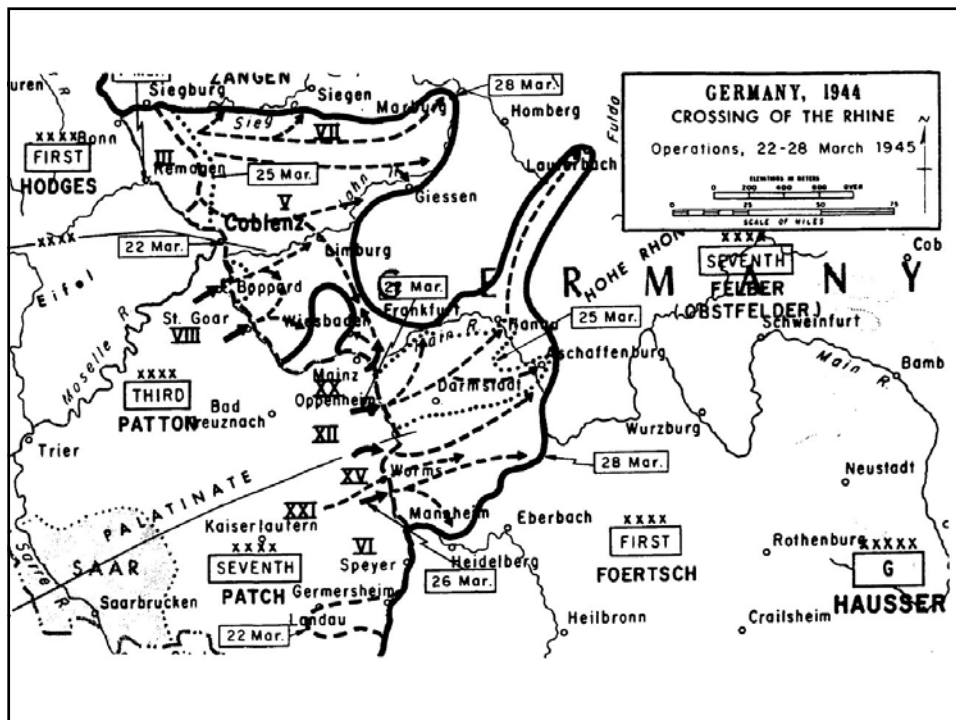
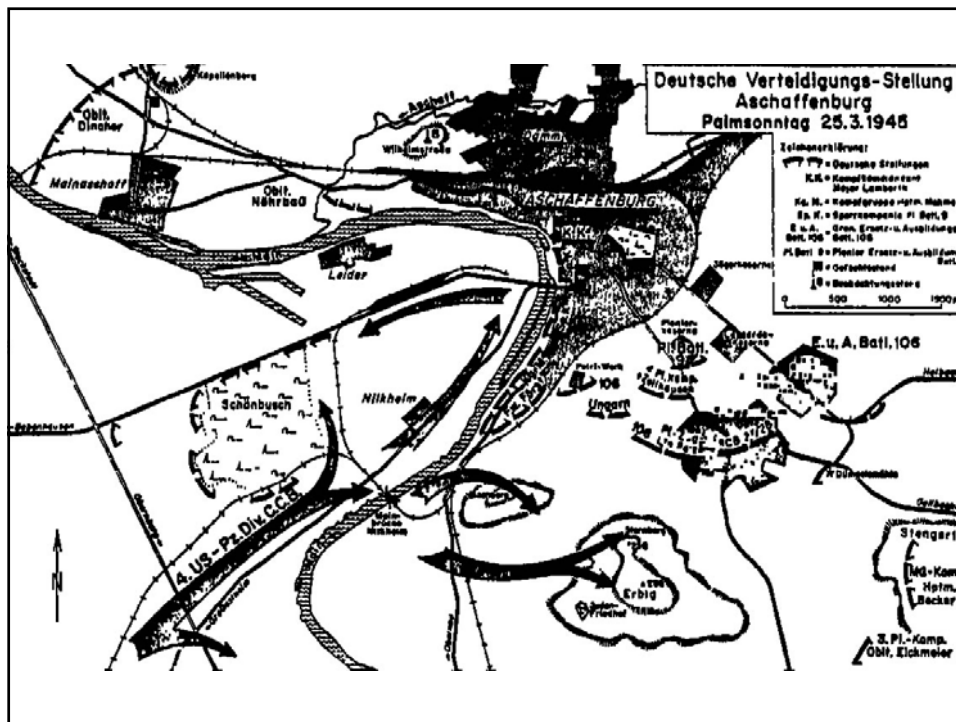
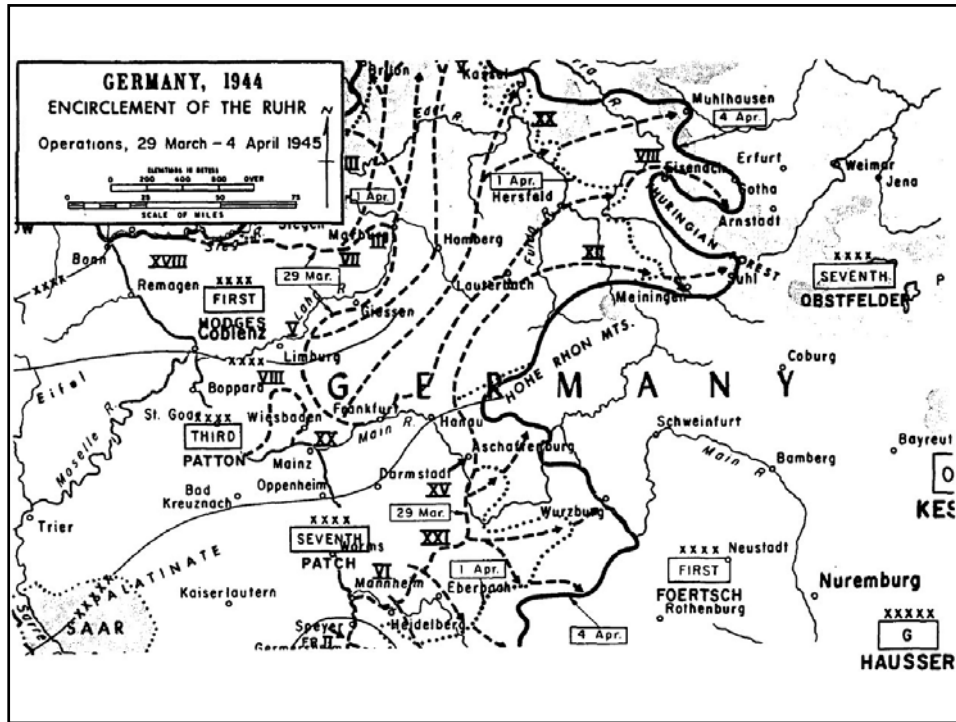


