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## Forgotten Mistakes: Crossing the Rhine Gorge, 1945

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FORGOTTEN MISTAKES:  
CROSSING THE RHINE GORGE, 1945

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

By  
Michael Duncan

May 2020

FORGOTTEN MISTAKES:  
CROSSING THE RHINE GORGE, 1945

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I dedicate this thesis to my beautiful wife Karyna. Her incredible patience, constant encouragement, and unwavering support made this possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge those that assisted me with accessing valuable primary sources for this project. Mark Kitchell, the administrator for the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in World War II website and social media presence, provided me with multiple accounts from veterans of the Rhine Gorge crossing. Mark Gallagher graciously granted me permission to use the account of his father, Robert Gallagher. The staff at the Donovan Research Library found the infantry school paper written by Paul Brown for me in their archives. Lori Miller from Redbird Research provided me with the Morning Reports of F Company, 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment from the National Archives at St Louis, and Geoff Gentilini from Golden Arrow Research found the After Action Reports of 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in the National Archives at College Park.

Additionally, I would like to thank my committee members. Dr Doss guided this project from the beginning and provided incredibly detailed feedback in her draft reviews. Dr Miner challenged me to rethink how I analyze perspectives and critique sources. Dr Olsen encouraged me to make bold assertions when warranted by the research. Their contributions were truly invaluable and are visible throughout the thesis.

## PREFACE

In 2012, my brother showed me a uniform from World War II that he had recently framed. It had belonged to my grandfather. I observed a strange patch on the shoulder—a white “W” imposed over a bright blue background. It was not until four years later while visiting the National Infantry Museum that I saw a large display with every division patch from World War II and noticed that same patch from my grandfather’s uniform. It was the emblem of the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. I began to do some casual research, reading that the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division did not see any significant combat during the war. Soon after, I was at the Donovan Research Library at Fort Benning and stumbled upon the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division history book from 1947, where my grandfather’s name was listed under F Company, 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and my interest was reignited. Rather than confirming that the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had not seen significant combat, further research showed that his company had suffered severe casualties at one specific battle—the crossing of the Rhine Gorge. I learned that my grandfather was not present at the crossing, but I was still curious. I could hardly find anything about it. Then I found an obscure article online by Oscar Friedensohn describing the horrors of that night.

For years I continually returned to the Rhine Gorge crossing, trying to understand it. I found other accounts from veterans. I obtained records from the National Archives. The deeper I dug, the more intriguing it became. Why did the stories from veterans seem to conflict with the official histories? This thesis is my attempt to explain what happened in late March 1945 at the Rhine Gorge as well as explore how an obscure battle with relatively little strategic impact could seriously affect the way we remember the past, write history, and use that history to navigate the present.

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FORGOTTEN MISTAKES:  
CROSSING THE RHINE GORGE, 1945

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157 Pages

Directed by: Selena Doss, Alexander Olson, and Jeffrey Miner

Department of History

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In the years following World War II, official military records along with news reports and personal accounts of senior military leaders formed a narrative that emphasized American exceptionalism and focused on the success of the United States military. That original narrative became a foundation for foreign policy and military doctrine, and its characterization of the tactical and operational decisions made by American military leaders has remained almost entirely unchallenged. This thesis seeks to reverse that trend by carefully analyzing the tactical and operational aspects of one specific event, the crossing of the Rhine Gorge by the 89th Infantry Division.

The original narrative of World War II minimizes the Rhine Gorge crossing, while first-hand accounts from soldiers reveal that significant mistakes were made in the planning and execution of that operation. The discrepancies require reconciliation through a careful examination of all available sources. Layering a variety of primary sources including media outlets, army reports, senior leader accounts, and the statements of participating soldiers demonstrates the fallibility of the accepted World War II narrative. The process of layering primary sources also reveals the need for further analysis of the tactical decisions made by American leaders during World War II. Furthermore, it necessitates further investigation into the impact of the original narrative on subsequent policy decisions in the United States.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE LEGACY OF WORLD WAR II

A character in *Les Misérables*, lamenting the death of his comrades on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris barricades while *he* lived, triggered a flood of memories... and it all came rushing back.

—Oscar Friedensohn<sup>1</sup>

In the early morning hours of March 26, 1945, a handful of wooden boats slipped into the cool, rushing waters of the Rhine River as American soldiers from the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (89<sup>th</sup> ID) attempted to cross the last remaining obstacle separating Allied forces from the heartland of Germany. As the initial group crossed, they were met with fierce machine gun and canon fire—over 100 soldiers died and many more were wounded in the ensuing chaos as they frantically attempted to fight the swift current, finding themselves completely exposed to the weapon systems of the German defenders.<sup>2</sup> The 89<sup>th</sup> ID was not the only unit to cross the Rhine; nor were they the first. The Germans attempted to destroy all the bridges across the Rhine, but the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division from First Army found a bridge intact on March 7, 1945 at Remagen. The 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group executed a complex airborne and amphibious crossing in northern Germany beginning March 23, 1945, the same day that the 5<sup>th</sup> ID crossed in the south near Oppenheim. By the time the 89<sup>th</sup> ID crossed, there were already four bridgeheads across the Rhine spanning the length of the Western Front. (Figure One) While none of the other crossings would prove as costly as the one executed by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID with over 200 casualties sustained in a matter of hours, the story of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID has been largely ignored

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<sup>1</sup> Oscar Friedensohn, “Red Ran the Rhine,” *World War II* (Apr. 2005), 36.

<sup>2</sup> Friedensohn, “Red Ran the Rhine,” 39.



Figure One: Major Allied Bridgeheads across the Rhine River<sup>3</sup>

or forgotten.<sup>4</sup> Why has the crossing of the Rhine Gorge been overlooked? Answering that question highlights a need for further study of American military tactics in World War II.

Thorough analysis of the Rhine Gorge crossing with particular attention given to the American soldiers who participated in the battle, American leaders who planned the attack, and German leaders responsible for the defense of the Rhine proves conclusively that significant tactical mistakes were made by leaders in the United States Army.

Specifically, they chose a poor crossing site, rushed the operation, inappropriately

<sup>3</sup> Base Map adapted from "Rhine River Germany Map," <http://hrsport.nl/>, labels added using Microsoft PowerPoint.

<sup>4</sup> Calculating the total cost in terms of soldiers killed and wounded is difficult due to incomplete records. The 354<sup>th</sup> IN records claimed 132 killed and 51 wounded from that regiment alone. The 89<sup>th</sup> ID history recorded 62 total 353<sup>rd</sup> IN soldiers killed during the war, and a conservative estimate based on engagements throughout the war would be that at least half of those soldiers were killed during the Rhine Gorge crossing. Using a similar ratio for wounded results in 20 additional 353<sup>rd</sup> IN soldiers wounded. Finally, between references in the 354<sup>th</sup> IN reports and the 89<sup>th</sup> ID history, at least 8 engineers were killed. Based on the number of engineers participating, 15 total engineers killed and 10 wounded is a safe estimate. Those records and estimations add up to a total of 178 killed and 81 wounded. Therefore, 259 casualties is a conservative estimation, although it is entirely possible that over 300 casualties were sustained due to inconsistencies in records.

attempted a surprise attack, and failed to sufficiently coordinate for a combined arms operation. However, these mistakes have not been previously outlined in histories that detail American military tactics—a genre that revolves around *US Army in World War II*, the authoritative historical production of the US Army Center of Military History (often shortened to the Center of Military History).<sup>5</sup> Histories like *US Army in World War II*, often referred to as the “green books” because of their original binding, rest on a foundation of primary sources that consist of news reports, army written reports, and personal memoirs of senior military leaders. American military mistakes were occasionally overlooked in the green books as well as the army reports because the authors were fundamentally concerned with promoting American exceptionalism. The process of detailing the mistakes made during the crossing of the Rhine Gorge serves as a model for how American military tactics can be critiqued in a useful manner by objectively outlining the limitations of existing histories and adding a layer of analysis that has been lacking.

In a letter written specifically for the men of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID at the end of the war, the Division Commander, Major General (MG) Thomas Finley states, “That day we came of

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<sup>5</sup> More detailed analysis of *US Army in World War II* will be provided in Chapter Two. The importance of those volumes and the work of the Center of Military History in general cannot be overstated. *US Army in World War II* was a massive project that spanned decades with dozens of volumes and multiple authors, intended to provide an all-encompassing account of US Army operations. Providing invaluable details, the project was truly impressive and remains the most authoritative history of American military tactics. Referred to as the “green books” because of their original binding, the project became a template for later green books that would cover World War I, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and other military conflicts. The 21<sup>st</sup> century publication of volumes covering the Iraq War demonstrates the enduring relevance of green books. Producing over 600 volumes, most of the titles published by the Center of Military History can be accessed at <https://history.army.mil/catalog/browse/title.html>. The influence of the Center of Military History is one of the core themes weaved throughout this thesis. This work seeks to augment the valuable contributions of the green books and show that the green books represent a specific perspective, leaving room for further analysis.

age, justified our long months of training and gained a fierce incentive to drive on.”<sup>6</sup> MG Finley’s optimistic assessment of the Rhine Gorge crossing foretold how the event would be remembered; however, other eye-witness accounts portray a more solemn narrative. One of the veterans from that day, Private First Class (PFC) Oscar Friedensohn, describes the event in the magazine *World War II* as “an assault as unthinking and unnecessary, but also as brave, as the Charge of the Light Brigade.”<sup>7</sup> Although their perspective has not been systematically documented, the veterans of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID left behind fragments of a story that conflicts with the official American war narrative.

The sharp contrast between MG Finley and PFC Friedensohn concisely illustrates the core historical problem that must be addressed: the accounts of soldiers do not match the authoritative historical works like the green books, which were fundamentally written from the perspective of senior leaders in the army. Furthermore, historians like Charles MacDonald, who wrote the green book covering the Rhine Gorge crossing, have hesitated to fully examine and question some of the tactical decisions made by American military leaders.<sup>8</sup> The solution is to carefully examine a narrow topic using a wide variety of primary sources in order to refine the original narrative, providing an explanation for why the historiographical record has not already identified and fully addressed this research problem.

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<sup>6</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division: 1942-1945* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 16.

<sup>7</sup> Friedensohn, “Red Ran the Rhine,” 36.

<sup>8</sup> Charles B. MacDonald, *United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations, The Last Offensive* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1973), 234. MacDonald is referenced because he wrote the green book covering the Rhine Gorge crossing, but the critique applies generally to all the green books authors. As with the larger topic of *US Army in World War II*, further analysis of MacDonald will be provided in Chapter Two, but it is important to note that MacDonald was a meticulous historian who authored a valuable volume about the Rhineland Campaign. This thesis will demonstrate the limitations of his green book volume due to purpose, perspective, and primary source selection in order to show that the author’s work should be supplemented with additional analysis.

Before exploring the topic further, valuable context must be provided for the Rhine Gorge crossing. A short explanation of unit sizes, along with a summary of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID history and an overview of the Rhineland Campaign will ground the Rhine Gorge crossing within its historical context. After that, an analysis of the original narrative of World War II as well as the idealistic revisions and mythological story telling traditions will provide insight into its historiography. Next, a review of how the World War II narrative has impacted subsequent policy decisions will substantiate its enduring relevance. Finally, chapter previews will outline how a variety of perspectives and sources can be used to better understand the Rhine Gorge crossing as well as the implications of refining and retelling that specific piece of history.

To properly understand the scale of the operations conducted on March 26, 1945, it is helpful to review the echelons of army units and their approximate size. American divisions such as the 89<sup>th</sup> ID were typically made up of 10,000-15,000 soldiers. The 89<sup>th</sup> ID was subdivided into regiments. In addition to the special troops and enablers such as field artillery and engineers, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID consisted of three infantry regiments, the 353<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment (353<sup>rd</sup> IN), the 354<sup>th</sup> IN and the 355<sup>th</sup> IN, each consisting of about 2,500 soldiers. In turn, each of those regiments was divided into three battalions, numbered one through three, and consisting of about 700 soldiers each. The battalions contained three rifle companies and a heavy weapons company, each with 150 soldiers, for a total of four maneuver companies per battalion. The company names were letters, beginning with “A” and continuing in order across the regiment through “L.” Therefore, “A Company” (A Co) through “D Company” (D Co) belonged to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (1<sup>st</sup> BN). Similarly, E Co through H Co belonged to 2<sup>nd</sup> BN, and I Co through L Co belonged

to 3<sup>rd</sup> BN. Rifle companies typically consisted of three rifle platoons (about 35 soldiers), and a weapons platoon with machine guns. Rifle platoons contained three squads (10 soldiers). Above the division level were corps (25,000-50,000), army (100,000-150,000) and army group (wide variance in size).

As is evidenced by the organization of American army units, the number three was important in the tactical approach of the United States. There were three maneuver regiments in each division, three maneuver battalions in each regiment, three rifle companies in each battalion, three rifle platoons in each rifle company, and three squads in each rifle platoon. Typically, units would fight with two elements forward and one element in reserve. On March 26, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was tasked with crossing the Rhine River between the towns of Kestert and Kaub, a 16.7km stretch of what is known as the Rhine Gorge. In order to accomplish their mission, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID separated their sector into two smaller sections, assigning the 353<sup>rd</sup> IN to the southern section and the 354<sup>th</sup> IN to the northern section, with the 355<sup>th</sup> IN held in reserve.<sup>9</sup> The 353<sup>rd</sup> IN chose to cross at Oberwesel, encountering relatively light resistance. The 354<sup>th</sup> IN crossed in the northern sector at two locations, with 2-354<sup>th</sup> at St Goarshausen and 1-354<sup>th</sup> IN 2.3km north at Wellmich as 3-354<sup>th</sup> IN was held back as the regimental reserve.<sup>10</sup> Finally, G Co served as the battalion reserve for 2-354<sup>th</sup> IN, and B Co served as the battalion reserve for 1-354<sup>th</sup> IN.<sup>11</sup> The practice of holding units in reserve meant that although an entire division was assigned a seemingly small section of the river to cross, only four companies would face the brunt of the German defenses at Wellmich and St Goarshausen, as is clearly

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<sup>9</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 201.

<sup>10</sup> James Wilson, *Combat History of the 354th Infantry Regiment, 1945* (Colorado Springs: 354th Infantry Regiment Society, 1985), 13.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, *Combat History of the 354th Infantry Regiment*, 27.

illustrated in Figure Two with the highlighted companies representing the force initially tasked with crossing in the most dangerous sector—roughly 600 soldiers. The size of the

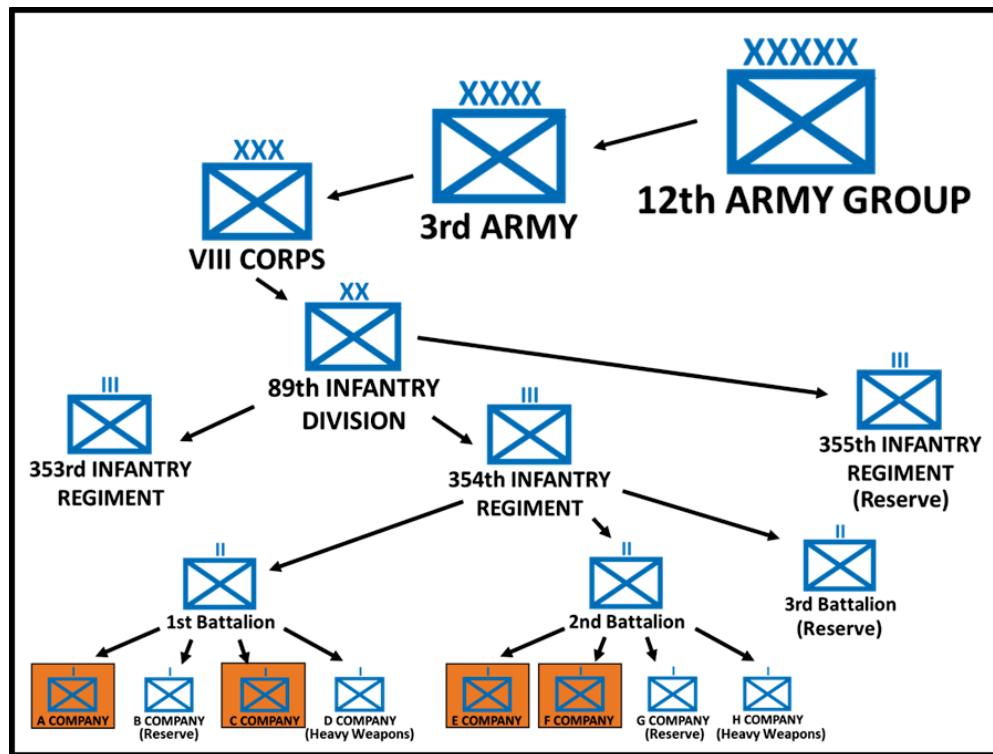


Figure Two: 89<sup>th</sup> ID Task Organization for Rhine Crossing

American force making the initial crossing is important because it contextualizes the casualties suffered. In a war where millions of soldiers and civilians died, hundreds of casualties can seem relatively inconsequential. But hundreds of casualties suffered by a group so small is devastating.

The section of river assigned to the 89<sup>th</sup> ID had both strategic and symbolic significance, which contributed to the risk. In his memoirs, Lieutenant General (LTG) George Patton said very little about the crossing of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID—he even attributed the crossing to the 76<sup>th</sup> ID, the unit the 89<sup>th</sup> ID passed through before they crossed the Rhine Gorge. However, he did make a specific note about the significance of the location. “It was rather prophetic, I thought, that we should cross at St Goar, near the legendary site of



the Lorelai<sup>12</sup>—one of the sacred spots of German mythology.”<sup>13</sup> In *The German Quarterly*, Ignace Feuerlicht traces the history of the Lorelei legend back to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> The legend surrounds a prominent rock which soars above the cliffs of the Rhine Gorge south of St Goarshausen where Lorelei, a nymph, would supposedly sit, distracting sailors and causing them to crash into the treacherous cliffs lining that section of the river.<sup>15</sup> The Rhine Gorge is a long section of the southern Rhine River, characterized by steep banks leading up to towering ridges. The water flows quickly in the Rhine Gorge, especially during the spring when the ice melt flows down from the Alps. Although there is not a nymph sitting on Lorelei rock causing accidents, the area



Figure Three: Rhine Gorge Near St Goarshausen<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Several spellings exist including “Lorelai,” Lorelay,” and “Loreley.” The most common spelling, “Lorelei,” will be used unless it is part of a quotation containing the alternate spelling.

<sup>13</sup> George S. Patton, Jr, *War As I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), 274.

<sup>14</sup> Ignace Feuerlicht, “Heine’s ‘Lorelei’: Legend, Literature, Life,” *The German Quarterly* vol. 53, no. 1 (Jan. 1980): 82.

<sup>15</sup> Feuerlicht, “Heine’s ‘Lorelei,’ 90.

<sup>16</sup> “Rhine River Gorge from Loreley Rock Germany,” *Wikimedia Commons*, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b1/Rhine\\_River\\_Gorge\\_from\\_Loreley\\_Rock\\_Germany.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b1/Rhine_River_Gorge_from_Loreley_Rock_Germany.JPG).

around St Goarshausen is still the scene of boating accidents, as merchant and tourist vessels navigate that difficult stretch of river.<sup>17</sup> All of the soldiers who participated in the Rhine Gorge crossing mention the speed of the current. Friedensohn says, “The river was much too powerful. Trying as hard as we could, utilizing all our strength, we could not alter the downstream course.”<sup>18</sup> Even a cursory overview of the countryside, as is provided by Figure Three, illustrates the challenges presented by the Rhine Gorge. In terms of terrain, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was assigned one of the toughest sections of the Rhine River to cross.

At the time of the Rhine Gorge crossing, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was one of the most highly trained organizations in the United States Army, even though they lacked extensive combat experience. Therefore, the mistakes made during their crossing cannot be dismissed as the natural result of unprepared troops and leaders facing combat for the first time. The 89<sup>th</sup> ID was originally formed during World War I but was immediately deactivated when the war ended. On July 15, 1942, it was reactivated at Camp Carson, Colorado, and began to prepare for combat.<sup>19</sup> For over a year, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID continued to build combat power at Camp Carson, going through multiple training exercises until November of 1943 when the entire division travelled across the country to participate in the Louisiana Maneuvers, a large-scale exercise involving multiple divisions.<sup>20</sup> The Louisiana Maneuvers were part of a series of exercises ordered by General (GEN) George Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, to prepare the army for World War II. GEN

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Landler, “O Lorelei, Your Rhine Is a Beauty, and Still Treacherous,” *The New York Times* (27 Oct, 2003), A4; “Acid Ship Overturns Near Rhine's Lorelei Rock,” *The Australian* (14 Jan, 2011), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Friedensohn, “Red Ran the Rhine,” 39.

<sup>19</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 52.

Marshall witnessed the struggles of American forces during World War I and strove to better prepare for war in the 1940s.<sup>21</sup>

After spending three months training in Louisiana, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID travelled directly to Hunter Liggett Military Reservation in California for another series of maneuvers and training exercises in January of 1944.<sup>22</sup> Those exercises lasted until the end of May, 1944, when the division moved to Camp Butner, North Carolina, for yet another iteration of training.<sup>23</sup> With the move to North Carolina, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was reorganized from a light infantry division to a standard infantry division, which meant thousands of new soldiers were transferred into the unit. In order to effectively incorporate those new soldiers, the division created and ran an infantry basic course for new arrivals as well as one of the first ever Expert Infantryman Badge Testing Boards to reinforce individual soldier skills.<sup>24</sup> As a result of both large-scale maneuvers and intense individual soldier training, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was thoroughly prepared for combat.

It was not until December of 1944 that the 89<sup>th</sup> ID began movement overseas to fight in the European Theater.<sup>25</sup> With extensive training spanning over two years in four different regions of the country, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was one of the most highly trained units of World War II, even though they did not see combat until the final months of the war in 1945. The 89<sup>th</sup> ID was not unprepared when they were ordered to cross the Rhine Gorge. They had just as much or more training than any other division in the United States Army

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Kathryn Barbier, "George C. Marshall and the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* vol. 44, no.4 (Autumn 2003): 389-390.

<sup>22</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 57.

<sup>23</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 65-66.

<sup>25</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 74.

and were fully manned and equipped for the mission. Therefore, any explanation for the trouble they experienced during the crossing must look deeper than ill-preparedness.

To understand why the 89<sup>th</sup> ID found themselves on the bank of the Rhine Gorge in 1945, it is helpful to review the operational context of World War II. In broad terms, American involvement in the war can be divided into theaters and subdivided into campaigns. The Pacific Theater was primarily fought by the Marines and Navy with small army contingents using the strategy of island hopping, or capturing key logistical outposts across the Pacific Ocean, to defeat Japan. In the Mediterranean Theater the United States Army first focused its attention on the Libya Campaign before moving across North Africa and into Italy via the island of Sicily. Although the Mediterranean Theater was a series of campaigns that continued until the end of the war, the European Theater became the primary focus of the United States Army in the summer of 1944 with D-Day and the Normandy Campaign. After moving across France, Belgium, and Luxemburg, the army pushed into Germany itself in what is now known as the Rhineland Campaign.

The greatest obstacle for the Allies during the Rhineland Campaign was crossing the Rhine River, a feat first successfully undertaken when the US First Army found and exploited a bridge the Germans failed to destroy at Remagen. The seizure of the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen is well known as the decisive point for the Rhineland Campaign. The government widely publicized the actions of the First Army and as a result, that event captured the attention of the American public. MacDonald explains in the Rhineland Campaign green book, “The capture of the Ludendorff railroad bridge and its subsequent exploitation was one of those *coups de theatre* that sometimes happen in

warfare and never fail to capture the imagination.”<sup>26</sup> Because the crossing at Remagen dominated the narrative, other crossings have largely been ignored. One of those overlooked crossings is the one conducted by the 89th ID, part of LTG Patton’s Third Army, in the Rhine Gorge.

Immediately following the conclusion of World War II, the Center of Military History began working on its thorough operational analysis of the war. The resulting green books, including MacDonald’s *The Last Offensive*, were so detailed that they discouraged further historical analysis of World War II operations. Ronald Spector, a military historian, describes the uniqueness of World War II history. Usually military histories focus on operations and tactics, but those aspects of World War II, “had been covered so thoroughly in the official volumes that relatively few authors attempted to produce original accounts.” Furthermore, Spector argues that the histories produced by non-military scholars rely heavily on the green books for operational analysis.<sup>27</sup> Even though it took decades for the series to be completed, volumes were released consistently following the war and dominated the historical record of tactics and operations in World War II.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> MacDonald, *Last Offensive*, 234.

<sup>27</sup> Ronald Spector, “Public History and Research in Military History: What Difference Has It Made?” *The History Teacher* vol. 26, no. 1 (Nov. 1992): 92.

<sup>28</sup> Although *The Last Offensive* by MacDonald was not published until 1973, there were not any noteworthy attempts to create a comprehensive history of the Rhineland Campaign prior to its publication. That may have been due to the consistent release of green books beginning in the late 1940s. It was widely known that the topic would eventually be covered by the Center of Military History, and there was apparently no appetite for such a work outside of that institution. The only significant historical works addressing the Rhineland Campaign prior to MacDonald’s publication were the memoirs of American generals and the division history, both of which MacDonald cited in his book. It may seem like an outlier due to the late publication, but the overarching consistency between preserved army records, officer memoirs, and MacDonald’s book justify grouping them together within the original narrative. Their consistency likely results from the fact that each author served in the United States Army during World War II, including MacDonald himself.

Likely due to the amount of time it took to complete the green books, the historical boards for specific units produced histories that were endorsed and printed by the United States Army.<sup>29</sup> The 89<sup>th</sup> ID published their own history, but it was consistent with the subsequently published narrative of *The Last Offensive*, providing more details about that specific division. Although the official histories are well researched and meticulously written using army reports and leader accounts, they do not question the tactical and operational decisions leading up to the crossing of the Rhine Gorge. While they do mention the casualties and struggles incurred during the crossing, their message is a clear affirmation of the US military's initial conclusion that the operation was an unmitigated success. These early published histories form the foundation of what could be described as the original narrative of World War II.

The original narrative typically promotes the idea of American exceptionalism, especially in its treatment of American fighting forces. For example, MacDonald structures his volume to present the United States military as the greatest fighting force in modern warfare. In his review of *The Last Offensive*, historian Edward Parsons comments, "A comforting notion pervades MacDonald's story: America's casualties were usually minimized by the competence of Eisenhower's officers."<sup>30</sup> In order to maintain that comforting notion, mistakes made by American officers in places like the Rhine Gorge are minimized or entirely ignored. Since many of those histories were produced by organizations such as the Center of Military History, their emphasis on American

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<sup>29</sup> Almost all the World War II divisional series books were published by the Infantry Journal Press in Washington DC in the late 1940s and early 1950s. *Stone and Stone*, an online database for World War II books lists over thirty books in the series. A list of the titles can be found at <http://books.stonebooks.com/publisher/2641/>.

<sup>30</sup> Edward B. Parsons, "Reviewed Work: United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations: The Last Offensive by Charles B. MacDonald," *The Journal of American History* vol. 61, no. 4 (Mar. 1975): 1145.

exceptionalism following World War II and in the midst of intense foreign conflicts should be viewed as unavoidable contextual grounding rather than a flawed historical approach.

In addition to the historical accounts commissioned and published by elements of the US government, another crucial element within the original World War II narrative is the collaboration that occurred between the United States Army, specific army leaders, and the media. This collaboration forms the foundation of primary sources on which the official histories rest. As military historian Peter Mansoor highlights, “The guns had hardly cooled after the Allied victory over Germany in World War II when both participants and historians began the debate over the relative merits of the armies that fought the war.”<sup>31</sup> Although the army published its own history, there were also several leaders who attempted to influence the narrative and justify their own decisions by publishing personal accounts of the war. GEN Dwight Eisenhower and GEN Omar Bradley both wrote autobiographies focusing on the war years.<sup>32</sup> LTG Patton died at the end of the war, but his detailed notes were consolidated into a posthumous account.<sup>33</sup> Also, one of LTG Patton’s staff officers wrote a book about the Third Army which

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<sup>31</sup> Peter R. Mansoor, “Building Blocks of Victory: American Infantry Divisions in the War Against Germany and Italy, 1941-1945,” PhD Diss. (The Ohio State University, 1995), 1. Mansoor’s dissertation was later adapted and published as a monograph. The above quotation did not survive the adaptation, but Mansoor’s argument remained the same. Specifically, he argued that the US Army displayed a higher level of combat effectiveness or tactical proficiency than the Germans during World War II. He was actively disputing the theory that the United States won the war through the rapid production of war material alone. *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945* (University of Kansas Press, 1999), 2. Although only tangentially related to this thesis, it is worth noting that Peter Mansoor was an Army Officer, serving as a Brigade Commander in Iraq following the initial invasion. He later worked for General David Petraeus as one of the primary architects of the “Surge” and American counterinsurgency doctrine. His analysis and perception of American military history directly influenced US foreign policy and military strategy. He is just one example of how the topics of military history generally and World War II specifically continue to directly impact the world today.

<sup>32</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948); Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story* (New York: Holt, 1951).

<sup>33</sup> George S. Patton, Jr, *War As I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947).



basically echoed Patton's opinions.<sup>34</sup> All of these officers were strategically involved in the decision to cross the Rhine Gorge, and their early analysis of the Rhineland Campaign enabled them to maintain a level of control over the narrative and avoid detailed critical analysis of their decisions, especially since their accounts are generally consistent with official histories. Finally, the American media served as little more than a mouthpiece for the United States Army during World War II. As historian Steven Casey asserts, the reporters told "a story that both the military and the home front wanted to hear."<sup>35</sup> Journalists were strategically placed, and their stories were monitored to ensure that they echoed the official story.

