

Siege of Bitchie

December 14th the 399th made the long march up through Lemberg and down through the winding road cut between huge pine-covered hills toward Reyersviller. Past mangled 88 chassis and dead Germans. *The doughboys' orders were that they would take Bitchie in the morning and go into Corps reserve in the afternoon. Fair enough, because nobody could live in a foxhole during the winter.* The Red Battalion filed into the woods of Spitzberg to cross the Reyersviller gap and ascend Shoenberg and Shimberg.

"Ah'm walkin' in yoah footprints, white man. This pasture and woods look slightly mined to me."



*"A beautiful city, like something out of a fairy tale"... Bitche
as seen from Reyersviller Ridge*



"We're going this way to steer clear of that road junction down there where the Bitche—Lemberg road meets the Reyersviller Road."

"Boy, look at that fleet of Shermans rumbling up the highway toward Bitche. And that must be the 3rd Battalion moving up on the other side."

"According to the sign it's only 2 kilometres."

"Just a matter of hours."

Months, Joe, months.

The Red Battalion dug in on the Reyersviller Ridge and the Blue Battalion dug in down on the right between the Bitche highway and Railroad.

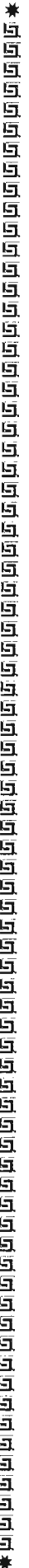
"We passed through the 398th and dug in along the edge of the wooded horseshoe that was Shimberg and Shoenberg. Down in front of us lay a beautiful city, like something out of a fairy tale. Three big knobs made a beautiful triangle in the middle of the valley floor. Two were covered with dark green trees, and one had a monstrous stone fortress sitting on top—Spread around were the red-roofed houses and a little white cemetery in the sunshine. Beyond the city were rolling ranges of hills, one after another. Boy, what a place to stay in Corps reserve."

The attack was pushed back to the 15th to give the 398th on the left a little more time to do whatever it was they had to do. Sgt. Stan LaBrake of Able took a combat patrol down into the city past the red chapel towers of the College de Bitche into a stiff fire fight. Apparently the krauts wanted to live in Bitche, too. On the 15th Bitche would fall.

"Everything was peaceful and beautiful in the morning air. It couldn't have been more than a thousand yards. I'll bet I could run right down the hill into Bitche in three minutes without all these bandoliers and grenades holding me back."

Able would drive between the Citadel and the green hill to the left, Charlie would drive past the Citadel, Baker would sweep up the right side of town, and the 2nd Battalion would spill into Bitche to grab the Citadel. Objectives? A range of hills two miles behind the city. Everything was set. The Germans had nothing to stop us. At the last minute the attack was cancelled.

The situation began to unfold. The ancient Citadel had a dozen 88's in its stone apertures. The other two pretty green hills of the triangle were artificial and actually Forts Sebastian



and Grand Otterbiel of the Maginot Line. Also dumping fire into Bitche would be Forts Grand and Petit Hohekirkel, Petit Otterbiel, Ramstein, Simserhoff, Freudenberg.

And don't let the "Petit" fool you. They were all big forts, with moats and drawbridges and French 75's and everything. The man-made ridge towering over Bitche on the northwest was Fort Schiesseck. Newspapermen called the whole works the "Ensemble de Bitche."

The attack was postponed and officially the 399th sat back to watch the 398th do their stuff. King Company sent a 13 man patrol to the Hôtel on the Pond de Hasselfurt. Sgt. Russell Sefing crawled up to the Hôtel and brought back a burp gunner who said that 30 Germans with four machineguns had just moved into the Hôtel and were expecting the Americans to attack on the 16th. *They weren't disappointed.*

Five pea-shooter light tanks went in with King the next morning. The barking of the tankers' tiny 37's combined with Pfc Robert Masters' blazing BAR overran the position and captured 16 in the Hôtel. The Blue Battalion moved forward to the edge of woods fronting on Bitche.

Lt. Harry Flanagan and five daring Baker doughs captured a house next to a strong pillbox on the Bitche highway right under the nose of the Citadel. *At dawn of the 17th Charlie's 3rd platoon with Lt. Robert Hakala and Sgt. Russell Solovey's machineguns made a dawn dash for the College de Bitche sprawling 400 yards below their Shoenberg positions.*

"We were on OP up on Shoenberg when Charlie filed out of the woods. It was like a movie. The Germans had trenches dug all around the college and came running out of the building to man their machineguns. Just then Dog Company's mortars opened up and landed right in the middle of the krauts. That killed all but three who ran back inside to man an upstairs machinegun. The mortars coughed again and three rounds went through one hole in the roof and wiped out the crew. I never saw such shooting in my life!"

That night the rest of Charlie infiltrated down into the College, climbed in a broken window, and dispersed in the vast, battered building.

Pvt. Santiago Gonzales led Baker Company in storming the pillbox next to Flanagan's Fortress by shooting up six Germans. The 2nd platoon grabbed off the houses between the pillbox and the College. *The 100th Division had two rifle companies billeted in Bitche.* Able Company sent Sgt. Ignace Dombrowski and Joe Galiuzzi into the city at night.

