

Part Two

OVERSEAS

The Division sailed the next morning, Saturday, October 14, on four ships: the "Santa Rosa" (ex-South American cruise ship), carrying General Albert C. Smith and his staff and the men of the tank battalions; the "Le Jeune" (formerly the German liner "Windhuk"), with the men of the infantry battalions, the Division band, a separate tank battalion and a tank destroyer battalion; the "Sea Robin" (a brand-new troopship), carrying the artillery, 84th Medics and the MPs, and the "General James Parker" (formerly the liner "Panama"), with the 125th Engineers, 136th Ordnance, and the 94th Cav. In addition, there were 14 assorted freighters and Liberty ships carrying armored vehicles and other equipment. No trucks, peeps, half-tracks or light tanks were taken. Roughly, a complete Armored Division needs 35 ships.

Our company was packed deep in the bowels of the "General Parker" where the air was hot and foul and the bunks were in four-high tiers. We were kept below decks until the convoy was out at sea and had picked up its destroyer escort. With time on our hands, it probably didn't matter that the chow lines were incredibly long and involved descending a long, narrow flight of stairs, a stand-up mess, and then up a long flight again.

At the outset, some of us were assigned to special duties. I drew the Chaplain detail and assisted at the Chaplain kiosk, passing out books, games, decks of cards and the like. I also passed out hymnals at the daily services.

In the evening came the klaxon call: "Now hear this! Blackout ... no smoking on deck... close all portholes." There were movies in the afternoon and evening in a cleared area between decks. There were also ice-cream lines, and, as a bonus for those of us who were serving a higher authority, "social drinking" with the Chaplain in his quarters. If there were any German subs in the area, they might have picked up the sounds of country music, for some of our hillbillies sang and twang their guitars the whole night through. In the Gulf current, we lay on deck at night, watching the stars, the phosphorescence in the sea, talking, thinking.

October 25, 1944 (Wednesday)... V-Mail... Somewhere at sea ... Your son has proven to be a good sailor. There are perhaps others on board who have fared as well, but not many!

I'm sure you realize that censorship is extremely strict at this stage and that anything I write must be in generalities or of a non-military nature.

I will write to you at least once a week by V-Mail. When time and censorship permit, I will write at more length. Perhaps it would be a good idea if you sent me about a dozen air-mail stamps. I don't know whether we will be able to buy any at our destination. From what I've heard, air mail is a bit faster than V-Mail. When you write, send me the list (better make that a copy) of the addresses I left with you.***

October 25, 1944 (Wednesday)... Somewhere at sea... [letter, postmarked Oct 31]... Perhaps we had some seafaring ancestors, for I am a good sailor. At the outset, and more recently when we experienced a change in the weather, I had some slight sensations of "butterflies in the stomach," but nothing more, nothing as serious as the mal de mer that many of the others suffered.

We have one officer [Lieutenant Dunn?] who was a bit too cocky when we boarded ship. He talked a lot about the gyro-stabilizer and kidded us about sea-sickness. He felt fine until we hit the high seas, and there proved to be about the least seaworthy man in the company. He is in for a good deal of kidding whenever he shows his face again.

Our days and nights are pretty much our own. We eat and sleep when we are supposed to and spend the rest of our time reading, writing letters that won't be mailed for some time yet, or just sitting in the sun.

We have a Special Services unit with us and they provide music and occasional live entertainment. They also attempt to show movies from time to time in a cleared area between decks, but towards evening, and continuing even after most of us are asleep, that space would put one more in mind of a gambling hall.

On clear moonlit nights, though, the deck is as peaceful as peace can be. Lying on my back and watching the stars, it is an altogether new sensation. It is also a time to think and this is an occasion when there is a lot to think about.

At the outset, some of us were assigned to special duties. I drew the Chaplain detail. Consequently, I am the butt of many jokes and have been dubbed "Chaplain, junior grade." As far as work goes, there really isn't any. I assist at the Chaplain kiosk, passing out books, games, decks of cards and the like. I also pass out and collect again the hymnals used in the daily services.

Censorship forbids mention of anything of a military nature, such as: our destination, which is still debatable; the weather; size of convoy or escort; or description of troop carrier. So you can see, there is quite a restraint placed upon the ramblings of one's pen. Someday I can go into greater detail, but for now, it's not really that important.

You will probably hear from me several times by V-Mail before you receive this letter, even though this is the first letter written.***

There were rumors as to our destination from day one. It wasn't until we were about ten days out, though, that we were given booklets on France, and sometime later told that our port of destination was Marseille. That was also the day we were told to clean and repack our ammo clips. Passing through the Straits of Gibraltar on October 26, we lined the rails to view the coasts. It was in the Mediterranean that we hit our roughest seas and many were sick for the first time.

[The Big Picture: On August 15, 1944, in Operation Dragoon,

the U.S. 7th Army and the 1st Free French Army (making up the 6th Army Group) invaded Southern France, landing 94,000 men and 11,000 vehicles on the Cote d'Azur by the end of the first day. Opposing them was the German 19th Army, which was soon in fitful retreat up the valley of the Rhone.

On September 12, just outside Dijon, the 6th Army Group met up with the right flank of the 12th Army Group. But the Allied advance through France had been more rapid than planners had anticipated and supply lines were now stretched to the very limits. By early Autumn, there were 56 Allied divisions in three Army Groups manning a 500-mile front. German resistance was already growing and the Seventh Army, to which we had been assigned, was now fighting its way through the Vosges Mountains against a strong and resourceful enemy. The Rhine was the symbolic frontier of the German homeland, and, as the battle raged closer and closer to the Reich's frontier, the defenders would become even more determined.]

MARSEILLE

The 14th Armored would be the first division to use Marseille as a port of entry. Our ship entered the harbor late in the afternoon, Saturday, October 28. We stayed aboard ship that night. Next morning, wearing full field, which for me included an ammo bag with sixteen heavy clips of .45cal for my M3 submachine gun, offloaded via LCIs (landing craft, infantry) to a broad concrete dock that was one of the few solid structures to be seen. The port area was otherwise in ruins and swarming with POWs clearing away rubble.

Along cobbled streets and passing our first sidewalk pissoirs (We were in a foreign land!), we began our march around noon. Under our heavy burdens and softened by sixteen inactive days aboard ship (and the very recent rough spell), the march was a real tester, seemingly up hill all the way, and on and on for hours. Virtually everyone was breaking discipline, cursing, falling to the side of the road, many in real pain, and the afternoon grew very warm. To further distress us, we were frequently crowded to the side of the road as American six-by-sixes, empty, roared by. The older French along the way paid us little attention, but young children were out in force, asking for sweets and cigarettes: "Bon bons? Chocolat? Cigarette pour papa?" It wasn't until a day or two later that we learned that American cigarettes were a stronger form of currency than the French franc.

After nearly fifteen brutal miles, we reached our assigned bivouac area: cold, barren fields above Septemes. As night fell, it got colder and colder. We built fires and heated our rations. After our meal, we were so tired we just wrapped ourselves in our shelter halves and blankets and fell asleep. Around midnight, we were awakened by heavy, cold rain. Rousing ourselves, we buddied and pitched tents, then huddled around our fires to dry and warm.

Monday, there was a little more order. Tents were pitched by platoons and tank crews. Later, some of us took a walk

through the neighboring countryside and we bought our first local wine ("vino"; in Provence, natives spoke an Italian-flavored patois, hence vino, not vin rouge). That night there was an air alarm [we were within range of a German air base at Genoa, Italy] and we had to extinguish our fires. With a couple of buddies, I got into Marseille the next night, drank wine (Cap Corse) at a sidewalk cafe and looked over the city. We had changed most of our dollars through the military before we found out about black-market rates, which offered twice as many francs to the dollar.

October 31, 1944 (Tuesday)... V-Mail... [Delta Base]... A belated Happy Birthday! I have arrived safely at my overseas destination--and that is about all that I am allowed to say. When my whereabouts can be disclosed, I am sure the revelation will surprise you.

The news [there must have been mail awaiting us when we arrived in France] that Jimmy [Coccia, a bomber pilot] is a prisoner was a shocker. He couldn't have been in action long. The fact that he and his crew are alive is heartening, though.