Because the original narrative consisting of official histories, leader memoirs, and flattering media coverage intentionally glosses over the crossing of the Rhine Gorge, there is not as much historiographical context for that specific event when compared to other World War II topics—it has been largely forgotten. But this dearth does not preclude contributions by later historians. Unfortunately, the complexity of World War II, the immense range of subtopics, and the diversity of opinions make it difficult to generalize the historiography. Furthermore, there is significantly less historiographical analysis of World War II than would be expected considering the immense amount of research that has been conducted on the topic.

The only comprehensive work on World War II historiography that exists is *World War II in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, with General Sources: A Handbook of Literature and Research*. Edited by Loyd Lee and published in 1997, it attempts to

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<sup>34</sup> Brenton G. Wallace, *Patton and His Third Army* (Harrisburg: Military Service Publishing Company, 1946).

<sup>35</sup> Steven Casey, *The War Beat, Europe: The American Media at War Against Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.



document the most important academic works covering prominent themes discussed since the conclusion of the war. Recognizing the need for his project, Lee writes, “There is, surprisingly, no comprehensive historiographic survey of the Second World War.”<sup>36</sup> One likely reason for the lack of historiographical summaries on World War II is that the original narrative firmly grounds the historical discussion, resulting in less drastic interpretive deviations than other conflicts and historical subjects have seen. Supporting that theory, Donald Schilling notes in his chapter within Lee’s volume, “the war as defined and depicted in the late 1940s and early 1950s has remained strikingly consistent over the decades.”<sup>37</sup> While much has been written about World War II, many of the original themes and arguments have remained unchallenged, especially at the tactical and operational levels. The endurance of original themes such as American exceptionalism, even in seemingly apolitical narratives, has had a profound impact.

The effect of a World War II narrative promoting American exceptionalism has been outlined by several scholars. Steven Hook and John Spanier argue in their textbook, *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*, that America’s global foreign policy since becoming a world power has been based entirely on a national identity defined by the country’s interpretation of World War II.<sup>38</sup> As they succinctly put it, “The era of

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<sup>36</sup> Loyd E. Lee, *World War II in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, with General Sources: A Handbook of Literature and Research* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), xiv.

<sup>37</sup> Donald G. Schilling, “Histories of the War in Europe and the Pacific,” in *World War II in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, with General Sources: A Handbook of Literature and Research* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Hook and Spanier, *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*, xiii. The growth of American exceptionalism following World War II has been widely acknowledged and discussed. Stephen Wertheim did an excellent job of compiling some of the works on this topic in his dissertation on the global supremacy of the United States stemming from World War II. Stephen Alexander Wertheim, “Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy in World War II,” Ph.D. Diss (Columbia University, 2015). Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, *FDR and the Creation of the U.N.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New

American primacy began amid the ashes of World War II.”<sup>39</sup> More than just a reaction to objective facts about the war, America’s foreign policy has been inextricably linked with a specific *interpretation* of the war. Historian Jeremy Black asserts that “the domestic politics of the war led into the politics of the memory of the war.” Furthermore, Black argues that the fight to control the narrative and resulting political ramifications of that narrative have essentially been a continuation of the war.<sup>40</sup> A cursory look at United States foreign policy following World War II reveals an aggressive attempt to control global events, including armed conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Adjusting the World War II narrative would not necessarily change foreign policy, but the original narrative is undeniably linked to the actions of the United States following the war.

In addition to foreign policy, the original war narrative has had a profound and ongoing impact on the military. Modern military scholars often view World War II as the blueprint for successful military operations. In his book *Anatomy of Victory*, strategist John Caldwell refers to World War II as “the benchmark for a victorious national commitment.”<sup>41</sup> His entire argument revolves around the idea that World War II was an

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York: Columbia University Press, 2012), ch. 3; Daniel Plesch, *America, Hitler and the UN: How the Allies Won World War II and Forged a Peace* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011); David Schmitz, *The Triumph of Internationalism: Franklin D. Roosevelt and a World in Crisis, 1933-1941* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2007); Stephen Schlesinger, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003); Andrew Johnstone, *Against Immediate Evil: American Internationalists and the Four Freedoms on the Eve of World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Johnstone, *Dilemmas of Internationalism: The American Association for the United Nations and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1941-1948* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009); Warren Kuehl and Lynne Dunn, *Keeping the Covenant: American Internationalists and the League of Nations, 1920-1939* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> Hook and Spanier, *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Jeremy Black, *Rethinking World War Two: The Conflict and Its Legacy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), x.

<sup>41</sup> John D. Caldwell, *Anatomy of Victory: Why the United States Triumphed in World War II, Fought to a Stalemate in Korea, Lost in Vietnam, and Failed in Iraq* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 149.

unmitigated success. He believes that a deep understanding of *why* American forces succeeded provides the key to duplicating that success in future conflicts. Asserting “there has never been any doubt in any informed mind,” Caldwell never considers the possibility that the narrative of unmitigated American success could have been at least partially manufactured by the media, the military, and early historians.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, historian Thomas Ricks argues that the World War II model of officer management should be implemented today because it was the last successful war the United States fought. Interestingly, Ricks notes that the modern American military in many ways remains within the mold created by GEN Marshall. For Ricks that must be emulated in more ways to enable future success.<sup>43</sup> Overall, military strategists constantly hearken back to World War II for inspiration. While there is a place for learning from the past, few discuss the extent to which the World War II narrative was tailored to support the case for American exceptionalism and expand global influence.

Although the historiography has been surprisingly consistent, there are two important trends that represent divergences from the original narrative. First, in the decades following World War II, cracks in the official story began to form as scholars questioned controversial policies such as carpet bombing, the censorship of the media, the treatment of Japanese Americans, and the use of nuclear weapons. In 1957, Louis Morton noted for the journal *Foreign Affairs* that criticism of the decision to use nuclear weapons began soon after the war concluded.<sup>44</sup> Once they began, the critiques did not cease. For example, in 2005, Thomas Childers questioned the excessive violence

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<sup>42</sup> Caldwell, *Anatomy of Victory*, xiv.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 18.

<sup>44</sup> Louis Morton, “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 35, no. 2 (Jan. 1957): 334.

perpetrated against German civilians through bombing campaigns for the journal *Central European History*.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, critiques concerning the effect of the war on the United States span the decades from the conclusion of the war until today.<sup>46</sup> The one commonality that unites all of these critiques is that they attempt to revise the original narrative for ideological purposes, focusing almost entirely on strategic level decisions at the highest echelons of national leadership. Of note, these ideological divergences represent the bulk of scholarly revisionism for World War II. Specifically, the academic community has focused almost exclusively on ideological issues stemming from the war without delving into combat operations and the tactical decisions of American soldiers and leaders.

Conversely, in the decades that followed the war, other historians, authors, and media personalities began to focus on the individual soldier's experience during World War II, producing an interesting and unique glorification of the war. President Ronald Reagan's speech at Normandy commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day is an excellent example of that glorification, but the trend began long before Reagan and can be seen in the books of popular author Cornelius Ryan who was willing to question certain aspects of the original war narrative in order to honor individual soldiers who participated. More than one of Ryan's books were adapted into popular films. Several scholars in the past two decades have noticed the glorification trend, pointing to the books of Stephen Ambrose, Hollywood movies such as *Saving Private Ryan*, and even

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Childers, "'Facilis Descensus Averni Est': The Allied Bombing of Germany and the Issue of German Suffering," *Central European History*, Vol. 38, no. 1 (2005), 105.

<sup>46</sup> Allan M. Winkler, "World War II Homefront: A Historiography," *OAH Magazine of History* vol. 16, no. 3, World War II Homefront (Spring 2002): 5.

video games such as *Call of Duty*.<sup>47</sup> While the intent is often honorable, the glorification of heroic actions tends toward mythological story telling produced for popular consumption within the United States rather than critical scholarly analysis.

Overall, the willingness of some historians to question the perceptions and cultural memories of World War II, regardless of their motivation, has provided a foundation for amending the original narrative. World War II history has been consistently altered to support ideological arguments and capitalized on to promote nationalistic feelings. The ideological revisions and mythological retellings have developed alongside each other, informing very different perspectives and conclusions about the significance of World War II. Since they were typically produced for different audiences, they have also resulted in a significant gap between popular history and academic history. Both traditions have limitations, but they provide the precedence for further analysis of the subject. Specifically, ideological revisions have opened the door for harsh criticism of American leaders when it is justified, while mythologizing popular histories have placed an emphasis on the accounts of individual soldiers whose stories often diverge from the official histories embodied most prominently in the green books.

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<sup>47</sup> Tanine Allison, *Destructive Sublime: World War II in American Film and Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018); In his insightful monograph, Jonathan Bullinger provides a comprehensive analysis of how the children of World War II veterans created the larger-than-life cultural memory of those that served. His work heavily influenced the direction of this thesis. Bullinger notes the intersection of media forms, explaining how they combined to form a cultural perception of World War II that distorted the historical record with far-reaching societal and political ramifications. Jonathan Monroe Bullinger, *Reagan's "Boys" and the Children of the Greatest Generation: U.S. World War II Memory, 1984 and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Andrew Williams, "The Reaffirmation of National Myth in World War II Digital Games," PhD Diss. (The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2011); Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959); Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974); Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U. S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

Implementing methodologies from both traditions, it is possible to shift focus away from the strategic political decisions and toward the tactical decisions of American military leaders in World War II. Although historians have critiqued and revised much of the war narrative, it is still extremely rare for scholars to question the original tactical and operational narrative. Ironically, reexamining this aspect of the narrative can result in refined perspectives on the strategic and political ramifications of the war. In order to refine the tactical and operational narrative, it is necessary to examine, compare, and contrast the following perspectives of the Rhine Gorge crossings: the American media, the United States Army, US Army General Officers, the German defenders, and participating American soldiers. Understanding what happened during a battle is challenging, but comparing perspectives and balancing discrepancies creates a clearer picture. The most daunting aspect is compiling and analyzing the accounts of veterans. While there are several sources available, thought must be given to the location of each person on the battlefield to make difficult judgments concerning their credibility. Some wrote decades after the conclusion of World War II. Others present seemingly inaccurate details that must be carefully examined to determine reliability. By narrowly focusing on a specific event, it is possible to widen the search for sources and incorporate a large variety of perspectives, enabling an informed critique of the original narrative.

The media is a logical starting point for understanding the American memory of World War II since they formed the initial picture most Americans had of the war. Chapter One focuses on newspaper articles, newsreels, and radio broadcasts produced during the war, citing primary sources but also leveraging research on how the media created its narrative. The media did not really cover the Rhine Gorge crossing, in part

because they were censored to prevent reporting that would portray the United States military negatively, yet simultaneously they were also willing promoters of American exceptionalism. Lack of coverage for the Rhine Gorge crossing is significant because the media typically covered the war effort in detail.

Building on the influence of the media, Chapter Two discusses how the United States Army meticulously preserved written records and created histories including the overarching *US Army in World War II*, which draws heavily from After Action Reports. All these documents demonstrate how the military interpreted and understood the events of World War II. Official histories and army reports do not portray the Rhine Gorge crossing as a flawed operation because each author had a vested interest in promoting American exceptionalism. Fundamentally, *they* were the Americans that were exceptional, so favorable estimations of their own efforts should be expected. The unit reports were written by officers intimately involved in the planning, and the histories are still a product of the same over-arching organization even if they are somewhat removed from that specific battle.

Behind both the media portrayal and the official histories there were intelligent leaders working diligently to understand, craft, and control the narrative of World War II. No matter what their motivations may have been, the autobiographies and biographies of key World War II generals indicate how they perceived the war both strategically and operationally. Army senior leaders were close enough to the Rhine Gorge crossing to know it was flawed, but far enough removed that they did not have to justify it in detail. They provide varying levels of positive interpretation while simultaneously distancing themselves from mistakes without even acknowledging them as such. Each general was a

strong proponent of American exceptionalism, often supporting that narrative in a self-serving manner. Chapter Three compares the works of senior leaders to the official army records and the media reports to show how they complement each other, forming a generally unified original narrative.

Although often overlooked, the reports of German defenders provide a great deal of insight into the accuracy of US Army conclusions about the enemy they were facing. Chapter Four examines the German military records preserved following the war in archives by the United States, providing interesting counterpoints to the narrative produced by American leaders. Thorough analysis of the forces defending the Rhine Gorge absent American interpretation leads to more accurate conclusions about reasonable outcomes—it reframes the cost in terms of lives lost compared to how many casualties could be expected against a weakened defensive force. The German leaders had no desire to promote American exceptionalism, and their accounts open the door for a more critical interpretation of American tactics.

While the German perspective is invaluable, the most important perspective for re-examining the crossings of the Rhine Gorge is that of the soldiers who participated. Admittedly, the accounts of American soldiers are the most unreliable and contradictory sources available, but they are also the only surviving eye-witness records. Their stories must be balanced against each other and the unit reports since the intensity of combat can lead to distorted memories. Despite the interpretive challenges, they would have been less inclined to conform their stories to a larger narrative, and several previously unrecognized trends can be gleaned from their accounts. Acknowledging the human proclivity to sensationalize, they still convincingly prove that significant tactical errors



were made by the United States Army. Having already examined the other perspectives, Chapter Five highlights the perspectives of American soldiers who crossed the Rhine Gorge and puts all those perspectives in conversation, specifying the four fundamental mistakes made by American leaders: poor crossing site selection, unnecessarily rushed operational tempo, the inappropriate use of a surprise attack, and an insufficiently coordinated combined arms operation.

Comparing a wide variety of sources and perspectives demonstrates that the virtually unquestioned original narrative of the Rhine Gorge produced by the Center of Military History and related sources does not adequately incorporate the perspective of the soldiers who conducted the crossings or the German defenders. Furthermore, the original narrative also inadequately discusses the mistakes made by American military leaders in order to reinforce American exceptionalism. The details surrounding the tactical decisions of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID and how history treats them may seem relatively insignificant—the outcome of World War II did not rest on the success or failure of their mission at the Rhine Gorge. However, if those tactical decisions have been misrepresented, it leads one to question what other tactical decisions have been misrepresented. The original World War II narrative impacts more than just that specific story. The history of World War II looms large in the development of American military doctrine, the crafting of foreign policy, and overarching conceptualizations of America's place in World History. The process of refining the history of the Rhine Gorge crossing could serve as a model for further refinement and the development of new World War II interpretations as a whole; in turn, revising the World War II narrative could impact how other conflicts are understood.

## CHAPTER ONE

### MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF THE WAR

Since such stories might reveal information on conditions within the Army which might prove valuable to the enemy, the utmost caution was necessary in censorship of copy.

—201<sup>st</sup> Field Press Censorship Organization<sup>48</sup>

Following the crossing of the Rhine Gorge by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID, no newsreels heralded their actions. There is no record of detailed radio reports about the struggle at St Goarshausen. Newspapers buried the events of March 26, 1945, in generalized war reports with little or no mention of the American lives lost. But what does the lack of reporting say about the Rhine Gorge crossing? Why did the media ignore what happened? There are two fundamental reasons. First, the United States government censored the media, using coercion to control their message. Second, and more importantly, the media willingly promoted the idea of American exceptionalism, fully endorsing the priorities of the military and government. The American media propagated a narrative that minimized the mistakes of the United States military and highlighted successes, becoming little more than a mouthpiece as the United States government controlled their reports using both coercion and cooperation.

Unlike the Rhineland Campaign and the crossing of the Rhine Gorge, the topic of government censorship during World War II has captured the imagination of the American academic community, resulting in a robust body of research on the topic. Examining the topics of censorship and freedom of the press from almost every imaginable angle, serious historical monographs have been written consistently since the

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<sup>48</sup> 201<sup>st</sup> Field Press Censorship Organization, "History of United States and Supreme Headquarters, AEF, Press Censorship in the European Theatre of Operations, 1942-1945" (Office of the Chief of Information, Department of the Army, 1953), 77.

1960s, with spikes in the 1970s due to the Vietnam War and the early 1990s due to changing perspectives after the conclusion of the Cold War.<sup>49</sup> While much has been written, the most thorough examination of how the United States government conducted its censorship during World War II is media historian Michael Sweeney's book, *Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II*.<sup>50</sup> The work of Sweeney and the historians who preceded him can be used to provide valuable context for a thorough analysis of newspaper articles, radio reports, and newsreels. Their conclusions can then be applied to the crossing of the Rhine Gorge and leveraged to understand why the lack of coverage is so significant.

During World War II, to prevent enemies from collecting intelligence from the media, the United States developed a robust censorship program that originated from World War I censorship policies. James Mock, a historian of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, states in his analysis of World War II policy that, "Anyone who has examined in detail America's censorship activities in World War I will understand why there must be limits to censorship in a democracy, even in war time."<sup>51</sup> Mock and his colleagues analyzed President Roosevelt's policies in real time, participating in a symposium in 1942, discussing censorship policy. They brought a historical perspective to the discussion,

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<sup>49</sup> James Russell Wiggins, *Freedom or Secrecy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's A War On?: The American Home Front 1941-1941* (New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1970); Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); George H. Roeder, Jr, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience during World War II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Stephen M. Roth, *The Censorship of International Civilian Mail During World War II: The History, Structure and Operation of the United States Office of Censorship* (Lake Oswego, OR: La Posta Publications, 1991); Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black. *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>50</sup> Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> James R. Mock, George Creel, Neville Miller, Zechariah Chafee, Jr., Ralph Casey, and Arthur Krock, "The Limits of Censorship, a Symposium," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring 1942): 3.

using the extreme policies of World War I to characterize the administration as relatively restrained and liberal. Although World War II censorship was *relatively* light, it was fundamentally based on World War I policy, meaning that it still strictly controlled the flow of information.

At the beginning of American involvement in World War I, the face of government censorship was George Creel, the director of the Committee on Public Information.<sup>52</sup> Creel enforced laws like the Espionage Act of 1917, which provided the government with the ability to prosecute individuals spreading dangerous information. The language of the Espionage Act was broad, and the law allowed for significant fines as well as imprisonment for up to twenty years.<sup>53</sup> The Espionage Act was quickly followed by the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918, further expanding the ability of the government to control the media.<sup>54</sup> While the excesses of censorship during World War I informed World War II policy reforms, they also provided a precedent for government control over the media.

At the outbreak of World War II, President Roosevelt said, “It is necessary that prohibitions against the domestic publication of some types of information, contained in long-existing statutes, be rigidly enforced.”<sup>55</sup> In his analysis of war time control over the press, Daniel Smyth argues that President Roosevelt was likely referring to the elements of World War I censorship legislation that were still on the books in 1941.<sup>56</sup> While contemporary scholars like Mock may have characterized Roosevelt’s censorship policies

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<sup>52</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Theodore F. Koop, *Weapon of Silence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 20.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Joseph Smyth, “Freedom of the Press and National Security in Four Wars: World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the War on Terrorism,” Master’s Thesis (The University of Maryland, 2007), 52.

as *relatively* light, the president clearly remained entrenched in the controlling and cautious mindset of World War I policymakers. Sweeney notes that President Roosevelt was skeptical of the press and not particularly concerned with preserving their civil liberties.<sup>57</sup> However, President Roosevelt did see the media as an important tool for promoting the war effort, even if he did not trust them.

In order to curb their excesses as well as tap into their potential for constructing a positive narrative, President Roosevelt created both the Office of Censorship and the Office of War Information.<sup>58</sup> Byron Price directed the Office of Censorship, providing guidelines for the media regarding information that should be excluded from their publications. Although the administration was ready to provide Price with unparalleled legal authority to censor the American media, he idealistically chose to initiate a system of voluntary self-censorship instead.<sup>59</sup> Voluntary participation was enabled by the exceptional patriotism amongst the citizens and organizations of the United States due to the aggression of Japan and Germany. However, it should also be noted that the willingness of the administration to implement harsher forms of censorship contributed to the media's active participation in self-censorship.<sup>60</sup>

Conversely, the Office of War Information, led by Elmer Davis, acted as a news source for American publications, pushing a government-approved narrative to the media.<sup>61</sup> The idealistic Price did not approve of the "salesman" approach of the Office of

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<sup>57</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 73.

<sup>58</sup> Kevin J. Brogan, "Defense Policy: An Approach for Exploring the Military-Media Tension," PhD Diss. (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2006), 70.

<sup>59</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 14.

<sup>60</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 213. Sweeney illustrates the willingness of the Office of Censorship to implement strict control over media by recounting two cases in which they ordered the suspension of radio broadcasters, a German American and an Italian American, due to suspected subversive behavior. In both cases the individuals were subsequently fired by their employers. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 127-133.

<sup>61</sup> Brogan, "Defense Policy," 71.

War Information, leading him to resist President Roosevelt's attempts to merge the two offices.<sup>62</sup> Although Price was not comfortable with the Office of War Information, they did not typically achieve their means using an authoritarian approach, but rather co-opted the media by providing additional access to information in order to maintain control of the story. Kevin Brogan argues in his dissertation on defense policy that the media and the military had a mutual respect, allowing the Office of War Information to operate behind the scenes without implementing active control measures.<sup>63</sup> However, once reporters entered a war zone during World War II, the contents of their reports were not controlled by either of the two government offices. Instead, the theater commanders had complete control over the access granted to reporters and war correspondents. Additionally, all news leaving the theater had to be reviewed and approved by the military, providing commanders with an unprecedented ability to control the news sent back to the United States for public consumption.<sup>64</sup>

Overall, the United States government undoubtedly fostered a spirit of cooperation with the media, enabling immense control over how the war story was told, and the media was complicit as they sought to support the war effort. As Sweeney says, "Journalists were part of the team."<sup>65</sup> Additionally, the heavy-handed actions of the government during World War I and the insistence of the Roosevelt administration on media control created a passive environment of coercion. It was understood that violations of self-censorship would not be tolerated, and anything that could be construed as a lack support for the United States would invite serious consequences. Therefore, the

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<sup>62</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 97.

<sup>63</sup> Brogan, "Defense Policy," 74.

<sup>64</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 51.

<sup>65</sup> Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory*, 2.

government used both cooperation and coercion to control the narrative communicated by the media.

The level of control exercised by the government over the media fluctuated by media type. During World War II the media took three primary forms: print, radio, and newsreels. Generally, the print media was able to get closer to the front lines, but they were dependent on commanders for their access and their reports were vetted by the military prior to sending them to the United States. On the other hand, both radio and newsreels were limited by the technology of the times, making it difficult for them to keep up with the fast pace of the Allied forces. They often relied on reports coming from print journalists and information released to them by large Allied headquarters elements. The three media forms were coerced both actively and passively to varying degrees, and all of them willingly cooperated to achieve a startling lack of coverage for the Rhine Gorge crossing considering the steady streams of radio, film, and print reports flowing from the front lines.

Since the print media war correspondents were closest to the action, they formed the cornerstone of World War II reporting as they faced enemy fire alongside American soldiers. The famous reporter, Ernie Pyle, was shot in the head by a Japanese machine gunner on the island of Ie Shima—he was just one of fifty-four journalists killed during the war.<sup>66</sup> While their bravery cannot be questioned, the historical consensus is that they provided the American public with an incomplete or overly idealistic version of events as they unfolded in Europe. In a monograph providing subtle counterpoints to that consensus, Steven Casey succinctly summarizes the majority view by saying,

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<sup>66</sup> Casey, *The War Beat, Europe*, 353.

“correspondents packaged news in a palatable form.”<sup>67</sup> Ernie Pyle’s biographer, James Tobin, argues that the American public did not want to read about the horrors of war, but rather looked for upbeat news about the success of their soldiers. According to Tobin, correspondents like Pyle provided the people with what they wanted and needed to hear.<sup>68</sup> Tobin’s analysis illustrates the majority view referenced by Casey. Specifically, Tobin argues that war reporters chose to provide an idealistic portrayal of the war rather than simply being forced to do so by the government. Writing in the 1970s at the end of the Vietnam War, Phillip Knightley provides a more cynical interpretation of World War II reporters, claiming that they allowed themselves to be co-opted by the American war machine.<sup>69</sup> Whether or not Knightley’s cynicism is warranted, he convincingly argues that excessive government influence on the media can be dangerous.

Although Steven Casey maintains that journalists were more than just mouthpieces for the government during World War II, the media was unquestionably influenced by the military. Even Casey admits that the military censored reports and controlled access to information in order to maintain control over what was being sent home to the American people. As the Allies crossed the Rhine River, the influence of American military leaders on the print media fixated reporters on one specific event: the capture of the Ludendorff Bridge by the 9<sup>th</sup> Armored Division at Remagen on March 7, 1945. In his autobiography, war reporter Andy Rooney recalls his excitement about being one of the first reporters on the scene. “The crossing of the Rhine was one of the most

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<sup>67</sup> Casey, *The War Beat, Europe*, 1.

<sup>68</sup> James Tobin, *Ernie Pyle’s War: America’s Eyewitness to World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 243.

<sup>69</sup> Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker from the Crimea to Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 330.



important events of the war and Howard Cowan and I had it exclusively.”<sup>70</sup> But Rooney’s access to Remagen was no accident. He openly admits that the public-relations officer for the 9<sup>th</sup> AD played a crucial role in providing access to reporters.<sup>71</sup> In that sense, the reporters were exactly where the army wanted them to be. Rooney may have been first to the scene, but within hours there was a frenzied rush of journalists scrambling to cover the events at Remagen.<sup>72</sup> American newspapers were filled with stories about that important event, and it overshadowed other stories even as subsequent crossings were conducted.<sup>73</sup> The Ludendorff Bridge provided the kind of symbolic, visceral storyline that made for a great report, and as reporters fixated on Remagen they also fixated the eyes of the entire nation to Remagen.

Although journalists were overwhelmingly focused on Remagen, GEN Eisenhower wanted them to highlight one additional story during the Rhine Crossing. COL Robert Allen, a staff member in GEN Patton’s Third Army, recalls GEN Eisenhower instructing the Third Army to “Call in the reporters and see that they get the right kind of stories... They’ll use them and the folks back home will eat them up.”<sup>74</sup> The story GEN Patton provided for reporters was the virtually uncontested crossing of the Rhine River by the 5<sup>th</sup> ID at Oppenheim, south of the Rhine Gorge on March 23, 1945. GEN Patton provided the “scoop” for this crossing to reporter Edward Ball, and the headline of *The New York Times* on March 24 read, “PATTON CROSSES RHINE IN A

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<sup>70</sup> Andy Rooney, *My War* (New York: Public Affairs, 1995), 252.

<sup>71</sup> Rooney, *My War*, 251.

<sup>72</sup> Casey, *The War Beat, Europe*, 322.

<sup>73</sup> A search for “Remagen” using the historical newspaper digital database *ProQuest* produces hundreds of results, including detailed exposes written by war reporters. In contrast, a comprehensive series of searches using key words and phrases from the Rhine Gorge crossing produces only a handful of newspapers even mentioning that crossing with no detailed accounts.

<sup>74</sup> Robert S. Allen, *Lucky Forward* (New York: Manor Books, 1977), 55.



crossing at Oppenheim—an uplifting and encouraging story of ambitious leadership saving American lives.

*The New York Times* published daily updates on the progress of Allied troops during World War II, with reporter Drew Middleton writing a detailed column that tracked the movement of Armies, Corps, and Divisions. Hardly any significant movement escaped Middleton’s attention, let alone significant battles, which often merited their own feature pieces. As the Third Army crossed the Rhine Gorge, rather than a front-page story, the 87<sup>th</sup> ID and the 89<sup>th</sup> ID received a passing comment and a parenthetical addendum, respectively. Middleton writes, “The doughboys pushed over the river between Koblenz and Boppard at one minute after midnight last night according to reports from the front.” His underwhelming assessment of the 87<sup>th</sup> ID’s crossing is followed by a side note in parenthesis: “A German report said another crossing had been made between Boppard and St Goarshausen, Reuter reported.”<sup>76</sup> The only other mention of the crossings is buried in the daily official press release from the Allied Expeditionary Force. On March 26, it states that the Allies crossed near Boppard in assault boats and “met strong resistance from anti-aircraft guns and dug-in enemy positions.”<sup>77</sup> The following day there was a vague reference to a new Rhine River crossing in the south executed without air or artillery preparation.<sup>78</sup> It is unclear if either or both of those comments refer to the crossing of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID, but the complete lack of detail sufficiently

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<sup>76</sup> Drew Middleton, “Patton Drives East,” *The New York Times* (26 March, 1945).

<sup>77</sup> “The Texts of the Day’s Communiques on the Fighting in Various War Zones,” *The New York Times* (27 March, 1945).

<sup>78</sup> “The Texts of the Day’s Communiques on the Fighting in Various War Zones,” *The New York Times* (28 March, 1945).

buries the story and avoids having to mention the significant loss of American lives in the Rhine Gorge.

On the other side of the country, *The Los Angeles Times* also provided updates on the progress of American troops. Although they typically do not give the same level of detail, they do mention both the 87<sup>th</sup> ID and St Goar. *The Los Angeles Times* article states, “Along the Rhine, the 87<sup>th</sup> Division made a new crossing east of Boppard, linked up with another new bridgehead established at St Goar, and widened the new holding.”<sup>79</sup> Once again, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID is not mentioned by name, even though they faced the brunt of the German defenses in the Rhine Gorge and sustained the most casualties; also, there is not even a mention of the difficulties encountered during the crossing. Overall, the newspapers clearly feature the actions that made better stories and served the war effort by keeping the morale high back in the United States. Remagen dominated the news, and Third Army’s crossing at Oppenheim provided an uplifting narrative, but the struggles in the Rhine Gorge were kept from the attention of the American public.

Print media undoubtedly had the greatest access to frontline news during World War II and reached a wide audience across the United States; however, the radio was arguably the most common source of news for Americans. In her dissertation on the impact of the radio during World War II, Melissa Dinsman asserts that over 90% of American homes had a radio, and even though newsreels and newspapers dominate the modern conception of reporting during World War II, the radio served as the primary news source rather than those other mediums.<sup>80</sup> Dinsman goes on to argue that the radio

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<sup>79</sup> “Yanks Set Mile-an-hour Pace,” *The Los Angeles Times* (29 March, 1945).

