



The Battle of
BITCHE



For Christmas cheer we decorated pines or firs with packages from home and tinfoil dropped by planes to confuse radar detection.

Urbach. Since the enemy seemed to be holding positions no further forward than the northern side of Bitche, the 399th moved its main lines forward to where the outpost lines had been.

During darkness of 28 December, the division put "Plan Tennessee" into action. This was an attempt to achieve a defense in depth on a front so long that our lines were spread dangerously thin. Strategy called for each regiment to have two battalions on line and one in reserve. Every day of our defensive operations, each regiment was to dispatch a patrol of at least platoon strength, in daylight or dark, to gain information or take prisoners.

Continuing to work out defensive positions, the 1st Battalion of the 398th moved its CP to Petit Rederching while the troops took up Maginot Line positions east and north of the town. On the regimental right, the 3rd Battalion of the 398th moved into reserve—Co. I resting in Holbach, Co. K in Siersthal, and Co. L around Legeret Farm. The 2nd Battalion of the 399th, taking over from the 3rd Battalion 398th, left its defenses facing eastward along the Lemberg-Bitche highway and came into line next to the 1st Battalion 399th Inf. in position north of Legeret Farm.

As a part of the defense in depth, the 3rd Battalion of the 399th extended its lines across the entire rear area of the regimental front from Lambach south-

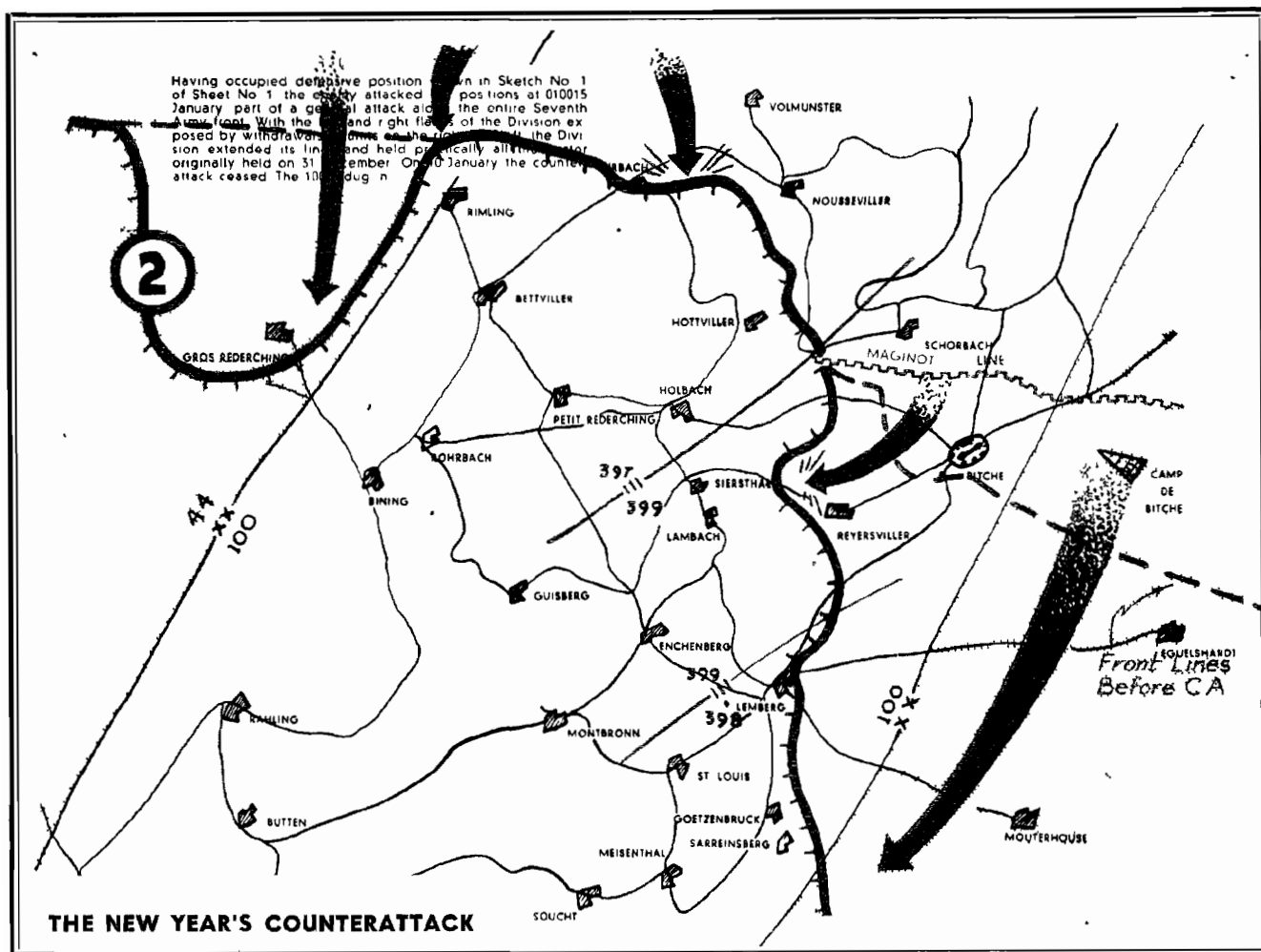
east across le Spitzberg to south of the little settlement Schwangerbach, making contact with the 398th on the left and the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron on the right. The 399th regimental Cannon Co. and Anti-Tank Co. and the 925th F A Battalion coordinated their fires with particular concern for the right flank. In the light of the attack which was soon to come this concern was almost a premonition.

Because intelligence reports showed that all American prisoners were asked a standard set of questions about gas masks and gas training, the division was again issued its gas masks on 29 December. The day was without military action, but there were further shifts in position. The 1st Battalion of the 397th shifted part of its front to the left near Rimling. The 3rd Battalion rearranged its positions on either side of Rimling with Co. K to the northwest, Co. L to the east, and Co. I south of the town for defense in depth. To each battalion of the 397th, one platoon of Co. A of the 23rd Tank Battalion was attached. Part of the front left by the 1st Battalion of the 397th was taken over by the 1st Battalion of the 398th when Co. B moved north from positions along the Maginot Line east of Petit Rederching to Hill 312, just south of Urbach. Co. A also advanced northeast by foot so that it was on line to the right of Co. B and on high ground between Urbach and Hottviller. Co. C remained in Petit Rederching.

In the 2nd Battalion sector, Co. G moved to reserve in Hottviller and Co. E took its place on line, capturing six prisoners whom Co. H had spotted. Co. F was still near Hottviller and the 3rd Battalion remained in reserve. When the 2nd Battalion of the 399th had completed its relief of the 398th around Freudenberg and Legeret Farms, it divided its zone into two parts, with Co. G next to the 398th and Co. E on the east next to the 1st Battalion of the 399th. Co. F was in reserve near Legeret.

A platoon of Co. C 397th, accompanied by four medium tanks and preceded by high explosive and smoke shells from the artillery, attacked across open ground to the hill east of Rimling and cleared the patch of woods, taking 19 PWs and finding 12 dead.

In mid-afternoon of 30 December, 11 P47s, some with German and others with American markings, strafed and bombed Hoelling, Petit Rederching, Maierhoff, Rohrbach, and Bining, killing three and wounding eight men in the 397th CP area. After nightfall, Lt. Robert H. Rush and 25 men from Co. G of the 398th, leaving their reserve positions in Hottvil-



ler, moved north through enemy lines and surprised the Germans in Dollenbach. The patrol sprayed the houses with automatic weapons fire, and even mowed down an enemy chow line of about 12 men. Having accounted for at least 25 enemy casualties, the patrol withdrew entirely unharmed. All during the day and night the enemy, too, had been trying to push patrols across No Man's Land, but the division held its ground.

The last day of the year was the first day of heavy snow. All signs showed that the enemy was being reinforced, and the Division G-2 section issued a report warning that the Germans were likely to make a large-scale attack sometime around New Year's. The 255th Inf., part of the 63rd Div., which as a division was not yet in the theater, was attached to the 100th Div. On its arrival in XV Corps area the 63rd was to make daylight reconnaissance preparatory to taking up positions between the Saar River at Wittring and a point south of Gros Rederching. These positions

in the Maginot Line area were a secondary reserve on the 100th Div's. left flank and formed the base of a wedge-shaped area between our division and the 44th Div. During the day a patrol from the 1st Battalion of the 398th captured 15 PW's in Urbach.

New Year's Eve Counterattack

New Year's Eve found us wrapped in the first heavy snowfall we had experienced in France. At home, the setting would have been perfect. There was a greeting card touch in the dancing snowflakes, the icicle burdened trees, the red-tiled farm buildings cloaked in holiday coats of white. And yet only a few yards ahead under the unbroken snow, behind a clump of sheltering pines, over the crest of a nearby hill, Death, the uninvited guest, waited.

Suddenly, the air was chilled, the snow wet and cold. In the foxholes, we stamped our feet to restore circulation and drew close the hoods of our newly issued white coats. It wasn't so much the fear of death



as the uncertainty of life which made one shiver. The soldier learns to look at death philosophically. But it was this business of living from second to second which made the burden so difficult. The ability to plan for the future is a prerequisite for human happiness. Here there wasn't even a few hours of respite on the eve of the western world's greatest festival. Here there was only waiting for an awakening from a dream-world, while we dangled in mid-air, suspended like puppets on a thread which a puff of artillery could break.

As an escape, we took refuge in reminiscing. We recalled happier New Years, wondered what friends and loved ones were doing, imagined the feverish preparations for the celebration. Had we been at home, we, too, would have had a date. It was nice to think about that. Soft, clean clothes, a warm room, thick steaks, music, a stimulating cocktail, the heady scent of a woman. Happy New Year! We cursed obscenely.

But we did have a date that night, a midnight show, an all-night party with thousands of screaming, drunken German Fascists whose leaders had chosen this as the psychological moment for their long expected counter-offensive. We were perfect hosts. The party was going to be a success even if our German guests didn't enjoy it.

Until late in the day, there was little indication that this was the beginning of a determined German counter-offensive which was to threaten the entire Seventh Army front. In general terms, the Germans drove southward in the vicinity of Gros Rederching and forced the withdrawal of the 44th Div. This drive exposed the 397th Inf. holding the 100th's left flank. At the same time, the enemy, taking advantage

of the enforced withdrawal of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron below Bitche, attacked the uncovered right flank of the 399th from the east and south. Our division was thus in danger of being cut off by the two prongs of a double envelopment. Had these two German drives, attacking toward each other, been able to meet, the 100th would have been completely outflanked from four sides. That we did contain the enemy's thrust to three sides, is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that our lines were spread dangerously thin on a single front and that we were prepared to hold that front only. Two factors can be attributed to this success: the great skill with which, though handicapped by insufficient troops, we had been deployed for defense in depth; and the individual fighting qualities of the American soldier.

The enemy offensive began innocently enough. A Kraut patrol hit the right center of the 399th's Co. B, entrenched on the northeast corner of le Schoenberg Hill, south of Bitche. The patrol was driven off after a brief fire fight, but it had marked the line where the attack was to come in force.

Preceded by colored flares, the first attack came on just this portion of the line in late afternoon. Striking from southeast of Bitche, the enemy cut across Junction 304 on the Lemberg-Bitche highway. This assault, in considerable force, was driven off by machine gun fire. To meet this attack the 1st Battalion of the 399th was in prepared positions on high ground. Co. A was on the hill called le Schimberg north of Reyersviller, and Co. B was on le Schoenberg just west of the Lemberg road with an outpost of six men in the College de Bitche, another outpost of ten men east of the highway, and a third outpost in a house along the road. With each company was a platoon of



heavy machine guns. Twenty mortar men from Co. D were also in line as riflemen.

At 2130, four hours after the first attack, Co. B reported that the enemy was sending up a great number of flares. The Germans began firing on the outposts half an hour later but were apparently stopped, though communication with the College was knocked out. By the light of flares, the outpost to the east of the road counted 20 dead to their front and reported hearing fighting to the east as though the 117th Cavalry were being attacked.

The firing batteries of the artillery, the regimental Cannon Company, and the mortars had all planned to unleash a few rounds just at midnight as a celebration for the New Year. They had already been alerted for this fire when word came back to the mortars that the enemy was firing on the outpost along the road. The mortars opened up. Shortly, the artillery fired its celebration and caught the main body of the attackers right on the primary targets.

This fire and that of such weapons as Sgt. Clifford W. La Belle's light machine gun, stopped the attack. La Belle, of Co. B's Weapons Platoon, was located in an open field 100 yards to the front of a group of buildings called Wolfsgarten Farm at the right of the company. In this outpost, the machine gun was supported by ten riflemen. Enemy tracers set the barn on fire, and the flames silhouetted the position, but the men continued firing their gun. Later, La Belle exposed himself to run 300 yards to the woods to obtain additional ammunition and a new barrel for the machine gun which had been burned out by the outpost's continuous firing.

Two hours later, the enemy made his third attempt

The great winter defense before Bitche was a commentary to the men who dug the positions and manned the outposts.

against the outpost on our east flank. The attack was in full force, when an officer of the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron, on the division's left flank, telephoned Maj. Lawrence A. Conrey, S-3 of the 399th.

"We're falling back a little," he said.

"How far is a little?" Maj. Conrey asked.

"About two thousand yards," was the reply.

The major swore. "Do you have to fall back so far all at once?"

His answer was a click of the telephone. The mechanized cavalry is effective mainly as a striking force. When it comes to holding ground, it is impotent. Actually, the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron withdrew a great deal further than 2000 yards. By mid-afternoon, they had fallen back as far as Wingen, eight or nine miles to the south, only to find that the enemy already was in the town. The cavalry then turned back and moved off westward out of the combat zone.

By 0230, the enemy, in his third attack, was already capitalizing on the withdrawal of the cavalry and, while striking the Co. B main line of resistance from the northeast, was also coming against our right flank outpost from its unprotected east side. With Sgt. La Belle at the machine gun continuing to delay the enemy, the outpost began to move back, taking successive positions to hold off the Germans. For two hours T. Sgt. William T. Kelleher, Tec. 5 Leon D. Beacham, Pfc. Robert H. Douglas, and the other riflemen with La Belle kept the enemy away from the MLR. They moved into the area of a Co. C. platoon on the east side of the Lemberg highway, aided it in



Above, stringing wire entanglements. Right, a wire crew, dressed in white camouflage suits, warms up in the open.

its delaying fight and withdrawal, and then reported to the B Co. CP. Here they were given the task of guarding the right flank of the command post.

Completely cut-off by the enemy after the enforced withdrawal of their company, the six B Co. men holding an outpost in the College de Bitche were engaged in a life and death comedy-drama with 300 Germans which would have done justice to the wildest Hollywood scenario writer.

The six men, Pfc. Irving W. Bower, Andrew Powell, and Juan Meza, and Pvs. Porter W. Lane, Willis C. McIntyre, and Carl L. Eyverson, had been in their advanced listening post for several days. In the darkness of this New Year's morning, one of the team spotted the approaching column of Jerries, and the helter-skelter to disappear began. With all normal exits from the college blocked by the enemy, the Baker Co. men asked one of the French civilians who inhabited the building whether there was any secret way out. In answer, they were led to a room where a window had recently been sealed with cement blocks.

With only their bayonets and trench knives as tools, the six men began hacking at the cement bulwarks in an effort to loosen the blocks. Down the corridor, they could hear footsteps approaching. Andy Powell, a full-blooded Indian, moved to the side of the door and waited. Just as the first block came loose, a rifle butt crashed against the closed door. A solid blow smashed a panel, and a German, holding a candle, poked his head through the opening. That was a bad error and showed poor training. Powell blew the Kraut's stupid head off with one rifle shot.

