

1945

The Eighty-first chemical mortar battalion

United States Army

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THE EIGHTY-FIRST
CHEMICAL
MORTAR BATTALION

*The
Eighty-First Chemical
Mortar Battalion*



1945

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Foreword

THIS booklet is dedicated to the forty-one officers and men of the Eighty-First Chemical Mortar Battalion who made the supreme sacrifice.

To give a thorough account of the accomplishments of the Eighty-First Chemical Mortar Battalion would take thousands of pages. To detail the heroic deeds and meritorious service of the gallant officers and men of the Eighty-First would take more thousands of pages. A booklet the size of this could be written about each enlisted man and each officer. It is believed the history is concise, yet shows the battalion to have lived up to its motto, "Equal To The Task."

JACK W. LIPPHARDT,

Lt. Col., C.W.S.,

Commanding.

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I.

ACTIVATION AND BASIC TRAINING

The story of the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion does not start back in the musty annals of early American military history. Insofar as antiquity and tradition are concerned it is conspicuously new, but the few years since its activation have been packed with accomplishment, heroism, and battle experience in keeping with the highest traditions of any unit in the United States Army. The 81st was formed when the country was faced with the necessity of creating a highly trained, efficient army in a minimum of time.

The 81st Chemical Battalion (Motorized) was activated by the following order:

HEADQUARTERS FORT D. A. RUSSELL, TEXAS

General Order

25 April 1942

Number 22

ACTIVATION OF CHEMICAL WARFARE BATTALION

1. Pursuant to instructions contained in General Order No. 39 Headquarters Third Army, Smith-Young Tower, San Antonio, Texas, dated April 14, 1942, and War Department letter, March 25, 1942. AG 320.2 (3-14-42) MR-M-GN, Subject: Activation of Chemical Battalions, the 81st Chemical Battalion (Motorized), Fort D. A. Russell, Texas, is activated this date.

By order of LIEUT. COLONEL FRANKENBERGER.

Official:

CLAUDE F. SPANG

Capt., Inf. (CASC)

Adjutant

CLAUDE F. SPANG

Capt., Inf. (CASC)

Adjutant

Thus was born the 81st, without fanfare, but with quiet purpose. It was up to the Battalion to write its own history and these pages will show how well the job was done.

The original cadre of the battalion was specified in a special order from Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland, dated April 19, 1942, ordering five officers and seventy-six enlisted men to report to Fort D. A. Russell for duty. Lt. Col. Thomas H. James, CWS, was assigned to the battalion as Battalion Commander.

Surprising as it may seem after three years and the usual drifting, transferring, and evacuation of personnel, a fair number of the original cadre were still with the battalion at the end of the war in Europe.

These "old-timers" are listed below:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank at Activation</i>	<i>Present Rank</i>
Jack W. Lipphardt.....	1st Lt.	Lt. Col.
Ernest G. McDaniel.....	2d Lt.	Captain
Herbert F. Levy.....	2d Lt.	Captain
Harold L. Hausman.....	2d Lt.	Major
John W. Bundy.....	Master Sgt.....	1st Lt.
Charles S. Gardner.....	Pvt.	1st Lt.
Walter R. Young.....	Pvt.	1st Lt.
Edwin E. Johnson.....	Corporal	Tech. Sgt.
Rupert A. Price.....	Staff Sgt.....	1st Sgt.
Leonard P. Gibbs.....	Sgt.	1st Sgt.
Oliver H. Fisher.....	Corporal	Pfc.
Paul A. Sellers.....	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
Steven A. Emery.....	Pvt.	Master Sgt.
Victor F. Minchow.....	Pvt.	Master Sgt.
Rudolph A. Hilland.....	Tec. 4	Tec. 5
Harry E. Randall.....	Corporal	Master Sgt.
Timothy J. Sweeney.....	Corporal	Pfc.
Charles H. Miller.....	Pvt.	Tec. 4
John Kuchmy	Pvt.	Tec. 5
John H. Yungclas.....	Pvt.	Tec. 4
Joseph E. Clapham.....	Pvt.	Tech. Sgt.
Frank Florio	Pvt.	1st Sgt.
Toney Sirianni	Pvt.	Tec. 4
Mike Carahalios	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
George A. Haase.....	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
Michael A. Martino.....	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
Alfred Paparelli	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
Theodore F. Shulski.....	Pvt.	Tec. 5

Lt. Col. Thomas H. James assumed command of the 81st Chemical Battalion by its first general order, dated April 26, 1942. A West Pointer and a Regular Army officer of wide and varied experience, he immediately set to work organizing the battalion. To him and to the able officers and men aiding him is due the credit for bringing

the organization to the peak of combat efficiency and morale it had attained by the time it was first committed to battle. The day that Col. James assumed command the cadre was assigned to the various companies, thus creating the framework upon which the four letter companies and headquarters were built after the arrival of additional personnel.

Fort D. A. Russell, the birthplace of the 81st and where it experienced its growing pains, is situated just outside Marfa, Texas, in the heart of the Big Bend Country. The Fort was an old one, having been a cavalry post of the Border Patrol. Marfa itself was a little cattle town with a big sense of hospitality and a bit of Old Mexico. The Paisano Hotel, the Marfa Joy, the Crewes and Jimmy's Place will strike a familiar, pleasant note to all who experienced their hospitality. Mexico wasn't many miles away and Ojinaga and Juarez drew many visitors from the 81st in search of Mexican atmosphere. The first impression of Fort D. A. Russell and the surrounding territory was that of vast waste and plenty of space, without a tree or a really green blade of grass for miles around, but soon the charms of the plains, the rugged beauty, mellow sunlight, and glorious nights won over. Surrounding the Fort was a range of small mountains, the Smith Hills, and off in the distance could be seen the landmark of the country, Cathedral Mountain.

In May, approximately 75 men joined the battalion, coming from all over the country, and on June 9 approximately 250 men came from Fort Dix. Between June and October small groups were assigned until October 17 when Mississippi descended on us. About 500 men from the land of turnip greens and cornbread were assigned to the battalion without any previous basic training. This created a gigantic task on the part of the officers and non-coms to train and condition these men and fit them into the organization; a job accomplished in a minimum of time through the untiring efforts and the whole-hearted cooperation of the men. The battalion to this day consists largely of those Mississippi lads, although they could not be recognized as the raw, green recruits of those days. Today they are seasoned veterans, proven in battle, equal to any combat soldiers in the Army.

Equipment and training aids were scarce and inadequate in those days, but American ingenuity at improvising when equipment was lacking paid dividends. The battalion at first was equipped with .45 cal. revolvers as small arms and the men were trained and fired for record using them, only later to be equipped with Enfield rifles and

again go through the same process. Despite the antiquated weapons, nearly all qualified and many made sharpshooter and expert.

From activation until November of that year the 81st Chemical Battalion was a battalion without mortars. Although it was discouraging not to have the basic weapons to work with, the time was well spent in physical conditioning, the school of the soldier, identification of chemical agents, field marches, field hygiene, small arms training, etc. Few will forget the obstacle course; but then also memorable were the swimming parties at Balmorhea and the company beer parties. Organized athletics were stressed in the battalion, and good-natured team rivalry was at a high peak among the companies in baseball, basketball, football, and track.

The hikes to Smith Hills and Cathedral Mountain over the hot, rough, dusty coleche will be remembered by all. The bivouacs at Smith Hills, with the night patrolling exercises, were all too realistic to some who were the victims of over-enthusiastic patrols looking for prisoners.

In September the mortar carts arrived, but still no mortars. It afforded a good deal of amusement to have to drag the carts over hill and dale for miles just to "get the feel of it." In October the mortars arrived and everyone's morale went up. We finally had our guns! From then on the bulk of the time was spent in mortar drill, care and cleaning of the mortar, and the tactics and technique of firing. Dry run followed dry run and now everyone wondered if we were ever going to fire a live round. Gunner examinations followed soon after, and the results were excellent.

In January 1943 the anticipated day came. A few rounds were released to the battalion and everybody was in a dither as to who would fire the first round. The signal honor fell to C Company and Pfc. Pace was the lucky man to drop the round down the barrel while the battalion waited with bated breath.

A general idea as to the difficulties encountered due to lack of training equipment can be had when one considers that for a long period of time the battalion's ammunition dump contained exactly 25 rounds of FS for training purposes.

Several more shoots were held after that, and that the constant drills and dry runs had paid dividends was evidenced by the accuracy of the shooting.

The really big event of the firing in Texas was the battalion

shoot at Turner's Ranch in February 1943, when the outfit was given permission to fire up all ammunition on hand. On this occasion the battalion took up prepared positions the night before and at dawn all mortars in the battalion fired what was then considered an enormous number of rounds of WP and FS; even the now-forgotten Livens projectors were fired. Many will remember digging the emplacements for those Livens in the hard, oh so hard, Texas soil that night. The Colonel, there on an inspection tour, commended Col. James on the accuracy and efficiency of the firing.

Soon after, the battalion was alerted for departure from Texas for participation in Louisiana maneuvers.

On April 2, 1943, the first contingent of the battalion left Fort D. A. Russell for Leesville, Louisiana, and on the following day the rest of the organization followed. The grand send-off the people of Marfa gave will long be remembered by those present. They were truly sorry to see us go. The 81st had made a wonderful impression on them and had gained many friends. A military band from the airfield nearby serenaded the train as it left the station. The first phase of our military career was over, and ahead of us lay the task of preparing ourselves for combat by rigorous operations in the field.

II.

MANEUVERS AND TRAINING IN THE U. S.

Louisiana Maneuvers

The 81st Chemical Battalion arrived at Camp Polk, Louisiana, on April 5, 1943, where it participated in maneuvers in conjunction with the 85th Division until May 4. The battalion gained much experience in the reconnaissance, selection and occupation of mortar positions and in the tactical employment of mortars in support of an infantry division. This was its first experience in operating with troops other than its own. Probably the biggest problem during these operations was that of supply and mess. Many times the companies "sweated out" the mess trucks, but in most instances the "chow" came through. This was also the unit's first experience at living in the field for a prolonged period, and the chiggers, ticks, "piney woods rooters," snakes, and rain, torrents of it, all did their best to make it an arduous one.

The rumors flew wide and free from every latrine in the area, especially after a showdown inspection in which all equipment was brought up to combat strength and serviceability, but we "cooled off" for a while.

For the battalion, Louisiana maneuvers constituted a good shake-down. It demonstrated our limitations and possibilities, and the things that must be accomplished before the peak of efficiency could be reached. It was a "dry run," but like all dry runs it paid dividends when we fired for record.

It was in Louisiana on Easter Sunday that the battalion held its first anniversary and Col. James presented to the unit, in a colorful ceremony, its battalion colors on which were portrayed its insignia and motto. Col. James devised the insignia while the battalion was stationed at Texas. The shield has a field of blue and gold, signifying the colors of the Chemical Warfare Service. A spouting volcano, a replica of Cathedral Mountain which is the outstanding landmark for miles around Fort D. A. Russell, is rampant on a golden background. The spout of smoke and flame was added to signify our future mission of smoking and burning the enemy. Subjacent to this is the white Lone Star of Texas on a field of blue. Below the shield is a scroll bearing the battalion's motto, "Equal to the Task," picked from many submitted to Col. James. To Lt. Bundy (then M/Sgt.) goes the credit for devising that phrase. How prophetic those words were will be proven in the pages to follow.

Amphibious Maneuvers at Camp Gordon Johnston, Florida

On May 6, 1943, the 81st arrived at Camp Gordon Johnston, Carrabelle, Florida, for participation in amphibious, commando, and physical training. The battalion was attached to the 28th Division for administrative purposes during its stay there. The program was vigorous, hazardous, and exciting, and several fell by the wayside due to the rapid pace and constant exertion under the hot, tropical Florida sun.

The program consisted of combat swimming, speed marches, unorthodox exercises (and we do mean unorthodox), street fighting, Judo, hand-to-hand fighting, use of knife and bayonet, cargo net practice on mockups, loading and unloading in small craft, demolitions, and the use of explosives. The battalion also had its first taste of the infiltration course at this time. The attack on Schicklgruber village with live ammunition furnished plenty of excitement and firsthand experience in street fighting and battle sounds.

Trips to Tallahassee, beach parties, and other extra-curricular activities took the curse off this particular period, but no one was sorry when orders came to leave the place that Winchell had dubbed "The Alcatraz of the Army." Every man that came through that training will admit, however, that he was in better physical shape for it. The battalion departed from this station on June 9-10, 1943.

Camp Pickett, Virginia

On June 12, 1943, the 81st Chemical Battalion arrived at Camp Pickett, Virginia, where it was stationed until October 14 of that year. During that time the battalion was trained in the use of the Springfield rifle, the carbine, and the BAR, firing for record in all these weapons, and the old Enfields were finally turned in. It was at Camp Pickett that the battalion fired its first rounds of HE and everyone was more than pleased with the wallop it packed. A good deal of time was spent in mortar drill, bringing the squads, platoons, and companies to a high degree of efficiency.

Many of the personnel found accommodations in nearby towns and brought their wives there to be near them. Practically every officer and man was given a leave or furlough during the five months that the battalion was stationed there.

During the months of August and September, the battalion participated in several amphibious maneuvers with the 28th Division at Camp Bradford, Norfolk Naval Base, Virginia, and B Company spent two weeks on mountain maneuvers in West Virginia. In the course of training at the amphibious base the battalion received instruction and training in the use and adjustment of life belts, and in the purposes and characteristics of various types of landing craft. Naval customs and terminology, net scaling and adjustment of equipment, embarking and debarking from landing craft, loading and unloading of vehicles, and the installation and firing of the mortar in LCVPs were all studied. Later on the battalion, attached to the 28th Division, engaged in the practice assault on the "Solomon Islands" in Chesapeake Bay. For many members of the battalion this was the first experience with sea travel, and as a result a few cases of mal-de-mer were experienced. For its first ship-to-shore operation the battalion did an excellent job. This was also the battalion's first experience with C and K rations, and actually we thought they were good.

Company B, attached to the 109th Infantry of the 28th Division, spent a rigorous two weeks in the vicinity of Elkins, West Virginia, participating in mountain maneuvers. The long hard pulls, and hand-carrying the mortars up those steep mountains, taxed the energy of everybody, but a different method of moving equipment was learned.

On August 13, 1943, D Company was detached from the battalion for overseas duty. The first contingent of the outfit was on its way. Many envied them, others were damned glad it wasn't their company, but all wished them Godspeed. Eight months were to go by before they rejoined the battalion.

The battalion (less Company D) was alerted for overseas shipment on September 30, 1943, and at once plunged into the feverish activity of its P. O. M. (Preparation for Overseas Movement.) All leaves and furloughs were cancelled, and censorship and security regulations were explained to the men.

On October 14, 1943, after Col. James's memorable "This Is It" speech, the battalion departed from Camp Pickett, Virginia, for the P. O. E. staging area at Camp Shanks, New York.

III.

STAGING AND OVERSEAS MOVEMENT

Camp Shanks

The battalion arrived at Camp Shanks on Friday, October 15, 1943. Here the unit was processed, every item of equipment checked for serviceability, and all excess personal belongings discarded.

Every officer and man was given a thorough last-minute physical inspection (which consisted of counting the number of arms, legs, and eyes a person possessed). All organizational equipment had been turned in at Pickett and new equipment was to be reissued on the other side. From this it was deduced it was not to be a "shore to shore" operation. Since the unit was alerted shortly after arrival at Shanks, it was restricted to the immediate area for the duration of its stay there. Just forty-five minutes from Broadway, and not a thing could be done about it! One man could see his home from Camp Shanks. That really hurt. All the unit censors were kept busy deleting and cutting up letters, but finally the word came.

On October 20, 1943, the battalion embarked on the *Capetown Castle*, a British ship formerly used on the South African run. The lights of New York, crossing the river on the ferry, the Red Cross doughnut girls, and the band at the docks, played on personal sentiments. Everyone was quiet and tense until the band started playing "Dixie," and then every Rebel throat in the battalion, plus a few renegade Yankees, took up the tune while marching up the gang-plank, loaded down with what seemed to be a ton of equipment.

