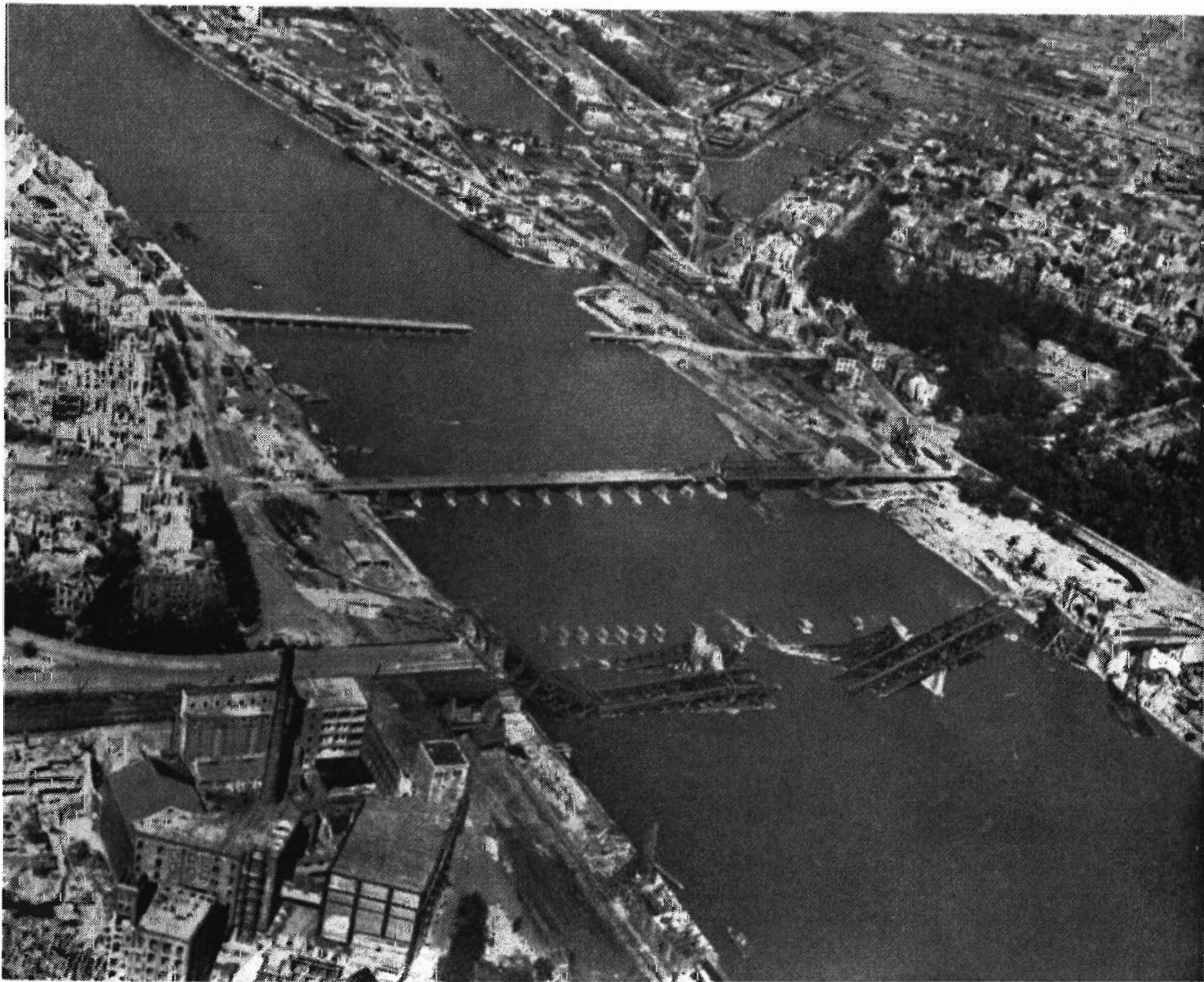


RACE to the BRUNNEN



G

iant pincers were to be sprung on Reyersviller, the Blue Battalion sweeping across the Reyersviller Ridge and the White Battalion driving down Spitzberg Mountain to spring the trap shut. Waves of aircraft and tanks were on hand, the 66th and 71st Infantry Divisions were moving up behind the 100th.

