

## DECEMBER

### INTRODUCTION

The dawn of December found the 90th Division, an interior unit of XX Corps, poised on the high ground West of the SAAR between MERZIG (exclusive) and REHLINGEN. With the exception of a small area in the extreme southern portion of its zone, it had driven the enemy from the West bank of the river and in so doing had all but completed its initial assigned mission. On its right the 95th Division, charged by Corps with the establishment of a bridgehead in the general vicinity of SAARLAUTERN, was rapidly approaching the SAAR. To the North the 10th Armored Division, blocking the Corps left flank between the MOSELLE and SAAR with a secondary force, was converging on MERZIG.

The dispositions of the 90th Division were generally as follows:

(a) 357th Infantry on the Division right held the forward slopes of the high ground due East of GERLFANGEN with 3rd Battalion, while echeloning the 2nd Battalion to the right rear overlooking the towns of EIMERSDORF and SIERSDORF. Its 1st Battalion was battling for the town of BUREN South of the NEID River.

(b) 359th Infantry with 1st and 3rd Battalions abreast occupied FREMERSDORF on the riverbank and from that point echeloned to the left rear to include Hill 348. 2nd Battalion in regimental reserve was assembled in vicinity of OBERESCH.

(c) 358th Infantry (Division Reserve) was a considerable distance to the rear at VECKRING BARRACKS, midway through an intensive rehabilitation program.

(d) 90th Reconnaissance Troop, operating from SILWINGEN, maintained contact between 359th Infantry and the 10th Armored Division.

(e) Division CP located at HALSTROFF, was prepared to displace to HEMMERSDORF when the right flank had clarified.

1 December 44

At 0600 F and I Companies, 357th Infantry, advanced to and occupied the towns of SIERSDORF and EIMERSDORF respectively without opposition other than artillery fire of considerable magnitude. Following the consolidation of these towns, a 3rd Battalion outpost was position to lead the on the East edge of LORWALD. South of the NIED, B Company continued its attack and by noon, had liquidated all remaining resistance in BUREN. Simultaneously A Company was swung to the left of B Company to clean that portion of SIERSDORF South of NIED and the high ground overlooking REHLINGEN (Hill 308). A Company had completed its mission by dark and C Company dispatched two combat patrols through it, around both sides of the Hill mass, to investigate REHLINGEN. Their forward [Page 1] progress blocked at all turns by a profusion of mines, these patrols failed to reach REHLINGEN.

359th Infantry made minor adjustments during the morning hours, MONDORF and MECHERN were occupied without resistance by L and I Companies respectively, while the garrison of FREMERSDORF was reinforced by the remainder of B Company.

Heavy and sustained enemy artillery lashed the forward areas throughout the day, denying any appreciable freedom of movement. Despite this however, reconnaissance continued apace for position areas for direct fire weapons of all types and for routes to these positions with a view to their occupation under cover of darkness. Organic and supporting engineers worked steadily to span the NIED at NIEDALTDORF, HEMMERSDORF and SIERSDORF [SIERSBURG] and to demine the areas contiguous to the NIEDALTDORF-REHLINGEN road.

2 December 1944

The XX corps plan envisaged that the 95th Infantry Division in addition to driving the initial bridgehead across the SAAR River would swing North to seize the high ground opposite REHLINGEN to cover the 90th Division's crossing at that latter point. But as indications mounted of the buildup of enemy strength in the SEIGFRIED defenses the practicability on the 95th Division accomplishing such a difficult maneuver became more and more remote. The Division consequently, having anticipated the necessity of an assault crossing within the zone for several days now took steps to develop such a plan.

Across the SAAR within the present zone of action lay a towering, steep slope Hill mass, studded with pill boxes and entrenchments. A firm foothold on this terrain feature would effectively remove observation from a possible bridge site at FREMERSDORF and for that reason the Division speculatively eyed this ground. On the other hand, a skillful and tenacious defending garrison could annihilate a regiment as it struggled up the precipitous slopes. Without a detailed and accurate intelligence picture the risk was too great and the Division pointed at sights to the South. Corps approved the request that the Division boundary be swung Southeast to include the town off WALLERFANGEN and across the SAAR, where it coincided with the PRIMIS River. This accomplished, 359th Infantry was directed to relieve elements of 357th Infantry South to the NIED River and to outpost its broadened zone with minimum force, holding the bulk of the Battalions in defiladed areas. 357th Infantry was thus enabled to concentrate its Battalions vicinity of BUREN. Simultaneously 358th Infantry was alerted for movement to forward assembly areas generally along the new Division right boundary. [Page 2]

The daylight hours passed without appreciable activity except for the excellent work of the emplaced TDs against the located pillboxes of the LINE, some six of which were destroyed. But as darkness closed, the Division front became alive. C Company 357th Infantry, its path cleared by the engineers, movev towards an entered REHLINGEN. Engineers swept the BUREN-REHLINGEN road for the passage of tanks. Elements of the 3rd Battalion 357th Infantry were relieved in position by 2nd Battalion, 359th Infantry. All along the front of the 359th Infantry additional 50 caliber MGs, AT Guns, tanks, TDs, as well as 155 mm SP guns were emplaced. The artillery accelerated its program of harassing and destruction fires across the SAAR and shifted two Battalions South of the NIED.

3 December 44

By 1000, 359th Infantry utilizing its 2nd Battalion, had completed relief of elements of 357th Infantry West of the NIED River and had accepted responsibility for its new zone. The river line was outposted lightly (commensurate with tactical security) while the bulk of the troops

assembled in covered areas. Throughout the day, considerable fire was maintained on the SIEGFRIED defenses across the SAAR in a continuing attempt to force the enemy's attention on this particular area.

357th Infantry assembled its 2nd and 3rd Battalions in the area BUREN-SIERSDORF-HEMMERSDORF while devoting its principal attention to the establishment of OPs and the opening of routes to REHLINGEN.

Meanwhile in the 95th Infantry Division zone, elements of the 379th Infantry had forced a crossing of the SAAR and had secured the main bridge in SAARLAUTERN. But however suspicious this initial success was, the immediate prospects for exploitation were unfavorable: the Division was scattered and the attack could only be prosecuted piecemeal; the attack area was small and allowed the enemy to contain the effort. And so the long expected order came from corps: cross within zone at the earliest practicable hour.

358th Infantry was directed to move 4 December to BISINGEN-OBERLIMBERG-STE BARBARA, to outpost river and reconnoiter for possible crossing sites. The tentative boundary between regiments was drawn to include ITZPACH to the 357th and PACHTEN to the 358th.

4 December 44

358th Infantry initiated movement by motor from VECKRING BARRACKS at 0900 and proceeded without incident (save sporadic shellfire interdicting routes near destination) to designated assembly area. By 1700, the regiment had closed into localities as follows: [Page 3]

1st Battalion in STE BARBARA, Regimental Headquarters and 2nd Battalion in GISINGEN and 3rd Battalion in OBERLIMBERG.

2nd Battalion, 357th Infantry moved to ITZBACH while the Division CP opened for the first time on German soil at GROSS HEMMERSDORF.

All activity during the day was directed toward preparation for the coming assault. OPs were established on the wooded high ground dominating the West Bank of the SAAR, in the same area, reconnaissance continued for firing sections for TDs and SP 155 mm Guns. Engineers swept and improved the axial roads leading from BUREN, ITZBACH and STE BARBARA to the river as well as the river road connecting WALLERFANGEN and REHLINGEN. Assault battalion commanders and staffs surveyed their general crossing areas and selected positions for supporting weapons. Corps support in the matter of engineer troops and equipment was at length firmed. Patrols scheduled to investigate the defenses across the SAAR were thoroughly oriented and given final briefing just before dark. Target date for the operation was final as early morning, 6 December.

