

## PINPOINTING METZ

The 3rd Cavalry Group, reinforced by a battalion of tank destroyers, was spread over a front of 20.5 miles along the Moselle River. It screened the troop movements to its rear from Thionville to the northern boundaries of the XX Corps zone. The 95th Infantry Division, by the 2nd of November, had disposed its forces around the fortified salient west of the Moselle. On the 8th of November, the armor began its move north to an assembly area behind the Cattenom Forest. It was prepared on order of the Corps Commander to pass through the Koenigsmacher bridgehead and thereby kindle the spark that would set the front ablaze and culminate in the destruction of the fortified barrier standing like an armored shield between the XX Corps and the Saar River.

Early in November, the 5th Division came back from its training grounds and rest centers to take over once more the bridgehead area south of Metz. After the bridgehead was re-occupied, patrols learned that the enemy had prepared a systematic defense works with mines, roadblocks, and blown bridges. The enemy line was held by a Regiment of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, two fortress machine-gun battalions, and several battalions of the Stellung type which out-posted the river at night, but withdrew to strong points in the villages during the day. On the 3rd November, the 5th Infantry Division was informed of its task in the XX Corps operations to envelop Metz from the south. The initial mission was to affect the crossing of the Seille River and drive to the Nied River in the vicinity of Bazoncourt.

The enemy was known to have concentrations in Louvigny and around the stronghold of Fort L'Aisne. In addition to the artillery fire plan for covering the strong points, the XIX Tactical Air Command was called upon for bombardment of the Fort L'Aisne position and other known strong points in the zone south of Metz. Two squadrons of fighter-bombers were to provide tactical support on the initial days of the bridgehead operation. On the 8th of November, the 5th Infantry Division was informed by XX Corps Headquarters that its portion of the operation would begin at 0530 hrs, November 9th.

On the afternoon of November the 8th, the Seille River began to rise as a result of a three-day heavy rainfall. By midnight it had overflowed its natural banks and spread out to a width of 300-600 feet at the proposed sites for crossing. It was decided to cross all assault companies by assault boats instead of by employing footbridges at the planned position. The first assault crossing of the infantry support bridge north of Cheminot was slow and difficult. The leading assault elements grew fire while proceeding along the ridge east of the Seille River.

Leaving the advance units to engage the enemy, the remainder of the bridgehead force, under cover of a smokescreen and early-morning fog, rushed the slopes of the ridge and secured the wooded knoll that dominated Fort L'Aisne, 3000 yards to the north. The enemy's reaction to the occupation of the hill was a heavy artillery concentration falling dead center on the wooded area.

The 9th of November was a gray, misty day. The ground was heavy with clinging mud thickly sewn with land mine personnel mines. Little cover for the advancing troops was found along the open slopes east of the Seille. The low hanging clouds and heavy mist reduced air support to a minimum and denied the attacking troops the encouragement of seeing planes of the XIX Tactical Air Command bombing and strafing the enemy strong points.

The engineers, however, were in close support with assault boats, foot bridges, and rafts and there were guides to direct the infantry to the proper sites. The 1103rd Engineer Combat Group of XX

Corps put a Treadway bridge across the swollen Seille at Longueville and a Class 40 bridge along the Cheminot Road west of the river.

It was known that the German 17th SS Division was the real backbone of the defenses of Metz, and the power that kept the Wehrmacht divisions fighting in line. A special patrol was sent out from this German headquarters with the objective of getting behind XX Corps lines to find out to strength and composition of the American troops. The patrol consisted of one SS lieutenant, one Wehrmacht lieutenant, and one SS master sergeant. It had penetrated our lines approximately 15 km when it was discovered by a road guard from an engineer battalion attached to the American 5th Infantry Division. After two days of interrogation at lower levels, members of the captured patrol were brought to the XX Corps prisoner of war enclosure where they gave the locations of the buildings, the hours of messing, and a strength and status of supply of most of the troops in their area. Three days after this information was passed on, these buildings became primary targets for the Allied Air Forces. At 1140 hours, during the enemy's daily staff briefing his G-2, G-3 building was hit. Sixty-seven enlisted men and high ranking German officers were killed. The Commanding General, who was late for the meeting, was picked up later.

The penetration east of the Seille was a serious threat to the German escape and supply route and the enemy knew it. Artillery fire from the forts in the area reached an intensity seldom encountered in France. The town of Sanry-sur-Nied came in for a particularly heavy pounding. Corps infantry elements held the high ground near the town and were making preparations to force a crossing.