I suggest that you send me canned goods mostly: soups, bouillon cubes, deviled ham and the like. [The post office required a "request" from those serving overseas before food packages and the like could be mailed to them from home.] A canned fruit cake would be a real treat. Since you have a recent change-of-address notice, you can send the packages as Christmas mail, which should get them here in fairly good time.

I am writing this by candlelight, and now, rain is falling on my tent. I am comfortable, though, and find things quite interesting.***

I managed to get into Marseille every few days, usually with one or two other members of the platoon. For most of us, it was wine, women, and a visit to the "pro" (prophylaxis) station. We also made our first acquaintance with the Turkish toilet, one of the world's most exotic forms of indoor plumbing. At local bars, most potables were in short supply, but I did acquire a taste for anisette with orange juice as a chaser.

Wandering alone near the port one evening, I experienced my first air raid. Fog machines quickly screened the port and I took cover in a nearby doorway. There was heavy ack-ack, the deep boom of bombs exploding, and the steady drone of German aircraft overhead. I doubt that I was really at risk for the bombs were apparently dropped some distance away.

Transportation between our campsite and Marseille meant hitch-hiking (six-by-sixes and semis) and often much walking. Fortunately, there were trolleys running from the center of Marseille to the outskirts of the city.

The Division's job at Marseille was to re-equip itself, to unload its tanks and artillery pieces and other equipment from the ships, to pick up trucks and peeps and light tanks and prepare to move to combat. There was the flash of arc-welding all night long from the other encampments, but we literally had nothing to do, since our tanks, which were to come from

North Africa, had not yet arrived. The Division, however, was spreading out. Some of our recon troops were hauling ammunition to drop-off points (from where it had to be hauled up the mountain trails by mules) for infantry units, which would soon include the 19th and 68th AIBs, engaged in combat in the Maritime Alps, at the Italian border. CCA (25th and 48th Tank Battalions, B-94 and the 62nd AIB) would soon be in hard combat south and west of Strasbourg. The 47th Tank Battalion would be supporting the 45th Infantry Division. Our company, however, was assigned to Delta Base MP duty, as traffic cops. For a few days, I stood at busy crossroads and directed convoy traffic.

At the encampment, there was more discipline, with calisthenics and road marches. We improved our bivouac and built up our tents with lumber sidewalls, and lined the bottoms with straw. I folded my two blankets into sleeping-bag form and stitched them together with bootlaces. There were frequent rations of candy, cigarettes, and frozen beer. We also saw our first issues of "Stars and Stripes."

We quickly discovered the value of cigarettes and candy. Two packs of cigarettes were enough for a session with a mademoiselle (at Madame Clery's and other such establishments), with perhaps a candy bar thrown in as a petit cadeau. Cigarettes then cost us 5¢ a pack! A carton brought \$20 or more on the black market, making it easy for me to quit smoking!

On November 7, we went by truck to a Repple-Depple (resupply depot) for our first baths (showers, actually) in nearly a month. The mobile bathhouses, set up in drafty tents, were run by Italian POWs. It was strictly by the numbers, with the blowing of whistles signaling you to move on--wet down, soap up, rinse off--but it was wonderful to feel clean again.

November 7, 1944 (Tuesday)... (air-mail letter)... Believe it or not, but today, over here where we live under the most primitive of conditions, I had a hot shower! The Army has vehicles with the requisite facilities that travel even into combat zones to afford the troops an opportunity to feel really clean, at least once in a while.

I can't tell you where I am or where I have been, but I am enjoying myself and was on pass yesterday.

Mail is still quite irregular and my most recent from you was yours of October 19. It all gets through eventually, but it's nicer to get several pieces of mail each day rather than a stack once a week, if then.

Not that I want to overdo things, but here's another request for a package. Candy and the like are appreciated; you know how I am between meals. You could send some cigarettes, too. Our "PX" rations here are two candy bars and five packs of cigarettes a week. There are no other sources of supply. Civilian markets are nonexistent.

As you have undoubtedly noticed, my mail to you comes by several different means--regular mail, air mail, and V-Mail. Let me know the traveling times, if you can figure them out. Also, have Barbara [my sister] thank Annie Vogan [our high-school French teacher] for me.***

November 12, 1944 (Sunday)... I went on pass again yesterday. We are near a large city where there is entertainment, of sorts, and sights to see. And bluntly, it's "somewhere to go."

The American Red Cross is pretty well established in town and, among other services, operates a "snack bar" for soldiers. Because of civilian food shortages, that is the only place where we are "allowed" to eat while on pass. The black market is in full swing, though. To give you a for-instance: a pack of cigarettes, which costs the soldier 5¢, can bring \$2 in this market. That's a 1900% profit! Some of the soldiers take advantage of it, but because of the limited ration, most of the smokers hold on to their packs.

If you are still looking for suggestions for tid-bits to include in packages, you could send me some cans of peanuts or cashews, and candy bars that will withstand the weather. Unless they are on the way, forget about the air-mail stamps. They are taking pretty good care of us at this end.

Lately, our company has been assigned to [Delta Base] MP duty. It's mostly been directing convoy traffic. I get a kick out of holding up my hand to stop a staff car with a high-ranking officer and then waving a column of lowly truckers through a busy intersection!

The recent weather, although cold at night, has been quite pleasant. No more of the rain we had when we first arrived.

Mail is still slow in coming through. My last letter from you was yours of October 22. It comes in bunches. My copies of TIME and LIFE must be piling up somewhere, too.***

November 18, 1944 (Saturday)... Your letters through November 2 came in a bunch a few days ago. That's the way it goes. I would guess that, in spite of the fact that they were sent "air mail," they came by ship.

I hope that Dad's arthritis is better. It's a good thing the weather doesn't affect many young people that way. We would be in poor shape--sleeping on the cold hard ground, with the rain and dampness, and soon, the snow!

By now you will have met Maria [my older brother Bob's fiancée] and have had some word from Ken [my younger brother, who had been anticipating imminent overseas shipment with his Marine unit], so I am awaiting the next batch of mail to learn the news, as well as responses to my first letters. One thing you must remember: both Ken and I could or should have been sent overseas a long time ago. It's unfortunate, though, that both of us will miss Bob's wedding.***

November 19, 1944 (Sunday)... V-Mail... Censorship has been relaxed a bit, as you can see by the dateline. Word came through a little while ago that we could now write our correspondents that we are "somewhere in Southern France." You may have guessed that a while ago. A lot of people thought we were in a number of different places. Let me know what you guessed.

I get along quite well with the civilians, as my three years of high-school French are finally paying off. I am a little rushed for time just now, but in following letters I will be

able to give you some of my impressions of France and its people.***

We knew that we would be moving north any day now and, when one of my buddies learned about a "cash market" in Gardanne for our "surplus" cigarettes and other trading materials, a couple of us set out by peep for Gardanne. We missed a turnoff and went the long way round, passing through the small, lovely town of Aix-en-Provence. We never did locate the "market", but while in Gardanne took advantage of the public baths, and I soaked in a tub that had been drawn for me by attendants.

NORTH TO BATTLE

We were alerted for movement and, on Tuesday, November 22, loaded into derelict 40&8s. We then sat around for hours and I took the opportunity to examine some nearby coastal gun emplacements. It was dark by the time the train left Marseille and began squeaking its way north up the valley of the Rhone. It was a cold, very uncomfortable, three-day ride, stopping every few miles. The latrine meant a shovel and a spot along the right of way; and in the middle of everything the train would start up again.

We detrained at Nomexy (15km north-northeast of Epinal). In the car behind the one I was in, Donald Dickson, cleaning his M3, shoved the clip in with the bolt back and safety off and accidentally pumped five rounds of 45cal. into Sgt. Parsons at very close range. I ran for a doc. Fortunately, there were medic non-coms nearby; they saved Parsons with plasma and quick action. It was difficult to restrain Dickson, who was terribly distressed and ready to take his own life.

We went by truck to Zincourt (4km east of Nomexy) and billeted in a huge barn. We drew blanket sleeping bags (otherwise known as "fart sacks") that first night. I was expecting a little too much and awoke in the middle of the night, half frozen in the bare, drafty loft. I undid my bedroll and got inside the blankets. After that, I slept in straw when it was available.

November 26, 1944 (Sunday)... [Zincourt]... The mail came in a bunch again today [following our move by rail from Delta Base]. The latest from you was your November 16 V-Mail letter. I know there are several earlier letters out there, including the one written November 12. But they all should reach me eventually.