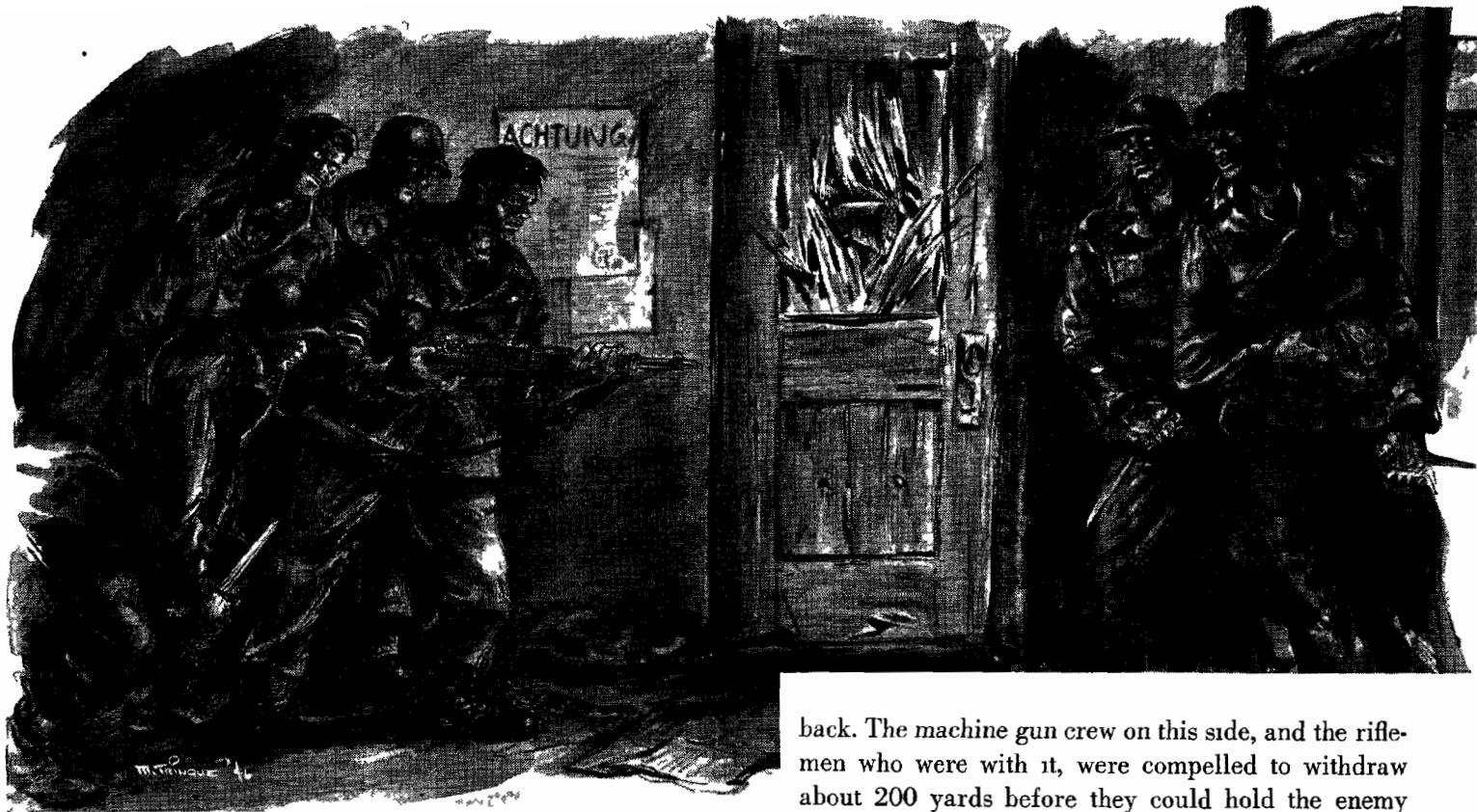
Working frenziedly, the Co. B men enlarged the hole in the blocks while the battering at the door was resumed with renewed vigor as additional Germans rushed to the scene. Finally, the hole was large enough for them to crawl through, and the Centurymen, abandoning all their equipment except for Meza's sub-machine gun, squeezed through the opening.

To their chagrin, the Baker men found that the window led to another corridor instead of the great outdoors and safety. Spotting a German at the far end of the passage, Meza cut him down with the tommy-gun, and the six men took off around a corner in the opposite direction as a flock of Krauts, attracted by the firing, dashed after them. Luck was with the Co. B men. By accident, the Americans stumbled upon a basement furnace room and scrambled into the dark flues. Almost holding their breath, they waited tensely in their sooty hiding place while the Germans searched the room.

The morning and afternoon dragged on slowly. The sound of voices and the scrape of hob-nailed boots could be heard plainly by the Baker men as the Germans combed every room in the corridor and other parts of the building. At last, the noise of the hunt died away. For the moment, at least, they were safe.

Waiting until nightfall, the six men left their hiding place and tiptoed upstairs where they found a room with an outside door on the far side. On the floor of the room, however, three Krauts lay sleeping. Taking a desperate gamble, the Americans stealthily stepped over the slumbering Germans and opened the door with a prayer that it would not squeek.

Luck was still with them. The German sentry was just turning a corner of the building. The Americans



waited until the sentry was out of sight and made a dash for the woods, 300 yards away. Rapidly as possible, the six Centurymen began to climb a slope which led to our lines. They were brought up short by an American voice from a foxhole and the ominous command "Halt! What's the password?"

The six men could have kissed that sentry. In American, Bower answered, "We're just looking for Baker Co. We've been lost for 16 hours."

At the front, one can never tell what will happen in such a situation. But, fortunately, the soldier believed them. By midnight, they had been taken to an artillery headquarters to be identified.

Because of the difficulty of maintaining communications, the 1st Battalion of the 399th did not know that the Recon had already fallen back at least 4000 yards, but the battalion reserve was sent to the right flank anyway. The reserve platoon of Co. A was placed just east of Co. B along with two rifle platoons of Co. C. These troops went across the Lemberg road and took positions facing east. The remaining platoon of Co. C was the battalion mobile reserve.

Before daylight the Germans threw in a short artillery barrage against Co. B. Then they sprang their fourth and most powerful attack. With this one they almost succeeded. The two platoons of Co. C which were facing east held against the severe pressure, but the major thrust of the enemy against Schoenberg Hill and the right flank of Co. B caused our lines to fall

back. The machine gun crew on this side, and the riflemen who were with it, were compelled to withdraw about 200 yards before they could hold the enemy advance. T. Sgt. Rudolph Steinman of Co. D, who was with this gun crew, notified the battalion CO that he was moving back and asked for some riflemen to support him in an attempt to retake the position. He was promised a platoon, and the understrength platoon of Co. C, which had been the mobile reserve, was sent to Steinman's positions. When daylight came Steinman had fought back with his MG-crew nearly to his original position. Elements of Co. B were now to come up and take over from the Co. C platoon. Across the road from his position, Steinman could see two enemy digging in. He shot one, and the other surrendered. While Co. B returned to its positions, the enemy dug in to await reinforcements. Unfortunately for the Germans, Co. B had good observation of these reinforcements coming from Bitche, and accurate artillery fire blasted group after group of the enemy as they attempted to move into line.

At 0815, an enemy artillery shell struck an ammunition truck passing the CP of Battery A of the 925th F A Battalion. While the medics were trying to rescue the truck driver and battery men were struggling to put out the fire, the ammunition exploded, injuring two medics and two artillerymen.

Initially, the 399th was disposed so that its front faced northeast toward Bitche, the 3rd Battalion holding rear area lines to give depth to the defense. But with the sudden withdrawal of the 117th Cavalry, the regimental flank suddenly became the front which now extended as far back as Sarreinsberg, or Wingen, or



With the ground frozen hard as flint, digging in for the expected counterattack became a major problem.

Marseilles, for that matter. With Co. L in reserve, the remainder of the 3rd Battalion held the ridges to the rear of the front lines, ridges which began with le Steinkopf, just east of Siersthal, and curved southeast to a height east of Lemberg.

Co. K of the 398th, attached to the 399th, blocked the enemy on the west of le Steinkopf. The 2nd Platoon of Co. K 399th, with a section of light machine guns, held Steinkopf and Signalberg as the left flank of the secondary defense. Just to the east, the 1st Platoon of Co. K, with one heavy machine gun and an anti-tank gun, covered a point of woods at the head of a draw between Signalberg and Spitzberg and maintained a three-man outpost in Reyersviller. Co. K's 3rd Platoon stretched across the northeast face of Spitzberg to the Lemberg-Bitche road at the Kollert road junction, with an outpost in Schwangerbach where the Reyersviller road joined the Lemberg highway.

Beyond the highway, covered by a section of heavy machine guns, the 3rd Platoon of Co. I was dug in on the north slope of Rundenkopf. The east slope of Rundenkopf was occupied by the 1st Platoon of Co. I. The 2nd Platoon defended le Staengelberg, the high ground between Rundenkopf and the Lemberg-Bitche railroad. A four-man outpost held Wolfsbronn Farm.

This outpost first discovered that it was in the front lines when in mid-morning 30 Germans began firing on the building in which they were housed. In a running fire fight during which a BAR was used to good advantage to make the enemy keep close to the ground, the outpost moved back to its lines. Farther north in Reyersviller, the Co. K outpost was also finding that the enemy might at any moment have them surrounded,



and they too fell back to their main lines. Since the enemy was exploiting the open flank by making end runs further and further south, two platoons of Co. L were sent out to Hochfirst ridge, just east of Lemberg, with two mortars and three heavy machine guns for support. They sent an outpost south to the other side of the Lemberg-Bitche railway.

All morning the enemy had been moving more troops to his front opposite Co. B. Suddenly, just at noon, a mob of German soldiers leapt out of their holes and trenches and came running toward the Co. B lines on Schoenberg Hill. Screaming, howling, and cursing above the sound of their fire, they ran upright, ignoring cover, and acting as though they were drunk or doped. This first wave shattered itself against the crossfire of our machine guns and accurate mortar shelling. The Germans who escaped dodged back until a second screaming wave caught up with them and swept them forward again.

T. Sgt. Steinman had been digging in his machine gun in the area of the Co. A platoon on the right flank of Co. B, when at least a company of the insanely charging Germans began rushing his position. Pfc. "Rip" Farish who was with him shouted, "Let's take off! Let's get the hell out of here."

"Take off? Look at 'em come! I've been waiting two years for this."

Waiting until the Germans were only 50 yards away, Steinman began to fire. Farish said later that he had never heard a machine gun sing the way that one did. One hundred Germans were killed in successive charges against the gun.

Just as this fifth attack against the Co. B main positions began, the two platoons of Co. C, east of the Lemberg Road and to the right of Co. B, reported that the



enemy was attacking them and apparently trying to make a flank assault from the southeast. These platoons held against the attack, and the reserve platoon of Co. C took up positions to their rear. But the enemy was able to by-pass the positions to the south and slash through to the Lemberg road to the rear of the Co. B main lines on Schoenberg. Then, wheeling the attack northward, the Germans overran and completely surrounded the reserve platoon of Co. C which fought on until all but four of the men had been killed or captured. These four were able to sneak through to our lines when the enemy attack had gone beyond them.

The German's northward attack carried them to the rear of the Co. B CP. The Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon from the Battalion Headquarters Company and all the Co. B men who were around the house where the CP was located, formed a defense line. Crouching at a window S. Sgt. William Bartscher, the forward observer for the 925th F A Battalion, called for artillery to be dropped on spots as little as fifty yards from his own position. This damaging fire and that of the small group of defenders who used up more than 400 rounds of ammunition, held the enemy for two hours. Much of this fire came from the machine gun of Sgt. La Belle who was firing from an upstairs window of the house. Worried for fear this barrel would also burn out, as an earlier one had, La Belle continually oiled his gun. He was among the last to leave when the CP group withdrew and was captured before reaching our lines.

The order for Co. B to withdraw from its positions on Schoenberg and fall back west to Schimberg Hill in line with Co. A, came at 1500 in the midst of this defense. By this time, the enemy, attacking from both

the northeast and the south, had almost closed the escape route. The Co. B men began to fall back by two's and three's, moving cautiously along the wooded ridge. Some of the men on the right flank cut across to the high ground south of the Reyersviller road and reached the positions of Co. K. Sgt. Steinman with his machine gun crew and the platoon of Co. A, which was with him beyond the Lemberg road, moved back from one position to another. While the machine gun moved to a new spot, the platoon kept up a fire from the flank. Then when the MG was able to give them flanking fire for cover, the platoon fell back. Working this kind of alternate crossfire, the men were able to reach Enchenberg where they were ordered to go to the rear of the new positions of Co. A.

The 925th F A Battalion was also ordered to move back to Enchenberg.

Having held the enemy off and even forced him to pull back a little to escape our artillery shells, the Co. B CP group had given some of the company time to reach the new lines. Capt. Altus W. Prince, Sgt. Bartscher, and Pfc. Earl K. Oliver with two others now set out for a ridge 1500 yards to the west. They were taken prisoners and failed to reach the new area. In another tragedy of the withdrawal, the driver of a jeep in which three wounded B Co. men were being taken back to the aid station was shot. The jeep careened over a bluff, killing all the men.

Though Co. A had swung its right flank back slightly so that its lines ran nearly straight south from Freudenberg Farm, the burden of fighting off the enemy while moving to new lines fell on Co. B. To cover this withdrawal, Lt. Joseph Nageotte and his 81mm mortar platoon fired nearly 1000 rounds at minimum range. Then in the dusk, when the mortar men had already removed four of the tubes, they were set upon by the enemy. Firing the two tubes still in position as well as their small arms against the Germans who came up from their right rear, the mortar men repulsed the Jerries and, leaving the base plates which were frozen in the ground, took their tubes with them back to Lambach and Enchenberg.

When the two platoons of Co. C east of the Lemberg road—platoons which had beaten off all attacks only to have the enemy by-pass them to the west—had fallen back and re-assembled in Lambach, the 1st Battalion's readjustment of its lines was complete.

During the late afternoon the enemy had also been attacking in the 3rd Battalion area further south. Shortly after Co. K of the 255th Inf., reinforcing our



Moving against Bitche. Note the shin-deep mud covering the field.

division, had moved to support positions on Hochfirst Ridge near Co. L of the 399th, the enemy attacked both Co. L and Co. I to the north. Co. I killed all of a small force of enemy who approached from Wolfsbronn Farm. The enemy force attacking Co. L was spotted by the outpost on the south side of the Lemberg-Bitche railway as they came along the tracks. The outpost sent this information to the sergeant in charge of the 2nd Platoon. He began to lead two squads along the north side of the tracks so as to fire on the attackers from across the railway area. But the outpost fired first, and the Germans tore across the tracks right into the path of the two squads. The fire-fight lasted about 30 minutes. Then another enemy force came at the two squads from the northwest, charging and screaming as though expecting to overrun our men who, instead of being trampled under foot, continued to fire as they pulled back to their foxholes. Because it was dusk and their losses had been severe, the Germans dug in.

The company now had to cover so large a front, there was a gap on the northeast face of Rundenkopf Hill between the first and third platoons of Co. I. Through this gap about 30 enemy infiltrated just before dark and reached Kollert Hill on the Lemberg Road one-half mile to the west. Capt. Alfred E. Olson, Co. I CO, shifted his second platoon to the left and a Co. L platoon moved up so that the enemy was pocketed. Five Germans were killed. When the night closed down, the enemy made no attempt to break out and before dawn the 3rd Battalion had shifted its positions from the area.

