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HEADQUARTERS 636th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
Office of the Battalion Commander

APO 758, U S Army
7 January 1945

SUBJECT: Transmittal of Records

TO : Commanding General, Seventh Army, APO 758, U S Army
(Thru Channels)

1. Pursuant to instructions contained in Letter, Allied Force Headquarters, dated 20 April 1943, file AG 314.7/389 G-N, Subject: Historical Records and Histories of Organizations, transmitted herewith Operations in France, December 1944 of this Battalion.

2. Conclusions:

a. It has been definitely proven that due to the enemy's infiltration tactics, it is absolutely necessary to have a .30 caliber machine gun, preferably ball mounted, on the M-10. I am highly in favor of having the necessary modifications performed.

In wooded terrain it is impossible to stop enemy infiltration. Due to the lack of sufficient troops to form an effective screen it will never be entirely stopped. A .30 caliber machine gun mounted on the M-10 will provide a means for the destroyers crew to combat these infiltrating parties.

b. Maintenance status of the tank destroyers during the month of December brought out the necessity of rotating equipment.

Due to the length of service of our equipment, being constantly on the line destroys combat effectiveness. One platoon of each company held in a reserve status, undergoing maintenance, plus constant rotation of platoons, prevents a great deal of loss of equipment due to mechanical failures at critical times during an action.

c. Tank destroyers should not be put under the control of infantry junior officers. Their lack of experience in handling armor and lack of knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of the tank destroyers make them prone to expose this valuable piece of equip-

CLASSIFICATION CHANGED leading tank destroyers to the infantry's front

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

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DOWNGRADING COMMITTEE 76 MAR 48

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line positions, merely to have them there, when there are no remunerative targets, or where effective covering fire can be placed from positions farther to the rear, merely increases our M-10 casualties.

d. Effective tank destroyer fire can be accomplished at night from positions that are untenable during daylight hours by using the method outlined in Annex #1, S-3 summary. This method may be used in all types of terrain with little difficulty or extensive preparation.

e. The 3" illuminating shell can be used to good advantage when tank destroyers are placed on road blocks at night. One TD of the platoon, kept to the rear of the road block and laid for direction during daylight hours, can illuminate the area forward of the road block on call from the forward guns, thereby allowing the TD's to place effective fire on the enemy.

Charles F. Wilber
CHARLES F. WILBER
Lt Colonel Inf
Commanding

1 Incl:
Narrative of Operations for the month
of December 1944, with attached annexes.

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**HEADQUARTERS 636th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 738 U S Army**

7 January 1945

OPERATIONS IN FRANCE, DECEMBER 1944

At the beginning of the month of December, elements of the Battalion were attached to the Division's Regimental Combat Teams, positioned and in readiness for a push into the Rhine River Valley.

Reconnaissance Company was attached to the 142d RT, and was a major source through which its Commander obtained information for making an estimate of the situation, making decisions, and preparing the conduct of operations. The 2d Reconnaissance Platoon moved through the forward elements of the 142d RCT, with the mission of locating hostile troops and installations. Upon reaching V-767635, two kilometers northwest of Selestat, the enemy was encountered in force. While engaging the enemy in a fire fight the platoon was forced to withdraw to Guebelsheim, V-750735, after its positions were subjected to intense enemy artillery and mortar shellfire barrages.

The destroyers of Company "A" supported elements of the 142d RT in its drive towards Selestat. The attack progressed until the RT's 3d Battalion was held up several hundred yards out of Kintzheim, V-7461 by strong enemy small arms positions. Plans were made for an attack the following morning.

The 2d Platoon of Company "B" supported the 2d Battalion, 141st RCT. From direct fire positions the destroyers expended seventy-six rounds of HE and sixteen rounds of AP on enemy dispositions in the wooded area and houses in the vicinity of Hill 922, V-5433. At the completion of the missions considerable enemy counterbattery shellfire fell on the destroyers positions.

