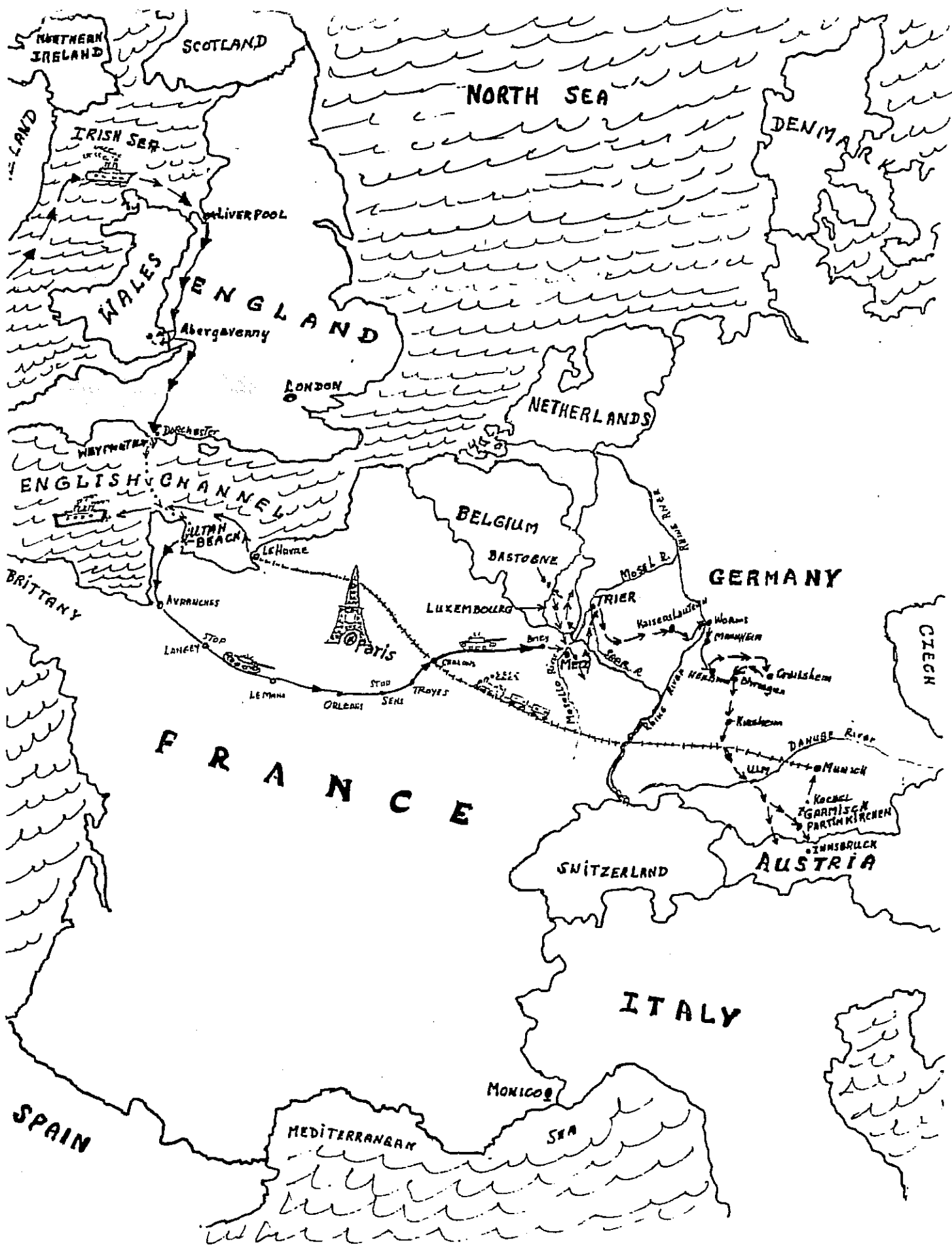


**609th
TANK DESTROYER BN.**

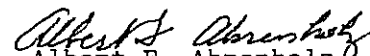


A.F. AHRENHOLZ



COPYRIGHT 1988 BY:
Albert F. Ahrenholz
All rights reserved

This book is the property of the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion Association and it may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the author or of the said Association.


Albert F. Ahrenholz

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author of this document was a member of the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion from August 24, 1942 to July 2, 1945. He served in Company A as a Platoon Leader and Executive Officer from August 1942 to July 1943; as Headquarters Company Commander from July 1943 to August 1943; as Commander, Company B, from August 1943 to June 1945; and in Headquarters and Headquarters Company as a Staff Officer from June 1945 until July 1945. After a military career of 34 years, he retired from active duty as a Colonel on August 1, 1974.

A MINI HISTORY
OF
THE 609TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

ACTIVATED: DECEMBER 15, 1941 FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

DEACTIVATED: NOVEMBER 13, 1945 CAMP BRECKENRIDGE, KENTUCKY

UNIT DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS:

DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATION
AWARDED TO:

COMPANY C (LESS 1ST PLATOON)
2D PLATOON, RECONNAISSANCE COMPANY

AUTHORIZED BATTLE RIBBONS

Members of the 609th T.D. Bn are authorized to wear the EUROPEAN-
AFRICAN-MIDDLE EASTERN THEATER CAMPAIGN RIBBON with a Battle Star
for each of the following Battle Campaigns if present during the
period indicated:

NORTHERN FRANCE	Jul 25, '44 - Sep 14, '44
ARDENNES-ALSACE	Dec 16, '44 - Jan 25, '45
RHINELAND	Sep 15, '44 - Mar 21, '45
CENTRAL EUROPE	Mar 22, '45 - May 11, '45

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The contents of this Mini-History contain information gathered from the significant written response of 25 former members * of the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion who participated in all or many of the key battles/campaigns in which their units were involved. A hearty "Thank You" to all.

The most important operations were: The Metz Campaign, Northern Luxembourg, Bastogne (especially Noville and Longvilly), the Saar-Moselle Triangle, the Capture of Trier, The Battle of Crailsheim and the Pursuit Phase of Operations which started after the fall of Ohringen and carried through Kirchheim, Ulm and finally Garmisch-Partenkirchen. The narrative contains excerpts from the official 609th TD Bn After Action Reports, some of which were provided by Mrs. Frank Vargo from her husband's files. Thanks very much Verna.

Lester M. Nichols, author of "IMPACT", the Battle Story of the Tenth Armored Division, deserves a special thank you for his permission to use copies of some sketch maps, pictures, Organization Charts, as well as a few narrative excerpts from his excellent book. This has served to provide the skeleton upon which to build and portray the 609th Combat History.

Finally, but by no means least, a very special thank you to my wife Roma, for putting up with my early morning and late evening absences and for her administrative assistance; to my son John for helping me out of a hole in getting this printed; and to Joy Boston, the "Jack of All Trades" in Beaufort, S.C., who scraped up time, mainly on weekends to do the initial typing.

*MAY NOT BE COMPLETE:

Robert Acord	Ellie McManus
Walter Allen	Joe Messner
Eugene Bakula	Jack Miller
Clyde Barry	Leo Miller
Anthony Battaglia	Arthur Mitchell
Jim Blessington	Everett Morgan
Elmer Brown	John Pilon
Cecil Duncan	Frank Porter
David Duncan	Colby Ricker
George Flynn	Russ Sanford
George Funke	Jim Seton
Edison Harris	Bill Shotola
Vic Harris	Joe Silva
Al Hiebert	Clyde Sink
Joe Kahaulelio	Ray Whisenand
Frank Kut	

FORWARD

The idea for this Mini History came about in 1986. Several members of Co B coerced/drafted the author into preparing a "Memory Trail" of WWII combat operations involving the Company. I agreed, but it became obvious during the initial research that this should be a Battalion history. Of course the degree of coverage for each unit would be contingent upon information available in files and that provided by former members. Thus began what became a "Labor of Love". Obviously, the product would have been more complete if undertaken 40 years ago. But we have tried hard to come up with a reasonably complete and accurate portrayal of events as they happened.

You will find and be upset by the extensive use of abbreviations throughout the text. My goal was to identify and record as many small unit actions as possible while attempting to hold down length, thus reducing publication expenses. To assist with your understanding of the terms it is important that you familiarize yourself with the "Glossary of Terms and Abbreviation" on page 75 before reading the narrative. Also, some readers will be disappointed that they don't have a more visible part. Alas, those are the risks one must consider when undertaking such a task.

Not receiving the "Kudos" they deserve, is the fate of all those who labored in the background trying to keep the fighting elements supplied, maintained and otherwise supported. For this I am truly sorry.

It has been my duty and privilege since the end of WWII to have spent almost an additional 30 years commanding combat units to the Brigade level, being Chief of Staff of two Armored Divisions and having the opportunity to attend the National War College. With all this, my associations have been many. But nowhere have I served with a more interesting, dedicated and proficient group in their assigned tasks, particularly in combat, than the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion of 1944 and 1945. Having said this, I salute all of you in the support echelons at Company and Battalion level for a job well done. I'm sure all those who served in the "Line" units will agree.

All members of the Battalion join in a sincere "Well Done" to the members of Company C, the 2nd Platoon Reconnaissance Company and the attached Headquarters Company personnel who served so bravely and professionally at Bastogne. You are a distinct credit to yourselves and the 609th.

The following is a summary of known Battalion casualties and awards made: Three Officers were killed and eight wounded. 35 Enlisted Men were killed, 129 wounded, five were Prisoners of War(POW) and one was missing. In the awards category, Officers earned six Silver Star Medals, 26 Bronze Star Medals with two Oak Leaf clusters, one Soldiers Medal and 12 Purple heart Medals. Enlisted personnel earned 10 Silver Star Medals, 114 Bronze Star Medals with two Oak Leaf Clusters and 164 Purple Heart Medals with 10 Oak Leaf Clusters. Two Non-Commissioned Officers, S/Sgt William Bayless and S/Sgt John Pilon both of Company C, were awarded Battlefield Commissions. It has been a difficult task insuring that correct casualty figures have been cited and individuals recognized by name. Obviously, some wounded and in receipt of Purple Heart Medals may have been omitted, not by choice, but for lack of records. The same situation holds for those entitled to awards. If anyone is aware of an individual in this category, please notify the Association so that they may be included in any subsequent updating of the History. GOOD READING AND Reminiscing.

Al Ahrenholz
Al Ahrenholz

IN MEMORIAM

This abbreviated history of the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion is dedicated to the memory of those members of the Battalion who made the supreme sacrifice. In giving their life for our Country on the field of battle in a foreign land, they dedicated their life that people everywhere might live in dignity and peace. This dedication is made also to those buddies who have enjoyed the fellowship of our 609th Association in the past, but have been called to serve a greater Master. May they all rest in peace.

CONTENTS

O	CHARTS, DIAGRAMS AND PICTURES	0.
I	ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING FOR COMBAT	1.
II	MOVEMENT TO COMBAT	6.
III	BATTLE OF METZ AND THE SAAR-MOZELLE, FIRST TIME	10.
IV	BATTLE OF LUXEMBOURG AND BASTOGNE	18.
V	CLEARING THE TRIANGLE AND ASSAULT ON THE SAAR DEFENSES	27.
VI	CAPTURE OF TRIER AND SWEEP TO THE RHINE	34.
VII	RHINE TO CRAILSHEIM	43.
VIII	RACE TO THE ALPS	56.
IX	OCCUPATION DUTY AND THE TRIP HOME	64.
X	BATTALION COMMAND POST LOCATIONS	66.
XI	LIST OF KNOWN CASUALTIES AND PRISONERS OF WAR (POW)	68.
XII	LIST OF KNOWN AWARDS	71
XIII	COMMAND & STAFF ASSIGNMENTS - COMBAT OPERATIONS	74
XIV	GLOSSARY OF TERMS & ABBREVIATIONS	75.
XV	EXTRACT, DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATION	76.

CHARTS, DIAGRAMS AND PICTURES

THE 609th FIRST "MAIN GUN".	3.
METZ CAMPAIGN CHART.	14.
TDs AT PERL AND THE "SWITCH LINE" CHART.	16.
BASTOGNE SITUATION MAP #1 AND CCB ORGANIZATION CHART.	21.
BASTOGNE SITUATION MAP #2 Dec 19, 1944.	22.
BASTOGNE SITUATION MAP #3 Dec 20, 1944.	24.
BASTOGNE SITUATION MAP #4 Dec 27-31, 1944.	26.
SAAR MOSELLE TRIANGLE - OPERATIONS DIAGRAM & ORGANIZATION CHART.	28.
Co C UNIT FIRING ON SIEGFRIED LINE/DIAGRAM OF SIEGFRIED DEFENSES.	31.
TRIER CAMPAIGN - OPERATIONS DIAGRAM.	35.
PHOTOS OF DAMAGED GERMAN EQUIPMENT.	39.
PHOTOS OF 609th ON THE ROAD / MORE DAMAGED GERMAN EQUIPMENT.	40.
SKETCH MAP, RHINE TO THE NECKAR CAMPAIGN.	44.
SKETCH MAP, HEILBRONN TO ASSAMSTADT.	46.
CRAILSHEIM ORGANIZATION DIAGRAM.	47.
CRAILSHEIM BATTLE, CHART #1.	50.
CRAILSHEIM BATTLE, CHART #2.	51.
CRAILSHEIM BATTLE, CHART #3.	53.
SKETCH MAP, OHRINGEN TO ULM.	57.
609th TD SECTION AT ULM.	60.
SKETCH MAP, ULM TO THE ALPS.	61.

ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING FOR COMBAT

BACKGROUND

During World War II, the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion (TD Bn) had its great "Day in the Sun". Prior to and since then there was/is no such organization. This deserves a brief explanation. In the 1930's, when Hitler and the German military forces imposed their will on many countries of Europe, our Military leaders observed for the first time just what had been going on during training of the small German Army. The Germans had learned well from World War I, particularly in the final stages when the Allies notably the British and later the Americans and French introduced the tank on the battlefield.

The Blitzkrieg tactics demonstrated by the Germans in their conquest of European and North African countries generated American development of some 20 Armored Divisions (AD) and about 300 separate Armor Bns of which 111 were TD Bns. These units were organized to offset the advantage and superiority of German doctrine and tactics by countering the lethal 88mm and 75mm towed and self propelled (SP) anti-tank (AT) weapons and enemy tanks.

Approximatley 65 SP and towed TD units saw service in the European Theater of Operations. During World War II, the THIRD Army TD units alone were credited with knocking out 648 enemy tanks and 211 SP guns. In addition, operating as assault guns in support of Infantry (Inf) and Armor units, the TD's destroyed 349 Anti Tank guns, 175 Artillery pieces, 519 Machine Guns (MG's) and 1556 wheeled vehicles of all types. Through the Maginot and Siegfried Lines the TD's wiped out 801 pillboxes and bunkers. Of THIRD Army totals, the 609th had a confirmed record of 51 MK IV, V and VI Tank kills. Also, there were 36 SP and 45 towed AT guns destroyed; 10 artillery pieces, 18 SP and Towed Anti Aircraft (AA) guns, 17 Halftrack/Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs), 2 aircraft, 1 locomotive, 36 MGs, 81 Pillboxes or Bunkers, more than 136 wheel vehicles and wagons of all types and a variety of other military equipment destroyed (e.g. bicycles, motorcycles, FDCs, etc).

Following WWII, studies and field exercises demonstrated that while the TD capability was needed, it can be performed as well by a modern tank, thus precluding the need for separatetype vehicles. A new ground or vehicle mounted guided wireless AT weapon the TOW, replaces the old towed TD AT weapon.

FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA - DECEMBER 15, 1941 - JANUARY 6, 1943

Following experiments with provisional AT units of company (Co) and battalion (Bn) size, equipped with a myriad of weapons, the first TD Bns were organized during December 1941. One of those was the 609th Tank Destroyer Bn at Ft. Bragg, N.C. on Dec 15, 1941. This unit consisted of Headquarters and Headquarters Company (Hq & Hq Co) with a Medical Detachment, three line or T.D. companies and a Pioneer Co. The initial Cadre of Officers (OFFs) and Enlisted Men (EM) came primarily from the 9th Infantry (Inf) Division (ID) Artillery with three officers coming from 9th Div units. Fillers for the Bn (400), came from the local Field Artillery Replacement Center.

With receipt of filler personnel in February, the Bn engaged in an intensive individual and basic unit training program. Conditioning, individual weapons firing and small unit training were the order of the day for the next six months.

Proficiency firing with the Bn basic weapon, the towed 37mm AT gun, was conducted. During the later part of this period practice in shipboard loading took place in the Norfolk, VA - Chesapeake Bay area. In August 1942, came the first and last major reorganization of the Bn. The Pioneer Co was redesignated the Reconnaissance (Rcn) Co. In accordance with the new designation, equipment changes were instituted, e.g., scout units received Harley Davidson Motorcycles, amphibious Jeeps, M-6 Armored Cars mounting the 37mm, 3/4 ton trucks for each Platoon (Pltn) and Bazookas and mine detectors, to mention a few.

August 1942 saw other changes, additions and rumors, i.e. the line companies were receiving the Halftrack mounting the 75mm gun and the officer ranks were filled with a number of junior officers mainly from the Artillery School at Fort Sill, Okla. The rumor trail had the unit preparing for overseas duty with the 9th Div as part of an invasion force to hit the North African Coast in the late fall of 1942. Many wives knew this before the Bn did. When General Patton visited Ft Bragg to address the departing 9th Div, many former 9th Div personnel in the 609th displayed disappointment that the Bn was not included in the invasion force. Fortunately, someone made a wise decision that the Bn was not yet ready for combat, although rumor had it there was not enough shipping for the 609th and two other TD Bns.

On September 20, the 609th received a new Commanding Officer (CO) and an S-3 directly from the Cavalry School at Ft Riley, Kansas. Lt Col Roland Browne, a West Point officer, who had headed up the Weapons Department, immediately instituted his "spit and polish" routine (shave, haircut, salute) and an intensive weapons training program for individual, crew served and main gun personnel. Many likened the 75mm gun to a howitzer. With its low muzzle velocity, one could almost track the projectile flight with the naked eye. Pltn and Co small training exercises were expedited, but with no trained tacticians in the command, particularly in armor tactics, the Bn endured many "drills in futility."

In the course of all this, the Bn. moved from the "Spring Lake area" to the "Animal area". This gave the unit closer access to training and to the railhead. However, some wags suggested that they really wanted the Bn away from the POW Stockade where personnel were under constant scrutiny from the elite AFRIKA CORPS and submarine prisoners.

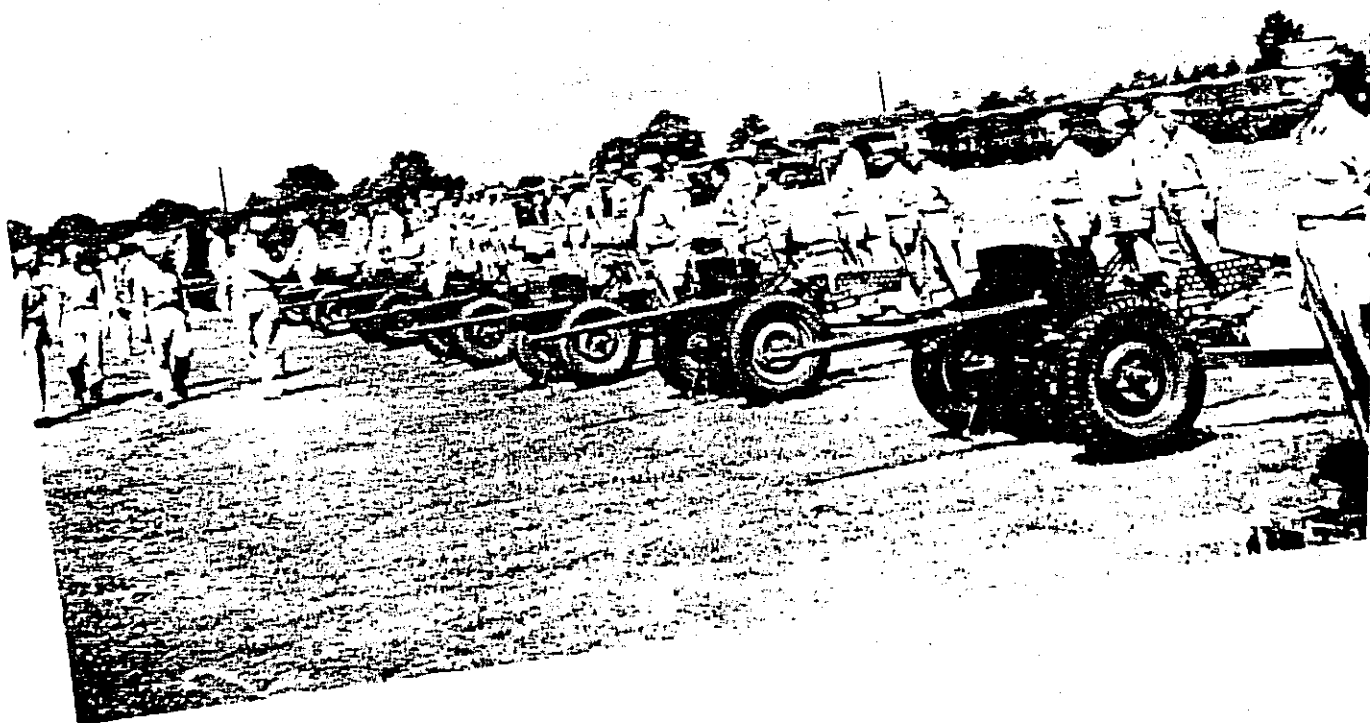
The days (and nights) at Fort Bragg were not all confined to the rigors of daily training, maintenance and physical exercise, there was the TOWN PUMP in Fayetteville. By October, with the 9th Div now departed, two new organizations came on Post, 82d Airborne (Abn) Div and the 2nd Armored Div. There was no love lost between these two organizations. What was more natural than their meeting at the most popular "watering hole" in town? The ingredients of music, local belles, Geronimo, tankers, alcohol and unit pride would sooner or later lead to a confrontation. Strangely, the ownership didn't mind the broken windows, torn cushions, etc. With the large amount of money being made, he had it back in shape for the next weekend. It should be noted with tongue in cheek there never were any 609th members involved.

December 1942 brought great news. As one former member of the 609th said "to ease the disappointment of not being part of the North African Task Force, the unit was being sent to Camp Hood, Texas". The major part of December was spent in practicing our train loading procedures, getting equipment in shape and finally for most, Christmas leave. On January 6, 1943, the first of five trains departed for Texas.

CAMP HOOD, TEXAS - JANUARY 10 - APRIL 10, 1943

During the first two weeks in January, the Bn was involved in loading, moving and unloading personnel and equipment at the new "temporary" home Camp Hood, Texas. The three months spent there would provide a liberal dose of

609th Tank-Destroyer Battalion



In Action

physical training, weapons maintenance and firing, small unit and Bn level field training involving armor type units. The camp also provided excellent facilities for maintenance training of all types. To preclude outside distractions, unit personnel were restricted to the camp area except from Retreat on Saturday to Taps on Sunday. In making sure that training was pertinent and realistic, the Bn operated under the direction of the 7th TD Group (Gp), commanded by Col. H. Herman of the TD School. His personnel conducted and supervised live fire obstacle courses, street fighting, night fighting, and other specialty training to sharpen reflexes for combat situations. Our "graduation" exercise required traversing a barbed wire strewn obstacle course followed by the requirement for running up a long steep hill appropriately named "Puke Hill". Many blamed the sulphurous water for causing the illness rather than the Hill.

This initial period of intense combat training had some tragic as well as humorous episodes. On the tragic side, there were several instances of carelessness or over intense reaction to training conditions resulting in death for at least four members of the Bn. Another instance of death occurred when a member on guard duty took his own life because of pressure he apparently couldn't cope with. His feeling conveyed to the last person seeing him alive, was "I am tired of this old S---." Soon this statement made the rounds of the Bn and was often used when frustration set in. Thus originated the phrase "ARCURI was right". On the humorous side, there was the case of the Bn field grade super infiltrator during a field exercise, who ended up with a broken arm after trying to sneak up on and disarm a sentry.

LOUISIANA MANEUVERS - APRIL 7 - JUNE 8, 1943

The Bn departed Camp Hood, Texas on April 6, 1943 by motor convoy and rail closing into Hawthorne, La. on April 7, 1943. This was to be both a relaxing period in the history of the Bn and a frustrating one. It was relaxing in the sense it did not involve the rigorous schedule of Camp Hood, but frustrating in that personnel really couldn't put to use many of the things learned. While there was abundant practice in erecting and striking tentage and other basic training activities, there were few occasions when we were able to employ armor type field training. Few areas can compare with Camp Polk reservation and surrounding land for uncomfortable conditions. Most of the time weather was rainy, the ground muddy and the men miserable. Maneuver opponents were the 85th and 93d Divs.

There are many humorous and exasperating incidents to relate. Those attracting the most attention by recollection: The Rcn Co Commander constantly trying to keep up with the amphibious jeeps which were forever disappearing and suddenly, but belatedly reappearing. Or, the time when the Bn CO received his brown bag lunch consisting of a liverwurst sandwich made up with heel ends of the bread, minus all else. To compound the insult, it had been placed on his track vehicle in the sun for sometime. The Hq Co Commander and the Mess Officer received a blistering chewing out while standing at attention in the sun. Then there was the story of David Bennett of Co A and the wedding at Manning, La. Notwithstanding, the Commanding General of the maneuver Hq awarded the Bn an excellent rating in all phases of operations.

CAMP SHELBY, MISS. - JUNE 9, 1943 - AUGUST 1, 1944

The Bn departed the maneuver area by rail and motor on June 8, and closed in Camp Shelby, Miss. on June 9, 1943. This was to be the last stateside station for the Bn before moving to Camp Shanks. For the first time since leaving Camp Hood, the 609th began operating as a professional Bn. Shortly after arrival and before really getting settled in the new area, the Bn CO scheduled our first Saturday

morning inspection. Just about everything failed. "Important" things like no butt cans in the hutment areas were understandable, but completely failing the vehicle maintenance inspection except for Leo Miller's jeep really turned the juice on. Pressure was exerted on all facets of operations. Company Commanders were put in place with the Co they would lead in combat and internal Co organizations were also being set to the degree possible. The Bn S-3 Section was pushed to schedule Officer and NCO schools, small unit training exercises, individual and crew served weapons training, live fire exercises with the large caliber guns, individual PT and conditioning hikes. Maintenance programs were stepped up with daily motor stables conducted by "the numbers." Saturday morning inspections were held, often with "full field" layout of personal equipment.

Soon all phases of Bn operations began to mesh with an accompanying sense of professionalism pervading all ranks. As if on signal, the announcement was made that new more modern equipment would arrive shortly. On Oct 27, 1943 the Bn received 36 of the new Buick HELLCAT, 76mm full tracked motor carriage, T-70, later to be given permanent classification as the M-18 Tank Destroyer. Rcn Co received the M-8 Armored car mounting the 37mm gun. All Cos received the M-20's and line Cos received the Armored Ammo Trailer to accompany the M-18. A complete line of new Communication equipment was received.

With this issue of new equipment, the rigorous indoctrination and training programs began all over. Many should recall the Bn Commanders famous words "Direct - Inspect - Connect - Protect". The introduction of new equipment was eased somewhat by the "Tech Reps" who visited or stayed with the unit for extended periods of time. The greatest training problems involved: inadequate tank gunnery firing facilities, inadequate field training areas and lack of armored type units to maneuver against. But most of those problems were resolved by constructing moving target ranges and developing adequate scenarios for maneuvering against our own Bn units. The results of our training test conducted by the 7th TD Gp under Col Harrison Herman were excellent. The 609th main gun firing results were some of the best they had recorded. On February 14, 1944, Valentines Day, the Bn CO presented 400 long overdue Good Conduct Medals to members of the Bn in recognition of outstanding service.

Many humorous incidents or happenings occurred at Camp Shelby which we can now look back on with a "Chuckle". These included: preparations for the July 4th Hattiesburg parade which required that each vehicle be assigned a name (the Bn COs was "Old Four-eyed Bastard"); or the steady issue of old Australian Goat and how the Mess Stewards and the Cooks were encouraged to "hide the taste"; or the Class VI runs to New Orleans that "no one" was aware of; or the Officer, NCO and EM Schools when everyone was required to disassemble and assemble individual and crew served weapons; or the birthday party the Officers had for Capt Harvey on March 14, 1944 at the "Club Arcuri"; or the Poker and Crap games held throughout the Bn area on Payday; or the Bn CO's directive there would be no more "Cobbler" dessert made -- all pies had to have a covering layer; or after watching the 442d Inf Regt "midgets" fast walk past our Bn area as they finished their 25 mile hike, the Bn CO decided to schedule one for the 609th on New Years Eve, Dec. 31, 1943. "Those were the days!" Then came "D" day June 6, 1944. The three Line Company Commanders attending Gunnery School in Camp Hood were quickly recalled. Everyone was excited. Where were the orders? The month almost passed when on June 28 overseas movement orders arrived - morale was sky-high.

II

MOVEMENT TO COMBAT

CAMP SHANKS, NEW YORK - AUGUST 3, 1944 - AUGUST 10, 1944

Classified orders were received on June 28, 1944 directing the 609th to move by train to the staging area at Camp Shanks, N.Y. for follow-on shipment to the European Theatre of Operations. An advanced Overseas Detachment of two officers and one EM departed on July 15 and arrived at BREAMORE, ENGLAND on July 30, 1944. Preparations for rail shipment were made, all unit equipment was prepared for storage and unit trains were scheduled to depart at 0950 and 1145 on Aug 1st.

Now came the SHELBY GOODBYES. One particular event stood out: who was the slinky, slender, peaches and cream complected, long black-haired southern belle who came out to Shelby in a Taxi Cab from Hattiesburg to kiss that ugly 1st Sgt, goodbye? The train trip was anything but uneventful after the "tearful Goodbys". During the train ride a senior officer decided to ride on the rear platform of the Observation Car dressed in his BVD's as the Command train approached Birmingham, Ala. A loud argument took place when the Conductor insisted he must get dressed or get inside. The Bn Executive Officer(XO) finally prevailed upon him to go inside. You could tell then that this unit was in a fighting mood. Both trains closed the Camp Shanks staging area by August 3d.