The 3rd Battalion of the 255th Inf., whose Co. K was already in line, moved into Lemberg and began



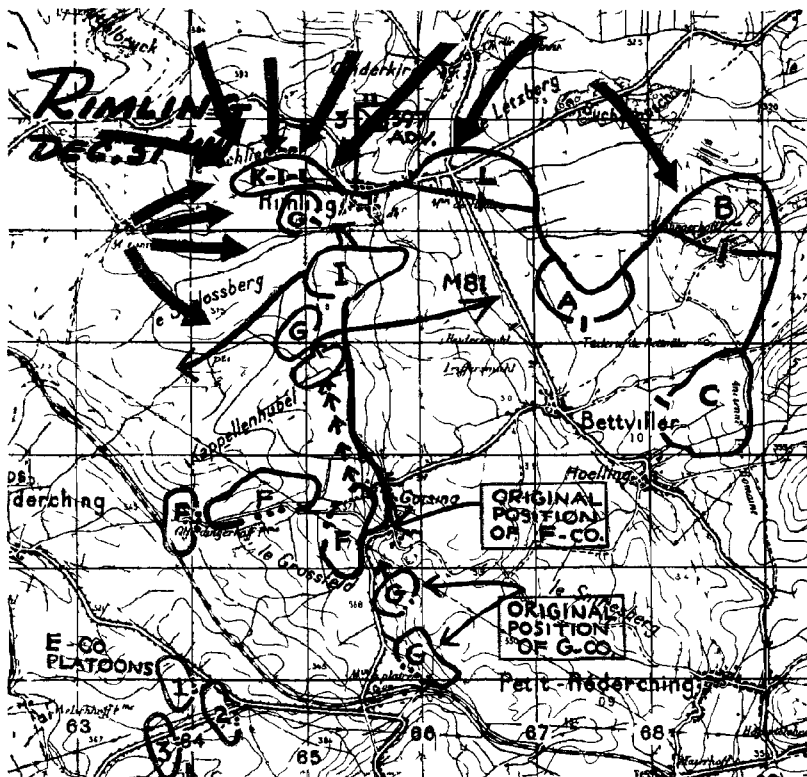
A mortar crew prepares to "throw 'em in". Empty cases tell own story.

to take positions facing east and running from Road Junction 404, southeast of Lemberg, north to Rundenkopf. These reinforcements made possible the closure of the gap in the lines of the 3rd Battalion of the 399th. Further support was on the way. The CO of 3rd Battalion, 141st Inf., 36th Div., arrived at the CP of the 3rd Battalion 399th, a couple of hours before midnight with the word that his outfit, a part of VI Corps reserve, was to take over the area east of Lemberg to help shorten and seal off the exposed and extended flank. This outfit was to establish itself from Road Junction 404, southeast of Lemberg, to the junction at Kollert Hill on the Lemberg-Bitche road two kilometers north of the town. Since Kollert Hill was already the right flank of Co. K of the 399th, this change meant that Cos. I and L, further south, would move out. They were ordered to take new lines west of Co. K and reach across the Steinkopf Hill in line with the 1st Battalion.

The first twenty-four hours of 1945 thus ended for the 399th, after the regiment had sustained five vicious enemy attacks in the area of Co. B and held against deeper and deeper encircling attacks on its unprotected right flank.

The enemy had also attacked against the left flank of the division at the same time as he began his major offensive against the eastern flank. On the west Co. K of the 397th Inf. faced the chief force of the enemy's attack.

On the last day of 1944, the 3rd Battalion of the 397th held the 100th's western flank in the area around Rimling. To the west was the 71st Inf. of the 44th Div. The 1st Platoon of Co. K 397th Inf. was dug in on a bare hill called le Schlietzen north and west of Rim-



ling. This hill was the highest peak in the area and commanded all the ground to the north and west. To the south, it extended in a long, somewhat lower ridge or series of ridges running past Guising, two or three kilometers south of Rimling, almost to Rohrbach. This ridge was higher than the other ridges to the west. Just east of the positions of the 1st Platoon of Co. K on the north end of this commanding ground, were the lines of the 2nd Platoon. These lines covered the highway running from the north into Rimling and were the northernmost positions of the battalion. The positions of the 3rd Platoon of Co. K ran southwest along the highway and ridge and then turned east to include the north edge of Rimling itself.

The east end of Rimling was held by Co. L. Its lines extended eastward along the highway between Rimling and Epping-Urbach to its crossing with the north-south highway between Günderkirch and Bettviller. From here, the Co. L positions turned east about half a kilometer into the open ground to the right of this crossroads.

The 1st Battalion of the 397th, as the right element of the regiment, extended about two kilometers east of the 3rd Battalion in the direction of Urbach. Co. I formed the secondary defense in positions running east and west just south of Rimling, supporting the entire front of the battalion. The heavy mortars of Co. M were set up in a dry creek bed east and south of Rimling and to the rear of Co. L. The 2nd Battalion was in reserve, with Co. F around and west of Guising,

Co. G south of Co. F on hills above the Gare de Rohrbach, and Co. E deployed around the road junction west of the Rohrbach railway station. These support positions, like those of the 3rd Battalion of the 399th on the right side of the division, were to become front positions when the division flank was exposed.

Because the 397th had been in these positions for a few days, our foxholes were deep and had been roofed over with logs and earth. In the bare earth these were well camouflaged, but the snow which fell late in December, shortly before the attack, made them almost invisible. The warning from division G-2, a couple of days before the attack, that the Germans were likely to start an offensive sometime near New Year's caused the 3rd Battalion Commander, Major William Esbitt, to order all the men to be on the alert twenty-four hours a day. Both Co. K and Co. L had a platoon of heavy machine guns set up as a part of their defenses, and there were four tanks in Rimling to be used as emergency defensive fires.

Just after dark on the last day of the year Co. I sent a patrol from its support positions into Gunderkirch, for, although the enemy lines were known to be generally north of the positions, his main lines had not yet been determined. Just before midnight the 71st Inf., 44th Div., to the west of Co. K, sent word that they were being attacked by at least five companies of enemy. The battalion commander alerted the already alert battalion, and the patrol from Co. I was recalled. It reported that it had encountered no Germans either going out nor coming back.

At midnight, as a New Year's celebration, the 374th F A Battalion took part in a total fire by division and corps artillery, firing one round of high explosive and one round of smoke from each gun.

A few minutes later the enemy attacked along the entire battalion line, with especial force against Co. K on Schlietzen Hill. Apparently hoping to have the advantage of surprise, the Germans advanced without artillery fire, but the companies had been on the alert for this attack for some time and were ready for it. As he had done on the 399th front, the enemy came at our lines without trying to take cover, rushing forward bold upright and shouting such things as "Yankee bastards" and other obscenities. The Jerries attacking on this front were known to be elements of the fanatic 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. They were clearly determined to take Schlietzen Hill. About two hundred men attacked the 2nd and 1st platoons of Co. K. Our men used every weapon available in fighting off the

Pvt. Leon Outlaw, the Co. M machine gunner who played an important role in stopping the enemy by killing an estimated 100 Krauts.

Krauts. In the 2nd Platoon area, on the top of the hill, the right-flank heavy machine gun manned by Pvt. Leon Outlaw of Co. M tore holes through the advancing Germans and did much to stop the attack. To the east along the highway, however, the enemy overran the positions of the Co. K first platoon, and 18 or more Germans reached the north edge of Rimling where they attempted to set up machine guns to the rear of the 1st Platoon positions. S. Sgt. Moore fired on this group and killed one of them, then called for fire from the tanks within Rimling itself. After a few rounds of hits and near-misses from this tank fire; the enemy fled from the town, leaving guns and equipment behind.

Although the first wave of the offensive had been stopped as a co-ordinated movement, small groups still remained on the Co. K front and continued to fire. Often they stood upright and hollered "American gangsters" or "Yankee bastards" as they fired. This unexplainable behavior allowed our men to kill or wound many of them. Frequently, with a kind of insane heroism, the wounded Nazis continued to fire from where they had fallen. Small groups also tried to infiltrate through our lines. Since many of these Germans wore white camouflage suits, it was nearly impossible to see them against the snow. But when they moved they were revealed in the bright moonlight and cut down by our rifle fire.

The main power of this first assault had been released against the two western platoons of Co. K on Schlietzen. But there had been heavy patrol action against the 3rd Platoon deployed along the northern edge of Rimling, and against Co. L along the road to Epping-Urbach and in the area around and beyond the crossroads. Coming from the north, one of these patrols was able to enter the outskirts of Rimling. Two Germans came within rifle range of the Co. L CP in a building in the east end of town.

Sgt. Steen, at the doorway, fired upon them, killing one and wounding the other. This wounded German he then persuaded to come into the house to have his wound treated. The Jerry seemed chiefly interested, once he had been persuaded to give up, in getting out of combat and back to a rear area.

Co. L had its machine guns set so as to fire on an area about 75 yards to the front, a close-in fire intended to increase the deadliness of the weapons. During the night, Sgt. Robert L. Madren reported an



enemy patrol trying to attack frontally from the northeast against his position. Then he waited to allow the four Germans in the lead to come very near his hole. Firing with great rapidity at very close range, he killed all four, and the rest withdrew.

All through the period, after the first wave of the attack, while the men of Cos. K and L waited for the enemy to form his new assault which they knew would come, the 3rd Battalionites could hear the sounds of heavy fighting on the front of the 71st Inf. to the west. The prospects were none too pleasant.

When the first enemy attack had been beaten off after about an hour, sounds to the front of Co. K showed that the Germans were regrouping to make another attack. This time, as though realizing that there was no chance of surprise, the enemy began his onslaught with an artillery barrage. Immediately after the artillery and mortar fire had lifted, more than 300 Germans, screaming and shouting, rushed toward Co. K from the north and northwest. This foolhardy assault was stopped because the fire from Co. K maimed or killed whole groups of the attackers.

In the lull, one platoon of Co. I went into line just to the east of the flank platoon of Co. K and another Co. I platoon took over positions within the area of the 1st Platoon of Co. K on the east slope of Schlietzen Hill. The other platoon of Co. I and the Weapons Platoon remained in the support positions south of Rimling. Although the 374th F A Battalion fired several missions to the west in aid to the 71st Inf., that



regiment dropped back. Because of a failure of communications, the 3rd Battalion of the 397th was not informed of this withdrawal which further exposed its left rear area to the enemy.

The third wave of the enemy offensive, again preceded by artillery, came just before dawn. Although it was repulsed, the Krauts discovered the unprotected stretch of about a thousand yards along the 3rd Battalion flank where the 71st Inf. had fallen back: Small German patrols began to by-pass Co. K's positions on the heights of Schlietzen and, by swinging south, worked into Rimling from the southwest. The terrain south of Schlietzen Hill is slightly lower than the crest of the hill but is still a high ridge dominating the land to the west. When the enemy began to come across this ridge, the platoon of Co. I which had remained in support when the others went forward, was sent to ridge positions south of the Co. K flank with part of the Weapons Platoon as support. Even when this platoon was given two tanks for additional support there were not enough men to fill the gap. The Germans, still noisy and apparently indifferent to danger, continued to attack and infiltrate through the openings in our lines.

With the enemy infiltrating behind its positions and continuing to make small attacks from its front, the 2nd Platoon of Co. K was forced to draw back off the top of Schlietzen.

S. Sgt. Saul Scheiman of Co. I directed deadly mortar and artillery fire on these enemy patrols, stopping many of them. But one group of about platoon strength managed to enter the south end of Rimling. There they assembled in front of a church. In the

tower of the church where he had an excellent view of the entire area was 2nd Lt. James S. Howard, forward observer for Battery C of the 374th F A Battalion. For weapons Lt. Howard had a grenade, a carbine, and a pistol. It was still not quite light, but Howard dropped the grenade into the midst of the enemy group and then fired a magazine from his carbine and one from his pistol into the patrol. Those Germans who were still alive and able to move dashed across the street and into a house opposite a church. After daylight some men from Co. I headquarters surrounded the house, threw a hand grenade into the basement window, and ordered the Germans to surrender. One by one, 20 Jerries came out of the cellar and gave up.

With Germans on three sides, with patrols constantly engaging in fire-fights against them, and with enemy artillery fire falling in and near their positions, the 2nd Platoon of Co. K, even after it had withdrawn from the top of Schlietzen, was in a very hot situation. The Co. K commander, 2nd Lt. Robert Harris, went up to see the condition of this platoon. He was fired on by snipers and his progress was marked by artillery and mortar fire, but he decided that the platoon ought to attack and retake the hill. The battalion commander agreed, called for an artillery preparation, and ordered Co. G plus a platoon of Co. F to move into line south of the ridge platoon of Co. I and the two tanks, a line from which the 2nd Platoon of Co. K would attack. Before these plans could be put into action, the enemy attacked twice, chiefly against the open flank, this time with three companies and eight tanks, but was driven off by artillery. Then, just after noon, while Co. G and part of Co. F moved up from around Guising and the Rohrbach railway station to hold the ridge as far as a kilometer and a half south of Schlietzen, the 2nd Platoon of Co. K counter-attacked. The platoon took the hill with little effort because the enemy had turned his attention to the open flank and was not in position to stop the assault.

During the morning Lt. Weiler with a group from the Co. L CP were making a reconnaissance of Rimling to find any enemy who might still be hiding in the town. A civilian came up to the patrol and said he could show them where there were some Germans. Though warning his men to be careful of a possible trap, Lt. Weiler and his patrol went with the civilian to a house. Here the civilian called out for the enemy in the basement to surrender. Without firing a shot, 17 enemy gave up the fight.

The enemy's assault was so wholly directed at the west flank of the regiment, that Co. L, to the east of Rimling, faced only minor attacks, as did Cos. A and B on the 1st Battalion front further east. An enemy force advanced from the woods east of Güderkirch and reached a draw just to the front of the positions of Co. B around Mehlingerhoff Farm. Here the attack was stopped and, though a number of Germans withdrew, 11 surrendered and nineteen were killed.

During the afternoon enemy-flown P47s strafed towns in the division area. Two bombs dropped in Bining landed near the CP of the 374th F A Battalion, destroying two vehicles and injuring two soldiers. Besides the ack-ack around Montbronn, all automatic weapons on the vehicles of the Headquarters Platoon of the 100th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop fired on the enemy planes when they strafed Montbronn. Tec. 5 William H. Rikers of the Troop was manning the .50-calibre machine gun mounted on the kitchen truck. Tracers from his gun clearly hit one of the planes which later began falling leaving a trail of smoke.

The rest of the Rcn. Troop had been employed on the right flank and to the rear of the division. The 3rd Platoon made contact with the 117th Cavalry Squadron early and found them withdrawing from Mouterhouse. The platoon kept up liaison with the cavalry until late in the day when it sent an eight-man patrol on foot to look for enemy along the road running southeast from Lemberg to Mouterhouse. They found no Germans. Just before midnight, the 2nd Platoon of the 100th Rcn. Troop, further south, sent a foot patrol toward Mouterhouse along the road from Sarreinsberg. It also found no enemy.

Shortly after midnight, on the morning of 2 January, Co. F of the 397th Inf., less one platoon already in line with Co. I southwest of Rimling, moved into positions along the ridge south of Schlietzen Hill so that they faced west and north. Later, Co. G also moved to this area to the south of Co. F. Since Co. E remained astride the road net west of the Rohrbach railway station, the 397th regimental front was now greatly extended along what had been its left flank.

