

TAC NEWS

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YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE The Death of the Second Panzer Division



The 2nd Panzer Division was established in 1935 as one of the original panzer divisions of the German Army. It participated in the campaigns in Poland in 1939 and France (1940), where it formed part of Heinz Guderian's XIX Motorized Corps. It was the first German division to reach the coast when it captured Abbeyville in May 1940. After isolating the Allied armies by reaching the coast, the division participated in the encirclement at Dunkirk. After taking part in the conquest of the Balkans in the spring of 1941, it was transferred to eastern Poland for Operation Barbarossa. As part of Army Group Center, it came within sight of Moscow before being thrown back during the massive Soviet counteroffensive in December 1941.



Heinz Guderian

2nd Panzer continued to serve on the eastern front during 1942 and 1943. After incurring severe losses

during the Kursk offensive in July 1943 it was transferred to France in early 1944 for refitting. At the time of the Normandy invasion, 2nd Panzer was stationed inland as part of the German strategic reserve. After taking part in the abortive Mortain counterattack, the division broke through the Falaise Gap with but a handful of tanks and a few hundred infantry. The division was then brought back to western Germany where it was combined with the remnants of the 352nd Infantry and reequipped with new vehicles and artillery. By the start of Operation *Wacht Am Rhine*, the 2nd Panzer was nearly at authorized strength with a total of 64 Panthers, 28 MkIVs, and 45 StugIIIs. Commanding 2nd Panzer was Colonel Meinrad von Lauchert, a newcomer to the division but an experienced armor commander on the Eastern Front.



Meinrad Lauchert

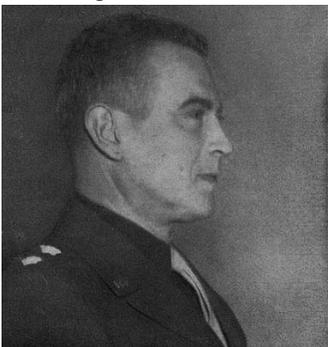


Hasso von Manteuffel

As part of the Hasso von Manteuffel's 5th Panzer Army, 2nd Panzer's plan of attack was to quickly overwhelm the thinly held American lines and take Clerf by the end of the first day. From there it was expected to reach the critical road junction at Bastogne the day after and the Meuse River four days after the start of the offensive.

Attacking on 2nd Panzer's northern flank was the 116th Panzer Division, also rebuilt after its near destruction at Falaise. On the divisions southern flank was Manteuffel's third armored formation, the Panzer Lehr Division, another rebuilt division yet still under strength in armor.

The German attack started at 0530 on December 16th, after a short but intense artillery barrage. Unexpected heavy resistance by the U.S. 110th Regiment/28th Infantry Division and damage to a key bridge over the Our River disrupted the 2nd Panzers timetable. Clerf did not fall until late on the 17th, allowing several U.S. units, most importantly the U.S. 101st Airborne Division, to reach Bastogne ahead of the German columns. Blocking 2nd Panzers route into Bastogne were two task forces from CCR of the U.S. 9th Armored Division, Task Force Rose and Task Force Harper, each comprised of mixed companies of tanks and infantry. Task Force Rose came under attack by leading elements of 2nd Panzer on the morning of the



Maurice Rose

18th and was surrounded before permission to withdrawal was given. Task Force Harper, defending Longvilly, came under artillery fire near nightfall, followed shortly by an attack by 2nd Panzer Panthers that shattered it. Remnants of CCR started retreating back into Bastogne.

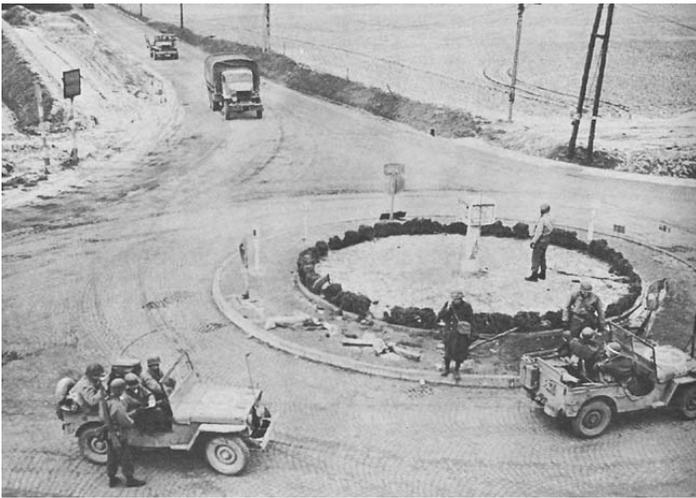
CCB of the U.S. 10th Armored Division arrived in Bastogne late on the 18th, dividing its assets into three separate task forces covering the approaches into Bastogne. One of these, Task Force Cherry advanced east along the road to Longvilly, became snarled in a traffic jam with the retreating remnants of CCR/9th Armored Division. Elements of three German divisions, 2nd Panzer, Panzer Lehr, and 26th *Volksgrenadier*

converged upon the jammed mass of vehicles on the afternoon of the 19th and systematically destroyed it. American losses in units facing 5th Panzer Army during the first few days of the offensive had been staggering. However, their sacrifices had not been in vain. Serious losses in men and material had been inflicted on Manteuffel's assault force. Even more important was the time and fuel consumed by the German Fifth Panzer Army's drive to the Meuse, both commodities in short supply.

