

## CHAPTER III

On August 26th we were again on our way, this time towards Fountainbleau 170 miles away. Our route took us through many places, the largest being Château Dun, Pithiviers and into the outskirts of Fountainbleau, itself.

The trip to this historical town, home of the famous Summer Palace and gardens of the Kings of France, was the longest single road march that we had yet made since we set foot on French soil, and proved to be of great interest to all. After leaving our bivouac at Marmouille, the first great difference was a sudden disappearance of hedgerows. The plain fields of France were just like the typical midwestern area of America. The most amazing thing was a complete lack of enemy planes, we did not see a single plane the whole trip. Another thing was the lack of signs of war. Here and there we saw an abandoned German vehicle, but saw very little damage done, other than a few places that have been bombed.

Fountainbleau, the summer place for moneyed Parisians, an old city, yet modern. The streets lined with those ever famous sidewalk cafes, and restaurants. The towns gave us Americans a very warm reception. We passed through the center of the city in the evening when everyone was out sitting around doing some social "elbow bending".

The afternoon of the twenty-seventh saw us preparing to cross the Seine River, where the engineers had done their usual excellent job of putting in a pontoon bridge. Antiaircraft guns defended both sides of the river against possible air attacks. Approaches to the bridge were jammed with heavy traffic, double columns of armor, artillery, ack-ack batteries, and other units. Slowly, surely, we crossed the bridge and climbed up the sharp, winding road that led to the ground east of Fountainbleau. Thirty-five miles rolled behind us that day as we went into bivouac near the town of Cheny. The next morning started another typical day of moving in leaps and bounds. As dusk came upon us, burning haystacks could be seen in the distance. TDs were moving out ahead of us firing into the stacks as they afforded excellent concealment for enemy self-propelled guns and tanks. The fire from these long burning piles illuminated the immediate areas too well, our vehicles were silhouetted against the skyline – well set up targets for any Jerry who might be waiting for us. But our luck held good until we hit Jonchey-Sur-Vesle, where an ack-ack gun truck hit a mine while pulling to the side of the road, and blew up. For over an hour 40 mm, 50 caliber machine gun, and bazooka ammo, filled the rain soaked night with battle sounds. Captain Danovsky, Headquarters Battery, was killed near the same spot, earlier in the day by a mine. His driver, Cpl. Jim Shaw of B Battery, died from wounds caused by the same explosion.

August 30th we moved towards Rheims, famous city of Cathedral and Champagne. Unfortunately the powers that be decided against our entry into this beautiful city that beckons so invitingly from the distance of six kilometers. From high ground we can see the twin towers of the celebrated cathedral reaching for the sky. Just as successfully as stretching out our hands for a glass of "Dry Monoplie", six kilometers from heaven. We went into position near St. Mames.

The "bitches" of yesterday turned into the pleased grins of today, September 1st. Men from the Battalion could go to Rheims for a few hours. The fortunate few had a splendid day for sightseeing and tasting. Here was the French spirit at its best, both the human and bottle varieties. Expensive? Well, what was it worth to those who had been "a little too busy" to visit a city in three months? To those the price was secondary – to walk a street, to admire a statue, to look in a store window, to flirt with the girl, to drink in a city sparkled in the bright sun. Below there also was an abundance of effervescent wine,

champagnes known the world over, and many interesting things to be done, if only for a few hours, the drought would be over.

We stayed in the vicinity of St. Masmès until September 6th. This was a good opportunity for the men to clean themselves as well as their equipment. A small, fast flowing stream, the Vesle flowed through the battery positions. Several movies were shown at the theater in the town of Bazancourt. The movies were all lousy, as usual, but helped to relieve the monotony of waiting. During this stay here there were a few changes in the officer personnel; Captain Lippard, Charlie Battery Commander, became Battalion Executive, Captain Thornton went to Charlie Battery as Commander, and Lt. Mann to Captain Thornton's place as liaison officer.

On the sixth we moved from St. Masmès on a long trip towards, and beyond Verdun. Our route took us through Pont Farverger, Betheniville, St. Hilaire Le Grande, Suippes, Somme Suippes, St. Menehold, Clermont, Blercourt, and Verdun itself. Verdun, the famous besieged city of World War I, with its cold grim fortresses had seen too much of soldiering to be much interested in our long convoy. The old fortresses of this town were not defended by the Germans in this present conflict, a few battle scars were to be seen but not many.

After going through Verdun, where the people had a sort of beaten, downtrodden look, a look as if they had been worked by a tyrant all their days, we headed out east and went through Etain and finally arrived at Barancourt ninety-four miles from where we started in the morning.