5 December 44

The prospective zone of action of the Division presented problems of even greater magnitude than had the MOSELLE operation. Although providing excellent observation, the high ground

adjacent to the West Bank was so rugged in character that it delimited approaches to the river to the roads from ITZBACH and through WALLERFANGEN. The SAAR itself, a stream of only 200 feet in normal times, was at flood stage and inundated the far banks for a considerable distance making cross-country movement extremely difficult. The SEIGFRIED LINE began literally at the riverbank and extended in a solid belt of unknown kilometers eastwards. The great density of the mutually supporting pillboxes was apparent to observers. Between the river and the MERZIG-SAARLAUTERN Railroad which paralleled the river 1 km inland, the flat, open ground was dissected by entrenchments and completely covered by the weapons in the fortifications. In the right half of the zone, where the 358th Infantry was to operate lay the heavily fortified, adjoining towns of PACHTEN and DILLINGEN. In the 357th Infantry zone the terrain sloped gently from the railroad to a wooded ridge which ran Northeast along the Division axis of advance -- it was down this ridge that the Division main effort was to be directed. To the North loomed a towering and forbidding Hill mass which would flank the Division advance all the way to the initial objective (the high ground between DEPPENWEILER-PIESBACH) and in addition provided observation on the proposed bridging sites. Finally, the Division's left flank was unprotected -- [Page 4] and would always be! Establishment of a bridgehead was feasible but the course of action thereafter remained a moot question.

The Division attack order, issued after a unit commander and staff conference, called for a two regiment assault:

(a) 358th Infantry, two battalions abreast, to initially capture PACHTEN and DILLINGEN and blocking the DILLINGEN-DIEFFLEN corridor, drive down the high ground toward PIESBACH.

(b) 357th Infantry, in a similar formation, to drive rapidly inland to gain the ridge, block to the North and be prepared to continue abreast of the 359th Infantry when that unit had cleared DILLINGEN.

(c) 359th Infantry, initially exerting pressure by fire against the high ground confronting it, was prepared to cross behind either regiment and swing Northeast to assault the high ground North of BECKINGEN or to attack the same area directly across the SAAR from present position if the area was lightly held.

(d) The Engineer support closely paralleled the MOSELLE crossing plan with the 179th Engineers earmarked for the 357th Infantry and the 206th Engineers behind the 358th Infantry.

Faced again with the triple operation of an attack against a defended River line, a night assault and the breaching of the vaunted SIEGFRIED LINE, the Division, its ranks decimated by previous replaced losses, gathered its remaining strength accepting the challenge, turned its eyes eastward, determined to succeed.

The closing hours of the 5th were replete with activity. Supporting weapons were positioned; engineer equipage staged forward, advance CPs and control posts installed at designated points; guides spotted to assist troop movement. Preparations were complete.

6 December 44

One to two hours after midnight the assault troops moved silently from forward assembly areas and threaded their way through the inky blackness of the night to the river bank. At 0415 the leading waves of four battalions shoved off for the far bank and crossed with nearly complete tactical surprise. Only on the extreme Division left in the zone of the 1st Battalion 357th Infantry was there any enemy reaction to the activity on the near bank; and this due to the accidental firing of a multiple 50 caliber antiaircraft gun positioned in REHLINGEN.

In a 358th Infantry zone, 1st Battalion on Regimental right crossed with B and C Companies abreast just downstream from the destroyed bridge and pushed across the open ground towards DILLINGEN astride the road from the bridge site. Bypassing [Page 5] defended pillboxes enroute, the Battalion reached the railroad track which bisected the town, prior to dawn and there halted for reorganization and the gaining of contact with 3rd Battalion on the left. At daylight assault teams worked their way backward to reduce those pillboxes which, avoided during the night advance, were now harassing the rear elements. The line of pillboxes South of the PRIMS River, outside of the Division zone of action, delivered withering fire into the extreme right flank of the Battalion and forced the positioning of A Company in depth to engage this threat. At the same time a 155 mm SP, working with A Company began the methodical destruction of three particular pillboxes.

3rd Battalion Crossing abreast of and on the left of the 1st Battalion, had secured a firm foothold on the western portion of PACHTEN by daylight. After initial reorganization, Battalion began a systematic reduction of the houses and camouflaged pillboxes in the town which brought it, by dark, to within one block of the railroad track. The attack the first day developed the existence of a strong belt of moated fortifications along the left regimental boundary which stubbornly defended, nullified all attempts at lateral contact with 357th Infantry for a solid week.

2nd Battalion, originally scheduled to cross in trace of the 1st Battalion was redirected to follow the 3rd Battalion and at 0800 initiating crossing on a footbridge which had been constructed by the engineers. The existence of this bridge was almost immediately discovered by the enemy and subjected to intense machine gun and mortar fire delivered or directed from the pillboxes just off the regimental left flank. But with great gallantry all men of the 2nd Battalion infiltrated across in fast rushes and by 1500 2nd Battalion was completely assembled in the West end of PACHTEN.

1st Battalion 357th Infantry after the brief confusion caused by the enemy mortar and artillery fire which greeted the outburst of the multiple 50 caliber mentioned above, crossed rapidly just South of REHLINGEN, and avoiding an unproductive fight in the flat open ground adjacent to the river, wound its way in a long column through the manned pillboxes. By dawn it had reached the BECKINGEN-DILLINGEN road and leaving one platoon of C Company to block to the North drove inland to the high ground in a PACHTEN area and there halted faced to the North and East, awaiting the arrival of the 2nd Battalion.

2nd Battalion Crossed in column of Companies just South of the destroyed railroad bridge. G Company leading, gained the barracks area on the BECKINGEN-DILLINGEN road without appreciable resistance while E Company second in column, moved off to its left flank and captured a group of pillboxes on the high ground to the Northeast. [Page 6] F Company caught

on the open ground midway to the barracks area by daylight was abruptly stopped by flanking machine gun fire from the pillboxes along the railroad embankment on the left bank and the fortified area between regiments on the right flank. A well coordinated fire and smoke plan which involved a portion of G Company (faced to rear) the supporting TDs and artillery, finally shook this company free and by 1600 it was enabled to join G Company.

At 1730 the first enemy reaction to the Division's attack other than artillery and mortar fire, which had increased in intensity throughout the day, made itself felt in the form of an infantry-tank assault which struck the 1st Battalion from the Northeast; this effort was repulsed with heavy losses to the enemy by the artillery and the excellent defensive work of the Battalion. Meanwhile the 3rd Battalion, taking its cue from the experience of F Company postponed its crossing until darkness; by 2400 it had assembled in the barracks area.

To the North the 359th Infantry maintained its West Bank positions and pounded away on the visible fortifications studding the opposing hills. It executed four demonstrations with smoke and the concentrated fire of all weapons which drew in turn a considerable amount of retaliatory mortar and artillery.

However successful the Infantry assault, bridging operations made no progress. Beginning at midmorning the enemy lashed the river banks with artillery and mortar concentrating on the only two points technically suited to bridging operations. He was able in fact to place machine-gun fire on both sides throughout that first day. The component parts of the first draft were destroyed by fire before they could be launched into the water. The footbridge used to cross 2nd Battalion 358th Infantry was shot out by day's end and all the assault boats which had not been removed from the water's edge were punctured by shell fragments. Smoke operations were generally unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons:

Firstly; lack of organization.

Secondly; variable wind which blew fitfully up and down the SAAR Valley.

Lastly; inability to cross the heavy drums of fog oil to the East bank of the River.

And so as the day drew to a close, there was no span of any sort nor even a ferry operating across the SAAR. Profiting by their experience on the MOSELLE, the regiments had established supply dumps as close to the near bank as practicable and had organized their carrying parties. Throughout the night food and ammunition were hand-carried to the river, loaded into assault boats and crossed with great difficulty through the raging waters of the [Page 7] rapidly rising SAAR. And on the far bank carrying parties again went into operation, toiling forward with heavy loads through machine gun, mortar and artillery fire to reach the front line elements with the necessities for tomorrow's operation. They sustained that first night, and in the nights to come, casualties -- considerable casualties -- but they did their job without complaint. Movement of supplies to the 357th Infantry was seriously curtailed by the necessity of waiting until the 3rd Battalion had been ferried across.

