

VIII.

THE ST. LO BREAKTHROUGH

After the five-hour bombardment of St. Lo on the 25th of July, Company A was given a schedule of fire to support the infantry attack the next morning. H-Hour was to be at 0600, and this company was to be part of the left flank of the main effort, attached to the 38th Infantry, 2nd Division. The specific orders were to break through and advance, regardless of losses.

Closely coordinating with the artillery, the company furnished very close support to the infantry. A smokescreen was laid for the initial advance, supporting screens furnished throughout the day, and harassing missions fired at enemy OPs and mortar positions. Approximately 600 rounds were fired that day. This was one day that A Company received more than it gave. As the day slowly passed by, and shells kept coming in, it was realized that the enemy had been saving his ammunition for just such an attack. Both the OP party and the communications section suffered casualties that day.

The attack was a great success and a series of short, hard-won advances followed. Passing over Hill 192 the company crossed the shell-pocked St. Lo Road and sought the safety of deep German foxholes, there to sweat out the Luftwaffe. "Bed Check Charlie" came over every night.

Gains were now measured by two or three hedgerows an hour instead of two or three per day, but the hedgerows were becoming fewer and smaller. On the 27th of July, A Company entered St. Jean Des Baisants, a town utterly destroyed by artillery and mortar shells. Leaving by a sunken road which had been a previous target for the company, it came upon the body of a dead German. Beside him lay the base of an exploded WP shell, fired at a range of 4,200 yards. The instrument corporal was ordered to remove this road block since the accuracy of his calculations was held responsible for it. It was here that General Hays, Artillery General of the 2nd Division, remarked on the accuracy of 4.2s, as he had observed the first round of adjustment hit the rump of a horse; the target having been a convoy of horse-drawn wagons..

Following the St. Lo breakthrough and the capture of the city, all troops continued to advance and exploit the break to its fullest extent. The Vire River was the next objective, and beyond that the southern border of Normandy. The going was tough and treacherous, for the enemy took the utmost advantage of every hill and hedgerow. It

was "good mortar country," and well-defiladed positions could usually be found. The pace became faster and more prisoners began to come in than ever before. Enemy artillery and mortar fire was fierce, and bombings were more frequent. During this period the companies had an opportunity to enjoy a few days' rest, the first they had had since D-Day.

CWO John W. Bundy, Hq. Det., and S/Sgt. Jack L. Rush, Company A, received orders awarding them battlefield appointments as second lieutenants, on July 29.

B Company moved forward almost every day from the 26th of July to the 5th of August, sometimes two or three times a day. There was no let-up in enemy resistance and on two occasions the company narrowly missed having numerous casualties. On the 27th near les Planches, and again on the 29th near Rouxville, two shells from a German "170" landed in the mortar position, but failed to explode. At this time, night air attacks were more frequent than ever before, and parachute flares continuously illuminated the battle areas.

The first night after leaving Hill 192 a bomb fell in the C Company area, wounding Cpl. Conroy, instrument corporal. The next night another fell in the FDC area, within ten feet of the men in their holes; it harmed no one but set a jeep afire, and small arms ammunition exploded all over the area.

At this time C Company shelled and burned the town of St. Jean des Baisantes. It was then attached to the 35th Division, on the right flank, just south of St. Lo. On the 30th of July the company moved with the infantry into the town of Condé Sur Vire, where several startling incidents occurred in the space of a few short hours.

The mortar position, of necessity on a forward slope to the left of town, was continuously subjected to grazing rifle and machine gun fire coming from the adjacent hill. Cpl. Emerson's bald head made a particularly good target especially when he removed his helmet and bent over his aiming circle to lay in the guns. Jerry began to snipe, and at every "ping" of a passing slug, Emerson knocked the aiming circle off a few mils. By the time he finished, the guns were close to firing on a back azimuth. Then things really began to happen. A German AT gun opened up, hit a jeep, then turned on the 2½-ton ammo truck and slammed an AP shell through the motor. The truck, loaded with 150 HE and 150 WP shells, caught fire, the WP going off in bursts of two or three rounds at once. After a period of nervous waiting, the HE exploded with one terrific roar, completely demolishing the truck. Pfc. Burgess, Headquarters driver,

walked several hundred yards into town where he picked up a piece of his steering wheel, all of the truck he could find to turn in for salvage.

It is significant that despite these harassing incidents, the company fired a smoke mission screening the next town. No one was injured by the explosion of the ammo truck but two men were wounded by the small arms fire. The same day S/Sgt. Toole received a battlefield commission as second lieutenant for outstanding leadership under combat conditions.

D Company remained in position near Cormolain until July 29, in support of the 50th Field Artillery Battalion, 5th Division. During this period the company knocked out a machine gun nest and destroyed an enemy OP in a church tower—which an air mission was unable to accomplish. It also furnished several successful smoke-screens; one in particular prevented observation of German artillery which was inflicting heavy casualties. Another was fired in support of an attack by assault troops. The company was highly commended for this work by Lt. Col. Calhoun, Commanding Officer, 50th Field Artillery Battalion.

On the 28th of July another honor came to D Company when S/Sgt. Loren E. Weaver received a battlefield commission as second lieutenant.

While attached to the 10th Infantry, 5th Division, on July 30, the company silenced a machine gun near Coutu and helped to break up an enemy counterattack which was severely punishing and driving back our infantry. No support was obtainable from the artillery on this operation because of the nature of the terrain.

B Company moved into an assembly area on July 31, in which it came under one of the heaviest enemy shellings since D-Day, for while moving out of the area a very heavy concentration was laid in. A sunken road with its high, banked hedgerows provided adequate protection and no one was injured. The front lines were advancing so rapidly at this time that B Company was seldom in one position for more than a few hours at a time.

On July 31, C Company demolished and set fire to the town of Torigny sur Vire, where the enemy was offering stubborn resistance. Those that saw the town afterward will bear witness that the job was thoroughly done. The path of advance was lined with dead animals, horses, cows, sheep, and hogs, offering mute evidence of Allied artillery and air bombardment.

It was during the next day that a C Company jeep struck a Teller mine. First Sgt. Radakovitz, T/5 Croak, and Pvt. Winston were killed, and Pvt. Arnold injured. The death of these men, all well liked in the company, was a great loss. First Sgt. Radakovitz was truly loved by the men; his leadership and advice will never be forgotten by those who served with him.

Moving just north of Torigny, Company A approached Vire and on August 4 fired one of its most successful missions. Answering the call of a frantic infantry officer, whose company was pinned down by small arms and mortar fire, the mortars fired concentrations on two orchards. Shortly after, the infantry commander reported the enemy completely routed, and his men had taken the position without firing a shot.

Several days after this mission the squad leaders and non-coms visited the target area where they found several hundred rounds of German mortar ammunition fully prepared for firing, several thousand rounds of small arms ammunition burned by WP shells, and two houses burned down. Direct hits had been obtained on a mortar position. Food set out ready for a meal, and a line of mess kits lying on the ground, indicated a hasty departure. Evidently the job had been well done.

The advance continued! The Vire River was crossed. It was here that the infantry reported to C Company that the bursting WP shells had sent hundreds of Germans screaming into the river, to ease their burning flesh where particles of flaming phosphorus had struck them.

During the first few days of August, D. Company moved on to Le Breui, and thence on to Le Perron, near Torigny sur Vire, where it was attached to the 23rd Infantry, 2nd Division. The company harassed an enemy armored column and motor park near les Mesnils, on August 4. Oil and gasoline fires could be seen sending huge clouds of dense smoke into the air.

Following the breakthrough at St. Lo, the rear CP moved on to Berigny, and then to Vieux Calnes. Near St. Martin Don the companies assembled on August 5 and 6 in a battalion assembly area after having been relieved by V Corps. Companies A, B, and D had been attached to the 2nd Division, while Company C was supporting the 35th Division. This ended the battalion's first sixty days operation against the enemy and comprised the first formal rest period it had enjoyed since D-Day. The move to this assembly area represented an advance of sixty kilometers.

During this short breathing spell, August 5 to 12, a thorough inspection of all equipment was accomplished, repairs made, and replacement parts obtained.

