5: CROSSING THE LA PLAINE

Advance elements of the Regiment reached the La Plaine on 18 November and were met with a furious barrage of artillery and small-arms fire, coming from the hills and emplacements across the river. The enemy was now aware of the trap in the making, and desperately concentrated his fire power in our new direction of attack.

Regardless, the 1st Battalion, with Company A in the lead, attempted a crossing of the river in the face of the withering fire, but the odds against the assault group were too great. The well-concealed Krauts burned this intended point of crossing with round upon round of artillery and small-arms fire, compelling Company A to withdraw and move west about five hundred yards where it succeeded in crossing despite heavy fire. With one company on the east bank of the river, the remainder of the Regiment dug in on the west bank toward the close of day.

Night in the Vosges at this time of the year falls fast and indescribably black. This new obstacle presented another unforeseen problem. The riflemen in the forward positions had to be fed and supplied with ammunition before morning. Jeeps could not operate over the rough terrain in the inky blackness and, if it were possible, the sound of their motors would in all probability invite enemy artillery and mortar fire.

Carrying parties from the Antitank and Ammunition and Pioneer Platoons were organized to bear rations and ammunition by foot. This was a long and tedious process. The only method the parties had of finding their way to the line companies in the pitch black was by holding on to the communications wire and trolleying their way forward over hundreds of yards of rocky, heavily underbrushed and uphill terrain in the pouring rain. Many times en route a carrier, bent under the load of a crate of rations and belts of ammunition, stumbled through barbed wire or deep mud only to lose hold of the guiding wire. Several

groped around aimlessly in the night over unfamiliar and mined territory for hours before they found their bearings. Too much cannot be said of these men who made it possible for the Regiment, on many occasions, to push successfully through the Vosges Mountains.

As the riflemen were being replenished with ammunition and supplies, patrols were sent out along the entire line in an effort to find just one weak spot in the strong German defenses. Determined resistance was met at all points except at the right flank of La Trouche, the town across the river. This was our opening. Here the 1st Battalion would smash through, gain the territory to protect the east flank of the bulk of the Regiment, as it crossed the river to sweep into the broad La Plaine Valley and complete encirclement of Raon-l'Etape.

The following morning broke partly cloudy but visibility was good. The 1st Battalion, with a company of the 325th Engineers in support, jumped off and started across the river. Enemy artillery and small-arms fire from the houses in La Trouche opened up but again, with Company A already across the river and in the lead, the battalion pushed on to clear the area and protect the flank of the 2d and 3d Battalions which were preparing to jump off.

Maneuvering in the rocky terrain was difficult. Hills were not gradually sloped but instead were steep and the men constantly exposed themselves in scaling the tough scrub bushes. There were many such hills which seemed to stretch in a never-ending range. With Jerry constantly looking down our throats and spraying our advance up the tortuous hillsides, each hill in the 1st Battalion's area was taken. Casualties were heavy but the doughs persisted in their efforts, thrashing their way upwards and eliminating each enemy strongpoint with well aimed grenades or a ripping burst of fire.

With its flank protected, the 3d Battalion pushed off from the north bank of the La Plaine River and proceeded in clearing the

heavily fortified hills in their sector of operations. Company K led and, while advancing over an open field on the opposite side of the river, met with a furious outburst of fire coming from the edge of the woods ahead. Squad flanking maneuvers eliminated the more effective enemy machine-gun nests, and finally the company wormed its way near enough to spring up and in a close-up fire fight killed or routed the enemy.

At the end of the day the entire 3d Battalion pushed across the open field, although subjected to observed artillery fire, and continued on to drive the Germans from the surrounding hills. Occasional bursts of fire punctuated the evening, but it was insignificant in comparison with the fire fighting earlier in the day. Sniper shots rang out and twanged through the valleys as the battalion dug in before their last big objective and Raon-l'Etape —Hill 578.