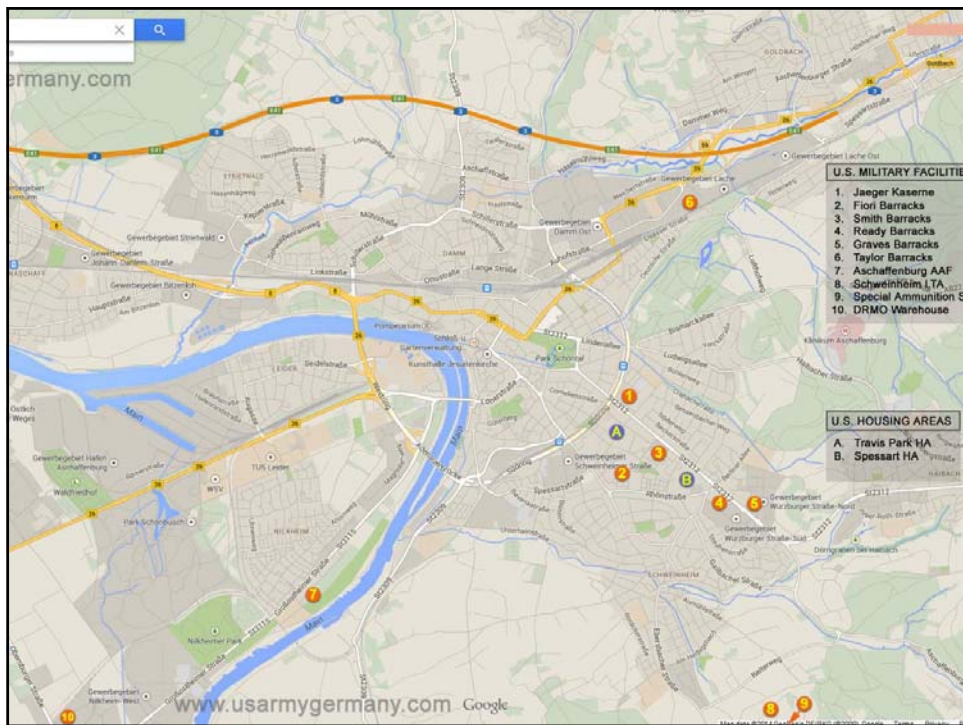
Setting the Stage

- For OKW the news in the west was bad. Allies had breached the Westwall, seized the Saar Palatinate and the Rhineland, crossed the Rhine in several places and now were driving almost unopposed towards the heart of the Reich.
- Wehrmacht remnants in south central Germany were streaming back to the next defensive echelon along the Wetter, Main and Tauber Rivers. Their combat fitness was low and any effort at defense resembled a delay.
- Pushing them were two strong experienced American armies, the Third and the Seventh.
- The Third Army spearhead was the 4th Armor Division racing across the flat country between the Rhine and the Main through Darmstadt, aided by the German decision to abandon Darmstadt, a city substantially destroyed by aerial bombing.
- LTC Creighton W. Abrams' Combat Command B (CCB), 2,500 strong, raced to the Main River in Aschaffenburg following a report of an undamaged road bridge over the Main.