Units of the 2nd Panzer skirted along the northern outskirts of Bastogne and continued their drive to the Meuse, while the Panzer Lehr Division and 26th *Volksgrenadier* Division were tasked with seizing Bastogne. In Noville, several miles northwest of Bastogne, another one of CCB/10th Armored Division task forces, Task Force Desobry, covered the northeastern approach into Bastogne. In the early morning hours of December 20th, elements of 2nd Panzer repeatedly clashed with Task Force Desobry, forcing it to abandon Noville and allowing the 2nd Panzer to continue its drive east. By nightfall on the 21st, *Kampfgruppe* Bohm, the reconnaissance element of the 2nd Panzer Division, had seized a bridge over the Ourthe River at Ortheuville after charges set by U.S. combat engineers failed to detonate. 2nd Panzer was now approximately halfway to the Meuse but would have to wait for over a day for more fuel before it could continue its drive northwest towards Marche.

Meanwhile, north of 2nd Panzer, 116th Panzer Division was experiencing its own difficulties. Although it had not encountered the resistance that 2nd Panzer had, traffic and fuel problems had slowed its advance. Panzer Lehr continued its futile attacks on Bastogne until ordered to bypass Bastogne to the south on December 22nd, leaving behind *Kampfgruppe* Hauser in order to reinforce 26th *Volksgrenadiers* attempts to storm the town.

The U.S. First Army response to 5th Panzer Army's drive was swift and decisive. Units were being fed into blocking positions west of Bastogne as early as December 19th. Hotton was covered by only weak elements of the U.S. 3rd Armored Division but, this was enough to repel leading elements of the 116th Panzer Division. The 334th Regimental Combat Team of the U.S. 84th Infantry Division arrived in Marche on December 20th with the 335th arriving the next day. Further west, the British 29th Armored Brigade was rushed to the Meuse crossings at Namur-Dinant and arrived there on December 21st. The U.S. 2nd Armored Division was ordered south to fill the gap between the 29th Armored Brigade and 84th Infantry Division.



Crossroads near Marche Belgium

After refueling, 2nd Panzer Division resumed its advance on December 23rd. With Marche now held by strong U.S. force, two *kampfgruppen* were detached from the main body of 2nd Panzer and ordered west towards the Meuse at Dinant. *Kampfgruppe* Bohm, reinforced with a few Panthers, lead the way. *Kampfgruppe* Cochenhausen followed, comprised of the 1st Battalion/3rd Panzer Regiment (minus the Panthers sent to KG Bohm), Panzergrenadier Regiment 304 (minus 2nd Battalion), along with the self-propelled artillery battalion from the 74th Panzer Artillery Regiment and engineering and flak units. The remainder of 2nd Panzer stayed behind to screen Marche and keep the lines of communications open.

The stage was now set for last act of the Fifth Panzer Army's drive to the Meuse. On the evening of December 23rd, *Kampfgruppe* Bohm raced up the highway towards Dinant, reaching the woods near the town of Foy-Notre Dam. *Kampfgruppe* Cochenhausen followed it the next day arriving in the woods east of Celles, both *Kampfgruppen* now desperately short of fuel. *Kampfgruppe* Holtmeyer was further east, within supporting distance of *Kampfgruppe* Cochenhausen. Meanwhile, 116th Panzer Division was occupied attempting to displace the U.S. 84th Infantry Division between Hotton and Marche. Instead of joining 2nd Panzer at Celles, Panzer Lehr spent most of the day seizing Rochefort from a single infantry battalion, only succeeding after outflanking it from the north. By Christmas Eve, Fifth Panzer Army's advance had come to an end. A column of *Kampfgruppe* Bohm probing towards Meuse at Dinant was repelled by elements of the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment positioned east of the river. This marked the furthest advance of the Wehrmacht during the Ardennes offensive.