"So just when we get to the first house we hear footsteps. So we kneel down in the road and wait. Four long overcoats with burp guns crooked in their arms come laughing and talking up the road headed for our lines. Ten yards from us, we open up. Three fell and one ran away firing his burp gun into the dark. Then we turned around and ran like hell ourselves. I'm a staff sergeant now. Big deal. Whatsa matter? I was doing all right as a private."

The College was only 300 yards from



Bitche Express... Baker jeep wheels through Shoenberg woods with hot meal for Joes in Flanagan's Fort

the Citadel in Bitche. A jovial Counter Intelligence Corps Captain sent Frenchmen into Bitche every night. Not all returned. *He pointed out to Charlie doughs the periscope up in a fissure of the Citadel that was trained on their College window.*

The Artillery really made merry. All night long the 399th Joes on guard heard the big guns beating a tattoo in the rear.

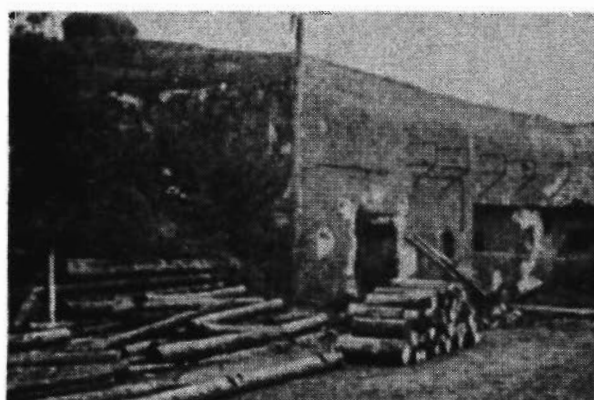
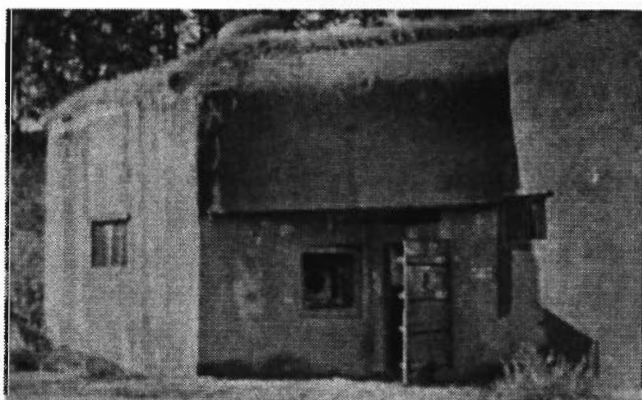
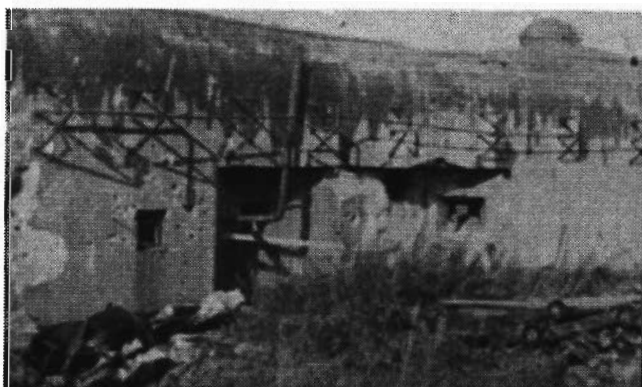
"They hammered like Gene Krupa's drums, and then went over our foxholes like that descending melody of Glenn Miller's '2 o'clock jump'. It was sweet music all right."

Tanks formed ranks on Shoenberg Ridge with their stout 76mm noses sticking out of the woods pointed at the Citadel. Anti-tankers lined up their guns beside the Shermans all ready for the jumpoff. Every day was clear blue skies with no clouds but millions of airplanes. All day long the orange tailed "Jabo" Thunderbolts filled the sprawling Bitche valley with their 8-barrelled thunder and bounced 500 pound bombs off Schiesseck.

Two Doughboys crept up to the 925th FA forward observer's hole. One looked through the F/O's telescope, the other read Stars & Stripes.

"Hey, here's an article about the Doughboys at Bitche. That's us! This guy Ed Clark says us Joes are practical, not theoretical men, and that we're hanging our wash on the Maginot Line."

"Gosh, through this telescope I can see the turrets sticking out of that fake hill Schiesseck. Every time the Thunderbolts dive down to strafe 'em the turrets disappear underground."



"And don't let the 'Petit' fool you..."

Tanks formed ranks... Sherman on Shoenberg



"Listen to this. He says the Maginot forts are all stacked-up cement graveyards and that you can knock 'em apart with a pencil or bayonet."

"The Thunderbolts are dive bombing Schiesseck now. I can see the tiny bombs going down — and they bounced right back up. Maybe those pillboxes are made of rubber."

"Never mind that. You should read the newspapers, 'cause they're educational. The article says even the Germans don't have any faith in the Maginot because all the forts face the wrong way."