Strong opposition was encountered from the German 45th Machine Gun Battalion while the immense forts of the Groupe Fortifie Verdun harassed the attackers with fire from the heavy gun batteries. In spite of this opposition the assault waves drove eastward from the river and seized Cheminot. The objective was Louvigny which was to be taken in a surprise attack from the south. Savage bursts of small arms fire from St. Jure, however, pinned down the leading elements and the assault was delayed.

At 1500 hours a surprise attack was launched from the cover of a ridge near Louvigny. The Corps troops breasted of the ridge line in full view of the enemy and knocked out enemy machine gun crews southeast of the town before they could swing the guns into action. The attacking companies closed in quickly, swept through the town, and cleared it before the enemy was fully aware of the attack. The town was occupied 1730 hours and an outpost front was extended to the railroad line on the east.

While Louvigny was being cleared, another battalion of infantry moved up to engage the troublesome pocket in St. Jure, and, in a short, sharp skirmish captured the town and drove out the remainder of the garrison.

Back at the river banks, XX Corps engineers were still hampered more by the record high waters of the Moselle than by the ever present artillery barrage from the Metz forts. The river grew wider and wider as the rain continued to fall. The engineers fought their own special kind of war against the mighty forces of nature. Standing chest deep in the icy, racing waters of the Moselle, they laid pontoons only to have their enemy, the river, turn them loose again.

A Bailey bridge could not be constructed immediately, but an infantry support Treadway bridge was put across and reinforced to carry light traffic. Dismounted troops poured across and reinforced the leading waves of the beachhead forces. Work on a 160 foot Bailey bridge was carried on under grave

difficulties and was completed at 0230 hours, November 10th. Within a few hours tanks and tank destroyers were moving across to support the infantry in its attack to the east.

The next barrier in the path of the eastward driving troops was the town of Silly-en-Saulnois. During the night of November 9th, arrangements were made and an assault schedule prepared for a combined attack by infantry of the 5th Division and tanks of the 6th Armored Division.

The drive began at 0700 hrs, November 10th, and almost at once ran into machine gun and mortar fire from the town of Alemont. Alemont was in the zone of the XII Corps on the right flank of the XX Corps where a pocket had been left by the 80th Division. The town was situated on commanding ground dominated a large area to the north in the XX Corps zone of advance. After determining that no XII Corps troops were in the danger zone, tanks and infantry, in a combined assault, took the town by 1100 hours and continued to drive, under heavy artillery fire, to seize the high ground to the southeast of Vigny.

While the attack was progressing on the southern flank of the 5th Division, the assault eastward from Louvigny on the north flank was resumed. The town of Pagny-les-Goin, although its defenses had been softened by air bombardment, still put up a stiff resistance. A fortress battalion, armed with automatic weapons, was placed in position behind temporary obstacles of logs, masonry, and machinery, and resisted all efforts to storm the town. To make matters worse the town of Goin on the exposed left flank of the Division laid enfilading fire on the attacking forces with deadly effect. The thunderous din of a "serenade" by Division and Corps artillery slowed the fire and quelled the will of the Germans to resist, and the American troops cleared the obstacles to seize Pagny-les-Goin before noon.

A combat command of the 6th Armored Division, preparing to knife east along the highway through Vigny, was blocked by a demolition bridge, and a detour through Pagny-les-Goin as soon as the town was cleared was planned. When Pagny-les-Goin had been taken, elements of the 5th Division moved quickly to the high ground north of Vigny and captured it from the German defending force. The tanks of the 6th Armored Division followed quickly into Vigny and raced on to Buchy.

Infantry troops of the 5th Division were next assigned to attack across 4000 yards of open country from Pagny to Silly-en-Saulnois and to take the objective by nightfall. The seemingly perpetual fall rains and heavy ground mist of the Lorraine region came to the aid of the attackers in this difficult maneuver, screening them from enemy observation. The attack went well until it reached the slope only 200 yards from the town, at which time heavy mortar and 20 mm fire began to fall on the assault waves. This only served to give impetus to the race for the cover provided in Silly-en-Saulnois. With the aid of concentrated fire poured into the town by the tanks of the 6th Armored Division from the south, the infantry drove in and captured Silly-en-Saulnois by 1700 hrs, November 10th.