<sup>80</sup> Melissa Lauren Dinsman, “Radio at War: Literature, Propaganda, and the Emergence of New Modernist Networks During World War II,” PhD Diss. (University of Notre Dame, 2013), 10. Dinsman would later adapt her dissertation into a monograph. Although her book reinforced and polished her argument, in doing

had a unique connection with people and was able to affect the thoughts and emotions of the public in a manner that other forms of media could not. She states that, “more than written or pictorial images, images created via sound appeal directly and more powerfully to the listener’s imagination.”<sup>81</sup> Stanley Cloud and Lynne Olson make a similar argument in their monograph on the CBS broadcasters of World War II, stating that the lack of editors and the immediacy of radio made those journalists some of the most influential media personalities of the war.<sup>82</sup> The ability of radio to quickly reach American homes and the relative lack of censorship compared to print and film made it an incredibly influential medium, but it was not without its drawbacks. Although more difficult to enforce, radio was still subject to the guidelines of the Office of Censorship and the Office of War Information. Additionally, the nature of the technology created unique limitations.

Radio broadcasting technology developed dramatically during World War II, but it could not keep up with the fast pace of an offensive campaign. Broadcasting equipment could not be slung on a reporter’s back or be moved from one location to another at a moment’s notice. It took time to disassemble and set up, and transporting it safely was no small task. Due to these limitations, radio reporters typically set up their operation around large headquarters that did not move as frequently. The benefit of being near the campaign headquarters was ready access to centralized information; however, they were often limited to the official reports given to them by the military.<sup>83</sup>

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so it lost some of the succinct summaries featured in the dissertation, which is why the book is not quoted here. Melissa Dinsman, *Modernism at the Microphone: Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics During World War II* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

<sup>81</sup> Dinsman, “Radio at War,” 13.

<sup>82</sup> Stanley Cloud and Lynne Olson, *The Murrow Boys: Pioneers on the Front Lines of Broadcast Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 40.

<sup>83</sup> Casey, *The War Beat, Europe*, 8.

Since radio was less mobile than print, it is necessary to understand where the key radio reporters were located during the Rhine Gorge crossings. Ed Murrow and his CBS crew, the preeminent radio reporters of the war, remained in London until March of 1945. When they decided to move closer to the action, they chose the largest, most complex mission planned for crossing the Rhine River—the northern crossing by the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group near Wesel, Germany. The Wesel crossing consisted of Operation Plunder using naval landing craft to cross the Rhine, and Operation Varsity which was one of the largest airborne operations of the war.<sup>84</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group was commanded by the British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery and consisted of both American and British soldiers, making it prime material for journalists with the added complexity of international cooperation in the midst of an already complicated operation.

Due to the forces involved and the type of operations conducted at Wesel, it is not surprising that it attracted the attention of radio reporters. CBS aired an episode of *The March of Time*, a dramatic radio program produced by *Time* magazine, featuring Bob Cappa recounting the story of jumping with paratroopers from the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group. Cappa, a reporter and photographer employed by *Life* magazine, recounts the horror of seeing a dead paratrooper, but the rest of his story focuses on the success of Allied troops.<sup>85</sup> Even after witnessing war first-hand, Cappa and the CBS radio team continued to promote the optimistic themes that the military wanted them to feature.

Eric Sevareid, one of the CBS reporters in that sector, provided an in-depth report on the crossing of Ninth Army, 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group for the *CBS World News Today*

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<sup>84</sup> Cloud and Olson, *The Murrow Boys*, 230.

<sup>85</sup> Bob Cappa, “The Kitchen of Tomorrow,” *The March of Time* (29 March, 1945), audio file accessed via archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/1945RadioNews/1945-03-29-CBS-The-March-Of-Time-The-Kitchen-Of-Tomorrow.mp3>.

broadcast on April 5, 1945. In his report, he claims that the soldiers were happy in that sector because the war was going so well. His story is full of overwhelming optimism.<sup>86</sup> One of Murrow's colleagues at CBS, Bill Shadel, reports later in the same broadcast that their crew remained in the northern sector with 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group until early April, when they moved down to the Third Army sector to report on one specific story—the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald.<sup>87</sup> Although they were focused on the breaking news of concentration camps, by moving to that sector CBS had access to the story of the Rhine Gorge crossing. After all, it was the 89<sup>th</sup> ID that liberated Buchenwald, only a few days after they crossed the Rhine Gorge. If Ed Murrow and the other CBS radio men heard about the difficulty the 89<sup>th</sup> ID had recently experienced, they made no mention of it. The subjects covered by the CBS reporters were important, but they were also uniformly optimistic and consistent with approved themes. Location had much to do with CBS initially failing to report on the Rhine Gorge crossing, but even when they had access to the story, they chose not to mention it. The initial limited access demonstrates a level of coercion, while the decision to ignore the Rhine Gorge demonstrates blatant cooperation.

Although CBS was the preeminent news outlet, they were not the only radio network sending reports from the front. BBC also had reporters following the Allied advance. They predictably followed the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group as well, since they were most interested in the progress of British soldiers. Stuart McPherson broadcasted a report from the British bridgehead, focusing on the hustle and bustle at the constructed bridge as

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<sup>86</sup> Eric Sevaried, "CBS World News Today" (5 April, 1945), audio file accessed via archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/1945RadioNews/1945-04-05-CBS-World-News-Today.mp3>.

<sup>87</sup> Bill Shadel, "CBS World News Today" (5 April, 1945).



soldiers excitedly raced across the Rhine River.<sup>88</sup> Echoing McPherson's report, Wynford Vaughan-Thomas notes the optimism at the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group bridgehead, stating soldiers could "see the end to it all now."<sup>89</sup> Even though soldiers were still dying, the BBC reporters accentuated the positive news for their listeners and spoke as if the war had basically concluded already, with victory inevitable.

In addition to those from CBS and BBC, there were also radio reports from NBC. During the Rhineland Campaign, they had two reporters sending updates back to the United States. Along with many of the newspaper reporters, radio man John MacVane was embedded with First Army at Remagen. He broadcasted the first radio report from the east side of the Rhine River on March 26—the day the 89<sup>th</sup> ID crossed the Rhine further south. MacVane describes his view from a mountaintop near Remagen by saying "today all is quiet."<sup>90</sup> He proceeds to claim, "only in scattered points... are the Germans putting up a fight," noting that "all along the front divisions are reporting resistance light or nonexistent."<sup>91</sup> MacVane's words are ironic considering the intensity of the battle raging in the Rhine Gorge at that very moment of his report.

Ed Hocker, the other NBC radio reporter, was located far to the south with Seventh Army, part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group which included French units. He had no knowledge of what was going on in the Rhine Gorge, speaking primarily of the vast

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<sup>88</sup> Stuart McPherson, "Stuart McPherson Reports from Germany," *BBC News* (28 March, 1945), audio file accessed via archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/1945RadioNews/1945-03-28-BBC-Stuart-McPherson-Reports-From-Germany.mp3>.

<sup>89</sup> Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, "Wynford Vaughan-Thomas Reports on the Spearhead," *BBC News* (31 March, 1945), audio file accessed via archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/1945RadioNews/1945-03-31-BBC-Wynford-Vaughan-Thomas-Reports-On-The-Spearhead.mp3>.

<sup>90</sup> John MacVane, "NBC World News Roundup" (26 March, 1945), audio file accessed via archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/1945RadioNews/1945-03-26-NBC-World-News-Roundup.mp3>.

<sup>91</sup> MacVane, "NBC World News Roundup" (26 March, 1945).



numbers of German soldiers in the south.<sup>92</sup> While the NBC reporters were closer to the Rhine Gorge than CBS and the BBC as the crossing occurred, they did not even mention the difficult struggle faced by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID.

The commentary provided by James Stevenson, the NBC radio anchor from New York, provides additional insight into why there were no reports from the Rhine Gorge. His prepared bulletin about that sector of the river states:

General Patton's American Third Army on the southern sector of the Western Front has struck with lightning speed and tremendous power in a drive which has already gained over 40 miles east of the Rhine. Although there is a news blackout of Patton's operations, a glance at the map shows the strategic possibilities of his position.<sup>93</sup>

On the day that the 89<sup>th</sup> ID from LTG Patton's Third Army struggled to cross the Rhine Gorge, radio reporters and the rest of the media were cut off from access to military operations in that area and were confined to reporting generalized bulletins prepared for them by the army. Stevenson goes on to describe "the comparative ease with which the Allied armies swept across the Rhine."<sup>94</sup> There is no hint in the NBC report on March 26 of setbacks in the Rhine Gorge, and reports from other networks fail to even mention Third Army, focusing instead on the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group in the north and First Army at Remagen.

While radio was more difficult to censor, the radio reporters were not spread out evenly across the entire front. They carefully chose their locations based on where they believed the biggest story could be found. They were also restricted by the military. The only broadcasters who were able to see the war up close were in northern Germany,

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<sup>92</sup> Ed Hocker, "NBC World News Roundup" (26 March, 1945), audio file accessed via archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/1945RadioNews/1945-03-26-NBC-World-News-Roundup.mp3>.

<sup>93</sup> James Stevenson, "NBC World News Roundup" (26 March, 1945), audio file accessed via archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/1945RadioNews/1945-03-26-NBC-World-News-Roundup.mp3>.

<sup>94</sup> Stevenson, "NBC World News Roundup" (26 March, 1945).

Remagen, and far to the south as the Allies were crossing the Rhine—nowhere near the Rhine Gorge and the crossing of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID. The one exception is the CBS group who missed the crossing itself but linked in with the 89<sup>th</sup> ID shortly thereafter.

Based on the preserved radio broadcasts, it is possible that radio reporters were completely fooled by the military, but knowing that the media typically cooperated with the military in promoting themes of American exceptionalism it is more likely that they sculpted reports to support an entirely positive portrayal of Allied efforts along the Rhine River. Since the military used a news blackout to cut off media access to the Rhine Gorge, the reporters could not have initially known about the struggles entailed in that crossing. However, they also did not seem to question the use of black outs. In the sectors they did cover, their reports were so optimistic they seem unrealistic in hindsight and, given the chance to retroactively report on the Rhine Gorge crossing, they remained quiet. Clearly the radio networks shared a level of culpability in shaping a World War II narrative that overly accentuated the success of the American military.

In addition to print media and radio broadcasts, Americans also received their news from short films known as newsreels. There were several private film companies producing newsreels including Universal, Warner Brothers, Paramount, MGM, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, and RKO-Pathé. The film companies remembered the strict oversight of the government during World War I and proactively decided to produce newsreels supporting the war effort rather than face similar heavy-handed control. Private Hollywood companies also created the War Activities Committee to provide oversight for their wartime efforts. Although the Office of War Information eventually took control of film management, the War Activities Committee worked to maintain autonomy for

private companies throughout the war.<sup>95</sup> The steps Hollywood took to regulate themselves could have been motivated by patriotic fervor, but they were also concerned with their profits. Consequently, the films they produced used sensationalism to boost entertainment value and turn a profit by filling theaters.<sup>96</sup>

One newsreel that exemplifies their typical sensationalism and overproduction is the film “Fight for Rome,” part of *The News Parade* series. Historically, the fight for Italy was one of the toughest and most costly campaigns of World War II for the United States. In the film, up tempo marching music accompanies stock footage of explosions and American troop movements. The commentary oozes with dramatic and sensational descriptions of American actions. Describing the initial landings, it claims “swarming ashore in force, they take the German high command completely unawares.” Rather than questioning American operations or crediting German defenses in areas that saw high American casualties, the film states, “there is no battle area anywhere where nature is more closely allied with the enemy than in Italy.” Yet “the battle-hardened Yanks” are always pressing on heroically toward victory. Describing the Germans, the film claims, “they blast and burn in a senseless orgy of destruction.”<sup>97</sup> While all American media tended toward sensationalism, the newsreels took it to a whole new level.

Whether motivated by money or patriotism, the newsreels and propaganda films of the 1940s absolutely sought to further dramatize the war by reinforcing narratives of good versus evil, placing the United States within a moral conflict absent of complexity

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<sup>95</sup> Birgit Streich, “Propaganda Business: The Roosevelt Administration and Hollywood,” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* vol. 16, no. 1 (1990): 51.

<sup>96</sup> Jessica Louise Szalay, “World War II Newsreels: The Legacy of Yellow Journalism,” Master’s Thesis (California State University, 2009), 66.

<sup>97</sup> Periscope Film, “Anzio Landings in Italy, Monte Cassino, Russian Offensive in Romania World War II Newsreel 70842,” YouTube Video, February 4, 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFAlfpDGvUo&list=PLqqqqZrD37h5aphoS\\_vQtha80Tqq94YTz&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFAlfpDGvUo&list=PLqqqqZrD37h5aphoS_vQtha80Tqq94YTz&index=5).

or grey areas. As historian Claudia Springer argues in her analysis of World War II films, they attempted to manipulate the emotions of their viewers.<sup>98</sup> Such manipulation is clear in films like “Fight for Rome,” where descriptions of exceptional American heroism are accompanied by dramatic displays of American firepower and motivational music even though the events being described actually resulted in thousands of American casualties sustained against significantly outnumbered German defenders. There was nothing to be gained by the film companies in describing the horrors of Italy as the Americans paid dearly for their advances. When compared to other newsreels, “Fight for Rome” is not unique in how it portrayed the war. Nearly every film of that era displays the same level of overly positive descriptions. In order to communicate their message, newsreels needed to feature events that supported their narrative, and mistakes made by the United States military would not have played well to their audiences.

Although there were several companies producing newsreels, they agreed early on to participate in a rotapool system in which all footage from the front lines was shared across all the film companies.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, all footage had to be reviewed by the Office of Censorship and the Office of War Information, meaning there was not a significant difference between films from separate companies.<sup>100</sup> Eventually, the Office of War Information took oversight one step further and began to produce their own newsreels, titled *United News*.<sup>101</sup> Hours of archived newsreels remain available online and in archives, but the nature of how they were produced means that a relatively small sample

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<sup>98</sup> Claudia Springer, “Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam,” *Cultural Critique* no. 3, American Representations of Vietnam (Spring 1986): 152.

<sup>99</sup> Szalay, “World War II Newsreels,” 40.

<sup>100</sup> Szalay, “World War II Newsreels,” 42.

<sup>101</sup> Szalay, “World War II Newsreels,” 43.

can provide an accurate picture of how all newsreels reported a particular event since they were using the exact same footage.

As the Allies fought their way across the Rhine River in March, the film crews shot many reels of footage. In early April, the Office of War Information released a *United News* short titled “Rhine Barrier Smashed.” The entire film focuses on Operation Varsity and Operation Plunder with the airborne and amphibious operations of the combined British and American 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group in northern Germany. The short newsreel contains stunning images of planes taking off, hundreds of paratroopers jumping into combat, and landing craft moving across the Rhine River. Featuring yet another dramatic musical score typical of the newsreels, the film begins by stating that Allied forces laid “like great engines poised on the left bank of the Rhine.” It uses epic language to describe Americans like “the onslaught reached heights of fury never equaled, even in Normandy.” Concluding with a comforting sentiment for the audience, the film states “the artisans of victory... are driving the giant blows, speeding the hour the whole world has awaited for over five bitter years.”<sup>102</sup> There is no nuance in the newsreel, nor is there any mention of other sections along the Rhine River.

*Universal Newsreel* provided a Hollywood perspective on the crossing of the Rhine with the shorts “Allies Drive Across Rhine to Victory” and “Air Army Invades Germany.” The first film begins with remarkable images from the battle for Cologne prior to the Rhine crossings. Although the footage features an uncharacteristically high level of destruction from the urban fighting, the violence portrayed is almost exclusively one-sided with images of German tanks and positions being destroyed by American

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<sup>102</sup> Nuclear Vault, “Rhine Barrier Smashed (1945),” YouTube Video, June 3, 2011, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=qSBC8h2BpC0>.

heavy weapons. The film also features shots of soldiers moving across the Ludendorff Bridge in Remagen, highlighting the significance of finding and capturing a bridge over the Rhine River before the Germans could destroy it. The narrator states, “South of Cologne at Remagen, our troops made one of the most spectacular coups of the war.” Ironically, the newsreel states that the capture of the bridge “saved a costly crossing by assault boats.”<sup>103</sup> Of course, it does not mention that the same sort of costly crossings avoided at Remagen were executed in other sectors including the most costly crossing in the Rhine Gorge.

The second video largely mirrors the *United News* film, covering the massive joint operations of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group. In another moment of irony, the newsreel features a shot of an Allied glider with the question, “is this trip necessary?” etched on the front of the aircraft. The narrator flippantly states, “This trip is *really* necessary for victory,” as if any sentiment of doubt or disillusionment was nothing more than a joke. While crossing the Rhine River was necessary to defeat Germany, it would have been difficult to continue disregarding that sentiment in the Rhine Gorge after so many crossings had already been accomplished elsewhere. The newsreel concludes with footage of GEN Eisenhower recognizing the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division for their efforts during the Battle of the Bulge. The ceremony featured bands, pristine uniforms, soldiers marching on parade, and even a Hollywood actress—a far cry from the death and suffering of war.<sup>104</sup> The film gives the impression that the struggle of World War II was already complete as Allied forces rolled unmolested through the heart of Germany.

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<sup>103</sup> Universal Newsreels, “Allies Drive Across Rhine to Victory 1945/3/26,” YouTube Video, October 11, 2006, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=h6w927SbH1s>.

<sup>104</sup> Nuclear Vault, “Air Army Invades Germany (1945),” YouTube Video, May 13, 2010, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=GLNU4YXC-8U>.

None of the newsreels even mention the Rhine Gorge. The news blackout referenced in radio reports certainly played a significant role in stifling reporting, but the tone of the films is not compatible with such difficult struggles anyway. Based on the coverage of Italy, even if the film crews had been granted access, they more than likely would have distorted the narrative to make it look like an unmitigated success for the American troops. More than any other medium, newsreels displayed blatant propaganda rather than careful investigative journalism. Their sensationalistic and overly dramatic storylines were primarily driven by the need to please audiences. Newspaper and radio reporters were also censored and co-opted by the military, but they did not rely as heavily on drawing an audience. Newspapers were readily available and trusted by those in the public who wanted to know what was happening in the war. Radio reached into homes across the country. Only newsreels needed to attract people to turn a profit—and to do so they used sensationalist techniques that Hollywood had perfected by that time.

Overall, the United States government was extremely effective at controlling the stories provided to the American public by the media. The Office of Censorship kept the media from publishing information that could hurt the war effort, and the Office of War Information proactively shaped the narrative for the people on the home front. There were also specific challenges for reporters trying to cover the advance of the Allies, including receiving access from the military for specific regions and moving radio or film equipment across a war zone. Finally, the media had a vested financial interest in promoting a pro-American narrative to the public. Motivational stories sold newspapers, attracted listeners, and filled seats in theaters.

Even though the media was tightly controlled during World War II, there was a variety of media outlets—so many that it is possible to find record of almost every significant engagement during World War II. Not much happened without coverage. Considering the reach of the American media, the near complete lack of coverage for the crossings of the Rhine Gorge by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID is significant. It means that it was not the type of story that would make it through censors, contribute to the war effort, or financially benefit the media outlets. Why not? It was not just due to the casualties. Other battles resulted in far more casualties. But those other battles had a significant impact on the outcome of the war and could be easily characterized as necessary sacrifices in the effort to defeat an evil enemy. The crossings in the Rhine Gorge, on the other hand, were harder to characterize as necessary. The Allies had already made it across the Rhine at multiple locations across the entire Western Front. The media did not want to bring attention to the fact that so many American lives were lost in a poorly planned operation that may not have been necessary.



## CHAPTER TWO

### OFFICIAL HISTORIES AND ARMY REPORTS

Where previously the U.S. military planner, searching for an important precedent or an accurate description of how a problem was handled in the past, was forced to search through masses of retired files and unofficial literature, so far as World War II is concerned he need turn only to the green volumes on the shelf of every higher headquarters, including the White House, and read what happened.

—LTC M.C. Helfers<sup>105</sup>

Although media coverage of the Rhine Gorge crossing was extremely limited, the units that participated kept detailed records of the events. The institutional records provide more details than any other sources and, therefore, form the skeleton of facts such as dates, times, units involved, battlefield effects, and casualties sustained. The amount of raw information available is extremely helpful, but rather than providing the entirety of the story, the army records still represent a relatively narrow perspective—that of United States Army leaders. None of the people who wrote the initial reports physically participated in the early contested crossings since they worked in headquarters sections behind the front lines with each higher echelon located further from the fighting. Written by people who were not even remotely present, the official histories rely primarily on the initial reports preserved by the army. Also, the histories and unit records refrained from portraying the crossing of the Rhine Gorge as a flawed operation because the authors had a vested interest in promoting the narrative of American exceptionalism. Consequently, the official military records and histories should be primarily used to construct the baseline of events and not be regarded as a definitive account absent of narrative shaping perspectives.

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<sup>105</sup> M.C. Helfers, “The United States Army's History of World War II,” *Military Affairs* vol. 19, no. 1 (Spring 1955): 36.

The army reports and official histories go hand in hand, but they represent two different types of sources. The army reports are primarily After Action Reports (AARs) which were written by every unit from the battalion level all the way to corps and army, covering all actions conducted during a given period. Written reports, or summaries of actions, have always been a hallmark of the United States Army, and during World War II they took the form of typed, succinct reports that would cover no more than a month with at least a short entry for each day. Typically completed shortly after the events they described, the unbound reports would be sent to higher headquarters as a comparatively thorough follow-up to any quick reports sent during the battle via radio or runner. An example of an AAR can be seen in Figure Five, illustrating how some days were summarized with a short sentence while others included more detail. Written by staff

22 Mar 45

Received Division order to concentrate present location, 1030. All elements regrouped in vicinity of Bessenbach. Sk and Inj - 3, PWs taken - 120.

23 Mar 45

Division order received regarding motor movement to vicinity of Bickerbach in anticipation of crossing of the Rhein River. WIA - 2, Sk and Inj - 4, PWs taken - 15.

24 Mar 45

Regiment began motor movement to new concentration area vicinity of Bickerbach, 0700. Movement completed 1300. Sk and Inj - 2.

25 Mar 45

Battalions moved to forward assembly area vicinity St Goar, commencing 1000. Regimental and Battalion Command groups spent the day making reconnaissance of river sites. Field Order No 4, issued to units, 1300, 25 March.

During the day it was revealed that we would cross the Rhein, vicinity of St Goar. This area had been occupied by a unit of the 417th Infantry of the 76th Division for the previous 3 days. Contact with the G-2 of the 76th Division presented information that the enemy was located in the high ground on the opposite bank of the Rhein from St Goar, strength unknown. The 76th Division had been successful in sending patrols across the river at this point, and gave us valuable information concerning possible crossing and terrain study of the opposite bank at this point. Units of the enemy opposite us, were all determined to be from anti-aircraft units, in most cases, fighting as Infantry. Sporadic small arms and artillery fire was falling in St Goar during the afternoon of this day. WIA - 1, Reinf - 100.

- 3 -

Figure Five: Selection from the 354<sup>th</sup> IN AAR for March, 1945

officers such as the adjutant or assistant operations officer and endorsed by the unit commander, they were exclusively a product of headquarters elements and represented the perspective of the commander. Their content was usually limited to the official orders produced by the staff, the incomplete reports that made it back to headquarters during the battle, and the assessments of subordinate commanders after the fight concluded. Not all the AARs survived the war, but the ones that did were preserved on microfilm by the National Archives, making them invaluable primary sources.

Official histories are books that were written under the authority of the United States military and published as an official historical record by the government. They rely heavily on AARs but represent a legitimate attempt to consolidate primary sources into cohesive narratives, or histories. While the military has long valued the preservation of history, the Center of Military History took the lead role in history production following the war—a role that endured through subsequent conflicts. Responsible for consolidating the stacks of records like AARs into narrative form, the Center of Military History has provided a valuable service by producing books that translate the raw historical data into history. Like other Army publications, each volume is given a number. For instance, *The Last Offensive*, which covers the Rhineland Campaign, is CMH Pub 7-9-1. In that sense, the books are best understood as a middle ground between army field manuals and history textbooks.

Unit histories are slightly different, because they were produced by individual units soon after the war before being published by the army. Therefore, unit histories were written by whoever the commander of that specific unit deemed fit. Based almost

entirely on unit records and featuring dozens of pictures, the unit histories are comparable to a well written school yearbook that cites sources.

The starting point for examining army records and official histories must be *United States Army in World War II*, which provides broad analysis of the Rhineland Campaign. Even though the volume relevant to this discussion was not completed until 1973, it was designed to be both the first and last official word, produced by the organization responsible for codifying the historical record. These green books stand at the forefront of the official army narrative, so analysis must begin with them. Narrowing the topic, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division: 1942-1945* provides an in-depth look at that particular division, to include the Rhine Gorge crossing. Produced separately from *United States Army in World War II*, the division history is distinct yet complementary and is cited by *United States Army in World War II*. Comparing these two official histories with the AARs from units involved in the Rhine Gorge crossing can help explain how different echelons and types of units interpreted the battle. Together, all these sources represent the perspective of the United States Army as an institution, and provide essential details concerning the Rhine Gorge.

Of all the historical works published by the military, the most comprehensive and thorough project is the series *United States Army in World War II*, or the green books as they later became known due to their distinctive binding. (Figure Six) The reader's guide to the series, itself an official volume of the green books, identifies 78 volumes in total, written between 1946 and 1992, covering every conceivable aspect of the army's involvement in World War II.<sup>106</sup> The Center of Military History, a group of historians

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<sup>106</sup> Richard D. Adamczyk and Morris J. MacGregor, *The United States Army in World War II: Reader's Guide* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1992), iii.

employed by the army, produced the series, bringing a professional and academic approach to the project. Robert Coakley, a deputy chief historian for the Center of

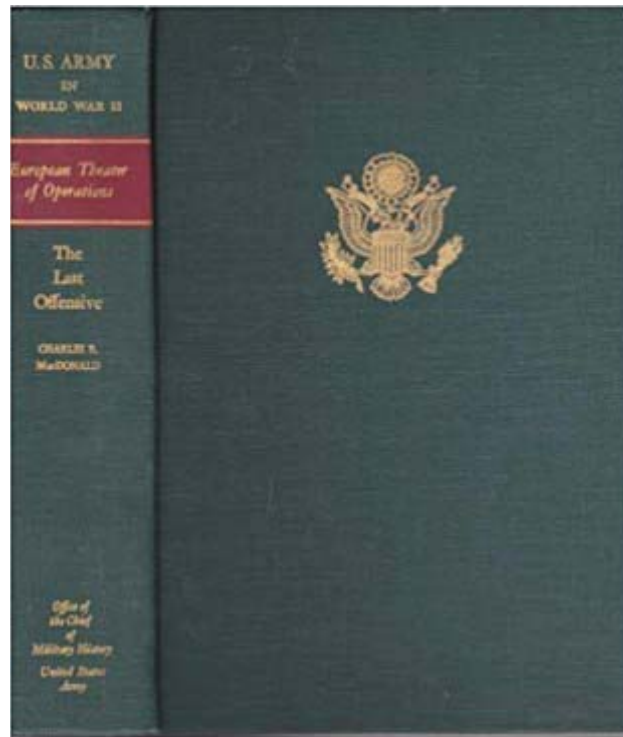


Figure Six: *The Last Offensive* with Original Binding

Military History, claims that the guiding principle for the green books was to create a history that was “complete and honest.”<sup>107</sup> To facilitate that honesty, in 1947 President Eisenhower issued a directive that the Center of Military History be granted full access to documents from the war, ironically instructing them to create a history that would provide legitimate lessons for future generations rather than only portraying the United States favorably.<sup>108</sup> Despite this intention, the publications still present an excessively favorable perspective of the United States.

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<sup>107</sup> Robert F. Coakley, “Reflections on Writing the Green Books,” *Army History* no. 27 (Summer 1993): 37.

<sup>108</sup> Coakley, “Reflections on Writing the Green Books,” 38.

There are two important facets of the green books that significantly impact how they should be read. First, very few of the contributing authors had extensive training in history writing. Most of them were retired veterans who transitioned to the Center of Military History. As Coakley himself states, “few of us had any substantial historical publications, military or otherwise, to our credit. So for the most part we had to learn by doing.”<sup>109</sup> Lack of pedigree does preclude historical accuracy, but the army could have done a better job recruiting credited historians from outside their organization if their intent was creating an unbiased history. Second, the thoroughness of the series monopolizes the tactical narrative and discourages historians from providing new analysis of the battles and the decisions military leaders made. Although not necessarily nefarious, this monopolization is by design. Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) M.C. Helfers, an army historian writing in 1955, notes that the green books are intended to be the only source that leaders need to consult to understand World War II. Additionally, the green books discourage further analysis of tactics because historians are reticent to put hours of study into a subject that had already been covered in such detail.<sup>110</sup> No historical work is beyond scrutiny, and the thoroughness of the green books should not shield them from reasonable criticism. For that reason, the Center of Military History’s attempt to meticulously craft an authoritative narrative does some harm in addition to the obvious benefits of a comprehensive history.

The green book volume covering the crossing of the Rhine River is titled *The Last Offensive*. Written by Charles MacDonald and published in 1973, it is admirably even-handed and fair. MacDonald was a decorated World War II employed by the Center of

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<sup>109</sup> Coakley, “Reflections on Writing the Green Books,” 38.

<sup>110</sup> Spector, “Public History and Research in Military History,” 92.