- Awaiting them were 5,000 KKA combatants and 10,000 troops of the hastily organised 413 Replacement Division, controlling all German forces in the 60 km from Hanau to Miltenberg.
- At the start of the battle Aschaffenburg was an isolated defensive stronghold with few support troops,
 - An initial defensive echelon was west of the Main river in the Nilkheim salient.
 - A second echelon was arrayed in strongpoints from west to east on high ground or in fortified positions in front of the urban area.
 - Open ground south of the city in the vicinity of the Nilkheim railroad bridge was also held.

















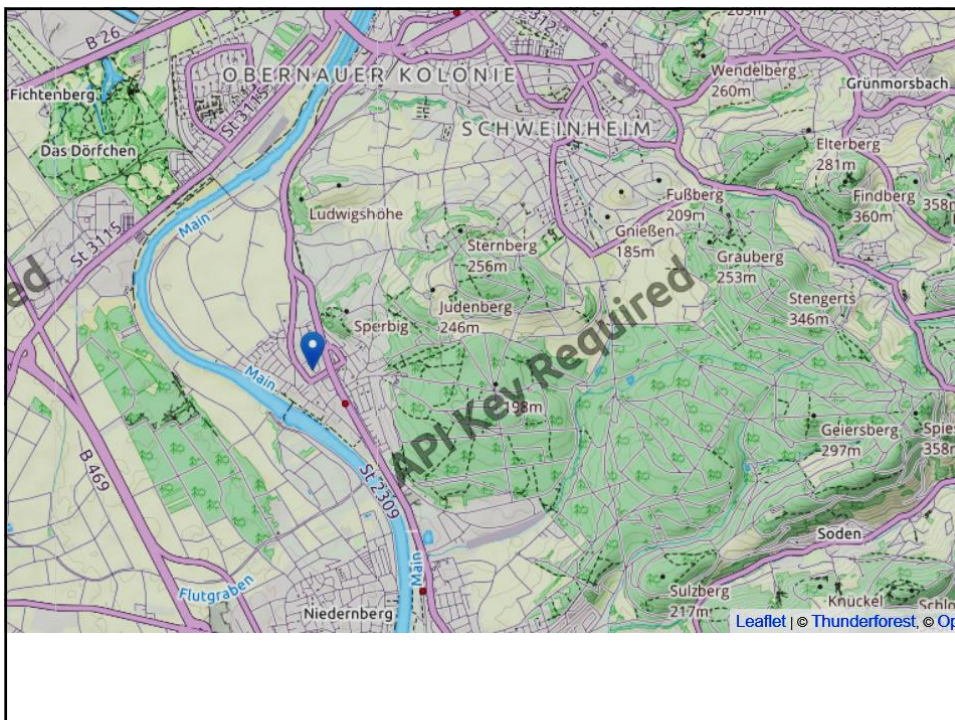


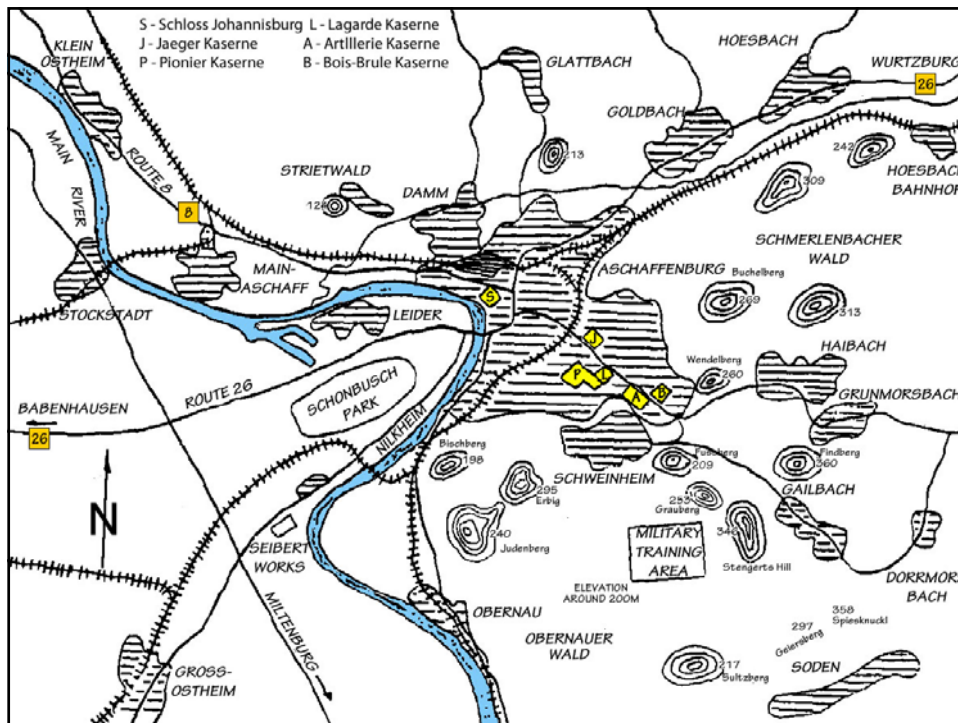












The Hammelburg Raid (Task Force Baum)

Belligerents