Before dawn of D-Day, March 15th, the 399th jumped off from their Winter Line they had held for 72 days. The 3rd Battalion silently crossed the deep no-man's-land of the Kirscheidt and in the early morning mists of uncertainty farmed out into the German lines at 0613. The surprised enemy was rapidly overrun and by 0617 Love had pushed onto Shimberg. By 0730 Sgts. Ark Chin and Manuel Hernandez of King Company were in the College de Bitche. The sun came out and the mists glided away from the gaunt stone Citadel.

On Spitzberg the enemy was waiting with four thousand hidden mines and plenty of infantrymen as the 2nd Battalion kicked off unheralded by artillery at 0600. Sgt. Melvin Denham's squad was leading Fox's 3rd platoon in the silent dawn jumpoff broken only by the roaring of three Sherman tanks which started to work down Spitzberg with the infantrymen. The three tanks were knocked out within a minute and the doughfeet moved ahead.

Pfc Francisco Hinojosa while first-scouting the Fox spearhead worked through a triple row minefield with his bayonet and destroyed two machinegun bunkers behind the mine field. A sudden machinegun burst from a third nest killed the scout after he had won the Distinguished Service Cross.

Sgt. Richard Trapani was the forward observer for How's 81 millimeter mortars. To win a battlefield commission on March 13th he merely had to say "yes" to the routine question "Would you be willing to lead a rifle platoon in combat?" and he would get his Mortar F/O job back again as a 2nd Lieutenant. Trapani was one of those guys with ideals, and not wishing to risk 40 men's lives to his complete inexperience of rifle tactics, he said "No." March 14th he went back to How Company as mortar sergeant.

March 15th Dick Trapani was up front per usual calling his mortar shots. He borrowed grenades from the Fox scouts, knocked out two machineguns, and was killed running risks no rifle platoon leader would ever be called upon to take. Trapani's action was underrated with the DSC.

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The 398th sneaked ahead to grab off Freudenberg Farms, Fort Freudenberg, and Fort Schiesseck, the identical nightmarish Maginot ground they had stormed in December to win a Presidential Citation. It came easy this time, and the two Regiments once again topped the majestic sprawling valley of Bitche from the commanding ridges.

As if in mockery of all that had gone before, Bitche fell without a fight. Sweating Paddlefeet shuffled into the streets of Bitche, walked under the shadow of the Citadel, took a look around they would remember. Six Charlie doughs led by Lt. Elwood Shemwell captured the monstrous Citadel.

Red-headed Captain Harry Flanagan led Baker Company into Bitche. Standing on a street corner waving an American flag he spotted Peter, the French spy who had sneaked into Bitche from the College in December. Peter said that on the night of January 1, 1945 he had seen Captain Prince and 10 other soldiers being marched through the streets of Bitche as prisoners. That was the first news Baker had heard of the valiant men who didn't escape from the New Year's Day encirclement.

The civilians of Bitche spoke surprisingly good English and whipped out the celebration schnapps, but the Infantry had work to do.

"We fight for Bitche four months and then we march through it in 10 minutes and out the other side."

"Yeah. Sherman would probably have said 'La guerre, elle est Helle' if he had fought his wars with nations that spoke different languages."

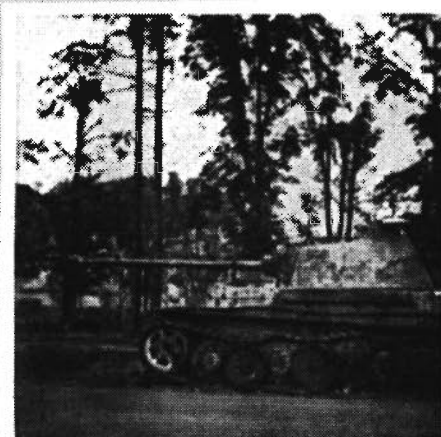
"What do y'all think the North and South were?"