Camp Shanks was a highly proficient staging area. Before most of the men knew it, they had haircuts, new ID Cards, sore arms from shots, records completely checked and then a trip to the Great White Way in NYC. For some it was like the old WWI song "How Do You Get Them Back on the Farm After They've Seen Parie" or to "Camp Shanks" after they've seen New York City. Then departure time arrived, August 10, 1944. Off went 33 officers, 2 WOs and 604 EM to NYC and Pier 52, North River, Manhattan and loaded on the Luxury liner "CONTE BIANCOMONO", former Queen of the Italian Lines. The ship, which had been named after one of Mussolini's relatives, was now a little worse for the wear with much Mahogany wood and much more rust. Renamed the USS HERMITAGE, with Commodore Weems at the helm, it was to be the Bn home and the Flagship for the cruise to Liverpool, England. On the morning of August 11, the ship hauled anchor and headed out to sea there to be joined by 43 other vessels of all shapes and sizes. The 10 troop ships and 34 supply ships were protected by two cruisers and nine Destroyer Escorts (DE's).

On board the Hermitage were some 6000 troops comprising three TD Bns, four AA Bns, one Medical Bn and Miscellaneous Special Troops. The CO 609th was the troop CO and many of the 609th officers staffed the ship, i.e. Lt Edison Harris, Co C, was the Gunnery Officer while other 609th Officers were Compartment Commanders. Daily routine on the Hermitage was calisthenics (if you could find the room to swing your arms), sanitation (clean sweep down fore and aft) and eating two meals a day - navy beans at 3 AM and another surprise at 2 PM. If lucky, you had a bunk on one of the upper open decks and not one in the "Hold" where the temperature was as hot as Hades. Most of the ships' air conditioning did not work. To compound the agony, the Commodore received word that a German Sub Pack was trailing the Convoy. He decided to turn south to the vicinity of the Azores while some of the escorts chased the subs. When all was clear, he turned straight North to Liverpool. This tactic delayed arrival to early on the morning of August 24th rather than the 21st as originally scheduled.

After arriving at Princess Pat Landing, the Bn was met by the Bn S-1, Lt Fredericks, who together with Capt Seton, S-4, and Command Sgt Jones had made the follow-on arrangements for transportation and Camp facilities to house the Bn.

The first train load left at 4:00 A.M. Following a six hour train ride, we arrived at Pontypool Wales, then a short bus ride to Llanover Park Camp in MONMOUTHSHIRE, England adjacent to the town of ABERGAVENNY.

Since most of the shipboard travel was uncomfortable, there wasn't much humor involved. However, there was a snicker or two by those who had learned about a senior Bn officer's encounter with the badly operating toilet in the "luxury class" suite where he was billeted. It seems that he got somewhat soaked every time the "John" was flushed. Turned out he was using the Bidet (common on European ships for those wanting to wash the genital region of the body) and not the Commode. Oh well. And who can deny that "Slick" Cramer and one or two others had a smooth way of accumulating all the spendable income in the Bn only two or three days after pay day.

LLANOVER PARK CAMP, MONMOUTHSHIRE, ENGLAND, AUGUST 24, 1944-SEPTEMBER 15, 1944

Upon arrival, the Bn received assignment orders to THIRD US ARMY. Like the old Horse Cavalryman and his horse, the unit's first order of business was to take care of the equipment. In this case, it was necessary to locate the various items, then care for them. To start with, supply depots planned to issue the Bn used vehicles, maintaining that all new vehicles had been sent to France. But with a lot of "midnight exchanges" our innovative S-4, Capt Jim Seton and his cohorts "managed" to find all new jeeps and trucks. Equipment when received was loaded with cosmoline. In particular, the Wright Whirlwind aircraft engines in the M-18s were packed with preservative. It wasn't until one or two of the engines had been damaged did the maintenance crews figure out that the lower pistons were loaded with excess preservative which had to be cleared before starting.

Meanwhile, under the supervision of Warrent Officer Russell "Punchy" Semrow, a whole series of combat developed modifications were performed. On the M-18's for starters: 30 caliber machine gun mounts were welded on in front of the assistant Driver's hatch, fabricated hinged metal covers were emplaced for covering the turret openings, equipment racks were attached to the rear and sides of the turret. On the Jeeps: the spare tire was moved from the rear to the side to make room for a full length equipment rack, an angle iron contraption was welded to the front of the vehicle as a wire cutter, on some vehicles a MG tripod was welded in front of the rear seat, on others small arm boots were attached in convenient locations. Similar modifications were made on the M-8 and M-20 Armored cars. Every vehicle in the Bn received some type of modification, e.g. Mess truck alterations were rather elaborate to accomodate cooking on the move.

Once main armament was ready for combat, firing exercises were conducted to establish the proper "zero". In all, three firing exercises were conducted elsewhere in Wales to get the 76mm guns ready to go. But all activity at this final staging area was not of such a serious nature. Although scrounging teams were out scouring the many equipment depots for tow bars and other necessities, there was time for relaxation. One such place was the town of MYRTHYR TYDFIL, WALES 10 or 15 miles distant. On several occasions, the Bn would send a convoy to the town. Many of the troops enjoyed the atmosphere and cordiality of the Welsh Pubs. It was strange to note the segregated policy of having male and female patrons in separate rooms. In the course of one of these trips, Reconnaissance Company had the opportunity to meet a young Welshman who seemed to know all Andrew Sisters songs and even sounded like one of the sisters. He insisted that the Americans should hear his sister and him sing duet versions of the various songs. When time came for the Pub to close they went out in the street. The young fellow located his sister and in the pitch dark of the blackout, they serenaded the group with several of the songs in top-flight harmony. Only the call for return to camp brought the proceedings to a halt.

Shortly before departing Llanover Park Camp, the Bn CO decided the area should be spruced up. When the British found out about it they raised H---. They wanted the area to look unoccupied for security reasons. As it turned out, the 609th was one of the last combat units to stage from England. Future shipments would land and process from various locations in France.

MOVEMENT TO UTAH BEACH AND ACROSS FRANCE - SEPT. 16 - 24, 1944

Finally, unit preparations for combat were completed. Orders were received to move the Bn to the port area of Dorchester England for subsequent movement to Weymouth/Portland for overwater shipment to France. The overland trip of 140 miles was made on Sept 16 by way of: ROSS, GLOUCESTER, CIRENCESTER, MALMSBURY, CHIPPENHAM, MECKSHAM, WESTBURY, WARMINSTER, SHAFTESBURY, BLANDFORD, to DORCHESTER. Other than minor mishaps along the way, i.e. fences were knocked down, houses damaged, etc. the road march was carried out extremely well considering the problem of controlling the steel-tracked vehicle on cobblestones. Prior to the march, all units were provided with dry D rations for the noon meal. The evening meal was handled by a base camp crew in the Dorchester area. This consisted of selecting your "C" ration menu from a series of large galvanized cans containing boiling water. Upon opening a can it would literally explode leaving more outside than inside. A similar procedure was followed the next morning.

Movement was then made to Weymouth/Portland for loading on three LST's and was completed on the 18th. The 609th left for France on Sep 19th heading for UTAH BEACH. The NAVY served a delicious evening meal, weather was good and the trip uneventful. Much food bartering went on between the troops and the LST crews. Anchor was dropped off UTAH BEACH at 0315 Hrs 20 Sept. 1944. For the most part, the off-loading went very well. One LST did strike a sandbar pretty hard, but all vehicles got off with no damage. Units proceeded inland to the first Bn bivouac area on the Continent in the vicinity of ST MERE EGLISE, France. Bn personnel were now officially "Continental's".

The Bn stay in the Bivouac area was limited to getting the unit's equipment accounted for and prepared for combat. For the main armament, this required bore-sighting the 76mm guns. Basic loads of ammunition were checked and unit supplies were drawn and distributed as required. Supply and fuel trucks were located with units as would be Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in combat. By the afternoon of the 21st everything appeared to be in order. Directives were received attaching the Bn to XX Corps in MARS LA TOUR area. It was time to make the 400 plus mile trip across France to join the 4th TD Gp commanded by Col Browning, a XX Corps Special Troops unit.

Early morning on Sep 22d, the Bn crossed the Start Point and headed East. Communications Zone (Comm Z) Military Police had the route and movement schedule well in hand. Following closely the Red Ball Express Route 3 after AVRANCHES, the Bn bivouacked vic of LANGEY, France (near Mayenne), a first day trip of some 125 miles. At each stop along the route, the French people would pass out fruit and other good food items and many flowers. On the 23d, the Bn covered some 200 miles finally stopping at COURTALAIN (five miles SW of SENS) at which point the M-18s started running out of fuel. The Bn basic load of gasoline was badly depleted because someone in Comm Z directed that all fuel must be held for the British (Gen Montgomery's) operations up north. But Major Hatina, Bn S-3, located an Air Corps Supply Depot with an excess of 100 plus octane gasoline. All vehicle tanks and reserve gas cans were filled and units were soon on the way. It was at this location the Bn had its first experience with the FREE FRENCH Underground (FFI) rounding up German collaborators. Justice was meted out in short order.

As the Bn approached the combat area and "The Moment of Truth", personnel were asking themselves "Am I prepared to face the moment we have all trained for? How will I act - react?" Everyone would soon find out. On Sept. 24th, the Bn covered its last leg (180 miles) of the long trip across France and arrived in the general area of BRIEY/GRAVELLOTTE.

III

BATTLE OF METZ AND THE SAAR-MOSELLE, FIRST TIME

INDIRECT FIRE ROLE - SEPTEMBER 25 - NOVEMBER 3, 1944

Upon arrival in the Metz area, the Bn was disposed to the rear of the 90th Div units. Hq and Hq Co, 609th and Co B were located in the vicinity of MOUTIERS while Companies A and C proceeded directly to field firing positions in the vicinity of BATTILY, VERNVILLE and ARMAN-VILLIERS. The Bn was under the operational control of the 4th TD Gp, but never functioned in that role.

In the initial deployment, Companies A and C participated in indirect fire missions in support of XX Corps Artillery and/or the 90th Div Artillery (Arty). On Sept 27th, Co B displaced from the reserve area at Moutiers to the town of GANDRANGE where it also went into an indirect fire role. Its mission was to support the 90th Div Artillery with the primary role of supporting the 357th Inf Regiment (Regt), 90th Div, in its attack on MAIZIERES LE METZ (better known as "Mazie") and later the large Slag piles between Mazie and Metz City. Because of the great shortage of artillery ammunition in Sept and Oct, 609th Line Companies fired in excess of 14,000 rds of high explosive (HE) ammunition. Most of this was in support of 90th Div units which were positioned in a 90 degree arc extending from a point directly west of METZ to a position directly north near Mazie on the west bank of the MOSELLE River. While most of the indirect fire was interdictory in nature, Co B for instance, fired nearly 1000 rds of observed fire in support of the 357th attacks on Mazie and several hundred rounds in attacks against the Slag Pile positions.

General observations of the period Sept 25 to Nov 4 can be summarized as follows: This was a great opportunity for initiation to combat. While the indirect fire role was unusual for a unit with primarily a direct fire role, it did provide time for a newly arrived unit to become accustomed to combat. In addition to firing a few thousand rounds of ammunition, other situations occurred which brought home the seriousness of combat. Examples were: Bn personnel came under enemy Artillery fire; personnel could observe close air support missions against the large number of Forts in the Metz area mainly Fort Driant and Fort Jeanne d'Arc; the need for digging in positions and properly camouflaging them; how to live in the field under combat conditions and keep dry (there were almost 90 days of rain in the fall of 1944); troops experienced the sensation of having V-2 rockets fly directly over their positions at a height of only a few hundred feet (sounded like a freight train with all the color of sky rockets); GM technicians had the opportunity to see first hand the M-18 Hellcat in the field. For commanders, experience was gained in preplanned indirect fire missions, (This was especially important when the fire was in close proximity of friendly inf positions.); in the case of Co B, there was an added bonus when several missions of indirect fire were directed at a large caliber railroad gun located in a railroad tunnel east of the MOSELLE. While it was never confirmed that the gun was seriously damaged, spotter reports placed the fire directly on target more than once.

Many personnel, not only in the 609th, but in many other units in the area, did not understand the reason for such a static combat situation from late September until almost mid-November. The defensive posture of Army units was caused by the shortage of fuel and artillery ammunition mentioned earlier. Most supplies were sent north to Montgomery's forces. Div Arty Batteries were limited

to five rounds per howitzer per day, often less. The movement of track vehicles was almost non existent. This explains why the 609th fired so many indirect fire missions. 76mm ammunition was not rationed. But large expenditures of ammunition through the tube of a direct fire weapon results in tube wear and has an effect on direct fire accuracy. The fact that the Bn fired about 440 rds per tube before engaging enemy armor on the battlefield may have had some effect on weapon accuracy, but no tests were ever conducted to prove this.

There were many humorous incidents during the period. Most of the following happened in Co B, but I am sure an equal number of interesting events occurred in the other companies. One of these occurred in Co A the first night they were in position:

It seems that one of the Co Outposts heard a strange sound. After challenging for the password three times - and no reply - the Outpost fired a blast of MG fire. Next morning, members of the Outpost searched the area from which the noise had come and found a dead cow. For the first night in combat zone, it wasn't a bad reaction.

Some lesser French official in the town of GANDRANGE talked with the Co B Maintenance Section about borrowing motor oil to get the Mayor's old car running. One of the mechanics obliged. Next day they came back pushing the car. The Frenchman said the car ran good for several minutes then stopped. He couldn't get it started again. The moral is don't put detergent oil in an old car -- it will soon gum up the works.

Another was about the excited Artillery forward observer who was directing Co B fire in Mazie. His Observation Post (OP) was on the 2d floor of a building on one side of the street and he was directing fire on a German chow-line in the back of a building one block over. Shouting into his telephone, he said: "I've got your fire on the chow-line, now lets get the food". He claimed many enemy casualties.

The Co B Command Post (CP) was in the basement of a school. Many of the men when using the outside toilet facilities for the first time found it very interesting. Getting your feet into the proper floor markers puzzled some. Or when the Mayor invited a few members of Co B to a several course dinner. Sgt Armand Lague was the interpreter. Toward the end of the last course, Lague was going through an elaborate "Thank You" when there was a tremendously loud noise outside and the house was shaking. Everyone ran out to see what was going on. Overhead, like a huge freight train spewing flame, was a V-2 rocket passing westward. The next day it was learned a malfunction somewhere over northern France/southern Belgium turned it and the rocket headed east when it crashed in the vic of BRIEY leaving a huge crater.

Co B suffered its first fatality in this area when one of the cooks, PFC George McCune, was killed in a shelling of the water treatment point nearby.

METZ OFFENSIVE - NOV. 9 - 19, 1944

During the latter part of October, THIRD Army supplies of fuel and ammunition once again reached levels sufficient to permit taking the offensive. Plans for seizing METZ, which had been prepared two months earlier, were dusted off. Seizing METZ was a challenge Gen Patton couldn't and wouldn't pass up. To capture by direct attack, this bastion protected by some 35 mutually supporting forts, would be a feat historians claim had not been accomplished in 1500 years. It was in this framework that the 10th AD supported by the 609th was to get its baptism of fire as part of XX Corps.

The advance Hq, 10th AD, arrived in the MARS LA TOUR area on Oct 29th with the combat units arriving daily thereafter. On Nov 2d, the forward elements received their first taste of combat when the German guns of the METZ forts fired

several artillery barrages on their positions. On Nov 4th, the 609th TD Bn was attached to and would spend almost 95% or more of its remaining combat time with the 10th Armored "Tiger" Div.

Shortly after this exposure to combat, the THIRD Army Commander, Gen Patton, addressed the assembled officers and key NCOS of the 10th AD and attached units in an outdoor amphitheater west of MARS LA TOUR. Giving his "fire and brimstone" talk, as was typical with him for newly arrived units, Gen Patton outlined his philosophy of combat. Officers were expected to lead not follow. "You can't push a piece of wet spaghetti" was his favorite term. He emphasized that there are plenty of medals to be given when they were deserved. Troops were expected to be clean shaven, wear ties and in general look sharp. He stated that if at anytime during the attack you encounter civilians firing on troops take necessary steps to eliminate them. If fired at by civilians in built up areas, burn the damn towns down. He didn't expect the commanders of leading elements to report "We are tied down by fire and can't move". He expected units to bypass such obstacles and cut them off. Logistically, he wanted all units to carry seven days of rations, so the unit transports would have sufficient capacity in their trains for fuel and ammunition. Finally, Gen Patton said he expected METZ to be captured in short order, because he wanted to be on the RHINE by Christmas. With this "Fight Talk" over, we returned to our units "all fired up".

The offensive was set to kick-off on Nov 9th with the 5th Div on the Corps right, south of METZ, having the mission of breaking out of its small bridgehead east of the MOSELLE and attacking in a northeasterly direction. The 95th Div was to relieve the 90th Div in present positions and apply pressure on the German salient west of the MOSELLE until the other Divs crossed the River, then attack straight ahead and capture the City. On the Corps left, north of METZ, the 90th was to force crossings of the MOSELLE in the vic of THIONVILLE, and attack southeast and meet the 5th Div just east of METZ. Meanwhile, the 10th AD would cross the river behind the 90th, then attack out of the bridgehead to the east-southeast of the 90th Div to close the pincers with the 6th AD attacking northeast from south of METZ.

From this point on, Rcn Co attachments to Cos A-B-C 609th were SOP with some adjustments in Pioneer and Mortar support depending on the mission of each Co. Standard attachments were 3d Pltn to Co A; 1st Pltn to Co B and 2d Pltn to Co C. The 609th attachments to the 10th AD for the Metz offensive were Co A to Combat Command A (CCA), Co B to Combat Command Reserve (CCR) and Co C to Combat Command B (CCB). A Combat Command contained a flexible mixture of combat units and generally included Armored Inf, Tanks, Engineers, TD, AA and sometimes Rcn elements. The make-up depended on the CCs mission.

After the initial phases of the Corps attack had begun, Eighth AF Flying Forts (B-17) came over in mass, conducting bombing attacks on the METZ fortified positions. In some areas they released their bombs early and many units not yet in the assault echelons were lining up for breakfast. Luckily the bomb impact area was free of troops, but many still in the Mars La Tour area were having breakfast when the bombs started landing several hundred yards away. Everyone hit the ground and messkits went flying.

"H" hour was 0330 hrs Nov 9th. The 90th Div made the initial crossings in assault boats and two small bridgeheads were established, one at MALLING and one at CATTENON. But a new enemy struck at the 90th Div - the weather. Rain, cold and penetrating, soaked the troops to the bone. Roads became quagmires, but the biggest threat came from the Moselle. Normally just over 399 ft wide, it stretched in many places to a width of 800 ft. While troops sat in the forests west of the crossings sites for almost four days waiting for the bridge to open, foot soldiers of the two Infantry Regts' across the river were without armor support. Because of the river's swift flow, the Engineer bridge builders could not keep the bridge intact. On the 12th, because the Germans brought up some tanks and SP assault guns the engineers were asked to lash two rafts together so

that two M-18s, from A or C Compaines, 609th, could be ferried across river. This was done and as soon as the vehicles reached the east bank they entered into combat in the vicinity of PETITE HETTANGE. Three enemy SP guns were knocked out immediately.

But this was not the armored support expected. Because of the river conditions, no more friendly armor was to reach the east bank until the following day when a bridge was finally constructed. German attacks against the Inf during the first four days were blunted mainly by the heavy artillery concentrations provided by Div and Corps Artillery. The savageness of the fighting and the results of the hundreds of artillery concentrations fired can only be described by the results observed two or three days later when freezing weather had replaced the rain. Bodies of the dead, German and Americans alike, were being carried to sides of the roads and stacked like fire wood for several hundred yards awaiting grave registration personnel.

Late on Nov 13th, the rain stopped, river levels fell and bridging was in place. The 90th Div moved the remainder of its combat and support units across into the bridgehead area. Early on the morning of the 14th, CCB, 10th AD, followed by CCA, moved across the bridges and preparations were made for attacks to the east and southeast. Both Combat Commands were seriously restricted by the muddy terrain. Essentially, the tank units were road bound. On the morning of the 15th, CCB with Co C 609th attacked directly east toward MERZIG with the mission of securing crossings over the SAAR River. Held up initially by blown bridges east of Kerling, CCB with TF Cherry on the left and TF Wiener on the right continued a slow advance restricted mainly by roadblocks and heavy enemy shelling.

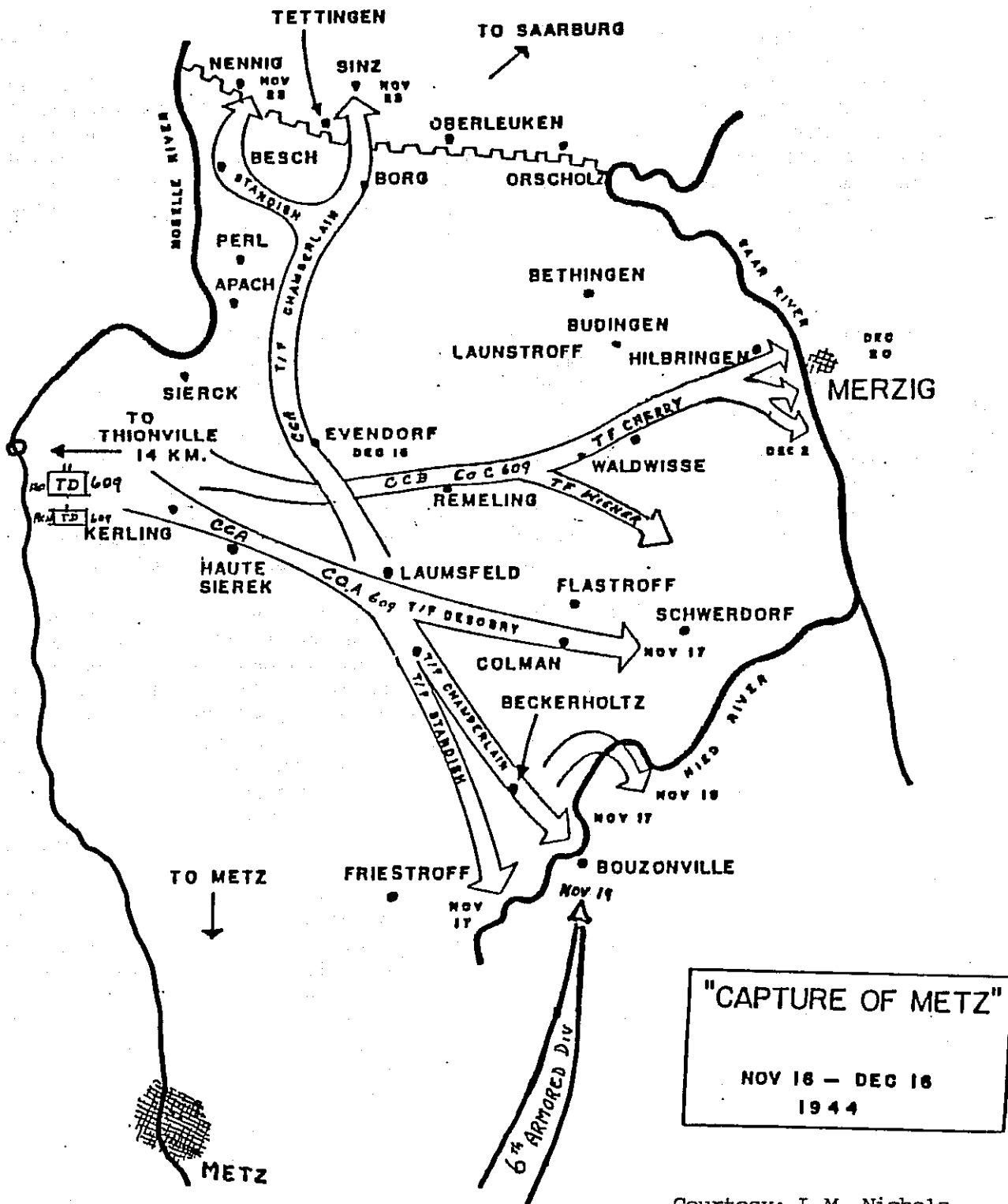
Task Forces and Teams (hereinafter referred to as TF and TM) were smaller segments of mixed forces. A Combat Command depending on its size could be made up of from one to three Task Forces. A Task Force could be made up of two to four Teams and Teams were usually of reinforced Company size. With the M-18's excellent cross country capability and their long barrellled 76mm superior fire power, the TDs were called upon frequently to fire on road blocks, AT guns and concentration of troops. CCB elements finally reached the town of HILBRINGEN on the west bank of the SAAR opposite MERZIG on Dec 1st. During the attack, Co C was instrumental in knocking out several AT guns and killing or wounding an estimated 100 enemy while suffering no vehicle losses and only two wounded, who were not identified by name.

Meanwhile, on the morning of Dec 15th, CCA with Co A, 609th, attacked southeast toward the Div objective of BOUZONVILLE to close the pincers on METZ. With TF Chamberlain on the left, making the main effort, and TF Standish on the right and TF Desobry with a splinter command following, CCA reached the NIED River just north of BOUZONVILLE on Dec 19th having much the same type resistance as CCB encountered. Again it was demonstrated that the M-18 was much more versatile than the M-4 Tank and the TF and Team commanders called on them often when long distance, accurate fire was needed to eliminate German AT guns and road blocks.

FIRST SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE OPERATION - NOVEMBER 19 - 27, 1944

On Nov 19th the 10th AD pincers with the 6th AD was closed. CCA received new orders which required reversing their direction and moving north. After relieving TF Polk, a reinforced Armored Cavalry Group (Gp), they were to continue the attack to clear the Saar-Moselle Triangle and secure crossings over the SAAR

THE CAPTURE OF METZ



Courtesy: L.M. Nichols
Author of IMPACT.

River in the vicinity of SAARBURG. It was during this phase of combat that the 10th AD with the 609th units attached (atchd) gained the distinction of being the first THIRD Army unit to enter Germany.

While CCA and CCB were fully committed in the first phase of combat, other 10th AD combat and support units were occupying reserve positions in the vic of Kerling. CCR under the command of Col Gatchell, with Co B 609th atchd, prepared counterattack plans for a number of situations. Shortly after CCA received orders to relieve TF Polk, Co B was relieved from attachment to CCR and atchd to CCA. Co A was then atchd to CCR. In turn, Co B Pltns were atchd to each of the CCA Task Forces; one each to TF Chamberlain, TF Standish and TF Riley. On November 21, CCA began its assault on what was to become known as the famous "Switch" portion of the Siegfried Line. Initially, small gains were made, but it soon became evident that this was not an armored unit mission. Hindsight being 20/20, it was obvious that with a combination of poor mobility, poor visibility, extensive mine fields and tank obstacles and ditches that this was primarily an Infantry operation. Once the positions were penetrated, armored units could make a breakout.

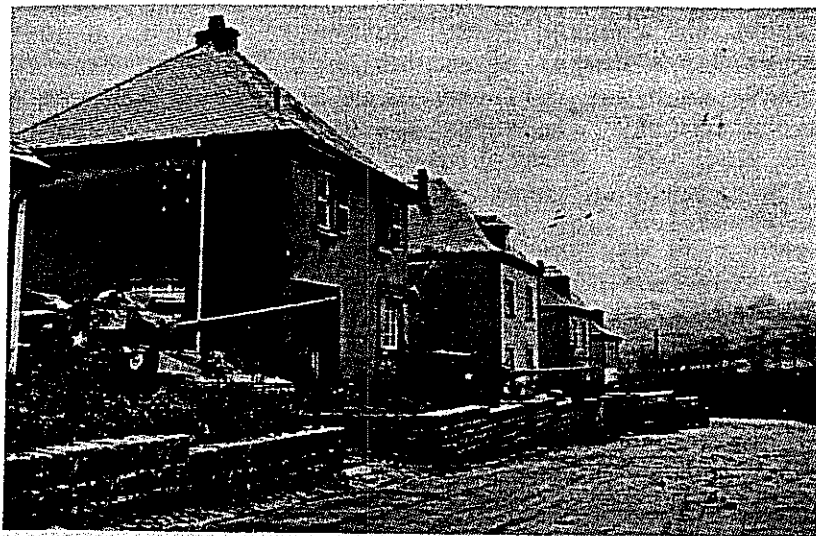
When it became apparent that CCA did not possess the number of Inf personnel for the task, 10th AD requested XX Corps for attachment of a Regimental Combat Team. The 358th RCT from the 90th Div was assigned the mission. Kicking off on Nov. 23d, (Thanksgiving Day) and for the next three days, the combination of CCA and the 358th was still not able to advance more than a few hundred yards. The laying of additional enemy mine fields and the use of heavy artillery concentrations further depleted the already drastically under strength Inf units. But a lesson was learned, although an expensive one. On another day and under different conditions the situation would be reversed. (Feb 1945).

American offensive operations against the Switch Line were halted and the big attack for a bridgehead at SAARBURG was abandoned by XX Corps. With attacks against the Saar Line further south by the 90th and 95th Divs going well, the Corps CG directed the 10th AD to move all units south and clear the zone west of the SAAR River adjacent to the left flank of the 90th Division. In the seven day period of supporting CCA and the 358th Regt, Co B 609th had damaged or destroyed over eight SP AT weapons, a dozen pillboxes, a large number of automatic weapons emplacements and killed or wounded an estimated 80 enemy personnel.