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> United States Third United States Army 4th Armored Division <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Baum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Germany <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POW Lager Hammelburg • 251st Infantry Division (4th Wave) • Panzerjägerabteilung (AT Bn) 251 Deutsche Infanterieschule
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Commanders and leaders

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LTG George S. Patton Captain Abraham Baum (POW) LTC John K. Waters (POW 2/43) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oberst Heinrich Köhl, PzJgAbt 251 Generalmajor Gunther von Goeckel, Commandant Oflag XIII-B
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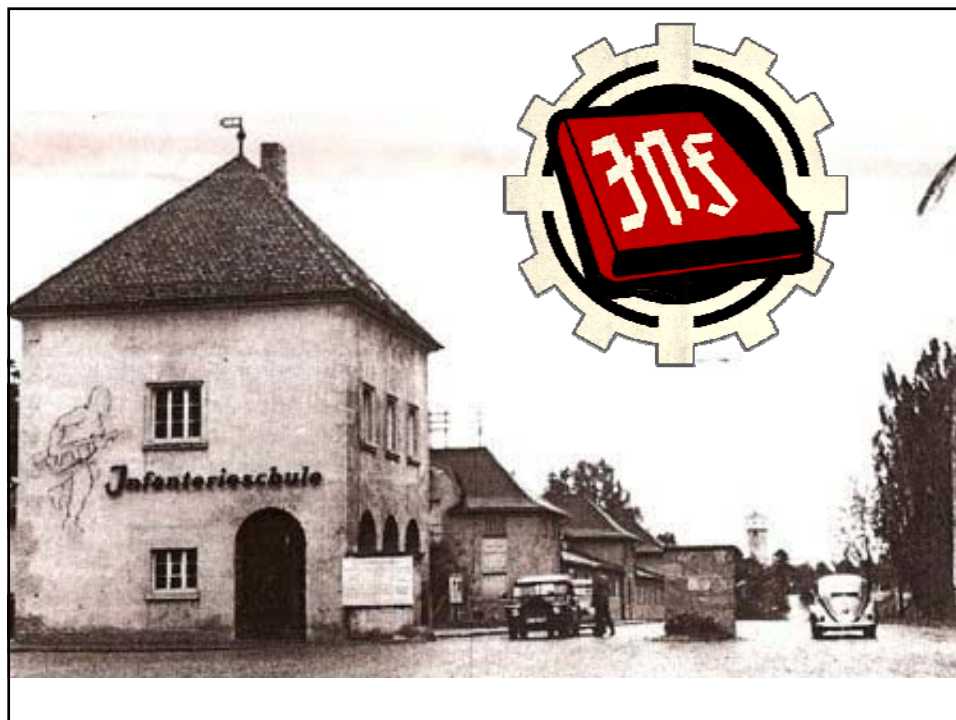
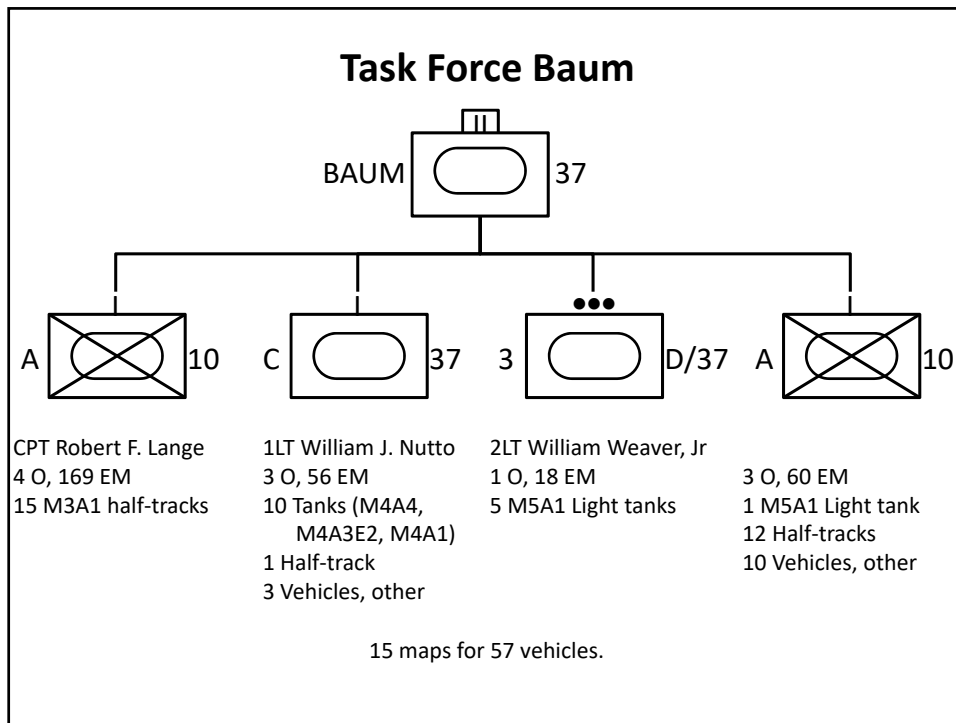
Strength