From Barancourt we went to Landres, and ended up in a small town called Lugquengnieux, after passing through a small place, just a wide spot in the road called Mairy. The towns in this zone are all mining towns dull, dreary and uninteresting, almost dead. A few children and girls wave and smile, but men are sober faced and tired looking, trudging along, minding their own business, looking straight ahead. Lt. Cantini returned to the battalion in this position.

About 0200 on the morning of September eighth, small arms fire could be heard to the rear. Towards dawn the Battalion heard that a panzer brigade searching for our recon outfit, not realizing that they were up against an entire division, attacked Division Artillery Headquarters, killing several and wounding many more. Finally some aid was brought to the men and the Panzer outfit made its way to Mairy, where our Service Battery was located; also in the town was the 1st Battalion 358th and their Canon Company. The Germans entered the town shortly after daybreak, only to run into a tremendous barrage of all types of fire, including artillery which had swung its guns 180 degrees in order to fire on the enemy. Grenades were tossed from windows into open half tracks, riflemen were sniping from all vantage points; bazookas smashed and wrecked tracked vehicles as fast as they came into range. The artillery was firing heavy a barrage on all roads coming into town, thus blocking any escape. A and B companies, 358th Infantry, plus Service Battery plus our artillery accounted for 48 half tracks, 27 assault guns, 7 tiger tanks, 2 motorcycles and 1 truck, and 100 prisoners, and 47 wounded, the 1st Battalion suffered 22 casualties. Sgt. Tammany, and Pfc. Schneiderman knocked out a tank, S/Sgt. Tucker and Cpl. Harnagel an halftrack, Sgt. Gemar and Cpl. Rathage stopped a Mark V tank. All these men, from Service Battery, did their splendid work with bazookas, and no casualties. The Panzer outfit learned too late that it was pulling the tale of a tiger, and was almost completely annihilated. A heartening sight during the fight was to see the Frenchmen come out of the town and woods with weapons of all types and heading for the scene of the fight. That day was the first active firing we had done since the Falaise Pocket. Nine hundred twenty-four rounds fired. That night a normal barrage was laid down right in front of the CP. During the day the ack-ack had quite a novel experience. One of their gun sections had spotted some Germans running into the woods right in front of the gun, so Captain Aurbach, B.C. had

them level the Bouffers and fire horizontally into the woods with Lt. Bauer doing the adjusting. Though the results were never known, at least it stopped Heinie from running around out in the open and attacking Headquarters Battery position.

After everything had quieted down around Lucquenieux we moved two and one half miles to Trieuy. A large settlement of Polish miners were working here, and a few of the men in the Battalion who could speak the language had a little celebration to break the monotony of speaking English. The country was becoming more hilly, with occasional pillboxes cropping up, apparently we were getting into the old Maginot line wherein France had placed her hopes, only to be overrun in 39 days

On the thirteenth we moved to the vicinity of Veremerange, close to the Moselle River and the German border. Our mission was to clear the town of Thionville, or Diedenhoffen, as the Germans were prone to call it. It was while in this position that heavy and continuous rains turned our battery positions into quagmires. One battery pitched their tents, pup tents, inadequate at best in a dry creek bed until the rains brought a small flood.

On the sixteenth a German, believed to be an artillery spotter, was discovered in an upstairs apartment. Above the room where the battalion CP was located. He was immediately taken to the rear P. W. Cage. A fine thing.

In cleaning up Thionville much loot in the form of Nazi flags and German equipment was found by our forward party boys, who had well "established" themselves in the Hotel Metropole, using the upper floors as an OP.

Patton's armor had struck towards Metz, elements of which had entered this well fortified city, and though no heavy resistance had been met, had to withdraw because supplies could not be brought up to them. All along the front the 3rd Army went into more or less static positions. Our Division was no exception. We remained in Veremerange until the twenty-seventh.

On the afternoon of the twenty-seventh we moved through Briey, Jarny and Mars Le Tours coming to a halt outside of Vionville, within 16,000 yards of Metz, but only a short distance from its too big forts, Jeanne D'Arc and Driant. After a few days of moving around the Battalion finally became settled in positions that afforded good firing positions and yet gave fair protection against the guns from the German manned forts that "barked" almost every night. Rainy weather had followed us to this position, making pools out of foxholes and lakes out of dugouts. On the twenty-ninth a new battery was added to the battalion, "Dog" Battery, with Lt. Green as Commander. It consisted of three 10.5 cm German guns. September 30th relieved some of the monotony for the fellows. Twenty-five percent from each of the batteries were allowed into Giraumont for 24 hours of rest and relaxation, to shower, sleep indoors, see a movie, or do what you please. "K" rations for the bill of fare. The showers were located at the mines in the town. Individual tile stalls! As long as we were in Vionville we were permitted this change from the sameness of battery duty.