Sea Voyage

The following day, October 21, 1943, after everyone had been assigned quarters, the *Capetown Castle* steamed out of New York harbor. Many of the men missed their last chance to look at the "Old Lady with the Torch" because the decks were cleared, but those who did, wondered when they would see her again.

The ship wasn't long at sea before boat drills were started. It was difficult to get used to wearing life belts at all times. Crap games started everywhere. Musical instruments soon appeared and close harmony on the deck at night was customary. It was good to see the old battle wagon, the *Texas*, and off on the horizon various cruisers, destroyers, and destroyer escorts. The nearest ships to the *Capetown Castle* in the convoy were the *Empress of Australia* and *Monarch of Bermuda*. One of these was loaded with American

nurses. So near and yet so far! The latrine situation was quite a problem, and many a helmet was used for a purpose other than the one for which it was intended.

Catalina flying boats and naval blimps escorted us for several days until we got well out to sea. The route followed was the southern one, long and circuitous, but safer. The constant zigzagging of the course of the ship was difficult to become accustomed to at first, and a few cases of seasickness resulted. Despite all orders prohibiting the same, rumors flew fast and furious. It was later learned, after the voyage was over, that the *U. S. S. Murphy*, one of the ships in the convoy, had collided with another ship, resulting in the *Murphy* being cut in half. The bow section was lost, but the stern section made it back to New York. The danger of submarine attack was ever present but it did not hinder one bit the harmony sessions, crap games, pseudo-rumors, and high morale.

The trip was a long one, taking in all eleven days. Company D, which had left in August, was fortunate to be sent over in the *Queen Elizabeth* which travelled alone, without escort of any kind, due to her speed: she made the trip in five days.

On November 2, 1943, the *Capetown Castle* docked at Liverpool, England, amidst the music of an English regimental band and the cheering and waving of a mixed crowd including ATS girls, soldiers, and the inevitable American MPs. Everyone lined the rails and started throwing cigarettes, chocolate, money, and sundry articles to the ATS girls, but in many cases the aim was poor and it afforded a great bit of amusement to see the mad scramble for it. Over the public address system the new arrivals were told how to behave in England and a little bit of what to expect there. One particular incident stands out: a Scottish officer wearing kilts walked down the dock, and the clamor of the catcalls, whistling, and yoo-hoos was deafening. The battalion disembarked on November 3 and entrained on the curious little English railroad cars that were to carry us to Penkridge, Staffordshire, arriving that afternoon. Part of the battalion had an opportunity to see the havoc of the blitz in Liverpool.

The battalion was finally overseas!

IV.

ENGLAND AND THE ASSAULT TRAINING CENTER

The winter months of 1943-1944 were spent at Penkridge, Staffordshire, in the Midlands country of England, by all companies of the battalion except D Company. During this time the unit was reequipped with all its organizational equipment and was kept in shape by a varied program of exercises and many hikes to nearby (?) Channock Chase. Penkridge was a sleepy English village and at first the natives didn't know quite what to make of the "Yanks," but when the civilians found out that Americans weren't all gangsters and that they might sleep safely in their beds at night, they became quite friendly and hospitable. The cultural points of interest were Penkridge Church, Litchfield Cathedral, and Hatherton Hall. For those interested in culture of a lighter vein, Civic Hall at Wolverhampton, the pubs at Stafford, Cannock, and other neighboring towns served to keep all amused. "You cawn't miss it," "Any gum, chum," and "Time please, gentlemen," became familiar phrases, and despite the protests that it was awful stuff, copious quantities of "Mild and Bitter" were consumed.

All during this period, D Company was at the famous ATC (Assault Training Center) near Ilfracombe, North Devon, acting as school troops. It was not relieved from this duty until April 1, 1944, at which time it rejoined the battalion.

From December, 1943, through April, 1944, each company of the battalion, including parts of Headquarters, participated in intensive amphibious and assault exercises at the ATC and along the western and southern coasts of England. Few who participated will forget the regimental landings, firing from LCVPs, the company assault problems, the "hedgehog" at the Assault Training Center, or the exercises Duck 1 and 2, and exercises Fox and Fabius. It was learned later that enemy "E" boats were operating in that vicinity at the time. All these problems were considered rough, but it was found later that they were child's play compared to actual combat.

The battalion was reorganized under a new Table of Organization on February 14, 1944, and the 376 men rendered surplus by this reorganization were transferred in grade to the 92nd Chemical Battalion then being formed. The members of the unit were sorry to see so many of their friends leave, and the men concerned hated to go, but it was a necessary action.

In March the battalion left Penkridge for Poole, Dorset, where it was rejoined on April 1, 1944, by D Company. All companies

participated in the AA firing at Newquay with the .50 cal. machine gun, and in intensive mortar shoots at Exmoor range in North Devon and at Canford Heath near Poole. However, despite the intensive training program carried out by the battalion during this period, all personnel had sufficient time for recreation. Most of them managed to get to London and many other places of interest on short passes. The foggy weather gave birth to the famous story that England was kept afloat by barrage balloons, but the blackouts seemed to enhance sociability rather than kill it. Many English friends were made, and two men asked for and received permission to marry English girls.

On February 15 the battalion had been attached to V Corps of the First United States Army. The battalion was further attached to the 1st Infantry Division on April 20, 1944. It was about this time that the field artillery method of observation and firing was adopted. Its advantages over the old mortar methods were soon proven in combat.

MARSHALLING AND EMBARKATION

After a little more than six months of intensive preparation following its arrival in the United Kingdom, the battalion was alerted on May 12, 1944, for what proved to be the greatest event in modern times, the invasion of Europe.

Together with elements of the 1st Infantry Division and attachments, the battalion moved into the marshalling area near Dorchester, Dorset, on May 15, 1944. The assault group of this battalion was composed of 437 officers and men and 35 vehicles. Once in the marshalling area it was held incommunicado from the outside world. The residual elements were moved to Bournemouth, Hants, at this time, to join other residual elements of the 1st Division. Later the rear echelon was moved to Falmouth for embarkation, and the initial build-up (overstrength) was moved to Tiverton for shipment so as to arrive in France and join the forward echelon on D plus 5.

The entire assault echelon was moved to Camp D-11, where it remained as a battalion until Sunday, May 28. During this time everyone, from the battalion commander to the private of the line, was briefed on the operation. Complete and comprehensive relief maps, recent aerial photographs, and the latest intelligence reports were used, so that every detail of terrain, location of enemy installations and underwater obstacles, etc., was learned with painstaking accuracy. Col. James gave what later proved to be his last talk to us, expressing complete confidence in our ability to live up to the words "Equal to the Task."

On this date the assault echelon was broken up and attached to two combat teams—the 16th and 116th. Companies A and C were attached to the 16th CT, made up of the 16th Infantry Regiment of the 1st Division and attached units; B and D Companies to the 116th CT, made up of the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Division plus attachments; and battalion Headquarters to the 1st Division Headquarters. Company A then moved to Camp D4 and D8, B to D1, C to D 10, D to D1 and battalion Headquarters to D5.

Beginning on June 1 and continuing through June 2, the entire assault echelon was moved to Weymouth harbor where it embarked on various craft, including APAs, an LSI, and LSTs. Company A was assigned to the *S. S. Henrico*, an APA; B Company to a British APA, the *Empire Javelin*; C Company to the *Empire Anvil*, a British LSI; D Company to the *U. S. S. Charles Carrol*; and Headquarters Company to the LST 83. The rear echelons of the various

companies embarked at a later date in two Liberty ships, the *Lucille Stone* and *Louis Kossuth*. After leaving the marshalling areas, the battalion commander had no further contact with any of his companies until the landing on bloody Omaha Beach on D-Day. In all, the assault groups spent ninety-six hours on the choppy waters of the Channel.

After the assault groups had embarked, it was announced that D-Day would be June 5, but later an announcement was flashed that D-Day had been postponed for twenty-four hours due to bad weather off the coast of Normandy. H.-Hour was to be at 0630 hours, June 6, 1944. It was later learned that it had to be then or be postponed at least a month. What a decision to rest on the shoulders of one man! Yet a more capable man than our Supreme Commander, General "Ike," would be difficult to find.

On the afternoon of June 5, one by one the craft slipped out from Weymouth harbor to assemble with similar groups somewhere in the Channel. The immensity of this mighty invasion fleet was awe-inspiring to everyone who participated in General Bradley's "greatest show on earth." Here was the armed might of the "decadent democracies" spread out as far as the eye could see. The dry runs were over: this was the record shoot, testing whether a free people could hope to meet and vanquish the regimented power of a brutal dictatorship. It was truly to be a "battle of the giants."

VI.

INVASION AND THE BEACHHEAD

Just before dawn on June 6, as the armada approached the coast of Normandy, bright, lightning-like flashes could be seen illuminating the whole horizon. The arrival of the mightiest convoy that man had ever assembled for a single operation was heralded by a thunderous rumble directly to the front. This was the initial air and sea bombardment laid down on Omaha Beach early that day in an effort to neutralize or soften up the enemy's prepared positions. Despite the immensity of this preparation and the gigantic losses inflicted on the enemy, the fighting forces were to learn soon enough that they would yet have to pay heavily to gain that little strip of France.

Approximately fifteen miles from shore the larger craft hove to, and at 0430 all companies transferred their men and mortars to LCVPs. As the men clambered down the cargo nets in the murky, false dawn, the Navy wished them Godspeed, and the craft shoved off from the mother ships into a choppy sea for the rendezvous areas several hundred yards offshore. Here they circled, endlessly it seemed, causing the boat teams to be wet to the skin and, in many cases, violently seasick. All during this time the promised air support passed overhead, wave after wave, and faces lifted to see it were filled with gratitude.

Battleships and cruisers fired salvos into the Nazi defenses, destroyers steamed offshore battling 88s emplaced solidly in the bluff, while smaller vessels sprayed the beach defenses with rockets. Finally the craft straightened out into waves and headed for Omaha Beach with all the speed and power they could muster. All the companies were in either the fourth or fifth wave of the assault echelon. Soon empty LCVPs passed, returning to the APA. Seeing the empty craft relieved the strain a bit, for then it was known that the first wave had managed at least to disembark. The din of the battle came closer and closer, and to the sides and rear could be seen spouts of water where enemy shells were landing. Looking through the slit in the ramp one could see the smoke, wreckage, and carnage of the beach rapidly coming closer. The staccato rattling was soon recognized as machine gun bullets impacting as the craft threaded their way through the various lanes cleared by the shore engineers but which still were often lined with underwater obstacles and mines. Finally, with a last surge of power and a lurch that sent the unprepared hitting against the bulwarks, the craft grounded, and the ramps flew down spilling men, guns, and equipment on to the

hell that was the shore of France. Many say now that it was a good thing most were "green" troops, for many a veteran "froze" that day. The constant drilling at the ATC resulted in doing automatically what was supposed to be done, without stopping to think of what was being faced. Heavy seas and the fact that some craft hung up on underwater obstacles made it impossible to make a dry landing.

The companies landed in the following order:

Companies A and D	H plus 50 minutes
Company B	H plus 90 minutes
Company C	H plus 9 hours

The LCT of the forward battalion command group was heavily shelled as it approached the shore. Enemy artillery pierced the starboard side of the craft amidship, killing T/Sgt. Cook of Headquarters Detachment and seriously wounding Col. James. The engine room was flooded and the rudder hit, leaving the craft with its dead and wounded adrift and floating out to sea. Aided by the current, the boat drifted toward shore and finally, at about 1030 hours, beached itself under the protection of a steep cliff, where, under covering fire from the craft, the wounded were transferred to shore. Col. James was evacuated to England later that day in a hospital ship. Major Johnson (then Captain), being the senior officer ashore, took command of the assault echelon until the rear echelon arrived.

Company A, in support of the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, 1st Division, landed at Easy Red Beach. Several mortars and carts were carried away by the heavy seas. After a hard struggle, the equipment was rescued and the company remained on the beach the entire morning, subjected to devastating machine gun fire which made it impossible to move. The company commander, Captain Moundres, was severely wounded while making his way through the surf to the beach. First Lt. James P. Panas, who had already rescued a wounded doughboy from the water, ran back across the beach and, under heavy enemy machine gun, artillery, and mortar fire, carried his wounded company commander ashore. Captain Moundres died as the result of his wounds, so Lt. Panas, being now the senior officer, took command of the company, reorganized the platoons, and got them safely off the beach into firing positions along the slope of the

bluff. For his leadership and gallantry in action, Lt. Panas was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. The only enlisted man lost by A Company on the beach was Pvt. George Baumgartner who was killed when an enemy artillery shell exploded near him. Pvt. Kidwell distinguished himself by retrieving several men being carried away by the rising water, giving them first aid in complete disregard for his personal safety and in spite of a wound he himself had suffered. Kidwell was later awarded the DSC for his gallantry and self-sacrifice.

After the infantry had broken through the beach defenses, the platoons took up positions by a tank trap in a field about 500 yards in from the beach. The enemy had direct observation on these positions and subjected the company to a severe shelling.

B Company's mission was to land on Dog Green Beach and provide direct support for the 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry. Because the water obstacles had not been cleared and the beach was under heavy mortar, small arms, and antillery fire, the control boat ordered the wave to land, instead, on Easy Green, the left flank of Omaha Beach. As the boats were running along parallel to the beach, about 1,000 yards offshore, two of the LCVPs were hit and disabled by artillery. Despite an extremely heavy sea and the continual harrassing fire from enemy machine guns and other direct-fire weapons, all personnel and equipment were safely transferred to an empty LCT. At approximately 0930 hours the entire wave was safely beached. Here the company was reorganized and moved inland about 100 yards.

At this time only a small section of the beach was held by American troops, and enemy fire was still inflicting heavy casualties. It was not until late in the afternoon that part of the company was able to move to a bluff overlooking the beach and fire its first mission. The first round was fired by Sgt. Florio's squad at 1700 hours at a machine gun nest in the woods near St. Laurent-sur-Mer. Later in the evening it was found that nine men and two officers were missing; otherwise the company was intact. It was learned later that Lt. Walton, Cpl. Grob, and Pvt. Skaeski died of wounds received on the beach.

In order to accomplish its mission, the company was forced to advance through one of the uncleared mine fields found everywhere about the beach. During this move Pfc. Rone was injured by an anti-personnel mine, and later died.

The wave containing C Company's LCVPs bore in towards the beach on schedule, but since the infantry was still pinned down within a few yards of the water, the control boat moved them back to sea, where they rendezvoused. Another attempt was made at 1000 hours, and still another at 1200 hours, the latter being met by machine gun fire as it reached the beach. As a last measure the wave moved down the beach to the right of Dog Red, where a landing was successfully completed at 1500 hours, under heavy machine gun and mortar fire. The platoons, separately attached to battalions of the 16th Infantry, 1st Division, moved along the beach to their sector and initially set up 200 yards, inland. Mines and sniper fire were ever-present dangers and again the medics distinguished themselves when Sgt. Linnea Freda worked for hours treating and evacuating wounded with complete disregard for his own safety. He was later awarded the Silver Star.

At 0720, D Company's craft beached on Easy Green in support of the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry, under an incessant hail of machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. Of necessity the boat teams were landed in water up to their waists, and the precaution that had been taken to attach inflated life belts to the carts proved a wise one. Machine gun bullets ripped into the belts on several of the carts, however, deflating them and causing the carts to sink. Sgt. Raymond Nicoli, T/5 Felice Savino, Pvt. McLaren, and Pvt. Benton L. Porter were wounded while rescuing this equipment and refused medical aid until this was accomplished. These men were justly awarded the DSC for their bravery. The preceding wave of infantry were lying only a few yards from the water, pinned down by the fire raking the beach. Lt. Mohrfeld, platoon leader, 2nd platoon, was hit within a few minutes by machine gun fire and died shortly thereafter. Lt. Costello assumed command of the platoon and, knowing that to linger on the beach was certain death, reorganized the squads and infiltrated them off the beach amidst the heavy fire impacting there. Lt. Costello later received the Silver Star for his gallantry. Captain Gaffney, company commander, was instantly killed when the craft in which he was riding struck a mine. Lt. Marshall, platoon leader, 1st platoon, took over command. The bravery of the medics in taking care of the wounded under fire was again proven by T/5's White and Marrin.