<p>Stalag XIII-C – 127 US POWs Oflag XIII-B – 1,291 US POWs 11 officers and 303 men 16 tanks, 28 half-tracks, 13 other vehicles.</p>	<p>251st Infantry Division TO&E: 15,019</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers 491 • Officials (Beamten) 99 • Non-Commissioned Officers 2,165 • Enlisted Men 12,264
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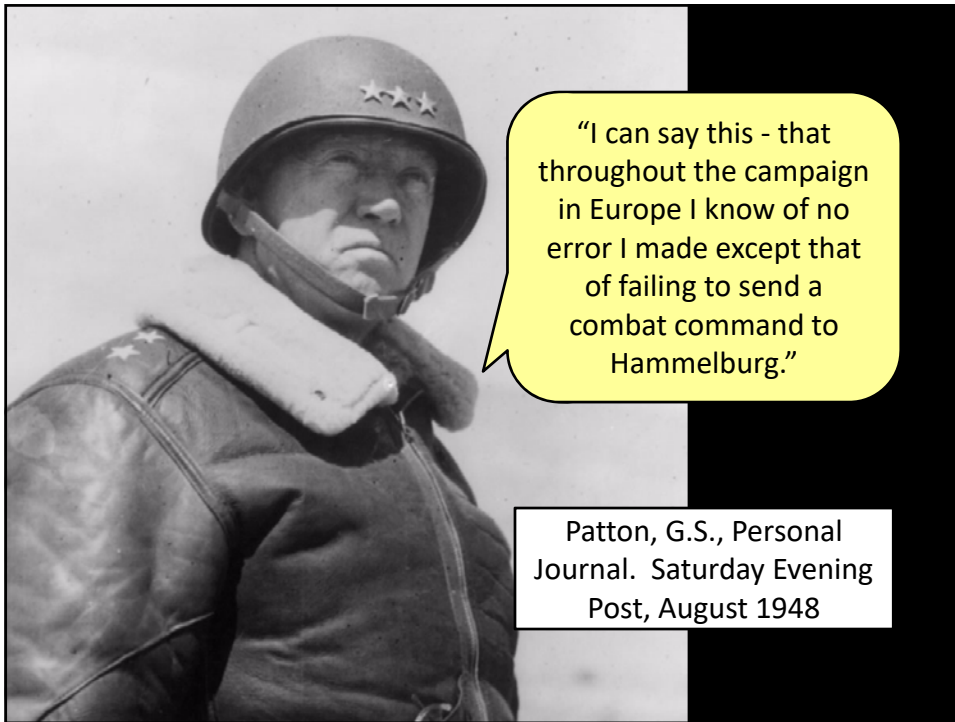
Casualties

<p>32 killed 247 wounded, missing or captured 35 returned to friendly lines</p>	<p>Destroyed 12 trucks, 3 tanks, 3-4 ammo carriers, 6 locos and 12 trains, many AA guns, killed numerous Germans, captured 200 and released 700 Russian Grafendorf POWs</p>
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Interviews with captured Germans and official German records bear testimony to the fact that Task Force Baum accomplished the mission of creating a diversionary action.

"General von Obstfelder believed that Task Force Baum would be followed by the 4th Armored Division and possibly the entire 3rd Army because he still did not know that they were swinging north."

Other German units, elements of an estimated three divisions, were diverted to the Hammelburg area to stop Task Force Baum and to block the suspected follow-on attack.