Between October 2nd and November 1st, though there was no real fighting going on, the artillery fired any missions that came in, for our FO teams were out and so were the Liaison Crews. Captain Culp, Battalion Surgeon, was evacuated to England, and Captain William McConahey was transferred to us from the 2nd Battalion, 357th Infantry. Sgt. D'Angelo was made a 2nd Lt. and went to Baker Battery. Major Salisbury became our new S3, replacing Major Conn, who took over the Battalion Executive's job. Captain Andrews returned to us from England where he was convalescing after being wounded in the battle of Foret de Mont Castre. For the past month and a half we had our true share of rain. Our Fire

Direction was enlarged by attached units, namely; two platoons from the 712 tanks, two platoons from the 74th tank destroyers, and one platoon from A Company, 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion, plus Liaison Officer from the 5th Div-Arty, and an officer from B Battery, 943rd F.A. The Battalion switchboard looked like a civilian board for there were so many lines coming into it, thirty in all. We finally established a separate FDC for the attached units, with a few from the battalion running it under the able guidance of Lt. Green as S3 and S/Sgt. Roy Compton as his assistant. Sgt. Compton was from A Battery. The Red Cross clubmobile visited us twice during our stay here. One Sunday afternoon we were visited by either our first buzz bomb, or perhaps one of those jet propelled jobs. No one was sure, for the clouds were low hanging, and the plane, or object was not easily identified. Here we received our first cigarette rations in a long while. Rumors were circulating around that soon there would be three day passes to Paris! No one really believed it, but it was something to mull over in one's mind. A few days later six men went to Paris from this Battalion. So, it was not just a rumor! One night while Fort Driant was serenading us with 15 cm guns a shell went right through the wall of the room immediately next to where Colonel Munson was sleeping, bursting there, and he didn't even wake up! Must be wonderful to be a heavy sleeper! More rumors. We were to be relieved by a brand-new outfit, the 10th Armored, and go back for a rest. We left for Arcourt on November 2nd, twenty-six miles to the rear. The 10th took over lock, stock and barrel. Even moved their self-propelled guns into our gun positions.

November 3rd we had reveille, calisthenics, and all the trimmings at a training program provides. A rest? Everyone realizes that there is something big being cooked up, for we were told that the position that we moved into there would be no moving around, and all insignias would be covered up.

On the 5th, Sunday, there was no training schedule, but everybody was alerted for a night move. We took off at dusk and drove blackout for thirty-five miles right into the heart of the Maginot Line. Just west of the Moselle River. The batteries were all told to lie low during the day, and to eliminate all unnecessary movement. The CP was set up in a large two-story fort with electric lights and ventilation system. The next few days nothing was done except to sit around and wait for H-Hour to arrive. Attached to us was a 241st Group Artillery, and again we formed another F.D.C. using tanks in battery formation, using them as guns for interdiction only. We know now that the Moselle is to be our task, and the Fort Koenigsmacher is one of the main obstacles, after once across.

H-Hour finally arrived on the morning of the 9th, 0300. This time we played a trick on Heinie and never fired a round across in the sector that the infantry was to take, they went over, on boats and after awhile a footbridge. At least two battalions across before the Germans knew what was afoot. That was when we started firing on selected targets. The infantry was to take the high ground around Koenigsmacher also the fort itself. Liaison 1 and 3 went over with the first wave to get communications in back to our F.D.C. The forward observers with first wave were; Lts. D'Angelo, Coleman, Buchanan and Murray. The heavy rains had made the river three times its normal width, and it was now a fast-moving torrent. Good progress was made after reaching the other side, but the need for dry clothing and supplies was most urgent. On the 10th, Lt. Lloyd Watland, one of our Liaison pilots dropped food, clothing and explosives to the infantry, who were fighting near the fort. Composition C was dropped to the 1st Battalion so that they could blow the strong Fort Koenigsmacher, an obstacle for any further progress. The engineers were desperately trying to bridge the swollen torrent, and for their protection we kept constant cloud of smoke between them and the high ground further ahead from which the enemy could observe all activity. Several times they had the bridge completed only to have the river wash it away. Finally a bridge was in and we were told to get ready to cross. Also word was gotten to us that the Fort had fallen, with a total of 240 prisoners, including the Commandant. The capture of this fort now made it easier for all to move, and made for more flexible maneuvering. We moved down to

the bridge at 0300 on the morning of the 14th, the bridge that the hard fighting 315th engineers had put in. The night was one of pitch darkness, with slow drizzling rain making it just that much more unpleasant, and causing us to creep along yard by yard, as a blind man picks his way across rough ground. The first vehicle across was a gun truck from C Battery, and the battalion came immediately behind it, dodging the German shells that were coming in to the bridgehead area. Other than a few extra heartbeats, there was no mishap on that river crossing.

