



The Winter Line



The counterattack was over, and the 399th never lost an inch of ground for the rest of the war. Front lines ran from ghost town Hottviller to Simserhoff's giant forts to Freudenberg Farms, bellying south through the deep draw of Kirscheidt across Steinkopf and up over high Glassemberg village to the Lemberg—Bitche highway.

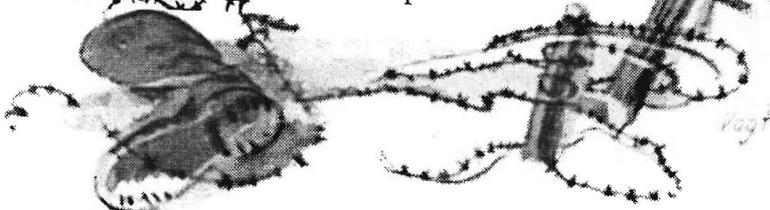
"This warfare don't settle anything. Two days ago we had a front running east — west, and now it runs north — south."

The Germans knew which way the front lines ran, however, and dropped 14 aerial bombs on Able and Baker's front foxholes.

Midnight of January 2nd, a forward OP of King Company on Signalberg challenged a group of six shadows which stumbled up out of no-man's-land. They didn't know the password, and didn't have any weapons or helmets. They were the Baker outpost lost on New Year's Eve in the College de Bitche — Juan Meza, Andrew Powell, Harry Powers, Carl Syerson, Porter Lane, and Willis McIntire. They had a story to tell.

"We're just wishing each other a Happy New Year when we hear hobnail boots clattering upstairs. Then two krauts come down to search our coal room. One lights a match and his buddy lights a piece of paper and they both poke their heads into the room. Powell, who's been calmly waiting for 'em to light up, plugs 'em both with two shots. Then we hide under a trashpile while their kamerads come to hunt us down."

"After hiding out for a whole day Meza finds a plugged-up chimney. We dug it out like in that Count of Monte Christo and escaped



Snowbound '50... it paid to know the password



“Sgt. John Nulty’s philosophy on combat was ‘say a prayer, grab your rifle, hit the ground, start shooting’.”

“Yeah, and the atheists’ theory was ‘Grab your rifle, hit the ground, start shooting, say a prayer’.”

There were no radios. Joes got it from the platoon CP. Platoon occasionally sent a man up to Company to see what was cooking. When a man got back as far as Battalion they started drawing big pictures for him.

“You’re the first officer I ever saw come up to the foxholes, Lieutenant Landis. Just like in the cigarette ads. What happened in the counterattack, sir?”

“Jerry took a bunch of woods. Reyersviller was the closest thing to a town they got. Hope they have a cold winter over there in the Dominal Forest.”

“Is that right what the Stars & Stripes call us, a ‘Bitche Bulge’?”

“Oh sure, why the New York Times even calls us the Lorraine Salient.”

“Break that one down, will yuh Lootenant?”

“Oh, yes. There’s a Plan Lafayette cooking that the French tankmen are going barrelling into Bitche tomorrow morning shooting up everything. Stay down in your holes, men. They say there’s a French Sherman parked next to every farmhouse in the Rear.”

The tanks never showed up. Doughboys are patient, because it pays them to be. It was a full week later that they gave up on the big brave French tankers ever shooting up Bitche.

“The Frogs musta liked the farmers’ daughters,” one of the dogfaces concluded wryly and let it go at that.

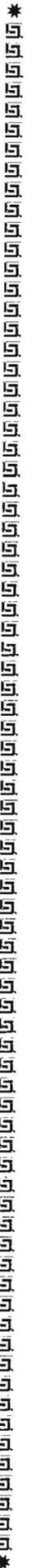
Intelligence doped out the German flare system: Red meant All Quiet, Green—Danger, Yellow—American patrol. The 399th kept the yellow flares busy. 3rd Battalion patrols raided high Signalberg, the 2nd raided Sussels Farm down past the Dragon’s teeth. Lt. Elwood Shemwell took a Charlie raider force into Reyersviller which was broken up at the first house on Hell’s Corner by a chain of machineguns.

The enemy sat back in his Bitche fortresses and sent Screaming Meemies blazing orange meteor trails in the night sky. At the end of their shrieking neon parabolas they crashed into our lines like thunder, destroying a 1st Battalion anti-tank gun.

When it wasn’t raining Meemies it was snowing. The farm buildings out in front of the French Garrison blazed all night and the dead cow in the yard formed a guiding marker for Joes going out on night outpost to the black pillboxes out front. Bleary-eyed OP sentinels watched the Dragon’s teeth march up and down in front of their eyes all night long.

The night of January 7th a herd of white-washed Sherman tanks crept cautiously forward through the moonlit snowdrifts led by doughs who sprinkled sand on the snow to deaden the metallic roar. Early January 8th the Blue Battalion kicked off after Signalberg and Spitzberg.

Pfc Jacob Vogt was the lead scout as Item moved through the deep snows against Spitzberg Hill. The key to the Bitche Bulge was Spitzberg and there were plenty of Germans around that morning. Item ran into an MLR of 8 machineguns in a row with riflemen in between. Sgts. Irving Schlechta and Herbert Shusta led the 1st platoon to the left flank to get around the machineguns.



T

*he pause that reinforces... infinity is the time between
the end of one counterattack and the start of the next one*



*Lt. Col. Ellery Zehner, an empty Tommygun, a Sherman tank ...
a hill was taken on a bluff*

William Bechtold, Jarvis Helsley, Robert Kadison, Frank Wisniewski, Arthur Ullman, and Joseph Tyre were in on the knockout of three MG nests out in the open firing from the little wooded shelf overhanging Broadway. Sgt. Thurston Cox destroyed a nest with an AT grenade at close quarters.