Shell's eye view of Bitche... Americans coined a phrase

"What he don't know is that those French 75's fire out the back door. Maybe if we smuggled a couple copies of Stars & Stripes to the krauts they'd get scared and pull back to the Siegfried and then we could move into the Maginot and practice being Frenchmen for the winter."

"Boy, I'll bet the civilians back home got a big kick out of this article."

The turned around Maginot Line lay between Bitche and the Siegfried Line to the north, hence the 399th walked right up to the gates of the city on Reysersviller Ridge and the College de Bitche without much trouble. But to bust through the city was another story. As the doughfeet axiom goes: you get only what you pay for.

"We never could get onto the way the Germans and French argued over the spelling of words. The French called it Bitche and the Germans called it Bitsch. So we decided to be independent and named it Bitch. We hit it right on the head, it turned out."

December 17th when Baker and Charlie dashed into Bitche, the 398th hit the Forts on the high bare Maginot plateau to the west of Bitche. From Shoenberg we could see flame throwers blazing away on Fort Freudenberg and then Sherman tanks appeared on the skyline as the doughboys moved toward the doomed hill of Schiesseck.

Sgt. Thomas Sweeney led an eight man King night patrol which bumped into two camouflaged pillboxes across the Bitche—Strasbourg highway almost in Camp de Bitche. A machinegun, grenade, and finally hand-to-hand fight followed. Only two of the eight got back to our lines, and the remainder drifted in dazedly during the night. Item patrols spent their days in the woods, their nights in Bitche.



*398th doughboys give
Freudenberg Farms
bunker a quick bazookay*



*Nobody here but just us Kamerads ...
Americans capture Germans in French Maginot*



"The gallant 398th Infantry assaulted the man-made monster of Schiesseck"

December 18th the gallant 398th Infantry on the left continued their battle across the shrapnel-sprayed table to the west of the city and assaulted the man-made monster of Schiesseck. They overran all eleven forts of Schiesseck and won a Presidential Citation.

"The city is surrounded by a 100th Division horseshoe."

"And the Corps artillery and the Air Corps keep coming. It won't be long now."

"I hope not. Only six more shooting days till Christmas."

Also on December 18th roving bands of SS troops overwhelmed an outpost line on a lonely front up north. December 19th rank upon rank of Königstiger tanks rumbled through the gap. Von Rundstedt's gray-clad legions had broken through. This affected every soldier on the Western Front. Patton roared northward, Patch took over Patton's sector, the 398th withdrew from Schiesseck, and the 399th took over the front of a full Division. The 2nd Battalion moved into position along the Lemberg—Bitche RR to guard the Division's right flank.

"You know, I can't figure out the war, sometimes. In the battle for Lemberg we were on the other side of the tracks trying to get over here. Now we're on this side of the tracks, waiting for the enemy to come across from the other side."

December 23rd the 399th lined up in depth for an expected counterattack. The 3rd Battalion formed on Spitzberg and the 2nd dug in around Lemberg. The 1st Battalion held an outpost line semi-circling Bitche. Flanagan's Fortress looked up at the Citadel from the Lemberg—Bitche highway in the east. Fort Fraley — only Schiesseck Fort still in American hands — looked down on the Citadel from the west.

"Yuh know, we got the Citadel right where we want it — practically surrounded. And all with only five guys on each side of the city."

Up front there were 4 men in Wolfs-garten Farm, 3 in Flanagan's Fort, 6 in the College, an OP here, a listening post there — strictly a dotted line.

"The College de Bitche was the spookiest, weirdest place we were ever in. We'd walk down those long, pitch black, glass-covered corridors, and the echoes and noises would sound like something straight out of Hell. The place must have had a 100 passages. There was this damned horse that used to walk around outside the College at night."



"... strictly a dotted line"

“We named it the College de Hard Knocks. My old man was right when he told me to keep away from education. Just think, if I went to college I might be an officer now. Phew, am I lucky. We’d need a Regiment to defend this place.”

They didn't have a Regiment, just six Baker privates with a will to live.

On Christmas Eve the Engineers were blowing a road block along the Bitche—Freudenberg Road at Fort Schiesseck to bottle up any prospective tank attack from Bitche. An enemy patrol came up, the Engineers took off, and the six man squad of 18 year old S/Sgt. Chester Fraley came storming out of their pillbox to rout the krauts.

Rumor had it that on Christmas Day the Germans would all lay down their arms. Early Christmas morning two American sentries on a lonely outpost held their rifles levelled at two approaching longcoats. One carried a burp gun, one carried a bottle, both were weaving. The crashing of a lone M-1 broke the Yule morning and the burp gun clattered on the frozen ground. The two krauts laughed, weaved some more, and raised their hands.

"Merry Christmas," said the ex-gunner in English.

