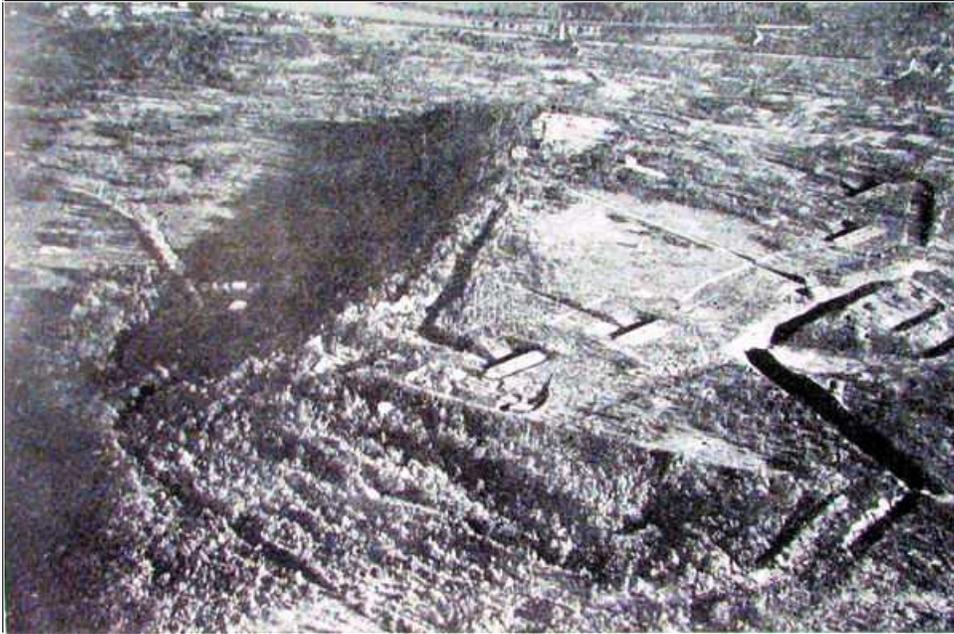


ATTACK ON FORT DRIANT



Aerial view of Fort Driant with the Moselle River in background. Zig-zag shadows represent Tank obstacles. On the left are barracks on which troops climbed to find ventilators.

About 5 miles southwest of Metz, just west of the Moselle River, stood Fort Driant, one of the strongest in the band of forts. During the September operations across the river south of Metz, this great rampart of steel and reinforced concrete with its batteries of huge guns was a thorn in the side of XX Corps. From its commanding position, it could turn on a speedy curtain of fire down the Moselle Valley and hamper any advance. Fort Driant was, accordingly, considered a keystone in the Metz fortified region and its reduction was thought to be a necessary prelude to a successful tank attack up the Moselle Valley toward Metz. In addition, after the severe fighting along the Moselle River line, a successful assault on one of Metz' great bastions would serve as a morale booster for the troops of XX Corps.

For these reasons, and to gain first-hand experience in the reduction of such fortified bulwarks, an attack by the elements of the 5th Division was endorsed by XX Corps and the Third Army.

Very little definite information on Fort Driant could be obtained, but it was believed to be defended by at least three companies of elite troops and several batteries of heavy guns.

After a bombing run by P-47s and an artillery preparation an attack was launched on September 27th to probe out the defenses. The assault echelon ran into interlacing bands of machine-gun fire laid along a huge moat 20 yards wide and 30 feet deep. The casemates and concrete shelters had walls seven feet thick and were so located as to command all likely approaches. Wire and belts 20 feet wide surrounded these barriers and heavy accurate artillery and mortar fire was delivered from the

surrounding forts, Jeanne D'Arc, Somme and St. Blaise. Unable to approach the well protected positions with demolition charges, the attackers were forced to withdraw to their original lines.

Unfavorable weather postponed further efforts until October 3. The lessons learned in the first unsuccessful attempt were made the subject of close study by Corps officers, and a more ambitious plan was adopted. On October 3, the fort was bombed with napalm bombs, which are filled with jellied gasoline it ignites as the bomb explodes and burns with great heat. At the same time, a combined force of tanks, infantry and engineers, carrying the latest demolition equipment, bangalore torpedoes, flame throwers, and every type of explosive charge, struck at the fort from the north and south.