"We took 99 prisoners and killed 150 krauts with a company which numbered 52 men at the objective. The enemy wanted that hill and started throwing counterattacks from all angles. Pfc James Hasselschwurt got his third purple heart, all in the face. The eight-man 3rd Platoon under Lt. Fabian Hechtkopf beat off 70 Germans who swarmed across the Lemberg—



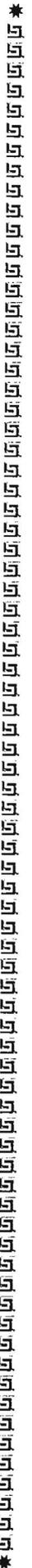
Bitche highway to hit their exposed flank where the 36th Division was supposed to be but wasn't. Lt. Simmons' Love platoon was attacked to Item and captured 35 krauts. Simmons had 8 men and 7 BAR's. He let one guy carry a rifle and called him his runner."

King Company jumped off in the middle and pushed over the tip top of bare Signalberg, raked by bullets and shrapnel. Lt. Marcel Novotny's 2nd platoon spearheaded the attack with Elmer Mink and Theodore White leading, overran enemy mortar positions and captured 25. In one of the German dugouts on Signalberg, Captain Frederick Batrus found his monogrammed stationery being used by krauts who had captured it in the Counter Attack. Mike Company recaptured several machineguns abandoned Jan. 1.

Love Company started on low ground. 47 Joes and 3 Shermans busted out of the woods next to Steinkopf and started up Signalberg to join King. The enemy threw a screen of 88 and MG fire sweeping down from the high ground which killed Lt. Park Ashbrook up front and drove the company back into the woods.

Lt. Colonel Ellery Zehner, 399th CO, jumped into a tank and roared up Signalberg. When the Sherman hung on a stump and got knocked out, he advanced on foot to rout 15 krauts out of their holes and led them back through no-man's-land under heavy fire from both American and German lines, all with an empty Tommygun. Regimental Commanders have more important things to worry about than personal ammo supply.

Love Company reattacked and drove up Signalberg to join King at the beacon tower. Medic George Boe ran around all afternoon of the 8th under fire caring for wounded. At twilight



160 krauts stormed up from the Reyersviller backslope to hit King and Item's precarious new holdings but they were driven back down.

Lt. Alphonso Siemasko's 3rd platoon of George made a night raid on Shorbach.

"Shorbach was a ghost town in a valley way behind the German lines: it was a Volksgrenadier Battalion CP. The patrol was called 'Operation Hollywood'. We were to clean out the town of krauts, set fire to corner houses with Molotov cocktails, shoot a blue flare when leaving, shoot a red flare for artillery on the fire-marked town. Then we were supposed to walk a mile through an alerted enemy to our lines. Simple, wot?"

The raiding party ran into a perimeter of machineguns outside the town, didn't go through with the theatrical accoutrements. Said S-2 Lt. Kenneth Morgan who sent them out: "Never expected to see you guys again."

All night of the 8th Zehner's tank blazed on Signalberg, lighting up the battlefield. A night raid into Item's lines was broken up by Sgt. Harry Lampert. At dawn a hit and run counter attack by Germans carrying one or two automatic weapons apiece charged up from behind the Tower. Sgt. John Mullins of Love opened up with his machinegun and scattered the attackers. The white Shermans were still around and pumped 76mm stuff into the fringe of woods behind the pinned krauts to discourage reinforcement.

Mortar Observer Dunbar stood atop a camouflaged tank burning out one carbine after another and at the same time directing deadly 60 mortar fire. Warren Kurtz walked out among seven dead burp gunners to get a souvenir, found them very much alive, captured all.



"The white Shermans were still around..."

The enemy expected Item Company to press the attack down Spitzberg to Reyersviller and threw in three companies of Grenadiers. The only thing holding Item back was manpower shortage. Ferocious fighting had gotten Item onto Spitzberg, tenacious fighting kept them there. The counter attacks would surge up from the monster



draw called Broadway and the krauts were invisible until they bobbed up 75 yards in front of Item. Then Ranger Robertson would open up with his BAR and the battle was on. Rear Echelon mortarmen Anthony Sevino, Edwin Lohbauer, and Dino Ravene fired mortars, lugged ammo through the drifts, carried wounded out on litters, laid wires, ran patrols to the sparse units on the flanks.

Sgt. William Morgan spliced the battalion wire 17 times, kept every inter-company wire working under round-the-clock small arms and artillery, was killed by a shell burst repairing a wire. When asked if he sent out any patrols between Jan. 8th—15th Captain Alfred Olsen replied "We were the patrol."

To prove it, Fox Company of the 398th pushed through Item on January 10th to attack. 100 yards in front of Item foxholes they ran into a murderous volley of fire and withdrew. Item threw out a smokescreen to evacuate the wounded at twilight and the krauts threw in another counter attack under the smoke.

Down on the corner of the Bitche—Lemberg highway was a 10 man outpost co-owned and co-operated by the 399th Infantry and the 36th Division. Cpl. Calvin Brown was a big Swede who talked just enough like a kraut to make all enemy patrols feel at home behind our lines. Kraut patrols had a choice of turning left at the OP and hitting the 36th Texas Division or turning right and hitting the 100th Century Division.

"The Jerries must have looked up the records and seen that the 36th was a rugged old Anzio outfit, because one hell of a bunch of raids hit our Item lines."

One morning a big brass hat came up to the front lines on a tour of inspection. He noticed Item's sparse line of defense.