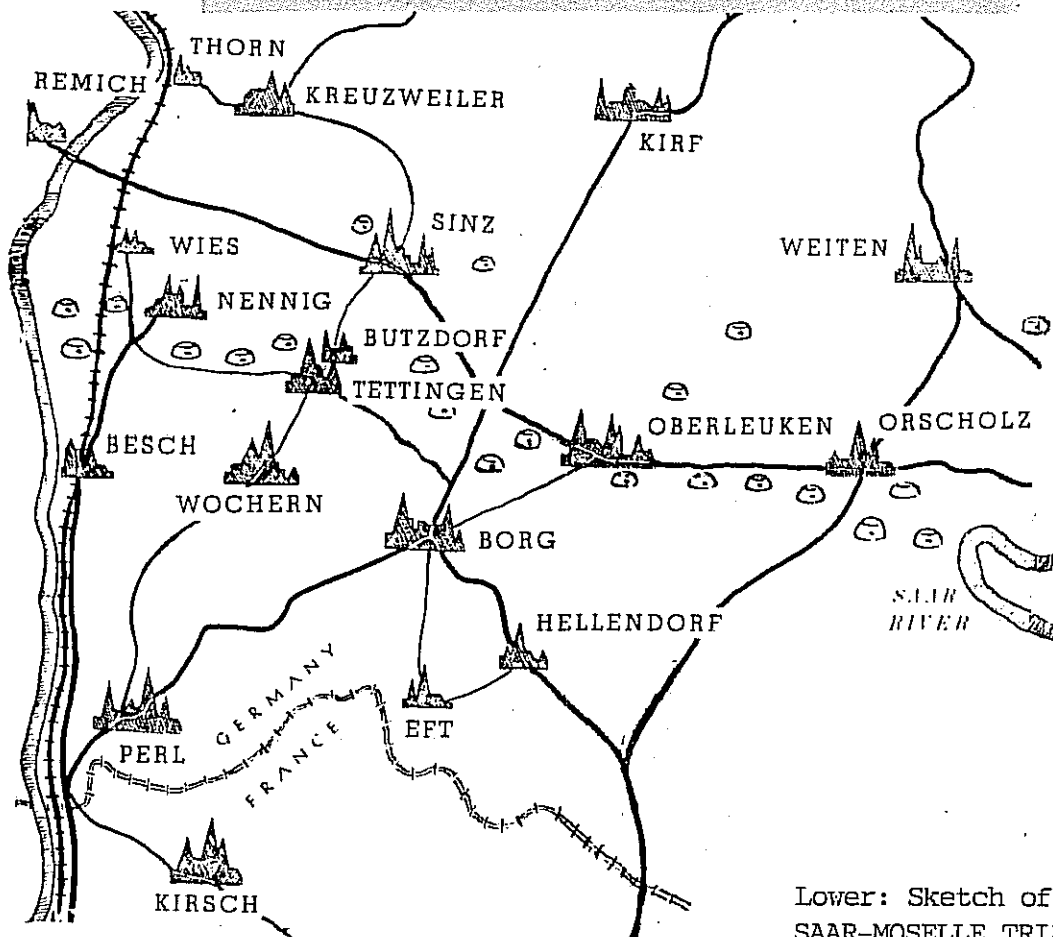
On November 27, TF Polk was once again brought into the triangle area and relieved CCA units in place. Co B, 609th was detached from CCA and atchd to TF Polk. This change dictated that Co B would occupy firing positions in the same area for a period of one month (Nov 21-Dec 21). However, the climate of support was entirely different. The Cavalry personnel were more daring and adventuresome, much of which was probably imbued in them by their experiences in chasing the Germans across France from Normandy. In any event, nightly patrol activity was common place and German reaction was expected in kind. In addition to normal defensive fire in support of the patrols, M-18 positions were often moved and harassing fire delivered on suspected weapons emplacements.

In the almost 12 mile front extending from the Tettingen-Besch area on the MOSELLE, to the Hilbringen-Merzig area on the SAAR River, TF Polk, consisting of two armored cavalry squadrons (sqdns), two assault gun trps, an Engineer Co and Co B 609th, performed a remarkable job of keeping the opposing German forces off balance. The constant movement of units and the continued harassing fires were intended to give the impression that the enemy was facing a much larger force. Further south, heavy Artillery concentrations by 10th AD were diversions for another purpose. On December 6, the 90th Div was preparing for another river crossing at DILLINGEN to secure a bridgehead east of the SAAR seven miles south of MERZIG. To mask this effort, 10th AD units along with Companies A and C, 609th in supporting roles, conducted a series of jabs and feints. In turn, they were shelled heavily by German Artillery and many casualties resulted.

IMPACT



German homes at Perl provide hiding place for 609th Tank Destroyers waiting to move up front



Lower: Sketch of
SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE
"SWITCH LINE"

Top: Photo Courtesy L.M. Nichols
Author of "IMPACT".

It is an interesting fact of life in combat that support units can always be kept busy even when the basic tank and inf units are taking a rest. This was the case in the last week of November and the first two weeks in December. 609th units together with the AA units and particularly Div Artillery participated continuously in some type of combat activity and made a creditable showing during their first five weeks of offensive combat. The full story of the 609th achievements cannot be fully realized from the histories written for and by the larger units. In the same vein, let it be noted that the 609th Rcn Co personnel, attached by Pltn and Section out to the line Companies, invariably performed their missions in an outstanding manner. Likewise, it is important to note that the Battalion Headquarters Company logistical, maintenance and administrative personnel put forth a tremendous effort to ensure the forward elements were properly supported. To further help in the effort, it was determined more "clout" was needed in the Bn Maintenance organization to deal more effectively with supporting maintenance echelons. The Bn CO directed the assignment of Capt Hank Haemmerlie as the Bn motor officer. While this move probably didn't "thrill" the officer concerned, it proved highly beneficial to the line units. Hank performed a superb job.

IV

BATTLE OF LUXEMBOURG AND BASTOGNE DEC 16 1944 - JAN 16 1945

ATTACK THROUGH THE ARDENNES - DECEMBER 16, 1944

Late in the afternoon of December 16, 1944, the Bn Executive Officer (XO), Major William F. Shotola, was directed to report to Gen Bradley's ARMY Gp Hq in LUXEMBOURG City along with representatives of other 10th AD commands. Gen Bradley and staff briefed about the Ardennes Offensive the Germans had just launched. When Maj Shotola rejoined the Bn late that evening, all 609th units minus Co B were alerted for immediate movement to Luxembourg along with the 10th AD. Upon reaching Luxembourg on December 17, CCB was directed to assemble in the vic of Merle as Div Reserve with Co C 609th atchd pending receipt of movement orders to BASTOGNE. Co A was directed to the vic of ETTELBRUCK and atchd to the 109th Inf Regt, 28th Div. Hq 609th moved to the town of MERSCH, Luxembourg and joined 10th AD Hq. 1st Pltn Co C, because of mechanical problems, was detached from it's parent company and atchd to CCR pending damage repairs. Meanwhile, CCA had received orders to continue to move north where it would support elements of the 4th Div, CCA of the 9th AD and 109th Inf Regt as required. These units were attempting to contain enemy forces which had forced crossings of the SURE River between ECHTERNACH and WALLENDORF at the confluence of the SURE and OUR Rivers. CCR, with 1st Pltn Co C and other combat and supporting units, was directed to move north behind CCA to assist in the containing action. On the morning of December 18, CCB was placed under Control of the Commanding General VIII Corps and directed to move immediately to the town of BASTOGNE.

When the German offensive started on December 16, FIRST Army units manning the line in the Luxembourg area vic of REMICH in the southeast corner to MAISCHEID on the OUR River in the north east corner, some 60 miles, were more or less in a state of transition. Normally this was a relatively quiet sector of the front and used by FIRST Army to rotate combat units through for rest, refit and rehabilitation. On occasion, it was also used for the combat indoctrination of new units. Such was the case on December 16. The front line in the Luxembourg area from north to south was manned by the newly arrived 106th Div; the 28th Div, a veteran organization recently rotated out of the Hurtgen Forest after heavy fighting; Combat Command A of the 9th AD, new on the line and the veteran 4th Div also recently pulled out of the Hurtgen Forest for refit.

The Ardennes Offensive caught everyone by surprise. In a short period of time units of the 106th Div were overrun. Losses in personnel and equipment were devastating and the Div was no longer a combat effective force. Two line Regts, 110th and 111th of the 28th Div were badly mauled and withdrew to the west by bits and pieces, some personnel eventually reaching BASTOGNE. The 109th Regt, southernmost of the three Regts, had suffered severe losses, but was still capable of holding a limited area. As the Germans advanced, it was forced to pull back south of the SURE River below a line from DIEKIRCH to ETTLEBRUCK on the left flank of CCA, 9th AD. The 4th Div covered an extended front from five miles west of ECHTERNACH to south of REMICH near the French-Luxembourg border, a distance of over 30 miles, most of it along the SURE and MOSELLE Rivers. This was the combat disposition in the area when the 10th AD (minus) reached the southern hinge of the Bulge on December 17, 1944.

DEFENSE OF LUXEMBOURG - DECEMBER 17, 1944 - JANUARY 10, 1945

CCA, composed of three TFs, closed rapidly on positions of the 12th Inf, 4th Div, and CCA, 9th AD in northeast Luxembourg. TF Chamberlain, first to arrive, was committed to the attack in the vic of MULLERTHAL where enemy forces posed the greatest threat to a breakout toward LUXEMBOURG City, 14 miles south. TF Standish attacked toward the town of BERDORF being threatened by a rapidly advancing enemy force and TF Riley moved in the direction of SCHEIDGEN and ECHTERNACH where "E" Co of the 12th Inf Regt was in danger of being cut-off. The commitment of CCA achieved the mission of stopping the enemy advance toward LUXEMBOURG City. However, little was accomplished in eliminating enemy positions which had penetrated about six miles south of the SURE River. Positions further to the west held by CCA, 9th AD and the 109th Inf Regt south of the SURE River, while constantly pressured, did not break.

During the period 18 to 27 December, units of the 609th in the area, consisting of Co A (reinf) and 1st Platoon Co C, were frequently shifted to the point of most danger. As mentioned earlier, Co A was committed to provide anti-tank capability for the 109th Regt in positions south and southwest of ETTELBRUCK. These positions were established to guard against possible enemy breakthrough along the Ettelbruck-Bastogne Road and the Ettelbruck-Luxembourg Road. The 1st Pltn Co C was used in this period somewhat like a fire brigade. On 18-19 December they were atchd to CCR; on December 20-22 to A Co, 20th Inf; on December 23-24 to Co C, 3d Tank Bn; on December 25-26 to CCA, 9th AD and on December 27 returned to Bn control at BERINGEN, Luxembourg.

Co B 609th, atchd to TF Polk since November 27 in the Saar-Moselle Triangle, continued the support role during the early stages of the Ardennes Offensive. As before, missions consisted of fire support of patrol activities, interdiction and harassing fire on suspected positions such as road intersections and troop concentrations. In the Hilbringen/Merzig area, extensive armor piercing and HE fire was placed on the Siegfried Line fortified positions.

On December 21, orders were received by TF Polk to release Co B from attachment and directed the unit to rejoin its parent Bn at MERSCH, Luxembourg. Co B departed the PERL area early on Dec 22. THIRD Army Military Police facilitated a smooth movement under very difficult conditions. After travelling 75 miles over icy and snow covered roads, they closed in MERSCH at 1930 hours. While elements of the Co serviced their equipment, a warm meal was prepared by the mess section, a real delight.

As this was taking place, the Co Commander was directed to report immediately to Colonel (Col) Rudder, CO of the 109th Inf, at his CP in STEGAN, Luxembourg. The blackout jeep trip of some eight miles was interrupted by encounters with Military Police check points on the lookout for German Airborne infiltrators. One needed to know baseball, football and other trivia to get by. At the operations meeting, Col Rudder wanted Co B to move immediately into uncharted defensive positions along a forest covered ridge south of the SURE River. After some discussion on the merits of prior reconnaissance and Inf support before moving armored vehicles into night positions it was agreed that "I don't care when you move, but I want your company in firing positions before daylight." As usual, the atchd Reconnaissance Pltn did a great job of supporting the Co. In later years when Co B Commander met Col Rudder at Texas A & M (then President of the college), they recalled the situation with less antagonism.

The firing positions selected were close to and overlooking the SURE River and the parallel road north of it which ran east and west from DIEKIRCH to ETTELBRUCK. The Co sector of responsibility covered an area from ETTELBRUCK eastward for about 4000 yards. Occupying this defensive position until after Christmas resulted in a lucrative harvest of German vehicles, equipment and personnel. Among those recorded were 3 MK IV Tanks, 3 APCs, 4 halftracks, 5 trucks, 4 Artillery pieces, 3 mortars and carriers, 4 wagons, 1 Storch Rcn aircraft with pilot, 2 captured US Assault Tanks, 2 German CPs with personnel, 18

bicycles and riders, and an overall estimate of 300 personnel killed or wounded. The Co expended 266 rds of 76 mm, and several thousand rounds of 30 and 50 caliber ammunition. The 2d Pltn Co B claimed to be the only TD unit to destroy an enemy aircraft with Pilot. Sgt Jordan's M-18 Crew with Cpl Tony Battaglia as gunner relished this distinction and bragging rights until Sgt Earl Miller's Crew with Elmer Brown as gunner repeated the act months later just south of Ulm.

On Dec 27 Companies A and B, the 1st Pltn of Co C, and Rcn Co (minus) were under 609th control at BERINGEN, Luxembourg. The Bn was atchd to 10th AD (minus) under operational control of XII Corps. During the period December 27, 1944 - January 10, 1945, 609th units in the Luxembourg area performed road and area rcn in rear areas of the front line divisions. Maintenance of personnel, vehicles and equipment was performed, as well as dental and other health checks.

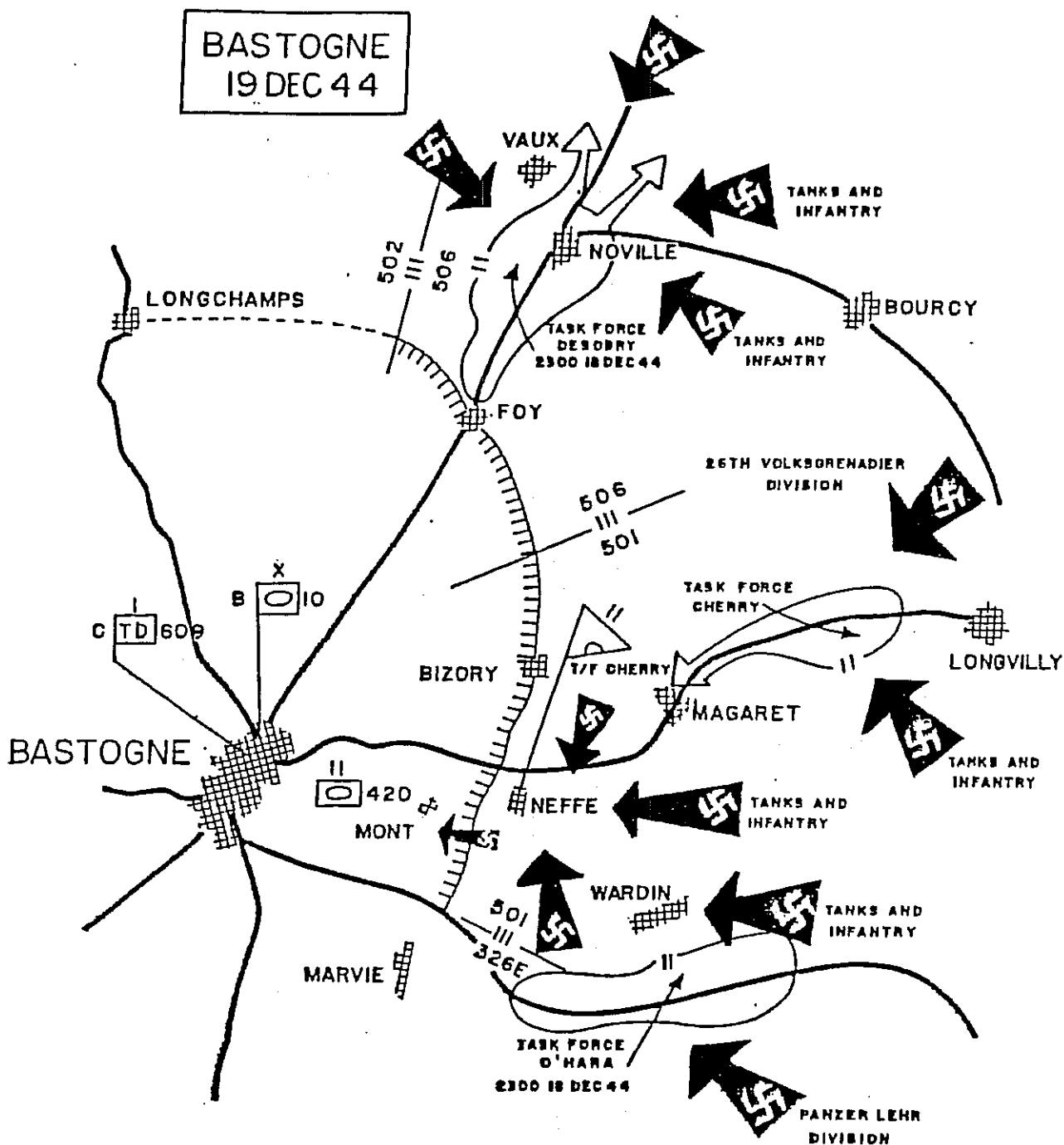
BASTOGNE - DECEMBER 18, 1944 - JANUARY 16, 1945

It was quite apparent to those who participated in the epic struggle for BASTOGNE that it was the greatest battle of WWII. While many veterans will argue the point, members of the 609th TD Bn agree that it was the most significant part of 609th operations during the "Battle of the Bulge". An Associated Press communique in December 1944 spelled out in detail the magnitude of the enemy's attack which hit CCB, 10th AD and it's atchd units of which Co C (less 1st Pltn), with 2d Pltn Rcn Co atchd, was a part. The communique stated: "powerful and aggressive enemy forces composed of elements of eight German Divs smashed headlong into Combat Command B of the 10th AD and its atchd units in the early hours of December 19, 1944. The bloody Bastogne epic rocked the entire world with its ominous outcome, for it was here that the enemy spearhead struck violently in an effort to capture the important Bastogne road junction, vital to the success later of capturing Antwerp, largest supply point for Allied troops on the western front."

Recalling earlier mention CCB, after arriving in Luxembourg on December 17, was placed in 10th AD reserve vic of MERLE. On the morning of December 18 a directive was received to move post haste to BASTOGNE. There was strong suspicion that the small Belgium town of BASTOGNE was to be a key point in the days ahead. It was in this vein that CG VIII Corps, Major General Middleton, stated in his directive to Col Roberts, CCB Commander, "When your troops arrive in BASTOGNE, place one third of your forces each in NOVILLE, LONGVILLY and BRAS". These towns were situated about seven kilometers from BASTOGNE on key roads leading in from the north, east and southeast and were excellent avenues of approach for German panzer forces. To secure these positions until the arrival of the 101st Abn Div was a large order, but by midnight of December 18, CCB was in position as directed. For the next three days, CCB accomplished its mission at all three locations causing significant time delays in the enemy's plans to capture BASTOGNE, while causing severe losses of personnel and equipment. However, this was not accomplished without considerable loss of friendly life and equipment.

A description of the action at NOVILLE exemplifies how the intrepid CCB units, assisted by Co C 609th and atchd units, played a significant role in the successful defense of BASTOGNE. The TF at NOVILLE, commanded by Major Desobry was composed initially of: The 20th Armored Inf Bn (less two Companies); Co B of the 3d Tank Bn - with 30 light and medium tanks; An Armored Engineer Pltn and a Rcn Pltn from the 90th Rcn Sqdn. The 3d Pltn Co C, 609th, joined the Team late in the evening of Dec 19th. Altogether the force totalled just over 400 men.

After setting his defenses at NOVILLE in the very late hours of Dec 18, Major Desobry waited for the Germans to arrive. A heavy fog lay over the area in the early hours of Dec 19th. At about noon the fog lifted and the defenders



Courtesy: L.M. Nichols
 Author of "IMPACT".

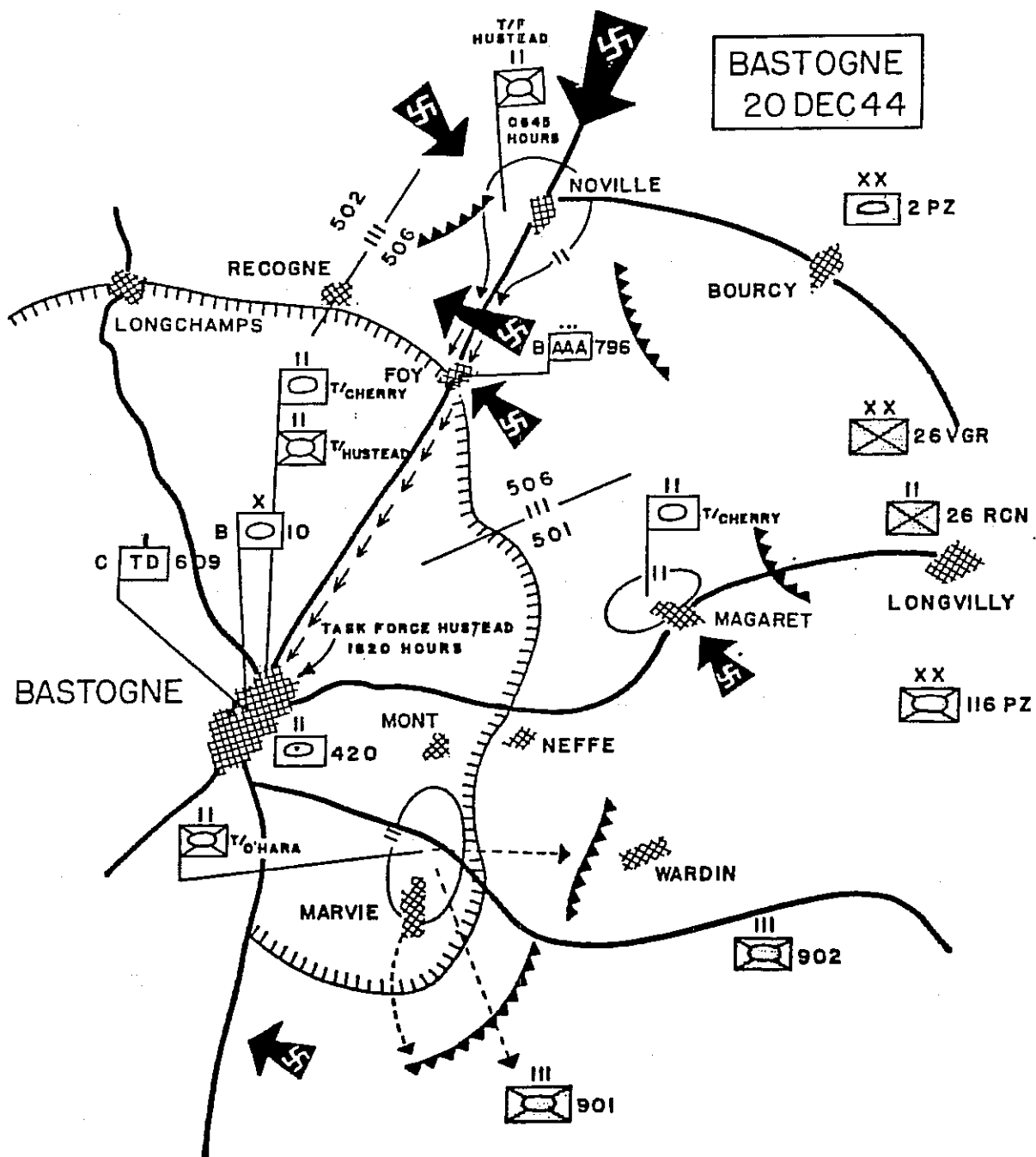
identified what appeared to be scouting elements in the distance. Desobry's roadblock forces at BOURCY, HOUFFALIZE and VAUX, small towns on the key roads leading to NOVILLE engaged the enemy causing them to withdraw. Stragglers from American units which had been overrun continued moving westward through the roadblock positions during the remainder of the 19th. Meanwhile, German Artillery, mortars and patrols continued to harass the strong points. Concentrations of American Artillery were directed at suspected enemy attack positions. But this was the quiet before the storm. All during the evening hours, the German fire continued and the sound of armor movement could be heard. More stragglers coming through Noville reported large concentrations of enemy armor and Inf assembling behind the high ground some two miles east of the blocking positions. Shortly, the 3d Pltn Co C 609th arrived from BASTOGNE to reinforce the AT capability of TF Desobry.

Early on Dec 20th German elements, consisting of two tanks supported by halftrack mounted Inf, approached the BOURCY and HOUFFALIZE roadblocks and fired flares to identify the forces located there. At HOUFFALIZE, two M-4 tanks occupying positions on the road were highlighted and quickly knocked out. The crews escaped leaving the disabled vehicles to block the German advance. Friendly Artillery concentrations and bazooka fire, together with a heavy fog, forced the enemy to pull back. Major Desobry called his roadblocks back to NOVILLE fearing they would be cut off. The confrontation between adversaries was soon to be unveiled. By 0800 German probing forces approached NOVILLE. Two enemy tanks reached the outskirts of town and were immediately destroyed by Inf bazookas. With the morning fog still close to the ground, other small elements of the enemy tried to penetrate the perimeter. But in each instance they were repelled.

Major Hustead, who assumed command of the TF when Major Desobry was seriously wounded during the night shelling of his CP, called on his forces to be vigilant when the fog lifted. Lt Dave Hagens, 3d Pltn Leader, had his M-18s move to preselected firing positions. At about 1300 hours the fog, like a huge stage curtain, lifted to expose a vast array of German armor. It was an awesome sight to see the many tanks within 200 yards of the small village. Fortunately, Hagens had placed his Pltn of four M-18s in excellent positions, especially the two commanded by Sgt Richard Beaster and Sgt John Pilon. As mentioned in many newspapers, magazines and book reports, it was like shooting ducks in a gallery. In a matter of minutes, Cpl Colby Ricker, gunner for Sgt Beaster's M-18, quickly knocked out five tanks and a short while later was credited with two more before their M-18 was hit. Other members of Beaster's crew were Pvt Pendziwater and Pvt Ellie McManus. Sgt Pilon's tank with Cpl Justin Double as gunner, accounted for another five tanks destroyed before the action abated. Other members of Pilon's crew were T/5 Robert Kurz, PFC Michael Hughes and Pvt Calvert.

The volume and accuracy of fire caused the German forces to withdraw, if only temporarily. Later, word was received from Reconnaissance forces and the 101st Abn units in FOY that enemy forces were attempting to bypass NOVILLE and assault friendly 101st Inf positions at FOY. This would cut the withdrawal route of Noville forces. Late on the afternoon of Dec 20th, Major Hustead requested permission to move his forces back to the rear of the Foy positions. The move was approved, but he was directed to continue back to the vic of BASTOGNE where his forces would become part of a central reserve force. Sergeant's Pilon and Duncan M-18s and the other armored vehicles of the 3d Pltn conducted the rear guard action as the TF literally had to fight their way back through enemy forces until clearing the 101st lines west of FOY.

Altogether, in the two plus days the TF was able to hold NOVILLE, over 31 German tanks plus an assortment of SP AT guns, halftracks and other enemy armor were destroyed. The small 609th Pltn accounted for 15 of the tanks with the loss of only one M-18. The 2d Pltn of Co C 609th supporting TF Cherry at the Longvilly blocking position also performed admirably in much the same aggressive way the 3d Pltn had at NOVILLE.



Courtesy: L.M. Nichols
Author of "IMPACT".

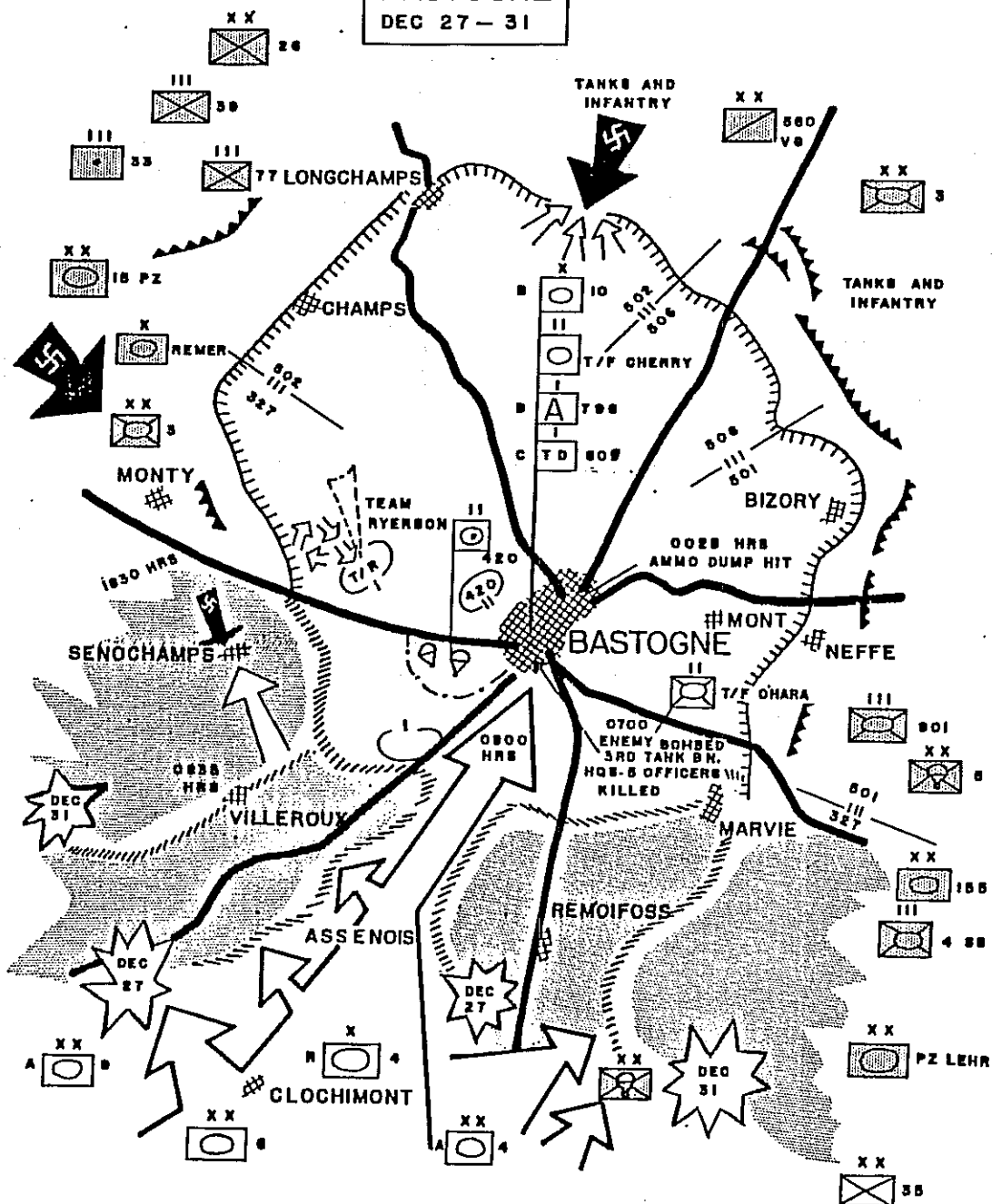
Following the "Nightmare Days" of December 19 and 20, CCB forces that had manned the Noville and Longvilly blocking positions were consolidated into a "Fire Brigade" under LtCol Hank Cherry. Made up of two teams, one commanded by Major Hustead and the other by Capt Ryerson of the 10th AD, this force constituted the Bastogne "Mobile Reserve". Its primary mission, during the remaining three weeks CCB and atchd troops were to be in BASTOGNE, was to counter any enemy attacks against 101st Div forces on the perimeter defense lines that could not be contained or repulsed by local forces. On Dec 28, after the road was opened to BASTOGNE, Lt Harris replaced Lt Gladden, 2d Pltn leader, who had received a concussion during heavy enemy shelling.