Able and Baker struck out along two different highways toward Camp de Bitche, a huge military camp to the east. The range of Maginot hills behind the city looked down on the rifle companies as they shuffled along in the morning sun. *Whistling 88's began marching along the fields beside the advancing columns as the enemy made one last fling to destroy the conquerors of Bitche.*



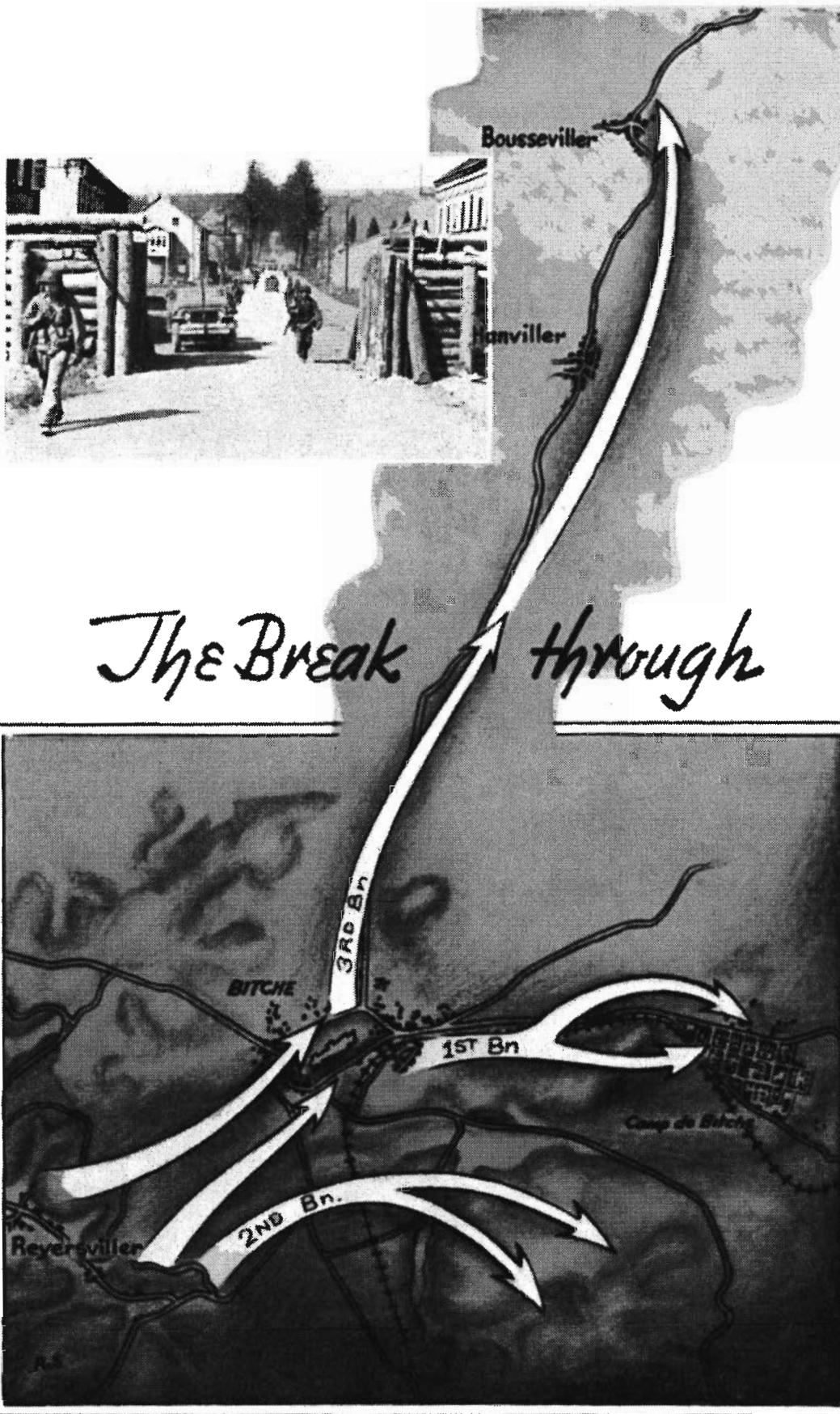
World War II, shot-by-shot . . . Able in Camp de Bitche

Panzers waited in Camp de Bitche



*Sons of Bitche a winter had made them
look like fathers, feel like grandfathers*

.... a huge military camp to the east



“D

og-Tired . . . Why do they call a Dogface a Dogface?



