

1-1-1945

## History, 125th Armored Engineer Battalion: Camp Shanks, New York to V-E day inclusive

United States Army

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HISTORY - 125TH ARMORED ENGINEER BATTALION

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# HISTORY

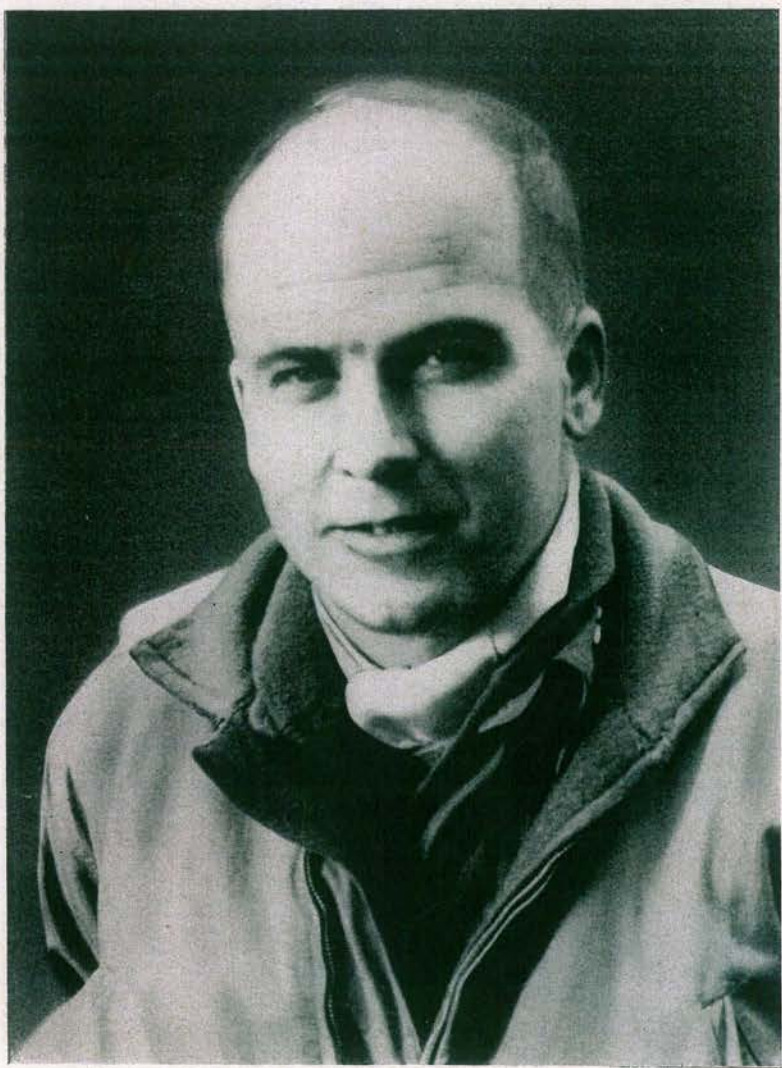
125<sup>TH</sup> ARMORED  
ENGINEER BATTALION

CAMP SHANKS, NEW YORK

TO

V-E DAY INCLUSIVE

PAVING  
LIBRARY  
1955



LIEUT. COLONEL JOHN R. MORRISON



# Staff

Editor . . . . .	Capt Franklin Wallace Jr
Assistant . . . . .	Pfc William Olpp
Assistant . . . . .	Tec 5 Samuel Wilson
Assistant . . . . .	Pfc Eugene Osegueda
Assistant . . . . .	Pfc John Dickman

Special thanks is extended to the above named assistants whose efforts and long hours of work made this history possible.

We are indebted to Capt Robert Dow, S Sgt Robert Gorham, and Tec 5 Joseph Kubovy for their work on the illustrations.

The Editor wishes to express his appreciation for the cooperation of the members of this command who contributed information. It must be realized that all the incidents and stories herein are not necessarily the most important to all the individuals who took part in the action. We hope that this history will revive many more amusing and heroic stories to be told at their leisure in the years to come.

The Editor

ROMAN  
CLUB  
YHSA  
IN ROMA



## *Dedication*

This book is dedicated to those members of our command who gave their full measure that the cause of humanity might be preserved. May we heap high upon the altar of faith the flaming desire that will envelope and destroy all forces tending to incarcerate the freedoms of mankind. Let us, who live, devote our lives to substantiate this faith for which they made the supreme sacrifice.

It is with reverence that their names are here listed.



# *Killed in Action*

RANK	NAME	DATE
	<b>Bn Hq &amp; Hq Co</b>	
Lt Col	JOHN R MORRISON	26 April 1945
M Sgt	Willard F Sherman	25 April 1945
Tec 5	Chester D Watkins	24 April 1945
Pfc	Joseph A Cornacchia	24 April 1945
Pfc	Leo O Langley	9 April 1945

## **Company "A"**

Tec 5	Michael M Marcus	26 December 1944
Tec 5	Dominick F Marinaro	15 January 1945
Tec 5	Charlie Bates	1 January 1945

## **Company "B"**

1st Lt	JAMES B QUINN	5 April 1945
Sgt	Harry C Lockwood	20 April 1945
Cpl	Edward W Preiss	5 April 1945
Tec 5	Augustus H Witherite	19 April 1945
Pfc	William S Domin	20 April 1945
Pfc	Eugene Kaminski	20 April 1945

## **Company "C"**

2d Lt	JOHN P DELMAY	24 March 1945
Tec 4	Norman M Allport	7 April 1945
Tec 5	Carlo Cascegno	24 March 1945
Tec 5	Louis F Twardy	22 November 1944
Pfc	Joseph Fallat	21 March 1945
Pfc	Walter E Locking	14 January 1945
Pfc	Joseph W Patterson Jr	15 January 1945
Pfc	Robert N Snodgrass	21 March 1945

## **MISSING IN ACTION**

### **Company "A"**

1st Lt	URIEL S RIDINGS JR	1 January 1945
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### **Company "C"**

Pvt	Frank J Di Lorenzo	18 December 1944
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**HEADQUARTERS**  
**125th ARMORED ENGINEER BATTALION**  
**APO 446** **U S Army**

**SILVER STAR MEDAL AWARDS**

BN HQ — HQ CO  
MORRISON, JOHN R (Posthumous) Lt Col  
Lemmler, Dale W Tec 4

COMPANY "A"  
Ludwig, Walter S Sgt  
Aiello, Salvatore J Sgt

COMPANY "B"  
HUMBERT, CLYDE O 1st Lt  
QUINN, JAMES B (Posthumous) 1st Lt  
Bombach, Otto F Pfc

COMPANY "C"  
BARDWELL, CHARLES M 1st Lt  
DELMAY, JOHN P (Posthumous) 2d Lt  
HEWETT, HOBART B 2d Lt  
WISE, ANTHONY 1st Lt  
Johnston, Forrest L Sgt  
Seitz, Roy O Tec 4

**BRONZE STAR MEDAL AWARDS**

BN HQ — HQ CO			
MORRISON, JOHN R (Posthumous)	Lt Col	Potter, Dean D	Tec 4
WATKINS, GEORGE R	Major	Tukua, George O	Tec 4
WILLIAMS, ODELL D	Major	Bacon, Harold C	Tec 5
KNIGHT, ROBERT R	Captain	Barton, Russell C	Tec 5
MUNCH, MELVYN F	Captain	Grant, John F	Tec 5
O'NEAL, JOHN M	Captain	Kubovy, Joseph V	Tec 5
HENN, WILLIAM	1st Lt	Williamson, Claude F	Tec 5
LONG, HARRY H	1st Lt	Zimmerman, Alfred O	Tec 5
TILLY, OTTOMAR W	1st Lt	Davies, Richard L	Pfc
MILLER, WALTER G	CWO	Davis, Louis I	Pfc
OAKES, LYNDALL D	CWO	Lankford, Stanley E Jr	Pfc
NOAH, NORMAN E	WOJG	Lutz, Walter P	Pfc
Rodgers, Elbert	M Sgt	Meade, John M	Pfc
Neuburger, Rudolph G	1st Sgt	Unger, Frank A Jr	Pfc
Beeson, James G	T Sgt	Weydig, Peter Jr	Pfc
Carlson, Howard K	T Sgt		
Michels, Reinhard B	T Sgt		
Zick, Carl S	T Sgt		
Edwards, Norman P	S Sgt	DILLARD, JOHN A B JR	1st Lt
Gorham, Robert L	S Sgt	MC KEON, GERALD	2nd Lt
Hannigan, Joseph M	S Sgt	O'Rourke, Thomas J	1st Sgt
Johnson, Gunnar K	S Sgt	Bowen, Archie F	S Sgt
Kirsch, Bernard J	S Sgt	Timko, George	S Sgt
Whittaker, Charles M	S Sgt	Graziano, Anthony	Sgt
Wysochanski, Alexander	S Sgt	Nichols, John R	Sgt
Ferguson, Walter P	Sgt	Raven, Einar M	Sgt
Connor, John J	Tec 4	Reesor, Joseph C	Sgt
Colberg, Joseph L	Tec 4	Milbrandt, Albert F	Tec 4
Foster, Leonard R	Tec 4	Powell, Albert C	Tec 4
Gilmore, Thurman P	Tec 4	Ziots, Carl A	Cpl



Austin, Curtis H  
Berrier, Carl E  
Brockway, William R  
Carpenter, William H  
Boyd, Oscar L  
Foster, Jack B  
Kortlandt, Karl R  
Stickney, Warren E  
Thompson, William E

### COMPANY "B"

EDDINGTON, RICHARD W  
CULLEN, MARTIN J  
ROBINSON, MELVYN O  
Konicki, William A  
Gulbin, Henry J  
Reddy, William P  
Bell, Elliott C  
Critchley, John Y  
Davis, James A  
Fix, Harry E  
Weiner, Morton A  
Bordlemay, Paul A  
Gill, Francis X  
Jemiola, Edward L  
Loch, Anthony C  
Winnicki, Michael

### COMPANY "C"

WALLACE FRANKLIN R JR  
KITTINGER, EDWARD P  
WISE, ANTHONY  
COPES, JOHN C III  
Coen, Hugh B  
Henkelmann, Bernard F  
Seyfarth, John T  
Thomas, Orlando  
Thorn, Kenneth  
Archuleta, Donald A  
Lewis, Robert E

Tec 5 Lukins, Robert R  
Tec 5 Mc Clure, Charles F  
Tec 5 Moran, Lawrence J  
Tec 5 Reynolds, William P  
Pfc Streaser, David W  
Pfc McCarty, William T  
Pfc Seitz, Roy O  
Pfc Stockman, Earl T  
Pvt Bliss, William F Jr

1st Lt Haglund, Roy W  
1st Lt Lorenc, Frank M  
2d Lt Mylod, Charles P  
Shelley, Warren R  
1st Sgt Whitford, Joseph W  
S Sgt Boorum, William K  
Sgt Cascegno, Carlo  
Tec 4 Guth, Kenneth A  
Tec 5 Loop, Homer J  
Tec 5 McAtee, Donald J  
Tec 5 Mosser, John J  
Tec 5 Mowers, Lylle E  
Pfc Schmidt, George A  
Pfc Sparks, George R  
Pfc Stroble, Charles  
Pfc Taylor, Glen L  
Pfc Woitowicz, Frank I

Captain	Hall, Gordon E
1st Lt	Hodson, Raymond F
1st Lt	Koerner, George R
2nd Lt	LaGravenese, Joseph
1st Sgt	Lucien, Eugene J
S Sgt	McKane, James E
S Sgt	Overberg, William J
S Sgt	Pearce, Samuel G
S Sgt	Robinson, Bayard S
Sgt	Southard, Nelson F
Sgt	Skarzynski, Walter C
Sgt	Stratton, Earnest E

[illegible]

## FIRST OAK LEAF CLUSTER TO BRONZE STAR MEDAL

### COMPANY "A"

Stickney, Warren E Pfc

### COMPANY "B"

EDDINGTON, RICHARD W	1st Lt
CULLEN, MARTIN J	1st Lt

### COMPANY "C"

WALLACE, FRANKLIN R JR	Captain
Thorn, Kenneth	S Sgt







# Prologue

The raw ore had been mined! It was you and I, soldier. We, or at least the greater portion of us, had received that famous "Document" -- Remember? It started out "Greetings --" On the 15th day of November 1942 the War Department activated the Fourteenth Armored Division. The ore was in the mill and the United States Army started the huge wheels of the giant factory. The progress of developing a finely tooled fighting organization was under way. The roaring infernos of the blast furnaces removed the "impurities" of a civilian life. They would make us Tough and Strong! The resultant lava was pressed into a mighty mass with the firm purpose, to destroy the enemy.

Our training days at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, were the beginning of the process. Here the crude metal mass started to take form. Under Lt Colonel Dean E Swift the Battalion learned the fundamental principles of soldiering. However the highlight of our days spent here was something not included in our training schedule.

In May 1943 the rampaging Arkansas River had risen to new heights flooding the surrounding country side. Lt Colonel Swift with his newly organized battalion worked day and night. People were rescued from isolated area and a treadway bridge was constructed to maintain communications and carry pipe lines to restore the water supply of Fort Smith and nearby villages. Although all efforts were exhausted, the turbulence of the swollen Arkansas tore the bridge apart. Capable leadership prevented any loss of life. Undaunted by their first failure the battalion constructed another bridge, pipe lines were installed and the water supply was resumed.

Then began the "dry run" of maneuvers, which were, by the way, not very dry. It seemed as though Mother Nature had saved up all the rain for the year and then let it pour down on us. For weeks we lived in mud, slept in mud, and even ate (in) mud. During this time Lt Colonel John R Morrison took over command of the battalion. Finally maneuvers were over, and we headed for Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

By this time our organization had become a precise piece in the fighting machine that would some day in the future strike and destroy the enemy. At Camp Campbell we again went into garrison life and immediately began the process of polishing off the rough edges of this formidable tool. Then we of the 125th Armored Engineer Battalion as an integral part of This War Machine, The Fourteenth Armored Division, emerged from the factory. Then ---.

The "Big Boss" held a conference. Master minds of this great organization, the United States Army, were gathered. A decision was to be made!! Suddenly in this sanctum of secrecy the silence was broken by a typewriter. The orders were written! They needed us and we were ready like a stallion champing on the bit.

The nervous system of our communication network pulsated with the secret news. Smoke belched forth from other factories, weary drivers relieved one another, the trucks must roll; trains sped through the night, their precious cargo would be delivered; Then ---.

## *We greet France!*

October 14, 1944, at 1630 hours, the blast of a whistle, and the James Parker was on its way. At last, the men were allowed to go 'top side'. Any hope for a final fling on the 'great white way' had long since died. From the time we left Camp Campbell on the 6th of October, it had been a whirlwind trip. First a quiet train ride from the rolling Kentucky hills to the old Hudson River Valley region of Camp Shanks, N. Y. At this anthill of activity the final P. O. E. processing took place. It consisted of lifeboat drill, clothing checks, gasmask drill, training films and the speediest physical examination on record. In fact many are still wondering to this day why one carried a spoon to the examination. With all these duties to be done during the five days spent here the expected pass to New York City was denied.

Co. C had boarded the ship on the 11th of October as an advance party. Their job was to set up details and prepare the living quarters for the main body of troops. In making this movement, one difficulty was encountered; "Mike" C Co's mascot since days on maneuvers in Tenn. in 1943, could not be left behind. A group of the boys formulated a plan by which the dog was successfully smuggled aboard. With the aid of sleeping pills Mike was carried as TAT equipment until he was safely below deck.

We had crammed barracks bags and musette bags to overflowing. Then long files of men, loaded with equipment, dragged themselves to crowded trains. A ferry boat ride to Brooklyn Army Base — for some men their first trip to New York, for others their last. The embarkation pier, a WAC band blared forth, hot coffee and doughnuts, tired, sweating men crowded on the boat — it was a mosaic of misery.

Now such thoughts were swept from the minds by a clean sea breeze. It was one of those clear sunny days one finds during Indian sum-



mer- the Statue of Liberty stood out in all its majesty in the harbor, gradually fading out of sight as the boat pulled out to sea. Finally twilight fell. With heavy hearts we took our last glimpses of the states, dusk on the Atlantic Highlands with its twin lighthouses on the Jersey coast.

It didn't take long to learn the history of the James Parker. She had formerly been the SS Panama with a passenger compliment of 200 and a hold full of bananas. Yes, after all the ancient army jokes about banana boats we were on one!

Rumors continued as usual — the increasing warm weather and sight of a few birds from the semi-tropics on board started an entire new story — Japan?? South Africa?? Brazil?? Panama?? Thus it was until we sighted land.

The trip across was unusually calm, and the quote of sea sickness lower than expected, although those who suffered did not consider this so. There were army activities: gas mask drill, quarters inspections and medical injections. Then there was mess at the "Greasy Spoon", a noisy spot in the bowels of the ship that nearly brought butterflies to the stomach of the most hardy.

Meals were not a pleasure; they were a necessary ordeal in the fight for survival. Quarters were a bit crowded too — if you moved six inches too far in any direction you were sure to be in some one else's territory.

Activities varied, some had KP, some had stewards mess, others deck cleaning details. Sgt. Hannigan's clean-up detail although self explanatory had its oddities for it became the daily routine to see his merry crew out swabbing the deck each morning. It was the seaborne version of policing the company area. The KP details each evening were a grind that started about 7pm after our 2nd meal finished. So many men were taken from each Ships' company. Every night you could see the gloomy crew trudging down into the galley. They knew what was ahead for them — stripped to the waist they would sweat from the steam off the boiling water. Tables were washed, floors scrubbed, pots and pans worked over and metal plates washed endlessly. About 12 midnight duties were over and one could fall asleep without being coaxed.

Ships companies were composed of usually an entire company of army personnel who wore a button which read 1A or 1B, 2A or 2B etc. This enabled men wearing them to locate their quarters and served in separating the companies in the chow line. It took 3 to 4 hours to serve one meal to some 2200 men who were on board. Many spent their time reading, gambling or just looking

at the endless monotony of ultramarine, and green waves with their lacy white spray.

On the night of the 24th, the lights of Casablanca could be seen on the African coast, and the morning of the 25th found us in Trafalgar Bay below Cape St. Vincent. We sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar, the tree clad African coast on one side and the bleak rocky land of Spain on the other. With field glasses, one could see the white houses and minarets of Tangiers. Soon the famous rock came into view — that evening the sea was rough and considerably colder; the Mediterranean proved stormy. Thus in a heavy squall we approached Marseilles with waves breaking over the side of the boat and as the ship neared shore, we saw our first evidence of what bombs can do. There were vessels sunk with just the superstructure showing above the water, huge bomb craters along the breakwater, houses on the water front with the walls blown out — exposing all that might be inside — just like the newsreels. An interesting sidelight was the view we had of "Chateau d' If" — the famous castle of "The Count of Monte Cristo". There were a few barrage balloons tugging at their cables making us realize we were still in danger of enemy air attacks — what a juicy target we would make!

After the careful blackout regulations we had observed, it caused much excitement and speculation to see the well lighted harbor area and the twinkling lights of the city across the bay. At that time fighting was still in progress in the vicinity of Nice some sixty miles away.

The following day we disembarked at 1500 hours. It was Sunday and a minimum of activity seemed to be at hand. In fact, the heavily bombed and shelled harbor area gave the false impression of a much deserted town. The next few hours proved a grueling ordeal for men who had been inactive for some weeks. A ten mile march, indeed, we had no idea where we were going, merely following a sign marked Delta Base Sector. We climbed over hills, passed through little French villages where our boys bought their first wine for cigarettes or chocolate. It was dark when we finally reached the bivouac area — great fields teeming with humanity and a thousand campfires burning in the night. We finally fell into a field at 2030 hours. One or two blankets, a shelter half in a damp field on a raw, cold night, along with a sore back and blistered feet was no man's idea of a good reception in France. It certainly could have been much worse; we were not making the initial invasion and the way was prepared for us, such as it was. However, were we there? When a man is very tired he can wait. Tomorrow would tell.



# Days at La Malle

It wasn't the call to chow that roused us from our blankets, the next morning, but the chance to huddle around a fire to warm our sore and frozen limbs. So this was La Malle! We had no idea where we were; last night we seemed to have marched to a desolate spot miles from anywhere. But now that it was light, we saw that we were camping along the main road and trolley line to Marseilles. We immediately began establishing our area and a messhall was set up for each company.

The equipment began to arrive and the remainder of the stay was spent in unpacking TAT equipment, receiving, processing and loading our new vehicles. The chow was good, but there didn't seem to be enough of it. We had passes to Marseilles and Aix en Provence, which was our last look at civilization and chance to get away from Army routine for months to come, hence, the opportunity for a pass into either town was not often overlooked.

Marseilles is a melting pot of many nations, a tough sea-port town. The "Canabiere" with its many cafes was an area teeming with a polyglot of humanity -- soldiers of all nations, Sikhs from India, Berbers from Morocco, Senegalese from Benin, French, British, and American soldiers and sailors -- all adding to the confusion of "Wine, Women and Song". Marseilles presented us with an opportunity to indulge in French beer, which was a little flat, and French wine, which was a little expensive. There were several movie houses, showing ancient American films like "Topper" and "The Great Dictator". The Red Cross Canteen in the center of town was always crowded, but it was fully worth the long wait in line for a last chance at doughnuts, cookies and coffee, and conversation with American girls. The waiting GI was constantly haunted by French soldiers and civilians "bumming" cigarettes and chocolate, and a smoked butt, expertly flipped from experienced GI fingers, would scarcely reach the ground before it was scooped up by an eagerly-alert civilian. Cigarettes and chocolate were now more difficult to get, even by the soldiers, consequently, few were anxious to part with their precious rations unless it was for a good price.

There was a little French boy about twelve, very well-dressed, but obviously undernourished, standing shyly apart from the clamoring beggars. He undoubtedly was unaccustomed to the pastime of "mooching", but, through sheer necessity, he was there, not knowing where to begin or what to do. A gruff GI, touched by the child's skinny legs and plaintive eyes, dug into his pockets and produced a huge, half-pound bar of Hershey's Milk Chocolate. Tossing it to the boy with an aloofness

such as would not expose his feeling of sympathy, he muttered roughly, "Here, Kid. Maybe this will help put some meat on those legs." The boy, saucer eyes glowing like Christmas morning, fondled the bar tenderly, murmured a polite "Merci" and ran for home, eager to show the prize to his family. No doubt the candy lasted for weeks.

Aix en Provence was a less congested place. Like Marseilles, it was an ancient Roman Settlement -- a decaying arch still showed a vestige of its past. Here a large casino afforded entertainment of a slightly more quiet nature than Marseilles. American music was good-naturedly murdered by well-meaning French musicians, playing popular songs of ten or fifteen years ago.

The bivouac area at the Delta Base Section was a beehive of activity, trucks running to and from the port, bringing up supplies and TAT equipment to the battalion. Tools and guns were taken out of cosmoline. TAT equipment amounts to the necessary odds and ends, tools and clerks' cabinets, machine guns and accessories and so forth used by the companies and sent overseas with the troops -- thus we get TAT (to accompany troops). Trucks were being constantly worked on to get them into combat condition. The equipment had not all arrived, and we were short many necessities -- canvas tops for the vehicles, windshields, tools, etc.

With the line companies cleaning TAT equipment and getting supplies, Headquarters Company meantime was quite busy welding racks on peeps and holders for bedrolls and rations. At the same time a trailer was built for Mr. Oakes for his Personnel Section. It was a conglomeration of parts from all sorts of vehicles including French and German as well as American battle-scarred military vehicles and passenger cars. When finished, it was quite a sight to behold.

During this time there was a constant threat of enemy aircraft even though the land had been cleared for miles around. Nevertheless, it could be expected that some Jerry planes might sweep down, strafe our area and harass troop concentrations and movements toward the front. Because of such possibilities, air guard posts were established on a nearly hill overlooking the camp site. Two men on each post kept a sharp eye skyward with a fifty calibre MG set on an anti-aircraft mount. There were American patrols observed but no sign of German planes.

At La Malle we were inconvenienced with what may or may not be called a "privy". It was a crude contraption consisting of a long, boxlike affair with a series of holes in the upper side. It sat out in the open unsheltered from wind, rain, or sun, and afforded the occupant a fine view of the surrounding countryside, including the trolley line and the main



road between Marseilles and Aix. One never knew what to expect -- exuberant motorists would wave to any sitter on the "throne" or cyclists would tip their hats gravely, and more than once the trolley slowed down as it passed the "reviewing stand". However, the climax occurred one day when one unsuspecting GI was calmly approached by a woman who insisted upon selling him a bottle of wine.

On the 5th of November, Company "C", attached to CCA moved out, finally fully equipped for battle by generous donations from the other companies. Headquarters remained in the La Malle area until the 22nd of November. In the meantime, parts of the battalion had moved out and a number of the headquarters men were with various units. The problems of picking up vehicles, rations, and supplies involved various tasks, especially those of preparing vehicles for battle conditions, as for example, the minor detail of welding angle irons on the front bumpers of peeps for protection against strung wires. While unloading, one injury occurred. Tec 4 Edward Budrick suffered a fractured pelvis when a load shifted on a Brockway truck. Budrick made a fine recovery and returned to his outfit within four months.

The remainder of the battalion started preparations to evacuate the bivouac area, and by the 22nd of November, the motor convoy was on its way to the front. Already Co "C" was experiencing combat. The first day of the trip a distance of one hundred thirty nine miles was covered, reaching the French Cavalry stables at Bourg de Peage in the evening. The convoy had passed by the Triumphal Arch at Orange where once proud legions of the Roman Army marched on their path of conquest two thousand years before. We saw the walls of Avignon which once had been the seat of Popes in Medieval times. Further on, the road was strewn with the remains of German convoys, twisted masses of steel left from the invasion of Southern France several months earlier. Most of the men had their first view of deserted villages, gaunt, burnt-out houses with sightless windows and charred timbers, a mute testimony of what lay ahead. The second day of the trip, two hundred three miles were covered. The great industrial city of Lyon was by-passed. Night was spent in French barracks at Dijon, ancient capital of the Dukes of Burgundy. The weather was considerably colder here and snow flurries not infrequent. Another one hundred nine miles brought the convoy to an assigned bivouac area at Verriere de Portieux. Fighting in this area was recent history and much knocked-out enemy equipment lay still unrusted. From here, one could expect air raids and precautions increased.

Enroute to the area at Verriere de Portieux, squads were dropped off at road junctions

and important bridges to provide road guides for the column following, hence, it was a few days before the entire outfit gathered at the assembly area. An air of expectancy was gradually being built up among the men, for soon, too soon, they were to enter combat, for we had now joined the 7th Army, commanded by Lt Gen ALEXANDER M PATCH, whose Headquarters were at Epinal on the Moselle River.

## *Assembly at Les Verrière de Portieux*

The bivouac area was a beautiful spot, bounded on two sides by mud four feet deep and marked off to indicate a road, on the other two by swamps and marshlands that were as good as a barbed wire fence to keep the GI's from wandering off. The area itself was something out of this world. There was running water at your disposal at all times -- running all over -- thru your tent, into your bed rolls -- anywhere you didn't want it. The area was in an enchanting wooded spot that helped nature make things worse for us. When the sun shone, the trees ward off any heat that might reach the little Shangri-la and when it rained (many of you, at this point, might ask when didn't it rain) the trees mercifully stored up the precipitation until it poured down in great enough quantities to drown an unfortunate GI who dared to venture from his tent.

The time was spent in working on loading and final preparations of equipment and vehicles. The roads were in so bad a condition that corduroying was necessary in many spots. Ditches were dug and puddles were drained. No sooner did it seem that all this back-breaking work was doing some good when it would start to rain again. Everyone was getting disgusted with "Sunny France". It looked as if the 125th's stay in the ETO was going to be a muddy one. It turned out later to be worse than muddy.

A completely new type of training was encountered here. It was a mine school but a very different kind than the school at Camp Campbell or Chaffee. It actually amounted to clearing areas mined by the Nazis in their retreat.

Every morning a group of officers and enlisted men would travel to an area that had recently been captured and where minefields had been discovered but not removed. A varied selection was found -- Teller mines, Regal mines, Schu mines and Schachtel mines. A good school it was because one could not afford to make



a mistake. The men were organized in probing teams. An engineer officer who was in charge of the area would lead the men to the mined area and begin the job of probing and digging out the mines.

Lt. Colonel Swift, 125th's old battalion commander, visited the area one day and gave the men an inkling of what to expect in battle. He said that mines would take up much of our time but that they were nothing to fear for "They are only mechanical devices and can only be set off mechanically". The men were taught a new method of breaching a minefield which was totally different from what had been taught in the States. It used less men yet was more thorough. This was used with good results in later operations.

Others were engaged in the problem of actually getting supplies to the fighting men. For example, a thousand pounds of cratering charges were delivered to the line companies around the 30th of November, it was the beginning of a trip over the Vosges mountains, that would be made throughout the Winter and on into the following Spring, the supply route from Epinal to Alsace.

At Portieux, the first 14th Division shower point was set up. It utilized the facilities offered by an old glass factory. The shower point was one of the most looked for and prayed for units. Dusty, mud-covered "dough feet", grimy tankers, dirt-caked engineers alike welcomed it, although the water was often "damned cold". In the months following, many units used our facilities, including the 101st Airborne Division.

During the stay at Portieux, the weather, though not cold, threatened rain. Here at night the first gun fire was heard, and one could see flashes in the distance as if there was a thunderstorm several miles away. Nightly "visits" from Jerry planes were evident, and for the first time the men realized how close we were to the enemy and war.

Much to everyone's disgust, the weather took a turn for the worse and, instead of threatening rain, it grew colder, and a mixture of snow and rain fell, which augmented our misery. It was a fitting setting for the feeling of suspense and the tingling anxiety which affected all of us. Everyone knew that the day they were waiting for was soon to come. It was just a matter of time.

On December 1st, the battalion minus Co "C" left the bivouac area and completed an uneventful trip to the Division assembly area. Hq and Co "A" went to Wilshausen while Co "B" set up its CP at Gottesheim.

## *Through the Vosges on to the Alsatian plains*

Company "C", which had moved ahead with CCA, had but a brief stay at Verriere de Portieux when it was involved in the audacious Vosges Mountains Campaign. It long had been considered impossible to cross the Vosges if they were half-way defended, but for once it was proven otherwise.