With daylight, the enemy continued his attacks from the northwest. The German had moved ten or fifteen tanks up on the hill north of Schlietzen from where they fired on the 2nd Platoon of Co. K. Throughout the day the enemy formed again and again for containing and holding attacks against the 397th while he attempted to take advantage of his initial success against the 44th Div. to the west.

These attacks were broken up by the 374th F A Battalion. In mid-morning the artillery dispersed at least a battalion of enemy infantry to the regimental flank and shortly after knocked out a tank which was advancing with infantry support. In the afternoon well-placed shells broke up a concentration of 50 tanks and other vehicles to the north of the front. This noteworthy effectiveness was possible because of the location of the forward observer in the church tower in Rimling. But the enemy's success to the west forced Battery C of the 374th to move to positions southwest of Bining, with the result that the battalion CP and the gun positions received a good deal of counter-battery shelling.

To the east, on the other flank of the division, the 3rd Battalion of the 255th Inf. 63rd Div. had taken positions east of Lemberg and the 141st Inf. 36th Div. was moving into adjacent positions. Reinforced, the 3rd Battalion of the 399th began to swing Cos. L and I around from Rundenkopf, northeast of Lemberg, to reinforce Co. K on the hill mass east of Lambach and overlooking the Reyersviller-Siersthal road and the Bitche-Lemberg highway. Co. L shifted to the left side of Co. K and dug in on a hill northeast of Lambach. Co. I was ordered to pull back from Rundenkopf to the Lemberg-Bitche highway, march north along it to the Kollert road junction, and then turn up the steep road northwest on to Signalberg Hill. A detail which had been sent ahead on route reconnaissance came back and met the company south of the road junction. They reported that the enemy already held the area to which Co. I was to go and that two of the advance party had been captured. Informed of this situation, the battalion CO ordered Co. I to take positions on the southern slope of Hill 415, south of Glassemburg. This first defense of a rear slope was to be imitated by other companies of the regiment in the next few days.

The enemy, attacking several hours after midnight on the morning of 2 January, came west along the Reyersviller road between the positions of Co. B and Co. K and forced the left flank of Co. K back from its positions. The company had no radio or telephone communication with the battalion CP, but because this advance looked like a full scale assault, reported it to the battalion commander by runner. Maj. Angelo Punaro, acting battalion CO, sent back word that a platoon of Co. I and a heavy machine gun would be sent to the area. This support was emplaced before dawn, and later on an anti-tank gun was also brought

On 23 July 1946, in Allendorf, Germany, General Von Mellenthin, commanding general of the 19th Germany Army, submitted the following sworn statement relative to enemy forces and defenses confronting the 100th Division during the Vosges Mountains campaign and the battle for Bitche. This sensational, press-time revelation was forwarded to the editor from Germany by Gen. Withers A. Burress. More than any commendation by an American general, it extols the fighting qualities of the soldiers of the Century Division. It is also a lucid supplement to our own G-2 information.

BREAKTHROUGH OF AMERICAN FORCES OVER BACCARAT TO BADONVILLER, MIDDLE OF NOVEMBER 1944

While in October 1944, the general attitude of enemy forces in the larger Metz area can be described as quiet and the units of the *German First Army*, which were very much worn out by battles ensuing the invasion and the subsequent withdrawal through France, had some time for refreshing, the troops of the Seventh U. S. Army, committed in the Vosges, left the *Nineteenth Army* no time for carrying out the badly needed refreshing in peace. Thus the *21st Panzer Div.* and the *16th Div.*, committed in the Rambervillers-Bruyeres sector, were involved in current defensive battles, which pressed their positions back for several kilometers, in October 1944. Nevertheless, they were able to prevent a breakthrough.

On 8 November 1944 an American major attack was launched on the sector on both sides of Metz. According to an order given by the *Army Group G*, the *21st Panzer Div.* was to be relieved by the *708th Div.* commencing on the night of 9-10 November 1944. The *Panzer Div.* was quickly transferred to the Metz battle area in order to be committed there against the threatening enemy breakthrough. The *708th Div.*, now in the course of being brought up, had been activated in Slovakia about six weeks ago.

By 10 November 1944 a defensive battle, lasting for several days, commenced in the Baccarat-St. Die-Bruyeres area, in which the enemy had but little success in the beginning. On 11 November 1944 stronger U. S. forces attacked also further to the North in the direction of Blamont.

While the *553rd Div.*, committed here, in a tenacious battle succeeded in preventing an enemy breakthrough, the situation in the Herbeville-Baccarat sector, and south of it where the *708th Div.* was committed, developed in a less satisfactory manner. The relief of the *21st Panzer Div.* by this infantry division was not completed at that time, so that here the enemy struck on a sector not yet fully ready for defense. He could, therefore, make deep penetrations and Baccarat was taken by the 100 U. S. Div.*

Also, on 13 November 1944 the *553rd Div.*, in general, was able to hold its positions west of Blamont. On the contrary, the situation on the *708th Div.* sector became threatening. Exact reports from the division had not yet arrived at the higher staffs on that day. Still, it is recognized that the American leadership quickly grasped the big possibilities offered to them in the Baccarat area as on that day the U. S. units were energetically pushing forward in the direction of Ancerville and Badonviller. On 15 and 16 November 1944, the remnants of the *708th Div.*, defeated in the Vortagen, were driven back to the line Cirey—east of Badonviller—Raon L'Etape. Thereby the Seventh U. S. Army (100th Div.) had succeeded in penetrating to a depth of 20 kilometers. The elements,

*Baccarat was not taken by the 100th Div. The Division did debouch from that town for its attack through the Vosges Mountains.

still holding positions west of Blamont, were thereby threatened on their deep southern wing and had to be withdrawn into the Blamont area and north of it. Between 17 and 18 November 1944, the *708th Div.* was completely pressed back to the edge of the Vosges.

Thus the inner wings of the XV and VI U. S. Corps—the 14th U. S. Armd. Div. and the 100th U. S. Div.—succeeded in smashing the *708th Div.*, lacking combat experience, and in a daring thrust, during a few days, advanced to the line Raon L'Étape—Badonviller—south of Blamont, while the attack launched by U. S. units further north in the direction of Blamont, and north of it, could make headway for a few kilometers only.†

Summing up, from the point of view of the *Army Group G*, we can say that the U. S. units committed on the sector of Baccarat and north of it had almost completely smashed the *708th Div.*, caught the *553rd Div.* in its deep wing, creating thereby the supposition for the breakthrough of the American and French Armored Forces near Zabern, taking place on 22 November 1944.

DEFENSIVE BATTLES OF THE FIRST ARMY IN THE BITCHE AREA, BEGINNING OF DECEMBER 1944

The counter-attack launched by the *Panzer Lehr Div.* on 24 and 26 November 1944, with the object of closing the front gap near Zabern (Savern) by a thrust from the Sarrunion to the South, had failed. The forces did not suffice for this purpose. Besides, the *11th* and *25th Panzer Divs.*, which were still committed in the sector of the *First Army*, were required for our major Ardennes offensive, which was scheduled to begin middle of December. On the night of 30 November-1 December 1944 the *Panzer Lehr Div.* had to be quickly relieved from the Saarunion area. With a heavy heart, we had to order the *11th Panzer Div.* with subordinate *25th Panzer Gren. Div.* still to extend their long drawn sector in order to relieve forces necessary for relief of the *Panzer Lehr Div.* On 1 December 1944, the main body of the *11th Panzer Div.* and the *25th Panzer Gren. Div.*—the latter consisted only of one regimental group with about 8 to 10 tanks—were already taken back into the line Witttring-Aachen-Biningen-(Bimig)-Bois de Heiligenbronn (Maginot Line). On that day stronger U. S. Armored Forces pushed forward on both sides of the road Lorenzen-Biningen toward Bitche. We succeeded in intercepting this push by flanking fire from both sides, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. One of these armored flanking groups was assembled in the woods southeast of Biningen.

The *361st Volks Gren. Div.*, which was committed on the adjacent sector of the lower Vosges south of Bitche—one of the best infantry divisions engaged in the defensive battle in the larger area of Metz—had in the beginning of December to withstand a steadily increasing enemy pressure in forset battles. In these battles, the 100th U. S. Div., which was known to us from the Vosges (battles) as being a crack assault division with daring and flexible leadership, succeeded in taking the village Mouterhouse, Lemberg and Montbronn. In consequence of this steady, strong enemy pressure the *Army Group G* was not able to withdraw from the Bitche sector the *11th Panzer Div.* and the *25th Panzer Gren. Div.*, so badly needed for the Ardennes offensive. These forces had to remain on this front in order to prevent a possible breakthrough of the American forces in the Bitche area.

(Signed) VON MELLENTHIN

†In other words, the attack by the 100th Div. was of material assistance to XV corps in its breakthrough to SAVERN Pass and the capture of STRASSBOURG.



up. When the Anti-Tank Platoon leader tried to return with his driver in a jeep, he found that the enemy had broken through to the area behind the 1st Platoon in the center of Co. K. The two men were ambushed by the enemy before they could withdraw from the area. The driver and the jeep were captured by the Krauts but the lieutenant was able to return to the Co. K positions. The Co. K men, unwilling to believe that the enemy had penetrated so far, decided that the fire had come from company guards. Lt. Behrens, Lt. Skinner, and four men set out and found the jeep. As they approached they were challenged in German and, when they didn't answer, were fired on from positions around the jeep. They returned to the platoon.

Soon the enemy began a drive on Co. K, and the rest of the company fell back to take up positions on the rear slope of the hill just south of Signalberg, leaving the 1st Platoon surrounded and isolated. In the attack the 1st Platoon killed two wire-men who were advancing with an artillery forward observer and captured the officer. To the west of Signalberg, Co. L, which had also been hit by the German attack, withdrew to the south several hundred yards. This action left Co. K of the 398th Inf., attached to the 399th and dug in on the north slope of Signalberg and Steinkopf, in positions almost surrounded by the enemy. Co. L counterattacked twice to come to the relief of Co. K of the 398th Inf. and was twice driven back. On the third try, Co. L was successful and seized the high ground late in the afternoon.

When it was dark, the 1st Platoon of Co. K, cut off in the center of the front, removed the breech block from the anti-tank gun and the bolts from the machine guns. Leaving the rest of their equipment, they made their way back to the new lines of the company.

Left, tying dynamite into a notched tree. When the charge is exploded, the tree falls across the road forming an abatis, or roadblock. Above, time out to wash up.

The regimental CP moved to Montbronn during the day, and the 925th F A Battalion withdrew to positions around the town. Enemy aircraft dropped a number of bombs in the area of Co. A. Co. G drew back from positions around a road net east of Hottviller to positions about a kilometer west and south where they would be in less danger of having the enemy infiltrate behind their positions.

On the remainder of the 399th Inf. front, the Germans, with lines running almost north and south from east of Hottviller through Simserhoff and Freudenberg Farms and across le Steinberg and le Spitzberg Hills, was generally quiet. Co. L attempted to move forward to the high ground on Steinkopf but, after eight hours of bitter resistance by the enemy, was forced to go back to its original lines.

Co. C of the 141st, attached to the 399th the preceding day, held against enemy pressure and the 3rd Battalion of the 255th moved into reserve positions in Lambach.

Against the other flank of the division, the 3rd Battalion of the 397th Inf. continued to be harassed by enemy assaults, and the Germans went on attacking as though they had been doped. A pre-dawn attack was broken up by artillery, and a mid-morning attack by at least 150 foot troops and a very large number of tanks was driven off by the artillery and by the infantry on Schlietzen Hill. The Germans had constantly shelled Rimling and now began to use white phosphorous shells which set fire to a number of buildings in the town. Co. E, to strengthen the exposed west flank, moved further north so that it occupied a



Keeping vital roads passable was a full-time job for the engineers. Right, refugees returning to Rohrbach after the town was liberated by Centurymen.



nose of hill south of Rimling and pointing southwest toward Gros Rederching. The maintenance and kitchen installations of the 374th F A Battalion moved south to Rahling to get them away from enemy shell fire.

The reason for these changes in position was that the 44th Div. had been forced back to lines south of Gros Rederching so that the flank of the 397th Inf. was unprotected for about 5000 yards south of Schleitzen Hill. Coming through the gap between the 100th and the 44th, the enemy had pushed 150 men and four tanks into the town of Achen where two battalions of the 255th Inf. 63rd Div. had been holding secondary defense positions along the Maginot Line. Though without artillery support, the battalions counterattacked and retook the town thereby ending the German threat to turn the flanks of both the 100th and the 44th Divisions.

Although the enemy main effort on the fourth day of his offensive was directed against the 44th Div. to the west of our lines, he also tried and failed to drive Co. G. of the 397th from the hill south of Schlietzen. On our eastern flank, the Germans attempted to push Co. A of the 399th from high ground but elsewhere on the regimental front was content to hold the forward slopes of the hills whose reverse slopes were occupied by the 3rd Battalion of the 399th.

In the most thrilling action of the day, Co. K of the 255th Inf. sent a 26-man patrol from near Lambach out to Reysersviller and killed 30 enemy with the loss of a single man.

On this day, also, Col. Andrew C. Tychsen was offi-

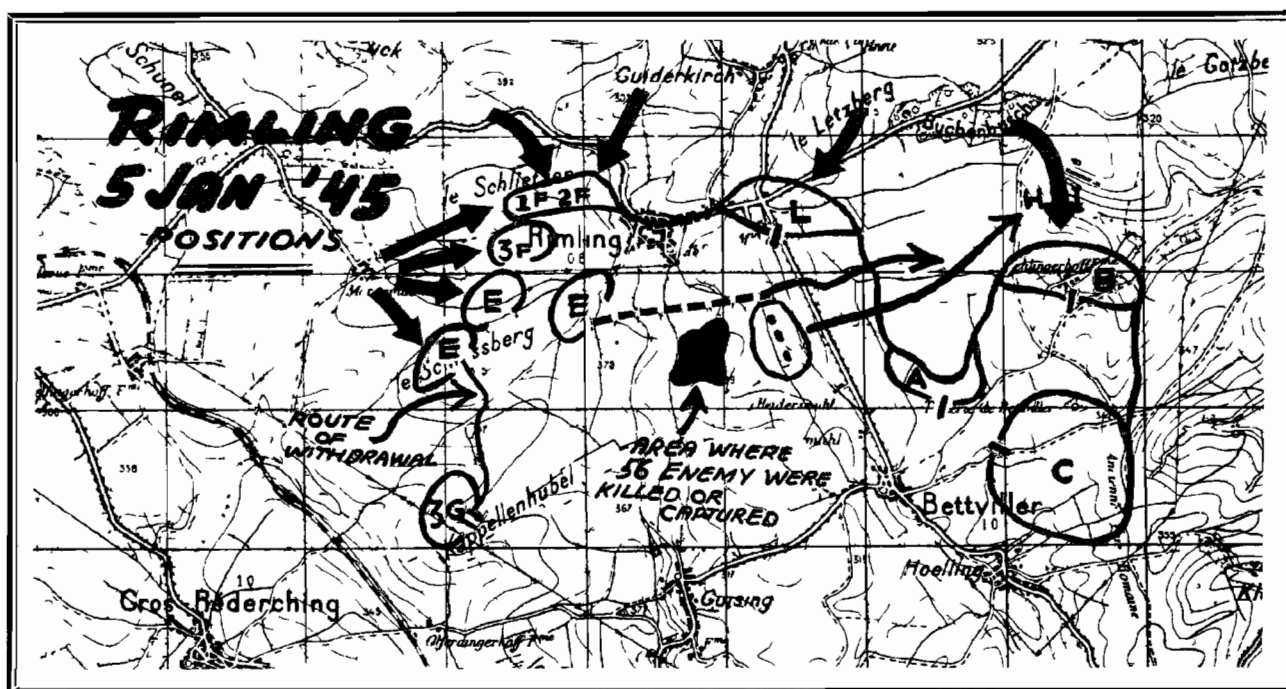
cially appointed Assistant Division Commander.