On the 15th and 16th we were in position near Niederrhein, firing heavy concentrations at the withdrawing Germans. Running through the battalion area was a huge tank trap, unfinished in parts, with tools still in it, showing how recently work had been done on it, by slave labor. In the soft, muddy earth could be seen the footprints of those who had worked on the trap.

We marched ordered at 1000 on the 17th. The fighting was almost as bitter as Normandy. The most extensive mine fields we have yet run into. Large stacks of anti-personnel mines and teller mines were piled along the roads – the engineers doing their usual good job of the deactivating and pulling them. Brave man! The odor of death hung in the air, like a curtain, as our vehicles carefully threaded their way along roads marked by signs reading: "DANGER! MINES!" We went into position in Distroff, the town where G Company was nearly, or treacherously, trapped for a while; the familiar scenes of shattered houses, burned out and blackened vehicles, dead men and horses, all here in great numbers.

Alerted to reinforce the 915th Field Artillery on the eighteenth. The Jerries were retreating fast and we had to move fast to keep within range and deliver effective fire. This running fight kept up for three days, and as we moved from town to town we passed all the gruesome sights of a hard-hitting type of fighting, roads marked by smashed vehicles, horse-drawn vehicles with their animals sprawled in a bloody smear, and corpses all over the roadsides. Then we returned to Distroff to prepare a movement into another sector, where we were to follow the 10th Armored into Germany.

On the twenty-second this battalion pulled into Perl Germany, the first complete outfit of the 90th Div-Arty to be in pre-1940 Germany. Up to now we had been fighting in the Alsace-Lorraine country, the chess board that both Germany and France had taken turns in controlling. Our F.D.C. was located at 34 Adolf Hitler Strasse. The Battalion fired a volley at 1300, on a target that was our first blasting on the Sacred Soil of the Superman. Those that pulled the lanyards for the ceremonial rounds were: Pvts. Deramus and Murphy, and Pfc. Thompson and Clark of A Battery; Captain Johnson, Lt. Webster, Cpl. De Lara, and Pfc. O'Daniel of B Battery, 1st Sgt. Lawton, Pfc. Joe Hansen, Pfc. Moret, and Pfc. Jechna of C battery. Our plans soon changed and we went back to regimental combat team control, instead of supporting the 10th Armored.

November 23, Thanksgiving day. Rain and Turkey, with all the trimmings. There was little activity that day, though many were able to take shower baths, located in the modern school house. We noticed a big difference in the towns and farms here in Germany, over those in France. One of the big changes was the absence of the wealth usually found out in front of the French houses. The German houses all had new furniture, modern plumbing and electricity, though the latter was out, because of the fighting that went on in and around the towns.

Captain Smith took over as A Battery C.O. while Captain Andrews became Liaison 1. From a position between Perl and Borg we went back under Division control in German controlled France, a move of about 17 miles to Zewrange, passing through Apach, Sierck, Kirchnaumam, Halstroff, Flashstroff. Our mission was to go into support of the 915th F.A. Pretty soon after moving into our

position some fairly heavy German artillery came in and tore up a couple of tents and trucks, other than that all was well.

December 1st, moved to Fresdorferhof, we are back in Germany once more. A large force of American medium bombers over us this day around noon, and an A20 crashed about a mile from the battalion position, luckily the crew bailed out safely and the pilot came down in B Battery location. Unfortunately the plane crashed into an ack-ack gun position, killing one and burning two others. Side glance; Battalion received its first lot of combat shoes.

The Battalion moved to Gissengen on the night of December 4th, because Jerry had observation on a crossroad in the center of the road. Whether he had observation or not makes no difference for soon rounds started coming in on the road, much to the consternation of the message center which was located about 300 feet from the bursts. The next morning no sooner had A Battery finished registering when twelve rounds came into the position. Again Lady Luck was with us and no one was injured it was decided to move A Battery as one never knew whether the Heinie would bring in more effective fire than that which they had. The gun battery moved about 1000 yards closer to the river. Our mission was to take the town on the other side of the Saar River, Dillingen. The Saar, another river that had to be overcome, another river that had to be bridged, so that we could get to the enemy on the other side.

Lt. Colonel Munson was decorated with the Croix de Guerre, thus adding another decoration to his already impressive display.

On the morning of the 6th at 0415 the 358th Infantry initiated H-Hour by crossing the Saar in assault boats to take Dillingen. But it was not as easy as that. Dillingen was a well camouflaged fortress town. Pillboxes were disguised in various ways; garages, stores and buildings turned into traps to catch the unwary. The street fighting was of a particularly vicious type and gains were measured in yards, hundreds not thousands. The enemy were using their crossfire pill boxes to good advantage.