On November 17th, the 1st platoon moved out as an attachment to the 62nd Infantry and the 25th Tank Battalion, while the 3rd platoon moved out simultaneously with the 48th Tankers. The Second platoon was held in reserve. It joined the column behind CCA with headquarters platoon. They moved through mud all night — the drizzling rain made blackout driving miserable. Next morning many of the men saw their first dead German soldiers from whom the French had taken shoes and other articles of clothing or any valuables they may have had. This fact was evidenced by pockets turned inside out on the dead men. In one town, we saw an old Frenchman loading corpses into a cart and stamping them down so there would be room for more. On either side of the road, dead horses and wrecked equipment gave evidences of skirmishes the previous day.

November 18th was the 125th's first day of combat. The infantry had run onto a road block and called upon the engineers to neutralize it. Thus the 2nd squad of the 1st platoon under the direction of Capt May (then 1st Lt) filed through the drizzle of rain towards the road block which consisted of a pile of logs extending well across the road. Without warning, a Jerry mortar shell exploded in the middle of the group killing Tec 5 Louis Twardy and seriously wounding Sgt Edward Kearse, Tec 5 Howard Kemp and Pfc Charles Roessler. Capt May and Pvt Don Roberts were hit by fragments but not seriously enough to stop them in their work. These were among the first casualties in the division. They served to bring home the grim realization of the actualities of war.

The 2nd platoon pulled into the fray on the 21st, attached to the 25th Tk Bn, and soon were in range of the sound of artillery and small arms fire. They were forced to the side of the road to allow a column of the 3rd infantry division pass for their all-out effort in the attack on St. Die. The infantry made a successful attack the next day, and, since that sector was covered by the 3rd Division, the 25th Tks, with the 2nd platoon moved to



another locality finally meeting Company Headquarters at Donon Pass on the 23rd.

The 3rd platoon, attached to the 48th Tk Bn, passed through Baccarat and on into enemy territory, not having much trouble with the enemy in their sector.

In the endless rain, these three elements of the 14th Armored Division slowly descended from the mountains, working against scattered resistance, miserable in the cold, penetrating dampness.

It was the work of such men as Tec 5 Glenn Taylor, who was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for removing three quarters of a mile of road block with a bulldozer, often without protection of covering troops, that was responsible for CCA's ability to pour its armor on the Alsatian plains from the pass at Donon. The Vosges once aptly called "The Black Hole of Death" were ours.

November 25th began a new phase — the battle of Alsace. CCA's column passed through Schirmeck with its notorious Nazi concentration camp for French political prisoners. From there, they continued winding down to the Rhine valley; for the original objective given at Portieux was the securing of a bridgehead on the Rhine. At Schirmeck, the platoons split up again.

The 1st platoon moved toward the town of Ebersheim. The weather had grown quite warm, consequently, everyone was in high spirits as the town was neared. However, reports from returning reconnaissance elements disclosed that the enemy was dug in in force, thereupon, it was decided to backtrack and attack the town from the flanks. This proved a fatal mistake for many. It was the night of November 26, one of those cold mists began closing in on the whole column, hiding from view all that might be near. The column approached Erstein with full lights on, intending to take the town and proceed to Ebersheim from the left, however, the enemy didn't seem to like the idea and had a warm reception awaiting.

Reconnaissance drove into town and reported all clear. The infantry moved in and immediately the silence and murky blackness of the night was pierced by tracer bullets, flares, and the flash and roar of shells. It was a perfect ambush and the column was caught right in the middle of it. Still parked on the road leading to the town, they were unable to find cover for the vehicles so, leaving two men aboard each vehicle to man the guns, the remainder dug in the adjacent fields while yellow tracers flashed overhead. Needless to say, it took little time to be well below the level of the ground. The work made one warm, although the night was bitter cold and wet. A platoon of infantry was cut off and given up for lost; the enemy was slowly infiltrating around our flanks, threatening to

cut us off. Things were pretty hopeless as the night wore on. Matters grew worse and at 0200, Capt. May, ordered the 1st platoon to move into town afoot as support for the beleaguered infantry. They began the short march, only to be met by scattered elements of the infantry, retreating. Seeing that a full withdrawal was in order, General Karlstad (then Col) ordered the vehicles turned around, and the column hastily hightailed it out of town. Sgt Thorn, platoon Sergeant of the 1st platoon, was later awarded a Bronze Star for his actions in organizing the withdrawal and in forming a rear guard, which remained until every vehicle was out of danger.

The infantry suffered heavily, several tanks were lost, but most of the boys that were cut off were able to make their way back next morning. There were no casualties in the engineers, only dignity suffered. There was, however, slight damage to the vehicles; the 2nd squad's halftrack rode back on the combat rims of the front wheels.

Yes, the enemy was there in force. Houses along the street were bristling with machine guns in every window. Anti-tank guns and 88's were dug in good positions. It was a hot night and one not to be forgotten. Many hoped that this was the toughest fight they were to see, but those that hoped so were soon to have their dreams shattered.

The 2nd platoon again attached to the 25th Tanks proceeded to Obernai which had been liberated a few hours earlier; hq platoon remained here and the 2nd platoon proceeded to Goxwiller.

The column struck strong opposition in the next town, Gertwiller. The Germans seemed to be retreating reluctantly and pouring in artillery while their infantry secured strong positions on the other side of a stream that divided the town.

The column halted, and the recon went ahead to sound out the enemy. They reported the town cleared, but a destroyed bridge in the middle of town would hold up any advance on the part of our tanks. The infantry entered town and soon were pinned down by all types of fire. At 1700, the 2nd platoon dismounted from their vehicles and entered town to throw a treadway across the stream. Here they were met by an intense artillery barrage. One shell hit the roof of a house beside which Sgt Bob Lewis and PFC Gene Osegueda were taking shelter, however, they threw off the debris and soon were on their way again.

At the bridge site, it was discovered that the enemy had flooded a street that could be used for a bypass, so Tec 5 Latawski, Cpl Shelley, PFC Breedlove, PFC Stutz, and PFC Haber had to clear the debris used for damming the water. The bad part of this operation was that artillery was hitting around them all the while. This hard-working crew



finally accomplished its mission and an infantry Captain led armor through the bypass to support the hardpressed infantry fighting at the edge of town.

As night progressed, the situation became worse. The enemy was infiltrating around both sides of the town. Machine and 'burp' guns opened up from hidden positions. All plans for building the bridge were abandoned, and defense of the town was established. The 2nd platoon took its first prisoners that night when two krauts walked up to PFC Trahan and offered themselves along with their weapons to the startled GI.

The platoon was called out at 2330 to set up an MLR so that the infantry, who now were cut off, could fall back to more secure positions. Positions were taken on either side of the street. While the platoon was lying in the street, Tec 5 Horton turned to PFC Van Hise and said, "Cold, isn't it?", and the funny part of it was that such a calm statement of facts should be made while all the time Jerry was throwing in "beaucoup" shells. To make matters worse it was found that enemy infantry had infiltrated into the platoon's positions. This fact was discovered when PFC Snowden walked out in the street to recover a gas can. A sniper let loose with a burst from a 'burp' gun. Snowden did not stay to get the can but beat a hasty retreat to the house. Tec 5 Kaiser and Tec 5 Devilbiss were leaning against a wall when a sniper fired a shot at them, hitting between their heads. He had fired from a chimney. One of the 25th Tk Bn's tank commander's saw what had happened and turned his gun in that direction. He fired one round of HE and blew sniper, chimney, and house to pieces. By daylight, forces were consolidated to make an orderly withdrawal.

A tank was used to lead the way out of town, as it was necessary to blast snipers from houses to which they had infiltrated during the night. Every weapon was put to bear on buildings, as the small group made its way cautiously through the streets. Tec 5 Devilbiss saw a sniper in a 2nd floor window and let go with a blast from his M-1. Result — one less German to worry about.

Once out of town, the platoon set up another defense line. Foxholes were dug without persuasion and it was none too soon. The enemy had observation and began to throw artillery on the positions. One shell hit directly in the hole of S Sgt (then Cpl) Henkelmann but luckily he was sitting in a foxhole with another GI. The same shell made swiss cheese of Pfc N. Pusi's rifle stock and cut Pfc W. Overberg's overcoat to shreds.

That afternoon, the platoon returned to Goxwiller and remained here while our forces poured a concentrated artillery barrage on the resisting forces in the town. That evening all

had turkey 'sandwiches' for a reminder of Thanksgiving. The next day Gertwiller was retaken, a bridge was constructed, and the final mopping up of a few snipers was accomplished. The column moved on to the town of St Pierre.

Lt Tilly's platoon, the third, was still attached to the 48th Tk Bn. This column was supposed to race south along the edge of the mountains, take Selestat, thus sealing off any German troops left in the hills. They proceeded east to Molshiem and then south through Obernai. When evening came, the platoon was on the road to Barr; a section of the road was subject to heavy enemy shell fire, so it was considered more feasible to turn back and spend the night in Obernai. Barr turned out to be a rough prospect.

The 3rd squad was called upon to remove road mines at Barr. The town itself was the center of heavy bombardment. It was here that many of the boys heard their first 'screaming meemie' as the German rockets have been so aptly called.

Progress was much slower than expected, the move south proceeded at a snail's pace, due to the necessary removal of mines from the road.

It was decided to bridge at Anlau. The convoy of bridge trucks, and Sgt Lukin's squad truck, carrying treadway started down the Barr-Anlau road. Halfway to the bridge site, the bridging detail came under Jerry artillery and small arms fire. The squad returned the fire as the vehicle sped through the enemy pocket of resistance. At length, arriving at the bridge site, Sgt Lukins dispersed four of his men, Hall, Moncino, Mosser and McKane as security. The squad leader, Lorenc, Stratton, Bennett and Stockman worked on the bridge. Having completed the bridge, the squad endeavored to get the information back to the column commander. However, all efforts to run the gauntlet of enemy fire again were in vain. Sgt Lukins, then, placed the balance of his men on security and awaited the arrival of the leading elements. The column arrived in thirty minutes, and the armor rolled on. Although the vehicles were hit, there were no casualties among the men. Proceeding southward, the column encountered an enemy mine field. The third platoon again rallied to the call and breached a gap. Once again the column gained momentum to harass and destroy the withdrawing Hun. The following day, the platoon joined the rest of the company at St. Pierre.

Here the company was reorganized. On December 4th CCA pulled out to rejoin the Division in the Hochfelden area. "C" Co proceeded north to an assembly area at Bosendorf where it returned to battalion control and had an opportunity to lick its first battle wounds.



COPY

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HEADQUARTERS VI CORPS  
APO 46, U. S. ARMY

6 December 1944

ORDER OF THE DAY

Since the beginning of the military history of Europe, to force a successful passage of the Vosges Mountains has been considered by military experts an operation offering such small opportunity for success as to forestall consideration of such effort.

To march, supply and maintain a large body of troops through these natural obstacles, without hostile opposition, is a major problem in itself.

To fight cross-country, in the face of unreasoning, stubborn Nazi resistance, at times supplying over snow-covered roads and trails, through this region and at this season of the year, is a military achievement of which all who participated can be justly proud.

To those men of the 100th and 36th Divisions who battered the flanks, to those of the 3d and 103d Divisions and of the 14th Armored Division who poured onto the Alsatian Plain, to those supporting combat troops of the Corps, and to those indispensable elements of supply, maintenance and evacuation, I extend my thanks and my congratulations. Teamwork, without which there can be no success in battle, has been yours to a superlative degree.

It is with pride and humility that I realize the pinnacle and the magnitude of this concerted achievement of American soldiery--- your achievement. I have every confidence that the future of the VI Corps rests secure and bright in your capable hands.

/s/ Edward H. Brooks  
/t/ EDWARD H. BROOKS,  
Major General, U. S. Army,  
Commanding

CERTIFIED TRUE COPY

*K A McClary*  
K A McCLARY  
1st Lt CE  
Adjutant

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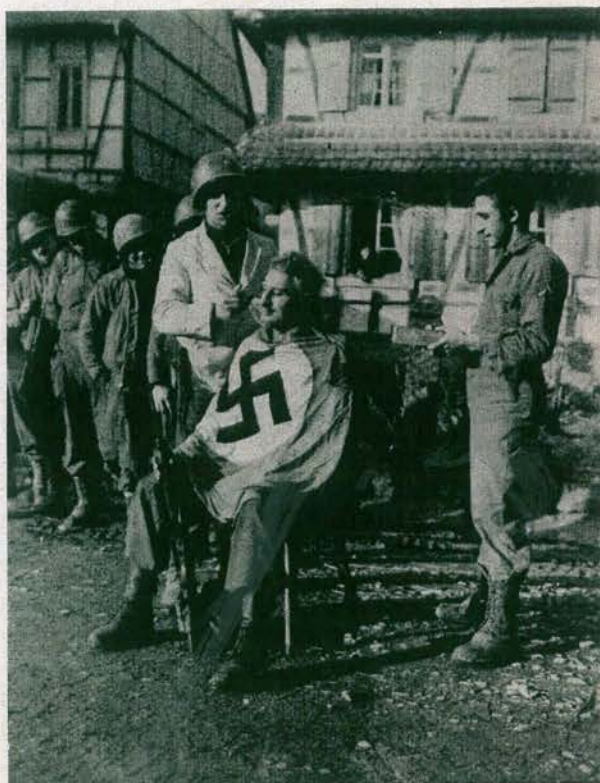


La Malle, France





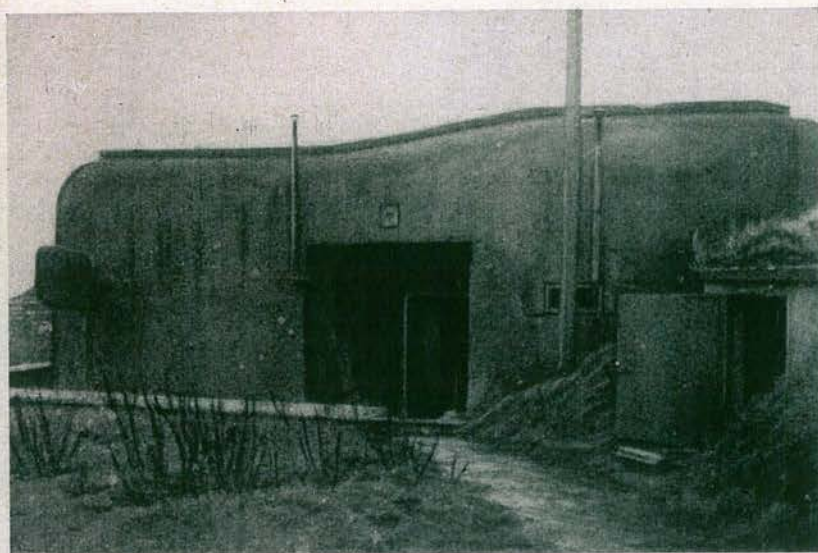
The first time  
we build timber trestle  
under treadway  
Hunspach, Alsace



Service de luxe  
HQ outdoor barber salon  
Hunspach, Alsace



Keeping the supply route open  
Wissembourg, Alsace  
December 16, 1944



Pill box in the maginot line  
near Hunspach, Alsace





Sturdy Bridges were needed to carry our armored load  
Wissembourg, Alsace December 16, 1944



# *The Battalion Gathers Vicinity of Wilshausen*

The assembling of the 14th Armored Division at the beginning of December found various elements fairly well dispersed. CCA returned to Division control after its experiences in the Vosges with the VI Corps. It was under these conditions that Co. "C" left St Pierre for Reidheim and reached Bossendorf in the vicinity of Hochfelden, the Divisional assembly area, on the 1st of December.

On this same date, the major part of the battalion left Les Verriere de Portieux for Alsace. For the convenience of billeting, proper dispersion and security, Headquarters and Co "A" went to Wilshausen. Co "B" was sent to Gottesheim. The motor convoy covered eighty five miles, traveling until a black and heavy fog had settled down. They reached Wilshausen where "Hq" and "A" Co were to billet. Capts Hanson and Knight traveling together found the town in advance of the column. Here "Hq" and "A" Companies were able to give their men the advantage of billeting rights. A few rooms and haylofts, of a none too luxurious nature were secured. However, it was a big improvement to have dry floors and a roof overhead, rather than the dampness and mud of the "great-out-of-doors".

For Co "A", operations for the first few days were limited to the removing of mud from men, equipment and vehicles. Guard became an intensified reality with the enemy near at hand. It consisted of two out-posts of three men and a vehicle guard by the squad or platoon.

The third day at Wilshausen found Co "A" performing its first necessary duties of war, road maintenance. The first and third platoons went to Saverne to fill bomb craters in one of the highways. They cut down trees, hauled railroad ties, and removed gravel and tile from destroyed enemy engineer dumps and ruined houses. The Second platoon, in the meantime, was engaged in cutting firewood as the natives complained about an exorbitant use of their dwindling stocks.

The first platoon of Co "A" left for Pfaffenhoffen to take over a captured Nazi Engineer dump and lumber yard. The men converted an old "Pot and Kettle" factory into a barracks. Here, Lt Dillard issued engineer supplies to outfits in the vicinity on written requests.

This job was taken over primarily to relieve men of the 120th Engineers for other duties. In going to the dump in Pfaffenhoffen, the unit was strafed for the first time. Nothing

serious occurred but the boys got a few shots off with their fifty calibre MG at the low flying ME-109's as they came in view. S/Sgt O' Rourke got his convoy safely through. The Second and Third platoons continued road work from Wilshausen to Hochfelden and from Wichersheim to highway 421. It was here in Alsace that the boys had their first introduction to a crystal liquid that is closely related to nitro-glycerine and turpentine; it is called "Schnapps" by the Alsations and Germans.

Meanwhile the First and Second Squads of the First platoon moved out of Pfaffenhoffen with Task Force England leaving the Third squad in Pfaffenhoffen. The mission of the Task Force was to seize and secure a route through the Hagenau Forest suitable for the passage of the Division. The job of the Engineers was to go ahead of the column and clear any obstacles that might block the way. It was a tense situation; no one knew what lie ahead; work continued cautiously.

At the entrance of the forest, the first obstacle was encountered. It was an unmined road block. That was soon out of the way and the Force traveled on scarcely a mile to come upon a second road block. This one was loaded with S-Mines. It was removed, but at a price. Two men were wounded when one of the mines was activated.

A third obstruction was encountered in the forest in the form of a blown bridge. Word was sent back for forty feet of Treadway to bridge the gap. Capt. Knight led one truck up and Major Watkins brought up the other. Sniper fire was the only enemy action that took place while building the bridge. From there the Task Force moved on to Surbourg to await the rest of the Division.

In a lighter vein, we might mention the finding of a generator that looked like a cross between a Model "T" and a Battery Set. Tec 5 Rino Hill and PFC Filmar were forever tinkering with the contraption for somewhere in its complicated mechanism there should be some ball-bearings. Many happy hours were spent using their mechanical bent of mind and ingenuity; but one great mystery remains — "What in the Hell were they going to do with the ball-bearings when they found them?"

One tragedy occurred at Wilshausen when Pfc Wilfred Thompson was killed by the accidental firing of an M-3 gun in the mess line. It was Co "A"'s first casualty.

Co "B" made themselves at home in Gottesheim; the CP being established in a school house, with the boys billeted in various and sundry homes nearby. Duties varied from the posting of CCB Headquarters to reconnaissance. The boys remember a buxom lass named Lucy who used to hang out at the Mess Line. Her conversation appeared harmless. Later on it was learned that she and the school teacher



who lived above the CP were hanged by the French Government as Nazi spies. This proved beyond doubt what a dangerous section Alsace could be.

For all but Co "C", it was a first introduction to front line areas. The men saw their first dog fights, actually heard the crack of artillery pieces and saw the flashes of landing shells at night. War for them was becoming a reality. Co "C" at Bossendorf, however, was trying to recover from actual contact with the enemy. They were making the necessary changes in equipment such as as the mounting of ring mounts on their vehicles and profiting by the knowledge gained only in actual battle experience. While at Bossendorf, some of the men went to demonstrations on the use of rocket launchers held by Co "A" at Wilshausen. Here, it was shown how such an instrument could be used to reinforce and protect armored units, also its effectiveness as a defensive weapon against enemy armor was demonstrated.

Another show was given, on the assault of a fortified position. Here, effective methods for

the blowing out of Dragons Teeth were being considered. While the gathering was in force, the visit from an ME-109 proved quite exciting and nearly broke up the affair.

Bossendorf possessed two taverns that served a mediocre grade of beer which was welcomed by all, especially Henry Krug. From this town, and other localities, the boys were taken to a shower point set up in a warehouse by the railroad tracks at Hochfelden. It was more of an ordeal than pleasure as the anti-room was unheated; but Americans being essentially clean will go to "killing" methods to accomplish such ends.

On the 13th of the month, the Division jumped off on its mission to capture Wissembourg. This found the battalion on the move again. Battalion Headquarters, Hq Company and Co "A" moved into Hagenau and were billeted in homes on the North edge of town. Co "B" left Gottesheim for Neiderbetschdorf and Co "C" moved with CCA toward Wissembourg, reaching Surbourg on the 13th. Thus a new phase begins; our first efforts to break into Germany.



*“Mission  
Wissembourg-Salmbach”*



## *Co "C" attempts assault on Siegfried*

The stay at Bossendorf lasted a week, and the company was ready to move on, their wounds having been thoroughly licked. The entire division was ready for the big movement to Wissembourg and ---? It was this mission of CCA of which Co "C" was a part, to capture Wissembourg and advance through the line. This action was made possible by the first platoon of Co "A", which prepared the way for the division by clearing a path through the Hagenau Forest. By nightfall, on the 12th of December, the first platoon had cleared a road block, pushed aside a strip of abatis, and bridged a 35-foot stream with treadway. During the night, the 2nd and 3rd platoon of Co "A" cleared nine miles of road between Hagenau and Surbourg.

The 2nd platoon of Co "C" moved to Reidheim on the 11th of December to join the 25th Tk Bn and were on the move again. They passed through Hagenau and were outside Surbourg at the coming of darkness. The next day, the column moved on to take Soultz, Surbourg, and Hunspach, with little resistance. At Hunspach, they halted to build a 30-foot bridge and to remove a 545 pound aerial bomb from another bridge.

Advancing on Altenstadt the next day, they came under a heavy mortar barrage that damaged the platoon truck. The next job was that of cleaning up the debris from a railroad overpass that the Germans blew in their hasty retreat.

While this was going on, the first platoon moved into Soultz where they stayed two days in a nice house above a drygoods store amply stocked with Nazi flags and banners. Hence, everyone had some fitting souvenirs to send home.

On December 16, the 62nd Infantry and the first platoon of the engineers moved on to Wissembourg and took the city after a heavy artillery barrage. The city was strategically located near the German border and was naturally important, consequently, the 14th received a good write up in the newspapers back home. The 1st platoon was then put into reserve and stayed in town while the other columns moved on toward the border. In the main part of the town, a canal was bridged, and a few days' rest was enjoyed by the men.

While the first platoon was being held in reserve, the second platoon with the 25th Tanks, moved through the town and entered the town of Schweighofen near the line. It was here that their job was begun. Demolition charges were prepared and a crew of 22 men was picked to blow a row of dragon's teeth

to allow the passage of armor. The crew moved to Kapsweyer where fighting was still in progress. Only a few streets of the town were taken; rifle and machine gun fire were received from the other end of the town, and the Jerry artillery had them spotted. Refuge was sought in a house until the fire let up. At 0200, December 18, the demolition crew moved out to do the job, each man carrying 50 pounds of TNT, and protected by one squad of Co "C", 62nd Infantry. The teeth were half a mile away and the going was tedious. En route, machine gun and artillery fire was encountered, and within sight of the objective, the party was halted and fired upon by a German sentry. This drew more artillery fire and the party was forced to evacuate the area after taking one prisoner. The attempt to assault the line was abandoned and the column returned to Schweighofen. However, the engineers returned daily to Kapsweyer to flush out snipers that had infiltrated during the night.

The column was relieved by Doughfeet of the 79th Infantry Division, and the second platoon returned to Wissembourg, then to Rechtwiller where they spent a quiet Christmas Day.

During this time, the third platoon was by no means inactive, for they pushed on past Wissembourg and the border of Germany, building bridges and dodging artillery fire until they entered the town of Rechtenbach, Germany. It was a farming community, completely deserted except for a few cows, chickens, and rabbits, which were quickly rounded up as pleasant change from dry rations. The situation on the whole Western Front had changed considerably during the past few weeks. The Germans were counter attacking along the entire front from Holland to the Swiss Border.

The men of the platoon busied themselves with converting some of the 2300 pounds of explosives into charges suitable for use against pillboxes and anything else they might encounter on their way through the Siegfried Line. While the men worked on the demolitions, three shells came in, one hit the house on the enemy side, another went over the trailer, used to carry the demolitions, and hit a building about 50 yards behind. The third was a dud; it passed over the men, missing the load of explosives by about ten feet.

Later in the day, a call came through for a squad of engineers, who were needed to move some timber which had to be made accessible to the tankdozer. The infantry, supported by tanks, were to make an attack on the town of Ober-Otterbach. This town was the gateway to the Siegfried fortifications and was well defended. The tanks were being held up by a demolished bridge and a crater. A tankdozer was on hand to fill in the crater. The only material available, for the bridge,



was some timber which the tankdozer couldn't get to. The engineers were to place the timbers in a workable position. As the first squad, led by Sgts Seyfarth and Mc Clure approached the site, several pieces of enemy self-propelled artillery fired at the American positions. The engineers had been spotted; one of the first shells hit the half-track in which the men had been riding. At the same time, the artillery opened fire and the Germans began a fierce counter-attack against our troops. The infantry on the left flank of the engineers were pinned down, enabling the enemy to almost encircle the town. Despite the heavy fire encountered during the entire operation, the engineers did accomplish their mission, the stream crossing was made, and the tanks used the ford later in the day when a new thrust was made.

One man was lost during the withdrawal from the encircled town, Pvt Frank DiLorenzo. The squad was ordered to withdraw under the heavy fire. A search was made for the missing man, but to stay longer meant certain capture, so they were forced to leave without him. They moved back to Rechtenbach and remained there until the 23rd of December. From Rechtenbach, they moved into Rechtwiller with the company, where Christmas dinner was had.

Meanwhile, the first platoon, on December 13, was committed with the 62nd Infantry to form Task Force Shedd. They moved out from Wissembourg and arrived at Altendorf at dusk. There was sporadic shellfire during the night, not close enough to do any damage, but enough to force the civilians into their cellars. That day, the task force had entered Germany, but were ordered to withdraw while Thunderbolts of the Air Corps strafed and bombed the German defenses along the Siegfried Line. Everyone hoped that this would be the deciding factor in demolishing the approaches to the Line itself.

At midnight, an engineer patrol was sent out to reconnoiter the positions of the Siegfried Line and to determine the dimensions of the dragons' teeth which had to be demolished before the attack could be made. Lt May and Sgt Spring led the patrol, and Cpl Roger Austin, Pvs Eppler, Dixon, and Hillis constituted the remainder of the patrol. They left at midnight, carrying nothing but their slingless rifles. All excess equipment was left behind to prevent any unnecessary noise. They returned safely about 0400 not having contacted the enemy and brought back the necessary information. It was found later that the enemy was there in too great a force for our small combat command, consequently, the column moved back to Wissembourg.

The situation became grave --- the enemy was counter-attacking on all fronts, and the systematic shelling of Wissembourg was going full swing. Frequently, shells of a heavy caliber fell on the outskirts of town at night, (it was

said that the Germans were shelling us with a 290 mm piece). On the morning of December 15th a call came to the engineers reporting a shell hole in the center of the main road from Wissembourg to Soultz. The third squad of the first platoon was immediately dispatched to the scene with picks and shovels, expecting to do the job in an matter of minutes however, the hole was much larger than the expected size. It was fifteen feet across and approximately ten feet deep, substantiating the story about the heavy gun the enemy was using. A squad of engineers with picks and shovels would have taken all day and perhaps more to fill the crater, so the bulldozer was called out, and the job finished in a half-hour.

The other companies, also in Wissembourg at the time had moved out, leaving Co "C" as rear guard, but the following day, the first platoon moved out, leaving the town nearly vacated of American troops adding much to the anxiety of the civilians. It will always be remembered how the long line of sobbing, tearful Frauleins waited to say "Auf Wiedersehen" to the Casanovas of Co "C". Perhaps the girls were more worried over their leaving than they were over the expected arrival of the Wehrmacht.

The company assembled in the tiny town of Rechtswiller, where it spent Christmas Day, having Christmas dinner cooked for them by the kitchen and also by obliging civilians. There was plenty of turkey and chicken, and, with rest, quiet, and mail from home, it was not such a bad Christmas after all, considering how bad it might have been.

## *"B" Co bridges into Germany*

While CCA was successfully accomplishing its mission in Wissembourg, CCB was attempting to take Salmbach, a town on the Lauter River near the German border. December 11th saw elements of CCB still in Gottesheim, Co "B" of the engineers doing outpost duty on CCB headquarters and guarding the waterpoint. Minor reconnaissance work was also done, but the stay in Gottesheim was a quiet one, except for the sound of distant artillery fire from our own "Long Toms".

The company was alerted December 15, the first platoon attached to the 19th infantry, along with the Brockway driver, the bulldozer and crews. The 2nd platoon was attached to the 48th Tk Bn, and the third platoon remained with company headquarters, constituting CCB reserve. The column moved out to Niederbetschdorf and bedded down with CCB. The



same night, the first platoon put up a foot-bridge under mortar fire, and a treadway bridge to replace the bridge destroyed by the enemy.

In Niederbetschdorf, the men met an American woman who had been stranded in Alsace for five years. She mentioned the fact that the Germans had retreated through the town two days previously, moving with trucks, horses, and wagons.

The treadway having been finished, the column moved through Hatten and Buhl arriving in Trimbach where hot chow was served. The men were bedded down in billets acquired in the usual manner, that is, a door-to-door canvas, asking the usual, "Haben Sie ein Zimmer für Soldaten zu schlafen?". Most of the rooms were obtained through the courtesy of Tec 5 Joe Sand and Pfc Mackey.