During the next two days, 5 and 6 January, the division made a number of changes in its lines. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 398th effected a double relief with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 255th; which means, in military terminology, that the units changed places with each other. The 1st Battalion of the 398th took up west flank positions for the division to the northwest of Achen, and the 3rd Battalion moved to the east of Achen. The 2nd Battalion of the 398th was attached to the 399th and took the reserve positions of the 3rd Battalion of the 255th Inf. around Lambach, allowing the latter battalion to move to the area east of Petit Rederching, in reserve positions for its own regiment.

In the 397th Sector, the 2nd Battalion took over from the 3rd Battalion though Co. L remained in its lines to the east of Rimling. In the relief, Cos. E and F moved to Schlietzen Hill and the area just south of it to the west of Rimling, and Cos. K and I moved back to the vicinity of Rohrbach and Bining for a rest.

Only the 2nd Platoon of Co. E had trouble moving into these new positions. The platoon was preceded up the slope by three light tanks whose fire drove the enemy from the knob the platoon was to occupy. The riflemen went into foxholes and the tanks withdrew to the reverse slope of the hill for the night. The enemy attacked, apparently thinking that the tanks had gone. The attack was beaten off, as were three more during the night though one of them was preceded by an artillery preparation. Because of this heavy night fighting, the wounded could not be taken back for medical care.

Germans who had infiltrated to the northeast, or right rear of the platoon, kept the men pinned down



by sniper fire throughout the next morning. The fighting, which had been of varying intensity during the night, had left some men short of ammunition while others had nearly their fully supply. Lt. Dominick S. Cuccinello, the platoon leader, left the safety of his foxhole to collect ammunition from those men who had it and give it to those who didn't. When he was wounded in the arm by a sniper, he crawled back to the reverse slope where the tanks were and ordered them to move up. Under their protection in the gathering dusk, Lt. Cuccinello, though wounded himself, worked until the other wounded had been taken from the area.

The enemy continued shelling the 2nd Battalion heavily all during 7 January and sent numerous patrols against the fighting 397th men. The 2nd Platoon of Co. E could not be supplied with food, water, or ammunition. Wire communications could be maintained only by use of auxiliary wire teams. To the south, Co. G had had to beat off enemy infantry and tank advances which were repeatedly launched from the vicinity of Moronville Farm.

After a day of limited enemy activity, 8 January fairly sizzled with action. On the western end of the division front, while the 3rd Battalion of the 398th remained in Maginot Line positions from Achen east to Singling, the 1st Battalion took up secondary defense positions from Singling east to Rohrbach.

On our eastern flank, the 3rd Battalion of the 399th initiated an attack to the east in conjunction with the

1st Battalion, 142nd Inf., 36th Div., which was south of the Century. Co. I had been holding positions on the reverse slope of Hill 415, south of Glassenberg. Co. K, in the center of the battalion lines, was on the west slope of Hill 427, a rugged promontory at the southeast end of the steep-sided valley east of Lambach and just west of le Spitzberg. To complete the battalion front, Co. L, on the northern end, occupied a hill northeast of Lambach, separated by a draw from le Steinkopf to the east.

The aim of the 3rd Battalion attack was to take the heights of Signalberg and Spitzberg instead of holding reverse slopes. The job would be difficult because these peaks were completely open country and the enemy had observation of them from positions which he had had a week to prepare. The artillery barrage on German lines began at 0745. When it was over, Co. I with tanks from Co. A of the 753rd Tank Battalion moved through Co. K and along the edge of woods on the southern slope of the hill mass so that it could go around the southern flank of the enemy entrenched on Spitzberg. This maneuver was slowed by enemy mortar and rifle fire and by the need to co-ordinate with the tanks which could advance best along the roads and trails.

At the time, Co. I numbered only 85 men, a number reduced by ten during the first 1500 yards of advance. Co. I had now reached a line only 35 yards from a formidable enemy position comprising entrenchments of the World War I type and log fortifications from

which the enemy suddenly opened fire on our leading elements. Seeing that his men were too close to attempt to flank the position and that to delay would mean annihilation, Capt. Alfred E. Olson Jr. chose the only alternative. Rushing to the front of the company, he charged the positions. The company followed and overran the emplacements. Before noon, Co. I had flanked the enemy on the crest of the hill and was on the south slope of Spitzberg.

Co. K then moved east to the head of the draw to its front by crossing the saddle between Signalberg to the north and Hill 427 to the south. On the left flank, a platoon of Co. C took over the positions of Co. L on the hill northeast of Lambach overlooking the Reysviller highway from the south. This platoon was to block off the road while Co. L drove southeast across the wooded draw and up to the height of Steinkopf. But Co. L had hardly started its attack before it was driven back to its positions by enemy fire from 88s and mortars.

In early afternoon, after Lt. Col. Elery M. Zehner had made a daring tank reconnaissance of the route, Co. L again attacked. By nightfall Love Co. had battled up Signalberg and made contact with Co. K on the right and with a platoon of Co. E of the 398th at the road junction northeast of Lambach. This platoon, like the rest of the 2nd Battalion of the 398th, was a part of the reserve defense of the 399th in the Lambach area. Co. F of the 398th during the afternoon had helped Cos. I and K of the 399th fight off a determined enemy counterattack. The day ended with the 399th Inf. holding the high ground to its front.

The major action of 8 January, however, was the defense of Rimling by the 2nd Battalion of the 397th. Rimling is a town located on the long and gradual slope which forms the eastern part of Schlietzen Hill. Basically, the town is built around a rectangle formed by four main streets. The highway which runs north

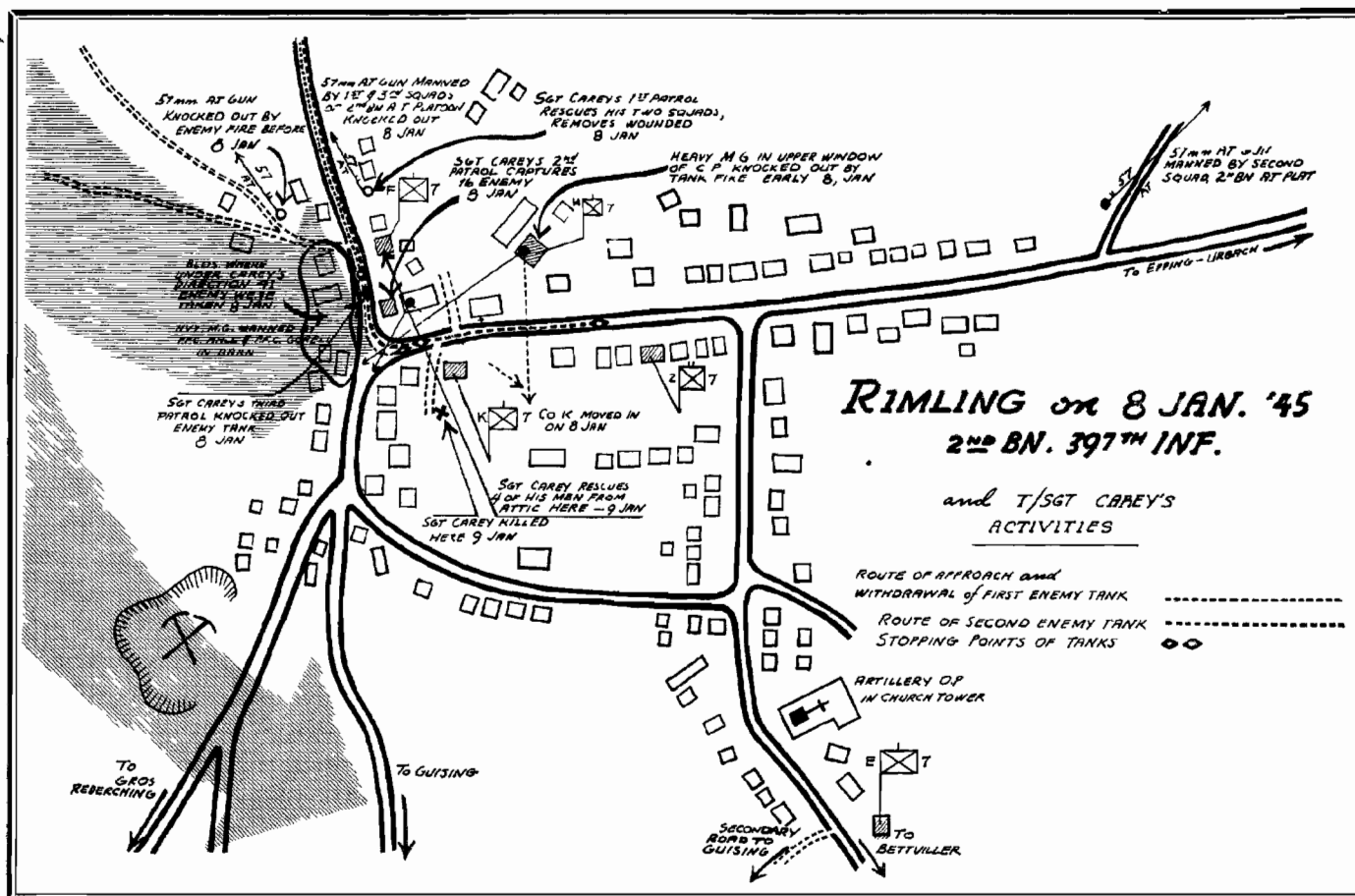
from Guising through Rimling and curves west around Schlietzen makes the western side of the rectangle. The northern side is the highway running east from the Guising road to Epping-Urbach. The eastern end of the rectangle is the road which branches south from the Epping-Urbach highway to the southern end of Rimling where it splits into two roads, one to Bettviller and the other to Guising. The southern leg of the rectangle is merely a street joining the western and eastern ends.

About 0300 on 8 January, the enemy began shelling the positions of the 2nd Battalion 397th Inf. on the high ground west and north of Rimling, using artillery, mortar, tank and rocket fire. Following this fire concentration, about 200 German infantrymen and 12 tanks attacked in a two-pronged drive. Pushing around Schlietzen Hill from the north and south, the Germans entered the houses in the western part of Rimling and began crossing the west side of the rectangle of streets in the central part of the town. The foxholes of Cos. E and F on Schlietzen had been by-passed or overrun. Co. H had set up two of its heavy machine guns to cover the junction where the Guising road, on the west side of Rimling, is joined by the Epping-Urbach road on the north side. One of these machine guns was set to fire from an upstairs window of the company CP, a house on the north side of the Epping-Urbach road about 100 yards east of the corner where the street meets the Guising road. The other machine gun was located in a barn on the corner itself. This gun, because casualties had reduced the machine gun crews of the company, was manned by Pfc. Ellis J. Hall as gunner, and Pfc. Robert L. Gorell, the company bugler, as assistant gunner. With them in the barn was an ammunition bearer.

The lead tank of the German northern prong came into town accompanied by infantry who, as usual, preceded and flanked the tank or rode upon it. As it came south to the corner, machine gun fire from this tank wounded the gunner and assistant gunner and disabled the Co. H machine gun in the CP.

The CP now had only small arms for protection and for sniper fire. But as the tank neared the corner, Ellis continued to fire his machine gun from the barn, and Gorell sprayed the area with a sub-machine gun. The German foot troops took cover and scrambled off the tank. One of them was able to throw a grenade into the barn, however, mortally wounding the ammunition bearer. The explosion blew manure, straw, and debris all over the gun and the other two men. While the gun





was not firing, the lead tank turned east down the Epping-Urbach street toward the CP.

A second tank now moved into the place which the first had just left at the corner. Though they were overwhelmingly outnumbered and now almost surrounded, Hall and Gorell did not leave by the escape route which still remained. Instead they cleaned off the gun and began firing on the second tank. The tank now tried to swing around so as to fire on the barn, but the street was too narrow for this maneuver. In an attempt to take the gun by force, the German foot troops re-organized and rushed the position. Ellis and Gorell fired at point-blank range, killed eight, and drove off the rest. But one of the Jerries had thrown another grenade which caused a heavy barn door to fall on the two men. Once more hay and debris showered over them. The watchers in the CP could almost hear the silence as the machine gun stopped firing.

During this pause the Germans made another attempt to knock out the gun. The second tank, however, seized the opportunity to take off up the street by which it had entered town. The lead tank also backed up. As it reached its original position, the in-

fantry concentrated around it. Suddenly, Hall and Gorell, who had dug out of the debris, began to fire again. This fire so surprised and disorganized the enemy that they hit the dirt, scattered, or tried to take cover behind the tank. But the tank had had enough and began withdrawing. A German captain, apparently trying to stop the tank, was run over and killed by it. This vehicle also rumbled away up the street to the north.

By maintaining their steady fire, Hall and Gorell were able to keep the German infantry pinned down, but a Jerry in a near-by building fired a Panzerfaust at the barn. One old stone and mortar side of the building caved in on the gun and the two intrepid Centurymen. Gorell was killed instantly; Hall was blown about twenty feet and knocked out. The Germans didn't know that the gun was buried, and the building now occupied solely by the dazed and defenseless Hall. They seemed only to remember how dangerously effective the gun had been, and took off as fast as they could. When he came to, Hall struggled free of the rubble which covered him and stumbled to the CP. There he reported to Capt. Anthony J. Maiale, his CO, that he had been

stunned by the last explosion, that he had searched for but couldn't find Gorell or the gun, and that the ammunition handler had been very seriously wounded. Since it was almost daylight, a combat patrol from the company went over to the barn. They returned in a few minutes, having found that Gorell was dead as Hall had reported. The gun was completely covered by fallen masonry. The ammunition handler, meanwhile, had reached the Co. F CP, the next house to the north of the barn, and was dying of his wounds.

When the Germans attacked at 0300 on 8 January, the 2nd Battalion Anti-Tank Platoon was manning only two guns. The third gun, which had covered a road leading up Schlietzen Hill to the west of Guising street, had been knocked out by earlier action. Of the two guns in position, one manned by the 2nd Squad of the platoon was on the eastern edge of town covering the approach along a road running from the north into the Epping-Urbach road. The other gun was in position north of the Co. F CP. This piece was manned by the 1st and 2nd Squads of the platoon.

Because the enemy had by-passed or overrun the troop positions on Schlietzen, the only men left to defend the town were the guards and personnel of the company and battalion command posts. Shortly before 0800 direct fire from an enemy tank knocked out the anti-tank gun in the northwest corner of town.

T. Sgt. Charles F. Carey Jr., the anti-tank sergeant and acting platoon leader, reported from this area to the battalion commander that the gun had been destroyed. Then Sgt. Carey assembled a patrol made up of men from his platoon headquarters and from part of the squad on the east gun. His idea was to check on how far the enemy had penetrated the town during the darkness and see whether he could put the western gun back in action. With T. Sgt. Willie E. Jones, Pvt. Orwin H. Burkholder, and two other men, Sgt. Carey left his platoon CP and started for the west end of town. The group entered all buildings on the way, looking for enemy. They found none until they reached the Co. H CP on the north side of the street. There Co. H men told the patrol that two enemy medics had been seen poking their heads out past the corners of buildings across the narrow side-street to the west. The patrol crossed this street to investigate and heard groans coming from one of the buildings. On entering, they found two Co. H men who had been wounded.