Number four mortar of the 1st platoon, Sgt. Miller's squad, fired two rounds of HE, from the initial landing place, at a machine gun

emplacement 500 yards away. Lt. Sabbione directed the fire from the mortar position. Although the target was at too close a range to hit, it is believed that these were the first rounds of the battalion fired on the continent of Europe.

C Company changed positions three times after the initial landing on Easy Green. One of these movements involved a hand-carry of all equipment across a waist-deep, muddy marsh under fire. At 2200 hours the company moved northwest along a sea wall 800 yards inland through les Moulins to St. Laurent-sur-Mer, arriving at 2400 hours. Here the company dug-in for the night and concealed its equipment.

All the assault vehicles of A Company were landed safely later that day, and those of C and D Companies were also landed with the loss of only one jeep apiece. B Company was unfortunate enough to have one of the vehicle personnel killed and two others and an officer wounded. Only one B Company jeep was landed, although another was later salvaged: all other vehicles were lost.

The next day A Company passed through Colleville-sur-Mer and made slow but certain gains, supporting the infantry whenever called upon. On D plus 3 the company was detached from the 16th Infantry, 1st Division, and attached to the 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry, 2nd Division.

The nights were still cold, strange, and restless; the tension was felt by everyone. The sight of new units passing on the road gave everyone a sense of exhilaration.

The trek inland was slow and exhausting. C Company moved through Colleville-sur-Mer and St. Honorine des Pertes, still supporting the 1st Division. This company fired its first rounds on D plus 2 at enemy positions near Fosseer Sancy. On D plus 3 the attachment was changed to the 2nd Division. At this time Lt. Robert Mann and his platoon accomplished a magnificent feat. Under enemy observation and sniper fire, Lt. Mann led his platoon down a steep hill, over an open field, and across a creek, in order to furnish the infantry with the close support it so badly needed. It was necessary to wade the creek and hand-carry all equipment. The doughs were so happy to have the 4.2s that they lent a helping hand and later saw that the platoon was supplied with rations.

By June 10 the town of Trevieres was finally cleared, after being subjected to a heavy shelling by this company. On June 12 an OP party, consisting of Lt. Mann, Cpl. Roach, and Pfc. Jones and

Harris, accompanying an assault company, was pinned down for two hours and then overrun by a strong German counterattack. During this engagement the popular Lt. Mann was killed, Roach and Jones captured, and Harris luckily managed to escape. Two days later Roach escaped, but Jones remained a prisoner until the Allied armies overran Germany. Lt. Mann was awarded the Bronze Star posthumously for gallantry in action, leadership, and courage.

June 14 (D plus 8) found C Company in position near Les Aieres facing Hill 192, when the enemy repulsed an attack by the 2nd Division to take the hill.

On June 9, B Company, seriously handicapped by the loss of its vehicles, acquired two 6 x 6 trucks from the field artillery. The acquisition of these vehicles solved the immediate transportation difficulties. At the time, B Company was supporting the 5th Ranger Battalion in an attack to clear out the coast fortifications. Elements of the 29th Division attacked St. Marguerite d'Elle on June 12, with preparation fires from B Company in conjunction with the artillery. On June 13 the company moved to Couvains and was registered in for the first time by an artillery observation plane. By this time the artillery had come to know and respect the power of the 4.2 mortar, particularly because of the better support it could give the infantry in the hedgerow terrain. After having been reattached to the 116th Infantry, B Company assisted in the attack on Bretel Woods. The attack lasted two days, with the fanatic resistance ending on June 14. The company fired a total of 560 rounds of HE and 174 rounds of WP during the course of this operation—a record which stood for several weeks.

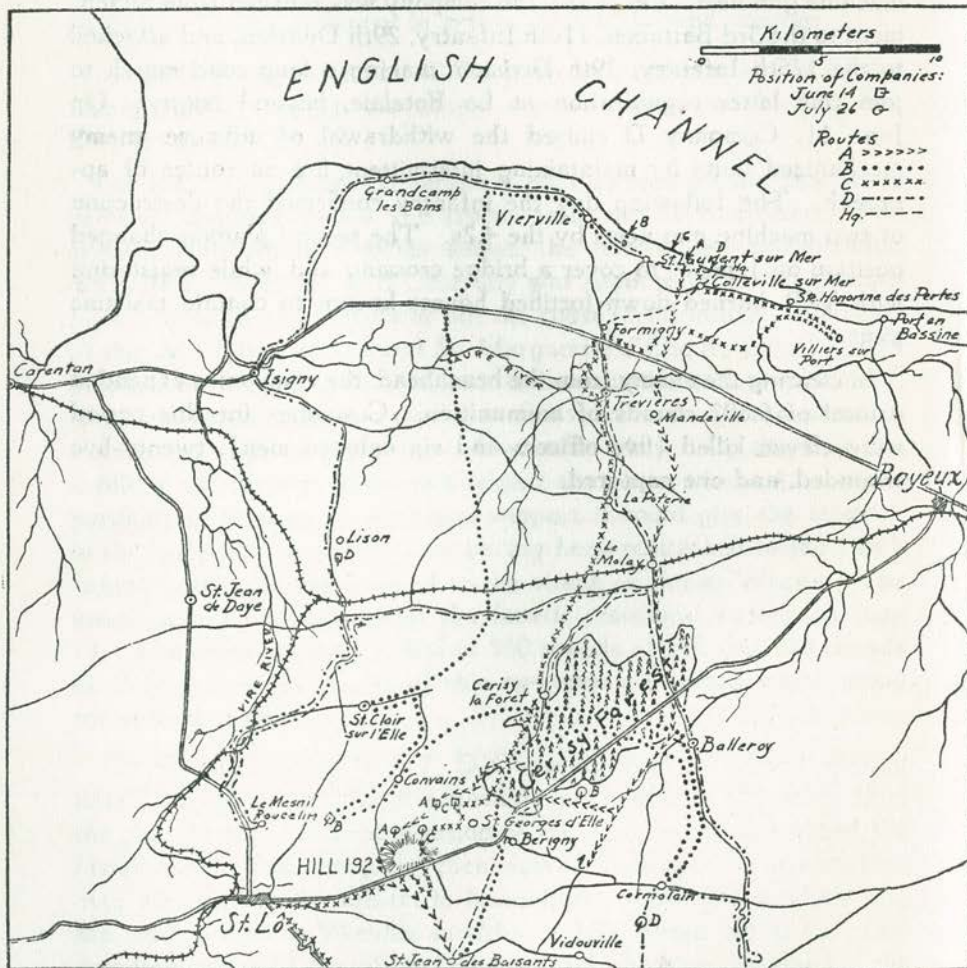
On the morning of June 7, D Company fired its second mission near St. Laurent-sur-Mer at a machine gun nest only 800 yards from the gun position. A concentration of HE completely neutralized the installation. The company then moved northwest, cross-country over difficult terrain, subject to intermittent sniper and machine gun fire, and arrived at Vierville-sur-Mer at 1600 hours, where the commanding officer of the 116th Infantry, 29th Division, assigned it the task of providing security fire.

It was here that the company was subjected to one of the heaviest shellings it ever experienced. Several batteries of enemy 150mm artillery, firing from the vicinity of Pont de Hoe, pounded the center of town and the road leading to the beach. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the regimental OP group and on a field artillery

battalion coming from the beach. An ammunition dump was blown up, scattering small arms ammunition in all directions. This action caused a withdrawal from the town along the highway.

At 0530 hours, on June 8, D Company aided in the bloody attack on Grand Champs les Bains and was credited with another enemy machine gun nest. On June 9 the company was relieved from attachment to the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry, 29th Division, and attached to the 175th Infantry, 29th Division, making a long road march to join this latter organization at La Fotelaie, beyond Isigny. On June 11, Company D caused the withdrawal of advance enemy mechanized units by maintaining intermittent fire on routes of approach. The following day the infantry confirmed the destruction of two machine gun nests by the 4.2s. The second platoon changed position on June 14 to cover a bridge crossing and, while registering with WP, burned down fortified houses known to contain machine guns.

In clearing the enemy from the beachhead, the companies expended a total of 6,807 rounds of ammunition. Casualties for this period were eleven killed (five officers and six enlisted men), twenty-five wounded, and one captured.



VII.

THE BATTLE OF THE HEDGEROWS

The long, slow, bloody battle of the hedgerows, which finally brought the infantry to Hill 192 and St. Lo, lasted from June 14, when the beachhead was secured, to the 26th of July, when the attack from Hill 192 to St. Lo was launched. By this time the Germans had built up sufficient strength to halt V Corps' advance for a while. Progress was measured by hedgerows, and this period of fighting was probably the most bitter of the entire European campaign.

Counterattacks were heavy, fierce, and numerous in the sectors of all companies between the dates of June 14 and July 26. The units to which some of the companies were attached were confronted with picked paratroop units, but these suffered such extremely heavy casualties from American mortar and artillery fire that one division with two-thirds of its strength casualties, had to be replaced.

Since this was essentially a dairy country, many cattle were killed, and in the hot June and July sun the odor soon became almost unbearable. The natives sold cider or a highly volatile brand of poison called "Calvados," and often provided a chicken or eggs (albeit unwittingly once or twice).

The rear echelon of the battalion embarked in two Liberty ships on June 14 from England and dropped anchor about two and a half miles off Omaha Beach the following day. During the night Jerry planes came over and bombed. The AA guns on each ship, and from shore installations, put up a tremendous barrage of flak, and fragments falling on the decks sounded like an ominous hailstorm. Contact was established on June 16 with the advance CP, and the rear echelon moved inland near Trevieres, France, where it remained for almost five weeks. Mess and ammo trucks were dispatched to the companies soon after arrival.

Nightly schedules of harassing fire were almost a certainty for A Company during this period. It was here that the phrase "Who is harassing whom?" was born. Souvenir hunting began about this time, despite the fact that all companies were almost continuously under fire of some sort. During one such barrage, A Company's Pvt. Bill Kaminsky jumped into what he believed to be a foxhole, but which turned out to be a straddle trench, much to his discomfort. This company was often in one position for many days at a time waiting for the infantry to take the stubbornly defended hedgerows before moving forward. Hardly a day passed that HE or WP missions were not fired.

On June 16, the regimental commander of the 9th Infantry commended the company commander of A Company for the effectiveness of a smokescreen which the company had laid in support of the crossing of the La Droine River. On this date also, the regimental commander of the 116th Infantry instructed his battalion commanders to call on the 4.2s as much as possible for close support because they could get twice the fire of the artillery out in the same amount of time.

At the beginning of this period, June 16, C Company, while supporting the 2nd Infantry Division, went into a static position facing Hill 192. This was a long high ridge, held by the Germans, which blocked the Allied advance along the all important St. Lo-Bayeux highway. From this hill, the enemy had excellent observation and pounded the troops facing them incessantly with artillery and mortars. Counterattacks in this sector were heavy and fierce during this period and C Company did much to break them up by firing WP and HE. The company was credited with stopping several of these attacks unassisted.

During June 15 and June 16, D Company did considerable effective firing in the vicinity of Moon-Sur-Elle. A series of enemy strong points consisting of a road block, a fortified house, and heavy machine guns south of the town were holding up the advance of the 175th Infantry, 29th Division. These positions were so well concealed by the terrain and foliage that the forward observer and his party, in order to observe and pin point the fire, took a squad of infantry as security and infiltrated 200 yards ahead of the infantry outpost to within 45 yards of the enemy; they were so close, in fact, that they could hear the enemy talking. After the registration was completed the enemy started throwing hand grenades at the party, so they withdrew to high ground and covered the area with mortar fire. The infantry, taking advantage of this concentrated shelling, moved in as the fire was lifted and succeeded in securing the ground.

D Company had an opportunity to learn the effect of its firing firsthand on June 17. An infantry patrol reconnoitering the town of La Meauffe was badly cut up by enemy fire coming from emplacements and buildings near the edge of town. Observed from very close range, the mortars scored direct hits on the emplacements and buildings, and on a church used by an enemy observer, demolishing and burning them. Immediately on "cease fire," four of the enemy surrendered, and upon interrogation by the infantry S-3 they stated that the shells landed directly in the emplacements, killing twenty-

seven that they saw. The WP had a terrific effect on the morale of the troops, causing them to evacuate the town. On this date three members of a forward observation party were killed by direct fire from enemy artillery. They were 2nd Lt. Giles B. Harris, Cpl. Thomas H. Ward, and Pvt. John J. Knott.

First Army orders were received on June 17 which listed the 81st Chemical Battalion as one of the units eligible for unit citation for extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in the initial landing on the coast of France.

On June 18 and June 19, after the many days of shuttling and hand-hauling, the companies received the remainder of their vehicles with great cheer. About this time, men began to be sent back to the battalion rear for two-day rests and cleanups. Badly-needed replacement officers and men joined the companies at this time.

Pvt. Domenic Sanna of D Company was killed on June 18, when two jeeps, carrying up the company's first batch of mail and a load of ammunition, took a wrong turn and ran into a strong enemy party. Both jeeps had to be abandoned, but several Germans were killed and wounded in the fight.

To D Company the name "88 alley" has a particular significance. On June 19, while attached to the 175th Infantry, 29th Division, the company moved up to the vicinity of Le Mesnil-Roulexin to effect the relief of the 115th Infantry which had been cut off by the enemy. The FO party had left the night before with an infantry patrol and at 0230 hours, as one platoon moved up with the infantry, the route of approach was shelled incessantly. German dead lined the roads and hedgerows where a bicycle company had been ambushed by the 115th, but before the night ended there were many American dead there also. Miraculously the mortar men escaped death, but shells were landing so close that several ear drums were broken. A smoke mission was fired from this advanced position, with the infantry moving in under cover of the screen to take the town that day.

On June 19 Lts. Andrew Z. Baker, Company C, Charles S. Gardner and Francis Fisher, Company A, were wounded by artillery fire while at the observation post; all by one shellburst. Lt. Fisher had only joined the company about five hours before.

B Company, attached to the 29th Division, fired a highly successful smoke mission on June 20, west of Couvains, to cover the withdrawal of friendly tanks. The following day a twenty-five minute concentration from its mortars was credited with stopping a company

of enemy infantry attacking up a draw near the gun position. It was confirmed by the infantry that B Company had definitely knocked out an 88 and killed over twenty Germans on this day.

On the 29th of June, the S-3 of the 115th Infantry to which B Company was attached informed Captain Levy that prisoners had told interrogators they had come to dread the devastating effects of the heavy mortars. The next day the commanding officer of the 175th Infantry issued instructions that all targets within range of the 4.2s be assigned to them. This decision was prompted by reports from more prisoners taken by the 175th regarding the heavy casualties inflicted on their personnel by the heavy mortars, and also by the comparative weakness of artillery in the hedgerow terrain.

By now the 3rd Armored Division had opened its drive along the roads leading to St. Lo. On being detached from the 29th Division, the commanding officer of B Company was presented with the Bronze Star for the meritorious manner in which his company had carried out the support of the various combat teams of the division.

On July 1, D Company was relieved from attachment to the 197th Field Artillery Battalion, 30th Division, XIX Corps, and left La Fotelaie. It then travelled thirty-two miles across the front to take up positions near Caumont where it was attached to the 33rd Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Division, V Corps. This sector was the foremost point on the Allied front at the time, sticking out like a finger into enemy territory and receiving fire from both flanks and front. The company took up positions behind a hill which quickly and justly earned the name "Purple Heart Hill." Despite the defilade, Jerry constantly sought to shell the position with fire from high angle artillery, mortars, and "screaming meemies." During one such barrage T/5 Fix was killed and T/5 White was wounded while attempting to give him first aid.

On the Fourth of July, at exactly 1200 hours, all companies fired one round from each gun as a part of the great Independence Day Shoot along the whole front. D Company also celebrated the Fourth of July by knocking out an entire platoon of German mortars. That night, at the Caumont "hot spot," D Company's sector was subjected to a strong counterattack, preceded by an artillery, mortar, and Nebelwerfer-preparation. The "Fighting First," supported by the 4.2s and other weapons, managed to beat Jerry off, despite the terrific shelling. Thanks to deep foxholes and overhead cover the casualties were few.

By July 7, most of the companies had made a big advance in centralizing control of their firing through the use of Fire Direction Centers. Company A's FDC was almost put out of existence several days later when a direct hit was made on the dugout it was occupying, closing up the entrance and scattering equipment and personnel. Several casualties were inflicted on the company at this time.