It was here that the main job of the engineers was to take place, that is, the building of the bridge over the Lauter River into Germany, and while the bridge was in the process of construction, Capt O'Neal whose habit it was to appear often out of nowhere, rode up in his peep to see how things were progressing. The peep was left a few hundred yards from the bridge, and Capt O'Neal and Tec 5 Weiner started for the bridge. Before they reached the bridge, the air was pierced by the scream of an artillery shell and Weiner yelled "Hit the dirt". Before the words had completely left the Cpl's mouth, Capt O'Neal was in a ditch with Weiner on top of him. Capt. O'Neal, floundering in the water and mud, was a sorry sight, and Weiner burst out laughing, thinking of the lack of discrimination on the part of the incoming shell which forced both officer and enlisted man to hug the same protective earth. The story, although not unusual, is typical of the daily action and humor that occurs at the front. It only furthers the truth of the saying --- "There is no rank in No-Man's-Land".

The third squad of the third platoon, under Sgt Lakey finished the bridge across the Lauter at midnight, and some of the men crossed to the opposite bank just to say that they had been in Germany. The second platoon sent one squad into Germany with a Task Force, and they found the area to be heavily mined. Among the mines recovered was a new type glass mine with a chemical detonator.

The first platoon, meanwhile, was in Salmbach dug in foxholes with the 19th Infantry. With them were the 48th Tankers. The second platoon was still in Trimbach clearing mines under frequent artillery shellings, while the first squad of the third platoon under Sgt Davis was in reserve.

December 19th found company headquarters still in Trimbach. The vehicles were taking a beating and beginning to show signs of wear on parts that needed more time and work spent on them. The first platoon half-track,

driven by Tec 5 Fix, was stalled in a wooded area outside of Salmbach near the bridge site. A clogged gasoline line was the trouble, and the maintenance section was called. Motor Sgt Capra boarded the  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton Dodge and started for the front, which he was anxious to see. He wasn't alone, for Cpl Sand, armorer, S/Sgt Gulbin, Supply Sgt, Tec 4 Richardson, and Tec 5 Arnold, mechanics jumped in the truck and started with the Motor Sgt. They soon reached the track and began dismantling the gasoline line. Hell broke loose, and the first shell chased the group under the vehicle, helmets banging, men scrambling in a tangle of arms and legs in an attempt to reach comparative safety. When all was silent, work on the gasoline line again progressed until the next barrage sent the group diving under the vehicle. Needless to say, a new speed record was established in cleaning a clogged gasoline line, and the track soon sped out of the area with a speed judged only by the fact that over 500 pounds of TNT was inside the vehicle.

*"A" Co goes on*

*a bridging Spree*

Company "A" was extremely instrumental in keeping the other companies in the line well-supplied with bridge material. They did some excellent bridgework all the way from Hagenau to the German border.

Arriving in Hagenau on the night of the 13th, Company "A" found the town in pitch darkness, with no outward sign of life. Only the odor of smoke and the stench of death pervaded the atmosphere, and the wreckage and debris of demolished buildings were everywhere. Sgt Warren's squad of the 2nd platoon was left in Hagenau to assist in the repair of a bridge, while Sgt Zuckman's and Sgt Nichol's squads went ahead on the road to Surburg. Their task was to check all the bridges and culverts on the way for possible demolition charges, and to maintain and guard each bridge. The shoulders of the road were reported to have been heavily mined, so blackout driving in the dark Hagenau Forest was a nerve-wracking task.

The 3rd platoon was at work also on the road to Surburg, each squad being given a section to clear of mines and roadblocks. No mines, however, were found, and the work proceeded cautiously, the men remembering the unfortunate accident that happened to four men from the 1st platoon while removing a roadblock the night before. On this occasion Pfc's Olson, Christiansan, Hoofard, and Dougherty of the 1st platoon were removing a road block --- one of the many encountered



in the Hagenau Forest on the road from Hagenau to Surburg. Large trees had been blown across the road forming abatis.

After the trees had been sawed in two, the four men started to lift the trees off the road. An S-mine had been placed on the side of the road with a wire running to the fallen tree. As the men lifted the log from the ground, the S-mine was set off. Pfc Olson and Pfc Christiansan were wounded seriously in the shoulder and evacuated; the other two men were only slightly injured, returning to duty after receiving medical attention.

On the 15th of December, the company moved from Hagenau to Hunspach, an uneventful trip marked only by the usual remarks of a group of soldiers moving from good living quarters toward the front. The 2nd platoon moved to Soultz to repair a concrete slab bridge which had been unsuccessfully blown by the enemy. Two holes, approximately four feet in diameter, were filled with rock and gravel. One squad was used to haul the gravel, four men were out as security, and the remainder worked on the bridge. A couple of bottles of champagne were found in a nearby house, adding to the pleasures of the day and making the task seem less arduous.

Meanwhile, the 3rd platoon had taken over the job of constructing a fixed bridge near Buhl, at the same site that "B" company had previously placed treadway. With the aid of the brockways from the other companies, the treadway was quickly removed and on its way to the front where it was badly needed. The work on the fixed bridge began immediately under the supervision of Tec 4's Hogstrom and Braden. There was some difficulty in placing a bent in the swift stream, and Tec 5 Powell, without being ordered to do so, took off his clothes and dived into the icy water to remedy the cause of the trouble. Eventually the Class 40, twenty-four foot span bridge was completed, and Powell later was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for his actions. The bed of the stream however, constantly shifted and the bents settled deep into the mud at the bottom, accounting for the name "Sway-back Bridge".

The next day, the 2nd platoon, leaving one squad to maintain the by-pass at Ingolsheim, built a Class 70 fixed bridge at Leitersweiler. On this job five bents had to be recapped and the men worked late in the evening until the bridge was completed. The 1st platoon, meanwhile, was putting up a Class 40 fixed bridge at Hunspach. Here, there was steel treadway previously installed by "C" company across the span and, as the road was the main supply route for the division, the bridge had to be built under the treadway so that the traffic could be kept moving. The treadway was removed during the last twenty minutes while the flooring was laid. The 3rd platoon

assisted the other platoons by hauling the required lumber and gravel needed on the jobs.

On December 17th, the 2nd platoon built a Class 70 thirty-eight foot bridge at Hofen, and the setting on the outskirts of the town was a memorable one. The Jerries had set charges on the bridge which would be set off by our own tanks. The Germans who had engineered the job had done a worthy task, for a hastily retreating Kraut tank not only set off the charges, demolishing the bridge, but knocked itself out of action. The tank lay on its side in the stream, its occupants still pinned inside.

Several Teller mines were found in this area by Sgts Thompson and Mc Daniels, and, using charges prepared by PFC Everling, the mines were properly destroyed. The platoon carpenters promptly rolled up their sleeves and got down to the job at hand, and the bridge was finished in record time.

On the 17th, the 1st platoon built a Class 70 bridge at Altenstadt, using steel I-beams, as stringers. The overflowing stream had flooded the approaches to the bridge so that it was necessary to cut a drainage ditch with a jackhammer to take care of the water. The 3rd platoon, aided by a bulldozer, built both approaches to the bridge, and, at all times a six-man security was maintained as protection for the men working on the bridge. During the night an intense artillery barrage was encountered, and three men Sgt Raven, Tec 4 Kroupa, and Tec 5 La Fevre were wounded while on security.

Company Hq moved up to Wissembourg and were billeted in a former college building. Enemy shells began to come in and, as the large building was well-exposed to enemy observation, it was not a comfortable spot to be in at the moment.

On the 21st, the 1st and 3rd platoons cleared debris from the blown bridges sites at Wissembourg, preparatory to building two fixed bridges. Pieces of unexploded German TNT, primacord, and caps were removed and destroyed, and the bridges were completed at midnight the same evening.

Artillery had been coming in all night, and it was getting too "hot" in Wissembourg, so the rest of the company moved out, heading for Hunspach.

With Von Rundstedt attacking in the north, the 3rd Army was trying to pinch off the Ardennes salient. That left the flank of the 7th Army exposed. CCR, "A" 125th Engineers, 94th Cavalry, 117th Cavalry, one battery of the 501st FA and the 68th Infantry Battalion made up Task Force Hudelson whose mission it was to protect the left flank of the 7th Army.

The engineers laid mine fields, built abatis, prepared road craters, and barbed wire fences to slow up an expected attack on a line



running south from Bitche-Mouterhouse-Bannstein-Barenthal-Phalsbourg.

On the 23rd of December, the company moved to Forneau-Neuf, and, since the company was alone in the town, a complete outpost system was set up.

On the 24th, the 1st platoon was sent to Barenthal to build a bridge. Here Tec 5 Welch was hurt and hospitalized when the hood of the air compressor fell on his arm. On the same day, the 2nd and 3rd platoons laid barbed wire and anti-personnel mines around the defensive positions of the 117th Cavalry. It was ticklish business, but proceeded well. The 2nd platoon was shelled by 88's and Sgt Nichols was injured in the shoulder by a small shrapnel fragment. He returned to duty soon after receiving treatment.

For the next week, all the platoons were busy establishing defensive positions in front of outposts of the 117th Cavalry and the 94th Cavalry. Each day the men could see their double apron barbed wire fence gradually growing until five thousand feet had been laid. The men heard from friendly patrols that the nearest enemy outpost was only a few hundred yards away.

The whole atmosphere was one of expectation. The weather was not extreme, but the frozen ground increased the difficulty of erecting the fence. It was nearly impossible to drive stakes in the ground to brace the fence, and even a greater problem was to find stakes which would not split once they had been started into the frozen ground. The men were using short lengths of pipe in lieu of pickets

or stakes. The sounds of "stake driving" rang thru the clear, still air. It was impossible to conceal the sound and with the enemy outposts, but a few hundred yards away.

Still the men were never fired upon by small arms. No, Jerry was too sly -- he preferred to wait until dusk and then, would throw in several rounds of mortar fire as the men returned to their vehicles. Luckily, no casualties resulted. But the tired, strained look of each man reflected the tenseness of the situation, as they returned each evening to their CP at Forneau-Neuf.

Besides constructing barbed wire fences, the platoons also laid anti-personnel mines in front of the fences. It was while placing an anti-personnel mine that Tec 5 Mike Marcus was fatally wounded as the mine accidentally went off. The unfortunate accident dampened the spirits of every man in the company, as Mike had always been everyone's friend -- Christmas turkey didn't mean much to the company that night.

By the last day of 1944, the company had completed the defensive positions which they had started a week before. The two Cavalry outfits were openly thankful to the "crazy engineers" for providing added security to their positions.

So, on the evening of December 31st, each man returned to Forneau-Neuf, happy that the company's place of preparing defense positions was at last over. No one realized that he would start the New Year off in the Engineer's secondary role -- as an Infantryman.





We bridged our way into Germany  
Lauter River, Salmbach, Alsace







Quiet days at Barenthal, Alsace



Bridge at Barenthal, Alsace



## *“Defensive operations”*

(Editors' Note: The following story is a first-hand account of the heroic defense "A" Co performed when they withheld a large-scale German attack in the Bitche Sector on New Years Eve. It was written by Lt John Dillard, 1st Ptn leader, who not only is a gallant leader, but also an author.)



## *Jerry greets Company "A" on the New Year*

"-- while on the 7th Army front several minor patrol clashes occurred today in the vicinity of Bitche and the area southeast of Bitche --." That was all the radio news available to the homefront. Good. Just several minor patrol clashes. Then there was really nothing to worry about in the news at least, for their son was in the engineers and most likely in some rear area fixing a road. He was always writing home about some quaint little Alsatian town he had spent the night in. Often, he mentioned the cute little French-German Mademoiselles who worked so hard in the fields, and spoke of their ways of living. Indeed, his last letter received just yesterday expressed the hope of spending New Years drinking a little schnapps and writing a few letters.

So New Years Eve passed in the Dillard home, with Mom and Dad Dillard a little sad in their hearts, yet with fierce pride for their boy in far off Alsace.

There was a knock on the door. 1st Lt. John Dillard stopped writing and in his best French said, "Entrée!"

The door opened and a runner slithered in.

"The Captain wishes to see the Lt. right away, Sir."

"Okay. Be right there," replied the Lt. The runner disappeared.

Slipping on his combat jacket, the Officer shuffled to the door. Pausing, he glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes to twelve. Ten minutes until the New Year!

"I hope its a happy one," he thought, then aloud, "Sgt O'Rourke!"

Platoon Sgt O'Rourke, a big blond Irish lad from Buffalo, let the magazine covering his eyes fall away and answered, "Yes Sir!"

"Better get the squad leaders up," the Lt warned, "The Old Man probably wants some roads gravelled. It has been snowing since about 2000. Anyway, something's up judging from the way "Popeye" acted. I'll be back shortly."

"Yes Sir!" the Sgt answered and wearily sat up.

Over at the CP, maps were spread over the table. Cigarette smoke hung thickly in the room. Several runners were nervously standing by and the 1st Sgt sat eyeing the Old Man intently. The platoon leaders of the 2nd

and 3rd platoons were already sitting with their own maps handy. Both were nervous and on edge. They looked up quickly when Lt Dillard walked in.

"Heah he is now Cap'n," the 2nd ptn officer said in drawling tones. Although his tones were soft everyone present caught the tension underlying the simple statement.

"Good!" the Capt grunted. He continued gazing at the map for a moment then looked around at his platoon leaders.

There was Dillard, 1st platoon leader, short and slim. Young looking. About twenty-five he guessed. Good officer! Knows his men.

Ridings. Old Ridings from Arkansas. 2nd platoon leader. Short and heavy yet good broad shoulders and hips. Give him a job and he'd get it done. Little slow sometimes but in there at the finish. And Kittinger. "Kit" for short. Young and nervous, Kit. Thin and medium height. Dark too. Probably a killer with the ladies back home. College man. He's a corner all right.

Damn! but they all looked fierce! Well, two months in the front lines working day and night, fighting as infantry, building bridges, fixing roads, clearing mines and supplying engineers materials for a division was bound to wear a man down.

"Here's the deal!" the Capt. said suddenly. "We are here at Forneau-Neuf. Bitche is here. Barental here. The Krauts are making an attack in this vicinity here. North of us. We are to go up these two roads. One here and one here, dig in and in case the b..... come down this way hold 'em. I don't think they will but they might. CCR is spread mighty thin. That's why we're being used as infantry," the Capt paused, dragged on his cigarette and continued, "Kit, you take your platoon up the west road and Ridings, you go up the East road. The 1st platoon is in reserve temporarily. Okay. Questions?"

"Dismounted?" Kit wanted to know.

"After the first mile, yes. Take your vehicles though for ammo and communication."

"Who is on our flanks?" Dillard asked.

"C" of the 62nd is on this ridge to the extreme right. "D" Troop of the 94th on the left in the vicinity of Bannstein," the Capt answered. Then, "It's now 0020. I'll be in the center here. Move out as quickly as you can."

There was a general exodus and the room fell quiet again except for faint rustlings of papers as the 1st Sgt began stowing his battle kit. In the distance, artillery boomed.

Upon Lt Dillard's return to the 1st platoon the squad leaders were sitting on old ration boxes grouped around the candle.

"What's up, Lt?" Sgt O'Rourke asked and without waiting for an answer added. "I've alerted the platoon for moving."

"Good," replied the Lt and proceeded to outline the situation, "I expect we'll go to



the assistance of which ever platoon gets into difficulty. Just sit tight. We'll get a call in a little while."

Each man then turned his thoughts inward. Some left the room to attend to last minute matters. The Lt contemplated his letter that he had been writing -- "Dear Mom and Dad," it began, but his thoughts wandered. France was a big place all right. Why did the Frogs always have to want a stinking place like Alsace? Hell's Fire! Old Boche could have the place for all he cared. Africa, Italy and the rest too. Fact is, they ought to make 'em take over and run the place after the war just for punishment. Nazi flags one day. Free French the next, but they kept the big red banners with the crooked cross hidden away just in case. War was ninety per cent waiting anyway. What were they waiting on now? Well, time would tell -- Sherman sho' was right.

The Lt's thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of a runner. He took the message and read aloud, "Send one squad up each road. Prepare same for demolition. One squad to Mouterhouse to report to 117th Cavalry. No contact."

The Lt looked up.

"Here we go lads. Sgt Ludwick, take the 1st squad up the East road. Sgt Godfrey, take the 2nd up behind Kit's platoon, Reesor, the 3rd goes to Mouterhouse. O'Rourke, you go with Sgt Reesor and report back as soon as possible. I'll go with the 1st squad until we get going and then drop over to Sgt Godfrey's squad later. Straight? Okay. Move out!"

Outside the half-tracks coughed and growled into life. White vapor rose steadily from their exhausts. The men huddled about their squad leaders and silently listened to their missions. It was not unlike a football huddle; the Lt thought, as he lit a cigarette and cupped it against the night. He went swiftly from one squad to another, giving them a last check.

Riding along up the hill, everything was quiet. Snow struck the faces of the men and little drops of water formed where it melted. The men themselves were silent, listening. No one said a word! Suddenly the heavens split ahead! A thunderous explosion that lighted the sky and shook the earth reverberated through the Vosges hills. Tracers licked at the ridge ahead and the "brrp! brrp! Kraut rat pistols mingled with the throaty staccato of a Yank fifty caliber. Rifles cracked and Jerry "Screaming meemies" began coming in.

The Lt stopped the half-track and climbed out. He said distinctly, "All right, Sgt Ludwick, get this road prepared from the turn ahead, back. Put out a little security. The 2nd platoon is in action up there. I'm going up to see what the score is."

Halfway up the ridge, the Lt was forced to halt his advance. The mortars were awful thick, he thought. After a bit, the barrage

shifted left enough for him to see the trail ahead. Where a figure detached itself from the shadows and hurriedly scrambled down the hill. It was a runner from the 2nd platoon. As he approached the officer, he observed that his left arm hung limply and that the man carried no weapon.

"Hey!" he called, "What gives?"

"Ran into some Heinies up over the ridge. 'Bout a company, I guess Sir. They got beaucoup mortars in support though and at least one 88. We're dug in acrosss the ridge and I reckon we can hold them okay for a while," the runner answered and then scurried away.

"Birth of the New Year," mused the Officer and turned to see how the 1st squad was making out.

Sgt Godfrey loaded his men and Pfc J Lee, a demolition specialist of the 3rd platoon, and turned to watch the 1st squad move out. They disappeared quickly in the snowy darkness. For awhile, he thought he could hear the tracks squeaking. He turned up his collar and climbed into his own half-track.

"Move out!" he ordered and checked his watch. 0040.

"Hell of a way to start a New Year off," he muttered.

At 0055, his half-track was moving slowly up the icy hill. The Sgt's every nerve was alert, for as he pulled on to the road leading up the hill he thought he had heard small arms fire. He wasn't sure but then you never could tell. Gonna' put a foot patrol ahead pretty soon now.

Without warning, a huge sledge hammer struck his right shoulder and the night was shattered by the dreaded "brrrp! brrrp!" of machine pistols.

Ambushed, by God! The thought flared through the Sgt's whirling brain. Then, "Rat-tat-tat-tat--tat!" answering fire from his own vehicle.

"Good ol' Sucher and his thirty!" he thought. Funny, the half-track felt as though it were going backward and --.

The half-track rolled over with a crash. Once again it rolled and then settled in the briary draw on its side.

All was quiet.

As Sgt O'Rourke and Sgt Reesor entered the 117th Cav C.P., they paused to look at the sky to the Northwest.

"Bright, ain't it?" queried Sgt Reesor.

"Yeah. It ain't the sunrise either," was the answer. They went on in and reported to the S-3. "--one crater and a thousand feet of abatis," Sgt Reesor finished talking.



No one in his squad said anything so he ordered them into the half-track. The vehicle moved on to the road and headed northwest toward Bitche.

When Lt Dillard reached the CP, he was greeted by a jeep bearing three very bloody men from Sgt Godfrey's squad. Suddenly sick with apprehension he peered in. Pfc Lee rolled his head toward the Lt and gasped, "Half-track ambushed -- rolled over -- Germans all over -- Godfrey pinned in -- we were thrown out -- got back."

Nodding quickly, the Lt stepped back and scurried over to the CP upon entering a white faced Capt and Maint Sgt looked up from a message. "Just in time!" the Capt ripped out, "Read this."

The message read; "platoon ambushed - all vehicles destroyed by enemy. Need help." It was signed by the Platoon Leader of the 3rd platoon.

The 3rd platoon had taken the west road and had travelled up the road approximately a mile before dismounting from their vehicles. An open field lay ahead, covered with freshly fallen snow, which glistened brightly in the moon light. Across the field, the road narrowed and seemed to disappear between two ridges, whose gentle slopes gradually steepened into sheer rock ledges. Dense snow covered evergreens blanketed the ridges and gentle slopes and cast dark shadows upon the pure white, background of the snow covered road below.

The men cautiously crossed the open field in single file -- with Lt Kittinger and S Sgt Archie Bowen in the lead -- closely followed by the other three squads. The long line of men stretched along the road for several hundred yards and kept close to the sides of the road, preparing to take to the road ditches in case the enemy opened fire. The open field was crossed without incident and gradually the leading elements of the long line of advancing men passed out of the clearing and around a slight bend in the road, always keeping in the shadows of the trees, which covered the gradually steeping slopes on the sides of the road.

Half way up the ridge, on the left side of the road, was a singled track rail line, while directly opposite on the right, was a narrow trail. The platoon had moved pass the road bend a few hundred feet, followed by the vehicles closely behind.

Suddenly, the sound of low voices and the shuffling of feet could be heard coming from the direction of the railroad track. The noise and seeming disorder of the troops moving on the railroad track, suggested that our own infantry was in hasty withdrawal. Still no firing had been heard but several men distinctly heard sounds of swearing and

cursing in very plain English. It certainly must be friendly troops! Still, Lt Kittinger and S Sgt Archie Bowen were not satisfied -- in fact they were certain that it was enemy forces. Acting on this decision, Kit and Bowen led the long column of men up a small path on the slope of the ridge to the trail half way up the ridge. Whoever was approaching on the tracks had yet to discover the platoon of engineers. Reaching the trail on the right ridge, the men laid on their stomachs and waited until the unknown troops could be identified.

By this time, the trucks and peep had followed behind the men on the road, until the vehicles were nearly along side the unknown troops coming forward on the railroad tracks. The shadows of the tall trees did not completely cover the road, but as yet the vehicles were undiscovered, although partly in view.

S Sgt Bowen was sent down to the road, from the trail above, to get the vehicles turned around on the narrow road. As soon as the trucks began to maneuver to turn around, they were immediately discovered.

"Brrrp! brrrp!" No question now, they were Jerries. For five minutes a murderous fire poured down upon the platoon trucks. Jerry believing that the men were still in the trucks. Meanwhile, the platoon withheld their fire, for it was impossible to fire through the thick trees and foliage which blocked their view of the enemy on the opposite ridge. Still the enemy had not located the platoon but soon the Germans began spraying the general area with bullets. Lead was now coming too uncomfortably close, so all of the men, acting on their own initiative, climbed the steep, snow covered ridge, reaching the rock ledges on top of the right ridge.

There seemed to be nothing left to do, but to work their way back to Fourneau Neuf, since it was impractical to engage a numerically superior enemy, particularly with the rough terrain and the poor field of fire making the situation all the more difficult. The men started to make their way back to Company Hq at Fourneau-Neuf in small groups of three and four.

Kit's platoon knocked out! Godfrey's squad out! Jesus! What's to stop the whole Kraut Army from coming on down? The Lt's mind raced swiftly. Help! Slowly an idea formed and he turned to the Capt.

"I'll lead the 540th Engineers up there if we can get contact with them. How about it?"

For answer, the Capt grabbed at his phone and demanded CCR Hq.



Sgt Reesor led his squad and Pfc Kortlandt, demolition man of the 2nd platoon, up the hill and began preparing his section of the road for demolition. Hell was really popping. From the ridge line, he had a pretty good view of what was going on, since it was beginning to get light. About a thousand yards to his front he could see the double apron fence that his platoon had put up two days ago. It was changed considerably for on it, under it and hanging in it were dead and dying Germans. Some were hanging limply -- others were moving feebly, while some merely lay and screamed. All were covered by a light coat of white snow. Scattered for yards on each side were helmets, guns, more bodies, all the debris of battle.

Closer by, he could see where the Krauts had entered a little wood and had dug in temporarily. Still closer, he could see what was left of the 117th Cav and one Troop of the 94th Rcn Sqd. Their vehicles were lined up, hub to hub. Men were dug in and every gun in the line was belching thunder.

The Yanks were slowly giving ground though, because there were several battalions of Heinies moving up. Their supporting 88 fire was creeping closer to the Sgt's position. "Wiere-umph! Wiere-umph! They were incessant.

Sgt Reesor turned and went down the hill to hurry his men. Lucky thing he had a squad instead of a platoon. They would sure as hell use them as infantry and he was in no mood. Besides, he had an engineer job to do. He had to stop the kraut vehicles by blowing the road.

Sgt Ludwick's squad finished preparing the eighth road block and what was left of his men squatted down behind a shed to light a cigarette for day was breaking. Nine of his men were missing. Eight of them were stationed on the blocks ready to blow things to hell; and one had been hit by a stray shell.

"Sure wish I had a cup of coffee. Black coffee," the Sgt grunted.

The Lt stopped the first man in the column. "540th", he asked?

"Yeah" a disgruntled corporal answered, "The Capt's right back there." The Lt nodded and waited for the CO.

"Howdy, Capt. I'm Lt Dillard, 125th. I'm going to lead your company up that road. I have a squad up there knocked out, and maybe there are a few guys left from our 3rd platoon still around."

"Okay, I'm Capt Green. What do you suggest?"

"I'll lead with a point of four men. Spread your men out. One platoon along the road on one side about a quarter way up each ridge. We'll go till we hit the half-track."

The Capt turned to his platoon leaders and issued his orders. At 0210 the point stopped. Ahead, and in a draw lay what was left of a half-track.

"Careful," the Lt warned, "Cover me."

The four men in the point settled down in the snow and watched him crawl along the ditch toward the half-track.

As he approached the vehicle, he could make out several bodies lying about. Was that a movement? Yes. One of the forms was digging something close to the side of the half-track. Closer now -- Godfrey!

The Sgt's legs were pinned down under the ring mount and he was busily digging them out of the frozen ground with a knife. He stopped digging as the Lt squirmed up and turned his body, his knife at the ready.

"Godfrey!!!!"

Sgt Godfrey's first sensation as he opened his eyes was one of extreme cold. He turned his head and tried to move his body. The movement brought a twinge of pain to his right shoulder, otherwise, his upper body seemed to be all right. His legs were heavy. Felt as though they were anchored in concrete. Looking down, he discovered the reason. No wonder! They were under the half-track's ring mount from the middle of his shins down. They didn't hurt much though. They were numb. Most of his clothes were gone. That explained the cold. Some kraut had stripped him except for his pants, even to his dog tags. The Heinie b.....!

Looking around, he counted four of his squad lying in various positions. What had happened to the rest, he could only guess. He could see what had happened to the man closest to him. He had a bullet hole neatly between his eyes. He was stripped even to his shoes. Up the road, he could hear sounds of digging and once in a while a voice that sounded like, "goot" Once he heard a Yank voice loudly demand, "Where the hell are the umpires?" but he didn't recognize the owner. After a while, it got quiet except that he could hear some small arms and mortars way off to his right.

The Sgt reached to the immediate area and found a trench knife that the Germans had overlooked. He started digging his legs out. How long he dug he wasn't sure but it was a long time because he had several large blisters. That was okay. The digging warmed him some, but also awoke pain in his legs. A slight noise -- to his rear startled him. He stopped digging, once got ready to sell his life dearly, providing he could reach whatever or whoever it was. It was then that he heard the Lt. whisper "Godfrey!"



It was nearly daybreak when Capt Green's outfit finished preparing its line. The men settled down to watchful waiting. Their watching was not in vain either. The dawn brought with it a large Jerry combat patrol. About thirty men, the Capt guessed. Probably the advance element of a larger force. Anyway there were some twenty dead bundles of Hitlers' Youth. When the action was over and those that made their way back to their own lines undoubtedly said that the Yanks had brought up strong reinforcements in that valley.

The Lt arrived at Sgt Reesor's location at the exact minute that two 88 shells did. His driver swung the peep over to the ditch and they both hit the ground.

"Close," he muttered as he went up the hill to see his Sgt.

It was 1100 hours and the burly Sgt was munching a K ration biscuit.

"How's things, Sgt?" he inquired.

"Not too bad, Sir. We've got about eleven hundred feet of abatis prepared and a thirty foot crater." was the reply.

"Good deal," the officer nodded, then, "Looks like we'll have to blow this one before long. Leave two men to blow her and I'll leave the peep to bring them out. No use killing thirteen men when three can do the job."

The Sgt's face lit up and he went to gather his men. About fifty yards down the hill an 88 shell burst.

Things were getting warm, Sgt Ludwick decided as he watched several shells land in the field behind him. Funny how these Krauts always disturbed your noon meal. The small arms fire was getting closer too, which meant that the 2nd platoon was probably withdrawing.

The 2nd platoon had been called out to reinforce Co "C" of the 62 AIB. The men on their three squad trucks headed up the east road as planned. The men dismounted about one-half mile from the town of Bannstein and walked to a point about seven hundred yards from a railroad track, where positions were set up. The ground was frozen to a depth of several inches, making digging in of positions a very difficult ordeal, especially with 88's and mortar shells hitting all around, showering shrapnel in all directions. Fighting was already taking place on the distant outskirts of Bannstein and scattered firing could be heard in the woods around the town. The situation seemed to be very fluid, so orders came from Co "C" of the 62nd to move one squad closer to the railroad track in order to guard that approach.

Sgt Zuckman's squad moved up near the track and began the difficult job of digging

in again, this time setting up the squad's machine guns on the edge of a woods, with excellent coverage of the railroad track.

Lt Ridings accompanied by Pfc Boyd made their way through heavy fire into the town of Bannstein and was just approaching the infantry CP when an artillery shell burst in the street -- a stray piece of shrapnel hitting the Lt.; Pfc Boyd was not injured by the shell although only a few yards from the Lt. Boyd then carried his platoon leader into the infantry CP and later returned to his squad with orders from Lt Ridings for Lt Thompson (then S Sgt) to take command of the platoon.