Carey left the group and soon returned with the German medics whom he had found in a nearby room. On his orders the medics cared for the wounded. Sgt.

Jones, having been called over by a man from Co. F, had gone to that company's CP and there learned from Lt. Leo Rabinowitz that Capt. William Stallworth wanted to talk with Sgt. Carey if he were with the patrol. Jones came back, and Sgt. Carey went over to the Co. F CP. When he returned, Sgt. Carey said that Capt. Stallworth had pointed out to him a building from which German snipers had been making it difficult for the Co. F men to move about. While Sgt. Carey had been gone Pvt. Orvin Burkholder had also spotted some Germans in the same house. Saying that they could take care of that house when they had made sure about the gun and its crew, Sgt. Carey led the patrol to the gun position. They found the piece had been damaged but could still be fired. Some of the gun crew had been wounded.

Sgt. Carey quickly re-organized the crew and put the gun into position so that it would cover the approaches to the Co. F CP. Then he and the patrol removed the wounded to the battalion CP where they could get medical attention. It was now about 1000 and the patrol turned its attention to the enemy in the houses near the Co. F CP. Leading his men around the building which housed the CP, Sgt. Carey paused before the house occupied by enemy. He said, "Cover the doors and windows. I'm going in." As he approached the doorway Sgt. Carey shot and killed two snipers, threw a hand grenade in at the door, and entered alone. Soon he came out with 16 prisoners. The patrol returned to the Co. H CP where the Krauts were searched and then sent back to the battalion S-2.

While unloading a 398th chow truck, Tec 4 William H. Bailey was surprised to see two Jerries walk out of the woods. They explained they had been sweating out dinner call for several hours.





But Sgt. Carey, having reported to Co. H, went over to the Co. F CP and pointed out a group of houses which were occupied by more Germans. In these buildings patrols from Cos. F and H took 41 more prisoners.

This second patrol had returned about noon. In mid-afternoon Sgt. Carey, returning from the western gun position, located a German tank in the west end of town. Arriving at the platoon command post, he sent Pfc. Richard C. Banks to a truck for a rocket launcher and ammunition. Taking the bazooka, Sgt. Carey moved with S. Sgt. Turner C Benefee, Pfc. Lloyd O. Burtner, and Pfc. William F. Dugan from house to house under enemy fire until they had reached a position to the rear of the tank. Covered by the others Sgt. Carey got into firing position. His first round missed, but the second was a shattering hit which set the tank on fire. Knowing that the crew would try to escape from the flaming vehicle, Sgt. Carey grabbed Sgt. Menefee's M-1 and waited. With the rifle in firing position, Sgt. Carey watched the first German clamber out of the escape hatch, held his fire until the Jerry was far enough out so that he would fall away from the turret rather than back into the tank. Then Carey squeezed the trigger and the German fell clear. The rest of the crew were thus convinced that the first man had made good his escape. By repeating this procedure Sgt. Carey was able to kill three of the tank crew and wound another. To prevent the entry of more tanks, Sgt. Carey stationed his patrol as a bazooka team in a barn near the road and then placed one of his ten-man gun squads near the Co. F CP with a second bazooka as further anti-tank defense.

One of the big guns adds its voice to the choral requiem of enemy resistance at Büche. Left, an abandoned Jerry forest position.

The first day's attack on Rimling had not been very successful for the enemy. The resistance by the 2nd Battalion had been greatly increased in midmorning when Co. K moved from its reserve positions into the town and set up its CP on a side street just to the south of the Epping-Urbach road.

Besides a two-pronged advance into the western end of Rimling, the enemy had attacked further south and, seizing Moronville Farm on a hill to the southwest of Schlietzen, had taken Schlossberg Hill just south of Schlietzen. Parts of Cos. E and G were forced to withdraw southward toward Guising because they were unable to beat off the German tanks and infantry. On this new hill the Krauts were in a position to advance to the east and, unless stopped, could cut off Rimling from the south.

On 9 January, in the morning darkness, the Germans again entered Rimling from the north and west. This time their drive carried them past the Co. F CP. Approximately 30 men of Co. F were cut off from the rest of the company and captured. Six men of the anti-tank squad placed at the CP by Sgt. Carey were also captured. But the remaining four escaped to the attic of the building. Sgt. Carey went out alone, worked a ladder into place beside the building, and the four men were able to come down safely. Early in the afternoon Sgt. Carey, Sgt. Jones, Cpl. Rollins, Pfc. Burtner, and Pfc. William F. Dugan set out to try to rescue Sgt. Goodwin and his bazooka team who were in the loft of a barn which the enemy had surrounded. In order to attack the barn from the south they went



Advancing through battered Rohrbach, the battle-wise infantrymen avoid bunching up. This is a far cry from close-order drill.

east from the Co. H CP, crossed the Epping-Urbach road, and moved behind the battalion CP. Then they worked back west to the side street which ran in front of the Co. K CP. Here, covered by the others, Sgt. Carey crossed the street under enemy fire and turned to cover the crossing of the others. When all were across, he fired his bazooka into a building in which some Germans were holed up, hoping to drive them out and make an escape route for the bazooka team.

Then, armed with a carbine fitted with a grenade launcher, he crossed the street again. While he was doing so, an enemy sniper almost succeeded in picking him off. Sgt. Carey called back to the others, "Damn, that was close." Once across, Sgt. Carey turned to cover the others. At that instant, a German bullet killed him. His patrol was unable to reach him in the open space and had to withdraw by another route. For his magnificent work during these two trying days, Sgt. Carey was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.

When the enemy attack hit our lines, Sgt. Robert W. Senser and 11 men were resting on the top floor of a house across the street from the Rimling church. Senser, a forward observer for the regimental Cannon Company, was attached to the 3rd Battalion. He had been observing from the church steeple since 1 January and had asked permission to remain as observer when that battalion was relieved. Caught in the rapid Kraut drive, Senser and the other men in his party suddenly found their house surrounded by a German patrol. The Jerries threw in three grenades, one land-

ing in the hall just outside the room where the sergeant and his men were relaxing. Realizing that the house could be best defended from the top floor, but unwilling to risk casualties to the others, Sgt. Senser sent them to the basement. Then from the upstairs he fired his carbine into the German patrol which had been directing a stream of machine-pistol bullets into the house. Two of the enemy were killed, and the rest retreated.

After daylight, the Cannon Company CO radioed to Sgt. Senser asking if he could place fire on some tanks in the town. Senser immediately crossed the street under small arms and artillery fire, climbed up into the battered steeple. There he found that he couldn't make radio contact with his company. Using artillery communication located in the steeple, Senser registered a battery of 155s on the tanks, destroying one, damaging another, and forcing the rest to take off. Although his CO said he was sending a relief for Senser, the sergeant refused to be relieved on the grounds that it was too dangerous for anyone to risk coming to the tower and remained at his post.

While the troops in Rimling itself—the men of Co. K and part of the men of Cos. E and F and of the Battalion Headquarters Company—were trying unsuccessfully to drive the enemy from the town, the Germans struck east from Schlossberg Hill, and quickly seized Hill 370, about one kilometer south of Rimling. From here the Germans rushed down the northeast slope toward the Co. H 81 mm mortars emplaced in a creek bed south of the east end of Rimling. To break this attack, the mortars were fired at a range so short as to be dangerous to the mortar-men them-

selves. Besides their own rifles or carbines the mortar-men even fired a captured Jerry machine gun to smash the assault. The attack collapsed when 29 Germans surrendered after 26 of their fellows had been killed and 11 wounded.

In mid-morning, the 1st Battalion of the 398th, which with Co. B of the 749th Tank Battalion had been attached to the 397th Inf., moved from its positions near Rohrbach to make a counterattack. The intention was to clear the enemy from his new heights south of Rimling and make our troops in the town safe from encirclement. The attackers, with Co. A on the left, Co. C on the right, and Co. B in support, were able to retake Hill 370, freeing the Rimling-Guising road. But the powerful enemy force of infantry, tanks, and self propelled guns resisted strongly and we were repulsed twice in local counterattacks from Schlossberg Hill and Moronville Farm as well as from Schlietzen itself.

The collecting point for the wounded, under 1st Lt. Dwight L. Burton, Medical Administrative Corps, had been set up in a concrete pillbox along the road north of Guising about halfway to Hill 370. In early afternoon, a runner from the collecting point brought news to the aid station in Guising that there were ten seriously wounded men in the pillbox who needed to be moved to the rear for more complete medical attention. The road between the collecting point and the aid station was under enemy fire because tanks and tank destroyers had been moving about in the area. Since a round of heavy mortar or 88mm fire landed on the road about every forty-five seconds, no men were being ordered to go forward to evacuate the wounded. Pfc. Marco Zagha, a litter-bearer and not a driver, offered to take the medical jeep and bring back the wounded men. In spite of the Red Cross markings in the jeep—which must have been clear to the enemy forward

observers who could see the whole stretch of road—the firing did not slacken. Pfc. Zagha, who would take no one with him because of the danger, however, made four trips to bring the wounded back to the aid station.

Casualties had been extremely numerous, and the enemy's emplacements to the front and flank gave him an enormous advantage. Rimling had been held in the hope that the 44th Div. to the west would be able to advance and cover our right flank. But now the division ordered the 397th to fall back to an east-west line running roughly through Guising, where it would be able to tie in with the 44th Div. on a shorter front. The withdrawal from Rimling began just after dark. It was managed so well that, about 20 minutes after the last unit had left the town, the Germans launched a major tank-infantry attack to take Rimling, unaware that it was already empty. Our heavy concentrations of artillery fire, laid directly on the town, caught the Germans unprepared and caused heavy damaged. When the 397th had dropped back to lines running northeast from Kapellenhubel Hill across the highway north of Guising to the left flank of Co. A north of Bettviller, the 1st Battalion of the 398th returned to its reserve positions.

The remarkable defense our division made in stemming the German's savage 10-day drive was aptly summed up by Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers. The commanding general of the Sixth Army Group sent the following letter of commendation to the 100th Div. for holding against the German counteroffensive:

"The rugged American stubbornness of the combat elements of the 100th Infantry Division has played a tremendous part in stemming the tide of attack by superior enemy numbers. In the area of Rimling you successfully repulsed repeated enemy attempts to penetrate your lines; your great accomplishment forced the enemy to give up the offensive action on your front. Inflicting great losses to strong elements of three enemy divisions, you have successfully protected an important sector in the Hardt Mountains. When the force of the powerful enemy drive carried him into a salient in the Bitche area, the prompt and effective extension of your lines to block his advance was a splendid example of skillful maneuver. I heartily commend all members of this division for their outstanding achievements."

The rest of the division zone was quiet on 9 January. But early on the morning of 10 January, Co. F of the 398th Inf., attached to the 399th, began the last offensive action of the division until our great spring





A dogface peers cautiously into the maw of an enemy pillbox. The haze of battle still hangs over the opening.

offensive in the middle of March. The company, with a platoon of tanks from Co. A 753rd Tank Battalion, attacked to drive the enemy from a draw between Signalberg and Spitzberg Hills. The enemy had been sending small, harassing patrols up this wooded draw which separated the right flank of Co. L 399th Inf. from the flank of Co. K to the south. Enemy fire from the forward slope of Spitzberg was so intense that after a short advance Co. F returned to its original positions. About dark, the Germans, under cover of a smoke screen, counterattacked against Co. I 399th Inf., to the south of this area. Waiting until the smoke had lifted, Co. I laid down such effective fire that the Germans withdrew.

From 10 January until 15 March, the division remained in the static defensive positions of a winter line. Since the 100th had been the only division on the Seventh Army front not to fall back under pressure from the enemy, it was ordered to hold while other divisions on the Army front were regaining positions from which they could jump off in the spring offensive. When late in January the 44th Div. to the west had relieved the 398th Inf. and that regiment had moved to the east on the division right around Goetzenbruck and Sarreinsberg, the division zone, except for minor adjustments, was established for the period. In general, the division front lines extended from near Bettviller northeast to a point north of Hottviller and then south to the vicinity of Sarreinsberg, passing east of Hottviller, skirting Legeret Farm and across Signalberg and Spitzberg.

This, then, was the locale for the long boredom of winter warfare. The endless cold and misery of foxholes, trench foot and nervous kidneys. The routine

shift from foxholes to reserve positions in crowded, smoky houses. The reluctant shift back to the foxholes again—foxholes that we logged over, and propped up and floored under until they took on the aspect of permanent habitations. The walking or driving along roads deep in snow or slush. The two “hot” meals coming luke-warm from the marmite cans and half frozen before you could wolf them. And the desire to puke at the thought of K-rations. The thawing weather early in February. The streams swollen, the draws flooding, and the foxholes and emplacements filling with icy water. Everything was wet, and always everything was muddy. The old mud was hardly caked before it was slimed over with new mud.

And the military duties? We strung concertina wire across all the likely approaches and then across all the unlikely ones. We dug new emplacements for weapons. We repaired communication wire which otherwise harmless mortar fire was endlessly knocking out. We shored up the sides of our holes. And when we went into reserve, we took training on how to use the weapons we had learned to live with. Or we trained the replacements whom the army called “reinforcements.”

Or we went on night patrols.

One night patrol is just like another. The sense of uneasiness before you start, the slight, gnawing anxiety as you set out, an anxiety you don’t define in terms of mines or machine guns, an anxiety you don’t quite admit to full consciousness. Darkness is a distortion in which all distances are wrong and all directions doubtful. There is always the moment when you are sure that you are lost. This is the basic pattern, unchanged by the variations on it—sometimes you were part of a big combat patrol, sometimes of a sneak patrol. The terrain was wooded and difficult or open and dangerous. In the snow you might wear camouflage coats and hoods; in a thaw you might give yourself away by slipping or by the sound of mud sucking at your footsteps. Sometimes you went out under “artificial moonlight,” and sometimes you took a flame-thrower along. Maybe you were supposed to bring back a prisoner, maybe only to look and listen to find where the enemy was, or maybe you went out to shoot up a few Krauts for the hell of it. But you didn’t like patrols, even if you were a part of a Raider Platoon which some of the outfits organized specifically for



A 399th patrol was returning "Indian file" from a night raid when Sgt. Nelson Spangler, walking behind Pfc. Alex Kowlek, banged his eye against Kowlek's gun. Alarmed, Kowlek swung around and connected with Spangler's other eye. Box score: Jerries, 10 killed and 15 wounded; Our Side, 2 black eyes.

patrolling. It was the kind of stuff that takes the heart out of you and you got a little sick of the smug news reports which said, "Activity on the Seventh Army front was limited to patrolling."

At 0100 on 28 January, 2nd Lt. Marvin L. Larson, who had been 1st Sgt. of Co. I of the 398th and had received a battlefield commission, led a patrol through the lines of the 1st Platoon and toward the enemy positions. In the patrol were Sgt. Donald W. Wheeler, Sgt. Thomas M. Light, and seven other men. Lt. Larson had made a reconnaissance of the area during daylight. The 1st Platoon lines were on a wooded slope overlooking the Lemberg-Bitche road. Beyond the road to the east were the enemy positions.