The southern force succeeded in reaching its initial objective, using the fire of the tanks to blast a path through the protecting wire. Even the point-blank fire of self-propelled 105 mm guns firing at ranges of 30 yards failed to penetrate concrete turrets and barracks. For a time, concentrated fire dropped on the exposed assault troops threatened to stop the attack. A few ventilators atop two barracks were discovered, however, and after several explosive charges were dropped through these, the Germans came out.

There began now a strange, confusing fight that has been called the "battle for the tunnels." Down in the subterranean fastnesses of the mysterious old fort, Germans and Americans hunted each other through the tunnels in an eerie, medieval atmosphere. Deep in the interior of the fort for the control centers for the garrison and the heavy revolving turrets of the guns; and, these were the targets sought by the Corps troops. The fight became more desperate and weird as the days went on. The combatants lobbed hand grenades around corners at each other, burned and blasted their way through steel doors and stonewalls, and set up ambushes in the dark, twisting, underground quarters. But, little progress was made, and the constant strain in the sickening fumes of explosives were gradually weakening the attacking force.

The action is described in a XX Corps Operational Reports as follows:

"The following morning artillery fire from the adjoining forts forced the attackers into the cover of underground barracks and also hampered the supply of assault units. No additional ground been gained since the initial penetration. In fact, enemy counterattacks periodically eliminated small infantry patrols that out-posted the underground barracks, and knocked out four tanks by bazooka projectiles. The Commanding General of the 5th Infantry Division decided the afternoon the 5th of October, after a conference with the Commanding Officer of the 11th Infantry Regiment, to organize Task Force Driant under the command of the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General A. D. Warnock, and additional troops were placed in Fort Driant to eliminate enemy resistance.

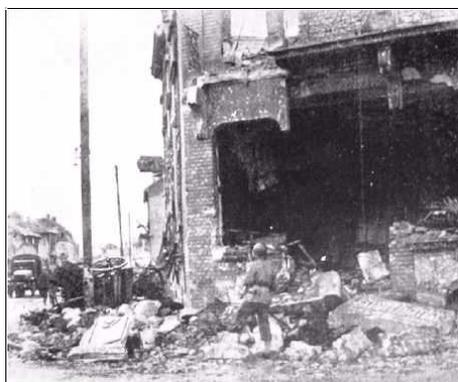
"The assault on the various casemates in Fort Driant continued under increasing artillery fire from adjoining forts, especially the Verdun Group and Fort Marival. On two occasions American troops, in determined sallies, were able to get on top of the gun positions of the underground concrete artillery encasements located in the southern portion of Fort Driant; but, the steel revolving turrets resisted all attempts to blow them with engineer charges. A carefully planned, concerted assault by an infantry company, supported by tanks, to take the entire southern portion of Fort Driant, resulted in the capture of most of the Company and its officers. Firing thereafter was cut down to the exchange of small arms fire and enemy explosions of engineer charges in the tortuous, subterranean passages that linked the various forts in Fort Driant. The infantry was now safe from the artillery fire, but dust fumes stirred up by the explosions made unbearable the living conditions of the men in the crowded Fort. Casualties continue to mount.

"After a week's fighting only the two barracks in the southwestern portion of Fort Driant were in the hands of the task force, now called Task Force Warnock. The five casemates of the main Fort were still held by the enemy. On the morning of 10 October, Major General Hugh Gaffey, Chief of Staff, Third US Army, Major General Walker, commanding general of XX Corps, Major General Kirwan and Brigadier General Warnock of the 5th Infantry Division decided, in a joint conference, after surveying the situation, to cease offensive action in Fort Driant. Sufficient forces were not available and to continue the attack would entail a needless loss of life. By the morning of 14 October all troops had been withdrawn from Fort Driant. The troops once more took up their position containing the fort." From this episode came a true picture of the nature of the Metz siege.

MAIZIERES-les-METZ



Troops fighting and resting in and around Maizieres
Long ago Hd learned to grin at sight and thought of
One less Nazi.



Each village suffered blitz effects because the Germans so thoroughly armed every sector.
Maizieres-les-Metz was no exception.

Another savagely fought preliminary to the main event of Metz was the town of Maizieres-les-Metz, a steel mining town of 3,000 population. It was located on the west bank of the Moselle six miles northwest of Metz and sat squarely astride the best and most direct route from the north into Metz. During September, repeated efforts to seize the town were repulsed by heavy artillery and mortar fire zeroed in on all approaches to the town.