Because of the speed and power of the infantry of XX Corps, the devastating shock effect of Corps artillery, and the close air ground cooperation, the Germans lost their defenses along the Seille River. Enemy efforts to form a wedge defense against the Northeast expansion of the bridgehead south of Metz were already being thwarted by carefully laid plans of XX Corps to encircle the city and choke it off from reinforcement from the east.

The encircling arm of steel bending up from the south was already shaping half of the noose that was to strangle the citadel of Metz.

The attacks south of Metz were carried on with redoubled fury. The Corps plan of attack now was to race another five miles east in Nied river and to seize any bridge left intact by a surprised enemy. Two armored columns spearheaded the way to Dain-en-Saulnois, early on the morning of November 12th, while infantry took over the high ground flanking the highway at Beux. The route of advance brought the attacking columns under heavy fire from enemy batteries located along a defense line 3000 yards to the north of Aube, overlooking the Nied River.

The armor knifed forward to positions looking down on the river at Ancerville. The 5th Division troops promptly surged into this riverbank town and secured it for bridging operations.

The bridge at Ancerville was blown by the enemy, and Corps engineers, sent up to prepare a crossing site, came under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. Infantry troops accordingly made an assault crossing during the night, and secured a small bridgehead, enabling the engineers to construct a treadway bridge under cover of darkness.

A combat command of the 6th Armored Division, while making a reconnaissance for a crossing site, seized the bridge and Sanry-sur-Nied just as an enemy patrol was about to blow it up. A small force was crossed and held a shallow bridgehead while preparations were made for crossing in force at dawn, November 12th.

The XX Corps master plan for the reduction of fortress Metz assigned to the 5th Division the mission of securing a bridgehead over the Nied River. This plan had a double purpose: first, to cover the wheeling movement of the tanks of the 6th Armored Division back to the XII Corps zone, and second, to cut the main escape route of the hard pressed to German garrison in Metz.

This operation was accomplished through close cooperation between the two divisions in an outstanding example of the armored infantry teamwork that was so much a trademark of XX Corps tactics. The tanks aided the infantry in the seizure of Sanry-sur-Nied, Bazoncourt, and Vitoncourt, while the infantry guarded the exposed left flank of the armored column. After a brief bitter skirmish Sanry-sur-Nied was taken at 0800 hours, November 12th. The armor followed closely but ran into heavy anti-tank gun fire and thickly mined roads in the advance to Vaucremont. Infantry aid and heavy Corps artillery support eliminated the enemy resistance and by 2100 hours the town was captured. The armor was now free to resume its turning movement to the south.

The enemy made his counterattack on the Sanry-sur-Nied area the next day. Following a heavy artillery preparation the enemy attack came in at 1400 hours against the right flank. The enemy formation was spotted as it left the cover of the woods and all available fire from artillery, mortars, tank destroyers, and tanks cut down the attacking formation.

While this attack was being met on the right, the heavier counterattack was made from Domangeville. Artillery fire came too late and the enemy overran the observation post on the western hill and got within 500 yards of the town. But the right flank defense placed a large volume of fire on the Hill and forced the enemy to withdraw.

At 2200 hours another attack broke loose from the northwest and northeast under a heavy artillery barrage. At first, darkness prevented the forward observers from spotting the enemy attack formation. A house to house defense within the town stopped the counterattack at close range and forced the Germans to pull back.

There were no other large-scale attacks on the Nied River Bridgehead. This initial objective of the 5th Division had been taken on November 12 and held until the 14th. Then on order of XX Corps, the direction of attack was changed to the north after infantry patrols, probing into the southern group of Metz forts, found them to be lightly held.



FRONT LINES DURING INITIAL PHASE OF ATTACK

## KOENIGSMACHER BRIDGEHEAD

The 90th Division, fighting on the north of Metz, was busy establishing a foothold over a flooded section of the Moselle in preparation for an envelopment of Metz from the north.

The 90th Division, carefully implementing the XX Corps order, prior to moving into the Cattenom Forest prepared for an assault crossing by two full regiments. Engineer attachments from XX Corps joined and trained with the Division in its training area. The Corps Engineer directly planned and controlled the work of the engineers which consisted of furnishing and manning assault boats and constructing infantry support bridges, Treadway bridges, and floating Bailey bridges at each of the regimental crossing sites, Cattenom and Malling.