"Then Wild Bill Sullivan went in shooting with his carbine, dashing up to the slit and firing into the fort. Sullivan got the Distinguished Service Cross, Baker Company got 125 mixed Lugers and P-38's, higher headquarters got a German infantry battalion, complete to the Colonel, as POW's."

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"King captured the dead city of Schweix"
 a T-5 led the 100th into Germany



Camp de Bitche had been mopped up completely by Able when Tigers, Panthers, and 88 SP guns

roared up from the thick woods to the east and counter attacked. The flimsy wooden barracks Able doughs were firing from disintegrated before the point blank snudge pot 88's. In the uneven battle of the Tigers vs. Infantrymen, fearless Lt. Thomas Plante was killed leading the infantrymen in driving off the counterattack, winning the Distinguished Service Cross.

March 17th was D + 2 and the Blue Battalion struck north from Bitche up the main highway toward Germany and the Siegfried. Slashing relentlessly through Hanviller and Bousseviller the 3rd Battalion pivoted East and swarmed into ghost town Liederscheidt with its mutely staring houses and "Achtung Minen" signs and silence of death.

At 1431 first scout Richard Hanz of King Company with rifle at ready cautiously and suspiciously walked past the stone marker on the border to lead the 100th Division into Germany. King Company quietly captured the dead city of Schweix, moved to the high ground beyond, and dug in. Gleaming blanchely in the sunshine on the next open hillside. lay the vaunted Dragon's teeth of the Siegfried.



"...north toward Germany and the Siegfried"

"...the vaunted Dragon's teeth of the Siegfried"

The ghosts wanted company...



Chamberlain 'fiddled' while bordertowns burned



Holes with houses in them



In infantryman aimed at Germany across the border



Dragon's teeth open wider, please

At 1445 the Red Battalion routed a German outpost in the hills beyond Roppeviller and first scout Ernest Emmons of Able shot and chased the fleeing krauts across the border.

The scout trudged back with rifle still smoking, sat down on the border stone, took off his netted helmet, wiped his sweat-dripping brow with an empty bandolier.

"Takes something out of you, running from one country to another," commented Emmons.

Between the Maginot and the Siegfried Lines lay tall-pined gloomy forests, with mathematical death traps of barbed wire and bunkers on every hill. The towns were ghost towns, targets for Maginot and Siegfried mass artillery practice in 1940, in days of the War of Words, Peace in Our Time, Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, Mussolini. Siegfried mortars, machineguns, and 88's felt out the 399th as they dug in Red, White, and Blue astride the border. Platoons were in Germany, platoon CP's in France.

The night of March 18th the green 5th Infantry of the 71st Division moved up with headlights blazing, platoon leaders calling the roll, everybody shouting at once, to relieve the 399th doughs in their foxholes on the border.

"Welcome to the Fodderland, boys."

"Where's your BAR hole?" asked a non-commissioned camel under 100 pounds of junk.

"Don't have one."

"Why aren't your holes in a straight line? How do you expect to turn back a bayonet charge?"