About this time the *Stars and Stripes* announced the units which had been awarded the Presidential Citation by reason of their extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in action. The battalion can be justly proud of the fact that the 81st Chemical Battalion was among those cited. A copy of the citation is given below:

"GENERAL ORDERS

WAR DEPARTMENT

No. 73

Washington 25, D. C., 6 September 1944

II—BATTLE HONORS.—3. As authorized by Executive Order No. 9396 (sec. I, Bull. 22, ED, 1943), superseding Executive Order No. 9075 (sec. III, Bull. II, WD, 1942), citation of the following unit in General Orders No. 40, Headquarters 1st Infantry Division, 17 July 1944, as approved by the Commanding General, United States Army forces in the European Theater of Operations, is confirmed under the provisions of section IV, Circular No. 333, War Department, 1943, in the name of the President of the United States as public evidence of deserved honor and distinction. The citation reads as follows:

"The 81st Chemical Battalion, Motorized, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action. In the invasion of France the mission of the 81st Chemical Battalion was to furnish close mortar support for the two leading assault regiments. In the accomplishment of this mission the 81st Chemical Battalion landed at H 60 minutes on D-Day, at which time the beach and harbors were under incessant machine gun, artillery, rocket, and mortar fire from the enemy. Underwater and beach obstacles were encountered as the landing craft approached the shore and in the advance from the landing craft to the beach. When two LCVP's in which a part of the battalion was landing sank from enemy shell hits, the men of the 81st Chemical Battalion transferred their mortars, ammunition, and equipment from their own landing craft to an LCM, and under constant shelling managed to land the equipment. In another instance, when their landing craft sank, the men, by their fierce persistence in the face of great odds, swam ashore, towing with them two mortars and two mortar carts which previously had been made buoyant by life preservers. Though numerous casualties were suffered, men of the 81st Chemical Battalion were not deterred from the accomplish-

ment of their mission, and upon reaching shore with the loss of only one mortar, continued in support of the infantry for twelve days without relief. Such heroism and gallantry, in the face of tremendous odds and unusual and hazardous conditions, are in keeping with the traditions of the service and deserving of the highest praise'."

Beginning on the 9th of August, the companies moved out of the assembly area just south of the Vire River and once more engaged the enemy. The following day the rear battalion CP moved closer to the town of Vire while the forward CP rejoined the 2nd Division CP.

B Company was again on the line on August, attached to the 9th Infantry, 2nd Division. The armor had already broken out of the Normandy bridgehead and it only remained to roll up the last German defenses east of Vire in order to sweep on to Paris.

During the first three days of these attacks B Company kept pace with the infantry and was credited, in one mission fired late in the evening of August 11, with having knocked out two enemy tanks, killed or caused the surrender of a large number of enemy, and with having forestalled a large scale counterattack in the process of forming.

C Company also moved out on August 10 to the south, in the general direction of Vire. More rugged fighting took place, many missions were fired, and several small towns set on fire. Cpl. Morrison received shrapnel wounds during this period which later led to his death. In one position near Truttermer le Grand the infantry failed to push off on schedule and the company, not knowing of this delay, displaced forward, in accordance with prearranged plans, to a previously reconnoitered position. The enemy, having either spotted the position, or, while firing at a nearby road, shelled the company continuously. Many men were hit and Pfc. Kelly later died of wounds received at this time.

Company D moved out on August 12, attached to their old friends the 175th Infantry, 29th Division. When the company joined this outfit at Les Hautes Vaux it was shocked to find very few of the old officers of this regiment left. During the trip, the company passed through Vire and marvelled at the damage done by air and artillery bombardment. The town was literally pulverized and still burning. The roads leading to the assembly area, near St. Sauveur, were littered with enemy dead, vehicles, armor, dead horses, and broken matériel.

Company A also was attached to the 175th, on August 12. This company made mad rushes throughout Vire by day and night. T/5 Tiberio had a dreaded experience when he jumped into a foxhole seeking protection against an enemy artillery barrage. Before he could get settled another soldier, who had the same idea, jumped in on top of him. This one was a German, but had sense enough to surrender without a fight.

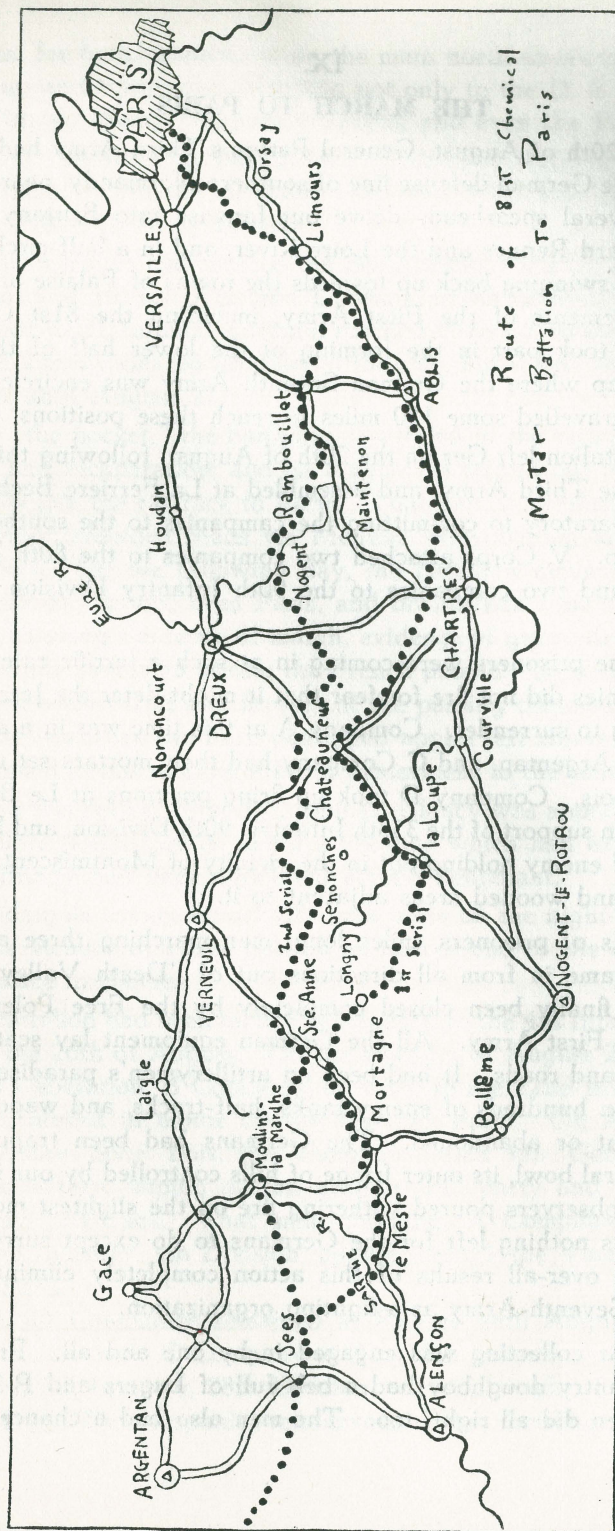
B Company had an unfortunate incident occur while attached to the 38th Infantry, 2nd Division. On August 13, early in the morning, the kitchen jeep, hauling up breakfast and mail, was lost. The mess personnel had taken a wrong turn, found themselves in enemy territory, and were forced to abandon the vehicle.

Eight prisoners were taken by D Company on August 13 and 14. In order to find a position from which to support adequately the infantry, the reconnaissance party, consisting of an officer and two men, had to travel along four miles of secondary roads over which no American troops had passed and no mines had been cleared. They arrived at the town of Pont d'Grenne and found they were the first Americans there. The Germans had just left, leaving thousands of dollars' worth of supplies and equipment. So the town of Pont d'Grenne, and much booty, was captured intact by three Americans. This same day a Ninth Air Force, P-38 pilot reached the company CP, at St. Sauveur, after four days behind enemy lines. Though not wounded, the officer was shaken quite a bit. Three more prisoners were taken that day in one of the mortar positions.

During a reconnaissance near St. Sauveur on August 15, Lt. Weaver captured seven more prisoners. About this time the town of Tinchebray was heavily shelled by the mortars of C Company. Enemy resistance was collapsing all along the line. The Battle of the Breakthrough had been won. The "rat race" was on, and was gaining momentum every day.

The companies were again relieved from the front line on August 16 and 17 and the battalion assembled in the vicinity of Ger. Up to this time the battalion had expended 31,352 rounds of ammunition.

Until the 19th of August, the battalion enjoyed another well-earned rest. Although someone once said a rest period was merely a preparation for the next operation, the chance to clean up and see a USO show, featuring lovely Dinah Shore, certainly skyrocketed morale above its usual "excellent."



IX.

THE MARCH TO PARIS

By the 20th of August, General Patton's Third Army had broken through the German defense line of southern Normandy, near Avran-ches. Several spearheads drove out fanwise into Brittany, to the south toward Rennes and the Loire River, and in a half-circle to the southeast, swinging back up towards the towns of Falaise and Mortaine. Elements of the First Army, including the 81st Chemical Battalion, took part in the forming of the lower half of the great Falaise trap where the German Seventh Army was encircled. The battalion travelled some 180 miles to reach these positions.

The battalion left Ger on the 20th of August, following this spearhead of the Third Army, and assembled at La Ferriere Bechet, near Sees, preparatory to committing the companies to the southern part of the trap. V Corps attached two companies to the 80th Infantry Division and two companies to the 90th Infantry Division for this mission.

