

OVERSEAS MOVEMENT



The next day our "overseas processing" began. The last minute showdown inspections at Fort Bragg were followed by others at Camp Kilmer at which time much of our equipment was declared obsolete and unfit for combat. We turned in a lot of things and in their stead we were issued articles we had never seen before. We recieved bulky and heavy shoe-pacs which claimed a considerable part of our duffle bag, and brown knit sweaters with high necks and long sleeves. Rumors that we were going to the Pacific were thereby dispelled. Many of us were sure Iceland was the destination. Then too, maybe the enemy was being misled.

We were subjected to inevitable typhoid and tetanus shots as well as vaccinations for small pox. Although we had time to ourselves, seemingly needless and endless formations at all hours of the day griped us. We were getting used to our situation and had already determined the location of theatres and service clubs.

The second day of processing was more definitely concerned with our impending overseas operations and we were herded into theatres to view movies on resisting enemy interrogations and hear lectures on treatment of enemy prisoners and other helpful orientation. This day was again punctuated with inspections of both person and equipment. We were waiting patiently for the end of what we had been told would be a three-day period of quarantine which would be marked by the issuance of passes to New York City.

The third and last day was a repetition of the two preceding days. We did find time to write letters initiating the use of our new address "c/o Postmaster, New York, N. Y." which gave us a certain thrill to realize we would very soon be an intimate part of the war. Time seemed to fly as we became more cognizant of the fact that our days in the states were numbered and that once we left, it would in all pobability be for quite an extended period.

Our first twelve-hour passes were distributed on September 30th. For many of us it was the

first view of New York City. We took the opportunity to make long distance calls home and when we did get the folks there didn't seem to be anything to say. To those of us who had been able to go home it was so unbelievable a situation that the short period of time passed with many things unsaid and still more undone.

We were concerned with speculations as to the exact date of departure and destination. Lying around with little to do, our thoughts, though they took different tracks, seemed to hit the same blind alleys. Where are we going and when? We wrote letters to many of whom we had forgotten in previous months, telling them of the situation and asking them "don't forget to write." The days were all alike.

On October 5th we were alerted. That night with our equipment again on our backs, we entrained in the hours of darkness after having mysterious numbers chalked on the front and back of our newly issued steel helmets. Everything was planned for us. We went over a predesignated route to a predesignated car and took a predesignated seat. There seemed nothing that we ourselves could do that had not already been done. After a comparatively short train ride we hauled our weary bones and personal loads from the train to the ferry which took us to the port. Crowded together more closely than we thought possible, we surged aboard the limited decks of the ferry. Craving a last view some were denied that pleasure by being allotted space in the part of the interior of the vessel usually reserved for cars. Half heartedly one began to sing "I love to ride a ferry," while another quipped with grim humor "is this trip necessary?"

Miserable, we sat, leaned, knelt, or stood in a variety of ludicrous unconventional poses in a vain attempt to ease the load on our backs and shoulders as the motors in the bowels of the ferry started chugging and a sensation of movement assured us that we were on our way. We joked with one another, but our hearts weren't in it. Impossible to detach a hand from wherever it had become lodged in this mass of humanity in order to reach into a pocket to get a handkerchief, we let the sweat stream from our brows and run down our cheeks as we became progressively more aware of underwear plastered to our bodies and soaked uniforms. Jammed together in an impossible heap of arms, legs, packs, duffle bags, boxes of service records and typewriters, we could only hope for a quick end to this part of the trip, at least.

When the ferry docked, it was more out of instinct than premeditated action that we were

able to drag ourselves onto the pier in long lines of querulous and unhappy men, eyeing the gangplank leading into a gaping hole deep down on the side of a large vessel with suspicion and even downright fear. We shed some of our more cumbersome equipment and adjusted ourselves as comfortably as possible to await the embarkation. As we sat or laid silently, occupied with our thoughts, we heard the band playing in the distance mocking our feelings. Cheery fresh looking Red Cross girls passed among us offering doughnuts and paper cups of coffee too hot to drink or hold. Not having had anything to eat for several hours, we were appreciative of this gesture, eating and drinking heartily. We were also given chocolate bars which we tucked away.

After what seemed an eternity, "All right! Let's go! Get your equipment on! Snap it up! On your feet!" rang through the air and with solemn faces we struggled into our loads blessing the miracle which kept us from sinking to the boards. Again there was waiting in line as one by one we passed our first sergeant and company clerk at the foot of the gangplank, responded to our last name, by giving our first name and middle initial, then stumbled up the gangplank.

Once on board we followed the man disappearing rapidly ahead of us through a myriad of passageways and a maze of steps going up and down until one by one we were forced into what was to be our home for we knew not how long. Six of us were wedged between two tiers of three hammocks which were in a collapsed state portending the real problem of what to do next.

Soon we had been told how to lower our hammocks and had thrown our equipment on them. There remained but one question — where were we to sleep? Many of the hammocks were in



dire need of repair and flimsy ropes crashed, refusing the strain of our burdensome packs. A familiar cry those first few hours was for rope to repair this situation. We had not expected first class suites or even third class staterooms. But this, this was out of this world and right into the next. Thus began our acquaintance with the U.S.A.T. George Washington. It could never blossom into a friendship. Taking the tortuous route to our quarters below sea level we wondered how we would ever find our way out again.

Before long a certain orderliness patterned itself and with the help of experienced personnel aboard ship we had hung our gas mask, pack, and rifle on conveniently located hooks and thus accommodated our long suffering body. Late that night, with our bedding unrolled, we struggled into our hammock. The easy motion of the ship as it clung to the pier lulled us into a state vaguely resembling sleep.

On the morning of October 6th we weighed anchor and were off on the greatest adventure in our lives and will perhaps never again experience anything equal to it. Once on the sea those of us who had doubted, doubted no more. We were going overseas. We were going to fight a war and that was that.

Life on board ship never ceased to amaze but very seldom amused. Despite unstinting efforts on the part of Special Service to provide entertainment and diversion we were all too preoccupied with our thoughts, expectations, fears, and hopes to take stock of what was going on around us. Each meal was an ordeal. The lines that extended from the mess hall through most of the ship could be seen at all hours of the day although there were only two meals served daily. The mess hall itself offered up a potpourri of odors of cooked food, sweaty bodies, and sea water that made two meals quite enough. We stood along high tables, sideways to afford more space, soon washed our mess gear, and hurried to reach the fresh air above.

Some took French lessons while most of us were content to stay on the deck and watch the other ships of the convoy. We could see destroyers, describing protective circles, sub-chasers darting fore and aft, while miniature aircraft carriers marked time in the distance. We watched the stern of the ship in front as it churned the water and were fascinated by the white foam in the green sea.