The great attack on Hill 192, the gateway to St. Lo, was begun by the 2nd Division on the 11th of July. The mortars of this battalion pounded the hill and adjacent environs with a total of 4,832 rounds. C Company alone pumped out 3,195 rounds in 14 hours and company A fired more than 500 rounds. Intelligence later reported that WP concentrations were so heavy that the enemy was forced to don their gas masks for protection against the acrid smoke.

C Company began firing at 0540 hours and fired almost continuously throughout the day. Probably the outstanding achievement was the smokescreen laid to prevent German observation on the important village of St. Georges D'Elle. The screen, maintained for almost the entire day, was considered by those who observed it, to be a model for the offensive employment of a smokescreen. HE, used to blast strong points and enemy personnel, did a magnificent job in keeping the enemy from forming for counterattacks. Considerable counterbattery fire was received in the mortar position during the operation.

The 19th Field Artillery Battalion, 5th Division, relieved the 33rd Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Division, on July 13 at Caumont, but D Company remained at the hot spot in support of this new unit, which had never been committed. The following day Pfc. Robert Hoerter was seriously wounded and T/5 Leonard Topley and Pvt. George Jelush were wounded slightly on Purple Heart Hill. Several direct hits on the dugouts used as an OP buried Lt. Costello, Cpl. George New, and Pvt. Ramirez under a mass of logs, sandbags, and debris. All miraculously escaped injury.

This company left Caumont on July 22, and took up positions at Courmolain, attached to the 50th Field Artillery Battalion, 5th Division, where it fired several missions in the vicinity of La Vacqurie and burned down the town of Bieville, an enemy strong point. It remained there until July 26, when the British took over that sector.

Many observers rave about their "dream shots." Captain Panas often talked about his, which occurred while registering on a typical red-roofed Normandy farmhouse, on the south side of the St. Lo

road, during July 24. The A Company commander placed a shell on the roof of the house, and to check the lay of the guns fired another round. The second round went through the hole in the roof made by the previous shell, and exploded inside!

On July 25, all in the vicinity watched in amazement the all-out bombing of St. Lo, as wave after wave of Allied bombers pounded the city for hours. Then came the long awaited breakthrough at St. Lo, just to C Company's right flank. The next day, July 26, the 2nd Division jumped off from Hill 192, with the 4.2s closely following, firing at every opportunity.

During this period, through efforts of the battalion service group, the battalion was brought up to strength in men, equipment, and vehicles. Although M6 propellant was critical, the companies were kept well supplied. The great amount of breakage of mortar parts did not seriously interfere with the firing, because of the rapidity of repair and replacement of these needed parts by headquarters service personnel. The battalion fired a total of 26,874 rounds by the close of this period.

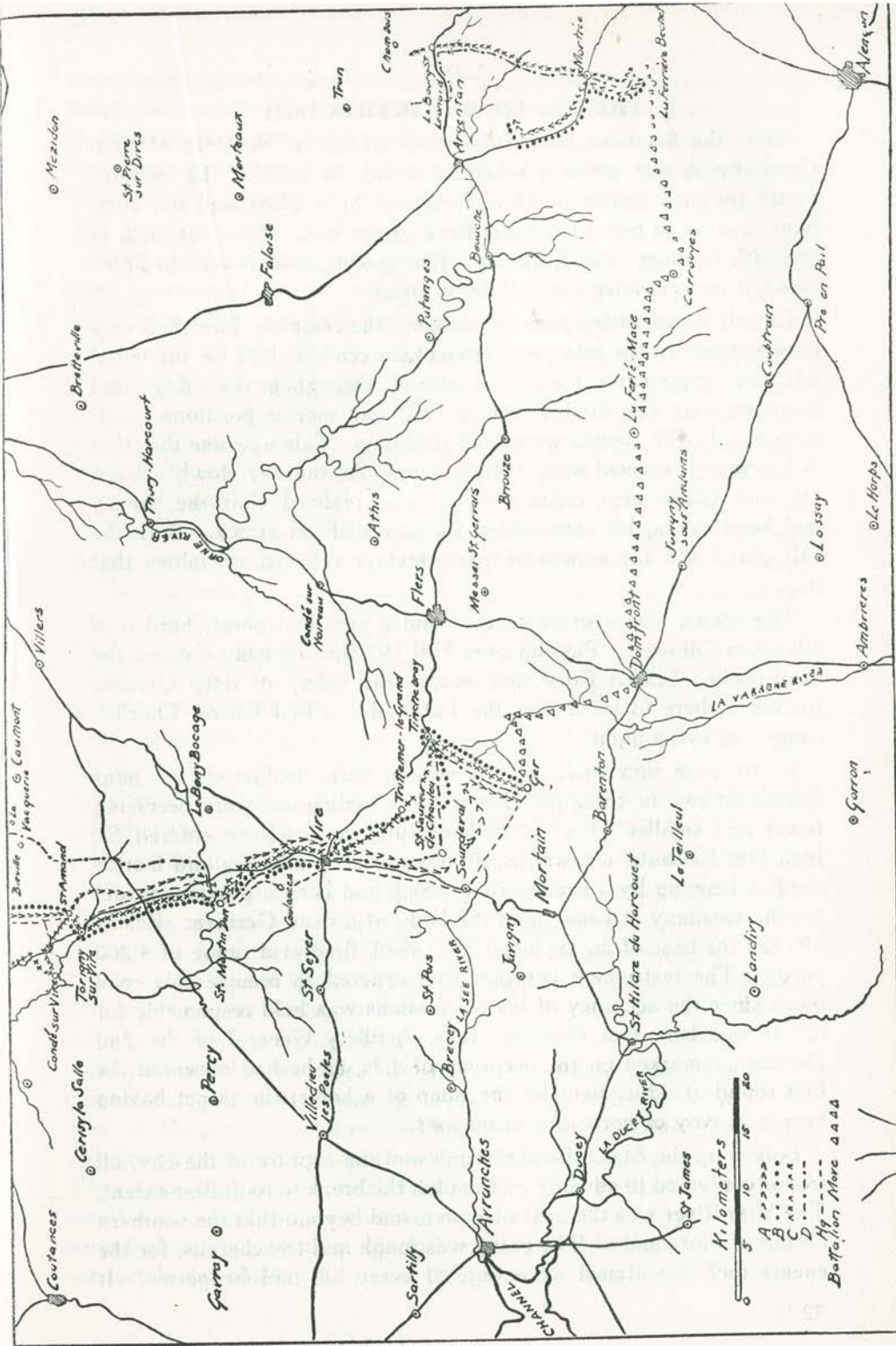
The Silver Star for gallantry in action on D-Day was awarded, during this period, to the following-named officers and enlisted men:

CAPTAIN W. JOHNSON.....	Bn. Hq.
LT. CHRISTOPHER H. COSTELLO.....	D Company
T/4 CHARLES R. DYKENS.....	A "
CPL. RAYMOND D. LITTLE.....	A "
PFC. HOYT D. ANDERSON.....	A "
T/5 KENNETH L. WHITE.....	Med. Det.

And the Bronze Star to:

LT. JAMES P. PANAS.....	A Company
LT. JOHN F. RIDDLE.....	Bn. Hq.

for meritorious achievement on D-Day.



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.

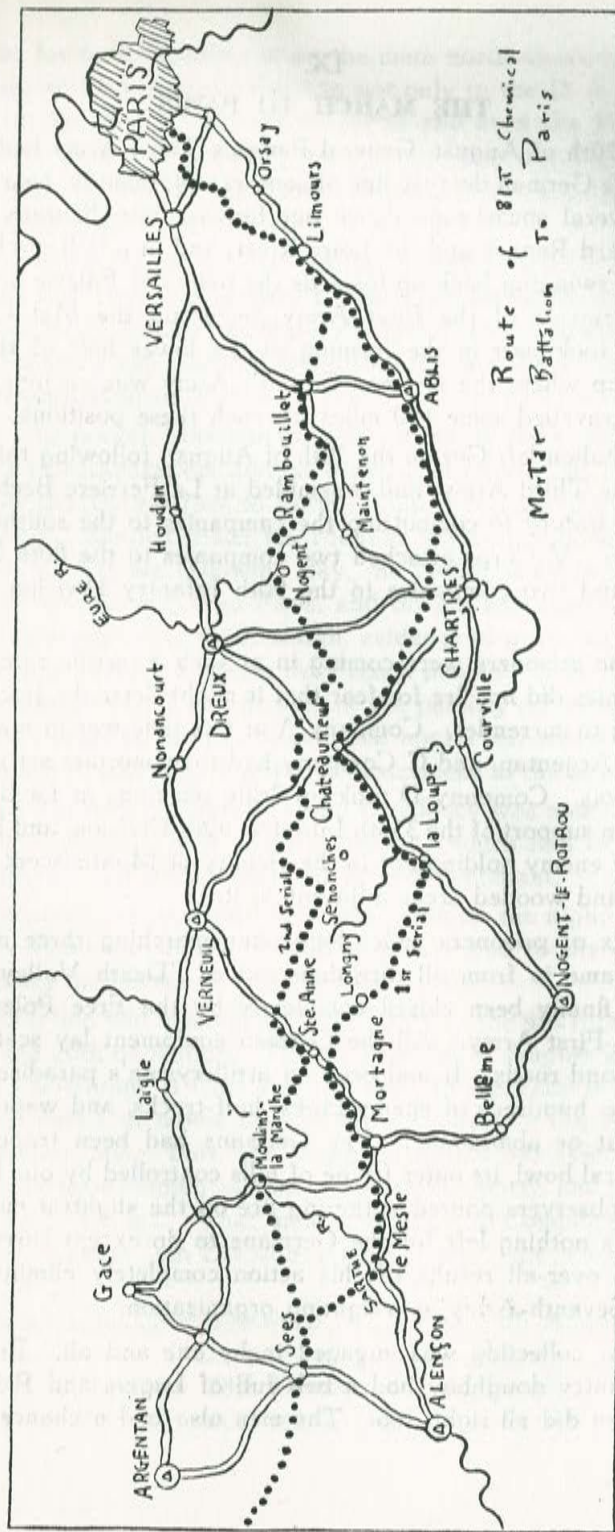
B Company had an unfortunate incident occur while attached to the 38th Infantry, 2nd Division. On August 13, early in the morning, the kitchen jeep, hauling up breakfast and mail, was lost. The mess personnel had taken a wrong turn, found themselves in enemy territory, and were forced to abandon the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

Map Scale

1: 1,000,000 (approx.)



Albt

AMIENS

Nestlé

Montdidier

Bretrève

Beauvais

Clermont

Chantilly

Seignolles

Ermenviller

Avilly-sous-Bois

Meaux

PARIS

SEINE

REIMS

Valenciennes

Cambrai

Solismes

Hautmont

Moubeuge

Mons

Charleroy

Namur

Meuse R.

AACHEN

Vervier

Malmedy

St. Vith

Schöenberg

Prüm

Neuerberg

Houffalize

Wiltz

Libramont

Bastogne

Palisaul

Gertrix

Vitry

Bouillon

Rossignol

Arlon

Luxembourg

Mersch

Ettelbruck

Diekirch

Echternach

Trier

Wasserbrillig

Saarburg

Remich

Esch

Thionville

Fontoy

Metz

Sageltern

Company Routes

A

B

C

D

HQ.

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 Compiègne 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 cross-road. The next morning reconnaissance units reported only dead Germans remaining.

After passing through Le Bourget airport, Louveres, Vemars, Pontarmé, Chaumont, Villeneuve sur Verberie, Mercière aux Bois, many times just an hour or two after the enemy, D Company also arrived at the Compiègne 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 Muno on September 7. Near Ros-singnel, 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.

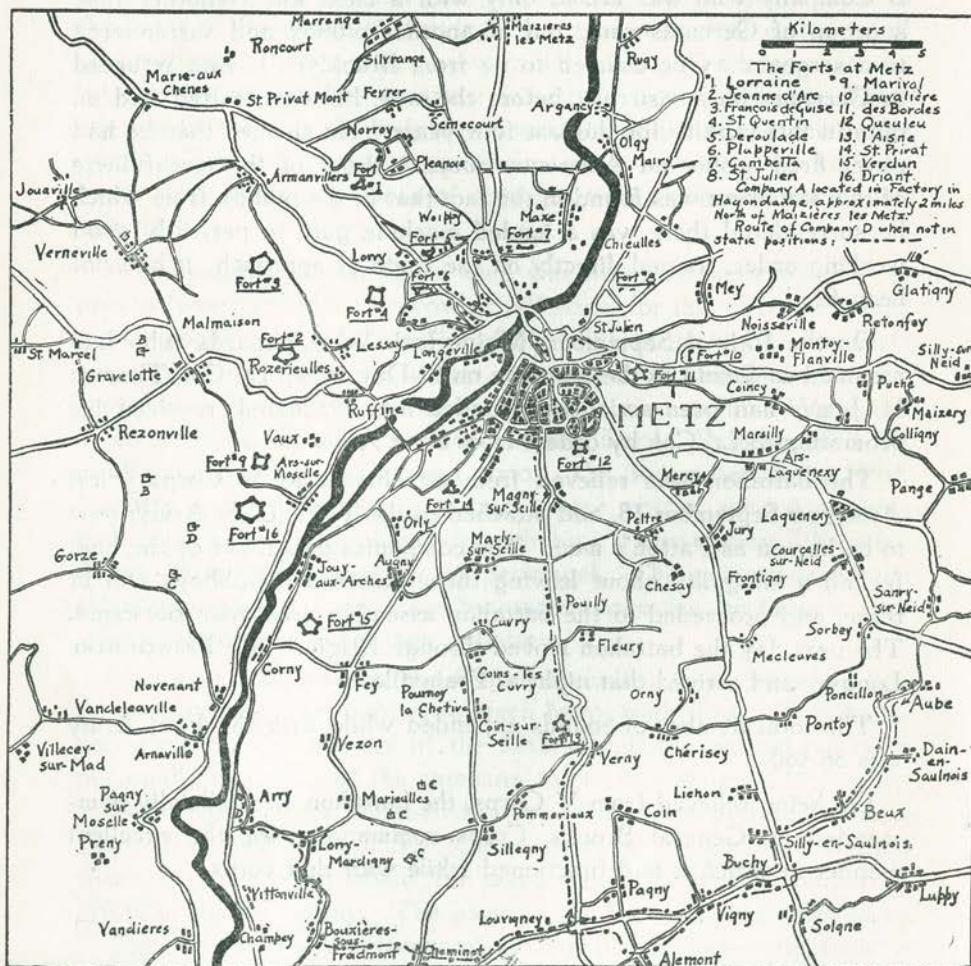
Many strange things happened to the companies during their first few days in Germany. One day thirty-six Germans, the entire complement of a pillbox, surrendered to Pfc. Sklaraw, a medic from B Company who was armed only with a mess kit. Another time a group of Germans came out of another pillbox and 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 interdiction, 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 guerrel

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 Ebbersviller. 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.