Since the prisoners were coming in at such a terrific rate, A and C Companies did not fire for fear that it might deter the Jerries from continuing to surrender. Company A at this time was in a assembly area near Argentan, and C Company had their mortars set up south of Chambois. Company D took up firing positions at Le Bourg-St. Leonard, in support of the 358th Infantry, 90th Division, and harassed pockets of enemy holding out in the vicinity of Montmiscent, as well as roads and wooded areas adjacent to it.

Columns of prisoners, miles long, men marching three and four abreast, came in from all directions out of "Death Valley." The trap had finally been closed completely by the Free Poles of the Canadian First Army. All the German equipment lay scattered in the fields and roads. It had been an artillerymen's paradise. Hundreds upon hundreds of enemy tanks, half-tracks, and wagons were burned out or abandoned. The Germans had been trapped in a huge natural bowl, its outer fringe of hills controlled by our infantry. Artillery observers poured withering fire on the slightest movement. There was nothing left for the Germans to do except surrender or die. The over-all results of this action completely eliminated the German Seventh Army as a fighting organization.

Souvenir collecting was engaged in by one and all. Practically every infantry doughboy had a belt full of Lugers and P-38's; the mortar men did all right, too. The men also had a chance to view

our allies, for here, jammed up on the main north-to-south highway, was armor and equipment belonging not only to the U. S. Army but to the British, French, Canadians, Poles, and even the Free Dutch.

German casualties in this great envelopment were estimated at 400,000 men. Fourteen divisions had been destroyed; part of the German Fifteenth Army as well.

American troops had crossed the Seine above Paris by August 23. Then the 2nd French Armored Division, under General Le Clerc, and the 4th U. S. Infantry Division reached Paris on August 25. The FFI had already cleared up most of the city, but it was not officially liberated until August 27.

After "the pocket," the battalion assembled in the vicinity of Sees for rest and recuperation, and on August 25 moved out in battalion convoy to join the rat race to Paris. That day it traveled 122 miles along dusty, crowded roads via Moulins, Rambouillet, and Nogent to Limours. On the following day, the battalion moved on to the little town of Bievres, near Paris, and bivouacked near an air strip there. All along the route of march, evidence of gratitude, welcome, and good will prevailed among the French people. Over-enthusiastic celebrants hurled fruit and flowers at the passing column, and many times ripe tomatoes and hard pears and apples left marks on a man. This seemed to afford quite a bit of amusement to the natives.

During this period, First Sgt. John D. Clancy was appointed Warrant Officer Junior Grade, filling a vacancy which had existed since CWO Bundy had been appointed second lieutenant.

Considerable enemy air activity took place on the night of August 26 in the vicinity of Paris, putting an abrupt end to the celebration taking place in Bievres.

The battalion had been tactically attached to the 4th Infantry Division on the 26th of August. On the morning of August 27, the day of Paris's liberation, B Company, attached to the 22nd Infantry, 4th Division, moved in motor convoy through Paris. On August 28, near Aulnay Sous Bois, the company killed ten Germans and wounded fifteen, wiping out an artillery FO party and destroying an enemy half-track. That same morning, A Company, attached to the 8th Infantry, 4th Division, passed through the Vincennes section of Paris.

C and D Companies remained at Bievres until August 29, and then were attached: C Company to the 110th Infantry, and D Company to 112th Infantry, 28th Division, our old friends of maneuvers in the U. S. The companies rendezvoused that morning in the Bois

de Boulogne and prepared to take part in the official march of the U. S. Forces through Paris, although the 4th Division, with A and B Companies attached, had preceded them by two days.

The two companies moved out, passing the 2nd French Armored Division (who, we must admit, were to be envied for the delightful companions they had in their tanks and pup tents) and into the Avenue de la Grande Armée, where the vehicles formed four lanes five yards apart. The parade turned into the Champs Elysées, past the Arc de Triomphe, and through the Place de la Concorde; the traditional route of all parades in Paris. On the reviewing stand at the Place de la Concorde were Generals Bradley, Hodges, De Gaulle, and Koenig.

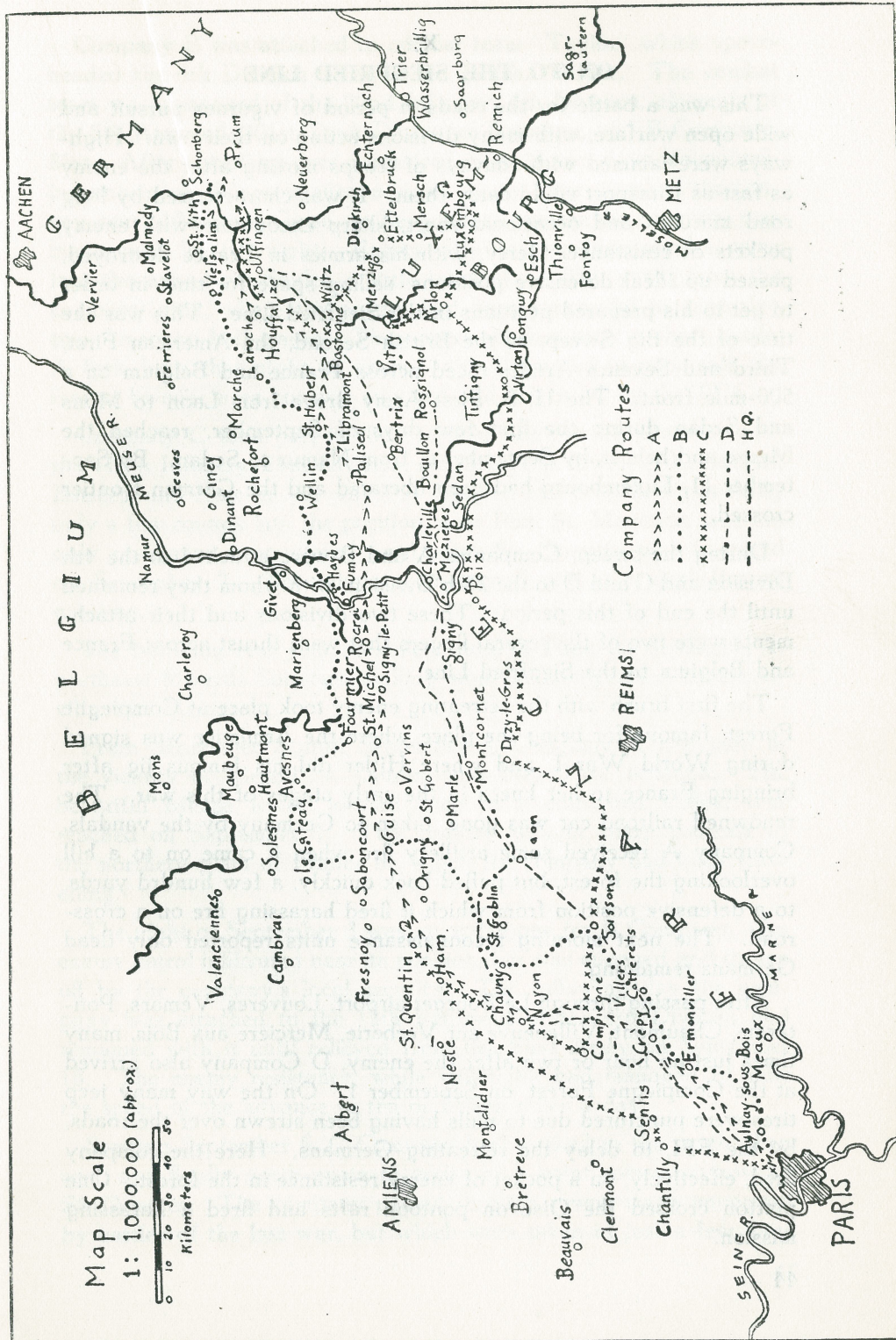
It is for each man to remember the fervor of the welcome received in Paris, for it was tremendous. Millions of people jammed the sidewalks and crowded towards the vehicles. The hilarious crowds, held in place by the FFI, broke through many times and mobbed the vehicles in a mad frenzy of kissing, handshaking, back-slapping and the presentation of gifts of flowers, wine, fruit, and food. Ah, those Parisians! There is truly no people in the world like them. It is impossible to record here all the bright pageantry of the days of Paris' liberation. The official records report no casualties those three days, but every hand was sore from shaking, and every face bore the red badge of the liberator lipstick. Parisian women were strikingly beautiful with their colorful clothing, high hair-do's, and gayety. To see the happiness and gratitude in the faces of these people made all the weary weeks of fighting seem suddenly worth while.

By August 29, after two days of firing which helped to clear the last Germans from the city, B Company was already moving on the roads that were to lead, in less than a month, to the Siegfried Line.