The next morning the 3d Battalion formed a huge line of skirmishers. Company L was to sweep up the left side of the hill, Company K the center, and Company I was to clear the right side. The men struggled through the underbrush up the face of the hill and had almost reached the crest when the entire hilltop broke out in a fury of staccato machine-gun and rifle fire. Tired from mounting the steep incline, the 3d Battalion men sprang into action at the first outburst of fire and deployed into position. Crawling and creeping through the heavy underbrush and enemy fire, they spotted the sources of fire and set to work wiping out each of the emplacements. At the end of the day Hill 578 was left smouldering and quiet but in the hands of the 3d Battalion.

Meanwhile the 2d Battalion pulled out of its flank protecting position, forded the La Plaine River and drove on in its mission of seizing the high ground north of Moyenmoutier. With Company G in the lead it pushed on across the open field on the south bank of the river and started up the steep side of Hill 603, drawing mortar and heavy small-arms fire. Halfway up, the first two platoons of Company G were pinned under a merciless blanket

of automatic fire coming from rock-banked positions. In a daring move the 3d Platoon crawled to a flanking position. Springing up and firing, they charged and routed the Germans at bayonet point.

The 2d Battalion drove on between the 1st and 3d to reach and occupy the high ground north of Moyenmoutier and close the mission of the 398th in the Raon-l'Etape area.

With the encirclement of Raon-l'Etape and the enemy driven from the citadels protecting it, the city itself lost all strategic importance to the Germans and fell easy prey to the 100th Division. The tough outer shell of the winter defensive line in our sector as well as that along the entire Seventh Army front was cracked wide open, and the Germans were in full retreat to their borders and defenses in the east.

Lieut. George F. H. Walters describes the action in these words:

The Vosges are silent sentinels that through the centuries have stood as a military obstacle to those armies that have tried to operate through their winding, tortuous trails and the dark recesses of their forests. Since very early times, when Caesar's legions pushed northward from Rome, these bulwarks that stand as guardians to Germany's southwestern frontier discouraged and disheartened many a hardy veteran. The very nature of their terrain, as well as the cold chilling rains and fogs that descend in early fall, followed by severe snows and freezing weather, is enough to turn the blood to ice in one's veins. Truly the elements join with the mountains to make this spot a most undesirable one in which to wage war. Surely no sector on the long Western Front presented a more difficult or trying problem to leaders and men than this vast wilderness that stretches to the Rhine and the Black Forest on Germany's southern flank.

The gray skies of November had come, and with them the rolling icy fogs that creep down through the ravines with their keen penetrating cold, turning the woodlands into a deep and dreary gloom.

If the French and American forces were to attempt a push in this region, it seemed disaster would face them. The German forces waiting patiently in their seemingly impregnable positions watched with confidence the movements of their enemies. The paths, trails, open ravines, and roadways were mined with all the devices known to German in-

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genuity. From the hidden depths of the woods, guns of various calibers covered each natural approach. The entire region seemed nothing more than a giant death trap waiting to spring closed upon those who had courage enough to venture near its shadowy domain.

Friday, 17 November. To the men of the 3d Battalion of the 398th Infantry it had no significance. One day is as the other along the dark muddy roads of the Vosges.

But to many of the weary doughboys who plodded along under the weight of their equipment; cursing the war, the weather, and their luck; jesting with their comrades; turning silently to thoughts of home and happier days in their minds; this march was their last. Death was close that Friday, but not as we were to know it in the days to come, when whining bullet and bursting shell would forever silence the grumblings or the laughter of many of the boys. Bodies of German soldiers, their green uniforms sodden and wet from the incessant rains, their hands ofttimes upraised in protest, reminded us that death was ever near. So many soldiers have died on the field with this last futile gesture. Some men peering at these silent bundles, bloody and distorted, said nothing; others pointed with a grimacing remark, "There's a good Jerry." Despite previous warnings of booby traps and mines, soldiers found time to snatch various articles for souvenirs from the German equipment that was strewn along the roadside. In the distance could be heard the mortar's ominous thud and the machine gun's spasmodic bursts; these were the only sounds reminding us that somewhere ahead were the gray-green legions of the *Wehrmacht.*

The long lines of tired troops streaming along the dark roadside, their young, anxious faces peering from beneath their helmets, and the forms of other soldiers sprawled in death in the gloomy shadows beneath the trees, seemed to bring to one's mind the words of the poet Housman when he wrote:

> Far and near and low and louder
> On the roads of Earth go by
> Dear to friends, the food for powder
> Soldiers marching off to die.