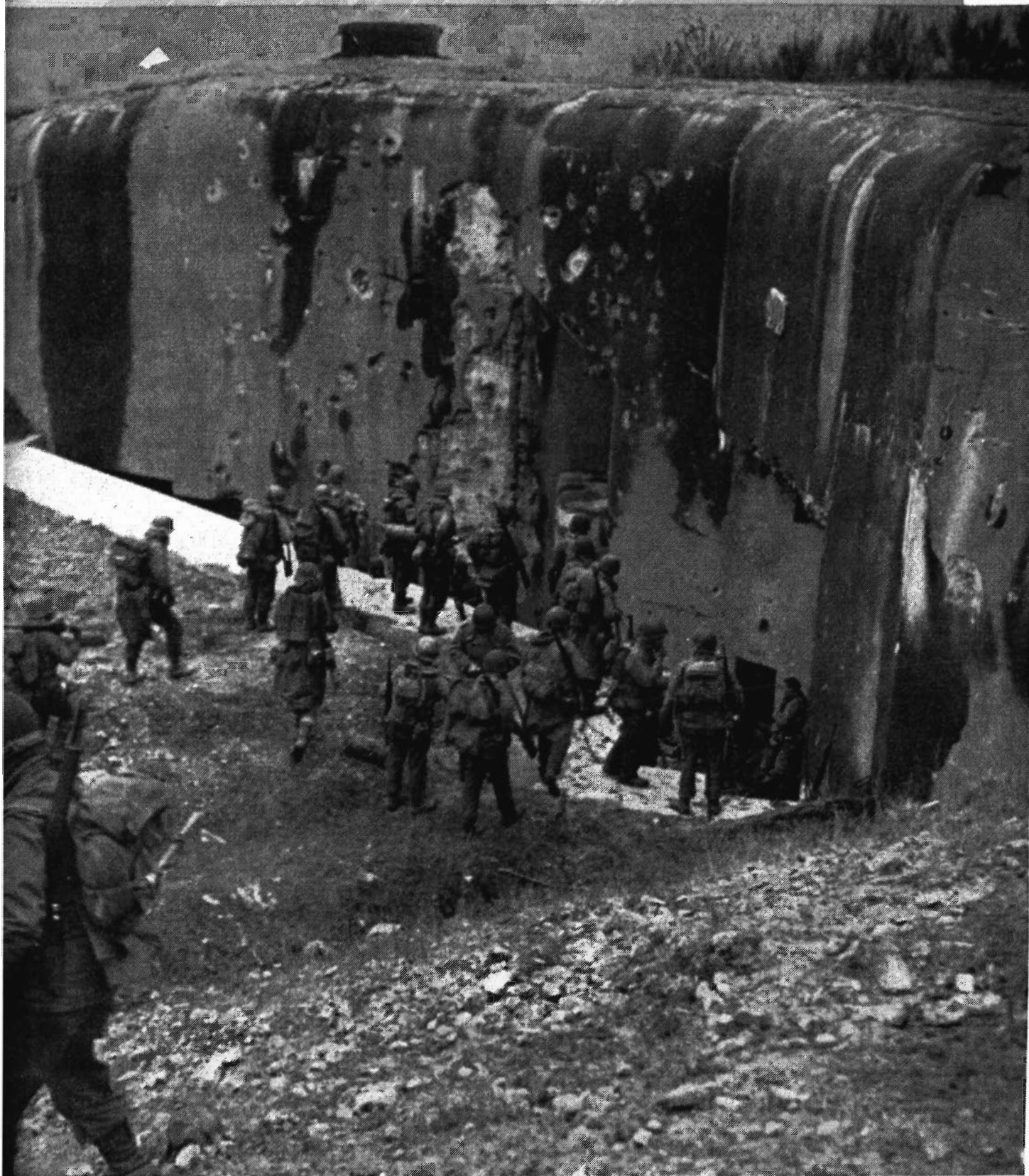
"Beautiful shot," said one of the sentries, "I thought we'd never save the bottle." —

The rest of the Wehrmacht failed to show up, however, and Christmas Day was blessed with no casualties in the entire Regiment and holiday turkey with all the trimmings. Some turkeys were frozen by the time they reached the forward OP's after dark, the only safe time.



Mortar à la Maginot

“T
he White Battalion moved up into the Magnot Line . . .”



"I'd like to meet the General who's responsible for us being stuck way out here on this outpost."

"High calibre, the Army calls him."

"I wouldn't know, I'm only .30 calibre myself."

P-47's roamed the Bitche valley daily. Snowmen hundreds of feet tall stood above the city in fantastic array as Corps 240 Long Toms dropped in White Phosphorus spark sprayers. *Taller than the Citadel, these snowmen.* The days were clear and an icy moon hung over the city every night. Our Armies had been drawn Northward and the Regiment was stretched tight as a fiddlestring. The 398th held Freudenberg Farms on the left and the luckless 117th Cavalry Recon moved into the Bois de Bitche on the right.

A jeep whirled past Freudenberg Farms hell for leather toward Bitche. A couple of white parkas in a foxhole waved them to a frantic stop.

"Where's the fire, soldier?"

"Down this road. You see, we're artillery observers."

"Well, you see, this is our last outpost before Bitche. In ten seconds you'da been safe for the duration. How's the Stars & Stripes coming?"

"Good. They say the edge has been broken off Rundstedt's tanks and no German gains have been made lately. Big battle at Bastogne. So long."

The jeep wheeled around and zoomed off out of sight behind Freudenberg Farms.

After dark on the 28th Plan Tennessee went into effect. The old guys called it the Tennessee Maneuver. The new guys called it "One hell of a way to spend the winter." The White Battalion moved up into the Maginot Line on the left, George in ghost town Hottviller, Fox in the French Garrison, Easy in Freudenberg Fort and Farms.