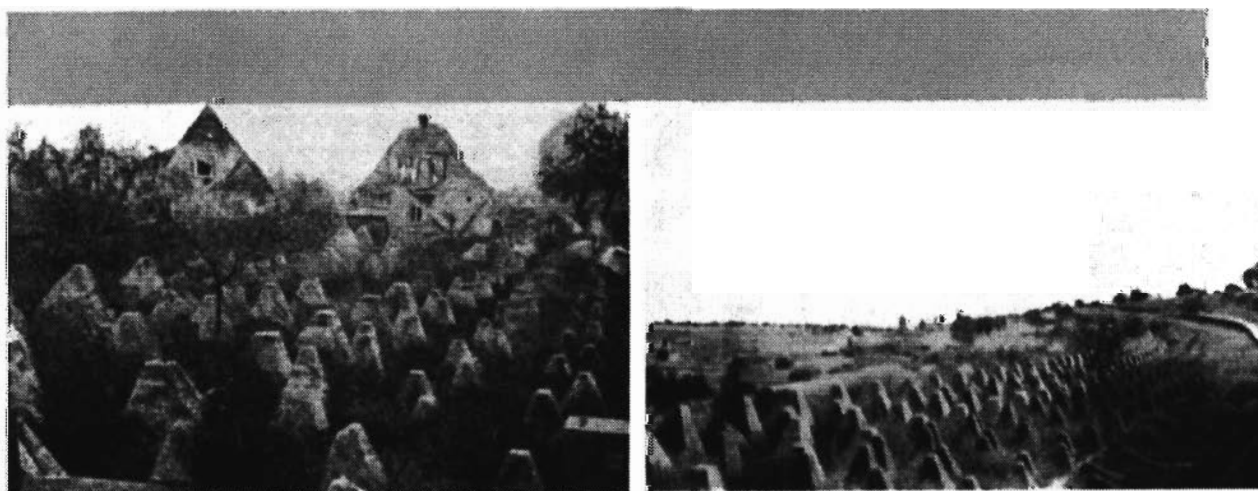
"Uh, the Lootenant is a battlefield commission and isn't too sharp on that technical stuff. What's all the junk for?"

"This is our T/O equipment. All of it's necessary to win a war. Where's yours?"

"Uh, musta misplaced it."

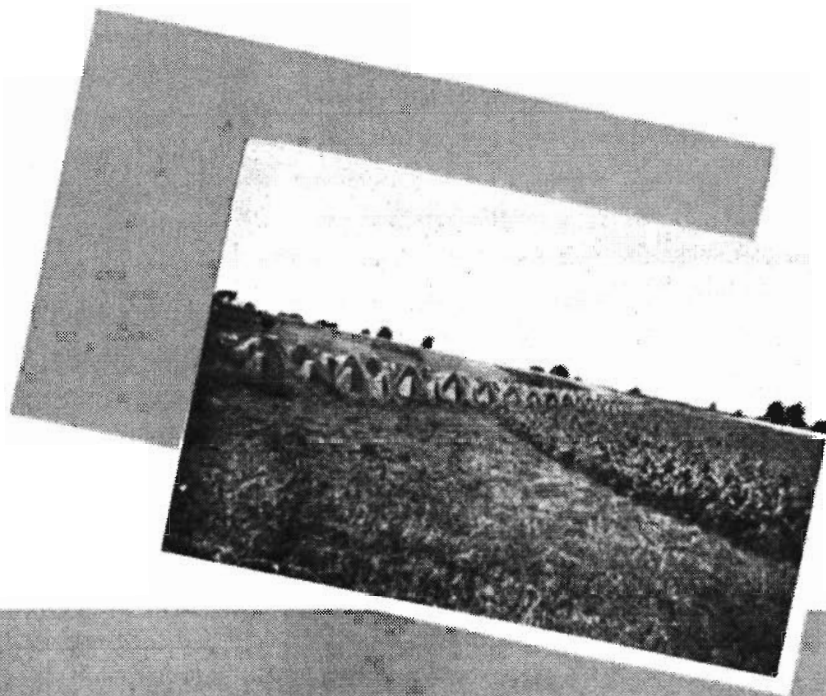
"Well, good-bye now. I've got to set up my MLR and FPL and RRL and OPL and LPL for an imminent counterattack."

"Uh, yeah, sure. Good luck."



"... while the McCoy lay a mere three miles to the front"

So as ye sow, so shall ye reap



Don't stop there, Joe



"What outfit did you say you were? I'm going to write a foxhole novel on everything that happens."

"The 933rd Infantry. Got that?"

The White Battalion moved into a sandwich of the 397th Infantry and the 3rd CMH Division who were busy busting a hole in the Siegfried. Easy, Fox, and George waited for a counterattack and sweated under terrific direct fire from the underground fortresses.