The supply echelons were busy preparing plans for evacuating the wounded and for supplying and reinforcing the bridgehead troops. Motor boats were brought up to be used in the event of the failure or loss of the ferries or bridges either through enemy action or the mighty current of the flooded Moselle.

The problem of signal communications was also given careful consideration. In addition to the double tactical net, an engineer and a traffic control meant were organized and link together and extra stocks of batteries accumulated.

With the aid of trucks provided by G-4, XX Corps, the Division was moved under cover of darkness into the Cattenom Forest. By dawn November 8, the entire force including supporting elements had closed quietly within the final assembly area and the defiladed area to its rear.

Throughout the day, final plans for the coming attacks were completed. In accordance with the Corps Commander's plan to mislead the enemy into believing that the main effort was to be made at Uckange, the artillery battalions registered with only one gun per battalion in preparing the firing data.

Every detail of the attack was carefully planned in advance. From the high ground lower echelon commanders surveyed their far bank objectives, established their initial phase lines, and made their reconnaissance of routes of approach and crossing area. Personnel concerned with traffic circulation and bridge control received their final instructions and went to their post. In the afternoon every man in the 90th Infantry Division received a thorough briefing on the coming mission with emphasis being placed on its importance in the tactical plans of the XX Corps and the Third United States Army.

Under cover of an accelerated assault gun preparation by the 3rd Cavalry Group, the XX Corps engineers moved forward at darkness to the best unloading points. Plans and preparation were finished. Their fulfillment remained to be affected.

## THE CROSSING



Stealthily, and in complete blackout, the assault battalions of the 358th and 359th Infantry moved shortly after midnight from their assembly areas to the preestablished boat stations. After a 400 yard carry of the cumbersome boats over the open ground, the first waves crossed the rapidly rising waters of the Moselle. The Moselle initially aided the assault by inundating the close-up enemy defenses on the east bank, but the flooded condition of the river made the crossing more and more difficult. The assault boats were tossed about by corks in a swirling water. Some capsized and went down with their crews and cargoes. Footbridge cables could not be anchored and, to aid to the difficulties, the enemy began dropping artillery fire and mortar shells on the near banks among the infantry waiting to cross and the engineers struggling with the boats.



*The Moselle River at Thionville in flood stage  
. The same as when assault crossing was made.*

The crossing was forced in a pouring rain, however, across the racing, yellow Moselle. Further trouble in the form of deep mud on the far bank was encountered. The river was now so high that the enemy mine fields were covered over with water. Some assault craft were carried as far as 1000 yards downstream from the intended landing sites. The Moselle, rather than the enemy, became the more formidable foe. The river, by noon, had swelled to 800 yards in width. More and more boats were lost. The six battalions of infantry across the river made progress but were fighting only with hand-carried weapons.

The assault waves drove ahead in spite of all difficulties and charged up the high ground toward Fort Koenigsmacher. The assault was carried on with such speed the infantry-engineer teams ripped through the wide bands barbed wire surrounding the outworks of the fort and reached the open trench system before the first alarm was sounded by the enemy sentries.

The Germans were taken completely by surprise. Thinking that the Americans could never force a crossing of the Moselle at flood stage, they had developed a sense of security. It was another instance of the "Ghost Corps" tactics of striking where least expected. The Germans, fighting skillfully, but as usual by the book, were stunned at the daring of the maneuver.

The first waves drove the German outposts into their underground fortifications seized the trenches; but with typical Teutonic ingenuity, the enemy had the trenches zeroed in, and mortar fire began to fall accurately into the trenches themselves. In some places machine guns were able to pour enfilading fire down the length of the trench system. The heavier 100 mm batteries of Koenigsmacher could not be brought to bear because of the closeness of the attackers.



*Part of the fortification and obstacles at the entrance to Fort Koenigsmacher*

At the end of the first day's activities the 90th Infantry Division hadn't moved eight battalions of infantry across the flooded river, penetrated to a depth of 2 miles without armor and support, overrun seven towns, penetrated a Metz type fort, and captured 200 prisoners. The initial bridgehead had been secured.

The attack continued against the armored observation posts from which the deadly mortar fire was being directed against the assault troops. The engineers came to the fort during this phase, blowing

the concrete structures on the westward approaches to the fort, one after another, with huge satchel charges of Composition C2.