Our situation has changed somewhat, but we are still under a shroud of secrecy. I can safely say, though, that the "40-and-8s" of the last war, and probably of the French Revolution, are still very much in existence.

I was pretty certain the reference to Annie Vogan would be helpful. Yes, Bob Fee [a boyhood acquaintance] is still in the division. I haven't seen him since Camp C though. I would guess that a lot of lads from the neighborhood are in the area. With my usual knack of running into people from home, I expect to see just about anyone, anytime!

It's good news to learn that packages are on the way. Be sure to take special care in wrapping, as some of the fellows have received spoiled food. Don't send too much hard candy. We are having a "run" on the stuff just now.

The French, after four-plus years of war, are pretty bad off. Only this morning, I was talking with several "urchins" who, physically, appeared to be about four or five years of age. Quite to my surprise, I learned they were nearly twice as old as I had guessed. You may have seen references to this condition before.

This is some of the "oldest" country in the world and it sure looks it. Buildings are ancient and even the soil looks tired. Away from the larger cities, the people and their customs and practicabilities are generations behind us.

I have been able to sample a number of French wines and liqueurs. Some have been good, but most reflect the long German occupation. Near the larger Mediterranean cities, some of the French are capitalizing on the American presence with the sale of a local wine known as "vino." A liter of this slow poison usually costs one or two packs of cigarettes, or an equivalent number of candy bars or cans of C ration. But occasionally a French family will share a bottle of pre-war vintage with a few of us. You then get some sense of what the French viniculturists built their reputations on.

I sent Barbara a money order today. She will give you \$25 from it. Buy her something for Christmas and put the rest in the bank. If Bob's wedding comes off too soon for an exchange of letters, you can spend \$50 for a wedding gift from me. That, you will have to withdraw from my savings account.

I presume my monthly checks from TIME [\$29.25] are still coming through. I wonder, though, whether I'll get the usual Christmas bonus this year. This will make three Christmases in a row away from home--and I hope the last!***

We drew our tanks and worked night and day cleaning cosmoline parts and guns. We were near enough to the front lines now to hear the continual rumbling of artillery.

ACTION ON THE RHINE

We were VI Corps, Seventh Army, and the only armored division on the Seventh Army front. When the breakthrough was made to the Alsatian plain, we were ready, and on December 1 moved into action. The 94th Cav was to be attached to the 79th Infantry, near Hoerdt and Weyersheim, protecting that division's right flank and rear.

The 94th included four scout troops (peeps and armored cars), an assault troop (modified tanks with 105mm howitzers), and F Company. My assignment, as it had been throughout the later stages of our training, was to 1st platoon, as bow gunner/radioman (the tank could also be driven from my position, if necessary) in the platoon leader's tank. Crew of Fox 1-1: 1st Lt. Robert Hamilton (commander), T/4 Neal Stidham (driver), Pfc. William Barefoot (gunner), and yours truly (bog).

Our long column climbed and wound its way through the Vosges Mountains, getting ever closer to the front. Toward evening we reached our destination. We were waiting on the Hoerdt-Weyersheim road when we came under our first enemy fire--the high, sudden whine of incoming. We sat there buttoned-up and then finally got orders to move ahead and into Weyersheim.

In the village, which was less than 10km west of the Rhine, we took over barns and moved the tanks inside, as concealment from the enemy. There was considerable maintenance to be done as the tanks were relics of the North African campaign. There was enemy air activity, mostly ME (Messerschmitt) 109s, and a good deal of incoming artillery, but at regular intervals, so we could usually anticipate it. During the night, when the artillery got worse, Butzine crawled under his tank and wouldn't come out until hours later.

On the second night there was considerable excitement as a report came in that a large German combat patrol was moving on Weyersheim. Capt. Zielinski got quite excited under the first real pressure. He had tanks back-to-back on each of the streets in our area, with the rest of the men of the company positioned to protect the flanks. We were all trigger-happy and the alert continued through most of the night.

The next day, my section (tanks 1-1 and 1-2) was sent out to take up a post with a small unit of the 79th at the farthest eastern limit of our defense, nearest the Rhine. We kept one tank under a small overpass and the other at the corner of a nearby farmhouse. The infantrymen held a position to the north of the farmhouse and we set up a machine-gun emplacement to the east of the house, just at the edge of a small woods, with good observation across the fields to the German-held towns of Herrlisheim and Gamsheim.

There was lots of incoming artillery, but most of it was directed more toward the infantry's position and the village of Weyersheim. Squadron was making patrols to Herrlisheim and probing the defenses of Gamsheim. A Negro artillery unit behind us was shelling the German positions. The artillerymen put on quite a show when in action, moving and chanting to a fast rhythm, which ended, with the pulling of the lanyard, "Now, Hitler, count yo' chillen'!"

The tension at night was multiplied as civilians came across the fields and through the woods, waving white, and we had patrols out, and you just never knew what to expect.

December 5, 1944 (Tuesday)... [Weyersheim]... Yesterday I got a bunch of your mail, through November 21 and including the "missing" November 12 letter. As I said before, it all comes through eventually. No packages yet, though.

I'm not sure whether or not I told you before but that large French city that I visited so often was Marseille. It's a pretty tough port and, with its many varieties of French Colonials, holds an even greater pot-pourri than some of the more-forbidding sections of New York City.

In answer to your questions: we are usually "billeted" in buildings, now, so the nights, despite the elements, are not

too uncomfortable. I am always looking for "old friends", but as yet haven't run into any. Dan [Brennan, 63rd Infantry Division] might come my way though, so I will try to learn just where his unit [245th Regiment] is.***

On December 7, the 94th Cav was ordered to take Gamsheim, which lay about 6km to the east of Weyersheim. Herrlisheim was about the same distance to the north of Gamsheim. Squadron, supported by B and C Companies of the 19th AIB, 2B of the 25th Tanks, C Company of the 813 Tank Destroyer Battalion, and with Col. Hudelson in command, attacked and seized the town in a fierce but not prolonged house-by-house, street-by-street engagement. Major Smith, Squadron S-2 and outwardly the personification of the professional soldier (he was a West Pointer), cracked very early in the fighting.

Our light tank section didn't take an active part in the mission, but I might have made a major contribution had I been better prepared. The machine-gun emplacement was deep with mud and I was outside on the high ground assembling duckboards when two ME 109s came over very low and relatively slow as they banked and almost stalled in a tight turn, no more than 70 yards from me, before going in to strafe the attacking force. The aircraft were so close to the ground the infantrymen to my left were going at them with M-1s and BARs. Had I been in the pit, I might have gotten off most of a belt of .30cal at the two of them.

When the Gamsheim mission was completed, we were relieved and moved back to Weyersheim and the familiar barn. Stidham was after a cute young thing next door and took me along as interpreter and we passed a very pleasant evening with the family. The next night, I went over on my own, and soon got quite a surprise, as most of the platoon, including Lt. Hamilton, dropped in.

NORTH THROUGH ALSACE

The Division was reforming at Hochfelden and moving to attack, to strike north through Alsace and into Germany. On December 11, Squadron was ordered back under the 14th's control and we moved to Mutzenhausen. There, we had our first visit from the Red Cross, and a lovely blonde who looked like a young Madeline Carroll. That night, Allied planes roared overhead for hours, going and then coming back as, in the biggest air attack yet staged on Germany, 1,600 B-17 and B-24 bombers pounded communications targets in Frankfurt, Hanau and Giessen.

During the night of December 12, several German planes raided our town. Half a dozen of us were asleep in a loft and just beneath a tile roof when we were awakened suddenly by the very loud and very near sounds of bombs and ack-ack. The raid had taken us so by surprise that we just froze in place. Later, comparing our reactions, we noted that every one of us had thought almost immediately of the highly shatterable tiles just overhead. That would be the last time any one of us slept near a tile roof.

We moved up to Aschbach on December 15. We were now just below Wissembourg and the Maginot line was mostly behind us. Our platoon took over a house at the edge of town, near an outpost that we were to man. I had picked out a fine feather bed, but after one night of luxury I was sent to the Company CP as platoon runner and slept on a hard floor. There was a postal card in that house from an Alsatian who was a POW at Camp Campbell. Just another of the ironies of War!

We watched a really big Allied daylight air armada: target, Karlsruhe, which was the logical objective of our drive, if we could seize Rhine crossings.