"The effect of the diversion of those (German) units on the subsequent advance of the 3rd Army was evidenced by the fact that the 4th Armored Division didn't fire a shot for the first 90-100 miles in its subsequent attack.."



Oldinsky, Frederick E., LTC.
Military Historian,
Armor (Jul-Aug 1976)



Presentation by Ian Fraser

Task Force Baum

A desperate mission based on a terrible idea by a vain General

Introduction

- This presentation details the life and death of Task Force Baum.
- The opinions expressed are mine based upon research.
- It is primarily dedicated to Major Abraham J Baum and the Officers and men of his task force.
- However The Officers and mem of the 4th Armored Division who supported the breakthrough of the force on the evening of 26 March 1945
- Hauptmann Walter Eggemann and the Officers and men of the German Task which attacked and destroyed Baum's force.

What is a Task Force?

."A Task Force is a temporary tactical grouping composed of one or more arms or services formed for a specific mission of operation. The operation of large armoured formations will frequently dictate the organization of task forces. The composition of such forces will be decided only after a careful estimate of the associated means which will be required to accomplish the projected mission or operations. This estimate must consider the nature of the expected resistance, the distance to which operations are projected, the terrain to be traversed, and the troops available for the operation" The U.S. Field Manual

The Mission

- The objectives of Task Force Baum were to penetrate 80 Km through German Lines and liberate American prisoners of war (POW) from OFAG XIII-B near Hammelburg.
- The Task force would then return through the German lines to their start point with the released POWs!

•Really!!!

The real reason for the raid

General Patton the Commander of the United States 3rd Army had received personal or official intelligence that his son-in-law Lieutenant Colonel John Waters was currently being held in the POW camp.

Lt Col. John Waters (December 20, 1906 - January 9, 1989)



- The photograph opposite was taken of Lt. Col. Waters in Tunisia in 1943.
- He graduated from West Point in 1931.
- He married General Patton's daughter in 1934.
- He commander an armoured battalion group in the Battle of Sidi Bou Zid 14-17 February 1943. His command was destroyed and he was captured.
- He returned to active duty in 1946, served in Korea and was also a Divisional Commander (4th Armored Division), a Corps Commander (V Corps), an Army Commander (5th Army) and finally Commander of the United States Army, Pacific. During his distinguished career he held significant Staff Appointments. He retired as a Four Star General.
- He had no knowledge or has any responsibility for the actions of his father-in- law.
- I honour his service!

The selection of Captain Baum

At aged 91, a frail Abe Baum detailed his selection:

' I was lying on a halftrack's engine to keep warm when a courier told me to report to division headquarters. When I walked in, there were General Patton, XII Corps commander [Manton] Eddy, 4th Armored Division commander [William M.] Hoge, and Creighton Abrams, who ran Combat Command B. I thought, what the hell am I doing here? Nobody but Patton liked the idea of a task force. Abrams said the mission needed a combat command—3,500 to 5,000 men. Patton said there wasn't time to organize one. They assigned it to me because the other candidate had hemorrhoids, which Patton personally inspected. Patton said he'd get me the Congressional Medal of Honor. I told him I had orders; I didn't need to be bribed. I had no idea the mission was about his son-in-law.'

The make up of the Task Force

- **Company A, 10th Armored Infantry Battalion** (Capt. Robert F. Lange) - 4 officers and 169 men mounted in 15 M3A1 half-tracks
- **Company C, 37th Tank Battalion** (1st Lt. William J. Nutto) - 3 officers and 56 men mounted in 10 M4A3, M4A3E2, and M4A1 medium tanks, and 4 support vehicles
- **3rd Platoon, Company D, 37th Tank Battalion** (2nd Lt. William G. Weaver, Jr.) - 1 officer and 18 men mounted in 5 M5A1 light tanks
- **Command & Support Element, 10th Armored Infantry Battalion** - 3 officers and 60 men mounted in one light tank, 12 half-tracks, and 10 other vehicles
- **Altogether the force numbered 11 officers and 303 men, 16 tanks, 28 half-tracks, and 13 other vehicles.**

Task Force Firepower

- As was seen on the previous slide the main firepower would come from the Sherman Tanks of the C Company 37th Tank Battalion. The main gun on these tanks were either 75mm or 76mm except for the M4A2 which carried a 105mm gun.
- The light tanks (M5A1) were armed with 37 mm main gun which was obsolete at this stage of the war.
- The Carriers M3 had no major weapons other than machine guns.
- Apart from the three M4A2 tanks, there was no major artillery and my research indicates no mortars were carried by the force

Experience of the American Forces

The Officer's and men of the the Task Force belonged to one of the elite units of the United States Army in World War 2 - the 4th Armored Division. They served under LT. Col Creighton Abrams. He had been the Commander of the 37th Tank Battalion. He was the Commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam during my tour of Vietnam. As a General he served as Chief of the United States Army.