"Where is your depth, soldier?"

"Sir, you can't have depth where you ain't got men," said Sgt. Julius Del Mese.

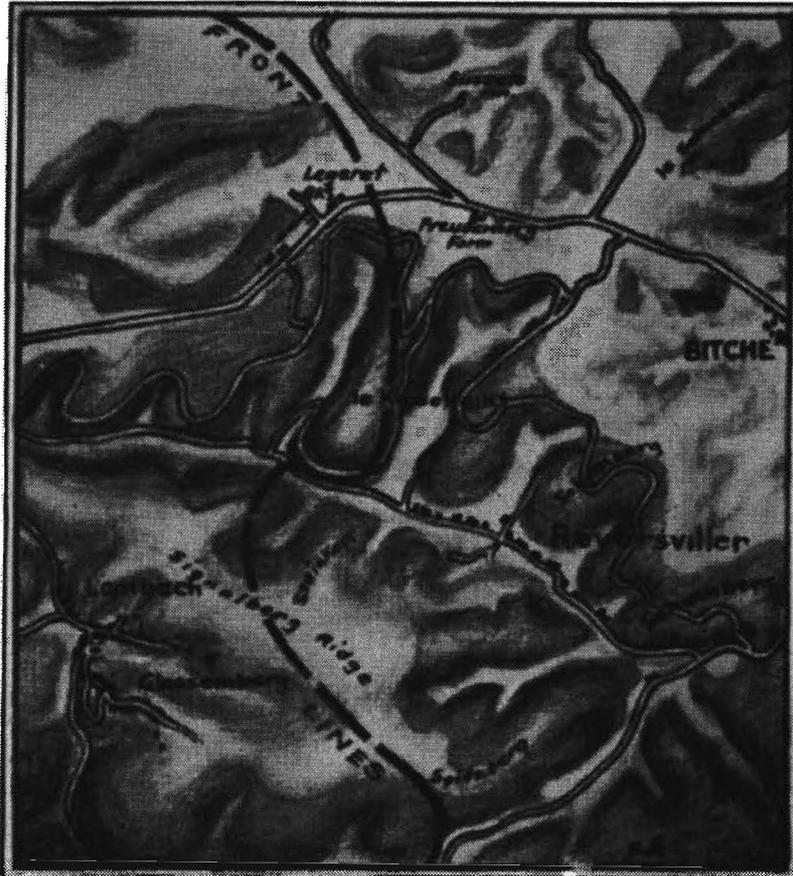
"Why, I could walk right through here between your holes at night," continued the brass hat.

"Yes, sir, and you'd be pushing daisies like all the German B----- who thought the same thing."

The brass hat departed for the wonderful Rear and Item Company settled down for another quiet evening of counterattacks.

After 27 consecutive days of fighting the Red Battalion was relieved by White between





Little Anzio and the Splinter Factory. On January 12th Colonel Edward J. Maloney took over as 399th CO, with Zehner, Speigel, and Lentz CO's of Red, White, and Blue Battalions.

The Winter Line was unique. On the high weather and weapons-beaten Maginot table the 399th held half of the Maginot Line and the Germans held the other half. Hence the winter campaign was fought sideways, something the French engineers of 1939 Maginot blue-printing hadn't bargained for. Sticking out of the Maginot plateau were the two giant forested knees of the Kirscheidt, with no-man's-land down between the knees. Where the American knee

came out of the plateau was Little Anzio and the end of the knee was the Splinter Factory with a southern exposure into Reyersviller village at the end of the German knee. Across the Reyersviller Road rose majestic, wind-swept Signalberg Mountain with its airplane beacon sitting on top. Dug in atop this huge hump in the sky, 399th Joes could see the entire Winter Line — Freudenberg Farms, French Garrison, Reyersviller Ridge, Kirscheidt, en effet tous. Where Signalberg ran into woods on the right was Spitzberg and in front of the two lay the giant draw Broadway.

The one thing that very few 399th doughboys saw during the winter was Reyersviller itself, burrowed in a deep valley.

“Our anti-tank gun is set up by that knocked down overpass on the Reyersviller—Siersthal road. So that's all right. But every day about a dozen visitors — T-5's, Generals, everybody — come and stand by my gun and point and say happily ‘It's down that way, right over there’. I'm easy to get along with, but WHAT's over there?”

Reyersviller, m'boy.

Lt. David Ballie of Hawaii and Able Company took a night patrol after a machinegun on Steinkopf that had been harassing the Splinter Factory.

The patrol maneuvered around and approached the bunker along the route the

*Back at Platoon CP hibernation often set in
Meginot No-Man's-Land . Nobody wanted it*

*machine gunners' relief was sup-
posed to come.*

The guard called, "Iss dot du, Otto?"

Sgt. Joseph Galiazzi said "Nein" and
fired eight shots quick.