Darkness fell rapidly as darkness does at that time of the year in the Vosges and in the semi-gloom soldiers still moved quietly toward the chosen assembly area.

On gently sloping ground, in the cover of a forest that turned the early evening hours into an inky blackness, the troops pulled the equipment from their tired backs and set to work digging in. The thud

of intrenching tools, the rattle of stones against metal, and low murmurs of jest or complaint told the story that infantrymen were preparing their beds for the night. Darkness fell quickly; men constructed their holes carelessly, some too shallow; others with only twigs overhead to protect themselves from the deadly tree-bursts. So the men, armed with a false sense of security, lay down in the cold, damp darkness and attempted to gain a night's rest, only to have their slumber interrupted by the occasional bursts of enemy artillery.

The morning of the 18th. The day was wet, cold, and foggy, as the troops crawled from their holes or rose from where they lay, rubbing their eyes, and trying to shake a little warmth into their stiffened limbs.

It has been traditional with the Army that soldiers should hurry and wait. So in the hazy morning light men stood or huddled around in groups, eating their K rations, engaging in low conversation, and most of all, waiting. The subjects were typical of the American soldier: the vices and virtues of women, the war, their breakfasts, and a hundred other incidentals. But most of all they waited, looking anxiously at any officer or runner who appeared on the scene, and with all the inquisitiveness of the American soldier, not hesitating to greet him with, "What's up?"

Near noon that day company commanders, staff officers from battalion, and runners with radios, clustered around a large stump to receive the situation and orders for their first attack. The troops were tense with expectation, and rumors were rampant in the ranks. The eyes of the most unconcerned private turned towards a short, mild mannered, quiet-spoken man who stood in the center of the gathering—Lt. Col. Floyd Stayton, 3d Battalion commander.

For men untried in battle, the objectives were most formidable-looking indeed. The river was narrow, meandering down through a small open valley. Across that valley rose the hills that formed the objectives. The last one, the one farthest away, known to us as Hill 578, rose abruptly to a height of some 578 meters. Dark and forbidding forests covered the slopes of these hills, and the tops, brush, and timber stunted from the ever wearing winds crowned the heights.

Here the German forces waited for their enemies. Among their units that opposed our attack were the 708th and 716th Infantry Divisions. The artillery fire that fell into our area was thought to be that of the 658th Artillery Regiment, which had its headquarters battery well concealed in the overlooking slopes. Lieutenant General Richter commanded the 716th Infantry Division, and Lieutenant Colonel Fischer directed the operations of the 726th Regiment. With them

also were the 748th Regiment, known as the People's Regiment. Its 2d Battalion was led by Captain Fisher, with Captain Sturn and Lieutenants Esser and Grosskopt in command of the 1st, 3d, and 4th Companies, respectively. Although many of the German vehicles were horse-drawn, it can be said that this force was well equipped.

To many of the men that day, the situation was rather hazy, so from points of vantage they kept vigil. The battalion observation post was a small foxhole behind a stone wall and could only accommodate two men. Forward of this observation post, facing the enemy lines, Lieutenants Guga and Anderson set up their own mortar observation post, zeroing their guns in from this point in order to support the coming attack. The day closed with the battalion still in position; the order to jump off was for daybreak the next morning.