In the first day of the operation the Division had successfully crossed the foot elements of two regiments and had made a deep penetration into the SIEGFRIED defenses; but success was by no means assured. No transport had been crossed through the lack of a bridge or even a ferry

and the commanding observation maintained by the enemy permitted no assumption of quick and easy construction. No contact had been established between regiments; no firm contact existed in fact between battalions. In the rear areas of both regiments the enemy tenaciously held pillboxes which denied any freedom of movement between riverbank and advanced elements during daylight hours. Before any general advance could be prosecuted therefore preconditions must needs be met:

1. The cleaning up of rear areas.
2. The establishment of a firm lateral contact between all units, a requisite all the more necessary since the enemy was already beginning to infiltrate through the existing gaps.
3. The construction and maintenance of bridge or other means for crossing supplies and supporting armor.

7 December 44

While supplies were laboriously moved across the SAAR during the early morning hours, additional attempts were made to provide more expeditious crossing means. Three times a cable was stretched across the river in the zone of the 357th Infantry; three times it was broken by the force of the current. A second treadway ferry set was damaged by velocity fire enroute to the crossing site opposite PACHTEN.

Shortly after daylight 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry and supporting artillery broke up a strong tank-supported attack before it reached their leading elements. Thereafter that Battalion continued work on the fortifications along its left flank and assisted the advance of the 2nd Battalion. 2nd Battalion moved at daylight from its assembly area in western PACHTEN [Page 8] swung onto the right flank of the 3rd Battalion and attacked generally East in a step-by-step reduction of the pillboxes which during the first day had prevented contact with the 1st Battalion. In a bitterly contested daylong fight it cleared the area in the center of the regimental zone and linked the flank battalions establishing a firm regimental front along the West side of the railroad tracks.

Despite the fluid situation in the area, 2nd Battalion 357th Infantry drove ahead at 0700 and after a hotly opposed advance came up on line with the 1st Battalion. These two units readjusted to establish a tight perimeter defense on the high ground which commanded approaches from the North and Northeast. Scarcely had these readjustments been executed when a concentric assault was launched from three directions, the main force of the effort striking G Company from the Northeast. The attack was prosecuted with determination and skill by high grade troops; but our infantry, no less tenacious, and abetted by the massed artillery firing at maximum rate, slowed, stopped and threw back the onslaught; the enemy withdrew in disorder leaving no less than 150 dead on the field. Meanwhile the 3rd Battalion set about the difficult task of clearing the precarious supply routes. L Company and attacked to the South to eliminate those fortifications along the inter-regimental boundary; K Company moved North, to clear the pillboxes along the North arc of the railway embankment; and I moved East from the barracks area to secure a lodgment on the high ground to the right of the 2nd Battalion. The work was slow and arduous, with artillery and direct fire support made difficult of coordination by the fact that the bulk of the troops were forward of the points of attack.

Throughout the day in the 357th Infantry zone the enemy continued infiltration and reoccupation of every pillbox not physically held by our troops. Even after his bloodily repulsed attack against the 1st and 2nd Battalions the Boche maintained steady pressure in the area allowing our men no freedom of movement -- forcing them to remain continuously in their waterlogged foxholes. At 1730 tanks moved South from BECKINGEN along the road to DILLINGEN but were dispersed with three casualties by alert artillery observers and accurately delivered fire.

The high ground North of BECKINGEN had been smoked continuously by the artillery, but while that area afforded the enemy his most dominating vantage point he could also view the crossing area from many additional points on a 180 degree arc. Windy conditions, the worst yet encountered, made impossible the maintenance of an effective smokescreen on the river line proper and, with every indication of construction drew immediate fire, bridging operations were postponed to the dark. Darkness though masking our activity had its own peculiar drawback, for the rainy, moonless night retarded operations to maddening slowness. While [Page 9] supporting engineers struggled to get their heavy equipment to the riverbank, carrying parties in assault boats again went into action to provide a human supply line. 358th Infantry, with excellent communications behind them and the supply routes free of enemy interference except for heavy artillery fire on the river itself, resupplied expeditiously and fully. In the 357th Infantry sector the story was different. Here the river was swifter and the management of assault boats a difficult problem. The supply route, traversing the marshy ground, was cut sporadically by machine-gun fire from the unreduced pillboxes along the railroad embankment. The 1st Battalion carrying party was driven back by Boches who had infiltrated to the rear of the Battalion area.

The situation of the 357th Infantry presented additional problems. Because of the infiltration tactics of the enemy it was imperative that each pillbox be physically outposted. Each required a minimum of a squad to allow rotation and rest. There was no shelter of any sort in the area occupied by the 1st the 2nd Battalions and the men, forced to occupy continuously their water filled foxholes without opportunity to care for their feet, were already developing symptoms of the dreaded trenchfoot. The regiment was subjected to enemy pressure from the North, East and Southeast: moreover its rear area was not completely cleared. In view of these facts, Division revised the original scheme of maneuver and began to plan on the employment of the 359th Infantry between 357th and 358th Infantryies to reduce the resistance between regiments, to relieve the pressure on the right of 357th Infantry, and to crack the stalemate in DILLINGEN by the capture of the high ground beyond the town. The contemplated maneuver was made known to the 359th Infantry in the form of a warning order.

8 December 44

All attempts of the engineers to provide a vehicular ferry service were unavailing: bridge trucks bogged down enroute to the river; artillery fire destroyed the only crane; and control was lost of working parties in the dark. The 3rd day -- a day of continual counterattacks -- dawned with the infantry still unsupported by armor, AT guns or adequate supplies.

1st Battalion 358th Infantry jumping off, across the railroad tracks was immediately engaged by heavy fire from the large, staunchly constructed buildings which fronted the open siding area.



No amount of artillery fire could lessen the strength of the enemy opposition, and the 1st Battalion, except for a portion of G Company which secured a footing in the railroad station across the tracks, was stopped for no gain. [Page 10]

3rd Battalion 358th Infantry sustained an attack at 0700 from 200 infantry and five tanks. Except for a shallow penetration between the 2nd and 3rd Battalions this assault was effectively contained. However, the Boche maintained a steady pressure throughout the day by heavy artillery, by machine-gun fire and by the skillful use of his roving tanks. By so doing, he effectively prevented the 2nd and 3rd Battalions from resuming the offensive but he paid a considerable price: two tanks were destroyed, enemy in abundance were killed or wounded and some 50 taken prisoner.

The defenses of the 1st and 2nd Battalions 357th Infantry were severely tested by a series of attacks which continued without abatement from morning to night. All were repulsed with extravagant losses to the enemy. Battalions reported that these Germans were fanatical, that they advanced in close formation through terrific artillery fire until their ranks were decimated. Never, they said, had they seen so many dead as littered the battlefield by the end of the day. I and L Companies were likewise struck by an infantry-tank assault; they too held their ground. Although the regiment had yielded not an inch, the constant pressure was beginning to make itself felt on the fatigued, exposed, casualty ridden ranks of the infantry and plans were made to withdraw the 1st the 2nd Battalions slightly so that the regimental front might be firm and supply line shortened.

At 1200, 359th Infantry was directed to assemble in the BUREN-ITZBACH area preparatory to crossing in the zone of the 357th Infantry at midnight. The directive further required that the direct fire weapons, so laboriously emplaced during the preceding week, be left in position together with shell and three platoons all under the command of a designated staff officer. 357th Infantry was directed to report in NCO guides to the advance CP of 359th Infantry to assist the movement through the former's area. Arrangements were made for the Division Engineer to provide two foot bridges for the regiment's crossing and the supporting engineers directed to stand by with assault boats in the event the foot bridges should fail. By dark 359th Infantry had closed into its designated assembly areas and had completed the necessary route reconnaissance for its night movement.

Two regiments fighting with great courage and determination had scarcely been able to sustain themselves in the face of the enemy's savage reaction to this penetration into the SIEGFRIED Defenses. Under orders to continue the drive and to gain contact with the equally hard-pressed 95th Infantry Division on the South and without expectation of outside assistance the Division was now prepared to deliver its remaining punch. Once the 359th Infantry was committed, the issue must be decided by the 90th Infantry Battalions with the support of the Division Artillery. [Page 11]

At Division level the greatest task was to provide that minimum bridging which would allow passage of the armor and expedite the follow of supplies.