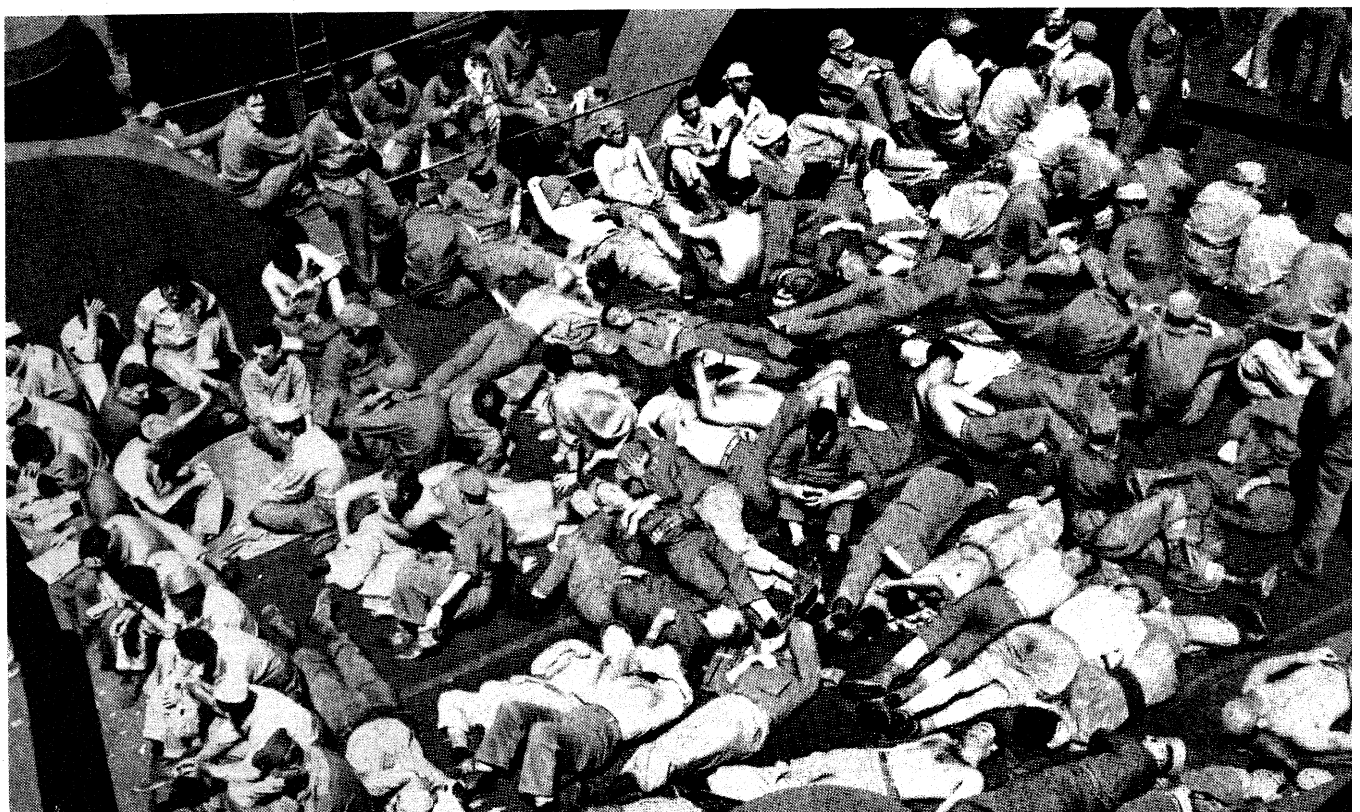
The trip was quite uneventful. Of course there were almost daily variety shows organized by Special Service, augmented by the equipment that was a permanent part of the ship. Even part

of the crew joined in the entertainment. An Ex-British comedy star was dug up from the hold of the ship. He gave unsparingly of his talent. There were singers, imitators, piano players and other instrumentalists in the party, happy for the opportunity to do something a little different from sitting on the deck and watching the horizon bounce. All of this effectively intruded upon the terrible monotony that the tedious voyage threatened.

The loudspeaker system of the George Washington played a big part in our lives mid ocean as we began to discern starboard from port and fore from aft. Familiar became the nightly, "Black-out is now in effect. There will be no smoking or lighting of matches on the open deck." Though confusing and not too meaningful a statement, "Electrician on watch, report to the bridge" carried an intimation of mystery and adventure which we found much to our liking. Other announcements were made public through this ubiquitous mechanism, and it was not too long before we grew accustomed to it and took to mimicry of the flat monotonous voices.

We were not long out before we learned that our destination was Marseilles, France. We couldn't possibly have known that we were to be the first convoy to enter the Mediterranean soon after it had been cleared of the enemy and mines. We could not possibly have known of the other numerous "firsts" our Regiment was to establish in combat. Secure on the sun washed decks of the George Washington we were not thinking too much of that.

There was a four page mimeographed sheet named the "Hatchet" bearing the motto "Don't bury me, pass me on" which was published daily. Copy and editing was provided by personnel of Division Special Service. Our regiment furnished the illustrators and typists and thus we took



pardonable pride in calling it "our paper." Carrying the latest news gleaned from ships wires and a full page of cartoons in addition to stories about the ship and current entertainment schedules, it fulfilled a need for news coverage and we were grateful for it. The boys up in "Troop Headquarters" were kept busy late each night running off the stencils and stapling together the two pages.

To pass the time we played poker and rummy and shot craps. All of us will remember the long hours of wishing, waiting and hoping. There was a good deal of reading material distributed. The more popular pocket editions and overseas editions were stored away when informed by the "Hatchet" that it would be a good idea to hang on to this reading material when we struck land for there would be very little of that immediately available in France.

There were numerous "sweet potatoes" and other similar easy-to-learn instruments. The various noises of neophytes blowing haphazardly created a bizarre feeling among us of a Mardi Gras that had no place to go or to happen. Some stuck to it, however, and practiced long hours at the expense of our buddies' peace of mind, ultimately becoming proficient and leaping from the category of beginner to that of entertainer.

None of us will ever forget the two storms we experienced, the first of which, described by the captain of the ship, Capt. Batchelder, as the worst he had weathered while transporting troops in this war. The George Washington did not toss as much as might have been expected. The sight of the



smaller vessels, as they bucked and tossed in the mountainous waves, was enough to give us the general idea. There were few who did not suffer at least a wee bit from "mal-de-mer." Some went overboard, at least to some extent. Very few of us felt like eating a hearty meal, despite the warnings of seafarers that to eat two square meals a day meant absence of an upset stomach. We didn't give ourselves the opportunity to test this seasoned advice as the slightest odor from the mess hall sent us scurrying to some out of the way corner to retch and heave with a little degree of privacy and regard for the upholstery.