*Next morning the machinegun was
on display in Siersthal and five dead
krauts were on display on Steinkopf.*

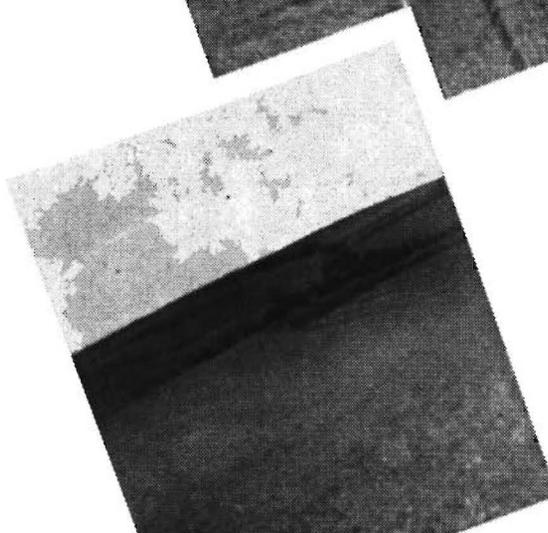
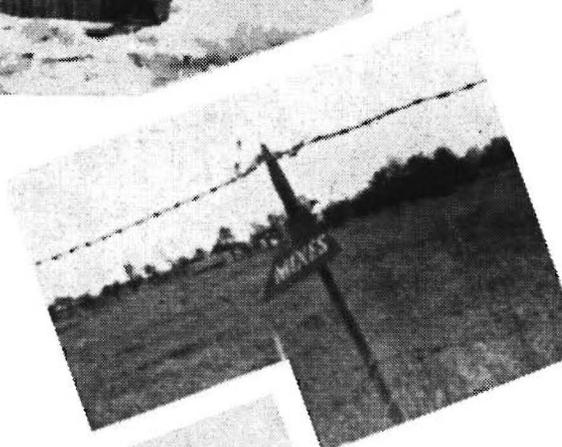
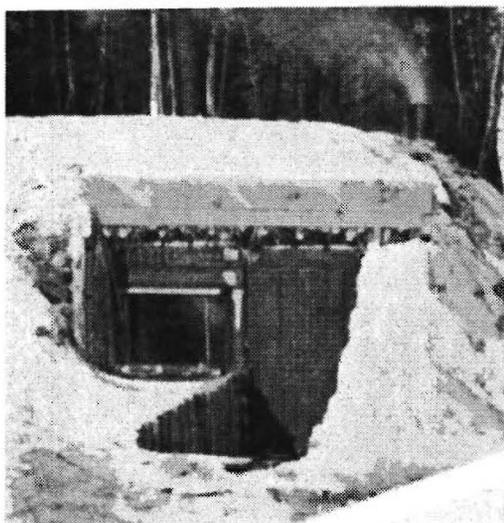
January 15th Red relieved Blue on

Signalberg—Spitzberg with its Jerry "Machine-
gun Charley" spraying the hillside and long
salvoes of artillery which rose out of Bitche's
fortresses, climbed over the Reyersviller Ridge
and dumped HE on Skytop. Concertina barbed
wire was thrown up in front of the winter
line and the heavy snows began. Doughs
counted the footprints around their foxholes in
the morning to see if there had been any hob-
nailed callers. Jeeps were painted white, and
white-caped snipers went out front.

"There was a jeep sitting out in no-
man's-land next to the Tower which
every rifle platoon eyed longingly
but nobody dared to go out to re-
trieve. One night Sgt. Fred Wilson of
Love Company crawled out icy Sig-
nalberg past the Tower to the jeep,
tied a cable to the bumper, got be-
hind the wheel, and steered it back to
our lines."

Thirty-one Jerries surged up out of
Broadway at midnight of January 18th to
make noise while a woman spy slipped
through our lines. Able broke up the kraut
patrol and fraulein Mata Hari was nabbed
by an alert OP.

*Signalberg Mountain... a huge hump in the sky
Reyersviller... no ceiling on real estate*



*Freudenberg Farms
... in daytime, the status was quiet and quo*



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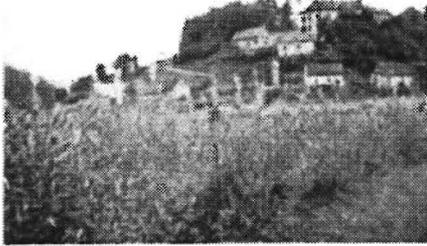
oomtown





“For the next few days our squad debated on the proper methods of interrogation for women spies, but I guess the Army has rules.”

The Winter Line was run on a schedule: one battalion in foxholes on each side of Reyersviller Road and one battalion in reserve in the French towns of Siersthal, Lambach, and Glassemberg — tiny villages nestled in the deep valleys behind the Maginot turrets in the heart of Lorraine. The local people spoke German although they claimed allegiance to the French. Those quaint cow-towns came to be the doughfoot’s idea of heaven after the weeks underground in the hills. The front lines were a common proving ground for all 399th men. Water-filled foxholes be-



Siersthal... “nestled in the deep valleys behind the Maginot turrets”

hind the Dragon’s teeth, little pillboxes in open pastures, the Garrison farms with their dead cow and clear view of Freudenberg, Little Anzio, Kirscheidt ridge, Splinter Factory, Reyersviller Road, Steinkopf, Signalberg near the Tower, Grenade Terrace overlooking Broadway, Spitzberg woods.

“Freudenberg Farms were the hotspot of the Maginot. The French Garrison farms were only 400 yards across an open field from Freudenberg and its two little pillboxes out back. Outpost crews hustled in and out after dark and before dawn: during the daytime the status was very quiet and very quo on the Maginot front.”

“The Freudenberg Ensemble de Machineguns kept everybody indoors except Lt. Young of How Company who would calmly throw a smoke grenade out into the road and then slowly stroll across the road, all 6’3” of him, in full front of Freudenberg.”

Up by Signalberg Tower on the night of January 27th George outpost Richard LaFleur, Michael Sirockman, and John Harlowe walked over to the next hole without helmets or rifles and said “Is this Fox Company?” Spotting a big burpgun sight sticking out of the foxhole, they excused themselves for a moment, got their rifles and captured three krauts in the hole.

The Big Boys took a look at the Winter Line on their maps and noticed that Steinkopf hill bulged slightly into our lines. That line should be straightened out to keep everything neat, they decided.