Night descended upon the valley, and under the protection of its darkness T/Sgt. Albert Campbell of Elizabeth, New Jersey, who was later to wear the bars of a second lieutenant, led the first patrol towards the river. It consisted of two squads from his 2d Platoon of Company K. His men had been chosen to protect the battalion observation post, so from their positions they stole forward, going down the slope into the valley. They crept to the shadows of the lumberyard and cautiously crossed the bridge, which they found intact, although the Germans had attempted to mine it. Once across, they moved behind the shelter of the river's bank, to the right some hundred yards or more, and then boldly crossed the field towards the woods. The night was very dark, but there was enough light to see a number of holes, which they assumed was the work of mortar fire. This evidence led them to believe that the field was zeroed in. After listening for some time without hearing or seeing any other signs of the enemy, they returned to report to Captain Jones. During the remainder of the night, three more patrols moved out. The first encountered nothing, while the last two reported that they had heard moving horse-drawn wagons.

Delay and confusion have been part of every battle since battles have been fought. This was true on the morning of the 19th. Daylight came, and Company K was still on the road, waiting to move across the bridge and into the valley to strike at the Germans. They were in a column of platoons with the 3d Platoon leading, followed by the 1st, Weapons, and 2d, in that order. The 2d was in reserve because they had borne the burden of running the patrols. Captain Jones, anxious to get his company moving, met Lt. Henry Pajak of Chicago, Illinois, leader of the 3d Platoon, and told him to cross the bridge and move towards the objective. Pajak was the first to cross the bridge. He turned

from the captain, gave his platoon the signal to follow, and started on a dead run across the planking. On reaching the other end, he turned to the right and streaked along an embankment that paralleled the river. Having gone some three hundred yards, he stopped to allow his platoon to overtake him. There they formed in a two-platoon front, the light machine guns on the flanks. Pausing a moment for breath behind the protective bank, the company, with the 3d Platoon on the right, the 1st on the left, and the 2d in reserve, proceeded across the field in line of skirmishers.

When Howe's red-coated grenadiers marched up the steep slope of Breed's Hill to be mowed down by New England farmers, one of the grave errors of the day was that the English veterans were packing close to 125 pounds of equipment. They finally threw off their heavy packs and drove the farmers from the breastworks. The doughboys of the 3d Battalion that day suffered from the same cumbersome load that the Redcoats must have generations before. Hooks and belts were unfastened, and packs went rolling away, and any other items that got in the way were readily tossed aside. Behind each attacking company was a wake of discarded equipment.

The 3d Platoon was nearing the woods; the Weapons Platoon to its immediate rear, was thundering over the wooden bridge like a horse on a barn floor, each man racing for the bank. And then it came; what they had expected, what they had waited for, and what they had feared. It came from the corner of the woods, a little off to the left. A Jerry machine gun opened catching one squad of the 3d Platoon with fire. The two lead platoons, the 3d and 1st, both reached a defilade in the middle of the field. The machine guns were following the lead platoons; one directly behind the left flank of the 1st Platoon and the other behind the right flank of the 3d.

In command of these guns was Sgt. Andrew Porter, of Long Beach, Long Island, who won the respect of every man in his company for the way he worked his machine guns into position to knock out the enemy fire that pinned down his beloved Company K. The enemy weapon opened up at the left of the field. Porter shouted to his right gun, "Watch the tracers!" No sooner had the glowing bullet been fired than his gun joined in. He made a motion to the right gun and ran about twenty yards, the right gun, manned by Privates First Class Hunt and Burrows followed on his heels. The left gun continued to fire to cover the right gun's advance. The right gun again in action, the left gun picked up and moved forward about twenty yards. In this manner were the guns leap-frogged forward, until the two were out in front of that defilade, their muzzles spewing forth the death-dealing pellets.

Porter, when speaking about that action afterwards, said, "Those boys are the best damned gunners in the Army." He was referring to Privates First Class Hanse, Burrows and Raymond Hunt. Their cool and rapid action had given the men of the two lead platoons the opportunity to reach the defilade. The gunners on the left were Pfc. Frederick Arheit of Toledo, Ohio, and Pfc. Edward Garrity of Jersey City, New Jersey.