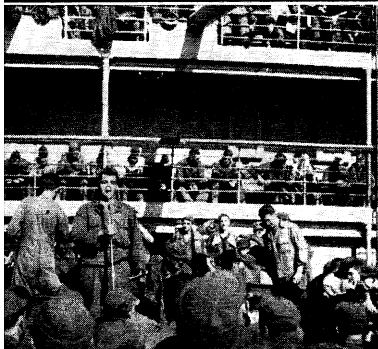
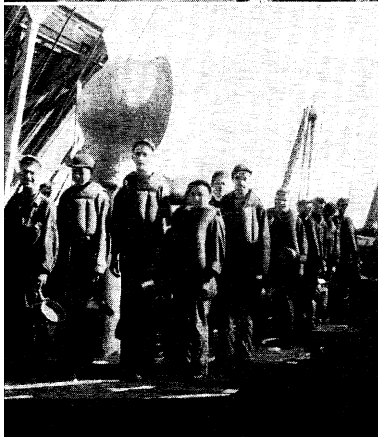
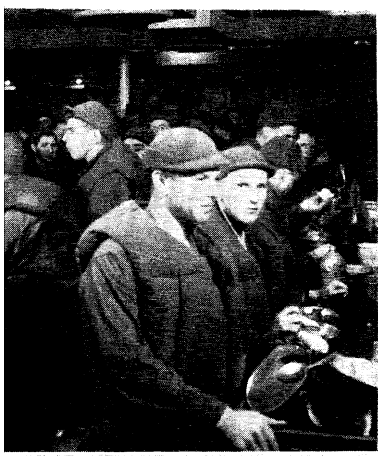
Forsaking the hot and smelly quarters to sleep on the deck was a frowned on practise. But the luxury of fresh air made the taboo honored in the breach. We awoke the night of the storm to find ourselves fit to be wrung through a wringer. The slashing rain and the waves which dashed the decks had caused this sorry predicament. It seemed that the higher in the boat you got, the better.

The storm finally subsided and the calm permitted the daily afternoon movies, atop the Main Hatch on "B" Deck, to be resumed. The nightly announcement over the loudspeaker system regarding the disposal of garbage at the rear end of the ship no longer gave us inward qualms. The motion of the ship was again normal and our hopes were high that we had suffered the last of such an ocean upheaval.

Nearing enemy land and waters, boat and fire drills were held periodically. At the call, we went to predesignated spots, lined up and did precisely what we were told. Our equipment was checked and, on many of these occasions, we fixed gas masks to our faces and stared at the incredible scene of limitless sky and sea around us through foggy eyepieces.

Each faith held appropriate worship every day we were on the water. We attended these services which proved good for our morale and good for occupying our mind and thoughts. Most of them were held in the Officers' Lounge on the top deck, but some were outdoors under the impressive background of men on watch and of far off vessels.

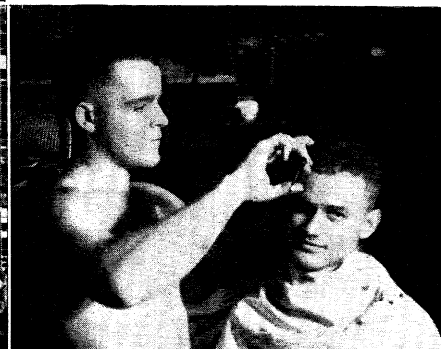
After dark, when looking out into the sea was like peering up a clogged rifle bore, musical patter could be heard issuing forth from some bent on yet another release from the immediate surroundings and implications. Good old-fashioned song fests were held, with the group growing as the evening wore on. Though we were never quite sure who the bass was on our left, or the uncertain tenor on our right, we joined with a lustiness and the overall effect was ample justification for the effort.



As if designed to destroy the serenity, generally characteristic of the voyage, daily inspections were made of quarters and rifles. Perhaps the most fruitless task of this all-male trip was the "short arm" which had also been given immediately prior to our embarking. We had dental inspections and perfunctory physical examinations. We had morning calisthenics, in shifts, and the special orders came forth from Troop Headquarters, promoting some, breaking others. One might have felt that we were still at our old stomping grounds in Fort Bragg or Fort Jackson: but one had only to take a quick glance to the right or left to see that we were aboard an army transport, and definitely headed toward Europe.

Many wrote long letters home, trying to conform with all the censorship regulations which were pounded into us as part of each day's routine. We received one mail delivery while on the high seas, the second day out. After that, all contact with the states was confined to news from the wireless, which fell far short of the personal touch. In our letters, as in our daily conversation, we speculated about the future, mulled over the past and regarded our present.

It was while on the high seas that we received word of Gen. MacArthur's kept promise — the invasion of the Philippines. Seeing in this news an indication that a speedy end to the Pacific War was probable, our morale went soaring. Those who had feared being sent to the South Pacific when the European War was over, became more composed. It was even wagered by the optimistic that the Japs would quit before the Germans. Another piece of heartening news was the slashing Russian drives through the German lines. Our offensives were actually penetrating Germany, culminating in the capture of Aachen after several days of what must have been terrific warfare. Try as we might to project thinking of ourselves in terms of actual combat, we found it impossible to believe that one day, not too far off, we might be sharing a foxhole with another guy before he made a dash across open terrain under enemy observation.



After eleven days of sea and sky we sighted land on October 17th. From the first triumphant shout that there was something tangible to the starboard, those, still vertical, rushed to that side of the ship and it took an authoritative voice blasting through the speaker system, warning of overbalancing one side, to force us back to an even keel. At first no more than a low-hanging cloud in appearance, (and many of us cynics claimed it was such) the northern coast of Spanish Morocco soon became a reality.

Now alert for anything, we sighted land to port. First Spain, then the Rock of Gibraltar, were outlined in the setting sun. After eleven days of interminable zigzagging across a vast ocean, we at last were nearing our destination. As we drew closer to the land, and the aircraft carriers which had been accompanying us moved off into the distance and out of view down the West African coast to Casablanca, we were able to discern little things.

The African coast was beautiful in a rugged way with occasional snow-white adobe houses and great jutting cliffs of what seemed solid rock surmounted in one instance with a large dwelling affair which closely resembled a medieval castle. We could see little settlements of four or five white houses. The sea was dotted with fishing schooners and rowboats carrying natives ploughing their way from Spain and Italy to North Africa. Although there was very little vegetation in evidence, we had expected vast expanses of desert and were surprised to find Africa but no Sahara.