*Maginot Pillboxes went 14 stories underground... below,
and railroads lingerie*



View from Signalberg OP's... in the trees were Jerries



Lt. Herbert Verrill and Pfc Cyril Van Lanen took Easy's 3rd platoon roaming Steinkopf at night on January 29th. They brought back 12 prisoners who said there were 39 more krauts on Steinkopf, enough to keep our patrols active.

"Everything happens at night. Then the kraut patrols had a tough time getting through our lines, but in the daytime they could probably have walked back to our Division CP, everybody being comfortably asleep in their foxholes at the time."

"Yeah, we did everything at night all right. During the daytime it wasn't even safe to reach for the toilet paper at Little Anzio."

The monster forts of the Maginot were 1% above the ground, 99% underground.

"We went into a pillbox near the French Garrison looking for some foxhole furnishings. Down 14 double flights of stone stairs it was pitch dark and damp and eerie. There could have been a million Jerries hiding in there and we wouldn't have noticed. We tip-toed down long stone passageways with a flickering candle and every little noise we made echoed for miles, like something out of Tom Sawyer. We found a railroad, hospital, Diesel power plant, kitchens, restaurant, water works, machine shops. Also millions of beds and plenty of women's lingerie. I guess the Frenchmen in 1940 didn't spend all their time figuring tactical problems. We got lost and came up in Fort Simserhoff, nearly a mile away. Lucky thing we didn't wander off in the other direction — the Heinies would be hanging us out of Freudenberg Farms for targets about now."

Two enemy pillboxes at the Needle's Eye on the German side of the Kirscheidt were also 14 stories deep and linked by tunnels with Freudenberg Farms. The American high command wanted Freudenberg Farms and they wanted the two pillboxes, and they wanted them all at night. *From the second floor of the Farms the Citadel of Bitche would be visible.*

It was pitch dark the night of February 2nd as Item and Able moved up through a sleet storm for the twin jumpoff. Lt. David Ballie's 1st platoon of Able slid down the American side of the Kirscheidt like human toboggans on the icy slope, and groped up the heavily wooded enemy side. At the top a machine gun MLR opened up, the krauts spontaneously touched off colored flares and started lobbing grenades into the completely pinned platoon. *Hugh Vickers loosened up the right arm which beat Dizzy Dean in 1932 and hurled frag grenades into the nests after the little*

Spitzberg Woods

"Morale in the foxholes was a lot of little things..."



German pineapple grenades had wounded Raymond Sholes and three more raiders. Sgt. Herbert Rice's squad worked up between two machineguns, and Robert Jones stood up in the bright flare-light firing his BAR from the hip to silence first the left gun, then the right one.

Sgt. Ross Spenilla and Lt. Fabian Hechtkopf were Item patrol leaders who knew Freudenberg Farms by heart. After they had reconnoitred the attack area 43 Item doughs stumbled ahead in the inky blackness looking for Freudenberg. They had memorized every doorway to the closely-bunched Farms, but in the darkness it didn't help. Sgt. Walter Moore and Benjamin Shafer took 32 men against the blacked out Farms while Lt. Henry Prysi led eight men against the pillboxes out back. Doughs helplessly bumped into one another in the dark and fell into water-filled shell craters. A dozen enemy machineguns sliced up the blackness and electrically controlled mines were exploded. The Item doughboys were fighters and kept advancing right into the doorways. Flares suddenly began bursting overhead and the kraut gunners had targets. Slowly Item withdrew with heavy casualties. *Next day Stars & Stripes said the 7th Army night front was absolutely quiet except for minor patrol skirmishes. Not so minor to the Joes who were there.*

"Before daybreak they bring up chow for the outpost crews. At noon we eat chow out of little cans, and then after dark they bring up more chow. The only trouble with this Winter Line is that there's nothing around to eat but chow."

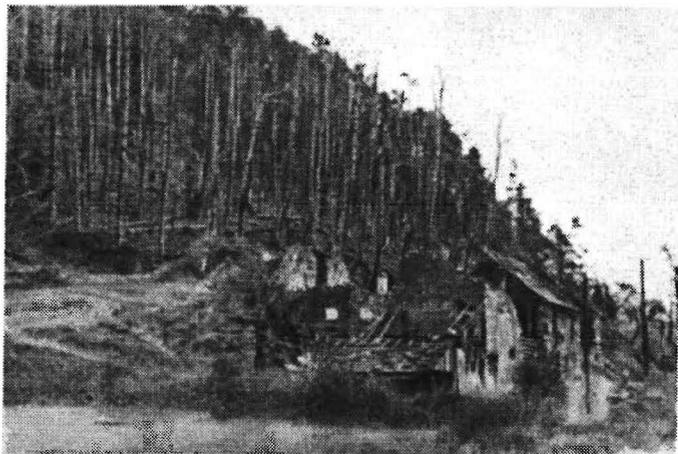
"Remember, pal, morale is a lot of little things."

"Yeah, beans and cubed carrots."

And so it was all winter long up in the foxholes. Morale was spotting the battered company jeep churning up through the mud with PX rations, rumors, and maybe a package. Morale was a cheerful letter from home describing the corner drug store and gossip about the most beautiful little Chick in Hometown, USA. Morale was whether you got



Hell's Corner, Reyersviller...many American patrols, many German machineguns



Downtown Reyersviller and steep slope of Signalberg ... at the top sat the 399th



a dinner K ration with malted milk tablets or one with York Caramels; whether you got socks size 13 or socks that fit; whether you stood guard from 8—10 and 2—4 or from 6—8 and 12—2. Morale was whether your two foxhole cronies were good Joes or 8—balls. Morale was hearing that you would go to Division Rest in maybe two months, or that there was going to be a drawing for two men per battalion to visit Paris or Brussels. It was having an attack on Steinkopf hill called off. But most of all morale was knowing that you were going to go in reserve in Siersthal, Lambach, or Glassemberg in 8 days, 6 days, 5, 4, 3, 2, tomorrow!

