

6: PURSUIT THROUGH THE VOSGES

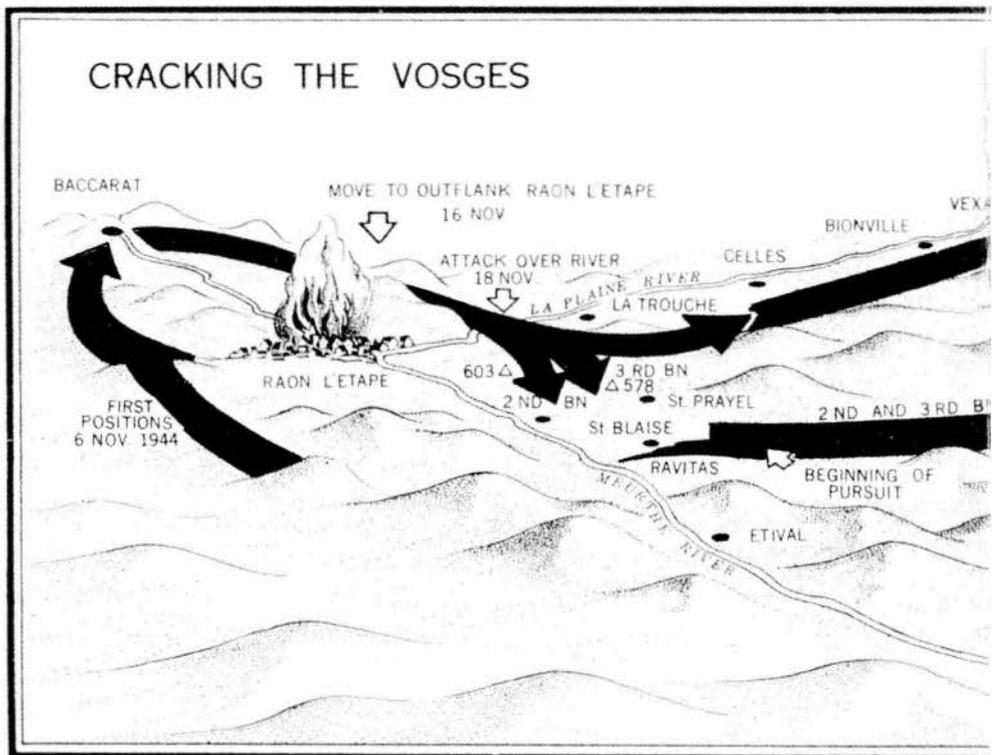
Deep in the Vosges the men of the 398th Regiment, with the green of inexperience worn off in the recent trying and bitter battles in the hills and forests around Raon-l'Etape, started out in pursuit. Determination was written on their bearded faces and was even more pronounced in the way they reloaded their weapons and slammed the bolts home.

The mission of seek-and-destroy continued on as the 2d and 3d Battalions pushed on over the rugged terrain in the rain, cold and sleet to Moyennmoutier, south of La Trouche. Casualties rose as enemy artillery and mortar fire bracketed the advancing columns and fanatic but futile counterattacks developing from the southeast took their toll. Sniper-infested wooded areas slowed and sometimes halted movement but organized resistance was fast crumbling.

At Moyennmoutier, to keep the fleeing enemy in a disorganized state and from forming another line in the Vosges Mountains, G-2 of VI Corps decided on a mobile task force designed to strike swiftly and cut enemy supply lines. The task force, comprised of units of the 398th Combat Team, including engineers, tanks, tank destroyers and artillery, was built around a nucleus of the 2d Battalion.



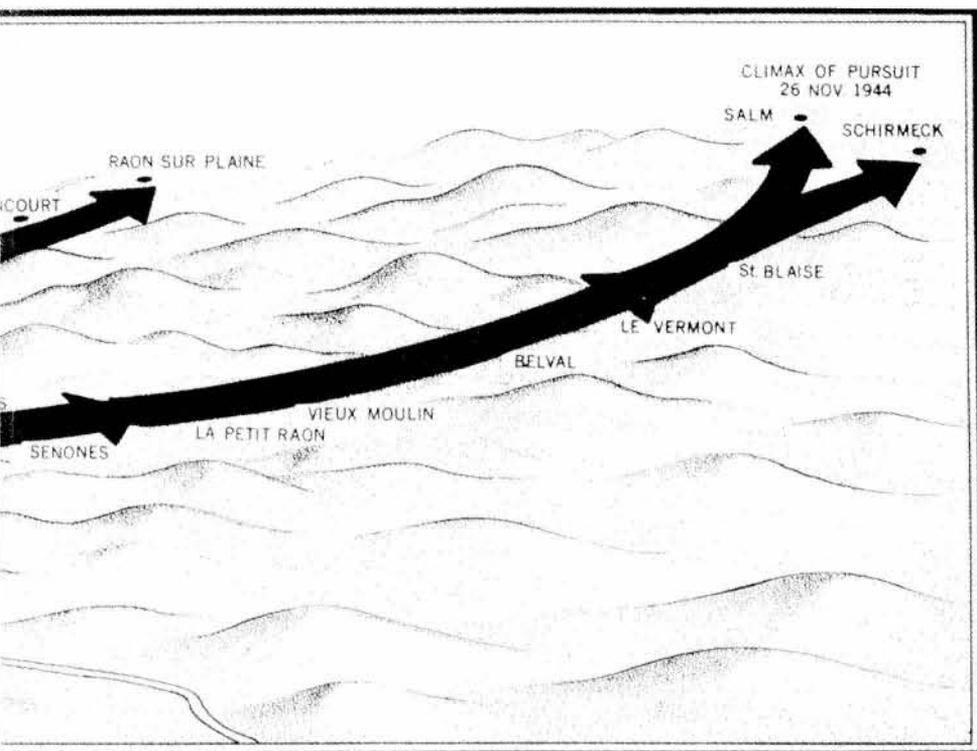
High ground overlooking Moyennmoutier



However, the Germans retreating slowly on foot were aware of this threat and set up innumerable roadblocks on the way. Outside of Moyenmoutier and again at Senones the task force was halted by these obstacles and shelled heavily by artillery and mortars already zeroed-in on the area.

