

TIMETABLE OF THE LIBERATION OF THE CITY FRANKFURT AM MAIN:

22.03.1945: Two Battalions of the US 3. Armored Division under command of General Patton cross the River Rhein close to the village of Oppenheim in attempt to reach Berlin as the first allied forces.

Rumors about this are spread and the remaining citizens of Frankfurt are waiting nervously for “the things to come” while the local Nazi leader Gauleiter Jakob Sprenger declares the city to be now the “Frontstadt Frankfurt”. He commands all remaining approx. 100.000 citizens to defend the city up to the “last drop of blood”.

For the defence of the city is Generalmajor Friedrich Stemmermann responsible. He has only about 1,000 soldiers at hand. Most of them Volkssturm (kids and elderly pressed to duty). The only regular Wehrmacht troops are parts of a “Landeschützenbataillon” and a “Ausbildungskompanie” – without any combat experience- plus a single Flak-Gun-Group.

Headquarter of those remaining defenders is the building at Taunusanlage no. 12 – about 1.5 km from the central railway station in the heart of the city (today the location of the Deutsche Bank twin towers).

24.03.1945: The 5th US-Infantry Division and the 6th US-Tank Division liberate the city of Darmstadt, about 30 km south of Frankfurt and are heading north towards Frankfurt - using partwise the Reichsautobahn from Darmstadt to Frankfurt.

25.03.1945: The US- troops occupy the destroyed Frankfurt Airport south of the city first and then the parts of the city of Frankfurt south of the River Main as Niederrad and Sachsenhausen. Nearly no resistance is reported.

26.03.1945: German pioneer troops destroy all remaining bridges across the River Main. The destruction of the most important bridge - the Wilhelmbrücke - only about 500 metres from the central railroad station fails out of unknown reasons. The eastern side of the bridge is damaged, but the bridge still in place.

On the northern side of the Wilhelmbrücke the remaining badly equipped Wehrmacht Forces try to resist with machineguns and (not sure) a single anti tank gun, hidden behind in a hurry piled up walls out of stone and profile steel in front of the buildings on the left end right end of the bridge.

Gauleiter Jakob Sprenger and most leading Nazis leave the city hidden in Wehrmacht uniforms towards Thüringen and burn down the Nazi and Gestapo buildings in the city before doing so. Sprenger is later on been trapped in Tirol and kills himself with poison before being caught by US-Troops.

At about 5 p.m. the US-Troops attack the Wilhelmbrücke and kill the defenders on the opposite side of the bridge. Camera-Men of the Signal Corps and Army Photographers are in place and make unique pictures of the bridgehead and the US-Troops fighting their way from the bridge via the Baseler Platz to the nearby Central Railway Station.

In the meantime US pioneers start immediately the repair of the Wilhelmbrücke to open the access across the river for Tanks and Jeeps.

27.03.1945: In the meantime the Oberbefehlshabers West, Albert Keßelring is pointing out a new Kampfkommandant for Frankfurt in the fierce attempt to stop the buildup of a American bridgehead north of the Main River. In the very last minute – in the early morning of the 27th - Oberstleutnant Erich Löffler is taking over the command in the city with a group of 9 of his officers.

But his command ends dramatically only some few hours later: at about 2.30 p.m. a 105 mm grenade hits the command post at Taunusanlage no. 12, killing all officers and Löffler in the first floor. Generalmajor Friedrich Stemmermann is been seriously wounded in front of the building by the explosion – so there is from one moment to another no longer existing military commandment left in the city.

In the meanwhile is at Schwanheim – in the southwest outskirts of the city – a heavy fighting between a Flak-Gun group with former Reichsarbeitsdienst gunners taking place. The resistance is then soon eliminated by a massive attack of US Tanks.

US-Forces are then fighting their way from the Baseler Platz to the west, taking over the Gutleut Garrison, only 50 m. from the Baseler Platz (later on up to 1977 home of the 21st Replacement Bn.)

Other units fight their way to the central railway station and via Kaiserstrasse and the eastern river main banks across the centre of the city, passing the Kaiserplatz and the Hotel Frankfurter Hof, heading then north via the West-End / Eschersheimer Landstrasse and northeast across Bornheim. Some of the Wehrmacht soldiers try to build up machinegun strongpoints at the Eschersheimer Landstrasse in attempt to resist. Citizens can convince them not to fight back and to leave the city instead and to minimize that way the amount of further casualties. The remaining Wehrmacht troops are soon pushed northwards and out of the city by the US-Troops.

The building of the former Metallgesellschaft at today's Reuterweg (50 metres north of the Alte Oper building) is occupied by Lt. Col. William H. Blakefield (Executive Officer, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Bn.) for the new military government. At the northern end of the Reuterweg the US-Forces occupy then as well the former IG Farben building and establish later on their Headquarter in Europe's largest administration building at this time. Some of the few houses without damages from air raids nearby are occupied for military administrative personnel as well.

(After WWII, the IG Farben Building served as the headquarters for the Supreme Allied Command and from 1949 to 1952 the High Commissioner for Germany (HICOG). It became the principal location for implementing the Marshall Plan, which largely financed the post-war reconstruction of Europe. The state apparatus of the Federal German Government was devised there. The IG Farben Building served as the headquarters for the US Army's V Corps and the Northern Area Command (NACOM) until 1995. The US Army renamed the building the General Creighton W. Abrams Building in 1975. The US Army returned control of the IG Farben Building to the German government in 1995. Today is the "Poelzig Bau" complex used by the Goethe University of Frankfurt).

Parallel to the installation of first administrative structures in the city is the journalist Wilhelm Hollbach been pointed out to be the first Major of the City of Frankfurt at the local "Zero Hour".

29.03.1945: Thursday (“Gründonnerstag”) the official capitulation of the city of Frankfurt am Main is proclaimed via the American Forces Radio Luxemburg. Frankfurt is not any longer “Frontstadt” and officially liberated by the US-Forces. Oberstleutnant Erich Löffler and other killed German soldiers are buried at the central cemetery.

- “Zero hour” in Frankfurt is about six weeks before the second world war officially ends in Germany.

After “Zero Hour” in Frankfurt:

30.03.1945: The former German Airforce Airfield at Eschborn – in the western outskirts of the city – is in the hand of US ground forces since 25th of March. On 30th of March, combat engineers from IX Engineer command 832d and 825th Engineering Aviation Battalions arrived to make the airfield operational for American aircraft. A Pierced Steel Planking runway was laid down over the damaged concrete runway and enough repairs were made to make the airfield operational by early April. The airfield was designated as Advanced Landing Ground “Y-74 Frankfurt/Eschborn” and immediately put to use as a transport resupply and casualty (S&E) evacuation airfield. C-47 Skytrain transports used the airfield frequently.

On 7 April, Ninth Air Force P-47 Thunderbolts fighter planes arrived at Eschborn. The 371st Fighter Group and the 367th Fighter Group flew combat missions with Thunderbolts until the end of the war in May. The 367th remained at the airfield until mid-July 1945 when the Air Force turned the Eschborn airfield and base over to Army ground forces.

15.07.1945: The AFN Frankfurt radio broadcast starts from a Signal Corps truck located at Kaiser-Sigmund-Strasse, just behind the IG-Farben building (US-HQ).

26.07.1945: US President Truman arrives in a C-54 Aircraft at Eschborn Army Airfield. With General Eisenhower he is visiting a parade of the US-Troops and heading south to Heppenheim.

Sources: Frankfurter Rundschau Online, Wikipedia, The Truman Library, archive Steinweden