In the meantime, the 4th Platoon mortarmen were working madly to get their guns in action. Within a moment, T/Sgt. Edwin Rajotte was up forward, observing where another machine gun had opened up, keeping the riflemen pinned down in the defilade. He shouted his orders back to Sgt. Joe Perry, of Birmingham, Alabama, who was controlling and directing the operations at the guns. The three mortars fired in battery, and within two rounds had knocked out the Jerry gun.

During the intense firing from the woods, Company K was pinned to the earth, and it seemed at that point that the Germans would annihilate them as they lay helpless on the open ground. Lt. Henry Pajak ordered a squad to work around to the right, using to screen their movements a patch of weeds that lay directly to their front. Their mission was to rout the enemy from their left and reduce the fire that was holding them helplessly at bay. The squad pushed off, moving through the weeds, which afforded a little concealment. Pajak feared a delay would give the Jerries the opportunity to open up with mortar fire, and was determined to fight his way to the enemy. He passed word back along the line that all eyes should be turned toward him and that everyone was to come up with his weapon firing. The green patch that had grown still under the raking fire of German guns sprang to life. Up leaped the men of Company K, their Mls firing with steady barks, until their weapons blended in one huge chorus that became a roaring staccato. They went forward in a rush, their bodies bent like men bucking a strong wind. Men always run like that in the face of enemy fire. This volume of fire, together with the fire of the leap-frogging machine guns left the Germans no choice but to seek shelter in a hole or retreat.

Our men pushed on, gained the edge of the woods, overran the German positions, and swept through the forest like an avalanche. Whether the Germans were caught napping, or whether the speed with which the Americans struck caught them off balance is not known. Some turned to fight, others fired a few shots and either surrendered or fled. Green-coated veterans of the *Wehrmacht*, with hands upraised, and the cry of *"Kamerad"* on their lips, greeted many a panting doughboy from the gloomy slopes of the first objective.

Company I followed the same route K had taken. As the 1st Platoon, led by Lt. Floyd McNally, Little Silver, New Jersey, crossed the field, they were fired at by snipers, even though Company K had already gone through the area. The 1st Platoon went straight into the woods, while the 2d Platoon of Lt. Raymond Snell, Saint Paul, Minnesota, fanned out to the left to clean out a pocket of snipers that kept the open field under fire constantly. Snell, after being pinned down by a sniper, arose from where he had hit the ground and calmly walked toward his enemy, emptying his carbine as he went. The remainder of Company I followed the route of the 1st Platoon. Company K had taken the first three objectives so Company I met only small pockets of snipers that Company K had been forced to by-pass.

Company L was the last to cross the field that afternoon, swinging left of Company I in the corner of the woods. Capt. Robert E. Brinkerhoff of Belleville, New Jersey, a big man with a harsh voice and an aggressive manner, went out ahead of his company to make sure that everything was going smoothly. He left the company in the command of Lt. William E. Nelson, of Birmingham, Alabama. Captain Brinkerhoff and his runner, Pfc. James R. McInnes of Brunswick, Georgia, went across the field in front of the 2d Platoon of Company M, a heavy machine-gun outfit following in close support of Company I.

The heavy machine guns of the 1st and 2d Platoons of Company M perhaps had the toughest time of all in this attack, for under the weight of their heavy guns and ammunition they constantly kept up with the rifle companies. Although these guns were used but little in this battle, they were always in position to support the fast-moving riflemen.

After Captain Brinkerhoff had crossed the field, he remained in the corner of the woods and watched his company advance across the open terrain. Only a platoon and a half crossed first. The rest of the company lost contact, and stayed behind until Lt. Samuel Titlbaum, Brooklyn, New York, was sent back to bring them across.