Company A crossed the Seine over the Austerlitz Bridge on August 27 on its way to Germany. Companies C and D set up, on the night of the great parade, in the outskirts of Paris. C Company bivouacked in an abandoned race track and many of the men were allowed to spend the evening in the city. D Company set up its mortars in Le Bourget, where snipers were still active. To them, Paris was so near and yet so far.

The next morning found both companies on the road again, moving with the 28th Division, once more hot on the trail of the fleeing Germans.

In driving the enemy from the coast of Normandy and across northern France the mortars had expended a total of 31,949 rounds.



X. ON TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE

This was a battle for the roads, a period of vigorous pursuit and wide open warfare, with many divisions acting on their own. Highways were jammed with convoys of troops moving after the enemy as fast as transport could carry them. It was characterized by long road marches and occasional short, sharp encounters with enemy pockets of resistance. Jerry, with his armies in France destroyed, passed up ideal defensive positions, selling space for time in order to get to his prepared positions in the Siegfried Line. This was the time of the Big Sweep, as the British Second, the American First, Third and Seventh Armies raced across France and Belgium on a 500-mile front. The U. S. First Army drove from Laon to Mons and Sedan during the first few days of September, reached the Meuse and held it, by September 6, from Namur to Sedan. By September 11, Luxembourg had been liberated and the German frontier crossed.

During the sweep, Companies A and B were attached to the 4th Division and C and D to the 28th Division, with whom they remained until the end of this period. These two divisions and their attachments were two of the several fingers that were thrust across France and Belgium to the Siegfried Line.

The first brush with the retreating enemy took place at Compiegne Forest, famous for being the place where the Armistice was signed during World War I, and where Hitler did his famous jig after bringing France to her knees in the early stages of this war. The renowned railroad car was gone, taken to Germany by the vandals. Company A received some artillery fire when it came on to a hill overlooking the forest, but pulled back quickly, a few hundred yards, to a defensive position from which it fired harassing fire on a crossroad. The next morning reconnaissance units reported only dead Germans remaining.

After passing through Le Bourget airport, Louveres, Vemars, Pontarmé, Chaumont, Villeneuve sur Verberie, Merciere aux Bois, many times just an hour or two after the enemy, D Company also arrived at the Compiegne Forest, on September 1. On the way many jeep tires were punctured due to nails having been strewn over the roads, by the FFI, to delay the retreating Germans. Here the company fired, effectively, on a pocket of enemy resistance in the forest. One platoon crossed the Oise on pontoon rafts and fired a harassing mission.

Company B was attached to combat team "Taylor" which spearheaded the 4th Division drive to the Belgian border. The combat team was composed of the 22nd Infantry, 4th Division, elements of the 5th Armored, 801st Tank Destroyer Battalion, and B Company, 81st. After travelling over a hundred miles in two days, encountering only negligible resistance, a small enemy force attacked the convoy near L'Arbre de Guise, on September 1, where the company was bivouacked for the night. Enemy rifle and machine gunfire came into the area from Soulet, a little town about fifty yards from the company area, where the enemy had been successful in capturing two American half-tracks. These were retaken after a short battle. A little later that night an enemy tank attempted to penetrate the mortar bivouac area but was engaged and driven off by the TDs.

Company C took part in the 110-mile drive to St. Quentin with the 110th Infantry, 28th Division, liberating the towns of Luzarches, Estrees, and Ham on the way. A German self-propelled gun firing only a few rounds into the position, near Pont St. Maxence, was the only resistance encountered until after St. Quentin was liberated on September 2. The whole town turned out in typical French greeting.

The battalion rear echelon rolled through Paris on September 1, northeast towards Soissons, making stops at Longperrier, Ermenonville, and Haramont.

From September 2 until September 5, Company A remained in the vicinity of Mesnil St. Laurent and Neuville St. Armand. The beautiful Meuse River, located deep in a cultivated valley, was reached on September 5. This country was in sharp contrast to the northern plain of France on which the company had been travelling.

The night of September 3 was an active one for B Company. An enemy patrol infiltrated near its position, but was engaged and driven off by the company's local security. The following day the company was attached to the 12th Regiment of the 4th Division and remained with it until relieved from the First Army on September 18. The enemy resistance, while still light, had managed to slow the speed of the advance to ten or fifteen miles a day.

Starting September 5, C Company backtracked to the south, then east, and finally north again to arrive at a point somewhat east of St. Quentin. The company passed through towns made important by battles of the last war, but which were taken in just a few days

this time. The route went through Ham, Noyon, Compiègne, Soissons, a total of 130 miles.

Company D drove through La Fère on September 2, past crowds of overjoyed, liberated people. The next few days the company passed through Bray, Lepron les Valees, and St. Menges, finally reaching the Belgian border at Munro on September 7. Near Rossingnel, on September 9, the company fired on an enemy troop column, inflicting many casualties and causing it to take off for the woods. This same day the company arrived at Heinstert and on the following day crossed the Luxembourg border near the town of Surre.

By the 9th of September the rear battalion group was in Belgium, having passed through Laon, Rozoy, Etion in France, down into Sedan and over to Paliseul, Belgium. During the rapid advance across France the army supply services performed as brilliantly as the combat troops, doing three months work in one. In gasoline alone, Allied armies were consuming over one million gallons daily. Fuel was brought forward by a 700-mile pipe line, then trucked, and flown by C-47's to the forward area. Long trips were made to the rear by our battalion service groups to bring up badly-needed mortar and ordnance equipment.

In A Company's sector the platoons moved forward in separate, parallel thrusts through a fluid front. At one time a German armored car pulled out of a side road into the company's column. It was greeted with a storm of lead from tommyguns, pistols, carbines, and M1's, and wisely beat a hasty retreat.

Probably the most courageous, and certainly the most decorated individual in the battalion, was Captain James P. Panas, Company A commander. While driving in a jeep with Cpl. Raub and T/5 Anselme on September 6, to locate part of the company, Captain Panas ran into enemy troops in the town of Vresse. The party managed to get out of town, firing as they did so, definitely killing one German and wounding several others, but encountered two enemy tanks blocking the road at a sharp curve. With no alternative, they abandoned the vehicle. When fired upon, Captain Panas ordered the two men to disperse, which they did, escaping to a nearby wood; Cpl. Raub returned later to send a radio message. The two men were assisted during the night by the FFI and Belgian patriots and were rescued the next morning by a reconnaissance unit. Captain Panas fought to the end, firing all his ammunition at the

enemy before being killed. His body was recovered the next day near Vresse. He had taken a stand behind a building and the Germans had apparently used tanks in destroying the building. The grateful Belgian people had placed his body in a position of honor and brought floral tributes to a truly brave man. Lt. Watts then assumed command of the company.

At St. Hubert, on September 8, B Company received another memorable welcome. At the invitation of the Belgian civilians most of the company spent the night in houses where entertainment was provided in honor of the first American troops to enter the town.

Company C's motor march continued, passing just south of Sedan, entering Belgium on the 8th of September. On the 10th, Lt. Sippel and his reconnaissance party ran into machine gun fire, and Lt. Sippel was seriously wounded. The route swung north through Arlon towards Bastogne, but due to a blown bridge the march was reversed and the column swung back through Arlon and into the city of Luxembourg on the night of September 11. A huge crowd welcomed them to the city, but as usual the column did not tarry long. Here the company guarded Radio Luxembourg, the most powerful transmitter in Europe.

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, which D Company entered on September 10, was a beautiful little country with wooded, rolling hills and fields, here and there an ancient castle, and clean, picturesque little towns. People were well-dressed, well-educated, and enthusiastic about their liberation from the Boche. And besides that, they had good beer! The company moved from Heinstert to Weiderdange to Holler, arriving there on September 11. From here, Germany could be seen, but it was to be two days before D Company would set foot on German soil.

To D Company goes the honor of being the first company of the 81st to reach German soil and to fire from it. On September 13, at 0100 hours, Captain Marshall and Lt. Costello crossed the Our River into Germany on a reconnaissance, and so became the first members of the battalion to set foot on "Der Vaterland." The 2nd platoon left Weiswampach, Luxembourg, at 0530 hours, and moved into position at 0600, near Peterskirche, Germany, in support of the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry. The 1st platoon left Clervaux at 0630 hours and moved into position near Sevenig, Germany, at 0700 hours, in support of the 2nd Battalion. The FDC set up in a pillbox between the two platoons at 1000 hours.

At 0815 hours, D Company fired its first mission from German soil. It is believed that this was the first American heavy weapon fired in Germany, since the infantry 81's had not been set up yet, and the artillery was across the valley, still in Luxembourg. The targets were enemy troops, which were dispersed. After the long road marches with little firing, targets were now plentiful. Later that day an open gun emplacement was knocked out, an anti-tank gun silenced, and a troop concentration broken up with many casualties to the enemy. The mortar business was picking up!

