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CAPTURING THE REMAGEN BRIDGE 75 YEARS AGO
“THE MIRACLE OF REMAGEN” — THE 9TH ARMORED DIVISION OF THE
US 1ST ARMY CAPTURES THE LAST SURVIVING BRIDGE ACROSS THE RHINE
ON MARCH 7, 1945 AND HASTENS THE END OF WW2

As the Allied armies approached, Hitler ordered the destruction of all the bridges that spanned the Rhine. By March 7, they all had been destroyed, except one – the Ludendorff railroad bridge at the little resort town of Remagen a few miles to the south of Cologne. On that day at about 1 PM an American reconnaissance patrol reached the wooded hills overlooking the river at Remagen, and to their surprise, discovered the bridge still intact. Then the race began. By 4 PM the US Army had reached the other side of the river and secured the bridge. Over the next several days, heavy fighting ensued while more than 25,000 troops and heavy equipment crossed the river until the bridge collapsed on March 17, 1945.

US Army estimates indicate that the surprise crossing of the Ludendorff Bridge probably saved more than 5000 American lives that otherwise would have been lost by an assault crossing of the river. In addition, the capture of the bridge enabled the US Army to encircle and trap 300,000 German troops east of the Rhine in a matter of days, thereby causing the war to end much earlier than expected on May 8, 1945.

The presentation is based on eye witness accounts and interviews, histories of the 1st Army and the 9th Armored Division, as well as several books written by historians on both sides of the conflict. It includes original photos and film clips as well as interviews from US Army and German archives.

Hollywood became interested in the Remagen Bridge story and made a full-length movie starring Robert Vaughan, George Segal, Ben Gazzara and E. G. Marshall in 1969. The History Channel aired a special program of the event in 2006.

Wolf Koch grew up in the Rhine River valley in Oberwinter, now a suburb of Remagen, and immigrated to this country more than five decades ago. He recalls accounts by family members and friends about the fight around the bridge head. He served as an officer in the US Air Force and was stationed for four years at Bitburg Air Force Base, not far from the Remagen site. Dr. Koch, a resident of Sterling, Illinois, is a consultant to the oil and petrochemical industries and has been a professor of chemical engineering. He regularly presents talks on energy related topics at professional society and civic group meetings.

He and his wife Linnea travel extensively; their interest in history has taken them to many historical sites in European countries, covering the period between the Stone Age and medieval times. Locally, they have studied accounts of the Adena and Hopewell civilizations, have traveled to many mound builder sites in Ohio, Iowa and Illinois and completed a booklet on the Hopewell civilization in the Rock River valley for use as a resource in teaching local history. Dr. Koch has given many talks on the Hopewell and was an invited speaker at a combined Annual Meeting of the Iowa and Illinois State Archeological Societies. Together with his wife, he has just completed a presentation on the Kaskaskia-Cahokia Trail, Illinois' First Road.