9 December 44

359th Infantry began their crossing in 0050, Battalions in column in the order: 1st, 2nd, 3rd. The swift current of the swollen SAAR had nullified all attempts at the construction of a footbridge and the crossing was consequently made by assault boats. The 1st Battalion crossed rapidly but the continued reduction of the number of available boats due to the necessity of combining of engineer crews for the return passage slowed the passage thereafter. 2nd and 3rd Battalions completed their cross river movement at 0440 and 0700 respectively, under intermittent artillery fire. At daylight 1st Battalion on the right and 2nd Battalion on the left were in the high ground a kilometer East of the barracks area battling among a nest of pillboxes. 3rd Battalion assembled initially in the barracks area and from that point moved South to establish contact with the left of the 358th Infantry. This contact was denied by a long slender enemy salient of pillboxes which extended nearly to the river, bolstered at its extremity by two deeply moated forts which had resisted the direct hits of 240 mm Howitzers. 3rd Battalion drove into this salient but the open ground and excellent defenses made progress slow and costly. The advance of the 1st and 2nd Battalions was no more rapid as the enemy fought back with great fury.

To the North enemy pressure continued strong against the 357th Infantry. The situation in the 1st Battalion was particularly critical. Trench foot had seriously cut the number of combat effectives; many men, unable to walk, had to be carried from the pillboxes to their foxholes to man the defenses when Boche attacks were imminent. Elements of the 3rd Battalion continued the work of cleaning out the pillboxes along the curve of the railroad track Southwest of the 1st Battalion's position, finding that the Krauts reoccupied every box not strongly held. Almost forgotten in the general melee was the action of the 1 platoon of C Company which had been left astride the BECKINGEN-DILLINGEN road on the first morning. Daily at dawn this platoon was attacked and surrounded; daily also this gallant little band fought back savagely until the enemy withdrew to lick his wounds.

2nd and 3rd Battalions 358th Infantry resumed the attack 0700. 3rd Battalion cleaned the enemy from the West side of the railroad track while the 2nd Battalion drove across the tracks. F Company discovering a tunnel under the railroad yards, pushed through it and gained the exit where they were immediately engaged by pillboxes and a strong Boche assault group. In the ensuing fight elements [Page 12] of that company were cut off and even considered to have been captured. Meanwhile the 1st Battalion was attacked by a numerically superior force which pressed it until nightfall. Behind the Battalions an Infantry support raft was finally made operative and began crossing AT guns and jeeps, welcome reinforcements for the embattled doughs.

At 1415 medical supplies arranged for with the XIX TAC the preceding day were dropped in the 1st Battalion 357th Infantry area by four P47's. The pilots did an excellent job, coming in fast as treetop level and hitting the drop zone squarely in the middle.

Two hours later the first treadway ferry was completed and ready for tanks. It was discovered however that a tank could not negotiate the existing approaches and a three-hour delay was enforced to properly prepare them. The first tank was safely crossed at 1930. One phase of the battle with the river had been won! Unfortunately, although across the river, tanks could not yet

be dispatched to those units who most needed them because of the unreduced fortifications blocking contact between 358th and 359th Infantry.

The left two regiments were again supplied by assault boats and carrying parties, the latter now numbering 200 men in the case of the 357th Infantry and something over 100 in the 359th Infantry. Unsung heroes, these men, for they braved the river, all manner of fires, and worked throughout the hours of darkness, returning in the morning to resume their normal duties.

As the Division took stock of itself, it could but question the ultimate future of the operation. All Battalions were committed and a majority of these were not disposed for an attack but rather fighting desperately to hold their hard-won gains. The men of the 357th Infantry exposed to the elements for four days, were developing trench foot in increasing number; the 359th Infantry operating in an area similarly devoid of cover could logically be expected to fall prey to the same malady in short order. Although a vehicular ferry was operating behind 358th Infantry it was with no value to the left two regiments until the savagely held enemy salient in the middle of the zone could be reduced. There was no immediate prospect of a junction with the 95th Division on the South since that unit was hotly engaged with the defenses in the town of SAARLAUTERN. Notwithstanding the heavy losses which had been inflicted on the enemy to our immediate front and the capture of some 600 prisoners, he continued to marshal strength against our regiments. All this the personnel of the Division knew. They knew too that there was no alternative and accepted the challenge. [Page 13]

10 December 44

Beginning at daybreak, piecemeal attacks were launched against all portions of the Division front, providing further proof of the enemy's determination to throw us back across the SAAR whatever the cost.

And enemy group, supported by five tanks, penetrated the 3rd Battalion 357th Infantry's line from the Southeast, up the DILLINGEN-BECKINGEN Road. The Boche infantry was thrown back in disorder but the tanks carried on, three reaching a point less than 100 yards from the Battalion CP before they were destroyed by the bazookas. The remaining two turned tail and were immobilized by artillery while in flight. At the same time, a strong force attacked and flanked C Company on the 1st Battalion left; the entire day was consumed in eliminating this threat. This action, similar to those during the preceding four days, made requisite a shortening of the regimental front and the formation of a regimental reserve to adequately cope with the situation. The 3rd Battalion, considered free after the passage of the 359th Infantry, was not in reality so; on the right flank the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 359th Infantry had been stopped short of a complete passage of lines and elements of the 3rd Battalion, 357th Infantry were consequently still in close contact.

All Battalions of the 359th Infantry continued hammering at the pillboxes which, thickly clustered in their zone, confronted them on all sides. The enemy still held the high ground in the area of the 1st and 2nd Battalions and from that commanding terrain counterattacked each forward thrust by the assault elements. It was a fierce fight with each individual pillbox an

objective, calling for a coordinated attack, a rapid consolidation and an equally swift organization for defense.

The problems confronting the 3rd Battalion Commanding Officer were at least as difficult -- the unit had become widely spread as a result of the preceding day and night of fighting and could not be reassembled in daylight because the entire zone was raked with intense enemy fire. Several platoons were known to be in captured pillboxes but contact with them was either lacking or limited to voice radio. Nonetheless the immediately available elements of the Battalion continued the attack South towards the 3rd Battalion, 358th Infantry, eliminating several pillboxes.

The heaviest enemy pressure on the Division right was sustained and absorbed by the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 358th Infantry. The latter unit quickly repulsed the attack directed against it during the early-morning accounting for four tanks in the brisk fight. But the weight of the Boche assault was obtained at the 1st Battalion and that unit was heavily engaged until dark. On its extreme right, the attackers isolated the two platoons of A Company [Page 14] occupying the fortified slaughterhouse (which provided the regiment with ample rations since 6 December) and pounded their stronghold with terrific artillery concentrations. But they were unbeatable though contact with them was not reestablished until the following day. In view of the developments on both flanks, 2nd Battalion withdrew its F Company elements to the West side of the tracks and prepared to move to the aid of either adjacent Battalion. It was evident that the Germans were bent on an all out effort for their attacks were supported by a sustained cannonading which smashed into PACHTEN and West DILLINGEN from dawn 'til dark.

Difficulties in abundance continue to arise on the river. By 0800, the rapid fall of the SAAR grounded the ferry just off the near approach and effectively stopped operations. While the approaches were being extended (a corduroy job requiring hours), to allow loading in deeper waters the smokescreen dissipated momentarily. Given a brief glimpse of the activity on the near bank, the krauts loosed heavy and accurate concentrations which partially destroyed all floats. For the remainder of the day, enemy artillery raked the worksite sufficiently frequently to prohibit effective salvage operations. It was apparent that bridging could be successfully carried on only under an absolute smoke cover but although every resource had been mustered, the maintenance of that cover was a doubtful quantity. Twenty odd smoke generators emplaced on both sides of the river provided the basic screen, supplemented by floating and land smokepots; the artillery and 4.2" chemical mortars blinded the enemy observations and covered the breaks in the fog oil screen. It was the biggest operation of its kind yet attempted in combat. But nature was pro-German! High winds whipped through the valley, first North, then South, changing directions several times a day. The smoke organization established for the morning might well be completely ineffective by noon. Those in charge did their best -- all too frequently they were thwarted by the elements.