The rest of the 399th moved back into reserve wooded areas and spent the days shooting deer, pulling lanyards on nearby artillery, and training in smashing imaginary Siegfrieds while the McCoy lay a mere three miles to the front. The 399th had the distinction of being one of the few combat outfits left in France while the rest of the Western Front pushed into Deutschland.

On the second day of Spring the 399th Armored loaded onto everything with wheels. *The trucks, jeeps, kitchen wagons had their wheels on the bottom, while the tanks and TD's had wheels inside driving them.* Objective-Mannheim. The average Paddlefoot's conception of Europe was Bitche and maybe the next hill, but Mannheim — that must be the middle of Germany.

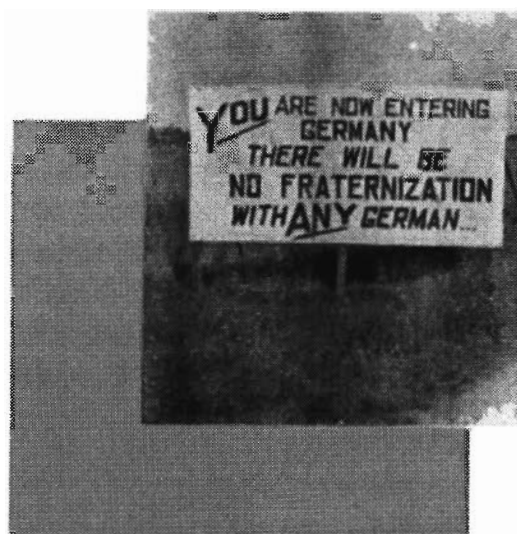
The 1st Battalion riding Task Force Winn — 7th Army Special-rolled across the border in mechanized array and into the 3rd Division's neatly punched hole in the Siegfried.

"We're tearing through some peaceful woods and bingo! We come out in the open and here are millions of yellow and green Dragon's teeth gnashing in the sunshine from horizon to horizon, with deep tank moats behind them. Our road ran between the Teeth and the endless ridge of invisible pillboxes with long 88's craning their necks out. Everywhere were shattered barbed wire and bomb craters, just like the common conception of World War I battlegrounds. I'm glad we didn't have to fight for this baby."

Charlie Company was the 7th Army spear as Task Force Winn rolled deep into the Saarland with a Flying Jeep overhead keeping Lt. William Kizer's lead tank aware of what lay ahead by radio. Each Sherman left a long plume of white dust trailing fantastically behind as the armored arsenal rumbled over high misty ridges overlooking prosperous red-roofed valleys which in the sunshine looked like toy villages without roofs.

Big white surrender flags and German civilians hung out of every window, taking their first look at these conquerors from America who had dared to breach their invincible Siegfried into the Aryan sanctity of the Fatherland.

"They saw sand-bagged Shermans with stubby defiant 76mm snozzles roar proudly past. Riding the tanks they saw tough-looking American soldiers—human grenade trees



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"They're gonna have to drag me to make me go camping among the pines in the Adirondacks after the war. If I never see another pine tree it'll be too soon."

In early twilight the speeding armor broke out of the high Hardts with their littered roadsides of knocked out German tanks into the sprawling majesty of the pancake Rhineland.

"This is a different kind of front. It's 60 miles long and one Sherman wide."

A fairy land of red and white villages lined up one behind another a few kilometres apart. The church spires were unlike the tall slim Catholic steeples of France: they were squat and gray. The Red Battalion pulled up at Deidesheim. *The Blue Battalion liberated a liquor warehouse in urban Neustadt and shared it reluctantly with the rest of 7th Army.*

