

BATTLE OF THE RHINELAND

The 7th Armd. on the right was held up west of METZ and further south the 5th Inf. was laboring mightily to maintain a precarious bridgehead across the MOSELLE. What was originally assumed to be a stout rearguard action soon disclosed itself as an organized defense. XXth Corps in fact was hammering on the outer fringes of FORTRESS METZ, which the enemy had decided to hold. Between the 712th and the MOSELLE however stood only the outposts of this mighty bastion. Wiping these aside and only infrequently meeting any sizeable attempt to stop their progress, the tankers and doughs drove forward. On the northern flank B Co. with 359 reduced ANGEVILLERS and HETTANGE GRANDE. On the south C Co. with 357 passed through BRIEY and after taking HAYENGE reached the MOSELLE south of THIONVILLE. In the center A Co. with 358 pressed forward past FONTOY and on 12 Sept. assaulted the key town of THIONVILLE from two sides, while the attached Hq. 105s harassed enemy vehicles on the other side of the river. The tanks had to fight from corner to corner as roadblocks, bazookas and snipers prevented any rapid movement. They reached the vicinity of the bridge after nightfall just as it was blown by the Boche. Knowing that strong forces were well emplaced on the other side, the Division Comdr. abandoned the idea of crossing in the middle of the night.

Operation "Thunderbolt" as originally conceived contemplated a frontal assault on METZ, with the 90th making the main effort after forcing a crossing at THIONVILLE. Preparations were made to put this plan into operation on 13 Sept. but when the V Corps' 5th Armd. moved up abreast on the left flank and relieved pressure there, the 90th received orders to slide right and relieve the 7th Armd. and 5th Inf. of their positions across from METZ. This involved a considerable thinning of the lines and made an attack in strength for the time being impossible. The relief was effected on 14 and 15 Sept. C Co. and 357 covered the left flank, with B Co. and 359 on the right. Task Force Randolph, consisting of A, D and Hq. Cos. with TD and Engineer attachments, filled in the gap between B and C Cos. and held the open ground northwest of AMANVILLERS. This force centered in STE. MARIE AUX CHENES, minus one A Co. platoon which remained at THIONVILLE for 10 days as part of a diversionary force. During the period 16 Sept. to 31 Oct. Task Force Randolph – renamed Task Force Sundt by 1 Oct. – remained stationary with A Co. rotating platoons from the "Mine" to the open ground near AMANVILLERS, at which place the tanks did indirect firing, occasionally pulling up to fire straight into the villages to the immediate front, assisted at times by Hq. 105s. On 15 Oct. A Co. traded places with B Co., while D Co. remained in the same position the entire time with several platoons outposting the left flank near ST. PRIVAT.

With Operation "Thunderbolt" not yet discarded B Co. with 359 made a major thrust into GRAVELOTTE and into the teeth of mighty FT. DRIANT. This action lasted from 15 Sept. to 30 Sept. and was fiercely resisted by the Boche. The tankers found that direct and close range firing into the forts caused little damage; even a test blasting by P-47s met with little or no success. But this team would not be denied its assignment and pounding forward from gravel pit to gravel pit, all the while subjected to devastating shelling, it took over complete control of GRAVELOTTE by 1 Oct. Even then however strong patrols from both sides were constantly active. Ordered to remain on the aggressive defensive B Co. set up indirect firing positions near VERNEVILLE and operated there until 15 Oct., at which time it swapped places with A Co., moving over to the "Mine" and STE. MARIE. Experience had shown that a frontal assault on the METZ bastion would, even if eventually successful, be much too costly. Further an ammo shortage made any large scale offensive impractical. It was therefore decided to nibble at the forts and keep the Heine alert and guessing. But for any future enveloping movement to be rewarding it was essential to batter down FT. DRIANT and to seize MAIZIERES LES METZ so that huge FT.

JEANNE D'ARC could be flanked. The 5th Inf.'s 11th Regt. drew the DRIANT mission while C Co. with 357 were allotted MAIZIERES.

This latter operation commenced early in October and lasted the entire month. It was one of the most, if not the most, bitterly waged contests in the entire 3rd Army zone during the period. The Boche was determined, strong and brilliantly led and since the Division was so greatly extended it was impossible to assign more than 1 Tank Co. and 1 Inf. Battalion to the struggle. For 25 days and nights the C Co. tankers and 357 doughs held one-half of the town, the fanatical Boche the other half. And while huge slag piles and a school house offered some protection the big guns of the defending ring of forts were constantly launching their deadly peril. The reserve C Co. platoon worked feverishly to answer and still this blasting and the men in the town made use of every opportunity to occupy the next house, the next block. Finally on 28 Oct. the original heroic forces were reenforced and after a large scale effort the whole town was occupied. MAIZIERES: a small town but the site of great gallantry and skill and perhaps the key to the huge operation which so closely followed its capture.

October was a month of nibbling – at the METZ bastion – and waiting – for more gas, for more ammo, for warmer clothing. Fall weather had set in and with it incessant rain. The roads became mucky; the fields in which the tankers did their indirect firing became big seas of mud. Firing used up 24 hours a day and all crew members became experts with the Azimuth Indicators and Gunner's Quadrants which though inexact did not prevent one gunner from putting a shell through a window when the forward observer called for it. Ingenuity was at a premium as the tankers dug caves in the mud and built elaborate houses – even mess-halls – with the crating slats and cardboard shell cases. In the north the 1st Army fought and won the battle for AACHEN and Germany proper was at last penetrated. In the relatively quiet 3rd Army sector METZ still stood, taunting and fearsome. And as the month closed the 712th knew that it was destined to be once again involved in one of the vital campaigns of the whole war.

On 1 and 2 Nov. the 95th Inf. Div. relieved the 90th, and the 712th moved back to JOUDREVILLE. This area had previously been used by other reserve divisions for rest and training and ostensibly the 90th was to have a similar break. In fact a training schedule was framed, complete with such garrison favorites as reveille and retreat. Vehicles were restored and new issues of clothing made in anticipation of the fast approaching winter. There was even a café in which reunions were held with old friends from the newly committed 10th Armd. Many crews billeted in houses with hospitable civilians whose radios were always available and with whom, in most stumbling French, the night counterattack of 8 Sept. was rehashed, as advance elements of the Nazis had reached the outskirts of JOUDREVILLE. But this move, while it did result in some rest and relaxation, was in the main only a feint. By limited objective attacks and continued patrolling during October the contours of the METZ defensive area were fixed and plotted. Supplies had been accumulated in vast quantities and the plan to encircle the most formidable Heine stronghold in France had been devised: The 5th Inf. on Corps right was to thrust northeast from its bridgehead and form the southern arm of the pincers. The 95th Inf, was to contain the enemy salient west of the MOSELLE and when the pincers began to close to reduce the salient and capture the city. The 90th and 712th, making the main effort, were to cross northeast of THIONVILLE, roll up the Maginot Line and, teaming with the 10th Armd., close the pincers east of METZ.