Once in the woods, Company L fanned out, swinging in a great arc to the left of Company I. Both companies came upon artillery pieces, horses with harnesses on, and other German equipment which the Germans had left behind in their haste to take off. The horses were unharnessed and were sent galloping away with a smart whack on the rump.

Late in the afternoon, with darkness approaching rapidly, the action slowed down. An occasional crackle of rifle fire or machine-gun fire flared up, but there were no real fire fights like the ones earlier in the day. Snipers still fired at our troops.

Darkness put an end to the fighting. The men dug in that night in the shadow of the last big objective, Hill 578.

The next morning broke at 0730, cold, damp, and dreary. The plan of attack was to have the three companies form a huge line of skirmishers. Company L was to sweep up the hill from the left, K from the middle, and I from the right. They were to converge on the top. Throughout the day, the companies lined the hill that in places resembled rugged cliffs, meeting pockets of resistance, none of which was organized.

A squad moved around to the left to outflank the Germans, killing one and capturing several others. It was at this time that the Jerries threw two counterattacks in this area. During an attack two doughboys, who had thus far failed to bag a German, spotted one creeping up on them. They commenced a conversation between them as to whether or not they should kill the man. While they continued their debate, the German continued to crawl toward their position. When within twenty-five yards of them he was shot by another soldier thus ending their debate and leaving both to lament their failure to bag a Kraut.

Company K, who had the mission of climbing the face of the slope was struggling through the underbrush and over the rocks in a column of platoons. It was the identical story of the two flank companies. They were allowed to approach almost to the crest and then the woods seemed to spring alive with fire. When the first bursts came, a number of men were resting for a few minutes to catch their breath. It caught them standing or sitting around rather nonchalantly; however it took the men but a few minutes to get into action and beat the Jerries at their own game. The fire pinned Captain Jones and the leading elements down. Lieutenant Pajak with his men went to their aid. Maneuvering around, they put a heavy concentration of fire upon the enemy, forcing him from the hill.

During the afternoon the sun broke through a cloudy sky but with the coming of night the gloom and fog settled down.

The companies consolidated their positions on the hill. Company L moved down the forward slope to dig in but was later withdrawn. Although the troops were ready to continue on, it was decided that on these heights that overlooked the small village of St. Blaise would be the place to await any further demonstration the enemy might make. Snipers still fired at men who exposed themselves to any extent.

Numerous and lengthy have been the tales told in history of the suffering of soldiers. Hallowed and sacred to American hearts are the hills

of Valley Forge. There liberty-loving men huddled together while icy blasts of winter with its drifting snow beat upon them. Here is where the bloody footprints on the snow bore testimony to their suffering. Indelibly inscribed in the minds of the 3d Battalion, 398th Infantry Regiment, is the name of Hill 578. What Valley Forge was to the blue-and-buff veteran of Washington's day this wind-swept hill was to these GIs. When the mantle of night put an end to their digging, there was but one thing to do—crawl into whatever shallow hole you had and wait until the light of morning came. With the coming darkness came a severe wind and a driving freezing rain. The men had no rolls for there was no possibility of getting them up to the positions in the darkness. In the first days of action men had discarded their packs and equipment in the heat of battle, so raincoats and blankets were lacking. There was nothing to eat, for they had dropped their rations along with the rest of their equipment. In fact, very little was in their stomachs, as they had eaten about one K ration apiece in the two days of fighting. It was in this condition that the doughboys huddled together as best they could in their holes and waited. The wind moaned in the trees around them, and those on the reverse slope received the icy blasts in their holes. The rain lashed at them with a cutting effect; their clothes were saturated. Bodies that had steamed with perspiration some hours before now writhed beneath each freezing blast. The downpour of rain filled the holes of the sufferers, driving them from a reclining position to one that would keep as much of their bodies out of the icy water as possible. They sat on their helmets and hid their numbed hands under their jackets. Some were driven out of their holes by the intense cold of their bodies, but once out, the intensity of the wind and rain drove them back in again. The wounded could not be evacuated, so in sodden German blankets that their comrades picked up they lay in their foxholes suffering silently, for any groans that may have escaped their lips were lost in the howling of the storm.