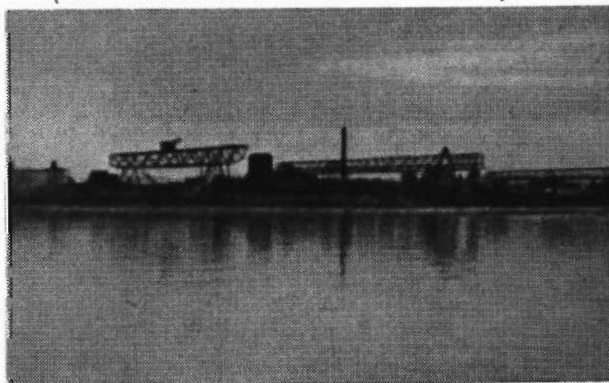
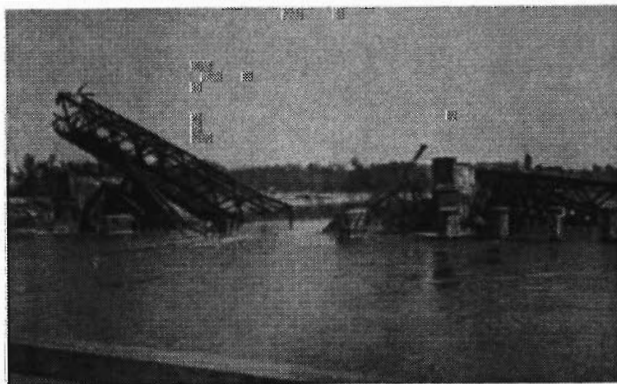
ME-110's strafed the idle column at dawn and Task Force Winn jumped off again toward Mannheim. Through Deidesheim, Neckensheim, Hochdorf, Dannstadt, Mutterstadt, Maudach. 30 kilometres to Mannheim, 24, 17, 11, 8, 6. Between Maudach and Ludwigshafen the 399th bumped into doughfeet from the 94th Division of the 3rd Army. Two Armies had joined. The Saar pincer had closed. The battle of grease pencils, speedometers, and gasoline was over.

"Patton's boys didn't walk tilted over forward and their hair didn't stick straight back and their ears weren't pinned flat against their heads, like the newspapermen like to believe. They were strictly a bunch of beat out riflemen like ourselves. 'Old Blood and Guts' the 94th Joes told us. 'Our blood and his guts'."

March 24th the 399th moved for the Rhine. At 0830 a dusty jeep wheeled up to a submerged bridge and Captain Alfred Olsen of Item Company got out.

"So this is the Rhine. Hmph, it doesn't look so tough. We'll round up a rowboat and start sending patrols across."

A sniper's bullet pinged from across the water barrier and the jeep took off tout de suite. Minutes later Love Company on tanks roared into Altrip and King pushed up to the River. The 2nd Battalion tore to the Rhine banks south of Ludwigshafen at 1100, and the 1st Battalion cleared themselves a path through shattered southern Ludwigshafen to reach the River. The 399th Infantry held a solid watch on the Rhine. Across the River, factories and cranes were still humming away turning out guns. Sniper and SP-88 fire raged across the Rhine day and night.



Mannheim-in-the-Rhine . . . an infantryman said "Hmph"

Michael Escalera, Wilbert Davis, and Joseph Tylutki of Charlie Company jeeped through the streets of Ludwigshafen shooting up the houses with the .50 calibre machinegun in Wild West style, routing out Wehrmacht Colonels, Captains, and a hundred others.

The 399th was again relieved by the 71st Division and pulled back off the Rhine a few miles. The 3rd and 45th Divisions had crossed the Rhine to the north and the 100th Division was awaiting priority to get across into the bridgehead.