While placing a self-propelled 155 mm Long Tom, in a position where it could be used for direct fire on the pill boxes, Colonel Munson was hit by shell fragments and had to be evacuated. This was his third wound since landing in France. That day the self-propelled knocked out two pillboxes.

Enemy artillery fire continued to come into the battalion area throughout the night of the eighth. Two rounds dropped in next to one of the guns in Baker Battery, killing Pvt. Packard and wounding Cpl. Henry. The weather was still miserable, the slush turning the fields into mires and the pits in which the guns were implaced were no longer capable of holding the guns. Firing platforms had to be made, and heavy logs had to be placed under the guns to keep them from sinking. The cannoneers were improvising shelters of various designs to keep dry. That night several hundred rounds were fired in a spot already registered on, where counterattacks were reported taking place. For several weeks rumors had been circulating around that a few men would be able to go home on the 30 day leave, plus travel time. Cpl. Rumick and Cpl. Wallace were the lucky ones to go home. On the 10th, a German was found hiding in a haystack near the S.P. position. He claimed to be a corporal but was wearing a lieutenant's dress, and had a pair of field glasses on his person, apparently planted for observation purposes. Major Salisbury left this battalion on the 13th for Div-Arty, to take up the job of S3. Captain Reddington came to us as the new S3. He was formerly with 20th Corps Artillery. While attempting to put a cable across the Saar, Cpl. McGee and Pvt. Green, both of Headquarters Battery were thrown from the boat, and as the river was so completely covered by a cloud of smoke visibility was very limited, and they were last seen going downstream, being dragged by the swift current. Two others who were in the boat at the time managed to get to shore.

Up to date, December 19 the S.P. gun had knocked out 10 pillboxes and damaged four others. On the 19th, twenty-three men were transferred to the infantry. We were informed also that on the night of the 21st and 22nd that the infantry would be withdrawn. It looked as if we were needed elsewhere, especially the "Bulge". During the next evening and morning the infantry was brought back in boats, for no bridge had ever been put in, everything had been ferried back and forth. Behind them the "Doughboys" had left the town that had been completely devastated. A town that was never again to be retaken by the Germans. It was a big dent in the highly vaunted Siegfried line, regardless of the cost to our men.

At 0600 on the morning of the 23rd we moved out of Gissingen and after passing through several small rather beaten up towns we went in to position around Gongalfangen. The reason for this move instead of the "Bulge" was to take up a defensive position, with a series of positions that we could fall back to in case Von Runstedt tried to break through in our sector. Bridge approaches were mined and trees were prepared for hasty roadblocks. During this time Fire Direction was preparing all kinds of defensive fires, with the usual, "on the ball" work of the survey section. While this work was going on we were intently awaiting news of the happenings up in the Ardennes but as yet nothing could be determined, other than a bunch of personal opinions. That night Cpl. Bruss, computer from B Battery, played midwife to a cow, she was having trouble dropping her calf. As Christmas approached our thoughts, taking up a lot of our thoughts of home, were still on the outcome in the Ardennes, wondering if any good news would come out, so as to make everyone a little more at ease. Christmas Eve came and went, turkeys and champagne having been distributed to all the batteries. Sent 524 rounds over towards Jerry just to let them know that there was a lot of Hell in store for him if he dared to venture our way, and to remind him that "Peace on Earth, Goodwill Towards Man" was a good thing to strive for. Christmas day came upon us with all its meaning shrouded by the dark cloak of Mars, but the Lord knew that we wished to celebrate his nativity in a bright and cheerful manner, and we found that he heard General Patton's prayer, for the sun came out in all its splendor and at least made the day as cheerful as possible. Later that morning the Red Cross doughnut wagon pulled in and made the day more pleasant. The chaplains also did right by us all, for their services were inspiring to the most downhearted. As far as action was concerned the day remained quiet, but that night we sent a very new and deadly shell screaming into the enemy lines. The German offensive and magnificent defense of Bastogne were the main topics of discussion. Though the weather had cleared, it had turned extremely cold. The firing batteries were in pyramidal tents and hot stoves, headquarters was in houses, so everyone was not suffering too much from cold weather. December 31st, the year came to an end, 205 rounds were fired otherwise it was very quiet. New Year's Day found us still at Gongalfangen and outlying districts, and direct support of the 358th Infantry, with the 343rd F.A. still lending their support to us. Enemy aircraft have become more frequent of late, one was shot down near Waldweisse. Our planes patrolled the skies from dawn to dusk. We had several snowstorms and the roads were bad. Everyone was on edge, for tales had been spread about the enemy as more ruthless than ever, and would hesitate at nothing to get what and go where they wanted. They had been apprehended behind our lines, dressed in our uniform, thus throwing all travelers, under suspicion, and causing us to stop all cars on the roads.