At 2000, in a conference held in the 359th Infantry CP, decision was made to withdraw the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 357th Infantry to more favorable ground to firm the regiment on a line which could be held with its greatly reduced strength. At the same time the 3rd Battalion 359th Infantry was directed to relieve all elements of the 3rd Battalion 357th Infantry to permit that

latter unit to clear all enemy resistance along the railroad North to a point abreast of the 1st Battalion.

During the night, the assault boat ferry service functioned rapidly and smoothly, thanks to the decreasing current and receding waters of the SAAR. All units crossed and desired supplies in the desired quantities and evacuated the bulk of the wounded and prisoners. [Page 15]

11 December 44

At 0200 the Germans supported by the ever present tanks drove between the 1st and 3rd Battalions 359th Infantry and overran 3 pillboxes before being brought under control. The status of those elements of the 3rd Battalion in the pillboxes in question remained obscure. Since the 1st Battalion was at the time sideslipped into the right (Southeast) it counterattacked in daylight to recover the lost ground but made little progress. Meanwhile the 3rd Battalion continued its painfully slow regrouping and probed to the South to accurately determine the enemy dispositions in the still existent salient. 2nd Battalion maintained its position and cleared and two (2) rear area of pillboxes which had been reoccupied by infiltrating Krauts the preceding day. During this period, the 90th Reconnaissance Troop was attached to the 359th Infantry and given responsibility for the outpost of the Division North flank along the West bank of the SAAR. The Infantry of the shell was assembled in BUREN preparatory to joining their Battalion at dark.

1st and 3rd Battalions 357th Infantry accomplished their planned repositions withdrawing South and Southwest an average of 500 m. K Company continued the attack against the enemy held pillboxes on the Most side of the embankment of the East-West portion of the railroad and in the days fight captured 3 pillboxes and some 80 PWs.

By midafternoon 1st Battalion 358th Infantry had reestablished contact with the 2 platoons of A Company in the slaughterhouse, finding them somewhat shaken but completely intact. All battalions in the regiment continued reconnaissance and development of enemy positions across the railroad track but attempted no forward movement. Detailed route reconnaissance failed to determine a passable lateral route for tanks in accordance with the proposed plan of running the gauntlet of enemy defenses to deliver armored support to the 359th and 357th Infantry. In front of the 3rd Battalion positions, a multiple track railroad ran through a deep cut, spanned by a concrete overpass which connected with the BECKINGEN-DILLINGEN Road. Possession of this overpass and the intersection beyond it would provide the necessary armor route and at the same time block the approach to the 359's position via which the Boche had been making his harassing flank sorties.

In the area now occupied by the 90th Reconnaissance Troop the enemy stepped up his artillery and mortar fire and for the first time opened up on the outposts with sustained machine-gun fire. His program of fires increased in intensity throughout the day. While not particularly uneasy of the situation the Division faced the fact that its strength was committed across the SAAR and that no troops were available to reinforce the 90th Reconnaissance in [Page 16] the event of an enemy crossing opposite the latter. These circumstances were communicated to Corps and

resulted in the alerting of the 10th Armored Division to be prepared to move one Combat Command to that area in the event anything untoward developed.

12 December 44

Work continued all night on the vehicular ferry and the equally important approaches while supplies flowed across river at the fastest rate since the beginning of the operation. Small boat ferry was greatly facilitated by the installation of two support cables in the zone of the 359th Infantry.

K Company, 357th Infantry, completely relieved by the 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry, resumed the attack North to clear the railroad embankment and succeeded in eliminating all but the northernmost two pillboxes. This advance broadened the base of the bridgehead, firming the left flank of the Division and more than recompensing for the slight withdrawal of the 1st and 2nd Battalions a day previously. While each of the Battalions was reconstituting a reserve company, 2nd Battalion was attacked by a Boche Battalion, striking from the draw generally East of that unit's position. This effort was repulsed with characteristic thoroughness and the foe, contented himself thereafter with sharp probes into the 1st and 2nd Battalions' perimeter.

The vehicular ferry was reconstructed and fully operative by the morning and the crossing of armor reinitiated. A particularly effective smokescreen masked operations and the delivery of tanks and TDs proceeded with dispatch. When it became necessary to suspend ferrying late in the afternoon, by reason of the impassability of the approach route to PACHTEN (the rapid rise of the SAAR having inundated the dirt road), better than a company each of tanks and TDs had been delivered to the far bank.

8" and 240 mm howitzers pounded away all morning at the pillboxes in the enemy held salient separating the 358th and 359th Infantry. At 1300, a Luxembourger volunteered to induce the Kraut defenders to surrender and moved out to the pillboxes. Through his efforts, a total of five pillboxes showed the white flag discharging some 40 Germans. A 3rd Battalion, 358th Infantry patrol moving North through the fortified area immediately thereafter established at 1530 the long-awaited contact with a platoon of the 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry, holding a large pillbox in advance of the 359th's line. This latter unit, given up for lost 2 days previously, had successfully captured the box thus greatly aiding the junction. Two platoons of armor were quickly dispatched through the 359th Infantry to the 357th Infantry. [Page 17]

This day was notable for two reasons -- the 358th and 359th were finally joined and armor was henceforth available to all battalions. In a normal operation these might be matters of negligible import but the 90th on the seventh day of combat East of the SAAR they were accomplishments of considerable magnitude. I Company, 357th Infantry topped off the activities by reducing the two remaining pillboxes along the railroad in a skillfully executed night assault.

13 December 44

Although the Division was concentrated in the smallest attack area in its combat history, the combination of circumstances made the problem of maintenance of gains difficult. The opposing

troops while not acting in concert, were excellent individually and skillfully lead. They infiltrated boldly. They took and reoccupied undermanned pillboxes and once regained they fought savagely to hold them. Therein lay the crux of the problem: pillboxes by the score dotted the bridgehead area and the depleted strength of all units made the manning of all boxes within 500 m of the frontline a physical impossibility. All regiments had already pressed into service as infantry, personnel of Cannon and Antitank Companies, guard platoons and miscellaneous other personnel not required for service as carrying parties. An additional complication lay in the fact that the character of the resistance demanded that mobile support or counterattack group be habitually available to each Battalion Commander. Each passing day saw the number of combat effectives dwindling from wounds, trench foot, exposure and sickness. The obvious solution of blowing all pillboxes not required for shelter fell short of realization because of the inadequacy of the demolition supplies which could be transported to the bridgehead.

The ultimate security of both the 90th and the 95th Divisions lay in the consolidation of the two separate bridgeheads. Such a maneuver would give each unit a protective flank and moreover make available to the 90th the SAARLAUTERN Bridge. The first step towards fulfillment of this objective from the standpoint of the 90th was an expansion of its holding DILLINGEN and the capture of the PRIMS RIVER bridge (or bridge site) on the DILLINGEN-SAARLAUTERN Road. Should success be limited to the foregoing, it was felt that the Divisions left flank could be contracted towards DILLINGEN and PACHTEN, pulling the bulk of the left two regiments undercover to increase their staying powers. Division was confident that while the 357th and 359th Infantries could not maintain themselves on their present positions for any protracted period under continuously heavy pressure, the town of DILLINGEN could be held indefinitely as a Division [page 18] strong point. Consequently plans were issued for a partial readjustment preliminary to a continuation of the attack to seize the remainder of DILLINGEN on 15 December. Precedent to this assault, 3rd Battalion, 358th Infantry was to secure the overpass and road intersection beyond, thereby facilitating the planned sideslip of the 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry.

Ferrying continued eminently successful with the bulk of the armor, wire and litter jeeps, command vehicles and ammunition trucks crossing prior to dark. But an entirely new problem was developing. The road from the ferry site to PACHTEN was deeply inundated and was disintegrating; each vehicle had to be meticulously guided through the mile stretch with the least mishap spelling disaster in the shape of a roadblock.