Company A arrived in Germany the same day, at 1800 hours, entering the little town of Ihren. The people stood in sullen little groups, staring, while an occasional unguarded child waved. The 4th Division, to which A Company was attached, was facing a comparatively weak section of the Siegfried Line only two kilometers in depth. The country consisted of rolling plains, largely barren of growth, and poor for defense. It was through this section that the German blitz gained momentum to roll through France in 1940, and here also where, later, the famous Ardennes offensive broke through in December, 1944.

The German border was crossed by B Company at 1313 hours on the 13th of September. The enemy resistance stiffened, quite suddenly, late in the afternoon when German artillery in the Siegfried Line began to shell the surrounding roads.

Company C moved north through Bastogne and then east through part of Luxembourg to cross the Our River into Germany on September 15. As if to forecast the coming events, the weather, which had been reasonably warm and dry in France, now turned cold with continuous rain. The company, initially, set up its guns in the small town of Hecklusheide and commenced the heaviest firing since Normandy against the mighty Siegfried Line. Here heavy artillery and mortar counter-battery fire was received, the heaviest since the hedgerows.

By the 12th of September the battalion rear command post had moved to a bivouac area one mile south of Bastogne, this area later to become the famous battle ground of the Ardennes offensive. The forward CP group, consisting of the battalion commander, S-2, and S-3 sections, had been moving with the V Corps CP.

Much credit is due to the service troops of this organization, who travelled miles over stretched supply lines to bring up vital rations, ammunition, and mortar parts during this period.

The 4th Division, with A and B Companies attached, wasted no time in attacking the Siegfried Line. It was attacked and breached on September 14 with the 4.2s of A Company giving close support from the town of Buchet. Infantry reported several direct hits on pillboxes being assaulted and were highly complimentary in praising the effectiveness of HE shells. In view of the successful initial penetration, the enemy expected a major breakthrough attempt and so threw many fierce counterattacks, massed many big guns, and threw terrific artillery concentrations at the attacking Americans. Several casualties were suffered when mortar shells landed in A Company's position. Many times the boom of the guns could be heard, firing from the vicinity of Prum. Company A fired continuously from a sea of mud for the next few days. Missions consisted of burning the three small towns of Hontheim, Sellerich, and Herscheid. Close support was given to the attack on Brandscheid, a strongpoint of the Siegfried Line in this sector. Change of targets, and constant calls on the mortars by the infantry, sometimes involved a back azimuth, or complete shifting about of mortars. In one harassing mission, Company A was given credit with wiping out half a company of enemy infantry located in a road cut.

Company B went into position southeast of Hascheid on September 14 for its first set-up in Germany. The next day German infantry halted the 4th Division's advance in this sector just beyond the first line of steel and concrete bunkers. While on the road, moving up, B Company's column was shelled by German artillery, but most of the rounds fell short, driving several of the enemy out of hiding and forcing the company to dismount for a time and act as infantry. Later that day T/5 Sklarew, Pvt. Dobbins, and Pvt. Solik, in search of souvenirs, captured sixty-five prisoners in an enemy bunker that they had thought was deserted.

On September 16 the enemy was still being engaged by our infantry in the woods, a few hundred yards from B Company's position. Enemy artillery fire was heavy during the day and the infantry suffered heavy casualties. Pvt. Long was slightly wounded while with the FO party that day. On the following day Lt. Robert Wuller, forward observer, rescued a wounded infantryman in spite of heavy enemy fire, for which he was later awarded the Silver Star.

In the sector where C and D Companies were located, firing continued almost unabated as the 28th Division slammed itself into the cement and steel of the German defense line. Both companies received much credit for the work done in this operation, but no one

will forget the sacrifices of the doughboys of the 28th Infantry Division as they attempted to breach the line.

From September 13 to 19, D Company remained in position on the Siegfried Line, firing night and day in support of the battered 28th. Between 150 and 400 rounds were fired every day, mostly at unobserved targets. On the very first day the company fired on the town of Roscheid, destroying 24 enemy personnel and a small ammo dump. The mortars were called on more and more as the infantry learned of their accuracy and effectiveness. Here the fighting was as fierce as the hedgerows, with the added advantage to the enemy of having prepared positions and strategically placed pillboxes with walls and roofs of steel-reinforced concrete six to ten feet thick.

A smokescreen 1,100 yards wide was fired, on September 14, to prevent observation from a row of pillboxes; for this effective screen the Company received the praise of the 109th Infantry CO. Requests came in all day from the mortar observers, and also from the rifle companies, for specific missions. Steady streams of PWs could be seen coming in, but resistance was still fierce. Rain impeded the much-needed support of air and armor. On September 15 the 109th Infantry credited the 4.2s with one enemy mortar, several machine gun nests, and another ammunition dump. Three enemy OPs were destroyed as well as most of the personnel. The mortars saved one infantry platoon, pinned down by machine gun fire, by firing a covering smokescreen while they withdrew.

All during this period, the Germans shelled in an effort to find the mortars that were raising so much havoc with them. The Assistant Division Commander of the 28th visited the mortar positions personally to commend the company for its fine support.

The firing continued unabated. One of the most outstanding missions was completed on September 16 when the company burned down the town of Roscheid, for many days a strongpoint and supply base for the enemy. The glare of the fire was seen miles away in Luxembourg by the company commander on returning from a trip to the company rear. The next day another anti-tank gun was destroyed and several enemy tanks burned with WP. The observation post, always a hot spot, received several direct hits from "big stuff." Lt. Weaver and Cpl. Aaronson brought wounded doughboys in under cover during this barrage. The commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion, 109th Infantry, was rescued by the company's fire on September 18 when pinned down by fire from enemy automatic

weapons. This proved the 4.2 an effective weapon, as far as this officer was concerned.

Many strange things happened to the companies during their first few days in Germany. One day thirty-six Germans, the entire complement of a pillbox, surrendered to Pfc. Sklaraw, a medic from B Company who was armed only with a mess kit. Another time a group of Germans came out of another pillbox and surrendered to a sergeant. One claimed to be from Brooklyn; having returned to Germany on a visit just before the war, he was drafted and on duty in this vicinity for the last four years. He claimed that he had never fired a shot on American troops. Proof of the truthfulness of this statement was found in the fact that in the pillbox from which he surrendered there was a loaded machine gun, in perfectly good working order, trained directly on the route of approach: it had not been fired.

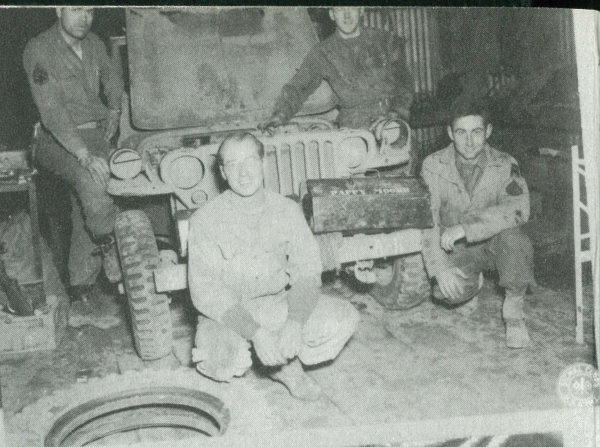
On the 16th of September, Major Jack W. Lipphardt, who had assumed command of the battalion on D-Day, when Lt. Col. Thomas H. James had been seriously wounded and evacuated, received his promotion to Lt. Col. by orders from First Army.

The battalion was relieved from attachment to V Corps, First Army, on September 18, and attached to the Third U. S. Army; now to be known as Patton's men. The companies pulled out of the line, feeling a bit guilty about leaving those battered doughboys still in there, and proceeded to the battalion assembly area near Bastogne. The next day the battalion moved through Belgium into France near Longwy and arrived that night at Brainville.

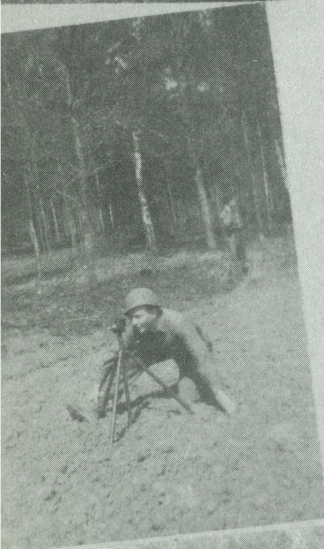
The total number of rounds expended while with the First Army was 36,360.

On being relieved from V Corps, the battalion was officially commended by General Brooks, Corps commander, for the excellent manner in which it had functioned while with that corps.









XI.