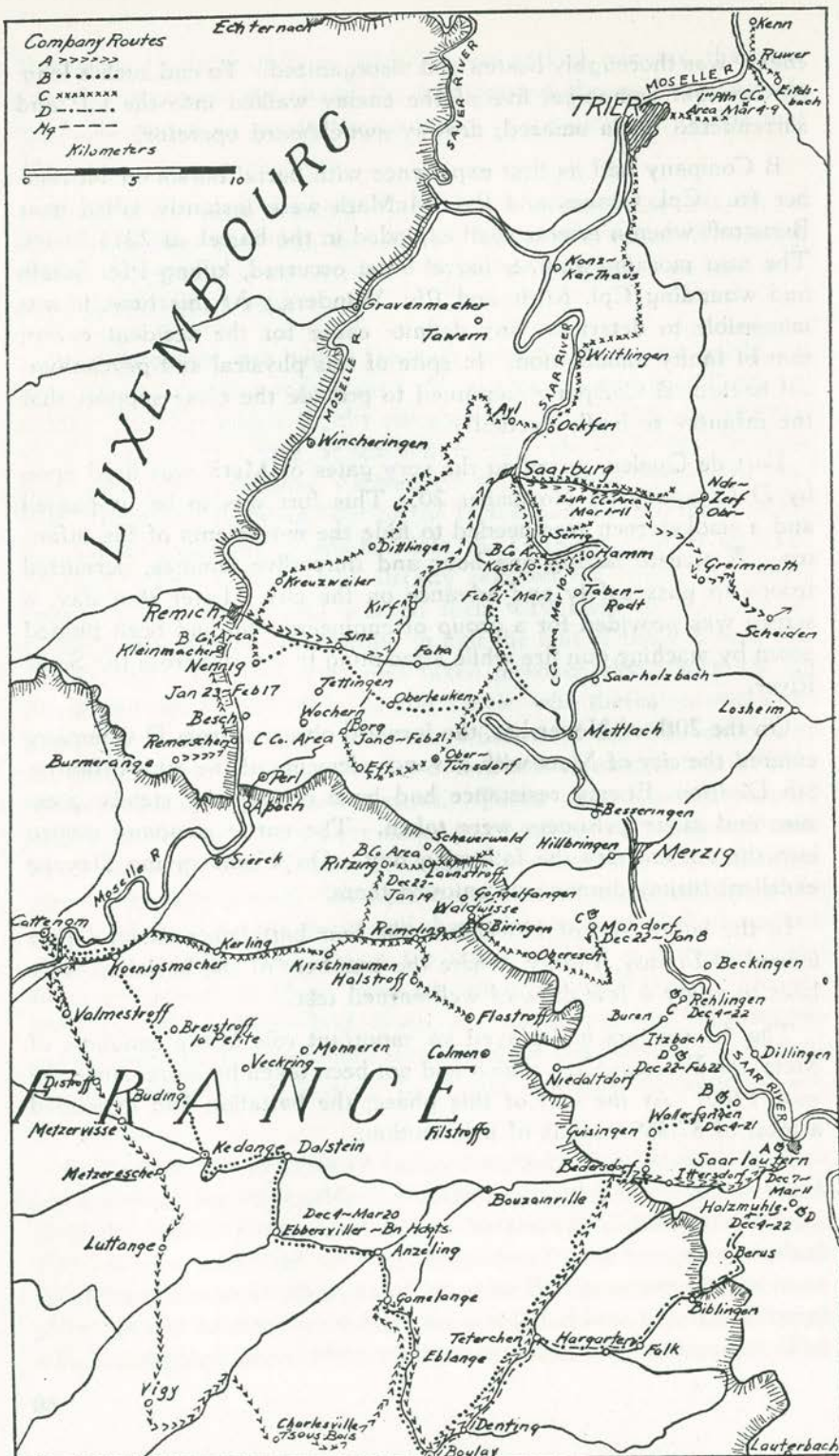
B Company had its first experience with barrel bursts on November 16. Cpl. Graves and Pvt. McMath were instantly killed near Breistroff when a mortar shell exploded in the barrel, at 2315 hours. The next morning another barrel burst occurred, killing Pfc. Scarfo and wounding Cpl. Kittle and Pfc. Winders. 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.



XII.

TAKING AND HOLDING THE SAAR VALLEY

With the fall of Metz, Patton's Third Army continued to advance from the Moselle River across Lorraine to the German frontier and into the important Saar Basin. In the initial phases of the operation to reach the Saar River, the infantry captured Boulay and drove north to outflank the Maginot Line. The initial moves—the same day-after-day sequence of attack, advance and hold—which this time brought our infantry to the banks of the Saar, were similar to the moves made by our troops in the battles through Normandy.

Company A, attached to the 399th Infantry, 95th Division, found itself, on November 24, in Gomelange, located on the flooded Neisse River. Elements of the Maginot Line were located on the eastern banks of the Neisse. Resistance was rapidly overcome, and missions were limited to harassing fires on the town of Valmunster, and HE missions against pillboxes and enemy personnel digging in near Valmunster.

In this period, B Company played a more significant part than in any other operation in which it had engaged since the Battle of the Hedgerows. The company moved, on November 25, in support of the 377th Infantry, 95th Division, which was fighting near Boulay sur Moselle. From this time, until the 3rd of December, when the company moved to the west bank of the Saar, the old familiar pattern of the Normandy breakthrough was repeated. Resistance stiffened, for a few days, while the Germans withdrew the main body of their troops across the Saar. B Company remained in a static position in Guisingen until this resistance was crushed. A few days later, however, in Niederlimberg (a suburb of Wallerfangen), the company began the long unceasing effort to keep its mortars firing day and night in support of the infantry fighting a bitter, violent battle for Dillingen and a bridgehead across the Saar.

Meanwhile, C Company continued to support the 10th Armored's drive. At this time, Lt. Andrew Baker and Cpl. Frank Ferrara distinguished themselves by crawling forward to a knocked-out tank under fire, dragging several wounded tankers from inside, and pulling them to safety. Both received the Silver Star for their gallantry in this action. A decoration came to Lt. Baker from the enemy side as well, for while at an OP a cry for help was heard; crawling forward to investigate, Lt. Baker found a German FO, also a 1st Lt., seriously wounded. Baker dragged the wounded officer to the safety of the

American lines and the grateful German presented him with his own Iron Cross.

The platoons continued to fire many missions, saving the armor much trouble on the flanks. Many non-battle casualties were evacuated at this time, due to the extremely rigorous weather conditions. Trench foot and colds ran right through the company, although all men made every effort to combat these menaces.

Company C was attached to the 90th Infantry Division on November 26. The company left the 10th Armored Division and moved into position south of the tankers, on the Saar River. Shortly after this, the company was shocked to learn of the death of Captain Gates, company commander, who was accidentally killed by a gunshot wound. First Lt. Lee H. Boyer, executive officer, assumed command of the company.

Metz was the jumping-off place for D Company in the attack on the Saar Valley. On November 24, the company joined the 378th Infantry, 95th Division, and advanced using the leapfrog system once more. The enemy again adopted a hit-and-run defense, subjecting the company to intense fire along the route of advance. Fire was so heavy on two towns, Narbfontaine and Niedervisse, that it was necessary to evacuate the ammunition vehicles. The towns of Coume and Hargarten were fired upon and occupied, and the towns of Dalem, Varize, and Denting were entered without incident, after being reduced by the infantry. The towns of Falck, Remering Berweiler, and Sauleavon fell before the advancing doughboys.

In the town of Falck, on November 28, the 1st platoon of D Company acted as infantry, beating off fierce counterattacks from the hills dominating the towns. Enemy fire became so intense that the company withdrew from Falck. Later on in the day a direct hit was scored on one of the company's ammunition jeeps in Saule. Two men were slightly injured, but more casualties were averted by the courage of Pvt. Myrick, who kept the fire under control with a fire extinguisher; meanwhile the enemy continued shelling.

Company A advanced through Boulay to Momerstroff, on November 28, where it was attached to the 377th Infantry. The next day, at 1540, the company entered Germany for the second time, near the town of Ittersdorf, west of Saarlautern. Here the company had a noisy reception when shells landed in a field next to the OP, a bulldozer set off a mine at a road intersection, and a barracks thirty feet from the OP blew up. Missions were confined to harassing fires on Felsburg, the roads leading to the town, and high ground above it.

Company B was in position at Niederlimberg, on December 5, in support of the 358th Infantry, 90th Division, which was preparing to make an assault crossing of the Saar River. At 0430 hours, December 6, the infantry crossed and attacked the towns of Dillingen and Pachten. At daybreak the enemy laid a heavy concentration of artillery on the footbridge, which was being screened by a smoke generator company, making it impossible for the "smoke" men to maintain the screen. At 1130 hours, B Company was called upon to take up this screen, and under difficult conditions maintained it until dark that night. The ground was extremely marshy and more than one mortar could seldom be kept in action at a time. Since this footbridge was the only one in use, the others being under extremely heavy shell fire, the success of the crossing was attributed in no small measure to the 4.2 mortars. During that day of firing, the company expended 86 rounds of HE and 1,070 rounds of WP.

Company C, meanwhile, was moved towards the Saar and took up positions in Buren and Itzbach to support the north flank of an assault crossing of the river to be made by the 90th Division. In order to give closer support, the platoons moved up to the town of Rehlingen, on the very banks of the river. The road to Rehlingen was "hot," but no hotter than the town itself. The enemy had excellent observation on all of Rehlingen and movement within the town had to be kept to a minimum. It was found necessary to keep all but a few of the jeeps in Buren and haul up ammunition at night, running the gauntlet by day whenever necessary. The FDC was maintained in Buren with OPs established across the Saar.

By December 1, D Company was again firing on German soil in the attack on the town of Bristen, Germany. Alt-Forweiler, Neu-Forweiler and Holzmuhle were next on the list of fiercely contested German towns. From Neu-Forweiler, the company fired a smoke-screen in support of the 378th Infantry attacking Lisdorf on the western bank of the Saar. Holzmuhle, like every other town along the Saar in this sector, proved to be no vacation spot. The company remained in firing position in this town from December 4 to December 22, 1944, and every day of its stay it was subjected, at irregular intervals, to shellings from across the river. Near misses in the area caused many flat tires and shrapnel holes in the vehicles.

On December 5, the infantry crossed the river to Ens Dorf, on the east bank, and the initial assault units moved out in assault boats under cover of darkness without preparatory artillery fire. Lt. Costello, FO, and Pfc. Leslie Palmer, with the assault company, were

stranded in Enseldorf for three days when enemy artillery knocked out the only bridge. Street fighting and tank attacks raged in Enseldorf all during that period. Enemy strongpoints east of Enseldorf, and pillboxes dominating the town were fired upon, and diversionary smokescreens furnished.

The enemy fought bitterly to defend the Saar: thus the mortar targets were numerous and varied. An immense slag pile on the east bank of the river, north of Enseldorf, was fired on continuously to deny the enemy its use as an observation post. The town of Griesborn, and the eastern outskirts of Enseldorf were fired on many times. Attachment was changed, on December 7, to the 358th Field Artillery Battalion, 95th Division, so that more closely-coordinated fire could be achieved. Harassing fire was poured upon suspected enemy positions during the hours of darkness, to keep enemy movements down to a minimum.

The battalion rear command post had meanwhile moved to Ebersviller, France, from Fontoy. A report on ammunition difficulties was rendered to higher headquarters by the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Lipphardt, together with several defective specimens in an effort to remedy this situation.

Company A first supported the bloody attack on Saarlautern from Oberfelsberg, where it took up position on December 1; moving the next day to a former military camp, nearer Saarlautern, while still attached to the 377th Infantry. Here the company CP, FDC, and OP were all established in one school house. Interdictory fire was directed on Saarlautern Roden, a suburb of Saarlautern, located on the east bank of the river. On December 4 the infantry pushed into Saarlautern Roden, supported with fire from the 4.2s. On December 7 the company moved into Saarlautern proper; here it was on the receiving end of numerous mortar and artillery TOTs which caused several casualties.

Facing a very strong part of the Siegfried Line, Company A was called upon for night and day missions. Sometimes as many as seven different targets a night were fired upon. HE and WP shells were used to burn houses, harass enemy OPs and supply routes, and button up the numerous pillboxes lining the banks of the Saar. The company also participated in many TOTs, and fired missions observed by infantry and artillery personnel.

Company B remained in position at Niederlimberg for the greater part of December. During the two weeks following the infantry's crossing of the Saar on December 6, the mortars were kept firing

night and day under difficult conditions, averaging nearly 2,000 rounds per day. In one twenty-four hour period, ending at midnight December 8, the company fired 2,925 rounds in support of the 358th Infantry fighting across the river. Day-long screens to cover the engineers' attempts to span the river with footbridges, as well as screens to cover the movement of the ferries crossing with supplies and returning with wounded, were fired by the company. In addition to this, HE and smoke missions were furnished in support of the infantry. Night harassing and interdiction fires, in Dillingen and its approaches, were also fired.

During this period, every man in the company not actually engaged in firing worked hauling ammunition, unloading the ammo trucks, and preparing the rounds for firing. On December 9, between 1615 and 1730 hours, 936 rounds were fired to engage twenty targets requested by the infantry regiment. Company B's firing was the heaviest in the battalion during the month of December; in the first seven days, almost 14,000 rounds were expended.

All during the company's stay at Niederlimberg, the mortar positions were under enemy artillery and mortar fire from across the river, but fortunately only light casualties were suffered. One serious loss was suffered, however, when a fire broke out in a storage room in which prepared rounds were stored, ready for use in night harassing missions.

General Van Fleet, 90th Division commander, paid a visit to the company on December 12, to express his satisfaction and appreciation for the firing which the company had accomplished in support of the Dillingen operations. The pace of this day and night firing began to slacken somewhat on December 16, when only 429 rounds were fired.

During the period of its stay at Rehlingen, C Company fired more ammunition than in any other period of comparable length. The infantry had to fight to the utmost to preserve their bridgehead and every round fired in their support helped. Counterattacks were fierce and heavy and often supported by tanks. Pinpoint concentrations to stop these counterattacks were often necessary and were fired at all times of the day and night. Actual ammunition expenditures averaged close to 2,000 rounds daily. WP was used primarily as an anti-personnel and incendiary agent. Several local towns were reportedly set on fire. Most of the enemy were in pill-boxes and thus not vulnerable to mortar fire. Jerry did run in a couple of mortars or a self-propelled gun for a while, fire, and then pull out. Concentrations of HE were particularly effective against these

targets of opportunity. During this period, T/4 Harvey and T/5 Cleary were seriously wounded and Pvt. Arnold was killed when a land mine exploded near a knocked-out 6 x 6 truck they were inspecting for spare parts. The telephone wire from Buren to Rehlingen was knocked out several times a day by enemy shells, but despite the necessity of working under heavy fire the communications section did a splendid job in keeping the lines in operation.

The companies were now entrenched firmly along the west bank of the Saar River, from Saarlautern towards Mondorf, when the plan of operation was changed from an offensive one to a holding action. The reason for change in tactics was the "Battle of the Bulge" being waged further north.

In the face of fast-diminishing manpower and equipment, Hitler decided to stage one last counter-offensive, planning to carry the German line to the Meuse in two days and Antwerp in three weeks. If successful, thirty-eight Allied divisions would be cut off and the Germans given the respite they were seeking. Von Rundstedt in an acknowledged "all out" gamble struck, on December 16, at the weakest part of the Allied line; south of Liege and northeast of Bastogne. By December 23, the Germans had broken through in an area extending just south of Monschau to Wiltz. Only the courage and steadfastness of American troops, like the 101st Airborne at Bastogne and the 9th and 10th Armored, stopped the German steamroller in the Ardennes. Allied forces were quickly regrouped by General Eisenhower to squeeze the top and bottom of the Bulge, and a greater portion of Patton's Third, spearheaded by the 4th Armored Division, were pulled from the Saar Basin in the south to help relieve the pressure.

As a result, only a holding force was left along the Saar River, and the Siegfried Switch Line extending from Merzig west to the Moselle River. The infantry remaining was pulled back to the west bank of the Saar River into defensive positions, and only the bridgehead at Saarlautern was maintained. The front along the Saar, from north of Merzig to south of Saarlautern, was held by only two divisions all during those two hectic weeks. Artillery ammunition was low, and consequently the mortars were called upon for the bulk of the fire missions.

In line with the regrouping of troops for defense, Company A retired to a safer position on December 25, where it could still reach the majority of its targets, with part of the company going to Souhof, and the remainder to Schonbruck. The company remained

in this static position for the remainder of the Ardennes offensive, firing for the most part only night harassing missions.

In B Company's sector, troops were withdrawn from Dillingen on December 21, the position being no longer tenable because of the thinly-held front. The withdrawal operations were covered again by smokescreens provided by B Company's mortars, and, on the 22nd, after the last troops had been evacuated, the company moved out under one of the heaviest and most concentrated shellings it had yet received.

Only a small holding force was left along the river; most of the 358th Infantry, and supporting units including B Company, moved north to the Siegfried Switch Line to take up positions along the section of the German border which formed the southern leg of the Saar-Moselle triangle.