*Exterior view of Fort Koenigsmacher cut off from relief and finally conquered.*

In the same manner, attacks were launched against the shelter points or sally points which guarded the entry into the underground portion of the fortifications. These points were one-story concrete pill boxes jutting up from the bare hillside. Each had one small entrance, protected by guard room, leading to staircases descending to the underground quarters of Fort Koenigsmacher. In many cases, infantry-engineer teams rushed through heavy fire into the entrances of the shelter points and placed the demolition charges on a staircases leading below. In this way, the exits were blocked and the enemy prevented from infiltrating onto the top of the fort.

Ventilating ports, so necessary to the German fortress troops, were a high-priority target. These were demolished by dropping satchel charges down the shaft, or by pouring in gasoline followed by thermite grenades. This effective procedure was performed so often during the day that artillery liaison planes, in response to a hurry up call, dropped more explosive supplies along the road leading to the fort.

The top side of the fort was completely overrun and the last armored observation post knocked out by noon, on November the 10th. The German garrison was trapped below in the damp, dark corridors of Fort Koenigsmacher. Efforts were made by counterattacking enemy troops from other forts to rescue their beleaguered comrades, but these attempts were beaten off by the determined troops of the 90th Division.

Final resistance in the fort was overcome on the third day by the simple but effective expedient of floating the lower portions of the fort with large quantities of gasoline and tossing thermite and white phosphorus grenades in after it. The resulting holocaust apparently cooled the desire of the fortress defenders to hold out; for, the remaining 120 troops surrendered en masse.

At other points along the bridgehead perimeter, enemy resistance to the infantry advance was stubborn and hectic, but the advance continued to make progress. By the use of marching fire, the keystone fort of Metrich was enveloped and reduced.

The rain continued and the river rose unchecked. The inundated area became a mile and a half wide, and supply for the bridgehead forces was a crucial problem.

The eight infantry battalions on the far bank were still fighting with hand-carried weapons and needed armored to counter the infantry-tank teams that the enemy had collected and was prepared to throw into the battle at this particular stage. Battle casualties had been severe and toll from exposure and trench foot was increasing steadily. A bridge was the only answer.

General Walker, in an effort to employ the 10th Armored Division more quickly, ordered a bridgehead at Thionville by elements of the 95th Division since the river bed in that area was deeply channeled and the flood conditions of the Moselle would be least felt there.

The crossing by units of the 95th Division brought heavy artillery and mortar fire from Fort D'Illange and Fort Yutz, but the bridgehead was slowly expanded, the enemy pushed back, and gains consolidated.

On the morning of the 11th of November, the 357th Infantry drove forward in the center the bridgehead through rugged, wooded terrain along the line of the Maginot forts. They made excellent progress.

On the right of the bridgehead, elements of the 90th Division moved ahead and took up positions along the wooded ridge. The enemy launched a counterattack on the morning of November 11, but was almost annihilated and the advance continued against concentrated artillery fire and strong resistance. Hundreds of German troops, fleeing from the blazing assault on Fort Koenigsmacher, were captured or killed.

During the evening of November 11th, the Moselle River reached its highest crest in 29 years. Its swollen width and racing current made bridge building activities impossible. The artillerymen on the western side of the rivers stood knee deep in mud to support the infantry on the far side of the Moselle.

At 0830 hours, November 12th, a strong battle group of the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division counterattacked. The enemy had finally committed his last large group of reserves in a desperate effort to limit the expanding bridgehead or to smash it back into the wide Moselle. All the artillery in the Corps, over 20 battalions, blanketed the enemy troops and the attack was stopped with heavy losses. American infantry were brought across the river, and, with the aid of the 1st Tank Destroyers counterattacked and turned the Germans' attempt withdrawal into a complete rout.

At Thionville, the 2nd Battalion of the 358th Infantry had encircled and swarmed over the heights of old Fort Yutz and began routing out the entrenched enemy defenders. This was accomplished by noon on November the 12th, and the guns of Fort Guentrange and XX Corps artillery blanketed the artillery casemates of Fort D'Illange.

All three regiments of the 90th Division continued to press forward through the Maginot Line, retaking Kerling and seizing the heavy woods which dominated Oudrenne. Along the southern front of the bridgehead, the town of Haute Ham was cleaned out and the high ground overlooking Distroff was firmly held.

The construction of a Bailey bridge for the 10th Armored Division was underway and the armor was ready to strike from an assembly area in the rear of the Cattenom Forest.

