

2: TO THE BATTLE AREA

About this time the rejoicing of the people throughout the world, which had risen to a crescendo as the American and Allied armies smashed across northern France, had waned. Indications and hopes of peace before Christmas had faded away as the Germans along the entire front buttressed the new battle line of the Rhine River in the north and stemmed the Allied drive. It was evident now that the Germans had no intention of quitting as the world had hoped once their borders had been threatened. Although they entertained no hopes of victory the Nazis attempted to create a stalemate, assuming that time and the past years of war plus the bitterness of another winter would discourage further fighting and induce a negotiated peace. However, the Allies had no thought of demanding surrender other than unconditional, nor had they any thoughts of digging in for the winter. Reinforcements and more supplies and equipment were brought up to strengthen all armies. The German defenses were constantly probed for a weak spot. An opening was being sought through which Allied might could make a decisive effort to crush the enemy.

In southeastern France the American Seventh Army, of which our Regiment—the 398th Infantry—was soon to become an integral part, was preparing to push through the winter line and the Vosges Mountains.

Our Regiment, fully geared and equipped for battle, left Septemes in three groups for Villancourt, France. The first and second groups departed by rail on 28 and 29 October, respectively. The remainder of the Regiment left by motor convoy on 31 October at 0730. The motor march took three days. Valence, a distance of 142 miles, was arrived at eight hours later. On 1 November at 0730 the convoy pulled out of Valence and at 1815 hours of the same day arrived at Dijon, 190 miles away. On 2



Vicinity of St. Gorgon

November at 1545 hours the convoy arrived at the ETOUSA assembly area in the vicinity of St. Gorgon.

The trip by rail had taken three days and with the arrival of the motor convoy the entire Regiment was once again assembled at an area only five miles from the front. This was our last stop before going into actual contact with the enemy. Our proximity to the battle lines was emphasized by the sight of foxholes which had been recently vacated. The logs and camouflage covering the holes were still in contact and heavy impressions of combat boots, other than our own, were in evidence in the soft ground. Here for the first time we heard the thunder of our own heavy artillery sending tons of explosives into enemy positions. We heard and saw artillery before and during maneuvers, but this time it was for keeps.

A feeling of excitement rather than consternation filled the men. We were anxious to be on the way and face whatever consequences lay before us. We were aware that eventually it would have to be done, and the longer we remained at St. Gorgon the more the suspense grew.