Military History following the war. The relatively late publication of *The Last Offensive* is due entirely to workload for the Center of Military history. Although they employed dozens of authors, to complete the 78 volumes for World War II, most authors had to write multiple volumes. MacDonald began his contributions to the green books with *Three Battles: Arnaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt* in 1952. He followed that book with *The Siegfried Line Campaign* in 1962, and finally *The Last Offensive* in 1973. Since the writing of each green book involved sifting through thousands of preserved unit reports, it is not surprising that MacDonald's second and third volumes each took about a decade to complete. While the world changed drastically between 1945 and 1973, the writing process remained strikingly similar for the green book historians. They carefully read all the relevant reports preserved in the National Archives, reviewed any unit histories already published, and consulted the writings of key American leaders. Secondary sources are referenced occasionally, but not consistently, meaning that the impact of delayed publication is minimal.

Like many of his peers, MacDonald was a historian by trade, not training. Although he was proficient with historical investigation and excelled in the use of primary sources, he was less familiar with questions of historiography, historical context, and source criticism. To his credit, he does not hesitate to point out challenges the army faced, and even provides critiques; however, he stops short of any harsh criticism. In the very first sentence, MacDonald asserts that the United States Army in 1945 was the most powerful force in history to that point—a theme that he returns to repeatedly throughout the text as his thesis.<sup>111</sup> While that may very well be true, his introductory words

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<sup>111</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, ix.



foreshadow an incredibly positive portrayal of the army, even when discussing specific missteps or potential failures. The reason for his tone is fundamentally a need to support his overall thesis, but it also serves to protect the army's reputation and promote American exceptionalism. After all, he was employed by the army. MacDonald's work attempts to temper criticism and contextualize it in a way that prevents a contradiction of his thesis.

Strategic decisions led up to the Rhine Gorge crossing. Before D-Day, GEN Eisenhower and the Allied staff planned the entire invasion of Europe, to include the final occupation of Germany. The original plans called for two thrusts into Germany from Belgium and France, one in the north to capture the Ruhr industrial area and one in the south to capture the Saar industrial area, as is depicted in Figure Seven.<sup>112</sup> Running the

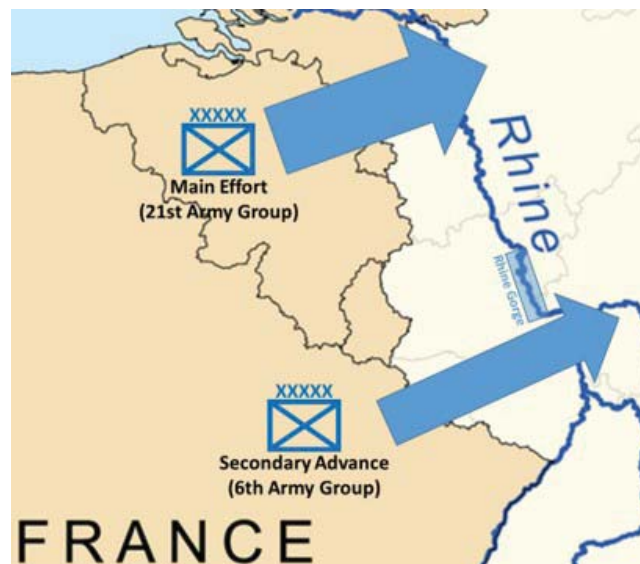


Figure Seven: Planned Rhine River Crossings

length of what had historically been the western border of Germany, the Rhine River served as the final barrier to be crossed. While there were many different options

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<sup>112</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 2.



considered, as the crossing of the Rhine River drew closer, GEN Eisenhower decided to keep the original plan and cross in those same two regions. The southern crossing was supposed to occur upstream of the Rhine Gorge in order to facilitate the capture of Frankfurt and avoid the difficult terrain to the north.<sup>113</sup>

There were tactical reasons for prioritizing those two regions for the crossing of the Rhine River, but there were also political considerations. The northern portion of the Allied front consisted of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group, which was under British command and included Canadian forces. The 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group was in the south and was commanded by GEN Devers, an American, but included a French Army as well. The 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group formed the center of the Allied front and consisted entirely of American forces—they were conspicuously not featured in the plans for crossing the Rhine River. GEN Eisenhower, as the Allied commander, was sensitive to the requests of the British and French who used political channels to pressure him into giving them a greater role in the final days of the war.<sup>114</sup>

Even though the geographical aspects of the plan remained unchanged as preparations began for the Rhine River crossings, the unexpected capture of the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen by elements of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group significantly changed the Allied strategy. GEN Eisenhower believed every single bridge across the Rhine River would be destroyed by the Germans, meaning that boats would have to be used to assault across the river and secure the far side so that pontoon bridges could be constructed to enable large-scale crossings with heavy vehicles. Securing a bridge intact meant that forces could be pushed quickly across the river without conducting a

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<sup>113</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 18.

dangerous amphibious operation requiring careful planning and coordination of assets. The capture of the bridge had to be exploited regardless of the original plan, and every Allied leader knew it. Adjusting the strategic plan due to the events in Remagen exemplifies the type of critical flexibility that wins wars, but as the plan flexed further the potential for critical mistakes increased as subordinate commanders added their own distinct amendments.

MacDonald's description of Remagen's impact illustrates his willingness to critique some American leaders, even if he refuses to describe subsequent operations as flawed. Specifically, MacDonald highlights the hubris of LTG Patton who sought to dramatically rush across the Rhine and steal back the headlines from LTG Hodges' First Army and the capture of Remagen.<sup>115</sup> Even as the Remagen bridgehead was being exploited, GEN Montgomery continued to plan the crossing of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group north of Remagen at Wesel in order to create multiple avenues of approach for the Allies into Germany. Although GEN Montgomery was a methodical planner, the unanticipated events at Remagen required him to execute his preparations quickly in order to support the forces already across the river and prevent the Germans from massing at Remagen and driving the Americans back across the river.

LTG Patton knew that GEN Montgomery would soon cross the Rhine, and now that portions of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group had already deviated from the original plan by crossing at Remagen, he was determined to beat his old rival from the African Theater by quickly leading his forces across.<sup>116</sup> The position of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group in the center of the Allied line meant that entirely new sections of the Rhine River could be considered

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<sup>115</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 266.

<sup>116</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 267.

for crossing. (Figure Eight) With GEN Montgomery planning to begin his assault on the evening of March 23, the 5<sup>th</sup> ID from LTG Patton's Third Army crossed the Rhine River

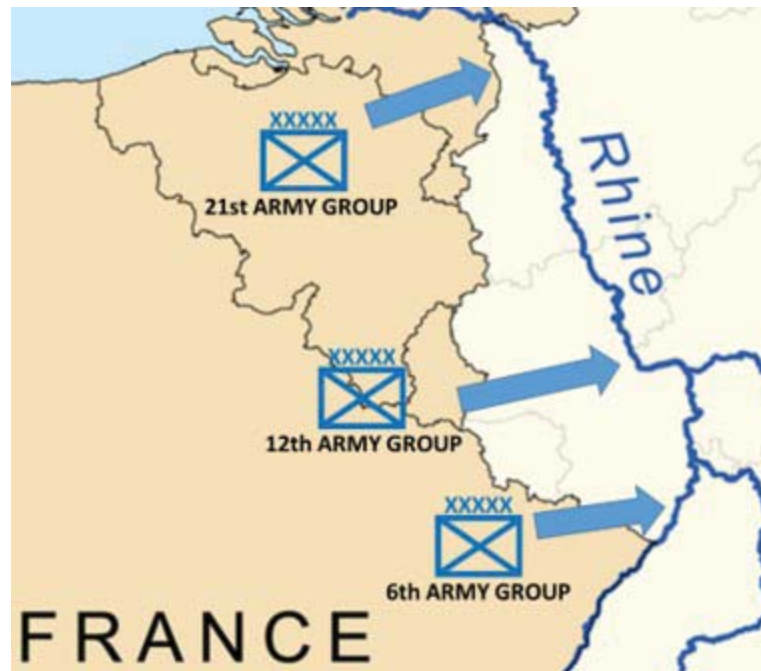


Figure Eight: Allied Advance to Rhine River

in the early morning hours of that same day at Oppenheim, beating the British across. The 5<sup>th</sup> ID soldiers crossed in paddled wooden boats without preparatory fires or any significant artillery, air, or heavy weapons support.

The theory behind LTG Patton's haste was that the Third Army could catch the enemy by surprise in an area they did not expect an attack, but the reality was that LTG Patton had pushed his forces faster than the enablers could support, so there were no other options for the crossing.<sup>117</sup> His plan rested entirely on the enemy not having any significant defensive positions, and was motivated by the hubris of LTG Patton and his desire to beat GEN Montgomery. Despite his motivation, LTG Patton's gamble paid off and the operation was spectacularly successful as the Germans were unable to mount a

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<sup>117</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 270.

serious defense at that location. The capture of a bridge at Remagen forced the Allies to cross the Rhine River more quickly than they had originally planned, and for leaders like LTG Patton who were not originally supposed to conduct crossings it provided an opportunity to seize a more important role.

Although the Third Army beat the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group across the Rhine, LTG Patton ordered LTG Middleton's VIII Corps to conduct additional crossings in the Rhine Gorge region. To his credit, MacDonald spends three paragraphs of his account discussing the difficulty of the terrain in the Rhine Gorge, noting why a crossing there was ill-advised. He concludes by saying, "A more unlikely spot for an assault crossing no one could have chosen."<sup>118</sup> Reading carefully and using insight from other sources, one can infer that choosing the treacherous terrain of the Rhine Gorge as a crossing site was a mistake, but MacDonald does not explicitly identify it as such. Regardless, on the morning of March 25, the 87<sup>th</sup> ID assaulted across the Rhine Gorge at Boppard. The first wave received some effective fire from the Germans, but their defense dissolved quickly, and the following waves crossed with little opposition. Despite the light resistance, the 87<sup>th</sup> ID still had difficulty crossing due to the fast current.<sup>119</sup>

The next day, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID conducted their crossings at St Goarshausen, Wellmich, and Oberwesel. Wellmich was only a few miles north of St Goarshausen with Oberwesel lying on the southern edge of the division boundary. Figure Nine shows how close the 89<sup>th</sup> ID sector was to the already successful crossings at Remagen, Oppenheim, and Boppard. MacDonald notes that the defense was much more effective against the 89<sup>th</sup> ID

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<sup>118</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 274.

<sup>119</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 275.

at Wellmich and St Goarshausen, where the enemy illuminated the River using a gasoline-soaked barge and utilized grazing fire from 20mm anti-aircraft guns to inflict

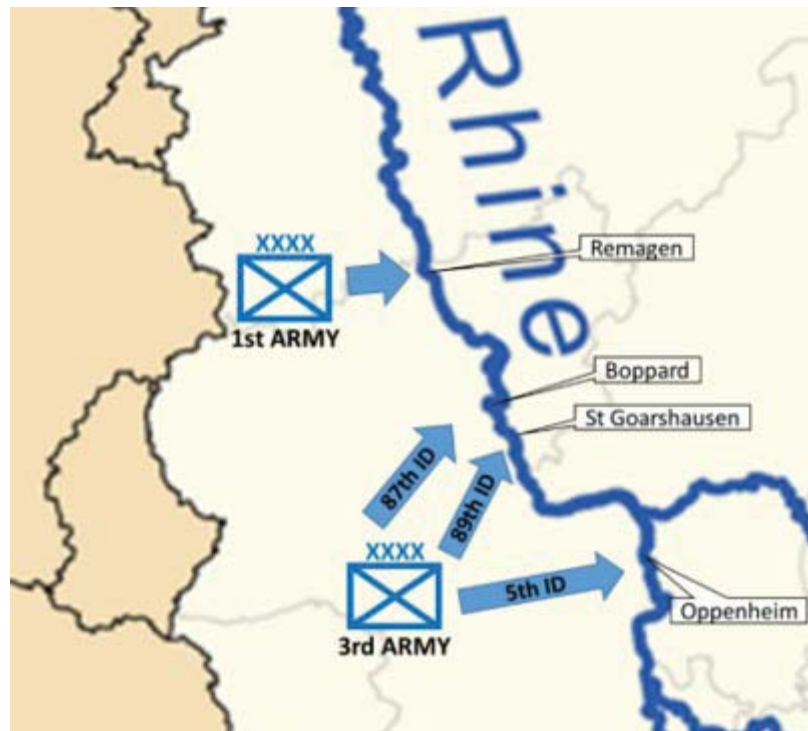


Figure Nine: 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group Bridgeheads

over 200 casualties.<sup>120</sup> He asserts that the German defense was not completely broken until the afternoon of March 26 when a squadron of P-51 Mustang fighter planes destroyed German gun positions in the vicinity of Lorelei Rock.<sup>121</sup> Although MacDonald does not say so, it was the late use of combined arms enablers during the day that allowed the Americans to eventually succeed rather than the use of surprise tactics during the night.

The scope of MacDonald's work, covering the entire Allied front, does not allow him to go into detail about the crossing of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID, but it does provide valuable

<sup>120</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 276.

<sup>121</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 277.

context for the battle and allow for further critiques. In discussing the Rhine Gorge, MacDonald indicates that the hubris of LTG Patton led to an inadvisable crossing, but he stops short of blaming anyone or labeling the operation a mistake. In MacDonald's defense, he is attempting to describe a campaign that spanned hundreds of miles and included the entire Allied front with hundreds of thousands of combatants. He outlines large-scale operations rather than closely analyzing any single engagement. To address such a massive subject, MacDonald primarily cites reports and documents preserved by the army. With thousands of pages preserved, it would be impossible to track down first-hand accounts from junior soldiers for every engagement that occurred during the Rhineland Campaign. However, without those first-hand accounts, he is left with only the perspective of army leaders.

Even though *The Last Offensive* provides a more objective view of the United States Army than the media provided in 1945, it is still part of an official project by the military. MacDonald was employed by the army, and his argument represents the army well. Since his thesis is that the United States Army was virtually unstoppable, dwelling on mistakes would not further his argument even if he were willing to acknowledge them occasionally. Therefore, he stops short of characterizing the entire Rhine Gorge crossing as flawed.

While *The Last Offensive* provides the historical context for the crossing of the Rhine Gorge, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division: 1942-1945* provides more detailed information about how the operation was planned and executed, with almost no consideration of operational context.<sup>122</sup> Published in 1947 by the division historical board, it is an official

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<sup>122</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 96.

army publication, even if it is not part of the green book project or published by the Center of Military History. It was commissioned by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID, overseen by staffers within the unit, and produced primarily for the soldiers and family members who wanted to read about heroic service rather than tactical blunders. Featuring small print on 8.5 inch by 11 inch sheets and reaching 270 pages, it is a significant volume, even though dozens of pictures reduce the length of the narrative. Although informative with citations noting which reports were consulted, none of the authors were historians and the project should not be treated as a peer-reviewed, academic history book.<sup>123</sup> However, the focus on the 89<sup>th</sup> ID makes it invaluable for analysis of the Rhine Gorge crossing. The division history even contains a copy of the order issued by division headquarters on March 25, 1945.

Careful analysis of the division order reveals that the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was clearly attempting to surprise the Germans, even though the Germans had been observing them and would have been expecting an attack. Additionally, the division organized its forces for a combined arms assault with multiple enablers meaning that any failure to incorporate enablers must have occurred at echelons below the division level. The order states that VIII Corps assigned the 89<sup>th</sup> ID with the section of the Rhine between Kestert and Kaub. In turn, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID divided their section at Urbar, assigning 354<sup>th</sup> IN with the northern section and 353<sup>rd</sup> IN with the southern section. The 353<sup>rd</sup> IN is listed first in the

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<sup>123</sup> The title page lists a total of seven individual authors referred to collectively as the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Historical Board. The authors were MAJ Maynard L. Diamond, LT Willard E. Simms, CPL Edward B. Baldinger, CPL Meyer Siegelbaum, TEC4 Louis H. Cook, TEC4 Ernest W. Fair, and TEC4 Hal G. Evarts, Jr. As the ranking member, MAJ Diamond would have likely functioned as a senior editor and project manager. As the only other commissioned officer, LT Simms could have been the only writer with a college degree. While a college education is certainly not a prerequisite for writing good history, the historical board lacked any academic training in source criticism or formal history writing. Their purpose was less historical specificity and more memorialization and promotion of the unit.

order, which would normally mean their mission was the priority; however, the allocation of assets indicates that 354<sup>th</sup> IN was the decisive operation. To support their crossing, the 354<sup>th</sup> IN had a tank destroyer company and a medical company attached. In direct support, they had a company of engineers with additional engineers from a second element as well as two 155mm and one 105mm field artillery battalions. Also, all artillery assigned to the division had a “be prepared to” support mission for 354<sup>th</sup> IN. Finally, 30 paddled boats and 10 motorized boats were assigned for St Goarshausen while 55 paddled boats and 10 motorized boats were assigned for Wellmich.<sup>124</sup> The ordered start time of 0200 and the reliance on paddled boats indicates that the division intended to repeat the strategy of surprise used at Oppenheim and Boppard. However, it would be difficult to achieve surprise a second time using the same strategy.

As the 89<sup>th</sup> ID prepared to cross the Rhine Gorge, they passed through the 76<sup>th</sup> ID who had been occupying the west side of the river. The 76<sup>th</sup> ID had been sporadically engaging targets across the river and gathering aerial photos in preparation for offensive maneuvers, which would have made surprising the enemy with a crossing even more difficult.<sup>125</sup> Unlike the Oppenheim crossing where the availability of enablers was limited, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID had 304 artillery pieces as well as aerial cover from the XIX Tactical Air Command supporting their operation.<sup>126</sup> In another move that prematurely telegraphed the American’s intention to cross the Rhine Gorge to the Germans, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID conducted an artillery barrage the evening prior to the assault. Therefore, it is not surprising that as the first wave began to cross at St Goarshausen and Wellmich, the

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<sup>124</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 201-203.

<sup>125</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 96.

<sup>126</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 97.



Germans were prepared for their attack. The defenders initiated with heavy small arms fire, machine guns, and 20mm ant-aircraft guns; they even illuminated the entire engagement area by shooting a barge soaked in gasoline, providing clear fields of fire on the American soldiers trying desperately to paddle their way across the stiff current.<sup>127</sup> Demonstrated by the effective defense mounted as the first waves of soldiers struggled across the river, it was clearly misguided to assume that the enemy could be surprised in the Rhine Gorge. Without a smoke screen or covering fire from supporting elements, they were completely exposed to the German weapons. Even though the division organized for a combined arms assault, the vital enablers were not used effectively to support the crossing until much later during the daytime.

The detailed descriptions in the division history of the initial crossing are couched in terms of heroism and achievement, but a close reading reveals the sort of chaos indicative of a flawed operation. At St Goarshausen, E Co and F Co were tasked with establishing a foothold on the other side of the Rhine Gorge, taking the high ground north of town as well as the town itself. The first wave consisted of about 25% of F Co and nearly all of E Co. Those boats were hit the hardest, with three of the four boats from one platoon being destroyed in a matter of minutes. Only 11 men from another platoon made it to the other side.<sup>128</sup> The boat containing the headquarters section from E Co was destroyed as they crossed, killing both the Company Commander and the Company First Sergeant.<sup>129</sup> Losing two of the top three leaders for the company would have been crippling. Typically, key leaders are separated on the battlefield to prevent such a loss,

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<sup>127</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 98.

<sup>128</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 98.

<sup>129</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 100.

but either they failed to appropriately plan, or they were rushed into the boats causing the mistake.

The remnants of E Co and F Co that crossed consolidated on the far side and did what they could to destroy enemy defensive positions, but they had trouble communicating with their battalion support elements and had limited combat power. The communication problems represent a failure in planning since the incorporation of supporting fire during an operation requires redundancy in the communication plan so that assaulting units are never entirely cut off from their enablers. The rest of E Co and F Co crossed after sunrise at about 0800, and by 1000 the first element of G Co began to cross.<sup>130</sup> The plan had called for a surprise attack aided by the cover of darkness, but because surprise was not the correct tactic for the Rhine Gorge crossing the reserve elements were not able to reinforce the attack until the sun rose, which was a costly delay.



Figure Ten: 89<sup>th</sup> ID Area of Operations<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 101.

<sup>131</sup> Base Map from Google Maps, labels added using Microsoft PowerPoint.

A Co had similar experiences at Wellmich as they initiated their crossing simultaneously with the St Goarshausen attack. Being the first element to cross, A Co sustained heavy casualties, and C Co halted their movement after seeing the struggles A Co experienced. The portions of A Co that made it across the river consolidated on the far side, deciding to wait for reinforcements before continuing their attack. Like the St Goarshausen assault, the cover of darkness did little to achieve surprise but forced the unit to delay reinforcement. At dawn, the remainder of A Co and C Co crossed, aided by two American tank destroyers providing covering fire. These combined arms enablers proved decisive once they were finally employed. B Co, the reserve element, crossed at 1430 during the daytime and proceeded into Wellmich, clearing the town.<sup>132</sup>

In addition to the specific details provided by *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, several important observations can be inferred about the tactical decisions of American leaders using the division history, even if they are not specifically highlighted. First, the enemy was fully prepared for and anticipating another Allied crossing in the Rhine Gorge—even if surprise would ordinarily have been an effective tactic, it was not appropriate for that specific situation. Second, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was unable to effectively mask their movement across the Rhine Gorge with a smoke screen. The division history notes that the winds were blowing to the west, making it impossible to employ the division smoke generators.<sup>133</sup> While that analysis is correct, it fails to account for the delivery of smoke rounds with indirect fire systems. During World War II, the army possessed the ability to create a smoke screen using mortars. With proper planning and preparation, smoke could have been provided by firing it on the east side of the Rhine Gorge. Third, a significant

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<sup>132</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 103.

<sup>133</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 107.

amount of combat power, including tanks and tank destroyers, were held in reserve as part of Task Force Johnson which was intended to quickly exploit the bridgehead once it was established.<sup>134</sup> The idea of a mounted reserve was common, but it could have been employed earlier to support the crossings, especially as the initial waves ran into significant resistance. Finally, the division historical board corroborates the claim in *The Last Offensive* that the aerial support from P-51 Mustangs during the afternoon was decisive in breaking the German defense of the Rhine Gorge.<sup>135</sup> Smoke, armored support, and aerial support were all critical combined arms enablers that were decisive in the eventual success of the crossing and should have been used from the outset, but the division history fails to identify their delayed usage as a mistake.

Overall, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* focuses on the heroic actions of soldiers in the face of difficult circumstances rather than questioning the decisions of leaders. In fact, the division history never critiques leaders at all. Although the focus on heroism and effective leadership is likely intentional considering the audience, it is also inevitable considering the sources consulted. At the end of the chapter covering the Rhine Gorge, the list of references consists entirely of orders and reports generated by headquarters sections, supplemented only by letters from the 89<sup>th</sup> ID commander.<sup>136</sup> Although not specifically mentioned, the historical board would have also had access to the citations for valorous awards issued to specific soldiers who demonstrated heroism. However, the historical board apparently made no attempt to conduct interviews with any of the soldiers who witnessed the events first-hand. By only consulting with leaders, the

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<sup>134</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 201.

<sup>135</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 108.

<sup>136</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 116.

division history naturally summarizes their combat by grandiosely stating they “had made two historic river crossings and driven deep into the soil of the Third Reich to establish themselves as aggressive combat veterans.”<sup>137</sup> The soldiers who saw their friends cut down like targets at a firing range in the middle of the river would have given the board a more nuanced perspective. Still, the level of detail provided helps piece together the events of March 26, 1945. *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* provides less tactical analysis than *The Last Offensive*, but what it lacks in analysis it makes up for in detail.

Although the official histories are valuable, they are not the only sources available concerning the Rhine Gorge crossing. There are multiple After Action Reports (AARs) written by the units involved that have been preserved. They were written immediately following the events, so they present an unfiltered view of what each unit headquarters experienced. One surviving AAR belonged to the 354<sup>th</sup> IN, the regiment that crossed at St Goarshausen and Wellmich. The AAR relevant to this discussion covers the actions of the regiment from March 12 to March 31, written by CPT Corwin Spencer, the regimental adjutant. Adjutants were clerical workers, and as the regimental adjutant CPT Spencer served as a personal assistant for the regimental commander, COL Robert Aloe. The AAR is intended to be the commander’s official report of events occurring during the referenced time period and is signed by COL Aloe himself.

The 354<sup>th</sup> IN AAR reveals that the regiment had more information about the enemy they would be facing than the official histories indicate. For instance, the regimental and battalion command groups had the opportunity to do extensive reconnaissance from the west side of the river while planning their operation. They also

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<sup>137</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 116.

conducted a thorough intelligence handover with the 76<sup>th</sup> ID, who identified multiple enemy fighting positions on the high ground surrounding St Goarshausen. In fact, the AAR indicates that the 76<sup>th</sup> ID had conducted several patrols across the river over the previous three nights, developing a detailed understanding of the enemy defenses, which featured the powerful 20mm anti-aircraft guns. Also, 354<sup>th</sup> IN received sporadic small arms and artillery fire from St Goarshausen throughout March 25 as they were planning their assault, further proving that the enemy was prepared to defend that section of the Rhine.<sup>138</sup>

Although the division history and *The Last Offensive* are generally consistent with the AAR, their failure to recognize this small matter of intelligence is significant. It was not just a matter of the Germans knowing that the Americans were going to cross the Rhine Gorge—354<sup>th</sup> IN *knew* that the Germans were actively preparing for an assault by US forces. Considering that information, continuing to plan for a surprise attack seems incredibly reckless. Additionally, detailed knowledge of enemy defensive positions could have resulted in complete neutralization of them during the initial attack with the proper use of indirect and direct fire enablers. However, the AAR does not accentuate that fact, and the official histories failed to acknowledge it. COL Aloe certainly does not admit planning a flawed operation.

The 354<sup>th</sup> IN AAR also provides some details about the Rhine Gorge crossing that are not mentioned elsewhere. First, it states that a captured German soldier later claimed they allowed the first wave of soldiers crossing at Wellmich to make it most of the way

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<sup>138</sup> Corwin C. Spencer, Adjutant, 354<sup>th</sup> IN, to Commanding General, 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, APO 89, U.S. Army, April 16, 1945; 389-INF(354)-0.3, (12685), A/A Rpt-354<sup>th</sup> INF REGT, Mar 1945; WWII Operations Reports, 1940-48, 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division; RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1917 – NA; National Archives Building, College Park, MD.

across before engaging them in order to divide the unit and maximize the effect of direct fires. Such actions demonstrate an alert defense that could not be easily surprised. The AAR also confirms that tank destroyers and anti-tank 57mm guns were used effectively at Wellmich once the sun rose, further demonstrating the importance of combined arms enablers. Finally, the medical portion of the AAR lists the casualty numbers; 35 bodies were recovered, and 112 wounded soldiers evacuated by 354<sup>th</sup> IN. Additionally, 65 soldiers were presumed dead, but their bodies had not been recovered from the river.<sup>139</sup> The numbers provide an idea of how many casualties were sustained, but they do not tell the whole story. The bodies and wounded soldiers evacuated were limited to what the 354<sup>th</sup> IN processed, and the numbers for presumed dead only include 354<sup>th</sup> IN. There were other enablers such as the engineers whose numbers are not included.

The high casualty rate, the crucial role of covering fire from supporting elements, and the surprisingly effective German defenses all paint a more complex picture of the Rhine Gorge battle than what is found in the official histories. Unfortunately, they are all subtle points that are not belabored within the AAR. Since AARs are basic reports the regiment was required to produce they do not contain in depth historical analysis. CPT Spencer was not a historian or military strategist; he was a capable staff officer, but someone who was far-removed from the front lines and produced a written record intended to reflect the perspective of his commander. Interviewing the soldiers who participated was beyond the scope of his duties.

The battalion level records for the crossing of the Rhine Gorge were not preserved, but some of the company level records are still available. Specifically, the

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<sup>139</sup> Corwin C. Spencer, Adjutant, 354<sup>th</sup> IN, to Commanding General, 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, APO 89, U.S. Army, April 16, 1945.

morning reports for F Co provide some limited insight into the small unit perspective. Morning reports only existed at the company level and were primarily used to track personnel. They were written on pre-printed forms approximately 4 inches wide and 10 inches tall, with spaces for marking the number of officers and enlisted personnel present along with their duty statuses. At the bottom of each form there was space for a short summary of the day's events.

There are two separate notes by F Co concerning the Rhine Gorge crossing. The first note, from March 25, states that the company moved to St Goar in preparation for the assault and conducted reconnaissance and planning.<sup>140</sup> The fact that companies were afforded an opportunity to conduct their own reconnaissance is significant because it means that there was adequate time to conduct a deliberate crossing of the river rather than a hasty attack relying on the element of surprise. The second note, from March 26, states that a single platoon from F Co landed on the far side at 0300 with the rest of the company landing at 0915, which corroborates the accounts in the division history and the regimental AAR.<sup>141</sup> Since the space available for summaries was limited, not much can be gleaned from those statements, but the importance of daylight is clear.

In addition to the surviving records from the 89<sup>th</sup> ID, there are a handful of records still available from other units that were tasked with supporting the 89<sup>th</sup> ID. For instance, both the 602<sup>nd</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion (TD) and the 748<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion (TK) produced AARs that were preserved. Like the 354<sup>th</sup> IN AARs, they are written by

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<sup>140</sup> 25 Mar 1945 Morning Report, F Company, 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment; *Office of the Adjutant General Morning Reports, Mar 1945* (National Archives Microfilm Publication 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, roll 12887); National Archives Building, St Louis, MO.