The 1st and 2d Platoons of Company "C" maintained a reserve status, under Battalion control, in the vicinity of La Vaucelle, while its 3d Platoon supported the 1st Battalion, 142d RT on its attack towards Selestat from positions east of Neuhels, vicinity of V-719070.

On the following day, 2 December, the 142d RT continued its vigorous assault towards Selestat, with close direct fire support being given by the destroyers of Company "A". As the troops displaced forward, they were opposed by determined enemy infantrymen and armor in the

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vicinity of V-779611, the southwest section of Selestat. The 2d Platoon finally penetrated into the town with the troops of the 3d Battalion, where, after heavy fighting the ROT's objective was reached. The 1st Platoon, upon reaching V-754637, was ordered into indirect firing positions by the Regimental Commander, with the mission of firing interdiction and harassing fires assigned by the 138d Field Artillery Battalion. The 2d Platoon supported the assaulting troops by placing direct shellfire on enemy installations and dispositions that confronted the troop's advances.

The destroyers of Company "B", assembled in St Marie Aux Mines, were awaiting movement orders from the Commanding Officer, 141st ROT. Elements of the 2d Platoon supplimented the fires of the 131st Field Artillery Battalion from indirect fire positions.

Upon orders from the Division Commander the destroyers of Company "C" moved to assembly areas, the 1st and 3d Platoons in the vicinity of V-620387 to support the 1st and 3d Battalions, 143d ROT respectively. The 2d Platoon, in readiness to support the ROT's 2d Battalion, moved to an assembly area at V-637568. While in these areas, the destroyers remained on an alert status, prepared to move upon Regimental order, and support the infantry in its mission of blocking the right flank at Aubure, V-6155 and the assaulting of and capturing of the town of Ribeauville, V-6995.

Reconnaissance Company continued its aggressive patrolling in the 142d's sector. The reconnaissance elements maintained contact with the enemy on the roads South of Grewiller at V-737595 and V-745594, as well as at V-760603, east of the town.

At this time the Battalion Command Group was situated in Roubach le Frans, V-646647. It was learned that the Division's axis of advance would be towards the southeast and the town of Ribeauville, so shortly after noon, the Command Group moved to St Marie Aux Mines and established a Command Post. From this location, not only was the C.P. on the Division's axis of advance, but it shortened and improved the Communications with the Division Command Post.

On 3 December, the 2d Platoon of Reconnaissance Company was given the mission of patrolling from Selestat to the crossroads at V-754579, to V-780365, and then on to V-787559 and to the bridge at V-791550. After reaching the bridge, the Platoon was to continue Southeast to Ohnenheim, and then proceed North to Weidelsheim. The Platoon, upon reaching a point at V-750585, ran into an enemy wired roadblock, whereupon it returned to a point in the vicinity of V-769598 to select a

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roadnet to the Southeast, which would enable them to carry out their mission. It was soon learned that all roads in that sector were covered with water. A route through Orschwiller and to the Southeast was selected. Upon reaching V-746594, the Platoon drew shellfire from an enemy flak wagon, so it was then ordered to return to its assembly area in Chateaufort.

The 1st Platoon established an O.P. in Orschwiller, so as to observe any enemy movement or dispositions in Hippelyte, or at the road junction, V-754579. Close surveillance was maintained over the area between these two points.

The 2d Platoon of Company "A" continued supporting the 3d Battalion of the 142d RST in its house to house fighting in Selestat. The Platoon knocked out one enemy implaced machine gun and killed ten enemy personnel while placing direct fire on enemy occupied houses.

Company "B" remained in the vicinity of St Marie Aux Mines. The 1st Platoon moved into indirect firing positions, while the 2d Platoon moved to the front line sector to support the 2d Battalion, 141st RST in its attack on Aubure.

The destroyers of Company "C" moved forward and supported the 143d RST's attack on the town of Ribeauville. Upon entering the town, the destroyers underwent enemy artillery and mortar barrages. With elements of the infantry and supporting armor, the destroyers moved to the Eastern edge of Ribeauville to establish road blocks in that portion of the town.