Meanwhile, the 3d Battalion, now attached to the 397th Infantry, pushed forward on the right flank of the mobile force and reached Senones by foot without opposition. The 1st Battalion, attached to the 117th Reconnaissance Troop, after holding positions in and around La Trouche struck out on the left flank of the Regiment's advance and swept past Celles-sur-Plaine. By 25 November it had reached Grandfontaine and Shirmeck—its farthest point of advance in the VI Corps' area.

The task force continued on to Le Vermont where the operation was disbanded. Here the 2d and 3d Battalions met and together fanned out towards Champanay, St. Blaise and Salm

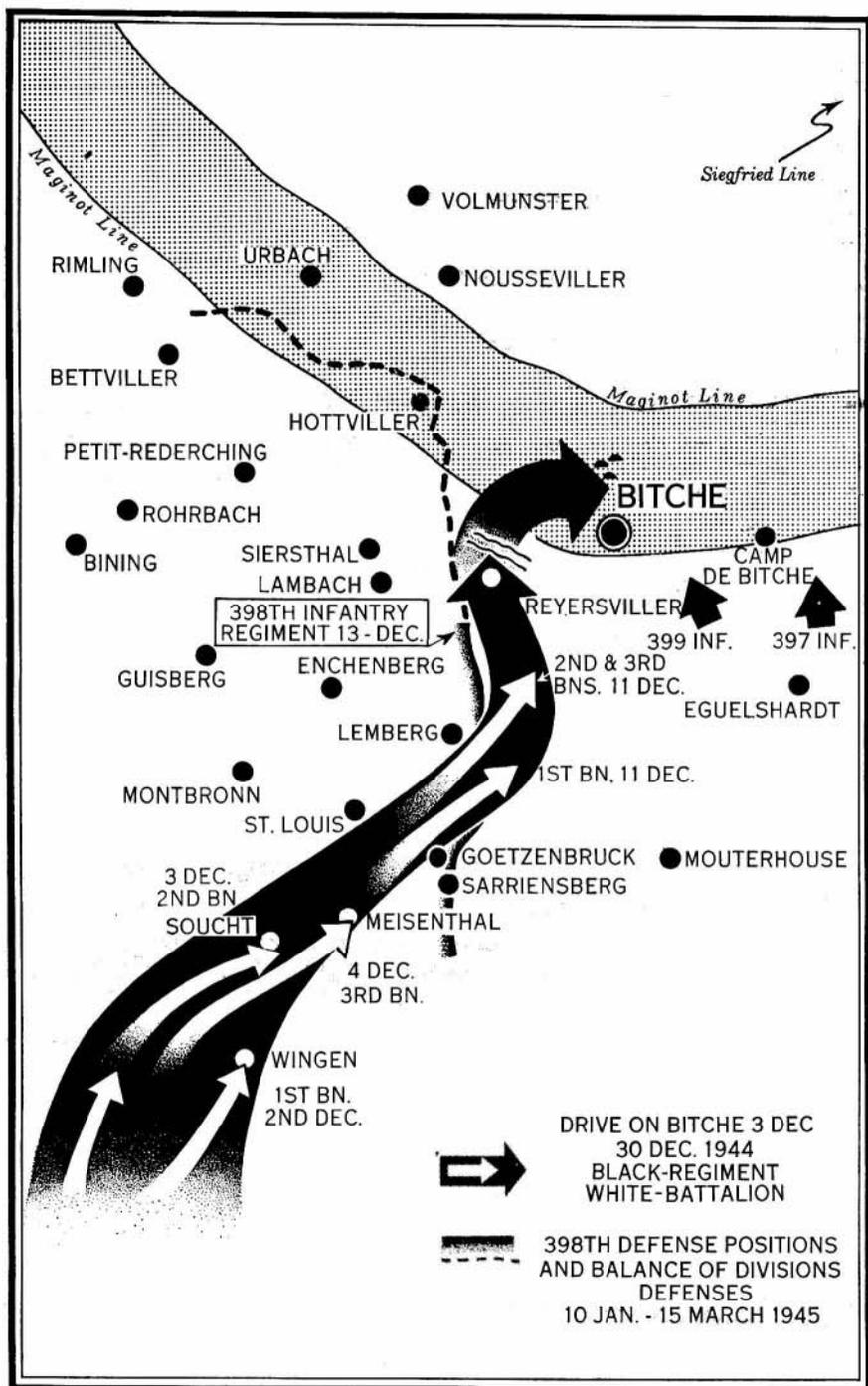


where the 398th Regiment climaxed its Vosges Campaign.

The 100th Division terminated its operations in the VI Corps' area after converging with elements of the 3d Infantry Division and 14th Armored Division pushing on to Strasbourg and the Rhine. In recognition of its success and tactical ability it was ordered north into the XV Corps area and the zone of the hinge of the Maginot Line—Bitche.

The 398th Regiment sped back to Raon-l'Etape where it regrouped and moved north into the vicinity of Troisfontaines preparatory to the Bitche campaign.

Movement orders weren't long in coming. On 2 December we were moving up by motor and foot. At the time we had no conception of the size or importance of the task that lay before us but from the massed artillery units we passed while moving up we were not wrong in assuming something big—really big—was in the offing.



The Fight to Bitche