The Battalion rolled on election day – 7 Nov. – to be in a position to cross as soon as a bridge was constructed and by 8 Nov. all preparations were made, with B Co. at EVANGE and C Co. at BOREST assisting in the preparatory artillery barrage. Early in the morning of 9 Nov. the doughs mounted assault boats and shoved off. Soon they were across in considerable numbers and were

infiltrating around huge FT. KOENIGSMACHER. The tanks waited on a minute's alert, ready to cross when the signal came. Rumors floated back from across the swollen waters, all later proving to be facts. The doughs were battering gallantly and successfully at the FORT but were being constantly and savagely assaulted by strong Boche armored columns – this action was dramatized by Pierre Huss in the Cosmopolitan Magazine: “The Fort Is Ours !”. The subsequent 5 days were anxious and frustrating ones for the tankers. Already the 712th – 90th team had become “blood-brothers” and yet one half of that team was fighting to the very utmost, while the other half – the tanks – was unable to assist. The MOSELLE was on a rampage and the engineers were unable to construct a bridge on its overrun banks. Kraut artillery was finding the bridge sites with deadly and punishing accuracy. But the work continued and frequently word would be received to “prepare to cross”. The tanks, sporting their newly attached floaters which had been put on in record time after Gen'l. Patton had indicated his wishes to Battalion Hq., would crawl down the murky, muddy roads in the black of night, only to be informed that the swift waters had smashed the bridge, or mines had blown it, or direct shell hits had ruined it. A new bridge site would be chosen and the tanks would waddle through the mud to be near it, only to find that the previous one had been chosen again. The tankers spent wakeful nights in hay lofts in and near FINEM and listened to the nearby Long Toms throw the book at the Boche.

The situation on the other side finally reached such a critical stage that supporting armor became essential if it were to be retained and exploited. So on 13 Nov. at 1400 a B Co. platoon pulled down to the river bank and under an elaborate smoke screen ferried across on rafts, with shells plopping in the waters all around them. The fire power of these 5 Shermans could not begin to compete in value with the morale boost they gave to the exhausted doughs. Both this platoon and the C Co. tanks which came over shortly afterwards were greeted with cheers and tears. All armor fanned out to support all forward troops and in a short time the atmosphere was changed from an overall feeling of last ditch retention of position to aggressive offense. Meanwhile work on the bridge continued despite adversities and success at last came to the dogged engineers. By the evening of 14 Nov. the entire Battalion was across the pontoon bridge, along with great quantities of supplies. Now the team of steel and muscle was reunited and ready to complete the assigned task – juncture with the 5th Inf. Once again the tankers saw the ruins and wreckage of houses. And for the first time they saw pillboxes in great numbers. Mines, always a peril, were laid in abundance with 12000 found in one field 1 km. wide and 15 kms. long.

B Co. working with 359 on the left began a drive onto the REITHOLTZ WOODS to close a gap that had been created between 359 and 357 in the vicinity of OUDRENNES. While pushing forward one platoon hit a dense mine field and in a very short time three tanks were disabled. The area was under accurate Kraut fire and anti-personnel mines were everywhere so the tankers were forced to remain in their tanks throughout the night while the wounded doughs lay on the ground nearby. Eventually B Co. was completely covered by the advance of the 10th Armd. and reverted to Division reserve. C Co. with 357 in Division center was subjected to a terrific artillery barrage from the big guns of FORT HACKENBURG. All American guns, including the tankers 75 mm. were brought to bear on this FORT and it was smashed. Later a skillfully conducted thrust secured BUDING, BUDLING and HELLING. On 17 Nov. a strong-point having been uncovered at KLANG, C Co. tanks, with the town of KEDANGE just added to their belts, were called in. As the Shermans approached the enemy bolted and fled right past some 357 doughs who massacred them. At dawn on 15 Nov. the most violent counter-blow of the entire campaign struck in and around DISTROFF where A Co. with 358 was located on Division right. Two battalions of the 25th Panzer Div. drove abreast into the town, while a third enveloped from the left flank. After recoiling from the initial blow, tankers, TDs and doughs stood their ground and lashed at the Heine armor and doughs. One platoon made a masterly flanking movement across the summit of a barren hilltop to join the fray. After 4 hours of savage fighting the attackers accepted failure and withdrew. On the following day A Co. supported the doughs in seizing

INGLANGE by flanking through a dense, mucky woods – a previous effort down the main road had been stopped by the counterattacking Boche. D Co. attached to 90th Recon, had the mission of screening the right flank and contacting elements of the 95th making a brilliant sweep on KUNEZIC they were badly hampered by large minefields. But they continued their mission and soon had a route cleared for the 10th Armd. as well as keeping the flanks of the 90th and 95th linked.

At this point the 90th Operational Reports read : “Teamwork among the several components of the Division developed in 5 months of hard combat was paying off ... Tanks and TDs rendered close and effective support at all times ... The north pincers of the Corps was advancing on schedule.” The Kraut was beginning to falter. Many Heines were using the Safe Conduct Passes dropped to them from the air. On the night of 16 Nov. A Co. tanks, working without infantry, broke into METZERVISSE and eliminated the German garrison there. The next day the tanks spearheaded the attack on METZERESCHE, with one platoon flanking to the left and covering the enemy escape route from woods on a high hill. Later they seized LUTTANGE and with 358 went into Division reserve. The noose was beginning to tighten and everything indicated that the Boche was attempting to escape from METZ. 18 Nov. was a day of pursuit; the once proud defenders of the bastion had been outwitted and outfought. All previously assigned objectives were scrapped and all units ordered to extend themselves to the utmost. B Co. rolled forward so quickly and with such effectiveness that the Boche had no time to blow prepared demolition charges on bridges and overpasses. Brushing aside resistance at CHARLEVILLE-SUR-BOIS, they crossed the NIED RIVER and took a position at CONDE-NORTHEN squarely athwart the major escape route. Here they intercepted a fleeing column and annihilated it. C Co. advanced boldly across fields into EBERSUITTER and, forced to switch routes due to anti-tank ditches, drove into BOCKANGE where they caught a supply column and pounded it unmercifully. D Co. continued its brilliant work clearing VIGY and VRY and establishing a forward position at AVANCY. The move was so rapidly and adroitly executed that several retreating columns were trapped and the 37 mms. rained death and destruction.