Co C 609, with attachments, when not participating with the "Fire Brigade", was atchd to and supported various Abn Bns of the 502d and 506th Airborne Regts. During these attachments, 2d Pltn Rcn Co participated in actions involving Rcn elements of the Bns while the Mortar sections joined Bn Mortar Pltns in providing support fires.

A consequence of the reaction of three CCB blocking positions to the enemy attacks was to successfully stem the enemy advance until the 101st Abn Div was able to place its available units on line and prepared to react to the German threat. Thus, CCB forces which had stopped the German 2d Panzer Div at NOVILLE and slowed up parts of three enemy Divs at LONGVILLY had bought, at high cost, the time needed for the 101st to organize and deploy a solid defense for BASTOGNE. Historians will recognize that without the determined stand by CCB east of BASTOGNE, the successful defense of the City would not have been possible. The writer also believes that when the full story of BASTOGNE is recounted, adequate evidence will reveal that Co C 609th TD Bn, with atchd units, will be accorded proper recognition for its significant contribution to the battle.

The official record of Co C during the Bastogne campaign reveals this small force destroyed 23 German tanks, 2 88mm A/T guns; 5 self-propelled AT vehicles; a number of command and supply vehicles, and accounted for approximately 300 enemy killed in action and a much larger number of wounded. Co C and atchd unit losses included: 3 M-18 TDs; 2 M-20 Armored Cars; 3 Jeeps; 1 2 1/2 ton truck; 1 LMG and 33 personnel killed, wounded or missing. (KIA 7; WIA 24; Missing 2).

DEC 27 - 31



Courtesy: L.M. Nichols
Author of "IMPACT".

V

CLEARING THE TRIANGLE AND ASSAULT ON SAAR DEFENSES

CLEARING THE TRIANGLE FEB 19 - 21, 1945

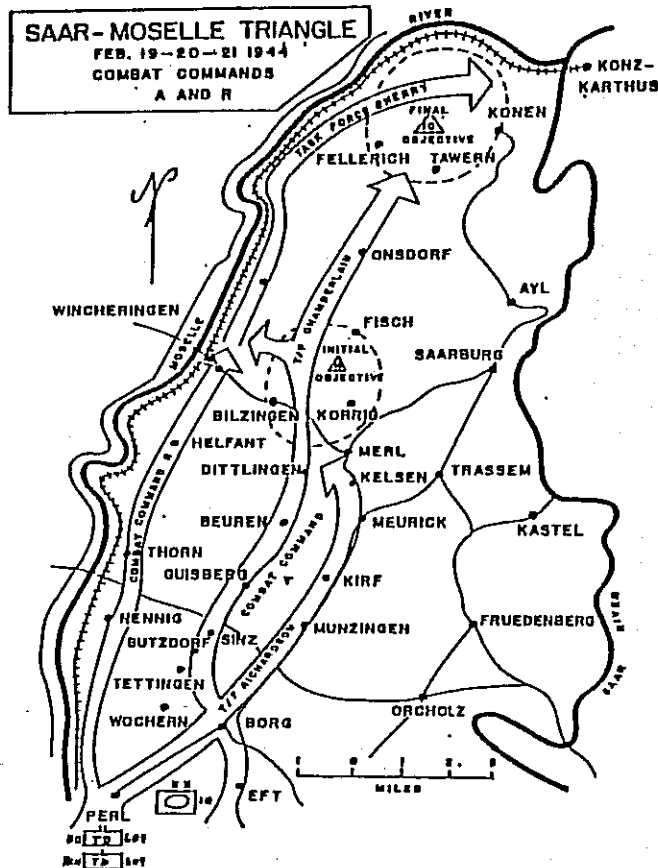
Now it can be told. On January 5, 1945, Major William F. Shotola assumed command of the 609th TD BN vice LtCol Roland A. Browne who assumed command of the 7th TD Gp. Upon completing its Battle of the Bulge assignment (except for CCB and attachments still in BASTOGNE), the 10th AD (minus) and attached elements relocated to the Metz area - only this time on the east side of the river and city. Initially under XV Corps, SEVENTH Army, the 10TH AD later reverted to XX Corps, THIRD Army control. Not yet announced, but in the planning stage was a second chance to crack the Saar-Moselle Triangle on the way to assaulting the Siegfried Line east of the SAAR River and the capture of TRIER. Subsequent fast moving operations would result in the complete defeat of Germany.

On January 11, 1945, the 609th TD Bn (minus Co C) was released from operational control of XII Corps in Luxembourg and reverted to control of the 10th AD (minus CCB) which was already in the Metz area. The Bn (minus) road marched from Luxembourg positions with Bn Hqs and attached units closing in COLLIGNY, France. Companies A and B moved to PANGE, France. 1st Pltn Co C, travelling with Bn Hqs would later relocate to the quaint village of VILLER-LA-QUENEXY. The movement was conducted in perhaps the coldest weather yet experienced in Europe. Most personnel could not get the chill from their bones for several days.

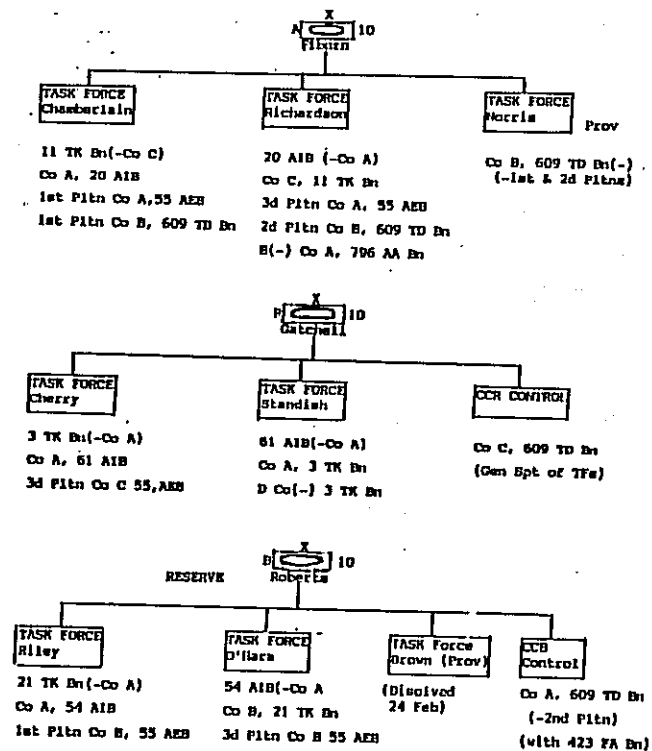
The short one week respite that followed, allowed Bn personnel to get caught up with letter writing and other niceties, plus the usual functions of maintaining equipment. Time was available for short visits to METZ and an inside view of some of the 35 forts and surrounding area the Bn had spent looking and firing at from positions to the west, particularly Fort Driant and Jeanne d' Arc. While gazing at this amazing stronghold, few men realized that on September 1 and 2, 1944 the 15th Cavalry Squadron THIRD Army, had penetrated the area east of the river and the city of METZ with little opposition only to be recalled to the main force positions west of the MOSELLE River because fuel and ammunition supply lines had run dry.

Upon spending the week of "leave", all 10th AD units were moved south and further east to positions in the XV Corps SEVENTH Army sector behind the 95th Div on line. The following changes to 609th attachments were made: Co A, with 3d Rcn Pltn was atchd to and joined with CCB vic BURBACK; Co B (minus 1st Pltn) atchd to and joined CCA vic HOLACOURT; 1st Pltn Co B, was atchd to TF Standish vic MERLEBACH; Co C, with 1st Pltn rejoined and 2d Rcn Pltn atchd, returned from Bastogne with CCB and closed initially at ST. JULIAN. The Co was then atchd CCR and moved vic BAMBIDERSTROFF. Each Bn unit and Bn Hq Co moved several times during the ensuing four weeks in the general area of DIEUZE, BURBACH, PUTTELANGE, FORBACK AND FAULQUEMONT. Officer patrols were initiated and conducted on a regular basis to reconnoiter routes and select unit positions in a wide area should German forces penetrate front line positions, particularly where newly arrived and inexperienced units were located.

Interspersed with this activity were training programs geared toward the coming offensive. One firing mission was conducted by 2d Pltn, Co B in support of a newly arrived Inf Regt (276th) in the vic of BOUSBACH. Lt Gray after conferring with the commander on the ground was given the mission of destroying a suspected enemy OP in a church steeple about 1500 yards away. Taking one destroyer, and knowing how the Germans would react, Lt Gray selected a firing position from



COMBAT ORGANIZATION
SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE



which the destroyer could exit promptly when the mission was accomplished. After firing 3 rounds of armor piercing and 7 rounds of HE ammunition and observing 10 hits, the target was destroyed, mission accomplished, the commander was satisfied and the destroyer departed the area. After travelling a short distance, they heard several incoming rounds. The newly arrived commander would learn a lesson - don't shoot at a church steeple unless you are prepared for an Artillery response.

What had been anticipated by many for several weeks, suddenly came to fruition. On Feb 9, orders were received attaching the Div to XX Corps, THIRD Army. By evening Feb 10, the Div had relocated to the north and east of METZ. The Saar-Moselle Triangle Offensive would kick off in the near future. It would be well to understand that this was not going to be a "cakewalk". A pet term of mine. The Saar-Moselle Triangle, as described earlier, is bordered on the east by the SAAR River and on the west by the MOSELLE River. At its base or on the south, it is crossed by an extensive line of fortifications called the Switch Line. completed in 1940, it was two kilometers in depth and composed of Tank traps, ditches, dragons teeth, concrete pillboxes and mine fields. Its purpose was to deny access to the high ground overlooking TRIER. Constructed in depth, it was intended to drain the attackers' strength to such a degree that the Germans waiting behind the fortification could make short work of any troops who might be able to penetrate. This was demonstrated in the futile Nov offensive operation. From its base to the confluence of the Saar-Moselle Rivers just south of TRIER, the Triangle is some 19 miles long and at its base along the Switch Line it is 9 1/2 miles wide.

To prepare for the arduous task ahead, a short but intensive training program was conducted. First, the basics of tank-infantry team training were demonstrated for the large number of Inf replacements received to fill the ranks of those lost during the Bulge fighting. Fortunately, a number of tough, experienced men were assigned from hospitals after recovering from wounds received in the "Market Garden" operation (the Airborne jump into Holland in August-September). These men learned well and later proved to be outstanding team members. Earlier, training had been conducted for replacement tankers. At the time Col Roberts of CCB, after his experience at BASTOGNE, convinced the Div CG, General Morris, it would be wise to use "The Deadeye" 609th TD "Sharpshooters" to assist in tank gunnery training for the new as well as the older tank crewmen. This was agreed to.

Meanwhile, when it was learned that the Corps Commander planned to use the 94th Div, now in the Triangle, to assist in punching a hole through the fortified line prior to the 10th AD jumping off, all subordinate commanders were in hearty agreement. At last, this was the proper method for conducting the assault on fortified positions.

The preliminaries were now over. The attack order had been received and the organization for combat was set. The Div would attack along two axis. CCA would be on the right, CCR on the left paralleling the MOSELLE River, and CCB in reserve. On the afternoon of February 19, the combat elements were moved north to assembly areas near PERL and BESCH.

As opposed to the abortive effort against the Switch Line in Nov 1944, this was a classic Armor-Inf-Artillery operation in the assault of a fortified position. The 376th Inf Regt, already on line and attacking, had the mission of punching a hole through the two kilometer deep Switch Line. When penetration had been achieved, the armor would effect the break through. The well conceived and brilliantly executed plan had the 376th Inf Regt, now atchd to the 10th AD, hold the shoulders open.

At 0700 hours Feb 20, CCA launched a two pronged attack. TF Richardson and TF Chamberlain of CCA shot through the break. The atchd Pltns of Co B played their part in silencing the AT guns present. The speed and violence of the attack was awesome. Lead elements covered some 19 miles and captured over 20 towns in

less than 36 hours. The TD units blasted the few tanks that stayed to fight while Artillery support placed heavy fire on all pockets of resistance. As the 10th AD forces slashed their way toward Div objectives on the northern part of the Saar-Moselle Triangle, the 376th Inf units moved rapidly to clear all bypassed resistance. The advance of CCA forces supported by the 376th was so rapid that CCR on the left and CCB following CCA had little in the way of action. As this phase moved to a conclusion, Col McClune of the 376th Inf Regt, received the following order; "The 376th will effect a crossing of the SAAR River vic of AYL and establish a bridgehead east of the River vic of OCKFEN. Time of crossing operation will be 0400 hours, Feb 22".

ASSAULT ON SAAR DEFENSES - FEBRUARY 22-26, 1945

As the last vestige of enemy resistance in the Triangle was being eliminated on Feb 21, the CO 376th was meeting with his subordinate commanders, including supporting unit COs, in the town of MANNEBACK to issue orders for the coming operation. As a support unit commander atchd to the 376th, the writer was one of those invited to attend the 8 PM meeting being held less than two miles from the proposed bridge site at AYL. The 3d and 1st Bns of the 376th in that order were to make the assault boat crossing. The SAAR River, some 150 feet wide and approximately 15 feet in depth, obviously could not be forded. Once the crossing was secured, an Army Pontoon Bridge Bn, assisted by the 55th Armored Engineer Bn, 10th AD, was to construct the bridge. A smoke generator unit would provide a smoke screen for the operation. Indirect fire support for the crossing included artillery from the 10th AD, the 94th Div and XX Corps. Initial heavy protective direct fires would be provided by Companies A and B, 609th from overwatching positions just west of AYL, and by Co C, 609th from the high ground just north of AYL. Concentration of these fires would be on the Siegfried Line pillboxes on the high ground east of the river and other German positions overlooking the proposed bridge site.

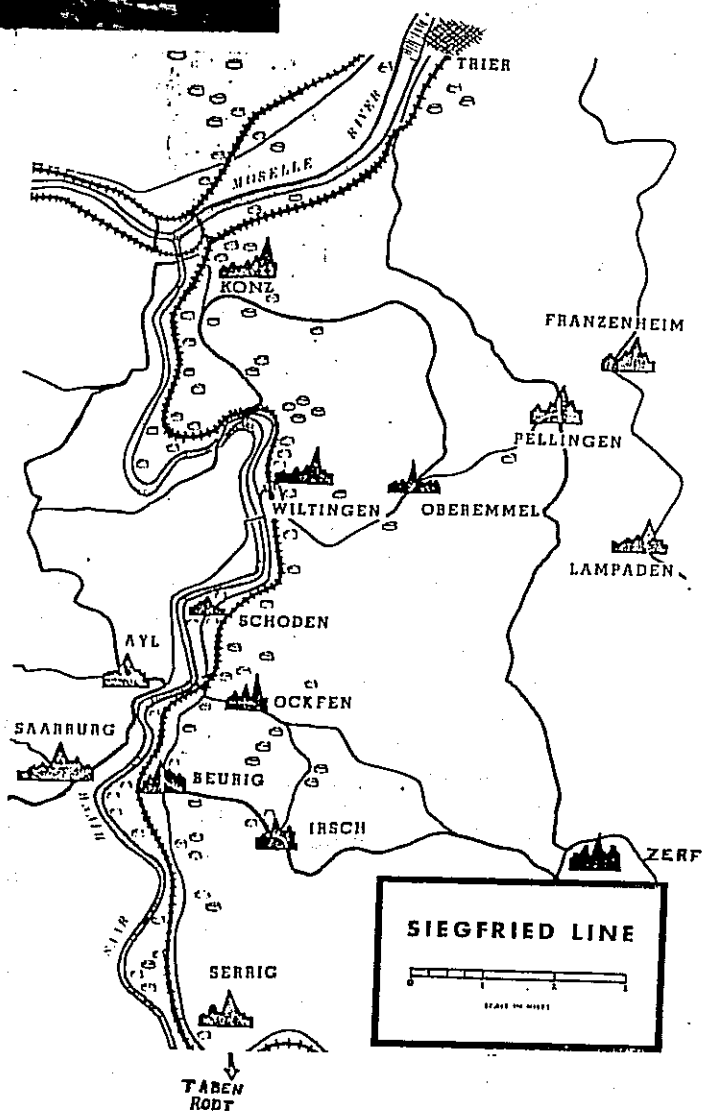
H-hour (0400 hrs) on the 22d arrived, but to the consternation of all, the Pontoon Bridge Bn was nowhere to be found. Frantic efforts to locate the unit were to no avail. Because of this delay, the element of surprise was lost and when daylight arrived many men were killed or wounded on the flat pasture land between AYL and the river. The smoke generator units efforts were only partially successful. Troops were withdrawn from the river line into covered positions until new plans were devised. After hours of delay and the preparation of new plans, it was decided to send two Bns of the 376th across the river, one at AYL and one 400 yds south. Attacking at midnight on the 22d, the assault boat crossing was completed in the very early hours of Feb 23. The bridgehead was established west of OCKFEN. The operation was successful, but enemy pressure in the bridgehead area east of the Saar was heavy and progress was slow. To speed up the attack, the CG 10th AD decided to commit his dismounted Armored Inf units as a TF under Brig Gen Piburn into the 376th bridgehead area. During the afternoon hours of Feb 24 and early hours of the 25th, under the protective smoke screening of the 81st Chemical Co, the three dismounted Armored Rifle Bns under heavy enemy fire crossed the river by assault boat to join the 376th in the bridgehead area. To provide Inf units in the bridgehead with armored support, 1st Pltn Co B, together with one Section of 1st Pltn Co A 609th, were floated across the river on makeshift rafts. This was a wise decision. These TDs provided strong fire support against enemy tanks and especially against the numerous pillboxes nearby.

Meanwhile, as a diversionary tactic, the Corps Commander directed the 94th Div, minus the 376 Inf Regt, to establish a bridgehead at TABEN-RODT eight miles south of AYL. The operation was so successful it was decided to erect a bridge there and move the 10th AD mounted units across to gain valuable time. While the dismounted elements were involved in enlarging the Ockfen bridgehead, tanks,



Sharpshooters of Co C 609th TD Bn convince residents of Wiltingen to surrender.

(Picture courtesy L.M. Nichols author of "IMPACT".)



halftracks and other armored vehicles were moved to the TABEN-RODT site and began crossing the SAAR on Feb 25. Once across the SAAR River, they moved rapidly north on the east side of the river to rejoin the dismounted armored Inf elements who had fought their way from the bridgehead southeast to the outskirts of IRSCH.

Once established in the Ockfen bridgehead, the Inf units of the 376th and 10th AD had to overcome heavy enemy firing from a great number of pillboxes located in that portion of the Siegfried Line east of the SAAR River. As mentioned earlier, the primary solution to this problem was the continuous direct fire provided by the guns of the 609th. From the west side of the River, Co C provided direct fire support for the 376th Inf pushing north along the high ground east of the River. During this phase of operations, numerous pillboxes were destroyed or their occupants surrendered. This extensive pillbox battle continued for several days as the 376th and the dismounted 10th AD Inf units were committed to reducing the Siegfried Line positions east of the Saar. Co C 609th (minus) continued to provide outstanding direct fire support for the 376th units until they were well north of WILTINGEN. It was during one of these firing missions on Feb 24th, that a 76mm gun experienced a muzzle burst resulting in the untimely death of Sgt Richard Woodford (Rcn) and PFC Carl Lloyd (Co C) who were occupying an OP just forward of the gun positions. Eventually, engineer units were charged with the mission of blowing up the pillbox structures after they had been sealed and abandoned.

The greatest remaining action to be accomplished in consolidating positions east of the Saar before jumping off in the attack on TRIER, was securing the town of IRSCH, three miles east of the river, and the railhead center of ZERF seven miles east of IRSCH. Accomplishing this required the concentrated effort of a Combat Command with three Bns of dismounted Inf at IRSCH alone. At ZERF the Germans had massed several Bns of Artillery and numerous AT guns to cover the Siegfried Line positions at IRSCH. 10th AD casualties were heavy, but the German losses were extensive with hundreds killed and wounded and over 500 prisoners taken. LtCol Standish, one of the top Inf officers in the 10th AD, was killed in this action. The town of ZERF was next and it was even a tougher nut to crack.

Opposed by the 416th Volksgrenadier Div, the 10th AD units lost five tanks and several personnel killed and wounded before TFs Riley and Richardson with 2d and 3d Pltns of Co A, atchd and TFs Chamberlain and O'Hara, with 1st and 2d Pltns, Co B atchd were able to reach the western approaches to the town. There they encountered mine fields and received AT fire from enemy units on the dominating high ground, as well as unusually heavy Artillery fire. After the Inf and Engr units cleared lanes through the mines fields, the TD units moved to positions on the high ground west of ZERF and NIEDERZERF and for an extended period placed a heavy concentration of fire on the many AT weapons and personnel located there. In one action alone, a Pltn of Co A destroyed a battery of four 88mm AT weapons. While this operation on Feb 26th was highly successful in driving the German forces from the ZERF and NIEDERZERF strong points, again it was not attained without significant losses in personnel and equipment. Lt Townsend from Co A and Lt Ed Gray from Co B and several EM were wounded. The fighting at IRSCH and ZERF was characterized as being as fierce as some of that at BASTOGNE. This was attested to by the large number of losses in personnel and equipment suffered on both sides.

While heavy fighting was taking place in the IRSCH and ZERF area, Inf from the 376th Regt was still clearing the Siegfried Line fortifications along the east bank of the Saar River. Co C 609th, had the mission of providing direct fire support for these operations. In the course of this support over 40 pillboxes were destroyed or neutralized.

Important lessons were learned or relearned from the Saar-Moselle Triangle and the Saar River crossing operations. An attack through a fortified position entails very deliberate planning and violent execution when armored units are involved. Sufficient Inf must be available to punch a hole in the enemy line after which the armor can move through rapidly and exploit the rupture. This formula was used in the attack of Feb 20. However, in the Saar River crossing operation planned for Feb 22, no detail should have been left to chance. If positive coordination measures and redundancy had been used, the bridging would not have been lost. An organization such as a bridge unit involved in a highly critical operation, not familiar with the area, and moving under black out conditions, must receive greater attention from the support unit than the one officer and his driver that was provided. In this instance many lives would have been saved and the momentum of the attack maintained. The 10th AD could have been in TRIER at least two, possibly three, days sooner.

VI

CAPTURE OF TRIER AND SWEEP TO THE RHINE

CAPTURE OF TRIER FEB 27 - MARCH 2, 1945

On Feb 27, the 10th AD, after consolidating the Saar bridgehead and temporarily securing the railroad complex at ZERF, set in motion its plans for a rapid capture of TRIER. There was greater urgency to this than met the eye. General Patton had "borrowed" the 10th AD which was at that time part of the Strategic Reserve for Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), on the basis of being able to release it on short notice. The bridging fiasco had already dug into the borrowed time. The organization for combat was much the same as that used in the Saar-Moselle Triangle operation. CCA with TF Chamberlain leading was to attack in the left sector of the Div zone. The TF when reaching TRIER would attack the city from the south. Initially, TF Richardson of CCA was to establish mobile defense positions on the high ground west of ZERF, to protect the Div flank in that area from strong enemy forces known to be located east of the railhead complex. When released from this mission, the TF was to move north on order and attack TRIER from the southeast. CCB with TF O'Hara leading, had the mission of attacking north in the Div right sector and assaulting TRIER from the east. CCR with TF Cherry leading was to follow CCB and upon clearing the Zerf complex move to the Div right flank, maintaining contact with CCB and attack TRIER from the northeast.

The distance north from the Irsch-Zerf area to TRIER was about 12 miles, but it traversed mostly open, rolling and sometimes steep terrain. Width of the zone of operations extended in some places eight to 10 miles, gradually narrowing as one reached the vic of TRIER. Initially the SAAR and later the MOSEL Rivers served as the left boundary, while a mainline railroad running north and south through the town of RUWER five miles northeast of TRIER to ZERF served as the right boundary. When the MOSELLE River passes from France to Germany, the spelling of the name changes to MOSEL.

Jumping off in the attack on Feb 27, CCA led by TF Chamberlain, with 1st Pltn Co B atchd, made good progress north on the main road toward PELLINGEN. CCB, with TF O'Hara leading and 2d Pltn Co B atchd followed TF Chamberlain. At a sharp turn where the IRSCH-ZERF road swings north to PELLINGEN, TF O'Hara's units came under murderous 88mm and 75mm AT fire from the high ground to the east. For several hours this fire exacted a heavy toll of vehicles and personnel. It was here that this writer, located about 200 yards south of the corner, observed Lt Pat Troy of Rcn Co, with complete disregard for his own safety, pull two men from a 1/4 ton vehicle that had been hit and carry them to safety in a nearby ditch shielded from enemy fire.

During the heavy antitank and Artillery fire on the 27th, LtCol O'Hara was wounded and replaced by Major Haskell, Bn Executive, who led the CCB attack on TRIER. Late on Feb 28, TF Riley of CCB, with 3d Pltn Co A atchd, took off straight north in the Div sector between TFs Chamberlain and Haskell's forces. By 0700 on Mar 1, Riley's forces encountered stiff enemy resistance in the form of direct AT fire and time fire from German artillery while completely exposed on an open hill. In addition to the heavy damage inflicted on Riley's tank and Inf units, the 3d Pltn Co A, lost three M-18s, two of which burned. Three crew members; Sgt Newman, Cpl Carroll and PFC Bennett received serious burn injuries. The Pltn was returned to BEURIG for re-equipping. Meanwhile on March 1st TFs Chamberlain, Haskell and Richardson, pushed ahead with the attack. TF

Chamberlain's force after seizing PELLINGEN on Feb 28 was directed to turn left and seize KONZ KARTHUS at the confluence of the SAAR and the MOSEL Rivers. TF Haskell, with Team Lang leading, pushed forward aggressively in the CCB sector on the Div right and TF Richardson, with 2d Pltn Co A atchd, moved from the role of Mobile Reserve at ZERF and attacked quickly up the center of the Div sector.

The Div was now in the classic Armor offensive formation with CCA attacking up the left avenue of approach, CCB attacking up the right avenue of approach and a TF up the center. Strong German resistance, generally in the form of heavy AT and Artillery fire, blocked the advance at every opportunity. Many Teams lost 50% or more of their tanks. In spite of this resistance all units continued to push on. A case in point was CCB TF Haskell. On Mar 1st, Team Lang deployed with one tank as the spearhead followed by the four M-18s of 2d Pltn Co B. As the force moved around Hill 427, just southeast of TRIER, they were confronted by a large force of 88mm AT guns and a number of 20mm horizontal Flak guns. The spearhead tank of Lang's force was promptly knocked out. The TD Pltn deployed immediately and in the ensuing fire fight completely destroyed the enemy force. The Pltn was flushed with victory, but it was during this action that Sgt Nelson "Pop" Wilson was killed. Pop was believed to be the oldest member of the Bn serving with a combat Pltn. Before moving on toward TRIER, the Team counted nine 88mm AT guns, five 20mm AA guns (multiple mounts) one halftrack, one 20mm AA gun (towed) and one Bn Fire Direction center complete. Also, before reaching TRIER, this same Pltn flushed out personnel of the antitank unit and those from a retreating Field Artillery unit. 474 prisoners were added to the POW cages.

By early morning, Mar 2, 1945, 10th AD elements under TF Richardson, with 2d Pltn Co A, crashed through remaining German forces and sped through TRIER to capture the 2000 year old "ROMER" Bridge intact signaling the end of organized resistance in TRIER. A summary of all sources received/reviewed by this writer, (from eye witnesses, participants, casualties and documents) indicates that the fighting in the ZERF-IRSCH area and on the approaches to TRIER involved combat intensity overshadowed only by BASTOGNE and equal to that at CRAILSHEIM later in April.

In summarizing the attack to capture TRIER, it is readily apparent that 609th units figured prominently in the fighting. While there weren't a great number of enemy tanks involved (three knocked out), the presence and actions of the large number of German AT weapons was awesome. Records available and eye witness reports substantiated the destruction of some 25 AT weapons of all types. The ability of the Pltns to accomplish these results was enhanced significantly by the support of atchd Rcn Co units and Company and Battalion maintenance and logistical elements. During this period, 1st and 2d Pltns Co C in support of 376th Inf Regt driving north against Siegfried Line positions east of the SAAR claimed penetration of another 29 pillboxes bringing to 69 the number penetrated by Co C since the SAAR River operations started on Feb 22.

In researching the TRIER operation it was also surprising to learn of (1) The varied number of 609th Pltns that participated in the attack on and defense of the "ROMER" Bridge and (2) "Trivia" "Who discovered the huge Champagne Celler in Trier?" No fewer than four 609th Pltns lay claim to having found it. There is a strong feeling here that an awful lot of men -- many more than were in the 609th, wish it had never been found. One large group was the many correspondents who were either given or procured for themselves the merchandise located on the upper three or four floors where the new or "green" champagne was stored. Those who had the knowledge or willpower to descend deep into the bowels of the building found excellent champagne.

THE EHRANG-WITTLICK OPERATION - MAR 3 - 12, 1945

With capture of its first major city in Germany and the unexpected capture of a bridge intact over the MOSEL River, THIRD Army in a jubilant mood directed XX Corps to "test the waters" and see if a sudden dash up the MOSEL gorge would achieve a breakthrough toward COBLENZ or provide the opportunity to seize a bridge over the MOSEL in the ZELL area. The latter option could provide a spring board for an envelopment of the German forces west of the Rhine. With that in mind, XX Corps directed the 10th AD to seize Wittlick some 30 miles to the Northeast. For the 609th units, the next eight or nine days would see a "hodge-podge" of assignments. Co A units would support: CCB elements, 90th Rcn Sqdn and 19th Cav Sqdn of the 16th Cav Gp; Co B units would support CCA elements, (i.e. TFs Cherry, Riley and Hankins), 3d Bn 417th Inf RCT, 76th Div and Team Davis, CCR; Company C units would be atchd to: 376th Inf Regt, CCR, 90th Rcn Sqdn, 417th Inf RCT of the 76 Div, CCB (TF Haskell), Div Artillery, 3d and 43rd Cav Sqdns.