On the 4th of December, the 2d Platoon of Reconnaissance Company was given the mission of sending dismounted patrols forward to find possible crossings across the L' Ill and Remwasser Rivers, and then continue to the towns of Chamehain and Heidehain to learn the strength and dispositions of the enemy. On the 5th, the 1st and Pioneer Platoons were sent out with the missions of reconnoitering for bridges at V-797309, V-792338, V-795357 and V-780365. The patrols reached a point within 400 yards of V-787359, where they drew fire from enemy small arms and machine guns, blocking further advances toward their objectives. The 2d and 3d Platoons had the mission of checking the condition of the bridge at V-818397. Upon reaching V-789395, the patrol encountered stiff enemy opposition from enemy small arms and machine gun fire. Three of the six-man patrol managed to withdraw, after being pinned down by the enemy shellfire for several hours. On the following day elements of Reconnaissance Company was given the mission of securing the bridge sites at V-779392 and V-781393. The other bridges in that sector could

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not be reached because of intense enemy small arms and machine gun fire. The Company secured the bridge sites until relieved during 8 December 1944. The Company was then given the mission of maintaining a motorized patrol on the Selestat - Guemar Road, during daylight hours. After dusk each evening, outposts were established at V-770593 and V-752566, so as to keep observation on the roadnets in these sectors.

Company "A" continued its close support of the 142d RCT in the Selestat sector. A number of the destroyers were employed from indirect firing position, supplementing the fires of the 132d Field Artillery Battalion on enemy dispositions observed by the air O. P.

The destroyers of Company "B" expended 463 rounds of H.E., while supporting the aggressive advances of the 141st RCT. One Platoon, from direct fire positions, destroyed three enemy personnel carriers, and one motorcycle. It was estimated that approximately twenty enemy personnel were killed as a result of the firing.

The Company "C" destroyers, supporting elements of the 143d RCT in the sector South and Southeast of Ribeauville, assisted in the capturing of Rignewihr, V-6782 and Zellenburg, V-6952. Although the troops only met negligible enemy opposition, two destroyers were disabled by enemy bazooka fire and one by enemy artillery shell fire.

Shortly after noon on 6 December, the Battalion Command Group moved from St Marie Aux Mines to Ribeauville.

During the night of 6 December, Company "B" moved to an assembly area in Ribeauville, where it was put on a Division reserve status.

At this time, enemy artillery activity was moderate. Selestat was shelled intermittently by enemy artillery shellfire of heavy and light caliber, while Ostheln and Guemar, east of Ribeauville were subjected to considerable medium and heavy caliber fire. Considerable nebelwerfer fire was reported as falling on Zellenburg. There was a noticeable marked increase in aggressive enemy infantry action. The enemy launched a series of attacks against Hill 393, V-676497, that gained them some positions on the slopes of the Hill.

On 5 December, Company "B" relieved Company "C" and supported the 143d RCT with six destroyers in direct fire positions. Company "C" withdrew from its forward positions to an assembly area in Ribeauville where it was placed in Division Reserve to carry on necessary motor maintenance.

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As the days passed, the situation became more critical in the sector South and Southeast of Ribeuville. On 11 December, the enemy made heavy counterattacks in that sector, and its troops infiltrated through gaps in the frontlines. Heavy concentrations of friendly artillery and mortar shellfire were placed on the enemy in an effort to counter its movement.

Reconnaissance Company was relieved of the motorized patrol mission on the Selestat - Neuwar Road, and given the mission of reinforcing Company "E", 142d in defending the town of Juemar. The Company moved into defensive positions within the town, where it would be able to fulfill its mission in case the enemy made a thrust towards the town.

Three destroyers of Company "G" moved from the Company assembly area in Ribeuville to direct fire positions in the vicinity of Seblenheim, enabling them to support the 3rd Battalion, 143d ABN's assault on the town of Bonzwihr.

The 3rd Battalion's attack from Mittelwihr, toward Bonzwihr, penetrated through the outskirts of the town, where strong resistance was encountered by enemy infantry, supported by tanks.