Captain Baum was a very experienced combat officer was wounded during the Normandy Campaign. Senior officers prized Baum's candour and tenacity. He had played a critical part in the Battle of the Bulge. He had led a small force to link with the defenders of Bastogne. However he only six hours to plan the raid! A tall task for any officer.

The Breakout Plan.

- As stated the Task Force came into existence late in the afternoon of the 26th Of March 1945.
- The plan is to advance through a hole in the German defences at Schweinheim. On the 25th of March, elements of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion and the 37th Tank Battalion capture a railway bridge on the Main and secure an eight square kilometre lodgement on the East Bank bridgehead by taking the Bischberg and Erbig.
- The breakthrough would be achieved after an assault by B Company 37th Tank Battalion and B Company 10th Armored Infantry Battalion supported by an artillery barrage. At 1930 hrs the supporting Artillery of the Combat Command B fires for thirty minutes. The two companies attack, however they meet stiff resistance and lost two tanks and infantry casualties.

Problems with the Plan

- Patton issued only general guidance but insisted that it depart that evening.
- His aid Major Stiller (who knew Lt Col. Waters) was left to fill in the details!
- This was the first attempt to liberate American POWs.
- The distance to the camp and return was a real problem.
- They didn't even know the exact location of the camp!
- Furthermore there no detailed Air support plan.
- Finally the 4th Armored Division was leaving the area.

The Route

Given the need for speed, the Task Force would follow the most direct route to the camp, bypassing the heavily defended Aschaffenburg and moving along defile flanked by a river on side and steep hills on the other.

The tight schedule called for the Force to reach the camp on the afternoon of the 27th of March and complete the expedition late that same night!

The intelligence for the area was inadequate, there was no consideration of any serious enemy contact to and from the camp.

The POWs

- The prisoners would be in no fit state to walk or fight their way back to American lines.
- There was no extra weapons, no surpluses of clothing, blankets, or foodstuffs for the POWs.
- As stated there were inadequate maps or even extra compasses for the use of the POWs.

The German defence in Hammelburg

The American intelligence fail to recognise that the Hammelburg was still a very activity training area for the Germans. The following training units were located in the area;

- There were 50-80 snipers located north of the camp and they were also armed with Panzerfausts.
- There was also a hundred Engineering Officers and Non-commissioned officers undertaking training in the area. They had small arms and Panzerfausts.
- The camps were guarded by approx. 200 soldiers.

German Units that reacted to the raid

- Once the raid was under way German authorities directed other units to intercept the Task Force:
 - Panzerjägerabteilung 251 (14 Hetezer and 12 75mm anti tank guns.
 - 100 Officer cadets all former battle hardened NCOS.
 - Kampfgruppe Demmel two Heavy companies and two infantry platoons of Grenadier regiment 113. These troops came under command of Panzerjägerabteilung 251.

The German defenders also had access to air reconnaissance and ground support.

The Task Force sets out

As stated above the plan got off to a delayed start. What was supposed to take 30 minutes lasted hours.

Finally Baum told the attacking companies; ' Get out of my way, I'm going". Baum blasted his 50 vehicle column through the smoking town, moving quickly down the road to Hammelburg,

They proceeding through several villages meeting little or no opposition.

However as rumbled into the town of Lohr they lost a Sherman tank to a Panzerfaust. The front of the column led by the Stuarts(M5) destroyed a convoy of German trucks!

The fight at Gemünden

- The Task Force sped on towards the town of Gemünden on the River Saale. They attacked several trains on the way and knocked down telephone poles and cut telephone wires.
- They blasted their way into the town which was heavily defended and three tanks were destroyed. Moreover, the vital bridge was destroyed by the German defenders. Although he found another crossing, Baum was wounded and his was losing men and vehicles during the process. He lost 3 killed, 18 wounded and 37 captured.
- Whilst he was still moving he was falling well behind schedule and had collected two hundred German prisoners including an SS General.

The Russians and the SS General

After crossing the Sinn River, the task force changed directions again moving East towards Grafendorf. On the way they liberated 700 Russian POWs who they handed over to them their German POWs including the SS General and his staff.

They also made radio contact with Allied plane and ordered air strike on Gemünden. The results of which they witnessed.

However the SS General was soon free and reported the destination of the task force to local Command.

Also at this time the column came under aerial observation! The pilot reported that the size of the column (12 tanks, 3 assault guns and 27 halftracks).