There, looking as peculiar as something out of a fantastic movie, was a city lighted up. After almost two weeks of staring into a bitter blackness at night, there was what looked like a modern great white way. You could follow the twin lights of automobiles as they spun along the banks of a bay around which the city had been built. Following a winding road up the slope was an entire procession of street lamps, each one twinkling merrily and each one a token of a separate memory to us. It looked like fairyland, and we clung to the view of this sparkling scene until it was out of sight in the distance. Then we tore ourselves away from the rail to consult the nearest map. We found that the place had been Ceuta. We made a mental note to return there one day.

Our destination became official on October 18th, when we received pamphlets on the history of France and the living conditions which we could expect to find there. The French classes became more meaningful. The French phrase books had also been distributed and were supposed to be of aid to us in our transactions with the French civilians. We tried out our newly acquired knowledge on one another and had a lot of fun trying to twist our tongues and teeth around the peculiar syllables of this unusual language. We admired our buddies who had acquired a knowledge of French at school and were able to tell us different words.

We began following the coastline of North Africa, then, and found it to be, in great part, a repetition of what we had seen that first day. On October 19th we left the coast line and seemed to be out in open sea again. We were subjected to still another storm. Though not of the intensity of that on the ocean, it was enough to put some of us on our backs once more and the recollections of the previous one inspired more of us to avoid the mess hall. The sea, a vivid green, as advertised, became extremely choppy, and the ship bucked and tossed to an alarming degree, but we were assured from all corners that everything was under control. Although the George Washington was rather old, the Captain had complete faith in her.

We learned that this ship had been a German luxury liner before the First World War. It was captured and converted into a troop carrier. We were told that it was on this ship that Eleanor

Holm had had her famous party at which she had bathed in champagne. Long lists of important personages were associated with the George Washington, but we were quite sure that none of these people would have recognized her in her present garb. She was painted a drab gray and all the luxury of polished brass and silver trimmings had gone the way of all mere aesthetic items. Her once beautiful lounge was our mess hall, and her dining rooms were sleeping quarters.

It came as a complete surprise to all of us when we docked in the battered but still beautiful harbor of Marseilles on October 20th. The sight that greeted us as we pulled into the bay was breath-taking. One main regret was that we were unable to write home about it, and many of us were afraid of losing the original sensation.

In the distance was the famed French Riviera, with its magnificent chateaux and the renowned Monte Carlo. The other side of the inlet was a sloping cliff, coming down to meet the garbage-strewn water. Along this cliff a road wound, and in some places disappeared from view into mysterious tunnels, only to reappear on the other side. On closer inspection, we could see places where bombs had damaged this thoroughfare, making it quite impossible for use, and then the thought struck us that it was not long ago that the Germans had been in control here and the Seventh Army had landed and then swept up the center of the country. Close on the heels of this realization was the one that no longer could we compute the distance to the front lines as thousands of miles. Now it was merely a couple of hundred, if that much. We wondered just how long before we'd measure that distance in hills, blocks, and buildings.

We were faced with the seemingly impossible task of re-rolling our bedding in the limited space of our quarters. This was no slight undertaking, and one man had to tackle it at a time, while the others of us stood on iron stairways or what was laughingly called an "aisle" to wait our turn. Getting into the equipment, as time for debarkation came near, was yet another problem, and some of us will never know exactly how it was accomplished. In combat one does the impossible. We had learned how, many days before. Facing the facts squarely, we did do it.

As the afternoon drew on, and we were watching the other smaller ships of the convoy pull into a dock and unload their human cargo, we wondered how long we would be on the ship before feeling solid land beneath us. In answer to our silent queries, over the ever-present loud-speaker the voice began giving out with orders that told first one company and then another to prepare for leaving the George Washington.

It was getting dark and we were prepared with our equipment to ascend winding stairways and passages in order to debark. One by one the companies were called to the caverns in the side of the ship from which they went down rope nets to landing barges for the trip to the shore. Before half of us had been able to quit the vessel there came an excited call over the microphone: "Electrician on watch, report to the bridge. Turn all lights on the ship out. All lights out. There will be no smoking or showing of lights of any sort in any part of the ship. Plumber on watch, report to the bridge. All lights out. Everyone remain exactly where you are. Remain where you are. All lights out!" These words were repeated again and again, and one by one the lights all went out. "Electrician, lights on "C" deck aft still on!" An then angrily, "Get those lights out!"

None of us knew what the score was. We had ideas. There were groups of us already in the landing barges fastened to the side of the ship. There were those of us lined up ready to descend by the rope nets, with the heavy equipment still hanging to our bodies. There were those of us still down in the hold, and those in the process of climbing out of the hold. All motion ceased and we made ourselves as comfortable as possible in the various positions in which we happened to be caught. The man on the microphone was no help. The situation was not alleviated for almost half an hour as we sat or leaned or stood or lay in utter darkness fearing the worst and expecting at any moment to hear the sound of a torpedo ripping into the steel structure. Then we heard A-A fire.