From the 24th of December until the 22nd of January, when the initial attacks against the Saar-Moselle triangle were launched, B Company remained in static defensive positions at Schuerwald and Gangelfange. Alternate positions were chosen as the Division's plan called for a defense in depth in case of an enemy breakthrough of the thinly held lines. Christmas and New Years were celebrated by most of the battalion in the line, and as many festivities as possible were held in an effort to make the holidays pleasant, in spite of the combat conditions. Packages from home were shared and somehow, somewhere, a little bottled cheer was obtained. Deep snow covered the ground and the weather became quite cold. On January 4, Cpl. Penrod was the first man from B Company selected to go to the United States under the furlough plan.

The battalion rear command post did a splendid job in establishing and maintaining a rest camp at Fontoy, France, shortly after Christmas. Here the battle-weary mortar men enjoyed a few days of much-needed rest, recreation, and relaxation; each company sending back a few men at a time. Dances, movies, U. S. O. shows, super-chow, and the delights of the neighboring towns of Longwy and Villerupt did much to raise the men's morale.

On December 22, C Company moved to Mondorf, into a defensive position to the north, on the Saar, opposite Merzig. Close cooperation with the infantry was established in event of a counter-offensive in this sector. The very first night the company moved in, a heavy artillery barrage came down on the company CP. Since the barrage was very accurate, it was thought to have been observed by civilians in the town. Following this, all civilians were evacuated

and the town became extremely quiet. The main event was the excellent Christmas dinner served by the mess sergeant and his crew.

On the same day, D Company moved north to the town of Itzbach, opposite Dillingen. During the period of the Ardennes offensive, this company with the aid of a few infantry and cavalry troops held a front along the Saar of approximately two and a half miles. The enemy had reoccupied the towns of Dillingen and Pachten, after the withdrawal of the Americans, and re-manned all the pillboxes on the eastern bank of the Saar. Company D's entrance into Itzbach was greeted by a heavy shelling from enemy positions across the river. This was repaid many-fold in the days that followed.

A partly demolished railroad bridge, used by enemy patrols to cross the river, became one of the company's primary targets. One mortar at least was kept on it at all times and the company forward observers used it to show off the accuracy of the 4.2 to the artillery observers. Any movements seen by day or heard by night were subjected to immediate fire from the mortars. This was necessary, since if Jerry got across in force it would have meant a dangerous threat to the entire line. The route across the bridge denied, the enemy attempted to send patrols across by boat. Although camouflaged, the FOs picked out the boats and directed sufficient fire on them to render them useless. At this time an unusual mission was given the companies. The mission was to fire intermittently on the Saar River to keep the ice broken, thus denying the Krauts another method of crossing the river.

Shortly after coming to Itzbach, the FO party ran into a patrol of Germans that had crossed the river and occupied the OP during the night. T/5 Stejskal, a member of the party, opened fire on the patrol, killing two of the enemy and wounding another. The OP party withdrew and the wooded area was subjected to fire by the 4.2s. No more enemy patrols were encountered until January 3, 1945, when the command post received a radio call from the 733rd Field Artillery Battalion forward observer asking for help. The OP had been surrounded by a strong enemy patrol and one of the FO party had been wounded. A patrol was immediately formed and it proceeded to the besieged observation post. The enemy was engaged and dispersed, resulting in two enemy soldiers wounded and one taken prisoner.

One of the mysteries of the war occurred on December 31. The enemy was observed in what appeared to be a formal guard mount in Pachten. What they were doing nobody knows; at any rate, it

turned out fatally for the participants. Thirty-eight rounds landed in and around the ceremonial group, causing an estimated fifteen casualties.

Cpl. George Neu was the first man from D Company to be selected for a furlough to the United States; he was one of the original D-Day men who had been decorated for heroic achievement.

Company D's OP, overlooking the Saar, was used as a training ground for new officers of the battalion. Under the supervision of veteran forward observers these officers were instructed in precision firing, the building of smokescreens, and in the use of artillery methods of observation, using the Germans and their installations for targets. Platoon and squad sergeants were also given an opportunity to see the results of their work. Lt. Steffens, during one of these instruction periods, chose a cable used by the enemy to cross the river as a demonstration target, and managed to put it out of action with a round of HE: a fine feat of precision firing.

As the year came to a close, the battalion had expended 154,567 rounds of ammunition. Many outfits had made a great ceremony of firing their 100,000th round. The 81st was too busy firing to bother with such fol-de-rol.

On January 7, B Company was attached to the 301st Infantry, 94th Division, which took over the 358th sector. Part of the company moved up to Mittel Tunsdorf, Germany, on January 19, to support the attack of the 301st against the town of Orscholz on the following day. The attack lasted for two days and met with such fanatic resistance that the infantry suffered heavy casualties and was forced to withdraw, under cover of a smokescreen maintained by B Company throughout the day. The mortar company then withdrew from Mittel Tunsdorf, which was shortly thereafter overrun by the enemy. The first operation against the Saar-Moselle triangle had been a failure.

On January 22, the company was attached to the 302nd Infantry, 94th Division, which had pushed a thin wedge along the eastern bank of the Moselle and was holding this narrow bridge-head opposite the company's position in Klienmacher, Luxembourg. The first operations against the triangle were slow and costly and for almost a month thereafter the battle was little more than a holding operation, while sufficient forces were being brought up for a large-scale attack.

Company C's next important move came on January 9, when a

reattachment to the 94th Division necessitated a move to the Siegfried Switch Line, in the Saar-Moselle triangle. During this period, the platoons were in small towns north of Perl on the Franco-German border. As attachments within the division changed, the platoons moved from town to town. The company command post was usually at Pillingen or Wochern, while the town of Borg was continually used for an observation post as well as a mortar position.

The 94th's job was at first to create a diversion, then attempt to take part of the line, keeping the crack 11th SS Panzer Division, still in the vicinity, from entering the Ardennes offensive.

Later, with the assistance of the 10th Armored Division, the 94th did accomplish a major breakthrough.

XIII.

THE SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE

After Von Rundstedt's offensive into the Ardennes had been smashed, at heavy cost of the enemy, the Third Army concentrated on cleaning up the triangle formed by the Saar and Moselle Rivers. The 94th Division now had the support of the 10th Armored Division, and other units released from the Bulge and from the Saarlautern area; among these B and C Companies of the 81st. Company A remained in the Saarlautern area during this operation. The Saar line itself was held by a mediocre Volksgrenadier Division, reenforced by the crack 11th SS Panzer Division.

During the first days of the campaign, B Company supported the infantry from positions in Kleinmacker and later from Remich, on the Luxembourg side of the Moselle. For the most part, the missions fired were smokescreens, although several targets of opportunity were effectively engaged. The numerous enemy pillboxes were most successfully attacked after smokescreens had been laid to cut off observation.

Lt. Eggert was seriously injured by a land mine while on an FO mission across the Moselle River during an attack on January 26; no other casualties were suffered.

On the following day, B Company moved up to Remich in support of the 302nd Infantry's advance and went into a static position, remaining there until February 18. The 301st Infantry took over this section on January 28, and the company continued in support of the relieving regiment. The 2nd platoon moved across the river on January 31 to Wochern, Germany, in order to provide closer support. As a result of the spring thaws, all bridges across the Moselle north of Thionville had been washed out, and the troops on the German side were virtually isolated, except for the bridge at Thionville.

S/Sgt. Young was the first enlisted man in B Company to receive a direct commission as 2nd Lt. being awarded the appointment on February 1.

The first of the large-scale attacks to occupy the east bank of the Moselle north of Besch, and ultimately clear the triangle, began on February 7. The platoon across the river moved into Nennig, in order to support the attack. This position was heavily shelled by the enemy during the time it was occupied. Several men were wounded and many vehicles temporarily put out of action. Sgt.

Byrnside was instantly killed, on February 8, when an artillery shell burst beside him in the street. In spite of heavy counterbattery fire, the platoon maintained smokescreens and fired all other missions called for by the infantry.

On February 13, Captain Herbert Levy left the company to go on temporary duty to the U. S. A., for rest and recuperation. He was still in the U. S. when the war in Europe ended.

As the companies swung north into the Saar-Moselle triangle the battalion rear command post remained at Ebersviller, France, and the rest camp was still maintained at Fontoy.

By January 22 the towns of Tettingen, Butsdorf, and Nennig, in C Company's sector, had fallen. This was the left flank of the line, but such success did not as yet constitute a major breakthrough. German shelling of the mortar positions was generally heavy. Until January 26 the platoons helped the infantry in beating off severe counterattacks. One infantry platoon leader personally expressed his appreciation for the effective fire furnished his unit.

Local attacks took place from January 26 to February 15. On this latter date the town of Sinz was taken. Screening support and HE were fired intermittently all during these operations, as were emergency missions against strong counterattacks, supported by tanks.

Meanwhile, D Company's attachment had changed to the 26th Division Artillery and, on February 1, 1945, Brig. Gen. Ross, artillery commander, visited the mortar positions and the FDC. He was pleased with the operation of the FDC and complimented the entire company for efficiency of operation. Other visitors during this period were Brig. Gen. Bullene, Office of the Chief, CWS, Washington, D. C.; Col. Day, Asst. Cml. Officer, ETOUSA; Col. Powers, 12th Army Group Cml. Officer; Col. Green, XX Corps Cml. Officer; and Capt. Paulson, technical expert from Edgewood Arsenal, who arrived February 15, 1945, to make a survey of faulty ammunition which the mortar companies had been encountering. After an inspection the group complimented Capt. Marshall on the performance of his company.

Company D kept steady pressure on the enemy from its position in Itzbach until February 18. On that the day, the company was notified of a change in Table of Organization which necessitated the disbanding of the company and transfer of the personnel to A, B, C, and Hqs. companies. It was with reluctance, but a feeling of

pride in a job well done, that D Company disbanded. All the men were determined to continue putting their best efforts forward in their new companies. Company D's contribution to the final destruction of Germany's armed might had been far from insignificant.

On January 29, A Company, still in the Saarlautern area, was attached to the 102nd Field Artillery Battalion of the 26th Division. Under this attachment the company was to have little spare time. Twenty-four-hour firing schedules were assigned, in addition to many missions fired by infantry observers, often within a hundred yards of friendly troops, but with excellent results. Since their ammunition was rationed, artillery observers fired the 4.2s considerably. To make the cycle complete, even the 81mm mortar observers fired several missions. It seemed everybody was firing the already over-worked 4.2 mortars.

The company moved back to Saarlautern on February 13, leaving Schonbruck an entirely different-looking place. Although the town was literally crawling with livestock when the company arrived, these strangely disappeared during the next few weeks; only a few decrepit goats being left to roam about. Evidently the lady who, on being evacuated, cried, "Who will take care of my chickens?" had many a volunteer. "Representative" Will Brent of Mississippi kept an attic full of chickens but failed to promote eggs on a wholesale basis. Just before coming to Saarlautern, Sgt. Collum's squad set a record by firing over 1,000 rounds without once digging out the baseplate; only a move to another mortar position discontinued the score.

Here was probably the most boring period Company A had experienced in combat. The time was marked by an increasing number of smokescreens for limited drives, and to shield tank and tank destroyer movements. Impounded ammunition was fired with lanyards. The rest camp at Fontoy proved to be a welcome escape from the drudgery of Saarlautern. The company attending a showing of a film on non-fraternization. Ironically enough the only inhabitants of Saarlautern, beside the American soldiers, were a herd of malodorous goats.

A week later, thirty-six men and three officers from the disbanded D Company joined this company and a third platoon was formed.

While at Saarlautern a second enlisted man from A Company received a commission. S/Sgt. Bartley Cranston, who had been with the company since June, 1942, was commissioned a 2nd Lt.

Despite the tremendous difficulties encountered, the men of the disbanded D Company were transferred and supplies turned in and redistributed with a minimum of confusion while the companies were still in the line. The feat of reorganization while in the line is perhaps the first time that any such thing has been done. This was made possible by the efficient operation of the companies and battalion supply sections. This reorganization was officially completed on February 22.

The first of the great attacks to clear the Saar-Moselle triangle began on February 19. At 0400 hours, after an artillery barrage comparable to those which preceded the attacks in Normandy, the 301st Infantry jumped off as part of the division attack; by nightfall the infantrymen had secured their first objective, the town of Faha. The attack was highly successful, resulting in heavy enemy casualties, many prisoners taken, and large quantities of German heavy equipment destroyed or captured.

Both platoons of B Company displaced forward on February 20 from Sinz to Faha, after the attack had again progressed on schedule. By early evening, the infantry succeeded in occupying most objectives around Freudenberg. Company B was responsible in no small measure for the comparatively light casualties suffered by the infantry in the attack. Two smokescreens were laid down and kept going in the manner of a creeping barrage, behind which our infantry advanced.

The objective for the next day was the Saar River. Late in the evening the river was reached and B Company displaced forward to occupy the towns of Perdenbach and Kastel; the mortars were laid to cover the river in case of a counterattack.

The 301st Infantry received orders to attack again on the 22nd of February, to establish a bridgehead across the Saar. Before this could be done, however, the small town of Krutweiler, on the west bank of the Saar, still in German hands, had to be taken. The 94th Reconnaissance Group was assigned this task and the 2nd platoon of B Company fired a four-hour smokescreen to prevent observation on this town from the town of Saarburg and from pillboxes on the west bank. Results were excellent; not one of the attacking group became a casualty from enemy fire although several were killed and wounded by S mines. Following this, the company fired a screen enclosing the entire bridgehead, from 1100 hours until dark, a feat which contributed greatly to the success of the operation.

The entire company crossed the river that night by ferry and by a bridge at Taben-Rodt; severe shell fire was encountered all along this route. The company then set up in static positions in Serrig. Later, one platoon moved back across the river to Hamm. Because of a freak bend in the river, Hamm actually was further east than Serrig, and thus offered a more suitable position with better range coverage. From here the company fired numerous HE missions for the 301st Infantry and 5th Rangers, on stubbornly resisting pockets of the enemy holding out in the broken and mountainous terrain. The opposing troops at this time were elements of the 11th SS Panzer Division and the 2nd Mountain Grenadier Division.

In C Company's sector on February 19, in conjunction with the 10th Armored, the 94th Division broke the line from the Moselle to Oberleuken, the later being taken by the 5th Rangers. By the 20th, the armor had rapidly driven to Saarburg and the northern tip of the triangle.

February 22 found C Company in Dittlingen and Kastel where men assigned from disbanded D Company arrived. While on reconnaissance to Saarburg, Capt. Boyer, Lt. Yorke and party captured sixty-nine prisoners. With the 1st platoon on the left and the 2nd on the right the advance continued to the Saar. The company CP moved to Saarburg while the 1st platoon, now attached to the armor, supported a Saar River crossing near Ockfen. The 2nd platoon, meanwhile, coordinated with the 87th Smoke Generator Company set up to fire a smokescreen south of Saarburg, near Hamm.

On the 26th of February the 2nd platoon crossed the river and advanced to the east, stopping eventually near the town of Zerf, on March 1, where exceptionally heavy resistance was encountered.

The 1st platoon crossed the river on the 27th by means of a ferry to Ockfen, and then advanced by short jumps toward Trier. By the 4th of March, this platoon had entered Trier, while the 2nd platoon was firing on a hot corner near Zerf. The armor had swung abruptly to the north on to the main highway here, and the Germans, from good defensive positions, were counterattacking with SS troops, supported by mortars, rockets, and artillery. In fact, at one time, the SS troopers cut the main supply route to the platoon.