On 19 Nov. D Co. made contact with elements of the 735th Tank Bn., supporting the 5th Div., and the great operation was at an end. Mighty METZ was encircled and itself fell on the following day to the 5th and 95th. This stupendous achievement had been accomplished against a fanatical and unusually strong enemy, across rugged and adverse terrain, and under the most miserable weather conditions. As the tankers and doughs turned toward the SAAR and their next engagement the acclaim resounded in their ears:

“The capture and development of your bridgehead over the Moselle river in the vicinity of Koenigsmacher will forever rank as one of the epic river crossings of history.” Gen'l. George S. Patton in a Letter of Commendation.

“All units shared the dangers, all units met their responsibilities with resolution and an overpowering will to win. It was perfectly coordinated team-play among the several components which insured ultimate victory.” Maj. Gen'l. Walton H. Walker, Commanding Gen'l. XXth Corps, in a recommendation for a Presidential Citation for the action.

Leaving the forts around METZ to be mopped up by the 5th Inf. (not until 13 Dec. did FT. JEANNE D'ARC finally capitulate to the 87th Inf. Div. which had relieved the 5th) XX Corps headed toward Germany proper, with only the SAAR RIVER lying between it and the SIEGFRIED LINE. The 712th pulled in around DALSTEIN and took advantage of a short break to do justice to a Thanksgiving Dinner served up in grand style by the mess crews. But as they gorged on the turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce, the dank cold and driving rain reminded them of others who were not so fortunate. The

7th Army on the right was painfully carving out the COLMAR POCKET. Further north the 1st and 9th Armies were fighting inside Germany, feeling out the West Wall. Even in Corps sector the 10th Armd., with 358 attached, was striking east against German emplacements and having a rugged go of it.

On 25 Nov. a powerful series of attacks were launched in the final drive to clean out the area west of the SAAR. B and C Cos. were committed, while the Battalion with A and D Cos. followed in their wake, bunking down in NEUNKIRCHEN for several days. The attacking forces found only rearguard action but it was skillfully devised and materially assisted by tremendous concentrations of artillery from the other side of the river; the Boche meant to tramp on any river crossing and blanketed the approaches with well directed fire. C Co. was instrumental in cleaning out FURWEILER and OTZWEILER. B Co. aggressively supported the drive of 359. Bulldozers were in constant use, filling in anti-tank ditches and scooping holes for the Long Toms. Their work was made doubly difficult by the sluggish mud and constant shelling but they performed ably and without a hitch. By 1 Dec. these troops had cleaned out all but one small spot west of the river and as the tanks pulled up in the woods covering the high hills which commanded the short flat banks of the river the tankers could look across through the rain and see the towns of PACHTEN and DILLINGEN, and they could take partial stock of what was in store for them.

The east bank bristled with pillboxes, the outer fringe of the heaviest belt of the entire SIEGFRIED LINE. The hills behind were high and made ideal spots for heavy Kraut guns. The river, while normally small, was overflowing its banks and everywhere, even on the main roads, there was mud. One tank in a period of 8 hours rescued 9 peeps which had been hopelessly bogged. Not only did they have the desperate Boche, now fighting on his own soil, to fight, they also had the swollen, changeable river, the terrain and the weather. While the 10th Armd. on the left charged for MERZIC, the 95th – at SAARLAUTERN on the right – and the 90th – at DILLINGEN in the center were to force crossings and make juncture on the other side. Early in the morning of 6 Dec. the 90th doughs slogged down the hills, mounted the assault boats and went across. By dawn they had infiltrated past some of the strong points and had obtained fairly strong positions, with 357 in the woods to the north and 358 in the town itself. Now the job was to keep them supplied and get the armor over so that the bridgehead could be exploited. Every component cooperated to this end, while the doughs stubbornly maintained their positions on the other side, constantly set upon by Kraut tanks and frequently encircled by infiltrating Kraut doughs. Huge artillery duels waged as the Boche brought up his best and his biggest. One dud which thudded through a half-track was measured at 10 inches. American 105s and 155s were pulled forward to fire point blank into the pillboxes. Men from D Co. manned .50 calibers and, lying in water filled slit trenches under constant shelling, poured lead across the swollen stream. The Mortar Platoon set up positions equally exposed to the Boche concentrations and kept their guns firing night and day. The tankers from A, B and C Cos. lived in their tanks on the wooded hills and frequently pulled up to destroy designated targets. A change of socks every day helped to reduce the fast growing rate of trench foot.

And again the gallant engineers were momentarily whipped in their efforts to construct a bridge. The Boche kept all chosen bridge sites covered with HE and the river itself frequently smashed the first attempts. A footbridge was finally completed and reinforcements filtered across it with supplies. Many tankers from D and Hq. Cos. were pressed into this service and made perilous and heroic trips across with food and ammo, returning with the wounded on litters. Without supporting armor the decimated ranks of 357 and 358 doughs were hard put to maintain their positions, much less expand them. And finally 359 was committed and went over to take positions in the center, between the woods and the town. And on 9 Dec. one A Co. platoon crossed by ferry near WALLERFANGEN under a heavy smoke screen into the flames and explosions that enveloped PACHTEN and DILLINGEN. Again the

tankers were greeted with cheers and they immediately deployed forward to support all three regiments. A sudden fall of the river, perhaps controlled in part by the canny Heine, grounded the ferry and effectively stopped its operations. On this same day the smoke screen dissipated for a short time, giving the Boche visual observation of which he took full advantage and most floats were destroyed. For three days and nights the engineers worked feverishly to repair the damage while the 5 Shermans on the other side were constantly engaged, rushing through the rubble in forward areas to frustrate Heine blows which were hitting from all sides. Finally after an elaborate system of smoke screening had been established the ferry began operation again, and on 12 Dec. one platoon of C Co. and the rest of A Co. tanks were borne across. The first tanks managed to slither their way up the slushy, muddy banks to the main road but soon the path, supported in part by landing mats, became impassable and one tank bellied down some 20 yards from the ferry landing, thus blocking the crossing of all others. At once men on the other side began cutting logs which were soon delivered across the river and everyone assisted in building a corduroy road, which despite the continued shelling was completed by midnight. It was just wide enough to hold the tracks and the tank drivers were called upon to use all their skills in using it. Early the next morning the remaining tanks crossed and the situation, while still tense, eased somewhat.