Murderous artillery fire and mortar fire began to fall in the area, where Sgt Zuckman's squad had dug in. Enemy infantry was seen to be infiltrating into Bannstein and from all appearances Co "C" of the 62nd was too small a force to hold the waves of infantry which had already entered the outer edge of Bannstein. A large force of German soldiers were seen going into a barn near the center of town. Sgt McDaniels opened up with his 50 Cal machine gun at a range of one thousand yards. The barn became too hot for Jerry and he very foolishly tried to escape from the barn through the same door he had entered. Several Germans were seen to fall and Cpl Lonnie Williams accounted for at least two more krauts with his M - 1.

By now, Jerry tanks could be seen maneuvering in Bannstein itself, and to add to the difficulties the automatic weapons jammed and several rifles froze up due to the extreme cold weather. At 1220, orders came to the platoon to fall back. Artillery fire was severe so the men withdrew in small groups rather than in squad formation. They finally met Sgt Ludwick's squad which had set up further back on the road.

Sgt Ludwick's set-up was fair. He had set up a thirty calibre machine gun on his left and his fifty was covering the right. If the 2nd platoon came he could help a little, he guessed. He got up and started up the road to see his men.

Cpl Johnson was on the second abatis and the Sgt stopped to talk to him a minute and bum a cigarette. "Old Man" Johnson was what the men called him.

Casually the "Old Man" said, "I think somebody is shooting at me."

"Yeah? Probably a sniper," the Sgt answered.

Then not so casually Johnson gabbled, "I know somebody is shooting at me!" and a bullet snapped overhead.

Both were on the ground.

It was 1230 when fresh infantry came up. Their orders were to relieve a company of engineers who had held this valley since last midnight.



"Good old infantry!" thought Sgt O'Rourke as he watched them pass up the valley, "Guts! That's what them guys have, guts!"

The grizzled 1st Sgt of the infantry outfit glanced at the engineers turned doughfeet as they walked past him on the way out, "They got guts, them guys!"

Later that day a tired group of men rode the three remaining vehicles of an engineer company to the nearby town of Reipertswiller to lick its wounds and reorganize.

Earlier in the day, the brockways, dozers, maintenance truck, mess truck, air compressor and supply truck went on to the vicinity of Barenthal. They didn't linger long here -- things getting too hot, so with enemy infantry swarming across an open field to take Barenthal, the engineer section moved out, rejoining the company the next day at Weinbourg. Tec 4 F. Wood with his water point had nearly been forgotten. At the last minute, he started to pack his equipment. He was severely wounded by a shell fragment in the lumbar region while organizing his material. The rest of the water point crew removed Wood with them as they left for safer places.

At 1130, Capt Knight, Lt Dillard, about 50 men, including several men from the 3rd platoon who had reached the CP, with the command halftrack, withdrew to Reipertswiller. They were entirely surrounded except for one road leading southwest and the general area was being shelled by artillery and time fire. Eventually, they reached Reipertswiller safely and here -- Sgt Ludwick's squad and also Lt Thompson (then S Sgt) with most of the 2nd platoon.

Then the reinforced company motored to Weinbourg, most of the men getting on Tec 5 Harold Young's truck. Here, the rest of the Company Headquarters including the mess truck, the brockways, dozer, maintenance truck, also the platoon trucks and the remaining members of the 3rd platoon, all rejoined the company. After many sighs of relief, heads and vehicles were counted and results showed one-half track, one peep and three two and one-half ton trucks missing, while in the personnel column, the figures showed that five men had been evacuated to hospitals, while thirty-five men and one officer were still missing in action including Pvt Swayngim, Hq Aid man attached to 1st platoon.

The company reorganized here as much as possible and without much rest, departed for Reipertswiller, leaving the brockways and air compressor behind and getting a two and a half ton truck from Hq Co. They arrived at Reipertswiller at 0100 2 January 1945. The cooks prepared some hot coffee for the men, but it was a long cold ride and they were too tired to stay awake until the coffee was made.

About 0800 the men were up again, and took up defensive positions on the hills on the north side of town. They dug in fast, while artillery fell in the area. Several enemy patrols were near, but our boys didn't get a chance to get them in their sights. An infantry outfit relieved the company and they pulled out, headed again for Weinbourg. On the way, the company was shelled, but no casualties were suffered. They arrived at Weinbourg at 1800 and there seventeen more men of the 3rd platoon rejoined the company, having previously reported to Bn Hq.

Another check was made here of vehicles and personnel and the latest figures showed that seventeen EM and 1 Officer were missing in action and six EM had been evacuated to hospitals, while one peep, one half-track and three two and a half ton trucks were still missed. The company reorganized here -- supplies being the main problem. The whole 3rd platoon had lost their duffle bags and musette bags -- had no toilet articles or any clothing except what they had on their person. Luckily, all the bedrolls had been loaded on the platoon truck and none of them were lost. Things weren't too bad, though, as the company pooled their mess kits and toilet articles, until lost articles could be replaced. Toilet articles were partly replaced from the daily rations and by the men in the other platoons generously giving over extra toilet articles they had.

Back in the states, the following radio news flash summed up the fighting of the 7th Army front: "-- While on the 7th Army front several small counter attacks of the enemy were beaten off in the area just southeast of Bitche. Military observers do not regard their activity seriously since --". That was all the news available to the homefront. Good! Mom and Dad Dillard still hoped that their son had a Happy New Year Day.

On the morning of the 4th, the company hit the road again, this time motoring to Steinbourg, about eight miles to the south. Here the company spent the first day cleaning equipment and receiving more equipment to replace that which had been lost. From the 5th to the 10th the company sanded roads, and building up stock piles of gravel all along the roads, mainly curves, hills, or at especially icy and slippery places.

During the stay at Steinbourg, four movies were shown, and two large mail calls helped to raise the general morale.

On the 11th of January, the company moved to Greisbach. The 12th of January found the company in Kutzenhausen only to move out in the early hours of the morning, arriving in the town of Schwabwiller at 0630 the 13th of January.



# Company "B"

## *prepares installations*

There were few casualties during this action. Tec 5 Lawrence Biddle was hospitalized with a broken toe, suffered during the construction of a bridge, and Pfc Henry Blackowsky received a broken eardrum. Patrols were going into Germany, but there was no great activity on either side so the company moved into Surbourg on the 23rd of December and to Phillipsburg on the 24th. The company was attached here to the 62nd Infantry in CCR. The job assigned was to prepare roadblocks and barbed wire entanglements in a defensive position. The first platoon, on Christmas Day, was at the front notching trees for roadblocks, as was the second. The third platoon planted four cratering charges and installed a triple concertina. Some Christmas!

The defensive work continued for the 1st platoon. In well chosen places through the hills and wooded areas, they built a double apron barbed wire fence. Besides this, during the day, they set trip flares and a triple concertina. Throughout the day, mine sweeping continued on the trails and dirt roads through the woods. The 2nd platoon built a high wire fence, two road blocks and, with the aid of the air compressor, made holes for cratering charges.

The job of making cratering charges is one of much prearranging for proper location. These charges should be placed to make the passage of enemy vehicles on particular roads impossible. Some charges were set to a depth of 10 feet to completely destroy the road and shoulders. This sort of crater would appear along a stretch where a bypass could not be effected. Still other charges were placed in rock formations in deep defiles so that when properly blasted they would avalanche down on the road at a place where the removal of the debris could not be accomplished quickly -- thus forming an effective road block.

The 3rd platoon also had its work laid out for the day with some road blocks to construct in areas not covered by the other two platoons. It was to be a thorough job. They also located one of our minefields and constructed abatis on either side. At the end of each day sufficient work had been done to insure a well designed and closely knit defense.

December 27th was merely a continuation of this defensive scheme. Each platoon repeated the type of work done the day previous but always in adjacent areas. Some craters were blown others set and wired for future detonation. With hills and valleys melting into one

another and the possibility of infiltration, we were vigilant. There were well placed guard posts, a listening post on the side of a hill and guards on duty at the 50 cal MG set on the ring mount of the radio car, facing down the long corridor of a ravine. The men who guarded there can still remember the sounds that echoed through the night and the eerie effect the moon had when it came up over the heavy wooded hill, throwing fantastic shadows out over the white fields. On through 28 December, all work continued along the same line. Up north, Von Runstedt, was digging deep into our lines. The Bitche sector which had long been a thorn in our side could be turned into a jumping off place toward the South if the enemy could once break through our defense. It was necessary that our defense should be adequate to stem any ideas of reconquest.

The 3rd platoon, under S Sgt Needham, destroyed enemy mines and prepared to blast a cliff overlooking a road.

Our job in this area finished on 29th of December and we were released from the 62 Infantry, as support under CCR. Once more, we reverted to Bn control.

To understand the daily situation of the suicidal work of the engineers, it should be made clear to the reader what "doing the job" means. The Infantry moves forward until they cannot safely continue the advance. It is then that engineers are called on to eliminate obstacles. The Infantry drops back or remains close enough to somewhat support engineer activity. It is not uncommon that when engineers go to work there is nothing before them but enemy. And whereas the Infantry move as silently as possible when on a mission, the engineers cannot even consider such a small thing as that when removing road blocks or building bridges. It must be realized that these engineers not only cleared paths for the passage of our armor but also helped to defend it against enemy counter-attacks. Finally it should be remembered that in this war engineers were as commonly seen on the front line as their brothers in arms, the Infantry.

## *New Year's day Charlie Company took a ride!*

Shortly after Christmas, the contentment of being billeted in warm houses was broken only by the news of Von Runstedt's Ardennes Offensive, and the men of Company "C"



eagerly awaited news of the progress of the battle. Coordinating with Von Runstedt's drive, the German Army along the entire border was counterattacking fiercely to regain both its lost ground and its battered prestige. Hence it was necessary for the elements of the 14th Armored Division to be deployed so that a counter-attack could be effectively met. The flanks of the XV Corps were weakly protected, so CCA of the 14th moved to remedy the situation.

"C" company left Rechtswiller on the 28th of December and moved to Scholbach, where it was billeted in houses -- a welcome opportunity, since the weather had grown cold. It was hoped that New Year's Day would be spent here, and preparations were optimistically made for a pleasant time, the turkey and extra holiday rations had been given to the civilians who were to cook the dinner for the men.

During the stay in Scholbach, the men sanded the icy roads in the vicinity and cut firewood for the civilians' rapidly depleting stock.

Duty called, however, and the 1st platoon moved out early January 1st with the 68th Infantry and the 2nd platoon joined the 48th

Tanks. The 1st platoon moved to an open field where the entire column of Infantry, Engineers and Tankers deployed as a decoy while the French came in to relieve us in protecting the flanks of the XV Corps. They were perfect targets for planes or artillery and the men struggled to dig-in in the frozen ground. The weather was bitter cold and the work done in digging the foxholes served well to warm the men.

At darkness, the column moved into the town of Dermigen where it found places to sleep in barns and houses.

The situation with the 2nd platoon was for the most part similar, and, when the danger of an enemy breakthrough had passed, the platoon moved through Imbsheim and back to Hattmatt where the whole of company "C" was reunited. The New Year's turkey, well preserved by the cold weather, was at last cooked by civilians and the belated dinner was wonderful.

The situation, when the company left Rechtswiller, appeared serious, but the Scholbach movement did not bring about a great deal of unpleasantness or trouble, so we were not disgruntled. It only delayed our New Year's celebration by a few days.



*“The battle of Rittershoffen and Hatten”*



# The holocaust

The prelude to this episode in the combat lives of the boys of the 14th Armored Division is one much remembered for personal incidents as well as the overall struggle for what was then, two Alsatian towns. It was then, with soldierly pride, we felt our division had done something memorable and with the passing of time, we could not forget its significance.

It was on January 11th that our division Hq pulled stakes and left Bouxwiller for an assembly area closer to the front. CCB moved in a column through Worth where "B" company fell in, having been sanding roads on the route toward Hohwiller where they set up business. They were only a few kilometers from the scene of the battle where for nights following, the burning and smoking ruins of Rittershoffen and Hatten could be seen. CCA already had been in action, being attached to the 79th Division a few days earlier. Co "C" as Infantry reserves, it was thought to be merely a formality with Engineers — but they were soon seen marching single file toward a field between Kulendorf and Rittershoffen to 'dig in'. Actually this was a 'tailor-made' job for there were fox holes already dug by Infantry who possibly had moved up. Still being held as Infantry reserve, "C" company remained in fox holes through January 11th and 12th under constant artillery and mortar fire. The cold wind and black nights were not bettering the situation. In this time, CCR had moved up and our "A" company was moving into Schwabwiller.

Hardly having settled down, an enemy plane flew over, circled once, then at tree top level came over the town to strafe the immediate area. It is possible that besides the number of vehicles and troops in town, the Jerry plane was seeking out artillery set up in fields nearby. The ack-ack guns around the town went into action, formed a curtain of fire and the sky was packed with black splotches that faded away. Regardless of this threat no planes were hit and on circling the area again the plane dropped an egg. It landed some two houses from "A" company CP — several men were killed and injured, but none from this company. Shrapnel went through the mess truck windshield and all windows in nearby houses were blown in. A munitions truck, much too close to the explosion, caught fire presenting a menace to the whole town. Four men from "A" company, with disregard for their own safety, unloaded eight inch shells from the truck. They were S Sgt Timko,

Sgt Graziano, Pvt Foster and Pvt Stickney; for such bravery, each received a Bronze Star.

Company "B" remained at Hohwiller feeling the effects of the counter battery from Jerry artillery which was close to the CP. On the night of January 12th, orders came down to "B" company for all available men to go up "on the line" to guard the left flank of CCB as Infantry. With the 1st platoon and 2nd platoon already detached only Hq Section and 3rd platoon remained for this job. At 0300 the 3rd platoon moved out into a bitter cold night, so black that the column literally crept up to their positions, and there was a question as to just where to 'dig-in' because no one was sure just how far or near the enemy was. Throughout the remainder of the night the men were bouncing picks and shovels off the ground for it was frozen to a depth of two feet and by dawn not much had been accomplished. There was continuous fear of incoming shells, that at times, caused men to drop to the ground for protection. There was no breakfast or dinner and what "C" rations they had were frozen solid. They continued to dig fox holes. Around 1800 while they were still busy a dud came in about ten feet from PFC Aday's fox hole. Being in the hole he did not notice it but only heard the noise, and raised up to see what had caused it. He saw it bounce off the ground between the combined fox holes of PFC Teti, T/4 Marasco and PFC Cramblet. The dud continued bouncing end over end, the three men dropped into their holes and prayed in earnest. With diminishing speed it bounced from a pile of dirt along side Sgt Lakey's fox hole splattering him with dirt as he bent down for another shovel full. Raising his head, Lakey exclaimed, "Who the hell threw dirt on me?" Without need for an answer he saw this large shell slowly coming to a stop after spinning. Down went his head and for one half hour he remained there not knowing what to do. With decision he raised up and with the others inspected the object of their consternation. The following day they blew the dud and were sure that it had sufficient charge to hurry them all to "Kingdom Come."

We knew that things must be getting rough all around, for Von Rundstedt was still creating some disturbance up North. Gen Patton swung his power up there to pinch off the 'bulge', leaving the left flank of the 7th Army exposed. It then had to be stretched to cover up this gap which greatly weakened its lines of resistance.

The intensity of the battle mounted — before the closing of the day CCB had attacked Rittershoffen from the East in the vicinity of Hohwiller. Heavy artillery and mortar fire was resultant. Tanks were lost. Infantry suffered greatly; whatever ground had been gained was lost by night-fall. CCR had not come



into the fray as yet, but were to see much action soon. Moving in from the west, CCA had cleared half of Rittershoffen after a bitter day of house-to-house fighting.

The battle raged in the two towns of Hatten and Rittershoffen for six days and sleepless nights. During this time the Engineers suffered casualties too, in small but important phases. The 1st platoon of company "C" on the 13th of January, moved into Rittershoffen in half-tracks, figuring sniper fire would be partially neutralized with some armor protection. Arriving at some houses, they scrambled quickly for the cellars because ground floor rooms were no longer safe since most of the buildings had lost their upper floors from direct hits by Jerries and our own artillery. Their house had to be well guarded to keep possession of it. They also had the job of out posting the 68th Infantry CP, that night and the next day. That afternoon Tom Dewhurst Asst Squad leader, was checking his men when he was injured by flying shrapnel. During the same day, PFC Loching was killed while on guard around some tanks caught in a mortar barrage.

CCR came into play attacking Rittershoffen from the south; CCB had launched three separate attacks from the north and Jerry, not standing still, had counter-attacked viciously in the evening at 2115 with Infantry and flame throwing tanks. There were slight penetrations — but the attack was stopped. There was no time to relax and very few times to get relief, resulting in many cases of frozen fingers and feet throughout this action. Trench-foot was a dreaded spectre throughout the winter, when men were unable to leave their shell holes.

"A" company, remaining in reserve, was now preparing a bridge for demolition on the road between Niederbetschdorf and Rittershoffen. Having completed that, they dug in then, guarded it with instructions to hold it as long as possible and then blow it only as a last resort. They too were in artillery range and within the circle of madness.

After these past four days of fighting it was still give and take with half of Rittershoffen in our hands and half occupied by the Jerries. If you were in the town, you heard shouting and stifled screams and the identifying 'brrrrp! brrrrp!' of Jerry guns, the steady cracking of machine guns and small arms fire coming from windows, crevices, and church steeple, sniping away at individual targets. The deep rumble of tanks inching out around corners to let go a direct shot into some strong point at a house near the other end of town. Some tanks no longer fired but merely stood where they were knocked out - just a black bulk among the charred ruins of homes. Bazookas and panzerfaust were being used as long range 'grenades'. White phosphorus shells burst in

the streets, with sudden yellow flames and smoke pouring from half-timber dwellings. Shadows disappeared from the new made light. Artillery observers nearby called ranges and waited for the friendly whistle that you fear, but know goes on to a more ripe target, — only a few hundred yards away. The daylight presented a more easily understood panoramic view. Buildings that only smoked because there was nothing more to burn, presented a feeling of being in some Ghost City, and still the shells came in — the mortar that never gave a warning, endlessly plopped in and around the buildings scattering mortar and rubble. There was the catching voice, crying 'Medic' and when the moment arrived when first aid could be administered, out they would crawl. Picking up the victims gently; they often found that what was left, should be buried with honors; nothing could be done for them. At the end — the surrounding fields no longer had a crystal mantle of clear white snow, it was now stained with soot from powder, pock-marked with shell craters and soiled with blood. The smoke still drifted from the town — there was nothing left — it seemed that nothing had been gained — although much had been lost in lives.

With the passing of each day, we found an increasing pressure. The resistance offered was identified by G-2 as the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division, 21st Panzer Division, and elements of the 20th Parachute Regiment, a recent arrival from Holland. It was admitted we were numerically outnumbered by troops, tanks, and artillery concentration in this limited area. There was reason enough for all this power in one small sector. It was an attempt to throw a concentrated offensive wedge to create a weak spot big enough to drive these Panzer troops through to retake all of Alsace and once more gain face.

On the 15th of January, CCB was in defensive support of CCA and CCR. Again it meant much work for the Engineers — as Engineers. Soon the platoons were pulled off the line and began accumulating mines to lay their largest field. More mines than we would lay again in this war. There was much difficulty in getting enough mines in a rush. "B" company was to lay a mine field somewhere between Leiterswiller and Rittershoffen.

The Corps order read something like this "--- a mine field will be laid across the entire division front ---." Lt Col Morrison assembled his staff. They faced the problem. All of the troops were attached to the combat commands. An order had been issued. A forward CP was set up in Schwabwiller. Col Morrison visited each of the Combat Commanders with his respective Company Commanders to coordinate the ground plan laid out by Major Watkins, the S-3. The Major then



arranged for vehicles to secure the enormous number of mines. Capt. Munch, the S-4, started the Supply platoon rolling and in a short while mines were arriving at the front. Capt Munch and Major Watkins coordinated the movements of the trucks and expended all efforts, successfully locating supply points for mines and by dawn seven thousand mines had been delivered to the companies. S/Sgt Hannigan and S/Sgt Wysochanski of the supply platoon, on some occasions guided the trucks within three hundred yards of the front lines in order to expedite the laying of the mine fields.

The boys didn't relish this job for it had snowed all day and had turned bitter cold by night. A sharp wind lifted the dry snow into drifts. It would have to be a hasty mine field. More mines would have to be gotten from somewhere. The overall situation was not improving. The mines were laid on top of the snow in the usual pattern four deep. Those British mines were an unfamiliar article to the boys; often they had difficulty getting the pins out.

The final objective of the minefield was that it be laid in the form of a semi-circle encompassing all of Rittershoffen and spreading a distance on both flanks. "C" Company had the center position while "B" Company laid the field on the left flank, and "A" Company on the right flank.

"A" Company began their minefield on the night of January 16th; they experienced many difficulties getting mines to their area. This mine field was laid near a side road south of Rittershoffen and north of the railroad tracks working along to the main road leading into Rittershoffen; their vehicles were parked just outside of the town, and the truck full of mines was driven to a barn near the mine area. From here the boys carried them to the field. The mine field was progressing nicely until nearly 0400, at this time Tec 5 Marinaro slipped on the icy ground while carrying mines. One of the mines exploded, killing him instantly. Pfc Boyd and Preske were peppered with flying pieces of steel from head to foot. Preske had to be evacuated while Boyd was treated locally and returned to duty. The following night the remainder of the field was laid. It was considered a huge mine field, the number of mines laid by lte Company numbered twenty-three hundred.

Meanwhile "B" Company was busy with their sector of the field north of Rittershoffen. Work proceeded according to plan despite the freezing weather and enemy action. At the end of the second night they had tied in with "C" Company and their work was finished. In all, over two thousand mines were put in by the company.

With the 1st and 2nd platoons of "C" company employed as Infantry in Rittershoffen, the titanic problem of laying a mine field

almost two thousand yards long, rested upon the shoulders of the 3rd platoon and Hq Section of the company. The area assigned to "C" company was in the shape of a semi-circle between "A" and "B" company's.

The shortage of engineers necessitated the use of one platoon from the 94th Cavalry Rcn. These men were instructed early on the evening of January 16th by Sgt Moran and during the night laid one thousand yards of mines. This belt tied in with "B" company on the left and extended to the Kuhlendorf-Rittershoffen road on the right.

One portion of this belt was within two hundred yards of enemy installations. If it had not been for excellent artillery support that neutralized these installations, it would have been impossible to complete the task.

The 3rd platoon, already short of men, were supported by the cooks, mechanics, and radio-operators of Hq. Section to lay their section. They were to tie in with Sgt Moran's section on the left and "A" company on the right. Led by Lt Tilly and Sgt Donovan, the platoon was unable to complete its section that night. The extreme cold weather made it impossible to assemble the mines out of doors, so a house in Oberbetschdorf was used. This meant a long supply line and slower work.

The men returned the next day and it was during this time that a mortar shell landed nearby killing PFC J Patterson Jr and seriously wounding Sgt McClure and PFC G Jenkins. Pfc D Moncino and Tec 5 C Yoder were badly shaken up, but soon were able to return to duty.

On the evening of January 18th, twenty men of the 2nd platoon went up to complete a short gap on the left flank of "C" company's section. The first load of mines were carried up and the process of laying the front row began when tracers started to streak across the evening sky, and the familiar sound of German machine guns vibrated through the air. The pacers were able to find cover in shell holes and later crawled back to the comparative safety of the assembly area. The job was abandoned for the night.

It was imperative that this final gap be closed. Preceded by an intense five minute artillery barrage, the platoon set out again the next night. Although more machine gun fire was encountered, the men completed their mission and all returned safely.

When the Battalion had completed its mission, the entire division front had been covered and the bulk of the German forces were encompassed by those little pots of steel that meant certain destruction for any tank that went over one. It had been a big job, over 7 thousand mines were laid, but we did it and were ready for more.

There has been little said of the danger these men faced laying these mines in the



darkness nor the discomforts that can be felt on a cold bleak winter's night. You had to remember where to put your feet, consider the threat of snipers and avoid enemy patrol clashes. Also predictable shell and mortar fire fell aimlessly about them. Some engineers were injured, to be sure, and some did not come back.

This defensive work was all a part of a larger scheme. At the same time bridges were prepared for demolition charges, trees were notched and TNT blocks set in place to be blown when necessary. The 2nd platoon of "B" company, was to lay barbed wire before the Infantry and had to wait eighteen hours until it was brought up from Epinal. After completing this job, the 1st platoon went on the line to relieve the weary Infantry. Artillery and counter-battery artillery duelled, many fell to close to Hohwiller. It was hot territory and getting hotter.

In the early stages of the battle, civilians still in Rittershoffen tried desperately to evacuate their homes and proceed to a safer location outside the fighting area. Carts and wagons, loaded heavily with household belongings could be seen frequently moving out of town along the main road -- not all reaching safety. On the main road between Rittershoffen and Kuhlendorf was a pitiful sight -- sickening testimony of the horrors of war. In the middle of the road lay a splintered, overturned wagon, the bloated bodies of dead oxen still harnessed to it. Clothes and furniture were scattered over the area, and, away from it a little distance lay the twisted, mangled bodies of an elderly man, his wife, and their daughter -- all hit directly by a German mortar shell. Vehicles entering and leaving Rittershoffen had to swerve to avoid running over the pitiful group.

Some civilians still remained in town, huddling in the cellars of their homes. As one house was destroyed, the people moved into neighboring cellars until several families were crowded into one cramped hole. The migrating civilians present a serious problem for the men fighting within the town, interfering with movement and obstructing view. Screaming, hysterical women running in the hell of No Man's Land added more strain to the men's jagged nerves.

A general withdrawal was announced, and one by one, outfits packed up and moved back from the front. The Field Artillery kept firing, trying to disillusion the enemy into thinking things were the same and nothing great was occurring.

On the 20th of January, intermittent snow and rain fell, the day proceeded slowly into nightfall which brought a quick freeze that added misery to the jammed up convoys. Outfits were mixing with one another adding

to the confusion. "B" company had the 1st and 3rd platoons sanding roads for CCB's withdrawal. The 2nd platoon remained on the line that night. Hq Section moved back from Hohwiller alone.

The road from Surburg was in extremely poor condition, ice on the hills making travel unsafe. "C" company, first in Surburg, covered the roads with anything available to obtain traction -- sand, gravel, dirt, and, to the utter dismay of the prudent Alsations, straw from the barns. It was a strange sight -- battered, heavily laden vehicles crammed with weary soldiers and torn, dirty equipment cautiously making their way through deep beds of yellow straw. All material that could be of use to the enemy was either destroyed or taken along. A tank-retriever, stuck along the route, was damaged and burned. The 1st platoon loaded approximately two hundred rounds of 4.2 inch mortar shells into the explosive trailer of the platoon truck, and all extra gas cans were punctured. Usable bridge timber was burned, leaving nothing behind for the enemy. It was an orderly, well-planned withdrawal, and all elements completed their movement successfully.

At 1800 January 20th, the bridge on the outskirts of Rittershoffen was prepared for demolitions by the 2nd squad of the 2nd platoon of "C" company and three men were left to guard it. By 2000 Hatten had been abandoned, and the Infantry was beginning to evacuate Rittershoffen leaving a screening force of tanks to cover the bridge. At 0300 the next morning the tanks withdrew to a new defense line at Neiderbetschdorf. The men remained at the bridge three hours longer with no one in front of them but the Germans. At 0600 the bridge was blown, and the men returned to the platoon at Oberbetschdorf.

A few men from the 2nd platoon of "C" company remained at Oberbetschdorf to blow a crater that would seal off all traffic coming through the town. They remained there that morning until all of the American forces had withdrawn and blew the crater.

The 79th Division Engineers took care of all demolition work withdrawing through the Hagenau Forest.

No enemy appeared during the withdrawal and though the columns were harassed by icy hills, and slippery roads, all units cleared Surburg. With all roads between us and the enemy blown or otherwise destroyed, we, as a battalion, but in separate convoys were to make our way from Surburg to Schweinheim. The roads were sanded by "A" company which had reverted to battalion control, preparing the way for our withdrawal to the new location. Their 3rd platoon had sanded the road from Surburg to Griesbach and the 2nd platoon continued from there to Schweinheim.



We "slugged" it out with them  
here  
Hatten, Alsace



The Germans used this Church  
as an Observation Post  
Hatten, Alsace





The bloody road into Hatten, Alsace



Aftermath  
Hatten, Alsace  
March 20, 1945



"A" company arrived by platoons as did "B" company throughout the night. "C" company remained overnight at Zeinheim arriving sometime the next day to join the battalion.

Our front had changed over night. We had now fallen back to a formidable barrier — the Moder River — the line had now somewhat straightened out. We had given up ground but could afford to. However, the lives lost there can never be forgotten nor the accomplishment of staving off an offensive that was never able to materialize again. The enemy had spent tremendously, and had little to show for it.

## Camp Schweinheim

On January 20th 1945, the battalion less company "C" arrived at a small Alsatian village. This was Schweinheim, affectionately referred to later, as "Camp Schweinheim"; and why not? Did we not have warm billets provided in the small but comfortable houses of the villagers? It was here that the battalion had an ample supply of 'Schnapps' and became thoroughly proficient in its use. There were pretty girls, invitations to home cooked meals and opportunities to share family stocks of vintage. Here too -- we were subjected to those 'garrison inspections', Remember? What a silly question, will we ever forget?

On the 22nd of January company "C" joined the battalion. They had been billeted in a small town called Zeinheim the previous day. At first the company was reluctant to move. You see it was the first time that American troops had ever been in this place. The village was nestled in a 'petit' valley and had not been exposed to the effects of war. Buildings were still intact, and the absence of devastation was a cheerful sight. Nevertheless 'Charlie' company welcomed an opportunity of seeing their buddies in other parts of the battalion. There is a kinship built up between men who have faced death together that is a binding as the love of a mother for her child. Now, we had a chance to 'swap' yarns.

Snow blanketed the earth. At this time, the few hours of sunlight offered little opportunity for Old Sol to melt the accumulations of several snow storms. On some occasions we had what might be classed as blizzards, making roads impassable, with wind swept snow banks six feet high. We did not face Jerry but engaged an enemy equally as potent — the elements of nature. Our mission was 'Keep the roads open for traffic'. The 14th Armored Division must be kept mobile. Had we not

'outfoxed' Jerry by popping up where least expected? It was a war of out-maneuvering the enemy! Supplies were an essential item that must get through. Drivers exhausted themselves, endeavoring to keep their vehicles under control and moving. It was our job to help them.