Everything was quiet as a mouse up front on the OP lines, but back in the Rear Echelon of S-2 things were humming.



"I wouldn't know, I'm only .30 calibre myself"

Paratroopers had jumped behind Enchenberg. Eleven thousand Germans and two hundred tanks were approaching Bitche from the North. German Messerschmitts filled the sky. The enemy was pushing power in through Bitche's back door. Horses clattered down in front of the black Maginot Dragon's teeth, and small groups of Germans loitered around on top of Schiesseck's Forts.

A tiny dog came through the dragon's teeth sniffed our lines went back. That night an Easy outpost hole was found empty. Down



"December 31st it snowed"

in Bitche the Germans played phonograph records for Baker Company of trains pulling into Bitche. *Baker Joes took a look at the map and saw that the Lemberg railroad ran into Bitche and then turned back south into our lines again, ignored the phonographs smugly.*

Kraut combat patrols hit Baker and fought infantry, hit the 117th Recon and met dug-in halftracks. They knew the Corps boundary must be in between: fate had placed it along the Lemberg—Bitche highway. The Jerries had more American parkas than we did. Pfc's directed artillery fire over the multi-phoned outpost exchange on everything that didn't grow. *December 31st it snowed. At 2200 hours of December 31st twenty thousand German SS troops milled around in huge mobs in snow-covered Bitche eating chocolate bars. The chocolate contained dope. The Western Front was quiet.*

Baker held the College de Bitche and the enemy had the Citadel (background)... Between the two lay the infinity of a winter



Counter ATTACK

Gunners Cecil Bailey and Fred Dewhurst had just come on guard on their anti-tank gun near Bitche. It was five minutes before midnight of December 31st.

"This'll be the first time I ever stood guard two years in a row without even sitting down for a rest."

"Sure is quiet here in that eerie white moonlight. The snow-bound Citadel sure does look ghostly. Say, look at that chain of flares drifting over the Citadel. Red, white, and yellow."

"Hey, look at the tracers flying over by Wolfsgarten. The barn is blazing. Look at those krauts running around in the light!"

"There's some more running around Flanagan's Fort. Let's fire!"

Whoom.... Whooooom.... Whoom.... Whooooom....

"Happy New Year, soldier!"

Whoom.... Whooooom....

"What's that?"

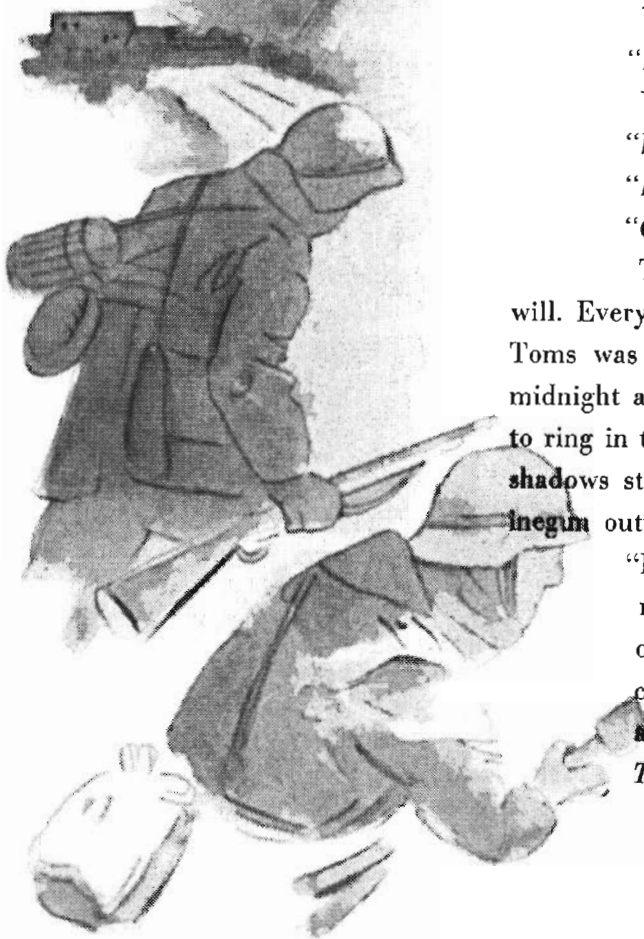
"I said 'Happy New Year!'"

"Oh yeah.... isn't it."

The Americans had a flare for the dramatic, as Americans will. Every gun on the 7th Army front from 60 mortars up to 240 Long Toms was set to fire at midnight. The Germans were actors too. At midnight a total artillery barrage roared and rocked the American lines to ring in the New Year and ring out all communications. A mob of shadows stormed out of the moonlight toward Baker Company's machinegun outpost in Wolfsgarten Farm.

"First we heard 'em shrieking like Indians. Then they came rushing in waves, waving their guns right into the sights of our machinegun. La Belle piled 28 of 'em out back and the charge finally broke. Those guys acted like they had just had a shot of something."

They had.