## CHAPTER IV

January 7 we left this last defensive position and headed in deep secrecy for Luxembourg. The 94th Division took over our positions. In making this move we had been transferred to the 3rd Corps, headed for the Ardennes Salient, in the vicinity of Lufange, Luxembourg, southeast of Bastogne. Our long trip carried us through Koenigsmacher, across the Moselle, Luxembourg City, Longwy, Grosbous and Eschdorf. The cold, bone chilling ride that covered part of the country we had previously fought through. We passed positions where our guns had been and the ammo boxes and piles of dirt just as we had left it. We crossed over the Moselle from Koenigsmacher to Cattenom, the bridge that had taken so much backbreaking, heartbreaking effort. One man expressed the feeling of many when he observed: "Hell this is a damned retreat." But we knew that up toward Bastogne there was this scrap and we were to be a part of it. So we moved through fine rain, snow and sleet, into the valleys and hills and the great Forests of Luxembourg.

Luxembourg City was a site for our country sated eyes. Homes, stores, autos, movie houses public conveyances, all added up to a welcome – if only momentary – change. The city had a Christmas Garden appearance with its oddly shaped houses, sharply angled roofs, chimney pots and fenced lawns and yards, now blanketed by snow.

Snow and high winds combined to make our days more uncomfortable than usual. A tremendous amount of artillery was in this area and we were told our Corps mission was to eliminate the German Salient southeast of Bastogne with the 26th Infantry smashing forward under terrible conditions; wind, snow, steep hills, slippery ice coated roads, which all gave mute testimony to the tenacity and fighting ability of the infantryman of our division. The 90th and the 35th were rapidly forming a pocket, and the Germans were frantically trying to escape.

From Bavigne we moved to Tarchamps, one of the towns. We had been pounding for several days we remained here four days firing, heavily, on a variety of targets, one a tremendous concentration on the village of Niederwampach. Our fire direction massed fourteen battalions on this target and after this bombing from the ground, the infantry moved in and took the town and the Jerries prisoner without loss to themselves. The Germans, stunned and bewildered, never had a chance to defend, much less to attack, our onrushing doughboys.

The 17th we march ordered to Bras, Belgium – this had been a town, but the Air Corps and artillery had reduced it to a pile of rubble, and the few houses that did remain were mere skeletons that mocked the efforts of those who tried to use them as shelters. Dead Germans, sprawled in twisted and grotesque heaps, were well refrigerated by the intense cold and snow – "when the thaws and warmer weather comes the stench will demoralize even the strongest stomach". While here the Germans through counterattack after counterattack at our infantry who were in the town of Oberwampach. During this period we fired a total of 7738 rounds at the tanks and infantry that tried to drive us from this hard-won sector. This was the largest expenditure of ammo since Normandy. Our 100,000th round was fired here.

After the bitter fighting of the past few days we advanced into battered towns which it cost much to take and hold. At Chimpach we found 12 German 75's in position with their sights still mounted, aiming stakes out, ammo laid neatly in rows ready to fire. Several of the guns had thermite grenades in their breaches, but the others had been abandoned before they could be destroyed.

Oberwampach, Stockem, Boxhorn, Binsfeld, Bieler, were all typical of the towns we had been fighting in since our arrival here. Smashed Jerry equipment littered the roads and fields which, was a pleasant sight to our eyes. The days were getting warmer and rain had taken the place of the snow which had been with us – it seems – for so long.

The end of the month, January 31, we went into position along the Our River, near the town of Wemeler in Belgium. This was in the general vicinity through which Von Rundstedt had made his initial breakthrough. Vehicles of the 106th and the 28th Infantry Divisions, the outfits which had taken the first blows of Rundstedt's power drives, were still lying where they had been knocked out. Then the rains washed most of the snow away and the river rose, of course, in flood stage; this revealed much small arms equipment scattered about and some of the men found pistols and small arms of all types. Wemeler and our position turned into mud and slop, the continual rains turned this hilly country into a series of racing mountain streams. The Valley roads were underwater and the engineers were rebuilding bridges and repairing roads and doing all they could do to slug up and over these sliding, crumbling, roads.

4th February, we slogged into Blielf where the Germans had converted a railroad tunnel into an underground factory. Excellent machine tools were in place and only needed the necessary power to make them operable. Living quarters were adjoining this factory – in fact part of the tunnel was used for sleeping. We remained at Blielf until the ninth, then moved into the environs of Branscheid.

When we entered Branscheid we were really in the Siegfried Line. Large pillbox forts dotted the hills, and the long rows of Dragon's teeth wound down through the valleys and up over the hills. The Battalion passed through the teeth and on the ninth an F.D.C. was set up in a two-room pillbox, on the outskirts of the badly mauled town of Branscheid, a town which Von Rundstedt's armor came plunging through. Mute testimony was a large amount of US equipment, lying around in a completely wrecked manner.