THE ATTACK ON THE METZ FORTRESS

While the First Army had driven across France into Belgium, Luxembourg, and finally into Germany itself, the armor of the U. S. Third Army had driven south through Orleans towards the oncoming U. S. Seventh Army, and also directly east through Chalons towards the medieval fortress of Metz, in the Moselle River Valley. As the 4th Armored Division's tanks rolled up to the gates of Metz itself, the ever-critical supply of gasoline slowed and then stopped entirely. The cavalry and tankers were driven back out of Metz and across the Moselle by the fiercely counterattacking Germans. Metz had been within grasp, but only for a moment. Supplies had failed to arrive so Third Army was forced to lay siege to the city's many forts. It was now evident that armor alone could not take Metz. Again the job reverted to the basic weapon of all armies, the doughboy with M1 and bayonet, supported by artillery and mortars.

It was for this reason that the mortars of the 81st were called in to assist in the gigantic task facing the 5th and 90th Infantry Divisions.

Much had been written about the assault on Metz, the mighty fortress of Lorraine, but little has been recorded about the battle the troops fought during the period from September 19 to November 20 with the elements, chiefly General Mud. It is true that the Germans threw everything they had into the defense of this citadel, yet their greatest ally was the weather.

From the battalion assembly area, the companies were attached to the two divisions assaulting the fortress area, A and B Companies going on the north flank of Metz, with the 90th Division, while C and D went to the south with the 5th Division.

The long battle for Metz was characterized by static warfare, similar in many ways to the trench warfare of 1914-1918. The Germans holding out in the great fortresses around the city made it impossible for the infantry to advance: thus the attack soon took on the nature of a siege.

On September 20, B Company occupied a position south of Verneville, in support of the 359th Infantry. The missions fired in this position, and subsequent ones, were for the most part harassing and interdictionary, or fired in support of the infantry against small groups

of enemy personnel manning the perimeter defenses of Forts Jeanne D'Arc, Driant, Marivel, and Guise.

A woods east of Marrielles was C Company's first position, facing the fortress city. It was the base of a long, thin spearhead extending north towards Metz. This area was part of an ex-gun-nery course of a German officers' candidate school, and consequently was well known to the former occupants. As a result, enemy artillery was accurate and heavy. It would be like sitting on the impact areas of Fort Sill and allowing the school personnel to shoot at one. Rain fell persistently, turning the low ground into lakes, and the high ground, once traversed, into a quagmire.

The enemy counterattacked, making the salient untenable. During a withdrawal to a new position 1,000 yards to the rear, the enemy brought down a heavy concentration of artillery fire on the 1st platoon and the company CP group, wounding several men. The company commenced firing from the new position, seeking protection from enemy shells by the shelter of nearby German-built dug-outs.

Company D moved into previously reconnoitered positions near Gorze, on September 20, facing Fort Driant, one of the strongest forts surrounding the city of Metz, and the company's principal target during its stay there. The company took up positions about 3,000 yards from the fort in ruined Franco-Prussian War emplacements, with no shelter save scrub trees and caved-in trenches. It remained in this position until October 15, taking all the punishment the elements and Jerry could administer. However, it was far from one-sided, for the mortars dealt out more than they took.

Three times the doughboys tried to assault the impregnable Driant, and three times they were driven back with heavy losses. During these attacks, and in interim between them, the mortars fired numerous HE and WP missions, giving the infantrymen all the close support possible, but the thick impenetrable wall's moats, and labyrinthine corridors of Fort Driant afforded too good protection for the stubbornly defending Krauts.

Many smokescreens were fired to deny enemy observation on advancing infantry. Good results were obtained against open emplacements surrounding the fort. On several occasions enemy tanks and self-propelled guns operating near the fort were silenced after concentrations of 4.2 shells had been fired on them. On the night of September 28, S/Sgt. Turbyne captured two enemy soldiers in

civilian clothes infiltrating through the fire direction center area at 0100 hours. That same day D Company was relieved from attachment to the 11th Infantry and attached to the 19th Field Artillery Battalion, 5th Division, in order more closely to coordinate fires.

Many air missions were flown against the fort, but the 500-pound "eggs" bounced like rubber balls off the solid concrete and exploded in the air. Heavy 240mm. howitzers threw shells at the fort, to no avail. The neighboring forts of Marivel and Jeanne D'Arc coordinated their fires, so that Driant was covered by their guns also.

The rain continued to fall incessantly, and the soft ground, with its big chunks of hard rock, raised havoc with mortar parts, causing excessive breakage. Other companies were experiencing the same difficulty with mortar-part breakage. Only the pooling of equipment and the redistribution of parts by Headquarters personnel kept the companies firing. On one occasion, a tank firing from the vicinity of Fort Driant shelled the company area. No casualties were sustained, but every shelter-half in the area was full of shrapnel holes, one mortar barrel was dented, and two HE shells broken open without exploding.

Company B's second position in the Metz sector was in a draw, west of Gravelotte. Here it built and furnished two large dugouts. The days became monotonously alike as the first rains of early fall came. Warmth and shelter were primary concerns.

On October 2, Company A moved just south of Hagondange into "Der Reichswerke-Hermann Goring-Werksgruppe Hagendinger." The enormous steel plant was located seven miles north of Metz and one mile west of the Moselle. Many large, colorful pictures of Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goring adorned the premises. These were, however, quickly and enthusiastically removed. A sign was found in an executive office instructing all who entered to come to attention, give the Nazi salute, and say "Heil Hitler." That sign started its trip to the U. S. A. the same day. During the stay in the factory, the personnel of this company never suffered a shortage of stationery, as the former occupants had obligingly left an abundant supply.

Company A's task was to assist the 357th Infantry of the 90th Division to take the town of Maizieres Les Metz. It proved to be a tough nut to crack; progress was measured from house to house. On October 3 the attack started. It was hotly contested by the enemy, and both sides expended large amounts of artillery, mortar, and small arms ammunition. The infantry advanced slowly, with

the close support of A Company's mortars, first taking an enormous slag pile located between the factory and the town, then driving the Germans out of several factory buildings. The doughboys gradually gained control of the northern part of town; then a stalemate ensued and both sides settled down to a slugging match.

Attached to the 2nd Infantry, 5th Division, C Company moved into position west of Sillingny, and dug-in for what turned out to be a six-week stay in that immediate area. Much time was spent in improving foxholes and trying to keep warm and dry. Towards the end of the period, the rain became so intense that practically all of the foxholes were filled with water. Roads into the area became bogs. Despite these difficulties, Mess Sgt. Haase appeared day after day, bringing up hot meals over almost impassable, heavily-shelled roads to the muddy mortar men. On the 30th of September, a company rest camp was established at Pagny and several men at a time were given a two-day respite from the mud and discomfort of the line. Clothes were washed, movies attended, and extracurricular activities engaged in. The French were quite cordial.

Throughout the Metz campaign, the companies were kept busy firing. Division and corps artillery were strictly rationed on ammunition, their fires being limited to registration and emergency missions; consequently, the entire artillery support for a time was furnished by the 4.2s and TDs. Fire missions came into C Company at all times of the day and night. All types of firing was done: smokescreens, anti-personnel, harassing, and counterbattery missions were some of the more common types. Firing was observed by our own FOs, artillery FOs, infantry FOs, and even by the doughboys from front-line foxholes. FDC controlled most of the firing.

While in position near Lorry several unfortunate incidents occurred. Lt. Toole, an officer who had won his commission on the battlefield, was accidentally shot to death by an infantryman while returning from the OP. Sgt. Innacone was instantly killed during a heavy mortar barrage, while eating chow near a foxhole. The loss of these men was deeply felt by the company.

The long-awaited attack on Fort Driant was begun at 1100 hours on October 3. Company D began supporting the advance of the 11th Infantry, 5th Division, by laying a smokescreen that was maintained for five and a half hours, permitting the infantry to reach the fort without observation from the nearby Fort Marivel. One platoon of C Company was brought up into position to reinforce the

fires of D Company for this mission. Due to overcast skies, air support for the attack was impossible until later that day. Firing under most adverse conditions, with mortar parts breaking and mortars nearly disappearing from sight into the unfavorable ground, D Company pumped out 1,620 rounds of WP in five and a half hours, while the platoon of C Company expended approximately 600 rounds on this mission. Because the guns would go out of action so quickly, it was seldom that more than two guns per platoon would be firing at one time. Several barrels were burned out from the rapid firing, and in all cases the gunners and cannoneers were forced to use asbestos gloves. In some cases the barrel became so hot that the gunner could not set the sight for making the necessary adjustments. Each barrel at one time or another had a cherry-red glow. Despite the fact that the doughboys had reached their objective under cover of this tremendous screen, they were not able to seize the fort, and the next day, October 4, the company was called upon to repeat the performance of the preceding day.

