announced that the campaign officially ended at 8 a.m. on February 9. This picture of the wrecked railway bridge at

Breisach was taken that same day as white phosphorous shells explode on pillboxes on the German bank of the Rhine. Having survived massive Allied bombing, it appears that German soldiers awarded this particular bridge an honorary Iron Cross! (USNA)



Left: More Nazi propaganda, the message on the left claiming that 'Bolshevists and democrats are the accomplices of Jewry for the enslavement of peoples. That is why National Socialism



fights unyieldingly for German liberty'. (ECPAD) Right: From Schlumbergerstrasse . . . to Rue Camille Schlumberger . . . Colmar . . . then . . . and now.



On February 8, a victory parade took place in Colmar when Général de Lattre de Tassigny of the 1ère Armée made his official entry in the liberated city. Here honour guards of the 12th

Armored Division (forefront) and the 28th Infantry Division (in the background) give acte de présence on the main square, the Place Rapp. (USNA)



Another celebration was held in the city on February 20 when Général de Lattre awarded 57 of the highest French decorations to American commanders. Among them were Major General John E.



Dahlquist of the 36th Infantry Division, Major General John E. O'Daniel of the 3rd Infantry Division and Major General Roderick C. Allen of the 12th Armored Division. (USNA)