For the most part the battalions regrouped in preparation for further action. 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry, partially relieved by 1st Battalion elements, sideslipped Southwest and took over from the remaining platoons of L Company, 357th Infantry; the Battalion also recovered the pillboxes lost the preceding night. 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry, employing the TDs, hammered at the pillboxes surrounding its limited objective -- the railroad overpass. Throughout the zone, the enemy pressure slacken perceptibly.

14 December 44

At 132300A, enemy attacked the I Company platoon manning the northernmost pillbox along the railroad spur and after routing the outposts, forced the surrender of the occupants.

Countermeasures were immediately planned and at daylight a reinforced platoon of L Company moved North and in a well-planned assault retook the fortification; the charge which blew the door killed 16 enemy and the remaining 25 surrendered promptly.

For three days the enemy dispositions in the vicinity of the overpass and main road intersection opposite the 3rd Battalion, 358th Infantry had been minutely reconnoitered. During the night, TDs and tanks were emplaced in selected direct fire positions and an elaborate fire plan developed. At 0730, in the half-light of the misty morning, I and L Companies assaulted abreast, supported by murderous fires, both direct and indirect. The careful planning paid off -- by 0900, the Battalion was on its objective, controlling the road intersection. Four pillboxes had been reduced and 70 prisoners taken. Following the action, 3rd Battalion 359th Infantry moved Southwest and relieved the 3rd Battalion 358th Infantry, the latter assembling in PACHTEN as regimental reserve. For the remainder of the day, 358th Infantry continued preparation for the morrow's attack. [Page 19]

The vehicular ferry was damaged in 1200 by a heavy artillery concentration and operations were suspended. Movement of supplies proceeded on a well-organized basis. 29 cargo carriers had replaced the bulk of the carrying parties, and trail ferries had replaced assault boats. All units had a reserve stock on the far banks with large dumps building up in PACHTEN.

15 December 44

The 358th Infantry together with the 359th Infantry through the early morning hours of the 15th laid the groundwork for the renewal of the assault against the tremendous strength within the enemy positions embedded along the East side of the railroad tracks in DILLINGEN. These defenses consisted mainly of many mutually supporting pillboxes and fortified buildings well manned by a stubborn enemy.

1st Battalion, 358th Infantry, due to the difficulty in getting its supporting TDs into position, was delayed somewhat initially while the 2nd Battalion, moving off on time, was halted just over the line of departure by the intense enemy mortar, artillery and machine-gun fire from the East portion of town. The Battalion immediately called for the 4.2" mortars to lay a smoke concentration to their front and flanks. Under cover of the smokescreen the two assault companies forced their way across the exposed railroad tracks to the protection of the buildings and were able at the same time to maneuver three tanks into position with the assault waves. The advance, at first, was slow but with the armor and tank destroyers employed in full, thus placing an overwhelming amount of accurate fire against the enemy fortifications, and the infantry's skillful and aggressive action, it soon became possible for the Battalion to break into the enemy positions causing the Boche to, in some cases, surrender themselves due to the utter confusion caused by the fury of our combined attack. After the initial delay the 1st Battalion pushed off without the TDs and succeeded in gaining a foothold on the east side of the tracks at which time the enemy laced every inch of the Battalion zone with devastating fire. The Battalion, through difficulty, maneuvered the TDs and tanks into position and together in a coordinated effort by all supporting weapons, allowed the infantry to capture, destroy and drive out the enemy from his MLR [Main Line of Resistance].



Only through the perfect cooperation between the armor, TDs and infantry did it become possible to capture the regimental objective of some 300 m east of the railroad tracks.

During the night the companies were forced to send patrols back through the once cleared area to clean out the few pockets bypassed during the attack and a Boche infiltrators. [Page 20]

The 359th Infantry on the 358th Infantry's left, attacked at 1330 with the 3rd Battalion on the right followed by the 1st and 2nd Battalions at 1500. Meeting, initially, organized resistance, the Battalions routed the Boche and pushed forward some 500 yards. The 3rd Battalion linked up with the 2nd Battalion of the 358th Infantry and the 1st Battalion 359th Infantry at 1745, thus securing the left flank of the 358th Infantry and improving the division's foothold within the SAAR Bridgehead.

The 357th Infantry maintained its position Northeast of PACHTEN moving Task Force Thompson across the SAAR River to relieve the 1st Battalion to, greatly diminished in strength was tired and in need of, in many cases, medical attention due to trench foot and sickness. Task Force Thompson consisted of all personnel from the regimental Antitank Company, personnel from the Battalion Antitank platoons and the drivers from the Cannon Company.

16 December 44

The assault regiments consolidated their positions within DILLINGEN while the 357th Infantry had an unusual but very pleasant surprise. A soldier, who had been isolated in a pillbox for three days with 15 other members of I Company, escaped by working his way carefully through the surrounding enemy's lines, returned to the 3rd Battalion Commanding Officer, obtained aid from the TDs and infantry nearby and managed to drive away the enemy thus freeing the beleaguered pillbox and the trapped soldiers.

The Division had reached a very critical situation. Men were altogether too few within the rifle companies and replacements in the near future were not contemplated. A decision had to be reached in order to maintain the effectiveness of the Division as a fighting unit.

The solution:

The reduction of the Cannon Companies, elimination of the Antitank platoons of the Infantry Battalion Headquarters Companies, the reduction of the 81 mm mortar platoons of Heavy Weapons Companies to one platoon of three squads, eliminating three section Headquarters and three mortar squads, the transfer to infantry unassigned Privates and it Pfc's in a number equal to 5% of the T/O strength of each Company except rifle companies, was the plan established at this time.

VECKRING BARRACKS was to be the training ground. [Page 21]

17 December 44

The 358th and 359th were to continue the attack on the 18th to clear the remainder of DILLINGEN. Plans, reconnaissance and resupply were the main points emphasized throughout the day in the bridgehead area.

The 1st Battalion, 357th Infantry was ordered to return to PACHTEN, upon closing to revert to regimental control.

The principal point to be exercised in the execution of this future attack was caution.

(a) To gain with the absolute minimum in casualties the assigned objectives.

(b) To hold, upon reaching the objective, until the 5th Division in the SAARLAUTERN Bridgehead was able to move abreast of the 358th Infantry.

18 December 44

The 359th Infantry, with the 1st and 2nd Battalions establishing a base of fire against the high wooded ridge North of DILLINGEN, moved the 3rd Battalion (right flank Battalion) at 0800 through the northern portion of DILLINGEN to a coordinated attack with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 358th. The 3rd Battalion moved quickly through the streets to clear 10 city blocks, meeting negligible resistance and blocking all approaches into the town from the North with L and K Companies; completing this move by 1000.

The 358th Infantry with the 2nd Battalion on the left and the 1st on the right attacked with the 2nd Battalion, who pushed on, rapidly clearing 11 city blocks and destroying five pillboxes making junction with the 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry in consolidating the final objective by 1100. The 2nd Battalion began immediately to probe with patrols, the factory area now to the Battalion's South. The 3rd Battalion, to the right rear of the 1st Battalion, faced to the South protecting the right flank of the Division along the PRIMS River.

The 357th Infantry remained in place protecting the left flank of the bridgehead. The 1st Battalion began to move across the river from WALLERFANGEN to PACHTEN at 1830 closing in PACHTEN at 2000.

The regiments were alerted during the night for fear of possible paratroop landings. Indications greatly favored the possibility that the Boche would employ such tactics. [Page 22]

19 December 44

An increase in the enemy activity was quite noticeable East and South of BECKINGEN. The men of the 357th Infantry, few that were physically capable, were on a constant alert for another German challenge to our hard-won positions. Information obtained from a prisoner indicated that a Battalion of picked men was going to attack the regiment on the 20th. A Company, 357th Infantry, less one platoon, was moved to a position on the ridge line directly South of Task Force Thompson, ready in the event that such an attack did materialize.

Supplies were still ferried through interdiction shellfire. The mud, rain and ever present cold weather made the difficulties along the riverbank more numerous.