Because of the extended front of XX Corps forces north of Metz (one regiment held 14 miles), and because the main effort at a penetration of Metz' defenses was directed by Corps Commanders order further south, the part of the front around Maizieres-les-Metz remained relatively quiet during the last half of September and early October.

In the early morning hours of October 3, elements of the 90th Division struck to secure Maizieres-les-Metz in an effort to gain positions at the base of the arc of forts west of Metz. By midday, the Bois de al'Abbe was cleared and infantry occupied a huge slag pile that towered over the town to the northwest. These positions were held against four counterattacks and incessant artillery fire by 150 mm howitzers. The addition of the 83rd Infantry Division to the XX Corps on October 5 permitted a shortening of the 90th Division's lines and a coordinated attack was launched on the morning of the 6th.

A squadron of P-47s from the XIX Tactical Air Command bombed the town with good results during the afternoon. Favorable progress was made initially, but the Germans fought back stubbornly. Bitter fighting developed in the woods and around the slag pile. While the enemy's efforts were directed toward retaking the slag pile, Corps infantry forces moved swiftly into the northern section of the town and into the steel mill district on the western edge and proceeded to mop up resistance there.

The enemy quickly brought up heavy reinforcement from the southern part of town and the battle developed into a house to house struggle. For the next three days, Corps troops in the town beat off repeat counterattacks thrown against them by special groups hastily assembled at Metz and sent to drive them from the town.

The importance attached to the town by the German commanders was evident from the tactics employed. Small groups of enemy infantry were placed in each house with orders to fight to the last man. The buildings and cells were sturdy concrete and stone construction, with walls often several feet thick. The numerous garden walls, courtyards, and heavily barricaded side streets made the reduction of each house a separate undertaking. The lack of sufficient forces to encircle the town from both the North and South made it necessary for XX Corps troops to battle their way down the long narrow axis of the town toward the southern end. Steady progress was made in this slow bloody fight, but it became apparent that a larger force in a coordinated attack would be necessary to take the town.

A Third Army order freezing all heavy caliber ammunition forced the abandonment of this plan. The close-in fighting continued until October 18th when a formidable obstacle, the centrally located City Hall, loomed up before the weakened Corps assault element. This heavily constructed building was strongly held by a determined enemy and soon became the principal bone of contention between the Americans on the north end of town and the Germans in the south. The City Hall became the hope of the defense and the focal point of the offense.

From the 19th to the 23rd of October, a 155 mm self-propelled gun was used to fire on the City Hall Building. Although one wing was eventually demolished and the roof torn off, still the enemy occupied the fortified barrier. The fact that the enemy continue to hold part of this key town, the

occupation of which was a preliminary step in and XX Corps' plan for the reduction of Metz, was a disappointment to the Corps Commander. It was felt that this northern outpost of Metz was important enough, as a supply artery for the northern arc of forts, to warrant a large-scale attack to end all resistance. Furthermore, the situation was intolerable and that both Corps and German forces were occupying parts of the same town though not on very neighborly terms. Accordingly on the 24th of October, XX Corps secured adequate ammunition allowance from Third Army for the use of the Corps infantry in the complete reduction of resistance in Maizieres-les-Metz.

Detailed plans were made for an attack on October 29th. The town of Maizieres-les-Metz was divided into sections and the striking force was assigned a specific group of houses with successive objectives designated in advance. The attack got underway after artillery was directed on all known enemy targets, and the enemy fell back in confusion. Several feints and diversionary attacks added to the confusion of the defenders while the main assault was directed toward the City Hall. Other task forces wheeled to cut the enemy escape routes to the south and east. By 1600 hrs the German garrison was split into two groups and had begun redraw to the central part of town. The enemy, now disorganized by the assault, began to surrender in groups of six to 30 men. By evening, the bulk of the town was occupied and only a few houses and the City Hall remained in enemy hands.

In the early morning hours of October 30th, the remaining enemy positions were mopped up. When Corps infantry troops moved in on the City Hall, only dead enemy soldiers were found. The capture of Maizieres-les-Metz was now complete and XX Corps ruled the town.

In this operation the equivalent of a German battalion was killed or captured at a cost of 55 casualties. Moreover, XX Corps was now in a position to cut the supply route to the fortified salient west of the Moselle and to exploit one of the best approaches to the inner defenses of Metz.