The maintenance section of battalion Hq. came to the assistance of the companies by constructing snow plows from such expedient materials as old boilers. These greatly augmented our feeble efforts to keep the highways free of snow and were largely responsible for final victory over that problem. Trucks were running day and night on a twenty-four hour shift basis in order that gravel might be spread. Ice had formed under the snow. This condition left no traction for our heavily laden vehicles dashing back and forth from front to rear areas.

It became apparent shortly, that Alsatian roads were never intended to withstand the hard wear our armored vehicles imposed on them. The struggle to keep roads maintained and passable was in some instances carried on twenty-four hours a day. It seemed an insurmountable problem.

Company "A" opened a quarry in the immediate vicinity of Schweinheim. It was located between there and Saverne. In the course of your travels it is possible some day you may be traveling east from Saverne, look on the right hand side of the road just after you cross the bridge on the outskirts of town, evidence of the 125th Armd Engr Bn Quarry is there.

With this ready source of rock and gravel the roads in the division area soon showed signs of improvement. The weather grew warmer as spring approached and a sudden thaw was responsible for another headache. Many of the roads developed 'frost heaves'. The foundation of the roads collapsed leaving miry craters in which a peep might readily disappear as if held in a bed of quicksand. This necessitated building an entirely new road bed. One recalls using bull dozers to clear all the mud from a road to reach rock bottom. All companies faced this problem. Some installed plank roads, for example the road from Dettwiller to Hochfelden. A "C" company project, with trucks from the other companies assisting by hauling rock and gravel, was the by-pass road from Dettwiller to Lupstein. You might be interested in knowing, as this book goes to press, a recent reconnaissance reveals that particular road still in excellent condition. Merely an example of the calibre of work done by this battalion. "A" company constructed a landing strip for the artillery liaison planes. We had various other assignments such as sanitation (we were merely garbage removal men), firing ranges and jobs of like



nature took time. Sgt 'Mike' our communication technician was daily hustling about endeavoring to keep the phone lines intact or else to his waist in the generator insuring the battalion a source for light. We witnessed an odd sight one day. Capt. Hanson, as battalion security Officer, laid out a very elaborate plan of protection. To test it, he executed a dry run. All of the men present in town quickly deployed to assigned posts. All went well save for the villagers. Not realizing it was a practice alert, they were loading their belongings on carts preparing for a quick exodus from Schweinheim, thinking the town was under siege. Lt Henn saved the day by explaining the situation to the burgomeister. His ability to speak German fluently was used to advantage on many occasions.

On January 25th company "C" was alerted to move out with CCA. Two of the platoons of that company joined battalions to which they had been previously attached. As further instructions failed to materialize, the two platoons rejoined their parent unit on the 27th.

During the latter part of January and the early part of February CCB was supporting the 79th Infantry Division which was holding the main line of resistance. Company "B" left Schweinheim to execute the necessary engineer work that CCB might encounter. The company had platoons attached to various battalions. The maintenance of roads was at all times a primary mission but from time to time the company was obliged to perform other tasks. Originally the company Hq was at Wahlenheim, but as the scope of its tasks broadened, the company moved and on the 2nd of February were in Marienthal.

During this period the main line of resistance, in general followed the Moder River. Our Infantry was continually probing the German line. Company "B" built a foot bridge that would enable troops to cross the Moder, also a treadway bridge was installed. Both of these were in the vicinity of Bischwiller. Jerry had decided to make this town as uncomfortable as possible. It was a case of ducking their artillery and mortar fire while continuing with the mission. The men of company "B" refer to this town as a 'hot spot'. During their operation in this sector the company swept the roads for mines in order to provide safe passage of men and vehicles. The town had

recently been occupied by Jerry and it was a general practice for the Hun to scatter mines around leaving them carefully camouflaged. This company was also instrumental in strengthening the position held by our troops by installing concertinas, road blocks made of mines (generally called Daisy chains). While not employed otherwise the company furnished interior guard for CCB Hq. On the 7th of February Company "B" returned to the fold at Camp Schweinheim. More stories to 'swap' --.

More days passed with show-down inspections. One which we well remember came as a result of an accumulation of excess automatic fire power equipment which had proven a necessity in our days of defensive combat. When we say excess, we mean that which is not authorized by Tables of Organization and Equipment. Orders had been issued contrary to our desires, so we were obliged to turn in all excess weapons.

During this period, time was spent in classes covering various phases of Engineer work. These were conducted mainly for the benefit of reinforcements (replacements) but the classes proved valuable to all of us. Instruction on the latest types of German mines was highly beneficial. On the 19th of February company "B" left Schweinheim in order to give closer support to the combat command with engineer work. The unit moved to Ringendorf with a primary mission of maintaining roads. In the early part of March the division took over defensive position along the Moder River. Company "C" bid the girls 'Au Revoir' (this is an error for it should have been 'Adieu') and headed for Berstheim to give engineer support to CCB on the 11th of March. On the 19th of March, Camp Schweinheim was deserted as far as the 125th was concerned. We had left with the words of the burgomeister echoing in our ears "do not disturb or throw stones at storks as they bring the occupants of the village luck"; We wondered. Company "A" had moved to Schwabwiller on the 18th and battalion Hq and Hq company were in Oberbetschdorf on the 19th of March. With the battalion dispersed throughout the division area we close this chapter of days at Schweinheim. This old town had become part of our life with its old houses, the 11th Century church tower and the ever present Alsatian manure piles.



*“Siegfried line”*



# *We crack the formidable Siegfried fortifications*

On March 11th 1945 the 14th Armored Division took over the defensive position along the Moder River relieving the 36th Infantry Division. This was a signal for the coming attack on the "impregnable" Siegfried Line. The first action in the battalion came with "C" company's attachment to CCB. CCA was already on line having relieved CCB during our stay at Schweinheim. However, when CCA had moved up, "B" Company remained in position and attached to this combat command. It was not until the whole division moved up into position that "B" Company returned to their usual attachment with CCB, and "C" Company reverted to CCA control.

In order to facilitate the telling of a series of events covering the actions of the various units in the battalion it will be necessary to take up each company separately. Starting with Hq, whose actions were for the most part of a supervisory nature. On the 19th of March, Hq, the last unit to leave Schweinheim, moved to Oberbetschdorf and the following day passed through the lifeless ruins of Rittershofen to Oberseebach. Here they remained during the breaking of the Siegfried Line. It must be realized that a number of elements of Hq's were utilized on the front lines by the various companies. Action by men attached to these units, will be mentioned as the chapter proceeds. It may be well to mention some of the work that preceded behind the lines in Hq.

An experiment was made at Oberseebach with new contraption as an aid in breaking the Siegfried Line. Three sections of treadway were welded together and attached by cables to a tank retriever unit. The purpose for such a unit was for the tank retriever to drop the treadways across a crater or anti-tank ditch. The armor on the retriever acted as a protection to personnel under heavy concentrations of small arms fire thus insuring a reduction in the risks entailed in such actions. The rig was never used but it has since then proved successful in the Philippine Islands. As far as we know, this was the initial venture. It was suggested by Capt Wallace and materialized by the efforts and ingenuity of Capt 'Joe' Mangan and the Battalion Shop.

On the 25th of March, Hq moved to Altenstadt and the following day into Germany.

The first of the line companies to be considered will be "A" company. On the 16th of March its 1st platoon was attached to Task Force "England", which included the Troop of

Cavalry, a platoon of Tanks and a platoon of Engineers. They moved up to the area of Mörschwiller. The destination in mind was Lauterburg. The jump-off was to occur on the morning of the 18th; but for some reason or other, it fell through. With that, the platoon rejoined the company at Schweinheim.

On the morning of the 18th, company "A" left Schweinheim for Schwabwiller, arriving there at 2300. Due to the attack of the Siegfried positions, this town was congested with soldiers. The company experienced great difficulty in establishing billets. That night the 3rd platoon went out between Schwabwiller and Surburg to repair roads and fill in craters. At this time Lt McKeon, who had recently received a commission from 1st Sgt, and three men set out in a peep to investigate bridges between Hatten and Bühl. They found both of the bridges out. On the following day long after their reports had been brought in, the men discovered that the bridges were mined, and somehow, they had managed to miss all of the eighteen mines in the area.

On the 19th "A" company proceeded to Oberbetschdorf to be with Battalion and Hq company. The 1st platoon swept the road between Hatten and Salmbach of mines. During this action, they located the afore mentioned eighteen mines, one was a box mine and seventeen were S mines. The 2nd platoon worked the road between Surburg and Hatten, removing three road blocks in Neiderbetschdorf. The men also cleared rubble, the remains of tanks and various types of debris from the streets of Rittershoffen and Hatten to enable two-way traffic clear passage.

That night CCR was alerted to move. This meant more road repair from Buhl to Trimbach, Oberseebach, Niederseebach, Aschbach, and hence to Stundwiller to facilitate two-way traffic. Timber was obtained to fill in five craters and cover the area with planking. The work was finished by morning. The following day was spent maintaining and improving roads in the vicinity of Oberseebach. That night thirty Satchel charges and thirty pole charges, each weighing approximately forty pounds were prepared for the use of company "C". On the morning of the 21st the 1st platoon built a fixed bridge at Altenstadt. This was at the site of a bridge they had built three months previously. The bridge was constructed beneath an existing treadway, so that traffic would not be interrupted until it was absolutely necessary. Thus convoys were halted, only for the brief period when the decking was laid. Meanwhile the 3rd platoon checked buildings division was to occupy in Oberseebach for any possible booby traps, mines or bombs; they found nothing, as usual. Trees were also cut down north of Aschbach to make room for an artillery observation plane landing strip. The 2nd platoon



swept the road from Trimbach to Altenstadt but found it clear. Later in the day they were put on a thirty minute alert to support "C" company, this failed to materialize.

More road work was accomplished by the 1st platoon with mine sweeping in the vicinity of Oberseebach and also along the road from Altenstadt to Kapsweyer. The latter road was subject to scattered artillery fire, fortunately no casualties occurred. Along this stretch a new type of magnetic mine was found. This device was carefully taken back for examination and study by proper authorities and ordnance.

On the 23rd the company took off, with the exception of maintenance vehicles and drove to Schweighofen. At this place all three platoons went to work removing debris and wreckage, that was impairing traffic through the town. They removed road blocks and repaired the road as far as Steinfeld. The 2nd platoon swept and cleared debris as far as Schaidt. The 1st platoon was engaged in welding closed the steel doors on pill-boxes throughout the area. That night the 2nd platoon remained in Schaidt and the 1st and 3rd in Schweighofen. The next day road work was continued as far as Minfeld. Later in the day the entire company gathered at Freckenfeld. The citizens had deserted the place leaving most of their possessions, thus the boys amused themselves rumaging through various effects, trying on top hats, chasing liberated chickens "that attacked them" and in general keeping off the border line of mischief. That night they returned to Altenstadt where battalion was located, and moved with battalion to Germany on the 26th.

"B" company once more was attached to CCB moving to Berstheim on March 15th. It was on this date that the company was relieved from CCA and attached to CCB, departing from Ringendorf at 1400 hours, changing places with "C" company at Berstheim. The next day the 1st platoon left for Huttendorf while the rest of the company remained where they were. The 18th found the company moving in support of CCA with CCB to Reimerswiller. They were engaged in the usual job of mine sweeping removing a great number of S mines. In this action T/5 John Critchley stepped on an S mine and was injured severely. The detail of clearing the roads of mines and checking booby traps continued through the following day.

It may be here mentioned, as to the disposition of the platoons: The 1st platoon was attached to the 19th Infantry, the 2nd platoon attached to the 47th Tank Battalion with the 3rd remaining with company Hq. The road march carried these units through the Hatten-Rittershoffen area to Siegen. A rather peculiar circumstance occurred in as much as the 1st platoon was ordered by division to return to battalion control. This was neither

convenient or possible at the time, so the 2nd platoon was relieved from the 47th Tankers leaving the 1st platoon with the 19th Infantry at Altenstadt.

On the 21st of March the 1st platoon was ordered to support "A" company in bridge construction over the Lauter River at Altenstadt. This was due to the fact that the tremendous drive ahead left a shortage of available personnel in the area. Meanwhile the company remained at Siegen. The following day Lt Eddington was transferred to "C" company due to the shortage of Officers there.

The 23rd found the company leaving Siegen with CCB at 0600 hours to support the breakthrough of the 103rd Division at Silz, Germany. They reached Silz about 0900 where a road crater delayed the column for two hours. Finally the convoy was on its way. It proceeded through Rohrbach. While in this town, a white phosphorous grenade was thrown from a window into the half-track in front of the company's radio car killing two and seriously injuring three men. It was observed at this point that people here had better food and clothing than in Alsace. That evening, for security reasons, the CP was set up in an open field in the vicinity of Billingsheim.

As a side note one might mention some observations made in this locality. It was here that a German convoy had been caught between artillery cross-fire. The rapidity of our advancing spearheads and air-craft had caused an inestimable slaughter. Most of the German vehicles were horse drawn, although many of them had formerly been motor propelled. It was evident that the supply of fuel was becoming acute in the German Army. An estimated nine hundred to one thousand horses were left dead or roaming in the fields. In fact, it was necessary to remove dead horses, dead Germans and wrecked equipment with tank dozers from the road. Heaps of horses and men in various stiffened postures covered the fields and ditches. While seemingly unbelievable one of the nearby streams ran red to rusty with the blood of dead horse and corpses mingled with mud and gasoline.

German soldiers in bewildered confusion gave up in little groups, white flags flying from sticks or limbs of trees. These men showed little enthusiasm. Even first aid men were bringing prisoners in. Company "B" took in approximately forty-five prisoners at the time. The removal of wounded and dead presented a huge problem, for example, at Herxheim ten Germans were found in bed, willing to surrender but unable to move under their own power.

On the 24th the CP moved to Rohrwiller and occupied another field. At this time two men in the 1st platoon were wounded by shrapnel, Cpl Moliaro and PFC Harmon. The 2nd platoon had returned to the 47th Tank



Bn and was engaged in removing demolition charges from bridges left by the retreating Jerries who lacked the time to blow them.

March 25th found the CP in a field near Bellheim. Everyone dug deep slit trenches for a heavy artillery barrage was expected. The 2nd platoon went into Gernersheim to clear debris caused by artillery barrages. That night when low flying planes dropped flares in the field close to the CP, it was found advisable to move immediately and another area close by was chosen. The following morning the company was relieved of its attachment to CCB and left Bellheim for the battalion assembly area at the German cantonment near Dierbach, Germany.

Company "C" took on the major part of the activity for this period. On the 11th of March the 1st platoon left Schweinheim when elements of the company were attached to CCB at Berstheim. They were followed later in the day by the remainder of the company. The work in this region was primarily road maintenance which extended as far as Pfaffenhofen. The men observed tremendous amounts of heavy equipment moving up the roads, something big was up. On the 15th of March, orders changed, "C" company reverted to CCA control. The 1st platoon was attached to the 68th Infantry and moved to Grassendorf, the 2nd platoon returned to its "old friends" the 25th Tankers at Ettendorf and the 3rd platoon was attached to Task Force Blue at Kerrwiller.

Action finally came on the 18th when the 103rd Infantry Division jumped off at Pfaffenhofen with an intent to carry the attack through Soultz sous Foret. At this time, due to its location, the 1st platoon had an excellent opportunity to view the attack on the area west of Hagenau just beyond the Moder River. From the hill where they were bivouaced they could see at least five towns of varying sizes scattered in the greening spring landscape. By the end of the first day of firing all were aflame. P-47's of the Air Corps dove and strafed at enemy emplacements, it was a spectacular sight -- gradually the big guns moved up, the roar of motors could be heard as the tanks advanced and columns of dust could be seen along the roads as the attacking forces advanced. At night, the towns burned weirdly, casting a red glow into the sky, the whole scene not unmindful of Dante's "Inferno".

The attack proceeded well and the 19th of March found the road march proceeding in order. By the evening of the 19th, the 1st platoon proceeded to Schweighofen, Germany. This period found the following disposition -- the 36th Division on our left flank and a French Division on our right; which gave us a reasonable feeling of security as both outfits were made up of battle-tested men.

On reaching Schweighofen it was considered advisable to hunt a house with a damned deep cellar to protect men from those dreaded 88's. At an early hour of the morning the men were roused to make a march to the town of Kapsweyer. It was one of those beautiful days of early spring, but any chance to appreciate it was out of the question. In actuality, it was a horrible night-mare deeply effecting the lives of all concerned. Occasional shell-fire was audible above the roar of the halftrack. Suddenly it seemed that all hell broke loose. The men cleared the track for cover landing in the nearest muddy cellar available. This was the beginning of a bad day.

An old veteran in the battle-scarred 36th Division seemed to be taking the situation calmly as the "screaming meemies" whined and crashed about all day. They had grown used to it. Yes, the cellars the soldiers occupied shook and heaved from the tremendous concussion outside, dirt flew in at doors and windows crashed, plaster and dust fell from the ceiling. For several hours not a dozen words were spoken by the men, 36th Division or 125th Engineers. Lt Hewett came into the main group and said, "It's too hot to accomplish anything up the line now, we will come back later." The 1st platoon loaded themselves into the half-track and took off for safer ground.

Back in Kapsweyer again, the men took the little gasoline stoves out and ate their usual supper of K rations. Lovely K rations! We felt so sorry for the poor unfortunate civilians back in the States who were continually complaining about the food situation.

When things had quieted down a bit, a trip back was made. The track was parked outside of town on the suggestion of the Lieutenant as there was no use in filling it with holes from enemy artillery. The charges were heavy and the men who carried them had no gloves. Lt Hewett decided to find out just what procedure was advisable. The men retired to convenient cellars. When the Lt came back about midnight, he woke the platoon, saying "Well, men, we've got to do it tonight. Now is the ideal time, it's darker than all hell." Perhaps you've never shaken so much that you can hardly hold a cigarette, -- well brother, we have.

It was after midnight, the platoon staggered down the street under the weight of TNT. Buildings on both sides of the street were burning and cast an eerie glow of red about the whole scene. They reached the last building in town, the 68th Infantry CP. For a few minutes a bit of conversation was struck up with men of the 68th. Their story wasn't pleasant. Here it is:

"About 2100 that evening the 68th had sent a patrol out to discover a way of rescuing the rest of their men in Steinfeld. Only a small



number of them that remained managed to crawl through the teeth and evade the withering machine gun fire coming from the pill boxes tangent to the line itself. That wasn't all, they were again sprayed with bullets when only three hundred yards down the road from the CP. One fellow ventured to say that the machine gun was firing from a hay stack."

This may have unnerved the boys a bit and even one of the squad squawked, "It's suicide." However, there is a certain courage in a soldier that makes him go on despite his better senses. Staying on the shadows as long as they were able, they crouched low and walked as quietly as possible. There was no talking or any other means of communication. The squad proceeded down the darkened road at an agreed thirty yard interval, the silence was broken by continual artillery fire and it was all a man could do to keep track of the man ahead of him. Sometimes they caught sight of the men ahead of them by the reflection of his frosty breathe in the cold air. Carefully laying their charges at the roadside, they walked to the ditch and rested for a minute for the boxes were heavy. This trip into Hell grew endless, it would seem as though they would never get there. A few minutes later they moved on in the same cautious manner. As they rounded a turn in the road the acrid smoke of smoldering timbers burned in their throat. The men gasped for breath. Looming up in the black of the night stood the Dragons teeth illuminated by the blazing buildings like so many gravestones in a cemetery. There it was!!!!

Quickly, in the same clockwork manner, the first man was over the narrow low wall in front of the teeth. Then the next man was over and so on. Not a sound was uttered. They tied their charges, a shadow was seen, the sound of a rifle bolt going home — was it Jerry? No, the Lt motioned for the men to stay low, the men could see his helmet now, "Thank God he was an American". The job was finished.

Every ounce of strength was necessary to make that final sprint back to the 68th CP. A thousand thoughts went through the men's heads, was the charge tied right, was the fuse going to work, will the enemy see it before it goes off? A few more moments and a lightening flash, three hundred pounds of TNT illuminated the night — The 1st platoon had completed its mission.

With the 1st platoon safely through a dangerous mission let us consider the 2nd platoon.

On the 18th of March the 2nd platoon left Ettendorf and proceeded to Oberseebach by way of Surburg and Soultz. At Hofen it was necessary to put in a bridge. It was the same site where the 2nd platoon of "A" Company

had built a bridge on the first drive north in December. The tank had been turned right side up to take out the dead Germans and then moved a short distance from the bridge. Then it was pushed into the stream so it would not block traffic. Now it made an ideal pier for an expedient bridge to permit a speedy passage for our armor.

While the bridge was under construction, Lt Copes and PFC Olpp proceeded to the other end of town to make a further reconnaissance of the bridges there. The bridges were found intact but several mine fields necessitated the vehicles remaining strictly to the road at that point. Towards sundown it was necessary to remove from a large road crater over a quarter ton of dynamite on the outskirts of Altdorf. In the same locality, two crater holes of unusually large dimensions had to be filled in; as a result they reached their destination at Oberseebach at a late hour.

Early the next morning the platoon proceeded to Altenstadt clearing some of the side roads and fields of mines to facilitate several paths of progress. On reaching Altenstadt the platoon proceeded to the Lauter River to size up a blown bridge but due to a heavy barrage of rockets and artillery from the retreating enemy, it was inadvisable to proceed with the bridge construction. The platoon proceeded to the outskirts of town waiting there until the barrage quieted down and then proceeded to Wissembourg. Quietly bedded down for an hour or so on the outskirts of town, the men thought that they would pass the night there. They were mistaken, for at midnight a messenger was sent to find the platoon leader. Their destination was Schweighofen.

They reached there at an early hour of the morning. A squad of fourteen men were picked to blow the Dragon teeth. The rest of the men followed them through Schweighofen to be deployed around the tanks on the outskirts of town facing Kapsweyer. The men, at the tank position, preceeded to dig in, however, it was decided to change the tank positions and the men returned to the other end of Schweighofen. Dawn was just breaking and the early hours of daylight added to the weird effects of burning buildings and the confusion of battle. A short while later the men returned from the task of placing their charges of the Dragons teeth. Their story was not unlike that of the 1st platoon. With an exception that they narrowly missed extermination by some close landing shells, that day the men rested up. On the night of the 21st a squad of fourteen men, made up for the most part of the same group that had gone the previous night, returned to the Dragons teeth. Again they struggled with their heavy charges and succeeded in accomplishing their mission without a casualty. This seems remarkable in view of the dangers entailed in such an operation.



Air guard in church steeple  
Schweinheim, Alsace



Presentation of awards by  
General Smith  
Schweinheim, Alsace



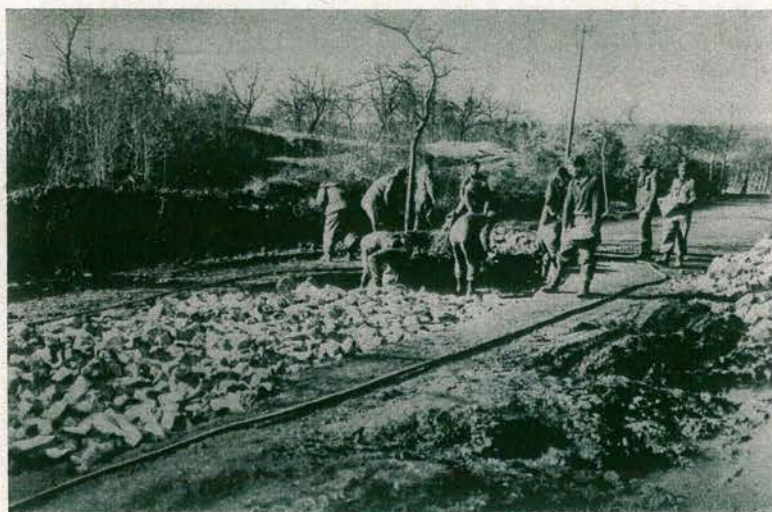


The machine age  
ancient French rock-crusher  
complete with operator  
Saverne, Alsace



125th Armd Engr quarry  
Saverne, Alsace





Road building in Alsace



Out of mire we built roads  
Alsace





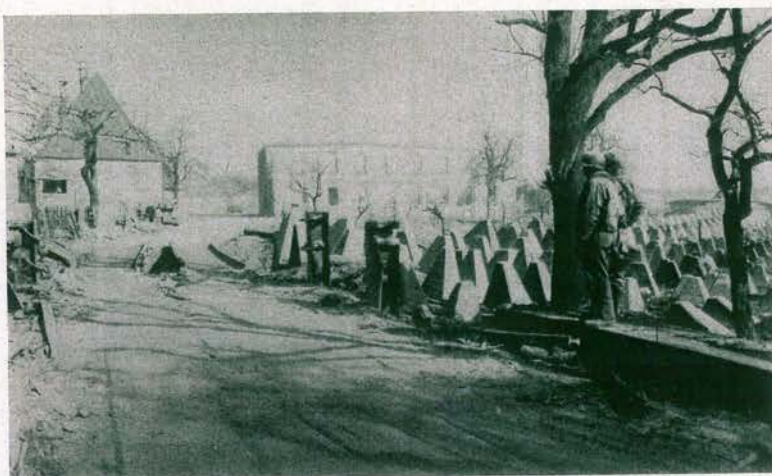
"Frost heaves" gave us troubles  
Alsace



S-2 picked up some of the  
"party boys"  
Griesbach, Alsace



The way was cleared  
south road into Steinfeld, Germany



"The morning after"  
Siegfried fortifications at Steinfeld,  
Germany, March 24, 1945





We pulled the "Dragon's teeth"  
of the Siegfried fortifications



Alles kaput



However, the night was not without tragedy. PFC Robert Snodgrass and PFC Nicholas Pusi, like good soldiers, decided to dig themselves a secure position in the field on the south edge of Schweighofen. The men had thought themselves secure, then in dead of night a tank retriever moving up in the blackness struck their fox hole. Pusi received a serious back injury and Snodgrass, before he could be reached, had suffocated to death. The whole platoon keenly felt this unexpected loss.

That day the remainder of the platoon was engaged in removing mines from the immediate area of Schweighofen. The following night everyone rested up for a strenuous day promised.

The plan for the day was as follows: By 0500 hours the Infantry was supposed to take off at Steinfeld and in accordance with this plan by 0600 hours the Engineers were to remove all barriers, clear debris and fill the anti-tank ditch on the end of town facing Minfeld. In accordance with this plan we arose at 0500 hours, hastily loaded ourselves on the half-track and proceeded through Kapsweyer. At a very short distance outside of this town it was considered advisable to dismount and proceed on foot. In extended order formation down the road to the haze of battle smoke. About three hundred yards from the Dragons teeth they were forced to the ground by artillery barrages. PFC Bounds was struck by shrapnel. The medical aid man was left to care for him and the men proceeded on their mission. They dropped to the ground again, for at this time the dragons teeth resembled, in the half light of the morning, a fourth of July flower pot or rather a series of flower pots for Jerry had decided to cover it with fire. When they reached the teeth it was fortunately quiet again. Creeping, crawling and running in a crouched position, they cleared the dreaded obstacle. They proceeded up the road to the north end of town. Some self instinct from previous battle experience suggested a safer course. The men proceeded close to the road but from house to house and yard to yard instead, as they approached the center of town, they ran into a road barrier defended by a machine gun nest. They were ambushed. Lt Copes was wounded and had to be evacuated. This left S/Sgt Thomas in command of the platoon. The next few minutes proved ticklish. The situation was desperate. PFC Stutz and Tec 4 Seitz went around the right flank of the machine gun position. Sgt Ray Hodson was at the window of a house at the corner of a street intersection and at an oblique angle to the machine gun nest, where he was in a position to fire at the enemy. Seitz rose from where he was in a position to fire at the enemy on the right flank and charged the nest shouting, "Actung, you Kraut sons of b...." He routed them out of

their hole and brought them in, the remarkable part of the feat was this; he had finished firing the clip in his rifle and it was empty.

PFC Goldenberg made an attempt to talk several more of the enemy into surrendering, with success.

All proceeded down a side street towards the center of town, an incoming shell fragment caught Goldenberg, who was evacuated. On reaching the main street where the tanks were deployed, and contacting the 1st and 3rd platoons, it was thought best to sit tight. All the men retired to cellars, which were the only safe places in Steinfeld. From the surrounding hills the enemy poured in everything they had including the "kitchen sink". Steinfeld was gradually being reduced to a mass of rubble.

Early in the afternoon four men were told to proceed to the south end of town to maintain the road at the treadway bridge crossing. Two of the men, Cpl Shelley and Cpl Breedlove, were injured by shrapnel while maintaining the bridge approaches.

The continual barrage of shells and mortars made it practically impossible for men to carry out any activity in the town. Even the moving from cellar to cellar was done at a great risk. As a matter of fact, PFC Rencher caught a fragment of shrapnel in the back of his leg in attempting to move. That evening the men gathered in one of the many fortifications the enemy had erected in the town. When it was considered reasonable, groups moved out of the town on a half-track, under the cover of darkness and by 1100 hours all were safely back in Schweighofen.

It is necessary at this point to make a clarification. Normally the 2nd platoon was led by Lt Charlie Bardwell but due to an unexpected accident, in which Lt Bardwell's peep ran into a tank in the dusk of evening on the 21st of March, he sustained minor injuries which necessitated his removal for several days. Thus Lt Copes had taken over on the morning of the 22nd.

The 2nd platoon's final mission in Steinfeld had not been accomplished. It had been intended, that the platoon should move to the edge of town in the direction of Minfeld to fill in an anti-tank ditch by hand. This task would have been utter suicide, as there were several thousand Germans located in the "bunkers" adjacent to the ditch. Under these circumstances, Lt John Delmay proceeded to the location with a VTR (tank recovery vehicle with a dozer blade attached) to fill in the ditch. The vehicle was an open turret affair. The work in filling in the ditch was accomplished despite enemy fire. As the vehicle was approaching our lines a German 88 scored a direct hit. Both of Lt Delmay's legs were crushed. Despite valiant effort on his part to recover, he died several



days later. Lt Delmay has been doubly the hero in this action for he undoubtedly saved the lives of an entire platoon by carrying out a job that he was in no way obligated to do.