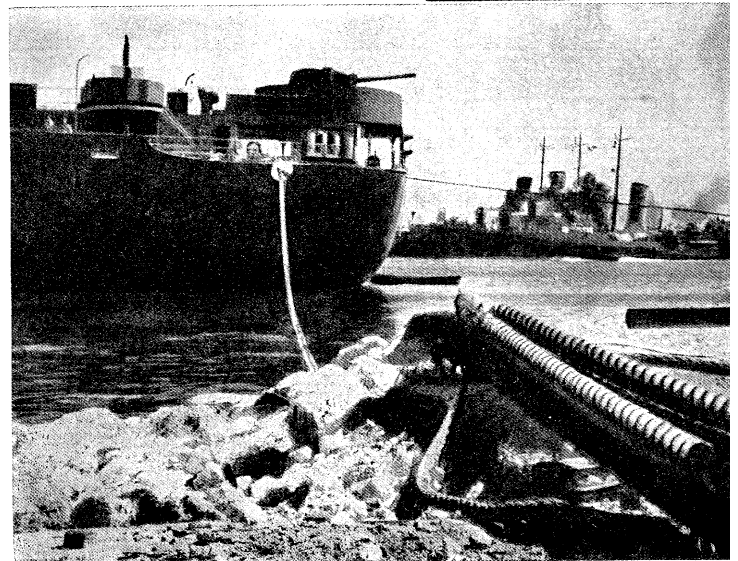
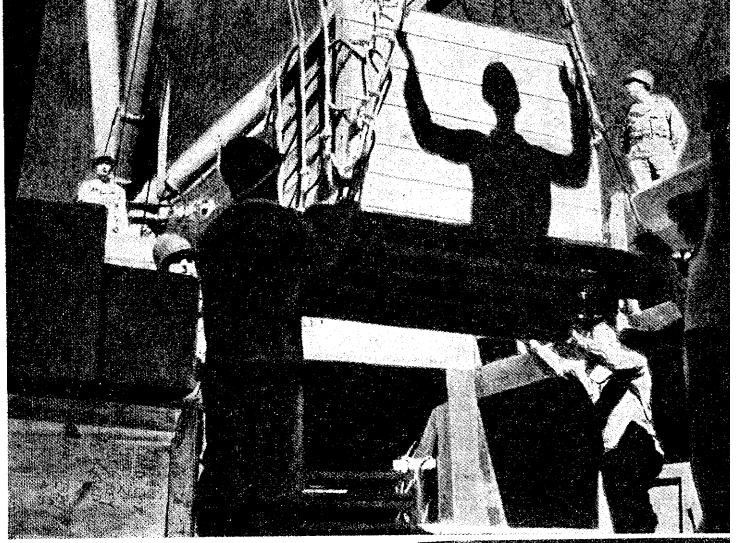
Soon the word reached us, if by rumor or from official sources we didn't know. But in any event it was not long before we knew that there was an actual air raid alert, and immediate danger of being bombed or torpedoed or strafed by enemy planes. We grabbed our weapons tensely; little good they would have been, and from this intimate association with the rifles, which were to be our buddies in combat, we derived an undeniable sense of well-being and satisfaction. Our role in the war was yet to come, but the feeling with which we were to become so familiar — the feeling of fighting an invisible enemy — had reached out to us early.

It was with no little satisfaction that we finally heard the reassuring voice. "All clear! Electrician on watch, turn on the lights. Proceed with the debarkation. All clear!" In the rigid and uncomfortable positions our arms and legs had fallen asleep, but we experienced such a sense of security when the lights blazed, once more in our faces, temporarily blinding us, that we laughed out loud at nothing whatsoever, and proceeded with our debarkation in high spirits.

When we reached the opening from which the landing net hung, we were given hasty instructions on how to manage all our junk and keep our hands free at the same time, but it was nothing short of a miracle that we were able to make the precarious climb without losing at least half of our paraphernalia. The knit caps which we had worn on the ship gave way to steel helmets, and we had our leggings on again, after the long two-week period without them. As a custom developed from living aboard ship, our canteens were full. In many instances, one or another of us dropped a carbine or a raincoat or overcoat in the hard descent into the landing barge, but very few of these fell into the sea and were easily retrievable when we hit the low decks. The friendly Negroes who manned these barges were hammered with questions regarding the different things Marseilles had to offer, and confessed that the questions were not new ones to them. We drank in their stories and wondered how long we would remain in this city which, from all accounts, had so much to offer.

In the short trip to the land, our pilots often shined their big searchlights onto bits of destruction visible above the surface of the water, and this was a real first-hand view of what war could do. We glanced back at the George Washington, still spitting out its human cargo, and saw for the first time the full size of the vessel with which we had been so intimately associated for two weeks. It looked larger than we had imagined, although we had been told many times that it was one of the largest troop transports in operation. We could only guess at the magnitude of the Queen Mary or another of her class.

With an exultant cry we scraped along the shore, the end of the barge was dropped to form



a gang-plank which bridged the way to dry land, and we tumbled ashore. This was France! This was a foreign country! What would it be like? The first sight that greeted our eyes was a sign stuck into the pebbly sand: "Murphy's Beach."

Somehow we managed to form into companies, and in the maze of men, equipment, lines of trucks and officers we located ourselves. The first thing we became aware of, and which struck us with something of a disappointment, was the fact that while we were now on good, solid earth we could still feel the surging motors of the ship beneath our feet. Having waited for two weeks to hit something steady and dependable, this came as a shock. We kept reassuring one another that it was only temporary.

The first thing we knew, we were on the march. For what distance or to what destination we had not the foggiest idea. A billboard advertisement posted to the side of a building, beaten by many years of weather, and written in French, was viewed by most of us with a great gasp of relief, for it lent credence to the heretofore only rumored fact that this was France.

Tramping along under the entire weight of all our present worldly possessions, we passed strange architecture in the down-end of the city, passed cafes still open at that late hour, passed groups of people who cheered us in a strange tongue or in some American colloquialism which was rendered ludicrous by the strange accent. Yes, there was no denying it, this was really France — land of romance and passion, land of liberation, land of song and laughter. And we were still marching — and bitching.

For several hours we puffed and pulled ourselves up the selfsame slope which we had viewed that afternoon, but now not with quite the same degree of ecstasy. We got a first hand view of stone walls, blackened houses and cobblestones. We became tied up with other columns of marchers and only by the merest of chance were we able to keep to our own gang. There were long stretches of monotonous climbing, then suddenly we would be upon another line of American soldiers taking a break. Given a break ourselves, we mingled with this other column and when a call came, "On your feet. Get moving!", we could but guess as to whether it referred to us or the others. We were worn out, our feet hurt, our back and shoulder muscles ached, and our heads were swimming, but we continued to march up and up.

We approached a small settlement of lights and thought for sure that this was the destination. Soon it was left behind us and we once again were entirely out of contact with civilization. Spiri-

tually hurt and physically exhausted as we were, we did not reason that this hike might have been a good thing. We were unable to look beyond our misery and realize that this was probably the best thing for us after having been confined to the small deck space of the ship for a two-week period of only limited exercise.

After four or five hours, during which time we covered approximately 12 miles, we arrived at our bivouac, no more than a large open field at the bottom of a hill, with a line of partially completed wooden structures which were to be our kitchens. Some of us were fortunate in being put into six-man squad tents, but most were merely waved vaguely into a line on the field and told that "this is your home."

We collapsed onto the ground and fell asleep. Some noted the cloudy sky and absence of stars, and had the foresight as well as the energy sufficient to roll up in a raincoat or shelter half. Others even went to the trouble of pitching pup-tents. But whatever we did, we woke up wet, damn cold, and bedraggled into a gray dawn the next morning that was not encouraging at all. Each of us remembered of having heard France referred to as being "La Belle..." To this we replied, wryly, "Hell!", or other more definite expletives. Whatever our scorn, we knew only that here we were, what next, we're wet, and when do we eat?