Due to the nature of the terrain, our tank destroyers were not able to bring fire upon enemy tanks in the town which were holding up the infantry's advance. The town was situated in a bowl surrounded on three sides by barren hills which were in our possession. These barren hills were well covered by enemy artillery, self-propelled and tank fire in the valley, making any firing positions there untenable during daylight hours. However, these hills offered the only positions from which TD fire could be directed into the town. The following plan was devised and carried out:

Three Company "G" destroyers, under cover of darkness, moved into position atop these hills. The noise of the moving destroyers was covered by a pre-arranged artillery and 4.2 mortar barrage on the enemy positions. At a pre-designated time, the infantry, which was being supported by our TD's, illuminated the town with 60 mm mortar and rifle flares for a period of ten minutes. Further, the infantry designated the targets by machine gun tracer. Our TD's fired 35 rounds of APG at the designated targets. The results were unknown for two reasons. Some of the initial artillery and mortar barrage fell into the town, thus causing a great deal of dust. Secondly, the 4.2 mortars fired smoke shells into the enemy positions, which drifted over the target area making visibility in that area very poor.

During the day, enemy artillery increased in intensity. The Division's

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forward areas, Ribeauville, and the Battalion Command Post area were subjected to heavy barrages of enemy artillery shellfire. During one of the barrages, the advance Company "B" Command Post was hit, wounding its Company Commander. The Company Commander and Executive Officer of Company "B" were wounded while enroute to one of the destroyer platoon's forward positions.

The 1st Battalion, 141st NBT and the destroyers of Company "B" were heavily engaged in repulsing a strong enemy counterattack which penetrated the outskirts of Riquewihr. The crews of the destroyers gave the infantrymen close support with 3-inch, .50 caliber and .30 caliber fire, forcing the enemy to withdraw from the town, after the crews had captured five P.W.'s and killed an estimated 35 enemy personnel. Company "C" also fired in direct support of the infantry during the enemy's counterattack on Riquewihr.

During the evening it was learned that large concentrations of enemy troops had been observed South of Kayserberg, forward of the 141st and 143rd NBT's sector. Enemy troop movement had been observed moving towards Solestat.

Shortly after 1800 hours, the S-3 conversed with the Division G-3 and learned that one Platoon of Reconnaissance Company was being withdrawn from Guemar and employed as a motorized patrol on the mountain road between Ribeauville and St Marie Aux Mines. A prisoner of war had reported that an enemy roadblock would be established on the road during the night of 12 December, so as to cut one of the Division supply lines.

During this period, the enemy thrust strongly reinforced troops into the Division sector. Prior to the employment of the Reconnaissance Platoon the enemy infiltrated through the Division Front and broke out on the Ribeauville - St Marie Aux Mines Road at V-6656 and attempted to establish a road block. After a fire fight with an artillery battery, the enemy was forced to withdraw to the hills. The Platoon of Reconnaissance Company maintained a motorized patrol on the road during the night without making contact with the enemy.

During the early morning hours of 14 December, heavy concentrations of enemy artillery and mortar shellfire fell in Mittelwihr and its vicinity. These barrages were followed by a heavy enemy attack which broke into Mittelwihr and infiltrated behind the positions of the 3d Battalion. Sharp and close fighting took place within the town. During this action one destroyer of Company "C" and two $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton vehicles

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were destroyed by enemy shellfire. As the result of timely employment of local reserves, a major breakthrough was prevented, although enemy pressure continued in the Mittelwihr area throughout the day.

Company "A", supporting the 142d RGT, continued to maintain defensive positions at roadblocks and bridges in Selestat and Gueimar.

At 0835 hours, the Battalion's Liaison Officer to Division, called the Command Post and reported that the enemy was in Mittelwihr in force, and that the situation was very critical. Enemy infiltration was reported in the Engineer's sector.