Again the question of supplies was becoming rather acute, for on the 13th of February a large flight of C-47's came over and dropped a great many supplies to us. It was not so much a question of out distancing the supply lines, but more the condition of the roads, which had been torn up not only by "Mother Nature" but also warfare and its heavy traffic. The supplies thus dropped helped the quartermaster to establish a forward dump in the fastest manner known to get large amounts of supplies to a place in a hurry, by air transport. It was a rare sight not to see pillboxes on the prominent hilltops, cleverly camouflaged and strongly constructed. As we saw them at the time they were of little use to anyone, for the infantry and engineers had used a little composition "C" on them, cracking each one wide open.

The 17th found us still in the same position, firing at a few targets. The early spring weather with its bud stimulating sunshine was magnificent. The sun appearing with its new warmth seemed to us a portent of ending this dreary fight. Only a few patches of snow remained, and that deep in the woods and permanently shaded spots. Our old friend mud was still making it miserable working outside but the newly found warmth of the sun compensated for a great deal.

Habshied, another very much blown apart town, typical of all Siegfried line towns, was our stopping place until the 20th, when we took off down through a winding road and stopped at Oberutfeld, where Jerry laid down direct fire on our ack-ack guns. Two of the batteries were so situated that it was necessary to keep them silent, for Jerry had observation on these particular positions. Several casualties were sustained by the 537th ack-ack, our attached unit, though our own boys escaped all. The

towns of Binshied and Arzfeld passed under our wheels between the 23rd and the 24th, and nothing much happened. On the way into the town of Binscheid we passed over a road curve that was being swept for mines at the time we passed. Very shortly after we got by, a newspaper correspondent happened to spin his wheels just at the wrong time on the curve, and "Blam". A newspaper man was immediately sent for.

No sooner had we reached Arzfeld than we were notified that we were to go into a rest period back in the rear. The 6th Armored was to take over our area. On the present drive, Task Force Scott and the 358th Infantry had taken 607 prisoners and were in the process of cleaning up the woods to the Prum River.

On February 25th we moved back to Winterspelt, for our rest, acting as the Corps reserve. Out in front of us sat a battalion of Long Toms, firing over the Prum River every so often. Our promise of a rest was an actuality; showers, clean clothes, loafed around, and took things easy. There were movies for those that wished to go, and church was also held. It was rumored that we were in SHAEF reserve. Everyone asked: "What gives?" A new month found us still in reserve and a lot of men were thinking perhaps the war was over, but the more sober ones believed it to be a period of reorganization and much needed rest.

At noon of March 3rd we march ordered and went to fighting again. We crossed the Prum River and went through the town of Prunfeld, a town so full of holes, shell and bomb, that it was hard to find more than two walls of the same building still standing, and finally ended in Dachschied. We had gotten a good six day rest and the spirit was again high, thus causing the men to make such remarks as: "A couple more weeks of regular moving and we should be crossing the Rhine". At that time we were supporting the fires of 915th F.A. Battalion.

Near the town of Serwerath, two Germans walked out of the nearby woods and gave themselves up to Cpl. Leo Widzinsky, Headquarters Battery. The story is that when Leo discovered they had no lugars, he told him to go surrender to someone else. Our destruction of these German towns was methodical and thorough. The civilians looked on with blank expressions as we passed through, it did not take much imagination to guess what their thoughts were. We wondered if they remembered the pictures that the Nazis released after their bombings of Coventry, London, Rotterdam, and Warsaw, and other points east, west, north and south? Probably not.

Our infantry team, 358th, went like the proverbial house afire after the rest period, and we kept up to them in good style. We made a late move toward the town of Pelm, but B Battery and part of Headquarters were the only elements to make it on the night of March 7th, the rest pulled off the road and closed in the next morning after daylight. All were ready for another march, only to be told that the 11th Armored had road priority, for they were striking for the Rhine, and we were to follow them. On the morning of the 9th on the way to Burch – many French P.W.'s shouted and waved in their splendaneous manner.

The Battalion convoy roared down one of Hitler's Autobahns on March 10th. The Autobahns were beautifully graded and equal to the best US highways. The particular highway that we went sailing down had a large racetrack and grandstand, perhaps 150 yards long, on the side of the road. Columns of prisoners marching to the rear areas were an excellent indication of the speed and power of the drive that was moving along out in front of us. The 4th Armored was smashing along at a terrific pace, hundreds of German horses were still in their traces, smashing pieces of animal matter, indicating to us the disorderly retreat of the once great German army.

