

# SCHWETZINGEN, GERMANY

day 35

Heading south from Worms, towards Mannheim the going was smooth until the 10th came face to the Neckar River which flows westward



*Present day Schwetzingen*

into the Rhine River at Mannheim. The bridges across the Neckar at this point had been destroyed by the German army in an attempt to slow the progress of the 10th Armored Tigers.

At 5:30 a.m. on Friday, March 30, the 55th Engineers built a bridge

across the Neckar River at Mannheim allowing CC B tanks and infantry to continue to Schwetzingen just ten miles south of Mannheim.

Between the intermittent stands of trees and open fields, the 10th Armored ran into episodes of German fire. The current strength of the 10th Armored was sufficient to eliminate the attackers easily. Elements of German infantry would make a stand and be knocked back. Several Panzerfaust (bazooka-like weapons) were fired ineffectually at the advancing Shermans.

The situation changed dramatically as they neared Schwetzingen. CC B had been expected. In addition to heavy resistance by the 198th German



*German soldier firing a Panzerfaust*

Infantry Division, which was one of the last strong German divisions left, there was also strong civilian resistance. Oddly, at almost the same time, CC A was being welcomed with open arms at Heidelberg not far away.

The 198th German Infantry chose to make their

stand in the fields north and east of Schwetzingen. Foxholes were dug, bunkers were hastily built, and snipers were positioned.



*Shermans lined up outside of Schwetzingen*

The 10th Armored CC B reconnaissance was effective and allowed CC B the time necessary to formulate a plan. They would fan out and attack from both north and east simultaneously. CC B slammed head-on into the German Infantry. Targets were plenty and kept the loaders and gunners busy. The loader would pull shells from the storage compartments as fast as he could, shove one into the open breech with a closed fist (experienced loaders knew to keep their fist closed to avoid broken fingers as the heavy steel chamber door slammed shut automatically). The tank commander would shout out the coordinates and the gunner would fire. The concussion was so fierce that the tank would rock on its treads. Bunker after bunker was destroyed.

Melvin would clear the way firing the .30 cal ball mounted Browning machine gun continually, pulling ammunition belts from the storage boxes sitting on a ledge to his right. The barrel of his gun turned white at times from the heat of constant firing and would become so hot that the shells would fire automatically in uncontrollable directions. Due to the extreme heat which caused damage to the rifling grooves, it became impossible to aim accurately. The only way to stop the firing was to let the ammunition belt run through without replacing it with a new one. He then would have to pull the gun inside, put on a pair of heavy asbestos gloves, and with a sizzle, grab the white hot steel barrel, remove it, and replace it with an undamaged barrel. All while trying to keep the enemy at bay.

The German 198th's position at Schwetzingen was to their disadvantage. With the Rhine River to their backs, they were trapped in a pocket and became easy fodder for the 10th.

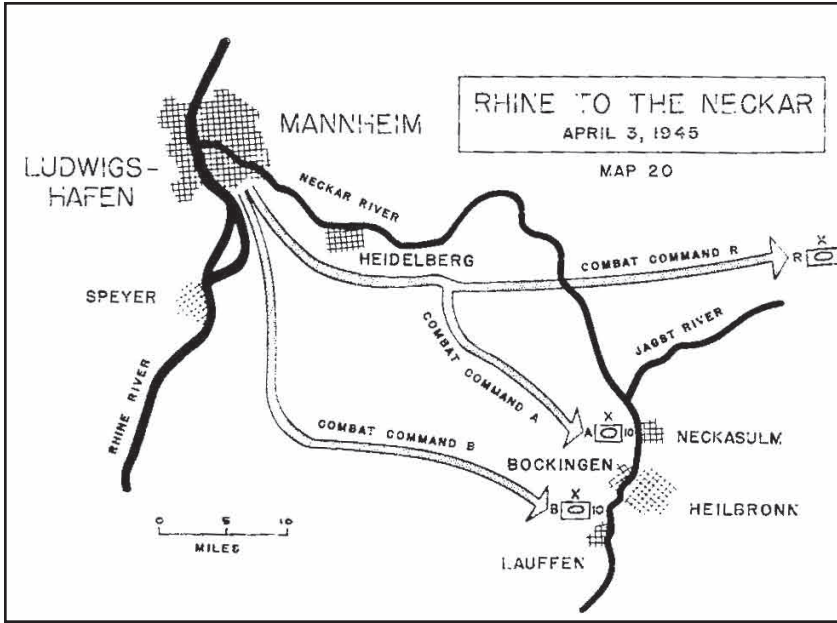
After CC B dispensed of the German Infantry, they rolled on through the town of Schwetzingen itself and were met on the outskirts of town by small arms fire from the remaining male citizens. Every doorway, every window, and every rooftop had a civilian combatant firing everything from a Walther Gewehr 41 semi-automatic to old, barely-operable weapons hidden after WWI and never

turned over to the Allies.

While driving through the small town, the tanks secured their hatches once again and manned all guns. The tanks returned fire from both of their .30 cal machine guns as they met fire from the buildings. As streams of lead struck brick, small puffs of dust would blow out, and shards of brick would fall to the ground below. Thick wooden doors were struck by so much hot metal that they were splintered and thrown open by the impact of the lead.

The .30 cal machine guns mounted in the Shermans were limited in the degree of vertical range of movement. Although effective at short distances to about the second stories of the structures around them, the higher levels of the buildings were relatively immune to their effect. Melvin's Sherman was taking heavy fire from the upper story windows of a three story building. While Melvin pivoted the .30 cal as high as possible in an attempt to reach these windows, his effort was ineffective. The gunner in the turret was just as ineffective with his co-axial mounted .30 cal. Both guns stitched pockmarks into the brick and mortar but not high enough to eliminate the snipers.

The commander ordered the tank to a halt. Prior to entering the city, the loader had removed a shell from storage and had already loaded the 36 pound high explosive projectile into the breech of



*Present view of Speyer and a distant Schwetzingen*

the main 76mm gun (later models of Sherman tanks were fitted with 76mm guns replacing the slightly smaller 75mm bore guns).

The commander barked the coordinates and degree to the gunner who responded quickly. The turret was rotated in the direction of the multi-storied building, and the main gun elevated and fired. In an instant the tank was violently shaken by the force of the shell being fired. Fire and smoke belched from the muzzle. In the same instant the third story exploded and collapsed in a cloud of dust, flame and debris. As the dust and smoke cleared, the building fell silent. The tank commander then ordered the tank forward. They continued down the road, steel tank treads grating and scarring the cobblestone roads, eliminating other threats in a similar manner.

The column of Shermans had passed through Schwetzingen driving west towards the Rhine River to make contact with the 1st French Army. Contact was to be initiated just south of Speyer, about five miles below Schwetzingen. The battle at Schwetzingen had the fortunate by-product of allowing the French Army to cross the Rhine undetected. Unfortunately the CC B absorbed serious losses.

As the Sherman tank Melvin was in passed through town, another series of roadblocks was encountered. Beyond the roadblocks was the

low-lying bottomland of the Rhine River west of Schwetzingen. The loader lifted another high explosive shell, shoved it into the breech and blasted the roadblocks away.

Clearing town, the column made an abrupt turn south to follow the narrow muddy river road towards the town of Speyer on the western side of the Rhine River. Their next major destination would be the town of Bruchsal some sixteen miles to the southeast. But first, they had to run the gauntlet through Hockenheim.