All during the month of October, lights burned late in the blacked-out Headquarters of XX Corps in Jarny. Plans for the final destruction of Fortress Metz and the drive to the Saar were the foremost preoccupation for all concerned. Supplies of every category were assembled in huge quantities for what had all the earmarks of a rugged and painful fight.

Information about the Fortress system of Metz, which had been gained through the gallant and bloody efforts of Corps troops all along the front, was closely studied by the Corps staff. All sources, from patrols to French Army Engineer officers, were combed for every shred of evidence of the great barriers guarding the valley of the Moselle.

Reinforcements were fitted into the units which had lost heavily in the savage fighting along the Moselle River line. Wherever possible, troops were pulled back for training in the assault of fortified positions and for a much-needed breathing spell before the coming offensive. Two new divisions, the 95th Infantry Division under the command of Major General Harry L. Twaddle and the 10th Armored Division, commanded by Major General William H. Morris, were attached to XX Corps during October. These new striking forces, destined to play a major role in the impending operations of the Corps, were deployed in quiet sectors of the line to give them battle experience and to hold the line already established.

The Americans and Germans both knew that something big was coming up and watched each other warily. During the latter part of October and early November, there was much shifting of forces and strengthening of positions on both sides in anticipation of the action to come. It was another "war of

nerves" with propaganda broadcasts and leaflets figuring in the pre-battle plans of XX Corps in an effort to break the morale and fighting spirit to the Nazi foe.

When the chill November days came, everyone knew the preliminaries were over and the championship bout was soon to begin. The XX Corps was ready to swing what the Corps Chief of Staff called its "Sunday Punch" in an effort to score the first knockout over the citadel of Metz in 1500 years.

The XX Corps plan, when perfected at the end of October, contemplated two distinct operations to be performed concurrently: first, an attack to encircle and destroy the Fortress and garrison of Metz; second, the seizure of a bridgehead over the Saar River in the vicinity of Saarburg as a base to resume the attack to the northeast. Regarding the second operation General Walker reasoned as follows. After the Metz operation had commenced and the enemy's strength had been siphoned into the threatened area, an infantry division, crossing north of Thionville could proceed rapidly over the base of the Saar-Moselle triangle and seize a bridgehead on the Saar River at Saarburg. The 83rd Infantry Division was to be attached to XX Corps for this mission. Saarburg was the weakest part of the Siegfried line in the XX Corps zone of advance to the east. Interrogation of prisoners of war indicated that this particular region was lightly held by the enemy. The execution of the second operation was timed to coincide with the encirclement of Metz.

The Metz operational plan directed the 5th Infantry Division to attack on the south from the Arnaville bridgehead, bypass the outer belt of fortresses, bridge the Nied River and attack north to seize the high ground southeast of Boulay.

The XX Corps Commander directed the 90th Infantry Division to make an assault crossing over the Moselle River on the north, execute a flanking attack along the trace of the Maginot Line, and join up with the 5th Infantry Division behind Metz in the vicinity of Boulay. By attacking along the ridge line containing the Maginot Forts, commanding ground would be held during the advance and the forts could be enfiladed, if necessary, one at a time without having the assault troops subjected to supporting cross fires of this fortified line.

General Walker, after making a personal reconnaissance of the northern portion of the XX Corps zone, selected the area between Malling and Cattenom for the 90th Infantry Division crossing site. This division would first reduce Fort Koenigsmacher and then establish a bridgehead over the Moselle in this area. The 10th Armored Division would be passed through the Koenigsmacher bridgehead and attack southeast to Boulay, at the rear of the Metz fortified region, on the outside of the 90th Infantry Division, after these two divisions had swept forward on their assigned mission, the 83rd Infantry Division would be passed over at the same place and dispatched on its concurrent mission to the northeast. The 90th Infantry Division was to link up with the 5th Infantry Division south of Boulay and thus complete the encirclement of fortress Metz.

It was believed, from the available intelligence, that the River line opposite Thionville was heavily defended by the enemy. Further south at Uckange there was an excellent crossing site. This was the logical place for a river crossing and it was thought that the enemy would be set for an attack in this area. With these considerations in mind, General Walker ordered a battalion of the 95th Infantry Division to make a demonstration in force at Uckange in order to distract the enemy's attention from the main effort of the 90th Infantry Division at Koenigsmacher.