Throughout the night of the 12th of November, ferrying activity and bridging operations continued. A smoke generator company of a chemical mortar Battalion screened the Cattenom site proper.



*Malling bridgehead much needed and rapid passage for heavy armor into Metz.*

The Moselle was receding rapidly and in doing so uncovered extensive minefields the Germans had planted along the river banks. Moving these submerged mines consumed five valuable hours and many other extensive minefields were encountered throughout the bridgehead area.

During the afternoon, the sweating engineers of XX Corps that completed a bridge over the Moselle at Cattenom . The steady advances of the bridgehead troops had placed them out of range of the lighter field artillery battalions, and a bridge was necessary for close support of the assault teams knifing into the forts and fortified towns east of the river. Under the Corps Commander's urging, work on the vital span had been carried on night and day in heavy clinging mud and under intense artillery fire. At 0540 hrs on November the 13th, the first vehicle raced across the completed bridge. The bridgehead was secure.

A turning point in the entire Metz operations had been reached. The Metz defenses had been pierced in the north and south, and the strongest and most formidable obstacle, the Moselle River, had been breached. In the north, the Koenigsmacher bridgehead forces were ready to surge forward and snap the enemy defenses. The armor was prepared to hurtle behind enemy lines sever the lines of communication. On the south, General Walker contemplating the action of patrols probing to the north, decided to turn the 5th Infantry Division directly north on Metz itself. The XX Corps was ready to exploit its successes and give the coup-de-grace to the fortified region of Metz.

During the fluid action all along the 40 mile front of XX Corps, the Corps Headquarters was faced with the necessity of adjusting the plan for the reduction of Metz to meet the ever-changing situation. The master plan, and its broad outlines, called for a classic encirclement of Metz and wide, sweeping maneuver in order to avoid a slow, costly frontal assault on the strongly defended ring of forts.

Four divisions were available for the operation. While the 90th Division was to swing one arm wide from the north, the 5th Division was to drive up from the south. The 95th Division, along the western approaches to Metz, was to exert constant pressure eastward, compressing the trapped enemy into an ever smaller pocket. The 10th Armored Division stood ready to exploit any breakthrough on the north to drive into Germany itself. The 83rd Division had had the mission of driving on to Saarburg, but was lost to the Corps on November the 11th by Twelfth Army Group order. This mission was then given to the 3rd Cavalry Group which was reinforced.



*Double-triple Bailey provided permanent approach to and from Thionville.*

In preparing for the final all-out drive on the city of Metz itself and the drive eastward to the Saar, the 1306th Engineer General Service Regiment constructed, at Thionville, the largest Bailey bridge known to have been built in the European Theater of Operations. It was 190 feet long and of the double-triple span type.

The 95th Division had been making excellent progress in its bridgehead in this sector of the Corps front. Infantry of this Division captured the airport at Haute Yutz, north of Thionville and had, by the 14th of November, taken Haute Yutz and the woods to the south, partially enveloping Fort D'Illange. This enabled the engineers to carry on their bridging operations with a minimum of interference from the enemy although the high waters of the Moselle still created a serious problem.

Farther north at Cattenom, the 90th Division continued to push more artillery and tank destroyers into its expanding bridgehead as the towns of Distroff and Oudrenne were taken. Division reconnaissance troops effected a link up with the 95th Division troops to the south.

The Corps Commander now decided to get the armored spear heads of the 10th Armored Division rolling as fast as possible, combat Command "B" was routed over the bridge at Thionville and then turned north on the River Road past Koenigsmacher. Combat Command "A" raced across the pontoon bridge at Malling and moved east of the Maginot Line on the left flank of the 90th Division.

The enemy made one more desperate attempt to stop the on-charging Corps forces on the 15th of November. The counterattack came in regimental size, supported by heavy assault guns. It was aimed principally at an envelopment of Distroff in the 90th Division zone. To enemy battalions with tanks and half tracks succeeded in driving a wedge between a defenders in the town, splitting them into two groups. The tanks, tank destroyers, and infantry troops in Distroff held their ground tenaciously while Corps artillery pounded the advancing enemy. After several hours of severe fighting the attack was

broken and the the remaining enemy troops attempted to pull back. Corps artillery thereupon lifted its fires to cover all routes of withdrawal and inflicted heavy casualties on the retreating Germans.