Again a protecting screen was started (at 1045 hours) and continued for seven hours and fifteen minutes. This time D Company bore the brunt of the job alone, firing approximately 2,300 rounds of WP in the operation. The doughboys managed to work their way into the first series of corridors of the fort, and even poured burning oil into some of the apertures, but the stubbornly-defended, honeycombed fort just could not be taken by direct assault, despite the heroic sacrifices of the infantrymen. The infantry pulled out of the stronghold that night and re-formed at the base of the hill. The company remained near Fort Driant, continuing to support the doughboys by harassing the towns neighboring the stronghold until October 15.

The OP used all during these operations was an observation tower 100 feet high which was under direct observation from the fort. Every now and then, Jerry would spray it with automatic weapons and flak. One time he really laid it on with artillery and succeeded in knocking out one of the legs supporting the tower; that ended that OP for a while. During this first week in October, D Company expended 4,845 rounds against Fort Driant. Here the company had its first experience with "streamers," incidents where the steel casings of WP shells burst, shortly after emerging from the mortar barrel, spreading phosphorus over the gun position and leaving a white streak in the sky pointing out the exact mortar position to the Germans.

All during October the battalion rear CP remained at Brainville, near Conflans, France, engaged in administrative work with XX Corps and supply to the companies.

Exactly one month was spent in the vicinity of Maizieres Les Metz by A Company, living in clean office buildings under not-too-unpleasant circumstances. To make the story seemingly complete, several films were shown in an air-raid shelter and the company was visited by Red Cross doughnut girls. However, it was not all a life of ease. A battle was being waged that seemed to have no end. Just as the mess sergeant would yell "chow" the platoon sergeant would yell "fire mission." Invariably just as the platoons got in the sack for the night, they would be roused to man the guns. Just as a guy was getting to know that cute Red Cross girl, she had to go. C'est le guerre!

In one month, A Company fired better than 13,000 rounds. Return fire from the enemy was limited and the few casualties suffered were minor ones. Missions were varied. Night firing, which consisted of harassing supply routes and possible regrouping areas, was SOP. Infantry officers requested HE fire within fifty yards of their own troops, knocking out an enemy machine gun and all but one of the crew. Acting on PW reports, the company destroyed two ammunition dumps. A direct hit was scored on a dug-in German mortar, and enemy OPs were continually harassed. One truck in a Jerry supply convoy was definitely destroyed.

Since the approaches to the front lines were under observation, the mortars of A Company were frequently called upon to screen enemy observation. On October 7, a screen was laid for the advance of bulldozers and engineers clearing mines. Later that day, tanks going into Maizieres were screened and thereafter every time a tank entered or left the front line position, which was at frequent intervals, a screen was fired. Starting October 18, an M12 tank mounting a 155mm gun, used for direct firing on buildings occupied by the enemy, was given the same service.

At this time B Company was split up in three sections to cover the regimental fronts of the 358th and 359th Infantry in the Metz area. One of these sections, consisting of two guns of the 1st platoon, remained in Verneville, the other two guns of this platoon stayed in the draw west of Gravelotte, while the 2nd platoon moved into a draw south of Resonville. Enemy patrols penetrated the front line in this sector on several occasions during these weeks. Pvt. Blankenship, after being challenged in German, shot and wounded

a member of the FFI, mistaking him for a member of a German patrol; otherwise the nights, like the days, were without incident. The rain, the cold, and the monotony of firing always on the same targets made the period of the siege of Metz seem almost endless.

Company D moved from the vicinity of Fort Driant on October 15 and set up in the area near Arry, France, on the reverse slope of a hill. Its primary mission here was to destroy the towns of Corny, Fey, and Vezon prior to jump off for the northerly attack on the forts of Verdun and to cover with fire enemy activities on the wooded plain southwest of Metz. All these places were occupied by considerable numbers of the enemy. These missions were carried out quite successfully during the company's prolonged stay in this area. When questioned by intelligence officers, PWs attested to the fear spread by the alternating HE and WP that was being employed. During this period D Company also established a rest camp in a hotel in Pagny, across the Moselle, where it set up its kitchen and rear CP. This was almost a necessity, since living conditions in the mud and ruins of Arry and its environs were almost unbearable for prolonged periods of time. Yankee (and Rebel) ingenuity was in evidence everywhere among the men in making foxholes and dugouts as livable and comfortable as possible. Make-shift stoves were constructed from Jerry gasoline cans, and the walls of the holes were lined with boards.

During this period the company was visited by an inspection team from Technical Division Chief CWS ETO, seeking to determine the cause of barrel bursts, streamers, shorts, breakage of cartridge containers, and poor condition of ammo in general encountered by the mortar battalions.

On October 19, Pfc. "Pappy" Fenner was chopping some wood for his fire when someone remarked, "Tough work, isn't it, soldier?" Fenner, without looking up, replied, "You're damned right it is," and then added a hasty "Sir" when he looked up and found General George Patton smiling down at him. The next day three men who had been wounded on D-Day, proud holders of the DSC, returned to the company. They were Sgt. Nicoli, T/5 Savino, and Pvt. Porter. The OPs in this area were hot spots, one in particular constantly coming under fire from the heavy artillery of Fort Verdun. A dead German near the OP became increasingly malodorous as the days passed. He was affectionately labelled "Herman the German." The company missions from this position included the complete destruction of the towns of Fey, Corny, and Vezon. Much

equipment was destroyed and many of the enemy killed or wounded. One job in particular was very gratifying. A friendly patrol returning to our lines called for a smokescreen when pinned down by enemy fire. This was quickly furnished and the patrol returned safely. Later in the day the patrol leader called personally to thank the company for a splendid job.

Prior to this, on October 19, the ammunition section of B Company, located near Jarny, was subjected to a heavy shelling from long-range German 280mm railway guns, located somewhere near Ebberviller. The first round burst within ten yards of the ammunition trucks, which were parked near a stack of HE and WP shells. Five rounds of WP were detonated by the explosion and fires were started throughout the area. S/Sgt. Huemphner and T/4 Bower, at great personal risk, fought and finally extinguished the fires. T/5 Gross and Pvt. Pace, Headquarters drivers, only partially clad and without shoes, drove the burning ammunition trucks to a place of comparative safety. All were awarded the Bronze Star for their heroic achievement on this occasion.

Maizieres Les Metz was taken, on October 29, with support of A Company's mortars which fired 2,247 rounds that day. A cleverly deceptive plan of attack was worked out whereby the company fired a screen shielding the infantry attacking from the rear, while other units pinned the enemy down from the front. This action diverted attention from the attacking forces, and enabled them to overrun the enemy positions. The operation was a complete success, and the next day Brig. General Weaver and Col. George of the 90th Infantry Division visited the command post to compliment the company on the effectiveness of its firing.

By the end of the month, the battalion rear moved to St. Benoit, France. At this time all companies except D Company were pulled out of the line for a day or two of rest and recuperation.

Finally the order was given to take Metz. The plan called for four drives, two from bases close to Metz, and two others, each crossing the Moselle, one north and the other south of Metz. These latter two were to converge east of the city, cutting the escape routes.

Company A was attached to the 358th Infantry, 90th Division, for the northern drive. The company arrived at Koeking on the Moselle on November 7, after an extremely wet night move. Mortars were set upon the main street and harassing fire was placed on Haute-Ham. A ferry landing at Cattenom, right under the eyes of the Ger-

mans occupying Fort Koenigsmacher, was selected as a bridge site. On November 9, the company moved into Haute-Ham and again set up their mortars on a main street. The infantry crossed the Moselle that day in assault boats, captured Fort Koenigsmacher, and beat off several counterattacks, but were left in a precarious position as a result of the heavy rains which flooded the river and made it almost impossible to construct a bridge. The supply problem became so acute that Piper Cub plans were employed to fly in K rations.

Orders alerting B Company were received on November 7. That night, attached to the 359th Infantry, 90th Division, the company moved to an assembly area near the Moselle. Heavy rains delayed the crossing, but the bridgehead was established, on November 9, with much less difficulty than had been expected. The mortar men crossed without mishap on November 13 and 14, and took up positions in the woods of Bois de Koenigsmacher. The following day, after moving into Breistroff la Petite, three men were injured when an enemy tank fired into buildings occupied by the company.

Company C swung from the south side of Metz, on November 10, back across the Moselle to join the 10th Armored Division's drive to the northeast across the Moselle and into Germany. Major Hausman, the battalion S-3, accompanied C Company on what proved to be a rugged operation. While on the road during Armistice Day, November 11, the company passed St. Mihiel, where the huge American military cemetery is located. Many clean and neat G.I.s were parading there, shoes shined and stripes sewed on. The mortar men looked at one another, covered with mud, wearing an assortment of uniforms, unshaven, dirty, and tired, and were reminded of the doughs in Mauldin's cartoons. They felt they didn't belong here with these prettily-dressed soldiers, but belonged back in the mud and rain, where mortar shells burst without warning and stripes attracted snipers' bullets.