Our outposts were heavy, as the 103rd Infantry was fighting behind and to our left and there was the continuing danger that they might drive the enemy into our positions. Both CCA and CCB of the 14th Armored Division were operating inside Germany on the morning of December 16, as were elements of the 45th and 79th Infantry Divisions. The West Wall defenses lay but a few kilometers ahead.

December 17, 1944 (Sunday)... [Aschbach]... Friday, I received your V-Mail of December 4. I would imagine there are a number of "in-between" letters still on the way. All of your packages are still on the way, I hope, as none has arrived as yet. I did receive one package, a book, "Try and Stop Me," from the Newspaper Guild. It's a collection of humorous stories and anecdotes compiled by Bennett Cerf. Pick up a copy for Dad if you can. I'm sure he would enjoy it! I would send him my copy, but there are a number of others here who have asked to borrow it.

I hope that Dad is well on his way to recovery by now. Ken's visit should have pepped him up! It is a shame that he has to be laid up at this time of year, this season. I know that you and he had great plans for your "twenty-fifth." And by the way, congratulations!

There is not much that is new, or rather, that I can write about. I had a letter from Uncle Kil, requesting a "request." Also, he thinks that Bob's fiancée is "a little young." As soon as I get a few minutes, I'll drop Val and Doris a line, too.

Here is a "request" for you: heavy wool socks (size 11) and air-mail stationary. Otherwise, they are taking pretty good care of us here. We draw free "PX" rations every day now: a pack of cigarettes, matches, chocolate bar, and a stick of gum. It helps!

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all!***

We went back to Ordnance at Biblisheim to have heavy armor plate welded to the tank bottom, as extra protection against land mines. While there, we were alerted against enemy parachutists. The weather had closed in and visibility was very poor; consequently, the Ordnance men were extremely jumpy and there was small-arms firing all night. It was a relief to get back to our forward position next day!

The Ardennes offensive had been launched by the Germans and

our drive was almost immediately halted by order of Theater Command. Division had made a considerable penetration of the southern defenses of the Siegfried, but now Seventh Army could no longer support our drive as heavy demands were being made for troop reinforcements, not only from reserve but right out of line, to go to the aid of our badly hit comrades to the northwest. The northern Seventh Army boundary was straightened and extended to cover an 84-mile front from the Rhine west, generally along the German Saar border.

December 21, 1944 (Thursday)... "France--with the 7th Army"... By the time you receive this letter, Christmas will have come and gone. Here's hoping you and the family had a good one! We don't expect much of a celebration here. There is a rumor, though, that every soldier will receive a bottle of genuine American beer!

Today, I received your V-Mail of December 10. That's good time for a change! And three of your packages have arrived: 1) the bouillon and fruit cake, 2) the Nestle "cocoa mix" and deviled ham, and 3) the cigarettes, gum and stationary. All of the packages arrived in good condition.

Here is a "request." First, a do-not. No more cigarettes. I thought it would be a good idea at the time, but now the Army gives us a free pack every day. What I would like most of all --and as soon as possible, if you can find them--are my fleeced-lined ankle-high slippers. They might be just about anywhere in my room. Try the drawers and the closet shelves.

My copies of TIME and LIFE are beginning to come through. The news in them is anywhere from four to eight weeks old, but still good reading.

I can enlighten you a bit now on my military situation. Yes, we are with the Division. We are in VI Corps, which is part of the Seventh Army. You undoubtedly have been reading about the Division, as we have been making headlines!

I know that you are worried some about me, but don't think of me as being in danger. There are a few million other American boys here and most of us expect to go home in good shape--and soon!

So far, it has been a great experience. I have seen a lot and learned a lot. I made out all right with my French, too. Had it down pat. But now I'll have to learn another language.

I'm still looking for some of my boys, but haven't run across anyone, yet! My old outfit [12th Armored Division] is in the 3rd Army. Many of those who were with me at OSU are in the 9th Army.***

TASK FORCE HUDELSON

We became a part of Task Force Hudelson and moved to Gundershoffen on December 22, and to Petit Marteau on the 23rd. Task Force Hudelson (94th Cav [minus C Troop and one platoon of E], 62nd AIB, 500th FA, 117th Cav, A-125 Eng--about 3,000 men) took over a 10-mile front (normally the assignment of a full division), running east from just south of Bitche, through

Equelshardt to Neunhoffen. The enemy had ceased to retreat, had begun to fight back, and it was politically as well as militarily a must that Sixth Army Group not be driven from Alsace by a German drive down the Alsatian plain to the Vosges. G-2 reported that, as the enemy attack in the Ardennes was being fought off, the enemy strength in the south Saar and along the east of the Rhine was being constantly increased, and in the snow-covered hills near Bitche and Baerenthal, we prepared to hold.

Our platoon was sent immediately to prepare defense positions in the woods near Bitche. We dug in the tanks and built up log embankments on three sides of the vehicles, built bunkers for sleeping space, and set up machine-gun emplacements to the front of the tanks. In the woods, we cut firing lanes, and set out trip flares, mines, and grenades.

The enemy was continually audible, if not visible, on the hills just across from our position, and we had frequent fire fights. There was quite a bit of incoming artillery and mortar fire, and all too often, when we called for our artillery, we got as much as the enemy. Positioned as we were in the woods, artillery fire all too often resulted in treetop shell bursts and a murderous hail of splintered wood and shell fragments.

One night when I was taking a turn at the machine-gun emplacement, with Butzine, a mortar round fluttered in almost on top of us--but failed to explode. Butze and I crowded the bottom of the emplacement waiting for the explosion, almost not breathing. I heard a ticking that I was certain came from the shell, and it was some time before I realized that I had become so sensitive to sound that the ticking of my watch had become that audible. We eventually conceded that the shell wasn't going to explode, but kept well down through the remainder of our watch.

Enemy patrols were very active and kept us continuously alert. One patrol got through to the 117th, butchered a number of sleeping men, stripped them and made their way back wearing the American uniforms. Another patrol got through to B Troop and destroyed three armored cars by exploding grenades against the mines carried in the turrets, damaged several other vehicles and inflicted many casualties.

There had been so many false alarms during the nights, however, that, after a few days all of us undoubtedly held our fire often when we shouldn't have, out of consideration for our sleeping comrades. That can happen when you are on the line for too long a stretch.

On Christmas Day, Lt. Hamilton shared a bottle of whisky with us, the members of his platoon, and we stood in a circle and wished each other greetings. On December 28th, our platoon was relieved and we went back to Petit Marteau (just to the east of Mouterhouse) for our turkey and Christmas.

That night, Sgt. Stinson drank most of two bottles of bad cognac and went berserk. We were sacked-in when he came to where we were billeted. He was in the next room, making a great deal of fuss, recalling his days of fighting in the African campaign, and suddenly began firing his M3. We were spread

out on the floor and I was very much afraid that he was going to shoot at the door to our room, so hurried to a window casement that offered some protection. I had armed myself and was prepared to shoot if the situation became any more dangerous. Galyean was with Stinson and trying to quiet him. They then came into our room and we all tried to act nonchalant so as not to cause any tension. Clapp finally got him out of there.

I thought Stinson was going to be all right then, but he got away and took over in the turret of one of the tanks. He had loaded the guns and was setting out grenades by the time Captain Z arrived on the scene. Stinson threatened to shoot, but the Captain, acting cautiously, was getting control of the situation. And then Pappy came along, advised the others to leave and took over himself. Pappy walked right up to the tank, talking all the while, climbed into the turret with Stinson and finally brought him around. He got him out of the tank and disarmed. The Captain then took over and placed Stinson under guard. Captain Zielinski didn't take the action he might have, but busted Stinson and had him transferred to C Troop.

Later, during the early morning hours, most of us began to suffer from diarrhea (bad turkey). Instead of being sent back to the line next day, it was decided to keep us in reserve. We made dismounted patrols to the north of our village and set out more barbed wire and trip flares.

A Few Words About Pappy

I don't suppose there have been many military units, on down to platoon size, that haven't held an individual called, more or less affectionately, Dad, Pop, or Pappy. We had a Pappy. And he was legit. Back home in Greencastle, Indiana, he had thirteen kids. A fourteenth, his eldest, was also in the Army.