February 9th was the 100th Division's 100th consecutive day in combat. Lt. Roy Simmons' Love platoon shot up a Broadway kraut patrol from Grenade Terrace. German-flown Thunderbolts dive-bombed Charlie Company on Kirscheidt. Able OP's spotted a French Tricolor protruding from wrecked Freudenberg Farms. *Just another day.*

Man-made moonshine made its entry into the annals of modern warfare the night of February 11, 1945, and Lt. Earl Cross' 1st platoon of Easy roamed and shot up Steinkopf by its silvery gleam. BARman Alex Kwolek, Spangler, Roth, and Gunther Weierstall who had been running the platoon all winter shot up 27 krauts in the raid.

Lt. James Walsh of How Company, former 1st platoon leader of Easy, had been told to keep away from Easy Company patrols. He went incognito on the raid. Later when the brass were investigating they asked a member of the patrol if he had recognized Walsh among the raiders. The Joe who had come overseas with Easy's 1st platoon replied "I'm new here."

Artificial moonlight bounced off the low hanging clouds, allowed night OP's to direct round-the-clock artillery, brought foxholes closer together, got in the krauts' eyes. Every rifle company sent patrols to Sussels Farm, Freudenberg Farms, Needle's Eye pillboxes, the high hill of Kirscheidt, Hell's Corner at the entrance to Reyersviller, Steinkopf, Broadway, Spitzberg woods.

Lts. Martin Quinlan and Duncan Emery of Fox Company used to argue over who would lead the next patrol. Able had a Sgt. Claude Currier who had the handle "Combat". Most of the

doughfeet preferred to get their action from war correspondents like Gunther who boldly described his trip into "No-Man's-Land" when he walked in front of the 240's.

At 0215 of February 11th a shell struck the leaning Tower of Signalberg and it collapsed beside a Love outpost. Signalberg had been so named because of its airplane beacon tower.

"Guess maybe we'll have to call it just plain Berg now," one of the Paddlefeet concluded. "Now that you mention it, this place IS a burg."

Man-made moonshine ... it got in the krauts' eyes



*
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A cold driving rain swept the snow from the hills on February 12th. Love Joes crept out to the fallen tower on Signalberg, planted hundreds of dynamite charges, ran back, listened to a terrific explosion rock the night. Krauts in Reyersviller muttered "Verdamnte Amerikaner!" and dove for the cellars. The Panama Canal had been started. The long trench of World War I vintage was burrowed 75 yards from the nearest Germans!

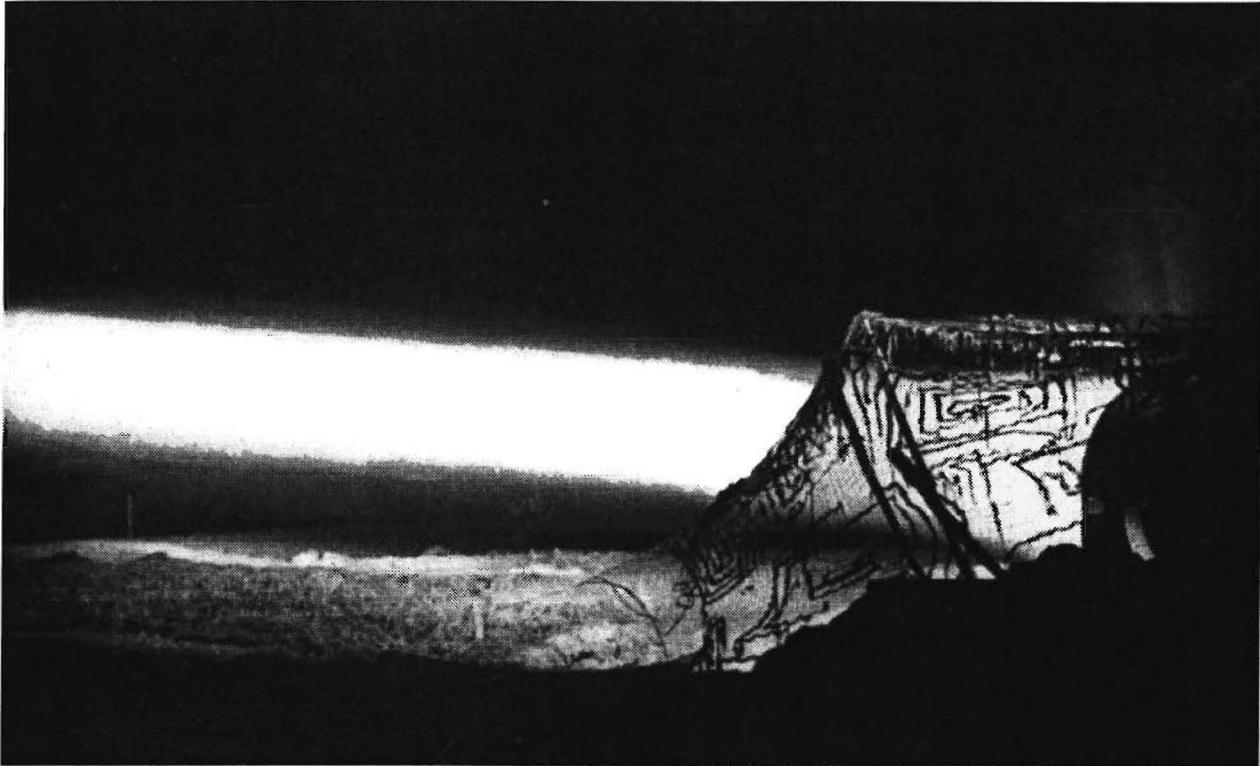
Sgt. Horace T. West had fought in Sicily with the 45th. He wanted to fight in Germany, so African authorities gave him a Springfield sniper rifle and shipped him off to the ETO. West landed with Love Company of the 399th Infantry.