At 142046A December, the Division G-3 called the Command Post and informed the Battalion Commander that he was to command the Division Reserve Force, which would be comprised of the Reconnaissance Company (less one Platoon), 636th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Company "D", 753d Tank Battalion, "D" Battery, 443 AAA Battalion and two Companies of Engineers, Company "C", 111th Engineer Battalion, and Company "A", 36th Engineer Regiment. The Battalion Commander immediately left the Command Post to confer with the Division G-3 to learn the mission of the Reserve Force. In the meantime, all Company Commanders of the units attached to the Force were contacted and informed to attend a conference at the Battalion Command Post.

After the Battalion Commander's conference with the unit Commanders, Reconnaissance Company and Company "D", 753d Tank Battalion moved into assembly areas in the vicinity of Ribourville. Liaison personnel from the units established themselves at the Battalion Command Post, so as to keep abreast with the situation and relay any orders that the Reserve Force Commander might issue.

Shortly before sunrise on 15 December, the Battalion Commander, G-3, and the Commanding Officer of Reconnaissance Company reconnoitered the Division Sector and selected positions from where the Division Reserve Force could be employed. Upon returning from the route reconnaissance of the terrain, the G-3 made a plan of employment for the Division Reserve Force. In case of a breakthrough in the Rignewihr - Mittelwihr sector, the Reserve Force Command Post would be established in the vicinity of V-679519. Reconnaissance of that area showed that all secondary roads on the high ground in grid squares 07 - 51 and 08 - 51 would support light tanks. If the force was to be employed in that sector, Reconnaissance Company (less one Platoon) and one Platoon of light tanks, would make out and occupy the high ground in the 07 - 50 and 08 - 50 areas. The Engineers would occupy the ground to the left of Reconnaissance Company and the light tanks would move initially to Rignewihr for disposition. Grape arbors in that area would prevent any cross country vehicular movement, although the possibility of enemy

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troop infiltration through the arbors was taken into consideration, and active patrolling on the part of the Division Reserve Force was planned to counter such a possibility. In case the enemy penetrated, the Division Frontline dispositions East of Zellenburg, the Command Post would be situated in Zellenburg. Reconnaissance Company (plus one Platoon of light tanks) would establish a roadblock in the vicinity of V-704513. The Engineers would build up a line running in an easterly or westerly direction on the high ground West of V-704513. Two flak wagons of the 443d AAA would be so positioned as to cover the left flank of Reconnaissance Company and the open ground towards Osthain. The light tanks would assemble in Zellenburg, and be dispersed from that point. An enemy penetration from Osthain was also taken into consideration, and if such had happened, a site for the Command Post had been selected at V-702545. Reconnaissance Company and one Platoon of light tanks would move to point 192, vicinity V-707526 and counter any enemy vehicular movement towards Ribouville from Osthain. The secondary roads in that area were so surfaced as to support the movement of light tanks. Close reconnaissance revealed the possibility of establishing defensive positions in the grape arbors, with excellent cover being afforded by the latter. The Engineers would form a defensive line with fields of fire to cover the open ground. One Platoon of Engineers would be held in reserve and in readiness to move forward to any sector where it might be needed. Two flak wagons would be positioned at point 210, vicinity of V-707526 with its fields of fire covering the open terrain over which the enemy might attack.

The Division Artillery prepared a defensive fire plan of concentrations for supporting the Reserve Force. A forward observer was attached to the Headquarters for directing any specified shellfire of the 155th Field Artillery Battalion.

During this period, the destroyers continued their close-in supporting roles with the Division MST's. Company "B" expended 88 rounds of 3-inch and 1400 rounds of .30 caliber, while helping extricate a trapped infantry company in the vicinity of Mittelwihr. Destroyers of Company "C" were employed from positions which enabled them close surveillance of the valley roads. Two of the Company "C" destroyers in Ribouville were kept on an alert status, ready for movement to any threatened area, while another destroyer was positioned on the Ribouville - St Marie Aux Mines Road, with the mission of guarding the flank of an Artillery Battery.

At 271030A December, the Division Reserve Force was disbanded, and all Companies reverted to the control of their respective unit Commanders.