“A mob of shadows stormed out of the moonlight toward Baker’s Wolfsgarten outpost”
...the enemy wished us a dope-happy New Year



Doped-up mobs charged Flanagan's Fort and the Shoenberg woods behind the College de Bitche. Three waves came up, the Dog heavy machineguns of Sgt. John Mizar and Paul Kovacs barked in the night, three waves broke and went back down again, leaving 100 fallen Germans under the barrels of the smoking guns.

Pfc Solter of Baker was hiding in a potato barrel in the cellar of Flanagan's Fort when the house was overrun by a thousand Germans. An Oberleutnant came down after him just as the 1st Battalion AT gun drilled 15 rounds through the house killing the officer. Solter escaped from the cellar through the AT shell hole in the wall.

In the high Maginot Line battlefield on the other side of Bitche Sgt. Frank Sims' Easy squad in the last pillbox of Schiesseck was surrounded, phone wires cut, Missing in Action. A fierce midnight attack welled up from below the dragon's teeth and Easy's 1st and 2nd platoons were waiting. Machinegunner Davis zeroed his clattering 30 on the hillside of Schiesseck and an enemy assault column ran right through his sights. Easy fought back under Sgt. Gerald Lennarton and Lt. James Walsh using several captured German machineguns in front of Fort Freudenberg. The attack broke.

At 0400 of New Year's Day three men from the 117th Recon without helmets or rifles came running into the Blue Battalion lines at Lemberg shouting that most of the 117th had been wiped out at the Hôtel de Hasselfurt. The German New Year's attack against the 7th Army hit first the Maginot powerhouse city of Bitche, and wave after wave of storm troopers smashed at the Corps boundary at Flanagan's Fort. *The remnants of the cavalry boys got on their armored horses and could be heard rumbling off through the Bois de Bitche, leaving the 399th with two miles of open flank.*



Storm Trooper... Happy days were here again

"If we had had another Baker and Charlie Company on the other side of the Bitche-Lemberg road there wouldn't have been any Bitche Bulge."

For hours the 399th fought off overwhelming 25-1 odds, and then the enemy began drifting thousands of storm troops into the Bois de Bitche to surround the 399th rather than fight it.

At dawn the Germans must have figured Shoenberg was cleared, because they started marching up from the Citadel past the College.

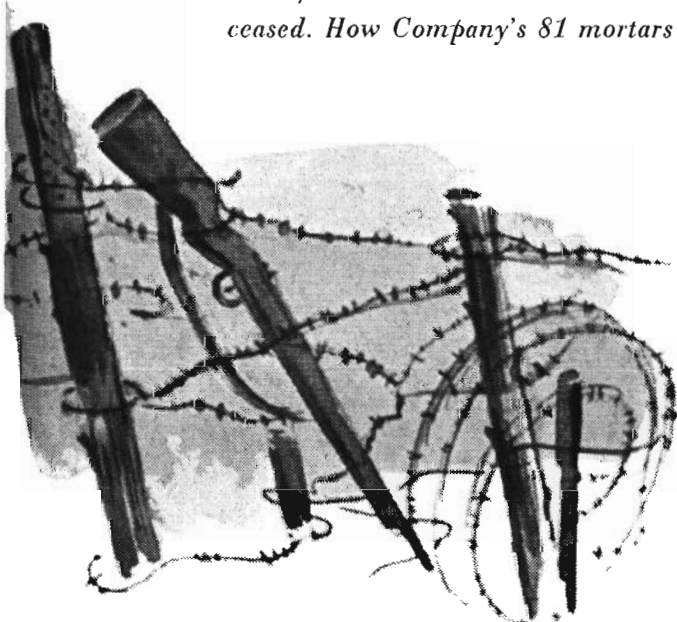
"Good soldiers, too," said Lt. Steinman of Dog who learned his soldiering in the French Foreign Legion. "Perfect columns of two."

Steinman fired a belt of 1500 rounds in one burst and destroyed the column.

At 0600 the Screaming Meemis shrieked into the 2nd Battalion lines and the Germans jumped off against George Company in a master attempt to encircle giant Fort

Simserhoff. The left pincer of the attack charged up out of a draw and overran the 1st platoon's exposed outpost commanded by Sgt. Russell Sisco. The attack got as far as the next OP hole. Sgt. John Harlowe skip-bombed the krauts with anti-tank grenades while Robert Tomlinson, Ralph Broitman, and Julian Motley blasted the enemy back into the draw. Machinegunners Klein and Mooney of How Company blasted the woods, and 81 mortars destroyed the attackers.

The right pincer worked into a draw defended by the 3rd platoon and George's 60mm mortars zeroed in. George reigned. The Infantry Journal later heralded Sgt. Harlowe's skip-bombing as a new weapon of war. The Air Corps swung in to bomb and strafe Shorbach from where all the attacks bubbled, and all activity in the sunken ghost town ceased. How Company's 81 mortars ruled the 2nd Battalion Maginot front.



*"... a fierce attack from below the Dragon's teeth"
... Easy and George were waiting*

On the right flank of the entire 15th Corps, Lt. Richard Ferguson's 2nd platoon of Charlie Company was surrounded on a hill by an overwhelming force of crazy krauts. Lt. Robert Hakala took his daring 1st platoon across the Bitche—Lemberg road to help out. 2nd platoon, escaped; 1st platoon, MIA.