The patrol moved cautiously along a thin strip of woods which projected to within 50 yards of the road. Snow covered the ground, and an overcast moon cast a fickle light through the close-packed trees. Lt. Larson crossed the road and the open field on the other side until he reached the woods beyond. One by one the men followed. As they entered this wood they could hear Germans coughing in the outposts to either side. With breath-holding care the lieutenant maneuvered his men to a point about 50 yards past these positions. There they halted, while Lt. Larson and one man moved to the right looking for a place where they could penetrate to the rear of the enemy lines. This route was discarded as impassable when Lt. Larson inadvertently stepped on a Schu-mine which luckily was defective and didn't explode. Painstaking prodding revealed a broad minefield and the two men returned to the patrol and made a similar reconnaissance to the left or north.

Finding this way seemingly clear, Lt. Larson led his patrol obliquely to the left, hugging the shadow

at the edge of the woods. Suddenly the patrol heard a German sentry, apparently having detected the patrol, work the bolt of his rifle. The patrol halted. It was in no position to get into a fire fight. Lt. Larson began to work his way silently forward, hoping to kill the sentry without alarming the other Krauts. Almost to the sentry, Lt. Larson stepped on a Schu-mine. This time his luck deserted him. The mine exploded and blew his foot off at the ankle. Alerted, it seemed as if the entire enemy front began firing in the direction of the patrol. Knowing that they could not fight so overwhelming an enemy force and realizing that the patrol might never reach their own lines if they tried to carry him with them, Lt. Larson ordered Sgt. Wheeler, his second in command, to lead the patrol back. The lieutenant began firing his carbine to draw German fire on himself and so divert attention from the patrol. Left alone Lt. Larson fired until he began to run out of ammunition. Four Germans left their positions to try to capture him. Coolly, Lt. Larson waited until the Krauts were almost upon him, then fired, killing three of them. The other escaped. Lt. Larson wrapped his trouser leg around his wound and fastened his belt around his leg as a tourniquet. Then he crawled on his one leg, dragging his painful stump, until he was past the enemy outpost. Here Sgt. Light, who had asked Sgt. Wheeler for permission to return, met the lieutenant and helped him to our own lines.

Toward the end of January the Russian drive was going so well that we began to make jokes, not very good jokes, about how the Russians would soon be meeting us. Toward the end of February German morale seemed to have dropped and occasional deserters began to come across to our lines. Early in March, taking advantage of this condition, the division began to stage propaganda broadcasts, telling the Germans to desert and describing the luxurious food and clothing which awaited them as American prisoners. A sizable number of Jerries came over.

One of the interesting activities of this period was the construction of a tunnel to a very advanced observation post in the 399th Inf. area. The 3rd Battalion of the 399th had been defending the reverse slope of Signalberg Hill. The Germans held the opposite slope. Between the two forces was the unwooded crest of the

hill, a no-man's-land to our troops. When by a careful study of maps of the area the battalion commander had found the most useful place for the OP, the men who were going to make the tunnel to it practiced their action on similar terrain in a rear area. Then during the rainy night of 15 February they began their tedious labor. The 925th F A Battalion began firing into the woods held by the Germans on the forward slope to keep the enemy buttoned-up while Lt. Roy E. Simmons with 15 men from Co. L moved over the crest to form a security screen facing the Jerry lines.

Sgt. Bernard L. Lonas followed, dragging a 60-foot cord behind him along the course over which the tunnel was to lead to the OP. This cord was knotted at three-yard intervals to mark where holes were to be dug for dynamite charges. Five other men from the A & P Platoon, Pfc. Richard D. Page, Floyd A. Denis, John P. Reilley, John P. Calliendo, and Ernest J. Rosa, began digging. As the holes were dug, Sgt. William C. Goodnight tamped a six-pound charge of dynamite into each cavity. Then, when the men from the A & P Platoon had withdrawn, flares were fired to call the Co. L men back to their lines. The A & P Platoon leader, Lt. William A. Paterson, ignited the charges while the artillery fired again to conceal the sound of the explosions. Sgt. Goodnight had to go out twice to re-connect the primer cord before all the charges went off. The Co. L men then shoveled out the debris left between the holes to clear the trench which the A & P men covered over with logs and sod, giving us a sheltered OP in an otherwise untenable position.

During this period of winter defensive action the army began to set up rest centers where men could go for a few days of relaxation from the cold monotony of foxholes. These rest centers were established on every echelon of command down to battalion level. Our division opened its rest center in Sarrebourg when it set up the Robert L. Ethridge Hotel, named in honor of the division's first winner of the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously. Later, too, the division was given quotas for passes to Paris and Brussels, a pass-program which was later expanded to include other places of interest. The Hotel then became a place where we could stop over for the night or for a cleaning up on our way to and from passes.

On 13 March, while the patrolling that had piled up so much information about the enemy lines continued, the first steps in the execution of the division's plans for its part in the Seventh Army spring offensive were carried out. The offensive was to begin in March. The

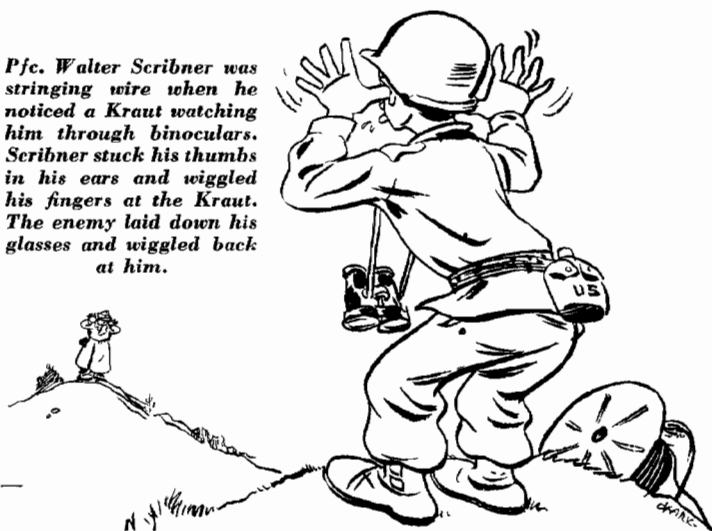
division was to attack from positions near the center of its defensive lines and move east to take Bitche, the high ground surrounding the town, and Camp de Bitche to the east. On the Seventh Army front the XV Corps, of which the 100th Div. was a part, was to make the main effort to crack the Siegfried Line and those parts of the Maginot Line still not taken. On the left or western flank of the corps area, was the 3rd Div.; in the center, was the 45th Div. These two divisions were to attack northward in the chief offensive. To the right, the 100th was to advance eastward, and, on the extreme right, the 71st was to hold eastward-facing positions. After taking Bitche, the 100th was to pivot northward, and leaving the 71st as a holding force in the Bitche area, was the attack north against the Siegfried Lines on the right of the 3rd Div.

In preparation for these moves, the 44th Div. (through which the 45th and 3rd Divs. were to attack) relieved the 397th Inf. on the right of the 100th Div. front. The 71st Div. relieved the 398th and the 2nd Battalion of the 399th to shorten our division front on the right or southeast. When these reliefs were completed, the 100th Div. had a front only one regiment wide.

On the clear, warm day of 13 March, the 324th Inf. of the 44th Div. took over all the front line positions of the 397th from just north of Hottviller westward. On relief the 1st Battalion moved by motor shuttle to Bining and the 3rd Battalion shifted to Rohrbach. The 2nd Battalion remained in reserve lines near Petit Rederching with Co. G near Hottviller. The following day, while the regimental CP was established in Holbach, the three battalions, with the exception of Co. K which stayed in Rohrbach, moved into the Hottviller area from which the attack was to begin.

On the other edge of the division sector elements of the 71st Div. took over from the 398th Inf. on the Sar-

Pfc. Walter Scribner was stringing wire when he noticed a Kraut watching him through binoculars. Scribner stuck his thumbs in his ears and wiggled his fingers at the Kraut. The enemy laid down his glasses and wiggled back at him.





Left, doughfeet pass through a section of the Camp de Bitche. Above, the same Nazi-held strongpoint after a severe air bombing.

reinsberg front so that the regiment could move to Holbach in position for its attack in the division center.

The next day the 66th Inf. of the 71st Div. relieved the 2nd Battalion of the 399th in the Spitzberg area and the battalion moved back into regimental reserve with the 3rd Battalion. The division right boundary now ran between Lambach and Glassemberg.

Strategy called for the division to take Bitche, the Camp de Bitche, and the Maginot Forts, to protect the right flank of the Corps until the Siegfried breakthrough. The 100th was then to follow the 6th Armored Div. through the gap and advance to the Rhine. In this master-minding, we faced certain disadvantages. The 45th and 3rd Div. had had a rest before their attack; the 100th had been in foxholes all winter. The 45th, on the left, was to attack due north, the 71st on the right to hold; both flanks of the 100th would thereby be exposed after a very short advance. To make matters worse, the high ground north and west of Schorbach was covered with mortar and nebelwerfer positions which the division would have to capture in order to hold Schiesseck Hill. In addition the enemy had had two months to perfect field fortifications and defensive weapons like road-blocks, entrenchments, mine fields, and wire entanglements.

But on our side of the ledger, the division had heavy artillery, and a battalion of self-propelled M-12s, while one company each of tanks, tank destroyers, and 4.2-inch chemical mortars was attached to each regiment. Since the three regiments were to attack abreast on their narrow fronts, the division had in reserve only the 100th Rcn. Troop and what was left of the 781st Tank Battalion after its three medium companies had been attached to the regiments.

The 3rd and 45th Divs. to the west were to attack at 0100 on 15 March, but General Burress chose to begin his attack at 0500. Because the location of enemy minefields and defensive works were known only for a limited depth to the division's immediate front, the general didn't want the attack to advance too far in the dark, lest it run into uncharted minefields and defense works, and bog down before daylight. At 0500, too, the Air OPs were sent aloft to locate gun flashes of enemy batteries. These planes had an anti-aircraft searchlight for their orienting point. To avoid forewarning the enemy of our attack the artillery fired only its normal missions during the night and until the drive had started.

On the first day of the attack, while Co. E of the 397th moved out to seize high ground and a blocking position northeast of Hottviller, the 397th, on the north of the division front, advanced slightly north and then east in a column of battalions. Cos. A and B, in the lead, moved forward along the ridge east of Hottviller and by 0900, four hours after the start of the action, had taken the high ground to the northeast of Schorbach, having by-passed the town. Cos. I and L, the attacking companies of the 3rd Battalion, acting as support, moved past Hottviller which had been receiving much enemy mortar and rocket fire, probably drawn by the armored columns which moved through the town. Shortly after noon Cos. I and L entered Schorbach; while Cos. A and B, having resumed their attack from northeast of Schorbach, cut the road east of town near its junction with the Bitche-Hanviller road.



Jerry PW's carry their own wounded through Bitche as French civilians watch pitilessly. Right, a column of Centurymen presses on toward Germany.



The regiment had received little small arms resistance though it encountered a good deal of artillery, mortar, and rocket fire. Casualties were caused chiefly by Schu-mines. The advance was also slowed by the bad condition of the roads, a condition caused by our own artillery fire during the winter. This action of the 397th, a drive of six or seven thousand meters, besides capturing many enemy mortar positions and the remnants of a nebelwerfer regiment, removed pressure from the attack on the Maginot Forts and, by eliminating supporting fires, caused the defense of the Maginot area to collapse.

The attack by the 398th Inf. in the division center had been expected to be the main effort, and priority of artillery fire was assigned to it. The 2nd Battalion, moving against Freudenberg Farm from near Legeret, ran into very heavy enemy small arms fire and was severely hindered by mines. By swinging north through the Simserhoff area, the 1st Battalion of the 398th by-passed this resistance, captured the hill north of Schiesseck, and then continued east to take high ground southeast of Schorbach. Before the end of day, the 2nd Battalion had taken Freudenberg Farm, Fort Freudenberg, and all the units of Fort Schiesseck. It found that the complete job of destruction which the 3rd Battalion and Co. B of the 325th Engineers had done on the forts before our withdrawal to defensive lines in December, had been so effective that the Germans were unable to use the forts for defense.

Like the 397th to the north, the 399th Inf. on the southern part of the division's sector was to have the

task of protecting a flank after it attacked. The regimental plan for the 399th envisaged a two pronged drive which would encircle the Germans in their positions on the forward slopes of Signalberg and Spitzberg in the area west of the junction of the Reyersviller road and the Lemberg-Bitche road. The 3rd Battalion was to clear the ridges north of the Reyersviller-Siersthal road, attacking southeast. The 2nd Battalion was to advance northeast on Spitzberg Hill parallel to the Lemberg-Bitche road. The two battalions would close their trap at the junction of the Reyersviller road with the Lemberg-Bitche Highway.

With Co. K on the north and Co. L to the south, supported by Co. I, the 3rd Battalion of the 399th, each company with a platoon of tanks, moved out at the attack hour. They passed through Fromuhl Woods and through the lines of Co. B, working across a series of ridges and wooded ravines. In less than an hour the sweating infantrymen had climbed the eastern slope of the last ravine and fanned out on Kirscheid ridge, north of the Siersthal-Reyersviller road, just northwest of Reyersviller itself. An hour later the troops had taken Schimberg Hill, and Co. K had occupied Schoenberg. The battalion had now by-passed Reyersviller and encircled from the rear the German positions on Steinkopf, Signalberg, and Spitzberg Hills where the enemy had caused so much trouble for two months. The battalion had also reached its point of rendezvous where it was to meet the 2nd Battalion. For the next few hours the 3rd Battalion mopped up the north of the Reyersviller road.

In the area of the 2nd Battalion of the 399th, while Cos. G and E remained in position to the southwest of the Spitzberg ridge, Co. F with a platoon of tanks



began its attack at 0600. Because the top of Spitzberg was bare and the Germans had had more than two months to perfect their defensive positions in thick woods on the forward slope of the hill, the attack was not easy. Patrols had already located mine fields, defensive wire, and machine-gun emplacements on the hill. But only later did the regiment learn, from a captured map prepared by German engineers, that there were nearly 4000 mines of various kinds on Spitzberg alone. Co. F with a section of medium tanks began the 2nd Battalion drive by skirting along the woods on the southern slope of the hill, passing through the positions of Co. C of the 66th Inf. The tanks were in the lead to knock out the Schu-mines, and Co. F men rode on the tanks to protect them from enemy fire. Just at the line of departure the leading tank slipped off the side of a hill and threw a tread. Within a few minutes the remaining two tanks of the section had been stopped by anti-tank mines. A reserve tank was rushed forward to where the men were being held up by mortar and machine gun fire.

S. Sgt. Richard Trapani, a mortar observer of Co. F, had advanced with the company headquarters group when the action began, but he soon moved up with the riflemen of the 2nd Platoon which was in the lead. When he saw how the extraordinary accuracy of the enemy mortar fire was causing casualties, Sgt. Trapani determined to eliminate the German mortar observers and gain positions from which to direct his own fire more effectively. While the company waited for the reserve tank to come up, Sgt. Trapani went ahead alone armed only with a pistol, half crouching, making short rushes from tree to tree. Later members of the company could see him crawling very close to enemy

Left, jubilant Centurymen roll into Bitche proudly displaying a liberated road sign. Above, French inhabitants happily welcome 100th dogfaces.

positions where he seemed to escape German observation because of the action of the rest of the company.

In mid-morning, after the 3rd Platoon of Co. F, now leading the attack behind the newly committed tank, had broken a gap through the wire and a deep mine field and begun to advance, Co. E was sent in on the left. The attack moved very slowly. About an hour before noon Sgt. Trapani returned from his reconnaissance. In spite of the threat of enemy fire and of Schu-mines, he went up to one of the men riding on the tank and obtained an M-1, bandoliers of ammunition, a pocketful of clips for his pistol, and four hand grenades.