The original Div plan of attack to seize WITTLICH involved CCA and CCB astride the MOSEL River. But problems with this plan quickly surfaced when CCA ran into difficulties getting across the RUWER River to the east of the MOSEL on Mar 4th and 5th. CCB ran into trouble at EHRANG when they found the KYLE River bridges blown. On Mar 6th, the Div plan of attack was changed. CCB, with Co A 609th atchd, continued to pressure enemy forces at EHRANG while Div Engineers were bridging the KYLE River. Meanwhile, CCA with TFs Cherry, Riley, and Hankins in that order crossed the ROMER Bridge on Mar 7th and attacked north. Bypassing CCB to the left, CCA forces crossed the KYLE River several miles north of EHRANG courtesy of the 76th Div. TF Cherry with 1st Pltn Co B atchd, moved rapidly to the northeast reaching a point six miles from WITTLICK by the end of Mar 8. During this 24 mile dash, 1st Pltn destroyed two MK V tanks, one 88mm towed AT gun, 1 halftrack and a small ammo dump. TFs Riley with 2d Pltn Co B atchd and Hankins had a relatively free ride.

The Ruwer area south of the MOSEL was still being contested by the 417 Regt, 76th Div, an action supported by the 3d Pltn Co B and the 2d Pltn Co C. These Pltns provided the Inf unit with covering fire in their assault on German positions northeast of RUWER. On Mar 7, 3d Pltn Co B received heavy mortar and artillery fire on their position resulting in wounds to Pfc Buttone, Pvt Carl Thompson and Pvt B. Thompson. On Mar 10, an exchange of tank fire resulted in the death of Pltn Sgt John "Red" Maher, one of the most popular soldiers in Co B. Sgt Steffen's crew, with Cpl Stamm as gunner, destroyed the German MK V involved.

At EHRANG during the period 7 through 9 Mar, Co A, less 2d Pltn atchd to C troop, 90th Rcn Sqdn providing flank protection, and Co C, less 2d Pltn atchd to 417th Inf, supported CCB and CCR respectively in performing clearing actions. On 8 and 9 Mar, TF Haskell, with 1st Pltn Co C atchd, crossed the new bridge at EHRANG and commenced clearing action at SCHWEICH and ISSEL. Opposition involved mainly sniper, Artillery and AT fire. On Mar 10 at WITTLICK, CCA units had seized and outposted the town. While TF Riley secured WITTLICK, TFs Cherry and Hankins, with 1st and 2d Pltns Co B atchd, moved rapidly toward BULLAY 12 miles distant in hopes of capturing a bridge over the MOSEL, but the Germans blew the structure as they neared the town. With this frustration, the Wittlick-Bullay operation was terminated. CCA 10th AD was directed to return to TRIER and prepare for the upcoming attack across the PALATINATE scheduled to kick off on Mar 16. But it was not yet time for the 609th to depart the greater Trier area.

SWEEP TO THE RHINE 13 - 24 MARCH 1945

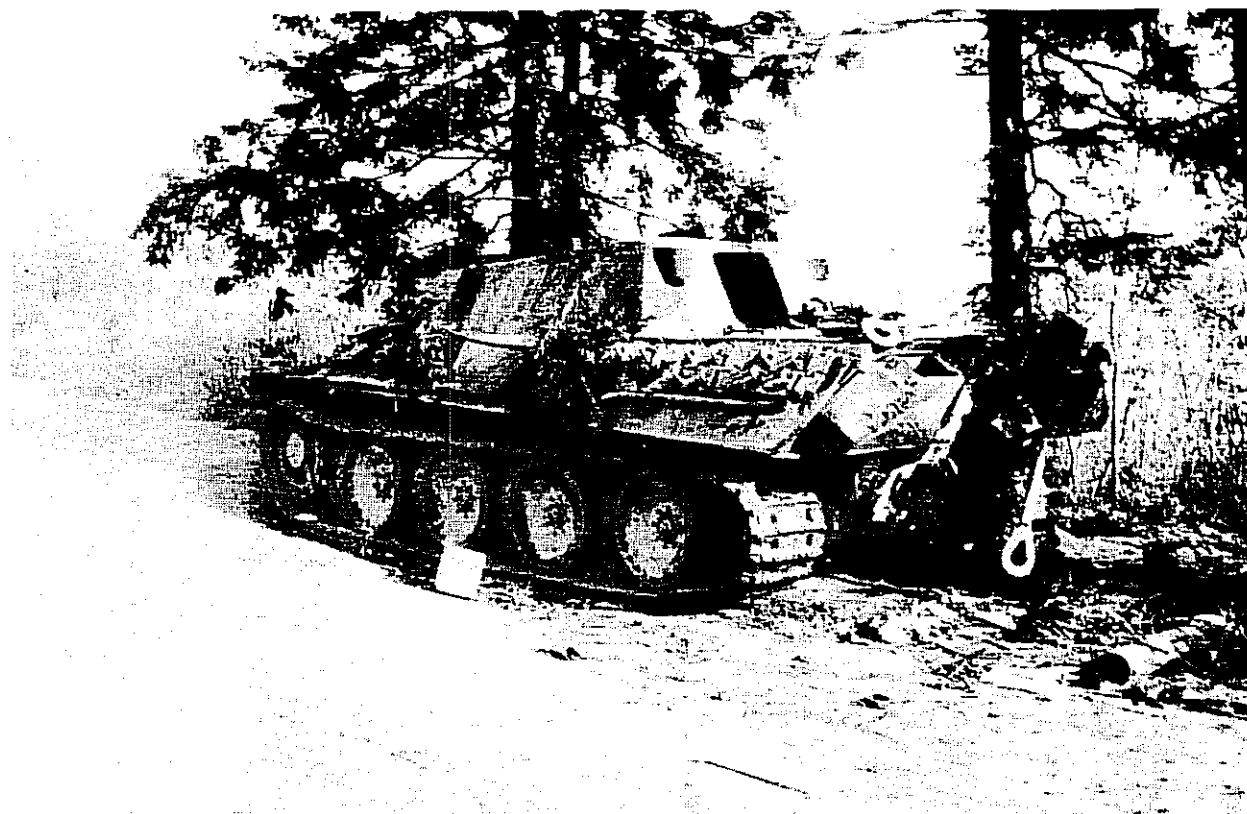
With the Wittlich Operation now complete and the 10th AD preparing for the coming offensive through the PALATINATE to the RHINE on Mar 16, 609th units prepared for a new venture. Actually it had already begun, when Co A was relieved

from attachment to 10th AD and atchd to the 3d Cav Group on Mar 10. On Mar 12, Co C 609th was also atchd to the 3d Cav Gp less 2d Pltn still atchd to the 417th Inf Regt. On Mar 13, Hq 609th was relieved from attachment to the 10th AD, and atchd to the 316th Provisional Cavalry Brigade (316th Cav Bde). The 316th Cav Bde, a hybrid organization, was presumably established by THIRD Army, among other reasons, to give Col James Polk a promotional vacancy. Col Polk a long time favorite of General Patton, was well qualified and extremely deserving of General Officer rank. However, in a more practical and operational sense, there was a definite need for a highly mobile, hard hitting organization to provide flank and rear area security during the coming offensive operations. This was to be a large coordinated offensive involving most American forces on the Western Front and would entail for the first time extensive operations within the German homeland. In the typical armor type operation over extended distances, pockets of resistance are often bypassed for the benefits to be derived from the shock action and confusion they cause the enemy forces against whom they are advancing. It is left to the follow-up units to erase these pockets or as in the case of the Cav organizations, to neutralize and eliminate any threat personnel in these pockets might have on friendly rear area logistical installations.

It was this mission that was performed by the 316th Cav Bde during the period Mar 11 to Mar 16 while the 10th AD was making preparations for the PALATINATE offensive. After the big offensive started, the 316th was dissolved on Mar 17th and the 3d Cav Group was moved south to the Saarlautern area to protect vital THIRD Army and XX Corps rear area installations. (The 16th Cav Group would then assume the XX Corps north flank mission with the 609th atchd). With this insight into future events, a brief picture of the Bde organization would be helpful. The 316th Cav Bde was composed of the 3d Cav Gp, made up of the 3d and 43d Cav Sqdns, and the 16th Cav Gp, made up of the 16th and 19th Cav Sqdns. Col James Polk, CO of the 3d Cav Gp was the senior officer and became the 316th Cav Bde CO.

This was the organization the 609th joined when Co A and Co C were atchd to the 3d Cav Gp on Mar 11. Co A (minus 3d Pltn) was atchd to the 43d Cav Sqdn and the 3d Pltn was atchd to the 19th Sqdn. Co C (minus 2d Pltn) was atchd to the 3d Cav Sqdn. The 2d Pltn was to be detached from the 417th Inf Regt and would join the 43d Cav Sqdn next morning. No significant actions occurred on the 11th. However, on the morning of the 12th, the 2d Pltn Co C after joining the 43d, was given the mission, together with a Light Tank Pltn from F troop (Trp), to move from the town of MERTESDORF to the town of KASEL and establish roadblocks. While moving along the route to KASEL a small town northeast of TRIER, the first of three tanks from the F Trp Pltn which was leading, struck a land mine and was immobilized. Enemy AT guns opened fire immediately on the column. The first and third M-18 destroyers were hit after one got off one round of HE at the flash from the enemy gun. The second and fourth destroyers attempted to maneuver, but the area was too restricted and they too were hit. Two M-18s burned and two were immobilized. Two of the Cav tanks were destroyed in place and the third destroyed by the crew when it would no longer operate. The 2d Pltn Co C, lost Sgt James McMonagle, Cpl Clem Hutchinson, T/5 Ralph Gray and T/5 John Cojetsky killed and S/Sgt Floyd Suber and Cpl Rudolph Eigenrauch wounded. All other personnel, including Lt Gladden, Pltn Leader, escaped and made their way back to Co control and returned to TRIER for resupply of vehicles and personal equipment.

On Mar 13, 3d Pltn Co C atchd to Trp C, 3d Cav in the vicinity of FELL, a small German Town near TRIER, while occupying blocking positions came under intense mortar and artillery fire. They were then attacked by three enemy tanks and an estimated fifty Inf. The attack was repulsed with one MK IV tank destroyed, 19 enemy known killed and 3 POWs taken. One Officer, Lt Davidson, was

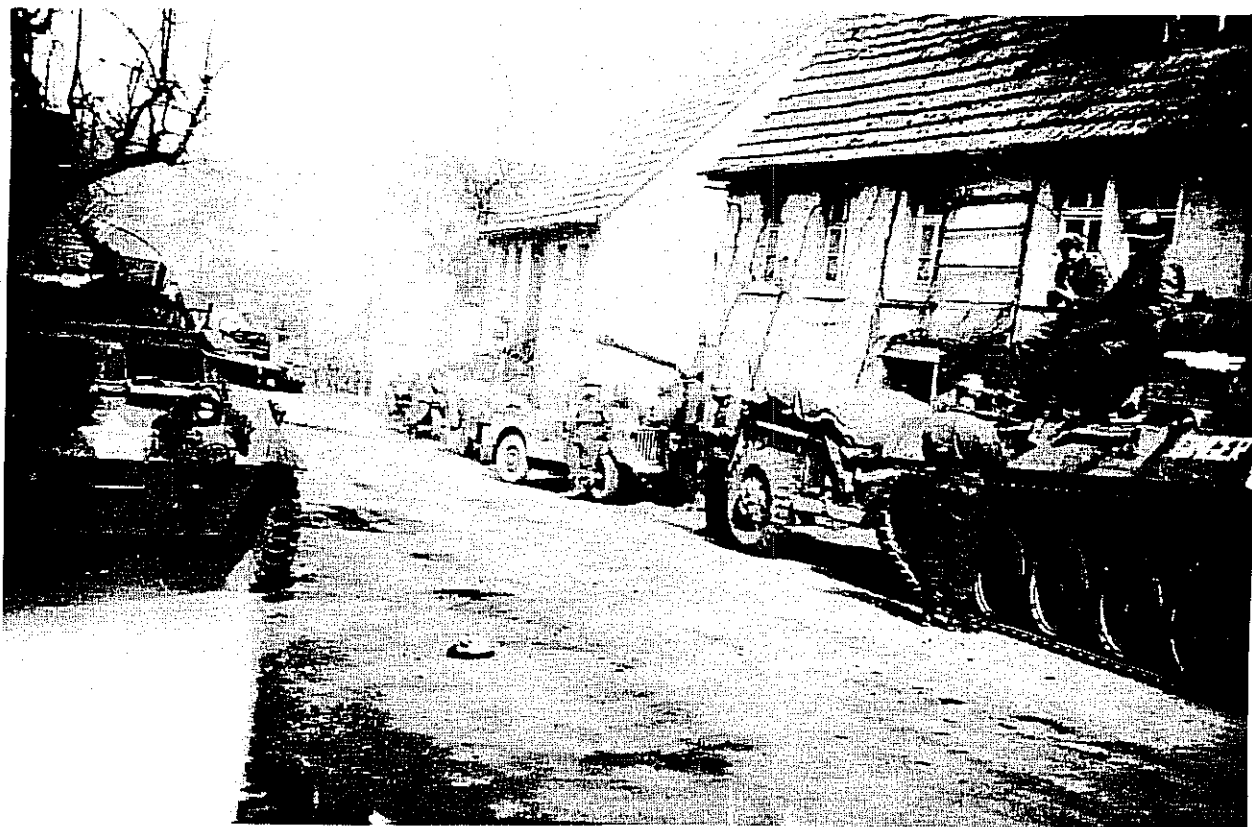


Many that didn't get away ↓

East of TRIER. ↑ One that didn't get away.
March, 1945.



Near IDAR-OBERSTEIN, GERMANY.



Crossing the PALATINATE near KAISERSLAUTERN. Rejoining the 10th.



Left: German supply column wrecked at BAD DURKHEIM.
Right: 609th M-18 Tank Destroyer "Clearing the Way".

Lower Photos
Courtesy: L.M. Nichols
Author of IMPACT.

killed instantly by enemy Artillery fire, and two EM wounded. Sgt John Pilon was cited for his bravery and leadership in this action by the CO, 3d Cav Sqdn. Later, he was awarded a Silver Star.

With increased enemy activity in the 3d Cav Sqdn area, Rcn Co, 609th had its first opportunity to perform as a complete unit. On Mar 13, with all Pltns under Co control, the unit moved to the town of KENN prepared to relieve elements of the 43d Cav Sqdn located in the 3d Cav Sqdn area. Rcn Co Command Post was co-located and operated with Trp A, 3d Cav Sqdn. The 2d and 3d Rcn Pltns established roadblocks with Co mortar Sections in supporting roles. Pltns conducted aggressive reconnaissance and patrolling in their assigned sectors. Rcn Co operated in this role until relieved and returned to Bn control on Mar 15th. Enemy activity subsided on Mar 14 and 15 with only minor action recorded in all Co areas.

On Mar 16, 1st and 2d Pltns, Co B atchd to A and C Trps, 43d Cav Sqdn moved to REINSFELD and jumped off in an attack toward the town of POLERT. The Pltns were instrumental in knocking out one MK IV tank and one 50mm AT gun. Another 50 mm AT gun was captured by dismounted personnel and later destroyed. In the vic of POLERT, two Nebelwerfers and one Command car were destroyed. During the course of the attack, the Pltns penetrated a total of five pillboxes with an estimated 6 enemy killed and 11 POWs taken. The 1st Section of the 1st Rcn Pltn captured one enemy Officer and 27 enlisted men in the vic of POLERT. Meanwhile, 3d Pltn Co B, atchd to the 19th Cav Sqdn, participated in an attack on the town of COBURG with D and F Trps. The Pltn neutralized three pillboxes during the attack and the town was occupied.

During the period Mar 17 - 20, enemy resistance began to crumble as effects of the XX Corps offensive were felt. Soon the advancing units found the main routes so cluttered with destroyed enemy vehicles and equipment that movement was restricted. It seemed the Air Corps fighter bombers were having a field day over the retreating enemy columns. On Mar 22, after the Bn CP had moved to WIRSCHWEILER, the 609th received orders to rejoin the 3d Cav Group at SAARLAUTERN. Co B, which had reached IDAR-OBERSTEIN some 35 miles east of TRIER, Co A at MORBACH, and Co C at SENSWEILLER, received orders to halt in place and prepare their units for movement to the vic SAARLAUTERN by way of MERZIG and BOUZONVILLE.

During this administrative halt, Co B, which the writer was with, decided to take advantage of a large German Kaserne over looking the city to perform maintenance and get cleaned up before the long march. The fact that someone had located a locked up German Officers club on the Kaserne with alcoholic stock had nothing to do with the decision. Some maintain also, that the CO, Co B, decided to get everyone out of IDAR-OBERSTEIN after a strange demolition incident. It seems an under-worked Rcn Co Pioneer Section, needing refresher training on demolitions and not aware that this was called the Diamond City, decided to try their hand on a large safe in a doctor's office. To muffle the sound, they wrapped the safe with several feather beds. The training exercise to open the safe was successful. However, any townspeople still living will long remember the loud explosion and the main street under a shower of feathers. This unit was known as the original "Feather Merchants". Sorry! The safe contained no valuables, but fortunately no one was injured by the explosion.

At 2130 hours, Mar 22, the Bn, less Hq Co, departed for SAARLAUTERN, via MERZIG and BOUZONVILLE and closed in the assembly area at SAARLAUTERN at 0920 on Mar 23d. At 1400 hours the Bn was relieved from attachment to the 3d Cav Gp and atchd to the 10th AD with instructions to join the Div vic of NEUSTADT. At 0600 hours, Mar 24, the Bn less Hq Co departed SAARLAUTERN for NEUSTADT. After passing through KAISERSLAUTERN, the route down to the Rhine valley was serpentine in nature, requiring some time to navigate. When the units reached the Rhine Valley floor and started through the town of NEUSTADT, they were treated to an awesome sight. First in view were two M-4 tanks with the turrets completely blown off and a short distance away, was an immobilized German Tiger Royal Jaeger tank mounting

a huge 120mm gun. A round from an American tank had creased a drive sprocket preventing the vehicle from moving except in circles. On close examination, there was evidence of six or eight hits on the front slope plate, but no penetrations. It turned out six of these tanks had been in the area, but travel was restricted because of their weight (over 100 tons each). There were many sighs of relief that the Bn did not have to face these behemoths, at least here. The Bn closed NEUSTADT area 1430 hrs, Mar 24th.

Meanwhile, the 609th line companies had instructions to join the commands they had been attd to in the TRIER area. Co A joined CCB at LANDAU, Co B joined CCA and moved to EDENKOBEN along with 609th Hq. Co C joined CCR vic QUAICKHEIM. After two road marches in two days totaling some 150 miles, units were glad to reach their destination, get a hot meal and clean up. It was learned that on Mar 23, switching of the Div between THIRD and SEVENTH Armies became official. The 10th AD had not only reached its final objective in the SEVENTH Army area, but was now part of the SEVENTH. The 6th AD which had crossed paths with the 10th at KAISERSLAUTERN was now part of the THIRD Army. All units were to receive several days rest while the Engineers erected bridges across the Rhine at WORMS. When operations commenced again, the 10th AD would spearhead the SEVENTH Army drive to the Bavarian/Austrian Alps.

VII

RHINE TO CRAILSHEIM

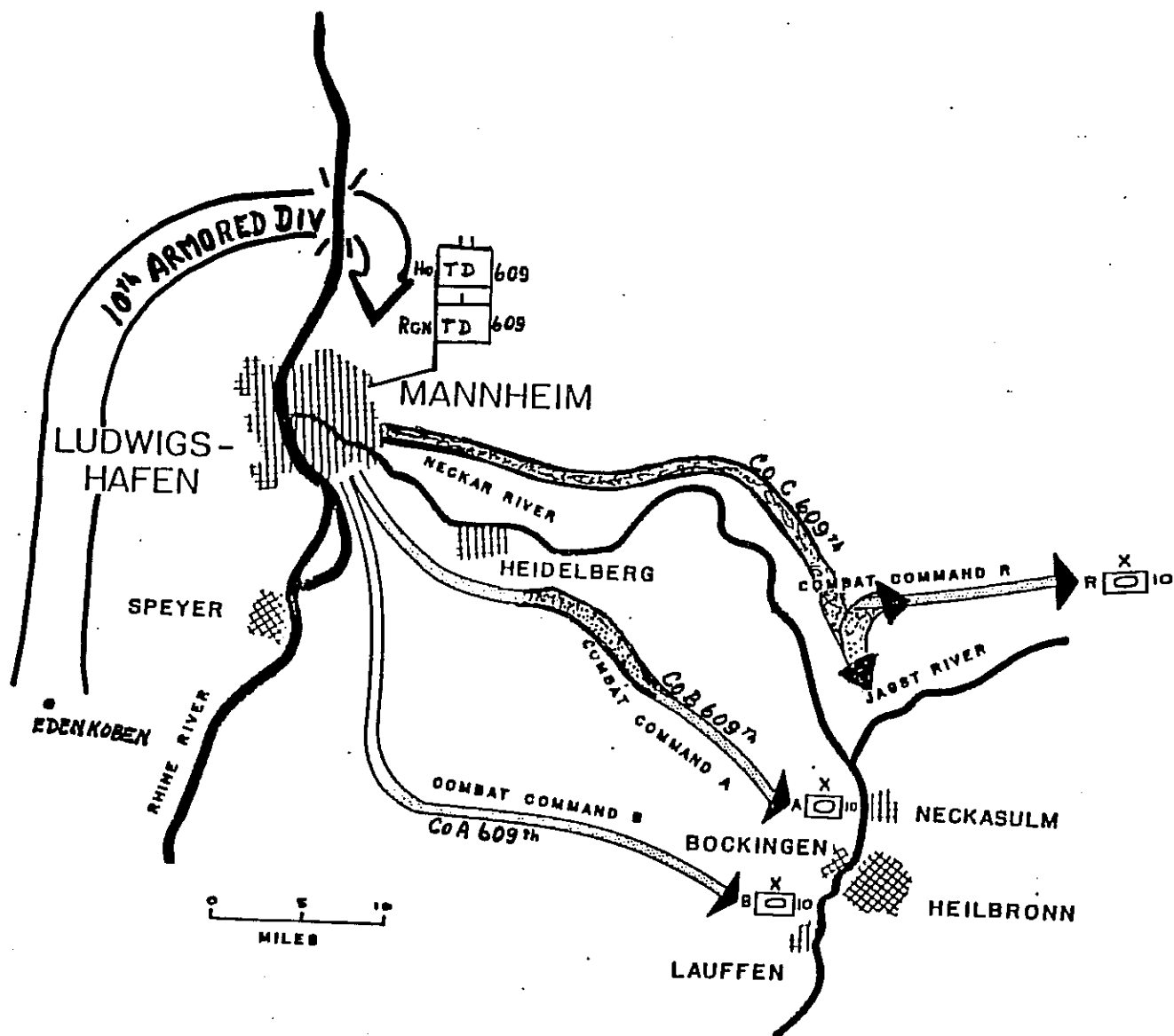
MANNHEIM TO HEILBRONN - MARCH 30 - APRIL 3, 1945

By Mar 28, the SEVENTH Army Engineers had completed two bridges over the RHINE River at WORMS. It was time for the 10th AD and its favorite atchd unit, the 609th TD Bn, to enter into what was to be the final six weeks of war in Europe. Crossing the Rhine on Sunday in the early morning hours, over a pontoon bridge, is not the greatest thrill in the world, but not getting shot at brightens the experience. From WORMS to MANNHEIM is only 15 miles, but with the traffic congestion caused by mingling of two Divs, Military Police units had their hands full keeping traffic moving.

For all practical purposes, the 44th Div, another SEVENTH Army unit, had completed mopping up action at MANNHEIM and secured a bridgehead south of the Neckar River. While the 10th AD Engineer Bn was erecting its own bridge over the river, other 10th AD units went into assembly areas in the vic of SANDHOFEN, VIERNHEIM, WEINHEIM and LAMPERTHEIM. March 29th was spent making necessary combat organization alignments in preparation for early morning attacks to the south and east. SEVENTH Army also revised its organization for combat by placing the 10th AD and two Inf Divs, the 63d and 100th under VI Corps and releasing the 44th Div to XXI Corps. At this time it might be well to reflect on Div strengths as they pertained to the Corps Divs.

The 10th AD had received no replacements since the Saar-Moselle Triangle kick-off on Feb 20th, as a result Inf strength was down 50%. The SEVENTH Army was the smallest of the American Armies with only two Corps and eight Divs, of which VI Corps had three. The majority of American strength on the Western Front was in the north where emphasis was being placed on reducing the Ruhr pocket. This brief strength and disposition picture will explain some of the difficulties Corps and 10th AD encountered later in areas such as CRAILSHEIM.

The Div attack was conducted in traditional armor fashion, by sound planning and violent execution with the next objective being HEILBRONN on the east bank of the NECKAR River. On the morning of March 30, TF Chamberlain with 1st Pltn Co A and TF Richardson with 3d Pltn Co A 609th TD Bn led CCB across the Neckar bridge and moved rapidly south paralleling the RHINE. Chamberlain advanced on the route nearest the River and Richardson used the southbound autobahn on the east to speed his advance. Their intermediate objective was the city of BRUCHSAL. CCA with TF Riley and 1st Pltn Co B followed by TF Hankins and 3d Pltn Co B, headed for HEIDELBERG. When, in the middle of the morning, HEIDELBERG was declared an "Open City" Riley and Hankins turned south on parallel roads toward WIESLOCH. TF Roberts, the third CCA force with 2d Pltn Co B, followed Hankins over the Neckar bridge. After word was received that HEIDELBERG had put up the white flag, Roberts was directed to turn south on the Rhine plain between Hankins and Richardson's forces. Back north of the Neckar, CCR units were moving in an easterly direction. Their mission was to stay north of the Neckar attacking east and south on a wide arc to approach HEILBRONN from the north. Advancing on parallel roads, TF Thackston, with 3d Pltn Co C 609th along with the 90th Rcn Sqdn advanced rapidly against light resistance, reaching a point 30 miles east of MANNHEIM by March 31st. Co C Hq and 2d Pltn moved with CCR Hq. The 1st Pltn, Co C was atchd to Div Artillery with 1st Sec to 969th Field Artillery Bn and 2d Sec to 937th Field Artillery Bn.



RHINE TO THE NECKAR

Mar 30 - Apr 4, 1945

During forward displacement of Hq Combat Command A, a rare opportunity was afforded to explore briefly the "Open City" of HEIDELBERG. While the Commander of Co B was coordinating with CCA on the afternoon of March 30, an enterprising member of the Hq Gp made a fast reconnaissance of the famous old hotel nearby and upon return displayed a liberated bottle of JWB Scotch, to be held for the first rest period. Strangely, others in the group never saw any of it again. Co B Command Gp spent the evening of March 30 in the town of ROHRBACH about three miles south of HEIDELBERG. No friendly casualties were reported in Cos A, B and C during the first day of the attack. However, three members, 3d Pltn Rcn Co atchd to Co A were killed when a large caliber enemy Artillery shell exploded in a tree as their vehicle was passing under it. Casualties were: Pfc Horace Jackson, PFC Sylvester Frye and PFC Russell Pollak.

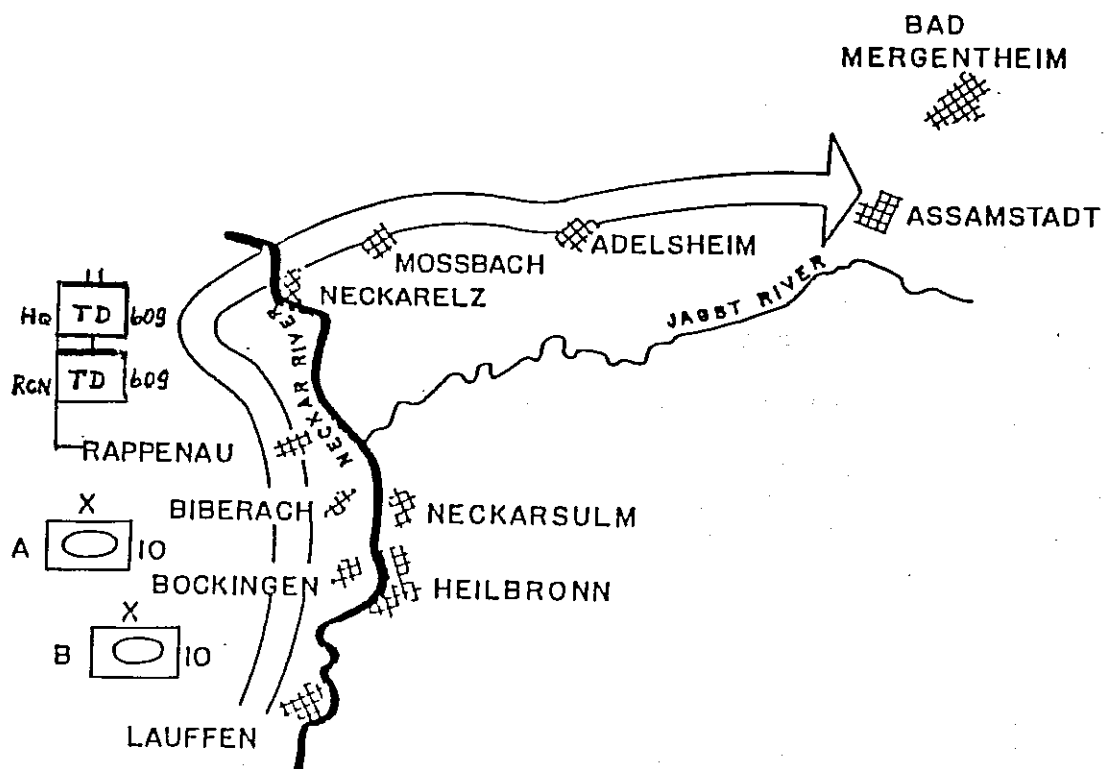
On the following morning TF Riley, upon reaching the town of LEIMEN, turned abruptly left out of the Rhine plain into the bordering hill country and soon began to make great strides forward. TF Chamberlain, on the extreme right flank of the Div, streaked south with only minor resistance. But the forces moving down the center of the Rhine plain continued to face stiff resistance. Hankins, Roberts and Richardson forces were encountering the bulk of the enemy armed with AT weapons. Riley's advance of 16 miles and Chamberlain's move of 23 miles, created an encircling effect which ultimately relieved the pressure on the middle forces. To the north and east CCR benefitted from the 12th Armored Division attack to their north and advanced 20 miles with little difficulty.