When I first joined F Company, Pappy (Robert R.) Johnson was the company armorer. He chose not to live in the barracks with the "'cruits," but instead slept on a cot in the loft of his workroom at the tank park. Though officially a T/5, he wore buck corporal stripes. He didn't keep our hours either. Every afternoon, promptly at four o'clock (opening hour), Pappy headed for the nearest PX and a few relaxing beers.

Pappy, although barely of age at the time, had seen some action in France in 1918, and had served a hitch with the Marines in China between wars. When he dressed for parade, he sported so many ribbons and hashmarks that, throughout the Division, he came to be known as "Stars and Stripes" Johnson.

Pappy was of less than average size, about five-six, and had the face of a cherub. He didn't have a mean bone in his body. When we were set to go overseas, Pappy had to pull strings to remain in the outfit. Having already passed his forty-second birthday, it was his choice to go into combat--and he was of no little inspiration to more than a few of us.

In early January, after the incident with Sgt. Stinson described here, Pappy was given command of a 1st platoon tank. After another display of valor, Major-General Smith came around to pin a medal on him. The General also offered Pappy a

commission, but Pappy slyly turned it down, telling the General that he'd have to make him at least a Captain, or he'd be losing money [as an enlisted man, he was drawing one of the Office of Dependency Benefit's biggest allotments]. Pappy did make a deal with the General, though, and arranged to have his eldest son, Jimmy, who was serving in the same theater in an anti-aircraft battalion, transferred to the Division--and Jimmy served as his father's gunner for the remainder of the War.

December 29, 1944 (Friday)... [Petit Marteau]... Our Christmas wasn't exactly a merry one, or the white one that Bing Crosby sings about, but it sure was a cold one! Despite all our winter clothing, we've really been feeling it lately. I have never been this cold before.

Thanks for the lengthy clinical report on Dad. Naturally, it is hard to anticipate the news, but by now, I would guess that he is home from the hospital and up and around once again. I certainly wish him a speedy recovery.

Thanks, too, for the pictures of Bob and his "Mary". What are his present plans? Is the engagement official yet?

I am enclosing a check for \$50, a Christmas gift from TIME. Please deposit it for me. Have you received any bonds from the Government yet? You should be getting a \$50 bond every month. They were to start with my November pay, which means they should be coming to you by now. Let me know the date of the first one.

I'll write more when I find a little time.***

December 30, 1944 (Saturday)... Your V-Mail letters of the 14th and 17th arrived today. It's impossible to say just how long it does take; sometimes "regular" mail beats air mail. The mail comes over a long route and means of transportation are quite taxed, even to the extent where mail becomes subordinate. Yesterday I received a letter from Bill Fennessy, and even though he, too, is in the European Theater, his letter took seven weeks to reach me!

I'm happy to learn that Ken's furlough was such a successful one. He must certainly have done Dad a lot of good. It's just as well he doesn't plan to marry until after the War. If he ever does get sent to the Pacific, he's likely to be there for quite some time. Does he still plan to go to college?

Whenever possible, conditions permitting, we are billeted in buildings. So it is not unusual to spend several nights deep in the luxury of a feather bed and then the next few on the hard cold ground beneath the protecting roof of a dugout.

This billeting is a nice deal. Most of the civilians willingly give up a "spare" room when we make a request. A rather homey atmosphere is produced as we sit around in the evenings with a civilian family, making awkward conversation (since we often don't speak each other's language), or just sharing their wine and schnapps and our candy and cigarettes. Their life is simple and, except in the larger cities, many decades behind what most of us are accustomed to. They all appear to be farmers to a certain degree. Most of the families

we've been encountering have their rabbits, chickens, pigeons, pigs and even cows. How they managed to hold on to all this during the long occupation is another story! [We were now in Alsace, close to the German border, and most of these people had closer ties to Germany than they did to France.]

For my part, there isn't much to worry about. I haven't "seen" all that much, but I have heard a lot! There are quite a few of us over here and if that old adage, "There is safety in numbers," still applies, I am quite safe! Most soldiers believe that "man's fate will out" and that just because they are over here, the percentages aren't going to rise against them.

From what we have seen, there is little doubt but that the enemy is willing to give up. But there are certain fanatics, holding all the power, behind them.***

December 31, 1944 (Sunday)... In a few more hours the old year will end and midnight will bring us a new and, we fervently hope, better one. We won't make a celebration of its arrival --the usual din that most civilians make--it will be noisy enough!

It has tried hard to snow for the past three days. We aren't too unhappy when it does snow, for the temperature has to rise. It has often been too cold to snow! The civilians say that this has been an unusual winter. There should have been a lot of snow before now.

At heart I am not a souvenir hunter, a collector of enemy impedimenta. Most of the guys do send items home, ranging from francs and marks (we are where we can use both) to German helmets. If there is anything you want, or if you know someone who wants something, let me know.

We did get our beer for Christmas--two cans from the Red Cross--plus a lot of candy. We had roast turkey, too, but without the usual trimmings.

The cigarette-smoking civilians back home who, according to news reports, are going half-crazy in their search for cigarettes, should have one consolation--the GIs fighting the War are getting them. I've been smoking two to three packs a week. But since we get a (free) pack every day, I now have quite an inventory.

I am enclosing a money order for \$18. Please deposit it for me. It isn't much, but we have no occasion to spend money where we are.

Best to all and may the New Year bring what we all are hoping for!***

[The above letter, not post-marked until January 5, was written on the eve of an attack centered initially against the 3,000 men of Task Force Hudelson by six German divisions.]

Just before midnight, December 31, under code name "10 May 1940", in commemoration of Hitler's entry into France, the Germans, without artillery preparation, launched a savage attack against the thin line of Task Force Hudelson and the 44th

Infantry Division further to the west. The attacking force was made up of the 19th, 36th, 256th, 361st, and 559th Volksgrenadier Divisions, with the up-to-strength and newly-fitted 17th SS Panzer Grenadiers and the 21st Panzer Division lurking behind the lines ready to exploit openings. Storming through the woods wearing white camouflage suits, the goal of the attacking infantry was to spearhead a drive down the Low Vosges toward Saarburg and Saverne, to expose the rear of the whole Rhine front north of the Colmar pocket and serve as a diversion for the Ardennes offensive.

In the days just before the attack, enemy patrols had been strong and aggressive; German artillery rounds began to land at crossroads and in villages, the enemy guns registering-in. Now, German infantry swarmed through the woods, firing their automatic weapons and screaming, "Die, Yankee bastards! Gangster bitches!" Many of the enemy acted as though drugged. Instructions went back to our artillery to just drop the shells in the woods, as "there are so many krauts up here you couldn't miss if you tried!"

When the attack first started, our platoon of five light tanks was sent as reinforcement to A-125 Engineers, who reported a strong enemy penetration to the east of Petit Marteau. The sky was clear and the snow-covered ground made the night quite bright. We had several hours of confused, nervous action, not knowing anything of the big picture, only aware of action on all sides. The engineers were disorganized and there was continual small-arms firing in all directions. An engineer officer called on us to lay fire on what was reported to be an enemy patrol; fortunately, we held fire long enough to establish that the "patrol" was our own infantry. We were trying to hold open the escape routes to Reipertswiller while the disorganized infantry moved back through.

At daylight, after running around virtually blind all night, Lt. Hamilton sent me to the top of a hill to reconnoiter. As the enemy had infiltrated all around us, I went well-armed and had several grenades at the ready. I scouted warily and, reaching the top, made a careful observation through binoculars of the surrounding countryside, but detected nothing of consequence. The road our tanks were on broke in a tight curve around the base of the elevation, making it an excellent OP for observing the nearby hills and a valley through which the enemy armor would have to come. I went back down to report and to recommend that we keep an observer there.

The lieutenant was worried. Stragglers had reported that heavy enemy armor was coming through, and we were getting conflicting reports from the few radio contacts we could make. We couldn't raise Company or Squadron on the radio, so Lt. Hamilton rode off in an engineer jeep to find out exactly what we were to do. I returned to the hilltop.

When the lieutenant returned, [he had Stidham sound the tank siren and] I came down again and we started moving west. It appeared that the enemy had broken through on both sides of us and we were in considerable danger of being cut off. The task force was in rapid retreat, the 117th Cavalry Squadron

having to extricate itself from virtual encirclement, as the enemy was attacking in greatly superior strength. Our platoon was alone now and apparently the defending force on that section of the front.