The company moved in a half-circle around Metz, arriving in Tetange, Luxembourg, on the 12th, and prepared for the drive on the Saar. The natives of the Luxembourg town entertained the members of C Company royally that night. The Moselle was crossed the next night under cover of darkness and smokescreens. On the 14th the company joined the armored column, moving with the 3rd Tank Battalion. The rain and a heavy shelling made rough going that night.

In order to stay with the combat teams, it was found necessary to leapfrog the platoons. As the division spread out, however, the mortar platoons were unable to maintain contact with each other and the leapfrog system was abandoned. Pvt. Anthony Pittari was instantly killed and several other men wounded near Kirschnaumen, France, due to a heavy enemy artillery barrage. During this shelling, Cpl. Bersch, although wounded, distinguished himself by assisting the medics to evacuate all other wounded personnel. He later received the Silver Star for his gallantry.

Due to the flooding of the Moselle, the armored drive had been postponed and the Germans had been able to build up strong field defenses in this area; in addition to this, the roads were heavily mined. The 10th Armored had some tough fighting to do, and the platoons of C Company, travelling without armor protection of any kind, continually encountered German troops by-passed by the tanks.

The first platoon moved off to the right, passing through Kirschnaumen, Remeling, Ritzing, and Flastroff, shelling many towns from their various positions. In many places the mortar men were the first troops to enter. Because of the fluid situation, the platoon was forced to retire from the Remeling area when the Germans counterattacked. The town was subsequently shelled by the company.

The 2nd platoon meanwhile went to Ritzing, then Launsdorf, and finally further east into Germany. Here the thin section of armor in front of the platoon pulled out, leaving the 4.2 mortars out in front. Even the 60mm's were set up to the platoon's rear. The enemy commenced to shell the position with direct fire weapons and mortars until the position became so untenable that march order was given. German observation was good, and while attempting to withdraw up a hill through almost impassable mud, each vehicle in turn seemed to be followed by a flight of mortar shells. One shell hit a trailer, another wounded several men slightly, knocking off Pvt. Tester's helmet. Pvt. Tester owes his life to a wad of toilet paper carried in the helmet. The falling helmet struck Pvt. Oates, who uttered the immortal words, "Take me Lord, I'm hit." Two trailers had to be left behind, including a complete mortar, but the platoon finally fought its way out and set up in a more tenable position.

Company D left Arry on November 6, and occupied a position near some 1914-1918 pillboxes in the vicinity of Bouxieres. This proved to be a jump from one mud puddle into a deeper one. Incessant rain flooded out every foxhole and made the ground wet and

soggy and highly undesirable for mortar firing. Despite these difficulties, the company managed to give supporting fire to the infantry, using charges as high as 35 rings at times, to get as much as 5,200 yards in range. A system of leapfrogging was put into effect, whereby one platoon moved ahead while the other remained in position to give support to the advancing infantry. During this process, the following towns were fired on and then occupied: Cheminot, Louvigny, Vigny, Gare, Beard, Lemud, Buchy, Aube, Dain-en Salnois, Domangeville, Verny, Crepy, Jury, Pouilly, and Magny. The 2nd and 10th Regiments of the 5th Division were supported in these operations. It was in Vigny that one officer, while on reconnaissance for a new position, captured an SS trooper attempting to blow up an important bridge; the American officer obtained a brand-new P-38 plus the prisoner. German dead, as well as destroyed enemy materiel, lined the roads as the advance continued. The 4.2 mortars were responsible for a good deal of this destruction. Enemy artillery was active, both from the mobile guns and from those in the forts surrounding Metz.

It was in the vicinity of Magny that the company had its "field days," on November 17 and 18. The enemy allowed one platoon to move into position, then opened up with heavy mortars. By infiltrating the men and vehicles, the platoon managed to withdraw without a casualty or loss of equipment and set up in a more tenable position near the 81mm mortars. An unfortunate incident occurred here when Pvt. Keith Sheehan was killed by a premature burst from an American 81mm mortar. That day, the company destroyed two enemy 75mm guns, putting one round right through the gun shield of one of them. A battery of enemy 88mm guns was spotted and fired upon until the enemy gun crews deserted the position. A parade ground, near some barracks, was fired upon and machine guns were knocked out in the vicinity. Enemy ammunition and oil supplies were also destroyed. All these targets were in the vicinity of Queuleu, a suburb of Metz.

Company A had its first experience with a shell bursting in the barrel, on the night of November 10. Sgt. Hodgins and Pvt. Haskell Roberts were seriously wounded. The company fired harassing missions on Fort Koenigsmacher and its approaches, before its capture, and thereafter harassed roads to the south and burned the towns of Basse-Ham and Haute-Ham. The mortars were called upon to supplement the smoke generators in screening the engineers' operations while constructing the bridge over the Moselle. On

November 13, from 0630 to 1615, 9 hours and 45 minutes, the company laid a screen in front of the hills beyond Basse-Ham, expending 1,202 rounds to permit the engineers to complete the bridge that day.

At 0350 the next morning, Company A crossed the Moselle to Koenigsmacher, and later moved to Valmestroff where it was on the receiving end of an extremely heavy artillery barrage and suffered several casualties.

A smokescreen was laid in front of Distroff, the next town in the drive south, enabling the infantry to capture it with only light casualties. On November 15, the company started to infiltrate into this town, one jeep at a time, at ten-minute intervals, since the Germans were still heavily shelling Valmestroff and the road leading to Distroff. It proved to be an "out of the frying pan into the fire" affair, because after several squads had left, the Germans counter-attacked Distroff. Two vehicles had already reached the town; the others halted, sought cover, and worked their way back to Valmestroff. Captain Watts, while attempting to halt the rest of the vehicles, was trapped by a German tank, and taken prisoner along with 1st Lt. Stone and Sgt. Lamb. Pfc. Arnold Tuttle, who thereafter was dubbed "half-track," looked out of the window of the CP, curious to see who had just pulled up in a 6 x 6, and was amazed to find a fully-manned German half-track instead. Tuttle retired to the nearest corner of the room and sought solace in a bottle of champagne. Frank Jones aided an infantryman in loading his bazooka. Several other men, trapped in a barn, "sweated it out" under a pile of hay while enemy infantry probed about and then left, unaware of the presence of the concealed men. Down the street a BAR man pumped six slugs into one of the enemy, who died shouting "Heil Hitler." Shortly thereafter the mortars laid down a smokescreen on Valmestroff, enabling our tanks to advance into the town and beat off the enemy, inflicting fairly heavy losses. Lt. Baum assumed command of the company.

At Distroff the backbone of enemy resistance was broken. Smoke-screens were laid to enable the infantry to advance over the bare ground between towns, and a few harassing missions were fired. The advance continued, and on November 19 the company reached Lue Chateau, east of Metz, at which point the encirclement was complete. A few missions were fired into a wooded area near Les Etange where stragglers from Metz were observed trying to escape. The

enemy was thoroughly beaten and disorganized. To end such a long, hard-fought campaign, five of the enemy walked into the CP and surrendered to an amazed, drowsy switchboard operator.

B Company had its first experience with barrel bursts on November 16. Cpl. Graves and Pvt. McMath were instantly killed near Breistroff when a mortar shell exploded in the barrel, at 2315 hours. The next morning another barrel burst occurred, killing Pfc. Scarfo and wounding Cpl. Kittle and Pfc. Winders. At this time, it was impossible to determine any definite cause for the accident except that of faulty ammunition. In spite of this physical and psychological hazard, B Company continued to provide the close support that the infantry so badly needed.

Fort de Queleu, guarding the very gates of Metz, was fired upon by D Company on November 20. This fort was to be by-passed and a smokescreen was needed to hide the movements of the infantry. A screen, lasting one hour and thirty-five minutes, permitted troops to pass safely and advance on the city. Later that day, a screen was provided for a group of engineers who had been pinned down by machine gun fire while attempting to return across the Seille River.

On the 20th of November, the forward observer from D Company entered the city of Metz with advance elements of the 10th Infantry, 5th Division. Enemy resistance had been crushed by steady pressure and many prisoners were taken. The entire company moved into the ancient city the following day. On Thanksgiving Day an excellent turkey dinner was enjoyed there.

In the latter part of November, the rear battalion command post moved to Fontoy, France, where the members of the battalion were later to enjoy a few days of well-earned rest.

The 4.2 mortars had played an important role in the conquest of Metz, the Fortress City, which had not been taken by storm since the year 1400. At the end of this phase, the battalion had expended a total of 87,859 rounds of ammunition.