Our spirits, ever in a state of flux, hit a new low, that first morning in France, as we crawled out of the mud and stared into an atmosphere and environment that held no hope. Looking at the surroundings in daylight for the first time we saw that we were located in a valley. All over the place were the lot of us in various stages of sleep and dress. Those endowed with more initiative fanned fires into being which the less endowed set out for at once. Our new entrenching tools got their first workout as we chopped down everything in sight. We dug holes to drain off the rain which continued to deluge us relentlessly.

There was a buzz of activity that accompanied the lining up and pitching of tents. The rain soaked weapons and the sopping wet blankets supplied one of the imponderables as the sky remained opened up and pelted all beneath. We struck out to complete building of the kitchens and gave them roofs before knocking off for the day. But we saw no immediate alleviation of the miserable situation. We were wet. Everything we had was wet, and there wasn't the remotest prospect of the leaden skies clearing up ever again.

By the close of the day the little tent city had become so flooded with several inches of rain

and mud that we took to the wooded slope and pitched our tents at an angle. A half hearted sun favored us in the late afternoon and immediately every available bush and tree limb was draped with clothes, blankets, and web equipment. Down in the valley, which was to have been our bivouac, there was nothing but large pools of muddy water, dotted with an occasional pup tent which the more dogged or perhaps merely indolent, insisted on maintaining. On the whole it wasn't a very pleasant indoctrination. Little did we think that in days ahead we would be looking back at this Delta Base Staging Area as a rather pleasant alternative.

Our first indication of things to come was the issuance of live ammunition. This could mean but one thing. Right then we didn't feel physically equal to combat: but we knew that our training had prepared us for such an eventuality. The second morning, October 22, was a Sunday, and church services for all faiths were held. The weather had cleared up some and we took short walks through the country, finding it rocky and rugged but beautiful in a primitive way. The aches in our backs from that hike of the first night were working themselves out and we had begun to once more realize that our feet were part of us and that walking could be a pleasure and not simply a means of getting somewheres.

French classes were begun on October 23. On that day the first passes into the City of Marseilles were given. We had learned that our area was just outside the small town of Septemes and that the famous historical city of Aix was nearby. A slight acquaintance with French civilians had been made, for a well-travelled dirt road ran past our area. There was a bit of a ruckus as the natives who owned the property on which we were living were incensed at our having so freely used trees for fires, maintaining that this was not part of the agreement with the authorities. The incident was straightway smoothed over by an accord sealed or drenched in their very best "Vin."

The passes we received for Marseilles marked the beginning of a liberal education. Each of us was looking for something different in the city and few were disappointed. As one we all headed at once for baths and barber shops. Then we discovered that there were stocks of fresh pears and grapes and other fresh things. We tried out our shipboard French but were soon reduced to gesturing and shouting in English. Somehow we managed to make ourselves understood.

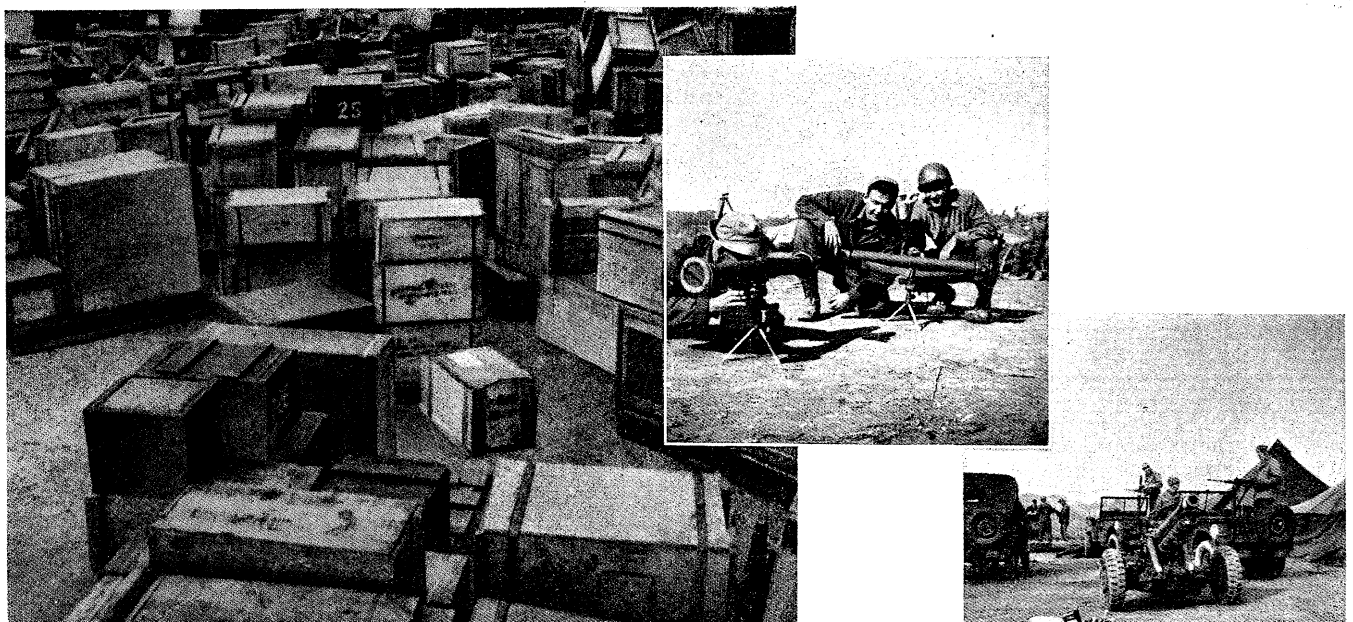
Our first view of the destruction by war appalled us, and though we were destined to see

infinitely worse, this was quite a startling novelty. We admired the civilians who were able to go about their daily business so apparently unconcerned as if nothing had ever happened. Most of the ruined buildings were near the water front and several famed cafes and hotels were not usable. We found the French Beer to be weak and warm and the large variety of wines to be damn potent. We found the girls heavily painted with extreme hair-dos and extremely short skirts.

We saw the beautiful Notre Dame De La Garde atop one of the hills outside the city and the famous Cathedral of Saint Vincent De Loup in the center of the city. Other places of interest drew us and we even managed to find restaurants where we had our first taste of French food. It was rather quaint to see a civilian with a long loaf of bread under his arm or in a shopping bag, as he took his place at the table.

During our ten days at this area there were but a few who had not been into the city two or three times, legally or otherwise. We found the M.P.s of a new variety from those whom we had known in the states. These left us entirely to our own devices and only called some major breaches of military courtesy or army regulations to our attention. We would crowd on to the already packed "Tramway", a French version of the Toonerville Trolley, whistle at the girls, and sing raucous songs as we swung into the city.