<sup>141</sup> 26 Mar 1945 Morning Report, F Company, 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment; *Office of the Adjutant General Morning Reports, Mar 1945* (National Archives Microfilm Publication 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, roll 12887); National Archives Building, St Louis, MO.



staff officers and represent the commander's perspective. The 602<sup>nd</sup> TD was a formation unique to that time period. Tank destroyers looked much like other American tanks. They were equipped with powerful weapon systems and powered by tracks rather than wheels, but they did not have the thick armor of a tank. The idea was that they would be fast enough to avoid being engaged by enemy tanks. The AAR notes that even though they were attached to the 89<sup>th</sup> ID for the crossing, most of their combat power was held in reserve with Task Force Johnson. Rather than supporting the crossing itself, the 602<sup>nd</sup> TD was pushed north to Boppard, crossing in the 87<sup>th</sup> ID area of operations before cutting south and linking up with the 89<sup>th</sup> ID on the other side.<sup>142</sup>

The 748<sup>th</sup> TK consisted of actual tanks, possessing the armor needed to survive hits from large weapons. Although they were not attached to Task Force Johnson, most of the 748<sup>th</sup> TK crossed at Boppard as well, following behind Task Force Johnson. The AAR indicates that they were pushed north due to the difficult terrain in vicinity of St Goar which might have prevented them from driving down to the treadway bridge that was supposed to be constructed there. The AAR does not mention any discussion of employing the tanks to cover the initial movement of soldiers across the river.<sup>143</sup>

The 602<sup>nd</sup> TD and 748<sup>th</sup> TK AARs demonstrate that the initial lack of covering fire from available tanks and tank destroyers was more than simply an oversight. The 89<sup>th</sup> ID intentionally withheld them from the fight, relying on the element of surprise rather than massing their combat power to support what they should have known would be a contested river crossing.

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<sup>142</sup> Clyde Berry, "Transmittal of Historical Records for Period 1 March 1945 to 31 March 1945" (Headquarters, 602<sup>nd</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion, 3 April 1945), 20.

<sup>143</sup> Robert R. Class, "After Action Report" (Headquarters, 748<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, 8 April 1945), 12.

Another surviving AAR was produced by the commander of United States Naval Forces in France for the commander-in-chief of the Navy. After D-Day, many of the landing craft used for the invasion were transported over land for use in the Rhine River crossings. The naval commander notes that his forces struggled to keep up with the pace of LTG Patton's Third Army, and barely made it to Oppenheim in time to support the first crossings of the Rhine River.<sup>144</sup> The boats were intended to be used to support the crossings at St Goarshausen, but when 354<sup>th</sup> IN began to struggle against the strong enemy positions, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID pushed the boats down to Oberwesel instead, rather than risking the loss of the naval assets.<sup>145</sup> It is interesting to note that powered landing craft were available to assist in the crossing, but were diverted to the location where resistance was lightest. Incorporating all available assets, a deliberate crossing of the Rhine Gorge could have used powered naval craft to quickly shuttle soldiers across the river, covering their movement using hundreds of artillery pieces and dozens of tanks, and masking their movement using smoke.

Considering the struggles faced by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID, it would stand to reason that Third Army would note what went wrong in order to prevent the same mistakes from being made in the future. However, the Third Army AAR only dedicates a total of four sentences to the crossing of the Rhine Gorge, and conflates the crossings of the 87<sup>th</sup> ID and the 89<sup>th</sup> ID. Unlike regimental and division AARs, Army AARs like the one produced by Third Army were a deliberate operation with significant resourcing. The Third Army AARs fill 10 volumes which were bound into books and even illustrated.

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<sup>144</sup> Charles Norris Houghton, "Report on Rhine River Crossings by U.S. Navy" (United States Naval Forces, France, 1945), 7.

<sup>145</sup> Houghton, "Report on Rhine River Crossings by U.S. Navy," 10.

The size and deliberate nature of these specific AARs make a lack of information even more notable.

The only analysis provided for the Rhine Gorge crossing states, “Generally, stiffer resistance was encountered in the VIII Corps bridgehead than had been met in the bridgehead of XII Corps.”<sup>146</sup> There are three possible reasons for Third Army recording such little detail. First, not all actions conducted at the division level could be discussed in depth. With multiple corps and several divisions making up Third Army, brevity was necessary, and only the actions that had a direct impact on the decisions made at the army level could be discussed at length. Second, it is possible that the 89<sup>th</sup> ID and VIII Corps did not provide a lot of details to Third Army headquarters. If the division and corps commanders believed that serious mistakes were made on their part, it would have been natural to forego dwelling on their mistakes in the reports to higher. Third, it is possible that Third Army understood that their rush to make it across the Rhine River had resulted in a poorly executed operation. For that reason, they may have intentionally downplayed the crossings of the Rhine Gorge. While all three reasons likely factored into the limited comments contributed by Third Army, the intensity of the fight and the sheer number of assets dedicated to the operation mean that the Rhine Gorge could not have gone entirely unnoticed by Third Army headquarters. Therefore, they must have purposely downplayed the events.

The official histories and army records provide much information about the crossing of the Rhine Gorge by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID, especially when they are compared with each other. It is helpful to note which details were communicated by each source, as well as

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<sup>146</sup> R.E. Cummings, “After Action Report, Third US Army, 1 August 1944 – 9 May 1945” (Headquarters, Third United States Army, 15 May, 1945), 316.

which details were left out. The army sources all reflect specific perspectives but grouping them together creates a consensus army perspective, atop of which sits *The Last Offensive*, the green book intended to be the final official word on the matter.

The army was honest and detailed in discussing the Rhine Gorge crossing, but also unwilling to characterize the battle as a flawed operation. When telling the story, the United States Army did not dwell on all the mistakes that were made or examine how the operation could have been conducted to reduce the loss of life. While it is possible to infer critiques, they were not offered by the authors. The army perspective is not surprising since few organizations seek to advertise their mistakes unless they are forced to do so. It may not represent an overt attempt by the government to cover up anything, but it is clearly limited. The lower echelon reports provide details that can be pieced together to demonstrate that tactical blunders were made, but they do not overtly identify them as such. As the account was generalized at higher echelons, details were left out without conducting any analysis into potential mistakes, to the extent that Third Army hardly mentioned the Rhine Gorge at all. The official histories provide details, but their assessments are clearly lacking because they were unwilling to cast an overtly negative shadow over the actions of the American forces. Clearly, more perspectives are needed to fully understand what happened.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NARRATIVE CRAFTING BY ARMY LEADERS

Each of the Allies had, according to its means, contributed to the common cause but America had stood pre-eminent as the arsenal of democracy.

—GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower<sup>147</sup>

The United States military and the media controlled the narrative most Americans received both during and after World War II, but organizations are nothing more than the people within them. It is easy to make sweeping statements about groups without recognizing the individuals exerting the greatest influence within or upon them. Some of the most influential personalities impacting the World War II narrative are the American generals who comprised the highest echelons of Allied leadership. During the war these generals kept meticulous notes, and at the conclusion of the war several of them wrote books providing their perspectives on the war; but their books do more than simply offer another perspective—they actively seek to control the narrative of the war in specific ways. Namely, they seek to shift the United States politically to exert stronger global influence at the beginning of the Cold War and memorialize the soldiers who died during the war. Regarding themselves, they seek personal recognition by justifying their decisions, refuting counter narratives and presenting an empathetic view of their leadership. The overarching theme of their writings is American exceptionalism, regardless of their specific intentions. Even some of the generals that did not produce carefully crafted accounts provide interviews or leave behind notes, seeking to control how particular events and people are remembered.

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<sup>147</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 1.

Regarding the crossing of the Rhine Gorge, there is not any lengthy discussion or analysis by American generals. As with the media, understanding their perspectives requires carefully examining the little they did say and recognizing what they did not say. The generals from division commander through supreme Allied commander were all familiar with the crossing and at least close enough to know that mistakes were made. But they were also far enough removed from the situation to avoid justifying the crossing in detail since the strategic ramifications were limited despite the human cost. The generals provide varying levels of positive narration in order to reinforce their own versions of American exceptionalism while simultaneously distancing themselves in subtle ways.

Interestingly, three of the most prolific narrative crafting American generals were in the chain of command for the 89<sup>th</sup> ID in March 1945: GEN Eisenhower, GEN Bradley, and LTG Patton. After the war, GEN Eisenhower went on to have a successful political career, serving two terms as the President of the United States. His political chops served him well during the war, and in the late 1940s he produced his personal account of World War II, titled *Crusade in Europe*. Eisenhower argues that the United States was the primary force responsible for the defeat of Germany, an evil empire. For him, the war serves as evidence that the United States should be more globally minded and continue to assert itself as a force for democracy and freedom.<sup>148</sup>

Unlike GEN Eisenhower, GEN Bradley did not have blatant global political intentions when he crafted his account. GEN Bradley tries to explain how military leaders made tactical decisions, highlighting the humanity of leadership.<sup>149</sup> However, within his

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<sup>148</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 1, 477.

<sup>149</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, xxvii.

honest discussion of flawed leaders, GEN Bradley argues that the humanity of certain generals made the greatness of their achievements all the more impressive.<sup>150</sup> In a very real sense, GEN Bradley seeks to justify the decisions of American military leaders by candidly acknowledging flaws while highlighting pure intentions and overwhelmingly positive results.

LTG Patton did not have a chance to create a finely crafted argument with his memoirs—he died before they could be completed; but he clearly intended to publish his own account and was working on the manuscript as the war concluded. After his death, LTG Patton’s notes were edited and published by his wife in a book titled *War As I Knew It*.<sup>151</sup> The tone of his posthumous book is undeniably self-serving. He speaks of the historic greatness of his unit.<sup>152</sup> He compares himself to leaders like Caesar, Scipio Africanus, and William the Conqueror.<sup>153</sup> A completed memoir may have had a more subtle argument, but the surviving account of LTG Patton demonstrates his fundamental desire to secure his own legacy. Rather than promoting global politics or humanizing American leaders, LTG Patton wanted to establish his own place in history. However, even his self-serving focus on legacy is congruous with the promotion of American exceptionalism.

While they did not produce their own accounts, the corps and division commanders responsible for the crossing of the Rhine Gorge did attempt to control the narrative in less obvious ways. LTG Middleton spent hours recounting his perspective on the war for a biographer in the 1970s. He claims that he did not write an autobiography

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<sup>150</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, xxx.

<sup>151</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, xiii.

<sup>152</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 105.

<sup>153</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 273.

because it would damage the reputation of respected colleagues.<sup>154</sup> That may be the case, but he clearly seeks to justify his own decisions and highlight his successes with his interviews. Since he did not immediately write his own story and did not provide interviews until the 1970s, LTG Middleton is more interested in setting the record straight regarding specific portions of the already hardening original narrative.

MG Finley did not leave behind much at all in the form of published documentation. Letters and memos survive in the 89<sup>th</sup> ID history, but little more. There are also short references to him in other historical accounts, providing a little insight into how he thought. The one theme in MG Finley's letters that distinguishes him from the other generals is an obvious remorse for the soldiers lost under his command, but he still treats the crossing of the Rhine Gorge as an overwhelming success. When combined, analysis of the five leaders who comprised the chain of command, from division commander to supreme allied commander, shows how they each attempted to control the narrative of World War II and, specifically, how they remembered the crossing of the Rhine Gorge and ignored tactical mistakes in order to support their argument.

GEN Eisenhower's career during World War II is one of the most incredible examples of military advancement in history, as he began the war wearing the rank of Major but rose to the position of Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe—earning the highest possible rank, General of the Army, or five-star General.<sup>155</sup> GEN

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<sup>154</sup> Frank James Price, *Troy H. Middleton: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), xi.

<sup>155</sup> Due to his principal role during World War II and his subsequent service as President of the United States, GEN Eisenhower has been written about extensively. Several authors have written biographies. Carlo D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002); Paul Johnson, *Eisenhower: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015). Notably, many authors have written about his crucial role in shaping the military and the country as the Cold War began. Gerald Clarfield, *Security with Solvency: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Shaping of the American Military Establishment* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999); Evan Thomas, *Ike's Bluff: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the*



Eisenhower served during World War I, and even though he was a competent and intelligent officer, he was caught in the stagnation of the interwar period. He was only a relatively low-level staff officer at the beginning of World War II. The turning point for GEN Eisenhower's career was the first iteration of the Louisiana Maneuvers designed by GEN Marshall. These were the same maneuvers in which the 89<sup>th</sup> ID would participate just two years later. In 1941, GEN Eisenhower served as the Chief of Staff for LTG Walter Krueger, who was the commander of Third Army at the time.<sup>156</sup> GEN Eisenhower performed so well in that position he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General at the conclusion of the exercise, entirely skipping the ranks of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel.<sup>157</sup> After spending a few months working directly for GEN Marshall as a planner, GEN Eisenhower was chosen to lead the Allied invasion of Europe, arriving in London in early 1942.<sup>158</sup>

GEN Eisenhower was selected to lead the Allied effort in Europe due to his fundamental belief in the importance of cooperation between the Allied powers. That fundamental belief permeates his account of World War II, and he identifies the unity of effort in Europe as a “miracle of achievement.”<sup>159</sup> Although he describes it as miraculous, GEN Eisenhower directly attributes the close cooperation of the Allies to the steadfast devotion of all parties involved to a single strategy. He argues that the Allies won World War II because their leaders “never wavered from their purpose of launching a full-out invasion of Europe across the English Channel at the earliest practicable moment.”<sup>160</sup>

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*World* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012); Louis Galambos, *Eisenhower: Becoming the Leader of the Free World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).

<sup>156</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 8.

<sup>157</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 10.

<sup>158</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 220.

<sup>159</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 4.

<sup>160</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 48.

GEN Eisenhower believed the Allies defeated Germany because they fought together with a singular strategy. The execution of that singular strategy required unity of command, and the United States provided both unity of command and the bulk of the military capital necessary to win.<sup>161</sup>

The overall argument GEN Eisenhower makes in his autobiography is important because it dominates his entire account. He argues that the United States was woefully unprepared for World War II due to foolish isolationist politics.<sup>162</sup> He aggressively promotes the idea that the United States was the “arsenal of democracy.”<sup>163</sup> Writing in the late 1940s, GEN Eisenhower was one of several American leaders who saw the rise of the Soviet Union as an existential threat to democracy—a threat that would require the United States to exert itself on the global stage in an unprecedented manner, building on the active role America played in World War II in order to protect and promote democracy. GEN Eisenhower states that “the world is now too small for the rigid concepts of national sovereignty.”<sup>164</sup> In his mind, America had to continue being the arsenal of democracy and exert more global influence to resist communism—a goal that could only be achieved, “if the men and women of America face this issue as squarely and bravely as their soldiers faced the terrors of battle in World War II.”<sup>165</sup> With such grandiose political convictions and aspirations, it was extremely important for GEN Eisenhower to positively portray the actions of the United States military in World War II. His entire political platform was based on the idea that America’s success in the war

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<sup>161</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 3.

<sup>162</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 2.

<sup>163</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 1.

<sup>164</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 477.

<sup>165</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 477.

was a template for proactively taking the fight to communism rather than allowing a new evil to threaten democracy as the Nazi regime had done in the 1930s and 1940s.

Due to his emphasis on increased global interaction and intervention by the United States, it is easy to see why GEN Eisenhower strongly promotes American exceptionalism in his book. In order to step up as the global protector, the country and the military, as the arsenal of democracy, must be the best. Everything about the American experience in World War II must support the idea that the United States is uniquely qualified to spread and protect democracy globally. Rather than simply being informed by the Cold War, GEN Eisenhower was one of the primary architects setting the conditions for how global politics would unfold in the decades that followed.

Given the importance of a unified strategy to GEN Eisenhower, it is not surprising that he had a balanced plan for crossing the Rhine River. Rather than rushing across the river as quickly as possible, he wanted to clear the east side of the river along its entire length, establishing a strong defensive line from which a coordinated assault could be made at multiple points. His plan for multiple crossing points along the length of the Rhine contradicted the British desire to focus entirely on the northern section where their forces would be taking the lead.<sup>166</sup> Even though GEN Eisenhower convinced his British subordinates that they needed to wait for American and French forces to establish strong defensive positions along the Rhine, he seized the opportunity to cross early with American forces when the bridge at Remagen was captured. In fact, GEN Eisenhower takes credit for the exploitation of Remagen and describes it as “one of my happy moments of the war.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 370-371.

<sup>167</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 379-380.

With American forces pouring across the Rhine at Remagen, GEN Eisenhower's deliberate strategy began to unravel, even though he later approved of the initiative taken by other American commanders. Specifically, the crossings south of Remagen did not proceed according to GEN Eisenhower's plan. While Remagen was a fortunate accident, GEN Eisenhower still intended to have two primary crossings with the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group in the North and the American Seventh Army in the South, part of GEN Devers' 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group. However, when GEN Bradley's 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group began crossing at Remagen, it prompted LTG Patton to drive hard for the Rhine River as well. His first crossing at Oppenheim happened without GEN Eisenhower even knowing, although he indicates that it was well executed.<sup>168</sup> It is unclear if GEN Eisenhower truly approved of all the crossings made by LTG Patton's Third Army. GEN Eisenhower had a long history with LTG Patton, and he describes LTG Patton as "an outstanding leader of troops."<sup>169</sup> However, GEN Eisenhower also specifically petitioned GEN Marshall to appoint GEN Bradley as an Army Group Commander, with LTG Patton serving as a subordinate Army commander, even though he was senior at the time. He favored GEN Bradley because he was "sound, painstaking, and broadly educated."<sup>170</sup> Essentially, GEN Bradley was more patient and controlled as a commander.

It is difficult to know how much GEN Eisenhower knew about the Rhine Gorge crossings and even more difficult to know how he truly felt about them. Although GEN Eisenhower admits that the Oppenheim crossings were highly successful, he seems to back away from the Rhine Gorge crossings, spending even less time in his memoirs on

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<sup>168</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 384.

<sup>169</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 40.

<sup>170</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 214-215.

them than he does on LTG Patton's previous crossing. Interestingly, he notes that "because of the rugged banks, bridging operations against an enemy looked almost impossible," indicating an uncharacteristic skepticism, followed by the phrase, "nevertheless, the VIII Corps made the attempt and, in spite of some sharp initial resistance, was successful."<sup>171</sup> In contrast to Remagen, where GEN Eisenhower takes credit for the actions of his subordinates, or Oppenheim, where he seems to retroactively approve of the actions of his subordinates, GEN Eisenhower noticeably distances himself from the decision-making process at the Rhine Gorge. Rather than describing them as acting on his orders or executing his intent, he places the decision to cross the Rhine Gorge squarely on the shoulders of VIII Corps. Even though he notes that it was ultimately successful, he uses a portion of his short paragraph on the Rhine Gorge crossings to note the "sharp initial resistance" and "rugged banks."<sup>172</sup> Considering the overall argument GEN Eisenhower is making in his book, it would be almost impossible for him to portray the Rhine Gorge in a blatantly negative light. If he were to openly criticize the choices of his subordinates, it would have undermined the idea that America led a miraculously unified and almost perfectly organized effort to defeat an evil regime during World War II.

Unlike GEN Eisenhower whose career jumpstarted at the beginning of the war, GEN Bradley was already a brigadier general and the commandant of the Infantry School when the war began.<sup>173</sup> From the outset, GEN Bradley was slated to be a prominent

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<sup>171</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 392.

<sup>172</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 392.

<sup>173</sup> Although not as discussed as GEN Eisenhower and LTG Patton, there are a handful of biographies on GEN Bradley. The foremost being DeFelice's work, all the biographies stress the humanity, humility, and relatability of GEN Bradley—qualities that GEN Bradley also sought to identify in his fellow leaders. Jim DeFelice, *Omar Bradley: General at War* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2011); Alan Axelrod,

commander, first with the 82<sup>nd</sup> ID and later with the 28<sup>th</sup> ID in 1943.<sup>174</sup> Before he even had a chance to make it overseas, GEN Bradley had already been given command of a corps.<sup>175</sup> In fact, GEN Bradley remained a corps commander as the United States Army moved through Africa and up into Italy in 1943, even as LTG Patton was serving as the Seventh Army commander, a position of greater responsibility.<sup>176</sup> The turning point for GEN Bradley came during preparations for the invasion of Normandy, when he was appointed as commander of First Army, and identified as the future commander of the planned 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group.<sup>177</sup> Although GEN Bradley's leapfrog over LTG Patton may have been transparent to him, GEN Eisenhower records in detail why he asked GEN Marshall to put GEN Bradley in command of the only American Army Group. He valued the calm and calculated demeanor of GEN Bradley and believed that LTG Patton was better suited to take command of Third Army.<sup>178</sup>

When composing his account of World War II, GEN Bradley did not have the same kind of political theory that GEN Eisenhower weaved through *Crusade in Europe*, but he did have a distinct purpose. In his book, *A Soldier's Story*, GEN Bradley seeks to explain exactly how commanders converted strategy into tactics on the ground.<sup>179</sup> He attempts to show how the personalities of imperfect commanders affected missions, but he also wants to vindicate their actions by highlighting the success they achieved despite

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Bradley (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2008); Steven J. Zaloga, *Omar Bradley* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2012).

<sup>174</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 12-13.

<sup>175</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 17.

<sup>176</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 145.

<sup>177</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 173.

<sup>178</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 214-215.

<sup>179</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, xxvii.

their flaws.<sup>180</sup> The American leaders were only human, and their humanity further exemplified the exceptional nature of what they achieved during the war.

Even though GEN Bradley typically agreed with GEN Eisenhower's strategy of consolidating forces along the length of the Rhine River before pushing across, his perspective changed when First Army captured the bridge at Remagen. GEN Bradley had accepted the fact that the other two Army Groups would conduct the two primary crossings. In fact, he had supported GEN Eisenhower by curbing LTG Patton's desire to race across the Rhine before the British and French were able to do so.<sup>181</sup> The tension between GEN Bradley and LTG Patton was palpable after their role reversal before the invasion of Normandy, and he considered LTG Patton to be a loose cannon. He writes, "George was still an impetuous man and even in Europe this impetuous nature continued to make trouble."<sup>182</sup> However, when First Army captured Remagen making it clear that the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group would be able to cross the Rhine in force, GEN Bradley let loose the impetuous LTG Patton. He did not want to allow the Germans to build up their own defenses along the Rhine, so he instructed LTG Patton to "take the Rhine on the run." Even though he intentionally gave LTG Patton the chance to cross the Rhine, the "speed and flair of Third Army's reckless advance," still caught him by surprise.<sup>183</sup>

When he allowed him to surge forward, GEN Bradley knew LTG Patton's intent was to cross the Rhine River south of the Rhine Gorge at Oppenheim, and he approved of that idea, even though LTG Patton executed the crossing much faster than he

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<sup>180</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, xxviii-xxx.

<sup>181</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 423.

<sup>182</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 356.

<sup>183</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 519.

anticipated.<sup>184</sup> Although surprised by the speed of Third Army, GEN Bradley strongly believed that crossing the Rhine as quickly as possible was preferable to the deliberate strategy of Field Marshall Montgomery and the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group.<sup>185</sup> Just as GEN Eisenhower takes credit for the exploitation of Remagen, GEN Bradley takes credit for the crossing at Oppenheim by Third Army. Even though it was LTG Patton that executed the crossing, GEN Bradley describes in detail how he wisely gave LTG Patton the needed permission to surge across. According to GEN Bradley, he understood the temperament of his subordinate and knew how to use it positively. However, he does not even discuss the subsequent crossings of Third Army in the Rhine Gorge. The only comment he makes about them is vague: “Patton struggled to tighten his grip on a small but severely contested bridgehead north of Main.”<sup>186</sup> Even more so than GEN Eisenhower, GEN Bradley distances himself from the Rhine Gorge crossings. He claims to provide a detailed description of the flaws and imperfections of commanders, but he almost entirely skips the struggles of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID, failing to even mention the division by name.

In his memoirs, even though he is more than willing to discuss what he considers to be personality flaws in leaders like LTG Patton, GEN Bradley is not interested in exposing serious tactical errors made by the United States military. His purpose is to demonstrate overwhelming tactical success despite the imperfections of leaders. Additionally, GEN Bradley seems to highlight his own ability to manipulate and compensate for the character flaws of other commanders. To portray the actions of his own unit as tactically unsound would have seriously questioned GEN Bradley’s ability as

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<sup>184</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, 521.

<sup>185</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, 524.

<sup>186</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, 526.



a commander, regardless of the overall outcome of the war. Therefore, the crossing of the Rhine Gorge is characterized by GEN Bradley as “severely contested” rather than strategically unnecessary or tactically unsound.

Although LTG Patton certainly intended to write an epic account of World War II, he never had the chance due to his untimely death in 1945. However, he kept copious notes in preparation for a comprehensive work at the conclusion of the war, and those notes were edited and published by his wife in a book titled *War As I Knew It*. Because it is little more than a compilation of notes, there is no unified thesis or purpose for the book, but there are some unmistakable themes. First, LTG Patton is obsessed with his own legacy. He often references great military leaders of the past and seeks to surpass their accomplishments. His notes are littered with historic comparisons. For example, he writes in the months following the Normandy invasion that, “As of August 14 the Third Army had advanced farther and faster than any army in history.”<sup>187</sup>

In addition to his historic legacy, LTG Patton is obsessed with defining his own nature. GEN Bradley referred to LTG Patton as impetuous—such a description would have pleased LTG Patton even if it were not intended as a compliment. LTG Patton plays up the idea that he was a loose cannon with unrestrainable ambition. He proudly notes his resistance to GEN Eisenhower’s plan of halting at the Rhine River to prepare for a two-pronged assault in the north and south. According to LTG Patton, he told GEN Bradley, “unless I could continue attacking, I would have to be relieved.”<sup>188</sup> He indicates that GEN Bradley did not care for Field Marshall Montgomery’s plan to cross the Rhine deliberately, corroborating GEN Bradley’s account. LTG Patton understood the larger

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<sup>187</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 105.

<sup>188</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 240.

picture, but unashamedly pushed beyond the limits of his orders to secure his legacy. Without asking GEN Bradley, he planned to cross south of the Rhine Gorge, spurred forward by the success of his peers. By his own admission, the news of First Army crossing at Remagen ignited jealousy within him.<sup>189</sup> He was determined to play the hero, and he intentionally acted gregariously to build his reputation.

With all that has been said about LTG Patton, even by himself, it would be reasonable to assume that he was responsible for the ambitious, if inadvisable, crossing of the Rhine Gorge.<sup>190</sup> However, LTG Patton shockingly does not try to take credit for the idea. In fact, LTG Patton intended to shift divisions away from the Rhine Gorge to support the crossings further south. In what was perhaps a play to LTG Patton's ego, LTG Middleton suggested an ambitious plan to capture Koblenz with his VIII Corps rather than transferring troops to XII Corps.<sup>191</sup> Koblenz sat on the western bank of the Rhine River at the northern end of the Rhine Gorge, and LTG Middleton's plan to capture it led directly to the subsequent Rhine Gorge crossings by VIII Corps.

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<sup>189</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 254.

<sup>190</sup> LTG Patton is one of the most discussed American leaders, and an exhaustive examination of how he has been treated historically would be a book unto itself. A good starting point for research would be some of the biographies and related analyses written about him, beginning early after his own writings were published by his wife and Brenton Wallace's published first-hand analysis of Patton's actions during the war. One of the first biographies was published in the 1960s and was overwhelmingly positive. Ladislav Farago, *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 1964). By the late 1970s writings transitioned more to lessons learned rather pure biography. Porter B. Williamson, *General Patton's Principles for Life and Leadership* (Tuscon: Management and Systems Consultants, 1979). By the 1990s a whole new generation of biographies began. Carlo D'Este, *Patton: A Genius for War* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996); Stanley P. Hirshson, *General Patton: A Soldier's Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002); Alan Axelrod, *Patton: A Biography* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006). Recently, more analysis has been done concerning his strategic theories. James Kelly Morningstar, *Patton's Way: A Radical Theory of War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2017). Always a point of discussion, the character flaws of Patton were discussed more skeptically in a recent work. Jim Sudmeier, *Patton's Madness: The Dark Side of a Battlefield Genius* (Lanham, MD: Stackpole Books, 2020). Overall, the ambitious nature of LTG Patton is always the primary topic, with a wide variety of opinions about the efficacy and morality of his ambition.

<sup>191</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 259.

LTG Patton focused all his energy on the Oppenheim crossing, which is reflected in his memoirs. He sees it as the perfect strategy in the perfect location, describing the crossing as magnificent and glorious.<sup>192</sup> Regarding the Rhine Gorge crossing, LTG Patton is less magnanimous, referring to LTG Middleton's plan as an attempt to "force a crossing in the gorge of the Rhine."<sup>193</sup> Further supporting the theory that LTG Patton was focused on Oppenheim, he misidentifies the division conducting the Rhine Gorge crossing at St Goarshausen, claiming it was the 76<sup>th</sup> ID. Although the 76<sup>th</sup> ID was located at St Goar on the western bank of the Rhine, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID passed through their defensive positions and conducted the crossing in that location. LTG Patton's foremost concern is the poetic significance of crossing the Rhine Gorge near the Lorelei.<sup>194</sup> LTG Patton even notes that historical studies portrayed the Rhine Gorge as "impassible."<sup>195</sup>

Even though the Rhine Gorge crossings were not LTG Patton's idea, he celebrates the fact that American forces made it across in that dangerous section of the river. His willingness to distance himself from the planning while celebrating the tenacity of the American soldiers who crossed speaks volumes even though he refrains from providing open criticism. LTG Patton was always looking for recognition, and his fundamental purpose for writing about the war was establishing his own legacy within the historical record. If he truly believed that crossing the Rhine Gorge was an effective strategy, he would not have pushed credit away so willingly—it was not in his nature. On the other hand, LTG Middleton worked directly for LTG Patton, and it would not have played well

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<sup>192</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 268.

<sup>193</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 267.

<sup>194</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 274.

<sup>195</sup> Patton, *War As I Knew It*, 275.

for LTG Patton's carefully crafted legacy to criticize him. It was an ambitious plan, and LTG Patton was the king of ambitious plans, so it had to be praised.