General Ernest Harmon, commanding the U.S. 2nd Armored Division, was eager to attack the 2nd Panzer Division spearheads. U.S. aerial reconnaissance had located both *Kampfgruppe* Bohm and Cochenhausen and radio intercepts made it clear that both formations were short of fuel. Although the Allied high command wanted to



Ernest Harmon

use the 2nd Armored to adopt a defensive posture, corps headquarters issued Harmon deliberately vague orders, assuming that he would interpret them in his typically aggressive manner. This assumption was well made. On Christmas day, Combat Command B/2nd Armored Division, split into two task forces, advanced on Celles, enveloped it from two directions, and effectively cut off *Kampfgruppen* Cochenhausen and Bohm from the rest of 2nd Panzer. The German sluggish reaction to their encirclement can be attributed to their fuel shortage as well as intense and accurate artillery fire and air strikes worked over the woods where Cochenhausen's force was hiding.

The 82nd Reconnaissance Battalion/U.S. 2nd Armored and 3rd Royal Tank Regiment contained *Kampfgruppe* Bohm in the woods to the northwest. However, some elements of the *kampfgruppe* escaped their encirclement and linked up with *Kampfgruppe* Cochenhausen in the woods northeast of Celles. While Combat Command B was surrounding *Kampfgruppe* Cochenhausen, Combat Command A/U.S. 2nd Armored Division advanced south in two separate task forces, seized Buissonville and threatened 2nd Panzer's lines of communication. Panzer Lehr attempted to dislodge CCA on Christmas morning, but was repulsed after losing more than a dozen tanks and assault guns.



Knocked out Panther near Celles

The next day, after being relieved by a *kampfgruppe* of the 9th Panzer Division near Marche, Colonel Lauchert formed another *kampfgruppe* from what remained of the 2nd Panzer that would attempt to rescue his two surrounded forces near Celles. *Kampfgruppe* Holtmeyer, consisted of the division's armored infantry battalion (1st Battalion/2nd Panzergrenadier Regiment), two companies of tanks, a battalion of towed guns, two companies of engineers, and part of the division's flak battalion. *Kampfgruppe* Holtmeyer came to within a mile of Celles before being crushed by elements of CCB/2nd Armored Division. Another relief force, formed from elements of Panzer Lehr, suffered a similar fate. Combat Command B spent the next two days methodically cleaning up both pockets.

About 600 men from *Kampfgruppen* Cochenhausen and Bohm escaped the encirclement on foot. All of the equipment of the reconnaissance batt., Panzergrenadier Regiment 304, 2nd Battalion /3rd Panzer Regiment, three artillery battalions, and two-thirds of the division flak battalion had to be left behind. For the second time in less than six months, 2nd Panzer Division ceased to exist as an effective fighting force.

George Chrestensen

Editorial note: George Chrestenson wrote an article on the 'first death' of the German 2nd Panzer Division - covering aspects of the Falaise Pocket campaign. You can find it at May-June 2004 issue of Tacnews, "The Rock of Mortain," which is available free on line at <http://www.ghqmodels.com> (click "Military Models " & then "Newsletters")

**Next Issue of Tacnews:
"You only Live Twice"
Scenario!**

In Memorium

John Fernandes, Jr.

1948 - 2009

It is with the greatest sadness that we announce the sudden death of a great friend of GHQ's, John Fernandes. John was someone who put family, friends, and his country ahead of everything else, including himself. He will be missed by the many people who he touched around the world. You could always count on him being upbeat and optimistic, no matter what the circumstances. Everyone who knew him will never forget him, and we are all better off because of people like him.

John was the author of *Micro Armour®: The Game*, both World War II and Modern. Every dime John received in payment was donated to help Vietnam veterans. John wrote countless *Tacnews* articles, and all of the Modern Country Studies found at the GHQ website. To get an idea of what John contributed to our hobby, read some of those - his depth of knowledge was unfathomable.

John joined the USMC - twice! He served in Vietnam, including the Battle for Hue City during the Tet Offensive. He then studied psychology at NYU, concurrently working at SPI as a game designer and playtester. Following graduation, he re-entered the Marine Corps and became a Chinese linguist and interrogator. His service included Beirut in 1983 (where he was in the barracks when terrorists blew the front half off the building!); in Afghanistan later in the 1980s (coordinating the transfer of Stinger missiles to fight the Soviet Invasion) and was in Tiananmen Square during the student protests in 1989. After retirement from the Marines, John established numerous gaming groups, always working on a set of playable *Micro Armour®* rules: GHQ liked them as fun, realistic and a true set of combined arms rules!

John had several ongoing GHQ projects when he passed away on April 25, 2009. His colleagues want to see them to completion. These will include a set of 1:1 rules, and a series of booklets on the North Africa campaign in WWII. Watch for those to appear at GHQ's website.

He's survived by his lovely wife, Beverly.

John Fernandes - *Semper Fidelis!*



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