The Panzerjaegers arrive



As the task force was close to their objective. They had to turn right on the roadway to reach the Oflag. It was at this location that Hauptman Koehl had placed his tank destroyers. During the battle , a further 3 halftracks and two jeeps are destroyed. The Americans damage a couple of the German tank destroyers and destroyed their ammunition and fuel vehicles. Baum's force withdrew under the cover of Sherman 105 platoon which resulted in the damage of another Panzerjaegers. However, the German could make good their losses, Baum could not.

The arrival at the Camp

The Camp Commander decided to surrender the Camp as the force made it towards them. However, Baum waited two hours to enter the camp. At this stage Col. Waters and several others walked out to meet the force under a flag of truce. Unfortunately he was shot by a German soldier. His comrades rush him to the camp hospital in a critical condition.

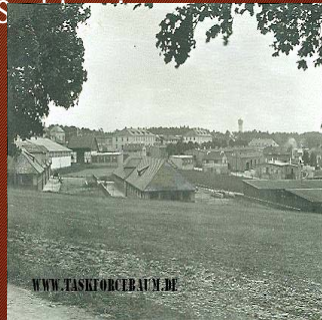
He completely missed, and indeed barley survived the culmination of the raid to free him.

Moreover the Germans now knew that the American force was just a raiding force and that it was on its own.

The German net was closing as forces moved into position.

Delay at the Camp

- On reaching the camp Baum soon discovered that instead of 300 American POWs, there were 1500 Americans plus 3000 S



Layout of the compound and photograph

Sorting out the mess

- The POWs in the camp under the Command of Colonel Goode were soon dismayed that only a small raiding party had liberated them.
- The delay in sorting out who would go and who wanted to stay caused a serious delay in departure. As stated there were no provisions or weapons for the the POWs. Several hundred of the POWs decided to join the Task Force for its return trip to American lines.
- To make matters worse the Task Force did not establish effective security around the camp or search for a safe route out of the area. As a result the Americans were blind, oblivious to the enemy activity around them.

The Route out

- It was 8.20 p.m. when Baum's force with over two hundred POWs left the compound.
- POWs were on the tanks which hampered their operational effectiveness. Drivers could not see and turrets could not traverse!
- Baum decided that the column must prevent discovery that night by avoiding all contact with the enemy.
- He despatched the remains of his tank company under the command of the wounded Nutto to locate the highway.

German road blocks

- The Germans had surrounded the area with road blocks.
- The Americans began to move through the actual German training ground. They lose tanks and vehicles and suffer further casualties.
- The Task Force arrives at a location called Reussenberg Farm. Unfortunately for the Americans, the Germans occupy an Observation Post in a ruined castle on top of the hill 427 (the Reussenberg) and are able to report the location and strength of the Task Force.
- Baum decides to hold up for the night to plan his escape.

Consolidation

- Therefore at 3.00 a.m. on the 28th of March the Task Force is consolidated on hill 427.
- The situation is grim. The force is down to 7 tanks, 3 assault guns and 20 halftracks (most filled with casualties).
- Just 110 of the original 293 are still with the unit.
- They are almost out of gas. Major Stiller Patton's Aid had planned to obtain fuel from captured German vehicles!
- Most of the POWs including Col. Goode return to the camp leaving just 57 prisoners with the Task Force.

Annihilation

- The German knew where the Americans were and their strength. They prepared to attack at dawn.
- Oberst Hoppe maneuvered reinforcements to surround the Americans. The combat engineers arrive with mortars, the battle hardened officer cadets arrive. His force is further reinforced by a battery of assault guns.
- More tanks including Tigers are arriving.

The German attack

- Just as Captain Baum starts his motor on his jeep the German attack starts at 9.15 a.m.
- The American position shook in a spasm of violence.
- The assault gun battalion was firing south of hill 426.
- To the southeast, Panzerjaegers and combat engineers advanced towards the task force.
- Cadet fired panzerfaust from concealed positions on the hill.
- The German response was coordinated, rapid, intense and overpowering. In less than twenty minutes it was over - every vehicle destroyed.

Capture of Captain Baum

- Towards the end of the assault Captain Baum yelled ' every man for himself' .
- Soldiers abandoned their vehicle and fled for cover in the woods.
- Captain Baum and Major Stiller are captured with Baum being wounded.
- Baum ends up next to Waters in the Camp hospital!.

Final Liberation

- As the American 7th Army advances towards the camp most of the POWs are again moved by the Germans. However, those sick and wounded are left in the Camp hospital.
- The 14th American Armored Division liberates the camp on 6 April 1945 just 9 days after the failed mission.

Patton visit



General Patton visited both his son-in-law in hospital where he awarded with a Silver Star. the

Capitan Baum

- Captain Baum is treated at a Field hospital and reports back to duty with the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion on the 10th of April 1945.

He is promoted to Major on the 18 April 1945!

Along with many members of the task force he is decorated!

He returns to the USA on 15 May 1945/