Up until now a juncture between the 95th and 90th was considered impossible but this mission, now that the armor was across, was again the objective. To complete it the PRIMS RIVER BRIDGE on the DILLINGEN-SAARLAUTERN road had to be taken. Plans were laid whereby 358 and 359 would attack southeast across the railroad tracks and clean out the business and factory section of the town there. This would permit both 357 and 359, to slide right, and closer, stronger cooperation between the three regiments could thereby be effected. This was to be done against an enemy still marshaling strong forces in the many pillboxes and an enemy which, while not acting in concert, was excellent individually and skillfully led. On 14 Dec. A and B Cos. and Hq. 105s supported the attack – at times leading the forces – across the tracks. For the first time they faced strong, interlocking pillboxes, but they quickly learned how to deal with them. The tanks poured lead at the concrete forts, buttoning up all apertures and at times stunning the occupants into insensibility, and the doughs rushed forward to plant the explosives. The advance was slow but inexorable. Speaking of this action the 90th Operational Reports state: “Only through the perfect cooperation between armor, TDs and infantry did it become possible to capture the ... objective some 300 meters east of the tracks.” Casualties were slight as the tanks saw to it that the machine guns in the pillboxes were silent and the tankers had learned how to blast away the lurking bazooka man, but several tracks were blown by the ever-present mines.

For the next five days the team, working with assurance and reciprocal confidence, inched forward from pillbox to pillbox, house to house, in “the hottest spot on the Saar.” There was little left of DILLINGEN and all the civilians, save a few hardy souls, had fled. Cellars, caves and in one instance a rifle range pit served as shelters. And while a captured slaughter house provided fresh meat, other supplies and facilities were scarce. Generally it was necessary to dispatch a tank back to the ferry landing for the supplies, although occasionally a peep ventured up to the front despite the continued and accurate shelling. And occasionally the tankers took advantage of a lull to explore the vacated and ruined buildings and enjoy the best “looting” area there ever was. On 18 Dec. all personnel were alerted to be on guard against possible paratroop attacks as indications pointed toward the Boche employing such tactics. A PW reported that a Battalion of picked men was poised, ready to strike on the exposed left flank. And then quite unexpectedly the Division was ordered to withdraw all elements back across the SAAR; Von Rundstedt had attacked in the ARDENNES and the 90th was to be denied its fiercely fought for prize of DILLINGEN so that the American lines could be ready for any further attack. The withdrawal operation was conducted with consummate skill and under trying conditions. No bridge had yet been constructed and the armor had to be taken back by ferry – tank by tank. Mud still was a formidable and exasperating obstacle preventing any rapid movement. The chance had to be taken that

the Boche would detect the tactics and wait until half the units had cleared, striking in strength against those remaining. Operations continued 24 hours a day from 19 Dec. until early 23 Dec. The whole area was heavily blanketed with a smoke screen from the time the ferry chugged the first A Co. tank back on 20 Dec. until 02:30, 23 Dec. when the last B Co. tank returned. All that was left were two tanks which had become mired and were self-destroyed. What few structures there were in battle ravaged DILLINGEN were blown by a demolition squad. It was not easy to abandon this hard won gain but once the orders were received every effort was bent on executing them with dispatch and efficiency. So once the operation was over and successful all concerned could take a few easy breaths and then turn to plan for the next job.

During the period 23 Dec. to 6 Jan. the Alsatian towns of KIRSCHNAUMEN, REMELING, SCHEVERWALD, FLATTEN, OBERESCH, SILWINGEN, GUARLFANGEN, BERINGEN and FREMERSDORF became familiar places to the various units of the 712th as the Battalion, spread thinly along an extended line, assumed a position of aggressive defense, interlocking with TDs, mine fields, roadblocks, prepared demolitions and doughs. The MAGINOT LINE just behind was extensively reconnoitered so that all units could speedily move to it in event of a major thrust by the Heine from either the SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE or MERZIG, to tie in with Von Rundstedt's offensive in the north. Frequent sorties and screening movements were made by the armor to feel out enemy positions and compel him to retain forces in that area. The Recon. Platoon was very active these days, maintaining constant liaison with troops on the southern flanks where occasional reconnaissance in force by the Boche gave promises of developing into a major assault. And again the tankers had a break for they ate their Christmas feast in style and relative quiet, with their ears peeled to the radio listening to the tense situation in the ARDENNES. Winter had arrived and with it cold, clear days and sharp, bright nights. The weather was ideal for air operations and the tankers had frequent opportunities to watch ME 109s and P-38s and P-47s chase each other, punctuating their dives with the chatter of machine guns, and to watch the huge American armadas, leaving their fantastic vapor trails, drone northward to offer welcome and immense assistance to the unflagging efforts of the ground troops in the BULGE. With winter the mud soon hardened and froze, and all tanks had to be warmed up daily and their lubricating systems refueled with winter oil. With winter also came snow and ice, elements that were to torment the tankers for the next two months.

At the beginning of the New Year plans were initiated to drive on the SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE; all unit commanders were oriented and final preparations laid. Then on 5 Jan. a message from XX Corps read: "Be prepared for movement." Nothing more, but all plans were immediately scrapped. And by 6 Jan. the 712th and 90th were making their unsung and unheralded drive north to enter the BULGE and prove a decisive factor in its eventual reduction. Once again the team was rolling but this time under cover of darkness and on roads which defied the most skillful and strenuous efforts of all drivers. Sheets of ice made traction difficult and at times impossible; huge snowbanks concealed treacherous ditches. Often the levers would fail to control the tracks and the tank would scud and spin. The column began to thin out as tanks barged off into ditches or slid into positions crosswise to the road, thus preventing any forward movement of the vehicles in the rear. But the tankers surmounted and conquered these obstacles and the column continued to roll through THIONVILLE and LUXEMBOURG, past scenic beauty, enhanced by the heavy snow, which would have enthralled the peaceful tourist. Singly and in pairs the tanks began to arrive in the rear assembly areas near RIPPWEILER and BOULAIDE and by dawn 7 Jan. all units had completed the better than 60 mile march.