Lt Delmay, a native of Brussels, had seen his country overrun by the enemy. His actions, therefore, had always been motivated by that driving spirit which makes free men fight for a better world.

The 3rd platoon proceeded to Task Force Blue assembly area on the 15th of March. They remained with Task Force Blue until the 20th of March. During this time, the path taken carried them from Oberseebach to Schleithal on the German border. Their work was the usual engineer road maintenance, however, there were several unusual features in it. After clearing the town of Schleithal, the engineers worked on a bridge across a series of concrete flood control retaining walls on the Lauter River, which necessitated some three hundred feet of bridging. Also in the region of the Forrest de Mundat and in the approaches to the Beinald Forrest they laid over three hundred yards of corduroy to enable armor to roll through that region.

On the 20th, they were attached to CCA. With the other two platoons of "C" company they were called to blow a gap through the Dragon teeth which were strung before the fortified town of Steinfeld.

The 3rd platoon set up an assembly point in the last building at the town of Kapsweyer approximately three hundred yards from the teeth. The platoon leader, Lt Anthony Wise, started a reconnaissance accompanied by Cpl Goldapske. The party made its way across the open terrain and reached the teeth. Here as usual, they were met by an intense barrage of artillery fire which caused them to separate. Goldapske went ahead until he reached the last Infantry outpost; but before he could return, the Germans counter-attacked. As a result, the Cpl remained with the men on the outpost for over thirty-six hours, at which time the enemy made several desperate efforts to take the building where the station was set up.

As daylight came, the Infantry attack through the line was made, and went well until the foot troops encountered large numbers of heavily armed pill boxes, tank support was needed badly, it was then that the Col in charge of the attack decided that a path was needed through the teeth immediately. The Col gave this order after securing all possible information from returning Infantry and radio contact with men already well within the teeth. Three men, Sgt F Johnston, PFC E Lucien, and PFC P Di Cicco, members of the 3rd platoons 2nd squad prepared the necessary charges, their orders were to follow behind a medium tank, the tank was to protect them,

at least in measure, against small arms fire. As it developed, no tank was available so the men decided to go without it.

After advancing some two hundred yards, the three men were pinned down by a terrific rocket barrage and sniper fire from the flanks of the town. The Sgt was determined to reach the teeth until two Infantry men started to cross the road twenty-five yards in front of him, were killed by machine gun fire which raked the area. The engineers were waved back by other Infantry men who were dug in nearby. After returning to the CP and explaining the situation they had met, the party increased by four men and a tank was supplied to precede the men up to the teeth. This time they were able to place their charges despite constant shelling of the area which was under direct observation from nearby pill boxes. About ten minutes after the charges were set off, the first of the tanks passed through the gap.

This work was not accomplished without casualties to the engineers. The 1st squad had two men, Tec 5 Carlo Cascegnio, and Joseph Fallat, killed in action and three men wounded in action. They were caught by the rocket barrage when they were about to crawl over the concrete rim that bordered the teeth.

With a lane through the teeth, it was necessary to make possible a path for armored vehicles. The most logical place for such a path was over the original road. However, a ten foot crater had to be bridged. The 3rd squad, under Sgt Lukins drew this assignment and with the aid of men from Headquarters operations section, thirty-six feet of treadway bridge was laid across the crater. The driver of the first brockway truck, Tec 5 Alfred Zimmerman, was hit by a fragment of shrapnel in the lower part of his chest, while operating the crane. He was placed on the truck and one of the men drove it safely through while the remainder finished the job at hand. For this work at Steinfeld, T/Sgt James Beeson, Tec 5 Claude Williamson, Tec 5 Zimmerman and PFC Lewis Davis of Headquarters received the Bronze Star awards.

With the bridge completed that night, vehicles were moving across before daylight. Then the final task was the clearing of road blocks within the town. This job was assigned to the 2nd squad under Sgt Johnston. The demolition was brought into town by peep and a good cellar picked in which to make up the necessary charges. The streets were now filled with our troops and tanks all ready to jump off as soon as the road was cleared. The Germans must have discovered what was going on, for they raked the street all night long, thus inflicting heavy casualties among the men who had to remain in the open for lack of shelter. The first of the charges was prepared



by fastening two fifty pound boxes of TNT to a six foot plank which was placed against the center of the road block and propped up with another pole. Using this system, four other obstacles were later completely removed and our armor was able to speed ahead and complete their mission.

By the night of the 22nd all of "C" company was gathered in Schweighoffen. As Gen PATTON's 3rd Army approached the Rhine to the north of us and swung south, the Wehrmacht in our area was threatened with an encircling movement. Consequently, German troops began surrendering first in small isolated groups and later by the hundreds. The old line soldiers and SS troops abandoned the area leaving the old men and the young boy of the Volksturm holding the bag. Resistance staggered and crumbled.

By the afternoon of the 23rd we were able to proceed by convoy through Steinfeld and Minfeld, camping that night along the road. On the 24th the convoy reached a divisional assembly area, the push ahead had become suddenly a rat-race with the Germans wildly retreating to the further banks of the Rhine River. The 14th Armored Division found itself without a front. The night of the 24th "C" company returned to Altenstadt. On Palm Sunday we enjoyed our last day of fraternization in that old Alsatian town. On the following day the entire battalion moved to the German cantonment near Dierbach in the rolling hills of the Palatinate region of western Germany.

## *Leaving "Camp Kraut"*

### *we crossed the Rhine*

Situated in the very back-yard of the Siegfried Line, Camp Kraut as it was named soon after the 125th's arrival, was what remained of a German barracks after it had taken a pounding from the air. The surrounding hills were studded with pill boxes that overlooked all strategic positions in such a way that every foot of ground was covered by deadly fire of machine guns or 88's. During off-duty hours, groups of GI's went around inspecting the fortifications, hunting for souvenirs. The general trend of the soldier's conversation could summed up thusly -- "These krauts could have held out indefinitely if they had stayed in these pill boxes; they seem impregnable."

Indeed, it would have been difficult to neutralize entirely this extensive line of fortifications. But Jerry, groggy from the potent punches, was hurled from the ring in this particular area. In the machine gun embrasures there wasn't a gun to be found only stove-pipes pointed their ugly soot-stained snouts skyward adding a wholly unnatural domestic touch to the grim scene of the battle field.

Immediately upon arrival, the men cleaned and fixed up the barracks for living quarters. The vehicles and equipment were put in order again. Sleep lost during the past few weeks was made up and good meals were served in the Mess Hall.

Men were sent out daily on various engineering jobs -- mine-sweeping, road clearing and sealing of pill boxes with acetylene torches.

On the 30th of March the 1st platoon of "C" company was alerted to join the 68th Infantry in column for the crossing of the Rhine as the advance unit of CCA. It was a beautiful moonlit night with a fierce coldness that pierced to the bone.

This was a moment that all had been waiting for. It was the ambition of everyone to see the Rhine -- from the eastern side. This vaunted bastion had always been held before our invading forces as the final obstacle in our march into Germany, and now, it was to be crossed.

It was a long column and the serpentine pattern of the black-out lights was an impressive sight, indeed. We hoped that the people of Germany could see us coming, for they would then realize what was against them. The crossing of the river at Worms on a ponton bridge itself presented a spectacular sight, for the full moon played upon the water, lighting a pathway through the inky night.

At dawn, they arrived at Dieburg, a pleasant German town much different from the rambling, dirty farmhouses of farming districts. It was a manufacturing town, and the standard of living showed a marked improvement. It first appeared as though Germany had prospered greatly by the war, but the super race was not to enjoy this prosperity for long.

The remainder of company "C" crossed the Rhine early the next morning with the main body of CCA column and arrived at CCA's assembly area at Dieburg and joined the advance unit.

The remainder of the battalion left Camp Kraut in the early hours of April 1st and joined their respective combat commands -- "B" company joining CCB at Gross Zimmern. "A" company with CCR at Bossdorf. Upon crossing the Rhine, the 14th Armored Division changed from VI Corps to XV Corps.



*“The Beginning –  
– of the end”*



## *"A" Company on the "Autobahn"*

The next morning, April 2nd, the division was given the permission of passing through the 3rd Inf. Div lines, and under orders from XV Corps, combat teams -- CCA and CCB -- attacked. CCR was to follow CCB and to be prepared to support either combat command, acting at the same time, as protection to CCB's rear, until committed. The next four days found "A" company with little to do but follow behind CCB, keeping the roads passable for CCR, and on several occasions, acting as road guides for the convoy.

Although the brunt of the fighting, in these days, had fallen to the elements ahead, the road marches were not without excitement for a constant stream of the enemy poured out of the woods eager to surrender to anyone who would take them prisoner. Seeing Germans coming out of hiding, waving white flags, caused a lot of excitement at first, but soon the long stream of prisoners lost its novel side and Heinie's white flag meant just another mouth to feed and another dejected Jerry to guard. The overnight stay in Lohr on the 3rd of April was a very interesting stop; however not that "A" company had a big engineering mission to perform -- but Lohr was one of the larger cities, with adequate supply of Schnapps or wine to satisfy that ever present thirst.

On April 6th, CCR, after following CCB across the bridge at Gemunden, moved rapidly against minor resistance, clearing Adelsberg, Gossenheim, and Hundsgoch, before encountering a strong point defended by heavy artillery, dug in tank, and small arms fire. "A" company had no major engineering duties to perform on this CCR mission.

From April 8th to the 12th, the company was in an assembly area, first, in the vicinity of Mellbrickstadt, later in an area near Bedheim. Stopping for a few days in an assembly area meant just one thing -- cleaning equipment, maintaining vehicles, and personal inspections. Still the men had excellent billets in very modern homes, with everything provided, including beds, radios, hot and cold water, even to completely furnished kitchens. Here, too, the company set up a shower point for CCR troops, while a few members of the company found a little time to fish -- of course, the "Engineer Way"!

On April 12th, "A" company moved out again, with CCR now in the attack. The column reached the Main River where all bridges had been blown. On the 13th, the 1st

platoon repaired the first span and approach to a bridge over a power dam at Banz, but this bridge could hold only light equipment so heavy vehicles and tanks were forded across the Main River at Lichtenfels. One squad of the 3rd platoon acted as traffic guards across the power dam, making use of a telephone system; another squad from the same platoon performed the same job at the ford. Meanwhile, the 1st platoon left one squad to maintain the approach to the dam, the other two squads pushing on with the 62nd Infantry to whom they were attached.

"A" company was not on the move on the 14th of April, being again in an assembly area at Wonsees with CCR. However, the 3rd platoon had the job of repairing a crater blown in a small brick arch bridge over a narrow creek. The orders were to make the road passable in the shortest possible time so that CCR could send its command over the road. Acting on these orders and working under a time limit, the remains of the bridge were dropped into the narrow creek bed with demolitions. With the use of the company's heavy dozer, the crater was filled and the road ready, to be in use at the fixed hour. However, orders were changed and CCR didn't use the road immediately. In order to follow the original orders, it had been impossible to provide for adequate drainage of the creek. In time the creek backed up into the adjoining field and threatened to overflow onto the road before CCR could have used the road. Guarding against the chance of the water washing out the road bed, a ditch was cut across the road and culvert constructed, to take care of the water.

It was on this day -- the 14th of April -- that several Jerry planes were sighted overhead, but were driven off by anti-aircraft artillery located in the immediate vicinity.

On the 15th of April, CCR attacked and cut the Nürnberg-Bayreuth autobahn, "A" company ending the day in Trochau. Here, hundreds of prisoners became a problem for CCR Hq, so the 3rd platoon remained at Trochau while the 1st and 2nd platoons operated with the units to which they were attached, who were engaged in clearing roads of the enemy in the immediate vicinity of Creussen.

On the 18th of April, CCR moved to the vicinity of Rohrenstait and on the move "A" company Engrs acted as road guides, and maintained by-passes where over passes had been blown on the Autobahn.

The next morning the company moved a few kilometers to the town of Stockelsberg, but little work to do except to pull knocked out enemy vehicles off the roads, keeping them open for CCR units which were patrolling the area and improving the already held position. In the evening the 3rd platoon helped a platoon



of Infantry in out-posting CCR Hq -- an attack had been expected, but never materialized.

On the 21st of April, "A" company moved with CCR to the town of Altenfelden on the Autobahn. The 2nd platoon was parked on one side of the road with the 25th Tankers, while the 3rd and Hq platoons were parked across the road. Everyone thought this was only another routine halt at the end of the day. "Why in the hell couldn't we have taken another town, so there would be some kind of rooms to sleep in!" Fox holes were dug -- just to play safe -- and it looked like just another night under the stars. The Infantry had outposted this bivouac area, and each platoon kept the usual interior guard. All went well, throughout that night.

At 0600 the next day, vehicles and tanks were ready to move out in combat march formation, when PFC Kortlandt said, "Look! There's our Infantry moving around on that hill over there." Then PFC Mackie looked through a pair of liberated glasses and yelled, "Yeah, Infantry with overcoats on!"

It took a moment for this to sink in and simultaneously with the realization that they were Jerries, came the first salvo of 88's, landing just across the Autobahn, and soon the staccato burst of machine gun fire from our own tanks and Infantry.

Everyone grabbed his weapon and all ammunition he could find and headed for points of vantage. Each man to his hole! The 2nd platoon was to cover the extreme left flank, which was just on the edge of a thick wooden area.

For twelve hours the 'hail of lead' kept coming into the area, and making the situation most miserable, the weather changed to periodic torrents of rain. It was hellish sitting in a watery hole covered from head to toe with slimy, sticky muck -- not knowing where the enemy was going to attack and always straining to catch a glimpse of a kraut uniform.

It was on this day that the 2nd platoon lost another man. PFC Jack Rowe had gone back to T/5 Carl Berrier's truck to get needed equipment. He had gone with PFC Dan Gnan. Just as he approached the truck, a shell landed nearby. A piece of shrapnel hit Rowe in the left arm. He was immediately evacuated, but unfortunately, it was later necessary to amputate his arm. Gnan is still marvelling at his luck in escaping injury!

During the late morning and afternoon several American tanks were hit by artillery fire and all burnt furiously. Some American artillery batteries in the rear attempted to knock out the enemy artillery with counter-fire. The whining and screaming of shells became fierce, with incoming and outgoing shells zooming over head.

PFC Harry Williams, of the 3rd platoon, refused to let the situation dampen his spirits, so began singing his favorite tune -- always kept for just such predicaments -- "Why Don't we do this More Often". But humor didn't seem to stop Jerry from sending in a volley of shells, every four or five minutes. The entire situation was very fluid and small arms fire could be heard, not only in the forward areas, but in the rear as well.

Late in the afternoon, it was decided that Hq and the 3rd platoon would pull back from the Autobahn. The artillery had slackened a little but already the air compressor had been hit by an 88. Certainly, this was not the place for the expensive brockways and dozers.

As "A" company, pulled back on the Autobahn, they encountered sniper fire in the dense woods, paralleling the Autobahn. A panzerfaust just missed the radio half-track and exploded harmlessly on the opposite side of the road. A hand grenade bounced off the Mess truck and also exploded without seriously damaging any of the vehicles.

Every machine gun available, fired into the enemy positions in the woods. The men on the 3rd platoon trucks emptied several clips into the woods. PFC 'Red' Regall spotted several of the enemy, but was unable to fire his 50 Cal machine gun, since it was on the Anti-aircraft mount, and could not be turned in the proper direction for fire. 'Red' was wounded in the back, and later evacuated, but the company suffered no other casualties other than bullet riddled vehicles.

Meanwhile, the 2nd platoon, remained with the 25th Tanks and "sweated-out" continuous artillery fire all that night. Foxholes were knee deep in water, but constant bailing with helmets kept the men from floating out their holes. All nights there were suspicious movements in the woods keeping the machine guns busy and everyone very much awake.

Company Hq had moved back about a mile from Altenfelden, where they remained that night. On the morning of the 22nd, the company joined the column again and continued on to Hilpolstein and set up their CP. The counter-battery fire had dealt with the enemy artillery so that the movement was not hampered by incoming shells.

## *"The Wages of Sinn"*

"B" company received instructions to move but a few hours after arrival at their assembly area in Gross Zimmern and were well on their way by dawn of April 2nd. Traveling all day,



the Main River was crossed; chow was eaten on the march, and as evening approached the column was nearing Lohr.

Lt Robinson, reporting back from a pass in Paris, found the company with the CCB column, as it was waiting along the road for the town of Lohr to be cleared. The Lt immediately resumed his duties and during the course of the afternoon found it necessary to make a short reconnaissance accompanied by his driver and an Officer from the 19th Infantry. They proceeded on their mission and while approaching the town, which was not yet completely cleared, met a Jerry Mark-VI tank alongside the street. It was his duty to investigate the tank to see if there were any dead GI's around. In the company, he also held the position as Burial Registration Officer, and it was his job to recover the bodies and see that proper burial was performed. Lt Robinson, the Infantry Officer and PFC Bartels dismounted from their vehicle at a safe distance and cautiously approached the tank ever mindful of the fact that the Jerries were still in this town. Suddenly in front of them loomed a large group of Jerries and before the men could fire, they were fired upon and Lt Robinson was hit three times through the shoulder, Bartels once, puncturing his lung and the Infantry Officer took one through the leg. Immediately after firing, the Krauts, one and all, threw down their weapons, helmets and threw their arms in the air, surrendering to the men whom they had just shot. When counted, it was found that there were twenty-one Krauts. Lt Robinson, not too seriously wounded, brought them in, secured medical aid for the other two men, and with the others, was evacuated to a hospital. Thus, after approximately one hour of resuming command of his command, Lt Robinson again left it in the command of platoon Sgt, S/Sgt Needham.

The situation was fluid during these days; the road columns did not stop to establish a CP at night, rather the columns continued with the CP in the communications half-track.

During the time of the attack in Gemunden while the CCB column was rolling along the road, the 19th Infantry ran into small arms fire and the 1st platoon working with them noticed signs on trees reading ACHTUNG! MINEN! No one stopped because there were none in the road itself. However, a Recon peep came along; it was suggested that the area be checked at least the shoulder of the roads. The men dismounted and Tec 5 Weiner, PFC Jemiola and Lt Cullen looked over the ground. There were obvious cuts in the ground just as a mine field would look. Capt O'Neal drove up, looked things over and said, "Weiner, what do you make of it," said Weiner, "Well, Capt, seems funny that they would lay a mine field and then put up signs to

tell you it's there." "Well," said the Capt, "give it a try." So Weiner probed about the nearest plot that had been dug up and cautiously worked the soil over. Hitting against something solid, he worked the earth loose and found — an empty champagne bottle. That's not all, they probed, the next plot and up comes the straw casing for the bottle. They were ready to give up when the Capt said "Weiner, I'll bet you any money there is a mine in the next one." So Weiner probed and once again clanked into something solid brushing away the soil there lay three or four C ration cans. Having lost his bet, the Capt as well as the men laughed over the situation and the march continued.

The column moved along a bloody road near Neuendorf where GI's as well as many Jerries remained where they had fallen. Tec 5 Dave Stentford, who was set on getting guns and souvenirs, jumped from the compressor, and he and Lt Cooney wandered among fox holes still containing small arsenals of Jerry equipment. Dave picked up a Jerry gun put it on his shoulder, and now had one on either shoulder, and took off. Not far away was a Jerry shelter-half spread across a fox hole. At the time, Dave looked, the wind caught a flap and the cloth lifted about six inches revealing a pair of dark eyes peering out. Dave was surprised into sudden action, juggled the rifles he carried, trying to bring his M-1 in line with the surprise target. This brought Lt Cooney and soon the German came out quietly. The Jerry was stupidly drunk and wobbled away. His fox hole, by the way, contained a rifle, plenty of ammo, and a panzer-faust with hand grenades.

Finally moving on to Neuendorf on April 4th, a distance of six miles was covered that day. The town had been shelled during the day and was still a hot spot. The company remained here April 5th, during this day the 2nd platoon, working with the 47th Tank, sent out a reconnaissance to locate a bridge site on the Sinn River at Gemunden. They reported that all bridges had been blown.

It was found impossible to bridge at the main road to Gemunden as our tanks and infantry had not been able to penetrate the German positions. A destroyed bridge was located a short way upstream which might be used as a possible bridging site. Lt Quinn made reconnaissance and reported that the span could be crossed by treadway after the debris and jagged edges of the blown bridge were removed. In this manner the combat command could flank the strongpoint of enemy resistance and cut it off from the rear.

Lt Quinn led his platoon and a brockway to the site chosen for construction of the bridge, leaving the vehicles a safe distance, ready for a speedy withdrawal. An intense artillery mortar barrage from the Jerries in



We crossed the Rhine



The autobahns speeded  
our advance





They took over the burden

Capt John O'Neal  
Executive Officer

Major George Watkins  
Commanding Officer



a well concealed position on the opposite side of the river made with-drawal necessary. The entire platoon moved back, save Lt Quinn, Cpl Preiss, Sgt Moobery and Tec 5 George Schneider, who remained to look over the situation. However, it was impossible for the demolition men to continue with their job of blowing the remaining debris of the original bridge. Therefore, they secured cover while Lt Quinn directed our artillery fire to the other bank.

Several well placed shells on our part were later known to have found their target, but another well placed shell from the German gun also found its target and in doing so took the lives of Lt James B Quinn and Cpl Edward Preiss. Sgt Charles Mooberry was seriously wounded in the leg and was evacuated. Tec 5 George Schneider escaped with a minor case of shock. After this unfortunate accident, the platoon was brought back by S/Sgt Smith and later Lt Cooney took over the command.

That evening our infantry drove the Germans back from the original bridge site along the main road to Gemunden. A Bailey bridge was brought up and constructed by supporting engineers with no casualties.

In this, actually the company's first fatalities, it was found that not only a splendid leader was lost, but also a cherished friendship, which bound Lt Quinn to his men.

CCB's next mission was to take the prison camp near Hammelsburg. This was accomplished by 1500 April 6th. There were about fifty to seventy-five American soldiers in it, some who were hospitalized. Press photographers in our column who had come along for the story went through Gemunden — a badly battered town, to Hammelsburg arriving at 2000 traveling twenty-one miles that day.

The two day period following found the column running into local firefights, but the enemy was backing out in a hurry. The convoy proceeded from Hammelsburg on April 9th and moved into Munnerstadt, from there went to Ebertshausen arriving at 1500 on April 9th. The company remained here with CCB in reserve on a one minute alert. The company personnel spent their time maintaining weapons and equipment, cleaning up and had the opportunity to attend church services. There were no shows or mail coming in as we were moving too fast for supplies. Lt Eddington returned from Company "C" where he had been assigned for a short period. Here the German women folk washed the GI's clothes in the village green, under the watchful eye of Polish women who were in charge. These German women labored — the tables being turned.

The column departed from Ebertshausen at 0700 April 13th in an attack formation and

arrived at Rossach at 1415. Spearheading an attack, they departed the same night. It was cold and rainy and a bit precarious going through the hills in the dark night not knowing what lay ahead. Enemy resistance was strong. Konigsfeld was reached by April 14th and without waiting for a breathing spell, the attack continued and Kirchahorn was captured April 15th.

On April 17th the company departed Kirchahorn enroute to a division assembly point. While on the move, we discovered that the area was still in enemy hands. The CP was set up in Altensittenbach. Here, after nearly two years as CO of "B" company, Capt O'Neal was transferred to Bn Hq as S-3. Lt Cullen became the CO of the company.

CCB column once more moved ahead attacking steadily, forcing the German retreat to continue giving them little time to dig in. However, the terrain being hilly, the column was stopped just beyond Rasch and being a bad position, had to pull back to Rasch where the CP was set up. Tec 5 Hess, who had driven Lt Cullen all through the war was wounded while sitting in his peep. He was evacuated and Tec 5 West took on the job. CCB was in a precarious position, enemy forces counter-attacked on both flanks in an attempt to cut off the armored spearhead. Fire fights could be heard day and night from positions on three sides.

The 1st platoon guarding the underpass a mile from Rasch was alerted for a possible enemy counter-attack. Two fifty calibre machine guns were set up on half-tracks on either side of the underpass. About 2020 the guards were attacked by an estimated seventy-five to one hundred SS Troopers. PFC Elmer Adamson, on one fifty calibre fired a shot and his gun jammed. Immediately he took off for the house nearby where the remainder of the squad were sleeping. On his heels, burp guns followed till he reached the house. Not being hit, he woke everyone and they dressed quickly. Meanwhile PFC Laurel, operating the fifty calibre on the other track kept the bulk of Jerries at bay so the men in the house had a chance to dress.

Some Krauts infiltrated and succeeded in knocking out the gun and wounding Pfc Laurel with hand grenades, after which he was captured. The Jerries surrounded the house and fired into it with rifle, burp gun, hand grenades and panzerfausts. The men being pinned down, could not return the fire. Some had managed to get into the cellar and Tec 5 Augustus Witherite was caught coming down the stairs and was killed. A Jerry, sneaking in the back-door, pushed through. PFC Sullivan, who was part way down the cellar steps shouted, "Who's there?"



The Kraut stuck his head in the door, and Sullivan opened fire on him and he dropped and groaned. Not being satisfied, Sullivan fired again. Laurel, meanwhile, was sent to the house by the Germans to get the boys to surrender. They refused, and the Krauts continued to fire on the house and called for artillery which fell on and around the building. Once more Laurel was sent to get the boys to surrender. The men knew that the situation was hopeless and that they would eventually be killed or burned out. At 0230 they surrendered, now being greatly outnumbered. The seventeen men filed out of the house, hands overhead, sure that the holding action that they had attempted hoping that the Infantry would come, was in vain.

The captured men were put into their own half-tracks and driven back through the German lines with head lights on. During the rest of the night, they remained in their half-tracks at the first town behind the lines. For nine days, they were marched one hundred twenty miles, sleeping in barns with no blankets to ward off the bitter cold. They had soup once a day made of potato peelings. PFC G Radtke was hit by a Jerry vehicle and evacuated to a German hospital. After four days of marching, two more men needed medical attention and were evacuated, Tec 5 John Ryan and PFC Laurel. It was realized that the American columns were only two days away from the retreating Germans, but the men were helpless to do anything about it.

They were taken to a prison camp at Moosburg on April 29th. The American forces finally caught up with them. The Jerries took off without their prisoners. The rescuing Americans were the 48th Tank Battalion and the 19th Infantry with Maj Gen SMITH arriving to look over the situation. The boys returned to Battalion with Lt Bardwell and Sgt Ray Hodson of "C" company.

Later that morning, April 20th, the German counter-attacks were repulsed and CCB column retaking the lost ground. The body of Tec 5 Witherite was recovered but no trace of half-tracks was ever found. However, at least eight Jerries were found dead around the house where the previous nights activities took place.

Meanwhile the 2nd platoon was also having its trouble. In the vicinity of Altenthann the men, attached to the 47th Tanks were helping out-post the town. At 1300 the platoon was given ten minutes notice to go on a mission with the aid of one tank. Mortar and sniper fire had been observed. All men riding on the tank arriving at a safe distance dismounted and spread out on a skirmish line. They were moving down a slope that had no protective bushes or even high grass. Up to this time, they encountered no small arms fire although

there had been some artillery fire coming in. They flushed the woods, and finding no one, returned to the tank.

The tank radio brought a message of enemy fire in the near vicinity, thought again to be snipers, they jumped on the tank and returned to town. Here they received the job of clearing a small village consisting of no more than ten houses. A tanker on outpost had been shot there not long before. The boys dismounted from the tank at about three hundred yards from the nearest building. Again they formed a skirmish line and proceeded to move in. Within twenty-five yards of town they were met by a hail of small arms fire from the buildings. Once again there was no protective coverage; they were pinned down.

They began crawling around one flank until they encountered a wire fence that made them seek a new approach. Incoming mortar fire caused confusion because it was so well placed. Again they were forced to hit the ground. The tankers fired fifty and thirty calibre machine guns but were hit and the guns knocked out. Another tank arrived and the two moved in behind the engineers when one of the men was hit by flying shrapnels from a panzerfaust that missed one of the tanks. The tanks formed a "V" or wedge in front of Tec 5 B Groos so that a medic could come up and give him aid and take him away.

Finally they rushed the buildings to get better cover and in this action four men dressed in civilian clothes were found. These civilians were taken prisoner, and finding no one else around, they moved the four men back in the direction of the tank. The men discovered that any attempt to take the rest of the buildings was impossible because of snipers. Sgt August Waltrip reconnoitered the immediate area and ordered the men to withdraw because they had encountered more resistance than they could fight against. Sgt Harry Lockwood and PFC Eugene Kaminski and PFC William Domin started out to protect the rest of the men but got only twenty-feet away when Sgt Lockwood and PFC Kaminski were killed by snipers. PFC Domin continued on and was hit by shrapnel. Domin died later from his wounds.

The remaining men withdrew to the vicinity of the tanks using the four prisoners as protection until they reached the tanks, an open area. Maneuvering for a position behind a tank, Sgt Stanley Seola was hit. The tankers backed off slowly as did the engineers. Later by conversation, one of the boys who spoke Polish discovered that thirty or more Germans had been in the town. The platoon was assembled at Rasch for a short while to reorganize. But soon the column moved from Rasch breaking loose again and with CCB reached Unterferrieden on April 22nd.



## *„C” Company—rat race to Neustadt and on to Neumarkt*

During the early morning hours of April 2nd, “C” Co again attached to CCA, moved out beginning its second phase in the conquest of Hitler’s beloved “Fatherland”. The column began its drive due east digging an armored spearhead deep into central Germany in an attempt to divide the enemy in two, severing communication and supply lines.

The 1st and 3rd platoons, attached to the 68th Inf and 48th Tanks respectively, bore the brunt of front line duty during this operation while the 2nd platoon was in reserve with Co Hq. However, except for a few short firefights, the fighting columns had it comparatively easy, traveling against an enemy that was retreating quite rapidly.

During the first few hours on the march through the early morning darkness, the column came to a sudden halt. Immediately a very familiar noise was heard overhead -- it was the drone of a low-flying plane. Some bombs were dropped further back in the column, but no casualties resulted.

By daylight the column was moving through another small range of mountains. The traveling became very difficult when the combat command, passing through the 3rd Inf Division lines to form an armored spearhead, was forced to take a back road.