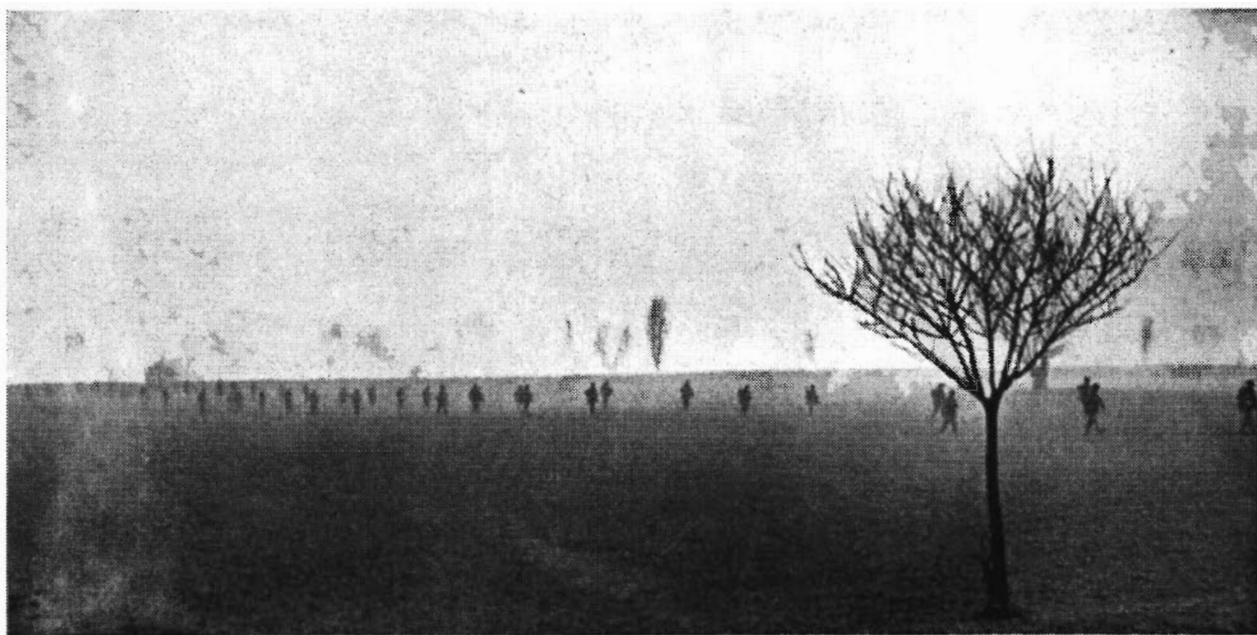
In the Rhineland, Doughs wore snappy derbies, zoot civilian suits, rode bicycles, motorcycles, horses, autos. Soldiers were told they must growl and look dignified to impress the civilians. The Joes figured they had impressed the civilians enough: they called us the 100th Panzer Division, we travelled so fast.

"This is the way a war should be fought," said a mountain of pink champagne bottles coming up a cellar stairs followed by a doughboy. Lootfilled Germany was quite a change from destitute France. "We hated to kick the Jerries out of their houses, but orders are orders, don't you know? Running water, electric lights, white bath tubs, fancy stationery. Everybody in the squad gets a bed now. And without too much reconnaissance you can find pistols, swords, watches, cameras. Not loot, mind you, all in the line of



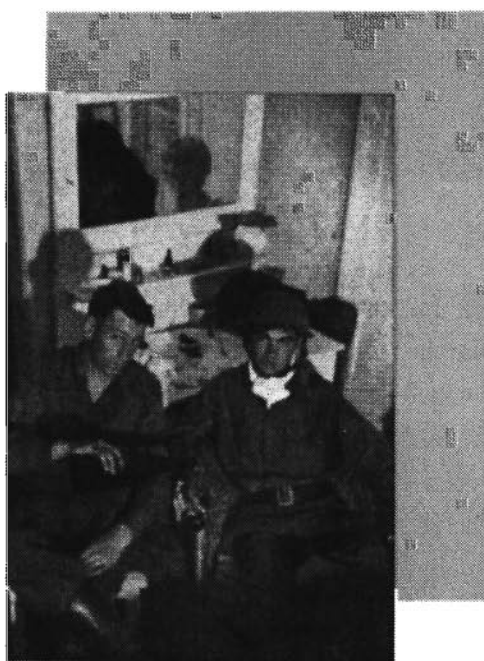
"...through shattered Ludwigshafen" ... ahead lay a river and question marks

"This is the way a war should be fought..."



duty. I'll bet by time we left the Rhineland they didn't have any more chickens than America has buffaloes. We really have to give Generals credit for mapping out this big ETO Spring cleaning. We took the most prisoners with the fewest casualties. Ah'm a high falutin' rootin' tootin' shootin' lootin' son of Bitche!"

Clearly, the war was practically over.



*"The 3rd and 45th Divisions had crossed the Rhine up north"
.... the 100th awaited a priority*