Here they were apprised of their mission. A large enemy salient still stood southeast of BASTOGNE. It was being contained but not penetrated by American forces in that area – thinly spread

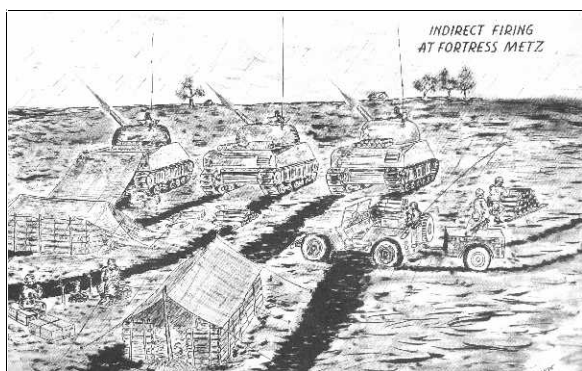
and badly exhausted after days of bitter fighting. The 712th and 90th, joining III Corps, were to add fresh impetus to this sector and make the main effort in reducing the salient and entrapping the Boche. They were to attack through the 26th Inf. positions, while the 35th Inf., 6th Armd. and 101st Airborne on the left or north and the 80th Inf. on the right were to make simultaneous thrusts. The greatest precautions were taken to insure surprise. Armor had moved up under cover of darkness and every unit took up positions in concealed assembly areas. Artillery emplaced battery by battery, and in registering prior to attack a 26th Div. gun ceased firing as each gun of the 90th opened up, so as not to increase density of fire. All unit and personnel markings were removed, a stratagem which paid dividends as a document captured later from the German 13th Paratroop Regt. revealed: "It is imperative that steps be taken to ascertain whether or not the American 90th Inf. Div. has been committed. Special attention must be given to the numbers 357, 358, 359, 343, 344, 345, 915, and 315. Prisoners identified with these numbers will immediately be taken to the Regt. Section."



Whoever Thought That These Ship Quarters Would Seem Comfortable Later On



General Patton requested that Floaters be Put On



"Pull Hard on the left Lever"



Score One for the Engineers



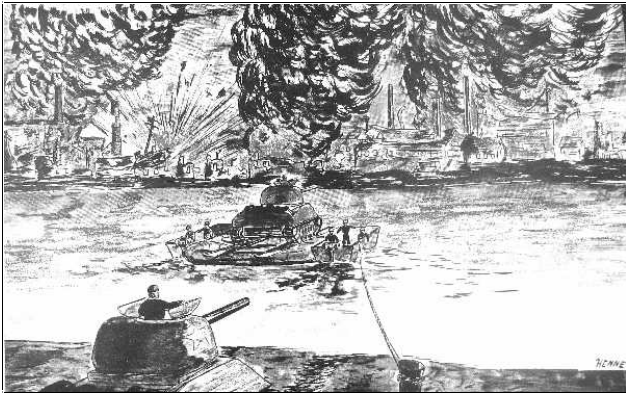
A Welcome Change from Cold C Rations
and Liberated Chickens



On the Way! – “Into Dillingen”



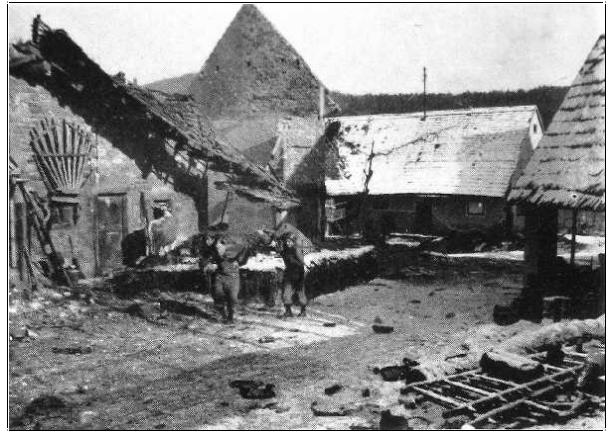
“Target!” – Dillingen



Sweating It Out



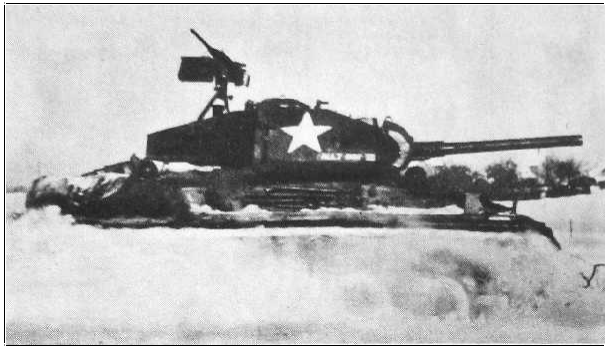
All the comforts of Home



GI Santa Claus



No Red Points



5th Gear



“Where does a Fellow Sleep Around here?”

BATTLE OF THE ARDENNES



Born in Detroit; Buried in the Bulge

On 9 Jan. the attack was launched. Ahead lay steep, unrelated and snow covered hill masses, rising in instances to 2000 feet and manned by a well equipped enemy with better than average training and a fairly high state of morale. Successive defense lines were dug-in foxholes along the high ground and in the dense forests. Most Heines were armed with automatic weapons and SS Panzer units formed a mobile reserve. The cold was numbing and pierced to the very marrow of the bones. Snow was everywhere, its whiteness setting off the large, green silhouettes of the Shermans (a whitewash preparation was not used until the middle of the month), and stilling the tread of the ever present Nazi patrol. This was the fourth time this hilly, thinly populated section of Luxembourg had been ravaged by the shells and bombs of men locked in fierce struggle. There was never a pause, never a time to relax. If the tankers managed to find some sort of shelter, no sooner would they have shaken the ice and snow off the bedroll and lain down than the guard would be at them, whispering in hurried, anxious tones: "Heine tanks coming in on the left !" Back they would have to mount into the cold, slippery and cramping tanks. Then the period of waiting and listening, their eyes straining to pierce the black night and spot the movement. Frequently the Heine would be no more than 100 yards away on the other side of the hill and his guttural accents would fall on tense ears. Often some miserable, wounded Boche would scream his pleas "Kamerad!" from his slushy foxhole. The driving snow grounded the fighter planes and Piper Cubs, so that many times attacks were launched without the usual preliminary bombing, strafing and reconnaissance. Day battles were titanic clashes with the tankers and doughs resolved to prevail and the Boche striking with savage desperation.