By now, German tanks were in Bannstein, Task Force Headquarters in Baerenthal had been surrounded, and the enemy had cut the Phillipsbourg-Baerenthal and the Baerenthal-Mouterhouse roads. Telephone lines were out and, with all the hills, most radio contacts failed. Not realizing the seriousness of the situation in the Mouterhouse area, what reinforcements that could be obtained were being committed at the eastern limits of the attack.

We couldn't get through to Bannstein or Baerenthal or Phillipsbourg, so we took the only road that remained to us and that was the road to Mouterhouse. We knew that we would have to make a fight for it. The enemy had cut the road in several places, but did not have any heavy weapons or armor there yet. We buttoned-up and made the slashing run to Mouterhouse. There, we were assigned to make a defense of the town while the remaining forces pulled out.

We sat out on the road approaches that the enemy armor would have to take and waited. Task Force was sending out radio messages to Task Force troops to fall back and assemble in the vicinity of Zinswiller. But with wire and radio communication out in our area, we were not reached. We didn't see any more Americans and, after a while, the town cleared, still hadn't received any further orders. The lieutenant decided "the hell with this expendable business" and we moved out.

There was an engineer section on the last bridge out of town and they had been awaiting us anxiously. As soon as we cleared town, they blew the bridge. And this was to continue until we caught up with the main column: engineers blowing bridges, craters, felling trees--anything that would serve to delay the enemy.

German aircraft were active and there was considerable strafing of our long tight columns. Our movement was incredibly slow. The roads were narrow and slick with ice, and the strafing was causing blockages. We climbed and wound through the Hardt Mountains and then, when we started a downhill descent, we were literally helpless as the tank slid on the ice, first sideways, and then backwards, as Stidham did all he could with the traction levers to make corrections. We tucked our tail in at Wingen-sur-Moder for the night of January 1. At dusk, Task Force Hudelson was "relieved" by a regiment of the 70th Infantry Division and ordered south to Reipertswiller to stabilize a defensive position.

The next morning we went on to Wimmenau and from there were sent to support the defense of Reipertswiller. We were out of the tanks when the enemy began heavy shelling in preparation for an attack on the town. We got back to our tanks in a hurry. There was very high ground on one side of the village and the enemy would likely come from there. We were sitting on the main thoroughfare, in an impractical valley position, with no room to maneuver. It was certainly no place for light tanks,

so we pulled back to Rothback.

Late in the evening, Capt. Zielinski came to tell Lt. Hamilton that he would have to take a combat patrol from one of the Recon troops up to Reipertswiller, as the Germans had knocked out the defenses at the south end and cut off the town. The lieutenant was furious and tried to get out of the assignment; he had never worked with the men, it wasn't his job. Fortunately for the lieutenant, a reinforced infantry unit broke through to the town before his group could go into action.

On January 3, we moved to Kirwiller, rejoining the company.

The Germans had paid heavily for the New Year's assault on the American lines. They had gained several thousand yards of terrain in the attack (by January 3, the initial thrusts around Bitche had been blunted) but the cost had been high in the number of casualties suffered. Seventh Army placed the figure as high as 1,500 along the Task Force front alone.

[After the War, Col. Daniel H. Hudelson (Maj. Gen., retired) submitted tape-recorded accounts of his WWII experiences as a combat commander in the Vosges Mountains in France to Allied Artists Film Corporation and these became the basis for the Allied Artists' 1961 film, "Armored Command," starring Howard Keel.

The film's dedication was "To the Seventh United States Army and its units which served the cause of freedom so valiantly and victoriously... This is the story of a bitter struggle and a determined stand by American soldiers in the Vosges Mountains who felt the brunt of Hitler's diversionary attack 'North Wind' --the attack that almost succeeded. To those brave soldiers and to all members of the Seventh U.S. Army we dedicate this picture."]

January 4, 1945 (Thursday)... [Kirwiller]... Our New Year was a noisy one! If you will refer to the newspapers for that date, you will know why.

We are taking a rest now and things seem unusually quiet. One of my buddies and I are sitting in the parlor of a "French" family, writing letters, listening to his (my buddy's) radio, and keeping warm. There is some good American music on the radio just now, but anytime there is any War news in English, the Germans set up an interference (static) that effectively blocks it out.***

On January 7, we moved to Bouxwiller and outposted the eastern end of the town--with machine-gun emplacements, grenades, signal flares, and tanks in support.

January 7, 1945 (Sunday)... [Bouxwiller]... Your December 24 and 28 V-Mails arrived today. I was pleased to learn that your holidays turned out so well. Too bad Ken had to leave when he did. That happened to me two years in a row!

So, while you and Dad celebrated your "25th", Bob gave Maria the ring. That certainly called for additional celebration. It must have been quite a weekend.

We haven't had any snow to speak of (which is quite unusual for where we are!), just a lot of REALLY cold weather. There are nights when I could use a hot-water bottle, or two or three, inside my bedroll--and that's not saying anything for the days!

I just missed seeing someone from home! In fact, he came into the Army with me, and yet I don't know who he was! Shortly after we pulled into a small town, one of our lads struck up a conversation with an infantryman from another division. During the conversation, the identification of our outfit came up, and the infantry lad said that he knew someone in the company --namely me! They were on their way to find me when we got the order to move out. And although I passed him frantically waving on a corner, I didn't see him (or hear him above the roar of the engines), as my attention was directed elsewhere. I learned later of the incident. And that's all--except, "he was tall and rather dark."

I am getting low again on outside foodstuffs, but since there is so much on the way, I won't make any more requests for a while, except--see if you can get the Viking Portable Library collections of Hemingway and Dorothy Parker. Tell Dad they are in the same series as Woollcott's "As You Were."***

January 10, 1945 (Wednesday)... [Bouxwiller]... Your V-Mail letters of December 31 and January 1 arrived today. That's very good time, considering that after Christmas mail lost its "high" priority. Packages, regular mail and even air mail are pretty slow in coming.

Yesterday, I had my first shower in nearly two months! Don't get me wrong, I do wash occasionally. But did you ever try to take a bath in a helmet? We had been scheduled for showers on numerous other occasions, but no sooner had the shower unit been set up than we got the order to "move out." After a long wait like that, a hot shower amounts to something. It really hit the spot(s)!

This morning, I paid a visit to the dentist. I had lost two fillings and one of the teeth had begun to bother me. He was a good man and now my teeth are in good shape again. It may seem unusual to you that we have dentists available to us, but that is just one of the many specialties that make up an Army, even in combat.

My old outfit [12th Armored Division] is up here on line beside us now. I hope to get a chance to run into some of my "old boys" soon.

There isn't much I can tell you about the War. Just read the papers.***

[The Big Picture: The shift of the bulk of Patton's Third Army from the Saar to meet the crisis in the Ardennes left General Devers's 6th Army Group with a front of more than 300km. General Eisenhower worried about Devers's ability to hold it and cautioned him repeatedly that if the Germans struck, he must be willing to sacrifice territory to maintain the integrity of his forces.

Eisenhower's concern was aggravated by the failure of the

French First Army to eliminate the Colmar pocket. This large German bridgehead west of the Rhine south of Strasbourg was about 80km wide and deep. Thus Devers had allowed Patch's Seventh Army to go off to other adventures without first securing its southern flank.

There had been growing evidence of German intentions to attack the 6th Army Group. Prisoner interrogations, reports of rail movements, aerial reconnaissance, and above all ULTRA indicated a flow of reinforcements to the Saarbrucken area as well as Colmar late in December. The special importance to Hitler of Devers's front along the sacred Rhine was probably signified by the reorganization of the defenders immediately along the Rhine on November 26 as Army Group Oberrhein; none other than SS Reichsfuhrer Heinrich Himmler took command.

But perhaps still more ominous, Johannes Blaskowitz returned to his old command of Army Group G in place of General Balck on December 22. Army Group G still operated facing Seventh Army westward from the Rhine and Blaskowitz was a general who continually reappeared in critical commands.

By the last day of 1944, Devers's intelligence counted seven German infantry divisions in line on Army Group G's front with three panzer divisions, lately refitted, in reserve. This enemy force could be augmented quickly by three to five lower-quality divisions. The most dangerous threat would be a drive by Blaskowitz down the Low Vosges toward Saarburg and Saverne, to expose the rear of the whole Rhine front north of the Colmar pocket. It seemed not unlikely that the enemy might also mount a direct strike across the Rhine against Strasbourg.