Religious services in the morning and getting packed in preparation for movement the next day were the order of events on October 29. Equipment was given one final check and souvenirs, which had been bought in Marseilles, were stuck into every available corner and crevice. Plans were made for the layout of the entire convoy. Rumors ran riot. Most persistent of these was that one of the other regiments had already hit the line and suffered casualties. The mention of casualties was hushed and quiet as if it were something not to be discussed too publicly. It was a strange feeling met with sobering silence for we knew that in a very short time we ourselves would be



sustaining casualties. Changes were in the offing and we were, frankly, frightened.

We finished packing early Monday morning, the 30th, piled our loads of equipment onto trucks and jeeps, squeezed our bodies into abnormally small grooves, and were off. We rode that day as far as Valence where we bivouaced for the night, in dress right pup tents. Our trip carried us through sweet-smelling southern French countryside of undulating hills and what then seemed picturesque cottages with red slate roofs. We were amazed at the ancient modes of transportation employed by the local populace. But soon horse and oxen teams pulling old wooden carts of all descriptions, became the conventional sight.

Early the next morning we bailed out of our tents and greeted the iron grey dawn. After a cold mess of a breakfast we once more assembled our dripping equipage and made ready for another day's journey northward. We passed through the outskirts of the lovely city of Lyons and though we noted many signs pointing the direction to Paris we noted too, with some little distress though not disappointment, that our direction was far to the east of that. After an uninspiring "K" ration lunch we were again on our way ever northward, ever nearer the front lines. We remained that night in a park outside Dijon, bereft of the pleasures the city had to offer — we were restricted.

The next day, November 1st, was somewhat more clear than had been the preceding two days and we enjoyed the more exposed views of an extremely pleasing countryside. To many of us it smacked of eastern Pennsylvania, Northern New York, and parts of New Jersey. There were small farming villages, comprised of clean white doll houses clustered around a church whose



steeple was inevitably the highest point. Especially fragrant and novel to us were the neat piles of manure gracing each front yard seeming to bespeak the wealth of each family. Friendly natives offered us bread and on occasion wine from precious stock which had managed to elude the marauding boche by happy chance.

We passed the reeking remnants of what had been a long German convoy of vehicles and weapons before our aircraft had caught sight of it. This being our first view of such camouflaged cars, trucks, and trailers we were intrigued by

the sight and despite the smell of decomposed bodies could not help but keep our eyes riveted on the sides of the roads. This long enemy column, we later learned, had been



retreating in front of the Seventh Army drive before our birdmen and artillery had caught the perfect target in their sights. There was not one vehicle worth even scrap. A good job had been done.

We arrived at St. Helene and prepared for a five day bivouac. We were now only six miles from the enemy, and we could hear the noise of heavy artillery pounding its death and destruction



into some inconceivable distant place. One of us remarked, "Somebody's gonna get hurt if they keep that up." This was greeted with wry laughter from some of us and an ominous silence from others. Yeah, someone was gonna get hurt all right, and we wondered just who. Rumors that we had come overseas as an occupational force were immediately dispelled. While at St. Helene, we established our first Command Post in a rectory of a Catholic church and there plans were made for actively engaging the enemy.

During this five day period it rained continuously as we tried to occupy our time as fruitfully as possible in pup tents, by cleaning our weapons and trying not to think. On November 5th we received mail at long last. Our time was immediately consumed with answering letters and trying vainly to get some hint past the omnipresent censors to the folks at home as to our situation, not yet too clear — even to us. We, who had clung tenaciously throughout the events of the past week to the overseas editions of books which had been distributed while aboard the George Washington, were happy now to have something to read — our only escape.

On November 5th we assembled our equipment into two categories: one group, including our duffle bags, which we would leave at a central location; and the other group, including our packs and rifles plus any other personal items we deemed necessary to have at all times, to take with us into combat. That afternoon we pulled out in 2½ ton trucks and jeeps to take our positions on the front lines. It had been one of the quickest debarkation-to-front-line-moves on record; but there were even more records to make.