Elements of Co A, mainly the 3d Pltn with Richardson, and the Pltns of Co B with CCA, especially those supporting Hankins and Roberts, were utilized to the maximum against the numerous dual purpose AT weapons. Enemy mortar and artillery fire was playing havoc with the Inf elements of these forces. Near SINZHEIM, the 3d Pltn Co B was directed to rescue two Pltns of Light Tanks cut off by enemy forces. With about 30 rds of HE and APC the enemy force was dispersed and Pltns extricated. Suddenly, on April 2d, enemy resistance started to crumble and large numbers of prisoners were taken. As the Div surged forward, many of the units experienced their first encounter with the new German jet aircraft. Our P 47 was no match for its speed. But this caused our forces no real problem since the supporting AA units proved to be capable of handling the situation.

The German units were withdrawing rapidly in front of Riley, so much so that his forces continued to pressure them even into the night. By 2300 hrs on April 2d, TF Riley had reached the west bank of the Neckar at HEILBRONN with TFs Hankins and Roberts closing early on the 3d. Not to be outdone, TFs Chamberlain (1st Pltn Co A) and Richardson (3d Pltn Co A), after capturing BRUCHSAL and over 300 enemy on the Rhine plain, wheeled 90 degrees to the east and headed toward HEILBRONN to join forces with CCA. Meanwhile CCR, traveling rapidly from the north with TF Thackston and the Div Rcn Sqdn paralleling the east bank of the Neckar, were suddenly stopped by the JAGST River and blown bridges only 11 miles north of HEILBRONN.

The entire Div closed on the Heilbronn area by April 3d, 1945 after a fast moving advance of about 40 miles by CCA and almost 60 miles by CCB in a little over four days. In the course of this charge, 10th AD forces had destroyed over 100 dual purpose AT/AA guns - a remarkable feat. The 609th was credited with a sizable number of them. But alas, all bridges over the Neckar in the Heilbronn area were blown. It was on the approaches to HEILBRONN at FRANKENBACH, that another popular 609th soldier was lost. Sgt Alexander Morales together with PFC Lionel Gregoire of Rcn Co were victims of a direct hit on their jeep by a large caliber German artillery round.

With blowing of the bridges, the trailing 100th Inf Div, was called upon to take over the 10th AD mission of capturing the fortress city of HEILBRONN supported by CCB, 10th AD and Co A, 609th. This attachment of CCB was to be short lived. VI Corps had more important plans for the 10th AD than having it try to force a bridge head over the Neckar River when intelligence reports indicated the

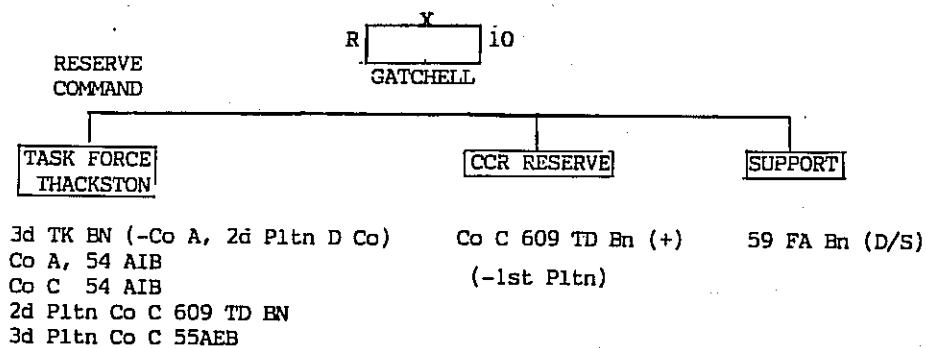
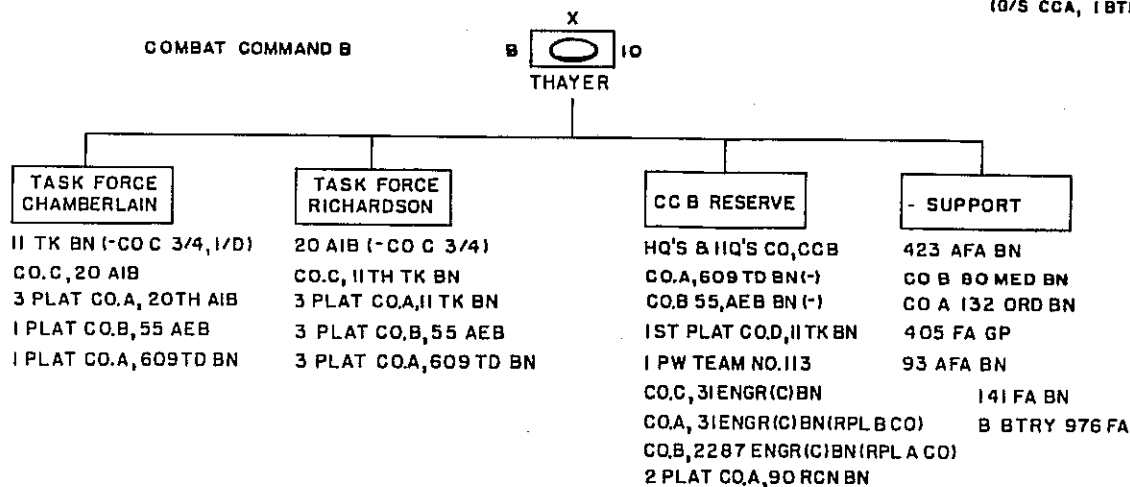
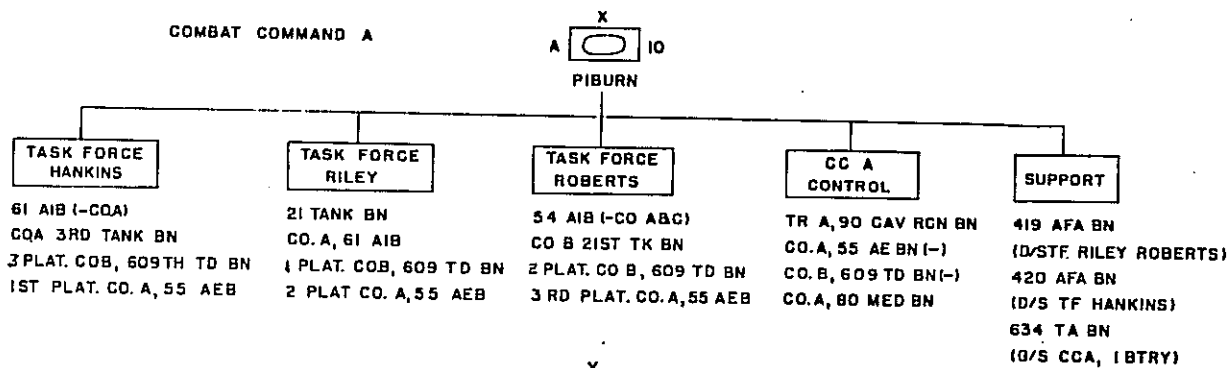


HEILBRONN TO ASSAMSTADT COMBAT COMMANDS A AND B

Courtesy: L.M. Nichols
Author of "IMPACT".

THE BATTLE FOR CRAILSHEIM

APRIL 4-10 1945



Germans had massed elements of three or four divs in the area. VI Corps wanted the 10th to continue exploiting enemy weaknesses and to move rapidly to the east toward CRAILSHEIM. To do this, the Div needed a bridge over the Neckar. When CCR had liberated the area east of the river, north of the Jagst, it had allowed the other VI Corps Div, the 63d, to move rapidly from Heidelberg and seize a bridge over the Neckar in the vic of MOSBACH. The 10th AD, was directed to cross the 63d Div bridge and exploit toward CRAILSHEIM. The 63d was to follow and clear any bypassed forces.

FROM THE NECKAR TO CRAILSHEIM - APRIL 5 - 10, 1945

The new 10th AD mission was in effect an exploitation to develop the enemy's weakness by an envelopment of the strong enemy forces holding HEILBRONN. This was to be accomplished by attacking directly east out of the 63d Div bridgehead. Upon reaching the general line from ROTHENBURG to CRAILSHEIM, the 10th AD would secure CRAILSHEIM holding it as a corner of the triangle, and then send its forces west-southwest to capture SCHWABISCH HALL. When the 10th AD and the follow-up 63d Div had secured the Schwabisch Hall area, the 100th Div would be relieved of the pressure at Heilbronn and could continue its attack east-southeast. All three Divs would then place further pressure on what ever forces remained in the Stuttgart-Heilbronn area. This could best be accomplished by severing the Stuttgart - Munich Autobahn and other avenues of escape to the southeast toward the Bavarian/Austrian Alps (National Redoubt).

The planning sounded great. But could the seriously understrength Divs of VI Corps follow the game plan? On April 4 CCR, which was already east of the Neckar, received orders to jump off early on the morning of the 5th and conduct a reconnaissance in force east in the direction of ASSAMSTADT. TF Thackston, with 2d and 3d Pltns Co C 609th, moved in the northern part of CCR sector and the 90th Rcn Sqdn, (minus one Trp screening Thackston's left flank) covered the south portion of CCR sector (north of the Jagst River). Early on the same day, from positions west of HEILBRONN, CCA with TF Hankins leading, moved north and crossed the 63d Div bridge vic MOSBACH and drove east toward ASSAMSTADT. TFs Riley and Roberts followed. It was Hankins plan to swing toward CRAILSHEIM on the main road from BAD MERGENTHEIM. By early evening on the 5th, Hankins, who had moved 45 miles already, met TF Thackston and personnel from the 90th Cav Sqdn in the vic of RENGERSHAUSEN about 5 Kms south east of ASSAMSTADT. After refueling and getting something to eat, Hankins forces, with the 3d Pltn Co B 609th following the lead Team, were prepared to move toward CRAILSHEIM, in the dark if necessary. By daybreak, the force had moved only about five miles because of poor, narrow dirt roads bordered by heavy forest and containing numerous abatis. Meanwhile, TF Thackstons forces with 2d and 3d Pltns of Co C, established road blocks to the north as flank protection for CCA elements.

Wanting to speed things along, Gen Piburn, CCA, directed TF Roberts, with 2d Pltn Co B supporting, to move down an interior route through DORZBACH toward CRAILSHEIM. As Roberts' force approached the outskirts of DORZBACH from ASSAMSTADT, they encountered a large, well manned enemy roadblock which required most of the night to reduce. After clearing the roadblock early on the morning of the 6th, Roberts' force, while moving toward the town of KLEPSAU encountered mines and was hit hard by AT Weapons, panzerfaust and artillery. It was during this action, that Lt William Fudge, 2d Pltn, Co B was fatally injured when his command vehicle hit a road mine in KLEPSAU. Pvt Walter Van Cleve was also killed and T/5 Clifford Howard and PFC Clyde Cagle were wounded. Lt Brannan replaced Lt Fudge as Pltn Leader.

On the morning of April 6th, Hankins forces were finally able to get untracked. After clearing HOLLENBACH, they moved toward GUTBACH, the last obstacle before gaining access to the main Crailsheim highway. Early afternoon, encountering only minor resistance, Hankins directed his lead elements to move

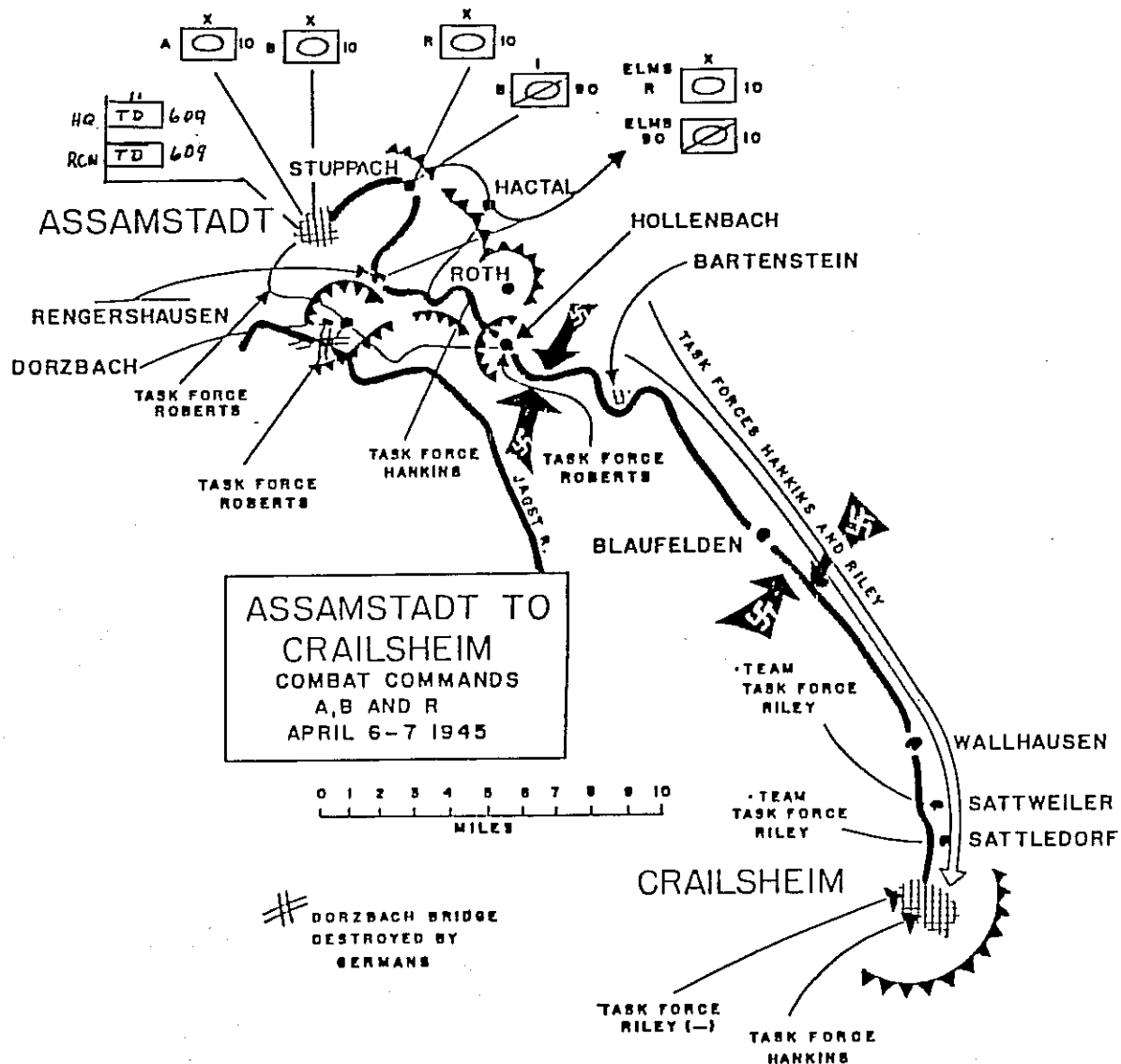
rapidly down the road to CRAILSHEIM. They covered the last 25 miles in just over two hours. When Gen Piburn learned of the breakthrough, he immediately ordered TF Riley to join Hankins at CRAILSHEIM. Riley with 1st Pltn Co B 609th, rolled into CRAILSHEIM about three hours after Hankins had organized his defense of the town. Shortly after Riley closed in CRAILSHEIM, the Germans cut the Main Supply Route (MSR). As time went on, this was to become a frequent occurrence and the route was dubbed "The Rolling Bahn" or "Bowling Alley". During the evening of April 6, Radio contact between Hq CCA and Div Hq at ASSAMSTADT and TFs Hankins and Riley at CRAILSHEIM was lost and the CGs message directing TF Riley to make the 90 degree turn to the west did not get through. As mentioned earlier, this was part of the envelopment plan contained in the VI Corps directive to 10th Armored Div.

On April 7, the Commanding General 10th AD flew into CRAILSHEIM by a small plane, at which time verbal instructions to all TFs were issued. Riley was to get his teams on the road west toward SCHWABISCH HALL; TF Force Roberts and CCA Command Post were to come south to CRAILSHEIM. CCB, which had just arrived in the Assamstadt area from HEILBRONN, was directed to relieve CCR of the blocking positions held just south of BAD MERGENTHEIM so CCR could move to CRAILSHEIM. CCB, in addition to the blocking position assignment, was directed to keep the "Bowling Alley" open. TF Chamberlain with 1st Pltn Co A and TF Richardson with 3d Pltn Co A inherited this later assignment. For one not intimately acquainted with the situation this was like a game of Chinese checkers.

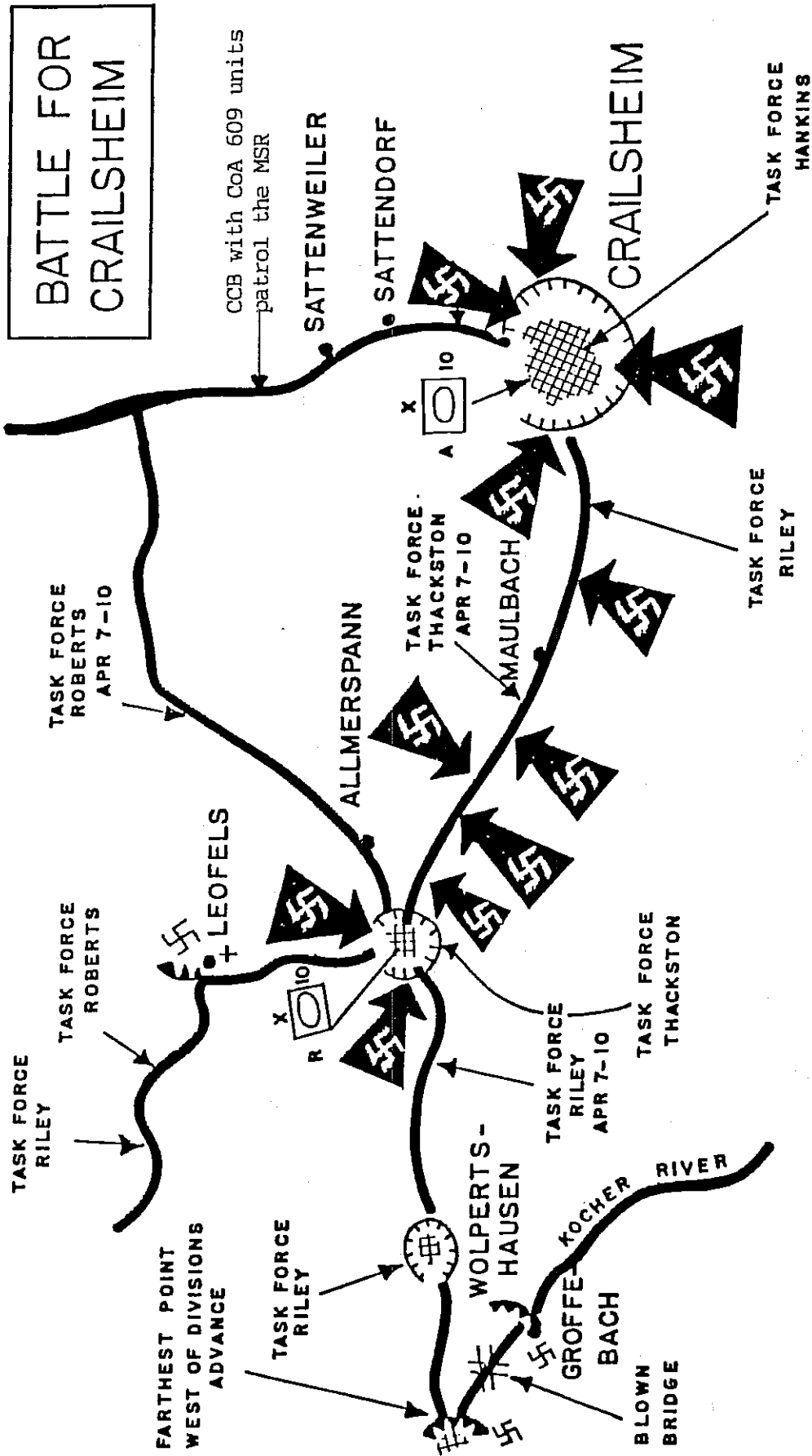
For those who would like to know where they were and why, the following recap may be helpful. According to VI Corps plan, the Div was to move to the east from the Neckar River as fast as possible. When reaching a position north of CRAILSHEIM, Div forces were to turn south and secure CRAILSHEIM. Once this was done, a unit of the Div would establish blocking positions there and all other forces would turn west and move rapidly to secure SCHWABISCH HALL. Up to this point the plan had worked well, but for one major flaw. There was not enough Infantry immediately available to be placed at the crucial location - CRAILSHEIM. Most historians do not address another equally key problem. Our intelligence did not know or recognize that there was an SS school of young Nazi fanatics located at ELLWANGEN, about 25 miles south of CRAILSHEIM. The SS or Schutz Staffel were considered to be the elite troops of the Nazi Party as opposed to the Wehrmacht the German regular army personnel. Further, it was not immediately recognized that German control of CRAILSHEIM would prevent, in the German minds, a rapid drive by the American armored forces directly south to the cities of ULM and AUGSBURG thus cutting off a large pocket of German forces who might otherwise retreat to the Alps. Again, the key factor was, we didn't have enough Inf to hold open the MSR or the corner at CRAILSHEIM.

Perhaps you may not care much about the big picture. But you would like to know where your Pltn or Co was during the first two days we have covered and where you probably were on the last two days of CRAILSHEIM, the 9th and 10th of April. On the evening of the 7th, all CCA units were at CRAILSHEIM or on the road west at ILSHOFEN or beyond at WOLPERTSHAUSEN, which is about half way between CRAILSHEIM and SCHWABISCH HALL. With TF Hankins at CRAILSHEIM was Lt Tom Smith and the 3d Pltn Co B located on the airfield. TF Riley elements, with Team Felice, etc. were stretched along the road west supported by Lt Douthitt and the 1st Pltn of Co B. TF Roberts, which became TF Ulrich when Roberts was killed on April 9, was in the same vic supported by Lt Brannan and the 2d Pltn Co B. On the evening of the 7th, all CCR elements were also in CRAILSHEIM or on the road west to ILSHOFEN. Lt Gladden and 2d Pltn, Co C, was with TF Thackston west of CRAILSHEIM keeping the road open between CRAILSHEIM and TF Riley of CCA.

All during the period, Lt Edison Harris with 1st Pltn Co C furnished close-in security for the 634th FA Bn which was supporting the 10th AD Artillery. Company C 609th (minus 1st and 2d Pltns) was in CRAILSHEIM with Hq CCR. The 3d



Courtesy: L.M. Nichols
Author Of IMPACT



Courtesy of L.M. Nichols
Author of IMPACT

Pltn Co C with Sgt Pilon was guarding the Hq Complex there. The Pltns of Co A 609th were with CCB keeping open the "Bowling Alley". The 1st Pltn was with TF Chamberlain, the 3d Pltn with TF Richardson and Co A (minus) with Hq CCB at ROT AM SEE or in some other town along the Main Supply Route north of CRAILSHEIM. Co A units were like nomads moving up and down the MSR. In their supporting role, all 609th units were involved with countering enemy small arms and Anti Tank fire, responding to enemy aircraft strafing, repulsing groups of enemy infiltrators or receiving a heavy dose of artillery, mortar and nebelwerfer fire administered by the Germans.

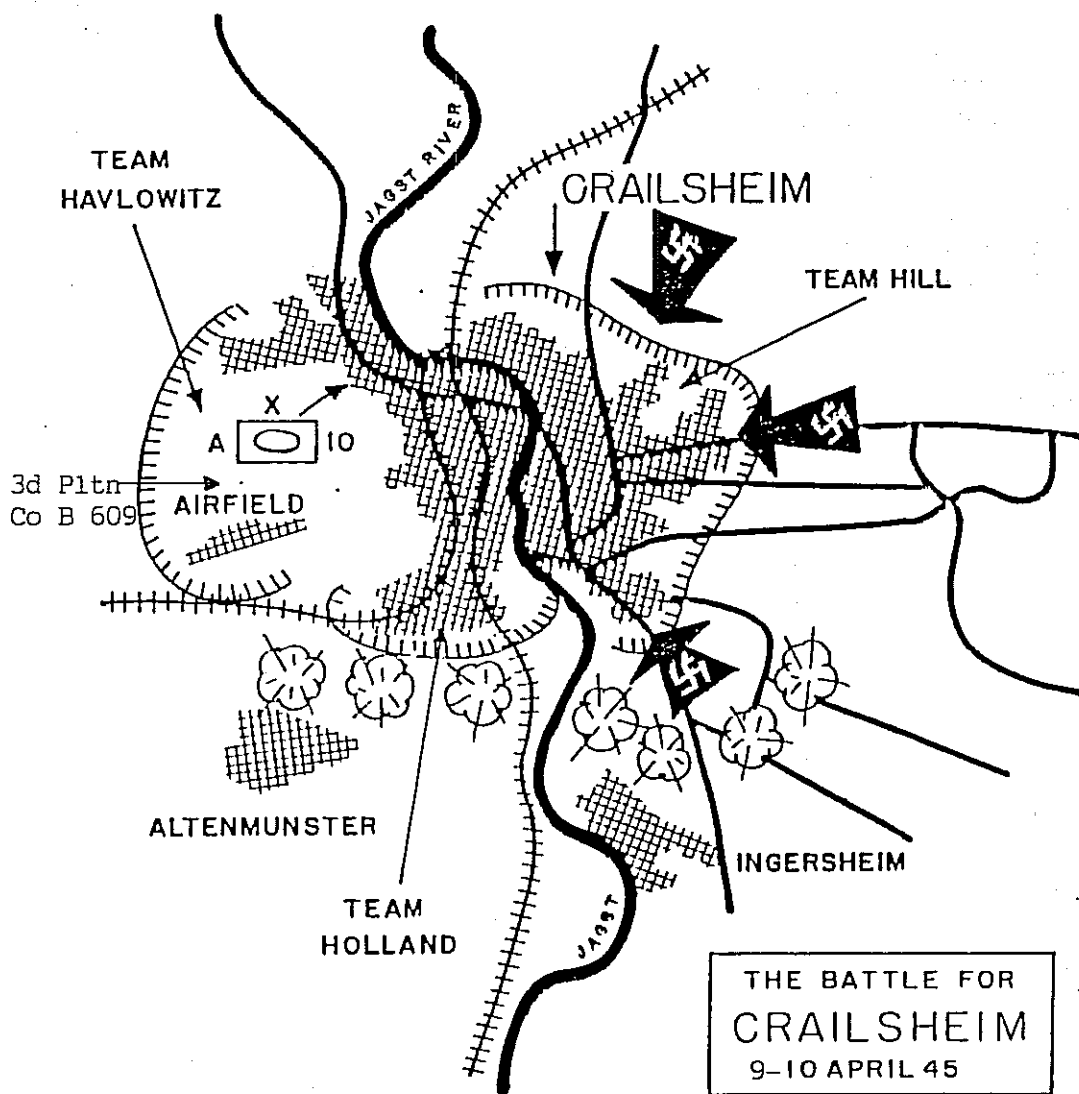
Not to be overlooked were the actions of Reconnaissance Company units and personnel. You will recall early on in this Mini History we stated there was a standard attachment of Pltns to each line Co. The 1st Rcn Pltn was attached to Co B the 2d Rcn Pltn to Co C, and the 3d Rcn Pltn to Co A. In the Crailsheim operation, the capability of these Pltns was often utilized to conduct route reconnaissance and patrols on the interior north south roads running from the Ilshofen-Crailsheim area to the vic of ASSAMSTADT. It was while conducting a road patrol in the vic of RUPPERTSHOFEN on April 10th, that the 2d Rcn Pltn was attacked by an estimated 100 enemy Inf supported by two Mk IV or Mk V tanks. Lt Grant one of the most capable and popular officers in the 609th and PFC Hallock were killed and Sgt Walter Allen, S/Sgt Joseph Fillinger and T/5 John King were wounded in a cleverly conceived and executed German ambush. One half-track and one M-5 light tank were lost to enemy tank fire.

Starting on the evening of April 7th and continuing until all forces were directed to withdraw northwest to the vic of MULFINGEN, the very pretty small city of CRAILSHEIM, as it was when TF Hankins entered, was reduced to complete rubble by the time American forces withdrew. Likened to the small city of BASTOGNE and the battle that raged there, historians and people who fought at CRAILSHEIM, have often referred to it as the second BASTOGNE. German forces fired tons of mortar and artillery ammunition into the area reducing such edifices as the rock solid bank building to a pile of stones.

While the immediate German forces did not possess a large number of tanks, they made up for it with a great number of 75mm and 88mm Anti Tank weapons, which were used not only at CRAILSHEIM, but also along the many roads American forces used in the area. German Inf were primarily young well armed SS troops, most of them coming from the large SS School located in nearby ELLWANGEN. Added to these strong forces, were portions of an Alpine Regt which had provided school troops. All in all, the enemy forces arrayed against the 10th AD troops were young, tough, fanatical Nazis who would often attack in such large numbers that it became routine to take them under direct fire with 75mm or 76 mm HE ammunition.

Because of its geographical significance, the Crailsheim operation brought forth one of the largest displays of German aircraft support since the Normandy landings. Gen Piburn, CCA Commander, related he had not seen German aircraft in such numbers since he left the North African Campaign. Not only were flights of 15 or 20 ME 109s common, but the German Air force committed a number of its new, swift ME 262 Jet fighters. If these Jet aircraft had been available in numbers earlier, the war might have taken on a different complexion.

It is impossible to relate the many heroic deeds and actions of all 609th units participating in the battle of CRAILSHEIM. Because of this, the writer has selected one particular operation that he is familiar with which exemplifies how other Pltns throughout the Bn performed in similar situations such as Co C at BASTOGNE and Co A on the approaches to TRIER (e.g. IRSCH and ZERF). It is natural, given the conditions of pressure and training, to expect like reactions. Assuming the hypothesis is correct, actions of the 3d Pltn Co B in the early morning hours of April 9th and 10th in and around the airfield just west of CRAILSHEIM are highlighted.



Courtesy Of L.M. Nichols
Author of IMPACT.