B and C Cos. were committed on the first day, joining in making flanking squeeze on BERLE. B, on the right or east flank, jumped off from NOTHUM just as tragedy struck when Lt. Col. George B. Randolph, up front as usual with his men, was felled by shrapnel never to rise again but his inspiration lifted his men of the 712th time and again in the succeeding days and months. C pushed off from BAVIGNE on the left flank. All units gained initial surprise but soon the Boche had rallied and

stubbornly tried to block the advance. High velocity shells rained through the air as the tanks slugged forward through the snow to eventually seize BERLE and take positions on the hill just north of the town. The infuriated Boche sent a strong Panzer force to regain this hill in the middle of the night only to have a short fused flare expose his lead tank. Quick and daring advantage was taken of this by a B Co. tank at a 20 yard range and the Mark V was soon aflame, its brothers scared into retreat. The flanks had not kept pace with the BERLE thrust and the Boche tried to capitalize. Smashing at the left he was beaten to a pulp by 2 C Co. tanks which rushed west from BASTOGNE. Attempting to leap on NOTHUM, he ran into D Co. tanks, serving as flank guards, and was decimated. B Co., having suffered high losses, was now fighting mad and with reckless courage lunged forward in the middle of the night to seize an important cross roads east of BAHOEY. Taking positions here, they were hit by the ferocious Boche. Refusing to budge, they tore the guts out of the attackers, expending 100s of rounds of ammo. D Co., still patrolling the precarious right, was pressed into service and attempted to rush ammo and supplies up to the hard pressed B Co. tanks. A hail of artillery from the dominating high ground lashed at them and the deep snows caused them to flounder. Seeking cover in a woods they found that a combination of snow, ice and roots played havoc with their suspension system and soon 4 tanks had thrown their tracks. Working without cessation under these conditions they managed to extricate enough tanks to get the supplies to B Co. C Co. still on the left thrust forward in a brilliant maneuver, harassed by AP fire from both flanks, and surged on DONCOLS with such speed that an entire Regimental CP was captured. They then took up defensive positions on the main highway in this area and in BENONCHAMPS. For 5 days they held here – living in their tanks in the biting, raw weather and frustrating every counterblow by the Heine.

The 26th Inf. began to pinch off the battered B Co. tankers, and on 12 Jan., after outpostting at BOULAIDE and HARLANGE, A Co., with 358, moved up through C Co. The 6th Armd., striking east with exposed flanks, was pointing toward BRAS. If juncture could be effected there, a large enemy force would be entrapped. A Co., moving through SONLEZ, was chosen to effect this mission and soon was locked with the strongly resisting Heine in a two day slugfest. Finally two tanks, braving devastating anti-tank fire, grasped the other side of the important railroad tracks and joined with the 6th Armd. in BRAS, thus sealing off large Heine forces. From BRAS A Co. battered forward, plowing across open fields to take NEIDERWAMPACH and, after skirting thick mine fields, reached OBERWAMPACH which they set about to do with desperate resolution and a never-mind-the-cost recklessness. For 3 days and nights the 712th, 773rd TDs and 90th doughs stood firm against 9 major counterattacks, inflicting huge casualties in men and equipment. Fighting became so intense that 1 tank, dealing with the Boche on its right, had just enough time to traverse left and knock out at a 15 yard range the lead half-track of another armored column. Massive artillery barrages assisted each side – the Heine threw 1500 rounds in a 24 hour period; the 344th FA Bn. unleashed 6000 rounds in 36 hours. Speaking of this action 90th Operational Reports state: “German losses were enormous and mounted as heavy snow storms blanketed enemy dead and wounded alike. No exact count was possible but an estimated several hundred Germans were buried from sight for long after the Division had left the area.”

B and C Cos. meanwhile had moved up on the left flank and by 17 Jan. B Co. had seized the key town of LONGVILLY, sending tanks out to take up defensive positions on the high ground. By 20 Jan. it had beat down the Boche rear-guard in HAMMIVILLE and for 3 days threw shells across the LORRAINE RIVER into the retreating confused and beaten Boche. With the tanks serving as brass knuckles, the 90th Div. first had smashed the salient and with it Von Rundstedt's ambitions. The team had never before worked with such effectiveness. German documents time and again referred to the devastation wrought by the tanks; never had they suffered so many casualties by the machine gun fire of tanks. Even though never officially confirmed, the story that Gen'l. Patton had rejected XX Corps' offer of other Divisions and insisted in his characteristic words that the 90th be sent north, was borne out by

the results achieved. 3rd Army Reports state: "All through the Campaign III, XII and VIII Corps faced determined and heavy resistance. It was largely due to the extreme power exerted on the enemy salient from the south that the enemy operation ended in failure. Although contact was established with surrounded forces in BASTOGNE early in the operation the issue remained in doubt till the middle of January. From that point on there was steady gains, and the enemy, his penetrating power gone, was forced to give ground and to retreat to his Siegfried Line emplacements."

With its northern flank secured the Division pivoted right and swung east. C Co. supporting 357 moved through ASSELBORN and BOXHORN on 22 Jan. but in trying to ford a creek north of SASSEL 4 tanks bogged down. Their infantry probed forward while the tankers labored in deep snow and icy water retrieving their Shermans. Just as night fell word reached them that the Heine was hitting at BINSFIELD and that the doughs were hard pressed without supporting armor. Without wasting a moment the tankers took the main highway to TROISVERGES and, turning right or east, headed down an ice covered, strange and unconquered road in the black of night. The Boche attempted to halt this movement by raining AP shells down on the column but the C Co. tankers drove on. The noise of their approach enheartened the embattled doughs and soon the "blood brothers" were reunited and the attackers were sent reeling backwards. Slogging their way forward this team battered through HUPPERDANGE and cut the SKY LINE DRIVE – the main LUXEMBOURG-ST. VITH highway. Reaching WEISWAMPACH on 27 Jan. they were again hit by the Boche in his final lunge but they sent him spinning.