Seemingly unmindful of the danger, Sgt. Trapani turned and walked toward an enemy machine gun, about 25 yards away, which was firing uninterruptedly upon our troops. The sergeant approached the dug-in position from the right rear. When he was quite close, the German gun crew noticed him and two of them began to fire machine pistols at him. Sgt. Trapani fired his M-1 from a crouch until they ducked. Then he threw two hand grenades into their hole and wrecked the gun. Three of the crew surrendered and the sergeant took their helmets and weapons from them and sent them toward our lines with their hands above their heads. Still out in front of the riflemen Sgt. Trapani moved against another machine gun position about 30 yards away, surprised the crew, and threw in his remaining grenades. The gun was demolished, three crew men killed and the other wounded. The destruction of these two guns allowed the company to



Above, an American column rolls past Hindenberg-Kaserne, a former French military barracks taken over by the Germans and liberated by the Century. Right, street scene in Bitche.



move forward slowly. Sgt. Trapani continued to move ahead of the lead elements and in the thickening woods was lost to view. At 1230 the leading platoon came upon his body lying face downward. In a half-circle around him were three enemy dead.

When during the morning Co. E of the 399th Inf. attacked on the left of Co. F, the 3rd Platoon of Co. E, led by 2nd Lt. Herbert S. Verrill, had to take three enemy pillboxes. As Lt. Verrill, after deploying his platoon, moved out ahead of his leading element, he came upon a field of Schu-mines, laid during the winter and now exposed by the melted snow. Beyond was a wire entanglement, behind which the three pillboxes were firing heavily. Since to stop would be disastrous, Lt. Verrill chose to move forward by stepping between the mines while his lead element followed his example. Suddenly Lt. Verrill stepped on a mine which had been cunningly buried among those visible on the ground. The explosion tore off his right foot and injured his left one. Because the lieutenant was ahead of them, the men were alerted to this new danger. Lt. Verrill retained consciousness, and lying on the ground continued to issue clear and precise orders for the withdrawal of his men from the minefield and then by hand and arm signals directed them into a defilade position. Only then did he allow himself to be given medical aid and removed from the area. Later the company advanced and destroyed the three pillboxes.

Slow though their progress was, Cos. F and E were gradually completing the encirclement of the Spitzberg positions which the 3rd Battalion to the north

had already outflanked. On Schoenberg above the Reyersviller and Lemberg road junction, Co. L held the southern slope, Co. K the northern one, and Co. I faced northeast between them. The executive officer of the 3rd Battalion, Maj. Angello Punaro, led a platoon of tanks into by-passed Reyersviller at 1300 and met no resistance.

While Co. G with two Sherman tanks advanced to clear Signalberg ridge to the west of Co. E, the 1st Battalion of the 399th, approaching Reyersviller from the west, removed a roadblock from the western end of town. With a Co. C platoon, 1st Lt. Robert E. Lynch attacked the German positions on Steinkopf from the northeast by going through a minefield. The Co. C men forced two Germans whom they captured in the first few minutes of action to lead them through the rest of the minefield. This strategy enabled them to snare 18 more Germans without a fight and gained them control of the ridge. By 1600 Apitzberg was cleared and the 2nd Battalion of the 66th Inf. relieved the 2nd Battalion of the 399th there. The 2nd Battalion 399th Inf. then moved into reserve in Reyersviller, and the 1st Battalion moved into positions on Schimberg Ridge west of the 3rd Battalion. At 1345 a patrol from Co. C had moved into Bitche without encountering any enemy. Two hours later a Co. A patrol pushed into the outskirts of the town, discovering five enemy machine guns guarding the south and southwestern approaches to the fortress city.

The second day of the attack, 16 March, saw the complete reduction of Bitche, its Maginot Forts, and the Camp de Bitche. To the north, the 2nd Battalion of the 397th attacked through the positions of the 1st Battalion northeast of Schorbach. The 2nd Battalion,



with Co. G leading, advanced eastward toward the crossroads where the road east from Schorbach and the road north from Bitche join the roads north to Breidenbach and Hanviller. To this point the resistance was very light although the enemy had partially destroyed a bridge on the Bitche road just south of the crossroads. By noon Co. G had taken the hill just east of the crossroads, and Co. F had moved to the higher hill to the east.

In occupying these two peaks on the Woustvillerberg the two companies had been harassed by small arms and automatic weapons fire from an enemy strongpoint, the most determined resistance of the day in the regimental area. The 3rd Battalion continued to block to the north and northwest on the division open flank, and the 1st Battalion moved to positions overlooking the Breidenbach road from the west above the crossroads.

While the northern approaches and escape routes from Bitche were thus being closed, the 398th in the center again advanced to the east. The 1st Battalion, on the regimental north flank, took a series of forts on the ridges north of Bitche—Ramstein, Petite Otterbiel, Grande Otterbiel, Fort Otterbiel. The forts were practically undefended though the battalion encountered rather stiff resistance from Krauts in field defenses surrounding the forts. The attack, however, was completed by noon. At 0620, Co. E of the 398th Inf. had entered Bitche, followed by the rest of the battalion. Resistance consisted of scattered small arms fire against the first attacking force ever to enter the fortress city as the troops cleaned out the few enemy riflemen from the western and northern end of the town. The 3rd Battalion followed and passed through

Above, the camera looks northeast from the parapets of the Citadel of Bitche. Left, an aerial view of the Citadel and surrounding terrain. We waited three months for the climb to the top.

the 2nd Battalion in Bitche at mid-morning to take the fort called Petite Hohekirkel to the east and slightly north of the town. In moving east from the fort, the battalion ran into enemy resistance just west of Camp de Bitche.

In the 399th sector to the south, the 3rd Battalion remained in positions on Schoenberg to protect the division's right flank, and the 2nd Battalion continued in reserve in Reyersviller. But the 1st Battalion attacked northeast-toward Bitche. While Co. C advanced up the Lemberg-Bitche highway toward the College de Bitche, Co. A, to the left and a little to the rear, attacked almost straight east from the nose of Schimberg Hill, while Co. B followed in support. Within an hour, at 0700, Co. C had taken the college, so long a scene of patrol actions, and half an hour later, without opposition, entered the city from the south.

First to enter the towering Citadel of Bitche were 1st Lt. Elwood H. Shemwell and six volunteers from Co. C who, guided through a minefield by a civilian, climbed a narrow path leading to the Citadel from the south. The Citadel was clear of enemy. In fact, the Krauts fired only five rifle shots to defend the town after the 399th entered. Co. C remained in Bitche while Co. A with tank support attacked eastward toward Camp de Bitche. Co. B, also with tanks, moved southeast along the Bitche-Strasbourg road.

As Co. B advanced toward Camp de Bitche, they began to receive mortar fire from the woods ahead and machine gun fire from two concrete pillboxes on the slope north of the road. The 2nd and 3rd Platoons of



Birdseye view of the College de Bitche from atop the massive Citadel walls. Right, stone ramp leading to the ancient castle. Note the moat at the base of the Citadel walls.

the company were moving forward with two tanks across the flat, open ground south of the road, and the 1st Platoon was to the north of the road. In the midst of the mortar fire the two lead scouts radioed to the company commander, 1st Lt. Harry G. Flanagan, that they had sighted the pillboxes from which the machine guns were firing. Lt. Flanagan ordered the 1st Platoon to maneuver to the north and rear of the pillboxes while the other platoons and the two tanks assaulted the positions frontally from the southwest. The 1st Platoon, under 2nd Lt. William E. Sullivan and T. Sgt. Wenston G. Coburn, began to deploy for its part in the attack by working up the slope behind the fortifications. They placed Sgt. Andrew M. Silvay and a light machine gun squad from the 4th Platoon with a squad of riflemen to fire on the entrance to the first pillbox from the right rear. The rest of the platoon moved further east.

The platoon began firing from these positions in co-ordination with the tank and infantry attack from the southwest, the tanks throwing anti-personnel and high explosive shells against the pillboxes. Lt. Sullivan, with two volunteers, Pfc. Michael Abraham with a BAR and a man with a bazooka, accompanied by S. Sgt. Arthur E. Weiss, crawled forward to the edge of the wire obstacle above the rearmost machine gun turret. Though they were in danger from both enemy and friendly fire, Pfc. Abraham poured rifle fire into the turret openings while the bazooka-man threw in a round which blew the turret off. Lt. Sullivan heaved a white phosphorous grenade which started a fire. As

the rest of the company, having silenced enemy resistance, began to close in, Lt. Sullivan and Sgt. Weiss crawled down the hill, skirting the wire obstacle. As they approached the gate leading into the enclosure at the rear of the two interconnected pillboxes, five Germans who had come out during a lull in the firing to man a gun in the yard, saw the two Centurymen and began to fire. Sullivan and Weiss charged, firing their carbines. The lieutenant killed one of the enemy, wounded another, and caused the rest to flee into the fortifications.

Holding a grenade, its pin already drawn, Lt. Sullivan walked boldly up to the door of the pillbox and called out to the occupants in German to surrender. A Jerry NCO came out. The lieutenant stopped him, and using him as a hostage, went up to the opening and repeated his demand. This time the Germans began to file out in a stream.

The catch included the battalion commander of the 2nd Battalion 225th Volksgrenadier Regiment, four officers of his staff, and more than 70 NCOs and enlisted men. The rest of the 1st Platoon of Co. B closed in and took the prisoners down to the road where the German Battalion CO formally surrendered to Lt. Flanagan.

In its attack along the road from Bitche to the Camp, Co. A had first been slowed by enemy resistance from a roadblock at the western end of the Camp. But with the help of part of Co. C of the 325th Engrs., the company had continued to move eastward.

The Germans at this point apparently decided that they had retreated far enough when they reached the eastern edge of the Camp. It was already late in the afternoon, and Co. A had completed the clearing of



The Citadel and city of Bitche on the road leading from the northwest.

the garrison area and had knocked out two German tanks. As the company reached the street on the extreme eastern edge of the Camp, the Jerries began firing from behind roadblocks in the area. Suddenly, four Tiger tanks and several self-propelled guns mounted on Mark VI chassis, moved in from the northeast and attacked south toward the company.

The 1st Platoon, under 1st Lt. David W. Ballie, had been on the left in the attack across the Camp. To the south, at the other end of the block, were the other two rifle platoons. Under the fire from the tanks, all took cover. Because they were outgunned, Capt. Richard G. Young, the Co. A commander, ordered the section of Sherman tanks which had been with the company to draw back. Then he and his runner, Pfc. Richard W. Montgomery, entered one of the buildings with the riflemen.

The Weapons Platoon, under 2nd Lieutenant Thomas E. Plante, moved into a stable just south of the 1st Platoon. Once inside and slightly protected from the enemy fire, Lt. Plante, Pfc. Jack A. Pascoline, who was a mortar gunner, and others of the platoon tried to set up defensive fires. But the German tanks came on, their 88s hurling shells directly into the buildings where the troops had taken cover.

The leading tank fired its cannon and machine guns almost point blank into the stable. Two bazooka rounds shot by the Weapons Platoon had both missed the tank. Lt. Plante seized the bazooka and ran out of the building. He threw himself to the ground just ahead of the advancing tank and fired the bazooka. The round blew off a tread of the tank and stopped it. Lt. Plante leaped up and rushed forward to throw a grenade into the turret, but the machine gun on the tank fired a



Bitterly defended Rohrback while fighting was still in progress.

heavy burst and mortally wounded him. The company was forming to fall back and mount an attack when the German tanks turned tail and fled along the railroad to the southeast.

One of the tasks which always followed the taking over of towns in France was the establishment of a government. In a division zone the G-5 of the division had the responsibility of working with local governments in the distribution of French food supplies, the evacuation of civilians, and other governmental functions. On the liberation of Bitche, Major Hamburg, our Division G-5, with Capt. Henri Lagaillarde, French Liaison Officer, and two representatives of the CIC went into the town and appointed a new mayor, a secretary, and a chief of police. The appointments were made on the basis of a "white" list previously prepared by CIC.

In spite of the damage done by shell fire, about 3600 civilians were still in the town where they had been living in cellars. They were poorly fed, and their sanitary conditions were very bad. Advance information from the Underground and from the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) had caused the G-5 to set aside a stock-pile of food for the city. On the day of liberation five 2½-ton trucks with canned goods, medical supplies and drugs, and 1000 loaves of bread baked by the bakers of Siersthal for their countrymen, rolled into Bitche. There was also a mobile soup kitchen.

Later, the Civil Affairs Detachment, commanded by 1st Lt. George K. Culver, set up headquarters in the town to supervise the government and dispensation of relief. The French sent in four doctors, four ambulance drivers, and two ambulances to help the local



The citizens of Bitche crowded the streets to welcome the Yanks.

hospitals and the civilian doctors in the care of the sick and wounded. After five long years Bitche had become French again.

The division pivoted and attacked to the north on 17 March, the third day of the attack. The enemy was no longer fighting even a delaying action. Resistance consisted of sniper fire. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 397th, on the division left, slashed forward from the vicinity of Schorbach and took Briedenbach to the north; the 3rd Battalion taking the town itself and the 1st Battalion the ground to the southeast. The 1st Battalion then turned east and captured Waldhausen while the 3rd Battalion moved north to clear a few snipers out of Dorst. In moving toward Walschbronn just east of Waldhausen the 1st Battalion ran into some sniper and machine gun fire. In all the towns the Germans had destroyed or tried to destroy the bridges. The 2nd Battalion moved into billets in Waldhausen for the night.

The 399th Inf. also attacked to the north on the division's east flank. The 3rd Battalion, relieved during the night by the 1st Battalion of the 14th Inf., struck north with Cos. K and L in the lead, quickly took Hanviller and Bousseviller, and turning east occupied Liederschiedt and Schweix. Schweix was the first town in Germany to be entered by any element of the division.

Co. K of the 399th crossed the border into Germany at 1431 on 17 March on the road between Liederschiedt and Schweix. With the area around the Camp de Bitche taken over by the 398th Inf., the 1st Battalion of the 399th also attacked north. The battalion moved by truck to Haspelschiedt to the northeast and then took Neudoerfel and Roppeviller. Cos. A and B



We acknowledged the cheers of the Frenchmen and pressed on.

went on to dig in on the high ground west of Hilst so that they were astride the border.

In its holding positions near Bitche, the 398th cleared out a few Germans around Hohekirkel.

The 398th and 399th Inf. went into assembly areas around Bousseviller, Briedenbach, and other towns to the north of Bitche. The two regiments occupied these assembly areas from 18 to 22 March. For two days the 397th Inf. held the division left flank and conducted patrols until the 106th Cavalry Group relieved them on the night of 19 March.

In the next two days the division made a motor march to the Rhine River at Ludwigshafen, a distance of 92 miles. The almost unbelievable fact about this motor march is that it was made by the division in its own vehicles or, as the army says, "employing only organic transportation and that of attached units." This move was made under the direction of the XXI Corps, which took over control of the 100th Division and of the 71st Div. on our right. The plan was for these two divisions to advance northeast. The 100th, with the 399th on the northwest, the 397th, next to the 71st, on the southeast, and the 398th in reserve, was to capture Neustadt and then Ludwigshafen. At Ludwigshafen we were to seize all available means of crossing the Rhine River. Because the Third Army had been driving south along the Rhine towards Mainz and Worms, the enemy resistance had disintegrated, and the division's advance by truck was slowed only by occasional blown bridges and roadblocks.

Great numbers of freed Russian, Greek, French and Polish slave laborers appeared along the highway. Most of the DPs seemed bewildered by their sudden liberation from bondage by the onrushing Americans.