Earlier the 3d Pltn commanded by Lt Tom Smith together with his Pltn Sgt William Hamilton accompanied TF Hankins into CRAILSHEIM. When it was decided to secure the small dirt airstrip west of town, Team Havlowitz to which the 3d Pltn was atchd, was charged with securing the area and keeping it clear. On April 8th an air resupply mission was approved for CRAILSHEIM delivery early on April 9th and 10th. Team Havlowitz was directed to prevent enemy ground forces from interfering. During the very early hours on the 9th, a large number of diehard SS troops, probably of Co strength, attacked the small under-strength Team from several directions. Seeing that the Havlowitz Inf elements were unable to repulse the enemy with mortars, machine guns and small arms fire, the M-18 crews took the fanatical enemy under direct fire. Using the 76mm guns and HE ammunition with point detonating fuse, they exploded the rounds on the ground in front of the advancing Inf. Lt Smith and Pltn Sgt Hamilton with mounted Inf moved the vehicles around the area, using the M-18 speed and maneuverability to answer request for assistance and to change position as needed. When his destroyer was about to be overrun by an estimated Pltn sized force, M-18 Commander Henry Gay turned his 50 Cal MG on the group and firing like a man possessed, killed or wounded over half the force, causing the remainder to pull back. That action seemed to charge up everyone. After reloading his weapon, T/4 Gay and his crew, with the assistant driver manning the caliber 30 coxail machine gun, sped around the perimeter of the air field picking off the retreating enemy.

On the following morning, Apr 10th, another attack by an estimated 600 enemy was similarly repulsed with an estimated 70 to 80 enemy killed. For the Pltn's actions in helping repulse those suicidal attacks, members of the Pltn earned three Silver Stars (Lt Smith, S/Sgt Hamilton and T/4 Gay). Bronze Star Citations for valor were awarded to two members killed, Cpl Dean Crockett and Pvt Matthew Toman. S/Sgt William Hamilton, T/4 Henry Gay and T/5 Clyde Sink were wounded.

The critical resupply situation caused by the inability to keep the road to CRAILSHEIM open, finally dictated that the Div request resupply by air as mentioned earlier. On Apr 9 and 10 a total of 50 C-47 transport aircraft, flying three sorties, landed on the small dirt airfield delivering over 20,000 gallons of gasoline, 7,000 rations, 1,000 rounds of 105mm Artillery and 100,000 rounds of small arms ammunition. On return flights they evacuated all wounded. This smooth functioning and daring operation, which lost one aircraft due to enemy artillery fire, was conducted by the 9th Troop Carrier Command.

It became almost impossible for CCB even with the help of the 90th Rcn Sqdn to keep the Main Supply Route open for even short intervals. Only a limited number of Inf units were available to hold off the numerous small enemy forces which infiltrated to ambush positions after the patrolling CCB units passed their locations. Consequently, nothing but armored vehicles could make the passage in safety. And this wasn't always certain. On Apr 9th while riding in an M-20 armored car patrolling the MSR, Lt Milligan, 1st Pltn Co A and T/5 Marvin Sumpter were injured when their vehicle struck a land mine and was destroyed. Based on the problems CCB was encountering, the CG 10th AD prevailed on the CG VI Corps to loan the Div an Inf Regt from the 44th Inf Div located just north of BAD MERGENTHEIM. The Regt arrived shortly and did a magnificent and business-like job of clearing the road.

After further consultation with Gen Morris about the seriousness of the Inf shortage, Gen Brooks, CG of VI Corps, directed the 10th AD to pull back to the northwest from CRAILSHEIM. The TIGERS would, after reassembling the command, be prepared for a new mission on April 11th. Steps were taken immediately to get the forces out of CRAILSHEIM and assembled in the area of MULFINGEN, about 12 miles south of ASSAMSTADT. With assistance from the 44th Div Regt to hold enemy forces from interfering, most Crailsheim forces withdraw up the MSR. It was not surprising that Crailsheim after-action reports confirmed that the last two units out of CRAILSHEIM on the evening of Apr 10th were the 3d Pltn Co C and the 3d Pltn Co B, 609th TD Bn. As these units made their way up the MSR, the planned Time on

Target (TOT) barrage was fired by Div Artillery as a farewell gesture. With this arrangement the 10th AD said goodbye to CRAILSHEIM. During the five day operation, 609th elements destroyed 2 tanks and 18 SP and towed AT weapons, four half-tracks and numerous general purpose vehicles. The Div Antiaircraft units downed 7 enemy aircraft, while the Army Air Corps downed 26 aircraft and destroyed 40 more on the ground. The Air elements also destroyed or damaged an estimated 400 railroad cars. American ground forces killed an estimated 1,000 Germans and processed more than 2,000 through the POW cages.

VIII

RACE TO THE ALPS

FROM OHRINGEN TO THE DANUBE - APRIL 11 - 25, 1945

After the discouraging experience of having to relinquish hard fought gains at CRAILSHEIM, the 10th AD wasn't given time to think about what might have been. Corps orders directed the Div to take a shorter envelopment route behind the enemy forces at HEILBRONN. The intermediate objective before closing with the 100th Div forces in the HEILBRONN area was OHRINGEN. The Div gave CCA, with support from CCR, the mission of seizing the city. Meanwhile, CCB was placed temporarily in VI Corps reserve. This lull in activity gave Co A the opportunity to catch up with personal and equipment maintenance.

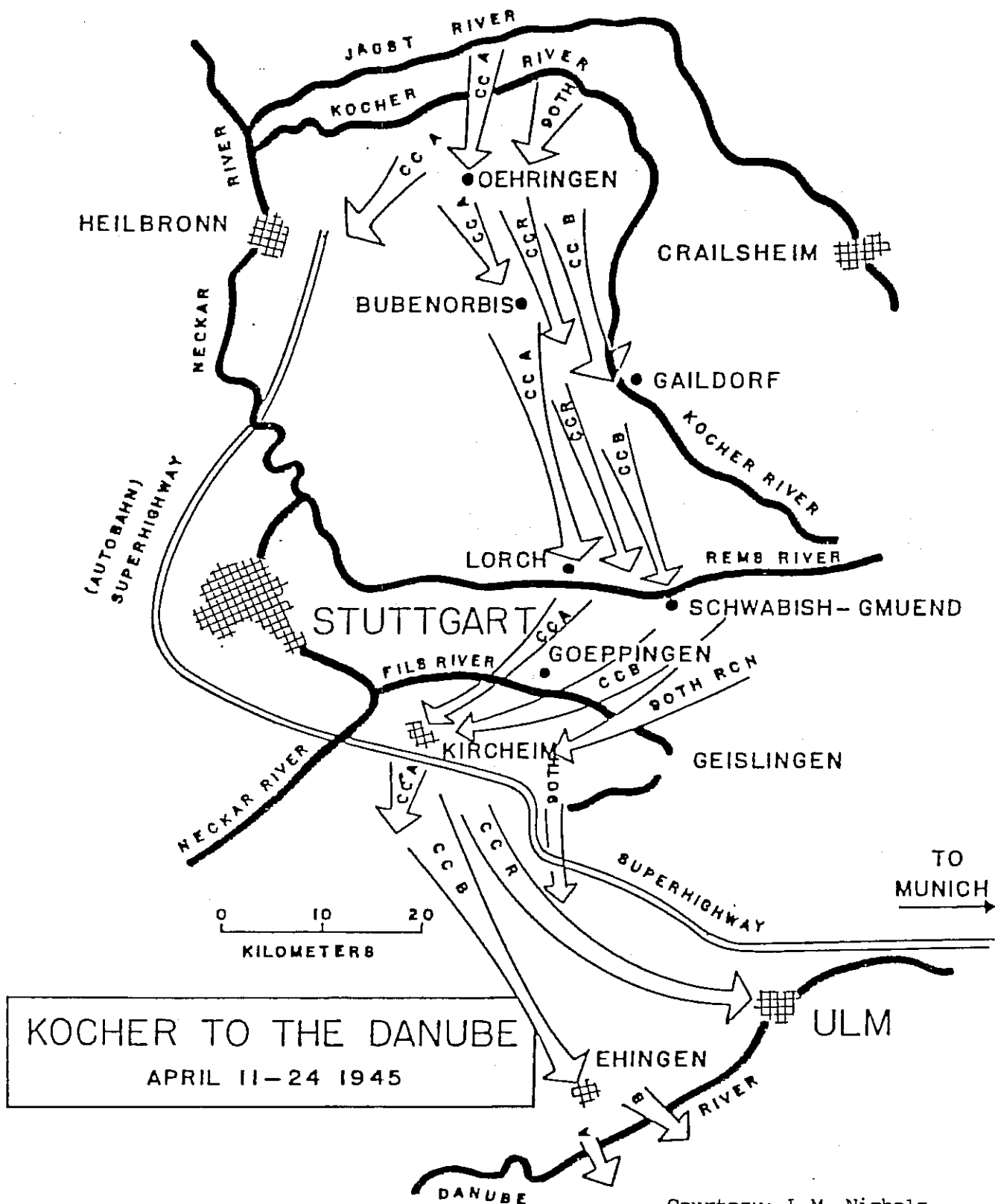
TF Riley with 1st Pltn Co B and TF Ulrick with 2d Pltn Co B atchd led the advance and moved rapidly to the vic WEISBACH, where the 63rd Div had secured a bridgehead. Moving against light resistance Riley and Ulrich were in the vic of KIRCHENSALL by the evening of Apr 11. TF Hankins with Co B (minus 1st and 2d Pltns) joined them early on the morning of the 12th. Taking off at brisk pace, the three commands reached OHRINGEN by early afternoon. Here they were opposed by remnants of German forces from HEILBRONN and by a number of civilians armed with panzerfaust, bazookas, and burp guns, who apparently did not plan to give up easily. In the house to house fighting that followed, the 1st Pltn Co B and a Section of the atchd 1st Rcn Pltn, suffered one officer (probably Lt Parks) and four EM wounded. Specific identity of the casualties was not available.

The Command determined there was a better way of handling this than fighting house to house. Recalling Gen Patton's admonition back at MARS LA TOUR in November: "If civilians fire on you in built up areas, burn the damn place down!" Gen Piburn called for a Time on Target, not incendiary in nature, to let them know we mean business. Using all 52 howitzers of the 10th AD Artillery, and whatever resources Corps Artillery had available, a time was coordinated to insure our troops were not in the specific area to be hit. With clocks synchronized, a count down was made at which time all howitzers fired the prescribed number of rounds. While the TOT had a profound effect, TFs Riley and Thackston with 2d Pltn Co C atchd still required several hours on April 13 before all resistance stopped. But a number of American lives were saved.

The capture of OHRINGEN and the joining of 10th AD forces with those of the 100th and 63d Divs east of HEILBRONN, signalled the end of this mission. The period Apr 14 - 16 provided an opportunity for all units to catch up on maintenance of personnel and equipment. It also permitted the "beefing up" of VI Corps strength for the operations ahead.

SEVENTH Army Commander, General Patch, together with Gen Brooks, VI Corps CG, sensed the end of the War in Europe was in sight. Severing the Stuttgart-Munich autobahn at KIRCHEIM would speed the cut-off of German forces in the STUTTGART area. Then by capturing the city of ULM followed by a quick dash to the German/Austrian Alps in that order, further enemy resistance would be futile. Since a beefed up VI Corps was the logical element to accomplish this, Gen Patch directed the immediate attachment of two more Inf Divs to Gen Brooks command.

By April 16th when the 44th and the 103d Divs had joined, all blocks were pulled and the race was on. CCB was released from Corps Reserve and the 10th AD advance went into high gear. The Div organization for combat, which had carried through the CRAILSHEIM battle, would stay fixed for the remaining days of the war.



Courtesy: L.M. Nichols
 Author of IMPACT.

The 1st Pltn Co C 609th, would remain with the 634th FA Bn as a security force. It appeared that Lt Speck Harris preferred the Artillery rations and cooking to "C" rations.

With all Combat Commands in the chase, the Div advanced with five armored columns abreast on the axis: SCHWABISCH HALL, GAILDORF, SCHWABISCH GMUND, GOEPPINGEN and KIRCHEIM. The Corps organization for combat had the 10th AD leading with the 44th Div following close behind. The 100th and 103d Divs would cover each flank of the 10th AD Div and the 63d Div as tailgate. The rugged terrain, with steep valleys and numerous rivers and streams, provided the ideal situation for the defender to use mine fields, road blocks and blown bridges to his advantage. But the momentum was with the attacking force. Units were no longer in the exploitation phase of combat, but rather the "pursuit" as Armor prefers to call it. The 609th Pltns were located well forward in the columns to take advantage of their long range accurate fire, particularly when reducing road blocks or engaging an occasional AT gun. The Team Commanders had learned to do this long ago.

By the afternoon of April 20th, TFs Hankins and Ulrich, with the 3d and 2d Pltns of Co B respectively, reached the outskirts of KIRCHEIM and came under fire from German units retreating from STUTTGART and again from civilian sniper fire. On the morning of Apr 21, as in OHRINGEN, a TOT was conducted and solved the situation, but in this instance not before Hankins' forces suffered a number of killed and wounded. A case in point was when the 2d and 3d Pltns of Co B had deployed taking enemy AT weapons and Inf under fire. Part of the atchd Rcn Pltn with Pltn Sgt Orville Estes was deployed in an orchard providing flank protection for the destroyers. In a burst of rifle fire from a group of enemy soldiers and civilians, Sgt Estes was killed and T/5 Cecil Duncan was wounded. The loss of Sgt Estes a popular soldier and friend was a great blow to all in Co B.

As Hankin's forces were clearing KIRCHEIM and rounding up more than 400 POWs, TF Ulrich with 2d Pltn Co B, established defensive positions west and southwest of OTLINGEN, a nearby town on the Autobahn, to block enemy forces pulling out of the STUGGART area. Here the 2d Pltn had a field day. Firing over 60 rounds of APC and HE ammunition, the Pltn destroyed one MK IV Tank, an 88mm AT gun, one halftrack and two Command vehicles. An estimated five enemy were killed and 30 wounded. Over 100 POWs were added to TF Hankins Prisoner cages. The 1st Pltn Co B was sent NW of KIRCHEIM to locate a reported tank. In short order a MK IV was located and destroyed. These blocking positions were maintained until the follow up 44th Div elements arrived to relieve them. Meanwhile, CCBs TFs Chamberlain (2d Pltn Co A) and Richardson (3d Pltn Co A) and CCRs TF Thackston (2d and 3d Pltns Co C) were in the KIRCHEIM area only a brief period. Div ordered them to continue the attack toward ULM and the DANUBE, some 30 miles distant.

The Div's first objective was secured. With KIRCHEIM captured and the autobahn cut enemy units in the STUTTGART area had difficulty escaping to the southeast. The German 19th Army was beset, with the French attacking from the west and south and now the U.S. VI Corps blocking from the north and east. German elements not staying to fight, either surrendered or started withdrawing towards ULM and the Alps.

When the forces of TFs Chamberlain and Richardson crossed the autobahn late on April 21st, another charge was on. Once the shell of enemy resistance was broken at the entrance to the plateau, known as the Schwabisch Alps, Chamberlain took off like he was on a stampede. But Richardson was not as fortunate. When his force encountered a road block in the vic of OBER LENNINGEN Lt Col Jack Richardson, a much decorated officer, was killed by a mortar round and Major James Duncan assumed command of the Force. Shortly after that incident General Piburn, Commanding General of CCA, was critically injured when his Jeep exploded a mine. The command was taken over by Colonel Tom Brinkley.

No such fate was in the cards for Tom Chamberlain. His Task Force churned up mileage in great chunks all day and by midnight April 22d had captured a bridge over the Danube at EHINGEN. The atchd 2d Pltn Co A was having a great ride. Along the way the TF was surprised by three enemy light aircraft over the column firing bazooka type weapons. Two of the three were destroyed by Antiaircraft units traveling with the column. The AA people were chided about letting one get away. They should have used the Deadeye TDs.

Other Div TFs after clearing KIRCHEIM, advanced on the general axis of: OBER LENNINGEN, LAICHINGEN, BLAUBEUREN. From BLAUBEUREN, CCA and CCB forces moved to the vic of EHINGEN, while CCR which included TF Thackston and now newly atchd TF Hankins stayed on the north bank directing their attack east toward ULM. CCA and CCB probed for more intact bridges when they arrived in the vic of EHINGEN and found two more a few miles either side of the town. All CCA and CCB units were south of the Danube by midnight April 23d except TF Chamberlain who was cleaning-up enemy elements left in EHINGEN. CCR units remained north of the Danube. Their mission was to attack ULM from the north and the west. The 2d and 3d Pltns, Co C alternated in supporting TF Thackston while 3d Pltn Co B continued in support of TF Hankins.

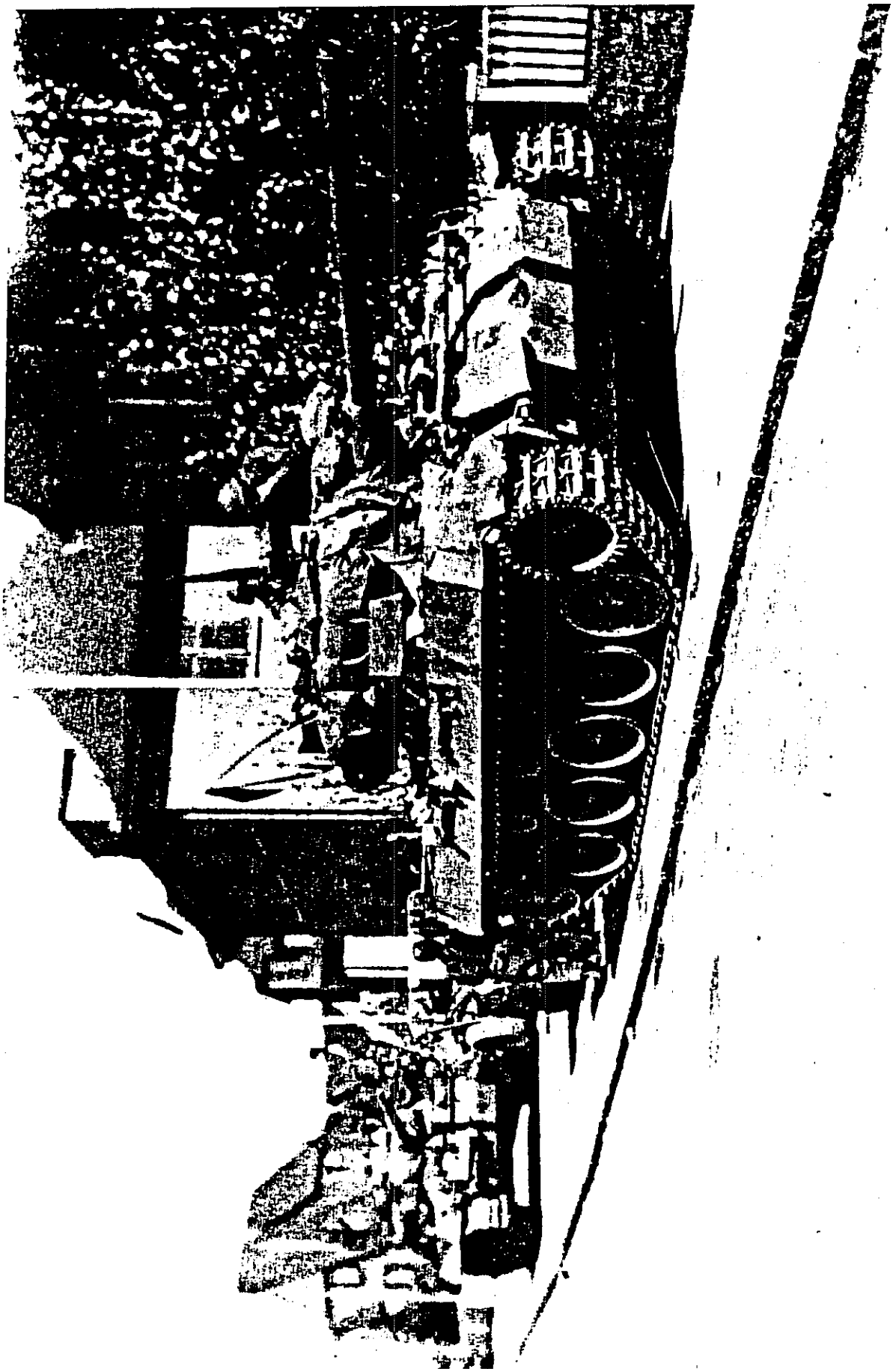
It was at this point that 10th AD forces became aware of the First French Army units moving east along the south bank of the Danube. On a liaison visit to the French 2d AD at LAUPHEIM, it was noted that they were systematically looting each town. Their system was deliberate and professional. As one French Officer said, "We plan to get back what they stole when occupying France". German household goods of better quality were professionally packed, crated and sent back to France by unit transport before undertaking the next phase of operations.

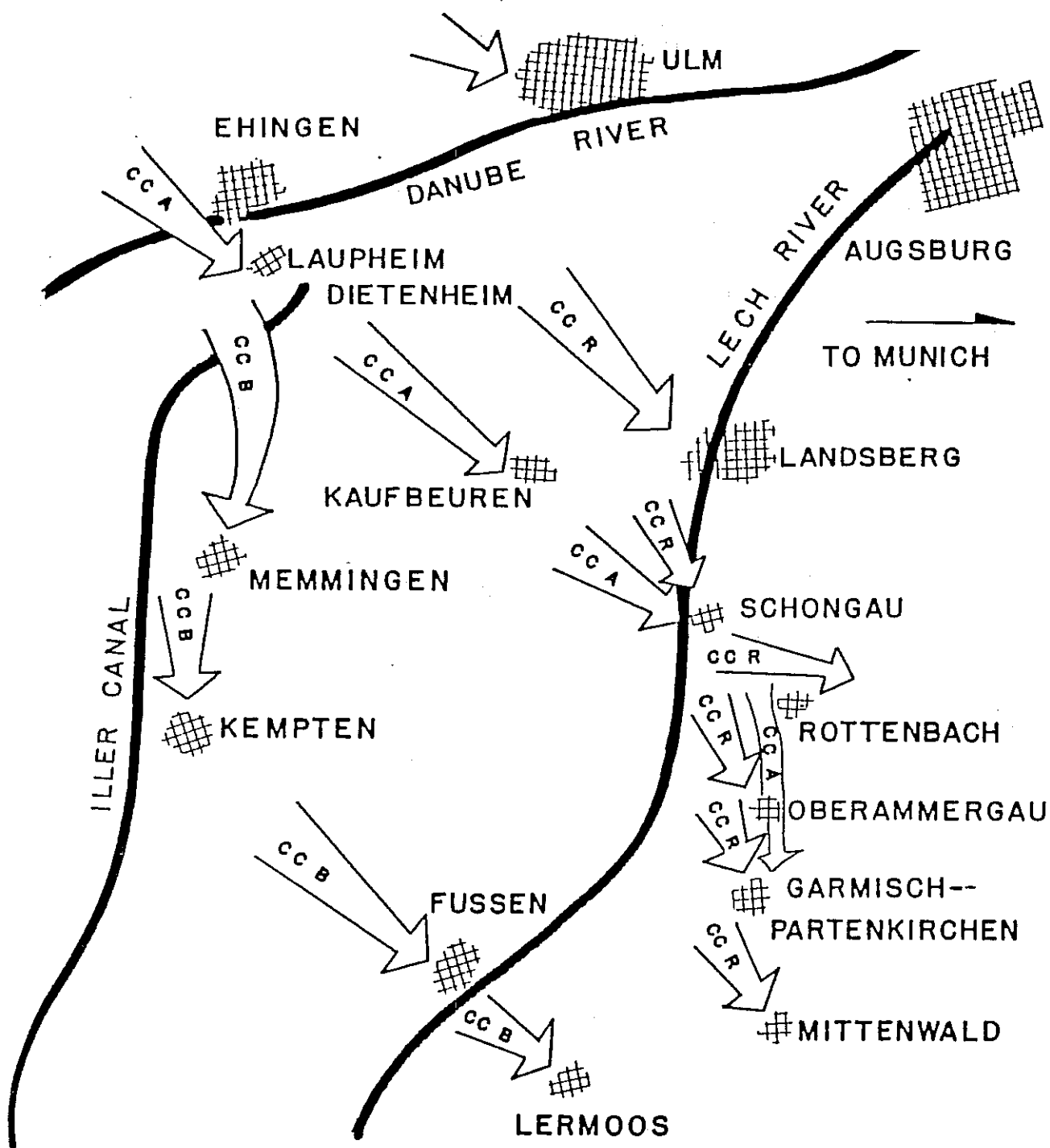
Again, as in operations between OHRINGEN and KIRCHEIM, the 10th AD was in the pursuit phase of operations, not just an attack. All 609th units were kept well up front with the lead elements. Because defensive capabilities of the German Army were in such a state of flux, major resistance was primarily in the form of roadblocks covered by AT, mortar and/or artillery fire. Except for sporadic firing missions, mainly at roadblocks, many of the TD units as well as the other Armor elements were just along for the ride. This reflects the devastating impact "Shock Effect" can have as a result of fast moving armor operations. German troops as well as the civilian population realized how conquered countries must have felt back in the 1930s.

As a result of coordinated operations in ULM, CCR's TFs Thackston and Hankins by April 26 were able to break the back of most resistance. Co C casualties were relatively light considering the occasional heavy resistance encountered. When the 44th Div assumed responsibility for clearing the remaining enemy, CCR quickly turned over 1500 POWs Hankins was holding.

FROM ULM TO THE BAVARIAN/AUSTRIAN ALPS - APRIL 26 - 30, 1945

The 609th TD Bn's last phase of combat, or "The Last Hurrah", or "Our Last Claim to Fame", whichever is preferred, commenced when units accompanied the 10th AD "Tigers" out of the greater Ulm area. Depending on which Combat Command or TF you supported, it was on either April 25th or 26th. CCB, with Co A 609th units atchd, crossed the Iller River bridge at DIETENHEIM on Apr 25th and advanced south toward FELLHEIM and MEMMINGEN with TFs Chamberlain (2d Pltn Co A) and Duncan (3d Pltn Co A) abreast. CCA's TF Ulrich (2d Pltn Co B) crossed the Iller at Illerrieden's new bridge site on Apr 25 and moved north toward ULM to relieve pressure on CCR units engaged in clearing ULM. Enemy artillery fire was very heavy at the bridge site and later at the unit assembly area in WULLENSTETTIN. PFC George Payne was killed by an artillery round and two unidentified members of 2d Pltn Co B were wounded. PFC Payne was probably the last member of the 609th





THE LAST KILOMETER
(FROM THE DANUBE TO THE ALPS)
APRIL 23 - 30 1945

Courtesy: L.M. Nichols.
Author of "IMPACT".

killed in action. It was also during this operation the the 2d Pltn, Co B, was credited with destroying a German liaison plane by 50 Cal Machine machine gun fire. This was a second for the Pltn, only this time it was Sgt Earl Miller's crew who "bagged" the kill. The first was in Luxembourg during the Ardennes Offensive.

On Apr 26th, TF Riley with 1st Pltn Co B crossed the ILLER River and headed southeast. With the 44th Div taking over the cleanup at ULM, TFs Hankins and Thackston came south over the main ULM bridge, joined TF Ulrich at NEW ULM and headed east-southeast into battle. All 10th AD columns were now "winging their way" toward the Alps. By days end on the 26th, CCB was on the Div right with TFs Chamberlain and Duncan abreast. They captured MEMMINGEN and secured the release of 5,000 wildly cheering allied prisoners from a POW camp outside of town. In the Div Center, CCA's TFs Riley, Hankins and Ulrich had rolled over 30 miles to MINDELHEIM encountering only light resistance. On visits to the leading units the writer witnessed some strange sights, e.g. a Pltn Leader riding gun barrel on the lead destroyer and in another instance, TF Hankins capture of a heavily camouflaged airfield with several Jet aircraft in revetments. The German personnel were gathered up, and guards left to secure the aircraft. On the left flank, CCR with TF Thackston (3d Pltn Co C) leading, gained another 35 miles, passing just to the south of LANDSBERG.

To this point in the pursuit, there was little if any resistance encountered except in MEMMINGEN. As CCB units entered the city they faced some panzerfaust and artillery fire. The Commander of CCB sent a message to the Burgermeister informing him to get the firing stopped and raise white flags or the town would be destroyed. The ultimatum was effective. With General Brooks, the Corps Commander, encouraging the advance like a cheerleader "Push On and Push Hard, this is a pursuit not an attack.", each TF seemed to try and outdo the other. The Div's prisoner take for April 26th was over 9,000. It is understandable why the "Deadeye Sharpshooters of the 609th were getting rusty. But on the 27th came a "Target of Opportunity". As the CCA forces of TF Ulrich approached the town of KAUFBEUREN, a large train with many cars containing equipment and passengers was observed pulling out of the town heading east. The 2d Pltn Co B finally found the ideal moving target range. With two well placed rounds of APC, Tony Battaglia and his M-18 crew with Joe Spatola as gunner did what they could never do in Camp Shelby, score direct hits on a locomotive. This claim was contested by another 2nd Pltn crew who maintained that their Gunner Elmer Brown should "win the turkey". Maybe they can have a shoot-off. In any event, another 150 German soldiers from the train were added to the ever swelling bag of prisoners.

On April 27, the advance made on all fronts of the Div was about 30 miles. While all of this was happening, units of the 90th Rcn Sqdn protected the north or left flank and did a good job. It is important also to mention that support given the 10th AD during the past two week period by the 44th and 100th Divs was outstanding in all respects. The 609th TD Bn was especially thankful to have the Inf support. As they say in Armor regarding bypassed enemy, "We passed em and the supporting Inf massed them."

Drawing nearer the Alps, it was obvious the "Super Race" was not going to make it to the "National Redoubt". Forces of CCB had closed or controlled every road into the Alps in the vic of KEMPTON and FUSSEN. Other such roads in the Div area would be closed shortly. TFs Chamberlain of CCB with 2d Pltn Co A and Duncan with 3d Pltn Co A and with Co A (minus) atchd, were the first 10th AD units to cross into Austria. In the center of the Div advance, TFs Riley of CCA with 1st Pltn Co B and Hankins with 3d Pltn Co B were held up temporarily at SCHONGAU by a blown bridge. In the north, TF Thackston of CCR with 2d and 3d Pltns Co C made contact with elements of the 12th AD south of LANDSBERG. Again, the Div POW cages were overflowing with another catch of almost 3,000 prisoners.

The hardworking Div Engineers finally repaired the bridge at SCHONGAU late on April 28. TF Riley quickly moved southward followed by TF Hankins. When Riley's force was temporarily held up, Hankins units (like the Darlington Speedway) shot by and led the advance through OBERAMMERGAU, the little town famous for the Passion Play. It was here that the 3d Pltn Co B came under the masterful touch of a new Pltn leader, 1st Sgt Frank Kut vice Lt Tom Smith who was on pass to Paris. CCB TF Chamberlain continued advancing past FUSSEN into Austria where impassable craters halted further advance. TF Duncan continued on a parallel road down into Austria. At the same time CCR elements on the north, passed to the east of SCHONGAU and down through WEILHEIM and MURNAU. With GARMISCH almost in sight, CCA was halted by a huge road crater requiring several hours to repair.