Flanagan's Fort where the Bitche Bulge began... Solter remembered a potato barrel

Charlie's 3rd platoon were dug in atop Reyersviller Ridge that day, as battalion "riot" platoon. They got a 1000 man riot, rushing down to bolster the remnants of Baker and Charlie in a last ditch fire fight raging down on Shoenberg. The line buckled and withdrew, leaving 30 Bakermen surrounded in their farmhouse CP. Pfc Thomas Richards and three buddies went on outpost.

"I was lying there right along the Bitche highway with my rifle cradled when two heads pop up not 15 yards away on the other side of the road. One of 'em says in perfect English 'Stick 'em up, Joe.'"

I didn't have time to tell 'em my name isn't Joe, I just plug 'em both between the eyes. Then I turned to ask my buddies if maybe we should pull back but they've already parteed."

Five hundred dope-happy Germans were screaming around Shoenberg, assaulting the Baker CP. The farmhouse had been Baker's CP and supply room, and there was plenty of ammo. Sgt. Clifford La Belle burned out half a dozen barrels as he fired 12,000 rounds from his white hot machinegun. Riflemen in the windows got four krauts for every five shots, it was that easy. In the attic, Captain Altus Prince fired three cases of anti-tank grenades. Sgt. William Bartscher of the 925th FA called all his batteries.

"Emergency concentration, attention all batteries, total concentration on grids 76.0—48.6. Got that? That's right, the target is the farmhouse where we are right now. Blast away."

The krauts stopped shooting, started screaming as howitzers rocked huge craters around the farmhouse and the Bois de Bitche. Baker split into buddy groups of four and tried to break through to our own lines during the shelling.

"Three groups of four headed up the hill toward Reyersviller. We heard a lot of shooting and then it was quiet. So our fourth group headed the other way down toward Bitche and then followed the edge of woods up Shoenberg and Shimberg and down into Reyersviller. The first three groups never showed up."

Captain Prince, Sgts. Bartscher and LaBelle had been in the first group.

Dog Company's mortar F/O Joseph Wesley poured deadly fire into German ranks as he withdrew up Shoenberg. The 81's had fired 1000 rounds and their barrels were pointing straight up when Wesley, unknowingly, backed into his own mortars, still directing fire. In a small arms battle the mortarmen escaped.

Able Company threw in their 1st platoon to guard the entrance to Reyersviller Valley from the enemy-filled Bois de Bitche. Gabriel Belinsky and William Nails were stuck on an outpost in front of the platoon.

"We're right down in the bottom of the valley and on each side of us on snow-covered Shoenberg and Spitzberg we see big mobs of men milling around. They're American reinforcements, we figure. Then the American reinforcements on the hills start shrieking like Indians and come charging down the hills on each side of us firing tracers at us. They weren't Americans after all. We ran almost two miles before we reached our own lines."

Pfc Charles Boonen fired his sub-machinegun into the enemy ranks as his Anti-tank Company crew escaped the encirclement taking their gun with them.

Half of the krauts in the Bois de Bitche turned into Reyersviller Valley, half kept coming over the high wooded mountains. The Blue Battalion line stretched taut from Spitzberg Hill to

"Able threw in their 1st platoon..."



counter attack. We waited for darkness. The schnapped-up krauts were singing down in Reyersviller having a delayed New Year's Eve party."

"We collected a task of Mike machine gunners, Charlie riflemen, anti-tankers and King riflemen. We figure when the kraut artillery gets up within pistol range of the American infantry it's time for the infantry to haulahss. There were four Looies — Hackling, De Witt, Skinner, and Behrens — and the ranking man of the bunch the kraut Captain was a prisoner."

That night a silent column of 65 shadows wearing white parkas moved like ghosts through the moonlit snowy forest to American lines a mile over the hill carrying wounded pick-a-back.

Wehrmacht warfare was a calculated science. The German hordes had broken through at the Corps boundary at Flanagan's Fort, fanned out in the vast Dominiale Fôret de Bitche, and driven south. 16 Tiger tanks were in Mouterhouse. Paratroopers cascaded behind our lines. English speaking Germans came through in jeeps wearing American uniforms.

The 117th Cavalry Recon had been routed on our right which started the breakthrough. Now, by an unpleasant coincidence, it was the 117th Panzer Recon rolling down from Bitche into Reyersviller looking for a hole in the American lines. Behind the Recon was poised the massed armor of the 117th Panzer Division. The enemy was hitting for a Bulge. He never found one in the 399th Infantry.

Easy Company's Maginot defenders threw back every attack on New Year's Day, and that night the Germans who were on three sides prepared an annihilation attack. Finally orders came for Easy to pull back from exposed Freudenberg Farms and Fort Freudenberg.

Green 255th Infantry troops moved up through Lemberg to bolster the Blue Battalion's thin defenses. They were newly committed and scared stiff as scouting attacks struck all night. At 0300 the 36th Texas Division moved in to take over the defense of Lemberg from the 100th and 63rd Divisions, and Love Company began their crazy Lemberg to Lembach march.

The cross-country snow jaunt from Lemberg to Lembach, two miles as the mortar flies, took five hours.