C'EST LA GUERRE

*Foxhole Fireballs
Combat Team*

VS

The Wehrmacht Supermen

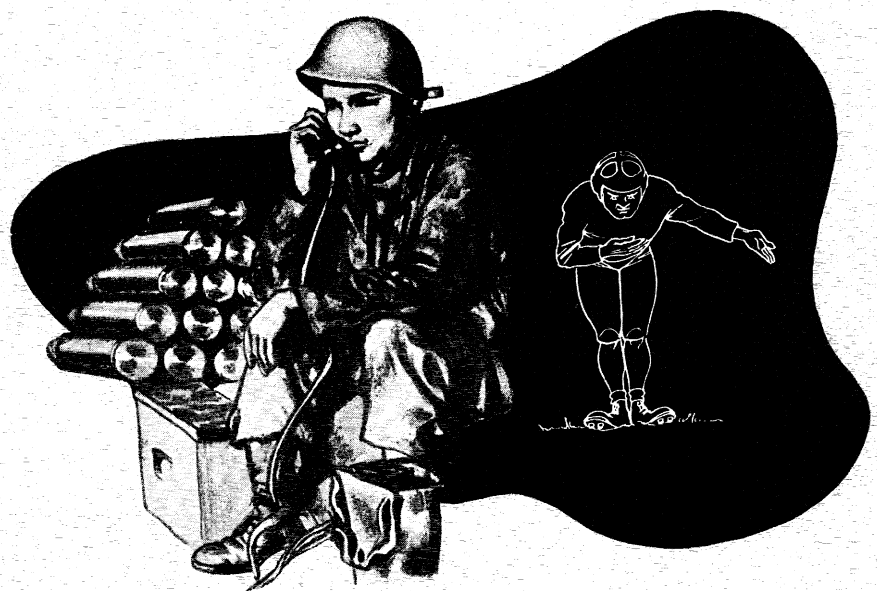
NOV. 7TH 1944 — APRIL 24, 1945

**IN THE
EUROPEAN THEATRE
OF OPERATIONS**

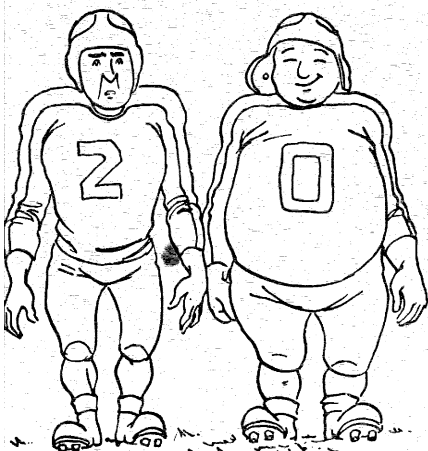
The Team



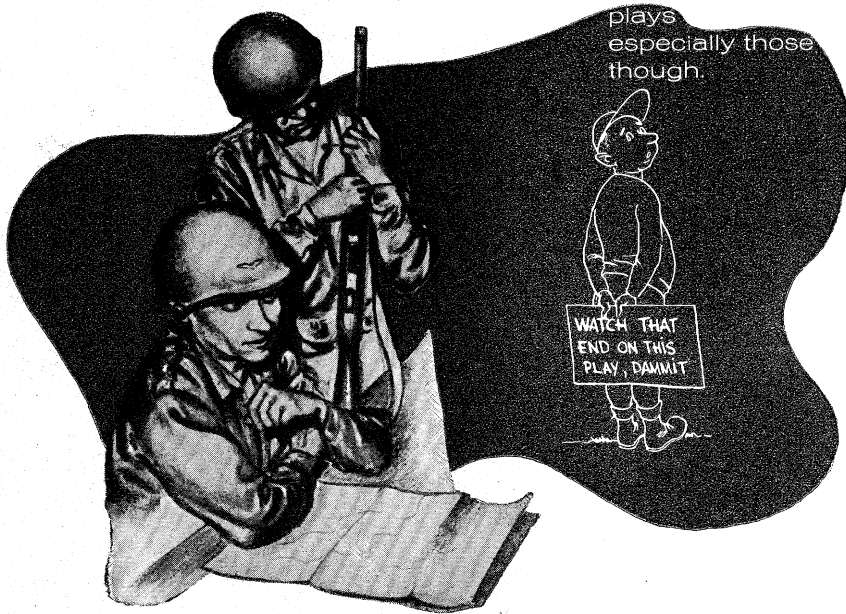
The 325th Medical Bn., Co. A. The "Doc" of the team. There at every kick-off, ever watchful and always ready with his little black bag.



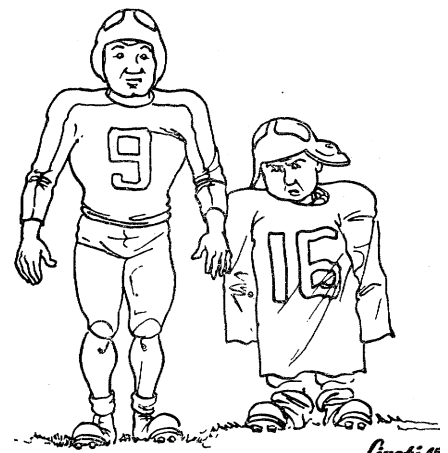
The 23rd Tank Bn., Co. A, the 749th Tank Bn., Co. B, and the 781st Tank Bn., Co. C. Our big backfield. On some plays, the line men would just check their opposition and let those bruisers literally steamroll the other team.



In battle, the Infantry cannot operate alone. Other essential units are attached to each regiment. The winning of battles depends on the smooth functioning of this arrangement. We like to call it teamwork. In army terminology it is known as the Combat Team.



The 776th TD Bn., Companies A and B, and the 824th TD Bn., Co. C. All during the game they stopped the enemy backfield dead in their tracks.



R E S T R I C T E D
HEADQUARTERS 100TH INFANTRY DIVISION
Office of the Commanding General
APO 447, U.S. Army

GENERAL ORDERS)
NUMBER 33)

E X T R A C T

SECTION IV — DESIGNATION OF COMBAT INFANTRY REGIMENT

Under the provisions of War Department Circular Number 408, 17 October 1944,
the 397th Infantry Regiment is designated a Combat Infantry Regiment.
By command of Major General BURRESS:

OFFICIAL:

RICHARD G PRATHER
Colonel GSC
Chief of Staff

BYRON C DE LA MATER
Lt Col AGD
Adjutant General

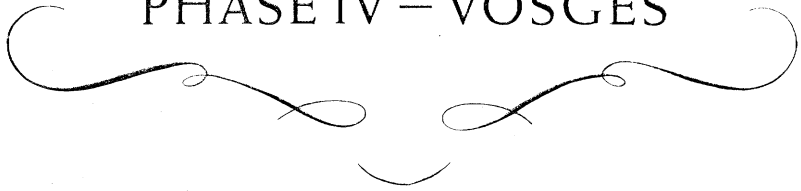
DISTRIBUTION:
"A" & "BB"

- 3 -

R E S T R I C T E D



PHASE IV – VOSGES



INTRODUCTION

*"Deep into the darkness peering, long I stood there, wondering, fearing,
doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before. . . ."*

Was it the cold, the fear, the letterless days, the dark, the not knowing where or when, or was it all of these? Maybe it was the sight of the first dead, the casualties due to exposure, the enemy artillery, the sniper fire on supply routes, the one long and one short and the waiting for the middle one. Whatever it was, wherever and whenever, we were scared because we were strictly on our own. Except for the few basic things that we learned in the States, like blackout and water discipline, all this was new and different, the situations never seemed the same, there was no rule to apply. We were constantly challenged by the weather and the enemy. The answer that would keep us alive was not in a book we had read or a lecture we had heard but in our own courage or dread, or just knowing that we had to live to get back home. Ernie Pyle said the soldier does not worry as much about getting hit as he does about dying because above all else he wants to get back and not miss the wonderful things that life will hold for him when it is all over. "To live," that's it, and we never knew whether tomorrow would be the day that might be our last "tomorrow". What else could you think about when two hours ago you left two friends dead in the melting snow, in the stinking mud, just left them there?

Move out, move out, move out! Get on the road! We were men on a chess board being pushed around by people we never saw, by orders we never read, going to a place we didn't know the name of, not knowing where the front was, or the rear or the flanks, praying that the "old man" knew what he was doing. At the end of our first day, too tired to dig fox-holes, we didn't worry about it. But that was the first day only. Let it come in, the works, too weak

to care, and if you did get one dug and it felt like home, "Move out, Move out, Get on the road." And then there was that same horrible anticipation more awful than the actual thing. Climbing a hill and not seeing anything but expecting a shot at any time was just as exhausting and frightening as the fight itself, that slow grind, the strange noises, the darkness, the drizzle.

This was the first campaign and the worst. New troops thrown into the thick of it in killing weather and in a day coming up against the worst the enemy had, 88's, mortars, sniper fire, mines, road blocks, automatic weapons, and terrain we knew nothing about. The enemy had every conceivable advantage but he lost and maybe it was because he was home and we had to get there.

Move out!