The situation in the ARDENNES was still quite fluid and indications were more numerous that there was a buildup in the SAAR-MOSELLE triangle.

The Division was ordered during the afternoon to begin immediately the withdrawal of all units to the West Bank of the SAAR.

It promised to be one of the most delicate operations ever undergone by the 90th Division. It involved transportation of nine battalions of infantry and over 100 vehicles, including tanks and TDs, across a river that was under enemy observation as well as within artillery range and without a single span. The entire operation would have to depend on a single ferry, the footbridge and a few assault boats.

The following was the plan as to sequence of events for the withdrawal:

- (a) 19-20 December, bulk of the armor.
- (b) 20-21 December, wheeled transportation (less the essential minimum).

One Battalion, each Regiment.  
Regimental CP 357th Infantry.  
Excess supplies -- US Dead.

(c) 21-22 December, all remaining, including engineer equipment on River in following order:

- (1) Remaining armor and wheeled transportation.
- (2) Bulk of troops.
- (3) Shells.
- (4) Engineer Equipment. [Page 23]

Orders were issued that the following units would move to the West side of the River during the first night; Company B and Company C, 773rd TD Battalion, Company C, assault guns, 712th Tank Battalion. By midnight, 11 TDs to 2 1/2 ton trucks, 9 jeeps and 1 1/4 ton truck, 2 M-20's and 2 M-8's, had moved to the West Bank of the river.

On the return trip was necessary to return approximately 12 2 1/2 ton trucks and 7 jeeps for the resupply of the troops in the bridgehead.

By the end of the first night the withdrawal was moving along smoothly and without incident.

20 December 44

Engineers and infantrymen, worked feverishly all-night to speed the safe transportation of the armor and TDs to the West side of the River. By 0930, 12 TDs, 21 trucks, 1 halftrack, 3 assault

guns, 1 M-2, 4 2 1/2 ton trucks, 9 jeeps, 2 M-8's, 2 SPs and 2 ammo carriers were ferried to the West Bank.

Engineers continued successfully to maintain a constant flow of traffic to the West Bank. Additional fuel drawn for the smoke generators was rushed to the East bank of the river to aid in the screening of the withdrawal.

During the day, the expected counterattack that was to hit Task Force Thompson did not materialize due to the excellent interdiction fire placed in the suspected assembly areas. 357th, 358th, 359th and the 315th Engineers in the towns of DILLINGEN and PACHTEN began on the laborious work of systematically placing booby traps, AP and A/T mines as well as completely destroying all pillboxes and fortifications within the entire bridgehead.

A footbridge was constructed in order to move the foot elements back to the West Bank. By midnight the 357th had the 1st Battalion across and proceeding well to their new assembly area in BURN [BURG?]. 359th Infantry withdrew their 1st Battalion to BUREN [DUREN?] at 1730 completing the operation at 2358. The 358th Infantry began withdrawal of their 3rd Battalion to assemble in WALLERFANGEN, the 3rd and last Battalion to cross the river, closed in WALLERFANGEN by 210200A.

21 December 44

The Division was to complete its withdrawal by 0800 on the 22nd. The regiments were to withdraw a bulk of their force from the line during the night of 20th and 21st leaving only a covering [Page 24] shell which in turn would withdraw at the last moment. The regiments were directed to destroy as much enemy material, military and civilian, as was possible prior to their departure.

The 357th Infantry outpost positions were taken by Company B at the commanding positions, from a point dominating the curve in the river below the 357th Infantry crossing site to approximately 1000 yards North of REHLINGEN, reinforced by patrols who were to contact the fixed posts at regular intervals. In addition, positions were occupied at the entrance of SIERSDORF. As the balance of the regiment was preparing to begin his withdrawal, Task Force Thompson received two counterattacks which were decisively punished by our artillery and mortar fire, the Boche evidently in desperate need of substantial information concerning the inactivity of the forward elements of the regiment.

The 2nd 3rd Battalions, 359th Infantry, minus shells, initiated withdrawal in 1900. The 2nd Battalion was completely across minus the shell by 1949. The 2nd moved from the river to OBERESCH. The 3rd crossed at 2045. Company C, being the covering force, established their link that was the link with the remaining covering forces of the division.

The 3rd Battalion, 358th had withdrawn and was to remain in WALLERFANGEN. During the morning the Battalion moved by motor to OBERLINBERG. The 2nd Battalion, minus shell, began his withdrawal of 1900 across the footbridge with the 1st Battalion, minus shell, prepared

to follow at 2045. The footbridge was all that remained in addition to Company A, the covering force.

Vehicles, tanks and TDs continued to move across the river at which time the enemy began to increase the well-placed artillery fire on the bridge and ferry sites. The enemy from time to time placed intense artillery fire on WALLERFANGEN and other approaches to the ferry sites making the work for the engineers more and more dangerous. Difficulty after difficulty arose. The roads on the East side of the river were becoming increasingly worse, which caused tanks and vehicles alike to become frequently stuck, greatly slowing the entire operation. To further handicap the evacuation, the river now at its lowest ebb, caused great difficulty on the part of the tanks and TDs as they had to be winched out one by one over the steep slippery bank. To make matters even worse, artillery fire, well-placed, destroyed the vehicle ferry stopping all operation on the riverfront for the remainder of the afternoon. The men laboring at the water's edge were nearing the peak of exhaustion.

It was fast becoming a race against time for by midnight with only a few hours remaining the division still had approximately 25 armored vehicles on the East bank. [Page 25]

22 December 44

Work was continued with the roads becoming more and more of a hazard at the bridge site. The men, under increasing pressure, worked in complete darkness under artillery fire and increasing cold to complete the withdrawal with a minimum loss to material. Orders were issued for the smoke generator company to begin smoking the ferry sites at 0830 for it was quite evident that all the vehicles could not possibly be evacuated before daylight.

The withdrawal of the covering shell began at 0300 and was completely clear of the East side by 0545. However there still remained 8 TDs and 5 tanks on the East bank together with one smoke truck and 10 odd jeeps. The men were bending every effort to rescue the remaining vehicles before the Boche became aware of the fact that the Division was going back to the west shore. By 0830 there were three pieces of armor, 5 jeeps and one smoke truck left to be evacuated. Each man was waiting, half expecting the Boche to move in to stop the evacuation of the remaining vehicles. There was no longer that secure feeling that the protecting shell would stave off the enemy when there wasn't any shell now.

At 0955 the German for the first time became aware that there was a withdrawal in process. At this time the ferry site began to receive mortar and direct machine gun fire. Immediately the Division Artillery began to smash the western outskirts of PACHTEN and DILLINGEN with a barrage after barrage to block off the enemy pursuit. 45 minutes later the Division had on the West Bank everything that could possibly be transported across, free from capture by the enemy. The Division left behind a total of two TDs, two disabled tanks, one 1/4 ton truck and one 2 1/2 ton truck which were destroyed before abandoning completely the East bank.

The engineers were forced to destroy the ferry and the boats that were left in the river. At 1000 the smoke was lifted only to reveal a burning mass of twisted structures and bloody memories of

battles hard-won and ground gallantly gained. There was a lump in the throats of many who left the SAAR Bridgehead.

The 358th Infantry moved by motor to effect the relief of the right flank elements of the 3rd Cavalry Group and establish a defense line from a point just East of BUSCHDORF to RIPPLINGEN. The 1st Battalion upon arriving on the West Bank entrucked and moved to [LAUNSDORF?], FRANCE as regimental reserve. The 3rd Battalion to WALDWISSE, detrucking at 1130 and occupied a line through WELLINGEN BUDUGEN with the OPLR along the river's edge. The 2nd Battalion moved by motor to LAUNSDORF, FRANCE.

The 359th Infantry upon completing his withdrawal across the SAAR [Page 26] immediately moved to take up positions along the river with the 1st Battalion on the left from RIPPLINGEN South to MECHERN and the 2nd Battalion on the right from MECHERN South to the NIED RIVER, the 3rd Battalion in reserve in the vicinity of BIRINGEN.