In light snow and rain, the 90th Division continued slow, steady advance along the trace of the Maginot Line to reach the high ground overlooking the town of Budling on November the 15th. Another obstacle loomed before the leading elements here. The guns of Fort Hackenberg on the left flank rained heavy and sustained fire. The artillery bunkers of the fort, reinforced by steel and concrete, were proof against the guns of the tank destroyers. Even 8 inch and 240 mm howitzers failed to lessen the volume of fire directed from Fort Hackenberg. Other infantry elements of the 90th Division drove ahead, however, capturing Inglange and Metzervisse. From these vantage points, self-propelled guns hammered steadily at the Hackenberg fortifications. With the aid of the 8 inch guns of Corps artillery, the fort's guns were finally silenced. Later inspection showed this direct fire from the self-propelled 155 mm guns had demolished the walls and turrets, torn cannon lose from mountings, and killed the occupants of the turrets and casemates.

With the elimination of this flank threat from Fort Hackenberg, the advance made rapid progress to reach the steep, wooded ridge that runs from Budling to Veckring.

Earlier in the morning of the 16th of November, the armor had broken out of the crowded bridgehead and was racing toward Merzig. The full weight of the firepower of the 10th Armored Division was now brought to bear on the enemy. A strong battle group of the 110th Panzer Grenadier Regiment offered some opposition, but was rushed before it could fully organize. Before darkness set in, Hargarten and St. Marguerite were wrested from the enemy.

Fighting along the ridge between the Maginot forts, the 90th Division further south kept pace with the armor. Metzeresche, Kedange, and the wooded high ground overlooking Hombourg Budange were overrun and occupied. An enemy strong point was set up at Klang, but a determined tank-infantry attack broke through the prepared positions, and the Germans fled to Kemplich.

Progress was rapid on the 17th of November. The armor wheeled swiftly through surprised enemy forces toward the important objective of Bouzonville. The bulk of the German forces had withdrawn or were attempting to withdraw toward the Saar River. Driving ahead in the wake of a squadron of fighter-bombers, the armor cleared Beckerholtz, raced through the Maginot fortifications near Kemplich, and stood ready to assault Bouzonville on the morning of November the 18th.

Throughout the 17th of November, the enemy retreated in long columns along ridges of the Maginot Line. The guns of the tanks and Corps artillery were kept busy cannonading the scattered groups which either fled toward the Saar River line came down from the heights to surrender the XX Corps forces.

Observing that the noose was tightening around Metz and at the enemy was withdrawing in force to the Saar, General Walker ordered the 90th Division to drive south with all possible speed to linkup with 5th Division coming up from the south. This swift and daring maneuver, typical of XX Corps tactics, would trap sizable enemy groups in Metz and its surrounding forts. Furthermore, it would allow the Corps Commander to disengage Combat Command "A" of the 10th Armored Division and send it north toward Saarburg where they 3rd Cavalry Group was already hacking away at the fringes of the Siegfried line in the Saar-Moselle triangle.



*Engineer units believed this heavy pontoon bridge at Uckange (765 ft.)  
to be the longest in France.*

After receiving the XX Corps ordered to contact the 5th Division, the 90th Division moved out quickly, overrunning bridges and underpasses before the enemy could demolish them. The drive carried through Aboncourt, St. Hubert and Conde-Northen in rapid succession. The same day, infantry troops crossed the Nied River to seize an important road junction at Pontigny.

The 90th Reconnaissance Troop with a supporting platoon of tanks and tank destroyers took over the high ground east of Avancy and cut the highway there. Late in the afternoon of the 18th of November, an enemy battalion was caught between Avancy and the high ground and blown to pieces by antitank guns and tank destroyers. During the night additional columns were jammed in the darkness against the wreckage of the first column. Tank destroyers and tanks went to work again, and, by morning of the 19th of November, 500 prisoners were taken and 32 vehicles had been destroyed.

Early on the 19th of November, the infantry captured Les Etangs in a surprise attack that plugged another escape route east from Metz. Two more long enemy columns moving east were trapped and the massed fires of the supporting artillery and the fighter bombardment destroyed 63 enemy vehicles.

The infantry was prepared to storm across the Nied River and capture Boulay, but the attack was canceled on XX Corps quarter because the encirclement had already been completed at 1100 hours on the 19th of November by the junction of the 90th Reconnaissance Troop with elements of the 735th Tank Battalion.