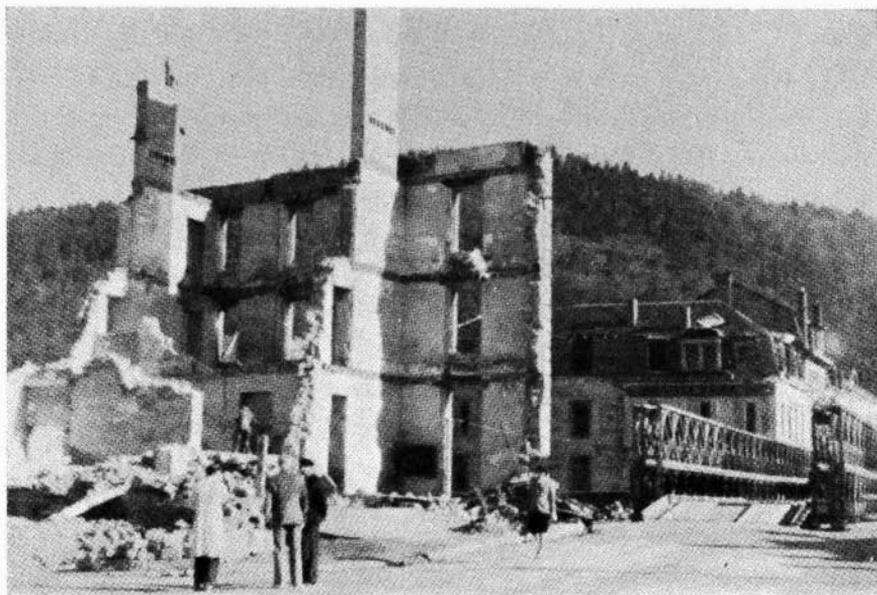


4: PUSHING THROUGH THE VOSGES

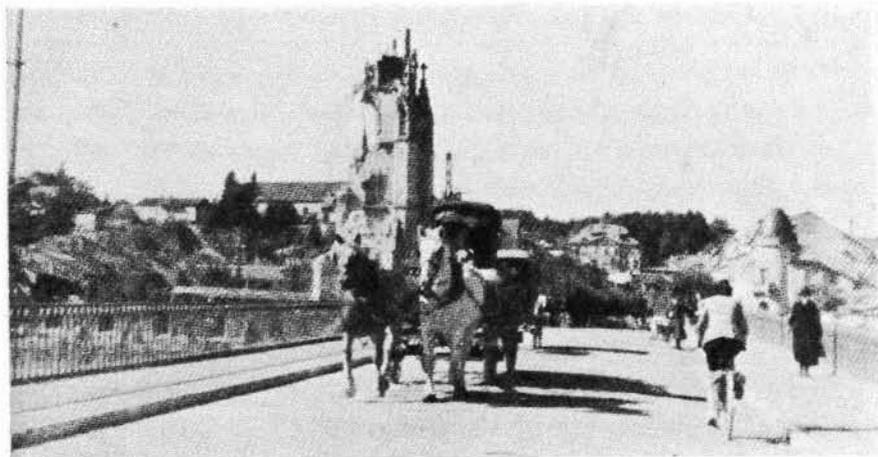
Now we were in strength and position to begin the cracking of the German winter defensive line. The rain, cold, mud, and snow were as much enemies as the Krauts when we concentrated on the Divisional objective—Raon-l'Etape.

This city was the nerve center of supply and communications in the German system of defense. As a natural barrier the Meurthe River lay before it and in our path. Both sides of the city were flanked by hills from which Jerry observed our movement and poured artillery into our positions. Because of these disadvantages a frontal attack was out of the question.

On the morning of 9 November the 1st Battalion pulled out of its position, after forcing the enemy to withdraw from a hill following a fire fight, and relieved the 2d Battalion of the 399th Infantry fifteen hundred yards west of Etival on the Meurthe River. The 2d and 3d Battalion operations were limited because of heavy enemy artillery fire and extremely bad weather.



This was a building in Raon



Baccarat

In this new position 1st Battalion men huddled in the shelter of their holes and awaited morning and the order to attack Etival.

Company B was the first to move out along the edge of the woods toward the objective, and succeeded in entering the southeast edge of the town unobserved. Late that afternoon Companies A and C followed. Company A proceeded through the woods but C, advancing over a heavily mined open field, suffered casualties from both the mines and artillery fire coming from across the Meurthe River. Casualties were heavy but with determination Company C pushed on into the center of Etival.

After establishing defenses for an expected counterattack which never came, the men for the first time since entering combat were able to heat their rations and warm themselves in the cellars of the town's shattered homes. The Battalion held onto Etival for four days, and on 14 November was relieved by elements of the 3d Infantry Division, sweeping in through the hills northwest of the town.

The day after Etival's attack and entry the 2d Battalion pulled out of its original position and swung around to the flank of the Regiment, occupying the high ground and protecting the right flank of the 1st Battalion. The 3d Battalion remained stable with heavy artillery fire falling into their area until 13 November



River at Baccarat

when it, too, moved north to relieve the 3d Battalion, 399th Infantry, in the vicinity of Baccarat.

Plans now were to outflank Raon-l'Etape by crossing the Meurthe River at Baccarat, moving down to the La Plaine River and crossing in the vicinity of La Trouche. Then they were to move in a southwesterly direction and into the key supply and communications city from the rear.

While the 1st and 3d Battalions were crossing the Meurthe River in the move to hit Jerry from the side and rear, the 2d Battalion was holding the original line before Raon-l'Etape and keeping the enemy's attention occupied with heavy barrages of machine-gun, 57mm and mortar fire. With the news that the 1st and 3d were safely across and in the process of encirclement of the key city, the 2d Battalion packed up and dashed north to protect the open left flank of the Regiment in the push down to the La Plaine River.

Heavily mined fields and roads and numerous roadblocks impeded the advance more than the token physical resistance offered by the enemy, which was eliminated by short, sharp bursts of fire from the automatic weapons in the hands of the alert doughboys.