On April 30th, TF Hankins led the 10th AD units into GARMISCH - PARTENKIRCHEN where he was given "the Keys to the City." While this was occurring, TF Duncan with 3d Pltn Co A in Austria advanced to within 35 miles of the Italian border where large road craters stopped any further advance. 10th AD plans calling for the capture of INNSBRUCK, Austria, were scrapped when forces advancing past MITTENWALD were stopped by several huge craters in the road short of the Austrian border.

By now, all 10th AD forces and especially the 609th TD Bn were ready for a dose of rest and relaxation. As though an omen, everyone awakened on May 1, 1945 to find the surroundings covered with a heavy blanket of snow. Everything was bright and clean. The war in Europe was all but over. PEACE!

IX

OCCUPATION DUTY AND THE TRIP HOME

OCCUPATION DUTY - MAY 1 TO AUGUST 15, 1945

Upon completion of combat operations on April 30, 1945, the 609th TD Bn was stationed in GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN Germany from May 1 to May 14. All units were involved in the maintenance of equipment, performing necessary guard duty and other special details levied by higher headquarters. Some unit personnel were given leave to PARIS (on a quota basis), while just about all had the opportunity to visit local sights. Selected personnel and equipment participated in the VE day parade. Sgt William Bayless and Sgt John Pilon of Co C finally received Battlefield Commissions and were sworn into the Army as new 2d Lts on May 1, 1945.

All major commands of the 10th AD initially had headquarters in GARMISCH. But eventually, because of the pure numbers involved and lack of facilities to adequately house personnel, movement to adjacent towns was dictated for some. For example, Div Artillery units were located in the Weilheim area about 25 miles north on the road to MUNICH. For this and other reasons, the 609th was soon relocated to the town of KOCHTEL and the surrounding area. Unaffected by war damage, KOCHTEL was located on a large body of water called KOCHTEL SEE, about 25 miles northeast of GARMISCH on the road to BAD TOLZ. The purposes for moving were two. One, as already mentioned, over-crowding in Garmisch, and two, the need for a security force to guard a "V" Weapons Laboratory.

Upon arrival in KOCHTEL on May 15, 1945 Hq & Hq Co, Co A and Co B were quartered within the town limits. Co C was initially quartered in a fine hotel in the small hamlet of WALCHENSEE located on the WALCHEN SEE about seven miles south of KOCHTEL. On May 20th, because of a higher priority occupant, Co C relocated to the small village of URFELD, four miles north. Rcn Co being the great scouts they were, outposted KOCHTEL with one element located in SCHELHDORF, across the KOCHTEL SEE and the remainder in the small village of JACKENAU nestled in the Alps near Co C area.

The primary guard duty requirement was for a classified facility known as the "V" Weapons Laboratory located on the east edge of KOCHTEL in a small ravine at the foothill of a steep mountain. The buildings housing the Laboratory were of the one story type resembling a small sawmill. It was quite innocent looking from the ground and air. The guard function was headed by one officer, Lt Robert Mayer, who drew guard personnel mostly from Co B, but with support as necessary from other Bn units. Few Bn members were aware of the project's significance.

The German Government, early in the war, had established on the north coast of Germany a highly classified project at a place called PEENAMUNDE. Here they gathered top scientists to develop a rocket program among other things. First evidence of its success were the rocket attacks on England. In 1944, after Allied intelligence learned of the plants existence, bombing attacks caused Germany to relocate the plant. It was decided to split the project with one part going to the vic of LEIPZIG and the other to the small Bavarian town of KOCHTEL. The Germans and the Americans, when it was obvious that the Russians were going to occupy the east part of Germany, destroyed the equipment and facilities at the plant near LEIPZIG. Subsequently, about 35 top scientists under Werner Von Braun staffed the Kochel facility. When the Americans took over the area the scientists were kept under detention in a local Gasthaus.

Among the many new developments located at the plant and probably most important to the U.S. and its Allies, were the two supersonic Wind Tunnels, one of which was still in crates. The operating Wind Tunnel was the only one of its kind in the world. Because of this, the Germans had been able to develop not only a rocket capability, but also the jet airplane. Late in the Fall of 1945

(Oct-Nov), the entire plant was packaged and shipped to White Oaks, Maryland. Later, Von Braun and his team of scientists were brought to America and staffed the U.S. Army Rocket development facilities at Redstone Arsenal.

Meanwhile, life went on for the other Bn units and personnel. Co A had responsibility for guarding a large power plant located at the south end of KOCHER SEE. Some say this plant provided power to a radius of 500 miles. Other Bn units were assigned a variety of tasks. Generally speaking, all were involved with guard duty of some type, maintenance of vehicles and equipment, some Military Government functions and of course recreation. The military Special Services in the Garmisch area were and still are some of the finest on the Continent. Military Forces in Europe still use GARMISCH and BERCHTESGADEN in Austria for their recreation areas. Lake Eibsee "The Tiger's Lair" and the winter sports atop the Zugspitz were/are most popular spots.

The final military operation at KOCHER was to exchange the M-18 TD vehicles for the brand new M-36. This was the last combat vehicle developed for the TD Forces by the U.S. Army.

HOMEWARD BOUND - AUG. 15 - NOV. 13, 1945

The time had arrived to give serious thoughts about going home. What else was there to think about? Granted, there were concerns about having to head off to the Pacific once home leave was over, but that would come later. On August 15, the dulcet tones of the 1st Sgt saying "Fall in" were like music to the ear. When the trucks were loaded, the convoy moved out for the MUNICH Bahnhof where trains were waiting for the scenic ride to RHEIMS, France. As the train gained speed, individuals began to reminisce. Now mind you, this wasn't all of the old gang going home, many of those high-pointers had already departed the good old 609th. It wasn't known at that time, but some of those "Old Timers" were still sitting around with another unit waiting for the trip back. As the men gazed out train windows, many thoughts passed their minds especially about recent days of combat when they might have fought through some of the same areas now just a blur in the countryside. Gonna miss these old boys, but it sure will be nice to get home. Soon we arrive at RHEIMS and Camp Atlanta for some more processing. Then the trip to Camp WINGS, gee that name is familiar, but what is holding us up? You say we gotta wait for the boat? The ship finally arrives. Someone says its the U.S. Victory, I like that. And as the anchor is pulled and we slide away from the pier at LE HAVRE, France, someone says, "Gee, August 30, 1945, is a real nice Thursday."

When the ship arrived in New York harbor, no Fire Boats came steaming out to spray water over our bow. Guess they've forgotten already. Well we don't mind, we are going home. After arriving at Camp Shanks, N.Y., someone else will say "Gee, September 7, 1945 is a real nice Friday." When processing is through, most are sent off on a 30 day home leave, except for those few poor souls who go on to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. For it is their job to unravel the messed up administration and most of all, the supply records.

Those who can make it back to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky by the second Tuesday of November, stand solemnly by as the Adjutant reads "By order of the Commander in Chief of the Military Forces of the United States of America, President Harry S. Truman and authenticated by the Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, The 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion is hereby deactivated." And I hear myself say: "Gee, November 13, 1945 is a real BLAH Tuesday" as many a tear is wiped dry. FIND, FIGHT, FINISH.

X

609th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

COMMAND POST LOCATIONS

Camp Shanks, New York (POE)	3 Aug '44
Liverpool, England	24 Aug '44
Llanover Park, England	24 Aug '44
Dorchester, England	16 Sep '44
Portland, England	19 Sep '44
Utah Beach, France	20 Sep '44
St Mere Eglise, France	21 Sep '44
Longey, France	22 Sep '44
Sens, France	23 Sep '44
St. Meneshold, France	26 Sep '44
Moutiers, France (Went into Action)	27 Sep '44
Vionville (U695564), France	3 Nov '44
Puxieux (U652547), France	3 Nov '44
Ottange, (U730955), France	9 Nov '44
U 870933 (Maginot Line Fort), France	15 Nov '44
Malling (U957906), France	17 Nov '44
Kaltviller (Q026903), France	18 Nov '44
Rustroff (Q012946), France	28 Nov '44
Garnich (P710145), Luxembourg	18 Dec '44
Merl (P815130), Luxembourg	18 Dec '44
Berlingen (P835298), Luxembourg	21 Dec '44
Rodenbourg (P965221), Luxembourg	10 Jan '45
Colligny (U970565), France	11 Jan '45
Dieuze (Q250235), France	17 Jan '45
Teting (Q217512), France	22 Jan '45
Bechy (Q009439), France	29 Jan '45
Metz (U8659), Germany	10 Feb '45
Sierck (Q018945), France	20 Feb '45
Besch (LC12015), France	20 Feb '45
Wincheringen (L054131), Germany	21 Feb '45
Nittel (L068179), Germany	22 Feb '45
Beurig (L150127), Germany	27 Feb '45
Trier (L226306), Germany	3 Mar '45
Waldrach (L287280), Germany	18 Mar '45
Thalfang (L467286), Germany	19 Mar '45
Wirschweiler (L595295), Germany	20 Mar '45
Saarlautern (Q285798), Germany	23 Mar '45
Edenkoben (R284755), Germany	24 Mar '45
Queichheim (R296663), Germany	25 Mar '45
Sandhofen (M510050), Germany	29 Mar '45
Rohrbach (R690870), Germany	1 Apr '45
Bad Rappenau (R991721), Germany	4 Apr '45
Hungheim (S293918), Germany	6 Apr '45
Assamstadt (S412937), Germany	7 Apr '45
Diebach (S375835), Germany	12 Apr '45
Ohringen (S285385), Germany	14 Apr '45
Bead Castell (S330545), Germany	18 Apr '45

COMMAND POST LOCATIONS (Cont'd)

Fornsbach (S403440), Germany	19 Apr '45
Aldorf (S456293), Germany	20 Apr '45
Faurndau (S383136), Germany	21 Apr '45
Laichingen (X440898), Germany	23 Apr '45
Ehingen (X474686), Germany	24 Apr '45
Laupheim (X595612), Germany	24 Apr '45
Unter Balzheim (X739558), Germany	25 Apr '45
Mindelheim (Y052420), Germany	27 Apr '45
Schongau (Y367177), Germany	28 Apr '45
Garmisch-Partenkirchen (D5282), Germany	30 Apr '45
Kochel (Y723015), Germany	15 May '45

XI

LIST OF KNOWN CASUALTIES AND PRISONERS OF WAR (POW)

(Killed, Wounded and Prisoners of War are listed by rank at the time)

All Killed or Wounded were authorized/awarded the Purple Heart Medal

KILLED

Reconnaissance Company

1st Lt Malcolm K Grant, Apr 10, '45	S/Sgt Orville E Estes, Apr 21, '45
Sgt Alexander E Morales, Apr 4, '45	Sgt Richard P Woodford, Feb 24, '45
PFC Sylvester E Frye, Mar 30, '45	PFC Horace E Jackson, Mar 30, '45
PFC Thomas M McGonigle, Feb 27, '45	PFC Lionel P Gregoire, Apr 4, '45
PFC Richard H Hallock, Apr 10, '45	PFC Russell W Pollock, Mar 30, '45

"A" Company

Sgt Raymond Jansen, Sep '44	PFC David Gill, Nov '44
PFC William Gillard, Nov '44	PFC Lloyd Powers, Dec '44
Pvt Butts Nov '44	
(Member of the unit only one day)	

"B" Company

PFC George McCune, Oct '44	1st Lt William N Fudge, Apr 6, '45
S/Sgt John B Maher, Mar 10, '45	Sgt Nelson A Wilson, Mar 1, '45
Cpl Dean J Crockett, Apr 10, '45	PFC George F Payne, Apr 25, '45
Pvt Matthew J Toman, Apr 10, '45	Pvt Walter H Van Cleve, Apr 9, '45

"C" Company

Sgt Clifford Miller, Oct '44	Cpl George Barnett, Dec 24, '44
T/5 Robert Kurz, Dec 21, '44	PFC Harry Greene, Dec 24, '44
PFC Michael Hughes, Dec 21, '44	Pvt John Pendziwater, Dec 20, '44
1st Lt Richard Davidson, Mar 13, '45	Sgt John W McMonagle, Mar 12, '45
T/5 John J Cojetsky, Mar 12, '45	T/5 Ralph S Gray, Mar 12, '45
Cpl Clem J Hutchinson, Mar 12, '45	T/5 Stanley F Pingstock, Mar 30, '45
PFC Carl B Lloyd, Feb 24, '45	PFC Robert S Curry, Apr 9, '45
Pvt George E Wetmore, Apr 9, '45	

WOUNDED

Headquarters Company

PFC Porter, Nov '44	Pvt Warren L Smith, Dec 23, '44
PFC Alfred Marzano, Feb 24, '45	(Medical Detachment)
(Medical Detachment)	PFC Marvin J Francis, Feb 28, '45
	(Medical Detachment)

Reconnaissance Company

2d Lt Paul W Barione, Mar 6, '45	2d Lt Parnell Marron, Dec 24, '44
Sgt Joseph Boyer, Dec 25, '44	Sgt Robert Egan, Dec 3, '44
Sgt John Hovan, Dec 19, '44	S/Sgt Joseph Fillinger, Apr 10, '45
Sgt Walter E Allen, Apr 10, '45	Sgt Forrest D. Holland, Apr 10, '45

Reconnaissance Company

Cpl Kermit A Cobb, Mar 1, '45
T/5 Richard Hertel, Feb 23, '45
T/5 Charlie Head, Apr 5, '45
T/5 John H King, Apr 10, '45
T/5 Nickolas Seech, May 1, '45
PFC Joseph R Watson, Feb 23, '45
PFC Pasquale Ciocco, Feb 28, '45
PFC Eugene Bakula, Apr 8, '45
PFC Henry Jaraczewski, Apr 10, '45
PFC John E Naylor, Apr 14, '45
PFC Benjamin Yeagle, May 1, '45
Pvt Frank Chappel Jr, Apr 10, '45

T/5 Patsy Moschelle, Dec 23, '44
T/5 Fletcher Butts, Mar 2, '45
T/5 Woodrow L Pflugh, Apr 10, '45
T/5 Cecil A Duncan, Apr 21, '45
PFC Bernard Garner, Dec 23, '44
PFC Edward A Gebo, Feb 27, '45
PFC Joseph Grimes, Mar 27, '45
PFC Roger Ward, Apr 9, '45
PFC Donald Tyger, Apr 10, '45
PFC Michael Wilson, May 1, '45
Pvt Michael Skowronski, Mar 20, '45

"A" Company

1st Lt William J Milligan, Apr 9, '45
S/Sgt Jack Miller, Nov 26, '44
S/Sgt Baranger S Long, Feb 27, '45
Sgt Gaston Lauze, Nov '44
Sgt John Bauer, Mar 3, '45
T/4 Dean McClintic, Dec 24, '44
T/4 James Dewar, Mar 2, '45
Cpl Louis Bradley, Nov 25, '44
Cpl Dennis J Carroll, Feb 28, '45
T/5 Charles Gessner, Dec 23, '44
T/5 Richard F Black, Mar 12, '45
PFC Harvey Bauman, Oct '44
PFC Leonard Flack, Nov '44
PFC John Lynch, Dec 25, '44
PFC Edward Salamack, Feb 27, '45
PFC Donald Anderson, Mar 1, '45
PFC Otis J Bernard, Mar 30, '45
PFC Andrew Mace, Apr 9, '45

1st Lt Francis Townsend, Feb 27, '45
S/Sgt Joseph Yuska, Nov 27, '44
*S/Sgt Eldridge Cashwell, Mar 12, '45
Sgt Richard M Newman, Feb 28, '45
*Sgt Theodore Maziarski, Apr 23, '45
T/4 William Zens, Mar 1, '45
Cpl Al Hiebert, Nov '44
Cpl Sidney Tedder, Feb 27, '45
Cpl Vincent Mateer, Feb 27, '45
T/5 Joseph Kahaulelio, Feb 23, '45
T/5 Marvin H Sumpter, Apr 9, '45
PFC Edwin Powers, Oct 19, '44
PFC Scott Harding, Nov '44
*PFC Otto Stankoski, Dec '44
PFC David S Bennett, Feb 28, '45
PFC Fluvio J Bari, Mar 2, '45
PFC Milton Laub, Mar 30, '45
Pvt Louis S Dasch, Mar 30, '45

"B" Company

Capt Albert F Ahrenholz, Feb 26, '45
1st Lt Edgar M Gray, Feb 27, '45
S/Sgt William Hamilton, Apr 10, '45
Sgt Ivan H Feine, Apr 12, '45
Cpl Leonard J Panella, Feb 23, '45
T/5 Hammon Davisson, Feb 20, '45
T/5 Clifford H Howard, Apr 6, '45
PFC Thomas Tierney, Dec 25, '44
PFC Orville Brown, Mar 13, '45
PFC Clyde Cagle, Apr 6, '45
PFC Arlie Defenbaugh, Feb 28, '45
PFC William Kossol, Feb 28, '45
Pvt Carl Thompson Jr, Mar 7, '45
Pvt Joseph L Mandella, Apr 2, '45

1st Lt Wilbur Brannan, Dec 19, '44
T/Sgt William Garlick, Feb 28, '45
Sgt James R Campbell, Feb 22, '45
Cpl Anthony Battaglia, Jan 12, '45
Cpl McKinley Bird, Feb 27, '45
T/5 Henry Frick, Mar 13, '45
T/5 Clyde L Sink, Apr 10, '45
PFC Thomas Bagley, Mar 31, '45
PFC Angelo Buttone Jr, Mar 7, '45
PFC Walter Cannon, Feb 23, '45
PFC Robert J Drozal, Feb 23, '45
Pvt Benedict J Thompson, Mar 7, '45
Pvt Lang, Mar 31, '45
T/5 Henry B Gay, Apr 10, '45

* Also awarded first OAK LEAF Cluster

"C" Company

1st Lt Edward Gladden, Dec 26, '44
T/Sgt George McGough, Jan 14, '45
S/Sgt Arthur Cain, Dec 25, '44
*Sgt Henry Moskalski, Nov 18, '44
Sgt Richard Beaster, Dec 20, '44
T/4 Albert Correll, Dec 24, '44
*T/4 Alexander DeFeo, Jan 12, '45
*Cpl David Bucholtz, Nov 19, '44
Cpl Anthony J D'Esposito, Jan 11, '45
Cpl Rudolph Eigenrauch, Mar 12, '45
T/5 Andy J Domenick, Jan 9, '45
T/5 Delbert G Crawford, Mar 15, '45
PFC Paul Chesne, Dec 22, '44
PFC Harvey Hamilton, Dec 24, '44
PFC Robert H Hieber, Jan 9, '45
PFC Albert Aiello, Mar 13, '45
PFC Robert Duncan, Apr 2, '45
*Pvt John McCall, Jan 10, '45
Pvt Carl E Courtney, Mar 13, '45

1st Lt David K Hagens, Jan 9, '45
*S/Sgt James Gibson, Dec 24, '44
S/Sgt Floyd E Suber, Mar 12, '45
Sgt Richard Horton, Dec 19, '44
Sgt Allen Iler, Mar 1, '45
T/4 Harold Myers, Jan 11, '45
T/4 Anthony J Katauskas, Apr 9, '45
Cpl Colby Ricker, Dec 20, '44
Cpl Chester Abeare, Mar 12, '45
**T/5 David Wilson, Dec 19, '44
T/5 Raymond Graybeal, Mar 9, '45
T/5 John Soyka, Apr 10, '45
PFC Clayton Dickerson, Dec 24, '44
PFC Othal Whitfield, Dec 27, '44
PFC John Luciano, Mar 12, '45
PFC Joseph H Bernard, Mar 13, '45
Pvt Ellie McManus, Dec 20, '44
Pvt James A Spencer, Jan 13, '45
Pvt Thomas H Henderson, Mar 13, '45

PRISONERS OF WAR

Reconnaissance Company

Sgt Walter E Allen, Apr 10, '45

"B" Company

Cpl Arthur Malicki, Mar 6, '45

"C" Company

Sgt Richard Horton, Dec 19, '44 (Died later while POW)
Sgt Richard Beaster, Dec 20, '44
Cpl David Wilson, Dec 20, '44

MISSING

"B" Company

Pvt Bruno J Wazny, Apr 10, '45

- * Also awarded first OAK LEAF Cluster
- ** Also awarded second OAK LEAF Cluster

XII

AWARDS

SILVER STAR

Headquarters Company

Cpl James J Long

Reconnaissance Company

1st Lt Paul Barioni
PFC Chester T Golubski

1st Lt Malcolm K Grant
PFC Thomas M McGonigle

"A" Company

1st Lt Robert Figg

"B" Company

1st Lt Thomas A Smith
S/Sgt John E Maher
T/4 Henry B Gay
PFC William L Torlay

S/Sgt William J Hamilton
Sgt Earl L Miller
T/5 Hammon Davisson

"C" Company

1st Lt David K Hagens

2d Lt John P Pilon

SOLDIERS MEDAL

Reconnaissance Company

1st Lt Malcolm K Grant

BRONZE STAR

Headquarters Company

LtCol Roland A Browne
Major William F Shotola
1st Lt Arthur J Morris
M/Sgt Gordon R Bailey
T/Sgt Walter J Anderson
T/Sgt Brendan P McElaney
S/Sgt Simon Berman
S/Sgt Harold McCann
T/3 James E Wilson
T/5 Joe B Cotner
PFC Chauncy Spencer

Major William H Hatina
Capt Henry J Haemmerlie
1st Sgt Edwin Janke, Jr
M/Sgt Lester E Peterson
T/Sgt George O Funke
T/Sgt Walter Reifsnyder
S/Sgt John P Bowman
S/Sgt Dudley Williams
Sgt James J Colberg
Cpl Roy H Kuemmerle

AWARDS (Cont'd)

Reconnaissance Company

Capt Arthur F Mitchell
1st Lt Billy B Parks
1st Sgt George C Flynn
S/Sgt Edward B Boyle
S/Sgt Francis J Fay
S/Sgt Harold E Graham
S/Sgt Harold T Smith
Sgt Forrest D Holland
T/5 Walter W Kozian
PFC John P Golden
PFC Henry J Jaraczewski
PFC Walter J Grabowy
PFC William C Mild
PFC Joseph A Morrisseau

1st Lt Malcolm K Grant
1st Lt Patrick J Troy
S/Sgt Lyndon F Barker
S/Sgt James J Doyle
*S/Sgt Joseph E Fillinger
S/Sgt Lionel J LaFlamme
Sgt Walter E Allen
Sgt Edward Gandy
Sgt Joseph F Santos
T/5 Woodrow Pflugh
PFC Donald F Dunlop
PFC Richard H Hatlock
PFC Vincent Kolecki
PFC Charles H Mink

"A" Company

Capt Harold H Dyke
1st Lt Millard F Frantz
1st Lt William J Milligan
S/Sgt James Stidem
T/4 Butler Brock
T/4 Ray King
T/4 Russell C Sanford
T/5 Fred T Lehmann
Cpl Dennis J Carroll
Cpl William P Watson
PFC Henry M Pederson

1st Lt Robert Figg
1st Lt Victor J Harris
2d Lt Irving Feld
Sgt John A Bauer
Sgt John E Hinshaw
Sgt Paul W Nichols
T/5 Kyle Bibbons
T/5 Lee D Patterson
Cpl John F Land
PFC David S Bennett
Pvt Clyde O Bowers

"B" Company

Capt Albert F Ahrenholz
1st Lt William N Fudge
2d Lt Edward J Douthitt
T/Sgt William J Garlick
S/Sgt John R Laffey
S/Sgt Paul Williams
Sgt Anthony J Cocca
Sgt Arthur Fournier
Sgt Ordna L McMullen
Sgt James Smith
T/5 Thomas F Cable
Cpl Dean J Crockett
Cpl Joseph H Martinez
Cpl Carmelo R Mula
PFC Taylor Highley
PFC Tony J Vila

1st Lt Wilbur S Brannan
1st Lt Edgar M Gray
1st Sgt Frank J Kut
*S/Sgt John W Garrity
S/Sgt Walter W Steffen
Sgt Elmer T Brown
Sgt Ivan M Feine
T/4 Walter S Gorski
T/4 Leo F Miller
Sgt Jimmie R Tress
T/5 Hammon Davisson
Cpl George F Koebler
Cpl James T McClone
PFC Edward H Campbell
PFC Frank J Kucharski
Pvt Matthew J Toman

* Also awarded first OAK LEAF Cluster.

AWARDS (Cont'd)

"C" Company

*Capt Stephen P Chorak
1st Lt Clyde E Harris
2d Lt William L Bayless
T/Sgt George W McGough
S/Sgt Arthur L Cane
S/Sgt Arnold M Guffey
Sgt Richard H Beaster
T/4 Alexander DeFeo
Sgt Norbert V.J. Gerjing
Sgt C.W. Martin Jr.
Sgt Henry J Moskalski
Sgt John P Wessinger
T/5 John J Cojetsky
T/5 Ralph S Gray
T/5 Robert H Kurz
Cpl Colby N Ricker
PFC George G Fuchs
Pvt Ellie McManus
Pvt John J Pendziwater

*1st Lt Edward F Gladden
1st Lt Robert W Mayer
2d Lt John P Pilon
1st Sgt Donald C Louya
S/Sgt Earl S Betts
S/Sgt James D Gibson
Sgt Leslie H Andrist
Sgt James B Cunningham
Sgt Camilla M Divito
Sgt Francis M Karner
Sgt James W McMonagle
CPL Joseph M Card
Cpl Justin D Double
Cpl Clem J Hutchinson
Cpl Dewey C Mann
Cpl Owis A Taylor
PFC Edgar L Calvert
PFC Michael J Hughes

Purple heart

All personnel who were killed or wounded in the Combat Zone in action against the enemy are authorized the PURPLE HEART MEDAL.

* Also awarded first OAK LEAF Cluster.

XIII

COMMAND AND STAFF ASSIGNMENTS-COMBAT OPERATIONS

HEADQUARTERS COMMAND AND STAFF

Bn Commander: LtCol Roland Browne: Sept 24, 1944 - Jan 5, 1945.

*Major William Shotola: Jan 6, 1945 - May 1, 1945.

Bn Executive Officer: Major William Shotola: Sept 24, 1944 - Jan 5, 1945.

Major William Hatina: Jan 6, 1945 - May 1, 1945.

Bn S-1: Lt John Fredricks: Sept 24, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

Bn S-2: Capt Alfred Liming: Sept 24, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

Bn S-3: Major William Hatina: Sept 24, 1944 - Jan 5, 1945.

Capt John Rugh: Jan 6, 1945 - May 1, 1945.

Bn S-4: Capt James Seton: Sept 24, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

Bn Motor Officer:

W.O. Russell Semrow: Sept 24, 1944 - Dec 1, 1944.

Capt Henry Haemmerlie: Dec 1, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

Bn Surgeon: Capt Herbert Mann: Sept 24, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

COMPANY COMMANDERS

Headquarters Company: Capt William Harvey: Sept 24, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

Reconnaissance Company: Capt John Rugh: Sept 24, 1944 - Dec 30, 1944.

Capt Arthur Mitchell: Dec 31, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

Company "A": Capt Harold Dyke: Sept 24, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

Company "B": Capt Albert Ahrenholz: Sept 24, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

Company "C": Capt Stephen Chorak: Sept 24, 1944 - May 1, 1945.

* Promoted to Lt Col shortly after cessation of hostilities.

XIV

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ORGANIZATIONS & BRANCH OF SERVICE

Armored Division	AD
Battalion	Bn
Cavalry	Cav
Combat Command A	CCA
Combat Command B	CCB
Combat Command R	CCR
Command Post	CP
Company	Co
Division	Div
Headquarters	Hq
Headquarters & Headquarters Company	Hq & Hq Co
Infantry	Inf
Observation Post	OP
Platoon	Pltn
Reconnaissance	Rcn
Regiment	Regt
Regimental Combat Team	RCT
Section	Sec
Squadron(s)	Sqdn(s)
Tank Destroyer	TD
Task Force	TF
Troop	Trp

EQUIPMENT & AMMUNITION

Antiaircraft	AA
Antitank	AT
Armored Personnel Carrier	APC
Armor Piercing	AP
German AT Weapons	75mm--88mm
Half Track	HT
High Explosive	HE
Machine Guns	MG
Self Propelled	SP
Small Arms	SA

MISCELLANEOUS

Attach(ed)	atch
Attack	atk
Enemy	en
Standard Operating Procedure	SOP
Vicinity	vic
Main Supply Route	MSR

PERSONNEL & TITLES

Captain	Capt
Colonel	Col
Commanding General	CG
Commanding Officer/Commander	CO
Enlisted Men	EM
Executive Officer	XO
General	Gen
Lieutenant Colonel	LtCol
Non Commissioned Officer	NCO
Officer	OFF
Warrant Officer	WO

HEADQUARTERS

THIRD UNITED STATES ARMY
APO 403

GENERAL ORDERS

7 February 1945

NUMBER 31

UNIT CITATION

Under the provisions of Section IV, Circular 633, War Department, 22 December 1943 and in accordance with the authority contained in War Department cable W-24 608, 21 January 1945, the following units are cited:

101st Airborne Division (less 2nd Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry Regiment) with the following attached units:

Company "C": 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion (less 1st Platoon; with 2nd Platoon Reconnaissance Company attached)

These units distinguished themselves in combat against powerful and aggressive enemy forces composed of elements of eight German Divisions during the period from 18 December to 27 December 1944, by extraordinary heroism and gallantry in defense of the key communications center of Bastogne, Belgium. Essential to a large scale exploitation of his breakthrough into Belgium and northern Luxemborg, the enemy attempted to seize Bastogne by attacking constantly and savagely with the best of his armor and infantry. Without benefit of prepared defenses, facing almost overwhelming odds and with very limited and fast-dwindling supplies, these units maintained a high combat morale and an impenetrable defense, despite extremely heavy bombing, intense artillery fire and constant attacks from infantry and armor on all sides of their completely cut-off and encircled position. This masterful and grimly determined defense denied the enemy even momentary success in an operation for which he paid dearly in men, material and eventually morale. The outstanding courage, resourcefulness and undaunted determination of this gallant force are in keeping with the highest tradition of the Service.

By Command of Lieutenant General Patton:

HOBERT R. GAY
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
Chief of Staff

OFFICIAL:

R. E. CUMMINGS,
Colonel, Adjutant General's Department
Adjutant General

NOTES