Unlike LTG Patton, LTG Middleton was known for his calm demeanor.<sup>196</sup> He did not seek attention or promote idealistic causes by publishing his own book after the war, but he was concerned with correcting mistakes he perceived in the World War II narrative. His combat experience was extensive. As a young lieutenant he participated in the American invasion of Mexico at Vera Cruz prior to World War I.<sup>197</sup> He went on to serve with distinction during World War I, becoming the youngest colonel in the United States Army and commanding the 39<sup>th</sup> IN at Bois de Foret where he revolutionized army doctrine by using "marching fire," which consisted of soldiers covering their movement with rifle fire in order to suppress the enemy and reduce the number of casualties taken during an assault.<sup>198</sup> After the armistice was signed, LTG Middleton was assigned to occupation duty in Germany along the Rhine River, spending time in Boppard, Remagen, and Koblenz—all important locations for the Rhine River crossings over two decades later.<sup>199</sup> When he returned to the United States, LTG Middleton, like many other officers, was reduced to his pre-war rank of captain and began an assignment at the Infantry School.

Due to his calm demeanor and propensity for academics, LTG Middleton excelled in the classroom as both a student and an instructor. He spent the next 18 years at the

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<sup>196</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, xii. The only significant work discussing LTG Middleton other than Price's biography was published within the last decade by a student at the Army Command and General Staff College. Led in his research by the instructors at the school, which is a requirement for career army officers, the author focused on the patience and cognitive discipline of LTG Middleton as an example for how to work through difficult tactical problems effectively under stressful conditions. Patrick N. Kaune, *General Troy H. Middleton: Steadfast in Command* (CreateSpace Publishing, 2011)

<sup>197</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 50.

<sup>198</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 68.

<sup>199</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 71-76.

Infantry School, the Command and General Staff College, the War College, and Louisiana State University as a Reserve Officer Training Corps instructor.<sup>200</sup> During the interwar period he had a significant impact on army doctrine because of his positions at army schools. He wrote much of the cutting edge combined arms doctrine of the period, which advocated the use of artillery, armor, and aerial support for infantry assaults rather than masses of men moving on line against fortified defensive positions.<sup>201</sup> He also taught night operations, a new concept intended to protect formations against aerial attack by using hours of limited visibility.<sup>202</sup> In the classroom, LTG Middleton drew heavily from his experiences in World War I, emphasizing the lessons he learned at Bois de Foret about the use of covering fire and combined arms warfare.<sup>203</sup>

When World War II began, LTG Middleton was recalled to active duty, having retired in 1937.<sup>204</sup> He commanded the 45<sup>th</sup> ID through Africa and into Sicily and Italy.<sup>205</sup> As the Allies began preparations for the Normandy invasion, GEN Eisenhower specifically requested to have LTG Middleton as the commander of VIII Corps even though he was experiencing health problems.<sup>206</sup> LTG Middleton had served alongside and worked with senior officers like GEN Eisenhower, GEN Bradley, and LTG Patton for years. He recognized the tension between GEN Bradley and LTG Patton, understanding that LTG Patton had a tendency to overstep his boundaries and take tactical control away from GEN Bradley as the Allies assaulted across France.<sup>207</sup> LTG

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<sup>200</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 76, 90, 94, 99.

<sup>201</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 80.

<sup>202</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 82.

<sup>203</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 85.

<sup>204</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 122, 137.

<sup>205</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 141, 147, 167.

<sup>206</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 171.

<sup>207</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 187.

Middleton seems to have more in common with GEN Bradley, speaking of “the counsel of caution” and stressing the necessity of methodical operations in combat rather than rushing to failure.<sup>208</sup>

As the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group approached the Rhine River, GEN Bradley did not want to outpace his supply system. Conversely, LTG Patton wanted to push as quickly as possible. LTG Middleton recalls reminding LTG Patton, “how emphatic Bradley was when he told Patton to remain in place.”<sup>209</sup> From LTG Middleton’s perspective, he and GEN Bradley were strategically placed above and below LTG Patton in the chain of command as calming advocates for deliberate and well-organized operations. However, roles reversed at the Rhine River. When LTG Patton planned to take divisions from him for the Rhine crossing, LTG Middleton resisted the idea with a plan so ambitious even LTG Patton thought it was too risky. After LTG Middleton proposed taking Koblenz with VIII Corps, LTG Patton said, “Only a fool would attempt such an operation with so few troops.”<sup>210</sup> Once VIII Corps took Koblenz, LTG Patton instructed them to cross the Rhine, expecting them to cross north of the Rhine Gorge near their new stronghold at Koblenz. According to LTG Middleton, LTG Patton was shocked when he revealed that he intended to cross in the Rhine Gorge instead. LTG Patton said, “Why, man, haven’t you read your history... you must know that no one has ever crossed the Rhine in that area.”<sup>211</sup> LTG Middleton countered that the Germans would not expect a crossing in the Rhine Gorge—they would not even bother to defend that area.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 190-191.

<sup>209</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 278.

<sup>210</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 279.

<sup>211</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 279.

<sup>212</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 280.

The specific details of the Rhine Gorge crossings are confused by LTG Middleton as he recounts them to his biographer. He claims that the 89<sup>th</sup> ID crossed at Boppard and the 87<sup>th</sup> ID crossed at Koblenz facing heavy resistance before sending elements north to Boppard in order to cross there.<sup>213</sup> In reality, the 87<sup>th</sup> ID conducted the crossing at Boppard, and the 89<sup>th</sup> ID attempted to cross at St Goarshausen, not Koblenz, which makes sense because St Goarshausen was ten miles south of Boppard, the distance and direction described by LTG Middleton. Adding to the confusion, LTG Middleton mentions the harassment of snipers at the Lorelei while the 89<sup>th</sup> ID crossed at Boppard.<sup>214</sup> Snipers located on Lorelei would have been ten miles south of Boppard, not even within eyesight. The 89<sup>th</sup> ID was harassed by enemy on the Lorelei, but it was heavy cannon fire from anti-aircraft gun positions—not the ineffective sniper fire described by LTG Middleton. Overall, LTG Middleton proudly takes credit for the decision to cross the Rhine Gorge. However, he also provides a confused and inaccurate description of the events. According to LTG Middleton, “The Eighty-ninth put all its infantry across the Rhine before daylight, against practically no resistance.”<sup>215</sup> In reality, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID faced stiff resistance as they crossed, and the majority of the division did not make it across until the sun rose and supporting artillery and aerial fires suppressed the fortified German positions.

Although LTG Middleton did not leave behind extensive records, even less remains of MG Finley. He did not leave behind his own account of World War II, and no one wrote a biography of him. All that remains are a few references in a handful of

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<sup>213</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 281.

<sup>214</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 280.

<sup>215</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 280.

books, and an obscure research paper written by MG Finley in 1933 when he was a student at the Command and General Staff College. That paper, titled “A Critical Analysis of French Night Attacks in the World War,” is extremely relevant to a discussion of the Rhine Gorge crossing conducted by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID. In the paper, MG Finley analyzes night operations during World War I in order to establish guidelines for successful night attacks. Eleven years after writing that paper, he planned a night attack to cross the Rhine Gorge.

According to MG Finley, the most important element in a night attack is taking time to thoroughly reconnoiter enemy positions and develop a detailed plan.<sup>216</sup> When forced to conduct his night attack during World War II, MG Finley failed to account for the tactical advantage of the defensive positions around St Goarshausen. Another point of emphasis for MG Finley is the element of surprise. He writes, “When surprise is complete the attack will generally succeed.”<sup>217</sup> Since one of the primary tactical errors of the Rhine Gorge crossing was the inappropriate attempt to achieve surprise, it is noteworthy that MG Finley specifically advocates that tactic in an academic paper. Interestingly, he also acknowledges the benefit of artillery and aerial support, but only if they do not detract from the element of surprise. He even asserts that tank support is entirely unnecessary.<sup>218</sup> During the Rhine Gorge crossing, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID failed to achieve the element of surprise, but also failed to immediately support the soldiers crossing with all the artillery, aerial, and tank assets available. Perhaps the enablers were not utilized at

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<sup>216</sup> Thomas D. Finley, “A Critical Analysis of French Night Attacks in the World War” (The Command and General Staff School, 15 April 1933), 25.

<sup>217</sup> Finley, “A Critical Analysis of French Night Attacks in the World War,” 24.

<sup>218</sup> Finley, “A Critical Analysis of French Night Attacks in the World War,” 3.



the beginning of the operation because MG Finley was fundamentally concerned with the element of surprise at the expense of supporting fires.

In his history of the Rhineland Campaign, MacDonald writes that MG Finley did not want to cross the Rhine Gorge at St Goarshausen. Instead, he wanted to use the crossing point secured by the 87<sup>th</sup> ID at Boppard but was unable to do so due to the congestion there on March 25, just hours after they had completed the crossing. MacDonald also claims that MG Finley personally procured the naval landing craft used at Oberwesel by his 353<sup>rd</sup> IN when he saw how contentious the Rhine Gorge crossing had become.<sup>219</sup> The ultimate success of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was due to the use of enablers such as artillery, aircraft, heavy weapons, and naval landing craft. MG Finley was reticent to force a crossing at the Rhine Gorge, but when ordered to do so he relied on the strategies he had developed during his study of World War I night attacks. When those strategies failed to produce the desired results, he adjusted his approach and used indirect fires to provide the support his soldiers needed to succeed. The only asset he did not use extensively to support the crossing was his attached tank unit, which he flexed north to cross at Boppard rather than using them to engage the enemy at St Goarshausen.<sup>220</sup>

The only preserved record of MG Finley discussing the events at the Rhine Gorge is in his introduction for the 89<sup>th</sup> ID history. He identifies that battle as the single most important moment for the division during World War II, and portrays it as a valiant and heroic moment, with no discussion of how it could have been executed differently. He certainly does not question the necessity of the crossing or undermine the sacrifice of the soldiers who died by admitting to tactical mistakes. Such a discussion would not be

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<sup>219</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 276.

<sup>220</sup> MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 277.

appropriate for the official history of the unit. However, it is apparent that the sacrifice of his soldiers weighed heavily on MG Finley. He asserts, “That is what the Division will remember longest; its brave men who died in those boats on the Rhine.”<sup>221</sup> Although MG Finley may have had doubts about his tactical decisions guiding the Rhine Gorge crossings, his official statement on the matter does not reveal any doubt. In committing it to the historical record, MG Finley provides the same sort of positive assessment his superiors give—with the only exception being a heartfelt recognition of the lives lost that day.

The accounts recorded by army leaders about the Rhine Gorge crossings are certainly not surprising. To expect a detailed and painful recognition of tactical missteps would be unrealistic, especially within the greater context of World War II. Thousands of lives were lost during the Rhineland Campaign, and exponentially more throughout the entire war. The loss of a couple hundred soldiers in a battle was not the type of thing that drew attention in 1945. Why would a leader draw attention to it himself if no one asked him to do so? It was easy to justify since the crossing of the Rhine Gorge was ultimately successful. After the war, generals were attempting to recognize the heroism of their soldiers, justify the overall cost of the war, and secure their own legacy in the wake of what was perceived as an overwhelming success. Whatever their individual motives may have been, all five of the commanding generals responsible for the Rhine Gorge crossings treat the operation as an unmitigated success, entirely ignoring mistakes.

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<sup>221</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 16.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE GERMAN PERSPECTIVE

Doubtless, the enemy will be interested to learn just how few forces defended the Rhine front.

—General der Infanterie Gustav Hoehne<sup>222</sup>

It is impossible to fully understand any given battle without examining both sides. The German defenders were quite effective at the Rhine Gorge, but how did they describe their own positions? Did they consider their actions successful? While it is often more difficult to find the perspective of the losing side, the United States did an excellent job of preserving reports captured from the German military. Although some of the German reports were lost forever during their long retreat and eventual collapse, many of the accounts of the German defenders in the Rhine Gorge were saved and preserved in the National Archives. As the German leaders who wrote the reports were not promoting American exceptionalism, their accounts provide crucial data points absent of any pro-American perspectives and enable a more critical interpretation of American tactics.

There are three important points regarding the Rhine Gorge crossing that can only be found through a careful analysis of the German records. First, the total number of German defenders was relatively small—only 50-75 personnel. Second, the types of soldiers assigned to that sector were not suited for repelling an attacking American division. The defense consisted of anti-aircraft and national guard soldiers rather than infantry or armor. Third, the morale of the defenders could not sustain intense pressure, in part because the national guard soldiers were known for surrendering quickly to

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<sup>222</sup> All german records referenced were translated into English when they were preserved in the National Archives. The original German is preserved, with the English translation immediately following it on the same microfilm. Gustav Hoehne, “Abwehrkaempfe Des LXXXIX.A.K. An Der Rhein-Front Vom 18.-28.3.1945,” MS B-584, Foreign Military Studies, National Archives Microfiche Publication M1035, National Archives Building, College Park, MD, 9.

advancing American forces. Comparing the true capabilities of the defenders to the casualties they inflicted provides a much clearer understanding of the true cost for the Rhine Gorge crossing and reframes that cost in terms of reasonably expected outcomes.

The preserved accounts are fundamental to understanding the German perspective, but they require context in order to be interpreted correctly. The standard organization and structure of the German military must be outlined so that the Rhine Gorge defenders can be contrasted to a typical German unit. In addition, the gradual degradation of the German military during the later years of World War II must be reviewed to explain why the Rhine Gorge defense was relatively weak when compared to prior defensive battles in which the Germans participated. When understood in context, the German records of the Rhine Gorge tell the story of a dramatically outnumbered and poorly equipped force mounting a lackluster defense—a story that demands a closer look into why the American forces struggled as much as they did in crossing the Rhine Gorge.

The largest branch of the German military was the Wehrmacht, which can be traced back to the German forces of World War I and the preceding Prussian military traditions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Because of their relationship to the forces of World War I, Chris McNab refers to the Wehrmacht in his book, *Hitler's Armies*, as “a phoenix from the ashes.”<sup>223</sup> The Wehrmacht was the heart of the German military and most German soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen belonged to this massive organization.

Another important branch of the German military was the Schutzstaffel, or as it was commonly known, the SS. The SS began as a personal protective force for Adolph

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<sup>223</sup> Chris McNab, *Hitler's Armies: A History of the German War Machine, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2011), 12-13.

Hitler, but eventually grew into a force capable of conducting independent military operations. The military arm of the SS was known as the Waffen-SS. For most of its existence, the Waffen-SS recruited along strict racial lines, promoting the core ideals of National Socialism, and becoming infamous for war crimes and extensive participation in the Holocaust.<sup>224</sup> Over the years, the reputation of the Waffen-SS has likely expanded beyond reality, creating a false contrast with the Wehrmacht. For example, author Robert Citino notes that most scholars agree the Wehrmacht soldiers were almost as fully indoctrinated into the National Socialist cause as the Waffen-SS.<sup>225</sup> However, the Waffen-SS did represent a large force—900,000 strong at its peak—with a selective recruiting process resulting in units that were typically more formidable than the average Wehrmacht equivalent.<sup>226</sup> Although the Waffen-SS was distinct from the Wehrmacht, in many instances Waffen-SS units operated under the control of the Wehrmacht since the Waffen-SS did not possess equivalent high-level command structures. If a Waffen-SS unit had been present at the Rhine Gorge when the 89<sup>th</sup> ID crossed, it would have made the crossing significantly more difficult, but the SS unit assigned to that sector was moved before the battle began.

The final branch of the German military that must be discussed was the Volkssturm. The literal translation of Volkssturm is “the people’s storm.” It represented a desperate attempt by the Nazi’s to defend the German homeland on both fronts using men that had been previously exempted from military service due to their age or other

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<sup>224</sup> Adrian Gilbert, *Waffen SS: Hitler’s Army at War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2019), 1.

<sup>225</sup> Robert M. Citino, *The Wehrmacht’s Last Stand: The German Campaigns of 1944-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 4.

<sup>226</sup> Gilbert, *Waffen SS*, 1.

disqualifying factors.<sup>227</sup> In spite of the pressing need for additional troops, Hitler initially resisted forming the Volkssturm, reasoning that it would signal an attitude of defeat to the German people and produce lackluster units since the potential soldiers being targeted had already been passed over for military service.<sup>228</sup> However, as the situation worsened for the Nazi's, Hitler had little choice but to authorize the formation of the Volkssturm on September 25, 1944.<sup>229</sup> Mobilized separately from the Wehrmacht, the Volkssturm was advertised as a final, unbreakable “storm” of German militarism that would protect the German culture and race from annihilation at the hands of lesser people—especially the Russian Soviets.<sup>230</sup> Although there were some limited victories on the Eastern Front against the Soviets, the Volkssturm was largely unsuccessful, with these hastily formed units surrendering quickly under the stress of combat or, occasionally, without even engaging in combat prior to surrender.<sup>231</sup> Their presence at the Rhine Gorge did little to aid the Germans in defending that terrain.

In addition to the distinct organizations of the Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS, and Volkssturm, the German military was divided into different types of units. For example, the Luftwaffe, or German Air Force, was a subset of the Wehrmacht. Most ground forces belonged to the Heer, or Army, but there were a few that belonged to the Luftwaffe. One type of ground force belonging to the Luftwaffe that factored heavily into the defense of the Rhine Gorge was the Flak Defense Unit. Flak units consisted of radar men, communication specialists, searchlight operators, and anti-aircraft gun teams. The Flak

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<sup>227</sup> David K. Yelton, “Ein Volk Steht Auf”: The German Volkssturm and Nazi Strategy,” *The Journal of Military History* vol. 64, no. 4 (Oct. 2000): 1065.

<sup>228</sup> Yelton, “Ein Volk Steht Auf,” 1066.

<sup>229</sup> Yelton, “Ein Volk Steht Auf,” 1067.

<sup>230</sup> Yelton, “Ein Volk Steht Auf,” 1075.

<sup>231</sup> Yelton, “Ein Volk Steht Auf,” 1082.

units were only ground forces in the sense that they did not fly. Although they operated on the ground, their focus was the air. They were specifically designed to defeat Allied aerial attacks against Germany, but by the end of the war they were instructed to hold defensive positions against ground attacks in addition to their primary mission of defeating enemy bombers.<sup>232</sup> Although their guns were certainly effective against wooden boats, Flak units were not properly manned, equipped, or trained for the kind of prolonged close combat that occurred at the Rhine Gorge.

Other types of units found within the German military included infantry, artillery, engineers, armor, mountain, and anti-tank units. Such subdivisions existed within the Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS, and Volkssturm. In addition to knowing the large organization to which they belonged, knowing the specific type of unit involved provides valuable insight into how they could be expected to perform. For example, a group of Waffen-SS infantrymen would typically be most successful in close combat against dismounted ground forces in thickly forested areas or complex urban environments. Wehrmacht tanks were overwhelmingly successful when matched against Allied tanks or dismounted forces in open areas. Volkssturm units struggled mightily unless they were facing the dreaded onslaught of Soviets, at which point they fought bravely even if they were largely ineffective. Most importantly, support units such as the artillery and anti-aircraft (Flak) were not equipped or trained for direct combat such as was seen in the Rhine Gorge. They were meant to assist the infantry and armor units by providing additional firepower while those other units maneuvered on their enemy and engaged in close combat.

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<sup>232</sup> Heins Seidler, *Images of War: Luftwaffe Flak and Field Divisions, 1939-1945* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2012), 1.

Considering the German military structure, there are multiple reasons the defenders at the Rhine Gorge were unfit for their task. Foremost, the bedrock of the defense was a small Flak unit, designed for aerial defense rather than ground defense. The Flak unit was then supplemented with Volkssturm soldiers who had been deemed incapable of military service until their country became desperate enough to recruit them. These soldiers were also not infantry soldiers, but rather military police.

The structure of the German military is not the only variable that must be considered when discussing World War II—the effect of time was critical. The German military was dramatically different at the end of the war. In fact, the German military grew and shrank throughout the war due to losses and mobilizations; additionally, the quality of equipment and training varied widely over time. For the first two years of the war, the Germans faced relatively little resistance and continued to expand and grow stronger in preparation for future operations.<sup>233</sup> The last five years of the war saw a steady decline for the German military as they faced struggles on multiple fronts against several opponents and transitioned from offensive campaigns to defensive operations.<sup>234</sup> It was this weakened German military that the 89<sup>th</sup> ID soldiers encountered when they crossed the Rhine Gorge.

By the end of 1944, the Germans were quickly retreating along three fronts, even as they continued to inflict damage on their enemies. As he prepared to defend against the

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<sup>233</sup> The German military swelled to 3.5 million prior to invasion of Russia. Bob Carruthers, *The Wehrmacht: Last Witnesses* (London: Andre Deutsch, 2010), 42. From 1941 to 1943 the Germans won multiple victories in North Africa. McNab, *Hitler's Armies*, 90.

<sup>234</sup> By December of 1941, the Germans had suffered over 730,000 casualties. McNab, *Hitler's Armies*, 178. By 1943, the Germans had completely transitioned to the defense in Russia, beginning a steady retreat into Germany in 1944. McNab, *Hitler's Armies*, 252. The Germans also transitioned to the defense in North Africa. McNab, *Hitler's Armies*, 167. Ceding Africa to the Allies, the Germans inflicted many casualties but also steadily lost ground in Italy. McNab, *Hitler's Armies*, 256.



impending Allied invasion of Western Europe, the senior commander General Jodl noted that there were 280 divisions remaining in the German military in 1944. However, with 25 in the Balkans, 12 in Norway, 27 in Italy, and 156 on the Eastern Front fighting Russia, that left only 60 divisions to repel the Allies. Of those 60 divisions, General Jodl estimated that only 30 were ready for combat.<sup>235</sup> Beginning with the Allied invasion at Normandy, the already weakened German military declined more rapidly, particularly due to the Ardennes Offensive and Operation Nordwind—two failed offensive operations.<sup>236</sup> The serious losses of late 1944 meant that fewer soldiers had to cover larger sectors, which would factor directly into the small number of troops assigned to the Rhine Gorge. Additionally, the long retreats across continents and failed offensives had taken a toll on the morale of the Germans, meaning they were more likely to surrender quickly when facing a strong attacking force.

As the German military retreated across the Rhine River in 1945, they established defenses, attempting to use that strategic terrain to repel the Allied advance into Germany. However, Operation Nordwind had seriously degraded the units responsible for the Upper Rhine. The defense of the Rhine Gorge, specifically, fell to the LXXXIX Army Corps, commanded by General Gustav Hoehne. The LXXXIX Army Corps was a relatively new unit within the German military, founded in late 1942 as the losses in Russia and Africa mounted. The unit saw little combat as it was stationed in Belgium, comprised of a revolving series of reserve divisions and soldiers rotating away from

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<sup>235</sup> Citino, *The Wehrmacht's Last Stand*, 109.

<sup>236</sup> The Ardennes offensive resulted in 120,000 soldiers and 600 armored vehicles lost. McNab, *Hitler's Armies*, 358. Operation Nordwind was “the death rattle of the Wehrmacht” because it exhausted German reserves and resources to the point that they were never again able to mount a significant offensive during World War II. Steven J. Zaloga, *Operation Nordwind 1945: Hitler's Last Offensive in the West* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 84. Operation Nordwind also seriously degraded the units that would later be assigned to the Rhine Gorge. Zaloga, *Operation Nordwind 1945*, 33.

sectors like the Eastern Front. The LXXXIX Corps was moved out of Belgium in November, prior to the Battle of the Bulge, then assigned to the Saar region where the unprepared troops were thrust headlong into Operation Nordwind, suffering over 2,500 casualties within the first week of fighting.<sup>237</sup> By the time the LXXXIX Corps was assigned to the defense of the Rhine Gorge, it only had two divisions remaining: the 276<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division (276<sup>th</sup> VG) and the 6<sup>th</sup> SS Mountain Division (6<sup>th</sup> SS).

The positions occupied by the LXXXIX Corps were initially created by the Von Berg Division, an element of Volkssturm soldiers recruited in the Rhine Gorge area and



Figure Eleven: German Deployment Along Rhine Gorge

serving as a National Guard force of sorts. Although it was labeled a division, the Volkssturm unit consisted of only two military police companies, totaling perhaps 200 personnel for the entire Rhine Gorge. As Volkssturm rather than Wehrmacht or SS, and

<sup>237</sup> William T. McCroden and Thomas E. Nutter, *German Ground Forces of World War II* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2019), 322-323; Zaloga, *Operation Nordwind 1945*, 49.

as military police rather than infantry or armor the Von Berg division was doubly unfit to mount a serious defense in the Rhine Gorge.

GEN Hoehne divided his sector at the town of Boppard, placing the 276<sup>th</sup> VG in the north and the 6<sup>th</sup> SS in the south.<sup>238</sup> (Figure Eleven) Like the Von Berg Division, the 276<sup>th</sup> VG was a misnomer, since their strength in late March was little more than 400 men.<sup>239</sup> The northernmost boundary of the LXXXIX Corps was the town of Niederberg, which sat on the east side of the Rhine River across from Koblenz.

The German military decided to strongpoint the key city of Koblenz, even though it sat on the west side of the Rhine, obligating General Hoehne to commit over half of the 276<sup>th</sup> VG to that city. Adjacent units contributed to the Koblenz defense, totaling 1,800 men, but when the Allied forces commanded by LTG Middleton took Koblenz on March 19, only about 50 of those German defenders made it across the Rhine, leaving an already depleted 276<sup>th</sup> VG in a precarious position. Even with his reduced force, GEN Hoehne assessed that it would be possible to defend the Rhine Gorge with remnants of the 276<sup>th</sup> VG in the north and the relatively strong 6<sup>th</sup> SS in the south. Unfortunately for GEN Hoehne, the 6<sup>th</sup> SS was taken from him on March 21 to serve as a reserve element to the east, leaving the southern sector of the Rhine Gorge without any infantry protecting it and making a defense there practically impossible.<sup>240</sup>

The withdrawal of the 6<sup>th</sup> SS from the Rhine Gorge meant the section where the 89<sup>th</sup> ID would cross fell under the command of the 19<sup>th</sup> Flak Brigade, the anti-aircraft unit

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<sup>238</sup> Hoehne, "Abwehrkaempfe Des LXXXIX.A.K. An Der Rhein-Front Vom 18.-28.3.1945," 1.

<sup>239</sup> Samuel W. Mitcham, Jr, *German Order of Battle, Volume One: 1st-290th Infantry Divisions in WWII* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2007), 271.

<sup>240</sup> Hoehne, "Abwehrkaempfe Des LXXXIX.A.K. An Der Rhein-Front Vom 18.-28.3.1945," 3; MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 251.

responsible for defending that region of Germany against Allied aerial raids.<sup>241</sup> Like other German units, the 19<sup>th</sup> Flak Brigade was severely undermanned and underequipped by March of 1945. GEN Hoehne notes that only the light anti-aircraft guns could be used in the Rhine Gorge, which would have primarily been the commonly used FlaK 30, a 20mm single gun system that was originally intended to be a place holder until the Flakvierling 38 could be fielded, which was an improved system combining four guns into a single weapon for an increased rate of fire.<sup>242</sup> The heavy anti-aircraft weapons were useless in the steep terrain of the Rhine Gorge due to their trajectory, so they were held further back and used only for anti-aircraft fires. The few remaining FlaK 30s and Flakvierling 38s were emplaced at key points along the ridges but had to be fired from exposed positions in order to effectively engage ground forces attempting to cross the Rhine. The only soldiers available to reinforce the 19<sup>th</sup> Flak Brigade were small contingents of military police from the Von Berg Division, who GEN Hoehne refers to as having “no fighting value whatsoever.”<sup>243</sup> So, as the American forces approached, the towns of Wellmich, St Goarshausen, and Oberwesel were defended by ineffective soldiers and anti-aircraft guns.

With careful analysis of the historical context and the relevant details communicated by GEN Hoehne, it is possible to reliably estimate the size and quality of the force defending the Rhine Gorge. Accurately assessing the German defense is crucial because doing so enables the extrapolation of reasonable outcomes for the Rhine Gorge crossing. In other words, it reveals how many casualties the German forces should have been able to inflict on the 89<sup>th</sup> ID. Although it is admittedly speculative by nature,

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<sup>241</sup> Hoehne, “Abwehrkaempfe Des LXXXIX.A.K. An Der Rhein-Front Vom 18.-28.3.1945,” 4.

<sup>242</sup> Seidler, *Images of War*, 154.

<sup>243</sup> Hoehne, “Abwehrkaempfe Des LXXXIX.A.K. An Der Rhein-Front Vom 18.-28.3.1945,” 2.

projecting what the German defenders *should* have been able to accomplish is critical to developing a truly wholistic estimate of the cost suffered by the Americans. If the Germans *should* have been able to inflict thousands of casualties based on the men and equipment available, it would indicate the American attackers conducted an efficient and entirely successful operation. Contrarily, if the Germans *should* have failed to even slow down a fully equipped American task force, it would dramatically reframe the significance of the casualties they inflicted.

Assessing the German defense is difficult, but not impossible. The records from the Von Berg Division do not mention the Rhine Gorge battle, indicating that the Volkssturm soldiers only had a minor role in the fighting.<sup>244</sup> The records of the 276<sup>th</sup> VG indicate that the 19<sup>th</sup> Flak Brigade was likely arrayed in about four defensive positions around towns on the eastern bank, with between four and eight FlaK 30s or Flakvierling 38s at any given location.<sup>245</sup> American POW records reveal that the total number of German defenders for the Rhine Gorge was less than 200 soldiers, with a little over 50 defenders at each location.<sup>246</sup> Therefore, the detachment of anti-aircraft crew members

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<sup>244</sup> Kurt von Berg, "Feldzug in Mitteldeutschland 22.3.45 bis 11.5.45," MS B-125, Foreign Military Studies, National Archives Microfiche Publication M1035, National Archives Building, College Park, MD, 1-10.