Mayen was a town. It was practically wiped off the map by allied bombers who gave the Heinies a modern version of old St. Nick's Christmas journey. Great craters covered one complete end of the town, and large buildings in the center of town had wide cracks, radiating from stone lintels and sills like spider webs. We went into position around Saffig, or the Battalion registered on targets across the Rhine. The 4th armored was to support our fires, but early the next morning our mission changed. We were to cross the Moselle again. After once having fought so hard and at such a price, it seemed that we had to take the "Damned" river again.

The picturesque town of Munstermaifeld was in good shape, and spring was definitely in the air, as the batteries went into position near the town, on March 12th. In the afternoon of the next day, an unwary enemy plane, coming over our area, was jumped by one of our planes a Lightning, and shot it down. We remained here until the Doughs crossed the Moselle again.

At 0200 on the morning of the 14th infantry crossed the Moselle and made good progress. The only opposition reported was that of heavy weapons shelling the bridgehead. Our Battalion march ordered to Betxemerhof, and waited for the dark so we could cross under the cover of night. For quite a while the army had been using artificial moonlight. Huge searchlights were set up some place in the rear, with their powerful beams reflected off the clouds thus giving enough light to ensure safe travel by trucks over narrow and treacherous roads. Just at dusk we pulled out of our position and formed for the usual slow ant like pace of the approach and crossing the bridge. As the column formed, and S.P. gun from across the river opened up on the bridgehead. On the far side, high on the hills that swept up from the River, could be seen the muzzle flash of this gun. The flash, then a shell screening through the air, and a loud crack, accompanied by a lurid flash, as a projectile landed. If he had swung over to his right a little more we would all been at his mercy but fortunately he was more interested in something else, for his shells kept landing about 600 yards away from us. It was a night filled with tension and immediate danger did not slacken until we went into position to Brondenbach, a town spread out along the Moselle. Because of the terrain we had to fire high angle, using a low charge.

The next morning bright and warm saw us waiting for the armor to get clear of the road so that we could take off again. The Germans were fleeing rapidly, and our moves though short, were many. We took off for Saabenhof. A long winding hill leading up from Brodenbach, gave us an opportunity to see the magnificently scenic country that we were moving through. To imagine a more beautiful variety of scenes was difficult, the rolling country with the Moselle curving in and around the sharp, vine covered hills the towns were clean and well situated, and only slight evidence of any fighting. The 4th armored was still rolling out ahead of us.

Afternoon of the 16th, after a long ride through rough territory we hit the town of Hassenbach. This town and areas around it had been hit. We fired into a wooded area beyond town, for the infantry had run into a group of SS men, numbering about 70. A hard fight took place but the result was several prisoners, and a few knocked out 20 mm ack-ack Guns and about 35 SS killed. Late that afternoon we received a report that Lt. Hester had crashed in enemy held territory, progress in reaching this spot was slow. Both men it was discovered at died in the crash. Well liked by all, they were to be missed very much.

For the past few days many French and Polish laborers had been seen along the roads. As the 17th was St. Patrick's Day, Sgt. McEachern of Headquarters Battery saw fit to celebrate. In commemoration of his patron Saint he proved that motorcycle riding was a snap: results, one sprained ankle.

Lt. Col. Munson returned to the Battalion on the 18th of March. We were in position at Gensingen where General Bixby, Division Artillery Commanding Officer, had dinner with the officers, celebrating the return of Colonel Munson. In this position we had our first chance to see the Heinie jet propelled plane in action. He was apparently interested in the bridgework in rear of us, for he kept flying around. Scorning all the flak that was thrown at him. Liberated eggs were becoming a very frequent item on our diet, and each position that we went into, eggs were on everyone's mind.

Off again on the 20th for another series of leapfrog moves. Close to noon we were attacked by a group of Heinie planes. They dropped sticks of antipersonnel bombs in A Battery's position, wounding five. Cpl. Stryker died later of his wounds. We have been seeing more German planes of all types, more than ever before. The situation was at this point getting very tight for the Germans. They were throwing everything at us, trying to stop the drive. The closer we got to the Rhine the more planes we saw.

We march ordered to the fairly modern town of Finthen, where we stayed for four days, while our combat team attacked and cleaned out Mainz. We were there from the 21st through the 24th. Germans had observation on the town from their positions on the east side of the Rhine, and an occasional round would whip into town. Several targets in Mainz felt our power, as the Doughs mopped up completely to the river's edge. Big plans were under way, for it was obvious that the Rhine was to be bridged pretty soon. On the 23rd the 26th division took over our positions, and we were to follow the 5th across, farther upriver. On the morning of the 24th we went down to the vicinity Neirstein and waited while the 5th crossed, followed by the 4th armored and then us. The big news during the day was that the 5th Division had reached the other bank without opposition.