The tall; lanky, bald, bewhiskered Oklahoman sniped continuously from the Splinter Factory with his '03. Few men volunteered to work on the skyscraper Panama Canal, but all day long West lay out there potting away with his "raafle" named Mabel. Legend says West killed 150 Germans. The legend is fact.

Baker Company staged two raids the night of February 12th. Thomas Briggs and Richard Jones took a patrol down through the gap in the black Dragon's teeth to neutralize Sussels Farm for the umpteenth time. The 3rd platoon went after Needle's Eye pillboxes with a flamethrower. Pfc Andrew Powell destroyed a machinegun nest as Baker waded through intense enemy fire to reach the pillboxes. Cpl. Floyd Baker squirted his fire eating machine and toasted the kraut sentries guarding the forts before Baker withdrew.



Horace West and friend . . . 150 Germans and a legend



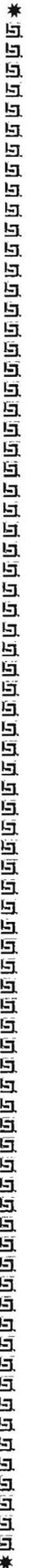
"...artificial moonlight wiggled illuminating fingers..."

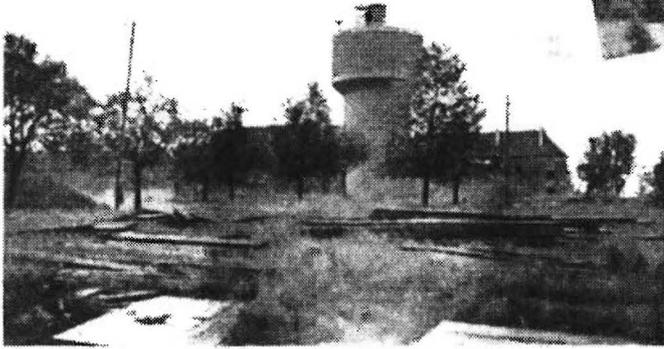
Item and King sent out four patrols after prisoners on February 15th. Lt. Warren Behrens' patrol ambushed two krauts on Signalberg, Sgt. Arnold Stevens' raider force was ambushed near Steinkopf, Sgt. David Griffin hit nothing. Down in the Fishing Grounds of Steinkopf Lt. Robert Hoth and Pfc Joseph Sanchez talked a kraut out of his burp gun and forced him to lead them to five kamerads, whom they captured.

Volksgrenadier troops were relieved by the 2nd Mountain Division who were in turn relieved by the 6th SS Mountain Division. The enemy was sending his mountain troops to fight in the Bitch hills.

Captain Frederick Batrus led a King platoon raid which shot up everything on the back-slope of Signalberg in front of the Canal for 15 minutes before returning to our lines. *Pfc John Jeske of Able took a patrol out to Zehner's Zany, the ghostly Sherman which had sat in no-man's-land with turret blown off all winter, found it completely booby-trapped. Item outposts saw a French tricolor flag draping out of Freudenberg Farms, had target practice.*

It was February, 1945, in Siersthal, France. Siersthal was gray under a wet snow mist. Overhead the artificial moonlight wiggled illuminating fingers toward the hidden enemy. Some GI patrol would probably raid Sussels and Freudenberg Farms tonight. A burp gun popped over on Steinkopf and a night owl hooted from the Reyersviller Road, a hoot which at times sounded suspiciously regular. Here at the company's Rear Echelon Shangri-La 750 yards behind the front there was light and warm stoves. Down in the 1st platoon there





Tower in front of French Garrison

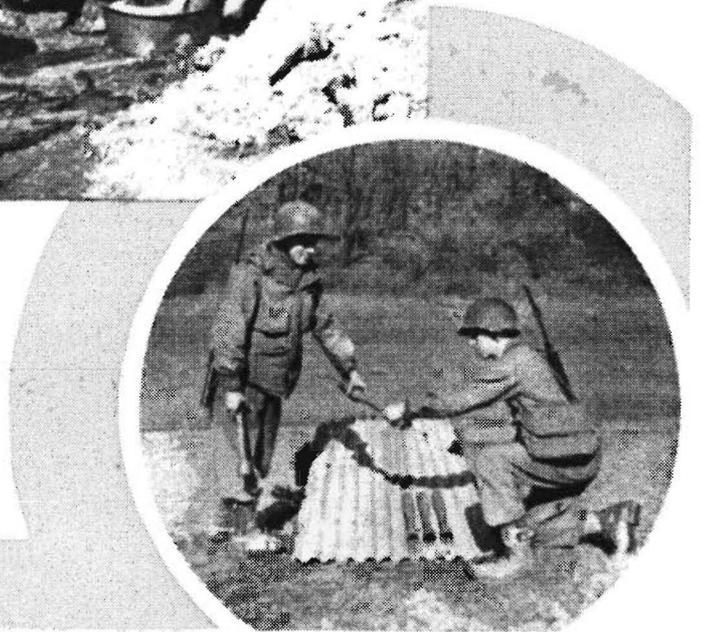
Looking Down Broadway from Grenade Terrace at the corner of Signalberg and Spitzberg

Sweating out the duration and six

Bathtub for two

Zehner's Zany, II . . . mortar shells fired electrically like bazookas

Aerial view of French Garrison . . . beyond the woods — the Maginot Line



was a game of 49 card stud poker going on. It looked like old times, like Bragg or on the ship.