The 1st and 3rd platoons advanced in the forward CCA columns with nothing but occasional blown bridges to hinder their progress. These were spanned with steel treadway sections and the march was continued.

As the 48th column approached Brüchenau, reconnaissance reported that the bridge on the outskirts of town had been blown. Lt Anthony Wise, 3rd platoon leader, accompanied by Sgt C McClure and his peep driver, T/5 Mowers, moved up to investigate. They found that the bridge was still intact, but set for demolition. While Lt Wise was under the bridge examining the charges, Sgt McClure noticed some Germans in concealed positions. They withdrew, but on leaving, were met by a hail of automatic weapons fire. Slugs peppered into the peep and one came close enough to Lt Wise’s head so that he will never forget the incident. The slug pierced the Lt’s steel helmet and helmet liner, and missing his head by no more than half an inch, passed through.

The first blown bridge was encountered just beyond Brückenau by the third platoon. The center pier was still intact, and the treadway was being prepared when a bypass was found. In this manner the column was able to advance without losing precious time waiting for the treadway to be assembled and set in place.

Meanwhile, the 1st platoon entered the town of Unsleben after an uneventful road march and remained there for three days. When they moved out again on April 8th, the column turned south with its objective-Neustadt.

There were tanks, mediums and lights, moving in column. There were half-tracks and trucks with the men of the 68th Infantry and 1st platoon of “C” Co. The whole combat command was now smashing through completely disorganized resistance.

There was German Infantry trying to retreat before them, breaking ranks and running for the woods when the forward elements caught up with them. There was artillery, German horses galloping fast as they could and finally leaping crazily and crumbling as the 105’s of the 500th AFA caught them on the road.

There were knots of resistance in the houses where soldiers and Volksturm tried to hold the column, and did -- till the tanks deployed, the artillery fired and the resistance was no more.

On April 10th the column reached Neustadt to finish another lap in the battle for Germany.

While all this was going on, the 3rd platoon continued on from Brüchenau and was stopped only to throw a treadway across a demolished span near Rupboden. By April 7th the column was approaching Bad Neustadt where the platoon suffered two more casualties.

Orders were received that the town was to be taken with all possible speed. The 1st squad half-track led the small Engineer group into town and had successfully passed the arched entrance when small arms fire was received from the back side of the arch. T/4 N Allport was manning the .50 Cal machine gun and was just bringing it to bear on the target when he was killed. Cpl. F Lorenc, who was on the .30 Cal gun, was also hit when a slug caught him in the arm. The resistance was cleared later in the afternoon, and the column moved into the town.

The 2nd platoon, meanwhile, was held in reserve but was by no means inactive. Attached to Co Hq, they followed the same route that the 3rd platoon had taken. On the night of April 3rd they built a bypass near the town of Lehraupen. It was a dark and miserably cold night, and the men were forced to work under black-out conditions. It was dangerous work handling the large timber in the darkness. During the night’s work T/5 R Kaiser was injured when a log stringer fell on his foot. The next night, April 4th, they constructed the forty foot bridge near Brüchenau. The column advanced only a few miles when another bridge had to be built. This time it was a thirty-five foot span near Rupboden and was completed early on the morning of April 6th. The column moved to Brendlorenzen on the next day. A counter-attack was expected that night, so the town was strongly fortified, but the attack never materialized.



On April 11th the entire company reorganized on the outskirts of Neustadt where Maj Gen Smith awarded Bronze stars to the men that blew the dragon's teeth and for other heroic actions during the campaign through Alsace and Germany. The Silver Star was presented to Lt Charles Bardwell, Lt Anthony Wise and Sgt Forrest Johnston. It was a very short breathing spell here. The company was on the move again a few hours after the ceremony. The second platoon at this time joined the 48th Tanks while the third platoon went into reserve.

The 1st platoon moved out with the 68th Infantry on 1800 April 11th and headed for the Autobahn toward Nürnberg. They didn't stay on it long, for enemy aircraft was quite active, and the column being an excellent target, left the broad highway and took to the nearby back roads.

By April 15th the 1st platoon was near Neumarkt building a bypass around a huge road crater. While doing the demolition work, Cpl H Rice was seriously injured in the face when he was hit by a huge falling boulder. That night they moved into the small town near Neumarkt and waited three days while the Infantry pressed the attack and the P-47 "Thunderbolts" of the Air corps strafed and bombed the area. Jerry was throwing in some time-fire once in awhile, but no damage was inflicted. In Neumarkt, a city now completely afire, the Infantry was having a difficult time covering all the necessary ground. The enemy was well-placed in the town with anti-tank guns and 88's; the tanks were stopped. Their mission was changed when the 65th Infantry Division arrived in the sector. CCA column moved to the right flank.

Shortly after the first platoon left Gleichamberg, the 2nd platoon now attached to the 48th Tanks, departed and reached the Main River at Douzgstadt. Here, they built a ford for the tanks and were forced into Co reserve once again when three of the trucks broke down. This was an unfortunate incident for they immediately proceeded to Hollfeld where the Infantry was running into stiff opposition. They began outpostting the town immediately upon arriving. The next morning, April 14th they removed two 545-pound aerial bombs from the road leading into town and deactivated the booby-trapped post office.

By the next afternoon, they had reached the Autobahn leading to Nürnberg, and they spent the night in Bonn. On the morning of the 15th, the 3rd squad lead by Sgt W Howard went out on reconnaissance with elements of the 94th Recon and the 48th Tanks. Traveling through a heavily wooded area, the squad had as its mission the opening of a supply road through a pocket of resistance that had been bypassed. Advanced reconnaissance reported two road blocks. The first was remo-

ved with no difficulty as it was not guarded. Approaching the second barrier, the squad discovered a recently used German bivouac area complete with rifles and equipment. The men dismounted and took cover while a small group went forward to look over the situation.

Lt Clyde Humbert and T/4 R Seitz advanced up the road to the barrier when they were fired on. Meanwhile, PFC S Langford, the platoon's medic, hearing the shots, moved up to give any needed first aid. While making his way across an open field, Langford was hit by rifle fire in the leg. Lt Humbert and Seitz heard the shots and crawled to a vantage point where they saw Langford lying. Lt Humbert returned for a tank to evacuate the wounded medic while Seitz advanced under the enemy fire to Langford's side and administered first aid.

The tank came up, and the two men lifted Langford on the front and shielded his body as the withdrawal was made safely. For this action Lt Humbert and T/4 Seitz received the Silver Star, and PFC Langford was awarded the Bronze Star.

Later the same afternoon the road block was neutralized and cleared by the squad, and they finally rejoined the platoon.

It was the quiet little town of Betzenstein that they moved to on the afternoon of April 16th. It continued to be quiet until the next morning when three German tanks, supported by Infantry attempted to retake the town. They drew up a hasty defense line within the town, and the enemy was forced to withdraw after suffering the loss of one tank and a considerable number of men.

They traveled to Altdorf the same day and outposted the town that night. The next morning, the 2nd squad, with elements of the 94th Recon located and eliminated another road block and several of the Wehrmacht armed with panzerfausts. The next orders took them to Berg on the evening of April 18th, but enroute, they were forced to stop by a heavy artillery concentration; they spent the night in the small village of Unter Olsbach. The next morning they moved to Berg and observed the terrific fight that was going on for possession of Neumarkt. On attempting to outflank the town, the company, now together, was faced with its most difficult engineering job. It was their job to get the column up a mountainside with a thirty per-cent gradient, and in many places, steeper. It had been raining continuously for three days, and there was no bottom to the soft muck. Finally it was necessary to build four hundred yards of corduroy before the vehicles could get through. Some artillery fire was drawn, and Pvt B Czarnecki was wounded in the leg by shrapnel. The 2nd platoon was the first to begin the job, and it was later joined by the 1st platoon which ran into soft ground to the right. When the road



was completed, after two days and nights of continuous work in the rain and sleet, the company regrouped at Altdorf. It was unusual weather for Spring, for it had turned bitter cold and flurries of snow fell at times.

## *Rough days for Headquarters and Headquarters Company*

On the 2nd of April, Hq left Rossdorf covering another forty miles to Sommerau. The 3rd of April found them on the move to Weisenthal, where they caught their breath for a day or so. The fighting was continuing towards the headwaters of the Main River. The company left on the 6th of April for Rieneck, a town in the general direction of Fulda, an old Bavarian city. Among other vehicles in the convoy, we must mention "Noah's Ark", named for WOJG Noah. It was an old cab over motor, French lorry reconverted with a half-track motor, affectionately known to those who worked on it as the 'monstrosity'. It had been extensively overhauled at Schweinheim and at "Camp Kraut" a half-track motor was added.

Rieneck was left for a new location on the 7th of April. We parked ourselves in Hammelsburg prison camp, which the Nazis had recently vacated. Here we found an old member of the 125th Engrs, Capt McGee, who had been our medical officer back in the States. He had come overseas some months before us, and had been taken prisoner in Normandy. Capt McGee refused to leave his patients at the prison until he was properly relieved by another competent medical man. Despite apparent thinness due to malnutrition, he seemed much the same as usual.

On the 9th of April we suffered a rather serious loss. A bivouac party set out under the guidance of Major Williams, Capt Hanson and Lt O'Neal to find suitable quarters ahead. On attempting to enter a town they were halted by a road block. A mortar or grenade, it has never been clearly ascertained, hit the lead peep, killing the driver and injured S Sgt Norman Edwards. When it was seen that T/5 Leo Langley had been killed instantly, the Germans marched the others into town. Sgt Edwards, T/4 Claire Russel and PFC Elmer Swanger were left sitting in the kitchen of the Burgomeister's house, while Major Williams, Capt Hanson, Lt O'Neal and PFC Herbert Zahn, the latter could speak German, were taken in the other room and shortly afterwards were made to drive off with some German officers for questioning. In the meantime, infantry of the 42th Infantry Division came into

town and released the men who had been held in the kitchen. Edwards was later found to have suffered internal injuries besides the shrapnel wounds, which were minor, and was removed to the hospital.

That night S Sgt Lawrence Floyd and T/5 Robert Robinson were captured by the enemy while attempting to remove a British prisoner of war who was suffering from acute appendicitis, to the 84th Med Det. The ambulance evidently took a wrong turn in the dark wooded area they were traveling through. All the men mentioned above have since been accounted for. Despite the loss of the officers, Hq moved to Lebenham near Bad Neustadt. Here we remained until the 11th of April. It was at this time that part of the operations section moved a number of burning freight cars with a winch attached to a brockway truck. This business took place in the Lohr sector and saved a considerable quantity of valuable lumber needed for road and bridge construction from destruction.

The trip from Lebenham to Haina was twenty eight miles. We stayed there for several days, and then proceeded to Lichtenfels on the 13th of April. Lichtenfels was little damaged and a town of some interest, close to the important Bavarian city of Bamberg. We left the following day for Maggendorf. This trip was made through the beautiful limestone cliff country. At this time a new trouble presented itself in the form of bombing of convoys by jet-propelled planes. The 15th of April brought more bad news, M Sgt Willard Sherman, who had just been transferred to company "B" pending his field commission as a 2nd Lt was killed by a sniper, while making a bridge reconnaissance. Sherman had been one Hq most able non-com. At the same time PFC Stanley Langford of the Med Det was also hit by a sniper.

The next move was to Schleedorf, in the hills north of Nürnberg. Sometimes dry runs prove effective. Hq decided to hold a practice 'alert'. Men armed to the teeth were placed at strategic positions -- the results were effective as streams of krauts with white flags and handkerchiefs came out of the surrounding woods -- to them it looked like a raiding party and they had had enough.

On the 18th we were at Altdorf and remained there until the 23rd. At this time, we joined Gen Patton's 3rd Army, becoming part of the III Corps. The 14th Armd Div up to then had served faithfully under Gen Patch in the VI and XV Corps of the 7th Army.

Moves now followed in quick succession, as it was becoming increasingly apparent that the Wehrmacht was collapsing on all fronts. About the 21st it was reported that Cpl Warren Hargrave, Med Aid man of company "B" was missing in action. He was liberated by our troops some days later.



*“We join Patton’s Army”*



HEADQUARTERS  
125TH ARMORED ENGINEER BATTALION  
APO 446 c/o Postmaster  
New York City, New York

25 April 1945

GENERAL ORDERS)  
NUMBER 1)

ASSUMPTION OF COMMAND

Under the provisions of AR 600-12, the undersigned hereby assumes command of the 125th Armored Engineer Battalion.

/s/ George R. Watkins  
/t/ GEORGE R. WATKINS  
Major, CE, 125th Armd Engr Bn  
Commanding

A TRUE COPY:

*Lyndall D. Oakes*

LYNDALL D. OAKES  
CWO, USA,  
Asst Adjutant.



## *Able "A" at Altmühl*

The 23rd of April, the day the Division passed from the 7th Army to the 3rd Corps, 3rd Army, found Co "A", Hq plat at Hilpoltstein. All three line platoons had been attached to other units; the 1st platoon to the 62nd infantry; the 2nd platoon to the 25th Tk Bn; and the 3rd platoon to the 47th Tk Bn.

It was on this day, that the 3rd platoon set out with the 47th Tk Bn, as a part of a Task Force. This was a new experience for the platoon, since most of the jobs falling to the platoon previously were road maintenance and bridge building. Now the platoon had the assignment of taking care of all the engineer work which befell the Task force.

All of the forward elements in the Task Force were either, armored cars, tanks, or half-tracks and the 3rd platoon felt just a bit self conscious with their two and a half ton trucks. It wasn't too pleasant a thought being the only vehicles on the Task Force without a little armored protection.

The Force had not gone far before the Engineers were called upon to remove a mine-field across the road which held up the column. The German box type mines were blown in place and the holes made by the explosion were immediately filled to allow passage of the Force.

Throughout the day, several more mine fields interrupted the march, keeping Cpl Powell, Tec 5 Stokes, and Pfc Munyon — demolition men — very busy. The German civilian population were helpful in warning the Force about the mine field locations.

The 1st platoon, with the 62nd Infantry, had encountered several mine fields and was also called upon to remove a road block near Alferhausen. One squad was sent to clear the road block, but the block was covered by mortar fire. After the fire was neutralized the squad cleared the block by blowing it with demolition charges and then removing the logs by hand.

On the 24th of April, CCR attacked with two Task Force columns, the 62nd Infantry on the right and the 47th Tk on the left. The Infantry Task Force ran into road difficulties and had to follow the 47th Tank column. The 3rd platoon attached to the 47th Tk Bn had the most smooth sailing all of that day. Tec 5 James Meehan had great fun rolling his truck up to the edge of a town yet to be taken, while the light tanks swarmed across the open fields to surround the objective, and the infantry prepared to dismount from their vehicles before entering the town on foot. Fortunately, most of the towns and villages were taken without a shot being fired. A few Jerries would surrender waving white flags — others were

usually rounded up out of hiding places in barns and cellars.

At the close of the day, the Task Force had reached the Altmühl River at Gungolding and the command decided to call a halt to the operations of that day. All had gone well for the Force -- perhaps Jerry would soon call it quits!

But again, the Heinies decided to be obstinate and just a little bit annoying! During the previous weeks, the Germans had followed the policy of giving ground and gathering together their dwindling forces to stem the Allied advances only at locations where natural terrain features favored their defensive tactics, and the Altmühl River was to be just one of those spots!

Gungolding was a small, dingy, little town, bisected in the center by the Altmühl River, and situated in a valley surrounded on all sides by high ridges. The ridges and high ground above the town were heavily wooded, while the narrow, but swift Altmühl River flowed through the valley between the ridges. The bridge connecting the two sections of Gungolding had been blown.

Elements of the Task Force were left in Gungolding that night while the CP of the Force was set up in Hernstetten, the first town to the rear. Here, the 3rd platoon of Co "A" secured billets for the men, and later that evening, was joined by Co "A" Hq and the 2nd platoon.

Early in the evening, Gungolding was retaken by a strong enemy counter-attack, which forced the elements of the Task Force from the town. The 86th Infantry division had been following closely behind the Task Force spearhead clearing wooded areas and bypassed villages and were now employed to retake and clear the town. A bridgehead was established on the further side of Gungolding and an infantry foot bridge was built over the Altmühl River. More elements of the 86th infantry division crossed the foot bridge, and cleared the ridges and wooded areas of the enemy force -- meeting little opposition, while taking a few prisoners. The 86th Division wanted to get their heavy weapons sections across the river to support the doughboys all ready across the river. Since the 14th AD had originally reached and taken Gungolding, the Co "A" engineers now had a job to do. It sounded simple. All that needed to be done was to put a few sections of a ponton treadway across the stream. Still, the krauts could't see it that way!

The 998th Treadway Bridge Company was called to bring up their equipment. The 2nd platoon was to inflate the pontons and was to be responsible for getting them into the water. The 3rd platoon, as the plan had it, was to lay the treadway and to connect the assembled pontons. Some artillery fire had been hitting



the town and the proposed bridge site, but infantry men of the 86th had secured the ground on the far side of the stream and seemed to have the general area cleared of all enemy troops.

Early in the morning of the 25th of April, the 2nd platoon inflated the pontons in a rear area and had loaded them on their trucks and the company Brockway. The vehicles started for the bridge site with the platoons trucks in the lead and the heavy brockways in the rear. When the vehicles reached Gungolding, the brockways were left in the center of the town, while the other trucks went on to the banks of the river, which, as mentioned before, divided the town into two separate districts.

No sooner had the pontons been taken off of Tec 5 Carl O'Brien's truck when the fire-works let loose!

Everyone made for the nearest shelter in adjacent buildings. Both platoons stayed in the shelter of the buildings throughout the day, while shells came in, two or three every thirty seconds. The enemy had infiltrated back into the area, once cleared by the 86th Infantry Division, and was throwing direct fire into the town from well concealed and very advantageous positions on the surrounding hills.

Anyone who stuck his head outside of a building stood a very good chance of losing it; the incessant artillery and mortar fire was deadly. Occasional sniper fire kept most everyone off the streets except for Tec 5 Mc Elhannon who faithfully acted as liaison between the 2nd and 3rd platoons. Again, Co "A" was just plain lucky and was without casualties, although many 86th Div men were killed or wounded throughout the day. Infantry patrols of the 86th, artillery and even air support were unable to locate or neutralize sufficient gun positions to stop the enemy fire.

After "sweating out" the day long artillery barrage, the 3rd platoon was ordered to return to Company Hq in the next town to the rear, Hernstetten. The 2nd platoon followed shortly with what remained of the vehicles and the inflated pontons. All but one of the pontons had been damaged by shrapnel or sniperfire, and it was impossible to put up a ponton treadway bridge until the enemy fire was silenced.

During the night, the enemy artillery ceased firing at 2300 and early the next morning the two platoons returned to the bridge site, later joined by the 1st platoon, erected an 81 foot ponton treadway bridge. Each man had a feeling of having accomplished a mission, when he saw the vehicles rolling across the bridge. The 86th Division moved their vehicles across the bridge, followed by CCR. Soon Jerry would be on the run again, and the men could actually see the important place of the Engineers in the team work of a task force.

After crossing the Altmuhl River on the 25th of April, CCR proceeded on their way to Ingolstadt. When they had traveled but a few miles, the 1st platoon encountered an extensive system of roadblocks. 400 yards of abatis and poles driven into the road were removed in 37 minutes by 2 squads while men from the 62nd Infantry flanked the roadblock and eliminated a few remaining snipers.

CCR continued the advance meeting tank and infantry fire at Kosching. During this operation, the 1st platoon was attached to the 62nd infantry. Meanwhile, the 3rd platoon remained with the 47th Tank Bn, and found it their job to destroy seven captured enemy 155 mm guns and a large amount of ammunition. The force closed in on Ingolstadt with "doughfeet" of the 86th riding on the tanks of the 47th. On that evening, the fight continued for Ingolstadt, Co "A" stayed in Lenting on this occasion.

On the 28th of April, CCR relieved elements of the 86th Div in Ingolstadt, and the next day found Co "A", with CCR, crossing the famed Danube and following CCA to Furth. Here Co "A" Hq and the 3rd platoon, remained for two days. Meanwhile, the 1st platoon was attached to the 25th Tankers while the 2nd platoon operated with the 68th Infantry.

On the 1st of May, Co "A" crossed the Isar River at Moosburg and arrived at Hohenpolding at 0400 hours the 2nd of May, having driven through rain, snow and sleet with a driving wind which made traveling most difficult. The men bedded down with the knowledge of having to move on the same morning.

Getting up at 0730, after only three hours of sleep, the company had hot chow and was once again ready to fall in behind CCR troops. Things didn't work out as planned. Instead of moving at eight o'clock, the column did not pull out until 1300 hours. This march was not so very long, and evening found the company billited in the small but comfortable town of Ober Bergheim. The two platoons attached out did not enjoy the ride that day. The roads seemed to fall apart at spots and had to be maintained by the platoon that was attached to the units finding the going difficult.

Then came the dawn of May 3rd, and the Engineers were summoned to alleviate the situation caused by impassable roads. Fuel and ration trucks couldn't reach the Hq town because of these poor road conditions. After a brief but well-made reconnaissance, the CO saw the need for his other two platoons. Obtaining permission to bring them back to the company control, he soon had men and equipment operating to open the MSR. For two days, May 4th and 5th, the company operating as a complete unit of Engineers for the first time in six days, labored and strained, and on the 5th of May the road was open for all military traffic.



The men who built three hundred and eighty yard plank road, nicknamed it — Co "A" Autobahn. They were proud of their work and knew it would stand up under any load the division would put over it.

While the platoons were cursing and hammering, the shower point was being set up for CCR in the hall of a flour mill located on the banks of a small creek. The hall floor caved in, but this did not prove too much of a problem. CCR and troops attached got their hot showers, even if they did have to stand on planking covering the gap made by the caved-in floor. After all, it was the shower that counted.

Something was in the wind! The men knew this for sure. Reverting back to Bn control after being attached to CCR for five weeks caused some speculation. The company moved back over the same road that it had built not more than a day before. The rumors were flying back and forth. Some of the men would say, "It's only a matter of days now".

The billeting party that preceded the move had selected an area on the outskirts of the town of Hilpolding. Every platoon had a completely furnished home for each squad. The brief stay here, was one of enjoyment for there was little engineering work to be done, however there was the usual cleaning and maintaining of equipment and vehicles.

Rumors about the war ending were still being heard. The fact that almost every squad had a radio of its own, didn't help matters any in this respect. Every time someone turned on and heard a German radio mumbling something about "krieg" they would start the story rolling that the war was over. Finally on the 7th of May the announcement was made, at 0001, one minute after midnight, 8 May 1945 all hostilities were to cease.

The war was over! So this was the end of it! Still, the men didn't feel any different. Sure, they celebrated in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, London and Paris, but what did the men have to celebrate about — or with! Still, the actual fighting was ended in the ETO -- that was something at least. In the back of everyone's mind was the one question -- What about the CBI, and how will it affect me??

## *Brave men of "B"* *Bridge Altmühl*

With spearheading armor accelerating the deterioration of the German Army, resistance split up into small pockets. The line was fluid. With these pockets being bypassed, we

rushed on only to be stopped again at some point, where the advantage went to the enemy for a short length of time; until we could rout them out once again or bypass. Shifting our drive to the south, we went under control of the 3rd Army, Gen Patton's famous 3rd -- being detached from the XV Corps, 7th Army and joining the 3rd Corps. It had little significance for we continued our drive as usual. All this took place on April 23rd as we were moving toward Jarsdorf, an assembly point.

At 0600, on the 24th day of April, CCB split into two columns leaving Jarsdorf; the 48th Tanks on the left with our 2nd platoon attached, and the 19th infantry on the right with the majority of the column behind them. Blown bridges in both columns held up the general advance but one bridge was repaired in an hour to take the load and continue the drive. At 1300, they encountered a mine field and finding no bypass it had to be cleared.

Resistance was all rear guard action that did not materialize. Instead they slowed our advance with road blocks and mine fields, none of which was defended.

Spearheading for the 99th infantry division attack, we arrived at Hirschburg. Here, before our eyes lay a natural barrier. From the dominating heights of Hirschburg, one could see a large spacious valley through which ran the Altmühl River. It was here that more blood would flow from the veins of brave men. The valley, through which the river flowed, was flat and opened to a greater advantage to the enemy, who could see our every movement on the roads and around the blown bridges where the following action took place. The friendly side of the river gave us about three hundred yards of flat open ground that went immediately into a steep rocky cliff, covered in profusion with brush and trees. The enemy side ran for one hundred fifty yards as flat open ground melting into a heavily wooded mountainside. From Hirschberg down through a winding trail into Belingries at the foot of the slope on our side, we were in constant view by enemy observers as we went about our task of bridging the Altmühl River.

The morning following our entry into Hirschberg, the engineers were called on to rig up a ferry to bring back wounded men from the 19th Infantry who had sent a small force over the river. S Sgt Lewis Debardi, Pvt Thomas, Needham, Pfc Otto Bombach, Sgt Charles Doane, and Pfc Paul Bordlemay went down the winding trail into Belingries and near the blown bridge, set up the ferry system. It consisted of a rubber ponton boat and a rope tied to a tree on the far side of the river and stretched across to Bordlemay's three quarter ton truck. S Sgt DeBardi was struck by shrapnel while checking the rope on the vehicle. As the next to the last wounded infantry



men was ferried over, Pvt Needham was hit by shell fragments. The wounded infantry man was safely brought to the bank and lifted to the ground. Both engineer casualties were evacuated with the infantry men.

Because the present bridge site was under a heavy concentration of enemy artillery and mortar fire, a new site was being reconnoitered. On the afternoon of the same day around 1400 a party of Officers and men left Hirschberg. Pfc Stech drove Lt Eddington and M Sgt Sherman, who had been attached pending his commission as a 2nd Lt. With them went Lt Cullen, then the CO of the company. In the two peeps, they descended into Beilnigries and on up stream about three miles. Now, more than ever, under observation, they dismounted from their peeps in a small village near the new bridge site. This blown bridge was also under artillery fire which added to their displeasure, as they approached the bridge. They stayed well down until the site was reached. Until now, no small arms fire had made them alert, so, climbing upon the blown bridge, they began their observing. "Zzing", the first shot found its mark and Lt Cullen crumpled to the ground. The remaining two men dragged and carried the wounded officer to safety as small arms fire peppered the bridge and cracked in the air above them. Bursting shrapnel continued to hamper the rescue work and Lt Eddington and M Sgt Sherman had to seek better cover, leaving the wounded man where he lay.

Meantime, Tec 5 West, seeing their plight, took off back to the CP, and told his story to an ever increasing number of listeners. Among them was a new officer who had just been assigned to the company, Lt Lemuel Bryan. It was he and a group of volunteers gathered by "Pop" Davis, Sgt; who assembled together Tec 5 Murphy, Pfc Martin, Pfc Kocis, Tec 4 Moeller, Pfc Kolodziej, Tec 4 Marasco, Tec 5 Biddle, Pfc Teti, Pfc Aday, and Pfc Cramblet. This group and Lt Bryan took along a .50 Cal and a .30 Cal machine gun, a BAR, and individual weapons and following the same route went to the bridge site. Once more, small arms fire followed them and at times seemed to catch up to them as they tore down the road. Arriving without any casualties, they watched and listened while Pfc Stech explained the situation at hand. They took the light .30 MG and the .50 MG through the town, setting the .30 up in a window nearest the river to cover the area where the rescue work was to be accomplished. Teti, Kolodziej and Biddle went along into this house as riflemen. The .50 MG, operated by Kocis and Moeller, set by a railroad to cover the advance of Pfc Martin and Lt Bryan going to the aid of the besieged men. Tec 5 West and Murphy, with his BAR, went into another

house, facing the battlefield for the coming activity. The stage was now set and while we have been behind the scene more shells and mortars had accentuated the air hanging heavy with a quietness that borders on the prelude to a storm. Still, too, rifle fire punctuated one's thoughts. With a sudden burst, both machine guns opened fire into the church steeple and windows where the kraut's fire had been coming from, forming a crossfire. With this chatter keeping the krauts busy, Martin took off toward the wounded men running and crawling, flopping for incoming shells. He had no helmet on, nor was he carrying a rifle, only a first aid kit; No, he's no medic -- just an Engineer, but he's got guts, that Martin. At a reasonable distance followed, Lt Bryan, covering Martin and moving with him. Martin stopped and called for Lt Cullen. Lt Cullen answered. Martin, still alert for those snipers, crawled to where the voice came from. Wading across a small creek, he raised his head slowly and Zing, a sniper not fifty yards away, in a foxhole, tried to pick him off. Martin, sure that he had gone the wrong way, worked back and called again. Lt Cullen answered and Martin reached the wounded man who said he thought Lt Eddington needed aid worse than himself. Martin went off in the direction told and found Lt Eddington. Here Martin heard the story of how Lt Eddington and M Sgt Sherman, in taking cover, were caught from the side by snipers and Sgt Sherman was killed outright. Lt Eddington, hit by a ricochet bullet, was not seriously injured but severely shocked. Martin returned to Lt Cullen amid friendly fire overhead and enemy mortar and artillery that had not ceased all through the action described. He treated Lt Cullen. Meantime, Lt Bryan had crawled back and gone for the medics. Nearby, were the infantry, who approached, getting ready to attack.

Friendly artillery dropped smoke shells on the edge of town from where the krauts had been firing all afternoon. The infantry asked us to support their attack by using our MG's and as theirs were burned out, rifles and the BAR were the only equipment of any use. Moeller, Kocis, and Cramblet went to the bridge site to recover the wounded men and the body of Sgt Sherman. With our CO, Lt Cullen out of action and Lt Eddington being evacuated, Lt Bryan became Company Commander the same day of his arrival.

On that day the battle launched by the infantry at 1730 could be seen from the stone wall behind the CP at Hirschberg, and our artillery was seen falling into the woods and buildings across the river. We were sure that the bridge to be built that night would be blown before it was finished, but through the dark hours of night the bridge was completed and not one single round of artillery fell.