Devers's G-2 served him well... The XC Corps of the German First Army (opposed by Task Force Hudelson) kept up its pressure along the mountain chain, and by January 4 it had punched the "Bitche Salient" some 10km deep into the Seventh Army front, reaching as far as the town of Wingen on the Moder River.

Combined with the assault of the XIII SS Panzer Corps (against the 44th Infantry Division) to the west of Task Force Hudelson, the XC Corps thrust clearly was intended not only to reach the Saverne Gap and thus cut the line of communication of Patch's troops on the Rhine and in the Lauterbourg salient, but more immediately to envelop the relatively new 100th Division, which lay between XV Corps' 44th Division and VI Corps.

Under Eisenhower's insistence, Devers had to instruct Patch to prepare to pull the main body of VI Corps all the way back to the Vosges, leaving only reconnaissance forces in the Alsace Plain. This brought a cry of anger and alarm from the French high command since this would expose Strasbourg to recapture. De Gaulle threatened to remove his forces from Eisenhower's command if that proved necessary to save Strasbourg. The Supreme Commander ultimately agreed that the withdrawal should be limited so that the right wing of VI Corps would go on holding some distance north of Strasbourg.

Such evidence of Allied indecision--which for a short time left Strasbourg practically undefended--may have encouraged Blaskowitz to attack from Wissembourg into the Alsace Plain, as he did beginning January 4, under operation Nordwind. In

addition, a portion of Himmler's army group (the 553rd Volksgrenadier Division) crossed the Rhine near Gamsheim north of Strasbourg on January 5. Two days later, Army Group Oberrhein also began attacking against the French northward toward Strasbourg out of the Colmar pocket.

Task Force Linden--the infantry elements of the 42nd Division --had only recently been brought into the line at Gamsheim to flesh out the long front held by the 79th Division along the arc of what remained of the Lauterbourg salient. Notwithstanding its World War I fame as the Rainbow Division, the 42nd Division was ill-prepared and would not have been thrust into the line except for the emergency. And now the fight around Gamsheim was developing badly. -- The material bracketed here was largely extracted from the book, "Eisenhower's Lieutenants"]

My old outfit, the 12th Armored, which had only recently arrived in France, was quickly shifted from XV Corps, where it had helped to stem the drive west of Bitche, to backstop the 79th.

The Germans had built up great strength for their Bitche drive and had not broken through. They saw another opportunity, through Hagenau and on to the Strasbourg plain. The enemy was to try us again, at the towns of Hatten and Rittershoffen.

On January 9, the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division attempted a double envelopment of Hatten, with 15 Mark IV tanks on the north flank, 15 Mark IVs and a company of mounted armored infantry on the south flank.

As part of Task Force Wahl (79th Infantry), the 1st platoon of 48th Tanks, with only four tanks in action, destroyed six of the enemy tanks. But the battle quickly escalated as both sides brought up additional infantry, armor and self-propelled artillery.

HATTEN

On the north edge of Hagenau Forest lies a plain that slopes gently upward to a crest and then drops to the Seltzbach River. On the slope, halfway from the woodline to the crest, no more than 10km west of the Rhine, lie the twin villages of Hatten and Rittershoffen, feudal farm towns characterized by the ever-present smell of manure--200 houses apiece perhaps, and with two main streets each. There, the German was in the house next door, and in the house across the street (and sometimes in the cellar when you were upstairs). When you moved, he fired a burp gun, and if you moved again he fired a panzerfaust, and if you still could move he called in corps artillery.

The enemy had cocky paratroops there, and SS troops in their dead-black uniforms, and tankers from crack panzer divisions, and artillery pieces numbering into the hundreds. This powerful force (which included elements from the 10th SS Panzer Division, the 21st Panzer Division, the 7th Parachute Division, and the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division) had struck, driven back the men of the 42nd Infantry Division, cut off a regiment of the

crack 79th. The 14th Armored was ordered to counterattack, to restore the MLR (main line of resistance).

On January 11 we moved to Gundershoffen and came under heavy artillery fire. We were moving up as the 14th went on the attack again against numerically superior forces.

On January 12 we moved to Eshbach. (At Eshbach, S/Sgt. Mauldin, half-drunk, made an inspection of the 1st platoon guard posts, walking around with the lid up, bolt back, his finger caressing the trigger of his M3. Next morning, Sgt. Weatherby, with our concurrence, made formal charges against him and he was immediately removed to C Troop as a private.)

By the morning of January 13, virtually the entire division had been thrown into the attack. There was no reserve. The three combat commands were in the line. Late Sunday afternoon, January 15, F-94 moved its light tanks into defensive positions south and west of Hatten. A white winter mist lay over the land. It was a bitterly cold day and the ground held a light coating of snow; the white camouflage of our tanks blended well into this humble offering of Nature. Shell craters were dark eruptions in the hard ground and all too often we heard a screech and a crack! as still another was formed.

In the foreground, nearly equal numbers of American and German tanks, thirty-five or more, remained where they had been stopped. Some were upturned, some shattered and spread. Others appeared untouched. But then, sometimes it takes just one round of AP, or a well-aimed panzerfaust. Snow had covered many of the immobile hulks, others were burned black. Two still burned, with billows of black smoke and leaping flame. The increasing darkness was pierced by an occasional crack! or loud staccato as still more ammo went off.

That night, we (the five tanks of 1st platoon) moved out across the single railway track to the south of Hatten, passing in single column through a mined area, to make a run to the east of Hatten, a diversionary movement as infantry staged a night attack in the town. We drew considerable fire; the Germans were playing a favorite night-firing game of theirs, spraying the area with 20mm tracers until they got a ricochet from a tank's armor, then opening up with a heavy AT gun, with one shell from an "88" passing so close to my face that I could feel the heat from it and smell the cordite. As the night was nearly pitch black, we held our fire to keep from pinpointing our positions. The enemy then broke into our radio net and attempted to confuse us with false messages, trying to get us to move into areas that he had earlier zeroed-in on. We were also extremely conscious of the increasing danger from dismounted enemy as we now had to keep pretty well buttoned-up.

We lost Pappy's tank, but he and his crew scrambled atop another. Lt. Hamilton was in radio contact with Capt. Zielinski, who was trying to direct us from back on the line. Lt. Hamilton finally convinced the Captain that we were in serious trouble and we turned back. We moved back to our defense positions and were told to expect a counterattack and infiltration. Every man remained alert and behind a gun.

The expected attack never came. Heavy artillery swooshed overhead, from both directions, and every ten minutes Jerry threw one at us. Sometimes the bursts were close and then shrapnel splattered the tanks with metallic clangs.

Toward daylight, the sheep came, more than a hundred of them. We didn't know what to make of it as they plodded and bleated their way toward us. But then we recognized that this scarred and frozen turf was their grazing land and that, starved, frozen, crippled and splattered with blood, they were as scared as we. Bunching together, they bleated and baaed, nosed the ground and pawed at the turf.

But we had other concerns. At seven o'clock artillery fire increased and it was coming our way. We first thought the enemy had an observer spotting us, but then decided not, as the barrage passed over and then to the right, searching and sweeping in a regular pattern. Some of the shells did fall close. Big ones! Several times, sheep were caught in a blast, with mutton, guts, and blood flying in every direction. The stench of the freshly dead was nauseating and the cries of the young lambs became almost human.

During the morning we made another run toward the town and came under intense fire when moving up toward the cemetery. We accomplished our mission as FOs (forward observers) noted the enemy gun positions and called in heavy concentrations of artillery. Several batteries of self-propelled 105s had moved up to the line and the artillerymen threw barrage after barrage into the enemy-held section of Hatten. During the day, most of the sheep wandered off, leaving their dead and the dying, which we mercifully shot.

We observed platoons of medium tanks supporting our infantry in an attack on the town, with many of the tanks being stopped dead, burning furiously, as only a tank can burn. In the town, you would be on one side of a wall and the enemy on the other and you would lob grenades over, and the infantry would set up a mortar and take off all the increments except one and try to lob shells over one house and onto the next. There was the tension of always looking down your sights, always waiting, and the artillery always coming in. The fighting had reached such a vicious pitch that they tried to range in 8-inch howitzers on single houses. Seventh Army later estimated that the Germans had 60 batteries of artillery facing Hatten alone.