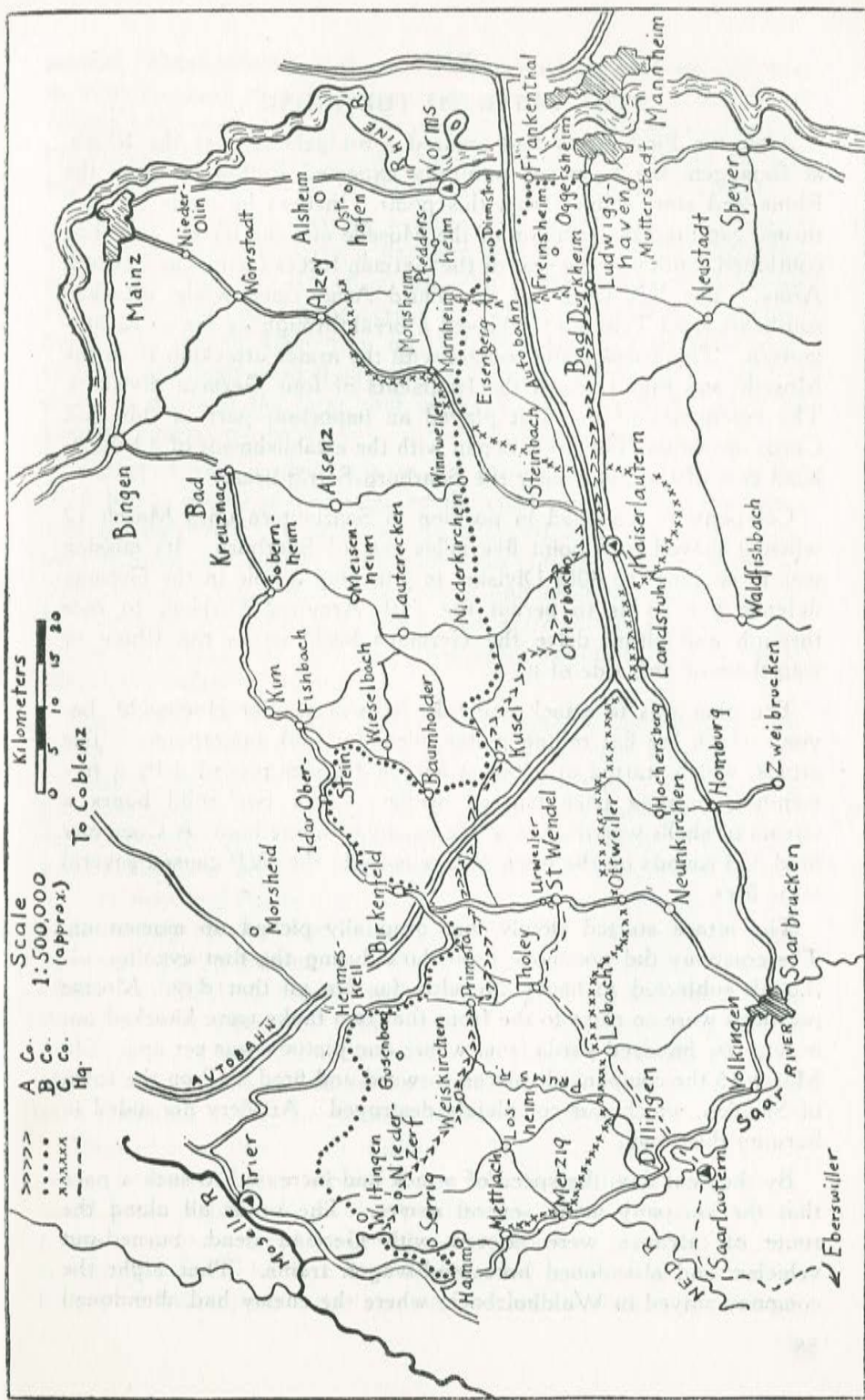
On the 28th of February, Lt. Col. Lipphardt, battalion commander, established a forward battalion supply point in the triangle. This action provided the companies with a more accessible clearing point for the transmission of documents to the battalion rear and facilitated

the movement of supplies and spare parts forward.

The 76th Division, north of the Moselle opposite Trier, sent a regiment across a bridge, which had been captured intact, to help clean up the Trier area; the 1st platoon was attached to this, the 417th Regiment, 76th Division.

The 10th Armored Division's push north to clear the triangle was highly successful. The German resistance was quickly broken and, on March 4, American troops held all the ground between the Saar and the Moselle. The success of this operation paved the way for the drive to the Rhine and the great enveloping operation which destroyed the German XII Army Group.

At the end of this period the battalion had fired a total of 199,520 rounds.



XIV.

THE DRIVE TO THE RHINE

After the First Army had secured a bridgehead over the Rhine, at Remagen, the Germans naturally expected Patton to cross the Rhine and start rolling from this point. Instead he made a quick thrust, captured the junction of the Moselle and the Rhine, and then continued south into the rear of the German forces facing the Seventh Army. The XX Corps of the Third Army, meanwhile, attacked southeast from Trier and achieved a breakthrough as far as Kasierlautern. This corps made contact with the armor attacking from the Moselle and thus trapped the fragments of four German divisions. The companies of the 81st played an important part in this XX Corps operation. The drive began with the establishment of a bridgehead east of the Saar, near the Saarburg-Serrig area.

Company A remained in position in Saarlautern until March 12 when it moved to a point five miles east of Saarburg. Its mission was to support the 80th Division in punching a hole in the German defense line so as to permit the 14th Armored Division to race through and either drive the Germans back across the Rhine or trap them on this side of it.

The plan was to attack and take Schwarzwaldler Hochwald, beyond which lay flat rolling plains, ideal for tank operations. The attack, which started at 0300 on March 13, was preceded by a tremendous barrage from massed artillery. For two solid hours a stream of shells was thrown at the enemy. In one hour, A Company fired 353 rounds on the town of Greimerath; the WP caused several large fires.

The attack started slowly, but gradually picked up momentum. The company did not move until dark during the first evening, although subjected to heavy Nebelwerfer fire all that day. Mortar positions were so close to the front that two tanks were knocked out only a few hundred yards from where one platoon was set up. On March 15 the company displaced forward and fired WP on the town of Sheiden, which was completely destroyed. Artillery fire aided in burning this town.

By the next day, the speed of attack had increased to such a pace that the company made several moves. The roads all along the route of advance were littered with German dead, burned-out vehicles, and abandoned horse-and-wagon trains. That night the company stayed in Waldholzbach, where the enemy had abandoned

several 120mm mortars and a horse-drawn supply caravan. It was in Waldholzbach that the house occupied by CP rear burned down (origin unknown). Sgt. Jack Huntley, usually cool under enemy fire, ran upstairs and jumped out of a window when all he had to do was walk out of the front door, on the ground floor, to escape the flames.

The retreat rapidly became a route. By March 18 the company was making several moves a day and was not in contact with the enemy until reaching Kussel on the 19th. The withdrawing enemy troops attempted to escape across the Rhine, by way of Ludwigshafen, but the air force tore up their columns at Bad Durkheim, strafing and destroying thousands of vehicles. Burned-out vehicles, dead horses, and the litter that marks an army in flight could be seen for miles.

March 21 was a black day in the history of A Company. At 0710 hours, enemy planes attacked the company which at that time was serving breakfast, strafed, and dropped anti-personnel bombs over a wide area causing very heavy casualties. This occurred at Wachenheim, south of Bad Durkheim and west of Ludwigshafen. Lt. Campbell, Lt. Griffith, and Pvt. Bell were fatally injured; Capt. Baum, Lt. Koresdoski, and thirty-five men wounded. Forty battle casualties within ten minutes.

For its part in the drive to the Rhine, B Company was attached to the 94th Division. In preparation, the company moved out of position in the bridgehead across the Saar on March 9, remaining attached to the various regiments of this division until the banks of the Rhine were reached. The drive began on March 10 and progressed slowly at first, but gained momentum until marches of ten, fifteen, twenty, and finally thirty to forty miles a day were made without encountering serious opposition. The company captured so many prisoners that it became necessary to leave the ranking German officer or NCO in charge with instructions to surrender to the American rear elements. The speed of the advance was so rapid that it was impossible for the forward elements to handle the vast number of German prisoners, and long columns of them could be seen marching to the rear without benefit of guards.

After passing through Birkenfeld on March 19, part of the company set up and fired on some German vehicles and half-tracks, which could be seen from the mortar position on a hill about 900 yards away. The guns were laid directly and all fire was adjusted from the mortar position. This type fire-adjustment was unique in the combat history of B Company. By this time, the last recourse of the fleeing

Germans was to commit the remaining Luftwaffe in strength. Soon jet-propelled planes put in an appearance over the columns, strafing and bombing nearly every day. The 2nd platoon was subjected to several bombing and strafing attacks on March 21, causing injuries to several men. In spite of this, the platoon moved a total of forty-two miles during that day. The next day, the 1st platoon fired the company's first mission on a target across the Rhine from the town of Moersch. Meanwhile the 2nd platoon was firing from Oggersheim, in support of the attack on the important town of Ludwigshafen on the Rhine. The platoon position in Oggersheim, as well as all the adjoining streets, was constantly subjected to enemy artillery fire. It was here that the company suffered its last battle casualty west of the Rhine when Cpl. Harvey Colome was killed by the freak burst of an 88-armor-piercing shell exploding in the room directly above the cellar in which he was sleeping.

At the beginning of this period, the battalion rear command post remained at Ebersviller, France. Battalion forward command post consisted of three jeeps; the battalion commanding officer, battalion S-3, and battalion S-2. This party made contact with all companies daily. On the 13th of March, Brig. Gen. Rowan, Chief CWS, ETOUSA, Col. Powers, Twelfth Army Group Chemical Officer, and Col. Wallington, Third Army Chemical Officer, visited the battalion commander and staff. The rear group departed from Ebersviller on March, 21 after a three and a half months' stay, and proceeded to Urweiler, Germany. After a few days there it moved on to Gonsenheim, a suburb of Mainz. Because of the rapid and long advances, supply men and mail orderlies put in long hours on crowded roads to bring vital supplies and precious mail up to the rolling columns. Certain supplies were difficult to obtain and many a German vehicle was stripped of tires to replace those worn out on mortar vehicles; tires were fast becoming a critical item. During this time, firing was not too heavy since there was no longer a stable front.

After cleaning up the Trier area, Company C was attached to the "Yankee" (26th) Division for a part in the drive to the Rhine. First this division attacked down the east bank of the Saar, towards Merzig, while the company set up in towns on the west bank to cover the infantry across the river. This country was very rough, hilly, and difficult to fight through, and the platoons were kept busy firing against enemy personnel entrenched in the rocks and pillboxes.

A striking example of devotion to duty was displayed by Communications Sgt. Teirce who attempted to swim the fast-moving, ice-

cold Saar with a line tied to his waist, in order to get a communications wire across. The current almost carried Sgt. Teirce away when he was within ten yards of the opposite shore, and he had to be pulled back. However, the line was later carried across by other means.

The east bank of the Saar was cleared by March 17. The company crossed the river in support of two regiments of the 26th Division, which drove directly east towards Kaiserlautern and the Rhine.

Although resistance was scattered, small groups would at times held out stubbornly. The main towns passed through by C Company in this rapid advance, were Merzig, Urexweiler, Ottweiler, and Landstuhl. The infantry then swung south of Kaiserlautern into a great forest. The company joined regimental convoys and moved on northeast to Alzey through Winweiler and Kirchheim Bolinden.

Although close to the Rhine, C Company never did reach it on this drive. On March 24, orders came from the battalion for all companies to return to an assembly area near St. Wendel, Germany. Enemy resistance west of the Rhine had been utterly destroyed and the battalion now prepared for the forthcoming Rhine crossing and the swift campaign to finish off the remnants of the German army still in retreat east of the great river. In driving from the Normandy coast to the banks of the Rhine, the battalion had expended a total of 208,641 rounds of ammunition.



MOP UP TO AUSTRIA

Mainz fell on the 23rd of March to Patton's Army, with armored units forging ahead to cut the escape routes and isolate remaining enemy forces. The Third Army, working from a bridgehead established south of Mainz, drove from the east bank of the Rhine, reaching Frankfurt by the 26th of March, and a point seventy miles northeast of Frankfurt by April 1. Such a good job had been done of eliminating the German armies on the west bank of the Rhine, that this operation was carried out with comparative ease. Meanwhile the vital industrial Ruhr area had been encircled by elements of the First and Third Armies. This operation cut off the bulk of the enemy's remaining reserves.

General Eisenhower's strategy of great double enveloping movements, to cut off and destroy the main German army groups fighting in the Ruhr and in the south beyond Frankfurt, was by now a complete success. In late April, American troops began mopping up operations in Austria; the campaign for Germany was virtually at an end. The campaign had been characterized by long, swift advances. Occasional short, sharp infantry battles had been fought, but in only a few of these was heavy mortar support required.

Company B was the first in the battalion to cross the Rhine; an advance party passed over a pontoon bridge near Bausheim at 1600 hours on March 27, and the remainder of the company followed after dark that same night. The sight of navy crews running LCVPs across the river brought back vivid memories of D-Day. At Bausheim the company was attached to the 905th Field Artillery Battalion, 80th Division. Moving with the artillery, the company advanced twenty-seven miles to the Main River, near its confluence with the Rhine. Little resistance was encountered here, although heavy artillery fire landed in the town of Bischofsheim, where the company set up to support the infantry about to cross the Main.

The next day, B Company crossed the Main River to Delkenheim; the days that followed were spent moving along the roads in motor convoy, trying to keep up with the rapidly advancing forward elements. There were no front lines, as such, for an advance of forty to fifty miles a day was not unusual. The excellent Reichsautobahn made possible these advances, in spite of the great volume of traffic. The general route of advance, after crossing the Main, was northeast between Wiesbaden and Frankfurt, along the Reichsautobahn head-

ing north towards Giessen, then northeast past Alsfeld and Hirsfeld, and finally swinging north to Kassel.

While approaching Kassel, near Guxhagen, on April 1, enemy tanks fired on the 1st platoon convoy, killing Pfc. Swenson. At this time the company was attached to the 319th Infantry, 80th Division; several missions were fired in support of this regiment's attack on the Kassel area.

By April 7, the drive had carried so far forward that B Company moved into an assembly area in the city of Gotha and remained there until the tactical situation should again require the use of 4.2 mortars.

Two days later, on April 9, Lt. Bartley Cranston realized the forward observer's dream when the Germans launched a strong counter-attack against the 319th Infantry then forming in Hocheim for an attack on the city of Erfurt. Lt. Cranston directed HE on the attacking force, repulsing it and forcing the enemy to withdraw, leaving approximately one hundred dead and wounded behind. The 1st platoon was at this time supporting the 318th Infantry's attack on Weimar. Upon its relief from this organization, on April 12, the Division Artillery Commander of the 80th Division commended B Company on the superior support it had furnished during the attachment.

Before leaving the Erfurt area, B Company personnel were shown the results of Nazi savagery at the Ohrdruf concentration camp. No one who saw this inhuman spectacle had any doubts thereafter as to what he was fighting against.

For B Company these were the last days of combat in the European theater. The company was placed on detached service with the AA Radar School, Fifteenth Army, at Chateau Reux, near Dinant, Belgium, as school troops. It remained at that station until shortly after hostilities ceased.

Company C was not very far behind B Company in crossing the Rhine. A few hours after B Company's crossing at Bausheim, C Company crossed at Mainz and drove all night on the autobahn, passing through Frankfurt on the way.

The advance started off in a northeasterly direction towards Kassel, following the route of the 11th Armored Division. Occasionally a German plane would bomb and strafe the column. The task force to which the company was attached was on the northern flank of the Third Army just beyond the Ruhr pocket. Prisoners

were continually being taken by members of the company as by-passed Germans were everywhere.

On April 5 the company pulled into Eschwege, a large town southeast of Kassel, where it was employed in guarding a hospital and large warehouses filled with military equipment; resistance was so slight that no mortar support was needed.

Meanwhile, on March 29, at 1740 hours, Company A crossed the 1,986-foot pontoon bridge at Mainz. That night the company stayed in Weisbaden, in luxurious dwellings, but was soon off again on a rapid advance toward Kassel. The nights were spent in houses, and in every position there was the usual mad rush for eggs and then for the best bed. By April 5 the company had passed through and beyond Kassel.

On April 1, the battalion rear followed A Company's route over the bridge at Mainz. With the situation changing so rapidly, and the forward elements moving at such a fast pace, it was necessary for the weapons companies to be on the road almost twenty-four hours a day in order to remain in close support of the 80th and 65th Divisions. The Reichsautobahns provided an excellent route of attack for the Allied steamroller. The battalion CP also made one-night stands through Eifa, Mosheim, and Gotha, finally setting up for a few days at Weimar.

Company A, still attached to the 80th Division, fired its first mission east of the Rhine on April 9, registering on the town of Tottelstadt. The next day several successful missions were fired. The first platoon, located in the town of Ermstedt, spotted 50 of the enemy approaching the town. The mortars opened up at a range of 675 yards, killing or wounding at least 15 Germans; the remainder were captured by the infantry. The same day, the 2nd platoon fired close to 150 rounds of WP on the town of Salomonsborn, burning most of the town and routing the enemy.