CCB prepared to move across the Altmühl River on the morning of the 26th at 0700. They had not gone far when the leading elements were stopped for an hour by four hundred yards of abatis that had to be cleared by the engineers of our company. Through the day, no resistance was encountered. As the two columns approached the Danube River, crossings leading to it were taken intact in the vicinity of Neustadt. Before reaching the river, small arms fire fights were encountered. The 48th Tks on our left were strafed by a lone plane wounding Pfc Oran Williams as he dismounted from a truck to take cover. The 19th column, before entering Forchheim, was being fired on, the town not having been sufficiently cleared. Artillery fire was being received, and the road we were on was the center of attraction to heavy mortar barrages zeroed in on the crest of a hill, just before entering town. As the column entered the town, forward elements were forced to dismount and secure safe places from the murderous hail of flying mortar fragments. Some vehicles caught at the crest were damaged, a few men were hit, and medical aid administered. During a half hour period, the column entered the town in spurts. Orders were given to mount up and all our company's vehicles went over the crest at the same time. We closed in Forchheim at 2030 the same day.

Settling down and preparing supper, we went about our duties. Mortar fire fell on the hills behind the town and the whoosh could be heard as the mortars passed over the town. The 2nd platoon with the 48th Tks in a town on our left was under constant artillery fire and were directed to join the company that evening. No sooner had they found sleeping quarters than heavy shells began falling nearby, overshooting the town.

Tec 5 Charles Bell and Tec 5 Samuel T. Wilson, on radio duty at the time, were chatting rather unconcernedly until the first heavy barrage started falling on roof tops. It was then decided that the canvas top on the car was inadequate protection.

There was no more fire the remainder of the night but only the foolish and the brave slept in upstairs beds. The following morning the damage was viewed, with roofs showing gaping holes and the indescribable picture of Eugene Rork's truck which was too close to a manure pile when a shell struck.

The company remained in Forchheim, on the 27th CCB regrouped and maintained close liaison with the 99th infantry division. Reconnaissances of bridge sites were made and possible assembly areas. Tec 4 Shanahan, with the 2nd platoon, was hit with shrapnel from artillery falling in town.

Continuing the drive, CCB departed Forchheim at 1600 and crossed the Danube River at 1800 at the town of Ingolstadt and proceed-

ed to an assembly area in the vicinity of Martinzell, arriving at Gresenfeld. The following day with no resistance, the column moved on to Shatzhofen arriving at 1700. That night news was received of the liberation of the fifteen men from the 1st platoon who had been captured nine days previous. Three of them had remained back and received treatment at German hospitals.

We departed from Shatzhofen late 30 April remaining on the road all night. Weather turned cold and windy, it started raining and sleeting changing to snow. By morning, the fields were white -- this was the 1st of May. During the night, the column had crossed the Isar River at Moosburg. At 0500, May 1st, leading elements of the 19th infantry with 99th Div repulsed a counter-attack. The column continued on southeast arriving at Brück where we spent the night. The men from the 1st platoon who had been captured and liberated were returned to the company. Telling many stories of their hardships as PW's was part of that day's entertainment.

Rumors of a Nazi collapse grew, and yet their armies fought on. The company arrived at Aschau at 1700, 2 May 45. The CCB advance was slowed by blown bridges and road craters impeding the advance, however, the 47th Tk column on our left advanced more rapidly and took a bridge intact over the Inn River. Meanwhile, remaining at Aschau, German troops entered town in groups and up to entire companies carrying white flags or hands over head. At the same time, some nine hundred British and Australians, former PW's that had been liberated, came streaming down the road on bicycles, carts, horses and wagons, wheel barrows carrying Red Cross boxes. It was quite a sight to see, and much time was spent listening to their stories.

With the bridge secured by the 48th Tk, the rest of CCB moved to the vicinity of Aschau to assemble. CCB moved into Grunterbach, meanwhile, negotiations for the surrender of army airfields were in progress. Final surrender of one thousand personnel of this jet plant was arranged. In this vicinity, four ammo plants were taken along with the liberation of three prison camps and one concentration camp. On the same day, confirmation of the surrender of German troops on the Italian front reached us. The company was relieved from CCB and reverted to Bn control.

May 5th found the company proceeding to Hilpolding. It became more evident each day that the war could not last at the rate the Jerries were surrendering entire units intact. Proclamations and orders were issued over the radio for troops in advanced positions to cease firing at a certain hour. The influx of German prisoners increased each day. May 6th found the company remaining at Hilpolding, relaxing for



the first time from the rigors of combat. From this day until Victory was declared by our Supreme Commander, our duties were of purely routine nature. That of maintaining roads and bridges in divisional zone.

May 8th, although an important day for histories, was one of routine Army work for those of us overseas. The thanks we offered was an individual one not spoken outwardly but carried within. For each of us felt a different sensation from this common declaration.

## Company "C"

### *Final days of the War*

On the 23rd of April, the 14th Armored Division was transferred from the 7th Army into Patton's 3rd Army. Attached to CCA, Co "C" assigned its platoons to their usual columns.

The 1st platoon, with the 68th Infantry, moved out through Altdorf and on to Berg. The weather was still exceptionally bad and the ground, softened to a bottomless mire, made it difficult for the vehicles to proceed. This was the Engineers' greatest headache — getting the vehicles through — and countless nights were spent corduroying soft spots in the roads and winching vehicles out of the mud.

Near Altdorf, the 1st squad of the 1st platoon reinforced a bridge and was surprised by enemy mortar fire. They took refuge in a nearby house and later, the job having been finished, joined the rest of the platoon which had continued with the column.

On the 27th, CCA covered the east side of the Autobahn, in the vicinity of Eckersmerken, until the Division had safely passed. CCA was pushing closely behind CCR, and, on the same day, it crossed the Altmühl River and took Meeming.

The column, running into very little resistance, went through the large bombed-out city of Ingolstadt, on the 26th crossed the Danube River over which a treadway bridge had already been constructed and continued to Manching where a huge airport was located. The column stopped here for an hour, giving the men the opportunity to examine closely the elaborate set-up the enemy had so generously and hurriedly vacated. Hundreds of aircraft were left intact, and among these was a jet-propelled fighter, captured without a scratch on its gleaming metal surface. This was the type of plane that had caused us so many scares -- the plane

that bombed CCA Hq at Kuhlendorf during the battle for Rittershoffen. We were happy to know that it would never fly against us again.

The enemy was becoming disorganized and confused, hence the last stages of the battle were merely a matter of mopping-up scattered resistance groups and collecting the hundreds of prisoners awaiting capture along the roads. It was rather a strange sight to behold -- groups of German soldiers, unarmed, white flags of surrender in their hands, looking hopefully at our column as we breezed past them. No one wanted to pick them up -- they were too much trouble.

On the 28th, CCA regrouped and drove to the Isar River, capturing Moosburg where the 14th Armored Division liberated 110,000 Allied prisoners of War mostly American and British soldiers. The welcome we received did our hearts good, and we did not begrudge giving our limited supplies of cigarettes and chocolates to them.

At Moosburg, the 2nd platoon built a footbridge over the Isar River so that the Infantry could cross and press the attack. After it had finished with the footbridge at Moosburg, the 2nd platoon moved a very short distance outside the town to work on a bridge that had been demolished, collapsing it in the center. Log stringers were laid on both sides in a "V" shape, and planking was laid on top of them. The 2nd platoon left shortly when the 1st platoon arrived to complete the job.

The 2nd platoon traveled all day in the wet snow and came to a halt outside Velden, where another bridge was blown, necessitating a bypass. Both CCB and CCA were held up in the large field outside Velden while the work was done. The 2nd platoon was later joined by the 1st, and both platoons finished the job by morning, after working all night in two inches of wet, miserable snow.

The next day, 3 May, the 2nd platoon, left behind by CCA, traveled south with CCB, until it reached the Inn River. The CCA column proceeded north where Company Hq alone, built a treadway bridge at Ruprechtsburg, until it was joined by the 3rd platoon.

From Ruprechtsburg, the column moved to Vilsbiburg where the whole company had gathered. The 3rd platoon proceeded from this point south east toward Neumarkt and the 1st platoon moved south in the thickly-wooded sector, toward Mühldorf. Difficulty in getting the vehicles through the narrow trails was encountered, until finally it was necessary to cut fifty yards of road through the trees. Later the same day, the 1st platoon built a small bridge to allow passage and, going through a huge wheatfield, made its way to Mettenheim.

The 3rd platoon reached Mühldorf where it remained two days before moving to join the company at Mettenheim on the 4th. The



company remained in Mettenheim for three days, eagerly awaiting news of the end of the war. It had been officially reported that Himmler and Goebbels were dead and that Goering had been captured, and it seemed only to be a matter of time before the war would finally close.

Moving to Jettenstetten on the 8th, we received official word of the end of the war. Everyone was happy and relieved, but there was no great exuberance; there was more of a feeling of thankfulness that it was all over.

## *The end of the road?*

The 23rd of April found Bn Hq and Hq Company billeted in the town of Hilpolstein. In the course of the following days they made numerous moves in order to be in position to more closely support the line companies. The route took them through Kraftsbuch, Neuses, and Mindelstetten. During this period "B" and "A" companies were in need of treadway to span the Altmühl River. Lt Col Morrison was personally guiding a convoy of treadway to "A" Co at Gungolding when his vehicle hit a German mine. The Colonel had been endeavoring to pass around a tank. His driver, T/5 Chester Watkins, was killed instantly and PFC Joseph Cornaccia died shortly afterwards. Colonel Morrison was evacuated but died soon after. He had been CO of this battalion since 18 December 1943. It is unfortunate that he was unable to see the full consummation of his efforts. He had successfully directed the battalion through the most trying part of the war.

The death of the Colonel brought about a number of changes in the officer personnel, especially in view of the casualties occurring earlier in April. At this time Major Watkins was on pass, resulting in Capt O'Neal's assumption of command. At this time we would like to pay tribute to Capt O'Neal for his efforts in sustaining the engineer operations without loss of impetus. Simultaneously Capt Knight became S-3, which changed commands in "B" and "A" companies respectively.

On the 27th of April Major Watkins returned from pass and assumed command. The following day Hq crossed the Danube at Ingolstadt. This once-fine relic of a medieval city was now in shambles. They stayed at a captured airfield near Manching that night. Next day they were in Reichersdorf where they stayed until May 1st. On the move again, liberated Moosberg, was passed through. Here thousands of former prisoners, happy but confused, greeted them. Strangely enough there was little sign of rioting, and things were comparatively quiet. All extra rations flowed

from the trucks to these men who had been starved in German hands, some for months, some for years.

Our progress was halted here by a blown bridge over the Isar River. On April 30th the Division Engineer, Major George Walkins, was advised by the Commanding General of the 14th Armored Division that a bridge would be constructed over the Isar at Moosburg. The Division was, in the meantime, moved to an assembly area preparing to move over the proposed bridge.

Reconnaissance was performed by Major Watkins along with Capt Wallace of "C" Company and the S-3, Capt Knight with Major Crandall of the 300th, to find the most suitable bridging site. Finally after a conference with the Corps Commander, Corps Engineer, and the Commanding General of the 14th Armored Division, it was decided to construct the bridge to the north of the destroyed bridge.

The 998th Treadway Bridge Company, which at one time had been Company "E" of our battalion furnished the equipment. In reorganization Company "E" had been eliminated from the Armored Engineer Battalion some months previously in the States. This chance meeting in Germany was the first opportunity for many old friends to see each other again.

Major Watkins set up a forward CP at the bridge site in order that telephone communications could be established with Headquarters of the 14th Armored Division. The 300th Engineer (C) BN. attacked, a supporting battalion of Engineers constructed the bridge, and by the end of the day it was completed; however continuous maintenance was needed on the approaches. During the dark hours of the next morning the Division crossed the treadway and moved on.

The convoy reached Arndorf late that afternoon. Here they heard the first rumors of a coming V-E Day. In fact the Italian front had collapsed, and the Russians had Berlin. On the 3rd of May they moved to Velden, where the CP was located when V-E Day came.

The feeling of knowing the war was finished over here was accepted very nonchalantly by the men. There was little or no outward reaction for we went about our work without particular enthusiasm. We would like to have had the day off, but it was not so for the engineers. Whatever emotion was shown came by way of conversation with the general expression — "Boy, Am I glad it's over". The feeling was genuine. Their facial expression showed they could relax, and even sleep during the day, if they could get away somewhere. The thanksgiving in their hearts that they were still alive was the common feeling among all the men. We had done our part. It was the silent prayer and the inward feeling of calm that actually counted after all.



# *Our Leaders*



## Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company

From the date of activation, our battalion, which was known to be one of the best in the Division, was placed under the capable leadership of Lt Col Morrison; our Executive Officer was Major Williams, a man who carried out his duties in a firm but pleasing manner. The commander of our S—3 section was Major Watkins. Our S—2 Section was composed of two of the best officers in the Division in their line of work, Capt Dow, who spoke French fluently, and Lt Henn who did a superb job when we were in Germany. Our S—1 Adjutant was Lt Wise. Leading our ADE Section was a Regular Army officer, Capt Robinson. Our S—4 position was filled by Capt Munch. Our Battalion Motor Officer was the pleasant and cheerful little man, Capt Mangan. Commanding Officer of Hq company was Capt Hanson while the Motor Officer was Lt Kohloss. The officer responsible for all the good times and trips we made, our receiving of PX rations, books and magazines was the Special Service Officer, Lt Humbert. Reconnaissance positions were filled by four Officers, Lt Deans, Lt Cooney, Lt Gavigan, and Lt O'Neal. The quiet little CWO at the BSO, commonly called "Pop" was Mr Miller. Our Personnel Officer was filled by CWO Oakes. The jolly little WOJG at the Motor Pool was Mr Noah. Our Battalion Surgeon was Capt Rice who always has a pleasant word for everyone. Our Dental Officer, who is known as "Doc", is Capt Dailey.

Our first change came in Schweinheim when Lts Deans and Kohloss were transferred to an Infantry outfit, and Lt Cooney was transferred to "B" company. The next change came when Lt Wise was transferred to "C" company and Lt Mc Clary assumed the duty of Adjutant, being transferred from "A" company.

Tragedy first struck our Battalion when Major Williams, Capt Hanson, and Lt O'Neal were captured while making a reconnaissance in trying to find a suitable bivouac area for our section on April 9th. They have now been liberated and have returned to the States. The Major's position was filled by Major Watkins, and Capt O'Neal, transferred from "B" company, became S—3. Capt Mangan, the Motor Officer assumed command of Hq company in Capt Hanson's stead. While Major Watkins was on pass, Lt Col Morrison was leading a group of trucks that were carrying treadway to the front for the line companies when his peep ran over a mine. He died two days later. Capt O'Neal assumed command of the Battalion until Major Watkins returned a few days later. Capt Knight of "A" company was transferred to fill the position of S—3. Meanwhile Lt May was transferred from Division G—3 and assumed command of Hq company.

Lt Humbert, SS officer, was transferred to "C" company. Lt Morse was transferred to "B" company. The remainder of the Officers retained their original assignment. Lt Long was transferred to Hq from "B" company as SS Officer. Lt Mac Donald, having received a field commission, was put in the vacancy left by the Assistant S—3. Lt Bostwick was transferred in from a replacement center as a Reconnaissance and I&E Officer, thus leaving us the final line up on V—E Day.

### NOVEMBER 1st

C O	Lt Col John R Morrison
Ex O	Major Odell Williams
S—3	Major George Watkins
Assnt S—3	2nd Lt Herbert Morse
S—1	2nd Lt Anthony Wise
S—2	Capt Robert Dow
Assnt S—2	2nd Lt William Henn
S—4	Capt Melvin Munch
Bn Mtr O	Capt Joseph Mangan
ADE O	Capt Clifford Robinson
Hq Co CO	Capt John Hanson
S S O	2nd Lt Clyde Humbert
Rcn Off	2nd Lt William Deans
Rcn Off	2nd Lt Raymond Cooney
Rcn Off	1st Lt James Gavigan
Rcn Off	2nd Lt Richard O'Neal
Pers Off	CWO Lyndall Oakes
BSO	CWO Walter Miller
Mtr Pool O	WOJG Norman Noah
Hq Co Mtr O	2nd Lt Fredrick Kohloss
Bn Surg	Capt Donald Rice
Dental O	Capt Arthur Dailey

### V—E DAY

C O	Major George Watkins
Ex O	Capt John O'Neal
S—3	Capt Robert Knight
Assnt S—3	2nd Lt Kenneth MacDonald
S—1	1st Lt Kenneth McClary
S—2	Capt Robert Dow
Assnt S—2	1st Lt William Henn
S—4	Capt Melvin Munch
Bn Mtr O	Capt Joseph Mangan
ADE O	Capt Clifford Robinson
Hq Co CO	Capt Marion May
S S O	1st Lt Harry Long
Rcn Off	1st Lt Ottomar Tilly
Rcn Off	2nd Lt David Bostwick
Rcn Off	1st Lt James Gavigan
Pers Off	CWO Lyndall Oakes
BSO	CWO Walter Miller
Mtr Pool O	WOJG Norman Noah
Hq Co Mtr O	
Bn Surg	Capt Donald Rice
Dental O	Capt Arthur Dailey



# "A" Company

At this time we are given the privilege of paying homage to the Officers who led Company "A" through the hostilities. To those who have left and those who still remain, we extend our highest regards.

From the date of our activation and through most of the combat, we had Capt Knight as our commanding officer. He has proved is ableness and worth many times during the blackest days and also his wonderful sportsmanship during our many good times together.

Our Headquarters platoon leader was Lt Mc Clary, who also held the extra job as Motor Officer. He was an excellent leader in his quiet, efficient manner. Lt Dillard, leader of our 1st platoon, who was formerly from "B" company in the States, was liked immensely by all of the men in the company. His duties were performed in a most efficient manner during combat and he proved that he was really a civilian at heart during off-duty hours. The nicely rounded, jolly fellow with the pleasant Southern drawl who led our 2nd platoon was Lt Ridings. Another quiet, well-mannered and most efficient leader was Lt Kittinger of the 3rd platoon.

Our first change in Officer personnel came during the bitter campaign at Bannstein, Alsace when Lt Ridings was seriously injured and was declared Missing in Action on January 2nd. The vacancy was filled by Lt Thompson who received a Field Commission from his position of Platoon Sgt on January 8th.

On January 8th, Lt Tuma joined our company at Steinburg, Alsace and shared the duties of Headquarters Platoon and Motor Officer with Lt Mc Clary until the latter was transferred to Battalion Headquarters as Adjutant on the 16th of January. On this date Lt Hewett joined the company and assumed command of the 3rd platoon relieving Lt Kittinger who assumed the duty of Motor Officer of the company.

At Schweinheim during the last week in March, Lt Mc Keon, who received a Field Commission from 1st Sgt, assumed joint command of 1st platoon with Lt Dillard but was finally transferred to an Infantry Battalion within the Division. At this time Lt Hewett was relieved of command of the 3rd platoon and transferred to "C" company because of an acute Officer shortage there. Lt Kittinger again assumed command of said platoon.

On April 22nd, Lt Atkins joined the company, making an overage in Officer personnel until the last week of April when our Commanding Officer, Capt Knight was relieved of command of company and was transferred to Battalion Headquarters as S-3. Lt Dillard, relieved of command of 1st platoon, assumed command of company and Lt Atkins assumed command of 1st platoon.

On May 5th Lt Tuma was relieved of assignment and departed for the States for a leave of absence and with the final phase closing in on us, we readjusted our Roster of Officer personnel to read:

## NOVEMBER 1st

C O	Capt Robert R Knight
Hq Sec.	2nd Lt Kenneth A Mc Clary
1st Pln	1st Lt John A B Dillard Jr
2nd Pln	1st Lt Uriel A Ridings
3rd Pln	2nd Lt Edward P Kittinger

## V—E DAY

C O	1st Lt John A B Dillard Jr
Hq Sec.	
1st Pln	2nd Lt Robert A Atkins
2nd Pln	2nd Lt Perry Thompson
3rd Pln	1st Lt Edward P Kittinger



# "B" Company

We pay tribute to those Officers who gave freely of their time, suffering casualties along with the men with whom they worked. At the beginning of our combat career Capt O'Neal was Commanding Officer. He had been with us since our activation date at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas.

Lt Cullen led the 1st platoon through many an ordeal working with the 19th Infantry. In the 2nd platoon and liked by all with whom he came in contact, was Lt Quinn. Not to be forgotten is the quiet but proven in combat leader of the 3rd platoon, Lt Eddington. The youngster among the Officers was Lt Robinson who took many a ribbing because of his nonchalant reaction toward women; he had Headquarters platoon. When the first change came, the company had already been in combat and with Lt Eddington on pass, Lt. Robinson moved from Headquarters platoon to take charge of the 3rd platoon.

On his return, Lt Eddington shared command of Headquarters platoon with Lt Cooney who had been assigned to the company from Battalion Headquarters. On March 22nd Lt Eddington was transferred to "C" company. The first Officer to become a casualty was Lt Robinson when he was hit by sniper fire on April 3rd. His position was not filled immediately, so S Sgt Needham assumed command and ably carried out his job.

The most tragic of events followed only two days later when on April 5th Lt Quinn, while on bridge reconnaissance, was killed. His platoon leadership was filled by Lt Cooney. Lt Eddington returned the same day, but was sent to the hospital immediately.

On April 17th Capt O'Neal left the company and became S—3 in Battalion Headquarters. The new commanding officer was Lt Cullen, and Lt Long took Lt Cullen's place in the 1st platoon. Two days later Lt Long was evacuated to the hospital. At this time M Sgt Sherman was sent to the company to train for a Field Commission. He assumed command of the 3rd platoon. Lt Cooney remained leader of the 2nd platoon.

On April 25th Lt Cullen went to a bridge site with M Sgt Sherman and Lt Eddington. Lt Cullen was injured and evacuated, Lt Eddington suffered shock and also evacuated. M Sgt Sherman was killed.

In the meantime, Lt Bryan was assigned to the company and before the day was over became the commanding officer if only for a few hours. On April 26th the situation had completely changed, for now Lt Eddington had assumed command of the company; Lt Bryan took over the 1st platoon. Lt Morse and Lt Humbert were assigned to the company on April 29th and assumed command of the 2nd and 3rd platoons respectively and were leading them in battle.

With the War at an end, the final line-up ran:

## NOVEMBER 1st

C O	Capt John M O'Neal
Hq Sec.	2nd Lt Melvin O Robinson
1st Pln	1st Lt Martin J Cullen
2nd Pln	1st Lt James B Quinn
3rd Pln	2nd Lt Richard W Eddington

## V—E DAY

C O	1st Lt Richard W Eddington
Hq Sec.	
1st Pln	2nd Lt Lemuel Bryan
2nd Pln	1st Lt Clyde O Humbert
3rd Pln	1st Lt Herbert Morse



# "C" Company

Six months of combat through France, Alsace and Germany caused many changes in the Officer component of "C" company. Some of them were killed or wounded while gallantly leading their command against the enemy. Others were transferred into various other companies in the Battalion to cope with the everchanging tide of events and casualties that occurred throughout the fighting.

The capable leader who began our trek with us back in the cold, bleak days of November 1944 and led the company through all the action in the ETO was Capt Wallace. He was commanding officer during all the fighting across France and Alsace, through the Siegfried Line, across the Rhine River, and into Germany until hostilities ceased. Lt Long, a well-liked and most efficient officer led Hq platoon. Our 1st platoon was led by Lt May who was a Regular Army Officer and put forth some splendid leadership. The rough and ready man who led the 2nd platoon was Lt Bardwell while our 3rd platoon was under the command of Lt Tilly.

Lt May left his command of the 1st platoon on February 4th and was assigned to the G-3 Section of Division Headquarters. Lt Long, leader of Hq platoon, took over command of the 1st platoon. Soon, however, he was sent

to the hospital, being in a weakened condition after the Vosges campaign. He was succeeded by Lt Hewett who carried the platoon through the remainder of the war.

Lt Copes joined the company on January 16th and assumed command of Hq platoon. He took over the 2nd platoon when Lt Bardwell was injured. During action at Steinfeld, Germany on March 22nd, Lt Copes was wounded and evacuated. At this time Lt Eddington, transferred from "B" company, took over the platoon until Lt Bardwell returned a few days later.

On April 11th Lt Humbert took over Hq platoon and remained until Lt Weiss arrived as a replacement on April 22nd. Lt Humbert was transferred to "B" company.

The tragedy which affected us all so very much was the death of Lt Delmay. He was a native of Belgium who had received citizenship in the States, joined the Army and received his commission. He was working on a tank retriever filling up a large crater in a road when his vehicle was hit by artillery; both his legs were crushed. He died shortly after. He had been with the company but a short time, however, long enough to win the comradeship of all the men and officers.

When V-E Day was proclaimed, our Officer list read:

## NOVEMBER 1st

C O	Capt Franklin R Wallace Jr
Hq Sec	1st Lt Harry H Long
1st Pn	1st Lt Marion H May
2nd Pn	2nd Lt Charles Bardwell
3rd Pn	2nd Lt Ottomar Tilly

## V-E DAY

C O	Capt Franklin R Wallace Jr
Hq Sec	1st Lt Alexander Weiss
1st Pn	2nd Lt Hobart Hewett
2nd Pn	1st Lt Charles Bardwell
3rd Pn	1st Lt Anthony Wise



# Epilogue

The "125th" was a battalion of which they were mighty proud. The men had performed their work well, and as a result the battalion was held in high esteem by all.

Redeployment was uppermost in the minds of the loved ones at home and a subject of constant interest to all of the men of the 125th Armored Engineer Battalion. What would happen? Where would they go? As part of the 14th Armored Division was scheduled to go to America to be disbanded it was necessary that all low point men be transferred to units staying in the Theatre or scheduled to be shipped to the China-Burma-India Theatre.

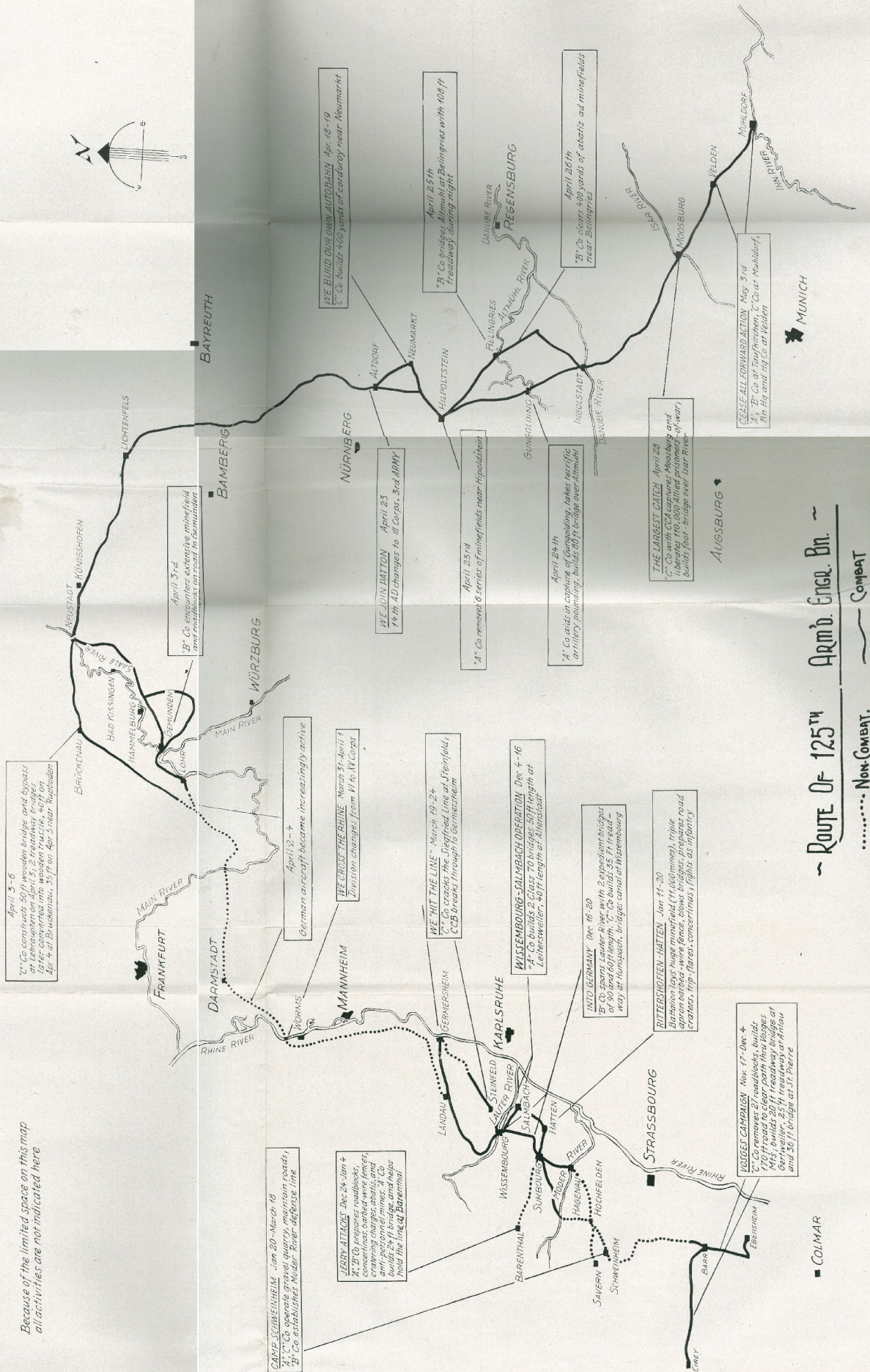
There were no "Brass Bands" or grand parades when the members of the battalion were sent their varied ways. Those remaining stood with heavy hearts as the trucks drove off carrying their "buddies" to other units. The comradeship which was forged among them by "sweating out" artillery barrages, wallow-

ing in mud to construct bridges, ducking small arms fire, and exposure to the elements in the cold of winter, will never die.

Efforts were made to keep as many as possible of the men together. As a result, transfers to other units were in large groups. Late in June the first group transferred to the 220th Engineers of the 20th Armored Division. Another large group went to the 120th Engineers of the 45th Division. Both of these units are already home and reports of marriages being received already. The remainder of the men left on July 11th for the 2827th combat Engineer Battalion of the 36th Engineer Group.

However, these "buddies" are not forgotten. In the years to come, there will be happy reunions. No matter how far apart they live from each other, or how different their purpose in life, there will be that bond which will remain between brave men forever.





~ ROUTE OF 125<sup>TH</sup> ARM'D. ENGR. BN. ~

..... Non-Combat.

# COMBAT



HISTORY -- 125TH ARMORED ENGINEER BATTALION

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