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During the day the destroyers in the Mittelwihr - Bollersheim - Zellenberg sector were subjected to steady harassing enemy artillery shellfire, with especially heavy concentrations in the Bollersheim area. The enemy infantry furnished aggressive opposition to our troops. Throughout the Division sector, the enemy made several counterattacks, which were quickly repulsed by our troops as they displayed a defensive attitude with sharp hand to hand fighting, and from well emplaced positions. Company "B", from direct fire positions, supported the 141st RCP's attacks on the towns of Kientzheim and Sigolsheim.

After being relieved from the Division Reserve Force, Reconnaissance Company relieved the Engineers of their roadblock and outpost installations on the Selestat - Tuenar road. The Company "B" destroyers fired on enemy traffic in the Kayserberg - Kientzheim - Sigolsheim - Ammerschwihr sector.

Plans were made and perfected for the movement of elements of the Battalion to Strasbourg on 20 December, where upon arriving in that sector, the Battalion would relieve elements of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion with minimum delay. At 190855A December, the Battalion Advance Detail left for Strasbourg to secure the tactical plan, make run of positions, and make preparations for the Battalions movement into that sector.

On the 20th, the Battalion Command Group, Reconnaissance Company and Company "B" moved to the vicinity of Strasbourg. The Battalion Command Post was established in Koenigsbaffen, V-989978. Company "B", attached to the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron occupied positions in Selts, while Reconnaissance Company established its Command Post in Strasbourg.

During the period 21 - 26, elements of Reconnaissance Company maintained a motorized patrol through the streets of Strasbourg. During the hours of daylight the patrol checked the route every two hours, and after darkness, a continuous patrol was maintained. The patrol was not only alert for enemy activity in the sector reconnoitered, but also made a close check of civilian passes. At night the patrol enforced light discipline with the city.

After being relieved by Companies of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, Companies "A" and "C" assembled in areas in the vicinity of Ribeauville. On 23 December, Company "A" moved to Strasbourg, where shortly after its arrival, it was attached to Tank Force Linden. //

Company "B" was attached to Tank Force Harris which relieved it of its attachment to the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron. The 1st Platoon

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maintained indirect firing positions in the vicinity of Leutenheim. This Platoon supplemented the fires of the 155th Field Artillery Battalion. The remainder of the Company remained in an assembly area in the vicinity of Leutenheim. The 3d Platoon of Reconnaissance Company was attached to Company "B" for purposes of making reconnaissance for the Company.

On 24 December, Company "C" moved from Ribeauville to an assembly area in the vicinity of V-002961 where it reverted to Battalion control. On the same date, one Platoon of Company "A" supported the 132nd Field Artillery Battalion, and another Battery "B", 133rd Field Artillery Battalion. The remainder of the Company remained in its assembly area.

Reconnaissance Company (less the 3d Platoon) was attached to Task Force Linden on 26 December. Its 3d Platoon was attached to Task Force Harris to be employed on reconnaissance missions designated by that Headquarters.

The remainder of the Battalion was relieved of its attachment to other units and moved to an assembly area where preparations were made for a move to the 36th Division's Rehabilitation and Training area South of Sarrebourg.

Shortly before midnight on 27 December, the Battalion (less Reconnaissance Company) started movement to the Division area. The Battalion Command Post closed into the town of Harbouey, V-372968, at 280123A December with the remainder of the Battalion, closing shortly thereafter into villages in that sector.

For the remaining period of the month, the Battalion (less Reconnaissance Company) maintained its vehicles and checked individual and Company property.

During the evening of 30 December, a Staff and Company Commander's conference was conducted by the Battalion Commander, at which time the Battalion Commander informed the officers that the Battalion was on a six-hour alert for movement upon orders from higher Headquarters, to a designated sector of the Seventh Army Front.

At the close of the period, Reconnaissance Company remained on the Line in the Strasbourg sector, where the Company (less the 3d Platoon) maintained motorized patrols, outpost, and radio relay stations for the 42d Infantry Division. The 3d Platoon ran motorized patrols on the route Camp D'Oberheffen - Drusenheim - Sessenheim and Schinheim² for elements of the 70th Infantry Division.

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Map Reference: Easter France, 1:50,000.

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