All night long through chattering teeth the question came in hoarse whispers, "What time is it?" At the answer, one could hear the usual remarks, "My God! How long will it last?" "I'm freezing to death." "Move over; it's running down my neck again." Men who braved the fury of the German guns now huddled together and whimpered like children. After a night that seemed as eternal as the ages, a faint streak of dawn began to appear. A few were able to crawl from their beds suffering. Somehow they got to their feet, and after they had gotten some movement back into their bodies, they helped drag other comrades from their holes, who dropped in their tracks from exposure. Men

attempted to build small fires to warm themselves, caring little whether the enemy saw them or not.

It was at that time that Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Ernest Janes came to the relief of the suffering troops. When darkness put an end to the battle of the 19th, carrying orders for the attack, accompanied by some forty men and six jeeps loaded with rations, ammunition, and water, the Major started in search of the battalion. In the darkness they picked their way over a tortuous trail through the hills. To keep contact was almost impossible. Two jeeps and a number of men became lost in the darkness. After a two-hour search they were found. At one point the jeeps were bogged down in mud. A group of prisoners passed by, and the Major motioned for them to push the vehicles. Whether the Germans did not understand the request or ignored it is not known. Getting no response, he whipped out his pistol and with a few wild gestures sent the Jerries scurrying to the jeeps, pushing like demons. The elements had unleashed their fury upon the caravan of struggling men as if to add to their misery. A tree crashed across the trail, blocking the passage of the vehicles. From there on the equipment had to be hand-carried. All night long the little band of men struggled up the hill, following a communications wire so as not to become lost in the inky darkness. They arrived on the summit of the hill with their life-saving loads at 0800 the next morning. The sight of the rations brought new encouragement to the nearly frozen troops.

The orders were to attack at 0700; it was a little past 1000 when the men moved out. The sun was shining, and its rays heartened them. Below lay a little village, and the mere sight of houses aroused the men. They had experienced the cold, wet gloom of the Vosges. They were ready to face anything the Germans had to get near a building. As they fanned out and strolled down through the forests, it was noticed that vehicles were in the village. Not taking any chances, they sprinted across the open fields until they gained the shelter of the first few buildings. There stood a GI truck. Underneath a shed two soldiers were busy over a jeep. Sighs of the profoundest relief were heard from the lips of the worn-out men. Out on the road some stopped to light a cigarette, others stood for a minute, looking back at the hill they had descended. Whatever ran through their thoughts we can only guess, for they turned and silently plodded on.

There was a break for the men in the village, and soldiers, mud-stained and drenched, swallowed coffee that the village women brought them. Soon little fires blazed along the road, and men tried to warm

their swollen hands or held their soaked feet toward the warmth of the flame.

Once along the road, they were able to march again without the fear of sniper bullets or machine-gun fire. The town of Moyenmoutier became their haven of rest; here were provided food, clothing, and shelter.

The crossing of the La Plaine will not go down in history as the names of Waterloo, Gettysburg, or the Marne, but to the 3d Battalion it was as decisive as any of these. Here is where bright-eyed youngsters from the classrooms, gangling youths from the farms, and men from other walks of life met the people who had trained long years for war and who thought they were destined to rule the world. Here is where this band of liberty-loving men routed the Supermen from their gloomy strongholds and beat them at their own game—war. Neither the elements nor German gunfire stopped them. This is a story not boastfully written, but with a reverence deep and full to the memories of those who served with the 3d Battalion, 398th Infantry. No towering monument, however colossal, can stand as a more fitting tribute to the deeds and valor of these men than their own symbol; a figure of an infantryman, mud-stained and battle-weary, who wrote with his blood and suffering the final chapter in the story of victory.

Regimental commander at OP