Outside the little house above the church the second platoon guard challenged the approaching GI. "Give the password." "Cripes if I remember it. Some kind of a — oh yeah, Cigar!" "Brandy." The sentry started to whistle softly "It Had To Be You". From Enchenberg a 105 American howitzer let go with a new type artillery shell that buzzed over Siersthal and exploded in a dull orange "crump" somewhere in Bitch.

In the waning days of February there was a big moon which came up in the German East about 10 and set behind the American lines at 5. When the moon was down OP life was nerve-racking and doughfeet used grenades lavishly. When the moon did shine on the lonely outpost holes it lighted up the C ration cans around the foxhole like a diamond necklace, making the poor Joe on guard feel like a conspicuous young deb out among wolves. Deadwood crackled underfoot and patrols sent out after prisoners reported that the Jerries were playing hard to get.

Overhead in the night sky chugged the last of Goering's Luftwaffe Mohicans-Bedcheck Charley the scout plane. He never dared to venture out in daylight hours.

The last days of February the sun came out and a strong wind chased big white clouds across the Winter Line. On towering Signalberg, doughboys stripped to the waist, took baths in the natural springs which dotted the hillside, lay basking in the sunshine out front of their foxholes.

"Dear folks, Well here I am writing from a horizontal pose in the sun in No-man's-land. Just a-settin' on a salient, thas all.' Boy, the folks back home will really eat that up!"

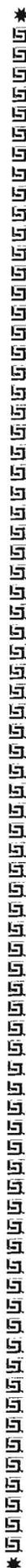
In the French Garrison guys lolled outside in easy chairs, German-piloted P-47's played cat and mouse with our Cardboard Annie back over Enchenberg. Doughs stacked Hershey bars from the last PX ration in neat wooden shelves in their foxholes.

"You know, I wouldn't mind 'sweating out the duration and six right here in this hole. We do our fighting with Zhukov and Patton via the Stars & Stripes. Nobody bothers us and we don't bother nobody. The Brass issue orders for us to police up the area, but I don't see any of 'em coming up front to check on it. Status quo, I love you."

A flock of geese flew over and the entire front line opened up. In the tiny hill-top village of Glasseberg, American Red Cross girls brought the finer things of life to the doughboy battalion in reserve. *The girls were 600 yards from the nearest Heinies but didn't write a book about it.* ARC gals went for combat Joes: they were more simple in taste, straightforward, and more appreciative than the Rear Echelon Commandoes.

Anti-tankers Henry Cosmos and John Williams drilled 27 rounds of HE down Broadway from Skytop. Commented foxhole analysts: "Reyersviller's catching Hell again!"

The March winds took over. S-2 heard a rumor that seven Germans in Reyersviller wanted to give up. George Company's 3rd platoon were appointed FBI to investigate. James Stiles and Ronald Fett scouted the 21 Full Blooded Infantrymen and moved into Reyersviller Past Hell's Corner shouting boldly in Deutsch to "Raus kommen!" It was so quiet you could have heard a mortar drop then a lone Jerry rifle cracked. A rash of rifles, machine guns, BAR's, machine pistols, burp guns, grenades, flares broke out. *Nobody surrendered.*



How mortar speak:



Fugitives from the law of averages . . . 4th platoon of King



*Garrison Promenade
Avec les SS's*

*K. C. K. C. K. . . .
the spice of life*



Underground Athletics

All the replacements — or reinforcements as the Army preferred calling them — went up to the Belgian Bulge all winter, but in early March the 399th began filling up. ME-110's bombed and strafed the French Garrison, American patrols probed Steinkopf and roamed freely up the deep canyon of the Kirscheidt. The enemy was becoming harder to contact all the time. A luckless George patrol to Steinkopf led by Carl Henry, Joseph Posterino, and John Harlowe stepped on shu mines.

March 7th psychological warfare was initiated. Loudspeakers were set up on Kirscheidt and Broadway.

“Come alone or in groups of two . . . make your way to the open ground and follow the paved roads West to the American lines . . . stay in the open . . . hands held high with palms forward (grenade precaution) . . . do not bring weapons . . . do not try to climb the high hills or go into the woods . . .”

Go West, young man, go West.

Pfc Robert Gustafson of King was wounded when a bullet from his BAR ricocheted off the Dragon's teeth. Captain Travis Hopkins led a platoon of Love in a successful daylight raid on the Needle's Eye.

Up North the 1st and 9th Armies were slugging toward the Rhine and Patton was zig-zagging up the Moselle Valley in a giant pincers against the Saarland which confronted the 7th Army with its Maginot and Siegfried Lines.

March 14th the sun put in long hours. Fleet upon fleet of P-47 "Jabos" and P-51 Mustangs rode herd over Shorbach and Bitche, strafing and divebombing the German rear echelon. That night the black dim-starred night was aglow with the awesome frenzy of colored flashes 50 miles away a Pirmasens was bombed over in Germany. A squadron of Flying Forts adjusted their Norden sights on Bitche's dormant Forts at midnight.

All during March when someone would mention the subject of jumping off, General Andy Tychsen had always replied with his tongue in his cheek, "Beware of the Ides of March." March 15th at 0100

the 399th resumed their private
little Bitche war one day
ahead of the 7th
Army jump-
off.

*



Et tu, infantryman... the Ides had come