On 26 Jan. the 712th and 90th passed from III Corps to VIII Corps control and were assigned the mission of spearheading the Corps drive across the OUR RIVER. The precipitous cliffs on the east side of this river gave the Boche a natural defensive position and he made the most of it. And once more the doughs had to cross waters while their tanks awaited the bridge. A and C Cos. stood ready to spring from their positions around BEILER, LEITHUM and OBERHAUSEN, occasionally pulling out onto exposed high ground to fire into enemy strong points on the other side. On 30 Jan. a fording place was located and three C Co. tanks sloshed across but tore up the bottom and made further vehicular progress there impossible. Further south 358 erected a bridge and A Co. tanks moved across into STUPBACH, pushing out later in the day to secure STEINKOPF. Here they found the outer fringes of the SIEGFIED LINE, with well emplaced pillboxes scattered in the high and steep hills. What few roads there were became more and more impassable as huge chunks of earth loosened by the tank tread or an explosive slipped down to block the road, the bed of which itself was crumbling. All the terrain bore the scars of three periods of intense fighting and the villages were nothing but rubble and walls. Despite these adversities the town of HECKLANFIELD finally fell to the resolute team and the bridgehead was firmly established. For 25 days the fighting had been constant and intense and at last, while new plans were being plotted and new missions assigned, it was possible to relax for a bit. Summarizing this last period 90th Operational Reports state: "Supply – always a problem – was made more difficult by the constant snow storms and the limited road net of the narrow Division sector. Engineers labored unceasingly to keep roads open Litters were attached to skis to expedite evacuation Tanks were whitewashed for camouflage and it worked well but near-zero temperature and drifting snow caused much mechanical trouble Withal armor support as well as accurate artillery fire were again invaluable in crushing the enemy defense."

By the end of January all territory which had been seized by the Boche in his December breakthrough had been regained and now, badly disorganized, he was attempting to regroup himself in the SIEGFRIED LINE in front of the 3rd Army which continued its remorseless march to the east. As the West Wall campaign commenced VIII Corps was on Army left or north, with the 87th, 4th and 90th Infs. on line from north to south and the 95th Inf. and 11th Armd. in reserve. Further south the III Corps

was poised with the 5th, 76th and 80th Infs. and 4th Armd. on line, and linking with the 7th Army was XXth Corps with the 26th and 94th Infs.

During the first few days in February the 712th and 90th remained on the aggressive defense across the OUR but soon found themselves shifting north to assist in the main effort at PRUM, their positions being taken over by the 11th Armd. A major thaw had set in and the snow had turned to slush, the rock-like mud to mire, and the ice-covered streams were overburdened with water and debris. The tanks passed through ST. VITH – easily the most devastated town seen in the entire war – and traveled over roads many of which had become almost impassable. The main road was canalized into a narrow, muddy bottleneck that taxed engineers and MPs alike to keep open – an entire column of the 11th Armd. bogged down and the armor stretched bumper to bumper for many miles. The Recon. Plat. worked incessantly, looking for alternate routes and guiding the line platoons to their respective assembly areas. Jump-off positions were reached on 4 Feb. and the task ahead at first seemed insurmountable. It was found that pillboxes were far more numerous than shown on defense overlays, and many were adeptly camouflaged. The enemy usually fought stubbornly until completely surrounded, and he supported his positions with artillery, considerable deadly nebelwerfer and mortar fire, high velocity fire from dug-in gas-less tanks, as well as roving tanks and SP guns. The ground was hub-deep with mud, streams were flooded, and the constant rains made air cover something to wish for. The wet, and at night freezing, cold, coupled with the heavy expenditure of ammo in this type of fighting placed heavy demands on the supply sections, already laboring under tremendous obstacles due to the conditions and qualities of the road net.

But the 712th-90th team rammed through the two heavy belts of the LINE in 15 days – 5 Feb. to 20 Feb.; a tribute to the might and skill of this team, tempered and forged for such deeds in the fires of DILLINGEN. Even the 3rd Army Reports, with rare precision, single them out to state : “As an example of the bitterly contested drive toward Prum, the 90th Inf. Div. reduced 153 enemy pillboxes in one day, 8 February.” This could well be called the “SCHEID” area for most of the fighting centered around the towns of HABSCHEID, BRANSCHHEID, BINSCHHEID, EIGELSCHEID, WINTERSCHHEID, HERSCHHEID, BNOSBLANCHHEID, HECKUSCHHEID, and HALSCHHEID. Once these were little towns, their inhabitants concerned only with peaceful agricultural pursuits. But they happened to be located right where the Nazis chose to build the LINE. And so the barns became intermingled with many concrete boxes. Now as the tankers remember them there is nothing left but a few walls and concrete rubble with the steel structural supports asunder and clawing the air. Huge pools of thickly muddied waters in which floated the dead and the destroyed spotted the mucky streets and yards. And other places like WINTERSPELT, KELFELD, HOLL NICH, GROSSLANGENFELD, NDR, UTTFELD, OBR, UTTFELD, and MASTHORN recall the freezing cold nights during which the enemy was often caught napping and considerable progress made, and the murky, rainy days during which the tanks were continually spitting out lead at the next pillbox – the next pillbox, hoping that perhaps one would be sufficiently unharmed to provide some shelter in its dank, dark chambers for a night of rest. If not, the cramped floor and seats of the tank itself would have to serve. It sounds easy: “Button up the apertures and let the doughs rush forward.” But AT guns, mines and bazookas rang up a heavy toll. The tank platoons were soon well under strength often operating with two instead of five tanks. But the tankers sought no relief and continued to form a strong link in the team chain. Individual exploits and extraordinary incidents were frequent. One tank platoon leader, having been misguided, walked into an un-captured pillbox just as the Heines in it were walking out. He beat them to the draw and took the next pillbox as well. One platoon seized a box to find it manned by members of the 4th Inf., stranded and isolated there for 5 days. One platoon cast caution aside and drove right through a huge minefield and, although badly mauled, accomplished its mission. And even when a Company was put in reserve it immediately reverted to the secondary role for tanks and fired indirect. In actual fact the SIEGFRIED

LINE was not impregnable. It was breached by a team – armor, infantry, engineer, and artillery. Constant plugging by the tankers and doughs and engineers created the original chinks and then, as the Boche fell back, artillery smashed at his communications, P-47s bombed and strafed his rear areas, and then deep-driving infantry mounted on tanks and fast moving Task Force Spiess exploited the gains and generated the rout. This much touted barrier was crumpled and ground to bits by the inexorable and matchless onslaught of the 712th-90th team. The score showed: 500 pillboxes reduced, 3195 PWs, 25 tanks, and a cornucopia of captured enemy material.