The 357th Infantry moved in the order of 3rd Battalion, 2nd Battalion, AT, cannon, Headquarters Company and the 1st Battalion less outposts. The movement began at 1300 through narrow, muddy and congested roads but with excellent road and traffic supervision under the circumstances. The regiment closed in the 3rd Battalion of 1430 at OUDRENNE. The 2nd Battalion finding other units in the town of LAUNSFELD was forced to move to KALENBURG. Billeting was quite a problem due to the crowded conditions of all the small villages in the rear division area. The 1st Battalion moved into HAUTE-SIERCK after finding KIRSCHNAUMER occupied by Corps troops. With considerable juggling the regiment succeeded in getting all troops under cover and a program for rehabilitation was immediately set up as well as a plan of defense and counterattack.

Division CP moved back to VECKRING BARRACKS.

This marked the end of the strenuous operations East of the SAAR River and the beginning of a period of a more static and less active type of warfare.

23-31 December 44

The division establishing its defense, with the 3rd Cavalry Group attached, from the MOSELLE River East to the SAAR, then South to the NIED RIVER. At this point the left flank of the 358th Infantry linked with the 3rd Cavalry group. The 358 Infantry link LED on the right with the 359th Infantry at RIPPLINGEN to the North bank of the NIED River where visual contact was made with the 95th Infantry Division. Initially the regiment constructed hasty field fortifications with some difficulty due to the frozen ground.

The division immediately began laying plans for the employment of the Corps and Division Reserve as did the regiments lay plans for the employment of their reserve battalions. An elaborate system of demolitions, roadblocks and minefields, AT and anti-personnel, was instigated. The 773rd and 774th TD Battalions, prepared many secondary positions throughout the division zone. The TDs and at all At guns alike prepared and occupied primary positions in immediate support of the infantry battalions.

The regiments made extensive reconnaissance of rear areas and the MAGINOT LINE in anticipation to the possibility of being forced [Page 27] to occupy positions behind those presently held in the face of a strong German effort emerging from either the "SAAR-MOSELLE Triangle" or the MERZIG area.

The regiments rotated their battalions in the line enabling all the personnel to share the comforts of a hot shower and a change to clean clothes.

During this period the Division's two weeks training school, established at VECKRING BARRACKS, was in full operation, training approximately 300 men taken from the Division and attached units.

On the 27th the Division began to receive the first group of scantily trained replacements, who had received a mere two days training at METZ prior to their joining the Division. They had been freshly called into the infantry from other branches of the services and were to make up three out of each four men, on an average, in the rifle squads of the Division. Little did they know that in the not-too-distant future they were to participate in one of the most important of operations.

Patrol activities were once again strongly enforced and from the 27th of December to the end of the month, the regiments planned carefully, raiding parties, combat and reconnaissance patrols with the main purpose of capturing prisoners, keeping the enemy constantly on the alert and prevent the Boche from withdrawing his forces to reinforce his Divisions in the ARDENNES.

The Luftwaffe during the closing days of the year was unusually active in the Divisions sector.

VAN FLEET  
COMMANDING  
STILWELL  
G-3  
[Page 28]

#### OBSERVATIONS ON THE SAAR RIVER CROSSING

Crossing of the SAAR RIVER and the subsequent operations resulted in a number of conclusions which are briefly set out below. Lessons gained are applied separately to the operations: 1-River Crossings; and 2-Attacks on pillboxes and their fortified positions. Certain problems dovetailed in our experience, making the problem appear as one, although in fact, the Crossing complicated the pillbox attack, and the existence of the pillboxes complicated the problems offered by the river.

SUPPLIES. As a result of the experiences in crossing the MOSELLE, all plans for the current operation were based on the assumption that there would be no bridges. As a result, the movement of supplies was underway without confusion or loss of time as soon as tactical conditions permitted; in this case the inability to cut off the enemy's observation of the Crossing

site limited all movement to after dark. This particular problem was more difficult than would normally be expected because of the swollen river. In spite of these added difficulties, our supply movement was satisfactory for minimum purposes because of prior planning. Steep banks and fast current eliminated possibility of using either the alligators or dwks provided the regiments. After considerable searching, five M-29's were located and placed in operation; they were particularly effective in negotiating these extremely soft mud and water holes in the river bottom. Their quiet operation was also a value as the nearness of the enemy lines and the activity of pillboxes still occupied by the enemy made advisable the elimination of all possible noise.

**HELP FOR ENGINEERS.** In the handling of supplies the strain on the engineers in maneuvering the assault boats in the swift current made it apparent that some relief would have to be provided. Instead of the usual six engineers to a boat, two infantryman (in this case personnel from the carrying party) were assigned, their activities supervised by four engineers. This allowed rotation of the available engineering personnel, without which the ferry operations would have been interrupted before minimum supplies could be crossed each night.

**CABLE FERRY.** On the sixth night of the operation, the ferrying problem was somewhat eased by the installation of two cables, one for safety purposes, directly across the current and fastened to "dead men" at each side. Four assault boats were coupled together in sets of two; two pullies were run from corners of the long side of the "ferry" to the cable. Motivating power was provided by the current by playing out one of the pulley lines, depending on the direction desired, it was possible to make a round trip across the river in 20 minutes under ideal conditions, including loading and unloading. Personnel capacity was 16 men, with two engineers doing the operating. [Page 1]

**PRIORITY OF SUPPLIES.** Supply needs of the battalions were made known to the officer in charge of dispatching prior to darkness. This allowed sufficient time before the start of movement each night to have the necessary items on hand and ready to go. Priorities varied from day to day, with the greatest need on any occasion ranging from medical supplies to rations or ammunition.

**PILLBOXES.** Effect of firing: Destruction of pillboxes encountered in this area by SP TDs or 155's could not be classified as successful; however, direct hits by either of these guns around the apertures provided enough shocking power to stun the occupants beyond fighting condition and the subsequent capture of the individual box could be more readily accomplished. In the event of boxes supported by direct fire from others, it is, of course, necessary to apply the same neutralizing treatment to those covering the particular box under attack. Experiences of the regiments proved beyond question the absolute necessity of either protecting the boxes against recapture, even though behind the forward elements, or destruction by demolitions. In this case, limited manpower made both solutions very difficult. Another point of vital importance -- in the protection of the box against recapture it is necessary that the main defense be afforded from the outside from dug-in positions.

**THE IDEAL ATTACK.** While the successful attack against any pillbox must be considered as a separate problem certain standard operations do exist. The site of the attacking force will vary



dependent on terrain and the size of the pillbox to be taken. The assault group should be composed of infantry with automatic weapons and bazookas, engineers with satchel charges and a self-propelled gun. The number of infantryman will vary from a squad to a platoon, or possibly even a company. Usually four engineers is sufficient to place and detonate the satchel charges, under covering fire of the infantry and a self-propelled gun. From the jump-off the gun should begin firing on all known and observed embrasures. This will greatly reduce the hazard of hostile small arms fire. Speed is always essential in an operation of this type because there's always the threat of mortar or artillery fire which the Germans will call down on their placement to break up the attack. As the assault group moves forward the infantrymen will continue to neutralize any resistance from the outside of the box and also aid in "buttoning up", already begun by the SP. Upon containing the enemy inside the pillbox engineers move forward, place and detonate the satchel charge. Once this has been done there is little "mopping up" to be done.

The 357th was fortunate in having one of those "ideal attacks" during the SAAR operation. The assault team consisted of 2 squads of infantry, 4 engineers and one TD, attacking a three room pillbox. As the group move forward the SP opened fire [Page 2] and in all, directed three rounds at the target. Two rounds penetrated an exposed port and exploded inside, the third round going through the box out the rear door and exploding in a field beyond. The assault group moved up quickly, the engineers setting off three satchel charges which shattered the door and turned the inside of the pillbox into a pile of debris without effecting the main structure. There had been 20 occupants in the box; at the end of the operation 12 of these were, in fair condition. Precaution: the satchel charge by no means demolished the pillbox and had it not been heavily guarded from the outside, it could have been reoccupied by the enemy and would have again become a very serious obstacle.

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