The remainder of the 95th Division would be disposed to contain the German fortified salient west of Metz. The Division would maintain constant pressure along that defensive perimeter until the

encirclement had been accomplished or until a weak spot developed there. Then, on the Corps Commander's order, the 95th Infantry Division was to advance and capture the city of Metz.

Prior to the river crossing, the 3rd Cavalry Group would screen the Moselle River line north of Thionville and cover the readjustment of the troops. After the bridgehead had been established, the cavalry would follow the 10th Armored Division across to join the main effort to the south. The cavalry would then guard the north flank of the XX Corps.

D-day was set for the ninth of November 1944. The intervening two week period was to be used in training troops for the assault of fortified positions and in the regrouping units.

The 10th Armored Division was placed along the southern perimeter of the German salient west of the Moselle. This was done not only to give the Division battle indoctrination, but also to confuse the enemy. The 4th and 6th Armored Divisions of XII Corps were also being assembled further south in the vicinity of Pont-a-Mousson. It was believed by the XII Corps Commander that if the 10th Armored Division were put in the same locality the enemy would assume that a concentration of armor was to be employed in the drive south and east of Metz, a deceptive move which battle experience later proved successful.

During this period of relative quiet the enemy commanders had ample time to consider the strategic value of the Metz system and to organize their defenses. Four German divisions, numbering in all 30,000 troops, were holding Metz in the Moselle River line. On the north, the 416th Infantry Division with a strength estimated at 8300 men, held the sector from Koenigsmacher to the northern boundary of the XX Corps. The 19th Infantry Division, with a strength of more than 5000 troops, held the Moselle sector from Koenigsmacher south to within five miles of Metz. This division with its officer candidate school personnel and special Fortress troops, had a strength of approximately 9000 men. South of Metz was the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, numbering approximately 6000 men. Other General Headquarters units, such as flak and artillery battalions, totaling 2000 men, were scattered throughout the area.

Generalleutnant Kittel, an expert in Fortress defense, was brought from the Eastern front to take command of the 462nd Volksgrenadier Division. He did not arrive in Metz until the operation had begun, and then only could dispose his units to meet the attack and give orders to defend at all costs.

The enemy, at this time, held only one small pocket across the Moselle in the northern portion of the XX Corps zone. This pocket was held by three enemy companies in the town of Berg and on the high slopes directly northwest of it. Presence of the enemy at Berg precluded a surprise attack in the Koenigsmacher area. The 3rd Cavalry Group, commanded by Colonel James U. Polk, which was patrolling in this area, was ordered by XX Corps on November 4 to wipe out this pocket.