Deprived of his LINE the Boche now began a headlong retreat which did not end until V-E Day. The 712th and 90th drive began to gain momentum and speed, spearheaded by Task Force Speiss. This force, having D Co. as its basic unit and with small TD, Engineer, Recon., and Inf. attachments, was attached to 358 and worked mainly on Division right, riding roughshod over the piecemeal resistance. Other units swept forward, finding only isolated Panzer units as their main opposition. C Co. ran into 5 Tiger Royals at LICHTENBORN but managed to score only once and was forced to chase them to KOPSCHEID. Here again the Panzers showed their heels and on 23 Feb. retreated back across the PRUM at WAXWEILER. C Co. closed in fast but, finding the bridge at WAXWEILER blown, had to wait a day before taking that town, by which time the tanks had gotten away again. Task Force Speiss meanwhile made rapid thrusts, clearing HALENBACH and WINDHAUSEN, where a large group of PWs reported that all Heine positions had been overrun. A Co. likewise bumping into Panzer opposition, seized LAUPERATH and KRAUTSCHIED and on 24 Feb. made the Division's final spurt in this area, capturing many PWs at BELLSCHIED. Since about the 3rd week in Normandy rumors had been current almost every day that at last the tankers were going to go into reserve and have a real rest. Suddenly the rumors became fact and, their positions taken over by the 6th Armd. and 6th Cav. Grp., the doughs and tankers moved into SHAEF reserve on 25 Feb., with the 712th settling down in HACKHALENFELD.

SHAEF Reserve was a luxury even though HACKHALENFELD was no paradise. The rest achieved and the maintenance performed – although not for B Co. which was attached to the 6th Cav. Grp. to assist in the holding positions – made the next two months less arduous. The 3rd Army had been put on the aggressive defense in the middle of February but March brought marching orders and soon all units were in high gear, eventually to thrust clear across Germany with dazzling, history-making speed. The 712th and 90th reverted to VIII Corps control on 2 March and were ordered to make a bridgehead across the KYLL RIVER. They moved through the 6th Armd. on Corps left and at once were pacing the Corps drive, with the 4th and 87th Infs. on their right and the 11th Armd. initially on the left. The Boche, pressured all along the front, was bending all his efforts to get east of the KYLL, but the speed and adroitness of the tank-riding doughs frustrated this tactic, despite the hilly, densely-wooded terrain and the never-ending rainfall.

Newly-formed Task Force Kedrovsky – D Co., with Recon. elements from the 773rd TD and 90th, and later augmented by Hq. 105s, minesweeping teams and several rifle platoons – was attached to 359 on Division left and spearheaded the drive. Brushing aside roadblocks, catching Panzer crews unawares, bludgeoning AT guns, skirting mine fields (in which the new plastic devices were found), this force swept forward seizing NEUSTRASSBURG and many prisoners, all the time keeping liaison with 6th Cav. Grp. on the right. B Co., handicapped at first by roadblocks, kept pace, cleaning out SEIWERATH, while C Co. on the left took OBERHERSDORF after many small fire fights with enemy forced into the sector by the advancing 11th Armd. By nightfall 5 Mar. all units had reached the river only to find all bridges blown. C Co. had charged through BIRRESBORN, taken MINERALBRUNNER, and then surged into LISSINGEN, where it was relieved by Task Force Kedrovsky. B Co., in a brilliant stroke, had captured MURLNBACH, while A Co. moved up prepared

to strike across and seize GEROLSTEIN, a huge marshaling area. The river itself was not wide but reconnaissance indicated, as did fairly heavy Heine small arms, mortar and AP fire, that the east bank could be turned into a strong-point. The ground rose sharply there and many cunningly concealed and carefully placed entrenchments had been dug. On the whole it was similar to Normandy and the Boche could have charged a bloody price for it, had he been able to regain his balance. It was still cold, rain seemed endless, and living facilities were few, so the tanks again served as homes.

On 6 Mar. C Co. forded across after the 357 doughs and made excellent progress initially but left exposed flanks. The Boche, revealing unexpected power, hit these flanks and soon had many American doughs surrounded. A quick revision of tactics was undertaken to meet this threat and in several hours the doughs were liberated, the situation restored and NEIDEREICH seized. Here B Co. passed through and went on, engaging in frequent fire fights, to take DENSBORN and GEES. Task Force Kedrovsky and A Co., fording across at WALLERSHEIM and hampered only by AT ditches and road craters, soon had the situation in GEROLSTEIN well under control, chasing 5 Heine tanks into PELM. A Co., after making contact with B Co. at GEES, followed the Panzers and seized PELM. Later in the afternoon the bridgehead was expanded, with A Co. taking ESSINGEN and BERLINGEN without much trouble, while B Co. had to make a real fight for WABKONIGEN. The 712th-90th team had made an 8 km. bridgehead across the KYLL and while originally only CCA of the 11th Armd. was to pass through it, both CCB and CCR used it, as the 4th Inf.'s, as well as the 11th's own, were not wide enough. This was the beginning of the great and widely heralded "Armored Division Days". But just as the unsung linemen on the gridiron make it possible for the all-American backs to flare across the headlines, so did the 712th-90th team frequently have to punch out the holes for the organically faster moving Armored Divisions. For the moment the tankers were content to watch the 11th Armd. vehicles go through as many a cellar in the vicinity revealed "beaucoup" Moselle and Rhine wine. But by 8 March, with the 11th really rolling, they were once again in the thick of things. Summarizing the next four days, 3rd Army Reports state: "Closely following armored spearheads of the 11th Armored Division, the 90th Infantry Division made rapid progress while other units made good progress." Jumping off early each morning the tankers, their tanks covered with doughs, thrust with lightning-like rapidity into the small towns by-passed by the 11th. Here they would help make the house-to-house cleanup and set up roadblocks. Pausing just long enough to consolidate and coordinate, so complete was the rout that frequently two American units would be off again. Battalion and regimental zones soon overlapped and moved in on the same town from different sides. This section had never been a Nazi hotbed and more often than not the streets would be lined with cheering civilians, waving flags in much the same way as the Frenchmen had. But most gratifying was the unmitigated and overflowing joy of the liberated slave laborers as they burst from their miserable hovels and camps to cheer the tanks. A polyglot of all nationalities was found in every town, and the roads soon became jammed with these people as they wasted no time in starting the trek to their homeland. And the roads were always lined with prisoners, frequently traveling unescorted. With the 4th Inf. and 87th Inf. containing the EIFEL POCKET created by these thrusts, it appeared that the 712th-90th team was destined to don the garb of an Armored Division as it kept pace with the history making advances of the 4th and 11th Armd. Divisions. But on 12 Mar. a stop-order was received and the 90th was transferred to XII Corps, assigned to the 4th Armd. zone to protect Corps' north flank and to cross the MOSELLE in conjunction with the 5th Inf.



The Noblest profession – 712th, 90th Team had third highest casualty list in the ETO



A Light Tank puts on Camouflage



“Prepare to move Out”



Setting Up Home in a Pillbox



Alles Kaput



Hurray Up and wait