We took advantage of the terrain and were in what amounted to a defiladed position, which meant the enemy could not bring direct fire from his "88s" on us. Much of the heavier shelling was passing overhead, seeking out the Moder River crossings behind us. The first of the German twin-engine jet-propelled ME 262s were also in action.

When night came, infantry in the woods to our right reported infiltration attempts by white-clad Germans. We changed the positions of our tanks as a precautionary measure. At midnight the darkness was broken as the enemy shot up flares. There was movement to our direct front. Several tanks opened up at the same time with nervous chatters of machine-gun fire. And then we heard again the almost human cries and the bleating.

We were extremely tense. It could easily be a ruse of the Germans: infiltration with the sheep. The stench this time was even more over-powering as they moved closer and sought protection near the iron bulks. We fired several times, uncertain of our targets: two-legged or four-legged.

The sheep settled about the tanks and, after a tense hour, only an occasional bleat, a rumbling of bowels or an emptying of sheep bladders penetrated the awesome silence. Anything could be happening!

The lull of the night continued into morning. The all-night tension, the bitter cold, and the bare sustenance of emergency rations had us all in a state of exhaustion bordering on collapse. We started up our engines, sounded our sirens, fired our guns, and some of us dismounted to herd the sheep away. We had no alternative but to drive the sheep to a distance and then cut lose at them with our M3s. The near-zero cold quickly froze most of the stench within their stiffening carcasses.

Toward noon, we made another diversionary run at the southern edge of the town while heavier forces attempted to reinforce elements embattled in the town itself from the northwest. Enemy observers directed heavy mortar and artillery fire on us and Stidham kept spinning and weaving the tank to keep out of a bracket. Dirt and steel sprayed all around us, and the tank was shaken many times, but there were no direct hits.

Back on the defense line, we tried to blast the ground for fox holes so that we could at least get out of the tanks for a spell, but the ground was frozen solid (and we nearly so, as we faced not only a difficult enemy but the coldest weather to have hit Alsace this century; the temperature at night fell to between -5 and -20°F.). Sgt. Weteñdorf then wanted to move from his position as he was under the delusion that most of the artillery falling on us was directed at him. During the day, when we could risk the noise, we were burning our small Coleman stoves inside the tanks for some warmth.

Because of our many long hours in the sitting position, body fluids were now beginning to drain from our feet and ice was forming in the bottoms of our shoepacs. When it's cold outside a tank, it's even colder inside, and I kept my feet on a piece of burlap and off the icy metal as much as possible. I also removed my shoepacs and massaged my feet frequently to stimulate circulation. I found some comfort, too, in changing socks, wearing the alternate pair next to my upper body to dry and warm them.

The Negro 827th TD (tank destroyer) Battalion was in action in our area. Our infantry reported that at night, as they supported the tanks with flank protection, a pair of white orbs would flash just above a turret and they would hear a desperately whispered, "Doughfeet... doughfeet... where is yo' doughfeet?" They were good, though, and there is a story, possibly apocryphal, that they tell of the early tank battles at Hatten. The Negro TD gunner saw three German tanks coming down the road toward his position and anxiously asked his tank commander what he should do. The TC told him to try for the lead tank as that would stop them. He took out the lead tank with one round and

excitedly asked what he should do next. The TC told him to try for the rear tank as that would keep them from getting away. The gunner destroyed the rear tank with a single round and then said, "Don't tell me no mo', Ah'm catchin' on quick!" and knocked out the middle vehicle.

After three days and nights without rest and only emergency rations, we moved back to Niederbetschdorf. Sixteen men of the twenty in the platoon were either in or on their way to the hospital, with wounds and/or frozen feet. By now, our 90-man company had twenty-seven men in hospital. I was one of the last to report to the Battalion Aid Station and, there, saw medics working over gray, near-corpses. I walked out and returned to the company area.

Even after three days without rest, I was too tense and couldn't sleep. The captain saw me and ordered me to return to the medics and have my feet checked. My feet proved to be in better shape than those of most of the other men of the platoon, as I had been more sensitive to the cold earlier and had taken some precautions. Many of those hospitalized had feet that were black from frostbite and very near the second stage of gangrene. Even my feet had the appearance and texture of wax. The hospitals were overcrowded, so the medics instructed me to keep off my feet for several days, with frequent checks, and gave me a sedative so that I could sleep. Two days later I moved across the street and sat around the Squadron CP as company runner.

Our town was under continuous artillery fire and we lost two sitting tanks to what we thought was chance fire. There were also a number of casualties among men just walking through the narrow streets of Niederbetschdorf. We later found there was an enemy observer in town calling the shots.

The 3rd platoon had taken over for us on the line. Prater and some others went to a shack near the railroad track to try and get warm. A German patrol came brazenly through, wearing American uniforms and chatting away in English. After making their reconnaissance, they staged a swift attack, tossing several "potato mashers" (concussion grenades mounted on a wooden handle) into the shack. Prater was blown out of his shoepacs and through a closed door, but sustained only minor injuries.

Pappy wanted his tank, but Squadron wouldn't allow the recovery vehicle to go out after it, as it would likely come under direct fire. Pappy finally talked the Captain into letting him go out in another tank. His tank was in a crater and inoperable, but he did remove personal effects and the machine guns. Pappy came back beaming, a bottle of cognac in each hand.

T/4 Richard Kramer, one of F Company's mechanics, volunteered and was put in command of a tank that went in and out of Hatten a dozen times or more on courier service, braving intense fire, taking in ammo, medical supplies and radio equipment, and hauling out wounded. The tank had been stripped of all excess gear and was traveling at max speed (roughly 40mph), miraculously escaping serious damage each time. I wrote up the citation and Kramer was recommended for the DSC.

By now, strong defense positions had been established behind the line formed by the Rothback and Moder Rivers, and the German four-division attack at Hatten-Rittershoffen had been held. Meanwhile, to the southeast of us, when elements of the 10th SS Panzer Division came up against elements of Roderick Allen's 12th Armored Division, their experience paid off against American inexperience. Despite skies clear enough for XII TAC Thunderbolts to fly 190 sorties and claim twenty-seven tanks, the panzers knocked out seventy of the 12th Armored's vehicles and united the Gamsheim bridgehead with the Army Group G advance. Under the German's one-two punch from east and north, Generals Brooks (VI Corps) and Patch (Seventh Army) reluctantly decided to withdraw VI Corps to the newly strengthened positions behind the Moder.

Retreating in gloom deepened by steel-gray skies and icy roads, VI Corps formed along its new line on the night of January 20-21. Our main forces pulled out of the Hatten-Rittershoffen area in a blinding snowstorm on January 20. We (F Company) were among the last to leave on the night of January 21. Most of our tanks were handled by two-man crews. Galyean and I took one, taking turns at the controls. The roads were now deep in snow and it was a slow cold convoy. One of our tanks threw a track and we just pushed it aside and dropped thermite grenades into the transmission and into the breach of the 37mm gun. We had no time for anything else, as engineers were waiting to blow the Moder River bridges. It was an all-night march and in the morning we arrived at Wolsheim, where we were to go into reserve, rebuilding.

[In his military memoir, Armored Command, Col. Hans von Luck, commanding the 125th Regiment of the 21st Panzer Division (and a veteran of the fighting in Poland, France, Russia, North Africa, and Normandy) characterized the two-week-long battle for Hatten and Rittershoffen as "one of the hardest and most costly battles that had ever raged on the western front." Artillery duels on a colossal scale took place every day, heavier than the 21st had ever experienced in Normandy. Both sides used their artillery nonstop, firing 10,000 rounds per day.]

"At Hatten and Rittershoffen the 14th Armored Division fought one of the greatest defensive battles of the War."

-- Gen. Jacob L. Devers, Commander 6th Army Group

[The enemy was now faced with his own tiresome marches and regrouping before he could hit the new positions. Nevertheless, the Germans maintained close enough contact with Seventh Army troops that Devers hastened the 36th Division, recently released from SHAEF reserve by Eisenhower, to aid the 12th Armored against the continuing insistent probes of the 10th SS Panzers. The 45th and 79th Divisions were also augmented in the new line by the 103rd Infantry Division, shifted from near the XV Corps left.

But we were out of it when the enemy charged the Moder River line on the night of January 23-24 with six divisions pushing