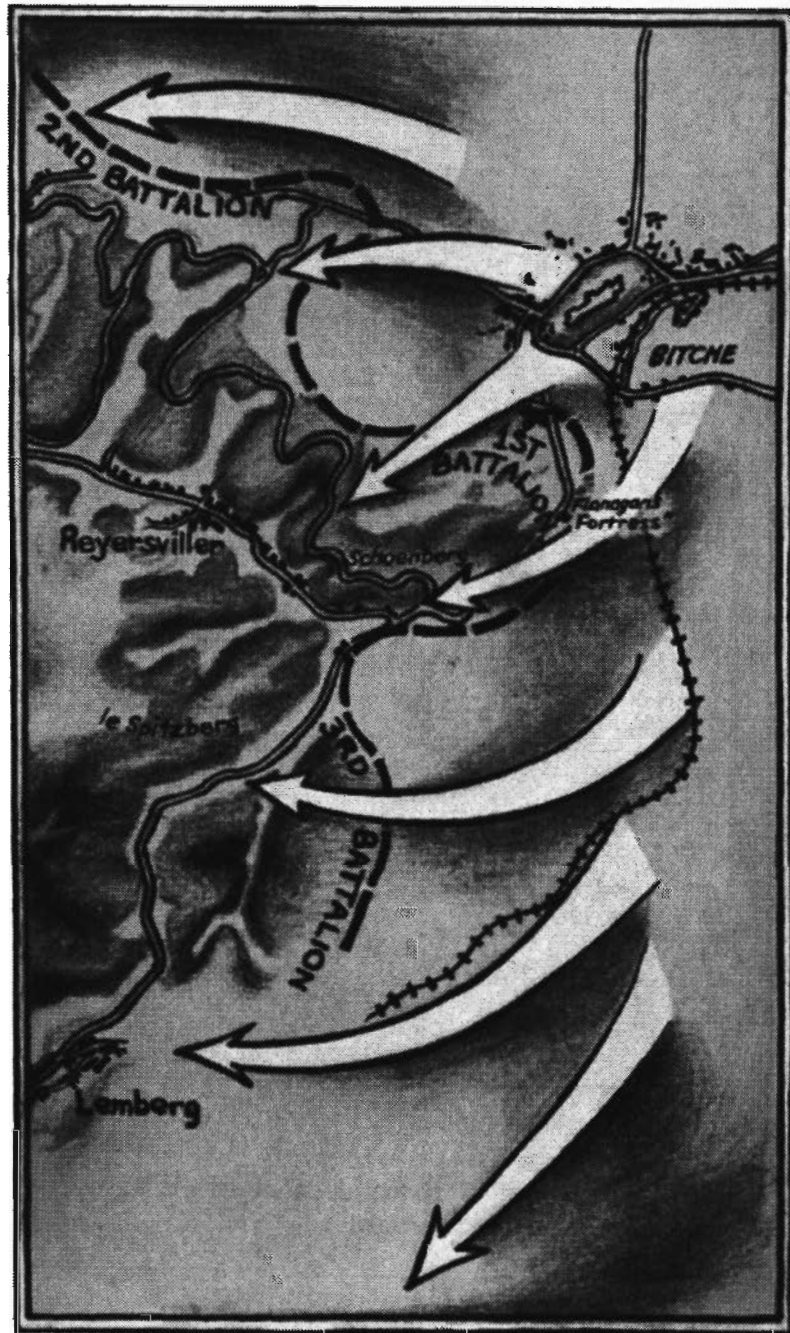
"That night was the low point of the war. We were completely beat out when we got to Lembach at dawn. Major Punaro says to 'follow that contour line till you run into the 398th.' Maybe we shoulda asked him if contour lines were painted on hills, but we took off like he said. We never did run into the 398th but we did run into Jerries up by the Signalberg Tower, and after a firefight took five prisoners and went back down for more orders. Then they sent us down through Siersthal up Reyersviller Road through the snow and finally we relieve the 398th who are standing there waiting for us without any foxholes.

There are little patches of woods all around us and pretty soon we begin to notice krauts mobbing around behind every tree and we're surrounded.

So we make a break for it and every kraut gun in France opens up but we escape and finally dig in."

At daybreak of January 2nd the Germans, at a cost of 400 men in the Shoenberg ("Beautiful Mountain") woods alone, had battered the 399th. His total gain was the stretched out valley village of Reyersviller and the massive Reyersviller Ridge as far west as the Kirscheidt where the Red Battalion was entrenched. The 399th's front jutted out at Spitzberg and Signalberg. *The enemy wanted that high ground.*

At dawn 100 infantry with tanks smashed through Item Company's right flank forcing a 1000 yard withdrawal to high ground behind the Lemberg—Bitche highway. Love Company on the exposed ground overlooking Reyersviller were jolted by 100 more infantry and shoved back.



"The dope had worn off and the two groggy punch-drunk Armies felt each other out feebly. The krauts didn't have enough dope for another attack and the 399th didn't have enough men left to reattack."

The fanatical, shrieking, doped-up gangster of New Year's Day returned once again to the sullen, crafty, lurking, dull German soldier.