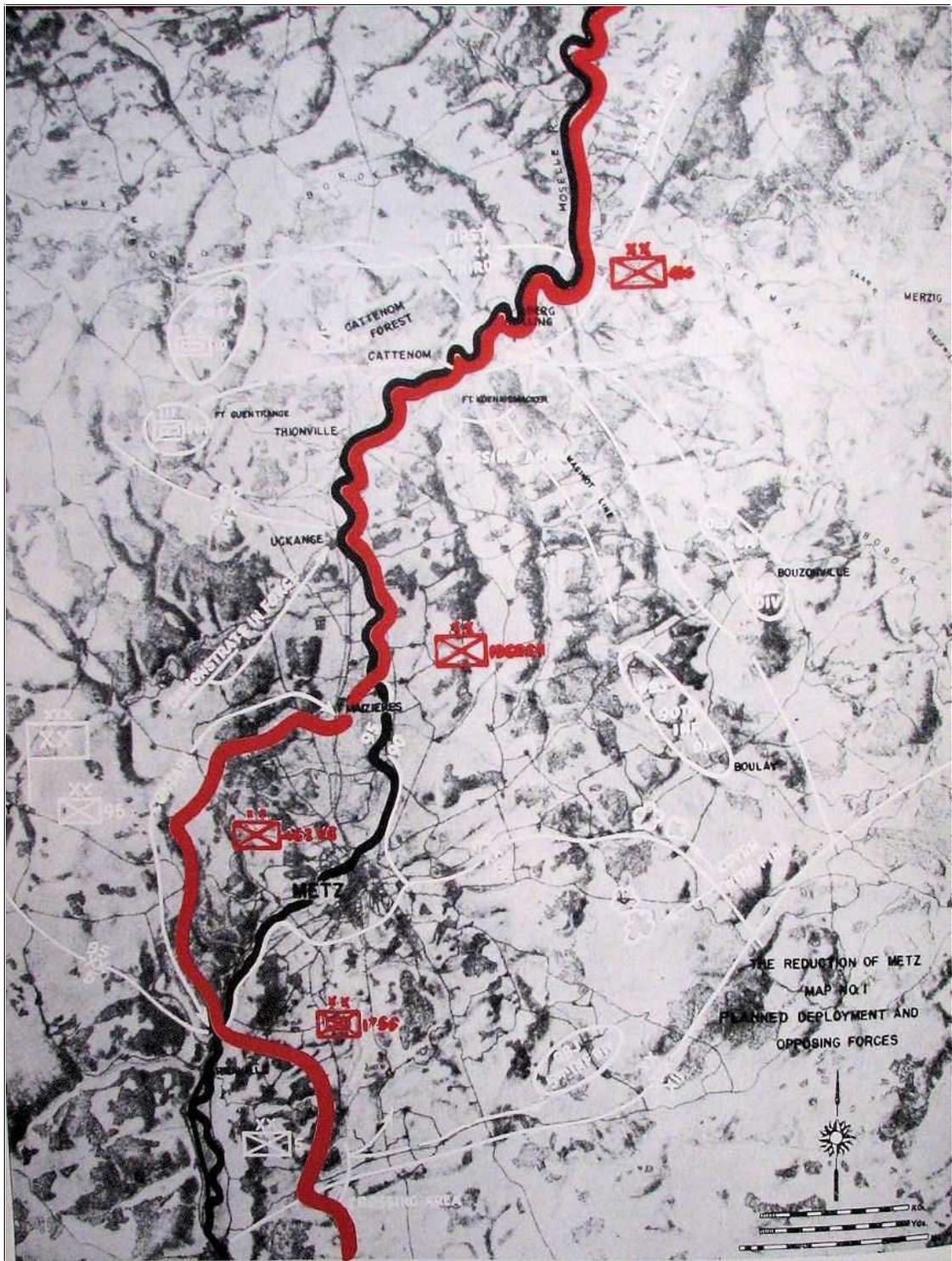
The initial assault was made in the early morning darkness of the 5th of November by a small armored-infantry team. This team penetrated the minefield that blocked entrance to the town of Berg and drove the enemy defenders back across the Moselle. This action isolated the remaining enemy company on the slope to the northwest of the town. Artillery concentrations on the slope paved the way for an attack by a small force of dismounted cavalry which captured the enemy and occupied the hill. This cleared the stage for the assembling of XX Corps units behind Cattenom prior to the attack.

The Commanding General of XX Corps Artillery, Brigadier General Julius A. Slack, had 18 2/3 field artillery battalions available to supplement the normal division artillery, plus the eight 100 mm French guns of the captured fortress Guenrange and captured German ordnance.

Because the two areas of initial assault for the encirclement of Metz were separated by 40 to 45 miles, the Headquarters Battery was placed in charge of XX Corps Artillery which was disposed to support the attack of the 5th Infantry Division in the southern bridgehead. The XX Corps artillery allocated its 18 2/3 Field artillery battalions to support the 90th Infantry Division attack. One field artillery group in the field artillery battalion, manning captured enemy guns, reinforced the 95th Infantry Division in the area selected for its demonstration in force in the vicinity of Uckange.

Security was of paramount importance in the movement of XX Corps artillery to the new position areas. Deceptive measures were adopted. Artillery, remaining in the old positions, increased the rate of fire to match the volume normally fired by all the artillery. Radios and observation posts were left in old position areas to maintain normal traffic and patrol. Reconnaissance of the new positions was restricted.

During the movement of the 90th Infantry Division to the Malling-Cattenom area, all vehicle markings and shoulder patches were changed to correspond with those of the 3rd Cavalry Group, which had been operating for several weeks in that area. As an additional deceptive measure, the 23rd Special Troops were assigned the job of maintaining the pre-existing artillery picture. Under cover of darkness, they moved with their dummy rubber guns into the abandoned positions. Gun positions, camouflage, motor traffic, and radio communications of the old setup were maintained. Flashes of chemical powders were set off simultaneously with a firing of the one group of XX Corps artillery that had remained behind to reinforce the 95th Infantry Division.



Planned development and opposing forces