The next few days were marked by long jeep rides; many pistols and other souvenirs were secured; roads were clogged with German prisoners, liberated soldiers, and displaced persons. The company passed through several fairly large cities. The first platoon fired 70 rounds into Erfurt and then entered the city on April 12. The 2nd platoon reached Weimar the same day. The following day found A Company in the famous glass manufacturing city of Jena; by the 16th, the company reached the outskirts of Chemnitz.

Company C was attached, on April 4, to the 76th Division which

drove eastward through Mulhausen and Langensalza. At this time the 76th Division was closer to Berlin than any other unit of the U. S. Army. The general route of advance was directly east, passing north of Erfurt through Apolda, Zeitz, and Altenburg, then on towards Dresden to Lunzenau. Resistance was light, although one town was heavily shelled after it refused to surrender when issued an ultimatum. The guns were laid directly on the town from the mortar position while signal corps photographers took movies of the action. Intermittent strafing and bombing of towns and moving columns by enemy planes continued.

On or about April 18, Patton swung his forces south, using Chemnitz for a hinge, and headed toward the Danube River and Austria. The XX Corps boundary changed and the mortar companies took part in the drive to the south.

Company A travelled all night, on April 18, to join the 71st Division to which it was attached at Bamberg. The new plan was to drive south to the Danube, cross it, and then head for the so-called National Redoubt. A slight amount of opposition was met at Regensauf where the bridge across the Regen River had been blown. Mortars were set up near a warehousefull of prefabricated parts for airplanes and missions fired on the woods northeast of the town. The Regen River was crossed that night, while the company was staying in Regensauf. The next day the woods north of the Danube River were cleared, and the Danube reached by nightfall. As the infantry were crossing the river in assault boats, some of the company's HE commenced to land a few hundred yards in front of them. The inexperienced doughboys jumped from the boats into the stream, as this was their first contact with 4.2 shells.

On April 26, A Company fired 489 rounds in support of the Danube River crossing and the assault on Regensburg. A smoke-screen was laid, HE and WP missions fired at the enemy dug-in along the river and at troops trying to escape from the city. The company crossed the Danube at 0145 hours on April 27, and set up just south of the river, close to the target area of the previous day, about four miles east of Regensburg. Enemy dead lay where they had fallen and equipment was scattered everywhere.

While in the process of moving south, C Company stopped at Apolda. Many of the men had an opportunity to visit the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar. Here, as in Ohrdruf, was concrete evidence of the inhumanity of the Nazi machine.

The move south was made through Coburg, to a town near Bauking, from which the drive continued cross-country towards Austria. The attachment was changed to the 71st Division, which the company supported until the end of hostilities. Just prior to this S/Sgt. Conroy of C Company received a battlefield commission as 2nd Lt.

The company passed near Nurnberg on its way down to the Danube, northeast of Regensburg. Here a crossing was easily made. Straubing and Landau came next. At Landau, the Isar River was crossed by means of a wrecked railroad bridge. The drive met negligible resistance and continued straight on towards Austria.

As the battalion neared the Austrian border all companies were attached to the 71st Division. Company A and Company C crossed the Inn River on successive days, May 2 and 3. The FO for Company A observed enemy personnel digging in near the river, obviously intending to defend it, but after nine HE shells landed nearby they soon abandoned the idea. A smokescreen was laid, which contributed to the successful crossing of the river. This was the last mission that A Company fired in the European war.

Passing Wels, the company continued on to the Enns River, there to await the Russians and V-E Day. The final combat positions of A Company were in Garsten and Ternberg, Austria, for the 1st and 2nd platoons, respectively.

On May 3, at 1435, the 1st platoon, C Company, crossed the Inn River into Austria, near the town of Ernig. The 2nd platoon, following foot troops, crossed a little later over a hydro-electric dam which served as a bridge. The company moved on in the same general direction, and crossed the Traun River, near Lambach, on April 5. The previous evening a few rounds were fired at a column of retreating Germans, but for fear of destroying a bridge a cease fire order was given.

The night of May 5, found the whole company near the Enns River, the boundary between the U. S. and Russian troops. The battalion command post crossed into Austria over the Inn River on May 4. At the cessation of hostilities, on May 8, 1945, the battalion, less B Company, was along the Enns River, one of the meeting points between the American and Russian forces. In the fight for the liberation of Europe the 4.2 mortars of the 81st had fired 212,572 rounds.

The war in Europe was over! The day everyone had been waiting for had arrived. The long, hard, bloody road from the beaches of Normandy, across the continent of Europe, was ended. Every man celebrated in his own way, but in the hearts and minds of each and every one was a thought for those comrades who had given their lives to make this day possible.

EPILOGUE

Shortly after V-E Day the battalion was detailed on Military Government work in Austria and Germany. The battalion was for a time the occupying force in Braunau, Hitler's birthplace, and neighboring towns. While there, the battalion was attached to the 5th Field Artillery Group, the companies occupying the towns of Degerndorf, Brannenburg, Oberaudorf, Raubling, and Redenfelden, near Rosensheim, in the Bavarian Alps. Some members of the battalion were sent home for discharge under the point system. The rest were "sweating it out." But no matter where the future finds them, the men of the 81st will always be, as they have been in the past, "Equal to the Task!"

Appendix

ACTUAL COMBAT

The following is the number of days each company had been on the line:

Company A	313 Days
Company B	297 Days
Company C	318 Days
Company D	246 Days

REST PERIODS

Company A

St. Martin Don, France	7-10 Aug.	4 Days
Ger, France	17-19 Aug.	3 "
Sees, France	23-24 Aug.	2 "
Porcher, France	24 Sept.-1 Oct.	8 "
Morfontaine, France	3-6 Nov.	4 "
Urweiler, Germany	25-26 Mar.	2 "

23 Days

Company B

St. Martin Don, France	7-9 Aug.	3 Days
Ger, France	17-19 Aug.	3 "
Sees, France	23-24 Aug.	2 "
Brehain-la-Ville, France	4-6 Nov.	3 "
Urweiler, Germany	25-26 Mar.	2 "

13 Days

Company C

St. Martin Don, France	5-9 Aug.	5 Days
Ger, France	17-19 Aug.	3 "
Sees, France	23-24 Aug.	2 "
Bievres, France	27-28 Aug.	2 "
	20-22 Sept.	3 "
Leitersweiler, Germany	25-27 Mar.	3 "

18 Days

Company D

St. Martin Don, France	7-12 Aug.	6 Days
Ger, France	17-19 Aug.	3 "
Sees, France	21-24 Aug.	4 "
Bievres, France	27-28 Aug.	2 "
Disbanded	22 Feb. 1945	

15 Days

RECAPITULATION OF CASUALTIES

The following is a recapitulation of casualties for the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion from the 6th of June, 1944, to the present time:

Type	Battle		Total
	Officers	Enlisted Men	
Killed in action.....	7	26	33
Died of wounds.....	3	5	8
Prisoners of war.....	2	2	4
Seriously wounded.....	8	26	34
Slightly wounded.....	8	101	109
Seriously injured.....	1	4	5
Slightly injured.....	-	9	9
Totals.....	29	173	202

Non-Battle

Officers—20

Enlisted Men—196

ATTACHMENTS

Divisions supported by companies of the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion:

First U. S. Army

V Corps	XIX Corps
1st Div.	29th Div.
2nd Div.	30th Div.
5th Div.	90th Div.
35th Div.	4th Div.
80th Div. (inactive)	28th Div.

Third U. S. Army

XX Corps

90th Div.	94th Div.
5th Div.	26th Div.
7th Armored Div. (inactive)	65th Div.
95th Div.	80th Div.
10th Armored Div.	76th Div.
83rd Div. (inactive)	71th Div.

AMMUNITION EXPENDITURE

The following is a recapitulation of ammunition expenditure from 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945, inclusive:

	HE	WP	FS	Total
Company A.....	30685	17335	—	48020
Company B.....	30011	33615	—	63626
Company C.....	36889	23329	367	60585
Company D.....	19509	30832	—	40341
(Disbanded 22 Feb. 1945)				
Grand Totals.....	117094	95111	367	212572

PRISONERS OF WAR

The companies of the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion captured the following number of prisoners between the 6th of June 1944 and 8 May 1945, inclusive:

COMPANY	OFFICERS	EM	TOTAL
Hq.	10	238	243
A	5	126	131
B	—	185	185
C	3	376	379
D	—	17	17
Totals	18	942	960

The number of prisoners taken by the weapons companies is much higher than shown, but only those shown on historical records are in the total. It is estimated that an additional 1000 prisoners were taken by the companies and immediately turned over to the infantry to be marched back to a cage.

DEAD OF THE 81ST CHEMICAL MORTAR BATTALION

Mann, John R.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1st Lt.
Cook, Ray J.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	T/Sgt.
Mason, Leo M.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Skaleski, Raymond R.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Knott, John J. Jr.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Ward, Thomas H.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cpl.
Hughes, Lucian D. Jr.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Frausto, Margarito C.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Croak, John E.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	T/5
Winston, Beverly	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Walton, Philip C.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2nd Lt.
Gaffney, Philip J.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Capt.
Moundres, Thomas P.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Capt.
Baumgartner, George M.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1st Lt.
Barron, Louis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Knipple, Warren K.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Fix, Raymond L.	-	-	-	-	(120th)	-	-	-	T/5
Offner, Andrew M. Jr.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cpl.
Panas, James P.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Capt.
Iannacone, Constantine J.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Sgt.
Kelly, Joseph M.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pfc.
Rone, James	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pfc.
Sheehan, Keith C.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Toole, John R.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2nd Lt.
Grob, Herbert D.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cpl.
Byrnside, Delmar C.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Sgt.
Gates, Bernard M.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Capt.
Colome, Harvey K.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cpl.
Bell, Vernon H.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pfc.
Griffith, Everett W.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1st Lt.
Swenson, Paul E.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pfc.
Pittari, Anthony	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Scarfo, Joseph F.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pfc.
Graves, Robert L.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cpl.
Arnold, Frank B.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
McMath, William M. Jr.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Harris, Giles B.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2nd Lt.
Sanna, Domenic A.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pvt.
Campbell, John W.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1st Lt.
Morrison, Roy V.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cpl.
Radakovitz, John S.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1st/Sgt.

II—BATTLE HONORS.—3. As authorized by Executive Order No. 9396 (sec. I, Bull. 22, WD, 1943), superseding Executive Order No. 9075 (sec. III, Bull. 11, 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 plus 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 LCVPs 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 the men of the 81st Chemical Battalion were not deterred from the accomplishment of their mission, and upon reaching shore with the loss of only one mortar, continued in support of the infantry for 12 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

HEADQUARTERS, ARMY SERVICE FORCES

Office Chief Of Chemical Warfare Service
Washington 25, D. C.

24 August 1944

SUBJECT: Commendation.

To : Commanding Officer, 81st Chemical Battalion, APO 652,
c/o Postmaster, New York, N. Y.

1. It is a particular pleasure for me to commend the 81st Chemical Battalion for its outstanding accomplishments in the liberation of enemy-occupied territory.

2. The Presidential unit citation and other honors bestowed upon your organization, collectively and individually, attest to a high degree of military proficiency in which your personnel can be justly proud, and in which your Service takes equal pride.

3. In both spirit and attainment, the 81st Chemical Battalion exemplifies the high traditions of the Chemical Warfare Service.

WILLIAM N. PORTER

Major General

Chief of the Chemical Warfare Service

SUBJECT: Commendation.

TO: Commanding Officer, 81st Chemical Battalion

THRU: Commanding General, First U. S. Army, APO 230

1. Upon relief of the 81st Chemical Battalion from attachment to the V Corps, I desire to express to you, and through you to the officers and men of your command, my thanks and appreciation for the excellent manner in which they functioned while under this corps.

2. The record of the 81st Chemical Battalion during the campaign for Western Europe has been indeed an enviable one. The battalion entered combat with this corps on D Day and has served uninterruptedly with it for 104 days. It was in the line continuously for the first 60 days of combat. Notwithstanding the unfortunate loss of its commanding officer and a large portion of its equipment during the landing on the French Coast, it has at all times been ready for any mission which it has been called upon to perform. It participated in the decisive assault on Hill 192 on 11 July 1944 and its effective support of the 2nd Infantry Division contributed in a large measure to the success of that attack. It has operated in support of artillery as well as infantry. Elements of the battalion during the above period have been attached to ten different divisions. It has sustained more than 100 casualties, and 53 of its members have received individual decorations. It has won the coveted Presidential Unit Citation for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy.

3. No words of mine could add to the prestige of an organization with such a record. It is indeed a history of which any organization of the United States Army can be justly proud. I accept its loss to the corps with regret. My best wishes for your continued success go with each and every one of you.

EDWARD H. BROOKS,

Major General, U. S. Army,
Commanding.

HEADQUARTERS 90TH INFANTRY DIVISION

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL

AGO 90, U. S. ARMY

AG 200.6

19 January 1945

SUBJECT: Commendation.

TO: Commanding Officer, 81st Chemical Battalion, APO 403, U.S. Army.

THRU: Commanding General, Third U. S. Army, APO 403, U.S. Army.

1. Companies "A," "B" and "C" of the 81st Chemical Battalion rendered extremely valuable services to this division from 20 August, 1944 to 7 January, 1945.

2. During the Maizieres-les-Metz operations Company "A" fired a total of 12,054 rounds HE and WP from 15 October to 1 November, aiding materially in the capture of that town. During the Moselle River crossing Company "A" fired a total of 4,537 rounds of WP and HE from 9 November to 18 November. During one twenty-four hour period this company maintained a smokescreen about two thousand yards wide during daylight hours in addition to other missions called by the supported unit. During period from 8 October to 4 November, Company "B" fired a total of 8,447 rounds of WP and HE in the Gravelotte area.

3. In the Saar River crossing 6 December to 22 December, 1944, "B" and "C" Companies rendered most valuable services. Especially were these companies helpful in this action with their highly successful smoking operations. During this action "B" Company fired a total of 23,886 and "C" Company fired a total of 17,862 rounds of HE and WP.

4. The exemplary manner in which officers and enlisted men of this battalion have supported the 90th Infantry Division under all types of weather, terrain and enemy action has been outstanding. The constant close cooperation of Lt. Col. Jack W. Lipphardt, Battalion Commander, and his staff, was of the highest type.

5. The support furnished by these companies of the 81st Chemical Battalion contributed greatly to the successes of the 90th Infantry Division. Their future assignment in support of this division would be most welcome.

J. A. VAN FLEET

Major General, U. S. Army
Commanding.

HEADQUARTERS COMBAT COMMAND B

10TH ARMORED DIVISION

APO 260, U. S. ARMY

2 December 1944

SUBJECT: Commendation.

To: CO, Co "C," 81 Cml Bn.

1. During the period 7-30 Nov your company, or part of it supported each team of this Combat Command and materially assisted us in our advance between the MOSELLE and SAAR RIVERS.

2. I wish to commend you for your wholehearted cooperation and efficient employment of your troops, and to further commend the officers and men under you for their untiring efforts, disregard of danger and proficiency with their weapon.

3. It is a pleasure to give you this commendation.

EDWIN W. PIBURN

Brig Gen, USA Comdg.

HEADQUARTERS FIFTEENTH UNITED STATES ARMY

APO 408

Office of the Commandant, 15th Army Radar School

18 May 1945

SUBJECT: Commendation.

To: Commanding Officer, 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion, APO 403.

1. Company "B," 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion, was on temporary duty at this station for the period 15 April-18 May 1945, both dates inclusive. During all that period, members of the company executed all the firing missions for the Radar School. The company acted as supply agency, operated two messes, provided most of the transportation used at the school, furnished the interior guard, policed the area, and in general administered the operation of the chateau.

2. The officers and men of Company "B," 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion are commended for their excellent performance and attention to duty in all their assigned tasks.

3. It is requested that this commendation be forwarded to Company "B," 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion, for their records. It is further requested that higher headquarters be informed concerning the commendable performance of this company, while on duty at this station.

N. A. McLAMB,

Lt Col., CAC, Commandant.

hipphardt, Jack to
T.A.R.