<sup>245</sup> Two light batteries (size unknown) and one heavy battery (consisting of 12 guns) were assigned to 276<sup>th</sup> VG. Rudolf Freiherr von Gersdorff, "Einsatz der 276. Volks-Grenadier-Division 17.-27.3.1945," MS B-124, Foreign Military Studies, National Archives Microfiche Publication M1035, National Archives Building, College Park, MD, 5. Considering the reduced combat power of German units in 1945, that would have amounted to approximately a battalion. GEN Hoehne would have divided the 19<sup>th</sup> Flak Brigade evenly between the northern and southern sectors of the Rhine Gorge, leaving a similarly sized battalion to support the 6<sup>th</sup> SS. GEN Hoehne stated that the heavy anti-aircraft guns were not employed against ground forces. That would leave two batteries of light anti-aircraft guns, a maximum of 24 pieces, to cover the entire southern sector. While the Americans only crossed at three locations in the southern sector, the German defenses extended all the way to Eltville, further upstream. A conservative estimate of four defensive positions around towns on the eastern bank would result in about six FlaK 30s or Flakvierling 38s at any given location.

<sup>246</sup> The history of the 354<sup>th</sup> IN claimed that a combined 200 prisoners were taken in Wellmich and St Goarshausen. Wilson, *Combat History of the 354th Infantry Regiment*, 29. However, the reports of 2-354<sup>th</sup> IN stated that only 49 prisoners were captured in St Goarshausen, meaning that the number 200 was likely inflated. There is no indication in German or American records that the town of Wellmich was strengthened

with assorted Volkssturm soldiers defending St Goarshausen consisted of 50-75 Germans manning 6-10 light anti-aircraft guns. Oberwesel and Wellmich were likely defended by fewer Germans, since they are not even mentioned in the reports. No infantrymen participated, no artillery was allocated specifically to the defenders, and no armored vehicles were available. Some of the German soldiers were untrained recruits who had previously been barred from joining the military. The anti-aircraft soldiers were trained to shoot airplanes—not engage ground forces and hold terrain. All these factors indicate that German forces should have only been able to inflict a relatively small number of casualties. The fact that such depleted units were able to impose substantial losses on the 89<sup>th</sup> ID is further evidence of operational missteps on the part of the American military.

Assessing the American forces is much easier due to the available records. At well over 10,000 soldiers, the 89<sup>th</sup> ID was at least 50 times bigger than the German force defending the Rhine Gorge. The 89<sup>th</sup> ID also had 304 artillery pieces, two attached armored battalions, and aerial cover from the XIX Tactical Air Command supporting their operation.<sup>247</sup> Additionally, the soldiers of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID were fresh and ready for combat while the German defenders were weary from years of fighting. The only significant advantage the Germans had was terrain, but American forces had the enablers needed to reach across the river and mitigate the German advantage using high-caliber direct fire weapons, artillery, and air power. After comparing all the factors and assessing both sides, it is completely reasonable to say that the Americans could have defeated the

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with more defenders. If anything, Wellmich would have had fewer defenders because it was smaller and less significant.

<sup>247</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 97, 201-203.

Germans without losing more than 20 men.<sup>248</sup> Undoubtedly, if the Americans had not made themselves so vulnerable while crossing the Rhine Gorge, they could have easily broken the German defense without losing many soldiers. As it was, the Germans inflicted over 250 casualties—more than 50 casualties than there were defenders. The Americans lost over 10 times the number of men than would have been reasonably expected. It is only in those terms that the true cost of the Rhine Gorge is revealed.

At face value, the numbers indicate an overwhelming advantage for American forces; a closer look demonstrates that the situation was even more bleak for the Germans than the numbers alone say. The German records do not provide a detailed account of what happened during the Allied crossing of the Rhine Gorge—in fact, they have hardly any details at all. After discussing how they set in the defenses, the reports simply say where the Allies crossed. Such little information is not surprising. The German soldiers who experienced the battle first-hand were killed or captured, and their accounts did not make it back to their superiors.

Ultimately, the Germans were categorically defeated at the Rhine Gorge, but given the state of their units, their defeat was entirely predictable. The value of the German perspective lies in their detailed account of just how minimal the defenses were along the Rhine Gorge—a perspective that was entirely overlooked in American accounts. To their credit, the few German soldiers remaining in the area did organize a relatively impressive resistance, but given the state of their forces, the amount of damage

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<sup>248</sup> Rather than an arbitrary number, 20 men represents the loss of two assault boats during the Rhine Gorge crossing. Since the 89<sup>th</sup> ID had some knowledge of the German positions, they could have neutralized most or all of them. However, if they failed to initially neutralize two German 20mm gun positions, those positions could realistically damage or destroy about two assault boats before being neutralized by properly positioned American armor supporting from the west bank of the Rhine. Although speculative, the number is a reasonable projection.

inflicted on the Americans is truly astounding. The German perspective serves to undermine the narrative of American exceptionalism that pervades the original narrative of World War II generally and the Rhine Gorge specifically.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS

As we walked back to the starting point, I could see what had happened to the boats that preceded us. The shore was covered with human bodies, arms, legs, and human flesh was evident along the shoreline. This was a horrible, ghastly fight.

—SGT Clarence Petoske<sup>249</sup>

A great deal can be learned from the historical records of the Rhine Gorge crossing that have been preserved by the United States government. Those records provide a treasure trove of reliable facts—timetables, unit positions, casualty numbers, operational orders, etc. The National Archives have even preserved German military records, enabling historians to look at the battle from both sides of the Rhine. However, the preserved military records leave out one of the most important perspectives: the American soldiers who were on the ground and in the boats crossing the Rhine Gorge. So where can that perspective be found? Scattered bits and pieces, traces of an event long ignored, can be recovered from the edges of history in the form of short accounts written in newsletters or posted online for fellow veterans as well as obscure articles that were never widely read. The soldier perspective is the most valuable group of sources for reshaping the Rhine Gorge narrative for two basic reasons: it is the only collection of eye-witness accounts available and it has not yet been incorporated into a wholistic historical analysis of the battle.

The value of soldier accounts does not negate the serious limitations involved with using them to reshape the narrative. They are the most contradictory and unreliable sources available, even though they still have much to offer researchers. Some soldiers make claims that are clearly inaccurate when compared to other accounts and the unit

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<sup>249</sup> Clarence Petoske, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 9.

records. Inaccuracy is inevitable considering many wrote their stories decades later. Time can alter even the most distinct memories, and veterans certainly read the histories available to them and compared memories with fellow veterans over the years, distorting their own thoughts about the events they witnessed. Soldiers also saw the Cold War unfolding around them, and their feelings about current events could have galvanized their political sensibilities and distorted their memories. Additionally, humans have a proclivity for sensationalism, and war stories are by no means immune from that natural tendency. Sharing a war story online, in a newsletter, or in a magazine presents a unique opportunity to garner the appreciation of others by overstating experiences. Consequently, recreating a minute-by-minute record of everything that happened during the battle is not possible using their accounts, but carefully reading their stories reveals unmistakable trends and patterns.

The *feeling* and *tone* of veterans' stories is completely different than that of the original narrative crafted by leaders, journalists, and historians working for the War Department. Rather than simply celebrating the power of the American military, the individual testimonies of veterans leave an impression of immense tragedy and poor planning by senior leaders. The memories communicated by veterans represent the most significant elements of the story for them. Even seemingly inconsequential details should be taken seriously, especially when multiple people mention similar specifics.

The surviving soldier accounts of the Rhine Gorge crossing consist of a wide variety of individual perspectives recorded for distinct purposes. Oscar Friedensohn managed to have his account published in a couple of short periodicals. Paul Brown wrote a detailed analysis of the battle for one of his army schools. Donald Chase, Robert

Gallagher, and Murray Coffey posted their memoirs online. Several men wrote down their memories for inclusion in “The Rolling W,” a magazine edition printed ahead of an 89<sup>th</sup> ID reunion in 1994 and distributed to veterans of the unit. Finally, a few soldiers sent their stories to the 89<sup>th</sup> ID website where they were posted for fellow veterans and family members to see.

In total, there are almost thirty first-hand accounts written by American soldiers that participated in the Rhine Gorge crossing whose identities can be confirmed using the rosters preserved by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID or other military records. The accounts range from short paragraphs to book-length memoirs. The individual perspectives vary from infantrymen crossing in the initial wave to support soldiers watching the entire battle from the ridgeline. The highest-ranking soldier was a captain serving as a company commander, and the lowest ranking was a private serving as a rifleman. The details in the personal accounts often vary, based on each specific perspective. Since the accounts are incomplete and the reliability of individual soldiers is difficult to establish without having much background information on them, the only effective way to leverage their stories is to identify trends, thereby consolidating them into a unified perspective.

The first trend from veteran accounts is a communicated feeling of impending doom felt as they prepared for the attack. For example, First Lieutenant (1LT) Jim Connell begins his story by mentioning that the phrase “see the Rhine and die” was painted all over the buildings on the west side of the Rhine Gorge.<sup>250</sup> The phrase must have been prevalent in Oberwesel, because PFC Ed Quick also mentions seeing a crudely

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<sup>250</sup> Jim Connell, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 6.

painted skull and crossbones with the slogan “see the Rhine and leave your skull there.”<sup>251</sup> The signs made a lasting impression.

In addition to the signs written on walls, several soldiers specifically remember receiving a hot meal before the attack, which they interpreted as a bad omen. PFC Robert Gallagher and Captain (CPT) Paul Brown mention the hot meal without going into detail about the significance of it.<sup>252</sup> The recurrence of otherwise insignificant facts like receiving a hot meal say a lot about how people felt. PFC Phillip Leveque explains the feelings that accompanied a hot meal: “We were told that we were going to have Class A rations (cooked by the company mess sergeants) for supper. This was ominous as hell itself, as we hadn’t had Class A food for weeks.”<sup>253</sup> Putting it more bluntly, PFC Lester Becker says of the hot meal, “I think they figured it would probably be the last one for many of us.”<sup>254</sup> The feeling of impending tragedy communicated years later by veterans could be a product of hindsight with the results of the battle creating the memory of that feeling, but even that would be significant because the historical records do not feature a sense of tragedy or doom at all. Regardless of when those feelings manifested, they represent a divergence from the original narrative.

Contributing to the ominous mood of the veteran accounts, many of them describe the difficult terrain in the Rhine Gorge. Demonstrating an awareness of the mythology born in that region, three veterans speak of the Lorelei who had supposedly lured sailors

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<sup>251</sup> Ed Quick, “Rhine Crossing,” *89th Infantry Division of World War II*, November 18, 2001.

<sup>252</sup> Robert F. Gallagher, “World War II Story: Scratch One Messerschmitt,” *Gallagher Story*; Paul J. Brown, “Operations of Company A, 354th Infantry Regiment, 89th Division, in the Rhine crossing at Wellmich, Germany, 25-26 March 1945” (1947-1948), Infantry School Student Papers, in the MCoE Libraries Digital Collection, 6.

<sup>253</sup> Phillip Leveque, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 10.

<sup>254</sup> Lester L. Becker, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 7.

to their deaths in the Rhine Gorge for centuries.<sup>255</sup> Admittedly, it is unlikely they knew of the Lorelei connection until after the war, or at least after the battle, but their connection to that myth is likely tied to difficult personal experiences with the terrain. Many others simply note the rough landscape that inspired those myths, such as Sergeant (SGT) Harold Mathews who says little about the crossing, focusing almost entirely on the struggle he had moving up the east bank at Oberwesel. “The bank was very high, nearly vertical and terraced with grape vineyards making our climb very difficult.”<sup>256</sup> PFC Eric Leiseroff, who also crossed at Oberwesel, does not go into as much detail, simply exclaiming, “On the other side it was all mountains!”<sup>257</sup> The steep slopes on the far side of the Rhine Gorge were not forgotten.

CPT Brown focuses on the strategic aspects of the terrain in his account, noting that it heavily favored the enemy with steep banks and a fast current of icy water flowing from the Alps.<sup>258</sup> Taking his analysis even further, PFC James Jochen states that the terrible location for a crossing was even worse due to the spring thaw which swelled the river and made the current more dangerous than usual.<sup>259</sup> There is no way PFC Jochen could have known what that section usually looked like, but there is no reason to doubt that the fast current made a distinct impression. In fact, the swift current is one of the most mentioned details in the Rhine Gorge accounts.<sup>260</sup> CPT Brown’s understated

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<sup>255</sup> Connell, “Rhine Stories,” 6; Robert F. Gallagher, “World War II Story”; Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 3.

<sup>256</sup> Harold Mathews, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 5.

<sup>257</sup> Eric Leiseroff, “This Country Gave Me Life!” *An Honor to Serve* (Ann Arbor: Sheridan Books, 2007), 247.

<sup>258</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 7.

<sup>259</sup> James J. Jochen, “We Had Our Baptism of Fire, and We Survived,” *An Honor to Serve* (Ann Arbor: Sheridan Books, 2007), 174.

<sup>260</sup> Matt Landers, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 7; Leveque, “Rhine Stories,” 10; Friedensohn, “Red Ran the Rhine,” 38-39.

assessment at the end of his essay, “In my opinion a better crossing site could have been selected,” is echoed throughout the veteran narratives.<sup>261</sup> Although senior leaders passively acknowledged the difficult terrain, it is only in the accounts of participating soldiers that the full impact is found. Their accounts of the river conditions are corroborated by the mythological traditions and ubiquitous news articles describing the Rhine Gorge that have already been examined.

As the soldiers of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID prepared to attack the difficult terrain of the Rhine Gorge, another prevalent feeling was that of confusion as they rushed through last minute planning. There is always confusion during operational planning, but many soldiers noted an exceptional lack of information leading up to this river crossing. PFC Elmer Herbaly writes that he did not even know where he was as they prepared to cross the Rhine River.<sup>262</sup> Corroborating his account, PFC Leveque states that junior soldiers never knew where they were, and that their leaders intentionally never told them; however, at the Rhine Gorge the unknown was particularly frightening, and he admits, “I was scared to death.”<sup>263</sup> More than one soldier indicates that they had no idea Allied forces had already crossed the Rhine River—they thought they would be the first troops to enter the heartland of Germany.<sup>264</sup>

Interpreting the confusion of soldiers presents two problems. First, their confusion could have been a more personal issue than they realized. The fact that they knew little about their situation is not necessarily indicative of widespread confusion. Second, admitted confusion is not consistent with some of the other details they claim to recall

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<sup>261</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 23.

<sup>262</sup> Elmer L. Herbaly, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 11.

<sup>263</sup> Leveque, “Rhine Stories,” 10.

<sup>264</sup> Friedensohn, “Red Ran the Rhine,” 37; Leveque, “Rhine Stories,” 10.

vividly, meaning they were either not actually that confused or some of their details were invented or came from other sources rather than their own memories. The reliable perspective that can be found by consolidating the stories is that preparation at the lowest levels was rushed, which would reflect poorly on the abilities of company, battalion, and regimental headquarters to publish timely plans. This perspective is conspicuously missing from the official records. The generals responsible for the Rhine Gorge crossing made no mention of rushed planning, but it is likely that this facet of the operation was completely transparent to them. Their knowledge would have been limited to what the battalions and regiments reported since they did not personally observe the crossing.

Conversely, veterans with more rank indicate that they had a decent grasp on the situation prior to launching the attack, which supports the conclusion that the plans were not properly disseminated to the lowest levels. 1LT George Pusey states that the Rhine Gorge crossing was the only time he received a formal attack plan during World War II; but even he admits that the plan was changing significantly as they made their preparations for the crossing.<sup>265</sup> Since the division and regimental plans seem to have remained the same, some of the blame for last minute changes and confusion should fall on leaders like LT Pusey and his immediate supervisor for failing to provide sufficient clarity to their soldiers.

CPT Brown notes that 2-354<sup>th</sup> IN did not issue the battalion operations order until 2400, just two hours before the attack initiated. By the time he returned from the order, his company had to begin moving down to the launching point. CPT Brown tried to brief his platoon leaders individually as they moved through the darkness—being so rushed it

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<sup>265</sup> George Pusey, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 13.

is unlikely the plan filtered down farther than that. As they began loading boats no one knew where to go or which boat to get in, so leaders randomly assigned soldiers to boats. However, leaders like CPT Brown could have anticipated the delay from battalion and created their own load plans or at least basic movement coordination. After all, they had known for several hours that they would cross the river, even if they did not have the official order.

Despite any personal culpability overlooked by leaders like LT Pusey and CPT Brown, the plan was certainly published too late by the battalions. There definitely was a clear division plan for crossing the Rhine Gorge; the 89<sup>th</sup> ID official history has the division operations order published in totality for posterity. However, most of the soldiers loading the boats that night had no idea what that plan was.<sup>266</sup> Leaders at all levels were responsible for that confusion.

Another trend in the veteran accounts about the Rhine Gorge crossing is the use of supporting assets such as artillery and smoke (or lack thereof) to assist in the operation. At first glance, this topic is difficult to interpret because the stories seem to conflict, with some claiming that they were used extensively and other stating that they were not used effectively at all. There are two principles that can be used to clarify the matter. First, the individual accounts are often based on impressions and individual perspectives, meaning that two people could hear or see the same incident and still provide varying assessments. Second, for artillery there is a difference between preparatory fires and covering fires. Preparatory fires take place *before* an objective is attacked in order to destroy or displace the enemy, while covering fires take place *during* an attack in order to prevent the enemy

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<sup>266</sup> Brown, "Operations of Company A," 10-11.



from engaging friendly elements as they move closer. By looking closely at soldier accounts to identify the timing of the artillery fire they heard or saw, it is possible to determine if they witnessed preparatory fires or covering fires. Preparatory fires would have been much less effective than covering fires for a river crossing.

From the veterans' stories available, six different soldiers specifically mention hearing or seeing extensive American artillery fire across the river before the attack began.<sup>267</sup> PVT Friedensohn, on the other hand, takes issue with the idea that the artillery fire was extensive, stating "I remember sporadic shells at what seemed like random intervals."<sup>268</sup> Regardless of the intensity or whether the soldiers knew their purpose, all of these artillery missions were preparatory fires, executed long before the crossings began. CPT Brown clearly remembers requesting that additional preparatory fires be conducted immediately prior to the assault to make them more effective, but his request was denied.<sup>269</sup> Because the preparatory fires were executed long before the attack and the enemy occupied fortified positions with cover, their effect would have been minimal.

CPT Brown's requested preparatory fires may have been more effective than those conducted, but covering fires would have done the most to protect the soldiers crossing that night. As PFC Herbaly notes about the moment of crossing, "There was to be no artillery, so we were on our own in securing a foothold."<sup>270</sup> Rather than being a purely hypothetical point, the testimony of SGT Clarence Petoske who crossed after the Americans began using covering fires during the day demonstrates conclusively how

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<sup>267</sup> Cornelius D. Woodard, "Rhine Stories," *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 5; Becker, "Rhine Stories," 7; Petoske, "Rhine Stories," 9; Herbaly, "Rhine Stories," 11; Gallagher, "World War II Story"; Robert Woodrum, "Recollections of WWII," *89th Infantry Division of World War II*.

<sup>268</sup> Friedensohn, "Red Ran the Rhine," 37.

<sup>269</sup> Brown, "Operations of Company A," 10.

<sup>270</sup> Herbaly, "Rhine Stories," 11.

much of a difference artillery would have made during the initial attempts: “I think all our boats made it across without being shot at. I guess the reason we were so successful in crossing was that our artillery had laid down a tremendous barrage of fire.”<sup>271</sup> The failure to leverage artillery to cover the first waves during the night certainly contributed to the number of American casualties sustained.

In addition to artillery fire, another asset that was often used to support maneuvering troops was smoke, which could be provided by mortars or smoke generators. Technician Fifth Grade (TEC5) Cornelius Woodard and PFC Sol Brandell both remember smoke generators being used, but the wind was blowing in the wrong direction, making them completely useless.<sup>272</sup> CPT Brown recognized the need for effective smoke when his soldiers took contact in the middle of the river. Acting quickly, he grabbed his radio and called in smoke from the only asset available to him: 81mm mortars. Smoke rounds from mortars were white phosphorus shells, which exploded into fragments of incredibly hot metal while creating a thick cloud of smoke. However, mortars are an area weapon system and need to be adjusted onto a target through a process of firing rounds with an observer calling in corrections to the gun crews. Since the mortars were not already adjusted onto a target on the far bank, CPT Brown’s request resulted in three rounds being fired, with two of them impacting on the American side of the river. Due to the danger of deadly white phosphorus rounds landing on his own troops, CPT Brown had to immediately call for a cease fire on smoke rounds, leaving his men without any concealment as they struggled across the river.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Petoske, “Rhine Stories,” 9.

<sup>272</sup> Woodard, “Rhine Stories,” 5; Sol Brandell, “Recollections of a WWII Infantryman,” *89th Infantry Division of World War II*.

<sup>273</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 14.

The reason for not using covering artillery fires or adjusting smoke targets onto the far side prior to the assault was simple, if misguided. The plan was to execute a surprise infiltration across the river and catch the enemy off guard.<sup>274</sup> Unfortunately, it was clear that the Americans intended to cross the Rhine, even if the exact time was unknown. The massive buildup of troops and the harassing preparatory fires would have had the Germans on constant high alert. As CPT Brown writes, “In my opinion, there is no such thing as a secret crossing of a river.”<sup>275</sup> SGT Murray Coffey notes in his memoirs that after he made it across in the initial wave, his group received word to stay under cover while tanks and artillery engaged the enemy from west of the river. After witnessing the success of those fires, he decided that they should have done that from the beginning rather than attempting to sneak across the Rhine Gorge.<sup>276</sup>

Another one of the most discussed aspects of the Rhine crossing is the type of boat used, resulting in two dramatically different experiences. Those that used the wooden assault boats typically relate tragic memories. 1LT Connell remembers one his soldiers, PFC Harold Lannom, being shot in the head so close to him that teeth fragments struck 1LT Connell’s cheek. They were vulnerable in the middle of the river and paddled furiously to reach the other side.<sup>277</sup> PFC Herbaly almost drowned when his boat capsized, not due to enemy fire, but simply because it could not handle the weight of the passengers in the fast current.<sup>278</sup> Whoever was responsible for incorporating the small wooden boats did not understand how difficult it would be to move across the powerful

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<sup>274</sup> Gallagher, “World War II Story”; Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 10.

<sup>275</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 24.

<sup>276</sup> Murray Coffey, *World War II and My Military Memories* (Self-published through Lulu Press, 2016), 65.

<sup>277</sup> Connell, “Rhine Stories,” 6.

<sup>278</sup> Herbaly, “Rhine Stories,” 11.

current—especially under enemy fire. The plan had incorporated a crew of two or three engineers with each boat who were supposed to return to the west bank in order to pick up more soldiers.<sup>279</sup> PFC Gallagher observed from the west ridgeline as the initial wave struggled across the river. Once they reached the far side, not a single boat dared to attempt a return trip.<sup>280</sup> Their decision to remain on the east side was not a sign of cowardice. As PFC Jochen notes, the assault boats were agonizingly slow and made easy targets for the German defenders.<sup>281</sup> Attempting a return trip would have been foolhardy.

The soldiers who crossed later using motorized assault boats and naval DUKWs had an entirely different experience. PFC Becker and PFC Quick both crossed quickly with no incident at Oberwesel.<sup>282</sup> PFC Leonard Waldner saw one DUKW capsize, but only because it was loaded down with a 105mm howitzer cannon.<sup>283</sup> PVT Friedensohn witnessed the stark contrast between the assault boats and powered boats firsthand. He was severely wounded while crossing in a wooden boat. After making it to the east side, he faded in and out of consciousness for hours until he was picked up by soldiers in a powered boat and evacuated to receive medical care. They were engaged by enemy machine guns on the way back, but the boat remained untouched because the Germans were unable to hit such a quick target.<sup>284</sup> Like the lack of artillery support, the use of wooden boats was intended to surprise the German defenders. Leaders assessed that powered boats would simply be too loud. The amount of paddled boats readily available likely factored into the decision as well.

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<sup>279</sup> Petoske, “Rhine Stories,” 9; Friedensohn, “Red Ran the Rhine,” 37.

<sup>280</sup> Gallagher, “World War II Story.”

<sup>281</sup> Jochen, “We Had Our Baptism of Fire, and We Survived,” 174.

<sup>282</sup> Becker, “Rhine Stories,” 7; Ed Quick, “Rhine Crossing.”

<sup>283</sup> Leonard Waldner, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 5.

<sup>284</sup> Friedensohn, “Red Ran the Rhine,” 41.

The most prevalent trend in the stories recorded by veterans of the Rhine Gorge crossing is undoubtedly the nightmare that erupted when the first wave of soldiers reached the middle of the river. In order to frame and understand some of the differences in their narratives, they can be divided according to location. As has been stated, there were three crossing locations for the 89<sup>th</sup> ID: Oberwesel, Wellmich, and St Goarshausen. Based on time and location, the stories range from unsettling to utterly terrifying.

The mildest location was Oberwesel, where the 353<sup>rd</sup> IN crossed. There were likely fewer defenders in that location, and the 353<sup>rd</sup> IN managed to get scouting parties across without taking any contact from the enemy. PFC Leiseroff recalls crossing with three or four other E Co soldiers before the unit attempted any large-scale operations. As they patrolled the east side, they came under direct fire from the Germans.<sup>285</sup> An E Co soldier who crossed with the first large wave, PFC Becker, notes that most of the fortified German defensive positions had already been destroyed by the scouting parties, but they did still receive machine gun fire and enemy artillery fire as they crossed.<sup>286</sup> PFC Waldner from the regimental cannon company echoes PFC Becker's statement, emphasizing the important role of those initial scouting parties.<sup>287</sup> Without diminishing the actions of the small patrols who cleared the way, it is worth noting that the number of German positions in that area must have been significantly lower than the other two sites considering how effectively the Americans were able to neutralize the defensive positions. As successful as the crossing at Oberwesel was, it was not without cost. TEC5

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<sup>285</sup> Leiseroff, "This Country Gave Me Life!" 247.

<sup>286</sup> Becker, "Rhine Stories," 7.

<sup>287</sup> Waldner, "Rhine Stories," 5.

Matt Landers was with the first wave of DUKWs crossing at Oberwesel and remembers one of those boats being hit by enemy fire as it pushed away from the western bank.<sup>288</sup>

At the northernmost crossing point of Wellmich, the soldiers were not as fortunate. The 354<sup>th</sup> IN also planned to send a small patrol across before the first big wave of soldiers, and around 0130 CPT Brown received a report from MAJ Willis, the 1-354<sup>th</sup> IN executive officer, that the B Co squad chosen for that task had made it safely to the far side.<sup>289</sup> PFC Donald Robertson was a member of the scouting element, and he remembers making it across without the enemy firing a single shot, but unlike the scouts at Oberwesel, his squad did not engage any Germans once they made it across. They watched the main body follow them halfway across the river, at which point “all hell broke loose.”<sup>290</sup>

The soldiers he saw in the river were from CPT Brown’s A Co. The 2<sup>nd</sup> PLT had just pushed away from the shore when the shooting started, and most of them were able to scramble back to the west bank, although some of them drowned before they could make it back.<sup>291</sup> Since the first boats had no choice but to continue to the other side, A Co was split in half, with the commander and first sergeant on the west bank unable to contact or help their soldiers on the far side. Since the assault boats did not return, CPT Brown and the rest of his company were unable to make it across the river until 0500, a full three hours later, when motorized boats were brought down to the west bank.<sup>292</sup> From A Co alone, the chaos in the Rhine Gorge resulted in 19 soldiers killed, 23 wounded, and

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<sup>288</sup> Landers, “Rhine Stories,” 7.

<sup>289</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 11.

<sup>290</sup> Donald L. Robertson, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 8.

<sup>291</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 12.

<sup>292</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 17.

4 more taken prisoner.<sup>293</sup> It is difficult to calculate how many casualties were sustained by the other companies or the engineers and other enablers who participated. However, Wellmich clearly took a heavy toll on the soldiers who crossed there.

As terrible as the experience at Wellmich was, the situation at St Goarshausen was even more horrific. Two companies, E Co and F Co initiated their crossing of the Rhine Gorge simultaneously. From his position downstream, CPT Brown heard the maelstrom erupting as his own soldiers loaded into boats. “As the head of the second Platoon started down the bank, intense firing started on our right flank.”<sup>294</sup> The soldiers of 2<sup>nd</sup> PLT, E Co struggled through the chaos. The platoon leader, 1LT George Pusey, describes the scene in his boat: “Raleigh had a paddle shot out of his hand—the splinters hit Wingert in the face. It seemed like shells were in our clothing.”<sup>295</sup> Staff Sergeant (SSG) Raleigh Bowling, the squad leader whose paddle was shattered, later stated, “When we were crossing, I didn’t think any of us would make it.”<sup>296</sup> One of the soldiers from 2<sup>nd</sup> PLT, PFC William Carver, claims that only 11 of members of his platoon made it to the other side.<sup>297</sup> PVT Friedensohn, the engineer who would later write extensively about the horrors of the crossing, was one of the soldiers responsible for transporting E Co. He provides a chilling account of how his boat was ravaged by one of the German anti-aircraft guns.

Seconds after the explosive force ripped into us, an unworldly silence covered the boat. The firing continued, along with the deadly lightscreens. We barely heard the noise—it came from a distant world. Our world had shrunk once again to the few still left aboard this small boat. Others had been blown over the sides by the force of the 20mm fire. I found myself amid an unmoving tangle of arms, legs and bodies in the bottom of the boat.

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<sup>293</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 23.

<sup>294</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 12.

<sup>295</sup> George Pusey, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994):13.

<sup>296</sup> Raleigh Bowling, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 12.

<sup>297</sup> William J. Carver, “Rhine Stories,” *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 12.

The 1<sup>st</sup> PLT from E Co reached the other side with similar numbers remaining. The other platoon, 3<sup>rd</sup> PLT, was unable to push through the firestorm; the current pushed them downstream where the survivors linked up with A Co and participated in the Wellmich assault once motorized boats were available.<sup>298</sup>

Few first-hand records survive from F Co, but Technical Sergeant (T/SGT) Colby LaPlace from the reserve company that followed later in the day reports that F Co faced the brunt of the slaughter. As the attack proceeded, he heard that only 15 men from the initial push by F Co made it to the other side.<sup>299</sup> Thankfully, LaPlace's report did not mean that the rest of the company had been killed. Like A Co at Wellmich, the remainder of F Co who were able to stop movement when the firing began had to wait until daybreak to make another push. Their crossing was covered by a smoke screen and covering fire from the cannon company.<sup>300</sup> The exact number of casualties sustained by F Co is difficult to assess. Accountability reports for the days that followed reveal the chaotic nature of the attack. It took days for some soldiers to be reported as casualties. Based on the influx of replacement soldiers and the somewhat unreliable reporting of the company, at least 40 soldiers were either killed or severely wounded during the crossing.<sup>301</sup>

Although relatively accurate losses can be deciphered for the 353<sup>rd</sup> IN and the 354<sup>th</sup> IN, the total number of casualties can only be estimated since there were so many

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<sup>298</sup> Wilson, *Combat History of the 354th Infantry Regiment*, 17.

<sup>299</sup> Colby S. LaPlace, "Rhine Stories," *The Rolling W* vol. 4, no. 37 (Apr. 1994): 9.

<sup>300</sup> Wilson, *Combat History of the 354th Infantry Regiment*, 20.

<sup>301</sup> Morning Reports, F Company, 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment; *Office of the Adjutant General Morning Reports, Mar 1945* (National Archives Microfilm Publication 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, roll 12887); National Archives Building, St Louis, MO.



supporting personnel from other units who were never systematically calculated.

Apparently, no one ever wanted to know the full cost of crossing the Rhine Gorge. SGT Coffey claims that around 1,000 men were killed, wounded, or missing in action.<sup>302</sup> His claim is demonstrably inaccurate since a conservative estimate for casualties is 259 and any number over 400 is sensationalistic.<sup>303</sup> While SGT Coffey and the other soldiers cannot be trusted to determine the true number of casualties, the feelings communicated by the veterans stranded in the middle of the firestorm are clear. Although memories of feelings are subject to the distortions of time, the overwhelming consistency across the individual stories allows for the distillation of a reliable generalized soldier perspective. From his perch on the ridgeline, PFC Gallagher watched and listened as the battle unfolded. He notes, “The fighting continued on throughout the night in the valley and the noise varied from loud to deafening.”<sup>304</sup> The carnage in the middle of the river was forever seared in the memories of the men who were at the Rhine Gorge that night, even if the specifics of that carnage were distorted in unique ways for each veteran.

Although not as prevalent as other trends in the veteran accounts, two of the most detailed sources emphasize the crucial role of American armored vehicles in allowing the units crossing to overcome the German defenses during the day. CPT Brown, whose narrative was composed only three years after the events occurred, provides an excellent analysis of the tactical advantage tank destroyers provided.

At 1035, two tank destroyers appeared across the river. With the tank destroyers buttoned up, they continually ran up and down the road behind the stone building, stopping every few seconds and firing at the 20mm positions on my flanks. This firing made my company nervous as we hung to the side of the rocky hill. The TD's fire silenced several 20mm positions. One could see the 20mm tracers glancing off the tank destroyers.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Coffey, *World War II and My Military Memories*, 65.

<sup>303</sup> See footnote 4 in Introduction for analysis of casualty estimation for Rhine Gorge.

<sup>304</sup> Gallagher, “World War II Story.”

<sup>305</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 19.

The motorized boats had enabled CPT Brown to ferry the remainder of his company across the Rhine, but the other companies crossing at Wellmich were still pinned down by the German anti-aircraft guns. Additionally, CPT Brown's company was unable to break out of their small beach head without reinforcements from the rest of the battalion.

The tank destroyers were attached to the 354<sup>th</sup> IN for the Rhine Gorge mission, but they were not employed at Wellmich until the late morning. The German 20mm anti-aircraft guns were designed to shoot high into the sky and destroy unarmored World War II era airplanes. Although they were incredibly effective against wooden boats, they were unable to penetrate even the thin armor of American tank destroyers. Once employed, the tank destroyers quickly eliminated the anti-aircraft guns while the 20mm rounds, which had been wreaking havoc on American infantry all night, bounced harmlessly off their hardened exteriors. CPT Brown concludes that the support from the tank destroyers, coupled with artillery support, enabled the other companies to begin crossing. In turn, those reinforcements allowed CPT Brown to resume his attack and seize the objective.<sup>306</sup>

Sitting high on the ridge overlooking St Goarshausen, PFC Gallagher witnessed the effect the American armored vehicles had there. Just before daybreak, he heard the familiar clinking of tracked vehicles moving into position near him. Once the sun rose, he saw an awesome display of military power.

There were tanks and tank destroyers lined up along the rim, about one hundred feet apart, for the entire length of the town down in the valley. There were about twelve to our right and they extended as far to our left as we could see. Some were up close to the rim while others were farther back. We had seen some of the Third Army's armored might before, but never anything of this magnitude. The sight was almost surreal, with the morning ground fog hiding the vehicles tracks and their turrets and cannons protruding through looking like a sea of turtles.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Brown, "Operations of Company A," 19.

<sup>307</sup> Gallagher, "World War II Story."

The American armor at St Goarshausen sat on the ridge waiting for further orders until about 0800, when they began to bombard the German defenders on the other side. The intensity of the firepower left observers marveling at the coordinated and powerful effect they produced. By 1100, the tanks and tank destroyers had degraded the German positions enough to allow the reserve company to make it across the Rhine Gorge. PFC Gallagher describes the role of the armored vehicles in detail, noting that they turned the tide of the battle and allowed the American infantrymen to finally succeed after a long night of struggling to maneuver against the German anti-aircraft and machine gun positions.<sup>308</sup> Although the official reports clearly note the presence of armor assets and even reference some of their actions, it is only in the accounts of soldiers who observed the battle where their crucial role in the eventual success of the crossing can be found.

In addition to American armor, American aircraft played a crucial role in the battle, finding their way into several veteran accounts. As with the armor assets, the eyewitness accounts prove how important the aircraft were in overcoming the initial setbacks of the crossing. There are significant discrepancies about the planes, demonstrating why their individual stories are unreliable. Fortunately, there was more than one veteran who witnessed the events, and it is possible to compare accounts to reconcile them rather than discounting them entirely. The process of reconciliation illustrates how a strong consolidated perspective can be distilled.

Some veterans mention the planes in passing, like TEC5 Woodard who only says that P-51 Mustangs (an American fighter plane) assisted during the day with strafing runs against German positions.<sup>309</sup> PFC Waldner and PFC Leveque provide an interesting

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<sup>308</sup> Gallagher, "World War II Story."

<sup>309</sup> Woodard, "Rhine Stories," 5.

additional detail, claiming that two Messerschmitts (German fighter planes) attacked the Americans at the Rhine Gorge until the P-51s engaged them in a dogfight and destroyed one of the German planes.<sup>310</sup> Contradicting their account, CPT Brown notes that six planes arrived at the Rhine Gorge at 1345 eliminating multiple German 20mm guns—all six of those planes being P-51 Mustangs with no German aircraft in the area. He also witnessed a plane being shot down but states that it was a P-51 destroyed by the German anti-aircraft guns.<sup>311</sup>

PFC Gallagher was assigned to an anti-aircraft battalion, so he was sharply attuned to what was happening in the air. He authoritatively states that only American aircraft arrived at the Rhine Gorge, but during the confusing battle some of the P-51s conducted a strafing run on American positions along the west bank. Their actions caused many of the Americans, including some of the anti-aircraft crews, to mistake them for German planes. In one of the tragedies of war, one of the American anti-aircraft guns engaged and destroyed a P-51 Mustang, believing it to be a Messerschmidt.<sup>312</sup>

Understanding PFC Gallagher's perspective explains the discrepancies. While the conclusions of the other veterans were incorrect, the fundamental presence and importance of American planes was consistent throughout the accounts, providing a reliable consolidated perspective.

Another crucial point can be pulled from the accounts of fighter planes—the destruction of the P-51 was a fratricide incident like the American mortars landing on the west bank as described by CPT Brown. In another example of possible fratricide, CPT

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<sup>310</sup> Waldner, "Rhine Stories," 4-5; Leveque, "Rhine Stories," 10.

<sup>311</sup> Brown, "Operations of Company A," 19.

<sup>312</sup> Gallagher, "World War II Story."

Brown tried to assist his soldiers who were engaged during the initial crossing by setting up a support by fire position with his machine guns. His battalion executive officer had to order a cease fire as soon as they initiated because there was no way of knowing the location of any soldiers on the far side.<sup>313</sup> Undoubtedly there were cases of fratricide that went unnoticed or at least unrecorded. Chaos and confusion in modern combined arms warfare can easily lead to fratricide as it becomes difficult to distinguish forces on the battlefield. Although the fratricide was tragic, the P-51s destroying German positions did provide the support needed for the infantry to make it across the river.

Support from armored vehicles, artillery, and aircraft eventually allowed American troops to successfully take their objective across the Rhine Gorge, but the accounts of soldiers who participated contain a palpable feeling of distrust in the American senior leaders who planned the operation. SGT Coffey argues that the initial waves were sent over to test the strength of the German defenses, since no one would have knowingly sent soldiers against such positions without providing more support for the initial push. He likely misunderstood the reasoning of American senior leaders—they clearly intended to conduct a surprise attack with the lack of support being part of that plan. However, SGT Coffey was right to conclude that “the crossing should not have been attempted until air and artillery strikes had further weakened the German defenses.”<sup>314</sup> Rather than analyzing the tactics, PFC Jochen doubts the necessity of the entire mission in his account. He claims that it was only conducted in order to allow LTG

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<sup>313</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 14.

<sup>314</sup> Coffey, *World War II and My Military Memories*, 64.

Patton to publicly brag about the achievements of Third Army who crossed the Rhine in more locations than any other unit.<sup>315</sup>

Providing a more tangible account of distrust in senior leaders, SSG Bowling speaks of a negative interaction he had with LTC Benson, the commander of 2-354<sup>th</sup> IN, who SSG Bowling refers to as “the snake.” After making it across with one of the initial waves during the night, SSG Bowling and his men had spent hours engaging in close quarter combat throughout St Goarshausen. The rest of the battalion arrived on the east side mid-morning, providing a short opportunity for SSG Bowling and his men to quickly cram down some of their canned rations before proceeding with their attack. While they were eating, LTC Benson entered the room they were occupying and immediately began to yell at the soldiers for failing to render a salute when they saw him.<sup>316</sup> The commander failed to understand the tactical situation on the ground and see that customs and courtesies were hardly a priority in the middle of a battle. His lack of recognition for what his own soldiers had gone through just hours earlier as they crossed the Rhine Gorge was just one example of why his men did not respect or trust him.

In his analysis of the Rhine Gorge crossing, CPT Brown concludes that the mission was overall a success, but provides three pages of criticism, explaining how it could have been conducted without causing so many casualties. Like others, he notes the lack of artillery and armored vehicle support for the initial waves, as well as the late utilization of motorized boats.<sup>317</sup> Since he was writing a paper for an army school, it is not surprising that CPT Brown maintains an incredibly professional tone throughout his

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<sup>315</sup> Jochen, “We Had Our Baptism of Fire, and We Survived,” 174.

<sup>316</sup> Bowling, “Rhine Stories,” 12.

<sup>317</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 23-25.

analysis. However, the number of critiques he provides as well as the specificity of his critiques reveals a deep distrust in the higher-level planning that went into the Rhine Gorge crossing. The most obvious examples of his distrust are found in phrases like “there is no such thing as a secret crossing” and “this crossing was a hurried up affair” and “the use of smoke... would have reduced casualties.”<sup>318</sup> In spite of his professionalism, a hint of resentment shines through in CPT Brown’s account of his experiences during the Rhine Gorge crossing.

It is certainly possible that CPT Brown was deflecting responsibility for some of his own failures. While there are no surviving critiques of CPT Brown, the division history records the dates every commander served in that position. CPT Brown served from March 16, 1945 through April 1, 1945—only 15 days. The reason for his short command is not clear, but his replacement remained in place for the remainder of the war and received a Silver Star, the third highest award for war service, while CPT Brown received no award.<sup>319</sup> It is possible CPT Brown was removed because of what happened to his company at the Rhine Gorge, which would give him reason to later justify his own actions for posterity. Such analysis does not negate CPT Brown’s observations, but it does mean he could have overstated the failures of others. Fortunately, the core points he made can be corroborated by other sources.

Throughout all the stories, a fundamental distrust in the decisions of senior leaders is unmistakable. The analysis of each veteran is unique, but the overall theme is consistent: serious mistakes were made. The river was destructively dangerous in the Rhine Gorge, making it a poor crossing site. At the lowest levels, the preparations were

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<sup>318</sup> Brown, “Operations of Company A,” 24.

<sup>319</sup> 89th Infantry Division Historical Board, *The 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*, 229.

rushed and unorganized, which reflects poorly on the planning of parent units. Most importantly, the surprise attack was a misguided strategy and there was not enough prior coordination to quickly execute a combined arms attack after the surprise failed.

When comparing the surviving personal accounts of the Rhine Gorge crossing, it is easy to get bogged down in the details, noting the inconsistencies and areas in which they conflict with each other. Such problems are to be expected considering the stresses of combat as well as the amount of time that elapsed between the events themselves and the writing of the accounts. While times and places are easily misremembered, recurring details and shared feelings about the crossing create a reliable generalized eye-witness perspective. Veteran narratives do not provide the exact speed and temperature of the Rhine River, but they do express how the water *felt* to all the soldiers who nearly drowned there. It is impossible to know how many German anti-aircraft guns were firing based on personal stories—in fact, the stories vary wildly—but those same stories are the only place that the psychological impact of 20mm rounds shredding through a wooden rowboat can be found and how that impact affected the battle on the ground.

The veterans make it clear that the crossing was tragic and terrible, not simply a shining example of American military might. While the tragedy of the crossing is a product of a specific perspective that does not tell the whole story, it is a perspective that has not previously been factored into analysis of the Rhine Gorge. Therefore, the stories of the soldiers on the ground are essential and should not be ignored or forgotten.



## CONCLUSION

### ADJUSTING THE NARRATIVE

Both the monumental achievements of the U.S. government and its many foreign policy setbacks can be attributed to the nation's constructed identity as an exceptional world power uniquely qualified not simply to dominate but to remake the world order in its own image.  
—*American Foreign Policy Since World War II*<sup>320</sup>

In reading the accounts of veterans, one fundamental point becomes painfully clear: the American military made significant mistakes in crossing the Rhine Gorge. By comparing the accounts to each other as well as the other available sources, it is possible to identify four specific mistakes made by senior leaders: they chose a poor crossing site, they rushed the operation, they inappropriately attempted a surprise attack, and they failed to coordinate for a combined arms operation involving multiple enablers. Recognizing these mistakes as failures on the part of leaders is necessary in order to explore why they were not previously recognized and revise the narrative accordingly.

Senior leaders made the mistake of choosing to cross the Rhine River in a location that so heavily favored the defenders. LTG Middleton was likely the person responsible for that idea. Familiar with the area due to his experiences in World War I, he was convinced that the Germans would not expect an attack there. Additionally, he was desperate to keep his troops as LTG Patton looked to shift combat power away from LTG Middleton's sector.<sup>321</sup> Crossing the Rhine Gorge was a bold plan that flew in the face of conventional wisdom, promoted by a man that needed to take such a risk to maintain his prominent position as the Allies drove into Germany. Certainly the gregarious personality of LTG Patton allowed the decision to stand, and the inability of MG Finley to dissuade

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<sup>320</sup> Hook and Spanier, *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*, xiii.

<sup>321</sup> Price, *Troy H. Middleton*, 280.

his commander or offer a satisfactory alternative compounded the mistake, but ultimately it was LTG Middleton who was most responsible for choosing to cross the dangerous Rhine Gorge. Even though some, including LTG Middleton, would later focus on the captured objective and describe the operation as a tactical success, the decision was fundamentally a mistake that unnecessarily cost the lives of many American soldiers.

Senior leadership's decision to conduct a rushed operation considering the complexity of crossing in a dangerous location like the Rhine Gorge was another error. After deciding to cross, leaders should have proceeded with great care, ensuring that all the necessary preparations were made. Instead, speed was emphasized at every echelon, rather than deliberate planning. The emphasis on speed originated with GEN Bradley as he sought to capitalize on the opportunity created for his 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group by the capture of Remagen. Once his forces took a lead role, GEN Bradley did not want to cede that role by failing to exploit the opportunity to cross at multiple locations and spearhead the thrust into Germany. He turned to LTG Patton, the master of speed, to accomplish his intent.<sup>322</sup> As American forces rushed to make it across the Rhine, the small unit leaders hastily struggled to adequately prepare their men for the dangerous mission they had been given.

Most importantly, senior leaders chose to attempt a surprise attack in the Rhine Gorge, which turned out to be the single greatest mistake. Responsibility for that decision falls squarely on the shoulders of MG Finley because he had all the assets necessary to conduct a deliberate crossing rather than a surprise attack. There is no surviving record explaining why he chose a surprise attack, but careful analysis offers two logical possibilities. One is that it was the most expedient method and could be executed more

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<sup>322</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 524.

quickly as senior allied leaders stressed speed. The other possibility is that MG Finley genuinely believed it to be the best chance for success. The crossing at Oppenheim had recently caught the enemy off guard, which could have factored into his decision. If Oppenheim provided the precedence, he should have recognized that the enemy would be more prepared for such tactics after they had just been fooled. Perhaps MG Finley simply believed surprise attacks were always the best option. His writings on the tactical advantages offered by night attacks indicate as much.<sup>323</sup> If so, it can only be said that MG Finley was wrong. He judged that surprising the enemy by attacking at night would be successful, but it was not.

There were multiple factors contributing to the failure of a surprise attack in the Rhine Gorge. The Germans saw the Americans preparing for an attack days before it was executed. Attempting to surprise the Germans led to paddling wooden boats rather than using motorized boats, with devastating results. In addition, maintaining surprise prevented American mortars from registering before the fight began, which would have allowed them to accurately drop smoke rounds onto the east side and cover the movement of friendly forces once they were compromised. Ultimately, the surprise attack led to all armored assets being postured for follow on operations rather than being in position to provide covering fire across the river. At least some of those assets were eventually moved into position, which was a decisive factor in the ultimate success of the 89<sup>th</sup> ID. Similarly, artillery and air assets were not prepared to support the initial crossings.

The final mistake made by senior leaders during the Rhine Gorge crossing was failing to properly coordinate a combined arms operation. Even though they were

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<sup>323</sup> Finley, "A Critical Analysis of French Night Attacks in the World War," 24.

attempting a surprise attack, there should have been extensive coordination prior to the attack for how direct fire from armored assets and machine guns, indirect fire from mortars and artillery, and aerial support would be deconflicted if their employment was necessary. The fratricide incidents exemplify why that sort of planning was important. Failure to plan for the potential use of every weapon system left the 89<sup>th</sup> ID incapable of properly supporting their initial crossings once the element of surprise was lost.

After noting the clear mistakes made by American military leaders, the historical record must be analyzed to determine why the mistakes were not widely acknowledged after the fact, which is why the perspectives of all available sources are so important. The leaders who generated the initial reports had no interest in bringing attention to their mistakes, and the official histories did not see a need to portray the crossings as failures since they ultimately succeeded. The generals who wrote their own accounts were concerned enough with their legacy that they did not explore these mistakes—especially since no one was asking about them. Finally, the media was incorporated into the war effort, and fully endorsed the narrative promoting the military. After all, the American public seemed to want stories about American power and success, not American mistakes. Together, all these sources created the original narrative of the Rhine Gorge crossings as well as the entire war.

The pre-eminent voice for the original World War II narrative is the green books, or *United States Army in World War II*. The specific author responsible for covering the Rhine Gorge is MacDonald, and he whole-heartedly supports the core theme of the green books—that the American military was the greatest fighting force in modern warfare. Authors such as MacDonald occasionally overlook mistakes made by American officers

in places like the Rhine Gorge in order to support that theme. But why is it so important for them to maintain the narrative of overwhelming American exceptionalism? Their purpose is likely nested in the purpose of GEN Eisenhower's autobiography: promoting American power to expand foreign policy and confront the Soviet Union.

The power of portraying the United States military in World War II as an unstoppable force cannot be understated. American exceptionalism did more than simply justify aggressive foreign policy—it required aggressive foreign policy. Logically, the possession of a military that is presumed to be all-powerful incurs a moral obligation to confront evil wherever it exists. Once that presumption is accepted, the discussion shifts to the definition and identification of evil with little thought given to the limitations of the military. Therefore, America's foreign policy following World War II was inextricably linked with a specific *interpretation* of the war. That interpretation enabled the United States to aggressively confront the expansion of the Soviet Union and communism, but it also resulted in a lasting obligation to control global events after the Soviet Union fell. The felt obligation to use military power superseded politics over multiple administrations as American influence extended into regions such as the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, the Balkans, and North Africa. Although the World War II tactical narrative is not solely responsible for subsequent foreign policy, it is undeniably linked to the actions of the United States following the war.

The success of the American military, amplified by the original narrative, also shaped how the military saw itself. Setbacks during the Cold War and beyond were contrasted with the embellished memory of unmitigated World War II success. The presumption of an all-powerful military required the production of new capabilities in

order to meet the expectations of the country. With the investment of resources, the military adapted to meet those expectations, reinforcing the initial presumption rather than challenging it. Consequently, further military success and unprecedented capabilities only bolstered the felt obligation to use the military to solve both real and perceived problems throughout the world.

Considering the influence of the original narrative, it is important to understand how and why it has been revised over the years as well as delineate the elements that have remained unchanged. With the expansive breadth of research that has been conducted and the innumerable volumes that have been written about World War II, there is surprisingly little introspection within this field of history. The sheer mass of research on the topic has resulted in a historiography that is immense yet congruous. Tasked with outlining the general histories of World War II, historian Donald Schilling asserts, “the war as defined and depicted in the late 1940s and early 1950s has remained strikingly consistent over the decades.”<sup>324</sup> Referring to the consistency of debated subjects, Schilling’s comment belies the incredible durability of the original narrative.

Beyond the original narrative, there are two general types of World War II history: idealistic revision and mythological story telling. For years, the idealistic revisions have focused on the highest strategic levels including Germany’s inability to defeat the Soviet Union, the importance of the Mediterranean front, the postwar role of the Soviet Union, and the use of the atomic bomb.<sup>325</sup> That tradition has expanded to cover domestic issues, with historians analyzing World War II through the lenses of gender,

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<sup>324</sup> Schilling, “Histories of the War in Europe and the Pacific,” 3.

<sup>325</sup> Schilling, “Histories of the War in Europe and the Pacific,” 14.

sexuality, and race.<sup>326</sup> Even though they dig into incredibly specific details, such histories are still idealistic because they are revising the historical record by exploring aspects that were previously ignored without seriously questioning details about the operations and battles that took place.

Strikingly similar from a methodological standpoint, the mythologizing story tellers also rarely question operational aspects of World War II. These historians, often producing extremely popular books, attempt to portray the war through the lens of the individual soldier. In doing so, they elevate the character of the American soldier to a level that occasionally pushes the boundaries of realistic assessments. Stephen Ambrose, one of the premier authors in this category, describes his own approach in the introduction to his book, *Citizen Soldiers*: “It is about the GIs, the junior officers and enlisted men of ETO—who they were, how they fought, why they fought, what they endured, how they triumphed.”<sup>327</sup> Ambrose has no interest in examining the tactical aspects of the war or the decisions of senior leaders unless it contributes to his portrayal of the American soldier as the archetypal hero overcoming hardships. Of note, Ambrose discusses the crossing of the Rhine, but only mentions the capture of the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen.<sup>328</sup> Mythologizing story tellers focus so intently on describing the experiences of the American soldier, they largely miss the larger implications embedded in their stories—the details that conflict with the original narrative.

In the 1950s, historian Michael Howard began to push for a more wholistic approach to military history, rather than focusing on “the technical aspects of combat.”<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Loyd E. Lee, “We Have Just Begun to Write,” *Diplomatic History* (Summer 2001): 369.

<sup>327</sup> Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 13.

<sup>328</sup> Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 372.

<sup>329</sup> Schilling, “Histories of the War in Europe and the Pacific,” 4.

Howard's argument makes sense because World War II was an expansive war, with an impact that extended far beyond the battlefield. Conversely, events that occurred thousands of miles from the gunfire sometimes played decisive roles in the ultimate outcome of the war. But there is one organization that is still keenly interested in the technical aspects of combat: the United States Army. As most historians have migrated to a more wholistic approach, the historians employed by the military have taken sole responsibility for detailing the tactical aspects of the war. They use official reports and personal accounts from senior leaders to piece together a cohesive account. Combined with the media record, their work has defined the original narrative of World War II, and since most historians have little interest in the tactical and technical aspects of the war, the original narrative has remained unchallenged on that level.

The efforts of the American military to understand and preserve the tactical and operational history of armed conflicts have not been limited to the World War II narrative. The Center of Military History has produced analysis for nearly every military action that followed, often in the form of green books just like the original works covering World War II. Their analysis is comprehensive and thoughtful, but it is unavoidably limited by the same issues of perspective that impact the original green books. Therefore, it must be supplemented with additional perspectives and complementary research that is capable of challenging core elements of narratives in ways that the military alone cannot. The layering of perspectives on the crossing of the Rhine Gorge by the 89<sup>th</sup> ID illustrates how descriptions of seemingly insignificant details can conflict under scrutiny, revealing important lessons that supersede the immediate



consequences of the battle. Such layering should not be limited to the Rhine Gorge. History should never be limited to one perspective.

The crossing of the Rhine Gorge did not win the war. The Allies had already crossed the Rhine at several locations and would have continued their campaign regardless of what happened there. The struggles encountered at the Rhine Gorge did not prolong the war either. Strategically, the battle did not matter. But historically, it is extremely significant. The crossing of the Rhine Gorge has been ignored because it does not fit well into the original narrative of World War II emphasizing American exceptionalism. That same narrative has played a large part in shaping the choices of American leaders and has consequently impacted global events.

The Rhine Gorge story is like a crack in a dam—a well-hidden dam. It reveals the existence of a narrative that was crafted politically but has remained unchallenged even as politics change. It demonstrates the need for critical analysis into how military leaders conducted the war, not just at the strategic level but also at the tactical and operational levels. It allows for more refined critiques of the United States, reframing notions that have dominated its identity for decades. What if the actions of the United States military in World War II are not the gold standard for military operations? What if those leaders can be critiqued extensively like any other leader? Finding fault with the original narrative and American leaders in World War II does not completely undermine the history of that period; it simply allows for a more refined approach in specific cases. It can even alter, either slightly or dramatically, the meaning of a war that reshaped the world, and it can absolutely change how we use the story of that war in the future.

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## APPENDIX A: REFERENCED VETERANS OF THE RHINE GORGE CROSSING

Everett Anderson, Technician Third Grade, Adjutant  
HQ/89<sup>th</sup> ID

Lester Becker, Private First Class, Infantry  
E Co/353<sup>rd</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Raleigh Bowling, Staff Sergeant, Infantry  
E Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID  
Squad Leader

Sol Brandell, Private First Class, Infantry  
HQ/355<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Paul Brown, Captain, Infantry  
A Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID  
Company Commander

John Cain, Private First Class, Infantry  
Service Co/355<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

William Carver, Private First Class, Infantry  
E Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Donald Chase, Private First Class, Infantry  
K Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Murray Coffey, Sergeant  
Anti-tank Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID  
Section Leader

Jim Connell, First Lieutenant, Infantry  
A Co/353<sup>rd</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID  
Platoon Leader

Oscar Friedensohn, Private, Engineer  
C Co/168<sup>th</sup> ENG, 7<sup>th</sup> AD

Robert Gallagher, Private First Class, Field Artillery  
815<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft BN

Mathew Hanks, Sergeant, Infantry  
M Co/353<sup>rd</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Elmer Herbaly, Private First Class, Infantry  
C Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID  
Machine Gunner

James Jochen, Private First Class, Infantry  
K Co/355<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Matt Landers, Technician Fifth Grade, Infantry  
Service Co/353<sup>rd</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Colby LaPlace, Technical Sergeant, Infantry  
I Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID  
Platoon Sergeant

Al Lasche, Staff Sergeant, Infantry  
Service Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Eric Leiseroff, Private First Class, Infantry  
E Co/353<sup>rd</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Phillip Leveque, Private First Class, Infantry  
HQ/2-354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Harold Mathews, Sergeant, Infantry  
C Co/353<sup>rd</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Clarence Petoske, Sergeant, Engineer  
B Co/314<sup>th</sup> ENG, 89<sup>th</sup> ID  
Squad Leader

George Pusey, First Lieutenant, Infantry  
E Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID  
Platoon Leader

Ed Quick, Private First Class, Field Artillery  
B Battery/340<sup>th</sup> FA, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Donald Robertson, Private First Class, Infantry  
B Co/354<sup>th</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Clyde Solmon, Private First Class, Infantry  
HHC/353<sup>rd</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Leonard Waldner, Private First Class, Infantry  
Cannon Co/353<sup>rd</sup> IN, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Cornelius Woodard, Technician Fifth Grade, Signal  
HQ, 89<sup>th</sup> ID

Robert Woodrum, Technician Fifth Grade, Field Artillery  
A Battery/341<sup>st</sup> FA, 89<sup>th</sup> ID